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—roy v. harris, editor of augusta courier, 1951

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—south carolina gov. nikki hale y, july 10, 2015, on
the confederate battle flag on the state house grounds in columbia

COMMUNITY ACTION GUIDE

Across the South, Americans of all races, ethnicities and creeds are asking why governmental bodies in a democracy based on the promise of equality should display symbols so closely associated with the bondage and oppression of African Americans.

It's a movement that has risen from the ground up — one driven by local activists and civic leaders raising questions and making decisions about their values and the kind of community they want to be.

Confederate battle flags were raised on government property throughout the South to commemorate the Civil War centennial during the 1960s. If that's why the flag is displayed on government property in your community, don't let it stop your efforts. Find out why it continues to fly decades after the commemoration.

Map the path to change

Find out what governmental body is responsible for overseeing or maintaining the display. If the symbol is the name of a city park, for example, the city council and mayor would be the parties to contact. If it is a school name, the local school board would be the appropriate entity. An online search or call to your city hall, county courthouse or state legislature can point you in the right direction.

Once you've determined the pertinent governmental body, ask about the process for removing the symbol. You might, for example, need to appear before your city council or county commission, or you might need to persuade your state legislator to sponsor a bill. A clear understanding of the process is crucial for a successful effort.

Organize and raise awareness

After you conduct the research, it's important to build public support. Policymakers may be hesitant to remove the symbol if they believe there is no public demand for such action or that it will raise the ire of constituents. Demonstrating public support for the symbol's removal can overcome this obstacle.

Here are ways to build support for your effort:

IDENTIFY COMMUNITY GROUPS AND LEADERS that may support your effort. Enlisting these groups can quickly amplify your campaign. These groups can contact their members and can sign on to a letter to the appropriate governmental body, for example.

WRITE LETTERS TO THE EDITOR of your local newspaper. If you have already enlisted civic groups in your cause, encourage them to write letters to the editor.

CLAIM: The Civil War wasn't about slavery. It was about states' rights.

RESPONSE: The desire to preserve slavery was the cause for secession. Secession documents for several states cite slavery as their reason for leaving the Union. The vice president of the Confederacy, Alexander Stephens, said the country was founded on the belief that all men are not created equal, but that slavery is the "natural and normal condition" of African Americans. It doesn't get any clearer than that.

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CLAIM: Slaves fought for the Confederacy, which proves the Civil War wasn't about es cite slavar

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CLAIM: This symbol can't be racist because I want to keep it and I'm not racist.

RESPONSE: Our personal beliefs can't change the history of the Confederacy, which was founded upon a belief in white supremacy — nor can they change the effect a symbol has on others.

CLAIM: This [school/team/mascot] has long been named after a Confederate leader. There's no need to change it. It's just part of the community.

RESPONSE: The students are as much a part of this community as this name. It sends the wrong message to these students — especially students of color — when their school honors someone loyal to a government founded on the idea that one group of people is inherently superior to another and should be able to enslave them. It also sends the wrong message about our community.

[If applicable to your school] We should look not only at the history of the school's namesake, but our community's history. This school was not named shortly after the Civil War. It was named during the civil rights movement when many schools in this country were named after Confederate leaders as a protest against school desegregation. Our community shouldn't continue sending this message.

CLAIM: My ancestor bravely served the Confederacy in the Civil War. He didn't own slaves. He was just defending his home. Removing this symbol disrespects him and the ancestors of others in this community.

RESPONSE: This issue isn't about the personal motivations of one soldier. It is clear that as a government, the Confederacy endorsed slavery and white supremacy. It can be found in the Confederate Constitution and in statements of the Confederacy's leadership. And it can be found in the secession documents of the states. This symbol represents the Confederate government, which endorsed these beliefs.

It is worth noting that many Confederate veterans attended "Blue and Gray" reunions after the Civil War. These reunions brought veterans from both sides of the war together for reconciliation and celebration of their collective identity as Americans»

The Confederacy: In its Own Words

The desire to preserve slavery was the cause for secession by Southern states. But 150 years after the war, many continue to cling to myths. As recently as 2011, 48 percent of Americans in a Pew Research Center survey cited states' rights as the reason for the war, compared to 38 percent citing slavery. This finding is all the more astonishing because a review of statements and documents by Confederate leaders makes their intentions clear. The following is an example:

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TEXAS DECLARATION OF CAUSES FOR SECESSION, FEBRUARY 2, 1861

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