Historians now recognize the injustices heaped upon African Americans in the name of (white) national reconciliation, but this belated recognition does not erase the legacy of a century in which white southerners were not asked to dishonor or feel ashamed of their ancestors and in which black southerners had no voice in determining the heroes and symbols of their region. During a recent dispute over the renaming of Confederate Memorial Hall at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee, a black math professor asserted bluntly that “the race problems that wrack America to this day are due largely to the fact that the Confederacy was not thoroughly destroyed, its leaders and soldiers executed and their lands given to the landless free slaves.”10 Shocking as this statement was, it verbalized the frustration that some people feel toward the moderate settlement of America’s Civil War. It also suggested what could have happened to the losers of this conflict but didn’t. It underscored the challenges facing a society that reincorporated defeated people, their beliefs, and their symbols.

The passage of generations has complicated the answer to the question of how America should treat self-styled Confederate Americans. For many people today, the Confederacy and the flag are part of their personal and familial heritage, effectively devoid of ideological content. Allegiance to the Confederacy and the battle flag arise from a desire to honor their ancestors and from an innate sense that “it’s always been this way.” Anything that forces change—even in the name of rights past wrongs—is resisted in principle. A recent survey of how Americans learn their history and what history they regard as most trustworthy reveals the importance of family history and personal heritage. By honoring their ancestors, vindicating their cause, and revering their symbols, Confederate descendants are engaging with history in the same way that other Americans do. Confederate heritage activists decry what they perceive as a double standard at work: that white southerners are the only Americans not allowed to celebrate their ancestry openly.11

If precedent and fairness suggest that Americans should allow “Confederate Americans” to retain their dual loyalty, the association of Confederate heritage and symbols with extremist political movements sug-