



September 2, 2020

To: Members of the League of Women Voters of the Tennessee Valley

Subject: Statement Regarding the Confederate Monument in Madison County

On September 2, 2020, Kathleen Leonard, President of the LWVTNV, accompanied by Rita Bray, member, attended the Madison County Commission Meeting. Each made a made public statement regarding the confederate monument. The LWVTNV will continue to make statements regarding the monument as part of our Diversity Equity and Inclusion program that includes the Truth Telling and Reconciliation necessary to Make Democracy Work for everyone in the Tennessee Valley.

Ms. Leonard's Statement

Good morning, I am Kathleen Leonard of the League of Women Voters. I am here to speak the truth regarding the Confederate Monument on our courthouse square. Some may say that this monument represents our history. And YES IT DOES. It is not history of romantic barbeques and balls but that of a constant reign of terror.

Let me read to you from the September 8, 1904 New York Times: The headline reads: "ALABAMA MOB HANGS NEGRO. Burns Jail to Get at Him -- Vote Taken Before Hanging." The article describes a horrific lynching and I am just going to read to you from that account.

"A mob estimated at over 2000 ...swelled to enormous proportions... The local military company was called out, but they were outwitted by the men, who conceived the idea of smoking out the prisoner. ...the jail was set afire. A dense smoke spread through ... the building. The Fire Department was not allowed to approach ...and was driven away with bullets."

"The crowd would allow nobody to enter or come out until... Horace Maples was surrendered... in some manner the negro got through a window... He was caught, a rope thrown around his neck, and taken to the County Court House. There was an immense crowd on the lawn."

Subject: Statement Regarding the Confederate Monument

"[In stirring speeches]...Trying to dissuade the mob. They were hooted down in turn... the men with the rope pulled the negro away, threw the end of the rope over a limb, and drew him up. The negro was dead in a few minutes."

It was late on a September night... the jail was on fire... there was an enormous jeering mob... there was no escape... Horace Maples was lynched on OUR courthouse square. We must speak this truth and reconcile with our African American community to heal the wounds of this horrifying era in our history.

A little over a year after the lynching of Horace Maples. Virginia Clay-Clopton representing the United Daughters of the Confederacy dedicated this monument to the principles which gave birth to the confederate cause. I cannot even imagine the pain seeing this monument must have caused the friends and family of Horace Maples.

Now, you may wonder: why is the League of Women Voters so concerned by this Confederate Monument? The original suffragists were also abolitionists. But after emancipation, a rift formed among the suffragists. Racism entered the movement. In Huntsville, prominent white women and ardent segregationists championed suffrage. Among those women was Virginia Clay Clopton. We regret this association with the suffrage movement.

Where it stands today, this monument serves no purpose but as a symbol of racism, the pain and suffering of untold numbers of people of color. The League of Women Voters Stands in Solidarity with the African American Community of Madison County and demands that you REMEMBER HORACE MAPLES AND TAKE DOWN THIS MONUMENT

Ms. Bray's Statement:

Good morning, I am Rita Bray a member of the Tennessee Valley League of Women Voters. I too am here to speak the truth regarding the Confederate Monument on our courthouse square. We must acknowledge that this monument is a shrine to white supremacy. To say otherwise, is to ignore history not to preserve history.

Please consider the dedication on the monument: "In memory of the heroes who fell in defence of the principles which gave birth to the confederate cause." What were those principles? There is no doubt among reputable historians that the Confederacy was established upon the premise of white supremacy and that the South fought the Civil War to preserve its slave labor. Its founding documents and its leaders were clear. "Our new government is founded upon ... the great truth that the negro is not equal to the white man; that slavery subordination to the superior race is his natural and normal condition,"

Subject: Statement Regarding the Confederate Monument

declared Confederate Vice President Alexander H. Stephens in his 1861 Cornerstone speech.

Following the hotly contested election of 1876, a compromise ended reconstruction in 1877. This compromise ushered in a reign of racial terror during which African-Americans were stripped of basic rights, murdered in public for reasons such as competing with whites in business, seeking the vote or even failing to give way on the sidewalk. Jim Crow laws were enacted to disenfranchise the newly freed African Americans and re-segregate society. It is during this era, that Horace Maples was lynched on the Madison County Courthouse Square and a little over a year later this monument was dedicated.

We must acknowledge the truth that the monument was dedicated to the principles which gave birth to the confederate cause during the period when the white confederates were regaining control of the southern state governments. The truth is that these defenders of the Confederacy "who fell in defence of these principles" waged war against the United States to preserve white supremacy and the enslavement of millions of people.

Now you may be wondering why I believe it is important to be here today. I am one of the many Army transplants who arrived in Huntsville as a child. I came here from the Pacific Northwest, Washington State, so I was unprepared for the segregated south. On one of my first shopping trips to GC Murphy's I noticed the whites and colored water fountains. These signs confused me... should I use the colored since my clothes were colorful? Later in life I met Dr. Sonny Hereford when he spoke at a book club meeting about integrating the Huntsville school system. I wondered why didn't I know this? I wanted to learn more. I also knew that we need to speak the truth about the past and our regret for the pain and suffering that this monument represents. I thought that the hate had gone away but as I listen constant stories of racial injustice, I know that the hate is still here. The monument serves no purpose but as a symbol of that hate. We must take a first reconciliatory step by removing the monument. We stand in solidarity with our friends of color and **DEMAND THAT YOU TAKE DOWN THIS MONUMENT.**

Respectfully,



Kathleen Leonard
President, League of Women Voters of the Tennessee Valley

cc:

LWV of Alabama State President: Barbara Caddell