

Written Up By Robert E. Lee Camp 1640 Of The Sons Of Confederate Veterans

Defenders of popular history and the “righteous cause” narrative disparage any attempt to justify the Confederate Cause with the pejorative “Lost Cause Myth.” Their mantra is every motive was slavery and any other claim such as “State’s Rights” is nothing more than a post war fabricated smoke screen. But is this true, or is the “Lost Cause Myth” a myth in itself? What about State’s Rights? Were any in the South talking about this motive for secession before the post-war period?

“The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people.”

- 10th amendment U.S Constitution.

“The experiment instituted by our revolutionary fathers, of a voluntary Union of sovereign States for purposes specified in a solemn compact, had been perverted by those who, feeling power and forgetting right, were determined to respect no law but their own will. The Government had ceased to answer the ends for which it was ordained and established. To save ourselves from a revolution which, in its silent but rapid progress, was about to place us under the despotism of numbers...The tyranny of an unbridled majority, the most odious and least responsible form of despotism, has denied us both the right and the remedy. Therefore we are in arms to renew such sacrifices as our fathers made to the holy cause of constitutional liberty.”

-Jefferson Davis Inaugural Richmond 1862.

“The hour is coming or is rabidly approaching, when the states from Virginia to Georgia, from Missouri to Louisiana, must confederate, and as one man say to the union we will no longer submit our retained rights to the sniveling insinuations of bad men on the floor of congress. Our constitutional rights to the dark and strained contraction of design men upon judicial benches. That we detest the doctrine, and disclaim the principle, of unlimited submission to the general [Federal] government.... Let the North, then, form national roads for themselves. Let them guard with tariffs their own interests. Let them deepen their public debt until a high minded aristocracy shall rise out of it. We want none of all those blessings. But in the simplicity of the patriarchal government, we would still remain master and servant under our own vine and our own fig-tree, and confide for safety upon Him who of old time looked down upon this state of things without wrath.”

- A Congressional committee on Northern interference in the South.

“Northern States of a political school which has persistently claimed that the government thus formed was not a compact between States, but was in effect a national government, set up above and over the States...The creature has been exalted above its creators; the principals have been made subordinate to the agent appointed by themselves.”

- Jefferson Davis Message to confederate Congress April 29, 1861.

“When the dogmas of a sectional party, substituted for the provisions of the constitutional compact, threatened to destroy the sovereign rights of the States, six of those States, withdrawing from the Union,

confederated together to exercise the right and perform the duty of instituting a Government which would better secure the liberties for the preservation of which that Union was established.”

- Jefferson Davis Inaugural Address Richmond 1862

“If centralism is ultimately to prevail; if our entire system of free Institutions as established by our common ancestors is to be subverted, and an Empire is to be established in their stead; if that is to be the last scene of the great tragic drama now being enacted: then, be assured, that we of the South will be acquitted, not only in our own consciences, but in the judgment of mankind, of all responsibility for so terrible a catastrophe, and from all guilt of so great a crime against humanity.”

- Alexander Stephens The Vice President of the Confederacy.

“The people of the North have endeavored to destroy its limitations. To make it sectional in its operations, and subservient to their sectional interests, and to make the government of the United States itself a consolidated government, has been the aim of their steady and unintermitted efforts.All encroachments by Congress on the Constitution of the United States, they have uniformly upheld; until at last the Constitution, by their interpretation, is virtually abolished, and now consists only in three words — “the general welfare,” of which they are the judges and dispensers....With the Constitution overthrown, and the government of the United States in the hands of a hostile section, not only liberty, but self-preservation, demanded their separation from it.....In seceding therefore, from the United States, the Confederate States have only exercised a right inherent in all Sovereignties. In their judgment, the agreement they had made with the Northern States had been grossly violated. Its whole purpose was overthrown. Instead of an agency of very limited power, having for its object the defence of the States against the aggressions of foreign nations, it has been converted into a government of unlimited internal powers. Unless the people of the Confederate States were prepared to surrender forever their liberties, there was but one course left for them to pursue — they must escape from the domination of such a government...“The people of the North have steadily upheld the policy of setting aside the Constitution, and of thus rendering the government of the United States omnipotent in its legislation.”

- Report on the confederate committee of foreign affairs 1861.

“Announce a revolution in the government and to substitute an aggregate popular majority for the written constitution without which no single state would have voted its adoption not forming in truth a federal union but a consolidated despotism that worst of despotisms that of an unrestricted sectional and hostile majority, we do not intend to be misunderstood, we do not controvert the right of a majority to govern within the grant of powers in the Constitution.”

- Florida Declaration of causes of secession.

“If they (the North) prevail, the whole character of the Government will be changed, and instead of a federal republic, the common agent of sovereign and independent States, we shall have a central despotism, with the notion of States forever abolished, deriving its powers from the will, and shaping its policy according to the wishes, of a numerical majority of the people; we shall have, in other words, a supreme, irresponsible democracy. The Government does not now recognize itself as an ordinance of God...They are now fighting the battle of despotism. They have put their Constitution under their feet; they have annulled its most sacred provisions; The future fortunes of our children, and of this continent, would then be determined by a tyranny which has no parallel in history.”

- Dr. James Henly Thornwell, 1862

"If the Confederate States, ever had any doubt as to the necessity of a separation from the people of the North, that doubt would be removed by the recklessness with which they allow their own liberties to be trampled on. They appear to have no idea of free Government. Those necessary restraints on power — those nicely adjusted balances, by which justice and liberty are secured in a free government, are not understood."

- Report on the confederate committee of foreign affairs 1861.

"Let us consider for a moment the results of a consolidated government, resting on force, as proposed by the dominate party at the north....a consolidated despotism, upheld by the sword and cemented by fear...now it [the union] has been seized upon by a sectional party, it is claimed that its powers are omnipotent, its will absolute, and it must and will maintain its supremacy, in spite of states and people, at the point of the sword...it is organizing fleets and armies to wage war upon the authors of its being [the states]."

- Richmond Whig Editorial A Government of Force April 10 1861.

"Northern population was increasing, by immigration and other causes, in a greater ratio than the population of the South. By degrees, as the Northern States gained preponderance in the National Congress, self-interest taught their people to yield ready assent to any plausible advocacy of their right as a majority to govern the minority without control. They learned to listen with impatience to the suggestion of any constitutional impediment to the exercise of their will, and so utterly have the principles of the Constitution been corrupted in the Northern mind that, in the inaugural address delivered by President Lincoln in March last, he asserts as an axiom, which he plainly deems to be undeniable, of constitutional authority, that the theory of the Constitution requires that in all cases the majority shall govern; and in another memorable instance the same Chief Magistrate did not hesitate to liken the relations between a State and the United States to those which exist between a county and the State in which it is situated and by which it was created."

- Jefferson Davis Message to Congress April 29, 1861 (Ratification of the Constitution)

"All that the South has ever desired was the Union as established by our forefathers should be preserved and that the government as originally organized should be administered in purity and truth."

- Gen. Robert E. Lee Quoted in "The enduring Relevance of Robert E Lee"

"The principle now in contest between north and south is simply that of state sovereignty"

- Richmond Examiner Sep 11 1862

"As soon as it was known, that it was the intention of the northern president to usurp war making powers, and wage war against sovereign states of the confederacy [deep south] and that Virginia was called on to contribute men and money....no one doubted what her action would be...when the union became an engine for oppression...she could not hesitate to throw herself on the side of freedom."

- Richmond Whig Editorial April 19, 1861

“Whereas, the Federal Constitution, which created the Government of the United States, was declared by the framers thereof to be the supreme law of the land, and was intended to limit and did expressly limit the powers of said Government to certain general specified purposes, and did expressly reserve to the States and people all other powers whatever, and the President and Congress have treated this supreme law of the Union with contempt and usurped to themselves the power to interfere with the rights and liberties of the States and the people against the expressed provisions of the Constitution, and have thus substituted for the highest forms of national liberty and constitutional government a central despotism founded upon the ignorant prejudices of the masses of Northern society, and instead of giving protection with the Constitution to the people of fifteen States of this Union have turned loose upon them the unrestrained and raging passions of mobs and fanatics, and because we now seek to hold our liberties, our property, our homes, and our families under the protection of the reserved powers of the States, have blockaded our ports, invaded our soil, and waged war upon our people for the purpose of subjugating us to their will; and Whereas, our honor and our duty to posterity demand that we shall not relinquish our own liberty and shall not abandon the right of our descendants and the world to the inestimable blessings of constitutional government: Therefore, because we may choose to take part in a cause for civil liberty and constitutional government against a sectional majority waging war against the people and institutions of fifteen independent States of the old Federal Union, and have done all these things deliberately against the warnings and vetoes of the Governor and the solemn remonstrances of the minority in the Senate and House of Representatives: Therefore,have a right to establish any government which to them may seem best adapted to the preservation of their rights and liberties.”

- Kentucky Ordinance of Secession

“Forced to take up arms to vindicate the political rights, the freedom, equality, and state sovereignty which were the heritage purchased by the blood of our revolutionary sires”

- Jefferson Davis 1863 quoted in Battle cry of freedom James McPherson Oxford U Press.

“We, the people of the Confederate States, each State acting in its sovereign and independent character, in order to form a permanent federal government, establish justice, insure domestic tranquillity, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity — invoking the favor and guidance of Almighty God — do ordain and establish this Constitution for the Confederate States of America.

- CSA Constitution preamble.

“The CSA congress can have no such power over states officers. The state governments are an essential part of the political system, upon the separate and independent sovereignty of the states the foundation of the confederacy”

- Judge Robertson 1864 Confederate Virginia supreme Court Case Burroughs v Peyton.

“The establishments of the [federal] supreme court, with appellate power over the supreme courts of the states would be utterly subversive to states rights and state sovereignty.”

- Henry S Foote of Tennessee Dec 16 1863.

“The real issue involved in the relations between the North and the South of the American States, is the great principle of self-government. Shall a dominant party of the North rule the South, or shall the people of the South rule themselves. This is the great matter in controversy.”

- Robert Barnwell Rhett Montgomery, Alabama, 1860.

“The Southern States, now stand exactly in the same position towards the Northern States, that the Colonies did towards Great Britain. The Northern States, having the majority in Congress, claim the same power of omnipotence in legislation as the British parliament. “The General Welfare,” is the only limit to the legislation of either; and the majority in Congress, as in the British parliament, are the sole judges of the expediency of the legislation, this “General Welfare” requires. Thus, the Government of the United States has become a consolidated Government; and the people of the Southern States, are compelled to meet the very despotism, their fathers threw off in the Revolution of 1776.”

- Address of South Carolina to Slaveholding States Convention of South Carolina 1860.

“The contest on the part of the north was for supreme control, especially in relation to the fiscal action of the government.. on the other hand southern states, struggling for equality, and seeking to maintain equilibrium in government.”

- Rose Oneal Greehow, 1863.

Even the Southern political tradition affirmed State’s Rights:

“The duty of state governments, to protect themselves from encroachments.”

- Joseph Desha Kentucky Governor 1825.

“The question is, whether ours is a federal or consolidated government; a constitutional or absolute one; a government resting solidly on the basis of the sovereignty of the States, or on the unrestrained will of a majority; a form of government, as in all other unlimited ones, in which injustice, violence, and force must ultimately prevail.”

-John Calhoun South Carolina Senator J 1831

“Resolved, That the several States composing, the United States of America, are not united on the principle of unlimited submission to their general government; but that, by a compact under the style and title of a Constitution for the United States, and of amendments thereto, they constituted a general government for special purposes — delegated to that government certain definite powers, reserving, each State to itself, the residuary mass of right to their own self-government; and that whensoever the general government assumes undelegated powers, its acts are unauthoritative, void, and of no force: that to this compact each State acceded as a State, and is an integral part, its co-States forming, as to itself, the other party: that the government created by this compact was not made the exclusive or final judge of the extent of the powers delegated to itself; since that would have made its discretion, and not the Constitution, the measure of its powers; but that, as in all other cases of compact among powers having no common judge, each party has an equal right to judge for itself...each party has equal right to judge for itself.”

- Kentucky Resolutions of 1798 written by Thomas Jefferson.

“When all government domestic and foreign in little as in great things shall be drawn to Washington as the source of all power. It will render powerless the checks provided of one government [states] on another, and will become as vengeful and oppressive as the government which we have separated.”

- Thomas Jefferson.

“The true bearers of our liberty...are the state governments”

- Thomas Jefferson.

“That this Assembly doth explicitly and peremptorily declare, that it views the powers of the federal government, as resulting from the compact, to which the states are parties; as limited by the plain sense and intention of the instrument constituting the compact; as no further valid that they are authorized by the grants enumerated in that compact; and that in case of a deliberate, palpable, and dangerous exercise of other powers, not granted by the said compact, the states who are parties thereto, have the right, and are in duty bound, to interpose for arresting the progress of the evil, and for maintaining within their respective limits, the authorities, rights and liberties appertaining to them.”

- Virginia Resolutions Written by James Madison

“The powers delegated by the proposed Constitution to the federal government are few and defined.”

- James Madison Federalist Papers #45.

“Our government is not to be maintained or our union preserved by invasions of the powers of the several states... its true strength consists in leaving individuals and states as much as possible to themselves ..not in binding the states more closely to the center”

- President Andrew Jackson

“State authority was the rule, federal the exception... the power is in states alone.”

- President Franklin Pierce, 1855.

“when the government of the united States acts within its proper bounds it will be the interest of the legislatures of the particular States to Support it, but when it leaps over those bounds and interferes with the rights of the State governments they will be powerful enough to check it.”

- Roger Sherman, 1787.

Even foreign dignitaries and Northerners recognized State's Rights:

“Overthrow the present form of Federal-republican government, and to establish a strong centralized government in its stead...national banks, bankrupt laws, a vast and permanent public debt, high tariffs, heavy direct taxation, enormous expenditure, gigantic and stupendous speculation . . . No more state lines, no more state governments, but a consolidated monarchy or vast centralized military despotism.”
later saying “instead of crushing out the rebellion,” the “effort has been to crush out the spirit of liberty” in the Northern states.

- Clement L. Vallandigham D-Ohio NC spoke of the Reason for Lincoln's war 1863.

"I saw in State Rights the only availing check upon the absolutism of the sovereign will, and secession filled me with hope, not as the destruction but as the redemption of Democracy."

-British Lord Action Correspondence with Robert E Lee.

"The Union was formed by the voluntary agreement of the states; and these, in uniting together, have not forfeited their nationality, nor have they been reduced to the condition of one and the same people."

- Alexis de Tocqueville Democracy in America.

Secession is "the very germ of liberty...the right of secession inheres to the people of every sovereign state."

- Kenosha Wisconsin Democrat 1/11/61.

"the leading and most influential papers of the union believe that any state of the union has a right to secede"

- Davenport Iowa Democrat and news 11/17/60

"Every power, jurisdiction, and right which is not by the said constitution clearly delegated to the united states of America, or of the government thereof remains to the people of the several states, or to the representatives state governments"

- New York Constitution ratification convention.

"The war . . . has tended, more than any other event in the history of the country to militate against the Jeffersonian idea, that "the best government is that which governs least."

- Illinois Governor Richard Yates, January 2, 1865

"State sovereignty died at Appomattox"

- Supreme Court Justice Salmon P Chase 1864-73.

"In saving the union, I have destroyed the Republic."

- Abraham Lincoln.

Even some proponents of the popular narrative admit the war destroyed the rights of the States:

"(After the war) the old decentralized federal republic became a new national polity that taxed the people directly, created an internal revenue bureau to collect these taxes, expanded the jurisdiction of federal courts, established a national currency and a national banking structure. The United States went to war in 1861 to preserve the Union; it emerged from war in 1865 having created a nation. Before 1861 the two words "United States" were generally used as a plural noun: "The United States are a republic." After 1865 the United States became a singular noun. The loose union of states became a nation."

- James M. McPherson.

"The several states bound loosely in a federal union under a weak central government into a new nation forged by the fires of war"

- James McPherson Battle cry of Freedom Oxford U Press.

“Union victory in the war destroyed the southern vision of America and ensured that the northern vision would become the American vision. Until 1861, however, it was the north that was out of the mainstream, not the south.”

- James McPherson Battle Cry of freedom.

From this sampling of quotes it is easy to understand why the rights of the States was a top concern in the South and not just a post war smoke screen. The consolidation of power in the Federal Government was a primary concern as a direct threat to the rights of the States and the self-government of their citizens.