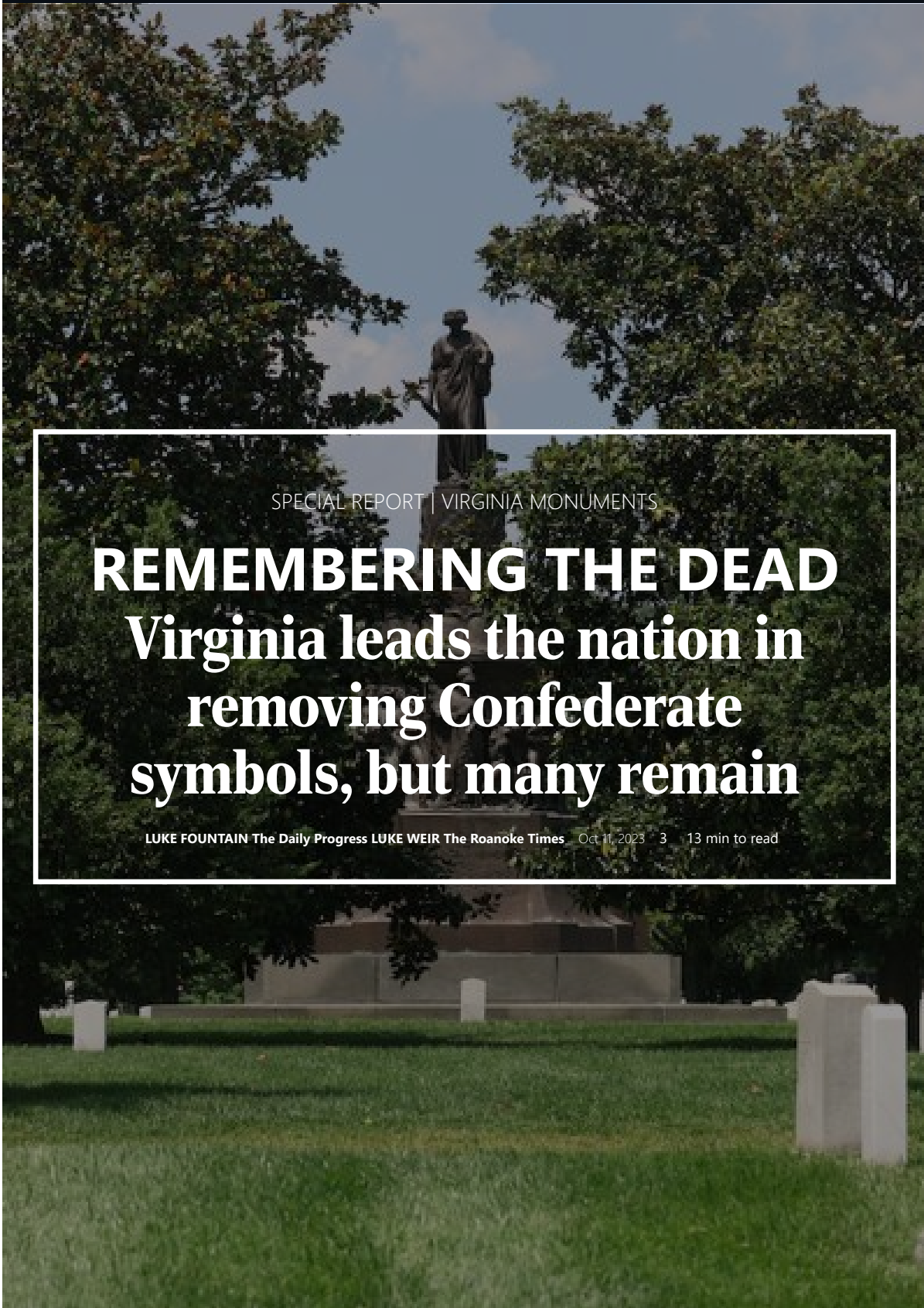


SPECIAL REPORT | VIRGINIA MONUMENTS

# REMEMBERING THE DEAD

## Virginia leads the nation in removing Confederate symbols, but many remain

LUKE FOUNTAIN The Daily Progress LUKE WEIR The Roanoke Times Oct 11, 2023 3 13 min to read





porter Luca Powell looks into the history of Confederate monuments.



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In the center of a roundabout on the western side of [Arlington National Cemetery](#) near Washington, a bronze statue with a green-blue patina towers over a field of headstones. ¶ It's quiet there: The cemetery's bus tours do not stop at the site, and several cemetery workers said they didn't even know it existed. ¶ But the monument, simply named the [Confederate Memorial](#), has caused quite a commotion outside the cemetery gates. ¶ The 109-year-old, 32-foot-tall work, the largest remaining Confederate memorial on public land in Virginia, is slated for removal by Jan. 1 under the terms of the 2020 National Defense Authorization Act, which prohibits "names related to the Confederacy" on "any base, installation, facility, aircraft, ship, equipment, or any other property owned or controlled by the Department of Defense or a military department."

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The figure at the top of the Confederate Memorial in Arlington National Cemetery is a woman in classical garb meant to represent the South.

LUKE FOUNTAIN, THE DAILY PROGRESS

¶ The dismantling is part of a wave of Confederate symbols, names and statues that have been erased from view in Virginia after the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis three years ago. The killing of Floyd, who was Black, by police reignited calls to rid public spaces of Confederate iconography.

The **Southern Poverty Law Center** estimated more than 160 “symbols of hate” in 2021 alone were removed from public property after the death of Floyd, **more than in the previous four years combined.**

For three consecutive years now, Virginia has led the nation in the removal of Confederate symbols from public spaces. Since 2020, the law center estimates 116 Confederate symbols have been removed from public spaces in Virginia. Of the 48 removed last year nationwide, 13 were in Virginia.

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But some, such as the massive Arlington work, remain. The statue's removal has faced legal and logical challenges that its predecessors have not.

Unlike the statues commemorating "our Confederate dead" or honoring individual generals funded by Confederate veteran groups, the Confederate Memorial in Arlington National Cemetery was authorized by Congress. In the wake of the Spanish-American War, President William McKinley supported the memorial as an act of reconciliation and national unity. While the bulk of the cost was fronted by donations collected by the United Daughters of the Confederacy, the memorial also found support among Union veterans; the 23rd New Jersey Regiment donated \$2,961 in today's money to the construction.

Unlike other Confederate icons, the Arlington memorial does not depict a real historical figure, but rather a figurative one: a woman representing the American South in classical garb, wrapped in a robe and crowned with olive leaves. Below her feet, a mount depicts 32 life-size figures: soldiers and civilians, men and women, white and Black. Rare for a Confederate memorial, the installation includes two Black figures: a body-servant compelled to follow his white master into war and a weeping woman holding a child up to a departing soldier.

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And then there is the artist behind the artwork. **Moses Ezekiel was a cadet at the Virginia Military Institute**, a Confederate veteran and one of the first American-born Jewish artists to win international acclaim. Ezekiel's involvement with the memorial went well beyond its construction. He is buried at its base alongside the nearly 500 bodies of Confederate veterans and widows.

**Those opposed to removing the Arlington memorial** have argued that what makes it different is what makes it worth preserving.

There are those such as former U.S. Sen. Jim Webb, D-Va., who argued that removing the statue is outside the scope of the National Defense Authorization Act.

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**"I cannot imagine that the removal of this memorial, conceived and built with the sole purpose of healing the wounds of the Civil War and restoring national harmony, could be within the intent of a sweeping sentence placed inside a nearly trillion-dollar piece of legislation,"** Webb, who also served as U.S. Navy secretary under President Ronald Reagan, wrote in an Aug. 18 Wall Street Journal commentary.

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#### About this story

The killing of George Floyd three years ago resulted in the removal of Confederate statues and symbols in numerous communities across Virginia. In a three-part series, we look at which ones remain — and what comes next.

**Part one:** More than 100 of Virginia's Confederate memorials have come down. But the process has been complex.

**Part two:** How statues created mythological characters from Confederate generals.

**Part three:** In the Lynchburg region, less movement towards dismantling iconography

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Then there are those such as Republican Gov. Glenn Youngkin. The governor, who declined to comment for this piece, has had a hands-off approach to the debate over Confederate icons: neither supporting their removal nor directly intervening when localities choose to remove them. His approach has been so hands off that Ann Hunter McLean, a noted defender of Confederate memorials whom he had appointed to the state Board of Historic Resources, said she resigned.

“We have a wonderfully rich heritage in Virginia, and I think we are destroying that by destroying and removing it,” McLean said in the wake of her departure.

The looming January deadline, however, has moved Youngkin to speak out against the Arlington memorial’s removal.

“I have a strong opinion on this. I don’t believe that statue should be removed,” Youngkin said March 10, while speaking with radio host John Reid.

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During the interview, Youngkin cited the memorial’s origin as a monument to reconciliation and the numerous visits both Democratic and Republican presidents have paid to the site, as well as Ezekiel and his faith, noting that under Jewish law transferring a dead body from one grave to another is strictly prohibited.

“Ezekiel is buried underneath it, and by Jewish tradition he can’t be moved,” Youngkin said.

With U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin making no move to keep the statue in place, Youngkin has since requested the Virginia Military Institute accept the memorial and place it at its Civil War museum at New Market Battlefield, roughly 80 miles from campus. The school’s board of visitors has voted to accept the request, but said in a statement that it still needs permission from “the Army and all the necessary funding from available federal or state resources for the project” — which means the artwork’s fate is still very much in limbo.

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Groups supporting the statue’s removal have said that the arguments posed by Youngkin, Webb and others are distorting and misrepresenting history in order to defend Confederate iconography.

**“We have a wonderfully rich heritage in Virginia, and I think we are destroying that by destroying and removing it.”**

**Ann Hunter McLean, a former member of the state Board of Historic Resources, on removing Confederate statues.**

The Southern Poverty Law Center has argued that not only must the statue go by law — the **2020 National Defense Authorization Act** makes that much clear — but that the notion that the memorial symbolizes any sort of national unity is an outright lie. McKinley, the group says, was after Southern votes not reconciliation.

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“If the Confederate memorial at Arlington — born from McKinley’s act of political expediency — is a symbol of unity at all, it is this false unity created by erasing the cause of freedom from American memory and from American priority,” the group said in a statement.

Karen Cox, a professor at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte who specializes in Southern history, said she concedes the Arlington statue is “different,” but that doesn’t make it better than its counterparts.

“Even though the Arlington memorial is different and just pays homage to the dead and was built as a symbol of peace and reconciliation, it still perpetuates the Lost Cause and white supremacy,” Cox said. “It should be taken down.”

Neither side in the debate actually has any authority to preserve or remove the memorial, but the substance of the debate is significant, historians say. It’s significant because it has changed.




Cox

“It appears the fight has shifted from monuments and symbols that glorify leaders of the Confederacy to more nameless statues and ones that simply commemorated the dead,” said Thomas Brown, a University of South Carolina history professor specializing in the Civil War.

#### The figurative and the literal

Although the monuments have had their detractors since they were erected, the movement to rid the state of them really picked up momentum after the deadly Unite the Right rally-turned-riot in Charlottesville over the fate of that city’s statue of Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee. It only picked up speed in 2020, when the state’s Democrat-controlled General Assembly passed a bill allowing localities to decide the fate of their war memorials, including Confederate monuments.





Charlottesville's statues of Confederate Gens. Robert E. Lee, right, and Stonewall Jackson, left, await their fates shortly after being removed in 2021.

ANDREW SHURTLEFF, THE DAILY PROGRESS

But one of the real reasons Virginia has removed so many is because it had so many to begin with, said Caroline Janney, director of the John L. Nau III Center for Civil War History at the University of Virginia.

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“Virginia was in many ways the most important state to the Confederacy, in part because they sent the most men to fight, the most famous officers like Lee and Johnston were from the state, and Richmond embraced the image as the head of the Confederacy during the war and in the Lost Cause years,” Janney said.

So how have some survived?

Brown argues that it’s perhaps because pieces such as the Arlington memorial are more figurative and less visible.

The mammoth statues erected across Virginia in the likeness of Lee and other Confederate officials were lightning rods, sparking mass protests and violent riots.

Charlottesville in 2017 and Richmond in 2020 attracted the largest crowds and the most attention. Their memorials to Confederate leaders were also among the largest: The monument to Lee that once sat on Richmond’s Monument Avenue stood more than 60 feet tall, and the monument that sat in what was once called Lee Park in downtown Charlottesville weighed roughly 1,100 pounds.

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Less literal monuments and more obscure tributes have attracted less attention and remain standing.

### **Confederate dedications in the U.S.**

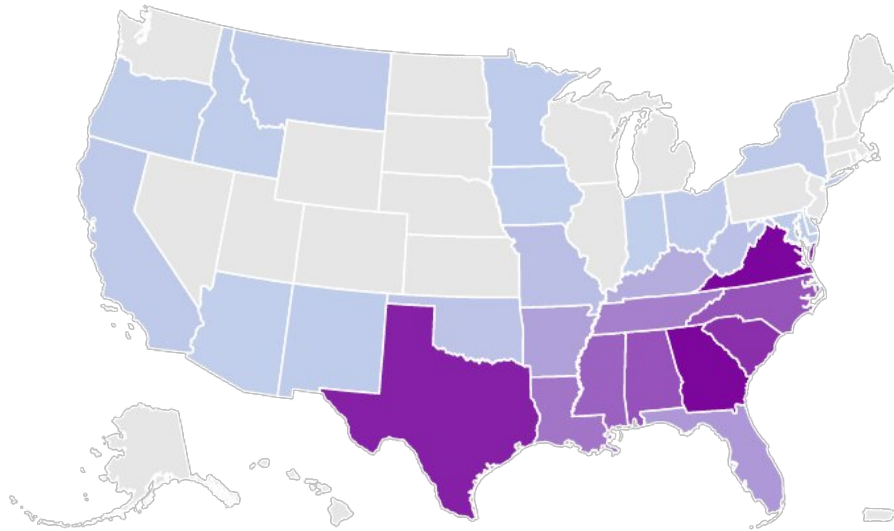
More than 2,600 Confederate symbols are publicly present across the U.S., according to the

Southern Poverty Law Center.

Select type of dedication:

All types

1 281



Source: Southern Poverty Law Center

A Flourish map

Just last year, The New York Times proclaimed, “**Richmond’s Last Confederate Statue Is Removed,**” after a memorial to **Confederate Gen. A.P. Hill at West Laburnum Avenue and Hermitage Road was toppled.** (The remains of Hill, who was buried beneath the statue, were reinterred in Fairview Cemetery in Culpeper, his hometown, following a long legal battle.)

But The Times was wrong.

Hill was the last city-owned statue to fall, but not the last statue of a Confederate in Richmond.







A statue of Confederate Gen. Stonewall Jackson stands outside the Virginia Capitol on Thursday, Aug. 3, 2023.

MIKE KROPP, THE RICHMOND TIMES DISPATCH

In fact, just outside the doors of the Capitol sit three Confederates in a neat row. In the center sits a 7-foot-tall statue of Gen. Stonewall Jackson on a 9-foot pedestal; to his left on a 7-foot base is a 6-foot-tall Hunter Holmes McGuire, the Confederate doctor who removed Jackson's arm and a lifelong defender of slavery; and to his right on a 9-foot base is a 7½-foot William "Extra Billy" Smith, a Confederate veteran who served as governor before and after the Civil War.

Like with the Arlington memorial, several visitors just steps away were not even aware the statues were there.

Unlike the Arlington memorial, the statues fall under the jurisdiction of the governor. And one of the key reasons they remain standing is because Youngkin has made no effort to remove them.

### **Your turn: Share your thoughts about Confederate names and monuments in Virginia**

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Asked last year about their fate, the governor's spokeswoman Macaulay Porter said in a written statement that "he firmly believes that we must not airbrush our history. The governor believes that we must not overlook or excuse the sins of our past, but we must resist the movement to cleanse our history." But in many cases, it is exactly because Confederate memorials can be overlooked that they go undisturbed.

Just south of Fredericksburg, a 23-foot-tall pyramid of rough-hewn Virginia granite stands as a monument to the 1862 Confederate victory at the battle fought there. Commissioned in 1897 by the Confederate Memorial Literary Society, the pyramid has stood untouched in a field for more than a century. Perhaps because it sits on the other side of a set of railroad tracks or perhaps because its name — Meade's Pyramid — suggests it might be a monument to Union Gen. George Meade, the pyramid largely goes unvisited and unnoticed; it doesn't even have a Wikipedia page.

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In Amherst, a plain obelisk stands in the grass in front of the county courthouse dedicated by the United Daughters of the Confederacy in 1922 "to the memory of the sons of Amherst County who from 1861 to 1865 upheld in arms the cause of Virginia and the South." In May, years after other Confederate memorials were toppled, the Amherst chapter of the NAACP asked that the county reconsider the monument. In a letter sent to the board of supervisors, the group never calls for the removal of the structure but rather the removal of the language used on the structure, specifically citing references to a "noble cause."

"Our goal is a solution that is amenable to our community," the group wrote. "We stand ready

to collaborate.”

While Washington & Lee University’s tributes to its second namesake are far from figurative or obscure — Lee is in the name, after all — the college has been making moves to both preserve its physical monuments while making them less visible.

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Chief among them: the recumbent statue of Lee in the university’s chapel. In 2014, the university removed the Confederate battle flags that once circled the statue. In 2021, it opted to change the name of the sanctuary from Lee Chapel to University Chapel. And in February, after two years of back-and-forth, the school and the city of Lexington came to an agreement to build a “partial wall” obscuring the statue of Lee from public view within the chapel’s auditorium.

Rather than make their monuments less noticeable, localities in other corners of the commonwealth have added more memorial markers, contextualizing those that already exist.

In a small grassy square in Christiansburg on the corner of Main and Franklin streets, a 15-foot obelisk stands in the shade of an enfeebled oak. The unadorned pillar was dedicated in 1883, honoring Montgomery County’s “sons who fell in the Lost Cause.” The gnarled tree standing beside it, stunted by years of nearby development, is likewise a monument to that cause. Planted in 1902 by Montgomery County treasurer and Confederate veteran Arthur O. Sullivan, the Constitution Oak celebrates the adoption of Virginia’s 1902 state constitution.

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“Basically what it did was disenfranchise African American voters at that time,” said Montgomery County Museum of Art & History Executive Director Casey Jenkins. “And in its way of reclamation, it tried to disenfranchise any freedoms that they had guaranteed for themselves after the Civil War.”

The two symbols still stand, but next to them now stand three “storyboards” describing Black community life, education and slavery in the area. They were developed by the Christiansburg Institute, a grassroots Black cultural heritage and historic preservation organization, along with public input over a four-year process that began in 2018.

Those storyboards in tandem with the other memorials provide a sense of balance, according to Jenkins.

“For lack of a better term, that square is no longer whitewashed,” Jenkins said. “We’re telling those fuller stories, making sure that all voices are a part of those stories.”

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### Impounds, graveyards and museums

These are the circumstances that most Confederate memorials will likely remain standing, according to historians. Those that are taken down, often with the promise of future relocation

and contextualization, are frankly never going to be seen again, they say.

“A lot of statues may end up in storage facilities like impound lots or somewhere that can hold them,” Janney said. “Many we won’t see again.”

That’s despite the promises many of the statues’ procurers have made once the monuments were removed.

Museums such as Richmond’s Black History Museum and Cultural Center of Virginia were supposed to receive multiple statues removed from Monument Avenue in 2020, according to Mayor Levar Stoney. But three years later, workers at the museum, who declined to be quoted, said they haven’t received and never will receive them simply because the weight of the statues would break the floors of the museum and some are too tall to even fit through the doors.

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“Theoretically, leaders can say, ‘Let’s put a statue in a museum,’ but logistically, physically and financially, it makes no sense,” Janney said. “Museums have a hard enough time storing small collections, much less storing and displaying 20-foot-high statues that weigh tons.”

The Black History Museum said in a statement that it remains committed “to ensuring the Confederate monuments, objects that were created and intended to glorify and ultimately perpetuate the ideology of those who led the fight to enslave African Americans, are repurposed so they are no longer used in that way.”

The museum, however, did not say how it planned to ever accept the statues that can’t fit in its facility, nor did the mayor’s office answer what the city planned to do with the statues in the meantime.

Similarly, Charlottesville’s statue of Jackson, removed in 2021, was loaned to the LAXART museum in Los Angeles after removal, but two years later, it has not even left the East Coast. LAXART obtained the statue along with two other Confederate monuments from the city of Baltimore. Those statues are being held at a car impound lot on the side of a Baltimore highway surrounded by a chain-link fence. Though clearly visible, when employees at the lot were asked if the statues were still there, they said they could neither confirm nor deny their presence.

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LAXART has, however, confirmed that the statues are not on the West Coast, and the exhibition meant to feature them is still only in the planning stages.

“‘MONUMENTS’ will feature existing and newly commissioned works of contemporary art displayed alongside decommissioned Confederate monuments, including the Stonewall Jackson monument. Planning for the exhibition is still underway,” Danielle Bias, a spokeswoman for LAXART, said.

Moving the monuments poses a financial and logistical challenge, and placing such large statues in museums risks overshadowing neighboring exhibits and essentially establishing them as attractions for both tourists as well as the white supremacists, neo-Nazis and neo-Confederates who once defended them from removal.

Until they were threatened with removal, they rarely attracted large crowds.

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Thomas Chapman would know. He leads the Albemarle-Charlottesville Historical Society, and works across the street from the park in downtown Charlottesville where Lee once stood. According to Chapman, most of the time, the park was quiet.

“People would not travel out of their way from far and wide to see these statues,” Chapman said. “There weren’t even any large ceremonies with the statues besides a couple of Confederate anniversaries. They weren’t a mecca for white supremacists.”

Placing them in an art or history museum could incidentally attract more visitors to the statues post-removal than when they were originally standing.

This could be ameliorated by following the lead of the Jefferson School African American Heritage Center in Charlottesville, which obtained the city’s Lee statue free of charge after its removal in 2021 and has so far successfully fought off legal challenges to its ownership.

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The center plans to melt down the statue’s bronze and use the material to build a more inclusive and appropriate piece of public artwork that “expresses the city’s values of inclusivity and racial justice,” according to a statement. The organization has christened the project “Swords Into Ploughshares.”

The two groups that attempted to block the statue’s destruction, Trevilian Station Battlefield Foundation and the Ratcliffe Foundation, expressed concerns that the statue had already been melted down. But the city’s attorney Richard Milnor has said Lee had merely been disassembled and stored at an undisclosed location.

Because of the legal challenges, a gag order had been imposed guarding the location of Charlottesville’s Lee statue. A Freedom of Information Act request, however, identified a foundry in Nashville, Tennessee, as its current location. When contacted, the foundry denied the statue was there.

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There are nearly 500 Confederate veterans and widows buried at the base of the Confederate Memorial in Arlington National Cemetery.

LUKE FOUNTAIN, THE DAILY PROGRESS

Other monuments' locations are even more ambiguous.

In 2020, the United Daughters of the Confederacy removed a statue that once stood in the heart of Alexandria. Erected in 1889, the Appomattox portrayed an unarmed Confederate soldier facing south with a bowed head, standing on a base inscribed with the names of Confederate soldiers from Alexandria who died in the Civil War. The statue's location was unknown for two years before the base, without its crowning figure, resurfaced at Bethel Cemetery in the city by the graves of 10 members of Col. John Singleton Mosby's rangers and 15 soldiers of the 17th Virginia Regiment from the Alexandria area.

Neither the city of Alexandria, the United Daughters of the Confederacy nor cemetery owner James Clink would say when, how or why the pedestal had been moved to the cemetery or where the missing statue is being kept.

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Clink has publicly said he would like to have the rest of the memorial installed at the cemetery, but has acknowledged the United Daughters of the Confederacy — ostensibly the group fostering the statue — won't even tell him where it is.

"They won't say," Clink told local news outlet ALXnow in February, "just that it's in a big crate."

The fates of Alexandria's, Charlottesville's and Richmond's statues — essentially unknown — suggest Arlington's memorial will likely join them in the ether.

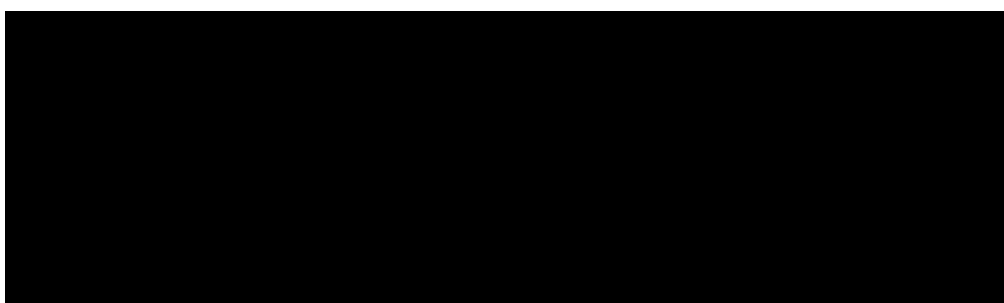
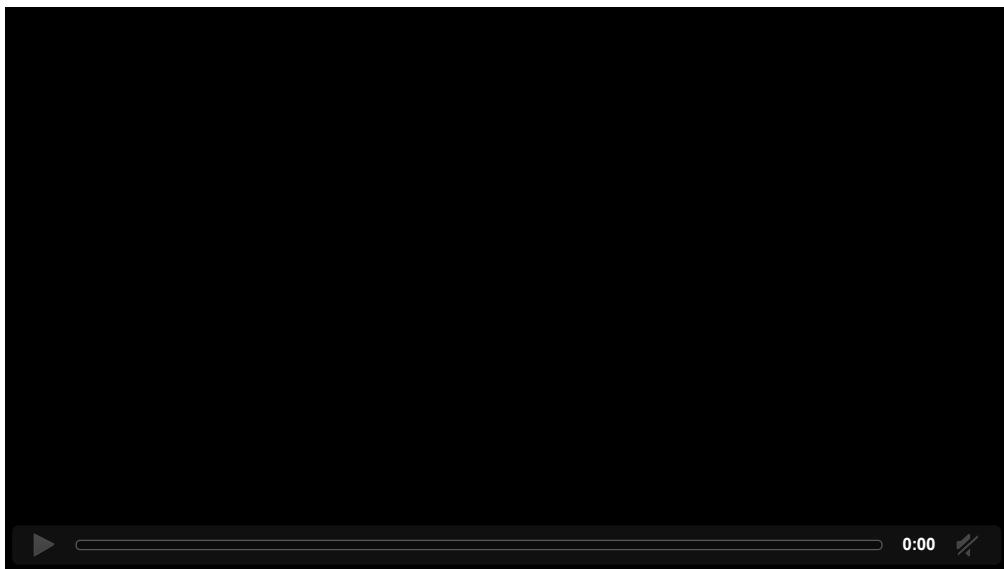
"Will we see it again?" Brown of the University of South Carolina asked. "Once it's down, I doubt it."

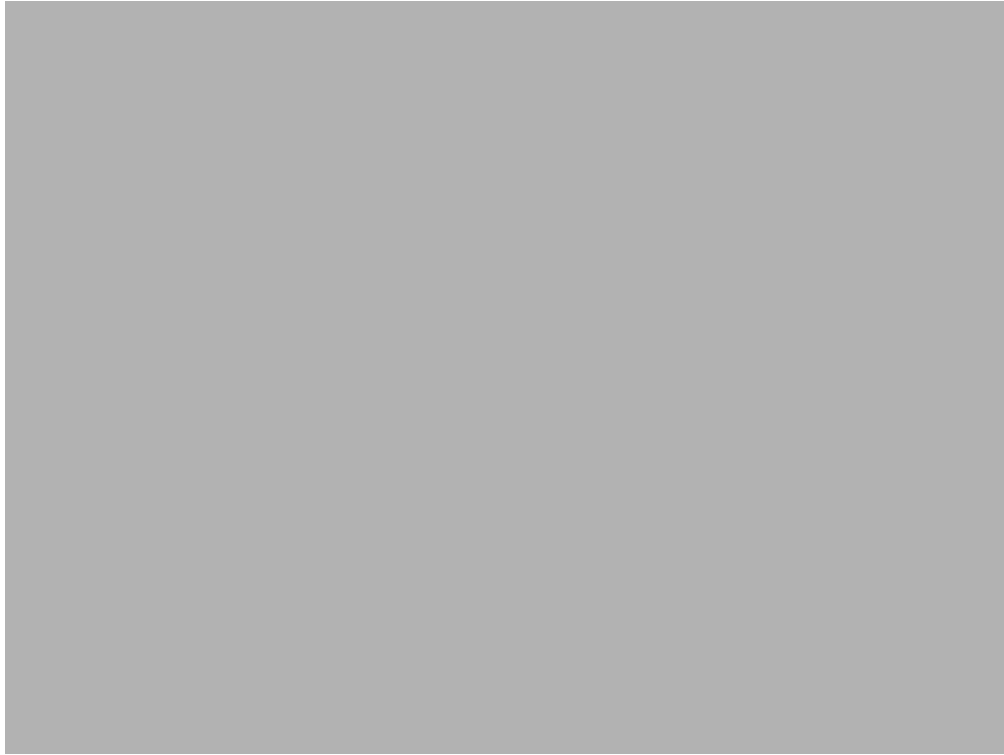
*Haley Sandow with The Daily Progress contributed to this report.*

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## **Confederate monuments are removed in Richmond**







The pedestal of the J.E.B. Stuart monument was partially removed this week.

ALEXA WELCH EDLUND/TIMES-DISPATCH





The pedestal of the J.E.B. Stuart monument is partially removed Wednesday, February 2, 2022.

ALEXA WELCH EDLUND/TIMES-DISPATCH

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The pedestal of the J.E.B. Stuart monument is partially removed Wednesday, February 2, 2022. St John's United Church Christ is on right.

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The pedestal of the monument to Confederate Gen. J.E.B. Stuart was partially removed on Wednesday.  
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Workers remove the pedestal of the Matthew Fontaine Maury Monument on Monument Ave. in downtown Richmond on Wednesday, February 2, 2022. EVA RUSSO/TIMES-DISPATCH  
Eva Russo

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Workers remove the pedestal of the Matthew Fontaine Maury Monument on Monument Ave. in downtown Richmond on Wednesday, February 2, 2022. EVA RUSSO/TIMES-DISPATCH

Eva Russo

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Workers remove the pedestal of the Matthew Fontaine Maury Monument on Monument Ave. in downtown Richmond on Wednesday, February 2, 2022. Here, tar, a waterproofing agent, can be seen along the inside of the pedestal. EVA RUSSO/TIMES-DISPATCH

Eva Russo

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Workers remove the pedestal of the Matthew Fontaine Maury Monument on Monument Ave. in downtown Richmond on Wednesday, February 2, 2022. Here, Michael Spence, construction superintendent with Team Henry Enterprises, holds a locking pin, a structural element and 1 of approximately 16 that helped to hold the pedestal together. EVA RUSSO/TIMES-DISPATCH

Eva Russo

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Workers remove the pedestal of the Matthew Fontaine Maury Monument on Monument Ave. in downtown Richmond on Wednesday, February 2, 2022. Here, names believed to be of brick masons can be seen etched into the mortar. EVA RUSSO/TIMES-DISPATCH

Eva Russo

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Workers remove the pedestal of the Matthew Fontaine Maury Monument on Monument Ave. in downtown Richmond on Wednesday, February 2, 2022. EVA RUSSO/TIMES-DISPATCH

Eva Russo

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An employee of Team Henry Enterprises worked on Monument Avenue in Richmond on Tuesday to remove the pedestal and final pieces of the monument to naval commander Matthew Fontaine Maury.

DANIEL SANGJIB MIN/TIMES-DISPATCH

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Workers remove the pedestal of the Matthew Fontaine Maury Monument on Monument Ave. in Richmond, Va., on Tuesday, Feb. 1, 2022.

DANIEL SANGJIB MIN/TIMES-DISPATCH

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Workers on Tuesday removed the pedestal that used to hold the Matthew F. Maury monument on Monument Avenue in Richmond.

DANIEL SANGJIB MIN/TIMES-DISPATCH

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Workers remove the pedestal of the Matthew Fontaine Maury Monument on Monument Ave. in Richmond, Va., on Tuesday, Feb. 1, 2022.



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DANIEL SANGJIB MIN/TIMES-DISPATCH

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DANIEL SANGJIB MIN/TIMES-DISPATCH

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A worker removes the pedestal of the Matthew Fontaine Maury Monument on Monument Ave. in Richmond, Va., on Tuesday, Feb. 1, 2022.

DANIEL SANGJIB MIN/TIMES-DISPATCH

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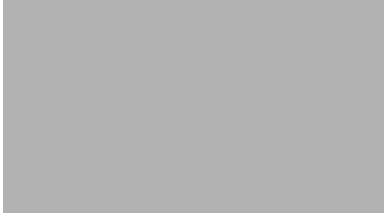
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