History, Heritage, or Propaganda:
Should Confederate Monuments Come Down?

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DR. GILL

Good afternoon everybody. On behalf of the Marilyn Shuler Human Rights Initiative and our
fabulous partners at Albertsons Library I want to welcome you guys to the first Teach
-In of the fall series. I'm a historian and teach-ins go back to 1965 when folks were confused
about the Vietnam War, particularly students. They didn't feel like they were getting the truth
from their government and the news was confusing, and so they called upon professors who
might know a little somethin' to help them understand the facts. They weren't academic lectures.
They weren't research talks. They were designed to give you information that you could use in
about 30 minutes to better understand the world outside your front door, and they continued ever
since and that's our objective here today. Is that, we try to pull something out of the news that's
confusing and grab on to somebody who knows a little something. They're going to tell us -
Elizabeth is going to share with us about 30 minutes of information she thinks we should know
about this topic and then the next 30 minutes is for you guys. So you're here for a reason. Your
opportunity is to ask questions of this expert to try to unpack what you want to know about this
debate over historical monuments. We know that history is not just about knowing the past. It's
about identity and it's about narratives that can be politicized for a variety of ends. Dr. Elizabeth
Swearingen got her Ph.D. in cultural - huh, um - Educational Anthropology and did work on
Civil War reenactments and how the folks who do those things develop an identity out of that,
and she can unpack the economics and politics of it. She spent a lot of time thinking and writing
about this, so with no further ado thank you for being here and giving us some context for this
debate, and then you guys think about your questions 'cause you guys are going to be on next.

DR. SWEARINGEN

Thank you Jill. When I finished my dissertation in about...I was a little late coming in about
2002. Right after 2001. I was studying the performance of the Confederacy in America primarily
through its material culture. Umm... and having a lot of fun with that. I was a guest historian,
and so I was sort of really involved with the sense of Antebellum dress and artifacts. 9/11
happened...um... during the first part of my...uh, after my private study and um...I found myself
all of a sudden not in an obscure dissertation anymore, but in something which was front and
center post-9/11 identity politics in America I went from teaching, ah...historical dress
reproduction to political science in an instant, and, uh, became a women's studies professor for
the California State University system. Educational anthropologists you know, what in the world
do we do? We literally study identity. We study such things as race, class, gender, sexuality,
religion, geography, history, and how it affects the way we hear each other. How it affects the
way we learn from each other. or don't hear and don't learn from each other. I teach in the
Foundational Studies Program at Boise State, which has been a wonderful ride so far. The
Confederate flag. I was on campus yesterday and I think you probably noticed the protest that is
happen out in the center of campus, and the uh... the pro-life uh visuals and they had the
Confederate flag right in the middle of 'em and it just like - Whoa! - you know kinda slapped me
in the face and I thought, "Okay, so I'm pretty much an expert on the performance of the
Confederacy, but it's the first time I have ever seen the Confederate flag appropriated in a
discussion about reproductive rights." and uh, so, um, I thought there might be a question about
that. I'm not going to talk about that. Uh, we have a question I've prepared to sort of deal with it,
uh but today it's gone, and which is interesting. Equally as fascinating as to why was it put up?
and why was it taken down? Um...the Confederate flag, which is also known as the Rebel flag,
Dixie flag, the Southern Cross, were all used sparingly prior to the 1950s and 60s. In fact, um,
they were primarily battle flags. They were never actually, uh national flags for the Confederate
states of America. The one that we see most often today is the Southern Cross Army of
Tennessee. It is the bars and uh stars on a rectangular field um...It's interesting, um, to note that
the time these flags started to appear on state capitals and city halls uh was during the 1950s and
60s which aligned with the Civil Rights Movement and some of the push back. It became aligned
with um, it's worst of all signification is being aligned with the Ku Klux Klan at several of their
rallies. uh There is no doubt among reputable historians that the Confederacy was established
on the premise of white supremacy because its founding documents as under here say, "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". This was the
Confederate Vice President in 1861 It's difficult to make the argument today [cough] Excuse
me. That the Confederate flag is not a racist symbol, but despite this well documented history
many Southerners and many other identity groups still cling to not only the Confederacy as
heritage, but to its symbolism within uh the Confederate flag. There is a deeply rooted narrative
that has over-gone decades of whitewashing and revision and sanitizing uh in order to sort of
build the story. The effort to remove the truth and reality, and the brutality of the enslavement
of human beings um...means that this story is more about its symbolism It's more about the
values and beliefs shared by a community, and it's about our understanding of that history, and
it's about acknowledging those injustices of the past. So heritage does not equal a history.
Heritage is something which is very different, so I was looking at the sense of is the Confederate
flag history, heritage, or hate? It's actually all three depending upon uh the lens that you actually
look through. The American heritage industry is basically a nostalgia movement uh against the backdrop of performance, of social dramas um, I've studied Civil War reenactments, but I've also studied the Ken Burns series, and I've also studied all Civil War magazines, and I've also studied all the ads and media, and I also study how children who are brought to a Confederate memorial uh how do they process and what do they learn? and I'll share a little bit of that with you. History, um, as opposed to heritage is always contentious, is always interpretive. It's always viewed through a contemporary lens. It's constantly being, uh um reinterpreted, um but it is based upon rigorous academic research, um and is as close as we can get to objective um, standards. Uh historians themselves recognize that history is always under that very critical lens. So you can say that yes the monuments of the Confederacy and the Confederate flag are history in the fact that they exist. What they mean and uh, why they are there is, um, interpreted thorough historical lens very different than interpreted through a, um, a heritage lens. Southern heritage is replete with not only representations of dominant white cultural traditions but it's also inseparable from Nationalism which serves as kind of a, um, security blanket or comfort in face of the uncertain futures. Heritage exaggerates. It omits. It selectively forgets and it constructs something called a "collective memory" uh which is really an identity text that is owned and passed down. Um, it represents a deliberate packaging of the past into tangible and intangible artifacts that you can purchase. into commodities for public consumption some of the aspects of the past will be emphasized while others are minimized or left out. Authenticity becomes sort of a form of cultural capital, it's almost like money that is traded and regulated by in-group membership, thus heritage literally becomes that cultural space uh, where the expression of dominant or major ethnic group values and beliefs happen It has little or nothing to do with historical accuracy. What often fools us or makes it difficult for us to see is that buildings and monuments seem so intrinsic to their environment. They seem so solid and unchanging that they literally become a catalyst that goes from generation to generation because they are preserved and passed down. It forms kind of what um, historians call a "cultural of continuity" so visible and tangible that it masks the ideological contexts below its surface. History requires critical comparative insight into whose history is represented? How has it changed? And who is left out? Next slide Now, I think all of us remember um, the shock of seeing um, the University of North Carolina campus, especially the night rally that happened before the next day in which we saw marchers with torches. One of the protesters was recorded as saying this, "I'm not allied with fascists. I am one. I'm a fascist myself. So I'm not really allying with them. Something that unites us all is the belief that white heritage and white culture is vastly important and is worth fighting for." In order to understand the sense of how do these alt-right identity groups form and how do they use history. It's necessary to go into some other studies. One field of study is called Alienation Studies, and it takes a look at how different ethnic groups feel alienated as the demographics of society change. Within our post-modern uh, society in the United States and
the vastly different demographic landscape, many white males experience themselves as influenced by forces they cannot control. Uh, and they feel that this erodes their liberties and their rights. Confederate monuments serve as a form of political theatre um, that they can perform against this fear of engulfment of other and also to exercise their will to power Public performances and memorials act as these forms of social drama. They give participants a cathartic feeling and a purification feeling that produces strong emotions of pleasure and it begins to sway and affect public opinion What's interesting about this is that the body becomes the central point so not only does it reflect the culture, but it constructs culture as well. These collective public displays are framed by social ethnic struggles, not only in how they engage the symbolic imagination, but also in how they create a space for self as subject. They take many forms including rituals, myth, memorials, acting, oratory, um, monuments, plaques, and all the other heritage industry artifacts that go with it. They produce very convincing sights and sounds of emotional rushes and in this way the symbolism of the Confederacy becomes a very effective recruiting tool, especially for young white males feeling alienated from an identity group. Confederate monuments have real implications within the pluralistic society. Um, that makes Confederate monuments profoundly political in relationship to public consciousness and identity. The intense growing pluralism of American democracy a constant push and pull to redefine national identity. Public debate around the removal of these Confederate monuments actually presents us with the very unique opportunity to study those complex interactions of power within what I'm calling post-9/11 American identity politics Some of the questions that we would ask is how do white national groups use Confederate symbolism for recruitment and identity? How do group processes cultural and struggles of power interact, and how do they effect learning, especially in educational sites? What norms, values, beliefs, and assumptions about America are reflected in Confederate symbolism? How are Confederate monuments used as living history? How does white privilege and power reflect within what is called a hidden curriculum of Confederate monuments and all living history artifacts and sites? One of the ways that we can study this is to look at consumption behaviors. Um, and we can see that how Confederate ideology is constructed, how it's lived, and how it's played out in all of it's very representational forms. Memory studies allow us to map how historical memory which then is closer to heritage than it is to historical interpretation is used to uh, to construct a wide variety of national, ethnic, social, and religious identities. The historical memory of a people, nation, or any aggregate group evolves over time. Um, and it evolves in relationship to ever changing contemporary contexts. It's a means of contending for power and place. Heritage is therefore inherently the struggle for contested truths and interpretation of these symbols, monuments, and events. Another thing that I find interesting is that Confederate memorials, and living history contain all the elements of a passion play. Including sacrifice, atonement, resurrection, reconciliation, prayer, and even hymns, ah with an overall, sort of what I call, um patrio-erotic-
deity, uh God's purpose to save the republic, uh literally in the market manifested through the
uh co-modification of confederacy um, but this symbolism neglects the broader social political,
and historical contexts that were in effect during the time of their creation, especially related to
other more marginalized groups. So one other thing Uh, you should change the slide again. One
of the things that we need to sort of take a look at is what is the actual history of, uh, the
monuments themselves? I see that the text didn't really come up on that, okay. To understand
the present moment we need to take a look at the actual history of monuments and how we
remember and it isn't just about the Confederacy. It isn't just about, um, the, uh the South. It's
also about the North. Both the North and the South tended to remember the war as an Anglo-
version. Kind of like a family reunification of a white-Christian-Anglo family. So we can see
here that even in the uh Emancipation Proclamation Memorial we have Abraham Lincoln, who
is positioned as a savior, extending a gift of emancipation to an African-American who is not
even making eye contact, and is still kneeling uh the uh dress is unequal, um this is very very
different than how African-Americans choose to memorialize uh their experience. So I don't
want to give the impression that this is like good North, bad South. Because it's actually sort of
an Anglo version across both. However there is nothing in the North that begins to valorize the
sense of uh winning as a military victory of the North. It's very much about emancipation and
Abraham Lincoln. Where it is in the south it moves very much to a militarized. The problem
lies, I would argue, as an educational anthropologist, that the problem really lies in the outcomes
of learning really that's where, kind of like the "rubber hits the road" It's a very effective learning
process, and you need to sort of understand, you know if we expose the younger generation to
this what do they actually learn? These memorials rely on such things as hero worship, a form
militarized masculinity, and a very romanticized version of American history that um privileges
honor, chivalry, and uh the lost causes of the South. Contrary, due to popular belief, it is not
Abraham Lincoln who emerges as the hero of the American Civil War. It is Robert E. Lee To
give you a taste of this, um one of the things that I did in my research is I looked at 350 fifth
graders that were exposed to living history and Confederate monuments, um where both the
North and the South was presented, and I asked them to just simply journal about what they
learned about the um causes um, or what they learned about the Civil War. Here's what fifth
graders had to say. "The brave men who all fought will rest in peace, not pain. For this country
united will never break again, and a nation united will never be the same." "It didn't matter if
you were South or if you were North. They were all God's creation they all needed help and they
all fought for their country." "The Confederate flag means the same thing as the US flag." "You
probably would be against your brother on the other side. It was a really sad thing." "It felt not
so good because some people were relatives on different sides fighting against each other." "Both
sides wanted gold [laughter] and both were American." The early Confederate monuments that
were erected right after the Civil War tended to be memorials of grief and profound loss and
they were primarily in cemeteries. They were erected to honor the sense of the value of soldiers. Um, and they suggest a moment of quiet reflection. However, monuments after the turn of the century uh, were basically monuments to reestablish white supremacy in a Jim Crow south, and to sort of overcome the uh reconstruction as the federal government left. They celebrated literally the South's return to power over reconstruction and sent a very powerful message to anyone coming into the south, um beware. The heritage industry part of it meant that most of these monuments were actually put up by private confederate organizations without any kind of public debate or review and you could buy them in a manufacturing market, and so there ended up literally hundreds and hundreds of them. The Confederate statues they were not built to depict the truth of the Civil War. Eric Foner who is a, uh historian said First the telling of history changes with society and our understanding of ourselves and second these historical monuments are less about their period and more about the society, the kind of society that erected them. For example, if the Civil War is recast as a war about tariffs or state's rights or about the minutia of historical battles, you can displace, minimize or ignore racism and slavery. My three years of ethnographic research demonstrated this um this clearly um so one of the things that the students responded to is um claims of truth. I uh asked them what was true about their experience in Civil War and these are what some of the students had to say. "Did you know that the Civil War wasn't about slavery? They fought because the North was attacking the South. The South said it was being overtaxed, but the North said it was because of slavery. When some people want something enough, or disagree with something enough it causes fights murder and sometimes war." "I learned the South point of view, state's rights." "I learned the Civil War was supposedly about freedom for the slaves when it actually was really about taxes on the southerners." "General Lee was interesting, but I didn't really understand him. General Lee picked the Confederate side because he didn't want to fight against his own country. It was Lee's duty to protect Virginia from the invasion of the North. Lee hated slavery. Then we went to the other the Southern point of view civil rights." I thought it was so interesting that students were not being overtaxed, but the North said it was because of slavery. When some people want something enough, or disagree with something enough it causes fights murder and sometimes war." "I learned the South point of view, state's rights." "I learned the Civil War was supposedly about freedom for the slaves when it actually was really about taxes on the southerners." "General Lee was interesting, but I didn't really understand him. General Lee picked the Confederate side because he didn't want to fight against his own country. It was Lee's duty to protect Virginia from the invasion of the North. Lee hated slavery. Then we went to the other the Southern point of view civil rights." I thought it was so interesting that students were not able to distinguish between civil rights and state rights. They were not, um able to distinguish either with the McDonald's happy meal that they got during their presentations that McDonald's didn't sponsor the American Civil War, and so their suggestions for living history was more hamburgers and more refreshment sites. Now you would assume that fifth graders would understand the context, but what happens is that you have sight, sounds, tastes, smell. They're very very much concerned about um, how our body processes things and they are seductive and they seduced everyone from the principles, to the teachers, to the students, to the uh participants, uh in feeling that somehow because they had a more whole body experience that that represented a truer form of history than the interpretation or the discussion that they might actually have in the classroom. And there was little or no follow through afterwards uh in order to sort of unpack some of those meanings. The timeline of the um, uh, monuments that were built clearly shows,
that uh, not only the places that they were uh built but the time frames they were built. So the early ones show a lot more building in cemeteries, the later ones show a lot more building in public places associated with schools, um, and um uh other government offices. The top uh next slide please, the um, if you look at the Confederate monuments by state Idaho's got two?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Two

DR. SWEARINGEN

We actually have 11. Okay? Because we have a lot of place names and environmental names that uh that refer to the Confederacy, but the top states are Virginia, Texas, Georgia, North Carolina, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Alabama. There are 109 public schools named for Robert E. Lee. There are 80 countries and cities named for the Confederacy, 9 official confederate holidays in the United States, and 10 military bases named for Confederates. This issue of whether to take Confederate monuments up or leave them down really came to a head with the um the horrific massacre of nine African-American church goers, um, in um, South Carolina by Dylan Roof. Dylan Roof was a proclaimed white supremacist. often seen posing with a Confederate flag a gun and a racist manifesto. He literally described the process of going through that I talk about earlier, the sense of alienation. The sense of looking for an identity text, and then the sense of of vilifying another group as being uh a threat. Some of the alt-right uh, and federalist websites that I've looked at describes this as a fear that the United States is being overtaking by a cultural revolution similar to China, and so the comparative analogies they're making is that the destruction of the iconography of the Confederacy is a destruction of America's core identity. After Dylan Roof there were about, um 20 monuments that came down really quickly um, about another hundred were petitioned to come down um, and most of those were blocked, um but there were over 360 counter protests across the United States since Dylan Roof to try and preserve the Confederate monuments. Um, NPR/PBS did a survey of American sentiment in regards to this, and they found that 80% of Americans disagree with the white supremacy movement. That seems to be pretty clear. 94% disagree with the views of the KKK, which is even more apparent. But 62% disagree that the Confederate monuments shouldn't be taken down. So the majority in the United States feel the Confederate monuments should actually stay up. Next slide please. What is interesting is that Confederate monuments are still going up. So, uh, this one went up in Tennessee and it went up under the idea of heritage movement and there are plans for many many more to continue to be erected. This one is Sons of the Confederate Veterans, which is similar to Daughters of the Confederacy. They tend to be funded and paid for through private donations, and if they're put on any kind of private land then the democratic process is to get their okay really aren't there. Uh, they've shifted somewhat away from the over-militarized look to something which is more about the individual soldiers valor, and the argument is made um yes the Confederacy is deeply embedded with racist meanings and
beliefs, but nevertheless it still represents the valor of soldiers who lost their lives in defense of
country and therefore that is a worthy American family story to be memorialized. So we then
come to the idea of should we preserve them, should we move them, or should we destroy them?
Underlying this debate about Confederate monuments is a bigger debate about race in
America, and it's a debate about the push back and what is, many, um editorialists are calling
a whitelash. Over the past several decades we have experienced globalization, income stagnation
and downward mobility in the United States, and we've also experienced at the same time a
growing change in the democratic, the appearance of our populations. Now black and
brown Americans, women are cutting in line and they appear to be taking more away from those
who feel that they have a special ownership and right to America. Uh, Robin DiAngelo who
studies race at Westfield State University she described it this way, "White people in North
America live in a social environment that protects and insulates them from race based stress.
That insulated environment to racial protection builds white expectations for racial comfort
while at the same time lowering the ability to tolerate racial stress, leading to what I refer to as
white fragility. White fragility is a state in which even a minimum of amount of racial stress
becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves. DiAngelo explains some of these
triggers that can make white folks defensive about race, especially not only for their
growing racialized politics, but as more persons of color attain leadership in America. All these
triggers were present in the last year especially in our election and through the presidency of
Barak Obama. Trump's racist rhetoric, Black Lives Matter protests, all push against the idea of
one privileged ethnicity and white privilege." You can even apply this concept to what we
saw in Charlottesville. Many of the people involved had likely lived advantaged lives, but
they've seen their racial security challenged. They saw the first black president Barak Obama.
They see demographic statistics that show white Americans will no longer be the majority in the
coming decades. They see all this talk about Black Lives Matter and the importance of diversity
including policies like Affirmative Action. They see recent movements to tear down Confederate
monuments in the south and they see themselves, um as being accused of racism at some point
in their lives making them defensive and angry. It forms a collective identity, in groups that
feel that they have literally a divine purpose, or a God's mandate, to protect and preserve the
United States. In the end this makes it very difficult to have a reasonable conversation about
race. It effectively kind of perpetuates a status quo by allowing white Americans to avert
discussions about how to change existing circumstances. Meanwhile the election of Donald
Trump has symbolized literally how the alt-right has taken that and been invigorated by those
politics. So, what should we do? The American History Association um, has come out with a
statement that says that they welcome the emerging historical debate about Confederate
monuments much of this public sanctuary was created without such conversations and without
public decision making processes. Across the country communities face decisions about the
disposition of monuments and memorials. These decisions require not only attention to historical facts, but also an understanding of what history is and why it matters to public cultures. Next slide please. Some of the questions that the American History Association is presenting to the public is to first of all acknowledge that the contemporary American South is pluralistic okay, so it isn't about blame and shame. Understand that the commemorative Confederate landscape is a product of white privilege and power and that African-Americans did not have a voice in that. Understand that America's future landscape should be crafted under inclusive public debate and democratic processes. Realizing that we've always toppled old buildings, moved and renamed streets, and engaged in what is called creative destruction of historical buildings and relics. Be willing to put some money into it. Whether it is private or legislated for memorials that honor those who have been left out of the historical narrative. And before a Confederate monument is removed, carefully photograph, measure and document it because it is a historical monument of its existence and to completely destroy it literally violates. Next slide please. The children what can educators do? and why is it so important? The sensory overload of any kind of living history or tangible artifact can flood students' perception and experience. It also floods students who do not see themselves represented in that, so many children of color and recent immigrants to the United States see themselves as forever outside of the collective identity of America. Critical educational practices of history should explore this. Explore the cultural capital that is actually embedded within the ideology as a hidden curriculum and challenge those ideologies of whiteness in how they exist and how they are socially reproduced to create literally those very critical important intellectual spaces to dismantle racism and lead to a deeper understanding of how we can create a more just, ethical and moral society. The critical question becomes can history be a vehicle to stimulate a more pluralistic American by opening a door of understanding about ourselves as a nation, um, and how diversity begins to change American identity. If history is in fact the, in the race, the critical consciousness of a citizenry heritage is not meant to do that and hate is certainly not meant to create anything [inaudible] Thank you for inviting me.

[applause]

**DR. GILL**

And that's what a teach-in's supposed to do is to give us a broader framework to think about these current issues. Now it's your time. You came for a reason. You have curiosity, questions, uh observations What would you like to ask? or talk...yes?

**AUDIENCE MEMBER**

Um, where did you interview those 5th grade students? Right here in the area?

**DR. SWEARINGEN**

Um, I did an ethnographic, um dissertation over at I was only going to do one, one year, and I
was only studying the dress. I was only there for Antebellum dress and the uh how did that form
cultural capital in a living district of events? And since I was already a designer it was easy to
do the dress, so the first year was fun! Just [inaudible]. And then 9/11 happened and I realized
that we had this narrative of war that they were performing. The real war happening as Bush
sent troops into Afghanistan um, and they were, they were, collapsing over each other. And then
you had a lot of Vietnam War Veterans who considered themselves authentic to Civil War
soldiers, although they weren't. believe me, age, weight, all those kind of things.

[laughter]

Um, and then no women allowed. Um We're talking about give me a real gun and I'll go kick
their ass. And I recognized that I was in a moment in history where I was sort of capturing the
before, during, and after, and... Thank you. And I decided that maybe what I was studying was
identity politics that get embodied through artifacts and um drama, and so it completely shifted
and I expanded it to all of California, some of Oregon, some of Idaho Idaho has really interesting
living history events. And I looked at observers who come. I looked at uh, Civil War buffs who
participated in living history. I looked at what historians do. I looked at the media, and films,
and everything around it, all the literature, and then I looked at children who were studying US
history and there was um about uh 1,800 of them that [inaudible]...over several different events
and I arranged to get the journals of 350 of those. So sort of triangulated from several different
directions, but what is interesting is observers they want to see people die. So by far the number
one code on that ethnographic research was the performance of death. How you die? How do
you pretend it? How authentic can you be? so it was everything from urinating on [inaudible] to
create a patina, to holding your breath to bloat yourself. uh, but then they would have these um
charges in the field that would come up with smoke and they didn't really think the public was
watching, so they would self-resurrect. So they could stay in the game. Black powder enthusiasts
were given uh, a portion of black powder for the event, and they were gonna shoot until it was
gone. The rules were that if you made eye contact you were dead. But in actuality when I had
served was pretty much that everybody chased themselves around the field until they ran out of
black powder and then everybody died. One event that I went to that was especially interesting
because all of a sudden there was a whole group of women that came out on the quote "the
historical battlefield" with frying pans and um, uh, dough rollers. You know pins. Just clobbering
[inaudible] and um, and then the audience said, "Wow I didn't know they did that." Um, but
when I actually interviewed those women and said, "What happened?" and the way living history
is set up around the Confederacy is that the North sees itself as the good guys, ah but there are
no women. Historical accuracy. Authenticity. No women in the Union camp, but the
Confederacy is saying, "Hey we can wear anything we want. We're Jimmy Dean, rebel without
a cause, and we just want to fight against the federal government anyway we can, and so you
have all kinds of people who appropriate the Confederacy for those purposes and they can wear whatever they want. But because the Civil War was fought mostly in the south they get to have their wives and children. So it's this great picnic. Um, but to the public they don't want the Confederacy front and center so you got to go way far away, usually in the reenactments in order to get to them. Uh, and the wives and family of the North became settlers. They created what was called the Civil Town and that's where you would go to see them.

**DR. GILL**

A question.

**AUDIENCE MEMBER**

Yeah I was curious because one of the things that I have seen of late is this uh business of conflating the Confederacy, the American flag, and nationalism so that hey they're the real patriots. They're the true Americans. I'm trying to figure out how'd that conflation occur?

**DR. SWEARINGEN**

[cough] Well Eric Foner says that that what troubles him the most is the idea that we're seeing the American United States Flag, the Nazi flag, and the Confederate flag conflated together He says that clearly makes this about a nationalist movement about identity politics and clearly takes it out of the venue of history and heritage and uh I would argue that you have, you know, Confederate organizations that are just as horrified by what has happened in the alt-right rallies as some of the people are in the [inaudible] They're really more about preserving a familial story, a sense of family, and sort of glossing over the parts that they don't really want represented. Then you've got sort of like a very very far right. Coming from that far right uh, there is a fear of engulfment by a movement from the left which is compared to the French Revolution and the Bolshevik Revolution and the um Mao Revolution in China. The idea that they're fighting for the very cultural life of American. Um, Then you have historians that are saying, "Wait a minute before we take everything down we need to talk about it!"

**AUDIENCE MEMBER**

You mentioned there were two monuments in Idaho. Where are they and what are they?

**DR. SWEARINGEN**

Okay I have a slide of that. [laughter] If I can get to um Okay so these are the monuments, um in Idaho the two. Robert E. Lee Creek and Robert E. Lee Monument. If I could get this up farther [cough] Okay, there are also um 11 other. In ah, places in Idaho

**AUDIENCE MEMBER**

Like Seceeh Meadows outside McCall?
Yeah, um hm, right, um hm. Um, so I think someone else is gonna be actually covering the movement of the Confederacy into Idaho. Cause there's a pretty strong presentational [inaudible] for that Yes?

Audience Member

Um, you said that the monuments were put up in public spaces later after the turn of the century. Was that in a...to try to combat the rise of like civil rights movements?

Dr. Swearingen

Exactly, and it was not only that, but it was an attempt to align it with the power of government. So that when it is in the city hall or when it is on public grounds it begins to assume state power as well.

Audience Member

Uh, two things. One, I graduated from Robert E. Lee High School in San Antonio, Texas.

Dr. Swearingen

You did?

Audience Member

Which was established in 1957, not coincidentally, not long after Board v. Brown v. Board of Education. Uh, but my question for you is, um, there are some uh very large Confederate monuments, I'm thinking of Stone Mountain in Georgia

Dr. Swearingen

You are.

Audience Member

That are obviously impossible to move or in fact to take down. How do you feel about uh, contextualizing those monuments

Dr. Swearingen

Exactly, that's what educators say is that you can't accept a heritage story of the monuments. That you have to contextualize them in the types of societies that build them. You cannot avoid women and African-Americans uh, you can't even, um one reenactment I went to, um I think it was in California. [sigh] [chuckle] They had this bizarre battle against the Mormons. And uh, and um, and I was raised on the essence of I was like so fascinated by this history that I've never heard about, but it had nothing to do with history. It had to do with this sort of anti-Mormon sentiment that was, you know, we need to kill them too while we're at it. And um, but it was children who were playing it. Which means that it wasn't the children who were picking up that text. That text was coming from the parents. Yes?
AUDIENCE MEMBER

Um, so you talked a little bit about alienation studies. Um, and I was wondering if there's any research on how that happens. How to stop that, and like how, like the cultural transmission, so is it a familiar cultural transmission or are people going out and just doing this? Like?

DR. SWEARINGEN

That's the $64,000 question. okay. If you have a dominate group who's been normalized and naturalized that the cultural representations aren't about them then they tend to think of themselves as being purely human and individuals. Uh, when you start to deconstruct and unpack that you get those triggers Because what happens is if it gets embedded in identity then when you're trying to deconstruct that history in a classroom students feel as if their identity is being attacked, and you get sort of like this emotional identity crisis. And um, you have to be aware of that. Um, and you have to make classrooms safe places and you have to sort of teach self-care. But you can't shut down the dialogue either, and uh there's a lot of studies that take a look at the trajectory that um someone who is um white in American that the trajectory to them going to a more cultural pluralistic understanding of themselves. And usually the first step is, uh denial, and anger, and to kill the messenger, and then there is the sense of "well teach me what to do". You know, "you tell me what to do" and then there is this sense of "Come in and take over and leave." You know reestablish themselves as a leader Um, and then there is this really awful period of self-reflection, and grief and wanting to fix it. You know. Wanting to give privilege away! You know buying some time. It'll never work. Uh, the very difficult job of being a white ally while not co-opting it. Not leading it. Um, is something that I still struggle with. But eventually you go through a situation where you get comfortable enough which is simply naming history and naming that. So I've had some interesting experiences in Idaho as I've been in the community and I've said such things as "Oh my goodness! How white of me!" You know, uh at say Target. And you just watch the brittleness. Most of the conversations that we have about race and the media are what I call looking at the tip of the iceberg. They're looking at intentional, overt bigotry, but most of racism is systemic. Historically situated pervasive and persistent. Uh, and to look at that means that as a white person you have to recognized that you're part of that narrative

[portion of footage lost due to camera battery]

AUDIENCE MEMBER

...ask forcibly take this statue down. You can ask the person, but how do we...how, you know?

DR. SWEARINGEN

I'm not sure. Do you all know what Bedford was famous for?

[random answering]
The egregious massacre of black soldiers who fought for the North. So it's one of the more egregious Confederate monuments. And children are going to internalize that and socialize that if they see it every day, and it's going to literally be so normalized and nationalized that it's going to get pushed into their subconscious. And then it's gonna take years before they maybe have a critical education class that begins to give them a way to talk about it. I don't have an answer for that. Does anybody else have a suggestion? How do you, uh deal with private monuments?

AUDIENCE MEMBER
I would love to see um, a monument nearby that realized the people that were slaughtered.

DR. SWEARINGEN
Okay, so I do have...another point of view there. Right. So let me show you some things I've got that begins to ask the question "whose heritage?". Because I was curious about that too. How many African-American monuments are there actually? So for example, these begin to tell a narrative of the American...African-American experience. This one is a monument of at Brown University to um [inaudible] of slavery. This one is the Whitney Plantation in Wallace, Louisiana. I actually visited this plantation when I was in Louisiana uh last year. Um, I'm not sure how I feel about plantations. They're...and I'm really conflicted about the story that they say they present and the story that they actually present. But what is interesting about the Whitney Plantation is that pretty much had to be done in secrecy in order for it to be African-Americans who built the history around telling that story. You have The Ark of Return at the United States um, National Headquarters that literally has people enter into a space that shows them how tightly the Atlantic Slave Trade packed enslaved Africans within the belly of the ships. You have the National Museum of African American History which has just recently been opened in 2016. Um, and so the memorialization of those uh populations who have been left out of history, whether it's women, African-Americans, Latinos Native Americans, Chinese Americans, um, is now just beginning to sort of gain steam, and there's still uh an interesting amount of push back. Like for example, there is a park in California that is part of the California State Parks called Allensworth I don't know if many of you know about it. It's [inaudible] and Tulare It was the first African-American town in California, and he was a chaplain uh, black chaplain in the Civil War, who decided that if he migrated to California, to the west, he could escape the systemic slavery. And he formed this town with a school and it was going really really great until the local lands owners, primarily Anglos, decided to cut the water source and move the railroad. Uh, and effectively passively killed the town. And then he was killed shortly after that. Uh, that memorial is still there in California, but it's completely unfunded by the parks. So you have to make an appointment to have a docent who will come and show it to you. So even among the parks systems (I think I just lost this) um, it is marginalized. Yes?
AUDIENCE MEMBER
How do I then, to bring his question back into play, um I heard you talk about the hidden curriculum. Which I think is important...don't you think that a discussion should be started around the null curriculum and what's not being talked about?

DR. SWEARINGEN
That is the hidden curriculum.

AUDIENCE MEMBER
The null curriculum?

DR. SWEARINGEN
That is the hidden curriculum. Right. Exactly, the hidden curriculum is who is left out? What is not said? Uh, all of the things that frame it, you know, underneath. And can be everything from the architecture of a classroom, uh is it a circle? Is it rows of chairs? Um, to literally how questions and answers, um are done within the classroom. The hidden curriculum is basically I would argue about the body. The body literally becomes a text and we bring those identity texts and experiences with us and it filters our learning. Even the idea that we privilege a sense of learning is only about cognition. It's only about the sense of what happens at an academic brain level is to miss all of the sensory stuff and all of the architecture that happens around. So for example, when I looked at living history memorials there were a lot of um southeast Asian immigrants who'd come after the Vietnam War and you would have presentations of cannons firing, Bowie knives, and some pretty scary stuff and what these students would do is they would just kind of put their head down and pull away. If you asked the uh the people who were in the living history, "Why did they do that?" They'd say, "Well, because they're obviously passive students. What do you expect from those kinds of people?" And you'd get a very sort of marginalized, but when you actually talk to the students, themselves, they had come from war violence. They did not know that they weren't going to get sliced and diced by a Bowie knife. They were terrified, and so literally in the way we handle uh, living history events we can privilege an Anglo version simply by how we arrange it. In the Civil War reenactment that happens within Fresno. It's the largest one in the United States by the way. Largest west of Gettysburg. People like to come there cause they can die on the grass in the shade.

[laughter]

Um, the African-American community there tries to present a narrative of African-American culture. The observers who are about, the public are about 98% white continually want to collapse that to just a slave narrative. Uh, in which, or they want, it's the only place where I ever saw the audience trying to stuff dollar bills in women's bras as a thank you for a living history event, and then when they were rejected uh, they would get angry and defensive and then uh
they'd say, "Well what do you want us to do? We think this is really cool." Uh, how 'bout a hug? How 'bout a thank you? And then the entire encampment the African-American, as the African-American experiences of culture and narrative and song were more and more popular they were pushed farther and farther and farther in the landscape, so that they were not the first thing that you actually saw.

**AUDIENCE MEMBER**

So as a student, kind of going back to what you're asking, and as a white female, how do you?...how can I go about talking to someone who is kind of...aggravated about the lack of, you know um I guess, like a white man feeling left out and feeling like he's being knocked down, or that he's not privileged, how can I have a conversation with someone like that and tell them, you know, hey whether it is I think...I know that's kind of a weird thing...

**DR. SWEARINGEN**

I deal with that all the time. Um, my partner is a conservative Idaho cowboy. Um we've been together for three years. I adore him. I've only slammed the door once. You know in three years. I think there are times when you cannot have a productive conversation. It just can't happen. Uh, I think there are other times in which you can sort of take "Isn't it interesting the way we look at this?" or sometimes I'll say outright I would love to have a productive conversation where we both listen and explore if you're willing. But there are times when I just can't have it. What is so interesting is...I don't know if I'd call him my boyfriend at my age, but whatever...um Is that he jumps in when someone says, "what does your sweetheart do for a living?" and he lies. You know, he'll step in and say, "Um she's a kindergarten teacher." You know? and I'm going, "Why did you do that?" "Well I was just trying to protect you." uh and so he has learned just by osmosis. So I think what we model is important. And I think that we model intolerance or we model not willing to be a bridge person and have those kinds of difficult dialogues that all we do is separate. So I'm really interested in the sense of those bridge spaces where dialogs can happen. As a white person I think it's on you to do your own work and to do your own studying. Um, and to be willing to be uncomfortable because there's no way you can go through this process uh and feel that collective guilt once it hits you. Uh, without actually experiencing it. One of the things I find troubling about Idaho is that Idaho is pretty good on its LGTB population and a lot of um but you will see white LGBT people defensive about racial questions. Um, and so just because you have an understanding about one particular marginalized identity does not mean that you have an understanding in other ones as well. So I think you know it has a continual [inaudible]

Thank you.

[applause]
DR. GILL

Thank you so much. [inaudible] In the next, uh. We're skipping next week but then following
that there's going to be a series on Russia. We're gonna try to unpack that. Understand
relationship with the United States and Russia and bring the politics into it. Please grab a flyer
on your way out if you wish.

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]