

# Virginia high school suspends students who wore Confederate flag clothing

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People gather at the South Carolina State House during a rally to support the removal of the Confederate battle flag from the building's grounds in Columbia, South Carolina, June 23, 2015. Photo: Tracy Glantz/The State/TNS

A  
peaceful  
student



demonstration at a Virginia high school ended with school administrators suspending 23 teens. The students had worn clothes decorated with the Confederate battle flag. School officials say the flag violates the school's dress code and have banned it from school.

The students said they wore the Confederate symbols to protest the school policy. The students, who attend Christiansburg High School, see it as a violation of their free speech. Students are barred from wearing any clothing that could "reflect adversely on persons due to race." The policy specifically mentions "clothing with Confederate flag symbols." The Confederate states tried to drop out of the U.S., which prompted the Civil War. The Confederate states allowed slavery, and were determined to keep it.

### **Fighting About A Flag**

Brenda Drake is the Montgomery County schools spokeswoman. She said that half of all American middle schools and high schools do not allow the display of the Confederate flag. About 8 percent of Christiansburg students are black and more than 80 percent are white, according to The Associated Press. A total of 1,100 students attend the school.

Drake said Confederate flag symbols have been banned at Christiansburg High since 2002. That year, fights between black and white students broke out, some of which were linked to students wearing Confederate symbols. Some of the violence has continued up until today despite the ban, she said.

Drake said the district values the First Amendment right to freedom of speech. She added, that it has "to maintain an orderly and safe environment for all students."

### **An Unfair Dress Code?**

High school junior Zach Comer was among the students who took part in the demonstration last Thursday morning. He said that the purpose of the protest was to criticize the school's dress code. He said it unfairly targets the Confederate battle flag and those who fly it.

"We're doing it to raise a point that the flag is not racist," he said. "Everyone else can wear whatever shirts they want but we're not."

Comer appeared at the rally with a Confederate flag draped over his shoulders. He also wore a Confederate flag belt buckle and a T-shirt with a Confederate flag on the back.

Comer said that he does not discriminate against anyone.

### **Heritage Or Hatred?**

Some people argue that the Confederate flag is a proud symbol of Southern history. Others call it as a symbol of hatred that celebrates slavery and discrimination. The Confederate flag and monuments to Confederate leaders have been questioned in recent months, after a white man killed nine people at a historic black church in Charleston, South Carolina in June. The man charged in the shooting had previously posed in photographs waving the Confederate flag.

In July, South Carolina lawmakers voted to remove the Confederate flag from the statehouse grounds. Meanwhile, colleges around the country have taken a close look at their Confederate flags, monuments and symbols.

### **A Reminder Of Slavery**

Chet Morley graduated from Christiansburg High this year and now attends college in Boston. Morley said he saw students wear clothing with the Confederate battle flag during his time at the school. Teachers sometimes pointed out that it was against the dress code, but others overlooked it.

Morley, who is black, said seeing the flag bothered him, but he never said anything around his white classmates. Although his classmates said the flag symbolized their pride in their Confederate roots, Morley said it made him think of slavery. His stepfather is a descendant of a slave, and his father's family, from the Bahamas, likely has slave roots as well.

"Southern pride is just a little cover-up, if you ask me," Morley said. About the Confederate battle flag, he said, "As for me and my ancestors, it means more than that."

### **Sons Of The Confederacy**

The students were suspended Thursday after they were stopped by school administrators who said they could not go inside wearing Confederate clothing.

"We said no," said sophomore Dalton Reedy, a member of the Sons of the Confederacy group, who wore a T-shirt, belt buckle, bandanna and necklace with the Confederate battle flag. "I grew up on it. It has nothing to do with racism."

Reedy, who said his ancestors fought for the Confederacy, said he doesn't believe the dress code policy is fair. "Most people look at me like I'm a racist. What I really find offensive is we have a black student awareness club but we don't have a Mexican awareness or Russian or white club."

### **Making Their Point**

Reedy's mother, Angie Craiger, said that she was proud of her son for "standing up for what he believes in."

"He's not one of these people to sit back and complain about it at home and do nothing to make a difference," Craiger said. "Why are they trying to begrudge him for his beliefs?"

Comer said that students plan to continue the protest by wearing their Confederate clothing again.

"We definitely got a point through today," Comer said. "We set out to accomplish something today and we way overachieved it."

## Quiz

- 1 Read the following sentences, paying attention to the words "violates" and "violation."

*School officials say the flag violates the school's dress code and have banned it from school.*

*The students, who attend Christianburg High School, see it as a violation of their free speech.*

All of the situations below are examples of a "violation" EXCEPT:

- (A) someone who drives 20 miles per hour over the speed limit in a school zone
  - (B) someone who posts their own journal entries on an anonymous website
  - (C) someone who reads another person's text messages without permission
  - (D) someone who leaves school during lunch, even though the school does not allow off-campus lunch
- 2 What are the two MAIN perspectives discussed in this article?
- (A) the views of the students, and the views of their parents
  - (B) the views of the students, and the views of the school officials
  - (C) the views of people who attend the school, and the views of people who are not students of the school
  - (D) the views of people who oppose the Confederate flag being worn in schools, and the views of people who support it

3 Read the following sentence.

*"Southern pride is just a little cover-up, if you ask me," Morley said.*

What does Morley's use of the phrase "just a little cover-up" show about his attitude toward the issue of the flag?

- (A) He is reluctant to talk to others about his opinions of the flag.
- (B) He is skeptical about some people's claims about Southern pride.
- (C) He is doubtful of anyone wanting to wear any flag to display pride.
- (D) He is concerned that people are making a bigger deal out of the flag than they need to be.

4 Read the sections "A Reminder Of Slavery" and "Sons Of The Confederacy." Which perspective would Chet Morley and Dalton Reedy MOST LIKELY share?

- (A) The Confederate flag represents slavery.
- (B) The Confederate flag represents family pride.
- (C) The flag is meaningless in the present day.
- (D) The flag has meaning for people.