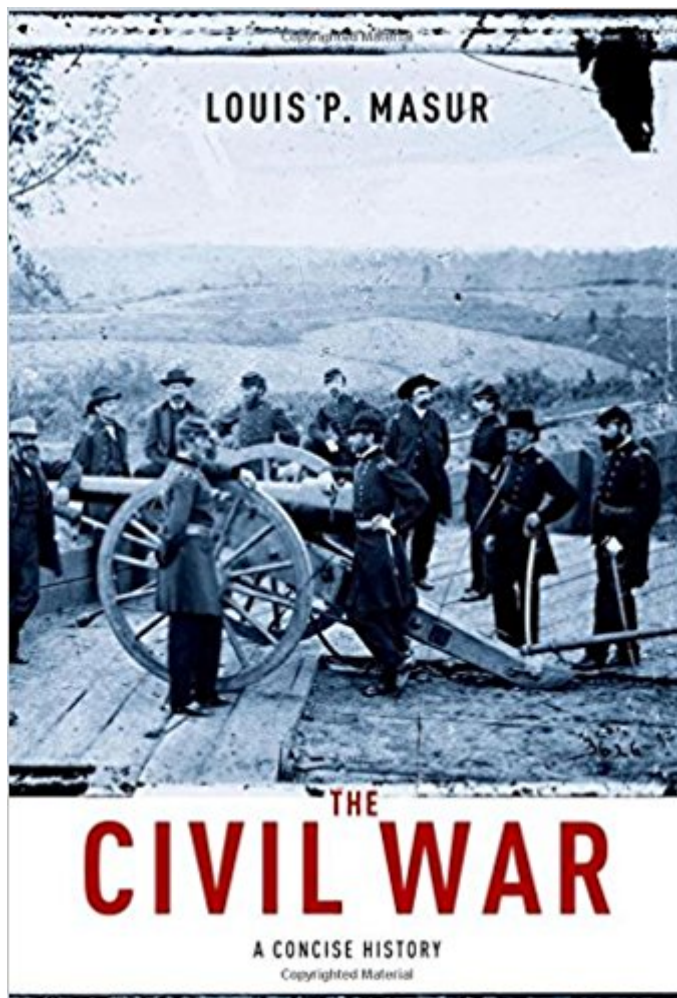


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# The Civil War: A Concise History



## 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

**\*Starred Review\*** As the sesquicentennial of the outbreak of the Civil War approaches, foresighted librarians will need to be prepared for their own Fort Sumter siege by patrons with either new or renewed interest in that terrible conflict's causes and course of events. For the reader uneasy with any study more than general-interest, this book is the first one that the anticipating librarian should place in such a person's hands. It is an immaculate overview that quickly gets to the heart of the matter, precisely surveying, with keen insight, the slippery slope to war's outbreak, which was paved with increasingly bitter opposing views on slavery and states' rights and territorial expansion; along the way, the concept of nullification added its own coat of slipperiness. By the 1850s, "clearly, the political system was breaking down, unable to contain sectional rivalry and violence." Moving year by year but not ploddingly, as that mode might suggest, Masur charts the ebb and flow of Union and Confederate successes. In wrapping up, the author's clear view of Reconstruction brings the process of settlement well into the latter part of the century. --Brad Hooper

"Masur's pocket-sized chronological account of the Civil War packs a powerful punch. It is hard to overstate this accomplishment, as so many have tried before and failed." --H-Net "A short history of the Civil War is a daunting task to say the least, so complex and wide-ranging is the story, yet Louis P. Masur has accomplished the task not only with remarkable all-inclusiveness, but with considerable perception, and not a little genuine eloquence. The result is surely the finest account in brief compass that we have." -- William C. Davis, Virginia Center for Civil War Studies, Virginia Tech "Louis P. Masur has done a splendid job of explaining why the Civil War came, how it unfolded, and what Union victory meant. His ability to bring clarity to such a complex subject in so few pages makes this a wonderful place for anyone to begin an exploration of the most important period in American history."-Gary W. Gallagher, author of *The Confederate War* "A succinct, highly readable account, Masur's book conveys both the drama and the complexity of America's greatest moral and political crisis."- Jacqueline Jones, author of *Saving Savannah: The City and the Civil War* "Louis Masur's history of the Civil War is extraordinarily deft and balanced, featuring a judicious choice of primary source quotations."-Elizabeth Varon, University of Virginia "In this concise history of the Civil War, Louis Masur makes good on his promise 'to explain what happened, how it transpired, and what it all meant.' A great deal happened in that war, and it meant more than any other event in

American history. Masur covers all the important points of this dramatic story with a deft pen that carries the reader through those crowded years with remarkable clarity and understanding."-James M. McPherson, author of *Battle Cry of Freedom*"For the reader uneasy with any study more than general-interest, this book is the first one that the anticipating librarian should place in such a person's hands. It is an immaculate overview that quickly gets to the heart of the matter, precisely surveying, with keen insight, the slippery slope to war's outbreak, which was paved with increasingly bitter opposing views on slavery and states' rights and territorial expansion; along the way, the concept of nullification added its own coat of slipperiness." -Booklist, Starred Review "An ideal guide. Masur's deft touch is reflected in the judicious way he mines his material, which includes analysis for the set of illustrations included in the text. One finishes this book, whether read over the course of hours or months, with a sense of having traced the outlines of a vast historiographic territory." --History News Network "Masur performs a miracle by providing a concise but compelling narrative of the Civil War era, packing in the critical information to track the trajectory of secession, war, emancipation, and Reconstruction...Highly recommended." --Library Journal "Fresh and amazingly brief." --Salon "If you want to cut to the chase, this is the volume for you." -Forbes.com"This book delivers far more than its title suggests, as it is a concise history of not merely the Civil War, but the entire Civil War era. By a masterful melding of the techniques of Bruce Catton's lively narrative storytelling and the scholarly craftsmanship typified by T. Harry Williams and Shelby Foote, Louis P. Masur has written a book that should appeal to the widest audience - including lay readers, students, and academics - interested in the Civil War. This book is an essential addition to everyone's Civil War collections." - Civil War History

This 94-page history stands out as one which may serve as the perfect affordable and concise one-volume account of both the war and its causes for junior and high school teachers of the Civil War, as well as college and university teachers of the first half of the United States survey. It is hard to overstate this accomplishment, as so many authors have tried before and failed.

Masur's tutelage under Civil War heavyweight James McPherson infuses the book's two central themes: (1) what began as a limited war evolved quickly into a total war, and (2) that the abolition of slavery became over the course of the war a central objective of both the president and the United States government. Though few knowledgeable persons would disagree with either of these premises, the attention each receives briefly at the introduction and then throughout the text gives the book a solid foundation. But this is only the beginning. With a deft hand, Masur touches briefly on the major touchstones of antebellum America that led ultimately

toward secession, including the Nullification Crisis, the Compromise of 1850, the Dred Scott case, and John Brown's raid at Harpers Ferry, Virginia. Once the war begins, he gives appropriate attention to other important topics, from the technological explosion the war promoted -- including the transition from smooth-bore to rifled muskets and the use of photography -- to the federal government's role in promoting economic and geographic expansion through the Homestead Act and Morrill Act of 1862 and the National Banking Acts. These and other salient topics Masur integrates seamlessly into the larger story of slavery, secession, and unlimited war. An additional bonus is the centering of Abraham Lincoln in the narrative, from his election in 1860 to his assassination in 1865. In this way, the personal and public trials and tribulations of the 16th president serve as a metaphor for the entire nation during its most trying time.

At the risk of being redundant I won't bother restating the fact that this book is concise, but I will say that I was and am very impressed with the way the author (Louis Masur) was able to write this book without going in to complex detail. Masur does a great job of overviewing events and discussing them on the same basic level throughout the entire book. There are many parts of the book where you know he could expand, or could elaborate on, but he doesn't. He keeps the book short and to the point without deviating from the path or making the read tedious. Masur also writes this out without burdening us with colorful or intellectual diction. Everything is catered to the every-day man and not to the history professor. For these reasons this book probably wouldn't be entertaining for someone who knows a lot about the American Civil War, but for those who are new to the subject or not that familiar with the entire story behind it, this book is a great buy. I for one considered myself to be pretty knowledgeable about the early years of the war, but didn't know a great deal about 1864 or '65. Masur's book filled in a lot of the gaps and did well reminding me of some information I had forgotten. Overall this was a genuinely entertaining read and I'd highly recommend it to anyone looking for an overview of the Civil War who doesn't have a lot of time on their hands.

A summary insight into the causes, course, carnage and conclusion of the civil war. Detailed but not overly so, clearly insightful and fair, although largely from a unionist's perspective. An excellent introduction.

Easy to follow, Hits the highlights without voluminous detail about battles and troop movements found in other more detailed works. The key battles, the key success, and the key failures are listed in brief format, all with an underlying and continuous referral to Lincoln and his approach to the war and handling his generals. Interwoven among this are key highlights of the major issues involving slavery and how it affected the North and the South. If you want a clear understanding of events that led up to the war, slavery, and Lincoln's presidency without having to wade through hundreds of pages filled with thousand of details and minutia that go beyond the average reader, this is the best book I have seen so far.

This book does a good job of doing what it was written to do: be a concise history of the war. There is a place for this approach. For example, I was able to read this entire book on the plane before visiting Gettysburg and Antietam, which helped me to understand the overall context of what I saw at Gettysburg and Antietam.

Like previous reviews of this book, it's almost incredulous to believe the Civil War may be summed up in 100 pages. However, Masur successfully does so, year by year. Not only is the book a great read, but it's also a plethora of information that can and should not be ignored.

I've read a bunch of Civil War books, but this one lives up to it's reputation as "concise." If you're looking to educate/review the American Civil War in less than a day, this book accurately covers all important issues and events and adds interesting anecdotes.

The book is exactly as one would expect. Nasir does a fantastic job of summarizing the Civil War without leaving important details out. It's a relatively easy read, and I would recommend this book to anyone looking to learn about the Civil War.

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