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Searching for Black Confederates: The Civil War's Most Persistent Myth

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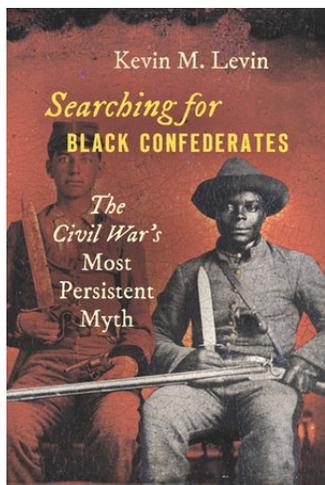
assistant professor and curator of manuscripts. In 2011, Krim was assigned to take over curatorial responsibilities for the Cello Music Collection in the Martha Blakeney Hodges Special Collections and University Archives, including archival processing, research support, donor relations, collection development, instruction, community outreach, and marketing.



Krim has experience working in both public and technical services in public and academic libraries. She received her MA in anthropology in 2006 from East Carolina University and her MLIS from UNCG in 2008.

BOOK REVIEWS

Searching for Black Confederates: The Civil War's Most Persistent Myth. Kevin M. Levin. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2019. ISBN: 9781469653266 (cloth), ISBN: 9781469653273 (ebook). \$30 (cloth). 240 p. Price varies (ebook).



This is a fascinating and troubling book. As any serious student of history knows, history can be used and misused and interpreted in wildly different ways depending on one's ideology and the purpose for which history is being used. Sources used as evidence are subject to very selective interpretation and the ignorance of much of the American public can be taken advantage of by those seeking to promote a particular agenda. The myth of Black Confederate soldiers is a perfect example of the politicization of history too. Presidential counselor Kellyanne Conway famously used the phrase "alternative facts" very early in the Trump Administration to address a controversy over the presidential inauguration crowd size. *Searching for Black Confederates* provides a detailed investigation into what one might call the alternative facts used by those who have been promoting the supposed existence of Black Confederate soldiers in recent decades.

Marshalling a variety of primary sources, Kevin Levin documents the existence of camp slaves who served in the Confederate army. However, none of these camp slaves ever served as a soldier. Instead, they were present to serve as body servants for well-to-do Confederate officers and soldiers or put to work on constructing earthworks, repairing railroads damaged by Union forces, etc. It is true that in the final weeks of the war in 1865, the Confederate Congress, out of desperation, passed legislation to enlist Blacks as soldiers, but virtually none did enlist (2-3). How did the undisputed existence of camp slaves become evidence for the supposed existence of Black Confederate soldiers?

Levin brilliantly documents the ways in which advocates of the Lost Cause, in the decades following the Civil War, manipulated historical interpretation. First, starting at Confederate veteran reunions, selected former camp slaves were invited to participate (and were furnished with military uniforms and even medals). Supporters of the Confederacy placed an emphasis on supposed camp slave loyalty to the Confederacy and to their masters. This greatly served to bolster the Lost Cause argument that the Civil War was fought over "northern aggression" and states' rights rather than slavery itself (83-84). The theme was racial reconciliation and cooperation even during the era of Jim Crow. Providing such "evidence" and parading elderly former camp slaves in uniform at these reunions blurred the distinction between slave and soldier in the minds of many as those actually old enough to remember the Civil War died off.

The real turning point, according to Levin, was the late 1970's. Thanks to a growing concentration of scholarship on the history of slavery, the rise of the civil rights movement (and accompanying successes in dismantling Jim Crow), and the popularity of *Roots* on television, advocates of the Lost Cause such as the Sons of the Confederate Veterans and United Daughters of the Confederacy felt increasingly threatened as their interpretation of the Civil War came more into doubt if not disrepute. More recently, the election of Barack Obama as the country's first African American president proved to be an additional catalyst for Lost Cause activism. Not

surprisingly, the rise of the Internet has greatly assisted the propagation of the myth of the Black Confederate soldier.

As Levin explains, it is not so much the creation of fake information, as the propagation of misinterpreted evidence via thousands of web sites that has helped bring this about. One of the most popular pieces of supposed evidence for Black Confederates is a doctored photograph of black Union soldiers. Originally published in *Civil War Times Illustrated* in 1973, the photo has been mounted on the Internet in an altered form leaving out the white commanding (Union) officer (136). In recent years, a small contingent of African Americans has signed on to the myth with the most famous, H.K. Edgerton, who has been photographed in Confederate uniform taking place in a well-publicized march from North Carolina to Texas in support of “Southern heritage” in 2002 (152).

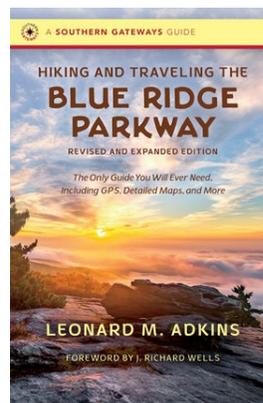
Even more recent developments ranging from the National Parks Service promoting a more accurate and nuanced story of the meaning of the Civil War and growing national support for the removal of Confederate War monuments as a result of a recent spate of hate crimes such as Dylann Roof’s murder of nine African Americans attending Bible Study in Charleston, South Carolina in 2015 or the violent demonstration involving white nationalists in Charlottesville, Virginia in 2017, has helped discredit the Lost Cause and the myth of the Black Confederate soldier in the eyes of many. However, Levin notes, “the mythical black Confederate narrative will continue to be embraced by those who believe it will serve their agenda” (183).

Aside from being riveting reading, Levin’s book is an excellent example of how history is truly relevant to modern American life and how it can be manipulated and twisted to promote inaccurate interpretations to further political and ideological goals. Following good historical practice, Levin’s book has numerous endnotes indicating exactly (and accurately) where he located information and quotes, and his book includes a lengthy bibliography including both primary sources and secondary sources used in the course of his research. He writes well so even the more casual, non-academic reader will find *Searching for Black Confederates* to be an accessible read.

Recommended for all academic libraries and most public libraries collecting in the areas of Civil War and African American history. This book is also an excellent example of how historical research works and the importance of how such research is interpreted.

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Hiking and Traveling the Blue Ridge Parkway Revised and Expanded Edition: The Only Guide You Will Ever Need, Including GPS, Detailed Maps, and More (Southern Gateways Guides). Leonard M. Adkins. Foreword by J. Richard Wells. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018. ISBN: 978-1-4696-4697-8 (Pbk: \$19.95): 408 p.



This work covers the Blue Ridge Parkway located predominantly Virginia and North Carolina. Leonard M. Adkins works for *Blue Ridge Country* as a walking columnist. Mr. Adkins trekked on five occurrences on the Appalachian Trail. The writing style is easy to understand, eloquent, and enchanting. The contents include Foreword by J. Richard Wells, Abbreviations, Trailhead Locations of Official Blue Ridge Parkway Trails, 1. Introduction, A Short History of the Blue Ridge Mountains and the Parkway, How to Use this Book, The Mountains-to-Sea Trail, Advice and Precautions, Blue Ridge Parkway Regulations, 2. Rockfish Gap to the Roanoke River: Blue Ridge Parkway Miles 0-114.8, 3. The Appalachian Trail, 4. The Roanoke River to Julian Price Memorial Park: Blue Ridge Parkway Miles 114.9-296.9, 5. The Tanawha Trail, 6. Julian Price Memorial Park to US Route 441: Blue Ridge Parkway Miles 297-469.1, Appendixes A. Blue Ridge Parkway Offices, B. Inns, Lodges, and Cabins on the Blue Ridge Parkway, C. Campgrounds on the Blue Ridge Parkway, D. Blue Ridge Parkway Roadside Bloom Calendar, E. Forest Service Maps, F. Bicycling the Blue Ridge Parkway, G. Become a Blue Ridge Trail Master, Acknowledgments, Suggested Readings and Field Guides, and Index. Thirty five black and white photographs enhance the discussion of the Blue Ridge Parkway. The manual includes seventy four detailed maps. The work shares locations of all mile markers along the approximately four hundred seventy miles of the Blue Ridge Parkway. For example Mile 0. Rockfish Gap. US RT 250 and 1-64 (1,909 feet), Trails of Mount Mitchell State Park, Blue Ridge Parkway Mile 355.3 the tallest mountain, and Mile 469.1 US RT 441 and the southern terminus of the Blue Ridge Parkway where the Great Smoky Mountains National Park Oconaluftee Visitor Center is located. The descriptions of the trails usefully consist of the distance of the trail, the exertion of the trail, and how to enter the trail. In addition, the author notes what trails are the best to walk. The Blue Ridge Parkway offers horse trails and mountain bicycling.

Some of the foliage seen are white oaks, trilliums, oak trees, rhododendron, rosehips, blueberries, raspberries, persimmons, blackberries, strawberries, lady slipper’s flowers, hickory, violets, bloodroot, hemlocks, green ferns, birch, and maple. Other plant life consists of jewelweed,