

Confederate Soldiers and Sailors Monument Plinth on Mount Royal Avenue

Background

A plinth block of etched granite is all that remains of the Confederate Soldiers and Sailors Monument on the 1400 block of Mount Royal Avenue. Installed in 1903, the plinth originally was the pedestal for a bronze statue of a winged woman (Glory) clutching a wounded soldier in one arm and upholding a laurel wreath in the other. Etched in the front of the plinth are the words:

GLORIA VICTIS [Glory to the Vanquished]
TO THE
SOLDIERS AND SAILORS
OF MARYLAND
IN THE SERVICE OF THE
CONFEDERATE STATES
OF AMERICA
1861-1865

The east side is etched with the motto of the Confederacy, DEO VINDICE (God our Vindicator), and the west side is etched with the motto of Maryland, FATTI MASCHII / PAROLE FEMINE (Strong Deeds, Gentle Words). The back is etched, GLORY STANDS BESIDE OUR GRIEF, and below the monument is credited to the Maryland Daughters of the Confederacy, which commissioned the monument in honor of Maryland's soldiers and sailors who fought on the Confederate side of the Civil War.

The Maryland chapter of the Daughters of the Confederacy was founded in 1895 and, in concert with other chapters around the country, endeavored to fundraise for and install monuments to the Confederacy. These monuments' larger purpose was to sympathetically mold public views of the reasons for Confederate secession and defeat by the Union in the Civil War. During the war, some citizens in Baltimore were partial to the Northern cause and others were partial to the Southern cause.

In 2015, Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake created a Commission to Review Baltimore's Public Confederate Monuments and make recommendations about how Baltimore City should balance the political, historical, and artistic meanings of its Confederate monuments. The Commission recommended in its August 2016 report to retain the Soldiers and Sailors Monument with "very serious recontextualization." In its report, the Commission concluded:



Today, the monument asks those who interact with it to remember the Confederate Soldiers and Sailors that lost their lives in the Civil War; it also asks us to view their service to the Confederacy as glorious. Through sculpture and inscriptions, the monument also glorifies the Confederacy itself as evidenced by the Confederate flag, laurel wreath, and use of the Confederate motto as an inscription. These messages cannot be separated from each other.

In August 2017, Mayor Catherine Pugh ordered the bronze statue of the monument as well as other Confederate monuments in Baltimore to be removed through emergency mayoral powers in response to nationwide protests around Confederate monuments. An interpretive plaque had been installed by the monument but was removed at some point as well. The removal of the bronze statue and interpretive plaque has left the plinth sitting on its own.

Review

The Confederate Soldiers and Sailors monument was erected to memorialize a cause that would not be glorified in today's Bolton Hill. Although its statue has been removed already by the City, the plinth carved with the Confederacy motto remains and is the object of recurrent graffiti. Confederate sympathizers are undeniably part of the history of Bolton Hill, but nothing significant about the monument or its site calls for memorializing or glorifying the Confederate cause in the neighborhood.

The committee met or communicated with residents along Mount Royal Avenue as well as MICA leadership about their sentiments surrounding the plinth. Nearby neighbors try to tend the gardens around the plinth. It has not subversively become a social justice gathering point, though MICA instructors have considered installing temporary and transformative art around it. While the committee heard some Bolton Hill residents voice a general interest in seeing public historic markers retained for their historical significance, no one has indicated a specific interest in retaining the plinth since it has become an unaesthetic block of granite impeding more constructive purposes for the site.

Recommendation

Without a compelling reason to retain the plinth, the committee recommends full removal of the Confederate Soldiers and Sailors monument.

Works Cited

Fandos, Nicholas, Goldman, Russell, and Bidgood, Jess. "Baltimore Mayor Had Statues Removed in 'Best Interest of My City.'" *New York Times*, August 16, 2017. Accessed August 23, 2022.

Schmitt, Rolf R. "Notes on the History of West Mount Royal Avenue," March 14, 2021.

Special Commission to Review Baltimore's Public Confederate Monuments. "Report to Mayor Rawlings-Blake," August 16, 2016.

<https://www.baltimorecity.gov/sites/default/files/Confederate%20Monuments%20report.pdf>