

Our heritage is hate

By [David Henson](#)

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I have burned one flag in my life. In college, some friends and I set a Confederate flag ablaze in a parking lot one summer afternoon. It was a symbolic way for us to renounce our racist heritage as young southern men.

But renouncing it didn't erase it. Reducing it to ashes didn't do anything to end the white supremacy on which the United States was built. Burning it didn't change the fact that I—and every other white person in this country—was benefitting from the very thing I tried to disavow.

So while I understand why there is such a fervent call to take down the Confederate battle flag flying over the South Carolina capitol in the wake of the Dylann Roof's terrorist attack at Emanuel AME Church, I am also worried that it will provide white people an easy way to absolve themselves of the white supremacy endemic in U.S. society.

White people love few things more than to take down a symbol and let the structure we benefit from remain in place.

Should that racist, treasonous flag come down? Absolutely. It should have come down decades ago. But don't think for a second it will fundamentally change things. You could burn it, and what it stands for will remain. Trust me. I've tried.

That flag isn't flying over Baltimore, or New York City, or Cleveland. But what it represents—white supremacy and white brutality—remains firmly in place.

See, we have a race problem in the United States. And it's a white problem. It's this problem in which white people kill and brutalize black people. And it's been going on for about 400 years. In the North and in the South. It started with the Middle Passage. It continued with murderous slavery. It kept on and on with lynchings and executions.

It didn't relent with segregation, sundown towns, or mass incarceration. With the [heinous bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham that killed four girls](#). With the terrorist shooting of nine people at Emanuel AME Church in Charleston. Its lineage includes state enforcers of the racist order like Ben Tillman, Bull Connor, and Michael Slager.

We've got a 400-year-old problem here. And it's a white problem. It hasn't stopped. And it won't stop. Not until all white people—conservative and progressive, northern and southern—understand one thing: our heritage is hate. Our heritage is murder. Our heritage is oppression. Our heritage is violence and brutality against black people.

And we benefit from that heritage, regardless of whether we ever strung up the noose, whether we ever loosed the dogs, whether we ever held the fire hoses, threw the tear gas, or pulled the triggers that killed Trayvon Martin, Tamir Rice, Michael Brown, Walter Scott, Freddie Gray, or Pastor Clementa Pinckney and his parishioners.

We might not have been the perpetrators, but we are the collaborators and the enablers. And the beneficiaries of brutality.

We are the silent ones standing in solidarity with hate, death, and racism, pretending we stand for equality and justice because of what's in our hearts and of whom we are listening to.

The time for silence is up. White people, it's time to own our heritage.

If you are in the corner saying, "not me" or "that's not my heritage" or "my parents did this and that," then you are part of the problem. In the U.S., if you are a white person—yes, all white people—then racism is your heritage.

White privilege (a.k.a. white supremacy) is that economic and social heritage of slavery and segregation. All white people have benefited from slavery, segregation, and ongoing white supremacy in some way. Every white person is grafted into the racist system as a beneficiary. It's not a personal attack. It's not an anti-white statement. It's a fact of life in the U.S. as a white person.

Until we see that and confront that, these tragedies will go unchecked. Racism is a problem born of whiteness.

So white folks, don't go to your mourning black friends asking how to help or what to do. Or to talk about the problem of racism in this country.

Trust me, they know all about it. The folks who need to hear about racism are the people who are perpetrating it directly and upholding it implicitly.

So go—no, run—to your white institutions, [your white churches, and your white communities](#) and **tell the truth**.

**As white people, we are to blame and we are the beneficiaries of what's happening to black people in this country.**

Don't talk about racial reconciliation. Talk about racial justice.

Don't talk about forgiveness. Talk about reparations.

Don't talk about your black friends and how you are colorblind. Talk about the racist system that brutalizes black people and privileges white people.

Talk about this problem in America. This white problem. That's been going on for 400 years. That's killed millions of black people.

Let's talk about our white heritage. Our heritage of hate.

*Originally posted at [Henson's blog](#)*