The term Lost Cause originated in 1866 when a Virginia journalist published a book with that title which blamed Jefferson Davis for the defeat of the Confederate States of America. For many years now, the term has referred to and embodied a romanticized, mythical view of the Old South in regard to the Civil War. As Georgia history professor David William Harper notes, the Lost Cause projects an image "of an idyllic South, populated by a chivalric race of cavaliers who were kind masters to happy slaves—a utopian South, beaten and broken by superior northern numbers and industry..."

Although the Lost Cause is mythology, it is still viewed as historical truth by many credulous persons and even defended as an accurate account of the past by various pro-South groups (as well as by racist demagogues). This year marks the 150th anniversary of the bombardment of Fort Sumter and the outbreak of the Civil War. What better time to demythologize the Lost Cause? Therefore, I will now expose the utter nonsense relating to the princi- ments of the Lost Cause. I rely on an impressive, growing body of Civil War literature by history professors and other scholars that step by step, again and again, usually without any serious contradiction, has demonstrated that the Lost Cause is a false cause.

Myth No. 1: The principal reason the Southern states seceded was states' rights, not slavery.

Although no one denies that the issue of states' rights was of vital importance in the Old South, the overwhelming consensus among modern historians is that slavery was the principal reason the Southern states seceded. Secession occurred principally because the South dearly loved and passionately desired to vindicate the institution of black slavery. South Carolina was the first state to secede. On Dec. 24, 1860, four days after approving the Ordinance of Secession, the state's Secession Convention pronounced the "life, liberty, and property of the Immediate Causes Which Induce and Justify the Secession of South Carolina from the Federal Union." This weird document—passed by godfearing white Southerners who believed that God is a pro-slavery deity, that slavery is a "Higher Law," and that true Christians could be opposed to slavery—proves beyond a reasonable doubt that slavery was the main impetus for that state's decision to secede. Almost all the grievances listed to justify splitting the Union involve slavery, slavery, slavery. The bizarre document even states: "Those [Northern, free] States have assumed the right of deciding upon the propriety of our domestic institutions [slavery]; and have denied the rights of property [slavery] established in the Southern States and recognized by the Constitution; they have denounced as sinful the institution of slavery; they have permitted open establishment among them of [antislavery] societies, whose avowed object is to disturb the peace and destroy the [slavery] property of the citizens of other States. They have encouraged and assisted thousands of our slaves to leave their homes; and those who remain, have been invited by emissaries, books and pictures to serve insur- rence." (My italics.)

Myth No. 2: In the winter of 1860-1861, prior to the firing on Ft. Sumter, there was overwhelming Southern support for secession.

In the months before Ft. Sumter was bombarded on Apr. 12, 1861, the South was, as Georgia history professor David William Harper explains in his book, Deeply Divided: The South's Inner Civil War (2008), "badly divided" on the issue of secession, as the elections for members of the various state secession conventions demonstrated. "Throughout the Deep South, official returns gave secession's opponents about 40 percent of the popular vote. Opponents of secession (known as unionists or co-operationists) ran neck and neck with secessionists in Alabama and Louisiana... In Texas, two-thirds of voters opposed secession." Additionally, pro-secession elements committed so much widespread fraud at the ballot box and in the vote-counting that "the returns cannot be trusted as a gauge of popular opinion. Most likely, anti-secession sentiment was considerably stronger than the final vote would suggest." Here in Georgia, Williams points out, secessionist Governor Joe Brown "faithfully claimed that secessionist delegates had carried the state by over thirteen thousand votes. In fact, existing records from the time suggest that secession was probably defeated by just over a thousand votes."

Throughout the Southern states, secessionists used coercion and subterfuge to discourage or prevent opponents of secession from voting against secession. "So worried were secessionist leaders over the possibility of secession being voted down that they used intimidation and violence in their efforts to control the ballot box wherever they could."

The current historical consensus that there was a broad-based opposition to secession throughout the Old South in the months immediately preceding April 1861 is summarized by David Potter in his book, Lincoln and His Party in the Secession Crisis (1995):

"At no time during the winter of 1860-1861 was seces- sion desired by a majority of the people in the slave states... Furthermore, secession was not basically desired even by a majority in the lower South, and the secessionists succeeded less because of the intrinsic popularity of their program than because of the extreme skill with which they utilized an emergency psychology..."

Myth No. 3: After Ft. Sumter was fired on there was no significant opposition to secession in the South.

Although the South was electrified and the secession cause hugely strengthened during what David Williams calls "the passionate post-Sumter excitement," none-theless, "there were large cracks in the facade of Southern unity," Williams gives examples; in eastern Tennessee, two-thirds of the voters voted against approving the legislature's secession ordinance; in North Carolina, nearly one-third of the delegates at the state secession convention were unionists; and in Virginia, the election that ratified secession "was rife with fraud and intimidation [against opponents of secession]."

Myth No. 4: Unlike the North, the South during the Civil War respected civil liberties, did not abuse its arrest powers and did not imprison suppos- edly disloyal citizens.

This myth has been exploded by historian Mark E. Neely, Jr., in two books: Confederate Rights: Jefferson Davis and Civil Liberties (1993) and Southern Rights: Political Prisoners and the Myth of Confederate Constitutionalism (1999). Neely points out that "the Confederate government curtailed many civil liberties and imprisoned troublesome citizens. Moreover, many white Confederate citizens submitted docilely to being treated as only slaves could have been treated in the antebellum South." Passports were required, for example, for civilians who traveled by train, and Confederate citizens attempting to board trains "were likely to have irritating encounters with military officials who asked them nosy questions about their identity and destination. Guards and inspectors confronted citizens on every railroad and at many crossroads."

After arduous research, Neely discovered records proving that at least 4,108 civilian prisoners [were] held by military authority in the Confederacy. There were many more political prisoners than these, but I was able to locate records for only 4,108 in some five years of searching." Neely also discovered that "the Confederate Army's first arrest of a citizen occurred on Apr. 14, 1861, even before President Abraham Lincoln called out troops to suppress the rebellion. Finally, Neely discovered that "the number of civilians arrested by mili- tary authority in the Confederacy has never been accurately tabulated, and the population differences, appears to be about the same as the number arrested in the North."

Neely concludes: "Knowledge of the existence of thousands of political prisoners now makes it easier to understand the Confederate Cause... [T]he Confederate government restricted civil liberties as modern democratic nations did in war."

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The complete version of this article can be found at www.flagpole.com.