

Commission on Human Rights

DAVIS MEMORIAL STATUE REMOVAL FROM CAPITOL IS NECESSARY KY HUMAN RIGHTS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SAYS

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LOUISVILLE, Ky. July 2 2015—Kentucky Commission on Human Rights Executive Director John J. Johnson urges the immediate removal of a marble statue of Jefferson Davis from the rotunda of its state capitol in Frankfort, Ky.

Executive Director Johnson said:

“As we celebrate our great country’s independence and freedom from tyranny and oppression, the moral conscience of our nation and our state is once again being tested.

“Jefferson Davis was the figurehead of a rebel group called the Confederate States of America and led a war against the United States of America in the 19th century over the issue of human bondage and other matters. The U.S. Civil War led to hundreds of thousands of deaths. The victory of the U.S. over the rebellion forces freed thousands of people who had been held hostage and who had been bought and sold as property for generations.

“It has always been out of order to glorify Davis’s actions by memorializing him with a statue in the Kentucky Capitol Rotunda, the highest place of honor in the very seat of our state government.

“I urge officials to remove the Davis statue and to remove from other state government properties Confederate statues, flags or tokens displayed in manners designed to celebrate or honor them. The appropriate location for such items is in museums or history centers and exhibits for educational purposes.

“This is not a new issue, but an old one. The statue and these other symbols have long stood as an affront to many citizens. Now, due to recent events including the murder of a group of human beings as they held a Bible study in church, states around the nation seem ready to address the issue of memorializing the Confederacy on or inside government properties.

“In terms of the study of symbols and their affects, Confederate symbols represent slavery, hatred, racial bigotry, ignorance and segregation. When displayed for the purpose of honoring the, they glorify torching, lynching, whipping, castration, branding, raping, burning and other forms of domestic terror. Any laudatory display of these by government carries the suggestion of official approval by government. This is wrong.

“Instead of honoring objects recalling a dark time when Americans treated other Americans with treachery and violent, criminal wickedness, monuments and treasures of state pride should be those appreciating leaders and accomplishments surrounding the high ideals of Kentucky and America, such as those of freedom, equality and humanity.

“History is filled with Kentuckians of many races, both male and female, who have made high contributions to the collective good of society and who are worthy of consideration for a place of honor in the capitol rotunda.”

The Board of Commissioners of the Kentucky Commission on Human Rights will meet in August. Commissioners have requested this issue be placed on the agenda with the intention of considering adopting an official resolution from that body to call for removal of the Jefferson Davis statue from the capitol in Frankfort.

The executive director’s statement is issued in light of current public debate over the removal of Davis’s statue from the Kentucky capitol and removal of Confederate items from government properties in other states. The public’s attention to government display of such objects comes after the notorious, recent murders in Charleston, S.C., allegedly carried out by the accused suspect because of racial prejudice.

The Kentucky Commission on Human Rights is the state government authority that enforces the laws that make discrimination illegal.