

Good morning.

To Chairman Bryant, Vice Chair Manning, Commissioner Johnson, Commissioner Smith, Commissioner Qualls and Commissioner Brewer. Thank you for your stewardship of Halifax County and for weighing my request.

I would also like to extend gratitude towards County Manager Brown and Clerk Wiggins for their assistance in speaking before the board of commissioners.

If someone kidnapped your loved one, and sold them to someone to do with as they wish, would you build some sort of memorial to commemorate that person? Furthermore, would you construct a monument to honor someone who armed themselves to defend not only that person's right to kidnap and sell your loved one BUT ALSO the right of another person to purchase that loved one as their property?

Of course, you wouldn't. You're probably saying to yourself, "Mr. Pierce, what kind of question is that?"

Well, the aim of my line of inquiry is to understand why we've allowed the tablet commemorating Confederate Army Brigadier General Junius Daniel to remain on the lawn of this building for over 90 years.

Because General Daniel is that person who armed himself to defend the right of another person to kidnap men, women and children and sell them to the highest bidder, who would enslave that person to do with them as they pleased.

Born into a wealthy, slaveholding family, Daniel was actively involved in the business of acquiring, managing and bartering human chattel, and was well aware of its benefits. His grandfather, Willie Daniel, enslaved 13 Africans according to the 1800 United States census. Reviewing subsequent censuses, Gen. Daniel's father, John Reeves Jones Daniel, enslaved six in 1830, 15 in 1840 while he served as North Carolina's attorney general, 38 in 1850 while serving as a United States Congressman from our state, and 51 in 1860 while working as a farmer.

The combined value of John Reeves Jones Daniel's real estate and his personal estate (which would have included those he enslaved) was nearly \$188,000, the equivalent of over \$5.8 million today. That type of wealth allowed him to purchase land for a plantation in Caddo Parrish, Louisiana, close to the city of Shreveport.

A West Point graduate, Junius resigned his commission as a first lieutenant in the US Army in 1858. Over the next three years, he assisted his father in the management of his Louisiana plantation. Records from a May 1872 case in the Louisiana State Supreme Court indicate that on April 2, 1859 Daniel purchased from his father quote "certain lands and negroes" close quote for the sum of five promissory notes valued at \$3000 each at six percent interest. As stated earlier,

Junius was actively involved in the institution of chattel slavery and was no stranger to how it would profit him.

Junius returned to North Carolina upon its secession in 1861 and offered his military services. In June of that year, he was commissioned colonel of the 14<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment that had been organized in Garysburg. In September 1862, he was commissioned a brigadier general, one of four from Halifax County. Gen. Daniel was mortally wounded during the Battle of Spotsylvania Court House and died on May 13, 1864.

According to the *News & Observer*, the Halifax chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy erected a memorial tablet for General Daniel on November 15, 1929 in a ceremony attended by about 300 people. The newspaper reported that the Rosemary band played “Dixie” and “Dixie Land” was sung.

Dixie was written by Daniel Decatur Emmett in 1859. A songwriter and entertainer, Emmett was the founder of the Virginia Minstrels, the first troupe of the Blackface minstrel tradition. Blackface performances involved White men painting their faces and hands Black while performing racist caricatures, imitations and mockeries of African American men and women.

So, the Halifax chapter of the UDC dedicated a tablet to a man who fought to keep Black people enslaved during a ceremony where they sang a song written by a Blackface performer that celebrated the captivity of enslaved Black people, and their picking of cotton? Yes, those ladies knew exactly what type of message they were sending with their actions.

Blackface minstrelsy also allowed performer Thomas D. Rice to write the song Jump Jim Crow in 1828, a tune that gave us the character Jim Crow, a caricature of an enslaved Black man who was dimwitted and physically disabled. The name Jim Crow, according to UNC history professor Dr. William Sturkey, was the term used to describe the quote “the culture of the American South that devalued Black life through legislation, second-hand institutions, social customs and violence” close quote.

Jim Crow has been symbolized worldwide by a photo of a Black male youth drinking from a ‘colored’ water fountain on the front lawn of this building. If you don’t believe me, just Google Jim Crow. It’s the first image that pops up. That photo was taken in April 1938, nearly a decade after the installation of Daniel’s commemorative tablet.

I can only imagine how a Black person in the past must have felt walking up to this courthouse looking for justice, while a tablet honoring a Confederate general who came from a slaveholding family rested on the front lawn along with a sign that reminded them that though you’re no longer enslaved, you’re still a second-class citizen. While that sign is gone, the tablet remains in the front of a building where now, not only do our elected county officials meet, but where our County Manager’s Office, County Legal Office, County Finance Office and Board of Elections are housed.

Make no mistake. Junius Daniel gave his life to preserve two things: The ideology of White supremacy, and the continued enslavement of Black people. If you question Daniel died to uphold White supremacy, listen to these words from the Cornerstone Speech, an oration given by Confederate States of America Vice President Alexander Hamilton Stephens prior to the Civil War that outlines the differences between the CSA and the USA. In reference to the Confederate government, Stephens states quote “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. This, our new Government, is the first, in the history of the world, based upon this great physical, philosophical, and moral truth” close quote.

If you question that Daniel fought to keep Black people enslaved, take some time to read the the Confederate Constitution, a document that explicitly states, among other things, that the quote “institution of negro slavery as it now exists in the Confederate States” close quote would be protected, and that no quote “law denying or impairing the right of property in negro slaves shall be passed” close quote.

Vice Chair Manning, when you enlisted in this country’s army in February 1962, you took an oath to quote “support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic” close quote Gen. Daniel was a domestic enemy of the United States. His oath required him to quote “bear true faith, and obedience to the Confederate States of America” close quote. And I just explained to you, through references to the Cornerstone Speech and the Confederate Constitution, what that true faith and obedience to the CSA entailed.

Ladies and gentlemen, in arriving at today’s decision, if you decide to take action, there may be those who’ve said to you in reference to this tablet, “You can barely see it. It’s not hurting anyone.” Well, if it’s barely visible and isn’t bothering anyone, what’s the problem with moving it someplace else?

Others may say, “They’re erasing history.” I disagree, as the process of deciding that the tablet should be removed has led to a more accurate narrative of our history being brought forward.

Others may have stated, “They owned slaves and fought for the right to keep them because that’s just how it was then.” I’d say there were also people who fought and spoke out against the right of people to enslave others back then. They were called abolitionists. People like the Society of Friends across the Roanoke River in Northampton County. Women like Sarah and Angela Grimke in South Carolina. Men like Hinton Helper who was born in Davie County, NC and Daniel Reaves Goodloe who hailed from Louisburg in Franklin County. And les, we forget, the enslaved themselves were the first abolitionists. Furthermore, the town we’re located in, Halifax, which was Daniel’s hometown, was part of the Underground Railroad.

An online version of the letter to the editor I wrote you weeks ago garnered over 4200 views and 340 comments on a local news site. An online petition to remove this tablet has almost 200 signatures.

Commissioners, you can't come into this building and pledge your allegiance to the United States of America while allowing a reminder of allegiance to the Confederate States of America to remain outside. Why would we allow a memorial to someone who was a traitor to the republic and an advocate of slavery to remain on public property?

Our neighbors in Rocky Mount and Warrenton have removed their monuments and memorials to the Confederacy over the past 2 ½. I pray that you follow suit.

Thank you.