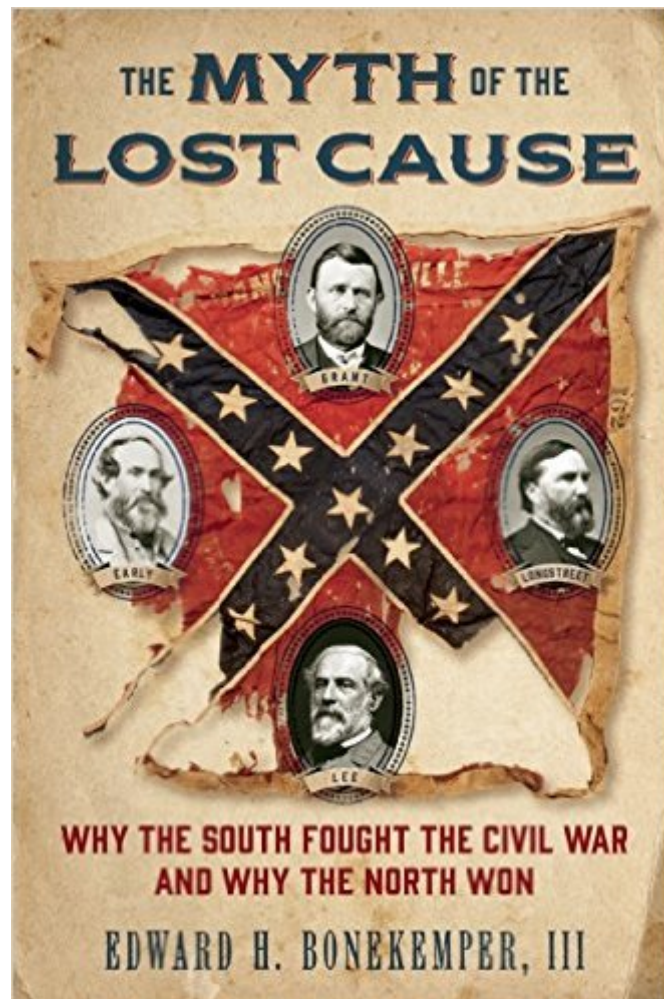


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The Myth Of The Lost Cause: Why The South Fought The Civil War And Why The North Won



Synopsis

The former Confederate states have continually mythologized the South's defeat to the North, depicting the Civil War as unnecessary, or as a fight over states' Constitutional rights, or as a David v. Goliath struggle in which the North waged "total war" over an underdog South. In *The Myth of the Lost Cause*, historian Edward Bonekemper deconstructs this multi-faceted myth, revealing the truth about the war that nearly tore the nation apart 150 years ago.

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Customer Reviews

A July 5th Washington Post article this year quoted Patricia Hardy, a member of the State Board of Education in Texas, as stating that slavery was a "side issue" to the Civil War. There would be those who would say the reason for the Civil War was over slavery. No. It was over states' rights. Ms. Hardy should read Ed Bonekemper's latest book, "The Myth of the Lost Cause." In this, his sixth Civil War book, which is perhaps his finest, Mr. Bonekemper uses his gifts as both an historian and a lawyer to shred revisionist history that has tried to sanitize the reasons Southern states seceded from the Union. Mr. Bonekemper's research is thorough; his arguments are compelling. The high percentage of slaves compared with the total population in the seceding states (57 percent in South Carolina) and the high percentage of slave-holding families in those states (49 percent in Mississippi) are strong indicators of the importance of slavery in the decisions of these states to leave the Union. The reader is provided with the actual language from the declarations at the state secession conventions. Mississippi got right to the point: "Our position is thoroughly identified with the institution of slavery." At that time, the issue of states' rights was not on the

agenda of the seceding states; Southerners were dissatisfied instead with the Northern exercise of their states' rights - failing to return fugitive slaves in accordance with the Constitution and Federal law! Additionally, the South's rejection of the use of slaves as soldiers and the South's failure to promise to end slavery to gain the diplomatic support of Britain and France demonstrated that the independence of the Confederacy was a lesser priority than the preservation of slavery.

A well written and well-researched book that effectively debunks many of the 'Lost Cause' legends that surround the Civil War. Bonekemper is especially effective at revealing the true cause of Secession - undeniably, slavery - using extensive quotes taken from emissaries, ambassadors, and even Secession document themselves. Allowing the actors to speak for themselves through these quotes is devastating to the legend of State's Rights as the primary motivator of the conflict. The book loses focus as it transitions to some of the secondary arguments. The author presents solid evidence of Grant as a skilled and determined leader, but his efforts to discredit Lee come off as forced. He relies heavily on casualty tables and differentials to bolster his arguments, but the numbers are often dubious and their interpretation disingenuous. Curiously, his own narrative sometimes fails to synch with these data tables. The criticism of Lee's tactics draws heavily from McWhitney & Jamison's *Attack and Die*, a statistical analysis of casualty rates that argued that the South's best and only chance was to fight a purely defensive war. Bonekemper falls into the same trap of breaking down battles and casualties in the manner that one would the play-calling in a football game, ignoring entirely the immense pressure and stress that affect military decision-making. Lee's successes in the first half of the war are due more to his moral domination of his opponents than to his handling of troops, a fact that cannot be reflected on a table or graph. It wasn't statistics that froze Hooker when he emerged from the Wilderness - it was the fear of Lee's aggressiveness. Grant had this same mastery over the Confederate generals in the West, as the Vicksburg campaign clearly illustrated.

These are dark days indeed for adherents of the old Confederacy's legacy: Their flag is denigrated and banned from display, their monuments defiled, even the relics of their heroes are disinterred and removed from public grounds. This timely new book from noted historian and lecturer Ed Bonekemper will only add to their plight. 'The Myth Of The Lost Cause' strikes directly at the deeply flawed arguments advancing noble motives for the Civil War south and the Confederacy. A casual student of American history has always been perplexed by the seeming

imperishability of patently fallacious arguments defending the south and its defeat. Encountering these landmines time after time in otherwise academically rigorous works, one is left with the impression that there has been, for over a century, an alternate history conspiracy along the lines of Turtledove's 'Guns Of The South'. Well, it turns out that there really is an alternate history, albeit without AK-47 rifles. In a carefully researched, persuasively written and thoroughly documented narrative, Mr. Bonekemper outlines creation of the lost cause myth, from the writings of actual participants in the war, through early and mid 20th Century authors such as biographer Douglas Southall Freeman, to works as recent as the massive three volume history by Shelby Foote. Mr. Bonekemper takes on directly the several fallacies of the Lost Cause arguments. The first third of the book is devoted to an unassailable refutation of the most heinous of these, the argument for some cause other than slavery for the Civil War. These ninety or so pages are alone worth the price of the book. The first six pages of Bonekemper's concluding chapter wrap up the slavery subject as neatly as has ever been done.

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