

This paper is one of a series of individual essays written within the conceptual constraints provided by "Forums for a Future." The collection of essays will become the individual episodes of the podcast.

'... Forums for A Future...'

Podcast (#10) The Power of Wealth and Beliefs
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Prelude

Part I of the series contains a brief 2-minute promotional and a conceptual foundation for thinking about change as the convergence of economic, political, social and personal perspectives. Part II is a set of four podcasts that provides a philosophy for the 21st century. Part III contains three lessons from modern history for informing the present, and for deriving their prescriptive implications for the future. Today, in Podcast # 10, I will discuss the third of these three lessons, the "Power of Wealth and Beliefs."

Key Concept

The key concept is that Power can be understood only in the context of Beliefs and Wealth. Beliefs and Wealth combine to ensure there is sufficient Power to sustain the wealth and to provide a self-justifying belief system.

Introduction

Why, nearly 150 years after the end of slavery, do Afro-Americans still occupy the bottom rung of the socio-economic class structure, especially when so many things have changed? With all of our social progress over that period, why hasn't racism been eliminated?

A partial answer is the power of wealth and beliefs. Class and social structure wield power to keep the status quo in place. Although it is true that minorities have made substantial economic and social gains over the past 150 years, so too has everyone else. As the social context changed, wealth and beliefs have worked to keep the status quo the same. I will illustrate this proposition by considering three periods of racial struggles in the history of the United States:

1. Abolitionists vs. Slavery. This is the period from the beginning of colonization until the Civil War and the end of slavery (1863).
2. Reconstruction vs. Jim Crow. This is the period from the end of the Civil War until the Supreme Court decision of Brown versus Board of Education in 1954.
3. Desegregation (Affirmative Action) vs. Reverse Discrimination (Anti-Affirmative Action). This is the period from 1954 until the present. This third section will be the major portion of today's podcast.

1. Abolitionists vs. Slavery

Today, when an immigrant to the US applies for citizenship the Immigration and Naturalization Service provides him or her with a study guide. The guide includes 100 typical questions they may be asked during the citizenship interview. Question 61 reads: "What is the basic belief of the Declaration of Independence?" The correct answer is: "All men are created equal." The relevant quotation from the Declaration of Independence is:

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life Liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

The study guide refers to these as "inherent rights" that form one of the three main principles of the Constitution of the United States.

Abolition

At that time in our history, 1776, slavery was already considered immoral and inhuman. The slave trade was made illegal in England in the early 12th century, and enforced servitude had largely disappeared in the 1600s. By the time the Declaration of Independence was written slavery was illegal in Britain. Yet, slavery not only continued in America for nearly a hundred years after the Declaration of Independence, but it actually underwent a huge increase of 30% for each of the decades from 1800 to 1860. By contrast, slave trading was abolished by England in the early 1800s and all slaves in the British Empire were emancipated in 1833.

How could something so clearly a contradiction with the concepts of "Equality" and "Inherent Rights" in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution have continued for another 100 years -- especially when slavery was being abandoned by the rest of the Old World as morally wrong? The rationalization in the US was the distorted Belief that State's Rights had a priority over the Human Rights so clearly embodied in the Declaration of Independence and in the Constitution, but, the more likely explanation was that the Wealth of cotton provided the Power to maintain the status quo.

Follow The Wealth

The large increase in the number of slaves in the US during the first 60 years of the 19th century was the direct result of the invention of the cotton gin by Eli Whitney in 1793. Before then, one person could clean 1 pound of cotton per day, but after the invention of the cotton gin the same person could clean 50 pounds per day. As a result, the production of cotton in the Southern states went from 1.5 million pounds in 1790 to 331 million pounds by 1830. Just prior to the Civil War, production had increased to 2,275 million pounds, by which time slaves accounted for 40% of the population of the South.

This huge increase in the production of cotton was achieved through the expansion of land devoted to growing cotton into the cotton belt of the deep South, only made possible by growth

of slavery. But, even more important, the wealth produced by the abundance of inexpensive raw cotton launched the textile industry in the New England States. The capital resulting from the cotton, textile, and slave trade was the major contributor to the emerging industrial revolution. Cotton was the leading industry that sustained the economic development of the new American colonies through the first century of independence, accounting for 57.5% of all US exports by 1960 on the eve of the Civil War.¹

The industrial North, no less than the agricultural South, was equally dependent and complicit in the continuation of slavery in the United States, long after it was outlawed in Great Britain, under the convenient justification (belief) that the Constitution did not allow the Federal Government to intervene.

The Emancipation Proclamation

Yet, there was no constitutional crisis over the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 when the Federal Government, only then, felt free to intervene, now that it was in the economic interests of the North to undercut the southern economy based on exporting raw cotton, to encourage runaway slaves, and to recruit them into the Union Army. The Civil War, which started in 1861, was initially fought to keep the Southern states from seceding from the Union, not to officially end slavery.

2. Reconstruction vs. Jim Crow

Reconstruction following the Civil War had two elements. The first was the process for returning to the Union the Southern states that seceded. By 1865 all of the Southern states had repealed secession and ratified the 13th amendment that abolished slavery. The second was to integrate the former slaves into full participation in the economic, political, and social systems of the United States.

This second element was far more divisive than the first. Under a series of Reconstruction Acts the Army was given control over the South to ensure the vote for black men, and to oversee the reconstruction of the political and economic structure of the South. By 1870 the last of the Southern states had been readmitted to the Union and were able to return to self-government. The Southern states then began passing laws that created racial segregation; these were accepted by the North as a compromise for the reintegration of the United States and for recovering from the tremendous economic and human costs of the war.

Plessy vs. Ferguson

Over the next two decades civil rights measures from the reconstruction era were either converted into segregation laws or overturned by the Supreme Court. In Plessy vs. Ferguson in 1896 the court ruled that state mandated "separate but equal" facilities were legal -- the basic belief that all men are created equal in the Declaration of Independence, and principal of inherent rights in the Constitution, notwithstanding.

Democracy Betrayed

These precedents set the course for the remainder of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century. In 1898 the Fusion Party, a political party composed of whites and blacks, won the city election in Wilmington North Carolina. Following the election a group of 2000 white supremacists revolted with physical violence against the black community. Property was destroyed and the elected government driven out of the city and replaced by white leaders of the race riot. As the authors of *Democracy Betrayed* note:

"In its overall effect...the end was nothing less than a revolution against interracial democracy. Its aftermath brought the birth of the Jim Crow social order, the end of black voting rights, and the rise of a one-party political system in the South that strangled the aspirations of generations of blacks..."²

It took only 20 years after the Civil War for the Belief of limited Federal Power, and the Wealth of cheap labor, to conspire for slavery to be replaced by segregation, and for Reconstruction to be no more successful than abolition to disrupt the Power of the status quo. Woodrow Wilson, a Southerner, who lobbied for human rights on the international level following World War I was responsible for extending segregation to the Federal Government in 1913. Clearly, the founding belief, that "all men are created equal" with "unalienable rights," was infinitely negotiable.

3. Desegregation vs. "Reverse Discrimination"

The contradiction between "separate but equal" with the notion of "equality" and "inherent rights" became sufficient hard to justify that this false belief was finally reversed in 1954 by the Supreme Court decision in *Brown versus Board of Education*. With that decision segregation was no longer legal. Yet, what followed was another 20-year struggle, known as the civil rights movement, which was required to actually implement the decision of the Supreme Court.

This segment of the podcast is based on an invited address that I, and my co-author, Thom Moore, a professor at the University of Illinois, delivered in Washington DC at a conference convened to commemorate the 50th anniversary of *Brown versus Board of Education*. The focus of our presentation was on the impact of the Supreme Court decision to actually end segregation in higher education, although, of course, the civil rights movement was much broader in its scope. The complete text of our published paper is available through a link on the Forms for a Future homepage at www.kerenner.com.³

The Civil Rights Movement

Ending segregation was not a peaceful process. In 1957 white crowds rioted in Little Rock Arkansas over the admittance of nine students to the previously all-white high school. President Eisenhower had to call out the National Guard to restore order. In 1963 Governor George Wallace stood in the doorway of the University of Alabama to block the registration of two black students, who were escorted through registration by Federal marshals. College students from the North and South joined together to integrate lunch counters and bus stations across the South. They were physically attacked and beaten, and some were murdered. It was a long and bloodied

list of events, including the assassination of Martin Luther King. Anyone who cannot remember these events from the 1960s needs to review the photographic images in order to appreciate the depths of white violence. Some of these images are available on the Forums for a Future Home Page.⁴ The story of the white supremacist's Wilmington Race Riot of 1898 was repeated over and over again, more than half a century later, as a response to the legal requirement for desegregation – nearly 200 years after the Declaration of Independence.

Affirmative Action

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 went beyond making forced segregation illegal by broadly prohibiting discrimination and by requiring Affirmative Action, through Executive Order 1124 in 1965, to compensate for the damage of past discrimination by increasing minority participation in all phases of economic and political life. Affirmative Action was one of the key elements of President Johnson's domestic agenda of a "Great Society" intended to use the prosperity of the time to address the pressing social problems of race and poverty.

In my own field, of higher education, this meant actively recruiting minority students and faculty, and providing support programs such as Black Student Centers and Black Studies Programs. Over the next several decades there was a large increase in the absolute number of minority students who attended and graduated from college. With the increase in the number of minority students there was also a growing resistance to affirmative action as a form of reverse discrimination that was unfair to majority students.

However, what was overlooked, by simply counting of the number of minority students, was the fact that there was also a huge increase in the participation rates of everyone in higher education. In fact, over the time affirmative action was instituted, whites actually made greater relative numerical gains than minorities.

Passive Resistance and Formal Backlash

Operating in parallel with affirmative action, which gave a small relative advantage to minority students, there were a variety of other race-sensitive programs that gave a relatively larger advantage to majority students. These were policies such as: legacy admissions, tax deferred educational savings programs, pre-paid tuition plans, reductions in need-based scholarships, restrictions on race-specific support programs, grade inflation, tuition increases, and a variety of additional factors. The net effect of this has been to maintain the same relative numerical majority advantage over minorities that existed before affirmative action. In addition, these policies contributed to a form of de facto segregation in which minority students are concentrated in second-tier schools located in large urban centers, while majority students are concentrated in first-tier institutions located in the educational suburbs. The complete set of graphs and statistical analysis on which these conclusions are based is available in the full technical report that may be accessed from the Forums for a Future homepage at www.kerenner.com.

The Status Quo

The passive resistance against actually eliminating the effects of segregation has now evolved into active backlash in the form of legal challenges based on the assertion of “reverse



discrimination.” The Michigan case brought before the Supreme Court in 2003 severely limited the implementation of affirmative action. In addition, there have been successful ballot initiatives to amend state Constitutions to prohibit the use of affirmative action, most recently in the 2006 in the State of Michigan. Once again the formal legal Power of the democratic state has been used to invert the language and concepts of equality, on which the civil rights movement was based, to protect the actual advantage of the majority.

It appears that today, in 2006, it is our Belief that efforts to compensate for the past cumulative effects, of first slavery and then segregation, have been fully rectified, and that any further sharing of economic Wealth through greater equality of opportunity would be unfair. The end result of this third historical episode in the US is the same as the two before it; all that has changed is the form through which Power maintains the status quo. First with abolition, then with reconstruction, and now with affirmative action, each, in turn, has only been able to temporally alter the practical manifestations of Belief and Wealth in the forms of slavery, segregation and reverse discrimination. The challenge for the future is to understand that the belief of “reverse discrimination” is no more equitable than was the prior beliefs of: (1) “State’s Rights,” or of (2) “separate but equal.” Four centuries after the settlement of our Continent, the social context has significantly changed through three distinct historical periods, but yet the fundamental racial inequalities stayed the same. Clearly this is not good enough for the future.

Concluding Comments

This podcast marks the end of Section III in which I developed the idea that Power, Wealth and Beliefs are NOT three independent concepts, but rather a closed system in which each one, in turn, can be understood only in terms of the other two. The key concept is that they are the three tips of a triangle, and, as such, respectively represent the Political, Economic and Social forces that constrain our Personal existence. My conclusion for Part III is that we cannot continue that trajectory unbroken if we are to have a future.

In the next section, Part IV, I will propose three antidotes for restructuring the contemporary interplay between these political, economic and social forces in order to gain a coherent and sustainable personal future. As I attempted to show in Part II, the future requires new ways of

thinking. Maintaining the status quo for the continuation of the current mechanisms of power, wealth and beliefs will lead to the political, economic and social collapse that are foretold, respectively, in the three textbooks by Friedman, Dyer and Diamond.

End Notes

¹ Ronald Baily. The other side of slavery: Black labor, cotton, and textile industrialization in Great Britain and the United States, Agricultural History, 68:2 (1994: Spring), pp35-50.

² David S. Cecelski and Timothy B. Tyson. Democracy Betrayed: The Wilmington Race Riot of 1898 and Its Legacy. University of North Carolina Press, 1998.

³ K. Edward Renner and Thom Moore. The more things change, the more they stay the same: the elusive search for racial equality in higher education. Analysis of Social Issues and Public Policy, Vol.4, No. 1, 2004.

⁴ We shall overcome: Historic Places of the Civil Rights Movement. <http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/travel/civilrights/> or the pictures used in our power point presentation at the Society for the Psychological Studies on Social Issues Conference, 2004, available on the "Forums for a Future" home page on www.kerenner.com podcast number 10 on the syllabus.