



**National Association for the  
Advancement of Colored People  
Temple Branch  
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Should the Confederate soldier statue at the northwest corner of Courthouse Square, Bell County Courthouse be moved? The question is why put the Confederate soldier statue next to a court? A court that is a key institution for seeking justice. Intentional or not, the site selection was, and continues to be, a clear and ominous message to those citizens who were the target of racism. It shouts, “YOU are not welcome here.”

The statue should be moved to a location that is dedicated to the history of Bell County or a place where other Confederate soldiers rest. Such a venue will enable all to consider the statue in its historical and cultural context. It should not be in front of a public building that represents justice for all. The debate over relocating the Confederate soldier statue centers around what the statue represents. Some consider the statue a remembrance of their history of serving their cause. Others see the statue as a vestige of one of the most violent and dark periods of our country’s history. These differing perspectives affirm that the statute should be in a more appropriate setting.

History tells us that the Confederacy was made up of states that seceded from the United States of America. It was an unsuccessful effort to destroy these United States. Equally important is what the Confederacy represented, and by extension, the statue of the Confederate soldier near the Bell County Courthouse. The secessionists fought to preserve a way of life. The key factor in that way of life was the concerted effort to continue the abominable institution of slavery. Even if many soldiers who fought for the Confederacy did not own slaves, they still were complicit in the preservation of the brutality of slavery and its ensuing reign of terror against African Americans. There was little justice for slaves in the secessionist states. It defies belief that a statue honoring injustice should stand guard near one of the places that was charged with dispensing justice.

The 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the United States Constitution abolished slavery except as punishment for a crime. It was ratified in 1865. The 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the United States Constitution granted citizenship, apportionment as a whole person, and equal protection under the law to anyone born or naturalized in the United States. It was ratified in 1868. It is important to remember that the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the United States Constitution excluded Native Americans. The 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the United States Constitution secured the right to vote for African American men. It was ratified in 1870. It took the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the United States Constitution, ratified in 1919, to secure the right to vote for women. The 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, and 15<sup>th</sup> Amendments were efforts to constitutionally secure the full rights and benefits of citizenship for former slaves, and to finally recognize that African Americans had an indelible right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness just like any other “red-blooded American.”

It is this backdrop that makes the timing and location of the Confederate soldier statue so ironic. There is the juxtaposition of the dedication of the Confederate soldier statue and the reality of

life for African Americans in Bell County. The statue was commissioned by the Belton Chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy. It was dedicated in 1916. Several months earlier, in July of 1915, a man called Will Stanley was brutally and horrifically murdered in downtown Temple. A mob snatched him from law enforcement and then became judge, jury and executioner. Mr. Stanley was beaten, mutilated, lynched and incinerated before a crowd estimated at 10,000. There was even a postcard describing the gruesome event as a “barbecue.”

The Ku Klux Klan (KKK) was active in Bell County around this same time. The KKK used terrorism, torture and intimidation in an effort to protect and preserve the Confederate way of life, especially the part of that life that subjugated African Americans.

For those who say that was a long time ago, I say consider how long it took to secure the passage of the right of African Americans to vote, notwithstanding the 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment that was ratified in 1870. That right to vote literally required “an act of Congress” in 1965. Consider the horrific murder of Emmett Till in 1955. Consider that in 2017, the U. S. Department of Education sent a letter to one school district in this County involving the investigation of possible disparate disciplinary treatment of African American students in comparison to Caucasian students who engaged in similar behavior. In short, the vestiges of what the Confederate soldier statue represents is with us still. We do not need to amplify those remnants of a bygone era with a statue near the Bell County Courthouse. The statue and its historical place in Bell County are better served in another venue.

Today the United Daughters of the Confederacy maintains a website that states, in part, that it denounces hate groups or groups that subscribe to racial divisiveness or white superiority. See [www.hqudc.org](http://www.hqudc.org). This is a welcome perspective in our divisive political environment. Still, we cannot escape the fact that the Confederacy did not seek to preserve the United States. Its goal was to separate from the United States of America. The Confederacy and members of its military did not, and do not, reflect any patriotism to this United States of America.

The Bell County Courthouse and its immediate environs should be welcoming to all citizens. It does not require a Confederate guardian to remind those entering the Bell County Courthouse of a sordid era of terror and injustice. Let this statue speak at a location that invites discussion of the history and culture of all who served the Confederacy, and those who opposed it. The northwest corner of Courthouse Square of the Bell County Courthouse is not such a location.

University of Mary Hardin Baylor President Randy O’Rear spoke to the Bell County Commissioner on July 16, 2020 about the wisdom of relocating the Confederate soldier statue. We can all benefit from reading his remarks which are available the University of Mary Hardin Baylor website. See [www.umhb.edu](http://www.umhb.edu). The University of Mary Hardin Baylor was even willing to help defray the costs of the relocation to a more appropriate site.

It is well past the time to relocate the Confederate soldier statue to an appropriate place. By so doing we send a message loud and clear that ALL are welcome here and they will get equal justice. Let’s make the Bell County Courthouse and Courthouse Square a true reflection of the Goddess of Justice who stands atop the Bell County Courthouse.

NAACP Temple Branch Executive Committee