

THE "BUBBA" MIND

I've been perplexed for a long time as to why the 'white nationalist/supremacist' mindset has been perpetuated for the century-and-a-half since the Civil War. So I decided to do a little research on that whole subject and I was amazed at how little I knew about the origins of the movement and how it was perpetuated. A little history is in order ... please bear with me.

To begin with, slavery, primarily of peoples of African descent, was prevalent at the time of the writing of the Constitution. Even the state of New York, in 1789, allowed slavery but abolished it prior to 1800. The Constitution even acknowledged the institution when it agreed to count slaves as 3/5 of a person for the purposes of the census and apportioning legislative seats.

The Jefferson administration in 1808 banned the further importation of slaves, but the northern tier of slave states sold/shipped their excess population of slaves south to work in the cotton fields.

The incorporation of the Louisiana Purchase created a rift between the Southern states, who depended on slave labor for their agricultural needs, and the Northern states, who had ample labor pools for manufacturing. The southerners wanted to make the number of any new states/territories equal in terms of whether they would be slave-permitting or free entities. This was to preserve the balance of power in the Congress between slave and free states.

By 1850 the animosity between the two factions had reached a level to where the cotton-growing states in the South were threatening to secede from the Union. When Lincoln won the presidency in 1860 on a platform of ending the expansion of slavery, seven states in the south seceded (South Carolina, Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas). Four others (Virginia, Arkansas, Tennessee, and North Carolina) joined the Confederacy once the Civil War began. The war actually started with the attack on Fort Sumpter in Charleston harbor. The rest is history.

The slave culture in the South was always there from the first settling of the land. It was institutionalized in the early seventeenth century with the establishment of large plantations involved with the cotton and tobacco trades. It was white-oriented and the black population was always considered to be property with no rights.

There was only a five-generation spread between the start of the

eighteenth century and the beginning of the civil war. There is only a five generation spread between the end of the Civil War and the present day.

Consider that the cultural norms of the south had one-hundred-sixty years to mature and be ingrained into the social structure before the Civil War. That social structure which took a century-and-a-half to build was torn apart in the space of five years.

In the TV film 'Gettysburg', the writers have the following explanation of secession between General George Pickett and the British envoy to the Confederacy:

"Suppose that we all joined a club, a gentlemen's club. After a time, several of the members began to intrude themselves into our private lives, our home lives. Began telling us what we could and couldn't do. Well, then, wouldn't any one of us have the right to resign? I mean, just resign. That's what we did. That's what I did and now these people are telling us that we don't have that right to resign."

In addition, we have to remember that the only Civil War battle that was actually fought on Union territory was at Gettysburg - every other battle of the war was on Confederacy land. The soldiers of the Confederacy were theoretically then defending their home turf - which puts a more defensive and defiant attitude in place. I can only imagine how I would feel if my state were 'invaded' by the federal government and my way of life altered radically. The Southerners considered the conflict to be 'The War of Northern Aggression.' Many still hold that opinion and, it would seem, for good historical reason.

To amplify all these feelings, the Union armies were basically foraging, once they crossed the Mason-Dixon line. This meant that they were confiscating crops and livestock that most of the southerners were relying on to personally exist. Sherman, on his march to the sea, added insult to injury by burning most of the structures that he ran across (not to mention much of the city of Atlanta), making it impossible for those affected to forgive and forget.

Once the war was over, Lincoln's primary objective was to make it relatively easy for the Confederate states to rejoin the Union. His assassination left his Vice-President, Andrew Johnson to carry out those policies. I quote extensively from Wikipedia for a while:

At the end of May 1865, President Andrew Johnson announced his plans for Reconstruction, which reflected both his staunch Unionism and his firm belief in states' rights. In Johnson's view, the southern states had never given up their right to govern themselves, and the federal government had no right to determine voting requirements or other questions at the state level. Under Johnson's Presidential Reconstruction, all land that had been confiscated by the Union Army and distributed to the freed slaves by the army or the Freedmen's Bureau (established by Congress in 1865) reverted to its prewar owners. Apart from being required to uphold the abolition of slavery (in compliance with the 13th Amendment to the Constitution), swear loyalty to the Union and pay off war debt, southern state governments were given free reign to rebuild themselves.

As a result of Johnson's leniency, many southern states in 1865 and 1866 successfully enacted a series of laws known as the "black codes," which were designed to restrict freed blacks' activity and ensure their availability as a labor force. These repressive codes enraged many in the North, including numerous members of Congress, which refused to seat congressmen and senators elected from the southern states. In early 1866, Congress passed the Freedmen's Bureau and Civil Rights Bills and sent them to Johnson for his signature. The first bill extended the life of the bureau, originally established as a temporary organization charged with assisting refugees and freed slaves, while the second defined all persons born in the United States as national citizens who were to enjoy equality before the law. After Johnson vetoed the bills, causing a permanent rupture in his relationship with Congress that would culminate in his impeachment in 1868, the Civil Rights Act became the first major bill to become law over presidential veto.

After northern voters rejected Johnson's policies in the congressional elections in late 1866, Republicans in Congress took firm hold of Reconstruction in the South. The following March, again over Johnson's veto, Congress passed the Reconstruction Act of 1867, which temporarily divided the South into five military districts and outlined how governments based on universal (male) suffrage were to be organized. The law also required southern states to ratify the 14th Amendment, which broadened the definition of citizenship, granting "equal protection" of the Constitution to former slaves, before they could rejoin the Union. In February 1869, Congress approved the 15th Amendment (adopted in 1870), which guaranteed that a citizen's right to vote would not be denied "on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude."

By 1870, all of the former Confederate states had been admitted to the Union, and the state constitutions during the years of Radical Reconstruction were the most progressive in the region's history. African-American participation in southern public life after 1867 would be by far the most radical development of Reconstruction, which was essentially a large-scale experiment in interracial democracy unlike that of any other society following the abolition of slavery. Blacks won election to southern state governments and even to the U.S. Congress during this period. Among the other achievements of Reconstruction were the South's first state-funded public school systems, more equitable taxation legislation, laws against racial discrimination in public transport and accommodations and ambitious economic development programs (including aid to railroads and other enterprises).

After 1867, an increasing number of southern whites turned to violence in response to the revolutionary changes of Radical Reconstruction. The Ku Klux Klan and other white supremacist organizations targeted local Republican leaders, white and black, and other African Americans who challenged white authority. Though

federal legislation passed during the administration of President Ulysses S. Grant in 1871 took aim at the Klan and others who attempted to interfere with black suffrage and other political rights, white supremacy gradually reasserted its hold on the South after the early 1870s as support for Reconstruction waned. Racism was still a potent force in both South and North, and Republicans became more conservative and less egalitarian as the decade continued. In 1874, after an economic depression plunged much of the South into poverty, the Democratic Party won control of the House of Representatives for the first time since the Civil War.

When Democrats waged a campaign of violence to take control of Mississippi in 1875, Grant refused to send federal troops, marking the end of federal support for Reconstruction-era state governments in the South. By 1876, only Florida, Louisiana and South Carolina were still in Republican hands. In the contested presidential election that year, Republican candidate Rutherford B. Hayes reached a compromise with Democrats in Congress: In exchange for certification of his election, he acknowledged Democratic control of the entire South. The Compromise of 1876 marked the end of Reconstruction as a distinct period, but the struggle to deal with the revolution ushered in by slavery's eradication would continue in the South and elsewhere long after that date. A century later, the legacy of Reconstruction would be revived during the civil rights movement of the 1960s, as African Americans fought for the political, economic and social equality that had long been denied them.

Since the Second World War, these racial views left over from the Civil War have been merged and amplified by the Master-race theology of the Third Reich, and spawned a resurgence of the white-nationalist and white-supremacist movements.

This, of course, not only reinstated de facto segregation in the South, but reinforced it.

The current administration has given these groups an almost free hand to emerge from the shadows and proclaim their views. The 'bubbas' of the resentful South have combined with the militia movements and other racially-monolithic groups to form a toxic brew of formerly extreme views that are attempting to become mainstream.

With three-plus living generations within the family group, it's not difficult to see how attitudes and prejudices are passed down over the dinner table or informally in conversation. I can remember in my own family, getting the admonition from my mother: "I don't want you playing with" [fill in the blank]. That blank was many times 'that Mexican kid' or some other group. It didn't matter that I got along fine with them but the subliminal social stigma of having the 'wrong associations' would win out every time.

This, then is the framework that has generated the distrust and anger at the federal government as well as the racial and ethnic hatreds that have emerged alongside it. And it's been within my lifetime that the

civil rights movement and legislation has been passed and enforced.

People that were brought up in the South pre-1960 are still with us and still possess those same racist and sexist attitudes and prejudices. The residual resentment has been passed down from generation to generation, parent to child for the intervening one-hundred-fifty years. It will probably be two or three more generations before the more virulent aspects of the Civil War legacy are muted again.

I lived in Dallas, Texas, for a few years in the 1970's. Almost everywhere I turned, this same underlying current of antipathy was present. On the surface, it was southern hospitality and charm, but below the outward appearance, racism and the culture wars were just a scratch away. I saw it first hand when three generations of a person I worked with all parroted the same racial views. The city (like most cities, and most not in the South) was still largely segregated and showed no signs of making major gains in integration of the schools or communities.

To see these prejudices and ideologies in action, I suggest watching the movie "A Time to Kill", starring Matthew McConaughey and Sandra Bullock. It encapsulates the way the South viewed racial stereotypes in the mid-twentieth century, and still retains much of that ideology to this day. For some it will be a reminder, and for others an eye-opener. But for all, it is a potent insight in how far we have to go to eliminate or at least diminish the problem of race in this country.