

Professors circle the debate on Lee Circle

November 12, 2015 11:00 AM Claire Davenport
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Since summer, a [debate](#) has heated up over whether the Confederate flag and monuments to leaders of the Confederacy, such as this one to Robert E. Lee in New Orleans, have a place in the contemporary South. Monuments are more than statues, history faculty members say; they are symbols of what we believe and the ideals we uphold. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

Students shuffled into a small room in Hebert Hall on the Tulane University uptown campus, crowding in to partake in a discussion over whether the statue of Robert E. Lee at Lee Circle and other Confederate monuments should be removed from New Orleans. Even though the room was packed to the brim, once history professor [Randy Sparks](#) started speaking, the silence set in except for the slight nibbling of

pizza crusts.

Sparks, whose specialty is Southern history, talked about the negative connotations the Confederacy has concerning slavery. He believes we need to rid the city of these negative associations.

“I believe that it is time to turn the page on the past and move these types of monuments to a museum where they can be interpreted in all their complexity,” Sparks said. “We must reclaim our history and send a different message about who our heroes actually are.”

Sparks cited many parks in Europe where controversial statues and figures reside; the things they represent may be observed instead of representing public opinion, he said.

Co-presenter [Laura Rosanne Adderley](#), head of the [African and African Diaspora Studies](#), agreed on many points with Sparks, speaking about how it is important to understand that monuments in public spaces reflect our values. She called for a reassessment of these values and a reinterpretation of these historic markers to present their complexity.

“We need monuments not only as a celebration but as a challenge to what we know,” she asserted, encouraging students to think about these issues and find solutions for them. “Grappling with the history of slavery is essential for understanding the history of the United States.”

The history department will have similar discussions about current events once or twice a semester through a program called History in the News, to give historians a chance to step forward and give context to the issues shaping our society today while engaging students in contemporary discussion.

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