



The Civil War Told By Those Who Lived It: (Four-volume boxed set)

Brooks D. Simpson (Editor) , Aaron Sheehan-Dean , Stephen W. Sears (Editor)

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From Reader Review *The Civil War Told By Those Who Lived It: (Four-volume boxed set)* for online ebook

Robin Friedman says

With this four-volume box set, “*The Civil War Told by Those Who Lived It*”, the Library of America completes its commemoration of the American Civil War in grand style. Beginning in 2011 and concluding in April, 2014, the LOA published a volume of original source documents for roughly one year of the Civil War, timed to coincide with the War’s 150th anniversary. Each volume offers extensive accounts of the political, military, social, and individual history of the War told from a variety of perspectives. The voices in each volume are from North and South, political leaders and generals, journalists, soldiers, sailors, slaves, freed slaves, slaveholders, poets, observers, and many more. Some of the participants are famous while others are obscure. Taken individually and as a whole, the volumes offer a comprehensive portrayal of the Civil War and its causes, progress, and consequences. The writers are as a group extraordinarily articulate and reflective.

In an identical Preface to each volume, the LOA indicates the purpose of the series.

“Each volume in the series covers approximately one year of the conflict, from the election of Abraham Lincoln in November 1860 to the end of the war in the spring of 1865, and presents a chronological selection of documents from the broadest possible range of authoritative sources – diaries, letters, speeches, military reports, newspaper articles, memoirs, poems, and public papers. Drawing upon an immense and unique body of American writing, the series offers a narrative of the war years that encompasses military and political events and their social and personal reverberations. Created by persons of every class and condition, the writing included here captures the American nation and the American language in the crucial period of their modern formation. Selections have been chosen for their historical significance, their literary quality, and their narrative energy, and are printed from the best available sources. The goal has been to shape a narrative that is both broad and balanced in scope, while at the same time doing justice to the number and diversity of voices and perspectives preserved for us in the writing of the era.”

Each of the four volumes includes valuable supportive material in addition to the documents. Each begins with a brief Introduction from the volume’s editor providing background information for the documents that follow. The documents each are prefaced by a short introduction providing context. Then, each volume includes a detailed chronology for the time period covered in the book. For example, the chronology in the first volume covers April 1860 – January 1862. Each volume also includes short biographies of the authors of each entry in the book, together with explanatory notes and maps at the beginning and end of the volume.

I had the opportunity to read and review each volume of the series as it was published. Each book was a pleasure to read and helped in my understanding of the Civil War. In what follows, I offer a brief summary of each volume.

The first volume begins with the election of Abraham Lincoln in November, 1860 and concludes in January 1862, when Lincoln named Edwin Stanton as Secretary of War to replace Simeon Cameron. The volume includes 120 articles by over 60 participants. The military centerpiece of the volume is the First Battle of Manassas which is covered by several participants. The volume includes Lincoln’s First Inaugural Address, Chief Justice Taney’s “*Ex Parte Merriman*”, poems by Melville and Whitman, and much more.

The second volume includes 150 pieces (11 published for the first time) by ninety participants. It begins with

a speech by Frederick Douglass in January, 1862 and concludes with a letter by Lincoln in January 1863, both of which concern Emancipation. The Final Emancipation Proclamation, dated January 1, 1863, is the heart of this volume, which also covers important battles such as Shiloh, Antietam, the Peninsula Campaign, Fort Donelson, Stones River, the fight between the Monitor and the Virginia, and more.

The third volume includes 148 pieces (11 published for the first time) by ninety participants. It begins in January 1863 with the Army of the Potomac's "Mud March" following the Battle of Fredericksburg and concludes with Lincoln's appointment of U.S. Grant as General in Chief in April, 1864. Lincoln's Gettysburg Address is a highlight of the volume. The battles covered include Gettysburg, Vicksburg, Chickamauga, and Chattanooga. The book documents the Union's use of African American troops at Fort Wagner and Port Hudson. It covers the New York City draft riots which followed immediately upon the Battle of Gettysburg.

The final volume of the series includes 160 pieces by 100 participants. It begins in March, 1864 with a Union cavalry raid on Richmond led by Ulrich Dahlgren which may have involved a plot to assassinate Jefferson Davis. The book concludes in June 1865 with a proclamation announcing the surrender of all Confederate armies west of the Mississippi and freeing the slaves in Texas. This proclamation became the basis for the holiday of Juneteenth. The book covers the surrender of Lee to Grant at Appomattox. It includes many documents on Lincoln's re-election as president in 1864 together with his Second Inaugural Address. Military events covered include Grant's Overland Campaign and Siege of Petersburg, Sherman's capture of Atlanta and March to the Sea, General Thomas' victory at Nashville, Sheridan's Shenandoah Valley Campaign, the Fort Pillow Massacre, Andersonville Prison, and more. Documents describe the assassination of President Lincoln and the Grand Review of the Union Armies held in Washington, D.C upon the conclusion of the War.

The Library of America deserves gratitude for this masterful collection of source documents on the American Civil War. The book offers readers endless opportunity to think about the conflict and about its continued significance to the American experience. The boxed set includes four pull-out posters with maps by Civil War cartographer Earl McElfresh. Readers who have purchased the individual volumes may purchase the posters and maps separately.

Robin Friedman
