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BLACK
C o m m e n t a t o r**
Commentary, analysis and investigations
on issues affecting African Americans
www.blackcommentator.com

Issue 175 – March 16, 2006

*Freedom Rider
Civil War in America
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Every year the Sons of Confederate Veterans use the North Carolina statehouse to celebrate their annual confederate flag day ceremony. It has become more common in recent years for some white southerners to openly wax nostalgic for the days when their ancestors fought and died to preserve slavery.

It is easy to see a connection between present day yearnings for a return to Dixieland and renewed efforts to threaten voting rights. It is less obvious to see similar connections with trends elsewhere in the country. South Dakota is a long way from South Carolina, but that state recently joined the battle to turn back the clock on civil rights and return to the bad old days when white men ruled and everyone else was subservient.

The legislature in South Dakota voted to outlaw abortion except in cases where the mother's life was endangered. Even rape, incest, and fetal abnormality will no longer be legally justified reasons for abortion. Republican State Senator Bill Napoli described the only instance when he thought abortion would be justifiable.

"A real-life description to me would be a rape victim, brutally raped, savaged. The girl was a virgin. She was religious. She planned on saving her virginity until she was married. She was brutalized and raped, sodomized as bad as you can possibly make it, and is impregnated. I mean, that girl could be so messed up, physically and psychologically, that carrying that child could very well threaten her life."

Napoli has some very strange fantasies. Hide your daughter if you see him coming. In South Dakota, rape victims who aren't pious or saving themselves for marriage are just out of luck.

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The right to abortion became the law of the land with the Supreme Court Roe v. Wade decision in 1973. In the absence of that decision being overturned by the court, the action of the South Dakota legislature gives the finger to the United States constitution and anyone who believes in it. South Dakota has fired on Fort Sumter. Congressman John Conyers stated, "Victory in the South Dakota case will give conservatives renewed momentum to challenge all the other freedoms we hold dear."

When the Brown v. Board of Education Supreme Court decision outlawed segregation in public schools, southern states decided to ignore the law. Some didn't desegregate and dared anyone to complain. Others closed their public schools and deprived black children of their right to an education.

South Dakota's legislators are like the segregationists of old. They have intentionally broken the law. They are hoping for court challenges and expect Bush appointees Alito and Roberts to live up to right wing expectations and overturn the Roe decision.

The 21st century confederates are succeeding because no one is willing to stand in their way. The Argus Leader, the largest newspaper in South Dakota, announced it will not take an editorial position on the new law. Spineless editorial page editor Chuck Baldwin made this amazing comment about his decision to gag himself. "Rather than change anyone's mind, we would create another controversy." Translation: the powerful have spoken and I'm not bucking the system.

The civil war of the 1860s came about when the south was not content to maintain slavery but insisted on expanding its reach into new territories and forced non-slave holding states to be complicit in their crimes through the Fugitive Slave Law. A South Dakota instigated rejection of Roe will be felt in states that would never consider banning abortion.

The boldness of the right wing isn't restricted to any single issue. In South Dakota civil rights for women have been eliminated. In Georgia voting rights have been severely curtained.

The Department of Justice gave Georgia approval to institute a photo ID requirement for voters. The new law will effectively keep thousands of black Georgians out of the voting booth.

In the days immediately following the 2004 election there were numerous jokes and cartoons about blue state secession. All joking aside, what will New York do if Roe v. Wade is overturned? It should be willing to uphold its own laws and stop complying with the tyranny of the political majority.

In other words, we need a movement. That movement must loudly proclaim a refusal to go along with right wing fantasies of time travel to the 1950s. Movements require civil disobedience and risk taking. Movements create their own leadership. Movements tell the Hillary Clintons of the world, "We may hold our noses and vote for you, but we won't defer to you."

Civil rights and civil liberties are in grave danger. They will disappear if there is no willingness to fight for them. Preserving them will mean having to fight against some of our fellow citizens. We can fight with non-violent methods, but there has to be a fight. The only alternative is to find ourselves back in the days when everyone knew his or her place and didn't dare step out of it.

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