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It's time to take down the Confederate flag

Nikita Richardson (<http://hellogiggles.com/author/nikita-richardson/>) / June 23, 2015 1:53 pm





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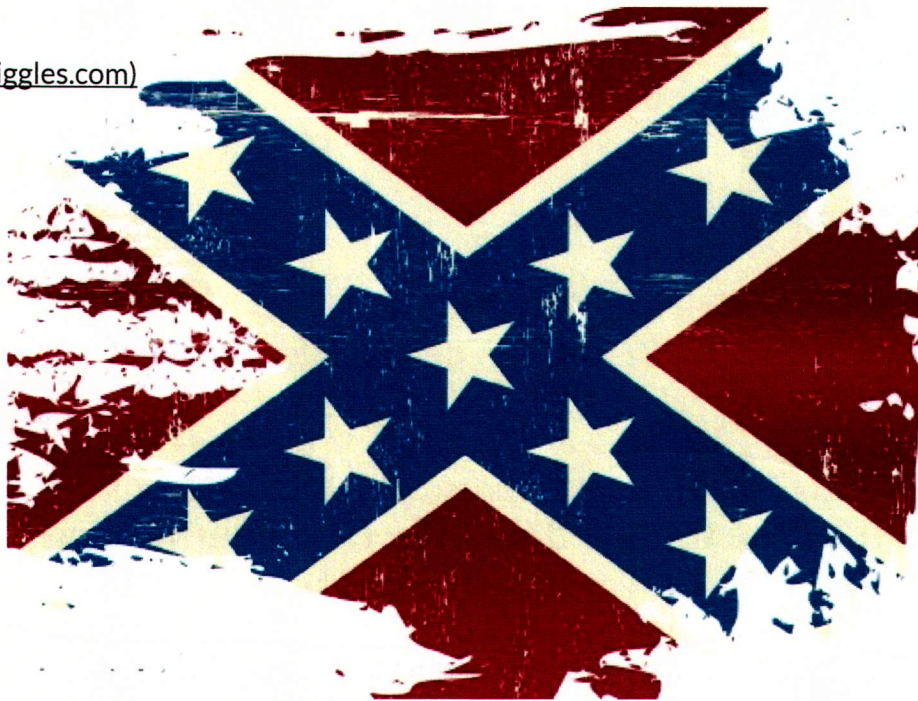
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For years, my father has been an avid garage sale enthusiast, heading out on Saturday mornings to search for deals on everything from gently used furniture to unwanted jewelry. Garage sales — and great finds — are abundant in our corner of metro Atlanta, where families have lived for generations, accumulating unique items passed down from their parents and grandparents.

So, it's no surprise that a few years ago, my dad started coming across something very particular to Southern garage sales: Mammy figurines. They are somewhat abundant, relics of the *Gone With The Wind* era when race-based tchotchkes were a “charming” addition to the home. They are statues of dark women, with tar-like skin topped with a headscarf and cover, in a kitchen dress that can barely contain their Rubenesque figures. Sometimes big red lips are added to drive the point home.

While I've never agreed with my father for buying these tiny, offensive, female figurines, I have occasionally pondered the deep awkwardness that must be a part of this transaction. My father, a middle-aged Black man, who came of age just after the Civil Rights era, is purchasing racist figurines from the children or grandchildren of white people, for the most part, who now likely understand these objects are too offensive to keep.

From my father's perspective, he's doing his part. He's keeping these items out of the hands of people ~~who really do not want~~ that piece of Southern history. In the same way that many Western museums have been forced to return items taken from other countries during the reigns of imperialism and colonialism, my dad is taking back the art of his people, sort of.

While Southerners have understood and accepted for some time that these Mammy figurines are racist, the same cannot be said about the Confederate battle flag — a symbol that you really do see all over the South.

Southerners who take pride in the flag often display it in over-the-top ways — flags flapping from pickup trucks, or hanging from a porch in a quiet neighborhood, or catching the breeze above a government building. Though relics of the Confederacy are no longer on our state flag, reminders of the battle flag have long been unavoidable.

For many, the flag is a symbol of those lost in the Civil War and of Southern pride, but for others it is a symbol of hate, racism, and segregation. The emblem was adopted by hate groups including the segregationist Dixiecrat Party (http://www.confederatepastpresent.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=163:confederate-symbols-at-the-1948-dixiecrat-convention&catid=36:the-civil-rights-era&Itemid=47) and white supremacist groups like the Ku Klux Klan. Those who feel they can divorce the two — the heritage from the hatred — should look to the legacy of the gammadion cross (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swastika#Names>), better known as the swastika, which has its origins in religions of the Far East, but has forever been stripped of its positive meaning by the events of World War II. In other words, you really can't divorce a symbol from its history.

Yesterday, South Carolina governor Nikki Haley finally took a stand against (<http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/charleston-church-shooting/south-carolina-gov-nikki-haley-calls-removal-confederate-flag-state-n379801>) the Confederate flag, which for decades has enjoyed a prominent place on the state's capitol building. Referring to last week's massacre of nine Black people (<http://hellogiggles.com/charleston-honored-victims/>) in a historically black church at the hands of a white supremacist, Haley said (<http://www.cnn.com/2015/06/22/politics/nikki-haley-confederate-flag-south-carolina-press-conference/>), "Today we are here in a moment of unity in our state, without ill will, to say it's time to move the flag from the capitol grounds," adding that the flag is unquestionably a "deeply offensive symbol of a brutally offensive past."

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Nikita Richardson is an editorial assistant at Fast Company magazine and freelance writer. Check out more of her work at ... <http://hellogiggles.com/author/nikita-richardson/>

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