

***“Recently, Confederate monuments have been removed in New Orleans. Should these monuments be removed nationwide? Why or why not, please support your position.”***

A monument’s sole purpose is to commemorate something significant and celebrate it. They are not merely historical reminders or ways to ensure that an event is not forgotten; monuments cast the person or event being portrayed as larger than life, victorious, something that should bring feelings of pride. But, Confederates are none of these things. Portraying men who were willing to die rather than give respect and basic human rights to African Americans as heroes deserving of commemoration is a shameful misrepresentation of American history. The history behind the statues, the ideas and hatred they represent, and the very reason for their construction is why Confederate monuments should be removed nationwide.

The Civil War was fought over the right to own slaves. Many of those in favor of Confederate pride and monuments claim states’ rights are the reason behind the war, but Confederate leaders were particularly clear about their racist motives. In his Cornerstone speech, Alexander H. Stephens—vice president of the Confederacy—stated, “Our new government is founded upon ... the great truth that the negro is not equal to the white man; that slavery subordination to the superior race is his natural and normal condition.” Texas’ Declaration of Secession claims that African Americans were, “rightfully held and regarded as an inferior and dependent race.” There is simply no questioning whether or not the Confederacy was founded on abhorrent, racist ideals and no place for glorifying that type of divisiveness and disrespect in modern America.

However, were the monuments in question even put in place to honor fallen Confederates? The answer is yes and no. Shortly after the war and continually afterwards

monuments were constructed; but, there are two periods in which the dedication of Confederate monuments spiked significantly, as shown in a study by the Southern Poverty Law Center. The first spike was from the late 1890's through the 1920's, which overlaps with the rise of Jim Crow laws, the founding of the NAACP, Plessy v. Ferguson, and-- overall-- a time of severe racial tension in America. The second spike occurred during the Civil Rights Era. These statues were not placed in cemeteries or other places of reverence; instead, they were placed in town centers and outside of government buildings. As Karen L. Cox--a professor of history at the University of North Carolina -- writes, "The fact that they were placed on the grounds of county and state courthouses was intentional. The message: white men are in charge."

Confederate monuments were never supposed to shine a light on America's dark and racist history or be beacons of Southern pride. Their purpose was to intimidate vulnerable Americans and further the aspirations of white supremacists, and although Confederates should be remembered, they should not be celebrated; instead, their stories should be told with the appropriate context in an honest way that portrays the racism and violence they supported, so that we can learn from the parts of American history we are not proud of: no monuments necessary.