

NAACP NEWS

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PRESS RELEASE

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Georgia NAACP
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Georgia NAACP condemns Governor Deal's deafening Silence on KKK Remarks *NAACP opposes pending bills glorifying the confederacy*

The Georgia NAACP strongly condemns the ahistorical defense of the Klu Klux Klan by Representative Tommy Benton (R-Jefferson) and the deafening silence from his party's leadership including Governor Nathan Deal, Speaker David Ralston and Lieutenant Governor Case Cagle. Further, the state's oldest and largest civil rights organization announce unequivocal opposition to Benton's pending bills (House Resolution 1179 and House Bill 855) seeking to restore Robert E. Lee's birthday on Jan. 19 and Confederate Memorial Day on April 26 in the wake of Gov. Deal's weak compromise of listing them on state calendars as generic paid holidays for state employees and amend the State Constitution to protect Stone Mountain.

Specifically, House Resolution 1179, which Benton, R-Jefferson, dropped in the House "hopper" last Wednesday, assures that the "heroes of the Confederate States of America ... shall never be altered, removed, concealed or obscured in any fashion and shall be preserved and protected for all time as a tribute to the bravery and heroism of the citizens of this state who suffered and died in their cause." It also requires the park around the mountain to be kept as "an appropriate and suitable memorial for the Confederacy." If passed, the resolution would go to voters as a statewide referendum.

"Proponents of these pathetically divisive bills will not support a public apology from the State of Georgia for the atrocities of slavery endorsed and supported by the Code of Georgia from 1755 to 1865 but have the unmitigated gall to glorify the Confederacy" says Georgia NAACP President and Civil Rights Attorney Francys Johnson.

The NAACP'S well documented campaign against the glorification of the confederacy began with D. W. Griffith's 1915 Birth of a Nation. In recent years, the NAACP has worked to prevent another permanent display of the Sons of Confederate Veterans on Courthouse Squares and remove the Confederate flag from places of sovereignty. Tommy Bento (R -Jefferson) is a historical, right wing extremist emboldened by the crass rhetoric of presidential contenders and a fear of a striking white majority. Benton's bills are the latest efforts to win a war that was lost 150 years ago" says Johnson. "Many will suggest that the removal of monuments is akin to destroying culture or that the SOCV, a modern iteration of the KKK, have a First Amendment right to the displays. That is simply not true. The NAACP has stood on those same First Amendment considerations many times and there are dozens of cases with NAACP in the caption to show it. However, what is dangerous here is Governor Nathan Deal's silence. Further, the silence of other elected officials to condemn Benton's revisionist propaganda is deafening. Georgia's constitution should not be amended to permanently adopt the hateful viewpoint of Benson's ilk," says Johnson.

"These same Counties will have a major problem when we begin to request an equivalent space on the Courthouse square to erect monuments to the millions of human life maimed, murdered, and marred by Chattel Slavery, America's original sin" says Johnson contemplating a plan to mark all 586 racial lynching's in Georgia as documented by a recent report of the Equal Justice Initiative.

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150 years after Gen. Robert E. Lee surrender to Gen. Ulysses Grant's Union forces at Appomattox Courthouse Virginia, the memory of the Confederate States of America remains dear to the hearts of millions of Southerners whose ancestors fought beneath the battle flag, with its starry blue St. Andrew's cross on a blood-red field. Although the SOCV and the county units who have endorsed their agenda by approving the use of public lands feel responsible to honor the past wicked deeds of their ancestors through official governmental action; they resist all notions that they have any responsibility to apologize to their ancestors' victims through official governmental action. That reeks of hypocrisy in basic philosophy. "American slavery was a state sanctioned action no less than the Jewish Holocaust in Germany" says Johnson.

The question of how the Civil War should be remembered has proven to be a contemporary political and cultural bombshell -- not only in Georgia but in South Carolina, Mississippi, Virginia and other Southern states. "It's shameful that Representative Benton, a history teacher no less, has such a narrow view of Georgia history. He fails to recognize that Georgia between 1735 and 1750 was unique among Britain's American colonies, as it was the only one to attempt to prohibit black slavery as a matter of public policy. The decision to ban slavery was made by the founders of Georgia, the Trustees. Why not celebrate that history," says Johnson.

"The main tenet of what the Confederacy stood for was the maintaining of slavery," says Senator Vincent Fort, an Atlanta Democrat who led the effort to remove the Confederate symbol from the Georgia flag. "The Confederate battle flag was the symbol of defiance of this nation becoming one nation under God."

In 1991, the NAACP adopted a resolution condemning the Confederate battle flag as a symbol of "tyrannical evil" and "an odious blight upon the universe." The resolution committed the NAACP's "legal resources to the removal of the Confederate flag from all public properties." Though the predominant Confederate symbol, the St. Andrews Cross, was removed from the state flag, the NAACP firmly believes that Georgia is already crowded with reminders of Georgia's Confederate past. Among them are confederate monuments all over the state, large portraits in the capitol of Robert Toombs, a Georgia secessionist leader who served as a Confederate general, and a marble bust of Alexander Stephens, the Georgian who was vice president of the Confederacy.

The Georgia NAACP has called on a Day of Legislative Action with the Moral Monday Coalition on February 8, 2016 at the State Capitol to call attention to and lobby to defeat the extremists measures proposed during this legislative session. More information on this Legislative Day of Action can be found at www.naacpga.org.

Founded in 1909, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) is the nation's oldest and largest civil rights organization. The Georgia NAACP has had an unbroken presence in Georgia since 1917. The Georgia NAACP maintains a network of branches throughout Georgia, from cities to small rural counties. The Georgia NAACP has been the most effective and consistent advocates for civil and human rights in Georgia. The NAACP's half-million adult and youth members throughout the United States and the world are the premier advocates for civil rights in their communities, conducting voter mobilization and monitoring equal opportunity in the public and private sectors. ###