



Virtual Valentine Resources

History at Home Student Lesson Plans

Monument Avenue's Beginnings: Looking at Primary Sources Related to the Lee Monument

Grade: 8 - 12

Overview: Learn about the beginning of Monument Avenue through examining letters, maps, and newspaper articles from when the Lee Monument was created. These primary source documents, from the time period, allow us to see the monument from a variety of perspectives.

Essential Questions:

- How do monuments get their meaning? How does that meaning change over time?
- Who gets to create monuments? Whose voices are being heard or lifted up by monuments and whose voices are missing or suppressed?
- What is missing from Richmond, Virginia's current monumental landscape?

Virginia Standards of Learning Alignment:

VS.1, VS.8, USII, USII.3, USII.4, CE.1, VUS.1, VUS.7, GOVT.1, GOVT.3, GOVT.9

Materials:

- **"Monument Avenue Beginnings" primary source packet – includes 5 documents:**
 - Robert E. Lee Personal letter to Thomas Rosser, a former Confederate general, 1866
 - Jubal Early Letter, Southern Historical Society Papers- Account of organizing Lee Monument Association upon death of Robert E. Lee:



- Map of William C. Allen Addition/ Robert E. Lee Monument
- Lee Monument Unveiling Coverage- Richmond Dispatch, May 29, 1890 front cover
- John Mitchell JR. Editorial "What It Means"- on the monument's assembly and unveiling in the Richmond Planet May 31, 1890

Vocabulary:

- **Monument:** Accepted forms generally include statues, obelisks, landmark objects or art works like sculptures or fountains that are there to honor an ideal, a person or an event. They demonstrate a community's honoring of events and people for qualities they symbolically represent, and that the community deems indispensable to its identity (though not always agreed upon by all community members). (Ex: Martin Luther King, Jr. monuments created to honor the person and his commitment to fostering equality.)
- **Memorial:** Memorials ritualize remembrance; specifically, they primarily focus on tragic death, loss or violence. They are meant to ensure that certain events and people will never be forgotten, while we may, in many cases, feel ambivalent about some aspects of the events. (Ex- Vietnam Veteran's Memorial in Washington, DC, honors the sacrifice of the service members who are individually named, not the war itself.)

In short, monuments can be memorials; memorials can be monuments. But they are not always the same thing.

For more on this way of differentiating these terms, see Gary Shapiro, "The Meaning of Our Confederate Monuments," May 15, 2017, New York Times.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/15/opinion/the-meaning-of-our-confederate-monuments.html>

- **Private v. Public memory:** Private memory is personal and usually mourns the loss of a particular person. Public memory is often institutional/political focusing on how a community chooses to remember and memorialize its past.
- **The Lost Cause:** The Lost Cause is an interpretation of the American Civil War (1861–1865) that seeks to present the war from the perspective of Confederates, in the best possible terms. Developed and coined by white Southerners in a postwar climate of economic, racial and social uncertainty, the Lost Cause narrative created and romanticized the "Old South" and the Confederate war effort, often distorting history in the process. This movement crafted a historical interpretation of the war that reconciled antebellum society with the devastation of southern defeat. The Lost Cause narrative allowed former Confederates to claim that disagreement with the Union over states' rights, not slavery, was the ultimate cause of the war. Ultimately, the end of Reconstruction led to the creation and enshrining of the Lost Cause through the commission of statues and plaques to commemorate the Civil War dead. While

many historians have labeled the Lost Cause a myth or a legend, it is an example of public memory, one in which nostalgia for the Confederate past is accompanied by a collective forgetting of the horrors of slavery.

Program Outline:

1. Introduction
2. Primary Source Analysis
3. Compare & context
4. Recap & discover further

1. Introduction:

There is always more than one side to a story is a common phrase we use sometimes when we are talking about something controversial. Think of a time when maybe your side of the story didn't get told. Maybe a brother, sister or friend said that you did something that you know you did not do and you got in trouble. Wouldn't you have wanted to tell your side of the story?

When we are looking at historical events with a critical eye, we want to make sure that we know the story from a variety of points of view in order to have a broader understanding. It is important to take all the pieces of a story and analyze them to get a richer more complete story.



Robert A. Lancaster Collection, The Valentine.

As you take a closer look at some primary sources related to the first monument on Monument Avenue in Richmond, Virginia, the monument to Robert E. Lee, some questions to consider:

- What is the whole story here?
- Why was it built?
- Was everyone excited about it?
- Did Lee want a statue of himself?
- Who benefitted from the statue being built?

2. Primary source analysis

Individually or as a group, ask your students to consider following questions about each of the five primary source documents:

- **How would you describe the document? What is it?**
- **Who created it? Who was the intended audience?**
- **What is its purpose?**

A. Robert E. Letter Personal letter to Thomas Rosser, a former Confederate general, 1866.

B. Jubal Early Letter, Southern Historical Society Papers- Account of organizing Lee Monument Association upon death of Robert E. Lee:

The Southern Historical Society documented Southern military and civilian viewpoints from the American Civil War, published in the late 19th Century.

- This account (volume 17) was published in Richmond by the society in 1889.
https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Page:Southern_Historical_Society_Papers_volume_17.djvu/7

C. Map of William C. Allen Addition/ Robert E. Lee Monument

D. Lee Monument Unveiling Coverage- Richmond Dispatch, May 29, 1890 front cover:

E. John Mitchell JR. Editorial "What It Means"- on the monument's assembly and unveiling in the Richmond Planet May 31, 1890.

Think about this as you put the pieces of the story together...

- Richmond newspapers devoted the front pages and multiple pages inside to covering the unveiling of the Robert E. Lee monument and associated events, including parades and processions.
- Do you think all perspectives were covered in those newspaper articles? How do you imagine people in Richmond might have felt about this statue? Who was in favor of the statue? Who

was opposed to the statue? What might have kept people from speaking out if they were opposed to the Lee statue?

- Take a look at the next page to get more information about each document and check your student's analysis.

3. Compare your own analysis of each document with the analysis/ context below

Ask your students compare their answers to the analysis below. After looking at the primary sources, have them reconsider these questions. Have any answers changed? Describe how.

- How do monuments get their meaning? How does that meaning change over time?
- Who gets to create monuments? Whose voices are being heard or lifted up by monuments and whose voices are missing or suppressed?
- What is missing from Richmond, Virginia's current monumental landscape?

A. Robert E. Letter Personal letter to Thomas Rosser, a former Confederate general, 1866.

- **How would you describe the document? What is it?**

This is a personal letter from Robert E. Lee to Thomas Rosser in December 1866 the year after the war ended. He is answering Rosser's letter concerning a monument being created to honor Lee.

- **Who created it? Who was the intended audience?**

Robert E. Lee writes the letter to Rosser. His former general is the intended audience.

- **What is its purpose?**

The purpose is to tell Rosser that he does not want a monument honoring him. He says that it will *"have the effect of retarding, instead of accelerating its accomplishment; & of continuing, if not adding to, the difficulties under which the Southern people labour. All I think that can now be done, is to aid our noble & generous women in their efforts to protect the graves & mark the last resting places of those who have fallen, & wait for better times."*

Lee says that for the country to move on the best thing to do is mourn those who have died not put up monuments in his honor.

B. Jubal Early Letter, Southern Historical Society Papers- Account of organizing Lee Monument Association upon death of Robert E. Lee

- **How would you describe the document? What is it?**

It is an open letter to former Confederate soldiers that appeared in newspapers in October of 1870 after Lee had died.

- **Who created it? Who was the intended audience?**

Jubal Early, a former Confederate Lieutenant General in Lee's army, wrote this letter to former Confederate soldiers.

- **What is its purpose?**

Early's purpose was to encourage the Confederate soldiers to come together to discuss creating a monument to memorialize Lee. He asked them to come to Richmond on Nov. 3rd,

1870. They met at the First Presbyterian Church where the old City Hall is now. Originally, the project to erect a monument to Robert E. Lee in the City of Richmond began with the women of the Hollywood Memorial Association, who conceived the idea within hours of Lee's death on October 12, 1870 in Lexington, Virginia. (Often these projects were undertaken by women's groups.) After failed attempts to raise funds by two competing groups (the women's group and Jubal Early's group) in Richmond, the project to build a Robert E. Lee monument moved forward under the leadership of newly elected Governor Fitzhugh Lee, a nephew of Robert E. Lee and former Confederate General. In March 1886, the two competing associations were merged into one organization called the Lee Monument Commission, under Fitzhugh Lee's direction.

C. Map of William C. Allen Addition/ Robert E. Lee Monument

- **How would you describe the document? What is it?**

This is an early plan for Monument Avenue from 1888. At the time, the land that would eventually become Monument Avenue was just outside the city limits and in line with Franklin Street, Richmond's most prestigious residential area. It was owned by a local citizen named Otway S. Allen

- **Who created it? Who was the intended audience?**

Otway S. Allen who owned a large parcel of land that he wanted to develop and sell. The intended audience was the city of Richmond officials that he wanted to convince to buy his land.

- **What is its purpose?**

Allen had heard that there was a proposal to build a new monument and the City was considering where it should go. Allen had the ambitious idea to propose the City purchase and develop his land for the monument and a new neighborhood development. Allen commissioned this detailed plan to illustrate his concept of creating a grand boulevard in Richmond on his land. It includes lots for houses, medians, landscaping and side streets. It also includes an image of the Robert E. Lee Monument that the City was planning. The original plan for Monument Avenue included only one monument. The rest of the monuments five monuments were not added until many years later.

- The Lee Monument Association ultimately took Allen up on his offer. In July 1887, the Allen family deeded the circular plot of land for the monument to the association. In 1892 the city of Richmond annexed the land west of Lombardy to the Boulevard and over the next forty years the majority of the homes that stand there today were built.

- The Lee Monument Commission chose the French academic sculptor Marius-Jean-Antonin Merci to create an equestrian statue of Lee. The sculpture was cast in Paris in nine large pieces, each weighing several thousand pounds.

D. Lee Monument Unveiling Coverage- Richmond Dispatch, May 29, 1890 front cover.

- **How would you describe the document? What is it?**

A newspaper article from the Richmond Times Dispatch celebrating the day the monument was unveiled in 1890.

- **Who created it? Who was the intended audience?**

It was written by the staff writers from the Richmond Times Dispatch. The audience were the mostly white citizens of Richmond.

- **What is its purpose?**

The purpose of the article is to celebrate the unveiling of the Lee monument. When the monument arrived in Richmond by train, between 10,000-20,000 Richmonders took turns hauling the Lee Monument pieces by ropes attached to four wagons from the train station on Broad Street to the site on Monument Avenue. At the end of the day, the ropes were cut into pieces, tied with ribbons and handed out as souvenirs.

- The Lee monument was unveiled on May 29, 1890 in a carefully orchestrated event that attracted an estimated 150,000 participants (more than the total Richmond population at the time).
- At the unveiling, Col Archer Anderson, a veteran of Lee's Army, partner with his father in the Tredegar Iron Works, and director of the Lee Monument Commission spoke. He praised the statue as a memorial to an honorable man and reiterated the evolving view of Lee as a hero of noble character:
 - "Let this monument, then, teach to generations yet unborn these lessons of his life! Let it stand, not a record of civil strife, but as a perpetual protest against whatever is low and sordid in our public and private objects! Let it stand as a memorial of personal honor that never brooked a stain... Let it stand as a great public act of thanksgiving and praise, for that it pleased Almighty God to bestow upon these Southern States a man so formed to reflect His attributes of power, majesty, and goodness!"

E. John Mitchell JR. Editorial "What It Means"- on the monument's assembly and unveiling in the Richmond Planet May 31, 1890.

- **How would you describe the document? What is it?**

This is also a newspaper article that covers the unveiling of the Lee monument. This article is from the African American newspaper, The Richmond Planet. The tone of this article is different

from the one in the Richmond Times Dispatch. The article in the Richmond Times Dispatch is celebratory while this one is critical of the statue and the event overall.

- **Who created it? Who was the intended audience?**

John Mitchell Jr., the editor of the Richmond Planet. He was writing for his mostly African American audience.

- **What is its purpose?**

He wanted to voice his opinion that not everyone was happy with the statue. He said that there were no American flags flying at the unveiling, only Confederate flags. He believed that this monument only served to keep open the old wounds of war. He felt like this was a way for Southern whites to use the Lost Cause narrative to reassert their dominance after Reconstruction. The Lost Cause is an interpretation of the American Civil War (1861–1865) that seeks to present the war from the perspective of Confederates, in the best possible terms. Developed and coined by white Southerners in a postwar climate of economic, racial and social uncertainty, the Lost Cause narrative created and romanticized the “Old South” and the Confederate war effort, often distorting history in the process. This movement crafted a historical interpretation of the war that reconciled antebellum society with the devastation of southern defeat. The Lost Cause narrative allowed former Confederates to claim that disagreement with the Union over states’ rights, not slavery, was the ultimate cause of the war. Ultimately, the end of Reconstruction led to the creation and enshrining of the Lost Cause through the commission of statues and plaques to commemorate the Civil War dead. While many historians have labeled the Lost Cause a myth or a legend, it is an example of public memory, one in which nostalgia for the Confederate past is accompanied by a collective forgetting of the horrors of slavery.

4. Recap & take it further:

- **Encourage your students to draw connections between the primary sources and reconsider the questions posed in the introduction:**
 - What is the whole story here?
 - Why was it built?
 - Was everyone excited about it?
 - Did Lee want a statue of himself?
 - Who benefitted from the statue being built?
- Investigate the origins of other monuments in our city. For example, the Washington Equestrian Statue at the Virginia State Capitol, the Arthur Ashe statue on Monument Avenue or the latest statue Rumors of War at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA).
- Ask your students what is missing from Richmond’s monumental landscape?
- Use these resources for additional research on the Lee monument

- For more details on the Lee monument and its history, see: https://www.dhr.virginia.gov/VLR_to_transfer/PDFNoms/127-0181_LeeMonument_2006_nomination_final.pdf
- For more details on Monument Avenue and its development see: <https://npgallery.nps.gov/GetAsset/4e28a156-9c67-42e6-aa88-6fef548210ac/>
- American Civil War Museum's project "On Monument Avenue" is also a great resource on this topic: <https://onmonumentave.com/>