

RACISM AND THE RISE



Wright for the Palm Beach Post

OF THE RIGHT

by Sharon Martinas

LEGACIES OF TWO RECONSTRUCTIONS

In two brief periods of U.S. history (1860 to 1880 and 1954–1975), mass based, multi-racial social movements, led by people of color, successfully challenged the institutions of white supremacy in this country, and brought, for a brief period of time, some measure of democracy and social justice to large sectors of oppressed peoples, of color and white.

The characteristics of both mass movements were quite similar, as were the strategies of counter-revolution that undermined the movements, and eventually destroyed the gains they had made. The legacies of both reconstructions, which led to the rise of the Right in the 1890's and 1990's, offer many lessons for anti-racist organizing strategies.

Characteristics of the Movements

- °° Both brought an end to a major legal institution of white supremacy: slavery and apartheid.

- °° Both brought forth major leadership from peoples of color: African American and Native American in the 1860's; African American, Chicano, Native American and Asian American in the 1960's.

- °° Both brought significant gains to African Americans, and the 1960's brought significant gains to all sectors of communities of color: political power, educational access, economic opportunities for working and middle class people, survival programs for poor people, and mechanisms for community empowerment. In addition, virulent ideological racism by white people and institutions became temporarily "unacceptable" from the mid 1960's through the late 1970's.

- °° Both had strong support from a large base of progressive white allies, mostly from the middle classes.

- °° Among white allies, women took a leadership role in linking the struggle against racial and national oppression with the struggle against gender oppression.

- °° Both targeted cross class alliances of white people and institutions in the South, but also raised major challenges to white supremacy in the North.

- °° Both demanded, and received in part, some measure of justice from the executive, judicial and legislative branches of the federal government.

- °° The federal government and the national ruling class it represents received intense pressure to end legal white supremacy from international sources. (England and Ireland in the 19th century, Third World nations and socialist countries in the 20th.)

- °° Both struggles brought major benefits to sectors of non-ruling class whites. In the first Reconstruction period, European immigrants got millions of acres of cheap land and access to a college education for their children. Women's rights issues were thrust onto the national agenda, and women eventually got both the vote and coverage from anti-discrimination laws, specifically as a result of the gains of the Black freedom struggles. Poor whites in the South got the vote and access to free public education for the first time during the 1870's Reconstruction; and labor unions were strengthened immeasurably in the same period.

How the Movements were Undermined and Destroyed

In 1949, V.O. Key wrote in Southern Politics in State and Nation,

"When the going gets rough, when a glimmer of informed political self interest begins to well up from the masses, the issue of white supremacy may be raised to whip them back into line."

In my opinion, no single quote I've ever seen so adequately describes the reason for the sea change of mass public opinion between 1964 and 1994. In 1964, years of mass, multi-racial movements of social protest, led by African Americans, ushered in one of the most progressive periods in U.S. history. In 1994, a cross class coalition of white people, led a mass grassroots organized reactionary movement to the Newt Congress, which promptly began to dismantle 60 years of progressive social legislation-- much of which benefited the very people who voted in the Newts.

The same scenario was played out in the 1890's. Let's examine some of the strategies used by the forces of reaction in both periods:

(1) Federal government targets African American community with institutions of economic, legal and military terrorism.

In both eras, mass based movements led by activists of color looked to the Federal Government to redress grievances and to protect communities against terror. In both eras, the federal government used its institutional power to destroy the movements, targeting African Americans first, then their allies within the social movements.

Economic: In both eras, the government expressly denied African Americans the economic capacity to strengthen their community's self sufficiency. The Radical Republicans of the 1870's refused to grant the freed people 40 acres and a mule, forcing them to become sharecroppers, a condition of semi-slavery controlled by cotton plantation owners. In the late 1960's, the federal government cut off community economic development grants because communities of color demanded control over them.

Political: In the 1890's, congress allowed state legislatures to deny the right to vote and hold political office to people of color, and refused to punish states which condoned terrorism against people of color within their borders. Congress barred Asian American immigration completely. Today, Congress legislates criminalization of all poor people, and is federalizing Proposition 187.

Legal: Supreme Court reinterprets federal laws to undermine specific anti-racist and pro affirmative action protective legislation recently passed by Congress. Also, courts refuse to require federal protection of the lives of peoples of color, and act to wipe out legal protections against police and prison brutality.

Military: From the 1870's through the 1890's, the federal government sponsors terrorism against Native Americans and Mexicans. In the 1960's and 1970's, the FBI institutes COINTELPRO against activists of color. In the 19th century, it refuses to disband the KKK. In the 1990's, it supports vigilantism against Latinos at the border. In the 1990's, it wages a "war on drugs" which condones police murders of African American and Latino youth, using the excuse that they are all drug dealers. Then it incarcerates those who do not die on the street.

(2) Political, educational and media institutions use the ideology of race as the "wedge issue" to divide white allies from solidarity with communities of color.

A *wedge issue* is one that can effectively divide those who should be united, and reunify them around different goals. An *ideology* is a world view, a lens through which we view, consciously or unconsciously, our daily experience. To be effective, an ideology must be able to explain, or make some sense of, that daily experience.

For example, the ideology of capitalism promotes the belief that if you work hard, you can make a lot of money. In the United States, *some people* who have worked hard have made a lot of money, so the ideology takes hold, even though millions of people work hard and barely survive.

The *ideology of race* includes *racialized values and racialized emotions*. For example: "I believe in working hard," is a statement of my values. It becomes racialized if I infer, without even saying so, that a woman of color is on welfare because she doesn't work hard.

An example of *racialized emotions*: A white woman says, "I am afraid of getting raped so I rarely go out at night." This sentence expresses racialized fear. The unspoken lens through which the fear is filtered sees a white woman raped by a man of color. Yet the statistics tell us that most white women are raped at home, or by someone they know, who is much more likely to be a white man.

Race has been used as a wedge issue since the colonial period, effectively dividing oppressed whites from building coalitions with communities of color, but its use in the past 30 years has been somewhat unique. First of all, race as a wedge issue is the foundation of the Right's strategy to win political power for the Republican Party. (See next part *Highlights of the History of the Rise of the Right*.) Second, the methodology employed by the Right in manipulating racism has been effectively transferred to the wedge issues of sexism, homophobia and the criminalization of the poor, thus compounding the divisions among the oppressed. (In "Creating a Culture of Resistance, see the exercise, *"The Right's Racist Rhetoric."*)

Third, the Right has effectively used the power of television to push the ideology of race deep into the mass subconscious. Fourth, they have organized a massive, national grassroots movement capable of transforming their ideology into local, state and national power bases. Fifth, they are operating at a time of major global economic change, when millions of white working and middle class people see their dreams of a good life for themselves and their children rapidly disappearing, and are open to finding easy answers -- blaming people of color for their problems.

(3) White progressive movements voluntarily chose to prioritize their own issues of oppression and abandon the struggle against racial oppression.

In both periods, the white women's movement was born out of the struggle for African American liberation, and in both periods, the majority of white activists abandoned that struggle to focus on winning rights for white women. The labor movement of the 1870's, beginning with a strong platform of support for unionizing Black workers, ended in the 1880's leading the struggle to exclude Chinese people from the country. During the first Reconstruction, white teachers from the North went South to teach the freed people, and some were lynched by white mobs. During the second Reconstruction, the American Federation of Teachers built a national union on its reputation of successfully smashing the first African American and Puerto Rican

community controlled school district in the country (Oceanhill-Brownsville, 1968, NYC).

In the 1890's, millions of farmers and sharecroppers organized into the Populist Party, defying the segregated Democratic Party. But the white Populists sold out the Black activists for a stake in the majority political pie. In the 1990's, some queer activists, whose movement was started by queers of color at Stonewall, focus their struggle on the right to become equal opportunity murderers of peoples of color in the U.S. military. And we use false analogies between homophobic and racial oppression to justify demands for these "equal rights."

Results

The 1890's and the 1990's have a lot in common. Communities of color devastated; labor, women's and queer movements on the defensive; millions of people out of work; intense hostility to immigrants; while the rich get richer and international capitalism dominates the world. We need a long term view to keep hope alive.

WHO IS THE RIGHT?

Definition and Goals

The Right is a cross class white coalition whose goal is *unchallenged* political, economic, cultural and military power in the United States. Its long term goal is to create an absolutist white supremacist, capitalist, male supremacist and homophobic theocracy in this country.

Components

The Right is made up of many interlocking organizations, institutions and classes. Below are some of the most prominent parts:

Economic Right:

The "economic right" came out of the "new money" of the Southern and South Western capitalist class based in oil, real estate and high technology, as well as individual millionaires like Coors. This sector challenged, then merged with the "old money" of the East Coast financial sectors, organized around Wall Street.

Political Right:

The *Old Right* includes groups prevalent in the 1950's and early 60's like the John Birch Society and the White Citizen Councils that organized in specific reaction to the Supreme Court's 1954 Brown v. Board of Education decision ending school segregation.

Reactionary populism, based in the Southern and Northern white working class, was launched by George Wallace's American Independent Party in 1968, and got a new look with Ross Perot's *United We Stand* campaign in 1992.

The *New Right* built its institutions in the early 1970's. Some of the best known people and organizations are: Paul Weyrich's Heritage Foundation and Committee for the Survival of a Free Congress; the Rutherford Institute, Phyllis Shaffly's Eagle Forum, the Committee to Stop the ERA; Howard Phillips' Conservative Caucus, John Dolan's National Conservative PAC, and Richard Viguerie's computerized conservative mailing lists.

Christian Right:

The Christian Right was officially born when New Right and Christian fundamentalist leaders formed the Moral Majority in 1979. Perhaps the most important political force of the 1990's, the Christian Right includes hundreds of interlocking single and multi-issue, local, state, and national organizations. Some of the better known include: Pat Buchanan's Christian Coalition, Lou Sheldon's Traditional Values Coalition of California, Randall Terry's Operation Rescue, Beverly Le Hayes' Concerned Women for America, American Family Associates, Focus on the Family, California Pro Life Council and Robert Simmond's Christians for Excellence in Education in California.

Before the 1970's, the majority of white people who identified themselves as "fundamentalist" Christians rarely voted, and less rarely in an organized fashion. In 1994, 33% of the white electorate identified themselves as "evangelical Christians." The most powerful group, the Christian Coalition, got 70% of its candidates elected in 1994.

Racial Nationalists (a term used by Chip Berlet)

Included in this group would be most right wing talk show hosts, David Duke, and Pat Buchanan. The term seems to apply to racists who are focused on keeping the U.S. as a nation for white people (The noted scholar John Henrik Clarke calls this brand of racism "white nationalism.") Samuel Francis, who blames multi-culturalism for attempting to wipe out 'traditional white, American, Christian and Western values' says,

"Americans who want to conserve their civilization need to get rid of elites who want to wreck it but they also need to kick out the vagrant savages who have wandered across the border, now claim our country as their own, and impose their cultures upon us. If there are any Americans left in San Jose, they might start taking back their country by taking back their own city...You don't find statues of Quetzalcoatl in Vermont!" (Chip Berlet, "The Right Rides High," The Progressive. Oct. 1994.)

The best response to Mr. Francis I've seen was on a young Latino's T-shirt:
"We Didn't Cross the Border. The Border Crossed Us."

Paramilitary Groups

There are thousands. They are white, racist, sexist, homophobic, anti-semitic, armed and dangerous. Their ranks have grown dramatically with the economic crisis that has dispossessed millions of young and middle aged white men. Oklahoma was just the tip of the iceberg. Some of the better known names of groups are: KKK, White Aryan Resistance, White Patriot Party, Liberty Lobby, local militia groups and organized racist skinhead youth. (For more information on the paramilitary right, see Michael Novick, White Lies White Power: The Fight Against White Supremacy and Reactionary Violence. Maine: Common Courage Press, 1995.)

Results

The Right has come close to accomplishing their goals. The Old, New and Christian Right, and many racial nationalists like David Duke, have effectively taken over the apparatus of the Republican Party. The Economic Right has merged with the older economic rulers to achieve international hegemony through GATT, NAFTA, the World Bank and the IMF. The Right's agenda dominates the mass media, the Congress, and sets the national agenda. Views that would have been labeled 'racist' and 'reactionary' twenty years ago are now called "conservative" or "mainstream." Paramilitary groups and individuals have merged with extremists in the Christian Right (like Operation Rescue) and racial nationalists to create a nationwide network of grassroots terrorists.

HIGHLIGHTS IN THE HISTORY OF THE RISE OF THE RIGHT

- 1954–55** Brown vs. Board of Education; Murder of Emmett Till, Rosa Parks initiates Montgomery Bus Boycott.
- White Citizens Council; resurgence of KKK; whites close pools and schools.
- 1960–64** Civil Rights Movement: Freedom Rides, Sit-ins, voter registration, Freedom Schools, Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, Selma March, mass demonstrations and arrests.
- 1964** Civil Rights Act of 1964
- Goldwater Campaign for president:
- (1) Ran on opposition to the Civil Rights Act, opposed to segregation but also to federal enforcement of desegregation.
 - (2) Beginning of poor Southern whites shift to Republican party.
 - (3) Beginning of *Southern Strategy*: using racism as a wedge issue to win white working and middle class voters from Democratic to Republican Party.
 - (4) Phyllis Shaffly, founder later of Eagle Forum, works on campaign.
 - (5) Richard Viguerie makes first computerized mailing list of donors.
- A Fair Housing Referendum is defeated through the initiative process in California, after it had been passed by the legislature. First use in California of initiative process to push back civil rights gains.
- 1965** Voting Rights Act of 1965.
- Watts Rebellion in Los Angeles. (From 1964 through 1968, there are 329 urban rebellions in 257 cities.)
- Beginning of massive anti-Vietnam war movement. SNCC issues statement of opposition to the war.
- 1966** Martin Luther King, Jr. pelted by whites in Chicago. Black Power shout initiated by SNCC gains national attention. Black Panther Party formed in Oakland, goes armed to Sacramento.
- First "Reagan Democrats" go Republican in Chicago, a direct white lash to King's visit. Liberal Democrat Paul Douglas defeated for re-election.
- Ronald Reagan, funded by 5 California millionaires, elected Republican Governor of California by white electorate in suburbs. He runs on a government restraint, anti-tax, and 'entitlement' to property and business platform. Initiates use of "race-neutral" language in campaign.
- 1968** Martin Luther King assassinated. Massive rebellions in urban areas.
- After a bitter four month long strike, the Third World Liberation Front at San Francisco State, with mass multi-racial student, faculty, staff and community support, wins the first Ethnic Studies and Special Admissions Program for students of color (the first affirmative action program). President H.I. Hayakawa, funded by a Chicago millionaire,

goes around the country preaching a 'get tough on students' line. He later founds the U.S. English organization which initiates English only campaigns around the country.

Election of Richard Nixon: whitelash against Black uprisings.

George Wallace's American Independent Party gets 10 million white votes and founds contemporary white reactionary populist movement. Wallace's campaign introduces key aspects to Right's racist agenda:
(1) Term "reverse discrimination" replaces old "white power" term.
Civil rights for African Americans means 'reverse discrimination.'
(2) Whites called 'victims' of Black civil rights movement.
(3) *Beginning of color coded language: No mention of 'race' or 'racism.'*
(4) Focused white working class anger on Federal government and 'elite intellectuals' in conscious creation of reactionary populism.
(5) Laid ideological basis for future tax revolt against government.
(6) With aid of computers, Wallace's 10 million voter lists are turned over to the Republican Party.

1965-73 Era of major movements of communities of color: A few examples:
1965: United Farm Workers of America organized in California;
1968: American Indian Movement founded
1969: League of Revolutionary Black Workers in Detroit
1969: Los Siete de la Raza in San Francisco
1970: Height of Puerto Rican Independence Movement
1971: Rebellion in Attica Prison
Early 1970's: Foundation of Asian Law Caucus in San Francisco
1972: National Black Political Assembly in Gary, Indiana
1972: La Raza Unida Party convention in El Paso
1972: Supreme Court halts death penalty
1973: Supreme Court in Roe v. Wade says abortion is constitutional

1973-75 Founding of Core New Right Institutions:
Viguerie's computerized mailing lists helps Jesse Helms found Congressional Club. Paul Weyrich founds Heritage Foundation and Committee for Survival of a Free Congress. Howard Phillips founds Conservative Caucus. John Dolan founds National Conservative PAC. Phyllis Shaffly founds Eagle Forum.

1974-76 Boston: massive whitelash against court-ordered busing.

1972-80 Justice Department takes 51 state and local governments to court over affirmative action, focusing on challenging white working class bastions of racism: police, fire departments and skilled craft unions in construction. In same period recession begins to hit millions of working class jobs.

1978 BAKKE DECISION: First major defeat for affirmative action. With complicity of a UC official who urges Bakke to sue, UC refuses to admit to its past discrimination, thus weakening its case. Massive student protests to support affirmative action. Court says no more quotas in an educational institution, based on race. Media makes Bakke out to be an aggrieved white man, victimized by unqualified students of color.

Briggs Initiative in California defeated. Initiative would have denied teaching jobs to pro gay and gay employees. Though 2,879,000 voters supported the homophobic initiative, massive organizing in the labor and gay communities secured a 58% to 42% No Vote on Prop. 6.

On same ballot, Prop. 7, to expand the death penalty, won.

Proposition 13 in California: the tax payers revolt. Based among white home owners, this initiative rolled back assessments on houses and businesses. It caused a major defunding of public schools just as the students of color became the majority in urban areas. Prop 13 led to a nation wide tax revolt: 18 states followed California. The tax revolt was a major turning point in U.S. politics as white voters found a way to defund cities where there were Black mayors and majority populations of color, thus effectively undermining their political power gains of the late 60's.

In response to a desegregation suit filed in 1969 by the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights, the Internal Revenue Service commissioner ruled that a school would lose its tax deduction if it had few or no Black students. Many of the all white schools set up in the South to avoid desegregation were also Christian schools, established to keep children away from the "permissive" culture of the 60's. The IRS ruling outraged the Christian School Network, that sent 126,000 protest letters to the IRS. Richard Viguerie commented that, "It was the spark that ignited the Religious Right's involvement in real politics."

1979 Robert Billings of the Christian Schools Movement introduces televangelist Jerry Falwell to New Right leaders. This meeting founds the Moral Majority, the first political organization of the Christian Right.

1980 **Election of Ronald Reagan: the Right takes the *white* house.** Reagan campaigns on an ideology of return to the segregated life of 1950's white burbs: a time of white middle class women in the kitchen, the cult of individualism, cultural conformity and extreme patriotism. His campaign never mentions the word 'race,' but all his imagery is color-coded. His presidency involves major restructuring of the U.S. economy: massive union busting, huge tax gifts to the rich and corporations, devastating destruction of social service networks, the notorious "drug war" on communities of color, refusal to fund Aids research and treatment, appointment of rightwing ideologues to federal courts, and an obsession with smashing the revolutions in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Grenada. He appointed Clarence Thomas head of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, thus ensuring the non-enforcement of federal affirmative action programs.

1980 Christian Right adopted pro-active language and strategy: "pro-life, pro-abstinence, pro-family," "equal rights for all, special rights for none." Christian Right uses sexism and homophobia as its "wedge issues," using the same the same rhetorical strategies as with racism.

1983 U.S. English founds F.A.I.R. (Federation of Americans for Immigration Reform) in California which begins long term attacks on Latino immigrants.

- 1984** Christian Right plays major role in re-election of Reagan.
- 1986** In California, the initiative process is used to recall the U.S.'s most progressive State Supreme Court justices: Rose Bird, Cruz Reynoso and Joseph Grodin. The campaign focuses on the judges' refusal to enforce the death penalty, but the campaign is financed by California agribusiness opposed to the Court's support of farmworker legislation.
- In same election, voters defeat an English only and Aids quarantine initiative.
- Gay African American Timothy Lee is lynched in Concord. His body is found behind the BART station. No one is arrested or convicted.
- 1987** Oregon Citizens Alliance is created from tax revolters, right to lifers, gay bashers and people fighting land use regulations.
- 1988** George Bush uses the the Willie Horton ad to get elected. The ad pictures an African American criminal committing a new crime on parole.
- Colorado voters support an initiative banning abortion.
- 1990** *White sheet to white shirt:* (Ex?) Klansman and Nazi David Duke runs for governor of Louisiana. He gets 55% of the white vote but is defeated by Black voters and the New Orleans business class afraid of the effects of a Duke victory on tourism, the city's major economy.
- Stealth Campaign in California:* The California Pro Life Council and the Christian Coalition get 60% of their candidates elected to local offices and school boards in San Diego County. Their strategy is to use unknown candidates, with no publicity on names or issues. They organize directly through churches: voter ID, phone banking, and putting voter cards on cars in church parking lots the Sunday before the election. The strategy had been created by the Heritage Foundation (the most powerful think tank in the country) as a way of "percolating through the system from the ground up."
- 1992** Equal Rights Amendment defeated in Iowa, although a pre-election poll indicated a 54% yes vote. The Christian Coalition distributed 600,000 voter guides and made 45,000 phone calls. The No on ERA Committee made over 1 million door to door contacts in the state.
- 1993** With massive funding by the Teachers Union, the voucher initiative is defeated in California.
- 1994** Propositions 184 (three strikes you're out) and 187 (no schools or medical care for Latino and Asian children without papers) wins in California, although massive grassroots organizing defeated 187 in San Francisco and many other counties of Northern California. The New Right gathered signatures to put 187 on the ballot in churches and at gun shows! The sweep brought the Republicans to power in the state legislature for the first time in 35(?) years.
- Nationally, Christian Coalition gets 70% of its candidates elected.

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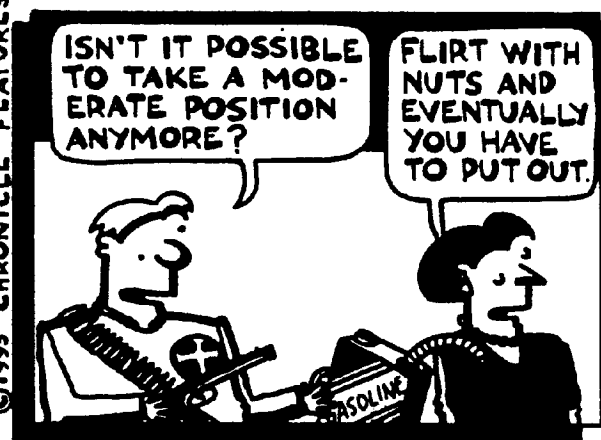
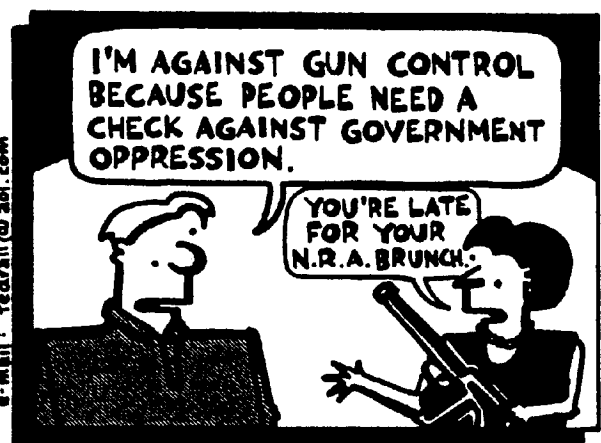
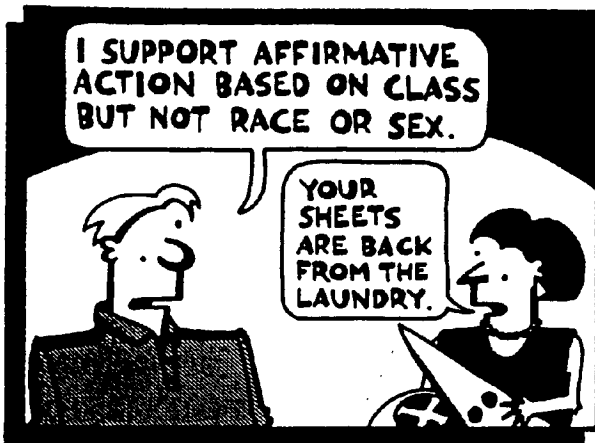
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