

The Controversy Behind the Confederate Flag

What emerged as the rebel flag

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USPA NEWS - First created by William Porcher Miles, himself a House of Representative member from South Carolina until succession, he chaired the origination committee, and although his "bar and stripes" model was rejected as a national choice...

The American Civil War raged for four long years, from 1861 to 1865 and simply put, pitted the north, loyal to the Union and in opposition to slavery, against southern states, known as the Confederacy, who were pro-slavery. What began in succession from the Union left thirteen former states to effectively create a separate government, a separate constitution and symbolically its own flag. What emerged as the rebel flag of a hastily assembled confederacy some 160 years ago, today is adorned by some as a token of southern pride, but equally despised by others as a living symbol of slavery, white supremacy and racial injustice. First created by William Porcher Miles, himself a House of Representative member from South Carolina until succession, he chaired the origination committee, and although his "bar and stripes" model was rejected as a national choice, it did end up being adopted as a war flag by Robert E. Lee and his Army of Northern Virginia, the main military force of the Confederate States, and eventually the preeminent symbol of the confederacy and a southern symbol of national identity.

After the Civil War, veterans were the ones mostly using the Confederate flag at events that commemorated fallen soldiers. By the 1940's it began to appear in different circumstances not related to the Civil War, but at university games. The decade culminated in the flag being resurrected by so called southern Dixiecrats who's members of a southern contingent paraded it around the Democratic National Convention in opposition to President Truman's reelection and his decision to desegregate the military. Throughout the 1950s, and the pivotal 1960's the confederate battle flag represented those who opposed not just a political decision but the growing civil rights movement and other social issues throughout the south. Even after segregation and all the strives toward equality in America, the flag remains a physical representation for people throughout the south who advocate for a broad interpretation of state rights over Federal interference, and as excuse to rebel against authority in general.

Today people that support the flag face some type of time orientation with some values placed in the past. Organizations like the Daughters of the Confederacy and the Sons of Confederate Veterans continue to embrace the flag as a culturally based symbol, inherited as a kind of heirloom of culture transmitted from generation to generation, but the flag for the masses is instead a popular icon of white supremacists representing the continuum of the darkest periods of United States history- slavery, oppression and overt prejudice against African Americans. The battle to remove the Confederate flag from public display on government property started in the 1960's with marches, protests and boycotts and by the 1990's lawsuits were beginning to turn in favor of removing the flag from display. Public opinion had begun to slowly change, and with continued momentum, the debate entered in the 21st century.

By 2000 it was clear that more Americans were beginning to oppose the public display of the Confederate flag, arguing that it did not matter whether well-intentioned defenders of the flag regarded it as a symbol of their heritage or as a right of southern states since its very history honored slavery, segregation and inequality. What wasn't clear was whether simply displaying a flag, violated an individual's 14th Amendment rights, or if removing it violated the 1st Amendment rights of those who put it in public view in the first place. What was understood however was that certain cultural patterns were being exposed, while other extolled in the highest courts of the land.

During that same watershed year, the confederate flag was removed from high atop the statehouse dome in South Carolina, but a legislative compromise reinstated on Capitol grounds, ten feet from a Confederate monument. There the issue simmered until 2015 when a 21-year-old self-described white segregationist with deep racist beliefs, who posed and gleefully gesturing in pictures with the Confederate flag, shot and killed nine people in a black church in Charleston. In his manifesto he chillingly wrote that he "chose Charleston because it is the most historic city in my state, and at one time had the highest ratio of blacks to Whites in the country."^[2] Under mounting pressure, then Governor Nicky Haley, who once said lamented that the killer, Dylan Roof had "hijacked a flag that represented service, sacrifice and heritage", had the flag permanently removed from the Capitol grounds.

A 2015 study conducted by Politico asked 2,000 likely voters where they stood on displaying the flag and the results of the study

describe that 54% felt the flag was a symbol of Southern pride while 36% called it racist. The divide was strongest not on racial identity, but by political party with a huge drop in support from Democrats but a strengthening number of Republic in favor of the flag.

In 2016, California congressman Jared Huffman, authored a bill in the U.S. House of Representatives to ban the display Confederate flags on flagpoles at Veteran Administration cemeteries calling the Confederate flag representative of "racism, slavery and division." It passed despite Republican opposition by a 265-159 vote. Many political leaders recognized that even if the flag was not intended to offend, many citizens considered it as such. Former President Barack Obama for example believes that flag "belongs in a museum", but current U.S. President, Donald Trump choses to defend the idea of the Confederate flag, calling it a source of pride for people who love the South.

Still this year, Mississippi made it official by voting to replace the last state flag in American that had the iconic cross of the Confederate battle flag, with a completely new look with the unveiling of its new state flag which prominently display a Magnolia blossom this past November 5th, Mississippi voters sent a message to the world "that we are moving forward together" said former State Supreme Court justice Reuben Anderson. And in that spirit, we find the hope of a new beginning where painful reminders of the past are not forgotten, but instead used to teach lessons. While it is not easy to see the battle between a flag as just as a symbol of regional pride, or just a racially charged symbol of hate perhaps the words of former Senator John McCain of Arizona, a warrior and a peacemaker, might ring true. "We make the future better than the past. We don't hide from history, we make history!"

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