

Unity in Community (UiC) Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) about Confederate Monuments

What difference would it make to take the Cornelius Confederate monument down? What's the point of taking down the monument – it won't stop racism

Of course, taking the monument down won't stop racism. But what it WILL do is remove a symbol glorifying White Supremacy, and a source of great pain to the people affected by what the monument stands for: a war fought by Southern states united in a cause to keep Black Americans enslaved. Taking down the monument is not the end goal, but it's a start. It's an opportunity to bring more people into conversations about our shared beliefs and values.

What's wrong with honoring someone who served his country in time of war?

This was not a war of patriotic defense of the United States or one of our allies. It was a war to protect the rights of Southern states to hold Black Americans in bondage. It was a war fought by Southern states to secede from the Union. These men were not heroes. They were traitors who were trying to destroy the Union.

The statue represents the country's history, no matter how complicated. Why are you trying to censor, whitewash, and erase history?

We should be clear that monuments themselves are not history. They are about the people who put them there. Aside from that, history lives in many places – in books, documents, oral traditions, objects, personal memories, etc. The history that the statue represents should be learned by telling the *whole* story of what the Civil War and slavery were all about. The statue doesn't educate in any way other than as a symbol that glorifies White Supremacy. Statues should be displayed in museums, cemeteries or in private areas, where they can be put in proper context and people who CHOOSE to see them can do so.

For some of us, this is our heritage. Why are you trying to erase our heritage?

Those who want to preserve their individual heritage are of course free to do so. However, what exactly is the heritage that you are trying to hold onto? If your heritage is to glorify the efforts of soldiers who fought to continue the institution of slavery and to destroy the United States of America, that aspect of heritage is not something to be proud of. Though no one can change what people choose to glorify about their heritage, that choice cannot and should not be publicly displayed to add to the pain of those whose heritage involves enforced enslavement. The rest of us should not be forced to be constantly reminded that a group of states fought for the right of states to maintain the institution of slavery.

Should we remove every monument that anyone finds offensive?

Of course not. However, as we learn more about our history as a country, we must acknowledge the history of Confederate monuments and what they represent. We must consider the context and values of the community in which the monument stands. Removing all monuments that any individual finds offensive would be a slippery slope. However, Confederate monuments do not represent the stated values of most communities – inclusion, fairness, and justice for all. So yes, those monuments should be removed from public placements of prominence.

Why is this being discussed now? The Confederate monument in Cornelius has been there for many years, and no one has complained.

Confederate monuments were erected to instill fear and intimidation. Those who complained risked harm or even death. However, even in the face of this, people have complained from the very beginning. Their voices have just not been heard. Systemic racism, despite the denial of some, is finally being acknowledged, and that monument is a part of that systemic racism that exists in our nation and has existed for far too long.

There are also many people who did not know the history of these monuments and were not aware of what they represented, or the fear and pain that they still provoke. Now that we know, we must act.

Why are you focusing on a monument when there are bigger, more important issues to address?

Taking down the monument is one of many important issues that we must address, and are addressing, as a community and as a country. Along with taking down the monument, UIC has been actively working in collaboration with many others in our community, to address affordable housing, voting rights, and education, among other issues. The monument symbolizes the White Supremacy and racism that lies at the heart of every issue, where there is injustice and inequality. We must continue to fight for racial equity and justice on all fronts, including the monument.

What harm is it doing there? Why do you care?

The monument is doing harm. It serves as a constant reminder of the racism that exists today. The monument offends many people because of what it stands for: a memorial to those who fought to protect the institution of human slavery and a symbol of the enduring legacy of White Supremacy. Monuments were erected, in large part, to intimidate and instill fear in Black people. We should care about its continuing effect on Black Americans as well as many others in our community.

Why did the United Daughters of the Confederacy wait until the early 1900s to erect the monuments?

The United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) were responsible for the largest number of monuments, markers, and other memorials. As the UDC saw Civil War veterans beginning to die off, they wanted to ensure that the memory of the Confederacy did not die with them, so they created a narrative to preserve what they romanticized as the “War of Northern Aggression,” more popularly known as the “Lost Cause” narrative. Their narrative was meant both to indoctrinate Southern children in a “big lie” of their era and to intimidate African Americans. The monuments served as a reminder of White superiority in a South no longer occupied by Union troops.

Why were the statues not erected during the Reconstruction era?

With Union troops stationed in the South and Republican-led governments in place, erecting statues of men viewed as traitors against the United States would not have been allowed. Once those troops were withdrawn as a condition of the contested Presidential election of 1876, Southerners were free to build monuments and engage in any form of intimidation of Black people that they chose.

Why were the statues displayed in public places?

It's no coincidence that North Carolina has 42 monuments standing in front of courthouses. Courthouses are the places where lynchings most often happened. Placing monuments in prominent and public places, like courthouses, was part of the strategy to instill fear and intimidation in Black people. What better way was there to remind Black people that white Southerners controlled all aspects of their lives. As they saw it, the South belonged to the Anglo-Saxon Southerner.

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Please note that this is a living document. We invite your comments and suggestions. We will be continually adding, correcting, and removing information as we learn more about Confederate monuments.