



“WHY ALL THE FUSS?”

JEDI • Opener

Justice • Equity • Diversity • Inclusion

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CWEA

PROTECTING CALIFORNIA'S MOST
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Member Story



Early in my career, I was assigned to a dewatering project. On my first day on-site, there was this very tall crane with an American flag hanging from it. I didn't think anything of it. But, a few days later, the Stars and Stripes were replaced with a Confederate battle flag.

Being African-American, I believe that the Confederate flag symbolizes a long history of racism, injustice, and violence. What's worse, it seemed like someone took the time and effort to put it there on purpose, just for me to find. Naturally, I was upset. When I brought it up to the supervising engineer, he acted utterly unconcerned and continued to work without addressing the issue at all.

Later that same day, still feeling disturbed. I mentioned my discomfort to another engineer visiting from the United Kingdom. Concerned but confused, she tried to understand what the flag represented and why it had upset me so. "This Confederate thing, is it sort of like the conflict between Catholics and Protestants in Europe?" she asked. I said it was, in a way. Hearing that, she immediately called the construction manager and had him remove the flag.

Debi Lewis, CWEA Past President & Board Member

Why all the fuss?

All it took was a moment for my colleague to listen, empathize, and realize that she could do something to make our job site less hostile and more welcoming. But first, she had to take my concerns seriously and act. That's precisely what an ally does.

TAKEAWAYS:

- Do you consider how others perceive the symbols displayed at work?
- What can you do to make your workplace more welcoming?
- Has anyone ever approached you looking for help to feel included? How did you respond?



The word **ally** comes from the Latin word *alligare*, meaning "to bind to," like nations who are allies in wartime — they will act together and protect one another.



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Debi Lewis
CWEA Past President
Retired

**Thank you Debi for sharing your story!
To share a story or for resources, visit dei.cwea.org**

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