

SHOULD CONFEDERATE MONUMENTS BE REMOVED FROM PUBLIC SPACES?

THIS ACTIVITY SHOULD TAKE ABOUT 90 MINUTES. IF STUDENTS ARE ABLE TO REVIEW MEDIA FOR HOMEWORK, IN-CLASS TIME SHOULD BE 45 TO 60 MINUTES.

INVESTIGATE

Read, watch, and listen to the three media resources on the Thinkalong module. Students can use the Investigate graphic organizer to summarize each piece of media and record new information. Below are summaries of the three pieces of media curated in the Thinkalong module.

KEEP OR TAKE DOWN?

PBS Newshour + Student Reporting Labs | July 30, 2019 | Video
6:28 minutes

Edward Smith, a PBS Student Reporting Labs Fellow, reports from Louisville, Kentucky on a local debate surrounding a memorial to Confederate soldier John B. Castleman.

- Erected in Pleasure Ridge Park in 1913, the statue represents John B. Castleman, a Confederate General, riding a horse and dressed in an equestrian outfit.
- During the Civil War, Castleman was a Confederate cavalryman and he participated in Morgan's Raid, a Confederate incursion into northern (Union) states that attempted to free Confederate prisoners near Chicago and burn Union naval ships in the Port of St. Louis.
- After the Civil War, Castleman returned to Louisville, where he was a member of the local school board and the Louisville Parks Commission.
- Some interpret the monument as a celebration of a man who greatly benefited the local community, while others see it as a symbol of racism and white supremacy, given Castleman's allegiance to the Confederate cause.
- A committee, appointed by the Mayor of Louisville and charged with determining whether the statue should remain, determined that it should be removed, stating that, "monuments to Confederate soldiers were frequently erected as a way to perpetuate systemic racism and bigotry...We must ensure that in our lived experience monuments do not serve such purposes."
- In 2019 the plan to remove the monument was rejected by the Cherokee Triangle Architectural Review Committee, but that verdict was then overturned by an appeal filed with the Louisville Landmark's Commission. The statue was removed on June 8, 2020.

IN RICHMOND, VA., PROTESTERS TRANSFORM A CONFEDERATE STATUE

NPR | June 12, 2020 | Article

A statue of Confederate General Robert E. Lee in Richmond, Virginia is slated to be removed, but until then, protesters have transformed it into public art space.

- Artists have covered the monument and its pedestal with anti-racist slogans, dancers have performed at its base, and Black Lives Matter protesters have gathered and posed for pictures at the site.
- Hip hop artist Gregory Carden, known as Radio B, who used the monument as a backdrop for his most recent album cover, explains that the sculpture's alteration by protesters upends its status as a symbol of white supremacy.

Using public media — video, audio and digital reports — about newsworthy topics, these classroom-based exercises help students to think critically about media messages, develop informed opinions, and practice how to take a stand.

- Another activist, Matthew Barbour, explains that the recent transformations to the sculpture, made by a diverse group of people, are a potent symbol of the possibility of the Black Lives Matter movement.
- The monument was erected over 130 years ago. Virginia Governor Ralph Northam called for it to be removed after the death of George Floyd on May 25, 2020 at the hands of police in Minneapolis, Minnesota.
- However, several lawsuits have been filed in an attempt to halt the removal of the monument.

CONFEDERATE MONUMENTS ARE COMING DOWN, ARE STREETS AND HIGHWAYS NEXT?

NPR | June 6, 2020 | Article

One scholar suggests that recent efforts to remove Confederate monuments should, “slow down.”

- As Confederate monuments across the country have been taken down, other physical and visual symbols of racism and white supremacy, such as murals or building names, are also being removed or changed.
- In Louisiana, in an effort to remove public symbols of racism, Nicholls State University has decided to rename two buildings named after Confederate soldiers, and in New Orleans, the city is renaming Jefferson Davis Parkway in honor of civil rights leader Norman C. Francis.
- The actions in Louisiana were taken in response to the death of George Floyd, a Black man who died in police custody in Minneapolis, Minnesota on May 25, 2020, and the subsequent Black Lives Matter protests held across the United States.
- Recent efforts to remove Confederate monuments have reenergized similar calls that were made after a violent 2017 white supremacist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia.
- However, art historian, Harriet Senie cautions that city leaders should “slow down,” arguing that, “We can take down all the Confederate monuments in this country, but that will not end racism if we can’t learn from them.”

KEY WORDS

Look out for these important keywords in the news stories. Discuss the definitions with your classroom and see how they affect the understanding of the story.

- Racism
- Confederate states
- Union states
- Black Lives Matter
- States’ rights

CONTEMPLATE

Students will use media literacy questions to critically engage with news by thinking about its purpose, searching for bias and discussing missing perspectives. They will answer the 5 Key Questions of Media Literacy created by the Center for Media Literacy, which are:

1. Who created this message?
2. What creative techniques are used to attract my attention?
3. How might different people understand this message differently than me?
4. What values, lifestyles and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, this message?
5. Why is this message being sent?
6. When was this media created, and is it still relevant?

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A graphic organizer is included in this guide and the Thinkalong website to help students answer these five questions about each piece of media.

DEBATE

Students will engage their peers in an evidence-based debate using the media they just analyzed. Use the debate tool on the module webpage to help form an evidence-based response to the debate question.

In addition to rich in-class discussions, teachers can also connect with other classrooms through the Thinkalong website.

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