



Written by [R. Cort Kirkwood](#) on May 18, 2021

## WaPo: Man Who Wants Robert E. Lee Statues Gone Is Not, as Claimed, a Descendant of Lee

Almost a year ago, a Baptist minister named Robert W. Lee announced that, as a descendant of Robert E. Lee, he supported the removal of [Marse Robert's](#) statue in Richmond, Virginia. But the *Washington Post* fact checker, Glenn Kessler, has disclosed that Reverend Lee is unrelated to General Lee.

Or at least Kessler — with help of records, genealogists, and the folks at [Stratford Hall](#), the general's ancestral home — found zero evidence that the two are related.

Confronted with the news, Reverend Lee is observing near monastic silence. He can't respond because he can't hold his head up, he says, the result of the medication he takes. Most of us couldn't hold our heads up if we were caught retailing a similar whopper, but in any event, rest assured, the Big Fib will not affect his reputation as a Man of God.



AP Images

### There He Stood, He Could Do No Other

The worthies of the media spilled a great deal of ink on the Reverend Lee last year when he appeared at a press conference with Virginia Governor Ralph Northam to denounce his supposed ancestor.

"We've been talking about his great-great-grandfather," Northam said of the earnest young man in a collar.

[Reverend Lee then published](#) a column in the *Post*; it too denounced the general. The headline and column firmly declare that Reverend Lee is one of the general's descendants.

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In the small town where he grew up in North Carolina, he wrote, the elders taught that "the Civil War was fought for "states' rights." But "there's more to that sentence, something we southerners are never taught: The Civil War was fought for states' rights *to enslave African people in the United States of America.*"

Not really, but [Lee continued](#):

My name is Robert W. Lee: I'm a Christian pastor, a husband, a friend, a son, a brother. But you undoubtedly realize that I bear the name of the icon of the Southern understanding of



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the world, and I also bear his heritage.

As a descendant of Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee's family, I have borne the weight and responsibility of that lineage. Even though my parents never pushed it or subscribed to all that it could entail, my own upbringing oozed with Southern pride. I had a black nanny — even in the 1990s — and a Confederate flag that hung in my bedroom until middle school. I believed that in commanding the Army of Northern Virginia, Lee was a Christian man with the best of intentions.

Reverend Lee gave up on that idea, and set out to his ruin supposed ancestor's reputation:

I am fully aware that the broken, racist system we have built on the Lost Cause is far larger than a single statue, but the statue of my ancestor has stood for years in Richmond as an idol of this white supremacist mind-set. The statue is a hollow reminder of a painful ideology and acts of oppression against black people. Taking it down will provide new opportunities for conversations, relationships and policy change.

In a similar piece in 2016, also in the *Post*, [he declared](#) that "I live with his name." He was "tired of the careless conversations where racism rears its ugly head."

Continued Lee:

I'm tired of the name Robert Lee equating only with someone who fought to divide the nation on the basis of race. Most importantly, I'm tired of young black men being gunned down by police.

His website, by the way, [features photographs](#) of him with famous black leftists such as Whoopi Goldberg, Jesse Jackson, and Senator Cory Booker (D-N.J.). Such is his renown as the ultimate foe of "white supremacy" that he offered a prayer at the prayer service for Sleepy Joe's presidential inauguration.

### **Fact Check**

All went well for the good reverend until Kessler finally did what he's paid to do: check facts. That's why his employer, the *Post*, calls him a "fact checker."

Why Kessler didn't check Reverend Lee's *bona fides* last year we are not given to know. Nor are we given to know why the *Post* didn't verify his claims when offered the newspaper his first piece in 2016.

A lawsuit that seeks to remove a Confederate statue in Iredell County, North Carolina, and to which Lee was a party, Kessler observed, also peddles the connection to General Lee. It calls him "the fourth great-nephew of Confederate General Robert E. Lee."

But the truth about Reverend Lee is this, [Kessler reported](#):

There is no evidence that Rob Lee, who was born in North Carolina, is related to Robert E. Lee, according to The Fact Checker's review of historical and genealogical records. We were aided in our search through these records by a retired Los Angeles trial lawyer and Civil War chronicler named Joseph Ryan, as well as an official at Stratford Hall, the



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ancestral home of the Virginia Lee family.

On his website, Rob Lee describes himself as “a descendant of Confederate General Robert E. Lee.” At an appearance in Tulsa in 2020, he suggested that he was connected to Robert E. Lee because he is a direct descendant of Lee’s older brother, Charles Carter Lee.

So we looked for evidence that Rob is related to Charles Lee or any other brother of Robert E. Lee. He did not respond to repeated requests for comment — via email, text message and Twitter — but his own writings are vague on the connection.

The minister also claimed a connection in his book, [A Sin By Any Other Name](#). The family, he wrote, called the general “Uncle Bob.”

Kessler’s report makes clear that Reverend Lee is unrelated to the man in gray. He is not descended from Lee’s older brother, Charles:

For Rob Lee to be a descendant of Charles Carter Lee, who lived in Powhatan County, near Richmond, one of Charles’s five sons would need to be his great-great-great grandfather: George Taylor Lee, 1848-1933; Henry Lee, 1849-1901; Robert Randolph Lee, 1853-1940; Williams Carter Lee, 1855-1882 (who died unmarried in a railroad accident); and John Penn Lee, 1867-1924.

But when we traced the genealogy, the trail quickly ran cold. None of the direct descendants of these Virginians led us to Rob Lee.

Instead, when we worked backward from Rob Lee’s family — the various Robert W. Lees — we ended up in Alabama, not Virginia. Lee’s book makes a nod to that fact, quoting his grandmother as saying: “The original Lees came to Virginia and then made their way down to Alabama. Some of those Lees came back to North Carolina.”

Kessler traced the minister’s ancestry to Robert S. Lee, an Alabamian who fought for the Confederacy. “When he died, the *Greenville Advocate* reported that ‘nearly all his friends throughout the county’” had a name for him: “Uncle Bob.”

“He also appears to be Rob Lee’s great-great-great grandfather,” Kessler reported with a string of names tied directly to the man who denounced R.E. Lee. That is something, of course, Reverend Lee’s great-great-great grandfather never would have done.

[Wrote Kessler:](#)

Rob Lee did not acknowledge our many queries for evidence of his connection to Robert E. Lee. His father also did not return a phone call. Chris Hollinger, an attorney at O’Melveny & Myers LLP, which filed the Iredell lawsuit, said he would not discuss whether he tried to verify Lee’s claim.

### **Three Tweets**

After Kessler’s report appeared, Reverend Lee skedaddled, as they used to say when General Lee had Bluebellies on the run.

“There is an article in the Washington Post about me being not related to Robert E. Lee,” [he tweeted](#) on



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May 14. "I have chosen not to engage because I am currently on a regiment [sic] of medication that has made it difficult to keep my head up. There are also family dynamics that make this difficult."

And he was none too happy that the *Post* disinterred his real ancestors:

Why the *Post* is so focused on my heritage and lineage while not focusing on the issues of the statue at hand is beyond me. As they mixed up even the most basic facts, I have removed my name from the lawsuit as not to detract from the community of Statesville that I love.

In a second tweet two days ago, Lee stood by his flimsy claim:

I stand by the records I have seen and worked with. They are not mine to share. Family dynamics are at play, and after a column in 2016 and 2020 in the *Washington Post* we believed we had provided enough verification.

My mission and ministry has been confronting white supremacy as a sin. Regardless of whether you believe me or the article, the fact remains that either lineage participated and profited from racism and slavery. That ends with me.

[Reverend Lee's website reports](#) that 85 percent of his Baptist congregation is a homosexual or some sort of sexual deviant. He is the only "straight clergyman" at his church.

He writes a "weekly devotional" for FLOTUS "Dr." Jill Biden, [who holds](#) neither a Ph.D. nor an M.D.



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