

MOTHERS OF THE LOST CAUSE: HOW THE UNITED DAUGHTERS OF THE  
CONFEDERACY PERPETUATED WHITE SUPREMACY IN THE NEW SOUTH

by

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In the aftermath of the American Civil War, Reconstruction enfranchised millions of freed slaves. After centuries of chattel slavery, African Americans finally had the opportunity to establish their rights and attempt to create a better future for coming generations of Black Americans. At the same time, elite white southerners were left to themselves with the question of how to reassert their power in a new society without slavery. The legitimacy of their power went under questioning as the enfranchisement of African Americans posed a serious threat to their position in society. Once at the top of the racial caste system, elite white southerners pushed for a system which maintained their superiority, socially and legally. In the best interest of only themselves, elite white men worked to reinstall white supremacy as the law of the land.

Wives of these elite white men took up the call to aid in the reinstatement of white supremacy. While their husbands—who were wealthy lawyers, businessmen, and politicians—worked to establish Jim Crow into law, southern white women turned to the discipline of history as a means of protecting white supremacist ideals. They created a romanticized version of the Old South, or the society of the American South before the Civil War, with pen and paper as their weapon of choice. Starting off as the Ladies' Memorial Association, the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) was created in 1894 in Tennessee with aims to protect the legacy of Confederate men and women, and of the Confederacy itself. The organization grew with the turn of the twentieth century and hit its peak of popularity around this time. It was no coincidence that the Daughters, or members of the UDC, began work immediately after Reconstruction. They had explicit goals of maintaining the white supremacist society they benefitted from during the era of the Old South. As times changed in the New South, or the era after Reconstruction, the Daughters adapted and fought to maintain the status quo from the time of their beloved Confederate ancestors. In this paper, I argue that the UDC perpetuated white

supremacy by seeking vindication for the Confederacy through creating a distorted history of slavery and the Civil War, influencing education, and constructing monuments.

The topic of the UDC is not exactly a focal point in the larger historical context of the New South. However, many historians have analyzed the history of these southern women and created a significant amount of historical literature on the topic. Karen L. Cox has written extensively on the topic, and her work *Dixie's Daughters: the United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture* provides an overview and analysis of the organization's operations and goals. Journal articles from Fred Arthur Bailey, Sarah H. Case, and Juliette Woodruff highlight the UDC's attempts to rewrite history to fit their pro-Confederate narrative as well as efforts to implement their work into southern public schools. Other articles from Euan Hague, Edward H. Sebesta, Tom Vincent, and Caroline E. Janney emphasize the UDC's creation of monuments and their underlying incentives of protecting white supremacy in regard to erecting Confederate memorials.

As for primary sources, literature from the Daughters themselves provided great insight into the mindset, aspirations, and incentives for the operations of the organization. Mary B. Poppenheim was historian-general, or the lead historian of the organization, from 1917 to 1919. In 1938, she published *The History of the United Daughters of the Confederacy* in which she described the work of the UDC from its conception until the time the book was written. Additionally, *The United Daughters of the Confederacy Magazine* from the CSUF University Archives and Special Collections provided insight into the operations of the organization in the mid-twentieth century. The magazines, published from 1959 to 1970, showed the work of the organization well into the twentieth century and how they maintained the same ideals of which the organization was founded.

## Revisionist history

The UDC worked to perpetuate white supremacy in the New South by achieving vindication of the Confederacy and Confederate soldiers, but their platform relied heavily on a doctored version of the history of the Civil War. In order to persuade people on large scales in the South and across the nation, they used revisionist history with roots in white supremacy. They knew presenting the history of the Civil War, or as they liked to call it, the “War Between the States,” as a battle to maintain slavery as the root of its conflict, would not be successful in garnering pride amongst Southerners. They took bits and pieces of historical truth and built an entire history of the society of the South, slavery, and the Civil War. This version of history effectively erased the voices and history of people of color from this era, and it promoted the idea that they were happy under the oppressive rule of slavery.

One way in which the Daughters were successful in promoting their cause was through heavy involvement and focus on white women in history, both in the field of history and in remembering the women of the Old South. They recognized women as key figures to be admired and respected. In 1938, UDC Historian-general Mary B. Poppenheim herself emphasized the contributions of Confederate women when she wrote that the “guiding strength, individuality, personality, and achievement of the women who knew the hardships of war and reconstruction in the South” were the foundations of the UDC.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, she noted that women had been writing history as a way to honor Confederate ancestors and glorify their actions as an expression of their love for the Confederacy.<sup>2</sup> Poppenheim advocated that it was Southern women who answered the call to rewrite the history of the Civil War due to their dedication and desire to

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Poppenheim, *The History of the United Daughters of the Confederacy*, (Virginia: Garrett and Massie Inc., 1938), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Poppenheim, *The History*, 49.

honor their legacy. She wrote, “Let it be remembered that at the close of the War Between the States in the South women took up the torch of hope at a time when the clouds were darkest and lighted Southern manhood on to brighter days.”<sup>3</sup> She was adamant that women should be involved in and unafraid of revisionist history because it was an acceptable way for women to gain a public voice. Women’s involvement in this distorted history was essential to the work and cause for the UDC as it provided women with the opportunity to have their voices heard in the discipline of history, and it grew the belief in their white supremacist doctrine.

The Daughters created great incentive for women to get involved in creating a “true” history of the South. The UDC gave out physical awards of recognition to women who created the best historical work for the organization. Initially, they gave out trophies, medals, and other materially valuable prizes to encourage women’s work in history. As the organization grew and acquired more wealth, the prizes they offered became more and more extravagant. Poppenheim stated the prizes included “cups, trophies, [and] cash prizes being offered annually by friends of the department from all Divisions.”<sup>4</sup> Such prizes as these could be displayed in the home and represent the achievement. This in turn inspired Daughters to get involved in creating such a history and reinforced the doctrine of the UDC. Many Daughters became “amateur historians” and had their articles published in magazines and in school materials.<sup>5</sup>

To achieve their goal of vindication, the UDC created a historical narrative of cherry-picked information which honored the Confederacy. Revising history as the main way to relieve Confederate blame and guilt for the Civil War was essential to the Lost Cause—the interpretation of history with the intention to present the Confederate loss in the least shameful way possible.

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<sup>3</sup> Poppenheim, *The History*, 115.

<sup>4</sup> Poppenheim, *The History*, 141.

<sup>5</sup> Karen L. Cox, *Dixie’s Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture* (Florida: University Press of Florida, 2019) 95-96.

Instead of presenting Confederates as slave-owners determined to protect their power and their oppression of Black Americans, the Lost Cause—which the UDC was proudly and greatly involved in—aimed to highlight the least repulsive aspects of Confederate men. This “Lost Cause” was deeply personal to the Daughters, as they were the generation who came after the men who fought in the Civil War. Easing the blame from the Confederacy was an essential goal of the UDC because, as Cox wrote, “the people they sought to vindicate were their parents and grandparents.”<sup>6</sup> They did not want their familial reputations to be destroyed, and took up arms—in the form of the pen and paper—to create a story that presented their fathers as patriotic, good men.

The writings of the UDC take a firm stance against what they claimed was “biased history” because it questioned the status quo of the Old South. One method of fighting against “biased history” was by presenting the Southerners as defenders of the U.S. Constitution during the Civil War, rather than aggressors.<sup>7</sup> This idea made it seem as though the South was a victim of the North’s aggression also promoted the controversial idea that since slavery was a protected institution of the Constitution, they were defending their constitutional rights. In the beginnings of the organization, the UDC victimized the South to make the political standing of their relatives more enticing. It was much less acceptable to fight to protect the legacy of someone who committed a crime against humanity: owning slaves. Thus, they changed the historical narrative of the Confederacy into a noble crusade of the defense of states’ rights—that is, the rights to defend and participate in the institution of slavery—as a more acceptable story. This helped maintain the Old South narrative that Southern men were honorable men.

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<sup>6</sup> Cox, *Dixie’s Daughters*, 3.

<sup>7</sup> Cox, *Dixie’s Daughters*, 4.

The UDC turned to alternative history as a way to defend the status quo because they felt threatened by Reconstruction. White elites felt their status in society was in peril due to the growing rights and success of Black Americans after the Civil War. Throughout the South, wealthy white people became increasingly fearful of their position in society being taken from them, and as Poppenheim said, “[t]his time, the contested field was not the bloody ground of Shiloh or Gettysburg, but the interpretation of the past.”<sup>8</sup> They collected fragments of history to build an all-encompassing story of the entire South by selecting pieces of “evidence” which coincided with the white supremacist beliefs they upheld. Poppenheim wrote that they worked “by collecting fragmentary and scattered information of value, by reviewing histories, by encouraging the study of history as well as safeguarding it in the schools.”<sup>9</sup> Here, she admitted that they cherry-picked bits of “information of value,” or pieces which would help reinforce their ideas, while ignoring the vast amounts of information which would directly confront their views. Mildred Lewis Rutherford, historian-general of the UDC from 1911 to 1916, advocated for “a pro-Southern view of events”<sup>10</sup> and promoted strict, traditional gender roles as well as the preservation of white supremacy. Generally, the UDC used revisionist history in an attempt to, as historian Tom Vincent wrote, “impose order on an increasingly changing society”<sup>11</sup> by instilling ideas of white supremacy and classism in the minds of Southerners. They created a believable history which protected the integrity of their ancestors and reinforced the need to maintain an artificial social and racial hierarchy in the South.

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<sup>8</sup> Fred Arthur Bailey, “Free Speech and the ‘Lost Cause’ in Texas: A Study of Social Control in the New South,” *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 97, no. 3 (1994): 454.

<sup>9</sup> Poppenheim, *The History*, 136.

<sup>10</sup> Cox, *Dixie’s Daughters*, 39.

<sup>11</sup> Tom Vincent, “Evidence of Womans Loyalty, Perseverance, and Fidelity: Confederate Soldiers’ Monuments in North Carolina, 1865-1914,” *The North Carolina Historical Review* 83, no. 1 (2006): 63.

The Daughters presented this alternative history as the “true” version of history, which made it digestible and believable to whites across the South. Daughters frequently used words such as “correct,” “impartial,” and “authentic” to describe their interpretation of the history of the South.<sup>12</sup> These words were important in the presentation of their history. They were dedicated to resurfacing the “truth” about the South and in order for people to believe it on large scales, it had to be something worth taking pride in.

Many of the Daughters’ interpretations of history confronted heavy topics such as slavery and war guilt in such a way that they shifted the blame away from the Confederacy. For example, they acknowledged slavery as a necessary evil which was forced upon them by the North. They argued the claim that, as historian Fred Arthur Bailey wrote, “slavery had been forced upon the region by profit-hungry New England merchants who inflicted their human cargoes upon the North as well as the South.”<sup>13</sup> This controversial and manufactured claim both explained that the South had slavery imposed on them and that the Southern people were such honorable people that they took up the burden of the institution. Additionally, it shifted the blame off the Confederacy by stating that the North also had slaves, which was not untrue. However, slavery was a foundational aspect of Southern agrarian culture and was much more prevalent in the South.

The UDC used revisionist history to paint Northerners as the “bad guys” in the history of the South and Civil War. One claim of the historians in the UDC was that the abolitionists were the real traitors of the U.S. and Constitution because they tried to tear down an institution which was protected by the Constitution, and they incited slave riots across the South.<sup>14</sup> It was not the Southern rebels who seceded from the U.S. who were traitors but the very people speaking out

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<sup>12</sup> Cox, *Dixie’s Daughters*, 94.

<sup>13</sup> Bailey, “Free Speech,” 471.

<sup>14</sup> Bailey, “Free Speech,” 474.



against slavery. The Daughters took the fact of slavery as a protected, constitutional institution to mean that the South was justified in their defense of it. UDC member Marjorie Reeves countered the idea that Jefferson Davis, President of the Confederate States of America, was a traitor or a rebel by presenting his contributions during the Mexican-American war and in the expansion of the United States.<sup>15</sup> Daughters also vilified Northerners in their stories, mostly claiming they had intentions to humiliate the South because of their loss during the Civil War.<sup>16</sup> Other controversial takes portrayed Southerners as good, moral people who were victims of Northern aggression. Northerners were shown to be “cold and mercenary,” while Southerners were “invariably genial and generous” and “refined and humanitarian.”<sup>17</sup>

In addition to villainizing Northerners, rhetoric from the UDC’s revisionist history shifted blame off of Confederate men. Literature from the organization grew, as Case said, “to establish the South’s contribution to United States history, to legitimize secession, and to idealize the antebellum plantation.”<sup>18</sup> Mildred Lewis Rutherford, historian-general for the UDC from 1911 to 1916 and long-time white supremacist educator, played a large role in establishing this point of view. Its roots in white supremacy lay in the foundational idea that the Civil War was not a fight over slavery but an issue of states’ rights. Additionally, the UDC used specific language to shift blame off the Confederacy. Instead of calling it the Civil War, the Daughters wrote about “The War Between the States.” Renaming the war served to remove slavery from the connotation of the war and promoted the Confederate cause as one of pursuing rights. In 1941, the group urged Congress to officially retitle the war as “The War Between the States” to imply that the South

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<sup>15</sup> Euan Hague and Edward H. Sebesta, "The Jefferson Davis Highway: Contesting the Confederacy in the Pacific Northwest," *Journal of American Studies* 45, no. 2 (2011): 293.

<sup>16</sup> Sarah H. Case, "The Historical Ideology of Mildred Lewis Rutherford: A Confederate Historian's New South Creed," *The Journal of Southern History* 68, no. 3 (2002): 610.

<sup>17</sup> Juliette Woodruff, "The Last of the Southern Belles," *Studies in Popular Culture* 8, no. 1 (1985): 65.

<sup>18</sup> Case, "The Historical Ideology of Mildred Lewis Rutherford," 609.

seceded legally, creating a different country altogether.<sup>19</sup> Thus, in this mindset, it was not a Civil War because it was fought between two legally independent nations. Though unsuccessful in this attempt, the UDC did succeed in vindicating Jefferson Davis, the president of the Confederacy. In 1978, pressure from the UDC urged President Jimmy Carter to create legislation restoring citizenship to Jefferson Davis.<sup>20</sup> Pardoning Davis was only one of many victories the Daughters claimed in the name of vindicating the Confederacy.

### **Involvement in Education**

Writing an alternative, thinly-researched history of the American Civil War was the foundation of the UDC's rhetoric, but shaping public education was the method through which they could implement their white supremacist ideals. The UDC had great interest in asserting dominance over the materials learned in public schools because it would allow for their historical perspective to survive, and in turn protect the rigid, white supremacist societal structure. Specifically, the UDC emphasized the importance of sponsoring the education of "worthy descendants," as Poppenheim wrote. She described the introduction of education into the foundational goals of the UDC when they "introduced the clause 'to help educate the needy descendants of worthy Confederates,' thus planting for all time this great work into the very heart of our society."<sup>21</sup> Many of these "worthy descendants" were white women, whom the UDC had great interest in sponsoring the education of.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, the "Hero Fund" was created to sponsor the education of these "worthy" pupils, and a UDC convention in 1921 showed that

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<sup>19</sup> Woodruff, "The Last of the Southern Belles," 63.

<sup>20</sup> Woodruff, "The Last of the Southern Belles," 64.

<sup>21</sup> Poppenheim, *The History*, 95.

<sup>22</sup> Cox, *Dixie's Daughters*, 91.

almost two dozen young men were gifted with an education through the Hero Fund.<sup>23</sup> Editor of *The United Daughters of the Confederacy Magazine* Estelle A. Haggard expressed her joy in the success of the Hero Fund, because it gave “means to secure a richer, fuller life through higher education to hundreds of men and women throughout the country.”<sup>24</sup>

In order to subsidize the legitimacy of the pro-Confederate history children got in schools, the UDC implemented physical representations of the Confederacy and supportive literature in southern classrooms. Until 1919, they carefully monitored curriculum and practices of public schools by frequently visiting schools.<sup>25</sup> Teachers and administrative staff cooperated with the Daughters and other Lost Cause organizations, sharing the narrative of a vindicated Confederacy with the youth.<sup>26</sup> In classrooms, portraits of Jefferson Davis were hung next to George Washington and Confederate flags flew alongside American flags, with the intention of putting a face to a name and associating the Confederacy’s values with American values.<sup>27</sup> Mildred Lewis Rutherford was a schoolteacher for over half a century and knew children were impressionable. In 1911, she became historian-general of the national branch of the UDC for the writing of her textbooks *American Authors* from 1894 and *The South in History and Literature* in 1906. This gave her the means through which she could attempt to implement pro-Confederate textbooks in public schools.<sup>28</sup> Poppenheim recalled the “importance of having correct, fair, and unbiased history taught in the Southern schools” due to the contributions of the UDC.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Estelle A. Haggard, “Editorial,” *The United Daughters of the Confederacy Magazine*, 1966, United Daughters of the Confederacy Emma Sansom Chapter Collection, California State University Fullerton Special Collections, Box 7, Folder 4.

<sup>24</sup> Haggard, “Editorial,” 2.

<sup>25</sup> Cox, *Dixie’s Daughters*, 127.

<sup>26</sup> Bailey, “Free Speech,” 463.

<sup>27</sup> Cox, *Dixie’s Daughters*, 134.

<sup>28</sup> Case, “The Historical Ideology of Mildred Lewis Rutherford,” 608.

<sup>29</sup> Poppenheim, *The History*, 135.

The UDC's efforts of creating a pro-Confederate history paid off in the very beginning of the twentieth century when their textbooks were accepted into public school curriculum in the South. In Texas, authors of "truthful" history textbooks introduced a "historical paradigm, a grand epic that taught Texas children to respect elite rule, fear the Negro race, and distrust the Yankees."<sup>30</sup> Children were provided with these romanticized textbooks which presented their narrative as unquestionable historical fact. These textbooks included harmful white supremacist ideals, in which they romanticized plantation life, explained slavery as necessary for African Americans, criticized Reconstruction, and honored the elite whites from antebellum society.<sup>31</sup>

The UDC's contribution to the implementation of these textbooks was significant. They intentionally chose history textbooks which favored Confederate veterans and the Confederacy to lead children to wholeheartedly believe in this doctrine. Literature from *Daughters* such as Rutherford was the prominent narrative, which revolved around a core in white supremacy. Lost Cause organizations, particularly the UDC, created history committees to monitor which textbooks were used in public schools throughout the South and to eliminate contradictory points of view from public access.<sup>32</sup> Mrs. M. M. Birge, chairwoman of the UDC's textbook committee, took significant leadership to "immunize young minds against democratic reforms" through selection of textbooks.<sup>33</sup> Their influence over the choices of textbooks solidified with their success in a Texas uniform textbook law in 1897. This law required cities with fewer than 10,000 residents to adopt textbooks as mandated by the state; the "state-mandated" textbooks were hand-

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<sup>30</sup> Bailey, "Free Speech," 471.

<sup>31</sup> Bailey, "Free Speech," 470.

<sup>32</sup> Cox, *Dixie's Daughters*, 124.

<sup>33</sup> Bailey, "Free Speech," 453.

picked by the UDC and the United Confederate Veterans.<sup>34</sup> After the law passed, the UDC proudly “declared all school histories free from sectional impurity” in 1915.<sup>35</sup>

Censorship was a major objective for the UDC, and they worked to achieve it by removing “impure” histories from the classroom and public libraries. As Bailey wrote, they “expunged offending works from schools and libraries” and “silenced dissident teachers” in an effort to prevent children from coming across opposing stories.<sup>36</sup> Cornelia Branch Stone, president of the Texas Division of the the UDC, had compiled a list of 115 “Commended for Southern Libraries.”<sup>37</sup> The Daughters feared if children came into contact with stories which countered the pro-Confederate narrative, they would start to question the history they were taught and in turn question the legitimacy of Old Southern society. Thus, only literature approved by the UDC was to be presented in public spaces for children to be exposed to.

Outside of the classroom, the UDC fostered the education of southern youth through extracurricular activities, particularly through the Children of the Confederacy (CofC). Editor Mrs. John L. Woodbury of *The United Daughters of the Confederacy Magazine* recognized the importance of the CofC, and said to “foster the work of the Children of the Confederacy is really an extension of life insurance for our own organization.”<sup>38</sup> The UDC promoted the CofC as their greatest method of preserving their ideology. In 1896, founders of the UDC “began to consider the necessity for organizing the children” and creating local chapters which reflected the structure of the UDC itself.<sup>39</sup> CofC chapters had been a priority, as it allowed the UDC to control the

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<sup>34</sup> Bailey, “Free Speech,” 462.

<sup>35</sup> Bailey, “Free Speech,” 462.

<sup>36</sup> Bailey, “Free Speech,” 453.

<sup>37</sup> Bailey, “Free Speech,” 461.

<sup>38</sup> Mrs. John L. Woodbury, “Our Heritage,” *The United Daughters of the Confederacy Magazine*, 1959, United Daughters of the Confederacy Emma Sansom Chapter Collection, California State University Fullerton Special Collections, Box 7, Folder 2.

<sup>39</sup> Poppenheim, *The History*, 181.

education and activities of the youth outside of the school where they had established dominance. CofC members were frequently enrolled by their parents at birth, before the child was cognizant or able to conceptualize the Confederacy.<sup>40</sup> By 1906, the Daughters had established CofC chapters across Texas, where they sang Confederate songs, learned stories about Confederate soldiers, and decorated Confederate graves.<sup>41</sup> Activities such as these created an environment in which the Confederacy was presented as something to celebrate and take pride in.

### **Monument building**

Confederate monuments were a successful tactic of the Daughters which provided a cultural landscape that honored the Confederacy and Confederate veterans. The UDC's construction of monuments occurred generally in the time after Reconstruction, an era in which white elites worked to reestablish their power. Beginning in 1914 and going strong until the mid-twentieth century, this cultural landscape included hundreds of monuments and statues throughout the South which included the UDC's historical analysis of the Civil War and its Confederate heroes, displayed with grandeur in public spaces. Confederate monuments fall under one of the many categories of "racialized" cultural landscapes in the U.S., but these monuments hold an explicit context in white supremacist historical doctrine.<sup>42</sup> This root in white supremacy was expressed through the UDC's erasure of slavery from the context of the Civil War and the actions of Confederate soldiers, and thus erasing the voices of African Americans from this history. These monuments were more than a recognition of historical events, as they were reminders of the white supremacist status quo of the Old South. Elite whites who lived through the Civil War

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<sup>40</sup> Woodruff, "The Last of the Southern Belles," 65.

<sup>41</sup> Bailey, "Free Speech," 458.

<sup>42</sup> Hague and Sebesta, "The Jefferson Davis Highway," 283.

wanted these monuments to remind children of the sacrifices of their Confederate ancestors, and the Daughters took extensive measures to fulfill this desire.<sup>43</sup>

The UDC's intention to vindicate Confederate soldiers through the creation of monuments was present in each one. Poppenheim wrote that Southern women "knew monuments would speak more quickly, impressively, and lastingly to the eye than the written or printed word."<sup>44</sup> The entire history of Confederate "heroes" was written on a small plaque at the base of each monument with no mention of their ties or loyalty to the institution of slavery. It provided a quick, digestible, unquestioned version of history derived from the cherry-picked information from the UDC to the public. The location, type of monument, inscription, and other factors determining the outcome of the monument were all chosen intentionally in order to attract the most attention in an area.<sup>45</sup> Because these monuments served as reminders of the greatness of the Confederacy, it was important which information was displayed. A study of the Confederate memorials in North Carolina "reveals the ebb and flow of white conservative power in the state," as well as how the UDC "used these monuments to construct and reconstruct their memories of the Civil War and its meaning."<sup>46</sup> When a monument in Shiloh was to be constructed in 1917, the committee from the area wanted a monument that represented not only the battlefield, "but a monument that would tell the story of Shiloh and have a special meaning to the South,"<sup>47</sup> as Poppenheim wrote. Thus, the UDC put in extensive effort to create a monument whose historical basis lay in the UDC's pro-Confederate interpretation of the battle. As many of the Daughters themselves were the wives of elite white male business owners, lawyers, and politicians, this interpretation benefitted their

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<sup>43</sup> Vincent, "Evidence of Womans Loyalty," 81.

<sup>44</sup> Poppenheim, *The History*, 49.

<sup>45</sup> Cox, *Dixie's Daughters*, 72.

<sup>46</sup> Vincent, "Evidence of Womans Loyalty," 63.

<sup>47</sup> Poppenheim, *The History*, 54.

families as well. By honoring the Confederacy, these women upheld the doctrine of white supremacy to the benefit of their families and husbands.

Such extensive effort can be seen in the efficiency in raising funds, as it highlights the Daughters' dedication toward and sophistication in creating Lost Cause monuments. The UDC erected hundreds of monuments across the South and had the ability to fund and establish them in public places. Essentially, the UDC had the power to control the cultural landscape through their fund-raising abilities.<sup>48</sup> One of the UDC's proudest achievements, the Jefferson Davis monument in Richmond, Virginia, cost the UDC \$70,000 as well as over a decade of planning and work.<sup>49</sup> Confederate monuments were expensive to create, but the UDC's dedication to their Lost Cause motivated them to see the projects through. For many monuments, the UDC called upon local communities to help fund the monuments. Local whites donated funds to aid in the construction of these monuments.<sup>50</sup> In doing so, the local communities became involved and invested in the creation of monuments. In addition to local funds, the UDC received public funds as seen when the North Carolina General Assembly passed bills to allocate money to the UDC for the purpose of monument-building.<sup>51</sup> Though monuments were not exclusively produced thanks to the UDC in North Carolina, the UDC "brought a greater sense of organization, purpose, and fund-raising abilities to North Carolina's Confederate monument movement."<sup>52</sup> They had great influence on the creation of other monuments even if they were not directly involved because they taught others how they can participate in the process.

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<sup>48</sup> Hague and Sebesta, "The Jefferson Davis Highway," 295.

<sup>49</sup> Poppenheim, *The History*, 50.

<sup>50</sup> Cox, *Dixie's Daughters*, 56.

<sup>51</sup> Vincent, "Evidence of Womans Loyalty," 68.

<sup>52</sup> Vincent, "Evidence of Womans Loyalty," 78.



Meanings of Confederate monuments generally revered Confederate soldiers as patriots and emphasized their contributions to the advancement of white southerners. They frequently erased slavery from the context of the Civil War and portrayed their fight as one for states' rights. Confederate soldiers would live on past their deaths in the form of stone and marble statues which serve as reminders of the gallant heroes they once were. Generally, soldiers were remembered, as Cox wrote, "as both loyal southerners and American patriots, for their defense of states' rights."<sup>53</sup> They reminded white southerners that their ancestors fought "the good fight" while overlooking the history of slavery in the men's lives and reasons for fighting in the war. In protecting the notion that the Confederacy fought to defend their constitutional "states' rights," the UDC was able to argue against accusations of promoting racism through the monuments.<sup>54</sup> Additionally, the defense of states' rights united white southerners against what they believed was an unfair history. Monuments promoted, in Cox's words, "the South's devotion to patriotic principles."<sup>55</sup> One example of this is seen in the Jefferson Davis monument, in which Poppenheim described the inscription that explicitly protects the "high and solemn motive of defending and protecting the rights we inherited and which it is our duty to transmit unshorn to our children."<sup>56</sup> Although the fight for states' rights in the context of the Civil War was the right to defend the institution of slavery, the UDC used monuments to express the patriotism of Confederate veterans in their fight for unidentified rights.

Confederate monuments evolved over time from expressions of grief to celebrations of the lives of Confederate men. As editor of the UDC magazine Woodbury wrote in 1959:

Every marked Confederate grave will always be Confederate territory. They do not die

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<sup>53</sup> Cox, *Dixie's Daughters*, 49.

<sup>54</sup> Hague and Sebesta, "The Jefferson Davis Highway," 293.

<sup>55</sup> Cox, *Dixie's Daughters*, 60.

<sup>56</sup> Poppenheim, *The History*, 51.

who are remembered, and the memory of that gallant force, and their confidence in moral leadership, will weave itself into the lives and thoughts of those who treasure and appreciate it.<sup>57</sup>

However, Confederate monuments did not always have explicit importance in celebrating Confederate lives. The very beginnings of Confederate monuments stemmed, according to Vincent, “from the natural human need to commemorate and grieve the loss of loved ones.”<sup>58</sup> Before 1890, memorials dedicated to the Confederacy were accordingly placed in cemeteries throughout the South. Into the twentieth century, the UDC built more monuments in public places like town centers and courthouse squares, and the meaning of those monuments shifted.<sup>59</sup> In placing monuments into public spaces, their meaning became an extension of the education southerners received in public school.<sup>60</sup> Inscriptions and symbolism in the monuments reflected the revisionist history most southerners were exposed to during their schooling through UDC-approved textbooks. Portrayal of Confederate soldiers as martyrs for their cause and as heroes in these monuments reinforced the idea that they were patriotic men fighting to defend their rights. A monument in Arlington National Cemetery erected in 1914 with the aid of president Woodrow Wilson expressed the argument that the South’s defense of states’ rights “was not a defense of slavery, but rather evidence of a commitment to constitutional principle.”<sup>61</sup> Here, the UDC justified the actions of the Confederacy by honoring their patriotism and emphasizing the fact that slavery was a constitutionally protected institution, rather than a cruel violation of human rights.

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<sup>57</sup> Mrs. John L. Woodbury, “Museum Piece,” *The United Daughters of the Confederacy Magazine*, 1959, United Daughters of the Confederacy Emma Sansom Chapter Collection, California State University Fullerton Special Collections, Box 7, Folder 2.

<sup>58</sup> Vincent, “Evidence of Womans Loyalty,” 63.

<sup>59</sup> Hague and Sebesta, “The Jefferson Davis Highway,” 283.

<sup>60</sup> Vincent, “Evidence of Womans Loyalty,” 64.

<sup>61</sup> Cox, *Dixie’s Daughters*, 68.

One particular monument, the Faithful Slave Memorial, recognized the history of slavery in the context of the Civil War, but through the work of the UDC it reflected a romanticized, incomplete picture of it. The memorial was started in 1907 and erected in 1931 with the intention of promoting an idealized history of slavery by highlighting Heyward Shepherd. The narrative of the UDC honors Shepherd, who refused to partake in the abolitionist John Brown raid of 1859. The UDC's interpretation of the historical event falsely claims that Shepherd was faithful to his master and did not want to free the slaves from his plantation.<sup>62</sup> However, historical accounts show that he was searching the railroad bridge for some missing men who were seized at the start of the insurrection, when he was ordered by one of Brown's men to halt. He did not do so and turned around to head back to the office. The man who gave him the order shot him in the back and killed him.<sup>63</sup> Though he did not express any intentions of preventing other slaves from fleeing, he became, according to historian Caroline E. Janney, a "Christ-like martyr for many white Northerners and African Americans."<sup>64</sup> Shepherd was the first person killed during the insurrection, and the Daughters remembered him as a reflection of the "negroes of this neighborhood, true to their Christian training, [who] would have no part with those who offered pikes and staves for bloody massacre."<sup>65</sup> Though untrue, the Daughters presented this doctored interpretation of Shepherd's death as an example of "good" slaves and as proof that slaves were happy in their status of subjugation. Poppenheim described the meaning of the monument as "exemplifying the character and faithfulness of thousands of negroes, who... so conducted themselves that no stain was left upon" the heritage of Confederates, as well as "an everlasting

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<sup>62</sup> Poppenheim, *The History*, 77.

<sup>63</sup> Caroline E. Janney, "Written in Stone: Gender, Race, and the Heyward Shepherd Memorial," *Civil War History* 52, no. 2 (2006): 119-120.

<sup>64</sup> Janney, "Written in Stone," 120.

<sup>65</sup> Poppenheim, *The History*, 78.

tribute to the best in both races.”<sup>66</sup> In other words, only the slaves who were presentable to the UDC as “faithful” were worth honoring and remembering because they were subservient to the Confederate cause.

The Jefferson Davis Highway (JDH) was another memorial which served the purpose of creating a racialized cultural landscape which exonerated the Confederacy. An ambitious project, the JDH would serve as a particular highway which stretched from the Atlantic to the Pacific with scattered markers and memorials dedicated to Confederate President Jefferson Davis. This highway was “to be beautified and historic places on it suitably and permanently marked”<sup>67</sup> in the name of Davis. When the UDC realized they would not have the funds to construct the highway exactly as they envisioned and had no right to claim the name of the interstate highway, they came up with the idea of opening road stop attractions, milestones, and other landmarks dedicated to Davis.<sup>68</sup> However, the UDC was successful in Texas, where the Texas State Highway Commission officially recognized “the transcontinental highway known as the Jefferson Davis Highway,”<sup>69</sup> providing state-backed support for the construction and legitimacy of it. The JDH fell under the same purpose as other Confederate monuments, in which they attempted “to rehabilitate Confederate figurines and promote a ‘Lost Cause’ interpretation of the Civil War which exonerated the slaveholding Confederacy.”<sup>70</sup> Again, the JDH reflected the UDC’s attempts to eradicate slavery from the context of the Civil War and Jefferson Davis.

Unveiling monuments in grand, ceremonious occasions was as symbolic and significant as the monuments themselves in that they created a sense of pride and unity among whites in

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<sup>66</sup> Poppenheim, *The History*, 78.

<sup>67</sup> Poppenheim, *The History*, 80.

<sup>68</sup> Poppenheim, *The History*, 80.

<sup>69</sup> Poppenheim, *The History*, 84.

<sup>70</sup> Hague and Sebesta, “The Jefferson Davis Highway,” 288.

southern towns. Newspapers described monument unveilings as “the ‘county’s biggest and proudest day’ and ‘an occasion that will never be forgotten by any of the immense crowd that attended it.’”<sup>71</sup> Emotional, elaborate, pro-Confederate ceremonies gathered white communities in swarms and gave them a chance to celebrate their “heritage.” Ceremonies played a large part in solidifying community support for the Confederacy, as they portrayed the monuments and the history of the Confederacy as something to celebrate and take pride in. Poppenheim described the unveiling of the Jefferson Davis Memorial in Richmond as a ceremony “with all the pomp and pageantry that could be commanded in the city of Richmond.”<sup>72</sup> In addition to solidifying communal sentiment toward the Confederacy, celebrations of Confederate monument unveilings created a historical memory for the town. UDC members “made sure that a monument unveiling was celebrated as an important moment in the history of the community.”<sup>73</sup>

Perhaps the most important aspect of these celebrations was the presence of children. Grand ceremonies honoring monuments as well as the history of the Confederacy coincided with the history they were taught in school. The Daughters viewed, as Cox wrote, “each monument as a gift that connected past generations with future generations.”<sup>74</sup> The UDC’s idea was that children would see these elaborate ceremonies and associate them with the distorted history they were exposed to in school, inciting a sense of pride in Confederate heritage. Children were often “enlisted” to unveil monuments and participate in fund-raising efforts to construct them.<sup>75</sup> In getting children involved in the process, the UDC hoped to instill reverence toward their Confederate ancestors and their sacrifices.<sup>76</sup> Additionally, monuments showed children that their

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<sup>71</sup> Vincent, “Evidence of Womans Loyalty,” 76.

<sup>72</sup> Poppenheim, *The History*, 50.

<sup>73</sup> Cox, *Dixie’s Daughters*, 61.

<sup>74</sup> Cox, *Dixie’s Daughters*, 63.

<sup>75</sup> Vincent, “Evidence of Womans Loyalty,” 81.

<sup>76</sup> Vincent, “Evidence of Womans Loyalty,” 81.

Confederate ancestors “fought a good fight,” as depicted in their symbolism and inscriptions. One monument’s inscription “personified the Confederate soldier ‘who fought a good fight and was only overcome by overwhelming force.’”<sup>77</sup> Overall, monuments and the commemoration of unveilings were forms of connecting the youth, especially their children, to the past through their “heritage,” as UDC members hailed monument building as a way “to pass on their version of the war and its meaning.”<sup>78</sup>

### **Roots in white supremacy**

The UDC’s primary goal, though implicit in the words of the Daughters, was vindication for the Confederacy and in turn, preservation of white supremacy. Since its foundation in 1894, the UDC worked to preserve the memory of the Confederacy as a morally just, patriotic society.<sup>79</sup>

Editor Mrs. John L. Woodbury of *The United Daughters of the Confederacy Magazine* wrote in 1959:

In these changing times it is well to examine our heritage, and the use we make of it. That examination inspires all our aims and purposes. We naturally think of the rights guaranteed to us by the constitution, as well as the action of the Confederate government in defending them.<sup>80</sup>

Defending the Confederacy was a noble cause, a Lost Cause, for the Daughters. Through vigor and dedication, the Daughters worked to release the war blame and guilt from the Civil War from the shoulders of their fathers, grandfathers, and other relatives. In an issue of the magazine from 1960, Woodbury repeated her passion to honor the Confederates “for their devotion to their ideals; we honor them for their confidence and moral leadership; for their firm belief that right

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<sup>77</sup> Vincent, “Evidence of Womans Loyalty,” 85.

<sup>78</sup> Vincent, “Evidence of Womans Loyalty,” 90.

<sup>79</sup> Cox, *Dixie’s Daughters*, 158.

<sup>80</sup> Woodbury, “Our Heritage,” 4.

would prevail, because it was right.”<sup>81</sup> Her belief, in accordance with beliefs of the Daughters throughout the organization, had strong roots in white supremacy.

UDC members had a strong desire to protect the white supremacy of the Old South as a reaction to Reconstruction, or the attempts from the federal government to enfranchise freed slaves after the Civil War. Reconstruction ended around the late 1870s, and the work of the Ladies’ Memorial Associations—a precursor movement to the UDC—began around the same time. Founded in 1894, the UDC was a unified, organized social group which represented the white supremacist notion to preserve white supremacy. Elite whites took control after Reconstruction ended, and actively worked to suppress African Americans’ voices and advancements in society. This was entirely to the benefit of these white elites, as it reflected the societal ideals from slavery. To achieve this, white supremacy served as “an important measure of social control; black deference... to white authority in the Old South, moreover, was regarded as an instructive example of good race relations in the New South.”<sup>82</sup> White elites sought to enforce this apartheid-like structure, and the Daughters fought on their behalf. Their work embodied the angry sentiment of whites during Reconstruction, who wanted to reestablish “home rule” which prioritized the power of white Democrats. According to Cox, this “paved the way for the next phase of the Lost Cause,”<sup>83</sup> in that the UDC’s work reinforced this ideal.

The UDC’s version of history romanticized the white supremacist aspects of society from the Old South. White supremacy was systemically embedded into society of the Old South, and the Daughters idealized it as what historian Karen L. Cox wrote “an Old South custom that should

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<sup>81</sup> Mrs John L. Woodbury, “To Honor, Not Mourn,” *The United Daughters of the Confederacy Magazine*, 1960, United Daughters of the Confederacy Emma Sansom Chapter Collection, California State University Fullerton Special Collections, Box 7, Folder 3.

<sup>82</sup> Cox, *Dixie’s Daughters*, 106.

<sup>83</sup> Cox, *Dixie’s Daughters*, 11.

remain intact,” which “is critical to understanding the racist implications of their work.”<sup>84</sup>

Revisionist history was the medium through which the UDC idealized society of the Old South. Mildred Lewis Rutherford, historian-general of the UDC from 1911 to 1916, was outspoken in her support of white supremacy as a custom of the Old South. Her work in historical literature “helped create a culture that legitimized control by traditional southern elites.”<sup>85</sup> Works such as *American Authors* and *The South in History and Literature* were used and endorsed by the UDC as textbooks for southern children; these textbooks romanticized the systemic racism of the Old South. Another instance of romanticizing white supremacy can be seen in *The United Daughters of the Confederacy Magazine*. An article by Ione Swan Raenier from 1959 reminisced about slavery by recalling the singing of slaves. She wrote:

Some of us have had the pleasure of hearing the Negroes sing as they worked in our homes, we have heard the night-time serenaders who used to wake us with their almost angelic interpretations on banjo, fiddle, bass, viol, and mandolin.<sup>86</sup>

Although her words praise the voices of the slaves who worked in her home, they also arise memories from the white slaver owner’s point of view. She was very happy to hear them sing but did not disclose whether they were singing because they were happy or as an expression of grief.

To their own benefit, the Daughters sought to prevent social advancement of Black Americans. Rutherford sought to maintain African Americans at the bottom of an apartheid-like societal structure which reflected that of the Old South. She believed that “African Americans, moreover, should remain faithful to their former masters”<sup>87</sup> in order to preserve the racial caste system of the Old South in which Black Americans would remain at the bottom. Rutherford

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<sup>84</sup> Cox, *Dixie’s Daughters*, 6.

<sup>85</sup> Case, “The Historical Ideology,” 628.

<sup>86</sup> Ione Swan Raenier, “South in Song and Story,” *The United Daughters of the Confederacy Magazine*, 1959, United Daughters of the Confederacy Emma Sansom Chapter Collection, California State University Fullerton Special Collections, Box 7, Folder 2.

<sup>87</sup> Cox, *Dixie’s Daughters*, 39.



emphasized the importance of history as a way “to warn of the folly of deviating from white supremacy, Democratic control, and gender hierarchy.”<sup>88</sup> White supremacy, according to Rutherford, was the glue binding her ideal society together, and allowing Black people to achieve social advancements would threaten the establishment she, and many Daughters, so admired.

Along with elite whites, the Daughters acted against the enfranchisement of freed Black people, which would threaten the restoration of white supremacy from the Old South. Rutherford opposed women’s suffrage, as it “would create new voting opportunities for African Americans and open the way for more federal civil rights laws.”<sup>89</sup> While many other Daughters supported women’s suffrage, Rutherford took an explicit stance against it due to the possibility that it would allow Black Americans to attain rights. Deprivation of rights was also viewed as a way to protect the sanctity of women, as it was in the Old South, and maintain the power of elite white men.<sup>90</sup> Preventing African Americans from joining the political sphere in the late 1890s allowed white women to gain an advantage due to their race.<sup>91</sup> Theoretically, Black men could take up positions in governmental offices because of their gender, and they would detract from the political voices of white women. Thus, disenfranchising Black people was an important goal of the UDC. Voter suppression from southern governments was rampant throughout the South with the introductions of literacy tests, the Grandfather clause, and poll taxes. This was supplemented by the doctored history of the UDC indoctrinated in children from a young age throughout the South. Restricting civil rights was not enough to solidify public sentiment into what they wanted. As Bailey wrote, “[a]ll southern whites must be taught to think correctly, to appreciate the virtue of elite rule, to

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<sup>88</sup> Case, “The Historical Ideology of Mildred Lewis Rutherford,” 600.

<sup>89</sup> Case, “The Historical Ideology,” 614.

<sup>90</sup> Case, “The Historical Ideology,” 617.

<sup>91</sup> Cox, *Dixie’s Daughters*, 14.

fear the enfranchisement of blacks, and to revere the Confederate cause.”<sup>92</sup> Literature from the UDC helped implement these ideals in southern whites to expand and solidify white supremacy in the South.

A key aspect of the romanticized literature from the UDC is that it removed slavery from the forefront of the context of the Civil War. Doctrine of the UDC claimed slavery was forced upon them by the North, and that the benevolent southerners had taken up the “burden of slavery” out of their affection for African Americans.<sup>93</sup> UDC members, as Cox wrote, “resented claims that the South fought the Civil War to defend slavery,”<sup>94</sup> claiming it was a fight over states’ rights. Rutherford argued the root of the Civil War was not conflict over slavery but a difference in the “nature of the government of the United States.”<sup>95</sup> This watered-down take on history pushes the essential aspect of slavery away from the context of the Civil War. Mrs. M. M. Birge was offended that there were people who believed the Civil War was fought to free African Americans from slavery.<sup>96</sup> Furthermore, the Daughters supplemented the removal of slavery from the Civil War’s context by including notions that slavery was a benevolent institution. The Daughters recalled the Old South “as a region led by benevolent masters who were supported by genteel women, both of whom were rewarded by the faithfulness of slaves.”<sup>97</sup> Daughters justified slavery further “by claiming the institution had a ‘civilizing’ influence on slaves.”<sup>98</sup> Racist views toward Black people fueled such a dehumanizing statement such as this. These racist views extended to their sentiment toward contemporary events. Rutherford insisted that since abolition,

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<sup>92</sup> Bailey, “Free Speech,” 457.

<sup>93</sup> Bailey, “Free Speech,” 472.

<sup>94</sup> Cox, *Dixie’s Daughters*, 96.

<sup>95</sup> Case, “The Historical Ideology,” 610.

<sup>96</sup> Bailey, “Free Speech,” 458.

<sup>97</sup> Cox, *Dixie’s Daughters*, 12.

<sup>98</sup> Cox, *Dixie’s Daughters*, 105.

“blacks had become ‘disorderly, idle, vicious, and diseased,’”<sup>99</sup> as if they were better off during slavery. Rutherford sentimentalized memories of slavery, reminiscing on the way slaves sang, danced, and laughed on plantations.<sup>100</sup>

A more explicit example of the UDC condoning white supremacy was their outward endorsement of the KKK. In the years after the Civil War, Confederate veterans were bitter about Reconstruction, and the Daughters took after these opinions.<sup>101</sup> Confederate veterans expressed their praise for the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) as “the South’s Redeemer,”<sup>102</sup> explicitly expressing their support of the white supremacist, terrorist organization; the UDC took after this opinion. As an organization, “[t]he UDC officially recognized the Klan for helping to restore southern home rule and white supremacy.”<sup>103</sup> The aims of the KKK, as endorsed by the UDC, complemented their work in indoctrinating southern whites through the work of the Daughters. One Daughter, Laura Martin Rose, portrayed the “Klansmen as chivalrous knights” who were “necessary to restore law and order to the South.”<sup>104</sup> Rose took up the role of the UDC’s historian-general after Rutherford in 1916. The latter historian-general falsely blamed lynchings on “unscrupulous imposters dressed as Klansmen”<sup>105</sup> in an attempt to shift blame off of true members of the KKK but was unafraid “to criticize African Americans who stepped out of ‘their rightful place.’”<sup>106</sup> Lynchings were murders with nature in terrorism and white supremacy, and Rutherford covered up for and endorsed the Klan for them.

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<sup>99</sup> Case, “The Historical Ideology” 610.

<sup>100</sup> Case, “The Historical Ideology,” 611.

<sup>101</sup> Cox, *Dixie’s Daughters*, 37.

<sup>102</sup> Cox, *Dixie’s Daughters*, 37.

<sup>103</sup> Cox, *Dixie’s Daughters*, 107.

<sup>104</sup> Cox, *Dixie’s Daughters*, 108.

<sup>105</sup> Case, “The Historical Ideology,” 618.

<sup>106</sup> Case, “The Historical Ideology,” 619.

The UDC worked to maintain white supremacy in the New South by vindicating the Confederacy through the creation of a distorted history of the Old South, involvement in the public education system of the South, and in the construction of monuments. As many Daughters were the wives of elite white men, they and their families benefitted from the reinstatement of white supremacy in the era after Reconstruction. In perpetuating white supremacy and the Lost Cause, they also worked to venerate and vindicate their Confederate ancestors from “unfair” history. Creating a distorted version of history set the foundations for their later operations and goals. Namely, they implemented their Lost Cause narrative into public schooling throughout the South. In order to supplement such education, they worked tirelessly to erect Confederate monuments which aligned with and supported the Lost Cause doctrine. The work of these women had lasting impacts on the education, cultural landscape, and society of the American South into the twentieth century.

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