



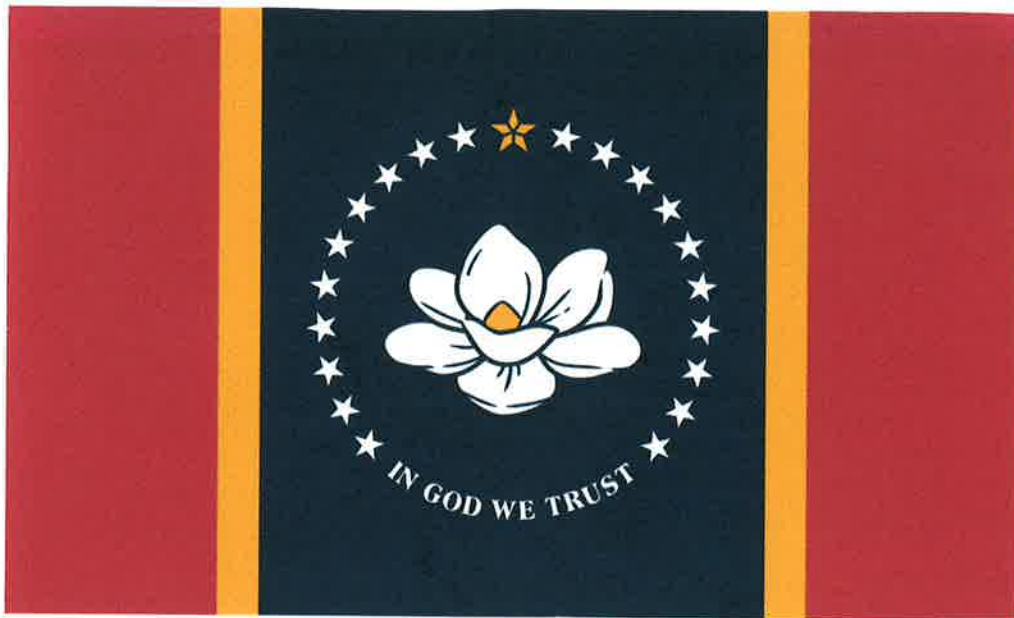
A Symbol of Change

Dedicated to the hard work of those
working towards ending systemic racism
in the State of Mississippi.

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Overview



New Flag of Mississippi, 2020.




Kylin Hill 
@H_Kylin

Either change the flag or I won't be representing this State anymore ¹⁰⁰ & I meant that .. I'm tired



Tate Reeves  @tatereeves · Jun 22

Over the weekend there has been a proposal floating amongst some in the legislature to create a second Mississippi flag. Let's call it the "Separate but Equal" flag option.

 While well-intentioned I'm sure, it does not meet the threshold.

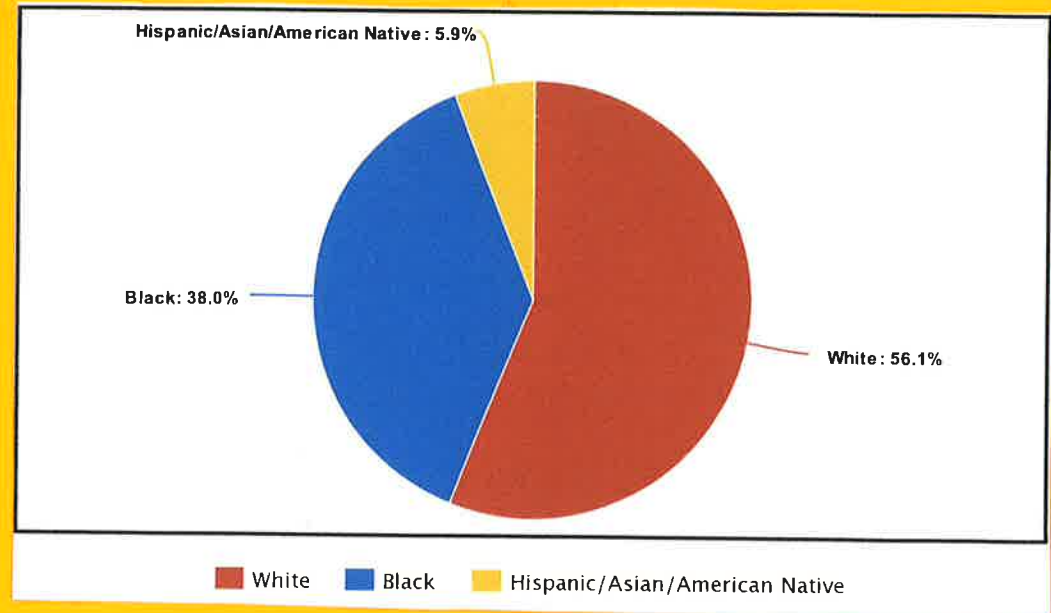
Tweet from Past-MS State Football player

If you have lived in Mississippi for a few years, I'm sure you know that the state flag was recently changed. The old flag, in place from 1894-2020, featured a symbol that was unbecoming to many. This symbol, the battle flag of the Confederacy, was seen flying atop every government building in Mississippi for almost 150 years after the ending of the civil war. In 2020, state lawmakers finally settled down and decided to leave this image and flag in the past, and allow the state to continue to move on from its unsettling history. Thus, the new "magnolia" flag was adopted. It is quite the beautiful flag, boasting the state's unique and vibrant magnolia flower.

Why the Change?

The act of changing something that is so grounded in one's history is typically very hard to do. However— sometimes it shouldn't be. You see— for Black Mississippians, the changing of the flag was a much needed action that took far past an acceptable amount of time to occur. The symbol of the confederacy which existed on the old flag is a symbol of hate, one that is quite terrifying for Black People to see flying above their heads.

Population of Mississippi by Race



Approximately 38% of Mississippians, or 1.1 million people, are Black People. These people deserve to feel safe in their home state just as much as anywhere else in the country. These people needed to feel safe and cared for. These people needed a state that would protect and serve them. These people needed change.

Robert Johnson



Robert Johnson III
Mississippi State Representative,
2004-current

Johnson worked tirelessly
on the removal of the
old state flag.

Excerpt of Johnson's interview with NPR.
June 28, 2020.

"I'm glad you acknowledged that I was a Black man growing up in Mississippi. And it seems - let me put it in this perspective. It almost seems silly in the Black community that we were even having this discussion. I mean, why would you ask me to have to vote to take down something that we know is almost, you know, arguably illegal? Why do we even have it?"

I grew up in a time - I'm 61 years old. I was born in 1958. So I grew up during the civil rights movement. I walked and marched as a child with my parents in protest. And what that flag represents to me - when we saw - what we were told when we see that flag, that means that's somebody that may hurt you, may set your church on fire, may set your house on fire, may kill you - or may have killed somebody you know. That's what it represents whenever we see that.

And so it represented when I grew up when I walked in a building in a dentist's office, there was a colored side - literally. I'm only 61. I can remember going to the dentist - a colored side and a white side. That flag hung in offices like that - not as a state flag but as a Confederate battle flag. And to have that on our state flag and to work and serve under that - to try to prosper and raise children under that in a state that - I'm here because I want to be. I'm here because I love this state. A lot of us had opportunities to leave, left and came back. But to do that almost seems ridiculous. And to get it done feels cleansing, feels powerful to me. And so that is a great day."

A Deeper Look...

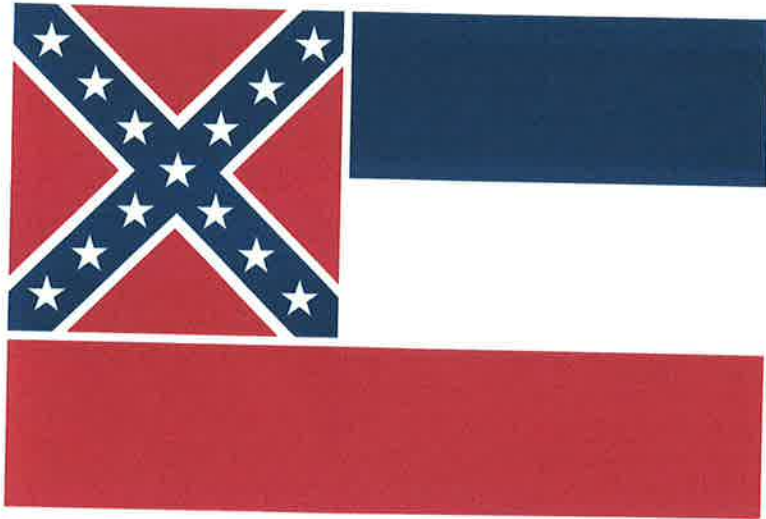
This interview with Robert Johnson, a Black Mississippi legislator at the time, was held in the summer of 2020. The interview was conducted by Lulu Garcia-Navarro, a host for NPR, during a time of great change in the state of Mississippi. There is a strong conversational tone throughout the interview— one of peace and reassurance. Even in the tough parts of the conversation, the overall gratefulness for what is occurring at the time shines through to the Mississippians with whom this interview is being shared.

Is the flag of the Confederacy a symbol of treason? Johnson starts his response in asking a similar question to this. The Confederacy was a union that stood directly against the United States of America, and I believe that bearing the image of this treacherous nation is in fact an act of treason against the United States, regardless of the intention or so-called “patriotism” behind it. There should be punishment for these acts, and Mississippi should not have been allowed to proudly fly a flag bearing that image for so long after the fact.

Johnson explains the deep and twisted meaning behind the flag of the confederacy. For Johnson and the Black community of Mississippi, the flag is not just a canvas with colors and designs. The flag is not a “symbol of heritage.” The flag is not innocent, as many proclaim. In the 60’s and 70’s, when Johnson was young, the confederate flag was a very common sight in rural Mississippi. Many white people saw the flag as a symbol of racial unity and strength around whiteness. Many black people, however, saw the flag in a complete opposite light. Johnson explains that the flag was a sign to black people— a sign that told them they were not safe. A sign that told them to get out. A sign that basically had the letters W A R N I N G plastered across the front of it. It was a demonizing symbol of torture and brutality, one that black people in Mississippi simply could not escape.

These meanings and symbolisms are not only true for the past— they hold the same weight today as they did forty and fifty years ago. That is the reason that change was sought in Mississippi. The state flag **needed** to change. As evidenced by Johnson’s words, it was simply unacceptable for the state flag to bear any resemblance to the hateful confederacy’s flag— let alone having the full flag placed within it. The day that the flag was changed was a day that marked the progress being made in Mississippi to right the evil wrongs of the past. Surely this is not the end of the problem— but it was an important piece of the journey. Systemic racism is still deeply rooted in the state, but this can change. The removal of the old state flag was an empowering experience for the Black community in the state, and will forever be a defining moment in Mississippi’s history.

Opposition to the Change



Old Flag of Mississippi
1894 - 2020

There are many who oppose the changing of the flag. Many still claim the old flag—clinging on to the disgraceful history of the Confederacy and the idea of “heritage.” Some people are simply ignorant of the meaning behind the flag. Some choose to turn a blind eye towards it. Others—well, they embrace it. Everyone has their thoughts and opinions, and oftentimes these are hard to change. But here is the biggest step in easing the problem of racism when talking to these people:

EDUCATE THEM. Ask them if they know what that flag stands for. Were they aware of these things? Do they still support it? Explain why this flag has an evil history, so that they are fully aware of what they are standing behind.

Now, be cautious in doing this. Be sure to monitor the conversation, and walk away when the time is right. Never instigate a fight or argument—no matter how the conversation turns. Stay calm and collected, and be confident.

The Future of Mississippi

The change has been made.

So... what now? Is the past erased?

Are the struggles of Black People gone?

OF COURSE NOT

Yes, the flag is in the past, but its effects are still very present. The issue of racism is still unfortunately a major problem throughout Mississippi. There is still work to do. There is still change to come. Systemic racism is still in existence and is felt around the state very heavily. But this is a start. A good start actually. The erasure of this flag marks the time at which Mississippi lawmakers recognized the need for change. The need for action. There is hope, after all, that Mississippi will one day rid itself of these problems. Not today. Not tomorrow. But one day.

Futher Reading

Resources I used for this project:

Mississippi Lawmakers To Remove Confederate Emblem From State Flag : NPR

[npr.org/2020/06/28/884351911/mississippi-lawmakers-to-remove-confederate-emblem-from-state-flag](https://www.npr.org/2020/06/28/884351911/mississippi-lawmakers-to-remove-confederate-emblem-from-state-flag)

Mississippi flag: one year later

mississippitoday.org/2021/07/01/mississippi-flag-one-year-later/

Flag of Mississippi | United States state flag | Britannica

[britannica.com/topic/flag-of-Mississippi](https://www.britannica.com/topic/flag-of-Mississippi)

The History of Mississippi's State Flag - 2013-02

mshistorynow.mdah.ms.gov/issue/the-history-of-mississippi%27s-state-flag

Population distribution of Mississippi 2021, by race and ethnicity

www.statista.com/statistics/1026012/mississippi-population-distribution-ethnicity-race/#:~:text=In%202021%2C%2036.1%20percent%20of,races%20in%20that%20same%20year

Create a Pie Chart

meta-chart.com/pie#/display

Rep. Robert L Johnson III (@RepRJohnson) / Twitter

mobile.twitter.com/reprjohnson

For more information on the changing of the Mississippi State flag, please visit these great and useful resources:

Take a Stand MSU, a website created by students demanding the university to remove the old state flag from campus:

takeastandmsu.weebly.com/our-demands.html

The Smithsonian Magazine article on the changing of the flag:

[smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/mississippi-will-replace-its-confederate-themed-state-flag-180976209/](https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/mississippi-will-replace-its-confederate-themed-state-flag-180976209/)

The University of California– San Diego's guide to anti-racism efforts and education:

ucsd.libguides.com/antiracism

