**The Confederate Flag: Heritage or Hate**

* Excerpted from The New York Times, Upfront by Bryan Brown

Everyone knew they were witnessing history. On July 10 in South Carolina at the State House in Columbia the confederate flag was lowered, folded, and taken away.

It was a moment packed with emotion, especially since it had come to pass because of the shocking murder of nine black churchgoers in Charleston by a young white supremacist. As the flag came down, some in the crowd chanted “U.S.A!”

“I didn’t think I’d live to see this,” says James Johnson, who was there. For him, the flag represented slavery and the *oppression* of blacks like himself in the South for a century after the war.

Others in the crowd weren’t so happy. Robert Hines, who is white, stood quietly holding small rebel flags. “We had 22,000 South Carolinians die under the flag,” he said. For him and many other Southerners, the flag is a symbol of pride and heritage.

How did the flag – and other symbols of the Confederacy – come to represent such different things to Americans?

The flag we know today as the Confederate flag wasn’t actually the official flag of the Confederacy but a battle flag carried by *rebel* soldiers during the Civil War. After the war, those tattered battle flags receded into the background, as white and black Southerners tried to rebuild their lives during Reconstruction.

Shortly after Reconstruction, much of the South began instituting “Jim Crow” laws that kept discrimination against black people in place for nearly a century. Violence against blacks, including lynchings, also became common.

Starting in the early 1900s, groups began working to gain civil rights for blacks. The Supreme Court’s 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling outlawed segregation. And federal courts forced integration on buses, trains, and other public spaces. Many white Southerners **bridled** at Northern “interference,” and the battle flag became a symbol of resistance. In 1961, the South Carolina Legislature ordered the rebel flag to be flown from the State House dome. Officially, it was to commemorate the start of the Civil War 100 years earlier. But many people understood it as opposition to civil rights gains.

“The more the white South lost on this issue,” says Charles Zelden, a historian at Nova Southeastern University in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, “the more important that flag came to be.”

That’s something Johnson, who witnessed the flag removal, experienced firsthand. When he was a boy, the Ku Klux Klan, a racist group that terrorized blacks, would march through his hometown of North Carolina carrying the Confederate flag. “That’s how they showed they disliked you,” he says. “There is nothing good about that flag as far as black folks are concerned.”

Since the civil rights era, the battle flag has become more ingrained in Southern life. It’s flown proudly from many houses, in public squares, and by fans at NASCAR races. Some elements of its design are included in seven state flags.

Since the Charleston shootings, many Southerners have rallied to defend the flag. “It’s not about slavery,” wrote Ron Springer, a descendant of Civil War veterans. “It’s about my ancestors fighting for their freedom.”

Zelden, the Nova Southeastern University professor, says that many Southerners see the flag as a symbol that the South, in its history and culture, is different from the North. “Symbols have the power to represent so much in a quick visual flash,” he says. “The flag is a shorthand for ‘This is who I am, this is what I believe.’”

Bill Ferris, a white Mississippi native who teaches at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, has written extensively about the South. Though he supports taking down the battle flag in all public places, he also believes that the best way to combat hate is not to erase history but to confront it. Confronting race and racism doesn’t mean the country should whitewash history, Ferris says. Instead, he advocates erecting new monuments to honor noble African Americans.

“The South has a long memory,” he says. “The full range of people who live in the South should have their history and memory recognized.”

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| *rebel* – a person who resists authority, rules, tradition; *oppression –* using power and authority in a cruel or unjust manner |

Please answer the following questions in grammatically correct sentences and cite textual evidence.

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1. Citing textual evidence, explain the original purpose of the Confederate flag.
2. What is the controversy surrounding the Confederate flag? What reasons are provided to support the claims on either side of the issue?
3. Symbols are an important representation of culture. How has the Confederate flag been used to symbolize cultural beliefs?
4. In line 25, the text states, “…the battle flag became a symbol of resistance.” Historically, how has the Confederate flag been used as a symbol of opposition?