

**Lee County Branch NAACP Unit 5110
3903 Dr. MLK Blvd. Suite K
Fort Myers, FL 33916**



July 4, 2013

Mr. Cecil Pendergrass
Chairman, Lee County Commission
2115 Second Street
Fort Myers, FL 33901

Mr. Pendergrass:

Re: Removal of the portrait of General Robert E. Lee's from Commission Chambers

The Lee County branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) wishes you and the entire County Commission a happy Independence Day. At this time when we celebrate our nation's independence, we draw your attention to a concern that we have held for several years. It involves the continued use of the portrait of General Robert E. Lee in the commission chambers. We believe that the continued use of this portrait portrays a negative image of what the people of this county stand for. We do believe that the city commission and the people it represents are working towards the integration of people of different backgrounds. General Robert E. Lee was against such integration and his portrait is a symbol of undermining such efforts. Evidence to support this can be found in several published documents.

We provide the following specific reasons to support our request for the removal of Robert E. Lee's portrait from the commission chambers:

1. Robert E. Lee stood for the suppression of African Americans

In a testimony that he made before a congressional committee, Robert E. Lee stated that Virginia would be better-off if all the African Americans could be eliminated from the state. Similarly, in a recorded letter that he wrote to his wife Mary Anna in 1856, he stated that:

"The blacks are immeasurably better off here than in Africa, morally, socially & physically. The painful discipline they are undergoing is necessary for their instruction as a race, & I hope will prepare & lead them to better things. How long their subjugation may be necessary is known & ordered by a wise Merciful Providence. (*Letter to Mary Anna Lee, December 27, 1856*)

2. Robert E. Lee was against the employment of African Americans

In various documents, it is recorded that General Robert Lee looked down on African Americans and was always against the continued employment of African Americans. In the book "*Recollections and Letters of General Lee*," by his son, R.E. Lee, Jr. which was published by Doubleday, Page & Company in 1904, Robert E. Lee stated that:

"I have always observed that wherever you find the Negro, everything is going down around him, and wherever you find the white man, you see everything around him improving." (p. 306). Similarly, in a recorded conversation with Colonel Carter, Robert E. Lee urged him to get rid of the Negroes left on the farm—some ninety-odd in number, principally women and children, with a few old men—saying the government would provide for them, and advised him to secure white labor.

3. Robert E. Lee held strong white supremacist views and was against civil rights for African Americans

In his *White Sulphur Springs Manifesto*, Robert E. Lee is recorded to have made strong arguments against the civil rights for African Americans and he expressed strong white supremacist views. His language in reference to African Americans was derogatory and insulting then and it is still insulting and derogatory more than two centuries later. Use of anything associated with him (including using his portrait) is tantamount to condoning his insults.

4. Robert E. Lee was against the abolition of slavery

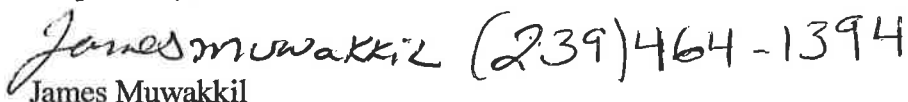
It is recorded in several documents that Robert E. Lee was against the liberation of African American slaves. This is recorded in the *Confederate Truths: Documents of the Confederate & Neo-Confederate Tradition from 1787 to the present*.

We are ready to present more evidence to support our conviction that at this time in our nation's history, the continued hanging of the portrait of a man who held such views is insulting not only to African Americans but to all people of Lee County and is against the ethos of our constitution and all those who believe in the respect of each and every person and the co-existence of all human beings regardless of their backgrounds.

We therefore kindly urge you to do the right thing and **remove the portrait of Robert E. Lee from the county commission chambers**. In addition, we regret to note that there is an acute under-representation of minorities in virtually all job levels in the county's offices. We are urging the commission to demonstrate the commitment to integration of all people by hiring qualified minorities in different areas of our county and providing contracts to minority contractors. This would correct the anomaly of the disproportionate representation of the minorities in labor force in the commission.

We eagerly look forward to hearing from you.

Respectfully,

 (239) 464-1394

James Muwakkil

President, NAACP, Lee County Branch # 5110

cc: John Manning – Commissioner, District 1

Larry Kiker, Commissioner, District 3

Tammy Hall, Commissioner, District 4

Frank Mann, Commissioner, District 5

~~Doug Meurer, Interim County Manager~~

Andrea Fraser, Interim County Attorney