Notes: Monument for the People of Columbus, Ohio

WHITENESS IN AMERICA
Justice is what we need, but just us is all we've got. The varied political actions over these past months taught me, once again, that we white Americans still need to learn how to love our black brothers and sisters and other people of color—not only as entertainers or sports heroes or as a once-in-a-lifetime presidents or vice-presidents, but as equals. We've got a long way to go.

OUR CIVIC HEALTH*
In late May, during the early days of nationwide marches following the death of George Floyd beneath the knee of a Minneapolis police officer, Ohio Congresswoman Joyce Beatty, Columbus City Council President Shannon Hardin, and Franklin County Commissioner Kevin Boyce were pepper-sprayed by members of our local police force.

In June, Columbus City Council declared racism a public health crisis.

On Friday 13 November, with six weeks still remaining in the year, the number of homicides in Columbus reached 144. The previous murder record of 143 was set in 2017. This year's deaths include six children below the age of ten, one of them not yet born, and twenty-four teenagers. Sixty of those killed were between the ages of twenty and twenty-nine. An additional twenty-five victims were between thirty and thirty-nine years old; and twenty-nine of those murdered were forty years old or older. Each of these homicides, no matter the circumstance, is a wound to our civic body.

FORM
The form and location of *Monument for the People of Columbus,* leave it open to a variety of uses. One under-reported phenomenon of this past summer's Black Lives Matter protests is how frequently a long, hot day might end with a break out of dancing. This happened in Newark, Ohio, where rumors predicted an invasion by "busloads of radicals from Columbus." The Franklin County radicals never materialized. Instead, after standing up and standing together for Black lives, Newark demonstrators finished their day by transforming the Licking County Courthouse Square into an open-air dancehall and celebrating each other.

Likewise, one June evening while walking my dog along the downtown Columbus riverfront,
I followed the noise of a small crowd confronting a large police presence at the entry to police headquarters. As darkness set-in, a boombox replaced the megaphone and the face-off suddenly broke into a dance-off, even if no police joined in.

It's easy to imagine the stone platform of, *Monument for the People of Columbus,* serving as stage for a summer music event. It might otherwise make a good spot for a photo-op or for celebrating a City Hall wedding. My point is that the platform invites Columbus residents to use it whenever, however and for whatever purposes they might see fit.

SHAPE
The elliptical shape of the platform derives from a Shaker oval box made of wood.

The Shakers are a American religious sect of radical, Christian communists. Today, they're remembered mostly, if at all, for the functional refinement of their furniture design. As importantly, however, they danced their religion—hence the label, "Shakers." They believed in equality of the sexes as well as in equality of the races and they integrated their households. They were pacifists and conscientious objectors. During wartimes they organized peace conferences. Their behavior—how they acted—as much as anything they made provides me a kind of model.

A small handful of Believers still live and practice in Sabbathday Lake, Maine. In the nineteenth century, there were several Shaker communities in Ohio including at Shaker Heights near Cleveland. The largest of their settlements anywhere was, at one time, Union Village near Lebanon, Ohio.

IMAGE
Sometimes nothing is better than something.

*I was introduced to the phrase, "civic health," by Gretchen Ritter, Executive Dean and Vice Provost, College of Arts and Sciences, The Ohio State University.

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Addendum: In December, after I wrote the above, two unarmed Black men, 23-years-old Casey Goodson, Jr., and 47-years-old Andre Hill, were separately shot and killed by local police in Columbus. Goodson, Jr., had his housekey in the door and was holding a Subway Sandwich bag; Hill was shot and killed while holding his cell phone and delivering Christmas money to a friend. Columbus suffered 169 murders in 2020. Its previous record for a single year was 143 murders in 2017. In the past year, Columbus had the highest rate of fatal police shootings in Ohio with Franklin County's average of 4.81 per million well above the national average of 2.99 per million.