

Kendra D. Stewart
June 15, 2007
Dr. Hattery and Dr. Smith
Sociology 318

Heritage vs. Hate:
The Impact on Higher Education of 4 Southern States Desire to Honor the Confederacy

Standing at the intersection of Jeff Davis Avenue (1st President of the Confederacy) and Martin Luther King Street (Leader of the Civil Rights Movement), it is difficult to digest these two symbolic, disparate historical figures combined in any kind of philosophy that could possibly intersect. Similar to this street corner, however, many states in the Deep South attempt to create such an intersection where the man who argued for segregation and the oppression and enslavement of a group of people based on the color of their skin and a man who fought to end such practices are both honored.

This dichotomy of holding on to an oppressive past while making small adjustments to a more inclusive present have proved not only to stand in opposition of one another but have guided many of the southern states into a slower development and arrival into modern times. The high poverty levels, high incarceration rates, and low high school graduation rates are all indicative of the States' desire to hold on as (a plethora of Confederate monuments suggests) to a separate and not so equal past. All of these factors contribute to low access to the flagship higher educational institutions in these states.

In recent times, four states in the Deep South (South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi) have all had official state symbols honoring the Confederacy. South Carolina was recently embroiled in a battle over the Confederate flag's placement atop

the State House. As a compromise, in 2000 South Carolina legislature voted to take the flag down from the State House but has still positioned it on display on the State Grounds.¹ Georgia recently entered two phases of flag design modifications. The State's flag from 1956-2001 had within it a representation of the Confederate flag. In 2001, Georgia altered the State flag to contain a smaller representation of the flag (assuming its size had anything to do with its offensiveness). Finally, in 2003, Georgia removed all images of the Confederate flag from the State Flag.²

Alabama, like South Carolina, once flew the Confederate Flag on top of the State House, but removed the flag in 1993.³ On State Grounds, however, Alabama has a very large Confederate monument honoring the soldiers' fight and the premise behind their fight. Moreover, Alabama's current state flag displays the bars derived from the Confederate flag. Lastly, Mississippi is the *crème de la crème* today in glorifying the Confederacy. Mississippi currently has a large image of the Confederate battle flag embedded in the State flag. Not only is this flag affixed upon the State House, but it is present in every school and governmental building across the state, making its image even more salient in Mississippi than any other aforementioned Southern state.

Oddly enough, though these States clearly have many white politicians (who identify and value the ideals of the Confederacy) in power, a large proportion of these States are comprised of African-Americans. According to Census Data, in 2005 Mississippi had 37% black residents, Alabama had 26%, Georgia had 30% and South Carolina had 29% all compared with the national average of 13%.⁴ Each of these states

¹ "South Carolina takes Confederate Flag Down," 2000

² "Georgia State Flag," 2007

³ "Marchers Want Confederate Flag," 2000

⁴ "Race and Hispanic Origin in 2005," 2007

has more than twice the national average for African-American residents showing that they have a high concentration of America's black citizens.

The Confederate flag and what it stands for should be offensive to people of all races, but it is definitely offensive to the large majority of African-Americans that were specifically targeted by enslavement and treatment as sub-human. As Mississippi State Senator David Jordan stated, it is painful for him to look at a symbol that personally carries such a negative and cruel connotation, a person who attended the Emmett Till trial and saw the two guilty white men acquitted of the brutal murder of a young black boy by an all white jury. To many people, seeing the Confederate flag reminds them of the institution of slavery, vicious lynchings (where in some instances the flag was flown over the dead hanging bodies), Jim Crow laws, the Ku Klux Klan (which used the flag as one of their symbols) and a whole host of other injustices directed towards blacks and those that supported them gaining equal rights.

The psychological impact of seeing the State condone such an image can be detrimental to all citizens of the particular state. Those who oppose the beliefs behind the image feel less valued by the government and put little trust into governmental policies and institutions. This distrust could very well be founded, considering that those voting citizens and policy makers who stand behind a celebration of the Confederacy and are sanctioning monuments and flags to carry its symbols, also put into action many policies that go along with this ideology. A continuing permeation of the Confederate flag indeed may encourage citizens who might have let go of this *heritage* to continue to remember that ideology and put forth practices that support it.

For instance, in some Southern counties following the *Brown v. Board* decision in 1954 that ruled the “separate but equal” educational system as unconstitutional, officials simply decided to shut down the public school system as opposed to integrating the public schools. Under this model, all students suffered considering nobody, regardless of race, was receiving a public education. Another reaction in some southern counties was to build segregated academies. These academies would be all white privately funded schools that would not accept any federal or state aid in order to legally maintain their segregated status.⁵ With the creation of segregated academies, most, if not all of white students were pulled from the public system to the financial detriment of the public school system, offering black students a poor education. At the same time, many of the segregated academies were also poorly funded providing white students with a lower quality of education.

This long-lasting effect of placing bigotry above quality education for all citizens is evident in the high school graduation rates of Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, and South Carolina (the States with the strongest current attachments to the Confederate flag). In 2005, the United Health Foundation ranked the 50 states in order of highest to lowest high school graduation rates. Mississippi was ranked 46th among all states. Alabama was immediately behind at 47th. Georgia was ranked at 49th only above South Carolina which landed dead last at 50th.⁶

With such dismal graduation rates, a large chunk of these states’ populations are automatically taken out of the college applicant running. Each state’s percentage of

⁵ Champagne, 1973

⁶ High School Graduation, 2007

residents with a bachelor's degree was below the national average in 2005.⁷ If such high numbers of the states' residents are not graduating from high school, then attaining a college education is not even an option for them, relegating them to lower salary brackets and quicker occupational ceilings resulting from this lack of higher educational opportunities. The Census determined in 2004 that the average person with a college degree earns over \$25,000 more than the average high school graduate.⁸ These statistics factor into the high poverty levels in these states. Mississippi led the way as the poorest state in the country with a poverty level of 21.3% in 2005 (compared to the national average of 13.3%). Alabama, South Carolina and Georgia all joined Mississippi in the top 15 of the poorest states in 2005.⁹

All of these statistics have an effect on the public flagship higher educational institutions in these states and how they are serving their state college-bound population. Many of these schools have highly publicized stories regarding their integration: Charlyane Hunter-Gault and Hamilton Holmes integrated the University of Georgia in 1959;¹⁰ James Meredith integrated Ole Miss in 1962 after a federal court order and under the protection of U.S. marshals;¹¹ Vivian Malone and James Hood integrated the University of Alabama in 1963 against Governor George Wallace's stand in the schoolhouse door.¹² These public institutions are closely tied to the state government bureaucracy and as such its ideologies. Therefore, if the government approves and employs the use of the Confederate flag as an official symbol, it is not surprising that the

⁷ "Percent of People Completed a Bachelor's Degree," 2007

⁸ Meyers, 2006

⁹ "Percent of People Below Poverty Level," 2007

¹⁰ "Race Sensitive Admissions," 2000

¹¹ "Ole Miss Refuses," 1997

¹² "Blocking the Schoolhouse Door," 1996

state flagship institution would also widely accept the use of the symbol. This acceptance relays many messages to would-be students who are offended by the Universities' use of the symbol and also has an effect on the admissions and recruitment practices of these institutions.

The University of Alabama, which is located in a state that is 26% African-American, only had a black enrollment of 11.8% in 2005.¹³ Taking into consideration that the University of Alabama has a 72.4% admittance rate in 2005, this displays that the low number of African-American enrollment can both be attributed to low application rates from black students in addition to the number of black students that are denied admission.¹⁴

The low number of black students present at the University of Alabama, however, are not fully integrated themselves. Over 45 years after its initial integration, in 2001, no black student had ever joined a white fraternity or sorority on campus. This segregation is true in spite of a supposed university mandate calling for the integration of these organizations in 1991. Many of the alumni from these white greek organizations are wealthy politicians and economic powerhouses in the state with a lot of influence on both university officials and present sorority and fraternity members.¹⁵ Under this structure, it will be many more years to come before blacks and whites are also integrated socially at the University of Alabama outside of the classroom and the sports fields.

The University of South Carolina (USC), located within walking distance of the State House where the Confederate flag flies on State grounds, also has disappointing numbers when it comes to the recruitment and enrollment of black students. In addition

¹³ "Enrollment and Student Characteristics," 2007

¹⁴ "Admissions and Entering Student Information," 2007

¹⁵ "The University of Alabama," 2001

to the celebration of the Confederate flag, South Carolina also largely celebrates former U.S. Presidential Candidate on the Dixiecrat segregationist ticket and 39 year Senator Strom Thurmond. USC touts buildings like the Strom Thurmond Wellness and Fitness Center named after and in recognition of Thurmond.

Continuing the trend of low black enrollment numbers for a state with a high black population (29%), USC only enrolled 13.6% African-American students of its total enrollment population in 2005.¹⁶ The state of South Carolina is also a good example of how flagship, predominantly white institutions have pushed black students towards historically black colleges and universities (HBCU's) to keep them out of the state white colleges. Before his death, many college presidents of HBCU's in South Carolina honored Thurmond for his support and financial backing of many such colleges in the state.¹⁷ (Among the schools he aided, Thurmond also supported South Carolina State University, the HBCU that educated his half-black daughter who was revealed to the public following Thurmond's death.) By funneling scholarship money and financial backing to HBCU's in the state, many black students opted to attend predominantly black colleges instead of facing opposition to the integration of the white flagship institution.

The University of Mississippi, better known as Ole Miss, continues with its States' practice of incorporating the Confederate history and beliefs into the fabric of its campus life. Following the *Brown* decision, the university immediately set forth a policy requiring all applicants to submit five recommendation letters from Ole Miss alumni. This feat was impossible for black applicants since at that time all Ole Miss graduates

¹⁶ "Enrollment and Persistence 2005-2006," 2007

¹⁷ "Group of Black College Presidents," 1996

were white.¹⁸ Today, the sports teams of Ole Miss are named the Rebels (a term used to refer to Confederate soldiers), the marching band still plays the song “Dixie” at football games, and Confederate flags are prominently waved at sporting events. Furthermore, on campus students pass a monument of a Confederate soldier at the front entrance, a cemetery for Confederate soldiers near the basketball arena and cross streets named Confederate Drive, Lee Loop, and Jeff Davis Drive.¹⁹

Due to its denial to let go of a racist history and belief system, Ole Miss’ academic and athletic quality have suffered tremendously. In 1988, the university was not permitted access to Phi Beta Kappa chapter membership due to its inferiority of faculty members and library resources. In addition to struggling to attract strong faculty, the school’s practices also make it difficult to attract top black athletes. Ole Miss athletic coaches that value integrated sports teams have complained for years that the school’s images of white supremacy are only damaging the athletic department’s competitiveness in the NCAA.²⁰ It comes as no surprise that in the state that has such a high number of African Americans at 37%, Ole Miss only enrolls approximately 13% black students.²¹

The state of Georgia may have finally rid itself from the embedded Confederate flag in its state flag, but the demographics at The University of Georgia (UGA) clearly show that residual effects are still active in the State’s policies. In 2005, Georgia was 30% black and over 20% of all college students in the state were black, but UGA astounding only had a black enrollment of 6%.²² These staggering numbers can be put into more context when taking into account that in 2000, a U.S. District Court Judge (a

¹⁸ “Ole Miss Refuses,” 1997

¹⁹ “Ole Miss Refuses,” 1997

²⁰ “Ole Miss Refuses,” 1997

²¹ “Enrollment Data – Oxford Campus,” 2007

²² “UGA Fall 2005 Enrollment,” 2007

graduate of both the college and the law school at UGA) struck down the use of affirmative action policies in the admissions process. Prior to this ruling, blacks already made up a small number of enrollees at UGA topping out at an all-time high of 6.8% in 1995 showing little sign of overcompensation regarding its policies to enroll black students.

In 1999 the black acceptance rate was 36.7% compared to the white acceptance rate of 66.7%; these numbers are before UGA was barred from using *race sensitive* admission practices. In addition to discontinuing the use of any race sensitive policies in admissions, the University without any prompting by court order halted the Holmes-Hunter Scholarship program that awarded \$1500 to a black student who showed leadership potential. Due to UGA's already tough admissions practices now coupled with anti-affirmative action policies and decreased scholarship opportunities for black students, college-bound blacks in the state are pipelined to the State's three predominantly black state institutions (each with an enrollment of over 90% black): Albany State University, Fort Valley State University and Savannah State University.²³

Taking into account the low enrollment rates and social isolation present on these campuses for black students, it is clear that there are detrimental effects of the continuation of celebrating the Confederate ideals within state government and in the higher educational institutions themselves. Moreover, proven by lower high school and college graduation rates and the ensuing high poverty levels, it can be argued that not only are African-Americans being adversely affected by a demeaning and dehumanizing past, but all of the states' residents, regardless of race are suffering from poor educational systems and access issues.

²³ "Race-Sensitive Admissions," 2000

In these environments where black students would be subjected to seeing state flags, the school's mascot and state monuments which all commemorate the Confederacy at every turn, it is no surprise that many blacks would not have a strong desire to attend these colleges with such atmospheres. A black student may assume that they will be underappreciated and undervalued in a population that still finds an observance of a Confederate past significant.

It is also not unthinkable that those blacks who do still want to attend these colleges are given a fair chance at attaining admission and then excelling academically and socially once they are on campus. Likewise, white students are receiving an inferior educational opportunity. They are not challenged to critique an oppressive heritage under the Confederacy but are encouraged to celebrate and support this *heritage* cutting themselves off from an increasingly global market and economy. Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi and South Carolina may have made tons of progress over the years in building more inclusive environments (many times by the prompting of federal government), but they need to do more to dissolve official state connections to the Confederacy to truly positively impact the educational and therefore financial conditions of all of their residents.

Works Cited

- “Admissions and Entering Student Information.” The University of Alabama 2005-2006 Factbook, Office of Institutional Research and Assessment. June 14, 2007. <<http://bama.ua.edu/~oir/>>
- “Blocking the Schoolhouse Door: George Wallace Clears His Conscience.” *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* > No. 14 (Winter, 1996), pp. 67-68 <<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=1077-3711%28199624%2F199724%290%3A14%3C67%3ABTSDGW%3E2.0.CO%3B2-M>>
- Champagne, Anthony M. “The Segregation Academy and the Law.” *The Journal of Negro Education*, Vol. 42, No. 1. (Winter, 1973), pp. 58-66. <<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0022-2984%28197324%2942%3A1%3C58%3ATSAAATL%3E2.0.CO%3B2-D>>
- Meyers, Mike. “College Degree Still Worth Investment, Economists Say.” CNN. June 21, 2006. June 14, 2007. <http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/business/274669_degreevalue21.html>
- “Enrollment and Persistence 2005-2006.” USC Institutional Assessment and Compliance. June 14, 2007. <<http://ipr.sc.edu/cds/cds2005/cdsb2005.htm>>
- “Enrollment and Student Characteristics.” The University of Alabama 2005-2006 Factbook, Office of Institutional Research and Assessment. June 14, 2007. <<http://bama.ua.edu/~oir/>>
- “Enrollment Data – Oxford Campus.” The University of Mississippi Institutional Research and Development. June 14, 2007. <http://www.olemiss.edu/depts/university_planning/institutional_research/enrollment_data/2005-2006/index_ox_2006.html>
- “Georgia State Flag.” State of Georgia Secretary of State. June 14, 2007. <http://www.sos.state.ga.us/museum/html/georgia_state_flag_current.htm>
- “Group of Black College Presidents Honors Strom Thurmond.” *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* > No. 12 (Summer, 1996), pp. 8-9 <<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=1077-3711%28199622%290%3A12%3C8%3AGOBCPH%3E2.0.CO%3B2-O>>
- “High School Graduation.” United Health Foundation. May 30, 2007. <<http://www.unitedhealthfoundation.org/shr2005/components/hsgrad.html>>
- “Marchers Want Confederate Flag to Fly Again in Alabama.” CNN. March 4, 2000. June 14, 2007. <<http://archives.cnn.com/2000/US/03/04/confederate.rally/>>

- “Mississippi will retain its 107-year-old flag.” CNN. April 18, 2001. June 14, 2007.
 <<http://archives.cnn.com/2001/ALLPOLITICS/04/18/mississippi.flag/index.htm>>
- “The Night Ole Miss Walked Off the Floor Rather Than Play Basketball against a Team with a Black Player.”
The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education > No. 31 (Spring, 2001), pp. 83-84
 Stable URL: <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=1077-3711%28200121%290%3A31%3C83%3ATNOMWO%3E2.0.CO%3B2-1>
- “Ole Miss Refuses to Denounce the Symbols of Slavery and Jim Crow.” *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* > No. 18 (Winter, 1997), pp. 62-64
 <<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=1077-3711%28199724%2F199824%290%3A18%3C62%3AOMRTDT%3E2.0.CO%3B2-L>>
- “Percent of People 25 Years and Over Who Have Completed a Bachelor’s Degree: 2005.” U.S. Census Bureau. June 14, 2007.
 <http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/GRTTable?_bm=y&_source=mdr&geo_id=01000US&_col=disp_order&ds_name=ACS_2005_EST_G00_&_lang=en&redoLog=false&format=US-30&mt_name=ACS_2005_EST_G00_R1402_US30>
- “Percent of People Below Poverty Level in the Past 12 Months.” U.S. Census Bureau. June 14, 2007. <http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/GRTTable?_bm=y&_source=dw&geo_id=01000US&_col=disp_order&ds_name=ACS_2005_EST_G00_&_lang=en&redoLog=false&mt_name=ACS_2005_EST_G00_R1701_US30&format=US-30>
- “Race and Hispanic Origin in 2005.” U.S. Census Bureau. May 30, 2007.
 <<http://www.census.gov/population/pop-profile/dynamic/RACEHO.pdf>>
- “Race-Sensitive Admissions Struck Down at the University of Georgia.” *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* > No. 29 (Autumn, 2000), pp. 42-43
 <<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=1077-3711%28200023%290%3A29%3C42%3ARASDAT%3E2.0.CO%3B2-O>>
- “South Carolina takes Confederate flag down from Capitol dome.” CNN. July 1, 2000. June 14, 2007.
<http://cnnstudentnews.cnn.com/2000/US/07/01/scflag.01/index.html>.
- “U. of Georgia Scrambles for Black Students.” CNN. June 7, 2003. June 14, 2007.
 <<http://www.cnn.com/2003/EDUCATION/06/06/black.recruits.ap/index.html>>

“UGA Fall 2005 Enrollment.” University of Georgia Office of Institutional Research.
June 14, 2007.
<<http://irhst40.irp.uga.edu/html/irps/irpb/Enrollment/2005Fall/2005-08.htm>>

“The University of Alabama: Where Racial Segregation Remains a Way of Life.”
The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education > No. 32 (Summer, 2001), pp. 22-24
<<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=1077-3711%28200122%290%3A32%3C22%3ATUOAWR%3E2.0.CO%3B2-M>>