

BRUNSWICK CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

MEETING – November 7, 2017

“AVOIDABLE TRAGEDY OR IRREPRESSIBLE CONFLICT”

SPEAKER – Will Greene

Will gets straight to the point of it. Slavery is the central theme. It is a monster in the midst of the only Representative Democracy in existence at that time. The statement that the Negro is inferior to a white person is just wrong. The abolitionist is pressing this point. Jeff Davis is saying “leave us alone.” Abe Lincoln says stick to our young Democracy and bind the nation as one.

Will tells us not to spend a minute thinking Southerners were fighting for a way of life. He points out that every State ordinance of secession has slavery as a main reason for leaving the Union. The future of slavery was addressed in 1787. The importation of slaves was to end by 1808. It doesn't say anything about that one-eighth of the present population who are slaves forever and count as three-fifths of a person.

Attempts were made to keep slave and free states equal. The Missouri Compromise was such an animal (Missouri =slave state & Maine=free) There was no climate of reason or good will.

Ya just had to be there to hear the Jeff Davis quote about slavery and a wolf!

The compromise plan did not work. Compensation to slave owners was not workable. Abolitionists were almost “radicalized.” Tempers raged in Congress as well as nationwide. (The abolitionist Senator, Charles Sumner, was beaten almost to death by a Southern house member with a cane.”) Race was a key. Slavery is for life and raised the issue of how to “race control” four million “racially inferior people.” Some suggested relocation to Africa. It proved expensive and had low participation.

Will suggests critical change came in the 1830's with the American Anti-Slavery Society and its Declaration of Sentiments written by William Lloyd Garrison. While professed non-violent in opposing slavery, it “blew the lid off” by saying absolutely no compensation be given. This said that 1. Man can't hold property in

man 2. Slavery is a crime. 3. He is not an article to be sold. His plan, Will says, had a fatal flaw—it demonized ALL Southern slave owners from George Washington to Jeff Davis. The unexpected consequences were that this caused contempt for the ENTIRE South. This went on for thirty years. The abolitionists became increasingly large in number. They would point to 700,000 free blacks and 2 million slaves. This was “shaking the tree” of our fragile young Democracy and testing our Constitution. The Whig party was shaken to its roots and a new party – the Republicans was formed. The issues of the Fugitive Slave Act and the Dred Scott decision (does a black man have the right to sue? etc.) and Abe Lincoln’s “A house divided” speech made it clear we could not continue as a nation half slave and half free.

Enter a “madman” – John Brown. His central purpose at Harper’s Ferry in 1859 was to launch a slave rebellion. His death made him a martyr in the North and a threat to the South. Will says the time for debate is over. Lincoln won in 1860 by 39% of the popular vote. Not one Southern State did he win. Fort Sumpter was soon bombarded and a horrible war was started. The South lost an entire generation of young men and understandably would call it “The War of Northern Aggression.”

The positive outcome was the 13th Amendment and preservation of a very fragile Democracy.

Will says everything piled up and we just could not find a peaceful solution that worked. He conjectures that we need to also mold a nation where the majority ruled and create a society where blacks and whites can live together.

Thanks, Will, for making it clear that we failed earlier to solve the slavery issue with good reason. War is a terrible, bloody solution. North-South pride and anger pushed us passed a point of no return.

The English emancipation had William Wilberforce, both a “pot stirrer” and politician, to find a peaceful solution—we had no one.

Dan Fink

