

Dukes of Hazzard Neutralized; Let the Healing Begin



When Governor Nikki Haley of South Carolina called for the removing of the Confederate flag from the grounds of the state Capitol earlier this week, I was impressed with how she went about it. She presented a thoughtful and compelling case, and acknowledged those who disagreed with her without

demonizing them. It was the mark of a good leader, which is something we're not used to seeing in politics these days.

The act, of course, was done in response to the murder of nine people in Charleston by a racist monster who clearly had an affinity for the flag and its dark, historical connotations. Though there's no logical argument to support the notion that the flag was somehow to blame for the actions of the killer (the timing of the announcement was less about principle and more about optics), the topic of the appropriateness of government buildings proudly displaying such a controversial symbol was certainly one worth revisiting.

As someone who has spent little time in the South, I admit that I've never fully understood the various interpretations of the Confederate flag. Like many, it strikes me as a divisive relic that is representative of a culture of racial oppression. That being said, when my vacationing family ate at a **black-owned** restaurant in South Carolina last year, I noticed a confederate flag hanging on one of the walls. And when I recounted that story on Twitter the other day, I received a reply from young black man who sent me a photograph of himself wearing a t-shirt with the flag on it. His message

to me: *"You never lived there so you wouldn't understand."*

I told him he was probably right; I don't completely understand.

Luckily, I don't *have* to completely understand it. As we saw with Haley's announcement (as she was flanked by leaders from both political parties), a state is fully capable of listening to their citizens and deciding what symbols should be displayed on their government buildings. Haley made a good decision in my opinion; the right decision. But like many cultural milestones reached in this nauseating era of political correctness, the act spawned some silly, self-congratulatory nonsense as well.

Calling for the removal of the Confederate flag, as a response to the Charleston shooting, effectively tethered the object to the actions of the killer. The flag morphed from an offensive symbol into something that actually *makes* someone racist.

This compelled a number of major retailers (including Walmart, Amazon, and eBay) to address the problem by disallowing the sale of merchandise related to the flag in their stores and on their websites (something they have every right to do as private-sector companies). Almost immediately, jokes began spreading across social media about *Dukes of Hazzard* memorabilia being outlawed. Within hours, something pretty close to that happened.

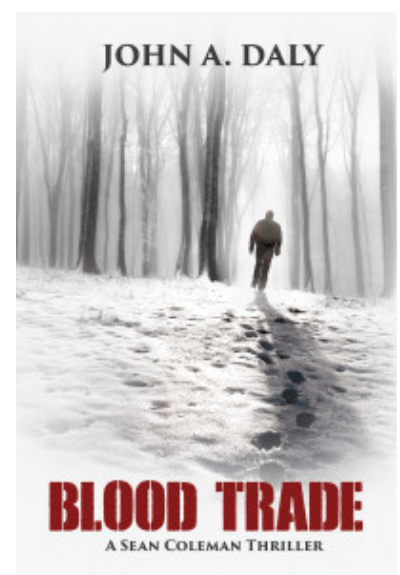
It was reported Tuesday night that *Warner Brothers* has stopped sanctioning the manufacturing of products related to the General Lee, the iconic car from the 1980's television show that featured a Confederate flag on its roof.

So there you have it folks... The Dukes have been neutralized. Of course, the next logical step will be to rename their car *The Conscientious Objector*, have it run on solar power instead of gasoline, and replace the stars and bars on its roof with a large "Coexist" bumper sticker. Let the racial healing begin.

Now, I certainly have no desire to ever own a Confederate flag (I do find it offensive), or relive my youth by buying the same kind of plastic General Lee car I played with as a child. Still, I can't help but look at this little exercise (which in itself isn't particularly consequential) and find it highly symptomatic of an irrational, unserious time in our history when we just can't figure out how to react to serious issues.

On what planet is the scrubbing of 1980's pop-culture imagery from society a logical response to nine Americans being massacred by a racist terrorist? If this were the key to dealing with racially-motivated hate and violence in the U.S., how could we possibly stand by as a society and let Quentin Tarantino make another movie where the n-word is used dozens and dozens of times? Is that somehow less racially offensive than the General Lee? Is it less hurtful?

For that matter, how could we tolerate the Nazi imagery still shown in re-runs of Hogan's Heroes, t-shirts with Che Guevara's image still sold in shopping malls, and old Lynyrd Skynyrd albums still sold online? And speaking of albums, what about offensive song lyrics? Should they be removed from music? Are we back to that old debate?



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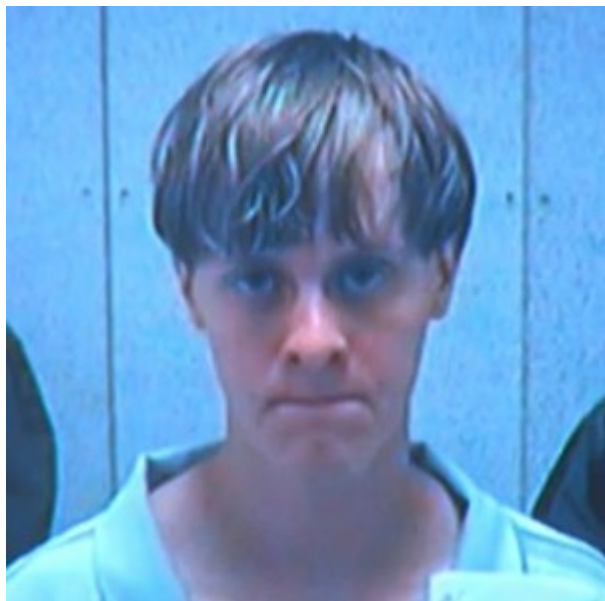
The good news is that, as of now, it's the free market that is behind this drive (not the government). The bad news is that ridding our culture of all of these things wouldn't do a single thing to detour someone like the Charleston killer from becoming what he became, and doing what he did.

By focusing efforts on the Confederate flag, I fear that we have lost sight of that. People always want a quick, easy fix to deeply rooted problems. They want a mantra that they can shout out loud or hold up on a sign. And once that mantra is heard, they wipe their hands, pat themselves on the back, and *call it a day* without the real problem ever being solved.

Is this about honoring the victims of hate and violence in this country, and dealing with the problem...or is this about satisfying our own sense of self-worth?

I wish people would ask themselves that question from time to time.

**Families Show Charleston
Killer Unbelievable Grace**



What is it that gives people the strength to forgive the person who murdered their loved ones just two days earlier? It's a question many people might have been asking themselves today as they listened to the families of those killed by Dylann Roof address the monster who changed their lives forever.

At today's bond hearing for Roof, every family member that stepped up to the podium to convey their thoughts chose not to deliver a message of understandable anger or vengeance, but rather one of breathtaking grace.

"I forgive you," said one victim's daughter to Roof as she sobbed. She added, "You hurt me. You hurt a lot of people. But God forgives you. I forgive you."

Another said, "You took something very precious from me. I will never talk to her ever again. I will never be able to hold her again, but I forgive you. And have mercy on your soul."

"I forgive you and my family forgives you," said Anthony Thompson, a relative of victim Myra Thompson.

A granddaughter of another victim told Roof, "Hate will not win."

The sister of Depayne Middleton-Doctor said, "We have no room for hate so we have to forgive and I pray God on your soul."

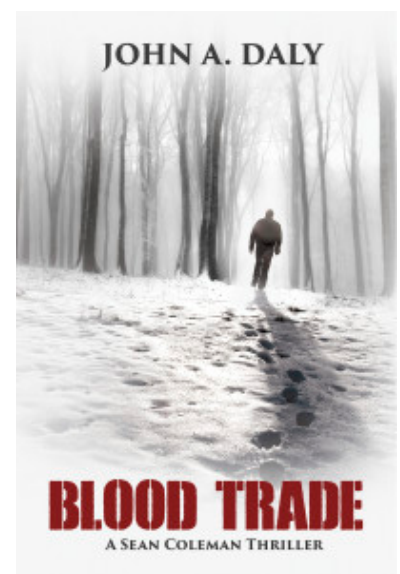
It was an amazing display, the kind I'm not sure I'd ever be strong enough to be a part of, if it were *my* family that Roof had destroyed. What we witnessed was something miraculous: The

comfort and healing power that comes with having faith in God.

Yes, I truly believe that.

I'm a lifelong Christian, but I rarely write about my faith. For the most part, I don't think it has a place in politics, and I certainly don't have any interest in imposing my beliefs on others. I respect just about everyone's religious backgrounds including those that reject religion all together.

When I hear people insist that religion (specifically Christianity when they're talking about the United States) spawns bigotry and does more damage than good to society, I tend to let such assertions roll off my shoulders. I'm able to do this, because I know in my understanding of God's message (and in my heart) that it's just not true.



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novel BLOOD TRADE.

Sure, there are people that use religion in narrow ways to justify bad (sometimes vile) behavior, and unfortunately those people are the ones held up by the media and other critics as being representative of an entire belief-system. They're wrong. Those who represent *my* faith are people like the

families of the Charleston shooting victims, who clearly understand better than most of us that the word of God is not one of intolerance, but forgiveness.

It's a message you don't hear so much these days, outside of the walls of a church, but it's as powerful as ever.

These Charleston families are who other Christians should aspire to be. Even those who reject faith can learn from them. In the midst of unimaginable sorrow they showed remarkable grace. And from that, society can learn a profound lesson in humanity.

God bless the Charleston victims and their families.

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If you're interested in a signed, personalized copy of my novel 'From a Dead Sleep' for only \$17.99, you can order one from my website. It also makes a great gift!