

in particular was enclosed and closed off by its slave system. To quote C. Vann Woodward: "The ironic thing about these two great hyphenate minorities, Southern-Americans and Afro-Americans, confronting each other on their native soil for three and a half centuries, is the degree to which they have shaped each other's destiny, determined each other's isolation, shared and molded a common culture. It is in fact impossible to imagine the one without the other and quite futile to try!"

Southern slave society grew from the same historical conditions that produced the world's other slave regimes. The rise of a world market and the need for cheap labor encouraged slavery, and only the advent of mechanical technology and industrialism rendered it inefficient and ultimately incapable of competing in the very market that created it. The South was haunted by its guilt and fear of slavery. Enslaving blacks was justified through claims that it was God's intent that whites were superior to blacks, that slavery civilized blacks and elevated them above their former status as jungle savages, and that in essence whites were carrying out God's law by making slaves and Christians out of pagan blacks. In reality, southern plantations were battlefields where slaves fought masters for physical and psychological survival, and although they were unlettered, outnumbered and unarmed, black slaves struggled in as many ways as they could to preserve their humanity against virtually inhuman odds. Southern whites bitterly resisted acknowledging the humanity of their black slaves (a contradiction of their claim of God's edict to Christianize them). Underlying their pious justifications was a terror of the system they had fabricated. The culture of the antebellum South was continually in dread of slave insurrection, and any outbreak was savagely suppressed. In a sense a reason for perpetuating slavery was the fear of reprisal once it was abolished.

Most northern whites also considered themselves superior to blacks and the desire to abolish slavery had more to do with its interference with paid labor than with human rights. Even a majority of the northern abolitionists who had risked imprisonment and their lives providing underground systems of escape for runaway slaves felt as Abraham Lincoln that blacks should dwell apart from whites.

Yet, ultimately, however intense the economic dialectics regarding slavery, and perhaps because the climate of industrialism allowed it, the most important reason for the abolition of slavery was the moral one. The idea of the inherent value of an individual outlasted slavery and was the chief source of its undoing. There were many reasons for the division of the young nation, South from North, but at its core was the inhumanity of slavery. Frank Tannenbaum, in his book *Slave & Citizen*, wrote that inherent in the history of slavery was an important contribution to the theory of social change: Wherever the law accepted the doctrine of the "moral personality" of the slave and made possible the gradual achievement of freedom implicit in such a doctrine, the slave system was abolished peacefully. Where the slave was denied recognition as a moral person and was therefore considered incapable of freedom, the abolition of slavery was accomplished by force, by violence and revolution.

We cannot separate our history from the long centuries of slavery. Without black slaves from Africa much of the Western Hemisphere would not have been converted into an enclave of European civilization. The fight for independence that characterized the American Revolution did not include liberty for slaves and the oversight caused the Civil War eighty years later.

Emancipation only brought a semblance of physical relief from slavery but its underlying racialism has not been eradicated nearly a century and a half later. If the class system of slavery is defined by color, then a post-slavery society becomes a form of apartheid, which has been the result in the United States since the Civil War, and which was starkly dramatized in the violence unleashed against the Civil Rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s. We begin the third millennium of our era still a divided nation, and as Lincoln said, though he was not the first to say it, a house divided will not long stand. Blacks as well as whites wish for separation, but there is really no other place to go. Just as whites are no longer Europeans, American blacks are not Africans anymore. For better or worse, blacks and whites are hybrid-Americans.

Slaves or free, the arduous, tragic and unequal role of black Americans in building and defending the nation has always been devalued and generally ignored. Just as the word *history* seems to imply only male endeavor (*his* story), so does it also imply Western/European/white dominance and supremacy over world affairs. Yet the black struggle for civic and social equality, especially in the last generation, has been the most inspiring

\*Roman slaves were granted not only freedom but much prized Roman citizenship.

\*\*Or for Native Americans, whom Jackson exiled to the far West and forced onto the 'Trail of Tears.'



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and closest to the revolution of the Enlightenment that gave birth to the United States than any other. This struggle is a continuation of what Washington, Jefferson, Adams, et al, started and unfortunately denied "people of color," who were regarded as property rather than persons "born equal" and certainly not "born free."

Lincoln's executive order of Emancipation went into effect January 1, 1863. Though it abolished slavery in the Confederate states (though not those under Union control), it was probably not legal according to U.S. civil law. To remedy any deficiencies in the proclamation in regard to its legal standing, the 13th Amendment to the Constitution was introduced in Congress in 1864 and was ratified in 1865, the year the Civil War ended. It abolished slavery or involuntary servitude in the United States or anywhere under U.S. jurisdiction. The Emancipation Proclamation, though it raised the conflict for union to an issue of international moral principle, had little initial practical impact because Lincoln at the time had no authority in the Confederacy.

Lincoln had proposed the proclamation the previous summer. Secretary of State Seward suggested he wait to announce it until a significant Union battlefield victory so that European governments would not misinterpret it as a final "shriek in our retreat."

Lincoln had said at the start of the Civil War, "If I could preserve the Union by freeing all of the slaves everywhere, I would do so. If I could preserve the Union by freeing none of the slaves, I would do so. If I could preserve the Union by freeing some of the slaves I would do so." His critics and some supporters thought the proclamation was a cynical act by a weak, vacillating President. Yet by conceding to "free the few" he struck to the heart of the conflict and never afterward wavered from his promise.

He got his victory at Sharpsburg, Maryland on September 16, 1862, near a little creek (and a church named after it) that forever gave the battle its name, Antietam. The Union Army routed a Confederate invasion of the North. It was the single bloodiest day of the Civil War: at least 15,000 dead on both sides and another 20,000 wounded or missing. (Union losses alone were twice as many as those of the Normandy D-Day landings 82 years later.) Five days after Antietam Lincoln issued his proclamation:

On the first day of January (1863)...all persons held as slaves within any State, or designated part of a State, the people whereof shall then be in rebellion against the United States, shall then be, thenceforth, and forever free.

"If my name ever goes into history," Lincoln said, "it was for this act."

It took a century and a southern President, a member of the 'Party of Traitors' to take the next step of what emancipation began. Lyndon Johnson successfully pushed through Congress the Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act of 1965. He said:

"Three and a half centuries ago, the first Negroes arrived. They came in darkness and in chains. The story of our nation and of the American Negro are like two rivers (that) flow through the centuries along divided channels. When the Liberty Bell rang out in Philadelphia, it did not toll for the Negro. When Andrew Jackson threw open the doors of democracy, they did not open for the Negro." It was only at Appomattox, a century ago, that an American victory was also a Negro victory. And the two rivers, one shining with promise, the other dark-stained with oppression, began to move toward one another."

But rivers of blood course between them. That same year of 1965 the Watts Riot in Los Angeles erupted, and eight years ago the worst domestic riot in U.S. history occurred in the same place because white police who savagely beat a black man senseless were acquitted by an all white jury.

With few exceptions American blacks are contained and isolated in urban ghettos in much the manner Nazis forced Jews into European ghettos. They are denied adequate education, employment, housing, education or health care, forced to subsist on deleterious doles stingily appropriated (which are exploited as examples of the need for abolishing welfare altogether). Their rage is forced inward against themselves. The barely constrained contempt whites hold for blacks is probably equally felt toward whites by blacks who are victims of the antipathy, but outnumbered 10 to 1 and without the tremendous legal strength and firepower of the whites, they are generally unable to strike back without horrendous consequences.

Not all whites are racial supremacists, though most are racist — if not intentionally, usually on impact. Yet, although whites have fought for and some have died for civil rights for blacks, the prevailing white attitude toward blacks was summed up in 1857 by Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court Roger Taney, when speaking for the majority in *Dred Scott* he stated that Negroes were considered "so far inferior that they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect."

Racism will only end when children of every race are taught early that the color of skin is far less than the quality of hearts and minds. That will not be easy. No less than the essential education system of the USA must be uprooted and rewritten to reflect the common struggle of both races to build and survive in this country. Then perhaps Lyndon Johnson's two rivers might converge.

"We cannot escape history," Lincoln said to Congress. "We...will be remembered in spite of ourselves. No personal significance or insignificance can spare one or another of us. The fiery trail through which we pass will light us down, in honor or dishonor, to the latest generation."

# Sunbelt Stories

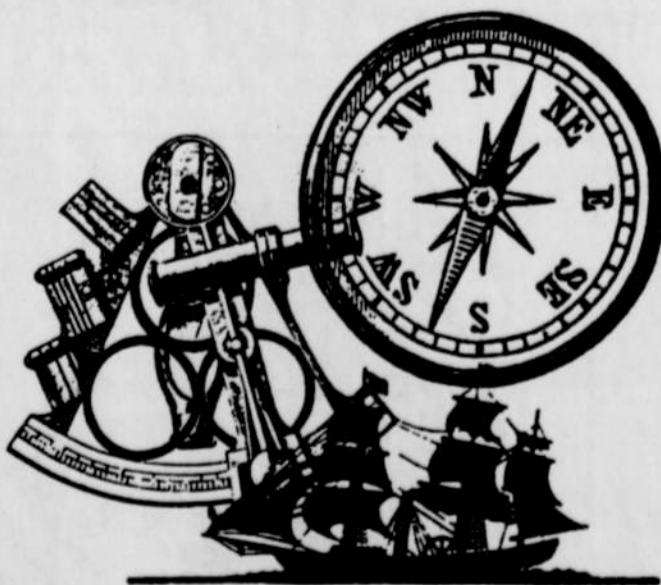
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