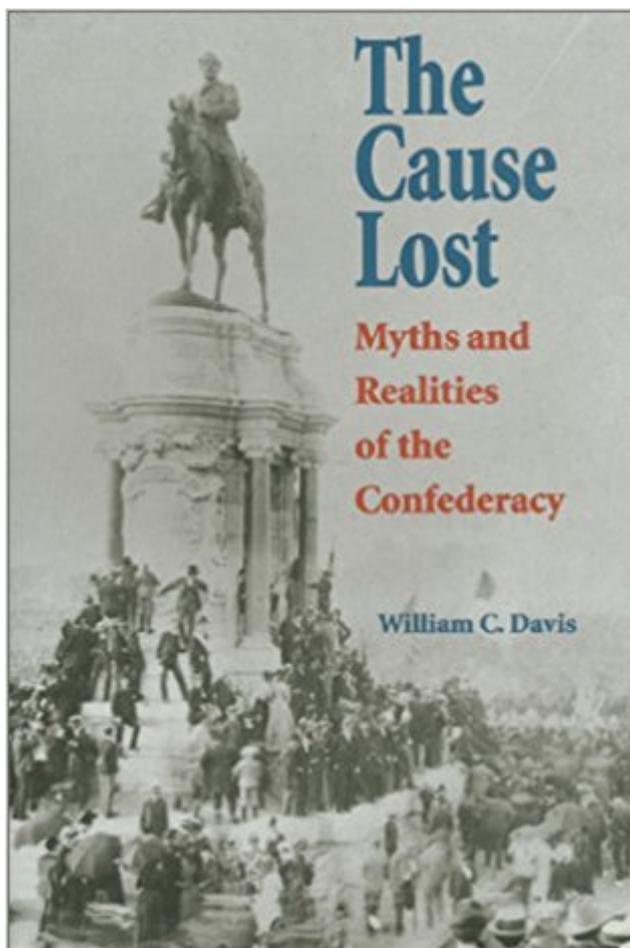


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The Cause Lost: Myths And Realities Of The Confederacy



Synopsis

This work investigates the facts and fictions of the South's victories and defeats during the American Civil War. It debunks long-standing legends, offers evidence explaining Confederate actions and considers the idealism, naivete and courage of military leadership and would-be founding fathers.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In a series of essays (some previously published) dealing with various aspects of the Civil War, Davis (*The American Frontier*, Smithmark, 1995) provides new insights into some of the myths and realities of the war. The essays on Jefferson Davis look at his leadership and his relations with his generals, especially Robert E. Lee, while those on Stonewall Jackson and Breckenridge correct a lot of the myths that have been written since the end of the war. The author also examines the Confederate armies in the West, blaming their losses on poor leadership and lack of support from the Confederate government, and illustrates why slavery was the single issue of the war though 90 percent of the participants from the South did not own slaves. Davis helps clear away misconceptions about the Civil War and gives the reader a clearer insight into problems that affected the South. An excellent book that should be in every Civil War collection. W. Walter Wicker, Louisiana Tech Univ., Ruston Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc.

"William C. Davis is one of the best and most prolific historians of the American Civil War. His many books have added immeasurably to our knowledge and understanding."

Provocative and easy to read.

William C. Davis is a fine historian of the Civil War who has written a number of excellent and lengthy books on the subject. But, as this collection of essays shows, Davis is not a strong essayist despite some valiant efforts. There are some excellent essays here; namely a critical but sympathetic look at Jefferson Davis and another sketch covering Jefferson Davis and his troubled relations with P.G.T. Beauregard and Joseph E. Johnston that ranks as one of the funniest pieces I have ever read on the war. But there are also some very weak entries including rushed looks at the various sieges of Charleston and the Trans-Mississippi region. There is also a look at film interpretations of the war which was entertaining. There is also a serious ethical breach from the historian. William C. Davis takes a number of shots at the Ken Burns production of the Civil War and praises A&E's "Civil War Journal." Alright. But William C. Davis consulted for "Civil War Journal" and appeared on it numerous times. Somehow he does not mention that in the essay. Sure it's a minor point but that's a conflict of interest and you would think Davis could have mentioned it. Davis is, as always, a readable writer but this collection of essays was not his finest effort.

William C. (Jack) Davis is a prolific author on the Civil War whose books (and talks) are both extremely well-researched and entertaining. He would be on anyone's short list of the best Civil War historians, and is the History Book Club's reviewer for new Civil War books. His books specialize on the Confederate side of the recent unpleasantness between the states. Like his other books, this one is well worth reading for his illuminating insight into topics such as the relationship of Jefferson Davis to his generals, especially Lee, Johnston, Beauregard, Jackson, and Breckinridge; the Confederate secret service and the 1864 U.S. presidential election; and the reasons behind the development of the post-Confederate philosophy known as the Lost Cause. Only one chapter deals with the lost cause--for a detailed book on the lost cause, read Gary Gallagher and Alan Nolan's "The Myth of the Lost Cause and Civil War History." But Davis's Cause Lost is a must read for anyone interested in the Civil War.

Mr. Davis writes for popular history in that he does not go too deep into any single issue but that he does reduce issues to the point that most readers can understand them. In this book he takes on several of the most enduring "histories" of The Lost Cause of the Southern view of the Civil War and for the most part effectively refutes them. He has done popular history a service by entering into this

particular fray. Most Americans recall of the Civil War revolves around what can loosely be called history, much of which is either partially or deeply wrong. Not all states for instance that left the US did so explicitly mentioning slavery, here Alabama comes to mind (the majority of the CS did name it the first or chief reason for secession). The Lincoln pre war tax impost was a reason but outside of SC is seldom mentioned in any other state paper and at best is a minor reason or excuse for the war that resulted. Slavery and Federal interference (or threat of interference) with it, constituted the chief reason for secession. Of course the majority of Southern men fought to defend their homes, one can argue here poor men were manipulated into fighting for the rich slave holders if you take the view of poor always fighting rich men's fights. However, this and the failure of the CSA government, other than the military, to accomplish much in the course of the War is today only now being noticed or studied. Reading several of the previous reviews it is obvious that no amount of scholarship will change their minds regarding the War, its causes, or lasting effects. Here is proof positive of Mr. Davis' points regarding The Lost Cause; yes history was rewritten, but by the losers. From the effects of various battles, the disregard in many Southern partisans' minds for the Western theater, hatred for those who after the War decided they were Americans again (Longstreet for instance), reasons why War came about, and coming up with reasons why the South lost all have been so colored by revisionists that non-Americans often wonder if the South had really won but allowed the North to think otherwise... There are many books coming out now on the Southern homefront now that are direct contradictions to this revised version of history. The South was never monolithic in white opinion (look at CSA desertion rates, voting records on secession, & Unionist activity behind Southern lines) nor was it a simple all blacks being pro-Union but there were no New York or black Confederate units either. This history is complex enough that the simplistic Lost Cause version is slowly being crushed, the fusion of what's left will doubtless be closer to the truth.

William C. Davis, famous and rather prolific Civil War historians, faces the myths that constitute the Lost Cause doctrine and destroys a lot of them. The book is a collection of articles published previously on several reviews: they analyze the relationships between Jefferson Davis and his generals, the forgotten fronts of war (South Carolina, Trans-Mississippi), and -last but not least- the southern attempts to find explanations to the defeat. The second half of the book is the better. The chapters devoted to the "forgotten fronts" are perhaps too short and generic. However a very intriguing book.

This is basically a series of essays, not the scholarly work that delineates the process the author

went through to reach his conclusions. It's also concentrated mainly on errors made in the actual conduct of the war. Does include a well stated argument for why the author concludes the war was fought over slavery. On the other hand, it includes an inadequately-researched section on why African-American slaves fought for the Confederacy but ignores all the slaves who ran away from their masters and sought refuge with and eventually fought in the Union army.

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