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"We are only insisting upon truth and justice for the Southern Confederacy": The United Daughters of the Confederacy, fabricated memory, and lost cause education

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## Abstract

This article analyzes the United Daughters of the Confederacy, a neo-confederate women's organization, and their efforts to vindicate the Confederacy with organized, united action. The Daughters attempted to popularize a revisionist historical mythology called the Lost Cause in order to maintain white supremacy. They accomplished this by engaging in extensive commemoration and monument construction. However, they were particularly impactful instilling their narratives of the Confederacy through their founding the Children of the Confederacy and monitoring school textbooks, fighting to remove any book which they deemed biased or unfair to the former Confederacy.

## Introduction

The United Daughters of the Confederacy is a neo-Confederate women's organization which became a powerful organization in the battle to memorialize and vindicate the Confederacy in order to maintain white supremacy. The UDC sought to rewrite the historical narrative of the Confederacy and what it stood for through organized, united action. UDC members particularly focused on children and public education in the form of textbook campaigns, fighting to remove any book which they deemed biased or unfair to the former Confederacy.

If we are at times apparently contentious," spoke UDC president Rassie White at the 1913 Annual Convention, "we are only insisting upon truth and justice for the Southern Confederacy, for the South, for our noble men, for truth, that we have in the different States UDC text-book committees to see that unbiased histories and unprejudiced readers are used in Southern schools.<sup>1</sup>

By memorializing the Confederacy, the UDC attempted to popularize a revisionist historical mythology called the Lost Cause. The central tenets of the Lost Cause held that the War was fought not to defend slavery, but out of noble love for their homeland. This ideology also erases the brutal legacy of slavery, instead presenting a false picture of an idyllic plantation with kind masters and faithful slaves. This allowed proponents of the Lost Cause to blame racial problems on emancipation and thus call for a return to white supremacy to restore the falsified glory of the Old South. Though the Lost Cause took on many local and regional interpretations to best suit a particular place's needs, one feature remains constant: it is untrue. The Lost Cause was a fabrication intended to promote white supremacy. Historian Adam H. Domby attributes the strength of the Lost Cause to its powerful 'combination of purposeful lying, unquestionably accepting tales that fit into an expected or useful framework, and unknowingly spreading falsehoods.'<sup>2</sup>

An important feature of the Lost Cause is its erasure of anyone who did not fit its idyllic portrayal of the Old South. The mythology focuses on elite whites as its main characters, backed by a supporting cast of loyal slaves. Its white men are all noble and authoritative, and its women are all beautiful and subservient. The Lost Cause has no need for poor whites or

1 United Daughters of the Confederacy, Minutes of the Twentieth Annual Convention (Raleigh: Edwards and Broughton Printing Company, 1914), 17.

2 Adam H. Domby, *The False Cause: Fraud, Fabrication, and White Supremacy in Confederate Memory* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2020), 16.

free African Americans because they present a challenge to its main purpose of glorifying white supremacy and patriarchal hierarchy.<sup>3</sup> They do not fit neatly into the imagery of an entirely unified region, all supporting a war fought for these principles. Thus, when the Daughters refer to the South, they solely mean the elite white class. Similarly, their references to the North often simply mean anyone who opposed their pro-Confederate rhetoric, regardless of geographic location. The Lost Cause was built on valorizing Confederate soldiers and making them martyrs for a noble cause, and to do this, proponents needed a monolithic enemy who opposed its brave heroes.

The Daughters' Lost Cause activities were seen as part of their duty to what historian Karen Cox has termed "confederate motherhood." Similar to republican motherhood, this duty endows women with the responsibility of training their children to be good citizens. It is because of this duty that the Daughters focused so heavily on teaching southern children about the history of the region and gave them such an important place in Lost Cause ceremonies. Cox has also posited that, unlike republican motherhood, Confederate motherhood was primarily motivated by fear:

fear that textbooks with a northern bias had already accomplished irreparable damage, fear that their ancestors might not be vindicated, and fear that future generations of white southerners may never know the sacrifices made by their Confederate ancestors.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, their education efforts were an attempt to be sure that their ancestors' legacies would not die out with their generation.

Most historians of the UDC have primarily dedicated attention to their monument building efforts. Caroline E. Janney's *Burying the Dead but Not the Past: Ladies' Memorial Associations and the Lost Cause* (2008) and William A. Blair's *Cities of the Dead: Contesting the Memory of the Civil War in the South, 1865-1914* (2004) examine the UDC's origins in Ladies' Memorial Associations, which were formed in order to honor the Confederate dead.<sup>5</sup> These associations set the precedent for public involvement for women's groups and inspired the UDC to use monuments as a method for Confed-

3 Ibid., 65

4 Karen L. Cox, *Dixie's Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2003), 123.

5 Caroline E. Janney, *Burying the Dead but Not the Past: Ladies' Memorial Associations and the Lost Cause* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press), William A. Blair, *Cities of the Dead: Contesting the Memory of the Civil War in the South, 1865-1914* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

erate vindication. Adam H. Domby's *The False Cause: Fraud, Fabrication, and White Supremacy in Confederate Memory* (2020) analyzes the political motivations behind the UDC's commemoration efforts, but this analysis is largely limited to their monuments.<sup>6</sup>

Similarly, many historians who study Lost Cause education have primarily studied men's organizations, such as the Sons of Confederate Veterans. James McPherson's "Long-Legged Yankee Lies: the Southern textbook crusade" (2004) discusses organized efforts to ensure schools were teaching pro-Confederate material but does not examine the UDC's textbook crusades.<sup>7</sup> Karen Cox's *Dixie's Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture* (2003) is one of the few works which analyzes the UDC's emphasis on children and education, though monument building continues to be the primary focus.<sup>8</sup> Combining both fields of study to analyze the UDC's education campaigns in the context of the broader Lost Cause education crusade reveals that the UDC played a crucial role in training children to uphold the Lost Cause.

## Origins and Early Work

The United Daughters of the Confederacy emerged as an official organization in 1894. The organization's official aims were

educational, memorial, literary, social, and benevolent; to collect and preserve the material for a truthful history of the war between the Confederate States and the United States of America; to honor the memory of those who served and those who fell in the service of the Confederate States, and to record the part taken by Southern women, as well, in untiring effort after the war in the reconstruction of the South, as in patient endurance of hardship and patriotic devotion during the struggle; to cherish ties of friendship among the members of the society, and to fulfill the duties of sacred charity to the survivors of the war and those dependent upon them.<sup>9</sup>

Though there had been previous women's organizations dedicated to restoring the glory of the Old South, the UDC added a new dimension to

6 Domby, *The False Cause*,

7 James McPherson, "Long-Legged Yankee Lies: the Southern textbook crusade," in *The Memory of the Civil War in American Culture* ed. Alice Fahs and Joan Waugh (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004),

8 Cox, *Dixie's Daughters*.

9 United Daughters of the Confederacy, *Minutes of the Fourth Annual Meeting* (Nashville: Print of Foster and Webb, 1898), 51.

the Lost Cause. Instead of just memorializing those who died in the War, the Daughters wanted to vindicate them. As shown in their official goals, the desire to control the narrative of history played a significant role in the UDC. This was, in part, due to the end of Reconstruction. Without federal troops there to suppress it, the Lost Cause was free to publicly take hold.

Another cause for this shift toward vindication was the changing demographics of these organizations. As the war became more and more distant, some members did not have firsthand connections to it as the founders. Thus, their mission became less about memorializing the individual dead and more about promoting the Confederate way of life as a whole. The Old South envisioned by many of the Daughters was an idealized mythology in which they, as elite whites, were still in total control. According to historian Karen Cox, the Lost Cause promoted “a version of the southern past based on a belief in the superiority of their race and class.”<sup>10</sup> Thus, the Daughters were creating a rhetorical, sentimental, plantation paradise in order to justify that for which their ancestors had fought.

The UDC had assistance from male groups with similar missions. For men, the United Confederate Veterans (UCV) and the Sons of Confederate Veterans (SCV) provided ample opportunity to work toward glorifying the Lost Cause. These men’s organizations have long been some of the most recognized for their work, as they were the ones in the most publicly visible roles. The Daughters themselves often overtly deferred to men, reflecting traditional gender roles which they claimed to uphold. Yet, behind the scenes, it was these women who were often in control. The Daughters were the ones fighting to build monuments, take care of aging Veterans, and host Memorial Day celebrations. In doing so, they carved out a niche for women in which they could be “natural leaders” without defying social norms.<sup>11</sup>

Indeed, the work of these women came to be seen as an extension of their duties as moral guardians, protecting the honor of their Confederate ancestors. This argument successfully veiled the Daughters in enough tradition that their political and ideological work went unquestioned. The work of the UDC was also set apart by their insistence on honoring both the men and women of the Confederacy. The women, the Daughters argued, suffered and did their part in the war as did the men, and thus they also deserved to be remembered.

The UDC grew quickly in the early twentieth century. Founded as just a small group of women in Nashville, Tennessee, within ten years

10 Cox, 12.

11 Ibid., 20.



membership had grown to almost 30,000.<sup>12</sup> Its members were from both the first and second generations removed from the Civil War. Older members remembered the war firsthand and had likely been a part of Ladies' Memorial Associations prior to joining the Daughters. The younger women, who made up a greater portion of UDC membership, grew up during Reconstruction and had been raised on Lost Cause mythology.<sup>13</sup> Though few of the women had personal memories of it themselves, they fought for a return to the culture of the Old South as they imagined it.

Reconstruction was often regarded as a low point for white Southerners, their darkest days. The Lost Cause imagery of the peaceful plantation, in which white masters controlled their faithful slaves and women are protected from all harm by their fathers and husbands, was much more appealing than the realities of the actual situations. As Cox argues, for these younger members of the UDC, "myth had replaced reality."<sup>14</sup>

The most prominent work of the UDC was their monument building. Nearly every city in the South has a monument to Confederate soldiers, placed there by the local chapter of the UDC.<sup>15</sup> These monuments served (and continue to serve) as public proof that the Lost Cause was alive and well, conveying the message that the white South was still devoted to Confederate principles and the men who died for them.

Domby argues that the monuments were intended to build up the false narrative of Confederate glory and played a key role in "justifying and defending [the continued] white hegemonic control of southern politics."<sup>16</sup> These monuments became rallying points for white southerners, and unveiling ceremonies were major public events. The Daughters themselves took center stage at these events, a solid reminder that these women were leading the creation the Lost Cause. One such monument ceremony in Opelousas, Louisiana in September 1897 was covered in the UDC's official newspaper, the *Confederate Veteran*, which praised the Daughters' work: "We look to you, ladies, whenever any movement of great moment is undertaken... We may try by ourselves, but without your assistance we never succeed."<sup>17</sup>

As the most public of the UDC's activities, monument building became one of the most important tools for advancing the narratives of the Lost

12 *ibid.*, 29.

13 *ibid.*, 37

14 *Ibid.*, 38.

15 *Ibid.*, 51.

16 Domby, 26

17 "Daughters at Opelousas, LA," *Confederate Veteran* (Nashville, TN), September 1897.

Cause. These monuments, placed in civic spaces, signified that Confederate values had not been reconstructed but were still shaping the present. The unveiling ceremonies were a rallying cry to Daughters in other chapters, inspiring them to mobilize their resources in their own communities.<sup>18</sup> These ceremonies were dramatic affairs, often featuring parades through streets adorned with Confederate flags. Confederate veterans led the parades, and

18 Adam Chamberlain and Alixandra B. Yanus, “Monuments as Mobilization? The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Memorialization of the Lost Cause,” *Social Science Quarterly* 102, no. 1 (Jan. 2021): 136.



**Figure 1:** UDC members pose in front of a monument to a Confederate general <sup>20</sup>

any visible war injuries only added to the heroic imagery.<sup>19</sup> The Daughters responsible for the entire event took center stage alongside prominent politicians and these veterans. In fact, a key point in the nearly every ceremony was a Daughter presenting the monument to a Confederate veteran followed by his acceptance and appreciation<sup>20</sup>. This visible partnership between the UDC and the veterans gave legitimacy to the Daughters as protectors of the white, Southern masculinity. White men had been entrusted with the fate of the Confederacy during the war, and it was white women who were entrusted with its subsequent legacy. Figure 1 <sup>21</sup>shows UDC members standing near a

19 Cox, 61.

20 Domby, 25.

21 Monument to Gen. John H. Morgan and his men, and some of the members of the U.D.C.

monument to Confederate general.

Children also played an important role in the creation of Lost Cause culture, especially in these monument ceremonies. They were often a central feature of the monument unveiling, symbolizing a link between the past and future generations. Children's choirs were common, performing patriotic songs like "Dixie" for the adults<sup>22</sup>. These ceremonies were important for the effect they had in instilling Lost Cause values and Confederate pride in Southern, white children, but also for the message they visibly portrayed. Crowds of children, all dressed in Confederate colors and embracing their Confederate ancestors symbolized a promise that the Confederate tradition would live on. The North had not succeeded in reconstructing white Southern youth just as it had failed to change their mothers and fathers.

The monuments erected by the Daughters have continued to be some of the most visible reminders of the Confederacy. Placing these statues in almost every town across the South was a way of publicly honoring Confederate soldiers, making their image more associated with valor and heroics than treason and rebellion. The Daughters, to be sure, made a lasting name for themselves as well by performing this work, a legacy which has extended into the 21st century. However, the UDC also realized that statues alone were not going to be enough to vindicate the Confederacy and her defenders. The powerful symbolism of children clad in Confederate memorabilia perhaps served as inspiration for the Daughters' new mission: they would have to expand their work to shape the living along with the dead.

## The Children of the Confederacy

"To the Children of the Confederacy you must consign your work, and it must be their task to keep the fires of patriotism burning bright upon our country's altars," declared Etta Putnam Johnson, leader of the Julia Jackson chapter of the Children of the Confederacy, to the 1908 UDC Convention<sup>23</sup>. The Daughters were just beginning to realize the potential of public education in pursuing aims, but schools were not the only place where they would carve out a niche. The UDC's official auxiliary children's group, the Children of the Confederacy, would become yet another way for them to indoctrinate Southern youth into the glory of the Lost Cause ideology.

The Children of the Confederacy (CoC) was first created in 1896, but it did not become a uniform auxiliary organization until 1917.<sup>24</sup> Before that

22 Cox, 64.

23 United Daughters of the Confederacy, *Minutes of the Fifteenth Annual Convention* (Opelika, Alabama: Post Publishing Company, 1909), 18.

24 Kristina DuRocher, *Raising Racists: the Socialization of White Children*

point, chapters were primarily the responsibility of the local UDC chapter and did not have a standardized curriculum to follow. Membership was open to both boys and girls who had Confederate ancestry, a requirement which was occasionally limiting for those who could not provide proof. Some children were enrolled in the CoC as early as the day they were born, as Daughters were often eager to enroll their children and grandchildren<sup>25</sup>. Most children did not become active members until they were at least six,

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in the Jim Crow South (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2011), 88.

<sup>25</sup> Cox, 136.



**Figure 2:** A chapter of the Children of the Confederacy with their leaders

however. The CoC grew rapidly as the Daughters began to dedicate more time and effort to its educational efforts. Figure 2 <sup>26</sup>demonstrates children and leaders of Confederacy.

Chapters of the CoC met monthly to study Confederate history, sing patriotic songs, and study the Confederate catechism. Figure 2 shows a CoC chapter proudly posing with their leaders clad in Confederate dress. The chapter has on display both a Confederate flag and an American flag, meant to establish patriotism for both the Confederacy and the United States. This was not, in the minds of the UDC, a contradiction, for they saw the Confederacy's secession as the highest act of patriotism to the United States

<sup>26</sup> Children of Confederacy, 1/19/24. Photograph. N.P., 1924, <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2016848591/>

Constitution.<sup>27</sup>

Part of their Lost Cause narrative insisted that secession was a legitimate and reasonable response to federal tyranny in keeping with the response of the founders of the United States to the colonial tyranny of England. Thus, the American flag played a significant role in the indoctrination of these children. Another item of significance within the Confederate Children was the Confederate Catechism. The catechism was a book of questions and answers designed as a call and response activity. This format retains a rhetorical power based on its religious undertones, as the catechism format was developed and used by the Christian church.<sup>28</sup> This association gives the catechism unquestioned authority, enhanced by its contents, in which the concept of truth is repeatedly reinforced.

One North Carolina CoC catechism had the leader ask, “What does your leader teach you?” followed by the response “The truth, and Confederate history.”<sup>29</sup> The repetition of this ritual, which was performed at every meeting and delivered by an authority figure, likely cemented the children’s belief in and understanding of the Lost Cause.

The content of the Confederate Catechism primarily centers around four themes: slavery, secession, the Civil War, and Reconstruction<sup>30</sup>. Many of these questions reinforce common Lost Cause themes that were already being incorporated into school curricula, but some take a more passionate stance than a school textbook would. One question asks, “Were our Confederate soldiers and our relatives who fought in the Confederate army traitors?” and expects the children to answer “No! No! No!”<sup>31</sup> This particular exercise trains children to respond with ardor and intensity upon hearing these accusations of treason levied at the South and their ancestors.

Other questions are designed to instill pride in Confederate soldiers, such as when the leader asks, “Did we kill many Yankees?” and the children respond “yes, thousands and thousands of them.”<sup>32</sup> The use of the term “we” in this question creates a connection for the children, drawing them into the War on the side of the Confederacy and strengthening the “us versus them” mentality in framing the North and the South while also valorizing

27 Cox, 65.

28 Amy Lynn Heyse, “The Rhetoric of Memory-Making: Lessons from the UDC’s Catechisms for Children” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 38, no. 4 (2008): 419.

29 J.P. Allison, *Confederate Catechism for Young Children* (Concord, North Carolina: n.p.), 8.

30 Allison 7

31 Allison, 7.

32 Allison, 6.

their ancestors. The rhetoric contained within this catechism was another powerful method of impressing the Lost Cause onto children in an effort to preserve these values for future generations.

Mildred Lewis Rutherford, who involved herself with the projects related to the UDC's historical mission, published monthly programs for the CoC while she served as historian-general. This pamphlet served as a way to standardize CoC curriculums, creating a more uniform understanding of Confederate history that lined up with the UDC's own historical program. Each month centers around a particular theme, such as Robert E. Lee, Confederate Memorial Day, or the Merrimac and Monitor<sup>33</sup>. The pamphlet also includes a matching program for local UDC chapters to follow. UDC meetings and CoC meetings were often held at the same time, so this encouraged conversation between mother and child, ensuring that their Confederation education was taking place at home, school, and club meetings.<sup>34</sup> Thus, the Lost Cause became an inescapable part of life for many southern children.

Through the Children of the Confederacy, the Daughters modeled the society they hoped to restore with this generation. Their regular meetings immersed children in Confederate history, teaching them that the Old South and plantation life were a more idyllic past. A past that they should be striving to rebuild. The Confederate Catechism trained the children to question their school teachings unless they came directly from white southerners. This organization created a group of children who deeply understood the Lost Cause and would fight for the future the Daughters wanted.

## The UDC and Pro-Confederate History

the Daughters were not content to just educate the children who joined the CoC. In order to come closer to their goal of creating an entire generation steeped in Lost Cause mythology, they began to take an interest in public schools. At the sixth annual meeting of the UDC, held in Richmond in 1899, Annie Booth McKinney, president of the Knoxville chapter, proclaimed that the group was working toward establishing a fund for educating local orphan children. This, she said, was because the chapter "prefers educating the living to raising monuments to the dead."<sup>35</sup> Though the UDC was already heavily involved in monument work at this point, Mrs. McKinney's statement is one of the earlier signs that the UDC's mission was shifting. Of course,

33 Mildred Lewis Rutherford, *Monthly Programs* (Athens, Georgia: n.p.)

34 Heyse, 410.

35 *United Daughters of the Confederacy, Minutes of the Sixth Annual Meeting*, (Nashville: Print of Foster and Webb, 1900), 7

“educational” work had been in the UDC’s constitutional objectives from the very beginning, but over time, this would become one of their most impactful missions.<sup>36</sup>

The Daughters saw a need to combat the narrative that Confederates were rebels and traitors, for this contradicted their mission of vindication. Adelia Dunovant, historian of the Texas UDC division, delivered a passionate address to the 1898 annual convention on the importance of combating what she termed as the “perversion of facts, omission of events, and adoption of Northern opinions.”<sup>37</sup> In it, she lashed out at certain textbooks for referring to the war as the North “putting down the rebellion,” lamenting that “instead of furnishing the children of the South draughts from the pure fountain of truth, it supplies surface water from about the fungus growth of popular opinion.”<sup>38</sup> Clearly, by the Daughters’ standards, any interpretation of history required a pro-Confederate stance.

Some of the most common narratives the UDC sought to combat were the assertion that the war was fought to defend slavery and that Confederates were traitors to the United States. According to the Lost Cause mythology, the war was fought over states’ rights, and thus Confederate soldiers were defending their homes, not their right to own other human beings as property. The Daughters also insisted that their ancestors were not defectors and rebels, but patriots of the highest caliber who fought to defend the Constitution from federal encroachment. This sentiment extends from the assertion that the war was fought over states’ rights, for the Confederates were, according to the Lost Cause, fighting to uphold their Constitutional right to self-determination which had been violated by the federal government’s attempts to interfere with slavery and the election of Abraham Lincoln as president.<sup>39</sup>

In order to enforce this falsified Lost Cause version of history, the UDC established a historical committee in 1897. The creation of such a committee followed a drawn-out debate regarding the Daughters’ responsibility to educate the children and grandchildren of Confederate veterans. Rebecca Felton, a Georgia Daughter and wife of Representative William H. Felton, questioned the UDC’s priorities with their memorial work:

36 United Daughters of the Confederacy, *Minutes of the Fourth Annual Meeting* (Nashville: Print of Foster and Webb, 1898), 51.

37 United Daughters of the Confederacy, *Minutes of the Fifth Annual Meeting* (Nashville: Print of Foster and Webb, 1899), 72.

38 *Ibid.*

39 Cox, 96.

If the dead soldiers could revisit earth during one of the great general reunions of the present time; if they could come down to us in long, shining lines, and tell us what they desired, and what would be most gratifying to parental love and genuine patriotism, do you suppose they would be asking for soldiers' homes or a refuge for survivors, when they now occupy homes "not made with hands, eternal in the heavens?" Would they ask you for monuments to "keep memory green," when they have already a place in your hearts more enduring than brass or marble? Do you imagine they would clamor for flowers on Decoration Days or any other days, if their orphaned daughters or granddaughters were ragged, homeless, and illiterate?<sup>40</sup>

Thus, the establishment of the Committee on History shows an organized push in a new direction for the UDC. Educating white, Southern children was not only about benevolence, but also about ensuring that the next generation would be indoctrinated into Lost Cause mythology. They were, in effect, establishing a younger cohort of future Daughters and Sons to one day take up their mission.

With the guidance of the national convention's Committee on History, local chapters were encouraged to provide for the education of local children, especially those who were descended from Confederate veterans, elect their own chapter historians, and write their own essays on the history of the Confederacy. Male organizations like the UCV and SCV were also engaging in historical writing, but while they were writing stories of battles and military tactics, the Daughters were writing about life on the home front and their vision of Confederate culture, which primarily centered on elite whites and their plantations.<sup>41</sup> They told Lost Cause stories of benevolent masters caring for friendly slaves and valiant wives managing plantations while their husbands were away. They often emphasized the peaceful domesticity of Southern plantation life.

The Daughters intended to contradict the notion that slavery was cruel or inhumane with narratives like that of "an old black mammy who cared for us" or "a faithful old negro man, who remained our 'right hand' until death claimed him."<sup>42</sup> Of course, they saw no issue with these claims coming mostly from white women who had very little experience with plantation life. These 'histories' were fixated on the white elites and their loyal slaves; poor whites

40 United Daughters of the Confederacy, Minutes of the Fourth Annual Meeting, 35-36.

41Cox, 103.

42 Kate W. Moore, "Tribute to Our Faithful Slaves," Confederate Veteran (Nashville, TN), July 1905.



were almost entirely excluded from the narrative.

By 1908, these historical efforts had become so key to the UDC that the national office of historian-general was established.<sup>43</sup> This position would quickly become one of the most powerful within the UDC. Virginia Morgan Robinson was the first woman to hold this office, and she was highly influential in establishing its duties and organizing chapter historians in order to pursue a united rhetorical path for vindication. She implored each chapter to begin collecting “papers, books and documents of every kind, relating to Southern history” so that the Daughters would be well equipped with primary sources for their historical writing.<sup>44</sup> Robinson’s work set the precedent of unifying the Daughters in a single historical effort, one which would be far more powerful than the local chapters writing on their own.

Mildred Lewis Rutherford, Robinson’s successor as historian-general, soon rose to prominence as one of the most notable influences on the UDC’s historical aims. Elected in 1911, Rutherford was already known for traveling the country to give lectures about her version of history, as well as her many essays and pamphlets defending the mythic image of the Old South popularized by the Lost Cause. This “vindication crusade,” as Cox calls it, placed Rutherford firmly at the center of the UDC’s fight to control the historical narrative.<sup>45</sup> In her first year as historian-general, Rutherford published an astounding eleven volumes and 3 scrapbooks, all regarding the history of the Confederacy, as well as the clubs dedicated to its memory, like the UDC and UCV.<sup>46</sup> This was intended to encourage even more Daughters to take up the pen themselves, as Rutherford saw their essays as one of the most important pieces of work being done by the UDC.

The women of the UDC had previously established a committee on education in 1909. However, these early iterations of the committee were quite moderate in comparison to the ambitious body which would later rise up as they pertained more to individual children than the public school system as a whole. Its early aims were less a desire to control the education of children across the South and more a reflection of the UDC’s mission to care for Confederate soldiers and their families. In the committee’s first annual report, they assert that their mission was “to help the descendants of Confederate Veterans to hold their places in the great struggle of life. We want to preserve Confederate history, and honor the Confederate soldier, and we

<sup>43</sup>Cox, 102.

<sup>44</sup> United Daughters of the Confederacy, *Minutes of the Sixteenth Annual Convention* (Opelika, Alabama: Post Publishing Company, 1909), 100.

<sup>45</sup>Cox, 103.

<sup>46</sup> United Daughters of the Confederacy, *Minutes of the Nineteenth Annual Convention* (Jackson, Tennessee: McCowat-Mercer Press, 1913), 144-145.

can find no better way than by training his children and grandchildren to be useful and honorable citizens of these United States.”<sup>47</sup> Thus, while this first committee was focused primarily on caring for Confederate descendants, their purview would soon expand to encompass all the children of the South.

What caused this pivot toward education? It was, in part, a reflection of the UDC’s desire to vindicate their Confederate ancestors, a mission which was not being achieved solely through erecting monuments. Historian James McPherson posits that the professionalization of history as a subject and the rise of standardized, public-school curriculums played a significant role.<sup>48</sup> These schools needed textbooks, and the publishing industry that rose up to meet this need was primarily based in the North. This, as McPherson calls it, was “the serpent... in the Confederate Garden of Eden,” for these books tended to espouse a viewpoint that reflected the growing nationalism of the North following the Union’s victory.<sup>49</sup>

In addition to all their work with the children of the South, the Daughters also sought to expand their sphere of influence beyond the former Confederacy. They recognized that schoolteachers played a large role in determining how friendly lessons would be towards the Confederacy, and therefore decided to establish essay contests at Northern universities where large numbers of teachers were being trained.<sup>50</sup> Leonora Rogers Schuyler, the chairman of the committee responsible for the essay contest at Columbia University, addressed the 1908 convention: “It is the teacher who guides and directs the thought of the coming generation, and with a wider vision, which comes with fuller knowledge, soon the whole land will echo the words that we feel expresses so well our sentiments, ‘Lee and the South be represented, constituted the real patriotic riches of the nation.’”<sup>51</sup> By encouraging students to write about essays about the Old South and the Civil War with the boon of prize money, the Daughters were hoping to grow the influence of the Lost Cause beyond the former Confederacy. This seemed like a mutually beneficial situation for the UDC, for they would get new pro-Confederacy essays to publish while influencing a new audience, and a student would be

47United Daughters of the Confederacy, *Minutes of the Sixteenth Annual Convention*, 259.

48James McPherson, “Long-Legged Yankee Lies: the Southern textbook crusade,” in *The Memory of the Civil War in American Culture* ed. Alice Fahs and Joan Waugh (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 67.

49 *Ibid.*

50 Cox, 112.

51 United Daughters of the Confederacy, *Minutes of the Sixteenth Annual Convention*, 263.

rewarded with prize money and would hopefully remember the donor once they became a teacher.

However, the UDC was naive in thinking that they could bring about a pro-Confederate shift simply by encouraging a study of history which lined up with their views. They would soon discover that their ideas on truth and bias were not nearly as universally true as they believed them to be. The winner of the 1907 essay contest was Christine Boyson, who was selected by a committee made up of academics and Daughters alike for having the best essay on the topic of “the South’s part in the War between the States.”<sup>52</sup> Each year of the contest, the winning essay was published in the official UDC newspaper, the *Confederate Veteran*, but Boyson’s essay was published with a disclaimer, stating “the *Veteran* is unwilling to make such a record of it without protest against several statements.”<sup>53</sup> Indeed, this essay, while very complementary of Robert E. Lee, directly contradicted the manufactured image of the Old South that was so key to the Lost Cause. Boyson’s essay was met with widespread outcry from the UDC and readers of the *Veteran*, especially for statements such as, “Intellectually the South was practically dead. Most of the people were densely ignorant.”<sup>54</sup> It is likely not a coincidence that the failure and embarrassment of this UDC effort was followed by attempts to standardize a core set of principles for the Daughters’ Lost Cause narrative, particularly in schools and textbooks.

## The Battle for Textbooks

As time passed and the Civil War became more and more distant, the Daughters of the Confederacy’s missions began to once again shift. The Daughters had witnessed how their personal ties to their Confederate ancestors grew weaker, and thus they wished to systematically instill Confederate values in children since family ties would no longer be enough to accomplish this. Knowing that there was strength in their numbers, the Daughters organized to have a voice in public schools and the books they were using. Their campaigns fought against any book deemed unfair to the South, meaning it contradicted the fabricated Lost Cause narrative the Daughters were fighting to establish as fact, and it would have a long-lasting effect on public education.

Mildred Lewis Rutherford was certainly aware of an issue with textbook publishing. In her 1912 address as historian-general, she proclaimed, “We

<sup>52</sup> “Robert E. Lee—A Present Estimate,” *Confederate Veteran* (Nashville, TN), December 1908.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

cannot in the South compete with the North in publishing houses... We must not blame the manufacturer of books at the North because he is pushing his interests in the matter of his books. You would do it and I would do it.”<sup>55</sup> In this statement, Rutherford is not only laying blame at the feet of the South for doing enough to combat the Northern publishers, but also acknowledging that these books did indeed function as a way to push their own agenda. Though much of the Daughters’ historical work was often veiled as the search for unbiased history, this serves as a clear reference to the reality that the Daughters recognized themselves to be fighting an ideological war. They were campaigning for a bias in their favor in order to treat this narrative as fact. By placing this narrative in textbooks, they were effectively legitimizing their Confederate mythology and attempting to turn it into the accepted history. Here, the women of the UDC traded the muskets and bayonets used by their ancestors for schoolbooks and pens.

Rutherford was exactly the person needed to take the reins for the UDC’s historical and educational crusades. She was a passionate advocate for the Lost Cause ideology and, according to historian Fred Arthur Bailey, “the UDC’s most articulate interpreter of the South’s past.”<sup>56</sup> Rutherford, perhaps more than any other Lost Cause proponent of the time, saw their historical work for what it was: a chance to control the narrative and return to the white Southern elite some of the power which they had lost during the Civil War. She recognized that history did not have to be just chronological dates and military battles, but, as she argued, “some human event, some social movement... and all the circumstances attending it, and the motives of all the people connected with it.”<sup>57</sup> She pressed other Daughters to fight for their version of history and would not rest until the South had been restored to its imagined glory.

Rutherford’s role as historian-general gave her the power to set standards for what defined a true, unbiased history from the UDC perspective. These standards “demanded unrelenting censorship of textbooks and library materials” which did not match the portrayal these Confederate groups deemed acceptable.<sup>58</sup> Rutherford’s 1914 essay “Wrongs of History Righted” was an early attempt to mark the exact problems she found in school textbooks. “The responsibility is yours, mothers and fathers,” she declared, “to know the training your children are receiving; to know by whom taught,

55 Mildred Lewis Rutherford, *Address* (Athens, Georgia: McGregor Co., 1912), 8.

56 Fred Arthur Bailey, “Mildred Lewis Rutherford and the Patrician Cult of the Old South,” *Georgia Historical Quarterly* Vol. 78, No. 3 (Fall 1994): 516.

57 Rutherford, *Address*, 13.

58 Bailey, “Mildred Lewis Rutherford,” 530.

whether true or false to all we hold dear. Only in this way can we stem the tide of falsehoods that have crept in, and are still creeping into the newspapers in our homes, into the books in our libraries, and into the text-books that we are allowing to be used in our schools.”<sup>59</sup> This placed the responsibility on the Daughters to be watchdogs in their own communities as part of their duty of Confederate motherhood to ensure their children were not being taught a history the UDC found unacceptable.

The deadliest sin a textbook could commit, according to Rutherford, was portraying slavery in a negative light. Far from being a cruel institution, she insisted that “slavery was no disgrace to the owner or the owned.”<sup>60</sup> She disputes the use of the term “slave,” stating that the term was a tool used by abolitionists to make slavery seem worse than it was. “They were our servants,” she insisted, “part of our very home, and always alluded to as the servants of a given plantation.”<sup>61</sup> Rutherford promoted this paternalistic view in which slavery functioned as a civilizing tool and was therefore a positive good. She even argued that African Americans should “give thanks daily that they and their children are not today where their ancestors were before they came into bondage.”<sup>62</sup> This defense of slavery doubles as a defense of white supremacy. By expounding on the merits of slavery, Rutherford is reiterating the benefits of white supremacy. She uses plantation life to exemplify what proper race relations should look like: black submission to white control. Rutherford hoped to see this structure in effect once more and thought that impressing this upon children was an effective method of reaching this end.

Another major fault Rutherford saw in many textbooks was the negative labeling of the South’s secession as a rebellion. This was, of course, a longtime tenet of the UDC, for even their monument work had been dedicated to countering the labels of traitor and rebel. Rutherford reasoned that the South had been justified in the decision to secede, for they had experienced “nothing but continued violation of the Constitution by the North.”<sup>63</sup>

The South, she argued, had clearly not been seeking a war when they seceded, for it was the North that was in control of the military resources like Fort Sumter. What portion of these resources the South had fought for had not been for war preparation, but simply taking “possession of the

59 Mildred Lewis Rutherford, *Wrongs of History Righted* (Athens, Georgia: McGregor Co., 1914), 3-4.

60 *Ibid.*, 14.

61 Mildred Lewis Rutherford, *The Civilization of the Old South: what made it: what destroyed it: what has replaced it.* (Athens, Georgia: McGregor Co., 1916), 3.

62 Rutherford, *Wrongs of History Righted*, 16.

63 *Ibid.*, 11.

things which were rightfully hers.”<sup>64</sup> By justifying secession as a response to Northern encroachment on the South’s Constitutional rights, Rutherford is echoing the Lost Cause sentiment that the South’s position was not one of treason, but actually a high act of patriotism. This idea frames secession as a defensive action by the South done simply to defend the principle of states’ rights. Though they may have lost this battle, it was indeed a great moral mission according to Rutherford’s history.

Of course, Rutherford and the UDC were not alone in their fight. The UCV and SCV were also interested in fighting against this perceived anti-Southern slant in education. Rutherford was a speaker at the 1919 Grand Reunion of the United Confederate Veterans, and in her speech, she stressed the importance of eliminating anti-Southern sentiment from school textbooks. She urged the UCV to dedicate more of their time and effort to this mission which the UDC had already been fighting for over a decade. Her address was met with rapturous applause, and the UCV immediately adopted a resolution to establish a committee consisting of five members from each of the UCV, SCV, and UDC.<sup>65</sup> This committee was named the Rutherford Committee in recognition of her contributions to the cause.

One of the committee’s first acts was publishing uniform standards for schoolbooks. Of course, Rutherford had long been writing essays for the Daughters on what was unacceptable, but her “Measuring Rod For Text-Books” signified a united, uniform approach that could be used by any of the three organizations involved. Whereas before, it had been more up to interpretation of what constituted anti-Confederate bias, this pamphlet laid out eleven clear statements, treated as fact, and the violation of any one of them was grounds for protest. The committee was truly drawing a line in the sand with this pamphlet, stating that “all library authorities in the Southern States are requested to mark all books in their collections which do not come up to the same measure, on the title page thereof, ‘Unjust to the South.’”<sup>66</sup> If the fight for textbooks had been a battle before, this was the committee readying the troops.

The Daughters quickly put the Rutherford Committee’s standards to work in their own local communities. The North Carolina division of the UDC became the center of one of the most notable controversies over Confederate history in textbooks. At their 1920 state convention, the state

64 Ibid.

65 “The Reunion in Atlanta,” Confederate Veteran (Nashville, TN), July 1919. ,

66 C. Irvine Walker, foreword to “A Measuring Rod to Test Text Books, and Reference Books, in Schools, Colleges and Libraries” by Mildred Lewis Rutherford (Athens, Georgia: n.p., 1919), 3.

historian noted that the North Carolina State Board of Education had adopted the use of David S. Muzzey's *An American History* for use in public schools. This was met with widespread protest by the North Carolina Daughters. "It is unfair to the noble traditions of the South from beginning to end," one Daughter proclaimed. "Our children should know the truth about their Southland and not be taught to feel his ancestors were fools and traitors."<sup>67</sup> The convention then voted to form a committee dedicated to fighting this book which "smacks with such unfairness."<sup>68</sup>

Muzzey's *American History* failed nearly every single test laid out in Rutherford's "Measuring Rod." The only standard which it did not fail, the treatment of prisoners of war at Andersonville Prison, was simply because that topic is not mentioned at all by Muzzey.

Rutherford's first two standards state that the Constitution was a compact and was not perpetual nor national, and therefore secession was not a rebellion since the North had reneged on their end of the deal.<sup>69</sup> Muzzey, however, stated, "Until a revolt is successful it is 'rebellion...'" and the authors of it and participants in it are, in the eyes of the law, traitors."<sup>70</sup> He acknowledged that the people have a right to revolt but questions the justification behind the South's secession. Rutherford's next standards argued that the North was fully responsible for the Civil War, that the party of Lincoln was hostile to the South, and that attempts to coerce the South to stay were unconstitutional.<sup>71</sup> Muzzey again disputed the UDC reasoning behind secession. He ardently rejected the notion that Abraham Lincoln's election was, in any way, a provocation to the South. "To call the election of such a man with such a program an invasion of the rights of the South, a violation of the Constitution, or 'an insult that branded the people of the South as sinners and criminals' was absurd," he wrote.

He also rejected the assertion that Congress did anything that would warrant the South's ire, saying that they "gave the South as little provocation for secession" as did Lincoln's election.<sup>72</sup> Contradicting the notion that the North was fully responsible for the War takes away a major component of the Lost Cause, which held that the Confederacy was completely justified in

<sup>67</sup> United Daughters of the Confederacy North Carolina Division, *Minutes of the Twenty-Fourth Annual Convention* (Charlotte, North Carolina: Queen City Printing Co., 1920), 41.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>69</sup> Rutherford, "Measuring Rod," 6-7.

<sup>70</sup> David S. Muzzey, *An American History* (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1911), 468.

<sup>71</sup> Rutherford, "Measuring Rod," 8-13.

<sup>72</sup> Muzzey, 463-465.

their response and had little choice but to fight. If Southern children were to learn that this was untrue, their entire view of their Confederate ancestors could collapse.

Muzzey also contradicted Rutherford's idealization of plantation life in the Old South. Another of her standards maintained that slavery was not a cruel institution.<sup>73</sup> Muzzey, on the other hand, held that "the existence of the coarse slave driver and the callous slave trader testified to its cruelty."<sup>74</sup> Casting slavery in this light contradicted all of the work the Daughters were putting in to make the Old South seem like a lost paradise, which also directly contributed to the legitimization of white supremacy. Muzzey also strongly and repeatedly violated Rutherford's standard attributing the cause of the war to states' rights instead of slavery. He wrote

the only "right" for which the South was contending in 1860 was the right to have the institution of slavery recognized and protected in all the territory of the United States. Whether or not the Constitution gave the South this right was exactly the point of dispute. It was not a case of the North's refusing to give the South its constitutional right, but of the North's denying that such was the constitutional right of the South. It was a conflict in the interpretation of the Constitution; and slavery, and slavery alone, was the cause of that conflict. To say that secession and the Civil War were not caused by slavery, therefore, is to say that the thing for which a man is fighting is not the cause of the fight.<sup>75</sup>

This combination of arguments, asserting that slavery was both barbaric and the cause of the war, once again targeted the valor of the Confederate cause.

The Muzzey textbook's final "crimes" come from its treatment of the Civil War itself. Rutherford's standards insisted that the Union army was responsible for destruction of property during the War and that the South was constantly seeking peace while the North refused.<sup>76</sup> Muzzey did not directly deny the charge of Northern property damage but simply failed to mention it. His account of Sherman's March to the Sea was rather straightforward and did not detail any of this military engagement activities beyond the path it took.

This, in the Rutherford Committee's eyes, was a glaring omission of

73 Rutherford, "Measuring Rod," 10.

74 Muzzey, 481.

75 Muzzey, 467-468.

76 Rutherford, "Measuring Rod," 14-21.



wartime atrocities committed by the North. The fact that it was not mentioned at all was, to them, evidence of a Northern bias. Muzzey fought back against the claim that the South was always seeking peace by first placing them as at least partially responsible for the breakout of war, and then discussing their fervor to win. Far from wanting the war to end, the South was “more confident than ever” in 1863.<sup>77</sup> Perhaps the most publicized excerpt from the entire controversy is Muzzey’s comment on the end of the war: “It is impossible for the student of history today to feel otherwise than that the cause for which the South fought the war of 1861-1865 was an unworthy cause, and that the victory of the South would have been a calamity for every section of our country.”<sup>78</sup> Rutherford herself used this quote in her pamphlet “Truths of History” as an example of the former Confederacy’s mistreatment in literature.<sup>79</sup> However, it is worth noting that Muzzey was not nearly the anti-Confederate crusader that Rutherford and the Daughters portrayed. This excerpt which had so strongly offended Rutherford was immediately followed by an acknowledgement of Confederate heroism in Muzzey’s work: “But the indomitable valor and utter self-sacrifice with which the South defended that cause both at home and in the field must always arouse our admiration.”<sup>80</sup> By this point, even this admission that Confederates were, in their own way, heroes was not enough to stem the tide of protest which met Muzzey’s *American History*. Full submission to the Lost Cause was mandatory to escape the ire of the Rutherford Committee.

To fight against Muzzey’s book being used to educate impressionable Southern children, the Daughters once again turned to their greatest weapon: their pens. At the 1921 North Carolina UDC convention, the chair of the textbook committee reported that each local chapter president had been asked to write a protest to every member of the State Board of Education and the State Text Book Committee. Protests were also sent to 55 high school superintendents whose schools were known to be using Muzzey’s book in their curriculum.<sup>81</sup>

In addition to this overwhelming letter campaign, some Daughters took to the press to wage their war. Virginia Crowell, a North Carolina Daughter, wrote a passionate letter to the *Monroe Journal* explaining the UDC’s

<sup>77</sup> Muzzey, 500.

<sup>78</sup> Muzzey, 517.

<sup>79</sup> Mildred Lewis Rutherford, “Truths of History” (Athens, Georgia: n.p., 1920), 110

<sup>80</sup> Muzzey, 517.

<sup>81</sup> United Daughters of the Confederacy North Carolina Division, *Minutes of the Twenty-Fifth Annual Convention* (Charlotte, North Carolina: Queen City Printing Co., 1921), 61-62.

criticisms of the book and appealing to Southern pride to gain support. “If Muzzey’s History should be taught in our Southern schools, then the U.D.C. as an organization should disband,” she wrote. “‘Loyalty to the truth of Confederate history is our motto.’ Can we be true to such a motto and teach Muzzey? No!”<sup>82</sup> The Daughters’ work did eventually pay off as in 1922, the State Board of Education did not renew its contract with Muzzey’s American History, and North Carolina classrooms were free from all but histories that supported the UDC’s vision of the Confederate South.<sup>83</sup>

## Conclusion

The Daughters’ fight to preserve white supremacy left its mark on the South. Under the guise of tradition and history, these women carved out a new role for themselves as Confederate mothers, taking an active part in publicly memorializing the Confederacy. The Children of the Confederacy and its catechisms trained children to instinctively defend the Confederacy and insist that their ancestors were heroes. The Daughters’ textbook crusade ensured that generations of Southern students exclusively learned Lost Cause history. These efforts contributed to the reign of Jim Crow in the South by creating a new cohort of Daughters and Sons ready to employ Lost Cause rhetoric, even once the original Daughters were no longer around to fight. Indeed, the generations educated with UDC-approved textbooks would continue to espouse white supremacy in the face of the Civil Rights Movement. It is, perhaps, no surprise that the region continues to struggle with its legacy of racism and inequality, particularly in school curriculums—a legacy which the Daughters of the Confederacy helped create.

<sup>82</sup>Virginia Crowell, “Muzzey’s History is Unjust to the Southland” *Monroe Journal* (Monroe, NC), August 26, 1921.

<sup>83</sup>United Daughters of the Confederacy North Carolina Division, *Minutes of the Twenty-Sixth Annual Convention* (Charlotte, North Carolina: Queen City Printing Co., 1922), 47.



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