

Could Lost Confederate Symbols Represent An Economic Boon for South?

By Caryn Rousseau

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (AP) - From a renamed "Confederate Boulevard" in Arkansas to the shrunken "Heart of Dixie" on Alabama's license plates, some in the South are erasing memories of their Civil War pasts with the hope of enticing investment.

"Business people and tourists don't know what to think about slavery, elitism, the Civil War," says Ted Ownby of the Center for the Study of Southern Culture at the University of Mississippi. "So one way is to give them an easy out. We'll change the name of this building, this street, change this display."

Over the last few years, more and more Confederate roots seem to be vanishing around the South. At Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tenn., last year, the school dropped "Confederate" from Confederate Memorial Hall. The University of Mississippi dropped "Colonel Rebel" as its on-field mascot. Georgia downsized, and then eventually removed a Confederate symbol from its state flag. And South Carolina's NAACP has been boycotting business in that state since 2000 in hopes of removing the Confederate flag from the statehouse grounds.

In Little Rock, the Confederate Boulevard change came just before the opening of the Clinton Library. In Alabama, "Heart of Dixie" was made smaller on the license plates in favor of specialty plates that bring in dollars for special interests.

John Shelton Reed, a professor emeritus at the University of North Carolina's Center for the Study of the American South, says the trend is clear, and business interests coupled with concern from the African-American community are the catalysts.

"Businesses named Dixie this and Dixie that, there are fewer of them than there used to be," Shelton says. "If you're a businessperson, why do you want a name that's going to raise anybody's hackles?"

Ownby says that Southern heritage's effect on business has been an issue since the Civil Rights movement.

"Little Rock, Birmingham, Selma, immediately after something horrible happened in those places, it was for a few years almost impossible to do business," Ownby says.

Jim Dailey, the mayor of Little Rock, says the Confederate Boulevard sign was changed after city officials noted that it was often the first thing visitors saw after arriving at the Little Rock airport. With the world's eyes on the opening of the Clinton Library, and with millions of tourism dollars at stake, the city opted for a different first impression.

So what exactly is the contention? Why do the stars and bars and the word "Confederate" upset so many, while others are so adamant to protect them?

"It seems to be glorifying elitism, racism and slavery," Ownby says. "It seems to celebrate one part of the community at the expense of the other."

Not so, says Ron Casteel, chief of staff for the Sons of Confederate Veterans. He calls the removal of rebel reminders a "disgusting trend" that can be pinned on political correctness.

"We honor everyone else's traditions and heritage, why should we discriminate against Confederate heritage?" Casteel says. "It is now a politically correct thing to do to erase Confederate symbols, Confederate street names, anything that is attached to something that is very much a part of political history."

But Ownby says out-of-town investors want to visit a South that isn't mired in the past. Many Southern tourist regions, like Mississippi's Gulf Coast, make special efforts to see that the atmosphere is war-free.

"They want to offer an image of a place of ease and peace, without people angry at each other," Ownby says.

Larry Griffin, a sociology and history professor at the University of North Carolina, says the South has simply become too diverse to identify with the symbols of its rebel past.

"Could these particular symbols truly represent the Southern people when they have such an extraordinary diversity?" Griffin says. "I don't believe that these kinds of symbols can represent truly a people, now of many hues, many colors and many faiths."

Historians say that it seems white Northerners are happy to let the South hash the problem out themselves, until money becomes involved.

"The white North appears to be letting the white South determine its own meaning," Griffin says. "If the symbols became so divisive that nuts and bolts economics were damaged, if there were boycotts ... the way to handle it is to get rid of the symbol, not permitting public authority to display the battle flag."

However, Griffin also argues that these symbols shouldn't be forgotten, just placed in context.

"We don't want to rewrite the past so moments are silenced or hidden," Griffin says. "The past needs to be observed and engaged, warts and all. There are places that would be proper sites for these kinds of symbols. It could be in a museum, in a national park or any of the Civil War battlefields."

On the Net:
University of Mississippi's Center for the Study of Southern Culture: <http://www.olemiss.edu/depts/south/>
University of North Carolina's Center for the Study of the American South: <http://www.unc.edu/depts/csas/index.html>

State Treasurer Holds Ribbon Cutting For First 500 Project Home Owner

RALEIGH - Christina Hunter, a North Carolina Department of Insurance employee and single mother, is the first new home owner in the Department of State Treasurer and Housing finance Agency's 500 project program.

A ribbon cutting ceremony took place December 14 to celebrate Hunter as the 500 project's first homeowner. The ribbon cutting took place at Hunter's new home at 2116 Brightwell Lane in Raleigh.

The Office of State Treasurer and the Housing Finance Agency (HFA) are teaming up for The 500 Project, to help 500 North Carolina public employees buy their first home.

The goal of The 500 Project is to help North Carolina's public em-

ployees buy their first home by informing them about the benefits of being a homeowner helping them with a low cost mortgage. Home ownership helps the homeowner build wealth, and it helps especially rural parts of the state retain career-minded employees at the state and local level.

"This is a win-win endeavor for the state of North Carolina. It is a chance to help our valued public employees own their first home," said State Treasurer Richard Moore.

The 500 Project is a two-year partnership between the Office of State Treasurer and HFA that officially begins in January 2005.

In 2002, HFA and the Office of State Treasurer formed a similar

partnership targeting public school teachers in four North Carolina counties. Because of the tremendous success of this pilot program the two agencies decided to expand their partnership; for The

500 Project.

For more information about The 500 Project visit [nctreasurer.com](http://www.nctreasurer.com) <<http://www.nctreasurer.com>>

Easley Appoints Griffin

RALEIGH - Gov. Mike Easley has appointed Ms. Susan Griffin of Durham to the Durham Technical Community College Board of Trustees.

Griffin is vice president of Griffin Financial Group Inc. She is a member of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Parent Council. Griffin received her bachelor's degree from UNC-Chapel Hill.

Board duties are to elect a president, employ personnel, purchase land necessary for the college's operation, apply standards and regulations to admission and graduation, receive gifts and donations, and provide instructional services. There are 12 members on the board, each serving a four-year term. The governor appoints four members.



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