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REAL TRUE NEWS

I've Been Making Viral Fake News for the Last Six Months. It's Way Too Easy to Dupe the Right on the Internet.

Here's what I learned trapping trending algorithms and the people of Facebook, even when I wasn't really trying to.

Marco Chacon 11.21.16 1:13 AM ET

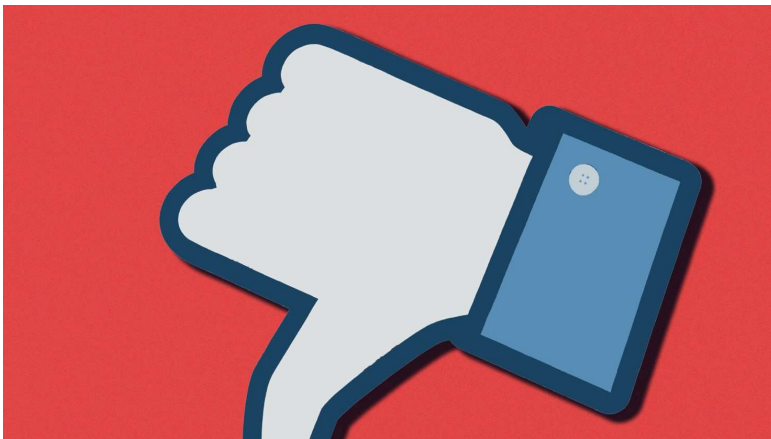


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How a Dem-Controlled House Would Play Hardball With Trump
MATT LASLO



< HOMEPAGE



turning: Hillary sold passport-making machines *directly to ISIS*. Obama won't say the words "Radical Islam" because it would break an Islamic Spell he thinks he is protected by. I did an exposé on the reason the Clintons were immune to prosecution. It was, I wrote on my website RealTrueNews.org, because they were sovereign citizens and therefore immune to the justice system.

It was silly and no one paid much attention to it.

At least that's what I thought.

I didn't know about Before It's News or the ecosystem of YouTube conspiracy theorists when I wrote an "anonymous interview" with someone "inside" 538's headquarters. This interview had a source saying what "everyone knew"—that people paid for polls as a psychological tool and that Nate Silver was in trouble because the "real polls" showed Trump winning in a landslide. This was on Aug. 2 and, at the time, Trump was tanking in the polls prior to the conventions.

By that time I had a stats program up showing my traffic and I saw a huge spike—where was it coming from? Two YouTube videos, watched hundreds of thousands of times. And a vast number of conspiracy sites that copied the various explanations, all of which linked back to my page. Seeing my dialogue and screenshots come out of the mouths of people solemnly reading them was a thrill—but it was also *scary*.

These people believe this.

wouldn't they? Smart, reasonable people got caught up in poll-unskewing in 2012. The mix of political desperation and absolute faith in a liberal media conspiracy was a toxic cocktail that meant *anything* could be a lie—especially if it was good news for liberals.

Never mind the humorous beats, like Nate Silver, frustrated with Trump's dominance was going to throw himself out a window—literally. Never mind that this conversation was absolutely unsourced, that RealTrueNews was run by a guy calling himself, literally, “Max Insider.”

Never mind any of that. Here was proof the polls were faked.

At that point I started creating other characters. I created #NeverEVERHillary, a 20-something young woman who wanted Bernie Sanders to give her a \$100,000-per-year job blogging about the revolution and was certain she deserved it. She [mocked ridiculous Huffington Post Sanders booster H.A. Goodman](#), writing that she believed him entirely and made a fool of herself. I created Projekt Pyramid, a totally mysterious entity that exposed the catastrophic secrets of the DEEP STATE.

During this phase I took a few requests. A friend sent me a meme asking why Obama didn't light the White House blue after the police killings, but did light it in rainbow colors for gay marriage. I did a story saying the White

outraged. My friend loved it, but didn't have the guts to post it to Facebook.

RealTrueNews' second brush with fame came a week later with a story entitled "Clinton Collapse: Insiders Say May Drop 'Soon.'" This story featured a DNC technological "war room" where the Clinton forces were in chaos because her support was collapsing. This was when guys like conservative talk show host Bill Mitchell—who did, in fact, write in to RealTrueNews at one point to discuss a mention of his name—was saying that Hillary's lack of support on Twitter meant she was losing.

The story had the all-purpose anonymous insider saying that attacks calling Trump "racist" had failed. That Hillary was buying followers—but all of Trump's were legit. (Studies show this is not true. A lot of Trump's supporters are bots.) It also touched on concerns about her health and hypothesized that, unable to participate in a debate, they would stage a Black Lives Matter "riot" or maybe a terrorist attack to stop them from happening.

This was breathlessly repeated all over the place and then Hillary *did* collapse. From pneumonia and dehydration, she appeared to pass out while getting into a van. Suddenly, the Clinton Collapse terminology, some fortuitous alliteration, went nuclear.

The hits lit up. I was partially aghast, but also partially gratified. It was bullshit, but it was consumed as absolute truth.

Trump was a “Russian Stooge.” (False, it declared, of course.) I was gratified when, in the article, I gave him a code-name claiming it meant Golden Lion in Russian. I used Google Translate to translate “Ugly Hair,” and a Russian Trump supporter wrote in to correct me.

I wrote one of the two articles I’ve redacted around then too. When the right was agonizing over Evan McMullin throwing his hat in the ring, I wrote up a story Photoshopping a Clinton Foundation document to make it look like he received money as part of the White Horse Initiative—a mythical Clinton Foundation program using actual Mormon prophecy about saving the United States. Later, when a bunch of hits started coming in, I put a retraction at the top and blamed Jill Stein for the misinformation.

Following the Wisconsin primary, I had a story out that morning suggesting Paul Ryan’s opponent Paul Nehlen had actually won the vote—but had it stolen from him by Democrats wanting to test their election stealing software, called “DemVotesMatter,” against a Trump-like opponent.

This was picked up the next morning when one of the guys behind the (excellent) Decision Desk team asked if anyone had a “the election was stolen” take from last night and Andrew Stiles of NewsCorp-owned Heat Street told him, on Twitter, RealTrueNews is On It.

got even better when Wonkette wrote a story making fun of RealTrueNews, the idiots who believed the election was stolen. Not realizing it was satire would become a theme. They also said in the article they'd probably never write about RealTrueNews again. That turned out to be false, although they didn't attribute the follow up to RTN.

But the huge breakthrough came with the Public Policy Polling memo. When PPP released a poll showing a major Clinton lead in Florida, I downloaded their PDF, turned it into a Word document and edited it. Heavily.

All the polling mythology went into it. Trump was up by huge numbers. The more corrupt Hillary was, the more Democrats loved her, and so on. It was absurd. The spelling was iffy—I save time by not editing anything—but it had a section in it where the author, at wit's end, complains about college pollsters, like Quinnipiac's co-eds and Monmouth's "Bernie-Grade Weed."

It went super-viral. One of the most accidentally brilliant things I did was set up a Scribd document-sharing account. I had seen legal docs and such posted there so that was what I did. I could have hosted it natively—but it seemed more "authentic" to put it on the site and post a link.

What I didn't realize was that people could and did find the Scribd document without going to RealTrueNews first—or, often, at all. This accidentally

For their part, PPP took it fantastically well, mocking people with their signature Twitter-wit and steadfastly refusing to disavow the obviously faked document to the anger of conservative detractors. When polling director Tom Jensen mentioned the memo in a podcast, I almost jumped out of my seat.

To be clear: They were amazingly good sports about this, even if I made their days a lot harder and brought even more internet wrath down on them than normal. When I did the same thing later with Monmouth it was, unfortunately, completely different.

One of my proudest moments with the memo was a Daily Kos article written by the site's founder Markos Moulitsas himself, asking whether the faked memo was a pathetic right-wing attempt at propaganda or a brilliant left-wing forgery. I couldn't break character to tell him it was the latter—but I was proud to see the online poll asking that question was close to 50-50.

As I understand it, a lot of people took Jonathan Swift seriously too.

The faked Monmouth poll actually upset them. I got a complaint to the website and was asked to remove their name from the page. I did, but the document was already out in the wild, as were ubiquitous screen caps of the front page.

I owe those guys a box of chocolates or something. I wouldn't do it again. On

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Post.

In the article he writes that: “The ‘memo’ itself is nearly a parody of conspiracy theorizing about what goes on in the media and elite institutions.”

Nearly.

Despite a *WaPo* story pinned to the top of Monmouth’s page, people still believe it to this day.

There was more. The biggest breakout I had came when a Vice reporter, Michael Tracey, was holding forth on Twitter in the wake of the Podesta Email leaks. He was speaking about the Goldman Sachs transcripts—and I had one.

I had written up a fake Goldman Sachs transcript days before, wherein Hillary Clinton is preparing a run for president and is speaking to the board of directors in 2014 about the coming threat to Wall Street and Washington power. That threat? Bronies, adult male fans of the cartoon *My Little Pony: Friendship Is Magic*. She has to explain this “Bronie Threat” to them and, in the process, describes a group of internet denizens she calls a “bucket of losers.”

When I tweeted the link and an image of some of the text at Tracey, I did it because I find him to be something of a self-important git and wanted to poke fun at him. I didn’t know at the time that there were Goldman Sachs transcript fragments in the WikiLeaks release.

The tweet went super-viral. It started an almost trending—but still going today—

by Malcolm Nance, an intelligence analyst for MSNBC among others, who tweeted to be wary of the WikiLeaks release.

Tracey, appalled by what he saw as casting doubt on the noble truth of WikiLeaks, declared me a possibly paid propagandist in Hillary's employ. The two-minute Internet Hate was turned on me.

Now, I wasn't recognized as the creator of the document, and I had never said it was from WikiLeaks, nor did the RTN article mention WikiLeaks. But by the end of that night, I saw a note that Megyn Kelly had just apologized for reading it on the air.

My blood froze. That was *not* a good feeling. I went desperately looking for a video and I found one. She was talking to 4 people about the leaks and, while 90 percent of her discussion was on the *actual* WikiLeaks, she at one point awkwardly stated that it appeared Hillary had referred to Sanders supporters as a "Bucket of Losers."

I was stunned. I found a clip of her retraction later saying that was false—but *not* divorcing the statement from WikiLeaks. Howard Kurtz apparently also read the "bucket of losers" tag on the air and didn't retract.

That, plus the Nance tweet, had some impact on the WikiLeaks reception. This was entirely unintentional, but Russia's state-sponsored news agency Sputnik, of course, saw a conspiracy. [Δ hilarious conspiracy:](#)

have been able to easily spot the fake with “(chaos)” actually written in the side bar and “((makes air quotes))” written before the “bucket of losers” piece in the completely comical so-called transcript, from referencing the document and saying: “Official Warning: #PodestaEmails are already proving to be riddled with obvious forgeries & #blackpropaganda not even professionally done.”

After Megyn Kelly pushed the false narrative and then apologized on air, another more establishment FoxNews personality Howard Kurtz also referenced the “bucket of losers” statement from the grotesquely comical fake transcript that has nothing to do with WikiLeaks whatsoever and claimed it was from the WikiLeaks document release which, again, a five second typing in the whistleblower’s search box would tell you immediately otherwise in what no doubt tees up Clinton to claim it’s all a fraud at the debate.

Grotesquely comical? I guess I’ll take that coming from Russia.

Some of the stories took a whole lot of effort for very little immediate payoff.

For one, I found out that Correct The Record, a pro-Clinton super PAC that intends to “correct the record on Hillary” on Reddit and Twitter had a Slack chatroom—but it was CorrectRecord. CorrectTheRecord wasn’t taken.

So I took it. I signed up a bunch of users, created 4 personalities, and had a

Reddit. I had been looking in the public financials for a pay-out to something that looked shady and I didn't find anything—but I wound up using first-initial/last names of real people who were paid by Correct The Record and people were able to figure it out.

I also had the analysts arguing about not wanting more lunch from We The Pizza, a real pizza place from which Correct The Record had frequently ordered. When internet sleuths googled We The Pizza, they were stunned to discover it was a real place in the middle of Washington, D.C.—just down the street from CTR's offices!

To 4chan, this was all the proof some users needed.

Another CTR “document” went super viral when I created a how-to-troll memo that had specific insults to be hurled at Trump supporters. This included “poll flogging”—which I thought was a *clearly* obvious euphemism—but I didn't see anyone call it out—wherein CTR paid trolls would “fling” polls at Trumpsters showing him losing in order to demoralize them.

This caught fire and people felt that “HEY! That happened to ME! It must be paid trolling.”

It's not paid trolling. It's just people who disagree with you on the internet.

At the end of the day, did this change anything? I don't know. I think I inadvertently hurt WikiLeaks, which

came to realize that they were believing in fake things.

For people who are desperate, however, believing in grand master plans to bring them down—no matter how obviously fake they immediately appear to be—is almost a necessity.

For moderates, I think it's a bit easier to avoid pitfalls: The mainstream news may not *always* be accurate on everything but there is a lot of it and they get the main points right. For conservatives there is no trusted media. There are only trusted *positions*.

Breitbart, World Net Daily, even InfoWars now count as on-my-side places where they believe the *real* truth lies. When the only news you are willing to believe is partisan news, you are susceptible to stories written “in your language” that are complete, obvious, utter fabrications.

RealTrueNews has Trump signifiers all over it. The language use is from right-wing blogs. Several of the articles are written with overt sexism or implicit racism that comes from the alt-right. This is like the protein shell of a virus that allows it to penetrate a cell. The “DNA” payload—the story itself—is then injected straight into the brain, bypassing critical thought.

This is a problem on the very far left as well: The doctrine that Bernie had his nomination forcibly stolen or that the Democrats are colluding warmongers seeking literal thermonuclear destruction is deep and entrenched. The

The main voices are far more mainstream, like Rachel Maddow and Stephen Colbert. The Rush Limbaughs of the left either do not properly exist or reach far, far fewer people. There are fake stories, but the media machine to promote them and sell advertising with them is not yet mature.

What ads do you sell on a Clinton Stole The Primary website? Plagiarized college papers?

Still, I would like to think, perhaps in the margins, that RealTrueNews either made people's lives a little more exciting—in a generally good way—or, perhaps, gave them pause about believing everything they read.



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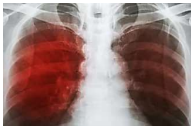
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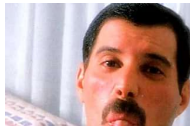
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BOB'S HIDEOUT

Time to Expose the Women Still Celebrating the Confederacy

“Their name is on all their monuments, but maybe because those plaques are rusty and faded people don’t realize the UDC is still a functioning organization.”



In 1926, the United Daughters of the Confederacy erected a monument to the Ku Klux Klan in a town just outside Charlotte, North Carolina. Though the marker itself seems to have been lost to time—or more precisely, to the urbanization and shrubbery that has sprouted around it—proof of its existence endures thanks to the UDC’s own meticulous record-keeping. In 1941, a local division of the group published North Carolina’s *Confederate Monuments and Memorials*, a book that handily compiles various tributes to the Confederacy from around the state, many of them the UDC’s own handiwork. Writer James Huffman got

big hands on a first response in which

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“In commemoration of the ‘Ku Klux Klan’ during the Reconstruction period following the ‘War Between the States,’ this marker is placed on their assembly ground. Erected by the Dodson-Ramseur chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy. 1926.”

Since the UDC’s founding in 1894, the elite white Southern ladies’ group has dedicated itself to erecting Confederate monuments around the country and, in more recent years, quietly ensuring those markers remain standing. They have been the single most effective propagandists for the Lost Cause myth, an alternative-fact-ridden version of history that denies slavery as the central cause of the Civil War while also insisting that slavery was a mutually beneficial institution—a win-win for both enslavers and the enslaved. UDC textbooks have taught generations of Southern children that the Confederacy—a nation whose founders were unequivocal about its cornerstone being white superiority and black enslavement—was a valiant and valorous cause.

Despite its influence, the UDC is rarely name-checked in national discussions about Confederate monuments overtly celebrating white supremacy. And the group remains active, with its national conference—an explosion of antebellum dresses and nostalgia for slavery—happening this weekend in Virginia.

It's time to... give the credit to...

White Supremacists Hiding in Plain Sight

“Their name is on all their monuments, but maybe because those plaques are rusty and faded people don’t realize the UDC is still a functioning organization,” says Heather Redding, an organizer with Hillsborough Progressives Taking Action, a North Carolina chapter of Indivisible. For the past two years, HPTA and other local anti-racist organizations have protested the North Carolina UDC chapter’s annual gathering in Durham.

“They meet regularly, they collect dues, they give scholarships, and they’re a nonprofit that gets tax breaks,” says Redding. “Basically, they’re white supremacists hiding in plain sight. And that’s particularly frustrating, because they parade around like an innocent historical group that just does community service.”

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According to the SPLC, the UDC

buildings, plaques and other tributes to the Confederacy. Though its influence has always been most pervasive in the South, members spread the Lost Cause to parts north of the Mason-Dixon line and west of the Mississippi river. A 1912 UDC plaque in Brooklyn commemorating Robert E. Lee was only removed last year; a road the group named for the Confederate general remains in the borough. Seattle's only Confederate monument was erected by the UDC and not incidentally, carved from a 10-ton block of Stone Mountain, Georgia, where the KKK held its 1915 rebirth ceremony. Even Arlington National Cemetery has a UDC Confederate memorial, erected in 1914 on Confederate President Jefferson Davis's birthdate. It features a crying black "mammy" figure, a white baby under her arm and another tugging at her apron.

Most of the UDC's monuments were erected long after the Civil War, in the 1910s and 1950s, effectively monumentalizing white racial resentment during the eras of Jim Crow and the Civil Rights Movement. In periods of epidemic anti-black racist violence and intimidation, UDC Confederate markers were visible symbols of white terror.

They still are.

Creating a Miseducated

Notion

[◀ HOMEPAGE](#)



immediately after the Civil War in battle-ravaged, economically wasted towns across the South. “They were trying to honor Confederate dead at a time when surviving Confederate veterans could not wear their uniforms in public, could not be involved politically, could not hold political office,” says Jalane Schmidt, a professor at the University of Virginia and organizer for the Charlottesville, Virginia, chapter of Black Lives Matter. In an era when the white South was still demoralized by their Civil War loss, these white Southern women—many of them from wealthy, prominent families—set about doing the work of decorating the fallen.

Karen Cox, author of the definitive history of the UDC, 2003’s *Dixie’s Daughters*, describes the LMAs as concerned with proper burials. “One of the key things Ladies Memorial Associations did early on was try to return soldiers bodies’ from battlefields where they died to their hometowns, and to create Confederate cemeteries,” she says. “They would also raise money for monuments, but the first monuments that they put up were modest, and they were erected in cemeteries.”

At the end of Reconstruction—that brief period when federal intervention made racial equality in the South seem possible—the North pulled its troops out of the South, leaving formerly enslaved blacks to fend for themselves. Power was again assumed by white

“less on bereavement and more on celebrating the virtues of the Confederacy.”

In the 1890s, the UDC coalesced from disparate LMA chapters throughout the South, and undertook what is today known as a vast rebranding campaign. Humiliation was transformed into honor in a rewriting of Civil War history that pitted a fictionalized Southern agricultural paradise against a Northern industrialized Goliath. With the war on the battlefield long lost, the UDC aimed its sights on a cultural win.

“The memorial associations had been seen as doing women's work—tending to the dead, remembering those lost, bringing flowers to graves. It was seemingly innocent work confined to graveyards,” says Schmidt. “But the Trojan Horse factor comes in when the [UDC] started taking this form of memorialization, which had been saved for the grieving, out into the public square... That's when we see the start of Confederate propagandizing. The UDC moves from memorializing in graveyards to monumentalizing in public spaces. And what these monuments did is they raced public spaces as white.”

“***In 1923, the U.S. Senate approved a plan backed by the Daughters for a***

Washington D.C. in memory of the faithful slave mammies of the South."

The UDC chose to erect many monuments in close proximity to legislative and judicial power centers, which is why so many Confederate markers are today located near courthouses and on state capitol grounds—a reminder to black folks that white institutions were not there to serve their interests. This past August, North Carolina's historical commission declined to take down a UDC Confederate marker, along with two others, from the Raleigh capitol building; a coalition of Charlottesville residents is currently engaged in a fight to remove a 109-year-old UDC "Johnny Reb" statue from a local courthouse.

"The UDC put [its monuments] in places where citizens have to work with their government," says Cox. "If you're an African-American person or a person of color, you have to pass by that Confederate monument on your way into the courthouse. It was a reminder that you're not likely to get a fair trial or fair treatment inside of that building. That, to me, was one of the UDC's most overt signs to the local black community that, "We're in charge here. This is a white man's government."

Approved the start of World War I UDC

addition to erecting cheap, mass-produced statues from Yankee manufacturers at an astonishing clip, the UDC in this era was venturing into uncharted public relations territory for the time. When the group learned in 1912 that a new transcontinental highway was to be named for Abraham Lincoln, members fundraised and lobbied state legislatures to build a competing cross-country highway named after Jefferson Davis. Though the project was never fully realized, a handful of states still have roadways named for the leader of a rogue U.S. enemy state. In 1923, the UDC successfully lobbied the U.S. Senate to build a Washington, D.C. monument “in memory of the faithful slave mammies of the South.” The project died in the House, but the UDC succeeded in putting up other “loyal slave” markers elsewhere, bolstering the sinister Lost Cause lie that blacks had been content in bondage.



“After learning a transcontinental highway was to be named for Abraham Lincoln, the Daughters pushed states to build a competing one

UAVIS.

The group also put some serious effort into lauding and normalizing the KKK, which was also in the midst of a membership explosion.

“The UDC always had ties to the Klan,” says Heidi Christensen, former president of the Seattle UDC chapter who quit the group in 2012. “But the connection became more overt in the 1910s. You’ve got *Birth of a Nation*, and then the second rising of the Klan, and you see [the UDC] openly revering the KKK and defending them as saviors of the white southern race during Reconstruction. Those things made it clear they were loyal to the Klan and saw them as heroes. And in some ways [the UDC was] sort of like the KKK’s more feminine, genteel sister organization.”

In a 1915 letter to the designer and original sculptor of the Confederate monument at Stone Mountain, Georgia UDC member Caroline Plane requested Klansmen be represented in the marker because “the Klan... saved us from Negro domination and carpetbag rule.” One year later, Los Angeles UDC leader Annie Cooper Burton penned a book simply titled The Ku Klux Klan that encouraged every UDC division to get “a memorial tablet dedicated to the Ku Klux Klan.” UDC “historian” Laura Martin Rose’s 1914 book, The Ku Klux Klan or Invisible Empire, today reads like KKK fanfic, brimming with swooning passages about the Klan’s

...book for socially-conscious black

leaning into the racist lie about the need to violently protect the sanctity of white womanhood.

“This book was unanimously endorsed by the United Daughters of the Confederacy...,” Rose writes, “[who] pledged to endeavor to secure its adoption as a supplementary reader in the schools and to place it in the libraries of our land.”

The UDC’s endorsement of pro-Confederate textbooks—and bans of those that didn’t promote the Lost Cause—would ultimately shape Southern education and historical memory for generations. That effort started almost immediately after the group’s establishment, when members began promoting textbooks for schoolchildren such as Susan Pendleton Lee’s *Advanced School History of the United States*. The 1895 book concluded the upside of slavery was that “hundreds of thousands of African savages [were] civilized and Christianized,” and suggested perks included being “fed, clothed, lodged and cared for better than any other menial class on the globe.” According to Cox, the effort to indoctrinate Southern children into the mythology of the Lost Cause—creating “living monuments” who would propagate the UDC’s agenda—became one of the UDC’s greatest priorities and legacies. The UDC’s youth auxiliary, the Children of the Confederacy, was founded in 1917.



**UDC was the KKK's
more feminine,
genteel sister
organization."**

— Former Seattle UDC chapter
President Heidi Christensen,
who quit the group in 2012.

Two years later, UDC "historian general" Mildred L. Rutherford published a lengthy 1919 pamphlet titled *A Measuring Rod to Test Text Books and Reference Books in Schools, Colleges, and Libraries*. The brochure advised school administrators charged with vetting textbooks in "colleges, schools and all scholastic institutions" to reject books that didn't "accord full justice to the South." Rutherford's list of mandates included:

Reject a book that calls a Confederate soldier a traitor, a rebel and the war a rebellion

Reject a book that says the South fought to hold her slaves

Reject a book that speaks of the slaveholder as cruel or unjust to his slaves

Reject a book that glorifies Lincoln and vilifies Jefferson Davis

The brochure also advised Southern librarians to vandalize books in their own collections that did not adhere to these rules by writing "Unjust to the South" on the title page. This method of vetting history textbooks became

White Southern children—as well as their black peers, who inherited old textbooks when whites had no more use for them—were steeped in the myths and delusions of white supremacy.



“The Daughters, whose youth auxiliary is the Children of the Confederacy, used textbooks to shape “living monuments,” as its ther group’s “historian general” once advised teachers to “Reject a book that says the South fought to hold her slaves (or) that speaks of the slaveholder as cruel or unjust to his slaves.””

That misinformation campaign has informed the politics of lawmakers from

Stephan Thompson and Jeff B... and

making that springs from anti-blackness and Confederate apologia. Neo-Confederate [politicians raised on UDC propaganda](#) have in recent years passed [cultural heritage laws](#) that make Confederate monument removal illegal and fabricated [the existence of black Confederate](#) soldiers to promote the fable that the Confederacy was an exercise in diversity. [Virginia Senate candidate Corey Stewart](#) built a campaign platform out of a pile of Confederate monuments draped in rebel flags—and very little else—and secured the GOP nomination.

It's not just politicians. A 2015 McClatchy-Marist poll found 41 percent of Americans don't believe in the [immutable fact of slavery](#) as the catalyst for the Civil War. And those books aren't fully out of circulation. Earlier this year, angry parents in Texas complained after discovering their kids had were being taught history from a [textbook that goes out of its way](#) to declare some enslavers "kind and generous owners," among other offensive tidbits.

The UDC: Still winning

By the UDC's own estimates, current membership [stands somewhere around 25,000](#). In 2008, the UDC issued a "Reaffirmation of the Objectives of the United Daughters of the Confederacy," which began by restating its objectives from the group's 1919 [Articles of Incorporation](#): "Historical, Benevolent,

Educational, Memorial and Patriotic"

about “Confederate valor” and references to “the War Between the States” was a update that makes clear UDC efforts to distance itself from its racist legacy and those who carry it forth:

BE IT KNOWN, that The United Daughters of the Confederacy® does not associate with or include in its official UDC functions and events, any individual, group or organization known as unpatriotic, militant, racist or subversive to the United States of America and its Flag, AND

BE IT FURTHER KNOWN, that The United Daughters of the Confederacy® will not associate with any individual, group or organization identified as being militant, unpatriotic, racist or subversive to the United States of America and its Flag.

Even as the rest of the country has erupted in debates, and occasional violence over Confederate monuments, the UDC has generally kept a low profile. Members rarely speak publicly or respond to activists or the media. (The group did not respond to a request for comment on this story by press time.) A rare exception followed the 2017 Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, an event whose target audience was racists enraged over the proposed removal of a Robert E. Lee statue. Heather Heyer’s murder and [the beating of DeAndre Harris](#) proved the violent extremes white racists will go to in order to defend Confederate monuments.

“We are pleased that certain hate groups

other symbols as their own,” UDC President Patricia M. Bryson wrote on the group’s website. “We as an Organization do not sit in judgment of [our ancestors] nor do we impose the standards of the 21st century on these Americans of the 19th century.”

In this, Bryson inadvertently confirmed the UDC’s continued commitment to ignoring the personhood of *black* “Americans of the 19th century,” who always recognized the immorality of slavery. New millennium, same old UDC.

Instead of putting new Confederate monuments up—the Sons of Confederate veterans are handling that job quite nicely—the UDC now pursues legal action against those trying to take them down. Over the last few years, the courts have become the primary tool of the UDC in fighting off challenges to their memorials.

In an ongoing case, a Texas chapter of the group sued the city of San Antonio after a council vote brought down a Confederate marker. This past July, a Louisiana UDC chapter announced plans to appeal a federal judge’s dismissal of their lawsuit seeking to prevent removal of a Shreveport Confederate monument. The Tennessee UDC chapter sued Vanderbilt University over its plans to remove “Confederate” from a dormitory name, citing a \$50,000 UDC contribution to the building’s construction in 1933.

Vanderbilt was ultimately forced to remove

equivalent of the original donation—for the right to wipe the offensive word from the building's facade.

In August, the city of Franklin, Tennessee, filed suit against a local UDC chapter in response to threats of litigation by the group's lawyer. The issue? Plans by local officials to put up four [African-American history markers](#) near a UDC Confederate monument in a town square to “help tell a fuller story of the Civil War.” But the group that says it is about history and heritage, not hate, claimed it owned not only the Confederate statue but the entire town square, and threatened suit if the African-Americans history memorials went up [anywhere near its monument](#).

There are other less grand ways the UDC continues promoting its damaging and dangerous historical lies. Kirt von Daacke, an Assistant Dean and professor in the History Department at the University of Virginia, and author of a 2012 book titled [Freedom Has a Face: Race, Identity, and Community in Jefferson's Virginia](#), told me in a brief email exchange that the UDC had emailed requesting he “come speak to the group about the [‘happier’ stories during the time](#) of slavery.” He declined.

Earlier this year, Encyclopedia Virginia editor Brendan Wolfe wrote [a brilliant response](#) to demands from the state's UDC branch to revise [its entry](#) on the group to omit the term “white supremacy.” (The group also has a petition calling for the same change to [its Wikipedia page](#).)

Wither T. ... Wolfe ... Franklin

ideas are the natural runoff of bad historical understanding. The angry emails he'd gotten about the article, he told me, "were all from [members of] the UDC, and they ranged in tone from pretty reasonable to really angry and unreasonable. But from my opinion, a lot were just really woefully *misinformed*—not just uninformed but misinformed—about some basic history."

Past Time To Update the Story

Despite the various ways in which the UDC has contributed to the miseducation of the American public and helped mainstream white racist terror, there's been little public shaming of the group or its members.

A recent article [by AP reporter Allen Breed](#) notes that the government of Virginia still awards its state branch "tens of thousands of dollars for the maintenance of Confederate graves—more than \$1.6 million since 1996." Funding to maintain black grave sites from the late 19th and early 20th centuries only began in 2017, after a [series of bills cleared the Virginia General Assembly](#).

"I think many of us have taken an interest in this group because no one else has," Heather Redding says, explaining why she and fellow activists

have focused their efforts on the UDC as

action. “It doesn't seem like there's been any sort of movement to hold them responsible for the damage they've done and for the way they continue to impede racial reconciliation and healing in this country. Once you start going down the rabbit hole of looking at their propaganda, it's hard to fathom that this group still exists. And the more you realize how entrenched they are in this false narrative they've constructed, you can't help but hold them accountable for all the damage they've done over generations and generations.”

“I'm sure these ladies are very nice ladies. I'm sure they're doting grandmothers and they love kittens. And they are also the Great Aunt Bettys of folks who are sitting on the city council. So how dare you say she is a racist? But that's part of the problem of the normalization,” says Schmidt. “We, as a country, should have moved beyond this—the fact that these women were able to install monuments that are still here, in some cases, 100 years later, that we can't get rid of. There's just not the political will to remove them. In as much as political officials don't want to challenge this, they are passively allowing this ideology to win. And this organization is still winning.”

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