THE LOST CAUSE

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The Cynical Historian. “Understanding the Lost Cause Myth.” *YouTube*.*com*. 2021. 10 Feb. 2023. Web. <youtube.com/watch?v=5EOhXF5lNgQ&t=332s>.

The “the lost-cause myth” refers to an interpretation of the United States’ Civil-War and subsequent periods that claims that the South’s insurrection during the Civil War was a noble effort.

The general tenets of the lost-cause myth are (The Cynical Historian):

Slavery was good for slaves.

The Civil War was not about slavery but about states’ rights.

The Civil War was the War of Northern Aggression.

Reconstruction was designed to punish the South.

The present effort to bend history to make it more sympathetic to whites is nothing new. The *Wikipedia* page, “Lost Cause of the Confederacy,” depict the Lost Cause thus:

Lost Cause proponents typically praise the traditional culture of honor and chivalry of the antebellum South. They argue that enslaved people were treated well and deny that their condition was the central cause of the war . . . Instead, they frame the war as a defense of states’ rights, and as necessary to protect their agrarian economy against supposed Northern aggression. The Union victory is thus explained as the result of its greater size and industrial wealth, while the Confederate side is portrayed as having greater morality and military skill. Modern historians overwhelmingly disagree with these characterizations, noting that the central cause of the war was slavery.

Here we see three more-specific descriptions of the Lost Cause’s assertions:

The war was “necessary to protect their agrarian economy against supposed Northern aggression.”

The South had “greater morality and military skill”; it had the “traditional culture of honor and chivalry of the antebellum South.”

The North only won because “of its greater size and industrial wealth . . .”

So according to the Lost Cause, the cause of the Civil War was not slavery but defending states’ rights. That is simply not true.

(1) From 20 December 1860 to 20 November 1861, each of the 13 Confederate states (and the Arizona Territory) approved an Ordinance of Secession. These declarations overwhelmingly, explicitly state that the reason for secession is to preserve slavery.

(2) Alexander Stephens, vice president of the Confederate States of America, in his “Cornerstone Speech” of 21 March 1861, was just as explicit.

The new [Confederate] Constitution has put at rest forever all the agitating questions relating to our peculiar institution—African slavery as it exists among us—the proper status of the negro in our form of civilization. This was the immediate cause of the late rupture and present revolution [the Civil War]. . . . Our new government[´s] foundations are laid, its cornerstone rests, upon the great truth that the negro is not equal to the white man; that slavery, subordination to the superior race, is his natural and normal condition. This, our new government, is the first, in the history of the world, based upon this great physical, philosophical, and moral truth.

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Most people are aware of the 13th Amendment, which abolished slavery. But actually it was just the first of several pieces of reconstruction legislation.

1865: 13th Amendment

1865: Freedmen's Bureau

1866: Civil Rights Act

1867: Military Reconstruction Acts

1868: 14th Amendment

1870: 15th Amendment

1871: Enforcement Act (against the Ku Klux Klan)

1875: Civil Rights Act

Despite these enactments, state and local laws were passed from the 1870s to the early 1900s to enforce racial segregation—the “Jim Crow” laws. According to *Britannica* (“What Is the Origin of the Term “Jim Crow”?), Jim Crow was a theatrical character who, from about 1830 on, popularized blackface minstrelsy. These laws required that blacks use separate “water fountains, restrooms, restaurants, lodging, and transportation, along with “separate but equal” schools.” The Jim Crow laws “were legally sanctioned by the U.S. Supreme Court (Plessy v. Ferguson, 1896) . . .”

The civil rights movement in the 1950s-1960s finally began to dismantle the Lost-Cause legacy. But there is much yet to be done.