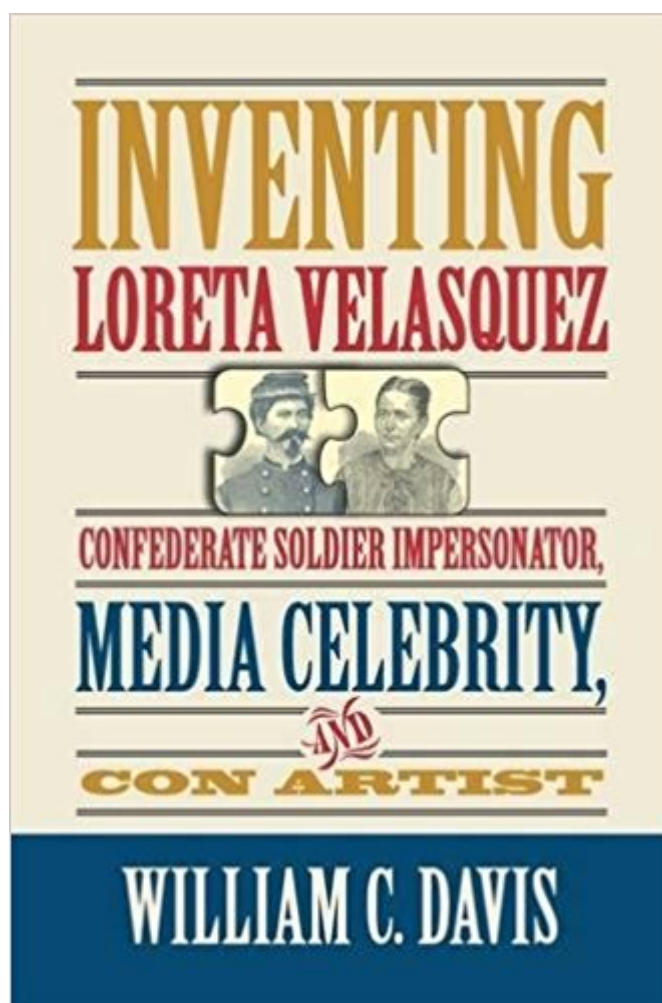


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Inventing Loreta Velasquez: Confederate Soldier Impersonator, Media Celebrity, And Con Artist



Synopsis

She went by many names—Mary Ann Keith, Ann Williams, Laretta Williams, and more—but history knows her best as Loreta Janeta Velasquez, a woman who claimed to have posed as a man to fight for the Confederacy. In *Inventing Loreta Velasquez*, acclaimed historian William C. Davis delves into the life of one of America's early celebrities, peeling back the myths she herself created to reveal a startling and even more implausible reality. This groundbreaking biography reveals a woman quite different from the public persona she promoted. In her bestselling memoir, *The Woman in Battle*, Velasquez claimed she was an emphatic Confederate patriot, but in fact she never saw combat. Instead, during the war she manufactured bullets for the Union and persuaded her Confederate husband to desert the Army. After the Civil War ended, she wore many masks, masterminding ambitious confidence schemes worth millions, such as creating a phony mining company, conning North Carolina residents to back her financially in a fake immigration scheme, and attracting investors to build a railroad across western Mexico. With various husbands, Velasquez sought her fortune both in the American West and in the Klondike, though her endeavors cost one husband his life. She also became a social reformer advocating on behalf of better prison conditions, the Cuban revolt against Spain, and the plight of Cuban refugees. Further, Velasquez was one of the first women to venture into journalism and presidential politics. Always a sensational press favorite, she displayed throughout her life an uncanny ability to manipulate popular media and to benefit from her fame in a way that prefigured celebrities of our own time, including using her testimony in a Congressional inquiry about Civil War counterfeiting as a means of promoting her latest business ventures. So little has been known of Velasquez's real life that some postmodern scholars have glorified her as a "woman warrior" and used her as an example in cross-gender issues and arguments concerning Hispanic nationalism. Davis firmly refutes these notions by bringing the historical Velasquez to the surface. The genuine story of Velasquez's life is far more interesting than misguided interpretations and her own fanciful inventions.

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Customer Reviews

“Truth is not only stranger than fiction; often, it’s even more fun. In *Inventing Loreta Velasquez*, William C. Davis reconstructs a fascinating life—not of the female Civil War veteran Velasquez was believed to be but of a pathological liar whose main accomplishment in life was hoodwinking the press and the public. Her true story is entertaining on every page.”—Christina Vella, author of *George Washington Carver: A Life*

“William C. Davis has done a masterly job of recovering the true story of a much misunderstood figure. *Inventing Loreta Velasquez* offers the drama of a detective story built on a foundation of superior scholarship. At one stroke, this book sweeps away a century and a half of confusion, misrepresentation, and inaccuracy. Academic and lay readers alike should welcome this exceptional study of a truly compelling character.”—Gary W. Gallagher, author of *The Union War*

“William C. Davis’s *Inventing Loreta Velasquez* is a masterpiece of historical investigation. Relentlessly dismantling the myths surrounding her controversial life, Davis provides indisputable evidence that Loreta’s gender-bending claim to be a noble and patriotic Confederate soldier and spy was little more than a tissue of lies, deceptions, and misdirection. From the pages of this compelling book, Velasquez emerges as a decidedly less salubrious heroine but still a fascinating figure. A great addition to the Civil War bookshelf!”—Joan Waugh, author of *U. S. Grant: American Hero, American Myth*

No longer should historians ever rely on *The Woman in Battle* when they write about women in combat or women and the Civil War. From this point forward, those who wish to know the story of Loreta Janeta Velazquez should turn to *Inventing Loreta Velasquez: Confederate Soldier Impersonator, Media Celebrity, and Con Artist*.

Civil War News

Inventing Loreta Velasquez promises to unpack and demolish the myths surrounding her controversial life. In Davis’s story she is hardly the patriotic Rebel soldier and spy she claimed to be on her resume, but nonetheless emerges in some ways an even more fascinating figure.

The Civil War

Monitor "Civil War scholar William C. Davis writes [this book] with urgency and flair, managing to make a cliffhanger out of history, in his quest to pin down the woman behind the legend. In his investigation, Davis discovers a story of media savvy, celebrity, and spin that could be ripped from today's headlines. . . . Davis's thorough, surprising research exhumes the historical Velasquez, bringing to life a troubled, determined person who knew how to manipulate and titillate better than the best." —Letitia Montgomery-Rodgers in Foreword Reviews

William C. Davis is the author or editor of more than fifty books on the Civil War. His work has received the Jefferson Davis Award, the Fletcher Pratt Award, the Jules Landry Award, and the Richard Nelson Current Award. He served as a professor of history at Virginia Tech and the executive director of the Virginia Center for Civil War Studies until his retirement in 2013.

In addition to being an acclaimed historian, William C. Davis is a masterful storyteller, and he has a great story to tell, thanks to his exhaustive research on Loreta Velasquez, a masterful storyteller herself. Velasquez, who had nine aliases and five husbands, was the closest thing the 19th Century had to a reality star -- a good-looking woman who told gullible reporters tales of donning a man's uniform and fighting at the deadliest battles of the Civil War. Davis debunks a large chunk of her claims and outs her as a grifter-extraordinaire in this fact-backed adventure story.

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