

John Kelly, “Why is Confederate general Albert Pike memorialized at Judiciary Square?”
Washington Post, 10/ 22/2016.



Could you write about the statue of the man near the Fourth Street NW exit of the Judiciary Square Metro stop? I don't know his name. He faces Fourth Street and his back is toward the rear of the Labor Department's Frances Perkins Building. Effusive descriptive accolades on the statue make me wonder if there is a backstory to substantiate his greatness.

— *Pat Deveny, Arlington, Va.*

His name is **Albert Pike** and, oh, does he have a backstory.

The words engraved on the memorial describe the multitalented Pike (1809-1891) thusly: AUTHOR, POET, SCHOLAR, SOLDIER, JURIST, ORATOR, PHILANTHROPIST and PHILOSOPHER. Hmm, did we leave anything out? Why, yes: Racist. Someone has added a reference to that. Spray-painted in two places on the granite base of Pike's monument are the words “Black Lives Matter.”

It's a sentiment that would have confused Pike, who — among his other achievements — rewrote the lyrics to “Dixie” so they were more likely to inspire Confederate soldiers.

“Southrons, hear your country call you!” Pike’s version begins. “Up, lest worse than death befall you!”

Ironically, Pike was not a Southron at all, but a Northron, born and raised in Massachusetts. He worked for a while as a schoolteacher, then lit out for the territories in 1831. He made his way to Mexico and involved himself in various adventures out West before settling in Arkansas, where he hung out his shingle as a self-taught lawyer. His clients included American Indian tribes.

Pike also wrote for Southern newspapers, eventually purchasing the *Arkansas Advocate* with funds that his wealthier wife brought to their marriage.

Politically, Pike was a strict nativist. He joined the Know-Nothing Party — those anti-Catholic, anti-immigrant agitators — but left when he found the party’s support of slavery insufficiently intense.

At the outbreak of the Civil War, the transplanted Yankee supported the Confederacy and was made a brigadier general in its army. Pike seems not to have been a good soldier. He oversaw a regiment of Native Americans but was unable to control them at the Battle of Pea Ridge in 1862. Some of the men under his command committed atrocities, scalping fallen Union soldiers. After further run-ins with his superiors in Richmond, Pike was reprimanded and resigned his position.

After the war — and a pardon from **President Andrew Johnson** — Pike returned to work as a lawyer and writer. He moved to Washington in 1868 and threw himself wholeheartedly into the minutiae of Freemasonry, an organization he had been involved with since 1850.

It is Pike’s Masonic activities — he wrote frequently on the topic and served as Grand Commander of the Supreme Council, Southern Jurisdiction — that prompted the construction of the memorial in 1901. The monument, with statues by sculptor **Gaetano Trentanove**, was paid for by the Masons.

It was said of Pike, “He found Freemasonry in a log cabin and left it in a Temple.” His body is interred in the House of the Temple, headquarters of the Scottish Rite of Freemasonry, at 16th and S streets NW, where there is a museum in his honor and the contents of his library are kept.

You can also see his death mask and compare it to the statue. A contemporary described Pike as “a man of gigantic frame and his long waving white hair and silky beard gave him a decidedly patriarchal appearance.”

Pike’s critics contend that he was instrumental in forming the Ku Klux Klan. Masons insist evidence does not support that. Of Pike’s activities in the late 1860s, “[The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture](#)” hedges: “He may have become involved in the organization of the Ku Klux Klan at this time, although this is not certain.”

Even if Pike wasn't involved with the Klan, he did believe that the races should not mix. He was against integrating Masonic lodges.

It's hard to judge the claims made about Pike's prowess in the field of letters. His doorstop of a magnum opus, "Morals and Dogma," is pretty much unreadable by modern audiences. His poetry has not aged well. He is revered in the Masonic movement, but unless you're a Mason it's hard to understand exactly why.

Pike is the only Confederate Civil War general honored with a statue in the capital of the side that won. The D.C. Council once contemplated seeking its removal. In 1992, the monument was the site of weekly protests organized by followers of fringe political figure **Lyndon LaRouche**. At least once, they managed to climb the statue and dress Pike in white sheets.

One conspiracy-minded website claims that Pike is a favorite of the "occultic groups in control of the puppet government in Washington, D.C." That's probably not true.

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Please tell me all you can about Albert Pike Elementary School in Ft. Smith, AR. Has there ever been any controversy about the name? What did you kids learn about Mr. Pike? Do you know when the school got named?

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