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# Should Mississippi change its flag?

## Confederate emblem is too divisive to remain part of flag

By Rep. Ed Blackmon  
Special to The Clarion-Ledger

To some it represents this state's history and heritage. To others, it represents slavery and discrimination. Many in this varied opinion on Mississippi's official state flag will never reconcile their differences. The feeling runs too deep.

Therein lies the problems. The one constant in the continuing debate over the incorporation of the Confederate flag into this state's flag, is that the flag is divisive. It has at its core an emotional charge that influences the passions of both its supporters and detractors.

The driving influence on how each of us view the Confederate flag is our perspective on this state's history. For me, the flag symbolizes the worst episode of man's inhumanity toward man. The Confederate banner flew over a nation and its army which had as its fundamental purpose the perpetuation of the enslavement of an entire race. Less we forget, slavery was more than just the bondage of human beings. It was the state sanction of murder, rape, torture of human beings and an obliteration of thousands of years of family histories and ties. There are no other such recorded acts in human history.

The legacy of this infamous history will live on through the decedents of many of these faceless and nameless victims of slavery through infinity.

The Confederate flag was not razed with the defeat of the South. Instead, hate groups cooped the flag and made it a symbol and banner during a reign of terror over the survivors of slavery. The Confederate flag was the banner under which the Ku Klux Klan operated and was the clear symbol of its desire to hold onto and perpetuate a system of apartheid.

Today, in Mississippi as well as a number of other Southern states, the Confederate flag lives on through official government actions, atop capital domes, government buildings and courthouses. There were men and women of honor who served for both sides during the Civil War. There should be other ways to honor the many thousands who sacrificed and gave their lives for the South.

A state flag should be a symbol under which all citizens, regardless of race, can unite and feel a sense of pride. The mere fact this article and the opposing view of the same, are being printed for this morning's paper, makes clear that the current flag neither unites or brings a sense of pride to this state's citizenry.

The late Rep. Aaron Henry introduced legislation to change our flag for 13 years. Each year, his proposed legislation met the same fate. It died in committee. Others, like Rep. Earle Banks, have taken up this cause by introducing annual legislation to remove the Confederate emblem.

With the heighten awareness generated by the battle in South Carolina, now is the

**PRO** time to find common ground in Mississippi on the issue of replacing the state flag with one that represents all of its people, beauty and majesty. By doing so, there can be a reconciliation of that most painful part of this state's past, and we can together pursue the potential of our future under a banner that unite rather than separates.



Blackmon

Rep. Edward Blackmon, D-Canton, represents House District 27 and is chairman of the House Judiciary B Committee.

## Changing Mississippi's flag would be even more divisive

By David R. Bowen  
Reader Editorial Board

It's that time again — flag time! The Legislature's in town, and the usual bills are being introduced to scrap the state flag.

The fuse was lit this time, as during the Civil War, in South Carolina. The good folks in Columbia might have solved the problem by adding the British flag to their capitol instead of taking down the Confederate flag, thus displaying all flags that have historically flown over their state.

Instead, they offered to take the NAACP up on its proposal to move the flag to a Confederate memorial, but the NAACP reneged and said no place was the right place for the flag.

**CON** If the people of Texas or California chose to honor the cultural and military heritage of their Hispanic citizens by flying the Mexican or Spanish flag on their capitol, then that would be their business and not ours.



Bowen

In Mississippi, we might choose to fly over the Capitol the flags of all those sovereign nations that have ruled what is now our state: France, Great Britain, Spain, the U.S. and the Confederate States of America. Instead, by incorporating the Confederate battle flag as part of the state flag, we honor the military courage and sacrifice of our forefathers who fought for what they saw as the principles of the U.S. Revolution and Constitution.

If you wish, you may call those who fought for independence in the American Revolution traitors and rebels, just as the Confederates were in 1861, but they won, which changes the perspective of history.

Historians today tend to agree that the South had the better constitutional case, but the North won the War, and that settled the matter. It is also good to remember that the Confederacy's Jewish Secretary of State, Judah P. Benjamin, offered to end slavery in exchange for British and French support for Southern independence. Slavery would have stopped no matter who won the Civil War.

It is distressing to see desecration of the Confederate flag by people such as the Ku Klux Klan, but it is even more distressing to see desecration of the American flag by the Aryan Nations, the American Nazi Party, and the Klan.

Nobody, however, seems to want to junk the American flag just because some nasty people abuse it or because it flew over many more years of slavery than the Confederate flag. Some of our fellow Mississippians say they are offended by a portion of our state flag, but many more would be offended by removing it.

Whose feelings are more important? Both sides claim the moral and historical high ground. We live in an age when anybody who shouts, "I am offended!" wins the game, but we can all play by those rules. Some say the flag is divisive, but changing it is also divisive. Unity, as in most issues, is not possible on this one.

We have a free and open democratic process — as do South Carolina, Georgia and Arkansas — where everybody can vote, and a duly elected state Legislature which is paid to resolve such matters. It is doing precisely that.

Some will be pleased. Some will not.

David Bowen, a former congressman who represented the 2nd District, is a member of The Clarion-Ledger's Reader Editorial Board.



File photo/The Clarion-Ledger

Waving over the memorial statue honoring the women and men of the Confederacy, flies the Mississippi State flag at the Capitol in Jackson. As a controversy over the Confederate battle flag rages in South Carolina, flag opponents are attempting to remove the Battle Flag portion from the Mississippi flag.

## Both sides? There are many sides to S.C. flag issue

By Brad Warthen  
Knight Ridder Newspapers

COLUMBIA, S.C. — I frequently hear from readers who want to keep the Rebel flag atop the South Carolina State House, exhorting me to "tell both sides" of the story.

And when they do that, I always think: Both sides? What do they mean, both sides? Do they really think there are only two?

The truth is that there are almost as many different positions on the flag as there are people who have

us into one that unites us.

So in the interest of furthering this discussion, allow me to offer just a few of the broad, and admittedly crude, categories into which I see people falling on the issue:

■ Johnny Rebs: These are true believers in the Lost Cause, and there is great variety even within this category. Some are reenactors, some just practice ancestor worship, Charleston-style. Some are history buffs who really mean it when they say "her-

These are the recent arrivals who look at the flag and say, "Whatsamatta wit' youse people down 'ere, uh?" Or something like that.

■ White Racists: They're out there, believe me. Keeping the flag up, for them, is purely a matter of rubbing something in black folks' faces and showing who's still the boss.

■ Black Racists: Decided long ago that there's no way you can trust the Man. They like the boycott not because it will lead to reso-

made the switch when they perceived the GOP to be the White Man's Party.

■ Business types: Of the people who want to move the flag, these are the only ones who actually worry about the boycott as an economic threat.

■ Atticus Finches: The classic, small-town, Southern-style liberal who sees great aunts told them as children not to use the "N word" because it was "common," but who later realized there were better reasons. They've been deeply

and working together on other problems. Some of these are business types, some are politicians, some write for editorial pages.

■ White Democrats: Very uncomfortable folks. Enough blacks in their districts to be elected as Democrats, enough whites to be elected as whites. These folks really want a resolution of the conflict.

■ Black Democrats: Also want a resolution. Have chafed under the flag for years, but largely concentrated their scant political

"both" sides of the issue. Some are idealists about it; some see taking a hard line as being to their personal political advantage. This group is making it hard to achieve consensus.

Not that "compromise" is what we need, in the sense of something that makes everybody equally unhappy. But what we do need is a solution that is just and fair and makes sense to the broad consensus of South Carolinians, no matter which of many "sides" they may embrace.