

Foreword to Confederate Monument Catalog

By Dr. Freddie Parker

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In their quest to “venerate and vindicate” their southern brothers and sisters who were defeated in the Civil War between the North and the South – in a struggle that resulted in the ending of 200 years of black bondage – late nineteenth century white southerners designed the “Lost Cause” myth. From the ashes of war, southern whites set out to rewrite why they seceded from the Union in 1860 and 1861. They forged a campaign of disinformation that glamorized the Old South and contended that southerners seceded to protect themselves from tyrannical northerners bent on destroying the southern way of life. The new narrative presented the black enslaved as loving their masters, as “Sambos” contented in their captivity, and most of all they set out to glorify Confederate soldiers who had given their lives to maintain the southern way of life. Southern whites propagated the notion that slavery had little or nothing to do with the genesis of the Civil War, rather the desire for economic independence, states’ rights, and a string of other causes stood at the center of the conflict between the north and the south. Rewriting the Civil War narrative made southerners patriots rather than traitors. In 1928 W.E.B. Dubois wrote that: “People do not go to war for abstract theories of government. They fight for property and privilege.”

Of the many efforts by southern whites to perpetuate the Lost Cause myth, the erection of monuments to Confederate soldiers has been the most visible. By the early 1890s, several Confederate veteran organizations were established as well as publications to keep alive the memory of fallen soldiers. In 1893, the magazine *Confederate Veteran* was founded and served as the “official mouthpiece” for those who perpetuated the Lost Cause myth. In her book,

Dixie's Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture, Karen Cox vividly chronicles the efforts of individuals and organizations, and especially the Daughters of the Confederacy founded in 1894 to keep alive the vestiges of the Lost Cause with the erection of hundreds of memorials to the “old way,” including the erection of monuments to ordinary Confederate soldiers and later Confederate generals and leaders Robert E. Lee, Jefferson Davis, Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson, General Pierre Beauregard, and hundreds of others. Initially these monuments were placed in cemeteries, but by the turn of the twentieth-century, they littered the public landscape of cities and towns across the United States.

Today, hundreds still stand inside and near state, county, city, and even federal buildings, especially courthouses, on full display. Frederick Douglass saw shortly after the end of the Civil War that southerners continued to “fight the Civil War.” Douglass wrote that: “The spirit of secession is stronger today than ever. It is now a deeply rooted, devoutly cherished sentiment, inseparably identified with the ‘lost cause’...Douglass regarded monuments to the Confederacy as disrespectful to former enslaved African Americans and to America itself. “Monuments to the Lost Cause will prove monuments of folly,” Douglass wrote in 1870. Writing in *The Crisis* more than fifty years later, W.E.B. DuBois wrote that: “The most terrible thing about War, I am convinced, is its monuments,—the awful things we are compelled to build in order to remember its victims. In the South, particularly, human ingenuity has been put to it to explain on its war monuments, the Confederacy. Of course, the plain truth of the matter would be an inscription something like this: ‘Sacred to the memory of those who Fought to Perpetuate Human Slavery’ ...It does, however, seem to be overdoing the matter to read on a North Carolina Confederate monument: “Died fighting for Liberty!”

There are thousands of Civil War memorials and monuments across the United States today. Whatever their form, most came into existence during the height of the Jim Crow period between 1900 and 1960. Spikes in the growth of memorials occurred during the celebration of pivotal battles of the Civil War and the twenty-fifth, fiftieth, and seventy-fifth anniversaries of the beginning and ending of the Civil War. Schools, roads, counties, towns, lakes, bridges, military bases, and parks are named in honor of Confederate generals and leaders. Today, more than 100 schools in the United States bear the name of Confederate leaders. It is not by accident that many schools were named for Confederate leaders just after the United States Supreme Court decision, *Brown vs Board of Education* banned school segregation. Southerners founded private schools and mounted a “massive resistance” campaign to maintain segregation of schools and public and private institutions in general. “In short, it appears that naming public schools after Confederate generals became another tool in the segregationists’ arsenal to politically signal this resistance and to further discourage African-American families from attempting to register at segregated all-white schools.” The name of a Confederate leader served to warn black families that they were not welcomed.

As of 2020, the Southern Poverty Law Center estimated that there are approximately 1750 “Confederate monuments, place names and other symbols still in public spaces, both in the South and across the nation.” Approximately ten percent of these monuments can be found in North Carolina. Strewn across the state from Wilmington to Albemarle to Asheville to Columbia in Tyrrell County across the state to Concord, 280 miles away, from Elizabeth City to Morganton, 360 miles apart, these “monuments of hate” can be found. After Dylan Roof, a white supremacist killed nine black worshippers at Mother Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina on June 17, 2015 and after the “Unite the Right”

rally in Charlottesville, Virginia to preserve Confederate memorials, there has been a huge effort by millions of Americans to “write an obituary” for these symbols that are a “slap in the face” to African Americans.

In the midst of these efforts, North Carolina enacted legislation to protect monuments. Within a month of the Charleston massacre, Governor Pat McCrory and the General Assembly colluded to make the removal of a monument possible only with the legislature’s approval. Over the past five years or so, more than 100 monuments have been removed by edicts and those protesting their presence in public spaces. Protesters in Durham removed “The Boys Who Wore Grey” monument on August 17, 2017, “Silent Sam” located on the campus of The University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill was removed on August 20, 2018, and on June 21, 2020, three monuments were removed in Raleigh from the Capitol grounds.

Since 2017, The North Carolina Commission on Racial and Ethnic Disparities (NC CRED) has been in the vanguard to remove Confederate monuments from inside and near courthouses in North Carolina. These symbols embrace every feature of the horrible system of 200 years of legalized black enslavement in the United States. From back-breaking forced labor from “sunup to sundown,” to the sale of human beings from county to county and state to state; from brutal whippings and legalized ear-croppings to castration laws, the rape of black women, and the separation of families, Confederate monuments glaringly speak that the ideals of the Old South and the Confederacy should be upheld and perpetuated. We cannot reconstruct without first deconstructing an attachment to a southern past that glorifies slavery and Jim Crow. We cannot move forward continuing to align ourselves with symbols of hate. Gerald Givens, president of the Raleigh-Apex NAACP said it best: "I understand America will never overcome white supremacy if it keeps protecting it, if it keeps honoring it...Until we reconcile what

happened in our past, we'll never be able to solve the problems that we have in the present and be able to lay a stronger foundation for our country and its future." I urge you to support the North Carolina Commission on Racial and Ethnic Disparities in its quest to remove Confederate monuments from public spaces across the state of North Carolina.

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