



Written by [Bruce Walker](#) on October 16, 2012

## Arkansas Honors Young Confederate Hero

“War is hell,” William Tecumseh Sherman once said. The American Civil War was a dark chapter in America’s history. Yet it did produce those who merited respect and honor. David O. Dodd was one such individual, though only a boy. He refused to betray his native Arkansas, and as a consequence was hanged as a spy by Union forces.



Now an Arkansas state commission has approved marking the site where the 17-year-old Dodd was detained by Union troops after he was discovered to have coded messages relating to their troop dispositions, according to a [CybercastNewsService](#) story.

Arkansas has already honored the young man who chose death rather than betrayal of his state. In fact, Arkansas has more places honoring Dodd than any other Civil War figure, including a school named after him and street signs dedicated to his memory.

Yet the recent decision by the Arkansas commission to honor Dodd is drawing criticism from some. Mark Potok, a senior fellow at the leftist Southern Poverty Law Center, assailed the move:

It’s a very sad story, but at the end of the day, Dodd was spying for the Confederacy, which was fighting a war to defend the institution of slavery...”There are currently more monuments to David O. Dodd than any other war hero in Arkansas. You would think that at some point it would be enough.”

Many Arkansans disagree. Sharon Donovan, who lives on W. David O. Dodd Road, observed, “The fact that we live in the South, I could understand why he would want to do it because he was actually working for us in a way.... For that era, I think it was probably a noble thing to do.”

Danny Honnol agrees:

Everyone wants to remember everything else about the Civil War that was bad. We want to remember a man that stood for what he believed in and would not tell on his friends ... He was barely 17 years old when the Yankees [hanged] him. Yeah, he was spying, but there (were) other people that spied that they didn’t hang.

David O. Dodd is a perfect representation of the continuing legacy of the American Civil War. Conventional history represents the war as a conflict between freedom and slavery — good and evil. When the Constitution was adopted, however, slavery existed throughout much of the Republic. State governments, one by one, emancipated slaves — a process that was ongoing right up to the Civil War. This seemed very likely to continue. In none of the “slave” states at the time of the Civil War — Delaware, Maryland, Kentucky and Missouri — was slavery profitable. Additionally, because the rising tide of immigrants resented competing against slave labor, voters in states such as Missouri (with a



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large German population) would not long tolerate the institution.

Moreover, the admission of new states anticipated that these would be free states. The Northwest Ordinances, for example, passed first under the Articles of Confederation, prohibited slavery in those states, which were the six surrounding the Great Lakes. After the adoption of the Constitution, this law was passed again. The states created by the Louisiana Purchase were almost all free of slavery.

Southern leaders, such as President James Monroe, even created an African nation, Liberia, which was intended to provide a home for freed American slaves where they might return and govern themselves. America assumed a protective hand over this nation that prevented it from ever becoming a European colony.

The motive of many, probably most, Confederate soldiers was not the preservation of slavery (most Southerners did not own slaves) but rather the defense of their homes and communities. In 1860, those homes and states meant more to most Americans than did the federal government, whose presence in the life of ordinary citizens was generally limited to the U.S. Postal Service and the Coast Guard.

But there is also often nobility, when men faced with death do what they think is right despite the cost to themselves personally. The Union Army had many such brave and noble men who fought and who died in the Civil War, but so did the Confederate States of America.

Honoring these men is not honoring slavery or secession. It is rather honoring that which is best and noblest in us.

*Pictures: David O. Dodd Elementary School in Little Rock, and the only known picture of David O. Dodd.*



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