



Kentucky African American Heritage Commission

410 High Street
Frankfort, Kentucky 40601
502-564-7005, Ext. 125

August 23, 2017

The Honorable Matt Bevin
Governor, Commonwealth of Kentucky
700 Capitol Avenue, Suite 100
Frankfort, Kentucky 40601

Dear Governor Bevin:

We terribly regret your recent decision not to remove the Jefferson Davis statue from the Capitol Rotunda. Our state and nation confront a moral crisis, and we stand in need of moral leadership that will rise above the violence, hate, and evil which seeks to overturn our founding democratic principles. The statue is clearly an affront to human dignity and serves as a symbol of bigotry, injustice, and a failed ideology.

You posit that removing the statue would be a “sanitization of history.” We disagree. The Davis statue was *actually* placed in the Capitol as a means of “sanitizing history.” The United Daughters of the Confederacy lobbied for the inclusion of the statue, at taxpayers’ expense, to shape Civil War memory and perpetuate Confederate ideals of race supremacy. Sadly, this statue has miseducated generations of black and white children.

Developing “historical context,” acknowledging that Davis was a slave owner and traitor, will not address the ugly racist symbolism the statue projects in the face of African-American history. It glorifies the Confederacy and represents the Jim Crow South. It was unveiled at a time when segregation, violence, and racial injustice permeated communities around Kentucky. Between 1900 and 1939, more than sixty African-Americans were lynched in this state. In 1936, just four months prior to the unveiling of the Davis statue, twenty thousand people gathered for the public hanging of a black man named Rainey Bethea in Owensboro, Kentucky.

We believe removing the Jefferson Davis statue from its place of prominence in our State Capitol will not diminish the lessons of Kentucky history nor deny the heritage of those who proclaim the rebel cause. The Jefferson Davis State Historic Site offers ideal logistical and educational space to address your concern over the “sanitization of history.” It will offer a grand opportunity to attract visitors who want to learn more about Kentucky’s history during the Civil War.

Nearly fifteen years ago, African-American leaders requested that state officials remove the Davis statue. Their request was ignored and dismissed. This time is different. Other state and local governments are taking progressive action to relocate Confederate monuments because they do not represent messages of diversity and inclusion.

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Governor Bevin, the nation is watching you, and history is recording how you will respond to this present day moral imperative. In this the 225th Anniversary of Kentucky statehood, we are respectfully asking you to reconsider your decision. Our hope is that you will represent *all* Kentuckians with courage, commitment, and the civic responsibility we so desperately need during this defining moment in the history of our state and our nation.

We are Kentuckians, too. Like you, we love our state and have dedicated our lives' work to making the Commonwealth a state that we are all proud to call home. We pray that you will seek to honor the Word of God which reads: "O man, what is good; and doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God." (Micah 6:8)

Respectfully,

Gerald L. Smith, Ph.D.
Chair, Kentucky African American Heritage Commission

Reginald K. Meeks
Chair, Kentucky Black Legislative Caucus

George A. Brown, Jr.
Vice Chair, Kentucky Black Legislative Caucus

Kentucky Black Legislative Caucus Members
Senator Gerald A. Neal
Senator Reginald Thomas
Representative Derrick Graham
Representative Darryl T. Owens
Representative Attica C. Scott

John J. Johnson
Executive Director, Kentucky Commission on Human Rights

Stan Holmes
President, Kentucky Black Caucus of Local Elected Officials

Raoul Cunningham
President, Kentucky State Conference of the NAACP