

**Presentation to the Chatham County Board of Commissioners
Request to Remove Confederate Monument
April 15, 2019
By Carl E. Thompson, Sr.**

Mr. Chairman and members of the board; thank you for this opportunity to come before you to speak regarding the issue that is before us this evening. I'm Carl E. Thompson, Sr. and I've served for many years in Chatham County as a local church pastor, elected official, community college educator, and entrepreneur. And, I'm here tonight advocating for the removal of the confederate monument from the courthouse square.

Over the course of my public life of service, I have made many acquaintances of differing ethnicity, religions, and with various political and social views. We've sometimes vehemently disagreed, but have always ultimately agreed to disagree, out of respect for one another. And while there is deep division among us around this issue, my hope is that we can one day come together to dialogue, in the spirit of truth and reconciliation.

All monuments convey or represent something. One may inspire pride and nostalgia to some, whereas in others it evokes memories of pain and suffering. It all depends on how each person interprets the history of it.

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I know the monument is viewed by some as a historical reminder of the men who fought for the confederate army, but let me tell you what it means to me, as an African American growing up and living in this county, and my understanding of the history that it represents.

As a child, I grew up in the fifties and early sixties in the segregated south and experienced the degradation and dehumanization that this system of injustice wrought. I remember when we traveled as families on vacations, we always traveled together for protection and support and out of necessity, packed picnic lunches and snacks for the long journeys. The laws that existed made public facilities such as restaurants and restrooms off limits to us.

As one of a small group of children, I experienced voluntary integration of the public schools in the sixties, and while I have very fond memories of Chatham Central H.S. I also have poignant memories of threats of violence and animosity during the early years.

Upon graduation from college, I moved back to Chatham County to live just as many of my friends were moving away to find better opportunities. There weren't many for people of color in this county in 1976, but I wanted to stay to try and make a difference in people's lives. I became a candidate for the office of county commissioner in 1977 and won, by the

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grace of God, becoming the first African American to hold that office since Reconstruction.

During my sixteen years as a public servant, I obviously spent a lot of time in and around the courthouse in performance of my duties. And I have to say, it sometimes felt surreal making decisions to protect the rights of all Chatham citizens in the shadow of an image, on a pedestal no less, who would deny me of mine.

There are many valid reasons this statue should be removed from the front of the most prominent building in our county. The foremost is that it does not reflect the core American values contained in our country's constitution that you, our county commissioners swore to uphold. Our constitution as a document is the embodiment of the ideals of justice, human rights for all, nonviolence, civil discourse, equal protection under the law, fairness, safety, integrity, accountability and truth.

This monument to the confederate cause does not embody or reflect any of our values.

Mitch Landrieu, the Mayor of New Orleans so eloquently sums this up by stating the following:

“These statues are not just stone and metal. They are not just innocent remembrances of a benign history. These

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monuments purposefully celebrate a fictional, sanitizes Confederacy, ignoring the death, ignoring the enslavement and the terror that it actually stood for.”

The presence of this monument sends an ambiguous message to anyone who comes to our county as to which side we stand on the constitutional ideas I’ve just mentioned. This government represents all the people of Chatham County and there should therefore be no doubt in anyone’s mind about the values we represent and hold dear.

As our county elected leaders, you have the opportunity to do what is right rather than what is expedient. Allow history to remember you as being for the cause of what is morally right and just. I believe this verse from the book of Isaiah in the Bible is most appropriate. It reads:

“Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow.”

Reconciliation can only come when truth is acknowledged and there is a sincere attempt to eradicate all vestiges of hate, oppression and man’s inhumanity to man. Germany stands out as a truly remarkable symbol of reconciliation and truth by removing all monuments to Hitler and the Third Reich from public view.

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Lastly, I'm here tonight for my children, grandchildren, and their many generations to follow, in this county. I want them to inherit a place where diversity, justice, equity, good will and quality of life are celebrated. I've spent my entire life working towards that goal, and while we have much progress to make; every time we are collectively moved by the Spirit of justice and righteousness, to act to remove a symbol of oppression and injustice from our midst, we are progressively moving towards that goal.

Thank you