



**AUC students burn state flag in protest at Capitol**

**By John Blake**  
STAFF WRITER

Morehouse College senior Lawrence Jeffries thrust Georgia's flag into the cool air on Sunday and lit a makeshift torch with his free hand.

The small crowd hushed as he placed the crude wooden torch against the red and blue flag.

"We're going to send Georgia's racist past up in flames," the 20-year-old student said as flames engulfed the flag. "Today we fight fire with fire. Burn, baby, burn!"

Under the watchful eyes of armed Georgia Bureau of Investigation agents, Mr. Jeffries and 10 other Atlanta University Center (AUC) students burned the flag on the steps of the state Capitol.

The members of the Students for African American Empowerment (SAAE), a 2-month-old AUC student group, said they moved because it symbolizes racism.

"When the Confederate flag flew in the Civil War, it stood for white dominance and slavery," said 21-year-old SAAE member Kevin Donalson. "As a state flag, it still flies for white dominance and slavery."

The rally was peaceful with no arrests.

As speakers took their turn at the podium before the flag-burning, rain began to fall on the crowd of about 30, most of whom were reporters.

Undaunted, members of SAAE and two other groups, the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement and the Center for Democratic Renewal, trudged to the podium, one by one.

They said the Georgia flag symbolizes a brutal time in the history of African Americans, and they demanded that the Legislature restore the original Georgia flag; the state seal superimposed on a field of blue.

The current state flag — the Confederate battle flag alongside the state seal — was adopted in 1956 by defiant Georgia lawmakers who were angered by court-ordered integration.

Gov. Zell Miller has said he will ask the Legislature to change the flag next year.

As the students prepared to burn the flag at Sunday's rally, five GBI agents took positions on the steps of the Capitol. A sixth agent circled behind the crowd and took pictures of Mr. Jeffries as he torched the flag.

A reporter asked the agent why he was taking pictures. The agent scowled and turned away. A fellow GBI agent smiled. "Why does the newspaper take pictures?" he asked.

Lewis Grizzard's column will resume shortly.

**Burning Georgia's "racist past" is how Lawrence Jeffries (right) described the flag-burning Sunday at the Capitol. From left are Ina Solomon, Jeffery Harris and Stacy Abrams.**

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