

The Seven Days Campaign — A Turning Point More Important than Antietam?



Smoke billows from the Union artillery line at the Battle of Malvern Hill. The July 1, 1862 engagement ended the major fighting of the Seven Days Campaign. Courtesy of the National Park Service

Gary W. Gallagher. HistoryNet.
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George B. McClellan, Robert E. Lee, and a watershed campaign.

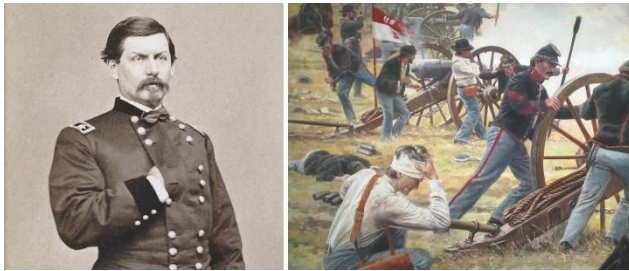
Readers might assume from the title that this article will explore the Battle of Antietam. After all, Antietam, together with Gettysburg and Vicksburg, often appears on lists of the war's crucial turning points. The arguments for all three are well known. Antietam brought emancipation to center stage via Abraham Lincoln's preliminary proclamation five days after the battle, Gettysburg marked the "High Water Mark" of the rebellion and sent Confederate fortunes tumbling toward Appomattox, and Vicksburg dealt a fatal blow to the Rebels by closing the Mississippi River. But this article addresses a turning point more important,

though far less often acknowledged, than any of those three—the Seven Days Campaign of June-July 1862. In the broader sweep of the conflict, George B. McClellan's failure and Robert E. Lee's successful effort marked a decisive moment in the Eastern Theater that in turn profoundly shaped the larger direction of the conflict.

A brief narrative of the campaign will set up an assessment of its consequences. Between March and the end of May 1862, McClellan led the Army of the Potomac, approximately 100,000 strong, up the Virginia Peninsula to the outskirts of Richmond. On June 1, Robert E. Lee replaced Joseph E. Johnston, who had been wounded the previous day at Seven Pines, in command of the Confederate army defending Richmond. The next four weeks provided a striking contrast between the two commanders. No general exhibited more aggressiveness than Lee, who believed the Confederacy could counter the Union's superior numbers only by seizing the initiative. When "Stonewall" Jackson's troops arrived from the Shenandoah Valley and other reinforcements arrived, Lee's army, at more than 90,000 strong, would be the largest ever fielded by the Confederacy. By the last week of June, the Army of the Potomac lay astride the Chickahominy River, two-thirds of its strength south of the river and one-third north of it. Lee hoped to crush the portion north of the river and then turn against the rest.

Heavy fighting began on June 26 at the battle of Mechanicsville and continued for the next five days. At Mechanicsville, Lee expected Jackson to hit Union Maj. Gen. Fitz John Porter's right flank. The hero of the Valley failed to appear in time, however, and A.P. Hill's

Confederate division launched a futile assault about mid-afternoon. Porter retreated to Gaines' Mill, where Lee struck again on the 27th. Once again Jackson stumbled, as more than 50,000 Confederates attacked along a wide front. Late in the day, Porter's lines gave way, and he withdrew across the Chickahominy to join the rest of McClellan's army. By this point, both Lee and McClellan had made their most important decisions: Lee to press the offensive relentlessly; McClellan to abandon all momentum and think only of retreat.



Maj. Gen. George B. McClellan, left, got oh so close to Richmond before General Robert E. Lee drove him away from the Confederate capital. Little Mac's artillery, right, saved him at Malvern Hill. (Bettmann/Getty Images; Painting by Don Stivers)

In the wake of Gaines' Mill, McClellan changed his base from the Pamunkey River to the James River, where U.S. naval power could support the Army of the Potomac. Lee followed the retreating Federals, seeking to inflict a killing blow as they withdrew southward across the Peninsula. The Confederates mounted ineffectual attacks on the 29th at Savage's Station and far heavier ones at Glendale (also known as Frayser's Farm) on the 30th. Time and again they failed to act in concert. By July 1, McClellan stood at Malvern Hill, a splendid defensive position overlooking the James. Lee resorted to unimaginative frontal assaults that afternoon, leaving more than

5,000 Confederate casualties littering the slopes of Malvern Hill. Although some of McClellan's officers urged a counterattack against the obviously battered enemy, "Little Mac" retreated down the James to Harrison's Landing, where he hunkered down, awaited Lee's next move, and issued endless requests for more men and supplies.

Confederate losses at the Seven Days exceeded 20,000 killed, wounded, and missing, while the Union's surpassed 16,000—only Gettysburg produced more casualties in a single battle. The campaign's importance, however, extended far beyond setting a new standard of carnage in the war. Lee had seized the initiative, dramatically altering the strategic picture by dictating the action to a compliant McClellan.

Four questions provide a helpful framework to gauge the importance of the Seven Days. The first involves military context: How did the campaign shaped by choices McClellan and Lee made in June and July figure in the entire tapestry of war during 1862? The first months of the year proved decidedly favorable to United States forces. Along the Mississippi River, they made excellent progress toward the strategic goal of taking control of the great waterway and dividing the Confederacy into eastern and western parts. Well before the first shots at Mechanicsville on June 26, Federal land and naval operations had seized Confederate strongpoints on the upper and lower Mississippi from Columbus, Kentucky, to New Orleans. The stretch of river between Baton Rouge and Vicksburg remained in Rebel hands, but as a conduit for transporting goods and as an outlet to the Gulf of Mexico for

exports, the Mississippi had ceased to be a Confederate river.



Union troops detailed to build Woodbury's Bridge are reflected in the Chickahominy River. The sluggish waterway split McClellan's force. (Library of Congress)

Federal gains in the Western Theater rivaled those along the Mississippi. Ulysses S. Grant's forces captured Fort Henry on February 6 and Fort Donelson 10 days later, opening the Tennessee and Cumberland rivers respectively, and stopped a Confederate counteroffensive at Shiloh on April 6-7. Don Carlos Buell's army occupied Nashville, with its crucial manufacturing, transportation, and distribution facilities, on February 25; just more than three months later, Henry W. Halleck led 100,000 Federals into the railroad center of Corinth, Miss. In less than four months, the United States had seized control of a vast swath of the Confederate heartland between Kentucky and Mississippi, a region rich in iron, industry, agricultural products, livestock, and other vital resources.

No part of the strategic puzzle loomed larger than Virginia, and Confederates could find little there to counter depressing news from west of the Appalachians. Joe Johnston's army abandoned its lines near Manassas

Junction early in March and retreated from a second position along the Rappahannock River a month later. The action shifted to the Peninsula, where McClellan's Army of the Potomac landed at Fort Monroe and moved slowly toward Richmond. Confederates gave up Yorktown on the 3rd of May, Williamsburg on the 5th, and Norfolk on the 9th. By the last week of the month, McClellan had reached the environs of Richmond, more than 30,000 troops under Irvin McDowell stood at Fredericksburg, and thousands more lay in the Shenandoah Valley and western Virginia. The Battle of Seven Pines (Fair Oaks) closed the month with yet another Confederate failure, as Johnston's ill-executed assaults produced several thousand casualties but left intact the strategic status quo. Stonewall Jackson's small victories in the Shenandoah Valley between May 8 and June 9 cheered Confederates hungry for good news from the battlefield but in no way offset the larger reality that McClellan's army was closing in on Richmond. Had Richmond fallen in June or July, the Valley Campaign would be no more than an insignificant footnote in Civil War history.

One last point about the military situation in the first half of 1862 bears mention. Operations in the Eastern Theater probably carried more weight than those elsewhere. This is not to say everyone looked to the East as the theater of decision—that surely was not the case. But a majority of civilians in the United States and the Confederacy, members of the U.S. Congress, and foreign observers almost certainly formed their primary impressions about how the war was going by reading accounts of Eastern operations. Several factors explain this phenomenon.

The centers of population clustered in the East, as did newspapers with the highest circulations. The largest and most prominent armies commanded by the most celebrated generals fought in the East, and they campaigned in the shadow of the respective national capitals. Some observers at the time, including Abraham Lincoln, lamented what they considered an undue focus on the East, as have a number of modern historians. Yet the fact remains that what happened during the Seven Days would exert all the more influence because of where it occurred.

The second framing question concerns civilian expectations as the armies prepared for their collision at Richmond. People in the United States envisioned success from the Army of the Potomac. This expectation derived from the triumphs on Western battlefields that had prompted newspapers to indulge in lavishly optimistic projections about McClellan's prospects for a decisive victory. Many editors across the loyal states claimed that Confederate morale had plummeted, as when a *New York Times* headline in late April described "A PANIC THROUGHOUT THE SOUTH." A few weeks earlier, Benjamin Brown French, the commissioner of public buildings in Washington, recorded that "news of victory after victory over the rebels has come and over them we have all rejoiced, and appearances indicate that the game of secession is nearly played out." Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts, a Radical Republican who did not wish the war to end without emancipation, similarly predicted an early termination of fighting. "It seems pretty certain that the *military power* of the rebellion will be soon broken," he wrote to the Duchess of Argyll on June 9. "What then? That is the great question.

[Secretary of State William H.] Seward assured me yesterday that it would 'all be over in 90 days.'"

Sentiment in the Confederacy contrasted sharply with that in the United States. Every Union military success promoted war-weariness among the Rebels. Shortages of food, territory lost to U.S. invaders, and stringent governmental actions, most notably the Conscription Act of April 16, 1862, added to a gloomy situation. In mid-May, a bureaucrat in Richmond aptly described deteriorating morale: "Our army has fallen back to within four miles of Richmond... Is there no turning point in this long lane of downward progress? Truly it may be said, our affairs at this moment are in a critical condition."

The absence of an army commander around whom the Confederate people could rally deepened the crisis. Four officers had stood out during the first stage of the war: P. G. T. Beauregard, the "Hero of Sumter" and co-victor at First Manassas; Joseph E. Johnston, co-commander at First Manassas and then head of the primary army in Virginia; Albert Sidney Johnston, who directed affairs in the sprawling Western Theater; and Robert E. Lee, who brought to his Confederate service a reputation as Winfield Scott's favorite soldier. By the time of the Seven Days, A. S. Johnston lay dead of wounds at Shiloh, and Beauregard had fallen out of favor with Jefferson Davis and gone into temporary exile after the loss of Corinth. In Virginia, Joe Johnston had retreated so often that many had come to question his abilities before Seven Pines. Lee stepped into Johnston's position with his public image tarnished because many Confederates thought he had performed timidly in

western Virginia during the autumn of 1861 and while in Charleston during the winter of 1861-62. Upon Lee's assignment to replace Johnston, one Confederate staff officer recalled, "some of the newspapers...pitched into him with extraordinary virulence, evidently trying to break him down with the troops & to force the president to remove him."

This brief review of events and opinion indicates how much was at stake as the armies prepared for a climactic contest outside Richmond—and raises the third question; namely, how did the Seven Days influence morale in the armies and on the home fronts? The Army of the Potomac is a good place to begin. McClellan's reputation suffered among those who believed he had retreated unnecessarily, given up favorable ground after repelling Lee's attacks at Malvern Hill, and fumbled a brilliant opportunity to capture the enemy's capital. Months of hard work had come to nothing because the powerful Union host withdrew to Harrison's Landing. Mixing sarcasm with disgust, a junior officer in the engineers noted how some of McClellan's admirers "deify a General whose greatest feat has been a *masterly* retreat."

Yet Little Mac remained immensely popular among the majority of his men. Speaking for this element of the army, a private in the 15th Massachusetts credited Rebel generals with movements that compelled McClellan to retreat from the Chickahominy to the James, adding, in the type of language mocked by the junior engineer, that the withdrawal "was one of the most brilliant achievements of the War." Frederick Law Olmsted, general director of the U.S. Sanitary Commission, conversed with officers and enlisted men at Harrison's Landing

immediately after the Seven Days. He concluded that the soldiers "believe that by the sacrifice of their lives they have secured an opportunity to their country" and with reinforcements would be eager to go after the Rebels again.

The Seven Days exacerbated the already poisonous distrust between Democratic generals in the Army of the Potomac and Republicans in Washington. Radical Republican Senator Zachariah Chandler of Michigan, a member of the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War, attacked McClellan unsparingly in the committee and on the floor of the Senate. Privately, Chandler called McClellan "an imbecile if not a traitor" who had "virtually lost the Army of the Potomac."



Alfred Waud sketched this Sunday morning service at McClellan's headquarters at Harrison's Landing. (Library of Congress)

Abraham Lincoln journeyed to army headquarters at Harrison's Landing on July 8-9, where he learned that McClellan had prepared what later became known as the "Harrison's Landing Letter." Little Mac called for a restrained form of warfare against the Confederacy. "Neither confiscation of property..., he insisted, "or forcible abolition of slavery should be contemplated for a moment."

Lincoln did not need a lesson in politics from McClellan, and the general's failure to capture Richmond in fact pushed the president toward the kind of conflict his general sought to avoid. The Seven Days had halted the surging momentum of Union military operations and seemed to foreclose the possibility of suppressing the rebellion through a restrained type of warfare.

Deeply affected by the outcome of the Seven Days, Lincoln moved closer to abolitionists and Radical Republicans who demanded seizure of slaves and other Rebel property. On July 22, he informed his Cabinet that he intended to issue a proclamation of emancipation. The Seven Days, therefore, not Antietam, is the key battle in terms of Lincoln's decision to take this extraordinary step. Congress, meanwhile, had put the finishing touches on the Second Confiscation Act, passed on July 17 and designed to free all enslaved people held by Rebels. Senator Sumner explicitly tied this act's passage—five days before Lincoln spoke to his Cabinet about emancipation—to Union military failure in the Seven Days. “[T]he Bill of Confiscation & Liberation, which was at last passed, under pressure from our reverses at Richmond,” wrote Sumner in early August 1862, “is a practical act of Emancipation.” Had McClellan been the victor in July 1862, he certainly could have pressed his case for a softer policy. The war could have ended in the summer of 1862 with slavery largely intact—the institution scarcely had been touched in any significant way at that point in the war, and most of the White loyal citizenry surely would not have demanded emancipation in addition to restoration of the Union as a condition for victory.

McClellan's retreat hit civilians in the United States especially hard because hopes had been so high. They understood that the campaign had failed, though few of them believed it presaged Confederate independence. Overall, they confronted the unpleasant fact that escalating sacrifice and loss likely lay ahead. New Yorker George Templeton Strong, a staunch Republican, noted in his diary on July 11: “We have been and are in a depressed, dismal, asthenic state of anxiety and irritability. The cause of the country does not seem to be thriving much.” Democrats tended to blame the Lincoln administration and Congress rather than McClellan, stressing that the army should have been reinforced before the final battles around Richmond.

In the realm of foreign affairs, the Seven Days carried far more clout with French and British observers than any of the Union successes west of the Appalachians. On August 4, Lincoln answered a French diplomat who suggested the Confederacy might be winning the war. “You are quite right,” the president conceded about the Seven Days, “as to the importance to us, for its bearing upon Europe, that we should achieve military successes; and the same is true for us at home as well as abroad.” But Lincoln bridled at the importance given events in Virginia compared to those farther west: “[I]t seems unreasonable that a series of successes, extending through half-a-year, and clearing more than a hundred thousand square miles of country, should help us so little, while a single half-defeat should hurt us so much.”



The painting above shows President Lincoln reviewing the troops at Harrison's Landing. Zachariah Chandler, left, Republican senator from Michigan, loathed McClellan. The general was a Democrat and had few friends across the aisle. (Library of Congress; Courtesy of the Berkeley Plantation)

The Union's "half-defeat" at Richmond profoundly affected the Confederacy's war for nationhood. The Seven Days thrust Lee into the limelight, and his leadership in June and July 1862 began an 11-month process by which he created a finely tuned military instrument that won notable victories. The Army of Northern Virginia rapidly became the most important national institution in the Confederacy and helped sustain morale in the face of mounting odds and hardships on the home front. Fellow citizens began to compare Lee to George Washington, which made sense because he and his army came to function much as Washington and the Continental Army had during the American Revolution. Beginning with the Seven Days, Lee shouldered an increasing share of the burden of sustaining morale among the Rebel citizenry. Long before Appomattox, most Confederates considered him and his army the fullest expression of their national project—and thus his surrender marked the effective end of the conflict.

The Seven Days also began the phenomenon of Confederates focusing progressively more on the Eastern Theater to determine prospects for independence. Lee had given them their

first major victory in nearly a year, helping to erase some of the sting from losses in the Mississippi Valley and Middle Tennessee. Over the next ten months, Second Bull Run, Fredericksburg, and Chancellorsville spread the impression that all good news emanated from the theater where Lee and his army operated. For the rest of the war, with the single exception of Chickamauga, Confederate field armies won no major victories anywhere west of the Appalachians. Under these circumstances, and with the additional importance of Richmond as a psychological, industrial, and governmental colossus, it should come as little surprise that Confederates fixed their gaze, as well as their hopes, on Virginia.



In this Peninsula image of captured Confederate Lieutenant J.B. Washington and his friend, Captain George Custer, the unknown African American boy is often overlooked. But his presence speaks to evolving war aims. (National Archives)

This brings us to the fourth and most important question: Did the Seven Days significantly alter the trajectory of the war? The foregoing discussion surely suggests that the answer is an emphatic yes. In terms of broad-scale impact, the

Seven Days stands as one of the great turning points of the conflict. Counterfactual speculation about what might have happened under different circumstances is usually pointless, but Lee's rise to command offers a clear exception. It is easy to imagine the war taking a very different path if Joe Johnston had escaped his wound at Seven Pines. He almost certainly would have retreated into Richmond, there to be besieged and eventually conquered by McClellan. The avalanche of bad news from other theaters already had threatened to smother Rebel hopes for victory; the loss of the capital might well have destroyed the Confederacy. Lee's successful defense of the city reversed a downward trend and virtually guaranteed a much longer and increasingly revolutionary struggle. Had McClellan captured the city, the war likely would have ended in the summer of 1862—with slavery largely intact and relatively little destruction across the South.

Much of the campaign's impact already was apparent by the end of July 1862. Observers on both sides could see the imprint of McClellan's and Lee's decisions on political connections to military affairs, on debates over war aims and policy (including emancipation), on civilian morale and attitudes, and on the diplomatic front. During that second summer of the war, people could only guess at some of the longer-term effects that stand out in retrospect. Students of the war should use that retrospective advantage to appreciate the full context within which the campaign was waged and the astonishing range of its immediate and far-reaching influence.

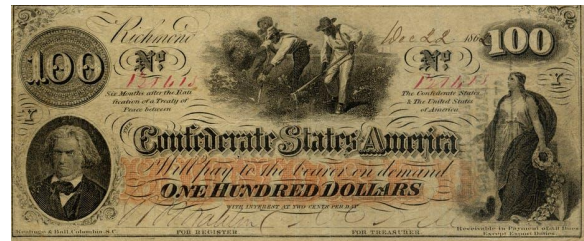
Gary W. Gallagher taught for more than 30 years at Penn State University and the

University of Virginia. His most recent book is The Enduring Civil War: Reflections on the Great American Crisis. (LSU Press, 2020).

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What happened to Confederate money after the Civil War?

May 3, 2021 8.02am The Conversation.
Robert Gudmestad, Professor and Chair of History Department, Colorado State University



Confederate currency had images of enslaved people, historical figures and mythical deities. [elycefeliz/Flickr](#), [CC BY-ND](#)

Curious Kids

Curious Kids is a series for children of all ages. If you have a question you'd like an expert to answer, send it to curiouskidsus@theconversation.com.

What happened to Confederate money after the Civil War? – Ray G., 12, Arlington, Virginia

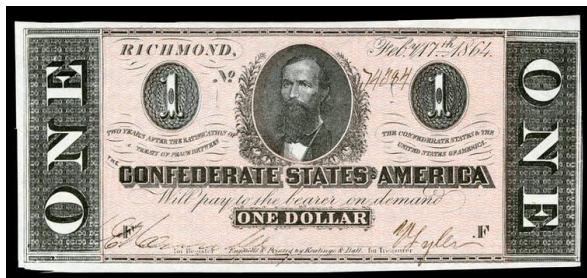
At the time the Civil War began in 1861, the United States government did not print paper money; it only minted coins. As

a historian of the American Civil War, I study how the Confederate government used a radical idea: printing paper money.

In 1861, 11 states tried to leave the United States and form a new country, causing a four-year war. Wars cost a lot of money so the new country, called the Confederate States of America, printed money as a way to pay its bills.

But this money was more like a promise – in technical terms, a “promissory note” – because its certificates were really pledges to give the currency’s holder a specific amount of gold or silver, but only if the Confederacy won the war.

Bills issued earlier in the war said right on them, “Six months after the ratification of a treaty of peace between the Confederate States and the United States, the Confederate States of America will pay” the bill’s amount to the person holding it. Later currency delayed the promised payout until two years after a peace treaty.



This Confederate \$1 bill was issued in 1864 in Richmond, Va., the Confederacy’s capital. National Numismatic Collection, National Museum of American History via Wikimedia Commons

The notes were commonly called “graybacks,” after Confederate soldiers, who wore gray uniforms. The bills were decorated with a variety of images, including depictions of mythological gods or goddesses, like the goddess of liberty. Other

graybacks bore images of important people in Southern history like George Washington, Andrew Jackson and Jefferson Davis. Some of the bills depicted enslaved Americans working in the fields, or featured pictures of cotton or trains.

But these images often weren’t very good quality, because the Confederacy didn’t have many engravers who could make the detailed plates to print the money.

When the South started losing the war, the value of Confederate money dropped. In addition, prices for food, clothing and other necessities rose because many items were scarce during the war. Graybacks became almost worthless.



This is what 1 million Confederate dollars looked like, in a photo from 1962. U.S. National Archives

In late 1864, a few months before the war’s end, one Confederate dollar was worth just three cents in U.S. currency.

When the Confederate army surrendered in April 1865, graybacks lost any remaining value they might have had. The Confederacy no longer existed, so there was nobody who would exchange its paper money for gold or silver.

Today, though, Confederate dollars have value as a collectible item. Just like people will pay money to own a Civil War hat or musket, they will pay money to own Confederate money. Some rare Confederate bills are now worth 10 times more than they were in 1861.

Hello, curious kids! Do you have a question you'd like an expert to answer? Ask an adult to send your question to CuriousKidsUS@theconversation.com. Please tell us your name, age and the city where you live. And since curiosity has no age limit – adults, let us know what you're wondering, too. We won't be able to answer every question, but we will do our best.

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The Best Civil War Books of 2021

POSTED 12/6/2021 BY The Civil War

Monitor



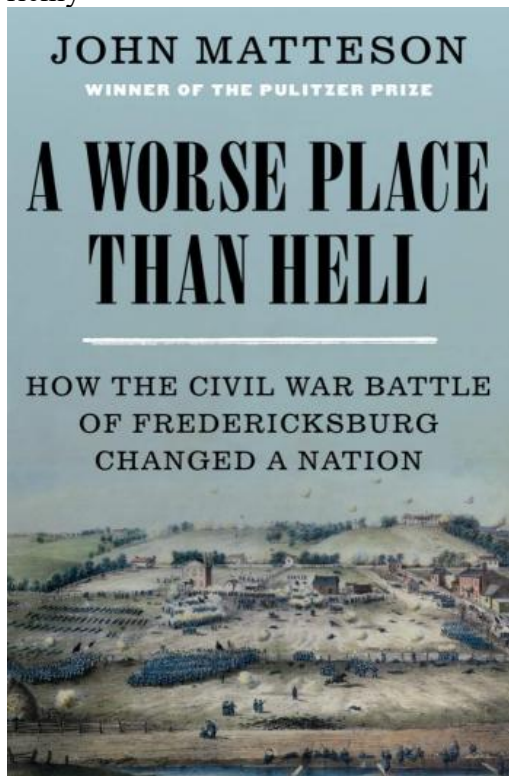
The Books & Authors section of our Winter 2021 issue contains our annual roundup of the year's best Civil War titles. As usual, we've enlisted a handful of Civil War historians, avid readers all, and asked them to pick their two favorite books published in 2021. Below are their selections.

We also gave them a chance to name an additional title or two that they're looking forward to, books either released this year or coming out in print soon. You can find those picks in the issue.

Brian Matthew Jordan

Top Pick: Elegantly crafted, John Matteson's *A Worse Place Than Hell: How the Civil War Battle of Fredericksburg*

Changed a Nation (W.W. Norton & Company) offers an urgently human portrait of the nation at war. A keen sense of contingency and well-chosen protagonists, together with careful attention to the mechanics of plot, propel Matteson's utterly absorbing history. Despite the suggestion of its title, *A Worse Place Than Hell* is no mere retelling of the fiasco of Fredericksburg; nor does it attempt to supplant the fine battle histories authored by Frank O'Reilly and George Rable. What Matteson delivers instead is a literate, richly



textured narrative revealing the war's uncanny capacity to yoke people together—and then annex their intertwined lives forever. Showcasing his mastery of both the

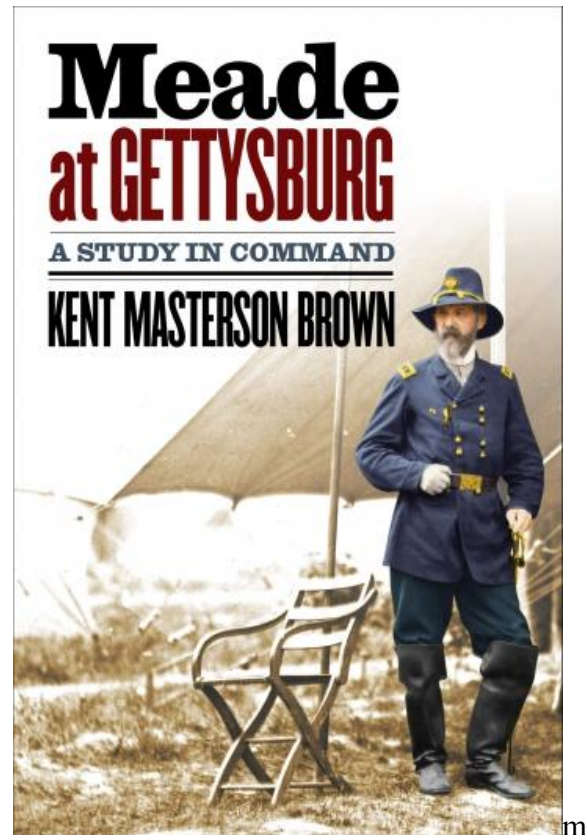
historian's craft and the biographer's art, Matteson has written a book that is at once wide-ranging and intimate. *A Worse Place Than Hell* will linger with readers—and will endure as a profound meditation on all that the Civil War visited upon body, mind, and soul.

Honorable Mention: Kate Masur's *Until Justice Be Done: America's First Civil Rights Movement, From the Revolution to Reconstruction* (W.W. Norton & Company) is a smart, timely, and capacious history that lends deep context to the Civil War era's fight for racial equality. Reaching back to the Revolution—and spending significant time in my native Ohio—Masur traces both the human and intellectual origins of the Civil War era's civil rights legislation. Building meaningful connections between people and events from different eras, *Until Justice Be Done* is a vital reminder that historians are too often prisoners of periodization.

BRIAN MATTHEW JORDAN IS ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF CIVIL WAR HISTORY AND CHAIR OF THE HISTORY DEPARTMENT AT SAM HOUSTON STATE UNIVERSITY. HE IS THE AUTHOR OF *MARCHING HOME: UNION VETERANS AND THEIR UNENDING CIVIL WAR*, A FINALIST FOR THE 2016 PULITZER PRIZE IN HISTORY, AND *A THOUSAND MAY FALL: LIFE, DEATH, AND SURVIVAL IN THE UNION ARMY* (2021).

Jennifer M. Murray

Top Pick: Scholars have written approximately 18,000 books on the Gettysburg Campaign and while it would be tempting to argue that we don't "need" one more, Kent Masterson Brown has proven otherwise. *Meade at Gettysburg: A Study in Command* (University of North Carolina Press) is a meticulously researched and masterfully written analysis of General George Meade's leadership between June 28 and July 14, 1863, that shows him as rightfully instrumental and indispensable to Union victory. Brown elevates Meade from an individual over-shadowed in the Gettysburg narrative—by both his contemporaries and generations of historians—to a general who successfully led the Army of the Potomac at the tactical, operational, logistical, and strategic levels of command. Gettysburg enthusiasts will find much of value here, including Brown's assessments of the infamous Pipe Creek Circular, the purpose of Major General John F. Reynolds' reconnaissance-in-force on July 1, Meade's role in the unauthorized forward



ovement of Major General Daniel Sickles on July 2, and allegations that Meade did not intend to fight at Gettysburg. Brown disputes the popular canard that "Meade did not pursue after Gettysburg" and offers a granular discussion of the many logistical challenges Meade's army faced in pursuit of Robert E. Lee to the Potomac, demonstrating that Meade never had a "golden opportunity" to annihilate the enemy at Williamsport. In December 1863, as Meade's detractors worked to erode his contributions to the Army of the Potomac's victory at Gettysburg, Meade lamented to his wife, "I suppose after awhile it will be discovered I was not at Gettysburg at all." Brown has redeemed Meade's reputation

and his book showcases a general who was decisive and exerted his authority to shape the outcome of the battle. In doing so, Meade achieved what no previous commander of the Army of the Potomac had been able to do: defeat Robert E. Lee.

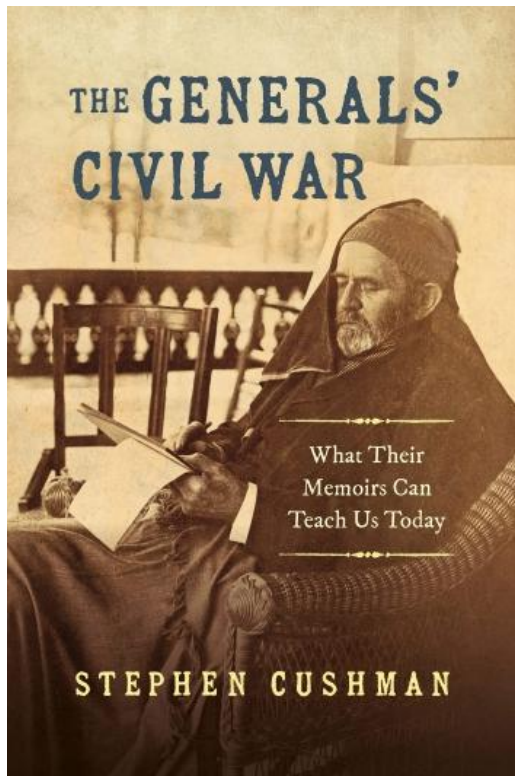
Honorable Mention: Andrew Lang's *A Contest of Civilizations: Exploring the Crisis of American Exceptionalism in the Civil War Era* (University of North Carolina Press) offers a comprehensive study of the ways in which the Civil War generation viewed the sectional crisis through the multiple lenses of American exceptionalism. Lang probes the conflicting understandings of exceptionalism, liberty, and democracy among the nation's diverse populations—slave owners, white northerners, women, free blacks, and slaves—from the antebellum era through Reconstruction. Placing what was the largest slaveholding republic in the world by 1860 in a global context, Lang masterfully demonstrates the ways in which external philosophies and events influenced America's sectional crisis. Readers interested in the interplay between philosophy, politics, intellectualism, culture, and warfare will find this an engaging and provoking read.

JENNIFER M. MURRAY IS A MILITARY HISTORIAN WITH A SPECIALIZATION IN THE CIVIL WAR IN THE HISTORY DEPARTMENT AT OKLAHOMA STATE

UNIVERSITY. SHE IS THE AUTHOR OF *ON A GREAT BATTLEFIELD: THE MAKING, MANAGEMENT, AND MEMORY OF GETTYSBURG NATIONAL MILITARY PARK, 1933–2013* (2014) AND IS WORKING ON A BIOGRAPHY OF GEORGE MEADE, TENTATIVELY TITLED *MEADE AT WAR*.

Kathryn J. Shively

Top Pick: It grieves me when Civil War scholars use memoirs—or any 19th-century account—as unmediated fact about what happened in 1861–1865. We could all stand to become better readers for picking up Stephen Cushman's quirky but marvelous *The Generals' Civil War: What Their Memoirs Can Teach Us Today* (University of North Carolina Press). It explores memoirs both familiar and less so: those of Ulysses S. Grant, William T. Sherman, Philip Sheridan, and Richard Taylor, but also the mixed-genre work of *McClellan's Own Story*, 166 manuscript pages of George B. McClellan's reminiscences along with his literary executor's additions of reports, dispatches, and letters. Each of Cushman's intricate and clever



chap

ters offers its own insights—to the interworking of “memory, imagination, history, and literature”; the co-creation of writer and audience; and the dynamism between memoirists and the publishing industry, with Mark Twain ever lurking behind the curtain. As Sherman and Joseph E. Johnston’s postwar friendship unfolds in Chapter 1, the 21st-century reader experiences the binding of emotional war wounds along with the 19th-century audience. When Grant combines simplicity and wit, thanks to teachers such as Abraham Lincoln and Twain—here in his recollection of writing the surrender terms at Appomattox: the particulars “did not occur to me until the moment I wrote it down”—one cannot help but question everything we thought we knew

about the past, not to mention memory. Similar to the reading experience of last year’s excellent *Belles and Poets: Intertextuality in the Civil War Diaries of White Southern Women* (Louisiana State University Press) by Julia Nitz, the reader may leave *The Generals’ Civil War* feeling uncomfortable about the hazy boundary between fiction and history. Embrace it.

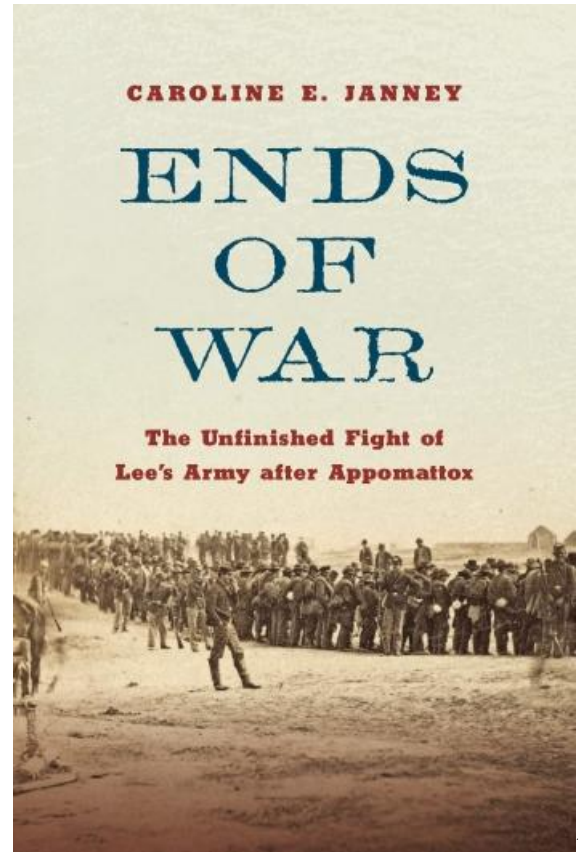
Honorable Mention: I’ve always been fascinated by the thrilling rise of “science” in the 19th century—an era of hubris, discoveries, and new disciplines, from chemistry to zoology. Eric Herschthal’s *The Science of Abolition: How Slaveholders Became the Enemies of Progress* (Yale University Press) examines how white and black abolitionists popularized the (mythical) ideas that enslavers were the “enemies of progress,” that science would render slave labor defunct, and that black people of the Atlantic world who engaged in scientific work could elevate their status among whites. That enslavers were every bit as modern as antislavery advocates, deeply invested in new technologies and soil science, was significantly obscured by this abolitionist rhetoric. But it is fascinating to explore how science came to be regarded as liberating and progressive, even while its circles remained beyond the reach of the marginalized. It goes without saying that to understand the Civil War is to understand

the great slavery debate, and Herschthal provides a fresh line of intellectual advance, away from the well-trod (though still important) themes of scientific racism and capitalism.

KATHRYN J. SHIVELY, AUTHOR OF *NATURE'S CIVIL WAR: COMMON SOLDIERS AND THE ENVIRONMENT IN 1862 VIRGINIA* (2013), IS AN ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF HISTORY AT VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY AND IS WRITING A BOOK ON CONFEDERATE GENERAL JUBAL A. EARLY'S INFLUENCE ON "SCIENTIFIC" HISTORY.

Gerald J. Prokopowicz

Top Pick: James McPherson brilliantly chose to conclude *Battle Cry of Freedom* on April 11, 1865, declining to repeat the oft-told



ale of the Lincoln assassination on the 14th, and offering only a brief epilogue on the “dizzying sequence of events” in the weeks that followed. In *Ends of War: The Unfinished Fight of Lee's Army After Appomattox* (University of North Carolina Press), Caroline Janney brings her laser focus to one of the most critical of those events, the disintegration of the Army of Northern Virginia, and how much more there is to the story. Her work complicates the traditional image of soldiers of the two armies shaking hands with mutual respect, like football players after the final whistle. The book shows how the fears, hatreds, and hopes inspired by the war lived on after the surrender, and how decisions made on the

spur of the moment, by Ulysses S. Grant, Robert E. Lee, politicians in Washington, and thousands of individual soldiers, in some cases had repercussions felt today in the survival of the Lost Cause mythology. If you're tired of reading about familiar Civil War events and eager to learn something new, every chapter of *Ends of War* will satisfy.

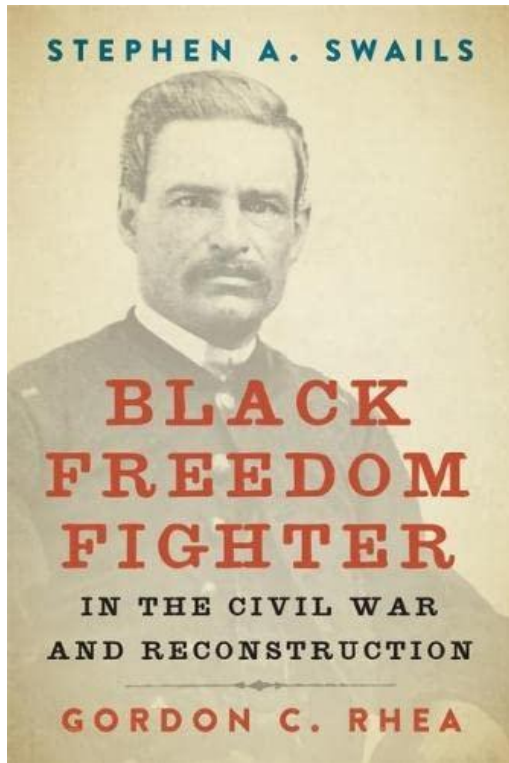
Honorable Mention: *Meade at Gettysburg: A Study in Command* by Kent Masterson Brown is a passionate, lawyerly (in the sense of attention to evidence and using words precisely), and convincing defense of the battlefield generalship of George Meade. Brown shows the reader just how remarkable it was for Meade to take command of the Army of the Potomac on June 28, 1863, and then lead it to victory over Lee only a few days later. The sophistication of Brown's analysis and depth of his research elevate the book above Monday-morning quarterbacking and contribute to a better understanding of the battle, a remarkable feat considering how much has been written about it.

GERALD J. PROKOPOWICZ IS A PROFESSOR OF HISTORY AT EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY AND HOST OF THE PODCAST *CIVIL WAR TALK RADIO*.

Kevin M. Levin

Top Pick: Most military histories of the Army of Northern Virginia end with the furling of flags and stacking of arms at Appomattox Court House, but this is precisely the entry point for Caroline Janney's *Ends of War: The Unfinished Fight of Lee's Army After Appomattox*. In this netherworld between soldier and veteran, Janney narrates the defeated Confederates' difficult journeys home as well as describes the small number who remained committed to furthering the fight for independence. Paroles that were issued to encourage peace led to questions about whether they applied to high-ranking officers and surrendered Confederates from loyal states such as Maryland. Surrender was anything but peaceful. Violence and uncertainty hung over the nation in the wake of Abraham Lincoln's assassination. In the months following Appomattox the first glimmers of the Lost Cause narrative emerged, as did a vibrant celebration of freedom among newly emancipated slaves, and finally a firm belief among victorious Union soldiers that they had saved the nation from rebellious traitors. In focusing on the first few months after Appomattox, Janney argues convincingly that the road to reunion and reconciliation was anything but

certain.



Honorable Mention: Robert E. Lee looms large over the Battle of Gettysburg. Not so much George Meade, who orchestrated the Army of the Potomac's first decisive victory on northern soil. Kent Masterson Brown's *Meade at Gettysburg* will force readers to rethink key aspects of the campaign, from Meade's plan to defend the Pipe Creek line in Maryland to his decision not to attack Lee at Falling Waters in the Confederate retreat to Virginia. *Meade at Gettysburg* succeeds brilliantly in analyzing Meade's command decisions and his contributions in shaping the outcome of the battle.

Stephen Swails served in the 54th

Massachusetts Infantry and became the first African American commissioned as a combat officer in the United States military. After the war, he served in the Freedmen's Bureau, helped to draft South Carolina's state constitution, and served in the state senate until violence drove him from office. In *Stephen A. Swails: Black Freedom Fighter in the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Louisiana State University Press), Gordon Rhea does a fabulous job of using Swails' remarkable life to illuminate the revolutionary achievements of African Americans during the Civil War era in the face of unspeakable political violence.

KEVIN M. LEVIN IS A HISTORIAN AND EDUCATOR BASED IN BOSTON. HE IS THE AUTHOR OF SEARCHING FOR BLACK CONFEDERATES: THE CIVIL WAR'S MOST PERSISTENT MYTH (2019) AND IS WORKING ON A BIOGRAPHY OF ROBERT GOULD SHAW FOR THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA PRESS. YOU CAN FIND HIM ONLINE AT CWMEMORY.COM.

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