

White Rage

By Carol Anderson, Ph.D.

Slavery and the plight of blacks is America's original sin. Each time African Americans have made a major step forward the white power structure has reacted by trying to take away their rights. This book covers five specific periods where blacks made large advances and the white backlash that followed each occurrence.

Prologue

White Rage is not primarily about physical violence, but how white reaction to black advances works its way through the courts, legislatures, and a range of government bureaucracies. This book makes visible the hidden fingerprints of white rage and traces its historic movements over the last 150 years.

The trigger for white rage, inevitably, is black advancement.

- ◆ The Civil War triggered the Black Codes, Jim Crow, and adverse Supreme Court decisions.
- ◆ WWI offered jobs and began the great northern exodus, but was met with prohibitions against travel, banning of commerce, and lynching for exercising First Amendment rights.
- ◆ Brown v Board of Education resulted in shutting down public schools and diverting public monies to privatized schooling for whites.
- ◆ Hard fought victories in the civil rights struggle caused a reaction that stripped Brown of its power, severed the jugular of the Voting Rights Act, closed off access to higher education, poured crack cocaine into the inner cities, and locked up, proportionally, more black men than even apartheid-era South Africa.
- ◆ A black man was elected president and voting rights were further restricted, the federal government was shut down, the Office of the President was openly and publicly disrespected by other elected officials, and convicting police of killing blacks became almost impossible.

White rage has undermined democracy, warped the Constitution, weakened the nation's ability to compete economically, squandered billions of dollars, rendered an entire region sick, poor, and woefully undereducated, and left cities nothing less than decimated. All this havoc has been wreaked simply because African Americans wanted to work, get an education, live in decent communities, raise their families, and vote. This is the unspoken truth of our racial divide.

The Civil War - Reconstructing Reconstruction

The Civil War produced...

- ◆ The Emancipation Proclamation
- ◆ The 13th Amendment to abolish slavery
- ◆ The 14th Amendment that defined citizenship
- ◆ The 15th Amendment codified a citizen's right to vote (for men)
- ◆ Millions of black people demanding their full rights of citizenship

In 1860, 80% of the nation's gross national product was tied to slavery and two thirds of the wealthiest Americans lived in the South. Even though slavery was prohibited outside the South, disdain for blacks was universal throughout the United States before the Civil War. Even Lincoln had no solution for dealing with Negroes as citizens and his idea was to resettle millions of blacks in what is now the nation of Panama. Lincoln's statement, "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," clearly illustrates his view of the Negro as race apart from whites.

Every state admitted to the Union since 1819, starting with Maine, embedded in their constitutions some discrimination against blacks, particularly the denial of the right to vote or to serve on juries. Many states, from California to Ohio, prohibited blacks from testifying in court against a white person.

After the Civil War President Johnson had no appetite for punishing whites for treason, nor for granting Negroes any more rights than they previously held, save they couldn't be sold as property. This resulted in the southern states immediately abridging Negro rights to vote, own property, or integrate into white society - the Black Codes. These codes were developed by respected judges, attorneys, and planters and reinstated slavery by another name. NOTE: Mississippi did not ratify the 13th Amendment until 2013.

Black economic independence was anathema to a power structure that depended on cheap, exploitable, labor, and required black subordination. This required coordination through the courts and via the suppression of education against all Negroes.

In effect, Southern courts transferred full control of black people from the plantation owner to a carceral {prison} state. Prisoner's labor was then sold off, effectively instituting government slavery. In Russia these practices are called Gulags. Through the concept of States Rights, the states - with the express approval of the Supreme Court - were able to neuter the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments.

WWI and Derailing the Great Migration

World War I created a tremendous demand for labor in the industrial North, first because of war shipments overseas and the loss of immigration from Europe, later because of the vast number of soldiers sent overseas. During WWI more than 1.5 million blacks moved north and the South became alarmed by the loss of their cheap and experienced labor. The South saw black advancement and independence as a threat to not only their culture, but their rural economy. Education was particularly withheld because it was believed knowledge 'spoiled the slave' and this belief persisted well into the 20th century.

White Southern elites reacted with cool, calculated efficiency. These were mayors, governors, legislators, business leaders, and police chiefs and they were determined to stop Negroes from moving to find better jobs and living conditions. The South had closed off every possibility for advancement or social freedom. Between the Civil War and 1920 annual lynchings numbered over 1000, over 90% of which were black.

Soon the South was blanketed with anti-enticement statutes, reminiscent of the Black Codes, levied against those 'luring' blacks away from their employers. When this didn't work, it became clear blacks themselves were fleeing the South without outside agitation.

Central to the Great Migration was the viscerally anti-South black newspaper - the Chicago Defender. This newspaper carried news of the oppression and was laced with job opportunities. There was also information about the Chicago Urban League, which was helping blacks transition to urban life.

Trampling on the 1st Amendment, locals ordered the newspaper confiscated and anyone who distributed it to be jailed and fined. When all this didn't slow down the exodus, trains were stopped during WWI and the legal system was used attempt to blackmail the railroads into not accepting tickets from Negroes.

In the North, the influx of blacks exposed the rigid segregation practices, while urban slums were not expanded to hold the large populations arriving. Rigid housing codes prevented blacks from moving out of the slums and violence often ensued when families tried to resist these restrictions.

Brown v The Board of Education - Burning Brown to the Ground

From 1890 into the latter half of the 20th century Jim Crow laws and practices dominated the lives of black people. Plessy v Ferguson insured separate facilities, but equal was never considered practical or desirable. This was the Achilles' Heel the NAACP used to repeatedly attack these laws. From 1935 on, they won repeated lawsuits, but were not able to effect real change. This illustrated that southern governments were simply incapable of meeting Plessy's Jim Crow standard of "separate but equal."

Finally, numerous cases were bundled into one, Brown v Topeka Board of Education, to show that separate was incapable of being equal. The Brown decision in 1954 not only ruled segregation unconstitutional in education, but in other aspects of national life.

Jim Crow principles were continued and were successful in eviscerating black access to the ballot box through poll taxes, education requirements enforced only against blacks, legislative apportionment that enshrined rural power, and interposition: where the state put itself between federal law and U.S. citizens.

- ◆ White Citizens Councils were formed and state flags began to reflect a confederate hue.
- ◆ The Southern Manifesto was adopted, with the sole aim to delay and defy integration orders.
- ◆ Public education was minimized and private 'white' schools were formed with public monies.

Education reshapes health outcomes, brakes the cycle of poverty, improves housing, and increases voter participation. Negroes have always been aware of this and a key aim has been to educate their children. Today the result of the educational delay and resistance is evident throughout the South - both among black and white citizens. The South falls into the bottom quartile of states rankings for all citizens in education, income, and quality of health.

Rolling Back Civil Rights

The 1964 Civil Rights Acts came directly out of the murder of three civil rights workers in Mississippi and the bombing, murder of black children in a Birmingham church. Bloody Sunday in Selma resulted in the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The civil rights struggle was moving forward, but white opposition once again geared up to oppose any further progress. The Republican Southern Strategy and a 'law and order' theme that specifically targeted black males for incarceration proved to be potent weapons against blacks in America. Politics and policies of two Republican Presidents and the locking up of a greater percentage of black males than occurred in apartheid South Africa were able to almost entirely blunt the civil rights movement.

The Southern Strategy of Richard Nixon was to redefine centuries of oppression against blacks as being about a 'seat on the bus' and 'water fountains'. Since these problems had been resolved, the economic and educational devastation that had been borne by the Negro population was declared over. Now everyone could start anew from the same point - the past could be forgotten. Secondly, racism was

redefined to be the visible - the KKK and jackbooted sheriffs. The underlying laws and techniques used so successfully to repress blacks came to be defined as "Law and Order."

In this environment, Civil Rights came to be defined around "handouts" and public assistance. Libertarian opposition to these practices became acceptable because they weren't applied equally to all people. Since blacks were thought to be on an equal footing with whites, no consideration for the harm previously done specifically to blacks by implicit suppression needed to be considered.

With the Civil Rights Movement, the days of respectable racism were over, however, race neutral language could still be used to direct white fear/dislike of blacks entering their "white" society. A zero sum game was promoted, where black gains would be equated to white losses. This divisive approach could - and has - been used between any two socially separate groups continuously in modern American politics.

Nixon's political strategy was to present a position on crime, education, or public housing in such a way that a voter could "avoid admitting to himself that he was attracted by a racist appeal." Civil and voting rights were weakened by the four Supreme Court justices Nixon nominated to the Court. This court allowed wealth to determine education access, thus restricting the poorest children - blacks were far poorer than whites in American society. White lawsuits for education discrimination further weakened education access for blacks - clearing away the last attempts to help the black population catch up to the rest of America.

Ronald Reagan became the most effective president in rolling back black gains in civil rights. His political adviser, Lee Atwater, defined Reagan's logic as 'racism with plausible deniability'. You start with "nigger", then move on to "forced bussing" and "states rights", followed by cutting taxes. By the time you finish you have a program that everyone can identify with, but still hurts blacks far more than whites. You have effectively eliminated any implication of racism.

Reagan loathed Lyndon Johnson's Great Society far more than the Civil Rights Movement, and he succeeded in characterizing it as a giveaway program for blacks. He ordered a 'scorched-earth' policy regarding education, employment, and housing. Budget proposals targeted, very specifically, those programs in which blacks were over represented and protected those areas (Social Security) of the 'social safety net' where blacks were underrepresented.

While access to higher education for blacks was crumbling, the Justice Department used every legal strategy to dismantle, obstruct, and undermine school bussing, leaving effectively segregated K through 12 schools. School lunch programs and other safety nets were shredded.

Reagan chose to slash the training, employment, and labor services budgets by 70%, while retaining federal aid for highways - which primarily benefited suburbs, not cities; and massive layoffs in federal jobs - where Negroes were a much larger proportion of the workforce - while deliberately weakening enforcement of civil rights laws in the workplace. The median family income of African Americans fell under Reagan, while other groups either held constant or rose.

Reagan's most aggressive move against blacks was the implementation of a "War on Drugs", during a time when drug use was down. His desire to topple a Nicaraguan government he considered beholden to Russia was frustrated by a Congress that didn't want further involvement outside our borders. A determination to privately finance the Contras opposing the Nicaraguan government resulted in his actively turning a blind eye to the Contra involvement in importing crack cocaine into California. Crack cocaine use exploded in 1985-86 - just as Congress cut off funding to the Contras.

The "War on Drugs" started as an educational effort, but became focused on enforcement, criminals,

and harsh, no-mercy punishment of people in the U.S. selling and using drugs. Since the drug distribution was centered in the poorest parts of society and blacks were the poorest Americans, while police were far more likely to move against urban blacks than white suburbanites, the entire program became a way to criminalize a large segment of the black population - effectively cutting them off from education, jobs, or ever being able to vote.

In 1986 Congress passed the Anti-Drug Abuse Act, stipulating mandatory sentencing and emphasizing punishment over treatment. This was followed up in 1988 by an even harsher act. The net result has been to make America the most incarcerated country in the world, by percentage of their population.

The Supreme Court legalized racial discrimination in the criminal justice system with the following results:

- ◆ Police could stop anyone, with little probable cause
- ◆ Racial profiling was approved
- ◆ Irrefutable evidence of racial bias in sentencing was disallowed
- ◆ Title IV of the Civil Rights Act could not be used to sue authorities

Ronald Reagan's policies and the importation of crack cocaine resulted in doing to the African American community what neither slavery nor Jim Crow had been able to accomplish - life expectancy rates for black males actually declined between 1984 and 1994.

The First Black President - Barak Obama

In 2008, for the first time in history, the black voter turnout rate nearly equaled that of whites. This was particularly troubling for Republicans because the largest percentage of eligible voters in 40 years had cast a ballot. The GOP leverage in elections goes up as the voting populace goes down.

The Republican reaction to this election was to reach for a tried and true weapon: disfranchisement - prevention of a person exercising the right to vote. Thus began the concern for voter fraud, increased emphasis on voter ID, reduction in the number and manning of voting places, and the illegal purging of voter rolls.

Just as African Americans' so-called genetically induced moral and intellectual failings provided the rationale for Jim Crow, the GOP created a similar series of hypotheses to rationalize voter suppression. Link the Democratic Party with blacks, link blacks with crime, and thus project this to voter fraud. The fact that they could tie another group - Hispanic immigrants - into this scenario was an even better cover for the overt racism of the effort.

Over time, disfranchisement has become more subtle, more palatable, and more sophisticated.

- ◆ Government-issued IDs make student IDs invalid, while concealed weapons permits are valid. Since the highest percent of people without government-issued IDs are students, seniors, and people of color, this almost exactly targets the people the GOP want to keep from voting.
- ◆ Early and Sunday voting is often necessary for the working poor. Curtailing these practices is a high priority and frequently seen in GOP governed states like Florida.
- ◆ The reduction of polling places and staff in poorer areas is an obvious target.
- ◆ Mass mailing to minority neighborhoods, with "do not forward" instructions - where people are more likely to move, results in returned mail which is later used to illegally purge voter rolls of legally registered voters.