

CONFEDERATE FLAG

From someone who teaches AP US History:

If you are confused as to why so many Americans are defending the confederate flag, monuments, and statues right now, I put together a quick Q&A, with questions from a hypothetical person with misconceptions and answers from my perspective as an AP U.S. History Teacher:

Q: What did the Confederacy stand for?

A: Rather than interpreting, let's go directly to the words of the Confederacy's Vice President, Alexander Stephens. In his "Cornerstone Speech" on March 21, 1861, he stated "The Constitution... rested upon the equality of races. This was an error. Our new government is founded upon exactly the opposite idea; its foundations are laid, its corner-stone rests, 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. This, our new government, is the first, in the history of the world, based upon this great physical, philosophical, and moral truth."

Q: But people keep saying heritage, not hate! They think the purpose of the flags and monuments are to honor confederate soldiers, right?

A: The vast majority of confederate flags flying over government buildings in the south were first put up in the 1960's during the Civil Rights Movement. So for the first hundred years after the Civil War ended, while relatives of those who fought in it were still alive, the confederate flag wasn't much of a symbol at all. But when Martin Luther King, Jr. and John Lewis were marching on Washington to get the Civil Rights Act (1964) and Voting Rights Act (1965) passed, leaders in the south felt compelled to fly confederate flags and put up monuments to honor people who had no living family members and had fought in a war that ended a century ago. Their purpose in doing this was to exhibit their displeasure with black people fighting for basic human rights that were guaranteed to them in the 14th and 15th Amendments but being withheld by racist policies and practices.

Q: But if we take down confederate statues and monuments, how will we teach about and remember the past?

A: Monuments and statues pose little educational relevance, whereas museums, the rightful place for Confederate paraphernalia, can provide more educational opportunities for citizens to learn about our country's history. The Civil War is important to learn about, and will always loom large in social studies curriculum. Removing monuments from public places and putting them in museums also allows us to avoid celebrating and honoring people who believed that tens of millions of black Americans should be legal property.

Q: But what if the Confederate flag symbol means something different to me?

A: Individuals aren't able to change the meaning of symbols that have been defined by history. When I hang a Bucs flag outside my house, to me, the Bucs might represent the best team in the NFL, but to the outside world, they represent an awful NFL team, since they haven't won a playoff game in 18 years. I can't change that meaning for everyone who drives by my house because it has been established for the whole world to see. If a Confederate flag stands for generic rebellion or southern pride to you, your personal interpretation forfeits any meaning once you display it publicly, as its meaning takes on the meaning it earned when a failed regime killed hundreds of thousands of Americans in an attempt to destroy America and keep black people enslaved forever.

Q: But my uncle posted a meme that said the Civil War/Confederacy was about state's rights and not slavery?

A: "A state's right to what?" - John Green

Q: Everyone is offended about everything these days. Should we take everything down that offends anyone?

A: The Confederacy literally existed to go against the Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, and the idea that black people are human beings that deserve to live freely. If that doesn't upset or offend you, you are un-American.

Q: Taking these down goes against the First Amendment and freedom of speech, right?

A: No. Anyone can do whatever they want on their private property, on their social media, etc. Taking these down in public, or having private corporations like NASCAR ban them on their properties, has literally nothing to do with the Bill of Rights.

Q: How can people claim to be patriotic while supporting a flag that stood for a group of insurgent failures who tried to permanently destroy America and killed 300,000 Americans in the process?

A: No clue.

Q: So if I made a confederate flag my profile picture, or put a confederate bumper sticker on my car, what am I declaring to my friends, family, and the world?

A: That you support the Confederacy. To recap, the Confederacy stands for: slavery, white supremacy, treason, failure, and a desire to permanently destroy Selective history as it supports white supremacy.

It's no accident that:

You learned about Helen Keller instead of W.E.B. DuBois

You learned about the Watts and L.A. Riots, but not Tulsa or Wilmington.

You learned that George Washington's dentures were made from wood, rather than the teeth from slaves.

You learned about black ghettos, but not about Black Wall Street.

You learned about the New Deal, but not "red lining."

You learned about Tommie Smith's fist in the air at the 1968 Olympics, but not that he was sent home the next day and stripped of his medals.

You learned about "black crime," but white criminals were never lumped together and discussed in terms of their race.

You learned about "states rights" as the cause of the Civil War, but not that slavery was mentioned 80 times in the articles of secession.

Privilege is having history rewritten so that you don't have to acknowledge uncomfortable facts.

Racism is perpetuated by people who refuse to learn or acknowledge this reality.

You have a choice. - Jim Golden

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