



AUGUST HINT: BE NICE

Always direct your criticism to public policies and public figures, never to readers. Believe it or not, a gentle, conciliatory approach will send the strongest message.

Case in point: Shortly after moving to NC, I visited the Pacific Superstore in Southport to purchase some beachwear. A large part of the floor was taken up by confederate merchandise. Being someone who has a visceral hatred of anything having to do with bigotry or discrimination, I was livid. I promptly left the store, drove home and pounded out a letter on my PC.

Here's the letter my gut wanted me to write:

*Today, I paid a brief visit to the Pacific Superstore in Southport where I was greeted by a large display of merchandise decorated with the confederate flag. I was disgusted that the owners of the store would sell anything symbolizing the South's miserable past of racism and slavery. Shame on them. And shame on any customer who supports their business! It's about time the people of North Carolina got over the Civil War.*

And here's what my brain told me to write:

*Yesterday, I walked into the Pacific Superstore in Southport where I was greeted by a huge display of apparel and other items made from material printed with the Confederate flag. My stomach knotted as a vision of black Americans hanging from a tree appeared in my mind. I know these symbols don't represent the good people of today's South, but as I turned around and walked out of the store, I wondered why we keep reminding the world of our past as if it were something to be proud of.*

It's easy to see which version made the most powerful statement.