

Goodbye to Gold and Glory

by Clyde Wilson

*"A crocodile has been worshipped, and its priesthood have asserted, that morality required the people to suffer themselves to be eaten by a crocodile."
—John Taylor of Caroline*

"THE FATHER OF WATERS now flows unvexed to the sea," Lincoln famously announced in July 1863. He was, according to a reporter, uncharacteristically "wearing a smile of supreme satisfaction" as he related the news of the surrender of Vicksburg.

Like many popular sayings about the war of 1861-65, Lincoln's words rest on certain unexamined assumptions. Why had the flow of the Mississippi been "vexed" to begin with? It is true the Confederates had forts guarding passages on the river. But these forts were not there to interfere with peaceful travel of the Mississippi—something which, in fact, Confederates devoutly desired and knew to be greatly in their interest. The forts were there to interrupt invasion by heavily armed gunboats and transports which had already established a record of bombarding undefended towns and landing thousands of men to loot, burn out, and murder noncombatants.

In fact, Lincoln wanted the Mississippi to be "vexed" as long as he was doing the vexing. The potential of New Orleans to become a Confederate free-trade port for the commerce of the world had been crushed in one of the first expeditions of the war. If the government could not control New Orleans to enforce its tariff on imports at the mouth of the Mississippi, then the Midwest would ship its produce to, and buy its cheaper goods in, New Orleans, even if it meant smuggling in evasion of U.S. law. The industry of the Northeast would no longer enjoy profit-

able "protection" of its captive markets, and commerce would no longer move to Northeastern ports. Not to mention that the Treasury might find itself with diminished funds with which the newly empowered Republicans could buy and reward supporters.

So much for emancipation of the Mississippi River.

Lincoln, of course, was also pleased by the simultaneous "victory" at Gettysburg, which had contributed mightily to "saving the Union." More of those unexamined sayings. Lee's army had not been defeated at Gettysburg; it had merely stopped attacking a much larger army on its own territory and returned home without any serious interference. And how about that "saving the Union"? As everyone had understood in earlier times (and many still did), the very act of "preserving the Union" by military conquest destroyed the Union and converted it into something else—a consolidated empire in which duly elected state governments were to be destroyed and a large part of the population was to be governed by force rather than consent. As H.L. Mencken commented, the Gettysburg Address is a very pretty composition, but it has it exactly backward as to which side was fighting for government of the people.

Neither had the war much to do with slavery, except that slavery helped to produce the immense crops of the South, which made up the vast majority of America's foreign trade, which the ruling interests of the North were not about to relinquish. Chronology here is important, as it is, indeed, in achieving clarity about any historical event. Large segments of Northern opinion at first received secession calmly: "Let the erring sisters go in

peace." Southerners, however rashly and unwisely, were simply invoking the good old American founding principle of "consent of the governed." Abolitionists felt freed of contamination. But then the capitalists began to collar the editors and the politicians. The North could not afford to let the Southern economy get beyond its grasp. Lincoln announced that he would initiate no hostilities, but he would collect the tariff at the ports.

Nationalism was the major force of the 19th century, and Lincoln rested firmly on its two pillars: the idea that a strong centralized government over a large territory meant prosperity, at least for some, and the emotional force attached to the widespread feeling that "national greatness" was a supreme and sacred thing to be preserved at any cost. The odd marriage of economic interest and nationalist fervor has, through all of American history, motivated the desire for a strong and unchallengeable central government. It still does.

It is now established with near-Soviet rigor and unanimity that the war of 1861-65 was "caused by" slavery. Never mind that it explains nothing to assert that an event of such vast and revolutionary dimensions was "caused by" one thing. Never mind that an earlier, magisterial generation of American historians, much more learned and objective than the current crop, emphasized economic interests and cultural conflict. The war must be slavery and nothing but slavery because of obsession with race and the well-established benefits of victimhood; self-righteousness, which takes for granted that any resistance to the domination of the righteous must be evil; failure of historical imagination in inability to distinguish the domestic servitude of the South, as old as the Bible, from 20th-century enslavement by governments; and willful refusal to accept that the withdrawal of a polity from a union is not "treason."

The "causes" of the war were many, among them slavery. But, strictly speak-

ing, what the war was “about” was the nature of the Union. Black slaves had been an integral part of American (not just Southern) society for well over two centuries, and nobody had gone to war either to keep them or to emancipate them. Indeed, Lincoln declared that he had neither the desire nor the power to interfere with slavery, and he would not know how to go about it even if he had the intent and the power. (Illinois did not admit black people to citizenship and sharply discouraged them from living there.) The South had no need to fight to “preserve slavery,” which had long existed and was in no immediate peril. When the states declared that hostility to slavery was their reason for secession, they meant that they did not accept the right of ill-disposed, irresponsible outsiders to carry out an endless program of hateful slander and petty interferences with their daily life in a

Union that their fathers and grandfathers had created for their liberty and well-being. Calhoun had warned 20 years before, “Now, I ask, if we have the right under the Constitution to hold the property, which none question, have we not also the right to hold it under the same sacred instrument in peace and quiet?”

But even if slavery was, in a sense, the cause of secession, that did not make it a cause of the war, for a war of conquest to prevent secession was a choice—a choice made even more questionable by the fact of Lincoln’s unprecedented election by only two fifths of the people and the seceded states’ declared willingness to negotiate in good faith.

Lincoln would not make war to free the slaves; but he would launch against other Americans a war of unprecedented scope and ferocity to *prevent secession*, in defiance of all previous understanding of the nature of the Union. Even Hamilton, in the *Federalist*, had promised that the proposed federal government would never be able to coerce a state. But Lincoln counted on the power of economic interest and the emotional fervor that mistook loyalty to a government for patriotism. Was America a consensual and dissolvable union of self-governing commonwealths? Or a consolidated empire in which the “consent of the governed,” once given, was eternally binding? In essence, Lincoln was saying that the consent of the people was a one-time thing, and they were ever after bound to obey the political faction in control of the federal machinery.

THE NATURE OF THE UNION was and has been vastly debated. Much confusion results from busywork of the advocates of an unappealable central government to distort words and history and sneak precedents past the people by dubious judicial pronouncements. Anyone who will study the question deeply and honestly will have to agree that the weight of the evidence favors the secessionists. Madison tells us

that the Constitution is to be interpreted by the people of the states, whose ratification only could and did give it any authority. We should think about the Constitution that was ratified by the states—not the proposal discussed in Philadelphia nor the Olympian musings of the *Federalist*, which were never ratified by anybody. Otherwise, we are stipulating that the rulers have some authority beyond the “consent of the governed,” which is to jettison everything unique about the American understanding of government.

Before Lincoln, *United States* was always a plural rather than the unnatural singular noun it has become. This was true in every law, proclamation, treaty, treatise, and public discussion. The term *United States* meant the Union of the states, not the federal government which represented the Union in some of its business. Read the Constitution with this in mind. To “provide for the *common* defense and promote the *general* welfare” (emphasis mine). Treason against the United States consists in “levying war against *them*,” something of which Lincoln was egregiously guilty. Lincoln never really addressed the constitutional issue except with a trio of whoppers—that the “Union” preceded the states of which it was composed, that the legitimate governments of 14 states were merely “combinations” of felons who were resisting the collection of taxes, and that governments in power could not allow themselves to be deprived of jurisdiction. He was not a political philosopher searching for truth. Though Lincoln was capable of a marvelous turn of phrase, he was on this occasion a politician justifying a dubious exercise of power with the tricks of a lawyer focused on winning a bad case.

It makes no difference that the Constitution allowed the Union to expand by the admission of new states. The new states were to be in every respect equal to the old. The Congress might govern a territory; it might admit a state into the Union, or not; it might be the largest landown-



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er in the state. But it could not create a state. According to the most fundamental American principle, only a sovereign people could adopt a constitution and create a commonwealth. This is why Jefferson in his last years regarded the attempt of the Northern majority in Congress to dictate a constitution to the people of Missouri as a “fire-bell in the night,” which was likely the “death-knell of the Union.” He thought slavery was a bad thing and wished something could be done about it. But the sovereignty of the people of the states was more vital, although it meant defending a new slave state and the right of the South to deal with the matter itself. In his last days he recommended that Virginia again declare state sovereignty and nullify federal legislation as it had done in 1798, and which South Carolina was to do a very few years later.

When Thomas Jefferson looked westward he saw succeeding generations of Americans creating new self-governing commonwealths. If the future generations wanted to go off on their own and form new confederacies, which he expected to happen in the west, that would not be a prob-

lem—they would still be Americans. He compared the new states to younger sons who were free to decide things for themselves. It was not the force of the federal government that held Americans together; it was their common blood and fellow feeling. But when Lincoln’s lovers of “the Union” looked westward they saw natural resources to be exploited, new markets to be developed, more political offices to be filled—all enhancing the growing power of the “nation.” Not to mention millions of immigrants, who would lower labor costs and increase the value of the free land Lincoln’s backers were getting from the government.

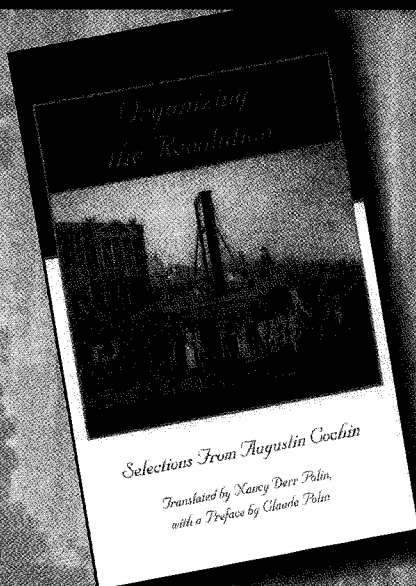
Granted, the world has changed and become more complex. Granted, fascism and communism were evil things and had to be opposed by a powerful government (though not everything done for such purpose was necessary or proper). So, when communism fell, we should have returned to the dividends of peace and the freedom of limited government. Instead, the government has become ever more powerful and more expensive. You will look in vain in the Constitution for the people’s grant

of authority to consume their blood and treasure in pursuit of a global empire of “democratic capitalism.” Every civilized person in the world was cured of such “national greatness” by the blinding light of Hiroshima, if not by the rivers of blood at Verdun. But the appetite for “greatness” in rulers with too much power is insatiable; and it always ends in disaster for the people caught up in it—like the Germans and Japanese in 1945.

We have long believed, with some justification, that Lincoln’s strong indissoluble national government has promoted our prosperity and nurtured the claims of our country to greatness. Has anyone noticed that it’s not working anymore? That the prosperity the unreachable and uncheckable government is promoting is mostly that of the international immensely rich, and that a multicultural global empire is not at all what we had in mind when we thought of the qualities that made our country great?

Clyde Wilson is an historian but doubts that people, especially politicians, will learn anything from history.

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Collegiate Bread and Circuses

by William Murchison

AH, THE GOOD OL' DAYS! If only they were as frolicsome and fulfilling as they commonly seem in the rearview mirror! All that notwithstanding, the shaky balance that, in university settings, once seemed to prevail between academics and athletics gives the past a certain golden glow.

You know what I'm talking about if you recall the college scene of 40, even 30, years ago. Certainly, dumb athletes roamed about, majoring in P.E. and dating the campus cuties. Certainly, coaches made too much money, causing faculty senates to lament the gaps between authentic achievement—their kind—and the sham varieties on display in local stadiums. The proper order of things might be out of whack at institutions dedicated supposedly to the training of young intellects and the preservation of eternal truths. Yet at institutions of this sort, things are generally out of whack one way or another. At least the head football coach didn't make \$5.1 million a year, as does the head coach at the University of Texas, Mack Brown; his wages and assured community standing come to mind in the aftermath of the Almost-Debacle this summer involving the Big 12 Conference.

The Big 12 was national news for a few days in June. Key members, led by Almighty Texas (one of my two *alma maters*, I am bound to note), seemed intent on bailing out for some place where they could get more money. Goodness, what would happen if they did? Superconferences would appear, to the detriment of mellow October Saturdays at smaller, poorer institutions. The superconferences, with their lucrative TV contracts and regional, if not national, fan bases, would dominate college athletics, meaning, primarily, college football.

It didn't happen. Texas, wealthiest of the wealthy Big 12 powers, pulled back at the last minute. The Longhorns would stay where they had been since bolting from the old Southwest Conference a decade and a half ago (in the process, destroying a set of prized, never-to-be-reconstructed local rivalries). Other potential fugitives decided that, if the Big 12 was good enough for UT, it was good enough for them. Whew! A net loss of two schools—Nebraska and Colorado—to other leagues left the Big 12 with just ten teams. What's in a name anyway, when the pay is so good? Because that was in fact what this summer's secessionist movement was about: filthy lucre—the filthier and more plentiful, the better.

It probably wasn't what the founders of the universities of Paris or Padua had in mind when they went into business hundreds of years ago—squads of athletes and their admirers overshadowing, in the public eye, the works of the mind. But so it has fallen out. To tell the truth, the academic side of the academic enterprise isn't what it used to be, what with tenure, grade inflation, diversity requirements, and growing disdain for the civilization of the West. I'll get to that in a minute.

Meanwhile, from a practical standpoint, the universities' cave-in to the sporting side of things makes a certain kind of sense. Filthy lucre comes in handy. And who's got it these days? Television has. TV exposure, with corresponding rights to divvy up the fruits of that exposure, was at the heart of the aborted threat to the life of the Big 12. Not the wish to bring more students into Saturday-afternoon concord as they perch on metal benches; not sentimentality about historic rivalries; not the loyalties and attachments such rival-

ries can excite. The \$1.2 billion distributed by the conference to member schools over the past 14 years wasn't enough. It was like Wall Street (and Edward G. Robinson in *Key Largo*). The schools wanted more. And, beyond that, still more.

Poor things. The University of Texas in 2008, the last year for which figures are available, made a mere \$87.6 million in football revenues, for a profit of \$65 million. Two non-Big 12 teams—Ohio State and Georgia—pulled in \$68.2 million and \$65.2 million, respectively. At the six high-dollar conferences that same year—a wrenching year for the economy, let us recall—revenues rose five percent. Translated into cash, this meant average revenues of \$31 million for each of the six conferences' 66 schools. Just four of the schools actually lost money on football: Duke, Wake Forest, Syracuse, and Connecticut.

The coaches, too, did well. Though less gaudily compensated than Mack Brown, four fellow head coaches—Nick Saban of Alabama, Urban Meyer of Florida, Bob Stoops of Oklahoma, and Lane Kiffin of USC—pulled down more than four million dollars each. Even some assistant coaches have begun making out like, well, head coaches. According to *USA Today*, six assistants were in line this year for salaries of more than \$650,000. A sports economist, Andrew Zimbalist, reasonably submits that such salaries “are sending a ridiculous message to students at institutions where athletics are supposed to be complementary to academics.”

So what, if anything, does one do about it? Do not the aforementioned gazillions proceed from the uninterrupted workings of the free marketplace? DeLoss Dodds, athletic director of the University of Texas (2009-10 salary: \$627,109), when asked whether a coach is ever worth five million dollars per year, replied, “Probably not, but it's the marketplace.” It is for a fact. The Obama administration might handle this unfortunate reality by instructing