

Brief Commentary on the War Between The States

By William Speir

This week marks the 150th anniversary of the beginning of what is incorrectly referred to as the American Civil War. It is properly called the “War Between The States,” which is the official term as defined by congress. Civil War implies that two competing forces were struggling for control of a single government. The South left the Union and the North launched an illegal war to force them back into the Union. The South did not want control of the US government, they simply wanted the North to respect the constitutional limits of the central government's power over the states. When it became clear that the North wanted to change those constitutionally defined controls, the South left in order to create a new country where those constitutional limits would be maintained. The Northern states invaded, defeated, and subjugated the Southern states, thus the “War Between The States.”

The leaders of the Northern Cause have been deified, even though their actions were illegal. Lincoln called for raising an army to invade the South without congressional authority or approval. The War was started while congress was not in session, essentially making Lincoln a military dictator of a nation that had thrown off the shackles of a King only to have them put back on by an overly ambitious politician. In spite of this, Lincoln is today revered as one of the most beloved Presidents in the history of the United States - second only to George Washington and credited with “saving the nation.” His actions may have, indeed, kept the states together as a single nation, but it was done at the point of the gun and sword. The war crimes committed by the North against the South have been ignored and the victims forgotten thanks to the way the history books were written.

The leaders of the Southern Cause have been demonized for years. However, most people forget that even Martin Luther King had great admiration for Robert E. Lee and mentioned it often. These great Southerners, caught between love and country and love of their state, made hard decisions based on their belief that the central government was supposed to be subordinate to the will of the states and that Lincoln's actions were illegal. Lee was offered command of the Union Army, but refused when he realized that the federal troops would have to cross Virginia to attack the South, and he could not envision taking federal troops through his state to attack other states that had left the union peacefully and legally.

There are also people (those who attempt to rewrite history in order to demonize the South and perpetuate the myth that the North was on a holy mission) who point out the slavery issue as if that justifies the murder of 500,000 Americans. Looking through our filters of today, slavery is a horrid institution. However, in the 1860's, slavery was legal - legally protected by state and federal laws. The north had taken 80 years to abolish slavery as part of its economic engine - not hard given the Irish and Italian immigrants who were treated little better than slaves and provided the cheap labor the Northern industrial complex needed. The South, however, had no such access to alternative cheap labor and retained slavery as central to its economic engine. The North wanted the South to give up slavery overnight, rather than giving the South the same amount of time the North had taken to change it's labor composition. And since, at that time, slaves were considered property, the North was attempting to violate the constitution by requiring the South to give up property without compensation. The South was not prepared to do this in the time frame being demanded by the North, and the North's unwillingness to

compromise forced the Southern states to peacefully leave the union in order to preserve their rights and their economy.

It is interesting to note that the South had no slave trade. Even the Confederate Constitution prevented the South from having a slave trade. The slave trade was based in Boston and Portsmouth, Massachusetts, and the Confederate Constitution stated that it would continue to rely on New England to provide its slaves. Slavery was a Northern Business, which makes it even more odd that the North wanted it abolished since it reaped the financial benefit of slave imports. History has forgotten this fact. Another fact that history has forgotten is that there were black slaveholders. It is estimated that almost 11% of all southern slaveholders were free blacks, according to the records that survived the war. An additional fact that history forgets is that almost 50,000 blacks fought FOR the Confederacy - not to preserve slavery, but to defend their homes from an invader. As an example, when Louisiana left the union, the first volunteer regiment that was raised and offered for Confederate service was comprised of 1,000 free blacks in New Orleans who wanted nothing more than to preserve their homes and their way of life.

Thanks to the War Between The States, the structure of our government was changed from one where the central government was subordinate to the will of the states and the people, as defined by the constitution, to one where the people and the states are subordinate to the will of the central government - without a change to the constitution authorizing such a structure change and without the ratification of that change by the people. Thus, the War Between The States, started by a president who did not have congressional authority to raise an army and invade the South, remains an illegal war because it changed our system of government through a force of arms rather than by the will of the people as established by the constitution. The cost of this illegal war? over 500,000 deaths (military and civilian alike) of Americans - more than the number of Americans lost in all other wars combined. That's a high price to establish a government that operates outside the constitutional limits of government as set forth by "We The People..."

The War Between The States is the most misunderstood period of American History because the victors (the North) wrote the histories to ensure that their illegal actions were remembered as both legal and necessary for the greater good. In the end, though, rhetoric aside, the fact is that, thanks to Lincoln, 500,000 Americans died needlessly so that the US Constitution could be cast aside and the government, as defined by our founding fathers, could be replaced with a central government that wielded absolute power over the states once and for all. Lincoln and his cronies thought they knew better than the founding fathers, and today we're still living under the results of their actions.

Think about the word "state." In common usage, a state is "a country or nation with its own sovereign independent government." Looking at the United States before the War Between The States, it is easy to see that the founding fathers intended this nation to be a loose association of sovereign states banded together for mutual protection and commerce. In essence, the federal government's primary responsibilities were international commerce and diplomacy, settling disputes between the States, and war/defense. Other than that, the power was held by the individual states. People's identity was defined by their state, not the US as a whole. After the War Between The States, what we now call "states" should more properly be called "provinces," which is defined as "an administrative region or division of a country." Our states are no longer sovereign but subjugated and relegated to virtual irrelevancy.

Originally, the people elected the House and the states appointed the Senate. That ensured that the federal government represented the needs of the people and the states since the states were supreme. When the constitution was changed so that the Senate was also elected by the people, that removed the States from having any power or say in the federal government. People are easier to control than the states, and this change, while publicized as in the best interest of the people, was actually only in the best interest of the federal government to remove state oversight in it's actions so that a major check on federal authority would be removed. Up until then, the armed forces were owned by the states and the states committed troops to war - that is why only congress can declare war. This, too, was changed to take the power away from the states as the founding fathers intended. The result? A federal government comprised of elected officials that ignore the will of the states and the people and have no checks and balances in place to ensure that they represent the will of the people and the states as originally defined by the constitution. The federal government operates separate from and independent of the people they are elected to serve, secure in their knowledge that there is little the people can do about it now that the states have been removed from the federal governing process.

Lincoln, in his role of military dictator, abolished our original constitutional form of government. The South left the union to preserve the constitutional government. The South lost, and in the end, so did all of America. That is the true legacy of the War Between The States.