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Raising Questions: Gettysburg Rising's Confederate Flag Forum

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Abstract

On March 3, Gettysburg Rising—a group that encourages civic engagement by sharing information—hosted a forum on the Confederate flag. It drew a modest, yet eager crowd. The goal of the event was to create an opportunity for people to come together and share their thoughts and feelings about the flag. After Professor David Hadley delivered a brief history of the flag, the attendees took the mic. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

Confederate Battle Flag, Confederate Memory, Secession, Slavery

Disciplines

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Comments

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THE GETTYSBURG COMPILER

ON THE FRONT LINES OF HISTORY

Raising Questions: Gettysburg Rising's Confederate Flag Forum

By [Olivia Ortman '19](#)

On March 3, Gettysburg Rising—a group that encourages civic engagement by sharing information—hosted a forum on the Confederate flag. It drew a modest, yet eager crowd. The goal of the event was to create an opportunity for people to come together and share their thoughts and feelings about the flag. After Professor David Hadley delivered a brief history of the flag, the attendees took the mic.



**What do you think
about the
Confederate Flag?**

Civil Discourse: Gettysburg Style

The March 3rd event sought to provide an open forum for discussion on the Confederate Flag and its legacy. Image courtesy of Gettysburg Rising.

One of the big themes during the ensuing discussion was time and place. While everyone disagreed on the specific circumstances, all agreed that the flag's display was appropriate in some situations and unacceptable in others. Flags in museums were universally accepted by the group, as museums present a controlled setting where the history can be shared via accompanying informational plaques. On the other side, the flag's use by white supremacist groups was deemed always inappropriate and offensive. When carried by these groups, there was no mistaking the flag's message of hate.

Everything in between – reenactments, historical sites, private property, merchandise – fell into different categories of acceptability for each person.

The question of whether the flag could be separated from Confederate ideals was also discussed. Anyone who reads the Articles of Secession must admit that slavery was a central factor in causing the Civil War. That's not to say that individual Confederates weren't fighting for other reasons, but the Confederacy itself was dedicated to slavery. As a symbol of the Confederacy, the flag necessarily championed slavery. However, many people in the room questioned whether the flag could be dissociated from the Confederacy and therefore from slavery. Take the case of using the flag to honor a dead Confederate ancestor: that ancestor is not the larger Confederacy, and the living relative is evoking a sense of personal history, not advocating for slavery. The group grappled with the question of whether the flag could be dissociated from slavery in this instance, or if the full sense of the flag's symbolism must always be present.

When asked for suggestions on how the flag controversy could be solved, the room seemed to largely agree on the same tactics. The first proposal was that people needed a better education on the flag's history. It's hard to understand the full significance of something without knowing its background. The second proposal was societal shunning. The group also largely agreed that the government should not be involved in deciding when or where the flag is displayed. The public should thus decide when it is appropriate and essentially, perhaps relying on peer pressure and boycotting to keep people from using the flag inappropriately. It would be like society's shunning of the N-word; although it is still used in some instances, that word has become mostly unacceptable in our world.

The most significant idea shared that night, however, was the importance of listening. When Professor Scott Hancock took a turn speaking, he explained how important it was to talk to each other about the flag. Although Professor Hancock's research has led him to certain conclusions and opinions, he still actively seeks out other people's thoughts. It's important to listen to everyone's views, even if those views go against your own, because this is the only way to truly understand the full meaning of the flag. Understanding is key to moving forward together in the flag controversy.

In the spirit of understanding, which was the motivating goal behind the forum, I hope that any of you that feel comfortable will use this post as an opportunity to share your own thoughts. I do want to set a few ground rules, though. Be respectful, no profanity, and no personal attacks. Also, this is a conversation, not a debate. You aren't trying to prove each other right or wrong, simply exploring different thoughts on the flag. Here are some questions to get you started, but by no means do you have to answer all or any of them.

- When and where do you think displaying the flag is appropriate?
 - Reenactments? Battlefields? Cemeteries?

- What are your thoughts of Confederate flag merchandise?
- What thoughts pop into your head when you see a Confederate flag?
- Can the flag be separated from the Confederate Cause in some situations?
- Any ideas of how we can move forward together on the controversy surrounding the Confederate flag?