

On the Ethics of Removing Confederate Monuments – Abstract

Author: Chandani Desai

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Andrew I. Cohen

Some protestors argue for the removal of Confederate monuments because they harken to the horrors of American racism, thereby excluding black Americans from the public sphere. This is necessary to address so that we may regain unity in these polarized times and address the legacy of American white supremacy. Unity is important because it fosters the ability of our democracy to serve the people. My essay examines this issue by considering a recent compelling argument in favor of removal and exploring some potential shortfalls of that and similar arguments.

This essay critiques Travis Timmerman's "A Case for Removing Confederate Monuments" by highlighting the insufficiency of his "harm." Timmerman argues that Confederate monuments should be taken down because they unavoidably harm undeserving groups, including (1) those that are reminded of the horrors of slavery, and (2) those that are reminded of the motivations for erecting these monuments (threats by white supremacists during the Civil Rights Era). The harm Timmerman describes for these groups comes from their awareness of the Civil War's racism and/or the statues' history.

I argue that Timmerman's harm is too broad a criterion to use in deciding whether to take down Confederate monuments, especially in America's multicultural society. Instead, I posit that Timmerman use wrongful harm- a violation of one's rights- as his criterion for removal of Confederate monuments. This is because wrongful harm is narrower, thereby restricting intercommunity conflict. Furthermore, given that the government would be the one to remove

the statues, it would be problematic to set a precedent for them to intervene in every situation of culture clash.

To conclude, the purpose of this paper is not to argue *against* taking Confederate monuments down. Instead, my intent is to highlight a flaw in Timmerman's logic so that (1) future arguments for monument removal will be made stronger by avoiding or accounting for this pitfall, and (2) arguments which proceed as Timmerman's does can be critically assessed in light of the objection that I pose. Finally, this essay has important implications for potential challenges of navigating the legacies of American racism in a society where people reasonably disagree about meanings.