

Virginia removes massive Confederate monument

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The statue of Confederate General Robert E Lee in Richmond, Virginia is being removed [File: Steve Helber/AP]

Richmond, September 8 (RHC)-- In a move that will cap decades of activism, crews are set to remove one of the United States' largest remaining Confederate statues – a towering statue of Robert E Lee in Richmond, Virginia.

The 6.4-metre (21-foot) tall bronze statue Lee, the commander of the Confederate Army during the US Civil War, riding a horse will be hoisted off its 12-metre (40-foot) pedestal, 131 years after it was erected in the former capital of the Confederacy as a tribute to the Civil War leader.

Activists have called for the statue's removal for years, saying it glorified the US South's slave-holding past. However, officials had long resisted its takedown, as have some residents of Virginia who argued moving the monument would be akin to erasing history.

Still, 10 days after George Floyd, an unarmed Black man, was killed under the knee of a Minneapolis, Minnesota police officer in May 2020, sparking nationwide protests against police brutality and racism, Democratic Governor Ralph Northam announced plans to take down the statue.

Two subsequent lawsuits stalled the removal for more than a year, but rulings last week by the Supreme Court of Virginia cleared the way for the statue to be taken down. "This is an important step in showing who we are and what we value as a commonwealth," Northam said in a news release announcing final plans for the removal.

The city has removed more than a dozen other Confederate monuments on city land since Floyd's death, but the Lee statue – one of the largest and most recognisable Confederate statues in the country – is expected to draw a crowd of both supporters and opponents. A heavy police presence is also expected.

The removal will begin with a large crane hoisting the 11-tonne statue off its pedestal. The sculpture is then expected to be cut into two pieces for transport, although the final plan is subject to change, said Dena Potter, a spokeswoman for the state's Department of General Services. After the statue is taken down, crews will remove plaques from the base of the monument and will replace a time capsule that is believed to be inside.

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