Opinion: What the Confederate flag really means

By Washington Post

In the aftermath of Thursday's tragedy in Charleston, the U.S. and South Carolina flags flew at half-mast over the top of the South Carolina State House to honor the black victims of a hate crime. But flying high in front of the building was another symbol: a Confederate flag.

Some argue that the flag is a symbol of slavery and oppression, while others insist that it is purely a matter of Southern heritage and pride.

But too little of the conversation takes into account the flag's complicated history, according to Matthew Guterl, a professor of Africana and American studies at Brown University who studies race in the aftermath of the Civil War. Given his research, which has touched frequently on the use of the Confederate flag, Guterl says that he finds it impossible to argue that it's a neutral symbol.

I spoke with Guterl to learn what exactly people misunderstand about the flag, its history, and how that affects what it symbolizes today.

Let's start with what drives the mentality that has angered so many people. Why do people embrace the Confederate flag?

There are at least two reasons why people embrace the battle flag or the stars and bars, which was first used by the army of northern Virginia.

The first, which is a kind of surface explanation, is that they imagine that in that context the flag is a representation of Southern history, Southern heritage, and Southern culture.

They tie it to questions of state's rights, and the absence of federal oversight.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Gay marriage's moment has come

By Frank Bruni, New York Times

Remember the AIDS crisis? If you lived in a big American city during its spread, you were witness to constant sorrow and countless examples of gay people treated as second-class citizens.

One was almost certainly this: the steadfast, heartbroken man being shut out of his beloved's final weeks — not allowed in the hospital room, not welcomed at the grave — because some family members disapproved and no law trumped their bigotry.

This was a recurring story, an infuriating leitmotif, and many gays and our allies remarked and railed that it wouldn't be happening if committed same-sex relationships got the legal recognition that heterosexual ones did.

Sometimes we even used the word "marriage."

That was 30 years ago.

Now we stand nervously and hopefully on the brink of a milestone. Before the end of June, a month associated with wedding bells and wedding cake, the Supreme Court will issue a major decision about the right of two men or two women to exchange vows in a manner honored by the government. It may

well extend same-sex marriage to all 50 states, making it the law of the land.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Father's Day matters even without dad

By Kathryn Reed

This is my sixth Father's Day without a father – at least physically without my dad. He died April 28, 2010.

We were never close. It was hard to talk to him. He was of the generation to be the provider – at which he excelled at. He was of the generation where demonstratively showing love or even doing so with words was frowned upon. This, too, he excelled at.



Don Reed

I love my dad. (Yes, I say it in the present tense.) And I know he loved me. I know we actually said, "I love you" to each other – but probably less than a handful of times.

Lately, I have wished he were here. When we did talk, it was usually about serious matters. I've had some serious issues to deal with in the last year. No immediate family member has been there for me, at least in the way I would have liked. It's been a learning process. I've learned I have incredible friends.

Ironically, I have "talked" to dad more in the last year than I feel like I did at anytime when he was alive. Maybe it's because I get to hear what I want and not what might have actually been said. But I doubt that. I'm not one to conjure up false memories or false "what ifs". Truth be told, I haven't heard much. But it felt good to talk.

Dad was always the voice of authority in our house growing up. It was oppressive and stifling at times. It was authoritarian. It was a household essentially of don't speak until you are spoken to. It was a household of where asking questions, asking "why" was verboten.

What an irony (or not) that I chose a profession where the overriding question is "why?". I still don't always get my questions answered, but I keep asking them. I joke that "why" is my favorite word. Maybe it's not really a joke.

Dad was the oldest of four kids. I'm the youngest of his four kids. I was never daddy's little girl. There were three "big girls" before me. But that's another story. Or not. It has a lot to do with what I'd like to talk to my dad about if we could visit for an hour or two.

Dads have a special role in every child's life – or at least they should. Even without my dad physically here, he still plays a role in my life – and it's still evolving. I never expected that.

I'm spending today with my mom. Our relationship has changed without dad, as it has for all of us kids. I'm guessing it does for most families when one parent dies. Our relationship

was always good. (Well, there was high school and when I bought a one-way ticket to Europe in my 20s – but we got through all of that). The relationship has been strained lately. She made a decision I don't think dad would have made. Intellectually, I know it's for the best. Emotionally, it's been incredibly difficult.

I hope today we can move forward. Life is short and precious. Misunderstandings and differing opinions need to be acknowledged. But forgiveness is the most important thing. No one will do everything we want, but that doesn't make their decision wrong, it just makes it different than we might have chosen.

Happy Parents' Day – that's how I now see this third Sunday of June.

Opinion: Transparency missing in EDC

By Larry Weitzman

It's been about three months since the CAO Pamela Knorr, obligated the taxpayers to a contract for legal services, except it appears the contract was for investigatory services. The contract, executed by Knorr and County Counsel Robyn Drivon had a spending limit of $50,000. A bill for services has already been received by the CAO for $15,627. It's not her money that Knorr is spending, but your money. While you may not pay property tax, almost everyone who lives in the county contributes to the approximately $40 million in annual sales tax revenue.

It’s appears to be a simple contract. To understand its purpose, structure, need, who is involved and what’s being done is shrouded in mystery. County government has turned into a wall of opaqueness. Everyone connected to this contract has circled the wagons to prevent any information as to how it came about, its purpose, need, billing, and real parties in interest. This is like a private deal paid for by public money, but the public is to butt out.



Larry Weitzman

On June 12 a *Mountain Democrat* reporter, the capable Dawn Hodson, attempted to inquire as to the nature of the contract and got stonewalled by everyone she talked to or attempted to talk to. Even when the questions had obvious answers, they were spun like a top. And remember, these people work for us, the taxpayers and get paid nearly $200,000 a year in base pay alone.

According to the story, the CAO wouldn’t discuss anything about the contract when asked about allegations regarding a contract for investigative services to be rendered or have been rendered by the law firm of Prentice, Long and Epperson, LLC. Instead, Knorr wouldn’t talk and referred Hodson to the county counsel.

In reading Hudson’s story it doesn’t look like Drivon was talking all that much and, in fact, was misleading when Drivon said, “The contract was authorized by the Board of Supervisors and the investigation was ongoing.” When asked about the nature of the investigative services, Drivon wouldn’t answer.

Drivon later affirmed that the contract was within the $50,000 authority of the CAO, meaning it didn't have to go to the Board of Supervisors for approval.

Drivon intentionally tried to mislead the *Mountain Democrat*. Drivon obviously knew this contract was not submitted to the BOS for approval in either a consent calendar matter or regular agenda item and yet said, "It was approved by the BOS." The BOS knew nothing of this contract. Drivon knew it but tried to imply because CAO Knorr had jurisdiction on her own to sign it that the BOS approved it. That wasn't just shady; it was plain pettifoggery. News readers are smarter than that.

County Counsel Drivon also would not answer questions as to the first billing statement of $15,627 as to what it was spent on. Drivon said that the money would come from county funds. Drivon needs to be reminded and Pam Knorr too that county funds are not their personal funds but the money belongs to the residents and taxpayers of El Dorado County. But now they won't even tell us how they are spending OUR money.

Instead they are lying to us as to how they are spending this money as Knorr and Drivon wanted to bill this $15,627 encumbering Facility Accumulated Capital Outlay projects and charge it off to "Fixed Asset: Project Management for the New Courthouse."

But the investigator, Ken MacHold, who is suppose to be working for the Prentice et al law firm did confirm in his phone interview with Hodson he is interviewing people in the county but he could not comment or disclose any other information regarding the nature of the interviews. According to Hodson, the Prentice et al law firm wouldn't' t even return phone calls.

We need a thorough investigation. I know it's spending more money, but hiding contracts from the public, lying to the

public about contracts, lying to the public about how money was spent or identified inappropriately by two of the highest officials in the county cannot be tolerated. This is not their private bank account, it’s our public money for public uses, not secret investigations done with a contractual subterfuge.

Larry Weitzman is a resident of Rescue.

Opinion: Bear trap issue at Resort at Squaw Creek

Publisher’s note: ***The following statement was issued by the Resort at Squaw Creek after the Bear League questioned why a bear trap was set.***

Thank you everyone for your feedback regarding the USDA Wildlife Services bear trap. While we appreciate the passionate response, we do want to keep to the facts of this particular situation, rather than the assumptions being posted on social media about what has been going on.

It is a fact that USDA Wildlife Services has set a non-lethal bear trap on our premises. This was done in response to our concern for employee safety, as well as the fact that the bear had been hit by a car in our parking lot and was most likely very injured, judging from the damage to the vehicle and the amount of blood both on the car and on the pavement. Wildlife Services recommended setting the trap and we complied with that recommendation.

Additionally, we are very cognizant of the fact that we, like everyone in the Tahoe basin, live in bear territory. Because of this, we take the appropriate steps to secure our premises.

It is false that the bear entered the resort through automatic doors, and it is also false to say we are not taking additional and extra precautions to deter this bear from coming back. Like all of you, we live in this area because we love being so close to the mountains and all that that entails. And, like you, we take responsibility to ensure that we continue to be good citizens of this mountain community.

It is unfortunate that this bear has been injured. We all hope that he can be restored to health and returned to the wild. He has not been around the resort for the past few days, and so far has not gone near the trap. USDA Wildlife Services tells us that it is likely he has moved on due to his injury and will not be back. In any case, the trap is being removed today.

We would appreciate if everyone could stick to the facts, despite the emotions that run high when we come into contact with these beautiful animals.

Sincerely,

Andre Priemer, general manager, Resort at Squaw Creek

The Bear League responded on Facebook saying:

Resort at Squaw Creek Bear Trap Update: (and final report, we hope) The bear trap has been removed (thanks to everyone who called them and commented about it). Apparently as soon as management learned the camouflaged trap had been discovered and that word was out on their plan to have a bear killed they made the unfortunate and badly thought out decisions to: 1) claim the bear would be 'relocated'—which of course, is Not true—DFW verified this immediately and told us Resort management had to sign the depredation permit stating they knew the bear would die. 2) craft a miss-information statement on BEAR League's Facebook page in an attempt to encourage our friends to actually believe that USDA Wildlife Services has such a thing as a non-lethal trap (they do not) and that USDA

Wildlife Services would give medical attention to a bear who was hit by a car (they do not, they only kill) and that USDA Wildlife Services would relocate the bear (they would not, they only know how to kill bears, not relocate them) And 3)———and this is the only ‘good’ decision they made so far——-remove the trap since no one was believing their ‘story’. So, thanks again, everyone. Another bear saved.

Letter: Apology from business owner

To the community,

To anyone in attendance at the City Council meeting regarding vacation rentals, I want to sincerely apologize for my losing control of my emotions and inappropriate behavior at the public meeting.

Jim Morris, Lake Tahoe Accommodations

Opinion: A truly bikeable Tahoe is possible

By Joanne Marchetta

We face some big, daunting environmental restoration challenges here at Lake Tahoe. But helping our environment every day can be as simple as riding a bike, walking, or

taking transit. And the hundreds of people who participated in the Tahoe Bike Challenge this June, including many of our employees at the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, are showing how big of an impact our individual actions can have.

The Tahoe Bike Challenge's concept is simple: For the first two weeks of June, leave your car parked as often as possible and bike, walk, or take transit to get around, for your own health and the health of our environment. Vehicles are a major emissions source for carbon dioxide, a greenhouse gas that is linked to climate change, and nitrogen, a harmful pollutant that gets deposited from the atmosphere into our Lake and fuels algae growth.



Joanne Marchetta

In this year's bike challenge, 315 people made 2,706 trips totaling 17,299 miles. By biking instead of driving, participants prevented an estimated 18,663 pounds of carbon dioxide emissions and saved an estimated $3,845 in fuel purchases – all in just two weeks.

The Tahoe Bike Challenge is in its 10th year. It's amazing to see how the event has grown from a small challenge among a few TRPA employees to a basinwide competition with agencies, businesses, and nonprofit groups forming more than 40 teams to see who can make the most bike trips to help the environment and earn a little bit in the way of bragging rights. The friendly competition also bolsters the ever-growing spirit of partnership and teamwork at Tahoe and TRPA is proud to play a

role in this positive evolution.

The goal is to get people riding bikes and keep them riding bikes. To help, the Lake Tahoe Bicycle Coalition has made the Tahoe Bike Map available on its website. It’s the Tahoe Region’s most comprehensive bike trail map, and will help anyone find just the kind of bike ride they are looking for, whether that’s a leisurely trip for the family, a better route to pedal to work or school, or a tough mountain bike trail.

Many of our employees at TRPA will be riding bikes, walking, or taking transit instead of driving for the rest of this month, and hopefully for the rest of the summer. We encourage you to do the same. Biking is not just good for our environment, it’s good for our health.

Every year TRPA uses the Tahoe Bike Challenge as a way to raise donations for our Environmental Scholarship Fund, which means biking is also good for our high school students. The fund has awarded 26 scholarships totaling $10,850 to local students to help them study environmental fields in college. After graduating, those students go on to help the environment around the world, and right here in our own communities.

Our Tahoe Talks Brown Bag Lunch Series this June is focusing on two bike-related topics. A June 17 lunch focused on legal rights and issues for pedestrians and bicyclists, and how laws could be improved so all citizens have rights to safe mobility. A June 24 lunch will focus on law enforcement programs that can raise awareness about traffic safety and improve safety for all road users.

TRPA recognizes that our communities need improved transportation infrastructure and transit services to offer easy-to-use options to the personal automobile at Tahoe. Partners in the collaborative Environmental Improvement Program have built 137 miles of bike and pedestrian routes since 1997, with more than 30 miles completed in the last five

years. More projects are under way. That includes Caltrans water quality improvement projects that incorporate bike lane and sidewalk upgrades for our highways; the Sawmill Bike Path that El Dorado County is building between South Lake Tahoe and Meyers; a new bike park in South Lake Tahoe; a new mountain bike park and new mountain bike trails at Heavenly Mountain Resort; and a new three-mile bike trail from Incline Village to Sand Harbor.

Our goal at TRPA is to have a fully-developed bike trail system at Tahoe within five years. It's an ambitious goal, but one we think is possible. More and more you'll be hearing the mantra that transportation is transformation – of our lake, communities, and economy. In fact, making communities at Tahoe more walkable and bikeable is a central goal in our Regional Plan and progress continues to be made. There are many ways people can help. Sometimes it's as simple as riding your bike instead of driving your car, taking a public survey to inform transportation policies, or watching out for bikers when you're driving. Please help us turn our vision for Tahoe as a safe walking and biking mecca into reality.

Joanne Marchetta is executive director of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency.

Opinion: Music that connects California

By Joe Mathews

What's the fastest way from Berkeley to Bakersfield?

Flip to the second disc of the album.



Joe Mathews

California’s disparate regions are nearly impossible to connect. But over the past two years, two bands – with overlapping members – have pulled off the trick, issuing three albums that explore today’s state from its coast to its inland deserts, from north to south. By examining the state’s divides so thoroughly, those two bands – Cracker and Camper van Beethoven –s how what really connects California: the wrong turns and struggles of regular Californians, not the handful of sun-splashed Silicon Valley successes.

Camper van Beethoven’s two albums–2013’s “La Costa Perdida” about Northern California and 2014’s “El Camino Real” about Southern California – show how dream seeking remains alive and well on both ends of our state, even if the dreams seem smaller. Cracker’s new double album, “From Berkeley to Bakersfield”, offers one side of Bay Area folk rock, and a second side of old-school country. Despite the stylistic differences, both sides of the album depict Californians as they really are – poorer and living in grittier places, but still carving out their own little kingdoms amidst squalor.

“Between the two bands,” David Lowery, founder and frontman for Cracker and Camper van Beethoven, told me recently, “we took the entire state apart and reassembled it.”

California, for all its dynamism, is still defined by dreamier music from previous generations – Tupac and Dre’s “California Love,” the Beach Boys, that Eagles hotel. But there has been some smart musical grappling with today’s California – from DJ Quik’s Compton rap slap at exurban sprawl –

“You couldn’t keep up with the city/ So you moved out to the desert/

And you want to blame your drama on me.

– to Becky G’s teenaged laments about foreclosure. And you can almost smell the marijuana on the title track of the latest album from the popular duo Best Coast, “California Nights”:

“I stay high all the time/Just to get by…

California nights make me feel so happy I could die.

But none of California’s classic titles compare to Cracker’s and Camper van Beethoven’s recent songs when it comes to being grounded in details of place. Both bands are established and more than 20 years old – with roots in Santa Cruz and in Redlands, in San Bernardino County. But Lowery says their deep musical dive into the state was inspired a few years back when a show at the Henry Miller Library in Big Sur got canceled, and the musicians found themselves with an unexpected week off.

The songs they produced span the state, from “Northern California Girls” to “Camp Pendleton.” In “La Costa Perdida”, Camper Van Beethoven sings of a fruit picker from near Brawley – a killer who got his heart broken “in the oil fields of San Ardo” (in Monterey County), buried his beloved in Parkfield, and sold her car in Fresno.

The albums celebrate gritty places and people across regions. Cracker tells a Berkeley girl she’s beautiful and suggests they attend “an anarchists’ rally at People’s Park.” The main character of “King of Bakersfield” sings,

“I got a double wide in my own Merlot vineyard.

I got plenty of space to park my dually trucks.”

If there’s one song that binds all the work together, it’s

“Almond Grove,” sung from the point of view of a guy from Maricopa in Kern County who goes to Oakland to work at the port, and gets involved in drugs. The song sounds like a triumphant return:

> *“I’m going home to the cotton fields/ To the almond groves,*
>
> *to the old homestead/See my Ma and Pa, mighty brother Jack/*
>
> *He went to Kandahar, but he never come back.”*

By the song’s end, it’s clear that he’ll see his relatives because they’re dead — and so is he. His ashes are going back to the almond grove.

The songs aren’t angry — except about Silicon Valley. Cracker’s “March of the Billionaires” thunders:

> *“Give up your rights, your most private thoughts, don’t make us label you some kind of Luddites. It’s better for us, therefore it’s better for you*.”

The song “El Cerrito,” about the Contra Costa County town, blasts at “pink-moustached taxi cabs” and offers the unforgettable chorus line, “I don’t give a shit about your IPO/I live in El Cerrito.”

While much of this music was made in California, Lowery doesn’t live here. For family reasons, he splits his time between Georgia and Virginia, but he plans to come back. “I would live somewhere in the High Desert. Or maybe up in the northwest corner of the state, Arcata or Crescent City.”

Or perhaps, he says, in both.

It’s all the same place, after all.

Joe Mathews is California and innovation editor for Zócalo Public Square, for which he writes the Connecting California column.

Letter: Ladies’ night at Bread & Broth

To the community,

A very lively and spirited group of Heavenly Mountain Resort sponsor volunteers showed up June 6 to help the Bread & Broth volunteers feed the 95 folks who attended the evening’s dinner.

As with every Monday dinner, B&B welcomes all who come to St. Theresa Church’s Grace Hall with a full-course dinner, give-away bags filled with fruit, vegetables, dairy products, canned goods and breads and, if they want, seconds and to-go containers.

To provide all of these wonderful options, Bread & Broth is staffed with cooks and volunteers who week after week generously give of their time to do all of the work necessary to provide nutritious food to the guests. Through B&B’s Adopt A Day of Nourishment Program, Vail/Heavenly Mountain Resort provided the $250 to cover the meal’s cost and sent Amanda Baronas, Wren Buxton, Michelle Baxter, Liesl Kenny and Michelle Peterlin to volunteer at their sponsorship dinner.

This group of lovely ladies was a pleasure to work with. They were fun and took a light hearted view of their “ladies’ night”. According to Buxton, the self-described “leader of the wild things”, a Bread & Broth ladies’ night is defined as, “Tie your hair back, throw on an apron and snap on a pair of surgical gloves. Then feel good about serving your community. Does it get any better than that?”

Not when you have a great group like this Heavenly crew.

Opinion: Playing the drought blame game

By Joe Mathews

I hate to play the blame game, but this drought is all your fault.

You are watering outdoors too much. You kept your lawn. You tore out your lawn – and put in hard surfaces that make your city hotter and the drought even worse.



Joe Mathews

And you, with the beautiful swimming pool you keep refilling before your sweet summer parties? I'm shaming you on Twitter as the person most responsible for the drought. Not so popular anymore, are you?

You're rich, and this drought is all the fault of you rich people, with your lush gardens, living in those wealthy water-wasting places like Beverly Hills and Newport Beach. You poor people, too, shouldn't be spared, since you're using all that water in those semi-arid places where you like to live, like the Antelope Valley. Why can't you spend thousands on low-flow

toilets and low-water appliances and drip irrigation, like the rest of us?

Those are just the people who are alive. Now I'm using my Ouija board to talk to you dead folks – this is your fault, as well. You just lie there, oblivious to the drought, in those lush grassy cemeteries.

You in the different California regions should shoulder the blame. You water-guzzlers in Sacramento are responsible for this drought – you only recently got water meters. You newlyweds and nearly-deads in Coachella, how dare you keep gardens and lawns in the desert? And don't look smug, you hippies in San Francisco and Santa Cruz. Yeah, you use less per household than most of us, but you're so holier than thou about it that I get all hot and angry, and I have to cool off with an irresponsibly long shower.

You guys in agriculture, in places like the San Joaquin and Imperial valleys, are the biggest villains. The very few of you use as much as 80 percent of the state's non-environmental water to grow something as unimportant as food. You farmers are growing all the wrong crops in the wrong places. Almond groves. Alfalfa. Dairy cows, drinking 35 gallons a day – Water Moooo-ches, you gals are—to produce the milk, to make the cheese, for the pizzas Californians eat. When you think about it, you pizza delivery guys are unindicted co-conspirators in the great water heist.

And why do you fishermen insist that water stay in the rivers and the Bay, when people need it? You're almost as bad as the fish. Delta smelt why can't you be a little tougher instead of getting all endangered and making people have to do without water because of you?

Don't think you're getting away with this, Silicon Valley and Hollywood. Your dream factories have long seduced people to come to this land where anything is possible (and where lawns

get over-watered). For all your creativity, have your industries figured a way out of this drought? No! The finest executive Hollywood has ever produced –Captain James T. Kirk of the Starship Enterprise – put his mind to the question, and the best he could do was a water pipeline from Seattle that would bankrupt the state. Maybe Spock could have solved the drought, but he died in February.

But why blame the drought entirely on fictional people from the future when you can blame old Delta families who have been farming there since the 19th century. You Delta folks just won't shut up – even after Jerry Brown told you to shut up – and let the governor build his two water-conveying tunnels under your homes and farms. Of, the drought is also all the fault of you, Gov. Brown, because you won't listen to anybody. You're a drought recidivist – we had one the first time you were governor too.

California state government, it's not just your policies that are letting this drought happen. You federal agencies are to blame too, with your regulations making it harder to move water around. You local water agencies didn't conserve fast enough and embrace tier-pricing quickly.

Don't try to hide, nature–I know it's you, not humans, who are responsible for this. Colorado River, how could you dry up on us? Hey, Sierra mountains, you can't call yourself Nevada (snowy) anymore.

Let's not forget who is responsible for rivers and mountains and the earth. This drought is on you, God. Not only do you fail to send California enough water, but also you deluge us with way too many possible culprits for this crisis.

If you can't make us examine our own culpability in this, couldn't you at least give us one clear-cut scapegoat, so we know exactly who to blame?

Joe Mathews is California and innovation editor for Zócalo

Public Square, for which he writes the Connecting California column.