COVER STORY

Monumental BATTLE

Why a movement to topple Confederate monuments has sparked debate, protests, and even violence

BY LAURA ANASTASIA

Protesters dressed in camouflage and gripping assault rifles gathered near a city park in Charlottesville, Virginia, in August. They had assembled for a rally of white supremacists: people who believe the white race is superior to all others. They were in Charlottesville, their leaders said, to march against the city's plan to remove a statue of Confederate General Robert E. Lee from the park.

But they weren't alone. Counter-protesters who opposed their views linked arms and marched toward them.

The two sides clashed—first with angry chants, then with water bottles, fists, and pepper spray. As chaos erupted, a car driven by an alleged Nazi sympathizer plowed into the counter protesters, killing one and injuring 19 others.

Despite the turmoil, Charlottesville still plans to remove the Lee statue, although opponents have filed a lawsuit to try to prevent that from happening. Charlottesville is hoping to follow the lead of other cities, including New Orleans, Louisiana, that recently took down Confederate monuments. In May, after years of controversy, New Orleans dismantled four massive Confederate statues, including one of Lee, who commanded Confederate troops during the Civil War (1861-65). The removals sparked angry protests and lawsuits.

New Orleans: Confederate General Robert E. Lee's statue is removed in May.

DAVID RAE MORRIS/POLARIS/NEWSCOM

The battles in Charlottesville and New Orleans are just two recent examples of how the fight over the meaning and legacy of the Civil War is still playing out more than 150 years later.

"We never addressed the legacy of the Civil War or slavery, and what it means to the country now and what it meant then," says Alvin Tillery, professor of African-American studies at Northwestern University in Illinois.

The movement to rid public property of Confederate symbols has been growing since June 2015, when 21-year-old Dylann Roof—an avowed racist who openly embraced Confederate symbols—murdered nine black churchgoers in Charleston, South Carolina.

Almost immediately, debates about Civil War monuments heated up in places such as Richmond, Virginia; St. Louis, Missouri; Austin, Texas; and Jacksonville, Florida. South Carolina later removed the Confederate battle flag from its capitol in Columbia, and Alabama took down the flag from a

Watch a video on the Confederate flag divide at UPFRONTMAGAZINE.COM

Charlottesville: White supremacists march to oppose the removal of a Robert E. Lee statue in August.

EMILY MOLLI/NURPHOTO VIA GETTY IMAGES (CHARLOTTESVILLE)

Confederate memorial on its capitol grounds in Montgomery.

'Not Just Stone and Metal'

But the push to remove Confederate symbols has spurred passions on both sides. Many of those who want them removed say they present a distorted view of the nation's past.

"These statues are not just stone and metal," says New Orleans Mayor Mitch Landrieu. The monuments, he says, celebrate an overly simplistic view of the Confederacy, while "ignoring the death, ignoring the enslavement and the terror that it actually stood for."

Some of those opposing their removal, including the white supremacists who marched in Charlottesville, are members of hate groups who believe that the white race should have power over all other races *(see "Hate Groups in America, p. 9)*. To them, the Confederacy represents a time when whites were firmly in control.

Others who support keeping the Confederate monuments have other concerns. They say the history of the South is being erased. Memorials like the one to Lee honor the bravery of Southerners who did battle in the Civil War, they say. In their view, the Confederacy fought, in part, to defend states' rights against the overreach of the federal government.

Pierre McGraw is among those descendants of Confederate soldiers who say the statues stand for the pride and heritage of the men who fought for their freedom. "It's just not fair to judge historical figures by today's morals, and

that's what's being done," says McGraw.

President Trump joined the debate after the events in Charlottesville, defending Civil War monuments in a series of tweets as part of America's "history and culture." Trump also blamed "both sides"—white supremacists and the protesters who opposed them—for the violence. His remarks were widely condemned by both Democrats and Republicans.

Views of the Civil War

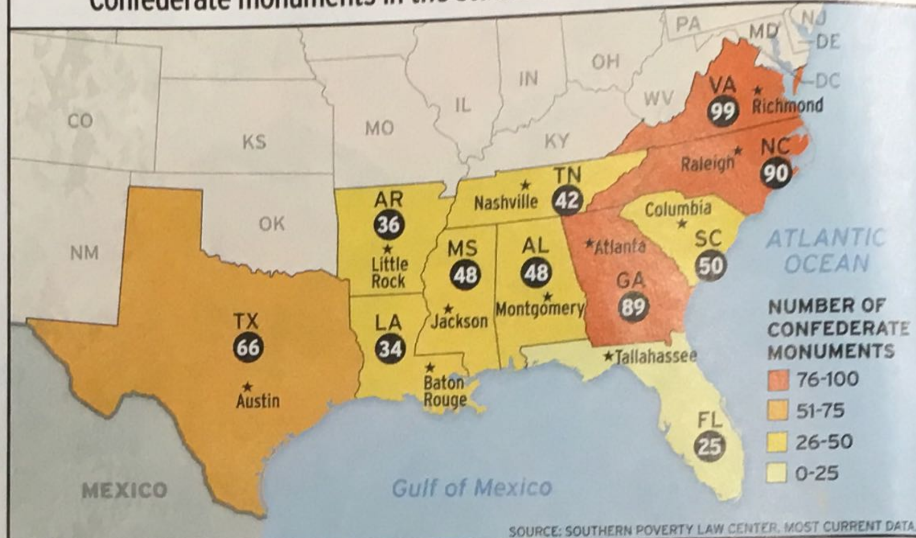
The modern battle over Confederate symbols stems partly from very different views of the Civil War and why the North and South waged it. When the war began, the Southern economy was mainly agricultural, relying on a few million slaves to harvest cotton. Most historians agree the war started because of the South's desire to continue slavery.

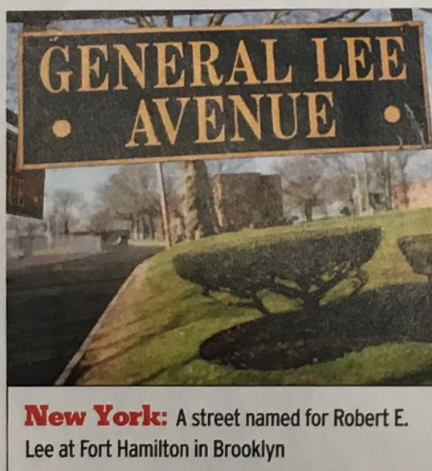
However, not everyone agrees with that interpretation of the war. Some say the South fought primarily for the right to decide its own affairs. After the North won the war, Southerners and groups in the South commissioned monuments to help promote that view of the conflict. Many of the memorials portray Confederate soldiers as selfless heroes—and don't mention slavery. For example, the inscription on a Confederate monument recently removed in St. Louis reads: "With sublime self-sacrifice, they battled to preserve the independence of the states."

Honoring Confederate bravery wasn't the monuments' only purpose, says James Grossman of the American Historical Association. They also served to rally white Southerners who resented the political and social gains African-Americans achieved after the war, including the right to vote, he explains.

In the 1870s, Southern states began passing Jim Crow laws restricting the rights of blacks and segregating them from whites. Over the next few decades, hundreds of Confederate monuments were erected as violence against African-Americans escalated.

'We haven't really dealt with the legacy of the Civil War and slavery.'





New York: A street named for Robert E. Lee at Fort Hamilton in Brooklyn

The building of Confederate statues surged again in the 1950s and 1960s, during the civil rights movement, Grossman says. Although blacks were making strides toward equality, there was still resistance to change in the South.

Today, many find the monuments offensive. Zyahna Bryant, an African-American 11th-grader in Charlottesville, feels the history of slavery shouldn't be celebrated. The city's Lee statue stirs up feelings of hurt and fear for Bryant, who petitioned the city to take down the monument.

"I am offended every time I pass it," Bryant wrote to city officials. "I am reminded over and over again of the pain of my ancestors."

But many of those who support keeping the monuments say their motives are about honor, not race. "When you start removing the history of the city," says Robert Bonner, a Civil War re-enactor from New Orleans, "you start losing where you came from and where you've been."

Confederate Tributes

Several states, including Alabama, Georgia, and Mississippi, have passed laws banning the removal of any monument on public property commemorating a historic figure or event. Lawmakers in Louisiana, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Texas are considering similar legislation.

But not all officials agree.

Charlottesville's vice mayor, Wes Bellamy, says of the Lee statue: "We believe that it's not a statue or memorial that should be in the city of Charlottesville. Certainly not in a public place, where people who are paying taxes are deeply offended by these statues and memorials."

At least 60 Confederate monuments in the U.S. have been removed or renamed in the past two years, according to the Southern Poverty Law Center. Nearly 700 remain, spread across 31 states, from California to Delaware.

Many other Confederate tributes exist across the U.S., including schools, streets, and mountains honoring figures like Lee, General Stonewall Jackson, and Confederate President Jefferson Davis. In August, the U.S. Army declined a request from a black congresswoman to rename

JIM MCMAHON (MAP); CHRIS HONDROS/GETTY IMAGES (NEW YORK)

Hate Groups in America

Organizations that spread hate have grown in the past two decades

They're present in every state in America, and they promote racism and hatred. More than 900 hate groups operate in the U.S. today, according to the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), double the number in 1999.

A hate group, according to the FBI, is one that promotes "animosity, hostility, and malice against persons belonging to a [different] race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, or ethnicity/national origin." These groups include the Ku Klux Klan and neo-Nazi and white supremacist organizations that promote hatred of blacks, Jews, immigrants, and others.

Hate groups vary widely in level of organization and size; some are no more than a loose affiliation of a few people, while others have hundreds of committed members.

Why are these groups allowed to march and promote their racist views? The answer lies in the Constitution—more specifically, in the First Amendment right to free speech, which protects Americans' right to express themselves, even if most people find what they're saying offensive.

"The First Amendment is a critical part of our democracy, and it protects vile, hateful, and ignorant speech," the American Civil Liberties Union tweeted in response to the Charlottesville march. The ACLU defends Americans' constitutional rights, even for those who belong to hate groups.

The First Amendment protects even vile and hateful speech.

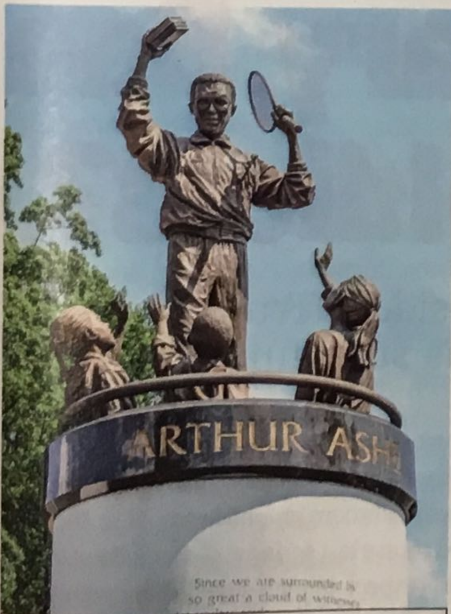
Despite being on the fringes of society, hate groups have used the internet to recruit new members and spread their views, and they've vowed to step up the fight against the removal of Confederate monuments.

President Trump's failure to immediately denounce hate groups after the Charlottesville violence caused an uproar (*see main story*), although he later said that "racism is evil" and called white supremacists "criminals and thugs."

So what can young people do to combat hate?

"Being informed," says Heidi Beirich of the SPLC. "Knowing what you're standing up to—and what you're standing up for—that's most important for young people today." *—Carl Stoffers*

Georgia: Ku Klux Klan members at a cross burning near Cedar Town, 2016. The K.K.K. formed after the Civil War to terrorize newly freed slaves.



Richmond's Solution: A statue of black tennis star Arthur Ashe in Richmond, Virginia, near several Confederate monuments

CHUCK MYERS/ZUMA WIRE/NEWSCOM (ARTHUR ASHE STATUE); JOHN BAZEMORE/AP IMAGES (GEORGIA)

streets honoring Lee and Jackson at Fort Hamilton in Brooklyn, New York. An Army official called any effort to change the names "controversial and divisive."

Telling 'the Whole Story'

Hoping to avoid such battles, officials in some places have opted for other measures. One approach has been to add more information to Confederate monuments, with background about the people depicted and their legacies.

For example, officials at the University of Mississippi kept a controversial Confederate statue on campus but added a description. The plaque reads, in part: "Although the monument was created to honor the sacrifice of local Confederate soldiers, it must also remind us that the defeat of the Confederacy actually meant freedom for millions of people."

Even this approach, known as "contextualization"—putting the monuments in historical context rather than replacing them—isn't without challenges. It took two years for university officials to agree on the final wording. And small signs may not be enough to counterbalance every monument, critics say.

Other cities have created new statues honoring African-Americans rather than eliminating Confederate ones. In Richmond, a statue of black tennis star Arthur Ashe overlooks the city's famed Monument Avenue, along with Confederate generals Lee and Jackson.

"I want Richmond to tell the whole story of its people," Mayor Levar Stoney recently told *Time*. "Not just a one-sided story." •

Additional reporting by Carl Stoffers.