Featured A monument to the Confederate statues of Athens-Clarke-County stands in the middle of Broad Street. The monument was erected in 1872 by the Athens Ladies Memorial Association. “At the time, the males couldn’t go around doing things like that because they had just lost a war and had some restrictions,” Johnson said. “It was basically an army of women going around trying to change the narrative around what succession was about and make their way of life look more moral than it actually was.”
CONFRONTING HISTORY

A monument to Confederate soldiers has stood in Downtown Athens for over a century, but local activists are now working to move the monument out of the city center.

“These were not erected solely to commemorate the dead. They were erected as an act of defiance and as a means of perpetuating White supremacy.”

-- AKELA REASON, University of Georgia Associate Professor of History

They were created specifically to exclude me and to ostracize my people -- Black people. It is a monument making a statement about how I don’t have an equal right to exist.”

-- RICHARD BANTON, Athens Anti-Discrimination Movement (AADM) publicist

“IT doesn’t feel good to pay taxes in a city and to be a patron of a city that allows (a Confederate monument) to be on public property,” Johnson said. “It doesn’t make a statement of inclusivity or diversity or that we even want to be inclusive. There (could be) something there that represents the city and where we’re trying to go.”

However, not all members of the community view Confederate monuments as offensive or exclusive symbols.

“I see monuments to the Confederacy the same as monuments to the Union. It’s just commemorating people that fought for their side of the war,” Clarke Central High School junior Patrick Madrid said. “I don’t think it’s like, ‘Here’s a statue that supports slavery’, I just think it’s more, ‘Here’s a statue of an American who fought for what he believed in.’ Whether morally that’s justified or not is a different argument.”

However, monuments such as this one are often seen as important historical objects and some argue that moving it would disregard its significance.

“(The monument) pays a reverence to those who gave the ultimate sacrifice. They sacrificed for their communities. These guys defended Athens, they loved Athens,” Lieutenant Commander of the Sons of Confederate Veterans T.R.R. Cobb Camp Curt Collier said. “(Moving the monument) is erasing history. I don’t want any monuments torn down.”

Lynae Sowinski, an attendant at an AADM meeting regarding the monument, believes that the
The law provides an opportunity for local governments that deem it necessary to relocate monuments “for the preservation, protection, and interpretation of such monuments” to do so. Many community activists suggest that this argument could be reasonably applied to the Broad Street monument.

“(The monument) had to be completely reconstructed two or three years ago and rebuilt. To adequately preserve the monument for future generations, people argue, and I argue, that a more appropriate place for it to be would be Oconee Hill Cemetery,” local attorney Russell Edwards said. “If we really want to preserve this monument and have it last a long time, we need to remove it from this corridor that is so heavily trafficked.”

The monument was first unveiled on College Avenue before being moved to its current location in the traffic median on Broad Street.

“This monument was already moved several times in its history, so I think there’s a perception that it’s always been there, but it hasn’t. It could very easily be moved somewhere else,” Reason said.

Some activists hope to get the monument moved to Oconee Hill Cemetery, a cemetery which houses a number of Confederate graves.

“We’re not honoring something they accomplished. We’re honoring that they fought and died so it should be a tombstone, basically. You honor someone who died on a tombstone; and you don’t honor people who lose wars, people that divided a country,” Johnson said. “Those are not usual things to honor people for but the Confederacy found a way to do it.”

One option that has been discussed is to not only move the Confederate monument, but also replace it with one that is more inclusive.

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“The last thing anyone wants is to see is this (monument) come down violently in a riot.”

-- MELISSA LINK, Athens Clarke County Commissioner