

Right action, right attitude

THE SENATE has done South Carolina proud. Not simply because it voted to remove the Confederate flag from our State House grounds — although essential, that was expected — but because of the way it did that.

Senators engaged in a respectful debate that focused on grace and peace, that demonstrated how black and white legislators had come to understand each other better, that should help anyone who cares to have help in that journey, and that could lay the groundwork for setting aside some of the bitterness that too often characterizes our politics. And after everyone had their say, they voted decisively, across partisan and racial lines, to retire the flag to a museum.

Achieving a consensus decision that reached across both racial and political barriers to pull the people of South Carolina together always has been at least as important as removing the flag. The quality of the debate, the motivation for the action,

always has been the metric by which any action would be judged. And the motivation in the Senate could not have been better: to love our enemies as we love ourselves; to recognize the pain the flag causes so many of our fellow citizens and to agree, out of love, to stop causing pain to our brothers and sisters.

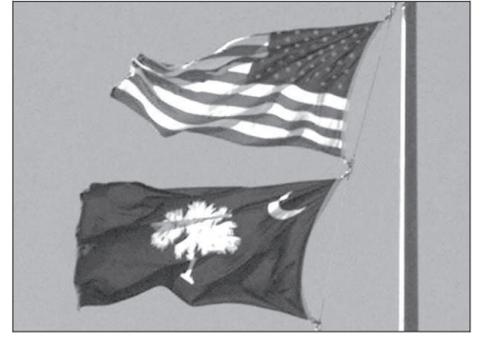
Sen. Lee Bright railed about “a Stalinistic purge of our cultural identity,” giving as an example efforts in one state to stop honoring the founder of the KKK, and meandered from suggesting that black people shared blame for slavery to trying just a little too hard to demonstrate that he respects some black people. But he was the only one flirting with racist talking points. The other two senators who voted against removing the flag — Danny Verdin and Harvey Peeler — simply explained why they respect the flag.

Everyone else reflected on the amazing grace displayed by the families of the late Sen. Clementa Pinckney and the other eight Christians massacred by a white su-

premacist while they studied the Bible at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston. To the nonsensical claim by Mr. Bright that the Confederate flag shouldn't be moved because it didn't kill those people, Sen. Gerald Malloy referred to those families and answered simply: “It was not his sin, but their grace that brought us here.”

What we need now is for House members to work together to achieve the same bipartisan, biracial consensus as the Senate did.

What we need is for House members to remember the motivation for South Carolina's change of heart. Not spitting in the graves of Confederate dead. Not even taking a position on what motivated Confederate soldiers. Simply reaching out in kindness and love to our fellow citizens. Simply agreeing that we don't want to do things as a state that make them feel like they are less than welcome at the place where our laws are made, that make them feel like we're spitting in their faces.



No more flags

UNLESS THEY want to be stuck in this same painful debate 15 years from now, House members need to join the Senate in voting to remove the Confederate flag from the State House grounds. Not switch it out with another flag. Remove it.

The S.C. and U.S. flags fly from the State House dome, right above the Confederate Soldier Monument. They are what we need; they are all we need. The monument was just fine for 111 years without a flag.

The best thing for our state is for the House to reject all amendments, just like the Senate did on Monday. Otherwise, we risk a protracted negotiating session that just invites more outside extremists into our state — from the KKK to people who climb the flagpole to take matters into their own hands. Our state doesn't need either.

Our legislators agree that we shouldn't fly a flag at the State House that causes pain to so many South Carolinians. South Carolinians agree. We just need to get it done.

Completely done. For good.

A new South Carolina

We have come so far. We are so close. Let's get it done.

That's the litany I've been reciting this past week, as the previously unthinkable quietly became a matter of fact — at least in the S.C. Senate. To paraphrase a T.S. Eliot quote that Sen. Tom Davis cited after the Senate vote: This is the way the Confederacy ends; not with a bang but a whimper.

We now live in a new South Carolina. No, the flag's not down yet, but the South Carolina I've known all my life is gone. In that late, unlamented version, that anticlimactic 36-3 vote in the Senate would have been impossible. And yet in this new world, it was so ... matter of fact. Poetry aside, there wasn't even a whimper.



Brad Warthen

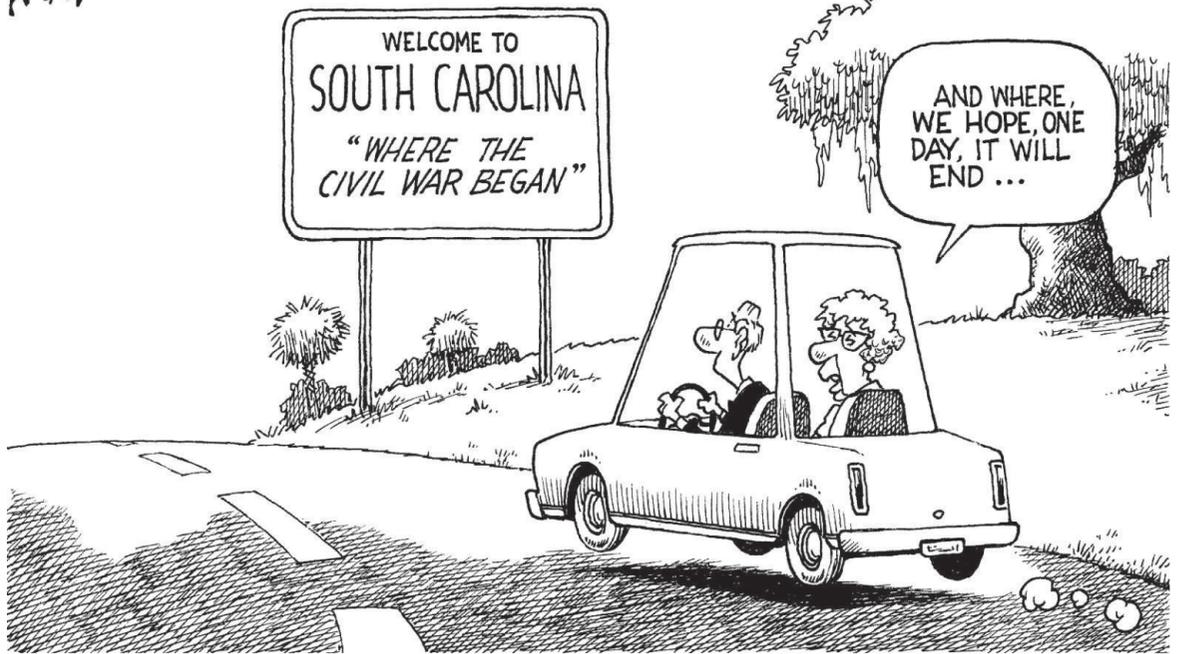
Guest Columnist

How did we get here? Well, I wasn't around for the start. But while some scoff at the ostensible reason for putting the flag up there — to mark the centennial of the War — I find it credible. I was in the second grade in New Jersey when the centennial observances began. Navy blue kepis — the hats we identify with the Civil War — were very popular among the kids who mocked my South Carolina accent. I searched everywhere and found a gray one. I wore it to school, daring the other boys to try to knock it off.

Innocent enough. But the centennial ended in 1965, and the flag stayed up. We know why. By that time, the civil rights movement was winning important national victories.

And what did the flag mean? We know. Oh, news reports will affect that priggish, pedantic neutrality peculiar to the trade: “Some people see the flag as meaning this; some see it as meaning that.” But we know, don't we? It is a way white South Carolinians — some of us, anyway — have had of saying that, despite Appomattox and the civil rights movement: *We can do this. We don't care about you or*

7/8/2015 THE STATE 7-8



how you feel about it.

It was a way of telling the world whose state this is.

My own involvement with the flag started in February 1994, about six weeks after I joined *The State's* editorial board. I hadn't planned to write about it. But my colleague Lee Bandy had asked then-Gov. Carroll Campbell about the flag. The governor had dismissed the issue as beneath his notice. He was too busy with the “big picture” to fuss about with such “temporal emotions of the moment.”

Carroll Campbell did a lot of fine things as governor, but on that day he really ticked me off. So I ripped out a short editorial — just 349 words — that said if the governor was serious about national ambitions (and he was), he needed an attitude adjustment. The “emotions” to which he referred arose “from a failure to resolve the central crisis of our history. That failure arises from many causes, but one of them is a lack of leadership. The rest of the nation can be expected to have little patience with a

man who seeks to lead it into the 21st century, but can't make a gesture to lay a 19th century conflict to rest.”

From that moment, I couldn't leave the issue alone. I berated a series of governors, and Legislatures, on this failure of leadership. And what result did I, or anyone else calling for the flag to go, get? A hardening of attitudes. The Republican Party rose to power in the General Assembly after putting a mock flag “referendum” on its 1994 primary ballot, after which legislators moved to enshrine the flying of the flag into law.

The anti-flag movement grew, and reached its zenith in 2000, with a 60,000-strong demonstration on Martin Luther King Day, and a dramatic march from Charleston to Columbia led by Mayor Joe Riley. And still, what did we get? A “compromise” that moved the flag to a more visible location. After which the Legislature made it clear for 15 years that it had zero interest in revisiting the issue.

But that all happened in the

old South Carolina, which ceased to exist not the night that Sen. Clementa Pinckney and eight of his flock were murdered in cold blood. It ended two days later, when the families of the slain forgave the young man charged with taking their loved ones away.

The new South Carolina was born in that moment, in that courtroom. Hatred and death didn't bring it into being. The love of the living did.

A chain reaction of grace started there, and its radiance shone forth from Charleston. The nation marveled: Why were they not seeing another Ferguson, another Baltimore? How can this black-white lovefest be?

A series of governors had, to varying degrees, brushed off the flag. (Although both David Beasley and Jim Hodges sought compromises.) And now here was one saying, without any mealy mouthed nonsense about compromises, “It's time to move the flag from the capitol grounds.” Period. God bless Nikki Haley for actively stepping out to lead

this new South Carolina, a state that would be ashamed to engage in the games of the past — a state that couldn't look at those victims' families and respond any other way. A state that had grown up.

Standing behind her on that miraculous day, three days after the arraignment, was a cross-section of our political leadership — black and white, Democratic and Republican. The chairmen of the two parties, whose rivalry was defined by the division that flag represented, literally stood shoulder-to-shoulder.

Things like this *don't* happen in South Carolina. Or rather, they didn't happen in the old South Carolina.

Anything can happen now. Anything. Thank God. Now, on to the House.

Mr. Warthen is the former editorial page editor of The State and now director of communications and public relations at ADCO, a Columbia marketing agency. He blogs at bradwarthen.com.

HAVE YOUR SAY

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