

## PROPOSAL

**Title** – “The South’s Greatest Vindication”: Mildred Lewis Rutherford and the Belief of Southern Superiority

**Program of Study** – History

**Presentation Type** – **Choose one of the following:** 3 Minutes Thesis

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**Category** – **Choose one of the following** – 3 Minute Thesis

Mildred Lewis Rutherford was a leading Southern apologist and “Lost Cause” romantic of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Born into privilege in Georgia in 1852, Rutherford had dedicated her life to leading the South to traditional conservative Southern values by describing how the South had contributed to American literature, glorifying the ideal Southern woman, and presenting an idealized version of the Civil War and Antebellum South. Described as “a leader among Georgians of her time” Rutherford epitomized the white Southern elite concerned with winning the war over the memory of the Civil War. From 1890 to 1927, Rutherford authored books and articles promoting “white supremacy” and argued that the South had a superior history, a superior cause, and a superior culture.

Rutherford argued the South was more influential in U.S. history than the North. She especially focused on the leaders that the South had given the nation. Men such as George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and John Calhoun, all represented Southern greatness. Rutherford also described the culture of the Antebellum South, glorifying slavery and plantation life. She went on to argue that the Southern cause in the Civil War, which she called the War Between the States, was a superior cause to that of the North. She made various Constitutional

arguments about secession. Additionally, she proclaimed the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments to be unconstitutional and said that they deprived slave owners of their legal property. She also argued that the South had a superior culture. Rutherford worked as a principal and president at the Lucy Cobb Institute, a private girls' school started by her uncle. She argued that ladies had to show themselves worthy of men's protection. She argued against women's suffrage, fearful that it would tear apart the social structure of the South.

Rutherford stands as a product of her era and as her generation started to die off, one sees how many of her ideals fall away with it. However, some of her ideals, namely her ideal of white supremacy and her defense of the Civil War, would remain long after her death in 1927.