

# Mississippi: A Book Makes People ‘Uncomfortable’ But What About Your Flag?

By Shawnta S. Barnes - October 19, 2017



The American flag & Mississippi state flag located in downtown Jackson, Mississippi

A school board in Biloxi, Mississippi has banned the Pulitzer Prize winning novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* because it makes people ‘uncomfortable.’ This novel, set in the 1930s, focuses on racial inequalities. Now, more than ever, youth need to be

aware of America's tragic past so they can understand what minorities and allies are fighting for today.

I find it interesting in a state where the Confederate emblem is part of its state flag that being 'uncomfortable' was the reason this novel was banned. How many Mississippi citizens are uncomfortable when they see the state's flag flying in the air?

The flag with the Confederate battle emblem has flown since 1894 in Mississippi and in 2001 a referendum to change the state's flag failed to pass. Although all eight public Mississippi universities, some government buildings, and some cities in Mississippi including Biloxi have decided not to fly the flag until the emblem is removed, that seems like an easy way out. I guess it might make people too uncomfortable to fight for change.

During my fall break, I spent some time in Jackson, Mississippi where my husband's paternal family resides. While walking downtown to the Parlor Market restaurant, we walked past the American flag beside the Mississippi State flag. I have been to Mississippi many times over the last 13 years and I really never stopped to think about the flag. I do believe the flag should be changed, but removing the emblem won't change the hearts of people in Mississippi who don't understand why the battle emblem is problematic for some of their fellow residents.

This is why it is dangerous to censor material like *To Kill a Mockingbird* in schools. We need the next generation to be comfortable engaging in difficult conversations. We don't need to pass down archaic beliefs and ideals. The real problem isn't being uncomfortable, it's fear. What if Mississippi students read about injustice and wanted their state to be different? People aren't uncomfortable, they are fearful of their way of life disappearing. If Mississippi schools were teaching students about social injustice and the history of the south, maybe students would be more engaged in learning and the Mississippi Department of Education wouldn't be potentially taking over yet another school district, Jackson Public Schools, the second largest school district in the state.