

**Prompt: According to Hooker, how do right-wing protests against the removal of Confederate monuments demonstrate white refusal and the lack of equivalence between Black loss and white loss?**

Contextual note from the instructor: The prompt for this week was based on an assigned portion of democratic theorist Juliet Hooker's book *Black Grief/White Grievance: The Politics of Loss*. Over the week leading up to this Friday on which the writing assignment was due, students had read Chapter 1 of the book, "White Grievance and Anticipatory Loss," in which Hooker argues that white supremacist culture in the United States features the refusal to acquiesce to legitimate political loss, and persistent mobilization behind "grievances" that are usually a response to mere anticipatory losses (losses that have not [yet] even come to pass, and may not be realistic). Hooker argues compellingly that longstanding white dominance in the U.S. has made it difficult for white citizens to accept a loss of privilege, because white citizenship has historically conferred both material and symbolic advantages. This has narrowed whites' political imaginations, resulting in a zero-sum view of racial politics according to which the (real or apparent) political gains made by marginalized groups are consistently perceived as a threat to white political dominance, further serving as the ground for the articulation of white grievances.

This particular prompt asked students to reflect on Hooker's discussion of protests against the removal of Confederate monuments as an expression of white refusal (for Hooker, white refusal and white grievance are concepts that are intimately linked together). Admittedly, this short writing assignment gets more at a delineation of white supremacist culture in the U.S., without completely contrasting it to the Black/anti-racist culture that Hooker goes on to describe in the book as one that privileges Black grief over white grievance. (A subsequent prompt addressed this second part, the following week.) However, Hooker does already bring these two cultures into relief in this section of the book, as she emphasizes the serious material loss required of Black Americans for even a minor symbolic loss to register as somewhat acceptable to whites. More specifically, focusing on the case of the mass shooting at Emanuel A.M.E. Church in South Carolina in 2015, Hooker argues that nine innocent Black citizens had to be brutally murdered by a self-avowed white supremacist in order for (some) Confederate sympathizers to accept that it might be time to take down Confederate symbols. This demonstrates the serious imbalance in power associated with these two groups, and the deeply entrenched racial inequalities that feed into it. "Horrific and undeniable Black losses were required to render a minor symbolic white

loss (the removal of the Confederate flag) palatable” in this case, Hooker assesses, citing a conservative talk-show host who conceded to the removal of Confederate symbols after the Charleston massacre even as he insisted that they represented more than just racial hatred (72). The cultural difference between white supremacists and Black Americans, here, centers on a lack of equivalence between their losses: whereas white dominant culture generally refuses to accept even minor symbolic losses, except in extreme circumstances (and even then, only begrudgingly and with resistance), Black Americans have endured a long history of being forced to accept ongoing substantial material losses. Hooker claims that this exposes an “[un]sustainable balance sheet of loss” (72); “[a]s (some) whites mourn lost statues and lost causes, Blacks mourn their dead,” she writes (74).