

How does fiction become an accepted truth?

Lesson Plan

Sculpting History at the Valentine Studio: Art, Power, and the “Lost Cause” American Myth

Introduction

Those who created the [Lost Cause](#) narrative used cultural and social centers of power to make it successful: education, media, politics, money, religion and violence. The Valentine Museum’s exhibit [Sculpting History at the Valentine Studio: Art, Power, and the “Lost Cause” American Myth](#) uses primary sources to show how Edward Valentine, leaders in Richmond, and others around the country reframed the reality of the Civil War. It uncovers the stories behind the Lost Cause, its legacy and those who resisted the myth.

Objective

Students will apply **historical literacy skills to evaluate and analyze primary sources** that show how the Lost Cause was promoted or resisted in each of the cultural and social centers of power: education, media, politics, money, religion and violence.

Virginia Standards of Learning: [VS. 8a-e](#), [VS.11a - e](#), [USII.2](#), [USII.5h, I](#), [USIII.2e](#), [VUSa,c-g,j](#), [VUS.3d](#), [VUS9cdeg](#), [VUS.10fg](#), [VUS12a](#), [VUS.16ab](#), [VUS.17a](#)

Essential Question: How does fiction become an accepted truth? Or, how do you know what to believe?

Supporting Questions:

1. Describe ways that the Lost Cause myth was spread.
2. Describe ways the Lost Cause myth was resisted.

Introductory Activity: Staging the Question

Ask students what is the quickest way to spread information today? They will probably say social media. Can they think of an instance where false information was spread using social media? One example might be the premature announcing of the death of a famous person. Follow up by asking them how they know what they see on social media is true? What do they think makes a meme or social media post spread more quickly? Can you think of any stories that turned out to be untrue that were spread by social media recently?

Explain to students that in 1865, there was no social media, but there were ways to spread information so that it became an accepted truth. Influencers, artists, writers, economic and political leaders used cultural and social centers of power such as education, media, politics, money, religion and violence to push certain ideas forward and suppress other ideas. After the American Civil War, many white Southerners sought a way to justify the loss of their brothers, sons, fathers and husbands as well as the economic and political loss they had experienced.

They crafted a story to frame themselves in a heroic light, rewriting the facts of history. Their myth became known as the Lost Cause.

The Lost Cause was a campaign to convince the public that:

- 1) The war was fought to protect Southern states’ rights, not the institution of slavery.
- 2) Slavery was a beneficial social structure for both enslavers and the enslaved.

3) The South's role in the war was not a treasonous act against the United States. How do we know it was a lie? How do you find the truth?

These questions may be used with students or just for the facilitator depending on the group.

Part 1: The Promoters (Formative)

Supporting Question: Describe ways that the Lost Cause myth was spread throughout the country and over time.

Students will evaluate and analyze primary / secondary sources using historical literacy questions using the "Be a historian" graphic organizer.

Divide students into groups and assign each group a center of power: education, media, politics/money, religion or violence. Each group will analyze one source that promotes the Lost Cause (Part 1) and one source that resists the Lost Cause (Part 2) related to their center of power. Choose which primary source from the list on the last page, [Studio Primary Source Portfolio](#). Each source will be a downloadable PDF.

Download the "Be a Historian" graphic organizer. Below are the questions from that organizer that students should use to analyze their sources.

Each group should analyze and discuss together your source using the following questions. Be prepared to share with the larger group when we come back together.

- What is the document/object/image? Describe it. What do you notice?
- Who created it? Is it a primary or secondary source?
- When was it created (before, beginning or after the American Civil War)? What else was going on during that time period?
- Who is the audience for this document/object/image?
- What is the message the document/object/image is trying to convey?
- Write an open-ended question about this document/object/image. What do you wonder about it? (An open-ended question **cannot** be answered with a simple "yes" or "no".)

Part 2: The Resisters Supporting Questions: Describe ways the Lost Cause myth was resisted.

Students will evaluate and analyze primary sources using historical literacy questions Using the "Be a historian" graphic organizer.

Students should remain in the same thematic group. Choose which primary source that you would like for students to analyze by going to the Sculpting History Primary Source Portfolio [webpage](#). Each source will be a downloadable PDF.

Each group should analyze and discuss together your source using the following questions. Be prepared to share with the larger group when we come back together.

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Part 3: Bring it together

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Ask students to write a 200-word museum label about their two sources that answers the essential question and connects how their center of power was used to promote and resist the Lost Cause myth over time.

Share each group's label and primary sources.

Part 4: Extending Learning

Check out these pages to discover more...

How Edward Valentine used art to promote the Lost Cause Myth.

- [Sculpting History at the Valentine Studio: Art, Power and the "Lost Cause" American Myth](#) (exhibit page)
- [Edward Valentine's Life and Career](#)
- [Valentine's Sculpture Studio](#)
- [Racist Caricatures by Edward Valentine](#)

How confederate statues on Monument Avenue in Richmond, Virginia evolved.

- [Richmond's Monument Avenue: Memorializing the Lost Cause Myth](#)
- [Monument Avenue: Robert E. Lee Monument](#)
- [Monument Avenue: J.E.B. Stuart Monument](#)
- [Monument Avenue: Jefferson Davis Monument](#)
- [Monument Avenue: Thomas J. \(Stonewall\) Johnson Monument](#)
- [Monument Avenue: Matthew Fontaine Maury](#)

Studio Primary Source Portfolio

<https://thevalentine.org/sculpting-history-resources/>

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A. Media: How Does The Media You Consume Affect Your Beliefs?

- a. Promoters
 - 1. Uncle Henry: Ancien Regime: Sculpture by Edward Valentine
 - 2. R. A. Wise letter to Edward Valentine about Uncle Henry Sculpture
 - 3. Nation's Ward: Sculpture by Edward Valentine
 - 4. Human Confederate Flag postcard, 1907
- b. Resisters
 - i. Newspaper Source: *Richmond Planet*, July 5, 1902

B. Education: Who Decides What We Learn About The Past?

- a. Promoters
 - i. Knowledge is Power: Sculpture by Edward Valentine
 - ii. Virginia: History, Government and Geography Textbook excerpt, 1964
 - iii. Measuring Rod by Mildred Lewis Rutherford excerpts, 1919
- b. Resisters
 - i. Funeral for "Joe Racism" by Armstrong High School Students, 1990

C. Politics & Money: How Does Money Support Political Power

- a. Promoters
 - i. UDC-JDMA meeting minutes/fundraising
 - ii. Equal Suffrage and the Negro Vote
- b. Resisters
 - i. Maggie L. Walker and staff from St. Luke's Penny Saving Bank,
 - ii. Jackson Ward Collective Foundation Ribbon Cutting, 2022

D. Religion: How Are Religion And Race Connected?

- a. Resisters
 - i. Image of MLK, Joseph Lowery and Wyatt Tee Walker (RTD, Carl Lynn)

E. Violence: Why Do We Use Violence?

- a. Promoters
 - i. KKK Christmas photo on Monument Avenue



Be the Historian: Source Analysis

Each group should analyze and discuss together one source using the following questions. Be prepared to share with the larger group when we come back together.

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3. When was it created (before, beginning or after the American Civil War)? What else was going on during that time period?
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