

The Confederate Battle Flag: Why is it perceived so differently
in the US and Europe/Germany?

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Abstract

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I was born and raised in Germany and came to the United States in 1996. In 2010 I became an American citizen, via the “Naturalization” process. I went back to school in 2013 and, being always interested in history, took a liking to early US history. The Civil War fascinated me the most, and the ongoing debate over what the war was fought over created my desire to investigate why the Confederate Battle Flag is so differently perceived in my old and new home country.

The Confederate Flag disrupts the public sphere in the US, but not as much in Europe.

Recent debates over the Confederate Battle Flag in the US sparked my interest in how its perception has changed over the decades since 1865. In Europe it is still mainly a symbol for rebellion, not a reminder of violation of human rights and slavery. Specifically, in Germany the flag was flown during the Velvet Revolutions in the late 1980s. These rebellions eventually led to political changes and the fall of the Berlin Wall. Researching the educational system in both countries to distinguish how differently the era of the American Civil War is taught in schools here and abroad suggests that there is a strong relationship between those educational systems and how the Confederate Flag is appropriated in popular culture. Using Critical Theory, I explore the reasons behind that difference in awareness of its representation. I am comparing popular culture creations like movies, fashion, and music that use the image of the Confederate Battle Flag in the United States and Germany. It is important to understand how a person's upbringing can shape their reality. I will also briefly discuss other European countries like Ireland, Russia and Italy to show how these nations have their own unique understanding of what the Confederate Battle Flag represents.

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Introduction

How the Research Started

Early on in my academic career I was fascinated with the American Civil War (1861-1865). My senior paper for a bachelor's degree explored Mathew Brady's photography of the Civil War and a possible connection to the Secret Service. Originally, I wanted to continue my research on Civil War photography. It was suggested, however, that I should find something a little bit more contemporary to write about. My mentor, Dr. Michael Allen, recommended looking at a book by John M. Coski, *The Confederate Battle Flag: Americas Most Embattled Emblem*. There, in the epilogue, was a brief mention of the Confederate Flag being displayed in various forms during the collapse of the socialist and communist regimes in Europe. This piqued my interest. Having grown up in Germany and living in Germany at the time of the collapse, I did not recall seeing that symbol consciously, or questioning why it would be there. I scoured the internet for images, and there it was: My "wait...what?" moment:¹

¹Chester, Large crowd gathering in Berlin 1988 with flags flying., digital image, The Mic Movement, September 16, 2011, retrieved September/October 2016, <http://micmovement.com/2011/09/the-south-shall-rise-again-but-in-berlin/>.



What was the Confederate Flag doing there? As far as I remembered, Americans were not involved in the protests in person. Who would pick this symbol, which is so hotly contested, and fly it at a rally to open the borders between East and West Germany? This image triggered so many questions. I started looking for answers.

The Confederate Battle Flag in Recent Concerns

The Confederate Battle Flag has become even more controversial in the United States since the Charleston massacre June 17, 2015. Dylann Roof, a young white male who was twenty-one years old at the time, shot and killed nine black church members and wounded three more at a prayer service in Charleston, South Carolina. His intent was to start a race war. Over the course of his arraignment, photos surfaced from his social media pages that showed him posing with a

gun and the Confederate flag. Another depicted him burning the American Flag.²



The images provided new fuel to a controversy that had been ongoing since the Civil Rights Movement. Because of the debates surrounding the Charleston shooting, the Confederate Battle Flag was removed from the state capitol grounds in South Carolina on July 10, 2015.³ Before its removal, major retailers and corporations, such as Walmart, Amazon, eBay, and Sears announced they would stop selling items which displayed the Confederate Flag.⁴ Consequently, Roof's actions also renewed the discussion about whether statues of Confederate soldiers and prominent figures like General Robert E. Lee or Jefferson Davis have a place in today's American communities.

In the wake of the mass shooting in Charleston, the New Orleans city council decided to remove General Lee's statue. In a speech given on May 19, 2017, Mayor Landrieu stated why the statue had to come down:

These statues are not just stone and metal. They are not just innocent remembrances of a benign history. These monuments purposefully celebrate a fictional, sanitized Confederacy; ignoring the death, ignoring the enslavement, and the terror that it actually

² Dylann Roof posing with Confederate Flag, digital image, CBS News, retrieved May 7, 2017, <http://cbsnews3.cbsstatic.com/hub/i/r/2015/06/20/3e2f87f3-e5a0-4ddc-9883-d6f0cf64da6e/thumbnail/620x350/3faaefd5f8a2842d042b7f516fa8349d/roofmanifesto23.jpg>.

³ Meg Wagner; Corky Siemaszko (July 10, 2015). "Confederate flag fans, critics gather at S.C. statehouse". *The New York Daily News*. Retrieved May 4, 2017

⁴ MJ Lee (June 23, 2015). "Walmart, Amazon.com, Sears, eBay to stop selling Confederate flag merchandise". CNN. Retrieved May 4, 2017.

stood for. After the Civil War, these statues were a part of that terrorism as much as a burning cross on someone's lawn; they were erected purposefully to send a strong message to all who walked in their shadows about who was still in charge in this city.⁵

While this statement is certainly true, some Americans argue it addresses only one aspect of the monument: slavery and racism. Some argue General Lee was a brilliant military leader. He was also a cartographer, who helped to lay out the state line between Ohio and Michigan and mapped the Des Moines Rapids on the Mississippi River in his function as a military engineer. After the Civil War, Lee favored reconstruction and advocated voting rights for African Americans.⁶ Some argue, then, that Lee's legacy is more than his service in the Confederate Army.

A similar controversy had erupted in September 1990 over the statue of Confederate President Jefferson Davis in Texas. In opinion pieces in the *Daily Texan* one faction tried to reason that "the former Confederate President did not fight for slavery, but for "self-determination" whereas the other party justified their call for removal with the statement that the Confederacy's conception of states' rights held slavery central to their beliefs.⁷

David W. Blight, a professor of American history, director of the Gilder Lehrman Center for the Study of Slavery, Resistance, and Abolition at Yale, and author of the book *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory*, was interviewed May 9, 2017 in connection with the call for removals of Civil War monuments in New Orleans. The interview was conducted by phone by Isaac Chotiner for the online magazine *Slate*. In the interview Blight pointed out that the South was "allowed to craft its own legacy, to build its own memorials, to create its own

⁵ Mitch Landrieu, "We Can't Walk Away From This Truth", *The Atlantic*, May 23, 2017, 1, accessed May 24, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/05/we-cant-walk-away-from-this-truth/527721/>.

⁶ Noah Andre Trudeau and Wesley K. Clark, *Robert E. Lee: Lessons in Leadership* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 204.

⁷ Charles D. Gear. *Fate of Texas*. (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2008), 246.

story, and historical memory is always about the politics of who gets to control the story.” Blight further delved into the legacy of General Lee, who in the twentieth century was portrayed as a Christian soldier following orders and fighting for his home. Blight argues that this is a twisted truth, because Lee was a Confederate Nationalist and knew the cause he was fighting for, despite being a good Christian. Blight also notes that war memorials are often contextual and political.

If you think about it, there is a World War I memorial in almost every village and town in Europe. To the soldiers. Understandably: We honor the dead for good reasons. But we don’t know quite how to build monuments and memorials to the aftermath, because they are not about valor or sacrifice or blood necessarily. They are about a political process that is often deeply divisive and deeply problematic.⁸

Politics and history- politics in history. A college professor of mine once said that history in any conflict is always written by the victorious party. That might be true, and we have many examples in the more recent past when a political change in regime triggered massive, often violent, destruction of monuments. The first things that fell in the socialist part of Germany after the Berlin Wall crumbled were statues of the leader of the socialist party, Erich Honecker. In Russia, monuments to Joseph Stalin and Vladimir Lenin fell almost immediately to the wrecking ball after the communist regime was toppled. But that is different in the case of the American Civil War, Professor Blight points out. He says:

You mentioned Saddam Hussein: You had a regime that took over a country and ran a brutal dictatorship and fell when he was deposed. It isn’t surprising that monuments were pulled down. The problem with America is that this was a Civil War that involved the whole country, and the South couldn’t go anywhere.⁹

⁸ Isaac Chotiner, "Should New Orleans Remove Its Civil War Monuments?," *Slate Magazine*, May 09, 2017, , accessed May 30, 2017, http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/interrogation/2017/05/should_new_orleans_remove_its_civil_war_monuments_historian_david_blight.html.

⁹ Ibid.

Blight's point is that memorials often reflect a particular time, place, and power structure. Interpretations of these memorials change through history, leading to the assumption that values concerning the start, duration, result and aftermath of the Civil War changed repeatedly during the 152 years after General Lee surrendered. Perception of the Civil War and its symbols, specifically in the South, shifted from having lost a war to preserve a lifestyle in the late nineteenth century, to the resistance to change and de-segregation in the 1950s and 60s, and remain, even today, a political issue for the opposing parties. The heated language of racism and white supremacy are tied to these legacies and they are sure to get a reaction out of current American voters.

Memorializing the Past

How have other countries dealt with history deeply rooted in conflict within their own boundaries? I offer Germany as an example; not only because I have firsthand experience, but because its example shows a different, in my mind more sensible way to keep history alive and in the consciousness of its citizens after devastating events and historical change. Memorials are not in public spaces like plazas or on capitol grounds. The website of the Goethe Institute phrases this eloquently:

German cities are full of memorial sites. Nonetheless, their character changed following the First World War. In place of bombastic victors' monuments, sites arose in honor of heroically fallen soldiers. After the devastating Second World War, no one felt any further need for hero worship, and in many places additional plaques with the names of fallen fellow citizens were simply added to those of the First World War" and states in a follow-up paragraph: "Since then, monuments celebrating national pride or outstanding personalities from politics, culture or science are no longer expedient. Instead of monuments, memorials arise that warn against war, displacement and exile, and genocide.... Germans are thematizing their own political and moral failure by means of

memorials and monuments”. The article ends, “More recent memorials have in common an architecture that avoids emotional pathos of any sort by means of restraint and simple design. They do not flaunt national pride or pretensions to power and are not directed against other peoples but possess a moral and ethical educational mission. They are meant to impart insight and humility and appeal to tolerance and humanity.”¹⁰

Here I would like to insert an example of history and memory that still makes most people uncomfortable, in Germany as well as the rest of the world. The Holocaust was one of the darkest periods in German history. After the end of WW II, Allied forces liberated the thousands of people kept in concentration camps. The photos, many taken by US soldiers, are terrifying, anger- and shame-inducing, and haunting. Some Germans will deny that it ever happened, despite the glaring evidence.¹¹ Some Germans will still try to find justification for the atrocities committed. Recently, in January 2018, a woman born to German parents in Canada was arrested in Germany for posting YouTube videos, allegedly filmed and uploaded in Germany, denying the Holocaust.¹²

However, Germany has formulated one of the toughest Holocaust Denial Laws in Europe. Paragraph 130, section 3 reads: ”Whosoever publicly or in a meeting approves of, denies or downplays an act committed under the rule of National Socialism of the kind indicated in section 6 (1) of the Code of International Criminal Law, in a manner capable of disturbing the public peace shall be liable to imprisonment not exceeding five years or a fine.” Followed by section 4: “Whosoever publicly or in a meeting disturbs the public peace in a manner that violates the dignity of the victims by approving of, glorifying, or justifying National Socialist

¹⁰ Falk Jaeger, “Avoiding the Pathos,” @GI_weltweit, October 2017, 1, accessed June 06, 2018, <https://www.goethe.de/eng/kul/arc/20979492.html>.

¹¹ Deborah E. Lipstadt, *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory* (London: Penguin Books, 2017), 8.

¹²<https://globalnews.ca/news/4336859/canadian-germany-holocaust-denier/>

rule of arbitrary force shall be liable to imprisonment not exceeding three years or a fine.”¹³

Germany was occupied by the Allies after the war; the US, Britain, and Russia oversaw detaining, prosecuting and punishing the criminals who had committed those monstrous acts against fellow humans. Post-war generations, like mine, spent much time in high school on the topic of WW II. Nothing was minced, or sugar-coated. I remember two field trips in eighth and ninth grade (1979 and 1980, respectively), one to Dachau and one to Auschwitz. Neither memorial glorifies the political background of the time, or the Nazi Party. Neither celebrates the racism and the white supremacy that was clearly displayed there. Hitler’s dream of a “master race” of blue-eyed, blond, tall and vigorous people is only mentioned in connection with the medical experiments that were conducted.

Both memorials, however, teach what happened and why it happened. A concise timeline shows snapshots of the political and economic landscape. They explain the circumstances that led an entire fearful nation down a path, following a deranged leader. The memorials show what to look out for and what to suppress and eradicate the minute it rears its ugly head again. They pay respect to the thousands who lost their lives there and the thousands that survived, forever haunted by their experiences. The entire existence of the memorials can be summarized in two words that are displayed at the end of a photo gallery at Dachau: “Never Again”. A sign at the entrance of Dachau’s memorial site reads: “Dachau- the significance of this name will never be erased from German history. It stands for all concentration camps which the Nazis established in their territory”.¹⁴

¹³ *Bundesministerium der Justiz und für Verbraucherschutz: Strafgesetzbuch [Federal Ministry of Justice and Consumer Protection: Criminal Code]* http://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/englisch_stgb/englisch_stgb.html#p1241, accessed June 29, 2018.

¹⁴ MTFanders. "KZ_Gedenkstaette Dachau." Digital image. February 01, 2006. Accessed June 05, 2017. <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/5/5e/Dachau-001.jpg/1024px-Dachau-001.jpg>



Europe has a different attitude towards history compared with the US. Europe embraces history and teaches it. History is highly valued and used as a tool to shape the future; be it through repetition of something that has worked in the past or by trying to avoid at all cost what has not worked. History is viewed as affirmation or means of prevention.

Comparison of values can be eye-opening. Dato' Seri Dr. Mahathir bin Mohamad, the Prime Minister of Malaysia, delivered a speech in 1996 to the 29th International General Meeting of the Pacific Basin Economic Council in Washington D.C. In his speech, he compared the societal values of East Asian populations with those of Americans. He established six values, one of which was “respect for education and learning.” This was ranking second in the list of values for East Asia and not even on the American list. Sixty-nine percent of East Asians appreciated learning and education compared to only 15 percent of Americans.¹⁵ There may be a connection to the ancient teachings of Confucius. He taught that “all things originate from Heaven and all humans originate from ancestors.” This is central to Confucian doctrine and “Confucianism

¹⁵ Mahatir Bin Mohamad, Dr., *"The Asian Value Debate"*, speech, 29th International General Meeting of the Pacific Basin Economic Council, Washington D. C, April 26, 2017), 6,7.

endows ancestral worship with the meaning of not forgetting one's origins."¹⁶ "Start in the past if you want to know anything about the future," was a topic in one of the classes I attended last year, titled TIAS 504: Values and Action.

Charles Taylor reached a similar conclusion in *A World Consensus on Human Rights?* He explored the connection between politics and religion when it comes to establishing a worldwide agreement on what human rights should be. He states: "Because of its roots in a certain justice agenda, the politics of establishing rights in the West has often been surrounded by anger, indignation, and the imperative to punish historic wrongdoing."¹⁷ Without a firm grasp on history, mostly our own (though it helps to know what else was going on in the world to spot important connections), there is no past. It is as if we started existing the moment we were born, without connection to the past, without any future to consider. The American cultural anthropologist Richard Shweder agrees. He writes: "Many in our culture lack a meaningful orientation to the past. We come from nowhere, the product of a random genetic accident. Many lack a meaningful orientation towards the future. We are going nowhere; at best, we view ourselves as machines that will one day run down."¹⁸

I believe there is a moral obligation to preserve our history. If historical symbols, like Confederate statues or the Confederate Flag, are offensive to the majority, then take them out of the offensive spots and make them publicly available to those that are interested. It will not end the current racism and the displays of white supremacy if all chronicles of the Civil War and the Confederacy are expunged from the record. Many small museums are privately run, non-profit

¹⁶ Xinzhong Yao, *An Introduction to Confucianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 202.

¹⁷ Charles Taylor, "A World Consensus On Human Rights?," *Dissent Magazine*, (Summer 1996), 20.

¹⁸ Richard A. Shweder, *Thinking Through Cultures: Expeditions in Cultural Psychology* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1996), 155.

organizations. They sit on private property and property rights apply here. In 1989 the Supreme Court ruled in the case of *Texas vs Johnson* that Mr. Johnson could burn the American flag because he was expressing an opinion and that this act was covered by the First Amendment. Texas courts had convicted him previously of desecrating the flag under Texas law.¹⁹ I would say that the flying of the Confederate flag by citizens on their private property falls under the same ruling. In December of 2016 Dr. Roy Cordato wrote an opinion piece on this ruling. He stated: “While I agree with Scalia that flag burning should be protected under the First Amendment, the more fundamental issue is not one of free speech rights but property rights. If the flag is yours, you have the right to burn it. If it is not, you do not.”²⁰ As Cordato points out, it is ownership of the flag that gives the owner the right to use it as a means of expressing disagreement.

Kwame Anthony Appiah, a British-born Ghanaian-American philosopher, cultural theorist, and novelist, dedicated a chapter in his book *Cosmopolitanism* to the imperial British forces that looted and carried off the treasures and cultural belongings of his African homeland. “In the current climate of political correctness (the avoidance, often considered as taken to extremes, of forms of expression or action that are perceived to exclude, marginalize, or insult groups of people who are socially disadvantaged or discriminated against”²¹ he writes, isolated artifacts were returned. The topic is still hotly debated in British and African newspapers alike.²²

¹⁹ William J. Brennan Jr., and Supreme Court of The United States. *U.S. Reports: Texas v. Johnson*, 491 U.S. 397. 1988, Periodical, accessed February 13, 2019, <https://www.loc.gov/item/usrep491397/>.

²⁰ Roy Cordato, “Flag Burning: A Matter of Property Rights,” *John Locke Foundation*, accessed February 13, 2019, <https://www.johnlocke.org/update/flag-burning-a-matter-of-property-rights/>

²¹ Google Search, accessed June 06, 2018, [https://www.google.com/search?q=political correctnes&rlz=1C1CHBF_enUS727US727&oq=political correctnes&aqs=chrome..69i57j0l5.5294j1j8&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8](https://www.google.com/search?q=political+correctness&rlz=1C1CHBF_enUS727US727&oq=political+correctness&aqs=chrome..69i57j0l5.5294j1j8&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8).

²² David Love, "France Agrees To Return Stolen African Artifacts to Benin, But Will Other European Colonizers Follow Suit?" *Atlanta Black Star*, July 22, 2018, , accessed July 25, 2018,

In 1970, UNESCO made a stipulation regarding the theft and the destruction of a peoples' cultural belongings. I think this stipulation can be applied here. It reads: "Cultural property constitutes one of the basic elements of civilization and national culture and its true value can be appreciated only in relation to the fullest possible information regarding its origin, history and traditional setting."²³ Appiah wrote: "It is essential for every State to become increasingly alive to the moral obligations to respect its own cultural heritage."²⁴

But how do European countries like Germany perceive a symbol like the Confederate Battle Flag that is so controversial to the US? Today, the presence of a Confederate Battle Flag makes many Americans feel uncomfortable. For many it stands for slavery, white supremacy, discrimination, and an unwillingness to see African Americans as equal. Dr. Monnica T. Williams of the University of Connecticut believes the Confederate Battle Flag to be one of many micro aggressors and prolonged exposure causes stress which can lead to general unwellness and, in some cases, post-traumatic stress disorder.²⁵ This is one side of the debate. The other side claims southern pride, a way of life, heritage and ancestry, and in many minds the flag represents a war which the South lost but should have won. They feel their roots are being erased and their history made obsolete. The flag has been used by politicians, the Ku Klux Klan, country music artists and Neo-Nazis here in the United States. But why did some Europeans adopt the Confederate Battle Flag for their causes? Why was the flag flown at mass gatherings in

<http://atlantablackstar.com/2018/07/22/france-agrees-to-return-stolen-african-artifacts-to-benin-but-will-other-european-colonizers-follow-suit/>.

²³ Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 2006), 121.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Monnica T. Williams, "The Confederate Flag-Heritage or Hate?", *Psychology Today*, July 6, 2015, accessed December 2, 2018, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/culturally-speaking/201507/the-confederate-flag-heritage-or-hate>

Germany in 1989, when citizens rose against an oppressive communist regime in the divided country?²⁶ It also appears at soccer games in Italy and Ireland and country music festivals in France and Germany. Germany especially has a love for everything “Americana,” from clothing and music to food preferences and symbols.

In this case, the focus on the Confederate Battle Flag is aimed at understanding how background shapes values and how different values create friction. The questions I am examining in this research are: Why is the Confederate Battle Flag perceived so differently in Europe and especially Germany? How different are the values attached to the flag? What makes Europeans attach different values to the symbol? I will attempt to show that the differences are generated by European educational systems, focusing on Germany. Does education have any influence on the difference in perception? This topic is relevant for history and especially the social sciences because it serves one important purpose: to explain the meaning, nature and challenges related to a phenomenon.

A personal connection

I was born and raised in West Germany. In the late 1980s I was in my mid-twenties and I had close relatives in East Germany. My parents had fled the East German town of Erfurt in 1963, climbing on a train with nothing more than two suitcases and some money. My father was significantly older than my mother and was divorced with four children. The kids lived with their mother. When he left Erfurt with my mother, the ex-wife and children remained. Then the wall

²⁶ Chester, "The South Shall Rise Again...But in Berlin?", The Mic Movement, October 03, 2011, accessed September 04, 2016, <http://micmovement.com/2011/09/the-south-shall-rise-again-but-in-berlin/>.

was completely shut, and travel was made impossible.

As I grew up, I got to know my step-siblings through letters and occasional visits to East Germany. A small number of guarded phone calls was made on special occasions, such as birthdays. Phonelines were randomly tapped by the East German government and there was a very distinct clicking sound in the line when that happened. Visas were expensive and hard to get. A good reason for a visit was needed; medical emergencies seemed to work best. As I recall my father was every two years close to death so his youngest daughter from the first marriage could visit. She had a pacemaker implanted at a very young age and could play the medical emergency card as well. Every couple of years we obtained visas to visit her.

I vividly remember how gray everything was in East Germany. The sandstone buildings were a dark gray, and the people seemed to have no joy in life. My stepsister had never seen a real pineapple, and bananas were a luxury. We visited her in 1977 (yes, that's where I was when Elvis died). I was 12 years old and very proud of a pair of black fashionable corduroy pants and a pair of furry moon boots. People in East Germany pointed and laughed when I was walking with my parents in the streets. TV was limited to two government-owned stations and American fashion, or any entertainment, like movies or TV shows, from outside of East Germany was not part of the line-up of programs. Current fashion, which in 1977 still took a few years to migrate from America to West Germany, was completely unknown in the eastern part. No wonder they thought I looked strange.

It was then that I heard the phrase "Vitamin C" quite often, with C standing for connections. With "Vitamin C" a person in the East, with connections to the West, could get their hands on what they perceived as luxury items and be the envy of their neighbors. I recall my parents sending small care packages to which I added little sample bottles of nail polish,

because they were a hot commodity for my step sister. She could trade them in for essential goods. In exchange we received (or bought on our few trips) household goods like towels, kitchen items, art books and sheet music. For my fifteenth birthday, I got a Spanish guitar from my mother's uncle who lived in Erfurt, my mom's home town. These general items were inexpensive because every factory in East Germany was subsidized by the government. My step brother-in-law worked for the railroad, which also received subsidies. He often told us that he sometimes sat around for 8 hours, chatting, reading the paper or playing cards with his fellow workers because there were no supplies for him to do his job, but they got paid anyway.

People tried to get their hands on everything western, often at a cost. What little Western goods and media made it to East Germany were treasured and frequently passed along for years. Some Easterners were brave enough to point their TV antennas towards the west and catch an occasional glimpse of grainy black and white western programming. There was always the fear of a neighbor, or even family members, calling the authorities. "Resistance is the byproduct of oppression. With the first inkling of exploitation and oppression come the seeds of struggle to throw off those who would exploit and oppress." So writes Larry Hales, one of the founders of Colorado United Communities Against Police Brutality, and an organizer of the Recreate 68 Coalition, and frequent author of articles in the online forum *Workers World*.²⁷ My eastern relatives had their own, very specific experience of oppression. My step brother-in-law was once arrested and jailed for six months for singing a popular song at a party, slightly inebriated. The song was called "What's the dog doing on the couch? (Was macht der Hund auf dem Sofa?)" and he had taken the photo of Erich Honecker, political leader of the country at the time, and

²⁷ Larry Hales, "Oppression Breeds Resistance," *Workers World*, https://www.workers.org/2009/us/oppression_0319/

placed it on the sofa. A neighbor turned him in to authorities.

What I know about the East German school curriculum is what I heard from my family members in the former East of Germany in my recent interviews. As far as I understand, American history was taught as a bad example of a political system. Being heavily influenced by Russia, any historical content was screened to fit the socialist or communist agenda. None of my family members recalled there being a lot of emphasis on the American Civil War, other than it being used as an example how too much freedom for the people can lead to unrest and ultimately a civil war. Slavery was used as a tool to show western depravity, using Karl Marx's and Frederick Engels' literature to prove that slavery was one of the many things bred by capitalism.²⁸

In East and West Germany, it took decades for simmering resistance to finally evolve into the non-violent revolutions that brought an end to the dividing wall and the oppressive socialist regime in the East. The Eastern government did not say that they would give up their place of power or that they would tear the Berlin Wall down when it became clear that they could not stop the uprising of citizens against the oppressive command. What they offered was a lift on the travel ban. East German citizens took this offer literally to the streets of Berlin and flocked to the checkpoints along the Berlin Wall, demanding that the border be opened so they could pass through. On the western side people like me were waiting. Would the authorities open the gates? As more and more people gathered the guards became worried. There were so many people chanting, waving, singing. Backup military forces could not get through and neither did any instructions from the leaders, so finally the guards just stepped aside and let things happen.²⁹

²⁸ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Communist Manifesto*, Chicago, Charles H. Kerr & Co., 1947

²⁹ Michael Meyer, *The Year That Changed the World* (New York, 2009), 169.

I knew my stepsister was on the other side and we had tried in a few very short phone calls to determine a meeting point. It took three hours before we finally saw each other.

Given my personal experience, the limited amount of knowledge available to people living in East Germany about the USA, and the oppressive regime under which east Germany existed, it is understandable how the Confederate Flag could have been perceived to be limited to rebellion, limited government and states' rights. I am not implying, however, that today people's awareness of the Confederate Flag is this restricted. In this age of information, being freely available at the touch of a finger, such narrow vision of a symbol seems highly unlikely. There are groups that want to preserve a relic from a time long past and they play on the heartstrings of people with a deep sense of heritage and belonging, downplaying the negative side in the process. There are people who use the flag as a shock symbol, and they are fully aware of the emotions and the negativity connected with it. To understand the deeper connections, I will start with a look at the history of the Confederate Flag since its inception in 1862.

A Brief Encounter with US History

The battle flag of the Confederacy stands alongside the flag of the German Nazi Party as one of the most contentious flags in history. Its meaning has evolved over time from a being an identifier of an individual's side in fighting a war to a representation of racism and the violation of human rights. To many, it remains a historical artifact and a symbol of regional pride. It can be made into a bumper sticker, jewelry or clothing items. The battle flag is not the original national flag of the Confederacy. That flag was found to be too similar to the Union flag. The problem became apparent in the first major encounter of the war: the battle at Manassas, or Bull Run, on July 21, 1861. General P. G. T. Beauregard was unable to distinguish between federal

and Confederate troops. After the engagement, he suggested to his commander the adoption of a specific battle flag.³⁰ The subsequent design, with the blue southern cross on red background with white stars was adopted by the end of 1861 and consistently flown until the fall of the Confederacy. The white stars signified the number of states in the Confederacy, reaching 13 by the end of 1861 when the secessionist parties of Missouri and Kentucky joined.³¹

From 1865 to 1948 the flag remained to many an identifier and historical artifact. That changed during the Civil Rights Movement when the so-called “Dixiecrats” resurrected the battle flag for their political purposes. This short-lived splinter group of the Democrats formed in 1948 and called itself the States’ Rights Democratic Party, promoting white supremacy, segregation and the enforcement of Jim Crow laws. The States’ Rights Democratic Party’s political platform was revealed at their second convention on August 14, 1948. Article 4 of their party platform read:

We stand for the segregation of the races and the racial integrity of each race; the constitutional right to choose one's associates; to accept private employment without governmental interference, and to earn one's living in any lawful way. We oppose the elimination of segregation, the repeal of miscegenation statutes, the control of private employment by Federal bureaucrats called for by the misnamed civil rights program. We favor home-rule, local self-government and a minimum interference with individual rights.

³⁰ John M. Coski, *The Confederate Battle Flag: Americas Most Embattled Emblem* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 8.

³¹ Coski, *The Confederate Battle Flag*, 11.

Missouri and Kentucky proclaimed neutrality early in the war. As time progressed, they found it harder and harder to keep that stance. The final straw was Lincoln’s plan to raise 75,000 troops to squash the rebellion. Both states found it to be “...illegal, unconstitutional and revolutionary.” Aaron Astor, *Rebels on the Border*, Louisiana State University, 2012, chap. 4, Kindle.

Article 5 stated: “We oppose and condemn the action of the Democratic Convention in sponsoring a civil rights program calling for the elimination of segregation, social equality by Federal fiat, regulations of private employment practices, voting, and local law enforcement.”³²



Figure 1 Dixiecrats jubilantly wave confederate flags at their 1948 Birmingham, Alabama Convention (Marion Johnson Photographs/Atlanta History Center)

One of the most memorable characters to come out of the Dixiecrat movement was Strom Thurmond (1902-2003), who served as a Senator for South Carolina from 1954 until 2003. In 1948 he ran for president with the Dixiecrats general platform of states’ rights, social conservatism and racial segregation but lost to his Democrat opponent Harry S. Truman. The party merged back into the Democratic party in the same year, but with significant long-term effects on the political landscape. Kari Frederickson states in *The Dixiecrat Revolt and the End of the Solid South*: “Dixiecrat faithful contributed the early leadership of many local and state citizen councils and served as a stepping stone to the Republican Party.”³³ The short-lived party

³² “Minor/Third Party Platforms: Platform of the States Rights Democratic Party,” August 14, 1948. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, accessed February 2, 2018, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25851>.

³³ Kari A. Frederickson, *The Dixiecrat Revolt and the End of the Solid South, 1932-1968* (Chapel Hill, NC: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2001), 9.

used the Confederate battle flag in their brief election campaign to symbolize resistance to the federal government, converting its value as a historical artifact to a symbol of racism.³⁴ The 1960s saw the rise of White Citizens' Council groups in southern states in response to the ruling in the 1954 case *Brown vs Board of Education*, which deemed segregation in schools unequal and the principle of "separate but equal" therefore inherently flawed. The Citizens' Councils attracted middle and upper-class whites and, differing from the Ku-Klux-Klan and other racist groups at the time, did not promote violence. They used economic, social and political pressure to subjugate African Americans and their supporters.³⁵ The Confederate Battle Flag was displayed proudly at their rallies. In the late 1970s and early 1980s support for the White Citizens' Council declined and they regrouped into the Council of Conservative Citizens which exists to this day.³⁶ These negative, emotionally charged values stayed with the flag throughout its continued use to counter the Civil Rights movement.

The Ku Klux Klan adopted the Confederate Battle flag during its third emergence after the 1950s. Founded by six Confederate veterans in 1865, the original Klan opposed the Loyal Leagues and Republican State Governments' Reconstruction Era policies. This first wave of Klan activity was driven by underground campaigns of violence against Republican leaders and both, black and white, voters. After 1870, Republican state governments in the South turned to Congress for help, subsequently concluding in the passage of three Enforcement Acts, the strongest of which was the Ku Klux Klan Act of 1871. It "attempted to provide a remedy for

³⁴ Sam Seder, 1948 political campaign button for the States Rights Democrats, digital image, The Ring of Fire Network, September 06, 2016, accessed August 02, 2017, <https://trofire.com/2016/09/06/ousting-dixiecrats-realignment-democratic-party-20th-century-majority-report/>.

³⁵ "White Citizens' Council (Council of Conservative Citizens)", *Participedia*, accessed February 5, 2018, https://participedia.net/en/organizations/citizens-council#cite_note-CCC-4

³⁶ *Conservative Citizens Foundation Inc*, accessed March 3, 2018, <http://conservative-headlines.com/>

private lawlessness. The statute outlawed conspiracies to deny civil rights and increased the power of the president to use military force to suppress domestic violence that deprived citizens of their “rights, privileges or immunities or protection named in the constitution”.³⁷

William J. Simmons, a Spanish war veteran, resurrected the Klan in his own version in 1915, recruiting the help of publicist Edward Young Clark and Elizabeth Tyler in 1920.³⁸ This form of the Klan now targeted Jews, immigrants, and Catholics alongside blacks and attracted a following of over 100,000 new members by the late summer of 1921.³⁹

The fourth and latest manifestation using the Klan’s name focuses their attention on opposing the Civil Rights Movement and they are classified as a hate group. David M. Chalmers states in his book *Hooded Americanism: The History of the Ku Klux Klan*: “Today, as in the 1970s, they arrive at rallies in Executive Campers, and their media celebrity, David Duke, travels around the country by jet to take part in TV talk shows. ...the Ku Klux Klan has been for more than 100 years -in fits and starts- a secret, terrorist society dedicated to maintaining white rule in the United states.”⁴⁰ The Klan also claims they are upholding traditional Christian values, but so

³⁷ Lou Falkner. Williams, *The Great South Carolina Ku Klux Klan Trials, 1871-1872* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1991), 42.

³⁸ Richard Baudoin, ed., *The Ku Klux Klan: A History of Racism and Violence* (Montgomery, AL: Southern Poverty Law Center, 1997), 16.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 17.

⁴⁰ David Mark. Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism: The History of the Ku Klux Klan*, 3rd ed. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 424.

far, no Christian denominations have declared affiliation with the Klan.⁴¹



Figure 1 A black man mockingly 'applauds' marching KKK members in New Orleans in September 1976

The Anti-Defamation League recently estimated the Klan's membership to be about 3,000 people.⁴² The Southern Poverty Law Center places that number anywhere between 5,000 and 8,000 active members with an unknown number of sympathizers and supporters.⁴³ Neo-Nazis fall in to the same category of hate groups. German Neo-Nazis use the Confederate Flag because the Swastika of the Nazi regime is banned by law in their country. Section 86 of the German Criminal Codes (Strafgesetzbuch) states:" Section 86a: Use of Symbols of Unconstitutional Organizations.

(1) Whoever:

⁴¹ Philip Perlmutter, *Legacy of Hate: A Short History of Ethnic, Religious, and Racial Prejudice in America* (Armonk, NY: Sharpe, 1999), 170.

⁴² *Tattered Robes: The State of the Ku Klux Klan in the United States*, PDF, Anti-Defamation League (2016), accessed March 3, 2018, <https://www.adl.org/sites/default/files/documents/assets/pdf/combating-hate/tattered-robos-state-of-klk-2016.pdf>.

⁴³ "The Ku-Klux-Klan", *Southern Poverty Law Center*, accessed January 9, 2018, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/ideology/ku-klux-klan>.

1. domestically distributes or publicly uses, in a meeting or in writings (Section 11 subsection (3)) disseminated by him, symbols of one of the parties or organizations indicated in Section 86 subsection (1), nos. 1, 2 and 4; or

2. produces, stocks, imports or exports objects which depict or contain such symbols for distribution or use domestically or abroad, in the manner indicated in number 1, shall be punished with imprisonment for not more than three years or a fine

(2) Symbols, within the meaning of subsection (1), shall be, in particular, flags, insignia, uniforms, slogans and forms of greeting. Symbols which are so similar as to be mistaken for those named in sentence 1 shall be deemed to be equivalent thereto.

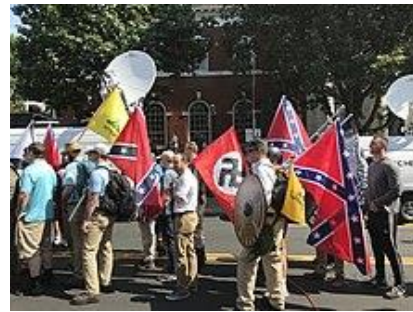
(3) Section 86 subsections (3) and (4), shall apply accordingly.⁴⁴

For Neo-Nazis this American symbol of white supremacy is the next best thing and not outlawed in Germany. Vice versa has the Ku-Klux-Klan, or at least its supporters, started to bring flags with the Nazi symbol of the Swastika to rallies. The “hooked cross” albeit an ancient Eurasian symbol, is not illegal in the United States. Some are calling for restrictions on its display, but legal experts say the reasoning behind those thoughts is flawed.⁴⁵ “A familiar meme in recent days has been that display of the Nazi flag is inherently ‘incitement,’ ” said Greg Magarian, professor of law, referring to the neo-Nazis, white supremacists and others staging a rally that resulted in counter-protests, skirmishes, arrests and death. “Displaying a Nazi flag can be incitement, but usually it isn’t. In the United States, most displays of Nazi flags have not, in fact, caused unlawful action. That’s very strong evidence that the display of a Nazi flag without

⁴⁴ “Section 86a Use of Symbols of Unconstitutional Organizations”, *Criminal Code (Strafgesetzbuch, StGB0)*, German Law Archive, retrieved March 5, 2018, <http://germanlawarchive.iuscomp.org/?p=752#86>

⁴⁵ “WashU Expert: The First Amendment and the Nazi Flag,” *The Source Washington University in St. Louis*, retrieved March 5, 2018, <https://source.wustl.edu/2017/08/washu-expert-first-amendment-nazi-flag/>

other, aggravating circumstances doesn't amount to incitement."⁴⁶ Legal experts cite the first amendment which guarantees the rights of free expression and action that are fundamental to democratic government, including rights to freedom of assembly, freedom of the press, freedom of religion, and freedom of speech.⁴⁷



It is safe to say that the Confederate Battle Flag has changed quite a bit in meaning, purpose, value and perception in 80 years. It remained from 1861 until the 1940s a relic of a war, an identifier, and an artifact. In the mid-twentieth century it was purposefully used to remind African Americans of their place in society and conveyed white southern pride and a deep anxiety and desire to preserve the status quo in the face of an emergent Civil Rights movement. The late 20th century to the present added a strong current of “white supremacy.” This leads me to explore how the media, television and movies in both, the US and Europe, shaped the opinion of an entire generation, my generation in particular, of what message the flag was supposed to send.

Education of the Masses through Media

In this segment, I look at movies, music, and TV shows. These are media whose content

⁴⁶ Ibid

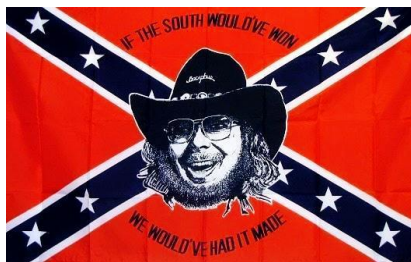
⁴⁷ *Dictionary.com*, s.v. "First Amendment," 2005, accessed June 7, 2018.

was available and easily accessible to the public through TV and radio in West Germany and the US. Other published media like books, magazines or newspapers were limited to specialty bookstores and therefore not accessed by the general populace in West Germany. Again, I will provide some background information to delineate my own position in this research. In German schools, English is a mandatory subject, taught from fifth grade on through graduation. I always liked it and was pretty good at it. When I graduated high school and started to work, I quickly became close friends with a co-worker who frequented the club scene of the American soldiers stationed in my home town. The clubs were usually in one building, but separated into Pop, R&B and Dance music, and Country music venues. At age twenty, I favored Country music. The more time I spent with my friends at the club and the more I interacted with American soldiers, the better my English language skills became. Pretty quickly I was reading American comics and magazines. Most of my other friends did not have that connection to American culture and media, and my extended family in East Germany certainly had no way of relating to that media.

American Country music became one of my favorite styles for about 10 years and I never perceived the frequent use of the Confederate Flag in videos or on album covers and CD inserts as offensive. The controversial use of the Confederate Battle Flag spans across the musical spectrum.

Country music has its fair share of Confederate Battle flags on stage, in videos or on album covers. Songs by Hank Williams Jr. and Blake Shelton use the words 'rebel flag' in their lyrics. In *The South's Gonna Rattle again*" Hank Williams Jr. sings: "We got some big old silver eagles, and we're fly'in all over this land and you can bet our brag on that rebel flag,

you can damn well count me in.”⁴⁸ Blake Shelton sings in *You Can Kiss My Country Ass*:
 “Tearin' down a dirt road, rebel flag flyin', coon dog in the back. Truck bed loaded down with beer and a cold one in my lap: Earnhart sticker behind my head and my woman by my side, tail-pipe's poppin', the radio's rockin', "Country boy can survive." If you got a problem with that, ha, ha, you can kiss my country ass.”⁴⁹



3 Hank Williams Jr. rebel flag; sold online at The Dixie Shop.com



Figure 2 Country music band Alabama's album cover

Alabama, a country music band from Fort Payne, Alabama, cites southern pride for their display of the flag. Teddy Gentry, bassist for the group, stated in 2015 in an interview with the *Tallahassee Democrat*: “To me, Alabama (the state) was always looked at as the heart of Dixie, and it had the rebel flag there. I never associated it with racism in any way. That was a symbol of the Old South, which I guess meant different things to different people. In our hearts, it meant, ‘This is where we’re from. We’re from Dixie.’”⁵⁰ Country star Trace Adkins wore an earpiece with the Confederate Flag on it on stage in 2012 and drew heavy criticism. He stated afterwards on his website: “As a proud American I object to oppression of any kind. To me, the battle flag

⁴⁸ Hank Williams, Jr., *The Souths Gonna Rattle Again*, Hank Williams Jr., Jimmy Brown, 1982, vinyl recording.

⁴⁹ Blake Shelton, *You Can Kiss My Country Ass*, Blake Shelton, Scott Hendricks, 2011, CD.

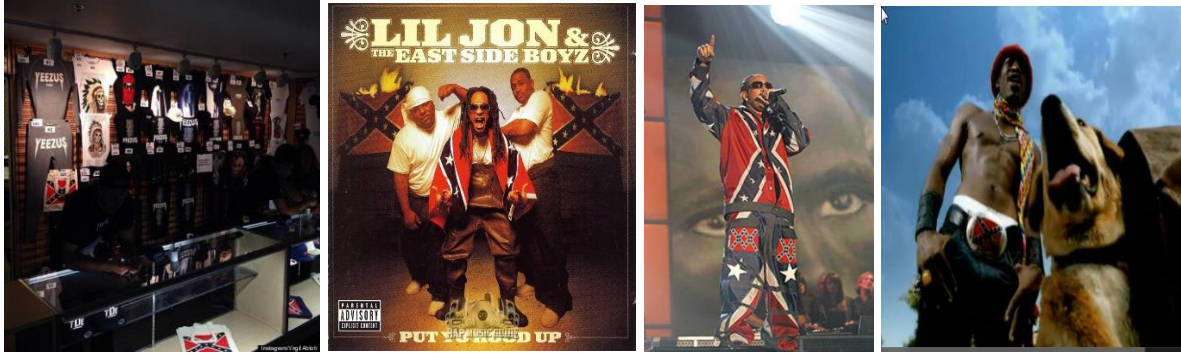
⁵⁰ "Tallahassee Democrat from Tallahassee, Florida on July 26, 2015 · Page U2," *Newspapers.com*, July 26, 2015, accessed July 26, 2018, <https://www.newspapers.com/newspage/117684618>.

represents remembrance of my Southern lineage - I am a descendant of Confederate soldiers who followed that flag into battle. I advocate for the preservation of America's battlefields and honest conversation about our country's history. To those who view the flag as a symbol of racism, that was not my message and I did not intend offense."⁵¹

Brad Paisley's song *Accidental Racist* (2013) echoes the words of both, Trace Adkins and Alabama. The lyrics describe an awkward imaginary conversation between a black and a white man and also features a rap section by LL Cool J. The white man says he does not mean to offend by wearing a shirt depicting the Confederate Battle Flag. He is referring to the geographical section of the Southern United States and to the band Lynyrd Skynyrd. The black man talks about misconceptions of sagging pants and do-rags. Both men are criticizing the fact that we often make assumptions and pass judgement based on outward appearances, and neither one of the men gets a chance to really know the other person.

American rap music artists have utilized the Confederate Flag in their art as well. Kanye West, Ludacris, and Outkast are African-American rap musicians that have appropriated the flag for their art. In the music video to *Ms. Jackson*, released in 2000, artist Andre 3000 from Outkast wears a Confederate Flag belt buckle. Kanye West wore and sold clothing featuring the controversial symbol during his 2013/2014 *Yeezus* Tour. Lil Jon draped a Confederate Flag over his shoulders and two burning flags appeared behind him on the cover of his third album *Put Yo Hood Up*, released in 2001. Hip-hop artist Ludacris sported an entire Confederate Flag jump suit at his performance at the VIBE Awards show in 2005.

⁵¹ Sterlingwit, "Accidentally Racist? The Confederate Flag in Country Music," Taste of Country, June 26, 2015, , accessed July 26, 2018, <http://tasteofcountry.com/remove-the-confederate-flag-from-country-music/>.



It could be argued that these musicians used the Confederate Flag for shock purposes only. The fact that these are black artists exacerbated the element of slavery and the controversy around the symbolism of the flag in the eyes of many fans who voiced their opinions in online forums such as Twitter and Facebook. The explanations given by the artists for using the flag varied from pure defiance (Kanye West) to political statement (Ludacris). West said in an interview with radio station 97.1 in Los Angeles: “React how you want. Any energy is good energy. The Confederate flag represented slavery in a way. That’s my abstract take on what I know about it, right? So I wrote the song ‘New Slaves.’ So I took the Confederate flag and made it my flag. It’s *my* flag now. Now what are you going to do?”⁵² Ludacris was more eloquent. He wrote a statement after his performance saying:

The discussions that have been sparked after my performance of ‘Georgia’ at the 2006 VIBE Awards is my exact reason for wearing a depiction of the Confederate Flag. This flag represents the oppression that we as African-Americans have endured for years; this is a symbol of segregation and the racism that reigned not only throughout the south but throughout the entire United States. I wore it to represent where we came from, to remind people that Ray Charles’ original ‘Georgia’ was written because of that racism. At the end of the performance, I removed and stomped on the flag to reveal my version of the flag; a flag comprised of black, red, and green. Those are the colors of Africa. It is a representation and my interpretation of where we were and where we need to go. Racism is just as prevalent now and if we are not constantly mindful of our history, and take

⁵² <https://www.thedailybeast.com/why-rappers-rock-the-confederate-flag-from-outkast-to-kanye-wests-merchandise>

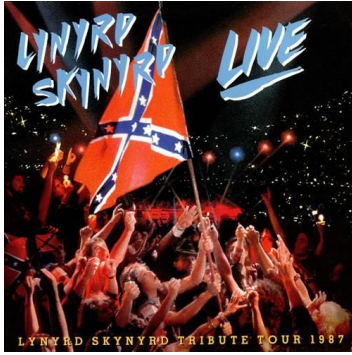
charge of it, history is destined to repeat itself because of ignorance. In order to move forward, we must never forget where we were. I hope people continue to question and challenge authority, media and themselves because only questioning and challenging can lead to enlightenment.⁵³

Lynyrd Skynyrd, an American rock band that originated in Jacksonville, Florida, made the Southern Rock genre popular across the US during the 1970s. The band's best-known song is probably "Sweet Home, Alabama" (1973) and in the country music clubs I frequented in my 20s in Germany it was always cause for a loud, more or less accurate, sing-along. The song created some controversy as the third verse references George Wallace, then governor of Alabama. Known for his steadfast support of segregation and other populist views.⁵⁴ Zachary J. Lechner also points out that the song was "a pointed rebuke of Neil Young. The Canadian rock star's song "Southern Man" (1970) paints southern white manhood as racist, while his "Alabama" (1972) reprimands George Wallace's state as aberrational." Lead singer Ronnie Van Zant "singles out Young by name in "Sweet Home Alabama", before singing "a southern man don't need him around anyhow."⁵⁵ The band used the rebel flag frequently on stage, in videos, on album covers and in their clothing lines depicting it. The relation of the lyrics and the display of the flag to the bands rebuttal of being racist seemed to be contradictory.

⁵³ <https://www.tapatalk.com/groups/politicalpalace/ludacris-responds-to-vibe-award-confederate-flag-d-t4131.html>

⁵⁴ Stephan Leshner, *George Wallace: American Populist*, (Cambridge MA: Perseus Publishing, 1995). 409.

⁵⁵ Zachary J. Lechner, *The South of the Mind: American Imaginings of White Southernness, 1960-1980* (Athens GA: University of Georgia Press 2018), 130



In 1997 Lynyrd Skynyrd guitarist Ricky Medlocke said: “Being that I am part Native American, I have to consider this thing, and I think people have a misconception about the South. A lotta people will look at us and say, ‘Hey, you fly the rebel flag; the rebel flag was a symbol of oppression,’ and all that. Nah, not really. To us, it’s just a symbol of where we came from—the South—and whatever happened during that time, you know, now we should look past that stuff. We’re all here on this land together, and we should try to make the best of what we’ve got before it’s too late.”⁵⁶ About fifteen years later, however, band members spoke differently about the subject. On CNN band member Gary Rossington stated: “Through the years, you know, people like the KKK and skinheads and people have kind of kidnapped the Dixie or Rebel flag from the southern tradition and the heritage of the soldiers, you know, that’s what it was about. And they kinda made it look *bad* in certain ways. So we didn't want that to go to our fans or show the image like we agreed with any of the race stuff or any of the bad things.”⁵⁷

An interesting point has been raised very recently by Lechner. He makes a compelling argument that the Confederate Battle flag may be used by southerners more for its expression of masculinity. He too uses Southern Rock music as an example. In *The South of the Mind*:

⁵⁶ <https://www.straight.com/blog/518196/lynyrd-skynyrd-and-confederate-flag>

⁵⁷ Ibid

American Imaginings of White Southernness, 1960-1980 he writes: “Both southern and non-southern fans similarly espoused Skynyrd’s view that the flag exemplified defiance and defensive southern chauvinism rather than racism.”⁵⁸ “The rebel flag always meant bikers, rebels, or Southerners in general, not this anti-black symbol from the racist South and the Civil War era,” he quotes a fan. This statement from a Lynyrd Skynyrd fan is echoed by another, stating: “I tend to believe it was less about race and more about the cultural identity of the hard rocking, hard drinking, rowdy southern boy identity that a good deal of their audiences could relate to.”⁵⁹

Heavy Metal bands, like Pantera, no longer use the rebel flag in their concerts as lead singer Phil Anselmo tried to explained in a confusing podcast in 2015: “I think, really, where the use of the rebel flag or Confederate flag with us really came from was our love for bands like Lynyrd Skynyrd and whatnot and shit like that, you know. There was never a time where it was okay to promote hate without a little tongue in cheek, you know? It was never this blatant thing, unless I was completely out of my mind, which I was at points in time. And I’ll own that for damn sure, but that was a long time ago... The way I feel, and the group of people I’ve had to work with my whole life, you know... You see a Confederate flag out there that says ‘Heritage, not hate’. I’m not sure I’m buying into that, you know?”⁶⁰

Randy Blythe, front man of Lamb of God spoke more eloquently about the topic. Born in Virginia, he grew up with the symbol, knows its military history and raises a valid question:

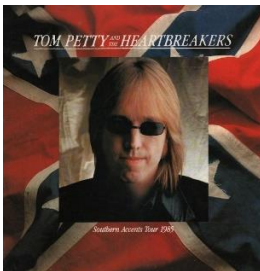
⁵⁸ Lechner, *The South of the Mind*, 130.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 130.

⁶⁰ "LAMB OF GOD's Randy Blythe Made A Great Point About the Confederate Flag," Metal Injection, July 13, 2015, accessed June 8, 2018, <http://www.metalinjection.net/latest-news/lamb-of-gods-randy-blythe-made-a-great-point-about-the-confederate-flag>.

I don't believe in censorship in America. I believe that anyone should be able to fly the swastika, right? Even the lowest of the low, the God Hates Fags people... they have the right to be idiots. We all have that right as Americans. This is a relatively free society and the minute we start clamping down just because we don't like something like that, if it's not directly hurting somebody else, that opens all sorts of doors. I think it's simple-minded to equate it [the Confederate Battle Flag] with a Nazi flag. Because, in fact, a lot of people in the south do look at it as a symbol of their heritage. I have relatives buried in graveyards who were Confederate flags. I live in Richmond, the capital of the Confederacy. But they don't equate it with hate. Publicly displaying that stuff is offensive to people. Use some common sense.⁶¹

Tom Petty recorded an album with a cover showing the Confederate flag in the background in 1985, but the image was not as hotly debated in the 1980s as it is now. Petty issued a statement in 2015, explaining that the flag was used to illustrate a character in his song *Rebel*. Petty noted that after the first concert using the flag, he noticed more and more fans wearing Confederate flag clothing like shirts and bandanas. It stopped after he interrupted a concert to address the issue.⁶²



Tom Petty



Kid Rock



Pantera

There are, however, celebrities that take the conversation in the opposite direction. Musicians Kid Rock and Ted Nugent use the image and are proud of it. Kid Rock is unapologetic for plans to compose a pro-flag song and states on his website that

⁶¹ Ibid.

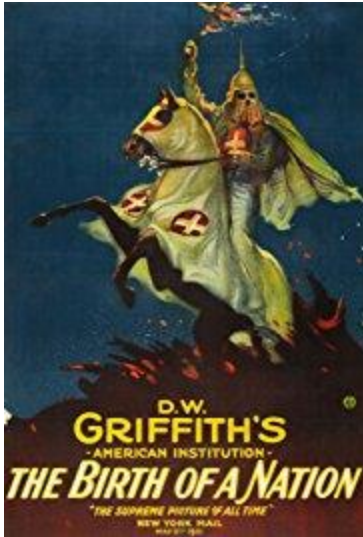
⁶² Tom Breihan, "Tom Petty Admits Touring With The Confederate Flag Was Stupid," Stereogum, July 14, 2015, accessed June 8, 2018, <https://www.stereogum.com/1815875/tom-petty-admits-touring-with-the-confederate-flag-was-stupid/news/>.

“Rock ‘n’ Roll ain’t supposed to be nice. ---it’s supposed to hit you upside the head with a tire iron, and that is exactly what this song does.” Ted Nugent’s further comments can be viewed as disturbing: “I believe that we always have to look at substance over symbolism, and I think we have to be honest. If we burned every Confederate flag today, would they stop shooting each other in Chicago? If we burned every Confederate flag today, would we stop sanctuary cities from accommodating murderers, rapists and savage people?”⁶³

The consequences of displaying the Confederate Battle Flag are easy to see in Tom Petty’s case. One album cover caused the fan base to start wearing the flag on shirts and bandanas. Fans want to emulate their idols, be like them, dress like them and fans also take their stars’ opinions, words, comments and behavior as their own. Artists, be they musicians, actors or authors, more than any other profession can attract a large fan base and exert a huge influence over the people that admire them. With that comes a responsibility to watch what they display, say or do. Very prominent bands have a worldwide following, and fans in other parts of the world are also inclined to take up their hero’s behavior and values. From dressing like the stars to rooting for the same causes, German fans are no different than American ones.

Hollywood may have an even bigger influence than musicians on shaping identity on a national scale. Countless movies and TV shows about the Civil War were produced, from D. W. Griffith’s film *Birth of a Nation* (1915) to the PBS period drama TV series *Mercy Street* (2016). Almost all of them lack one detail though: a central black

⁶³ "LAMB OF GOD's Randy Blythe Made A Great Point About The Confederate Flag," Metal Injection, July 13, 2015, accessed June 8, 2018, <http://www.metalinjection.net/latest-news/lamb-of-gods-randy-blythe-made-a-great-point-about-the-confederate-flag>.



character who survives the Civil War, starts a family and stands as an archetype of the American people, not just an ethnic part of the populace. Patrick Rael, Associate Professor of History at Bowdoin College, states: “For it is precisely here that we see these films doing their cultural work – of continually constituting and reconstituting race, class, gender and region, as well as the roles of these in shaping national identity in an intensely market-driven world of mass media.”⁶⁴ In other words, by rejecting certain aspects of the Civil War, while concurrently highlighting others, films can shape a nation’s understanding of itself. This paper, however, does not examine films and shows that are centered around the Civil War as an historical event. I am looking at popular films like *Smoky and the Bandit*, and TV shows like *The Dukes of Hazzard*, which were big commercial successes overseas. Both share a common theme: rebellion against authority. The Confederate flag was used freely in both, boldly decorating the roof of the car in *The Dukes of Hazzard* (aptly named *The General Lee*), and as a license plate and sticker on

⁶⁴ Jenny Barrett, *Shooting the Civil War Cinema, History and American National Identity* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009), VIII.

the black TransAm driven by Burt Reynolds in *Smoky and the Bandit*. That creates the question: will American films seen in Germany shape a German viewer's perception of the United States? More precisely, can it create a perception of a symbol?

The German/European Audience

Gary W. Gallagher, author of *Causes Won, Lost, and Forgotten*, asserts in his introduction that “remarks from members of the audience reminded me that films strongly influence perceptions of historical events.”⁶⁵ He also notes that “Hollywood’s overriding goal is to provide entertainment that will earn profits. Studios, producers, and directors seldom have a didactic purpose.” That is to say, what an audience makes of the message conveyed through media is up to the audience. Films like *Smoky and the Bandit* portray quite a few illegal activities, like smuggling alcohol, ignoring speed limits, ignoring jurisdictions, and letting personal grievances take over common sense. The film is humorous, and makes the anti-authoritarianism seem okay, creating indifference. The same scenario is presented in *Dukes of Hazzard*, where the two main characters deal with corrupt law enforcement, illegal alcohol manufacturing (moonshine), ignoring probation rules and so on, all the while displaying the Confederate Flag prominently on the roof of a car. A German fan of this genre of entertainment, with limited, or let’s say one-sided knowledge of the meaning of the Confederate flag (states rights, rebellion) could easily confirm the connection in his/her mind that the flag’s main connotation is defying authority, defying corrupt law enforcement and government, and rooting for personal

⁶⁵ Gary W. Gallagher, *Causes Won, Lost, and Forgotten How Hollywood and Popular Art Shape What We Know about the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 9.

freedom and rights.⁶⁶ Unless a person had relatives, or other personal connections to the US in the 1980s, verification of information from any kind of media (papers, films, music, TV) was difficult. The internet was still in its toddler stage and not widely available to everybody. The material was certainly available, but I find it hard to believe that many people would have gone to a library to research and verify information gathered from a movie or TV series.

I can offer my own experience of a European's perception of American mythology. By age 12 I was an avid reader and my favorite author at the time was Karl May (1842-1912). His series of books about the American West was published in Germany in 1893 and were advertised as "Adventure Novels" and titled "Winnetou I", "Winnetou II", and "Winnetou III". The author was already a well-established writer with other successful novels on the market. His "travel tales" were very popular in Germany and Austria and took the reader to exotic places like the Orient, the Middle East and later books were centered around China and South America.⁶⁷

The "Winnetou" Trilogy fit into the American "Western" genre. The novels described the life and adventures of a young Mescalero Apache who eventually became the chief of all Apaches (which included in the book also the Navajos), after his father and sister were killed by an unscrupulous white land owner. Winnetou had a lifelong friendship with a white land surveyor who immigrated from Germany and was nicknamed "Old Shatterhand". In the first book, as the friendship with the newcomer to the US develops, Winnetou often refers to his friend as "Shar-lee", which was

⁶⁶ Zachary J. Lechner, *The South of the Mind*, 128-130.

⁶⁷ Martin Lowsky. *Karl May*. (Stuttgart, Germany: Metzler Verlag, 1987) 64

conceivably the sounded-out name Charlie, referring to Karl May himself. Charlie was nicknamed “Old Shatterhand” because he could knock a man unconscious with one punch of his fist.⁶⁸

Together, the two men experienced many adventures, traveled through most of the United States and encountered good, upstanding citizens, as well as murderous men only out for their own gain. The two friends built a reputation of being fair, just, and only killing when there was absolutely no other way out, meaning self-defense.⁶⁹ Karl May’s books have sold over 200 million copies, over half of them in German speaking countries.⁷⁰ Even though his books have been translated into many languages (even Esperanto), May is virtually unknown in Great Britain or the US. Most of his adventure stories have been made into movies, which were great successes in Europe in the 1970’s. Winnetou was portrayed by the French actor Pierre Brice and Old Shatterhand’s part went to American actor Lex Barker. May himself maintained the aura of “Old Shatterhand” and was believed to have actually experienced all the adventures. He never confirmed or denied rumors about this. Only very much later in his life did he admit that it was all fiction.⁷¹

Through these books I grew up thinking most white settlers in America exploited the indigenous population, killing them if they did not comply, and that only a handful of people upheld the law, lived their life with a code of honor and pride, looked out for the little guy, and delivered justice. I also grew up with the perception of the Native

⁶⁸ Karl May, *Winnetou I*, 2009, Kindle edition, 12.

⁶⁹ Lowsky, 69

⁷⁰ Gert Ueding, *Karl-May-Handbuch* (Alfred Kroener Verlag, Germany, 2009), 509.

⁷¹ Lowsky, 243.

Americans as “noble savages”, misunderstood and feared. I had no way of confirming or denying any of the information that May provided; I took May’s descriptions of American landscapes and history at face value. Since May projected his writings as autobiographical and made the reader believe he travelled through the US, there was in my mind no need to verify anything he wrote. May did finally visit the US in 1908 for the first time with his wife, but his visit was limited to New York, Buffalo, Albany, the Niagara Falls and friends in Lawrence, Massachusetts. He never travelled in the so-called “Wild West”.⁷² I believe Karl May made a big difference in how European people perceived Native Americans and the relations they had with white settlers.

Similarly, it seems plausible, that European readers or viewers in the 1980s gathered information about America from books, magazines, films and TV productions and added their own limited knowledge to arrive at a result, a personal construct if you will, of reality. It is therefore conceivable, that the population of the divided Germany took the limited knowledge available and constructed the perception of the Confederate flag as a symbol of rebellion and used it as a symbol of fighting against an unjust and deeply corrupt government in Eastern Germany.

Country music, combined with trucker movies like *Breaker, Breaker* (1977) or *Convoy* (1978), fashion to create a deep admiration for the “land of the free”, where “rebels” could speed away from the local law enforcement after doing something illegal while freely owning a weapon. This, in turn, created a German version of “Americana”, a

⁷² Ibid, 320.

term referring to the culture, history, geography and folklore of the United States, for example, it made country fairs a German summers. Very popular and attended, the fairs feature American music, cover bands, and merchandise perceived to be truly American, like buckles, Stetsons, turquoise jewelry, and flags. The US flag and the



staple in well country that is belt clothing

Figure 4: Trucker festival Geiselwind, Germany.
Photo by Ruth Ellen Gruber.:

Confederate flag are both widely displayed and, in most cases, used interchangeably as the American flag. The events usually last for a weekend, seldom for a week. They attract quite a crowd and are family events. Trucker festivals feature booths with merchandise and even the occasional “best decorated truck/car/motorcycle”.



Figure 5: Country Music Mess, Berlin, 2010.
Photo by Ruth Ellen Gruber.

American journalist, editor, lecturer, and author Ruth Ellen Gruber has written in detail about those country fairs, not only in Germany but also France. Her work concentrates on the European fascination with the “Wild West.” In a blog entry from 2015 titled: “Confederate Battle Flag over the Imaginary Wild West”, Gruber explains:” For most country music fans I’ve

met in the scene, the flag seems to represent pure “rebel-hood” or the anti-Establishment, rather than to have a direct link with the Civil War, Confederacy, or slavery, i.e. the strong connotations that it evokes in the United States — and which have been at the heart of debates and discussion this past week since the AME church massacre in Charleston. Indeed, I have been lectured to by various Confederate flag-sporting Europeans about how slavery had “nothing to do with” the Civil War. Etc Etc.”⁷³

If this opinion still existed in 2015, at the time of Grubers blogpost, was there any change from the perception of the Confederate Flag in Germany in the 1980s? Part of the construction of meaning is certainly the public education system as it existed in both parts of Germany. There were quite a few differences how world history was taught and with the help of several family members and friends I was able to build a good picture of both approaches.

Public Education: Eastern and Western Germany and the US

This section introduces the East and West German school systems and anecdotal evidence of Civil War history presented to students in the former Germanies and the United States from the 1980s to today. I was specifically interested to find out if there were significant differences in the way the Civil War era was presented to students then and now. Germany, like Scandinavia and Central European countries, shares a two-branch education system: High school takes 10 years, and a pupil ideally graduates at age 16 and moves on to vocational training which lasts anywhere from one to three years. *Gymnasium* takes 12 years, preparing pupils for entry

⁷³ “Confederate Battle Flag over the Imaginary Wild West,” *Ruth Ellen Gruber: Cowboys and Jewish Culture*, accessed October 16, 2016, <http://ruthellengruber.com/blog/images/confederate-battle-flag-over-the-imaginary-wild-west/>

into universities.⁷⁴ Either path is free of cost in public schools, but private schools exist and can be expensive. The school I attended was a private, all - girls school, run by Catholic nuns in the heart of my hometown. Both educational paths were available to students at my school. The High school branch offered two options: a math - heavy track to prepare for careers in accounting or related fields, and skill - heavy (with classes like home economics and woodshop) to prepare for a more blue-collar workforce. The *Gymnasium* was also divided into a math heavy - branch to prepare for a career as a mathematician, physicist, chemist and related fields, and a language - heavy road to prepare for careers in diplomacy, politics, and medicine. I attended both branches, giving up the *Gymnasium* branch after it became clear that I did not have the knack for numbers my parents thought I had. Both schools offered a well-rounded education. The only elective classes were languages (French or Spanish in addition to the mandatory English) and sports (volley ball, soccer, or tennis in addition to the mandatory physical education class). Classes like English, Algebra, Geometry, Geology, Biology, History (world history and German history), Physics, Chemistry, German, Music, Ethics (formerly Religion) and P.E were obligatory and without qualifying grades a school year would have to be repeated in order to graduate.⁷⁵

According to my cousin Sven Gruner, who is three years younger than me and was born and raised in Eastern Germany, the school system there was similar. What was referred to as a *Gymnasium* in the west was called a Polytechnic Secondary School in the East. This branch similarly prepared students for a continuing education at universities, whereas the

⁷⁴ Hermann Horstkotte, *The German School System, Volume 20* (Munich: Goethe Institute, 2002), 8

⁷⁵ The educational system in Germany: case study findings, Volume 1, National Institute on Student Achievement, Curriculum, and Assessment, Office of Educational Research and Assessment, U.S. Dept. of Education, 1999, 154.

Vocational School embraced training for specific job markets. Sven also stated that both types of school provided merit awards and scholarships for students who proved to be good, upstanding socialists through attending meetings, displaying the right political views and being atheists. My cousin attended Vocational School, and worked for the railroad until the late 1990s, when he decided to go back to school. He recounts his years in school pretty much the same as my own, with a few exceptions. As we talked, we discovered the mandatory second language he learned was Russian. He too could have elected a second foreign language like English or French. Attending university required fluency in two foreign languages.⁷⁶

Germans tend to hang on to records, like papers with a good grade, certificates and acknowledgements, and at my request Sven dug through a trunk of “old school stuff” which produced a few old school books as well. His old “World History” book from 1984 was of particular interest.⁷⁷ Showing a copyright of 1979, the topics started with ancient civilizations and ended with Brezhnev being elected president in the Soviet Union. The timelines, dates and important happenings were factually correct, but the entire tone of the book was so different than my old West German World History book. We compared the time frame I was most interested in: the American Civil War. I was surprised to find that both books, his and mine, argued states’ rights and a desire for a decentralized government as the main point behind the conflict. My book stated: “Ursache war eine tiefe wirtschaftliche, soziale, und politische Spaltung zwischen Nord – und Suedstaaten.” This translates to: “The reason (for the conflict) was a deep economic, social and political rift between the states of the north and the south.”⁷⁸ It did acknowledge that:

⁷⁶ Sven Guner, interviewed by Karin Crelling, April 19, 2018, notes in possession of the author.

⁷⁷ Leonard Cottrell and Jean Bottero, *Meilensteine der Geschichte* (Germany: Pavlak, 1979), 420.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 422.

“ der Konflikt focussierte sehr auf der Institution der Sklaverei und ob die Regierung das Recht hatte dies zu regulieren oder sogar in einem individuellen Staat abzuschaffen.” This translates to: “this struggle focused heavily on the institution of slavery and whether the federal government had the right to regulate or even abolish slavery within an individual state.”⁷⁹

The Eastern history book had an underlying suggestive tone that too much freedom leads to greed and then uprising against the leaders of the country, and it also suggested that too much freedom and greed leads to decadence and depravity which accounts for such things as the institution of slavery. A thinly veiled link was drawn to the Revolutionary War as the first mistake in a long line of American mistakes. The Western textbook lacked these socialistic undertones and did not link to the Revolutionary War as an event leading up to the Civil War.⁸⁰ While my cousin did not remember much of the actual class and the instructor, his question to me was: “So, is the book wrong? Were you expecting something different?” I replied that I was surprised to find my memory of history class validated. Almost every person I spoke with (American and German) in my current research about my topic argued that the Civil War was all about abolishing slavery and even in Germany that should have been taught that way.

A friend of mine put me in contact with a history teacher in Baden Wuerttemberg, Germany. She provided me with access to the school curriculum for the year 2018. This curriculum is issued by the state of Baden Wuerttemberg and details what topic should be covered in each session. This manual requires the instructor to teach the War of Secession (or Buergerkrieg, which translated means citizen’s war) in six segments. Each part includes what

⁷⁹ Ibid, 423.

⁸⁰ Uwe Paschke, *Enzyklopaedie der Weltgeschichte Von der Entdeckung der Welt bis zur Eroberung des Universums*, (Baden-Baden, Holle Verlag, Germany, 1980), 329.

should be covered. In the last section it states: “Although the abolition of slavery was not the central point of the conflict in the beginning, it became more important over the course of the war.”⁸¹ The curriculum outlines that the war was originally fought over the right to self-determination of the states and that this is the main reason the southern states seceded from the Union. Slavery and its ultimate abolition are only covered in the section called “Wiederaufbau (Reconstruction).”⁸²

A view I had not considered came from an American former co-worker, Cynthia, who is in her early 50s, from a small town in Tennessee. Over a cup of coffee, she offered her take on the Confederate Flag.

Personally, I think we -our generation- are making this into a problem. We teach kids the wrong way. We politicize history and match it up to 2015, or 2017 or whatever year we are in. You can't do that. Yes, the Confederate Flag is a historical artifact and it stood for one side of a conflict. Adding our value and understanding of history today to this artifact is doing it a disservice and rouses up emotions that we can then not control. Our generation should just let it go and keep the meaning of the flag firmly grounded in history, not today's politics.⁸³

She revealed later in the conversation what she thought to be the main cause of the Civil War.

She explained a view that had not crossed my mind:

So my grandpa keeps all the family records and we have a bunch of letters and photographs and loose sheets of paper with musings and poems from one of my ancestors from the Civil War. How many -greats- would that be before grandpa? Two? Three? I don't know. But I know we didn't live on a plantation. I know we didn't own slaves and I know we didn't know anybody that did. When my

⁸¹ “Der Amerikanische Buergerkrieg (Sezessionskrieg0 1861-1865”, *Landesinstitute fuer Schulentwicklung Baden Wuerttemberg*, accessed February 10, 2019. <http://www.schule-bw.de/faecher-und-schularten/gesellschaftswissenschaftliche-und-philosophische-faecher/geschichte/unterrichtsmaterialien/sekundarstufe-I/19jahrhundert/usasek1/sezessionskrieg>.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Oral interview with Cynthia T. (former coworker) by Karin Crelling, July 2018, notes in possession of author.

ancestor signed up for the Confederates, he did it because he was fed up with politics. He wanted a state run government with little messing around from the Union government. He didn't even think about slavery. And when they tell me today that they all fought to protect their way of life, that's just bull...my ancestor had nothing to do with slavery and whether there were any or not wouldn't have made a goddamn difference in his livelihood.⁸⁴

Another person I spoke with was raised and educated in Oklahoma. His view was similar to Cynthia's: the flag is a historical artifact, which represented a military side of a conflict and the Civil War started over a belief in states' rights and minimal interference from government. Oddly enough, this person was completely unaware of the current ongoing debate about the Confederate flag and its meaning.⁸⁵

My own children, educated in Washington State in early 2000, recall spending a week on learning all about the Holocaust, but neither one remembers discussing the Civil War other than as a footnote in American History class. Dr. Gregory Kepner, a history teacher at Lakes High School discussed his current learning plan with me and noted that in the 30 years he has spent in the education system priorities have changed. He remembered earlier in his career discussing the 1860s history related to the right of states and self-government in more depth than he does today. He states: "Today it's almost exclusively about human rights, slavery and civil rights. Only a small portion is dedicated to the political climate of the time [Civil War era] with states objecting to the federal governments overall power. Yes, the discussion at the time was whether the federal government had the right to abolish slavery in a specific state, but it can be argued that this was a discussion about federal control in the individual states, not about the institution of slavery by

⁸⁴ T. discussion.

⁸⁵ Oral interview with Anonymous (friend) by Karin Crelling, July 2018, notes in possession of author.

itself.”⁸⁶

This Washington State High School uses *America's History* by James A. Henretta as the textbook. Chapter 14 is dedicated to the Civil War and titled “Two Societies at War”. The introduction is very broad, mentioning that there is never a simple explanation, but that racial slavery played an important part. It goes on to cite political statements, like the fears of racial intermixture if slavery is abolished. The authors also reference America's place on the world stage: “In a world still ruled by kings and princes, northern leaders believed that the dissolution of the Union might destroy for all time the prospect of a republican government based on majority rule, constitutional procedures and democratic elections”.⁸⁷ The rest of the chapter is dedicated to military strategy, civilian war efforts, and the eventual Confederate collapse. Dr. Kepner states that this year's curriculum has dedicated five lessons at 90 minutes each to the Civil War.

A textbook that I used at community college in a world history class stated that the Civil War began way before 1861, when the United States took California and other territories from Mexico in 1848, creating the argument whether the new territories should allow slave labor or be restricted to free labor.⁸⁸

It appears that today's text books in the United States are more focused on the politics behind the Civil War, even world-wide politics. Ernest Duveyrier de Hauranne wrote about German immigrants in Missouri in 1864. He asserted that the German population is strongly abolitionist and goes on: “They have brought to the New World the instincts of European

⁸⁶ Oral interview with Dr. Gregory Kepner by Karin Crelling, May 2018, notes in possession of the author.

⁸⁷ James A. Henretta et al, *Americas History* (Bedford/St. Martin's, 2004), 397.

⁸⁸ Robert Tignor et al, *Worlds Together Worlds Apart*, (New York: W.W.Norton & Company, Inc., 2008), 634.

democracy, together with its radical attitudes and all-or-nothing doctrines. Ancient precedents and worn-out laws mean little to them”. Further into his letter he writes: “They have not studied history and have no respect for hallowed injustices, but they do have, to the highest degree, that sense of moral principle which is more or less lacking in American democracy.”⁸⁹

The Confederate Battle Flag in Other Countries

Although this paper focuses on interpretations of the Confederate Flag in the US and Germany, it is interesting to note that other countries have adopted the Confederate Battle Flag for their own unique reasons. Italy, for example, seems to have a special bond with the America of the 1800s. *Nations Divided: America, Italy and the Southern question* by Don H. Doyle digs deep into the history of Italy’s own Civil War of 1860. This was not Italy’s first internal conflict and it wouldn’t be its last, but the connection between America and Italy is arguably the most significant during this time. As Doyle describes, Italy had been divided into several kingdoms with France and Austria occupying and ruling portions of the north and south of Italy. In 1860, Giuseppe Garibaldi became extremely offended by yet another annexation of his hometown Nice into the French Empire. He organized an army of about 1000 volunteers to eject the Bourbon king from Italy. Within a few weeks his army had grown to 4000 volunteers. Within one year Garibaldi managed to weaken the Bourbon rule in Italy to the point of retreat.⁹⁰ While the conflict was much shorter in duration and had a different outcome (the South was victorious), Italian citizens still feel a deep connection to American history. The similarity perceived here is a

⁸⁹ Ernest Duveyrier de Hauranne, *A Frenchman in Lincoln’s America*, (Chicago: Lakende Press, 1974), 305-9

⁹⁰ Edgar Holt, *The Making of Italy: 1815–1870*. (New York: Murray Printing Company, 1971).

southern uprising against an oppressive regime, and the image of the Confederate flag is associated with it in both, the US and Germany. Soccer fans in southern Italy proudly wave the flag at games.



Rooted in the same North/South conflict is the display of the Confederate Battle Flag in Ireland. Soccer fans here are displaying the flag in ways similar to Italy, as a symbol of perceived oppression from the government, deeply rooted in the religious beliefs of the church of England in the North and Catholicism in the South, which Kieran Quinlan explores in depth in his book *Strange Kin: Ireland and the American South*.⁹¹ Despite the divisive and violent confrontations in the United States over Confederate symbols Irish fans are still comfortable showing the flag publicly. Contrary to Italy, here it is not a rivalry between two former kingdoms, or the rivalry between the British Northern Ireland and the southern Republic of Ireland. One Irish supporter states: “As someone who abhors racism of any kind I’d still be reasonably comfortable flying a Confederate flag at a Cork GAA match – not to indicate support of racism, not because of the “Dukes of Hazzard,” not even because I like Country and Western music, but because at Cork matches I like to show the Red and White and its association with Rebels, and The South!”⁹² I find this statement specifically interesting, because it indicates that

⁹¹ Kieran Quinlan, *Strange Kin: Ireland and the American South*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 2005), 7.

⁹² <https://www.irishcentral.com/news/confederate-flag-flew-proudly-at-a-major-irish-sporting-event>

this person is aware of the negative aspects associated with the flag, but still chooses to single out the meaning of rebellion as the cause for the display.

National Geographic magazine printed an article in December of 2016 titled *Why Many Young Russians See a Hero in Putin*. Author Julia Ioffe illustrates her first meeting with a young Russian and writes: “His name is Sasha Makarevich, a 24-year-old cement worker, a blond ponytail falling down his back, a Confederate flag stitched onto his cutoff denim vest. “I thought it just meant independence,” he explains when I ask about it.” Here, again, the first connection is made by this European to independence, not slavery. The Confederate Flag has also appeared at Russian music festivals like *Nashestvie*, an annual rock concert held around Moscow since 1999.⁹³



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Many supportive friends and family members sent me links to articles, books, films, YouTube videos, blogs and Twitter or Facebook posts related to the Confederate flags use and interpretations. It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss them all but Twitter, especially, features a plethora of images of the Confederate Battle flag posted by global travelers. The flag appears in schools in Africa, on motorcycles in Vietnam, in clothing items sold at a shop in the

⁹³ Anna Nemtsova, A Russian Woodstock: rock and roll and revolution? not for this generation. *Newsweek* September 11, 2006.

⁹⁴ Digital image by Anton Belitskiy, *Nashestvie 2008*, posted to Flickr July 6, 2008. Accessed September 15, 2018. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/antonb/page101>

Ukraine, in a shop in Bangkok. Many captions convey the same thing: the people displaying the flag are unaware of the negative emotions and the racism associated with the flag. To them it symbolizes American freedom, independence and rebellion. It seems to me that cultural background and differences in education about the Civil War are key to understanding how people around the world interpret the flag.

Conclusion

European countries like Germany tend to see the Confederate Battle Flag as a symbol of independence, rebellion, freedom and antiauthoritarianism. Many suggest it is a thrilling feeling to display the flag to show disrespect for an oppressive government, a non-verbal display of opinion and political activism. Only secondly is the flag attached to topics like slavery, human rights, the Ku-Klux-Klan and the Civil Rights movement. In the United States the Confederate Flag is considered offensive because of its connection to slavery and the oppression (ongoing in many instances) of an entire populace (10-14 % of the entire population of the US is African American, according to Gallup).⁹⁵ On either continent the educational system has a large influence how the Confederate Flag is perceived. Focused on Germany I found that the school system places more emphasis on the fight for states rights than on the fight against slavery. Other Europeans, including some in Ireland, Italy and Russia, first connect the flag to rebellion and freedom. The American school system today tends to place more emphasis on the human and civil rights aspect of the flag's perception. Knowledge of the Civil War's history and symbolism, and which interpretations are prominent, influences peoples understanding of the flag in popular

⁹⁵ "Public Overestimates US Black and Hispanic Population," Gallup *News Service*, accessed January 28, 2019, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/4435/public-overestimates-us-black-hispanic-populations.aspx>

culture. For many Europeans, movies, like *Smoky and the Bandit*, and TV shows, like *The Dukes of Hazzard*, portrayed an America where it was okay to break the rules, to defy corrupt law enforcement and to fight an oppressive system; all under the symbol of the Confederate Flag. In the 1980s Europe looked towards America for the latest trends and a whole culture of *Americana* was created, embracing everything American and the Confederate Flag was used interchangeably with the Stars and Stripes to demonstrate affection.

My personal background placed me in a unique position to investigate the phenomenon. Growing up as a German citizen and through friends and family I was able to verify my own experiences. Connecting the flag first and foremost with rebellion and a fight for freedom is still widespread. The negative connotations attached to the Confederate Flag in Germany today come mostly from the use of the flag by Neo-Nazi groups. Ironically, during the fall of the Berlin Wall the flag was used by Germans as a proud symbol of insisting on states' rights and the rights of citizens to determine their own destiny. Becoming a citizen of the United States, and an American college student at university now, gave me the opportunity to understand how different educational systems treat the history of the Civil War differently. Here the negative aspect of the flag has led to a movement to eradicate it from public spaces, a push to make history invisible. The goal this nation has developed is to create an acceptable image of itself. But even if it succeeds in that attempt, often this will be subject to a white American image.

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