Does Heritage Still Matter?

“There was no surrender at Appomattox, and no withdrawal from the field which committed our people and their children to a heritage of shame and dishonor. No cowardice on any battlefield could be as base and shameful as the silent acquiescence in the scheme which was teaching the children in their homes and schools that the commercial value of slavery was the cause of the war, that prisoners of war held in the South were starved and treated with a barbarous inhumanity, that Jefferson Davis and Robert E. Lee were traitors to their country and false to their oaths, that the young men who left everything to resist invasion, and climbed the slopes of Gettysburg and died willingly on a hundred fields were rebels against a righteous government.”

--- The Rev. James Power Smith, last surviving member of Jackson’s staff, 1907

I like to start my speeches off with words from the past that the old veterans left behind for us. Who would have thought that these men had the power of insight to the future?

When we think of our heritage we usually think of our Southern Heritage. The mere mention of Southern Heritage can stir up powerful emotions in just about anyone. For those whose knowledge of American History is limited to a government school indoctrination, Southern Heritage can be provocative, conjuring up images of fat, lazy slave owners sipping mint-juleps or buck-toothed rednecks waving the Confederate Flag at a KKK rally. For those who were born with this heritage, or who have at least had the gift of independent thought, the term brings to mind a people rich in culture, history, and heritage.

As descendants of Confederate veterans, we know that the American South is more than a geographical location. From food to music, from sports to politics, the South is in many ways the heart and soul of this nation of sovereign states. But, the greatest threat to our Southern Heritage today is the infectious spread of political correctness. One cannot pick up a newspaper without reading about another attack on historic Southern symbols, monuments, and streets named after our heroes. One does not have to look far to find examples such as the attempted renaming of the Confederate Parks in Memphis or the threat of moving General Forrest’s Statue and Tomb. “Offensive” school mascots are being retired. The playing of “Dixie” at sporting events is discouraged, if not forbidden. The Confederate flag in fact in any variation of the star spangled St. Andrew’s cross is being removed from public view for fear of offending someone.

As we look around at all of the heritage violations that have erupted thirteen years into the 21st Century, I find myself asking, “Does heritage still matter?” Let’s face it, we live in a society that denies its own history or wants to rewrite it. In a recent report, in the “New South” only 64% of all Southerners are proud of their heritage. We live in a society where Southerners and descendant of Southerners are viewed as “Second Class Citizens” thus creating the belief that we are in a midst of a “Civil Rights Movement” of our own, the right to claim our heritage.

There are many out there who would like to see our heritage written as a footnote in the history books or forgotten all together. They wish to erase the truth about the Cause our ancestors fought and died for. They consider our traditions, values, and heritage as outdated and as a result many are turning their backs on their heritage and hold their heads in shame.

In a recent study conducted by Vanderbilt University sociology professor Larry Griffin and graduate student Ashley Thompson, they documented a trend that would have been unthinkable for Confederate President Jefferson Davis. Griffin and Thompson analyzed data from 19 polls conducted from 1991-2001 by the University of North Carolina during
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; even the politics of Southern states being dominated primarily by Big Business. (Let's face it, a phone call from the president of NationsBank or the publisher of a big 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.)

Yankee 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. But hundreds of thousands of Yankees 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. They attack our heritage because it is convenient for their aggressions. They cover up their emptiness, hatred, hypocrisy, and insignificance by identifying you as the Enemy. These people are hell-bent on using their power to destroy every last vestige of our heritage and identity!

But remember our attitude, "All we wish is to be left alone." This unfortunately represents the attitude of too many of us. One despairs at such blindness.

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

So what can you do about it? We must reeducate ourselves! How? Here are a few suggestions:

- Don't compromise. Compromise is only a defeat and a springboard for another attack. Do not give up your principles.
- Be worthy of your ancestors.
- Think like our Southern ancestors. We cannot defend just our Confederate heritage we must defend all of our Southern history. Lay claim to all of Southern history and culture. Remember people like Captain John Smith and Pocahontas, Dale Earnhardt, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Andrew Jackson, Alvin York, the defenders of the Alamo, and Audie Murphy are a part of our heritage as Stonewall Jackson, Robert E. Lee, and Nathan Bedford Forrest.
- Avoid arguments with the enemy and concentrate on educating yourself. They are not interested in debate or evidence. Remember, they are not attacking your great-grandfather's war: they are attacking you!
- 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 that 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.

My fellow compatriots, if you want to be a good American as defined today, forget about your heritage. Most of us care for family, place, Christian social order, courage, loyalty, and honor -- all things that are besieged in America today. Thus if heritage still matters to you today, then I say, reeducate yourself for the coming fight that is here during the third year of the Sesquicentennial of the War for Southern Independence.
history but, 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. By nature, Southerners are a conservative people. This is a good and healthy virtue, but like all virtues it can, if we are not careful, become self-defeating. Conservatives of today are viewed as dull-witted or poor in spirit who reject anything new, where as true conservatism is compared with that 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 way of life. Unfortunately, too many in the fight for Southern heritage are considered 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. Our Ancestors had to agree that they were glad that the Union had been saved and a stronger America had emerged. For the most part they did this with sincerity and enthusiasm; they had to since we were an occupied nation and if they had any hopes of personal success in the future. 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 our heroes, like Lee and Jackson, would be celebrated as American heroes.

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 portrayed a Confederate: "Red River," "The Searchers," and "True Grit."

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.

Wake up!! That world does not exist anymore! 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 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, fashionable abstractions, and the almighty dollar. We do not and will not in the foreseeable future live in a world where
which respondents aged 18 or older were asked — “Do you consider yourself to be a Southerner, or not?” UNC conducted the polls twice a year by telephone of a representative sample of roughly 700 to 1,100 “geographic” Southerners, defined as those who live in the former Confederate states plus Kentucky and Oklahoma. Some of the polls over the years included 400 to 500 “non-southerners.” Griffin and Thompson found that, thanks to the large influx of outsiders from all parts of the nation, the number of people claiming to be proud of their Southern heritage or even claiming to be a Southerner is dwindling. He found many people who outright reject being referred to as Southern. The polls surveyed 17,000 residents in all of the Southern states identified themselves as "Southerners" fell 7.4 percentage points, from approximately 78 percent to 70 percent.

According to Griffin and Thompson this decline can be attributed to the continuing convergence of region and nation — that groups who have traditionally exhibited the highest degrees of southerness are less prevalent as more newcomers move to the region. In other words, we are being bread out. Not just in the South, but in our nation as a whole by people who are slowly but surely replacing our traditions, morals, and values with their own thus erasing our heritage. Today, less than 40% of the Southern population even knows if they have a Confederate ancestor that fought in the war. And who is to blame? We are! We are a people who prefer to follow the old Maxim, "All I wish is to be left alone," and not get involved in controversy. So with the view that people have about our heritage, I ask the question again, “Does heritage still matter?”

In Little Rock, Ark., Confederate Boulevard was renamed Springer Boulevard. The University of Mississippi or “Ole Miss” as it is sometimes called, dropped Colonel Reb as its on-field mascot and plays a watered down version of Dixie called “From Dixie with Love”. Just last week, Ole Miss also announced that they will drop the honorary title of “Colonel Reb” given to the Homecoming King. As we all know, Georgia changed its state flag in an effort to distance itself from its Confederate history. "Heart of Dixie," Alabama’s state slogan, is disappearing from car license plates. Vanderbilt University tried to remove the word “Confederate” from a dormitory that was built with funds from the United Daughters of the Confederacy. The sad thing about each of those examples is that all of them occurred in the South. Worse, all of them were perpetrated by Southerners.

Most of the controversy today has to do with the display of Confederate symbols. You may recall the heated debate surrounding the Confederate flag that flew above the South Carolina statehouse. The flag sat undisturbed for nearly four decades until the NAACP decided to launch an economic boycott against the state. Legislators eventually crumbled under the political pressure and moved the flag to a nearby monument, but members of the NAACP were upset that the flag remained on Capitol grounds. While the NAACP recently announced that they would renew all efforts of an economic boycott, state tourism officials say measuring any effect is difficult. Despite the ongoing sanctions, the direct impact of travelers on South Carolina’s economy has grown from $7.5 billion in 2000 to $10.9 billion last year, according to the South Carolina Parks, Recreation and Tourism Department.

Believe me when I say that I have heard every criticism and insult that has ever been leveled against our heritage. But if there’s anything worse than a Yankee trying to tell us how to live or what to think, it’s a gutless, guilt-ridden, self-destructive Southerner who has been made to feel ashamed of his heritage to the point where he plays an active role in that destruction.

To summarize Sir Winston Churchill, “A nation that forgets its past looses its identity.” That’s what organizations like the Southern Poverty Center want, to erase our heritage. Many good people have been working in recent years to preserve our Confederate