

Defending Southern Heritage

Defending the Southern Heritage
by Clyde Wilson

Many good people have been working in recent years to preserve public acknowledgment and celebration of our Confederate history. Our fights have been largely defensive reactions to the innumerable strokes of our enemies, and most of them have been defeats. Our enemies control most of the "respectable" political, religious, educational, business, and media institutions of American society, including nearly all "Southern" institutions.

We have lost in part because many defenders of Confederate symbols have not understood the nature of the battle. Southerners are a conservative people. They prefer the traditional to the abstract and are slow to adopt new theories (one of the several characteristics that distinguish them from other inhabitants of the United States). This is a good and healthy virtue, but like all virtues it can, if we are not careful, become a self-defeating rigidity. The conservative philosopher Russell Kirk contrasted mere stand-patter conservatism of the dull-witted or poor in spirit who reject anything new with the true conservatism of an Edmund Burke or a John C. Calhoun who perceived that it was necessary to change in order to conserve because new conditions had created new threats to our patrimony.

Unfortunately, too many spokesmen in the fight for Southern heritage are stand-patters, i.e., dinosaurs on their way to extinction. They are trying to live in a world that they grew up in but which does not exist any more. The world that they grew up in accepted Southerners and Southern heritage as a positive part of America. That world began disappearing a half century ago and is almost gone.

After Reconstruction, which all sensible Northerners came to realize had been a grievous mistake, most Americans, North and South, took the Road to Reunion. Southerners had to agree that they were glad that the Union had been saved and a stronger America had emerged. (They were already genuinely glad of the end of slavery.) For the most part they did this with sincerity and enthusiasm (they had to if they had any hopes of personal success). Southerners became good and loyal members of the new America. They have lived up to that pledge every generation since, in fact have been the most loyal of all Americans and done more than their fair share in every war.

As their part of the bargain, Northerners acknowledged that Southerners had been brave and honorable in their war for independence, and their heroes, like Lee and Jackson, would be celebrated as American heroes. (There were always a few old Yankees around who wanted to exterminate the rebels, and indeed there still are, but they were a minority.)

This is why "The Birth of a Nation," creation of D.W. Griffith, son of a Confederate soldier, could be regarded as a national epic at the beginning of the twentieth century. Will Rogers, another son of a Confederate soldier, was a national institution and he and Shirley Temple and many others portrayed very sympathetic Southern characters in the films of the 1920s and 1930s.

Gone With the Wind, book and movie, was an all-time bestseller in the North as well as the South. Every major male non-Southern Hollywood star in the 1950s and 1960s portrayed a heroic Confederate: Errol Flynn, John Wayne, Clark Gable, Allan Ladd, Charlton Heston, Richard Harris, Montgomery Clift, Henry Fonda, Ronald Reagan, and Richard Widmark, to name just a few. In all his best movies, John Wayne is a Confederate: "Red River," "The Searchers," and "True Grit," the last two based on Southern novels.

Confederate battle flags were seen among American fighting men, in real life and film, during World War II and Korea, and Vietnam. Douglas Southall Freeman's R.E. Lee and Lee's Lieutenants were celebrated as accounts of American military valor. When President Roosevelt inaugurated the first completed dam of the TVA, he did so on a platform that flew US and Confederate flags.

That world does not exist any more! Defenders of Southern heritage should stop acting like it does. The people who want to do away with Confederate symbols are not people who will come around when you argue a little historical interpretation with them, or when you point out (as you know to be true) that your forebears were not fighting for slavery, or prove that you are a loyal American whose heart contains no hate and violence.

They do not care! They have no heritage of their own and do not know what a heritage is. They believe in their own self-interest and fashionable abstractions. We do not and will not in the foreseeable future live in a world where Southern heritage will be publicly honored except by us. We live in a regime where Confederate symbols are scheduled for complete obliteration. At present, we can expect no help from our own institutions, the politics of Southern states being dominated primarily by Big Business. (A phone call from the president of NationsBank or the publisher of a big

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newspaper carries more weight with any politician than 20,000 Confederates at a rally, or any number of personal visits from earnest citizens. This is a fact.)

The Compromise is broken. Why this happened would take several books to explain. Northern society has periodically gone through fits of fanaticism which have focused upon us. When was the last time you thought about telling people in New York or Seattle what to do? Never, because it is not a part of our national character as Southerners. But hundreds of thousands of Northerners are thinking about you and about their right to suppress your evil ways. In their fantasy world, which is the only culture of any significance they have, you are the evil obstacle to making the world perfect. They have always been that way.

It has nothing to do with you. It is their problem. It has nothing to do with the South except that the South lies convenient for their aggressions. They cover up their emptiness, hatred, hypocrisy, and insignificance by identifying you as the Enemy. This is the way Puritans behave when they lose their religion. Our forefathers saw this clearly. It was that kind of society and people that they fought to be free of!

Many of our official defenders have not figured out that the Compromise no longer exists. In a recent legislative election in South Carolina, the leftwing candidate brought out a bevy of veterans and SCV members to publicly condemn the conservative candidate because the conservative candidate was a Southern activist who allegedly would not repeat the Pledge of Allegiance.

It was as if the conservative candidate was one of the spoiled Yankee children who promoted treason in time of war in the 1960s. These good people are too blind to figure out that those 60s traitors are now in power in America and are the ones who are hellbent on using their power to destroy every last vestige of our Southern heritage and identity!

This unfortunately represents the attitude of too many flag defenders. One despairs at such blindness. The compatriots I am talking about, however, can be educated. I have seen it done. Democrats and Republicans both, of the ruling establishment, are relying on this kind of stupid "patriotism" to kill off challenges to their power. Southern heritage is the first casualty of that power.

WAKE UP! It is not 1945 any more, or even 1975. You can either honor your Southern heritage and preserve your Southern identity, or you can give unthinking obedience to the America of today. You cannot do both without engaging in self-defeating contradiction.

Here are a few suggestions.

Don't compromise. Compromise is only a defeat and a springboard for another attack. Don't think that being a good sport will make the other side good sports. Who follows an uncertain trumpet? You will probably lose. But a loss on principle preserves a rallying point. John C. Calhoun says: a defeat on principle is not an overthrow, while a victory by compromise is a defeat.

Be worthy of your ancestors. Don't be a goody goody "American" humbly begging to be allowed to keep a shred of your heritage. You are a member of a great people who are under attack and have been betrayed by their leaders. It is needed to defend the Southern people here and now and not just the noble Confederate soldier.

Think like a Southerner. We cannot defend just our Confederate forebears, as important as that is. They are but a part of Southern history. Lay claim to all of Southern history and culture, from Captain John Smith and Pocahontas to Dale Earnhardt. To concentrate on Confederate history alone is to concede to the enemy that the Confederacy can be segregated off as an evil episode of slavery and treason. It also plays into the North's everlasting tendency to claim anything Southern that is good, as "American," that is, non-Southern. George Washington is just as Southern as Robert E. Lee. Thomas Jefferson is just as Southern as Jefferson Davis. Andrew Jackson is just as Southern as Bedford Forrest. Alvin York, and Audie Murphy, and the Alamo are just as Southern as Stonewall Jackson. Lay claim to all your heritage!

Avoid argument with the enemy and concentrate on educating yourself and members of our people, especially the young, not forgetting the many Yankees of good will. In Heritage Haters you are dealing with people who send their children to private schools while busing yours and still think they are morally superior to you because they are in favor of busing and you are not. They are not interested in debate or evidence. Remember, they are not attacking your great-grandfather's war: they are attacking you! And, as we learned in the flag fight in South Carolina, this goes double for the academic "experts" in the war era, who are even less interested in evidence and perspective than the ordinary flag hater.

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Don't be discouraged. So beautiful and powerful is our heritage that it has taken them decades to cut away as much as they have. It will take some time and hard work to recover lost ground.

If you have to argue, turn the tables. The significant factor is the North's motives! They are the ones who invaded us, violating the fundamental American principle of the consent of the governed.

If you must debate, don't make indefensible statements that will be laughed out of court, like the war was not about slavery, most Southerners did not own slaves, and an exaggerated count of black soldiers in the Confederacy. Yes, the war was partly about slavery, though not on their side and not as centrally and in the way that they claim. Counting families, approximately one-fourth of Southerners were owners of domestic servants, almost all of them of a few people who lived and worked closely with the family. Yes, there were a great many black Confederates who helped sustain the armies and the home front, but not as enrolled soldiers.

Stop supporting federal government wars out of unthinking loyalty. For a long time the US armed forces had a chivalric Southern flavor. They now combine all the worst aspects of bureaucracy, imperialism, graft, affirmative action, and Political Correctness, in an atmosphere of moral depravity.

Cure yourself of Republican party thinking. What further proof is needed that the South and Southerners have nothing to expect from the Republican "conservatives" except payoffs to individuals to betray their people? As the Rev. Robert Lewis Dabney pointed out long ago, the Northern "conservatives," in the entire course of American history have never conserved anything. George W., though raised in Texas, suppressed innocuous Confederate plaques. McCain, though a descendant of Confederates, branded our flag as a hate symbol to be suppressed. The Republican governor of New York banished the Georgia flag. Shortly after their candidate was elected President, the Wall Street Journal and National Review published pieces ridiculing Southern conservatives. The message was clear: Give us your votes and shut up.

The worst thing that can happen to the South is to be turned into an appendage of the bland, principleless elements represented by the Republican party. Think like a Southerner, not like a knee-jerk "conservative." If Jesse Jackson causes a ruckus in Decatur, Illinois, applaud him. You can be sure that if he was making trouble in your town, Decatur, Illinois, would be cheering him on. They just don't want him to bother them.

My standpatter compatriots, if you want to be a good American as defined by the ruling institutions today, forget about your Southern heritage. But most Southerners care for family, place, Christian social order, courage, loyalty, honor – all things besieged in America today. That is, after all, why we love our heritage.

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CLOSE THIS BROWSER TO RETURN