

STATUES . . . STATUES

Mike Bell

These days the discussion surrounding how we remember and interpret our history would appear to be at an inflection point. A recent resolution in the U.S. House of Representatives would, among other things, effectively remove ALL confederate markers at national military battlefields (HR 7608). This may appear to be the correct approach to some, but as we

reckon with our past, it would also seem to be a time for discussing these monuments at greater length. When, why and where were they placed? Turns out it is complicated.



New Market Monument, "Virginia Mourning Her Dead," 1903. Courtesy Virginia Military Institute Archives (Photographs Collection).

On May 15 of 1864 at the Battle of New Market, cadets from the Virginia Military Institute made a charge that decimated their ranks. Their valor turned the tide of the battle. Their losses were commemorated in the work of Moses Jacob Ezekiel, **Virginia Mourning Her Dead.** The statue remains at VMI today.

Ezekiel was a cadet at VMI and had made the charge that day. He lived and sculpted most of his work while living in Rome, where he died in 1917. Today some are calling for removal of his works. Even though Ezekiel created most of his work by focusing on the lost cause idea of the war, he did create other pieces with a more general feel and focus. Being Jewish, Ezekiel hardly fits the stereotype of the lost cause apologist. Ironically, the statue lives on in a way that Ezekiel could hardly have imagined.

Jonathan M. Daniels was a member of the class of 1961 at VMI. In 1965, he was an Episcopal seminarian and found himself in Alabama at the height of the Civil Rights Movement. On August 20th of that year, Daniels was murdered literally giving his life that a young black friend might live. To this day he is honored and commemorated as a saint by the Episcopal Church. VMI honors people who have dedicated their lives in service to civil

and human rights. It is called the *Jonathan Daniels Humanitarian Award*. Past recipients include President Jimmy Carter (2001), former Ambassador Andrew Young (2006), and Rep. John Lewis (2015). As part of the honor, VMI gives the recipient of the award a small casting of **Virginia Mourning Her Dead**.

Like I said . . . it is complicated.



Jonathan M. Daniels '61 Humanitarian Award.
Courtesy Virginia Military Institute Archives
(Photographs Collection).

For further information concerning Jonathan Myrick Daniels:

[Jonathan Daniels, Civil Rights Hero - VMI Archives - Virginia Military Institute](#)

[Episcopal martyr Jonathan Myrick Daniels honored in online commemorations – Episcopal News Service](#)