

Kentucky Confederates

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Review

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Craig, Berry *Kentucky Confederates*. University Press of Kentucky, \$45.00
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In *Kentucky Confederates: Secession, Civil War, and the Jackson Purchase*, Berry Craig explains why western Kentucky, or the Jackson Purchase, was novel during the Civil War: despite the predominance of pro-Unionism across the state, the Purchase was staunchly pro-Confederate. The Purchase's fidelity to the southern cause was so well known that it earned the region the sobriquet "the South Carolina of Kentucky" (1). Craig argues that despite the Confederate army's withdrawal from the region in 1862 and the lack of statewide support for secession, pro-Confederate sentiment remained vibrant in the Purchase. For example, from 1861-1865, about 5,000 men from the Purchase enlisted in the Confederate army, while only 850 joined federal forces. Those who remained in the region joined roving bands of Confederate guerillas who attacked pro-Unionists and their families with virtual impunity and received food, weapons, and other support from local civilians. In order to subdue the region, occupying federal forces declared martial law, implemented loyalty oaths, and infamous Brigadier General Eleazer A. Paine wrought a so-called "reign of terror" by banishing Confederate sympathizers and their families to Canada and even ordering the execution of some suspected guerillas (261). However, all of these tactics proved futile. Purchase residents sustained faith that a gray-clad army would emerge victorious and liberate them from the Yankee invaders.

Craig begins by explaining how early patterns of settlement, trade, religion, and geography caused the Purchase to gravitate toward the Confederacy. Separated from the rest of Kentucky by the Tennessee and Cumberland rivers, geography determined that many of the region's early settlers migrated either from West Tennessee or points further south. Successive generations clung to the proslavery evangelical Protestantism their ancestors brought with them. The eight counties that compose the region were linked closely to the South via communities such as Hickman, Columbus, and Paducah which maintained

bustling river and rail commerce with Memphis, Nashville, and New Orleans. And as Kentucky's overall slave population declined after 1830, the Purchase's reliance on slave labor increased, especially for tobacco production, which by 1850 was highly profitable.

In many ways, the Purchase shared common social and cultural traits with the lower South which partly explains the region's adherence to the southern cause. But, Craig's primary focus for understanding pro-secessionist sentiment is through an exhaustive examination of the region's politics which had been heavily Democratic since the 1830s even though the rest of the state had been a bastion of Henry Clay and the Whigs. In the 1860 presidential election, the Purchase went to proslavery, southern Democratic candidate John C. Breckinridge, while the remainder of the state voted for John Bell and the Constitutional Union party. After the firing on Fort Sumter and Lincoln's call for seventy-five thousand volunteers, the Kentucky General Assembly declared the state neutral which prompted Purchase Democrats to indefatigably agitate for secession throughout the war. According to Craig, no other region of a loyal slave state advocated for secession. For example, in May 1861, U.S. Congressman Henry C. Burnett and other secessionists met at the now forgotten Mayfield convention to discuss possibilities of the region creating either a military alliance with or annexing to western Tennessee to create a new Confederate state. Ultimately, the delegates declined secession because they falsely believed that the rest of Kentucky would eventually secede once they fully understood that a Lincoln administration meant the death of slavery.

However, their faith that fellow Kentuckians would come to see the error in neutrality never came to light. In fact, after Confederate forces occupied Hickman and Columbus in September of 1861, Kentucky forsook neutrality for support of the federal cause. Although a minority, Craig also gives equal time to pro-Unionists, and their complicated interactions with slavery and race in western Kentucky. Kentucky's loyalty to the Union was always narrowly qualified: anti-Lincoln, white supremacist, and predicated on the preservation of slavery. Purchase Unionists, who by 1863 called themselves Union Democrats, were no different. They vehemently counseled their secessionist neighbors that rebellion had only furthered the cause of abolition by creating the circumstances for the hated Emancipation Proclamation and the subsequent recruitment of African-Americans into the Union army. For Union Democrats, abolitionists and secessionists were evil twins, threatening the social order and democratic institutions valued by all white Kentuckians. They saw no contradiction in

fighting to restore a union in which slavery, for all intents and purposes, was on the route to extinction. Ironically, by 1864, Purchase Unionists were using black troops to regain control of their communities and to combat Confederate guerillas, who were often their neighbors. Furthermore, black soldiers played a key role at the only major confrontation in the region, the Battle of Paducah in 1864, defending Fort Anderson from Nathan Bedford Forrest's cavalry attack. Also, Columbus served as an important recruiting camp for black enlistees and their families, second in activity to Jessamine County's Camp Nelson.

Kentucky Confederates' convincing thesis relies on a wide variety of sources, such as diaries, memoirs, travel accounts, and a copious number of newspapers, which Craig exhaustively mines to provide a nuanced political analysis. Studies of the Civil War in Kentucky usually provide little coverage of western Kentucky compared to either eastern Kentucky or the Bluegrass. The area's history stands in deep contrast to the dominant paradigm of Kentucky as a loyal state that, as historian Merton E. Coulter famously noted in *The Civil War and Readjustment in Kentucky*, joined the Confederacy after the war. Undoubtedly, Craig's book will change this trend in the historiography. *Kentucky Confederates* clearly illustrates that western Kentucky was a cultural and political bellwether that the rest of the state followed postwar in assuming a Confederate identity.

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