

Retouching History:

The Modern Falsification of a Civil War Photograph

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Introduction

“In the past decade,” the Yale historian David Blight has recently written, “the neo-Confederate fringe of Civil War enthusiasm . . . has contended that thousands of African Americans, slave and free, willingly joined the Confederate war effort as soldiers and fought for their ‘homeland’ . . . Slaves’ fidelity to their masters’ cause - - a falsehood constructed to support claims that the war was not about slavery - - has long formed one of the staple arguments in Lost Cause ideology.” [2]

In this paper we discuss a graphic example of Blight’s contention by examining a Civil War-era posed studio photograph of black Union soldiers with a white officer. We maintain that this photograph has been deliberately falsified in recent years by an unknown person/s sympathetic to the Confederacy. This falsified or fabricated photo, purporting to be of the 1st Louisiana Native Guards (Confederate), has been taken to promote Neo-Confederate views, to accuse Union propagandists of duplicity, and to show that black soldiers were involved in the armed defense of the Confederacy. As of the date of this website this photograph is being sold on the web by an on-line retailer, www.rebelstore.com, which promotes itself as “The Internet’s Original Rebel Store,” and advertises this photograph as a legitimate photo of “Members of the first all Black Confederate Unit organized in New Orleans in 1861.” [3]

The Photograph

In a photographic studio somewhere in Philadelphia, probably in early 1864, a group of black Union soldiers posed for a rather somber photograph with a white officer. We know nothing of this group, but it may have formed part of a unit that had been recently formed in the union army [4]. In his preliminary emancipation proclamation of September 1862, President Lincoln announced that the federal government would enroll African-American soldiers as of New Year’s Day 1863. By June of that year, a committee of prominent Philadelphians had been appointed to raise black regiments. By the war’s end the federal government had raised 166 black units of infantry, cavalry and artillery totaling 185,000 combatants. Eleven of these units had been formed at Camp William Penn, “the largest camp existing for the organization and disciplining of Colored Troops,” located in Cheltenham Hills (now Cheltenham Township, just outside the northern city limit of Philadelphia). The white officers commanding the troops were trained under the auspices of the Free Military School for the Command of Colored Troops established in Philadelphia in 1863. [5]

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Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5

The black and white studio photograph (Figure 1) was greatly embellished and used to create a colored lithograph that served as a recruitment poster to entice black men to join the Federal army. On the poster (Figure 2), the union officer's uniform is dark blue, that of the soldiers is very light blue (bordering on grey), but their caps/kepis are dark blue and the bugles on the caps are clearly visible. Other embellishments and additions by the engraver to the original black and white photograph include the tent on the left, the federal flag, the mountainous background, the tree on the right, and the drummer boy. Published by the Supervisory Committee for Recruiting Colored Regiments and engraved by P.S. Duval & Son in Philadelphia, no publication date is given on the poster, but it was probably done in early 1864 (see note 4). The poster caption reads "United States Soldiers at Camp 'William Penn' Philadelphia" with a sub-caption reading, "Rally Round the Flag, boys! Rally once again, Shouting the battle cry of FREEDOM" (Figure 2). [6]



Figure 1. Studio photograph taken in Philadelphia, probably in early 1864. The handwritten numbers, "1895 x 1895" in reverse in the upper right-hand corner appear to have been hand-scratched on the emulsion side of the original glass plate negative; these numbers may represent a catalog reference used by the photographer. Photograph, courtesy, James Spina (see note 6).

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Figure 2. Union Recruitment Poster (see note 4). Courtesy, Library Company of Philadelphia.

Although the recruitment poster seems to have been relatively well-known to bibliographers of Americana as well as Civil War historians and others interested in the Civil War, the original photo from which the poster was derived was apparently fairly obscure. However, in its July 1973 issue, the widely read *Civil War Times Illustrated* published a copy of the original photograph which had been submitted to the magazine by James Spina, an antiques dealer who had purchased it years before. [7] The photo published in *Civil War Times Illustrated* was a slightly cropped version of the original (for example, absent are the handwritten numbers of "1895 x 1895" which were scratched into the photographer's original negative and appear in reverse in the upper right hand corner; also deleted is a small portion on the right wall, as well as part of the ceiling shown in the original photograph), but was substantially the

same photo as the original (compare Figure 1 and Figure 3). The photograph published in the *Civil War Times Illustrated* was re-published in 1982 in the well-respected and accessible *The Embattled Confederacy*, the third volume in a monumental photographic history of the Civil War. [8]



Figure 1.



Figure 3. Black Union Soldiers and White Officer, derived from photo in Figure 1, as published in *Civil War Times Illustrated* (1973) and *The Embattled Confederacy* (1982).

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Retouching History

Sometime after its publication in either the *Civil War Times Illustrated* or *The Embattled Confederacy*, the photograph was scanned and digitally manipulated (we have not been able to establish which of the two publications was the source for this manipulation), to produce the photograph shown in Figure 4 with the caption “1st Louisiana Native Guard, 1861” that is being sold by www.rebelstore.com.



[click on image to enlarge](#)

Figure 4. “1st Louisiana Native Guard, 1861,” fabricated photo; sold by www.rebelstore.com and purchased in August 2004 by Jerome Handler.

The actual 1st Louisiana Native Guards, [9] consisting of Afro-Creoles, was formed of about 1,500 men in April 1861 and was formally accepted as part of the Louisiana militia in May 1862. The Native Guards unit (one of three all-black companies) never saw combat while in Confederate service, and was largely kept at arm's length by city and state officials; in fact, it often lacked proper uniforms and equipment. "The Confederate authorities," James Hollandsworth has written, "never intended to use black troops for any mission of real importance. If the Native Guards were good for anything, it was for public display; free blacks fighting for Southern rights made good copy for the newspapers." The unit apparently was never committed to the Confederate cause, and appears to have disobeyed orders to evacuate New Orleans with other Confederate forces; instead it surrendered to Union troops in April 1862. [10]

Circumstantial evidence alone raises the suspicion that the Louisiana Native Guards photo purchased from www.rebelstore.com (Figure 4) is a fabrication. Given the enormous number of publications and known photographs of Civil War soldiers, it is more than slightly curious that a photograph as striking as one showing armed black soldiers in the Confederate Army has apparently not surfaced in these publications, in the many books and websites devoted to Civil War imagery, or even in the enormous Civil War collections of the Prints and Photographs Division of the Library of Congress. [11] Moreover, several historians and specialists on the Civil War we consulted could not recall having seen this specific photograph of "1st Louisiana Native Guard 1861" in any publication while, at the same time, it is known that photographs such as the one shown in Figure 1 were used to make recruitment posters for the Union army. [12] Finally, even though we recognize that forgotten documents and photographs may yet await discovery and be brought to light, as far as we are aware every identified published photograph of the Louisiana Native Guards, its officers or enlisted men, depicts them in Union uniforms. It is also noteworthy that the four major published studies of the Louisiana Native Guards during the last forty years do not include a "1st Louisiana Native Guard 1861" photograph nor is there any mention of any members of the regiment as ever having posed for a group studio photograph while in Confederate service. [13] Nor are there any Confederate broadsides, songs, poetry, recruitment posters or similar material indicative of Afro-Confederate troop recruitment during 1861-64 similar to the Union's well-publicized, documented efforts during the same period.

Image Analysis

Although we believe the circumstantial evidence is very strong, the case for falsification rests most solidly on a detailed comparison of photographs shown in Figures 3 and 4. A careful examination of these two photographs reveals that the alleged Louisiana Native Guards photo (Figure 4) is a rather amateurish digital manipulation, most probably, as discussed above, of the photo published in either the *Civil War Times Illustrated* or *The Embattled Confederacy* volume (Figure 3). In either case, using Adobe Photoshop or a similar application, the image in

Figure 3 was cropped (the most obvious deletions, clearly visible to the naked eye, are the white officer and his sword along with the soldier standing immediately adjacent to him; and the door frame and part of the soldier on the right). An examination of the foreground and background in Figure 4 reveals that the patterned floor and wall coverings visible in Figure 1 have been digitally erased or painted over. A Union belt buckle (with the block letters "US"), is faintly visible on the sixth black soldier from the left in Figure 1; however, because Figure 4 is a lower resolution derivative, the belt buckle on the same soldier (now the fifth from the left) is obscured. (It stretches credulity to suppose that Confederate soldiers would be photographed wearing belt buckles of the Federal Army!)



Figure 3.

click on images to enlarge



Figure 4.

By itself, the text superimposed on the "1st Louisiana Native Guard" image (Figure 4) offers clear evidence of falsification. A sampling of a wide range of Civil War photographs has yielded none that contain superimposed text. On close examination, the text (letters) in Figure 4 is much sharper and clearer than the underlying image and does not exhibit the same quality loss as the photograph itself because it has not undergone successive analog and digital reproduction. What is most telling, however, is that the text, which gives the impression of being a nineteenth-century style font, is, in fact, a modern font face named "Algerian". The Algerian font, which has no lower case letters, has come bundled with multiple versions of Microsoft Word, including Word 95, Word 6.0, and Word 7.0. The font vendor Elsner+Flake sells a version of the font, EF Algerian, available for online purchase. [14] It should be stressed that once a font is installed, it is accessible by every application on the computer, including image manipulation software. Perhaps the most damning evidence with respect to the text is shown in the "1st Louisiana Native Guard" thumbnail on the www.rebelstore.com website (Figure 5). Although the low-resolution text is not quite legible, the font face clearly contains both uppercase and lowercase letters. The Algerian font used in the photo purchased

from rebelstore.com (Figure 4) is composed solely of uppercase letters. The lettering in the thumbnail image is another font style. This inconsistency suggests that the image has been manipulated at least twice, at least once while in the possession of www.rebelstore.com.



Figure 4.

click on images to enlarge



Figure 5. Page from www.rebelstore.com advertising sale of "1st Louisiana Native Guard" (last accessed 1 February 2007).

Interestingly, the handwritten numbers of "1895 x 1895" which, as noted earlier, appear in reverse in the upper right-hand corner of Figure 1 had been cropped from each of the subsequent generation images published in *Civil War Times Illustrated* and *The Embattled Confederacy*. The absence of these numbers in the image sold by www.rebelstore.com also suggests that its image was derived from either *The Embattled Confederacy* or from *Civil War Times Illustrated*. These numbers, which may have been some kind of catalog reference by the photographer, were hand-scratched on the emulsion side of the original glass plate negative; considerable search has failed to locate this original plate.

Conclusion

In sum, the evidence available to us makes it abundantly clear that the Union recruitment poster shown in Figure 2 was in fact based on a legitimate photograph, and that the photo labeled "1st Louisiana Native Guard 1861" that is being sold by www.rebelstore.com as a 19th century photograph is, in fact, a falsification. We cannot determine when this falsification occurred, but it was done within the last decade or so - - judging from the presence of artifacts yielded by digital manipulation and the superimposition of a modern font face.

The specific motives of the fabricator/s of the Louisiana Native Guard photo can only be conjectured, but the manipulation of photographic imagery for ideological/political purposes is a well-established practice. As the editors of *Civil War Times Illustrated* wrote in their August 2004 issue (p. 80): "It is tempting to think of photographs as evidence, documents of what

reality was like in some specific time and place. But from the earliest days of camera craft, photographers have been much more than mere recorders. At times, they can be outright masters of illusion.” The editors are discussing a more innocent Civil War photograph of a junior Union officer in field dress. He is posing in a studio in front of a false backdrop to create the impression that the photograph was taken outdoors against a rustic wooden fence. It is commonplace to observe that pictures “do not speak for themselves.” [15] The photographs of the Louisiana Native Guards offer an interesting illustration of that adage and show how a legitimate photograph can be altered and used to advance and support a particular contemporary political or ideological perspective in the present-day United States.

Notes

1) Author identifications: Handler, Senior Scholar, Virginia Foundation for the Humanities, Charlottesville; Tuite, former Director, Digital Media Lab, University of Virginia Library. The views expressed in this paper are solely those of the authors. This is an abbreviated version of a PowerPoint talk presented at the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities on 15 February 2005 and at the Conference on African Americans and the Civil War, Virginia State University, Petersburg, Va, 28 May 2005.

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2) David W. Blight, review of *Confederate Emancipation: Southern Plans to Free and Arm Slaves During the Civil War*, by Bruce Levine (Oxford University Press, 2006), in *Washington Post*, Sunday, March 5, 2006.

3) See also, for example, www.39thtexas.com; last accessed 18 January 2007.

4) Andy Waskie, a specialist in the Civil War history of Pennsylvania and Philadelphia, has confirmed the photo is of the 25th USCT unit (possibly Company C or G), mobilized at Camp William Penn in February 1864 and sent to war in March 1864. Waskie makes this identification from the clearly visible numerals “25” on the top of the caps of several of the men in the photo. Moreover, Waskie adds, “Since the 25th Regiment, U.S.C.T. was not raised until February 1864, and the fact that the men are also wearing the U.S. Army regulation light blue overcoat issued for winter wear, this photo must date to the winter of 1864, probably February or March 1864, after the unit was organized” (e-mail communication, Waskie to Handler, 5 February 2007).

5) The school provided month-long classes in infantry tactics and army regulations and gave officer candidates hands on experience by requiring them to drill black soldiers stationed at Camp William Penn. *Free Military School for Applicants for Command of Colored Troops . . . established by the Supervisory Committee for Recruiting Colored Regiments . . .* 2nd ed (Philadelphia, 1864), 7; Ervin L. Jordan Jr., *Black Confederates and Afro-Yankees in Civil War Virginia* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1995), 274-75, 289-290; Gregory J. W. Urwin, ed., *Black Flag Over Dixie: Racial Atrocities and Reprisals in the Civil War* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004) ; Dudley Taylor Cornish, *The Sable Arm: Black Troops in the Union Army, 1861-1865* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1987), 217-221.

6) The poster shown in Figure 2 is owned by the Library Company of Philadelphia; the

Historical Society of Pennsylvania also has a copy. For details on the lithograph and its historical background, see the exhibition catalog, **Negro History, 1553-1903: An Exhibition of Books, Prints, and Manuscripts from the Shelves of the Library Company of Philadelphia and the Historical Society of Pennsylvania** (Philadelphia, 1969), 51. An identical colored poster, but with a caption reading "Come and Join Us, Brothers," was also published by the Supervisory Committee for Recruiting Colored Regiments and produced by Duval & Son. It is also held by the Historical Society of Pennsylvania and has been published, in b/w, in Joseph T. Glatthaar, **Forged in Battle: The Civil War Alliance of Black Soldiers and White Officers** (New York: Free Press, 1990), between pp. 242 and 243; Glatthaar acknowledges the U.S. Army Military History Institute for the poster. The same poster is published in William Paquette, "Lower Tidewater's Black Volunteers," in Jane H. Kobelski, ed., **Readings in Black & White: Lower Tidewater Virginia** (Portsmouth, Va.: Portsmouth Public Library, 1982), 16; the National Museum of History and Technology is cited as the repository.

7) Both **Civil War Times Illustrated** and **The Embattled Confederacy** acknowledge James Spina as their source. After many inquiries and considerable search, Spina was located. Through telephone conversations and e-mail exchanges he provided the following information (which is included here with his permission): While he owned an antique shop in Connecticut in the mid-1960s, he purchased the original photograph -- sometime before 1973 (he cannot recall precisely when) -- from a former employee of the state of Connecticut who, at the time, lived in Milford, CT. This person "had an extensive collection of CW paper/photos and art," although Spina does not know how the photograph was initially acquired. Spina kept the photograph for a while, and estimates he sold it sometime between 1974 and 1979 to a photograph collector whose name he could not recall. Spina had no doubt about the photograph's authenticity, and reports it was "two tone brown" (i.e., sepia), not black and white. Spina had a photographic copy made of his photograph before it was sold, and made this photographic copy available to us (Figure 1). Spina had seen the recruitment poster in a June 1965 Goodspeed catalog which advertised its sale (the advertisement appears on p. 286 of the catalog). When he saw the advertisement, Spina concluded that the poster probably had been derived from the original photograph then in his possession. He brought the photograph to the attention of the editors of **Civil War Times Illustrated** and it was published in the July 1973 issue.

8) William C. Davis, ed., *The Image of the War: 1861-1865 Volume III: The Embattled Confederacy* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1982), 233. **Civil War Times Illustrated** kept the Spina photograph and when it was later re-published in **The Embattled Confederacy**, Spina was again acknowledged as the source. (It can be noted that William C. Davis, editor of **The Embattled Confederacy** was editor of **Civil War Times Illustrated** in 1973, and the late Frederic Ray was its art director; Ray was also one of the photographic consultants to **The Embattled Confederacy**.) Although Spina was aware of the photograph's 1973 publication, he was unaware of its republication in **The Embattled Confederacy** (e-mail correspondence and telephone conversations between Handler and James Spina, 31 December 2004, 7, 9, 10 January 2005).

9) According to contemporary sources and James G. Hollandsworth, the regiment's leading authority, the correct name is "1st Louisiana Native Guards," not "Guard." (Hollandsworth, **The Louisiana Native Guards: The Black Military Experience During the Civil War** [Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995]).

10) In 1862 Lincoln proclaimed that black troops would be recruited in the Union Army by January 1863, but before the end of 1862 zealous Union officers in the occupied Confederate South had enlisted several regiments. The 1st Louisiana Native Guards, organized as a Federal unit in New Orleans on September 27, 1862, was the Union Army's first official all-black regiment, unusual in that it was commanded by black officers during its federal service (as it had been during its Confederate service). The unit was to play an active role fighting on the Union side in several battles in Louisiana and Alabama during 1863-64, 1865, and suffered losses of approximately five officers and 215 enlisted men wounded, killed, missing in action or dead from disease. See Hollandsworth, **Louisiana Native Guards**, pp. 10-11; United States, Adjutant-General's Office, **Official Army Register of the Volunteer Force of the United States Army for the Years 1861, '62, '63, '64, '65: Part 8: Territories of Washington, New Mexico, Nebraska, Colorado, Dakota; Veteran Reserve Corps, U.S. Veteran Volunteers, U.S. Volunteers, U.S. Colored Troops** (Washington: Adjutant General's Office, 1867; reprint, Gaithersburg, Maryland: Ron R. Van Sickle Military Books, 1987), 8:246-47; Joseph T. Wilson, **The Black Phalanx; A History of the Negro Soldiers of the United States in the War of 1775-1812, 1861-'65** (Hartford, Connecticut: American Publishing Company, 1888; reprint, New York: Da Capo Press, 1994), 183-199, 212-219; Benjamin Quarles, **The Negro in the Civil War** (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1969 ed.),

116-18, 214-20; Thomas Truxtun Moebs, *Black Soldiers, Black Sailors, Black Ink: Research Guide on African-Americans in U. S. Military History, 1526-1900* (Chesapeake Bay and Paris, Va.: Moebs Publishing Co., 1994), 379, 1133; Jordan, *Black Confederates*, 218-19, 264.

11) The photograph is singularly absent, and not even discussed, in extensively researched works exclusively devoted to documenting the participation of free blacks and slaves “on the side of the Confederacy.” See Charles K. Barrow, J. H. Segars, and R. B. Rosenberg, compilers and editors, *Black Confederates* (Gretna, Louisiana: Pelican Publishing Company, 2001; originally published as *Forgotten Confederates: An Anthology About Black Southerners* [Atlanta, Georgia: Southern Heritage Press, 1995]); also, J.H. Segars and C. K. Barrow, compilers and editors, *Black Southerners in Confederate Armies: A Collection of Historical Accounts* (Atlanta, Georgia: Southern Lion Books, 2001).

12) What is readily noticeable on the lithographs, both of which were examined by Handler at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, is that on the belt buckles of the fourth and fifth black soldiers, from the left, the initials “US” are plainly visible, and have been particularly emphasized by the lithographer; the initials are not shown on the belt buckles of the other soldiers. The “US” initial is also faintly visible on the belt buckle of the sixth black soldier from the left in *The Embattled Confederacy* photograph (Figure 3), but is clearer still on the same soldier in the original photograph (Figure 1).

13) Mary Frances Berry, “Negro Troops in Blue and Gray: The Louisiana Native Guards, 1861-1863,” *Louisiana History* 8 (1967): 165-190; Hollandsworth, *Louisiana Native Guards*, 1-11, photographs between pp. 52 and 53; Nathan W. Daniels, *Thank God My Regiment An African One: The Civil War Diary of Colonel Nathan W. Daniels*, ed. C. P. Weaver (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998), 4-22, photographs pp. 57 and 78; Stephen J. Ochs, *A Black Patriot and A White Priest: André Cailloux and Claude Paschal Maistre in Civil War New Orleans* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), 68-94, photographs pp. 165-183.

14) The font was designed in 1968 and published by Elsner+Flake, a German design studio founded in 1986, which appends EF to its versions of classic typefaces. EF Algerian is one of the company’s most popular fonts (see www.elsner-flake.com and www.identifont.com for details and list of retailers who sell the font).

15) For a discussion of this theme with respect to images of Atlantic slavery, see Jerome S. Handler and Annis Steiner, “Identifying Pictorial Images of Atlantic Slavery,” *Slavery and Abolition* 27 (2006): 49-69.