

National Trust for Historic Preservation Statement on Confederate Monuments

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In recent weeks, protests throughout America and around the world have sprung up in support of racial justice and equity, sparked by the horrific killings of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and others. The National Trust stands committed to support this fight for justice. We believe that [Black Lives Matter, Black History Matters](#), and that historic preservation has a powerful role to play in telling the full story of our often-difficult history. A critically important part of this work is elevating and preserving the enormous and important contributions that African Americans have made to our nation and carrying that profound legacy forward through places of truth, justice, and reconciliation.

This nationwide call for racial justice and equity has brought renewed attention to the Confederate monuments in many of our communities.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation has previously issued statements about the history and treatment of Confederate monuments, emphasizing that, although some were erected—like other monuments to war dead—for reasons of memorialization, most Confederate monuments were intended to serve as a celebration of Lost Cause mythology and to advance the ideas of white supremacy. Many of them still stand as symbols of those ideologies and sometimes serve as rallying points for bigotry and hate today. To many African Americans, they continue to serve as constant and painful reminders that racism is embedded in American society.

We believe it is past time for us, as a nation, to acknowledge that these symbols do not reflect, and are in fact abhorrent to, our values and to our foundational obligation to continue building a more perfect union that embodies equality and justice for all.

We believe that removal may be necessary to achieve the greater good of ensuring racial justice and equality.

Although Confederate monuments are sometimes designated as historic, and while many were erected more than a century ago, the National Trust supports their removal from our public spaces when they continue to serve the purposes for which many were built—to glorify, promote, and reinforce white supremacy, overtly or implicitly. While some have suggested that removal may result in erasing history, we believe that removal may be necessary to achieve the greater good of ensuring racial justice and equality. And their history needs not end with their removal: we support relocation of these monuments to museums or other places where they may be preserved so that their history as elements of Jim Crow and racial injustice can be recognized and interpreted.

We believe that communities have an obligation to take on this issue forthrightly and inclusively. We recognize that not all monuments are the same, and a number of communities have carefully and methodically determined that some monuments should be removed and others retained but contextualized with educational markers or other monuments designed to counter the false narrative and racist ideology that they represent, providing a deeper understanding of their message and their purpose. We also recognize that some state legislatures have prohibited removal of such monuments, disallowing the rights of local communities wishing to remove these offensive symbols. Until such state laws are changed or overturned, contextualization may be the only option, at least for the present. Our view, however, is that unless these monuments can in fact be used to foster recognition of the reality of our painful past and invite reconciliation for the present and the future, they should be removed from our public spaces.

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Confederate Monuments—Frequently Asked Questions

How did the National Trust for Historic Preservation—an organization dedicated to saving places—arrive at a point where it supports removal of Confederate monuments?

The National Trust believes that [Black Lives Matter](#), [Black History Matters](#), and that historic preservation have a powerful role to play in telling the full story of our often-difficult history.

The nationwide call for racial justice and equity has brought renewed attention to the Confederate monuments in many of our communities. We reexamined the statements we made in the past, including the most recent made in response to the violent white nationalist demonstrations in Charlottesville in 2017, and determined to be more clear about the importance of removing these monuments from public places when they continue to reinforce racial injustice.

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As preservationists, our goal is not to freeze places in time, and historic places should be allowed to evolve as their communities and individuals do. The purpose of preservation is not to stop change, but to offer tools that help a community manage change in thoughtful ways that do not disconnect the community from the full legacies of its past and the potential for its future.

Does removing a Confederate monument mean you're erasing history?

No. History is not that fragile. History is written in our buildings, landscapes, documents, objects, oral traditions, individual memories, and many other places, as well as in monuments in public spaces. To the contrary, left standing without appropriate context, these monuments promote a false and damaging narrative. When removed, these monuments can provide an even deeper understanding of history in other venues, such as museums, that can offer fuller and more inclusive

context around the people, events, and ideologies that led to the monuments' creation, and their relationship to present-day issues.

Does the National Trust approve of the spontaneous removal of these monuments by individuals or groups?

No. Though the National Trust recognizes that these symbols have stood as tacit sanctions of oppression—in some cases, for more than a century—we do not agree with the removal of these monuments in any unplanned way, such as spontaneous action during a protest, that represents a danger to public safety.

What guidance is the National Trust offering to communities? What steps do you recommend?

The National Trust is in the process of developing additional guidance to help communities grapple with and formulate their own ideas on these issues, especially if they are considering removing a Confederate monument. We plan to share more resources in the coming weeks, and we want to play an active role in helping communities to allow their public spaces to continue to evolve to reflect their values. Please visit our website on this topic for updates and additional information.

What should communities do with the monuments that are removed?

Ideally, communities should be inclusive in deciding the future of these monuments and use the process as an opportunity for acknowledgement and reconciliation. Realistically, that may not be possible at the present time if the removal poses a risk to public safety. Options include putting them in storage; relocating them to private land or other locations as determined by the community; or recontextualizing them in an honest and inclusive way, whether in a museum or another place.

What, if anything, should replace them?

We believe that it is up to each community to decide whether or how to replace them, but that process should be done in a thoughtful and inclusive way to promote genuine healing and reconciliation. Because removal itself becomes a part of the ongoing history of the communities they once stood in, the resulting change in the cultural landscape of these public places creates an important opportunity to “tell the full story” about why they were erected—and why they were removed.

How does the National Trust's position on Confederate monuments translate to other types of monuments and memorials, such as those to Christopher Columbus?

This debate has sparked cascading conversations nationwide about the origin and meaning of other monuments, landmarks, or objects. We also acknowledge that not all monuments are the same. The National Trust's statement refers specifically to Confederate monuments, their unique context, and their relationship to this moment in time. That said, we encourage all communities to review, consider, and grapple with their full complex histories, and the way those histories are represented by monuments in public places, to help move us toward greater understanding and acknowledgement of our often-difficult history.

What is the National Trust doing to save places related to African American history?

The National Trust strives to tell the full American story, including, among other ways, the National Trust's [African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund](#), which works to save places where African American history happened. We invite members of the public to [take the pledge to join us in saving these places](#), and learn more about this critical work.

What about historic sites, especially former plantations, where people were enslaved?

We differentiate symbolic monuments from historic sites that have developed over time, some of them places built by African Americans held in bondage. These historic sites today must serve as critical places to explore the legacies of slavery and discrimination, and as sites of conscience where the honest exploration of our shared history and reconciliation can occur. At our own National Trust Historic Sites, we are engaged actively in this work, but there is much to be done and we look forward to sharing our work on this with colleagues across the country as it continues.

What about people who are proud of their Confederate heritage? How should they respond to this issue?

Thoughtful, honest dialogue is essential so that those who are proud of their Confederate heritage also begin to understand the way the monuments are seen differently by other members of the community. While these monuments may be understood as part of the legacy of

Confederate veterans, they are viewed by others—including some of those descendants of Confederate veterans, new residents, and African American members of the community—as public confirmation of an ideology that supports racial oppression. We believe that monuments in public spaces should reflect the shared values of the full community and should not project oppression or intimidation. People are still free to remember and honor their ancestors, whether Confederate, Union, enslaved, or free, which can be a path to deeper understanding of our shared and difficult history.