

Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality

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June 23, 2015

To: Richmond 2015 Chairmen of the Board Gov. Terry McAuliffe; U.S. Sen. Mark R. Warner; Richmond Mayor Dwight C. Jones; and Tom Farrell, Chairman, President & CEO, Dominion

Dear Chairmen of Richmond 2015,

In light of the recent racist massacre of nine African-Americans at a historic Black church in Charleston, S.C., and the resulting calls from Charleston Mayor Joe Riley, S.C. Gov. Nikki Haley, U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham, President Barack Obama and many other national figures from both major political parties to remove the Confederate battle flag from the grounds of the S.C. State Capitol, the Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality are calling on you to change the route of the UCI Road World Championships bicycle race.

The race, scheduled for Sept. 19 - 27, is expected to draw some 450,000 people to Richmond, plus reporters from 100 countries and a worldwide television audience of 300 million. This likely will be the biggest sporting event held in the United States this year and will be spotlighting our city, state and country before the world.

At the present time, your organization has chosen to use this race to highlight Monument Avenue, a virtual shrine to the slavery-defending Confederacy, with statues of Confederate President Jefferson Davis; Generals Robert E. Lee, Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson and J.E.B. Stuart; and Naval Commander Matthew Fontaine Maury. There also is one statue of an African-American, tennis champion and anti-apartheid activist Arthur Ashe, but your chosen route ignores him, making the Davis monument the highlight of the race by using it as the halfway turning point. The route includes having the cyclists ride their bikes directly over the sacred ground of Shockoe Bottom, for decades the epicenter of the U.S. domestic slave trade.

With international attention now focused on calls for South Carolina to end its official promotion of a flag that symbolizes the Confederacy and resistance to civil rights for African-Americans, continuing with this route as planned, during the Sesquicentennial Commemoration of Emancipation and the end of the Civil War, would put Richmond, with its status as the former capital of the Confederacy, in the worst possible light.

Dylann Storm Roof, the accused Charleston murderer, was an avowed white supremacist who delighted in showing online photos of himself with the flag of the Army of Northern Virginia, led by Gen. Lee.

But Roof is an individual. Your committee includes a U.S. senator, the governor of Virginia and the mayor of Richmond – all Democrats – and the leaders of many of Central Virginia's leading corporations, including Dominion, Genworth Financial, McGuire Woods, Williams Mullen, Atria, Kings Dominion, The Martin Agency, CarMax Inc and Virginia Biotechnology Research Park, as well as Kim Scheeler, president & CEO of the Greater Richmond Chamber (of Commerce); Jack Berry, president & CEO, Richmond Region Tourism; and the other Jack Berry, Executive Director, Venture Richmond, an organization that itself includes the major movers and shakers in Richmond business.

We are well aware that many of these same officials were among the leading proponents of building a stadium in Shockoe Bottom, a proposal that has been defeated – for now – by a sustained community struggle in which our organization has played a leading role.

We appeal to your own self-interest as well as your concern for the good name of our city when we call on you to change the route of this race. Otherwise, it is inevitable that the race will draw the kind of national and international scrutiny and criticism that could set back race relations – and tourism – in Richmond for many years to come.

Sincerely,

Ana Edwards – Chair, Defenders' Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project

Phil Wilayto – Editor, The Virginia Defender newspaper.

Cc: Directors of Richmond 2015;
Virginia, National & International News Media