



THE LEAGUE OF THE SOUTH INSTITUTE

FOR THE STUDY OF
SOUTHERN CULTURE AND HISTORY

Slavery as the Cause of the War Between the States

by Dr. Donald Livingston

Of all the myths taught to our children about the war between the states none is more corrupt (and corrupting) than the claim that the war was “about slavery”-- that the South seceded to protect slavery and the North invaded to abolish it. Slavery was a national enormity and not merely a southern problem.

It was not the South but New England that, in the seventeenth century, opened the slave trade with Africa and grew rich selling slaves throughout the western hemisphere. The seed money for the industrial revolution came from the slave trade and from financing and shipping southern exports, largely produced by slave labor. By 1860 nearly three fourths of American exports were from the South. Hardly anyone at this time, North or South, was prepared to integrate into society an African population of 3.5 million, many of whom were only two generations from tribal existence. Northern manumission laws were designed to rid themselves of their African population. These laws freed not adults but children, born after a certain date and upon reaching adulthood. Owners were free to sell their slaves in the meantime. By 1860 less than one per cent of Massachusetts was black. Many northerners thought that blacks would eventually die off as most of the Indians had.

Lincoln’s state of Illinois prohibited the entrance of any free blacks unless a bond of \$1000 each could be raised. The constitutions of Oregon and Indiana prohibited absolutely the entrance of any free blacks and nullified any contracts made with them. No political party of any significance in the North had proposed emancipation. Lincoln proposed sending free blacks abroad. The abolitionists, a tiny and despised minority, did urge emancipation, but their solution was peaceful secession of the North from the South as the best way of ending slavery. By 1861 the South had accomplished this goal for them. But worse, Congress, with Lincoln’s approval, passed an amendment to the Constitution making it impossible for the central government ever to interfere with slavery in the states where it was legal. The amendment would have been ratified by the states had the South stayed in the Union. Slavery could not possibly have been better protected than it was by the northern-dominated Congress of 1861.

With the exception of Haiti, slavery was peacefully abolished everywhere in the west by the 1880s. And it would have disappeared from the South by then had it been allowed to secede as the abolitionists had urged. The Confederate Constitution prohibited the slave trade and allowed for the entrance of non-slave holding states. The Confederate cabinet agreed to abolish slavery five years after the cessation of hostilities in exchange for British and French recognition. Robert E. Lee believed in gradual emancipation and freed the slaves he had inherited through marriage. He and other Confederate leaders argued early on to arm blacks as the first step in emancipation and integration. Slavery, like any other institution, had evolved over time. Theologians were urging reforms, and in the border states the institution was evolving into an apprenticeship system. Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Arkansas had voted to remain in the Union. They reversed themselves only after Lincoln illegally raised

troops from the North to coerce the seceding states back into the Union.

It has been said that the scholars of the League of the South, in their defense of secession, have not confronted the evils of slavery. We have long since confronted them-- as have all southerners. What has not been confronted (and what our nationalist historians guarantee will perhaps never be confronted) is the evil of launching a war that left 1,500,000 killed, missing, and wounded merely to consolidate a northeastern industrial empire. Lincoln was not able to win the war without finally directing it against the civilian population. This shocked Europeans, as it broke the code of civilized warfare that had been in place since the early eighteenth century. In violating the Geneva Convention the Lincoln administration became the first of the modern war criminals. To dignify this unexpected outbreak of barbarism as being "about slavery" is the deep lie in the soul of the American liberal. Indeed it has almost become a part of American self-identity. Until it is honestly faced Americans will remain in a condition of spiritual and political adolescence.