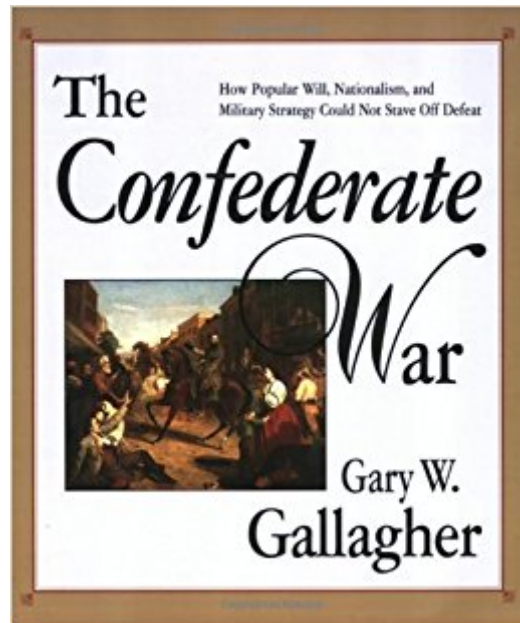




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The Confederate War



Synopsis

If one is to believe contemporary historians, the South never had a chance. Many allege that the Confederacy lost the Civil War because of internal division or civilian disaffection; others point to flawed military strategy or ambivalence over slavery. But, argues distinguished historian Gary Gallagher, we should not ask why the Confederacy collapsed so soon but rather how it lasted so long. In *The Confederate War* he reexamines the Confederate experience through the actions and words of the people who lived it to show how the home front responded to the war, endured great hardships, and assembled armies that fought with tremendous spirit and determination.

Gallagher's portrait highlights a powerful sense of Confederate patriotism and unity in the face of a determined adversary. Drawing on letters, diaries, and newspapers of the day, he shows that Southerners held not only an unflagging belief in their way of life, which sustained them to the bitter end, but also a widespread expectation of victory and a strong popular will closely attuned to military events. In fact, the army's "offensive-defensive" strategy came remarkably close to triumph, claims Gallagher. In contrast to the many historians who believe that a more purely defensive strategy or a guerrilla resistance could have won the war for the South. To understand why the South lost, Gallagher says we need look no further than the war itself: after a long struggle that brought enormous loss of life and property, Southerners finally realized that they had been beaten on the battlefield. Gallagher's interpretation of the Confederates and their cause boldly challenges current historical thinking and invites readers to reconsider their own conceptions of the American Civil War.

Book Information

Paperback: 272 pages

Publisher: Harvard University Press; Edition Unstated edition (March 15, 1999)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0674160568

ISBN-13: 978-0674160569

Product Dimensions: 0.8 x 6.8 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 13.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.6 out of 5 stars 41 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #111,573 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #60 in Books > History > Americas > United States > Civil War > Confederacy #92 in Books > History > Americas > United States > Civil War > Campaigns & Battlefields #212 in Books > History > Military >

Customer Reviews

Historians have often looked backward from the surrender at Appomattox to explain the failure of the Confederacy. They have concluded that the Confederacy's defeat was due mainly to decay from within resulting from internal strife among different factions of Southern society. Gallagher (American history, Pennsylvania State Univ.; editor of *Lee the Soldier*, LJ 4/15/96) disputes that interpretation. While he concedes that there were disagreements, he points to numerous letters and diaries that support his contention that Confederate society rallied around the Stars and Bars until Appomattox. Popular will gave rise to national sentiment whose morale depended on the battlefield victories won by Lee's army. Only Lee's surrender convinced many that the Confederate cause was indeed lost. The author makes a fine case for a new look at an old argument. Recommended for academic libraries and public libraries with Civil War collections. --Grant A. Fredericksen, Illinois Prairie Dist. P.L., Metamora Copyright 1997 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

A revisionist examination of the Confederate experience, as much concerned with historians and their methods as with history itself. "Any historian who argues that the Confederate people demonstrated robust devotion to their slave-based republic, possessed feelings of national community, and sacrificed more than any other segment of white society in US history," frets Gallagher (American History/Penn. State Univ.), "runs the risk of being labeled a neo-Confederate." He's right to worry. Making precisely that argument, his history of Confederate military and civilian experience veers dangerously close to hagiography of an entire culture. Challenging the current historical consensus that lack of will, absence of national unity, and flawed military strategy doomed the Confederacy, Gallagher presents contemporary letters, diaries, and newspaper accounts that rhapsodize about the true grit of rebel soldiers and civilians. To his credit, he resists the urge to backtrack from Appomattox when explaining military failure (as he accuses other historians of doing) and instead puts the Confederate war effort in a larger historical framework--namely the successful rebellion of the American Revolution. He poses a number of intriguing questions for fellow historians, suggesting most notably that scholars ask not why an uprising viewed as "a rich man's war but a poor man's fight" failed, but why so many non-slaveholders fought for so long. But his parade of testimonials to the nobility of the Lost Cause, unchallenged by critical questioning, sticks in the craw. Soldiers' letters, reenlistment figures, and editorials--which all suggest high

morale when taken at face value by Gallagher--could easily be viewed as propaganda. At least their bombastic language enlivens an otherwise stiffly formal academic text. A work of more interest to historians than general readers, and more important for the questions it raises than any it answers. (40 photos, not seen) (History Book Club selection) -- Copyright ©1997, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Dr. Gary Gallagher is one of the best modern historians of the Civil War. In "The Confederate War" published in 1985 (they were based on his lectures at the University of Texas at Austin Littlefield Lectures) the good professor discusses three major themes in looking at Confederate defeat:

a. **POPULAR WILL:** In this section we learn that the southerners will to win the war was important in keeping the Confederate nation alive for longer than expected. Gallagher quotes extensively from southern letters to show how their will in being true to the cause burnt brightly until ultimate defeat at Appamattox in 1865. Thousands of southerners developed allegiance to a cause that transcended loyalty and local interests (referring to white southerners). The Southern dream was to establish a slave holding society. The vast majority of the southern civilian and military population believed that Robert Lee and the Army of Northern Virginia would lead them to ultimate victory despite horrendous military defeats and the destruction of the southern economy and military.

b. **NATIONALISM:** Gallagher asserts that, contrary to popular modern historical opinion, thousands of Confederate soldiers and civilians believed strongly in the CONFEDERATE NATION AND CENTRAL GOVERNMENT. Patriotism rather than localism was the prime factor in developing a sense of nationhood among the southern people.

c. **MILITARY STRATEGY:** Gallagher contends that the south was defeated by the overwhelming numbers and military genius of great northern generals (primarily Grant and Sherman). Western victories for Confederate troops were few and far between. Only Robert Lee and the Army of Northern Virginia kept the southern cause alive through battlefield victories. The author does not believe a strictly DEFENSIVE STRATEGY or GUERRILLA WARFARE would have proven successful against the North.

d. **DEFEAT:** Gallagher devotes a few pages to the rise of the Lost Cause mentality in the South following the war. Gary Gallagher is a brilliant historian and this book, though controversial, is well argued and should be read by anyone interested in the Civil War.

If you want to understand the Confederacy and what the people of the South were fighting for, you have to read this book. It will challenge you and if you buy into the common myths of the war it may infuriate you. Understand, this is not an apologia for the Confederacy, there is no lost cause or

neo-confederate shrilling here. Rather, it is an honest attempt to understand the motives and experiences of the Confederate people. A classic. I recommend buying both this and the later work by Gallagher "the Union War." Together, they recover what soldiers and citizens of both North and South really thought about the war they were fighting.

It was ok!

One of the best books concerning the confederate effort during the Civil war by one of the most important historians of the last 35 years.

War involves more than shots fired. this book will show you what those factors are.

This is a perspicacious summary of how the South lost, why it fought on for so long, and why the war did not turn into an even longer guerrilla war.

A well researched exposition on the inner factors influencing the South and leading to their demise. Well reasoned arguments to contradict some long held traditional beliefs of factors like sectionalism that cost the confederacy the victory.

ok

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