

**CONFEDERATE MONUMENTS: LESSON 6: HANDOUT 1****HISTORY OF CONFEDERATE MONUMENT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI**

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In 1906, the Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) organized to put up a confederate monument at the University of Mississippi in honor of “not only to the heroes not forgotten, but to the zeal and untiring **patriotism** of a band of loyal women, and as history to the youth of the Southland.”<sup>1</sup> Those who believed in the Lost Cause declared that confederate monuments were meant to honor heroes who served the Confederacy and to recognize their bravery. They believed that the Confederacy was superior to the Union and that the Union was only able to overpower the Confederacy because of its weapons, size and strength. During the dedication ceremony for the monument, Charles Scott, a veteran of the Confederate army and candidate for governor, gave a speech. In his speech, he stated that the Confederacy was the “youngest, noblest, the bravest of all the nations of earth.”<sup>2</sup>

The Lost Cause also argued that the purpose of secession was to hold onto state rights rather than about keeping slavery. In his speech, Scott defended the Confederate cause by claiming it had nothing to do with the economic benefits of slavery. By this time, many Confederate leaders had already said that the reason the Southern states seceded was because of states’ rights rather than slavery. This was different than what many of them had previously said before and during the Civil War about the South’s need to preserve the institution of slavery.

<sup>1</sup> John Neff, Jarod Roll, and Anne Twitty, “A Brief Historical Contextualization of the Confederate Monument at the University of Mississippi,” (May 16, 2016). Retrieved from <https://history.olemiss.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2017/08/A-Brief-Historical-Contextualization-of-the-Confederate-Monument-at-the-University-of-Mississippi.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 2.

The Confederate monument at the University of Mississippi was placed during a time in which the gains made by Black people during the **Reconstruction era** were taken away by new **Jim Crow laws**. During Reconstruction, free Black people had been able to gain more rights and power. White people worried about losing their political power to large free Black populations and created these laws to take away Black people's rights. This included the right to vote.<sup>3</sup> The White Southerners who supported the Lost Cause viewed Reconstruction as a dark time in history.<sup>4</sup> A newspaper called the *Confederate Veteran* wrote that the UDC's purpose for **memorializing** was to "hold aside the curtain of memory that those who will may read the story as it was written—as it was lived—in the bitter days of war and reconstruction."<sup>5</sup>

In 1956, the Mississippi Citizens' Council used similar language when members wrote a letter that spoke out against the **integration** of Mississippi public schools.<sup>6</sup> After the 1954 **Brown v. Board** decision, Citizens' Councils were created by White **segregationists** across the South who wanted to keep Black children from attending White schools.

In 1962, the University erupted in violence when James Meredith, a Black student, attempted to integrate the University. When U.S. Marshalls were called in, a White mob attacked them. The U.S. Marshalls fired tear gas, and the segregationists took cover at the monument. General Edwin Walker climbed the statue, where he congratulated the students and told them that they had a right to protest and that their cause was just. Meanwhile, a local minister named Duncan Gray tried to get the mob to leave peacefully but was removed by force and sent away.<sup>7</sup>

Meredith was able to enroll, and the University of Mississippi was desegregated, but many White students continued to honor the Confederacy. For some time, the band wore uniforms that looked like those of Confederate soldiers. Some students even wore blackface and robes like those worn by the **Ku Klux Klan**. In 1984, the University yearbook stated, "The Confederate Soldier stands at the entrance of the campus, greeting prospective students and returning alumni alike. He reminds us of our Southern heritage—both its turmoil and peaceful tranquility."<sup>8</sup>

In February 2019, Confederate supporters rallied around the monument on campus. Members of the school's basketball team knelt during the national anthem at a game to protest the rally.<sup>9</sup> Two weeks later, student leaders voted to ask the University to move the monument to a campus cemetery where Confederate soldiers were buried. The plan to

<sup>3</sup> John Neff, Jarod Roll, and Anne Twitty, "A Brief Historical Contextualization of the Confederate Monument at the University of Mississippi," 2.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>9</sup> Emily Wagster Pettus, "Confederate Monument at Ole Miss to Be Moved to Cemetery," *ABC News* (June 18, 2020). <https://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/confederate-statue-moved-central-spot-ole-miss-71320238>.

move the monument was finally approved in June 2020. The statue was officially moved in July 2020. The cost of its relocation was estimated to be a little over \$1 million, which was paid by private donations and not public money.<sup>10</sup>

In recent years, the school has changed symbols and traditions related to the Confederacy. The school stopped using “Colonel Reb” as its mascot in 2003. Many people had complained that the mascot looked like a plantation owner. The band stopped playing the song “Dixie.” In 2015, students protested the state flag, which was decorated with the Confederate battle **emblem**, from being flown on campus. In 2016, the University put up a new plaque that told a fuller history of why the confederate monument was erected,<sup>11</sup> after a group of professors and students pushed for the change. The new plaque read,

These monuments were often used to promote an **ideology** known as the ‘Lost Cause,’ which claimed that the Confederacy had been established to defend states’ rights and that slavery was not the principal cause of the Civil War... Although the monument was created to honor the sacrifice of Confederate soldiers, it must also remind us that the defeat of the Confederacy actually meant freedom for millions of people.<sup>12</sup>

**\*Other facts:**

The University does not have a large population of Black students. Its enrollment records for the 2017-2018 year showed that students who identified as African American made up just 12.8 percent of the student body, a total of 2,667 students. White students made up 76.7 percent of the student population.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Emily Wagster Pettus, “Confederate Monument at Ole Miss to Be Moved to Cemetery.”

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Retrieved from <https://irep.olemiss.edu/fall-2017-2018-enrollment/>.