

Eric Rustum
May 28th, 2019
Period 1
USHAP Final Project

Confederate Monuments: Why Are They *Really* Here?

Prompt: What was the original cause for establishing monuments honoring the Confederacy in the United States?

In 1970 on Stone Mountain in Georgia, a massive project was finally completed for all to see. It was the Confederate Memorial Carving, a massive carving depicting three Confederate leaders on horseback including the commander, Robert E. Lee. At its dedication ceremony, Vice President Spiro Agnew hailed confederate soldiers and talked about what the current nation should learn from the Confederate example. Jon Special, the author of *Agnew Mellow in Talk Hailing Confederate Heroes*, quotes Agnew in his article by stating, “we must set aside the evils of sectionalism. Just as the South cannot afford to discriminate against any of its own people, the rest of the nation cannot afford to discriminate against the South.” The picture Agnew painted of the Confederacy seems awfully different from the ideology created by the Confederacy and those who established the Memorial Carving. Agnew emphasized their bravery, their courage, and their willingness to stick to their values. These morals, however, incited them to fight for the preservation of slavery in the United States, the most prominent goal of the establishment of the Confederacy in the 1860s. Coincidentally, Stone Mountain, Georgia is also the same location where the KKK burned a cross to signify their rebirth in the late 1910s. While many people claim that Confederate monuments, like the one in Stone Mountain Park, were established to

commemorate and recognize those who fought for the continuation of slavery, and to deter any movement in support of African Americans' rights in the country.

Although many assume that the memorials made for the Confederacy were established immediately after the Civil War, , the majority of them were created several decades later. According to a histogram published by the Southern Poverty Law Center, the number of monuments, roads, and many other symbols rose sharply from 1900 to 1920. In 1915, the film *Birth of a Nation* depicted racist images of African Americans being persecuted. This film was so popular, it incited the rebirth of the Ku Klux Klan. Jim Crow laws were prevalent throughout which was further supported by the *Plessy v. Ferguson* Supreme Court decision in 1896. The next big spike of memorials was from 1954 to 1970, during the Civil Rights Movement. This included the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision and the Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act. The increase in memorials to the Confederacy during those times was a form of racial suppression to prevent civil rights movements in the United States.

Those today who argue for the maintained placement of Confederate memorials argue that taking away the statues erases our history. Naming statues and putting up statues, however, is not how humans record history. Instead, they glorify people and values that they represent, and the values shown through Confederate monuments are unarguably for the discrimination of African Americans. Even if whites see the bravery and courage of the soldiers more than their racist intent in Confederate monuments, African Americans see fear, persecution, and death. Many have proposed putting the statues in educational settings like museums, if not taking them down altogether.

Annotated Bibliography

Essex, Jamey. "'THE REAL SOUTH STARTS HERE': WHITENESS, THE CONFEDERACY, AND COMMODIFICATION AT STONE MOUNTAIN." *Southeastern Geographer* 42, no. 2 (2002): 211-27.

This article goes into depth about the origins of the Confederate Memorial Carving at the Stone Mountain Park in Georgia and its connection to the rebirth of the KKK and white supremacist ideologies.

Hendrix, Steve. "Stone Mountain: The Ugly past - and Fraught Future - of the Biggest Confederate Monument." *The Washington Post*. September 19, 2017. Accessed May 23, 2019.
https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/retropolis/wp/2017/09/19/stone-mountain-the-ugly-past-and-fraught-future-of-the-biggest-confederate-monument/?utm_term=.69bd9e899169.

This article from the Washington Post describes the history of the Confederate Memorial Carving as being one connected to the KKK and white nationalist ideals supported by the Confederacy. It raises the question of whether or not the historic carving should remain on Stone Mountain or if it should be removed.

"Memorial Carving." *Confederate Memorial Carving | Stone Mountain Park*. Accessed May 23, 2019.
<https://www.stonemountainpark.com/Activities/History-Nature/Confederate-Memorial-Carving>.

This page gives background information about the Confederate Memorial Carving and what years it was proposed, built, finished, and dedicated on Stone Mountain in Georgia. This brief informational page does not give any opinions or insight about the debate on confederate monuments.

Special, Jon Nordheimer. "Agnew Mellow in Talk Hailing Confederate Heroes." *The New York Times*. May 10, 1970. Accessed May 23, 2019.

<https://www.nytimes.com/1970/05/10/archives/agnew-mellow-in-talk-hailing-confederate-heroes.html>.

This article is an archive of a New York Times article from 1970 that comments on the dedication ceremony of the Confederate Memorial Carving. The article points out how the vice president at the time, Spiro Agnew, talked graciously about the Confederacy and Confederate soldiers and their courage and dignity.

"Whose Heritage? Public Symbols of the Confederacy." *Southern Poverty Law Center*. 2016.

Accessed May 23, 2019.

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

In this in depth report originally published in 2016, the data tracking the amount of Confederate Monuments and when they were put up is displayed. It reveals that the U.S. has a very large amount of Confederate memorials and many of them were put up during the rise of segregation as well as the Civil Rights Movement.