

Briefing on Historical Context of Confederate Monuments, Symbols and Names

Mayor's Task Force on
Confederate Monuments

September 7, 2017



City of Dallas

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Purpose

This briefing has been prepared by City Staff in response to Task Force Members' requests and is not intended to be an exhaustive survey of history from 1865-1940. However, it is intended to give you essential historical context.

- Review the primary documents related to the Confederate Monuments in Dallas
- Define “The Lost Cause” movement
- Share statement from American Historical Association



Findings from City Archives

- The City Archivist pulled all relevant primary documents related to the Confederate monuments in Dallas
- Program memorializing the June 12, 1936, Dedication of the Robert E. Lee Sculpture (see handout):
 - 27 pages
 - Speakers and participants included:
 - President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who unveiled the statue in the company of Dallas VIPs
 - Chairwoman of the fundraising efforts of the Southern Memorial Association
 - Dallas Mayor, George Sargeant
 - Congressman Hatton W. Sumners, who introduced Jesse Jones, the Chairman of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation



Excerpts

- According to the Foreward, the memorial
 - “is in accordance with the objective of the (Southern Memorial) Association, which is to, honor the memory of the those who served the Confederacy, and to preserve the traditions and history of the South. It is the hope of the Association that these inspiring figures will arouse in present and future generations of young men and women to emulate the virtues of the great American, Robert E. Lee, whose name continues to shine brighter on the pages of history, with the passing of the years”
- Mayor George Sargeant of Dallas quote:
 - “This magnificent monument to General Robert E. Lee, the greatest soldier of all times, is gratefully accepted by me in behalf of the citizens of the City of Dallas. It shall stand here on this busy corner of our city as a perpetual memorial to the character, valor and achievements of this matchless leader of our own Lost Cause.”



The Lost Cause

- Name commonly given to a movement and myth that sought to help the traditional Southern white society reconcile the defeat of the Confederate States of America in the Civil War
- First appeared in 1866, and by the 1870s it was widely used - up until the 1960s
- White Southerners sought consolation in attributing their loss to factors beyond their control and to betrayals of their heroes and cause
 - the movement tended to portray the Confederacy's cause as noble and most of the Confederacy's leaders as exemplars of old-fashioned chivalry, defeated by the Union armies not through superior military skill, but by overwhelming force
 - they also tended to condemn Reconstruction
- Taken up by memorial associations such as the United Confederate Veterans and the United Daughters of the Confederacy

Multiple Sources: http://civilwarjourneys.org/the_lost_cause.htm, "Monuments to a Myth" – August 2017, "The Pernicious Myth, Of the 'Loyal Slave' Lives on in Confederate Memorials", SmithsonianMag.com – August 2017, "Confronting Slavery and Revealing the 'Lost Cause'" - 2011, <https://www.nps.gov/resources/story.htm%3Fid%3D217>



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The Lost Cause

- The Lost Cause became a widely accepted and propagated myth that....
 - helped Southerners to cope with the social, political, and economic changes after the Civil War, especially in the Reconstruction era
 - focused on the defense of states' rights, rather than preservation of slavery as the primary cause that led eleven Southern states to secede
 - viewed secession as a justifiable constitutional response to Northern cultural and economic aggressions against the Southern way of life
 - presented slavery as a benign institution in which the slaves were treated well and cared for and loyal and faithful to their benevolent masters
 - adopted and spread via popular cultural (“Gone with the Wind” (1939) is seen as the pinnacle of this adoption of The Lost Cause in popular culture)



The Lost Cause provided the justification and support for the Jim Crow system of rigid segregation which dominated the South for 100 years after the Civil War



Texas Secession

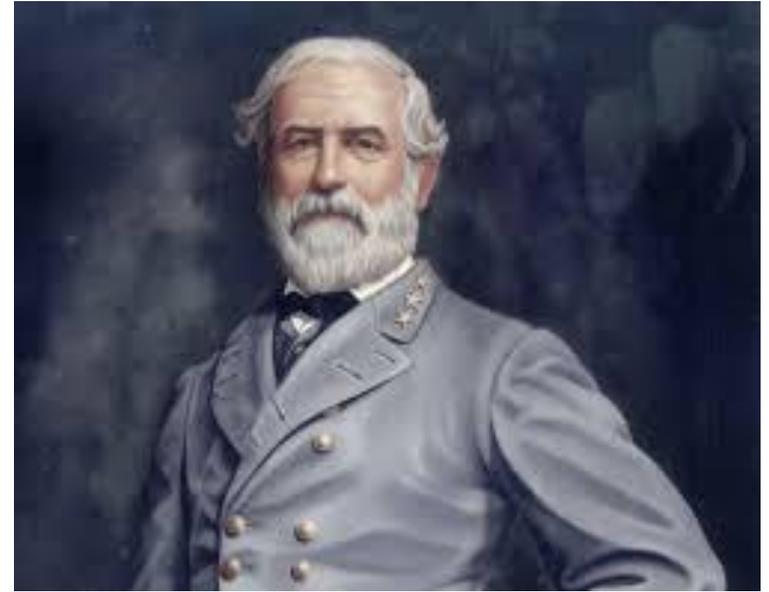
Texas abandoned her separate national existence and consented to become one of the Confederate States to promote her welfare, insure domestic tranquility [sic] and secure more substantially the blessings of peace and liberty to her people... She was received as a commonwealth holding, maintaining and protecting the institution known as negro slavery — the servitude of the African to the white race within her limits — a relation that had existed from the first settlement of her wilderness by the white race, and which her people intended should exist in all future time. Her institutions and geographical position established the strongest ties between her and other slave-holding States of the confederacy. Those ties have been strengthened by association.

— Texas Declaration of Causes, Feb. 2, 1861



The Cult of General Lee

- Central to The Lost Cause, is reverence for Confederate military leaders, such as Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson
- Narrative emerged that Confederates were never truly defeated on the battlefield – they were only overwhelmed
 - In Lee's farewell order to the Army of Northern Virginia, Lee spoke of the "overwhelming resources and numbers" that the Confederate army fought against
- Confederate generals represented the virtues of Southern Christianity, nobility, honor and chivalry
 - The Northern generals, were characterized as men with low moral standards who engaged in vicious campaigns against Southern civilians such as in the case of Sherman's March to the Sea
- Lee's death five years after the Civil War cemented his prominence, many began to idolize him as the "ultimate Christian soldier"
- Mythology regarding Lee's biography emerged, most importantly that he never owned slaves, which is not factual



Sources: "How the Cult of Robert E. Lee was Born", *History.com* - August 2017, and "The Myth of the Kindly General Lee", *TheAtlantic.com* – June 2017



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The Lost Cause

- "History comprises both facts and interpretations of those facts.
- To remove a monument or to change the name of a school or street, is not to erase history, but rather to alter or call attention to a previous interpretation of history.
- A monument is not history itself; a monument commemorates an aspect of history, representing a moment in the past when a public or private decision defined who would be honored in a community's public spaces."
- Communities need to decide what is worthy of civic honor and those decisions will change over time as the communities values shift.
- "Nearly all monuments to the Confederacy and its leaders were erected without anything resembling a democratic process."
- "African Americans had no voice and no opportunity to raise questions about the purposes or likely impact of the honor accorded to the builders the Confederate States of America."



The American Historical Association recommends that it's time to reconsider these decisions

Sources: American Historical Association Statement:
<http://blog.historians.org/2017/08/aha-statement-confederate-monuments/>



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