

COLLECTIONS IN THE CLASSROOM

Recumbent Lee by Edward Valentine, 1872



ERA

Late 19th
Century,
Reconstruction

THEMES

Religion,
Lost Cause

CITATION

Recumbent Lee,
1872, Edward
Valentine,
Cook Collection
0049,
The Valentine

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- Describe this image. What do you notice?
- How does the placement of this object in a chapel influence or change the story of this object?
- How did this statue of Robert E. Lee help to spread the myth of the Lost Cause?

CONTEXT

After the death of Robert E. Lee in 1870, the Lee Memorial Association hired Edward Valentine to sculpt a statue of the Confederate general to be placed in the chapel at Washington University, now Washington & Lee University, where he served as president. Lee's widow visited Valentine in his studio to discuss the design of the sculpture. She and the association members wanted Lee to be recumbent, or lying down, in the same style as the tombs of Prussian royalty. The finished work of Lee sleeping in his Confederate uniform was installed in the chapel in 1883. The base of the statue shows the Roman goddess Virtus from the Virginia State Seal standing in victory over a tyrant. Robert E. Lee was buried in a vault beneath the chapel along with his family.

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