

AN OPEN LETTER

FROM FRANK STEWART TO

# MAYOR MITCH LANDRIEU

Dear Mitch — *Shame On You!*

I am a conservative person who has supported your leadership in public life and felt you were a personal friend, along with your family. With that said, I must express my overwhelming disappointment in your public statement of criticism, identifying only myself as a deep-pocketed leader and high roller who failed to support your plan. Being the only one named in your interview is wrong. Your statements were reported on NOLA.com on Thursday, April 27, and in the Times Picayune on Friday, April 28.

Yes, I am a member of the Monumental Task Committee, since I believe firmly that the three remaining magnificent works of art should remain in their current location. In case you forgot, two of these monuments were placed on the National Historic Register years ago by Mayor Sidney Barthelemy. My friend and former mayor, Marc Morial, said he did not want to make the monuments an issue in his administration. In my opinion, the Liberty Monument was controversial and offensive to some, but it was a monument to the diverse history of New Orleans. However, the Liberty Monument cannot compare to the elegance of the remaining three monumental icons.

**MITCH**, to single me out in public as a “high rolling investor” was a cheap shot and utterly offensive and personally wrong. In my 81-plus years on this earth, I have never been known as a gambler, high roller, or a person who is prejudiced and practices discrimination. I worked hard to create a successful career in the memorialization profession that serves a significant percent of this city’s population. Because it is my opinion that the three magnificent statues on your removal list should remain in place, you decided to insult me publicly in a most personal and harmful manner. Mitch, you determined I was an obstacle in the pursuit of your own political ambitions which led you to create a racist’s schism in our very amicable and historic community. You said, Mitch, that you wanted to bring all citizens together, but you are doing the opposite! How very sad for you to choose a path that will harm the legacy of the Landrieu family in our state.

What happened in South Carolina was wrong and brutal, but that event should never be used by you for self-serving political gain by removing our historic statuary.

**MITCH**, I have been a loyal supporter for years of the Landrieu family. I supported your father, Moon, who I admire as a Jesuit alumnus and who was a great leader in public service as Mayor, Judge, and Cabinet member. Your father earned well-deserved respect for his accomplishments. As his son, you are destroying the good Landrieu name.

In addition to my previous support of you and your father, I substantially gave support to your sister, Mary, who served the state of Louisiana as Senator with honor and distinction. You will recall that I personally held a major fundraising event at my home for your sister. In addition, I have supported other members of your family such as Judge Madeleine Landrieu, Phyllis Landrieu, and other Landrieus. I continue to support and work with Phyllis in the Early Childhood educational program, which targets primarily minorities who live in poverty.

I have served on over 20 boards of nonprofit organizations. Presently, I am in my 3rd year on the Board of Xavier University and in that role I also provide financial support to the university. You may not know that I have supported St. Augustine High school in a major financial capacity. I have a lifelong record of working in this community to advance the equal treatment in the daily life of every citizen, regardless of race, religion, gender, or position.

**MITCH**, just last Saturday, I was a major sponsor of the annual fundraiser for the National Council of Jewish Women, which is an organization that I hold in high regard and respect for their tireless contributions to our community. Also last week, my wife and I attended a major fundraiser for Delgado Community College honoring my close friend and chosen member of my board, Alden McDonald who is the president of Liberty Bank. You know, Mitch, that Alden’s father-in-law was Judge Revius Ortique, one of our greatest African-American leaders.

However, since I support those who wish to preserve these monuments, which are works of art and have been in place for more than a century, you decided to attack me, since you are doing so much in your desire to divide this great city. I do not condone what those represented on these statues did, but I also cannot condone your attempts to eradicate history. **MITCH**, in complete justice, every person has a right to leave his or her own legacy – even you.

**MITCH**, I personally accuse you of having self-serving and very selfish political ambitions to make a public issue out of a matter that our last four African-American mayors never addressed. I do not recall this issue being a political promise either time you ran for Mayor. It was only when you could not run for re-election that you decided to divide the city. New Orleans has always been inclusive and diverse. Times change and we no longer live in the same world as when these monuments were erected as memorials. You, Mitch, are setting us back in race relations in our 300 year-old city.

**MITCH**, you know we cannot change history, but we can change our activities in life and learn from our past. This is called “positive evolution.” I ask you, Mitch, should the Pyramids in Egypt be destroyed since they were built entirely from slave labor? We all have learned about the power and abuses of the Pharaohs and the plight of the slaves since the Pyramids are still with us today. What about the Roman Coliseum? It was built by slaves, who lived horrible lives under Roman oppression, but it still stands today and we learn so much from seeing it. Egypt and Italy should be

grateful they had no Mitch Landrieu in power or these magnificent structures would not exist for the world to see today. Fair and Healthy “FREEDOM” is the answer to why our country is so great!

**MITCH**, I hope you can recall the time I visited with you in the privacy of your office and encouraged you to allow me and other willing citizens to pay for large bronze plaques that would be placed in front of each of these monuments explaining the wrongs of slavery and discrimination. I attempted to persuade you to use these three artistic monuments in new ways that would educate our citizens and visitors in ways that would show how far we have evolved as a nation, state, and city. At that same meeting, I suggested to you that the hundreds of thousands of dollars needed to accomplish your politically motivated desire to remove these National Historic Register treasures would be better used if applied to our roads, educational system, and public housing.

Whereas you may mean well, you are making the worst decision in your career. Everyone involved needs to put down their personal prejudices and let the magnificent memorials of real history remain as a permanent reminder to all - - - that the consequences of conflict and the results of positive evolution of life and mankind should not be forgotten.

**MITCH**, we were all created in different time periods and circumstances. We all need to learn to forgive and forget and not persist in anger or resentment, no matter the person or event. Life can be happy for those who can learn to love, forgive, and move on. For Christians, this is the justification of a Savior and Redeemer sent by an Almighty Origin to “forgive.” After my wonderful wife of 55 years criticized your misguided plans, you told her, “I still love you.” “Love”, not “Hate” should prevail! Well, Mitch, I still love you for the positive things you have done in the past for our city. Given your present desire to forever change the historical landscape of this 300 year-old city, I do not have to dislike you as you dislike your opponents. Your reputation of being a hard-headed person is not a complimentary trait. Open-minded individuals are always those who grow in wisdom. Can our elected leadership be “open-minded” enough to change the decision to remove the statues and bring a conclusion to the present controversy? I believe an open-minded leader will see a way to end this warfare by leaving history in place.

I ask you **MITCH** – should someone with your help, support, and authority try to profiteer in a business venue highlighting the history of slavery? Putting educational plaques up at these three monuments would allow all to learn free of charge about slavery. Instead, you allied with someone who makes a profit selling the history of slavery. Stop blaming us for our forefathers’ actions.

**MITCH**, I hope you carefully read every word I have written, even though you have heard these words before from me. You constantly express great concern about how many New Orleanians “feel” about these three monuments. Did you think about my feelings before you chose to try and publicly smear my name and my decades of service and commitment to everyone in our community? Did you first think about how your words might hurt the feelings of an 81 year old friend? You know Mitch, I feel sorry for you and the position you have put yourself in, and the bitterness you have brought out in people from both sides of what was a nonissue. I hope you can see that you have started another war, where many of your citizens and friends will be hurt in one way or another.

This was never something that was “the will of the people.” You cannot fool those of us who are New Orleanians. You never sought the opinion of New Orleanians before you went to the City Council with your self-serving influence. You did not ask the people since you knew what they would say. My wife, who used to be one of your fans, is truly upset with your actions and hateful words. Together, we implore you to reevaluate your position regarding these monuments and priceless works of art. There is still time, and I appeal to you to end this madness now, for your sake and for the sake of the citizens of New Orleans.

**MITCH**, it is crucial that you become a positive political leader who will unify, rather than divide those who once worked hard to get you elected. I hope your constituency will read and consider every word I have written in this letter. Repeated polls have indicated that a majority of voters are opposed to the removal of these monuments. THEY BELONG TO THE CITIZENS OF NEW ORLEANS - - - NOT TO YOU!

If you remain on your destructive path to take these monuments away, your legacy of public destruction, rather than unity, will be forever MEMORIALIZED! That is what this is all about. Memorialization of fact and history that cannot be denied. It’s time to live, to forgive, and learn from the memorialized past. Construction, not destruction, is life’s hope. Have you given any thought, Mitch, to the legacy you want to leave to your community and family?

**MITCH**, I am personally covering the cost of this communique, which is expensive, but not nearly as costly as what New Orleans will suffer if you remove these magnificent works of art. This letter was personally written and personally paid for by your “high-rolling”- - - friend?

*Frank B. Stewart, Jr.*