

Denuding Monument Avenue One Statue at a Time

Last week [Gov. Ralph Northam announced his plan](#) to remove the iconic statue of Robert E. Lee from Monument Avenue in Richmond, Virginia. This step will be the beginning of an undertaking that calls for the removal of four other statues of Confederate heroes, including that of Jefferson Davis. The now endangered statues have long been beloved tourist attractions that have given Richmond its cultural and historic profile.

The fashionable *Virginia Pilot* [produced a giddily joyous editorial](#) hailing the wrecking exercise as long overdue. According to the [Associated Press](#): “The move would be an extraordinary victory for civil rights activists, whose calls for the removal of that monument and others in this former capital of the Confederacy have been resisted for years.”

Northam’s decision was driven by the killing of George Floyd and the riots occasioned by that act: [“We need healing most of all.”](#) Supposedly tearing down historic statues will “heal” something, but I’ve no idea what that is.

The Virginia Legislative Black Caucus [issued a statement](#) on June 4 that “these structural and monumental symbols have been extremely offensive to Black America and others.” In the next sentence the statues are described as “so hurtful.” Will the destruction of “these structural and monumental symbols” do anything to improve the life of a single black person? For example, how will it bring down the rate of violent crime among the black underclass in our inner cities?

Allow me to wonder whether the members of the Black Caucus in Virginia have spent their lives traumatized by the statues on Monument Avenue. Fifteen years ago, my wife and I visited

Jefferson Davis' home, Beauvoir, in Biloxi Mississippi. The building and the adjacent parking lot were full of frolicking black schoolchildren, who were clearly having a good time. The display of Confederate Battle Flags on the property didn't seem to bother these black visitors in the least.

Which leads me to wonder if the denuding of Monument Avenue may serve other needs for black politicians and their constituents. Does it permit them to spit – at least symbolically – on a long dead white ruling class whom they have been taught to hate, and on their descendants, whom it may be hoped will feel dismayed? Hate does unite, after all.

Richmond's black mayor, [Levar Stoney, has added his voice](#) to this media-guided chorus of protest: "These monuments should be part of our dark past and not of our bright future. I personally believe they are offensive and need to be removed." Stoney also jubilantly announced: "Richmond is no longer the capital of the Confederacy." Unless I'm mistaken, Richmond ceased to be that in April 1865.

There are of course other reminders of a "dark past," which grows ever darker, Stoney and Northam might want to tear down or deface; and their allies both black and white, are already working on that project. Just look at the progressives on American campuses across the country who are planning to remove statues of Thomas Jefferson and other founding fathers who owned slaves.

Such wrecking operations, at least in the South, are possible because Southern whites, including descendants of those who fought for the Confederacy, with a few vocal exceptions, couldn't care less about their "heritage." Southerners for the most part are indifferent to their onetime shared heroes. Contrast them to the Italian Americans who have [defended Columbus' statues](#) against the Cultural Radicals in NYC.

Yes, I know there are fulltime Neo-Confederates who run around defending the “lost cause.” But they are only a small fraction of the Southern white population. Presumably, Jeff Sessions spoke for most “Southern conservatives” when he announced as attorney general [in a speech at the Union League](#) in Philadelphia that the defense of slavery was the overriding issue that caused the Civil War. Furthermore, Sessions’ ancestors had been on the wrong side of that quarrel and fully deserved to be defeated.

It might also be the case that what engages the Southern populist Right is no longer the War Between the States, but more current issues like gun rights. Attempts by Northam and other governors to go after gun owners have resulted in massive protests, as Pedro Gonzalez shows in a [feature article for *Chronicles*' June issue](#).

This does not mean that defending guns is an intrinsically worthier cause than keeping angry mobs from devastating our monuments and defacing graves. It is rather that gun rights galvanize a much broader segment of the South than historical questions. That’s just the way things are, even if the situation described doesn’t please the intellectual Right.

The question then becomes how to educate Americans to value the heritage that is now being erased, together with the works of art and long cherished monuments that our modern barbarians are trying to obliterate. Even more relevant: Can we do this before all the “offensive” monuments come down, and new ones go up celebrating the angry, transgendered, social justice advocates who advocate their removal?

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