**George W. Bush and his support for neo-Confederate organizations**

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**Amy Goodman**: The 1997-1998 annual report of the Museum of the Confederacy which is based in Richmond, Virginia. In it George W. Bush is listed as a donor to the Lone Star Ball which is a fundraising event of the Museum. In the Bush Campaign when we gave them a call to ask them specifically about this issue said they weren't ready to respond, but the Museum did and said that the Governor had sent a letter a support to the attendees if the event, the Lone Star Ball which was held at the Tredegar Iron Works gun foundry building the place where civil war armaments were produced for the Confederacy. The Museum is known as a place that celebrates achievements of soldiers of the Confederacy. And the Lone Star ball was honoring Texas last year, each year it honors another state. Before that it honored South Carolina. The Lone Star ball flew the Confederate flags of all the states of the Confederacy. People came, hundreds of people, in period clothing.

And today were are going to take a look at the Museum of the Confederacy and George W. Bush's involvement. We are joined by Ed Sebesta, who is a researcher on the neo-Confederate movement. Ed can you tell us what you found about this event and George Bush's involvement?

**Ed Sebesta**.: Well I found on page 37 in the fiscal report 1997-1998 he is listed as a donor to the fundraising event, the Lone Star ball, it is a short list, and it provides the upfront money for the Ball. He also has written letters of congratulations to the United Daughters of the Confederacy and also wrote a letter of congratulations to the Sons of Confederate Veterans for their 100th anniversary.

**Amy Goodman**: We got a copy from the Museum of the Confederacy of George Bush's letter that he wrote to the attendees of the Lone Star ball that was the big celebration of the Museum of the Confederacy last year. And in the letter he says, this is George W. Bush, "Understanding the history of our country is important for citizens, the Museum of the Confederacy provides an educational opportunity for visitors to experience the tragedy and triumph of a critical era in the American story. Through letters, books, photographs and other artifacts in the Museum the American Civil War period comes alive."

**Juan Gonzalas**: Well Ed Sebesta what about this issue of the celebration of the Confederacy itself, clearly this is has been an issue throughout the South the issue of South Carolina and the flying the Confederate flag there and across the nation. There are those in the South who still regard the battle of the Confederacy as just a heroic period of southern history and there are of course there are many in this nation who regard the confederate flag and the Confederate states as the ultimate symbol of white supremacy in American history.

**Ed Sebesta**: It has always been about white supremacy and they may come down and talk the language of heritage but in their own publications or in different venues it is about white supremacy. I mean the guy who coined the expression, "Heritage Not Hate," Lunsford, Charles Lunsford, and led the defense of the Georgia flag got kicked out of the SCV, the Sons of Confederate Veterans, because unlike the rest of them he was publicly associating with the Council of Conservative Citizens. And now currently he heads the heritage committee of the notorious League of the South and that is just one example. From beginning to end, from alpha to omega, it has been about white supremacy, and the Civil War is about slavery and evidently George Bush hasn't picked that up. It is not Hollywood tragidrama, its about slavery and afterwards it is white supremacy. I will make a point, E.A. Pollard wrote the Lost Cause, and that is where the book gave the name to this whole remembrance, "Lost Cause." People don't know that he also wrote "The Lost Cause Regained," in which he states, and listen carefully, "The Civil War was not about slavery, the Civil War was about white supremacy, and slavery was just a mode of white supremacy." And that's is from 1866 or whenever he published it, to the present.

**Amy Goodman**: Ed Sebesta we have to break for stations to identify themselves. And when we come back this researcher on the neo-Confederate movement will be joined by James McPherson who is professor of history at Princeton University, who attended the Lone Star ball I think, we will find out in a minute.

**Amy Goodman**: You're listening to Pacific Radio station Democracy Now. I am Amy Goodman here with Juan Gonzalas. Ed Sebesta, researcher on the neo-Confederate movement is our guest as well as James McPherson, professor of history at Princeton University. Sorry I think I think I got that wrong, did not attended the Lone Star ball but has spoken at the Tredegar Iron works foundry where these balls take place. Can you talk a little Professor McPherson about your thoughts about the Museum of the Confederacy.

**James McPherson**: Surely, actually I spoke at the Tredegar back in 1992 when it still was under the auspices of the Valentine museum in Richmond, which is a museum mostly for the history of the city of Richmond, subsequently they had financial problems and I am not quite sure what the status of the Tredegar is now, but I know that the Museum of the Confederacy is hoping to acquire it and administer it. I think, I agree a 100% with Ed Sebesta about the motives or the hidden agenda, not too, not too deeply hidden I think of such groups as the United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Sons of Confederate Veterans. They are dedicated to celebrating the Confederacy and rather thinly veiled support for white supremacy. And I think that also is the again not very deeply hidden agenda of the Confederate flag issue in several southern states. I do think though that the Museum of the Confederacy as it as it exists today in is a different category. It's founding motives back in the 1890s at the same time the United Confederate Veterans, and the Daughters of the Confederacy and the Sons of Confederate Veterans were founded, its founding motives were celebatory. But over time, and especially in the last decade or two, it has become a much more professional, research oriented, professional exhibit oriented facility.

**Amy Goodman**: But what about when you have for example these balls every year, like the Lone Star ball that George Bush wrote the letter of congratulations for when - you know it takes place at the Tredegar which is where they made the armament, they wear period dress, they have all the flags of the Confederacy flying.

**James McPherson**: I can't I think the motives of people who raise money for the museum and who attend balls in period costume and so on probably range from celebatory to genuinely historical. So there is a dimension to that. I do think the Museum of the Confederacy is now a a research and professional museum in the same category as other highly regarded museums around the country. Some its supporters I'm sure, and some of its sponsors, some its members of the board of trustees are undoubtedly neo-Confederates. I do know that back in 1992 and1993 the Museum of the Confederacy had a special exhibit on slavery and on the relationship of slavery and the Civil War which the old guard in Richmond who identified with the Confederate heritage were very angry about because that exhibit made all the same kinds of points that either Ed Sebesta or I would make about the Civil War that slavery was at the root of the conflict that led to the war. That slaves played a major part as slave force for the Confederacy but also a major part as soldiers for the Union. They also had a good exhibit on reconstruction and on the creative positives roles played by blacks in Reconstruction. They have moved away from the celebatory and pro-slavery heritage in their founding. As far as George Bush's letter, yes triumph and tragedy can be interpreted as ignoring the fundamental issues of the Civil War. Those words are ambiguous and vague depending on the context. But I didn't hear anything in that letter as you read it, that endorses the Confederate cause.

**Ed Sebesta**: There is a few points I would like to make. If I may.

**Amy Goodman**: Ed Sebesta, go ahead.

**Ed Sebesta**: Okay. For starters, in the early 1990s, Ludwell Johnson was accepted as their museum fellow, so while they are becoming more professional, a leading Neo-Confederate becomes one of their fellows, a regular contributor to the Southern Partisan, ---

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I pointed out that the Museum of the Confederacy was promoting Ludwell Johnson, a leading neo-Confederate to be a museum fellow. I said that I think they are playing both sides of the street. It came up that the Museum of the Confederacy glorifies the Confederacy. I pointed out this was true. I also pointed out that if there was a Museum of the Third Reich, which claimed to be merely historical and not anti-Semitic and just honoring the bravery of the individual soldier, and further tried to have a ball festooned with swastika flags, we would not accept their arguments and claims for a second. The reason why is that we consider Jews to be a part of us, not others.

I later had time after to do further research and I found out that the Museum of the Confederacy was selling two years in a row League of the South member Marshall DeRosa's neo-Confederate book on the Confederate constitution. So they are themselves playing both sides of the street. With the Museum of the Confederacy they don't wear funny costumes and shout, their influence is more subtle.

**At this point the tape resumes.**

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**Ed Sebesta (Continued)**: --- book I have called "Plantation Life in Texas," by Texas A&M. They tell about the bad things of slavery but it is all done with water color pictures, and this very flowing script they are mentioning it, yet they are romanticizing it. Of course, they give the game away in the last part where they say, -- Oh you know they are moaning over this plantation life going away and the horrors of reconstruction coming and so I don't see it really having giving up, I see them adapting. I would be much more impressed in their book, "Before Freedom Came," had an account of Robert E. Lee whipping his slaves and having brine poured into their wounds and cursing them. There is an account of that by one his former slaves who tried running away and got caught and gives an account and the cruelty and viciousness by what they suffered under Gen. Lee.

**Juan Gonzalas:** Ed Sebesta, in mentioning Robert E. Lee, I noticed under the webpage of the Museum of the Confederacy, that descendants of both Robert E. Lee and Jeb Stuart are featured as being important, heavily involved with the Museum. So it almost seems that there is - I guess it is in Richmond, former capitol of the Confederacy -- that they are, that there is an attempt to maintain sort of the heritage, the family heritages of the some of the people involved.

**Ed Sebesta:** Definitely, I mean, to be a member of the UDC, the United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Sons of Confederate Veterans you have to show descendance from some Confederate person or some person during the Civil War -- in the Confederacy. So it is a familial thing. In fact they even have a caste system in the UDC where they have Grand Daughters Clubs and Great-Granddaughters Clubs and I think they even have a Great-Great-Granddaughters Club. So its like this hereditary Southern aristocrat- aristocracy.

**Amy Goodman**: I wanted to ask about the whole controversy about the flag too and how George Bush gets involved with this, George W. Bush Jr. running for president. The South Carolina chapter of the NAACP has been putting increasing pressure for South Carolina to get rid of the Confederate battle flag that flies over the State House. The NAACP nationally has called for a tourism boycott of South Carolina, and Bush's response to this has been to tell people quote, "My advice is for people who don't live in South Carolina is to butt out of the issue." He said, "The people of South Carolina can make that decision." You know sort of getting to this states' rights issue. Ed Sebesta what's your reponse to this.

**Ed Sebesta:** Well, there is even another thing that Bush did, a reporter down in Texas asked if it was flying over the Texas capitol would he support that . He said that it was hypothetical and afterwards he told the reporter, "nice try." But the fact is that he is not a neutral, he actually is a supporter of the Confederacy and has a record of doing that, and I think this is sort of a public role. And, the whole idea of localism is consistent with his sort of states' rights talk that he is has been doing during his campaign. Which is sort of the classic sort of Lost Cause argument, what did we fight for, they fought for states' rights. And so I think he is being a little bit disingenous, but his real reasons -- he is trying to get the voters of the people who support the Confederate flag but he is also trying have plausible deniability.

**Amy Goodman:** James McPherson do you agree with this?

**James McPherson:** I don't know enough about Bush's position on the Confederate flag, I do know that the issue of the Confederate flag in South Carolina and also in Georgia where the Confederate battle flag was incorporated into the state flag back in 1956, that those, that those flag of those flags has a contemporary political agenda, and to the extent that any politician endorses that, I think Trent Lott did as well a couple of years ago,. far more vigorously. I can't support them in doing that. I think there is a distinction between flying the Confederate flag in museum or in reenactment of battles, or in other specifically historical context where that flag was part of the history that is being portrayed.

**Amy Goodman:**Well professor McPherson and Ed Sebesta we wanted to go out of the show today with the comment speech given by Tom Turnipseed, who was formerly the national director for Alabama governor George Wallace's presidential campaign. He says, "I was a racist at the time, and now one of the head's of the heads of the Center For Democratic Renewal," a civil rights organization, but I thank you both for being with us.