

An Open Letter to the Mt. Zion Monumental Association

The reckoning happening across our country has once again brought attention to the monument in Cornelius erected in 1909 and owned and maintained by the Association. While the monument's purpose in the eyes of the Association, as we understand, is to honor soldiers who you believe were fighting for their state – your cause also champions the brutal enslavement of human beings with the accompanying rape, murder, denial of rights and dehumanization. To many others, its true purpose was made clear by the context in which the monument's dedication was given – not right after the Civil War, but in 1910 after Jim Crow laws had been established, all gains made by Black people towards equality had been violently taken away, and during the height of the lynching of Black men, women and children. Furthermore, the dedication speech of the monument stated that the “ideal confederate soldier” fought “to protect from taint the Saxon blood that courses through your veins.” Surely the meaning of such a statement and the message it sends is disrespectful and hostile to Black people.

As you have noted, today's climate is politically charged. But let us be clear – the relocation of the monument should not be seen as a conservative versus liberal issue or a Democrat versus Republican issue. It is, as we see it, simply a matter of justice. None of us should let pride or stubbornness prevent us from doing the right thing. We all have a role to play in making our community safe and welcoming to all its residents.

Your statement that the Association was “exploring all options available to protect and save the monument” is not in conflict with our desire to see the monument relocated. The history that you see can be preserved in a museum or some other location. However, time is running out to accomplish this goal. As Mayor Washam has stated publicly, “the Monument is coming down, one way or another.” We do not advocate vandalism or violence in any way; however, there can be no doubt that not removing the monument leaves it open to such activity.

We implore the Monumental Association to hear our collective appeal for justice and to acknowledge the pain this monument continues to inflict upon Black people across Mecklenburg County and others who view it as a tribute to those who fought to keep Black people in chains. We, the undersigned, join with Unity in Community in calling upon the Monumental Association to relocate the Confederate monument as soon as possible.