



Return of the Copperheads

Republican group brings Confederate flag to Wilton winter event

BY SCOTT THOMAS ANDERSON / scotta@newsreview.com

Numerous political organizations are denouncing a Republican club's decision to display the Confederate flag at a Wilton holiday event, saying the move celebrated a legacy of racial enslavement, lynching and oppression.

The controversy was sparked December 8 at the Wilton Winter Festival, which typically features children riding horses and leading 4-H animals in a parade that ends at C.W. Dillard Elementary School. The popular hometown gathering also features floats, which is where the trouble began.

A group known as Conservative Republicans of Wilton, or CROW, piloted a float down the thoroughfare with a large Confederate flag hanging off the back. A cellphone video was soon shared on social media, which drew condemnation from the California Democratic Party, the League of United Latin American Citizens, the Council on American-Islamic Relations, the Elk Grove South County Democratic Club, Elk Grove Indivisible and Elk Grove Unified School District's Untold Stories of Racism.

The groups released a joint statement in mid-December saying the only reason to brandish the Confederate symbol is "to claim pride in the abhorrent history behind the flag."

SN&R wanted to ask CROW about displaying the symbol in a state that helped defeat the Confederacy during the Civil War, but the group has no publicly listed contact information. It does have a closed Facebook page with the description, "This group is based on Conservative point of views. Piss off with your Liberalism."

Amar Shergill, an executive board member of the state Democratic Party who lives in Elk Grove, said that what happened in Wilton shouldn't be taken lightly.

"When we hear that someone is going to bring that flag to an elementary school where little kids are celebrating the holidays, we're not going to stay quiet about," Shergill said.

Shergill asked the Sacramento County Republican Party to disavow CROW's use of the Confederate flag. Shergill said that Chairwoman Betsy Mahan responded that the county GOP has

no affiliation with CROW, and that the response was lacking.

"There have been many instances when the Republican Party has taken legal action to protect its image and brand," Shergill said. "It seems to me like they could be doing a lot more, and I think all of our region's prominent Republican officials should be asked, quite simply, do you support the Confederate flag?"

Mahan confirmed in an email to SN&R that the county Republican Party had no statement on CROW's use of the Confederate flag, though she added that her organization has never used or condoned it.

"The state Democratic Party is trying to make this much more than it was," Mahan wrote. "It is hardly a movement and bringing attention to [CROW's] five-minute ride down Dillard Road only serves the Democratic Party as they continue to work toward the annihilation of the Republican Party."

Sonia Lewis, founder of Elk Grove Unified School District's Untold Stories of Racism and Bigotry, an online forum for combating racism, said concerns about the Confederate flag have to be viewed through the prism of local hate crimes, including the targeting of a black-owned salon in 2017 and numerous incidents of harassment and intimidation aimed at black students in the Elk Grove area. The crime at the salon included a note that Elk Grove officials said was signed by the Ku Klux Klan, partly founded by Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest.

"The Confederate flag was a symbol of the Southern states coming together to say they wanted slavery to be an economic system for the entire country, so what it tells a person of color is, you preferred for me to be a slave," Lewis explained. "That's the root of what people don't always think about—or want to think about."

Lewis, a former teacher with a degree in history, thinks it's a misnomer to couch Confederate flag-bearing as historical nostalgia.

"You can have Southern pride," Lewis said, "but you don't have to have pride in a system that enslaved an entire people."

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founder, Elk Grove Unified School District's Untold Stories of Racism and Bigotry

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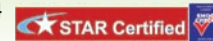
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