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# *ROBERT'S RAMBLINGS*

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## **Salter, Sowell, and Symbols**

There comes a time when something that has never been an issue all of a sudden becomes one for you. This happened to me a few weeks ago. I've never much been concerned about the Confederate flag, whether it is flown singularly or as part of the Mississippi state flag. I truly believe that there are much more important things that we should be dealing with at this time, but others have deemed the flag to be the most important.

Arguments on both sides of the issue run from the ridiculous to the profound. The idea that the flag is not official is one of my favorites. If you can live with someone for a few years and have that considered a legal marriage, then surely a flag can be flown for over one hundred years and have it become official. I also don't buy the argument that the confederate flag is responsible for all the African-American strife in this state either. Sid Salter pointed out in an editorial in July that the current flag is not even the flag that flew during the Civil War. The current flag has taken on far too much significance—as a symbol of oppression and as a symbol of pride.

Eliminating or changing the flag seems to be the easy way out of this. Nothing will change. Eliminating the flag will not make up for past wrongs;

it will not make everything perfect in the African-American community. Nor will eliminating the flag destroy the heritage that so many proclaim. The heritage that factions are trying to preserve is in the hearts and minds of those who live, not in a flag.

I could be more in favor of preserving the flag should I ever see it used to honor our heritage but that is not what I see. What I see are groups using the flag as a symbol of hate and divisiveness. At the same I hear arguments that the flag is not a symbol of hate, I drive through parts of southern Mississippi where I see bumper stickers that depict a capitol building with the Confederate flag over it and the words "I have a dream"—an obvious reference to Martin Luther King Jr.'s now famous speech—next to it. I can't buy that the people driving those vehicles are not racists and have no other interest at heart other preserving Southern heritage.

The real question we have to answer is one that I've never heard asked: "What should we do as Christians, as a church?" Given time, given the opportunity to discuss and debate, I'm certain we could come up with several points of view but I ask myself, what would Jesus do? I believe He would suggest that we

eliminate the flag and get on with the true issues at hand. Getting rid of the flag would be, in effect, turning the other cheek; it would quite simply be the right thing to do. If we removed that one obstacle then perhaps we could begin to address the true cause of the problems we have in this state.

Thomas Sowell, a conservative African-American fellow at the Hoover Institute, also wrote a short essay on reparations for slavery last July. There are several similarities between the debate of reparations and the Mississippi flag, but one point he made points to why we should eliminate the current state flag. Sowell says, "Whites may experience a passing annoyance over the reparations [*flag?*] issue, but blacks—especially young blacks—can sustain more lasting damage from misallocating their time, attention and efforts."

Eliminating the Mississippi state flag will not make anyone more educated, it will not eliminate poverty in any corner of this state, nor will it dishonor any of our ancestors, but it

will clear the path, at least partially, so that we may begin the work of easing tensions between the races, allow us to focus on the cause of the problems and not on the symbols of those problems. I believe that if we ultimately remove all of the excuses, tear down all the barriers, and open the doors to communicate, we will eventually have to address the real problems.

We as Christians, as a church, owe it to ourselves and to our Brothers and Sisters in Christ to lead the way to eliminate this symbol and to allow true healing to begin. It has been suggested that Trinity take a stand on this issue and Overture Presbytery to also take a stand on the issue. Such a step would be a welcome addition to the heated debate on this topic and may help bring some resolution. Why should we do it? Because it is the right thing to do. Because a man had a dream once, a dream "*that one day...little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers.*"