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## Breaking Down the “Heritage not Hate” Movement’s Origin, Usage, and Effect on Race Relations in the Post Civil War Era

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## Heritage of Hate?

Breaking Down the “Heritage not Hate” Movement’s Origin, Usage, and Effect on Race  
Relations in the Post Civil War Era

By: Laith Kewan

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What is “Heritage not Hate”?

The phrase “Heritage not Hate” has been described in numerous ways: a racist dog-whistle, a rallying cry for white supremacists, an avenue for white Southerners to show pride in their ancestry, and a “bumper sticker defense” for the Confederate Flag.<sup>1</sup> The phrase condenses the argument of the Confederate Flag’s place in modern American into two “catchier” terms – “Heritage” and “Hate.” “Heritage” is the encompassing term for defenses of the Confederate Flag’s display and usage as a symbol of Southern pride that disavows white supremacy. This pride can range from pride in the former Confederacy (both individual soldiers and the government as a whole), pride in the South as a whole, Southern rebelliousness, and beyond. “Hate” is the term used to sum up a century-and-a-half of prejudice in a simplistic term.

Use of the phrase “Heritage not Hate” is a relatively new development in the effort to de-racialize and depoliticize the Confederate Flag. It came about during a time when the Sons of Confederate Veterans (one of the most prominent supporters and defenders of Southern Confederate history) was making a conscious effort to distance themselves from white supremacist groups like the KKK and CCC (the Council of Conservative Citizens, a modern iteration of the White Citizens Councils of the 1950s and 1960s).<sup>2</sup> The mastermind behind the phrase was P. Charles Lunsford, the Chief of Heritage Defense for the Sons of Confederate Veterans.<sup>3</sup> This short and concise slogan represented an important moment in a continuous effort spanning from the end of the Civil Rights era to the present day – the refocusing of Southern Confederate memory away from slavery towards a de-racialized heritage-oriented celebration of the Confederate Flag and the Confederacy behind it.

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<sup>1</sup> Coski, “Myths & Misunderstandings.”

<sup>2</sup> Southern Poverty Law Center, “Neo-confederate extremists begin a takeover.”

<sup>3</sup> Hague, Beirich and Sebesta, “The Struggle for the Sons of Confederate Veterans,” 286.

## The Confederacy

Any discussion of the Confederate States of America needs to emphasize the primacy of slavery in its founding and existence. Although the percentage of slaveowners in 1860 with more than twenty slaves is in the single digits, the actual number of white Southern households that owned slaves was closer to 25%.<sup>4</sup> This means that, roughly, one in every four white Southerners at least had a direct connection to the ownership of a human being. Further, the profits from slavery filtered broadly through the South. While there is a great focus on the immense wealth held by the South's "planter class," other white Southerners, too, were privy to economic gains from chattel slavery. In fact, the income disparity between Northern and Southern regions was approximately \$22 dollars on average.<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, the 1860 South saw the majority of the nation's wealthy citizens living within its borders – out of approximately 70,000 Americans with wealth amounting \$40,000 or more, "40,000 of that number lived in the South."<sup>6</sup> Out of the 7,000 Americans with more than \$111,000, four thousand five hundred hailed from the South.<sup>7</sup> This vast wealth was a direct result of slave labor that fueled Southern agriculture, with 3,950,343 slaves distributed throughout the South as of 1860 (See Figure 1).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Glatthaar, *Soldiering in the Army of Northern Virginia*.

<sup>5</sup> Parker, et al, *The Structure of the Cotton Economy of the Antebellum South*, 119.

<sup>6</sup> Soltow, *Men and wealth in the United States*, 101.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> Graham, "Distribution of the Slave Population."

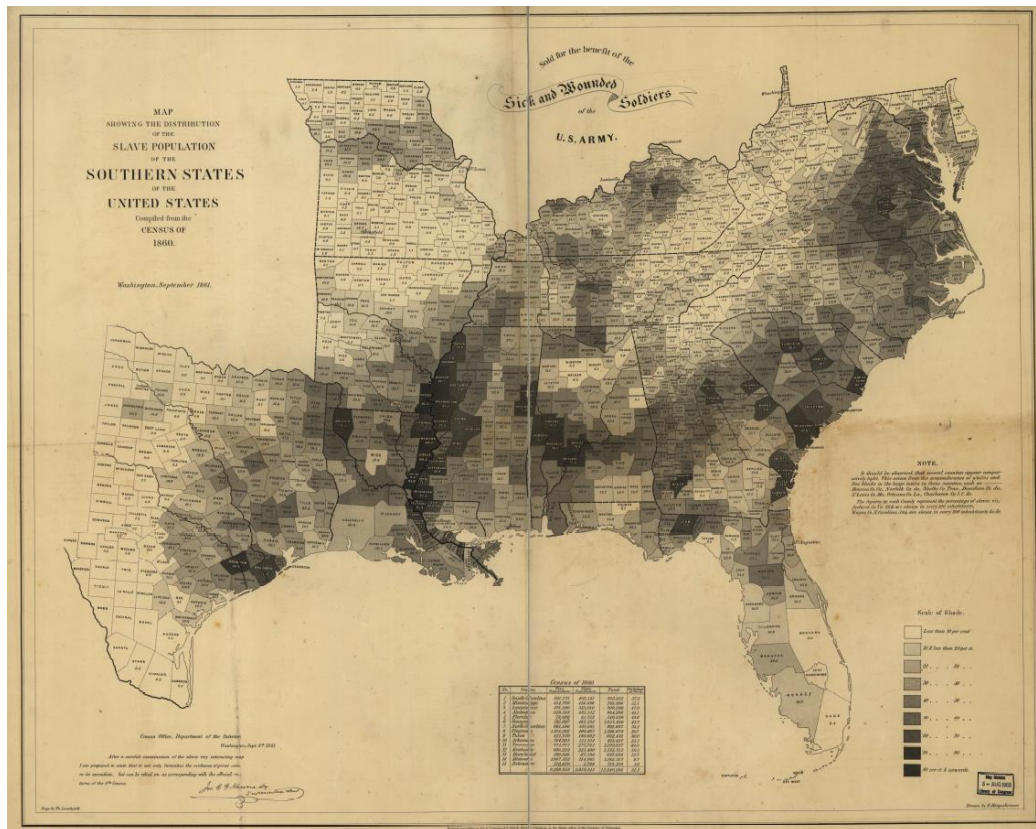


Figure 1 Shows the distribution of Slaves in the Southern states through the use of 1860 U.S. Census Data. Source: (Graham 1861)

The advocates for secession did not hide their defense of the institution of chattel slavery nor did they mince words in describing how central it was to their cause. Though the South's secession is a fiercely debated topic between proponents of "Heritage not Hate" and those opposing the celebration of the Confederacy, historians agree that the root cause of the American Civil War was slavery. Other concerns, such as the defense of state's rights and worries about government overreach were directly tied to its preservation. Robert Gudmestad, a history professor at Colorado State University, firmly states that "White Southerners left the Union to establish a slave-holding republic."<sup>9</sup> The assertion of slavery's centrality to the Civil War isn't

<sup>9</sup> Gudmestad, "What really started the American Civil War."

just the product of academic deduction – the Southern states that declared the reasons for their secession all focused on the defense of slavery as their central motivation.

Texas, for instance, listed issues such as attacks by Native Americans and bandits from Mexico as problems that had gone unnoticed by the Federal Government, but then changed course – devoting the rest of the declaration to the issue of slavery where – in Texas’s words – their “grievances assume far greater magnitude.”<sup>10</sup> Georgia, the fifth state to secede from the Union, described having had “numerous and serious causes of complaint...with reference to the subject of African slavery.”<sup>11</sup> Mississippi went further in depth with their establishing of slavery as the root cause for secession, describing how the state’s “position is thoroughly identified with the institution of slavery – the greatest material interest of the world.”<sup>12</sup> Finally, South Carolina’s declaration of causes describes the actions of Free States (and abolitionist groups within) as “agitation [that] has been steadily increasing,” going so far as to describe Northern ideals of abolition are an “erroneous religious belief,”<sup>13</sup> Alexander Stephens, former Vice-President of the Confederate States of America, emphasized how the foundations of the Confederacy “are laid...upon the great truth, that the negro is not equal to the white man; that slavery... is his natural and normal condition.”<sup>14</sup> The importance of slavery in the secession of Southern states is not just inferred – it’s clearly stated by the states themselves.

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<sup>10</sup> The Texas Convention, “Declaration of the causes.”

<sup>11</sup> Georgia Republic Convention, “Ordinance of Secession.”

<sup>12</sup> Mississippi Secession Convention, “Journal of the State.”

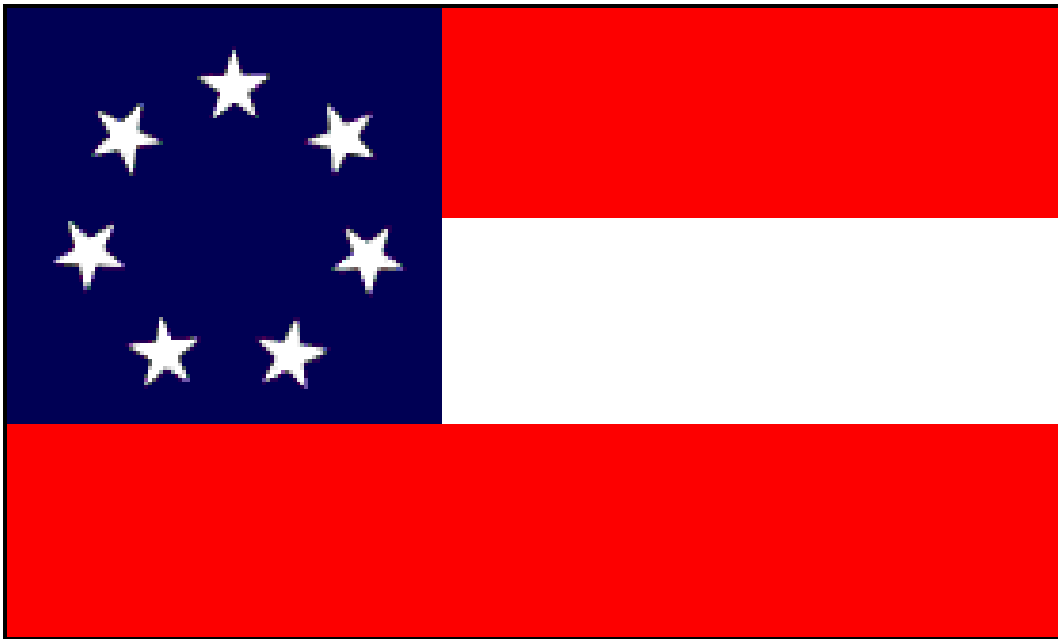
<sup>13</sup> South Carolina Convention, “Declaration of The Immediate Causes.”

<sup>14</sup> National Park Service, “Slavery as a Cause.”

## The New Flag

When the Confederacy first formed, much of its governmental symbolism and political organization mirrored that of the United States. The two Constitutions were incredibly similar – minus the Confederacy’s adjustments to further enhance the rights of states and slaveowners – with the Confederate government being created very much in the same fashion as the United States around seventy years prior; with a legislative branch, an executive branch, and a judicial branch.<sup>15</sup>

Furthermore, the Confederacy also created a flag that looked so similar to the United States’ that Confederate troops had trouble differentiating the two in combat. Originally, the Confederate Flag was known as the “Stars and Bars” – a flag echoing the design of the Union’s, however, with only seven stars and three stripes: (See Figure 2)



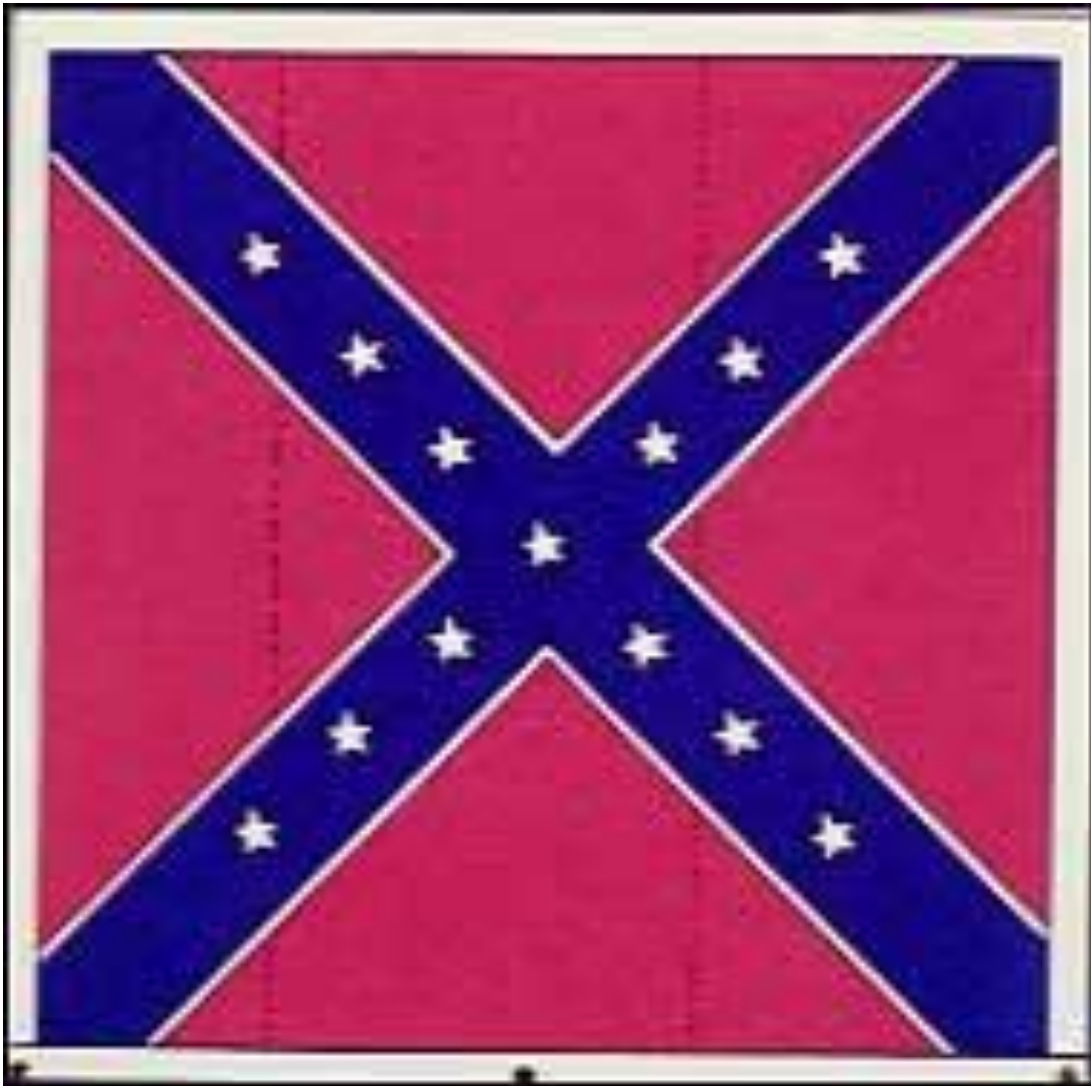
*Figure 2 Shows the first Confederate Flag design - the "Stars and Bars." Source: (Rockingham Community College 2023)*

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<sup>15</sup> Bomboy, "Confederate Constitution is approved."



Enter General Pierre Gustave Toutant Beauregard. Following a chaotic Battle of Bull Run in July of 1861, he pushed for the creation of a new national flag, and when that was rejected, a battle flag. In September of the same year, Beauregard finalized the “Southern Cross” design of the Confederate Battle Flag.<sup>16</sup> (See Figure 3)



*Figure 3 Shows the Beauregard Battle Flag. Source: (Sansing 2000)*

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<sup>16</sup> Sansing, “Mississippi History Now.”

Though this exact flag was never declared the official Confederate States of America national flag, it has become one of the most recognizable symbols of the Confederacy – and the Civil War – in the years following the conflict.

### Reconstructing a Flag

A broken Confederacy that had just faced defeat in battle, the loss of their main source of labor, a Northern opinion of them as “the less-civilized portion [of the United States],” and the progressing technology of industrialization was left picking up the pieces of a once-great economic powerhouse.<sup>17</sup> Between 1880 and 1900, the number of manufacturing plants in seven of the eleven former States of the Confederacy doubled.<sup>18</sup> Beginning in 1867, Radical Reconstruction, a direct response to President Johnson’s failing to handle the growing white violence prompted by emancipation, mandated African American citizenship and dispatched federal troops into the South to enforce a smooth transition and acceptance by the Southern States of the various new rights granted to free African Americans.<sup>19</sup> The presence of federal troops enforcing African American rights was not well received by the recently Confederate South, which was already less-than-happy about perceived encroachments on their sovereignty. In addition to being defeated, then, white Southerners were also dealing with challenges to white supremacy and economic changes - without the uncompensated labor they were used to. That’s the key idea – “what they were used to.” During this time (shortly after the war) many former Confederates and Southern planters sought to deal with their demoralization through emigration,

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<sup>17</sup> Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, 143.

<sup>18</sup> Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy*,” 79.

<sup>19</sup> Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution*, Ch. 6-9.

opium, alcohol, and religion.<sup>20</sup> In the midst of any major change, the natural human response is to cling to what is familiar. And, for many white Southerners, the Confederacy was familiar.

Yet, immediately after the American Civil War's end, resistance to the new normal as well as simple nostalgia weren't expressed through the display of the Confederate flag. There is little evidence of discrete prohibitions on the display of Confederate symbols and the flag. However, there seems to have been an unspoken rule. One notable example of this unspoken rule causing friction came in Rome, Georgia.<sup>21</sup> In early 1867, four former Confederate soldiers were arrested for having staged a Confederate officer's funeral complete with Confederate uniforms and a Confederate flag prominently draped over the casket. This incident spurred on one of the earliest discussions of what place the Confederate flag had in post-Civil War America, with media outlets and officials jumping to both criticize and justify the flag's usage. Supporters of the arrests – like General William Whipple – characterized the Confederate flag as “hateful to the people of the United States.”<sup>22</sup> Conversely, those in opposition described the flag's use in a way that would be repeated even a century and a half later – that the display of the flag was “innocent.”<sup>23</sup>

The arrest of four former Confederates for displaying the Confederate flag (and the ensuing media frenzy) was merely the start of conflicting perspectives on the flag's place in the post-war era. By the end of the century, numerous Confederate memorial groups had spawned to both preserve white Southern history and dignity. However, unlike how they described the Confederate flag, these organizations weren't innocent. In the Columbus Enquirer, a reader in the

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<sup>20</sup> Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution*, Ch. 6-9

<sup>21</sup> J. M. Coski, *The Confederate Battle Flag*, 47.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 48

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 47

1880s wrote how – if they were prohibited or shamed for displaying the Confederate flag on Memorial Day – they would “do something terribly outrageous.”<sup>24</sup> This opposition to Northern perspectives wasn’t just related to flags, however. Groups like the Ku Klux Klan also had arisen in the postwar era, led by former Confederate veterans to oppose Federal Reconstruction efforts, Black equality, and perpetuate the racial hierarchy in the South. The Klan, unlike later memorial groups like the United Confederate Veterans, didn’t use the Confederate flag as a banner to rally under, through the involvement of prominent former Confederates – such as the first Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan being former Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest – established a tie between the Confederacy and the KKK that would last throughout its existence.<sup>25</sup>

Although the Reconstruction-era Ku Klux Klan didn’t rely on the Confederate flag to achieve its goals during the Reconstruction era, other militant groups started to as federal involvement in Reconstruction enforcement lessened. The Charleston-based Carolina Rifle Club, one of many all-white social clubs that came into existence in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, openly decreed its opposition to Reconstruction reforms. On the eve of the 1876 gubernatorial election for South Carolina, members of the Carolina Rifle Club marched under Confederate banners while toting weapons to endorse the campaign of General Wade Hampton, a former Confederate General, and “prevent rumored Negro rioting.”<sup>26</sup>

How African Americans felt about Confederate flag displays is easy to infer yet hard to prove, as Black voices were continuously silenced after the end of slavery. However, they visibly suffered as a result of former Confederates regaining political control in the South. Southern

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<sup>24</sup> J. M. Coski, *The Confederate Battle Flag*, 52

<sup>25</sup> Southern Poverty Law Center, “Ku Klux Klan.”

<sup>26</sup> J. M. Coski, *The Confederate Battle Flag*, Ch.3.

newspapers would routinely ignore and discard reports of racial violence targeting African Americans for fear that the South would be “cast in a bad light.”<sup>27</sup> Although reports are sporadic and not always credentialed, organizations like the Equal Justice Initiative have estimated that between the end of the American Civil War and 1876, approximately 2,000 terror lynchings occurred in the United States.<sup>28</sup> Although slavery had been abolished with the Thirteenth Amendment and voting rights supposedly secured with the Fifteenth Amendment, Southern leaders – once Radical Reconstruction had ended and troops were withdrawn - instituted loitering laws, convict leasing, and eventually Jim Crow and disenfranchisement laws.

### The Lost Cause (Heritage)

The display of the Confederate flag became more widespread as white people in the “Redeemed” South tried to shape how the Confederacy would be remembered – efforts that would be dubbed “The Lost Cause.” Former Confederates played a large part in this, with magazines such as *The Land We Love* edited by General Daniel Harvey Hill (who went on to become one of the earliest Presidents of the University of Arkansas) being created to specifically praise and glorify the Confederate armies.<sup>29</sup> Further, groups such as the Southern Historical Society (founded in 1869) made a pointed effort to communicate “the Confederate version of the war” to others.<sup>30</sup> This effort was exemplified by the involvement of former Confederate General Jubal Early, who took control of the SHS in 1873 with the goal of ridding historical memory of “Unionist and emancipationist narratives.”<sup>31</sup> In an address to SHS delegates, Early donned his

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<sup>27</sup> Litwack, *Been In The Storm So Long*, 280.

<sup>28</sup> Equal Justice Initiative, “Reconstruction in America.”

<sup>29</sup> Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 78.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid

<sup>31</sup> Ibid

former military uniform complete with Confederate flag cufflinks and espoused heroism in place of defeat and dishonor.<sup>32</sup>

The late nineteenth-century also saw the emergence of a practice that remains fiercely debated in modern times – Confederate memorial statues. One of the most notable and earliest memorials – “The Recumbent Lee” unveiled in 1883 as a tomb for Robert E. Lee – spurred on the idea of Confederacy celebration.

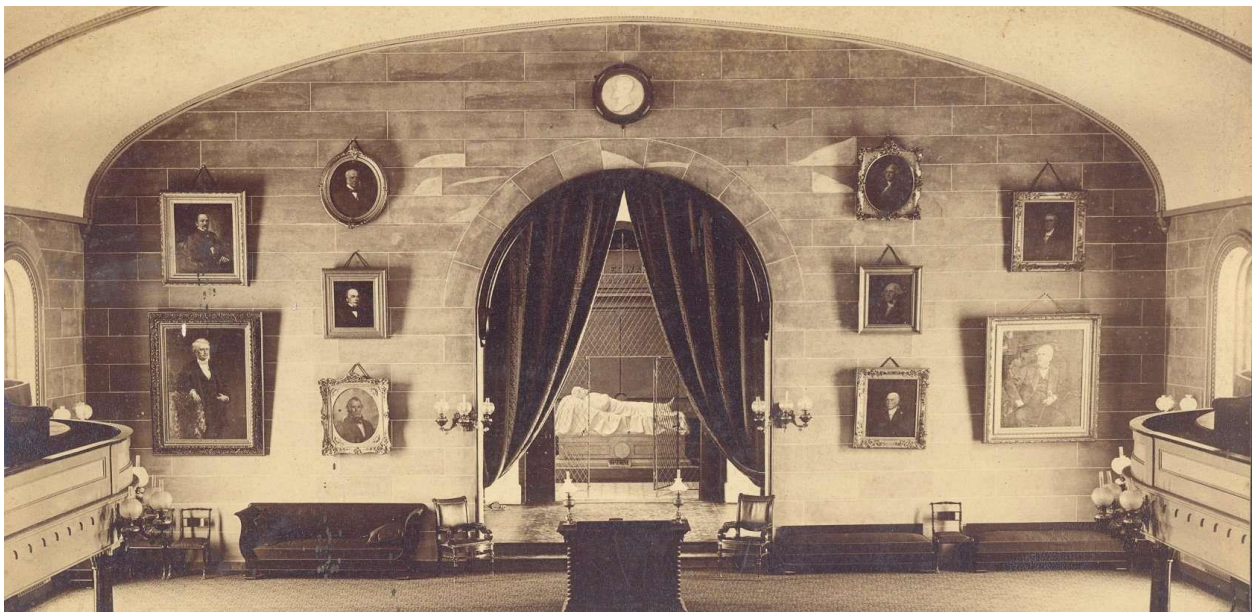


Figure 4 shows "The Recumbent Lee" by Edward Valentine. Source: (Miley 1890)

The vast Southern appreciation for the Lee Memorial paved the way for other Confederate memorialization – ranging from more Robert E. Lee commemorations to Memorial Day ceremonies that served both to honor the dead but also “Public reassurance of the justness of the cause.”<sup>33</sup> Through commemoration, former Confederates and white Southerners found an outlet

<sup>32</sup> Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 79.

<sup>33</sup> Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy*, 46.

to acknowledge the dead without outwardly accepting defeat. Furthermore, Confederate commemoration itself became a form of rebellion. As stated before, during Reconstruction, the display and celebration of Confederate flags and symbols had bordered on illegality and, at the very least, was looked down upon by the Federal government. But with the federal presence reduced, this commemoration became almost religious in its importance now with Southern churches revering Confederate leaders (Robert E. Lee, Stonewall Jackson, Jefferson Davis) “as religious saints and martyrs.”<sup>34</sup> Display of the flag gave white Southerners a way to both spite Yankees and assert the righteousness of their cause.

It should be noted that these Confederate statues, monuments, and displays did not emerge in a vacuum. Rather, the emergence of Confederate memorials coincided perfectly with the increase in legislation such as Jim Crow Laws and widespread African American disenfranchisement. These memorials weren't projects orchestrated by individuals who were simply former Confederates and their supporters yearning for a time long past – these were widescale movements that were designed to reinforce white supremacy and “instill in the minds of children ‘a proper veneration for the spirit and glory that animated’ Confederate soldiers.”<sup>35</sup> Children can't build statues, but they can be taught beliefs. And, through Lost Cause-perpetrating history books like John William Jones' “School History of the United States,” they were.<sup>36</sup> Pictures of the Confederate Battle Flag paired with theatrical descriptions of Southern bravery and honor against a resource-superior Union Army helped children to associate the Confederacy and its flag with nobility and the morality of the Southern troops.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Wilson, *Baptized in Blood*, 25.

<sup>35</sup> Janney, “The Lost Cause.”

<sup>36</sup> Jones, *School history*.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 262

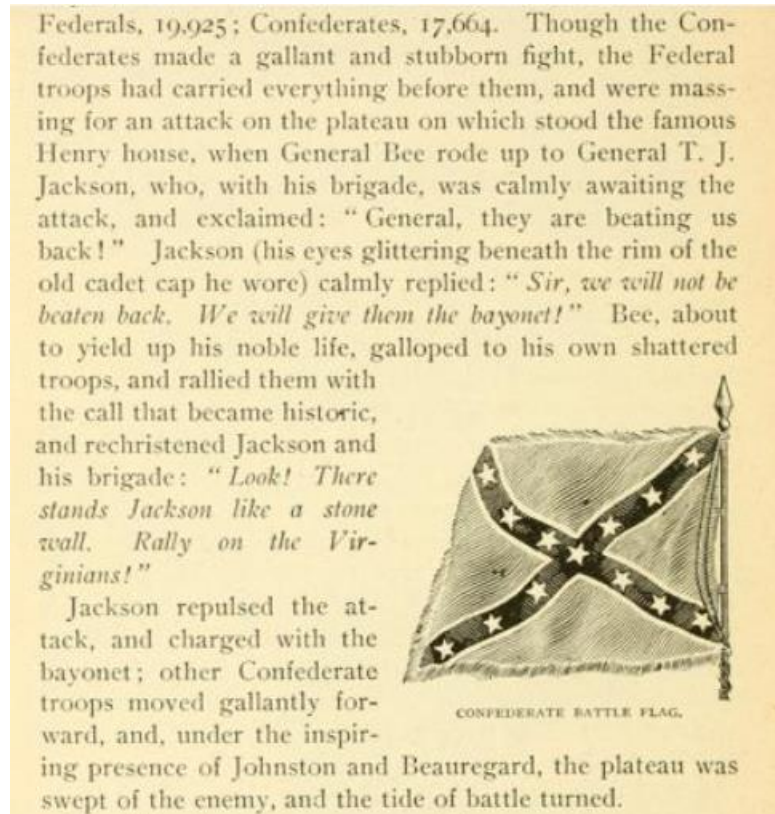


Figure 5 Shows a snippet of John William Jones' "School History of the United States." Note the Confederate flag displayed next to a narrative battle tale describing Confederate troops as "gallant" "stubborn" with their commanding officer's eyes "glittering beneath the rim of the old cadet cap he wore." Source: (Jones 1896)

In 1900, an effort to unite the various memorial groups in the South was made by the Southern Memorial Association in Fayetteville, Arkansas.<sup>38</sup> These efforts to present the former Confederacy in a positive light grew until 1915, when America's first blockbuster feature-length film was released – *The Birth of a Nation*. After that, they exploded. *The Birth of a Nation* was an entertainment catapult for both the Lost Cause ideology and sympathy for the Confederate cause. In an overly fictionalized representation of life in the United States after the Civil War, freed slaves (and African Americans as a whole) are represented in blackface as subhuman

<sup>38</sup> Janney, "The Lost Cause."



scoundrels who cannot control themselves in their crusade to prey on innocent white women.<sup>39</sup> The movie's effect was much greater than simply a box office success – it invigorated racism in the United States and the branches that accompany it. The Ku Klux Klan's membership skyrocketed, pumping new life into the organization.<sup>40</sup> Prejudice towards African Americans was bolstered and the Lost Cause movement gained steam. White people were shown as saviors in this film, especially former Confederates and Klansmen. Painting Confederate flag-toting soldiers and Klansmen as the “good guys” and former slaves as the “bad guys” serve to instill in the minds of viewers that – perhaps – the cause for which the Confederate States of America was fighting was righteous after all.<sup>41</sup> Although occurring over a century ago, the effects of *The Birth of a Nation* are still felt today. This film represents a definable point of divergence between the factual remembrance of the American Civil War and a whitewashed false narrative of the true nature of one of America's bloodiest conflicts.<sup>42</sup> Although the film didn't have a discrete effect on the prevalence of Confederate flags, it still served as an effective normalization of the Confederacy and its beliefs as a symbol of righteousness and honor. The film also inspired a new wave of the Ku Klux Klan that now reached beyond the South and into the West and Midwest, spreading white supremacy and fostering racial violence.<sup>43</sup>

### The Civil Rights Era (Hate)

After World War Two, display of the Confederate flag became more openly racialized and politicized than it had been during the Lost Cause's mass memorialization, directly responding to

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<sup>39</sup> Lehr, “100 Years Later.”

<sup>40</sup> Ibid

<sup>41</sup> Grief, “The Birth of a Nation,” 2.

<sup>42</sup> Dabashi, “There is no gallery.”

<sup>43</sup> Lehr, “100 Years Later.”

the growing Civil Rights movement and associated federal mandates. In 1948, the United States was still reeling from the end of World War Two and grappling with its position as a global superpower. The atom had been split, the United Nations was formed, and most of the competitors to the United States' dominance had been reduced to rubble following the intense fighting years before. Internally, the U.S. was coming up on an election year that was heavily centered around the subject of Civil Rights. Many African American soldiers had served in various roles during World War Two's war against fascism, and these soldiers (and their allies) were becoming increasingly disillusioned with the status quo of legalized racial prejudice.<sup>44</sup> The yearning for a better situation spawned the Civil Rights Movement as we know it today. However, it met with resistance. This resistance to Civil Rights took on various forms from counter-protests, violence, lynchings and more with the Confederate Flag now serving as a banner under which this Civil Rights resistance – both grassroots and political - could rally.

To preface, the Democrat incumbent Harry Truman supported the Democratic Party's platform of supporting Civil Rights. Added to that, the Supreme Court had just deemed racially segregated "white-only" election primaries as unconstitutional, leading to an influx of African Americans registering for the Democratic Primaries of 1946.<sup>45</sup> Additionally, the growing African American vote in battleground states like New York and Michigan proved to be imperative for a Democratic victory.<sup>46</sup> Many White Southerners did not appreciate the party's deference to this new voting bloc and instead chose to form a new political party called the States' Rights Democratic Party (Dixiecrats for short). This pro-segregation, pro-state autonomy, and anti-civil rights Party was formed not with the goal of actually winning the 1948 Presidential Election, but

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<sup>44</sup> National Park Service, "Birth of the Civil Rights Movement".

<sup>45</sup> Frederickson, "Dixiecrats."

<sup>46</sup> Sitkoff, "Harry Truman."

of convincing leading candidates (Thomas Dewey and Harry Truman) to drop the political plank of civil rights lest the election be thrown into the limbo that is the House of Representatives.<sup>47</sup> They did not succeed, but were still able to manage thirty-nine electoral votes. The unofficial adoption of the Confederate Battle Flag as a party symbol by the Dixiecrats helped cement the Flag as a symbol of opposition to Civil Rights and integration. For well over a decade after the Dixiecrats formed and dissolved in 1948, the Confederate flag would continue to be used as a symbol of “massive resistance” to court-ordered desegregation and Civil Rights, appearing in protests against diverse hiring (Figure 6) and school integration (Figure 8), to name a few.



*Figure 6 Shows Ku Klux Klan members counterprotesting Black proponents for diverse hiring in 1978. Source: (Blakemore 2021)*

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<sup>47</sup> Frederickson, “Dixiecrats.”



*Figure 7 Shows the South Carolina State Capitol flying the American Flag, the State Flag, and the Confederate Flag. Source: (Eric Draper; Associated Press 2000)*



*Figure 8 Shows a protest against the integration of Little Rock Central High School outside of the Arkansas State Capitol, with then-Governor Orval Faubus in attendance. Source: (Bledsoe 1959)*

South Carolina’s use of the Confederate Flag is particularly indicative of the massive resistance against Civil Rights. Although Figures 5 and 7 can be tied to “mob mentality,” but South Carolina’s raising of the Confederate Flag over its capitol grounds illustrates a distinct

governmental stance on the Civil Rights Movement. Furthermore, the timing of this display at the capitol grounds is serendipitous at best. The South Carolina government raised the flag in 1962 supposedly to celebrate 100 years since the start of the Civil War. However, the flag didn't come down in 1965 – it remained until 2015, taken by many as a symbol of resistance to issues such as school integration and other Civil Rights efforts.<sup>48</sup> Even as recent as 2001, Time Magazine called South Carolina's flying of the Confederate flag "a states' rights rebuff to desegregation and a daily affront to blacks."<sup>49</sup> Since a "concurrent resolution" was used to display the Confederate flag, there exists little record of the actual defenses for its positioning. However, the pro-segregation and anti-Civil Rights beliefs held by prominent South Carolina officials (like Strom Thurmond who led a 24-hour filibuster against the Civil Rights Act) do not support a case for display of the flag being apolitical.<sup>50</sup>

However, as the Civil Rights Movement waned in the 1970s, the Confederate Flag found itself thrust into the mainstream in a very different way. Unlike before, the flag wasn't used to intimidate; it was used to shine light on a new South, a South forged in rebellion – not slavery – that was proud of its heritage and adamant that honor, rebelliousness, and "good ole boys" were

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<sup>48</sup> Taylor, "The Complicated Political History Of The Confederate Flag."

<sup>49</sup> Cooper and Zagorin, "Republicans and the Rebel Yell."

<sup>50</sup> Worland, "This Is Why South Carolina."

the foundation upon which these Southern roots rest – to sum up, it was a South that the United States could be proud of.

### General Lee

Following the Civil Rights Era, white Southerners made strong efforts were made to change public perception of the Confederate Flag. This was part of a rehabilitation of white southerners in American popular culture. The rise in household television ownership paired with changing consumer interests (away from westerns and the like towards more action-oriented and less serious genres) saw the white South navigating an increasingly interconnected world. Along with this came a wave of change – social, political, and economic - that drew the rest of the United States' interest, an interest emphasized with the Democratic nomination (and eventual election) of Jimmy Carter – one of a new generation of Southern politicians who focused on gaining the African American vote rather than denying it. Carter was the first Deep Southerner to be elected to the Presidency since the Civil War.<sup>51</sup> In an increasingly globalized world, the South had the job of deciding what its identity was going to be. A “New South” was forming, and with it came efforts to shed itself of the dark, prejudiced, and “backward” history that the South had been identified with.<sup>52</sup>

The 1970s gave witness to an emerging “good ole boy” genre in popular culture. New films and television shows featured Southern blue-collar folks sticking it “the man” (“the man” meaning government, big business, and anyone else using power for bad; typically personified as also white). The Southern-mocking *Beverly Hillbillies* of the 1960s and racial dramas like *To Kill*

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<sup>51</sup> Time Magazine, “The South Today.”

<sup>52</sup> Ibid

*a Mockingbird* were gone, replaced by American underdog movies like *White Line Fever* (1975) that highlighted a Southern culture of rebelliousness and righteousness. This image was further cultivated with movies like *Smokey and the Bandit* (1977), where the Bandit (played by Burt Reynolds) is tasked with transporting beer cross country while being chased by a bumbling, traditionalist sheriff.<sup>53</sup> *Smokey and the Bandit* wasn't just notable because of its "little guy versus the man" plot; it also thrust an American muscle car into the spotlight – the Pontiac Trans Am.



Figure 9 Shows the iconic Pontiac Trans Am from *Smokey and the Bandit*. Source: (Reynolds 1977)

Emblazoned on the front license plate of the Trans Am, as shown above, is a Confederate Flag (specifically, the Georgia Flag which – at the time – had the Confederate Battle Flag shown in prominence). The high-flying antics of *Smokey and the Bandit* spurred on a growing theme of films and shows based around Southern underdogs, fast cars, and rebelliousness in a way to shift

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<sup>53</sup> Page, "A movie for the people."

the Confederate Flag (and the greater South) away from association with the prejudiced past and towards a more modern, American future.

Around this same time (1979 to be exact), a popular new television show called *The Dukes of Hazzard* premiered, centered around two cousins – Bo and Luke Duke – who live a Robinhood-esque lifestyle in their local community. Running from the law, epic car scenes, typical 1980s television. However, one of (if not the) most recognizable aspects of the show is the car that the Dukes drive around in – a 1969 Dodge Charger that was bright orange, had a Confederate Flag on the roof, and was named the “General Lee.”



Figure 10 Shows the "General Lee" Dodge Charger from *Dukes of Hazzard*. Source: (Gabriel Bouys; Getty Images 2015)

Although the combination of the Confederate Flag and the name “General Lee” would insinuate a white supremacist (or even a Confederate) connection, it is never addressed that way



in the series. In fact, the Flag on top of the car is only referred to as the “Rebel Flag,” and the “General Lee” name isn’t explicitly explained. Furthermore, the context of the show itself lends more to the flag being a symbol of Southern pride and rebellion against authority perceived as unjust. When explaining their family history, it is mentioned that their ancestors “fought everybody from the British to the Confederacy to the U.S. government.”<sup>54</sup> Most significantly, perhaps, the main antagonist – Boss Hogg – is fully named “Jefferson Davis Hogg” after the former Confederate States of America’s president.<sup>55</sup> Support for the former Confederacy in *The Dukes of Hazzard* is minimal at most, and borders on nonexistent. Major figures in the show’s creation further dispute any connection between the General Lee and Confederate ideologies. Gy Waldron – the show’s creator – doubled down on this stance when interviewed in 2020 about a resurgence in controversy over the Dodge Charger’s unique adornment. Waldron, born in Kentucky, described how “No one even connected the Confederate Flag with slavery,” going on to explain how it was just a part of “Southern Culture.”<sup>56</sup> The “Duke Cousins” also echo a similar tone. John Schneider – who played “Bo” – believes that the controversy surrounding the Confederate Flag-bearing Dodge Charger is a result of political correctness gone “way out of hand.”<sup>57</sup> The actor who played Bo’s cousin Luke – Tom Wopat – sympathized with those who call out symbols of injustice, but claims “the car is innocent.”<sup>58</sup> Ben Jones – the actor who played “Cooter” who went on to become a Democratic Congressman and owns various *Dukes of Hazzard* theme shops – provided his perception of African American response to the show. To him, having close friends such as Andrew Young – a prominent Civil Rights leader who

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<sup>54</sup> Poniewozik, “What Did The Dukes.”

<sup>55</sup> Ibid

<sup>56</sup> Gy Waldron, “‘Dukes of Hazzard’.”

<sup>57</sup> Ibid

<sup>58</sup> Ibid

befriended Martin Luther King Jr. – was evidence that “[they] couldn’t care less about rebel flags.”<sup>59</sup> To these important members of *The Dukes of Hazzard* cast, the show was just about two Southern cousins fighting against a corrupt system with their trusty 1969 Dodge Charger. Nothing more, nothing less; they were simply rebels. Along with other famous films and shows like *White Line Fever* (1975) and *White Lightning* (1973), great efforts were made to deracialize the Confederate flag (and the South), changing its association from that of a prejudiced symbol to an emblem of American underdogs.

### Rebel Music

After the end of the Civil Rights Era, the Confederate Flag found its way into the mainstream not only through television shows like *The Dukes of Hazzard*, but also through various musicians and bands. Tom Petty, Pantera, and – most notably - Lynyrd Skynyrd all displayed the Confederate Flag in some manner during their performances. Starting with one of the most prominent Confederate Flag-flying bands, Lynyrd Skynyrd was well known for parading the Flag in most of their shows since the band’s inception in 1969. They denied it was a symbol of racism, slavery, or even the Confederate States of America – it was just a Southern symbol to go along with their theme of “good-time Southern rock.”<sup>60</sup> One of the most clear depictions of Lynyrd Skynyrd’s view of Southern identity as a whole is contained in their intensely famous song “Sweet Home Alabama.”

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<sup>59</sup> Gy Waldron, “‘Dukes of Hazzard’.”

<sup>60</sup> Dawn, “Lynyrd Skynyrd lower, then raise.”

“Sweet Home Alabama” came about following a Canadian singer’s (Neil Young) song “Southern Man,” which was critical of the white South and its history.<sup>61</sup> The performances of this song were against the backdrop of Confederate flags, and lead singer Ronnie Van Zant embraced this: “Everybody thinks we’re a bunch of drunken rednecks ... and that’s correct.”<sup>62</sup> Skynyrd’s song suggested a South that is fiercely rebellious and dismissive of holier-than-thou Yankees – but, the band insisted, not racist.

Later, upon seeing the increasing controversy concerning symbols such as the Confederate Flag, the band supposedly attempted to distance itself from using the Confederate symbol. In an interview with CNN, the question was posed on whether the distancing was purposeful or accidental. The band’s last surviving original member, Gary Rossington, answered that Lynyrd Skynyrd had seen the “KKK and skinheads and people kind of kidnapped the Dixie or Rebel flag from the Southern and the heritage of the soldiers,” and how they didn’t want their band’s display of the Confederate Flag to come off as an endorsement of hate.<sup>63</sup> As in “Sweet Home Alabama” – Lynyrd Skynyrd were unapologetically Southern but were conscious of how others see the South (and the Confederate flag). For them, distancing themselves from the Confederate flag was another moment where they had to balance the perception of those using the Confederate flag as racist with their belief (and defense) that it isn’t, that they’re a “Southern American Rock band, first and foremost.”<sup>64</sup> This did not go over well, though, with many fans becoming disgruntled, going so far as to leave negative comments about how Lynyrd Skynyrd was “denying the flag that is part of their history” and selling out to political correctness.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Contreras, “Unfurling Sweet Home Alabama.”

<sup>62</sup> Ibid

<sup>63</sup> Rossington, “‘Last of a Dyin’ Breed’”.

<sup>64</sup> Payne, “Confederate Flag in Popular Music.”

<sup>65</sup> Smith, “Comment on CNN message boards.”



Figure 11 Shows Johnny Van Zant, Lead Vocalist for Lynyrd Skynyrd. Source: (Getty Images for Nashville Rising 2010)

In response to the backlash, Lynyrd Skynyrd – and Rossington, specifically – released a revised statement clarifying the comments made during the CNN interview. Rossington backpedaled and reinforced how Lynyrd Skynyrd “are and always will be a Southern American Rock band.”<sup>66</sup> To end his statement, Gary Rossington reaffirmed the band’s support of the Confederate flag, writing specifically that it’s a symbol of “Heritage not Hate.”<sup>67</sup> (See below) At the same time, however, Rossington declined to describe slavery as a cause of the Civil War, resorting to the academically discredited “states’ rights” explanation instead.

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<sup>66</sup> Rossington, “Lynyrd Skynyrd.”

<sup>67</sup> Ibid

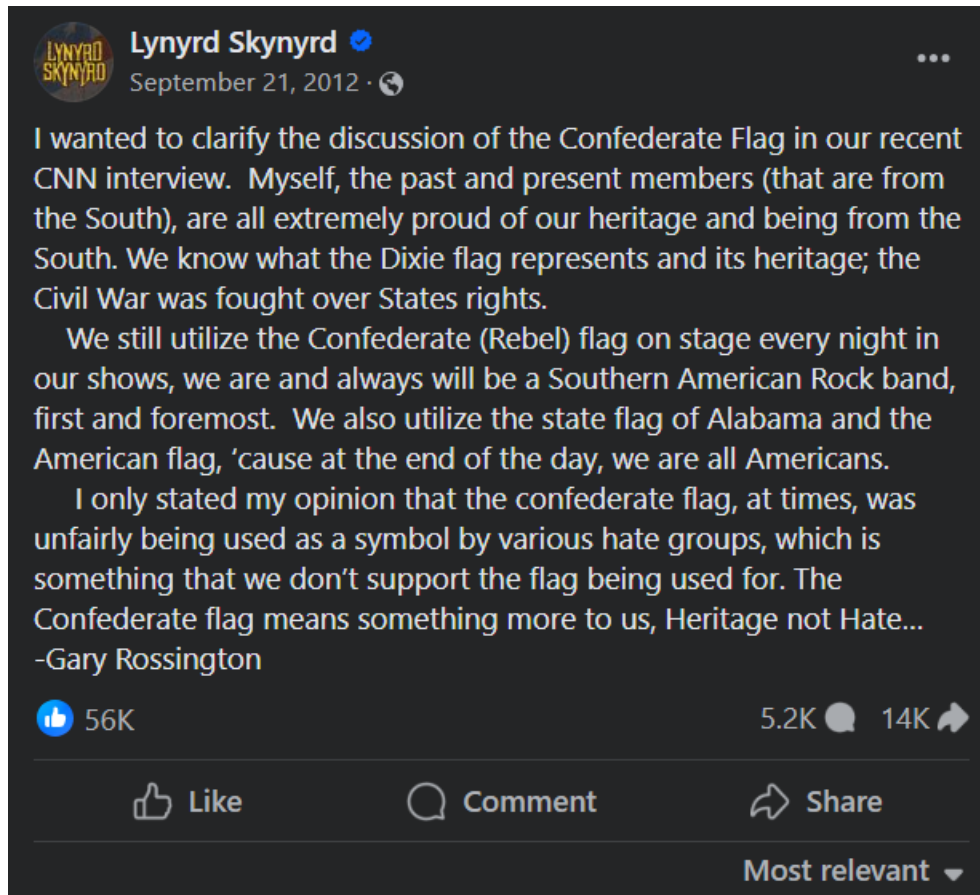


Figure 12 Shows a screen capture of Gary Rossington's statement regarding the CNN interview, posted from the official Lynyrd Skynyrd Facebook account. Source: (Rossington, Lynyrd Skynyrd 2012)

Lynyrd Skynyrd isn't the only bearer of the Confederate Flag in the music scene. Pantera (active largely in 1980s and 1990s) sold merchandise with the Confederate Flag emblazoned on it, played concerts where the Confederate Flag was projected onto the stage and décor, and even

played instruments with a Confederate Flag-esque design.



*Figure 13 Shows the band Pantera performing, surrounding by projected Confederate Flags. Source: (Giron 2016)*

When questioned by Rolling Stone about the Confederate Flag’s prominence in their band, Pantera member Phil Anselmo strongly emphasized how their inspiration for using the Flag came from Lynyrd Skynyrd, and it never symbolized anything more than that – “We weren’t confessing to any clandestine power of structure or however you assholes wanna put it these days.”<sup>68</sup> Rex Brown, the other Pantera member interviewed, emphasized that Pantera does not represent hate, race, or vitriol of the sort, claiming the band is about “quite the opposite.”<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Anselmo and Brown, “Pantera: A Wild Photo History.”

<sup>69</sup> Ibid

However, it should be noted that Phil Anselmo, in the same year, drew criticism for ending a performance with a Nazi salute and shouting “White Power.”<sup>70</sup> (See Figure 13)



Figure 14 Shows Phil Anselmo making a Nazi Salute onstage. Source: (Head 2016)

Anselmo made an apology video in which he denied any claims that he is a racist, but also insisted people should “thicken up your skin.”<sup>71</sup> This isn’t the first time something like this had happened to the singer – 1994 saw Anselmo refusing to disavow fans who had been shouting “White Power” at his performances, even saying (in 1995) that his performance “is a white thing.”<sup>72</sup> Further evidence of Anselmo’s bias comes from a side project band he is a part of – Superjoint Ritual (active since 1993). In their 2003 song “Stealing a Page or Two from Armed and Radical Pagans,” lyrics such as “no more of the coward muhammeds” and “taking no pity on the Jewish elitists” are espoused in a vitriolic manner.<sup>73</sup> While Anselmo denies being a racist,

<sup>70</sup> BBC News, “Rock band Down cancel European tour.”

<sup>71</sup> D'Souza, “Pantera shows cancelled.”

<sup>72</sup> BBC News, “Rock band Down cancel European tour.”

<sup>73</sup> Superjoint Ritual, “Genius.”

multiple instances of bigotry paired with prejudiced song lyrics provide strong evidence to at least some internal biases or profound insensitivity.

Another band, Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers, introduced the Confederate Flag in 1985 with their record “Southern Accents.” In the album, the term “Confederate” isn’t used, but the label “Rebel” is a prevalent theme. Inspired by Tom Petty’s Southern heritage, the Confederate Flag became a staple for his tour’s marketing. Eventually, the Flag became associated with Tom Petty, even after the tour had concluded. This association progressed so far that fans would wear Confederate Flag-adorned clothing at his concerts and, after a fan threw a Confederate bandana on stage, Petty stopped the show and blatantly denounced the Confederate Flag, stating how it was used solely “to illustrate a character” and how he “would prefer it if no one would ever bring a Confederate flag to our shows again.”<sup>74</sup> In short, Petty offered a markedly different reaction than Lynyrd Skynyrd had to their Confederate Flag association. However, country music singer Trace Adkins did have a response similar to Skynyrd when he faced criticism for wearing a Confederate Flag-emblazoned earpiece at the 2012 Rockefeller Center Christmas Tree Lighting.<sup>75</sup> Adkins, a member of the Sons of Confederate Veterans, remarked that – to him – the Flag represents his “Southern lineage,” and that he “did not intend offense” to those who view it as symbolizing racism.<sup>76</sup> Other artists purposely used the Flag to court controversy, an example being Kanye West’s usage of the Confederate Flag in his tour store and merchandise. While West described his use as taking ownership of the Confederate Flag – claiming “It’s my flag now” – in effort to deny the flag the oppressive power it held over African Americans as in the past (similar to how minority groups will take slurs/stereotypes and make them their own, thereby reducing

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<sup>74</sup> Krieg, “Tom Petty’s Confederate flag regret.”

<sup>75</sup> Payne, “Confederate Flag in Popular Music.”

<sup>76</sup> Ibid



the power those terms have). Others say that it's just a way for West to gain publicity at the risk of normalizing a symbol of hate.<sup>77</sup> Regardless, it shows a marked difference in the intentions behind using the Flag, especially when Kanye West outright says “the Confederate flag represented slavery in a way.”<sup>78</sup> Although these cases represent only a few of the many musicians (like Ludacris and Andre 3000) using the Confederate Flag, they illustrate a wide difference in how these influential people see the Flag and how it affects others. Most, however, firmly denied any white supremacist connection to the Confederate flag – something the Klan and Dixiecrats of the past would've never done.

#### The Confederate Flag's Guest Appearances

As popular culture made a conscious effort to distance the Confederate flag from a Southern history of white supremacy and prejudice, both the prominence and interpretation of the Confederate flag began to change. The Confederate flag was removed by many from political contexts. The goal of displaying the Confederate flag began to shift away from intimidation and massive resistance towards efforts to celebrate heritage, hence Charles Lunsford's “Heritage not Hate” slogan.

But, even though the South was changing, there remained traditionalists who continued to use the Confederate flag to represent a tangible connection to white supremacists before them.<sup>79</sup> Even Charles Lunsford, who had coined the term “Heritage not Hate,” insisted that race was integral to Confederate history – emphasizing how those who try to say the SCV was changing to

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<sup>77</sup> McLaughlin, “Kanye West co-opts Confederate flag.”

<sup>78</sup> Ibid

<sup>79</sup> Ortman, “Finding Meaning in the Flag.”

be less racialized were “full of it” - suggesting that “Heritage not Hate” was truly a dog whistle.<sup>80</sup> This idea is further supported through Lunsford’s attendance at various events hosted by white supremacist organizations (like the Council of Conservative Citizens). Additionally, one can look at the murderer of Civil Rights activist Medgar Evers in 1963. A well-known white supremacist and KKK member, Byron De La Beckwith, went free for almost forty years before a retrial managed to convict him of the crime.<sup>81</sup> However, it isn’t the delay in justice that ties in with the “Hate” side of the Confederate Flag, rather, it’s what Beckwith wore to court in 1994.



*Figure 15 Shows Byron De La Beckwith leaving the Hinds County Courthouse following his conviction. Source: (Solis 1994)*

If you look closely, you can see that Beckwith is wearing a lapel pin. Upon further inspection, this lapel pin can be seen to have a Confederate Flag design. This isn’t the only time

<sup>80</sup> Hague, Beirich and Sebesta, “The Struggle for the Sons of Confederate Veterans,” 287.

<sup>81</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Medgar Evers.”

that the Confederate Flag has made an appearance alongside violent white supremacy in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries. One of the most notorious instances of violent white supremacy in the post-Civil Rights era happened just seven years ago in Charlottesville, Virginia. The “Unite the Right” rally was a meeting on August 12<sup>th</sup> of white nationalists who met at a Charlottesville park to protest the removal of a Robert E. Lee Confederate statue. This group was met by counter-protestors, and the area soon turned violent. The violence climaxed when a white supremacist rammed his car into a crowd of counter-protestors, injuring many and killing one.<sup>82</sup> In images taken of the rally, a common item is seen.



*Figure 16 Shows the Robert E. Lee statue that was set to be removed. Source: (Katz 2017)*

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<sup>82</sup> Katz, “Clashes Over A Show Of White Nationalism.”

Figure 16 shows not just one Confederate Flag, but several. The flag isn't shown alone – various Nazi, alt-right, and white supremacist symbols are shown with it, as seen in Figure 16.



Figure 17 Shows "Unite the Right" Protestors holding Confederate Flags among Nazi Flags, white supremacist symbols, and Gadsden Flags. Source: (Crider 2017)

In 2015, a young, armed white supremacist walked into the Mother Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, was welcomed by the churchgoers, and subsequently opened fire. After a brief manhunt, the perpetrator was arrested and put to trial, where he repeated racial epithets and reaffirmed his commitment to his actions, laughing while admitting his guilt.<sup>83</sup> Both before and during the trial, Dylann Roof would cite racially charged misconceptions and beliefs that echoed those same sentiments popularized by movies like *The Birth of a Nation* – claims that African Americans were “raping [white] women and taking over the world.”<sup>84</sup> The Confederate Flag makes an appearance here, too. Figure 18 shows a picture Roof took with an all-too-familiar flag:

<sup>83</sup> ABC News, “Key moments in Charleston church shooting case.”

<sup>84</sup> Ibid



*Figure 18 Shows Dylann Roof posing with a Confederate Flag. Source: (Collins 2017)*

The understanding of the Confederate flag as a symbol of hate and white supremacy has persisted regardless of popular culture’s attempts to deracialize and depoliticize the emblem. Recognizing this, Southern states like Georgia and Mississippi that have had Confederate flags as part of their official state emblem have redesigned and removed the Battle flag from their political spaces (in 2001 and 2021 respectively).<sup>8586</sup>

What is Heritage?

The question “what is heritage” pairs with the question “what is a symbol.” In the past pages, the perception of musicians, actors, and extremists have been discussed. But what about the majority of people who fly the flag but don’t post hatred on Facebook or carry torches? The people who truly believe that “Heritage not Hate” is just a symbol of Southern roots that works well as a bumper sticker?

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<sup>85</sup> Jackson, “State Flags of Georgia.”

<sup>86</sup> Stracqualursi, “Mississippi ratifies and raises its new state flag.”

The best way to identify perspectives on the Confederate Flag and what it symbolizes is to ask, which is exactly what Jay Reeves did when interviewing Patty Howard, a 71-year-old white woman who was visiting the Stone Mountain Park in Georgia with her husband. Her response was that it symbolizes heritage, that she “[doesn’t] see it as related to slavery. To us, it just represents being from the South.”<sup>87</sup> She went on to say how they “aren’t offended by the flag, but they also don’t fly it at their home.”<sup>88</sup> Conversely, a 2015 CNN/ORC poll asked questions about various American Civil War topics, including whether or not respondents see the Confederate Flag as a symbol of racism or Southern pride. (See Figure 18)

23. Do you, yourself, see the Confederate flag more as a symbol of Southern pride or more as a symbol of racism?

	<u>Southern pride</u>	<u>Racism</u>	<u>Both equally</u>	<u>Neither</u>	<u>No opinion</u>
June 26-28, 2015					
All Americans	57%	33%	5%	5%	1%
Blacks	17%	72%	7%	4%	1%
Whites	66%	25%	3%	6%	1%

CNN/USA TODAY/GALLUP TRENDS

	<u>Southern pride</u>	<u>Racism</u>	<u>BOTH EQUALLY (vol.)</u>	<u>NEITHER (vol.)</u>	<u>No opinion</u>
2000 May 5-7	59	28	5	4	4
1992 Dec 4-6	69	22	2	3	4

Figure 19 Shows a snippet of the CNN/ORC poll questioning the perception of the Confederate Flag. Source: (ORC International 2015)

As seen in Figure 18, there is a sharp divide between whites and African Americans in how they perceive the Confederate Flag – something those who would depoliticize the flag have seemed insensitive to. For African Americans, an overwhelming majority (72%) view the flag as racist,

<sup>87</sup> Howard, “Confederate flag losing prominence.”

<sup>88</sup> Ibid

while a majority of whites consider it a representation of Southern pride.<sup>89</sup> However, an important addendum is the “trends” section below the 2015 responses. From 1992 to 2000 to 2015, as a whole, the perception of the Confederate Flag as standing for Southern pride decreases, while the view of it as racist increases.<sup>90</sup> Still, the jury is out on whether this trend will continue, as even following George Floyd’s murder and the ensuing social outcry, 35% of Americans total (and 44% of whites) still view the Confederate flag as a symbol of heritage.<sup>91</sup> Even so, it could be argued that – regardless of how many movies are made or slogans publicized – the Confederate flag could never be deracialized or depoliticized. For African Americans like Barrett Pitner, a writer for the Daily Beast, the Confederate flag (and the Heritage not Hate movement) is inherently oppressive. Pitner views the flag as a symbol of a heritage created from hate, describing how “Southern culture arose when Black Americans were not considered people” and that defenses of Confederate heritage innately exclude black voices.<sup>92</sup> Further, rapper Ludacris epitomized the Confederate flag’s meaning to African Americans in 2005 at the Vibe Music Awards when he said the flag “represents the oppression that we as African-Americans have endured for years.”<sup>93</sup>

John Coski, a historian and director at The Museum of the Confederacy, compiled a variety of articles and accounts on the Confederate Flag (and what it represented), one of which perfectly summarizes the “Heritage” perspective. This account, by a farmer and re-enactor named Lars Prillaman, elicits the difficulty that white Southerners encounter when faced with the idea of removing Confederate symbols when he says “I now feel as though I’ve hidden away my

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<sup>89</sup> ORC International, “Poll 6.”

<sup>90</sup> Ibid

<sup>91</sup> Quinnipiac University Poll, “Confederate Symbols.”

<sup>92</sup> Pitner, “‘Heritage Not Hate?’”

<sup>93</sup> Fisher, “Rappers have reappropriated the confederate flag.”

lineage in a dresser drawer.”<sup>94</sup> Furthermore, Prillaman illustrates the dichotomy that Southern whites face with regards to Southern heritage when he says “I hate the cause that they stood for, but I am fiercely proud that they stood.”<sup>95</sup> Prillaman honors the soldiers, not the cause. This sentiment is echoed by Nicole Elder Dyer, another descendant of Confederate soldiers. Dyer expresses disinterest in flying the Confederate flag or joining a heritage association – she “just want[s] to honor [her] relative’s humanity.”<sup>96</sup>

Southerners like Prillaman are perfect examples of true believers in the idea of “Heritage not Hate.” They’re not thinly veiled racists; they appear to be fully sincere when they say the flag is a symbol of their roots. But what is a symbol? After all of the emotions and beliefs and familial connections, what does the Confederate Flag mean on a historical, factual level? And, can the flag’s historical meaning be separated from its symbolic interpretation?

## Confederate Facts

Over the past thirty pages, we’ve looked at the origin of the Confederate Flag, how it’s been used with regard to the Civil Rights movement, how the Confederacy has led to racial issues in the post-Civil War Era, modern interpretations of the Flag, and more. But, with all of that said, what does the Confederate Flag symbolize on a factual, emotionless, historical level? The section following will summarize and lay out all of the information about the Confederate Flag that’s been gathered thus far, allowing for a neat conclusion about what the Flag actually means, and whether it has a place in the modern era.

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<sup>94</sup> J. M. Coski, “Embattled Banner.”

<sup>95</sup> Ibid

<sup>96</sup> Dyer, “Should We Honor Confederate Ancestors on Memorial Day?”



How the Confederate Flag has been used:

- The Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments did not end racism. Instead, groups like the Ku Klux Klan formed and, paired with social developments like *The Birth of a Nation*, created an American socioeconomic atmosphere designed to persecute African Americans.
- Groups like the Carolina Rifle Club used the Confederate Flag as a unifying symbol for people spreading hatred and racism.
- In the Civil Rights Era, the Confederate Flag was used to intimidate African Americans and hinder the cause of Civil Rights. Efforts ranged from subtle accessorizing (like lapel pins) to the outright flying of the Confederate Flag.
- The Confederate Flag was used as a representation of the Dixiecrats, a pro-segregation anti-Civil Rights political party with the sole purpose of interfering with the 1948 Presidential Election, where Civil Rights was included in the incumbent's platform.
- The South Carolinian Statehouse, in an effort to commemorate the centennial of the Civil War, raised the Confederate Flag over its dome. The flag remained until 2015, having been kept flying as a show of opposition to the Civil Rights Movement.<sup>97</sup>
- The television show *The Dukes of Hazzard* start airing with the iconic "General Lee" 1969 Dodge Charger emblazoned with the Confederate Flag on its roof. However, not once was the idea of Confederate sympathy hinted at, with the main antagonist being named after the former President of the Confederate States of America. The idea of the Confederate Flag as a "Rebel Flag" starts to emerge to illustrate resistance to generic authority figures instead of Civil Rights.

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<sup>97</sup> CBS News, "Confederate flag comes down in S.C."

- In the post-Civil Rights Era, the Confederate Flag found a new purpose as a symbol of Southern heritage, with music groups like Lynyrd Skynyrd and Tom Petty using the Flag to represent Southern roots.
- A resurgence in alt-right, neo-Nazi, and racist movements sees the increase in Confederate Flag usage as a means of intimidation.
- Armed white supremacists using racial epithets commit mass shootings and other violent crimes. Some were seen directly associated with the Confederate Flag.

How the Confederate Flag has been interpreted in the modern era:

- White and Black Americans are split on whether the Confederate Flag is a symbol of racism or Southern pride.
- The term “Heritage not Hate” starts to be used by the Sons of Confederate Veterans in the early 1990s as a defense of the preservation of Confederate monuments and Flag display. This movement, in addition to celebrating Southern heritage, insists, however, on the century-old Lost Cause tenet that the American Civil War was not fought over slavery, but over State’s Rights, Northern overreach, and a plethora of other causes.<sup>98</sup>

Over 150 years have passed since Robert E. Lee signed his surrender at Appomattox Courthouse. However, discrimination and persecution of African Americans did not cease. Rather, they merely became shrouded in legislation. No matter how many laws are passed to try and create legal equality – and there have been a number – the scars of slavery still remain on the United States, African Americans especially. Symbols of this era, the Confederate Flag specifically, can be easily tied to one’s Southern heritage. However, it’s important to understand

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<sup>98</sup> Schwieder, “Why Southern Men Fought.”

the heritage being celebrated. The atrocities of chattel slavery cannot be overlooked because a distant ancestor fought in the Civil War. There has to be a compromise, a “happy medium” between venerating one’s ancestors and having compassion for someone whose ancestors were taken advantage of. Compassion and education are the only ways these scars can begin to heal.

Tom Petty, when interviewed by CNN about his usage (which he regretted) of the Confederate Flag, describes how people “aren’t stopping to think how [the Confederate Flag] looks to a black person.”<sup>99</sup> Although having the compassion to acknowledge a symbol’s hurtful history is important, it isn’t a “cure-all.” It doesn’t solve fundamental problems in the United States like voter disenfranchisement, for-profit prisons, police brutality, or any of the other issues that stem from slavery and the intense prejudices that accompanied it.<sup>100</sup> Education, however, can. Education is what helps people improve their status in the world, get into positions of power, and make functional change. Education and compassion give people the tools to navigate a complex world with a complex history. It lets people revere their ancestors without hurting others in the process. And, it can help save lives. One of the most frightening aspects of the people who killed in the name of white supremacy is their age. Dylann Roof was 21. James Fields Jr. (who killed a counter-protestor with his car during the “Unite the Right” rally) was 22.<sup>101</sup> Both were led down alt-right rabbit holes of misinformation and miseducation that radicalized and drove them to violence against innocents. It’s impossible to say if anything could have stopped them, but the goal of compassionate and educational efforts is to at least try.

In finality, what is the Confederate Flag? Heritage? Or Hate? In the end, icons like the Confederate Flag are just objects. They become symbols when we attach meanings to them. As

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<sup>99</sup> Krieg, “Tom Petty’s Confederate flag regret.”

<sup>100</sup> J. M. Coski, “Embattled Banner.”

<sup>101</sup> Office of Public Affairs, “Ohio Man Sentenced to Life in Prison.”

John Coski states, “Trying to reduce the flag to a single meaning distorts the flag’s history and ignores the very real influence that history has had on perceptions and meanings.”<sup>102</sup>

Unquestionably, the Confederate Flag is hurtful. However, to many, it’s also a symbol of identity. Ideas of rebelliousness, Southern roots, and ancestral history clash with feelings of pain, disenfranchisement, and slavery. And, for each person, these feelings may be intermixed, problematic, or – above all – difficult to process. Everyone is different in what they believe, but through compassion, education, and an acknowledgement of what the Confederate Flag represents – from Southern rebelliousness to slavery – a genuine conversation can be had. A conversation not just about some fabric on a stick, but about finding a symbol that celebrates the South without excluding the black southerners whose ancestors made the region so unique.

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