

May 8, 2009

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President Barack H. Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

Since the administration of Woodrow Wilson, presidents have sent annually a wreath to the Arlington Confederate Monument. Prior to the administration of George H. W. Bush, this was done on or near the birthday of Jefferson Davis. Starting with George H.W. Bush, it has been done on Memorial Day.

I ask you to not send a wreath or some other commemorative token to the Arlington Confederate Monument during your administration or after.

There are several reasons as to why this monument, a product of the Nadir in American race relations, should not be honored, and I list and explain them in this letter.

The monument was intended to legitimize secession and the principles of the Confederacy and glorify the Confederacy. It isn't just a remembrance of the dead. The speeches at its ground-breaking and dedication defended and held up as glorious the Confederacy and the ideas behind it and stated that the monument was to these ideals as well as the dead. It was also intended as a symbol of white nationalism, portrayed in opposition to the multiracial democracy of Reconstruction, and a celebration of the re-establishment of white supremacy in the former slave states by former Confederate soldiers. In its design it also tells wrong history, boasting fourteen shields with the coat of arms of fourteen states. Thus it claims that Missouri, Kentucky, and Maryland were part of the Confederacy. They weren't.

The monument was given to the Federal Government by the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC), which raised the funds to erect it. The UDC's reasons for the monument are instructive. In the address of Mrs. Daisy McLaurin Stevens, President General of the United Daughters of the Confederacy at its dedication, she makes clear that the monument is to glorify the ideas of the Confederacy:

Great ideas and righteous ideas are alone immortal. The eternal years of God are theirs. The ideas our heroes cherished were and are beneficial as they are everlasting. These were living then; they are living to-day and shall live to-morrow and work the betterment of mankind. Thus our heroes are of those who, though dead, still toil for man through the arms and brains of those their examples have inspired and quickened to nobler things.

Since the United Daughters of the Confederacy upheld in multiple publications in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century that the Ku Klux Klan was the heroic effort of the Confederate soldier, we have an idea what the “noble past” and “ideas our heroes cherished” were. Of course one of these “ideas” was secession to preserve the institution of African slavery.

Likewise General Bennett H. Young, Commander-in-Chief of the United Confederate Veterans also defends the cause of the Confederate soldier, the neo-Confederate cause of their descendants, and defends secession in his speech as follows:

At this hour I represent the survivors of the Southern army. Though this Confederate monument is erected on Federal ground, which makes it unusual and remarkable, yet the men from whom I hold commission would only have me come without apologies or regrets from the past. Those for whom I speak gave the best they had to their land and country. They spared no sacrifice and no privation to win for the Southland national independence.

I am sure I shall not offend the proprieties of either the hour or the occasion when I say that we still glory in the records of our beloved and immortal dead. The dead for whom this monument stands sponsor died for what they believed to be right. Their surviving comrades and their children still believe that that for which they suffered and laid down their lives was just; that their premises in the Civil War were according to our Constitution....

The sword said the South was wrong, but the sword is not necessarily guided by conscience or reason. The power of numbers and the longest guns cannot destroy principle nor obliterate truth. Right lives forever, it survives battles, failures, conflicts, and death. There is no human power, however mighty, that can in the end annihilate truth.

In fact, most white Southerners in 1914 agreed that both slavery and secession were wrong. Not Young. No apologies. No regrets -- despite the historical record of Confederate soldiers having committed racial atrocities of massacring surrendered African American soldiers on at least eight occasions.

Hilary A. Herbert, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Arlington Confederate Monument Association, makes it clear that the monument stands for the legitimacy of secession, in opposition to Reconstruction, and for white supremacy. In his *History of The Arlington Confederate Monument at Arlington, Virginia*, he writes:

In 1867 the seceding States were subjected to the horrors of Congressional Reconstruction, but in a few years American manhood had triumphed; Anglo-Saxon civilization had been saved; local self-government under the Constitution had been restored; ex-Confederates were serving the National Government, and true patriots, North and South, were addressing themselves to the noble task of restoring fraternal feeling between the sections.

Within a generation after Congressional Reconstruction, American historians condemned it .... as “a crime against civilization,” and public opinion seems to have approved the verdict.

Herbert goes on to refer to the Confederate soldiers who joined the Ku Klux Klan and Red Shirts as being heroes for restoring white supremacy and overthrowing Reconstruction, referring to “the soldiers who fought the battles of the Confederacy and ... by their courage and devotion during the two decades after the war, were saviors of Anglo-Saxon civilization in their section.”

The monument itself has a Latin motto, “*Victrix causea Diis placuit, sed victa Catoni.*” It translates, “The winning cause pleased the Gods, but the losing cause pleased Cato.” This is a classical reference which to the cognoscenti implies that Lincoln was a despot and the Union cause unjust; Cato, the stoic believer in “freedom,” would have sided with the Confederacy.

The Arlington Confederate Monument is a denial of the wrong committed against African Americans by slave owners, Confederates, and neo-Confederates, through the monument’s denial of slavery as the cause of secession and its holding up of Confederates as heroes. This implies that the humanity of Africans and African Americans is of no significance.

Today, the monument gives encouragement to the modern neo-Confederate movement and provides a rallying point for them. The modern neo-Confederate movement interprets it as vindicating the Confederacy and the principles and ideas of the Confederacy and their neo-Confederate ideas. The presidential wreath enhances the prestige of these neo-Confederate events.

Fr. Alister C. Anderson, as Chaplain-in-Chief of the Sons of Confederate Veterans (SCV), at the 85<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the dedication of the Arlington Confederate Monument in 1999, gave a lengthy speech explaining its meaning. His understanding of the Arlington Confederate Monument can be said to be fairly representative of modern neo-Confederate opinion.

Anderson believes that the Civil War was a holy war between an orthodox Christian nation (the South), a view widespread in the neo-Confederate movement, and what he feels was an un-Christian and heretical North, as he explained in a series of articles in the Confederate Veteran as Chaplain-in-Chief of the SCV. This explains some of the passages of his speech at the Arlington Confederate Monument. In his speech Anderson explains regarding the monument:

... It reveals and concentrates in beautiful, rugged bronze nearly every idea that a true Southern historian, theologian, statesman, and patriotic citizen could present about the religion, culture, morals, economics, and politics of a civilization from out of which the Confederate States of America evolved. The monument captures the ideals and accomplishments that still existed at the end of the War for Southern

Independence. Thank God it does not depict the beginning of the Reconstruction Era, the most disgusting and destructive period in United States history from which the South has never really recovered.

Anderson goes on to note Washington's presence in bronze:

It depicts George Washington on horseback with the Latin inscription DEO VINDICE, which means, "God Vindicates." Southerners believed under the Constitution they had the right to secede if they were being harmed by a tyrannical government.

To Anderson, as to other neo-Confederates today, the Arlington Monument exists to glorify the ideas of the Confederacy, which he sees as the ideas of the neo-Confederacy.

Anderson goes on to explain, correctly, the meaning of the main inscription on the monument, "*Victrix causea Diis placuit, sed victa Catoni.*" This is a line from a poem Pharasalia by the Roman poet Lucan, used to represent Lincoln as a tyrant and the North as tyrannical. Fr. Anderson explains:

Victix causa, "the winning cause (or side)", referring to Julius Caesar's inordinate ambition and his lust for total power and control, is compared with President Lincoln and the Federal Government's desire and power to crush and destroy the South. Next we read diis placuit which translates "pleased the gods." In this context, gods are with a small "g" and refer to the gods of mythology; the gods of money, power, war and domination, greed, hate, lust and ambition. Next we come to the noble climax of this quotation, sed victa cantoni which translates "but the losing side (or cause) pleased Cato". Here Lucan, the poet, refers to Pompey's fight to retain the old conservative, traditional republican government of Rome. Even though Pompey was defeated by Caesar's greater military power, his defeat, nevertheless, pleased the noble Cato. And here, of course, Cato represents the noble aims of the Southern Confederacy. The South fought politically to maintain the Constitution which had guided her safely for eighty-seven years. She merely wanted to be left alone and governed by it. The aggression-minded totalitarian Northern government would not permit that and so she pleased the gods of abolitionism, transcendentalism, utopianism, state centralism, universalism, rationalism and a host of other "isms."

Anderson here denounces abolition, the anti-slavery movement that ultimately led the United States of America out of the moral evil of slavery, as an evil itself.

Sending a wreath to the Arlington Confederate Memorial Monument enhances the prestige of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, an organization with a long history of racism from praising the Ku Klux Klan in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, to publishing articles against the Civil Rights movement in the Civil Rights Era, to promoting neo-Confederacy today. When the president of the United States of America enhances the prestige of this

monument and of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, he strengthens a group working to set back America's progress in race relations.

Finally, in 2009, the main speaker for the annual observance at the Arlington Confederate Memorial is Ron Maxwell, director of the movie "Gods and Generals," whose neo-Confederate meaning he made clear in an interview in *Southern Partisan*. He also has written expressing his fear of Hispanic immigration leading to civil war in the notoriously racist Chronicles magazine, the organ of the ultra-right Rockford Foundation.

For the president of the United States of America to send a wreath to the monument this year would contribute to providing Ron Maxwell with a more prestigious setting for his speech. It would aid and abet the ongoing use of presidential prestige and this monument for their neo-Confederate agenda.

I ask you to break this chain of racism stretching back to Woodrow Wilson, and not send a wreath or other token of esteem to the Arlington Confederate Monument. This monument should not be elevated in prestige above other monuments by a presidential wreath.

Sincerely yours,