

OPINION EXTRA MARCH 12, 2017 6:44 PM

Is this post-sectional America?



ROB DILLON
Guest Columnist

COLUMBIA, SC — My daddy never much cared for Yankees. They were loud, pushy, fast-talking jerks. Rich, slick, wheeler-dealers, always out for a buck. Bragging all the time, living in their fancy houses, marrying their fancy women. They were rude, arrogant, nasty, repulsive boors, and we all down here couldn't stand to breathe the same air as Yankees, much less trust them.

Even as a child, I understood that as a stereotype. There were a few Yankees in the small Shenandoah Valley town where I grew up, and they weren't so bad. And I began to meet Yankees of my own age in college, and they were fine. Some of my best friends were Yankees. I cut one out of the herd and married her, giving no thought whatsoever to the children. The stereotype my father had spun receded into my subconscious.

My daddy also harbored some stereotypes about black people that (in retrospect) were less than charitable. But if you'd asked him whether he preferred blacks or Yankees, he'd have said black folks by a mile. He was condescending to blacks, certainly. But they were nice people. Not so Yankees.

Did a Yankee make this list? SC ranked one of the worst states to live in

ADVERTISING

Eight years ago there was some talk about a “post-racial America,” since a black man could be elected president. Such talk was self-evidently premature. As long as race is remarked, our culture is not post-racial.

But it seems possible to me that today, America may be on the brink of post-sectionality. Insofar as I am aware, the fact that Donald Trump is a nasty Yankee seems to have attracted no attention from anybody whatsoever.

“

NOT ONLY DID THE VERY CARICATURE OF THE NASTY YANKEE RECEIVE 55 PERCENT OF THE SC VOTE, HIS SECTION DOES NOT SEEM TO HAVE BEEN A MATTER OF PRIVATE CONVERSATION, MUCH LESS PUBLIC NOTICE.

And not just a nasty Yankee, but the very caricature of the nasty Yankee. The Rochester of Yankeedom. Yet not only did Donald Trump receive 55 percent of the vote here in South Carolina, his section does not seem to have been a matter of private conversation, much less public notice.

I hate to dredge up The Unpleasantness, since it seems so long forgotten. But Union soldiers killed more than 95,000 of us, including the fathers of many cousins I never knew. They burned our capital to the ground, and occupied the smoldering ruins with their army for 12 years.

They vandalized our statue of George Washington, and used our brand new State House for cannon practice, and when we raised the Confederate flag over that State House in 1962 it was a symbol of sectional defiance, not racism. It never meant “We Hate Blacks.” It meant, cleaned up for polite conversation, “Yankee Go Home.”

“

WHEN WE RAISED THE CONFEDERATE FLAG OVER THAT STATE HOUSE IN 1962, IT MEANT, CLEANED UP FOR POLITE CONVERSATION, ‘YANKEE GO HOME.’

When we lowered that flag from the State House dome in 2000, however, and removed it from the grounds entirely in 2015, the focus was racial. Proponents of the move argued that the flag offended blacks, which it certainly did, and opponents wanted it retained as a symbol of heritage.

As far as I’m aware, not one of the 4.8 million South Carolinians said, “And, btw, we hate Yankees.” Or we don’t. The very existence of the message that banner was designed to send seems to have been forgotten.

“

NONE OF THOSE SONS OF THE CONFEDERACY FIT THE STEREOTYPE OF A TOOTHLESS, BANJO-PICKIN’ BIGOT AS PERFECTLY AS THEIR DONALD TRUMP FITS MY FATHER’S OLD STEREOTYPE OF A NASTY YANKEE.

Meanwhile it is my impression that any stereotypes our Northern brethren may have held about Southerners began receding the day they drove Old Dixie down. I’m pretty sure New Yorkers noticed that Jimmy Carter represented the South when they voted for him in 1976, and probably also Bill Clinton in 1992 and 1996. But did they notice that Al Gore was from the South when they voted for him in 2000? I’m not so sure. Of course, none of those sons of the Confederacy fit the stereotype of a toothless, banjo-pickin’ bigot as perfectly as their Donald Trump fits my father’s old stereotype of a nasty Yankee.

So are we poised at the dawn of a post-sectional America? I admit that I only have recent personal observations to share regarding half of my hypothesis. Which is why I’m sending this dispatch to my friends up in Columbia.

If you all know anybody from the South, ask them if what I’ve said is true. And report back to Charleston at your earliest convenience. There’s nothing but Yankees down here.

Dr. Dillon taught genetics at the College of Charleston for more than 30 years; contact him at DillonR@fwgna.org.

