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## Southerners on New Ground: The Battle for Civil War Memory Since 1993

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**SOUTHERNERS ON NEW GROUND: THE BATTLE FOR CIVIL  
WAR MEMORY SINCE 1993**

by

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B.A. May 2020, Buena Vista University

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of  
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Approved by:

Timothy J. Orr (Director)

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **SOUTHERNERS ON NEW GROUND: THE BATTLE FOR CIVIL WAR MEMORY SINCE 1993**

Andrew William Hoffman  
Old Dominion University, 2022  
Director: Dr. Timothy J. Orr

Between the years 2015 and 2020, over 300 Confederate symbols, including over 140 monuments, were removed from public land across the United States. This unprecedented movement to discard Confederate symbols reflected a shift in how Americans chose to remember the Civil War. By 2015, the wide-spread attack on the legacy of the Confederacy was much-anticipated. In fact, its foundation was laid during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. This thesis fills a gap within the historiography of Civil War memory by exploring controversial events that reflect Americans' contrasting interpretation of the American Civil War from the years 1993 to 2021. It argues that the attack on Confederate symbols is truly an attack on white supremacy. Further, the battle against Confederate symbolism is a continuation of the struggle for civil rights. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) attacked the legacy of the Confederacy to start a national discourse concerning America's racist past and to eradicate white supremacy. In doing so, it became an active agent for change in minimizing public displays of the Confederate flag. The children and grandchildren of the civil rights era continued the legacy of their forbearers, demonstrating that, despite the optimistic belief that the war against white supremacy was won after the Voting Rights Act had been passed, the war was just heating up.

The war against Confederate symbols fit neatly within the folds of America's two-party system. This thesis argues that the memory of the Civil War, starting in the early 1990s, became

a highly contested political battlefield. Republicans used it as a mechanism to stir up votes by making it appear as if their opponents were erasing white culture. Democrats supported the removal of Confederate emblems in order to placate their constituents as they argued it was the best way to recognize America's darker past without celebrating it. While politicians debated the issue, grassroots activism yielded the most tangible results. The NAACP, and more recently, the Black Lives Matter movement, attacked Confederate symbolism to shift the national debate to focus on contemporary issues posed by white supremacy and systemic racism.

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This thesis is dedicated to my parents and my brother. Thank you for everything.

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I would like to thank my Committee Director, Timothy Orr. He did not hesitate to accept the responsibilities of directing this thesis. The moment I told him I wanted to do a project focused on Civil War memory, he seemed overjoyed and more than ready to tackle this monumental task with me. He provided countless hours of mentorship, forcing me to ask myself critical and analytical questions I would have never thought of. This thesis would not have been possible without his support and outstanding mentorship.

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else. As he works towards his doctorate, it has shown me where hard work can get you and to never give up on what you are passionate about. Also, I would be remiss if I did not mention that he was the one who allowed me to explore Civil War memory hands on. He opened his home and allowed me to live with him in South Carolina during the summer of 2018. We did not only get a summer full of Civil War history, but this is also when I saw my first Confederate monument. Finally, I would like to extend a thanks to my best friend, Jordan Strauss.

**ABBREVIATIONS**

AME	African Methodist Episcopal
BLM	Black Lives Matter
HB	House Bill
KKK	Ku Klux Klan
KMHC	Kentucky Military Heritage Commission
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
NCAA	National Collegiate Athletic Association
SCV	Sons of Confederate Veterans
SMMA	Stone Mountain Memorial Association
SPLC	Southern Poverty Law Center
UDC	United Daughters of the Confederacy

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In late January 2020, in a close 22-18 vote, the Virginia Senate passed the bill, HB 108, to end the state-recognized holiday called, “Lee-Jackson day in the commonwealth.”<sup>1</sup> The following month, the bill passed through the Virginia House in another close vote, 55-42. In April, the Democratic governor, Ralph Northam, signed the bill into law.<sup>2</sup> Northam backed this legislation from the beginning. When it was first introduced by Democratic Senator Louise Lucas, Northam said, “I don’t think there’s any secret that it’s in honor of two individuals who fought to prolong slavery which is not a proud aspect of Virginia’s history.” Although Northam was no student of Confederate history, by the time he took office, he knew enough about public opinion to know that Lee-Jackson Day had to be abolished. This state holiday was first established in 1889 to be observed in late January (the week when Robert E. Lee was born). It was first introduced by Governor Fitzhugh Lee, a former Confederate general and nephew of Robert E. Lee. Fifteen years later, the scope of celebration expanded to include a tribute to Confederate General Thomas J. “Stonewall” Jackson. Then, in 1984, Virginia politicians made the perplexing decision to combine Lee-Jackson day with Martin Luther King Jr. day, creating the equally controversial Lee-Jackson-King Day. This holiday lasted for nearly a decade and a half until, in 2000, the holidays were once again separated. During the first two decades of the twenty-first century, citizens of the commonwealth were free to honor their Confederate

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<sup>1</sup> Christian Zapata, “Virginia Senate Votes To Remove Lee-Jackson Day, Make Election Day a State Holiday,” *American University Radio* (Washington, DC), January 21, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Caleb Stewart, “Gov. Northam Signs Law Officially Ending Lee-Jackson Day as a Virginia State Holiday,” *WHSV* (Harrisonburg, Virginia), April 13, 2020.

“heroes” and do it a few days prior to the day that honored King.<sup>3</sup> However, when Northam abolished Lee-Jackson day in 2020, it did not stop citizens from Lexington, Virginia – a community that had an unbreakable link to both individuals – from engaging in their own extra-legal celebration.<sup>4</sup>

The “Lee-Jackson Day Lexington, Virginia” website operated by Brandon Dorsey – communications officer for the Stonewall Brigade Sons of Confederate Veterans (SCV) – explained that the SCV continued to celebrate the former state holiday because its members “hold up Lee and Jackson as examples of life well lived and devoted to duty and truth over selfish desires or ambition.”<sup>5</sup> On January 16, 2021, over one hundred members of the Virginia Flagg and the Stonewall Brigade SCV marched through Lexington waving their Confederate flags. The ceremony began at the Oak Grove Cemetery – which was formerly known as the “Stonewall Jackson Cemetery” – where they gathered in front of the Stonewall Jackson monument for a religious service. Following that, the ad hoc Lee-Jackson day parade marched two miles down Main Street in hopes of keeping “the memories alive of the Confederate generals,” or so Dorsey maintained. Dorsey indicated that, “it’s a family or blood matter. We’re all descendants of Confederate veterans.”<sup>6</sup> Then, to make the lines of battle clear, Dorsey explained how the celebration was actually a protest. He declared, “Democrats cannot force us to stop celebrating the lives of two great heroes and citizens of Lexington, Virginia.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Mikaela Lefrak, “Virginia House Votes With Senate To Abolish Lee-Jackson Day,” *NPR News* (Washington, DC), February 7, 2020.

<sup>4</sup> Caroline Eaker, “Lee-Jackson Day Activities Continue Despite No Longer Being Considered a Holiday,” *ABC News* (Lexington, Virginia), January 16, 2021.

<sup>5</sup> Brandon Dorsey, “Home,” Lee-Jackson Day Lexington, Virginia, accessed November 13, 2021, <https://leejacksonday.webs.com/>.

<sup>6</sup> Lindsay Cayne, “Members of Sons of Confederate Veterans Celebrate Lee-Jackson Day in Lexington,” *WDBJ News* (Lexington, Virginia), January 16, 2021.

<sup>7</sup> Dorsey, “Home,” Lee-Jackson Day Lexington, Virginia.

Dorsey was correct on one point. Lee-Jackson Day represented the frontlines in the ardent battle for Civil War memory. This study probes the complex question of how contemporary American society has engaged with and responded to the controversial matters that reflect the contrasting interpretations of the American Civil War. It argues that the fight against Confederate symbolism reflects a collective desire to overcome America's racist past. Further, the battle against Confederate symbolism, which began in the late twentieth century, is actually a continuation of the struggle for civil rights. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) attacked Confederate symbolism in an attempt to start a national discourse regarding America's racist past and to eradicate white supremacy in the United States. In response, the national news media covered the persistent large-scale protests, demonstrations, and economic boycotts organized by the NAACP in opposition to Confederate symbols. As Americans across the country watched the heightened scrutiny of Confederate symbols unfold, the size of the debate forced them to choose a side. A national discourse followed as politically-active Americans began to debate whether Confederate symbols kept Confederate "ideals" alive within modern America. The children and grandchildren of the civil rights era continued the legacy of their forbearers, demonstrating that, despite the optimistic belief that the war against white supremacy had been all but won after the Voting Rights Act had been passed, the war was just heating up.

The war against Confederate symbolism fit neatly within the folds of America's two-party system. Democrats pushed for legislation to abolish Virginia's Lee-Jackson day in the face of staunch Republican opposition. Every Republican senator voted against the measure except for Siobhan S. Dunnivant, who was a Republican representing Henrico county.<sup>8</sup> Richard Black –

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<sup>8</sup> Laura Vozzella, "Virginia Senate Votes to Eliminate Lee-Jackson Day, Create New Election Day Holiday," *The Washington Post* (Washington, DC).

Republican senator representing Loudoun and Prince Williams Counties – voiced his opposition. He expressed, “I have unease about the movement to erasing history. Maybe next time, it’ll be Martin Luther King. I would be opposed to erasing something in his honor.”<sup>9</sup> Republicans embraced Confederate history because a large portion of their base had a strong, deep, allegiance to that history. In recent times, as this thesis argues, the memory of the Civil War has become a highly contested political battleground. Republicans continued to glorify Confederate history at the behest of Confederate heritage groups in a desperate attempt to make it a rallying point for the far right and to appease their conservative base. Meanwhile, Democrats refuted the Lost Cause ideology in order to placate their constituents as they argued that removal of Confederate emblems was the best way to recognize America’s darker past without celebrating it. However, while political polarization often stymied efforts or stalemated the national debate, grassroots activism overcame the practical hurdles. The past three decades have been the most successful years for those who support the removal of Confederate symbols. Arguably, the people of my generation have destroyed more Confederate flags in the past five years than the Union army did between the years 1861 and 1865.

Long ago, academic historians reached a consensus on the Confederate flag dispute, but they now realize that the public is deeply divided. Robert Cook indicated that battles over the destruction of Confederate symbols have “retained the power to mobilize Americans in the politically and racially polarized present.”<sup>10</sup> In 2005, Fitzhugh Brundage predicted that, “current trends in southern politics suggest we can anticipate further corrosive debates over the past.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Stewart, “Gov. Northam Signs Law.”

<sup>10</sup> Robert Cook, *Civil War Memories: Contesting the Past Since 1865* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017), 8.

<sup>11</sup> W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2005), 338.

This study confirms his prediction, as these fights emerged alongside partisan political polarization.

Historians are less unified when it comes to the reasons for the recent surge in attention to Confederate symbols. Some have argued that the contemporary battles over Confederate symbolism are distinct from the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. After Civil Rights, so the argument goes, the U.S. entered a “colorblind era.” The push to discard Confederate imagery in the succeeding decades emerged because of a societal shift as Lost Cause advocates adapted to Americans’ “colorblind” reality.<sup>12</sup> Others have argued that the recent battles over Confederate symbolism is one phase in the much larger ongoing fight for racial justice. It was a movement against white supremacy that initially caused public criticism of Confederate symbolism, therefore, today’s fight against Confederate commemoration signals a continuation of the struggle for civil rights.<sup>13</sup> Most studies of Confederate memory do not consider events that occurred within the past three decades. This study corrects that by covering the years 1993 to 2021. In addition, it shows how, within the past three decades, the fight against Confederate symbolism is truly a fight against white supremacy. The Confederate flag made a full-scale return to American society in the 1960s, in opposition to the Civil Rights Movement. This is why, for instance, the Confederate flag was placed atop the South Carolina statehouse dome in 1962 – not merely to coincide with the one hundredth anniversary of the war.<sup>14</sup> Today, these symbols persist. The NAACP, and more recently, Black Lives Matter, have fought hard to

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<sup>12</sup> Kevin M. Levin, *Searching for Black Confederates: The Civil War’s Most Persistent Myth*, (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2019). Nicole Maurantonio, *Confederate Exceptionalism: Civil War Myth and Memory in the Twenty-First Century*, (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2019).

<sup>13</sup> Karen Cox, *No Common Ground: Confederate Monuments and the Ongoing Fight for Racial Justice* (Chapel Hill: The university of North Carolina Press, 2021). Ethan J. Kytte and Blane Roberts, *Denmark Vesey’s Garden: Slavery and Memory in the Cradle of the Confederacy*, (New York, 2018). Cook, *Civil War Memories*.

<sup>14</sup> Regina Green, “Confederate Flag Continues Tradition of Controversy,” *The Gamecock* (Columbia, South Carolina), March 21, 1997.

reverse these signs, arguing that their destruction is a signal victory in the effort to eradicate white supremacist ideology. The contemporary attacks on Confederate symbols confirms that the Black Freedom Struggle is not over and that the fight for civil rights can still be won.

This work begins in 1993 because that year witnessed a groundswell of activity. That year, control over the memory of the Civil War fell into the hands of politicians. Among several decisions, Republican governors across the South proclaimed April to be “Confederate History and Heritage Month.” This ignited a debate surrounding the public display of the Confederate battle flag, which, in turn, brought protest from Civil Rights groups. The first chapter examines the highly contested political debates over display of the Confederate flag. It argues that the battle over the Confederate flag became polarized when Republican politicians used the issue as a mechanism to stir up votes by making it appear as if their opponents were erasing white culture. Since the mid-1990s, Democrats refuted the Lost Cause ideology by advocating for the removal of the rebel emblem. Republicans fought to retain the rebel emblem to appease their conservative base. Early on, historians tried to insert themselves in this political debate, but uniformly failed. Few ordinary Americans listened to the experts. An exasperated Adam Domby suggested that historians had “an important role in providing needed context” for debates over Confederate symbolism and memory. He expressed that they had the power to draw much needed attention “to how the past has been used and manipulated.”<sup>15</sup> Politicians – not the historians – wielded the power. Eager to transform the issue into a simple “pro-flag” or “anti-flag” choice, the Confederate flag debate remained alive because it fed politicians’ desire to fight a ready-made, low-risk culture war.

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<sup>15</sup> Adam Domby, *The False Cause: Fraud, Fabrication, and White Supremacy in Confederate Memory* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2020).

But as the two parties played their game, the NAACP challenged the public display of the Confederate battle flag on the ground. Grassroots activism led by the NAACP forced the issue into national headlines, capturing the attention of Americans across the country. State by State, they won their fight. Never wavering from their initial goal, the NAACP mobilized large-scale support, attracting thousands to their rallies. Their organized protests, their strategic capabilities, and the unrelenting persistence of their leaders allowed them to captivate the nation. By gaining high-profile allies – for example, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) – the NAACP was able to prevail. This chapter concludes with the massacre of nine African American worshipers at Mother Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal church in Charleston, South Carolina in 2015. This racially charged act of violence resulted in the Confederate flag being removed from the statehouse grounds, ending a decade and a half long economic boycott of South Carolina. As the debate over the Confederate flag appeared to be won, this tragedy spurred the passions of many Americans towards a different facet of Confederate remembrance: the Confederate monuments that consumed America's historical landscape.

Chapter Two turns its attention towards the polarizing debates and the legislative maneuvering over the fate of these Confederate monuments. The initial catalyst that prompted an unprecedented scrutiny of Confederate iconography was the same event that forced a bipartisan effort to remove the Confederate flag from the statehouse grounds, the Charleston Massacre. Soon after, the Trump administration framed the debate. Unexpectedly, the President became an active, if incoherent, participant, and he deliberately inflamed the issue. The chapter chronicles three major turning points – the Charleston Massacre, the 2017 violence at Charlottesville, and the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis. After each tragedy, the call to remove Confederate monuments grew in crescendo, often causing mobs to take to the streets, forcibly removing them,

with or without official approval. These protests forced Democrats to work to find legal footing to remove such monuments in order to avoid future clashes. On the other side, Republicans responded by strengthening the legislation that protected monuments, and in most cases, they barred local governments from removing them. Despite these legal obstacles, the NAACP, and more recently, the Black Lives Matter (BLM) Movement retackled the issue, pressuring local governments to find loopholes to achieve removal. Even though these grassroots efforts to remove Confederate monuments have been commendable, this chapter highlights how American society has been reactive, not proactive, in the fight against Confederate iconography.

Chapter Three analyzes a topic that is not yet firmly grounded in historiography. This section examines how the BLM movement incorporated itself into the fabric of American society, emerging as a leading institution in the anti-Confederate campaign. BLM is a decentralized organization that attracts individuals who are not associated with any organized bureaucracy. The name of the movement has often taken on a life of itself, but its members have consistently argued that their foundational aim is to “eradicate white supremacy in the United States.”<sup>16</sup> Their attack on Confederate commemoration was justified using the same argument. Between 2015 and 2019, local and state governments legally removed fifty-eight Confederate monuments.<sup>17</sup> After the murder of George Floyd on May 25, 2020, BLM protests turned their attention to the remaining Confederate monuments. In the summer of 2020, protests and riots sparked across the country often turning violent and forcing politicians to decide the fate of Confederate monuments in a more immediate way. In under a year, BLM achieved the removal of 167 Confederate symbols, ninety-four of which were Confederate monuments. (The

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<sup>16</sup> About,” Black Lives Matter, October 16, 2020, accessed November 1, 2021. <https://blacklivesmatter.com/about/>.

<sup>17</sup> Neil Vigor and Daniel Victor, “Over 160 Confederate Symbols Removed in 2020, Group Says,” *The New York Times* (New York, New York), February 23, 2021.

abolishment of Lee-Jackson day in 2020 was the only Confederate symbol removed in 2020 that occurred before the death of George Floyd).<sup>18</sup> The BLM community argued that removing these monuments put the nation one step closer to the symbolic eradication of white supremacy.

Historian Karen Cox has argued that no compromise over Confederate symbols will be reached if the residents of that community disagree on their meaning. She indicated that there may be “no common ground” among citizens who represent a “competing version of history.”<sup>19</sup> This study confirms these findings. Presently, there is a clear partisan division concerning how the Civil War is remembered. While the numerous protests, demonstrations, and grassroots activism against Confederate commemoration has been admirable, Americans – as a whole – have utterly failed to understand the legacy of the war. The ongoing debate over the Confederate battle flag and Confederate monuments during a time of heightened racial tension points towards the need for a more open and honest national discussion concerning the Civil War’s enduring legacy.

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<sup>18</sup> “Whose Heritage? Public Symbols of the Confederacy,” Southern Poverty Law Center, accessed November 15, 2021, <https://www.splcenter.org/data-projects/whose-heritage>.

<sup>19</sup> Cox, *No Common Ground*.

## CHAPTER II

### IT'S NOT JUST A PIECE OF CLOTH: THE CONFEDERATE BATTLE FLAG IN THE CONTEMPORARY SOUTH, 1993-2015

In April 2003, impassioned protests engulfed the small coastal town of Beaufort, South Carolina, roughly seventy miles south of Charleston. This protest occurred after thirty-five high school students were suspended for displaying the Confederate battle flag on their t-shirts. Concerned parents and citizens led the first protest march which ended at Beaufort High School's district office. Another demonstration occurred at the front entrance of the high school. Sixty participants waved the Confederate flag and proudly displayed signs that read, "Heritage, not hate." One of the controversial t-shirts – the one worn by seventeen-year-old Brook Armstrong – exhibited freshly hatched chickens. In front, there was a broken eggshell adorned with the Confederate battle flag. The shirt read, "Southern chicks, better than the rest." Beaufort high school principal Bill Evans claimed that, until these recent events occurred, students at BHS paid little attention to the Confederate battle flag. This whole incident began when a seventeen-year-old white supremacist who wore a Confederate flag shirt passed out literature to BHS students with the Confederate emblem on it to recruit members to the Aryan Nation, an American white supremacist terrorist organization.<sup>1</sup> As the protests indicated, the white community of Beaufort believed the Confederate battle flag symbolized Southern "heritage" and pride in their Southern past.

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<sup>1</sup> Bruce Smith, "Confederate Flag issue still simmers in Beaufort: School Suspensions of Students Wearing the Symbol Spark Protests, Calls for Possible Lawsuits," *The Associated Press* (Beaufort, South Carolina), April 6, 2003.

The case in Beaufort provides an excellent example to illustrate how the Civil War has been remembered in American society and how, in the twenty-first century, these distinct interpretations have continued to collide and compete with one another. In the 150 years since the end of the Civil War, the focal point of the fight over the historical remembrance has shifted. A twentieth century Virginia resident summed it up when she indicated that, in the 1860s, the fight was over slavery. “In the 1960s,” she continued, “the battle was joined over voting rights and segregation. Now the war is over symbols.”<sup>2</sup> In 2005, historian W. Fitzhugh Brundage argued that the fight over the Confederate battle flag, and Confederate symbolism generally, formed a new battleground for the large war to determine who had the power to set the conditions for how American society remembered its past. But as events took shape, neither historians nor high school students made the most important strategic decisions in this war for American memory.<sup>3</sup> In contemporary society, politicians emerged as the generals of the culture war. In agreement with Brundage, Adam Domby indicated that these battles over Confederate remembrance were “symbolic of larger political fights.”<sup>4</sup> Domby argued that politicians fabricated narratives about the Civil War’s cause, about the legacy of Reconstruction, and about the conditions of slavery in order to justify current racial inequalities. In the twenty-first century, the Lost Cause narrative shifted its aim to “overlook not only the racism within the war but also the conflict’s and slavery’s continuing and disturbing impacts on American race relations.”<sup>5</sup> Another author, Nicole Maurantonio, cut right to the heart of the matter. In 2019, she argued that

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<sup>2</sup> Kathrine Gruminger, “Symbols of the Old South or of Hate?” *The Arcadian* (Richmond, Virginia), February 1, 1997.

<sup>3</sup> W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2005).

<sup>4</sup> Adam Domby, *The False Cause: Fraud, Fabrication, and White Supremacy in Confederate Memory* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2020), 163.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

the Lost Cause was far from obsolete; its defenders had successfully refashioned it for the new millennium.<sup>6</sup>

From 1990, politicians waged a continuous political struggle to determine how the Civil War was remembered. On one side of the argument, Democrats refuted the Lost Cause by arguing that the best way to move forward was to recognize America's darker history without celebrating it. On the other side, Republicans continued to celebrate Confederate history in a desperate attempt to make it a rallying point for white voters. But while politicians have used the Confederate flag to make a political spectacle, grassroots activism tackled the issue head-on. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People became an agent for change. In most instances, Confederate remembrance went unnoticed until grassroots organizers pushed back against the display of Confederate symbols. In recent times, two points regarding Confederate symbolism have become increasingly evident. First, Americans' memory of the Civil War showcased the dissonance between the academic community and politically active Americans. Second, American society has been spinning its wheels. Americans have yet to reach a consensus about the meaning of the Confederacy, and it seems that for every step taken forward, society takes three steps in reverse.

These pro-Confederate protests were hardly new. White Supremacist groups have utilized the Confederate emblem to spread messages of bigotry ever since the 1870s. Confederate veterans formed the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) in 1865. By 1870, the KKK extended into almost every Southern state, and it became a vehicle for white Southerners to resist the Republican party's Reconstruction-era policies that aimed at establishing political and civil equality for

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<sup>6</sup> Nicole Maurantonio, *Confederate Exceptionalism: Civil War Myth and Memory in the Twenty-First Century*, (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2019).

blacks. They adopted the Confederate battle flag as a symbol of their white supremacist agenda.<sup>7</sup> The controversy regarding the Confederate battle flag has not been confined to small areas of the United States either. Quite the contrary, display of the Confederate flag has become a national problem, transcending regional boundaries. The controversy surrounding the Confederate battle flag in the contemporary South reflects Americans' contrasting interpretation and memory of the American Civil War. The events that transpired at Beaufort high school, and the South as a whole, within the past two and a half decades, not only reflects how Americans have chosen to remember the Civil War, but more importantly, it outlines what Americans have chosen to forget. As Jacquelyn Dowd Hall indicated, "remembrance is always a form of forgetting."<sup>8</sup> Professional historians of the Civil War's memory have come to a consensus that Americans do not share a common memory of the Civil War and slavery. Leading the charge, in 2001, David Blight argued that Americans used two distinct expressions, race and reunion, to characterize the war's memory.<sup>9</sup> He suggested that three distinct visions emerged in the half century after the war's conclusion. Two of these visions went hand-in-hand, the white supremacist and reconciliationist visions. African Americans championed a third vision, the emancipationist vision, which made the black wartime experience central to the war's meaning. Blight argued that these three visions "collided and competed," each one simultaneously altering Americans' perspective on the war. But at the dawn of the twentieth century, the reconciliationist and white supremacist visions fully united, overpowering the emancipationist vision. With Jim Crow at its height, white nationalism reformed the history of the war on Southern terms. In agreement with

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," *The Journal of American History* 91, no. 4 (March 2005): 1233.

<sup>9</sup> David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: the Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001).

Blight, Robert J. Cook expressed that, “no single ‘memory’ of the Civil War has ever existed.” Other authors – Ethan J. Kytte and Blain Roberts – pointed out that Americans did not share a common memory of slavery either. As Cook articulated, historical memory has been used “to explain how groups of all kinds construct accounts of the past by a process of selective remembering and forgetting.”<sup>10</sup>

During the mid-1990s Confederate symbolism came under intense scrutiny. In December 1993 Republican governor of Mississippi, Kirk Fordice, with the support of the Sons of Confederate Veterans, declared April to be Confederate History and Heritage Month. (This month was chosen by the SCV because April was the month that the Civil War started and ended). Initially, this proclamation received little negative attention. One Mississippi resident wrote to Governor Fordice expressing herself “pleased to see you recognize and proclaim April Confederate Heritage Month. It seems so much publicity is given to other celebrations of heritage recently that important events in the South are overshadowed, ignored, and forgotten.”<sup>11</sup> This prompted several other Southern states to follow Fordice’s example, and they, likewise, declared April to be Confederate Heritage Month. Fordice’s proclamation omitted any reference to slavery. It read:

April is the month in which the Confederate states began and ended a four year struggle; and whereas, on Confederate memorial day, we recognize those who served in the Confederacy; and whereas, it is important for all Americans to reflect upon our nation’s past, to gain insight from our mistakes, and successes, and to come to a full understanding that the lessons learned yesterday and today will carry us through tomorrow if we carefully and earnestly strive to understand and appreciate our heritage and our opportunities which lie before us.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 2. Robert J. Cook, *Civil War Memories: Contesting the Past in the United States since 1865* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2017), 4. Ethan J. Kytte and Blain Roberts, *Denmark Vesey’s Garden: Slavery and Memory in the Cradle of the Confederacy* (New York, 2018), 4.

<sup>11</sup> Adam Ganuchau, “April Proclaimed Confederate Heritage Month each year since ’93,” *Mississippi Today* (Ridgeland, Mississippi), April 4, 2016.

<sup>12</sup> US Department of State issued by Ronnie Musgrave, *A Proclamation of Confederate Heritage Month* (Jackson, Mississippi, 2002).

Mississippi's Confederate Heritage Month proclamation has been used by the state verbatim every year since 1993.

In 1995, the Republican governor of Virginia, George Allen, issued his own proclamation, the first to do so after Fordice.<sup>13</sup> Governor Allen was less subtle in how he explained the purpose of the Confederacy. He referred to the Civil War as “a four-year struggle for Southern independence and sovereign rights.” Allen’s proclamation went on to recognize Confederate soldiers and citizens who sacrificed their lives for the “cause of liberty... and preserving the self determination of the bond of states.” This document also omitted any mention of slavery or Virginia’s population of African Americans.<sup>14</sup>

Both of these proclamations provoked little controversy until 1997.<sup>15</sup> That year, the NAACP took aim at Confederate Heritage Month. In Virginia, the NAACP had been unaware of Allen’s Confederate holiday because the governor’s office did not publicize his proclamation. In 1995 and 1996, his proclamation was known only to the group who requested it, the SCV. Lynda Byrd Harden, president of the Virginia chapter of the NAACP, later expressed her dismay at the secrecy of the proclamation, saying that, “had we been aware of it in previous years, we would have expressed outrage.”<sup>16</sup> When the governor’s office finally publicized the proclamation in 1997, the NAACP made its outrage known and pushed for Allen’s resignation. Harden argued that Allen’s proclamation did a disservice to Virginia’s black citizens because it did not recognize the fact that over four million African Americans had been enslaved and because he “did not even acknowledge that though there are some people who feel there is something to

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<sup>13</sup> Carl R. Weinberg, "The Strange Career of Confederate History Month," *OAH Magazine of History* 25, no. 2 (2011): 63.

<sup>14</sup> Spencer S. Hsu, “Allen’s Confederacy Month Brings Outcry,” *The Washington Post* (Washington, DC,) April 11, 1997.

<sup>15</sup> Michael Hardy, “Allen Apologizes for Confederate Month Decree – NAACP not satisfied, Plans Demonstrated,” *Richmond Times-Dispatch* (Richmond, Virginia), April 12, 1997.

<sup>16</sup> Nancy Feigenbaum, “Allen Criticized for Proclamation,” *The Daily Press* (Newport News, Virginia), April 11, 1997.

celebrate, this is causing great pain to other people in this country.”<sup>17</sup> Local NAACP chapters across Virginia contributed to the dialogue, calling it a divisive act. Rev. Lawrence Bethel, president of the Newport News branch of the NAACP, said, “It’s not going to unify the people of this commonwealth. There’s nothing for African Americans to celebrate in our Confederacy.”<sup>18</sup> Many ordinary Virginia residents believed Allen’s proclamation was “not the act of a thoughtful man.” In a letter to the editor to the *Smithfield Times*, Virginia resident Scott Bates supported the NAACP’s position. He argued that, “the Confederacy did not stand for ‘the cause of liberty.’ The Confederacy accepted that a quarter of its inhabitants were to be kept in bondage.”<sup>19</sup>

In a symbolic response to Allen’s proclamation, civil rights leaders across the Commonwealth held a “mock burial and chastised Gov. George Allen for spreading hatred.” This event occurred in the shadow of the former capital of the Confederacy. They placed the Confederate Heritage Month proclamation in a plastic bucket and buried it. However, not everyone agreed when Lynda Byrd Harden proclaimed to a crowd of forty participants that this proclamation “breeds hatred and bigotry,” because a crowd of Confederate re-enactors showed up to counter-protest. Two dozen men dressed in Confederate uniforms waved the flags of the Confederacy and the Commonwealth of Virginia while singing, “Dixie.” Rick Reid, a Confederate re-enactor and “heritage advocate,” thanked Allen for his proclamation and denounced any organization “who wish to eliminate those (Confederate) symbols.” Capitol and City Police, some on horseback and some on bicycles, cautiously watched over the dueling

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<sup>17</sup> Hsu, “Allen’s Confederacy Month Brings Outcry,” April 11, 1997.

<sup>18</sup> Feigenbaum, “Allen Criticized for Proclamation,” April 11, 1997.

<sup>19</sup> Scott Bates, “Allen Action Wasn’t Thoughtful,” *Smithfield Times* (Smithfield, Virginia), April 23, 1997.

rallies. Both parties conducted themselves peacefully, and according to reports, they avoided name-calling or violence.<sup>20</sup>

In Richmond, Republicans responded with outrage when they learned that a portion of the Commonwealth's population openly disapproved of Confederate Heritage Month. In response to the public criticism of the proclamation, Governor Allen apologized "for those who are sincerely offended" but expressed skepticism at the timing of the outrage. He argued that the issue had been fabricated for political purposes in the midst of a statewide election year.<sup>21</sup> In addition, Gleb O. Taran, a Virginia resident, believed that anyone in opposition to this proclamation had erred by judging the Confederacy "through the distorted politically correct lens of the late twentieth century." Taran, a self-identified Republican, vehemently supported Allen's proclamation, and with a typically ignorant Lost Causist view, questioned why anyone would defame the "legacy of the second American revolution" – a common name used by Lost Cause advocates to refer to the Civil War – or insult the "heroic struggle for liberty of northern aggression by the Confederacy."<sup>22</sup> A Mason-Dixon poll released in May of 1997 showed many Virginians agreed with Taran's interpretation of the war. According to the poll, 72% approved of Allen's proclamation. Only 23% disapproved of it and 5% were not sure.<sup>23</sup>

The battle over Confederate Heritage Month in Virginia also prompted a heated discourse concerning the display of the Confederate battle flag. Like Confederate Heritage Month, the debate over the Confederate flag followed party lines. For instance, in 1997, the Middlesex County Urbana Oyster Festival became a political platform to discuss the appropriate usage of

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<sup>20</sup> Michael Hardy, "NAACP, War Re-enactors Stage Rallies at capital," *Richmond-Times Dispatch* (Richmond, Virginia), May 1, 1997.

<sup>21</sup> Hardy, "Allen Apologizes for Confederate Month Decree," April 12, 1997.

<sup>22</sup> Gleb O. Taran, "Commemoration is Due for a Quaint Historical Period," *The recorder* (Monterey, Virginia), May 16, 1997.

<sup>23</sup> "Regional Wrap-up," *Southside Sentinel* (Middlesex county, Virginia), May 15, 1997.

the Confederate flag. Michael Ransome, head of the NAACP chapter in Middlesex County, voiced his opinion when he witnessed Confederate re-enactors marching through the Oyster Festival parade waving their reproduction battle flags. He suggested that this performance was to prove a political point by embracing Confederate history and intentionally forgetting that many other cultural histories resided in Middlesex.<sup>24</sup> In support of Ransome and the NAACP, Arline Robinson, argued that the Confederate battle flag symbolized an institution that perpetrated the “enslavement, murder, rape, and dehumanization of a race of people.” Therefore, she declared, the black community has every right to be offended.<sup>25</sup>

Ransome’s comments generated a whirlwind of backlash. One Middlesex County resident believed the re-enactors did not have any kind of “racial, cultural, or political agenda.” The re-enactors also accused the NAACP of creating “divisiveness where none exists.”<sup>26</sup> Another resident, Howard Holloman, felt compelled to voice his opinion in response to Ransome’s “completely unjustified and erroneous charges.” In accordance with the Lost Cause, he believed Confederate history was not shameful because they were fighting for their homes, families, and livelihood against the “United States Army who brutally invaded the Confederate States of America in 1861.” Holloman accused the NAACP of a hidden political agenda for their sudden outburst over the Urbana Oyster Festival.<sup>27</sup> Another newspaper correspondent highlighted the Lost Cause ideology when she expressed her belief that the Civil War was an economic fight, not a fight over slavery, and she questioned why anyone would be offended by

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<sup>24</sup> Michael Ransome, “Offended by Recent Actions in Community,” *Southside Sentinel* (Middlesex County, Virginia), February 6, 1997.

<sup>25</sup> Arline Robinson, “Confederate Flag Still Remains symbol of oppression to many,” *Southside Sentinel* (Middlesex County, Virginia), February 20, 1997.

<sup>26</sup> Ron Courtney, “Confederate Re-enactors Have No Racial, Cultural, or Political Agenda,” *Southside Sentinel* (Middlesex County, Virginia), February 13, 1997.

<sup>27</sup> Howard Holloman, “Reject Bigotry; Let Common Sense Prevail,” *Southside Sentinel* (Middlesex County, Virginia), February 20, 1997.

the Confederate flag as it was a symbol of the South, not enslavement.<sup>28</sup> Virginia citizens decided on the interpretation of the flag in roughly the same way as Allen's proclamation. According to another Mason-Dixon Poll, 67% of Virginia residents believed the Confederate flag symbolized Southern pride and heritage while only 23% considered it a symbol of racism.<sup>29</sup>

While the battle over Confederate memory flared up in Virginia, a more acrimonious debate occurred in South Carolina. There, the NAACP targeted the Confederate battle flag that sat atop the Statehouse dome. On January 17, 2000, in one of the largest demonstrations against Confederate symbolism, roughly 46,000 people marched to the South Carolina Statehouse "in hopes of convincing lawmakers to remove the Confederate flag from the Statehouse dome."<sup>30</sup> Young people who had never protested before marched next to an older generation who showed them the ropes as the crowd waved signs, stomped their feet, and sang, "The flag is coming down today" to the tune of "we shall overcome." Kweisi Mfume, the national president of the NAACP, who was the keynote speaker for the event, believed this was the "greatest civil rights rally since the 1960s." Several individuals who attended the rally in support of the flag's removal vocalized their opinions that the flag represented racism and divisiveness. Others believed it should come down because, quite obviously, it did not represent a sovereign entity. James Gillman, the president of the South Carolina chapter of the NAACP, embodied both views. Speaking to a massive crowd on the steps of the capitol, he expressed, "Let it be clearly understood that we live in the sovereign state of South Carolina, and not in the Confederate States of America."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Majorie Heater, "Leave Slavery Issue in the past, Look to Improve Future," *Southside Sentinel* (Middlesex County, Virginia), February 20, 1997.

<sup>29</sup> "Regional Wrap-up," *Southside Sentinel* (Middlesex County, Virginia), May 15, 1997.

<sup>30</sup> Clayton Kale, "Citizens, students rally against flag," *The Gamecock* (Columbia, South Carolina), January 19, 2000.

<sup>31</sup> David Firestone, "46,000 March on South Carolina Capitol to Bring Down Confederate Flag," *The New York Times* (New York, New York), January 18, 2000.

The 2000 protest in Columbia appeared to come out of nowhere, but in reality, it had been in the works for years. Back in 1962 when the chairmen of the South Carolina Centennial Commission, John May, requested that the Confederate flag be placed on top of the Statehouse dome in honor of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Civil War, it went up without much opposition. It was not until the 1990s when lawmakers and citizens banded together in opposition to the flag. In 1994, a plan was devised by the South Carolina senate to resolve the issue. According to the plan, the Confederate flag would be lowered from the dome and two smaller Confederate flags would fly besides the Confederate monuments that resided on the statehouse grounds. In addition, a commission would be appointed to oversee construction of a civil rights monument that would be erected in front of the Statehouse. Inevitably, this compromise pleased no one and a lengthy and controversial debate ensued. The same year, a non-binding referendum revealed that 76% of Republican voters wished for the Confederate flag to remain on top of the dome.<sup>32</sup> Further, a Southern focus poll conducted by the Center for the Study of the American South, Institute for Social Science at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, disclosed that 61% of white Southerners firmly believed there should continue to be a public display of the Confederate flag, while 24% of blacks strongly disagreed.<sup>33</sup> These differing views over the public display of the Confederate battle flag posed a substantial problem for politicians. In the middle of 1999, the NAACP organized an economic boycott in protest of the Confederate flag on the Statehouse dome. This led to a nationwide tourism boycott that risked losing \$280 million in estimated revenue. Kweisi Mfume expressed that, “It’s not just a piece of cloth. This is about the

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<sup>32</sup> Regina Green, “Confederate Flag Continues Tradition of Controversy,” *The Gamecock* (Columbia, South Carolina), March 21, 1997.

<sup>33</sup> Robert Holmes and M. Christine Cagle, “The Great Debate: White Support for and Black Opposition to the Confederate Battle Flag” in *Confederate Symbols in the Contemporary South*, (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2000).

dignity of a people.” He stressed the importance of sticking to the economic boycott until the flag was lowered. He maintained that, “the flag will come down. It’s just a matter of when.”<sup>34</sup> The tourism boycott of South Carolina provoked politicians to work on a compromise that could satisfy both sides. The January 2000 protest simply added a media component to the economic campaign against the flag.

Supporters of the flag – often known as “flaggers” – tended to defend their stance by attacking the opposition by painting them with the broad brush of “political correctness.” One flag supporter said that the public display of the Confederate flag was a minimal issue compared to the “stifling influence of ‘political correctness’ that has gripped all aspects of society far too long.”<sup>35</sup> In agreement, another flag supporter believed that, “trying to ban the Confederate flag will blow up in the politically correct people’s faces.” He believed the only way to make sure a symbol persisted was to threaten to ban it.<sup>36</sup>

Flag supporters mobilized with incredible speed. On January 17, 2000, dozens of them showed up at the Statehouse in Columbia to counterprotest. Unlike the duels in Virginia, the collision of protesters in South Carolina grew violent. One flag supporter who was surrounded by state law enforcement officials waved the Confederate flag and held a sign that read, “How do you spell NAACP? Racist.” Another man who waved a large Confederate flag was arrested at the rally for “disorderly conduct.”<sup>37</sup> Anti-flaggers shouted down a heavily bearded white man who wandered into the crowd waving a Confederate flag and holding a sign that read, “I Love You.” He was later taken into custody for aggressive behavior.<sup>38</sup> Although no fatalities or serious

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<sup>34</sup> Paul Shepard, “NAACP decides to continue boycott,” *The Gamecock* (Columbia, South Carolina), February 21, 2000.

<sup>35</sup> “Reasons for Opposing Flag Dead Wrong,” *The Recorder* (Monterey, Virginia), January 29, 1999.

<sup>36</sup> Richard Fulgham, “A Defense of the Confederate Battle Flag,” *Lebanon News* (Lebanon, Virginia), February 10, 1999.

<sup>37</sup> Clayton Kale, “Citizens, students rally against flag,” January 19, 2000.

<sup>38</sup> “S.C. Anti-flag Rally Draws Thousands,” *UPI News* (Boca Raton, Florida), January 17, 2000.

injuries occurred, it became clear that emotions were high, and the Confederate flag controversy would not subside.

But the protest at the South Carolina capitol yielded results. The NAACP and the anti-flaggers attracted high-profile support. Having watched the protests on the evening news, President Bill Clinton expressed his belief that the top of the statehouse dome was not an appropriate place for the Confederate flag.<sup>39</sup> His remarks on the subject occurred at a tribute for John E. Clyburn, the first black congressman from South Carolina since Reconstruction, which was held at Allen University.<sup>40</sup> However, the control over Confederate memory was left up to the local and state government of South Carolina. In February 2000, Governor Jim Hodges proposed a plan to remove the Confederate flag from the Statehouse dome and place it in front of the Confederate monument dedicated to Confederate General Wade Hampton which resided on the Statehouse grounds. But for the NAACP, this was not enough. Kweisi Mfume relayed that the NAACP was deeply offended by this compromise, and that it was “unacceptable and non-negotiable.”<sup>41</sup>

In April, as the debate progressed, lawmakers were unable to come to a consensus. The senate president, Democrat John Drummond, was one vote shy of the seven he needed to move the flag debate to priority status. He accused Republicans of “sabotaging the bill to make the flag an election issue.” This hypothesis made sense since all 170 lawmakers were up for re-election the following November.<sup>42</sup> The controversy regarding the Confederate flag on top of the Statehouse dome – whether to take it down or leave it up – became the perfect political

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<sup>39</sup> Leigh Strobe, “Clinton: Flag Should Come Down,” *The Gamecock* (Columbia, South Carolina), January 19, 2000.

<sup>40</sup> Marc Lacey, “Clinton Enters Confederate Flag Debate,” *The New York Times* (New York, New York), March 30, 2000.

<sup>41</sup> Paul Shephard, “NAACP Decides to Continue Boycott,” February 21, 2000.

<sup>42</sup> Leigh Strobe, “Senate Leaders Block Debate of Flag Plan,” *The Gamecock* (Columbia, South Carolina), April 5, 2000.

battleground where politicians and lawmakers could more tightly define the issues that separated them from their opponents. In the end, Black lawmakers blinked first. Black legislators who opposed the flag reluctantly decided that a compromise was a necessary step to end the divisiveness. State Senator Darrell Jackson, a black Democrat, expressed, “As much as I love the NAACP, I love South Carolina more. I’m doing what’s best for the state of South Carolina.”<sup>43</sup> On July 1, 2000, Governor Jim Hodges’s “compromise” was reached. The senate overwhelming voted 37 to 8 on the measure while the House was much closer with a vote of 66 to 43.<sup>44</sup> In accordance with the agreement, the Confederate flag was removed from the Statehouse dome and placed next to the Confederate monument which resided on the Statehouse grounds.<sup>45</sup>

Predictably, this compromise pleased no one. Anti-flaggers could not claim victory because the flag still flew, and Flaggers felt defeated because the flag did not fly as high as it once did. Of the two sides, the Flaggers griped the most. They were upset to admit that the NAACP held so much sway. One of them complained that the biggest threat to South Carolina was the “activities of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and their legal and racial boycott.”<sup>46</sup> Another flag supporter, Sherry Hicks, was disappointed to see the Confederate flag lowered from the statehouse dome. She relayed that the Confederate flag “served as a reminder of the past. The flag does not represent my history or anyone else’s. Instead, it represents a period of not just Southern but American history.”<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> David Firestone, “S. Carolina Senate Votes to Remove Confederate Flag,” *The New York Times* (New York, New York), April 13, 2000.

<sup>44</sup> David Firestone, “South Carolina Votes to Remove Confederate Flag From Dome,” *The New York Times* (New York, New York), May 19, 2000.

<sup>45</sup> Jairus Dayton, “State Residents Voiced Mixed Reactions to the Flag,” *The Gamecock* (Columbia, South Carolina), July 12, 2000.

<sup>46</sup> John Kirby, “NAACP Should Compromise,” *The Gamecock* (Columbia, South Carolina), April 21, 2000.

<sup>47</sup> Dayton, “State Residents Voiced Mixed Reactions to Flag,” July 12, 2000.

Groups in opposition to the Confederate flag were not satisfied with the decision to keep the Confederate flag on statehouse grounds.<sup>48</sup> James Gillman believed the new location was too visible as the “organizations executive committee voted unanimously against it.” Kweisi Mfume promised to extend the then five-month-old boycott if the flag remained near the Confederate monument. He argued that the only acceptable deal would be to move the rebel flag to the Confederate relic room.<sup>49</sup> In accordance with the NAACP, Beaufort resident Harold Crosby, expressed that by “placing the flag in an outdoor place of prominence only serves as a reminder of South Carolina’s racist past.” The broker of the deal, Hodges, felt no solace. The compromise had satisfied no one. Just before the lowering of the Confederate flag from the Statehouse dome, Hodges criticized this controversy as “one more hurdle that has to be overcome.” Clearly, the fight over Confederate remembrance was far from over.

As South Carolina legislators and the NAACP were fighting over the future of the Confederate flag, Mississippi engaged in a similar battle. In April 2001, white Mississippians won their fight to keep the Confederate battle flag. This came after the NAACP filed a lawsuit to remove the image of the Confederate emblem from its position within the field of the state flag. The NAACP argued the use of the Confederate emblem within the state’s flag violated constitutionally protected rights of free speech, due process, and equal protection. The Mississippi supreme court disagreed, and it ruled that retaining the Confederate flag within the state flag did not violate any constitutionally protected rights. Naturally, the SCV endorsed this position and led a campaign to defeat the proposed redesign of the Mississippi flag. Earl Faggert – former head of the SCV – was incredibly proud of the court’s decision and conveyed that,

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<sup>48</sup> Kirby, “NAACP Should Compromise,” April 21, 2000.

<sup>49</sup> Jim Davenport, “S.C. Legislature Approves Moving Rebel Flag From Capitol Dome,” *The Washington Post* (Washington, DC), May 19, 2000.

“perhaps we’ve finally been able to turn the tide on the cultural cleansing in our country. Maybe we will send a message to other states that they need a referendum, too.” Since Mississippi was a state with a flourishing casino industry, several officials worried that the vote to keep the Confederate emblem would prompt the NAACP to implement a tourism boycott like the one in South Carolina. However, this fear did not outweigh the political fallout most politicians believed would take place if the Confederate emblem was removed. Mississippi possessed a large population of Republican voters, and a 2001 referendum showed that 64.39% of Mississippians wanted to keep the Confederate emblem as the dominant feature of the state flag. Former Democratic governor William Winter conveyed that, “it became apparent that many lawmakers – even some who disliked the rebel emblem – would vote to retain the old flag for fear of angering constituents who have a deep, emotional allegiance to the Confederate symbol.”<sup>50</sup>

While the effort to deal with the Lost Cause failed in Mississippi, the flag remained in the public limelight. The Confederate emblem continued to be used by local political groups to make small political statements in the first decade of the twenty-first century. For example, a local restaurant owner in Columbia lowered the American flag and raised the South Carolina and Confederate flag over all his restaurant locations in the wake of the dome controversy. This was done to address the relationship between the state and federal government, as the restaurateur expressed, “I call on the South Carolina legislature to reassert the proper historic relationship of state sovereignty and I suggest that their first step be the removal of the federal flag from the Statehouse dome and all state property.”<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Paul Duggan, “Mississippi Keeps its State Flag,” *The Washington Post* (Washington, DC), April 18, 2001.

<sup>51</sup> Amanda Silva, “Local Restaurateur uses Rebel Flag to Make Political Statement,” *The Gamecock* (Columbia, South Carolina), August 24, 2000.

The NAACP called on groups and individuals to avoid traveling to the state for business or pleasure and it discouraged residents from utilizing hotels and restaurants. Kweisi Mfume also urged the entertainment industries and sporting events to support the economic embargo on the state. Consequently, this had a devastating effect on South Carolina's economy. It hit local entrepreneurs and the sporting industry particularly hard. Kitty Green – founder and owner of Gullah-N-Geechie Mahn Tours – described the boycott as a “slap in the face.” Her business which provided tours of Low Country plantations on St. Helena Island lost thousands in revenue and was on the brink of closure. Under the boycott, major low country cultural events such as the Penn Center's heritage days festival and Beaufort's Memorial day Gullah Festival were cancelled which would have brought in hundreds of vendors from across the state.<sup>52</sup>

In 2001, the pressure from the NAACP won over the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). The NCAA declared that predetermined championship sites would not be held within the state. This meant that basketball tournaments, conference baseball tournaments, and bowl games could not be hosted in South Carolina. This cost the state millions in tourism dollars as these sporting events would have attracted hundreds of thousands of individuals from across the country.<sup>53</sup> *The Post and Currier* reported that the Legends Bowl would have brought an estimated \$6 million in revenue to the Military College of South Carolina. Another prominent bowl game, the Palmetto Bowl, was scheduled for Charleston in 2004, but was “scuppered due to the boycott.”<sup>54</sup> This prompted the head football coach at USC, Steve Spurrier, to speak out in opposition to the flag. In typically brusque fashion, he stated that the state needed to get rid of

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<sup>52</sup> Roddie A. Burris, “NAACP Takes Another Look at South Carolina Boycott,” *The Washington Post* (Washington, DC), October 22, 2006.

<sup>53</sup> David Cloninger, “NCAA lifts Boycott of South Carolina after Confederate Flag Removal,” *Orlando Sentinel* (Orlando, Florida), July 9, 2015.

<sup>54</sup> Kriston Capps, “The Confederate Flag Has Cost South Carolina Millions in Tourism,” *The Bloomberg CityLab*, June 24, 2015.

“that damn Confederate flag.”<sup>55</sup> Even though headlines regarding the flag slowly vanished after July 1, 2000, the NAACP remained dedicated to keeping the issue alive. The director of African American studies at USC, Cleveland Sellers, relayed that, “It’s only a matter of time before the Controversy flares up again in South Carolina, as it has in other states.”<sup>56</sup>

While the fight over Confederate symbolism disappeared from South Carolina’s attention, tempers flared again in Virginia over an issue most thought had been put to rest. In 2010, for the first time in eight years, Republican Governor Bob McDonnell proclaimed April to be Confederate Heritage Month, and in the same fashion as his predecessor, George Allen, he omitted any reference to slavery. When national news organizations took notice of McDonnell’s move, he justified the omission of slavery from the proclamation by saying, “There were any number of aspects to that conflict between the states. Obviously, it involved slavery. It involved other issues. But I focused on the ones I thought were most significant for Virginia.” The eight-year hiatus from Confederate Heritage Month was due, in large part, to the election of two Democratic governors.<sup>57</sup> The new Virginia governor generated harsher criticism than did Governor Allen because McDonnell’s decision received the attention of Democratic President Barack Obama. In an interview with *ABC News*, the President condemned McDonnell for the omission of slavery from the proclamation and conveyed that, “I don’t think you can understand the Confederacy and the Civil War unless you understand slavery and so I think that was an unacceptable omission.” McDonnell also received backlash from former Democratic Governor L. Douglas Wilder, the NAACP, and other left-leaning organizations.<sup>58</sup> For example, the co-

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Pamela Hamilton, “Confederate Flag Fight Likely to Swell in Future,” *The Sun News* (Myrtle Beach, South Carolina), July 20, 2003.

<sup>57</sup> Ken Rudin, “VA. Gov.’s’ Confederate History Month: Why Now?” *MPR News* (Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minnesota), April 7, 2010.

<sup>58</sup> “Mississippi Gov. Barbour backs McDonnell on ‘Confederate History’ Declaration,” *Fox News* (New York, New York), April 11, 2010.

founder of Black Entertainment Television, Democrat Shelia Johnson, argued that, “the complete omission of slavery from an official government document, which purports to be a call for all Virginians to ‘understand’ and ‘study’ their history, is both academically flawed and personally offensive.”<sup>59</sup>

Under such immense criticism, McDonnell apologized for the “major omission” and added an entire paragraph condemning slavery.<sup>60</sup> He defended himself by saying that his proclamation was intended to enhance and encourage tourism within the Commonwealth of Virginia, but the substantial backlash made it clear that he executed an ill-conceived political maneuver. McDonnell understood that this would generate criticism from the Flaggers, but he realized he needed to win over moderates if the Republicans intended to keep hold of the State House. He spent the fall of 2010 mainly focused on non-controversial issues – jobs and the economy – which caused him to cede a large portion of the conservative base to his activist attorney general, Ken Cuccinelli II. McDonnell had intended for his proclamation to win back his conservative base, but when backlash rose to national attention, McDonnell made a speedy withdraw from the Lost Cause. Mark Rozell, a political scientist at George Mason University, indicated that, “It helps him with his base. These people who support state’s rights and oppose federal intrusion.”<sup>61</sup>

Some politicians weighed in with support for the embattled Virginia governor. For example, the governor of Mississippi – a fellow Republican – Haley Barbour, praised McDonnell for his proclamation. He said McDonnell did nothing wrong and “it’s a sort of feeling that it’s not, that it is not significant, that it’s... trying to make a big deal out of

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<sup>59</sup> Ken Rudin, “VA. Gov.’s’ Confederate History Month: Why Now?” *MPR News*, April 7, 2010.

<sup>60</sup> “Mississippi Gov. Barbour backs McDonnell on ‘Confederate History’,” April 11, 2010.

<sup>61</sup> Anita Kumar and Rosalind S. Helderan, “McDonnell’s Confederate History Month Proclamation Irks Civil Rights Leaders,” *The Washington Post*, (Washington, DC), April 7, 2010.

something that doesn't amount to diddly." Patrick M. McSweenty, a former GOP chairman, applauded McDonnell for his proclamation as he expressed that, "it takes a certain amount of courage."<sup>62</sup> He was also endorsed by the Virginia division of the SCV when they congratulated him "for showing both the insight and the courage to proclaim April as Confederate History Month."<sup>63</sup>

The kerfuffle over McDonnell's proclamation may have receded except that national news seized upon another Lost Cause attack from Virginia that happened on the heels of the McDonnell fiasco. In the same year as McDonnell's proclamation, a fourth-grade textbook circulated in Virginia claimed that thousands of blacks fought for the Confederacy, including two battalions under Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson. Joy Masoff, author of the fourth-grade textbook, obtained this information from a website endorsed by the United Daughters of the Confederacy.<sup>64</sup> Local Virginia news outlets connected the two events, making it clear that Virginia's backwards public education system was primarily responsible for the ignorance in the government. As the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* put it, the Masoff text "insults not only the memories of slaves who struggled for freedom but history itself."<sup>65</sup>

As if on cue, academics jumped in to deconstruct the black Confederate myth. In a conference held at Norfolk State University shortly after the outlandish claim by Masoff, one panelist went into the details regarding the Confederacy's development of black soldiers. She stated, "Confederate leaders relented and used black soldiers only in the weeks before the wars end in 1865." She went on to add that, "you don't need a history degree to know that Thomas J.

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<sup>62</sup> Helderman, "McDonnell's Confederate History Month," April 7, 2010.

<sup>63</sup> Chuck Rand, "Virginia Governor McDonnell Declares April as Confederate History Month," Sons of Confederate Veterans, April 7, 2010, <http://sonsofconfederateveterans.blogspot.com/2010/04/virginia-governor-mcdonald-declares.html>.

<sup>64</sup> Michael Paul Williams, "Textbooks Civil War Claim Exposes issues with the Process," *Richmond Times-Dispatch* (Richmond, Virginia), October 26, 2010.

<sup>65</sup> "Civil War: No End," *Richmond Times-Dispatch* (Richmond, Virginia), October 23, 2010.

‘Stonewall’ Jackson died in 1863.”<sup>66</sup> Like most insidious myths, Masoff’s lie came from a kernel of truth.

Another scholar, Kevin M. Levin, emerged as the most active participant in deconstructing the black Confederate myth. In his monograph *Searching for Black Confederates: The Civil War’s Most Persistent Myth*, he argued that the black Confederate myth first emerged in the late 1970s by Confederate heritage advocates as a response to the shift in Civil War memory following the Civil Rights Movement.<sup>67</sup> He expressed that, “stories of black Confederate soldiers and loyal slaves were embraced as a means to defend the memory of the Confederacy as well as in response to deteriorating race relations at the end of the twentieth century and beginning of the twenty-first.” This myth allowed the Lost Cause to flourish in the twenty-first century. Some Americans could now argue that the Confederacy did not fight to preserve slavery by using these mythical Black Confederate soldiers as evidence.<sup>68</sup> Confederate symbolism, Confederate Heritage Month, and perpetrators of the black Confederate myth were all components of the ongoing struggle for Confederate memory. Unfortunately, it took an unimaginable act of violence to turn the national outrage against the Confederate battle flag in a more permanent way. That tragedy occurred in the summer of 2015.

The Confederate symbolism debate took a drastic turn on June 17, 2015, when a white supremacist, Dylann Roof, brutally murdered nine African American worshipers at Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina. Roof operated a website called [thelastrhodesian.com](http://thelastrhodesian.com), named after Rhodesia – which is a reference to the white settler colony that became Zimbabwe in 1980 – and posted photos of himself waving the Confederate flag and

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<sup>66</sup> Williams, “Textbooks Civil War,” October 26, 2010.

<sup>67</sup> Kevin M. Levin, *Searching for Black Confederates: The Civil War’s Most Persistent Myth*, (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 3.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

holding a handgun. This website included a 2500-word manifesto which explained his motivations for his act of racially charged violence. In the manifesto, Roof explained<sup>69</sup>:

I have no choice. I am not in the position to, alone, go into the ghetto and fight. I choose Charleston because it is most historic city in my state, and at one time had the highest ratio of blacks to whites in the country. We have no skinheads, no KKK, no one doing anything but talking on the internet. Well, someone has to have the bravery to take it to the real world, and I guess that has to be me.<sup>70</sup>

The massacre caused a societal shift surrounding the Confederate flag. Tensions escalated on both sides, and it prompted more violence, aggression, and an immediate demand for change. On June 19, Cornell William Brooks – The NAACP National President – declared that the organization’s mission was to sow unity in the country by combating racism. Therefore, he argued that, “symbolically we cannot have the Confederate flag waving in the state capital.”<sup>71</sup> On June 26, Brittany Ann Byuarim-Newsome, an anti-flagger, climbed to the top of the flagpole and forcibly removed the Confederate flag. She was arrested, along with an accomplice, and faced a \$5,000 fine and up to three years of jail time for defacing a monument. At the time of her arrest, she sent a statement to the media that expressed that the Confederate flag must come down immediately. She said, “It’s time for a new chapter where we are sincere about dismantling white supremacy and building towards a true racial justice and equality.” Opponents of the flag believed that Newsome provided a great opportunity to resolve a divisive issue and the flag should remain down.<sup>72</sup> However, the South Carolina Heritage Act fiercely protected Confederate imagery. This act – which was signed into law on May 23, 2000 – forbade the removal or

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<sup>69</sup> Frances Robles, “Dylann Roof photos and manifesto are posted on website,” *The New York Times* (New York, New York), June 20, 2015.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> CNN News, “NAACP President: Take the Confederate Flag Down,” June 19, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hhqsjc-HECE>.

<sup>72</sup> Robles, “Dylann Roof photos and manifesto are posted on website,” June 20, 2015.

alteration of historic monuments on public property.<sup>73</sup> Consequently, a new Confederate flag was raised within an hour after Newsome's arrest. Roughly a dozen cars and trucks waving the Confederate flag arrived at the South Carolina statehouse shortly after Newsome's arrest ahead of a pro-Confederate flag rally.<sup>74</sup>

In response to the pressure, Republican Governor Nikki Haley called for the flag's removal on June 22, five days after the massacre, and legislative and political battles occurred in the ensuing weeks before its complete removal on July 10, 2015. After thirteen hours of debate, the South Carolina House of Representatives passed the bill with an overwhelming vote of 94-20. According to the bill, the Confederate flag must be removed from the grounds of the capitol within twenty-four hours of the governor's signing and "shipped to the Confederate relic room." Republican senator Mike Pitts was among the few who openly rejected this proposal and delayed the passage of the bill. He filed dozens of amendments the day prior to Governor Haley's signing to forestall the removal of the rebel emblem. He said, "I grew up with that flag, the current flag, being almost a symbol of reverence, because of my family's service in that war. It was not a racial issue."<sup>75</sup> The other Republicans who opposed the bill claimed that the flag represented their rich Southern history, and its meaning has been "hijacked" and "abducted" by racists. One Republican, Jenny Horne, who supported the flag's removal, scolded her colleagues for delaying the bill, expressing her disbelief that "we do not have the heart in this body to do something meaningful, such as take a symbol of hate off these grounds."<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> South Carolina General Assembly, House, *The South Carolina Heritage Act of 2000*. HR 4895, 113<sup>th</sup> session, introduced in the House April 11, 2000, [https://www.scstatehouse.gov/sess113\\_1999-2000/bills/4895.htm](https://www.scstatehouse.gov/sess113_1999-2000/bills/4895.htm).

<sup>74</sup> Robles, "Dylann Roof photos and manifesto are posted on website," June 20, 2015.

<sup>75</sup> Richie Duchon, "South Carolina House Votes Overwhelmingly to Remove Confederate Flag From Capitol," *NBC News* (New York, New York), July 9, 2015.

<sup>76</sup> "S.C. Republican Jenny Horne Gives Tearful, Moving Speech in Flag Debate," *NBC News* (New York, New York), July 8, 2015.

With Republicans and Democrats in South Carolina working together and agreeing that the Confederate flag should no longer be displayed on the Statehouse grounds, at the federal level, polarization remained unchanged. The removal of the Confederate flag from the South Carolina statehouse grounds set off a heated debate on the House floor concerning the future of Confederate symbols on federally owned property. Immediately, the Republicans crafted a bill that allowed Confederate symbols to be displayed in federal cemeteries and would have permitted the sale of the Confederate battle flag as a souvenir item at National Park Service sites. Democratic Representative John Lewis – a civil rights activist who was nearly beaten to death by police officers in 1965 on the historic Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama – argued that there was no room to display the Confederate flag on federal property because it represented “the dark past as a symbol of separation, a symbol of division, a symbol of hate.” In disagreement, Republican Representative Lynn Westmoreland conveyed, “You cannot make an excuse for things that happened, but most people that actually died in the Civil War on the Confederate side did not own slaves. These were people fighting for their states. I do not even think they had any thoughts about slavery.” This came at a time when Republicans were struggling to attract minority voters and they realized they would not have enough votes for the bill to pass so they removed it from the floor.<sup>77</sup> After the Confederate flag was removed from the South Carolina Statehouse grounds, the NAACP officially ended its fifteen-year-long economic boycott of South Carolina.<sup>78</sup>

The battle over the Confederate flag appeared to be won, but only after twenty years and after nine Charlestonians had paid the ultimate price. But vestiges of the culture war remained.

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<sup>77</sup> Jenifer Steinhauer and Jonathon Weisman, “Republicans yield as Confederate Flag Issue Roils Congress,” *The New York Times* (New York, New York), July 9, 2015.

<sup>78</sup> “NAACP ends its 15-year economic boycott of South Carolina,” July 11, 2015.

The Republican governor of Mississippi, Tate Reeves, amid a national pandemic continued Mississippi's three-decade's long tradition, and in April 2021, he declared yet another celebration of Confederate History and Heritage month. This decision to continue the tradition occurred shortly after Reeves signed a bill that rid the Mississippi state flag of the Confederate emblem.<sup>79</sup> After the Charleston massacre in 2015, the struggle over the memory of the Civil War shifted in a new and more intense direction. What would happen to Confederate monuments? This is where we turn to next.

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<sup>79</sup> Lici Beveridge, "Advocacy Group to Reeves: Throw Confederate Heritage Month 'into the dustbin of history,'" *Clarion Ledger* (Jackson, Mississippi), April 15, 2021.

### CHAPTER III

#### TOPPLING THE LOST CAUSE: CONFEDERATE MONUMENTS IN THE CONTEMPORARY SOUTH, 2015-2020

On a blistering June evening in 2015, Dylann Roof, a twenty-one-year-old white supremacist, captivated the nation after the news reported his slaying of nine Black churchgoers in Charleston, South Carolina. Roof's actions forced Americans to reconsider how they commemorated their nation's past. A profoundly distorted view of the American Civil War compelled Dylann Roof to open fire upon congregants inside of the historic Mother Emmanuel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church. After his arrest, he told police that he had to "prepare myself mentally." Therefore, on six occasions, he drove from his home in Columbia to Charleston to commune with Confederate history.<sup>1</sup> During his trips, he visited a series of historical locations that were associated with slavery and the Confederacy. He visited Sullivan's Island which served as the entry point for forty percent of the enslaved Africans brought to North America. He also toured several plantations that once housed large slave populations. He visited Elmwood Cemetery where Confederate dead were buried, and he visited a museum devoted to the Confederacy. No doubt, Roof selected his target with care. Mother Emmanuel AME Church, one of the oldest black congregations in the South, served as the house of worship for Denmark Vesey who, in 1822, planned a massive slave revolt for which he, along with his thirty co-conspirators, were tried and executed.<sup>2</sup> After Roof's arrest, investigators found several pieces of

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<sup>1</sup> Ethan J. Kytle and Blane Roberts, *Denmark Vesey's Garden: Slavery and Memory in the Cradle of the Confederacy*, (New York, 2018).

<sup>2</sup> Justin Miller, "Dylann Roof visited Slave Plantations, Confederate Landmarks," *Daily Beast* (New York, New York), August 12, 2015.

paper with the names of black churches in Charleston. In addition to the name Mother Emmanuel, the note contained the name of Denmark Vesey.<sup>3</sup>

On the website that Roof operated, thelastrhodesian.com, he posted photographs of himself waving the Confederate flag and he showed that he kept the Confederate emblem on the license plate of his car.<sup>4</sup> His online manifesto expressed that his desire was to combat “historical lies, exaggerations, and myths” about slavery. In addition to saying that white southerners treated slaves honorably, he complained that African Americans used slavery as a scheme to take over the United States.<sup>5</sup> His interpretation of the Civil War stemmed from a peculiar blending of Lost Cause ideology and white supremacist paranoia. He strongly believed that slavery was a benevolent institution that benefited both slaves and masters. In addition, he argued that most Southerners who fought for the Confederacy did not own slaves; therefore, they did not fight to preserve the institution of slavery. As police investigated his motives, Americans across the country watched on television as the story of his madness unfold. They collectively asked themselves tough questions regarding American race relations. Some wondered why Confederate monuments continued to hold a significant place within American culture. Mitch Landrieu – the mayor of New Orleans – led the charge. He asked citizens of New Orleans to consider Confederate monuments from “the perspective of an African American mother or father trying to

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<sup>3</sup> Kytte and Roberts, *Denmark Vesey's Garden*, 2. Denmark Vesey was accused and found guilty of planning a slave revolt; however, historians have debated on whether there was a conspiracy and if Vesey was involved. See Robert L. Paquette and Douglas R. Egerton, “Of Facts and Fables: New Light on the Denmark Vesey Affair,” *The South Carolina Historical Magazine* 105, no. 1 (January 2004): 8-48. Also see Michael P. Johnson, “Denmark Vesey and His Co-Conspirators,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 58, no. 4 (October 2001): 915-76 for the historiography on the Vesey conspiracy.

<sup>4</sup> Miller, “Dylann Roof visited Slave Plantations,” August 12, 2015.

<sup>5</sup> Brendan O'Connor, “Here is What Appears to be Dylann Roof's Manifesto,” *Mother Jones* (San Francisco, California), June 20, 2015.

explain to their fifth-grade daughter who Robert E. Lee is and why he stands atop of our beautiful city.”<sup>6</sup>

Historians Shelly Puhak and Karen L. Cox agreed that the Charleston massacre changed the whole game. According to Cox, the Mother Emmanuel shooting “transcended local debates” such that the debate over Confederate monuments became a national issue as opposed to a collection of local disagreements.<sup>7</sup> Shortly after national news media outlets reported Roof’s arrest, photos emerged of him posing with the Confederate flag. Americans across the country were then forced to equate Confederate symbolism to white supremacy. This attention nationalized the debate surrounding Confederate monuments. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), since June of 2015, more than 140 Confederate monuments had been removed from public land. (Two thirds of those monuments came down in 2020). Unfortunately, 140 monuments were just a fraction of the total monuments dedicated to the Confederacy. As of 2021, there were over 750 Confederate monuments in thirty-four states, both North and South.<sup>8</sup>

To comprehend the national debate surrounding Confederate monuments in contemporary American society, it is imperative to understand why they were erected. In her monograph, *Dixie Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture*, Karen L. Cox provided one of the first histories on Confederate memorialization. She argued that women led the charge to memorialize the Confederacy and were “active participants in debates over what would constitute as a ‘new’ South.” Further, she

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<sup>6</sup> Mitch Landrieu, “We Can’t Walk Away From this Truth,” *The Atlantic* (Washington, DC), May 23, 2017.

<sup>7</sup>Shelley Puhak, “Confederate Monuments and Tributes in the United States, explained” in *Confederate Statues and Memorialization* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2018), 89-90. Karen Cox, *No Common Ground: Confederate Monuments and the Ongoing Fight for Racial Justice* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2021), 4.

<sup>8</sup> Bonnie Berkowitz and Adrian Blanco, “A Record Number of Confederate Monuments Fell in 2020, but Hundreds Still Stand. Here’s Where,” *The Washington Post* (Washington, DC), March 12, 2021.

argued, the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC), which formed in 1894, enhanced and propagated the Lost Cause ideology by making it a “movement about vindication, as well as memorialization.”<sup>9</sup> Another author, James C. Cobb, suggested that the South was truly born after Appomattox, because the UDC and other propagandists fought – and won – the contest of defining post-war Southern identity.<sup>10</sup>

Most Confederate monuments appeared between 1890 and 1920, and the UDC was responsible for a majority of them. Then came a small spike in monument building in the 1950s and 1960s which coincided with the rise of the Civil Rights Movement. Ninety-three percent of Confederate monuments were erected after 1895 with half of those monuments dedicated and unveiled between 1903 and 1912, the peak years of UDC action. Simultaneously, the UDC rose in membership from roughly 35,000 in 1903 to almost 80,000 members by 1912.<sup>11</sup> The fundamental aim of the UDC was to mold the historical landscape in such a way that future generations would come to revere the Confederacy. The UDC raised funds to erect 700 stone and bronze monuments dedicated to Confederate leaders, soldiers, and civilians, providing a reason for white Southerners to take pride in their Confederate heritage.<sup>12</sup>

Another author, Dell Upton, utilized the Confederate Memorial Monument in Montgomery, Alabama, to show how Confederate monuments embodied Lost Cause politics. This eighty-eight-foot-tall monument featured a stepped base surmounted by four statues representing the four branches of the military and was dedicated to Alabama’s 122,000 Confederate veterans. Brought to fruition by women, it served as a tribute to female patriotism,

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<sup>9</sup> Karen L. Cox, *Dixie Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2003).

<sup>10</sup> James C. Cobb, *Away Down South: A History of Southern Identity* (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 2005).

<sup>11</sup> Cox, *Dixie Daughters*, 50.

<sup>12</sup> Cox, *No Common Ground*, 2.

while at the same time, valorizing the men who fought for the Confederacy.<sup>13</sup> Throughout the period of UDC dominance, African Americans erected “counter monuments,” monuments that gave African Americans a presence on the Southern historical landscape. Upton argued that Southerners shared what he coined a “dual heritage.” This allowed them to acknowledge their black past without surrendering to prominent white historical mythologies.<sup>14</sup> Not all historians agreed to Upton’s narrow view. By examining Confederate landmarks across South Carolina, Thomas J. Brown, revealed “a shifting collective memory” of the Confederacy and the Civil War.<sup>15</sup> Unlike Upton, Brown placed less emphasis on race. He argued that while race served a necessary component of Confederate memorialization, it could not explain the changing shape of Confederate commemoration. He suggested, in accordance with Cox, that class and gender were critical to comprehending the transformation of Confederate commemoration across the Southern historical landscape.<sup>16</sup>

As recent studies on Confederate commemoration have indicated, in the wake of the Charleston massacre, a new phase over the battle of Civil War memory commenced. Confederate monuments came under attack in an unprecedented way. Mobs took to the streets, forcing politicians to remove Confederate monuments in the face of legal restraints that protected them. Despite laws protecting these monuments, protesters took the matter into their own hands, often toppling Confederate iconography. The period between 2015 and 2020 witnessed many monument topplings. Truly, Confederate history was finally crumbling.

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<sup>13</sup> Dell Upton, *What Can and Can't Be Said: Race, Uplift, and Monument Building in the Contemporary South* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015), 30.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas J. Brown, *Civil War Cannon: Sites of Confederate Memory in South Carolina* (Capel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 1.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 5-6.

Historians of Confederate monuments agreed that the war over Confederate remembrance was driven by a desire to vindicate the Confederate generation. An effort led by women, honoring Confederate “heroes” through bronze and stone monuments became an essential component to ensure that the legacy of the Confederacy would not vanish. In doing so, the history of the war became remembered on Southern terms.<sup>17</sup> Today, Confederate monuments have been revealed to be less permanent than Confederate heritage groups initially anticipated. Race politics served as the fulcrum of the changing scope of Confederate memory. White supremacists selected Confederate monuments as their rallying point and, consequently, social activists targeted those monuments in hopes of taking away their symbolic bastions. This upheaval forced politicians to define their stance more tightly – whether to take the monuments down or leave them standing. Generally, Democrats fought hard to remove these monuments through legislative action. However, the Republicans became the biggest obstacle to removal. In response to the heightened calls to remove Confederate monuments, Republicans crafted stronger laws to protect them.<sup>18</sup>

In the wake of the Charleston massacre, seven states – Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia – all passed “heritage laws.” These laws made it difficult to remove or relocate Confederate monuments, and in most instances, they barred local governments from taking any action at all. Most of these laws were modeled after the South Carolina Heritage Act of 2000.<sup>19</sup> North Carolina’s law – codified in 2015 as North Carolina General Statue 100-2.1 – passed by the legislature and Republican Governor Pat

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<sup>17</sup> See Cox, *No Common Ground*. Cox, *Dixie Daughters*. Upton, *What Can and Can’t Be Said*. Brown, *Civil War Cannon*. Puhak, “Confederate Monuments.” for some historiography on Confederate monuments.

<sup>18</sup> “Confederate Monuments Are Protected by Law in Several States,” *KCRA News* (Sacramento, California), July 10, 2020.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

McCrory, required that objects of “remembrance located on public property may not be permanently removed.”<sup>20</sup> In 2017, state lawmakers in Alabama passed the Alabama Memorial Preservation Act. This law prohibited local governments from the “relocation, removal, alteration, renaming, or other disturbance of monuments located on public property for 20 or more years.”<sup>21</sup> In short, the Republicans denied their opponents any means to fulfill their campaign promises. Confederate monuments had to remain because the law said so.

These laws made legal removal tricky, but not impossible. Through careful maneuvers, some local governments removed obnoxious monuments without violating the heritage acts. In July 2015, the Memphis city council voted unanimously to remove an imposing statue of Nathan Bedford Forrest, a Confederate general responsible for the Fort Pillow massacre in 1864 and the first grand wizard of the KKK. However, the Tennessee Historical Commission halted the statue’s removal. The opposition to the monument’s removal was justified because of the Tennessee Heritage Act of 2013, which was later amended in 2016. According to the law, no statue, monument, or memorial “erected for, or named or dedicated in honor of a military conflict that is identified in the list of conflicts in which the U.S has participated and is located on public property, may be relocated, removed, altered, renamed, rededicated, or otherwise disturbed.”<sup>22</sup> In 2017, to bypass this law, the city of Memphis sold the land on which the monument resided to Memphis Greenspace, a nonprofit organization dedicated to removing urban clutter. That year, the monument was officially removed. To complicate matters, the city council had to conceive a plan to deal with the remains of Forrest and his wife. The bodies of

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<sup>20</sup> Protection of Monuments, memorials, and Works of Art, G.S. 100-2.1, North Carolina state law (2015) [https://www.ncleg.net/EnactedLegislation/Statutes/PDF/BySection/Chapter\\_100/GS\\_100-2.1.pdf](https://www.ncleg.net/EnactedLegislation/Statutes/PDF/BySection/Chapter_100/GS_100-2.1.pdf).

<sup>21</sup> Alabama Memorial Preservation Act, “Alabama SB60: 2017: Regular Session,” LegiScan, (2017) <https://legiscan.com/AL/text/SB60/id/1617687>.

<sup>22</sup> “Tennessee SB2138,” TrackBill, accessed November 17, 2021, <https://trackbill.com/bill/tennessee-senate-bill-2138-historical-sites-and-preservation-as-enacted-enacts-the-tennessee-heritage-protection-act-of-2016-amends-tca-title-4-chapter-1-part-4/1239100/>.

both had been encased in the base of the statue since 1905. Due to legal restraints, the remains were not removed until 2021. With permission from Forrest's descendants, the SCV handled the removal of the remains. A consensus was finally reached, and the remains of Forrest and his wife were interred in Columbia, Tennessee, at the National Confederate Museum at Elm Springs.<sup>23</sup>

During the summer of 2015, Mitch Landrieu began his assault on Confederate monuments. He called for the removal of four prominent Confederate monuments located throughout New Orleans. In December, after several months of political debate, the majority Democratic city council voted six to one to remove four Confederate monuments from prominent locations in the city. One of the monuments removed was an enormous bronze statue of Robert E. Lee that had been located in the city's central business district since 1884. Two other monuments depicted P.G.T. Beauregard and Jefferson Davis. The fourth was an obelisk that recognized the Battle of Liberty Place. Landrieu referred to these monuments as a "public nuisance" and argued that the people of New Orleans "have the power and we have the right to correct these historical wrongs." This removal was endorsed by a local landmarks commission, the Human Relations Commission, and a group of church leaders. Rashida Govan – an Urban League representative – argued that "those symbols represent the very worst part of the history of this city."<sup>24</sup>

New Orleans' monument removal did not occur without substantial pushback. Opposition erupted from Confederate heritage advocates and from Republicans who argued that the removal of Confederate monuments represented a movement to "whitewash" American history.

Republican Governor Bobby Jindal expressed fierce opposition towards the movement. He

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<sup>23</sup> Brent Staples, "Confederate Monuments as Instruments of Racial Terror," *The New York Times* (New York, New York), July 24, 2015.

<sup>24</sup> Daniel Victor, "New Orleans City Council Votes to Remove Confederate Monuments," *The New York Times* (New York, New York), December 17, 2015.

argued that the city of New Orleans could not erase its history. Unable to obtain a direct comment from Jindal himself, Mike Reed – Jindal’s Communications director – emailed *NBC News*, writing, “Governor Jindal opposes the tearing down of these historical statues and he has instructed his staff to determine the legal authority he has as Governor to stop it.” Thus directed, Jindal’s staff investigated Louisiana’s “heritage act” to obtain legal footing to block the removal of these monuments. But Louisiana did not have one. With no “heritage act” in the books, Thomas Carmody, Jr. – Republican representative from Shreveport – crafted House Bill 71 (HB71) to forbid the “removal, renaming, or alteration” of any military monument on public property including the “war between the states.” The bill was later amended to require a majority vote in a public election before any monuments could be removed. Carmody’s mission was to ensure that the Confederacy’s “sacrifices are not just randomly tossed away into the ash bin of history.”<sup>25</sup> Three weeks later, the state Senate shot down HB71 in a 4-2 vote. Senator Karen Carter Petersen – head of the Louisiana Democratic Party – said that, at the heart of the bill, was a debate about whether “state governments should overrule decisions local government makes about the monuments it owns sitting on property it owns.”<sup>26</sup> Clearly, the Senate believed the matter should remain a local dispute. Unable to do anything better, the pro-Confederate groups started a petitioning campaign. The petition obtained 31,000 signatures and it was endorsed by the SCV and Governor Jindal. Michael Duplantier, a resident of New Orleans and signer of the petition, opined, “we cannot hit a delete button on the messy parts of our history.” While

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<sup>25</sup> Mark Ballard, “Bill to Stop Confederate Monument Removals, Put Power in ‘People’s Hands’ Passes Committee,” *The Advocate* (New Orleans, Louisiana), May 3, 2017.

<sup>26</sup> Mark Ballard, “Two Bills Aim to Protect Confederate Monuments Killed in Louisiana Legislature,” *The Advocate* (New Orleans, Louisiana), May 31, 2017.

Republicans slowed down the effort to remove these monuments, they failed to stymie the process, and, on May 19, 2017, Landrieu oversaw their removal.<sup>27</sup>

Texas also lacked a “heritage law,” and therefore, Confederate monuments came under attack. The student government at the University of Texas (UT) at Austin passed a resolution supported by the school’s president, Gregory L. Fenves, to remove a monument dedicated to Jefferson Davis that stood prominently in front of the clock tower in the center of campus. In a letter to the faculty and students, Fenves wrote, “while every historical figure leaves a mixed legacy, I believe Jefferson Davis is in a separate category, and that it is not in the University’s best interest to continue commemorating him on our main mall.”<sup>28</sup> When UT at Austin voted to remove the Jefferson Davis statue, the SCV pursued legal action to halt its removal. Kirk Lyons – the attorney for the SCV – called the attacks on Confederate imagery an “ISIS-style cleansing of history and tradition.”<sup>29</sup> The SCV lost the legal battle, and the Davis monument was relocated to the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, where it became part of a new educational exhibit.<sup>30</sup>

Everywhere, Republicans went on the defense. In response to a call to remove a large portrait of John C. Calhoun from the Capitol Building in Washington DC, Republican Senator Mitch McConnell rejoined, “I don’t think we should seek to scrub out or airbrush that history.”<sup>31</sup> Opposition arose from Republican constituents all across the South. In response to the Charleston massacre, concerned citizens wrote to Governor Nikki Haley. One resident believed

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<sup>27</sup> Victor, “New Orleans City Council,” December 17, 2015.

<sup>28</sup> Kenneth Rosen, “University of Texas at Austin Moves Confederate statue,” *The New York Times* (New York, New York), August 30, 2015.

<sup>29</sup> Lauren McGaught, “UT removes Jefferson Davis Statue,” *Chron* (Houston, Texas), August 30, 2015.

<sup>30</sup> “Jefferson Davis Statue to be Relocated to Educational Exhibit at History Center,” *UT News* (Austin, Texas), August 13, 2015.

<sup>31</sup> Jenifer Steinhauer, “Historical Symbols in Midst of a Purge Movement,” *New York Times* (New York, New York), September 1, 2015.

that the decision “to call for the removal of the Confederate flag following the Dylann Roof shooting rampage was a mistake” and the effects of this decision are detrimental as “extremists are calling for the removal of the Confederate flag, monuments, and any symbol remaining from the confederacy.”<sup>32</sup>

To save the monuments, some defenders went through tortuous mental gymnastics to make their case. For example, one South Carolina resident argued that Dylann Roof illegally obtained the gun used to kill nine African American worshipers; therefore, Confederate symbolism and imagery “are innocent.”<sup>33</sup> Another resident expressed that “the right needs to get together and start cooperating right now or we will hang separately!” He then went on to explain how Confederate memorialization across the country had nothing to do with the Charleston massacre, and expressed, “I bet it was the meds he was on!”<sup>34</sup> Instead of removing Confederate monuments, one South Carolinian advised Governor Haley that the way to correct race relations in America was by removing monuments dedicated to African Americans and to the Union. He conveyed, “After all Lincoln committed treason and everything initiated by the Union is null and void.”<sup>35</sup> Of course, removing all remembrances to African Americans and the Union represented the most extreme right-wing view. Most critics stood firmly in opposition to the destruction of any memorialization. One South Carolinian summed up her viewpoint when she expressed, “We are all grieved over the loss of nine innocent lives, we have seen firsthand the horrific work of Satan. However, this is no excuse to allow Confederate monuments to be vandalized and removed.”<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> South Carolina resident, email message to Nikki Haley, December 26, 2015.

<sup>33</sup> South Carolina resident, email message to Nikki Haley, July 11, 2015.

<sup>34</sup> South Carolina resident, email message to Nikki Haley, June 24, 2015.

<sup>35</sup> South Carolina resident, email message to Nikki Haley, July 7, 2015.

<sup>36</sup> South Carolina resident, email message to Nikki Haley, July 4, 2015.

As public outrage clogged social media, professional historians weighed in, trying to solve the crisis. As previously mentioned, at UT-Austin, historians suggested that the Jefferson Davis statue be relocated to the Dolph Briscoe Center for American history. This became an acceptable solution for a portion of the population. Other historians suggested that more “counter-monuments” be erected to balance out the Confederate ones. In the winter of 2015, Ethan J. Kytile and Blaine Roberts proposed that the United States erect a national monument dedicated to slavery’s victims. They argued that tearing down Confederate monuments were not enough in a “country that teaches its history through monuments.”<sup>37</sup> Gary Gallagher, a professor of history at the University of Virginia, offered a different solution, one in favor of re-contextualizing Confederate monuments. He expressed, “In my view, eliminating parts of the memorial landscape is tantamount to destroying documents or images – all compose parts of the historical record and should be preserved as such. I favor adding text that places monuments within the full sweep of how Americans have remembered the Civil War.”<sup>38</sup> But other professionals would not accept Gallagher’s middle-of-the-road view and demanded a full-on removal. Some even wanted Confederate monuments removed but with the pedestals remaining in place as testament to the monument’s defeat. Apparently, in some cases, this was achieved. As of June 2021, according to the SPLC, “there are thirty-two of these (Confederate) monuments, nine in North Carolina where the pedestal remains.”<sup>39</sup> A minority within the historical community wanted Confederate monuments completely obliterated. Megan Kate Nelson, an independent scholar and activist, proposed that, “Confederate memorials should neither be

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<sup>37</sup> Ethan J. Kytile and Blaine Roberts, “America Needs a National Slavery Monument,” *New York Times* (New York, New York), December 5, 2015.

<sup>38</sup> Gary Gallagher, “empty pedestals: What should be done with Civil Monuments to the Confederacy and it’s Leaders” in *Confederate Statues and Memorialization* (Athens GA: University of Georgia Press, 2019), 122.

<sup>39</sup> Leoneda Inge, “As Confederate Monuments Come Down, The Pedestal Sometimes Remain. Why Some Consider That a Troubling Symbol,” *WFAE 90.7* (Charlotte, North Carolina), July 3, 2021.

retained nor removed: They should be destroyed, and their broken pieces left in situ.”<sup>40</sup> Clearly, even academics could not reach a consensus.

Even though the national discourse surrounding Confederate monuments came swiftly, action to remove these monuments did not. The two subsequent years that followed the Charleston massacre witnessed a total of only eight Confederate monuments legally removed by local and city governments.<sup>41</sup> However, the year 2017 offered a major turning point in the Confederate monument debate as tensions again escalated. That year, mobs took to the streets, vandalizing monuments and forcibly removing them.

The spark that ignited this groundswell occurred on August 12, 2017, when violence erupted in Charlottesville, Virginia. That day, white nationalists gathered for the “unite the right” rally at Emancipation Park to protest the removal of the Robert E. Lee statue that had resided in this college town for well over a century. This rally was met with fierce opposition from Black Lives Matter (BLM) and antifa. Both groups arrived to counter-protest the event. As the day droned on, the two sides indulged in racial taunting, shoving, and fighting. Terry McAuliffe, Democratic Governor of Virginia, called for a state of emergency and sent the National Guard to disperse the crowd and halt any violence. Unfortunately, the National Guard arrived too late. A twenty-year-old white supremacist from Ohio, James Fields Jr., drove his car into a crowd of counter-protesters. His improvised battering ram left thirty-four people injured and it killed thirty-two-year-old Heather Heyer.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Megan Kate Nelson, “Empty Pedestals: What should be done with Civil Monuments to the Confederacy and it’s Leaders” in *Confederate Statues and Memorialization* (Athens GA: University of Georgia Press, 2019), 128.

<sup>41</sup> Berkowitz and Blanco, “A record number of Confederate Monuments Fell in 2020,” March 12, 2021.

<sup>42</sup> Sheryl Gay Stolberg and Brian M. Rosenthal, “Man Charged after White Nationalist Rally in Charlottesville Ends in deadly Violence,” *The New York Times* (New York, New York), August 12, 2017.

News organizations took notice of the presence of high-profile Neo-Nazis at Charlottesville. One of those, Richard Spencer, in the days before the rally, conveyed that, “what brings us together is that we are white, we are a people, we will not be replaced.”<sup>43</sup> This sentiment was shared by David Duke, neo-Nazi and grand wizard of the KKK, who relayed his opinion that, “this represents a turning point for the people of this country, we are determined to take our country back, and that’s what we believed in, that’s why we voted for Donald Trump, because he said he’s going to take our country back and that’s what we gotta do.”<sup>44</sup> It did not take long for liberal citizens to unite the two ideas. Neo-Nazis supported Confederate monuments. Consequently, after the Charlottesville uprising, renewed national attention reignited the monument debate.<sup>45</sup>

The situation got worse when President Donald Trump inserted himself into the conversation. On August 14, two-days after the “unite the right” rally, Trump released an initial statement, most likely written by a staff member, in which he conveyed his opinion that, “we condemn in the strongest possible terms this egregious display of hatred, bigotry, and violence on many sides. On many sides.”<sup>46</sup> Unimpressed with such a cautious message, David Duke fired back, putting pressure on the president. He tweeted, “I would recommend you take a good look in the mirror and remember it was white Americans who put you in the presidency, not radical leftists.”<sup>47</sup> Michael Von Kitch, a Neo-Nazi from Pennsylvania, concurred with Duke saying that the rally made him “proud to be white” and that Trump’s election had “emboldened” him along

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<sup>43</sup> Laura Vozzella, “White Nationalist Richard Spencer leads torch-bearing protesters defending Lee Statue,” *The Washington Post* (Washington, DC), May 14, 2017.

<sup>44</sup> Julia Manchester, “David Duke: Charlottesville protests about ‘fulfilling promises of Donald Trump,’” *The Hill* (Washington, DC), August 12, 2017.

<sup>45</sup> Cox, *No Common Ground*, 164.

<sup>46</sup> Joe Heim et al., “One Dead as Car Strikes Crowds Amid Protests of White Nationalists Gathering in Charlottesville; Two Police Die in Helicopter Crash,” *The Washington Post* (Washington, DC), August 13, 2017.

<sup>47</sup> Manchester, “David Duke,” August 12, 2017.

with his white supremacist counterparts.<sup>48</sup> Others warned Trump that he had alienated his far-right supporters. One day later, on August 15, Trump rolled back his initial statement. He referred to the white nationalists at Charlottesville as “some very fine people.” Further, he argued that “there is blame on both sides,” and then stumbled awkwardly into an opinion about the monument debate. He said:

Many of those people [white nationalists] were there to protest the taking down of the statue to Robert E. Lee. So, this week, it’s Robert E. Lee. I noticed that Stonewall Jackson’s coming down. I wonder, is it George Washington next week? And is it Thomas Jefferson the week after? You know, you really do have to ask yourself, where does it stop?<sup>49</sup>

In accordance with Trump, Brag Bowling – the former leader of the SCV – conveyed his frustrations that “once the Confederate statues are gone, you will see the Founding Fathers gone. This is a way of erasing history and taking over, making it like a whole new country.”<sup>50</sup> After Trump’s second press conference, he received praise from David Duke and Richard Spencer, both of whom expressed gratitude for the President’s sudden change of opinion.<sup>51</sup> His staff appeared less joyful. John Kelly, the chief of staff, said he had wished Trump would have started fresh after Charlottesville and that this “was all him – this wasn’t our plan.”<sup>52</sup>

Contemporary American society did not wait long to respond to the violence in Charlottesville through more protests, more vandalism, and an immediate call to remove Confederate monuments.<sup>53</sup> The Democratic Governor of North Carolina, Roy Cooper, had one of

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<sup>48</sup> Heim et al., “One Dead as Car Strikes Crowds,” August 13, 2017.

<sup>49</sup> Politico Staff, “Full Text: Trump’s comments on white supremacists, ‘alt-left’ in Charlottesville,” *Politico* (Arlington, Virginia), August 15, 2017.

<sup>50</sup> Christina Bellantoni, “Q&A: This Confederate History Activist Condemns White Supremacists but Says Trump Was Right,” *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, California), August 18, 2017.

<sup>51</sup> William Cummings, “Former KKK Leader David Duke praises Trump for His Courage,” *USA Today* (McLean, Virginia), August 15, 2017.

<sup>52</sup> Karen L. Cox, “What Changed in Charlottesville,” *The New York Times* (New York, New York), August 11, 2019.

<sup>53</sup> Berkowitz and Blanco, “A Record Number of Confederate Monuments fell in 2020,” March 12, 2021.

the loudest voices. In an editorial to *The Harold-Sun* he wrote, “some people cling to the belief that the Civil War was fought over states’ rights. But history is not on their side. We cannot continue to glorify a war against the United States of America fought in the defense of slavery. These monuments should come down.”<sup>54</sup> In Durham, a crowd of more than 100 protesters from anti-fascists organizations – the Democratic Socialists of America, the Workers World Party, and the Industrial Workers of the world – agreed with Cooper. The protesters chanted, “No K.K.K., no fascist U.S.A,” as they threw a rope around the neck of a fifteen-foot monument, depicting an armed, uniformed Confederate soldier dedicated to “the boys who wore the gray” and pulled. They stepped back and watched as the monument come crashing to the ground.<sup>55</sup> The moment was decisive, but not terribly admirable. This act not only jeopardized the safety of its citizens, but according to the North Carolina Heritage Law, it was also illegal. In response, Cooper encouraged the North Carolina legislature to repeal a 2015 law that barred individuals from removing monuments without permission from the North Carolina Historical Commission. He expressed that his stance on this issue was motivated by the violence at Charlottesville and aimed at avoiding similar clashes.<sup>56</sup>

Meanwhile, the City of Baltimore took a more clandestine approach. It took down four Confederate monuments in prominent locations across the city in the middle of the night. One of the monuments removed was the Lee-Jackson statue that honored Robert E. Lee and Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson. The other three were dedicated to Confederate soldiers and sailors, to Confederate women, and to Roger Taney. Catherine Pugh, the Democratic mayor of Baltimore,

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<sup>54</sup> Roy Cooper, “Monuments Must Come Down,” *The Herald-Sun* (Durham, North Carolina), August 22, 2017.

<sup>55</sup> Maggie Astor, “Protesters in Durham Topple a Confederate Monument,” *The New York Times* (New York, New York), August 14, 2017.

<sup>56</sup> Cleve R. Wootson Jr., “History Is Not On Their Side: N.C. Governor Says State’s Confederate Monuments Must Come Down,” *The Washington Post*, (Washington, DC), August 16, 2017.

said this decision was motivated by a desire to avoid public violence after several local groups publicized their plan to pull down the statues. One organization – the coalition of Friends/Tubman House – helped organize the plan which they called, “Do it like Durham,” using the slogan, “Let’s tear down white supremacy and hate.” The event was cancelled after the monuments were removed by the city in a secret all-night operation.<sup>57</sup> Simultaneously, Jim Gray – the Democratic mayor of Lexington, Kentucky – expressed his desire to relocate two of his city’s Confederate monuments. These monuments depicted Confederate officers John Hunt Morgan and John C. Breckinridge. However, he hit a political roadblock when the Republican governor, Matt Bevin, argued that removing these monuments would lead to a “sanitation of history.”<sup>58</sup> At first, it seemed as though Bevin was winning the fight. The monuments were originally believed to be under the jurisdiction of the Kentucky Military Heritage Commission (KMHC), a five-member state board created in 2002 by an act of the General Assembly comprised of historians and military personnel. The board was scheduled to meet the following November, and most likely, it would have chosen not to relocate the monuments. However, Gray discovered a legal loophole. The former Mayor of Lexington, Teresa Isaac, signed an application in 2003 for the statues to be designated to the KMHC contingent on prior approval from the Lexington-Fayette Urban County Council. The council never approved the measure to make removal unlawful. Gray indicated that this means Lexington’s “local authority remains intact; this is a local decision, as it should be.” The monuments were immediately relocated to the Lexington Cemetery where both men were buried.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Bill Chappell, “Baltimore Removes Confederate Statues One Day After Voting on Issue,” *NPR News* (Baltimore, Maryland), August 16, 2017.

<sup>58</sup> Clare Foran, “Baltimore Takes Down Its Confederate Monuments,” *The Atlantic* (New York, New York), August 16, 2017.

<sup>59</sup> Darcy Costello and Justin Sayers, “Confederate Statues Removed Tuesday Night in a Quick Move,” *Courier Journal* (Lexington, Kentucky), October 18, 2017.

The successful removal of Confederate monuments in Durham, Baltimore, and Lexington spurred academic interest in the topic. Some historians became concerned that the protests had gone too far. Arthur Herman, an American historian and a senior fellow at Hudson Institution, argued that Confederate monuments were not racist. He suggested that Confederate monuments are dedicated to virtues, not to individuals, and that “if they come down now under violent pressure from the left, we may be losing a lot more than statues of dead Confederate soldiers.”<sup>60</sup> In direct opposition to Herman, Karen Cox argued that Confederate monuments must come down. She conveyed that Trump encouraged a new wave of domestic terrorists in the wake of Charlottesville and that Confederate monuments had symbolized hate and white supremacy for generations. She expressed that, “communities across the region have a moral obligation to take up the cause of removing them. Artifacts of hate will be lost, but their history and meaning will not.”<sup>61</sup> Bree Newsome agreed. She conveyed that Confederate monuments were part of a long history of white supremacy in this country. She wrote, “Not only are these acts of violence that are intended to cause terror, but they are also politically informed... It is terrorism. It should be labeled as such. It should be dealt with as such.” After Charlottesville, and amidst the calls to remove Confederate monuments, the Democratic mayor of Richmond, Levar Stoney, created the Monument Avenue commission. This organization was composed of politicians and historians to decide the fate of the infamous avenue dedicated to Confederate leaders. The commission received some unexpected aid. William and Warren Christian, descendants of Stonewall Jackson, sent a letter to Mayor Stoney supporting the need to remove their forebear’s statue. They wrote,

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<sup>60</sup> Sarah Jones, “Conservatives are still arguing Confederate Monuments are Testaments to Valor,” *New Republic* (New York, New York), August 21, 2017.

<sup>61</sup> Karen Cox, “Why Confederate Monuments Must Fall,” *The New York Times* (New York, New York), August 15, 2017.

“Confederate monuments like the Jackson statue were never intended as a benign symbol. Rather, they were articulated artwork of white supremacy.”<sup>62</sup>

Throughout 2017 and 2018, Republicans continued to defend Confederate monuments. Lochlainn Seabrook, a right-wing author who published with a vanity press, argued that attacks on Confederate monuments came from left-leaning America because of their “ignorance, social spite, and political expediency!”<sup>63</sup> Republican constituents fought hard to protect Confederate monuments, which is what, as Republican Corey Stewart indicated, “makes it a great political issue.” Stewart, who was Trump’s former state campaign manager in Virginia, used his ardent defense of Confederate monuments to rise to political prominence in 2017 during the Republican primary race for governor of Virginia. Although he lost, he forced the Republican nominee, Ed Gillespie, to come out in opposition to monument removal as well. However, Democratic Governor-elect Ralph Northam said he would collaborate with local governments to remove monuments dedicated to the Confederacy.<sup>64</sup> Unfortunately, according to the SPLC, the two subsequent years that followed the violence at Charlottesville saw a substantial decline in Confederate monument removal as states tightened their heritage laws and calls to remove these monuments went silent.<sup>65</sup>

Since 2019, the GOP strengthened its laws to protect Confederate monuments, and in most instances, Republicans made it increasingly difficult for local governments to remove them.<sup>66</sup> In 2019, Brian Kemp – Republican Governor of Georgia – Passed Senate Bill 77 into

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<sup>62</sup> Amy Goodman and Denis Moynihan, “Acts of White Supremacists, Trump Only Fuel Demands for Racial Justice,” *Reno Gazette-Journal* (Reno, Nevada), August 20, 2017.

<sup>63</sup> Lochlainn Seabrook, *Confederate Monuments: Why Every American Should Honor Confederate Soldiers and Their Memorials*, (Spring Hill, TN: Sea Raven Press, 2018).

<sup>64</sup> Alan Suderman, “Changing VA Struggles with Past, Future: Deep Ties to Civil War History Makes Removal of Monuments a Controversial Issue,” *Daily Press* (Newport News, Virginia), August 22, 2017.

<sup>65</sup> Berkowitz and Blanco, “A Record Number of Confederate Monuments Fell in 2020,” March 12, 2021.

<sup>66</sup> Jim Galloway, “About That Confederate General on Horseback at the State Capital,” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* (Atlanta, Georgia), June 30, 2020.

law. This Bill increased the penalties against those who “damage the state’s public and private monuments.” This legislation required that a vandal must pay up to three times the cost of the damage and legal fees. It also required that any local government seeking to relocate a Confederate monument must place it in a “site of similar prominence.” As is often the case, opponents of the bill argued that “local control” was the best way to handle the regulation of monuments. Angelika Kausche – Democratic representative from Johns Creek – expressed that, “it’s not lost on anyone that its purpose is to silence the debate surrounding Confederate monuments in Georgia.”<sup>67</sup> Despite the Republican effort to quell the monument vandals, contemporary American society witnessed the largest and most successful drive to rid America’s historical landscape of Confederate imagery in the summer of 2020.

Confederate monuments were again thrust into the national spotlight after the death of George Floyd, a forty-six-year-old African American, at the hands of a white Minneapolis police officer.<sup>68</sup> In the aftermath, many city governments redoubled their efforts to remove Confederate monuments. But at this point, Trump prepared for the backlash.<sup>69</sup> At the beginning of July 2020, Trump signed an executive order that protected monuments, memorials, statues, and threatened, as he explained it, “anarchists who tear them down with long prison time.”<sup>70</sup> Nonetheless, according to the SPLC, over ninety monuments were removed in 2020.<sup>71</sup> Despite the strict heritage laws that had protected Confederate monuments, many politicians were able to find loopholes to achieve their removal. For example, on June 23, a 115-foot-tall statue of John C.

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<sup>67</sup> Maya T. Prabhu, “Georgia House Approves Bill Protecting Confederate, State Monuments,” *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* (Atlanta, Georgia), March 28, 2019.

<sup>68</sup> Evan Hill et. Al., “How George Floyd was Killed in Police Custody,” *The New York Times* (New York, New York), May 31, 2020.

<sup>69</sup> Cox, *No Common Ground*, 6.

<sup>70</sup> ArLuther Lee, “As a Candidate, Trump said Confederate Flag Should be put in a museum,” *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* (Atlanta, Georgia), July 7, 2020.

<sup>71</sup> Berkowitz and Blanco, “A Record Number of Confederate Monuments Fell in 2020,” March 12, 2021.

Calhoun which resided in Marion Square in Charleston since 1886, was removed. Although Calhoun died in 1850 and did not live to witness the creation of the Confederacy, he was an ardent supporter of secession and arguably the biggest defender of American slavery. The Democratic mayor of Charleston, John Tecklenburg, found a loophole in South Carolina's Heritage Act that facilitated the statue's removal. He argued that this monument was dedicated to an individual, not to a particular war listed in the act. So, he declared, "from this perspective, the heritage act may not even apply to it." After a seventeen-hour long struggle to remove the monument that lasted throughout the night, construction workers were finally able to remove this towering statue. The long struggle that construction workers faced to remove this enormous monument, in a way, represented how stubborn and pervasive these monuments have been in American society.<sup>72</sup> Much like Calhoun himself, his statue did not go quietly.

Historians responded to the removal of the Calhoun statue by endorsing the decision. Adam Domby – an award-winning historian of the Civil War, Reconstruction, and the American South – argued that, by removing these Confederate monuments, Americans were, in fact, preserving the historical landscape, not destroying it. He expressed that, "Marion Square is much older than the John C. Calhoun monument and if you want to know what Marion Square looked and felt like in 1860 right before the Civil War than you need to not have that monument there. By removing these monuments, we are preserving the historical landscape."<sup>73</sup> Another historian, William Sturkley, professor of Southern history at UNC-Chapel Hill, in agreement with Domby, expressed that the people who made the argument that taking down these monuments were erasing American history "truly have no idea how much history has been erased."<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Emily Williams, "The Calhoun Monument and Its Legacy," *Understand SC*, Podcast audio, June 25, 2020.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Chris Joyner, "As Monuments Tumble, Are we 'erasing' history? Historians Say No," *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* (Atlanta, Georgia). July 11, 2020.

During this turbulent summer, historians confronted the Lost Causists directly. On July 4, 2020, a large crowd of right-wing extremists – some heavily armed – marched onto the sacred ground of the Gettysburg National Military Park in response to a rumor that Antifa planned to burn an American flag inside the Soldiers National Cemetery. The right-wing extremists gathered at various locations across the park in front of several Confederate monuments. Eventually, a large crowd assembled in front of the Virginia Monument, which depicted Robert E. Lee.<sup>75</sup>

Scott Hancock, Professor of Africana studies at Gettysburg College, arrived at the Virginia Monument to counter-protest. The people who Hancock encountered were not likely descendants of Confederates nor did they possess any nostalgia for the Confederacy. Instead, they proved to be impassioned right-wing extremists who ardently refused to accept the removal of any monument dedicated to the Confederacy. Even though no one had suggested removing monuments from Gettysburg's battlefield, the protesters screamed at Hancock, and his friend, Clotaire Celius. Hancock conveyed that one right-wing extremist yelled, "to go back to Africa," and "to go get our welfare checks," and of course, he said, "they employed the N-word."<sup>76</sup> Hancock remained calm and argued that these monuments needed to tell the whole story and that "when people leave here [Gettysburg National Battlefield Park] they understand the reality that the Confederacy, the organizing principle for the Confederate government, the reason there was a battle here, was because of slaves." The crowd of protesters responded dyspeptically, and in accordance with the Lost Cause ideology, aggressively yelled, "no!" and that it was "about

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<sup>75</sup> Shawn Boburg and Dalton Bennett, "Militias flocked to Gettysburg to Foil a Supposed Antifa Flag Burning and, an Apparent Hoax Created on Social Media," *The Washington Post* (Washington, DC), July 4, 2020.

<sup>76</sup> Scott Hancock, "Fear of a Black Planet," *The Journal of the Civil War Era* (State College, Pennsylvania), July 20, 2020.

money.”<sup>77</sup> As tensions escalated, several of the armed right-wingers forced Hancock to flee the scene; he had begun to fear for his own safety.

Beginning with Charlottesville, and escalating after George Floyd’s murder, the concern for public safety became a common rationale to speed up the process of monument removal. For instance, on June 10, the statue dedicated to Jefferson Davis that resided on Monument Avenue in Richmond was toppled and ripped from its pedestal by protesters and activists. Concerned for public safety, Richmond Mayor Levar Stoney asked the public “to allow us to legally contract to have the remaining ones removed professionally.” He declared, “I will push to waste no time on this and to make it happen as soon as possible.”<sup>78</sup> In another instance, protesters toppled a Confederate monument in Portsmouth, Virginia, which resulted in the serious injury of one demonstrator, Chris Green. A BLM activist who witnessed the scene told *NBC News* that “it came and fully hit him in the head. He lost a great amount of blood, and we ask that everybody pray for that man right now.”<sup>79</sup> In a quick response, the neighboring city of Norfolk removed its towering “Johnny Reb” monument which had resided in downtown since 1907. Legislation was passed in the Virginia assembly’s 2020 legislative session that allowed for cities and counties to remove Confederate monuments without the state’s permission; however, it did not go into effect until July 1. Three weeks prior to the legislation going into effect, Democratic Mayor Kenny Alexander ordered the Confederate monument removed from downtown Norfolk in “the interest of public safety outweighing that date.” Twelve hours later, crews removed the “Johnny Reb” statue. Vincent Hodges, a black resident of Norfolk, weighed in on the monument’s removal as

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<sup>77</sup> Scott Hancock, “Gettysburg Monuments,” *YouTube Video*, 7:37. July 8, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fg9nX67WxjI>.

<sup>78</sup> Michael Levinson, “Protesters Topple Statue of Jefferson Davis on Richmond’s Monument Avenue,” *The New York Times* (New York, New York), June 11, 2020.

<sup>79</sup> Dennis Romero, “Man Injured in toppling of Confederate Statue in Virginia,” *NBC News* (New York, New York), June 11, 2020.

he expressed that, “It’s a big deal because we know as a black culture that these monuments were put into place to keep us out. They were warning signs after the Civil War ended so for the city to take them down and take action means more than anything.”<sup>80</sup>

Even though 2020 witnessed the most successful and passionate drive to rid America’s historical landscape of Confederate monuments, many politicians and communities stalled and opposed this process. After 2020, the SPLC documented over 750 Confederate monuments still standing. The years 2015-2020 witnessed the removal of 140 monuments, or fifteen percent of the whole.<sup>81</sup> Not only has political discourse and legislation slowed the removal of Confederate monuments but some communities across the country had a difficult time associating racism and white supremacy with Confederate iconography. For example, in July 2020, an all-white board of supervisors in Lafayette County, Mississippi, voted unanimously to reject a proposal to relocate a Confederate statue that stood prominently in the middle of Oxford Square. The 5-0 vote to retain the monument dedicated to the Confederate soldiers from Lafayette County came in the face of a wave of protesters – student-athletes at the University of Mississippi – who voiced their opinion that the statue did not “represent Oxford for what it is and what it can be.” Kesha Howell-Atkinson – the only black woman serving on the Oxford Board of Alderman – argued that the statue obstructed “positive strides in our town and community at large have made in the area of race relations.”<sup>82</sup> Several board members staunchly disagreed with this sentiment. Larry Gillespie, District Two Supervisor, argued that relocating this Confederate monument would lead to disunity. He wondered aloud, “How things like statues and street names can be offensive

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<sup>80</sup> “Crews Remove ‘Johnny Reb’ Statue From Confederate Monument in Downtown Norfolk,” *13 News Now* (Norfolk, Virginia), June 12, 2020.

<sup>81</sup> Cox, *No Common Ground*, 7.

<sup>82</sup> Taylor Vance, “Prominent Oxford Residents Requested Lafayette County Relocate Confederate Monument,” *Daily Journal* (Oxford, Mississippi), August 23, 2020.

to some.” The white District Four Supervisor, Chad McLarty, agreed and added that he had been a victim of racism and police brutality and “no matter how many statues, flags or pancake boxes you take down in this world, they [racists] still exist.”<sup>83</sup>

The largest Confederate monument, Stone Mountain, located twenty miles east of Atlanta, exhibited the firm grasp that Confederate commemoration had upon American society. This enormous stone carving sits in the center of a sprawling 14,353-acre park. The carving depicts Jefferson Davis, Robert E. Lee, and Stonewall Jackson, something like a Confederate version of Mount Rushmore. According to officials, this carving is not going anywhere. Between the national pandemic and BLM protests that sparked across the country in 2020, Stone Mountain and its vendors lost sizably in profits to the tune of \$27 million. In the spring of 2021, the Stone Mountain Memorial Association (SMMA) voted to “modernize” the park. The modernization efforts involved moving the Confederate flags that once greeted visitors at the entrance of the park to the base of the ninety-foot-tall Confederate carving. Further, they altered the park’s logo so that it no longer depicted the Confederate engraving.<sup>84</sup> However, Bill Stephens, chief executive of the SMMA, believed that visitors would not be satisfied. Stephens expressed, “We’re at a point where the state is teetering on going one way or the other politically and the mountain is at the center of that.”<sup>85</sup> Efforts to remove Stone Mountain have been hindered by legal restraints. According to the law, “the memorial to the heroes of the Confederate States of America graven upon the face of Stone Mountain shall never be altered, removed, concealed, or obscured in any fashion.” This law was created in 2001 as a bargaining

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<sup>83</sup> The Associated Press, “Mississippi Board Votes ‘no’ on Moving Confederate Monument,” *ABC News* (New York, New York), July 7, 2020.

<sup>84</sup> Emil Moffatt, “Stone Mountain Board Approves Limited Changes to Park’s Confederate Imagery,” *WABE News* (Atlanta, Georgia), May 24, 2021.

<sup>85</sup> Timothy Pratt and Rick Rojas, “Giant Confederate Monument Will Remain at Revamped Stone Mountain,” *The New York Times* (New York, New York), May 24, 2021.

chip by Democrats to rid the Confederate emblem from the Georgia state flag. In addition, the logistics of taking down a monument ninety feet tall, 190 feet across, covering three acres on the side of an exposed granite mountain has raised many questions. This concern was summed up nicely by Stevens when he said, “To remove the carving would take a small, tactical nuclear weapon. Three acres of solid granite, it’s probably not going anywhere.”<sup>86</sup>

Protests, demonstrations, and political contestation have driven the national discourse concerning Confederate monuments. While historians have actively participated in the debate, politicians continue to wield power over how the country’s past was commemorated and remembered. Since the Charleston Massacre, the debate regarding Confederate monuments shifted, forcing Americans to view their past in a more critical way. However, the forces of white supremacy did not lose much from their own groundswell. On Memorial Day 2021, white supremacists took a sledgehammer to the base of the Denmark Vesey monument that resided in Hampton Park in Charleston, South Carolina. This was done in retaliation for destroying remembrances to the Confederacy.<sup>87</sup> Clearly, the fight for racial justice, the need to end white supremacy, and the need to reduce Confederate imagery has not subsided. Sadly, only the murderous events at Mother Emmanuel Church, Charlottesville, and Minneapolis forced politicians to reexamine the meaning of Confederate monuments and what should be done about them. While efforts to remove monuments has been commendable, American society has been *reactive*, not proactive, in its fight to remove symbols of the Confederacy. American society should not have to wait until another tragedy intervenes to consider what to do about the remaining statues.

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<sup>86</sup> Emil Moffatt, “Confederate Imagery On Stone Mountain is Changing, But Not Fast Enough For Some,” *NPR NEWS* (Washington, DC), June 21, 2021.

<sup>87</sup> Stephen Hobbs, “Denmark Vesey Monument Vandalized in Hampton Park, City Says,” *The Post and Courier* (Charleston, South Carolina), May 30, 2021.

## CHAPTER IV

### BLACK LIVES MATTER: A MONUMENTAL RECKONING, 2012-2021

As darkness consumed the nation's capital on June 19, 2020, the only outdoor Confederate monument in D.C. met its tumultuous fate. Following a day of Juneteenth celebrations and demonstrations against police brutality, hundreds of boisterous Black Lives Matter (BLM) protesters united at the intersection of 3<sup>rd</sup> and D streets. Here, in the neighborhood called Judiciary Square, sat a twenty-eight-foot-tall statue depicting Albert Pike, a Confederate general. When the overwhelming mass of people arrived, three BLM protesters scaled the bronze statue, wrapping it in chains and a rope.<sup>1</sup> As the crowd grew, awaiting its demise, they chanted, "Hands up, fight back," and, "Black Lives, they matter too,"<sup>2</sup> in sequence. At 11 P.M., utilizing their sheer manpower, they pulled. With that, the towering monument plummeted to the ground. As police stood by watching, protesters rushed to the fallen statue and doused lighter fluid onto the monument to set it ablaze. Applause and cheers proceeded as the onlookers watched the statue burn. Simultaneously, they shouted, "No Justice, no peace! No racist police."<sup>3</sup>

Just miles away from the site, President Donald Trump took the opportunity to express his opinion regarding the disorderly scene. As the statue smoldered, Trump tweeted, "The D.C. police are not doing their job as they watch a statue be ripped down & burn. These people should be immediately arrested. A disgrace to our country!" The joyous BLM protesters could not resist the chance to mock the President as they read Trump's tweet over a bullhorn and cheered.<sup>4</sup> In

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<sup>1</sup> Jose Umana, "DC Protesters Topple, Burn Statue of Confederate Gen. Albert Pike," *WTOP News* (Washington, DC), June 20, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Daily Mail, "Protesters Set Fire to Albert Pike Statue in Washington DC," YouTube video, 3:45, June 20, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1f9IqNk80VY>.

<sup>3</sup> Rachel Sadon and Christian Zapata, "Protesters Topple, Burn Statue of Confederate General Albert Pike in Judiciary Square," *DCist* (Washington, DC), June 20, 2020.

<sup>4</sup> Umana, "DC Protesters Topple," June 20, 2020.

addition to Pike's role as a Confederate general, he was a longtime influential leader of the freemasons. In fact, it was that group that funded the monument back in 1901. The BLM members did not care about the statue's origins. One member argued that, "It doesn't matter that he's not being honored as a Confederate general. He still has a long history of supporting racist causes." The attempt to remove Pike's statue had been ongoing for twenty-eight years. Back in 1992, D.C. Councilmember Bill Lightfoot introduced legislation that called for its removal. In an interview with the *DCist*, Lightfoot lamented that the bill eventually "faded away." He recollected, "Back then, we were still dealing with the crack cocaine epidemic, we were the murder capital of the country... so we were dealing with more pressing immediate concerns." The controversy surrounding Pike's statue sat quiet until 2017 when the "Unite the right" rally stirred up interest in its removal. But on Juneteenth 2020, the BLM community decided to not wait any longer. Tired of waiting for the sluggish wheels of government to turn, they took matters into their own hands.<sup>5</sup>

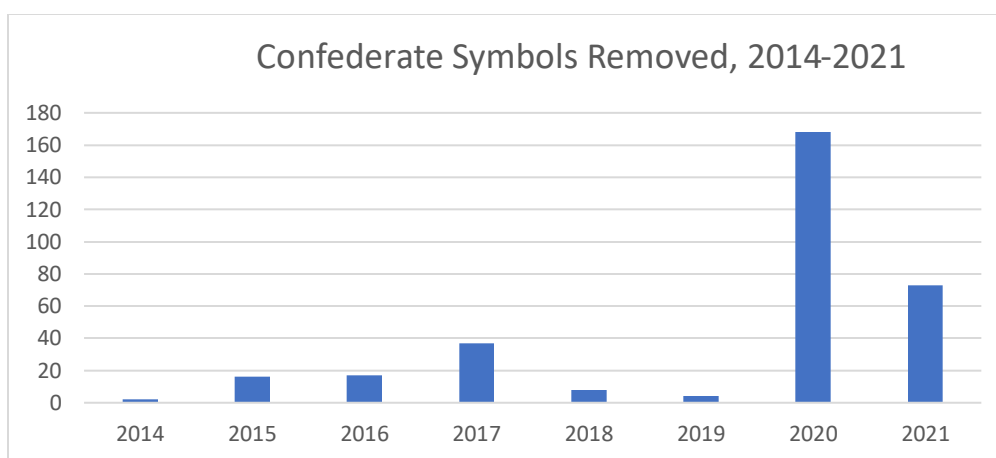
The destruction of the Pike monument in D.C. was a part of an intense wave of protests to discard Confederate imagery in the wake of the murder of George Floyd. While police killings of unarmed black men and women sparked outrage in American society much further back than 2020, the anguish and anger over Floyd's death actuated a powerful, unprecedented response led by the BLM movement. According to the SPLC, 168 Confederate symbols were removed in 2020, with over ninety being monuments. (See Figure 1). Only one of those symbols was removed before the death of George Floyd.<sup>6</sup> As a point of comparison, fifty-eight Confederate

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<sup>5</sup> Sadon and Zapata, "Protesters Topple, Burn Statue," June 20, 2020.

<sup>6</sup> Neil Vigor and Daniel Victor, "Over 160 Confederate Symbols Removed in 2020, Group Says," *The New York Times* (New York, New York), February 23, 2021.

monuments were removed from public land in the four-year span between 2015 and 2019.<sup>7</sup> The war against Confederate monuments had reached a stalemate. Confederate heritage groups continually filed lawsuits to prevent monument removal. Republicans enacted legislation that barred local governments from removing these monuments. But all this changed after Floyd's murder. In the summer of 2020, BLM protests turned their sights on Confederate iconography. Within days of George Floyd's death, and with immense pressure from protesters, crowds removed an unprecedented number of statues.<sup>8</sup> The effects of the BLM protests were felt most intensely in the Commonwealth of Virginia. There, crowds and local governments removed seventy-one Confederate symbols, more than any other state. North Carolina removed twenty-four, while Texas and Alabama Removed twelve each.<sup>9</sup>



**Figure 1. Confederate Symbols Removed, 2014-2021.** Data from “Whose Heritage? Public Symbols of the Confederacy,” Southern Poverty Law Center. Confederate “Symbols” include any monument, road name, school name, county or city name, marker, state holiday, U.S. military base, and other symbols that honor any person who served in the military or the government of the Confederate States of America.

<sup>7</sup> Nora McGreevy, “The U.S Removed Over 160 Confederate Symbols in 2020 – but Hundreds Remain,” *The Smithsonian Magazine* (Washington, DC), February 25, 2021.

<sup>8</sup> Karen Cox, “No Common Ground,” 169.

<sup>9</sup> McGreevy, “The U.S. Removed over 160 Confederate Symbols,” February 25, 2021.

Unlike the NAACP, Black Lives Matter confronted the legacy of the Confederacy in a more chaotic, aggressive, and fragmented way. At a time when the Confederate monument debate was already a national issue, protesters utilized the growing movement to place unprecedented pressure onto politicians to remove symbols dedicated to the Confederacy. Distinct from the initial call to discard Confederate imagery in 2015, BLM literally took matters into their own hands, forcing Americans to challenge how the country collectively remembered the Civil War.

The BLM movement took on new life in 2020; however, its foundation was laid almost one decade ago. On February 26, 2012, George Zimmerman, a twenty-eight-year-old neighborhood watch volunteer, shot and killed an unarmed black seventeen-year-old, Trayvon Martin, in Sanford, Florida. Martin was visiting his father's fiancée and her son at a gated community called, "The Retreat at Twin Lakes," a place he had visited on several occasions. This was also the neighborhood that Zimmerman routinely patrolled.<sup>10</sup> On the night of February 26, Zimmerman observed Martin returning to the gated community from a trip to the local convenience store. He called a non-emergency number to report a "suspicious person." On the call, he described Martin as "just walking around looking about. This guy looks like he is up to no good or he is on drugs or something."<sup>11</sup> The dispatcher specifically told him not to follow Martin; however, once the call ended, a violent encounter ensued, resulting in the death of the teenager. Six weeks later, Zimmerman was arrested and charged with second degree murder and manslaughter. After three weeks of testimony, in the summer of 2013, the six-woman jury, as *The New York Times* indicated, "rejected the prosecution's contention that Mr. Zimmerman had

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<sup>10</sup> "The Events Leading to the Shooting of Trayvon Martin," *The New York Times* (New York, New York), June 21, 2012.

<sup>11</sup> Mike Schneider, "911 Tapes in Trayvon Martin Shooting released," *Chicago Sun-Times* (Chicago, Illinois), March 17, 2012.

deliberately pursued Mr. Martin because he assumed the hoodie-clad teenager was a criminal and instigated the fight that led to his death.” Zimmerman claimed he acted in self-defense after Martin knocked him to the ground and repeatedly smashed his head against the sidewalk. The jury agreed and acquitted him of all charges.<sup>12</sup> In the wake of the acquittal, Americans confronted the harsh realities of American race relations and racial profiling. It ignited the passions of many Americans to create a movement that captured the nation’s attention, the formation of the Black Lives Matter movement.

Black Lives Matter formed after the acquittal of Trayvon Martin’s killer. The founders were three radical women – Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi. Its headquarters stated that its mission was “to eradicate white supremacy and build local power to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes.”<sup>13</sup> The foundation for the movement began on social media. In response to Zimmerman’s acquittal, the three organizers created a hashtag, #BlackLivesMatter, which caught the attention of the nation, and eventually the world. The movement gained momentum in 2014 after the death of Michael Brown in Missouri and Eric Garner in New York, both victims of police brutality.<sup>14</sup> Since its founding, BLM continually shifted, adjusted, and reframed its aims to correspond to America’s fast-paced, ever-changing atmosphere. But the heart of the movement has stayed true to the goal of eradicating white supremacy. Today, according to a Civis Analytics poll, the BLM movement is one of the largest movements in the history of the United States. Between 15,000,000 to 26,000,000 people participated in Black Lives Matter protests in the summer of 2020. Neal

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<sup>12</sup> Lizzette Alvarez and Cara Buckley, “Zimmerman is Acquitted in Killing of Trayvon Martin,” *The New York Times* (New York, New York), July 14, 2013.

<sup>13</sup> “About,” Black Lives Matter, October 16, 2020, accessed November 1, 2021. <https://blacklivesmatter.com/about/>.

<sup>14</sup> “A Brief History of Civil Rights in the United States: The Black Lives Matter Movement,” HUSL Library, accessed November 1, 2021, <https://library.law.howard.edu/civilrightshistory/BLM>.

Caren, an associate professor at the University of North Carolina- Chapel Hill who studies social movements, said that he had never witnessed “self-reports of protests that high for a specific issue over such a short period.” The polls are likely to be exaggerated; however, the *New York Times* indicated that even if only half of respondents told the truth, there would still be over 7,000,000 participants making it one of the largest movements in American history.<sup>15</sup>

The acquittal of Trayvon Martin’s killer did not only lead to the formation of BLM, but it also led to the radicalized Dylan Roof. In his online manifesto, Roof conveyed that “the event that truly awakened me was the Trayvon Martin case.” After viewing the Wikipedia article that discussed the case, it prompted him to research “black on white crime.” After viewing statistics from the “Council of Conservative Christians,” he was in disbelief. He questioned why the news overrepresented “Trayvon Martin’s case while hundreds of these black on White murders got ignored.” After some additional research, Roof concluded that the reports of the death of Trayvon Martin led Americans to misinterpret modern race relations.<sup>16</sup> He wrote:

I wish with a passion that niggers were treated terribly throughout history by Whites, that every White person had an ancestor who owned slaves, that segregation was an evil oppressive institution and so on. Because if it were all true, it would make it so much easier for me to accept our current situation. But it isn’t true. None of it is. We are told to accept what is happening to us because of our ancestors wrongdoing. I have tried endlessly to think of reasons we deserve this, and I have only come back more irritated because there are no reasons.<sup>17</sup>

In addition, these “historical lies” have caused every white person “to be treated as if they had a slave owning ancestor.”<sup>18</sup> Roof exemplified how many white supremacists began to utilize

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<sup>15</sup> Larry Buchanan, “Black Lives Matter May Be the Largest Movement in U.S History,” *The New York Times* (New York, New York), July 3, 2020.

<sup>16</sup> Brendan O’Connor, “Here is What Appears to be Dylann Roof’s Manifesto,” *Mother Jones* (San Francisco, California), June 20, 2015.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

Martin's death to perpetrate a Lost Cause agenda. In order to become enraged, Roof had to believe the Lost Cause as his personal gospel.<sup>19</sup>

On April 4, two months prior to the Charleston slaying, Walter Scott – a fifty-year-old Black man – was fatally shot by Michael Slater, a white Charleston police officer. At a Vigil held for Scott shortly after his death, Rev. Nelson Rivers III recalled that, “there was no doubt Walter Scott’s life mattered.” According to Rivers, the last person to pray at the gathering was Sen. Clementa Pinckney, who was later killed by Roof. The culmination of these events overwhelmed the community of Charleston, forcing protesters to speak up. Less than two years old, the phrase “Black Lives Matter” fast became a slogan in the anti-Confederate campaign.<sup>20</sup> Just days after the shooting, hundreds chanted “Black Lives Matter” as they marched passed Emanuel AME church. The protest concluded on the steps of Charleston’s Confederate museum. Some of the protesters held signs that read, “Southerners on new ground #BlackLivesMatter.” Waltrina Middleton, who helped organize the BLM protest, recalled watching her former classmates flying the Confederate flag on the back of their trucks. She told *The Washington Post* that she always viewed it as a form of “intimidation and a banner of racism.” Middleton, whose cousin, DePayne Middleton Doctor, was one of Roof’s victims, expressed that this movement ensured that her cousin’s life would not have been in vain. In doing so, she argued that Confederate flags belonged in museums, not “on public property that welcomes citizens of all walks of life. And I need to know that I’m welcome.”<sup>21</sup> This was the first instance where BLM aligned itself in opposition to Confederate commemoration.

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<sup>19</sup> Leon Neyfakh, “How Hate Groups have used the deaths of Trayvon Martin and other Black Men to Grow Their Ranks,” *Slate Group* (Lubbock, Texas), June 23, 2020.

<sup>20</sup> Jennifer Berry Hawes, “After Emmanuel and Walter Scott Shootings, Charleston Stayed Nonviolent. What Changed?” *The Post and Courier* (Charleston, South Carolina), June 1, 2020.

<sup>21</sup> Abby Philips and Chico Harlan, “Hundreds March in Charleston, Columbia to take down Confederate flag,” *The Washington Post* (Washington, DC), June 20, 2015.

Resistance towards Confederate monuments in the early stages of the BLM movement came in the form of vandalism. In fact, vandalism became a prominent platform that leaders used to grow recognition for the movement. Two weeks after the Charleston massacre, the phrase “Black Lives Matter” was graffitied onto monuments dedicated to Confederate leaders and such graffiti appeared in a half dozen states.<sup>22</sup> The most famous instance occurred at the former capital of the Confederacy when the BLM community tagged a statue of Jefferson Davis that had resided on Richmond’s historic Monument Avenue since 1907.<sup>23</sup> In Austin, Texas, BLM protesters tagged another Davis monument. They also vandalized a monument dedicated to Confederate governor Zebulon Vance in Asheville, North Carolina, and a more generic monument dedicated to the soldiers of the Confederacy located in St. Louis, Missouri.<sup>24</sup> A few weeks later, activists continued this trend when they painted “Black Lives Matter” on the front of the Robert E. Lee statue located in Charlottesville, Virginia.<sup>25</sup> Michael Allen – a Professor of American culture at Washington University in St. Louis – expressed, “If the monuments are a strong statement of past values, defacing them is the easiest and loudest way to rebuke those statements.”<sup>26</sup>

But having the loudest voice did not come without consequences. Some sympathized with BLM’s message but did not agree with the defacement of Confederate monuments. Amid the large-scale vandalism of Confederate statues across the country, the “Silent Sam” monument located on the campus of the University of North Carolina (UNC) at Chapel Hill was spray-

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<sup>22</sup> “Vandals Target Confederate Monuments in Half-dozen States,” *Tampa Bay Times* (Tampa Bay, Florida), June 26, 2015.

<sup>23</sup> Graham Moomaw and Brandon Shulleeta, “Monument Avenue’s Jefferson Davis Monument vandalized, creating a stir,” *Richmond Times-Dispatch* (Richmond, Virginia), June 26, 2015.

<sup>24</sup> “Vandals Target Confederate Monuments,” June 26, 2015.

<sup>25</sup> “Graffiti discovered on Robert E. Lee Statue in Charlottesville’s Lee Park,” *Richmond Times-Dispatch* (Richmond, Virginia), July 1, 2015.

<sup>26</sup> “Vandals Target Confederate Monuments,” June 26, 2015.

painted with the phrases, “Murderer,” “KKK,” and “Black Lives Matter.” This monument – which had been funded by University alumni and the UDC – depicted a young Confederate soldier grasping his rifle in both hands. The plaque indicated that “Silent Sam” stood in remembrance of “the sons of the University who died for their beloved Southland 1861-1865.” University officials quickly covered the bold statements with a large white plastic sheet and issued a public statement. According to that statement, UNC at Chapel Hill welcomes “all points of view, but damaging or defacing statues is not the way to go about it.”<sup>27</sup>

The largest outpouring of opposition came from Republicans who did not view this organization or its tactics in a positive light. Richard L. Morris, a U.S. Navy veteran, attorney, and Republican based in Suffolk, Virginia, denounced the BLM movement. In his distorted view of BLM’s mission, he declared that it “promotes the killing of police officers and the destruction of cities.”<sup>28</sup> BLM also received some high-profile critics. Amid his presidential campaign, Donald Trump expressed his frustrations over BLM in an interview with *Fox News*. He accused the movement of “dividing America” by focusing on issues of police brutality and race relations. He then equated systemic racism to his own political troubles. He said, “even against me the system is rigged. When I ran for president, I could see what was going on with the system, and the system is rigged. I can really relate it very much to myself.”<sup>29</sup> In agreement, Marsha Mercer – journalist for the *Richmond-times Dispatch* – referred to the vandalizing of Confederate monuments with the phrase “Black Lives Matter” as an “action that further divides the communities when they need to be united.”<sup>30</sup> If Black Lives Matter had begun the summer with

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<sup>27</sup> Claire Voon, “#BlackLivesMatter Protesters Target Confederate Monuments,” *Hyperallergic News* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina), July 6, 2015.

<sup>28</sup> Graham Moomaw, “Republican Lawmaker Starts War of Words with Remarks Against Planned Parenthood,” *Richmond-Times Dispatch* (Richmond, Virginia), January 16, 2016.

<sup>29</sup> Sabrina Siddiqui, “Donald Trump Strikes Muddle Note on ‘Divisive’ Black Lives Matter,” *The Gaurdian* (Washington, DC), July 13, 2016.

<sup>30</sup> Marsha Mercer, “Monument Men and Women,” *Richmond Times-Dispatch* (Richmond, Virginia), July 26, 2015.

near universal support, it faded quickly as the attacks on Confederate symbolism divided Americans into multiple groups based on personal opinion.

Much of the problem steamed from the nature of the organization. When formed, Black Lives Matter was a decentralized group with no formal national leadership. The name took on a separate life apart from the movement and it became associated with people who did not identify with any organized protest groups. This contributed to the chaos that arose at Charlottesville in 2017 as the counter protesters varied widely in ideology, tactics, and political aims. But despite that diversity of opinion, BLM clung to the argument that Charlottesville was a symbolic stance against white supremacy. According to April Goggans – an organizer for the Black Lives Matter DC – BLM hoped that the violence at Charlottesville would provide much needed recognition of the problem posed by white supremacy. In response to the accusations of the violent nature of BLM, she said, “folks who are anti-black, folks who operate within a racist or white supremacist framework are always going to see black people as violent.”<sup>31</sup> David Straughn – a member of BLM Charlottesville – shared this sentiment. He said, “We came to march. Some people assume Black Lives matter is a violent organization, and we didn’t want to give that impression. We came unarmed. We came with nothing but peace in our hearts and aggressive words for the Nazis.”<sup>32</sup>

The Republican party’s effort to lump all Black left-wing protest groups under the BLM umbrella invited criticism. Resistance came from the usual suspects. Bill O’Reilly, a disgraced American journalist, attacked the movement in an op-ed to *The Hill*, emphasizing how many of the counter-protesters showed up with weapons. He wrote, “People embedded in the grievance

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<sup>31</sup> Hansi Lo Wang, “For Black Activists, Charlottesville is Part of A Long History of Racial Strife,” *NPR News* (Washington, DC), August 17, 2017.

<sup>32</sup> Toure, “A Year Inside the Black Lives Matter Movement: How America’s New Generation of Civil Rights Activists is Mobilizing in the Age of Trump,” *Rolling Stone* (New York, New York), December 7, 2017.

culture believe they have a right to demonize the police, brand political opponents racists, and even destroy public property – all in the name of social justice.”<sup>33</sup> In agreement, a Richmond resident expressed,

Nazis, white supremacists, etc. – that espouse racial and political positions that disgust most of us got a permit and proceeded to exercise their right to free speech. On the other side were groups like communists (whose political movement has killed and imprisoned more people than Nazis did) and Black Lives Matter (a handful of whose members espouse killing cops), the anarchists and so on. This bunch of hate groups didn’t have a permit.<sup>34</sup>

In the wake of Charlottesville, the far right, the Republican Party, and white nationalists co-opted the language of Black Lives Matter. Right-wing groups employed such phrases as, “All Lives Matter,” “White Lives Matter,” and “Confederate Lives Matter.” These phrases often found their way into political discourse. Karen Cox indicated that the “tactic of co-opting language purposefully demeaned and diminished the original movements in hopes of retuning the focus to white lives and white power structures.”<sup>35</sup> In an interview with *Fox News*, Rand Paul, Republican senator from Kentucky, argued that BLM should change its name to “All Lives Matter or Innocent Lives Matter.” That, he said, would end the controversy. He then went on to express that, “commandeering the microphone, and bullying people, and pushing people out of the way – I think that really isn’t a way to get their message across.”<sup>36</sup> In another instance, Vice President Mike Pence, in an interview with *ABC News*, refused to support Black Lives Matter. Instead, he declared that, “All Lives Matter.”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Charlie Crowder, “Charlottesville Outrage Seems Selective,” *Richmond Times-Dispatch* (Richmond, Virginia), August 30, 2017.

<sup>35</sup> Cox, *No Common Ground*, 156.

<sup>36</sup> “Rand Paul tells Black Lives Matter: Change your name – and your tactics,” *The Guardian* (New York, New York), August 27, 2015.

<sup>37</sup> Nikki Carvajai, “Asked Repeatedly to Say, ‘Black Lives Matter,’ Mike Pence says ‘All Lives Matter’” *CNN News* (Atlanta, Georgia), June 19, 2020.

Pro-Confederate protests utilized these co-opted slogans by painting them onto the faces of counter-monuments across the South. Amid the protests that sparked during the summer of 2020, “white lives matter” was graffitied onto the Arthur Ashe monument that resided on Monument Avenue. Ashe, a black tennis star and native of Richmond, was honored with a monument in 1994 that was strategically placed on Monument Avenue to rival the imposing Confederate equestrians. Two months after Charlottesville, a small group of pro-Confederates waved the Confederate flag as they united on Richmond’s Monument Avenue. Within hours, hundreds of counter-protesters showed up, causing city officials to fear a repeat of Charlottesville. The pro-Confederate protesters stomped their feet and chanted, “All Lives Matter” and “Confederate Lives Matter” in sequence.<sup>38</sup> Police quickly escorted the crowd of pro-Confederates away to avoid a major violent clash.<sup>39</sup> Bernadette Onyenaka – a NAACP staff member – argued that this act of co-opted language is a true “testament to where our country is.”<sup>40</sup>

Members of the BLM community continually argued that Black Lives Matter did not mean that only Black lives mattered. Yet when the BLM community attacked Confederate imagery, all that white nationalists and pro-Confederates heard was that African Americans thought they were superior. Margaret Roane, a BLM activist, tried to combat this misinterpretation. She said that, “When we say that Black Lives Matter, we are not saying that only black lives matter, or that white lives, blue lives, or any other lives do not matter. We are saying that black lives matter as much as all other lives.” She stressed that throughout the history

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<sup>38</sup> Ned Oliver, “Monument Avenue Rally Attracts Few Confederate Supporters, Ends Peacefully,” *Richmond Times-Dispatch* (Richmond, Virginia), September 17, 2017.

<sup>39</sup> Sandra E. Garcia, “Arthur Ashe Statue in Virginia Vandalized with ‘White Lives Matter,’” *The New York Times* (New York, New York), June 17, 2020.

<sup>40</sup> Laura Kebede, “NAACP march from Ala. To D.C. Stops in at VUU – Rollback in Voting Act is Major Focus For Participants,” *Richmond Times-Dispatch* (Richmond, Virginia), September 11, 2015.

of the United States, “from slavery to Jim Crow to Rodney King and beyond” the lives of Black citizens have not mattered as much as white lives so, therefore, “Black Lives Matter is our way of saying this needs to change.”<sup>41</sup> Cornel West, a prominent Black activist and scholar, concurred with Roane when he defended Black Lives Matter as an expression. The movement he declared, did not exclude anyone. He said, “It just says that if you’re going to talk about all lives, then make sure you’re talking about the chocolate ones.”<sup>42</sup>

From summer to summer, Black Lives Matter defended itself and its decision to fight Confederate monuments, but its crusade took on new meaning in the summer of 2020. On May 25, George Floyd, a forty-six-year-old black man, was killed by a white Minneapolis police officer. Officers responded to a report that Floyd was allegedly buying cigarettes with a counterfeit twenty-dollar bill. Four officers arrested him, then wrestled him to the ground. After his arrest, and once his hands were cuffed behind his back, officer Derek Chauvin placed his knee onto Floyd’s neck for eight minutes and forty-six seconds, which stopped his ability to breath and caused his death. Bystanders captured this gruesome scene on video and the nation soon heard him begging for his life, repeatedly yelling, “I can’t breathe!”<sup>43</sup>

The murder of George Floyd sparked enormous riots and Black Lives Matter protests across several cities, both in the United States and around the globe. Their aim was to fight for racial justice and to bring an end to police brutality. In the South, these protests turned their attention towards Confederate monuments. The chaos, aggression, and violence that surrounded these protests intensified as the largest number of Confederate monuments (ninety-four) were

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<sup>41</sup> Margaret Roane, “Black Lives Matter Means They Matter Too,” *Richmond Times-Dispatch* (Richmond, Virginia), August 24, 2017.

<sup>42</sup> Graham Moomaw, “Activist Says Black Lives Matter Effort Doesn’t Exclude Anyone From Debate,” *Richmond Times-Dispatch* (Richmond, Virginia), September 4, 2015.

<sup>43</sup> Evan Hill et. Al., “How George Floyd was Killed in Police Custody,” *The New York Times* (New York, New York), May 31, 2020.

removed in the summer of 2020. BLM protesters turned their attention to Confederate monuments because what they had witnessed at the core of George Floyd's murder was what Confederate monuments symbolized to them – white supremacy, hatred, and systemic racism.<sup>44</sup>

These protests quickly found their way into the Commonwealth of Virginia. The Commonwealth's BLM chapter wanted Monument Avenue removed. On July 1, 2020, the African American mayor of Richmond, Levar Stoney, under immense pressure from BLM and with help from the Monument Avenue Commission, outflanked state law to remove eleven Confederate monuments from Monument Avenue, putting his reputation and his reelection prospects in danger.<sup>45</sup> But the BLM protesters wanted to beat the city government to the punch. BLM protesters defaced every monument (except the one dedicated to Arthur Ashe) that lined Monument Avenue. On May 31, the monument dedicated to Robert E. Lee was graffitied with the phrases, "Black Lives Matter," "ACAB (All Cops Are Bastards)," and the names of Black victims of police brutality, including George Floyd and Breonna Taylor. One week later, on June 6, protesters toppled the statue of Confederate General William Carter Wickham which resided in a downtown park since 1891. On June 10, energetic protesters tied ropes around the legs of the Jefferson Davis monument and watched it tumble to the ground. Consequently, this prompted Stoney to speed up the removal of the other monuments due to the concern for public safety.<sup>46</sup> Gregory Carden, an activist and local hip hop artist, expressed that, for some, this might look like destruction and vandalism but "to me, it looks like art." Another hip-hop artist and activist who was protesting at Monument Avenue, Rob Fields, hoped this movement would eradicate forever

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<sup>44</sup> "2020 Confederate Symbol Removals," Southern Poverty Law Center, accessed September 21, 2021, <https://www.splcenter.org/data-projects/2020-confederate-symbol-removals>.

<sup>45</sup> Andrew Lawler, "The Black, Millennial Mayor Who Tore Down His City's White Monuments," *Politico* (Arlington, Virginia), August 9, 2020.

<sup>46</sup> Michael Levinson, "Protesters Topple Statue of Jefferson Davis on Richmond's Monument Avenue," *The New York Times* (New York, New York), June 11, 2020.

the symbols of white supremacy and lead to political and systemic changes to address racial injustices.<sup>47</sup> Evan Reid, another activist, argued that the destruction, vandalism, and tagging of Monument Avenue “are recent examples of hope, a feeling that is in short supply right now.”<sup>48</sup>

After the protests commenced across Monument Avenue on May 31, Governor Northam declared a state of emergency across the Commonwealth. On June 2, Stoney sided with the protesters when he proposed a plan to take down the nation’s most prominent memorials to the Confederacy. He said, “times have changed, and removing these statues will allow the healing process to begin. It’s time we put an end to the Lost Cause. Richmond is no longer the Capital of the Confederacy.” Four days later, the city council voiced its unanimous support of Stoney’s plan. Legislation was passed in the Virginia assembly’s 2020 legislative session that allowed local governments to decide the fate of their city’s monuments, but it would not go into effect until July 1. On this date, quietly camped out in the home of a supporter near Monument Avenue, Stoney sent in cranes to begin the process of removing the monuments. Throughout the day, every Confederate monument that sat on city property besides the one dedicated to A.P. Hill – who is buried beneath his memorial – was removed.<sup>49</sup> After more than 130 years of memorializing and glorifying the Confederacy, Richmond began the necessary process of dismantling Monument Avenue.

Michael Paul Williams, a Black columnist for the *Richmond Times-dispatch*, attributed the destruction of Monument Avenue to the Black Lives Matter movement which, he stated,

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<sup>47</sup> Sarah McCammon, “In Richmond, Va., Protesters Transform a Confederate Statue,” *NPR News* (Washington, DC), June 12, 2020.

<sup>48</sup> Evan Reid, “Richmond must remove Confederate Monuments,” *Richmond Times-Dispatch* (Richmond, Virginia), June 4, 2020.

<sup>49</sup> Lawler, “The Black, Millennial Mayor.”

“cast an unflinching light on the ugly symbolism behind these monuments.”<sup>50</sup> Some historians have weighed in and agreed. For example, Stephanie McCurry, a Civil War historian at Columbia University, argued that the BLM protest movement in the wake of the murder of George Floyd catapulted the struggle over Confederate symbolism “to a place of unprecedented visibility that is likely to have lasting effects.” She went on to say that, “we’re in another world now, the mask is off in terms of these things being symbols of slavery. I don’t think there’s any going back from this movement.” For the leaders of the effort to remove Monument Avenue, the moment was certainly triumphant. By forcibly removing or pressuring politicians to take these monuments down, BLM took credit for completing one small step in eradicating white supremacy.<sup>51</sup>

While Richmond was the most notable instance where BLM protesters successfully dismantled and defaced Confederate imagery, it was not an isolated case. On May 31, just days after Floyd’s death, BLM protesters in Birmingham, Alabama, toppled a statue of Charles Linn – a Confederate Navy captain – using a rope, a truck, and an immense amount of manpower. After the monument lay damaged upon the ground, the protesters proceeded to deface it with phrases all too familiar with the BLM movement. These slogans included “BLM” and “ACAB.”<sup>52</sup> One day later, Democratic Mayor Randall Woodfin promised to have it removed. This statue had been the focal point of an ongoing political battle between the city and the state’s attorney general’s office. In 2017, the Attorney General, Steve Marshall, sued the city, arguing that removing the statue was a violation of the Alabama Memorial Preservation Act which protected

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<sup>50</sup> Michael Paul Williams, “Removal Rids Richmond of Symbol of Supremacy – Williams ‘The Lost Cause is Dead.’ Let’s Dismantle its Legacy Beyond the Symbols,” *Richmond Times-Dispatch* (Richmond, Virginia), June 5, 2020.

<sup>51</sup> Wenei Philimon, Trevor Hughes, and Marco della Cava, “Will the Black Lives Matter Movement Finally Put an End to Confederate Flags and Statues?” *USA Today* (McLean, Virginia), June 12, 2020.

<sup>52</sup> Alexandra Kelly, “Protesters Topple Confederate Monument in Birmingham: the Statue of a Former Confederate Captain was Brought Down During Demonstrations,” *The Hill* (Washington, DC), June 1, 2020.

the removal or alteration of monuments. Two years later, a unanimous Supreme Court decision sided with the attorney general's office. The city was fined \$25,000 and ultimately lost the legal battle – that is, until BLM protesters forced the issue. In a statement to the Birmingham News, Woodfin expressed, "In order to prevent more civil unrest, it is very imperative that we remove this statue. I understand the A.G.'s office can bring a civil suit against this city, and if there's judgement rendered from a judge then we should be held accountable, and I am willing to accept that because that is a lower cost than civil unrest in our country."<sup>53</sup> The next day, Woodfin pleaded with the crowd as he stood at the fallen statue speaking through a megaphone. He said, "allow me to finish the job for you." Marshall promised to file a new civil complaint against the city if the statue was removed. He said, "city leaders understand I will perform the duties assigned to me by the [Alabama Memorial Preservation] Act to pursue a new civil complaint against the city."<sup>54</sup> On June 3, despite the threat of another civil suit, the Linn Statue was taken away from Linn Park and a much larger fifty-foot-tall monument dedicated to Confederate troops was legally removed and taken to an "undisclosed location." Legal action has yet to be taken against the city of Birmingham.<sup>55</sup>

Farther north, demonstrators in Raleigh, North Carolina, used straps and ropes to pull down two Confederate statues that were a part of a larger monument located next to the state capitol. In addition, protesters tied a rope around one of the toppled monuments and hung it from a traffic pole. Further, they defaced the monuments with the slogans "Black Lives Matter" and

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<sup>53</sup> Audra D.S Burch, "Birmingham Mayor Orders Removal of Confederate Monument in Public Park," *The New York Times* (New York, New York), June 2, 2020.

<sup>54</sup> Colin Dwyer, "Confederate Monument Being Removed After Birmingham Mayor Vows to 'finish the job'" *NPR News* (Birmingham, Alabama), June 2, 2020.

<sup>55</sup> WBRC Staff, "Crews Fully Remove Confederate Monument in Birmingham's Linn Park, Mayor Woodfin Receives Death Threats," *WBRC News* (Birmingham, Alabama), June 3, 2020.

“No Justice No Peace.”<sup>56</sup> In response, more than sixty North Carolina lawyers signed a letter urging legislators and Governor Roy Cooper to remove the remaining Confederate monuments in Raleigh immediately. One day later, Cooper ordered the rest of the Confederate monuments to be removed. According to news reports, “crews worked for three days to disassemble the structure that supported the statues, bringing in cranes, towing straps, and metal rods to dismantle it piece by piece.”<sup>57</sup> Dory MacMillan – Cooper’s press secretary – indicated that the monuments were “stored in a secure facility until it can be determined where they should be kept permanently.” McMillan informed the *News & Observer* that the Historical Commission needed to approve the relocation of the monuments or “alteration of the monuments under North Carolina law, which the legislature classified as an ‘object of remembrance.’” No decision has yet to be made on the new location for these defeated Confederate monuments.<sup>58</sup>

Public reaction to BLM’s tactics was mixed. The *Washington Post*-ABC News poll conducted in July of 2020, showed that 52% of Americans were against the removal of Confederate monuments, including 80% Republicans.<sup>59</sup> In some cases, support for BLM waned as the nature of their protests led to protesters selecting confusing targets. On June 23, hundreds of BLM protesters in Madison, Wisconsin, toppled a statue of Hans Christian Heg – an outspoken member of the anti-slavery Free Soil Party and Union colonel who was killed at the Battle of Chickamauga – and dumped it into Lake Monona. This destruction was prompted by the arrest of a Black man who shouted at customers of a local Madison restaurant while he

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<sup>56</sup> Jason DeBruyn and Mitchell Northam, “Protesters in Raleigh Tear Down Statues From Confederate Monument,” *North Carolina Public Radio* (Raleigh, North Carolina), June 19, 2020.

<sup>57</sup> “Final Section of Confederate Monument Removed From Raleigh,” *WHSV News* (Raleigh, North Carolina), June 24, 2020.

<sup>58</sup> Jonas Pope IV, Andrew Carter and Dawn Baumgartner Vaughn, “NC Confederate Monuments in ‘secure facility,’ While Workers try to Remove What’s Left,” *News & Observer* (Raleigh, North Carolina), June 23, 2020.

<sup>59</sup> Jack Brewster, “Americans support BLM – but slight Majority Opposes Police Defunding and Removing Confederate Statue, Poll Finds,” *Forbes* (New York, New York), July 21, 2020.

carried a baseball bat over his shoulder. The protesters who chanted for his release also shattered windows at the Tommy Thompson Center and the Wisconsin State Capitol.<sup>60</sup> However, this destruction was not enough for some members of the BLM community. They took it upon themselves to tear down the “Forward Statue” which served as a symbol for the forward progress of women in the state. As perplexing as this scene was, protesters argued that these statues reflected a false sense of progress. Ebony Anderson Carter – one of the BLM protesters – in an interview expressed, “we’re not moving forward, we’re moving backwards. This (statue) doesn’t need to be here until we’re ready to move forward.”<sup>61</sup>

A similar instance occurred in Saratoga Springs, New York. On July 18, media outlets reported that a small group of protesters toppled an iron statue dedicated to the U.S. volunteers who fought for the Union. David Snyder – executive assistant to the Mayor of Saratoga Springs – expressed confusion. He theorized that this was tied to BLM protesters who wrongly believed this was a Confederate monument. Lexis Figuereo – organizer for “All of Us” – a group associated with BLM – expressed, “If anything, something like this would be done by somebody who had no idea what they were doing.”<sup>62</sup> In regard to the toppling of the Heg statue, Historian Karl Jakob Skarstein shared this confusion. He expressed surprise over this scene. He pointed out that Heg was “on the North’s side during the Civil War, the side that fought to abolish slavery.”<sup>63</sup>

Unsurprisingly, Republicans expressed outrage, not confusion. These instances fueled their argument that BLM protesters were little more than “thugs.” Robin Vos – Republican leader of the Wisconsin State Assembly – expressed his sadness “at the cowardice of Madison

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<sup>60</sup> Staff member of the Associated Press, “Wisconsin Crowd Pulls Down Statue of Abolitionist Who Died Fighting Slavery,” *Global News*, (Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada), June 24, 2020.

<sup>61</sup> Jaymes Langrehr, “Protesters Explained Why They Tore Down Statues at State Capitol,” *Channel 3000* (Madison, Wisconsin), June 24, 2020.

<sup>62</sup> Jacey Fortin and Bryan Pietsch, “Someone Tore Down a Union Army Statue in Saratoga Springs. Why?” *The New York Times* (New York, New York), July 18, 2020.

<sup>63</sup> “Historians Puzzled After Statue Razed,” *Newsinenglish.no* (Norway), June 24, 2020.

officials to deal with these thugs.” Further, he questioned why Democratic Governor Tony Evers had not intervened in the destruction of the statues since it took place on state Capitol property.<sup>64</sup>

Such perplexing scenes – the destruction of monuments dedicated to anti-slavery leaders – continued in Rochester, New York. On July 5, 2020, vandals tore down the Frederick Douglass statue that resided in the Maplewood Rose Garden. One hundred- and sixty-eight-years preceding this date, Frederick Douglass asked a simple question to the citizens of Rochester. He asked, “What, to the American slave, is your fourth of July?” His answer struck to the core of American hypocrisy. He answered that it was a day “that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim.”<sup>65</sup> Shockingly, on the anniversary of this famous speech, police said that they found the monument dismantled and placed fifty feet away from its pedestal with a finger missing. Investigations into the vandals yielded no results; however, this did not stop the speculation.<sup>66</sup> Like the Saratoga Springs incident, some tied this destruction to confused BLM protesters. President Trump took to twitter to weigh in on the monument’s destruction. He stated, “This shows the anarchists have no bounds.” Trump was not the only national figure to complain. His son, Donald Trump Jr., wrote, “Disgusting! We should all realize this movement is about promoting Marxism not stopping racism. They’re not going to stop folks.” One prominent former New York governor argued that this act was a “great example of the horrific state of affairs in history education in America.”<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Staff, “Wisconsin Crowd Pulls Down Statue of Abolitionist Who Died Fighting Slavery.”

<sup>65</sup> BlackPast, “(1852) Frederick Douglass, ‘What, to the Slave, Is the Fourth of July’,” (1852) Frederick Douglass, “What, To The Slave, Is The Fourth Of July,” August 24, 2020, <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/speeches-african-american-history/1852-frederick-douglass-what-slave-fourth-july/>.

<sup>66</sup> Raven Brown, “Frederick Douglass Descendant, Community Reacts to Statue Torn Down,” *WHEC News* (Rochester, New York), July 6, 2020.

<sup>67</sup> WROC Staff, “Mayor Warren Criticizes President Trump in Response to Frederick Douglass Statue Tweet,” *Rochester First* (Rochester, New York), July 6, 2020.

While speculation occupied the minds of many politicians, one thing was evident: the heightened national discussion on race played a pivotal role in this thoughtless act.

As mass confusion, protests, and riots plagued American society throughout 2020, city officials in Washington, DC became unnerved as activists increased their calls to remove the Emancipation Memorial that stood in the middle of Lincoln Park. This monument depicted President Abraham Lincoln holding the Emancipation Proclamation in his right hand while raising his left hand over the head of a liberated slave who knelt at his feet. At its dedication ceremony on April 14, 1876, Frederick Douglass extended his support to this, the first national memorial dedicated to Black people. Historian David Blight described Douglass’s speech as “both majestic and somber. His speech assumed the tone of a requiem, tempered by modest celebration, restrained nationalism, and redemptive hope.”<sup>68</sup> Over 144 years later, a chain-link fence surrounded the statue with armed police officers to protect it. Discussions surrounding the Emancipation Memorial were divisive, with everyone from D.C. residents to President Trump weighing in on the debate. Marcus Goodwin – a candidate for the District of Columbia Council – argued that the Emancipation Monument was a racist statue. He expressed, “the meaning is degrading. To see my ancestors at the feet of Lincoln – it’s not imagery that inspires African Americans to see themselves as equals in this society.” Glenn Foster – a BLM member and founder of the Freedom Neighborhood, a local group that organized efforts to remove the monument – expressed his frustration with the government’s lack of action. He conveyed, “When I look at the statue, I’m reminded my freedom and my liberation is only dedicated by

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<sup>68</sup> David Blight, *Frederick Douglass: Prophet of Freedom*, New York: Simon and Schuster: 2018.

white peoples' terms. We're trying to let the government know we're not going to wait any longer for our freedom to happen."<sup>69</sup>

While activists brought attention towards the Emancipation Monument, historians began to weigh in. In an interview with Michael Martin of *NPR News*, David Blight agreed with the activists, expressing, "The Freedman's Memorial has racist imagery. There's no question." However, he discouraged any actions that would result in its removal. He argued that the monument was a teaching tool that told the larger story of Black America's quest to get national recognition for Emancipation. He suggested that if you had a "great, new, modern, beautiful Emancipation memorial" next to the original one, it would be "an amazing way to mix past and present and learn from it. If that was a national creation, as Douglass said, let's create another national memorial there next to it."<sup>70</sup> Another historian, Jon White, agreed with Blight. He argued, "that the statue should be kept in place." He presented a letter from Douglass in support of the monument that described the sculpture as a beautiful expression of the act of emancipation. White indicated that, at the conclusion of the letter, Douglass mentioned that there is room in Lincoln Park for another monument. White believed that Douglass purposefully included "this suggestion at the end" so it could be "taken up and acted upon."<sup>71</sup>

Predictably, no Republican politician took notice of the historians' suggestions. They wanted only to keep the outrage going. President Trump criticized the protesters describing them as "rioters" and "bad people."<sup>72</sup> Republican Representative Kevin McCarthy of California wrote on Twitter that he had discussed the Emancipation Memorial with David Bernhardt – the

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<sup>69</sup> Aishvarya Kavi, "Activists Push for Removal of Statue of Freed Slave Kneeling Before Lincoln," *The Washington Post* (Washington, DC), June 27, 2020.

<sup>70</sup> Michael Martin, "Why a History Professor Says 'Racist' Emancipation memorial Shouldn't Come Down," *NPR News* (Washington, DC), June 27, 2020.

<sup>71</sup> Ailsa Chang, "History Professors Find Letter Showing Frederick Douglass' Opinion on Lincoln Statue," *NPR News* (Washington, DC), July 8, 2020.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

secretary of the Interior – who had conveyed to him that Trump would not “allow the Emancipation memorial of President Lincoln to be destroyed by the left-wing mob.”<sup>73</sup> As racial tensions escalated, and the BLM movement reached crescendo, Republicans went to great lengths to protect such monuments. Now, it seemed, they wanted to defend all monuments, even those dedicated to the Confederacy’s enemies.

To put these ideas into action, Trump issued an executive order titled, “Protecting American Monuments, Memorials, and Statues and Combating Recent Criminal Acts.” According to the order, federal law enforcement officials must prosecute individuals who damage federal monuments or statues. Further, he threatened to withhold funding to local governments that fail to comply with this order. This came at a time when he sought to halt the cultural divide in the United States during his re-election campaign as he suggested that Democrats had pursued an “assault on the nation’s history.” In that order, Trump wrote, “anarchists and left-wing extremists have sought to advance a fringe ideology that paints the United States of America as fundamentally unjust.”<sup>74</sup> On several occasions, during Trump’s campaign rallies, he referred to BLM protesters as “Anarchists” and “domestic terrorists” so there was no doubt that when he proposed this executive order BLM was fresh on his mind.<sup>75</sup> The order was ultimately unnecessary. Several federal statutes already criminalized the desecration of U.S. monuments. One law, the Veterans’ Memorial Preservation and Recognition

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<sup>73</sup> Kevin McCarthy (@GOPLeader), “Just Talked to @SecBernhardt. President @realDonaldTrump will not allow the Emancipation Memorial of President Lincoln to be Destroyed by the left-wing mob,” Twitter, June 24, 2020, 3:29 p.m., [https://twitter.com/GOPLeader/status/1275873827961081857?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1275873827961081857%7Ctwgr%5E%7Ctwcon%5Es1\\_&ref\\_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.nytimes.com%2F2020%2F06%2F27%2Fus%2Fpolitics%2Flincoln-slave-statue-emancipation.html](https://twitter.com/GOPLeader/status/1275873827961081857?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1275873827961081857%7Ctwgr%5E%7Ctwcon%5Es1_&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.nytimes.com%2F2020%2F06%2F27%2Fus%2Fpolitics%2Flincoln-slave-statue-emancipation.html).

<sup>74</sup> Michael D. Shear, “Trump Issues Executive Order Targeting Vandalism Against Monuments,” *The New York Times* (New York, New York), June 26, 2020.

<sup>75</sup> Philip Bump, “Over and Over, Trump has Focused on Black Lives Matter as a Target of Derision or Violence,” *The Washington Post* (Washington, DC), September 1, 2020.

Act of 2003, imposed a fine and ten years of jail time for anyone who vandalized a federal monument.<sup>76</sup>

Naturally, Democrats responded by digging in deeper on their side of the issue. One month after Trump's executive order, an eight-person commission appointed by Ralph Northam, the Democratic governor of Virginia, voted to recommend the removal of the Robert E. Lee statue sent by Virginia to occupy the U.S. Capitol. In December, this Confederate statue was removed, and in its place, workers placed a statue honoring civil rights activist Barbara Johns who was an instrumental figure in fighting against school segregation in Virginia.<sup>77</sup> In a joint statement, U.S. Representatives Donald McEachin and Jenifer Wexton (both Democrats from Virginia) said, "The Robert E. Lee statue honors a legacy of division, oppression, and racism – a dark period in the history of our commonwealth and our country." Northam reiterated this sentiment when he expressed, "the Confederacy is a symbol of Virginia's racist past and divisive history, and it is past time we tell our story with images of perseverance, diversity, and inclusion."<sup>78</sup> The decision also received praise at the federal level. Nancy Pelosi, speaker of the United States House of Representatives, referred to the removal of Virginia's statue as "welcomed news." Just prior to its removal, Pelosi ordered four portraits of former house speakers who served in the Confederacy to come down.<sup>79</sup>

Concurrently, the reverberations of the BLM protests penetrated their way into the naming of military installations. At the end of July, House lawmakers passed their 740.5-billion-dollar plan for the annual defense authorization bill. According to one segment of that plan, it

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<sup>76</sup> Dartunorro Clark, "Trump signs Executive Order to Punish Vandalism Against Federal Monuments," *NBC News* (New York, New York), June 26, 2020.

<sup>77</sup> Bryan Pietsch, "Robert E. Lee Statue is Removed from U.S. Capitol," *The New York Times*, (New York, New York), December 21, 2020.

<sup>78</sup> Merrit Kennedy, "Virginia Removes Its Robert E. Lee Statue From U.S Capitol," *NPR News* (Washington, DC), December 21, 2020.

<sup>79</sup> Pietsch, "Robert E. Lee Statue," December 21, 2020.

prohibited the “public display of the Confederate battle flag at all Department of Defense property.” The proposal was first introduced by Iraq War veteran Anthony Brown, a Democratic representative from Maryland.<sup>80</sup> In addition, the Defense Department required bases named for Confederate leaders to initiate plans to rename their facilities. Some of these base names included Fort Bragg in North Carolina, Fort Benning in Georgia, and Fort Hood in Texas.<sup>81</sup> The measure passed with a large 295-125 majority. The total witnessed the Democrats split 187-43 and a much closer Republican split of 108-81.<sup>82</sup>

This decision came in the face of a threat of a presidential veto from Trump which echoed his comments in the week prior that renaming these bases would dishonor the troops who had previously served there. Over Twitter he remarked, “We won two beautiful World Wars that were vicious and horrible, and we won them out of Fort Bragg, we won them out of all these forts and now they want to throw those names away.” Trump’s rhetoric further demonstrated the Republican party’s unwillingness to part from the rebel emblem. He said, “when people proudly have their Confederate flags, they’re not talking about racism, they love that flag. It represents the South, they like the South.”<sup>83</sup> The White House stressed that these “politically motivated attempts to rewrite history” is an egregious attempt to start a “new left-wing cultural revolution.”<sup>84</sup> Clearly, the effects of the summer of 2020 were felt at the highest levels of power.

The BLM movement made impressive strides during the summer of 2020. The protests led to far-reaching implications for the longevity of Confederate symbolism. However, after the

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<sup>80</sup> Leo Shane III, “Confederate Battle Flag would be Banned at all DoD Sites Under House Plan,” *Military Times* (Springfield, Virginia), July 1, 2020.

<sup>81</sup> Leo Shane III and Joe Gould, “House Defense Bill Strips Confederate Base Names, Curbs Presidents Powers in Troop Deployments,” *Military Times* (Springfield, Virginia), July 21, 2020.

<sup>82</sup> Leo Shane III and Joe Gould, “Fight Over Confederate Base Names Unsettled Even After Lawmakers Back Changes,” *Military Times* (Springfield, Virginia), July 23, 2020.

<sup>83</sup> Leo Shane III, “Trump Argues Confederate Base Names, Battle Flag Should Stay,” *Military Times* (Springfield, Virginia), July 20, 2020.

<sup>84</sup> Gould, “Fight Over Confederate Base Names.”

summer of 2020, white support for BLM hit a slight decline. According to the Pew Research center, support from adults declined by 12% while white adult support lowered by 15%.<sup>85</sup> *The New York Times* observed this data and indicated,

White Americans were more supportive of BLM following Mr. Floyd’s murder. This sentiment, however, did not last long and, as with Republicans, support eventually plunged. This movement among Republicans and White Americans helps us understand why aggregate support for Black Lives Matter has waned since last summer.<sup>86</sup>

The goals, tactics, and attitudes of the Black Lives Matter organization and protesters during their aggressive attack on Confederate imagery might help explain this decrease in white support. White liberals were eager to show solidarity when they saw BLM protesters taking to the streets to stop police brutality, but they were slightly less excited to engage in a broad attack against monuments.

Meanwhile, this slight dip in support should not overshadow the main point. Within two years of its formation, BLM turned its attention to the way the United States commemorated the Civil War.<sup>87</sup> At a time when the meaning behind Confederate monuments was already a national debate, BLM capitalized on the issue. The scale of monument removal caused by the Black Lives Matter movement signaled a new phase in the battle for Civil War memory. Distinct from the initial call to discard Confederate symbols in the late 1990s, BLM literally took matters into their own hands, forcing communities across the country to remove monuments through executive action or face a crowd-led wrecking crew. In a much more aggressive – and immediate – way than the NAACP, BLM attacked the memory of the Confederacy to draw much needed

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<sup>85</sup> “Support for Black Lives Matter Down Since June,” *Pew Research Center* (Washington, DC), September 15, 2020.

<sup>86</sup> Jenifer Chudy and Hakeem Jefferson, “Support for Black Lives Matter Surged Last Year. Did It Last?” *The New York Times* (New York, New York), May 22, 2021.

<sup>87</sup> “Whose Heritage? Public Symbols of the Confederacy,” Southern Poverty Law Center, accessed November 15, 2021. <https://www.splcenter.org/data-projects/whose-heritage>.

attention towards contemporary issues posed by white supremacy and systemic racism. But there was still much work to be done. In 2021, SPLC Chief of Staff Lecia Brooks indicated that there were still over 2,100 symbols of the Confederacy including 704 monuments.<sup>88</sup>

It has become quite clear that the fight is far from over and Black Lives Matter is not going anywhere. As the Southern Poverty Law Center has eloquently argued, “The argument that the Confederate flag and other displays represent ‘heritage, not hate’ ignores the near-universal heritage of African Americans whose ancestors were enslaved by the millions in the south.” Public displays of Confederate symbols, they argue, “trivializes their pain, their history and their concerns about racism – whether it’s the racism of the past or that of today.”<sup>89</sup> This is embodied within the heart of the Black Lives Matter movement.

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<sup>88</sup> “SPLC Reports Over 160 Confederate Symbols Removed in 2020,” Southern Poverty Law Center, accessed November 15, 2021. [SPLC Reports Over 160 Confederate Symbols Removed in 2020 | Southern Poverty Law Center \(splcenter.org\)](https://www.splcenter.org/press-releases/splc-reports-over-160-confederate-symbols-removed-in-2020).

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

Confederate monuments and symbols are troublesome reflections of our nation's past. As Karen Cox has argued, they are “weapons in the larger arsenal of white supremacy, artifacts of Jim Crow not unlike the ‘whites only’ signs that declared Black southerners to be second-class citizens.”<sup>1</sup> Similarly, David Blight argued that Confederate monuments and symbols were not only utilized to vindicate the Confederate generation but were used as prominent tools to justify and implement the Jim Crow era of segregation at the dawn of the twentieth century.<sup>2</sup> The same could be said of their purpose today. These monuments were dedicated by the leaders of the UDC and the KKK to justify and continue to perpetrate racial inequalities. They do not accurately represent Civil War history. Communities across America are supposed to erect monuments because, in part, they reflect the shared values of that community.<sup>3</sup> Americans must ask themselves, do these monuments represent the shared values of our community in the twenty-first century?

While the question over what to do with Confederate symbols is simple, the answer is quite complex. By analyzing the Black Confederate myth, Kevin Levin has argued that neo-Confederates have used mythology to protect the memory of the Confederacy. His study contributed to the notion that Confederate defenders sought to alter the Lost Cause for a colorblind era in the twenty-first century.<sup>4</sup> Likewise, Adam Domby and Nicole Maurantonio, showed how the Lost Cause was refashioned by Confederate heritage advocates for the new

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<sup>1</sup> Cox, *No Common Ground*.

<sup>2</sup> Blight, *Race and Reunion*.

<sup>3</sup> Cox, *No Common Ground*.

<sup>4</sup> Levin, *Searching for Black Confederates*, 9.

millennium to continue to perpetrate racial inequalities.<sup>5</sup> All of this has become part of the modern-day political calculus. Republicans embraced this new version of Confederate history at the behest of Confederate heritage advocates to appease their conservative base. Beginning in the early 1990s, politicians wielded the power to determine how the war would be remembered, signaling a new phase in the battle for Civil War memory. Separated from the historical community, and motivated by their own political aspirations, Republicans took up the Lost Cause mantle and used it as a technique to win over white voters.

Ever quick to frame themselves as the Republican party's alter ego, Democrats refuted the Lost Cause ideology. Both sides defined their issues tightly, separating themselves from their opponents. This laid the foundation for the highly contested political battleground in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Grassroots activism led by the NAACP forced the issue into national headlines, compelling Democrats to remove symbols dedicated to the Confederacy. With pressure from protesters, and the national news media outlets capturing the chaotic – sometimes violent – scenes, the battle for Confederate remembrance became a part of the political discourse. Since the Charleston Massacre in 2015, the debate over how the Confederacy was remembered has become a national dispute, forcing Americans to reexamine the legacy of the war. But the national discourse was fragmented. As Adam Domby eloquently indicated, “Politicians continue to weaponize the past to mobilize support through appeals to a shared identity and memory.”<sup>6</sup>

But in some ways, the debate over Confederate symbolism has been carried on for practical purposes. Both the NAACP and Black Lives Matter Movement saw value in attacking the memory of the Confederacy to eradicate white supremacy and draw national attention

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<sup>5</sup> Domby, *The False Cause*. Maurantonio, *Confederate Exceptionalism*.

<sup>6</sup> Domby, *The False Cause*.

towards the issue of systemic racism in the United States. In many ways, Confederate symbolism kept Confederate ideals present in American society. BLM maintained that attacking remembrances to the Confederacy is an attack on what those monuments stand for – white supremacy, hatred, and systemic racism. Dewy Clayton – political science professor at the University of Louisville who specializes in African American politics and civil rights – entertained this view. He questioned aloud what these monuments teach our children. “As they grow up,” he said, “they see these symbols of hatred and they see them everywhere in the public square. We’re sending the wrong message to them.”<sup>7</sup>

Despite the progress made, it seems as though Confederate commemoration will continue to produce an ideological, political, and academic debate for the foreseeable future. On June 17, 2021 – the six-year anniversary of the Charleston Massacre – the Southern Poverty Law Center published a report that indicated that more than 300 Confederate symbols had been removed from public spaces, including 170 monuments taken down since 2015. However, these numbers become less impressive when they are compared to the more than 1,895 Confederate symbols that remain. According to the SPLC, “692 of those symbols are monuments, many of them prominently located at county courthouses and town squares.” Jennifer Pinckney – the widow of Rev. Clementa Pinckney who was murdered by Dylann Roof at Mother Emmanuel AME Church – grieved for her slain husband every day. She argued that Confederate symbols are “racist in its purest form.” As Pinckney observed the SPLC data and witnessed the deterioration of race relations in the United States, she added that, “its effects are still present in our society. Every

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<sup>7</sup> Wenei Philimon, Trevor Hughes, and Marco della Cava, “Will Black Lives Matter Movement Finally Put an End to Confederate Flags and Statues?” *USA Today* (McLean, Virginia), June 12, 2020.

day is a constant reminder that nine people lost their lives and that nothing has changed over the past six years.”<sup>8</sup>

On July 10, 2021, almost four years after the violence at Charlottesville, a crowd of over 200 people watched as workers removed the Robert E. Lee statue – the same statue that was at the heart of the “unite the right” rally – from its granite base. The driver of the flatbed truck honked as he carried off the enormous bronze statue, prompting cheers and applause from the crowd. Two hours later, and two blocks east, workers removed the Stonewall Jackson monument from Court Square Park, formerly known as Jackson Park.<sup>9</sup> The decision by the city to remove these statues arrived more than four years after the initial proposal that caused white supremacists to unite in Charlottesville. Much of the delay stemmed from legal action. In 2019, the state circuit court upheld a 1904 law that applied to counties and then was later amended in 1997 to apply to cities. According to the law, local governments had the authority to erect war memorials, but were forbidden from disturbing or interfering “with any monument so erected, or to prevent the citizens of said county from taking all proper measures and exercising all proper means for the protection, preservation, and care of the same.”<sup>10</sup> Judge Richard E. Moore – the Judge of the Charlottesville circuit court – acknowledged that Confederate statues could be viewed as symbols to white supremacy, but because they depicted Confederate generals – Lee and Jackson – it inherently made them war memorials. In a letter, he expressed, “while some people obviously see Lee and Jackson as symbols of white supremacy, others see them as

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<sup>8</sup> Liz Vinson, “Six Years Later: 170 Confederate Monuments Removed since Charleston Church Massacre,” Southern Poverty Law Center, June 17, 2021, accessed December 10, 2021. <https://www.splcenter.org/news/2021/06/17/six-years-later-170-confederate-monuments-removed-charleston-church-massacre>.

<sup>9</sup> Hawes Spencer and Michael Levenson, “Charlottesville Removes Robert E. Lee Statue at Center of White Nationalist Rally,” *The New York Times* (New York, New York), July 9, 2021.

<sup>10</sup> *The City of Charlottesville, Virginia, et al. v. Frederick W. Payne, et al.*, Case no. 17-145, (Circuit court of Charlottesville, 1904).

brilliant military tacticians or complex leaders in a difficult time.” He added that, in either case, their statues “under the undisputed facts of this case still are monuments and memorials to them, as veterans of the Civil War.”<sup>11</sup>

But Moore’s decision did not remain. This case went to the Virginia Supreme Court where plaintiffs discovered a loophole in the law that protected both monuments. Justice S. Bernard Goodwyn of the Virginia Supreme Court argued that the city had a right to remove the monuments because they were erected long before the adoption of the 1997 law that forbade local governments from removing monuments and memorials once they are erected.<sup>12</sup> The Jackson statue was erected in 1921 while the Lee statue was unveiled in 1924. In fact, both monument dedication ceremonies hosted Confederate veterans reunions, parades, and balls. At the Jackson monument unveiling, a group of local school children formed a living Confederate flag down the road from Vinegar Hill, a prominent Black neighborhood in Charlottesville.<sup>13</sup> Justice Goodwyn wrote that, in the court’s opinion, “the trial court erred by interpreting the statute as operating retroactively to prohibit removal of the statues from the City’s parks.” In April 2021, this ruling overturned the 2019 Charlottesville Circuit Court and city officials began to organize the removal of both monuments.<sup>14</sup> In short, the monuments came down due to a legal technicality.

After the chaos and violence that consumed Charlottesville in the summer of 2017, and four long years of legislative battles, Charlottesville seemed to be coming to terms with its dark and intricate past. The removal of these monuments was “welcomed news” to Democratic

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<sup>11</sup> Liam Stack, “Charlottesville Confederate Statues Are Protected by State Law, Judge Rules,” *The New York Times* (New York, New York), May 1, 2019.

<sup>12</sup> Allyson Waller, “Charlottesville Can Remove Confederate Statues, High Court Rules,” *The New York Times* (New York, New York).

<sup>13</sup> Ben Paviour, “Charlottesville Removes Robert E. Lee Statue that Sparked a Deadly Rally,” *NPR News* (Washington, DC), July 10, 2021.

<sup>14</sup> Waller, “Charlottesville Remove Confederate Statues, High Court Rules.”

President Joe Biden. Emile Simons – Assistant Press Secretary to the White House – argued there was a difference between reminders and a remembrance of history. She said, “monuments to Confederate leaders belong in museums, not in public places.”<sup>15</sup> Following a year of protests that sparked across the United States in the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd, Richard Schragger – law professor at the University of Virginia – declared the supreme court’s ruling was a “symbolic victory in a way, and an important one.” Nikuyah Walker – the first Black female mayor of Charlottesville – agreed. At a press conference, she conveyed, “taking down this statue [the one dedicated to Robert E. Lee] is one small step closer to the goal of helping Charlottesville, Virginia, and America grapple with the sin of being willing to destroy Black people for economic gain.”<sup>16</sup> Predictably, some residents were not as enthused. Cornelia Johnson – a choir director and pianist in Charlottesville – disagreed with those who believed the removal of these statues to be a “great achievement.” She argued that, “Taking down a statue is not going to make things better for people of color. Change has to come from within. And it doesn’t bother me one way or the other if they leave it up.”<sup>17</sup>

Once the bronze statues of Lee and Jackson were removed, Charlottesville officials said that both monuments were placed in a “secure location on city property” until officials made a decision on what to do with them next.<sup>18</sup> On October 15, a proposal was submitted by the Jefferson School of African American Heritage Center to the Charlottesville city council that outlined a plan to melt down the Lee statue and repurpose the bronze to create a new work of public art through a community engagement process. Andrea Douglass, executive director of the

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<sup>15</sup> Emile Simons, Twitter Post, July 10, 2021, 4:33 PM, <https://twitter.com/EmilieSimons46/status/1413959615960780802?s=20>.

<sup>16</sup> “‘Such a Relief’: Charlottesville Onlookers Cheer the Removal of Confederate Statue,” *The Guardian* (New York, New York), July 10, 2021.

<sup>17</sup> Hawes Spencer and Michael Levenson, “Charlottesville Removes Robert E. Lee Statue.”

<sup>18</sup> Teo Armus and Joe Heim, “Charlottesville to Take Down Robert E. Lee, Stonewall Jackson Statues Saturday,” *The Washington Post* (Washington, DC), July 9, 2021.

Jefferson School of African American Heritage Center, believed this was an opportunity “to create a methodology for the local area to think about its public places.” More significantly, she said this plan could be a roadmap at the national level for “other communities that are interested in thinking about the same things that we’re being forced to think about.”<sup>19</sup> The proposal has yet to be accepted, and the fate of the removed statues continue to spur local legislative and political debates.

As Charlottesville’s example demonstrates, dealing with Confederate memory can be a violent, lengthy, and frustratingly slow process. As 2021 comes to a close, there are thousands of Confederate symbols that continue to consume America’s historical landscape signaling that the fight is far from over. The battle over Confederate symbolism within the past three decades reflects a collective desire to overcome America’s racist past. While politicians continued to wield the power over how the Civil War was remembered, grassroots agency yielded the most tangible results. The fight against Confederate symbols, largely led by the NAACP, suggests that we are still living in the civil rights era. The succeeding two generations – the sons, daughters, grandsons, and granddaughters of Martin Luther King’s generation – continued the legacy of their forebearers by going after the remnant of white supremacy in the United States. If the fight for racial equality appeared to be won in the 1970s and 1980s, the children and grandchildren of King’s generation realized that the 1990s amounted to a false spring. Confederate monuments needed to be dealt with. In taking to the streets, they inaugurated a new phase in the story of Civil War memory.

Communities across America must unite, recognize, learn from, and accurately represent their dark, intricate history without glorifying or celebrating it. Karen Cox argued that

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<sup>19</sup> Ginny Bixby, “Jefferson School Proposes Melting Lee Statue to Transform into Public Art,” *The Daily Progress* (Charlottesville, Virginia), October 20, 2021.

Confederate monuments are “a local problem” and their fate should be decided by “a cross-section of communities’ stakeholders.”<sup>20</sup> While this debate has transcended regional boundaries to become a national issue, the fate of Confederate symbols must be a local matter. Local and state governments have attempted to bypass the will of the federal government to remove symbols dedicated to the Confederacy. This is exactly the level at which Americans should come to terms with their past. New Orleans is one example of a locality taking control of the memory of the war. This city has continually fought to deal with its intricate and racist past and the city presently stands as one of the biggest leaders in the anti-Confederate campaign. Democratic Mayor Mitch Landrieu embraced local and state power to confront how the city has collectively remembered the Civil War. Speaking to the citizens of New Orleans in the wake of his decision to remove Confederate monuments from prominent locations across the city, he challenged New Orleanians to unite. He suggested that the citizens of New Orleans must “heal and focus on our larger tasks. Not only building new symbols but making this city a beautiful manifestation of what is possible and what we as a people can become.”<sup>21</sup> Landrieu was exactly right. Confederate monuments were open wounds. Finally, after 150 years, Americans began the necessary process of suturing them.

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<sup>20</sup> Cox, *No Common Ground*.

<sup>21</sup> Derek Cosson, “Transcript of New Orleans Mayor Landrieu’s Address on Confederate Monuments,” *The Pulse* (Pensacola, Florida), May 19, 2017.

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