This paperweight is a gold medallion in a blue Lucite display mount. The medallion depicts Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson Davis on the obverse, with the phrases “United We Stand Divided We Fall” and “Both Native Kentuckians” above the images. Below Lincoln, the medallion reads, “Abraham Lincoln President United States”; below Davis, it reads, “Jefferson Davis President Confederate States.” At the bottom of the medallion is the phrase, “Civil War Centennial.” On the reverse of the medallion the words “Kentucky State Numismatic Association” and “1ST Annual Convention Louisville 1961” are inscribed around the edge. In the center of the medallion is a starburst with state abbreviations inside of it, Kentucky’s “K” being at the top.

**Background Information**

This commemorative medallion was issued in 1961 by the Kentucky State Numismatic Association to mark the hundredth anniversary of the beginning of the Civil War. The association made the medallions in bronze, silver, and platinum, along with a single gold one that was to be given to Kentucky’s governor. The gold medallion was then encased in blue Lucite to serve as a paperweight.

**Significance**

Commemorative pieces such as coins, medallions, and badges are used to memorialize people, events, and issues. Most of the time, they are simply collectors’ items, and the coins are not meant to be used in regular circulation. Commemorative pieces have been collected for centuries, some of the earliest being Roman coins that depicted military campaigns and the defeat of enemies. This particular medallion was created to mark the Civil War centennial.

Planning for the Civil War centennial began in 1957, four years before the 100th anniversary of the start of the war, with Congress’ creation of the United States Civil War Centennial Commission. Members of the commission were directed to work with state commissions in order to commemorate the war with battle reenactments, parades, memorial statues, and other events. The state commissions in the South interpreted the war in a vastly different way than commissions in the North, most notably in terms of word choice and themes. Southern states saw the centennial as an opportunity to celebrate the Southern “way of life,” reflecting Lost Cause ideals that were prevalent in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. At the same time as the centennial, the civil rights movement was gaining strength; these vastly different issues proved difficult to reconcile, particularly because, as historian Robert Cook writes in *Troubled Commemoration: The American Civil War Centennial, 1961-1965*, “The centennial was built on a racially exclusive interpretation of the Civil War era. This interpretation denied agency to blacks and downplayed the significance of those events, notably emancipation and Lincoln's use of African-American troops.”

African-American members of Northern commissions were often excluded from participating in gatherings in the South. For example, they were denied entrance to the segregated Francis Marion Hotel in Charleston, South Carolina, for centennial opening events. Outrage over this exclusion was so strong that President John F.
Kennedy’s staff had the meeting moved to the desegregated Charleston Navy Yard. However, several Southern commission delegates still held their own “whites only” meeting several blocks away.

Excitement about the centennial faded because of the growing civil rights movement and the United States’ increasing military involvement in Southeast Asia. Despite the centennial’s unpopularity, the commemorative efforts that took place are important for historians to study. How people remember an event like the Civil War reflects their culture, society, and belief systems. This collective memory helps them form an identity and sense of community and provides historians with a better understanding of movements like the Lost Cause.

In the 1960s, the Civil War centennial focused on remembering battles and honoring generals, but today’s Civil War sesquicentennial aims to recognize women, African Americans, and others whose stories were neglected in the commemorative events of 50 years ago.

Related Resources

- See a collection of commemorative cards created for the Civil War centennial on the Civil War News website. [http://www.bobheffner.com/cwn/a_indexfront.shtml](http://www.bobheffner.com/cwn/a_indexfront.shtml)
- See another medallion made for the Civil War centennial on the Smithsonian Institution’s website. [http://americanart.si.edu/collections/search/artwork/?id=20752](http://americanart.si.edu/collections/search/artwork/?id=20752)
- Read about the centennial and sesquicentennial in an article titled “Not Another Civil War” on the Charleston City Paper’s website. [http://www.charlestoncitypaper.com/charleston/not-another-civil-war/Content?oid=1115181](http://www.charlestoncitypaper.com/charleston/not-another-civil-war/Content?oid=1115181)
- Find out about events during the Civil War Sesquicentennial at the Civil War Trust website. [http://www.civilwar.org/150th-anniversary](http://www.civilwar.org/150th-anniversary)