

# Battle lines drawn over Confederate monument

Rich McKay  
REUTERS

ATLANTA – The heroic images of three Confederate leaders carved into the granite face of Georgia's Stone Mountain have towered over the countryside outside Atlanta since the 1970s, paying silent homage to the Southern cause in the Civil War.

Its supporters say the monument – often compared with Mount Rushmore – honors those who fought and died for the Confederacy in the 1861-65 war between the states. But detractors have long viewed it as a defiant symbol of White supremacy. They say its messaging needs to be openly acknowledged and put into historical context in the interest of racial justice.

To accomplish that, the Republican-controlled state government authorized \$14million to redesign the museum at the base of the mountain. The aim is to present a more balanced view of what the gigantic bas-relief carving represents.

'The past is ugly,' said the Rev. Abraham Mosley, the first Black chairman of Stone Mountain Park's governing board, referring to the links between the Confederacy, slavery and the South's legacy of racism, which he said the museum currently obscures.

But the project is now facing a lawsuit that could stop it cold just months before it is due to open. The Sons of Confederate Veterans, a group that says it is committed to the 'vindication' for the Southern cause, argues that state law stipulates that Stone Mountain must stand as a 'tribute to the bravery and heroism' of those who suffered and died for the Confederacy. The redesign, the group says, would dishonor that memory and violate state law.

Featuring images of Confederate President Jefferson Davis, and Gens. Robert E. Lee and Thomas 'Stonewall' Jackson, all on horseback, the monument implicitly portrays the Southern 'lost cause' as noble and just. The museum currently presents the war as the South's struggle to protect the rights of the states against encroachment on the federal government.

The redesign, approved in the wake of the 2020 killing of George Floyd by a white police officer, runs counter to President Donald Trump's efforts to purge schools and museums – including the Smithsonian Institution – of content that highlights the role played by racism in shaping U.S. history and culture.

A spokesperson from the White House deferred questions about Stone Mountain to authorities in Georgia.

While there are no plans to alter the monument itself, the new exhibits would highlight the issue of slavery as driving the dispute between the industrial North and the agrarian South that led to the formation of the Confederacy and the Civil War.

Some displays would explore the links between Stone Mountain, once the site of Ku Klux Klan cross burnings, and the struggle for civil rights, which was at its height when the carving was commissioned.

'It's a challenge to reinterpret Stone Mountain, and I salute the idea, but the devil will be in the details,' said W. Fitzhugh Brundage, a historian and professor who focuses on race and the American South at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

**Detractors have long viewed the Confederate carving on the face of Georgia's Stone Mountain as a defiant symbol of White supremacy. Dustin Chambers/REUTERS file**

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