



August 23, 2023

Ms. Renea Yates  
Director,  
Office of Army Cemeteries,  
1 Memorial Avenue,  
Arlington, VA 22211.

**Re:** Section 106 Public Consultation Regarding Removal of the Confederate Memorial from Arlington National Cemetery  
*Federal Register* 51786 (August 4, 2023)

Dear Ms. Yates:

On behalf of the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), we write to support Arlington National Cemetery’s decision to remove the bronze elements of the Arlington Confederate Memorial, leaving only the plain granite base to protect surrounding graves. We write from a desire to correct distorted history, and out of concern over the surging white supremacist movement in the United States, including deeply concerning reports about extremism in the Armed Forces. Because of our sophisticated research on white supremacy and extremism, as well as our work on the power of history and memory, SPLC is uniquely positioned to provide insight into the importance of removing the Arlington National Cemetery Confederate Memorial.

Commissioned by the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) and erected in 1914, this monument was part of an organized propaganda campaign to rewrite history and maintain white supremacy in the decades following the Civil War. Before the war, Confederate leaders explicitly claimed slavery and white supremacy as their cause.<sup>i</sup> After the war, UDC sought to erase the achievement of emancipation, to reunite North and South under the banner of white supremacy, and to remake Confederate leaders as American heroes.<sup>ii</sup> Central to this project was the myth that enslaved people were loyal and content. Arlington’s Confederate monument promotes this racist myth by depicting a weeping Black “mammy” taking a child from a Confederate soldier, and an enslaved person following his enslaver to war. In 1915, former U.S. Secretary of the Navy Hilary Herbert wrote that the purpose of Arlington Cemetery Confederate Memorial was to correct “lies” told by popular anti-slavery novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, and to memorialize

slavery as part of a simpler, happier time.<sup>iii</sup> Arlington's Confederate Memorial thus represents a distortion of history, and an insult to those who rest at Arlington and in graves marked and unmarked all over the country who fought for emancipation.

In addition to distorting the past, Arlington's Confederate memorial does harm in the present. Sociologists and psychologists have written about the psychological toll on African Americans forced to confront symbols of white supremacy in public spaces.<sup>iv</sup> Service men and women of color make up 46 percent of the U.S. armed forces. They should not have to endure these dehumanizing symbols. SPLC is also concerned about the rise of white supremacy in the United States in general, and of extremism in the military specifically. While the vast majority of those who serve in the U.S. Armed Forces have no connection to white supremacy, studies show that the numbers are growing.<sup>v</sup> Those who are indoctrinated into white supremacist ideology present a threat to cohesion and morale in the military and ultimately to national security.

In 2020, SPLC applauded the inclusion of a mandate that the military remove all Confederate symbols and change the names of military bases named for Confederates in the bipartisan National Defense Authorization Act.<sup>vi</sup> We believe that removing the bronze elements of the Arlington National Cemetery Confederate Memorial is an essential step toward completing the work of ridding our nation of these pernicious symbols. Maintaining this monument in our national military cemetery—a cemetery originally created as a resting place for those who gave their lives for emancipation and Union—would be an endorsement of the Confederate cause of white supremacy. Removing the monument would demonstrate that our nation is dedicated to freedom, equality, democracy, and unity.

We deeply appreciate the opportunity to provide our input, and we would be pleased to serve as an ongoing resource for Arlington National Cemetery as this process moves forward.

For additional information, please contact:

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Michael Lieberman, Senior Policy Counsel ([michael.liberman@splcenter.org](mailto:michael.liberman@splcenter.org))

Sincerely,



Margaret Huang  
President and CEO  
Southern Poverty Law Center

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<sup>i</sup> See, Alexander Stephens, “The Cornerstone of the Confederacy,” 1861, or Charles B. Dew, *Apostles of Disunion: Southern Secession Commissioners and the Causes of the Civil War*, 2001.

<sup>ii</sup> For an extensive discussion of this process, see David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory*, 2001.

<sup>iii</sup> Herbert, Hilary A. Herbert, *History of the Arlington Confederate Monument*, 1915.

<sup>iv</sup> For more sources on the psychological toll of public symbols of White Supremacy see Karen L. Cox, *No Common Ground: Confederate Monuments and the Ongoing Fight for Racial Justice*, 2021.

<sup>v</sup> <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2021/10/12/extremism-among-active-duty-military-and-veterans-remains-clear-and-present-danger>

<sup>vi</sup> <https://www.splcenter.org/presscenter/splc-action-fund-applauds-passage-national-defense-authorization-act-which-will-remove>