

University of Alabama Civil War Monument - UDC Boulder

In response to the 2020 George Floyd murder amid a global COVID-19 pandemic, University of Alabama (UA) officials paid heed to the demands made by African American stakeholders and their diverse allies for a revised campus landscape defined by slavery, the Lost Cause and Jim Crow segregation. On June 8, 2020, UA removed three Memorial plaques and announced a UA system commission tasked with reconsidering problematic building names. The following day, more importantly, a facilities crew hoisted the 110-year old UDC Boulder off its pedestal and removed it from the centrally located Quad to an undisclosed location. The home to the winning Crimson Tide football team became a footnote to the history of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since late May 2020, over 100 Confederate monuments have been removed by elected officials and occasionally protestors. Other problematic monuments to enslavers, settler colonists, segregationists and white supremacists have also fallen across the United States and the world. Unlike these other monuments, the removal of the UDC Boulder from a greenspace where teams of enslaved people once hand-cut the grass had additional significance. The reckoning process has exposed the irreconciliation of its whitewashed slave past, post-emancipation racial exclusion and entire Lost Cause campus landscape and made hyper-visible the shallow nature of previous efforts for current stakeholders.

National events, specifically the Charleston Massacre and Charlottesville Unite The Right rally, changed both national and campus conversations regarding the built landscape defined by slavery and the Lost Cause ideology. Rapid demographic growth, the emergence of the Universities Studying Slavery consortium, and lessons learned from an earlier campus movement informed the questioning of the Lost Cause campus landscape.

The diverse UA community openly questioned why the University had not done more to acknowledge its racial past after issuing a 2004 apology for the institutional involvement in slavery. Since 2015, students, faculty and other concerned campus stakeholders have demanded the revision of the official campus tours with content contained in the alternate race-cognizant tours exploring the university's slavery and Civil Rights Movement pasts. In short, the UDC Boulder no longer had a place in their imaginings of a more inclusive, diverse and equitable campus where fuller narratives,

once silenced by the landscape, could be told.

As the inheritors of the whitewashed Lost Cause campus landscape, twenty-first century undergraduate and graduate students grappled with the monument builders' intent. They, like "southern blacks, who had no stake in celebrating the Confederacy," as Karen L. Cox puts it, "had to share a cultural landscape that did." Students developed and presented creative solutions of reinterpreting and contextualizing the campus history that the University promoted, but were met by either promises or emphatic rejections.

Nevertheless, concerned campus stakeholders persisted but had little faith in the UA administration. Following the murder of George Floyd, students drafted two petitions – one asking for the monument's removal as part of their demands for a more equitable and just campus and the second calling for the renaming of buildings whose namesakes had ties to slavery, Confederacy, the Ku Klux Klan, and segregation. Despite garnering 20,000 signatures, few expected administrators to remove the UDC Boulder. But, on 9 June 2020, UA administrators defied expectations and actually listened.

What was this Confederate monument to the UA campus?

University officials accepted the first of two Confederate monuments from the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) in May 1914. Placed in the center of where the antebellum Rotunda once stood, the original monument rested on a small mound surrounded by a concrete border memorial financed by the Class of 1912. Chaired by Ellen Peter-Bryce, the Tuscaloosa chapter women and select group of UA faculty, UA Confederate veterans and other prominent UA alumni organized the UDC dedication events which included the unveiling, a graduation ceremony, and UDC Division meeting.

UDC Tuscaloosa chapter women successfully raised the necessary funds for the fabrication, installation and unveiling celebrations within a year of announcing plans for its placement. While the final budget remains unclear, the installed UDC Boulder design suggests that the costs aligned with the typical \$1,000 to \$4,000 for a Confederate soldier monument. The unique design would be replicated by other Alabama communities and regional campuses over the next two decades. From the fundraising to the dedication, the resulting monument reflected the shared values of the Alabama monument builders, institutional leaders and the campus community. The UA campus declared their commitment to the preservation of the Lost Cause and its white supremacist logics.

One report published in *The Crimson White* on 6 May 1914 related how, during the unveiling festivities, UA administrators conferred diplomas to the “old soldiers who fought in the Confederate army in the days of 61-65” in the freshly painted Morgan Hall auditorium. Surviving Confederate veterans, their families, students, faculty, white Tuscaloosa and West Alabama residents, and the Alabama Division of the UDC members attended the graduation ceremony. The same report announced to students: “The University takes great pleasure in the part which it is playing in the work of the United Daughters of the Confederacy.” The graduation ceremony upstaged the actual unveiling in terms of coverage in the student and local newspapers. Some newspapers, like the *Birmingham Age and Herald*, carefully documented the names of surviving and deceased men who were conferred diplomas in its coverage.

The UDC Boulder unveiling served as the ideal backdrop for the public, institutional tribute to the aging Lost Cause living monuments at the graduation ceremony. Mrs. L. M. Bashinsky, the president of the Alabama Division of the UDC, encouraged UA students to “turn your eyes to the past and behold again the lives and the conduct of the men who went out from this institution in the 60’s and take their lives for your example” in the defense of the Lost Cause and segregation.

Dr. John Massey and Hon. Sam Will John echoed Bashinsky’s sentiments for the students to defend the institution as had Civil War students in April 1865. Both speakers offered a revised history of the April 1865 Croxton Raid that resulted in the wartime destruction of the campus except for a few buildings, and emphasized the heroism, institutional devotion, military discipline and how the cadets responded to the challenge posed by the invading “Yankee army.”

President Denny then addressed the veterans and designated family members who accepted the diplomas of the deceased graduates. Wishing “to speak to the veterans of the Confederacy words of honor, faith, and congratulation,” Dr. Denny, in the final graduation ceremony address, “begged each old soldier to accept the diploma as a testimonial of Alabama’s unchanging love and loyalty to those men who had so loved Alabama and been so loyal to her.” Dr. Eugene A. Smith, UA professor of Geology, then handed out the diplomas to the twenty-five veterans in Morgan Hall, a building named after John Tyler Morgan, a Confederate general who actively overturned African American Reconstruction gains as a U.S. Senator.

As evidenced in every aspect of the day, in the speeches as in the locale, UA considered the UDC as an equal partner in sustaining the campus as a white-only educational space dedicated to maintaining the Jim Crow system using Lost Cause ideology.

Attendees then moved to the Quad for the unveiling. After the singing of the UA alma mater, UDC Division President Bashinsky gave another brief address before Cherokee Van de Graaff and Miss Hortense Rhodes unveiled the UDC Boulder. The University Glee Club performed another selection before having “thirteen co-eds representing the thirteen original states” sing “The Bonnie Blue Flag.” Like the Morgan Hall ceremony, the unveiling rituals bridged the past with the present and showcased the institutional commitment to white supremacy as the unspoken legacy of its slave past.

Following these ceremonies, the UDC women held a statewide Division meeting. Of the three meetings held in Tuscaloosa, the second Division meeting centered around the campus dedications of the UDC Boulder. After the unveiling and graduation ceremony, the UDC chapters celebrated one another in a scripted opening event with elaborate welcomes followed by floral gift presentations in the Tuscaloosa High School auditorium.

The Tuscaloosa hosts reminded attendees of the restoration of the flagship University in the state, region, and nation following its wartime destruction. “We all rejoice coming into our own again,” Mrs. L. O. Dawson proclaimed in her opening remarks. She offered a brief history of R. E. Rodes, the chapter’s namesake, before extolling the current UDC chapter leader as “one of the fairest sweetest Daughters of the Southland.”

While noting the remaining expenses for the dedication festivities, the Alabama women were hard at work on the second campus memorial – a signed Louis Comfort Tiffany stained-glass window placed in library named after Amelia Gayle Gorgas, the first Alabama Division historian. Although UA alumni and individual chapters contributed to the UDC Boulder, the Chair’s final report noted the urgency of fundraising for the second UA monument. UDC leadership reminded its members that they “must bend every ear to finish the Memorial Window.” Overall, this second Tuscaloosa meeting was devoted to celebrating the accomplishment of the UDC Boulder and justifying the chapter’s third meeting as hosts for the dedication of the UDC Memorial Window.

After the Dedication, 1914-2020

The UDC Boulder had an uneventful history after the dedication celebration. Beginning in 1915, student groups and athletic teams frequently used the site as a backdrop to their group yearbook photographs and assorted campus scenes. Its likeness adorned the *Corolla* 1925 yearbook cover. The *Crimson White* featured it prominently in a 1923 alternative campus tour. In 1939, UA moved the monument without fanfare during the

renovation of the present-day Gorgas Library. Progress toward the modern university, and not student protest, prompted its relocation and the resulting revised monument without its original mound and border.

During the February 1956 events resulting in the expulsion of the first African American student, Ku Klux Klan members in full regalia and students waving Confederate battle flags received validation for their massive resistance against desegregation. It is not a coincidence that the grounds surrounding the UDC Boulder served as the staging area for the mob. Its mere existence emboldened them.

After campus desegregation, the UDC Boulder never elicited the same removal calls as it had at another Southeastern Conference (SEC) school. University of Missouri students successfully relocated a similarly designed boulder from campus in the mid-1970s, but few UA students called for the removal of their boulder. UA administrators either ignored or tabled any petitions received.

Minor vandalism did occur as documented in the 1975 UA yearbook. Instead, the UDC Boulder had been fully naturalized in the landscape. Most did not see it. Before Crimson Tide football games, revelers leaned against or placed their red cups atop it without reading its plaque. Like the various sites of slavery, the UDC Boulder had been hidden in plain sight for most campus visitors but a source of pain, largely for students of color and black Alabamians until the 2015 Charleston Massacre.

After the murder of nine African American parishioners in Emmanuel AME Church, campus conversations, like the nation, shifted regarding Confederate monuments, flags, and existing memorial landscape. The 2017 Charlottesville Unite The Right rally brought additional awareness to the Confederate monument. Inquiries abounded on whether UA had any UDC memorials. The *Crimson White* highlighted the monument and other Lost Cause symbols in several articles. The UDC Boulder and its whitewashed historical plaque became visible to UA stakeholders, sometimes of their own volition, but most often because of work done in a classroom setting, by a news article or on an alternate campus tour. By the time of the murder of George Floyd, the privilege of ignoring the UDC Boulder became untenable.

Concerned graduate and undergraduate students drafted yet another petition. Students insisted on the removal and relocation of the UDC boulder and two Confederate plaques to either a Tuscaloosa cemetery or University archives. Directly confronting the neo-monument defenders' 'erasing history' claim, petitioners applied the lessons of their course work, post-2015 campus discussions, and alternate campus tours before

demanding additional diverse faculty hiring, a robust retention strategy for faculty, staff and students, campus policing reform, and other demands.

These students understood the UDC Boulder and other Lost Cause symbols embodied the burden of an institutional legacy of slavery and race. The aftermath of George Floyd's murder revealed how slavery and its whitewashed Lost Cause legacy made visible UA's institutional "wound that has not been allowed to heal," to borrow Rochelle Riley's term. This institutional slave past influenced both the acceptance of the UDC Boulder and the decision to remain a white educational space until desegregation. While not at the campus entrance, the UDC Boulder reminded African Americans and other people of color of their less-than-equal place in this community, in spite of desegregation permitting their matriculation.

Student athletes, including members of Crimson Tide football team, had the additional burden of grappling with the sports industries as neo-plantations analogy. These unpaid African American athletes generate both institutional bragging rights and revenue through their labor on the grassy field of action; in the process, they disproportionately subsidize coaches' salaries and other college sports. As such, these players reckon with a unique challenge that is similar to what Kevin Blackstone has called the "discordant arrangement of power, wealth and labor" as "the athletic progeny of enslaved Africans." Collectively, these students and signatories understood the necessity for the campus to "put the burden down."

Based on previous inaction and gaslighting, petitioners expected their pleas to go unheard. A June 8, 2020 press release revealed otherwise. Unlike previous petitions, UA Board of Trustees and administration paid heed. Three Confederate memorials were removed immediately. The University of Alabama archives received the plaques before communicating the official announcement to the campus community and press outlets via e-mail. Facilities removed and relocated the UDC Boulder to an undisclosed location on the following day. Fresh sod and careful landscaping have since made it impossible to recall its existence.

The University has subsequently followed through with the renaming process. The campus is no longer marked by buildings named after two white supremacists. Additional buildings remain under consideration by the taskforce. It is unclear whether the decision and subsequent revision process was a response to the petition, fear of widespread campus protest once students returned from summer break, or institutional performative allyship following the nationwide protests during the Summer of 2020.

Even with removal, the University of Alabama remains firmly connected to the broader history of Confederate monuments. The UDC Boulder emerged during the first wave of the Confederate Monument placements in public spaces. UA actively contributed to the Lost Cause commemorative landscape throughout the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The 2020 removal is now forever linked to the Confederate Monument removal moment amid the COVID-19 pandemic. By understanding the UDC Boulder, it is possible to trace the history of the Lost Cause memorials, debates, and removals.

Reading and Research

Primary Sources:

The following sources provide numerous details relating to the fundraising, design, creation, and dedication of the UA Boulder by the United Daughters of the Confederacy and the campus community.

'1912 Class Memorial', *The Crimson White* (13 May, 1914), 1.

'A Singular Coincidence', *The Times-Gazette* (24 June 1913), 3.

Alabama Division, United Daughters of the Confederacy, *Minutes of the Eighteenth Annual Convention. Alabama Division United Daughters of the Confederacy Held At Tuscaloosa, Alabama, May 13, 14, 15, 1914. Organized in Montgomery, April 30, 1897. Mrs. L. M. Bashinsky, President, Mrs. E. M. Trimble, Secretary* (Opelika: Post Publishing Co., 1914); clipping, accessed in W. S. Hoole Special Collections.

Includes an account of the UDC's statewide Division meetings, one of which focused on the dedication of the UA Boulder and was held in the Tuscaloosa High School auditorium. Further details of the speech made by Mrs L. O. Dawson can be found here and in Huey's *History of the Alabama Division*, alongside information about the second UA memorial planned by the UDC: the UA Memorial Window.

Black, Ormond O., 'Campus of Alabama Abounds With Remains of Old University in Mount, Guard

House, Boulder, Observatory', *The Crimson White* (27 September 1923), 1.

'Boulders to be Placed at University', *The Times-Gazette* (11 May 1913), 3.

Corolla 1925, v. 32.

See this volume for the yearbook cover featuring an image of the monument.

Corolla 1975, v. 83.

Records minor vandalism carried out on the Boulder in 1975.

'Enthusiastic Business', *The Times-Gazette* (8 March 1914), 4.

'Honorary Degrees Given to Old Confederate Cadets', *The Crimson White* (13 May 1914), 1.
Provides detailed coverage of the speeches given by U.D.C. and campus officials during the monument's dedication, and the day's emphasis on preserving the UA campus as a white-only educational space.

Huey, Mattie McAdory, *History of the Alabama Division of the United Daughters of the Confederacy* (Opelika: Post Publishing Company, 1937).

'Morgan Hall Receives New Coat of Calsomine', *The Crimson White* (6 May 1914), 2.

'Mrs. Bryce, Originator of Boulder Plans, Elected Chairman of Committee', *The Times-Gazette* (14 July 1913), 3.

'Mrs. Bryce Local Committee For University Boulder', *The Times-Gazette* (16 July 1913); clipping, Netta Tutwiler Scrapbook, 1908-1914, McCorvey and Tutwiler family papers, W. S. Hoole Special Collections, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, AL.

'Program of the Eighteenth Annual Convention Ala. Division United Daughters of the Confederacy', *Tuscaloosa News* (2 May 1914), 3.

'U.D.C. Monument to Be Dedicated in May', *The Crimson White* (6 May 1914), 1.

'University Boys of Early Sixties Given Diplomas', *The Age-Herald* (14 May 1914); clipping, Netta Tutwiler Scrapbook, 1914-1916, McCorvey and Tutwiler family papers.

'Unveiling of the Boulder', program, (13 May 1914); Netta Tutwiler Scrapbook, 1914-1916, Digital University of Alabama Digital Collections, Tuscaloosa, AL.

Secondary Sources:

Beauregard, Isabelle, 'The UDC Boulder represents our campus', *The Crimson White* (20 February 2017), <https://cw.ua.edu/35974/opinion/the-udc-boulder-represents-our-campus/>.

One example of UA campus debates raised in the wake of the rise of white supremacist violence in, for example, Charleston S.C. and Charlottesville, N.C.

Blackistone, Kevin, 'Sports Industries as Plantations' in *The Burden: African Americans and the Enduring Impact of Slavery*, ed. Rochelle Riley (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2018), 65-68.

Bolling, Jessa Reid, 'UA Board of Trustees Authorizes removal of three Confederate plaques', *The Crimson White* (8 June 2020), <https://cw.ua.edu/65191/top-stories/ua-board-of-trustees-authorizes-removal-of-three-confederate-plaques/>.

Brewer, Keely, 'Nott Hall renamed, but committee's work is "far from finished,"' *The Crimson White* (5 August 2020), <https://cw.ua.edu/65352/news/nott-hall-renamed-but-committees-work-is-far-from-finished/>.

[Provides an account of the re-naming of Nott Hall and the work of the UA re-naming and removals taskforce.](#)

Casagrande, Michael. "Alabama trustees cite racist language while renaming Morgan Hall," *Al.com*, September 17, 2020, <https://www.al.com/news/2020/09/alabama-trustees-cite-racist-language-while-renaming-morgan-hall.html>.

Cox, Karen L., *Dixie's Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture, With a New Preface* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2019).

Garrison, Isabelle, 'Monumental Debate: Students divided over necessity', *The Crimson White* (1 September 2017), <https://cw.ua.edu/40835/top-stories/monumental-debate-students-divided-over-necessity-of-monuments/>.

One example of UA campus debates raised in the wake of the rise of white supremacist violence in, for example, Charleston S.C. and Charlottesville, N.C.

Green, Hilary, Monument Removals, 2015-2020, Google My Maps Project, 2020. Updated October 20, 2020, <https://www.hngreenphd.com/monument-removal-project.html>.

Green, Hilary, "Why Nott? Confronting a Campus Building's Legacy of White Supremacy," public lecture, UA Honors College, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, AL, September 6, 2017.

One example of UA campus debates raised in the wake of the rise of white supremacist violence in, for example, Charleston S.C. and Charlottesville, N.C.

Hollars, B. J., *Opening the Doors: The Desegregation of the University of Alabama and the Fight for Civil Rights in Tuscaloosa* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2013). Provides a history of desegregation at the University of Alabama, including an indication of the ways in which the Boulder provided a backdrop for white supremacist activities.

Mellown, Robert Oliver, *The University of Alabama: A Guide to the Campus and Its History* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2013).

Riley, Rochelle, ed., *The Burden: African Americans and the Enduring Impact of Slavery* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2018).

Silkenat, David. "'A Company of Gentlemen': Confederate Veterans and Southern Universities", *American Nineteenth Century History* (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1080/14664658.2020.1843838>.

Smith, Elayne, 'The names in the schoolhouse door: UA students question building names', *The Crimson White* (22 February 2016), <https://cw.ua.edu/30760/top-stories/the-names-in-the-schoolhouse-door-ua-students-question-building-names/>.

One example of UA campus debates raised in the wake of the rise of white supremacist violence in, for example, Charleston S.C. and Charlottesville, N.C.

Tarajano, Ruben, 'Our University must further its recognition of the history of slavery', *The Crimson White* (19 February 2018), <https://cw.ua.edu/42828/opinion/our-university-must-further-its-recognition-of-the-history-of-slavery/>.

Taylor, Stephanie, 'University of Alabama removes Confederate monument', *Tuscaloosa News* (9 June 2020), <https://www.tuscaloosanews.com/story/news/local/2020/06/09/university-of-alabama-removes-confederate-monument/112823838/>.

The University of Alabama System Board of Trustees, UA President Stuart Bell and Chancellor Finis St. John, "Joint statement regarding plaque removals at UA and formation of Building Names Review Committee," June 8, 2020, University of Alabama System Office, Tuscaloosa, AL, <https://uasystem.edu/news/2020/06/joint-statement-regarding-plaque-removals-at-ua-and-formation-of-building-names-review-committee/>.

Whites, LeeAnn, *Gender Matters: Civil War, Reconstruction, and the Making of the New South* (New York: Palgrave, 2005).