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ABSTRACT

The myths of the past that once defined South Africa's national identity were shattered on May 10, 1994 with the inauguration of Nelson Mandela following his victory in South Africa's first fully democratic election. Now, no longer does a colonial power or an oppressive minority control South Africa's destiny. South Africa's future is now in the hands of all South Africans, and the myths of the past are either inappropriate or insufficient to the expression of this new identity. Since those historic elections the question of which myths would emerge to define the new South African identity, and how they would come to be represented within the South African landscape, has remained largely unresolved. This is not to say that there are no myths, and no monuments, in the new South Africa. But it remains as yet unclear which heroes, which events, which ideas will coalesce to form the core of South Africa's new national identity. The stories that will become those myths for the new South Africa are still under negotiation; still swirling around, waiting to materialize under a consensus that says, "This is who we are." It is safe to say, however, that just as Myth and Monument played an important role in shaping the past identities of South Africa so, too, will they have a significant influence on the reshaping of that identity in the future. I will attempt to bring clarity to these issues by examining some possible directions that myth-making, monumentation and identity formation in South Africa might take.

Traces of Identity
Myth and Monument in the New South Africa

By Steven C. Myers
University of Washington, Seattle

On the slopes of Table Mountain, north of Cape Town, South Africa lies Kirstenbosch National Botanical Gardens. It is arguably one of the most beautiful and exotic spots in all the world. The Cape peninsula is home to a unique floral kingdom comprised of hundreds of species found nowhere else on earth. Myriad varieties of lovely, delicate flowering plants abound. Visible among the native foliage is a line of gnarled trees identified as Wild Almond, the remnants of a barrier over three hundred years old. They were planted there in 1660 by Jan van Riebeeck, leader of the first Dutch settlers to arrive at the Cape. The purpose of these trees was simple: to separate white from black.[1]

Not far away stands an enormous monument, a 100-foot staircase flanked by marble lions, complete with a bronze sculpture of a mounted warrior, spear upraised, atop a 15-foot pedestal. At the crest of these stairs stands a huge colonnaded edifice. It is for all intents and purposes a neo-classical temple, worthy perhaps of Caesar; indeed the entire structure is dedicated to a would-be latter-day emperor. Cecil John Rhodes had a vision to extend the British Empire in Africa "from the Cape to Cairo." His memorial faces north, looking out across the Cape Flats; as if on a clear day one might actually see all the way to the Nile and beyond. Rhodes, no doubt, would have had it no other way.

Figure 1. Van Riebeeck's Hedge (left), and the Rhodes Memorial (right).

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[1] Allister Haddon Sparks, *The mind of South Africa*. (New York, N.Y.: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), xiii.

Nearly 1,500 kilometers from Cape Town, on a hill outside Pretoria, stands perhaps the ultimate monument to the Afrikaner in South Africa. The great colossus can be seen from all directions as you near the city; it is the massive Voortrekker Monument, built in honor of those Afrikaner pioneers (*voortrekkers*) who left the Cape Colony by the thousands during the "Great Trek" of 1835-1837. The monument is 40 meters high, on a base 40 meters square. The central focus of the monument, visible from all interior levels, is the Cenotaph or "empty tomb" — the traditionally celebrated by Afrikaners as Covenant Day, commemorating the victory of a group of voortrekkers over a vastly superior force of the Zulu nation. Every year on that day, precisely at noon, the sun shines through an opening in the roof of the monument onto the center of this Cenotaph. This shaft of light illuminates the words "Ons vir jou, Suid-Afrika" literally translated: "We for thee, South Africa."

These places are monuments to the "old" South Africa. Each is a physical manifestation of a particular myth of South African identity, an identity of South Africa's past. Van Riebeeck's hedge represents the first unsuccessful attempt — as all such attempts have been ultimately unsuccessful — to separate black from white in South Africa. The Rhodes Memorial gives a grandiose physical presence to the myth, long since eroded, of a British Empire upon which the sun never set. And the Voortrekker Monument is the embodiment of the myth of the Afrikaners as the chosen people of Africa, with the destinies of all the other African peoples placed unto their keeping by God. All of these groups — and all of these myths — once held sway in South Africa and each tried to mold the country in its own image. Each, in its turn, left an indelible mark upon the nation's character just as they left their physical traces upon the landscape.

All cultures have such myths; stories preserved over generations, which they tell and re-tell to themselves and to others, that express who they are, how they came to be, and what their place is in the wider world around them. Ancient Rome, for example, had the story of Romulus and Remus. The natives of northwestern North America have tales of Thunderbird and Whale. Even the United States has such myths (think, George Washington and the cherry tree, or Paul Revere) that underlie its national character. These stories occupy an important place at the heart of a peoples' identity.

The myths of the past that once defined South Africa's national identity were shattered on May 10, 1994 with the inauguration of Nelson Mandela following his victory in South Africa's first fully democratic election. Now, no longer does a colonial power or an oppressive minority control South Africa's destiny. South

Africa's future is now in the hands of South Africans, and the myths of the past are either inappropriate or insufficient to the expression of this new identity.

Since those historic elections the question of which myths would emerge to define the new South African identity, and how they would come to be represented within the South African landscape, has remained largely unresolved. This is not to say that there are no myths, and no monuments, in the new South Africa. But it remains as yet unclear which heroes, which events, which ideas will coalesce to form the core of South Africa's new national identity. The stories that will become those myths for the new South Africa are still under negotiation; still swirling around, waiting to materialize under a consensus that says, "This is who we are." It is safe to say, however, that just as Myth and Monument played an important role in shaping the past identities of South Africa so, too, will they have a significant influence on the reshaping of that identity in the future.

In this paper I will attempt to bring clarity to these issues by examining some possible directions that myth-making, monumentation and identity formation in South Africa might take. I'll begin with a brief look at identity group dynamics in South Africa to establish a context for my argument. For that argument it will be necessary next to define what is meant by Myth and Monument, both as categories — as forms of communication — and as particular instances of those categories [i.e., myth(s) and monument(s)]. Within that discussion there will be several examples, including an in-depth examination of the myth of Nelson Mandela.

There follows an exploration of the parallels between post-war Germany and post-apartheid South Africa. At first glance, the analogies between the two seem to suggest a similar course of development in their national identities. However, I will argue that fundamental differences exist between the two experiences that militate strongly against such an outcome. I will next consider an incident from the apartheid years—the of the Gugelthu Seven—that illustrates how those differences have play out in South Africa through the creation of a remarkable new monument erected in their memory.

Having looked at one new monument in South Africa, I'll try to answer the question: Why aren't there more? Where are all the monuments to the "new" South Africa? I will propose one explanation that may shed some light on why they have been seemingly slow to materialize. Finally, I'll explore in-depth an example of this proposition that I believe brings together many of the issues

taken up throughout this paper and reveals how they are being dealt with in South Africa today.
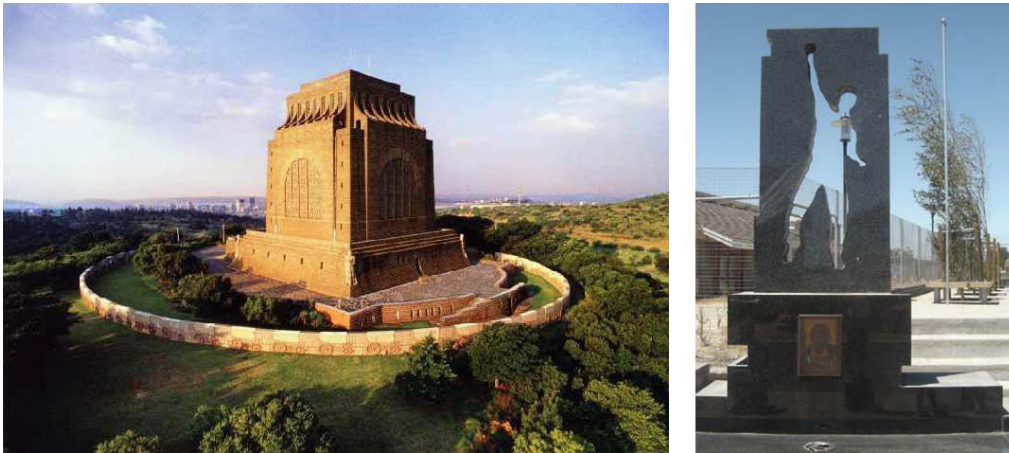

Figure 2. The Voortrekker Monument (left), and the Gugulethu Seven Memorial (right).

Identity, South African Style

These are critical issues for South Africa, because identity plays an enormous role in the resolution (and/or perpetuation) of conflict. This is especially true in South Africa, where the multiplicity of potential identity-group affiliations is staggering. For generations the lives of the people of South Africa – the jobs they could hold, where they could live, where they could travel, even who they could love – were based on their racial classification. And not out of social custom, but under a system of laws and regulations that dictated nearly every aspect of South African life. Every person's prospects and expectations were a consequence of the color of their skin. Such a system of institutionalized racism is impossible to dismantle entirely in a mere dozen years. For most South Africans today, their prospects – and most tellingly, their expectations – continue to be predominantly a matter of race.

Under apartheid there were three overarching racial identity categories in South Africa, white, black and "coloured." Although today these categories are vestiges of the apartheid era, these remnants continue to shape much of the debate regarding the economic, social and cultural restructuring of South African society. Thus, they continue to exert considerable influence over the conflicts surrounding these policies.

Within these three main identity groups there are numerous sub-groups to which one might have an attachment. Among the white minority there are the Afrikaners (the descendants of the original Dutch settlers in the Cape Colony) and the English (who began arriving in numbers around 1820). One or the other of these groups ruled South Africa for 300 years prior to the 1994 elections. Though they have relinquished political power, their economic and social advantages remain largely intact.

The coloured group, under apartheid, included no less than seven separate categories of persons including Malay (whose ancestors mostly came to South Africa as slaves between 1660 and 1840), Indian (primarily descended from the thousands of indentured laborers who came from the subcontinent in the 19th century to work the sugar plantations of Natal), and Chinese, as well as those of mixed-race heritage. Today, as they did under apartheid, this group occupies an uncomfortable middle ground, actively participating in the life of the nation, but with little or no influence over the direction of that life.

The black majority in South Africa consists of at least ten major tribal groups (which helps explain South Africa's eleven official languages) of which the Zulu, Xhosa, Sesotho, and Tswana are the largest. Since the end of apartheid much (though certainly not all) of the influence of tribal identity has been subordinated to the interests of the African National Congress (ANC), the ruling party that seeks to represent the entire population of South Africa. All of these groups add another layer of complexity to the process of identity formation in South Africa.

As I noted, many of these identity groups are remnants of the apartheid classification system that still exert influence on present-day social and political conflicts. Because, although the elections of 1994 altered the political system, much of the social, cultural and physical landscape of apartheid remains in place. Communities are still largely segregated – and physically separated – along racial lines. Despite the emergence of a nascent black middle-class, there exists a widening chasm between the rich (overwhelmingly white) and the poor (primarily black and coloured). These ongoing conditions reinforce the pre-existing cycle of poverty and lack of economic opportunity that was a primary component of the apartheid system. Their perpetuation creates an environment in which the younger generation of black South Africans has largely come to accept this state of affairs as, rather than as oppressive. Thus, the continued use of such categorizations (even in the service of economic restructuring) is seen by some as re-entrenching the underlying assumptions of apartheid beneath a veneer of democracy.

Amin Maalouf suggests that such complex, multi-layered notions of identity are the norm rather than the exception. One's identity, he says, "is made up of a number of elements…for the great majority these factors include allegiance to a religious tradition; to a nationality – sometimes two; to a profession, an institution, or a particular social milieu."[2] However, the list of potential identity factors is not nearly so limited. Maalouf continues, "A person may feel a more or less strong attachment to a province, a village, a neighborhood, a clan, a professional team or one connected with sport, a group of friends, a union, a company, a parish, a community of people with the same passions, the same sexual preferences, the same physical handicaps, or who have to deal with the same kind of pollution or other nuisance."[3]

These multiple facets exist, simultaneously, within each individual and form a hierarchy based upon one's background and life experience. Such a hierarchy is, according to Maalouf, highly mutable. It can change; indeed it does change, over time. "[O]ne has only to look at the various conflicts being fought out all over the world today to realise that no one allegiance has absolute supremacy."[4]

The issue that determines which of these many elements will gain ascendancy at any given time, says Maalouf, is a question of threat. When one of these elements is threatened, it will tend to dominate a person's identity. If, for instance, one feels their faith is in danger, then their religious affiliation seems to become their whole identity; whereas if one's tribe is under siege, one may fight tooth and nail to preserve it against members of one's own faith. Whichever aspect of one's identity is under grave threat at any one time will tend to become one's entire identity.[5]

This tendency is often exploited by those whose intent is to foment conflict and violence or to seize political power. Those people who share a certain affiliation are encouraged to "assert your identity" or to "protect your faith" and even if only a small percentage heeds that call, an army is born. A classic example in recent memory is what occurred following the break-up of the former Yugoslavia. Serbs and Croats, Christians and Muslims who had been living side-by-side for generations waged brutal war on each other – committing

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[2] Amin Maalouf and Barbara Bray, *In the name of identity: violence and the need to belong* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 10.
[3] Ibid., 10-11.
[4] Ibid., 13.
[5] Ibid., 13-14.

unspeakable atrocities – over ethnic and religious identities that were suddenly threatened by the disappearance of their sense of an overarching identity.

Thus the question of identity formation in South Africa becomes central to its future. In a land where the dynamics of identity are so volatile, the need to create a sense of common affiliation that can overcome the threats – both real and imagined – to more parochial identity group attachments is imperative. By examining the role of Myth and Monument in this process I hope to reveal some possibilities for South Africa's future identity.

Myth

In order to examine the role of Myth and Monument in the reshaping of South African identity, it is critical that we first define these two terms. It is important to distinguish Myth (and myths) from the seemingly interchangeable constructs of fables and fairy tales. The most fundamental difference is that Myth is almost always grounded in fact. Even the most supernatural mythology usually has some basis in reality. Fables (like those of Æsop) and fairy tales (like Hansel & Gretel or the Brothers Grimm), though they may have a moral lesson to teach, are seldom based on actual people or events.

The perceptive reader will have noticed that I have referred to both Myth and myth(s). This is an important distinction. Myth (capitalized) is a category of communication, one which I will define more fully in a moment; whereas myths are the individual stories themselves, unique to a particular people (though often similar across many nations), that give that particular people its unique identity. Thus myths are specific examples of Myth. Throughout this paper I will be discussing both and will do my best to clearly maintain the distinction.

In his essay "Myth Today", Roland Barthes defines Myth as both a type of speech and as a semiological system. As speech, he says, "…what must be firmly established at the start is that myth[6] is a system of communication, that it is a message. This allows one to perceive that myth cannot possibly be an object, a concept or an idea; it is a mode of signification, a form."[7]

If Myth is a form, then anything can be a myth provided it becomes a part of a discourse; that is, as long as it is part of a (literal or figurative) conversation. Such

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[6] Barthes does not make the distinction between Myth and myth(s) as I have, thus he does not capitalize the word. Nevertheless, he is describing Myth as I will be using it.
[7] Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), 109.

Mythic status, however, is neither inevitable nor automatic. Barthes maintains that Myth is always temporary, historical and contingent: "It is human history which converts reality into speech, and it alone rules the life and death of mythical language. Ancient or not, mythology can only have an historical foundation, for myth is a type of speech chosen by history: it cannot possibly evolve from the 'nature' of things."[8] As such, the material of Mythic speech must have already been endowed by history with some meaning.

Take, as an example, Caesar crossing the Rubicon. This crossing, in an historical context, carries enormous meaning for the future of the Roman Republic. It is, in fact, the beginning of the end of the Republic. Lacking such historical import, this event would be unsuitable for elevation to Mythic speech; it would have been "lost in the mists of time," as they say. However, given its historical impact, the crossing of the Rubicon has for centuries maintained a Mythic significance as beginning of end, as the act that seals one's inevitable fate. But it is neither the crossing, per se, nor the end of the Republic alone that produce this Mythic connotation; it is necessary for the two (crossing and ending, material and meaning) to be taken together. Barthes explains the process by which this occurs in his description of Myth as a semiological system.

Semiology "postulates a relationship between two terms, a signifier and a signified."[9] This relationship produces a third term, the sign, "which is the associative total of the first two terms."[10] Take an example from Barthes' essay: a black pebble in and of itself carries no meaning, though it could be made to mean many things. Use that black pebble to a death sentence in a secret vote and you create a sign: the pebble death sentence. As Barthes points out, the relationship between signifier and signified is not one of equality (i.e. black pebble $\neq$ death sentence) but one of equivalence (i.e., black pebble $\therefore$ death sentence). The sign exists only in the association between the two other terms.[11]

In Mythic speech it is this associative total, the sign, which is being communicated. But because it requires material that has already been imbued with historical meaning Myth is, in effect, a second order semiological system "constructed from a semiological chain which existed before it…That which is a sign (namely the associative total of a concept and an image) in the first system

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[8] Ibid., 100.
[9] Ibid., 112.
[10] Ibid., 113.
[11] Ibid., 112.

becomes a mere signifier in the second."[12] Here is a (strictly metaphorical) representation adapted from Barthes' essay:

Language {	1. Signifier	2. Signified	
	3. Sign		
	I SIGNIFIER		II SIGNIFIED
Myth {	III SIGNIFICATION [13]		

In order to become the mythical signifier, the linguistic sign must already possess an associative meaning (e.g., Caesar crossing the Rubicon *signifies* the beginning of the end of the Roman Republic). However, in the process of becoming Myth it is essentially emptied of this meaning. Although the meaning still exists, and is necessary to the creation of the mythic signification (e.g., "Caesar crossing the Rubicon as the beginning of the end of the Roman Republic" *signifies* the beginning of any inevitable chain of events), the first-order meaning is reduced to mere form within the second-order Myth. As Barthes writes, "When it becomes form, the meaning leaves its contingency behind; it empties itself, it becomes impoverished, history evaporates, only the letter remains."[14] Barthes stresses that this reduction from meaning to form does not remove the historical meaning; it merely places it in the background to be usurped in its primacy by the needs of a particular understanding of present-day necessity. According to Barthes, "In this sense we can say that the fundamental character of the mythical concept is to be *appropriated*."[15]

Thus, to say that one has "crossed one's own personal Rubicon" has nothing to do with an Italian river or the collapse of the Roman Republic. These historical meanings belong to the linguistic semiology and "evaporate" when Myth is invoked. Rather, the phrase conveys an associative meaning according to the necessity of current usage, something to the effect that one has "sealed one's fate; has set in motion a sequence of events that is beyond one's further control and from which one can no longer turn back."

One could say that South Africa crossed its own Rubicon in 1990, with the release of Nelson Mandela after 27 years in prison. This was the beginning of the end of white minority rule – and thus of apartheid – in South Africa. Mandela has

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[12] Ibid., 114.
[13] Barthes calls this second-order associative meaning the "signification", to differentiate it from the first-order linguistic "sign".
[14] Ibid.,117.
[15] Ibid., 199.

certainly achieved Mythic status, both at home and around the world, in the intervening years. Although a myriad of elements have contributed to that phenomenon, it is possible to examine the essentials through the suggested semiological framework to see how the myth of Nelson Mandela developed.

Mandela as Myth

As we've seen, Myth, as a form of communication, has a particular meaning it is attempting to convey. Thus for any particular myth, the essential question becomes: What is its meaning? What is it attempting to communicate? In the case of Nelson Mandela, let us begin by examining this question.

My assessment suggests that the myth of Mandela begins with the idea that he is the "Father of the Nation." Several people I spoke to described him as a South African George Washington, the leader without whom the new South Africa would not exist. Thus, the myth of Mandela is very much a myth about origins, in this case national origins. At a deeper level, the myth surrounding Mandela carries the message that he is an (perhaps *the*) exemplary South African citizen. His values, his virtues, his strengths are those of South Africa and of the South African people. Archbishop Desmond Tutu, in his speech at the conclusion of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), spoke directly to then-president Mandela, "Madiba[16], the world has looked in amazement and indeed awe at the remarkable example that you have set of magnanimity and generosity in your willingness to forgive and to work for reconciliation… They have seen the miracle of April 1994 continuing in people who suffered grievously, ready to forgive."

Thus, one notion that was conveyed to me during several personal interviews is that it is not uncommon, under widely varying circumstances when important decisions need to be made, for South Africans to ask (either literally or figuratively): "What would Madiba do?"

If this is the meaning – in Barthes' terms, the signification – of the Mandela myth, then it should be possible to work backwards to determine the component elements that produce this meaning. Perhaps then, what we have is Nelson Mandela *as* the exemplary South African citizen. But we have also established that the Mythic signifier, in this case Nelson Mandela himself, must be the associative

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[16] Madiba is Nelson Mandela's clan name. Among the Nguni people (which includes both the Xhosa and Mandela's tribe, the Thembu), the clan name is an appellation of respect. It is the name most South Africans use to refer to Mandela in casual conversation.

total of a previous semiology imbued with significant historical meaning. In Mandela we certainly have a person of profound historical import, and thus his Mythic signification might more precisely be described as Nelson Mandela *the historical figure* the exemplary South African citizen. From here it should be possible to look back and understand what it is about his life, his history that has created such a Mythic signification.

Nelson Mandela was born into the house of a tribal chief. Though not in the direct line of succession, he was fated to be one of the chief's foremost advisors. This is a source of great pride and deep significance for the indigenous peoples of South Africa. It marked Mandela as an eminent figure from the beginning. In his autobiography, he describes being deeply impressed by the tribal meetings presided over by his guardian, the chief regent of the Thembu tribe. These meetings had a lasting influence on Mandela as a leader. "As a leader, I have always followed the principles I first saw demonstrated by the regent at the Great Place. I have always endeavored to listen to what each and every person in a discussion had to say before venturing my own opinion. Oftentimes, my own opinion will simply represent a consensus of what I heard in the discussion."[17] Thus, he was schooled from an early age in the art of compromise and consensus building.

As a student in Johannesburg, Mandela was a founding member of the ANC Youth League. The Youth League is widely credited with reinvigorating the ANC and with moving them from an organization of words to one of actions. As a leader of the Youth League, Mandela organized and led many of these action campaigns. Ultimately, he was banned as a result – but he also gained a reputation as a man of conscience and conviction. Despite his banning, he and Oliver Tambo went on to establish the first black law practice in the city of Johannesburg.

After being famously tried and acquitted of treason, Mandela became the first leader of uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK), the armed wing of the African National Congress. While this solidified his reputation as a committed fighter (now, literally) for the cause of freedom in South Africa, it also forced him to live on the run. He became, as the South African press described him at the time, "the Black Pimpernel." His ability to elude the authorities only served to enhance his status.[18] Eventually, however, he was apprehended and again tried for treason.

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[17] Nelson Mandela, *Long walk to freedom: the autobiography of Nelson Mandela* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1994), 22

[18] Ibid., 267-68.

This time he was convicted and sent to Robben Island, the notorious prison twelve kilometers off the coast of Cape Town – and in a universe of its own.

Mandela spent 27 years as a prisoner of the apartheid regime, and it was during this time that his status reached Mythic proportions. In his absence and isolation, Mandela became the international symbol for the anti-apartheid movement. He became the leader and spokesperson for all the political prisoners on the island. His name and likeness appeared on protest regalia throughout the world, from buttons to t-shirts to placards and banners. Any officials, dignitaries or humanitarians who visited the island made a point of seeking him out to inquire about his health and state of mind; and he took advantage of such occasions to press not only for better treatment for himself and his fellow prisoners, but for the cause to which he continued to dedicate himself – freedom for all South Africans. Throughout his time as a "guest" of the apartheid regime, Mandela continued – presciently, it seems in hindsight – to prepare himself for his historical destiny.

There is, in Mandela's story, a remarkable resemblance to the mythology of classical Greece.[19] In Greek mythology few individuals ever traveled to the underworld and were able to return, and only one, Hercules, returned whole and triumphant. As a son of Zeus, Hercules had the blood of an immortal running through his veins; Mandela has the blood of royalty in his. In their lifetimes, both Hercules and Mandela survived attempts upon their lives and years of slave labor. Like that of Hercules, Mandela's life has been one of both triumph and sorrow, filled with arduous labors and truly Herculean deeds. And like Hercules, Mandela ventured into the underworld – both in exile and in the living hell that was Robben Island – and emerged victorious.

The conclusion of Mandela's story is well known. In 1990, he finally emerged from the underworld. Following secret negotiations with the South African government, he was released from prison and all opposition political parties were unbanned. In 1993, he and then-South African president F.W. de Klerk were jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for their work toward the democratic restructuring of South Africa. And in 1994, he was elected the first black president of South Africa, in the nation's first fully-democratic election. It was the ultimate triumph for the man who had become the ultimate icon of the struggle for freedom and it cemented his place as a Mythic figure in the history of the new South Africa.

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[19] I am indebted to my friend Kjersten Gmeiner, MD for suggesting this parallel.

Monument, and the "Germany Parallel"

A s mentioned previously, it is with myths of origin that I am particularly
concerned when it comes to South Africa. If such myths are at the heart of a
people's identity, it is monuments that give them form and substance. As James
Young has written in his book *The texture of memory*, "By themselves, monuments
are of little value, mere stones in the landscape. But as part of a nation's rites or
the objects of a people's national pilgrimage, they are invested with national soul
and memory."[20] Young's book is an exploration of the *idea* of the monument and
its role in public memory, specifically as it relates to the Holocaust. As such it is
an excellent model for South Africa, a model which I will examine in some
depth. In this regard I will make a distinction (similar to that between Myth and
myths) between Monument (as an idea, as a category of communication) and
monuments (as specific individual instantiations of Monument).

The process of monumentation is a primary method by which nations and
peoples revisit the myths that comprise their cultural identity. As Young puts it,
"The matrix of a nation's monuments emplots the story of ennobling events, of
triumphs over barbarism, and recalls the martyrdom of those who gave their
lives in the struggle for national existence – who…died so that a country might
live."[21]

There is a distinction to be made here as well, between monuments and
memorials. For the purposes of this paper, I will consider memorials to be a
specific sub-genre of Monument. Thus, all memorials are monuments but not all
monuments are memorials.[22] Arthur Danto, in an article on the Vietnam
Veterans' Memorial in Washington, DC, defines the distinction this way:

> We erect monuments so that we shall always remember and build memorials so
> that we shall never forget…Monuments commemorate the memorable and
> embody myths of beginnings. Memorials ritualize remembrance and mark the
> reality of ends…Monuments make heroes and triumphs, victories and conquests,
> perpetually present and part of life. The memorial is a special precinct, extruded

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[20] James Edward Young, *The texture of memory: Holocaust memorials and meaning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 2.

[21] Ibid., 2.

[22] Young makes a similar, but contrary, distinction. He says that a memorial can take many forms: memorial books; memorial days; memorial festivals, memorial statues, etc. Monuments, according to Young, are but one form of memorial, thus all monuments are memorials but not all memorials are monuments (3-4).

from life, a segregated enclave where we honor the dead. With monuments, we honor ourselves.[23]

"Danto's distinction is a good starting point," suggests Henry Pickford in his analysis of Holocaust memorials in Berlin, "because it rests on the *use* to which monuments and memorials are put in the context of public commemoration, which suggests considering them as modified forms of semiotic communication.[24] Thus monuments (and memorials) are not merely physical representations of Myth (or myths), but are a way of communicating directly the semiotic messages contained therein. Thereby, Myth and Monument are further entwined in the process of identity formation.

It is not a coincidence that both Young and Pickford made their observations in reference to Holocaust memorials in Germany. The parallels between post-war Germany and post-apartheid South Africa are too significant to ignore. Young, though referring to Germany, could just as easily have been writing about South Africa when he asks:

> How does a state incorporate its crimes against others into its memorial landscape? How does a state recite, much less commemorate, the litany of its misdeeds, making them part of its reason for being? Under what memorial aegis, whose rules, does a nation remember its own barbarity? Where is the tradition for memorial mea culpa, when combined remembrance and self-indictment seem so hopelessly at odds?[25]

Pickford takes this idea further, suggesting that such conflicted desires give rise to the creation of conflicted (and conflicting) identities. Future generations, he posits, face the daunting task of "constituting stable self-identities by way of identification with parents and grand-parents who, in the worst possible cases, may have been directly implicated in crimes of unspeakable dimensions, thereby radically impeding their totemic availability."[26]

He argues that this necessity to identify with figures whom one would otherwise renounce creates an ambivalence to conventional identity formation, leading to an attenuation of the idea of collective identity. This, in turn, leads to the creation of contradictory – and often competing – versions of history through

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[23] Arthur Danto, "The Vietnam Veteran's Memorial", *The Nation*, August 3, 1986, 153.
[24] Henry W. Pickford, "Conflict and Commemoration: Two Berlin Memorials", *Modernism/Modernity* 12, no. 1 (2005): 153-54.
[25] Young, 22.
[26] Pickford, 136.

which succeeding generations then attempt to construct an identity that distances them from the deeds of the past while appropriately representing their position within the larger historical discourse.

This phenomenon is particularly evident in the realm of Monument. According to Pickford, "The confluence of contradictory historiographies often results in symbolic conflict, and such conflict is perhaps nowhere more noticeable than in public memorials that seek to rescript these various histories into one story, one *mythos.*[27]

This should not be surprising, given the dual nature of the semiotic messages many such monuments are expected to convey. For purposes of analogy, I have replaced references to Germany in the following passage from Pickford with references to South Africa. The statement is rendered no less true as a result:

> The double bind afflicting [post-apartheid South Africa] is that the memorials commemorating the war dead are at once also monuments to the "birth" of modern democratic [South Africa]: the "myth of beginning" and the "reality of ends" that Danto separates by analytical definition are here inextricably convoluted…the historical narrative – the context – that [newly democratic South Africa] wants to tell itself is just as conflated, trying to name the same event(s) under two descriptions: defeat and rebirth are "co-originary," as Heidegger would say.[28]

Without sliding off into a lengthy treatise on the nature of identity formation, the parallels to the situation in South Africa should be apparent. Young states that the German national identity "is that of a nation tortured by its conflicted desire to build a new and just state on the bedrock memory of its horrendous crimes."[29] To the extent that the very same can be said of South Africa, one might expect the process of reconstructing the national identity to develop similarly there as in post-war Germany.

So the question arises, given the similarities between post-war Germany and post-apartheid South Africa, are there other circumstances that suggest that the process will play out differently in South Africa than it has in Germany? Are there powers at work in South Africa that suggest a dissimilar outcome? My answer to both questions is: yes. This difference, I believe, is embodied in the

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[27] Ibid., 138.
[28] Ibid, 154.
[29] Young, 22.

South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). More specifically, it is in the difference between the TRC and the Nuremberg trials.

It has become quite fashionable these days, nearly de rigueur, to view the TRC with a certain skepticism; to question whether it truly fulfilled any of its objectives, at least those stated in its charter. I have no intention, indeed no reason, to engage in that particular debate. For the purposes of the current argument, I contend that the TRC has succeeded brilliantly as an antidote to the conflicting historiographies that Pickford says have so plagued succeeding generations of post-war Germans.[30]

The essential difference between these experiences lies in the nature and history of the two proceedings. The purpose of the trials at Nuremberg was to establish guilt, to apportion blame, and to punish those responsible. It was, in the current parlance, a retributive proceeding. As such, it was an inherently adversarial process, as all criminal trials are. In that we are discussing conflicting historiographies, it is important to acknowledge the historical circumstances that brought about this process.

The Germans did not choose a retributive model; the retributive model was imposed upon them by the victorious Allied powers. Further heightening their sense of guilt was the fact that those who inherited the task of reconstituting German identity in the aftermath of the war held the same racial and cultural identity as those convicted of crimes against humanity. And because the charges constituted crimes against humanity, their convictions created not mere criminals, but universal pariahs shunned by the entire human race. This utter renunciation of not just the acts, but above all of the perpetrators of those acts, is primarily what activated the ambivalence of identification that Pickford cites as the origin of the historiographic and symbolic conflict in post-war German identity.

Contrast this with the history and principles behind the TRC. The purpose of the TRC was to determine, to the greatest extent possible, the fate of victims of gross human rights violations that occurred *on both sides* during the years of struggle against apartheid. It was not a trial to establish guilt; it was an attempt to ascertain the facts on behalf of those who could not do so for themselves. Thus,

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[30] It has been argued by somethat the legacy of the TRC has impeded the consideration of other potentially valid historiographies of the apartheid era. Though I won't address this issue here, I would tend to agree. See Yazir Henry and Heidi Grunebaum, *Re-historicising trauma: reflections on violence and memory in current-day Cape Town,* DACPM occasional papers series, no. 6 (Cape Town: Direct Action Centre for Peace and Memory, 2005); and Ciraj Rassool, Leslie Witz and Gary Minkley, "Burying and Memorialising the Body of Truth: The TRC and National Heritage," in *After the TRC: reflections on truth and reconciliation in South Africa,* Eds. James Wilmot Godfrey and Linda van de Vijver (Athens: Ohio University Press).

rather than being a retributive process, the TRC was intended as a *restorative* project. But as in Germany, the choice of a restorative model in South Africa was not entirely voluntary.

The white minority, in relinquishing power, were terrified (for good reason) of the prospect of reprisals against them once the transfer of power was complete. In order to counteract that possibility, it was made a condition of the transfer that a mechanism allowing amnesty for former functionaries of the apartheid government be established. To that end, in addition to hearings looking into the nature of the human rights violations committed under apartheid, the TRC also held a series of amnesty hearings wherein those accused of such violations could present their case for amnesty. These hearings, collectively, were conducted throughout South Africa over a period of two and a half years, the majority broadcast live on South African national television and/or radio. A primary consequence of the hearings was to establish a single *shared* history of the events of those years. It should not be necessary to point out that this is precisely the opposite effect of the Nuremberg trials as described above.

In this regard, one can make a credible argument for a continuum of late 20th century cases based on this idea. At one end is Germany, whose post-war identity has been formed largely by those identified with the perpetrators of the Holocaust (not by the individuals themselves, but by those of the same racial and cultural affiliation). At the other end lies Israel, whose identity has been forged almost exclusively by those identified with the *victims* of the Holocaust (in large measure, by the surviving victims themselves). And somewhere in the middle is South Africa, where victims and perpetrators are attempting to work out their new identity together. To my mind, theirs is by far the more difficult task.

But it is also important to note that, unlike in Germany, the inheritors of the state apparatus in South Africa are of an entirely different racial and cultural identity than those overwhelmingly implicated in the crimes of apartheid. This permits them to distance themselves from the evils of the previous regime. At the same time, the exigencies of nation-building – social, political and economic – impose upon them a necessary attitude of cooperation with their former oppressors, further institutionalizing the drive for reconciliation as opposed to retribution.
All of which suggests that the process of identity formation in the new South Africa could play out very differently than in post-war Germany. Seemingly, issues of pragmatic necessity may have nearly as much influence on the process as those of idealistic aspiration. The enduring commitment to reconciliation and cooperation requires that both sides be open to compromise for the sake of

ongoing harmony. Such compromise is never easy and is not always successful. An illustration of the difficulties can be found in the treatment of the Gugulethu Seven.

The Gugulethu Seven: a case study in the politics of Myth and Monument

In early 1986, a group of seven young men were recruited and trained as members of uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK). Unbeknownst to them, the man who recruited them was an *Askari*, a former MK operative who had been turned by the government into an agent of the Security Branch. These young men were trained in guerrilla warfare and armed by members of the Security Branch anti-terrorism unit at Vlakplass, posing as MK comrades.

On the morning of March 3rd 1986, the *Askari* drove these young men into the township of Gugulethu, where they believed they were going to conduct an ambush on Security Branch forces. The truth was that the Security forces were already there, waiting at a prearranged location to ambush them. As the van in which they were traveling arrived at the intersection of the NY1 and the NY111, the *Askari* stopped the vehicle and fled as the Security forces opened fire. A plaque attached to the memorial recently installed near this site indicates that, "Some of the activists were killed as they sought to defend themselves, some were killed as they tried to surrender, whilst the injured were shot as they lay on the ground."

Video of the aftermath of this attack was broadcast throughout South Africa in the hours and days that followed. Many of the victims' families learned of the fate of their loved ones only when they saw these images of the bodies being dragged away or manhandled by the Security forces. The community was outraged. Protests, both official and unofficial, erupted. In defiance of the existing State of Emergency an estimated 30-40,000 people attended the funeral. Despite eyewitness accounts to the contrary and conflicting forensic evidence, two separate inquests carried out by the apartheid government found that the men had been killed in a legitimate anti-terrorism operation.

During the TRC hearings it was revealed that this operation was planned and conducted by the Security Branch in the hope that it would be seen as a dramatic victory and would generate support for additional funding for the anti-terrorism unit. Only two of the officers involved in the incident applied for amnesty through the TRC. Both were eventually granted amnesty on the basis that they

acted "in the scope of their duties and within the scope of their authority and have complied with the requirements of the Act. (IOL)"

Unlike Mandela, it is not the history of their lives that has elevated the Gugulethu Seven to Mythic status, but the circumstances of their deaths. The message conveyed by the myth of the Gugulethu Seven is two-fold. The operation that killed them is considered among the most cowardly and despicable acts of the apartheid era; wherein the government created terrorists where none had ever existed before and then, for their own purposes, massacred them in cold blood. Thus, one aspect of the myth speaks of the ultimate betrayal.

The other signification of this myth, accounting for the devotion and commitment of these seven young men, is that of the ultimate sacrifice. Believing themselves to be fighting for the cause of freedom, they are remembered as heroes and martyrs. The memorial plaque states:

> Inspired by the ideals of the Freedom Charter and motivated by the command to render the country ungovernable, these young men paid the ultimate price. Their blood has nurtured the tree of freedom. This shrine should remind many that these seven young men lost their lives for the freedom we enjoy today.

As previously stated, monuments are one way of communicating the semiotic messages of Myth. The message(s) contained in the myth of the Gugulethu Seven have not always been so eloquently represented in Monument. A previous memorial located nearby was for years a source of controversy and consternation within the community, not only in Gugulethu but throughout Cape Town. The existence, and the replacement, of this previous monument is an object lesson on the impact of politics on the process of identity formation.

The original Gugulethu Seven memorial was quite small, perhaps four feet square, created of stone and cement. It was commissioned by the Cape Town City Council and unveiled on March 21st, 2000 – Human Rights Day. With an obelisk-shaped pillar about three feet high, it incorporated the eight-spoked wheel – the symbol of the ANC – along with a small plaque of only a few square inches. While it did list the names of the men who were killed, it did not attempt to represent in any way either their lives or their deaths. On the subject of the episode it was intended to memorialize, it was essentially mute. Installed along the NY1 road in Gugulethu, but so inconspicuous that it was easier to miss than to notice, it was more marker than monument.

By contrast, the new memorial to the Gugulethu Seven is nothing short of astonishing. At the front of a plaza paved in stone stands a line of seven ten-foot high granite slabs, one for each of the men who died that day. Each stands on a pedestal with a bronze plaque affixed, telling about the life of one of the victims. Cut out of each slab is the shape of a contorted human body. Visually, it is not at all clear if these bodies are contorted in the joy of life or the throes of death.

This new memorial was dedicated on March 21st, 2005 — exactly five years after the original. It is also located along the NY1 road, only a few yards from the location of the earlier monument. But this new representation is light years beyond the original in its artistic expression, in its incorporation into the larger landscape and in its depiction of the lives and deaths of these seven young martyrs.

How can we account for these two utterly dissimilar renderings of the same episode? Could the mythic signification of the events of that day have changed so drastically in five years as to account for the differences? Possibly; such metamorphoses have been known to occur. It has happened that some event or person so captures the popular imagination that it is catapulted into the national consciousness in such a way as to achieve mythic status. As just one example, the 1980 murder of John Lennon comes to mind. I know of no such epiphanal moment in the recent history of the Gugulethu Seven. I believe the explanation in this case lies not in the realm of Myth but in the realm of politics.

In an interview, Dr. Nico Jooste, historian and the Director of International Education at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University in Port Elizabeth, suggested that the politics of the Western Cape, where Gugulethu is located, provide some of the explanation:

> You wouldn't have found a lot in the Western Cape, definitely, because the Western Cape after '94 was not in ANC control — until now, last year [2004]. Prior to that time the Western Cape was controlled by the National Party — the New National Party — who had no interest in building monuments to the ANC victory.[31]

He continues:

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[31] Nico Jooste. Interview, March 25, 2005.

> That's why you'll find, if you go to East London, you'll find the Steve Biko
> monument in front of the City square. If you go to Johannesburg you'll find a
> number of monuments there. But not in the Western Cape, you're right about
> that.[32]

Yazir Henry, director of The Direct Action Centre for Peace and Memory,
agrees. "I think this is a key point," he says, "Why would parties – not just the
National Party, but also the Democratic Party and parties from that
tradition…why would they want to be reminded of their atrocity? They deny it!"
Henry, whose organization was involved in the discussions that resulted in the
creation of the new monument in Gugulethu, went on to say that lack of
resources, as well as what he called "battle fatigue" also contributed to the slow
pace of monumentation throughout the country. Both of those conditions could
have been overcome had there been the political will to do so. Monuments in the
new South Africa have become, it seems, as much a matter of realpolitik as of
culture.

Where are All the Monuments?

This issue of monuments is not simply an academic question. According to Ciraj
Rassool and his colleagues Leslie Mitz and Gary Minkley, all from the History
faculty at the University of the Western Cape, "One of the instant imaginings
accompanying the end of apartheid was that many of the symbols and memorials
that saturate the South African landscape would disappear."[33] Indeed, at a
conference held at Witwatersrand University in 1992, a primary topic of
discussion was the destruction of the Voortrekker Monument described in the
introduction.[34] Overwhelmingly, however, this impulse has not been translated
into action.

Tributes to the "old" South Africa continue to dominate the national landscape.
Markers commemorating the "Great Trek" and its heroes abound. A memorial
and cultural center dedicated to the English settlers of 1820 stands above
Grahamstown, where the preserved guns of a colonial fort still overlook the
town. Near the city of Paarl, northwest of Cape Town, an astoundingly phallic
monument to the Afrikaans language commands the view for miles in all

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[32] Ibid.
[33] Ciraj Rassool, Ciraj, Leslie Witz and Gary Minkley, "Burying and Memorialising the Body of Truth: The TRC and National Heritage," in *After the TRC: reflections on truth and reconciliation in South Africa*, eds. Wilmot James and Linda van de Vijver (Cape Town : David Philip Publishers (Pty) Ltd., 2000), 121.
[34] Ibid.

directions. These and innumerable other reminders of South Africa's history of oppression have been left standing "as if monumental structures encompass a neutral past."[35]

And it is not merely that the old monuments remain. According to Rassool, "If the removal and reconfiguration of apartheid's monuments have proceeded at a snail's pace, the construction of new monuments has been haphazard and piecemeal."[36] Following the elections of 1994 the government initiated the Legacy Project, which was intended to generate a coherent national program of monumentation. Such a program has been slow to materialize.

Politics played a role in keeping such monuments out of the Western Cape, yet another reason for this is that the government, committed both politically and socially to the goal of reconciliation, couldn't risk alienating the white minority. Dr. Jooste states, "You must remember the political transformation…took place in 1994. The socio-economic change is still taking place. It's only ten [*sic*] years. And monuments are either built by governments or by communities. The government has tended not to do that because monuments can also be quite divisive. In a multi-cultural society, where there's still a political divide, it could be quite divisive."[37] The danger of further isolating those with whom it has committed to reconcile left the government program hanging on the horns of a dilemma. This, in turn, has left it to individual localities to create their own projects (of which the original Gugulethu Seven monument was one) or not.

In the meantime — whether by design, by accident or some combination of the two — an alternative strategy for commemorating the heroes and events of the struggle against apartheid has emerged. In numerous locations throughout the country it is the *sites* of oppression and struggle that have been transformed into monuments. Foremost among these sites is the former political prison on Robben Island. Now a museum, with educational programs and a conference facility, much of the former prison has been preserved in order for future

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[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid, 122.
[37] Josste, interview.

Figure 4. Exercise yard and guard tower at Robben Island

generations of visitors to face, in some small measure, the reality of the experience of those whose suffering is now memorialized there. In addition, at all levels those doing the talking (so to speak) at Robben Island – leading tours, conducting educational programs, providing the historical context – are former prisoners on the island. This personal connection, the inclusion of individual experience to the historical narrative, adds enormously to what Young refers to as "the rhetoric of ruins". [T]he magic of ruins persists," he writes, "a near mystical fascination with sites seemingly charged with the aura of past events, as if the molecules of the sites still vibrated with the memory of their history…As houses come to be "haunted" by the ghosts (memory, really) of their former occupants, the sites of destruction are haunted by the phantoms of past events, no longer visible, but only remembered".[38]

The monumentalization of such sites requires an intention on the part of the visitor, however. "[W]ithout a people's intention to remember, the ruins remain little more than inert pieces of the landscape, unsuffused with the meanings and significance created in our visits to them."[39] This intention, this "will to remember," is one of the motivations behind the Western Cape Action Tour

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[38] Young, 119.
[39] Ibid., 119.

project. WeCAT, as it is known, is a program of the Direct Action Centre for Peace and Memory. Former MK soldiers conduct visitors on tours around the townships of the Cape Flats outside Cape Town, focusing on sites of oppression. Included in the tour is that stretch of the NY1 road in Gugulethu where the new memorial now stands, and where nearby the murder of American student Amy Biehl occurred; Thornton Road in Athlone, where the Trojan Horse incident took place in 1985; as well as the former Bantu Administration Building in Langa. At each stop along the way, the former soldiers (like the former prisoners on Robben Island) describe both the historic and the *personal* significance of each location.

The tours, according to director Yazir Henry, are both a memorial for the dead and a monument to the living. "Through creating a process that remembers young people who were killed during the liberation struggle in places that oftentimes they were not being remembered we, in the absence of plaques, decided to become the plaques ourselves. By remembering the ideals that those young people died for, and the spirit with which they carried them, we engage today, we engage the present, again." Henry, whose organization has been operating WeCAT since 1997, says the project is as much about the past as about the future. "We made promises to people that if they didn't make it that they would be remembered," Henry says. "And it was important for us who remained alive that there be an active process that honors those who died; that transmits to others, as well as future generations, the history of young people who – I think – did the impossible." He adds that, "Another important aspect of the WeCAT project is that it provides a vehicle for former soldiers who were engaged in that battle to bring onto the landscape, onto these sites of trauma and killing, their experience of those places and to transmit that outwardly as education."

The WeCAT project combines the "will to remember" with the immediacy of personal experience to transform sites of past oppression into living monuments that actively engage with present-day understanding. This immediacy makes the messages conveyed all the more powerful. Perhaps nowhere does this combination of monument and personal experience convey a more powerful message than in the area known as District Six.

District Six: Myth, Monument and Reality

For nearly a century, the area of Cape Town known as District Six was a vibrant, thriving, multicultural quarter of the city. Given its name in 1867, when it was established as the sixth municipal district of Cape Town, it occupies one and a

half square kilometers on the western flank of Table Mountain (arguably some of the most valuable real estate in all of Africa). In its heyday, it was a mixed community of some sixty to seventy thousand people that included, during its history: freed slaves and immigrants; artists and artisans; politicians and merchants; writers, teachers, priests, gangsters and sheikhs.[40] It was an area at once terribly overcrowded and enormously diverse; an area of dreadful poverty and surprising harmony.

Architect Lucien LeGrange[41] offers this description of the sense of community that characterized District Six during those years:

> Despite the origins of the various people that made up the population, District Six developed over a period of time into a community that was at once heterogeneous and yet still cohesive. It was a community that had a sense of continuity and a sense of its own history. It had a high population density that allowed for a threshold of support for a number of cultural, social and commercial services. Such diverse conditions were to influence the daily lives of people living in the area.
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> There was in District Six no apparent residential segregation between classes — labourers lived cheek by jowl with professionals. This was perhaps so because there existed an organic link between the various people that made up the community — families were often constituted of various 'classes', where professionals, artisans, and labourers were of the same family living under the same roof.
>
> In addition there existed a level of tolerance amongst people that could accommodate a range of religious and political beliefs. Christians, Muslims, Hindus and other creeds co-existed peacefully within the same street, the same tenement building. This tolerance contributed to the sense of community that existed within District Six. Despite different allegiances, people could attend the same church, mosque or school, share social and sports facilities, and exchange ideas freely. Identity, unlike the conservative character it has assumed today, was informed by common socio-economic circumstances and a shared sense of place rather than by notions of ethnicity or religious exclusivity.[42]

That sense of community was shattered on February 11, 1966 when District Six was declared a "Whites only" area under the Group Areas Act of 1950.[43] During the ensuing sixteen years, gradually but inexorably, District Six was demolished.

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[40] Noor Ebrahim, *Noor's story: my life in district six* (Cape Town: District Six Museum Foundation, 1999), 8.

[41] Lucien LeGrange is a trustee of the District Six Museum in Cape Town.

[42] Lucian LeGrange, "The Urbanism of District Six," in *The Last days of District Six,* ed. Jan Greshoff (Cape Town : District Six Museum, 1996), 8. Emphasis added

[43] The Group Areas Act reserved 87% of South Africa's land for whites, who made up only 25% of South Africa's population.

Over 3,700 residential and commercial buildings were destroyed.[44] The only structures left standing were the various houses of worship – churches, mosques and synagogues – that had been the anchors of the once-flourishing community. Tragically, the people of that community were forcibly removed, deposited among the ever-expanding townships of the Cape Flats – Lavender Hill, Hanover Park and Bonteheuwel – miles from their former home, from their work, and from those spiritual centers the government had so thoughtfully left behind. By the end of 1982 the reality of District Six had ceased to exist; the myth of District Six had only just been born.

During the years after the declaration of 1966, District Six went into a steady decline. Knowing what was coming, many who could afford it chose to leave on their own terms before they were forcibly relocated. Many shops and businesses closed, buildings were left derelict and unoccupied. Squatters, gangsters and petty criminals proliferated. The death throes of District Six were not pretty. At the same time, nostalgia sprang up for the "glory days" of the old neighborhood. The "will to remember" what had once existed there began to take hold. The loss of that sense of community that LeGrange describes led to the creation of a new sense of identity as "former residents," much as Maalouf suggests it might. One expression of this new sentiment was the appearance of romanticized tales of life in District Six, such as those presented by the late Richard Rive[45] in his book '*Buckingham Palace', District Six.* These nostalgic recollections laid the foundation for the mythologizing of District Six. It became, along with the Sophiatown area of Johannesburg (a similar neighborhood that suffered a similar fate), emblematic of the dream of a non-racialized South Africa where all were capable of living harmoniously together. Unlike Sophiatown, District Six became a monument to itself.

One of the goals of the South African government in declaring District Six for "whites only" was to redevelop this area for the benefit of the white ruling class. Its geography at the base of Table Mountain, as well as its proximity to the social and commercial center of Cape Town, made it some of the most desirable property in all of South Africa. Once the former residents had been removed and the landscape had been completely scoured, development would commence much as it had in the former Sophiatown area, by now entirely rebuilt and renamed Triomf.[46] But the government hadn't reckoned on the power of memory.

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[44] LeGrange, 9.
[45] Rive was brutally murdered in his Cape Town home in 1989 at the age of 58.
[46] For a fuller examination of the fate of Sophiatown, see Sparks, *The mind of South Africa*, ch.8.

Around the same time that Richard Rive was offering up his rose-tinted version of life in his former home, there emerged a grassroots community movement known as Hands-Off District Six. The expressed goal of this organization was to prevent the government from redeveloping the area without the participation of former residents. Through a combination of social, political and economic pressure, they were almost entirely successful. With the exception of the Cape Technikon, a large technical college located in the center of the district, the area remains largely bare and undeveloped, a monument to the inhumanity of apartheid.

Where once a dynamic community lived, worked and played, now for block after block fields of tall grass sway in the constant breezes that blow down off the slopes of Table Mountain. Between thoroughfares retained to allow passage through the area, the vestiges of the once-lively streets of the old District Six linger like ghosts. The wind howls with the echoes of children playing, or whispers with the muffled sounds of long-forgotten conspiracies. The very ground, as Young would say, "vibrate[s] with the memory" of a history that refuses to be forgotten. The myth of District Six lives here, amid the ruins.

Indeed, the ruins themselves serve to sustain the myth of District Six. For as long as the physical remnants are left undisturbed the possibility, no matter how improbable, of re-creating District Six in its mythical image remains. In District Six, the myth and the monument will continue to reinforce one another as long as that prospect exists. Alas, it is a fleeting hope:

> Given the strategic position of the vacant land and the growing need for affordable inner-city housing, it is inevitable that the area will have to be developed sooner rather than later…It is clear that all the families and individuals removed from the area cannot be 'repatriated' nor can intruding developments such as the Technikon be wished away. It would also be foolhardy to imagine that District Six can be reconstructed to what it was formerly.[47]

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[47] LeGrange, 13.

In fact, such redevelopment has already begun. In early 2004 the first new residential construction within the boundaries of the former District Six in over 40 years was occupied – by families that had previously been removed from the area. These homes, located on adjoining blocks in Chapel Street, represent the

Figure 5. Hanover Street, District Six, ca. 1950s.

first of some 4,000 expected to be completed by 2008. This process has been heralded as a "rebirth" of District Six. One former resident described it as, "…waking up from the nightmare."[48]

Notwithstanding the abundance of positive spin on what former residents call simply "the return," the issue of repatriation is an exceptionally thorny one. It encapsulates many of the complexities of Myth, Monument, memory and identity that challenge South Africa today. Despite the truth of the earlier suggestion that the myth and monument of District Six are mutually sustaining, they are at the same time profoundly in conflict; the realization of either one would require the demise of the other.

The preservation of the ruins of District Six as a monument would preclude any large-scale redevelopment of the area. Without such development, the realization of the myth of District Six as a community reconstructed in its own (mythical) image is impossible. By the same token, any effort to reconstruct District Six – in whatever image – necessarily entails the obliteration of the existing ruins. To whatever extent such reconstruction failed to live up to the mythical image of what District Six once was (and it is difficult to believe that the results of such an attempt could even come close), many people would undoubtedly feel that both the myth of District Six and the monument had been profoundly diminished as a consequence.

Redevelopment appears, if not imminent, then at least inevitable. Many believe that the return is necessary for the healing of past trauma. Former residents, especially those who were adults at the time of their removal, see it as part of the restitution required of the former regime – despite the reality that it is an ANC-controlled government administering the process.[49]   Given the enormous energy many have dedicated to their status as former residents, the reclaiming of the physical space from which they were brutally torn is, for them, a matter of reclaiming a lost identity.

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[48] Seshoane Masitha, "Coming home to District Six," *SouthAfrica.info,* February 13, 2003, http://www.southafrica.info/ess_info/sa_glance/social_delivery/update/district-six_120204.htm, (accessed January 18, 2006).

[49] Noor Ebrahim, interview, March 27, 2005

However, there are those – former residents among them – who believe that the ruins of District Six ought to be preserved. It is only through absence, they reason, that the true devastation of the atrocity committed there can be adequately communicated. They argue that it is not only the memory of those who died fighting against apartheid, but also the memory of those who suffered living under it, that needs to be preserved. In their view, any re-development in District Six will alter the character of the memory of those events in ways that can only serve to diminish its impact.

Figure 6. District Six today

They maintain that it would be nearly impossible to re-create the popular image of a harmonious, non-racialized community out of whole cloth. The previous community evolved organically over time – a process not offered via mere reconstruction. Ultimately, they believe that the lessons of what was done – and what was lost – in District Six are more valuable than any attempt to re-create the myth of a community that may once have existed there.

Of course, any question of value inevitably raises the issue of economics, and there are certainly economic arguments for the redevelopment of District Six. As previously noted, the area comprises some highly desirable real estate. Simple geography makes redevelopment a very attractive undertaking, economically. As

currently envisioned, reconstruction of the community would add some 4,000 family units to the economic base of the city of Cape Town. What value does a revived and dynamic economy have in the creation of a new national identity? How do you weigh that against the value of history and memory?

More specifically, however, many people are motivated to return to District Six for purely financial reasons. The opportunity to claim a piece of such valuable real estate can be a powerful incentive, especially for those who are children or grandchildren of former residents who may not have an intense personal connection to the past life of the community. For these people, the return is much more about their own future than about anyone's past. Such economic motives for return are seldom addressed publicly, inasmuch as they are incompatible with the mythology of memory, reconstruction and repatriation. Here again, the politics of pragmatism may play a decisive role in the formation of South Africa's new identity.

Conclusion

So, in the end, what can be said about the role of Myth and Monument, and about the future of identity formation, in the new South Africa? After all, identity – or perhaps more accurately, identities – have been dictated to South Africans for generations, since long before the "formal" introduction of apartheid. This history of oppression has left a legacy of obstacles, both cultural and practical, that must be surmounted in order for a new, more enlightened sense of identity to emerge. The work of Amin Maalouf suggests that in so doing, threats to the identities of the various groups within South Africa must somehow be eliminated or overcome. I would argue that this is most effectively accomplished by the creation of an overarching *national* identity common to all South Africans. In the end, what can be said about the role of Myth and Monument, and about the future of identity formation, in the new South Africa? After all, identity – or perhaps more accurately, identities – have been dictated to South Africans for generations, since long before the "formal" introduction of apartheid. This history of oppression has left a legacy of obstacles, both cultural and practical, that must be surmounted in order for a new, more enlightened sense of identity to emerge. The work of Amin Maalouf suggests that in so doing, threats to the identities of the various groups within South Africa must somehow be eliminated or overcome. I would argue that this is most effectively accomplished by the creation of an overarching *national* identity common to all South Africans. Such a national identity is not uncommon. Certainly nations with centuries, in some cases millennia, of continuous history (China, India, Egypt,

Greece, etc.), carry with them a strong national identity. But some younger nations have created strong identities, as well. The United States, for instance, is a relatively young country; Israel even younger. Both have a fierce sense of national identity. But what are the prospects that such a feeling of national identity will develop in South Africa, given its violent history of identity-based conflict?

I believe that if such an identity is to develop, Myth and Monument will play a pivotal role. It is evident that Myth is often an important element in the development of a people's identity. This is because myths carry the messages of history directly to the people; they are, in effect, a form of collective memory. (Why else would we remember the Rubicon 2,000 years later?) So the question of which myths will gain ascendancy in the (re)shaping of South African identity is critical to its future direction. They have had, and will continue to have, a profound influence on the values embraced, the policies enacted and the character of relations – internal and external – practiced by the South African people and their government.

Perhaps the foremost example of this influence is the myth of South Africa as "the Rainbow Nation." The idea of the Rainbow Nation draws from many of the myths I've examined here and binds together many of the hopes and dreams that South Africans have for their future. The Rainbow Nation projects South Africa as a progressive, non-racial democracy where people of all races, all faiths, and all backgrounds live, work and play together, and cooperate for the good of all. It is an idea born out of the traditional South African concept of *ubuntu*[50] and strengthened by "the miracle" of 1994 that allowed the nation to move from oppression to democracy without descending into civil war. And it is an ideal that has shaped the direction of South Africa's development ever since. A fundamental method by which these ideas, these messages, these values are communicated – both in the present and over time – is in monuments. The existence (or lack thereof) of such monuments, their location, form and character all affect the content of the messages they convey. Thus the issue of how the myths of the new South Africa are realized in Monument is a non-trivial matter.

The development of identity, and of Monument in particular, in post-war Germany provides a credible comparative case study. This comparison suggests that fundamental differences in the way South Africa has dealt with the atrocities

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[50] *Ubuntu* is perhaps best understood through the Xhosa expression "people are people through other people."

of its recent past may mitigate some, if not most, of the identity conflicts that Germany suffered in the last half of the 20th century. The TRC process has helped to create a shared understanding of that period that has effectively allowed all South Africans to recognize their collective historical origins. This shared understanding can provide the foundation for the sense of national identity that I have suggested.

The comparison with Germany also indicates some possible explanations for the slow development of new monuments in South Africa, as the nation struggles to memorialize those who perished while simultaneously celebrating the creation of a new democracy. This symbolic conflict has led to a strategy of creating monuments at significant "sites of memory." At such sites, the messages of history are more concrete and thus less open to (re)interpretation. The addition of personal narrative to the Mythic messages embodied at these sites (such as that provided by WeCAT and at Robben Island) creates a human connection that makes the messages all the more real; they become experiences rather than "just history." And in the end it is ones experiences that form the core of one's identity.

However, it is also true that Myth and Monument sometimes conflict with practical reality. This may be especially true in a place like South Africa which is still actively engaged in the process of nation-building. This process often involves compromises, which sometimes require that myths be subordinated to practical necessity. Such may ultimately be the case in places like District Six. This is neither inherently bad nor is it unexpected, as a nation's strength and prosperity also contribute to its people's sense of identity.

Ultimately, it will come down to the values embodied in the process. If the values employed in nation-building are consistent with those espoused by the complex of Myth and Monument, the two can work hand-in-hand to create a strong, vital, confident South Africa; an identity worthy of a nation that Desmond Tutu calls "the rainbow people of God."

Steven C. Myers is a 2006 graduate of the Comparative History of Ideas program, University of Washington, Seattle. He served in the Peace Corps in Benin (West Africa) from 2007-09, and is presently working in Benin with The Center for Arbitration, Mediation, and Conciliation of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Myers is a Mickey Leland International Hunger Fellow (2009-2011).