

OLD TIMES THERE ARE NOT FORGOTTEN

By M. Kelly Tillery

Louisiana, the state of my birth and upbringing, was recently rated in a U.S. News & World Report survey as “The Worst State To Live In.” As my brother who still lives there observed, “OMG! We lost to Mississippi?” Really. In eight categories - healthcare, education, economy, opportunity, infrastructure, crime, fiscal stability and quality of life, “The Sportsmen’s Paradise” ranked No. 50, the lowest of all states (“Best States 2018,” media.beam.usnews.com).

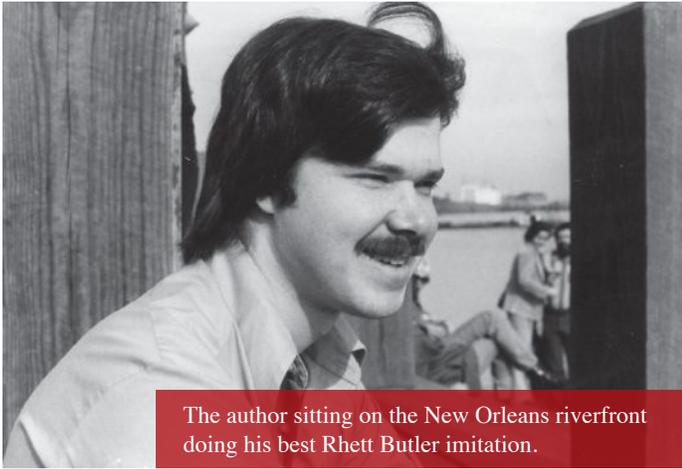
I was saddened, but unsurprised. I left Louisiana to attend college in Pennsylvania 46 years ago, in large part because I found my home state a racist backwater and intellectual wasteland, or as iconoclast H. L. Mencken put it best, though speaking

of the entire Old South in 1920, “The Sahara of the Bozart.” Seems not a lot has changed in almost a century.

As a student of history of the Civil War, and in the era of Trump, I was curious to see how Louisiana and the other 10 former Confederate







The author sitting on the New Orleans riverfront doing his best Rhett Butler imitation.

Those who now clamor to “Make America Great Again” fail, unsurprisingly, to explain precisely what time period in the past they refer to when they say America was “great.”

States of America (1861-1865) were faring 153 years after their ignominious and well-deserved defeat, and 140 years after reconstruction of those states failed so miserably due primarily to their stubborn, racist resistance.

Florida (No. 15) and Virginia (No. 20), do rather well, but are special cases. The former is largely populated by post-World War II immigrants from the North. And the stunning growth of the latter, once the heartland of “state’s rights” is, ironically, a result of the expansion of the federal government in and around Washington D.C.

Six other former Confederate states fare not much better than Louisiana - Mississippi (No. 49), Alabama (No. 46), Arkansas (No. 45), South Carolina (No. 41), Texas (No. 36), and Georgia (No. 31). Tennessee (No. 26) and North Carolina (No. 23) appear in the middle of the pack, but they were two of the four Upper South states of the Confederacy, almost border states.

So, seven of 11 former Confederate States remain, after all these years, the least healthy, safe, educated, bountiful and stable places to live in this country. All 11 fall below 30 in at least three of the eight categories. Two do so in four categories, and five do so in five or more. Alabama in seven, and Louisiana in all eight. Real progress in 153 years.

Five of those seven rank in the bottom 10 in education and all rank below 40 in healthcare. Of the 11, only one, Arkansas, has a lower-than-national-average percentage of residents not covered by health insurance. More than 40 percent of the nation’s poor live in these states and more than five million of them are children. All but Virginia have higher-than-average poverty rates. All have higher-than-average infant mortality rates, with Mississippi having the highest in the nation. Six of the 11 have unemployment rates higher than the national average. Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas, Mississippi, Alabama and Georgia are also, perhaps not coincidentally, the top states in incarcerations. Only two have lower-than-national-average divorce rates.

In all, one can get a driver’s license at the tender age of 15 (14 in Arkansas). In eight, one can marry at 16 or younger (14 in North Carolina). Louisiana, Arkansas and Mississippi have no marriage-age minimum. Family values, I guess. There is, however, uniformity there, and in all states, as to the drinking age due solely to the 1984 National Minimum Drinking Age Act which made a 21-year-old drinking age a condition for a state to receive federal highway funds. It seems that, as

disgraced former Philadelphia Congressman Ozzie Meyers famously said, “Money talks... and b-s- walks.”

Perhaps the president should have looked closer to home when he referred to certain places as “sh--hole countries.” But then again, every one, except Florida (the only one where he owns property), voted for him.

RECONSTRUCTION REDUX

In assessing why this is so, it is well to listen to today’s foremost authority on Reconstruction, Columbia University professor of history Eric Foner:

“From the enforcement of the rights of citizens to the stubborn problems of economic and racial justice, the issues central to Reconstruction are as old as the American Republic, and as contemporary as the inequalities that still afflict our society.”

We have come so far and have so much further to go, yet it seems that the bulk of the former Confederacy is still suffering miserably from the failure of, and resistance to, 153 years of the First Reconstruction and the Second Reconstruction of the Civil Rights Era.

Gallup reports that 57 percent of Southerners think the federal government does too much. Curiously, however, these former bastions of “states’ rights” which claimed and often still claim that the federal government should do little more than provide defense and postal services, rely more on largesse from Washington than other states. Four are in the top-10 recipients of same – Mississippi (No. 1), Louisiana (No. 2), Tennessee (No. 3) and Georgia (No. 8). Border State Kentucky is (No. 5). Alabama and Arkansas are close at (No. 14) and (No. 21), respectfully.

CORRUPTION

This U.S. News study did not include a category on public corruption. If it had, I would have expected Louisiana again take the gold, closely followed by my adopted state of Pennsylvania and other Yankee states like Illinois and New York. However, another recent study, also done for U.S. News, by The Center of Public Integrity, actually finds The Bayou State at only (No. 9), with fellow former Confederate states South Carolina (No. 13) and Texas (No. 15) almost in the top 10. Pennsylvania “proudly” stands at No. 6, hard on

the heels of gambling Mecca, Nevada. Apparently, greed and lack of principle and character know not the Mason-Dixon Line.

WRONG SIDE OF HISTORY

Astoundingly, Southern solons today continue their relentless efforts to restrict federal benefits to their own most-needy citizens, ensuring that their states will remain at the bottom of the next U.S. News poll. For example, Kentucky (a border slave state), Arkansas and Mississippi have all enacted, or are trying to enact, laws requiring Medicaid recipients to work as a condition of coverage, even though most cannot work or there are no jobs for those who can, so the laws just mean denial of health care. In June 2018, a federal judge blocked Kentucky's cruel law, as it would have caused 95,000 more Kentuckians to lose health care coverage. The Bluegrass State – proud to be No. 41?

“THE NIGHT THEY DROVE OLE DIXIE DOWN”

While perhaps it is only amusing to speculate, it is unlikely that a Confederate government would have provided more for the more than 100 million citizens of those 11 states today.

The leaders of the Confederacy, in addition to believing that slavery was the “cornerstone” (C.S.A. V.P. Alexander H. Stephens) of their new “nation,” did not believe that their “national” government should do very much at all. The Confederate Constitution, authored by slave dealer and Georgia lawyer, Thomas R. R. Cobb, mimicked ours in most respects, but specifically excluded from its congress the power “to provide for the general welfare” (Cf, U.S. Constitution, Article I, Section 8, C1.1) and limited expenditures on internal improvements to only waterway navigation. After the war, all 11 CSA states did provide pension benefits for their veterans, yet mostly only for the indigent and limbless, and such were minimal compared to those the federal government provided for Union veterans and their dependents.

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Alexander Tillery, son of the author, standing next to the marker for the only spot where Abraham Lincoln spoke in Philadelphia as President of the United States.

to when they say America was “great.” Is it the Reagan Era, The Fabulous Fifties, the Roaring Twenties, the Gilded Age or, perhaps, Antebellum? Make America Confederate Again? Or maybe just a dog whistle for “Make America White Again?” It would not be surprising to see their passion for “de-regulation” include efforts to repeal the 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments.

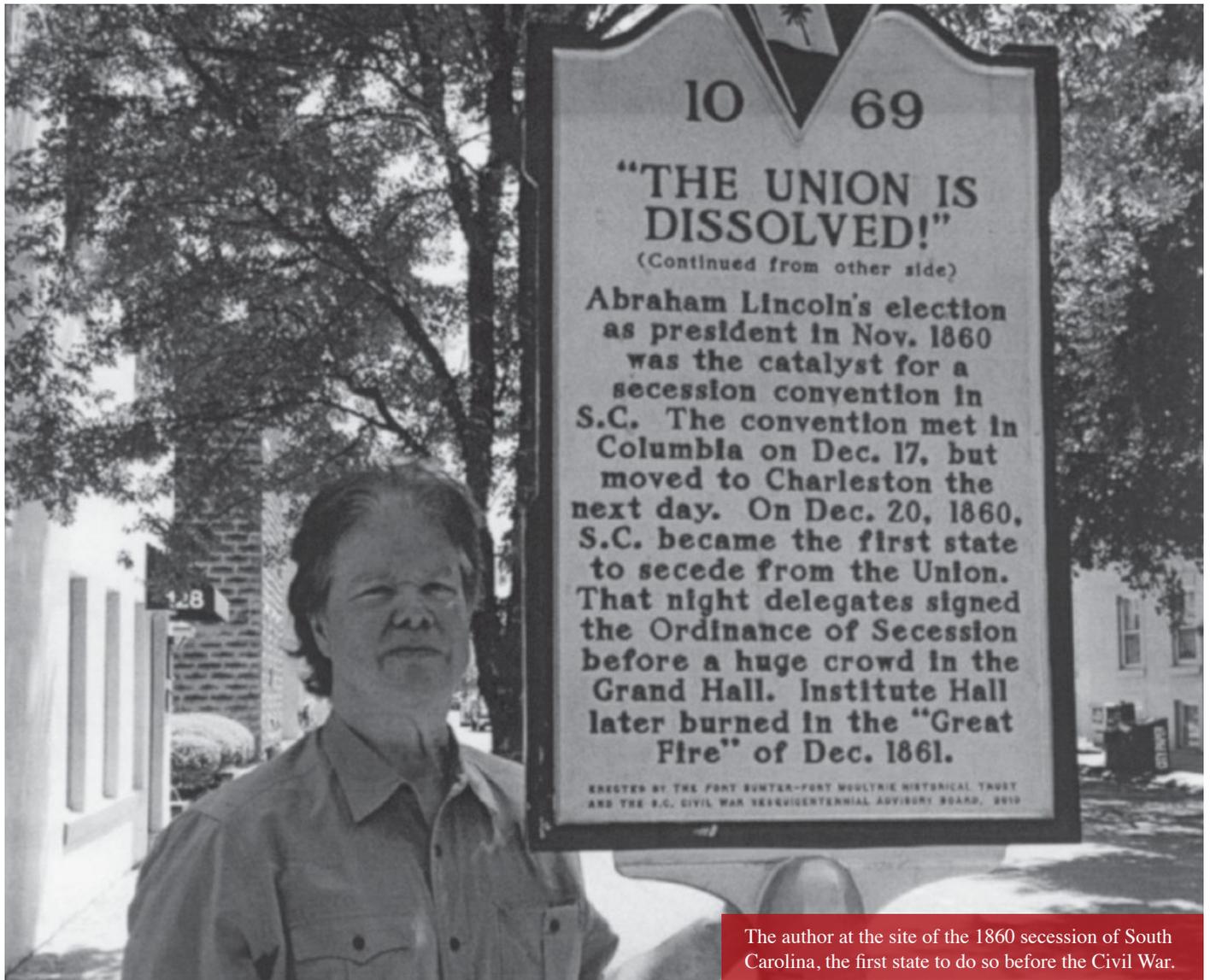
Lincoln said that every time he looked across the Ohio River from the free state of Ohio to Kentucky, the slave state of his birth, he could see the stark reality of the difference between an economy based on free labor and one based on slavery. As it is now, Cincinnati was then a booming metropolis of commerce and energy, while right across the river lay the empty expanse of northern Kentucky. Fly into the “Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky International Airport” in Hebron, Boone County, Kentucky today and see two worlds separated by

a river, not so different in relative terms, as they were in the 1860s. The legacy of slavery, Jim Crow and resistance to Reconstruction, not so far in the past.

POLITICS

In 1948, segregationist Dixiecrat presidential candidate Strom Thurmond carried four states – all former Confederate States. In 1964, Republican Barry Goldwater, an avowed foe of civil rights legislation, won six states, his own (Arizona) and five of the old Confederacy. In 1968, segregationist and Trump forebear, American Independent George Wallace, also won five former Confederate states.

Nixon learned from Wallace's success and won all the Southern states using his legendary and reprehensible “Southern Strategy” in 1972. And in 2016, “Republican” Donald Trump almost matched Nixon using his same strategy, taking 10 of the 11. All but



The author at the site of the 1860 secession of South Carolina, the first state to do so before the Civil War.

Louisiana, North Carolina and Virginia have Republican governors, 19 of their 22 U.S. Senators are Republican, and all have Republican-controlled legislatures. They were all originally “Democrat,” until, by no coincidence, the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

After two years of Republican control of Congress and the presidency, recent studies by economists, one by Rebecca Diamond and one by Peter Canons and Daniel Shoag, show clearly that “Trump counties,” particularly in the South, continue to fall farther behind the country economically, which translates into worse schools, more crime, fewer amenities and more. Yet, even in the “Blue Wave” of the 2018 midterms, most of the South still went Republican.

“WE’RE NO. 1”

These states do, however, lead the nation in one crucial area – voter suppression. Sure, they had so many years of experience with the KKK, poll taxes, literacy tests and gerrymandering, but “New South” legislators (read “Republican”) have vastly more modern and creative means to suppress the vote than Rhett ever dreamed of. Five years after

the Supreme Court (read “Republican-controlled”) gutted the Voting Rights Act (*Shelby County v. Holder*), for example, Alabama (No. 46, remember) has enacted laws providing at least seven innovative ways to suppress the vote of African Americans, Latinos and other marginalized groups. Not to be outdone, every other former CSA state has similar laws either on the books or planned. For example, of the 16 states which have active voter ID laws, nine are in the South. Of the 13 which have aggressive voter purge laws, five are in the South. Such efforts should be unsurprising from the states which participated in, then refused to recognize, the results of the 1860 presidential election, turning to bullets when they failed with ballots.

“STATES’ RIGHTS?”

Without acknowledging it, the slave power which had created the Confederacy to survive an existential war, had turned its back on its putative founding principles of “states’ rights” and succeeded in creating and maintaining a functioning national government for four years. One wonders what it could have accomplished in those years if at peace and with a free labor economy. Post-war, and more particularly

post-Reconstruction, the former leaders of the Rebellion who returned to power throughout the South, had by then completely forgotten how they had been able to survive during the four years of war. They, of course, lost, but if they had not so quickly and efficiently embraced the tools of a national government, they would not have lasted a year.

Sadly, they forgot that lesson, remembering only the more recent effects of the power of the Washington D.C.-based national government during Reconstruction which had given their former slaves freedom and the vote upending their culture of racism and greed.

The Confederacy was a centralized, national government with high taxes, a draft, impressment, suspension of habeas corpus, strict economic and industrial management and control of almost all transport. In addition to building a substantial and effective military machine, the CSA built a large, powerful, functioning civil government which at one point actually employed 70,000 civilians, curiously the same number of employees in today's Internal Revenue Service. While the Confederate congress famously debated big issues ad nauseum and left many unresolved, like whether to establish a Supreme Court, it was complicit in Jeff Davis's complete reversal of their "states' rights" political principles which had been the purported basis for Secession. Which, of course, proves the obvious point that the war was not about "states' rights," but rather slavery.

So how do we account for the continued lag, in all categories, of these states so long after the war? As so many of their white citizens are fond of saying of blacks, with a "level playing field," surely they should have made something of themselves in all that time? The question invites a book length analysis of 150 years of culture, politics and economics, but let us here examine just a few salient points.

First, they lost their largest "capital asset" – four million slaves, conservatively valued in 1865 at \$3 billion. But they gained an equal number of hard-working, experienced, free farm workers and craftsmen in need of employment and demanding

homes, education and consumer goods, if they had just worked with them instead of against them.

Second, while the war primarily visited destruction on the South, its primary physical asset remained scarred, but arable – its land. The South was by far primarily agricultural and had little in the way of manufactories, and most of non-military nature were back up and running not long after the war, including Richmond's famed Tredegar Iron Works, maker of the U.S. Capitol's dome.

Third, post-Civil War, the South experienced a significant labor/brain drain, of both white and black. Hundreds of thousands of newly free blacks fled their plantation prisons for hoped-for prosperity in the North, as did many disgruntled white Southerners.

Fourth, and most importantly, the relentless, governmental, institutional and personal racism, made it an area where few with capital wanted to invest, much less reside. Violence, voter suppression, lynchings, KKK and "separate but unequal" left it a wasteland of primarily farms producing staples for export for scores of years. It was only after the "Second

Reconstruction" of the 1960s, the Civil Rights Era, that substantial American businesses ventured into the South to garner the benefits of cheaper energy and non-union labor.

Fifth, Southern politicians of both parties relentlessly strove to minimize and restrict taxes and thus any governmental aid to their citizens, primarily because they did not want to share the bounty of the nation with black citizens.

Perhaps it is no surprise that according to a recent Rasmussen poll, almost one-third of the country thinks there will be a new Civil War within the next five years.

That worked out so well for the South the last time. Look away ... Dixieland. ■

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