

The Great Southern Lie

Ron Greene

As a boy growing up in small-town Louisiana, i became interested in the Civil War and Confederate military history, a stage that most Southern boys seem to go through. I was also taught that the Civil War was about states' rights and Northern aggression, not primarily about slavery. As i grew to young adulthood and learned more history and became able to think for myself, i realized that what young Southerners were taught in my day was false – what i think of as “The Great Southern Lie”. As seen in the recent letter by Bob Musick, the lie is still being told (along with others, such as “Lincoln started the war”).

The primary cause of the Civil War, which is strongly supported by the contemporaneous political writings and actions during the first half of the 19th century, was the **deep, deep political division between the Northern and Southern states**; war was then triggered by the attack by South Carolina on Fort Sumpter. The root cause of this division was slavery, as can be seen (among other writings) by the debates in Congress, and laws and compromises passed during that half century plus. This fact can also be verified by reading the articles of secession passed by such Southern states as South Carolina and Mississippi, which unambiguously state that slavery was the key factor. Those who believe that the cause was instead States' Rights may find it ironic that, e.g., South Carolina was one of the biggest opponents of States' Rights of Northern states who did not want to have to enforce the federal Fugitive Slave Act (a complaint explicitly spelled out in SC's act of secession).

It is true that most Southerners were too poor, or in some cases too moral, to own slaves, and so were not fighting for slavery. They did not have significant political power in a region where such power was almost totally controlled by the rich, who chose to maintain slavery because that is what made them, and kept them, rich. These rich were also responsible for the propoganda that the Federal government was “overbearing and abusive”. On the contrary, it was the South (particularly South Carolina) who denounced the compromise that would have allowed that region to continue with slavery, insisting that slavery be allowed throughout the U.S.

With regard to statues, i am in favor of keeping public monuments to the ordinary Confederate soldier. I am also in favor of erecting monuments expounding the truth of the impact of slavery upon the South. I am very strongly in favor of memorials to indigenous Americans, who historically have suffered much more than either of the factions currently weighing in

on the Confederate monuments issue.

Those who are interested in an alternative view of “The Great Southern Lie” may wish to check out my song, “The South’s Gonna Rise Again!”. It can be found on the internet at

rlgreene.net/song-writing/the-souths-gonna-rise-again