

# CYCLORAMA DOCUMENT BASED QUESTIONS

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**How and why has  
the meaning of the  
Cyclorama changed?**

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# Brief Timeline & Background

Brief timeline of *Battle of Atlanta* cyclorama (referred to as Cyclorama) that is at the Atlanta History Center.

**1882-1886** Milwaukee Studio of German and Austrian artists painted the first of two cycloramas of *The Battle of Atlanta*.

**1886-1890** *Battle of Atlanta* cyclorama toured the midwest & north initially receiving much fanfare. Another copy of the cyclorama is made 1887 but is lost in the late 1890s. The company who owns the Cyclorama declared bankruptcy in 1890.

**1891** Paul Atkinson, a Georgia born entertainment promoter, purchased the Cyclorama, and re-envisioned it as a Confederate victory. He first showed it in Chattanooga.

**1892-1893** The Cyclorama came to Atlanta. It was not profitable and as a result has multiple owners and moved to Grant Park.

**1898** After investing money in repairs, the final private owner of the Cyclorama, George V. Gress, donated it to the City of Atlanta.

**1921** The City built a “fireproof stone” structure to replace the wooden building the Cyclorama was in.

**1934-1936** The city received money from the federal government for repairs and added 128 plaster figures.

**1938-1982** Before the tour, visitors would hear Dixie, the unofficial anthem of the Confederate States of America.

**1959-1977** Citizens and city officials debated what to do with the cyclorama that was no longer popular and needed expensive repairs.

**1979-1982** First black mayor of Atlanta, Maynard Jackson led efforts to restore and make more appealing to 20th century audiences.

**1918-2015** Visitors listened to a narration voiced by Black actor James Earl Jones that referred to the Civil War as “the War between the States.”

**2014-2018** Atlanta History Center accepted responsibility for the restoration, preservation, and interpretation of the Cyclorama until 2089.

# Overview

In the Clue Book, you learned about how the *Battle of Atlanta* cyclorama began as a celebration of a Union victory but when it came to Atlanta became an attraction that honored Confederate valor. You also learned that the depiction of the Confederacy as a moral crusade for courage and freedom is called the Lost Cause. During the early twentieth century as Jim Crow became part of American culture, an organization called the United Daughters of the Confederacy spread the ideas of the Lost Cause through monuments, textbooks, and public holidays that depicted the Confederates as heroic freedom fighters and slaves as servants who willingly served their masters. Even as late as 2018, the [Southern Poverty Law Center](#) found that fewer than 10% of high school seniors can correctly identify slavery as the central cause of the Civil War. This document based question will allow you to better understand Denmark Mitchell's claim that the Cyclorama is "still stained in the memory of many as a confederate artifact" and discover other meanings that painting has taken on.

# General Logan Starred at Premiere (Doc. 1)



**Doc. 1** 1886 Ad for Minneapolis, Collection of the Atlanta History Center

The cursive headline reads “Logan to the Front.”

*Though few people know who General “Black Jack” Logan is today, he was a household name at the end of the 19th century. He served as a Congressman, ran unsuccessfully for Vice President in 1884, founded the Union’s veteran association, and created Memorial Day. As the Battle of Atlanta cycloramas [there were originally two], toured the North and midwest, ads featured Logan as the star of the painting.*

# 1888 Campaign Ploy (Doc. 2)

INDIANAPOLIS, July 2.—A great deal of comment and considerable bad blood has been caused here by the action of the managers of cyclorama of the "Battle of Atlanta." This cyclorama was built by popular subscription of \$10 shares and upward. Democrats as well as Republicans are stockholders.

On Wednesday morning an artist appeared on the scene, and very shortly thereafter the picture of Captain Theodore Davis, war correspondent of Harper's Weekly, disappeared and in its stead appeared General Harrison, mounted on a white horse. Harrison wasn't in the battle at all.

This alteration roused the indignation of the Democratic stockholders, and they immediately proceeded to make things warm for the management, with the result that the directors have ordered the picture restored to its original form.

**Doc. 2** 1886 Ad for Minneapolis, Collection of the Atlanta History Center



*Theodore Davis (a war illustrator who had advised the Cyclorama painters) as painted in 1886 & restored 2015*



*1888 Theodore Davis repainted as Gen. Benjamin Harrison, who was running for President*

## Atlanta Arrival (Doc. 3)

### A Confederate Victory.

There is one feature of this painting that alone will make it more interesting to southerners than any other one in existence, and that is, it is a battle in which the confederate soldiers are shown in the moment of victory. It gives justice to the southern valor that was ever shown in the face of the enemy.



CYCLORAMA.

“Battle of Atlanta.”

OPEN DAY AND NIGHT.

Only Confederate Victory  
ever Painted.

13-47c

## The Southern Version (Doc. 4)

**Doc. 4** 1913 Paul Atkinson to W.T. Waters Jr., a reporter for the Atlanta Journal

“. . . unfortunately, these cycloramas were all made with a view of exhibiting them in northern cities and the artists always gave a more glowing coloring to the federal troops than to the Confederates. Well, this is all right to the son of a federal soldier—but it don't always set so well with a son of a Confederate soldier. So when I mounted this picture in Chattanooga—and saw a group of Confederate prisoners being rushed through the federal lines, I at once said I'll change that scene if it costs me my job—so I secured an artist and I told him to take those Confederate uniforms off those prisoners and put every mothers son of them in a coat of blue. It took him days to do the job—but when finished he had a bunch of Yankees running like the mischief.”

## Confederate Heroism (Doc. 5)



**Doc. 5** *From the Lecture of W.H. Aaron in the 1930s as depicted by historian and artist Wilber Kurtz*

The cursive headline reads “Logan to the Front.”

Though few people know who General “Black Jack” Logan is today, he was a household name at the end of the 19th century. He served as a Congressman, ran unsuccessfully for Vice President in 1884, founded the Union’s veteran association, and created Memorial Day. As the Battle of Atlanta cycloramas [there were originally two], toured the North and midwest, ads featured Logan as the star of the painting.

# Metaphor for National Reunion (Docs. 6 & 7)

## **Doc. 6** 1892 *The Atlanta Constitution*

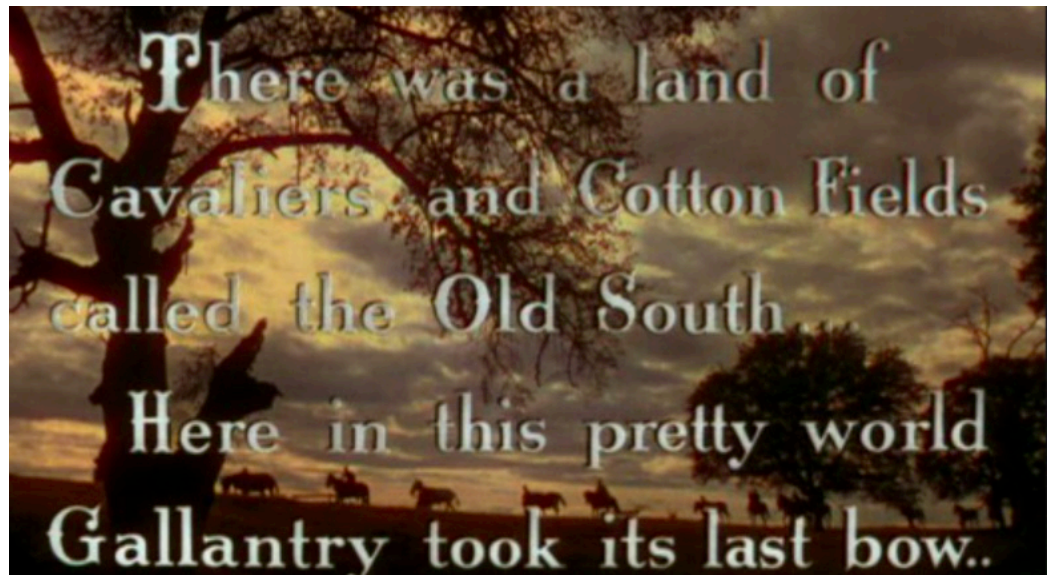
“...In their midst lies a severely wounded confederate; by his side is a federal who is supporting his head and trying to relieve his sufferings by giving him water. They are Joe and Henry Carter, of Newton, Ga. When the war broke out Joe enlisted in the southern army, while Henry cast his fortunes with the federals. They had not met in three years, and now they have met, not as foemen, hilt to hilt, but as brothers.”



## **Doc. 7** Gordon L. Jones, “*Yankees in Georgia?: How The Battle of Atlanta Cyclorama Became a Confederate Icon.*” 2019

The story was almost certainly an Atkinson invention. By 1898, the Confederate brother was (predictably) a member of the 42nd Georgia Regiment. By 1924, the brothers were not even from Georgia any more, but instead were the Martin Brothers of Tennessee—probably a holdover from *The Battle of Atlanta’s* run in Chattanooga.<sup>xxxvi</sup> Of course, the story was so convincing—and resilient—because audiences thought it should be true. Here was the ultimate tale of national tragedy, the “brother’s war,” the heart and soul of the reconciliationist sentiment that increasingly permeated Civil War memory in North and South after 1900.

## Gone with the Wind (Docs. 8-9)



**Doc. 8** 1939 Opening lines of the film

"Gone with the Wind" was a 1939 internationally acclaimed film that was based on a 1936 novel by Margaret Mitchell, an Atlantan. It glamorized slavery and the KKK and promoted the idea that formerly enslaved people didn't want their freedom and did not deserve civil rights after the Civil War.



Cyclorama Clark Gable Figure, 2019

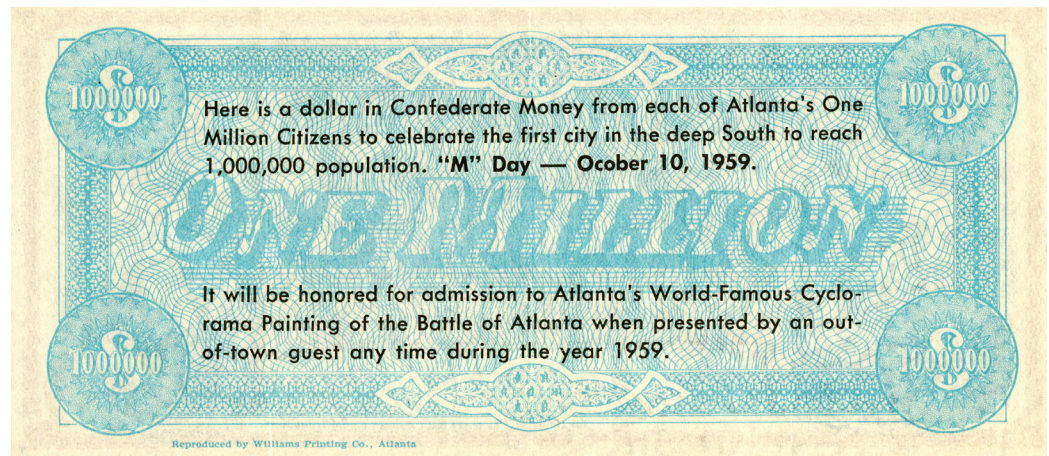
**Doc. 9** Life Magazine 1939

Clark Gable, the starring actor of "Gone with the Wind," stands in front of the Cyclorama with a local Atlantan who was selected to lead the "Gone with the Wind" Parade and Ball. When touring the Cyclorama, Gable supposedly told the mayor of Atlanta, William B. Hartsfield, that the only problem with the painting was he was not in it. Subsequently, Hartsfield ordered Gable be added and another plaster soldier that resembled Gable appeared.

# Confederate Icon (Doc. 10)



Front

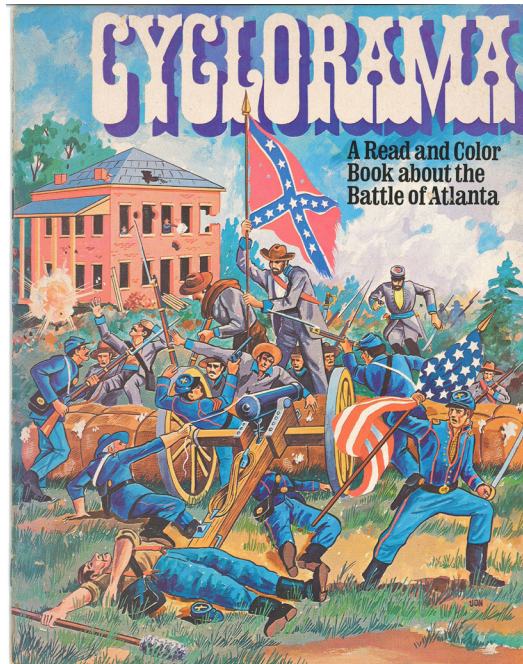


Back

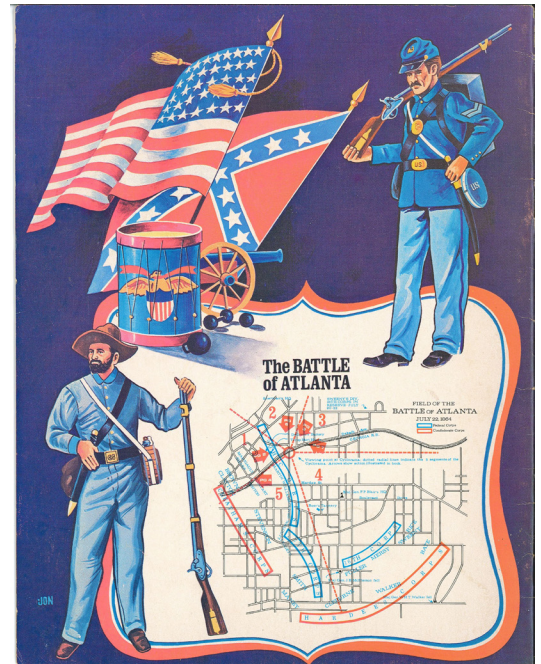
## Doc. 10 1959 Admission Ticket

In the circle below the Confederate Battle Flag the national motto of the Confederate State “Deo vindice” (Latin for “(With) God (as our) defender/protector”) frames an unknown Confederate soldier. Lt. Gen. T. J. “Stonewall,” one of the most popular Confederate leaders considered a martyr to the Cause as he died in battle is featured in the right corner. The text, “Two Years After the Ratification of a Treaty Of Peace between the Confederate States and the United States, Confederate States of America will pay to the bearer on demand one million dollars” would have appeared on Confederate money as the Confederacy issued their seventh series of CSA notes February 17, 1864 that had no worth beyond the CSA’s promise to pay upon their victory.

# Mixed Messages (Doc. 11)



Front



Back

## **Doc. 11** *Souvenir Coloring Book 1975*

By 1975 the Confederate flag had become a symbol of resistance to the Civil Rights Movement.

# **Atlanta History Center's Restoration and Reinterpretation (Doc. 12)**

Holland Collan, "A Victory for the Civil War 'Cyclorama.'"  
*The New York Times*, Feb. 21, 2019.

If you had visited Atlanta in the early 1960s, you would have found drinking fountains labeled "Colored" and "White." Driving into the city from the airport today you pass signs for Ralph David Abernathy Freeway, Andrew Young International Boulevard, John Lewis Freedom Parkway. As in the country at large, there have been big changes.

How deep are the changes? Nationally, militant whiteness is out in the open again. Our president is trying to inscribe a color line across our southern border. So politically split are the citizens of Fort America that it sometimes feels like a new kind of civil war is brewing.

These tensions have played out symbolically in skirmishes over the fate of historical monuments, specifically public sculptures memorializing the Confederacy. Should we trash them or keep them? Annotate them or let them be? With the recent reappearance in Atlanta of a depiction of a fateful 1864 Union-Confederate encounter, there's yet another loaded image to consider.

This monument, called "The Battle of Atlanta," is different from many of the others. For one thing, it's not a sculpture; it's a colossal oil painting: 49 feet high, as long as a football field, and conceived as a cyclorama, a wraparound environment for 360-degree viewing. And unlike many commemorative statues, its political affiliation—Union, Confederate—has shifted over time, depending on where the painting was shown and who was looking.

..Wisely, the Center doesn't treat the cyclorama as art, entertainment or monument. It presents it as a dynamic artifact of the past with complicated information for the present.

