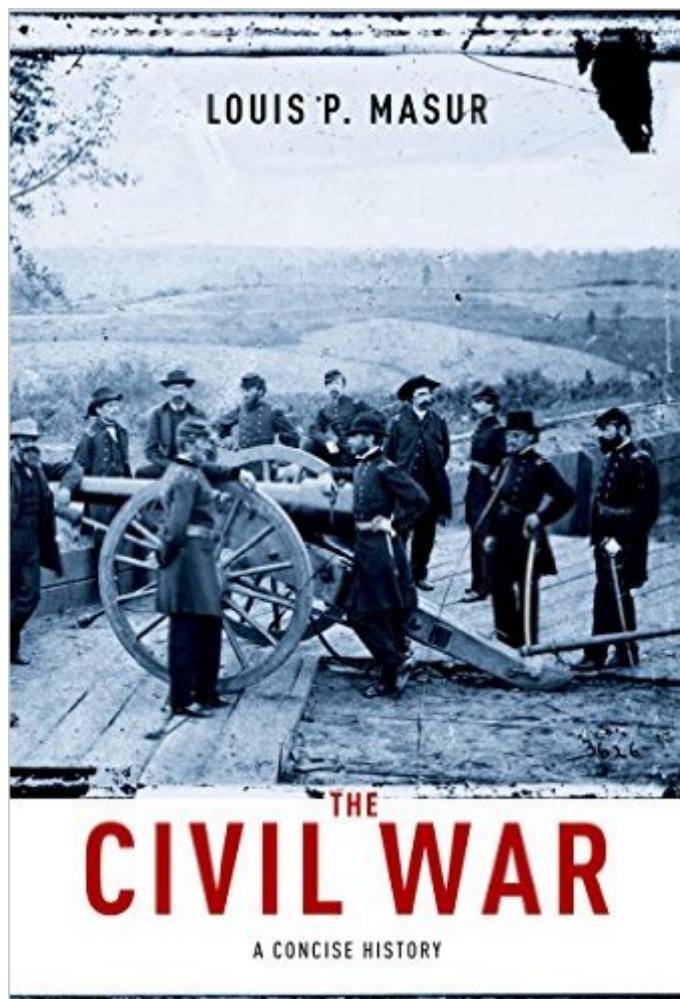


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The Civil War: A Concise History



Synopsis

One hundred and fifty years after the first shots were fired on Fort Sumter, the Civil War still captures the American imagination, and its reverberations can still be felt throughout America's social and political landscape. Louis P. Masur's *The Civil War: A Concise History* offers a masterful and eminently readable overview of the war's multiple causes and catastrophic effects. Masur begins by examining the complex origins of the war, focusing on the pulsating tensions over states rights and slavery. The book then proceeds to cover, year by year, the major political, social, and military events, highlighting two important themes: how the war shifted from a limited conflict to restore the Union to an all-out war that would fundamentally transform Southern society, and the process by which the war ultimately became a battle to abolish slavery. Masur explains how the war turned what had been a loose collection of fiercely independent states into a nation, remaking its political, cultural, and social institutions. But he also focuses on the soldiers themselves, both Union and Confederate, whose stories constitute nothing less than America's Iliad. In the final chapter Masur considers the aftermath of the South's surrender at Appomattox and the clash over the policies of reconstruction that continued to divide President and Congress, conservatives and radicals, Southerners and Northerners for years to come. In 1873, Mark Twain and Charles Dudley wrote that the war had "wrought so profoundly upon the entire national character that the influence cannot be measured short of two or three generations." From the vantage of the war's sesquicentennial, this concise history of the entire Civil War era offers an invaluable introduction to the dramatic events whose effects are still felt today.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

With the ongoing commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the beginning of the American Civil War, many Americans are revisiting the conflict or visiting it for the first time in an attempt to understand this seminal event and its continuing influence on American history. In less than 100 pages, this new book by Louis Masur, "The Civil War: A Concise History" (2011) offers a succinct introduction to the causes of the Civil War, to the conflict itself, and to the Reconstruction era which followed. Masur is William R. Kenan Professor in American Institutions and Values at Trinity College. He has published extensively on the Civil War and on American history. Writing freshly and well about the Civil War in a short introduction poses a challenge. Masur writes clearly, identifies issues, and avoids both over-simplification and polemics. Even though an introduction to the subject, the book benefits from an individualized approach and from the selectivity that comes from background knowledge and judgment. Besides presenting the familiar elements of the story, President Lincoln, Grant, Fort Sumter, Gettysburg, Lee, Sherman's March to the Sea, Appomattox, and the rest, Masur's history comes to life through detail. He draws on anecdotes and the words of individual soldiers that will be new and valuable to many students of the war. Masur also weaves the literature of the day into the context of the story as his book makes use of, "Specimen Days", Walt Whitman's prose reflections on the war, of Twain's and Warner's novel "The Gilded Age", of Herman Melville's short poem on the Battle of Shiloh and much more. Masur also makes good use of prints and photographs from the Civil War era. His short book reproduces several prints of subjects such as the Fugitive Slave Law (p.

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