

Remove Confederate Symbols Where Justice Is Sought

Carved above the columns at the entrance to the U.S. Supreme Court's noble home in Washington is a statement of dramatic simplicity. It is both a promise and a hope: "Equal Justice Under Law."

- Our nation has at many times and in many ways fallen short of that ideal. Yet it remains a keystone among the principles by which we govern ourselves. If all people are created equal, as the nation's founders declared, then they are, or should be, entitled to justice equally dispensed according to the duly enacted laws of the land.
- The State of North Carolina is among many where this grand proposition has often been tested. Fortunately, there has emerged a renewed effort to affirm our state's commitment to a justice system in which discrimination in defiance of the Constitution has no place.
- This effort has taken many forms, including recent recommendations of the Task Force for Racial Equity in Criminal Justice https://ncdoj.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/TRECREportFinal_12132020.pdf appointed by Gov. Roy Cooper. Yet any such quest for equity must reckon as well with public symbols evoking the long years when North Carolina's residents of African descent were held in slavery – and even after slavery's abolition were oppressed under the discriminatory, segregationist regime known as Jim Crow.

Among the most pervasive symbols of oppression, still found in public squares throughout the old Confederacy, are the monuments to Southern soldiers who fought to uphold a social order that had slavery at its root.

- The National Consortium on Racial and Ethnic Fairness in the Courts has taken a lead role in seeking the removal of such symbols. To that end, the Consortium has adopted a resolution <https://nccred.org/2020/national-consortium-on-racial-and-ethnic-fairness-in-the-courts-calls-for-the-removal-of-confederate-monuments-from-courthouse-and-public-spaces/> put forward by one of its affiliates, the N.C. Commission on Racial and Ethnic Disparities in the Criminal Justice System (NC CRED). <https://nccred.org/> The Commission is a private, nonpartisan advocacy group based in Durham.
- The N.C. Council of Churches, through action of its Governing Board, hereby endorses the resolution originated by NC CRED.

This endorsement is in keeping with the Council's foundational emphasis on racial justice. It follows the Council's statement of principle <https://www.ncchurches.org/2017/09/confederate-themed-monuments-time-reassess/> regarding the disposition of Confederate-themed monuments as adopted in 2017. The statement called for a loosening of state restrictions on the removal of

such monuments and for greater attention to their historical context, which in large measure was tied to perpetuation of the South's misguided Lost Cause awash in racism.

- The tide of events since 2017 – including dismantlement in 2020 of North Carolina's signature Confederate monument at the State Capitol -- has moved toward a repudiation of symbols linked to the civic cancer of white supremacy, even as they were or are presented as memorials to those who fought and died in the South's tragic rebellion.
- Nowhere do those symbols stand in sharper conflict with American ideals than at the buildings where justice is meant to be dispensed on equal terms to all comers.

As the resolution now endorsed by this Governing Board states, "Such markers and symbols of inhumanity positioned outside courthouses and centers of government power are a constant reminder of prejudice, hate and racism against black and brown people, and therefore, are inherently incompatible with a judiciary that should be dedicated to the Constitutional assurance of justice and equality under the law."

- The resolution further asserts, "People of color have expressed outrage and offense at having to pass these monuments as they enter courthouses in their communities to obtain services as court users, or to perform their civic duty on a jury, and thereby, are confronted with the duplicitous public message that tends to both invite the public into the 'Halls of Justice,' but at the same time intimidate and discourage some from their rightful entitlement to full access and fair treatment in the judicial system."
- The N.C. Council of Churches therefore joins NC CRED and its national allies in urging the removal of all such "Confederate monuments, memorials, flags, plaques, and other symbols and markers of racism and white supremacy, from all public spaces on, around, or within all property upon which courthouses or judicial offices of any kind are located."
- Tributes to Southern valor and sacrifice in furtherance of a cause so terribly wrong cannot be allowed to eclipse the goal of equal justice under law to which our nation is pledged.

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---Drafted by Steve Ford, Volunteer Program Associate

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