

NEWS & OPINION

Debate Stirring over Confederate Statues

By Quinn Tobias
Senior Staff Writer

In the summer of 2015, a controversial issue was brought to the forefront of the country's consciousness when the Emmanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church was attacked in Charleston, South Carolina. The assailant had previously posted pictures of himself posing with the Confederate symbol. In response to the racially charged attack, then-South Carolina Governor Nikki Haley removed the Confederate flag from state buildings and the capitol. The flag had been flown over the Capitol building for 54 years.

Fast forward two years and the issue has been resurrected. According to CNN, entering 2017, there were over 700 monuments commemorating the Confederacy. The majority were erected in the beginning of the Jim Crow Era when white politicians were encouraging segregation. As the topic has regained traction, 32 cities have removed, or have petitioned to remove, Confederate monuments from their communities.

The culminating event that brought the controversy to a boil occurred on August 11th, in Charlottesville, Virginia. The city planned on removing a prominent statue of Robert E. Lee. People protested the removal of the statue; among some of the protestors was a population of white nationalists. The protestors claimed the removal of the statue was an infringement of their first-amendment rights, while counter-protestors said the statue represents racism and oppression. The protest and counter-protest turned violent, resulting in the death of three people.

Multiple methods have been used in the removal of statues. Starting in 2015, New Orleans circulated a petition for the removal of four prominent Confederate statues. Subsequently, City Council voted 6-1 for the statues' removal. Conversely, in Durham, a statue of Lee

was vandalized and eventually toppled without the consent from state officials. The vandals were later arrested.

According to a poll conducted by National Public Radio (NPR), released on August 17th, 62 percent of Americans want the statues to remain standing. Defenders claim erasing dark parts of U.S. history will lead the country to repeat its mistakes. Junior Alex Blackwood is among those who oppose removal of statues. "They're part of U.S. history and I don't necessarily think we should take them down," he said.

Blackwood argues that the monuments to the Confederacy are a way for us to reflect upon a darker time in U.S. history. "I don't think the statues represent racial oppression and they're not meant as a symbol for hate, but represent history," he said.

Rather than making blanket statements such as all statues should be removed, or no statues should be removed, some believe a gray area exists. Blackwood stated it makes more sense for former Confederate states to have monuments rather than states that were not involved with the Confederacy. "I don't see why Montana was offended when their Confederate statues were removed," he said.

Professor Michael Brantley believes each monument should be looked at on a case-by-case basis. "I think it's like anything else, you have to have context," Brantley said. "You have to consider what and where they are." One statue he believes should be removed resides in Nashville. The statue is of Nathan Bedford Forrest, who was a Confederate General affiliated with the KKK.

Brantley deems the memorial in Rocky Mount more appropriate. It stands on private property and is co-located with a cemetery dedicated to honor Confederate soldiers who died in the war. "The monument is not to honor any political ideology, just com-

memorate the fallen," Brantley said. The monument explicitly states the Confederacy fought for their constitutional rights, not slavery. This was an effort to separate the Civil War from slavery. In 1958 U.S. Congress passed a bill that designated all Confederate soldiers as U.S. veterans.

People in support of the removal of statues also use history to aid their argument. "I think they represent a very dark and negative part of American history," senior Ishmail Harris said. "The Confederacy shouldn't be celebrated and I think all of the statues should be removed."

Harris disagrees with the popular argument that the Confederate flag represents southern heritage. "That means your heritage is about slavery," he said.

Junior Sydney McCall compares the Confederate statues to Nazi artifacts. "They belong in a museum," she said. "We can even learn from the darker parts of our history."

McCall questions our country's adoration of the Civil War. "America is the only country that glorifies our Civil War," she said. "Rather than looking at the Confederate soldiers as traitors, they're looked at as martyrs."

Another way she believes Americans glorify the Civil War is through reenactments, which are common in southern states.

McCall argues that Confederate statues have a residual psychological effect on African Americans. "A Confederate statue in front of a government building says we're fine with the history the statue represents and honor the people that have these values," she said.

Junior Jarell Evans has another retort for people who claim the Confederate flag represents southern heritage. "The American flag covers all of U.S. history," Evans said. He asserts that the Confederate flag has negative racial connotations. "People

who want to keep the statues are racists and use history as an excuse," he said.

Many blame Confederate statues for causing racial strains in the country. "I would remove the statues," Evans said. "There is so much racial tension now, and the removal of the statues would put racial tensions at ease."

The controversy creates a complicated and divisive topic for Americans to digest. Sophomore Leonardo Guzman believes the people who celebrate the Confederacy are wrong, but acknowledges that the removal of statues violates free speech. Guzman worries that if we remove objects we don't like, society could forget the history the monuments represent.

History Professor Jonathan Sarris is now teaching a seminar on the Civil War and its place in American culture and our collective memory. He took a slightly different approach in assessing the importance of monument preservation. "They represent the societies that build them and the citizens who view them," he said. "They're not history itself. It doesn't damage our understanding of history to remove a monument because we still teach, talk and write about it."

Ben Gillon, a student from England, wonders if the removal of Confederate statues marks the beginning of a slippery slope. "I think caution should be practiced because at what point do you stop," Gillon said. A self-identified Democrat, Gillon believes both Democrats and Republicans are too authoritarian in the way they enforce their views. "Where we need to be careful is most historical figures won't stand up to the moral scrutiny of the left. In regards to removing anything, what should be considered is the impact of the person being celebrated," Gillon said.

As protests continue, the controversy will not go away. Polarizing views have divided the United States. The Confederacy that once divided this country continues to do so.

Issue In-Focus 1: Visitation Revisited. When it comes to residence hall visitation hours, do you favor big changes, small changes or the status quo?

Toni Tutt

I would stick with the status quo on visitation hours. Even though the system isn't perfect, that doesn't mean it's not working. I like the current rules mainly for safety and noise reasons. I live near the stairwell and I can sleep better without all the noise going up and down the stairs at all hours of the night.

Quinn Tobias

Limited visitation hours foster an adulterated version of college. All students who are sophomores and above are older than 18; therefore, the student body is composed almost entirely of adults. By implementing rules that restrict who can visit your room and when, the college treats the students as children. One benefit of having visitation restrictions is that roommates don't run the risk of being distracted. A way to give students more freedom, as well as prevent roommates from being distracted, is to allow students who have single rooms to have no visitation restrictions. This compromise would allow students to opt into the old visitation rules or exercise their freedom in a single dorm. Currently if you are caught with someone in your room, you face consequences. But why punish someone when there has been no transgression committed other than violation of an antiquated rule? College is an experience; you gain academic knowledge, but you also gain responsibility and knowledge outside of the classroom. If all decisions are made for the students, there can be no growth. Coddling the students prevents them from growing up and restricts the college experience to strictly the academic, which closely resembles high school.

Santanlia Scoggins

I feel there should be open visitation for students who live in single rooms. Most such students are

upperclassmen, juniors and seniors. We're all adults. Because we have busy schedules throughout the day, the only time we get to see our friends/significant other is at night and that's only for a brief period. We're expected to act like adults on campus, yet we don't get treated as such. Aside from accumulating a lot of debt, I don't really feel like an adult most of the time I'm here. If I want to have my boyfriend over after 12, I should be allowed. If my friends and I want to do homework in our lobbies at 1 a.m., we should be able to do so as long as we're respectful of others in dorm. If the

school were to compromise and use my idea, I feel it could work. If the new rule is misused by residents, then they can have their visitation either limited to only having guests until 12, or they could lose their visitation as a whole.

Johnathan Pickler

Our current rule is that all guests must be signed in and they may only be there from 8 p.m. to midnight on weekdays and 8 p.m. to 2 a.m. on weekends. I believe that the college is giving us no freedom at all by having the rules like that. My recommendation would be that we have 24-hour visitation for all dorms. Although

Issue 2: Trigger Warnings. Do you think faculty should use trigger warnings in presenting certain course material?

Quinn Tobias

According to dictionary.com, a trigger warning is a stated warning that media or other content may upset or offend people, specifically people who have previously experienced trauma. The utilization of trigger warnings varies by the authority implementing the tactic. Some professors will warn of controversial topics to allow students time to articulate their thoughts and avoid offending their classmates. Some professors forego warnings and some allow students to excuse themselves from class if the content is deemed too offensive. College is a place to challenge yourself intellectually, broaden your perspective and sharpen your ability to think critically. Using trigger warnings to protect yourself from opposing viewpoints undermines the purpose of college. I discussed trigger warnings with three professors. All three echoed the thought that a professor's job is to encourage students to engage with difficult content. If they allowed students to excuse themselves from class at the hint of controversy, the

professors would be at fault for intellectually coddling students when they should be challenging them. As with many things, there can be no blanket statement. There are always extenuating circumstances that professors may need to accommodate. As one professor said, trigger warnings and content should be handled on a case-by-case basis. There are compassionate ways to cover potentially offensive issues that will still allow for a thoughtful discussion incorporating all viewpoints.

Santanlia Scoggins

Trigger warnings are helpful for some students. Having trigger warnings will help prepare students for anything that might cause anxiety from past traumas. I don't think that the trigger warnings should serve as an excuse for students to leave class, but just as a heads-up that something that is about to be covered in class may cause flashbacks or be offensive. Trigger warnings are appropriate if a teacher is covering a topic on rape, since there may be students in the class who may have been abused or assaulted in the past. If religion is being

discussed, a trigger warning could be used to warn class members that not everyone shares the same views and that all students should be mindful and respect everyone's opinion. Religion is a very touchy subject, no matter the religion or person, and people can get offended easily.

Johnathan Pickler

I believe that trigger warnings should be used in the college classroom. However, I feel like they should only be used for specific topics. Some examples include abortion, suicide, and certain material involving tragedy and death such as 9/11 and the Boston Marathon bombing. Some students may have been through a situation in which they experienced trauma or severe depression. I don't believe trigger warnings should be used on the topic of racism because, sadly, it's a part of history. One possible negative outcome is that students may use trigger warnings as an excuse to skip class. On the other hand, not using trigger warnings may result in angry students, leading to verbal or physical harm.

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STAFF

Senior Staff Writers

Johnathan Pickler,
Santanlia Scoggins, Quinn Tobias

Staff Writers

Carolynn Davern,
David Robinson,
Toni Tutt

Special Contributors

Andrew Stern
Grace Wallace

Faculty Advisor

Dr. William Grattan
(ext 5336)

179 Braswell • Phone: 985-5336
Email: WJGrattan@ncwc.edu

ALUMNI from pg 1

We're always trying to make improvements and one of my goals is to increase the giving percentage from our alumni. Alumni giving is a healthy way of measuring a college and we want to increase that as much as possible. I also want to provide services to our alumni, networking events, mentoring opportunities, the ability to access career and professional development tools from our career services team. We appreciate our alumni and I want them to know that.

Q. Describe your immediate and long-range goals.

A. We're revamping our alumni services, communication, and events. It's our goal to have six area events this year, giving alumni the opportunity to gather and network. We want to increase the alumni association exposure on all of our campuses, letting current students know how excited we are for them to be part of the Battling Bishop family. I'm really pushing to celebrate our alumni and their accomplishments; when one of us has a win, we all win. Celebrating those victories will increase our Bishop pride and help alumni realize the value of a Wesleyan degree. We also want to increase our alumni engagement, having alumni visit campus more often, participate in our community-service events, attend games, volunteer as guest speakers, mentor current students, help with internships, and attend other events on and off campus. We need alumni ambassadors and we've had several alumni already volunteer for that role, promoting, challenging and communicating the exciting things that are happening to the fellow alumni.

Q. Can you get into specific plans for the 2017-18 year?

A. I've planned to hold events in the following areas this year: Goldsboro, The Triangle, Wilmington, and Greenville. In Rocky Mount we'll host homecoming and "Spring Alumni Weekend" on campus. It's a long-term goal to organize alumni events in as many locations as possible, but right now we'll be cultivating the alumni ambassadors and go from there.



Wesleyan alum Rebekah Cain has returned to direct the college's Alumni Relations Department. G. Wallace photo