

# Rand Paul's Neo-Confederate Aide

**Exclusive:** Throughout U.S. history, anti-government libertarianism has been intertwined with slavery and racism, from the movement's early icons including many slaveholders to today's hero, Sen. Rand Paul, who hired a senior staff aide who has espoused extreme neo-Confederate views, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Some readers have questioned my recent historical reporting on the deep-rooted connections between "libertarianism" and racism in America. These readers don't want to accept that an ism derived from the word "liberty" could have longstanding ties to slavery and segregation.

But the links are not simply historical, going back to libertarian icons like slave-owning racists Thomas Jefferson, George Mason, Patrick Henry and (the later incarnation, at least, of) James Madison. [See Consortiumnews.com's ["Rethinking Thomas Jefferson."](#)]

Many tie-ins to the slave South are more recent or even current, conveyed through a nostalgia for the pre-Civil War days when white Southerners disdained federal interference in their contract right to own other human beings.

For instance, not only have today's libertarian heroes Ron and Rand Paul spoken critically of civil rights laws as an intrusion on "property rights," but the younger Paul now a Republican senator from Kentucky and a likely presidential candidate in 2016 has hired a senior staff member, Jack Hunter, who toasts the birthday of John Wilkes Booth, the assassin who murdered President Abraham Lincoln at the end of the Civil War.

As conservative Washington Post columnist Michael Gerson [wrote](#) on Friday, "It turns out that a senior member of [Rand Paul's] Senate staff, Jack Hunter, [has a history of neo-Confederate radio rants](#). And Paul has come to the defense of his aide. Paul's attempt to dismiss the matter has only added to the damage. 'It was a shock radio job,' [the senator explains](#). 'He was doing wet T-shirt contests. But can a guy not have a youth and stuff? People try to say I smoked pot one time, and I wasn't fit for office.'

"But Hunter's offenses were committed as an adult. They included defending a regime founded on slavery, comparing Abraham Lincoln to Saddam Hussein and raising (in Hunter's words) a 'personal toast every May 10 to celebrate John Wilkes Booth's birthday.' This was not a single, ideological puff but rather a decade spent mainlining moonlight and magnolias in the ruins of Tara.

"This would not be the first time that Paul has heard secessionist talk in his circle of confederates, I mean, associates. His father has attacked Lincoln for causing a 'senseless' war and ruling with an 'iron fist.' Others allied with Paulism in various think tanks and Web sites have accused Lincoln of mass murder and treason. For Rand Paul to categorically repudiate such views and all who hold them would be to excommunicate a good portion of his father's movement.

"It is a form of libertarianism that categorically objects to 150 years of expanding federal power. During this period, the main domestic justification for federal action has been opposition to slavery and segregation. Lincoln, in the Paulite view, exercised tyrannical powers to pursue an unnecessary war. Similarly, Paulites have been critical of the 1964 Civil Rights Act for violating both states' rights and individual property rights, an argument Rand Paul himself echoed during several interviews as a Senate candidate." [See Consortiumnews.com's "Marriage of Libertarianism and Racism."]

### **Mainstream GOP**

Still, Gerson, a more mainstream Republican, offers the polite excuse that Paulites are not "racists," only "opponents of the legal methods that ended state-sanctioned racism." In other words, though they object to government interference with the "liberty" of white people to own or oppress black people, these Paulites aren't racist.

The history actually shows an intrinsic relationship between racism and libertarianism, two sides to the same deeply tarnished coin. Going back to the Founding, the Southerners who opposed the Constitution with its dramatic concentration of power in the federal government compared to the states' rights of the Articles of Confederation based their case on the fear of plantation owners that the North inevitably would become dominant and would end slavery.

That was the case made by Anti-Federalists Patrick Henry and George Mason, two libertarian heroes, during Virginia's ratification convention. Like other opponents of the Constitution, they were adamantly opposed to its assertion of a much broader federal authority.

Historians Andrew Burstein and Nancy Isenberg recount the debate in their 2010 book, *Madison and Jefferson*, noting that the chief argument advanced by Henry and Mason was that "slavery, the source of Virginia's tremendous wealth, lay politically unprotected" and that this danger was exacerbated by the Constitution's granting the President, as commander in chief, the power to "federalize" state militias.

"Mason repeated what he had said during the Constitutional Convention: that the

new government failed to provide for 'domestic safety' if there was no explicit protection for Virginians' slave property," Burstein and Isenberg wrote. "Henry called up the by-now-ingrained fear of slave insurrections the direct result, he believed, of Virginia's loss of authority over its own militia."

Henry floated conspiracy theories about possible subterfuges that the federal government might employ to take away black slaves from white Virginians. Describing this fear-mongering, Burstein and Isenberg wrote:

"Congress, if it wished, could draft every slave into the military and liberate them at the end of their service. If troop quotas were determined by population, and Virginia had over 200,000 slaves, Congress might say: 'Every black man must fight.' For that matter, a northern-controlled Congress might tax slavery out of existence."

Though the Anti-Federalists lost their effort to block ratification of the Constitution – by a narrow 89-79 margin in Virginia – they soon settled on a new strategy. They began reinterpreting the document in a way that minimized federal authority and thus maximized chances for maintaining slavery. In this revisionism, the Southern slave-owning aristocracy organized behind one of their own, Thomas Jefferson who had been in France during the drafting and ratification of the Constitution.

After he returned in 1789, Jefferson served the slave-owners well with his charisma and political skills. Throughout the first six decades of the Nineteenth Century, the agrarian-based political party that he founded frustrated Northern efforts to restrict the expansion of slavery. The Jeffersonians, who later became known as the Democrats, bought time for a new industry to enrich Virginia's plantation owners, the breeding of black slaves for sale to the new slave states in the west. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[Racism and the American Right](#)."] ]

### **Twin Pillars**

Thus, slavery and the racism that went with it were always powerful driving forces in the ideological hostility to federal authority. One might say these peculiarly American economic and political forces were shackled together from the beginning.

This bond even survived the Civil War when the white Southern aristocracy soon reestablished itself under Jim Crow laws that treated freed slaves as second-class citizens. And, in the 1950s and 1960s when the federal government intervened against segregation, the old arguments about states' rights and contractual rights could be heard again.

Though many Americans had hoped that the election of Barack Obama in 2008 as the first African-American president would signify the beginning of a post-racial America, the opposite seems to have happened. The racist fury over having the dark-skinned Obamas in the White House energized a new rightist political movement that now seeks to roll back some of the key civil rights laws enacted a half-century ago.

Much as the white-dominated South tied up Congress in the pre-Civil War days and then used political obstructionism to end post-Civil War Reconstruction, the nearly all white Republican Party is now intent on creating a Second Jim Crow Era by suppressing the non-white vote, gerrymandering congressional districts and investing heavily in anti-government propaganda.

There will, of course, be assurances that none of this is racist; it is simply the implementation of “libertarian” values. And, indeed, many well-meaning Americans have embraced the “libertarian” label out of frustration with other government abuses, including imperial military overreach and intrusions of personal freedoms, either via surveillance or drug prohibitions.

But those problems can be addressed through serious political reforms without embracing an ideology that disdains collective government action to address serious challenges to the nation, whether those threats are global warming, out-of-control financial markets or the shameful legacy of American racism.

Regarding all those challenges, the response from the “libertarians” is to simply constrain the federal government, an old message with a very ugly past.

**Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his new book, *America's Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)). For a limited time, you also can order Robert Parry's trilogy on the Bush Family and its connections to various right-wing operatives for only \$34. The trilogy includes *America's Stolen Narrative*. For details on this offer, [click here](#).**

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