

Confederate Monument Interpretation Guide Template

This template is designed to guide researchers in providing factual information to use in a community dialogue about Confederate monuments. If the community decides that contextualization is the best option, this template can also be used to write a new historical marker.

Monument Name:

Erection/Dedication Date:

Group that Sponsored Monument:

Location of Monument:

City, State, Cemetery/Courthouse/etc.

Owned by State

Owned by City

Owned by Private Group

On a separate sheet, attach photographs of the monument and the monument unveiling ceremony, if available.

Briefly detail the dedication ceremony: the date it occurred, who attended, etc.

Briefly detail the history of the group that erected the monument: the group's mission, membership requirements, etc.

If available, provide a quote from the unveiling ceremony (must be succinct). Ideally, this quote states, in the dedicicator's own voice, their reason for erecting the monument.

Monument inscription: if there is text on the monument, provide it verbatim.

Describe the monument's physical structure, material composition, and overall imagery/symbolism. Go on to outline its history since its dedication: detail instances of it having been moved, altered, or how it was used by the community over time (ceremonies, civic protests, etc).

If the monument is of a particular individual, describe that individual's legacy. What was that person well-known for during his or her lifetime? How is that individual viewed today?

Are there any state or local ordinances governing monuments contextualization, movement, or otherwise?

The “Lost Cause”

The Civil War claimed the lives of an estimated 670,000 soldiers and civilians. Losses were especially high in the Confederacy, where nearly a quarter of all white men of military age were killed in combat or died of disease. At least 200,000 more were wounded or maimed.

After the war, bereavement and the shock of defeat created profound doubts among white Southerners about their faith in God. It also led them to question the great loss of life spent in defending the Confederate cause.

In response, white Southern writers, artists, veterans, women's associations, and political leaders of the late 19th and early 20th centuries sought to justify Confederate defeat as a moral victory. Collectively known as the myth of the “Lost Cause,” this reasoning maintained that secession was justified in defense of Constitutional liberties. It stated that white Southern men defended their homes nobly against insurmountable odds. It insisted that slavery was not a cruel institution and - most importantly - that slavery was not a cause of the Civil War.

Implicit in the “Lost Cause” was the belief, widely accepted throughout the United States, in white racial supremacy. Celebrations of the Lost Cause often went hand-in-hand with campaigns to enact laws mandating “Jim Crow” segregation and disenfranchising African American voters which also sparked racial violence, including lynching, well into the twentieth century.

Legacy

From the 1870s through the 1920s, Confederate memorial associations throughout the South erected more than 1,000 Confederate monuments in cemeteries, courthouse lawns, and town squares. Similar monuments commemorating Union soldiers were raised in the North, but few mentioned slavery or emancipation.

In both North and South, there were some historians, writers, veterans and community leaders, including many African Americans, who consistently argued for a version of history in which slavery was the central cause of the Civil War and freedom its most important result.

Today, historians recognize that although the Civil War wrought a terrible toll in death and destruction, it freed four million enslaved people and fostered passage of amendments to the U.S. Constitution that created national citizenship and equal protection of the laws, regardless of race. These amendments formed the legal basis for the Civil Rights Movement.

Our understanding of history changes over time. Civil War monuments remain important reminders of how history can be influenced by false ideas and misperceptions. This monument was created to recognize the dedication and sacrifice of Americans who fought to establish the Confederate slaveholding republic. Yet this monument must now remind us that their loss actually meant liberty, justice and freedom for millions of people - a legacy that continues for all of us today.