

### Cwbr Author Interview: Creating A Confederate Kentucky: The Lost Cause And Civil War Memory In A Border State

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## Interview

# CWBR AUTHOR INTERVIEW: CREATING A CONFEDERATE KENTUCKY: THE LOST CAUSE AND CIVIL WAR MEMORY IN A BORDER STATE

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Interview with Anne Marshall, Assistant Professor of History at Mississippi State University

Interviewed by Nathan Buman

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*Civil War Book Review (CWBR):* Today, *Civil War Book Review* is pleased to talk with Anne Marshall, author of a brand-new work, *Creating a Confederate Kentucky: The Lost Cause and Civil War Memory in a Border State*. Professor Marshall, thank you for joining me this afternoon.

**Anne Marshall (AM):** Well thank you so much for having me.

**CWBR:** What inspired you to look at the Civil War and Civil War memory and how did you come to choose Kentucky as the focus for your study?

**AM:** Well I really chose Kentucky because it sort of chose me I guess. I grew up in Kentucky; I had always sort of noticed as I was growing up that there was some real sort of dissonance between the sort of standard history of the state and its Civil War experience that I learned in fourth grade Kentucky history. And then the sort of public commemoration that I saw all around me, whether in historical markers or monuments or sort of the public dialog about the war and so when I got to graduate school this is right around the time when there was just a lot of great work about historical memory and the Civil War coming out and this was right when David Blight's book came out and I just thought, you know, this would be a really great angle at which to study the question of why Kentucky

supposedly succeeded after the Civil War and that's really how I came to the topic.

**CWBR:** James McPherson has written on the motivations of soldiers and, more recently, in light of important books by Chandra Manning and Gary Gallagher, what can your analysis of wartime Kentucky say about why soldiers fought? Did the Emancipation Proclamation shift the ways in which Confederate and Unionist soldiers and residents in Kentucky viewed the conflict?

**AM:** Yes, it definitely did and I think in a way different from that which these scholars sort of point to, I think that the general consensus (at least the question that they sort of hold up) is whether or not, and to what extent, the Emancipation Proclamation served as a real motivation for northern troops who had been fighting to preserve the union. And for Kentuckians who were (white Kentuckians at least) who were fighting to preserve the union the Emancipation Proclamation really had a negative effect. This was certainly not what some Union troops that were from Kentucky were fighting for and, in fact, many of them became incredibly disenchanted with the war effort; they had sort of seen the writing on the wall, of course, as Lincoln had been offering compensated emancipation to Kentucky before he issued the Emancipation Proclamation. So they sort of understood what was happening and then, of course, Kentucky was exempt from that proclamation but they were very dismayed because for them turning the war for union into a war to end slavery was antithetical to the entire reason they had decided to fight for the union to begin with, and I do think that another important difference between Kentucky (white Kentucky) and its rationale for fighting, in terms of nationalism, I think it's important to consider how many Kentuckians didn't fight. About 71% of white Kentuckians decided not to fight. Many, many Kentuckians evaded Lincoln's draft so really it's not so much in many ways a question of I think Kentucky's experience shows that for many loyal citizens that loyalty didn't necessarily translate into a commitment to actually don a uniform and go off and fight.

**CWBR:** That's interesting and I wonder shifting towards the years after the civil war. I wonder if the violence and lawlessness during 1865-1885 if that makes Kentucky unique or were these problems and challenge did they present a problem for residents in federally-reconstructed states as well? What might Kentucky's experience say about the effectiveness of Federal forces in southern states?

**AM:** I think that's a great question because I think that as we know the South was a very violent place after the Civil War, but I think with states like Kentucky, and also Missouri to even greater extent, tell us is that the border states were particularly violent and I think that this was an effect of the kind of fighting that had been so prevalent: the kind of guerrilla conflict, if you will, that had been so prevalent in the state during the Civil War. And also the fact that they weren't federally constructed, as you say. They really didn't have any, there wasn't this official military occupation in most places. There was really no apparatus outside of the state government to quell the violence in these states and so I think that it does point to the fact that in other southern states certainly federal forces had an effect in terms of quelling violence.

**CWBR:** well you mentioned earlier the unionists that were able to keep their state out of the confederacy and who fought for the union army in times. I wonder why did former Unionists, who successfully kept the state out of the Confederacy during the war, why did they fail to garner enough support to combat the conservative violent factions that you spoke about just a second ago in the post-bellum period?

**AM:** Yeah well that's another great question and what happened was a lot of these former Unionists were the conservatives. They weren't necessarily these leaders, former Unionist leaders who were able to use their pulls to keep Kentucky out of the Confederacy in the Union, weren't necessarily the ones condoning the violence. And in many cases they deplored the violence; they were also conservative and I think that after the war, and certainly the fact that the war had turned from a war of union into a war of emancipation, affected their conservative terms after the war and there's no question that, in spite of the fact that many of them did deplore the means (the violent means) that the violence was an effective way of bringing about political ends that really suited them. And on the ground the violence really sort of served their interest of their constituency, at least as far as their constituencies saw this, and that this violence against African Americans was used by lower-class whites to maintain their ideas about white supremacy. And also their access to labor, they were using violence to keep African Americans away from the polls but also away from jobs, so really these conservatives, it's not that they condoned the violence, but they certainly were aware of the fact that, in some ways, the violence served their interests and I think that that made them sort of politically ineffectual to some extent when it came to quelling the violence. Although, there were certainly calls from, not only former Unionists, but former Confederates, especially people like

Henry Watterson who was the editor of the Louisville *Courier*, journalists at that time to crack down on the violence.

**CWBR:** Shifting to one of the key phrases in the title of the book the lost cause. Some scholars have looked at this stating that perhaps the strength of the Lost Cause in New Orleans resulted from their relatively early and easy falling to Federal forces and inherit guilt in the city that helped them to embrace Confederate celebrations after the war. How does the experience in Kentucky compare to a place like New Orleans or perhaps other areas that failed to become Confederate strongholds during the war like Unionist Tennessee?

**AM:** Yes, well I think that it's, rather than focusing on the experiences of those places during the war, it's interesting to sort of see an effect that historians cite the guilt factor in New Orleans is a little bit like the fact that they tend to focus on the political crack-down under martial law and the federal forces in Kentucky late in the war as sort of a factor of turning Kentuckians against the Union once and for all in the end. And this, according to a lot of scholars of Kentucky, was the spring board for the Lost Cause, but I think what's interesting in all of these case whether we look at postwar Kentucky, postwar New Orleans, postwar East Tennessee, is the fact that no matter what the particular situation during the war, that southerners of all political stripes could really find a lot in the Lost Cause that suited their modern (their contemporary) political imperative during the postwar era. I really think that there really probably is some truth to the idea of guilt or the idea of (in Kentucky) of the poor treatment at the hands of the federal officials during the war. But what really makes the Lost Cause resonate for so long in these places is that it really carries with it a set of values in the postwar era that suits people all over the South and in the North in some places as well. So I think that that's really where I would place the power of the Lost Cause and reason that southerners, no matter what their wartime experience was or their sentiments were, can really sort of grab on to it in the postwar era.

**CWBR:** earlier you mentioned the importance of David Blight in sort of setting the foundation in the way you looked at the post bellum period when you began your studies. Thinking about the recent scholarship of David Blight and Heather Cox Richardson and the ways in which they examine how whites reconciled nationally by pushing blacks to the margins, might Kentucky be indicative of a broader trend and how does your study illustrate reconciliation in a national context?

**AM:** Yes, I think that one of the points that I, from the beginning of this project, saw as a both being and engaging with those notions that David Blight and Heather Cox Richardson put out there that are very important in telling the story in terms of narrative and reconciliation and having to push. In the case of David Blight, he argues that essentially northern whites relegated this, sort of emancipation narrative as he calls it, to the dust bin in order to reconcile with southern whites. And I think that this is a really resonant argument but one thing that I found in Kentucky is that, if you look at it and you look at what the Civil War soldiers were saying the during the war and you look at what the Civil War meant for all of these pro-slavery Unionists, what becomes apparent is that this emancipationist narrative was really never viable to begin with. So in essence, I guess, that means that what Kentucky can show us is that some Unionists never pushed African Americans to the margin after the war because they had always pushed them to the margin; they were never part of that vision of what the Civil War meant except for the fact that that meant the end of slavery and that was a bad thing. So I think that that really crippled white unionist memory in Kentucky for a long time and so I do think that that this really does illustrate, in terms of reconciliation, because I think that it shows that there are lots of narratives out there and that in many ways white Kentuckians show this reconciliation happening much more quickly than it does nationally, which we tend to focus on national reconciliation happening in the 1890s, but I think in Kentucky's case whites reconciled in Kentucky much, much earlier over these questions of race.

**CWBR:** That's really interesting and in terms of reconciliation it's my understanding from reading your book that GAR reunions play a large role in the reconciliation and I wonder, do you have any sense if African Americans had been incorporated into northern Grand Army of the Republic reunions and encampments before the Louisville meeting in 1895 or were the challenges that organizers faced to incorporate African-American veterans more commonplace?

**AM:** Yes, actually African Americans had been regular part of GAR meetings in many northern chapters. They were integrated so African Americans and whites joined alike, they met alike, they remembered the war in some common ways and actually there's a great book out about this, Barbara Gannon's, *The Won Cause* where she actually refutes some of what David Blight argues as well in terms of war memories and she uses the GAR membership and the integrated GAR membership to really show this. And so I think, in that sense, Louisville was presented a sort of new challenge: how were these northern, integrated chapters going to come in as equals; they come to the South and

suddenly African Americans and white members were supposed to be segregated and have different accommodations and sit in separate places and really, in that sense, the Louisville experience was different.

**CWBR:** What did the southern literature during the period, specifically Annie Fellows Johnston who sold millions of copies of *The Little Colonel* (later becoming a movie), what did that do for the image of the South in a national context, as we are looking at southern literature and sort of the popularity of things like *Gone with the Wind* and what not in popular culture in giving an impression of southern culture?

**AM:** Yes, well I would say that the *Little Colonel* series had a similar effect to the works of Joel Chandler Harris or Thomas Nelson Page in that it really sort of spun these tales even though the *Little Colonel* was set in the New South, it was actually set at the turn of the century, which is when Annie Fellows Johnston was writing. It really evoked a sort of Old South gentility; it gave northerners a way to sort of look at the South and the post-Civil War South which carried according to Annie Fellows Johnston a lot of the same conventions in terms of that the Old South had carried, for example, the African-American characters were not slaves but they were devoted servants, still, who had chosen to remain with their former owners because they were well-treated and happy. And there was a lot of this air of the Old South, that was sort of positioned in the New South and that gave northerners (people all over the world as a matter of fact) a way to look at the South with this sort of sense of nostalgia, a sense that sort of gave it a comforting elegant genteel setting and a world that was increasingly tumultuous. This was a time of increasing industrialization and increasing immigration and a lot of white Americans all over the nation were really sort of unsure about what was happening to their increasingly urbanized world. And so being able to go and read these books that evoked this sense of Old South/New South gentility was sort of a form of escapism that was really very appealing to many Americans.

**CWBR:** I wonder, how does looking at the ways in which Kentucky emerged from the war inform or shape our understanding of current events in a state like Kentucky versus other states like South Carolina, Alabama, or Pennsylvania?

**AM:** Yes, well I'm not sure that we can sort of trace a direct lineage in terms of a sort of causes and effects of Kentucky's war experiences and its sort of contemporary realities of Kentucky. But I certainly think if we're thinking about

identity which is something I wrote a lot about in this book, not only just looking at the Civil War narrative that that came out of Kentucky's Civil War experience in the aftermath, but I was also looking at, in a general the way, that these Civil War narratives sort of created an identity for the state as a whole. And I certainly think that the way that Kentucky's identity developed after the war, the things that made it seem like a former Confederate state have stuck with it in a lot of different ways, it still has this reputation for being sort of simultaneously poor but also having a sort of patina of wealth to it which we can associate with the Old South. Some of what Annie Fellows Johnston was trying to create in her books, for example, and it still has a reputation for being a sort of violent state, so I think that there are still some elements there that are. Certainly the racism that existed in postwar Kentucky that informed a lot of this identity is still there; I'm not sure that it's any greater of an extent in Kentucky than it is in certainly in other southern places, and perhaps even in northern places today, but there's still elements of that there so I think, in those ways, some of this identity is still sticking with Kentucky.

**CWBR:** Well it's interesting you mention identity and I have to ask why has it taken so long to incorporate African Americans and even Abraham Lincoln into the historical analysis of the Civil War in Kentucky and turning to the future and the present as well how has the Civil War Sesquicentennial celebration encouraged engaging and incorporating groups like these groups?

**AM:** Well I think in terms of African Americans I think Kentucky is sort of where a lot of other southern and formerly Confederate states are on this sort of public acknowledgement of African-American history in general. But also the history of slavery, the history of slavery's influence on Kentucky's Civil War experience, and also the impact that African Americans have had on Kentucky's Civil War experience in that its sort of come in the aftermath of the Civil Rights Movement where people were connecting present fights for African-American rights in the 1960s and on into the 1970s with the deprivation of those rights that had come out of the aftermath of slavery. And then had the promise of those rights had not been fulfilled in the Reconstruction era, I think that in this sense it's sort of similar to the national narrative and it's just really been in the last 20 or 25 years or so that really African-American groups have really been at the forefront of trying to gain recognition for their role in the state's history and to insert their experiences into the Civil War narrative of the state's history. And the Lincoln question is really interesting because he was of course a Kentuckian and was hated in his home state for so long, getting less than 2% of the popular vote



in 1860, and then he really didn't gain any popularity among the states whites after the war, so what's really been interesting of course that the Lincoln bicentennial, which those events were carried out mostly in 2009, and the state sort of did a whole 180 on this one and embraced Abraham Lincoln and had a couple of years of celebrations really where they focused on every aspect no matter how small every connection that Lincoln had in the state. And I think that that's really also a realization of Lincoln's legacy and buying into this finally saying Kentucky is buying into this David Blight emancipationist narrative 150 years later to I think that the sesquicentennial was sort of, in essence, took off the tone for the sesquicentennial remembrance have come out of the Lincoln bicentennial in the sense that, with the sort of events the state is highlighting this year ,they are trying to sell a broader story of the Civil War that incorporates Confederates, white Unionists, African Americans so I think that this sort of evolution of historical memory and public history as well.

**CWBR:** Professor Marshall, thank you so much for joining us this afternoon and discussing your new book, *Creating a Confederate Kentucky: The Lost Cause and Civil War Memory in a Border State*.

**AM:** Well thank you so much for having me.