

Not All Southerners Fly the Confederate Flag

I am a son of the South. I was born in Louisiana, spent my childhood in Alabama and attended high school in the suburbs of Atlanta. I grew up eating grits, drinking sweet iced tea and attending big family reunions where the old people sat on wide porches and fanned themselves while the kids ran barefoot in the Georgia red clay.

I'm not apologizing for my upbringing, or for my Southern drawl. There are so many things I love about Southern culture: the warm hospitality, the fact that strangers say, "Hey!" to each other on the street, the way little kids politely say, "Yes, Ma'am" and "No, Sir" to their elders, and of course the fried chicken, cornbread, biscuits, gravy, barbecue, slow-cooked collard greens and sweet potato pie—foods that were invented in the South and made famous at big church dinners.

But I want to make something clear to all my friends who might be tempted to stereotype: In all my years I never saw a Confederate flag in my house, never saw a Confederate decal on my dad's car and never once heard anyone in my family defend slavery, segregation or racism. Even though I had a great-great-great-great grandfather who died in the Civil War—in the Battle of Kennesaw—no one in my family ever told me I should honor that legacy.

For me, the Confederate flag is an ugly reminder of the South's biggest mistake. It is nothing to be proud of. The Confederate flag is something that should be put in a museum to warn us that people sometimes collectively practice injustice.

To a black person, the Confederate flag is a threat. It says: "We don't want you here." It has no business flying on any

government property. And if you put it on your lawn or on the back of your truck, you are sending a message of hate.

I am sure the reason no one in my family flew a Confederate flag or defended a “Southern heritage” viewpoint was because we were Christians, and we knew that Christianity and racism are polar opposites. Some of my ancestors were Methodist preachers who advocated for the abolishment of slavery long before the Civil War.

I grew up knowing that it was a sin to say the N-word, and I never heard my parents say it, not even once. When schools were desegregated when I was a teenager, I made black friends, discovered black music and tried to learn every dance I saw on *Soul Train* on Saturday afternoons. I was never afraid of black culture; I embraced it.

And after I was filled with the Holy Spirit at age 18 (on Southern Baptist property, mind you), I began to visit black churches and discovered the richness of the black Pentecostal experience. Today I feel more at home in some black churches than I do in some white ones. Some of my closest friends are black (both Northerners and Southerners) and they helped me celebrate when my oldest daughter adopted a baby from Africa two years ago.

Today, my black grandson (who bears my name) lives in South Carolina—only a few hours from Charleston, where nine brave black Christians were shot and killed on June 17 while they were having a Bible study at Emanuel . Church. The gunman, 21-year-old Dylann Roof, is a troubled white kid who apparently got his inspiration from white supremacist teachings.

Roof recently posted a photo of himself on his web site waving a Confederate flag—prompting protesters and South Carolina legislators to call for the removal of the flag from state capitol property. When I heard Gov. Nikki Haley call for the flag to come down this week, I joined a chorus of Southerners

who said, in unison, “Why hasn’t it already been mothballed?”

Some people may protest, saying, “It’s only a flag,” or “It only represents our heritage.” I disagree. The Confederate flag is an idol. It represents the evil force of racial hatred that has torn this country apart for more than a century and is still wreaking havoc on our cities today. If this symbol has the power to inspire a young man to blow away nine people with a 45-caliber Glock handgun, it may inspire others to commit even worse acts of terror.

Take the flag down. Put it in a museum and remind everyone who sees it that the South lost the Civil War because God is on the side of those who fight for justice.

J. Lee Grady is the former editor of Charisma. You can follow him on Twitter @leegrady. He is the author of *The Truth Sets Women Free* and other books. You can learn more about his ministry, *The Mordecai Project*, at .