



BLACK FLAG UNDER A GREY SKY

Forms of Protest

in Current Neo-Confederate Prose and Song

The current culture of white nationalism in the United States revolves around two geographically-based separatist movements in the form of the ‘Northwest Imperative’ and neo-Confederate movements.¹ They have filled the void left by the demise of the old white supremacist culture of the Jazz era, Civil Rights era, and ‘Militia’ era (mid-1980s to early 1990s) Ku Klux Klan and splinter neo-Nazi parties. This is not to say that the old white supremacist parties, such as the KKK do not exist; however, their impotency in the ‘real world’ white nationalist and overall political culture of the United States is apparent, mainly because the United States has undergone drastic changes in its culture and society since the heyday of the Klan’s resurgence

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1. The material used in this essay comes from the ‘revolutionary’-wing of the neo-Confederate movement, meaning only the essays, novels and songs that call for revolution or that advocate extreme Southern nationalism were used. The material referenced here is only a sampling of what is available. Regarding the different trends in the neo-Confederate movement, the interested reader should consult the two best known academic surveys: James W. Loewen and Edward H. Sebesta, editors, *The Confederate and Neo-Confederate Reader: The “Great Truth” about the “Lost Cause,”* University Press of Mississippi, 2010, and Euan Hague, Heidi Beirich, et. al, editors, *Neo-Confederacy: A Critical Introduction*, University of Texas Press, 2008, for a neo-Confederate perspective, see: Michael A. Grissom, *Southern by the Grace of God*, Rebel Press, 1988, and his *The Last Rebel Yell*, Rebel Press, 1991, as well as R. E. Smith, editor, *So Good A Cause: A Decade of Southern Partisan*, The Foundation for Education, 1993.

during the Civil Rights era. Furthermore, the leading philosophers and essayists of the American white nationalist movement are convinced that they cannot take back all of the United States unless something akin to an overall 'systems collapse' occurs.²

At present the most radical forms of white nationalist protest orbit around the so-called 'Northwest Imperative' or 'Butler Plan' (named after the late Richard G. Butler, pastor of the Aryan Nations) and the neo-Confederate movement. It is the latter movement that is the focus of this article. As the wounds of the Civil War were salved over and the failure of the Reconstruction of the South turned into the cry of "Home Rule" and the rule of Jim Crow, the beginnings of what would become the neo-Confederate movement began with the various myths that became the bedrock of the 'Lost Cause,' a 'civil' religion in the South during the late 1870s to early 1900s, which took shape with parades to Confederate graves on Confederate Memorial Day (normally May 10th or May 11th, depending on the state), the building of memorials to the fallen of the Confederacy, Confederate soldier reunions, the publication of various memoirs of leading Confederate veterans, continuing with the establishment of first, the Confederate Veterans Association, then the Sons of Confederate Veterans (commonly known as the SCV), and the United Daughters of the Confederacy (commonly known as the UDC). Finally, this period started to wind down with the publication of the racist novels of Thomas Dixon, Thomas Nelson Page and others at the turn of the 20th century into the mid-1920s.³

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2. In American fringe fiction, this idea has been explored in so-called 'Prepper' or TEOTAWKI (The End of the World as We Know It) novels and various white nationalist novels. For the impossibility of a white nationalist takeover of the United States, see Harold A. Covington "Socialism in the White Ethnostate," *Northwest Observer*, #127 (February, 2013), pp. 2-10. For a fictional sampling, see the 'Hasten the Day' trilogy by Billy Roper—*Hasten the Day: The First Year of the Balkanization of the United States*, *Waiting for the Sun*, and *Wasting the Dawn*, Createspace Independent Publishing Platform, 2015.

3. Thomas Dixon Jr.'s most famous novel, *The Clansman* (published 1905) was the second novel of his Reconstruction Trilogy. The other novels being *The Leopard's Spots* (1902) and *The Traitor: A Story of the Rise and Fall of the Invisible Empire* (1907). It was Dixon's novels, along with nostalgia for the Reconstruction era that helped to revive the Ku Klux Klan in 1915. Dixon was not the first novelist to defend the Confederacy, that 'honor' goes

However, as the last of the 'grey beards' (Confederate veterans) died off and the United States started to experience the first pangs of what would become the Great Depression, interest in the Confederate past was revived in the 1920s. The 'Southern Agrarian' movement in American literature renewed the call for respect to the South's old institutions and reverence for the antebellum and Confederate past, mainly as a reaction against the excesses of the 'Roaring Twenties' and the perceived hedonism that seemed to characterize urban life in the North. There was also a feeling that the Jazz Age appeared to many southern conservatives to not be the best of times, indeed the nostalgia for the antebellum period and the Confederacy can be traced to the mid-late 1920s.⁴ While gaining little ground among native southerners and even less ground among conservatives, it was the burgeoning distrust of an overarching federal government and rule from Washington that inspired the 'Southern Agrarians.' This nostalgia was swept aside during the Great Depression and, more importantly, as America geared up to enter World War II. However, with the end of World War II and coinciding with the first years of the Civil Rights era, interest in the Confederacy, its heroes and ideals started to resurface in the South, where memorials to fallen Confederates had

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to Brimsley Matthews and his 1882 novel *Well-Nigh Reconstructed*, in which an idealistic young man journeys from supporting the Republican policies of Reconstruction to supporting the Ku Klux Klan. Various histories have been published on the UDC, see Karen L. Cox, *Dixie's Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture*, UP of Florida, 2003. The official history of the UDC is Mary B. Poppenheim, et al, editors, *The History of the United Daughters of the Confederacy*, 3 vols., 1894-1986, reprint edition, Edwards and Broughton, 1966, 1985. There is no comparable history of the Confederate Veterans Association however, the closest is John A. Simpson, *S. A. Cunningham and the Confederate Heritage*, U of Georgia P, 1994. Sumner Archibald Cunningham was the founder and long-time editor of *Confederate Veteran* magazine.

4. For more on the Southern Agrarians, see Richard H. King, *A Southern Renaissance: The Cultural Awakening of the American South, 1930-1955*, Oxford University Press, 1980, and Paul V. Murphy, *The Rebuke of History: The Southern Agrarians and American Conservative Thought*, U of North Carolina P, 2001. The perspective of Daniel J. Singal in *The War Within: From Victorian to Modernist Thought in the South, 1919-1945*, U of North Carolina P, 1982, is also worthy of note.

been an important feature of southern life since the 1910s (or even earlier) and local 'Confederate days,' and folklore, legends, memorabilia and souvenirs that featured Confederate emblems and soldiers were commonplace. Furthermore, as some whites dug in their heels by resisting the civil rights marchers and George Wallace ramped up his campaign for president, the omnipresent symbol of the Confederacy, the Confederate battle flag (also known as the 'Stars and Bars') was adopted by the Civil Rights-era Ku Klux Klan because it symbolized resistance to the new political and social climate sweeping through the South.⁵ It should be noted at this juncture that before its adoption by the Civil Rights era Klan, the Confederate or 'Rebel' flag was not used by the previous incarnations of the Klan. The Jazz-era Klan and the Reconstruction-era Klan used either the American flag, in the case of the Jazz-era Klan, as seen in the newsreels of the Klan's march on Washington in 1924, or the red dragon banner, in the case of the Reconstruction Klan—the red dragon banner and the 'Rebel' flag are used today by various Klan groups, including the Traditional Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, the Confederate Knights of the Ku Klux Klan and others.

At the end of the 1960s and into the early 1970s, Southern bands like the Allman Brothers Band, Blackfoot, the Charlie Daniels Band, Lynyrd Skynyrd, the Marshall Tucker Band, Molly Hatchet, and The Outlaws, among others, would bring the 'Southern rock' sound to national attention, while other southern musical artists recorded more racist and reactionary music.⁶ David Allen Coe and Waylon Jennings, among other 'outlaw' Country performers, along with the prolific and overtly racist Johnny Rebel, would produce and record underground hits that would

5. 'Confederate Sam' used to be a ubiquitous symbol throughout the South of the 1950s-1980s and, at present, has been adopted by some members of the neo-Confederate movement. He has been featured on everything from beach towels and books, to posters, album covers, cigarette lighters, store signs, postcards and, of course, flags. See Figure 1 at the end of this article. For the history of the Confederate Battle Flag, see John M. Coski, *The Confederate Battle Flag: America's Most Embattled Banner*, Oxford UP, 1997.

6. For more on the history of Southern Rock, see Michael Buffalo Smith, *Rebel Yell: An Oral History of Southern Rock*, Mercer UP, 2014.

not be heard except by those ‘in the culture,’ at least before the invention of the internet.⁷ While relatively unknown outside the neo-Confederate and white nationalist underground, Johnny Rebel, and later, David Allen Coe became the sound of those white southerners who resisted, sometimes violently, the burgeoning black civil rights movement; though it must honestly be stated that David Allen Coe was more satirical and less racist than Johnny Rebel, whose songs mostly revolve around the ‘problem’ of blacks in the South. However, while these modern artists used modern technology and instruments, the roots of these rebellious songs of protest stretch back to the end of the American Civil War.

The first song to not only lament the defeat of the Confederacy but to reinforce the defiance some former Confederates felt at their defeat is “Good Ol’ Rebel,” which has been performed by many artists who have added their own spin and lyrics to the song. As performed by Hoyt Axton, the late actor and folk singer, the song is as close to the original as possible and its lyrics are below:

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Oh, I'm a good ol' Rebel
Now that's just what I am
And for this Yankee nation, I do not give a damn
I'm glad I fought again' her, I only wished we'd won
I ain't asked any pardon for anything I've done
I hates the Yankee nation and everything they do,
I hates the Declaration of Independence too,
I hates the glorious union, tis drippin' with our blood,
I hates the striped banner, I fit [old Southern English past for 'fight'] it all
I could,

I rode with Robert E. Lee for three years thereabouts,
Got wounded in four places, and I starved at Point Lookout,

7. David Allen Coe's two X-Rated albums include many overtly racist songs, while Waylon Jennings' version of “Good Ol’ Rebel” is also quite provocative. Johnny Rebel's songs include such underground hits as “Stay Away from Dixie” (a warning to the Freedom Riders), “Ni**er Hatin’ Me,” and “Send Them All Back to Africa.” Some of the songs attributed to Johnny Rebel on www.youtube.com actually come from the early 1920s and were recorded by various artists. Johnny Rebel was only active during the mid-late 1960s, with an album of his racist songs being released in the early 1970s. It is difficult to be more specific as no scholar has endeavored to explore Johnny Rebel's (real name: Clifford Joseph Trahan) career. Indeed, even his obituary is scarce on information about his career.

I caught [old Southern English past for 'catch'] the rheumatism a campin'
in the snow,
But I killed a chance of Yankees and I'd like to kill some more

300,000 Yankees is stiff in Southern dust
We got 300,000 before they conquered us,
They died of Southern fever, and Southern steel and shot
I wished there were 3 million instead of what we got

I can't pick up my musket and fight them no more,
But I ain't gonna love 'em now that is certain sure
And I don't want no pardon for what I was and am
I won't be reconstructed and I do not give a damn.
(Repeat 1st stanza).⁸

“Good Ol’ Rebel’s” lyrical ‘I’s reticence at being reconstructed acted as a battle cry for former Confederates who felt that while history had determined the defeat of the Confederacy, they were not about to surrender their sovereign rights (as they saw them) to determine the structure of their society. The protection of their ‘rights’ fit in nicely with the rise of the Reconstruction Ku Klux Klan and assorted organizations, like the Pale Faces, and the Knights of the White Camelia, who quickly turned from fraternal organizations into terrorist groups, especially when Freedmen and Republicans started to flex their political muscles. The rebellion of the Reconstruction Klan was as much a conservative rebellion as it was a reaction to defeat and the boredom and malaise that accompanied that defeat. The fact that most Reconstruction Klan members were economic ‘up n’ comers’ or leaders in their communities and Confederate military veterans should not be overlooked. Far from being drawn from the lower classes of southern society like the Civil Rights and ‘Militia’-era Klans (the Klan of the 1980s and 1990s), the Reconstruction Klan included businessmen, doctors, and lawyers.⁹ Indeed, all of the founding members of the Ku Klux Klan shared three important characteristics: they were all (a) Confederate veterans, (b) university educated, and (c) Scots-Irish, meaning their ancestors were part of Oliver Cromwell’s ‘plantation’ system that

8. “Good Ol’ Rebel”(1866) by Capt. A. S. Randolph, C.S.A. Hoyt Axton version (1991) can be found at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fT50xE1TMlo>. Accessed 15 October, 2017.

9. The best study to date on the Reconstruction Klan is Allen W. Trelease, *White Terror: The Ku Klux Klan Conspiracy and Southern Reconstruction*, paperback edition, Louisiana State UP, 1995. First published in 1971.

moved Scots Presbyterians into Catholic Northern Ireland. Some of these Scots-Irish moved to the United States, most settling in the South. While educated, they, like most die-hard Confederates, seemed to accept the defeat but refused to allow 'outsiders' ('Yankees') to determine how to structure southern society. Hence, the 'Good Ol' Rebel's' insistence on his refusal to be 'reconstructed' comes from the white Southerner being part of a defeated nation and his attitude that with defeat comes the knowledge that it could have been different and better (in his mind) if the war would have been won by the Confederacy. Whereas some former Confederates accepted the dictates of history and moved on with their lives, holdouts like Jesse James and Coleman Younger continued to fight the war. Furthermore, with the advent of Radical Reconstruction and the attempted overturning of the South's post-Civil War racial and societal structure, the politicized Ku Klux Klan took the lead in attacking Republicans, freedmen, 'scalawags' (native white southerners who supported the Union during the war and/or who supported the Reconstruction Acts) and 'carpetbaggers' (Northerners who moved to the South after the war). The Reconstruction Klan was quite successful in establishing 'Home Rule' in the form of Jim Crow laws that kept the majority of blacks out of political office and in a subservient economic position. However, a century later the demographics of the South had started to change, especially in the 1980s, with massive 'immigration' to the South from the North, mostly as a result of economic prosperity (not to mention non-white international immigration into the South beginning in the late 1970s). These new developments resulted in the revival of the idea of white Southern independence and uniqueness in many parts of the white South. In that sense, members of the current neo-Confederate movement are truly the 'Last Rebels.'

"Hold on to what you believe because they can't take that away"¹⁰—this brief quotation from a Lynyrd Skynyrd song appears to recapitulate the essence of the psychological defense that neo-Confederate and overall white nationalist groups have adopted. 'Holding on to what you believe' in the neo-Confederate sense requires both a celebration of group memory and the capability

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10. Lynyrd Skynyrd, *Can't Take That Away*, from the album *The Last Rebel*, Atlantic Records, 1993.

to selectively elevate the main values underlying the neo-Confederate narrative, while repressing other more popular narratives (in the sense of the popularity of those narratives within the overall culture of the United States). The words of some contemporary neo-Confederates will shed a better light on what they feel is at stake and, more importantly, how they view their opponents and their opponents' ideas. In his 1989 article, "A Long Farewell: The Southern Valedictories of 1860-1861," M. E. Bradford elaborates on the level of discourse aimed at the neo-Confederate movement, the white nationalist right and, indeed, any assertion of pride in white ethnicity by its erstwhile enemies in the United States:

For if you attack your countrymen as not merely mistaken but evil you are not proceeding politically or at law. Instead you represent an authority higher than statute or process and imply an intimacy with God's plan thusward [sic]. This strategy is called rhetorically *oraculum*—speaking for the gods. It is incompatible with the stable rule of law. (Bradford qtd. in Smith 25)

In essence, Bradford states what many neo-Confederates have come to see as their persecution for not believing the way that progressive, multicultural American society constantly reinforces they must believe. Furthermore, many neo-Confederates and other white nationalists, who are the intellectual inheritors of the founders of the Confederacy, look at their opponents as more delusional or bewitched than evil. However, in his 1985 article, Forrest McDonald points out that the cultural crusade many Social Justice Warriors and others on the political left seem to be engaged in to eradicate any whiff of apostasy from the current politically-correct society are anathema to the American system:

That is the first thing to understand about the Yankee: he is a doctrinal puritan, characterized by what William G. McLaughlin has called pietistic perfectionism. Unlike the Southerner, he is constitutionally incapable of letting things be, of adopting a live-and-let-live attitude. No departure from his version of Truth is tolerable, and thus when he finds himself amidst sinners, as he invariably does, he must either purge and purify the community or join with his fellow saints and go into the wilderness to establish a New Jerusalem. (McDonald qtd. in Smith 210)

Whereas McDonald's essay revolves around explaining the mindset of 'Yankees,' it could be argued that the current culture wars

in the United States pits present-day ‘Yankees’ against present-day ‘Confederates/Rebels,’ with both sides being the logical intellectual inheritors of their counterparts from 160 years ago.

The rhetoric aimed at the individual and collective neo-Confederate or white nationalist seems to be designed to shame him/her into conformity, as is exemplified by one of the major themes that failed Democratic presidential candidate Hillary R. Clinton leveled at her opponent’s supporters, labelling them as ‘Deplorables,’ which became a badge of honor that many adopted. The Trump rebellion of 2016 is just the latest in a long string of rebellions of the so-called ‘Unprotected.’¹¹ While Trump’s electoral victory in the 2016 U.S. presidential elections took many by surprise, it came as no surprise to others who have been watching the rise of white working-class frustration at the way in which current American popular culture and society denigrates and demeans, indeed, ‘shames’ them for believing as they believe, worshipping as they worship and for engaging in their various hobbies, like hunting or shooting guns. While it may seem strange to some, guns and the ‘gun culture’ used to be a prevalent part of Southern white culture. Hunting and shooting guns were considered rites of passage for most Southern white men, especially in rural areas and are considered hobbies among their adherents.¹² Sociologist

11. A term coined by Peggy Noonan in her article, “Trump and the Rise of the Unprotected,” *Wall Street Journal*, February 26, 2016.

12. Racist shootings by Southern whites or members of the neo-Confederate movement are rare, and while tragic, represent only a tiny fraction of deaths caused by guns in the United States. Indeed, only the Charleston church shooting of June 17, 2015 perpetrated by Dylann S. Roof can be classified as having anything to do with the neo-Confederate movement, even if peripherally. While other racists have used guns to commit heinous acts, the majority of gun-related deaths in the United States are related to random violence, gangs, drugs or other non-political causes. For more information, on the history and culture of guns in the United States, see *Gun Show Nation: Gun Culture and American Democracy* by Joan Burbick, The New Press, 2006, Clayton E. Cramer, *Armed America: The Story of How and Why Guns Became as American as Apple Pie*, Nelson Current, 2006, and Jen E. Dizard, Robert Merrill Muth and Stephen P. Andrews, editors, *Guns in America: A Reader*, New York UP, 1999. For race and gun ownership, see <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/07/15/the-demographics-and-politics-of-gun-owning-households/>, <http://demographicpartitions.com/>.

Michael Kimmel noticed the same process taking place with many of the Confederate ‘flag wavers,’ who ‘thumb their noses’ as it were at contemporary society when he wrote:

For Southern men, defeat meant a gendered humiliation—the Southern gentleman was discredited as a “real man.” [...] For the rest of the century and well into the twentieth century, Southern manhood would continually attempt to assert itself against debilitating conditions, Northern invaders (from carpetbaggers to civil rights workers), and newly freed blacks. The Southern rebel, waving the Confederate flag at collegiate football games, is perhaps his most recent incarnation. (Kimmel, *Manhood in America* 77)

While Kimmel was writing this in 1996, his 2013 book, *Angry White Men* also considers the rebellion that many white men (including the majority of Southern white men, who are more conservative in their outlook than Northern white males) embraced as the new millennium seemed to encompass everyone’s wishes except theirs. In quoting psychiatrist Willard Gaylin, Kimmel spotlights an important psychological aspect to the current pushback against popular American cultural and societal attitudes:

We can endure the fact that we do not have something unless we feel that something has been taken away from us. We will then experience a sense of violation. The smoldering rage which comes from being cheated [will be extended] to the society which allowed us to be cheated. (Kimmel, *Angry White Men* 25)

The neo-Confederate movement, in its essays, novels and songs, advocates that not only have they been ‘cheated’ by overall American society, but by history itself, reinforcing the ‘persecuted’ or ‘siege mentality’ as mentioned in the title of the 2002 book, *The South Under Siege, 1830–2000: A History of the Relations Between the North and the South* by Frank Conner, a neo-Confederate. Admittedly, both the neo-Confederate movement and the Northwest Imperative are fringe movements, hence the audience for the various writings (whether essays or novels) and songs is relatively small and the authors and song writers are, in a sense, ‘preaching to the choir,’ though the essays, novels and songs could be used

org/gun-owners/, <http://www.vox.com/2015/12/4/9849524/gun-race-statistics>. Accessed 10 Feb. 2020.

as recruiting tools. Finally, the novels of the neo-Confederate movement are available on various internet platforms, including Amazon. Also, the most well-known neo-Confederate band, Rebel Son, has its own website and if one is tenacious enough, Rebel 28's CDs can be purchased on the internet.

In essence, while neo-Confederates are members of what Wolfgang Schivelbusch called the 'culture of defeat,' they also have 'captive minds' in that their minds still wander back to that fateful day of July 3rd, 1863 in the farmland surrounding Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. In the words of William Faulkner in his 1949 anti-racist novel *Intruder in the Dust*, the white Southern boy can escape to that time in his mind:

[...], not once but whenever he wants it, there is the instant when it's still not yet two o'clock on that July afternoon in 1863, the brigades are in position behind the rail fence, the guns are laid and ready in the woods and the furled flags are already loosened to break out and Pickett himself with his long oiled ringlets and his hat in one hand probably and his sword in the other looking up the hill waiting for Longstreet to give the word and it's all in the balance, it hasn't happened yet, it hasn't even begun yet, it not only hasn't begun yet but there is still time for it not to begin [...]. Maybe this time with all this much to lose and all this much to gain: Pennsylvania, Maryland, the world, the golden dome of Washington itself to crown with desperate and unbelievable victory the desperate gamble, the cast made two years ago [...]. (Faulkner 125–126)

Reinforcing the 'could have been, should have been and would have been' attitude of history, the above quote not only imagines a past that might have been but reflects an attitude in the present. At present, neo-Confederates seem to be trapped in the ongoing, never-ending cycle of replaying the Confederate defeat, or of trying to overturn history's verdict of those three fateful days in July, 1863 mentioned above. David Goldfield elaborated on this feeling of being a 'captive of history' in his book *Still Fighting the Civil War*, when he stated:

If history has defined the South, it has also trapped white southerners into sometimes defending the indefensible, holding onto views generally discredited in the rest of the civilized world and holding on the fiercer because of it. The extreme sensitivity of some southerners toward criticism of their past (or present) reflects not only their deep attachment to their perception of history but also their misgivings, a feeling that

maybe they've fouled up somewhere and maybe the critics have something. Southerners may be loyal but they are not stupid. (Goldfield 318)

In traditional white Southern families, and in many black southern families, history is lived. Family gatherings where the family history is shared, and where the family Bible might be brought out, updated and talked about are, or were until relatively recently, commonplace occurrences. However, the neo-Confederate takes this tradition to the extreme, for while being 'trapped' in their history, the 'unreconstructed' neo-Confederate sympathizer continues to play songs, write novels and wave the Confederate battle flag proudly. However, whereas the battle flag is the most obvious symbol of the movement, it is the novels and songs that allow the movement to attract followers. Indeed, the novels and songs act as an outpouring of grief over a past that could have been, and over the present which is informed by a vision of a future that can still be. The novels and songs produced by the movement serve both as a source documenting the history of group affect and a product of communal trauma that continues to shape the group's self-definition and self-esteem, namely as a community living in a shared memory of trauma since the fall of the Confederacy. It is with the above in mind that this article turns to the song "Southern Wind" from Rebel Son's 2006 album *Unreconstructed*. The song is over eight minutes long; however, the most important part is the chorus, which is below:

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Southern wind blow on through our unforgotten land,
here today and yesteryear reunited once again,
Hear the cry of Confederates lost many years ago,
cannons thunder and a lonesome locomotive whistle blows
Keep pride inside with your fellow Rebel souls
Hear their stories from beyond the grave, so many left untold
Keep Dixieland alive in your heart and in your mind
Southern wind blows once again and will until the end of time.
(Rebel Son, "Southern Wind" 2006)

The idea that the members of a nation, both living and dead, are linked by blood and land, is stated quite blatantly in the chorus. While under disrepute in present Western popular culture, this theory has been and continues to be popular among various nationalists, including the current neo-Nazi white nationalist

movement, the so-called “Blood and Soil” factions being its most obvious adherents. Furthermore, the notion that the nation can survive a tragic, even devastating loss is nothing unusual; indeed, one just has to examine nationalists of all stripes to see that most have a ‘moment’ to which they look back. For instance, Serbian nationalists harken back to the defeat in 1389 of the Serbian medieval kingdom on Kosovo Polje (the infamous ‘Field of Blackbirds’), where King Lazar traded an earthly kingdom for a kingdom in heaven, according to legend. In the American South however, history is not just something for textbooks and professors but as Goldfield further observed,

History is not learned; it is remembered, it is handed down like a family heirloom through generations. Much of this remembered past is no longer in history books but it is valued all the more as a precious life-line, ever more fragile, connecting Southerners to the South and to each other. The memories invariably begin with the Civil War. And how white Southerners remembered the Civil War and its aftermath defined and distinguished the South for the next century. (Goldfield 16)

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And, as is argued in this article, the memory of the South’s defeat has ‘defined and distinguished’ the neo-Confederate movement of today as well. In light of the above quote, two diametrically opposing visions have been advanced regarding the American Civil War and Reconstruction. The first position is adopted by those sharing the unreconstructed view that Confederates were not fighting for the perpetuation of slavery but were struggling to defend their homes against invaders who wanted to change their way of life, admittedly slavery was a part of that life, but, they argue, the war was forced upon them by the ‘perfidious Yankees.’ This view is aptly phrased by Charles Scott Hamel in his introduction to the collection of articles from *Southern Partisan* magazine, *So Good A Cause: A Decade of Southern Partisan*:

Southern Partisan is somewhat different from other Conservative magazines in that its ethos stems from a region of the country which has tasted the bitter fruits of military defeat and has been subjected to repeated and continuous attempts to force it to change its way of life. The very existence of *Southern Partisan* is testimony to the fact that these attempts have not wholly succeeded, much to the chagrin of the ideologues and robber barons who nevertheless continue to make

war on this region in the name of the modern shibboleths of “equality” and “progress.” (Smith i)

The second view is the ‘modern,’ progressive interpretation of the Confederacy as a racist country better off forgotten at worst, or at best, its defeat and the civil rights struggles that followed are shining examples of how far the United States has come in race relations.¹³ The latter view is the view that popular American culture has adopted and any attempt by neo-Confederates or other white nationalist/white pride groups results in a popular demonization. Therefore, the opposing views appear to be locked in a Manichean battle, literally a struggle between light and dark, a brawl between good and evil, a fight between those who want to remember and revere their ancestors’ sacrifices and those who want to destroy any vestige of the Confederacy in the South, or, indeed, the United States. At least, that is the view of the neo-Confederate movement and its supporters.

The idea of a mind ‘captive’ to the history of its forebears is nothing new, as with every victory of the progressive, cultural and political left in the United States, especially post-Charleston and post-Charlottesville, the rhetoric directed against present-day conservative white Americans, not to mention, white nationalists, as being held hostage to the mistakes of their ancestors is very real indeed. To conservatives, the most extreme claims of their ideological opponents on the left appear to be ludicrous. ‘How,’ they appear to ask, ‘can we be held responsible for the crimes of our ancestors? We never owned slaves or killed Indians.’ Therefore, the changing of American popular culture from what it was in the 1970s to the present appears to be impossibly immense, at least to conservative whites, and, more specifically, conservative white southerners. Indeed, they seem to echo the words of conservative commentator Ben Shapiro, “One cannot right past injustices with present injustices.”¹⁴ Therefore, in celebrating

13. This view is present in most ‘establishment’ historians’ studies of the American Civil War but is most acutely explored by James M. McPherson in his *Battle Cry of Freedom: A History of the United States during the Civil War Era*, Oxford UP, 1988.

14. Far from being a radical, racist right-winger, Shapiro is a conservative, Orthodox Jew, who is well-known among conservatives in the United

the actions of former Confederates, present-day neo-Confederates are not only revering the memory of Confederates but also thumbing their noses at contemporary mores that seem to recoil in horror at any favorable mention of the Confederacy or its cause. Moreover, they are protesting the changes that have occurred in American society over the past sixty years or so. To say this protest is tragic would be an understatement, as most neo-Confederates have rejected current American popular culture in all its forms and have opted out of, not only the culture, but the overall society. This aspect leads not only to a counterculture (as evidenced by the cultural trappings of the neo-Confederate movement—the symbols, essays, songs, heroes and legends) but to a group that believes that its very physical existence is under threat of annihilation.

By their rejection of the current culture, neo-Confederates in the American South share their admiration of the Confederacy with the European white nationalist movement. Among the subculture of the world-wide white nationalist movement, especially with the advent of the internet and, in particular, YouTube, unknown or obscure bands and musicians can produce songs that are as racist or reactionary as they want.¹⁵ A further example of the popularity of a particular view of the Confederate cause, comes from the underground of the European national-

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States for his erudite argumentation and his fearlessness in debates against the progressive left. He is also extremely popular among young conservatives for his insistence on personal responsibility and his rejection of 'victim culture.' Furthermore, he is famous for saying, "Facts don't care about your feelings," in debates against various progressives and in many encounters with American university students.

15. While You Tube has tried to curb the posting of some of the more egregious songs, there are still many songs and videos available. One example is the group Aryan, whose song "Coon Shootin' Boogie" is among one of the more satirical examples of white nationalist music available on the site. Racist Redneck Rebels' debut album, *Keep the Hate Alive*, was, at one time, available in full, though it appears to have been removed because of violation of copyright. RRR, as they are commonly known, produced songs such as "Dropping the Kids Off in Harlem," "Blow Up the Middle East," and "Whatever Happened to that Dear Ol' Klan of Mine?," "Pederast Priests," among others. With the famous 'purge' or 'Adpocalypse' of June, 2019, it remains to be seen what neo-Confederate songs and videos will be available on the site.

ist right-wing, where the most vicious of Confederate warriors are honored, as evidenced by the following song by Redneck 28, a Welsh-based racist country band. “Outlaws” is from their 2015 album, *The South Will Rise Again*.¹⁶

Lookin’ back a long, long time to the U.S. Civil War,
Quantrill’s men were on the run from the Carpetbaggers’ law,
But then from all around the victors’ evil lies,
Put a ransom on their heads, falling them all to die
(Chorus)
They were outlaws,
Never bow to the blue,
In the Civil War, the Southern flags they flew,
(repeat)
To the South they were true
When the war was finally done they never dropped their Southern flags,
Bounty hunters everywhere wanted them all dead,
It was an ordeal as Quantrill’s men rode by,
It was always clear to them they had to ride or die
(Chorus)
Outlaws ridin’ on, Southern flags they fly
Death followed at their heels, they knew they could die
Never decent tombstones, never asked the reason why
They will live forever,
They’re great riders in the sky
(Chorus) They are outlaws...

The song celebrates those ‘outlaws,’ like Jesse James and Coleman Younger, who, after the Civil War found it difficult to adjust to civilian life and continued to fight against the encroachment of ‘Carpetbagger laws.’¹⁷ This aspect is likewise famously explored by director Clint Eastwood in the film adaptation of the 1972 novel by Asa Carter *Josey Wales: Confederate Outlaw*. Quantrill’s band of Confederate guerrillas holds a particularly unsavory place in Civil War history, as they were spectacularly brutal in attacking Unionist supporters in Missouri and in their sacking of Lawrence, Kansas in May, 1863. Among white nationalists, however, Quantrill’s band, and “‘Bloody’ Bill Anderson and, later, ‘Little’ Archie Clements’ band

16. Redneck 28, “Outlaws,” *The South Will Rise Again* (2015).

17. The best biography of Jesse James at present is: T. J. Stiles, *Jesse James: Last Rebel of the Civil War*, Vintage Books, 2003. For Coleman Younger and the Younger brothers, see Marley Brant, *The Outlaw Youngers: A Confederate Brotherhood, A Biography*, Madison Books, 1992.

(the band that Jesse James joined) is viewed with reverence bordering on worship as an example of the type of Confederate warrior who never asked for quarter and never gave any, in essence always flying the “Black Flag.”¹⁸ Historically, the song rings true, as Pinkerton detectives and various other ‘agents’ of the numerous train companies, at first controlled by Northern investors, and bounty hunters chased Jesse James, his brother Frank and the Youngers. The former Confederate guerillas’ support among the populace of northwestern Missouri was enhanced by the bitter feelings engendered by the fierce guerrilla war that raged along the Missouri-Kansas border from the ‘Bleeding Kansas’ period of 1854 to around 1874, depending on the county under investigation. Jesse James’ legend was further heightened by a former Confederate and newspaper editor, John Newman Edwards, who was responsible for constructing James and his gang of mostly former Confederates into folk heroes, especially among the pro-Southern former Confederates in Missouri.¹⁹ James and his gang’s exploits were further popularized by ‘dime,’ ‘nickel’ or ‘penny’ novels (named so because of their price); however, in current underground neo-Confederate culture, the current heroes of the movement come from novels written by authors who have taken their cue from other elements of the white separatist movement.

In a sense, the novels written by neo-Confederates of various stripes try to emulate the same ‘black flag’ feeling in their characters.²⁰ In Gregory Kay’s neo-Confederate *Third Revolution* saga, the revolution begins with a riot over the removal of the Confederate flag on the South Carolina State House grounds where it had flown

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18. In military terms, flying a/the black flag meant that no quarter would be given to one’s enemies, and, no quarter would be asked. Quantrill’s band flew a black flag, as did other Confederate guerrilla groups.

19. In combination with the aforementioned biography of Jesse James by T. J. Stiles, interested readers should consult Thomas Goodrich, *War to the Knife: Bleeding Kansas, 1854–1861*, U of Nebraska P, 2004) and Jonathan H. Earle and Diane M. Burke, *Bleeding Kansas, Bleeding Missouri: The Long Civil War on the Border*, UP of Kansas, 2013.

20. To review all of the fictional writings of the neo-Confederate movement would make this essay too unwieldy, therefore only two novels were used to provide a sampling, the first novel of Gregory Kay’s *The Third Revolution* tetralogy and Lloyd Lennard’s *The Last Confederate Flag*.

in front of the Confederate soldier monument, after being taken down from the South Carolina capitol dome. The hero of *The Third Revolution*, a white Columbia police officer, Frank Gore starts out in the novel as a proud, native South Carolinian with a major Southern pedigree. After he is injured during the riot that followed, in which white supporters of the flag were shot and killed by a black police officer, Gore is taken to the hospital and while there, his grandmother, who had raised him urged him to “tell the truth about what he saw,” as the mass media was trying to spin the riot into a “white supremacist conspiracy.” She gives him her locket, which she never took off and urges him to look inside:

Frank looked carefully, turning the locket over in his hands, but could see nothing else. “All I see is this cloth trim.”

“That’s not trim. That’s a piece of the company Battle Flag that my own grandfather died carrying at Shiloh, fighting the Yankee invaders. Those stains? That’s his blood, Frankie; his blood, my blood, and *your* blood.

Frank was numb. As he held the object, he could feel a strange warmth coursing through his body and it felt like unseen eyes were upon him.

“This is my heritage [...]”

Granny shook her head. “No Frankie, *this* is your heritage,” she said, tapping his chest gently over his heart with a bony fingertip. “It’s in here, in the heart and in the blood. Bred in the bone, like the old folks used to say. *This*,” pointing to the locket, “is just a symbol of it, a reminder, so that we never forget who we are!” (Kay 21, emphasis in the original)

Again, the above quote reinforces the idea that history and heritage are not ‘dead’ to the traditional southerner, but particularly to the neo-Confederate. In Frank Gore’s case, he pays for his beliefs. When he tries to tell the truth, he is forced to stay silent and through a series of adventures, he, and an enterprising reporter, Samantha Norris are forced to join the neo-Confederate revolutionaries, the CAP (Confederate Army Provisional). After marrying Ms. Norris, the farm they were staying at is attacked by Federal forces and his wife is captured. She is intimately tortured while in Federal captivity, à la Abu Ghraib, and once she was rescued by the CAP, Frank and Samantha Gore give an interview to a group of high school reporters hungry for a good story. In the course of the interview, Frank Gore explains his reasons for rebelling against the U.S. and becoming a neo-Confederate:

It was only after we saw what the Federal Government and its shameless lackeys here in the local administration were capable of doing that we became true believers. Due to their un-Godly persecution, we became revolutionaries, not because we lack patriotism, but because we *are* patriots. No patriot will allow tyrants and despots to hold sway over their country, for any reason. This South of ours, this beautiful Dixie Land, has been trodden under the heel of the tyrants in Washington for a century and a half, and that heavy tread has beaten down the Southern man until it's made us think that's the way it should be." (Kay 401–402, emphasis in the original)

Not only does the above quote repeat various neo-Confederate accusations against the federal government, namely destroying white Southern culture through forced integration, forced 'levelling' of educational opportunities (Affirmative Action), and the denigration of Southern speech patterns and culture, it also shows how one becomes a revolutionary—the threat of death at the hands of an omnipresent government forces one to fight. While Frank Gore's protest ends successfully in the novels as the South is freed and the Confederacy is reestablished, at present, while the neo-Confederate movement is protesting the supposed destruction of white Southern culture it has made little to no headway in the past twenty years or so. It does appear though, that the movement is becoming more and more radical and frustrated with the way in which American culture and society continues to supposedly denigrate the Confederacy and its symbols. It is interesting that the feelings that were projected into the candidates in the divisive 2016 presidential election are the same kinds of feelings that are injected into the debate over the legacy of the Confederacy, again, both sides seem to be locked in a Manichean struggle with the forces of evil.

As can be seen by the above examples, the spirit of protest, while not exactly 'tragic' within the neo-Confederate movement has an extensive and multifaceted history. While songs seem to be the most appealing, it is the novels that are probably the best examples of the tragic aspects of the neo-Confederate protest against the current state of society in the American South. Indeed, Lloyd Lenard's 2000 novel, *The Last Confederate Flag* seems to echo the quote of William Faulkner regarding the romantic vision of a future that might have been. While the story in Lenard's novel revolves around the differences between the forces sup-

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porting the Confederate battle flag and those opposed, the most interesting and telling parts involve the debate between the two sides and how the supporters of the flag and Confederate monuments view those symbols as part of an enduring South. One of the flag supporters, a member of the Sons of Confederate Veterans (SCV) reads out a portion of an essay written by Judge Ben Smith Jr. and published in the *Confederate Veteran* magazine which succinctly points to the heart of the matter as concerns certain symbols of white Southern pride, hence it is quoted at length:

All over the Southland we are plagued with an epidemic of do-gooder educators and mindless politicians hell-bent on obliterating all reminders of the Southern Confederacy. It is said that they do not wish to offend minority groups and members of the new enlightenment. Ancient symbols and time-honored traditions will be swept away as worthless encumbrances to the new breed of Southerner. Our children are taught to despise these totems of a once proud people. The new-style censorship is considered to be a splendid and humanitarian thing, a giant step on the way to the true brotherhood of man [...].

What arrant nonsense. It never occurs to these manipulators that catering to any kind of pressure to invoke the banning of symbols and displays of regional heritage is itself a contemptible form of intolerance. It cannot be a greater sin to offend other citizens who want to enjoy the privilege of free expression under the First Amendment of our Constitution [...].

The political avant-garde of today are the most intolerant breed to appear in modern America. These mischievous people are after votes and care little for constitutional principles. They are the worthy successors of the radical Republicans of another time (those who swarmed Southward during the reconstruction period to plunder, steal and occupy the seats of power). They have done more to polarize the races in the South than they have done to establish the good feeling that ought to exist between them.

If I am offended by someone who is expressing his ideas and not disobeying the law, that is just too bad, for both black and white, yellow and red, have every right to celebrate their heritage. [...] It is irrelevant that someone is offended by this lawful behavior. This is the Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave or so it used to be. (Lennard 196-198)

In four paragraphs, four distinct ideas are presented that illustrate the differences and lack of compromise between the two forces that are currently fighting over the Confederate flag and associated symbols of the neo-Confederate version of the South. First, the idea that 'do-gooder' educators are chang-

ing the South for the worst is a complaint that was heard during the first Reconstruction period when Northern (mostly young white female) teachers came South working for the Freedman's Bureau and would educate white and black together, thus trying to break down racial barriers that had existed for hundreds of years. Second, the shift in culture that has occurred where once venerated symbols, i.e. the Confederate battle flag are now despised and vilified by children, again, signaling a move not only in the contemporary ethos but in the future culture as well. Third, the painting of the opposition as not following the Constitution is a particular sore point with neo-Confederates, though Lenard's novel is less revolutionary than Kay's. Finally, the last two paragraphs hit upon the idea that the South has been involved in a culture war since the antebellum era but increasing in intensity during Reconstruction and into the contemporary era.

As the hero of Lenard's novel, Stonewall Bedford, sits in jail for defending his family from attack by black radicals, he looks out the window and sees a Confederate battle flag blowing in the breeze, to which he remarks:

I still hear the faint calls of the bugles at Gettysburg; still hear the distant sounds of the roll of the drums, see and feel the explosions of the bursting shells. I'm charging up Cemetery Ridge with the long lines of valiant men in gray, as my Confederate comrades scream, die, and reluctantly fall back. For a moment that day, we reached the high ground. If only we could have held it... if only we had won [...] if only [...]. (Lenard 432)

In echoing the Faulkner quote from *Intruder in the Dust* above, Bedford reinforces the neo-Confederate 'romantic' view of history, a view that is, at the same time, nostalgic and tragic because it appears that as long as there are neo-Confederates, there will always be those who are willing to 'tragically' protest the present and long for a past that could have been if only the Confederacy would have won. While unsavory to contemporary sensibilities, there is an undercurrent of tragedy to the neo-Confederate movement, for, like their precursors, they seem destined to fight an eternally losing battle against the overwhelming forces of modernism and progressivism.

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Figure 1: 'Confederate Sam'—the once ubiquitous symbol of the 'unreconstructed' or Southern Nationalist movement. Made popular in the 1960s with the centennial of the American Civil War, it has now become a somewhat sarcastic, somewhat serious symbol of the neo-Confederate movement and a mascot for those who consider themselves anti-PC. A version of 'Confederate Sam' was used on the CD cover of Rebel Son's 2006 album *Unreconstructed*. From the author's collection.

Figure 2: After 9/11, such bumper stickers started to appear. They have been followed with bumper stickers that feature American Indians (a quite famous photo of Mescalero Apaches is normally used), stating "Fighting Terrorism Since 1492." Frequently featured in the South on cars and trucks, the pictured version of the "Fighting Terrorism Since..." normally marks a supporter or sympathizer of the neo-Confederate, or Southern Nationalist movement. © FlyThemHigh.com 2016. Used with permission.



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