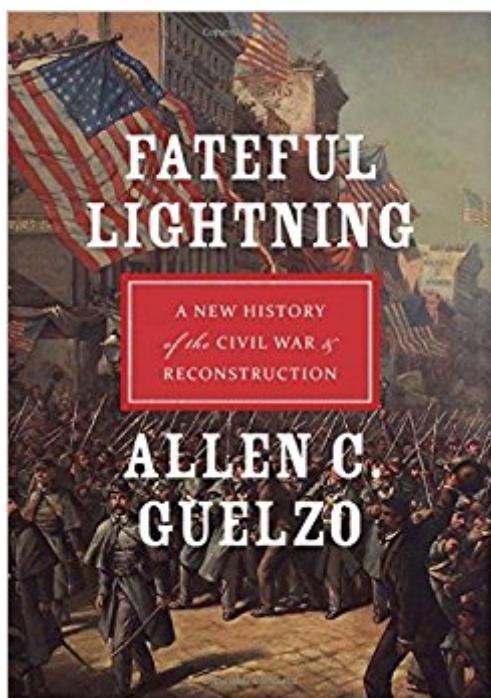


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# Fateful Lightning: A New History Of The Civil War And Reconstruction



## 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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Guelzo has a masterful command of the intricate narrative of the Civil War period. His tale contains

familiar stories, but also new insights." --*Journal of American History*"Guelzo's book is a shining example of the virtues of the macro approach when it is undertaken with energy and efficiency. By panning out and reviewing the events that occurred over several decades, Guelzo offers a useful synthesis of the developing Civil War narrative..." --*The New York Times* "It's hard to imagine a better one-volume history of the American Civil War than Gettysburg College professor Allen C. Guelzo's new work." --*The Washington Times* "Guelzo's prose is graceful and erudite - indeed, almost poetic. His is as comfortable with military topics as he is with the political, social, and economic aspects of the war and its aftermath." --*The Weekly Standard*"Allen C. Guelzo's new book should occupy the same position in the current Civil War sesquicentennial as Bruce Catton's books did 50 years ago during the war's centennial. *Fateful Lightning: A New History of the Civil War & Reconstruction* deserves this prominence for Guelzo's thorough knowledge of the subject, his ability to draw fresh conclusion, and his exceptional writing skills." --*The Saturday Evening Post* "This is an outstanding effort to recount and explain our greatest national trauma to general readers."

--*Booklist*"With his accustomed eloquence and erudition, Allen C. Guelzo has produced a grand and sweeping account of the Civil War, vividly depicting its events, its characters, and, most of all, the ideas that drove them. *Fateful Lightning* is destined to take its place alongside the classic narratives of the nation's greatest crisis." --*Steven E. Woodworth, author of This Great Struggle: America's Civil War*"[A] splendidly-written narrative" --*Civil War Book Review*"*Fateful Lightning* is a splendid accomplishment." --*David Frum, Daily Beast*"*Fateful Lightning* is a wonderful book. It is the summit of a long career of a consummate historian. ... [A] timely addition to a long tradition of scholarly histories of both the Civil War and Reconstruction. ... Guelzo seamlessly weaves the history of actual warfare with other cultural and historical events of the time. ... Because it is so well-written and produces such an engrossing story, it is one that students and scholars alike will relish."

--*International Social Science Review*

Allen C. Guelzo is the Henry R. Luce Professor of the Civil War Era, and Director of Civil War Era Studies at Gettysburg College. He is the author of *Abraham Lincoln: Redeemer President* and *Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation: The End of Slavery in America*, both of which won the Lincoln Prize. His most recent books on Lincoln and the Civil War era are *Lincoln and Douglas: The Debates That Defined America* and *Lincoln: A Very Short Introduction*.

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's 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. The congressional Republican Radicals and the Andrew Johnson administration crashed head on with diametrically opposed views of how to restore the Union. The former prevailed and the latter narrowly escaped impeachment. Despite some short-term successes Reconstruction failed long term. The issues of slaves relative to the Civil War are well known and further discussed here with emphasis on their struggle for freedom after they were "freed". If a purpose of the Civil War was to "free" the slaves it succeeded, however, it failed abolition in the sense of creating parity in citizenship with whites despite the 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments to the Constitution. The reasons for this were multiple and clearly explained. One has to consider "what ifs". What if Lincoln had survived? Would he have implemented Reconstruction more successfully? The author points out that Lincoln's political genius enabled him to achieve objectives by circumventing direct confrontation. Johnson, on the contrary was extremely confrontational, a recipe for failure in dealing with the equally confrontational Republican Radicals, who's majority was veto proof. However, there were certain factors contributing to Reconstruction's long-term failure over which Lincoln would have had little control. Lincoln predicted that it would take a hundred years for the freed slaves to live side by side with whites, which it did.

Ã¢ÂœFateful LightningÃ¢Â• tells the story of the American Civil War and part of the story of Reconstruction. In a single volume, Guelzo covers the period leading up to the War, the War itself,

and its aftermath. He covers familiar ground, but his two chapters on the pre-war period were a true eye-opener for me. Guelzo brings out the culture of the South and how it evolved into a place so alien from its Northern half. The mysterious Whig party is revealed to have been a major force for unity, but with its collapse the war became more inevitable. I never really understood who the Whigs were and what they believed, Guelzo does an amazing job of explaining them and their importance. The Whigs performed a long dance with Jefferson<sup>’</sup>s Democrats to keep the Union in tact. It was one compromise after another, it was yielding the presidency to Southerns almost exclusively for decades, it was packing the Supreme Court with Southerns, all in the name of maintaining peace and the Union. The Compromise of 1850 kept the Union together by bringing in a balanced number of slave and free states, but it also spawned the Fugitive Slave Act, a monster in the eyes of most Northerners, even those opposed to abolitionism. From there it all went downhill, with a seemingly endless list of horrors: The Dread Scott decision, Bleeding Kansas, John Brown, and on and on. Until the war came. Guelzo tells the story the best way I have ever heard it told. That was just the prelude to the war too. From there to book goes into the political, economic, and military aspects of the war and even goes into such neglected areas as the effects of the war on Native Americans and the role of women on both sides. The military narratives are brief, but well drawn, with enough detail that the flow can be followed. The nearly hopeless situations of both Jefferson Davis and Abraham Lincoln stand out starkly. Guelzo points out that both sides avoided a military dictatorship by using essentially the same methods; fascinating stuff. The world turned upside down times of Reconstruction are outlined in enough detail to be interesting, but it left me wanting more. Which is as it should be I suppose. I would give this book a top rating, five stars, but for two shortcomings: too few maps and illustrations, and a layout whose font I find thin and hard to read. The tremendously interesting *Further Reading* section, with its notes about the chapters and their sources, almost makes up for it though. Oxford University Press published this book and *Battle Cry of Freedom*, on the same topic, twenty-five years apart. Guelzo<sup>’</sup>s book is a fine successor, although it does not make the earlier book obsolete. Highly recommend.

This is an incredible work of historical art. Like so many of you, I have been reading about the Civil War, Reconstruction and the monumental aftermath, (which continues to this day) for many decades. There are, of course, many historical artists (Foote, McPherson, Catton and so many others well known and loved by you) whose works are so very crucial in obtaining as much knowledge and understanding as possible. But Allen Guelzo’s *Fateful Lightning* goes beyond

helping to understand. It is titled well as a "New History of the Civil War and Reconstruction". What is new is huge. It is a bringing together of the disparate facts and events to impart a deep, visceral feeling of Civil War history as a vibrant and organic event, the relevancy of which is very clearly of great impact now, and which will retain that greatness of impact throughout the future of the United States. Guelzo answers the question that so many of you Civil War historians have been asked time and again—"Why are you studying such a long ago event?" Guelzo's answer is, "Because it isn't over". Robert Henry, M.D.

I have been an admirer of Allen Guelzo's Civil War writings and I also like his work and commentaries on C-Span and PBS, but this last book, *Fateful Lightning* surpassed even my high expectations. Guelzo's deals with sides and points-of-view in a different and--to me--engrossing manner. From building navies, both Union and confederate to such small details as the two models for utilizing domestic resources, this book just keeps on with its rich historical picture of how the Civil War was fought and lived. It is not a regular Civil War history but one that I would recommend to anyone interested in the 1860's.

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