

THIS DAY WASN'T FOR FORTUNATE SONS

[NB: Check the byline, thanks. /~Rayne]

Six years ago – what seems like forever ago – I published a post about the origin of Memorial Day.

Today's All-American holiday didn't come about in one fell swoop. Its origins have been a bone of contention – did it begin in the South? did it start in the North? Was it an African American celebration?

Depending on who you ask you may find yourself in a discussion not unlike those surrounding Confederate statuary – fraught with past and present politics.

And good old-fashioned racism.

The first large formal observation of this holiday was marked by African Americans of Charleston, South Carolina in 1865 when their Civil War dead were reburied.

Read more about it at [Zinn Education Project](#).

Most Americans aren't aware of this history, not even lifelong residents of Charleston. The reason is racism manifest through cultural erasure.

I live in the first state to declare Memorial Day a statewide holiday. In 1871 Michigan set aside what was then called Decoration Day to pay tribute to its war dead. We lost more than 14,000 of the 90,000 men sent to fight in the south – about 3.5% of the state's population lost to the Civil War.

A Union soldier from Michigan wrote to his wife,

The more I learn of the cursed institution of slavery, the more I feel willing to endure, for its final destruction ... After this war is over, this whole country will undergo a change for the better ... Abolishing slavery will dignify labor; that fact of itself will revolutionize everything ... Let Christians use all their influence to have justice done to the black man.

He was killed not long after by a Confederate sniper.

We sent this man and others, our flesh and blood, to fight for what is right, to defend a more perfect union, to defeat the denigration of fellow Americans then enslaved. We've allowed the lingering toxins of the Confederacy to obscure why it was this nation went to war – not because of states' rights but because of an economic system dependent upon the reduction of humans to mere chattel.

We've sent our family members to defeat oppression in other wars, too many paying the ultimate sacrifice.

Now we've strayed from fighting for the ideals our country was founded upon. What was once defense against oppression has become offense for corporations, serving the US ill over the long run. It has become an excuse to create profits for the military industrial complex while ignoring the exercise of soft power through diplomacy. Our friends and loved ones who've died or have been injured or sickened for life are merely collateral damage along the way. ...

Now more than ever before it is critically important we remember not only our war dead who defended our nation, but the Americans who commemorated their war dead in the face of oppression, thereby establishing this holiday.

Remembering all who served regardless of their sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, color, religious creed, national origin, physical or mental disability is absolutely essential in the face of the current administration's politicide, ethnocide, and cultural genocide by erasure.

This year, instead of news stories about statues to prominent figures of the Confederacy being removed from public spaces, statues that represented crypto-celebrations of white supremacy, we are instead faced with widening gaps where Americans who served with honor and distinction once appeared, as these examples show:

Trump's anti-diversity push comes for Arlington Cemetery's rich, diverse history

To comply with the administration's anti-“DEI” policies, the cemetery has scrubbed its webpages on minority veterans and Black history.

<https://www.msnbc.com/top-stories/latest/arlington-cemetery-black-veterans-women-history-website-dei-trump-rcna196586>

1st all-female veterans Honor Flight from Chicago photo pulled from Pentagon website after DEI order

President Trump issued executive order to get rid of images, words related to diversity, equity, inclusion

<https://abc7chicago.com/post/operation-herstory-1st-female-veterans-honor-flight-chicago-photo-removed-pentagon-website-trump-dei-order/16065051/>

VA Dismisses Directors of Centers for Women, Minority Veterans

<https://www.military.com/daily-news/2025/01/30/va-dismisses-directors-of-centers-women-minority-veterans.html>

They're celebrations of white supremacy but this time wholly overt. We should not be passive about these excisions because they cut out our own.

And when I say *our own* it's personal for me; my father and sibling are AAPI and veterans, and they are proud of their service. It's infuriating to watch white supremacy treat them as if they never existed.

Commemorate ALL the veterans who served this country today. Honor them further by defending their living compatriots who earned benefits that should not be arbitrarily stripped from them.

This day belongs to ALL of us as Americans and not just some hateful fortunate sons.