

## Confederate flag belongs in museum

The “Stars and Bars,” the flag of the Confederate States of America, battle flag is a symbol of causes. The first of these, the Civil War (1861-65) to preserve states’ rights (specifically, the right to permit buying, selling, owning, and working human beings as unpaid chattel), was advocated by some as an absolute necessity, and opposed by others as an absolute disgrace. Proponents of the cause announced their secession from the United States, punctuating it with gunfire, and flying the Stars and Bars Confederate battle flag as their symbol of proud independence.

But in the end, the opponents won—sort of. Slavery was abolished, secession defeated, the Confederacy dissolved, its flag retired. But malicious resentment festered. Segregation and Jim Crow laws denied blacks many rights whites considered their birthright. Nominally emancipated slaves, already conditioned to imposed hardship and denial of opportunity, submitted to the double standard, not to “take their natural place,” but simply to survive a system that would rather see them dead than as equals. By various schemes, they and their children were denied education, well paying jobs, decent housing, equal justice, the right to vote, even common courtesy. Any who dared speak spoke out against the system were quickly silenced—by beating, burning, dragging, shooting, lynching, or threats of such to their families—often with the assent of local and state authorities.

However, the children and grandchildren of former slaves and could still defend and die for “their” country in subsequent wars, and many did so with valor and heroism. Yet upon returning to civilian life, these heroes were expected to resume “their place” as lower-class citizens—or else.

After World War II, though, this began to change. Some African Americans, denied full

citizenship despite serving well and honorably, began a movement to win for themselves the same civil rights others enjoyed—with or without those others’ consent. It was slow going at first, but it gradually picked up momentum and support, even in the nation’s highest offices.

In the early 1960s, some Southern states, still firmly under all-white control despite burgeoning black populations, hauled out their mothballed Stars and Bars, Confederate battle flag to fly over public buildings in defiance of civil rights and integration. ¶The symbol of the losing side in a conflict fought a century earlier was resurrected as the emblem of additional causes: of white supremacy, and of states’ rights to deny freedom to anyone—causes of intolerance and injustice.

And so it has remained until 2015, except that those whose rights it opposes are no longer only African-Americans, but also Hispanic-Americans, Asian-Americans, and even Native Americans. Plus Jews, Catholics, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, intellectuals, the disabled, and anyone else deemed “different.” Fear and hatred have devoured any shred of pride the flag might once have claimed.

Yes, the Stars and Bars symbolizes heritage, history, and tradition—but only of oppression and defeat, not of opportunity and progress. It’s a relic of an era that confused complexion with virtue, and arrogance with wisdom. It should be preserved, along with the swastika and the hammer and sickle, as reminders of how civilized people ought not to do things. While it shouldn’t be banned from private use, its the rightful public place for the Confederate [sic] flag is in a museum of horrors and lost causes, not flying over any public facility in a nation that professes liberty and justice for all.

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