

FROM OUR READERS

SOME FINAL THOUGHTS ON THE CONFEDERATE FLAG

LAVORA Perry's letter in the July 1997 *Living Buddhism* inspired me to read both James Tramble's and Pamela Spratlen's letters in the June 1997 edition, which further inspired me to reread Jeffrey L. Towery's letter from the April 1997 issue regarding the Confederate flag. After reading their letters, I am now moved to write a letter offering a slightly different point of view.

The winners of any war are the ones who write the history books. They clarify who the good and bad guys are. Invariably, the winners are the pure-hearted good guys and the losers are thoroughly bad.

In the case of the United States' Civil War, history teaches us that the Union troops were fighting to free the slaves, while the Confederate troops were fighting to keep those slaves in bondage.

However, one could read hundreds of letters written by these troops and never find any mention of slavery. Robert E. Lee, who turned down command of the Union army to lead the Confederate forces, did not believe in slavery. He inherited slaves but freed them before the war. Yet many Union generals owned slaves during the war.

The average soldier of both the North and South gave his life because he was called upon by either the Union or the state where he placed his loyalty. The issue of states' rights verses federal rights was in constant debate and unresolved even after the signing of the Constitution. Southern states were not the only states that threatened secession before the Civil War. Slavery was the emotional issue that politicians played to drive the country to war over secession.

I was born in Alabama, the heart of Dixie. Many of my ancestors were born in Alabama, long before it was called Alabama. My ancestors—the Creek Indians—cannot be found in Alabama now. They were not cheated, lied to, murdered, nor chased out of their homeland by people carrying a Confederate flag. The people who committed atrocities against my ancestors were the good guys and they carried a United States flag.

The Creek nation has survived, but other Indian nations that populated this land prior to the establishment of the United States have no survivors. In some cases we have never even heard of or read about them. They were annihilated by troops carrying flags of the Dutch, French, Spanish, English, but most often the United States, the same flag carried by Union troops during the Civil War.

To American Indians, that symbol—the United States flag—is easily the essence of evil. Whether it was carried by white soldiers, Buffalo soldiers, or other Indians. That symbol should not represent the pure-hearted good guys anymore than the Confederate flag represents the thoroughly bad guys. When a Native American travels to Montgomery, Ala., and sees the two flags flying over the Capitol, which one is most offensive? Which one most represents racism?

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Which one should be unfurled and eliminated from their homeland?

MIKE MORRIS
Wheaton, Md.

I WOULD like to add to the controversial collage of responses to Jeffrey L. Towery's letter in the April issue. Just recently I was involved in a Civil War simulation at school [sixth grade] and was placed on the Southern side by my teachers, therefore I felt obligated to study the subject. The South wasn't fighting just for slaves, they were fighting for many reasons. The South was fighting for freedom from the Union. Another reason the South was fighting was because of tariffs on imports that protected the North's manufacturers and raised the prices Southerners had to pay on imported goods. The way my books put it was that Southerners felt that they weren't getting anything back from the Union; they paid taxes but weren't seeing any improvements.

All the railways, roads, factories and more modern technologies were being built in the North. As an Alabama newspaper put it, "We purchase all our luxuries and necessities from the North." Most Southerners were uneducated and too poor to own slaves. I respect your [Mr. Towery's] opinion about the Confederate flag because at the beginning of the year, I felt the Confederate flag stood for hate. Now I feel that the North and South were equally unjust and no one came out the better.

EMILY SHINADA
Beachwood, Ohio

IN response to Carolyn Mumford's letter in the August *Living Buddhism*, I would like to commend Ms. Mumford for her rational approach to the issues raised by Jeff Towery several months ago.

I would like to add that not only are we unaware of who we were and what roles we may have played in past lives, we have no way of knowing who we might be in a future existence.

In light of this, I realized that I need to be very careful of whom I judge or criticize—I could be a white middle-class grandmother in the San Fernando Valley "today" and "tomorrow" a baby on my mother's back as she tries to cross the border from Mexico, a black man in South Africa, a Jew on the West Bank, a homosexual—anyone, anywhere.

We do not know what our karma has in store for us next, what lessons we need to learn or promises we have made.

Although I do not agree with Jeff Towery's view [of the symbolism behind the Confederate flag], his desire to defend his beliefs has caused many others to question their own beliefs and prejudices.

As a final point, throughout history, every race, religion, gender and age has been persecuted at one time or another. Being of Anglo-Saxon heritage in this life, my own lineage is particularly violent concerning the Normans, Saxons, etc.

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Should we all live our lives full of hate and bitterness for the low life-condition of our ancestors or put efforts into changing all humankind for the better? In President Ikeda's poem "The Sun of *Jiyu* Over a New Land," he urges us to return to our true roots and work toward the future together.

KITTY SCALZO
Winnetka, Calif.

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