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a Better Future NowBernie Foster
Founder/PublisherBobbie Dore Foster
Executive EditorJerry Foster
Advertising ManagerChristen McCurdy
News EditorPatricia Irvin
Graphic DesignerMelanie Sevckenko
ReporterMonica J. Foster
Seattle Office CoordinatorSusan Fried
Photographer

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415 N. Killingsworth St.
P.O. Box 5455
Portland, OR 97228Telephone (503) 285-5555
Fax: (503) 285-2900

info@theskanner.com

www.TheSkanner.com

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Opinion

Confederate Statues Fall, But Economic Racism Lingers

Cheers to New Orleans Mayor Mitch Landrieu, one of the first mayors to take Confederate statues down and to make the strong point that these statues represent nothing but oppression. You should check out the speech he delivered, in May, at MarketWatch.com.

More cheers to Baltimore Mayor Catherine Pugh who had statues removed in the dead of night to avoid Charlottesville-type confrontations between racist White supremacists (also known as “good people” according to “45”) and those who oppose them. And though he does little that I agree with, in the interest of equal praise, I must lift up Maryland Governor Larry Hogan, who had the statue of Roger Taney removed from the Maryland state house. Taney was an especially vile racist who authored the Dred Scott decision in 1857. He wrote that Black people had no rights that Whites were bound to respect, and provided justification for enslavement, even as many in the rest of the nation were clamoring against the unjust institution.

As the statues are falling, economic racism is not fading. African Americans still earn just 60 percent of what Whites earn. We have just 7 percent of the wealth that Whites have. The unemployment rate for Black workers is double the unemployment rate of White workers. Even with equal incomes, Blacks find it more challenging to



Julianne Malveaux
NNPA
Columnist

get mortgages or other access to capital and our economic rights are being challenged every day.

It is important to note that these statues were not erected immediately after the Civil War. Of course, Southern Confederates — a bunch of

“The origins of the wealth gap lie in this loss of land, and in the intimidation that kept African American people in near-slave status in the South

losers — were too broke to build statues. They were still trying to recover from the devastation of the Civil War. How did they plan to recover? They needed a captive labor force to work their fields, just as enslaved people had before the war. So they ensured quasi-captivity through intimidation. That need was partially responsible for the emergence of the KKK. They inspired fear, suppressed resistance, and, through Black Codes and Jim Crow, engineered the near-re-enslavement of Black people.

Black people who wanted to leave the South after the end of Reconstruction had to do

it in the dead of night. Black people, who had land, were often forced to concede it or be killed. The Emergency Land Fund, a now-defunct organization that documented the Black loss of land, indicated that Black folks lost as much as 90 percent of their accumulated land by 1970, at least partially due to trickery and intimidation.

The origins of the wealth gap lie in this loss of land, and in the intimidation that kept African American people in near-slave status in the South. Confederate statues, flags,

and Klan activity appeared wherever there was resistance—during and after the reconstructions, in the 1920s, after the Red Summer of 1919 and the return of Black men from World War I.

Again, we saw the rise of this activity, these statues and these flags, in the 1950s as the Civil Rights Movement pushed hard for equality. When people talk about taking “their” streets back, what they really mean is they want Black people (and other people of color) in their place; in their economic place and that place, for them, is subordinate.

So while Confederate statues are falling (not quickly

enough — there are more than 700 of these odious symbols still standing), and Confederate flags are waving less frequently, the economic racism the Confederacy established is alive and well. Just ask the young Black couple redlined away from a banking opportunity, or the innocent arrested person who can't pay bail. Ask the Black student whose loan burden is nearly twice that of her White counterpart, or the Black woman who pays more, and at a higher interest rate, for a car loan.

Sure, we have come a long way since those ugly days of enslavement or stark segregation, but some power comes from the Benjamins. And, according to some estimates, it will take more than 200 years to close the wealth gap. The statues may be falling, but economic racism is alive and well.

While I commend Republicans Lindsey Graham, Tim Scott, John McCain and so many others for condemning their president for his abject and ugly racism, I wonder if any of them would be so forceful in condemning economic racism, or in advocating for reparations. Absent their willingness to do that, they can earn style points for their remarks, but they do not seem prepared to change the harsh realities of Black life in our country today.

I challenge those who would tear down the statues and take down the flags to show equal zeal in tearing down the walls of economic racism.

Symbols of Hatred and Racism Should Not be Venerated

Trump administration's refusal to condemn the public display of Confederate symbols emboldens the hateful groups that seek to divide our country

For too long, the American people have lived side by side with the emblems of White supremacy, oppression and segregation. Their continued presence in our public sites and buildings is highly offensive to millions of Americans — regardless of ethnicity — and also serves as a painful reminder of the racial, ethnic and religious hatred that have marred this country's history.

Today, we are dealing with a President who believes that to take down these symbols is to change “history” and “culture” and an Attorney General who believes that to remove the Confederate flag from public buildings is to “delegitimize the fabulous accomplishments of our country.” We ask: how does it benefit our country to preserve an archaic and treasonous Confederate culture which sought to devalue, diminish and profit off the suf-



Derrick Johnson
NNPA
Interim
President & CEO

fering of Black citizens? The Civil War is a part of our history, but those symbols belong in textbooks so we may

“The mechanisms that aim to spread hate, terror and injustice take on many forms — from discriminatory laws and unfair systems, to racist symbols and confederate statues

learn from our past mistakes and grow from them. Symbols of hatred and racism should not be venerated.

This administration's refusal to condemn — and in

some instances blatantly defend the public display of these Confederate symbols — serves only to embolden and mobilize the hateful groups that seek to tear our country apart. As was evident in Charlottesville, theremnants of the Confederacy will continue to evoke hatred and inspire domestic terrorism until they are removed. Leaders of the Ku Klux Klan and oth-

Striking down these statues, flags, and memorials will not solve all the challenges concerning race and equality in America, but it will symbolize an end to the reverence and celebration of values that have divided us for too long. Baltimore, home of our national headquarters, just removed several confederate statues and moments. The NAACP commends the Charm City and the other towns, states and universities that have taken steps to rid themselves of these shameful monuments.

The mechanisms that aim to spread hate, terror and injustice take on many forms — from discriminatory laws and unfair systems, to racist symbols and confederate statues. As the nation's foremost civil rights organization, the NAACP will continue to fight the constructs whose sole purpose is to make America hate again.