

April 9, 1865

Today should be a federal holiday, a national day of celebration. But the more I think about it, the more I'm glad it isn't.

If it were, after over a century and a half of the Lost Cause mythology, of whitewashing the devastation of the war and its aftermath, of rewriting the roots and causes of the war, we as a country would be celebrating the wrong things and the wrong people.

We would be honoring Robert E Lee the great general, unbeatable in a fair fight. The man who followed his home state of Virginia when it seceded. The gentleman general who finally surrendered to the poorly dressed probable alcoholic Ulysses S. Grant because Lee cared so deeply for his men and sagely saw that it was time to put the nation back together.

We would hardly talk about Robert E. Lee the slave owner. The traitor.

He was defeated – out maneuvered, outmanned, and outgunned. Just as he was at Antietam and at Gettysburg. But he wouldn't get to march his army away this time. He and his men would get to go home, unpunished for taking up arms against the United States – granted amnesty for treason.

No. We would be celebrating what our textbooks tell us. That Lee was a great general and a great man. That after Appomattox there were a few battles and that we all worked to rebuild the nation, to bind its wounds and move forward.

We wouldn't talk about the failures of Reconstruction to come, we'd ignore the deeply ingrained racism that led to the war and continues to shape this country today.

No, on second thought, I'm glad today isn't a holiday. I'm glad it hasn't been hijacked with quaint little factoids and a rewriting of history.

On April 9, 1865 at Appomattox Court House in Virginia Robert E. Lee was defeated. He surrendered his Army of Northern Virginia to Ulysses S. Grant. It was not the last victory over the traitors who tore our country apart because they believed human beings can be owned – indeed that some human beings were better off owned, that they were \*meant\* to be owned. Fighting continued into May of that year. But the defeat of Lee at Appomattox was arguably the death knell of the Confederacy.

Perhaps if we had seen it and celebrated it for what it was at the time our nation would have moved forward instead of just moving on.