ESSENTIAL CIVIL WAR CURRICULUM

The Lost Cause: The War in Southern Myth and Memory

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In September 1906, Lawrence M. Griffith of Bates County, Missouri, addressed the tenth annual reunion of the state division of the United Confederate Veterans (UCV) at the Club Theater in Joplin. Representing the Sons of Confederate Veterans (SCV), he delivered a routine speech—a denial that Confederate soldiers were traitors and, of course, a roll call of the great heroes of the gray. But there was one paragraph that contained more truth than even Griffith may have realized:

> And when the ragged remains of an army of six hundred thousand Confederate patriots returned from a four year's fight with two million seven hundred thousand invaders, to find their homes despoiled, their families hungry, and their estates dissipated, there was born in the South a new religion. They did not think it wrong to worship those ragged idols, and with almost religious zeal they have given from their scanty stores to raise monuments to their defenders; striving by word, pen and printing press to make the world listen to the truths and learn both sides of that conflict.[1]

Griffith's phrase "a new religion" was a profound one, for it spoke of a vital force in the lives of postwar Confederates, a faith centered on the late Confederacy and, in the process, creating an image of their beloved South as a sacred land. For erstwhile Confederates in gray, and for their sons and daughters, the Confederacy became, as Robert Penn Warren later put it, a "City of the Soul." "We may say," Warren wrote in *The Legacy of the Civil War: Meditations on the Centennial*, "that only when Lee handed Grant his sword was the Confederacy born; or to state it another way, in the moment of defeat the Confederacy entered upon its immortality."[2]

This new religion of which Griffith spoke, this worship of the Immortal Confederacy, had its foundation in the myth of the Lost Cause. Conceived in the ashes of a defeated and broken Dixie, this powerful, pervasive idea claimed the devotion of

[1] *Official Proceedings of the Tenth Annual Reunion and Convention of the Missouri Division, United Confederate Veterans* (Jefferson City, MO: UCV, 1906), 42, hereafter cited as *Minutes UCV* (MO) (reunion number).
[2] Robert Penn Warren, *The Legacy of the Civil War: Meditation on the Centennial* (New York: Random House, 1961), 15.

countless Confederates and their female counterparts. When it reached fruition in the 1880s its votaries not only pledged their allegiance to the Lost Cause, but they elevated it above the realm of common, patriotic impulse, making it perform a clearly religious function. At annual meetings and other gatherings of veterans' groups and women's organizations, Southerners gave sacred status to the symbols of their Confederate past, dramatized them in formalized ritual, and expressed their meaning in mythic terms, thus laying a foundation for a Southern culture religion, a regional faith based upon Dixie's wartime experience. An amalgam of Protestant evangelicalism and Southern romanticism, this cultural faith found embodiment in the historical, memorial, and educational activities of numerous Confederate organizations, most notably the UCV and the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC).

It should be stated that not all students of the Lost Cause agree that it was a religious phenomenon. While Charles Reagan Wilson and Lloyd A. Hunter have presented that thesis cogently, many scholars eschew the religious interpretation. Yet none deny that the Lost Cause had an impact upon postwar Dixie remarkably akin to that of a profound faith, a genuine carrier of meaning for a "nation-that-was" seeking to deal with defeat and on a quest to comprehend its sense of loss. In fact, as early as 1973, Rollin G. Osterweis, building on Ernst Cassirer's insight that "myth is from its very beginning potential religion," observed that the Lost Cause became "the dominant faith of a region."[3]

The search to understand the region's sense of loss began well before the Lost Cause reached full strength in the 1880s. Not surprisingly, it all started with the least reconstructed Southerners—the ladies. Known during the war and Reconstruction for their bitterness toward Yankees and noncombatants, Dixie's women balanced their uncompromising behavior by lifting their hearts and voices in homage to the sacred cause. Their devotion began during the dark days of the conflict itself. Banding themselves together in local Soldiers' Relief Societies, mothers and daughters established canteens, secured hospital supplies, ministered in sick rooms, and in some cases, buried the dead. After the war these groups became memorial associations, collecting the bodies of shallowly buried Confederates and transferring them to more suitable burying grounds. As historian Caroline E. Janney demonstrates in her path-breaking study, *Burying the Dead But Not the Past: Ladies' Memorial Associations and the Lost Cause*, these groups not only reinterred the remains of over 72,520 Confederate warriors, but were the true pioneers of the Lost Cause tradition decades before the UDC, and played major roles in molding the culture, society, and even politics of the postwar South.

Their most lasting mark, however, was the founding of Memorial Day. The origin of this solemn event is obscure, but probably the safest claim rests with the women of Columbus, Georgia. On April 16, 1865, one of the last battles of the war ended on the Alabama heights overlooking Columbus, and on April 26, General Joseph Eggleston

[3] Rollin G. Osterweis, *The Myth of the Lost Cause, 1865-1900* (Hampden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1973), 29.

Johnston surrendered the last major Confederate field army to Major General William Tecumseh Sherman. At a cemetery near the battleground, the women of Columbus proceeded to care for the soldiers' graves. Early in 1866, after several women had been busily caring for the cemetery, Elizabeth "Lizzie" Rutherford recommended an annual observance for the decoration of the soldiers' resting places. The idea received spontaneous approval, and Columbus Memorial Association adopted April 26—the date of Johnston's surrender—as the most appropriate time for a universal observance. By 1900 the task of memorializing became so weighty and ambitious that a region-wide common observance seemed desirable. On May 30 of that year delegates from memorial groups throughout the South met in Louisville, Kentucky, to form the Confederate Southern Memorial Association (CSMA), which soon established June 3, Jefferson Davis's birthday, as Confederate Memorial Day.

While Southern women nurtured Memorial Day through its infancy, Confederate veterans began forming embryonic groups of their own. Most characteristic of these bodies were those designed to perform memorial and charitable deeds, such as aiding destitute widows and orphans, assisting the disabled, erecting monuments, and writing regimental histories. In addition to these groups, numerous local and state veterans' societies emerged throughout Dixie in the first decades after the war. All major cities in the region boasted at least one active unit, such as New Orleans's Washington Light Artillery, the Confederate Survivors' Association of Georgia, and the R. E. Lee Camp No. 1 in Richmond. By the end of the 1880s, with veterans' organizations sprouting up everywhere, the time seemed ripe for unity among ex-Confederates.

Two facts about these years produced an atmosphere conducive to the growth of South-wide Confederate organizations: Reconciliation was proceeding resolutely and with much speed, and the Lost Cause had gained an important foothold in the mind of the South. The celebration of America's centennial in 1876 made reconciliation a prime theme in the national arena and in the next decade significant events helped to weld the nation together. These included the rise of Rutherford B. Hayes to the presidency and his subsequent removal of federal troops from Southern soil; Hayes's tour of Dixie during which he participated in Southern Memorial Day exercises; the universal grief over the assassination of President James A. Garfield in 1881; and the appearance of ex-Confederates as pall-bearers at Ulysses S. Grant's funeral in 1885.

At the same time that Reconstruction was happily becoming a memory, the Lost Cause was becoming myth. As W. J. Cash cogently explains in *The Mind of the South*, the 1880s marked a period of Southern flight from reality. The war took on a nostalgic glow, and the Cause seemed in danger of "slipping into the past." White Southerners therefore joined it there—at least in spirit—and the symbols of its expression began to abound. Plans for united Confederate action got underway, the erection of monuments became evermore frequent, the oratory of the Lost Cause flowered beyond its previous

bloom, and Confederate museums—even a Battle Abbey—began to dot the landscape, taking on the aura of holy places.[4]

Under the impetus of this resurgent spirit, Confederate veterans moved quickly to launch a national organization. On June 10, 1889, sixty Confederates representing ten organizations gathered in New Orleans, adopted a constitution, and elected Major General John Brown Gordon as the first commander in chief of the United Confederate Veterans. When the newly created body held its first reunion on July 3, 1890, at Chattanooga, it was clear that the UCV would bear all the trappings of a culture religion. A tableau on "the Wounding of Stonewall Jackson" featured a hundred-voice women's chorus singing "Nearer My God to Thee," and an enactment of the surrender at Appomattox was accompanied by the obviously religious words of Father Abram Joseph Ryan's "The Conquered Banner":

Furl that Banner, softly, slowly!
Treat it gently—it is holy—
For it droops above the dead.
Touch it not—unfold it never,
Let it drop there, furled forever,
For its people's hope are dead![5]

For well over a decade—the very years the Lost Cause thrived—the UCV was a major institutional home for the Southern culture religion.

Naturally, the women of the South, with their well-known fervor and labor for the Lost Cause, were not to be outdone by the veterans. After their initial involvement in Memorial Day activities they joined the old soldiers in monumental and historical efforts. It was not until the 1890s, though, that Daughters of the Confederacy chapters sprang up at local levels. The first came into being in St. Louis in 1890, and during the next few years similar societies formed in Savannah, Georgia, and Nashville, Tennessee. By 1894, the "Daughters" were ready for a national organization. The United Daughters of the Confederacy emerged in the rooms of the Frank Cheatham Bivouac at Nashville in September of that year, and from its founding its members were faithful votaries at the shrine of the Lost Cause. Indeed, as C. Vann Woodward put it in his classic, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913*, the UDC gave the cult of the Confederacy "a religious character."[6]

With organizational foundations now laid, the devotees of the Lost Cause faith elevated their wartime Confederate emblems to sacred status, making them function not as mere emblems but as *religious* symbols, as collective representations of the Southern

[4] W. J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1941).
[5] Abram J. Ryan, *Poems, Patriotic, Religious, Miscellaneous* (New York: P. J. Kennedy and Sons, 1896), 168.
[6] C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951),. 156.

historical experience interpreted in the light of transcendence. It was no doubt to this singular aspect of Confederate symbols that Brigadier General Clement Anselm Evans, Methodist circuit rider and onetime commander of the UCV, pointed in a Memorial Day address in 1896. "We have a deep and honorable respect for some things which we call our mementoes," the *Confederate Veteran* recorded his words. "They are many and all are sacred; but I will mention only three, each of which deserves out perpetual commemorations." Evans's choices read like a trinity of the culture religion: "Dixie," the battle flag, and the old soldier's gray jacket.[7]

Without question, the banners of the Lost Cause evoked the most reverent response. These, after all, were the totems under which the warriors in gray fought and fell. They were not mere fragments of cloth but representations of the homeland itself, of the reality for which the soldier struggled. Thus, Confederates believed they should be treated as if they *were* that reality, for they contained the essence and meaning—and often the blood—for which Southern heroes gave their lives. In the days just after Lee's surrender, Father Ryan, a former Catholic chaplain and noted poet, gave expression to this sentiment in "The Conquered Banner." Its lyric description of the torn and tattered battle flag, drooping sadly on its broken staff as if weeping for the hands that had grasped it, touched the ardent feelings of his fellow Confederates, thereby becoming a leading anthem of the cultural faith and spurring other bards into singing the praises of Confederate banners. Employing biblical figures, for instance, Harry Lynden Flash, an aide-de-camp to Major General Joseph Wheeler in wartime, depicted the Confederate flag leading the chosen Southern nation like Moses' "pillar of cloud by day/of fire by night." Symbol of "a people's hope," the Stars and Bars, like the soldiers who carried it into the fray, succumbed for the cause:

> It fell—but stainless as it rose,
> Martyred, like Stephen, in the strife--
> Passing like him, girdled with foes,
> From Death to Life.[8]

Whether or not they would carry the battle flag on resurrection morn, there was little doubt in Southern minds that most Confederates would rise singing "Dixie." The battle hymn of the South served as a symbol of the land and the cause that no veteran would ever forget. At every reunion of Southern soldiers its lively strains called them to look "away down South in Dixie"—to the land in which they had taken their stand "to lib and die." Although written in 1859 by Ohioan Daniel Decatur Emmett of Bryant's Minstrel's, and clearly lacking the language and sentiments of religious symbolism, it became an emblem of the cultural faith as a result of postwar controversies over its words. At the June 1904 reunion of the UCV, a resolution called for the formation of a joint committee with the Sons of Confederate Veterans and the UDC "relative to the selection of suitable words for our immortal battle hymn." This measure sparked a fierce

[7] *The Confederate Veteran* 4 (July, 1896):228.
[8] Harry Lynden Flash, *Poems* ((New York: Neale, 1906), 158.

reply from Brigadier General William Lewis Cabell, who had a reputation as a vehement Lost Cause curmudgeon. Later that year, he wrote a letter to a UDC official that appeared in the November 6 *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, stating in clear terms his opposition to any tampering with "Dixie":

> Then let old "Dixie" alone, and when I am lying in my grave, wrapped in my old gray jacket, pierced in a dozen places with Yankee bullets, and when the man of God is through, let the daughters of the South, the prettiest and the most glorious women on earth, sing "Dixie," so that my spirit may be taken to heaven, to join my comrades who have gone before.

In his letter, Cabell mentioned still another of the South's potent symbols: the gray Confederate jacket. Along with many of his comrades, he expressed a desire to be buried in his old uniform coat, no matter its condition. This intent, while seemingly morbid and gloomy, was actually reflective of the role played by the hope in the resurrection—both of the soldier and his cause—which pervaded the Lost Cause. Fannie H. Marr, for example, portraying the role of an old warrior, had her protagonist utter the wish that he might be shrouded in his battle coat: "For I want to rest, till the Great Captain calls / In my suit of Confederate gray." Another Daughter, Fannie Downing, offered a similar plea:

Old suit! Once more you will be worn,
When I am in my coffin laid,
Upon the resurrection morn
I wish to stand in you arrayed,
When with hosannas loud and sweet,
Beatified with bliss intense
Our Southern Soldiery shall meet
Confederate in the highest sense.[9]

Apparently, on the day of resurrection the "Dixie"-singing choir would be clad in knightly garments of gray.

Of course, some sacred symbols could not be worn in coffins or transported to heaven: heroes, for example. And if there was anything at which the South excelled in those years, it was the creation of heroes—and chief among them were Robert E. Lee, Jefferson Davis, and Thomas Jonathan Jackson.

Lee began his rise to sainthood during the war but it was not until after his death in 1870 that his deification would reach complete fruition. Almost with his last breath, he rose to godlike stature in the mind of his countrymen. At Lexington, Virginia, on the very day of his death, a hastily called meeting of local residents, including veterans of the

[9] *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, November 6, 1904; *The Confederate Veteran* 10 (June 1902): 260; *The Land We Love* (November 1866): 37.

general's army and faculty members of Washington College, of which Lee had been president, formed the Lee memorial Association to arrange for his burial on the campus under Lee Chapel and the erection of a suitable monument in the building itself.Within months of their former commander's passing, veterans of the Army of Northern Virginia laid the foundations for a Lee cult and formulated the dogmas for the canonization of the South's leading Christian knight.

Most of the images that veterans and their ladies projected of Lee—embodiment of the South, a second Washington, the Christian knight—served as a basis for the major Lost Cause view of Lee as a godlike figure, manifesting the traits of Christ. Like Christ, Lee appeared to Dixie's soldiers as God's model of manhood. Randolph McKim, an officer on Brigadier General George Hume Steuart's staff and later a leading Episcopal priest, wrote of his subject in *The Soul of Lee*: "from the day when he publicly gave himself to the service of God in Old Christ Church, Alexandria, he lived not to himself, but to God and his fellow men." Lee was, McKim continued, infused "by the Christ-like spirit of self-sacrifice," and "the sign of the Cross was upon his life."[10]

At the dedication of the recumbent figure of Lee in the Lee Chapel, John W. Daniel spoke of the general's agonizing decision to resign from the United States Army in order to offer his services to his native Virginia: "Since the Son of Man stood upon the Mount and saw 'all the kingdoms of the earth and the glory thereof' stretched before him, and turned away from them to the agony and bloody sweat of Gethsemane, and to the Cross of Calvary beyond, no follower of the meek and lowly Saviour can have undergone more trying ordeal, or met it with higher spirit of heroic sacrifice." To some other veterans it was Lee's "Gethsemane," whereas others called it his "crucifix moment." Daniel added another dimension in calling Gettysburg's Seminary Ridge "the mount of [Lee's] transfiguration, where . . . the Divinity in his bosom shone translucent through the man, and his spirit rose up into the God-like."[11]

Unlike Lee's apotheosis, Jefferson Davis's began long before his death. His countrymen bitterly attacked him when the Confederacy collapsed, but his arrest and lengthy imprisonment in Fort Monroe spurred Southerners to respond to his plight with sympathy and renewed devotion. By the time of his release in May 1867, the former chief executive had become a heroic martyr—the crucified Christ of the Southern people who had suffered on their behalf. In 1886, Henry Grady, the editor of the *Atlanta Constitution*, summoned the ex-president from his self-styled exile at Beauvoir to appear at the unveiling of a memorial to Senator Benjamin Harvey Hill in Atlanta. On the day of the event, with Davis on the dais, Grady used the moment to intone a theme of the culture religion. "This moment," he proclaimed, "in this blessed Easter week, witnessing the resurrection of these memories that for twenty years have been buried in our hearts, has given us the best Easter since Christ was risen from the dead." Grady's words

[10] Randolph H. McKim, *The Soul of Lee* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1918), 200, 202, 210.
[11] J. William Jones, *Army of Northern Virginia Memorial Volume* (Richmond: Randolph and English, 1880), 120.

appropriately punctuated the most important decade in the *Confederacy's* rise from the dead. And Davis's role as a sacred symbol had been assured.[12]

Even more than Lee, Davis became the incarnation of the Confederacy's major principles, especially states rights. In a Funeral Oration for Davis, Charles Colcock Jones indicated that the Confederate president "remained faithful even unto death" to his belief in state sovereignty, and a member of the Texas House of Representatives noted Davis's allegiance to that tenet while striking a central theme of his deification. "The embodiment of a political ideal," the solon declared, "he became a sacrifice to all the misfortunes following defeat and, with a fortitude approaching stoicism, he offered himself a scapegoat to bear the so-called sins of his people." And, as late as 1923, a second-generation bard, Lucian Lamar Knight, would repeat the endless theme in a collection of poems, *Stone Mountain, or the Lay of the Gray Minstrel*:

Jefferson Davis! Still we honor thee!
Our lamb victorious, who for us endur'd
A cross of martyrdom, a crown of thorns,
A soul's Gethsemane, a nation's hate,
A dungeon's gloom! Another god in chains!

Here was Davis the Christ figure.[13]

If Lee and Davis reminded Southerners of Christ, another leader in gray made them think of Moses. Thomas Jonathan "Stonewall" Jackson was a natural candidate for Confederate sainthood since he combined in his character all the traits that Southerners admired. A devout Christian of the Calvinist variety, he was also a gallant warrior in the chivalric tradition and an ardent champion of Southern rights. Moreover, his death shortly after the battle of Chancellorsville made him a martyr, and the use of the newly adopted national flag as his burial shroud gave that martyrdom special meaning. In fact, his death was the primary reason Jackson entered the Confederate canon as a Moses figure. This would seem only appropriate to his wartime aide-de-camp, Presbyterian clergyman and scholar Robert Lewis Dabney, who wrote of the general's habit of praying in the midst of combat in Moses-like fashion. Reminiscent of that Old Testament deliverer "upon the mount of God" lifting his hands while Israel defeated Amalek, Jackson regularly appeared to pray in like manner during battles. Dabney observed him at Cross Keys, dropping the reins upon his horse's neck and raising "both his hands toward the heavens while the fire of battle in his face changed into a look of reverential

[12] Quoted in Raymond B. Nixon, *Henry W. Grady: Spokesman of the New South* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1969), 229.
[13] C. C. Jones, "Funeral Oration," in *Life and Reminiscences of Jefferson Davis* (Baltimore: R. H. Woodward, 1890), 331, 338; Texas House of Representatives, *In Memoriam: Jefferson Davis*, in Memorial Association Papers, Louisiana Historical Association Papers, Tulane University; Lucien L. Knight, *Stone Mountain, or the Lay of the Gray Minstrel* (Atlanta: Johnson Dallis, 1941).

awe." But it was the fact that Jackson never lived to see Confederate victory that sealed his image. As poet Harry Lynden Flash wrote:

> He entered not the nation's Promised Land
> At the red belching of the cannon's mouth;
> But broke the House of Bondage with his hand—
> The Moses of the South.[14]

The Confederacy's captains, however, were not the only ones to suffer for the cause, and its devotees knew it. The most common human symbols, in fact were the thousands of nameless soldiers, living and dead, whose courage, they vowed, must never be forgotten. Around these anonymous figures, a cult of the Confederate soldier developed, marked by a commitment never to let him die in vain. Determined that the private soldiers would "live in song and story," Southerners sought to preserve their memory in word and monument. As with the leaders, rank-and-file Confederates bore the marks of the Christian knight; nineteenth-century Ivanhoes, they were men of principle and honor.[15]

Since he bore those marks, the martyred Sam Davis—the South's Nathan Hale—served as the ultimate model of the common warrior. In the young Tennessean, hanged by Union soldiers as a spy in 1864, veterans in gray found an emblem of valor, honor, and sacrifice that contained all their images of the Confederate fighting man. His last words, vowing his loyalty to his comrades and his refusal to inform on them, were compared to those of Jesus: "Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends." Described as one of God's "own instruments" who, "touched by the hand divine, . . . rose from the gallows to the crown," Sam Davis became another Confederate Christ.[16]

In like manner all the Confederate martyrs were seen as spotless, blameless warriors who ventured all for self-rule and died for a holy cause, who were sacrificial lambs whose shed blood baptized and sanctified Dixie's soil.

To insure that the holy symbols of the Lost Cause would not be forgotten, Dixie's patriotic groups engaged in numerous ceremonial activities, the most important of which were Memorial Day and the UCV reunions. Like all rituals, these experiences were carriers of meaning for the Lost Cause faithful—a time to recall the past, to resurrect the days when the holy symbols were still living and viable. In short, Confederates sought through ritual to provide, for themselves and their posterity, a sense of attachment to their sacred history.

[14] Robert Lewis Dabney, *Life and Campaigns of Lieut. Gen. Thomas J. Jackson* (New York: Blelock, 1866), 110, 142-43, 413, 727; Flash, *Poems*, 150.
[15] *Minutes UCV* (MO) (5th), 16.
[16] *The Confederate Veteran* 4 (June 1896):176, 190 and 8 (March 1900): 99.

Undoubtedly, the central ritual occasion for telling the story was Memorial Day, the Sabbath of the South. Whenever held, the day's activities followed a common pattern. The ceremonies on April 26, 1898 at Columbus, Georgia, were typical. The festivities opened around two o'clock in the afternoon, as a procession of soldiers, marching bands, Confederate veterans from across the state, and local dignitaries formed at the city armory. With the bands playing martial music, all marched to the Confederate monument on Broad Street and beyond to the Presbyterian Church, "where the Ladies Memorial Association and the Daughters of the Confederacy took their places in the line of march, which moved thence to the opera house, where the exercises took place." At the opera house word symbols added to those already enacted by the military airs, tramping feet of the old soldiers, and glimpses of the monument attained during the march. Now oratory and prayer described the meaning of the solemn occasion, along with a reading of the history of Memorial Day and a rendition of Father Ryan's "The Conquered Banner." The day ended at the cemetery, where the ex-Confederates transcended time in a symbolic meeting with the martyrs of the Lost Cause. There they sounded the major themes of the Sabbath of the South—sacrifice, death, and rebirth—and embodied their words in the ritual acts of strewing immortelles upon graves and monuments.[17]

The annual reunions of the UCV contained ritualistic expressions of the cultural faith, though a more lively variety; indeed, they were virtual revivals of the Lost Cause religion. The elaborate plans of Southern cities for the annual reunion, the intense exhilaration of the veterans and their frequent outbursts, the appeal of parades and balls, and the centrality of stirring orations and the mythmaking of UCV historical work, the intertwining of Southern evangelicalism with the Confederate story—these were crucial aspects of the Lost Cause movement.

The veterans not only wanted their reunions to recapture the past but *intended* for them to do so. They therefore ordered their activities during their annual gatherings around the goal of reviving and "recounting memories of the past." At times this recollection, under the impact of the drama of ritual, could become graphically vivid. When Commander Clement A. Evans asked to hear the famed rebel yell from those gathered in Memphis in 1909, one veteran felt he was back in wartime again:

> And didn't they yell?
>
> You could hear Jackson's legions thundering down the slope and catch the dust of Forrest's brigade clattering like a whirlwind in that yell. It came again and again, circled three times from the pit to the very peaks of the roof of that great building and died away in the hum of laughter and approval that bordered upon tears.[18]

[17] United Daughters of the Confederacy, Georgia Division, *A History of the Origins of Memorial Day* (Columbus: Thomas Gilbert, 1898), 13-16.
[18] *Minutes, U.C.V.*, 6 vols. (New Orleans: UCV, 1907-1913), 1, (8th), 24, hereafter cited as *Minutes UCV*, volume number, (reunion number).

The erstwhile warriors, excited by seeing former leaders and comrades, and by the powerful remembrance of the Lost Cause, were thus quick to unleash pent-up enthusiasm for everyone who espoused the sacred principles. No matter how loudly the band played "Dixie" or "The Bonnie Blue Flag," no matter how attractive the decorations in the hall, nothing distracted the old soldiers when someone they loved appeared on stage. Commander John Brown Gordon's arrival always prompted instantaneous pandemonium—the waving hats and handkerchiefs, the screech of the rebel yell, the strains of the battle hymn. The appearance of Winnie Davis, "The Daughter of the Confederacy," at the Houston Assembly in 1895 provoked a wild melee. Plants and decorations on the stage faced destruction as a hundred people rushed the platform to touch the hand of the daughter whose father guided their nation through war three decades before.

Punctuated by such bursts of feeling, UCV reunions seldom displayed consistent ritual patterns. No single reunion, in other words, was ever "typical." Perhaps it is best to say that Confederate gatherings consisted of a series of spontaneous, loosely connected ceremonial acts. For example, within the business sessions themselves the elevation of beloved symbols occurred in unscheduled ways. Impromptu singing of "Lorena" or "I'm a Good Old Rebel" might capture the veterans' fancy, or an occasional church hymn would be sung, and frequently the old soldiers chose to join in "We are Old Time Confederates," a tuneful recollection of the past sung to the catchy revival song, "That Old Time Religion."

That interesting song, which normally ended with a rebel yell, illustrates a major dimension of Lost Cause ritual: the yoking of evangelicalism with the Confederate spirit. Prayers combining the symbols of the Lost Cause with the God of the Bible, Christian hymns interspersed with Confederate battle anthems, "altar calls" to join Davis and Lee at the throne of grace—all marked the revivalist nature of UCV reunions. Chaplain J. William Jones consistently opened the meetings with a prayer that melded Christianity and Confederacy:

> Oh! God our help in ages past. Our hope for years to come, God of Israel, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—God of the centuries—God of Stonewall Jackson and Robert Lee and Jefferson Davis—Lord of Hosts—God of the whole of our common country—God of our Southland—our God![19]

The clearest expression of the union of evangelicalism with the Lost Cause, however, appeared in the chaplains' sermons. A classic example is Chaplain Henry L. Wharton's message as late as 1923. He told his fellow veterans that they could be "proud to say that we followed General Lee… but prouder shall we be when we stand beside our Commander General Lee and look into the face of our Greater Commander, Jesus Christ." Wharton closed by saying:

[19] *Minutes, UCV*, 1 (6th), 7.

> Sometime up in Heaven there will be a Grand Reunion of our men, women, daughters, sons, because we have followed our Great Captain of Salvation… I think we will get David to come sit upon the platform with his harp and he will say, "What hymn shall we sing?" I think I would say, "Give us 'All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name' first and foremost, and wind up with 'The Bonnie Blue Flag.'"[20]

Here is a cogent reminder of Charles Reagan Wilson's observation in *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause*, that "each Lost Cause ritual and organization was tangible evidence that Southerners had made a religion out of their history." Even more tangible were the ways in which they interpreted their history—ways which constituted the mythic elements of the culture religion.[21]

Benjamin Harvey Hill, the former Confederate States senator from Georgia, knew that there was but one way postwar Southerners could justify the region's course during the "late unpleasantness": Though defeated on the fields of battle, they must emerge victorious on the pages of history. Hill articulated this belief at an Atlanta gathering of the Southern Historical Society in 1874. He declared: "we have but one resource left us for defense or vindication. The resource is history—impartial and unpassioned, un-office-seeking history." Postwar Southerners responded enthusiastically to this call. Viewing their Confederate experience as a redemptive event, they transmuted it into myth. For them, history became myth or, to be more precise, history assumed the function of myth. This is to say that Confederate mythmaking emerged from their foremost goal of providing their posterity with the truths of the War Between the States through writing and preserving their version of its history. In addition to the indefatigable work of the Southern Historical Society, an organization founded and led by veteran leaders of the Army of Northern Virginia, the UCV and UDC each had Historical Committees that saw their work as the central component in the telling of the Confederate story—their myth, a history-oriented, history-shaping force of much cultural potency.[22]

To begin with, former Confederates believed that the Old South which they had taken up arms to defend had lived by the noblest of motives and its way of life had been always a glorious one. Dabney H. Maury, for instance, told a veterans' reunion in 1893 that "no higher civilization has ever existed on earth than was here; and you can have no nobler work than the preservation of the memories of our struggle to maintain that civilization, and of the people who bravely made it."[23]

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[20] *Minutes, UCV*, 1 (6th), 7; 2 (12th), 32; Stenographic report of the 36th Reunion, UCV, 6, 100, 102, in UCV Records, Louisiana State University Archives.
[21] Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980), 36.
[22] Benjamin H. Hill, Jr., *Senator Benjamin H. Hill of Georgia: His Life, Speeches, and Writings* (Atlanta: T. H. P Bloodworth, 1893), 405-406.
[23] *Southern Historical Society Papers* 11 (1883): 54.

A second doctrine followed logically from the image of a noble South, namely, that the Cavalier South was forced to take up arms against money-seeking Puritan invaders. Put very simply, while Cavaliers of aristocratic manners and polite sentiments shaped existence in the South, in the other section there ruled an opposite extreme. Lucian Lamar Knight reminded his readers in *Memorials of Dixie-Land* in 1919 that slavery was universal. The North's role in its propagation was as crucial as the South's he asserted, "New England's conscience never hurt her in regard to slavery until her profit in the institution began to diminish."[24]

The chivalrous Southerners, according to a third doctrine of the Lost Cause myth, also fought only for the noblest motives and on the most honorable bases. Building upon this theme, veterans laid the blame for the hostilities squarely on the shoulders of the North. Brigadier General Bradley Tyler Johnson characterized the conflict in these words: "Repeat and reiterate that the war waged upon the South was an unjust and causeless war of invasion and rapine, of plunder and murder, not for patriotism or high motives, but to gratify ambition and lust for power in the promoters of it." He went on: "the war of the South was a war of self-defence justified by all laws sacred and divine, of nature and of man."[25]

For precisely this reason, Confederates rejected the notion that they had gone to war for the purpose of maintaining or extending the institution of slavery. This refutation was a cardinal element in the myth of the Lost Cause, and about none were they so vociferous. To accuse Southerners of warring for the sake of holding others in bondage, they retorted, was a cruel affront. Randolph McKim responded to that charge at a UCV reunion in 1904: "Think of it, soldiers of Lee!" he shouted. "You were fighting, they say, for the privilege of holding your fellow man in bondage! Will you for one moment acknowledge the truth of that indictment? Oh, no! That banner of the Southern Cross with the stars of God's heaven… You could not have followed a banner that was not a banner of liberty!"[26]

If Southerners did not fight to preserve slavery, neither did they wage a rebellion against the United States. According to the mythmakers in gray, the Confederacy, not the government in Washington, represented the sacred constitutional principles of the American system. Nearly every book or speech that originated in the mind of a former Confederate—from Jefferson Davis to the common member of the UDC—included a detailed examination, or at least an impassioned proclamation, of the South's right to secede from the Union. Most rested, in the final analysis, upon the dogma that the Constitution of 1787 had been a compact among equally sovereign states. Secession, the argument contended, was the constitutional right of free and independent states.

[24] Lucian L. Knight, *memorials of Dixie-land: Orations, Essays, Sketches and Poems* (Atlanta: Byrd Printing, 1919), 189-90.
[25] Confederate Memorial Literary Society, *In Memoriam Sempiternam* (Richmond: Waddey, 1896), 49-50.
[26] *Minutes UCV*, 3, (14th), Appendix, 17.

In that case, the struggle for Southern independence was no "War of the Rebellion," as the federal government persisted in calling it, and the adherents of the myth squelched the use of that term at every available instance. If the war was not a rebellion, then obviously the soldiers in gray were neither rebels nor traitors. At the UCV's Houston meeting in 1895, Chaplain J. William Jones sharply denied that any who had worn the gray were ever rebels. "George Washington and his compatriots were 'rebels' because they fought against properly constituted authority," he averred, "but we were not 'rebels' because we fought to uphold the constitution of our fathers." Quite the contrary, Dixie's soldiers, in the rhetoric of their comrades, were patriots who fought for self-government.[27]

A final element in the mythic pattern of the culture faith was the Confederate's belief that the Lost Cause was never genuinely lost. In affirming this belief, Southerners formed analogies between their own and other seemingly lost causes—especially that of Christ—and noted that truth, once overcome, generally rises again. Former private James N. Dunlop told his "fellow comrades" of the Army of Northern Virginia in 1879 that the cause of the Confederacy, similar to Christ's mission, was not lost at Appomattox. "Truth, subjected to mock trial and condemnation, scourged and spitted upon, betrayed by secret foes, staggering under the cross, and sealed to-day in its sepulchers," he proclaimed, "bursts tomorrow the gates of death, rises with the crown, triumphant reigns throughout the world." The myth of the culture religion wrested the promise of victory from the despair of defeat.[28]

Lawyer Gavin Stevens, a William Faulkner character, would understand those sentiments. In *Intruder in the Dust*, he explains to his young nephew, Chick Mallison:

> It's all *now* you see. Yesterday won't be over until tomorrow and tomorrow began ten thousand years ago. For every Southern boy fourteen years old, not once but whenever he wants it, there is the instant when it's still two o'clock on that July afternoon in 1863, the brigades are in position behind the rail fence, the guns are laid and ready in the woods and the furled flags are already loosened to break out and Pickett himself with his oiled ringlets and his hat in one hand probably and his sword in the other looking up the hill waiting for Longstreet to give the word and it's all in the balance. It hasn't happened yet, it hasn't even begun yet, it not only hasn't begun yet but there is time for it not to begin against that position and those circumstances which made more men than Garnett and Kemper and Armstead [*sic*] and Wilcox look grave yet it is going to begin, we all know that, we have come too far with too much at stake and that moment doesn't even need a fourteen-year-old boy to think *This time. Maybe this time* with all this much to lose and all this much to gain: Pennsylvania, Maryland, the world, the golden dome of Washington itself to crown with desperate and unbelievable victory the desperate gamble, the cast made two

[27] Ibid. 1 (5th), 33.
[28] *Southern Historical Society Papers* 8 (January 1880): 15-16.

> years ago; or to anyone who ever sailed a skiff under a quilt sail, the moment in 1492 when somebody said *This is it:* the absolute edge of no return, to turn back now and make home or sail irrevocably on and either find land or plunge over the world's roaring rim.[29]

Returning to the time when their sacred symbols roamed the land, Lost Cause worshipers and their descendants stood at the center of their collective experience, realizing that in it history had happened to them and that its meaning could be captured only in that sacred moment and its countless extensions. Because they remembered it, they did not "plunge over the world's roaring rim" but found
Land—a Sacred South, an Immortal Confederacy.

[I wish to express my sincere gratitude to Indiana University Press for granting me permission to borrow extensively from my chapter, "The Immortal Confederacy: Another Look at Lost Cause Religion,"
in Gary W. Gallagher and Alan T. Nolan, eds., *The Myth of the Lost Cause and Civil War History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), in the preparation of this essay. LAH]

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[29] William Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust* (New York: Random House, 1948; Vintage Books, 1972), 194-195.