

University of Mississippi History Faculty Statement about the Plaque Recently Installed in front of the Confederate Memorial on Campus

As historians at the University of Mississippi, we call on Chancellor Jeffrey Vitter and the contextualization committee convened by Provost Morris Stocks to revise the plaque recently installed in front of the Confederate memorial on our campus.

The Action Plan on Consultant Reports and Update on the Work of the Sensitivity and Respect Committee, which was released in August 2014, recommended that the University “seek suggestions from various interested constituency groups” to “offer more history, putting the past into context, telling more of the story of Mississippi’s struggles with slavery, secession, segregation, and their aftermath.”

In our professional judgment, the current plaque does not accomplish this goal. In response to Chancellor Vitter’s March 29th call for suggestions to change the wording of the plaque, we submit the following text, which has been adapted from a template created by the Atlanta History Center for this purpose:

From the 1870s through the 1920s, memorial associations erected more than 1,000 Confederate monuments throughout the South. These monuments reaffirmed white southerners’ commitment to a “Lost Cause” ideology that they created to justify Confederate defeat as a moral victory and secession as a defense of constitutional liberties. The Lost Cause insisted that slavery was not a cruel institution and – most importantly – that slavery was not a cause of the Civil War. It also conveyed a belief, widely accepted throughout the United States, in white racial supremacy. Campaigns for legally mandated “Jim Crow” segregation and for the disfranchisement of African Americans accompanied celebrations of the Lost Cause; these campaigns often sparked racial violence, including lynching.

Historians today recognize slavery as the central cause of the Civil War and freedom as its most important result. Although deadly and destructive, the Civil War freed four million enslaved southerners and led to the passage of constitutional amendments that promised national citizenship and equal protection of laws, regardless of race. This monument, created in 1906 to recognize the sacrifice of Mississippians who fought to establish the Confederacy as a slaveholding republic, must now remind us that Confederate defeat brought freedom, however imperfect, to millions of people.

We welcome the opportunity to play an active role in our campus’s ongoing efforts to provide historical context for existing symbols and building names on campus.

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