



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on May 11, 2017

New Orleans Removes Jefferson Davis Monument; Gens. Beauregard, Lee Next

“Iconoclasm is the social belief in the importance of the destruction of usually religious icons and other images or monuments, most frequently for religious and/ or political reasons.” Those words, from a Wikipedia article, not only aptly define “iconoclasm” but perhaps also capture the underlying issue involved in the step-by-step elimination of Confederate monuments in New Orleans.



New Orleans city workers removed a statue of former Confederate President Jefferson Davis in the pre-dawn hours on May 11, as protesters both for and against the removal of the 106-year-old monument stood nearby. A group opposed to the statue’s removal chanted “President Davis” and saluted the stature prior to its removal. As it was taken down, another group of people who had wanted it removed cheered and sang the chorus from “Na Na Hey Hey Kiss Him Goodbye,” a late 1960s pop song often chanted at sporting events after a rival team’s player, such as a pitcher, has been pulled from the game.

The city government purposely did not announce the timing of the statues’ removal, citing what it claimed were threats that some had made toward contractors who would do the work. Cardboard and tape covered contractors’ names on equipment used for the removal operation. The removal operation (shown) started very early, as a crane arrived shortly after 3 a.m. Workers who arrived an hour later wrapped the Davis statue in green plastic and by 5 a.m. the statue was lifted from its pedestal by the crane. It took another hour for it to be loaded onto a trailer, which took it to an undisclosed city facility for storage. It will eventually be delivered to a museum or other “suitable place,” according to New Orleans Mayor Mitch Landrieu.

As was the case following the removal of the Liberty Place monument on April 24, the removal of the Davis statue provoked immediate condemnation from defenders of the Crescent City’s historic monuments.

Pierre McGraw, the president of the Monumental Task Committee (an all-volunteer, non-political organization that has taken care of all New Orleans monuments for over 25 years) said in a statement.

Another historic monument was removed under the cover of darkness using amateur, masked workers in armor, unmarked vehicles and equipment, and with a heavy law enforcement presence. This time it was of Jefferson Davis, the former President of the Confederacy, but who was also a West Point graduate, a hero of the Mexican-American War, and the United States Secretary of War. Mayor Landrieu says the removals are to make “New Orleans more diverse,” but Landrieu cannot be inclusive, tolerant, or diverse when he is erasing a very specific and undeniable part of New Orleans’ history.

McGraw was present during the statues’ removal and said: “I am here to witness this debacle, taking down this 106-year-old beautiful monument. It hurts a lot.”



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As was noted in an [article posted by The New American](#) on April 25, Mayor Landrieu's campaign to remove the Confederate monuments in New Orleans began two years ago:

Landrieu launched his assault on Confederate heritage in New Orleans almost two years ago by calling for the removal of the Liberty Place obelisk and the three statues honoring Confederate heroes. He said that he was reacting to the murders of nine people in a Charleston, South Carolina historically Black church by Dylann Roof, a self-described white supremacist. The City Council voted six months later, 6-1, that the monuments were "nuisances" that created racial problems. The action led to litigation that prevented the removals until recently.

That article also quoted McGraw, who said following the removal of the Liberty Place monument, which was erected in 1874 to commemorate an uprising against the continued "Reconstruction" imposed on Louisiana by the federal government: "This city is blessed with a lot of monuments, some truly beautiful monuments done by notable sculptors. Any other city would be proud to have these monuments."

With the Liberty Place and Jefferson Davis monuments now gone, the next historic markers slated for removal are those honoring two great Confederate generals, Robert E. Lee and Pierre Gustave Toutant Beauregard. The accomplished lives of both of these southern leaders cast disbelief on the illogical reasons offered by the mayor and council. Landrieu, as you recall, said he was reacting to the murders of nine people in a historically Black Charleston, South Carolina, church. The City Council stated that the monuments were "nuisances" that created racial problems.

The assertion that monuments to these men contributes to "racial" problems is belied by how they lived their lives. While Lee had at one time owned slaves that he had inherited — he followed the example of George Washington by freeing them even before the first shots were fired in the War Between the States. Following that war, after Beauregard returned to New Orleans, he was active in the Reform Party, an association of conservative New Orleans businessmen who spoke in favor of civil rights and voting for the recently freed slaves. The Reform Party sought to form alliances between African-Americans and Democrats to vote out the Radical Republicans in the state legislature. Especially in those turbulent, postbellum times, the actions by Beauregard and his associates represented an unprecedented example of White-Black cooperation.

Steve Byas, the writer of the April 25 article about the removal of the New Orleans monuments, further noted of Lee:

Lee not only opposed slavery, but also the secession of Virginia....

Lincoln's decision to make war on the seven seceded states (without any authorization of Congress), precipitated the secession of four more states, including Virginia. For these states, the issue was clearly not slavery, but rather opposition to Lincoln's de facto declaration of war upon some sister states.

At this point, Lee had to choose. He was offered command of all U.S. military forces, but he could not bear to fight against his home state. To Lee, the issue of the war was not to keep his slaves (he had none), but rather to repel an invading force.

Lee's heart was heavy as, just prior to the outbreak of the war, he told a fellow officer: "I shall never bear arms against the Union, but it may be necessary for me to carry a musket in defense of my native state, Virginia."

Lee was almost universally respected — even by his foes in the war. His chief adversary, Gen. Ulysses



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Grant, treated him with obvious respect at the time of his surrender at Appomattox Court House. Lee's reputation as the quintessential Southern gentleman and soldier survived for the remainder of his life and his integrity was never questioned.

As for Davis, he did everything in his power to help prevent the outbreak of war between the North and South. As a Mississippi senator, he urged President Buchanan to withdraw the small garrison at Fort Sumter rather than risk a conflict. Upon his inauguration as the president of the Confederacy, Davis sent peace commissioners to Washington in early 1861, in an attempt to settle differences at the conference table rather than on the battlefield, but President Lincoln would not receive them.

In the mind of Davis and the other leaders of the Confederacy, the war was a defense of their states against the usurpation of the general government. The objective of the Confederacy was not to invade the North, nor to overthrow the government in Washington, but to defend their native soil against military enforcement of a Federal authority that the Southerners rejected as illegitimate. It was the culmination of the dispute over the doctrine of nullification that had been going on since 1832, when South Carolina nullified the Federal Tariff Act.

Americans have debated the justification for each side in what is usually called the Civil War ever since the war ended in 1865. That argument will probably never be settled.

But something that existed between gentlemen soldiers such as Grant and Lee — mutual respect — is often lost in today's politically correct society. Politicians such as Landrieu have no respect for the heritage of the places they purport to govern. They instead cater to the iconoclasts who want to erase every trace of a culture they neither appreciate nor understand.

In his article, Byas used the perfect phrase to describe what Landrieu and the New Orleans city council had done — he called it “the Taliban-like assault on Confederate monuments.”

Photo: Jefferson Davis statue in New Orleans being prepared for removal: AP Images

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