



STATEMENT OF THE NORTH CAROLINA DIVISION, SONS OF CONFEDERATE VETERANS

Never has an opinion, stated so smugly as fact, been easier to deconstruct than that of guest columnist William Keener shared in the Hickory Record on February 6. Little information is given about the author other than he is the chair of the local “humanist” organization...all you need do is search the internet for “American Humanist Association” to discover his motives for writing on this subject. The sanctimony, hypocrisy, and lazy suppositions of his column are as alarming as they are amusing.

As with many of his points, Keener’s point about the Populist caucus of 1895 is unclear. Regardless, the Populist movement in North Carolina was a backlash to Democratic rule and resulted in combination of the Populist and Republican parties into a “Fusion” ticket. This Fusion of parties, in power in 1895, was the most progressive political movement in North Carolina up to that date. The state’s first Republican Governor was elected as a result: the judicious statesman and Confederate veteran, Daniel Lindsay Russell. It was seventy years before another Republican, Jim Holshouser, was elected to that office. That said, if the Populist caucus was commenting on the importance of Confederate monuments, it was certainly not from the point of view of those in the Democratic party who would later lead the Wilmington riot of 1898.

As Keener continues, he recites the prevailing falsehood from so-called progressives on Confederate monuments and memorials, namely, that they were paeans to gilded-age white supremacy and a confirmation of Jim Crow oppression. The argument being that they were erected by unreconstructed former Confederates and racists to celebrate their late war to “enslave indigenous peoples and African Americans.” In this vein, Keener muses on the Catawba County Confederate monument and erroneously mentions a single public admission, in January of 1907, that slavery was the sole cause of the War. In fact, contrary to Keener’s research, the monument was dedicated in August of 1907. The quote cited by Keener was from a celebration of Robert E. Lee in Newton earlier in the year. The speaker was Methodist minister J.D. Arnold, and although he did utter the quote, he also stated in regard to slavery that “it was the will of Providence that we should fight it out to a finish and settle the question for all time.” By selectively and inaccurately quoting newspaper articles, Keener does nothing more than leave out the context for Arnold’s quote, that while the minister personally believed slavery to be the sole cause of the war, the question had already been settled by the War. That being the case, how could the Confederate monument in Newton celebrate an issue that had been previously settled?

When men such as these Confederate veterans put their lives in the balance, they did not do so lightly. Anyone with the capability of rational thought and the ability to read, would not conclude that a great many of them fought to preserve the American institution of slavery.

Especially because it was an institution that benefited a very small minority of Southerners. On the other hand, to suggest that a majority of Northerners fought to end slavery is equally false and laughable. Interestingly, at the dedication of the Newton Monument, future Governor Locke Craig spoke to a crowd of fifteen to twenty thousand North Carolinians. To them he said, “the vast majority of the men who composed the Southern armies owned no slaves. They fought for the Constitution of their fathers.”

Further, it is well known, as pointed out in Douglas Butler’s *North Carolina Civil War Monuments*, that the subjects of slavery or “Jim Crow” laws were rarely, if ever, mentioned in conjunction with the dedication of monuments. The monuments and memorials were created to honor the men who served and died, not to cheapen their contributions by a celebration of period politics and social issues. Nobody disagrees with Keener’s ancestor that the War Between the States was “miserable.” However, he misses the point that it was for that very reason that these monuments were dedicated.

The added assertion that the timing of such monument dedications was a coincident celebration of white supremacy and Jim Crow laws is also dead wrong. Just as is the practice now, we commemorate the service of veterans as they age. Monuments to the American Revolution, the World Wars, Korea, and Vietnam did not go up immediately after each war. They were erected as the generation of veterans grew older and a new generation wanted to honor their sacrifice and bravery. It is simply common sense and intellectual honesty to recognize this. If it was true in all of these other instances, why would it not be true for the War Between the States? Unfortunately, for people like Keener, drawing convenient yet unfounded conclusions for their arguments is a time-honored tradition that has only served to defame otherwise good and decent people like our ancestors. There is a reason that direct evidence is favored over circumstantial evidence.

Today, Confederates are often ironically called traitors by those who likely hate the United States more than any Confederate ever did. Our Confederate ancestors were not traitors. In fact, they were the only patriots who stayed true to the principles of the Founders and the spirit and text of the Constitution. There is NO difference between the Declaration of Independence, lauded as genius, and the secession of the Confederate States, deplored as treason. It was only after the direction of the Union took a hard left that our ancestors no longer had use for what has certainly become a republic of hypocrisy. Then Representative Locke Craig said it best, describing the motives of Confederates while speaking to the General Assembly in 1901, “It was not for the preservation of slavery but for the preservation of their rights guaranteed by the organic law. It was when the Constitution was violated that the drums began to beat...”

To Keener’s main point, it is not only illegal but extremely dangerous to move these monuments to museums or battlefields so that they can be “put in context.” Whose context and with what meaning? They will be further tainted with lies. Leave them be where they peacefully stood until they became a political scapegoat for progressives. Keener and his humanists are free to honor their ancestors as they please. We demand the same consideration.