

Transactive Discussion: Confederate Monuments

Please read the following prompt and quotes. In small groups, discuss the questions below.

Confederate monuments are figures, symbols, or messages meant to honor leaders from the Confederate States of America, the formal name and governing body of the South during the U.S. Civil War. The Confederacy was formed when Southern states seceded from the United States to preserve their right to own slaves in 1860. The Civil War soon followed as Northern states (the Union) fought to unify the country again.

After the Union won the war, southern states rejoined the United States. States began to erect monuments to soldiers, generals, and government officials from the confederacy. Thousands of confederate monuments and namesakes were created across the country (though the majority are in the South) since the war's conclusion ranging from street names to large, imposing statues.¹ Through the war ended in 1865, the majority of monuments were built between 1877 to 1964, frequently in majority Black communities despite the fact many Black Americans did not celebrate the confederacy. The erection of these monuments also coincided with campaigns of racial terror against Black people in America.

People have debated for decades over whether these monuments should be removed, contextualized, or relocated. People who want the statues removed argue the monuments celebrate white supremacy, slavery, and the oppression of Black people. People who want to preserve the monuments believe they play a critical role in remembering Southern history and honoring Confederate ancestors. Other suggest the monuments should be teaching opportunities. To do this, they would need to be removed from sites of reverence and need to be contextualized with the accurate history. The 2020 Black Lives Matter protests have led to large number of monuments being taken down across the country. However, thousands still remain.



¹ <https://www.splcenter.org/20190201/whose-heritage-public-symbols-confederacy>



“These statues are not just stone and metal. They are not just innocent remembrances of a benign history. These monuments purposefully celebrate a fictional, sanitized Confederacy; ignoring the death, ignoring the enslavement, and the terror that it actually stood for...They were erected purposefully to send a strong message to all who walked in their shadows about who was still in charge in this city...The Confederacy was on the wrong side of history and humanity. It sought to tear apart our nation and subjugate our fellow Americans to slavery. This is the history we should never forget and one that we should never again put on a pedestal to be revered.”

-Mitch Landrieu, Former Mayor of New Orleans

"From my vantage point, the idea that the way to deal with history is to destroy any relics that remind you of something you don't like, is highly alarming... It's true, of course, that there are historic personages who should not be honored or venerated. But I don't agree that keeping a monument means venerating the person or era it depicts; it can just as well stand witness to the folly of some despot's hubris or some tragic mass delusion... Statues can have many meanings."

-Cheryl Benard, president of the Alliance for the Restoration of Cultural Heritage

Discussion Questions

1. Given what you have read, including the quotes above, which perspective on this topic do you align with more, and why?
2. Using answers from Question #1, can you integrate the two perspectives or find a compromise between the two positions?
 - a. If not, why?
 - b. If so, what would the solution look like?