

Confederate flag inappropriate at solid waste transfer station on MLK Day

By Jon Ruggles, of Wallace

On Martin Luther King's birthday I drove to the Shoshone County Transfer-Station and was confronted with the stars and bars of the confederate battle flag on the front license plate area and rear window of a county employee's truck parked in a prominent spot so that people could not miss this harsh social statement. As man of faith that celebrates diversity, I was shocked by this act especially when the rest of our nation was celebrating our inclusiveness. As a result of this egregious behavior I filed a complaint with Vince Peterson the Solid Waste Operations Manager arguing that the display was a direct violation of Shoshone County Personnel Policy that dealt with racism.

I received Mr. Peterson's determination that stated they reviewed the "complaint and passed it onto the Prosector's office for review. She has responded that we give you a copy of the county personnel policy... We do not see a section that would indicate any county policy violation by Mr. Arthur's choice in decorating his personal vehicle. However, if you feel there is a particular section that applies, Keisha, our County Prosecuting Attorney would be happy to review this matter in more detail with you."

I proceeded as instructed and contacted the Prosecutors office who then told me I would have to go back to the Solid Waste Department and start over. Being frustrated I dropped off copies with the Shoshone County Commissioners and the Solid Waste Departments. I knew this issue was going to hit the local press so I gave them primary source material. All I was asking was that the flags be covered up or the truck moved to another less visible spot when the employee was on the site which is hardly a radical notion. The following is my response:

.... Even those with the most closed social awareness must realize that this emblem is a comment in support of: enslavement, racism, bigotry, xenophobia, cruelty and most recently used in the death of people of color. Further, this comment is directed at but not limited to: black, latin, native and asian americans. Moreover, this confederate flag has become the chosen emblem of the white power movement which advocates not only against and people of color (which includes Italians) but also those with different sexual identities and religions including Islam, Judaism and Catholics.

When you allow any employee to make social comments outside the normative position, you endorse this behavior as acceptable public policy for our entire county government. I contend this behavior is wrong and in violation of Shoshone County Personnel Policy Section VI, subsection D pg. 34 which clearly states: "Epithets, derogatory comments, slurs, propositioning, or otherwise offensive words or comments on the basis of race, color, religion... whether made in general, directed to an individual or directed to a group of people regardless of whether the behavior was intended to harass... is a prohibited form of harassment."

My argument also included the acknowledgement: "I am aware of your employees' right to self expression under the First Amendment of the United States Constitution but it is well proven that when you take employment you subjugate those rights to guidelines of your employer as a condition of employment which in this case is Shoshone County and its procedures. Had this vehicle been parked elsewhere it would be met with my distain but not legal redress." I also let Mr. Peterson know that my concern was not aimed at any individual but at the comment the flag conveyed. It was Mr. Peterson that outed his employee. Again, I am not asking Mr. Arthur to strip or scape his truck but merely to cover the emblems while he is parked visibly at the county facility as an employee or to hide his vehicle elsewhere on the expansive property. To do anything less is a reaffirmation of double standards and a conveyance of fear.

Cliff Arthur who owns the truck with the flags says that he is a follower of the TV show "Dukes of Hazard" and also has a hot rod called the General Lee with this flag on the roof as such, he thinks nothing is wrong with his truck being prominently parked at work. Admittedly, Mr Arthur has worked hard on his autos and his craftsmanship deserves praise. But just because his 1970/80's fantasy has morphed into his reality does not mean that all TV images are suitable for public domaine and some have unintended consequences and this might be the case in this display. However, Warner Communications that regulates this enterprise has taken off all confederate flags off of toys that resemble the hot rod and TV Land is pulling the shows reruns. Lead by Amazon stores like Walmart, Sears, eBay, Google Shopping and Etsy have stopped selling items that have the flag. Also in concert with this trend, Bubba Watson the owner of the original General Lee stated, "All men ARE created equal, I believe that so I will be painting the American flag over the roof on the General Lee." It is not political correctness to show concern for fellow citizens and "perception matters". Nor does it show respect to General Lee who asked that that flag not be flown at his funeral.

It is my belief that the confederate flag is being used in Northwest to promote fear or as a symbol of terrorism. This can be argued with some level of force since the community of Burns Oregon currently being terrorized by members of rightwing militia have these flags on their vehicles when they intimidate locals. Moreover, Idaho Representative Heather Scott from Priest River / Blanchard who is well known for her fanaticism carrying the confederate flag went to visit this militia in support of their usurpation of public lands. This is in spite of the fact that this state was founded by President Lincoln and this flag has never been on our state's flag poles. Clearly, showing the confederate flag disrespects our state and serves to denigrate our founder who gave his life in opposition to this racist ideology

Governments hold sway over us because, as individuals, we collectively decided to give our personal power to these entities for safe keeping. When we gave our consent to those who govern we gave it with a number of caveats which safeguard us from abuse. Chief among those provisions is the recognition that every individual regardless of race, creed, color religion or sex is entitled to equal protection. As Americans operating under the primary legal entitlement of, "equal protection under the law" we too are required to reciprocate socially and treat all persons as equal. Certainly, the term "equal" does not apply to financial benefits or physical attributes, but rather it connotes equality in a spiritual context. This was the benchmark of the Declaration of Independence which contended that all have been endowed by our creator with rights that cannot be separated from from the individual and that among those are: "life liberty and the pursuit of happiness" and I would hold this transfers to "freedom from fear". As such, when we deny these rights to others by waving the confederate flag we not only violate our mutual contract but God's law.

In closing, our governments —at all levels— are instituted to strive for justice, peace and dignity for all our citizens. If we are to error it ought to be in behalf of inclusion of our citizenry that those "barriers which divide us may crumble, suspicions disappear and hatreds cease." Therefore we must act swiftly and with certainty cast away this confederate flag and the racism it confers.

