

Tea Party Issues

The Battle for Historical Truth

Hits: 4059

Shortly before his death at the Battle of Franklin, Tennessee, on November 30, 1864, Irish-born Confederate Major General Patrick Cleburne reminded his comrades in arms of the possible cost of surrender:

“Surrender means that the history of this heroic struggle will be written by the enemy, that our youths will be trained by Northern school teachers; learn from Northern school books THEIR version of the war; and taught to regard our gallant dead as traitors and our maimed veterans as fit subjects of derision.”

This was particularly true during the Reconstruction years from 1865 through 1877. Not only was the South exploited economically, it was also subjected to continuous political despotism in an attempt to remold its social and political structures in the image of Northern radicalism. The concomitant objective of this tyrannical reign was to maintain the dominant national party in power without serious opposition. In addition, many Northern politicians campaigning at home “waved the bloody shirt,” reminding Northern voters how much invading the South had cost in Northern blood and treasure. Demonization of the South and the cause of Southern independence continued to be a dominant feature of Northern politics for many decades.

In an address to the graduates of Hampden Sidney College in Virginia in 1887, prominent theologian Robert L. Dabney advised them that Northern interests were straining every nerve to falsify or misrepresent history in order to justify the late war and sustain Northern national dominance. He warned them that:

“With a gigantic sweep of mendacity, this literature aims to falsify or misrepresent everything; the very facts of history, the principles of the former Constitution as admitted in the days of freedom by all statesmen of all parties ... The whole sway of their commercial and political ascendancy is exerted to fill the South with this false literature. Its sheets come up, like the frogs of Egypt, into our houses, our bed chambers, our very kneading troughs.”

Union propaganda generally served up a self-justifying misrepresentation of the war as a morality play in which a noble Union Army marched forth to battle for the glorious purpose of emancipating downtrodden slaves from evil Southerners. This explanation has been continued in an even more strident and self-righteous form in modern political correctness. These often-repeated assertions attempt to claim the moral high ground for Northern aggression and to discredit the South’s resistance to that aggression as “morally wrong.”

No serious student of the “Civil War” believes that the Union invaded the South to emancipate the slaves. Such ignorance, however, is commonplace. This propagandistic version of the war is commonly taught in public schools and, in ignorance, even in many Christian schools. Yet it has little basis in fact. Slavery was an issue between North and South, but not in the propagandistic, fabricated moral sense usually assumed. The extension of slavery into new territories was an

Tea Party Issues

issues. The Northern States wanted to preserve the new states for free labor without unfair competition from slave labor, but they also feared the possible social consequences of bringing in large numbers of blacks into the new territories. Most Northern legislatures severely restricted the entry of blacks, slave or free, into their states. Southern political leaders, on the other hand, felt that legislation preventing Southern immigrants from bringing their slaves into the new territories violated their property rights and was designed to assure Northern dominance in the new states and the national Congress. It was in the latter sense a matter of political numbers—part of an ongoing struggle for legislative dominance in Congress. It was the fear of unfettered Northern political dominance that made limited Constitutional government and States Rights paramount to the interests of Southern states.

President Woodrow Wilson was once asked how the role of slavery became so distorted and exaggerated as a cause of the “Civil War.” Wilson gave this succinct answer:

“It was necessary to put the South at a moral disadvantage by transforming the contest from a war waged against states fighting for their independence into a war waged against states fighting for the maintenance and extension of slavery...”

In the decades before the “Civil War,” the political parties that dominated North and South had come to have almost opposite interpretations of the Constitution. The Republican Party that emerged as the dominant party in the North in 1860 was essentially a big-business-big-government party willing to sacrifice the Constitution to national industrial and political greatness. Yet the South believed Constitutional government, and especially States Rights, were essential to its political and economic well-being. At that time, the terms “Conservative” and “Democrat” were virtual political synonyms. How things have changed!

Southerners also believed they were being forced to submit to a government whose character had been sacrificed to corrupt sectionalism. This sectionalism had been most flagrant in the protective tariffs passed to benefit Northern industry and imposed against strong Southern opposition beginning in 1824. This culminated in the passage of the Morrill Tariff, signed into law on February 2, 1861, which imposed tremendous hardship on the South for the benefit of Northern industry. This legislation nearly tripled the tariff burden on the South and virtually compelled the cotton producing states to secede. The immediate cause of armed conflict beyond the bloodless Fort Sumter confrontation was, however, Lincoln’s call for 75,000 troops on April 15 to put down the “rebellion” of seceding states and assure the tariff was collected.

Few modern writers recognize that there was also an underlying religious conflict between North and South that went to more fundamental depths than the debate over slavery. Secular propaganda has succeeded in framing the issue as a debate over slavery, but the truly essential issue was a debate over the authority and interpretation of Scripture, with the South taking the conservative side of the debate. Southern Biblical conservatives had their allies in the North, but one Southern cleric remarked that North and South had fundamentally different interpretations of the Constitution and the Bible.

Tea Party Issues

There were several decades from the late 1890s until the end of 1950s that saw a reconciliation of North and South. This was largely the result of efforts by the veterans on both sides of the war. Despite differences, each side treated the other with respect and even admiration. Southern cultural symbols thrived in a relatively friendly atmosphere of mutual understanding.

In the early 1960s, however, legitimate civil rights issues began to be pushed beyond the pale of Constitutional government, sound judgment, and fairness. Liberal politicians and demagogues then began to use the slavery and race issues again as a weapon to shut down debate on issues like school-busing for the purpose of racial balance, racial quotas and preferences, and other coercive methods of social change reminiscent of Reconstruction. This eventually led to tyrannical social and academic political correctness being imposed on discussion of issues related to race, slavery, and the "Civil War." These intellectual chains have also spread to any issue that conflicts with the now dominant philosophy of secular humanism. Unfortunately, the chains of political correctness are most heavily forged in academia. Degrees, grants, scholarships, promotions, publication opportunities, and academic prestige are often dependent on adherence to politically correct dogma and presuppositions. Beyond academia, political correctness has grown like a virulent cancer. This has been inimical to truth and courage, without which, no nation or people can long remain free.

Perhaps because of the radical and extremely misguided economic and fiscal policies of the Obama administration, many Americans are gaining new insight into how severely our freedoms have been eroded by big government unrestrained by the enumerated powers and States Rights in the Constitution. Americans, at least some of them, are beginning to realize again that big government endangers freedom. They are also beginning to realize that without the counterbalance of zealously guarded States Rights, federal power is essentially unlimited.

Ironically, constitutionally limited government and States Rights were what the so-called "Civil War" was really all about. In May 1865, while a prisoner in chains, former Confederate President Davis reminded North and South that:

"The principle for which we contended is bound to reassert itself, though it may be at another time and in another form."

The "Tea Parties" have rediscovered the issues. Let us hope that they will also have the insight and courage to be honest historians as well.

Americans, of all sections and races, have not been well-served by whitewashed or propagandistic history. True unity cannot be imposed by guns and bayonets or enhanced by false versions of history. True and lasting unity must be founded on a mutual respect for truth. Truth is the surest foundation for freedom.

Tea Party Issues

Mike Scruggs is a retired financial consultant and corporate business executive. He holds an MBA from Stanford University and a BS from the University of Georgia. He is a USAF combat veteran of the Vietnam War, holding a Distinguished Flying Cross and Purple Heart. He was recently Chairman of the Board of a Classical Christian School and is a former Republican County Chairman. He writes and lives in Hendersonville, NC.