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## History Rewritten: How America has Failed to Address the Legacy of the Civil War

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## **History Rewritten: How America has Failed to Address the Legacy of the Civil War**

**Maggie Debrovner**

The American Civil War never really ended. The legacy of the war is still seen through American educational, judicial, and economic institutions. For the past thirty years, most historians have agreed that slavery was at least one of the predominant factors in the bloody fight between the North and the South. Despite this consensus among historians, the ‘Lost Cause’ and ‘Old South’ narratives remain pervasive, in both the works of these scholars and among the nation as a whole. One of the biggest sources of economic and social discrepancies in this country is our failure, as a nation, to understand the true causes and effects of the Civil War and slavery. The emergence of Southern nationalist pride in the face of defeat prevented full enfranchisement of African Americans after the war, and continues to shape our historical and cultural memory. The ideological lexicon of the Antebellum South not only altered this memory in the South, but throughout the entire American education system, forever altering the discourse surrounding America’s past. As a nation, the United States has failed to address the historical legacy of slavery, both in 1865, and today. The common rhetoric of “well, my grandparents didn’t own slaves...” or “can’t we just get over it already...” exemplify the way slavery has been constructed as an historical anomaly, an event that only exists within the confines of itself, and has been forever eradicated.

The Lost Cause rhetoric was popularized in the South as a rhetorical device to defend Southern pride and rewrite their own history. This is agreed upon by many historians, but why then has this historical narrative become so deeply embedded throughout the entire nation? This version of history appealed to both the South, as well as the North, because slavery was a national problem, not just a Southern one. Rather than deal with the

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consequences of decades of enslavement and brutality, the national memory of the war has us looking primarily at ‘states’ rights.’ Racism had become an institutional structure that prevented both the North and the South from recognizing former slaves as equals and left the entire nation unwilling to remove Black men, women, and children from a permanent state of second-class citizenship. Throughout the nation, white leaders prevented full enfranchisement of African Americans, and led to the construction of a nation built on racism, inequality, and a fictional historical account. Through this paper I am going to argue that both liberal and conservative, Northern and Southern, Republican and Democratic historians have led us to a misrepresentation and false understanding of our nation’s past, an ideology that continues to influence all modern-day American institutions and structures.

The Lost Cause is not easily defined. It is “a full-blown, argumentative statement of the Confederate point of view with respect to all aspects of the Civil War.”<sup>1</sup> In summary, the Lost Cause legend was established “to foster a heroic image of secession and the war so that Confederates would have salvaged at least their honor from the all-encompassing defeat.”<sup>2</sup> The purpose of this narrative was to hide and cover up the embarrassing and tragic past of the South.<sup>3</sup> The elements of the myth which I will explain briefly were all created intentionally, thus distorting national memory. There are several claims to this myth. These include, “slavery was not a sectional issue,” meaning that protecting slavery was not the reason the South seceded, “the South would have given up slavery,” the nature of slaves was not as bad as its made out to be (included is the imagery of the ‘faithful slave’), the idealization of the homefront, the idealization of the confederate soldier, and the belief that the war was a ‘white man’s

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<sup>1</sup> Gary W. Gallagher and Alan T. Nolan, *The Myth of the Lost Cause and Civil War History* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 2010), 12.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

war.<sup>4</sup> Defenders of the Lost Cause praised "the heroism, the splendid courage, the patient toil and suffering, the unselfish patriotism and the sublime devotion of our countrymen who died in a unequal struggle for the preservation of what they believed to be the sacred inheritance of constitutional liberty bequeathed to them by their fathers."<sup>5</sup> In a single phrase, the Lost Cause can be defined as "the War of Northern Aggression." There are so many elements of this ideological construction it is impossible to mention them all in such a brief space. The important part of the narrative remains why it was constructed and how.

One of the most important elements of the Lost Cause philosophy is the construction of Old South imagery. The Old South is an idealized version of the South that is presented in films like *Gone with the Wind*. The film follows the Southern belle, Scarlett O'Hara, as she traverses the harsh reality of being a rich Southern white woman during the Civil War and the period of Reconstruction.<sup>6</sup> This image of the South is full of lavish plantation living, beautiful white southern women, and negative stereotypes of African Americans and slaves. The Old South was often characterized through history books and newspaper articles by "the homogeneity of its people,"<sup>7</sup> meaning wealthy and white. However, other historians like Thomas Jefferson Wertenbaker disagree, arguing that the identity of the Old South was not homogenous, but it was "slavery which bound the South together and created a sense of brotherhood."<sup>8</sup> Regardless of what ties the people of the Old South together, it was represented by

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>5</sup> W. Stuart Towns, "Haunting the South for a Century and More: Lost Cause Rhetoric and Ritual," *North & South: The Official Magazine of the Civil War Society*, 2012, 40.

<sup>6</sup> *Gone with the Wind*, dir. Victor Fleming, prod. David O. Selznick, by Sidney Coe Howard, Max Steiner, and Ernest Haller, perf. Clark Gable, Vivien Leigh, Leslie Howard, Olivia De Havilland, Thomas Mitchell, and Hattie McDaniel.

<sup>7</sup> R. S. Cotterill, *The Old South; the Geographic, Economic, Social, Political, and Cultural Expansion, Institutions, and Nationalism of the Antebellum South* (Glendale, CA: Arthur H. Clark, 1939), 262.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Jefferson Wertenbaker, *The Old South; The Founding of American Civilization* (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, Inc, 1963), 350.

“aristocratic social structure, its wasteful agriculture, its courtly gentlemen, its fine mansions...”<sup>9</sup> This is clearly seen in several film representations.

Films like *Gone with the Wind* served to present stereotypes and characteristics of different elements pertaining to Civil War Era dynamics. For example, the slaves presented in the film are portrayed as “unintelligent, passive, and faithful to the always indulgent ‘Old Massa.’”<sup>10</sup> This serves to reaffirm the Lost Cause myth that slaves really weren’t treated that badly, and many were “happy,” “well treated,” and “did not care” about their status as slaves.<sup>11</sup> The film also goes further to depict “freed Black people as arrogant and crude” in the period of early Reconstruction.<sup>12</sup> The film also characterizes Northern or ‘Yankee’ soldiers as “bad people who were gratuitously and randomly upsetting the genteel and benign Southern culture.”<sup>13</sup> Finally, the film represents vigilante groups like the Ku Klux Klan “in a manner wholly sympathetic to the idea of vigilantes and the necessity of their existence.”<sup>14</sup> Through popular culture, this false perception of a wholesome and honorable Southern way of life is constructed. Although this film, or others like it, never address the issues of slavery or the North explicitly, they serve to recreate the legacy of the war for the American public. Films and other aspects of popular culture are not typically viewed through a critical lens. This makes this film’s legacy even more dangerous, as viewers passively allow it to alter their perception of the South and the reality of slavery. The Lost Cause and Old South myth has thus permeated the minds of millions of Americans through acquiescent participation. Southern nationalism becomes more deeply entrenched in discussions about the war and slavery so as to avoid

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 352.

<sup>10</sup> Gallagher and Nolan, *The Myth of the Lost Cause*, 30.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

the admittance that the war was really fought over upholding their right to own bodies. The postwar South created an image of itself to feed to the rest of the nation to instill Southern pride and respect.

The Lost Cause mythology was spread not just through the popular culture image of the Old South, but also through confederate groups and ceremonies that formed after the end of the Civil War. For example, the United Confederate Veterans, UCV, formed in order to celebrate and memorialize the war.<sup>15</sup> During the 1890s this group, along with other confederate groups and committees, “compiled a list of recommended histories, noted the publication of new books, and condemned a few it considered unfair to the south.”<sup>16</sup> These groups worked together towards presenting a ‘true history,’ one that ensured “school children were taught only a southern understanding of the war.”<sup>17</sup> In addition to these groups, museums and exhibits served to keep alive a respect for Confederate history, all under the pretense that “pride in their ancestors” would lead to “noble and patriotic action.”<sup>18</sup> We still see this happening today with the creation and celebration of Civil War monuments of Confederate soldiers or generals. Pride in the past was necessary for the South, as well as the North. If there was ever to be unity within the country, the South could not be seen as the weak, powerless counterpart to the North.

President Andrew Johnson was driven by a desire to meld the North and South into one nation, to construct one unique American identity. After Abraham Lincoln’s assassination in 1865, the newly inaugurated Andrew Johnson pardoned all former confederates, took back all reparations paid, and lost the peace that had seemed so promising when the North won the war.<sup>19</sup> Through Johnson’s

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<sup>15</sup> Gaines M. Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South, 1865-1913* (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2014), 104.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>19</sup> A. J. Langguth, *After Lincoln: How the North Won the Civil War and Lost the Peace* (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2015), 87.

national reunification, Johnson not only had to excuse the Northern role in slavery, but also the Southern one. By accepting the Southern doctrine in the North, Johnson was able to unite the two halves of the nation thus creating a consolidated union, but in reality, was only uniting white Northerners with white Southerners forever stunting the growth made towards racial equality. The Southern narrative infiltrated the entire nation so as to facilitate the integration of the South into Northern politics and discourse, and to vindicate the amalgamation of white power and control.

We see this national embedding of Southern pride through “ceremonies and rituals on Confederate Memorial Day, at Confederate veterans' reunions, and at Confederate monument dedications.”<sup>20</sup> Most important is “the rhetoric that was part of these celebrations” which “promoted stability in an unstable time.”<sup>21</sup> As we have seen, “the power of that rhetoric is demonstrated in the persistence of the mythology that was developed and retained by many white southerners throughout the twentieth-century and, for some, on into the twenty-first century.”<sup>22</sup> Most historians from after the 1960s will argue that slavery was an undeniable part of the Civil War and the South’s secession. The conviction that the Southern version of the past must be upheld is now seen by most historians as a tool to give stability and structure to the reforming South. The shift from Southern historians attempting to claim their own past to historians admitting the faults in these historical accounts occurred during the 1960s and the Civil Rights Movement. The reemergence of the Lost Cause narrative made it clear that the belief in Southern pride and heritage during the Civil War was a way to deflect Northern perspectives and the abolition movement, the same way it is later used to deny rights and freedoms to African Americans in the face of segregation and discrimination in the 50s and 60s.

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<sup>20</sup> Towns, “Haunting the South for a Century and More,” 41.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

We have seen a bit on how and why the Lost Cause was constructed, but we have not yet looked into how racist ideology really informed this Southern dogma. At the end of the day, the Lost Cause was a defense of slavery. Historians have argued back and forth on the causes and precedents for the war, but the only part worth focusing on here is the way historians and thinkers have discussed the causes without addressing the racism that went into the decision-making process. Even before the 1950s you would be hard pressed to find an historian that did not acknowledge slavery as at least one primary motivation for the Confederacy. But what these historians fail to do is admit the gigantic role that slavery had in the Southern response to the war and how this was reflective of racist ideology and the overwhelming desire to maintain the institution of slavery. They admit that slavery was a driving force in the separation of North and South, but only as it pertains to economic freedom or states' rights. As William Barney discusses, "most Southern editors applauded any bold defense of slavery, and the most expedient course for the typical politician was a hard line on Southern rights."<sup>23</sup> And southern rights were exactly that, the defense and retainment of slavery.

Contrary to many beliefs, one of the main reasons the South was so persistent on maintaining slavery was the restrictions of immigration held by the North.<sup>24</sup> Since the North refused any large migration of freed Blacks, the South believed that as slavery became less and less economically viable, eventually the "inferior race would suffer a slow death by starvation," a popular view held by none other than famous confederate Jefferson Davis.<sup>25</sup> White Southerners desperately wanted to keep their slaves dependent and illiterate as they feared "a potential slave surplus."<sup>26</sup> Rather than simply wanting to maintain their economic system, "slavery was

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<sup>23</sup> William Barney, *The Road to Secession; a New Perspective on the Old South* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971), 163.

<sup>24</sup> Barney, *The Road to Secession*, 68.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 69.



more crucial as a technique for race control than as a labor system. They wanted no part of a South in which Black slaves gradually monopolized the labor force.”<sup>27</sup> Not only was the South attempting to uphold white supremacy rather than economic stability, the North was actually benefiting economically from the removal of slavery as an economic institution. If anything, the decision to end slavery by the North was more about economics than the South’s decision to defend it. In this period after the 1960s, the racialized aspects of the Civil War dialogue become increasingly obvious. The construction of the Lost Cause narrative and the failure to recognize the effects of slavery largely stem from racist ideology and hostility towards African Americans, and the desire of both the North and the South to present the war as being about anything other than racism.

The roots of racism in the Civil War dialogue are seen clearly from Confederate and Southern historians from before the 1950s. Nehemiah Adams claims that “the most disastrous event to the colored people would be their emancipation to live on the same soil with the whites.”<sup>28</sup> They argue that “antipathy to their color would not diminish, and being the feebler race, they would be subjected to great miseries.”<sup>29</sup> He cites a “looseness of morals” as well as an inferior mental state as the reason for their inferior status.<sup>30</sup> Adams argument is laden with racist beliefs about the nature of African Americans in his defense of slavery. This is not a unique take on the issue of slavery. E. N. Elliot defines slavery as “the duty and obligation of the slave to labor for the mutual benefit of both master and slave, under a warrant to the slave of protection, and a comfortable subsistence, under all circumstances.”<sup>31</sup> Here the slave themselves are not seen as human beings, but the right to

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>28</sup> Nehemiah Adams, *A South-Side View of Slavery; or, Three Months at the South, in 1854* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1854), 119.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>31</sup> E. N. Elliot, *Cotton is King, and Pro-Slavery Arguments* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1860), vii.

their labor is a commodity owned by their master.<sup>32</sup> The commodification of slaves was prevalent in both the North and the South.

In the early 20th century, KKK newspapers were heavily printed and disseminated throughout the nation. One issue of the newspaper, *The Fiery Cross*, featured a cartoon of a lynching by KKK members dressed in white hooded robes.<sup>33</sup> This issue was printed in 1923, over 50 years after the end of the War. Violence and ‘vigilante justice’ ran rampant in this period all the way through the 1960s and even later. This was in direct response to the inherent belief that whites were superior, and the violence was a reflection of their fear at losing this superiority. The lynching portrayed in this newspaper issue was meant not only to frighten Black readers, but also to ensure the dominance and control of whites over American society. This racism endured and grew after the end of the Civil War, largely because of confederate retellings of history and the creation of ‘race.’ Ira Berlin explains that “just as slavery had continually redefined notions of race, so notions of race would inform a new servitude.”<sup>34</sup> This is largely to do with the emergence of a “North-South dichotomy.”<sup>35</sup> The construction of Southern pride and the Lost Cause served to separate them permanently from the North, at least ideologically. In order to justify their cause and their role in the war, the South had to, in many respects, justify slavery, and the believed inferiority of African Americans. The disenfranchisement of African Americans was so prevalent in the period directly after the Civil War because racist convictions had become a deeply ingrained part of national discussions and education, largely thanks to Confederate historians.

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<sup>32</sup> Elliot, *Cotton is King, and Pro-Slavery Arguments*, vii.

<sup>33</sup> *The Fiery Cross* (Indianapolis), February 02, 1923, 11th ed., sec. 9.

<sup>34</sup> Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998), 358.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 359.

Avery O. Craven argues that the breakup of the union was accepted on both sides. On the Southern side, they felt the breakup was a necessary step “for the preservation of their property, their self-respect, their rights, and the regard of their neighbors.”<sup>36</sup> For the Northerners, “the enslavement of human beings could not co-exist with the labor requirements of free enterprise.”<sup>37</sup> The argument here completely ignores the lives of the slaves themselves, rendering them an economic means to an end rather than recognizing them as human beings. The author goes on to say that “slavery had come to symbolize values in each of their social-economic structures for which men fight and die but which they do not give up or compromise.”<sup>38</sup> Although the argument does include discussion of slavery, it only does so in explaining the economic causes in the debate surrounding slavery.

The commodification of slavery and human bodies is seen clearly in the arguments against slavery in the period directly before the war. In the proceedings recorded from the Democratic Republican State Convention in Syracuse in 1856, an address is given to prevent the further spread of slavery. The address calls for the “end to the Slavery agitation,” by making “Kansas a Free State” and punishing those who are arguing for slavery.<sup>39</sup> The address is making the claim that to eradicate the tensions between the Northern and Southern states, the issue of slavery has to be resolved. They argue, however, that the “violence and lawlessness” between the sides is a result of their political conflict, but not once does the address mention the truly barbaric nature of slavery.<sup>40</sup> Rather, the statement often refers to slavery as “human

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<sup>36</sup> Avery O. Craven, *A History of the South; The Growth of Southern Nationalism, 1848-1861* (Texas: Louisiana State University Press, 1953), 391.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Craven, *A History of the South*, 397.

<sup>39</sup> James Samuel Wadsworth and John D. Parsons, *Free Soil, Free Speech, Free Men: Proceedings of the Democratic Republican State Convention, at Syracuse, July 24, 1856: The Address and Resolutions, with a List of Delegates* (Albany: Printed by Order of the Convention, 1856), 8.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

servitude.”<sup>41</sup> The authors criticize the spread of slavery and the continuation of the institution, but only in that it furthers the polarization between the North and South.

The address was written to oppose the presidential candidate Martin Van Buren. This debate became known as the Free Soil Movement. The authors of this address oppose this movement because they believe in there are free men on free soil, they will bring slavery with them anyways. They want the government to intervene in the restriction of slavery in the Northern/Western states. The address states that if Van Buren were to become president, “*Kansas is slave.*”<sup>42</sup> The argument continued over the spread of slavery into the Northern states. Some did argue that slavery was an evil that needed to be contained and eventually eradicated. However, many others argued for this containment as a way to prevent the spread of African American slaves and ‘freedpeople.’

The Free Soil Movement was a direct discussion surrounding the existence of slavery, but at the same time had nothing to do with slaves at all. In the presidential elections of 1948 and 1952 both sides of the nation sought a remedy to the growing dispute over slavery and the tensions among the nation.<sup>43</sup> While both sides wanted to find a way to unite the country, neither was willing to advocate for the complete abolition of slavery, and rarely was slavery mentioned as a moral dilemma. At this point, slavery was causing issues within the nation that was making political and social life more difficult, but most importantly it was complicating the country’s economic interests. The majority of those who opposed slavery believed that it was “a threat to free labor, to free men, and to their cherished principle of equal opportunity for all men.”<sup>44</sup> Again, the argument against slavery is really an argument

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<sup>41</sup> Wadsworth and Parsons, *Free Soil, Free Speech, Free Men*; 6.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>43</sup> Joseph G. Rayback, *Free Soil: The Election of 1848* (University Press of Kentucky, 1970), 307.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 308.

for free labor and the economic benefits that this entails. These two elections represent a critical moment in the history of slavery as the free soil and free labor proponents were some of the biggest supporters of abolition. However, even among these abolitionists their motives remain tied completely to the economy and slaves are seen as nothing more than a commodity that is less profitable than free labor. The North directly adopts the same arguments as the South in order to unite the nation under a single, more profitable economic system, free labor.

This economic theme is prevalent among many historians long after the end of the Civil War and the abolition of slavery. These historians do not really find the cause of the Civil War to be the Northern condemnation of slavery, but rather the economic service or threat that these slaves represent. Rather than focus on slavery as an institution that destroyed the lives of millions, it is represented as a transaction. Slaves were protected and given a stable life in exchange for their labor. This is deeply tied to the view of slaves as sub-human. Later historians like Thomas P. Govan address that “this fear of the Negro and the belief in his basic inferiority were the fundamental reasons for the Southern defense of slavery, not, merely the fact that the institution was profitable.”<sup>45</sup> This is seen clearly in Northern historians’ focus on the economic factors in explaining the war. Charles W. Ramsdell explained that although slavery was definitely a contributing factor, “the breaking of the power of the planting aristocracy opened the way for industry and commerce and the economic regeneration of the region.”<sup>46</sup> It was the potential economic benefits that really drove Southern secession and the Northern attempt to eradicate slavery. Even in a more recent historical account, John Ashworth describes the war as a “bourgeois revolution,” the North rebelling against the wealthy, aristocratic

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<sup>45</sup> Thomas P. Govan, *Slavery and the Civil War* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1940), 537.

<sup>46</sup> Charles W. Ramsdell, “The Changing Interpretation of the Civil War,” *The Journal of Southern History* 3, 1937: 23.

‘Old South.’ He goes on to explain that through the industrial revolution, the North was aware that the implementation of machines rather than bodies for the majority of the labor would be more economically viable for the entire nation. The drive was to increase economic output and productivity through industry and machine.

These historians explain how the main factor in the Civil War was to destroy the system of slavery, but only so that the system could be replaced by an economic model that would be more efficient and beneficial for the country as a whole. The unification of the two sides was desired to promote industry and manufacturing during the very beginning of the industrial age. They acknowledge the rise of southern pride and nationalism, and how it occurred almost naturally in defense of losing economic and political rights to the federal government. But what almost all these historians fail to do is address how these decisions were deeply rooted in racist ideology and lack of sympathy for African American slaves. By failing to address the role of Southern ideology and racism in reconstruction decision and policy making, these historians further push the view of slaves as an economic commodity rather than human beings.

Through this emphasis on economic and political causes for the tensions between the North and the South, much of the attention to the harsh reality of slavery and its legacy has been lost. For example, “many Lost Cause orators proclaimed over and over how the war been fought over "constitutional liberty," The Confederacy was simply reclaiming it for the South.”<sup>47</sup> But these historians, both liberal and conservative, fail to address the truly harsh realities of slavery. In Frederick Douglass’ autobiography he describes the brutality and oppression of being Black in both the North and the South in the 1840s, claiming “that killing a slave, or any colored person, in Talbot county, Maryland, is not treated as a

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<sup>47</sup>Towns, “Haunting the South for a Century and More,” 4.

crime, either by the courts or the community.”<sup>48</sup> This is just an example that Douglass uses to explain the racism and discrimination that was manifested in every part of the nation, not just the South. He goes on to explain life on the plantation as well, and the brutality of his former masters.

So far, we have looked at historians who argue that slavery plays a central role, and those who put slavery on the backburner and focus more on the economic role slavery had in the Civil War. But what all of these historians fail to address is the role that this narrative played in the North as well as the South. Although they mostly agree that the narrative was constructed in the South as a rhetorical device to maintain pride and strength in the face of an embarrassing defeat, we can see that this historical memory is not preserved in isolation in Southern education or ways of thinking. All of these historians fail to mention the appeal that the Lost Cause had for Northern historians and thinkers as well. The war has been represented as two sides fighting for what they believe to be right. This constructed Civil War narrative appeals to both the North and the South because it exempts the South from the cruelty of enslaving thousands, and removes the North from blame for upholding racist institutions and policies. It allows the nation, as a whole, to move on from the War and slavery without confronting its lasting legacy. As much as the North had fought for abolition and emancipation, racism still ran rampant, as we can see from Frederick Douglass’ personal account. The South had removed themselves from the North so thoroughly based on ideology and history that the North had to appeal to them somehow.

The two halves of the nation were united in their defense of racism, the desire to keep white men in power, and the belief that economics were the real driving force in the war. As a united country they could overlook the racism inherent in thinking of the system in terms of commodity rather than the exchange of human

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<sup>48</sup> Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (Boston: Published at the Anti-Slavery Office, 1847), 24.

bodies. The inferior and dependent status of black men and women in America was an inherent belief in many of these thinkers. Rather than deal with the consequences of slavery or try to mend the gap between white and black Americans, the Lost Cause became the unwritten history for the entire nation. They are still so intertwined in all aspects of American life, that we have been unable, as a nation, to overcome this narrative, and reclaim and readdress our historical memory.

This is seen clearly in the article “What Kids Are Really Learning About Slavery,” published by the Atlantic. A study was conducted on American students in middle and high school on their understanding of slavery and the civil war. According to the study, “among 12th-graders, only 8 percent could identify slavery as the cause of the Civil War, while “fewer than one-third (32 percent) correctly named the 13th Amendment as the formal end of U.S. slavery.” Huge discrepancies still exist between the races, and racism and discrimination still run amok. A huge part of the social issues in the United States stem from our historical memory and the failure as a nation to recognize the influence of the Lost Cause narrative and how this nation is built upon a series of lies, falsehoods, and injustices. The debate surrounding the historical tie between modern understanding and southern restructuring of history, has repeatedly and consistently ignored the realities of slavery and failed to change the way we perceive the past. America is a nation built on slavery, racism, and inequality, not simply because of our history with slavery, but because of historical, political, and social misrepresentation and inability to address and confront the past.