Confederate Monuments

Table Talk: Family Conversations about Current Events

Topic Summary

More than 150 years after the Civil War, there is a new drive to remove Confederate monuments. In April and May 2017, the New Orleans City Council voted to remove four Confederate monuments from their city. This decision came on the heels of other cities such as Austin, TX and Louisville, KY, who also voted to remove their statues. New Orleans Mayor Mitch Landrieu championed the effort to take down the four Confederate monuments, stating, “It is self-evident that these men did not fight for the United States of America, They fought against it. These monuments
purposefully celebrate a fictional, sanitized Confederacy; ignoring the death, ignoring the enslavement, and the terror that it actually stood for.” Racial justice activists have been working for decades on the removal of Confederate monuments and other related symbols.

The latest national push for the removal of Confederate monuments and names began in 2015 after Dylann Roof, who idolized the Confederate flag, killed nine African-American worshipers at Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, SC. The monuments were removed for similar reasons as the Confederate flags—that the government should not honor people whose main accomplishment was fighting a war in defense of slavery. While some still deny that this was the motivation for Confederate secession, overwhelming evidence proves otherwise.

There are at least 700 and possibly more than 1,000 Confederate monuments in 31 states, located in public parks, courthouse squares and state capitols. Currently, additional cities are considering removing their Confederate monuments including Charlottesville, VA, Orlando, FL, Baltimore, MD and St. Louis, MO.

There has been some resistance to removing the monuments for a variety of reasons, including family members who want the memory of these men to be kept alive; people who feel the symbols of white supremacy should not be hidden away but should be on display for us to learn from them; historians who believe the monuments preserve and educate about America's past; and residents of the city who feel the tax payer money needed to remove the monuments would be better spent elsewhere.

There has also been resistance from current day white supremacists like Richard B. Spencer who protested in Charlottesville, VA recently saying, “We will not be replaced.”

These quotes represent two different perspectives on removing Confederate monuments.
“These statues are not just stone and metal. They are not just innocent remembrances of a benign history. These monuments purposefully celebrate a fictional, sanitized Confederacy; ignoring the death, ignoring the enslavement, and the terror that it actually stood for. After the Civil War, these statues were a part of that terrorism as much as a burning cross on someone’s lawn; they were erected purposefully to send a strong message to all who walked in their shadows about who was still in charge in this city.”

~ New Orleans Mayor Mitch Landrieu

“I understand the impulse to remove Confederate monuments, which embody some of the most repulsive aspects of the American past. But if we hide them away in a museum, it becomes easier to evade their implications. Let the statues to white supremacy stand, alongside monuments to the brave Americans who challenged it. Anything less let’s all of us off the hook.”

~ Jonathan Zimmerman, profession of education and history at the University of Pennsylvania

Age
13 and up

Questions to Start the Conversation

- Have you ever seen a Confederate monument or other monument?
- What surprises you about what you learned about Confederate monuments?
- Why do you think the New Orleans City Council voted to remove the Confederate monuments?
Questions to Dig Deeper

- What are the different reasons why some people and groups are opposed to taking down the monuments?
- What are your thoughts about the two quotes?

(Your questions here)

(These questions could be found in the "Related to this Resource" section.)

I ideas for Taking Action

Ask: What can we do to help? What actions might make a difference?

- Find out if there are any Confederate monuments or other related symbols in your community or nearby and determine whether there are any plans for removing them.
- Help to organize an educational forum in school to discuss Confederate monuments, symbols and current day white supremacy. Make connections to racial inequities in education, law enforcement, employment and other U.S. systems and institutions.
- Get involved in local or national activism around issues of Confederate symbolism, racism and current day white supremacy. See related resources to the right for activism.