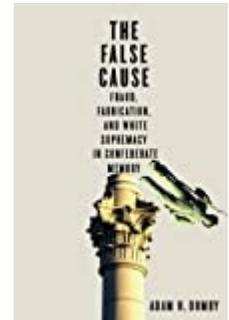


**Adam H. Domby.** *The False Cause: Fraud, Fabrication, and White Supremacy in Confederate Memory.* Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2020. 272 pp. \$29.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8139-4376-3.



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Adam Domby's *The False Cause* "details how white supremacy, fraud, and fabricated memories have fundamentally shaped how Americans, especially white southerners, recalled the past." In this narrative Domby explains how white southerners generally, but, specifically in this case, North Carolinians, used the "lies and falsehoods" they were taught about the Lost Cause to "justify segregation, disenfranchisement, and racial discrimination" (p. 3). A point worth appreciating up front is the time Domby takes to convey the reasoning behind his choice to use the words "lie," "falsehood," and "fabrication": as he notes, "a less provocative term than *lie* might obscure the purposeful creation and use of these constructions, and thereby render them innocuous" (p. 9). Throughout the work he argues that the falsehoods and fabrications are lies created to serve a contemporary purpose.

Chapters 1 and 2 examine the rewriting and invention of an expansive web of lies that white politicians and elites fabricated to serve their purpose and further white supremacy. In chapter 1, Domby engages with Jim Crow politics when dis-

cussing the motivations behind constructing monuments, stating that "monuments frequently have multiple overlapping meanings," but even the most innocuous concept of creating Confederate monuments to honor soldiers served as a method of celebrating the intentions and efforts of white supremacy (pp. 20-21). Domby acknowledges that transitioning monuments from the cemetery to a prominent public space such as a courthouse lawn altered the purpose of the monuments "as they increasingly served as celebratory markers instead of sober memorials," because doing so allowed white southerners to proclaim a moral victory and uphold systemic racism (p. 23). Chapter 2 deals specifically with the creation of ideal Confederates, discussing everything from exaggerating personal war records to conjuring "soldiers out of thin air" as an attempt to justify white southern rule (p. 47). Domby explains that during the height of monument creation, southerners understood that monuments were excellent tools that assisted people in remembering "historical figures as heroes, and heroes were part of a process that ensured a

specific memory of the war was passed on to future generations” (p. 46).

Chapters 3 and 4 are compelling and demonstrate the power of the pension as a prop for the Lost Cause narrative. In chapter 3, Domby reminds historians of the importance of money in crafting the Lost Cause narrative because money talked and said the things necessary to retroactively form a solid South. He explains that “pensions helped buttress a southern racial hierarchy through both the erasure of dissent and by presenting pensioners as white heroes to celebrate,” even if they had deserted the Confederacy when it counted (p. 77). Additionally, Domby states that “widows’ pensions could also help erase the dissent from the historical record while providing women with both monetary and social capital” (p. 87). While he provides a few examples, the extent of the social capital in relation to women is a fascinating point that deserves a deeper discussion in this context. In his opening example of Eli Williamson, Domby demonstrates the power of the pension even further when he explains North Carolina’s 1927 policy of accepting applications from African Americans who served as body servants or laborers (not soldiers) during the war for “Class B” pensions. He argues that “pensions for people of color forced to work for the Confederacy have been used since their issuance to buttress the Lost Cause and ideologies of white supremacy” because applications for Class B pensions “for former slaves and free people of color began to be cited as proof that there were ‘black Confederate’ soldiers serving alongside their masters” (p. 107).

In chapter 5, Domby artfully demonstrates how the concept of the loyal slave became the myth of the “black Confederate.” By looking at reunions attended by “black Confederates” and not closely examining those who garnered pensions, people can and do misconstrue these examples, as Domby shows, as false physical “proof” that Confederates were not “racist,” further providing hope for neo-Confederates that their heritage was a

much cleaner version of history than claimed. He argues that “the racial hierarchy that Julian Carr and other former Confederates desired was not undermined but rather reinforced by the attendance and limited participation of a few former slaves” (pp. 149-150).

*The False Cause* is full of thoroughly entertaining stories that grab readers’ attention and make them think about the lies of the Lost Cause and how pervasive that narrative has been throughout US history. Domby concludes this work by calling on his fellow historians to carefully and thoughtfully engage with the public with the hope of curbing these dangerous fabrications, because we “have the ability to call attention to how the past has been used and manipulated” (p. 168). Judging by his Twitter feed, Domby is leading by example.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at <https://networks.h-net.org/h-shgape>

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