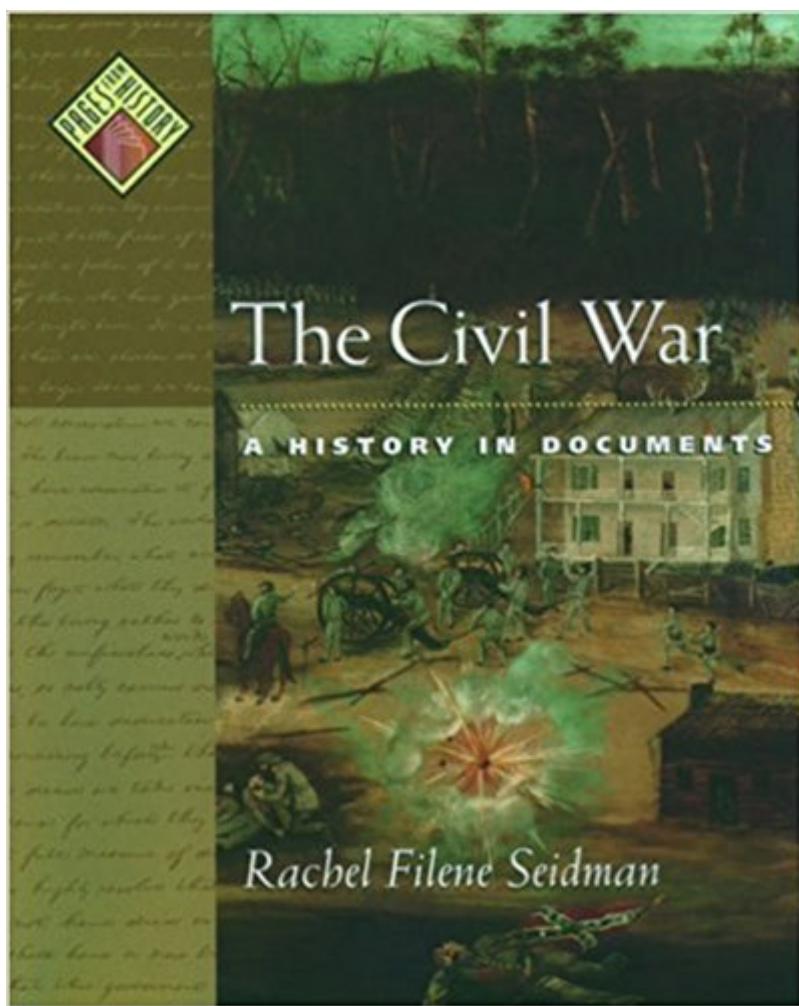


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The Civil War: A History In Documents (Pages From History)



Synopsis

The Civil War was not only a stunning event in military history; it defined the American people by forcing them to grapple with the founding principles of the nation. Rachel Seidman brings together an array of primary sources from the antebellum period, the war, and Reconstruction to provide a well-rounded account of this pivotal era. Political debates and military developments may occupy the historical foreground, but it is the letters, diary entries, memoirs, and testimony of blacks, Native Americans, women, children, farmers, and foot soldiers in the richly textured background that bring the Civil War to life. Ex-slave Frederick Douglass's abolitionist speeches and writings contrast with Southern magazine editor James DeBow's defense of the slave system to set the political conflict in a national context. Northern traveler Caroline Seabury's heartbreak letter about a slave auction and Southern slave mistress Ella Thomas's conflicted diary entries about her servant Isabella detail the daily brutality of slavery. Confederate general James Longstreet's report of the Battle of Gettysburg and Union general William T. Sherman's letter to the leaders of Atlanta document tactics introduced in the Civil War, while letters between soldiers and their families record the anguish and the courage on the battlefield and at home. A picture essay entitled "Images of War" graphically demonstrates the devastation wrought by the war through photography--a new medium in the 1860s that profoundly changed American attitudes about warfare. Despite the South's surrender, violence and conflict continued during Reconstruction. The 13th Amendment abolished slavery, but state-sanctioned Black Codes limited African American freedoms. At the cost of some 620,000 lives, the battles had ended, but America's struggle with the legacy of slavery was only beginning.

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Customer Reviews

Gr 9 Up-The American Civil War was a defining moment in this country's history. Seidman explores events leading up to it, the conflict itself, and Reconstruction through the eyes of people who lived through them. Divided into eight chapters, the volume utilizes primary sources including letters, diaries, newspaper articles, cartoons, and photographs. A short introduction prefaces the documents that tell the story of the fighting. Richly illustrated with informative, detailed captions and sidebars that often quote Civil War personalities, this is an exceptional addition to any library.

Classroom teachers will make use of it not only for the documents but also as a tool to teach where history comes from. Voices from the past help students find answers to the myriad questions of why Americans would fight and kill fellow Americans.-Patricia Ann Owens, Wabash Valley College, Mt. Carmel, IL
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Seidman's documents bookend the Civil War with the territorial expansion that preceded the conflict and with the Reconstruction that followed it. In this structure the documents, under the guidance of Seidman's linking narrative, all make a powerful impression of immediacy about ordinary people's experience of, and condemnation or defense of, slavery. In the sections of the war proper, Seidman continues the emphasis on the ordinary person's experience, whether a soldier or a "contraband" slave creating pressures on civil and military authorities. The course of actual military events thereby shrinks to secondary status, with relatively few documents presented about battles, campaigns, and leaders (Gettysburg is an exception). Such is Seidman's interpretive decision, and it's a respectable one in the historiography of the war--among others that could have been made--yet making decisions makes historical research interesting. Gilbert Taylor
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