

COLLECTIONS IN THE CLASSROOM

Jefferson Davis Statue from Monument Avenue, Edward Valentine, 1907



ERA

Jim Crow, 21st Century

THEMES

Lost Cause myth, Confederacy, Civil War, Monuments

CITATION INFORMATION

Jefferson Davis sculpture, 1907, Edward V. Valentine. Loan Courtesy of the Black History Museum & Cultural Center of Virginia.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

1. What is the Lost Cause myth?
2. How did public art help to spread the Lost Cause myth?
3. Why did citizens protest this statue in 2020? What motivated them to pull it down?

CONTEXT

Originally, Jefferson Davis had represented Mississippi in the United States Senate and House of Representatives, but during the American Civil War he became the president of the Confederacy.

The Jefferson Davis Monument was designed by Richmond architect, William Noland (1865-1951), and the figures were sculpted by Richmond artist, Edward V. Valentine (1838-1930), brother of the founder of the Valentine Museum. It included a 65-foot-tall column with a statue at the top, called "Vindicatrix," which was supposed to represent the symbol of Southern Womanhood and the "truth and justice owed to the South." Fully embracing a Lost Cause lens on Virginia history, the pedestal at the base of the Davis statue included historic dates that drew a connection between its 1907 unveiling to the English arrival in Virginia (1607), the American Revolution (1776), the Constitutional Convention (1787) and the Confederate secession in 1861.

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Jefferson Davis Statue
1907 bronze with 2020 paint
Sculpted by Edward V. Valentine (1838-1930)
Loan Courtesy of the Black History Museum & Cultural Center of Virginia

The Lost Cause and Its Monuments

On April 9, 1865, the South surrendered and officially lost the American Civil War. The landscape was marred by four years of battles, and the southern economy was in shambles. The next year, 1866, Edward Pollard, a local Richmond journalist, wrote **The Lost Cause: A New Southern History of the War of the Confederates**. In his writing, he introduced this idea that the Civil War was nothing more than a Lost Cause and reframed the memory of the war around a few key falsehoods:

- The Union had more soldiers and resources but the Confederacy held the moral high ground.
- The war was fought to defend states' rights, not slavery.
- The enslaved were happy and well-taken care of prior to the war and unprepared to take care of themselves.
- Confederate soldiers were all honorable and brave.

Since the South had lost the War, Pollard wrote, "All that is left of the South is "the war of ideas.""

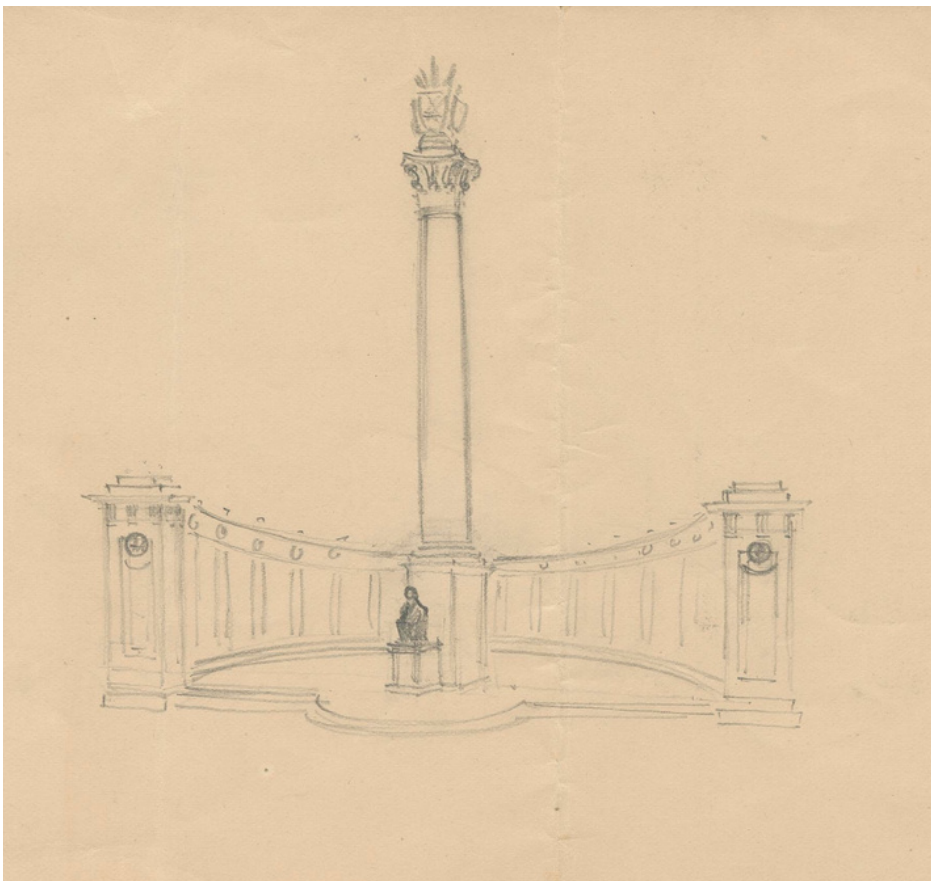
This Lost Cause mythology, which supporters of the Confederacy really began crafting before the Civil War ended, was ultimately a propaganda campaign that used the power of written, verbal, and graphic communication to alter the public's memory of the causes and outcomes of the Civil War and later Reconstruction.

Throughout the United States, the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) was responsible for erecting more than 700 Confederate monuments and memorials on public land. Members' efforts also led to a mass renaming of streets, highways and schools for Confederate leaders.

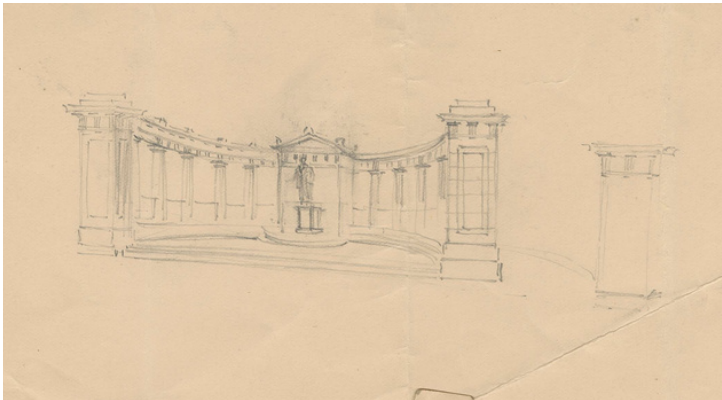
The Jefferson Davis statue is one example of this deliberate campaign that sought to assure white Southerners that the Civil War had been a righteous cause and their sacrifices had not been in vain. The monument speaks to white dominance while further oppressing Black Southerners in a segregated society.

Discussion of removal of the monuments came and went over the years in the 20th century. In June 2017, Richmond Mayor Levar Stoney formed the Monument Avenue Commission, made up of local citizens and historians, to examine and propose next steps for the future of Monument Avenue. On May 25th 2020, George Floyd, a 46 year old black man was murdered by a white Minneapolis police officer. The murder was caught on a witnesses' cellphone camera and the brutality of the event, along with other recent killings of Black Americans by police, lead to protests worldwide. In Richmond, the Lee Monument became a focal point for protests and activists to gather. While the protests were largely were peaceful, there were some instances of property destruction. The city's police response was overwhelming with tear gas and rubber bullets being used on peaceful protestors.

On June 10, 2020, activists pulled down the statue from its pedestal on Monument Avenue. On July 1, 2020, Mayor Levar Stoney announced at a morning City Council meeting that the City would begin removing the four remaining Confederate monuments on Monument Avenue.



Early designs for the Jefferson Davis monument, circa 1905, Edward V. Valentine Papers, The Valentine.



Edward Valentine in his studio, circa 1910, Cook Collection, The Valentine.