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Has the “Lost Cause” Finally Lost?

Has the pernicious fiction that there was something honorable about the Confederate rebellion – treason in the defense of slavery, as one observer so trenchantly put it recently – finally been irredeemably shredded?

History is being made now. Not just “ordinary” history, but momentous history. The kind of history that will even more deeply mark this moment in time – the Obama presidency – as a “landmark” of America’s march toward a more complete democracy.

That was underscored in striking fashion last month in three decisions handed up by the U.S. Supreme Court: one affirming in full the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare); the second affirming the right of same-sex couples to marry; and the third affirming the central provision of the Fair Housing Act of 1968 that housing policies and practices with discriminatory outcomes can be challenged, even if there was no intent to discriminate.

Simultaneously, the hard-shelled resistance to acknowledging the falsehoods of the Confederacy and its most potent symbol, the Confederate flag, has cracked. It cracked, on the one hand, under the combined weight of the tragic racial reality made apparent by social-media technology and the hashtag #blacklivesmatter, and, on the other, by Dylann Roof’s murderous rampage.

The reaction of an outraged public has forced some leading Southern politicians and some leading consumer companies to cut their ties to that stark symbol of America’s original sin, the Confederate flag, which Roof pledged allegiance to.

As one would expect, some conservatives have sneered that the outcry is just meaningless political



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theater.

And, also as one would expect, for entirely different reasons, even some advocates of progressive change have called the focus on the flag a waste of time and energy

phant -- by law in the South, and by custom that carried the force of law in the North for most of the following century.

That’s the reason “removing” the Confederate flag from the public sphere and eradicating what it symbolizes has cost so much in lives lost and human talent wasted all these years.

Further, to claim the “mass movement” against the Confederate flag is mere catharsis is to miss the powerful – and obvious – connection between the symbolic and the substantive.

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and said that taking it down won’t solve, or even address the numerous serious problems that fester along America’s color line. That position was succinctly stated by the headline in The American Prospect: “Removing the Confederate Flag is Easy. Fixing Racism is Hard.”

That claim, and the thinking behind it, has always been made about particular actions of Black freedom struggle. But it’s completely wrong.

Indeed, there’s no little irony in asserting that the present focus on the Confederate flag is empty symbolism given what the flag itself symbolizes. The flag is an enduring symbol of the fact that, although the Confederacy lost the military phase of its race war, white supremacy reigned trium-

phant -- by law in the South, and by custom that carried the force of law in the North for most of the following century.

After all, there are voluminous symbolic reasons Americans demand that any flag bearing the Stars and Stripes – whether it flies over the Capitol in Washington or the neighborhood park down the street — be treated not as an ordinary piece of cloth but as a sacred object.

And the now-successful movement urging that same-sex couples have the right to marry and have those marriages recognized by law everywhere in the United States was overwhelmingly driven by the symbolism of what marriage itself means both to individuals and to the society as a whole.

Black Americans’ freedom struggle has always relied on what could well be described as symbolic actions.

For example, during the 1955

Montgomery Bus Boycott conservatives aplenty derided as frivolous Blacks’ demand for the right to sit wherever they chose on the city’s buses. But soon, the boycott was recognized as the first stepping stone of the nationwide mass-action movement that destroyed legalized racism.

Pushing the Black freedom struggle forward has always required dealing with the multiple, often complex ways bigotry affects the lives of Americans – and understanding, as President Obama said in praising the Supreme Court’s same-sex marriage ruling, that progress in expanding the rights of Americans “often comes in small increments ... propelled by the persistent efforts of dedicated citizens.”

What is important at this moment is to redeem the martyrdom of those lost to the many manifestations of racism in America, including the nine congregants of Emanuel AME Church; to, as the president also said, “bridge the meaning of [America’s] founding words with the realities of changing times.”

A first step of that effort from this point forward should be to, yes, take advantage of the tragedy produced by Dylann Roof’s perverse allegiance to the banner of White Supremacy and destroy forever the notion that the “Lost Cause” is something to be proud of.

Lee A. Daniels is a longtime journalist based in New York City. His essay, “Martin Luther King, Jr.: The Great Provocateur,” appears in *Africa’s Peacemakers: Nobel Peace Laureates of African Descent (2014)*, published by Zed Books. His new collection of columns, *Race Forward: Facing America’s Racial Divide in 2014*, is available at www.amazon.com.

Confederate Flag Never ‘Misappropriated’

The other night I listened to a South Carolina state legislator announce his support for pulling down the Confederate battle flag (of the Army of Northern Virginia) from the South Carolina statehouse. In the course of his quite interesting comments, he argued that the Confederate flag had been misappropriated by hate groups. MSN-BC talk-show host Chris Hayes politely asked him how it was possible to misappropriate a symbol that was born in hate.

The South Carolina legislator chose that moment to do a tap dance.

There has been a good deal of discussion of the Confederate flag, discussion that has been reaching a badly needed crescendo.

The public is getting a better understanding of the history of the flag and some history of the Confederate States of America.

Yet there is one thing that has avoided any discussion: the Confederate flag is the flag of traitors.

The Confederate States of America was formed in open opposition to the Constitution of the United States.



Bill Fletcher Jr.
The Global African

It was treason.

Nevertheless, there are white people around the U.S. who seem to see no contradiction between flying both the flag of the U.S.A. and the C.S.A. How can we under-

stand this?

It seems to me that there are two main answers. First, that the reemergence of the Confederate battle flags (it is, actually plural) starts in the 1940s with the rise of the Dixiecrat revolt against a civil rights platform

wanted in North America and, as such, it was not that the CSA left the USA, but the non-slave states departed from the core mission of the Republic.

For this element of white America, the Confederate flag symbolizes the “America” of

the slave-holding presidents; the “America” of the genocidal wars against Native Americans; the “America” of unlimited possibilities for whites.

In other words, it represents what we, in Black America, understand to be the underside of the so-called “American Dream.”

Those who fly both flags do not see the flag of the CSA as a flag of treason but instead a flag of authenticity and essence.

Thus, irrespective of the correct and well-intentioned comments about the Confederate flag being a flag of traitors or a flag of hate, the reality is that it is flown not to represent Southern pride but as a reaffirmation of the essence of white supremacy.

It is, in other words, no different than the swastika.

Let’s stop beating around the bushes.

Bill Fletcher, Jr. is the host of *The Global African on Tele-sur-English*. He is a racial justice, labor and global justice activist and writer. Follow him on Twitter, Facebook and at www.billfletcherjr.com.

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