Mnemonicide: The Killing of American Public Memory

Macie Morgan and Dr. John H. Saunders
Communication Arts

Introduction
Public memory is being removed in the United States of America at a rapid rate. More specifically, Confederate monuments, memorials, symbols, statues, and other works are being removed from the public eye. “Mnemonicide: The Killing of American Public Memory” aims to find how these removals are affecting the greater public.

Key Findings
Based on Michael McGee's "ideograph," we coined the term "incongruent ideograph" to explain how the removals are affecting the greater public. The Confederate public memory removed over the past 20 years are incongruent ideographs, meaning the ideologies portrayed in the text represent a select group of people, and could not work as an ideograph for the evolving public. The ideograph gives the reason to argue for the removal, while some hold onto a previous culture making it incongruent. When public memory is first unveiled, it is at its highest congruence (aligning most with the ideas of the local public), but the congruence begins to decay overtime. Incongruence grows as the culture of a group changes, and eventually causes a removal of public memory.

Impact/Conclusions
The public memory landscape in America is changing more than it ever has before and is even happening in Huntsville where a Confederate monument was moved from the courthouse to Maple Hill Cemetery. Due to the timeliness of this research, examining the effects of the removals in the Communication Arts field is fresh. Studying the removals allowed us to grasp a working framework to understand the complete lifecycle of public memory texts.

References

Acknowledgements
For this project, we have only looked at newspapers and published articles. We could not look at all social media due to shared volume, but we openly acknowledge that social media plays a large role. The RCEU program is sponsored in part by the UAH Office of the President, Office of the Provost, Office of the Vice President for Research and Economic Development, The Dean of the College of Science, the Dean of the College of Engineering, and the Alabama Space Grant Consortium.