

Three-Fifths of a Person

Throughout the 2008 primary season media commentators questioned whether Americans “were ready” for a black President. That seemed like a stupid question to me, inasmuch as Obama was winning primaries, getting support from the Democrat National Committee, and led Hillary Clinton in captured delegates. If Americans were not ready to elect a black President, then they were certainly doing a poor job of demonstrating it.

The question those commentators were really asking was, “Obama may be winning the Democrat votes, but can he win the general election with all the ignorant, racist, red-necked Republicans voting for McCain?” If there’s one thing they teach in journalism school, it’s how liberal commentators can insult half the population of the United States and get away with it.

But while liberal commentators may have attended journalism school, few of them have ever set foot in an American History classroom. I offer as evidence the journalists who bring up the “three-fifths of a person” issue. Their criticism of the “racist South” – which, to them, may be the only thing preventing Obama from being crowned the new “Czar of the Socialist States of America” – ignores the facts of American History and the United States Constitution. To throw out the old bromide that the South was racist because it “only wanted to count slaves as three-fifths of a human being” may be a way of insulting the Southern States, but it’s a totally misleading statement.

Granted, the Constitution seems to support the Southern racist argument, because Article I Section 2 reads (in part) as follows:

“Representatives and direct Taxes shall be apportioned among the several States which may be included within this Union, according to their respective Numbers, which shall be determined by adding to the whole Number of free Persons, including those bound to Service for a Term of Years, and excluding Indians not taxed, three fifths of all other Persons.”

Doesn’t that say that slaves (“all other persons”) should be counted as three-fifths of a person?

Yes.

Didn’t the Southern States insist on that language as a condition of their accepting the Constitution?

Yes, but (and it’s a “but” as big as Barack Obama’s ego) while the Southern States argued for counting slaves as “three-fifths” of a person, *the Northern States were advocating not counting slaves at all*. It is certainly correct that three-fifths is less than one – but it’s also a lot greater than zero.

Note that slaves weren't given the right to vote – not even three-fifths of a right to vote - the fraction was used only in counting blacks for the purpose of determining the number of Congressional Districts in each state. The Northern States didn't want to count slaves at all, which would have given those states more power in Congress. The Southern States wanted to count slaves the same as whites, which would have given those states more power in Congress. Neither the North nor the South sought to free the slaves, they were seeking more representation in the Federal Government. But if you want to argue racism, you have to argue that the North was more racist than the South; at least the South wasn't taking blacks totally for granted – unlike today's Democrat Party.

The Southern States were reluctant to embrace the Constitution without additional safeguards. They were concerned that too much power had been given to the Federal Government by the Constitution, and they knew that would lead to abuses. Thus they insisted on the Tenth Amendment:

“The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people.”

The Southern States were right to insist on the addition of the Tenth Amendment to curtail federal abuse of power. They were wrong, however, in believing that the Tenth Amendment would be strictly observed. To a great extent it has been totally ignored, and vast numbers of programs implemented by the federal Government each year are, in fact, unconstitutional. (Many of FDR's ludicrous proposals were found unconstitutional by the Supreme Court, usually on the basis of the Tenth Amendment.) Most politicians, let alone members of the media, couldn't tell you what's in the Tenth Amendment.

Decades of abuses of power by the Federal Government ultimately led to the Civil War. Slavery was a large part of the situation, but secession was the only option left to the Southern States, which were enduring economic hardships because of high tariffs imposed by the Federal Government, and which, by 1860, had lost power because of population changes and the resultant redrawing of Congressional Districts.

The North fought the South to keep the Southern States in the Union, and to retain an omnipotent Federal Government. Ending slavery was not the main purpose of the Civil War (which technically was not a civil war but a War for Southern Independence), it was a side effect. In a letter to Horace Greeley, editor of the New York Tribune, Lincoln wrote:

“I would save the Union. I would save it the shortest way under the Constitution. The sooner the national authority can be restored; the nearer the Union will be “the Union as it was.” ... My paramount object in this struggle is to save the Union, and is not either to save or to destroy slavery. If I could save the Union without freeing any slave I would do it, and if I could save it by freeing all the slaves I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone I would also do that. What I do about slavery, and the colored race, I do because I believe it helps to save the Union.”

Abraham Lincoln said in his debates with Stephen Douglas in 1858:

“I am not, nor ever have been, in favor of bringing about in any way the social and political equality of the white and black races, that I am not nor ever have been in favor of making voters or jurors of negroes, nor of qualifying them to hold office, nor to intermarry with white people; and I will say in addition to this that there is a physical difference between the white and black races which I believe will forever forbid the two races living together on terms of social and political equality. And inasmuch as they cannot so live, while they do remain together there must be the position of superior and inferior, and I as much as any other man am in favor of having the superior position assigned to the white race.”

Lincoln was less interested in the plight of blacks than he was interested in the retention of absolute power by the Federal Government... much like Nancy Pelosi and Harry Reid.

This is not to diminish the greatness of Abraham Lincoln or the significance of the end of slavery, a disgusting, uncivilized, and unconscionable practice. But it should be noted that the United States is the only country that ended slavery with a war; all other civilized nations ended slavery peacefully. The United States could have ended slavery without a war; the Civil War was fought by the North to preserve the power of the Federal Government.

Knowledge of this history is critical for an understanding of the South and its traditions, such as the continued practice of displaying the “stars and bars” of the Confederate States of America. For most Southerners that flag does not represent racism or a desire to return to the days of slavery; it represents a longing for their State to get back some of the power that long ago was usurped by the Federal Government.

There is no doubt that if Obama loses the election in November, media pundits will be ready - and probably eager - to remark that, “A lot of Americans still weren’t ready for a black President.” They will mean, “Southern racists stopped Obama.” It will not occur to them that some Americans simply don’t want an already overblown Federal Government led by an inexperienced, leftist candidate with even more grandiose plans for the expansion of its power. The media just doesn’t get it. And if it talks about the three-fifths of a person rule, you’ll know why.

*Don Fredrick
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