



A Heart Divided

Cherie Bennett , Jeff Gottesfeld

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Is the Confederate battle flag a racist symbol—or a proud reminder of Southern heritage?

When Kate's liberal-minded family moves from the suburbs of New York City to a small town near Nashville, Kate is convinced her life is over. Redford lives up to Kate's low expectations. The Confederate battle flag waves proudly in the sky, the local diner serves grits and sweet tea, and country music rules the airwaves. Then she meets Jackson Redford III, scion of the town and embodiment of everything Dixie. And dang if brilliant, gorgeous Jack doesn't make Kate decide that maybe her new hometown isn't so bad after all. But a petition to replace the school's Confederate flag symbol is stirring up trouble. Kate dives right in, not afraid to attack what she sees as offensive. Getting involved means making enemies, though, and soon, Kate and Jack—and their families—find themselves pitted against each other in a bitter controversy: not just about the flag, but about what it means to be an American.

From the Hardcover edition.

A Heart Divided Details

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Author : Cherie Bennett , Jeff Gottesfeld

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From Reader Review A Heart Divided for online ebook

Danielle says

This one was kind of hard to get into, but I have a personal interest in the subject matter, so I stuck with it. High-school aged wanna-be playwright moves from NJ to TN, and gets sucked into a school controversy over the Confederate flag. The first half of the book is a narrative, and the second half is a play. I actually liked the second half much better than the first, but thought the writing throughout needed some work. The authors told, rather than showed, much of the story.

Jessica Abarquez says

Reference information:

Title: A Heart Divided

Author: Cherie Bennett and Jeff Gottensfeld

Publisher: Delacorte Press Year: 2004

of pages: 306 Genre: fiction

Reading level: Interest level: 12+

Potential hot lava: confederate flag issues, violence, racism

General response/reaction:

I read this novel when it was first published in 2004 because Jeff Gottensfeld came to our creative writing class to talk about how he wrote this novel. It was exciting because he had also either taught or talked with another class (I don't remember which) about creative writing. I picked up this book, not only because the author came to talk to us, but also because it was set in Franklin, Tennessee. Of course, he re-named the town to Redford, but as I read the story, I could almost envision those places (considering I live near Franklin). Gottensfeld told our class about the different reactions he was getting to some of his work. When he went to a California high school and asked the students if any of their relatives served in the military, very few raised their hands. When Gottensfeld came to the southern states and asked the same question, almost everyone in the class raised their hands. This pride in serving one's country was the basis of his book.

It was interesting to read about the debate over the confederate flag and the mascot of a "rebel." For someone from a northern state, of course the flag represents slavery and barbarism. For someone in a southern state, it is a symbol of pride (even if that pride cost them the Civil War). For me, that debate never really held much of an issue. I believe that the flag is a symbol of history no matter how "bad" people might view it. This novel brings up that debate in a creative and compelling way that made the novel easy to read. As I refreshed my memory on the story, I was remembering the debate and how interesting the story was when I first read it. I was glad that I was able to share this gem with my partner

Subjects, Themes, and Big Ideas:

- Racism
- History
- Legacy
- Pride
- Goals

Characters:

- Kate Pride – Narrator, from New Jersey, moved to Redford, TN because of her father's job, writes plays, wants to change the school's team name and emblem
- Jack Redford – Kate's interest, actor, does not take a side in the debate over the team's name
- Sara Fife – President of the Crimson Maidens, antagonist in the story
- Portia Pride – Kate's little sister, trying to get accustomed to her new living situation

Plot summary:

Kate Pride is somewhat of a diva in New Jersey. In New Jersey, Kate learned to take care of herself and voice her opinions on any subject she disagreed with. Basically, Kate learned to be harsh in a cruel world. When Kate's father moves the family for his new job, Kate has to learn how to deal with the Southern Hospitality that is served in Redford, Tennessee each day.

Kate attends Redford High School and learns that their team mascot is the rebels and that their emblem is the Confederate flag. She observes the racism and discrimination still apparent in the school. Kate decides that she wants to try to change the school's team name and emblem. She gathers some of the students to try to sign a petition that would gather a group to vote whether to change the name or not.

While she works on getting supporters, Kate also participates in the production of her school's play. As a budding writer, Kate tries to write a play about her experience at Redford High School. She interviews supporters and critics of her stand on the Confederate flag. However, Kate runs into problems as a "copy" of her script surfaces to a negative response from the administration. Not only is she losing support for her cause, her boyfriend Jack will not make a decision whether he is with her or against her. Jack's decision is harder since he is a legacy in the town.

Kate finally gives up her cause to change the name, but others take the cause further. When a group burns the Confederate flag during a football game, a fight breaks out which results in Portia getting shot. In the end, Kate gets her play performed and moves back to New Jersey. While it sounds like Kate runs back to her comfort zone of New Jersey, she has grown and learned from her experience in the south.

Strengths (including reviews and awards):

The female lead character is strong-willed. Although this story's main character is a female, it is not a normal love story. Kate is the one driving the action, but there are many obstacles that she must face, including a boyfriend who may not know who to support. This book and its authors are not well known, so I personally believe that this story can surpass expectations and be a diamond in the rough of many "traditional" love stories.

Drawbacks or other cautions:

People in the story are a little harsh when it comes to the insults and the subjects discussed in the novel. However, it is not as bad as other authors could be.

Teaching ideas:

Pre-reading:

- Review the events leading up to the Civil War
- Review the differences between the north and the south during that time
 - o What were the main issues that made the two differ so much?
 - o What were they fighting for?
- Have a debate about the Civil War
 - o Have one half of the room be the north and the other half be the south
 - o Have the students defend their position
- Journal (it might be different depending on what region of the United States the class is in)

- o What is the significance of the Confederate flag?
- o Write like a character
- ? Have the students take the mindset of a southern person during this time.
- Movie: The Patriot
- o Mel Gibson and Heth Ledger are in the same family but on opposing sides of the Civil War.

During Reading:

- Follow the different cliques in the high school
- o Split the class into the different cliques at Redford High and have them write journals as members of those cliques
- Discuss the dangers of each group

Post Reading:

- Debate: Where do you stand on the issue?
- o Keep the class in the different cliques and have them debate the issue

Kristen Fort says

Okay... So I finished it in one night, staying up way past my usual and I actually liked how it ended.

The beginning of the book is awfully written. What annoyed me: Kate and her mother's reaction to the Confederate flag (such a stereotype of Northerners... my parents were from New Jersey but had moved to Columbia, SC, a very Southern city, where the Confederate flag controversy was alive and well), the escalation of the high school romance (well, I guess some move on faster than others), and the grooming of the good old Southern boy... but it delighted me that it had failed.

I very much enjoyed the final product of the play Kate was determined to write. I enjoyed that she talked to various people to get their sides of the story. I enjoyed the shock that happens towards the end of the narrative, the clincher that gets Kate to finish it.

Just 3 stars, though, because the beginning was terrible. Would have been 2 stars if the ending of the book did not amuse me.

Rachel Lee says

Reference information:

Title: A Heart Divided

Author: Cherie Bennett and Jeff Gottesfeld

Publisher: Delacorte Press Year:2004

of pages: 306 Genre: Fiction

Reading level Interest level: 9th-11th Grade

Potential hot lava:

Racism, Adult Language, Violence, Underage Drinking

General response/reaction: I absolutely loved this book, and am kind of disappointed we never read anything like this when I was an adolescent. I really enjoyed the way the book was written. I thought that the authors

did a tremendous job creating the atmosphere of Redford. There were times in the novel where I could feel the tension between characters, as if it was real. There was definitely enough drama throughout the book to keep me interested. I thought Kate and Jack's relationship was very realistic, with issues a lot of students would be able to relate to. Being from the south, I was a little concerned of how this novel was going to address the issue of the confederate flag. I was pleasantly surprised that it wasn't one sided, but instead offered a great insight into how both black and white feel about the flag. I felt this book had strong female characters that young adults could relate and look up to. She was not a stereotypical damsel in distress female character, instead she is spunky and independent. Even the minor female characters, like Nikki Roberts, is a strong role model for young women, because she is able to take a stand for what she believes is right, without fearing what others may think. I thought this book presented enough diversity throughout that would enable all types of students to enjoy it.

Subjects, Themes, and Big Ideas:

Teen Romance

Diversity

Racism

Conflict with Parents

Planning for the future

Southern Culture/Pride

Characters:

Kate Pride- a junior from New Jersey, who is forced to move to Redford, Tennessee when her father has a job promotion. She loves theater and is an inspiring playwright. She is determined to learn the issues concerning the Confederate Flag and why people believe the way they do.

Jack Redford- ancestor of the legendary Redford bloodline, who is trying to live up to his family name, even though he has dreams that are much different, which consist of being in theater. He is Kate's love interest.

Nikki Roberts- African American student who is very adamant about changing the Redford High School mascot to something that will signify everyone, not just white people. She becomes a good friend of Kate.

Plot summary: Kate Pride is forced to move from New Jersey to Redford, Tennessee after her father gets a job promotion. She meets Jake Redford and is immediately attracted to him because they share a love for theater (and he's cute). Despite their differences, Kate and Jack begin dating and fall in love. She finds herself taking a stand for the removal of the confederate flag and school mascot with her friend Nikki. This power struggle between black and white inspires Kate to write a play about the Confederate Flag and Redford as a whole and begins interviewing different people within the community. When a fake play surfaces with Kate's name on it, Kate and Jack find themselves in a world of hate stronger than they've known. At a home football game, Kate's little sister is shot and no one knows who's responsible. This act drives Kate to put together a play that consists of the interviews, showing the Redford community that black and white will always be there, but that doesn't mean that hate must continue. The play acts as the last chapter of the book, detailing people's opinions of the Confederate Flag and recent events that were prompted by racial feud.

Strengths (including reviews and awards):

2005 winner Texas TAYSHAS High School Reading List

Drawbacks or other cautions:

Language, underage drinking

Teaching ideas:

- *Before reading this book have the class talk about stereotypes about southern and northern culture
- *Write a journal on how they feel the north or south still hold grudges about the civil war.
- *Have students journal about what they think will happen in the end of the book.
- *Have students break into groups, give different people different characters and have them role-play a counseling session.
- *Have students write a newspaper article about the events at Redford High School, including interviews with characters.
- * Have students act out a TV interview of Jack, Kate, and Nikki that would take place after Kate's play.
- * Students interview parents or grandparents about any events they can remember about growing up during the civil rights movement. How it made them feel? Did they go with society or against society beliefs?
- *Watch GLORY and have students respond to the racism in the movie and their personal responses to the film.
- * Have a debate about the Civil war? Was it justified? What were the causes? Was slavery the major issue?
- * Read article about government discussion about national apology for slavery. Have students debate whether the government should have an national apology for slavery (this would get the student involved in current issues)

Brianna says

I picked up this book because I will be working on the play of the same title/topic this summer (by the same author). Because of the silly cover, I never would have picked this from the shelf. I found Kate to be a difficult character to like. I wanted to kick her during the New York/New Jersey opening chapter. However, I stuck with the story and I thought that Bennett did a fine job of incorporating different perspectives on the issue of the Confederate Flag and what it represents. She has created complex characters who defy stereotypes, which I respect. I could done without much of the "hold-each-other-close-and-the-world-melts-away" business between Kate and Jack. I'm not a fan of swooning.

Candice Snow says

I decided to read this in honor of the recent debates over whether or not to remove the Confederate flag from public buildings.

In all honesty, I went in blind. I was raised in the North, so I'll be the first to admit that I knew diddly-squat about the Confederate flag and how it is viewed by Southerners. I expected to be well educated on the topic by the end of this story, but sadly I closed this book with no more knowledge about the flag than when I first started reading.

There was no actual discussion about why Southerners cling to a flag that is perceived as an inherently racist symbol while at the same time claiming not to embrace racism. I was annoyed that the Southern students who tried to defend the flag could only conjure up replies of, *I don't know. It's just sort of everywhere.* *SOUTHERN PRIDE, Y'ALL. THE SOUTH WILL RISE AGAAAAAIN!*

Even *I* know that the whole feud between the North and the South wasn't *just* about slavery. It was so much more complex than that (the fact that the North and South have always hated each other because of their vastly different commodities and power within the government, ect.) and this story failed to even acknowledge that point of view—the main character, in all her infinite wisdom, declares the flag racist, but that unfounded assumption is neither confirmed nor denied by the end of the story. I was left feeling confused and frustrated.

I understand the argument about tying the flag's significance to the fact that one of the reasons the South fought in the Civil War was to keep slavery alive, but what frustrated me to no end was there was never a strong devil's advocate in favor of the Southern argument that it represents "Southern Pride" and not "Slavery". I would have liked to see an intelligent character argue in defense of the flag, instead of having every supporter be a stereotypical "back hills racist redneck". It just seemed like the easy way out of bringing a healthy discussion to the table, and by the end of the book I felt cheated out of an intelligent revelation that would help me form my own opinions about a flag I still don't know anything about.

Basically, I was angry that almost the entirety of the plot focuses on Kate's rushed and unrealistic relationship with a classmate instead of informing me of the very rich and detailed history of the flag in question.

I found Kate to be an incredibly difficult character to like. Immediately upon moving from her home in New Jersey to a small town in Tennessee, Kate exhibits an air of arrogant superiority because she sees a Confederate flag flying on a flagpole. She declares the flag racist, makes a few stereotypical jokes about Southerners, and spends the rest of the story defending the claim that the Confederate flag is equal to that of a swastika.

The end of the story is a compilation of interviews Kate conducted and formatted into a play format. This section of the book was incredible and enjoyably insightful. Interviews from both old, young, black, and white attempted to suggest how both sides feel about the flag; unfortunately, it was such a small portion of the book, and it came at the very end of the novel, so I had already lost faith in the story. **If this topic at all interests you, I HIGHLY suggest you skip the fluff and read the portion at the end (Kate's play).**

Jess F. (From Me to You ... Book Reviews) says

"It's a compelling story about believing your values. The way you read it at first, I didn't like it until I understood that it was kind of written to have a bird's eye view of everything to make the ending that much better. And it is!! I cried, laughed, and learned more than I expected to out of this book. I highly recommend it ... especially to those northerners, like me, who still don't get it, or at least I didn't before I read this book."

Read more of this review here:

<http://frommetoyouvideophoto.blogspot.com/2010/02/purpose-of-life-is-life-of-purpose.html>

Sarah Dean says

This book had an incredibly good concept, but often confused me at points, because it seemed a bit all over the place. I feel that Kate's relationship development with Jack was EXTREMELY rushed. I feel like I would have understood their relationship much more if there had been more build up to it. It was like "Oh, I've met this girl I shared one secret with, better leave my girlfriend of four years for her immediately." I understand that Sara was...very unpleasant, but that's still kind of a large leap. But I digress. I still enjoyed the little plot twist at the end. I just had a very large problem with character and relationship development, especially with Jack. I understand Kate was narrating and she loved him, but he was just a bit too perfect for my taste, even with his really obvious (but really bland) flaws.

Shelby says

Ok. So I hated this book badly. It was THE worst book I have EVER read. All it did was BASH the south. Once I got to chapter 5 I TORE THE BOOK UP AND THREW IT IN MY GRANDMAS WOOD STOVE! I HATED IT. I DONT RECCOMEND ANYONE TO READ THIS WHAT SO EVER. Ok so some areas of the book that were completly and utterly false was that they said that the Confederate Flag was racist. Its really not. It is what people stand for just like french people stand for their flag southerners stand for this one and the american flag. Some people give it a bad name but the magority of people just have the flag because of heritage and what they stand for. I am sure that there is a huge amount of african american people who would stand for this flag too. So its obviously NOT racist like some people make the flag out to be. In one point of the book they were talking about how people shouldnt have to say the pledge well thats really off, why change something just for a few people who dont agree with it? If the majority is with it then those other few dont have to say there prayers or whatever during the moment of silence. I guess I should have finished the book but if you had felt the way I did you wouldnt have finished it either. Read it for yourself and maybe youll get something out of it that I didnt.

Laura Leonard says

Kate moves from New Jersey to a small southern town. She gets caught up in a debate over whether the school should continue to fly the Confederate flag. Kate struggles as an outsider, but eventually makes some friends and finds romance. Ultimately, she deals with the controversy by writing and staging a performance at the school. The place is included in the book. An especially good read for theater lovers.

Emily says

Provoking and deep, this novel explores equality in small town Southern America today. Kate likes writing plays, and she likes equality. So why is writing a play about equality in Redford, TN, so hard?? Does the Confederate flag stand for racial injustice, or for Southern pride and heritage?? Most of all, does she belong in this new home, or not?? P.S. The play at the end that she finally writes/compiles is pretty awesome, and so is the conclusion of the story!!!

Alexandra says

When I checked out the book at the library I thought it was going to be a girly, small town romance with the Civil War debate as a side story (Actually, when I checked it out I thought the title was "A THREAD Divided. Oops.), but I was wrong. True, there is romance, but the story strongly focuses on the issue regarding the flying of the Confederate flag. The story was well written and easily believable as the flag issue still exists in the south. I would easily recommend this forgotten gem of a book.

Vivian Zavala says

Have you ever have hard times with your family and school? This book is fairy tale realistic fiction. I was surprised when the author said about "america" that people need FREEDOM, people need what they need 2 let the colored people be people.

The setting is that a girl had a mom no dad. The mom had a baby with her sister . And she is going to another school year. the major events is that the girl like some one and 4 weeks later a new boy came and she had a crush on him and she had to some thing.

The author tone is very KIND OF mystery and sad . the author creates this tone by the girl because she is the main charater .in the text it says "the only it hurts is me im ruin my life my survirval and other stuffa that I don't even care my self" this quote made this hurtful and I feel the SAME of it. I mean I suffer a lot and makes things even HARDER than I thot :(.

I like that the author uses "be your self" or "be unique". I like this that he uses BE because is talking about your self not other that they don't mind of any thing abut their self .

I rate this book "eh" 4 stars it was good book it has things that relates about me. I kind of recomend well is a good book. Have you ever had something in ONE hand AND the other hand is something important is just stress ful.

Sarah says

I am still trying to figure this book out. I would say that it was a lame teenager book that was trying too hard, but there were some good themes. Character development was patchy and the book ends with a play that people can actually perform. It's hard to say that I actually liked this book, but I finished it, so that's got to say something...

Heidi says

I loved this YA and so did my niece, who is a picky reader. It's about a cute, smart and sassy northern girl whose family relocates to the south. Romeo and Juliet style, she and the big man on campus football player (who is also cute, sensitive, funny, and the scion of the town's founders) fall in love and have slightly different attitudes on race relations. While not prejudiced, he is the creature of his culture and sparks fly when the girl becomes best friends with the african american girl who is the campus radical determined to

bring change NOW. Perhaps in this day of our first African American president, this is no longer so topical, but I don't know. It was really very well done.
