

**BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
BUSINESS MEETING
BOARD MEMBER INITIATIVE**

TITLE OF ITEM: Review of Confederate and Segregationist Symbols in Loudoun County

CRITICAL ACTION DATE: June 2021

ELECTION DISTRICT: Countywide

STAFF CONTACTS: Rey Cheatham Banks, Chief of Staff to Supervisor Briskman
Zachary Harris, Legislative Aide to Supervisor Briskman
Omar Masood, Chief Legislative Aide to Vice Chair Saines

PURPOSE: To direct staff to prepare an information item listing and detailing the location of roads, buildings, signs and other public infrastructure named after and honoring Confederate or segregationist figures, symbols and slogans in Loudoun County.

RECOMMENDATION: Supervisor Briskman and Vice Chair Saines recommend that the Board of Supervisors (Board) direct staff to research the locations of Confederate or segregationist symbols throughout Loudoun County.

BACKGROUND: The American Civil War ended in 1865 when Robert E. Lee surrendered to Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Courthouse. The debate over what exactly led to the bloodiest conflict in American history continues to the present day. One of these perspectives that still captures the imagination of a significant number of citizens, particularly white citizens residing in former Confederate states, is known as the Lost Cause.

Invented during the post-Reconstruction era, the Lost Cause perpetuates a romanticized version of the Confederacy. It was a “mystique of chivalric Southern soldiers and the noble Confederate leadership embodied in Jefferson Davis defending a way of life, state’s rights, even the original American Revolution, against a rapacious Northern industrial machine.” The historically accurate reason for the Confederacy’s existence, the planter class attempting to protect their business interests as America expanded west to areas with little incentives for agriculture, is of little importance to the Lost Cause.¹ Instead, the Lost Cause paints the Civil War as a noble rebellion

¹Wills, Matthew. “Origins of the Confederate Lost Cause.” JSTOR Daily, July 15, 2015. <https://daily.jstor.org/origins-confederate-lost-cause/>.

consisting of states defending themselves against an encroaching federal government and industrialized northeast.

Statues, buildings, roads, and other forms of public infrastructure were created to help perpetuate this myth. Some might argue that Confederate symbols merely serve the purpose of maintaining history, but this misses the purpose of such structures. Similar to the Lincoln Memorial and Washington Monument, societies name buildings or erect statues because the figure they represent is perceived to have done something honorable. The structure of the Confederate government, however, proves that glorified individuals such as Robert E. Lee, J.E.B. Stuart, and Stonewall Jackson were fighting for an immoral cause.

Besides secession being blatantly unconstitutional, as proven by *Texas V. White (1869)*, the Confederate states created a government with white supremacy as a bedrock principle. In his 1861 Cornerstone speech, Confederate Vice President Alexander Stephens perfectly describes this institutional racism: “Its [Confederacy] foundations are laid, its corner-stone rests, upon the great truth that the negro is not equal to the white man; that slavery subordination to the superior race is his natural and normal condition.” Stephens even states that slavery “was the immediate cause of the late rupture and present revolution.”²

Furthermore, our country witnessed two distinct spikes in the installation of Confederate monuments and the use of other Confederate and segregationist symbols. The first spike began around 1900; shortly after *Plessy v. Ferguson (1896)* created the separate but equal doctrine. In addition to the implementation of Jim Crow laws throughout the south, the period between 1900 – 1920 saw the return of the Ku Klux Klan. The second spike began in the mid-1950s and lasted until the late 1960s as this coincided with the Civil Rights Movement.³ With this information, one can assume that the true intent of Confederate and segregationist symbols is not to preserve history but to remind a segment of the population of their “place.” They serve the specific purpose of upholding a biased and racist interpretation of the past. Triumphantly displaying Confederate symbols in public spaces conveys the message that Loudoun is proud to have been complicit and even supports a governmental system built on the oppression of African Americans.

In summary, Loudoun should not honor individuals that committed treason against the United States and who helped to maintain white supremacy. While the statue outside of the Leesburg courthouse is well known, it is entirely possible that other symbols have gone unnoticed. Members of the Heritage Commission confirmed that no organization has been tasked with compiling the locations of Confederate and segregationist symbols throughout Loudoun County. By considering other entities like roads, buildings, signs and even the Balls Bluff battlefield, Loudoun County can remove inaccurate and racist symbols from its communities. This will not only help with depicting history in an accurate manner, but also create a more inclusive County that does not continually honor and glorify America’s racist past.

²Stephens, Alexander H. “Cornerstone Speech.” American Battlefield Trust, March 21, 1861.

<https://www.battlefields.org/learn/primary-sources/cornerstone-speech>.

³ “Whose Heritage? Public Symbols of the Confederacy.” Southern Poverty Law Center, February 1, 2019.

<https://www.splcenter.org/20190201/whose-heritage-public-symbols-confederacy>.

This initiative further requests that staff develop a scope of work for conducting this effort to include an analysis of any resources needed to complete the project and to report that information to the Board of Supervisors at a subsequent Business Meeting with the goal of completing the project and reporting back to the Board of Supervisors by June 2021.

FISCAL IMPACT: The fiscal impact is unknown at this time.

DRAFT MOTIONS:

1. I move that the Board of Supervisors direct staff to prepare an informational inventory detailing the symbols and their locations, i.e., road or street names, buildings, signs, logos, organizations, markers, monuments, battlefields, and others in public spaces honoring Confederate and segregationist figures or symbols in Loudoun County, in consultation with experts in Loudoun history where deemed necessary, and report back to the Board of Supervisors in June 2021.

OR

2. I move an alternate motion.