



*A Short History of the American Civil War* by Paul C. Anderson.

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*A Short History of the American Civil War* is meant to provide a concise survey of the conflict for undergraduates and interested general readers. Historian Paul Anderson (Clemson Univ.) stresses the intellectual and social aspects of the war, as well as its significance in the broad sweep of American history. As in his earlier book, on the image of Confederate Col. Turner Ashby,<sup>1</sup> he relies mostly on secondary sources, apart from quotations of primary sources to illuminate the thinking of officials on both sides.

The book comprises a prologue on the war's origins, followed by five chapters on 1860 to 1864, and an epilogue on 1865 and Reconstruction. Anderson argues that the Civil War originated in issues unresolved since the American Revolution. Both Lincoln and Southern leaders claimed in 1861 to be the true heirs of the Revolution. In that sense, the Civil War was a struggle over the meaning of the revolutionary ideals that shaped the republic's early history. More exactly,

A fuller explanation of the war's fundamental dynamics would emphasize this: it was brought on by a relentless conflict over the future of slavery in a new and ever-expanding democracy arguing over the fruits of its prosperity. Americans, essentially, were arguing over a future that they were coming to believe was assured to them—the Founding generation and its successor brood in the early republic had not felt the same certainty—and confident they could control. (xxvi)

After reviewing the results of Abraham Lincoln's 1860 election and the first wave of southern secessions, Anderson assesses the strengths and weaknesses of each side. The Union benefited from a larger population, stronger financial capabilities, and much greater industrial output. But the Lincoln administration faced the daunting task of subduing a massive geographic area. Furthermore, both Northern and Southern national power ebbed and flowed with the vagaries of popular sentiment.

Anderson highlights 1862 as a critical year of the conflict by devoting *two* chapters to 1862. The first of these surveys Union successes in the Western theater before noting differences in the political/military views toward the war between President Lincoln and Gen. George McClellan. He then traces Union policy vis-à-vis Southern slaves from initial reluctance to emancipate, to Butler's contraband policy, to early deliberations about emancipation. Anderson goes on to show how initial Confederate setbacks in the West led the Jefferson Davis administration to centralize state power. This state-driven response helped the Confederacy mobilize its resources to sustain the Southern war effort for four years.

The second chapter on 1862 examines how Lincoln came to issue the Emancipation Proclamation (1 Jan. 1863) after the Battle of Antietam the previous September. Anderson skillfully balances interpretation and narrative throughout the book. Thus, for example, a discussion of how the Antietam campaign revealed the chasm between Gen. Robert E. Lee's and McClellan's military philosophies is matched in length by what happened during the campaign itself. Despite the

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1. *Blood Image: Turner Ashby in the Civil War and the Southern Mind* (Baton Rouge: LSU Pr, 2006).

Proclamation, the North experienced widespread discontent in the fall of 1862 due to an apparent faltering in the Union's military efforts.

Anderson's discussion of the twin Union 1863 victories at Gettysburg and Vicksburg concentrates on their long-term historical meaning. Pickett's Charge on the third day of Gettysburg became a key element in the postwar "Lost Cause" myth propagated in the South. The two battles were linked in that Lee's invasion of Pennsylvania, which led to Gettysburg, was in part an effort to thwart Grant's siege of Vicksburg. A Confederate invasion of the North might lead Lincoln to recall Grant to defend Washington. In the wake of Gettysburg, the number of African Americans in Union ranks continued to grow. Four out of five were former slaves seeking the benefits of emancipation.

Grant was ultimately called eastward after Braxton Bragg's victory at Chickamauga. The following Union victory at Chattanooga over Bragg set the stage for Gen. William T. Sherman's 1864 advance to Atlanta. That same year, the Union blockade reached a high level of efficacy, further constricting the Southern economy. In March, Grant arrived in Washington; his ensuing Overland campaign that spring brought the Union Army of the Potomac to Richmond's doorstep. The ferocity of the campaign bespoke the advances made in both weaponry and fortifications by this late stage of the war.

The South's best chance for a settlement late in the war came through the Union's 1864 presidential election. Anderson emphasizes that the outcome of the election was not a foregone conclusion. Certainly, Lincoln's re-election did not appear certain to Lincoln or Northerners who despaired over the heavy casualties of the spring/summer 1864 campaigns. This stress on contingency and the possibilities open to Civil War figures at each stage of the war is a major theme of the book. Lincoln's electoral victory, with 55 percent of the popular vote, highlighted ongoing support for his policies, a strong current of war weariness in the North, and a conservative attitude concerning emancipation.

The book closes with a short criticism of Reconstruction for failing to fulfill the commitments of emancipation in the face of Southern resistance and Northern acquiescence. Ultimately Anderson sees the Union as more successful at warmaking, while the South was better at peacemaking. The text is enhanced by forty illustrations and ten maps. *A Short History of the American Civil War* will best serve nonspecialist readers and students in undergraduate survey courses stressing the ideas and societal values that shaped the American Civil War.