If there was a word or symbol that was personally offensive to you, but others didn't see it that way, would you still be offended?

This is a question that can be posed when people say "retarded" but don't mean it offensively toward people who are mentally disabled, or when someone says "fag" but not in reference to someone who is homosexual.

Some symbols are contested on what their true meaning is.

Country singer Trace Adkins got some heat this past week as he sported a Confederate flag earpiece while performing during the nationally televised Rockefeller Center Christmas Tree Lighting.

To Adkins, the flag is representative of his Southern lineage because his ancestors fought for the Confederates and, he said in a statement, that he did not intend to offend anyone.

Although offense was not intended, don't we know by now that the Confederate flag is controversial and many find it offensive?

How much sincerity is there when someone says something and follows it with "no offense?" Typically, tacking on "no offense" at the end of a statement doesn't actually take away whatever offense it was carrying.

Of course it is Adkins' right to promote the Confederate flag and that he does so in a manner that is not to imply racism could make it OK, but should it be ignored that in doing so it might be bringing attention to an ugly time in America's history?

Why even bother with the Confederate flag when the American flag is an option that doesn't have negative connotations and represents all the freedoms of our country? The American flag can bring people together, while the Confederate flag separates people.

What if instead of a Confederate flag earpiece it was a swastika, and the claim was that it didn't represent the genocide of nearly six million Jewish people, but was a religious symbol, as it was to some before the Nazis adopted it as their own?

The connection between swastikas and the Holocaust is too strong and therefore the symbol is only seen as negative. It is unacceptable for people to claim that it represents anything other than genocide.

However, the Confederate flag is very popular in the southern part of the United States and can be seen on bumper stickers, belt buckles and some even get it tattooed. With such popularity, it does provoke the question: Does the Confederate flag still stand for what it did during the Civil War?

But at the same time, just because something is popular doesn't mean it's right. Some symbols are just too hard to overlook their negative past.

Another aspect to consider is that maybe the Confederate flag is only acceptable in the South and that it doesn't have a place in northern states.

As to where Illinois falls in that is unseen since those who live in the southern part of the state may have associated with southern customs, including the Confederate flag.

While the argument of freedom of speech can be made endlessly, those who choose to support the Confederate flag are also choosing to be ignorant as many people find it offensive.

The ironic part is, who knows if freedom of speech would exist if the Confederates hadn't lost the Civil War.