

## Our national struggle for identity

It's hard to believe that in America we are struggling for our identity. Throughout our history, we have been the great melting pot, the beacon of freedom, and the land of opportunity.

Now, it is clear we not only don't realize who we are, but we don't even like who we have been throughout our history.



In a recent trip to the East Coast, I am reminded of the great amount of history and heritage in this particular section of the country. It was there that some of the earliest Europeans came to these shores at Jamestown in 1607; it was there that some of our greatest leaders struggled early for liberty from George Washington, Patrick Henry Lee, and Thomas Jefferson (to name but a few); it was there that the Confederacy set up their capitol at Richmond, VA.

Of course, it was also in that area the slave trade flourished and slavery became the 'peculiar institution' of the Southern states.

Make no mistake, we as a nation are not perfect. We have our troubling sections of our past, whether in the continuation and expansion of slavery to the Trail of Tears as examples.

Despite our mistakes, missteps, and mistreatment, we are still a country who moves forward to the dreams of our Founders. We should not forget the words from our Constitution's Preamble where "We the People" work "to form a more perfect Union..."

What do we do and what do we make of our past struggles? As an educator, I argue we give an honest study of them and learn the lessons our predecessors did not or could not learn. We don't simply cancel them and wash over them. We certainly should not erase and recreate a past that did not exist through revisionist history.

During this same trip, I was honestly surprised during a walk outside in Norfolk, VA to read on an historical marker that there was a Confederate statue in the downtown area. I searched and eventually found the location where it was supposed to be. Now, as you can see in this picture, it is an empty pedestal, having been removed in June 2020. The pedestal was also subjected to graffiti, with one phrase reportedly noting to the effect “you lost, get over it”.



We have degraded ourselves from an honest look inward to an unrequited anger that pervades our continuing journey as a nation. Sadly, if one chooses to enter in to the discussion but does not agree with the prevailing outrage, then you are wrong and are likely labeled with outrageous names and denounced.

Let’s look again at the Confederate monument in Norfolk. In a site dedicated to Norfolk Highlights<sup>1</sup>, we are told this monument was nearly removed several times, but the people of Norfolk objected; so it remained. It was only in the anger of the recent past that such monuments were removed across the country.

There is room for a debate on keeping or removing statues, but it should be a debate; not a demand based on an incomplete or misreading of history.

If we don’t truly look at our national identity and realize that who we are is in great part because of who we were and where and how we’ve grown as a nation, then indeed our greatest days are behind us. If, however, we recognize our greatest days are ahead of us because we can become the **United** States of America again, we will continue to be the shining city on a hill the world does still look to for hope.

Rather than tear down, we should focus on building up, on having logical, reasonable, and polite debate. We should collectively denounce the concept that the loudest voice wins.

As Christians, we should honor our nation and its history, yet realize we live in a sinful and fallen world. We are called to be salt and light to that world, to be thankful for the blessings of our God on our land, and strive to make it better. We don’t do that by tearing down, but by striving to build up.

My hope and prayer is our nation looks at who we are – the vitriol and hate that spews forth and that we take a collective pause and reflect on how great a land we are, even

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<sup>1</sup> <https://historicforrest.com/norfolkHistoricalSociety/highlights/49.html>

with all of our past errors. Let us continue to lead the charge, defend the defenseless, and shine for this world. Through that, we invite, encourage, and strengthen the resolve of other peoples and we move closer to realizing that “more perfect union” the Framers of the Constitution envisioned.