From the Rubbles of the Confederacy to the Bricks of the Cause: War, Reconstruction, and Memory at the Virginia Military Institute, 1839 - 1900

VMI cadets depicted at the Battle of New Market

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“Like the Roman matron, when asked to show her jewels, the VMI points to her sons, and by them she is judged in the eyes of the world”

– VMI Alumni Association, March 25, 1897

The Lost Cause

Oh! say not that our ‘cause’ is ‘lost.’
Exult not in our pain
For they who war for truth and right
Can never war in vain
The precious seed may hidden lie;
But, sown in faith and prayer,
From wintery storms shall spring to life,
And a rich harvest bear.

Then gather treasures from the wreck,
Ere yet oblivion sweep
Our wealth of hallowed memories
Into the voiceless deep,
And let us sadly, proudly wear
The Gems, while life shall last,
And heirlooms, to our children leave
These jewels of the past.

VMI, 1865.

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Introduction

"I wake up every day wondering, 'Why am I still here?'" said William Bunton, a senior cadet at the Virginia Military Institute (VMI) in 2020.[1] Bunton, a Black student from Portsmouth, Virginia, matriculated into the military school in 2016 with hundreds of other new cadets, eager for the strict system of discipline, prestigious academics, and military culture that attracts many young students to the small college each year. Founded in 1839 to bring quality higher education and technical training to the Virginia public, VMI purports military-style values of equality that profess to erase barriers of wealth and background to promote greater education. However, at almost every turn of his cadet career, Bunton's experience as a Black cadet proved to be extremely dissonant with the values advertised by the Institute. The last public college in Virginia to integrate, doing so in 1968, VMI has made little progress since then to modernize and reform its operations and traditions. Forced to salute the statue of former VMI professor and Confederate General Stonewall Jackson, reenact Civil War battles as Confederate soldiers, and march under Confederate flags, VMI cadets live each day in a Confederate bubble centered around the worship of an outmoded and defeated way of life. In a modern political environment where norms of white supremacy and systemic racism are regularly being interrogated and reformed, VMI stubbornly remains a last vestige of the racist Confederate heritage that has prevailed in many aspects of Southern culture for centuries.

Racism permeates nearly every level of VMI's culture and identity and is deeply rooted in the school's involvement in the Civil War, where hundreds of cadets and alumni fought for the Confederacy to secede from the Union and preserve the institution of slavery. Confederate memorabilia and memorialization is ever-present throughout the Institute, with numerous

[1] Ian Shapira, "At VMI, Black cadets endure lynching threats, Klan memories and Confederacy veneration," *The Washington Post*, October 17, 2020

buildings, statues, and campus events dedicated to Confederate heroes like Stonewall Jackson and Robert E. Lee. This heritage permeates every facet of student life at VMI, with caders expected to memorize the names of the VMI cadets who died for the Confederacy in the Civil War Battle of New Market. Furthermore, new cadets are driven 80 miles from campus to take their "Cadet Oath" at the location of the Battle of New Market and reenact the Confederate rush across the consecrated battleground to earn their position in the corps of cadets.[2] VMI has boasted this legacy for decades and has unabashedly defended its celebration of Confederacy. As recently as 2020, school representatives assert that VMI does not hide Confederate symbols from prospective cadets, claiming they emphasize "a call to service" and "not the political issues of the time."[3]

While other colleges throughout the United States have endeavored to reckon with their ties to slavery and the Confederacy over the past several years, VMI has remained firmly entrenched in its Confederate past. In the past five years or so, a barrage of stories and accusations have surfaced, detailing the racialized pressures cadets face daily. In March of 2020, a Black sophomore cadet objected to the use of Stonewall Jackson's likeness in a design of the class ring, leading to a fellow cadet telling him to,

> "Fucking leave already. People like you are the reason this school is divided. Stop focusing so much on your skin color and focus on yourself as a person. Nobody i[n] your recent family line was oppressed by 'muh slavery.'"

In 2018, a white cadet told a Black peer that he would "lynch" his body and use his "dead corpse as a punching bag," leading to a suspension, rather than expulsion.[4] Demonstrating the

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[2] Ian Shapira, "At VMI, Black alumni want Stonewall Jackson's statue removed. The school refuses," *The Washington Post,* September 9, 2020.
[3] Ian Shapira, "At VMI, Black cadets endure lynching threats, Klan memories and Confederacy veneration," *The Washington Post,* October 17, 2020
[4] Ibid.

disciplinary double standard applied to Black students, several Black cadets who boycotted former Vice President Pence's 2020 speech on campus were punished at the same disciplinary level as the cadet who threatened to lynch his classmate.[5]

These racist incidents are not limited to student body at VMI. Several professors and administrators have been documented openly expressing racist sentiments and participating in racist demonstrations. In the Spring of 2020, a Black cadet who graduated in 2019 released a statement detailing how her business professor, E. Susan Kellogg, bragged about her family's affiliation with the KKK in front of her class and recalled "bobbing" when she was a teenager, referencing a practice where she would drive around her Ohio town looking for non-white people and hitting them over the head with a wooden board.[6] Kellogg admitted that the cadet's account was true but did not receive disciplinary action and, according to her LinkedIn page, Kellogg continues to work as a professor at VMI in 2022.[7] Additionally, in 2017, the then-Commandant of Cadets, Colonel William Wanovich, was photographed posing with cadets dressed up as "Trump's wall" at a Halloween party, his foot covering the "no cholos allowed" writing on the costume (Figure 1).[8] Neither Col. Wanovich nor the cadets photographed were disciplined.

How did one of the nation's premier military schools, referred to by many as the "West Point of the South," become such a bastion of white supremacy and Confederate pride? VMI alumni occupy high rankings in the United States military, with dozens of cadets commissioned into the military each year. Though by no means are all VMI cadets, professors, and administrators racists or Confederate sympathizers, what does it say that many of the nation's

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[5] Ian Shapira, "At VMI, Black cadets endure lynching threats, Klan memories and Confederacy veneration," *The Washington Post*, October 17, 2020.
[6] Keniya Lee, Twitter Post, June 19, 2020, https://twitter.com/youkenfuzed/status/1268651456409882624/photo/1
[7] E. Susan Kellogg, Linkedin Profile, https://www.linkedin.com/in/e-susan-kellogg-mba-phd-1652233/
[8] Latino Rebels, "VMI's Commandant of Cadets Posed With Trump 'No Cholos Allowed' Border Wall Costume," (November 9, 2017).

most celebrated military heroes and commanders come from an institute where they were immersed in Confederate imagery, rhetoric, and culture?

Figure 1. Col. Wanovich (right) with cadets dressed as the border wall

In his essential analysis of Southern identity and distinctiveness, C. Vann Woodward writes in *The Burden of Southern History* that the knowledge of its isolation as "the last champion of an outmoded system under concerted attack," led the South to develop a "suspicious inhospitality" to anything foreign or new and a "tendency to withdraw from what it felt to be a critical world." [9] Suffering immeasurable losses during the Civil War and reconstruction period, VMI indeed developed a sense of hostility and jealously guarded pride as the country changed in front of their eyes. As they attempted to carry the culture of the Old South and Confederacy with them, VMI faced threats from all sides, leading them to withdraw and self-isolate in order to preserve the way of life that they felt that they were tasked with

[9] C. Vann Woodward, *The Burden of Southern History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1960), 180.

protecting. Through a meticulous cultural analysis of the Institute during this period, one can begin to unravel the complex elements of this development and the calcification that built up around the Institute and continued to harden as the Institute matured.

The path VMI took to get to a point of such cultural insulation and enmeshment in Confederate culture, to the extent that professors unabashedly reminisce about their ties to the KKK, and white cadets threaten to lynch Black peers, is by no means a simple or straightforward answer. Throughout this thesis, I argue that the entrenchment of modern day VMI in Confederate memorialization and heritage is the product of a complex and lengthy institutional history. Specifically, I focus on the first sixty years of VMI's history, a tumultuous and highly transformative period that shaped the institution seen today. From the execution of John Brown to the outbreak of the Civil War, and the political reconstruction of the South, VMI was on the front lines of many of the most impactful historical events in Virginian and Southern history. For much of their early history, VMI cadets represented the pride of the South: young, educated, and industrious young men reared to serve and protect Virginia from threats internal and external. Some of the first to fly the Confederate flag, and the last to put down their arms, VMI cadets and alumni formed a peculiar identity during this period that defined the culture and operations of the Institute going forward.

To conduct this cultural analysis, this thesis is split into three chronologically divided chapters, each documenting a distinct period in VMI's evolution. Beginning with the Institute's founding in 1839, Chapter One outlines the first twenty years of VMI and its establishment as a distinctly Virginian school, designed to serve the state. These founding years formed a bedrock identity that would both guide and challenge VMI as it grew. Chapter Two documents VMI's involvement in the Civil War and its efforts on the behalf of the Confederate cause. During the

war, VMI faced the death of alumni and cadets, destruction of their campus, and decimation of the larger landscape. This period irrevocably changed VMI's outlook and mission, setting the stage for a period of intense cultural transformation. Chapter Three follows the institutional reshaping and the development of the Lost Cause myth at VMI during and after reconstruction, tracking the physical and cultural implementation of VMI's developing identity throughout the late nineteenth century. During these years, VMI struggled to retain its customs in the postwar South, instigating dramatic cultural changes and an institutional reorientation around Confederate memory. Through new buildings, monuments, and social groups on campus, VMI set the literal and metaphorical stones that would establish the college as a mecca of the Lost Cause and Confederate memory.

This transformation throughout the nineteenth century is not unique to the Virginia Military Institute. Throughout the South, families, organizations, and local governments faced physical, spiritual, and political destruction, forced the rebuild from ruins. With the crumbling of the social hierarchy and culture of the Old South, many white Southerners turned to the most tangible symbols of their past, glorifying the memory of the Confederacy and using the symbols of this past to reassert their power and relevance onto the present. Out of all the potent examples of Confederate resurrection, VMI's story is important for several reasons. From the perspective of the historian, VMI's history and post-war rebuilding is thoroughly documented, offering a valuable case study from a period where many documents and records were destroyed in the aftermath of the Civil War. VMI transcribed many of their meetings, events, and speeches on campus, allowing contemporary observers to understand how VMI functioned and communicated its goals and values. Additionally, many administrators and cadets kept scrupulous diaries and correspondences, providing valuable insights into the thoughts and beliefs

of historical actors, and offering a diverse array of perspectives, from cadets, to professors, and other friends of the Institute.

Furthermore, VMI stands out as a Confederate and Lost Cause institution because of their access to highly tangible Confederate icons. Both Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson were closely connected to VMI, with Lee living nearby and Jackson serving as a professor before his death during the war. In the years following the defeat of the Confederacy, monuments and memorializations to these men proliferated throughout the South, yet, because of their strong ties to the generals, VMI was able to assert a unique claim to their images and situate themselves as the "authentic" heirs of their legacy. As such, VMI became a site of pilgrimage for the Confederate faithful and intentionally oriented its culture around this Confederate inheritance in order to gain prestige and importance in the postwar South. Thus, because of their extensive documentation and highly public and intentional assumption of the helm of Confederate memory, VMI is an essential case study for the evolution of the Lost Cause and Confederate heritage in the South and how these systems and attitudes were founded, implemented, and strengthened. As institutions reckon with these legacies today, with the removal of Confederate statues, renaming of buildings, and political battles over educational curricula, understanding the deep roots and long histories of these issues is vital. This study of the Virginia Military Institute serves as a deep dive into a microcosm of this history, putting forth an examination of how Confederate culture arises, manifests, and embeds itself into American history and culture.

Chapter 1: The State and Her Sons: The Virginia Military Institute 1839-1860.

On July 3rd, 1856, a bronze replica of Jean Antoine Houdon's statue of George Washington was dedicated on the campus of the Virginia Military Institute, his calm but dignified stature positioned across from the Barracks to gaze upon the youth of his home state as they began their careers at the Institute. The placement was apt, as it was Washington who first emphasized the importance of the military institute in America, proclaiming in his last annual message to Congress, "The institution of a military academy is also recommended by cogent reasons. However pacific the general policy of a nation may be, it ought never to be without an adequate stock of military knowledge."[10] Before VMI, Washington's vision was first realized in 1802, when fellow Virginian Thomas Jefferson provided for the founding of the United States Military Academy, or West Point, in Northern New York. Beyond the military necessity underlined by Washington, the founding of West Point reflected a larger push in Europe and the United States for a formalized education of military commanders, instructed in military strategy and technique, engineering, and mathematics.[11] However, throughout the early years of the United States, this trend remained out of the reach of most of the young men in Jefferson and Washington's own state and throughout the broader South. For much of the early nineteenth century, West Point was held in disdain by many Southerners, notorious for being dominated by patronage, a bastion of Northern privilege.[12] The inaccessibility of West Point was compounded by the low levels of education and scarcity of schools in the South, putting a professional education out of reach of even the most academically inclined Southern men.

[10] George Washington, "Eighth Annual Message to Congress" (1796).
[11] "Preservation Master Plan: The Virginia Military Institute" (2007), 44.
[12] Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 167.

Although many Southerners were skeptical of the administration of West Point, the prospect of a Southern military school was attractive to regional leaders, who recognized the regional imbalance of education and military training as impediments to the South's growth. Beginning in the 1810s, several attempts were made throughout the South to establish military academies, but the results were generally rudimentary military training facilities that supplemented already existing military locations.[13] The founding of the Virginia Military Institute in 1839 followed this trend, established as means to guard the Lexington Arsenal in Lexington, Virginia while training future militiamen and soldiers.[14] However, while other military academies faded into obscurity or were integrated into other military facilities, VMI transcended this pattern and quickly grew into a formidable military and engineering academy by attracting public and governmental support. In *The Militant South*, historian John Gilmour argues that in order to become more than "reformatories or physical education centers," Southern military academies needed public support because of the steep expense to state governments, who were already stingy with funds.[15] VMI needed to convince the Virginia legislature as well as the citizens of Lexington that not only were the material investments were worth it, but that a Northern educational model could succeed and prosper within the dubious South.

In a large part, VMI achieved these objectives because of their integration of a Northern educational system with the unique needs of the state of Virginia. To bring the West Point model to Virginia, Claude Crozet was appointed as the President of VMI in 1839. Claude Crozet, the state engineer of Virginia, one time soldier in Napoleon's army, and former professor at West Point was selected as the first President of the Institute on the basis of his military experience

[13] John Hope Franklin, *The Militant South* (Harvard University Press, 1956), 147.
[14] Francis Smith, *History of the Virginia Military Institute* (Lynchburg, 1912), 50.
[15] John Hope Franklin, *The Militant South* (Harvard University Press, 1956), 149.

and knowledge of West Point.[16] Crozet's most significant contribution to VMI was his importation of the Thayer System, originally pioneered at West Point, which combined French principles of technical education with the regimented nature of military life to build discipline, character, and academic knowledge in young men.[17] Ultimately, the system aimed to foster educated civil engineers and military leaders who shared a sense of obligation to a code of ethics and public service. Thus, under the pedagogical leadership of Crozet, VMI became the first college in the South to offer formal engineering and mathematical education, in addition to military training. In a state that lacked formal education at all levels, the establishment of an institution that brought the prestigious educational model of West Point to Virginia was bound to catch the attention of Virginian leaders and the Virginian public.

However, to convince the public that an educational model that, while revered for its prestige, was renowned for its exclusivity, could work in Virginia, VMI needed to tailor its modality to the specific needs and wants of the state. This unenviable task was left up to Francis Smith, the school's first superintendent. A protégé of Crozet at West Point with Virginian roots, Smith was recruited by Crozet in 1839 to work as a professor and the first superintendent of the newly formed Virginia Military Institute.[18] As superintendent, Smith emphasized a utilitarian approach to education, implementing courses such as engineering, chemistry, and French (most engineering textbooks at the time were written in French), rather than subjects such as Latin or philosophy that were typical of other colleges.[19] In his memoir, *The History of the Virginia Military Institute*, Smith recollects his goals for the educational output of VMI, writing,

> "The object was not to fit the graduate for a single profession exacting in its demands, and not comprehensive in its scope, but to prepare young men for the

[16] John Hope Franklin, *The Militant South* (Harvard University Press, 1956), 149.
[17] "Preservation Master Plan: The Virginia Military Institute" (2007), 45.
[18] Jennings L. Wagoner, "Francis Henney Smith," American National Biography (1999).
[19] Francis Smith, *History of the Virginia Military Institute* (Lynchburg, 1912), 24.

> varied work of civil life… The military feature, though essential to its discipline, is not primarily in its scheme of education."[20]

Thus, while VMI modeled its organization and educational model after West Point, its mission was entirely different, aiming to cultivate productive and industrious citizens, rather than military commanders and strategists. In its founding years, VMI worked to adapt the model of West Point, built to serve federal needs, into a functional and productive curriculum that reflected its focus on state-level service.

At the turn of the century, despite its sprawling plantations and impressive ports, Virginia lagged socially and economically in comparison to its neighbors to the North. Due to the nature of the plantation economy, much of the Virginian population was very spread out, with frontier-style life persisting on large swaths of uninhabited land, few public schools, and poor infrastructure throughout the state.[21] Within this context, the founding of VMI and the promised training of educated civil engineers and public servants appeared as a saving grace to many Virginians. As one of the few Northern educated Virginians who returned to his home state, Francis Smith was uniquely situated to adapt the educational and social advances of the North to the needs of the South. First and foremost, Smith ensured that VMI cadets were educated as engineers, equipped with the basic knowledge to lead the infrastructural endeavors of the state. So important were these skills that the first cadet class at VMI took their final mathematics exams orally in front of the college trustees, faculty, and a large group of Lexington citizens. Failure meant immediate expulsion.[22] The instruction of these skills were so essential to the identity of VMI that, after the first class of cadets performed well in their exams, Francis Smith

[20] Francis Smith, *History of the Virginia Military Institute* (Lynchburg, 1912), 23-24.
[21] John Hope Franklin, *The Militant South* (Harvard University Press, 1956), 20.
[22] Francis Smith, *History of the Virginia Military Institute* (Lynchburg, 1912), 64.

proclaimed that, "on that day the Virginia Military Institute earned for itself the title… of the West Point of the South."[23]

Also important to Smith and the benefactors of VMI was the state of education in Virginia. After the American Revolution, a trend towards universal public education had spread through the new country, particularly the North. By the 1820s, most Northern states had some sort of school system supported by public taxes.[24] Although Virginia passed legislation in 1797 authorizing public education, local officials showed little interest in public schools and few schools were established in the early nineteenth century. By the time of the founding of VMI, education rates in Virginia were extremely low and rudimentary in quality at best. The founders and early benefactors of VMI envisioned the Institute as a mechanism to address these educational problems in both the present and future of Virginia. As superintendent, Francis Smith implemented these educational goals into the curriculum and culture of VMI. From their uniforms to their lodgings, a code of military uniformity was imposed on the cadets, erasing any outward social distinction, and ensuring an equal material playing field.[25]

Furthermore, cadets were expected to prioritize their courses and education over everything else: academic disobedience or inadequacy was not to be tolerated. Smith's academic strictness was best exemplified by an incident in 1851, where several classes of cadets skipped class to attend a highly anticipated criminal trial in Lexington. Smith was so enraged over the cadet's insubordination that he decided to expel every cadet who skipped class, nearly one third of the student body, explaining in his memoir that, "I could take no other view of the case than that of its being a direct resistance to lawful authority, and I never doubted for one moment what

[23] Francis Smith, *History of the Virginia Military Institute* (Lynchburg, 1912), 64.
[24] Jonson Miller, *Engineering Manhood*, 60.
[25] "Preservation Master Plan: The Virginia Military Institute" (2007), 48.

my duty demanded, and that was to dismiss every member… who had absented himself from duty."[26] Only after an appeal to the VMI Board of Visitors were the expelled cadets reinstated to avoid an enrollment crisis at the institute.[27] As illustrated by this incident, educational integrity and commitment were essential foundational values in the early days of the Institute.

This spirit also extended beyond graduation – graduates of VMI were required to serve as public school teachers for a minimum of two years.[28] This academic culture at VMI reflected a shift in Virginian norms, where education had previously been seen as a rich man's game and teaching as an unworthy calling for Virginian men. Now, the best and brightest Virginian youth were not only pursuing an advanced education but serving as the teachers of the next generation. With VMI trailblazing the way for the growth of higher education and teaching in Virginia, college enrollment in Virginia rose from 500 students in 1845 to 2,500 in 1860.[29] Additionally, these graduates paid their education forward, spread throughout the state as teachers and tutors, helping to expand the educational apparatus throughout Virginia.

The educational excellence of VMI and its emphasis on public service gained the school the admiration of citizens and the support of state officials. Many Virginians took pride in VMI's uniquely Virginian qualities, with one proud Virginian citizen describing VMI as "thoroughly and exclusively Virginian," where "the vestal flame of Virginia spirit and Virginia pride may be sedulously watched over by a band of Virginia youths."[30] The Lexington Gazette similarly boasted in 1842 that VMI would "soon be equal in every respect to the US Military Academy," and was "destined to confer the greatest blessings on Virginia, in sending forth accomplished

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[26] Francis Smith, *History of the Virginia Military Institute* (Lynchburg, 1912), 146.
[27] The VMI Board of Visitors is the supervisory board of the college. According to VMI's website, the Board, "defines the mission of the Institute as a public institution of higher education in the Commonwealth of Virginia and oversees the development, revision, and implementation of a strategic plan for the accomplishment of that mission."
[28] "Preservation Master Plan: The Virginia Military Institute" (2007), 52.
[29] Francis Smith, *History of the Virginia Military Institute* (Lynchburg, 1912), 79.
[30] John Hope Franklin, *The Militant South* (Harvard University Press, 1956), 151.

soldiers to impart skill and discipline."[31] The popularity and success of VMI was almost instantaneous: after the Institute's first year, the corps more than doubled in size and the number of applicants exceeded all expectations.[32] With its quick success, VMI soon caught the attention of state officials. In a formative moment in the Institute's history, sixty cadets were sent to Richmond in 1842 to parade around the streets of the capital and were examined in front of the state legislature. The impact on the legislature was deep and enduring: that year, the state increased the state endowment of the Institute, making VMI the first state supported military institute in the country and the first publicly funded college in Virginia.[33] The educational rigor and disciplined corps of VMI embodied the ideals of the industrious and upstanding Southern man, leading politicians and citizens alike to elevate the Institute as an emblem of higher education in antebellum Virginia and a representative of the state's progress and advancements.

With the pledged support of the state and the dedicated leadership of Superintendent Smith, the Virginia Military Institute continued to grow and thrive during the years leading up to the Civil War. From its first class of sixteen cadets, by 1858 the Institute boasted an enrollment of 150 cadets, bringing in over $18,000 in tuition fees in addition to $7,000 in state endowment, an astronomical sum compared to the entirety of VMI's original 1839 budget at $6,000.[34] Thus, in its first two decades of existence, VMI found great success and high prestige by rooting itself in a highly state-based identity, designed to produce virtuous and skilled young Virginians who would go on to uplift and serve the state. Founded on principles of integrity and equality, VMI succeeded by balancing national ideals of education and pedagogy with the particular demands of Southern culture where many similar institutions failed. However, as the meanings of both

[31] Francis Smith, *History of the Virginia Military Institute* (Lynchburg, 1912), 89.
[32] Jennings Wise, *The Military History of the Virginia Military Institute* (Lynchburg, 1915), 49.
[33] Ibid, 51-52.
[34] "Annual Report of the Virginia Military Institute" (VMI Digital Archive, 1858), 19.

Southern and national identity began to stretch and deteriorate with the buildup to the Civil War, the middle ground that VMI had struck in its founding years would become increasingly tenuous and delicate, challenging the Institute's identity, and forcing the college to find new ways to maintain its success and prestige in a transforming country.

Chapter 2: The Stay-At-Home War: Participation in the Civil War, 1861-1865

Within four short years, the Civil War would leave the South in ruins; physically, politically, economically, and socially. However, denied the power of foresight, in 1860, the looming conflict was viewed with excitement and anticipation by many throughout the South. Events like Bleeding Kansas and the formation of the anti-slavery Republican Party in the North hardened regional positions on slavery and escalated existing tensions. Southern politicians scrambled to demonstrate the extremes of their commitment to slavery and loyalty to the South during the years preceding the Civil War, making the sectional conflict the center of public life and discourse. Although VMI could be considered a relatively apolitical institution in many ways – the Institute did not have any major investments in slavery and abstained from making public comments on political issues – debates over slavery and state's rights became increasingly unavoidable in the late 1850's.[35] Indeed, many cadets hailed from wealthy Southern families who had large slaveholdings and the student body proved to be overwhelmingly in favor of secession, frequently raising the Confederate flag on school flagpoles to the vexation of VMI staff who endeavored to keep the school neutral in the ongoing political battles over secession.[36]

In combination with the general demographic profile and political inclinations of the cadets, the military culture at VMI produced a group of eager young men who felt prepared and entitled to fight for and serve their state and its peculiar institution. VMI got its first chance to prove its readiness to serve its state during the execution of John Brown in 1860. A radical

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[35] "Death of Old Judge," VMI Archives Digital Collection (1871).
VMI did own one slave before the Civil War. Anderson Dandridge, known as 'Old Judge,' was originally owned by a Professor at Washington College and was bought by the Institute in the 1840's to labor as a cook and nurse on campus. Dandridge was very popular among cadets and remained on VMI's campus after the Civil War and continued to work there until his death. Additionally, some professors and administrators had personal slave holdings, but slavery is seldom discussed in the school's official publications besides mentions of Dandridge.
[36] "Thomas Andrew Stevenson letter" (VMI Digital Collections, November 20, 1860).

abolitionist from Connecticut, Brown was captured and sentenced to death for leading a raid on the federal armory in Harpers Ferry, Virginia, in an attempt to instigate an armed slave rebellion. For many Southerners, including many of the cadets and military leaders at VMI, Brown was the ultimate representation of Northern radicalism and hostility. Though Brown failed to achieve his objectives, his raid succeeded in escalating regional tensions and demonstrating the potential for violence within the political environment of the country. As such, his execution represented an opportunity for Virginians to demonstrate their own power and resolve to defend slavery and ward off Northern encroachment into their rights to enslave and possess the bodies of others.

With the paramount importance of the execution, VMI's prominent involvement demonstrated the prestige of the school throughout Virginia. Commanded by Francis Smith, Thomas (Stonewall) Jackson, and John Preston, sixty-four VMI cadets were sent to oversee the execution of Brown (Figure 1). As proudly described by Preston, "the cadets were immediately in the rear of the gallows… They were uniformed in red flannel shirts, which gave them a gay, dashing, suave look."[37] Though they did not play an active role in the actual execution, the cadets served to represent the military depth of Virginia and the youthful reserves that were readily awaiting to be called to the defense of the South. Continuing this role, immediately after the execution, the cadets paraded through Richmond, performing artillery drills in the capitol. Again, this public display of discipline and force earned VMI further admiration from the state and state leaders subsequently sent VMI a supply of the newly developed "rifled guns" to test and store in the case of anticipated conflict with the North.[38] With every element of Brown's trial and execution being heavily imbued with meaning and symbolism, the prominence of the VMI cadets was no exception. Just as they were on the front lines of the execution, so too were they

[37] Francis Smith, *History of the Virginia Military Institute* (Lynchburg, 1912), 164.
[38] Ibid, 173.

anticipated to be at the front lines of the looming war, leading Virginia with their discipline, loyalty, and youthful exuberance to victory.

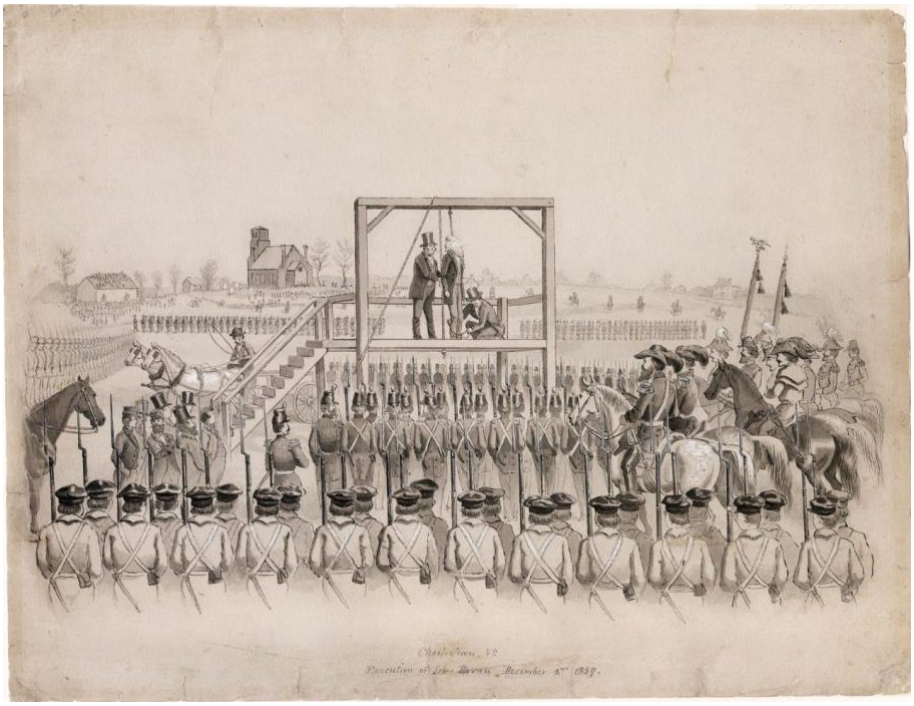

Figure 1. The Execution of John Brown, VMI cadets depicted in the foreground.[39]

Coming off the execution, the prospects for the Virginia Military Institute had never been higher. Their presence at the execution and ensuing parade through the state's capital was in part designed as a publicity stunt, highlighting VMI's role in what historian Jennings C. Wise describes as the "vindication" of the "majesty of Virginia."[40] [41] Political contemporaries at the time evidently agreed with this assessment, and the legislature bankrolled new barracks and academic buildings at the cost of $151,000 to the state.[42] In addition to the rise of VMI, John

[39] "John Brown Execution," Virginia Military Institute.
[40] Jennings C. Wise, *The Military History of the Virginia Military Institute* (Lynchburg, 1915), 114.
[41] Four "Wises" are referenced in this chapter. Jennings C. Wise (1881-1968) graduated from VMI in 1902 and later became the authoritative historian on VMI military history. His relation to the other Wise's is unclear. Henry A. Wise (1806-1876) was the Governor of Virginia during the trial of John Brown and went on to serve as a Confederate general. John Sergeant Wise (1846-1913) was the son of Governor Wise and a VMI cadet during the Civil War. He would go on to become a prominent Virginian politician, like his father. Henry A. Wise (1906-1982) was the grandson of John Sergeant Wise and the great grandson of Governor Wise, his namesake. He also graduated from VMI and served as a politician and author.
[42] Jennings C. Wise, *The Military History of the Virginia Military Institute* (Lynchburg, 1915), 94.

Brown's execution also represented a turn in public mood in Virginia. From 1813-1850, Southerners controlled the presidency and dominated the other branches of government including the Supreme Court. However, as the population and political power of the North grew, it became apparent to many that the political sway of the South was on its last legs. Events such as the John Brown raid also made it abundantly clear that this power shift would entail contentious political clashes, popular violence, and potentially, civil war. As one of the northernmost Southern states, Virginian leaders found themselves on the frontline of these political changes, adding a new sense of expediency to military development and growth.

As a preeminent military institution in the South, it was no surprise that the Virginia Military Institute was central to the state's military plans. Governor Henry A. Wise, whom the cadets had escorted through the state and paraded for several times, was "immensely proud of the cadets" and a close friend of Superintendent Smith.[43] Wise envisioned the Institution as both an important breeding ground for military leaders and as a larger symbol for the military strength of Virginia, leading him to take two important actions to elevate the importance of the institution in the late 1850's. At the establishment of VMI, all cadets were carried on the state militia rolls. However, few cadets actually served in the militia in the early years of the Institute, typically going on to careers in teaching, government, or public service. As the war approached, Wise moved to reinforce the military aspect of the school, formally announcing that VMI cadets were first under the authority of the Governor, then the Institute, clearing the way for cadets to be drafted into the state militia and clarifying their role as a soldier first, civilian second.[44] Moreover, Governor Wise also ordered Superintendent Smith to prepare a "synoptical work for

[43] Jennings C. Wise, *The Military History of the Virginia Military Institute* (Lynchburg, 1915), 114.
[44] Henry A. Wise, *Drawing Out the Man: The VMI Story* (Virginia, 1978), 35.

the instruction of militia service" to guide the Virginia militia as they prepared for war.[45] The resulting *Manual of Instruction for the Volunteers and Militia of the United States*, prepared by VMI professor Major William Gilham was adopted as a comprehensive guide for not only the Virginia militia, but later for the entire Confederate Army.[46] Wise's actions reiterated VMI's mission and founding purpose to serve the state's needs and military interest, cementing VMI cadets as the "state's sons" and reaffirming VMI's position as a leading institution of war preparation in Virginia.

With the school's estimable role in the buildup to the Civil War in addition to the general institutional culture of military preparation, there was a palpable sense of excitement and anticipation at VMI at the outbreak of the war. According to Jennings C. Wise, "The newspapers were scanned with avidity in Barracks, and the accounts of military preparations fired the cadets with an enthusiasm for war which youth, careless of consequences but longing for opportunities to win glory, alone can feel."[47] Cadet Thomas Andrew Stevenson encapsulates this deep enthusiasm for the Confederacy in a letter over six months before Virginia's secession, claiming that, "as a cadet I have sworn as it were an allegiance to the constitution peculiar to the Institute and independent of the general government," and that he would defend the Institute against a "corrupt and aggressive government."[48] In comparison to other military schools like West Point that fed directly into the federal military, VMI cadets felt a unique responsibility to the specific defense of Virginia, facilitating the feeling of deep loyalty and protectiveness of the state as the war approached.

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[45] William Gilham, *Manual of Instruction for the Volunteers and Militia of the United States* (1861), 6.
[46] Jennings C. Wise, *The Military History of the Virginia Military Institute* (Lynchburg, 1915), 115.
[47] Ibid, 126.
[48] "Thomas Andrew Stevenson letter" (VMI Digital Collections, November 20, 1860).

On April 17th, 1861, the fateful day arrived, and Virginia officially seceded from the Union, as state delegates boldly declared that "the Union between the State of Virginia and the other States under the Constitution aforesaid is hereby dissolved."[49] Immediately, all academic activities were suspended at VMI and the school fully pivoted towards war preparation. Reflecting the zeal for secession at VMI, Superintendent Francis Smith proudly declared, "War? Civil War! In all its intesensest fury was begun. The Virginia Military Institute was now called upon to fulfill the mission for which it had been so earnestly preparing."[50] Smith's proclamation reflects how dramatically the Institute pivoted in the months leading up to the war. Showered in praise, funding, and governmental prestige leading up to the war, VMI had adjusted its identity accordingly, moving from its insistence on producing educated civilians and public servants to emphasizing the military strength of the cadets and the Institute's "earnest preparation" for war. However, despite all the hype and fanfare, the Institute's actual role in the early years of the war was underwhelming, if not negligible. With an abundance of Confederate recruits and military leaders, only VMI professors were called to the frontlines, leaving the young and inexperienced VMI cadets to languish idly on campus. Those who were called upon to join the Confederate army were sent away from the front lines to drill recruits, relegated to a painfully minor role in the seeming war of a lifetime.

VMI cadets did not hesitate to express their consternation with their disappointing position in the Confederacy and imposed complacency. Then-VMI cadet John Sergeant Wise bemoaned that while General Lee's army carried out a "gallant defense" in the winter of 1862-63, cadets were "comfortably cared for in barracks, which were heated and lighted as well as if

[49] "Virginia Ordinance of Secession," Encyclopedia Virginia (April 17, 1861).
[50] Francis Smith, *History of the Virginia Military Institute* (Lynchburg, 1912), 181.

no war had been in progress."[51] VMI was so untouched by the Civil War in its beginning phases that the Institute was able to resume academic activities a few months later. Confederate generals would stop by campus on their breaks to serve as instructors and detail their battle exploits, another cruel reminder of the corps' irrelevance to the South's defense. So removed were the cadets from conflict that the Institute actually developed a reputation during the war for being a safe haven for Southern youths from being drafted into the army. Enrollment reached an all-time high in 1862, as parents aimed to shield their sons from combat, posing an ironic juxtaposition with VMI's confident rhetoric and positioning leading up to the war.[52]

If the role of the cadets was underwhelming, the instructors and institutional leaders who actually saw combat more than compensated for this lack. By 1861, there were 433 living graduates of the Institute, the majority of whom became commissioned officers in the Confederate Army. VMI graduates occupied many top roles within the Confederacy, to the extent that Virginia war-time Governor John Letcher was accused of favoritism and impartiality by other Southern soldiers.[53] Superintendent Francis Smith was also called to duty at the outbreak of the war, appointed to the Governor's "Council of Three," charged to "aid, counsel, and advise him in the exercise of his executive authority, in the emergency of the State." Smith was additionally appointed as the "Major General of Cadets" in the Virginia Militia, furthering his prestigious military and leadership reputation in the state.[54] Overall, with hundreds of ranking soldiers in the army and Smith positioned at the forefront of the war, the leaders and alumni of the Virginia Military Institute played a significant role in Virginia's contributions to the Confederacy.

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[51] John Sergeant Wise, *End of an Era*, (Boston, Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1899), 182.
[52] "Preservation Master Plan: The Virginia Military Institute" (2007), 54.
[53] Jennings C. Wise, *The Military History of the Virginia Military Institute* (Lynchburg, 1915), 147.
[54] Ibid, 138.

Despite the impressive accolades of many Institute affiliates, nobody from VMI had a greater impact on the war and Confederate memory in total than professor turned general, Thomas Jackson, or more familiarly, Stonewall Jackson. Perhaps the most famous and successful general in the Confederacy second only to Robert E. Lee, few at VMI would have anticipated Jackson's rise to success and prestige during the Civil War. In fact, Jackson was one of the most strongly disliked and ridiculed professors at the Institute. Referred to by the cadets as "Old Jack," Jackson was infamous for his eccentricity and stubbornness, known as a harsh and confusing teacher who would wander the grounds talking to himself and antagonizing cadets.[55] Jackson also had an extremely tense relationship with Superintendent Smith. According to John Sergeant Wise, Jackson avoided Smith at all costs, "having nothing to do with him officially" and frequently arguing with Smith over instructional methods and institutional policies during their scant meetings. [56]

Despite his reputation at VMI, Jackson's military record soon outweighed any eccentricities and he quickly rose to fame within the Confederacy, commanding the Confederate legions in legendary Civil War battles such as Bull Run, Harpers Ferry, and Fredericksburg. As his celebrity grew, discussion of his peculiarities waned, unless used for evidence of his unique genius. Thus, when Jackson died in May of 1863, after being accidentally shot by one of his own soldiers, Southern mourners were overcome with a near religious sense of reverence and grief for the fallen general. In an 1866 article, Jackson's doctor recalls how, during a medical transfer days before Jackson's death, "men and women rushed to the ambulance, bringing all the poor delicacies they had, and with tearful eyes, they blessed him and prayed for his recovery."[57]

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[55] Jennings C. Wise, *The Military History of the Virginia Military Institute* (Lynchburg, 1915), 76.
[56] John Sergeant Wise, *End of an Era*, (Boston, Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1899), 187-88.
[57] Hunter McGuire, as quoted in *1866 VMI Catalog*, 10.

Jackson's funeral was also an enormous event, with tolling church bells, artillery shots, and a long procession through Richmond, attracting over 20,000 mourners.[58] Jackson was ultimately buried in Lexington, less than one mile from campus, his grave becoming a site of pilgrimage for Confederate mourners and admirers. Jackson's death also had an enormous impact on the cadets who remained on campus and John Sergeant Wise recalls how the corps "felt that the loss was irreparable," leading dozens of cadets to resign from the Institute to immediately enlist in the Confederate Army.[59] Jackson's death symbolized a turning point in the larger conflict but especially so for the cadets at VMI, his image serving as a rallying cry for renewed invigoration and commitment to the Confederate cause as well as the glory and heroism in Confederate martyrdom.

Whether sparked by the impulse to redeem Jackson or the increasing desperation of the Confederate Army, the two years of war after Jackson's death proved to be a monumentally transformative and active period for the Institute compared to the relatively uneventful first three years. Only a few months after Jackson's death, the outlook for the Confederacy began to worsen, capped with a resounding loss at the Battle of Gettysburg in July 1863, which exacted enormous casualties on Lee's army. As a result, the VMI cadets found themselves increasingly enlisted in minor Confederate operations during the summer break, frequently participating in expeditions to find deserters and small defensive stands and military raids throughout the state.[60] Though generally inconsequential and uneventful, these small tastes of actions began to prepare cadets for the Institute's dramatic call to action in the winter and spring of 1864.

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[58] "Stonewall Jackson's Grave," *Encyclopedia Virginia*.
[59] John Sergeant Wise, *End of an Era*, (Boston, Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1899), 189.
[60] Jennings C. Wise, *The Military History of the Virginia Military Institute* (Lynchburg, 1915), 250-260.

By the new year, it was becoming clear that the war was sliding out of reach for the Confederacy. For the cadets on campus, this was punctuated by the news in February that General Grant's federal army would be marching on Virginia, putting the campus in the path of war. As the Union approached, Francis Smith pledged the Institute's resources to General Breckinridge, who was commanding the Confederate units in Northern Virginia, writing,

> "The Corps of Cadets numbers an aggregate of 280, of whom 250 may be relied upon for active duty… We have an abundance of ammunition, tents, knapsacks, shovels, and picks, and will be prepared to march at a moment's notice."[61]

The cadets were immediately taken up on their offer and called into action at the Battle of New Market in the Shenandoah Valley in May 1864. Under attack by Union General Franz Siegal, the cadets were called to reinforce General Breckinridge's command. Mostly under the age of 18, the cadets were initially relegated to a minor role in the battle, stationed to guard the baggage cart at the back. However, whether overcome with the adrenaline of battle, the desire to finally have a part in the war, or, as in John Sergeant Wise's case, fear of the ridicule of others for being on the back line, the cadets surged forward into the front of the artillery, coming under heavy Union fire.[62] While it is hard to distinguish historical myth from reality, it is clear that the charging cadets played a major role in the battle. According to a Confederate observer, "while the veterans around them wavered," the cadets "sprang forward with heroic enthusiasm," breaking Union lines and firing upon the Union artillery. [63] The charge of the cadets is frequently credited with turning the tide of the battle, resulting in a decisive victory for the Confederate Army.

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[61] "Civil War Letters of Francis H. Smith," VMI Archives Digital Collections" (May 2, 1864).
[62] John Sergeant Wise, *End of an Era*, (Boston, Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1899), 208.
[63] Jennings C. Wise, *The Military History of the Virginia Military Institute* (Lynchburg, 1915), 321

Confederate success at the Battle of New Market was perhaps one of the last significant victory of the Confederate Army before their surrender. Recognized as such by many soldiers and civilians, the battle was celebrated with a gusto only attainable for a people who know that the celebration may be their last for a long time. As recounted by John Sergeant Wise,

> "It is impossible to describe the enthusiasm with which we were received. A week after the battle of New Market, the cadet corps, garlanded, cheered by ten thousand throats, intoxicated with praise unstinted… pass[ed] in review before the President of the Confederate States, to hear a speech of commendation from his lips."[64]

Despite the eager reception of the cadets, the victory was not without its costs, and ten VMI cadets perished in battle, a 27% fatality rate for the corps compared to the 14% rate for the larger Confederate army.[65] These "boy-soldiers," as they were called, would loom large in the memory of VMI and the legacy of the Civil War, immortalized as martyrs and a symbol of the lost hope of the Confederacy.

However, in the immediate aftermath of the battle, the losses of VMI were not yet complete. Less than a month after New Market, Major General David Hunter arrived in Lexington as a part of a federal strike on Northern Virginia. VMI faculty and cadets retreated from campus, leaving it unguarded as Hunter's army burned, pillaged, and otherwise destroyed nearly every building (Figure 1).[66] Within twenty-four hours after his arrival, most of the campus was burned down and all books, equipment, supplies, and documents were stolen or lost. Hunter also stole the bronze Washington statue from campus, dismembering the figure and forcing his soldiers to lug the pieces as a trophy as they continued their march South.[67] In May of the following year, General Lee surrendered and, as put by Francis Smith, the South was left "in a

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[64] John Sergeant Wise, *End of an Era*, (Boston, Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1899), 216.
[65] Henry A. Wise, *Drawing Out the Man: The VMI Story* (Virginia, 1978), 40.
[66] "Preservation Master Plan: The Virginia Military Institute" (2007), 54.
[67] "Affairs in the South," *The New York Times* (September 10, 1866).

state of utter prostration, no one knowing what the future was to be, and apprehension and depression weighing down every heart."[68]

Figure 2. VMI barracks destroyed after Hunter's raid, 1865.[69]

With that, the Confederate states were no more, and the Virginia Military Institute was left in a state of unrecognizable disrepair, with little savable resources or infrastructure. Though most of the war was spent in idleness, this period was nevertheless transformative for the Institute, both physically and reputationally. Thanks to the legend of Stonewall Jackson and the celebrity of the cadets at New Market, the Virginia Military Institute became indelibly associated with the legacy of the Confederacy, especially the early periods of optimism and opportunity that loomed large in the memories of the South after the war. This reputation would become increasingly important as the New South reckoned with the destruction of the war and the anguish of reconstruction, leaving institutions such as VMI as important signifiers of what had been lost and what could be reclaimed during the post-war period.

[68] Francis Smith, *History of the Virginia Military Institute* (Lynchburg, 1912), 207.
[69] "Barracks in ruins after Civil War, 1865," VMI Archives Photographs Collection.

Chapter 3: The Ruins of Rebellion: The Reconstruction of VMI, 1865-1873

In 1914, nearly fifty years to the date of the destruction of the Virginia Military Institute, the U.S. Congressional Committee of Claims gathered to consider whether the Institute should be compensated for its losses during the Civil War. This hearing was a major moment for the Institute. After decades languishing in financial straits from their losses during the Civil War and the high cost of physical and institutional rebuilding, the opportunity to gain financial and legal recognition for what was felt to be a wanton destruction of VMI's campus was not lost on the Institute's representatives. Indeed, the very fact of VMI's summoning by Congress represented the years of toil and hard work put in to rebuild the reputation and influence of the Institute to the point of national recognition. Thus, when the third Superintendent of VMI, General Edward Nichols, took the stand, he looked to assert the importance of the Institute; past, present, and future, and the Institute's claim to just compensation.[70] In his few minutes of testimony, Nichols offered "no apologies" for VMI's past, instead emphasizing the national impact of the Institute, emphatically asserting that, "The Institute is *not* a local institution. It has 40 states represented and 5 foreign countries." This fundamental assertion of VMI's nationally based identity from its foremost leader stands in shocking contrast to its identity at the opening of the Civil War. How did "Virginia's sons," proudly born, raised, and trained to exclusively serve their home state become the nation's sons, with geographic diversity as their calling card in a few short decades? This transformation was neither sudden nor obvious and demands analytic scrutiny. Its exploration has the potential to reveal crucial insights about the changing identity of both VMI

[70] Lieutenant General Edward Nichols graduated from VMI in 1878 and served as a Professor of Mathematics until his appointment as Superintendent in 1907. As the third Superintendent, Nichols was the first Superintendent who did not serve during the Civil War, succeeding Scott Shipp who commanded the corps of cadets during the Battle of New Market.

and the greater South in the Reconstruction period and how the Institute and region's leaders adapted their politics, ideology, and pedagogy to meet a new era in Southern history.

During the Reconstruction period, the Virginia Military Institute's growth from near total ruin after Hunter's raid into a booming and internationally respected military and technical college was by no means static or linear. There were many instances where the Institute considered shuttering altogether before once again dusting themselves off and finding a way to keep operating. Despite the ups and downs, the post-war development of VMI can be broadly divided into three unifying periods; Prostration (1864-67); Rebirth (1867-73); and Physical Implementation (1873-1900). Each period represents a phase not only in VMI's institutional growth, but also how they imagined themselves and their identity within the New South and interpreted the legacies of the past. In many ways, these periods also paralleled similar processes in the broader South and offer an institutional case study that reveals key insights about the great development of reconstruction-era Southern society and politics. These decades featured the upheaval of deeply embedded racial norms, the overthrow and subsequent return of the Southern conservatives, and the rapid development of new social norms and hierarchies, forming a historical bedrock for the South's growth in the twentieth century. Though these processes were broad and far reaching, many of the changes and developments in the South during reconstruction can be tracked and interrogated on the micro-scale through the history of the Virginia Military Institute.

Period One: Prostration: 1864-1867

By the summer of 1864, little remained of the once illustrious Virginia Military Institute. Its campus burned, its cadets scattered throughout the state, and hundreds of its alumni dead or injured, the Institute appeared to be yet another Southern casualty of the Civil War. Coming off

of his involvement in the Battle of New Market and retreat from Lexington, John Sergeant Wise described his feeling of utter hopelessness and despair at the destruction of VMI and the defeat of the South, lamenting, "I was dead. Everything that I had ever believed in politically was dead. Everybody that I had ever trusted or relied upon politically was dead."[71] Having already evacuated Lexington prior to the arrival of the Union Army, what remained of the corps did not learn of the destruction of the Institute until June, nearly a month after the fact.[72] With no academic facilities in addition to the difficulties of studying in a warzone, many cadets sought to resign from the Institute to join what remained of the Confederate Army.[73] Nevertheless, the dogged Francis Smith declared his intent to rebuild the Institute in July 1864, months before the war officially ended. Always eloquent, Smith proclaimed to the VMI Board, who assembled in Richmond during the summer, "But perish the thought that the Virginia Military Institute is destroyed, or that bricks and mortar constituted the great military school of Virginia. That, thank God, still lives in the hearts and affections of the South – and in the vigor and manhood of its noble sons." [74] With this, the long process of physical and institutional rebuilding began under the same leadership of Superintendent Smith, but in a transformed regional and national landscape.

Though the broader South faced utter destruction, poverty, and displacement in the last months of the Civil War, the Virginia Military Institute and the residents who remained in Northern Virginia encountered a much more favorable outcome. After General Hunter's initial rampage through Virginia, Lexington and the greater Rockbridge County had little interference

[71] John Sergeant Wise, *End of an Era*, (Boston, Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1899), 324.
[72] William Couper, *One Hundred Years at VMI*, v. 3 (Richmond, Garrett and Massie, 1939), 54.
[73] Ibid, 79.
[74] Francis Smith, "Annual Report of the Virginia Military Institute" (VMI Archives Digital Collection), 24.

from federal soldiers and many of the wartime political leaders remained in place.[75] So favorable was the postwar political and military arrangement in Virginia that the Speaker of the State House proclaimed, "Virginia is now safe. Whatever they may do to other states, they cannot force a provisional governor upon her. Whatever they may do to other states, thank God, they cannot now saddle negro suffrage upon us."[76]

As a military school that actively contributed to the Confederate cause, without this favorable political context, it is unlikely that VMI would have the support to rebuild from any other government. However, with the sympathetic Governor Francis Pierpont at the mantle of the "restored state government of Virginia," Superintendent Smith quickly found a new political ally. In his appeal to the Governor, Smith minimized the role of VMI in the Civil War, claiming that "it is unnecessary to dwell upon the record of the last four years," a sharp pivot from the proud rhetoric about the military strength of the Institute in prior years. Instead, Smith directed the governor's attention to VMI's contributions to the "internal improvements" of the country in the pre-war years, harkening back to VMI's close relationship with the state government.[77] Whether or not Governor Pierpont believed these arguments, Pierpont surprised many of his contemporaries in his sympathy for VMI, arranging a loan for $50,000 and consulting with the Board of Visitors himself on architectural plans to rebuild in 1866.[78] With this funding and political endorsement, the Institute received the financial support and political legitimacy needed to embark on a reconstruction of their own, an efficient and surprising turnaround from the desolation of the war on the Institute.

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[75] Robert J. Driver Jr., *Lexington and Rockbridge County in the Civil War* (Lynchburg, H.E. Howard Inc., 1989), 100.
[76] H.J. Eckenrode, *The Political History of Virginia During the Reconstruction* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins Press, 1904), 30.
[77] Kaylyn L. Sawyer, "'With Nothing Left But Reputation': Reconstructing the Virginia Military Institute,'' *The Gettysburg College Journal of the Civil War Era* Volume 7 (2017), 10.
[78] William Couper, *One Hundred Years at VMI*, v. 3 (Richmond, Garrett and Massie, 1939), 112.

Figure 1. The corps of cadets drills in front of the burned campus buildings (1866)[79]

Although they received the state's approval to reconstruct, VMI leaders still recognized the political and financial contingencies of the post war South and generally made an effort to keep their heads down and focus on the logistical challenges of rebuilding, rather than engaging in the ongoing political battles. VMI officially reopened on October 16th, 1865 with 55 cadets trickling in. Though its doors may have been open, serious doubts about the viability of the Institute persisted. Even with the loan from the state and donations from local benefactors, VMI still owed nearly $100,000 in debt from pre-war loans and costs to repair the campus. Indeed, in the 1866 Annual Report, the Board admitted that "serious doubts were entertained by many of [the Institute's] warmest friends, whether it would be possible to revive an institution which had been so entirely stripped of all that was material to its existence and development." [80] Additionally, despite Governor Pierpont's warmness to the Institute, other authorities did not show the same benevolence. In 1865, the US War Department denied VMI's claims to damages

[79] VMI Digital Photographs Collection, "Corps on Parade Ground after Civil War, Faculty House Ruins. 1866"
[80] "Annual Report of the Virginia Military Institute" (1866), 5.

from Hunter's Raid, leaving the Institute completely saddled with the cost of rebuilding.[81] VMI was also denied access to the Morrill Land Grant of 1862, which allocated stolen indigenous lands to agricultural colleges throughout the country. This essentially denied VMI the resources and institutional legitimacy to carry on with its agricultural programs, a major component of its pre-war curriculum. As a final insult to injury, VMI cadets were banned from accessing functional weaponry by the federal government, forced to run drills without any rifles or muskets, a blow to the legitimacy of the Institute as a military school.[82]

These years of hardship and rejection demonstrated to the Institute that the post-war government could not be relied on in the same way as before the war. In response to the denial of the Morrill Grant, Smith expressed these frustrations, writing,

> "The State threw away the opportunity of doing justice to an institution which had borne the brunt of the contest during the war… But the Virginia Military Institute had resumed its operations upon the principle of self-reliance, the spirit became more resolute to go forward in the work which seemed plainly before it."[83]

This language of contempt and resigned self-reliance, coming from the man who once proudly labeled VMI cadets the "state's sons," represents an enormous shift in the mentality of the Institute. VMI's original engineering and agricultural programs were structured to serve the infrastructural needs of the state and create a population of homegrown engineers and technicians. Exclusion from the Morrill Grant not only punished an institute that had fought and sacrificed on behalf of the state but signaled the end of the special relationship between Virginia and VMI and favoritism shown by the state. Furthermore, state financial support and public recognition before the war was an integral element to VMI's antebellum identity, giving the institute importance, legitimacy, and popularity. No longer the benefactor of the state and

[81] William Couper, *One Hundred Years at VMI*, v. 3 (Richmond, Garrett and Massie, 1939), 117.
[82] Ibid, 140.
[83] Ibid., 233.

alienated by the federal government, the Institute was forced to turn inwards, relying on its own fundraising and recruitment abilities to restore the school to prosperity and prestige.

Though they faced great losses, VMI's regrowth was not curtailed by the lack of financial and political support from the state and federal government. 1866, only two years after the campus was destroyed, proved to be a pivotal year for the regrowth of the Institution. Though they still struggled financially, the Institute achieved key symbolic victories that began to rectify their situation. First, in July 1866, VMI graduated its first class since the end of the war, the majority of whom were New Market veterans, a mostly symbolic gesture to reiterate VMI's contributions to the Confederacy. Though the graduation seemed to mark a return to normalcy, it followed only two months after VMI's funeral procession for five of the cadets killed in New Market, a solemn reminder of the losses of the war.[84] Additionally, in the fall of 1866, the statue of George Washington that had been stolen by General Hunter in 1864 was returned to campus, seen by many at VMI as a symbolic concession of the unjust and wanton destruction of the Institute (Figure 2). The reinauguration of the statue and accompanying ceremony made national headlines and drew renewed scrutiny to the legality and justness of Hunter's Raid. Normally unabashed in its Republican sympathies, even the *New York Times* remarked, "If the Government had sent [Hunter] to make war upon bronze ornaments, well and good; if not, he was guilty of an act of vandalism." [85] Formerly a highly localized institution, this recognition in Northern media indicates VMI's rising fame from their involvement in the war and what many began to see as an unauthorized war crime in the destruction of campus. All and all, as VMI began to rebuild its campus, its reputation was also being established on the national stage and attracting renewed public attention and enrollment.

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[84] Annual Report of the Virginia Military Institute (1866), 9.
[85] "Affairs in the South," *The New York Times* (September 10, 1866).

Figure 2. Cadets and Lexingtonians in front of the returned statue.[86]

Despite some symbolic victories and increased revenue from the steadily increasing corps of cadets, VMI still struggled in the initial post-war years, mirroring the poverty and desolation of the larger South. In March of 1867, after the State Legislature unanimously rejected the 14th Amendment, the period of lax federal rule ended in Virginia, and the state became "Military District Number 1," with General John Schofield as the military commander.[87] The new military government was not nearly as sympathetic to VMI as the former governor Francis Pierpont and in April, Superintendent Smith was summoned to the state house to "show cause" for why "*the property known as the Virginia Military Institute should not be obliterated*."[88] By all indications, it appeared that the newly seated radicals sought to dismantle the Institute. Even Smith, normally optimistic, conceded the "unfriendly spirit" of the politicians who "design[ed] to destroy the school."[89] However, in another show of political brilliance, Superintendent Smith managed to talk the legislature down from blighting the Institute, flipping the school's deep debt to

[86] "Cadets and Townspeople in Front of Washington Statue, 1866," VMI Archives Digital Collection.
[87] H.J. Eckenrode, *The Political History of Virginia During the Reconstruction* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins Press, 1904), 52.
[88] William Couper, *One Hundred Years at VMI*, v. 3 (Richmond, Garrett and Massie, 1939), 154.
[89] Ibid.

demonstrate that if the Institute was dismantled, the state would be responsible for paying its debt. Instead, Smith argued, "would it not be wiser to throw every energy into it, that the school might be made an agent to aid the State in this work of restoration."[90] Whether convinced by Smith's zeal or deterred by his financial threats, the committee left the Virginia Military Institute intact and maintained an annual appropriation of $15,000 for the college.[91]

This spectacular victory for VMI against long political odds proved to be a turning point for the Institute. The sanction of an unfriendly state government gave the Institute a buffer of sorts, empowering VMI to pursue their own agendas and interests without worrying about federal threats. Additionally, a steadily increasing enrollment and endowment thanks to the Institute's rising reputation gave the school an additional financial cushion, providing VMI with financial security in case public funding should cease. All and all, this liberation from state dependency launched VMI into a new era, empowering the Institute's leaders to embrace the school's Confederate legacy and lean into a broader base of support throughout the state more fully. Over the next decade, VMI would transform from a struggling local institute into a bastion of Confederate memory, famous (or infamous, depending on who you ask) for its maintenance of Southern culture and honor in the face of Northern incursions and reconstruction.

Period Two: Rebirth, 1868-1873

In the years following the Civil War, the town of Lexington, Virginia became a mecca of Confederate memory. Confederate legends like Stonewall Jackson and the fallen cadets from New Market were buried in the center of the town, transforming the quiet town into a site of pilgrimage for many grieving Virginians. An 1866 article from the *New York Times* captured this

[90] William Couper, *One Hundred Years at VMI*, v. 3 (Richmond, Garrett and Massie, 1939), 154.
[91] "Virginia Military Institute Official Register, 1871," VMI Archives Digital Collection

sense of reverence for the fallen Confederates, describing the attention paid to Jackson's grave by residents and visitors,

> "Almost every inch [of Jackson's grave] from stone to stone bore flowery tribute to the sleeper beneath. Nearly all these flowers were as fresh as if pulled from the stalk but an hour before, and the villagers bear witness that they are renewed almost every day."[92]

In addition to the dead, several living Confederate legends also made their homes in Lexington. Most notably, the retired and newly pardoned General Robert E. Lee arrived in Lexington in 1866 after accepting the presidency of Washington College. Lee's arrival made waves throughout the country, and almost instantly young Southerners, especially young Confederate veterans, flocked to Lexington, filling Washington College and VMI to capacity.[93]

Capitalizing on this attention for themselves, VMI also hired Lee's son and decorated Confederate veteran, George Custis Lee to fill Stonewall Jackson's vacated professorship. In 1867, VMI brought in another Confederate hero, appointing former wartime Virginia governor John Letcher as the president of the VMI Board. Letcher's reputation as a conservative firebrand and outspoken Confederate furthered the appeal of VMI to those who lamented the loss of the Confederacy throughout the South. By 1868, VMI had increased its enrollment five times over, boasting 281 cadets, the second highest enrollment number in school history.[94] With newfound security from the threats of the reconstruction government, VMI began to clarify its post-war identity and bask more confidently in its Confederate past. Reflecting the Institute's new independence from dependency on the state, VMI capitalized on its appeal to disaffected youth throughout the South, opening their doors to cadets from other states for the first time in 1869.

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[92] "Affairs in the South," *The New York Times* (September 10, 1866).
[93] F.N. Boney, "Letcher and Reconstruction in Virginia," *The Mississippi Quarterly*, Vol. 19, No.2 (Spring 1966), 57.
[94] William Couper, *One Hundred Years at VMI*, v. 3 (Richmond, Garrett and Massie, 1939), 196.

Formerly a highly localized and state-based institution, VMI was clearly becoming a *Southern* institution, with between one third and one half of enrolled cadets hailing from other Southern states, mainly Kentucky, North Carolina, and Tennessee, from 1869 on.[95]

As the Institute expanded its reach, its leaders also worked on an institutional level to build an association between VMI and the Lost Cause of the Confederacy. The myth of the Lost Cause was contrived in the years and decades after the Civil War, referring to what historian Rollin Osterweis defines as a "literary expression of the despair of a bitter, defeated people over a lost identity."[96] For white Southerners economically and psychologically devastated by the war, the Lost Cause offered consolation, framing the war as a doomed, but righteous Southern stand in the face of Northern oppression and aggression. Central to this myth were the romanticized archetypal figures from the Old South, including the chivalrous Southern farmer, the pious Southern belle, and, most importantly, the noble Confederate knight.[97] C. Vann Woodward emphasizes the importance of these symbols of the Old South, arguing that the South "set about to celebrate, glorify, and render all but sacrosanct with praise," the relics of slavery and the antebellum South.[98] With its strong connections to Confederate heroes like Jackson, Lee, and the New Market cadets, VMI was perfectly situated to capitalize on this sentiment throughout the South.

As the leader and face of the Virginia Military Institute, Superintendent Smith was essential in espousing the new ideals of the Institute to reorient the school's public image around its connection to the Confederacy. This effort is best encapsulated in his introductory speech at the opening of the 1866 term, in which he endeavors to draw a direct connection between VMI

[95] "Virginia Military Institute Official Record" (VMI Archives Digital Collection, July 1864).
[96] Rollin G. Osterweis, *The Myth of the Lost Cause 1865-1900* (1973).
[97] Ibid.
[98] C. Vann Woodward, *The Burden of Southern History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1960), 181.

and the Confederacy, proclaiming, "The very spot on which we stand today is consecrated to us by the memories of heroes who are living and heroes who have died." [99] Once known to avoid him on campus, Smith spoke of the fallen VMI professor Stonewall Jackson with religious reverence in this speech, referring to him as a "peerless, world-renowned Christian hero," and encouraging the current cadets to form themselves on Jackson's model of the "Christian gentleman." [100] The cadets who died in the Battle of New Market received similar treatment, with five of the ten bodies of the fallen cadets buried on campus, near Jackson's grave, in 1866. The coffins of the cadets were brought to campus with excessive pomp, escorted from Richmond by a procession of cadets and given a lengthy ceremony at the local church.[101] The religious overtones that dominated the memorializations of fallen Confederates can be partly attributed to Superintendent Smith's deep personal religious convictions that frequently bled into his leadership of the Institute. For instance, in an inscription in a cadet's Bible, Smith wrote that the cadet must be a "soldier of the cross," putting on "the whole armor of God" to guard against the "fiery darts of the wicked."[102] However, the close association drawn between Confederate heroes and holy imagery also reflects how individuals like Jackson became larger than life figures in the narrative of the Lost Cause whose myths of greatness eclipsed the historical reality of their lives. No longer hindered by the eccentricities of his character and reality of his presence, Jackson and other Confederate martyrs became moldable images that could be appropriated for various purposes and arguments, their lives edited and exaggerated for their virtues and heroism.

In the post-war years, there was no greater Confederate legend than Robert E. Lee. Despite what was intended to be a quiet academic post at Washington College, Lee's presence in

[99] Francis Smith, "The Inner Life of the V.M.I. Cadet" (V.M.I Board of Visitors, 1866), 3.
[100] Ibid, 12.
[101] William Couper, *One Hundred Years at VMI*, v. 3 (Richmond, Garrett and Massie, 1939), 140.
[102] "The Bomb, 1896. Digital Version of the VMI Yearbook," VMI Archives Digital Collection.

Lexington in addition to Jackson's grave made the town a site of Confederate pilgrimage, attracting thousands of visitors from across the South (Figure 4). After Lee's death in 1870, this attention only expanded, consuming the attention of Lexington and the greater South for several weeks. Although Lee endeavored to live modestly after the war, his image came to represent the ultimate expression of the Lost Cause: the heroic Christian general who, despite his surrender, carried on the hope for the eventual reclamation of an independent South. VMI cadet William Nalle described how, upon hearing of Lee's death, "All business was suspended at once all over the country and town, and all duties, military and academic, suspended at the Institute."[103]

For VMI, Lee's death represented an opportunity to honor the Lost Cause hero while demonstrating the ability of the Institute to inherit the Confederate military legacy. As such, VMI leaders ensured that its cadets were at the front and center of the funeral, with Lee's funeral procession on October 15th passing directly through campus, as the cadets stood at attention, with the flags of the fifteen Southern states hung at half-mast behind them.[104] Additionally, several VMI cadets guarded Lee's corpse the night after the funeral, including Nalle who described it as "a great honor to be allowed to sit up with the remains," with "perfect silence kept the whole night."[105] Lee's funeral represented a symbolic passing of the Confederate torch, with VMI stepping into his place as the bearers of Confederate memory and legacy, demonstrated by their active role in his funeral. Additionally, with Lee's death, VMI no longer had to vie as much for Confederate prestige with other institutions like Washington College. With claims to ownership over the legacy of Jackson, New Market, and now, through the funeral, of Lee, VMI became indelibly, and nearly exclusively, the preeminent Confederate college in the New South.

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[103] "William Nalle Letter, Robert E. Lee Funeral, 1870," VMI Archives Digital Collection.
[104] William Couper, *One Hundred Years at VMI*, v. 3 (Richmond, Garrett and Massie, 1939), 218.
[105] "William Nalle Letter, Robert E. Lee Funeral, 1870," VMI Archives Digital Collection.

Just as their prominence at John Brown's execution had cemented VMI at the forefront of the Confederate battle for secession, VMI's leadership of Lee's funeral signified the Institute's central role in the new battle for Southern memory and Confederate legacy.

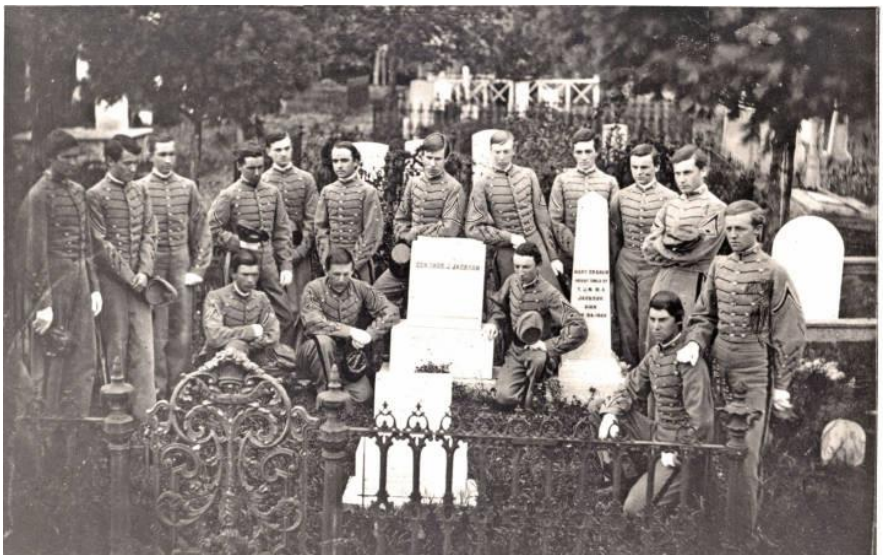

Figure 3. Cadet mourners at Stonewall Jackson's grave.[106]

Thus, Lee's funeral marked another turning point in the trajectory of the Virginia Military Institute. With Virginia readmitted as a state in 1870 and reconstruction formally ended, VMI was officially secured against the incursions of the Northern military government, providing financial and institutional security. By the end of 1871, the Institute's debts had been paid off and the campus rebuilt to pre-war size, with high enrollment to match. In a remarkable swing from $100,000 in debt five years prior, the Board estimated in 1871 that the entire campus and attached property were worth more than $250,000 (over five million dollars today).[107] For the next several years, the Institute entered a relatively quiescent period. Course offerings were expanded, the faculty grew, and enrollment increased at a steady pace. This stability and

[106] "Cadets gathering at grave of Stonewall Jackson, ca. 1868," VMI Archives Digital Collection.
[107] "Virginia Military Institute Official Register, 1871," VMI Archives Digital Collection.

financial security allowed the Institute to focus its symbolic efforts on channeling the Lost Cause into infrastructural manifestations of Confederate memory over the next several years, initiating a period of physical growth that continued to implement and mythologize representations of the Confederate past.

Period Three: Physical Implementation, 1873-1900

From the early 1870's until the first years of the 20th century, the Virginia Military Institute had a turbulent several decades. Wealth and endowment went through highs and lows, subject to the mercy of national economic depressions and fluctuations in broader interest in higher education. Despite ups and downs, the institutional focus on preserving the legacy of the Confederacy and advancing the myth of the Lost Cause remained constant. During the later decades of the 19th century VMI underwent several long-term initiatives to advance these interests. Expanding their campus, constructing new buildings, and adding new monuments and statues, VMI transformed physically and culturally throughout this period. However, similar to endowment and enrollment, these projects went through stops and starts, developed sporadically and unpredictably. Take, for example, the project to add a surgeon's quarters to the Old Hospital on campus. The proper location for the house was identified in 1871; the house was not built until 1903 and furthermore, not even occupied until 1919.[108] This sort of timeline is characteristic of VMI's developments during this period and as such, it is useful to deviate from a meticulous chronological approach and adopt a more thematic analytical framework to understand how VMI evolved and grew during this period. Nevertheless, the initiatives undertaken by the Institute during this period represent a structural articulation of post-war identity of the Institute and a direct manifestation of the ideology of the Lost Cause.

[108] William Couper, *One Hundred Years at VMI*, v. 4 (Richmond, Garrett and Massie, 1939), 227.

In the decades following the defeat of the Confederacy, the physical memorialization of the Confederacy became an essential aspect of the Lost Cause. It is often asserted by historians of the South and of reconstruction, that utter defeat and desolation of the Confederate South led disgruntled Southerners to seek "tangible proof" that their struggles had not been in vain and that white Southern culture persisted.[109] Locations of Confederate victories and the homes of Confederate legends in places like Lexington became essential gathering places and sites of memory, reflected by the numerous monuments, placards, and dedications to Confederates that proliferated throughout the South. These claims to space represented a public assertion of a history of white Southern pride and supremacy in the face of the defeat and humiliation suffered by the Confederacy.

As an institution that saw the worst of Northern destruction and annihilation, physical memorialization became paramount to VMI after the Civil War. Rather than a military school that saw combat only once and did not even fire a shot in defense of their campus, VMI could be reoriented in Southern memory as the home of heroes like Stonewall Jackson and the New Market cadets through rebuilding and monumental representation. Almost immediately after the war concluded, establishing some sort of memorial to Jackson was a high priority for Superintendent Smith. In 1866, Superintendent Smith directed the alumni association to establish the "Jackson Monument Fund," with ex-Governor Letcher as the chairman of the project.[110] Though the committee managed to raise over $5,000 from alumni and benefactors, including a substantial donation from former Confederate President Jefferson Davis, the Panic of 1873

[109] Christopher R. Lawton, "Constructing the Cause, Bridging the Divide: Lee's Tomb at Washington's College." *Southern Cultures* 15, no. 2 (2009), 7.
[110] William Couper, *One Hundred Years at VMI*, v. 4 (Richmond, Garrett and Massie, 1939), 57-58.

forced the Institute to redirect these funds to day to day operations.[111] [112] Unable to honor Jackson themselves, VMI turned to Robert E. Lee, the next available Confederate icon, whose immortalized image was readily available down the road at Washington and Lee College, renamed promptly after Lee's death.

Having established a preliminary claim to Lee's legacy and image during their prominent role in his funeral in 1870, VMI looked to strengthen their connection to Washington and Lee (W&L) in the following years. Cadets could take classes at W&L to supplement their technical education at VMI and students from both schools often participated in each other's clubs and fraternal organizations. As a physical demonstration of this associative effort, one of the few infrastructural projects VMI underwent before the 1880s, besides rebuilding the pre-war campus, was to establish a road from the VMI gates to the Lee Chapel at W&L.[113] The destination was by no means incidental: the Chapel was an essential part of Lee's memorialization in Lexington and was often appropriated by VMI for their own purposes. The Chapel was designed by VMI Professor Thomas Hoomes Williamson in 1868 as a worship space for students as well as Lee's own office. After Lee's death, the Chapel became more of a worship space to Lee himself, with the General buried underneath the Chapel and his office turned into a museum documenting his life. VMI cadets frequently gathered in the Chapel for events and services and were required to stop and salute every time they passed the building.[114]

The Lee's remained a prominent family in Virginia after the General's death and redirected much of their wealth and social clout into public memorializations to the late

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[111] "Annual Report of the Virginia Military Institute, 1873"
[112] The Panic of 1873 was a worldwide depression that lasted into the 1890's striking the American South particularly hard. This was the first truly international depression, and with agricultural prices sinking, many Southern farmers lost their farms and slipped into the ranks of tenant farmers or sharecroppers.
[113] "Preservation Master Plan: The Virginia Military Institute" (2007), 23.
[114] Christopher R. Lawton, "Constructing the Cause, Bridging the Divide: Lee's Tomb at Washington's College." *Southern Cultures* 15, no. 2 (2009), 11.

Confederate icon. In 1875, the pinnacle of this effort, the "Recumbent Figure" statue of Lee was completed, depicting Lee lying on his deathbed, with one hand on his sword, ready, even in death, to answer the call of the Southern States (Figure 5). Demonstrating the importance of memorialization to Southern communities, the inauguration of the statue into the Lee Chapel was designed as an exaggerated reenactment of his funeral, with the statue loaded into a flower covered wagon and paraded through the streets of Lexington through throngs of admiring Virginians. VMI cadets were again at the front of the ceremony and escorted the procession through Richmond to Lexington and gave the statue a thirteen-gun salute before it was led onto the college grounds.[115] This ceremony vividly illustrates how the idealized image of Confederate heroes and their associated could become more revered and celebrated than the men themselves. Before the Civil War, VMI cadets' public duties consisted of demonstrations in service of the state like escorting the Governor, or supervising John Brown's execution. However, as demonstrated by their roles in Lee's funeral and the inauguration of his statue, the Institute's identity had reoriented around the memory of the Confederacy and individual icons, transcending their service to the state for the call of the Lost Cause.

Figure 4. *Recumbent Figure*[116]

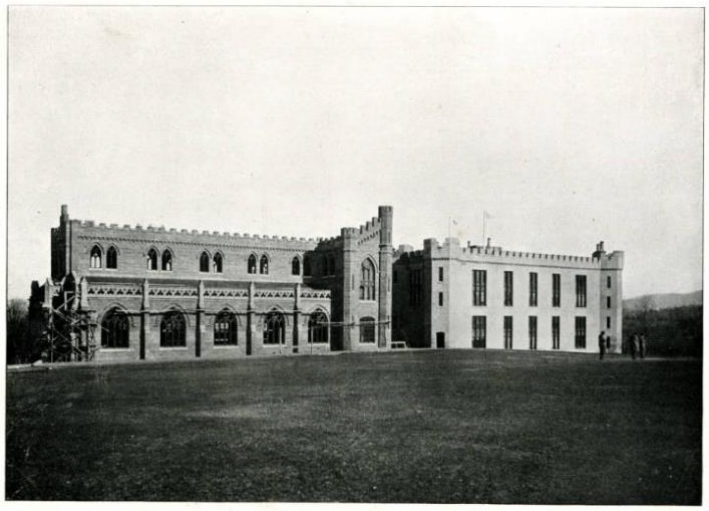
[115] Christopher R. Lawton, "Constructing the Cause, Bridging the Divide: Lee's Tomb at Washington's College." *Southern Cultures* 15, no. 2 (2009), 21.
[116] Edward Valentine, *Recumbent Figure of General R.E. Lee* (Library of Congress, 1875).

Though memorializing Lee became an essential part of the Institute's post-war identity, Lee's image was by no means exclusive to VMI. Throughout the South, memorials to Lee and institutions in his name became ubiquitous after his death, distilling the prestige offered by associating oneself with his memory. In contrast, VMI did have a unique and specific claim to the legacy of Stonewall Jackson. Although he had been an unpopular professor at VMI, cadets and institutional leaders did not hesitate to reframe Jackson's role on campus. In the years after his death, Jackson was transformed from the awkward and surly professor into the "Soldier of the Cross," who was a "humble, conscientious, and useful" man, according to his once adversary, Francis Smith.[117] Superintendent Smith frequently asserted VMI's exclusive claim to Jackson's image, writing, "surely the Virginia Military Institute has a precious inheritance in the memory of General Jackson." Smith also used Jackson's image as a call to action for cadets to dedicate themselves to the Lost Cause, urging them to "imitate his virtues, and here, over his lifeless remains, reverently dedicate your service… in defense of the cause for which he fought and bled, the cause in which he died."[118] This vivid language also demonstrates the importance of Jackson's physical relics on campus, with the proximity of his grave to campus used as a call for intensified devotion to the Institute and the Lost Cause.

Despite the high value placed on physical representations of Confederate past at the Virginia Military Institute, efforts to build statues and monuments lagged throughout the 1870s and early 1880s. During the 1870s, VMI purchased significant acreage to expand campus, building several residential buildings for professors and board members around the main campus, or "post."[119] However, these projects lacked cohesiveness and uniformity, blending into

[117] Francis Smith, *History of the Virginia Military Institute* (Lynchburg, 1912), 142-143.
[118] Ibid.
[119] "Preservation Master Plan: The Virginia Military Institute" (2007), 25.

the pre-existing Lexington landscape. It was not until 1883 that talks were renewed for a significant project to memorialize Jackson and other VMI heroes. At that year's Board of Visitors meeting, the plan for a new building to hold a chapel and event space was discussed, with a large worship space proposed, centered around a statue of Jackson, bearing obvious similarities to Lee Chapel.[120] In classic VMI fashion, the appropriate funds for such a building were not raised until 1893, whereupon construction was further delayed by another financial crisis in the South. Regardless, when the officially named Jackson Memorial Hall was finally completed in 1896, it was a crowning achievement of Confederate pride and memory. The enormous building exceeded original plans, containing a library, classrooms, and a large gathering space (Figure 6). The building was decked out with Confederate memorabilia, with the main floor dominated by a statue of Lee, surrounded by portraits of Jackson and other Confederates (Figure 7). Additionally, as a symbolic sign of the Institute's full recovery from Hunter's Raid, Jackson Memorial Hall also contained a new library whose catalog exceeded the prewar collection.[121]



JACKSON MEMORIAL HALL.

[120] William Couper, *One Hundred Years at VMI*, v. 4 (Richmond, Garrett and Massie, 1939), 57-58.
[121] Ibid, 60.

Figure 5. Jackson Memorial Hall exterior.[122]

Though it would later be demolished in 1916 only 20 years after its completion, to be replaced with a more symmetrical and cohesive design, at the time, the Jackson Memorial Hall symbolized the gloriously renewed and rebuilt Virginia Military Institute. The gala to celebrate the completion of the building in 1897 attracted admirers throughout the South, with a keynote address by Virginia Senator John W. Daniel, an infamous racist and proponent of the Lost Cause ideology, proclaimed as "the world's greatest orator" by admiring cadets.[123] The Hall was styled as a space for "hero-worship" that brought together all the themes of VMI's post-war development: physical reconstruction and growth, honoring institutional memory and legacy, and ideological assertion.[124] It served as a visual reminder to cadets of the legacy that they were responsible for carrying on and living up to and as a physical declaration of Confederate pride and celebration onto the Southern landscape. Overall, it marked the end of years of institutional instability and uncertainty, demonstrating the financial resources of the Institute and its capacity to assert a proud claim to its history, previously shrouded in shame and humiliation.

[122] "Construction of Old Jackson Memorial Hall, Barracks extension, 1896," VMI Archives Digital Collection.
[123] "The Bomb, 1897," VMI Archives Digital Collection, 39.
[124] Ibid.

Figure 6. Jackson Memorial Hall main floor.[125]

Though the transformation of VMI's campus throughout the later decades of the nineteenth century by its institutional leaders left the most enduring impact on the school and landscape, VMI cadets also engaged in many smaller scale activities aimed at amplifying the Lost Cause during this period. The activities of cadets during the postwar period up through World War I are often minimized in many institutional histories of VMI because cadets did not engage in any high-profile combat activities and are often overshadowed by their Confederate predecessors. However, although these decades were relatively quiet for the corps of cadets, there is no question that they acutely felt the weight of VMI's history and strove in many ways to fulfill the Confederate legacy they had inherited. While administrators sought to leave their physical mark on the landscape, cadets played out Confederate culture on a daily basis, serving as important foot soldiers in the white reclamation of the South and the perpetuation of the Lost Cause. For many of the young men who entered VMI during the post-war period, this was achieved through their engagement with fraternity life.

College fraternities first emerged in the South in Virginia colleges immediately after the close of the Civil War. Fraternities were founded as non-academic societies where students could freely assemble to discuss topics like philosophy, politics, and current events without the observation or censorship by school officials. Drawing on the pre-war popularity of debate clubs and intellectual societies, fraternities flourished at VMI. However, in contrast to the school run antebellum groups, Southern fraternities were typically founded by young, disgruntled Confederate veterans who feared the loss of the "culture of the Old South" and the intellectual heritage of the Southern aristocracy (read: white supremacy).[126] At VMI, New Market veterans

[125] "Library interior as it looked from 1896-1907; located in Barracks," VMI Archives Digital Collection.
[126] Freeman Hansford Hart, *The History of Pi Kappa Alpha* (Pi Kappa Alpha Fraternity: 1953).

founded Alpha Tau Omega in 1865, Kappa Alpha Beta in 1868, and Sigma Nu in 1869.[127] Fraternities also thrived at Washington and Lee, most notably Kappa Alpha, founded by student admirers of Robert E. Lee. Kappa Alpha positioned itself as the purest embodiment of the Lost Cause, describing its founding mission in an internal pamphlet as, "Southern in its loves, it took Jackson and Lee as its favorite types of the perfect knight."[128] KA was also one of the most explicitly racist fraternities, choosing the "KA" insignia as a reference to Kuklos Adelphone, an antebellum fraternity whose name and practices served as the inspiration for the Ku Klux Klan.[129] Indeed, many of its members would go on to become active members of the KKK. Many VMI cadets joined the Kappa Alpha Beta branch on campus as well as other fraternities at VMI and Washington and Lee.

With the abundance of fraternal organizations in Lexington, competitions between groups for membership became fierce, especially in years of low enrollment. In addition to the divisiveness on campus, fraternities were known for hazing activities that caused a ruckus for Lexingtonians, leading the VMI board to ban campus fraternities in 1885.[130] Nevertheless, VMI cadets joined Washington and Lee fraternities in substantial numbers and continued to be actively involved in the groups' social and political activities. Fraternities embraced the more extreme aspects of the Lost Cause ideology, putting the rhetoric of institutional leaders into action throughout the South. With many students coming from upper class Southern families who fought for and/or led the Confederacy, the fraternity members saw the Confederate cause as their rightful inheritance and imagined themselves as the last men standing between the South

[127] William Couper, *One Hundred Years at VMI*, v. 4 (Richmond, Garrett and Massie, 1939), 227-228
[128] William Kavanaugh Doty, Samuel Zenas Ammen and the Kappa Alpha Order (1922).
[129] Taulby Edmundson, "The Campus Confederate Legacy We're Not Talking About," *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (July 8, 2020).
[130] William Couper, *One Hundred Years at VMI*, v. 4 (Richmond, Garrett and Massie, 1939), 247.

and Northern tyranny and corruption. Pi Kappa Alpha, founded by The University of Virginia and VMI students in 1868 summarizes this sentiment in their self-written history, arguing that the college students of the South "felt the humiliation and uncertainty" of the Civil War and deemed it their "sacred obligation to preserve the best of [the] heritage of the Old South.[131] Fraternities represented an intentional effort to consolidate and protect white Southern privilege and culture against the turning tides of national politics.

Key to the appeal of fraternities was the opportunity to bond and connect across Southern colleges. During the 1870s and 80s, beta, gamma, delta, and epsilon chapters of each fraternity spread across the South, creating an imagined community of brothers and a bastion for Lost Cause proponents and white supremacists.[132] VMI cadets, who, before the war were bred to be exclusively loyal to their school and state, now claimed allegiance to brotherhoods not confined by the Institute's walls. In addition to brothers across different Southern universities, fraternity members also associated with other Southern institutions dedicated to the Lost Cause and upholding the power structures of the Old South. Perhaps most infamously, the Kappa Alpha Order, which claimed many VMI cadets as brothers, was closely associated with the KKK during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. KA members frequently referred to themselves as being part of the "Klan" and declared in their internal journal that, "The actions and the membership of the Klan are shrouded in mystery. . . But its members wore upon their breast the circled cross of the Kappa Alpha Order."[133] Because of the anonymity of the Klan, it is difficult to discern the level of engagement of VMI cadets specifically. However, it is well established

[131] Freeman Hansford Hart, *The History of Pi Kappa Alpha* (Pi Kappa Alpha Fraternity: 1953), 4.
[132] Nicholas L. Syrett, *The Company He Keeps: A History of White College Fraternities* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2009), 82.
[133] Taulby Edmundson, "The Campus Confederate Legacy We're Not Talking About," *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (July 8, 2020).

that VMI cadets were highly active in many fraternities in Virginia, often credited as founders and key members of the groups. For much of the late nineteenth century, despite the on-campus ban, VMI cadets continued to shape and engage with fraternity culture, forging their own expression of the sentiments of the Lost Cause and white supremacy.

Figure 7. An illustration of a Kappa Alpha Knight in the 1885 VMI yearbook planting a KA flag on the imagined ruins of the Civil War. The cross insignia bears resemblance to the insignia adopted by the KKK in later years.[134]

The engagement of cadets in fraternal life demonstrates the top to bottom adoption and perpetuation of Lost Cause culture, imagery, and activity at the Virginia Military Institute. While donors and administrators labored to erect monuments and buildings to Confederate heroes, cadets fashioned themselves in the image of their heroes of the Old South, tasking themselves with carrying on their legacy into the New South. Thus, by the end of the nineteenth century,

[134] "The Bomb, 1885. Digital Version of the VMI Yearbook," VMI Archives Digital Collection, 60.

VMI was rebuilt, physically and metaphorically, as a Lost Cause institution, known throughout the country as a holdover of the Old South, and making the school into a living and breathing embodiment of the Confederacy. By the end of the nineteenth century, the Virginia Military Institute had transformed from a highly localized technical institute into a booming college that attracted students from throughout the South. Additionally, VMI claimed a new allegiance, no longer answerable to the state, rather the larger community of the Lost Cause and the heritage and perpetuation of Confederate culture and history. This transformation reached all levels of the Institute, from the administration to the bricks and mortar, and the culture of the corps of cadets. Entering a new century, VMI carried with it the legacy of a military force forty years defeated, and the hopes of white Southerners for the reclamation of a society and way of life buried in the rubble of history.

Conclusion

For all this analysis of the Confederacy and the Lost Cause at VMI, there is a notable element missing throughout this thesis. African Americans, the very population enslaved in the Old South and repressed in the New South, are conspicuously absent from this history and from the larger VMI archives. After all, much of the institutional rebuilding of the Institute was structured around an ideology that strove to keep Black people in marginalized positions, ostracized from arenas of wealth and power, making their exclusion particularly troublesome. One must dig deep into the archives at the Virginia Military Institute to find any mentions of enslaved people or African Americans. Some of the only public records concerning Black people on VMI's campus reference Anderson Dandrige, familiarly known as "Old Judge" who was enslaved by the Institution from the 1840's until emancipation. Dandridge is mainly referenced as evidence of VMI's kind treatment of Black people, as Dandridge chose to stay on campus after the war, rather than seizing his freedom when the Union Army marched through Lexington.[135] Furthermore, although Superintendent Smith was a known slaveholder, holding nine slaves on the eve of the Civil War, the VMI archives include only one mention of Robert Price, or "Old Bob," who is recorded as Smith's "servant" in the archive. Similarly to Dandridge, Price demonstrated his loyalty to VMI by burying Smith's personal papers and valuables before they could be seized during Hunter's Raid.[136]

The erasure of Black Southerners and slavery from the archive and historical records is not without parallel historical precedent. After the Civil War, citizens in Lexington and the larger Rockbridge County made a concerted and violent effort to remove free Black people from the area. Black people within the region were rounded up and expelled to the countryside. Those

[135] "Death of Old Judge," VMI Archives Digital Collection (1871).
[136] "Robert Price ("Old Bob"), ca. 1875," VMI Archives Photograph Collection.

who remained were policed by local authorities for "idleness" and sent back to work on farms if they appeared unoccupied.[137] General Schofield, commander of the then Military District 1, resisted sending arms to Lexington because he feared that, "the freedmen's very lives are unsafe and they cannot get justice or protection."[138] At VMI, Superintendent Smith publicly expressed support for Black resettlement in Africa and opposed personal liberty laws for Black Southerners.[139] Thus, for white Lexingtonians, if Black people could not be completely erased from their landscape, they were candidates for further forced labor or violent expulsion. After the first few years of Reconstruction, Black people seldom appear in the personal recollections of VMI cadets and officials and official documents of the Institute.

The banishment of Black Virginians from both the historical archive and physical landscape at VMI illustrates an interesting ideological nuance in the analysis of VMI as a Lost Cause institution. At its most basic form, the Lost Cause ideology is centered around the reassertion of Southern white supremacy in the face of the depredation of slavery, which had previously constituted the core of white power and prestige. As C. Vann Woodward eloquently explains, as Southerner's defenses crumbled during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the South began to "substitute myths about the past," resurrecting images like the pious Southern belle and chivalrous Christian gentleman to prove the righteousness of their previous way of life.[140] The Lost Cause ideology was being formulated during a political climate in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century that increasingly condemned slavery as a moral stain on the South's legacy. This perceived attack led many white Southerners to grow

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[137] Robert J. Driver Jr., *Lexington and Rockbridge County in the Civil War* (Lynchburg, H.E. Howard Inc., 1989), 100.
[138] William Couper, *One Hundred Years at VMI*, v. 3 (Richmond, Garrett and Massie, 1939), 146.
[139] "Francis H. Smith Official Correspondence. Secession Crisis Letters, 1860-1861," VMI Archive Digital Collection, 3.
[140] C. Vann Woodward, *The Burden of Southern History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1960), 12.

increasingly hostile to the outside world and fiercely protective of their history and way of life, despite its increasing irrelevance as time passed.

The Virginia Military Institute perfectly encapsulates this pattern. With their campus destroyed, deprived of state funding, and denied institutional legitimacy in the years following the Civil War, VMI closed ranks, clinging to myths of military heroism and achievement. Rather than confront the ugly history of slavery and racial oppression that many of its leaders and alumni were invested in, VMI leaders chose to scrub it altogether, swapping it for a history of martyred cadets and professors who fought heroically to protect their home against an ignoble enemy. In order to maintain this myth and guard it from the full truth of the system that VMI fought to defend, the Institute had to erase and expel any history that challenged their narrative. As the years and decades passed with buildings and monuments erected for the school's Confederate heroes and traditions centered around preserving VMI's Confederate legacy, the Institute became increasingly enmeshed and isolated in this myth even as the world around them moved on and the Old South faded into history.

As a result of this legacy of seclusion from the outside world and insulation from the truths of history, historians of VMI and other Lost Cause institutions encounter a considerable dissonance and contradiction as fortifications of myth and legend begin to fail. For instance, as the political landscape of the country began to change during the Civil Rights Movement, VMI was mandated to desegregate and admit Black cadets; yet still forced them to reenact battles as Confederates and salute the statues of those who may have enslaved their predecessors. As the country changed, VMI's firm devotion to its Confederate history prevented them from adapting with changing social contexts, creating confusion and contradiction as the outside world inevitably seeped in.

This history of an entrenchment in Confederate mythology helps explain why VMI has become the bubble that it is today, where professors boast about their affiliation with the KKK and cadets feel entitled to threaten to lynch their peers. Through the built landscape of their campus, school traditions, and general culture, VMI has created a campus of Confederate delusion, where an alternate history of white Southern pride and heroism is reinforced at almost every turn. The process of creating this environment was by no means uniform or coherent, propelled by a variety of actors, from the politicking Francis Smith to zealous fraternity brothers, and reverent local admirers of Confederate generals. Nevertheless, this history has contributed to a modern institutional climate where cadets have license to behave in the model of their revered forefathers, tormenting racial minorities and flaunting their entitlement, shielded by an institution that celebrates the Confederacy and enshrines slaveholders.

Even so, in recent years, outside pressures to modernize and crack the protective shell of the Confederacy have finally penetrated VMI's walls. In 2020, dismayed by testimony of Black cadets and alumni from VMI, state leaders initiated a review of VMI's culture, writing that the school's values of "honor, sacrifice, dignity and service do not extend to all students."[141] In the wake of this investigation, VMI's Superintendent General J.H. Binford Peay III resigned and later that year, the school began the process of moving its statue of Stonewall Jackson off campus claiming that, "VMI does not define itself by this statue and that is why the move is appropriate."[142] In 2021, Retired Maj. General Cedric Wins was inaugurated as VMI's first Black superintendent, capping off a transformative two years.

[141] Eric Levenson, "Virginia Military Institute superintendent resigns after allegations of school's racist culture," *CNN* (October 26, 2020).
[142] "VMI Begins to Relocate the Stonewall Jackson Statue," Virginia Military Institute (December 7, 2020)

The history of VMI vividly demonstrates that whom an institution chooses to memorialize and claims as its heroes and leaders is an integral part of how it constructs its identity and imagines its past. Therefore, these recent efforts to distance the Institute from the Confederacy by relocating statues and restructuring the administration are significant steps to unraveling the long history of Confederate worship and racism at VMI. They should not be brushed off as superficial but recognized as signals of legitimate progress and cultural change. Even so, as the first several years of reconstruction demonstrate, a culture of racial exclusion and white supremacy can exist independent of such cultural signifiers and symbols. VMI did not build an official memorialization to any of its Confederate heroes until the 1890s and yet well before then the strength of the Lost Cause had already been firmly established at the Institution. VMI's isolation from the outside world was by no means a systematic or charted plan. It evolved steadily over many decades and was perpetrated by a variety of actors, becoming increasingly impregnable as the outside world moved farther away from the school's manufactured reality. As a result of this slow and communal cultural development, the roots of Confederate culture run deep at VMI, and must be interrogated on many levels in order to be adequately addressed and reformed.

If the preponderance of Confederate monuments and memorializations throughout the South proves anything, the adoption of the Lost Cause ideology was not exclusive to the Virginia Military Institute.[143] Throughout the South, many white Southerners have clung to a defeated, racist cause, motivated by the hope for the redemption of the privilege and power that they believed was unjustly lost. This ideology has permeated nearly every level of Southern society, from the actions of political leaders to the construction of public space, and educational

[143] In 2019, the Southern Poverty Law Center identified over 1,700 Confederate symbols throughout the American South.

curriculums in primary school and colleges. This case study of the Virginia Military Institute demonstrates how this pernicious culture took hold of Southern institutions, identifiable almost immediately after the Civil War and picking up speed as the South regained wealth, prestige, and political legitimacy. Institutions like VMI engaged in a wholesale adoption of this mentality, shaping their entire culture around the memory of the Confederacy, at first as a way of reckoning with the destruction of their landscape, but later as a concerted and intentional strategy to reshape the past and present in their favor. Understanding the many permutations of the Lost Cause and how it has become so intensely rooted in a given institution is essential to understand the vicious effects of this legacy on modern American society and how we may unroot Confederate and Lost Cause mythology and banish it into the annals of history for a final time.

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