

To: City of Edwardsville Administrative & Community Services Committee

CC: Edwardsville City Council and Mayor Patton

We are a group of Edwardsville citizens calling upon the city to take the following actions:

1. Remove the statue of Ninian Edwards from the downtown Ninian Edwards Plaza.
2. Relocate the statue to a museum or less public city space, to be displayed alongside plaques which describe the harmful historical actions of Ninian Edwards against enslaved persons and Native Americans.
3. Rename Ninian Edwards Plaza or leave the plaza unnamed.

Rationale

Even by the standards of his time (early 1800s), Ninian Edwards was a racist and immoral man. We know that it was not the intention of the City to honor Edwards' harmful actions when they raised his statue and named the plaza after him. Nevertheless, such a public display of Edwards' statue and name has the effect of creating an impression of approval. It bestows Edwards with undeserved honor and reverence, glorifying the man and his life.

Edwards owned slaves his entire adult life. When he moved to the then-Illinois Territory, he should have been forced to free the slaves he brought with him under federal law. But Edwards did not, and in the process, helped establish slavery in Illinois, a place that was supposed to be free by federal law. Additionally, as territorial governor, Edwards vetoed a bill that would have officially abolished slavery in Illinois. Because of this, slavery persisted in Illinois until 1848, more than thirty years after Edwards chose not to stop it. Ninian Edwards also committed harmful acts against Illinois' Native American population during the War of 1812, massacring dozens of tribespeople who were in fact United States allies living peacefully on their own land.

For these reasons, we urge the City to move Ninian Edwards' statue out of the downtown plaza to a museum or other appropriate community space where better information can be provided about his harmful actions, and to rename Ninian Edwards Plaza.

Asking for the relocation of the statue and the renaming of the plaza is in no way erasing history or destroying the fundamental history of Illinois. It is not a 'slippery slope'. Statues are created to honor a person, a group of people, or an event. So, in retrospection, we are literally putting Ninian Edwards on a pedestal. If this truly was about the case of preserving history, then when this statue was created and put up in 2008, it would have included a plaque highlighting Edwards' full history, explaining that Ninian Edwards was a founding member of Illinois and the

third governor of Illinois, but also that he owned enslaved people and continued slavery in Illinois. Although he did good for the state in certain respects, discussions surrounding his active participation in the removal and murder of Native Americans and his role in establishing slavery in Illinois are not included in the statue's display. If there is any erasure of history, it is the blatant lack of acknowledgment of his white supremacist ideals when the statue was commissioned and installed. The statue, placed on a pedestal in our downtown, and the naming of the plaza, with no plaque describing Edwards' full legacy, constitutes a rewriting of history into a whitewashed narrative that may be more comfortable for some but that is very partial and selective.

We do not learn or study history primarily through statues or monuments. Monuments are not designed to encourage debate, but to put forward a particular narrative for community honoring. We study history through books, primary documents, and first-hand accounts. Historical figures are flawed, but if we ignore that they are flawed, we get a warped idea that the United States of America was founded without sin. Dr. Adam Dombay, author of *The False Cause: Fraud, Fabrication, and White Supremacy in Confederate Memory*, explained this idea well, stating, "Statues are symbolic of who controls public space and correcting the narrative is part of the larger struggle to help people realize that racism still exists." So yes, we must assess history through the contemporary lens of what narratives our community believes should be honored. Removing the statue will not end the bigger racial problems in this community or in this country, but it is a start.

Actionable Items

We have included below six steps we are asking the city to take. We have arranged these chronologically based on what we think makes the most sense for how to proceed.

- *Action Item 1:* The city removes the Ninian Edwards statue image from the city website's rotating feature images.
- *Action Item 2:* The city create and add an educational plaque in front of the statue highlighting the true history of Ninian Edwards including his involvement in slavery and the removal Native Americans in Illinois.
- *Action Item 3:* The Edwardsville City Council and/or Administrative & Community Services Committee adopt a motion formally addressing the issue of the Ninian Edwards statue and the plaza named after him, such as a statement about Edwards, the incompatibility of Edwards' legacy with the city's values, and intentions to proceed with relocating the statue.
- *Action Item 4:* The city organizes community conversations about the plaza's future (e.g. name, purpose, physical features such as statue/sculpture/artwork).

- *Action Item 5:* The city removes and relocates the Ninian Edwards statue and plaque from a place of celebration and honor to a place of education (e.g. to the Benjamin Stephenson House or the Madison County Historical Museum).
- *Action Item 6:* The city selects, announces, and implements a new plan for the plaza's future.

City Action on Statue Removals

We are asking the City of Edwardsville to take this action. We believe this issue should be addressed by the officials we have elected to serve our community. We do not believe the city should abdicate its responsibility to govern whenever an issue is controversial, especially on issues of minority and civil rights.

Communities around the country are grappling with this same issue and are taking action. We have included at the end of this letter a list of statues removed by city governments all over the United States that were removed since the national protests impacted by the death of George Floyd began.

In Delaware, Wilmington Mayor Mike Purzycki referred to the removal and relocation of the Christopher Columbus and Caesar Rodney statues as “an overdue discussion about the public display of historical events and figures.” Caesar Rodney is a founding figure in Delaware’s history and directly contributed to the state’s claim to being “the first state.” Nevertheless, these statues were removed the week of June 12 in advance of a further discussion about how best to proceed. Mayor Purzycki said “We cannot erase history, as painful as it may be, but we can certainly discuss history with each other and determine together what we value and what we feel is appropriate to memorialize.”

(<https://whyy.org/articles/wilmingtons-statues-of-columbus-and-caesar-rodney-coming-down-at-least-for-now/>)

In Birmingham, Alabama, Mayor Randall Woodfin ordered the Confederate Soldiers and Sailors monument removed from a public park in the city, following civil unrest in the city that had led to the destruction of another Confederate memorial in that same park. The removal came with a \$25,000 fine for violating the Alabama Memorial Preservation Act of 2017, which prohibits the removal or altering of architecturally significant buildings and monuments that have existed on public property for more than 40 years. The mayor said “I chose my city to avoid more civil unrest” and added it was better to pay the fine than to experience more civil unrest. He additionally said, “We don’t have time to worry about something that’s not working for our city and relegates Black people to property and slavery. It’s important that we take this down and move forward.”

<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/i-chose-my-city-birmingham-alabama-removes-confederate-monument-faces-n1223511>)

In Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the city removed a statue of Frank Rizzo, police commissioner from 1968 to 1971 and mayor from 1972 to 1980. As mayor, Rizzo faced lawsuits over discriminatory hiring practices against Black police and Fire Department applicants, as well as a lawsuit by the U.S. Department of Justice for police brutality. The statue was removed from outside the Municipal Services Building and placed in storage until the city creates a plan for it. According to Mayor Jim Kenney, the statue represented “bigotry, hatred, and oppression for too many people, for too long.” According to Councilwoman Helen Gym, the city needs to “find a different way to reflect on his legacy.” She said “Frank Rizzo was known and loved by the people who knew and loved him. But putting that statue in such a central location sends a different message. We need that space to be welcoming to all.”

<https://www.inquirer.com/philly/news/philadelphia-statue-legacy-was-frank-rizzo-racist-20170822.html-2> and <https://whyy.org/articles/how-kenney-was-able-to-remove-the-rizzo-statue-without-anyones-approval/>)

Like these city officials, we hope city officials in Edwardsville will take action to ensure our downtown statues are inclusive and represent the best of Edwardsville. Please consider joining us in advocating for the relocation of the statue of Ninian Edwards.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Asher Denkyirah, on behalf of the citizen group for the Relocation of Ninian Edwards Statue and Renaming of Ninian Edwards Plaza

Monument/Memorial	City	State	Means of Removal	Description
Confederate Sailors and Soldiers Monument	Birmingham	AL	Removed by the city	Birmingham's mayor decided to remove the statue after another statue in the same park was vandalized. The memorial was ordered in 2017 to be partly hidden with plywood screens after the violence in Charlottesville, but the plywood came down after a unanimous state Supreme Court decision.
Confederate Adm. Raphael Semmes Statue	Mobile	AL	Removed by the city	The City Council of Mobile had the statue
Confederate soldier memorial plaques	Tuscaloosa	AL	Plans for removal	The University of Alabama Board of Trustees approved the removal of three confederate memorial plaques from the campus and their relocation to a "more appropriate historical setting."
Capital Guard Statue	Little Rock	AR	Removed by the city	The Capital Guard Statue, a confederate monument, was removed for repair on June 18 after it was vandalized. Little Rock's mayor announced that afternoon it would be removed permanently and relocated to be viewed in a "comprehensive historical context."
Christopher Columbus and Caesar Rodney statues	Wilmington	DE	Removed by the city	Wilmington officials removed two statues-one of Christopher Columbus, the other of Caesar Rodney, a slaveholder-to prevent them from damage and to create a "an overdue discussion about the public display of historical figures and events," according to Wilmington's mayor Mike Purzycki.
Confederate soldiers Monument	Jacksonville	FL	Removed by the city	Mayor Lenny Curry announced that all Confederate monuments citywide would be removed. This includes three monuments and eight historical markers
Athens Confederate Monument	Athens	GA	Plans for removal by city	The mayor and city commissioners announced plans to remove the monument.
The Confederate Soldiers and Sailors Monument	Indianapolis	IN	Removed by the city	The City Council of Indianapolis had the monument removed
Jefferson Davis Statue	Frankfort	KY	Removed by the city	The statue will be relocated to the Jefferson Davis State Historic Site in Fairview
Confederate Soldier John Castleman Statue	Louisville	KY	Removed by the city	The City Council of Louisville had the statue removed.
Confederate Soldier John Breckinridge Castleman monument	Louisville	KY	Removed by the city	City officials removed statue after a two-year effort, relocating it to the cemetery where the soldier is buried.
Confederate soldier monument	Iberville	LA	Plans for removal by city	A statue that paid homage to confederate soldiers will be removed after a unanimous vote by the Iberville Parish Council on June 16. The statue will be placed in storage.
Columbus Statue	St. Louis	MO	Removed by the park	Tower Grove Park's Board of Commissioners had the statue removed
Confederate Soldier monument	Oxford	MS	Plans for removal	The Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning approved the relocation of a confederate soldier monument from outside the University of Mississippi's administration building to the campus cemetery, a year and a half after the Associated Student Body Senate for inclusion and cross-cultural engagement passed a resolution denouncing confederate ideology.
Confederate soldier statue	Greenville	NC	Removed by the city	Local officials approved the removal of a confederate soldier statue located outside the Pitt County Courthouse in Greenville.
Nash County Confederate Monument	Rocky Mount	NC	Plans for removal by city	The City Council of Rocky Mount voted to remove the monument.
Fame Confederate Monument	Salisbury	NC	Plans for removal by city	Salisbury officials are in tentative discussions with the Daughters of the Confederacy for the permanent relocation of the Fame Confederate Monument.
Confederate Solider/Gen. Stand Watie monuments	Tahlequah	OK	Removed by The Cherokee Nation	The Cherokee Nation removed two confederate monuments from Tahlequah's Capital Square.
Frank Rizzo Statue	Philadelphia	PA	Removed by the city	The City Council of Philadelphia had the statue removed
John C. Calhoun Statue	Charleston	SC	Removed by the city	Charleston City Council had the statue removed
Spirit of the Confederacy/Confederate Lieutenant Dick Dowling statues	Houston	TX	Removed by the city	Two confederate statues in Houston have been removed two years after a task force condemned the statues and recommended their displacement from public property. One is being held in a museum while the other is in storage until its relocation is confirmed.
Appomattox Confederate Statue	Alexandria	VA	Removed by the city	City Government and the Daughters of the Confederacy had the statue removed
Virginia Defenders of State Sovereignty Confederate Soldier Monument	Farmville	VA	Removed by the city	The Farmville Town Council unanimously voted to remove the statue.
Confederate Soldier Johnny Reb Statue	Norfolk	VA	Removed by the city	Norfolk Mayor <u>Kenneth Cooper Alexander</u> announced plans to remove the statue and a day later it was removed
Robert E. Lee Statue	Richmond	VA	Plans for removal by city	Virginia's governor announce plans to remove an iconic statue of Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee after days of protests over the death of George Floyd.