

Confederate Monuments Debate

A. Mitch Landrieu's Speech on the Removal of Confederate Monuments in New Orleans

MAY 23, 2017 - This is the full text of the remarks delivered last May by the mayor of New Orleans, Mitch Landrieu, upon his removal of the last of the city's several Confederate monuments.

“ . . . New Orleans is truly a city of many nations, a melting pot, a bubbling caldron of many cultures. There is no other place quite like it in the world that so eloquently exemplifies the uniquely American motto: e pluribus unum — out of many we are one. But there are also other truths about our city that we must confront. New Orleans was America's largest slave market: a port where hundreds of thousands of souls were bought, sold and shipped up the Mississippi River to lives of forced labor of misery of rape, of torture. America was the place where nearly 4000 of our fellow citizens were lynched, 540 alone in Louisiana; where the courts enshrined 'separate but equal'; . . . So when people say to me that the monuments in question are history, well what I just described is real history as well, and it is the searing truth.

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The historic record is clear, the Robert E. Lee, Jefferson Davis, and P.G.T. Beauregard statues were not erected just to honor these men, but as part of the movement which became known as The Cult of the Lost Cause. This 'cult' had one goal — through monuments and through other means — to rewrite history to hide the truth, which is that the Confederacy was on the wrong side of humanity. First erected over 166 years after the founding of our city and 19 years after the end of the Civil War, the monuments that we took down were meant to rebrand the history of our city and the ideals of a defeated Confederacy. It is self-evident that these men did not fight for the United States of America, They fought against it. They may have been warriors, but in this cause they were not patriots. 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.

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Another friend asked me to consider these four monuments from the perspective of an African American mother or father trying to explain to their fifth grade daughter who Robert E. Lee is and why he stands atop of our beautiful city. Can you do it? Can you look into that young girl's eyes and convince her that Robert E. Lee is there to encourage her? Do you think she will feel inspired and hopeful by that story? Do these monuments help her see a future with limitless potential? Have you ever thought that if her potential is limited, yours and mine are too? We all know the answer to these very simple questions. When you look into this child's eyes is the moment when the searing truth comes into focus for us.

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We have not erased history; we are becoming part of the city's history by righting the wrong image these monuments represent and crafting a better, more complete future for all our children and for future generations.

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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. As a community, we must recognize the significance of removing New Orleans' Confederate monuments. It is our acknowledgment that now is the time to take stock of, and then move past, a painful part of our history.

(Accessed on 1.31.18 at <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/23/opinion/mitch-landrieu-speech-transcript.html>)

B. The Confederate Flag Is a Matter of Pride and Heritage, Not Hatred

The New York Times, Ben Jones. Ben Jones is the chief of heritage operations for the Sons of Confederate Veterans.
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It is obvious that some racists have appropriated and desecrated the Confederate battle flag for their pathetic causes, but those hateful folks also commonly display the Christian cross and the American flag. Do those symbols also inspire racism?

Some racists display the Confederate battle flag, as well as the Christian cross and the American flag. Should these symbols be seen as racist too?

Perceptions of the flag depend upon context. At a national cemetery or national battlefield it is seen in the historical context of the American Civil War. At popular re-enactments of that war's events, or in films like "Gettysburg" or "Gone With the Wind", it is seen in a theatrical context. In the television series "The Dukes of Hazzard" the flag on top of Duke boys car has been seen as a symbol of a non-racist Southern spirit by millions of viewers internationally.

To those 70 million of us whose ancestors fought for the South, it is a symbol of family members who fought for what they thought was right in their time, and whose valor became legendary in military history. This is not nostalgia. It is our legacy. The current attacks on that legacy, 150 years after the event, are to us an insult that mends no fences nor builds any bridges.

Recent scholarship such as "The Half Has Never Been Told, Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism" by Edward Baptist, and "Complicity, How the North Promoted, Prolonged, and Profited from Slavery" by writers of the Hartford Courant have shown that slavery was not the Southern sin, but the national sin.

We of Confederate ancestry would love to sit at Dr. King's table of brotherhood with those who wish to demonize and marginalize us. That conversation is long overdue.

(Accessed on 1.31.18 at <https://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2015/06/19/does-the-confederate-flag-breed-racism/the-confederate-flag-is-a-matter-of-pride-and-heritage-not-hatred>)

Read both excerpts then answer the following questions for class discussion tomorrow:

1. What is the argument made by each excerpt? How does each author support their argument? Provide two examples from each speech.
2. Do you think confederate statues should be removed from public squares and buildings?
3. Based on your answer to 2, explain how you would respond to the arguments made by the author above that holds the position that opposes yours. This should be done thoughtfully in at least 75 words
4. From your perspective, how should the Confederacy be memorialized?
5. What questions would you ask those who disagree with your position.