

Tomorrow Is Another Day

And it could be a bright one if we learn the lessons of yesterday

The contest is not over, the strife is not ended. It has only entered upon a new and enlarged arena.

— JEFFERSON DAVIS, 1881

We should be gratified to hear the toughs at East Coast prep schools sing the blues, to read of Spanish moss and prejudice as conjured by poets-in-residence imported from the North, to see Manhattan's young professionals sporting cowboy boots and frying okra. But we Southerners must ask for your indulgence if we seem less than flattered by the nation's appropriation of our trappings. We may have reason to believe that the South has more to offer than Muddy Waters, William Faulkner, and Paul Prudhomme could distill for mass distribution; and it may not be partaking of excessive pride to think that the country as a whole might prosper by our inheritance.

That inheritance is nowhere better formulated than in the extraordinary modern classic *Gone With The Wind*, which would surely be considered "The Great American Novel" if only it weren't so thoroughly — American. For those who prefer to take their truths in nonfiction form, Richard Weaver's interpretive survey of the rationalizations of the vanquished in *The Southern Tradition At Bay* (New Rochelle, New York: Arlington House, 1968) covers much the same ground and makes an equally compelling case for the unutterable heresy: that the nation might have been better off in the long run if the South had won the war.

The assault on the Constitution of the United States, which is gaining momentum every day and threatening to replace entirely the document it has so eviscerated, began in earnest in the decades preceding the War Between the States and has from the beginning been concealed by mouthings of high-sounding platitudes. That the assault has been launched and directed these one-hundred-and-some-odd years by the very men sworn to uphold the Constitution is a monstrous truth even world-weary Southerners are loath to proclaim. But

part of our legacy is a long-running association with demagogues, and it would be an unschooled Southerner indeed who had not learned that leaders can, and wittingly do, lead astray. Ashley Wilkes, Margaret Mitchell's archetypal Southern gentleman and the object of Scarlett O'Hara's misplaced affections, gives voice to this unpleasant realization, when he writes from the battlefield: "We have been betrayed . . . by words and catch phrases, prejudices and hatreds coming from the mouths of those highly placed, those men whom we respected and revered . . ."

You Said It, Ashley

That those very words could express the sentiment of an American veteran — of Vietnam, of Korea, or even of World War II — is a damning indictment of American leadership. That each of these wars — fought, we were *led* to believe, to preserve liberty — concluded with more persons enslaved than beforehand, and with our own freedoms in greater

The assault on the Constitution began in earnest in the decades preceding the War Between the States.

peril, is no coincidence. That the so-called Civil War in America not only fit the pattern but in fact established the formula for the future is a conclusion hard to avoid after even a cursory reading of *Gone With The Wind* or *The Southern Tradition at Bay*.

Weaver exposes the motives ulterior to the slogans of the North: "Union" and 'Abolition' were political cries, innocent-seeming, but the policies they entailed meant political centralization . . . the ending of fixed social relationships . . . and the substitution of pecuniary standards of conduct for the old code of chiv-

alry and *noblesse oblige* . . ." According to the Southern interpretation, "the North, led on by fanatical reformers, had promoted a revolution on principles rejected by the Founding Fathers." The South, says Weaver,

saw the North as an aggressive usurper, disregarding the Constitution whenever it stood in the way of sectional ambition, and seeking to reduce hitherto sovereign states into mere administrative provinces. It regarded as final proof of this design the transfer of the basis of government from compact to conquest, which destroyed the concept of a free union resting upon the consent of the members.

With the trashing of the doctrine of states' rights and the renunciation of the right to secession, the liberty of all Americans suffered a marked diminution and the nation took its first giant step down the road from Constitutional Republic to unrestrained Democracy. The vilification of the South from that point onward ensured that the legitimate Constitutional objections to the entire proceedings would never be given an impartial hearing. It may be that Northerners can be forgiven for not realizing where this road will lead, but Southerners have no excuse, for they have seen the future and should know that the Reconstruction planned for America as a whole will bear a striking resemblance to the barbarism visited upon the South, and succinctly recorded by Margaret Mitchell:

The South had been tilted as by a giant malicious hand, and those who had once ruled were now more helpless than their former slaves had ever been.

. . . The commandants of the Yankee troops in the various cities had complete power, even the power of life and death, over the civilian population, and they used that power. They could and did im-

prison citizens for any cause, or no cause, seize their property, hang them. They could and did harass and hamstring them with conflicting regulations about the operation of their business, the wages they must pay their servants, what they should say in public and in private utterances and what they should write in newspapers. . . .

The newspapers were so muzzled that no public protest could be raised against the injustices or depredations of the military, and individual protests were silenced with jail sentences. The jails were full of prominent citizens and there they stayed without hope of early trial. Trial by jury and the law of habeas corpus were practically suspended. . . . Proof and evidence were not needed. The accusation was sufficient.

The Fate Is Familiar

The striking parallels to the Communist revolutions of this century are hard to overlook. Indeed, the very term "reconstruction" has a decidedly Marxist flavor. Weaver points out that the Southerners of the era looked upon the victory of the North as "a triumph of the forces of materialism, equalitarianism, and irreligion." If they were justified in their assessment, the continuing assault upon the Constitution of the United States can be seen as a nationwide extension of the operation of these forces, and the well-documented American assistance in the establishment and expansion of the Communist empire can be seen as the international extension.

As representatives of a civilization besieged from without and betrayed from within, Southerners can speak to their countrymen with authority of the two-fold danger that now confronts us all. We have suffered invasion, we have seen our Constitution suspended, and we know the dreadful consequences of both. But, truth to tell, the only reason we are so wise today is that we paid so dearly for yesterday's stupidity. It is in cataloguing the mistakes of the South, then, that Margaret Mitchell and Richard Weaver perform their most valuable service to America.

Clear-eyed Rhett Butler gave it to us straight:

The trouble with most of us South-

erners . . . is that we either don't travel enough or we don't profit enough by our travels. . . . I have seen many things that you all have not seen. The thousands of immigrants who'd be glad to fight for the Yankees for food and a few dollars, the factories, the foundries, the shipyards, the iron and coal mines — all the things we haven't got. Why, all we have is cotton and slaves and arrogance. . . .

It is true that our Southern arrogance created among other Americans an abiding contempt for the South and for Southern ways. It is true that we underrated our enemies, and that we were naive enough to think that they would fight by our rules and with regard for our standards of decency. We placed no value on economic and industrial strength. We relied almost exclusively on a defensive posture, thinking we could win a war when our objective was merely not to lose. We made no compelling argument for the justness of our cause, because it

The future belongs to Americans who believe in America.

seemed so obvious to us. Worst of all, we learned to accept our defeat as proof that we were wrong.

That we made no brief and that we endowed our conquerors with virtue Weaver scores as our most glaring shortcomings:

The South committed two great errors in its struggle against the modern world. The first was a failure to study its position until it arrived at metaphysical foundations. No Southern spokesman was ever able to show why the South was right *finally*. In other words, the South never perfected its world view, which determines in the end what we want and what we are. . . .

Another great failure, and one for which people cannot be readily forgiven, is the surrender of initiative. So little has this section shown since 1865 that one is prompted to question whether the South ever really believed in itself.

It is not that the South is uncreative. . . . But it seems to have no faith in its own *imprimatur* . . .

But America can learn from our strengths as well as from our weaknesses. For the South, as Weaver observes, is a "refuge of sentiments and values, of spiritual congeniality, of belief in the word, of reverence for symbolism, whose existence haunts the nation." Weaver fully realizes that he is flouting conventional wisdom when he suggests that victory may have been more costly for the North than defeat was for the South. And yet, he is neither the first nor the last student of history to whom "it may yet appear that the North, by its ready embrace of science and rationalism, impoverished itself, and that the South by clinging more or less unashamedly to the primitive way of life prepared itself for the longer run."

One Nation Under God

Ultimately, our greatest strength is the knowledge, acquired under duress, that there is, and always has been, but one America, and that differences of region, race, and class are of little consequence, however much they may be magnified by villains. The realization for Southerners is long overdue, that it was not the North we were fighting, but those traitors to America who directed the force of the North against us. All this talk of North and South, black and white, rich and poor is — just talk. The Southern tradition is nothing more than a concentrated form of the American tradition. We share the same ideals, good men North and South; and in our "leadership," sad to say, we share a common enemy. For the American way of life is just as repugnant to our "leaders" today as the Southern way was to them 125 years ago. What we have now that we lacked then are the testaments of people like Margaret Mitchell and Richard Weaver to remind us that there is no such thing as a lost cause. Now, when we are tempted to despair, we can take heart in the indomitable will of Scarlett O'Hara, who retained her faith and hope when all else was lost. We can console ourselves with her charm, "Tomorrow is another day," and know for a certainty that the future belongs to Americans who believe in America. ■

— F. R. DUPLANTIER