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## The Confederate Flag As A Racist Symbol

In 1861, eleven states in the south of The United States of America ceded from the Union and war broke out between the Union and the Confederacy in April 1861 at the battle of Fort Sumter. The main reason of the divide between the northern and southern states was over the long-standing debate over the enslavement of black people. The war would claim up to a million lives within 4 years and ended with the abolishment of slavery in 1865 after the surrender of Robert E. Lee at the battle of Appomattox Court House. Because of the pro slavery notion behind the flag, it is widely seen as a hate symbol and is associated with white supremacists and neo-Nazis.

There are many reasons as to why the Confederate flag is seen as a racist symbol. According to the ADL (Anti-Defamation League) "During the war, the Confederacy and its military forces used a variety of flags, but the flag that became most associated with the Confederacy was the so-called 'battle flag.' Organizations such as the Sons of Confederate Veterans adopted the flag as a symbol of Southern heritage, but the Confederate soldiers that fought under it were connected to a campaign against President Lincoln's growing support for the repealing of the right to own slaves. The intent behind the Confederate campaign has led to the flag becoming very popular among white supremacists in the 20th and 21st centuries." The flag is a symbol for white supremacists to rally to for nearly 150 years since the foundation of the Ku Klux Klan.

The flag has been associated with numerous white supremacy groups, with the most notable group being the KKK. The same month of the abolishment of slavery, multiple former Confederate soldiers met in Tennessee to form a group, "dedicated to resisting laws giving blacks the same rights as whites." The Klan was known to carry out raids and lynching, according to Britannica, "Dressed in robes and sheets designed to frighten superstitious blacks and to prevent identification by the occupying federal troops, Klansmen whipped and killed freedmen and their white supporters in night-time raids." at the peak of their powers, they had over 4 million members nationwide signed up. The despicable actions carried out by the KKK clearly shows the Confederacy's racist influence due to their deep roots in the group. If such actions can be tied to the Confederacy, they can therefore be tied to their flag.

The flag still has racist connotations in the modern era, with numerous hate crimes being associated with the flag. The old ideology of white supremacy funnelled by the flag still has a grip over the country and the people who live in the former slave states. Tragic hate crimes have been found to have an affiliation with the Confederacy and the flag. According to the Guardian "The debate reignited in 2015 after Dylann Roof killed nine black people in a church in Charleston, South Carolina. A photo soon emerged of him holding a Confederate flag." Even

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looking back two years ago, The Unite the Right Rally in Charlottesville, Virginia was led by neo-Confederates and neo-Nazis. The Rally occurred because of the removal of Confederate monuments in the city. The event quickly turned violent and sadly, James Fields, a white supremacist, drove his car into a crowd of counter-protestors, injuring 28 and killing one, a 32-year-old woman named Heather Heyer. James Fields was sentenced to a life sentence according to the Rolling Stones, "On Monday, James Fields, the neo-Nazi convicted in the death of Heather Heyer and the injury of multiple protesters during the 2017 Charlottesville rally, was sentenced in state court to life in prison, plus 419 years."

However, many contests that the flag is a symbol of racism. Many people bear the Confederate flag as a symbol of Southern Pride. The groups who wave the flag are separated into Traditionalists and Supremacists. A study carried out by the JSSP showed that, "The greatest support for the Confederate battle flag is seen among Traditionalists and Supremacists; however, Traditionalists do not display blatant negative racial attitudes toward Blacks, while Supremacists do. Traditionalists make up most Confederate battle flag supporters in our sample, weakening the claim that supporters of the flag are generally being driven by negative racial attitudes toward Blacks." This shows the majority of the supporters of the flag just believe in Southern Pride and free speech, not supremacy. This argument has little foundation as the number of white supremacist groups rose from 100 in 2017 to 148 in 2018, showing a drastic increase of supremacist supporters, showing that although traditional supporters are not blatantly racist, the amount of supporters who fly the flag with racist intent is rising constantly.

The Confederate Flag has connections to fascism, with Neo-Nazis rallying to the flag during the Charlottesville Rally, alongside the Confederate Flag was Othala Runes, a Nazi hate symbol, which, according to the ADL, "In the 20th century, Nazis in Germany adopted the othal rune, among many other similar symbols, as part of their attempt to reconstruct a mythic 'Aryan' past. Nazi uses of the symbol included the divisional insignia of two Waffen SS divisions during World War II." The Confederate flag has associations with numerous pro-white hate groups, such as the League of the South, the National Alliance and the Southern Nationalist Network. The flag is also connected to supporters of President Donald Trump, who has taken many racist actions whilst in office and before his election, such as the travel bans on numerous Islamic countries and his racially fuelled support for the impeachment of former president Barack Obama. The President's history of indirect support for alt-right movements has stirred up high amounts of racial tension and given the racist groups a new powerful figure to rally behind.

In conclusion, the Confederate Flag is a hate symbol as its connections to so many hate groups make it impossible to ignore the fact. However, everyone must understand the context of the use of the flag as people innocently showing pride of their heritage can be clumped together with Neo-Nazis and White Supremacists. It is an extremely contentious subject, and everyone has varying opinions of the topic and it will probably be never agreed on as long as hate still

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