

Removal of the Confederate Flag from National Park Sites

A Guide for National Park Service Staff





Removal of the Confederate Flag from National Park Sites

This guide was created by the National Park Service WASO Office of Interpretation, Education and Volunteers (IEV) in conjunction with the Stephen T. Mather Training Center.

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Memorandum

To: Interpretation, Education, and Volunteers Staff, and National Park Service Cooperating Associations, Partners, and Concessioners.

From: Associate Director for Interpretation, Education & Volunteers /s/ Julia Washburn

Subject: Resources for IEV staff and partners on Confederate Flag

Following the tragic mass shooting that occurred in Charleston, South Carolina many questions have been raised over the display and sale of stand-alone Confederate flags at National Park Service sites. On June 24, 2015 Director Jarvis issued a memorandum to Regional Directors, Associate and Assistant Directors and National Park Service Cooperating Associations, Partners, and Concessioners requesting that they voluntarily withdraw items that depict a Confederate Flag as a stand-alone feature, especially items that are wearable and displayable. In addition, the memo noted that Confederate flags should not be flown in units of the National Park System and related sites, except where the flag would provide historical context.

We believe these actions will further enable us to achieve our mission in not only preserving our nation's heritage, but in telling a balanced narrative that is inclusive of all Americans. While the Confederate flag will always remain part of the nation's history, we also recognize that it can be seen and used as a symbol of hate. As Director Jarvis noted previously, the NPS can play an important role in healing and facilitating discussions around race, gun violence, and the difficult parts of our history that we are currently grappling with as Americans. One step towards this is equipping our staff with the tools and resources to facilitate such conversations.

In an effort to provide more information to our staff and partners that are fielding visitor inquiries on this recent change, we are providing key talking points and a facilitated dialogue guide. In addition, we will be offering virtual events during the week of June 29, 2015 to provide logistical information for IEV staff and partners, and offer a space for our own internal dialogue to reflect and process the historical moment we find ourselves in.

I would like to thank the dedicated IEV staff and partners who have diligently responded to the high volume of inquiries surrounding the removal of stand-alone Confederate flags. I hope the attached resources and upcoming virtual events will provide the support needed for you to carry out our mission and provide time to reflect on this significant moment in our nation's history.



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A Conversation with the Nation

In light of recent events, sales items that solely depict the Confederate flag as a stand-alone feature are being removed from national park book stores and gift shops. Products that place the flag in a historic context will remain in stores. The flag will continue to be used or displayed in national parks when it is in a historical context, such as in a museum exhibit, to signify troop locations, or in a reenactment or living history program.

As a result of Director, Jon Jarvis' request for Park Interpretive Managers, Superintendents, Cooperating Associations and Concessionaires to evaluate the use and sales of the stand alone Confederate flag, Julia Washburn decided to host a service-wide conversation. Joined by more than 300 NPS staff, volunteers and partners on June 29th and July 1st, Julia, was able to provide operational insights, historic perspective and a response to many questions that come up around this controversial and sensitive topic. To access the [recording](#) of this call and to find other resources made available as a result of these calls, visit the Confederate Flag Shared Folder. Also the [transcript](#) can be found in the same folder.

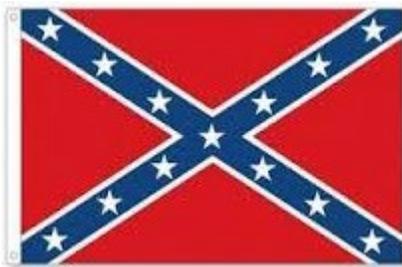


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Putting it into Context Today

By Robert Sutton, NPS Chief Historian

June 30, 2015



There were many iterations of the Confederate flag during the Civil War. Early on, Louisiana and Mississippi used what we refer to as the “Bonny Blue Flag.” The Confederate national flag, which became the official national flag, was similar to the American flag, but after First Manassas, when it was clear that both sides confused the Confederate for the American flag, Confederate Gen. PGT Beauregard developed the Confederate battle flag, which is the one we’re focusing on today.

As far as we can tell, the first official use of the Confederate battle flag after the war was in 1894, when Mississippi adopted the symbol in the upper corner of its state flag. Some claim that groups, such as the Ku Klux Klan started using the flag early on, but others claim that it more commonly used the American flag as its symbol. What is clear, however, is that in 1948, when Strom Thurman of South Carolina ran for president under the “Dixiecrat” Party, the Confederate battle flag became a symbol for segregation and blatant racism.

Its use was more widespread after the Supreme Court struck down segregation in *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954. Then in 1961, South Carolina placed the Confederate battle flag on the top of its capitol building, ostensibly to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Civil War. When the state moved the flag to the capitol grounds in 2000, the state legislature declared that removing it from the grounds would require a “super” majority or a 2/3 vote. As an interesting side note, Strom Thurman’s son, who is a member of the South Carolina Legislature, is [leading the effort to remove the flag](#) from the capitol grounds.



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Since the mid-1900s, the Confederate battle flag has been appropriated by many for various reasons. Some use it as a symbol of their heritage—such as the Sons of Confederate Veterans and the United Daughters of the Confederacy. These groups adamantly claim that the flag has been misappropriated by hate groups for all of the wrong reasons. But, they also claim that the flag has nothing to do with racism, slavery, or hatred. Others use the flag as symbols of hatred. The Southern Poverty Law Center, who tracks the issue, claims that more than 500 “hate groups” use the flag as their symbol. So, clearly, the flag means many things to many people.



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Informal Questions and Responses

Visitor Concern: Are you still allowing the Confederate flag to fly at NPS sites?

OPERATIONAL RESPONSE

- The National Park Service has ceased to fly the Confederate flag in national parks with the exception of circumstances where the flag provides historical context, for instance to signify troop location or movement, or as part of a historical reenactment or living history program, or depicted on or as part of a memorial.
- Confederate Flags will not be flown on any cemetery flagpole.

HEALING RESPONSE

- What word comes to mind when you see the Confederate flag?
- How did you first come to feel this way about the Confederate flag?
- What is your most powerful memory of seeing the Confederate flag?
- When have you witnessed others having a different experience/feeling about the flag? Why do you think that is?



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Visitor Concern: Is the removal of the Confederate flag an attempt to erase history?

OPERATIONAL RESPONSE

- While the Confederate battle flag will always remain a part of this nation's history, we also recognize that it represents different symbolism to Americans. To some it represents an important part of their heritage, but to others the Confederate battle flag has very negative connotations
- We recognize that the Confederate flag has a place on battlefields and in books, exhibits, reenactments, and interpretive programs and we will continue to interpret the significance of the flag within the historical events of the past.

HEALING RESPONSE

- What values does the flag represent to you?
- When have you seen someone use this symbol in a way that doesn't represent your values?
- How should we respond when symbols get "co-opted?"
- What does this flag mean to you, your heritage?
- How do you think you came to feel that way?
- How do you feel the meaning of this symbol has changed over time?
- What societal events contributed to that change?



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Additional Resources for Interpreters and Educators:

NPS Sites:

[Teaching with Historic Places - Civil Rights and Racial Healing](#)

Education is one of our most promising paths as we strive as a nation toward a more perfect union. To foster national healing after centuries of violence and racist terrorism, Americans must find ways to explore and talk about the roots of both injustice and heroic struggle against it. Classroom discussions about Civil Rights struggles in historic places can help communities toward racial healing. In honor of the American pursuit of justice, The National Park Service highlights Teaching with Historic Places lesson plans that focus on Civil Rights and Racial Healing. Created by interpreters, preservation professionals, and educators, these lessons are free and ready for immediate classroom use and are adaptable for most grade levels.

NPS – NHL Civil Rights Theme Study (2008)

[Civil Rights in America: A Framework for Identifying Significant Sites](#)

Existing Chapters

[Civil Rights in America: Racial Desegregation of Public Accommodations \(2004, rev. 2009\)](#)

[Civil Rights in America: Racial Desegregation in Public Education in the United States \(2000\) and supplement \(2004\)](#)

[Civil Rights in America: Racial Voting Rights \(2007, rev. 2009\)](#)

Other Existing Theme Studies and Initiatives:

[Theme Studies](#)

[Heritage Initiatives](#)



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Partner Sites:

[Front Page Dialogue: Race And Policing](#) by the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience: "In the United States, the deaths of black men and boys including Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Walter Scott, and Freddie Gray, among others, at the hands of police officers have led to a groundswell of demonstrations and debate on race, policing, and public protest. These deaths illuminate longstanding issues of racial profiling and systemic violence while highlighting the shortcomings of the criminal justice system."

[Facing History and Ourselves: Lessons and Units](#) on Civil Rights Movement. "The Facing History and Ourselves program is an integration of compelling content and rigorous inquiry. It calls upon the teacher's full engagement and mindful selection of resources, activities, guiding or 'essential' questions, and assignments."