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Director

*George Tyler Moore Center
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I am an academic historian who practices public history and advocates for preservation. The removal of Confederate monuments troubles me as much as the destruction of a historic building or the total “rehabilitation” of a battlefield. The built environment contains countless lessons if allowed to speak. Make no mistake, the bronze sentinels and stone plinths found primarily in Southern cities and towns offer an incomplete, even dangerous message if they remain silent. I can therefore appreciate why so many people wish for their removal. Confederate monuments are at once symbols of white supremacy, works of art, affirmations of the Lost Cause, and tributes to white Southerners. Yet, public history and preservation suggest that Confederate monuments can be used as tools for education, deliberation, and even protest. Interpretive signage and additional memorials or statuary offer one way to convey the thick historical and aesthetic layers associated with these relics. We can further democratize these spaces by capturing oral histories of the current monument debates, advocating teach-ins and dramatic performances, or encouraging viewers to create temporary discursive signage. Confederate monuments remind audiences of a painful past but can also give voice to contemporary social concerns and needs if they are allowed to speak.

CATHERINE CLINTON

Denman Chair of

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Headlines frequently call for the removal of Confederate monuments. Scholars try to learn from case-to-case how we can help communities find a place to debate how the culture of Confederate veneration affects the lives of those who live in the shadow of proslavery symbols.

Many suggest that eradication of these public symbols will create safe spaces and reduce the hostility felt by those resentful of Confederate remnants. What if monuments today might become more creative? In Germany, artists install “stoperstein,” stumbling blocks on the pavement adorned with names and dates of Holocaust victims. These arresting public installations remind passersby of those led to their deaths by a monstrous and unjust government.

Americans witnessed a controversy over a 2016 “Fearless Girl” statue installation in lower Manhattan. Public art can raise hackles, as well as awareness of critical issues. Perhaps we would be better served by funding counter-monuments to feed the hunger for new and different stories told with imagination. Perhaps shared spaces can become places where conflicting interpretations of circumstances might be highlighted.

Static 19th and 20th century visions set in stone might seem objectionable, but it’s probably equally offensive to try to sanitize the past without a plan to feed the human desire for knowing what’s come before in order to understand what might lie ahead.

CHRISTY S. COLEMAN

CEO

*American Civil War Museum
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In the past two years, the American Civil War Museum has fielded numerous calls regarding controversies about Confederate imagery. Many want the museum to take a firm stand to support or oppose the removal of these items from the public landscape. As an organization, we rely on our mission to guide our actions.

In short, ACWM is a resource for communities to explore the war and its legacies. We recently hosted a symposium called Lightning Rods for Controversy (aired by C-Span) to frame the conversation and give interested parties the opportunity to hear from content experts. In addition, our unmatched archival and artifact collections contain important documents and information to help address the “who, what, where, when, and—most important—why,” these monuments and symbols were placed. When communities are armed with this information, we are hopeful they will make well-informed decisions with reasoned discourse with all stakeholders.

At the heart of these discussions and debates is the core question of how we choose to remember. When it comes to the American Civil War, the answer is not always “blue and gray.” Americans of every background grapple with the war’s legacies in contemporary times. This history is not dead or past. This history is present.

WILLIAM C. DAVIS

*Professor of History, retired
Virginia Tech University*

In the passionate debate over where—and whether—the Confederacy merits remembrance today, we forget that changing values and demographics have always imperiled past generations' heroes. Nowhere is it written that heroes remain in place for all posterity. Where are the statues of George III today? New times make new heroes. Before 1968 there were no Martin Luther King Boulevards; today there are hundreds.

Removing statues in New Orleans and elsewhere is unfortunate, however understandable. Occasionally circumstances demand change. Nathan Bedford Forrest High School in Jacksonville, Fla., was all-white in 1959. By 2014 it had a substantial black student population. African Americans attending a school honoring a slave dealer (and possible abettor of the "Fort Pillow Massacre") was too surreal to be ignored.

Confederates represent a part of our history. Judge past figures by today's values, and our Capitol's "Statuary Hall" would become "Empty Pedestal Hall." Instead, consider Budapest's Memento Park. Rather than destroy statuary from the Communist era, the city moved it into one park as a "monument" to democracy's triumph.

"Lost Cause" mythology claims that Confederates seceded over self-determination. Ironically, as local populations today reevaluate who to memorialize, that argument is ascendant. Urban demographics will continue to shift, along with popular will, meaning that in the future if the people so desire, Davis and Lee may march back into town.

GARY W. GALLAGHER

*John L. Nau III
Professor of History
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Debates about the Civil War's memorial landscape erupt periodically and usually feature the same arguments from those who want to leave statues and other monuments in place and those who want to remove them. How to deal with Confederate monuments inspires honest disagreement among well-intentioned, well-informed people, as well as some vitriolic cant from both ends of the political spectrum. In my view, eliminating parts of the memorial landscape is tantamount to destroying documents or images—all compose parts of the historical record and should be interpreted as such. I favor adding text that places monuments within the full sweep of how Americans have remembered the Civil War. I also support erecting new monuments devoted to previously slighted groups or events. The controversy over the equestrian statue of Robert E. Lee in Charlottesville is a good example of current debates. I would preserve the statue, add panels discussing its history, rename the park, and commission a memorial to the more than 250 men born in Albemarle County who served in United States Colored Troops units. Visitors to the revamped park could ponder generational changes in memorialization that underscore the contested nature of historical memory. Taking down statues, in contrast, potentially inhibits a real understanding of our past, warts and all, and can obscure important themes, movements, and eras.

LESLEY J. GORDON

*Charles G. Summersell
Chair of Southern History
University of Alabama*

In 1908, the town of Raymond, in Hinds County, Miss., held a ceremony to dedicate a monument to Confederate soldiers. Ex-Confederate Captain William T. Ratliff assured listeners that their monument was not about defeat, but instead courage and "principles that would endure forever to show what men and women would do for a cause they believed just and right." The Nathan Bedford Forrest Chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy officially unveiled the statue, with an estimated 1,500 in attendance.

This statue, like the thousands found throughout the South and beyond, had a clear message: to celebrate and promote the ideals of the Lost Cause. The triumphant narrative of Confederate valor and sacrifice was meant to bolster white supremacy and silence African-American voices as much as their agency, particularly in the context of the Jim Crow South.

This campaign of obfuscation has been remarkably successful, leaving many white Americans unwilling or disinterested in grappling with the war's painful legacy. The removal of Confederate monuments—and the vigorous debate it has inspired—helps, I believe, to finally reach some sort of reckoning with that past in order to embrace a more pluralistic American society.

D. SCOTT HARTWIG

*Supervisory Historian, retired
Gettysburg National Military Park*

We are all aware that the legacy of our Civil War and Reconstruction is complex, controversial, and for some, painful. I can understand the anger residents of New Orleans might feel about a monument in the heart of their city commemorating and celebrating an 1866 massacre of black citizens who were simply demonstrating for the right to vote. It was a constant reminder of a white supremacist society and I sympathize with the city's decision to remove it.

Monument removal, however, becomes more problematic when we apply it to any monument or memorial associated with the Confederacy, as if by removing these symbols we can somehow repair the past and heal wounds. But does it? It seems more likely to heal one wound and open another. A better solution to tearing down Confederate monuments is the example of the Arthur Ashe monument on Monument Avenue in Richmond. Ashe's monument reminds visitors and residents that Richmond's history is complicated and more than just the memory of the Confederacy and its leaders. Rather than tear down monuments, build new ones, where appropriate, that tell the story of those who struggled bravely for freedom and equality.

HAROLD HOLZER

*The Jonathan F. Fanton
Director of Hunter College's Roosevelt
House Public Policy Institute, and
Vice Chairman, The Lincoln Forum*

A few years ago, my fellow historians Gary Gallagher and Joan Waugh took me to view the Indian War Monument in downtown Santa Fe. There, the problem of how to contextualize a tribute to the white man's battles against "savage Indians" was addressed by the almost comical obliteration of the adjective "savage."

The effort may have been clumsy, but it may point the way to contextualizing Confederate tributes, however ill-conceived, without destroying artworks that may have both historical and aesthetic value. Some of the equestrian "icons" long on view in Richmond, for example, surely deserve to survive as stellar examples of American sculpture. Not all art is easy to digest.

But even Stalin did not order the destruction of the great statues of the tsars in St. Petersburg, though his own images suffered a far worse fate (and deserved no rescue, if only because they were so mediocre). In effect, I remain torn. I abhor the iconoclastic destruction of art—whether by the Taliban at Bamiyan, Afghanistan [where two monumental sculptures of Buddha were blown up in 2001] or by our own justifiably offended citizens in New Orleans. Using the preservation of a mediocre Jefferson Davis statue to rally neo-Nazis waving the Stars and Bars is a repugnant exercise that deserves condemnation. Do no local museums exist in these cities willing to reinstall, or properly label, the worthiest examples of the post-Civil War memorial movement?

ROBERT K. KRICK

*Noted Speaker on Civil War topics
Author of Stonewall Jackson at
Cedar Mountain*

We live in an age riven by shrill and intemperate voices, from all perspectives and on most topics. No sane person today would embrace, endorse, or tolerate slavery.

A casual observer, readily able to convince himself that he would have behaved similarly in the 1860s, can vault to high moral ground with the greatest of ease. Doing that gratifies the powerful self-righteous strain that runs through all of us, for better or worse. In fact, it leaps far ahead of the Federal politicians (Lincoln among them) who said emphatically that slavery was not the issue, and millions of Northern soldiers who fought, bled, and died in windrows to save the Union—but were noisily offended by mid-war emancipation.

It is impossible to imagine a United States in the current atmosphere that does not include zealots eager to obliterate any culture not precisely their own, destroying monuments in the fashion of Soviets after a purge, and antiquities in the manner of ISIS. The trend is redolent of the misery that inundated the planet during the aptly named Dark Ages, arising from savages who believed, as a matter of religion in that instance, that anyone with opinions different than their own was not just wrong, but craven and evil, and must be brutalized into conformity.

On the other hand, a generous proportion of the country now, and always, eschews extremism, and embraces tolerance of others' cultures and inheritances and beliefs. Such folk will be society's salvation.

MICHAEL J. MCAFEE

*Curator of History
West Point Museum*

In Saratoga National Military Park there is a monument bearing the sculpted image of a boot and an epaulette of a brigadier general. That general's name is not mentioned on the monument, nor is it on the series of plaques honoring generals of the American Revolution in the Old Cadet Chapel at West Point, N.Y. Despite his gallant service, that man turned his back on his cause and became a traitor. For that reason there are no monuments that mention the name Benedict Arnold.

What does this have to do with the Southern monuments honoring the political and military leaders of the Confederacy? They, like Arnold, were traitors. They turned their backs on their nation, their oaths, and the sacrifices of their ancestors in the War for Independence. They did so not out of a sense of mistreatment or for money as did Arnold. They attempted to destroy their nation to defend chattel slavery and from a sense that as white men they were innately superior to all other races. They fought for white racial supremacy.

That is why monuments glorifying them and their cause should be removed. Leave monuments marking their participation on the battlefields of the war, but tear down those that only commemorate the intolerance, violence, and hate that inspired their attempt to destroy the American nation.

JOSEPH MCGILL

*Founder
The Slave Dwelling Project*

This nation was founded on an underpinning of slavery and white supremacy. While President Thomas Jefferson penned in the Declaration of Independence that "All men are created equal," he owned 600 people and fathered children with his enslaved Sally Hemings.

President James Madison is considered the father of our Constitution—"We the people." But Madison also owned slaves. The fact is, 12 of our former presidents owned slaves, and eight of them owned slaves while they were in office.

In our efforts to sanitize history by removing Confederate monuments that are reminders of slavery and white supremacy, we must ask ourselves: Where do we stop? As an African-American male, I do not buy into the "Heritage not Hate" defense of Confederate flags and monuments.

That said, I am in support of Confederate monuments remaining on the landscape. My reason being, Confederate soldiers were defending a way of life that was passed down to them. If we remove Confederate monuments, then we should also remove the monuments of their fathers and the fathers before them. In this sanitizing of history, we will eventually get to our Founding Fathers, some of whom were slave owners. How would Washington, D.C., look without the Washington Monument or the Jefferson Memorial?

MEGAN KATE NELSON

*Independent Scholar,
Author of Ruin Nation: Destruction
and the American Civil War*

What unites all of the participants in the debate about Confederate memorials? The belief that "retain" or "remove" are only two options. But what about a third option?

I would like to propose that Confederate memorials should neither be retained nor removed: They should be destroyed, and their broken pieces left in situ.

On a scheduled day, a city government or university administration would invite citizens to approach a Confederate memorial, take up a cudgel, and swing away. The ruination of the memorial would be a group effort, a way for an entire community to convert a symbol of racism and white supremacy into a symbol of resistance against oppression.

Historians could put up a plaque next to the fragments, explaining the memorial's history, from its dedication day to the moment of its obliteration. A series of photographs or a YouTube video could record the process of destruction. These textual explanations may be unnecessary, however. Ruins tend to convey their messages eloquently in and of themselves. In this case, the ruins of Confederate memorials in cities across the nation would suggest that while white supremacists have often made claims to power in American history, those who oppose them can, and will, fight back.

ETHAN S. RAFUSE

*Professor of History
U.S. Army Command and General
Staff College
Fort Leavenworth, Kan.*

Like Ulysses S. Grant, I respect the sacrifices and hardships the common soldier of the Confederacy endured, and the character and military skill of some of their leaders, while also disagreeing with those who wish to pay homage to the cause they fought for. Say what you will about the Civil War North (and much can be said that is critical), it did fight to preserve the ability of the United States to be a force for good in the world—and did so successfully. You also have to be pretty obtuse not to appreciate there is good reason to be offended by anything that honors people who fought to defend slavery and the Southern racial order.

That being said, I cannot help but think the time and energy being devoted to the removal of monuments could be spent in more constructive ways. Moreover, like it or not, these monuments are part of our heritage and cultural landscape (warts and all) and have value as educational tools. I would not want to see the Confederate White House bulldozed or lose the fodder for discussion the Heyward Shepherd memorial at Harpers Ferry provides. Shepherd, the first man killed by John Brown's raiders, was African American. Thus, there is the very real, practical question in regards to the removal of monuments of where one stops—and who decides where that point is?

THOS. V. STRAIN JR.

*Commander-in-Chief
Sons of Confederate Veterans*

I was contacted by the editor of *Civil War Times* about my thoughts on the removal of monuments that have been erected to honor the men that fought for the Confederacy during the War Between the States. It is my opinion, and that of many others, that these removals are an attempt to erase history. If you take the time to read the comments on social media and on the websites of the news organizations reporting these removals it is obvious that only a few people actually support the removals. What it boils down to is that the politicians are telling those that elected them that their wishes mean absolutely nothing to them.

Just this week one of these politicians that voted to remove a statue in Virginia lost in the primary for reelection and he noted that his stance on the removal more than likely cost him the election. In the end what we really have, in my humble opinion, is a group of people who are following their own personal agendas and saying, "to hell with the people" and moving forward with these removals. It isn't what we want, it is all about them.

SUSANNAH J. URAL

*Professor of History
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There's an obelisk at Karnak built to honor Hatshepsut, one of the few women pharaohs of Ancient Egypt. Its inscription captures her curiosity at how she, who ushered in a period of prosperity and peace, would be remembered: "Now my heart turns this way and that, as I think what the people will say. Those who see my monuments in years to come, and who shall speak of what I have done." Hatshepsut's successor, for reasons still debated, nearly destroyed every memory of her. But history has a way of haunting us.

In an era of great division, most factions in the Confederate monuments debate actually agree that history should not be erased. The question is in how it should be remembered. In my opinion, if citizens come together and agree to remove the monuments, they should do so. But don't hide them away in warehouses. Place them at museums or battlefield parks where historians and interpreters can help visitors learn about the motives behind the Lost Cause. That movement erected these statues to, yes, honor concepts of sacrifice for liberty and family, but these monuments were also designed to entrench a ruthless tradition of white supremacy.

Like Hatshepsut's obelisk, Confederate memorials "speak of what [we] have done." Let us do just that at historic sites designed for that purpose, where Confederate symbols, including the flag, are and should be part of the landscape from which visitors learn.