Reckoning with History

Confederate Monuments in American Cities

Practitioner Guide

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Overview

A case study is a story about how a person or group of people faced and dealt with challenges or opportunities. It is based on desk research and interviews with key actors but does not provide analysis or conclusions. Written from the perspective of the protagonist(s), it is designed to raise questions and generate discussion about the issues they faced. Cases are meant to help participants develop analytic reasoning, listening, and judgment skills to strengthen their decision-making ability in other contexts.

A case-based conversation is a way to anchor a conceptual discussion to concrete examples. It can bring a case to life and allow participants to place themselves in the shoes of the case protagonist(s), while also allowing a variety of perspectives to surface. This guide is designed to help you lead a conversation about the case, “Reckoning with History: Confederate Monuments in American Cities.”

Role of a Facilitator

The facilitator leads a conversation with a clear beginning and end, ensures that everyone is heard, and keeps the group focused. The conversation can be broken into three distinct segments: exploring the case, applying the central questions of the case to your organization’s challenges, and formulating takeaway lessons. Some facilitation tips and tricks to keep in mind are below.

BEFORE the discussion

Make sure everyone takes the time to read the case. Participants have the option to fill out the attached worksheet to prepare themselves for the case discussion. If you choose to use the worksheet, make sure you bring enough printouts for all. When setting up the room, think about situating participants where they can see you and each other. Designate a notetaker as well as a place where you can take notes on a flipchart or white board. Plan for at least sixty to seventy-five minutes to discuss the case and takeaways and have a clock in the room and/or an assigned timekeeper. Mention that you may interrupt participants in the interest of progressing the conversation.
DURING the discussion
Encourage participants to debate and share opinions. State very clearly that there is no right or wrong “answer” to the case—cases are written so that reasonable people can disagree and debate different ideas and approaches. Be careful not to allow yourself or others to dominate the discussion. If the conversation is getting heated or bogged down on a particular issue, consider allowing participants to talk in pairs for a few minutes before returning to a full group discussion. Do not worry about reaching consensus, just make the most of this opportunity to practice thinking and learning together!

Case Synopsis
When nine worshipers were massacred at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal church in Charleston, South Carolina, in 2015, a widely circulated photograph showed Dylann Roof, the white supremacist who carried out the attack, posing proudly with a Confederate flag. Many Americans called for the removal of Confederate symbols and monuments in public places. As mayors and city governments took steps to remove, modify, or relocate these relics, factions mobilized to defend them as essential markers of American history and heritage. In August 2017, white supremacists and others with nostalgic notions of the pre-Civil War South gathered in Charlottesville, Virginia, where officials were working to amend existing monuments. Clashes between these factions and counter-protesters turned violent, then deadly, when a neo-Nazi drove his car into a crowd of people, killing counter-protester Heather Heyer. With white nationalists threatening to descend on other cities, mayors scrambled to respond.

This case study follows the stories of mayors in three cities—Baltimore, Maryland; Lexington, Kentucky; and Charleston, South Carolina—as they worked to acknowledge and address the legacy of violence and injustice that Confederate monuments in their public parks and plazas represented in the aftermath of the hate crimes in Charleston and Charlottesville. They faced varying degrees of public pressure as well as practical and legal obstacles as they grappled with the moral implications of these objects.

The case is designed to help mayors, city leaders, and other public executives and students of public policy and public management think through adaptive leadership challenges with highly sensitive moral dimensions.

Conversation Plan
To prepare for discussions of this case, consider using and adapting these “Guidelines for Discussing Difficult or High-Stakes Topics” from the University of Michigan’s Center for Research on Learning and Teaching.

Users of this case (especially those who identify as white) may also find helpful background information and context in this compendium of resources compiled by Princeton doctoral students Anna Stamborski, Nikki Zimmerman, and Bailie Gregory. For further reading, see also How to Be an Antiracist by Ibram X. Kendi.¹
For additional historical and contemporary context, see *Stamped from the Beginning* by Ibram X. Kendi and data and background on the history of Confederate monuments in America from the Southern Poverty Law Center.²

**Part 1: Exploring the Case** (20–30 minutes)
The goal of this part of the conversation is to review the case from the point of view of the people involved. Suggested questions:

- *What were the advantages and disadvantages of Mayor Tecklenburg’s idea to use Calhoun’s own language on the plaque?*
- *What should have been his key considerations as he moved to address Calhoun and other Confederate monuments?*
- *What alternatives would you have considered in Tecklenburg’s place?*

**Part 2a: Diagnosing Moral Leadership Challenges** (20–30 minutes)
This part of the discussion allows participants to analyze Tecklenburg’s decision as a moral leadership problem. Suggested questions:

- *What role did Tecklenburg’s personal beliefs and morality play in his decision making?*
- *What norms, rules, or expectations associated with his role as mayor constrained his actions?*
- *What larger cultural, social, and political forces in the community were at play in his decision?*
- *How well aligned were these three realms of his responsibility?*
- *How did he manage any misalignments?*

**Part 2b: Application** (20 minutes)
If time allows, participants may break into groups to apply the concepts discussed to their own moral leadership challenges, repurposing the questions posed in part 2a.

**Part 3: Formulating Lessons** (15–20 minutes)
This part of the conversation focuses on the lessons of the case that participants will continue to reflect on and apply to collaborative challenges in their work. Some sample, high-level takeaways to review after a productive discussion:

- Sometimes public leaders facing a moral issue feel compelled to risk operating outside of the usual scope of their authority.
- Sometimes a public leader’s perceived scope of authority is significantly smaller than the actual scope.
- Public leaders must seek a path that
  - aligns their personal morality with the expectations and constraints associated with their role; and
  - affirms shared values within their community.
Appendix

Optional Worksheet  Pre-discussion Questions:

1. What would you have done in Mayor Tecklenburg’s position and why?

2. What made Mayor Tecklenburg’s decision a moral dilemma?

3. What outcomes or values did Mayor Tecklenburg hope to advance, and whose help would he have needed to do so?
Endnotes
