

# “Yes, There’s a Reason I Salute the Flag”:

## Flag Use and the Civil Rights Movement

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I had a feeling of a sense of pride and hope that, yes, this is the United States; yes, there’s a reason I salute the flag.

—Melba Patillo Beals,  
*Remembering Little Rock*, 1957

I wouldn’t fly the flag on the Fourth of July or any other day. . . .  
When I see a car with a flag pasted on it, I figure the guy behind  
the wheel isn’t my friend.

—Jackie Robinson, 1969<sup>1</sup>

In 1959, segregationists carried U.S. flags and Arkansas state flags when they strode up the steps of the Arkansas state capitol to hear Governor Faubus encourage their protest against integration. But several months after this Little Rock march, during the sit-in actions in Greensboro, North Carolina, that launched a new phase of the civil rights movement, young white men waved Confederate battle flags while heckling black students at Woolworth’s



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<sup>1</sup> Melba Patillo Beals, *Fighting Back, 1957-1962, Eyes on the Prize I* (Blackside Productions, 1987); and Jon Nordheimer, “Flag on July 4: Thrill to Some, Threat to Others”, *New York Times*, 4 July 1969, 23 (Robinson integrated modern major league professional baseball in 1947).

lunch counter. Soon Carolina A&T students waved U.S. flags back at their taunters.<sup>2</sup> These two incidents occurred near the beginning of a long period of increasingly turbulent struggle and resistance, and cited together, they imply a simple linearity of symbolic action that did not in fact occur. Even in the face of belligerent Confederate flag use, claiming the power of the nation's primary symbol for civil rights proved no easier than did the physical and legal struggles for equality.

Because national identity and purpose is open to dispute in democratic societies, particularly pluralistic ones like the United States, citizens can use national flags to signify internal conflicts as well as to support official policy.<sup>3</sup> As John Coski has so ably shown in his examination of the changing uses of the Confederate battle flag after the Second World War, the U.S. flag is not the only emblem Americans have waved in such conflicts. As a result, complicated flag use has played significant roles in many struggles over cultural-political power.

In his cross-national study of flag use, symbolic anthropologist Raymond Firth observed succinctly that "a symbol is . . . not an object but a relationship."<sup>4</sup> Symbolic relationships can be complex, dynamic, and multiply referential. They can encompass not only the relationship between the object and the signifying person, but at the same time, the relationship between the signifier and other, often diverging symbolic uses of the object.

People using flags to express conflicting opinions about national identity and direction have constructed lively symbolic dialogues connected to, but distinct from, traditionally recognized forms of political and social discourse.<sup>5</sup> Recent research has begun to look at these symbolic "flag acts" as keys to understanding the participation of ordinary citizens in cultural-political disputes. This essay examines flag uses during the civil rights movement of the 1950s-60s to provide a new view of the complex interaction of competing visions of America, as well as the shifting social relationships and cultural-political perspectives of those struggling for and those resisting the

<sup>2</sup> Photographs of anti-integration marchers in front of Central High School in Daisy Bates, *The Long Shadow of Little Rock: A Memoir* (New York: David McKay Company, 1962); photograph of marchers en route in Irving Spitzberg, Jr., *Racial Politics in Little Rock, 1954-1964* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1987); photograph of the group at the Capitol building, Edith Horsley, *The 1950s: The History of a Decade* (London: Dous, 1978) 196; and William Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Black Struggle for Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980) 118-119.

<sup>3</sup> In his 1972 examination of flag desecration statutes, Albert M. Rosenblatt observes that "[f]or the most part, [prosecutions under flag desecration statutes] have been associated with periods of national fervor, emotion, and more recently, controversy of a political sort" ("Flag Desecration Statutes: History and Analysis," *Washington University Law Quarterly*, 1972:2 (Spring 1972) 193); see also Robert J. Goldstein, "The Great 1989-1990 Flag Flap: A Historical, Political, and Legal Analysis," *University of Miami Law Review*, 45:1 (September 1990) 19-106, for a similar perspective on more recent events.

<sup>4</sup> John Coski, "'The Pervert Banner': The Confederate Battle Flag in the South in the Civil Rights Era," paper presented in the session *Dueling Banners: U.S. and Confederate Flag Use in the Civil Rights Era* at the Southern Historical Association conference, 10 November 1995; and Raymond Firth, *Symbols: Public and Private* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973), 361.

<sup>5</sup> Although flags seem always to have had a place in the early Republic's pantheon of patriotic emblems, they competed with the eagle, Columbia, the Liberty Tree and liberty cap, and George Washington himself; see series of paintings from the early 1800s in Nancy Jo Fox, *Liberties With Liberty, The Fascinating History of America's Proudest Symbol* (New York: E. P. Dutton/Museum of American Folk Art, 1986); Scot Guenter identifies various nativist and mainstream political uses of the flag as being in place by the 1840s (Guenter, *The American Flag, 1777-1924: Cultural Shifts from Creation to Codification* (Rutherford, New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1990) 47-65. See also John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

redefinition of race relations after the Second World War.<sup>6</sup> These were the precipitating issues for the entire period of social, political, and cultural upheaval.

Just before the turn of the 20th century, a movement emerged to “protect” the U.S. flag, which its supporters considered sacred, from uses they considered inappropriate. This movement promoted a particular style and content of patriotism by pushing to codify and legislate people’s flag use. Many other Americans, of course, continued to regard flags as symbolic objects only, which are powerful because of the vital national ideals they symbolize.<sup>7</sup> These attitudes roughly coincide with two long-standing poles of the American cultural-political psyche: first, the belief that democracy must be based on acceptance (or at least toleration) of differences, and second, the belief that democracy will thrive (or the fear that it will survive) only with the largest possible amount of agreement, or at least silence. For these reasons, dialogues over the symbolic nature and appropriate uses of flags often substitute for discussions of critical cultural-political differences without, however, directly addressing those issues. Because of this, flag disputes themselves often become symbolic enactments of individual and group enfranchisement or disenfranchisement. Through their disputes over flag use, Americans have worked out, though neither amicably nor very effectively, the terms under which they could see themselves and others included in the political and cultural union.

But because national flags are identified with official government policy and actions, they are most easily used by those who support those policies. By the mid-twentieth century, “correct use” of national flags had been effectively limited to official (i.e., governmental) uses and private uses termed “respectful” by regulations based on the privately published and promoted 1924 Flag Code.<sup>8</sup> After the War, Americans found themselves occupying widely differing positions regarding specific government policies and the cultural-political opinions of other citizens. All of these could be expressed by some use—or refusal to use—U.S. flags. By the end of the 1950s, however, official policies were changing and so were the symbolic possibilities of American flags.<sup>9</sup> Before the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954, American flags represented a society segregated *de facto* and *de jure*, both north and south, despite the words Americans used to pledge their allegiance and the melting pot ideals many children learned in school. This symbolism began to change as social and political circumstances began to change: when President Eisenhower

<sup>6</sup>Two other scholars, Scot M. Guenter and David B. Martucci, have published social history examinations of U.S. flag activity in the 1960s. Although his article is brief, Guenter’s use of a semiotic approach, augmented by concepts of hegemony and counter-hegemony, is illuminating (“The Hippies and the Hardhats: The Struggle for Semiotic Control of the Flag of the United States in the 1960s,” *The Flag Bulletin* XXXII: 130 (1989), 131-141 [the paper was presented at the 12th International Congress of Vexillology]); Martucci’s article (“The Red and the Black,” *The Flag Bulletin* XIII:3), an interview conducted by the Bulletin’s editor Whitney Smith, surveys a wide variety of 1960s flags. See also Robert J. Goldstein, *Saving Old Glory: The History of the American Flag Desecration Controversy* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996).

<sup>7</sup>See Robert Phillips, *The American Flag: Its Uses and Abuses* (Boston: The Strafford Company, 1930), 116-117 for a contemporaneous critique of the self-proclaimed “flag-protection” movement of the 1920s that produced the flag etiquette code and increased calls for protective legislation.

<sup>8</sup>Harrison Summers Kerrick, *The Flag of the United States: Your Flag and Mine*.

<sup>9</sup>My analytical scheme owes much to literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin’s discussion of the polyphony or multivocality (diversity) of meanings expressed by people in ordinary social discourse (which he thought novels captured particularly well—and which history, many scholars are increasingly demanding, ought to strive to do, also); see especially Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel,” *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. by Michael Holquist, trans. by Caryl Emerson & Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981) 259-401. The interactive conceptions of hegemony and counter-hegemony I try to apply throughout derive from Stuart Hall’s uses of Antonio Gramsci’s ideas, as does the idea of the “struggle for position” (see especially George Lipsitz’s conceptualization and explanation of these ideas in “The Struggle for Hegemony,” *The Journal of American History* 75:1 (June, 1988) 146).

finally sent U.S. troops to Little Rock to enforce the Supreme Court ruling in 1957. Nevertheless, in 1959, segregationists carried U.S. flags up the steps of the Arkansas State Capitol to begin their march to Central High School to protest its integrated re-opening.<sup>10</sup>

These people had history on their side. A hundred years earlier, the national flag had stood for slavery, and they carried it because they wanted it to continue to stand for segregation. Like many less secretive citizens, the Ku Klux Klan of the 1910s and 1920s had asserted its claim to "100%-Americanism" by marching ostentatiously under the U.S. flag in small towns and large cities across the nation. The Klan reorganized in the south after World War II, and in 1956 the Montgomery, Alabama, Klavern flew both the U.S. and the Confederate battle flags from their parading automobiles (an electrified cross on the roof of the lead Cadillac). Harkening to the Klan's 1920s heyday, the United Klans of America, the largest of the post-World War II groups, listed the American flag as one of its "seven symbols," which represented for them, in part, "an aggregation of UNDEFEATED STATES," the "principles of pure Americanism" and "all CONSTITUTIONAL LAWS BOTH STATE AND NATIONAL."<sup>11</sup> Additionally, the logo of the Klan-associated White Citizens' Councils featured crossed U.S. and Confederate flags, indicating that its membership intersected the sympathies of both Klan groups and the States Rights Party.<sup>12</sup>

First the late-1940s "Dixiecrats," then their political descendant, the National States Rights Party, used Confederate battle flags as their banners, adding specific symbolic weight to that flag. In 1956 opponents of admitting Autherine Lucy to the University of Alabama waved Confederate flags under the university flagpole before they marched to confront the university president with rocks and eggs.<sup>13</sup> By the 1960s the National States Rights Party collaborated extensively with Klan groups, sharing the speakers' stand at rallies and supplying Confederate flags for

<sup>10</sup> Photographs in Bates, Spitzberg, and Horsley (see note 2). Spitzberg, 118, briefly describes the march, which occurred on August 12th (the first day of school after the high schools had been closed for a year), and its aftermath. A few marchers or bystanders also apparently carried small Confederate flags. One of the latter appears in National Archives photographs, and they are mentioned in Reed Sarratt, *The Ordeal of Segregation: the First Decade* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966) 162.

<sup>11</sup> Film of a Montgomery Klan rally in "Awakenings, 1954-56," *Eyes on the Prize I*; and a 1960 pamphlet of United Klans of America Knights of the KKK cited in *The Present-Day Ku Klux Klan Movement Report by the Committee on Un-American Activities, House of Representatives, Ninetieth Congress, First Session* (House Document No. 377, Release Date: December 11, 1967) 349-61 (emphasis in the original). The second Klan declined after 1926 due in part to a series of moral and monetary scandals (see Bennett's discussion, 208-237), disbanding in 1944. The post-World War Two Klan discussed here, which had two growth periods (the late 1940s to mid-1950s and the early- to mid-1960s), was never as monolithic as the earlier Klan, some indication of which appears in the individual Klan histories provided in the HUAC Report. Klan regulations, taken from the 1920s Klan, state that any meeting room must be supplied with "an altar on which lies a Bible open at Romans 12, an American flag, an unsheathed sword, and a container of water" (Report, 24); the HUAC report insists that, although most of the post-World War II Klans adopted the 1920s Klan constitution, structure, and ceremonies, they did not observe most of the ritual, except for the robes and cross-burnings. The U.S. flag continued to hold its own specialized meaning for them, however.

<sup>12</sup> White Citizen's Council logo shown in "Mississippi Is This America? (1963-65)" *Eyes On the Prize I*; an ad for White Citizens' Council road signs featuring the "red, white, and blue" logo and its political slogan, "States Rights, Racial Integrity" (2 for \$25) appears in *The Citizen*, September, 1962. Founded in Mississippi in 1954, the Council movement had a "long-range strategy . . . to project it[self] into the mainstream of national conservatism" (Sarratt, 302). The logo of the Richmond, Virginia, Civil War Centennial Commission (and probably others also) featured crossed U.S. and Confederate flags; the centennial commemoration, 1961-65, coincided with both an increasingly activist civil rights movement and heightened opposition to change.

<sup>13</sup> E. Culpepper Clark, *The Schoolhouse Door. Segregation's Last Stand at the University of Alabama* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) 79.

parades like those in Anniston, Alabama, in May, 1965.<sup>14</sup>

The Confederate battle flag's implicit oppositional value soon made it segregation's primary symbol, often used in dialogue with U.S. flags signifying inclusion. This is what happened late the first week of the pivotal 1960 lunch counter sit-ins in Greensboro, North Carolina. After a few days of young white "toughs" waving small Confederate battle flags while heckling the sit-in students, a full-scale confrontation occurred. The "[w]hite boys paraded with Confederate flags, some with miniature flags stuck in cigarettes. . . ." Then the football team from Carolina A & T, the school whose students had begun the sit-in, responded by

carrying small American flags purchased in advance by student leaders . . . and form[ing] a flying wedge that moved through the whites to permit new demonstrators to replace those at the lunch counters. "Who do you think you are?" the whites asked. "We the Union Army," the football players responded.

The Greensboro *Daily News* reported that "At one point . . . a tall Negro waving an American flag led a parade of students around the aisles to mounting jeers and cat-calls . . . [and] sporadic bursts of applause and shouts. . . . A firecracker exploded in the crowd." Sounding very much like a second Civil War, this spontaneous confrontation of flags and wills climaxed with a bomb scare that closed Woolworth's.<sup>15</sup> Two weeks after Greensboro, "bands of white youths—some carrying Confederate flags and wearing Confederate hats—followed" student sit-in demonstrators through stores in Richmond, Virginia, "making remarks," and provoking "a number of Negro students [to break] out American flags," which they apparently had ready for use. Coverage in the Richmond *Times-Dispatch* featured a three-column posed photograph of at least eighteen young men grinning and holding up several medium-sized Confederate flags, but no image of the sit-in response with U.S. flags.<sup>16</sup> This apparent spontaneity had been building for over ten years.

More physically dangerous encounters occurred the next year at the University of Mississippi, where the Confederate battle flag, also the University of Mississippi football flag, became a powerful emblem of resistance to James Meredith's registration as a student. In one dramatic conflict, opponents of integration gathered at the flagpole and attempted to raise the Confederate flag. The student body vice president, Gray Jackson, led a group of students who circled the flagpole and raised the U.S. flag again. Ten days later, during the deadly riot of September 30, 1962, the Confederate flag replaced the Stars and Stripes. Criticizing these Confederate flag-

<sup>14</sup> HUAC Report, op cit., 14; and in *St. Augustine, Florida in St. Augustine, Florida, 1963-64: Mass Protest and Racial Violence*, intro. by David R. Colburn and ed. David J. Garrow (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing Inc., 1989), esp. 63 and 86 (note 1) and 139, 146-47.

<sup>15</sup> Wolff, 50; Chafe, 118-119; and Julian Morrison, "A&T Students Call Two-Week Recess in Protest Here," Greensboro *Daily News*, 7 February 1960, A4. None of these sources gives a specific chronology of who used which flag first; Chafe's narrative, however, implies that the Confederate flags waved first, with the American flags, "purchased in advance" of Saturday, used in response.

<sup>16</sup> "Richmond Is Scene of Negro Protests," Greensboro *Daily News*, 21 February 1960, A1; Tom Howard, "Sit-Downs at Counters Begin Here / Demonstrations Are Staged at Six City Lunch Counters," Richmond *Times-Dispatch*, 21 February 1960, 1 & 5 (the photograph on page 1 showed a panorama of students sitting quietly at Murphy's serpentine lunch counter, no flags visible). Two days later, some of the demonstrators at several lunch counters and at the upscale Richmond Room restaurant in Thalheimer's department store held U.S. flags to assert proactively their right to inclusion (photograph of attempted Richmond Room sit-in, the Valentine Museum, Richmond, Virginia).

wavers was costly; the next spring, a young art professor was fired for exhibiting a series of satirical paintings featuring Confederate battle flags splattered with segregationist graffiti. Other faculty left more voluntarily. This was clearly not the sort of Confederate flag use condoned by some segregationists. A *Richmond News Leader* editorial (probably by James J. Kilpatrick, a leader of “massive resistance”) had pointedly disapproved of the ungenteel, but merely provocative, use of battle flags against Richmond’s student sit-ins in 1960. Even more than the Confederate flag-wavers’ poor contrast with the studious, well-dressed demonstrators, they violated what the editor understood as the valiant history of the flag itself:

a gang of white boys came to heckle, a ragtail rabble, slack-jawed, black-jacketed, grinning fit to kill, and some of them, God save the mark, were waving the proud and honored flag of the Southern States in the last war fought by gentlemen. Eheu! It gives one pause.<sup>17</sup>

This rarified understanding of the Confederate flag’s symbolism had already been overtaken by ardent segregationist uses.

Moreover, as active federal support for integration grew in the mid-1960s, southern segregationists continued to feel that—and behave as if—they had seceded again, an important change from the claim on hegemonic power asserted by those carrying American flags at Little Rock in 1959. This estrangement was implicit in the “states’ rights” ideology on which most segregationists increasingly based their hopes of resisting change, an ideology that was not always symbolized by the Confederate flag. In the midst of the late-1950s school desegregation crisis, Virginia’s Governor J. Lindsey Almond decided to fly the state flag, rather than the U.S. flag, from the capitol building’s primary flag pole. Although the U.S. flag had always flown from the central pole (with state flags flying above the legislative wings when the Assembly was in session), the Governor’s staff denied that “the change [made without comment during the summer] w[as] related in any way to the continuing disagreement between the state and federal governments over school integration and other constitutional issues.” However, Almond had made this decision while administering a campaign mandated by the state Assembly to promote wider display of state flags at state offices, at first in courtrooms and school buildings. Almond objected to seeing state flags in subordinate positions to U.S. flags on single poles (especially short poles). After a week of complaints and explanations, he resolved the capitol crisis as he had a similar State Police station problem—by pointedly approving flying both state and U.S. flags, on separate, but equally high, staffs, while having to affirm that he not only “respect[ed], [but] . . . worship[ped], the flag of my country.”<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Ruell H. Barrett, *Integration at Ole Miss* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1965), 106 & 162, and *Rebel Underground* flyer, (University, Mississippi), 1:2 (October [1963?]). Allard Lowenstein Papers, Series 6:1, Folder 147, Southern Historical Collection, The Library of the University of North Carolina, (the mimeographed page features a waving Confederate flag in the top left corner and a flaming torch in the lower right (I am grateful to John Coski for a copy of this flyer)); “Obscene and Indescent [sic]” *Time*, 19 April 1963, 77 (one painting was entitled “America the Beautiful”; a number of ironic U.S. flag paintings of the 1960s and 1970s also used “America the Beautiful” as titles); “Ole Miss Exodus,” *Time*, 24 May 1963, 63; and *Richmond News-Leader*, 22 February 1960.

<sup>18</sup> “State Flag to Fly Alone on Capitol,” *Richmond News-Leader*, 18 November 1958; “Virginia Flag to Wave as Old Glory’s Equal,” *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 21 November 1958; “Gov. Almond Promises to Display both Flags,” *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 25 November 1958 (notes some support from Southerners for flying the state flag over state buildings); “State, U.S. Flags Fly Over Capitol,” *Richmond News Leader*, 25 November 1958; and “Flags Wave: Separate, but Equal,” *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 26 November 1958.

State flags did not have the oppositional power the Confederate battle flag had claimed by the end of the 1950s. Although segregationists posted White Citizens' Council logos, with their crossed U.S. and Confederate flags, in prominent places including public offices in city halls and courthouses, they increasingly abandoned the U.S. flag, confronting integrationist picketers and marchers with Confederate flags, taunts, and obscene body language. In Georgia, teenagers in cars "with Confederate flags waving from their aerials" harassed early bi-racial Freedom Marchers.<sup>19</sup> In Florida, white men "guarded" stores holding axe handles, a popular symbol of the threat of violent resistance inspired by Georgia's "chicken king"



Lester Maddox. Many of them were topped with Confederate flags, creating a symbol that doubled as an actual weapon.<sup>20</sup> Descriptions of the St. Augustine disorders of 1963-64 mention extensive use of Confederate flags (including those on axe handles), and occasionally an American flag, by KKK and National States Rights Party groups—including a provocative July 4th march in 1964. But these sources do not mention use of U.S. flags by civil rights groups.<sup>21</sup>

These explicitly racist uses made it difficult to perceive Confederate flags primarily as regional signifiers, creating identity problems for white Southerners who were not segregationists. This meant that white Southerners who fought for, or even merely supported, integration or equal rights had difficulty expressing symbolically their regional identity. Progressive Southerners had a unique problem: how to represent symbolically their emerging, but still mostly potential, political, and cultural possibilities—especially since other Americans increasingly tended to stereotype all white Southerners as racists. Was an integrated new "New South" with a unique regional identity possible? Or would potential New Southerners have to reject their southern identity to affirm their support for social and racial justice? One group of embryonic new New Southerners tried to create an inclusive symbolic identity. The Southern Student Organizing Committee (SSOC) was founded as part of the Mississippi Freedom Summer project in 1964 by southern whites involved in the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC); they later affiliated with SDS (Students for a Democratic Society). They adapted the Confederate flag to express a regional identity they could be proud of by superimposing the SNCC logo,

<sup>19</sup> Pete Seeger and Bob Reiser, *Everybody Says Freedom* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1989) 129. The marchers were trying to finish the walk William Moore, a white mailman, had been killed attempting alone.

<sup>20</sup> See especially the photograph of a man in a Confederate flag shirt angrily giving the finger to marchers during the 1966 March Against Fear, in Jo Freeman, ed., *Social Movements of the Sixties and Seventies* (New York: Longman, 1983), 190, as well as film clips throughout *Eyes on the Prize*. See Anthony Lewis and The New York Times, *Portrait of a Decade: The Second American Revolution* (New York: Random House, 1964) 135, for mention of a Citizens' Council sticker on the glass door of the Canton, Mississippi, circuit court clerk and voter registrar in 1964, the height of the voting rights campaign; the axe handles and Confederate uniforms are described in Oppenheim, *The Sit-in Movement of 1960*, 143; and Hunter James describes the role of axe handles in Maddox's rise to power in Georgia in *They Didn't Put That on the Huntley-Brinkley! A Vagabond Reporter Encounters the New South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993) 80-82.

<sup>21</sup> Colburn, *St. Augustine*, esp. 55, 66, 139, 144, & 146-48.

clasped black and white hands, across the center of the old battle flag.<sup>22</sup>

Other progressive Southerners campaigned against the battle flag's use as sports emblems at many colleges and its parallel use as an emblem of resistance to collegiate integration. In 1969 white students at the University of Texas-Arlington led a loud protest against these uses, flying a battle flag of their own—the Confederate banner altered with a large “Black power” fist thrusting out of the junction of the cross. They also tried co-opting the “Hook’em Horns” hand signal to symbolize support for integration.<sup>23</sup> At the same time, another, more marginal group also asserted symbolically that its southern identity could be combined with support for black militancy. A group of white southern migrants to Chicago calling themselves the “Young Patriots” emerged from an SDS ERAP project, “Rising Up Angry.” After breaking with SDS and affiliating with the Black Panthers, they saw no contradiction in using the Confederate and Black Panther flags together. However, the Patriot Party realized they couldn’t use these flags together to organize in the south. The “rebel” cachet of the Confederate flag so useful in the north was negated by its explicit racist uses in the south, where it was, in contemporary terms, “identified with a racist ruling class rather than an oppressed [i.e., poor white] minority” as in the north.<sup>24</sup> Uses of Confederate flags that attempted to be inclusive did not prove successful, though, and popular uses signifying resistance to integration expanded throughout the south—and elsewhere in the nation, too. As a result, the possible symbolic actions for sympathetic whites remained limited to flying U.S. flags at appropriate moments, as when a student unfurled an American flag from a second-story window as Vivian Malone and James Hood entered the Registrar’s office to integrate the University of Alabama in June, 1963.<sup>25</sup> By the late 1960s, many Southerners who supported equal rights felt they couldn’t adapt the Confederate flag to express their ideals.

<sup>22</sup> Conversation with Sara M. Evans, Minneapolis, Minnesota, December 1990. The SSOC logo apparently flew on buttons only; the design was suggested by an African-American SNCC member from Boston and adopted as a negation of the Old South associations of the battle flag (see exhibition, *Embattled Emblem: the Army of Northern Virginia Battle Flag, 1861 to the Present*, John Coski, Curator, Museum of the Confederacy, 1993-94, and paper on SSOC presented at the Organization of American Historians conference, Atlanta, April 1994, by William Billingsly, History Department, University of California—Irvine).

<sup>23</sup> “Rebel Flag Lowered After War Between Students . . .” *Jet*, 27 November 1969, 18-23. In 1971 a Florida school attempted to install the Confederate battle flag as its school flag, but was challenged on the basis of its segregationist meaning (Firth, note on 364); other schools already had a tradition of such use, most notably the University of Mississippi. Charles H. Martin, Department of History, University of Texas-El Paso, is researching a book on resistance to integration and its association with, and impact on, college sports in the south. My thanks to John Coski for sharing his discovery of the *Jet* article.

<sup>24</sup> Barbara Joye and the Liberation News Service, “Young Patriots,” reprinted from *The Great Speckled Bird*, 9 March 1970, in *The Movement toward a New America: the Beginnings of a Long Revolution*, assembled by Mitchell Goodman (Philadelphia/New York: Pilgrim Press/Alfred A. Knopf, 1970) 546-548. My thanks to George Lipsitz, Professor of Ethnic Studies at the University of California—San Diego, for providing information about this group, especially the details of their association with the Hank Williams Chapter of SDS. Joye states the Patriots disaffiliated from SDS in 1968, choosing to link themselves with the Black Panthers. The “Young Patriots” associated with the political “Patriot Party,” from which split a national organizing faction based in Yorkville, New York. By 1970, they also claimed chapters in Eugene, Oregon; Cleveland, Ohio; New Haven, Connecticut; and Richmond, Virginia—their first southern chapter (Joy, 548).

<sup>25</sup> The white student’s action was reported in “An End and a Beginning,” *Newsweek*, 24 June 1963, 32. The *Newsweek* reporter groups this event carefully with observations of the symbolism of the Confederate flag patch on the uniform of the federalized Alabama National Guard officer who asked George Wallace to remove himself from “the schoolhouse door,” the white-handkerchief signal of a state trooper that Wallace had made his stand, and James Hood’s designating himself an “American Negro” on his registration form. The coverage in the 21 June 1963 *Time* did not mention these symbolic details, focusing rather on President Kennedy’s groundbreaking civil rights speech and the historical background of the black struggle for equal opportunity.



This shifting dynamic of meanings offered symbolic enfranchisement for African-Americans, the combined result of federal actions in Little Rock and at Ole Miss, Alabama, and elsewhere, and the grassroots oppositional uses of both flags. However, African-Americans apparently did not use U.S. flags widely to claim symbolic legitimacy for racial equality until the mid-1960s. Coordinated use of U.S. flags in actions planned by national civil rights organizations emerged at that time from earlier flag use in specific local actions.<sup>26</sup> The lack of conspicuous flag-waving in the civil rights movement before the sit-ins of 1960 discussed above perhaps resulted partly from successful flag etiquette indoctrination that limited use to official and quasi-official occasions, where flags appeared at the focal point of an event, as they did at the March on Washington in August, 1963. Media images and descriptions of that event emphasized the large size and peacefulness of the crowd, most of whom carried placards identifying coalition groups or stating the principles the sign-carriers supported. The few individual marchers carrying flags appear isolated in the crowd. The American flags standing in their official capacity on the speakers' platform, however, produced dramatic and well-publicized photographs of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., framed by the podium flag, delivering his "I Have a Dream" speech.

Probably a more important factor, however, was the politics of segregated Americanism that American flags had long represented symbolically. Very much like the aftermath of the First World War, and despite the crucial service of black soldiers in World War II, their expectations of gaining full citizenship afterwards, and the wartime ideology of multicultural toleration, this American exclusionary ideology intensified during the first decade of the Cold War.<sup>27</sup> Even though the NAACP and other groups never diminished their assaults on racial barriers, post-war gains seemed more legalistic than substantive for many African-Americans. This was especially so in the south where returning servicemen, considered "uppity" by many

<sup>26</sup> This does not mean that civil rights organizations did not understand and take advantage of symbolic openings when they occurred. In 1961 the Virginia State Conference of the NAACP protested with a letter-writing campaign the appearance of a Confederate flag on Spotsylvania County automobile tags. More important, they created and distributed 500 U.S. flag stickers to cover the Confederate flags; the stickers included the inscription "ONE NATION INDIVISIBLE" (memorandum from W. Lester Banks dated April 18, 1961, Library of Congress, NAACP Papers, Group III, Sect. C, box 160—thanks to John Coski for sharing his research).

<sup>27</sup> Grasping the shifting relationships between WWII-era tolerant Americanism and various forms of intolerant Americanism (anti-black, anti-Catholic, anti-Semitic, anti-Communist) from the 1910s into the 1960s is difficult. Gary Gerstle's nuanced discussion in *Working Class Americanism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), especially Chapters 9-10 & Conclusion) is one of the best. A recent article credits "the virtual demise of domestic anti-communism as a serious concern by 1960" with making possible "the reemergence of a social movement critical of the racial status quo" (Michael J. Klarman, "How Brown Changed Race Relations: The Backlash Thesis," *Journal of American History* 81:1 (June 1994), 90). That demise is extremely problematic; a more accurate statement would be that an increasing number of African-Americans chose to actively dispute the equation of "equality" and "integration" with "Communism." They also found a way to use the Cold War as a wedge to leverage a redefinition of Americanism (for an brief but excellent discussion of the cultural-political constraints and opportunities of the Cold War on the civil rights movement, see Cheryl Lynn Greenberg, "Introduction," *A Circle of Trust: Remembering SNCC*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press), 2-3). Anti-communists continued to use red-baiting as a weapon against the civil rights movement into the 1970s, comprising an effective part of white backlash, particularly in the south, but in the north as well (see especially James Findlay's discussion of red-baiting providing lists of activists to the FBI by National Council of Churches staff and the generational divide in Cold War thinking represented by SNCC in *Church People in the Struggle: The National Council of Churches and the Black Freedom Movement, 1950-1970* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 86-88).

<sup>28</sup> Historians have noted the sense of optimism and expectation—mixed with anxiety—that accompanied the end of World War II, and have also commented on the political and physical struggles that ensued. George Lipsitz discusses these events in the context of labor history in *Class and Culture in Cold War America: "A Rainbow at Midnight"* (South Hadley, Massachusetts: J. F. Bergin Publishers, 1982), esp. 238-240. John Egerton describes in detail the "epidemic of random murder and mayhem [that swept] like a fever through the [south], fueled by white fears that black veterans might become a revolutionary force, and that blacks in general would no longer stay 'in their place,'" discussing this in the context of what he calls "the moment of opportunity after the Second World War [that was] not realized and captured and converted to the South's advantage" (*Speak Now Against the Day, The Generation Before the Civil Rights Movement in the South* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994) 365 & 11.

whites, were often targeted for harassment and violence.<sup>28</sup>

By the late 1950s, when many southern African-Americans looked at the flag, they saw at best the tension between American ideals and the reality of their daily lives. At worst, they saw the failed promise of freedom and equality, rather than a vital ideal they had only to participate in to claim. A young woman remembers her mother telling her in the 1950s that “she had a *right* to call herself an American,” but she “just didn’t feel like it” because of the ways she and her people had been treated by those in power. In 1964 author James Baldwin reported on national television during the voting rights campaign that a young black man had recently told him that “I ain’t got no country. I ain’t got no flag.” Baldwin remarked that he “couldn’t honestly tell him that he had.” At least two of the students integrating Little Rock’s Central High reported their ambivalence obliquely. They had felt—briefly, after they were finally enrolled—“For the first time in [their] li[ves]. . . like . . . American citizen[s].” One reported “feeling . . . a sense of pride and hope that, yes, this is the United States; yes, there’s a reason I salute the flag.”<sup>29</sup>

This heightened awareness of both the nation’s ideals and its failures led the young activists of the student sit-in movement to stand (or sit) more assertively against segregated Americanism. They seem to have been the first to become aware of the symbolic possibilities of this dialogue, particularly involving U.S. flags. They had been nurtured with both Second World War and Cold War Americanism that explicitly contrasted American freedoms with first Fascist and then Communist oppression, inadvertently heightening the discrepancy between the ideals of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution and the reality lived daily by African-Americans. In towns and cities across the South, they claimed their actions were based on fundamental American ideals, some waving American flags back at increasingly racist and provocative uses of Confederate flags. It was not even necessary to wave flags to make the same point: in Nashville, 3,000 African-Americans packed the courtroom for the trials of sit-in students, then sang “The Star Spangled Banner” and “The Battle Hymn of the Republic” as they left, while in Montgomery, more than a thousand blacks marched from Alabama State College to the state capitol singing the national anthem and reciting the Lord’s Prayer.<sup>30</sup>

They also explicitly positioned their cause as being not only moral, just, and right, but *democratic*, as well. In his contemporary account of the sit-ins, Merrill Proudfoot evaluated the enthusiasm and motivation of the Knoxville students as they began their movement: “They, it seems, had taken seriously what they had been taught in school, that ‘all men are created equal,’ that America is ‘the land of the free . . . .’” As first president of SNCC, Marion Barry testified poetically before the 1960 Democratic Platform Committee that “The ache of every man to touch his potential is the throb that beats out the truth of the American Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. America was founded because men were seeking room to become . . .

<sup>29</sup> Zohara Simmons, *Equal Rights under Law: Desegregation in America*, Program 1 of an eight-part audio series, written by Phyllis Crockett, produced by Mark Lipsitz of Radio America and broadcast on Minnesota Public Radio in 1990 (emphasis on tape); Minnijean Brown, quoted in Bates; and Melba Patillo Beals, “Fighting Back, 1957-62,” *Eyes on the Prize I*; and television appearance shown in video biography of James Baldwin broadcast by the Public Broadcasting System as part of its *American Masters* series. In her memoir, Daisy Bates comments (as have others at the time and since) on this discrepancy and on the role international condemnation of violent resistance to integration played in the civil rights struggle (220).

<sup>30</sup> Martin Oppenheimer, *The Sit-in Movement of 1960* (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing Inc, 1989) 125 & 163. San Francisco protesters had used similar tactics against the HUAC investigation of area college professors in January, 1960.

We are again seeking that room.”<sup>31</sup> But even as SNCC was characterizing racial and religious prejudice “unpatriotic, unchristian, and uneconomical,” its members continued to face charges of being dupes of “outside agitators,” the usual code word for Communists.<sup>32</sup>

Similarly, the students who began the Atlanta sit-in movement did so because they felt that they were not “legitimate participants in the democratic process” and “mistrust[ed] . . . all politicians, both white and Negro.” The Atlanta students wrote and published “An Appeal for Human Rights,” an eloquent statement of their beliefs and demands. Most of its six points supported the first point: “The practice of racial segregation is not in keeping with the ideals of Democracy and Christianity.” The last assertion, however, anticipated segregationist response and played on Cold War anxieties by claiming that “America is fast losing the respect of other nations by the poor example which she sets in the area of race relations.” True to form, Georgia’s governor and many white citizens rejected the Appeal as having been written, not by black Atlanta college students, but by those inevitable “outsiders.” These accusations rejected as inauthentic the students’ claim that the rights and freedoms stated in America’s great founding documents applied to them, thus forcing public attention away from the students’ claims as Americans and their perceptive Cold War warnings. Segregationists shifted focus instead to their own insistence that equality equaled Communism. This was not merely a strategic assertion: a white civil rights activist remembers the moment in 1963 he “realized fully for the first time” in Jackson, Mississippi, that “these men, and unquestionably most of the white people, not only were totally incapable of realizing the role of Mississippi in producing protests but were totally unable to realize that black people could themselves, lead themselves.”<sup>33</sup>

As a result, young people active in the emerging sit-in movement took pains that local and regional newspaper reports include their denials of outside influence. Also,

<sup>31</sup> Merrill Proudfoot, *Diary of a Sit-in*, 2nd ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1962, 1990) 185; Barry as quoted in Howard Zinn, *SNCC: The New Abolitionists* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964) 37. The sit-in students did not invent this strategy, of course; it was an especially old claim for African-Americans, as well as a particular point of World War II-era tolerant Americanism in its struggle against resurgent anti-communism and restrictive versions of Americanism. It was, however, a loud and consistent theme in SNCC’s activities in the early 1960s when the northern press was paying attention.

<sup>32</sup> Statement by “about 30 Negro college students” meeting at Durham, “Segregation Resistance to Continue,” *Greensboro Daily News*, 23 February 1960, A1; Oppenheimer, 121 (see also Proudfoot, 84-86); Zinn reports high school student Stokely Carmichael was “shocked to see Negroes at a[n] anti-JHUAC demonstration” in 1960 (56). Former President Truman charged the sit-in movement outright with being “engineered by communists” (Oppenheimer, esp. 56 & 70-80), and national black leaders had similar fears: in 1960 Rep. Adam Clayton Powell publicly accused Dr. King, A. Phillip Randolph, and Bayard Rustin of un-American influences. See also Taylor Branch’s discussion of charges of communists infiltrating civil rights organizations in *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-1963*, *passim*, but especially the Kennedy administration attempts to “control” King with such accusations (835-41); see also the “Martin Luther King” section of *Racial and Civil Disorders in St. Augustine: Report of the [Florida State] Legislative Committee*, originally published February 1966, reprinted in *St. Augustine, Florida, 1963-1964*, 228-236, for a contemporaneous statement of King’s alleged communist connections; the essay by David R. Colburn in the same volume provides a very good discussion of the role of anticommunist ideology (especially as propounded by the John Birch Society, which equated racial equality with communism) in resisting changes to the racial status quo (“The St. Augustine Business Community: Desegregation, 1963-1964,” esp. 217-221 & 233).

<sup>33</sup> Jack Walker summarized interviews with sit-in participants in “Protest and Negotiation: A Case Study in Negro Leadership in Atlanta,” *Atlanta, Georgia, 1960-1961: Sit-ins and Student Activism*, ed. David J. Garrow (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, Inc., 1989) 35 (the full text of “An Appeal for Human Rights” is printed on 183-187); whites’ response to the Appeal, including Governor Vandiver’s rejection of it as “anti-American propaganda” and Mayor Hartsfield’s praise of it as “a message of great importance,” is discussed on 66-67; and John Salter, *Jackson, Mississippi: An American Chronicle of Struggle and Schism* (Malabar, Florida: Robert E. Kriger Publishing Co., Inc., 1987) 217 (although part Indian, Salter was identified as white in Mississippi).

newspople often felt they needed to report who seemed to be directing whom. In Richmond, students stated “that the sitdowns were not being staged by any organized group” while a reporter wrote that in Charlotte,

The Negro demonstrators . . . appeared to be taking their directions from, and reporting to, Joseph Charles Jones, a divinity student who recently testified before the House Committee on Un-American Activities.

Jones, an articulate young man who defended the United States against propaganda attacks at the Communist-sponsored World Youth Festival last summer, denied he was either leader or spokesman for the demonstrators.

This awareness of their opponents’ cultural-political power to deflect their rightful claims to full citizenship led the conference that founded the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee at Raleigh in April, 1960, to formally express the desire that their movement would “remain indigenous, Southern, and predominantly Negro, not controlled by any organization, adult, Northern, or otherwise.” One of SNCC’s first actions was to sponsor a series of “southwide . . . demonstrations” on July 4, 1960. Less than a year later, a SNCC telegram to President Kennedy protested the “massive assault upon [the Freedom Riders]” while making the crucial assertion that they were “free-born American Negro students, who are first-class citizens of the United States,” and therefore, ought not need to ask for or demand the rights and protections enjoyed by other Americans. Nevertheless, counter-picket signs continued to declare, as they did in Knoxville, that “Sit-in Demonstrations Are Un-American” or ask “Is this a Communist Sponserd [sic] Organization?” while hecklers shouted “Communists!” as they harassed demonstrators.<sup>34</sup>

This cultural-political reality also existed in Jackson, where U.S. flag use, like that in Greensboro, Nashville, Richmond, and other sit-in sites, emerged spontaneously and locally. And as in Atlanta, Jackson activists claimed “the libertarian/egalitarian promise of the . . . Constitution [and] Declaration of Independence,” which were deflected by their opponents’ “Red Scare” counter-charges. They quickly engaged in both symbolic and substantive dialogues over the “Americanness” of equality for African-Americans in which flags made their first planned appearance in marches. A 1961 march of Jackson State students, partially organized by Korean war veteran James Meredith, provided a snappy model of symbolic possibilities: young women dressed in college colors and young men dressed in black and white—60 students marching downtown carrying American flags.<sup>35</sup>

Despite this precedent, reaching for U.S. flags was not a gesture many activists

<sup>34</sup> “34 Arrested in Sitdowns Here,” *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 23 February 1960, 1:6-6+; Charles L. West, “Youths Pack Cafe Areas of Stores,” *Greensboro Record*, 9 February 1960, A1; Oppenheimer reports the sense of the student conference in *The Sit-in Movement of 1960*, 45; a “special summary report” of July 4th activities was presented to the August SNCC meeting, *The Student Voice*, 1:2 (August 1960) 1 (reprinted in *The Student Voice, 1960-1965: Periodical of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee*, ed. Claybourne Carson, Martin Luther King, Jr., Papers Project (Westport: Meckler, 1990[?]) 22); and text of telegram from Edwin B. King, Jr., Admin. Secy. of SNCC, (*The Student Voice* 11:4 & 5 (April & May 1961), 1 (reprinted in *The Student Voice*, 43).

<sup>35</sup> John Hunter Gray (formerly John Salter, chair of Strategy Committee of the Jackson Movement and emeritus professor of American Indian Studies, University of North Dakota) in letter to researcher dated 26 July 1995; and Tim Spofford, *Lynch Street: The May 1970 Slayings at Jackson State College* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1988) 8. This march seems to have been exceptional—Spofford states that Jackson State students were known mostly for their political apathy throughout the sixties.

instinctively made. The child marchers in Birmingham had carried only picket signs, just weeks before May 31st, when Jackson public school students walked downtown in twos and threes singing and carrying flags to protest the arrests of college students who were being held in barbed-wire pens at the state fairgrounds. That event became known as the Children's March, where police dramatically ripped flags from the children's hands and arrested 600. The marchers' choice of actions had been constrained by a Jackson ordinance making it illegal to carry picket signs, or even to walk in a group as small as two, on penalty of "instant arrest." Both John Salter (now John Hunter Gray) and Edwin King attribute Medgar Evers, NAACP field officer and a World War Two veteran, with the idea of using flags in place of signs. Gray, who was chair of the Jackson Movement Strategy Committee, remembers that, besides asserting their American birthright, those who carried flags in the Jackson Movement saw them "almost as an icon or a religious symbol which might provide protection in some mystical sense—and certainly some inner sustenance for many individuals," exactly the feelings earlier flag protection movements wanted to instill. Edwin King remembers that "we thought that American flags might not quite fit the standard procedure of seizing our signs and [that] the students might not even be arrested, just for carrying flags."<sup>36</sup>

The flags did not protect them, of course, but did provide powerful visual images of large white policemen yanking flags out of black children's hands. King states that "we did not think the police would actually throw the flag[s] in the . . . gutter as some did, almost as if the flag was a poster that did speak out." The situation also provided John Gray (Salter) with a remembered contrast that was more than symbolic: He watched a woman sadly pick up a U.S. flag, and then he "drove through the downtown area. Confederate flags seemed to be flying everywhere. Police were everywhere. Hoodlums were everywhere."<sup>37</sup> Two days after Evers' assassination, black clergy marched in twos and threes carrying flags "to see if Negroes could walk with flags on Flag Day"—most were arrested. Jackson police apparently did not learn their symbolic lesson very well. Two years later, a series of photographs captured a much younger child (about 5) having his flag violently wrenched away by an angry policeman on the steps of the state capitol.<sup>38</sup>

Despite the symbolic clarity of these actions and reactions, the real work of democracy occurred when Jackson's black and white communities engaged, particularly on Flag Day, 1963, in the larger dialogue over whether racial equality was

<sup>36</sup> Many pickets at this time, though not all, carried flags; on at least one march, on June 11th, children purposely wore NAACP T-shirts and did not carry either signs or flags. Jackson's white establishment *Clarion-Ledger* reports flags being used only on Flag Day and during one small protest on June 8th. Summary reportage in the national press and video clips used in "Mississippi—Is This America?" (1963-1966), *Eyes on the Prize I*, indicate that flags were used in several marches, but these sources seldom provide specifics. Salter (Gray) gives more reliable detail on which marches used flags than do other sources, although precise dates are not always easy to determine.

<sup>37</sup> Salter, 149-150 (the New York Times reported "Jackson Police Jail 600 Negro Children," who sang and waved American flags on May 31st (Jack Langguth, 1 June 1963, 1:2+), as well as another, much smaller march with flags on June 3rd (Langguth, New York Times, 4 June 1963, 29:1); Edwin King cites this law as a "major reason" for marching with flags in a letter to the researcher, 26 September 1994.

<sup>38</sup> King in letter to researcher, 26 September 1994; statement of purpose attributed to "Negro leaders" in "Incidents Continue in Jackson," Jackson *Clarion-Ledger* (15 June 1963) A-8; the photographs of little boy, his flag, and the policeman (by Reiser) appear in Seeger and Reiser, 143-145, captioned "On the steps of the state capitol, Jackson, Mississippi" In a letter to the researcher, Professor John Dittmer of DePauw University states Reiser's photographs of the boy were "set up" to trigger the apparently easily provoked policeman into the same action others had taken with older children and their flags (letter to author, 31 July 1991); a film clip of this event was broadcast as part of a documentary on Freedom Summer on *Turning Point*, American Broadcasting Company, 1994.

American or un-American. During a late May meeting between Mayor Thompson and Negro representatives of his own choice, direct-action opponent Percy Greene, editor and publisher of the weekly *Jackson Advocate*, tried to use for the black community's advantage the white power structure's fear of communism, so often used to buttress segregation. He reported that he

urged the Mayor and Commissioners to take some action now in removing some of the areas [of] tension less [sic] he continue to play directly into the hands of the Communist [sic] who are using racial tension and violence to further world communism.<sup>39</sup>

The increased national and international attention attracted by these protests gave legitimacy to the charges that segregationists were un-American—even when, years earlier, a black Republican had taunted the national Democratic platform committee members by waving a Confederate flag to publicize their “Dixiecrat problem” in 1952. The white editors of the *Jackson Clarion-Ledger* responded to this criticism, but only when the objections came from Northerners opposed to segregation and upset by segregationist's Confederate flag waving. In a Flag Day editorial, the *Clarion-Ledger* urged readers to fly American flags “to refute any contention that our state and people are deficient in such respect [i.e., “patriotism and love for Old Glory”], by displaying the national colors wherever possible as evidence of pride in our American heritage.” In the Sunday paper two days later, a local columnist one-upped the standard sentiment that the “Flag is a symbol of our national sovereignty” (a statement unusual only for a states' rights paper) when she warned that liberals were hatching “[t]reachorous plots . . . all over this nation to subject the Flag of the United States of America and the Republic for which it stands, and to substitute the United Nations flag, symbol of world government . . . masquerading under the emblem of Peace.”<sup>40</sup>

Only a few years earlier “Americanism” had seemed to most white Americans a rather straightforward concept: pro-American and anti-Communist. Now the term was being stretched by some of those it had been used for decades to silence. In June 1963, the national office of CORE (Congress of Racial Equality) continued the symbolic appeal to a tolerant, pluralist construction of Americanism by setting a July 4th deadline for ending segregation in chain stores. Meanwhile, *Jackson Advocate* editor Green, like many mainstream African-Americans, continued to worry about charges of “communist” leveled for many years against the NAACP, CORE, and other civil rights organizations.<sup>41</sup> However, the *Clarion-Ledger* editorial demon-

<sup>39</sup> “Violence Continues,” *Jackson Advocate*, 1-6 June 1963, 2; Greene reported that he delivered his “somewhat lengthy, and sometimes impassioned speech” to Mayor Thompson after “the NAACP-Human Relations Council Group” walked out when Thompson refused to create a biracial commission. Gray/Salter calls editor Greene “pro-segregation,” and Dittmer of DePauw University states in a letter to me that his research on the Mississippi civil rights struggles has revealed that Greene cooperated with the State Sovereignty Commission, a secret, segregationist police force. Edwin King states in his foreword to Salter's book that “Suddenly massive red-baiting appeared on the Jackson scene inside the Movement, almost certainly so from federal sources . . . (xii). See also Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994) for an excellent discussion of the factions and power shifts inside the Jackson movement, in the white establishment, and in the federal government (157-169).

<sup>40</sup> “Republican Candidate Causes Furor in Dems Committee Meet,” *Jet*, 11:14 (31 July 1952) 6-7 (the candidate was a state legislator); “Flag Day Affords Opportunity to Show Pride in National Heritage,” *Jackson Clarion-Ledger*, 13 June 1963, 8-A; and Florence Sillers Ogden, “‘Stars and Stripes Forever’ At Least It Is Great Hope,” *Clarion-Ledger*, 16 June 1963, F-8. The U.N. flag indeed appeared in both civil rights and anti-war marches as an emblem not only of peace (which Ogden and others considered spurious) but also of human rights; African-American Ralph Bunche had represented the U.S. at the U.N.

<sup>41</sup> Langguth, *New York Times*, 4 June 1963, 28:3; and “Time for Negroes to Start Being Americans,” *Jackson Advocate*, 23-28 June 1963.

strates that by 1963, some savvy segregationists were beginning to worry that beligerent Confederate flag use made them seem less than 100% American.

By 1965 the hope raised by the first small successes of the movement, including the increasing—and increasingly positive—national media coverage, resulted in the prominent and planned role played by American flags in the Selma-to-Montgomery march. The assaults by police and state troopers that had stopped the first two march attempts meant the third and successful attempt was covered intensively by national and international print, broadcast, and photographic reporters. Their reports and images emphasized the prominent place the marchers gave the many large and small American flags they carried. As the marchers entered Montgomery, civil rights activists claimed American flags as their own, apparently reversing positions with the segregationist marchers who had carried them in Little Rock six years earlier. One observer reported that, with the Confederate and state flags flying from the state capitol, “the only American flags visible were those [the marchers] . . . carried.” Dr. King exhorted his followers to “march on to the realization of the American Dream,”<sup>42</sup> solidifying the emerging identification of equal rights with a renewed, inclusive definition of Americanism. The resulting news photos provided potent symbols of the marchers’ claims on American ideals and justice.

During the “March Against Fear” the next summer, at least one SCLC member pushed his use of an American flag beyond relatively passive flag-carrying to symbolic confrontation: In Grenada, Mississippi, Robert Green stuck a small flag above the bas-relief of Jefferson Davis on the base of the local Confederate monument and declared, “We want old Jeff Davis to know that the South that he represented will never stand again. . . . This is not the Confederacy; this is America!” James Meredith himself had signaled a new defiance, not only in attempting the march, but also in its confrontational style, embodied in a companion’s satirical use of Confederate hat and flag.<sup>43</sup> For many Americans, perhaps most particularly the white readers of *Life* Magazine sympathetic to blacks’ struggle against *de jure* segregation in the south, the flag-studded images of the Selma-to-Montgomery march and the March Against Fear felt like victory.<sup>44</sup>

Not all African-Americans understood this mid-1960s victory in representation as a triumph, however; their experiences had brought them to a variety of other understandings. In April 1966, a few civil rights protesters in Cordele, Georgia, frustrated after four days of demonstrations, replaced the courthouse flags with placards reading “Freedom Now” and “We Shall Overcome.” One man shook the state flag with its Confederate emblem at police while two others pulled at the U.S. flag, tearing it—an image flashed across the country by the Associated Press. This incident demon-

<sup>42</sup> Kathy Lange, marcher, and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., respectively, quoted in Robert Weisbrot, *Freedom Bound. A History of the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1990) 147 & 148. Images of marchers and flags provide the powerful opening sequence of *Eyes on the Prize I*, the video history of the movement.

<sup>43</sup> “Black Power!” *Newsweek*, 27 June 1966, 36; and film clip of Meredith and companion, “The Time Has Come, 1964-1966,” *Eyes on the Prize I*.

<sup>44</sup> The assertions of citizenship and social and cultural change communicated through the acts recorded in these famous photographs were critically important developments in the cultural-political “struggle for position” because the left’s traditional support of race issues caused them to become popularly associated with communism, particularly during and after the McCarthy era (e.g., “King at Communist school” billboards and J. Edgar Hoover’s campaigns to discredit King and others). For a fairly clear discussion by social theorist Antonio Gramsci of ideas from which others have extracted the concept of “war of position,” see *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, eds. and trans. (New York: International Publishers, 1971) 60-61.

strated not only that the frustration of black activists was rising, but also that segregationists could still use American flags. As a matter of fact, both Georgia's governor and the Ku Klux Klan loudly decried the incident, neither crediting an older black man with rescuing the U.S. flag and returning it to police. The Klan was particularly aggressive in making use of this symbolic opening, criticizing local police for inaction and declaring "if you can't protect this Flag we will bring enough Klansmen to do it for you." As part of what a reporter characterized as their "militant program of patriotism, religion, and anti-Negro sentiment," Klansmen sold "God Bless This Flag" bumper stickers for \$1.50.<sup>45</sup>

The public visibility of this frustrated outburst made it a pivotal event in flag use by civil rights activists. It was also a barometer of changes inside the southern civil rights movement and elsewhere in the nation, as well. Even after the success of the Montgomery march a year earlier, the extensive affirmative flag use in the second, well-publicized phase of the "March Against Fear" was not the immediate response of every black American in the aftermath of the attempted assassination of James Meredith. On a Brooklyn corner, Sidney Street, a decorated veteran of the Second World War, declared that "if they can do that to Meredith, we don't need no American flag,"<sup>46</sup> and burned his 48-star flag (leaving his 50-star flag untouched at home).<sup>47</sup> Soon, differences over using American flags during the mass March Against Fear revealed the distance between older freedom workers and the young people of the emerging Black Power movement: the "sight of the Stars and Stripes enraged SNCC workers" so much that one "rushed at [a] marcher and snarled, 'Give me those flags. That flag does not represent you.'"<sup>48</sup>

By the mid-1960s the symbolic vocabulary of the struggles for and against civil rights was not only confusing, but also changing rapidly. As increasingly radical blacks pushed against the legitimacy of the cultural politics symbolized by increased Confederate flag use, radical white segregationists moved whenever they could to reclaim American flags for their own meanings. The complexity of flag use throughout this period revealed the gaping fault line between African-Americans' hopes for future inclusion and cool-headed evaluation of existing cultural-political realities. When in 1963 Jackson students engaged in their local struggle to be recognized as real Americans by carrying flags as provocative

<sup>45</sup> "Negro Demonstrators Haul Down U.S. Flag," UPI report printed in the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 1 April 1966, 21, and "Klansmen Rally Over Flag Insult," UPI report printed in the *Washington Post*, 4 April 1966, A-17, cited in Goldstein, "The Great Flag Flap," 35. Hinton claimed he had been trying to lower the flag to half-staff to signify the Negro community's state of mourning when other demonstrators rushed forward and grabbed the flags; his co-defendant made no statement. They were both convicted (*Hinton v. State of Georgia*, 223 (GA), 174,164 S.E.2nd 246 (1967)). Communication theorist Stuart Hall characterized the nature of the struggle for position as constantly needing to legitimize hegemonic control, "almost as if [as characterized by George Lipsitz] the ideological dog-catchers have to be sent out every morning to round up the ideological strays, only to be confronted by a new group of loose mutts the next day" (Lipsitz, "The Struggle for Hegemony," 147). In the case of the Klan's pro-flag activities, some dog catchers seemed to have deputized themselves. Both Rosenblatt (207) and Goldstein (142) attribute the introduction and passage of the 1967 anti-desecration law to this event, as do Goodman and Gorden (28-29), who also credit the Radich flag art case and a flag caricature at a University of Hawaii rally with inspiring the passage of the bill.

<sup>46</sup> Television and radio reports at first stated that Meredith had been killed, rather than wounded.

<sup>47</sup> On flag-burning, see mainstream comments especially by Thomas A. Hoge, "A Record of Flag Desecration," *The American Legion Magazine* 83:5 (November 1967), 51; for legalities, see *Street v. New York*, 394 U.S. 576 (1968); also Rosenblatt's discussion of this case, and Goldstein, *passim*. In April, 1966, a young performance artist, José Rodríguez Soltero, had burned a flag accompanied by "The Ballad of the Green Berets" as a part of his performance piece, "Live-Multiscreen-Scrambled-Love-Hate-Paradox USA" (*The Vietnam Experience: 1968* (Boston: Boston Publishing Company, 1983) 108); he was apparently not arrested.

<sup>48</sup> Weisbrot, 203.



tests, they stepped briefly into the vanguard of the 1960s' crisis of American national identity. Local black activists needed considerable symbolic awareness if they were to avoid cultural-political land mines. A 1969 protest in Alexandria, Virginia, was handled particularly well. The protesting group, about one-third white, dragged a Confederate flag from the police department to city hall to draw attention to police brutality against black arrestees and the housing and jobs crises. At the police department, they met two groups of counter-demonstrators, the White Party of America and the National Socialist White People's Party, a member of which declared "Today they are marching over the Confederate flag, tomorrow they will be marching over the U.S. flag." The Black Association for Cultural Advancement had anticipated this criticism, so they also carried a U.S. flag to show their respect for it.<sup>49</sup>

Further shifts in meanings and uses of American flags occurred as the country began dividing over Vietnam and other issues, as well as civil rights. Flag use at each site of cultural-political conflict during this period, particularly from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s, affected other uses, including the struggle for and against equality for African-Americans. The resulting changes in the cultural politics of flag use affected African-Americans for the most part negatively.<sup>50</sup> Anti-war and peace groups flew a variety of flags<sup>51</sup> to declare their opposition to U.S. policy and social and political arrangements, including the NLF (Viet Cong) and red or black flags.<sup>52</sup> If they flew an American flag, it was frequently one from the Revolutionary War era. Some people chose to burn flags or tear them apart to express their contempt for U.S. Vietnam policy. Other Americans, perhaps following Norman Thomas' suggestion, ritually cleansed flags of the immoral actions performed in their name.<sup>53</sup> Others flew new flags, often U.S. flags with peace signs replacing the stars in the union, to symbolize both protest of official policy and hope that their American ideals might be realized.

The anti-war movement and the counterculture, as well as the fragmenting civil rights movement, all challenged assertions of a unitary significance for the U.S. flag,

<sup>49</sup> "Confederate Flag Is Torn Up By Protesters Against Police," *Alexandria Journal-Standard*, 27 November, 1969, 3 (many thanks to John Coski for sharing this article).

<sup>50</sup> Events similar to Cordele continued to occur, requiring astute awareness of flag symbolism by local black activists; see especially the Augusta, Georgia, incident in 1970 (Weisbrot, 227; and "Augusta: Race Riot No. 1," *Time*, 26 May 1970, 22-25 (200 of 390 arrested rioters were released and black leaders presented city officials with a replacement flag); *Time*, 30 November 1970 (cited in Firth, 359).

<sup>51</sup> Despite the Supreme Court's 1931 "Red Flag" decision that it was unconstitutional to prohibit people from displaying any type of banner, even one perceived as the enemy's, states passed laws stipulating those prohibitions during the late-1960s flag crisis period (Richard Goodman and William I. Gorden, "The Rhetoric of Desecration," *The Quarterly Journal of Speech*, LVII:L (February 1971) 26-27).

<sup>52</sup> These appear across images taken at the time: see especially Benedict Fernandez, photograph, "5th Avenue Committee March" (New York City, 1966), *In Opposition: Images of Dissent in the 1960s*; an event also discussed by Martucci. Flags from the American Revolution were particularly important to the counterculture; see text and photographs of scenes from Jerome Ragni and James Rado, *Hair, The American Tribal Love-Rock Musical* (New York: Pocket Books, 1969), which used several of the more significant Revolutionary War banners without stars and stripes. See Martucci for a survey with brief discussions of people's uses of a wide variety of flags and symbols during the late 1960s, emphasizing political action groups but also including the most important counterculture banners and symbols.

<sup>53</sup> See *Time*, 24 August 1970, for a photograph of a supporter of Daniel Berrigan washing a flag; and Harry Fleischman, "Norman Thomas: The Last Years," *The Progressive*, November 1969, cited by Goodman and Gorden, 30: "I don't like the sight of young people burning the flag of my country. . . . If they want an appropriate symbol they should be . . . washing it."

which upset many people. And they all asked questions located on at least two levels at the same time: First, in the larger context—Which of the competing national ideals would U.S. flags ultimately represent? Second, in each particular “flag act,”—To which construction of national identity was each citizen responding, and what relationships to those competing identities did each express? The cultural-political revitalization of Confederate flags increased the complexity of this cultural-political map. At the same time that segregationists waved Confederate flags and state flags incorporating the battle flag to resist extending full citizenship to blacks, they waved U.S. flags vigorously against other challenges to their idea of Americanism, particularly anti-war protesters. In 1969, Georgia Governor Lester Maddox responded to the Vietnam Moratorium by superimposing 30’x 50’ projected images of the U.S. and Georgia flags on the side of the state archives building. He declared to reporters, “We love them both.” Segregationists, who had seen exclusive use of the American flag snatched away from them, regained lost cultural-political power by vehemently supporting the war. Images of Wallace supporters show them with a varied display representing their ideology: “In God We Trust,” “Victory in Vietnam,” and Wallace bumper stickers, along with large U.S. and Confederate flags.<sup>54</sup> But only since the “Dixiecrat” revolt of the late-1940s had they needed more than one flag to express the full range of their cultural-political beliefs. Citizens who opposed the war and supported civil rights perceived a contradiction in this symbolism. One, a Navy seaman charged with encouraging anti-war sentiment in fellow sailors, satirized this brand of exclusionary Americanism by constructing an effigy of South Carolina Senator L. Mendel Rivers that incorporated several Confederate and U.S. flags as prominent elements.<sup>55</sup>

Many people who opposed the war and supported the civil rights movement resisted becoming flagless by continuing to assert that the U.S. flag could represent their vision of America. At odds with its official use, they flew some form of American flag at anti-war rallies. Americans influenced by the emerging counter-culture often wore flags in order to deny the contention that U.S. flags were sacred. They insisted on their utilitarian nature. Fueled by the civil rights and anti-war movements, counterculturists took dissent into every aspect of daily life, seeking to build a more humane and authentic society. Although they satirized the weaknesses of the founding fathers, many in the counterculture considered themselves their moral equivalents. Abbie Hoffman expressed this idea explicitly in his “flag shirt” trial<sup>56</sup> in 1968: “I was attempting to show that I and the other people summoned [by HUAC].

<sup>54</sup> “Maddox Shows Projector,” *New York Times*, 30 October 1969, p. 13; and AP/Wide World photograph of the “March for Victory” in Washington, D.C., 4 April 1970, widely printed at the time. (*Time* also noted the South’s “new passion for the national symbol” in “Who Owns the Stars and Stripes?”, 11 May 1970, 14). Not every group was as sober as the Wallace supporters; some managed satirical whimsy more typical at the time of the counterculture than the mainstream. In a patriotism (i.e., pro-war) parade in Houston in 1967, a member of the John Birch Society marched dressed in a feathered panama hat, a Confederate flag vest, an American flag bow tie, and miniature American flags pinned all over his clothes; his sign read “Draft Kooks” (Thorne Dryer, “Marines Attack Peaceniks,” *The Rag* (Austin, Texas), 7 July 1967 (1:27) 1).

<sup>55</sup> “Priest’s Progress,” *Time*, 1 May 1970, photo on p. 83 (the effigy also clasped a large whiskey bottle).

<sup>56</sup> Hoffman was not the first to be charged with desecration for wearing a flag-design shirt; Ama, one of the San Francisco Diggers, had been arrested in May 1968 for wearing an identical shirt (William Bonney [for the Diggers], “Hey! Let Go My Coat,” *Berkeley Barb*, 6:19 (10 May 1968) 6). There were undoubtedly other instances before Hoffman and apparently an increase in arrests afterward, discussed by Hoffman in “Flag,” a Liberation News Service syndicated article published in *Abas*, May 1969, 6. Hoffman wrote that the State’s brief quoted Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* about “[t]he importance of a flag in developing a sense of loyalty to a national entity.”

... and in general those people who went to Chicago, were acting in the American tradition—as the founding fathers saw it—more than [was] the House Un-American Activities Committee.”<sup>57</sup> When flags were contextualized on hippies, their sacredness was subverted. They engaged in satirical flag acts and street theater to dramatize the negative consequences of blind patriotism (one group carried flags and wore suits, ties, and dog collars when they picketed draft offices). Underground newspaper images were an especially important medium for satire and commentary. These uses asserted that many people who so often invoked the flag code and anti-desecration statutes themselves misused flags to enforce the inviolability of specific cultural-political ideas.<sup>58</sup>

The federal flag desecration law passed in 1968<sup>59</sup> strengthened the identification of flags with official Vietnam policy, thereby giving supporters of that policy permission to consider American flags their own both to wave and to wield as symbolic, and occasionally as actual weapons. This was particularly true after the literally iron-fisted attempt at re-possessing American flags from Vietnam dissenters during the Hardhat Riot and rallies produced scenes analogous to those of the Jackson, Mississippi, police when they symbolically disenfranchised African-Americans by snatching flags from their hands.<sup>60</sup>

The federal anti-desecration law established an official national patriotic correctness, the authority of which spilled over from supporting a foreign war to enforcing “law and order” at home. By 1969 police departments across the country had begun adding American flag patches and pins to their uniforms and stickers to their patrol cars. The *New York Times* reported that the mayor of Birmingham declared the flag to be “a symbol of law and order,” a distinct change from its more traditional if vague associations with freedom, liberty, and the Constitution. Many Americans, however, understood the phrase “law and order” and the addition of flags to uniforms as codes standing for social control, often in explicit contrast to social justice. An unsigned article in the December, 1970, *Sepia* referred to “the pro-war, anti-black, gun-loving conservative, support your local police faction [that] has adopted flag-waving as their party emblem.” The author also describes “police cars . . . with . . . flag[s] taped to the flashing light.” The mayor of Macon, Georgia, declared that the addition of the flags had created better police-community relations due to its appeal to the patriotism that “all Americans have.” Apparently unaware of

<sup>57</sup> Transcript of the testimony of Abbie Hoffman, “The Trial of Abbie Hoffman’s Shirt by the United States Government,” *The Realist*, November 1968, 10.

<sup>58</sup> E. A. Poe, cover drawing, *Berkeley Barb*, 5 September 1969, 3; and “Praise the Lord,” *Avatar*, 3-13 March 1968, 1. See also Warner Brown, “The Sexual Symbolism of the American Flag,” *Avant-Garde*, Summer 1971, 10-11; by the mid-1970s, mainstream humorist Russell Baker also analyzed the flag as “the ultimate male sex symbol” (Baker, “The Flag,” *Mom, the Flag, and Apple Pie* [New York: Doubleday and Company, 1976] 17). See my conference paper, “‘Tangled in the Stars and Covered with the Stripes’: Symbolic Struggles over Flag Use and National Direction in the 1960s,” presented to the American Studies Association conference, New Orleans, November 1990, and Guenter, “The Hippies and the Hardhats,” op. cit., 131-141, for more detailed discussions of these 1960s flag uses.

<sup>59</sup> “Flag Burning Bill Voted,” *New York Times*, 26 June 1968, 32:3, and “Flag Burning Bill Signed,” *New York Times*, 6 July 1968, 40:7.

<sup>60</sup> Nordheimer, 23; “Decision Promised on Wearing of Flag by Transit Police,” *New York Times*, 22 December 1969, 19:1 (officially or unofficially, flags appeared on police uniforms and cars throughout the country in 1969); “How to Desecrate Your Flag,” 79; and Nordheimer, 44. In his article, Guenter states succinctly that the Nixon administration’s announcement that police exhibiting flag patches on their uniforms was a “a respectful display” was “interpret[ed] . . . to mean hegemonic solidarity” with police against social disruptions blamed on a variety of protesters (138).

this effect, civil rights workers in the south declared, "Find the city that flies the most flags and you've found the city where we have the most trouble. . . . [T]he flag becomes the banner of the powerful white establishment."<sup>61</sup> The same perception was true of northern towns and cities, "patriotism" in this context having specific ideological and political content. The great baseball player Jackie Robinson stated in 1969 that "I wouldn't fly the flag on the Fourth of July or any other day. . . . When I see a car with a flag pasted on it[,] I figure the guy behind the wheel isn't my friend." Perhaps the most dramatic assertion that America should still stand for racial separation was captured on film outside Boston city hall during the 1974 school busing crisis, when an angry white man, using a flag and its large pole as a spear, rushed at a black man, a lawyer not associated with the busing case.<sup>62</sup>

By 1968 the expansive possibilities of American flags seemed for African-Americans to be closing in again, although a Black Panther flag displayed in California featured a panther stretched across the stripes of a Revolutionary War flag. Also in 1968, a small group in east Baltimore stood beneath their flag as they watched the disorders that followed Dr. King's assassination, and boxer George Foreman waved a small U.S. flag after winning his Olympic gold-medal fight. In 1969, veteran Jimi Hendrix performed a stunning version of the national anthem at Woodstock, his guitar emulating the sounds of modern artillery in Vietnam—a performance many mainstream Americans found disturbing. However, at the Olympics, Tommie Smith and John Carlos raised their fists in a black-gloved Black Power salute as two American flags were being raised and "The Star-Spangled Banner" was being played in honor of their first and second-place victories. The U.S. Olympic Committee confiscated their medals.

After the assassinations of the late 1960s, many politicized African-Americans felt they had little or no positive relationship to any version of the American flag. Some began using "Black Liberation" flags (red, green, and black vertical tri-colors) either in conjunction with or instead of U.S. flags. In 1971, some black troops in Vietnam displayed a red "Black Power" flag with a black fist in the center and "Black Unity" in black letters at the top.<sup>63</sup> Others vented their increasing anger with more physical gestures—in Augusta, Georgia, in May, 1970, marchers protesting the death of a young man in police custody "turn[ed] ugly" when they reached the county government building, from which they ripped the Georgia state flag, containing the Confederate battle flag, and burned it. A bloody riot followed. Later that year, marchers elsewhere in Georgia tore a U.S. flag from a funeral home pole and burned it.<sup>64</sup> Symbolic modulation was becoming more difficult.

<sup>61</sup> Dryer, "Marines Attack Peaceniks," photo on 7; "The Hard Hats," *Newsweek*, 25 May 1970, 34-35; "The Sudden Rising of the Hardhats," *Time*, 25 May 1970, 20-21; and Richard Madden, "Warren Praises Lobby for Peace," *New York Times*, 20 May 1970, 18, as well as Guenter, *op cit*.

<sup>62</sup> Bobby Powers, one of the men involved in this dramatic assault (though not the flag carrier) apologized twenty years later for his ideas and actions (Glen Johnson, "Apology Offered in Racial attack with Flagstaff," Associated Press, published in *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 18 April 1994, A-2).

<sup>63</sup> Photograph of Black Panther flag in Barb Arnwine, "'Getting Bad' in Claremont," *New Left Notes* (19 November 1968) 35.

<sup>64</sup> "How to Desecrate Your Flag," *Sepia*, December 1970, 79; Firth, notes on pp. 348 and 363-64 (this note describes a 1971 attempt by the Newark, New Jersey, Board of Education to permit the use of the Black Liberation flag in classrooms containing a majority of black students; this decision was challenged as divisive). I also remember seeing Black Power flags with the black fist on a white ground. See Martucci, *op. cit.*, for mentions of several black power and black nationalist flags discussed in the context of other flags of this period.

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These flag acts engaged—often simultaneously—in local, regional, and national dialogues about the legitimacy of ideas of equality that were not completely accepted in any part of the country. Competing symbolic uses and shifting meanings of American, Confederate, and other flags—like the freedom marches and counter-demonstrations and confrontations (including riots and police actions) themselves—touched the heart of the nation’s debates over equality and full citizenship for African-Americans: the need for new identities for, and new relationships between, black and white Americans. But the divergent underlying attitudes about U.S. flags in particular often produced more a disjuncture than a dialogue. Throughout these struggles, people holding nearly every cultural-political perspective felt insulted, if not assaulted, by the meanings others attached to flags and their attempts to assert those meanings. This often led to deep anger. People were “failing to communicate” on several levels—eager to send out their own assertions but often failing or refusing to receive others’ as legitimate. The apparent symbolic openness of American flags as non-specific emblems of American ideals or national unity into which citizens projected their own conceptions had vanished as soon as citizens began fighting over more specific, and therefore conflicting, meanings—and perhaps more important, over ownership of “the” meaning. These battles left Americans confused and anxious. A *Sepia* author stated this situation succinctly: “We’re a nation at war—at war with each other—and we don’t have any one symbol to unify us anymore.” *Time* echoed this with its own observation that “[t]he flag has become the emblem of America’s disunity . . .”<sup>65</sup>

Despite our memory of the flag-draped moral victory of the Selma-to-Montgomery March, we know that the struggle for equality for African-Americans and other minorities did not end in 1965. The comments quoted above probably record more accurately the felt outcome of the struggles for civil rights. However devoutly many Americans have wanted to make patriotic reverence of the flag a steady state since early nationhood, when we have waved our flags at one another, it has usually been to express competing ideas about national identity and direction. The blood and anger of the civil rights movement did accomplish at least one significant piece of symbolic work. It cleansed—at least for now—the U.S. flag of officially representing inequality as understood and practiced since the end of slavery. The symbolic weight of racism and the power to discriminate has fallen onto the Confederate battle flag, the use of which since World War II has made it, effectively, America’s second national flag. As a result, it has become the locus of contemporary struggles over race, competing constructions of southern identity, and in both its explicit and its implied relations to the U.S. flag, American national identity. Symbolic uses of both U.S. and Confederate flags continue to enliven and confound today’s dialogues on equality, race, and community.

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<sup>65</sup> “How to Desecrate Your Flag,” 79 (the author was referring to the “Hardhat Riot” and demonstrations in May and June, 1970); and “Who Owns the Stars and Stripes?” 8.

Raven was unable to gain permission for images of flags used in the civil rights movement by press time, but those uses can be observed throughout the Eyes on the Prize video series, as well as the many references listed in this essay's notes.

The photo in the beginning of this article shows a mob marching on Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, to keep Negro students from entering the school. It appeared in the Arkansas Gazette and was reprinted in *The Long Shadow of Little Rock* by Daisy Bates, University of Arkansas Press, 1986.