Robert E. Lee & Volunteer Networks to Solve Crime
What Happens Next – 10.3.2021
Allen Guelzo QA

Larry Bernstein:

Let's start out with that critical first decision where Winfield Scott and Abraham Lincoln want to smoke Lee out, to find out which side of the battlefield he's on, and I think you're absolutely right. I mean, he could have stayed neutral. If he really wanted to preserve the family estate by obviously joining the Confederacy in the way he did, he put that at risk. Why did Lincoln want to put a Virginian as head of the US army? Was that a serious offer? And second, why didn't he just stay neutral? Why did he have to take command of the Confederate Army? Why didn't he just say, "I'm on both sides of this. I'm staying out. I'm neutral?"

Allen Guelzo:

Well, understand that Lincoln, from the time that he's elected in November 1860, until he is inaugurated on the 4th of March 1861, Lincoln is dealing with a crisis over which he doesn't have a whole lot of control. The Southern States are seceding from the Union. Seven of the Southern States, the Gulf States had seceded from the Union to form this new entity, the Confederate States of America. And yet all through the speeches he gives from the time that he's elected until the time he's inaugurated, he keeps downplaying it. This is a phony crisis. This is a crisis which even gotten up by a lot of hot heads. When I become President, we're going to sit down, we're going to reconstruct things and there's going to be peace again and the entire nation will move forward.

And I don't think he was talking simply for effect there. I think he really believed that all of the conversations about secession had really been contrived by a lot of hot heads who would soon enough run out of gas, and the sober people would, once again, regain control, discussion would take place and a peaceful city situation and resolution would be achieved. To do this, to show his own good faith as President of the United States, Lincoln goes out of his way to make offers to southerners to join his Cabinet. Especially he makes a very strong offer to John A. Gilmer, a North Carolinian, to join his Cabinet. And he feels out other people who are either border state people, or who are southerners, about participating in the government. He wants to show he's trying to reach out and make a government, or at least a Cabinet, that will include everybody, and therefore all the Southern hotheads really can be undercut by that kind of a decision.

So it's really not a surprise that he would feel inclined to turn to a Virginian, or at least someone who was born in Virginia, for Field Command. That would be another signal. I am not thinking in terms of vindictiveness. I really want to bring southerners back into the nation and here's the proof of it in the purity of my appointment. Why would Lee accept it? Well, there are a number of reasons why Lee would say yes to this invitation. One is he put 30 years in the army. His family were all connected to at first his father, the Federalists, and then the Whig Party.

Federalists and Whigs had always had a very national rather than state or sectional orientation. And yet there were also forces that could push him the other way.

If for instance, he agreed to accept that command and the commands offered to him through Francis Preston Blair, one of the great political operatives in Washington, who is acting to represent Lincoln. If Lee accepts that command of Federal Forces, there's a strong probability that Virginia, which is just seceded from the Union, will occupy Arlington and confiscate it, because our Arlington's built on a bluff on the Potomac River, overlooking the national capital. People in Richmond said, "Put a couple of batteries of artillery up there and we'll have the Lincoln government in the bag." So he's aware that if he makes a wrong move that way, that could be the end of Arlington for his family.

On the other hand, if he agrees, if he resigns from the US army, turns down the offer; if he agrees to talk to the people at Richmond, and if he agrees well, perhaps to remain neutral or even to go to Richmond and accept what's being offered to him, well, there's liable not to be a war, and if there's no war, then Virginia's not going to confiscate Arlington. And if there no war the Union across the Potomac River is not going to confiscate Arlington. And he, there can be in Richmond working hard to promote reconciliation and some kind of peace agreement, which is exactly what people thought was going to happen in the middle of the April 1861.

Even Winfield Scott, the General whom he had served in Mexico and who was kind of a father figure for him, even Winfield Scott predicted that the country might break into two or three Confederacies, but only temporarily. They would come together. They would be a reconstruction of the Union. That, by the way, is the first time that word is used. There'd be a reconstruction of the Union, and there would be Robert E. Lee as one of the principal architects of this reconstructed Union. That seemed to be a perfectly likely and logical scenario. So he goes to Richmond, and in fact, in the month when he is commanding just the Virginia State Forces, all the orders he gives are, "Go on the defensive, stay on the defensive. Don't cross the Potomac river. Don't provoke anything."

When Stonewall Jackson... Who isn't nicknamed Stonewall yet, that won't happen until after the battle known as the First Bull Run, when Stonewall Jackson crosses the Potomac River into Maryland. Lee orders him back to Virginia because he doesn't want any provocation, because he's hoping that peace is actually going to be the result. Well, it doesn't turn out that way. And as I say, step by incremental step, Lee is drawn further and further and further into this secession situation, further and further into the arms of the Confederacy, and he ends up commanding the Army of Northern Virginia as the most famous of the Confederacy's Generals.

Larry Bernstein:

I want to change subjects to strategy for the war itself. My understanding is that when Lincoln first meets with Winfield Scott, Winfield Scott says, "I'm not the man to run this army. I'm too old, I'm too fat." And Lincoln says, "How is this thing going to play out?" And Scott says something like, "The weakness of the Southern river system. Defense is very easy to do because of the technology of the time. But the Southern weakness are these rivers that go in from Tennessee deep into the south. And that should be the way towards victory." And I want to contrast that with how Robert E. Lee thought about strategy from the Confederate side. It

seems that according to your book, what Lee was thinking was in order to persuade the North to give up, the Southern States, the confederates would have to invade the Northern States and cause trouble, suggesting to the people of the North that they should just sue for peace. And hence Robert E. Lee's decision to invade Pennsylvania and go after Gettysburg.

So it's interesting that the first thing you should mention is Jackson's invasion of Maryland because this later would become the core of Robert E. Lee's strategy. How do you think about the strategy for both Lee and for Scott, then later Grant, thinking about how to win this war?

Allen Guelzo:

Well, in some sense both Scott and Lee were right. Scott looking at things from the Union point of view, understood two things about the Union cause and the Union Forces. One is that the Union had vast resources and that over a long period of time those vast resources would eventually be the controlling factor in the outcome of the war. But he also understood that the available military forces, the Army of the United States as it was in 1861, was in no shape whatsoever to undertake any kind of dramatic invasion of the Confederacy. And so the recommendation of Winfield Scott is what's sometimes called the Anaconda Plan. Instead of trying to mount a too hasty attack on the Confederacy, what you do is you secure the external rivers and the external borders of the Confederacy, and then very gradually, very slowly squeeze it to death.

Looked at in the long term that actually was the strategy that did win the war. Lee understood that, but he understood it from looking at it through the other side of the telescope. He understood that the Confederacy could not survive the kind of war that Scott was recommending in the Anaconda Plan. Sooner or later, the superior resources of the North would eventually squeeze the life out of the Confederacy. How do you respond to that? Lee's recommendation was this. The South cannot go what we today would call a 15 round heavyweight bout. If the South is going to win its independence, it's got to score a surprise knockout in the first round. The only way to do that is cross the Potomac, head through Maryland into Pennsylvania, and either have some kind of climactic battle on Pennsylvania soil or else simply occupy time in Pennsylvania.

Have a Confederate army run around Pennsylvania through the summer and the autumn without lead or hindrance and thereby, by either result, show to the Northern people that the Lincoln administration is hopelessly incompetent and the political disenchantment that would emerge from that strategy would force the Lincoln administration to open peace negotiations with the Confederacy. Once you open those negotiations, no one is going back to fighting. And that would result in the independence of the Confederacy. What Lee was looking at was, like Scott, the long game, and in this case, Lee was playing not just a military long game, but he was playing a political long game, because what he planned to do militarily was to take as its target, the political will and resolve of the Northern States. He believed that could be worn away by the kind of strategy that he would perform on Northern soil and especially in Pennsylvania. And the truth is, Larry, it almost worked. He came very close to success that way.

Larry Bernstein:

Yeah, let's go to the Battle of Gettysburg. There's a lot of confusion in war particularly where there's poor communications at that particular point of time. Orders were confused, but still that's part of the game and you got to make do. How do you think about the battle of Gettysburg?

According to what you were just saying, did Lee make the right decision after the loss at Gettysburg to hastily retreat. I know Meade didn't follow him and that was a catastrophe. Or should he have gone somewhere else in Pennsylvania and done what you said, just caused trouble all over Pennsylvania? How do you think about Lee's decisions at Gettysburg and then Lee's decisions after the loss of Gettysburg?

Allen Guelzo:

Lee's overall campaign plan for the summer of 1863 was to get loose in Pennsylvania and either fight that climatic battle, which beforehand he predicted would probably be fought somewhere in the vicinity of Gettysburg, because Gettysburg is this wonderful center where all these roads come together in lower south central Pennsylvania. Either there was going to be a climactic battle like that, which he is confident of winning. I mean, he has just beaten the Army of the Potomac at two major battles at Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville.

This is an army, which is lacking, as far as Lee is able to understand it, is lacking in morale. It's lacking in good leadership and it might well be defeated in a climactic battle. If that happens, then there's nothing that stands in the way of a Confederate army that would move on Washington, Baltimore, Philadelphia, who knows, even New York City. But even if it doesn't fight such a great battle, his presence in Pennsylvania, he's going to depress the political situation so greatly that the Lincoln administration might not recover from it.

Think of it this way. In the fall of 1862, Lincoln issues his preliminary emancipation proclamation. He gets nothing politically for that. His party loses something like 35 seats in the House of Representatives and it loses two key Northern governorships, New York and New Jersey, to anti Lincoln Democrats.

In the fall of 1863, there were two more governor elections up. Pennsylvania and Ohio. If Lee can embarrass the Union cause in the summer of 1863, those elections in Pennsylvania and Ohio will go to anti Lincoln Democrats. Then look at the map, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, that's the center core war of the Union, as it existed in 1863. If the governors of those states fold their arms and say, "We are not cooperating further with this war, because it's obviously going nowhere." There would've been no choice. Lincoln would've had to go to the negotiating table and the result of that would've been nothing to require Confederate independence.

Now, it doesn't turn out that way because Lee loses the Battle of Gettysburg. But bear in mind two things. One is, it was a pretty close run there. Lee came within an ace of success at Gettysburg and the thought of the consequences of a Confederate victory on the third day at Gettysburg are enough to make your eyes roll back. It's a dreadful thought on its own terms.

The other thing is Lee loses so much in the Gettysburg battle that he really doesn't have much choice afterwards but to withdraw back across the Potomac, back into Virginia. But, by the time

we get to the plans for the campaign of 1864, Lee, once again, wants to launch an invasion of the north. And he's only thwarted from doing that by the fact that Ulysses Grant has now taken charge of things in the Eastern theater and Grant launches his own campaign across the Rappahannock River. And that's the over land campaign that will, in the long run, win the war in the east.

Larry Bernstein:

I want to change subjects to the relationship between the army and the President and its civilian government. Samuel Huntington wrote this great book called *The Soldier and the State*, which showed how the US Army has consistently delegated its authority directly to the President and has really never attempted a coup or tried to undermine the civilian government.

And what I thought was interesting was not only was that the case with the federal government, but it also appears to have been the case with the Confederacy as well. I mean, there are times where Robert E. Lee is very negative on Jefferson Davis' actions and decisions, but he, according to your book, seems to be very deferential to the democratic process and delegation authority to the President of the Confederacy.

How do you think about The Soldier and the State as it related to Robert E. Lee's decision making process? And maybe you contrast that with McClellan's bad behavior, his decision, for example, to go to sleep, instead of meeting with the President, when Lincoln is waiting in his home foyer. His decision to run against Lincoln in the 1864 presidential election.

So what are your thoughts on the military's delegation of authority to civilians?

Allen Guelzo:

Well, in large measure, you have that difference of result in Lee and McClellan because of the experiences of Lee and McClellan, which are radically different on that point. Robert E. Lee is the son of a famous revolutionary war general who makes the mistake of getting himself too deeply involved in politics, Federalist politics in Virginia, even in Maryland. Robert E. Lee's father not only loses the governorship of Virginia, because he makes that kind of mistake, but he actually gets beaten within an inch of his life by an anti-Federalist mob in Baltimore. That was one reason why his father simply decamps and leaves for the West Indies.

So, there's exhibit A. If you are a military leader, if you're someone with a military reputation, don't touch the political third rail. It will electrocute you. All right. That's exhibit A, his own father.

Exhibit B. His first surrogate father, which was the man who was the head of the Corps of Engineers when Lee was first commissioned and that was Charles Gratiot. Lee relied a great deal on Charles Gratiot. He looked up to Charles Gratiot a great deal, and Charles Gratiot showered a great deal of attention on Lee. But Charles Gratiot made the mistake of running afoul of Andrew Jackson's administration and Jackson, and his successor, Martin Van Buren, punished Gratiot for it. And Gratiot found himself dismissed from the army, disgraced. He actually ends his career as a mere clerk in the federal land office. What a humiliation.

And then exhibit C is Winfield Scott. Despite Winfield Scott's great campaign from Veracruz to Mexico City in 1847, nevertheless, even Winfield Scott runs afoul of the jealousy of President

James Knox Polk. And Scott himself is made to suffer for it, not as severely as Gratiot, but he's made to suffer for it.

And these three exhibits taken together are a constant lesson to Robert E. Lee. No military man should ever put his foot in the political river, because if you do, it will wash you away. And he has his dad, and Charles Gratiot and Winfield Scott showing that.

When Lee becomes the principal General of the Confederacy, he is almost alarmingly deferential to Jefferson Davis, even when he believes that Davis and the Confederate Congress are screwing things up royally. And I think the reason he is not going to go after Jefferson Davis is he has seen what happens to soldiers like his father, like Gratiot, like Scott. He has seen what happens to soldiers who involve themselves politically.

Contrast that with George McClellan. George McClellan's born with a silver spoon in his mouth. He graduates from West Point, amid the praise and applause of everyone. Everyone assumes he's going to be a military genius. When he becomes General in Chief of the Union armies, he simply assumes that he knows more than anyone else how a war should be conducted, and that includes Abraham Lincoln.

In fact, the contrast between McClellan, McClellan who's born to this elite Philadelphia medical family, goes to the University of Pennsylvania, goes to West Point. Contrast that with Abraham Lincoln. This country lawyer from Illinois who speaks in this upper border accent. McClellan looked at Lincoln and the only conclusion he could draw from Lincoln was at Lincoln was an ignorant gorilla. In fact, that's the word he uses for Lincoln, the ignorant gorilla.

So his reaction when Lincoln tries to assert control as constitutional Commander in Chief is to say, "What do you know about anything?" It's not helped by the fact that McClellan's politics are oriented in the direction of the Democratic party. He has no sympathy for emancipation, no sympathy for any form of anti-slavery. And when Lincoln takes a step to issue the Emancipation Proclamation, McClellan almost balks at issuing the Proclamation in turn to his army. His political advisors have to tell him, "No, you've got to do this. Otherwise, it would be treason."

Allen Guelzo:

And there are people in his army telling George McClellan, "General, march on Washington. We will follow you." McClellan had come to believe that Lincoln, not Robert E. Lee, was the real problem in the Civil War.

And I think it is safe to say that in that month between the Battle of Antietam and the time when Lincoln finally summons up the determination to dismiss McClellan from his command, in that window of time, we were probably about as close to some kind of military intervention or military coup as we have ever been in American history. Very different reactions, Lee's and McClellan's. And the irony is the reaction that I think we should admire, the reaction I think Huntington admired in his book, is the reaction of Robert E. Lee, rather than the reaction of the Union Commander, George Britain McClellan.

Larry Bernstein:

You mentioned Lincoln's delayed tactic of firing the disrespectful McClellan. And I think he was talking with Secretary of War Stanton who was demanding that McClellan be fired. And Lincoln

said something like, "It's easy for you to say to fire the General, but I have the responsibility to decide who should replace him and I don't have that man. And give me the replacement and I'm happy to fire him. But until such time, I'm boxed."

How do you think about the problems Lincoln faced and not only with McClellan, but his first few generals who were terrible?

Why did it take Lincoln so long to find someone like Grant and Sherman to run this war?

Allen Guelzo:

The wonder is he ever did find Grant and Sherman to run everything. Understand, the pre-war United States Army was really much more than a frontier constabulary. At the outbreak of the Civil War, the United States Army was exactly 16,000 men and officers. It was not a formidable fighting force. And it had never been designed that way. The officers who go to West Point are put through a course of study to make them engineers, not to make them combat leaders or great strategic thinkers. 90% of the time, a cadet with a stint at West Point, would've been in studies related to engineering. In other words, the construction of fortifications.

So when the Civil War breaks out, it presents Lincoln, it presents the nation with a military necessity that no one has ever really planned for. And there's no one who really knows what to do. I mean, it's a terrible thing to admit because the American Civil War is our great story. It is our great *Iliad*. Yet the truth of the matter is that when we found ourselves involved in this Civil War, we had no one to put in charge of it but amateurs. Amateurs who barely knew what they were doing.

And so, one after another, these generals are put up and one after another and then gets knocked down. And this is true on both sides. After a while, you scratch your head and you think, wait a minute, doesn't anybody here know, as Casey Stengel once said, "How to play this game?" And it really looked like the people did not. Because in large measure, the United States Army had never been designed to do that.

So you have an entire military culture, which is having to retool itself on the job under pressure. And the marvel is that it actually does find some genuine natural talents, like Ulysses Grant, like William Tecumseh Sherman. I must add, even a natural military talent like Robert E. Lee. Finding them was almost accidental because the people who would ordinarily have advanced into positions of leadership were by and large people who were almost totally unfitted for it.

Larry Bernstein:

I mean, the class size of West Point is ridiculously small. You mentioned in your book, I think, that Lee was in a class of 46 cadets.

Allen Guelzo:

Yeah.

Larry Bernstein:

And yet, despite the class size being so small, you get Lee, you get Grant, you get Johnston. There were a ... All these guys were in this class. It's just ... They must have known each other so well. I just find it mind bogging how small the class size is. It's like one of these New York City private schools.

Allen Guelzo:

Well, there was an advantage, at least in that. I mean, Lee and Johnston were both classmates at West Point. Grant and Sherman almost overlap. But a lot of the West Pointers who become Generals in the Civil War, yes, they did know each other as cadets. And sometimes, that knowledge came in handy.

To give you an example. When John Bell Hood becomes Commander of the Army of Tennessee in 1864, William Tecumseh Sherman is a little puzzled by this. And he asks among his own, "Does any of you know John Bell Hood?" And one of them pops up and says, "Oh, yeah. I used to play poker with him. This is a man who would bet $1,000 dollars with hardly a pair in his hands." And that told Sherman everything he needed to know about Hood, that Hood would launch one reckless attack after another. And all that Sherman had to do was to let Hood bleed his army to death.

Yeah. They knew each other that way and sometimes that knowledge could come in very handy. Not the kind of thing, by the way, that anybody was teaching in one of those classrooms at West Point. But still, it's practical. And as I say, sometimes very useful knowledge.

Larry Bernstein:

Why did you decide to write a book on Robert E. Lee and now? And why is his historical reputation, maybe in the decades after the war and maybe ending a couple decades ago, he was a master general. And why does it appear that his historical reputation is in decline?

Allen Guelzo:

Well, I decided to write a book about Robert E. Lee after I'd finished my book Gettysburg, The Last Invasion, in 2013. And there were really two things operative in my mind. Up to this point, I had written almost exclusively in what you could call Union subjects. I'm a Yankee from Yankee land. I'm from Philadelphia. And I've never been the sort who looked at the lost cause with anything but skepticism and certainly never was inclined to put a halo around the head of Robert E. Lee. But having written so much about Abraham Lincoln in particular and about the Union cause in general, I was really intrigued by the possibility of looking at the Civil War through the other end of the telescope. What did this war look like from the Confederate point of view, and what better set of eyes to look at it through than those of Robert E. Lee. The other question that intrigued me this way was a little bit more, shall we say, speculative. That is, how do you write the biography of someone who commits treason? I don't use that word carelessly, I don't throw that around just to be nasty and to try to say something snarky about Robert E. Lee and thus offend everybody living below them. Mason-Dixon line, I'm looking at this constitutionally, I'm looking at this legally.

Robert E. Lee took an oath upon his commissioning in 1829 to defend the United States and to obey the orders of the President of the United States. There is an oath today that we take. My son, who is a serving officer in the United States Army, took this oath. My father, who was an officer, took the oath. I took the oath when I became a member of the National Council of the Humanities. What did it say? It said you'll preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, domestic and foreign. I took that oath seriously, so did my father, so does my son.

For someone to turn his back on that was to raise his hand against everything that I held dear. I've often said to people that if I had been a soldier in 1861 to 1865, and if on some battlefield, Robert E. Lee had galloped into my gun sights, I would have pulled the trigger.

For me, the question then becomes how do you write what I've called difficult biography? When you write a biography of someone like Abraham Lincoln, you can write about someone that you can unreservedly admire. You can look at Lincoln and say, "Here is a great man and I admire him for being a great man," but how do you write the biography of someone who committed treason? How do you write the biography of someone who made big mistakes? I mean, for instance, how do you write a biography of Neville Chamberlain? I mean, Neville Chamberlain, why didn't Neville Chamberlain see Adolph Hitler for what he was? Was he blind? No. You ask the question and what you're confronted with is what I'm calling difficult biography.

How would you write the biography of someone who has done that? How would you write a difficult biography? That's what I really plunged into. Now, mind you, that was in 2013, 2014, when Robert E. Lee was still by and large simply a Confederate general out of the history of the Civil War. All that began to change dramatically after Charlottesville in 2017, and certainly began to change again after 2020. Robert E. Lee's reputation sank like a stone.

Certainly one thing which involved Lee and the sinking of Lee's reputation was that the Charlottesville riot took place around a statue, an equestrian statue of Robert E. Lee, but the larger question was what do statues of Robert E. Lee mean and what did they mean when they were erected? Were these monuments to white supremacy? If so, then that raises the whole question, why do we have these monuments on the landscape? Certainly, speaking as a Yankee, there is a certain puzzlement in my mind. Why would anyone even think about putting up a monument to Robert E. Lee? I mean, if someone came to me today and said, "We would like to know if you would sign onto a petition endorsing a new statue of Robert E. Lee," I would tell them, as politely as I could, to get lost.

When I look at things like that, when look at things like the Confederate flag, these are things which I'm manifestly unhappy with, and that has greatly complicated the process of writing this book. If this started out as difficult biography, it got more difficult as time went by, and yet you can't ignore difficult biography. Plutarch and Suetonius wrote about difficult biographical subjects. Plutarch has to write about Caesar and Alexander, he's got to write about Demosthenes and Cicero. There are aspects of the characters of those classical figures which were not pleasant. Suetonius has to write about Tiberius Caesar, and Tiberius was a monster of the first order.

We can't shrink from writing difficult biography, or there simply will be large blank gaps in our understanding, but writing difficult biography is a real challenge. It's a species of biographical writing which requires you to do something which is difficult for a biographer to do, and that is to exercise the biographer's empathy, because that's what a biographer needs, to understand the subject, without that tipping over into a wretched kind of sympathy. You want to find that middle path, the middle path of empathy. You don't fall off one side into rank sympathy. That was for me, as a historian and as a writer, and in large measure, those are the reasons why I stuck with writing this book and have brought it to publication today.

Larry Bernstein:

It's strange how the view of the Confederacy has changed over time, maybe particularly from the Southern perspective. Lee is lionized by Southern historians almost immediately after the war and almost to the present day, but not only just historians, you've got organizations like the United Daughters of the Confederacy, even the weekend warriors who do reenactments of the Civil War seem to not worry about these issues, but focus on other aspects of the Confederacy, which might also bring in the concepts of the theory of a lost cause.

I took my son to go visit UT Austin as a potential place to go to college, and I snuck away and walked around the State Capital building. There was this monument, a statue, to the Lost Cause and it was very similar to some of the ideas that you were mentioning about the North's strategy like a snake. The monument's plaque said, "The South was just trying to fight for the Constitution and the fight was unfair. There was two odd million Northerners against 600,000 Confederates and of course we lost, but we gave everything we had." Lee is part of that lost cause concept of this noble soldier making the best out of bad options.

How do you think about these three aspects? One is why was he lionized for so long, how did it play into the thesis of the Lost Cause, and what is driving the ideas of Southern history?

Allen Guelzo:

Well, let me try to answer them in this order. First of all, Lee himself did not have direct involvement with the development of the Lost Cause myth. The Lost Cause began very early as an idea. There's a book published by Edward Pollard as early as 1866 called The Lost Cause and Pollard articulates a number of the ideas that you've just mentioned. Lee did not show a whole lot in the way of enthusiasm for that. Lee actively discouraged putting up monuments. Lee encouraged former Confederate leaders like Jubal Early, even the wife of Jefferson Davis, Varina Davis, to say nothing that would cause dissension and bad feeling between the sections, stay as far away from that as possible.

Lee doesn't attend reunions. In 1869, there was a serious effort made here, Gettysburg, to have a reunion of the major leaders of the Army of the Potomac and the Army of Northern Virginia. The idea was they were going to go over the battlefield and talk over the various perspectives from each side. Lee refused to come. His answer simply was, "I really don't say that this is going to promote healthy national feeling. We have to move beyond the war and there are greater challenges lying before us."

Lee does not lend much encouragement to the makers of the lost cause, he leant even less encouragement to forms of Southern resistance after the war. He gives no countenance at all to the Ku Klux Klan and he cooperates as far as he believes he's obliged to cooperate with Union reconstruction forces. He doesn't like cooperating with them, well, they're an occupation forces, there's a certain degree in which you can understand that, but at the same time, he also is not actively out there ginning up resistance to occupation either to reconstruction.

Lee does not have a large role to play in the creating of the Lost Cause. He becomes a feature of the Lost Cause really only after his death in 1870. It's after his death that people like Jubal Early, especially in Jubal's famous speech in 1872 in Lexington, Virginia, where he picks up the banner of Robert E. Lee and basically enlists Lee posthumously in the ranks of the Lost Cause.

I think that the Lost Cause for a long time served a number of goals. One goal was white supremacy, there was no question. The Lost Cause was a way of saying white people are still in charge here in the South and just because we got beaten to a pulp on the battlefield doesn't mean that we're not still in charge. That's one meaning of the Lost Cause. Another meaning of the Lost Cause is how do you salvage some kind of dignity out of defeat? I mean, in America, we live by the success ethic. Anyone who is successful is good, anyone who fails is bad. It's like what Vince Lombardi once said, that winning isn't just the most important thing, it's the only thing.

Robert Lee has, I think, the hold he has on people not so much because of the Lost Cause, that's part of it, not so much because even of Southern white supremacist resistance, although that's part of it too, I think the most important segment of what made Lee a compelling figure for generations, even into our own time, was that he pulls off this business of surrender with the most exquisite form of dignity, that he goes to Appomattox, he surrenders his army, he resists the blandishments of officers who wanted to say, "Don't surrender, let's take to the hills. Let's carry on a guerilla warfare for the next 30 years in the Appalachians." He refuses that. His argument is, "We have lost the war. Let's face up to that and honorably surrender this army and take the consequences." The dignity with which he does that was almost like someone who comes to the end of a very bad play, but whose performance has been so good that they give him a standing ovation anyway, even if the play is lousy.

I think that has a lot to do with the compelling image of Robert E. Lee, not just in the South, but in fact across the country. I mean, you don't have to limit yourself just to Southerners to find people who, frankly, admire Robert E. Lee. You can even see this a little bit even in the last five years of Lee's life. Lee, after the surrender to Appomattox, goes off to become the President of Washington College, which is now today Washington and Lee University. It was a very unlikely kind of job for him to take because he did not see himself as an educator and Washington College was almost without a pulse at the end of the war. But within five years, he picks the place up, he dramatically increases the student body, increases the faculty, retools the curriculum in surprisingly progressive directions, and manages to turn into the most unlikely thing of all, and that is a great fundraiser. Where does he do the fundraising most successfully? Among the-

Larry Bernstein:

The North.

Allen Guelzo:

Yes, he gets Northerners sending him money, a quarter of a million dollars, Northern philanthropists like George Peabody in Massachusetts, Cyrus McCormick in Illinois. Robert E. Lee really knew how to shake the apples out of the tree. He would, today, have made a great development officer. He does this because, in large measure, people admire the dignity that he could wrap around defeat. Defeat, that ugly word in the American lexicon.

Larry Bernstein:

Let's expand on that critical meeting in Appomattox for a second and do a historical comparison. When the Japanese surrendered to MacArthur on the USS Missouri.

The Japanese sent a relatively junior guy, no one was willing to go. When the Germans gave up in World War I and World War II, I don't remember who they sent, but it was I think generally someone of very little importance. But here, I mean, the only person more senior than Robert E. Lee would've been Jefferson Davis himself, and there he goes, with an aide, to go visit General Grant.

I think what's amazing was Lee can't believe the good terms he's being offered.

Allen Guelzo:

Yes.

Larry Bernstein:

He's like, "Yeah." It's sort of like that episode of Seinfeld where they offer Kramer coffee for life, "I'll take it."

Allen Guelzo:

Right.

Larry Bernstein:

Grant thinks he's getting away with something as well. Both parties think they're getting a grand bargain.

Allen Guelzo:

Oh yeah.

Larry Bernstein:

Both Jefferson Davis and Stanton and Lincoln were very worried about giving their officers the rights to negotiate the peace.

Allen Guelzo:

True.

Larry Bernstein:

Maybe you could talk a little bit about how that went down and what the political leadership was worried about and why we should glorify the result.

Allen Guelzo:

Well, the funny thing about Appomattox, although funny is probably the wrong word to use, the ironic thing about Appomattox is that both of these leaders, Lee and Grant, come to the Wilmer McLean's parlor at Appomattox courthouse, both of them with an ace up their sleeve that the other does not know about. Robert E. Lee comes to this meeting with his officers beseeching him to turn the Army of Northern Virginia loose. Now, he is not thrilled about that, but at the same time, Robert E. Lee also knows that Ulysses Grant is the general with the reputation as unconditional surrender Grant.

Well, what unconditional surrender means is you're surrendering without conditions and without terms. When you are surrendering the way Lee is surrendering, this is someone who has been conducting the army of a rebellion, not a legitimate government. The United States never recognized the legitimacy of the Confederate government. Abraham Lincoln never uses the term Confederate States of America. He'll always use some circumlocution or he'll say, "The Confederate States so-called." But he'll never even in correspondence recognize the legitimacy of the Confederate government. It's always an insurrection. It's always a rebellion.

Well, what do you do to the soldiers of a rebellion or insurrection when they surrender? If you're an unconditional surrender guy, you can put a lot of people up against a barn wall and shoot them. That's what you do. That's what you do with the rebels and traitors. You could take the army of Northern Virginia and parade it through the streets of Washington or the streets of New York City like some kind of Roman triumph with people throwing garbage at them. That could happen because unconditional surrender means you have no conditions under which you're laying down your weapons.

Lee knows that Grant could do that. The ace that Lee has is if grant is going to be an iron pants about this surrender, if he's going to insist on unconditional surrender, then Lee will go back to his army and he'll fight it out there. He'll tell his soldiers, "Do as you see fit." Grant, on the other hand, Grant's coming to this, apparently he's coming as the great Ulysses Grant, unconditional surrender Grant. He's got the army of the Potomac behind him and they've apparently got their hands around the neck of the Confederates. But what Grant was not telling them was why he turns up at Appomattox courthouse dressed in an old, dirty uniform, and mud splattered boots. I mean, that's a very famous story about Grant. Grant shows up to the surrendered Lees in his dress uniform. Grants just, he's in an ordinary soldier's jacket with the Lieutenant General shoulder straps sewn on.

Why? Was it because Grant was just preternaturally sloppy as a dresser? No. It was because Grant had left his baggage wagons and supply wagons so far to the rear. You see, when Grant captured Richmond, Lee immediately bolts west and Grant immediately bolts after him. He

bolts after him so fast that after a week, Grant is so far ahead of his supply trains. He can't even feed his own army. Grant comes to Appomattox Courthouse, he doesn't even have a dress uniform to wear. He comes to the surrender ceremony knowing that, and this is what he admitted years later to the journalist John Russell Young. If he couldn't have gotten Lee to surrender there, he would have had to have broken off the pursuit because there were so far ahead of their supply lines.

So, Grant knows he has got to make Lee an offer he can't refuse. So he does. And instead of a demand for unconditional surrender, Grant instead proposes with a parole. All of the army of Northern Virginia from Lee on down, parole every one of them. Permit soldiers of the army of Northern Virginia to take, to claim, any mules or horses they want, take them home with them for spring planting. And even on top of that, officers of the army, instead of lining them up and shooting them, officers of Lee's army will be permitted to keep their side arms. That's a very symbolic gesture. But Lee looks at that and it's everything he could desire. They sit down, they trade their copies of their letters and acceptances, and the surrender is done. Each has gotten what they wanted and they've gotten it not quite understanding what the other had as a possible alternative.

It's a remarkable move, but it means that Lee's army dissolves. It does not take to the highways and byways like robbers and pilfers. It dissolves. It goes away and fades back into the civilian context. By the same token, those Confederate soldiers who were able to go home as Grant had specified, without fear of molestation by the federal government provided they observed the terms of the parole. And grant is able to go back to Washington and say the entire army of Northern Virginia had surrendered. With that, that's the backbone of the Confederacy. Once that's gone, you're simply waiting and looking at your watch and waiting for the rest of the Confederacy to fall into your lap. It's a great moment. It's a great moment, but also a moment for real nail-biting behind the scenes.

Larry Bernstein:

What seems bizarre about that story is Grant takes this authority, but it doesn't appear to have checked it with the President. If Lincoln knew he was meeting with him. He could have gotten some sort of guidance. He had conversations with the President. We know that Lincoln later is lenient to the confederates in his second inaugural. Do you think that Grant felt that he was following Lincoln's objectives? That he loosely understood what Lincoln wanted to do and this reflected not only his views, but reflected that of the administration?

Allen Guelzo:

Before Lincoln and Grant parted company at Petersburg, Lincoln told Grant pretty forthrightly, "We have to bring this war to an end and we have to bring it to this war to an end soon. Because we're running out of money. We're not going to be able to pay for much more of this war." Lincoln and Grant understand each other to a remarkable degree. It is a great partnership.

In fact, one of the projects I have in front of me, as something else coming right up on the road, is a project with Glenn LaFantasie, a Grant scholar. Glenn and I are going to sit down together

and we're going to pull into a one volume all of the Grant-Lincoln correspondence in the years between 1862 and 1865. What emerges out of that correspondence and what people will be able to read in this book when we have this published, is a really tremendous partnership between two people who really came to trust each other implicitly. Lincoln tells Grant, "You've got to get the war over with. You got to get Lee to surrender." Lincoln for his part is willing to trust Grant to take that in execution.

After the surrender, Grant comes back to Washington. He sits down at a Cabinet meeting with Lincoln and the other members of the Cabinet. Lincoln never utters a syllable of rebuke to Grant for having obtained these terms. As far as Lincoln is concerned, this was the best possible way things could have been managed. So what Grant does is very much reading the mind of Abraham Lincoln.

The same cannot really be said about Lee and Jefferson Davis. Jefferson Davis was, I mean, the only word I can use is delusional. This war was lost beyond any hope of recall and yet Jefferson Davis was amusing himself with the prospect that we were going to continue. He was going to run away down into the south. Somehow they were going to keep on fighting and, no, Robert E. Lee must not surrender. Lee ignores it.

Finally, by the end of the war, Lee is finally going to do something to politicians he had never done before, and that is, disobey them. He surrenders his army to Grant. If we can be grateful to Robert E. Lee for nothing else, we can at least be grateful for the fact that he did surrender the army intact. In that respect, what he did that point was probably the greatest service he could have done the country.

Larry Bernstein:

We end each session on a note of optimism. Can you speak about teaching the civil war to the next generation of Americans, what should they get out of it? What can we be optimistic about children learning about our country that'll serve us in the future?

Allen Guelzo:

I think three things. First of all, we can learn that the Constitution of the United States survived the severest test that any instrument of government can be put to. We can look back on 1861 to 1865 and see that our Constitution worked under the stress and under the pressure of the greatest cataclysm that this nation had ever experienced. And not only did it work before, but it worked through and it worked after. If it does nothing else, the Civil War should tell us that what we have in our Constitution is a remarkable and durable political document. Not to be thought of or described lightly. A document like that which could endure the Civil War intact, could guide this country during a crisis like that, is a genuinely remarkable piece of political literature, and we should prize it that way.

The second thing I think we could learn from it and teach the students is that at the moment of great crisis, which the Civil War was, the American democracy produced a great leader, and that was Abraham Lincoln. Actually, produced a number of great leaders, but greatest above them all, towering above them wall, Abraham Lincoln. It's often been said, and I'm afraid that even Samuel Huntington was inclined to say it, or at least some of his students were, that the

great flaw of democracy is that it takes the common individual, the common citizen, and makes them the center of attention. Isn't that a big mistake because the common citizen is likely to be a very boring commonplace person? That's supposed to be an argument against democracy.

But when we look at what happened in the Civil War, what we see is that at this moment of life and death trial, they're steps forward almost without any precedent, almost without an expectation. A person who had no particular experience in bureaucracy or executive management or any of those things that we think consultants tell us people are supposed to have, this man who had been a lawyer, who had been a single term Congressman, steps forward and provides us with the greatest and most eloquent leadership we've ever had. If the American people can provide from their ranks that kind of leadership in that kind of crisis, then we have the best argument in favor of democracy that has ever been devised. I offer Abraham Lincoln as the best example and explanation of that.

The third thing is when we look at how this war was conducted. This was a war in which untrained masses of young Americans were thrown together in the most violent and bloody kinds of conflicts. Yet, they stood to it with a firmness and a resolution that takes the breath away. Once again, we're confronted with this conundrum that ordinary people are just supposed to be ordinary. But when we look at the soldiers of the Civil War, and when we look at leaders like Grant, Sherman, Sheridan, these were people who were not walking around before the war with sterling resumes. Grant was clerking in his father's leather goods store in Galena, Illinois when the war broke out. In eight years, he's President of the United States.

Larry Bernstein:

It's unbelievable.

Allen Guelzo:

It really is. It's a greater story even. We think the rise of Abraham Lincoln is a great story. The rise of Ulysses Grant is actually an even greater one. But that kind of military leadership from out of the ranks of the ordinary citizens, it's like nothing that you see except, perhaps, Cincinnatus and his plow in the Roman Republic, walking away from his farm, taking command of the emergency, solving the emergency, and then walking back and picking up with his plow where he left off. Nothing like it since then. That is what we see in our military leadership in the Civil War.

Once again, what we have is a ratification of this idea of democracy that Lincoln gave such eloquent shape to it. Gettysburg in November of 1863. There are wonderful lessons to be learned from the teaching of our American Civil War. I've been teaching them now myself for many decades, and I probably am going to keep on teaching them for as long as I'm able. But it is a great story and it is a story that just never wears out.

Larry Bernstein:

Now, I thank you. That was really an extraordinary session. I was so happy I decided to get you to speak again for Robert E. Lee and I hope to have you again soon. Thank you so much.