

# Inquiring Minds Topic- November 6, 2020

Bob Barger, Moderator

## PROS AND CONS OF REMOVING MONUMENTS/SYMBOLS, ETC

### FACTOIDS

**Abraham Charles Myers** was an American army officer and a graduate of West Point Class of 1833. During the American Civil War, he was appointed Quartermaster General of the Confederate States Army with the rank of colonel. The city of Fort Myers, Florida is named for him.

**Lee County** is named after Robert E. Lee, a Confederate general. The City of Fort Myers' Robert E. Lee bust is gone for now.

---

### QUESTIONS

1. What would you do with Lee county and Fort Myers names?
2. How do you differentiate between learning our history and celebrating our history? Is this distinction helpful?
3. What would you do with the 10 major Army installations named after Confederate Civil War leaders? Leave the names or change them?
4. Statues of Christopher Columbus have been removed in many cities. Do you agree with this action? Where would you put the statues if they are removed from a public place?
5. Thomas Jefferson, the writer of the Declaration of Independence and our third president, owned slaves. What should we do with his statues, names on things, etc?

---

Remembering is powerful. Remembering, forces us to become wiser.

We think of the words *Never Forget* and we instantly remember 9-11.

Across the United States, there are an estimated **1,741 public symbols of the Confederacy**, according to the Southern Poverty Law Center. These symbols include schools, parks, bridges, roads, statues and more. Most confederate monuments were build between 1890-1950 which matches up exactly with the era of Jim Crow segregation.

Although many Americans recognize the immorality of historic colonialists, slave owners and anti-abolitionists, some say these symbols should be preserved as a reminder of the country's past. From 2017-2019, at least 44 monuments have been removed across the country. During 2020, this number has significantly increased.

As of the last count, there were over 700 statues and monuments are in the US. **Twenty- five of these are in Florida.** Some recent examples of monuments and memorials being removed include:

- The U.S. Marine Corps ordered the removal of all public displays of the Confederate flag—including from things like mugs, bumper stickers, and posters—from Marine installations. The U.S. Navy is adopting a similar policy, and the U.S. Army is reportedly expected to soon make a decision about such displays.
  
- Bipartisan proposals were introduced in Congress that would form a commission to make recommendations for renaming bases and Defense Department property that honors Confederate leaders. President Donald Trump signed an executive order on Friday 6/26/20 to protect federal monuments after a rash of recent incidents involving the vandalism of statues memorializing the Confederacy and some of the nation's Founding Fathers.
  - Hofstra University in NY on June 23, 2020, moved the statue of Thomas Jefferson from the entrance to it's campus to a museum close by. Jefferson enslaved more than 600 people in his lifetime and fathered four children with Sally Hemings, a slave.
  - There are 10 major Army installations named after Confederate Civil War figures such as Forts Rucker, Benning, Gordon, Beauregard, Polk, Bragg, Hill, Lee and Pickett that the military wants to rename
  - House Speaker Nancy Pelosi called for the removal of nearly a dozen statues in the U.S. Capitol depicting Confederate leaders and has also called for the removal of portraits of four House speakers who served in the Confederacy on display at the Capitol
  - NASCAR announced that, effective immediately, displays of the Confederate flag would be prohibited from all events and properties.
  - The Mississippi Governor Tate Reeves signed a bill into law on Tuesday, June 30, 2020 that replaces the current state flag bearing the Confederate battle flag emblem, a

gesture triggered by support across the United States to dismantle symbols of slavery and racism

- After weeks of protests, the mayor of Chicago has decided to temporarily remove two statues of Christopher Columbus until further notice. Columbus has been revered for centuries for discovering North America, despite his and his crew's mistreating and murdering of Native Americans.

The polling by NBC News/*Wall Street Journal* in 2020 showed that 51 percent of respondents believe Confederate statues should be taken down, while 47 percent disagree. That represents a significant shift from 2018, when a clear majority (63 percent) of Americans said that the monuments should remain, while just 35 percent said they should be removed. The most popular proposal—backed by 41 percent of respondents—is to place the statues in museums but remove them from public spaces. About a third (31 percent) said that the statues should remain in place with plaques added to provide greater historical context. Only 16 percent believed the monuments should remain exactly as they are without any changes.

Why It Matters: Washington, D.C., is a city of remembrance. Within its 68 square miles, America's capital hosts more than 160 monuments and memorials. Many of them, such as the Washington Monument and Lincoln Memorial, honor the country's leaders. Whether dedicated to the famous or the obscure, each memorial sends the same message: Don't forget—remember this person or this cause. Rather than leave the events and people to the fragile pages of history books, their remembrance is entrusted to cloth, granite, marble, and steel. But what if the cause represented is not worthy of commemoration? How do we know when public memorials cause should be torn down?

**The following questions might be asked when deciding if a public memorial is good for a community or a nation.**

***What is our intention in desiring to keep/remove a memorial?*** Maybe the history of why the memorial was originally put up would be helpful

***What reality is being memorialized?*** A prime example is the historical truth about the Confederate flag. It's shocking how many Americans are willing to defend the flag and yet don't know basic facts about the symbol, such as that it was never the official flag of the Confederate States of America and that it only became popular in the mid-20th century when it was adopted as a symbol by several segregationist and white supremacists groups. It is also baffling how some people can claim the Civil War was about "state's rights" despite the fact that the Confederacy made it clear the primary right the states wanted was to protect the institution of slavery. We should be honest about history and strive to understand the reality we're memorializing.

***Is this reality worthy of public admiration and emulation?*** — For certain memorials, particularly those celebrating a cause, this question is easy enough to answer. The Confederate flag was a symbol adopted by white supremacists because it celebrated the "heritage" of those who betrayed their country and fought to defend the enslavement of black Americans. That is probably not a cause worthy of admiration or emulation. **When the memorial is of a person, though, the issue becomes more complex, which is why we need to consider the next question.**

***Is the person who is symbolically embodying this reality so compromised with evil that regardless of the reality being memorialized, the person is too tarnished even to be used to memorialize something worthy?*** — In answering this question, we should consider both the person's character and the reason they are being memorialized. Consider, for example, two military leaders, George Washington and Robert E. Lee. Both men are frequently remembered for being of noble character. And yet both men owned enslaved people. Does that make them equally tarnished?

***What criteria should we use as a limiting factor?*** — Unless we become iconoclasts and support the removal of all memorials, we will need to define a limiting factor in determining what should be removed. From Jonathan Edwards to Margaret Sanger, American history is filled with men and women who endorsed the white supremacy of their day. How do we decide what memorials to them must be discarded?

As the nation observes the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of slavery, a Chicago documentary filmmaker tweeted about the painting *Declaration of Independence*, which hangs in the rotunda of the U.S. Capitol. The painting depicts a moment in 1776 showing 47 men, including Thomas Jefferson, John Hancock and Ben Franklin, most of whom were signers of the declaration.

"This is one of the most famous paintings in American history: Declaration of Independence. Thirty four of the 47 men in the painting were slaveholders according to some accounts.