

The Confederate Flag: A Symbol of Heritage or Reminder of Hate?

Is the Confederate flag a symbol of states' rights? Or is it a symbol of slavery, racial prejudice, and hatred?

James M. Coski is the historian at the Museum of the Confederacy in Richmond, Virginia and author of a definitive work on the Confederate flag. According to Coski, defenders of the flag often claim that the Confederacy did not exist to defend or preserve slavery, and that Confederate soldiers fought to defend their homes and land from what they perceived to be aggression by northern states. Thus a clothing company whose logo contains the flag recently claimed that it represents "heritage, not hate." And a flag defender recently declared on CNN that it is merely a "memorial to our ancestors."

However, Coski says there's more to the story. He cites Civil War Southern writers and soldiers who clearly stated that the war was also about slavery. One such editor noted in 1864: "WE ARE FIGHTING FOR INDEPENDENCE THAT OUR GREAT AND NECESSARY DOMESTIC INSTITUTION OF SLAVERY SHALL BE PRESERVED, and for the preservation of other institutions of which slavery is the groundwork."

According to Coski, "African-American slavery was inextricably intertwined with white southerners' defense of their own constitutional liberties and with nearly every other facet of southern life." He concludes: "Descendants of the Confederates are not wrong to believe that the flag symbolized defense of constitutional liberties and resistance to invasion by military forces determined to crush an experiment in nationhood. But they are wrong to believe that this

interpretation of the flag's meaning can be separated from the defense of slavery."

In a culture which views truth as opinion, controversy will erupt whenever opinions conflict. But the Confederate flag issue is about more than opinion. It is a fact of Civil War history that the flag was originally associated with the institution of chattel slavery. And it is a fact of recent history that the flag continues to signify racism for many.

Commentator Russell Moore: in today's culture, the flag "represents a defiance against abolition and against civil rights. The symbol was used to enslave the little brothers and sisters of Jesus, to bomb little girls in church buildings, to terrorize preachers of the gospel and their families with burning crosses on front lawns by night." Moore concludes, "That sort of symbolism is out of step with the justice of Jesus Christ," and calls on South Carolina to "take down that flag."

I agree. I hope South Carolina removes the Confederate flag from its Capitol grounds, and Mississippi removes the emblem from its state flag, and other corporations follow the lead of Wal-Mart and Sears in removing Confederate flag merchandise from their stores. But I'm afraid that the rest of us will then think this issue is now resolved. I'm afraid we'll decide that Dylann Roof's horrific actions were an isolated event, ignoring the white supremacist lies that inspired him.

I'm afraid we'll decide that civil rights laws and progress are enough, ignoring the endemic racism that still affects and infects our culture. I'm afraid pastors will sidestep this issue rather than confront it in their pews. I'm afraid Christians won't take the lead in helping our culture move from racism to reconciliation. And I'm afraid I won't do all I can to advance God's will for our shared humanity.

John saw a vision in heaven of "a great multitude which no one

could count, from all nations and tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb” (Rev. 7:9). Jesus wants this vision to be a reality “on earth, as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10).

Jim Denison, Ph.D., is founder of the Denison Forum on Truth and Culture, a non-sectarian “think tank” designed to engage contemporary issues with biblical truth. Join over 100,000 who read Dr. Denison’s daily Cultural Commentary: . For more information on the Denison Forum, visit . To connect with Dr. Denison in social media, visit or