

# How the South Won the Civil War

Subtitled: Oligarchy, Democracy, and the Continuing Fight for the Soul of America

Written by Heather Cox Richardson is a history professor at Boston College. She lives in Maine and writes a daily blog called Letters from an American.

She gave us insight into an American history that we never learned about in school. And she was the only white author we read.

So the title - How the South Won the Civil War- seems kind of crazy at first glance. Yes, the Union defeated the Confederacy on the battlefield and the slaves were freed, but the concepts upon which the Confederacy was built endure to this day. Reading this book helped us to understand how that happened.

Richardson explains that the US is built on on a fundamental contradiction or paradox - which is that "all men are created equal" yet the writers of those words owned slaves and thought of women as a lesser being altogether. Our Founding Fathers were adherents of Enlightenment concepts. And although they espoused the the equality of all men they also knew that their personal concept of freedom depended on slavery.

The subtitle of How the South Won the Civil war is Oligarchy, Democracy, and the continuing Fight for the Soul of America.

We learned that slave owners were the oligarchs of their time. They believed that they were better than their slaves. African Americans were deemed "the mudsills of society". The term mudsill comes from the name of the large wooden beams placed on the ground to support the weight of a house. The Church supported this theory, teaching that God has given everyone a place in the hierarchy. Women and African Americans were at the bottom and were subordinate to white men.

Lincoln did not believe in the mudsill theory. He believed in giving resources to the workers at the bottom of society so that they could use their creativity and intelligence to innovate and create and lift up all of society.....which reminds me of what Biden is trying to do now.

This book explained that oligarchy and democracy are not compatible. And it explained how we as a country have stuck to the belief that the white race is superior. Oligarchy and white supremacy are Confederate ideologies and they are alive and well today.

Heather Cox Richardson does a wonderful job of explaining American history after the Civil War. In this era the new oligarchs were mine owners and ranch owners. One interesting idea she elaborated on is how the image of the cowboy was used for political purposes. The popular image of a cowboy was a white man, strong, with no need of government, master of his own destiny. This image of the cowboy was not based in reality, it was an intentionally created image. In actuality, one third of cowboys were men of color. They were often poor, working hard for ranch owners.

More recently we have seen this cowboy symbol used very effectively by the Republican Party with politicians such as Barry Goldwater, Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan and even George W. Bush. These men continued the belief that white men were above all others and that the government should allow the oligarchs to have freedom to run their businesses without

government regulation. They worked to lower taxes on the wealthy. These were Confederate values.

And so some of the underlying concepts of the Confederacy continue to this day. We even saw the Confederate flag in the Capital on Jan 6.

Heather Cox Richardson explains our country's struggle to provide equal opportunity to everyone. She helped our group to understand that the Civil War did not save us from Oligarchy or from the sins of our founders. She opened our eyes to how and why the Old South survived and thrived.

The book served to ground us in our country's history as we learned more about racism and white supremacy in the present.