



May 25, 2017

OPEN LETTER REGARDING CONFEDERATE MONUMENT
AT CADDO PARISH COURTHOUSE

By email to the Caddo Parish Commissioners

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Dear Commissioners:

I write to encourage you to remove the Confederate monument that stands in front of the Caddo Parish Courthouse. Regardless of how long it has been at that location, a monument to the Confederacy has no place at a courthouse in the 21st Century.

There is no question that the monument stands as a memorial to the “Lost Cause of the Confederacy.” Speaking at the monument’s dedication in 1906, Edwin H. Randolph, U.S. Attorney for the Western District of Louisiana, said:

All over the Southland the United Daughters of the Confederacy have erected monuments to perpetuate the memory of brave and devoted sons of the South who bled and died for the principles embodied in the cause for which the Stars and Bars were so heroically created and defended.

For we believe that all the great reforms among the nations, and all the mighty strides of the people towards constitutional government and personal liberty have had their genesis and their clearest expressions in the principles for which the Confederate soldier fought and died.¹

Those who think that the monument no longer commemorates slavery or its ongoing legacy of white supremacy should review the current website of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, Shreveport Chapter #237, which claims ownership of the monument. Prominently displayed below the list of 2016-2018 officers is a document titled “Why I am a Daughter of the Confederacy.”² That document, also featured on the website of the United Daughters of the Confederacy,³ contains the following statement:

I am a member of The United Daughters of the Confederacy because I feel it would greatly please my ancestor to know that I am a member. It would please him to know that I appreciate what he did and delight his soldier love to know *that I do not consider the cause which he held so dear to be lost or forgotten*. Rather, I am extremely proud of the fact that he was a part of it and was numbered among some of the greatest and bravest men which any such cause ever produced. (emphasis supplied.)

¹ <https://www.nps.gov/nr/feature/places/pdfs/13001124.pdf> (accessed May 24, 2017)

² <http://udcshreveport.weebly.com/chapter-info.html> (accessed May 24, 2017)

³ <http://www.hqudc.org/why-am-i-a-daughter-of-the-confederacy/> (accessed May 24, 2017)

In other words, the organization claiming ownership of Caddo Parish's Confederate Monument proclaims itself proud of the cause of preserving the institution of slavery, and does not consider it either "lost" or "forgotten."

There is no question that a sizeable proportion of the residents of Caddo Parish was neither consulted nor considered when the monument was installed. At no time did that monument reflect the entire population of Caddo, many of whom had personally been enslaved, or were the sons and daughters of those who had been enslaved by the very people who installed a monument to their suffering. Descendants of enslaved people now likewise face this shameful reminder of a cause that denied their very humanity.

Contrary to popular cliché, removing a monument designed to commemorate those who fought to preserve slavery does not risk forgetting or repeating that ugly part of our history. The parish's website, which proudly states "During the Civil War, Shreveport would serve as the capitol of Louisiana when Baton Rouge fell to Union forces,"⁴ obliquely acknowledges that slavery existed. It could be amended to address the history and legacy of slavery that led to the presence of Union forces in Baton Rouge. Those who fear repeating a shameful past should urge Caddo officials to more directly address the truth.

The proper question is not whether we risk repeating history, but rather how we can learn—as a community, a state, and a society—to face that history in its totality. Slavery spawned unfathomable suffering. Forcing those whose families were victims to live alongside a monument to those who induced their suffering is not the road to reconciliation.

No one can argue in good conscience that slavery is a part of our history to be proud of. In today's world, slavery, often referred to as "human trafficking," is both criminal and rightly abhorred. Would we install a monument to a system of human trafficking, regardless of how hard a trafficker might fight to defend it? And if not, why would we maintain a monument that glorifies those who once engaged in the same activity – buying, selling, and forcing other human beings to work for them under horrific conditions?

It is self-evident that a courthouse must stand for impartiality and equal justice. Everyone must feel equal walking through courthouse doors. Many have spoken of the message of inequality they perceive at the Caddo Parish Courthouse because of the presence of the Confederate monument. That alone should be reason enough to remove it. If those whom the court serves don't believe they are seen as equal inside its walls, the court must change its message. And for all those who have testified to their personal sense of shame, humiliation, and repression, I am not aware of anyone who has said that their access to the court is enhanced by the presence of that monument. In other words, many are diminished by it, but no one has said they benefit from it. What public purpose is served by retaining something that hurts many and helps none?

The Caddo Parish Police Jury once contributed public funds to the installation of a monument reflecting the enslavement of many of its people. Today, its successor, the Caddo Parish Commission, can right that wrong. On behalf of the members and supporters of the ACLU in Caddo Parish, I urge you to do just that.

Sincerely,



Marjorie R. Esman
Executive Director

⁴ <http://www.caddo.org/index.aspx?NID=98> (accessed May 24, 2017)