Inventing Loreta Velazquez: Confederate Soldier Impersonator, Media Celebrity, and Con Artist

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Loreta Velazquez, cross-dresser and alleged soldier for the Confederacy, fascinated people in her own time and birthed a legend that still generates interest today. Civil War scholar William C. Davis writes *Inventing Loreta Velazquez: Confederate Soldier Impersonator, Media Celebrity, and Con Artist* 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.

Throughout Loreta's life, the two dominant features were “her quest for respectability and a near obsession with attention and celebrity.” She wanted to be a writer, but other than press releases and a best-selling memoir, *The Woman in Battle*, she seems to have settled for being written about. In her own time, she went viral; stories about her crossed war lines to appear in newspapers from coast to coast in just days. She herself traveled almost as much, changing names and identities like clothing and living in almost every region of the country before her death. Little is known about her beyond the documents she produced, documents that conveniently legitimated her celebrity and furthered her schemes. And a schemer she was, manipulating the national media and constantly reinventing herself to establish social connections and generate income on little more than her story of the hour. Loreta seized history in her own time, but, in the process, she buried the woman behind that notoriety. Her aliases took on lives of their own and, in many ways, never really left the public imagination, while Loreta died in anonymous penury. Davis's thorough, surprising research exhumes the historical Velazquez, bringing to life a troubled, determined person who knew how to manipulate and titillate better than the best.

LETITIA MONTGOMERY-RODGERS (March/April 2017)

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