

# In Act of Civil Disobedience, Woman Removes Confederate Flag at SC Capitol

By [Shafaq Hasan](#) | July 1, 2015

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It's been almost a year since Michael Brown's shooting ignited a frenzy of Internet activists, community organizers, and social justice leaders. As *NPQ's* coverage of the Black Lives Matter has shown, civil disobedience and social media have gone hand in hand as situations like the Charleston shooting, Eric Garner's death, and the slew of slain unarmed black men and women continue to illustrate how racism is an established force in our society. Social media has been the natural medium for many to react and communicate amid this frenzy. But there has been nothing yet quite like Bree Newsome, the woman who scaled a flagpole in South Carolina and tore down the Confederate battle flag.

Readers may remember *NPQ's* [coverage of the controversy last week concerning the flag](#). Politicians spanning the partisan spectrum from Mitt Romney to Bernie Sanders called on South Carolina to take down the Confederate flag following the Charleston shooting. While some said they considered the flag part of the South's heritage and history, others stood behind their belief that history is founded on the vitriol of slavery and racism.

On Monday, the South Carolina state legislature had enough votes to remove the flag from the Capitol. But two days earlier, while politicians waged their wars with words and lobbied legislatures, Newsome, a [30-year-old North Carolina resident and community organizer](#), climbed the flagpole in front of the South Carolina state capitol building using a metal harness and removed the flag herself. She was promptly arrested afterward, but her smile—and the social media response to her proactivity—reflects a victory.

Artists online have reimagined Newsome into a superhero while other members of the public [continue to fundraise for her legal fees](#). An Indiegogo campaign has raised more than \$120,000.

Newsome did not act alone. According to [a statement she gave to the Blue Nation Review](#), Newsome and a “small group of concerned citizens, both black and white” came to the decision to remove the flag.

“We discussed it and decided to remove the flag immediately,” said Newsome in her statement, “both as an act of civil disobedience and as a demonstration of the power people have when we work together. Achieving this would require many roles, including someone who must volunteer to scale the pole and remove the flag.”

“It was decided that this role should go to a black woman and that a white man should be the one to help her over the fence as a sign that our alliance transcended both racial and gender divides. We made this decision because for us, this is not simply about a flag, but rather it is about abolishing the spirit of hatred and oppression in all its forms.”

In many ways, Newsome and the group’s response is a direct response to the very issue at the heart of these conflicts: a lack of power and control over their circumstances. In those situations where law enforcement is in control, they have seen their friends, family members and strangers killed. Where they have tried to assert their power or control, they have also been killed.

This protest draws on the fundamental power given to the American people to act and bring justice when the government will not. After Michael Brown and Eric Garner, many may have forgotten the purpose of a grand jury: to give the people the power to stop an unjust prosecution.

[Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis said](#), “In a government of laws existence of the government will be imperiled if it fails to observe the law scrupulously. Our Government is the potent, the omnipresent teacher. For good or for ill, it teaches the whole people by its example. Crime is contagious. If the Government becomes a lawbreaker, it breeds contempt for law; it invites every man to become a law unto himself; it invites anarchy.”

However, the people’s power to counteract the government is most effective when exercised prudently by the masses. [“Whether the topic is trending nationally or it’s an issue affecting our local communities, those of us who are conscious must do what is right in this moment,”](#) says Newsome. “And we must do it without fear. New eras require new models of leadership. This is a multi-leader movement. I believe that. I stand by that. I am because we are. I am one of many.”—Shafaq Hasan

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# Woman climbs pole, removes Confederate flag

By [Greg Botelho](#) and [Emanuella Grinberg](#), CNN

<http://www.cnn.com/2015/06/27/politics/south-carolina-confederate-flag/>

Updated 6:15 PM ET, Sat June 27, 2015

(CNN)Dressed in climbing gear and a helmet, Brittany "Bree" Newsome shimmied up a 30-foot flagpole on the grounds of the South Carolina state Capitol early Saturday and removed the Confederate battle flag that has reignited national debate over the emblem's place in modern America.

Newsome removed the banner hours before a pro-flag rally was scheduled to take place at the monument in Columbia. By the time the flag was raised again, the moment had made its mark in the ongoing debate over the Confederate banner on the State House grounds -- and its value in American society 150 years after the end of the Civil War.

Newsome was arrested after she returned to ground with flag in hand. Video shows fellow activist James Tyson waiting at the flagpole's base inside the wrought-iron fence to help her out of her climbing gear. She posted bond and was released from jail Saturday afternoon, spokesman Mervyn Marcano said. Calls to her attorney have not been returned.

Newsome and Tyson, both 30, were charged with defacing a monument, a misdemeanor, and a new flag went up within about an hour, according to the S.C. Department of Public Safety. Not long after they were led away in handcuffs, Newsome became an online hero, a trending topic on social media and the subject of an online fundraiser.

Opponents of the flag, including celebrities, politicians and civil rights activists, used #FreeBree to applaud Newsome for doing what [many thought](#) lawmakers should have done sooner. While [filmmaker Michael Moore](#) offered to pay Newsome's legal fees, advocacy group ColorofChange launched [an online petition](#) calling for the charge to be dropped and an [online fundraiser](#) was set up pay Newsome's legal fees.

"Her actions represent a nation that is saying NO MORE of letting this symbol of white supremacy fly," first lady of New York Chirlane McCray [said in a tweet](#).

Thank you [@BreeNewsome](#) for doing something that should've been done over 150 years ago. [#FreeBree pic.twitter.com/p2yZq9THbf](#)

— Joshua Thicklin ([@JoshThicklin53](#)) [June 27, 2015](#)

We thank God that [@BreeNewsome](#) had the courage to take the flag down! [#KeepItDown](#) [#FreeBree](#) [pic.twitter.com/AKXOu4kB0c](#)

— Rev Jesse Jackson Sr ([@RevJJackson](#)) [June 27, 2015](#)

This needs to be a t-shirt, an album cover, a mural.... [#freebree pic.twitter.com/7e6CmTqyNG](#)

— Dave Zirin (@EdgeofSports) [June 27, 2015](#)

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People also came out in support of Newsome, likening her actions to those of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

"As well as supporting the permanent removal of the flag legislatively, we commend the courage and moral impulse of Ms. Newsome as she stands for justice like many NAACP activists including Henry David Thoreau, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and numerous Americans who have engaged in civil disobedience,"

"The NAACP calls on state prosecutors to consider the moral inspiration behind the civil disobedience of this young practitioner of democracy," NAACP President Cornell William Brooks said in a statement. "Prosecutors should treat Ms. Newsome with the same large-hearted measure of justice that inspired her actions."

The Charlotte, North Carolina, branch of the NAACP posted a statement Saturday on Newsome's behalf asking supporters to host nonviolent demonstrations in their own communities instead of visiting Columbia.

### **'We can't continue like this another day'**

South Carolina lawmakers raised the universally known Confederate emblem over the State House in 1961, officially in honor of the war's centennial. But it was also a time of growing momentum in the civil rights movement, and white leaders in the South were digging their heels in against efforts to end segregation. For nearly 40 years it flew under the U.S. and state flag, above the seat of government, until a compromise moved it to a flagpole next to a soldiers' monument.

That move didn't satisfy opponents, who maintained that the flag's display on the grounds amounted to tacit state endorsement of white supremacy.

But efforts to remove it had gone nowhere in the years before the awful night of June 17 -- when nine people who had gathered for Bible study at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston were massacred. All nine victims were African-American, including the Rev. Clementa Pinckney, who also was a state senator.

The motivations of the shooter, 21-year-old Dylan Roof, became clear after [his arrest the next day in North Carolina](#). A website surfaced showing a racist manifesto and 60 photos of Roof, some of them showing him waving Confederate flags while armed.

The revelations spurred politicians around the South to re-examine the placement of the Confederate flags on everything from government property to state-issued license plates amid national debate over its meaning. South Carolina's Republican governor, Nikki Haley, on Monday [called for the removal of the flag](#), saying that while it is "an integral part of our past, [it] does not represent the future of our great

state." Among the politicians joining her at the announcement were U.S. Sens. Lindsey Graham and Tim Scott, both Republicans, and Democratic U.S. Rep. Jim Clyburn.

State representatives on Tuesday resoundingly voted to allow debate on a bill to bring it down. Until such a bill passes, the flag continues to fly -- except for a brief time around dawn Saturday.

In a statement through activist group #BlackLivesMatter, Newsome explained her actions, saying, "we can't wait any longer."

"We can't continue like this another day," Newsome said. "It's time for a new chapter where we are sincere about dismantling white supremacy and building toward true racial justice and equality."

About 60 people attended the pro-flag rally, according to the Charleston Post and Courier. Those in attendance said they hope Newsome is punished for her actions.

"We consider this flag as a flag of heritage not hate," 75-year-old Greenville resident Leland Browder [told the newspaper](#). "I don't hate anybody. We feel like it's a part of our history. It's a part of the South."

CNN's Carma Hassan contributed to this report.