Imagine a big crowd of people all dressed alike. Some of them are waving the Confederate Battle Flag. Some are singing “Dixie” or playing the song on portable CD-players. However, this gathering is not taking place in the United States. It is not about the Civil War, slavery, or States Rights. The reason for this gathering is a soccer game in Munich, Germany. The people in the crowd waving the Confederate Battle Flag and playing the “Dixie” are fans of the Bavarian soccer club FC Bayern München. When asked why they are carrying the “Rebel Flag” they usually answer “because it is the flag of the Southern States.” With “Southern States” they do not necessarily mean the old Confederate States of America (CSA), but Bavaria. These soccer fans often do not know about the link between the Confederate Battle Flag and slavery and oppression. If they do, they do not care. In fact, they do not know that this flag is not the “flag of the Southern States” and never officially was. The political flag of the CSA, the Stars and Bars, looked rather different. For these German soccer fans, the flag is just a symbol for “the (German) South.” Like in the United States the flag has become “an effective symbolic shorthand” for the South (Coski 79). It is precisely this migration of a symbol across cultural borders which prompted this writer’s curiosity about the use, importance and meaning of Confederate symbols inside and outside the USA more than 150 years after the Civil War.

A lively discussion about flying the Battle Flag is going on in the US. Different groups, from Civil War buffs to anti-government protesters and diehard Southern Nationalists, are involved in this debate, each group giving the flag another meaning. Their common ground: each group rallies around the Battle Flag as soon as its public display is threatened with abolition. Georgia’s state flag had contained the Battle Flag since 1956 but had to be changed in 2001. Greeted with protests, the flag changed again in 2003 and now resembles the Stars and Bars of the Confederacy. In place of the esteemed Battle Flag, Georgia got a political flag.
Mississippi still keeps the Battle Flag as a prominent symbol on its state flag. South Carolina flies the Battle Flag from a flagpole in front of the state capitol after it was removed from the building’s cupola in 2000. Now the flag may not be removed from the State House grounds without additional legislation.¹

In wider circles, the Battle Flag is often used in the media to provoke or to challenge a person’s political views. On a recent episode of The Colbert Report (16 March 2009), Stephen Colbert made a reference to the ongoing debate in South Carolina while interviewing Governor Mark Sanford for the show’s segment, “Better Know A Governor.” Colbert called the flag “just a symbol” and could not understand the problem of displaying it. Sanford replied that the flag “for a lot of people unfortunately…is [linked to the Civil War] and for other folks in our state it symbolizes slavery and all that went with it.” The Battle Flag even played a minor role in the 2008 primaries when Republican candidates were asked about their opinion of the Battle Flag’s meaning.

Two more observations which concern this particular display of Southern Nationalism come from two personal encounters. The first occurred at a 2006 conference in Basel, Switzerland. Here, a colleague from MIT in Boston confessed that he wished the South had won the Civil War. If it had, he noted, George W. Bush would never have been President of the U.S. and could not have caused so much trouble. About this time, a student from Washington and Lee University in Lexington, Virginia, told me that the South “never really lost the Civil War.” It is curious that barely 140 years after the Confederate surrender at Appomattox, a Northerner wished the South had won that war, while a Southerner claimed the South had never lost. Suddenly, the United States looked more like a “house divided” than “one nation, indivisible.” In spite of post-9/11 patriotism, the U. S. seems now to face problems similar to Great Britain, where nationalist groups continue to win Scottish independence. As we will see, this is not the only commonality between the U.S. and Scotland. Just as the Scots created their national myth through forging a new history, the Southerners did the same, beginning right after the Civil War.²

After the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1991, many former Soviet states seized the opportunity to gain their independence. Southern Nationalists like R. Gordon Thornton point to this phenomenon and wish that the South would follow their

¹ For a detailed history of the so called flag wars as well as the Battle Flag, see John M. Coski, The Confederate Battle Flag: America’s Most Embattled Emblem (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005).

example. He claims further that it was the Old Confederacy that inspired the former Soviet peoples to seek freedom. In his view, the Confederate Battle Flag has become a symbol of individual rights and freedom all over the world. In his book *The Southern Nation: The New Rise of the Old South* he writes:

> Our flag, so despised by our conquerors and so beloved by us, flies wherever men long to be free. It no longer belongs just to us. We freely share it with any man who dares to dream of freedom. Berliners hoisted our flag atop their hated wall as Germany reunited...Latvians, and Estonians waved our flag when waving even their own meant death. The student protesters of Belgrade braved gas and bayonets to wave our banner...It mingled with the Fleurs-de-lis all over Quebec. Our version of Saint Andrew’s Cross also finds a ready market in Scotland...Even Zulus wave it in South Africa...our Confederate Battle Flag is a universal symbol of liberty. (Thornton 27)

For Southern Nationalist Gordon Thornton the Battle Flag has become a symbol of the struggle for freedom itself.

However, not only the Confederacy’s Battle Flag, but the South itself has been charged with symbolic meaning. In his autobiography, *Stand up for America*, the four-term Alabama governor, George C. Wallace, puts it in this way: “the South is no longer geography—it’s an attitude and a philosophy toward government.” In order to understand this “attitude and philosophy toward government,” one has to understand the South. Perhaps the South is no longer a simple matter of geography, but also about two new things: history and religion. This leads to the core questions of the paper. What is this Southern history and religion? Is there, or was there ever, one “Southern Nation”? Is there, according to Gordon Thornton, a growing Southern Nationalist movement able to exploit Southern history and growing tensions in the USA to gain similar success like the Scots?

**Forging History**

A person, especially a historian, cannot talk about the present without talking about the past. William Faulkner’s famous statement about the presence of the past explains why: “No man is himself. He is the sum of his past. There is no such thing as was because the past is. It is part of every man, every woman, and every moment. All of his or her ancestry, background, is all part of himself and herself at any moment” (qtd. in Meeter 90). The truth of this statement is even stronger in the South. Southerners seem to remember the Civil War as

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if it ended last week (as the Washington and Lee student quoted earlier). At least they remember their distinct history. There are not only the omnipresent Confederate memorials, but the South seems to be haunted by Confederate ghosts as well. Myths kept alive by organizations like the Southern League. The title hero of Barry Hannah’s novel _Ray_ could personify the South and the Southern dilemma. After describing his role in the Confederate army, Ray explains: “I live in so many centuries. Everybody is still alive” (Hannah 41). The old Confederates are still alive in the South, not only in Civil War reenactments, but in novels and films as well. The interesting question is: How are the Old Confederates depicted? Why should they be so popular when, in fact, they fought for slavery and lost a war?

One can get a sense of why the Old Confederates are so vividly remembered and revered in today’s South from Civil War movies like _Gettysburg_ (based on Michael Shaara’s novel _The Killer Angels_) and _Gods and Generals_ (based on Shaara’s son Jeff’s novel with the same title). First of all, the question of slavery does not seem to be the issue. When asked what they were fighting for, three captured Confederate soldiers reply that they are fighting for their rights, especially for the right to live their lives as they see fit. In _Gettysburg_, General George Pickett explains the reason for the war to Colonel Arthur Fremantle the British military attaché to the Confederacy by comparing the Union with a gentlemen’s club. He asks Fremantle what he would do when some members would start to intrude themselves into the private lives of the other members. He concludes: “Well, then, wouldn’t any one of us have the right to resign? I mean, just resign. Well, that’s what we did. That’s what I did, and now these people are tellin’ us that we don’t have that right to resign.”

Another officer of General Longstreet’s staff, General James Kemper, puts it like this:

"[T]he government derives its power from the consent of the people. Every government, everywhere. Well, let me make this very plain to you, sir: we do not consent, and we will never consent. And what you’ve got to do is you’ve got to go back over there to your Parliament, and you’ve gotta make it very plain to them. You’ve gotta tell them that what we’re fighting for here is the...freedom from what we consider to be the rule of a foreign power! I mean, that’s all we want. That’s what this war is all about...we established this country in the first place with very strong state governments just for that very reason. I mean...my home is in Virginia. The government of my home is home. Virginia would not allow itself to be ruled by...a king over there in London. And it’s not about to let itself be ruled by some president in Washington! Virginia, by God, sir, is gonna be run by Virginians! And it’s all for the Yankees, the damn, money-grubbin’ Yankees. I mean, those damn fools, they don’t get the message! Always the darkies, nothin’ but the darkies."

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4 This quote and the following are taken from the film _Gettysburg_ (Ronald F. Maxwell, 1993).
The second point, already mentioned here by Kemper is being under the rule of a foreign power. *Gods and Generals* also emphasized this. When addressing his troops, General Stonewall Jackson repeatedly speaks of “Our second War of Independence.” A Southerner would never say Civil War. They term the conflict “the War between the States,” the “War of Northern Aggression” or the “Second War of Independence.”

This depiction of gallant gentlemanly soldiers and their good cause, as well as the glorious and chivalric South in *Gone with the Wind*, are part of the phenomenon summarized by Mark Twain wittily thus: “When I was young I could remember anything, whether it happened or not, but I am getting old, and soon I shall only remember the latter” (qtd. in Horwitz 89). The South did fight “solely by the desire to preserve our own rights, and promote our own welfare,” as Jefferson Davis put it in his inaugural address. In truth, this included slavery, for the war was much more about slavery than films display or than Southern Nationalists are ready to admit. The clarity of their ancestors on the topic is shown in a brief glance at Georgia’s Declaration of Secession: “For the last ten years we have had numerous and serious causes of complaint against our non-slaveholding confederate States with reference to the subject of African slavery” (Georgia). The same holds true for Mississippi: “Our position is thoroughly identified with the institution of slavery—the greatest material interest of the world…a blow at slavery is a blow at commerce and civilization” (Mississippi). Similarly, in 1861, Alexander H. Stephens, Vice President of the CSA, was convinced that

> [The Confederacy’s] foundations are laid, its cornerstone rests, upon the great truth that the negro is not equal to the white man; that slavery, sub-ordination to the superior race, is his natural and normal condition. This, our new Government, is the first, in the history of the world, based on this great physical, philosophical, and moral truth.  

(qtd. in McPherson 3)

Or, as David Goldfield points out “slavery reached far beyond the plantation to affect social relations among whites and bind all whites together” (*Fighting* 190). The South’s honor was linked to slavery.

There is still the question of the Southern Nation: The Confederate States did not secede as one group. Each state followed its own interests. This was certainly true for the Border States which were not eager to secede and left the Union only after Lincoln began to raise troops against their southern neighbors. The seceded southern states never fought the war as “a united country.” They

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identified with their localities, rarely with an entity called “the South.” Western Virginia had its own secession in 1863 when it rejoined the Union as the new state of West Virginia. According to Frank W. Owsley, “Died of States’ Rights” could serve as an epitaph for the defeated Confederacy. Before and during the Civil War there was not a Southern Nation, there was not one South, there were many Souths. Still, as W. J. Cash wrote in *The Mind of the South*: “If it can be said that there are many Souths, the fact remains that there is also one South” (2).

**The Rise of a New South or Resurrection of the Old Confederacy?**

This “One South” was born at Appomattox Court House. It was born out of the need to explain what had happened: The South, or better, southern white men, fought and lost their War of Independence which led to the destruction of slavery and the exposure of their families to fear, poverty, even death. Ultimately, the war took everything away from the South except tradition. Margaret Mitchell’s Scarlett O’Hara notices this when contemplating Alabama gentry:

> An ageless dignity, a timeless gallantry still clung about them and would cling until they died but they would carry undying bitterness to their graves, a bitterness too deep for words. They were crushed and helpless, citizens of conquered provinces. Everything in their old world had changed but the old forms…The old usages went on, must go on, for the forms were all that were left to them. (Mitchell 608)

After the war, men like Alexander H. Stephens, Jefferson Davis, and Jubal A. Early promoted the idea of the Lost Cause. The reason for the war was now reversed. It was about states’ rights, not slavery. By 1865, Stephens had forgotten his earlier remarks. He now claimed something different: “Slavery, so called, was but the question on which these antagonistic principles … of Federation, on the one side, and Centralism, or Consolidation, on the other … were finally brought into … collision with each other on the field of battle” (qtd. In McPherson 4). Statements like this and books like Edward Pollard’s *The Lost Cause: A New Southern History of the War of the Confederates* (New York, 1866) began the revision of Southern history, seeking the redemption of the Southern people. By fighting for a lost but just cause, Southerners retained their honor.

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Religion was the other thing left to the South. In fact, religion was one of the things giving the South one of its most distinctive features: its own religious culture. A religious culture that, as Charles Reagan Wilson points out, “has dominated the American South since the early nineteenth century, a culture that blurred the distinctions between the secular and the sacred” (Judgment 4). From this time, there was a strong link between religion and culture and more than once religion helped to shape Southern culture. Even before the political secession of the southern states the South had its religious secession in the 1840s. Southern Methodists formed the Methodist Episcopal Church, South after the Methodist General Assembly had prohibited slave owners from holding the office of bishop. Baptists set up the Southern Baptist Convention for similar reasons. The Presbyterians, the third major denomination in the South, left their northern brethren at the beginning of the Civil War. After the Civil War the Southern denominations stayed separate and became “the repositories of the southern identity, the prime institutional embodiment of southern regionalism, and the treasuries of the region’s religious folklife” (Judgment 5). Had they provided a sense of community in the individualistic rural areas of the South, they now helped to nurture a distinct southern identity even more: according to Wilson southern religious culture evolved into a distinct southern civil religion after the Civil War. Adding to the differences that had already existed before the war—Southern churches had, moreso than their northern counterparts, “remained orthodox in theology and, above all, evangelical in orientation” (“Religion” 171)—ministers, who had themselves fought in the war, became priests of the new religion of the Lost Cause. Anchored in the strong evangelical belief in redemption and the emotional traditions of revivalism. Southerners tried to give new meaning to their loss and thus formed not only the creation myth of a Southern nation but the Religion of the Lost Cause as well.

The Civil War veterans became more than heroes; they were martyrs. And so, Stonewall Jackson’s dying words, “let us pass over the river and rest under the shade of the trees,” could be turned into a hymn, which “was officially adopted by the Southern Methodist Church” (“Religion” 176). Besides its hymns, the Lost Cause Religion had its symbols: Robert E. Lee, Jefferson Davis, and Stonewall Jackson as the Lost Cause Trinity, as well as the Confederate Battle Flag. The Southerners felt pride, not pity, in their defeat. The rightful victory was taken from the South, but that did not mean that the victors’ cause was just. The South could still be redeemed. God had not abandoned it but had rather chastised it “in preparation for a greater destiny in the future” (Judgment 20). Here, again, political and religious life intermingled in a distinctly Southern way: the blend of
the revisionist approach to the Lost Cause and religion and the birth of southern nationalism are described in more detail by Wilson in his book *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865–1920*.

Refurbishing the past was not enough in this revisionist effort. In the process of trying to define its place in history, the first *post bellum* generation began to emphasize white supremacy again. One way of doing this was to create the myth of protecting white women from former slaves, now depicted as black savages. In 1892 South Carolina Democrat Ben Tillman “declared that he would ‘willingly lead a mob in lynching a negro who had committed an assault upon a white woman.’ The black man...must remain subordinate or be exterminated’” (*Fighting* 196). William Faulkner depicts this attitude beautifully in his short story “Dry September.” But Faulkner already shows the corruption of this redeemed Old South as well. “Dry September” is about the lynching of Will Mayes, who is wrongly accused of raping Miss Minnie Cooper. Miss Minnie is a victim of the glorification of “lily white women” as white goddesses. Her word counts more than the word “of a nigger” as one of the characters exclaims (“September” 169). Frustrated by her “idle and empty days” (175) without occupation, social position, and intellectual interests she hopes that the mere hint of rape will prove her desirable. John McLendon, the leader of the murderous mob, is a victim of the past as well. Without any success in his private life—Faulkner describes the house of John McLendon as “a birdcage and almost as small” (182)—McLendon has nothing, but the traditional values—the protection of the white goddess—to hang on to and becomes a murderer. Just like the first *post bellum* generation this white man tries to find his place by proving his superiority over the blacks.

Finding one’s place is the common theme—the one constant—in Southern history. Southerners seem to remember the Civil War as if it ended last week. But do they? It might rather be a sense of being different from the rest of the nation. A sense of regional identity linked with the Civil War and the creation myth of the Southern nation. Although the Lost Cause as a popular movement began to decline after the First World War it still exists. There were changes in the South and many different myths—“the Old South, the New South, Reconstruction, the savage South of violence, the decadent South of Tennessee Williams, and now the Sunbelt” (*Judgment* 20)—but it also seems that the more things change, the more they stay the same. People try to hold on to their Southerness. The Old South—and with it the Confederate Battle Flag—over time becomes a lifeline or a buoy. It symbolizes the only thing that cannot be taken from the Southerners: their whiteness and superiority. In *Killers of the Dream*, Lillian Smith gives a good outline of the idea:
To be “superior” to be the “best people on the earth” with the best “system of making a living, because your sallow skin was white...made you forget that you were eaten up with malaria...made you forget that you lived in a shanty and ate potlikker and corn bread, and worked long hours for nothing. Nobody could take away from you this whiteness that made you and your way of life “superior.” They could take away your house, your job, your fun; they could steal your wages, keep you from acquiring knowledge; they could tax your vote or cheat you out of it...but they could not strip your white skin of you. (164–65)

The biggest change Southern society had to deal with was not the Civil War, but the impact of the New Deal and the Second World War. What had emerged during Reconstruction was, as Numan V. Bartley calls it, “the not-so-New South” (137). The Civil War had brought the abolition of slavery but had not changed the plantation society, and the same groups that dominated Southern society and politics before the Civil War still dominated it afterwards. The plantation was still the South’s “basic economic and social institution and essentially remained so until the 1940s” (138). Sharecroppers took the place of slaves on the transformed plantations. The South remained a strongly paternalistic society, kept a strong class consciousness rooted deeply in the idea of white supremacy. The “Benighted South with its violence, segregation and poverty so accurately depicted in Faulkner’s “Dry September” was also the nation’s “economic problem No 1” as President Roosevelt put it. The New Deal and World War II marked the end of the plantation system and the beginning of a real change, industrialization, and urbanization.7

Although the change led to the development of a “new regional consciousness” and the idea that “the vitality of America itself depended upon ‘a strong and economically prosperous South’” (Sosna 148), which would ultimately lead to the “Sunbelt South,” not everybody welcomed it. In 1957 Flannery O’Connor wrote:

The anguish that most of us have observed for some time now has been caused not by the fact that the South is alienated from the rest of the country, but by the fact that it is not alienated enough, that every day we are getting more and more like the rest of the country, that we are being forced out, not only of our many sins but of our virtues. (802)

Instead of trying to find its place the South now was afraid of losing it. However, such fears were unwarranted. As David Goldfield shows in his essay “The Urban South: A Regional Framework” scholars who saw the changes brought

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about after World War II as a reason to write an “epitaph for Dixie” had miscalculated (“Urban” 1010). Urbanization did change the face of the South. Yet, Southern cities never became centers of change, but bastions of conservatism shaped by evangelical Protestantism. Instead of influencing the countryside cities were shaped by the rural population moving in; “the Southern city and the South sprang from the same soil, sheltered the same people, and suffered the same burdens—both self-inflicted and superimposed” (“Urban” 1034). Dixie, its past, and its symbols were not and are not dead.

**Old Symbols—New Meanings?**

By now the Battle Flag’s meaning had greatly changed. It had come a long way from a revered relic of Civil War veterans to a source of identity. Starting on an 1861 battlefield as one among 180 different Confederate Battle Flags, it was adopted as the Battle Flag of the Army of Northern Virginia under Robert E. Lee and soon became the most popular flag of the South, a proud and honored flag. After the Civil War the Confederate chaplain Fr. Abram Joseph Ryan wrote his famous poem about the beloved “Conquered Banner”:

> Furl that Banner, for ‘tis weary; / Round its staff ‘tis drooping dreary; / Furl it, fold it, it is best; / For there’s not a man to wave it, / And there’s not a sword to save it, / And there’s not one left to lave it / In the blood which heroes gave it / And its foes now scorn and brave it; / Furl it, hide it—let it rest. /...Furl that banner, softly, slowly! / Treat it gently—it is holy—/ For it droops above the dead. / Touch it not—unfold it never, / Let it droop there, furled forever, / For its people’s hopes are dead! (Ryan)

During Reconstruction, the flag’s display was forbidden. With the rise of organizations like the Daughters of the Confederacy and the Confederate Veterans its banner was unfurled again and, step by step, it became a symbol and a buoy for all those trying to find their place in a defeated and humiliated South.

It was a dangerous buoy. Following it could mean repeating the old mistakes over and over again. Very similar to Quentin Compson’s theory about the repetitive nature of history in Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!*: “Maybe nothing ever happens once and is finished. Maybe happen is never once” (210). But the South did not only look backwards: soon after Reconstruction the idea of a New South started to spread. Mark Twain noticed this duality in chapter 46 of his *Life on the Mississippi*:

> There [in the South], the genuine and wholesome civilization of the nineteenth century is curiously confused and commingled with the Walter Scott Middle-Age sham civilization; and
so you have practical, common-sense, progressive ideas, and progressive works; mixed up with the duel, the inflated speech, and the jejune romanticism of an absurd past that is dead, and out of charity ought to be buried. But for the Sir Walter disease, the character of the Southerner—or Southron, according to Sir Walter’s starchier way of phrasing it—would be wholly modern, in place of modern and medieval mixed, and the South would be fully a generation further advanced than it is. (249)

Twain saw the danger of looking backwards—the Sir Walter disease as he calls it—and he saw the South’s opportunity as well.

The linkage of the Battle Flag with white supremacy during the civil rights movement is a good example for the danger of looking back. At the end of the 1940s the flag started to become symbol of popular culture. At the same time it lost its innocence. It was no longer just the revered flag of a long gone army and used only to remember the Confederate soldiers’ valor, but became associated with the Dixiecrats campaign for state rights and later with the battle against racial integration. Although the “unfurled ‘conquered banner’” (Coski 77) was a metaphor for the era between the Civil War and World War II during which the “widespread respect accorded to the flag and to the Confederacy became the status quo” (Coski 79), the flag’s use was actually very limited. That changed after the 1940s. Again Southerners felt threatened by change: While the explicit connection between the Battle Flag and white supremacy was new, Coski also shows that “the Confederate flag’s meaning in the 1960s was logically and historically consistent with its meaning in the 1860s—as a symbol of opposition to the employment of federal authority to change the South’s racial status quo” (294). Old and new meanings of the Battle Flag began to blend during the 1960s. The Civil Rights movement also ended the era of “widespread respect accorded to the flag,” because now for the first time the people who have been suppressed under the banner of Confederate slaveholders could voice their protest against its public display. In the wake of these protests followed the “flag wars” and widespread discussion about the public display of a flag of a slaveholding society that no longer existed. While African-Americans protested against any use of the Battle Flag, Southern heritage groups, writers and historians complained about the flag’s desecration by radicals. In 1961 Walker Percy lamented that: “When Lee and the Army of Northern Virginia laid down the Confederate flag in 1865, no flag had ever been defended by better men. But when the same flag is picked up by men like Ross Barnett und Jimmy Davis, nothing remains but to make panties and pillowcases with it.” Shelby Foote condemned the Ku Klux Klan as “the scum

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8 For more details on Afro-American reactions see Coski (especially chapters 7 and 9–13).
who have degraded the Confederate flag, converted it from a symbol of honor into a banner of shame, covered it with obscenities like a roadhouse men’s room wall” (qtd in Cobb 295).

Despite these setbacks the South started to use its opportunities, to look forward, and the flag began to change its meaning once more. Now it became possible for blacks as well to state, maybe with still some irony as David Goldfield points out, that they were Confederates in the sense that they were defeated “wherever and whenever there was a defeat” (Fighting 204). The flag became now the flag of those who struggled and lost. It was the flag of the likeable underdog and rebel, who kept fighting against the odds. From there it was a small step to what Tony Horwitz encountered in a Kentucky discussion about the display of the Battle Flag. He remarks that it seemed to “have floated free from its moorings in time and place and become a generalized ‘Fuck You’, a middle finger raised...in the face of...authority” (103).

Here we begin to see our soccer fans, or the guy riding a Harley down Route 66 wearing a “Rebel Flag”-bandana. The change is complete—the Battle Flag of a Confederacy of a slaveholding society has become a symbol for personal freedom and liberty. John Coski gives many examples for the United States. Among them a Harvard student, who wants to give Harvard’s liberalism a test by displaying the Battle Flag as a symbol for free speech (Coski 232). Coski also points out the other, negative meanings still linked with the flag and thus draws a detailed and balanced picture of “America’s most embattled emblem.” Nevertheless, he comes to the conclusion that the Battle Flag is “the second American Flag” and is “not an alien symbol grafted onto American tradition and is not therefore simply going to disappear.” The same is true for Europe and Germany where he encountered the Battle Flag in many different places from Trier to Würzburg. Coski claims that “in Europe the Confederate Battle Flag is associated typically with American values and American culture. From a vantage point beyond our shores, the Confederate flag is an American symbol” (293). Both, John Coski and James Cobb, also claim that “the Confederate flag has actually become a swastika substitute among neo-Nazis and Skinheads in Germany, where the swastika is banned by law” (Cobb 296). Both observations are in fact true, but there is more to the different appearances of the Battle Flag in Germany than being an American symbol or a swastika substitute. Take a closer look at the soccer fans: there are not only the FC Bayern München fans waving the Confederate flag; there are also the fans of FC Nürnberg and the fans of FC Köln. While the Bayern’s reason is obvious—Bavaria is after all the German South—one wonders why the Battle Flag should be popular in Köln. Here the flag is not used as short-
hand for “South,” but as the symbol of the likeable underdog. Though the same is true for Nürnberg it is not only the image of the underdog that leads to the waving of the Battle Flag in Franconia, which has only been part of Bavaria for a little more than 200 years. Here the flag is flown as an act of rebellion against the “Bavarian occupation” as it is often (not quite seriously) called. So, it is no surprise that John Coski encountered the flag hanging on the rearview mirror of a BMW in Würzburg. In Bavaria the Battle Flag is often used as a substitute for the Bavarian flag and can be seen flying in garden plots alone or next to the Bavarian flag. High school students sport it on their pencil cases, T-shirts, backpacks or bandanas. When asked what it stood for they answered: “The South [meaning Bavaria not the American South], Bavaria, rebel, or Rock’n’Roll.” To a lesser degree the answers were “Elvis, country music, and the Wild West.”

Especially the last answer is interesting and fits into Coski’s observation: for many Germans the Wild West is a synonym for the USA, as well as the Battle Flag “is an American symbol.” The symbol of one region has become a symbol for the whole nation. There is a lot of irony in this observation: the flag of the American South has become a synonym for the whole U.S., it is seen as something typical American, while for many Americans Bavaria and its culture and symbols—Oktoberfest, Brezen, Bier, Lederhosen—stand for something typical German. In both cases a region that strives to be distinct nevertheless represents the whole nation from which it would like to differ.

The story of the East-German MDR radio presenter known as Loman gives an example of the different meanings attributed to the Battle Flag. Loman grew up in the GDR and liked to listen to country music on forbidden West German radio stations. A lot of country fans in the GDR founded so called Indianistik-societies, i.e. Native American societies, in order to indulge in their forbidden passion. Loman made himself a Battle Flag, which he carried to those meetings. When stopped by the Stasi (secret police) he explained to them that the flag was not a symbol of the class enemy USA, but a symbol of the repressed U. S. South. So he was allowed to keep flying it. Again history proves its sense for irony; in November 1864 Karl Marx wrote in a letter to Abraham Lincoln congratulating him on his reelection:

Wenn Widerstand gegen die Macht der Sklavenhalter die maßvolle Lösung Ihrer ersten Wahl war, so ist Tod der Sklaverei! der triumphierende Schlachtruf Ihrer Wiederwahl. Vom Anfang des amerikanischen Titanenkampfs an fühlten die Arbeiter Europas instinktmäßig, daß an

9 The observations are based on personal encounters with high school students and university students in Bavaria 2008 and 2009.
In the GDR, it was forbidden to fly the Star-Spangled Banner and you could only show your passion for American country music by hoisting up high the slaveholders’ banner dreaded by Marx. Loman and his Battle Flag gained fame in 1989 when Loman stood for four days at the motorway in Gotha-Boxberg greeting West Germans at the now open border with his flag. Thus, Loman’s flag was a symbol for liberty and rebellion as well.\textsuperscript{11}

But still, Faulkner did not err when he wrote “there is no such thing as was because the past is. It is part of every man, every woman, and every moment.” The Battle Flag is not only used as a symbol for liberty. There is still the question of race and the Battle Flag is still used to show the gap between a Black South and a White South formed during the era of segregation. As soon as blacks sported Malcolm X shirts, whites started to wear Battle Flag shirts with the slogan: “you wear your X and I’ll wear mine.” There are still “Southrons” suffering from the Walter Scott disease. For them the Civil War is not over yet and you can hear them utter phrases like “[W]e are not sure we want to be part of the Union” (Horwitz 77). Tony Horwitz heard them all over the South and many worse. People like Gordon Thornton and the Southern Nationalists claim that the South is still occupied by a foreign Empire. The legislation passed by the Bush administration after 9/11—Homeland Security, Patriot Act—fueled their anger even more. For them it is Lincoln all over again. The Neo-Confederates fostered their Walter Scott disease and kept refurbishing history by overstating the Celtic background of the “Southrons” and creating a link between themselves, their Confederate ancestors, their past conquests were at stake in that tremendous conflict on the other side of the Atlantic. (Italics are mine, J.A.F).

\textsuperscript{10} If resistance to the slaveholders’ power was the measured motto of your first election, the triumphant war cry of your re-election is Death to Slavery! Right from the commencement of the titanic American strife the workmen of Europe felt instinctively that the Star-Spangled Banner carried the destiny of their class...When an oligarchy of 300,000 slaveholders dared to inscribe, for the first time in the history of the world, “slavery” on the banner of armed revolt...the working classes of Europe understood at once, [...] that the slaveholders’ rebellion was to sound the tocsin for a general holy crusade of property against labor, and that for the men of labor, with their hopes for the future, even their past conquests were at stake in that tremendous conflict on the other side of the Atlantic. (Italics are mine, J.A.F).

\textsuperscript{11} Cf. Interview with Loman: “Ich war noch niemals in Amerika.”
the Founding Fathers and the freedom loving Scots of William Wallace’s days. They are ready to make the same mistakes all over again. They are ready to shout “secession!” It seems that Faulkner’s most quoted line from *Requiem for a Nun* (Act I Scene 3) is still true for the South: “The past is never dead. It’s not even past.” The Battle Flag might have changed its symbolic meaning through the times and places, but it still bears the scars, the names and dates of all the old battles. It additionally carries now all the new scars it gained during Reconstruction, segregation and the flag wars. It still is a “Battle Flag” as well as an “embattled flag.”

**Secession or Southernization of the USA?**

The South and its history have been constructed and reconstructed time after time since the Civil War and the end is not in sight, yet. In this way the South is a good mirror for the whole of the United States. It reflects its worst and its best parts. It is the homeland of the Ku-Klux-Klan, but race relations there seem somewhat better than in other parts of the country. Goldfield quotes black historian John Hope Franklin explaining in 1995 that

> [t]he South, as a place, is as attractive to blacks as to whites. Blacks, even when they left the South, didn’t stop having affection for it. [...] they found that the North had its problems too, so you look for place of real ease and contentment where you could live as a civilized human being. That’s the South. It’s more congenial; the pace is better; the races get along better. It’s a sense of place. It’s home. (*Fighting* 284)

The South seems to have come at odds with itself and its history. However, the struggle for its identity keeps going on. But this struggle serves now as a propelling force and does not shackle the South any more. The South’s confidence is growing, people keep moving there and Southerners living in other places do not give up their “Southerness,” although there are still prejudices against the so called “rednecks.” This growing confidence—strongly linked to the idea of the Sunbelt States—brings along with it a new political power especially in times when conservative ideas are popular. Already 15 years ago, Peter Applebome wrote in his book *Dixie Rising* about the Southernization of the USA:
Think of a place that’s bitterly antigovernment and fiercely individualistic, where race is a constant subtext to daily life, and God and guns run through public discourse like an electric current. Think of a place where influential scholars market theories of white supremacy, where the word “liberal” is a negative epithet, where hang-'em-high law-and-order justice centered on the death penalty and throw-away-the-key sentencing are politically all but unstoppable. Think of a place obsessed with states’ rights, as if it were 1850s all over again and the Civil War had never been fought. Such characteristics have always described the South. Somehow, they now describe the nation. (8)

Does the U.S. as a nation “go South”? The future will tell us. Barack Obama’s election as President of the United States and Michael Steele’s election as head of the Republican Party seem to finally bring the heritage of slavery and segregation to an end. Even before Obama’s election the German daily newspaper Süddeutsche was actually hoping that the South would “go North” (Wernicke) and more liberal ideas would spread across the old Confederacy again. Gordon Thornton and the Southern League would like to have it in a different way, but all over the South—especially since 9/11—the Stars and Stripes have replaced the Battle Flag and the Fourth of July is by far more important than the still honored Confederate Memorial Day. Nevertheless, there have been threads by the Ku-Klux-Klan and White Supremacists against Obama’s life and incidents like this draw the media’s attention. Suddenly you can see Battle Flags again. Different groups rallying around it—the already mentioned spectrum ranging from traditionalists to real extremists—give the impression that there is a growing Southern Nationalist movement, when in fact there are only groups of various sizes clinging to in their perception endangered values. There still is the wild mixture of nostalgia and Southern nationalism. In this context the Stars and Stripes have not yet replaced the Battle Flag: as soon as changes threaten traditional values Southerners seem to hoist the Confederate Banner just a little higher than Old Glory. Here still transpires the old link between Southern society and Southern religion and the interpretation that the South represents the last stronghold of pure religion. Hopefully the future will show us that the promise of liberty—the new meaning of the Battle Flag—will prevail and that the “weary banner” starts to forget the old scars. Otherwise it would be wise to heed the words: “Touch it not—unfold it never!”
Southern Nationalism and the Promise of Individual Rights and Freedom

Works Cited


