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## **"In 2017, the Controversy over Public Monuments Celebrating Confederate Soldiers from the Civil War has Reached a Boiling Point with Outrage Leading to Action in many Cities Across the South"**

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Project Summary: In 2017, the controversy over public monuments and memorials celebrating confederate soldiers from the civil war has reached a boiling point with outrage leading to action in many cities across the South. In Memphis, Tennessee, however, the controversy over one specific civil war monument has been raging for decades. The statue of confederate general Nathan Bedford Forrest, erected right above the grave of Forrest and his wife, has drawn rallies hosted from groups such as the Ku Klux Klan and the Black Lives Matter movement for over twenty years. What makes this particular site of controversy most interesting is the strategic, and selective, use of Forrest's public memory by diverse groups to support their various causes.

Forrest was a slave owner, a founding member and Grand Wizard of the KKK, and led the attack on Fort Pillow where many black union soldiers were shot. Forrest also shut down and denounced the KKK after it became a group focused on hatred against non-white races, offered his former slaves some of the earliest forms of reparations, and delivered a post-war public speech where he detailed how he believed both black and white citizens could work together to lift each other up and produce a better society. These facts are validated in many historical records and biographies of Forrest.

The focus of this proposed study is to examine how and why groups as diverse as the KKK and the Black Lives Matter movement both use the first part of Forrest's history to further their cause and make their arguments, but also selectively disregard the second part of Forrest's history. This study will not make any comments on the quality or merit of the arguments made by the KKK and Black Lives Matter movement, but rather will make an argument about why both groups have chosen to utilize the negative elements of Forrest's history, and ignore the positive elements from later in his life. With some other statues, groups that wish to keep the statues will focus their rhetoric on the positive elements of the individual. Groups that wish to remove those statues focus their rhetoric on the negative elements. With the Forrest statue, the controversy is unique due to every side only focusing on the negative, and selectively ignoring the positive. This project will provide the student with experience conducting detailed historical research, an introduction to the burgeoning field of rhetorical public memory studies, opportunity to present original research at an academic conference, and a potential publication in a regional Communication Studies journal.

After being presented at either a state or regional academic Communication Studies conference to receive feedback, the resulting study will be submitted to the Southern Journal of Communication. I have

already been in touch with the current editor of the journal, and they expressed great interest in this study due to its timeliness and unique scope. I plan to include the student's name on both submissions.

Student Prerequisites: Students must be of junior or senior status in a major within the College of Arts, Humanities, & Social Sciences. Experience writing papers including historical research is preferred.

Student Duties: The RCEU student will have two major tasks. First, they will conduct historical research of Memphis newspapers reporting on all protests staged at the Forrest statue from 1995<sup>1</sup> to present, and will summarize the reported usage of the Forrest narrative used by different protest groups. Second, they will produce a summary of recent scholarship concerning public memory as it relates to the KKK, the Black Lives Matter movement, Forrest, and the removal of confederate monuments.

Mentor Supervision and Interaction: The RCEU student and I will meet at least once a week, and more often when necessary. We will use a shared Dropbox folder for both of us to update the elements we are working on. I will provide some theoretical understanding of public memory at the beginning of the collaboration. While I plan on crafting the primary argument for this study, I plan to involve the student in every other part of the process.

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<sup>1</sup> I am using 1995 here because I am a former resident of Memphis, TN, and it was during the mid-1990's that yearly public protests of the Forrest statue began.