

ATLANTA **HISTORY** CENTER

A Condensed History of the Stone Mountain Carving

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The carving on the side of Stone Mountain has a controversial history that involves strong connections to white supremacy, Confederate Lost Cause mythology, and anti-integration sentiments. From the beginning of efforts to create the carving in 1914, early proponents of the carving had strong connections to the Ku Klux Klan and openly supported Klan politics. Helen Plane, leader of the United Daughters of the Confederacy and credited with beginning efforts to create the initial carving, openly praised the Klan and even proposed Klansmen be incorporated in the carving. Sam Venable, owner of Stone Mountain, sanctioned Klan meetings on the mountain and remained highly involved with the group for many years. These are just a two of many early carving proponents involved with the white supremacist organization.

Given these influences and commonly accepted versions of Civil War history amongst white Americans at the time, the Stone Mountain carving effort carried with it Confederate Lost Cause sentiments from its beginning. Efforts at rewriting Confederate history as a moral victory and pining for the supposedly morally superior society of the romanticized Old South were at the center of the motivations behind the carving.

The carving effort collapsed in 1928. It was revived in the 1950s. Governor Marvin Griffin, an overt supporter of segregation, promised to resume the carving if elected during his campaign for governor, made the announcement 57 days after the Supreme Court ruling in *Brown vs. Board of Education* made the legal foundation of segregation in schools, separate but equal, unconstitutional. He also supported legislation to change the Georgia state flag to one featuring the Confederate battle flag. Pro-segregation members of the government and the community used Confederate symbolism, including Stone Mountain, to reassert Lost

Cause ideology and cling to their “way of life.” In other words, Confederate symbolism was invoked as a last effort at thwarting federally mandated integration.

Today, Stone Mountain is protected by Georgia law which states it cannot be altered, removed, concealed, or obscured to preserve its status as a tribute to the Confederacy.

From this controversial history rises an enormous tribute to the Lost Cause of the Confederacy and Massive Resistance to integration only a few miles from the city of Atlanta. To contribute to the dialogue coming from shifting perspectives on the carving, this history surrounding the carving must be understood from an evidence-based perspective.

Timeline of Stone Mountain Events

- 1914**
Editorial in the *Atlanta Georgian* prints proposition by John Temple Graves of the *New York American* to create a Confederate monument on Stone Mountain. Helen Plane, a Georgia United Daughters of the Confederacy leader, proposes a bust of Robert E. Lee be carved on the mountain.
- November 25, 1915**
William J. Simmons and a group of men ascend Stone Mountain and burn a cross, resurrecting the Ku Klux Klan and initiating 16 members.
- 1916**
Stone Mountain Confederate Monument Association (SMCMA) is incorporated with Helen Plane as the founder and first president. Sam Venable, owner of the mountain, stipulates that the carving has to be completed by 1928. Gutzon Borglum is selected as the carver.
- 1923**
Borglum begins carving.
- 1923**
SMCMA begins publishing *Stone Mountain Magazine*.
- 1924**
Borglum unveils completed carved head of Robert E. Lee.
- March 17, 1924**
President Calvin Coolidge signs a bill authorizing a commemorative coin designed by Borglum. The SMCMA sells the coin to raise funds.
- 1924**
Relationship between Borglum and SMCMA deteriorates.
- 1925**
Borglum is fired and flees to North Carolina. The SMCMA hires Augustus Lukeman as the new sculptor.
- April 9, 1928**
63rd anniversary of Lee's surrender at Appomattox- Lukeman unveils head of Lee atop an unfinished horse. Borglum's work is blasted off the mountain.
- Late 1920s**
SMCMA goes bankrupt due to the Great Depression and work on the carving halts.
- 1928**
The title to the mountainside is returned back to Sam Venable since the carving is incomplete. Venable grants the Klan unrestricted access to the mountain for rallies and meetings.
- 1941**
Governor Eugene Talmadge attempts to resume the carving, but plans are halted due to World War II.
- 1946**
Dr. Sam Green, a former Klan leader, attempts to resurrect the Klan with a rally at Stone Mountain, but is unsuccessful.
- May 1954**
Brown vs. Board of Education ruling strikes down "separate but equal" doctrine.
- July 1954**
Marvin Griffin announces his candidacy for governor of Georgia, campaigning against desegregation and proposing the completion of the Stone Mountain carving 57 days after the *Brown vs. Board of Education* ruling
- 1956**
Governor Marvin Griffin signs into law the new Georgia state flag which includes the Confederate battle flag.
- 1958**
Governor Marvin Griffin signs a law purchasing Stone Mountain and creating the Stone Mountain Memorial Association (SMMA) to oversee the completion of the carving.
- 1964**
Carving resumes under Governor Carl Sanders and the city observes the Battle of Atlanta centennial.
- May 9, 1970**
Progress on the carving is unveiled in official ceremony, featuring Vice President Spiro Agnew after President Richard Nixon suddenly cancels his appearance.
- 1972**
Carving is officially completed by carver Roy Faulkner.
- 1994**
In preparation for the 1996 Olympic Games, Stone Mountain begins exhibit renovations to soften focus on the Civil War.
- 2001**
The Confederate battle flag is removed from the state flag and the Confederate memorial on Stone Mountain is protected by law.

The Stone Mountain Confederate Memorial

The Confederate Memorial Carving at Stone Mountain Park is the largest and most famous symbol of the Lost Cause in America.

Below, we trace the development of the monument from United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) President Helen Plane’s proposal to the present day, explaining that it was carved to promote—and continues to represent—the Lost Cause mythology and massive resistance to integration. The Lost Cause mythology sustains a legacy of the Confederacy that was used to bolster the white supremacist policy goals of segregationists throughout the 20th century.

White Southerners were indoctrinated with the Lost Cause narrative by their grandparents, parents, schools, Confederate remembrance groups, such as the UDC and the Sons of Confederate Veterans (SCV), government officials; and academic historians.¹

Lost Cause monuments were erected to validate Southern secession and justify the Confederacy fighting the war in defense of States’ Rights—as opposed to the historically accurate primary cause of the war, the preservation of slavery.

In the early years of the project to create the carving, the memorial symbolized the widespread acceptance and support of white supremacy and Jim Crow segregation laws amongst many white citizens both in the South and across the country. In later years, it served the related purpose of galvanizing white Southerners against federally mandated integration and civil rights.

Lost Cause mythology deliberately ignores the 3.9 million Southerners (approximately 40% of the population of the Confederacy) who were released from bondage as a result of the Union victory. Providing historical context

for the carving presents an opportunity to educate the public on how Lost Cause mythology developed and why so many still adhere to it today. Most importantly, contextualization means the opportunity to tell the complete, nuanced story of all Southerners.

¹ Notable examples of these Southern apologists include U.B. Phillips, the University of Georgia’s E. Merton Coulter, and members of Columbia University’s “Dunning School” (named after historian William A. Dunning who oversaw U.B. Phillips’ doctoral work). A more accurate historiography that accounted for enslaved people—similar to the view of the Civil War accepted by modern historians —was used by some scholars at the time but was not considered mainstream.

Helen Plane, the United Daughters of the Confederacy, and the First Carvings

In 1914, John Temple Graves of the *New York American* wrote an editorial that was printed in the *Atlanta Georgian* that proposed the creation of a Confederate monument on Stone Mountain. Helen Plane, the Honorary Life President of the Georgia State Division of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, was inspired by this idea. She proposed a carving on the side of the mountain of Robert E. Lee as a new Confederate memorial.

From the beginning of the efforts to create the Confederate memorial, Lost Cause mythology was widely embraced by the proponents of the effort. Sam Venable, the owner of Stone Mountain, responded to Helen Plane's 1914 letter asking for support in creating the memorial:

"I am in thorough sympathy with the sentiment which underlies the movement to erect this memorial. From my childhood days to the present hour, I have entertained the most profound admiration and reverence for those who consecrated their lives and services to the 'Lost Cause.'"²

Several years later, the Georgia General Assembly passed a resolution honoring Venable for allowing the monument to be carved on his land. The General Assembly viewed the carving as a memorial to a cause, not to fallen soldiers:

"A Resolution ...WHEREAS Hon. Samuel H. Venable ... have made a patriotic donation to the Stone Mountain Confederate Monumental Association, a large portion of what is known as Stone Mountain, the largest plain of granite in the world, for the purpose of having carved thereon a colossal statue as a memorial to the Confederacy; which, when completed will be the only monument in the world to a cause."³

Shortly after Helen Plane's initial inspiration, on November 25, 1915, a man named William J. Simmons led a group of men up the side of Stone Mountain. With the blessing of Sam Venable, Simmons ignited a cross at the top of the mountain and resurrected the Ku Klux Klan.

The ceremony was conducted with white robes and hoods, a stone altar, an open Bible, an unsheathed sword, and a U.S. flag. Nathan Bedford Forrest II administered the oath of Klan membership to the group of 16 initiates.⁴ After the initiation, a cross was burned. The Klan's regrouping coincided with and was partially encouraged by both the film *The Birth of a Nation*—which premiered in Atlanta a week after the cross-burning—and the Leo Frank trial and murder. Leo Frank was lynched near Marietta on August 17, 1915, approximately three months prior to the resurrection of the Klan.

Unlike the original Klan, the second Klan was organized not only to oppose Republican rule and African American equality, but also targeted Jewish people, Catholic people, and immigrants. The Ku Klux Klan would grow to infiltrate local and state politics, ushering in an era of intense institutionalized white supremacy across the country.

² Sam Venable to Helen Plane, August 8, 1914, Helen Plane Papers, Special Collections Department, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia.

³ Resolution adopted in General Assembly of Georgia, August 21, 1917, Stone Mountain Confederate Monumental Association Records, Special Collections Department, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia.

⁴ Loewen (263) writes that Forrest went on to serve as the grand dragon of the Georgia Klan as well as national secretary. Forrest was the grandson of Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest.

The Klan would also grow to have a close relationship with the early proponents of the Stone Mountain Confederate Memorial, including Plane herself. Although not herself a member of the Klan, Helen Plane admired the Klan and even went so far as to suggest adding Klan figures to the proposed carving on Stone Mountain. After seeing the film *The Birth of a Nation* and observing Simmons' Thanksgiving Day cross burning, Plane wrote:

“The ‘Birth of a Nation’ will give us a percentage of the next Monday’s matinee. Since seeing this wonderful and beautiful picture of Reconstruction in the South, I feel that it is due to the Ku Klux Klan which saved us from Negro domination and carpet-bag rule, that it be immortalized on Stone Mountain. Why not represent a small group of them in their nightly uniform approaching in the distance?”⁵

In 1916, the Stone Mountain Confederate Monumental Association (SMCMA) was created, with Helen Plane serving as both the founder and first president of the organization.⁶ Sam Venable allotted a portion of the mountain to the SMCMA for the completion of the monument, stipulating that the carving must be completed by 1928.

Sculptor Gutzon Borglum was selected to carve the Confederate Monument. He soon updated the initial UDC plan for the monument, instead suggesting a more elaborate carving of Robert E. Lee leading troops into battle. He also proposed a memorial hall in the interior of the mountain to honor the women of the Confederacy. Although the selection of Borglum as the sculptor might seem ironic, since he had recently completed a bust of Abraham Lincoln on display at the US Capitol, it is less ironic when considering Borglum's eventual advocacy for Lost Cause and Klan ideals.⁷

In the 1920s, Gutzon Borglum and Helen Plane were not the only prominent members of the early Confederate Monument efforts to be involved with or sympathetic to the Klan. Sam Venable continued to be involved with the Klan and allowed the organization to use the mountain for rituals, while Hollins Randolph, president of the SMCMA and Nathan Bedford Forrest II, secretary of the SMCMA, were also members of the white supremacist organization.

Although Gutzon Borglum's involvement in the Klan is sometimes downplayed, there is significant evidence that indicates Borglum was an active participant in the Klan and eagerly subscribed to its ideology. He was a trusted advisor of David C. Stephenson, a Midwest Klan leader. His clearly professed racist views are demonstrated in quotes such as the following:

“If you cross a pure bred with a mongrel dog you get a mongrel. So it is in races. ... It is curious that the lowest race in civilization is the strongest physically and breeding (crossed) is always down. A Negro and a Jew will produce Negro, but Hindu and Jew—Jew; Chinese and Jew, offspring Jew; Italian and Jew, offspring Jew; and European race and Jew, offspring Jew.”⁸

Borglum began carving in 1923, the same year that the SMCMA began publishing *Stone Mountain Magazine*. In the first issue, it was described as “a magazine of information about the Great Stone Mountain Memorial to Confederate Heroes being carved by Gutzon Borglum.” In the same issue, SMCMA solicited donations from Georgians in an attempt to raise \$250,000.

⁵ Helen Plane to Gutzon Borglum, December 17, 1915, Helen Plane Papers. Special Collections Department, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia.

⁶ Minutes of annual meeting of SMCMA, April 23, 1924, Stone Mountain Confederate Monumental Association Records, Special Collections Department, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia.

⁷ Grace Elizabeth Hale, “Granite Stopped Time: Stone Mountain and the Representation of White Southern Identity,” in *Monuments to the Lost Cause: Women, Art, and the Landscapes of Southern Memory*, Cynthia Mills and Pamela H. Simpson, eds. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2003), 219-21. James W. Loewen, *Lies Across America: What our Historic Sites Get Wrong* (New York: New Press, 1999), 263.

⁸ Loewen, 264.

Here are two solicitations found in the issue:

Georgia yields to none in its love and veneration for the departed heroes. No people have borne the brunt of greater suffering and deprivation because of the War, and none have had its memories seared upon their souls with whither heat. Its hundreds of chapters of commemorative societies thickly clustered in every city and town, bearing witness to the keen and long-enduring love for the "Lost Cause" and the men who went down finally to defeat in the unequal struggle.⁹

And:

How to Subscribe ... Every man, woman, and child who loves the South and who reveres the glorious memory of the valiant men who gave their all for the "Lost Cause" will want to have some part in the Stone Mountain memorial. ... All subscriptions should be mailed immediately to: General Nathan Bedford Forrest, Sec'y.¹⁰

In 1924, Borglum unveiled the completed carved head of Robert E. Lee. The progress on the carving was talked about around the country. The Atlanta Constitution reprinted a letter from a Northern man who wrote that Atlanta would become the "mecca of American and of other peoples for all times."¹¹ Clearly, the narrative of the Lost Cause and veneration of the Confederacy was not solely limited to the South. Grace Elizabeth Hale, in her essay, "Granite Stopped Time: Stone Mountain Memorial and the Representation of White Southern Identity," writes that the memory of "a white southern nation had become, by the 1920s, a respected part of the American past even for many white nonsoutherners."¹² This white southern nation was represented in Confederate memory.

SMCMA published an unveiling edition in honor of the 1924 unveiling of General Lee. The issue contained speeches given at the ceremony. From the address by Dr. Ashby Jones in praise of Lee:

"Devoted to the Union, disapproving of slavery, and opposed to secession, he had been watching with less than a breaking heart the widening breach between the sections."¹³

From the address of Congressman William D. Upshaw:

"That shrine of unexampled splendor the heroism of Southern chieftains and the deathless love of their loyal followers in that tragic strife that was born of a worthy concept of loyalty to the Constitution on both sides and that eventuated in the Providence of the God of nations, in a clarified Constitution and one common flag for Americans - Americans everywhere!"¹⁴

The most prominent display of national support to complete the project came on March 17, 1924, when President Calvin Coolidge signed a bill authorizing a commemorative coin designed by Borglum. In the bill, the carving is described as "a monument to the valor of the soldiers of the South, which was the inspiration of the sons and daughters and grandsons and granddaughters in the Spanish American and World Wars." SMCMA was permitted to sell the coins to raise funds.

⁹ Stone Mountain Confederate Monumental Association, "Georgians Are Asked to Subscribe First \$250,000," *Stone Mountain Magazine*, volume 1, number 1, April 20, 1923, United Daughters of the Confederacy, Laura Rutherford Chapter No.88 (Athens, GA) Records, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia.

¹⁰ Stone Mountain Confederate Monumental Association, "How to subscribe," *Stone Mountain Magazine*, volume 1, number 1, April 20, 1923, United Daughters of the Confederacy, Laura Rutherford Chapter No.88 (Athens, GA) Records, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia. Nathan Bedford Forrest II is referred to as "General" because of his role as General Secretary of the Sons of Confederate Veterans.

¹¹ Hale, 224.

¹² Hale, 222-3.

¹³ Ashby Jones, "Address of Dr. Ashby Jones at Lee Unveiling Banquet in Atlanta, Jan. 19," *Stone Mountain Magazine*, volume 1, number 3, 1924, United Daughters of the Confederacy, Laura Rutherford Chapter No. 88 (Athens, GA) Records, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia.

¹⁴ William D. Upshaw, "Congressman William D. Upshaw Thrills His Colleagues with Memorial Speech," *Stone Mountain Magazine*, volume 1, number 3, 1924, United Daughters of the Confederacy, Laura Rutherford Chapter No. 88 (Athens, GA) Records, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia. This speech is a display of how Lost Cause thought (the Civil War was fought over a Constitutional dispute) was intertwined with reconciliation (its result was a "common flag" and a "clarified Constitution").

Borglum did not initially sympathize with the Lost Cause narrative of the monument. He witnessed firsthand the fervor of the UDC members who commissioned him, but it took time for him to accept their view of the causes of the Civil War. Gerald W. Johnson, in his 1927 book on the monument, *The Undefeated*, discusses this progression. Johnson conversed with Borglum at length after the latter fled to North Carolina, where, as Johnson put it, “he had taken sanctuary after the smash in Georgia.”¹⁵ Johnson writes:

“Secession was not such a cause, still less slavery. Slowly it dawned on him [Borglum] that what the men in the gray ranks fought for was the sanctity of contract, the inviolability of one’s pledged word, without which democratic government is impossible. They thought they saw the Constitution established by their fathers trampled underfoot; and they, too, rose to arms “that government of the people, for the people, by the people shall not perish from the earth.”¹⁶

It is clear that by 1923 Borglum came to accept the Lost Cause history of the war. He articulates the meaning of the monument in the following speech to the Georgia General Assembly:

“A monument to the Confederacy, a cause that was lost in its political sense, raises the question in the minds of a great many people as to why it should be done. ... A study of this conflict between the states, of 61-65, discloses an integral part of the history of this country. No part of it can be ignored. And certainly you southerners, who have suffered so much, would not want to have it incorrectly rendered, or forgotten, any part of it. No man, from leaders to drum boys, that ever had that cause at heart, and believed in the principle of “State’s Rights”, which was the basis of this fight, could recede one single inch from the principles he fought for, without changing the sincerity of his purposes. The Southern part of the struggle of that day is just as important as the northern part.”¹⁷

In this speech, Borglum states that his plans include depicting Nathan Bedford Forrest, the founder of the Ku Klux Klan: “The design ... includes first the infantry, and general staff reviewing the army, back of them General Nathan B. Forrest, and back of him the troops and artillery.”

Finally, in perhaps the most succinct and direct expression of the meaning of the carving, Borglum stated at the 1924 annual meeting of SMCMA, “Keep, I beg of you, all and every kind of scandal from the Memorial to your great cause of States right.”¹⁸

Despite these obvious overtures towards proponents of the Lost Cause ideology, Hollins Randolph and Rogers Winter sought to cast the monument as a symbol of sectional unity to some audiences to garner more support for the completion of the monument. For example, Hollins Randolph’s address at SMCMA’s annual meeting in 1924 said:

“It practically requires the entire time of your chief executive officer. He cannot consider the local community only, but must have regard to the whole South, and during the twelve months the field of effort and daily duty broadened to the Nation. The Nation awoke to the realization of what this Monument meant, and we have had to broaden our vision and efforts as we proceed in order to make it conform to the ideas of the people of this country, nay, more—to the people of foreign countries.”¹⁹

¹⁵ Gerald W. Johnson, *The Undefeated* (New York: Minton, Balch & Company, 1927), 115.

¹⁶ Gerald W. Johnson, *The Undefeated* (New York: Minton, Balch & Company, 1927) 83.

¹⁷ Gutzon Borglum speech to a joint session of the General Assembly of Georgia, July 16, 1923, Stone Mountain Confederate Monumental Association Records, Special Collections Department, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia.

¹⁸ Minutes of annual meeting of SMCMA, April 23, 1924, Stone Mountain Confederate Monumental Association Records, Special Collections Department, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia.

¹⁹ Minutes of annual meeting of SMCMA, April 23, 1924, Stone Mountain Confederate Monumental Association Records, Special Collections Department, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia.

The following is an outline of the marketing strategy for the Stone Mountain half-dollar submitted by G.F. Willis, Chairman of the Coin Committee of SMCMA. It is perhaps the most revealing example of SMCMA's willingness to say what was necessary to successfully complete the monument:

"Sales Methods ... Our appeal to the sentiment in the South will be made on the basis that the United States Government, under a Republican administration, has given the Memorial to the Confederacy national sanction and national aid by the largest issue of special coins ever minted; that this was done as a memorial to the valor of the soldiers of the South, which means the soldiers of the Confederacy, as well as their descendants; that this half-dollar carries the portraits of Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson on horseback. Our further appeal in the South, as likewise outside of the South, and this I consider our strongest appeal, is that this coin forever cements together all sections of our country."²⁰

To the South, they would market the coin as a triumph of the memory of the Confederacy, with a Republican president giving national validation to the Lost Cause through the minting of coins depicting Lee and Jackson. To the rest of the nation, they would market it as a symbol of unity.

In 1924, the relationship between Borglum and the SMCMA, and particularly between Borglum and Randolph, began to sharply deteriorate. Despite both men being members of the Klan, they backed different national leaders.²¹ The conflict hit a low point when Borglum's preferred Klan leader defeated that of Randolph. This defeat exacerbated Randolph's anger, which partially led to Borglum's firing. After he was dismissed, Borglum allegedly destroyed his clay models of the Stone Mountain carving with an ax. Facing a court injunction in Georgia for destruction of property, he fled to North Carolina. He went on to obtain international fame for carving Mount Rushmore between 1927 and 1941.^{22/23}

In 1925, the SMCMA hired Virginian Augustus Lukeman to complete the sculpture. His plan for the monument featured a carving of Lee, Jackson, and Jefferson Davis riding with Confederate cavalryman. Within the UDC

organization, a rift developed between the Atlanta chapter, which still supported Borglum, and other chapters, which sided with the SMCMA and Lukeman. In order to overcome the debacle surrounding the sculptors, the SMCMA tackled the uphill public relations battle by emphasizing Lukeman's Southern heritage and his ability to carve a tribute to the Confederacy that would last longer than the Lincoln Memorial.²⁴

On April 9, 1928 (the 63rd anniversary of Lee's surrender at Appomattox), Lukeman unveiled the head of Lee atop an unfinished horse. Then, Borglum's work was blasted off the mountain; the Atlanta UDC had unsuccessfully sued to prevent the destruction. Progress on the carving essentially stopped at this time largely because SMCMA went bankrupt with the early onset of the Great Depression in late 1920s Georgia.²⁵ With progress halted, the title to the mountainside returned to Sam Venable in 1928 per the original stipulation. He granted the Klan an easement for unrestricted access to the mountain for the purposes of rallies and meetings, guaranteeing their involvement with the site for decades. This special arrangement lasted until 1958 when the state purchased the land that is now Stone Mountain Park.

In 1939, Georgia attempted to convince the National Park Service to consider the mountain a natural wonder. The NPS rejected the application, arguing that the carving and quarrying at the mountain had removed its natural value.²⁶

²⁰ Outline submitted to SMCMA executive committee by G.F. Willis, 1924, Stone Mountain Confederate Monumental Association Records, Special Collections Department, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia.

²¹ Freeman, 78-9.

²² Hale, 225-6.

²³ Roger Winters, publicity director of SMCMA, wrote to Julian Harris, editor of the *Columbus* [GA] *Enquirer-Sun* denying that Borglum and Randolph had personal problems; the letter was titled, "Gutzon Borglum and the Ku Klux Klan Bugaboo." Credible historians disagree (Grace Elizabeth Hale and James Loewen). We are not arguing that a disagreement over Klan politics was the sole, or even the main cause of the conflict, but the tension introduced by it was a major contributor to the crisis.

²⁴ Hale, 226-7.

²⁵ Hale, 227-8.

²⁶ "Stone Mountain May Become a National Park"; *Southeast Georgian*, December 14, 1939.

Great Depression and World War II Hiatus

Over a decade after Lukeman halted work on the memorial, Governor Eugene Talmadge formed a group to resume the carving. They would rely on federal Work Projects Administration (WPA) labor to finish the job. In 1941, a Georgia native, Julian Harris, was hired as a sculptor, but the plans were halted due to the onset of World War II.²⁷

After WWII, interest in memorializing the Lost Cause declined.²⁸ During subsequent years, the Klan also declined, and in May 1946 Atlanta obstetrician and former Klan leader, Dr. Sam Green, attempted to resurrect the group with a rally at Stone Mountain. The effort was not successful, but is considered by some to be the creation of the third Klan.²⁹

²⁷ One model of Julian Harris' design is held by the Atlanta Historical Society.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Loewen, 264.

Completing the Carving and Fighting Integration

In May of 1954, the *Brown vs. Board of Education* ruling struck down the “separate but equal” doctrine, essentially dismantling the foundation of legal segregation in public schools. Marvin Griffin, lieutenant governor of Georgia, announced his candidacy for governor of Georgia in July of 1954, pledging to uphold segregation and proposing the completion of the Stone Mountain carving. Griffin was elected governor in November of 1954.

Fulfilling his campaign promise, Governor Marvin Griffin signed a law purchasing Stone Mountain for \$1.1 million and creating the Stone Mountain Memorial Association (SMMA) in 1958. The law stated that Stone Mountain and the adjacent property were to be “acquired, developed, maintained and operated as a perpetual memorial to the Confederacy and the Confederate States of America.”³⁰ Although Stone Mountain was also emphasized as an important tourism asset, Griffin’s views of a stark segregationist were well-known and associated with the Stone Mountain carving.

One strategy used by Griffin in promoting segregation was to make Confederate imagery more prevalent in the public eye. Along with committing the state to completing the Confederate memorial, he signed the law in 1956 that altered the state flag to include the Confederate battle flag.

Stone Mountain Park became what has been described as a neo-Confederate theme park complete with an antebellum plantation house. In 1963, a down-on-her-luck Butterfly McQueen, the actor who portrayed the enslaved woman Prissy in the film version of *Gone With the Wind*, was hired to live in the house and greet visitors. The combination of the “realistic” plantation house and McQueen’s presence led many visitors to feel that they were touring Tara.

Indeed, a *Gone With the Wind* museum was established at the park. Pamphlets for the park sanitized slavery and downplayed its importance as the cause of the Civil War. They incorrectly informed visitors that many white masters emancipated their slaves voluntarily before the war. Contributing to the park’s problematic depiction of enslaved people were well-furnished slave cabins.³¹ The site displayed, as Grace Hale puts it, a romanticized “racial utopia” to visitors.³²

The senior military historian of Atlanta History Center, Dr. Gordon Jones, captured the strange nature of the park: “In short, the Stone Mountain Park which emerged in the 1960s comprised a comical orgy of Lost Cause, Old South, and even Western movie clichés, clearly removed from the more serious and hateful Ku Klux Klan past, but also clearly rooted in it.”³³

While work on the carving did not officially resume until 1964 when Carl Sanders was governor, Marvin Griffin is credited with restarting the project and seriously committing the state to finishing the decades-long embarrassment. He is also responsible for establishing SMMA. Griffin saw parallels between the Civil War and the fight over federally mandated integration.

³⁰ Stone Mountain Memorial Association Act, Acts and Resolutions of the General Assembly of the State of Georgia 1958.

³¹ Hale, 229.

³² Ibid.

³³ Dr. Gordon Jones, “The New Battle for Atlanta: Mythologizing the Confederate Legacy at Stone Mountain Memorial Park and the Atlanta Cyclorama,” unpublished manuscript, September 15, 1999.

The following quotes demonstrate how he connected segregation, the Civil War, and the Lost Cause narrative of the Stone Mountain memorial:

Speech to the Georgia Press Association, June 14, 1958:

The great memorial carved in the living granite on its face will be a reminder to the Ages that we are a people proud of our traditions, our heritage and our way of life.³⁴

Evidence that by “our heritage and our way of life,” Griffin means segregation:

I tell you quite frankly that I would not trade a single supporter of mine for the backing of the carpetbag press, the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] or alien groups which are dead set on destroying segregation and our way of life.

And...

We have established a legal line to protect our people from onslaughts by outsiders who seek to destroy our age old customs.³⁵

In a 1958 speech to the Mississippi state legislature, he parallels fighting segregation to other Southern causes: “The people of the South have not forgotten the past ... freedom is a fragile flower and must be tended by the people with an alert vigilance which can only be given to governments close to home and responsive to the local will. Upon the great issues of the day, the South has played a valiant part ... we are united in this mighty battle for preservation of government and freedom from judicial tyranny. Upon the great banner of liberty and the rights of man we move into battle formation, and under an Almighty God, we will win an imperishable victory for our children and the generations yet to come.”³⁶

The most direct statement on the carving’s Lost Cause narrative and how it was used in the segregation fight is a press release from the governor, March 2, 1958, the day of SMMA’s swearing-in ceremony:

For release to all Sunday morning newspapers. Sunday, March 2, 1958. Atlanta Georgia... ‘Completion of the memorial,’ said Governor Griffin, ‘will be of everlasting benefit to the present generation and all future citizens of this state and the Southland. Now, when attempts are being made to destroy our very way of life, it will serve as a rallying point for all of us who believe in preserving the ideals for which our forefathers fought.’³⁷

³⁴ Marvin Griffin, speech to the Annual Meeting of the Georgia Press Association, June 14, 1958, Marvin Griffin Papers, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia.

³⁵ Marvin Griffin, speech to a meeting of the County Commissioners of Georgia in 1958, Marvin Griffin Papers, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia.

³⁶ Marvin Griffin, speech to a joint session of the Mississippi state legislature, April 2, 1958, Marvin Griffin Papers, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia.

³⁷ Press release from the governor’s office, March 2, 1958, Marvin Griffin Papers, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia.

Battle of Atlanta Centennial and a Shifting Narrative (1964)

In 1964, under the administration of Governor Carl Sanders, work on the carving resumed and the city observed the centennial anniversary of the Battle of Atlanta. The state sold \$5 million worth of bonds to fund the completion of the carving.³⁸ Just six years earlier, Griffin had defined the monument's meaning in sectional terms. By 1964, a narrative shift was taking place. The Civil War was not just viewed from the perspective of the Lost Cause, but it also served as a symbol of American triumph and unity.³⁹

SMMA clearly preferred to emphasize the themes of patriotism and unity over Lost Cause sentiments. For example, at the end of the reenactment of the Battle of Atlanta, held on the lawn in front of Memorial Hall at Stone Mountain Park, both "Dixie" and the "Star Spangled Banner" were sung. Furthermore, SMMA rejected the UDC's proposal for a chapel and persuaded them to create a flag terrace that would include both American and Confederate flags.⁴⁰

But, the patriotic displays at the reenactment of the Battle for Atlanta were not the first to occur at Stone Mountain. In 1928, at the ceremony to unveil Lukeman's progress, a large American flag covered the back of the stage. Patriotic themes have always been present at Stone Mountain and a U.S. flag even covered the altar at the mountaintop initiation of the new Klan in 1915.

In the 1960s, however, patriotic displays represented something different, a public relations shift away from the outright Lost Cause message and towards a more inclusive, patriotic understanding of the war. Scholars view the national messaging surrounding Confederate symbols as nationalization of the Lost Cause and what it stood for, essentially cloaking the Lost Cause and white supremacy in an American flag.⁴¹

In the 1960s, patriotism meant American unity in the face of the communist threat. Regardless of the motivation, over the next several decades the park took steps to downplay its image as a Confederate memorial.

³⁸ "\$5 Million in Stone Mountain Bonds Sold to Pay for Finishing Carving," *Atlanta Constitution*, August 6, 1964.

³⁹ This theme was present at centennial ceremonies at Gettysburg in July 1963 and at the unveiling of the Stone Mountain carving in 1970.

⁴⁰ David B. Freeman, *Carved in Stone: The History of Stone Mountain* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1997) 150.

⁴¹ Hale, 222-3.

“Unity through Sacrifice” 1970 Unveiling Ceremony

Progress on the carving was unveiled in a grand ceremony on May 9, 1970.⁴² President Richard M. Nixon was scheduled to attend, but Vice President Spiro T. Agnew was sent as a replacement, the White House explaining that President Nixon was preoccupied with the crisis in Cambodia. This slight angered some Georgians who either saw it as an insult or disliked Vice President Agnew’s divisive rhetoric.

Another famous guest, Billy Graham, was meant to attend and give the invocation, but cancelled at the last minute. He was replaced by Reverend William Holmes Borders, Sr., an African American pastor. This replacement prompted Klan leader and attorney James Venable to boycott the ceremony. Senator Herman Talmadge and Governor Lester Maddox also gave speeches. Mirroring the reconciliatory shift from the 1964 centennial, the theme of the unveiling was “Unity through Sacrifice.” The ceremony had unexpectedly low attendance.

While the speeches at the unveiling ceremony struck a reconciliatory tone, many refused to separate the carving from the subject it was depicting. WSB-TV news consistently referred to the carving as a Confederate memorial in their coverage of the 1970 dedication. For example, when discussing the logistics of attending the ceremony a reporter remarked, “naturally there will be no admission to the park, after all it is a Confederate memorial and officials expect to provide plenty of Southern hospitality.”⁴³

The association of the memorial with the Confederacy in 1970 was strong enough to pose political problems to President Nixon. Georgia Senators Richard B. Russell and Herman Talmadge, and several members of Georgia’s Congressional delegation arranged for Nixon to appear at the unveiling ceremony. Before they could make a joint announcement regarding the president’s attendance, former Republican Congressman Howard “Bo” Callaway and state Comptroller General James Bentley Jr. allegedly released the news.

The White House leaked their displeasure that the information was given to the press. The announcement was untimely because the Senate had not yet voted on Nixon’s nominee to the Supreme Court, G. Harrold Carswell, a Southerner who made explicit statements in support of white supremacy during a speech while campaigning as a candidate in the 1948 Georgia state legislature race.

While Senator Russell and other Southern senators supported Carswell, the NAACP opposed his nomination. WSB-TV reported:

Now the word is being leaked that the White House is even unhappy. The administration apparently did not want it announced that Nixon would dedicate a Confederate war memorial before the vote was taken on the Carswell nomination to the Supreme Court.⁴⁴

Nixon’s administration understood that the memorial was a Confederate monument and that news of Nixon’s dedication would not help Carswell’s confirmation. The nomination failed less than a month before the dedication ceremony.

The carving was ultimately completed by Roy Faulkner on March 3, 1972.

⁴² It was completed in 1972.

⁴³ WSB-TV, “Report on the Progress of the Stone Mountain Memorial Monument Carving,” April 30, 1970, WSB-TV Newsfilm Collection, Walter J. Brown Media Archives, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia. <http://dbsmaint.galib.uga.edu/news/clips/wsbn59524.html>

⁴⁴ WSB-TV, “Bentley and Calloway Upset that Nixon Plans to Dedicate Monument at Stone Mountain,” April 8, 1970, WSB-TV Newsfilm Collection, Walter J. Brown Media Archives, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia. <http://dbsmaint.galib.uga.edu/news/clips/wsbn59305.html>

Present Day

While there have been recent attempts to downplay Stone Mountain's Confederate elements—especially in anticipation of the 1996 Olympics—Stone Mountain's existence as a Confederate memorial is defined by law. As a part of a compromise reached in 2001, the General Assembly removed the Confederate battle flag from the state flag and at the same time mandated that the Confederate memorial on Stone Mountain remain untouched:

Any other provision of law notwithstanding, the memorial to the heroes of the Confederate States of America graven upon the face of Stone Mountain shall never be altered, removed, concealed, or obscured in any fashion and shall be preserved and protected for all time as a tribute to the bravery and heroism of the citizens of this state who suffered and died in their cause.⁴⁵

The history of Stone Mountain is one that is complex and intertwined with Lost Cause ideology, Ku Klux Klan connections, and resistance to integration. The carving looms as a point of controversy in the dialogue surrounding Confederate symbolism in this time of shifting sociopolitical perspectives.

⁴⁵ Article 1 of Chapter 3 of Title 50 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated (GA Code § 50-3-1 (2015)).

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