

Narrative History of the 1916 Confederate Soldiers and Sailors Monument Located at the Entrance of the Williamson County Courthouse in Georgetown, Texas

Context for This Educational Subject Marker-

The broadest educational and historical context for this proposed subject marker is found in the following quote:

“The Civil War was a transformative event in American history, costing hundreds of thousands of lives, leaving cities, towns, and the countryside in ruin, and abruptly changing the meaning of citizenship and freedom in the United States. The war led to the Constitution's 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments, which further shaped the relationships between citizens and their government, and abolished forever the inhumane practice of slavery in our nation. This bloodbath of almost unfathomable proportion fundamentally changed nearly every facet of American life. For many years, the Civil War story was told as an authoritative narrative of battles, troop movements and generals who won or lost. But in the last 50 years, our understanding of the Civil War has changed dramatically. No doubt the battles and generals still matter. But today's K-12 curriculum standards, and more importantly our students, need a more inclusive story.”¹

At the end of the Reconstruction Period there was a movement throughout the Southern states to memorialize the veterans who fought for the Confederate States of America and to build museums and monuments that celebrated not only the people who had made great sacrifices for the Confederacy but

¹ Carol Van West, *Teaching About the Civil War with Primary Sources Across Disciplines*, The Library of Congress: The TPS Journal, Vol. 1, No. 1, Winter 2012

the causes of the Civil War and how it was to be remembered. The Confederate and Sailors Monument that stands on the Williamson County Courthouse lawn is one of these monuments. This monument was erected in 1916 and represents a movement that began in the last decade of the 19th Century to venerate both the Confederacy and those who fought for it. This movement began with a renewed desire to celebrate what has been called “The Lost Cause”. Historical records suggest that this movement was launched with the dedication of the White House of the Confederacy in Richmond, Virginia in 1896. That museum would serve as “a treasure house of Confederate history and relics.” The dedication speeches made at that event set the stage for the movement within most of the former Confederate states in the late 1890s to memorialize the soldiers and the families who had defended the Confederacy. Those speeches encouraged white Southern women to be care-takers of the Lost Cause tradition, to see dedications like these as commemorations of “an epoch in the grandest struggle for liberty and right that has ever been made by man”. In their minds, the Confederacy had only “resisted invasion” by the North. A former Confederate general who spoke at this dedication in Richmond reinforced the ideas of white supremacy by saying that “The great crime of the century was the emancipation of the Negroes {sic}”.

In the years from 1896 to 1917 this Confederate memorial movement came under the control and leadership of new organizations like the United Daughters of the Confederacy and the United Confederate Veterans. A common theme throughout the dedication of Confederate monuments, Memorial Day celebrations, and museums was the glorification of the Lost Cause narrative that had been articulated by the former President of the Confederacy, Jefferson Davis. In his two-volume memoir, *The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government*, he placed the responsibility for secession and war on the North. While the Lost Cause narratives varied “somewhat over how slavery should be remembered, most shared a refurbished commitment to white supremacy and a desire for renewed

economic growth”. The United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) began a campaign throughout the South in the early 1900s to “glorify the valor of Southern soldiers and to defend their honor as defensive warriors”. At the same time they were “reinvigorating white supremacy by casting the belief about well-kept, Christianized, faithful slaves on Southern plantations prior to the Civil War”. By 1912 the UDC was encouraging the development of local Confederate monuments to give prominence to this interpretation of the Civil War and those who fought for it. A catalog of purchasable Confederate monument designs from a marble company in Marietta, Georgia was distributed throughout the South. These monuments served to reinforce the Lost Cause narrative about the Civil War and to promote white supremacy and racial segregation throughout the South. This was the same time period (1915) when D.W. Griffith and Thomas Dixon produced the motion picture- *The Clansman*- a racist epic film about the victimized South and the heroism of the Ku Klux Klan, that later gained national success in the retitled movie- *Birth of a Nation*.²

According to articles that appeared in *The Williamson County Sun* newspaper beginning in 1915, a local UDC group in Georgetown began raising funds for the purchase of the Confederate Soldiers and Sailors Monument that now stands at the Williamson County Courthouse entrance. Local citizens contributed amounts from \$1-\$5 to the fund and a minstrel show was also held to raise funds. Both the City of Georgetown and Williamson County contributed the largest amounts for the purchase of the monument that was dedicated on the Courthouse lawn on November 17th, 1916. This 21 feet tall monument was purchased for \$2000 by the Samuel Sanders UDC Chapter of Georgetown and originally had water fountains and an electric light globe. The monument was inscribed “In memory of the Confederate Soldiers and Sailors” with an accompanying Confederate battle flag at its base. A crowd estimated at the time to between 3000 and 5000 attended the dedication in 1916 which began

2 David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Belknap Harvard Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2001), 255-299

with a parade that started at a nearby public school that included Confederate veterans, members of UDC chapters from around the country, hundreds of school children, Southwestern University students, and Georgetown fire department members. This Confederate Soldiers and Sailors Monument is one of more than fifty such monuments that can be found at courthouses around the State of Texas.³

Overview For This Proposed Historical Subject Marker-

In the past several years many communities and institutions in Texas, and especially among Southern cities in the U.S., have been confronted with public calls for the removal of Confederate monuments and statues that were erected during the Jim Crow era. Many citizens and educational institutions today believe that these monuments and memorials glorify the era of slavery, white supremacy, and racial segregation that was predominant in the South well into the first half of the twentieth century. Debates and concerns about the appropriateness of removing long-standing Confederate veterans monuments have ensued from Denton County, to the University of Texas and even among representatives in the Texas Legislature. Most of the calls for the removal of Confederate monuments have been based on the belief that these monuments continue to diminish persons of African American heritage. The places of prominence that these monuments occupy do not help in overcoming the legacy of racial discrimination and segregation that still exists today. While some Southerners continue to argue that these Confederate monuments should be seen only as veterans memorials, others see these monuments as deeply offensive symbols of an ignoble past. In terms of today's commitment to racial justice a more troubling feature of many of these Confederate monuments is the place of honor that they have occupied for the past one hundred years. The Atlanta History Center, which has had to address these issues as one of the largest repositories of Confederate monuments and memorials in the

³ "Williamson County Confederate Monument Marks Anniversary", Johnston's Journal #105, United Daughters of the Confederacy Publication, Vol. 15, November, 2010

South, suggests that placing historical interpretive plaques on such monuments and memorials is a better way to preserve the historical realities of the Civil War while recognizing the racial discrimination that has been associated with these monuments.

The Atlanta History Center argues that historical interpretative plaques can provide educational information that places Confederate monuments and memorials in their proper historical context and that acknowledge we live in a different era of race relations today.⁴ In providing a suggested template to express these views the Atlanta History Center encourages statements like this to be added to historical interpretative plaques:

*“Our understanding of history changes over time. Civil War monuments remain important reminders of how history can be influenced by false ideas and misconceptions. This monument was created to recognize the dedication and sacrifice of Americans who fought to establish the Confederate slave-holding republic. Yet, this monument must now remind us that their loss actually meant liberty, justice, and freedom for millions of people- a legacy that continues for all of us today.”*⁵

Significance of This Historical Subject Marker-

We believe that this kind of marker needs to be placed next to the Confederate Soldiers and Sailors Monument located on the Williamson County Courthouse lawn. Its purpose and significance would be to deepen the understanding of the history of the Civil War, the legacy of the Jim Crow era, and the local resistance that was present in 1861 within Williamson County to the Confederate initiatives to

4 Atlanta History Center, “Confederate Monument Interpretation Guide”, <http://www.atlantahistorycenter.com/confederate-monument-interpretation-guide>

5 Atlanta History Center, “Confederate Monument Interpretation Template”, <http://www.atlantahistorycenter.com/confederate-monument-interpretation-template>

secede from the Union. Given the continued prevalence of the “Lost Cause” narrative about the causes and legacy of the Civil War, a marker that expresses historically verifiable facts about the Texas secession from the Union and the racial attitudes of the Jim Crow era would provide an educational function that the Confederate monument by itself does not provide.

Without an explanation of the historical context of these Confederate monuments erected during the height of the Jim Crow era (1895-1918) the public is easily left with the belief that such monuments are only tributes to the service and sacrifices made by Confederate soldiers. As the historian, Gaines M. Foster, revealed in his study of Confederate celebrations and monument dedication speeches during this era, these celebrations and monuments “served two interrelated social functions”. One function was to pay tribute to the old soldiers and their families who had served honorably in military service that ended in defeat. The other function was to remind southerners that they had acted rightly in supporting the Confederacy and what it stood for as an ordered and conservative society, with white supremacy being understood and affirmed as central to that kind of society.⁶

The historical understanding of this monument is also directly connected to Texas' reasons for joining the Confederacy, delineated in the Texas Ordinance of Secession that was drafted and approved in 1861 by delegates from all over the state at the Secession Convention in Austin. According to Texas State Library records, the 1861 “Declaration of the causes which impel the State of Texas to secede from the Federal Union” states:

“Texas abandoned her separate national existence and consented to become one of the Confederate States to promote her welfare, insure domestic tranquility [sic] and secure more

6 Gaines M. Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South 1865-1913*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1987, 127-144

substantially the blessings of peace and liberty to her people. She was received into the confederacy with her own constitution, under the guarantee of the federal constitution and the compact of annexation, that she should enjoy these blessings. She was received as a commonwealth holding, maintaining and protecting the institution known as negro slavery – the servitude of the African to the white race within her limits--a relation that had existed from the first settlement of her wilderness by the white race, and which her people intended should exist in all future time. Her institutions and geographical position established the strongest ties between her and other slave-holding States of the confederacy. Those ties have been strengthened by association.”

This Declaration goes on to define white supremacy in legal, social, and religious terms-

“We hold as undeniable truths that the governments of the various States, and of the confederacy itself, were established exclusively by the white race, for themselves and their posterity; that the African race had no agency in their establishment; that they were rightfully held and regarded as an inferior and dependent race, and in that condition only could their existence in this country be rendered beneficial or tolerable.

That in this free government all white men are and of right ought to be entitled to equal civil and political rights; that the servitude of the African race, as existing in these States, is mutually beneficial to both bond and free, and is abundantly authorized and justified by the experience of mankind, and the revealed will of the Almighty Creator, as recognized by all Christian nations; while the destruction of the existing relations between the two races, as advocated by our sectional enemies, would bring inevitable calamities upon both and desolation upon the fifteen slave-holding States”.⁷

⁷ “Declaration of Causes: February 2, 1861”, Texas State Library and Archives Commission, <https://www.tsl.texas.gov/ref/abouttx/secession/2feb1861.html>

The Southern conviction that secession from the Union was necessary in order to maintain the institution of slavery as an economic benefit to those states and to preserve racial purity and white supremacy has been well documented in the examination of the various ordinances and declarations produced by most of the states that joined the Confederacy in 1860-61.⁸ It is also important for Williamson County residents to know that one of the two delegates from Williamson County to that 1861 Secession Convention voted against leaving the Union.⁹

Such a subject marker would serve as an important educational resource for both white and black Americans to learn something of the history of the period when this Confederate monument was erected. As historian, Glenda E. Gilmore, points out, the period from 1890-1920, is often called the “nadir” of African American history. While more than 80% of the nation’s African Americans lived in former slave states until well into the twentieth century, they had to exercise their new citizenship rights among ex-Confederates and their sons and daughters. Gilmore says about this period, “White southerners continually reinvented new ways to impose white supremacy on their black neighbors. Black southerners fought back against disenfranchisement and unequal treatment, the imposition of segregation, and the violent white people who perpetrated racial massacres and lynching. Because the

8 Charles B. Dew, *Apostles of Disunion: Southern Secession Commissioners and the Causes of the Civil War*, University Press of Virginia, Charlottesville, 2001

9 Confederate War Department, “Ordinance of Secession of Texas”,
<http://www.csawardept.com/documents/secession/TX/>

rapidly industrializing South set up a system of racialized capitalism that left black people in segregated jobs at the bottom of the ladder, they sought the self-sufficiency of land ownership and started small businesses. Despite the onslaught of white supremacy, African Americans held hope that they would win the war for civil rights.”

During this era, “Jim Crow” laws were developed throughout the old Confederate states as a way to impose white supremacy by restricting the freedoms that freed blacks had received from the passage of the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments to the Constitution. “Jim Crow” had been a nickname for African Americans taken from a popular white minstrel who performed in black face before the Civil War. Later, African Americans appropriated it as shorthand for white oppression, disfranchisement, and segregation. Mississippi ratified a new constitution in 1890 to disfranchise black voters by a literacy test that required a voter to “be able to read any section of the Constitution, or be able to understand the same when read to him, or to give a reasonable interpretation thereof.” Some called it, “an understanding clause.” White registrars would administer the law, and they would decide whether the constitutional interpretations that black voters gave qualified as “reasonable”. Even though African Americans challenged this law, in 1898, the Supreme Court of the United States upheld voting restrictions in *Williams vs. Mississippi*. Other southern states didn’t wait, however, for that legal endorsement. They variously imposed complicated residential requirements for registering to vote. Some put in a grandfather clause that allowed illiterate whites to vote if their grandfathers had voted. Others enacted a poll tax. Across the region, voter turnout among blacks plummeted. The systemic exclusion of black people during this low point in African American history is well documented in two books- Leon F. Litwack’s *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* is a well-documented teaching resource, filled with stories of life at the nadir that tend to emphasize the horror

of white supremacy. Joel Williamson's *The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South*.

South since Emancipation renders a chilling account of how white supremacy reinvented itself to meet its challengers.¹⁰

The impact of white supremacy and racial injustices against African Americans during the era when these Confederate monuments were being erected in Texas has also been largely unreported publicly. Documented examples of the white lynchings of African Americans in Texas do exist, however. One source cites 40 lynchings of African Americans in Texas during the years of 1912-1918, with one occurring in Waco just six months prior to the erection of the Confederate monument in Georgetown.¹¹ A more recent study by the Equal Justice Initiative indicates that 275 documented lynchings occurred in a host of Texas counties, including one near Hutto, Williamson County, during the period of 1885-1940.¹²

The passage of Jim Crow laws aimed at maintaining racial discrimination, segregation, and white supremacy had a profound impact on African Americans in Texas and in Georgetown during the first half of the 20th century. The Texas Constitution was amended in 1876 to require electors to pay a poll tax. State statutes were passed from 1879 to 1925 to enforce both public and private racial segregation and to legitimize white supremacy in social interactions: criminalizing racial intermarriage; separating

10 Gilmore, Glenda Elizabeth, "'Somewhere' in the Nadir of African American History, 1890-1920", Freedom's Story, TeacherServe©. National Humanities Center, October 12, 2016, <http://www.nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/freedom/1865-1917/essays/nadir.htm>>

11 America's Black Holocaust Museum, "A Memorial to the Victims of Lynching", Texas, <http://abhmuseum.org/category/lynching-victims-memorial/texas/>

12 Equal Justice Initiative, "Lynching in America: Confronting the Legacy of Racial Terror- Supplement: Lynchings by County, Second Edition", <http://www.eji.org>

white and colored passengers in railroad coaches, depots, and on local streetcars; ordering Negroes to use separate public accommodations; and requiring localities to maintain racially segregated schools; etc. The prevalence of the Ku Klux Klan activity in and around Williamson County during this same period received statewide and local notoriety in the trial of Ku Klux Klan members by Dan Moody in 1923 in the Williamson County Courthouse in Georgetown. A new statue of Dan Moody has recently been placed on the Williamson County Courthouse grounds to attest to this historical significance.¹³ In reaction to the 1954 Supreme Court decision calling for the integration of public schools, the State of Texas passed an education statute in 1958 declaring no child was compelled to attend schools that were racially mixed and requiring an election for any local school desegregation.

These legal and social racially discriminatory practices subjected African Americans in Georgetown and in Williamson County to a host of injustices and indignities. Interviews with African American families who lived during this era reveal how widespread racial discrimination and segregation practices were in this part of Texas. During the first half of the 20th century Georgetown was residually segregated with most of the African Americans living on the “Ridge”, the “Negro” section of town across the railroad tracks on the West side of the city. Many of the descendants of freed slaves worked as sharecroppers on former plantations and farms around Williamson County.¹⁴ The people of color who lived in Georgetown, Taylor, and other communities in the county worked as gardeners, housekeepers, and laborers for local white residents and merchants. According to stories collected from this era of segregation in Georgetown, African Americans had to sit in the balcony of the local theater away from white people, go to the back-door of restaurants to order and receive food, use the “colored” public facilities, and obey strict white legal and social codes aimed at “keeping Negroes in

13 “Dan Moody Statue Unveiled”, *Williamson County Sun*, October 16, 2016 issue, Vol 42, No 20, page 1A

14 Georgetown Yesteryear’s: Sesquicentennial Series, A Project of the Georgetown Sesquicentennial Folklore Committee, ed. Martha Mitten Allen, 1985.

their place”.¹⁵ African American children had to attend the two-room “Colored School” on the Ridge and many only completed elementary school. Because the Georgetown hospital was for “whites only”, most of the African American babies had to be delivered by an African American doctor in Taylor.¹⁶ Some of the most telling local stories reflect a culture of white superiority and purity: “colored” children, for example, would only be allowed to swim in the public swimming pool a few times during the summer and after-wards the swimming pool would be drained and refilled for white children to swim. Generations of African Americans remembered that “Colored” people had to serve themselves at the “ice house” and put their money in a special hole to avoid being touched by the white ice house workers.¹⁷

The dedication of the Confederate monument in Georgetown in 1916 reflected a glorification of the antebellum period of slavery and white supremacy and thus reinforced the racial discrimination, segregation, and injustices of that time. This tragic, ignoble and inhumane treatment of African Americans by the dominant white population during the Jim Crow era has been ignored and minimized in both our state and local historical memories. A historical marker that summarizes this era of racial segregation and discrimination would provide a deeper understanding of this period in Texas history when Confederate monuments were being erected in places of prominence around the State.

Historical subject markers not only serve to educate the public about the events of the past, both the good and the bad, they can also help to interpret that history. Such is the case with Confederate monuments that were erected during the Jim Crow era which endorsed racial attitudes and injustices that we no longer embrace nor tolerate today. Like the decision that the Texas Historical Commission

15 “Growing Up Separate”, *Georgetown View Magazine*, February, 2014 , <http://gtownview.com/2014/02/>

16 Ibid, “Growing Up Separate”, *Georgetown View Magazine*, February, 2014

17 Oral history interview with Belinda Davis, 3rd generation African American resident of Georgetown, conducted on October 28, 2016