

Media Source Set

Instructions: Read the following sources and follow the directions on the handout “Analyzing Your Sources.” Each source is an excerpt taken from a news source.

Source 1: Rich Lowry, “Mothball the Confederate Monuments,” *National Review*, August 15, 2017.

The *National Review* is a U.S.-based magazine that most people agree presents a conservative perspective on issues. Rich Lowry is the editor of the magazine.

You can access the article at <http://www.nationalreview.com/article/450470/charlottesville-virginia-robert-e-lee-statue-remove-right-decision-confederate-monuments-museums>.

“Robert E. Lee wasn’t a Nazi, and surely would have had no sympathy for the white-supremacist goons who made his statue a rallying point in Charlottesville, Va., last weekend. That doesn’t change the fact that his statue is now associated with a campaign of racist violence against the picturesque town where Thomas Jefferson founded the University of Virginia. The statue of Lee was already slated for removal by the city, but the Battle of Charlottesville should be an inflection point in the broader debate over Confederate statuary.

“The monuments should go. Some of them simply should be trashed; others transmitted to museums, battlefields, and cemeteries. The heroism and losses of Confederate soldiers should be commemorated, but not in everyday public spaces where the monuments are flashpoints in poisonous racial contention, with white nationalists often mustering in their defense.

“Some discrimination is in order. There’s no reason to honor Jefferson Davis, the blessedly incompetent president of the Confederacy....

“Robert E. Lee, on the other hand, is a more complicated case. He was no great friend of slavery....

“Yet, faced with a momentous choice at the start of the war, he decided he was a Virginia patriot rather than an American nationalist.... He betrayed the U.S. government and fought on the side devoted to preserving chattel slavery....

“For supporters of the Confederate monuments, removing them from parks and avenues will be a blow against their heritage and historical memory. But the statues have often been part of an effort to whitewash the Confederacy. And it’s one thing for a statue to be merely a resting place for pigeons; it’s another for it to be a fighting cause for neo-Nazis.”

Source 2: Editorial Board, “On Confederate monuments, be deliberate,” *USA Today*, August 17, 2017.

USA Today is a U.S.-based daily newspaper. Most people agree that the newspaper provides a centrist perspective on issues.

This source is available at <<https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2017/08/17/deliberate-removing-confederate-monuments-editorials-debates/577416001/>>.

“Two summers ago, it took the massacre of nine African-American churchgoers in Charleston, S.C., for politicians to finally banish the Confederate battle flag from that state’s Capitol grounds, where it had waved defiantly for more than five decades. The cold-blooded murders also ignited calls across the country for monuments and other symbols of the Civil War to be removed from public spaces.

“Now, another tragedy—the violent death of a counterprotester Saturday in Charlottesville, Va.—has reawakened the raw emotion of the summer of 2015 and reopened the question....

“The question of what will happen to these monuments, most of them in the South, has suddenly taken on more urgency, as mayors and governors fear that their city or state will become the next protest battleground. But this rush to judgment should be slowed. Decisions ought to be made deliberately, state by state, community by community, and monument by monument. People on both sides will need to search their souls, to balance how much the symbol means to them vs. how hurtful it is to others.

“Guidance for these deliberations should not come from those who seek to bend this debate to their own evil purposes, or to score cheap political points. Guidance should come from people of goodwill who take into consideration why the monument was erected and who was being honored....

“The monuments could find appropriate homes in museums, where the Civil War story can be told but without reverence for leaders who fought to preserve slavery. Or, in some cases, the best answer might be to add more context to the existing display....”

Source 3: Michael Signer, “I’m a progressive mayor. Here’s why I voted no on removing my city’s Confederate statue,” *The Washington Post*, May 24, 2017.

Michael Signer is the Democratic mayor of Charlottesville. Note that he wrote this opinion piece in the *Washington Post* before the violence in Charlottesville in August 2017.

View the full article at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2017/05/24/im-a-progressive-mayor-heres-why-i-voted-no-on-removing-my-citys-confederate-stature/?utm_term=.503a12e3c395>.

“I believe that as a nation, in 2017, we still haven’t fully confronted our history of racism. As a progressive, I believe addressing structural racism is a mission incumbent upon all of us....

“Yet as the mayor and as a member of our council, I voted with the minority against a 3-2 decision to move the statue. We shouldn’t honor the dishonorable Confederate cause, but we shouldn’t try to erase it, either....

“I reject the false dichotomy that you must be either for or against the statue. I’ve advocated for a third path, one that has earned unanimous support from our council: Reimagining our parks by building new monuments as a powerful counter-narrative to their Jim Crow-era celebration of the Confederacy — neither forgetting the past nor accepting its grasp on our present and future....

“I arrived at my conclusion, though, after asking the council to create a nine-member commission to study the issue....

“One striking finding in the commission’s official report: ‘Numerous Charlottesville African American residents who have lived through decades of suppression of their history oppose removal on the grounds that it would be yet another example of hiding their experience. For them, transforming the statues in place forces remembrance of the dominance of slavery and Jim Crow white supremacy.’ This echoed what I heard in town hall meetings at black churches and private conversations with dozens of members of my community. One noted leader of an African American mentorship organization, for instance, told me he believes the statues should remain as a ‘teachable moment’ about our history....

“As philosopher George Santayana said, ‘Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.’ The history of racial oppression in America is horrific, but it is our history. An effort to excise from our public spaces all who were implicated in the oppression of African Americans would be a slippery slope. In Charlottesville, after all, our City Hall is adorned with a relief of Founding Fathers Thomas Jefferson, James Madison and James Monroe — all great Virginians, but all slave owners. Instead of removing such memorials, I believe that teaching future generations about the immorality of structural racism is the best way to honestly account for their failings.

“Whatever the final disposition of the Lee monument, Charlottesville will soon move forward to rename both our town’s Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson parks; add, in both parks, new landmark signage with updated historical accounts; and invest \$1 million in new monuments that acknowledge our awful history of slavery, segregation and racism while elevating our true heroes and reflecting our values today.

“In Lee Park, I envision a magnificent installation celebrating civil rights victories, and in Jackson Park, I imagine a powerful lamentation of slavery including Charlottesville’s slave auction block, currently remembered only through a flat plaque embedded in a nearby sidewalk....

“I firmly believe that our approach will allow us to create a living history that at once rebukes and transcends the past, mirroring democracy itself — the constant churn of speech and ideas that made our country the beacon of the free world.”

Source 4: Janelle Bouie, “White Americans Have to Make a Choice,” *Slate*, August 17, 2017.

Slate is a U.S.-based online magazine that most people agree offers a liberal perspective. Janelle Bouie is the chief political correspondent for the magazine.

You can view the original press release at http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/politics/2017/08/white_americans_can_end_the_fight_over_confederate_monuments.html.

“Who is America for? ... Charlottesville has made clear that the final say belongs to white Americans. For as much as blacks and other people of color can fight for the former, it’s up to white people to make a choice—will they share the country and its story, or will they reject equality for hierarchy and caste?”

“The fight over Confederate memorials is a proxy for this question. Their origin is in the myth-making of the Jim Crow South as symbols of white supremacy over a ‘redeemed’ South and building blocks in a narrative of national innocence meant to unify a divided white polity. In the myth, a figure like Robert E. Lee is transformed from the disgraced general of a brutal effort to expand an empire of bondage to the glorious figure represented in monuments like the one in Charlottesville, a valiant leader in a fight for independence. A man worthy of honor.

“That myth-making was the foundation for a new narrative of the United States, one tailored to a white public that could now celebrate the past without guilt or shame, and honor men like Lee without confronting what they actually fought for. In this story, slavery is marginal, black people are incidental, the Confederacy is tragic, and American history is an unbroken line of progress populated by heroes, saints, and demigods. Those massive equestrian statues of Robert E. Lee, Thomas ‘Stonewall’ Jackson, and other Confederate leaders were built to immortalize this story and the racial domination it justified....

“...This consensus illustrates Lee’s central place in public memory. It’s a reminder, too, that the fight to redefine that memory will be an uphill battle, since the call to remove Confederate monuments is a challenge to the myth of innocence that still shapes white Americans and their beliefs about this country. Indeed, if Confederate statues represent the effort to erase history, then this push to remove them is a request to recover and reckon with it. It’s a demand that those white Americans abandon the comforting fictions of unity and progress and confront the past and present in all of its ugliness. And it’s a call for white Americans to broaden their moral imaginations and consider the impact these monuments make on their fellow citizens, to understand what it means to reify the symbols of a slaveholder’s rebellion. To answer any of this is to answer that question of the era: Who is America for?...

“...A few days before the chaos in Charlottesville, the editorial board of the *Daily Progress*—the city’s daily newspaper—gave its view of the turmoil around the statue of Robert E. Lee. In an unsigned piece, it blamed the upheaval on local leaders who questioned the memorial and called for its removal....

“...But this is wrong. It presumes that these monuments were never controversial and that the narratives they represent were never contested. They were. They always have been. And the reason we have this fight is because for more than a century, too many white Americans were content with narratives built on exclusion and erasure. The question now is whether they’re still content, whether they still believe this is a white country, or whether they’re ready to share this country, and its story, with others.”

Source 5: Room for Debate, “Does the Confederate Flag Breed Racism?” The *New York Times*, June 19, 2015.

The following is a short excerpt taken from a collection of pieces that presents a range of other arguments about the Confederate flag. The *New York Times* is a U.S.-based media outlet that most agree presents a liberal or centrist perspective on issues. Ben Jones, the author of the comments below, is the chief of heritage operations for the Sons of Confederate Veterans.

View the full article at <<https://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2015/06/19/does-the-confederate-flag-breed-racism>>.

“Does displaying the flag show historic appreciation, or is it a symbol of a reviled era, that breeds racism and should not be officially approved?...”

“It is obvious that some racists have appropriated and desecrated the Confederate battle flag for their pathetic causes, but those hateful folks also commonly display the Christian cross and the American flag. Do those symbols also inspire racism?”

“Perceptions of the flag depend upon context. At a national cemetery or national battlefield it is seen in the historical context of the American Civil War. At popular re-enactments of that war’s events, or in films like ‘Gettysburg’ or ‘Gone With the Wind’, it is seen in a theatrical context. In the television series ‘The Dukes of Hazzard’ the flag on top of Duke boys car has been seen as a symbol of a non-racist Southern spirit by millions of viewers internationally.

“To those 70 million of us whose ancestors fought for the South, it is a symbol of family members who fought for what they thought was right in their time, and whose valor became legendary in military history. This is not nostalgia. It is our legacy. The current attacks on that legacy, 150 years after the event, are to us an insult that mends no fences nor builds any bridges.”

Source 6: Transcript of New Orleans Mayor Mitch Landrieu's Address on Confederate Monuments, May 19, 2017.

Mitch Landrieu is the Democratic mayor of New Orleans.

Read the original article at <https://www.nola.gov/getattachment/Mayor/Press-Conferences/5-19-17-Speech-Truth_Removing-Confederate-Monuments-in-New-Orleans_Mayor-Mitch-Landrieu.pdf/>.

“But there are also other truths about our city that we must confront. New Orleans was America’s largest slave market: a port where hundreds of thousands of souls were brought, sold and shipped up the Mississippi River to lives of forced labor, of misery, of rape, of torture.

“America was the place where nearly 4,000 of our fellow citizens were lynched, 540 alone in Louisiana; where the courts enshrined ‘separate but equal’; where Freedom Riders coming to New Orleans were beaten to a bloody pulp.

“So when people say to me that the monuments in question are history, well what I just described is real history as well, and it is the searing truth.

“And it immediately begs the questions: why there are no slave ship monuments, no prominent markers on public land to remember the lynchings or the slave blocks; nothing to remember this long chapter of our lives; the pain, the sacrifice, the shame ... all of it happening on the soil of New Orleans.

“So for those self-appointed defenders of history and the monuments, they are eerily silent on what amounts to this historical malfeasance, a lie by omission.

“There is a difference between remembrance of history and reverence of it. For America and New Orleans, it has been a long, winding road, marked by great tragedy and great triumph. But we cannot be afraid of our truth.

“As President George W. Bush said at the dedication ceremony for the National Museum of African American History & Culture, ‘A great nation does not hide its history. It faces its flaws and corrects them.’

“So today I want to speak about why we chose to remove these four monuments to the Lost Cause of the Confederacy, but also how and why this process can move us towards healing and understanding of each other.

“So, let’s start with the facts.

“The historic record is clear: the Robert E. Lee, Jefferson Davis, and P.G.T. Beauregard statues were not erected just to honor these men, but as part of the movement which became known as The Cult of the Lost Cause. This ‘cult’ had one goal—through monuments and through other means—to rewrite history to hide the truth, which is that the Confederacy was on the wrong side of humanity....

“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....

“Last year, President Barack Obama echoed these sentiments about the need to contextualize and remember all of our history. He recalled a piece of stone, a slave auction block engraved with a marker commemorating a single moment in 1830 when Andrew Jackson and Henry Clay stood and spoke from it.

“President Obama said, ‘Consider what this artifact tells us about history...on a stone where day after day for years, men and women...bound and bought and sold and bid like cattle on a stone worn down by the tragedy of over a thousand bare feet. For a long time the only thing we considered

important, the singular thing we once chose to commemorate as history with a plaque were the unmemorable speeches of two powerful men.’

“A piece of stone—one stone. Both stories were history. One story told. One story forgotten or maybe even purposefully ignored....

“We should stop for a moment and ask ourselves...if presented with the opportunity to build monuments that told our story or to curate these particular spaces...would these monuments be what we want the world to see? Is this really our story?

“We have not erased history; we are becoming part of the city’s history by righting the wrong image these monuments represent and crafting a better, more complete future for all our children and for future generations.”