

SPLC | ACTION

The Honorable Glenn Youngkin
Governor of Virginia
State Capitol Third Floor
Richmond, Virginia 23219

Dear Governor Youngkin:

On behalf of the Southern Poverty Law Center, we are writing to express deep concerns about your appointment of Ann Hunter McLean to Virginia's Board of Historic Resources. We urge you to reconsider and rescind this appointment.

Established in 1971, the SPLC has been tireless in identifying and rooting out extremist groups to create a fair, inclusive, and unified nation. We are a nonprofit advocacy organization serving as a catalyst for racial justice throughout the South. We work in partnership with communities of color to dismantle white supremacy, strengthen intersectional movements through transformative policies and initiatives, and advance human rights of all people. Since 2016, our *Whose Heritage?* project has contributed to these goals by mapping and tracking data on Confederate memorials to help communities identify and remove these symbols of hate. Our historians and research analysts have documented the more than 2,000 memorials in the United States today valorizing a secessionist government that waged war to preserve white supremacy and the enslavement of millions of people.

McLean should know exactly what Confederate memorials are designed to commemorate, as well as their current divisive impact on communities. In her 1998 dissertation, she wrote that the monuments on Richmond's Monument Avenue "reveal the dominance of a white, patriarchal, Protestant society and women's willingness to uphold that societal norm."¹ She also acknowledged that Black communities "viewed the statues and memorials differently" and noted then that the Lee monument in Richmond "reminds some in society of the open wound of racism."² Her knowledge of the what the monuments meant and how they are interpreted undermine her more recent justifications for the preservation of these symbols of hate and white supremacy.

In more recent statements, McLean mischaracterized the contemporary Confederate memorial debate, describing Confederate monuments as pieces of "fine art."³ While some Confederate memorials were commissioned by well-known artists, many Confederate monuments were mass produced.⁴ Describing Confederate monuments as fine art threatens to divert attention away from the actual reasons these memorials were erected and how historically underrepresented communities interpret them today.

¹ Ann Hunter McLean, "Unveiling the Lost Cause: A Study of Monuments to the Civil War Memory in Richmond, Virginia and Vicinity" (PhD diss., University of Virginia, 1998), 5.

² *Ibid.*, 3-4.

³ Eric Burk, "Youngkin Announces Two Board of Historic Resources Appointees Including Historian Outspoken Against Destroying Monuments, Dr. Ann McLean," *The Virginia Star*, July 14, 2022, accessed July 20, 2022, https://thevirginianstar.com/2022/07/14/youngkin-announces-two-board-of-historic-resources-appointees-including-historian-outspoken-against-destroying-monuments-dr-ann-mclean/?utm_source=iterable&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=edm.

⁴ Chris Carola, "Civil War 'Silent Sentinels' Remain Quiet Memorials to the Common Soldier," *Christian Science Monitor*, April 18, 2015, accessed July 20, 2022, <https://www.csmonitor.com/USA/2015/0418/Civil-War-Silent-Sentinels-remain-quiet-memorials-to-the-common-soldier>.

Moreover, academic historians have disproven McLean’s belief that “these statues were built to tell the true story of the American South.”⁵ The actual story these monuments tell completely erases the role that slavery played in the Civil War. By disregarding what established experts say on the topic, McLean demonstrates she is not qualified to hold this position.⁶

Finally, it is deeply concerning that your appointee has trafficked in the language of the Lost Cause. McLean has suggested that the Civil War was fought over the “sovereignty of each state and constitutional law.”⁷ This is demonstrably false. The Civil War was fought over slavery. Her unabashed and unapologetic use of the Lost Cause ideology should be disqualifying for an individual charged with helping to promote “the stewardship and use of Virginia’s significant architectural, archaeological, and historic resources as valuable assets for the economic, educational, social, and cultural benefit of citizens and communities.”⁸

We urge you to reconsider McLean’s appointment. We are confident that there are many Virginia historians who would better represent the state through their commitment to telling accurate and honest histories. The stakes are high – misrepresenting our past to promote false narratives that roll back decades of racial justice efforts is a disservice to the mission of the Board of Historic Resources. Virginia can and must do better.

May we hear from you on this matter?

Sincerely,



LaShawn Warren
Chief Policy Officer



Kimberly Probolus
Senior Research Analyst

⁵ *Richmond’s Morning News with John Reid*, aired December 23, 2021, accessed July 20, 2022, <https://omny.fm/shows/richmonds-morning-news/ann-mclean-december-23-2021>.

⁶ For a selection of scholarly works, see David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001); Karen Cox, *Dixie’s Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture*, 2nd ed. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2019); ———, *No Common Ground: Confederate Monuments and the Ongoing Fight for Racial Justice* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021); Erika Doss, *Memorial Mania: Public Feeling in America*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010); Sherrilyn Ifill, *On the Courthouse Lawn: Confronting the Legacy of Lynching in the Twenty-First Century*, Rev. ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 2018); Sanford Levinson, *Written in Stone: Public Monuments in Changing Societies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018); and Micki McElya, “Commemorating the Color Line: The National Mammy Monument Controversy of the 1920s,” in Cynthia Mills and Pamela Simpson, *Monuments to the Lost Cause: Women, Art, and the Landscapes of Southern Memory*, 2nd ed. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2019).

⁷ *Richmond’s Morning News with John Reid*, aired December 23, 2021, accessed July 20, 2022, <https://omny.fm/shows/richmonds-morning-news/ann-mclean-december-23-2021>.

⁸ DHR | Virginia Department of Historic Resources, May 5, 2022, accessed July 20, 2022, <https://www.dhr.virginia.gov/about-dhr/>.