



WHOSE HERITAGE?

PUBLIC SYMBOLS OF THE CONFEDERACY

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ABOUT THE SOUTHERN POVERTY LAW CENTER

The Southern Poverty Law Center, based in Montgomery, Ala., is a nonprofit civil rights organization founded in 1971 and dedicated to fighting hate and bigotry, and to seeking justice for the most vulnerable members of society.

For more information about
THE SOUTHERN POVERTY LAW CENTER

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“The Confederate flag is coming to mean something to everybody now. It means the southern cause. It means the heart throbs of the people of the South. It is becoming to be the symbol of the white race and the cause of the white people. The Confederate flag means segregation.”

—ROY V. HARRIS, EDITOR OF AUGUSTA COURIER, 1951

“[I]t should have never been there. These grounds are a place that everybody should feel a part of. What I realized now more than ever is people were driving by and felt hurt and pain.”

—SOUTH CAROLINA GOV. NIKKI HALEY, JULY 10, 2015, ON
THE CONFEDERATE BATTLE FLAG ON THE STATE HOUSE GROUNDS IN COLUMBIA

COMMUNITY ACTION GUIDE

Across the South, Americans of all races, ethnicities and creeds are asking why governmental bodies in a democracy based on the promise of equality should display symbols so closely associated with the bondage and oppression of African Americans.

It's a movement that has risen from the ground up — one driven by local activists and civic leaders raising questions and making decisions about their values and the kind of community they want to be.

And their voices are being heard in city after city.

They're being heard in places like Mobile, Alabama, where city officials voted to remove the Confederate flag from the city's seal.

In places like Gainesville, Florida, where a Confederate statue was moved to a museum.

And in places like Stuart, Virginia, where a judge removed a portrait of the city's namesake — Confederate General J.E.B. Stuart — from his courtroom. For many people, this debate may be

their first experience in local activism. The following guide provides tools for building a campaign, including:

- Step-by-step instructions for organizing a campaign;
- Advice for countering objections to the removal of a symbol; and
- Useful information about the Confederacy and its symbols.

Removing offensive Confederate symbols may be a long and difficult task. But whether successful or not, activists can take important steps toward building the kind of community where the values of equal justice and equal opportunity are shared by all.

What you can do in your community

Removing symbols of the Confederacy from public spaces in your community can be daunting, but with proper planning, you can launch a successful campaign.

Research the symbol

It's important to find out the history of the symbol in your community. The popular lore about why the symbol is displayed may not reflect the true history. Even historical markers and brochures for some displays may not accurately tell the story. This means taking the time to conduct research online, at the library or state archives.

Keep the following tips and questions in mind:

- Go to records, such as newspaper reports, to get a better understanding of the history — and the motivation — behind the display of the symbol.
- If the symbol is the name of a figure from the Confederacy, research that person's history. Document why their legacy doesn't reflect the values of the community.
- Find out when the symbol was first displayed in your community. Many Confederate symbols began appearing after the U.S. Supreme Court's school desegregation ruling in 1954 and continued to appear in the 1960s to protest the civil rights movement.

Confederate battle flags were raised on government property throughout the South to commemorate the Civil War centennial during the 1960s. If that's why the flag is displayed on government property in your community, don't let it stop your efforts. Find out why it continues to fly decades after the commemoration.

Map the path to change

Find out what governmental body is responsible for overseeing or maintaining the display. If the symbol is the name of a city park, for example, the city council and mayor would be the parties to contact. If it is a school name, the local school board would be the appropriate entity. An online search or call to your city hall, county courthouse or state legislature can point you in the right direction.

Once you've determined the pertinent governmental body, ask about the process for removing the symbol. You might, for example, need to appear before your city council or county commission, or you might need to persuade your state legislator to sponsor a bill. A clear understanding of the process is crucial for a successful effort.

Organize and raise awareness

After you conduct the research, it's important to build public support. Policymakers may be hesitant to remove the symbol if they believe there is no public demand for such action or that it will raise the ire of constituents. Demonstrating public support for the symbol's removal can overcome this obstacle.

Here are ways to build support for your effort:

IDENTIFY COMMUNITY GROUPS AND LEADERS that may support your effort. Enlisting these groups can quickly amplify your campaign. These groups can contact their members and can sign on to a letter to the appropriate governmental body, for example.

WRITE LETTERS TO THE EDITOR of your local newspaper. If you have already enlisted civic groups in your cause, encourage each group to send its own letter to the local newspaper to show broad support.

CONTACT LOCAL MEDIA. Try to get the news media in your community to cover your campaign. This can be done by calling your local newspaper, television station or radio station. Ask to speak to an assignment editor. Explain your campaign, but be brief and to the point. Ask for the name and contact information of someone to whom you can email a press release or other information updating them on the campaign's progress. Maintain a list of local media contacts, with names, phone numbers and email addresses.

BUILD AN EMAIL LIST OF SUPPORTERS. You can use this list to send regular updates about the campaign, to send alerts about meetings or rallies, and to have discussions about strategies.

USE SOCIAL MEDIA to raise awareness. Don't stop with just introducing the topic to people. Give them a reason to follow you on social media. Update them with your progress. Set up a Facebook page and use it and other social media outlets such as Twitter to regularly provide facts from your research that show why this symbol should be removed. Share success stories from other communities or other news related to your campaign.

AN ONLINE PETITION can help generate interest. There are a variety of websites to help you create a petition, including petitions.moveon.org. As it receives signatures, update your social media followers, and mention the signatures in your letter to the editor and when you speak with officials and potential supporters.

ORGANIZE A RALLY or other peaceful demonstration to raise awareness and generate media interest. Designate a spokesperson to speak at the event and to any media. Be sure to alert your local news media with information about the time and place, and be conscious of the timing so it occurs far enough in advance of the noon or evening TV news programs to be included in the broadcast. Try to make your event visually interesting (signs and banners can help) so that newspaper photographers and TV camera people will be able to capture compelling images that will make it more likely your event will make the news.

CONTACT POLICYMAKERS to support your effort. These can be policymakers with the governmental body that can remove the symbol as well as other influential officials. Call the office of the appropriate public official to arrange a meeting. Use your research to clearly explain why the symbol should be removed. You might describe how it's a divisive symbol rooted in a history of slavery and racism. Regardless of the response, be courteous and thank them for taking the time to meet with you.

Officially make your case

The process for removing the Confederate symbol from your community may require you — or a spokesperson for your effort — to speak before a governmental body. Be prepared for this possibility.

Use your research as the basis for a clear, concise and respectful presentation. Do not allow hecklers or opponents to rattle you or throw you off your prepared remarks. Stick to your points.

But you should be prepared for other speakers — and policymakers — to oppose your effort. Your presentation should include historical facts to counter objections. Describe how the display was racially motivated or how it represents values that have no place in the community today. The display may be part of an area's history, but you should emphasize that the community must answer the question, "Who are we as a community today?" Ask what message the display sends to visitors and residents.

Responding to Objections and Myths

When you begin your campaign, you will likely encounter opposition. In fact, you may encounter very vocal, even hostile, opposition. You should be prepared to respond in a calm, respectful manner that shows you have given thoughtful consideration to the issue, and have taken into account the sentiments of people opposing your effort.

The following are common claims used to defend public displays of Confederate symbols. Sample responses you can use and adapt for your campaign are provided. Please keep in mind that this list is not all-inclusive. Every campaign and each community is unique.

As you prepare your campaign, brainstorm more objections that may be raised. Use the Internet to research campaigns in other communities. Study the statements made by critics of those efforts. How did those campaigns respond? How would you have responded?

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CLAIM: It's heritage not hate.

RESPONSE: While some people see Confederate symbols as emblems of Southern pride and heritage, the question must be asked: Whose heritage?

The "heritage, not hate" argument ignores the near-universal heritage of African Americans who were enslaved by the millions in the South and later subjected to brutal oppression under the white supremacist regime of Jim Crow. Our democracy is based on equality under the law, and public entities should not prominently display symbols that undermine that concept and alienate an entire segment of the population.

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CLAIM: The Confederate battle flag is not racist. Hate groups hijacked the flag, causing people to associate it with racism.

RESPONSE: Hate groups didn't transform the flag into a symbol of white supremacy. The Confederacy was founded on the very idea of white supremacy, and soldiers who served under its banner — regardless of their individual honor or motives — fought to defend the institution of slavery. In his "Cornerstone Speech," the vice president of the Confederacy, Alexander Stephens, noted that the new government's cornerstone rested "upon the great truth that the negro is not equal to the white man."

CLAIM: The Civil War wasn't about slavery. It was about states' rights.

RESPONSE: The desire to preserve slavery was the cause for secession. Secession documents for several states cite slavery as their reason for leaving the Union. The vice president of the Confederacy, Alexander Stephens, said the country was founded on the belief that all men *are not* created equal, but that slavery is the "natural and normal condition" of African Americans. It doesn't get any clearer than that.

CLAIM: Slaves fought for the Confederacy, which proves the Civil War wasn't about slavery.

RESPONSE: For most of the war, the Confederacy did not allow enslaved men to serve. It changed its policy only in the final weeks of the war — a time when it desperately needed men. Few joined voluntarily.

CLAIM: We shouldn't remove things just because someone may be offended. What about the First Amendment's guarantee of freedom of expression? If we remove this symbol, what's next?

RESPONSE: Individual citizens still have the right to fly a Confederate flag — even if it offends people. That is their First Amendment right. But our government, which is supposed to serve *all citizens*, shouldn't endorse a symbol that represents the oppression of a group of its citizens. This is not a freedom-of-expression issue.

CLAIM: Slavery existed under the American flag, too. Does that mean we should take it down?

RESPONSE: There's no denying that slavery existed under the U.S. flag. There is, however, a key difference: The U.S. flag represents a country that ultimately freed its slaves. The Confederate flag represents a government founded to preserve slavery.

CLAIM: There are great figures in American history who were not members of the Confederacy but were slave owners. Should we tear down statues and other monuments to them?

RESPONSE: No. The difference is that, unlike the Confederacy, those historical figures are not generally being honored *because* of things so closely associated with white supremacy and oppression.

CLAIM: Removing this Confederate symbol is erasing history in the name of political correctness.

RESPONSE: This is not an attempt to erase history. It is an effort to end the government's endorsement of a symbol that has always represented the oppression of an entire race. These historical symbols belong in museums and other educational settings where people can see them and learn the full history of slavery, the Confederacy, the Civil War and Jim Crow.

Questions to help frame the debate

How can people of color be confident of equitable treatment if their local city hall or county courthouse pays homage to the Confederacy?

How can we as a nation heal deeply engrained racial divisions when signs of this romance with the "Lost Cause" speckle urban and rural landscapes across the South?

How can we address the inequalities of today when government officials won't acknowledge the raw and brutal racism endorsed by the Confederacy 150 years ago?

CLAIM: This symbol can't be racist because I want to keep it and I'm not racist.

RESPONSE: Our personal beliefs can't change the history of the Confederacy, which was founded upon a belief in white supremacy — nor can they change the effect a symbol has on others.

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CLAIM: This [school/team/mascot] has long been named after a Confederate leader. There's no need to change it. It's just part of the community.

RESPONSE: The students are as much a part of this community as this name. It sends the wrong message to these students — especially students of color — when their school honors someone loyal to a government founded on the idea that one group of people is inherently superior to another and should be able to enslave them. It also sends the wrong message about our community.

[If applicable to your school] We should look not only at the history of the school's namesake, but our community's history. This school was not named shortly after the Civil War. It was named during the civil rights movement when many schools in this country were named after Confederate leaders as a protest against school desegregation. Our community shouldn't continue sending this message.

CLAIM: My ancestor bravely served the Confederacy in the Civil War. He didn't own slaves. He was just defending his home. Removing this symbol disrespects him and the ancestors of others in this community.

RESPONSE: This issue isn't about the personal motivations of one soldier. It is clear that *as a government*, the Confederacy endorsed slavery and white supremacy. It can be found in the Confederate Constitution and in statements of the Confederacy's leadership. And it can be found in the secession documents of the states. This symbol represents *the Confederate government*, which endorsed these beliefs.

It is worth noting that many Confederate veterans attended "Blue and Gray" reunions after the Civil War. These reunions brought veterans from both sides of the war together for reconciliation and celebration of their collective identity *as Americans*. »

The Confederacy: In its Own Words

The desire to preserve slavery was the cause for secession by Southern states. But 150 years after the war, many continue to cling to myths. As recently as 2011, 48 percent of Americans in a Pew Research Center survey cited states' rights as the reason for the war, compared to 38 percent citing slavery. This finding is all the more astonishing because a review of statements and documents by Confederate leaders makes their intentions clear. The following is a sample:

"We hold as undeniable truths that the governments of the various States, and of the confederacy itself, were established exclusively by the white race, for themselves and their posterity; that the African race had no agency in their establishment; that they were rightfully held and regarded as an inferior and dependent race, and in that condition only could their existence in this country be rendered beneficial or tolerable."

TEXAS DECLARATION OF CAUSES FOR SECESSION, FEBRUARY 2, 1861

"Our position is thoroughly identified with the institution of slavery — the greatest material interest of the world."

MISSISSIPPI DECLARATION OF CAUSES FOR SECESSION

"They assume that the negro is equal, and hence conclude that he is entitled to equal privileges and rights with the white man. If their premises were correct, their conclusions would be logical and just but their premise being wrong, their whole argument fails."

ALEXANDER H. STEPHENS, VICE PRESIDENT OF THE CONFEDERACY
CORNERSTONE SPEECH, MARCH 21, 1861

"Our new government is founded upon ... the great truth that the negro is not equal to the white man; that slavery subordination to the superior race is his natural and normal condition."

ALEXANDER H. STEPHENS, VICE PRESIDENT OF THE CONFEDERACY
CORNERSTONE SPEECH, MARCH 21, 1861

"A geographical line has been drawn across the Union, and all the States north of that line have united in the election of a man to the high office of President of the United States, whose opinions and purposes are hostile to slavery."

SOUTH CAROLINA DECLARATION OF CAUSES FOR SECESSION,
DECEMBER 24, 1860