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CONFEDERATELY WRONG: THE NAMES OF HERMITAGE NEIGHBORHOOD IT SHOULD BE CHANGED

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CONFEDERATELY WRONG: THE NAMES OF HERMITAGE NEIGHBORHOOD IT SHOULD BE CHANGED

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
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in

Liberal Arts

by
Christopher Toombs
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Abstract

The Civil War was one of the most defining acts of war in American History. The Union and the Confederacy battled over the future of African born slaves. The Confederacy wanted to see the African born slaves in chains forever. However, the Union possessed the desire to allow the African slave a proper place in their society. LSU played a major part in the civil war on behalf of the confederacy. LSU's staff, faculty, and students fought in the war for Baton Rouge and lost to the Union. Hence, the spirit of confederacy was embedded in Baton Rouge culture regardless of the war defeat.

The spirit of confederacy provided local Baton Rouge Real Estate developers a marketing strategy to build confederate-themed neighborhoods. The intent behind the confederate-themed development concept was to increase racial segregation. Unbeknownst to the developers, the desire to have adequate housing trumped racism for middle class African Americans. My mother Alice Toombs was one of the first residents to live in the neighborhood of Hermitage. Hermitage was a fort for Andrew Jackson and a major contributor to the confederacy.

My life has been affected by the confederacy as have others that look like me. It is my desire to utilize my Liberal Arts education to unravel the mindset behind the confederate-named neighborhoods in Baton Rouge. Patterns in history support the notion that the confederate values of the civil war are popular in Baton Rouge. The East Baton Rouge Parish Street Naming Committee conducted research that breaks down the confederate themed neighborhoods in Baton Rouge. The goal of my work is to highlight the need to rename the confederate themed neighborhoods to increase unity and develop progress in a socially damaged Baton Rouge.

Currently, the celebration of the confederacy stifles the potential for racial advancement and diverse economic development. Baton Rouge is a unique city with a lot of pride and love. However, Baton Rouge is also a city that is still very segregated and territorial. South Baton Rouge is loyal to Louisiana State University and North Baton Rouge is loyal to Southern University. In 2022, the racial tension in Baton Rouge is still an issue. Renaming confederate themed neighborhoods can ease the tension by encouraging social conversation about new forms of progressive racial actions.

Herb Turner believed by creating a neighborhood with a confederate theme, LSU faithful would flock to his real estate development. Instead, he underestimated the middle class African American desire to live in decent living quarters. Mr. Turner built homes that were affordable and desirable with great amenities. I'm sure Mr. Turner could not foresee his beloved Hermitage becoming a majority black neighborhood. I have lived in Hermitage for over 30 years and now I see the unbelievable irony that exists today. The intent of Mr. Turner to keep black people out of his neighborhood development has backfired tremendously. Hermitage and all of its rhetoric is now outdated and not relevant. The confederacy lost the civil war and its unjust heroes are traitors. The name of Hermitage should reflect the new residents and their culture.

Chapter 1.

How did Hermitage Oaks Get Confederate Street Names?

The Civil War was a true turning point for the United States of America. The Confederacy held booming agriculture businesses that saw great returns due to their free labor system. According to Ransom, “In 1805 there were just over one million slaves’ worth about \$300 million; fifty-five years later there were four million slaves’ worth close to \$3 billion. In the 11 states that eventually formed the Confederacy, four out of ten people were slaves in 1860, and these people accounted for more than half the agricultural labor in those states.” (Ransom) The North was comprised of manufacturing industries and allowed Black people to experience some civil liberties, but they were not considered citizens. In 1861, the two sides—North and South—fought a war that last until 1865. Thousands died. At the end of the conflict, slavery, as a legally established institution, was abolished. Before the war, there was slavery; after, slavery ended. It was a true turning point for the United States.

But *why* was it fought? The question still resounds today. There remains, in fact, in the present, a difference of opinion as to why the North and the South began to shed blood. Despite the failure for all Americans to come to a consensus on the *why* of the war, the conflict had profound consequences. The Civil War established the future of American labor practices as well as created a new democracy. Scholars such as Richard Enmale, all the way back in 1937, often admitted the centrality of slavery in the *why* of the Civil War. Enmale saw slavery as a moral failure, writing that one school of thought “analyzed the Civil War in terms of the slavery issue viewed in the light of ethical considerations.” The war was, “a result of clashing ideas as to the moral justification of slavery: it did not rise from fundamentally divergent economies.” (Enmale)

In essence, although the Confederacy eventually conceded, neither the South nor the North paid the slaves retroactively for the work performed to build the United States of America. Instead, the elite citizens of the Union and Confederacy battled for the right to become one nation under God. The “slavery” issue was solved, the institution was abolished, but the trauma of slavery and its consequences on the enslaved person wasn’t even touched.

It all begins with the *why* of the war. Without acknowledging the *why*, streets get named after Confederate historical figures and places.

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The city where I grew up, Baton Rouge, is a part of the Civil War’s history tree. History books give precise times, dates, and places: According to Currier and Eves, “The Battle of Baton Rouge took place on August 4, 1862.” (Currier and Eves) The Civil War is a part of Baton Rouge’s DNA. The Confederate mentality has occupied Baton Rouge as a stronghold for over 159 years. Any remembrance of a time that used the word Nigger as a point of reverence to ebony hued people should be rebranded and reimaged. The streets of Hermitage—the neighborhood where I live and had my childhood—were created with the intention of Black people not being invited as residents in the community. The neighborhood’s Confederate theme said more than any other words could. However, due to progressive desegregation laws, Black people have made strides that afforded them to live in neighborhoods without racial restrictions.

Baton Rouge has a history of racial segregation that is documented and verified. The Civil War was a major contributor to the historical—often racist—ideals of Baton Rouge. The Confederacy is etched in memory of Baton Rouge’s citizens due to the Confederate-themed impact on the education system. The segregated education system instilled a difference between

white and Black citizens in Baton Rouge. It was understood, in law as well as practice, that educational resources would be unfairly distributed based on racial differences. According to researchers Bankston and Caldas:

“Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, black and white Americans lived lives that were separate and unequal, in law as well as in fact. This was especially true in the former slave states of the South, home to nine out of ten African Americans in 1900, and still home to a majority of African Americans one hundred years later. Historians have often argued that this racial concentration was the source of the long-lasting repression of black southerners by white southerners. During the years of slavery, between 1790 and 1860, people of African ancestry made up about one-third of the population of the southern states. In some of these states, including Louisiana, the majority of people were black under the regime of slavery.” (Bankston and Caldas)

Louisiana’s population was Black, in its majority, yet these citizens did not receive the benefits of state resources.

It all comes back to the *why* of the Civil War. The question, unanswered, continued to disadvantage the descendants of the people who were freed by the war.

The year 1860 is of importance because it represents the year LSU was established.

LSU was originally called the Louisiana State Seminary of Learning and Military Academy. Originally, the focus of the campus was to educate young people through higher education. According to the LSU Libraries, “In 1861, Louisiana joined other Southern states in seceding from the Union and Sherman resigned to join the United States Army. He would remain a friend and benefactor of the school for the rest of his life. When the Civil War began, most of the students and faculty members left the Seminary to fight for the Confederacy causing the school to close. After a few attempts to reopen, the Seminary closed for the duration of the war in April of 1863.” (LSU Libraries)

LSU closed its doors to support the war efforts of the Confederacy. Hence, the faculty and student body were traitors to the union and decided to fight against their country. According

to *Harpers Weekly*, “The rebels were led by Major-General John C. Breckinridge, who scampered off in such haste that he left his sword behind. It was picked up on the field and is retained as a trophy. Perhaps it was this circumstance that gave rise to the report that the traitor lost his right arm.” Despite taking the loss, the Confederate-themed LSU continued in Pineville, Louisiana for six years before moving to Baton Rouge. During the 1870s Baton Rouge was still in the developing stages. However, segregation was still the order of the day and Black people were still considered inferior and suffered from discriminatory actions from the white community.

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And it went on like that as Baton Rouge developed in the early twentieth century.

In the 1920s, real Estate Developer Alfred D. St. Amant was a stalwart in the effort to keep the Confederate spirit alive in Baton Rouge. According to research by Luana Henderson, “Mr. Alfred D. St Amant was a Klu Klux Klan member in the year of 1929.” (Henderson) Mr. St. Amant was racially motivated to build a segregated residential neighborhood in 1925, which eventually was called Southdowns. Close to the LSU campus, Southdowns extended and solidified the racist social structure in the urban development of the city.

It was just a few years before that LSU moved to its current location, and that location was close to Southdowns. According to LSU Libraries, “By 1918, LSU was experiencing growing pains and President Thomas Boyd began looking for land to build a new and larger campus. For several years, Boyd had his eye on Gartness Plantation south of Baton Rouge along the Mississippi River, thinking that the land would provide enough space for the university’s physical growth and further its agricultural mission.” (LSU Libraries) The economics of

developing white only communities made sense considering the times and social circumstance. A growing campus with financial commitments from multiple streams is a real estate development friendly community. Mr. St. Amant was very intent on keeping Southdowns white and privileged. Based on the history of LSU it's logical that the Southdown neighborhood theme should represent the history of the school.

The memory of the Confederacy continued to thrive with the development of the Southdowns neighborhood. Streets were named after Confederate generals like Lee, Stuart, and Pickett. It established a trend that would become the blueprint for developers in the area. While the names of Confederates were honored, the memory of the enslaved was forgotten, Naming streets after Confederate generals thus became, whether conscious or not, a serious level of disrespect to anyone who was African American. According to Deirdre Mask, author of *The Address Book*:

“We didn't put an offer on the house on Black Boy Lane, maybe it was the dated kitchen, maybe we weren't ready to commit, or maybe it was the street name, after all. I'm African American: my ancestors were in the bellies of those ships. And the street's name conjured up a time in America not so long ago when every black man, no matter how old, was known as 'boy' (I mean 'not so long ago' literally. 'That boy's finger does not need to be on the button,' Kentucky representative Geoff Davis said, in 2008, about America's nuclear arsenal. 'That boy' was Barack Obama.)” (Mask Intro)

Slave owners viewed ebony hued people as inferior and not deserving of being treated with compassion. And, yet, the words used by white people, the symbolic honor given to slave owners, engenders the same inferiority in the present. But words have power. And if we look behind the word “Confederacy” or the word “slavery” an awful history is laid bare. According to Brown, “to understand the conditions that have allowed such an exploitative industry to develop, we have to look at the origin of the United States prison system itself. Before the abolition of slavery there was no real prison system in the United States. Punishment for crime consisted of

physical torture, referred to as corporal or capital punishment. While the model prison in the United States was born in Auburn, New York in 1817, it wasn't until the end of the Civil War, with the official abolition of slavery, that the prison system took hold.” (Brown) Whippings and the threat of being sold were mainstays during the era of slavery. The pain and frustration of not knowing the fate of yourself or your family was always present. According to Smith, “after the men were all sold, they then sold the women and children. They ordered the first woman to lay down her child and mount the auction block: she refused to give up her little one and clung to it as long as she could, while the cruel lash was applied to her back for disobedience.” (Smith) In spite of these slavery-era atrocities, the real estate development around LSU pays tribute to Confederate memorialization.

Without answering the *why* of the Civil War, the Confederacy can view as heritage by some. But the memory of terror remains in street signs.

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Shenandoah is the name of a prominent neighborhood that shares the name of Confederate generals and places as well. The Shenandoah Neighborhood was developed by W.T. “Teddy” Harger in 1970. During this time LSU made attempts to relax their Confederate values consistent with growing protest for equality across the country. The graduation rates of Historically Underserved Groups (H.U.G.) began to increase and show growing support for diversity at LSU. However, that did not stop Mr. Harger from naming the streets in his neighborhood after Confederates who put ebony hue slaves in chains. According to research gathered by the Baton Rouge Metro Council’s Street Renaming Committee, “Shenandoah

Estates is concurrent with the 1970 school desegregation order ‘forced busing’ and David Dukes political efforts.” (Street Renaming Committee)

A neighborhood that is connected to the former Grand Wizard of the Klu Klux Klan in 1970 is scary. Mr. Harger promoted his development by suggesting future residents could “Golf without Guilt.” According to the Street Naming Committee, “Shenandoah leadership placed newspaper ads with white people interacting in a leisurely setting.” (Street Naming Committee) This project was not intended to appeal to the African American homeowners. Shenandoah was yet another project that is consistent with the Confederate state of mind.

Southdowns and Shenandoah were examples of a new wave of development in Baton Rouge. Confederate themed housing developments were intentional about celebrating a heritage fostered and supported by LSU. Another developer, Herb Turner and his associates, wanted to create a new neighborhood with the emphasis of keeping consistent with the spirit of the South. Hermitage Oaks—my neighborhood—was the result. Mr. Turner decided to use traitors of the United States as street names. The celebration of the segregation of Black people was on full display when Hermitage was created. However, Mr. Turner was a clever businessman with a knack for working with big deals. LSU was turning the corner in Athletics and Baton Rouge was becoming a college destination city. According to the *Sunday Advocate*, “A landscaped boulevard, Hermitage Parkway, will lead into the subdivision from Gardere Lane. Streets within the development are named in keeping with the title. (The Hermitage was the home of Andrew Jackson) General Jackson Avenue, Old Hickory Drive, General Beauregard Avenue, and General Lee cut through the development. Students living in the Hermitage will attend Robert E. Lee High, Kenilworth Junior High and Wildwood Elementary Schools.” (*Sunday Advocate*) The aforementioned developers named the land development project with the purpose of keeping the

Hermitage neighborhood as white as possible. But the project failed. My family, and many other Black families, moved in as white families fled to the suburbs.

No one answered the question of *why*.

Chapter 2.

Living in Hermitage: Or, The Making of Gardere in Baton Rouge, LA

As a child growing up on General Adams Ave., I became immune to the history of the name of my street. I knew about the American Civil War and that Black people suffered a great trauma. However, my first introduction to Hermitage was met with all white faces. The neighbors in Hermitage were happy-go-lucky and moved with purpose. The Hermitage families were middle class and looking to take advantage of a good housing market.

However, in the 1990s the demographic began to change for Hermitage. Section 8 housing changed the color demographic tremendously. I met my first Black neighbors around 1991. Marvin moved about three houses down from my house. Chris was my white friend who lived two doors down. We would play together from time to time but soon after their family moved away. By 1993, Hermitage was a majority Black neighborhood. Everybody was outside all the time in the early 90s in Hermitage. African Americans mostly populated the north side of Baton Rouge. Florida Blvd and Airline Hwy served—and still serves—as the color barrier for Baton Rouge. However, what would make a Black person at ease with living in a neighborhood named after Confederate general? According to Alice Toombs, my mother, “I wanted to raise my child somewhere safe and If I had to live on General Adams to provide that so be it.” My mother served as the Box Office Manager of the Riverside Centroplex and her close friends lived in Old South Baton Rouge. Hence, I attended school in Old South Baton Rouge as a toddler at Shiloh Baptist Church for daycare. In the 1980s there were very few African American friendly education options on Gardere Lane. Twenty years before my birth, the Louisiana state legislature attempted to circumvent the federal education desegregation mandates. According to Kennedy,

“The state legislature enacted yet another battery of laws renewing the requirement that white and Negro school children be separated, again barred any sort of state assistance to desegregated schools, and again punished as a crime conduct violating this prohibition.” (Kennedy) Choices are made in context. What mattered to my mother was opportunity, whether the street was named after a Confederate general was beside the point.

Ms. Toombs’s support system suggested that she allow me to attend school in the Old South Baton Rouge neighborhood due to the strong H.U.G. population. I began to build a tribe with my new friends who assumed that I lived in Old South Baton Rouge as well. However, as I grew older the idea of staying in Hermitage began to become an issue. My first elementary school was University Terrace. It served the children in an area called the Bottom in Old South Baton Rouge. Once my classmates realized that I was not a resident of Old South Baton Rouge they questioned me about it. I explained that I lived on General Adams Ave. However, my classmate Muhammed who was an offspring of the Nation of Islam came to school with some alarming news. Muhammed began talking about the Civil War and how General Adams was a Confederate general. At this point, I was in the fourth grade and not as intellectually astute as my classmate. He went on to tease me about living on a plantation and that’s when it clicked on me that my home was tainted by Confederate history. Devastated and ashamed, I began to assimilate to the code of Old South Baton Rouge. The code suggested that you stick with your own color and be ready to fight for your allegiance—my allegiance—with Old South Baton Rouge.

My new neighbors in Hermitage were from all over Baton Rouge due to white flight and affordable housing. Around 1991, Section 8 housing created opportunities for H.U.G. families to move into Hermitage. I soon learned that the culture of Hermitage was turning more urban than suburban. The apartment housing on Gardere Lane filled with low-income families with low

education levels and minimal juvenile supervision. Gang activity started to develop due to the inner-city perspectives of Gardere Lane and Hermitage. Survival and loyalty—that was the perspective. It was the code we had to live by.

The Confederate legacy of Hermitage provided ammunition to antagonistic urban youth who provoked young hermitage residents to defend themselves. Tribal lines were drawn, and I found myself on the outside looking in for my middle school years. Kenilworth Middle School was the main education option for middle school students in Hermitage. Due to the desegregation plan, Old South Baton Rouge students attended there as well. Every day I attended Kenilworth and had to walk on eggshells. The students from Old South Baton Rouge thought that the students from Hermitage were soft. “Y’all live out here with them white folks” my friend John Bryant would say at lunch. The merciless banter would go on for what seemed like forever, and I would be forced to hear racially charged rhetoric on the bus home. Fights were commonplace due to the hostile nature of the Old South Baton Rouge students.

My mother took me out of Kenilworth due to the increased gang activity and the fact that I was being caught in the middle of violence between the Hermitage students and the Old South Baton Rouge Students. Hence, I finished my time at St. Francis Xavier Middle School in Old South Baton Rouge to stay isolated from the growing gang element in the Gardere Lane/Hermitage area. Hermitage is littered with Confederate names and pays homage to the Confederacy. Robert E. Lee High School was a popular Confederate symbol in Baton Rouge. And it was the high school I was supposed to attend.

Others have felt the way I did—the way I do. According to one scholar, Yale historian and President of Rutgers, Jonathan Holloway, “The tension in my body was telling me something also. I look back and recognize that my visceral knowledge—my tension—was the

physical manifestation of an absence that could only have been constructed by a systemic attempt to deny me (and my people) a knowledge of my memories and history.” (Holloway 196)

I can relate to Holloway’s position because I was overcome with grief over the idea of going to Lee High School. Lee High school was the feeder school for the Hermitage neighborhood and their mascot was a Confederate rebel. According to Gill and Hunter, “President of the Association of the Army of Northern Virginia and future governor Francis T. Nicholls assured Lee’s daughters, The blood of Louisiana was poured out on a hundred hills and plains of Virginia, but they had done it willingly for Robert E. Lee and for duty.” (Gill and Hunter)

Robert E. Lee High School was a part of the Hermitage neighborhood culture and accepted as a norm for young African American residents. Inner city students often mocked ebony hue students for attending a school represented by a Rebel flag. According to Hartley, “The peak construction of Confederate monuments arose as the whites in the south disfranchised millions of African Americans, entrenched Jim Crow racial segregation, and began to flood Southern public schools with school textbooks teaching White supremacy and the inferiority of African Americans to both the white and black children in the South.” (Hartley) In 1994, I found myself in a conundrum when it was time to pick a high school. My family in Old South Baton Rouge wanted me to attend McKinley and my mother made it happen.

My Hermitage neighbors were not pleased with my decision to not suffer with them at Lee High School. Hermitage turned into a neighborhood full of kids who were intentional about not being seen as weak due to the shame and degradation of being a majority black neighborhood named after the U.S. defecting Confederacy. During the late 1990s the urban criminal element was apparent in Hermitage and the young residents began to choose alliances. I could not align with my neighbors because I could not identify with a group of people who were fighting to

represent a neighborhood based on the confederacy. Being from Hermitage was not socially acceptable in Baton Rouge. As a youth, I often attempted to shield the fact that my mother lived in Hermitage. The racial energy in Baton Rouge was thick during the 1980s and 1990s. Baton Rouge has a history that is marred in racial distrust. Hence, when a neighborhood named after Confederate generals was known to Black citizens it was a painful burden to bear. A person's domicile should be a place of pride and honor, not shame and insult.

Law Enforcement in the Hermitage neighborhood changed as the racial dynamic shifted. The East Baton Rouge Sheriff's Department used to make it their purpose to let the young ebony hued people know their place.

Come with me to the past—my past.

There is a path between Hermitage and Ragusa's Food Mart and the Sheriff's Department used to harass me and my friends when we would go to the store. They would ask questions like: "Where y'all going? or Are y'all from the other side?" "The Other Side" was a large apartment complex community that existed on the other side of Hermitage. The area used to be a major draw for LSU students in the 1970s and 1980s. However, that all changed when the Section 8 vouchers were accepted from renters. A large influx of urban youth residents from all over Baton Rouge descended on "The Other Side."

In the mid 1990s, a new BREC gym was erected in the back of the Hermitage neighborhood. Young residents from "The Other Side" would walk through Hermitage to access the gym. A lot of fights and disagreements occurred due to territorial issues between Hermitage neighborhood youth and "The Other Side" youth. Burglaries increased in Hermitage during this time as well as the remaining ivory hue residents left the neighborhood. Law Enforcement could not tell the difference between Hermitage youth and "The Other Side" youth so everyone

received the same abuse. I got called “Nigger” many times by Sheriff’s officers as a young man walking through Gardere. Looking back, the irony of living in a Confederate Civil War-themed neighborhood probably increased the level of venom coming from the EBR Sheriff’s office. After a while, “The Other Side” youth and the Hermitage youth began to galvanize and work as a unit. Gradually, families from “The Other Side” were moving into Hermitage and blending into neighborhood.

In the early years of the 2000s there was a bill passed for a South Burbank Crime Prevention District. The aim of this bill was to increase pay for law enforcement to do more patrols of the Hermitage neighborhood, as well as others. The extra presence of the Sheriff’s department made living in Hermitage feel as if residents were under siege. The idea of extra law enforcement sounds like a great idea until a mostly ivory hue non-resident EBR Sheriff’s team is roaming around the neighborhood.

Hurricane Katrina changed the trajectory of Hermitage forever. The influx of New Orleans displaced residents put a strain on law enforcement and their ability to control Hermitage. There were turf battles between the natives and the new residents. Random acts of violence created a very hostile environment that has haunted Hermitage to this day.

Presently, the Hermitage neighborhood is changing and becoming more diverse. Just yesterday, I noticed a Hispanic family moving up the street from my mother’s home. A young LSU professor has moved in a few houses down. The development around LSU has created a new buzz for Hermitage. I have been in Hermitage for over 30 years of my life. I have observed the neighborhood go from vintage to modern very quickly. Herb Turner’s marketing strategy was an oxymoron of what Hermitage has transformed into today. It may be that the residents of my

community will have to answer the *why* of the Civil War. The answer to that question can no longer accept the answers given before. The streets have to tell a different story.

Chapter 3.

Taking Back Our Streets: Or, How to Rename Confederate Streets

The present owes its conscience to the past. It's my point of departure. The historical record has real value for how we see our landscape. The East Baton Rouge Parish Metro Council has started a new street naming commission to review street naming policy. LSU Professor Dr. Stephen Andes is a leader on this commission and has compiled a list of neighborhoods with Confederate names. Based on research from the EBRP Street naming commission, there are multiple housing developments named after Confederate war figures. Shenandoah and Southdowns are two Baton Rouge neighborhoods that have Confederate name recognition sites on their developments. The common theme between Hermitage, Shenandoah, and Southdowns is that the neighborhoods promoted suburban living and were promoted to white couples.

Southdowns was established in the 1920s and openly published that the residents were for whites only. African American populations were mainly concentrated in the inner city of Baton Rouge. Real Estate Developers paid close attention to the growth of LSU as a potential to attract white families to their housing developments.

Articles from the *State Times* depict images of white families relaxing and enjoying the amenities of the Confederate-themed housing developments. Historically, Baton Rouge has always been a racially segregated city. Organizations like the Klu Klux Klan were integral in keeping the order of segregation in place.

Based on research from Launa Henderson, "The Ku Klux Klan grew rapidly having more than two million members by the mid-1920's. Departing from its secrecy, the Klan became a political force, assisting in the election of many public officials throughout the nation.

Baton Rouge, along with other communities in Louisiana organized chapters during this time, and in 1928 the KKK, Baton Rouge No. 3 chapter incorporated the Klansmen of the defunct Denham Springs chapter.” (Henderson)

The coincidence of the Southdowns development advocating for “white only” residents and the organization of the Klu Klux Klan can’t be ignored when considering the naming concepts for Baton Rouge suburban neighborhoods like Hermitage. The education system in Baton Rouge had a decades long lawsuit that displayed the intentions of the Confederate-loving residents. LSU being near Hermitage was enticing to developers due to the university’s growing enrollment and the need to provide affordable housing for students, alumni, and staff. However, LSU has a history of being adverse toward people of color.

It's worth stating again. According to LSU Libraries, “Louisiana State University began as the Louisiana State Seminary of Learning and Military Academy near Pineville, Louisiana in 1860. William Tecumseh Sherman was the first superintendent and he along with five faculty members taught the first students. The Seminary offered classes in engineering and liberal arts with strong military discipline.

The following year, Louisiana joined other Southern states in seceding from the Union and Sherman resigned to join the United States Army. When the Civil War began, most of the students and faculty members left the Seminary to fight for the Confederacy causing the school to close. After a few attempts to reopen, the Seminary closed for the duration of the war in 1863.” (LSU Libraries)

The fact that Louisiana State University was an active part of the Civil War plays a part in the culture of Baton Rouge. Thus, history spins around again. African Americans mostly populated the North side of Baton Rouge. Florida Blvd and Airline Hwy served as the color

barrier for Baton Rouge. What if a Jewish family moved into a neighborhood praising Nazi generals? That's what the history of my city feels like. Hence, what would make a Black person at ease with this type of situation? According to Alice Toombs, "I wanted to raise my child somewhere safe and If I had to live on General Adams to provide that so be it?"

The intent of keeping Black people out of hermitage was motivated by Confederate memorialization. Herb Turner was a real estate tycoon who built Hermitage at a price he knew only the middle-to-upper class could afford. Mr. Turner and his associates placed ads in the *State Times* of white families enjoying the amenities of luxury living close to LSU's campus. LSU was built on a plantation that was a home for slaves.

According to Barry Cowen, "Thomas Boyd had his eye on Gartness Plantation south of Baton Rouge owned by C. P. Williams of Mississippi. In 1918, Thomas Atkinson (dean of the College of Engineering), William Dodson (dean of the College of Agriculture), O. B. Steele (owner of Windrush Plantation), and other prominent Baton Rouge citizens, paid Williams \$500 on May 23 for an option to buy the property until the legislature could pass a bill to allocate the \$82,000 asking price. On June 4, 1918, the legislature passed Act 6 which provided the funding to purchase Gartness." (Cowen)

LSU's current campus was built on the grounds of slave owners with an emphasis on keeping the university partial to white students, faculty, and staff. There was a sense of racial privilege that comes from plantation homes and segregation. Establishing LSU as the picture of white privilege was the idea of the originators of the university. The Confederate history of LSU served developers with the marketing angles necessary to attract white families to the suburban areas around campus.

The Confederacy wanted to ensure ebony hue people never gained a foothold as equals. The Confederacy wanted ebony hue people to know their place in the world. Alexander Stephens, the Vice President of the Confederacy wrote about the Confederate Constitution in 1861:

“Our new Government is founded [upon exactly the opposite ideas;] its foundations are laid, its cornerstone rests, upon the great truth that the negro is not equal to the white man; that slavery, subordination to the superior race, is his natural and moral condition. [Applause.] This, our new Government, is the first, in the history of the world, based upon this great physical, philosophical, and moral truth.” (Stephens)

The South wanted to exploit the Black labor machine and places like Hermitage carry that racial disdain in their foundation. The rebel flag symbolizes a time when Black men were hung for any socially suspect reason. The South is an ugly place with an even uglier history. The fact that there are Baton Rouge neighborhoods in plain sight paying homage to the rapist and pillagers of Black people is appalling. The pain of knowing that the Civil War was fought to see who will control the labor of the world is insane. My ancestors were intellectually manipulated by the forefathers of America.

It feels important to say what I feel. The Confederate South is an ugly place with an even uglier history. The South to this day makes a good profit off the fruit of slavery. The work being done by the name changing commission is causing Black people—me included—to look through the window of the past. The American Civil War was a four-year battle waged on United States soil.

However, post-civil war people of color continued to be exploited for the financial benefits of their Confederate owners. According to Browne, “In 1865, the 13th Amendment officially abolished slavery for all people except those convicted of a crime and opened the door for mass criminalization. Prisons were built in the South as part of the backlash to Black

Reconstruction and as a mechanism to re-enslave Black workers. In the late 19th-century South, an extensive prison system was developed in the interest of maintaining the racial and economic relationship of slavery. Louisiana's famous Angola Prison illustrates this history best. In 1880, this 8000-acre family plantation was purchased by the state of Louisiana and converted into a prison. Slave quarters became cell units. Now expanded to 18,000 acres, the Angola plantation is tilled by prisoners working the land—a chilling picture of modern-day chattel slavery.”

(Browne)

In spite of the unfair mass incarceration of black people by a Confederate-based system, there was still a desire by Mr. Herb Turner to honor the Confederacy. The names of Confederate generals being honored is painful and callous. Hermitage Oaks subdivision was built with an expectation of being a neighborhood for middle class white families.

The Confederate South wanted to keep Black people in chains with their dignity subdued. It's a miracle that Black people are not diagnosed with Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome from birth due to the atrocities at the hands of the Confederates. Based on the research of Dr. Monica Hinton, “Unfortunately, when it comes to seeking medical or health assistance, African Americans are often suspicious of the care they will receive, and therefore, may only go to the doctor as a last resort. Historically, African Americans were mistreated at the hand of the medical profession, including being used as test subjects. Treatments have been based upon the belief that Black people are strong and do not need health care, or that Black people have higher rates of schizophrenia than white people or other ethnicities. However, if you are feeling symptoms of PTSS, it is important that you break the cycle of our history and seek the support you deserve from mental health professionals who care.” (Hinton)

Presently, there are symbols of the Confederacy still reminding ebony hued people of the painful past. I remember what author Deirdre Mask wrote. It's worth quoting again. I feel what she feels. "We didn't put an offer on the house on Black Boy Lane, maybe it was the dated kitchen, maybe we weren't ready to commit, or maybe it was the street name, after all. I'm African American: my ancestors were in the bellies of those ships. And the street's name conjured up a time in America not so long ago when every black man, no matter how old, was known as 'boy' (I mean 'not so long ago' literally. "That boy's finger does not need to be on the button." Kentucky representative Geoff Davis said, in 2008, about America's nuclear arsenal. 'That boy' was Barack Obama.) (Mask Intro)

The Confederacy has always viewed ebony hued people as inferior and deserving of being placed in chains. Hence, it is my opinion that every neighborhood that has a public street named after a Confederate entity be removed immediately. There is not a need to remember a time when people were treated less than human. It's a painful stain on the wonderful state that I love. LSU has evolved into something more than an old plantation on the hill. The diversity energy at LSU is changing and we are making new strides daily. Removing the confederate names would also be a great step toward America being the progressive nation that we can become.

We must answer the why of the Civil War.

I don't expect fans of the Confederacy will agree with my position. I expect Confederate lovers will try to find ways to justify their heritage. However, the Confederate heritage was on the losing side of the Civil War. According to Hartley:

"Not only had the succession caused the South to be invaded and conquered, and not only had the war cost hundreds of thousands of lives, but the war destroyed much of the South physically and economically. The war cost the South two-thirds of its assessed wealth, 40 percent of its livestock, more than 50 percent destruction of its farm

machinery, and incalculable damage to its rail and industrial infrastructure. Based on the prices for slaves quoted at the time of the Civil War, the nearly four million emancipated slaves were worth more than the value of all the farmland in the South at the time and three times the construction cost of all the railroads that operated in the United States.” (Hartley)

There is no denying that the Confederacy received most of the damage during the Civil War. But many slave owners received compensation for their losses, paid for by the United States government. The enslaved did not. In my opinion, however, it is time for some collaborative efforts to create economic opportunities for both slave-owning descendants and enslaved descendants. The economy is in a different place today. The 1800s are over, and we need new focus areas to increase societal efficiency.

I interviewed someone in Baton Rouge who is trying to do just that. According to Community Activist Myra Richardson, “Changing the names of the Confederate-themed could provide the opportunity for economic development partnerships that ordinarily would be looked over. Great chance to create cohesion.” (Richardson) Changing the Confederate Street names of Hermitage would display true progress for the future. Anger and hate are not the answer to living in a fruitful life. There is nothing but pain for African Americans when the Confederacy is celebrated. However, addressing the Confederate names can set the stage for the healing process to begin.

Having conversations about how slavery set African Americans back can set the table for racial unity. I’m not angry at the Confederates for capitalizing on free labor and making profits for hundreds of years. I have an issue with the horrible acts that the Confederates subjected the Africans to during their captivity. It changed the history of African people in America.

Based on research by Craemer, “A further important precedent to slavery reparations in the United States was General Sherman’s field order no. 15 issued as a war measure during the

Civil War in 1865. It provided 40 acres of land for each freed enslaved person (cited in Winbush, 2003) and entered popular culture under the slogan ‘40 acres and a mule.’ Within a few months, 40,000 freedmen received land until President Andrew Johnson returned the land to the former slave owners.” (Cramer) The travesty is a major reason why the names of Confederate themed streets should change. The imagination of 40,000 former slaves being promised a token of appreciation, only to have it taken away is sick.

I also spoke to the Hermitage Homeowner’s Association President, Sammie Grimes. According to Mr. Grimes, “I would like to see a very low-key approach to changing the Confederate names of Hermitage. The less publicity in the matter would benefit the process.” I can agree with Mr. Grimes because the Confederacy is still highly regarded in America. According to Cooper, Huffmon, Knotts, and McKee, “not surprisingly, ideological conservatives were more likely to support leaving Confederate monuments and memorials instead of vis-à-vis adding a marker, placing them in a museum, or removing them entirely. Older respondents were also more likely to prefer to leave monuments where they are, rather than favor the other options. Whites were less likely to support placing monuments and memorials in a museum or removing them altogether.” (Cooper, Huffmon, Knotts, and McKee) Changing Confederate Street names might just be up to us, as a community.

Mr. Joe Powell, a Hermitage neighborhood resident, shared his sentiments as well: “We should not honor traitors, that’s what they were. A bunch of goddamn traitors.” (Powell) The psychological mindset of people must be taken into consideration when suggesting the changing of Confederate streets. Based on research from Redding, Hou, and Mulhern, “The magnitude of the effect on UNC’s campus ought to alert community leaders as well as state and local governments that Confederate monument removal events that generate trauma, as a result of

expressions of racism, are likely to have a significant negative impact on community mental health.” (Redding, Hou, and Mulhern)

Renaming the Confederate streets is also a costly process. The burden of expense for making the changes falls on the petitioner. It’s not a simple process to change the names of the Hermitage streets. I interviewed my city councilmen about the process. According to Councilman Rowdy Gaudet, “I am in support of the residents of Hermitage. I sympathize with their struggle and will support whatever the community decides to do.” (Gaudet)

The feeling of being chained and placed in perpetual servitude is forever connected to Confederate war memorials. According to Henderson, Powers, Claibourn, Brown, and Trawalter, “In fact, in a statement released in 2017 following the White supremacists’ rally in Charlottesville, VA, the American Historical Association explicitly states that ‘memorials to the Confederacy were intended, in part, to obscure the terrorism required to overthrow Reconstruction, and to intimidate African Americans politically and isolate them from the mainstream of public life.’” (Henderson, Powers, Claibourn, Brown, and Trawalter) Celebrating a Confederacy that was defeated in the Civil War is not patriotic. America is now—supposedly--united under God and one nation. According to Less, “Confederate monuments are not all the same, but while they all have a veneer that speaks to the Confederacy and her soldiers, the vast majority are singing the tune of the Lost Cause. The Lost Cause is of course about vindication of Confederate loss, and the monuments are replete with Confederate symbolism, but their purpose is to promote a revisionist narrative of the Civil War that ignores slavery and validates white supremacy. The majority of what are today commonly called Confederate monuments should be recognized for what they are: monuments to the Lost Cause.” (Less)

Uplifting a “Lost Cause” is not the gateway to creating a racially equitable future. Memorializing the Confederacy is not helpful for modern race relations. The modern existence of Confederate-named neighborhoods provides “Lost Cause” advocates opportunity to keep Confederate tradition alive. The Confederate mindset is saturated in a fictional fantasy ideology. There is no way possible to consider the history of the Confederacy without including the inhumane acts committed against African American people.

According to Carr, “[Former New Orleans Mayor] Landrieu negates this view of the monuments’ creators, and of the fictional mythology of the Lost Cause that this persona embodies: ‘The historic record is clear...[these] statues were not erected to just honor these men, but as part of a movement which became known as The Cult of the Lost Cause. This ‘cult’ had one goal and one goal only: through monuments and through other means to rewrite history, to hide the truth, which is that the Confederacy was on the wrong side of humanity.’” (Carr)

Herb Turner, as a developer of Hermitage, decided to honor the Confederacy despite losing the war. He decided that he would promote an anti-African American history instead of creating a housing development for racial unity. According to O’Connell, “the historical concentration of slaves (as an indicator of the strength of the legacy of slavery) and the processes bound up with Confederate monuments may overlap to the extent to which both are proxies for forms of institutionalized racism.” (O’Connell) Turner’s development of Hermitage created a proxy for institutionalized racism. Baton Rouge is too diverse of a city to keep the spirit of Confederate memorialization alive.

Establishing a table for discussion about race relations should begin with a tangible healing process. Any symbolism that represents the bondage of people should not be celebrated. This research has opened a portal to spiritual healing.. Social reformatting should be the goal of

every form of government. Baton Rouge has to own its true history and begin the social reformatting process. Today, Baton Rouge is becoming a more diverse society with a plethora of new ethnicities populating the city daily.

But, despite the movement toward diversity and equity, the Confederacy is alive and in our face every day. Establishing social conversations around changing street names could bring people together who typically would never be in the same space. The opportunity to create new examples of unification could be explored based on the recommendation of renaming the Confederate themed streets of Hermitage.

Answering the *why* of the Civil War is a choice. It must be made now, in the present, and it begins on the very streets we call home.

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VITA

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