

### Session Title

Confederate Monuments: What To Do?

### Session Link [here](#)

### Session Participants

*Chair:* Edward L. Ayers, Tucker-Boatwright Professor of the Humanities, President Emeritus University of Richmond

*Panelists:* John Kuo Wei Tchen, Professor, New York University  
Christy Coleman, CEO, American Civil War Museum  
Turkiya Lowe, Chief Historian, National Park Service

### Overview of the Session

This session addresses the ongoing debate that is taking place across the country about the place of Confederate iconography, including battle flags and monuments, in public spaces. The 90-minute session is organized as a town hall discussion rather than a traditional format featuring three separate presentations followed by audience questions. What follows is a break down of the session into specific sections that will be of interest to both teachers and students studying this issue followed by suggestions on how to introduce this subject in the classroom.

### NCHE Habits of Mind

- Grasp the significance of the past in shaping the present
- Appreciate the diversity of cultures and variety of historical contexts, as well as to distinguish elements of our shared humanity
- Realize that all individuals are decision makers, but that personal and public choices are often restricted by time, place and circumstance
- Engage in patient reflection and constant reexamination of the past and present.

### Key Points in Session

8:30-11:30: Ed Ayers offers a concise overview of recent events that have fueled calls to remove Confederate monuments in public spaces.

12:15 - 23:00: Discussion of why some people are so emotionally attached to Confederate monuments and memory. Panelists address the importance of place in thinking about monuments as well as other controversies, including those surrounding the commemoration of Christopher Columbus.

27:45 - 43:00: Question/Comment from the audience suggests that monuments and memorials have educational value and therefore should be left alone. The question of whether there is the risk of a slippery slope re: their removal is also addressed.

In response, panelists point out that most Confederate monuments were erected and dedicated during the Jim Crow-era and are not straightforward representations of

the Civil War-era. Monuments are not rooted in historical fact. Panelists also analyze the role of political power in shaping the monument/memorial landscape in places like Richmond, Virginia.

43:00 - 43:35: Comment from the audience suggests that panelists look beyond the question of monument removal to the issue of what areas of history have been erased from public memory. Examples: Massacre of black soldiers during the Civil War at Fort Pillow, Tennessee, Thaddeus Stevens House in Pennsylvania and the New York City Draft Riots in 1863.

50:30: Panelists raise examples of how artists have expanded and deepened the ways in which controversial history that has long been forgotten can be uncovered and discussed. The role of wayside markers or historical signs is also analyzed.

57:20: Question/Comment from audience on whether monuments and memorials are needed as "role models."

1:03:00: Comment from audience that the question of whether monuments should be removed does not address the underlining problem of systemic racism in America.

1:11:00 - 1:14:55: Panelist responds by noting the raising of large Confederate battle flags along Interstate 95 near Washington, D.C. She describes these flags as "symbols of terrorism" and goes on to discuss what these symbols meant to her growing up in the South.

### **Potential Resources for Classroom Use**

1. Introduction to historical memory and the Confederate monument controversy in Charlottesville, Virginia from the [Choices Program](#) at Brown University
2. After Charlottesville: Contested History and Fight Against Bigotry from [Facing History](#)
3. History Teacher Chris Lese on "[Teaching Civil War Memory](#)"
4. History Teacher James Percoco on "[Monuments as Thought Objects](#)"
5. At Kevin M. Levin's [Confederate Monuments Syllabus](#) site you will find a wide range of op-eds on the Confederate monument debate, documentaries, blog posts, as well as primary sources, interviews with historians, and suggestions for further reading.

**Inquiry/Discussion Questions**

1. Do symbols of the Confederacy, including monuments, represent America in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?
2. In what way do Confederate monuments dedicated between roughly 1880 and 1930 both reflect and reinforce Jim Crow culture?
3. If you had the opportunity to design a Civil War monument or memorial for a public space in your community, what would it look like?