

Trump Republicans Show Us Who They Are

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May 10 is Confederate Memorial Day in North Carolina, honoring those who died fighting for the Confederacy. It's understandable when family members choose to remember and honor their ancestors. It's inexcusable when elected officials, who represent us all, choose to honor insurrectionists and white supremacists.

Last year, by an overwhelming vote of 285-120, Congress decided to remove from the Capitol statues of four notorious white supremacists. Only 67 Republicans, less than one-third of the Republican caucus, voted "yes." North Carolina Republicans David Rouzer, Madison Cawthorn, Dan Bishop, Ted Budd, and Patrick McHenry were among the vast majority of Republicans who voted "no." Let's consider the men they voted to honor and see what it says about the values they hold dear.

Vice President John C. Calhoun

Calhoun advocated white supremacy and praised the "direct, simple, and patriarchal mode by which the labor of the African race is, among us, commanded by the European." He said, "There never has yet existed a wealthy and civilized society in which one portion of the community did not, in point of fact, live on the labor of the other." He rejected the idea that slavery was evil and called it "a positive good" and "the most safe and stable basis for free institutions in the world."

U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice Roger B. Taney

Taney wrote the 1857 Dred Scott decision that allowed slavery to spread throughout the western territories. It helped plunge the nation into civil war four years later and is universally condemned as the Supreme Court's worst ruling.

Dred Scott was a slave whose master moved him to a state where slavery was illegal. When his master died, Scott asked the court to declare him free. Taney said Scott was not a citizen but mere property without rights.

Taney described African-Americans as "beings of an inferior order...unfit to associate with the white race...so far inferior that they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect." Taney concluded that "the negro might justly and lawfully be reduced to slavery for his benefit."

Arkansas Governor James P. Clarke

Clarke was an avowed white supremacist. He defended convicted nightriders and vigilantes who used violence to terrorize African-Americans. Clarke said he was

entrusted by “the people of the South” with “upholding white supremacy” and “the white standards of civilization.” Clarke Tucker, his great-great grandson, called his racism “inexcusable” and asked that his statue be replaced.

Tucker said his ancestor’s history of white supremacy was painful but, “Even when painful, we must have open and honest conversations about our history so that we can properly learn and grow from it.”

North Carolina Governor Charles B. Aycock

Aycock was a leading spokesman in the white supremacy campaigns of 1898 and 1900. “There flows in my veins the blood of the dominant race,” he said. “When the negro recognizes this fact, we shall have peace and good will between the races.” He helped instigate the Wilmington Massacre of 1898, the only successful insurrection in American history. A mob of 2,000 white men, armed with rifles and a gatling gun, set fire to black-owned businesses, overthrew the duly-elected government, and murdered dozens of people.

They were never punished. Aycock became Governor, and brought Jim Crow laws to North Carolina. “When we say that the negro is unfit to rule,” said Aycock, “we carry it one step further and convey the correct idea when we declare that he is unfit to vote. To do this we must dis[en]franchise the negro.”

Aycock bragged that North Carolina had “solved the negro problem...we have taken him out of politics” and recommended “our solution” to other states. “First, dis[en]franchise him...after that let him alone, quit writing about him, quit talking about him.” Aycock’s solution, quite literally, was “out of sight, out of mind.”

Aycock’s defenders call him “the Education Governor” because he supported schools for all students. But Aycock gave a pragmatic reason for supporting black schools. “An effort to reduce their public schools would send thousands more of them away from us. In this hour, when our industrial development demands more labor and not less, it becomes of the utmost importance that we shall make no mistake in dealing with that race which does a very large part of the work, of actual hard labor in the State.”

African-Americans were not full citizens to Aycock. They were a supply of cheap, back-breaking labor he did not want to lose.

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There’s a high school named for Aycock in Wayne County, North Carolina. Twenty-four percent of its students are African-American. They attend class every day in a school that

honors a man who disenfranchised African-Americans because he believed them to be inferior.

It's impossible to believe that these North Carolina Republican congressmen are ignorant of Aycock's white supremacy or his role in the Wilmington insurrection. It took place in Rouzer's district! Two years ago, Frank Bowers, a descendant of Aycock, petitioned Rouzer to shut down the Charles B. Aycock Birthplace as a North Carolina Historic Site. "His leadership role in the Wilmington Massacre of 1898 cannot be overlooked," wrote Bowers. "It is clear that we need to end the celebration of a known white supremacist."

The votes of Rouzer and his ilk to continue honoring Calhoun, Taney, Clarke and Aycock give the lie to the idea that white supremacy is a relic of the past. As the South's greatest author, William Faulkner wrote, "The past is never dead. It's not even past."

Rouzer and the rest of Trump's Republican Party have shown us their values by voting to glorify notorious white supremacists. When people show you who they are, believe them.

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