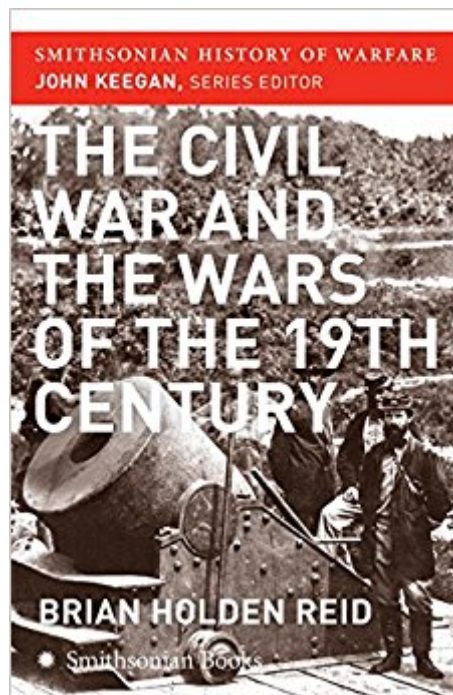




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The Civil War And The Wars Of The Nineteenth Century (Smithsonian History Of Warfare)



Synopsis

The Civil War was the bloodiest war in American history and a defining moment of the nineteenth century. In this concise and authoritative volume, Brian Holden Reid -- a leading expert on the subject -- reveals how industrialization and emerging methods of mass production gave birth to a new age of warfare, most dramatically represented in the unprecedented destruction and mass casualties of the American Civil War. Detailed, chronological history of the strategic and operational dimensions of both the Northern and Southern campaigns Strengths and weaknesses of the opposing sides Fresh perspectives on the war's global context Culmination of the war, peace negotiations, and their ramifications for the future

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Brian Holden Reid is a professor of American history and military instruction at King's College in London and the author of several books, including Robert E. Lee: Icon of a Nation and The American Civil War: Exploration and Reconsiderations. He lives in London.

The book is written in the lively language and very readable. Much attention (may be mainly) given to interaction of politics, psychology and conducting of war.

I started reading this book on a trip to the Shiloh (TN) battlefield without knowing anything about the author (there is no biographical information on the author given). Not far into it, I realized I was

reading a Brit's view of the Civil War. I have read many books on the Civil War and appreciated this one, not for any new information or understanding of this war, but for its foreign perspective.

Brian Holden Reid's goal in this book, as he states in the introduction, is to place the Civil War in context with two other major conflicts of the mid-19th century, the Crimean War and the wars of German unification. Contrary to many traditional accounts of the warfare of the era, he sees the three as reflecting the evolution of large-scale industrialized warfare during those decades, with the different struggles nevertheless demonstrating commonalities in the impact of new technologies and the changing scale of war. This is evident beginning with the Crimean War. Fought in the shadow of the Napoleonic wars (the British commander had been Wellington's secretary), Reid nonetheless demonstrates, in a very British-centric account, that the expedition to the Crimea would have been impossible without the steam-powered ships which sustained the forces. Yet while he challenges the notion of the British military as being "a museum piece", he does note that the reforms introduced hardly addressed the challenges of the new warfare that commanders like Lord Raglan faced. Similar limitations emerged at the command level during the Civil War. Reid's analysis of the conflict dominates the book, taking up three of its five chapters. His analysis is primarily operational and strategic, and it reveals how unready - and in many cases, unadaptable - commanders on both sides were to the new scale of warfare. Grant emerges as the dominant commander, Reid argues, not because of his ability as a field commander (which he sees as inferior to Lee's), but because of his grasp of "what was important in the higher level of the conduct of war." In this Reid ranks Grant with Helmuth von Moltke as the first masters of industrialized warfare, as the Prussian general demonstrated similar attributes in his successful pursuit of victory against Denmark (which is only briefly addressed), Austria, and France. All of this Reid presents with a generous seasoning of his sharp observations which leave little doubt as to his opinion on matters (his assessment of the staff of Austrian general Ludwig Benedek is that they "made for an entertaining dining club" is one of the more amusing among many) and make for a lively text. By comparing the three wars, he demonstrates clearly how industrialization transformed warfare, while his operational narrative shows how slowly commanders adapted to these changes. Heavily illustrated with photographs and maps, it is a quick read, and serves as an excellent introduction to the Civil War while putting it in the context of the evolution of modern warfare.

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