The fact that the presence of Confederate monuments along Monument Avenue causes a great deal of pain for a large number of people cannot be contested. But even taking emotions out of the argument, there is still no good reason to keep the monuments where they are when the space they occupy could be used for a much more poignant, inspiring purpose. As a future educator in the greater Richmond area, I argue that there are many Virginians who deserve memorialization and whose presence on Monument Avenue would serve our youth to a greater degree than the current Confederate statues.

The 2015 Social Studies SOL 3.13 states, “The American people have different ethnic origins and come from different countries but are united as Americans by the basic principles of a republican form of government, including the individual rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness as well as equality under the law.” In Virginia, as early as third grade, we teach our children not only about the benefits of ethnic diversity but also about how every person deserves equal opportunity regardless of race, ethnicity, sex, etc. Monument Avenue is a very public space, and instead of using it to memorialize and honor men who actively worked to stifle Americans’ freedoms, it could instead be used to serve as an easily recognizable location within our state’s capital that sets a much more positive example for our youth. Additionally, 2015 Social Studies SOL 1.2 states that students should be able to “describe the stories of influential people in the history of Virginia and their contributions to our Commonwealth.” There are so many Virginians of different backgrounds who had successful careers and made their marks on our state as well as our nation whose memorials could serve as educational opportunities as well as inspiration for Virginian children to become self-driven towards achieving similar esteem.

For example, one Confederate monument could be replaced by a memorial dedicated to women’s suffragists in Virginia. 2015 3.13 SOL Critical Framework stresses that voting is one of “of the ways that people can serve their community, state, and nation.” The movement for women’s suffrage in Virginia began about fifty years prior to women finally winning their right to vote. Over the span of those fifty years, so many women contributed to the cause in Virginia, particularly through the Equal Suffrage League of Virginia. The Equal Suffrage League of Virginia itself or even specific, particularly-involved women could be highlighted in a memorial to their cause on Monument Avenue, which would exemplify the point we try to teach our children that more than just men can make their mark on history.

Katherine Johnson, 1960s NASA mathematician, is another figure who could be memorialized on Monument Avenue in place of a currently-standing Confederate monument. Johnson made great progress as not just a woman but an African American working for NASA. In a similar way that Arthur Ashe’s fame as an athlete helped him make waves during the Civil Rights movement, Johnson’s mathematic genius propelled both men into outer space and opinions of African American women into the future.

Replacing some Confederate monuments to white men with more diverse historical figures does not mean that no white men should be memorialized. More tasteful choices could be made, though, by memorializing people who are not famous for their fight against others’ freedoms. Examples include medical expert Ephraim McDowell, referred to by Virginia.org as the “father of abdominal surgery” or inventor Cyrus McCormick.

While expanding the diversity of the memorials on Monument Avenue does align with Virginia’s educational goals for our children, it could have more than an informational impact on our youth. Exposure to stories of successful people of varying areas of expertise in such a prominent, public place as Monument Avenue could inspire children to chase a dream they may not have known they had. Eliciting passion from students is an issue that teachers of every grade level face every day; if there was an easy, all-encompassing, straightforward fix, the issue would not still be prevalent. However, if simply being exposed to a unique success story of a prominent political figure, a mathematician, a writer, or some other expert could stir up an interest in learning for our children, removing Confederate monuments that represent so much pain for so many in favor of this alternative should not be a question of “if” but of “when.”

*Virginia Is For Lovers*. The Commonwealth of Virginia. http://virginia.org. Accessed 21 Nov. 2017.

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