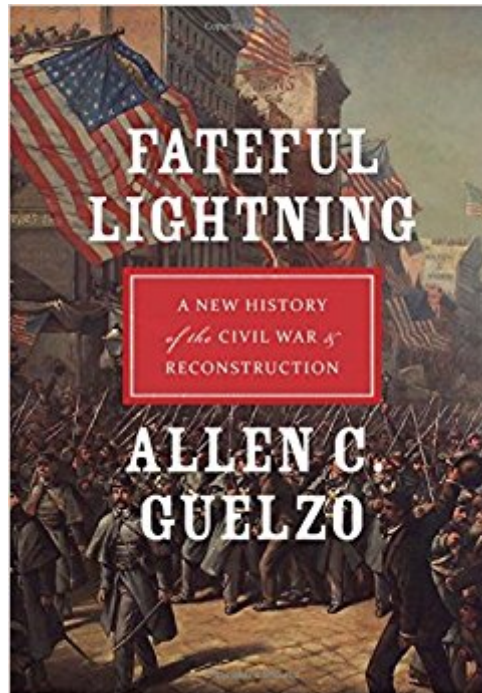


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Fateful Lightning: A New History Of The Civil War And Reconstruction



Synopsis

The Civil War is the greatest trauma ever experienced by the American nation, a four-year paroxysm of violence that left in its wake more than 600,000 dead, more than 2 million refugees, and the destruction (in modern dollars) of more than \$700 billion in property. The war also sparked some of the most heroic moments in American history and enshrined a galaxy of American heroes. Above all, it permanently ended the practice of slavery and proved, in an age of resurgent monarchies, that a liberal democracy could survive the most frightful of challenges. In *Fateful Lightning*, two-time Lincoln Prize-winning historian Allen C. Guelzo offers a marvelous portrait of the Civil War and its era, covering not only the major figures and epic battles, but also politics, religion, gender, race, diplomacy, and technology. And unlike other surveys of the Civil War era, it extends the reader's vista to include the postwar Reconstruction period and discusses the modern-day legacy of the Civil War in American literature and popular culture. Guelzo also puts the conflict in a global perspective, underscoring Americans' acute sense of the vulnerability of their republic in a world of monarchies. He examines the strategy, the tactics, and especially the logistics of the Civil War and brings the most recent historical thinking to bear on emancipation, the presidency and the war powers, the blockade and international law, and the role of intellectuals, North and South. Written by a leading authority on our nation's most searing crisis, *Fateful Lightning* offers a vivid and original account of an event whose echoes continue with Americans to this day.

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Customer Reviews

Dr. Allen C. Guelzo is the Henry R. Luce Professor of the Civil War era at Gettysburg College. Dr. Guelzo has written a heaving shelf of well received books dealing with Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War era. His new one volume history of the Civil War "Fateful Lightning" is a small print 536 hefty pages in the Oxford paperback edition. The book is illustrated with period drawings and contains a detailed bibliography which will whet the appetite of Civil War buffs & historians and general readers. The book is a scholarly master effort and is the best one volume history of the war since Dr. James McPherson's peerless "The Battle Cry of Freedom." A caveat: this book is NOT STRICTLY A MILITARY HISTORY OF THE WAR containing detailed accounts of battles! There are many such books as these. What Guelzo has done is look at America during this horrific time of civil war through the eyes of a social historian. Guelzo examines in detail such issues as:

- a. The plight of slavery and the divisive battles in Congress in pre-bellum American society to deal with this horrible and divisive "peculiar institution." Many pages are discussed to explaining the ramifications of the Missouri Compromise of 1820; the Compromise of 1850; the Kansas-Nebraska popular sovereignty Act of 1854 and the Supreme Court's Dred Scott decision which stated that slaves were not citizens and owners did not have to relinquish their ownership of chattel servants. Leaders discussed in this time were Henry Clay; Daniel Webster and John Calhoun. Weak presidents were unable to deal with slavery; John Tyler; Franklin Pierce and the inept James Buchanan among others.
- b. The role of women, native Americans, immigrants and African Americans are explored in depth.
- c.

This book is highly recommended for those who are generally familiar with the military history of the American Civil War. It explores, in some detail, the consequences of the war's impact on American society, both North and South. It adds another dimension to the understanding of the United States' greatest crisis. This is not a military history of the Civil War. It is not about its great battles and military leaders, but rather it is a history of the causes of the war, its civilian leadership, its impact on ordinary people, how the soldier in the ranks was equipped, fed, led and died, ending with, a lucid discussion of the post war Reconstruction, its short term achievements and its ultimate failure. What did the war actually achieve, if anything? This book is a different slant on Civil War history, thus, the subtitle: ".....A New History of the Civil War. Specific battles are discussed only in general terms related as to how their outcomes impacted policy both domestic and international. More emphasis is given to the details of the weapons used; fundamental battle tactics and how military units were raised, organized and equipped. The dislocation of and the great change in the roles of the female population, particularly in the South, dramatically illustrate in part the war's impact on civilian populations. Wives of southern plantation owners, in the absence of males off to war, were thrust

from the relative luxury of aristocratic plantation life to one of total responsibility of plantation management creating untold hardships. Violent riots occurred initiated by urban women in the south as a result of substantial food shortages, and in the North against the inequities of the military draft. This work lucidly dissects post war Reconstruction.

I read a very good book by this author titled "Gettysburg: The Last Invasion" last year and was looking forward to this volume. It was not what I expected but the more I read the more I enjoyed the book. I was expecting a narrative survey history of the era similar to Battle Cry of Freedom. Instead I learned that what is "new" about this book is the author's approach to the history of the era. This book contains a more diversified discussion of various topics written with a broad brush emphasizing social and cultural issues over the military history of the war. The military history of the war is most often seen as a result of the political and social events and not so much the cause of them. When I say broad brush I mean that the author wrote about what he felt was important without feeling compelled to make sure that he provided all of the details of a particular subject. Several times he mentioned Robert E. Lee riding his horse without ever telling the reader that the horse was named Traveler. Most books I have read included that information either because the author was showing off or they felt that those types of details were necessary for a thorough historical record. For this book that was an insignificant detail. Instead of those types of details the author has several discussions on different aspects of the role of women in the history of the Civil War era. He goes far and wide to include women of all walks of life and their participation in different events. I cannot recall another history of this era that mentioned the Seneca Falls convention and its importance. I was not aware that because of his support of women's rights the abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison lost control of the American Anti-Slavery Society.

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