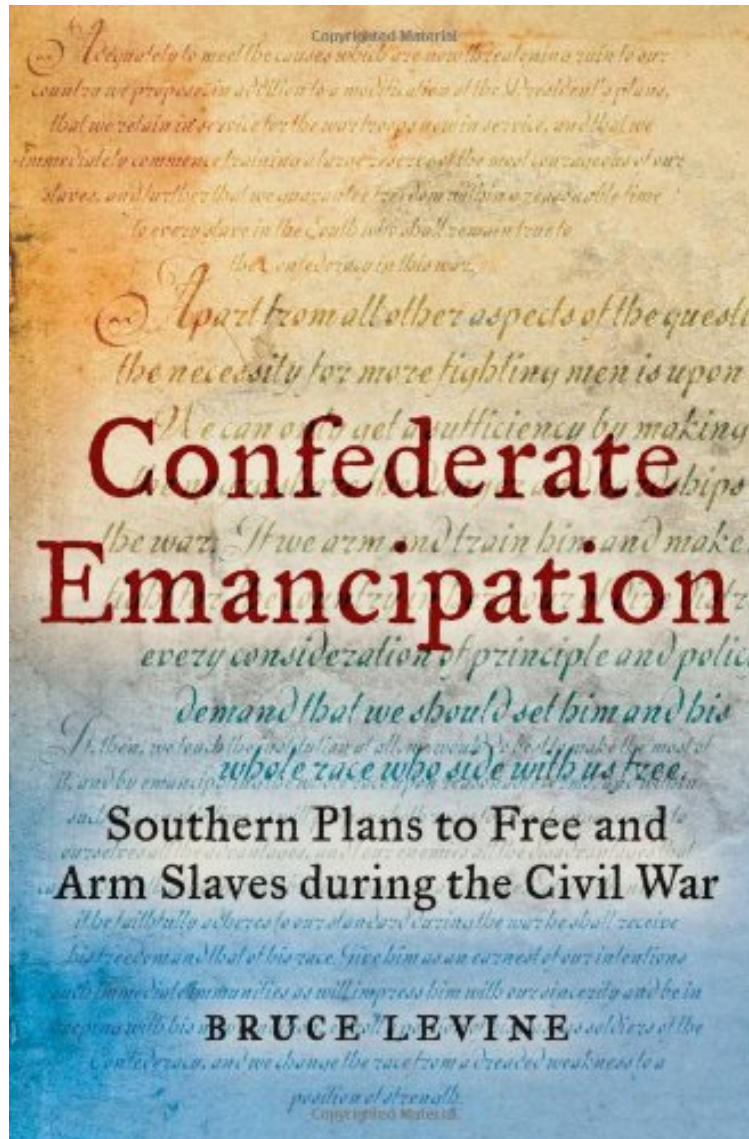


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Confederate Emancipation: Southern Plans to Free and Arm Slaves during the Civil War

Bruce Levine

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Emancipation: Southern Plans to Free and Arm Slaves during the Civil War:

16 of 18 people found the following review helpful. Read this book and assess the evidence for yourself By M. S.

BugherNo wonder this book makes Lost Causers so mad; by describing the Confederacy's late and ineffective efforts to recruit slaves into its armies, Levine simultaneously shows both how central slavery was to the Confederacy's economic, political and social systems (and how it was thus the central cause of the Civil War) and how much slaves did to seek their freedom and destroy the system from within. Levine offers an immense mass of evidence; there are 164 pages of clear, lively argument (with fascinating sketches of some of the main players), but the notes take up 52 pages and the list of sources, 18. The sources are particularly interesting: most are Confederates in the army, government and newspaper editorials talking about the issue at the time, and afterwards. There's also a thought-provoking section that places the attempt at Confederate emancipation in context with successful efforts at top-down reform in other countries: Germany, Japan and Russia. And another that traces the links from supporters of Confederate emancipation, such as Cleburne, with the South's post-Reconstruction efforts to keep as much control of black labour as possible (Jim Crow). This book is a fine addition to my Civil War library; I urge others to read it, and consider the evidence for themselves.

5 of 7 people found the following review helpful. Highly readable, richly sourced and well-organized. By Customer This highly readable, richly sourced and well-organized work is the definitive account of the political, economic and military forces that shaped the Confederacy's decision, in the last days of the war, to enlist Negro slaves as infantry soldiers. A very simplified summary is that the leaders of the Confederacy knew by 1864 that slavery was destined to end anyway; that slavery already had ended throughout the vast swaths of the South that had fallen under Union control; and that the desperate hope was to salvage a peace under which the plantation aristocracy would continue to dominate the political life of the South. The latter would ensure, if not slavery, the "next best" arrangement, a system of Negro servitude and peonage, backed up by suitable laws and law courts. Levine draws important connections between this last idea and the "black laws" that unregenerate Southern state legislatures passed immediately after the war, and also connections with the post-Reconstruction, Jim Crow period. The Confederate emancipation debates are thus seen as setting the cornerstone of the postwar political thought of Southern elites. The work is so well grounded in the primary sources that its key conclusions are very unlikely to be overturned. The one-star reviews found here originate with stubbornly ignorant neo-Confederates, and they should be ignored.

10 of 15 people found the following review helpful. Nothing New, But A Good Debunker of Myth By TEK This is an interesting book insofar as Levine is addressing those who have, in his view, taken as fact some of the historical falsehoods that are derived from the "Lost Cause" cult. Namely he is concerned with debunking the views held by some that: (1) thousands of blacks and slaves fought for the Confederacy; (2) blacks and slaves were cooperative in relation to the Confederate war effort; (3) the Civil War was not about slavery. Unfortunately, those who are members of the Lost Cause cult aren't easily persuaded of their foolishness no matter the weight of evidence presented to them (and Levine does have a plethora of evidence; two of his chapters have over 140 endnotes), so I doubt very much that this book will have the impact Levine desires. The result, in my mind, is that Levine thus ends up preaching to the choir. Unless you're a member of the Lost Cause cult you will probably not find anything in this book that is particularly surprising. Levine shows that even though some Confederates (emphasis on the "some") did initiate a policy to enlist slaves into the Army, the results were pathetic. Only a couple of companies around Richmond were ever organized, totaling some few dozen troops - not the hundreds of thousands as advertised. Slave owners were unwilling to give up their slaves. In fact, owners seemed more willing to see their own children die on the battlefield than to see their slaves given over to the army for the purpose of bolstering the army's strength. Even if owners had been willing to give up their slaves, countless testimonies show that the slaves understood the desperate status of the Confederate war effort by early 1865 and were not going to fight for the South. This book would make for a great secondary resource for those doing research projects on the topic. The book is full of source material. Nevertheless, this book is probably too dry for the average layman, especially when one considers the lack of novelty in the conclusions. Lost Cause perpetuators need to be rebuffed, but when historians pick up that task when writing a book the result seems to be a work that simply states the obvious.

In early 1864, as the Confederate Army of Tennessee licked its wounds after being routed at the Battle of Chattanooga, Major-General Patrick Cleburne (the "Stonewall of the West") proposed that "the most courageous of our slaves" be trained as soldiers and that "every slave in the South who shall remain true to the Confederacy in this war" be freed. In *Confederate Emancipation*, Bruce Levine looks closely at such Confederate plans to arm and free slaves. He shows that within a year of Cleburne's proposal, which was initially rejected out of hand, Jefferson Davis, Judah P. Benjamin, and Robert E. Lee had all reached the same conclusions. At that point, the idea was debated widely in newspapers and drawing rooms across the South, as more and more slaves fled to Union lines and fought in the ranks of the Union army. Eventually, the soldiers of Lee's army voted on the proposal, and the Confederate government actually enacted a version of it in March. The Army issued the necessary orders just two weeks before Appomattox, too late to affect the course of the war. Throughout the book, Levine captures the voices of blacks and whites, wealthy planters and poor farmers, soldiers and officers, and newspaper editors and politicians from all across the South. In the process, he sheds light on such hot-button topics as what the Confederacy was fighting for, whether black southerners were willing to fight in large numbers in defense of the South, and what this episode foretold about

life and politics in the post-war South. Confederate Emancipation offers an engaging and illuminating account of a fascinating and politically charged idea, setting it firmly and vividly in the context of the Civil War and the part played in it by the issue of slavery and the actions of the slaves themselves.

"Brilliantly researched and persuasively argued.... Levine delivers what ought to be a death blow to the still-popular refrain in Lost Cause rhetoric that the war had never been fought for slavery."--David W. Blight, Washington Post Book World "Thoughtful, authoritative, and convincing.... No one since Robert F. Durden has examined this broader issue with the kind of systematic and detailed attention that Bruce Levine provides in this slim but elegant book."--Civil War Times "Having fought for nearly four years to keep their bondsmen in slavery, many Southern whites experienced what amounted to a deathbed conversion to the idea of freeing and arming them to fight for the Confederacy. As Bruce Levine shows in this important book, the idea was unlikely to become reality even if Appomattox had not intervened to end the experiment before it fairly started. Disentangling myth from history, Confederate Emancipation deepens our understanding of the Civil War."--James M. McPherson, author of *Battle Cry of Freedom* "This is the little known, but vastly significant story of race at the crisis-point of the Confederacy. In clear and compelling tones, Levine sets out a history of the Civil War era through the words and actions of southerners pushed to the point of desperation, and hoping that slave soldiers might save the slavery-based southern way of life. This is historical detective work and analysis at its very best. The image of the Civil War South is transformed forever." --James O. Horton, co-author of *Slavery and the Making of America* "The Civil War produced few more ironic episodes than the Confederacy's debate about whether to arm and liberate enslaved African Americans. Bruce Levine's welcome study illuminates the conditions that gave rise to the debate, the forces arrayed in favor and against the idea, and the ultimate failure of those who saw black men as the key to establishing a white slaveholding republic. This book, which reminds us again of the war's immense complexity, deserves to attract the widest possible audience." --Gary W. Gallagher, author of *The Confederate War* "Throughout history, slaves have been armed in defense of their masters, often exchanging freedom for military service. The inability of the Southern Confederacy to do so until its doom was sealed reveals, perhaps as nothing else, the essence of Southern nationalism. In telling the full story of the Confederacy's failure to mobilize slaves in its defense, Bruce Levine brilliantly reveals the essence of Confederate nationality." --Ira Berlin, author of *Generations of Captivity: A History of African-American Slaves* From the Publisher "Having fought for nearly four years to keep their bondsmen in slavery, many Southern whites experienced what amounted to a deathbed conversion to the idea of freeing and arming them to fight for the Confederacy. 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In telling the full story of the Confederacy's failure to mobilize slaves in its defense, Bruce Levine brilliantly reveals the essence of Confederate nationality."--Ira Berlin, author of *Generations of Captivity: A History of African-American Slaves* About the Author Bruce Levine is the James G. Randall Professor of History at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He is the author of *Half Slave and Half Free: The Roots of Civil War* and *The Spirit of 1848: German Immigrants, Labor Conflict, and the Coming of Civil War*, and is co-author of *Who Built America? Working People and the Nation's Economy, Politics, Culture, and Society*.