

# KAMBUI OLUJIMI

**Topic/Theme:** Memorialization

**Grades:** 9-12

**Subject Areas:** Visual Arts, Social Science

## Lesson Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Connect U.S. History to contemporary issues by engaging with monuments.
- Collaboratively formulate revised monuments that respond to social, cultural, or political issues.

## Illinois Learning Standards

### Visual Arts

- NA-VA:Pr6.1: Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.
- NA-VA:Cn11.1: Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.

### Social Science

- SS.H.7.9-12: Identify the role of individuals, groups, and institutions in people's struggle for safety, freedom, equality, and justice.
- SS.Soc.2.9-12: Analyze the impact of social structure, including culture, institutions, and societies.

## Vocabulary

- **Context:** a situation within which something exists or happens, and that can help explain it.<sup>1</sup>
- **Monument:** a structure or building that is built to honor a special person or event.<sup>2</sup>
- **Systemic Injustice:** policies and practices that exist throughout a whole society or organization, and that result in and support a continued unfair advantage to some people and unfair or harmful treatment of others.<sup>3</sup>

## Questions for Viewing

- Compare *Slaver, Traitor, Klansman* with the [bust](#) of Nathan Bedford Forrest. How are they similar? How are they different?
- What do you think Olujimi intended to convey with *Slaver, Traitor, Klansman*? What do you see that makes you say that?

## Activity

To prepare for teaching this lesson, consider reviewing [Monument Lab's National Monument Audit Educators Guide](#).

1. Use the "questions for viewing" above to analyze *Slaver, Traitor, Klansman* as a class.
2. Engage students in exploring the [Toppled Monuments Archive](#).
  - Select one to three monuments to discuss as a class.
  - What connections can you find between *Slaver, Traitor, Klansman* and the monument(s) you selected?
  - How is Olujimi's work similar to what you see? How is it different?
  - What narratives and systemic injustices are perpetuated by these monuments?
3. Break students into small groups. Provide them with the following prompts to research and critique a monument of their choice.
  - Where is the monument located? What context does the location provide for "reading" the monument?
  - Describe what you see.
    - If the monument depicts people, what were they known for? How are they represented?
    - If the monument depicts an event, what happened at the event?
    - What additional contextual details can you identify?
  - What time period is the monument associated with? What historical issues were taking place at that time? How does this inform your understanding of the monument?
  - What message(s) does this monument convey about history?
  - Who or what is celebrated by this monument? Who benefits from the message(s)? Who is harmed? Explain why.



Kambui Olujimi, *Slaver, Traitor, Klansman*, from the series *When Monuments Fall*, 2021. Watercolor on paper. 29 x 24.5 x 3 inches (framed). Collection of Michael Sherman, Los Angeles. Photo credit: Jade Nguyen.

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4. Have students brainstorm a variety of ways their chosen monument could be altered to highlight omissions from the narrative—such as Olujimi’s emphasis on Nathan Bedford’s White Supremacist affiliations in *Slaver, Traitor, Klansman*.
- Challenge students to collaboratively redesign the monument to address problems surrounding what or who the monument represents.
  - What objects, people, or materials might students include to emphasize the monument’s contemporary context(s)?
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## Selections from the press release:

[The Rock that Cuts the Night in Two](#) features [Kambui Olujimi’s](#) expansive and diverse output, including videos, drawings, paintings, photographs, silkscreens, sculptures, installations, and textiles made by the artist from 2005 through 2023. Embedded with a sense of duration and exploration of memory, the exhibition demonstrates Olujimi’s long-term interest in both the construction and deconstruction of mythic spaces, via memories, monuments, and other forms of memorials.

## Artist biography:

Kambui Olujimi was born and raised in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn and is currently based in New York City. Olujimi received his M.F.A. from Columbia University. His work has been screened or exhibited at Sundance Film Festival; The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; MASS MoCA, North Adams, Massachusetts; Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid; Kunsthal Rotterdam, Netherlands; Para Site, Hong Kong; and on the screens in New York City’s Times Square, among others.

<sup>1</sup>Cambridge Dictionary. (n.d.). *Context*. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/context>.

<sup>2</sup>Cambridge Dictionary. (n.d.). *Monument*. [https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/monument#google\\_vignett](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/monument#google_vignett).

<sup>3</sup>Cambridge Dictionary. (n.d.). *Systemic Racism*. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/systemic-racism>.