



UT-Austin removes Jefferson Davis statue from main campus

*By Alexandra Samuels,
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Confederate symbols are being hauled down flagpoles and taken off retailers' shelves. And now, a statue of Jefferson Davis, president of the Confederacy during the Civil War, was removed from University of Texas at Austin's main campus on Sunday.

"All history is controversial, including the Civil War and its aftermath," said UT-Austin President Gregory Fenves when the decision was first made. "Over time, our perspective on historical figures has evolved, and we have made significant progress in overcoming the legacy of that era, as well as our own history as a segregated university.

"At the same time, it is the role of a university to study, interpret, and teach history, which can inform the present and guide us in the future."

He made the decision after receiving input from people including UT-Austin alumni, students and faculty members.

Texas station KXAN reported in March that the student government voted to remove the statue due to a resolution co-authored by Xavier Rotonfsky and Rohit Mandalapu.

"There are so many people on campus that are not only against it, but they've been historically affected by issues Jefferson Davis brought about," Rotonfsky, now student government president, told KXAN.

A plan to remove the statue Aug. 15 had been put on hold after a request for a temporary restraining order was filed in state district court by the Sons of Confederate Veterans, according to a statement on the university's website.

District Judge Karin Crump of Travis County ruled that the group was not entitled to stop the university's plans, according to the *Austin American-Statesman*.

The statue has been a magnet for graffiti. On May 10, the phrases “Davis Must Fall” and “Emancipate UT” were scrawled there, and following the June shooting at the Emmanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, S.C. — in which nine African Americans were killed during Bible study — the statue was painted with the tags, “Black Lives Matter” and “Bump ALL The Chumps.”

Statues of James Stephen Hogg, Albert Sidney Johnston, John H. Reagan and Robert E. Lee will remain on the Main Mall, Fenves said in his statement. “Hogg, Johnston and Reagan all had deep ties to Texas, and Lee’s complicated legacy to Texas and the nation should not be reduced to his role in the Civil War.”

A statue of President Woodrow Wilson that had stood opposite the Davis statue, and which was also taken down, will be relocated. The two had been placed together to symbolize a united nation, a lesson some say had been forgotten.

Not all students are on board with the decision.

“I disagree with the idea that Jefferson Davis, the Confederate flag or any other historical items are symbols of slavery and hate,” says student Zack Jimenez. “The confederate, or ‘The South,’ stood for state’s right, capitalism, a smaller government and conservative beliefs.

“The statues should stay in their place as a reminder of our history, both the good and the bad.”

Alex Samuels is a University of Texas at Austin student and USA TODAY College breaking news correspondent.