

Time to Get Real

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“Heritage or Hate” is a paper I wrote in 2015 and published on the Mid American Indian Fellowships website. I’m sharing the link again today. The paper contains, I think, a timely message.

Now, as I share the “Heritage or Hate” paper one more time, I have additional things to say. What I say here is for everyone. I’m posting this publicly. Share it as you will. Maybe someone will read it. That being said, I especially want to address my own people, Cherokee people. Although I speak only for myself, nevertheless, I feel compelled to write and share this. Those choosing to read it have the option of paying attention or disregarding what is communicated. To Cherokees and people of Cherokee descent, along with anyone else who may care to listen, I have this to say.

Most of us Cherokees have ancestors who fought on the side of the Confederacy during the Civil War. Most of our ancestors were pretty thoroughly colonized by that time, exhibiting symptoms of Stockholm Syndrome and rife with internalized racism against themselves along with various levels of learned racism against black people. Personally, I have ancestors who fought on both sides during the Civil War and some who fought to stay neutral or just to survive.

I have heard the rhetoric in defense of the Southern Cross flag. I have listened to the “Heritage not Hate” slogan and reasoning. As admitted in the “Heritage or Hate” paper, thirty nine years ago you could have heard me voice the same argument. Hopefully, I have learned a few things since then. During the Civil War, did your ancestor fight under that elongated Southern Cross flag so often seen displayed today? If your ancestor was with the Tennessee State Militia, the answer is Yes, otherwise the answer is a definite No. Each state had their own battle flag; some had more than one. That is a verifiable fact; check it out yourself. Those of our ancestors who fought to stay neutral or fought just to survive the Civil War didn’t wave any flags. But, as for your or my ancestors who joined with the Confederacy, whatever Confederate flag they fought under, they were fighting to protect a system of white supremacy. That’s a fact too, and that fact remains true whether or not those ancestors owned slaves themselves. That fact remains true whether they volunteered or were forcefully conscripted. That fact remains true even if those ancestors were, themselves, not white or passing as white. And, as for that elongated Southern Cross flag, where that flag has seen most action is as a KKK “battle flag” flying over innumerable lynchings, burnings and bombings of houses and entire neighborhoods and other horrendous acts of terrorism perpetrated against people of color.

Personally, I think the time of excusable ignorance has drawn to a close. For decades, I have written and spoken about the need for Americans and Turtle Islanders (Of All Ethnicities) to be honest about and to honestly deal with the history of this country. Only in that honesty can there be real healing of hurts, real reconciliation, real harmony, real relationship. Today, many *are* ready to be honest about our history and about the effect that history has on contemporary life. Others are not ready for honesty and are organizing to fight for a dishonest view of history, their own “alternate facts.” Lines are being drawn.

That Southern Cross flag is not just some benign relic of the past. People are not just playing “Dukes of Hazard” or “The Beverly Hillbillies” with it. That flag is being used today as a battle flag of white nationalists, many of whom are organizing into militias reminiscent of the colonial and state militias and rangers of the 18th and 19th centuries - death squads that roamed the land burning Indian crops and towns, indiscriminately killing men, women and children, financing the destruction and slaughter with scalp bounties. These white nationalists want a “purified white country”. They want a country free from black people, free from Indians (Indians from here as well as Indians from south of that line the white man drew). They want a country free from Jews and free from Muslims. They want a country free from anyone who does not look like and think like they do. The white nationalists say they “want their country back,” but it has never been *their* country. And now, the land itself spits them out like a piece of rancid fruit. This is a new epoch, a new creation with no place for “racial” supremacy, caste hierarchy, empire or hegemony. White nationalists own nothing but hate. Hate is their only heritage, and claiming that heritage, white nationalists hate everyone who is not white, and they hate

the majority of white people as well. And, to these white nationalists, that Southern Cross flag is a symbol of all the hate they hold near and dear.

Those who continue displaying that Southern Cross flag may vow and declare their motivation to be “Heritage not Hate,” but those who see that flag displayed assume, and logically so, that the one displaying that flag sides with white nationalists and white supremacists.

Some may say, “The Southern Cross flag is part of me, part of who I am.” The same could be said of a gangrenous foot, the difference being that retaining a gangrenous foot hurts only the one retaining it, while keeping and displaying the Southern Cross flag is offensive or deeply hurtful to millions whose lives are directly and daily threatened and impacted by the hate that flag represents and communicates.

We Cherokees call ourselves Aniyvwiyv Dhib̄ōb̄ (Real People); I firmly believe it is time we Get Real, be honest about history and put away the heritage of hate. Do’hidv ʌʌō (Peace)

Here’s the link to “Heritage or Hate” by Robert Francis, September 2015. <http://midamericanindianfellowships.org/PDF/Heritage%20or%20Hate.pdf>
