Now is the time to build Freedom Park in Raleigh

- The Freedom Monument Park would be between the Governor’s Executive Residence and the Legislative Building in Raleigh
- Statues and artwork would honor the African-American experience in North Carolina
- Only $700,000 has been raised out of $5 million needed

A rendering of the proposed park

BY THE EDITORIAL BOARD

The struggle over the symbols of the Confederacy has focused on what to take down and what to keep up. But the better discussion, as suggested by The News & Observer’s columnist Barry Saunders, would be about what new memorials and monuments to erect in honor of the other side of the South’s history, a struggle in which the South emerged victorious – the struggle for civil rights.

Fortunately, the focus of that positive discussion is already here. It’s the proposed Freedom Monument Park in Raleigh. In late 2012, Gov. Bev Perdue signed a lease agreement for the park to be constructed on the corner of Wilmington and Lane streets between the Governor’s Executive Residence and the Legislative Building. Statues and artwork in the park would honor
the African-American experience in North Carolina. But the art would also stress the efforts of all races to reach mutual understanding and the common values that bond all North Carolinians.

The park would be a natural stop for tourists and schools groups visiting the capital. Its contents would help balance the collection of statues and memorials in the area around the Capitol that honor Confederate soldiers and veterans of other U.S. wars.

The vision for the park came from the Paul Green Foundation, an organization that supports human rights. The project has attracted several corporate supporters, but it remains well short of its goal. Under terms of its lease with the state, the park organization must raise $5 million for planning and construction by 2017. The goal includes $3.5 million for planning and construction and $1.5 million for an endowment to fund maintenance of the park. So far, $700,000 has been raised, from foundations, corporations, individuals and the state.

The Civil War tore the nation asunder. The Civil Rights movement helped knit it back together. The areas around the State Capitol have several memorials to the Lost Cause. It’s time for a park honoring the Just Cause.

Read more here: http://www.newsobserver.com/opinion/editorials/article28623991.html#storylink=cpy

Online Comments:

David Warren

As Co-Chair of the NC Freedom Monument Park project, along with Goldie Frinks Wells of Greensboro, we thank the Editorial Board of the N&O for supporting this important new cultural landmark that will honor and celebrate the African American heritage. The thousands of school children who visit Raleigh will be enriched by learning more about the struggle "From Slavery to Freedom," in the words of Dr. John Hope Franklin, our founding Honorary Chair. We hope the corporate and business community will join the smaller grass roots donors and make the major gifts that will bring about this Park that stands for "freedom for all."

David Warren, Professor Emeritus, Duke University

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

JULY 26, 2015

David Warren and Goldie Frinks Wells: Erect monuments to freedom

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To the Editor:

Barry Saunders raised an evocative point in his July 8 column “Silent Sam needs a companion” about adding to rather than removing statues.

In this window of opportunity for North Carolina to demonstrate a positive rejoinder to the sudden Southern remorse over public reminders of slavery and Jim Crow, it might be well and perhaps easy for our political and business leaders to come together to find common ground on racial symbolism.

Our history of race relations has been strewn with both successes (Greensboro lunch counter in 1962) and failures (Wilmington riots of 1898) but our progress in African-American achievements has been remarkable – in business, the arts, politics, sports and education.

We can honor the past and celebrate the African-American heritage not by retaliation or even recompense, but by erecting monuments to freedom in public spaces across the state in all forms – buildings, statuary, plaques, parks and road names.

One idea already on the drawing board and approved by the Council of State is the African-American Freedom Park to be constructed in the center of Raleigh by a grassroots non-profit group in the process of raising funds for this new landmark. It will display the perilous struggle for freedom and the shared celebration of achieving it.

The time seems right to move ahead to make this state proud of the accomplishments of all its people.

DAVID WARREN AND GOLDIE FRINKS WELLS

CHAPEL HILL, GREENSBORO

THE WRITERS ARE CO-CHAIRS OF THE NORTH CAROLINA FREEDOM MONUMENT PARK PROJECT.

Read more here: http://www.newsobserver.com/opinion/letters-to-the-editor/article28650073.html#storylink=cpy