



Disunion: Modern Historians Revisit and Reconsider the Civil War from Lincoln's Election to the Emancipation Proclamation

Ted Widmer (Editor)

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A major new collection of modern commentary—from scholars, historians, and Civil War buffs—on the significant events of the Civil War, culled from *The New York Times'* popular *Disunion* on-line journal

Since its debut on November 6, 2010, *Disunion*, *The New York Times'* acclaimed journal about the Civil War, has published hundreds of original articles and won multiple awards, including "Best History Website" from the New Media Institute and the History News Network. Following the chronology of the secession crisis and the Civil War, the contributors to *Disunion*, who include modern scholars, journalists, historians, and Civil War buffs, offer ongoing daily commentary and assessment of the Civil War as it unfolded.

Now, for the first time, this fascinating and historically significant commentary has been gathered together and organized in one volume. In *The New York Times: Disunion*, historian Ted Widmer, has selected more than 100 articles that cover events beginning with Lincoln's presidential victory through the Emancipation Proclamation. Topics include everything from Walt Whitman's wartime diary to the bloody guerrilla campaigns in Missouri and Kansas. Esteemed contributors include William Freehling, Adam Goodheart, and Edward Ayers, among others.

The book also compiles new essays that have not been published on the *Disunion* site by contributors and well-known historians such as David Blight, Gary Gallagher, and Drew Gilpin Faust. Topics include the perspective of African-American slaves and freed men on the war, the secession crisis in the Upper South, the war in the West (that is, past the Appalachians), the war in Texas, the international context, and Civil War-era cartography. Portraits, contemporary etchings, and detailed maps round out the book.

Disunion: Modern Historians Revisit and Reconsider the Civil War from Lincoln's Election to the Emancipation Proclamation Details

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From Reader Review Disunion: Modern Historians Revisit and Reconsider the Civil War from Lincoln's Election to the Emancipation Proclamation for online ebook

Kris - My Novelesque Life says

This collection has essays from the past to now about the American Civil War. It is great for any history-lover -especially if you are a Civil War buff. I will be keeping this for reference and reading any essay I missed - I read this over two years as it was almost 500 pages.

Annimoli says

A very interesting series of articles with different subjects like the events leading to war and the proclamation, the key political players, cotton trade, slaves and slaveholders, the role of European states, armies and militia, volunteers, arms, underwear, camels, diseases, hygiene and medical care etc. Often very gruesome indeed. It is explained why there are not many written narratives from enslaved African Americans. Also a very interesting article on Grant and the Jewish population in the Union. Although the articles do not depict a comprehensive story of the history of the American Civil War it invites one to do further reading on the subject.

Jason Park says

Many Points of View Makes an Enjoyable Dive

I really enjoyed this book because of the format. This collection of essays by many writers makes it easy to put down and pick back up, as I did many times, but it also allows many voices and views to swirl around your head at once. I learned a lot about the Civil War through this book, whether on big topics such as emancipation or smaller topics such as what exactly amputation was like. Not a game-changer in Civil War history, but highly recommended for any history nerd like me.

Nastassja Riemermann says

Very educational, though it would have been easier to follow if I had had a better understanding of the battles and generals of the Civil War beforehand. A lot of the articles seem to assume a hobbyist's level of understanding of the war.

Colin says

These smart and snappy pieces about the American Civil War cover wide and varied topics. When taken

together, the essays convey the rich texture of this history -- the sheer amount that can be known about it, and the wonder of how things fit together. Essays on the jokes of the era, on playing cards, on arctic exploration, on divorce politics help me understand this period just as much as the excellent glances at the rifled muskets, the rivers of the West, or the politics of black exclusion. Each essay is short enough to catch and sustain interest, but sometimes I simply wanted more, and as a non-American, who has never read about the Civil War before, I also would have appreciated a little more conventional narrative in the introductions to each chapter, so that I might finally learn who, e.g., Stonewall Jackson was, before reading an essay about his acute sleep deprivation.

Steve says

I've been a fan of the Civil War since I was a child, voraciously reading all the biographies, battle tales, and histories I could come across. The affection hasn't waned much.

What's arguably the most compelling and gratifying aspect of this huge compendium of articles, mostly between two and four pages, is that there is so much new revelation. The first day I started reading it, moving haphazardly throughout the book and often simply starting to read the story that began at whatever part of the book I chanced to open, I read through a dozen pieces, each one equally engaging. I also happened to discover the presence of an ex-pat colony still alive and well in Brazil, where it happens a lot of defeated Southerners sought a second chance. Even more fascinating is the fact that these descendants speak what might be the only living example of antebellum Southern dialect.

Additionally pieces focused on the role of women in the war, one far too underreported, the attitude of foreign nations about our war (and how they spitefully wished for the nation's failure), the advent of authentic names in newspaper by-lines (most writers used pseudonyms), and the momentary wavering of long-time religious skeptic Abraham Lincoln when he pondered adding a religious phrase to the Constitution to help sell emancipation. It turns out that Lincoln used the religious zealots to market his ideas, knowing how loyal was their following and wide their reach, and that the crushing weight of the war caused him to rethink his positions, if only for a moment. Regardless, it certainly underscores the fact that America was most certainly not founded to be a Christian nation. Given that two of the most famous leaders of this nation were pronounced skeptics (Jefferson being the other), those who seek to argue their own Christian-based origin stories need to do a bit more research, but I digress.

As a fan of this genre, I can attest to the novel content as well as the high readability of these pieces. A delightful bed or bath-side book, this is a great read if only for a few minutes or for getting lost over several hours.

John Lucy says

Based on what the editors say in the introduction and the general format of the book, there should be a sequel to this book coming out soon. I sure hope there is, because this collection of very short historical articles is quite good.

A whole number of historians wrote in short articles for a New York Times project, and *Disunion* is the result. What you end up with is a wide variety of perspectives on a lot of major talking points on the Civil

War, and also a lot of close looks on very minor points concerning the Civil War. It's a fantastic collection for that reason. Generally, when you pick up a history book, what you read is a long treatise from one author's perspective about one topic. That means that you normally don't read about a whole lot of different topics because it takes you a week or whatever to read about one topic in one 300-page book. Well, this changes everything. While you don't get the 300-page, in-depth look at one or two battles, at Lincoln's cabinet, or the debate over states' rights that you might get in a typical history, Civil War book, you are exposed in bits and pieces to all of it. And all the while you're reading a bunch of different perspectives on the Civil War, which is always handy because the Civil War forms one of those ideological foundations that shape our thinking for the present and future.

Disunion is a fascinating read. You probably will encounter topics that you aren't interested in, but the good news is that you won't have to suffer through that article for any more than four or five pages. And you will read a lot of repetitious articles: repetitious because they cover the same ground, but not repetitious in that they are written by different historians with different opinions. The good news there is that you won't ever have to think about the Emancipation Proclamation or any other contentious issue with the same perspective that your high school teacher taught you since you'll be exposed to so much more.

I recommend this book to everyone, partly because our knowledge of history in the U.S. is pitiful.

Jim says

A compilation of the New York Times' Disunion blogs covering the period from Abraham Lincoln's election through the Emancipation Proclamation (i.e., 1860-1862). I hope that they come out w/ a sequel volume(s) that covers 1863-1865.

The blogs are short (5 pages or less)so they're quick reads. The blog authors include a number of well known historians who wrote books on the same topics. Although the 1862 section is dominated by discussions of the Emancipation Proclamation, there's something for everyone in this book. You're guaranteed to learn something new about the Civil War.

I recommend this book.

Aloysius says

A great collection of essays by historians covering different aspects of a critical period of time in America's Civil War: the start of the war to the Emancipation Proclamation.

E. Kahn says

Yet another volume feeding USA's national obsession with the Civil War. Be warned, if you don't know quite a bit on the topic before reading this book, you probably won't get much out of it. The essays focus largely on issues and events peripheral to the conflict.

Very unevenly written, which I suppose should be expected from a disparate collection of essays, but I

expected better from the NYT.

Michelle says

I can be a bit of a history buff. By that I mean I enjoy history and will read a nonfiction book for fun. But here's the key part of the 'a bit' statement: I am HORRIBLE at remembering facts. I used to be amazing at it, but I'd like to believe that I have simply reached a saturation point with what sticks in my brain...

That said, I cannot tell you all the facts that I read this large anthology of articles about the Civil War. They cover all different parts of the Civil War, some lesser known facets and those that have been covered widely. They are written by different people, all with a different voice and perhaps a different understanding of history. The anthology is broken up into different parts of the Civil War, leading up secession, the beginning of the war, expansion of the war, etc.

I found the secession parts most interesting because those are the parts that tend to get glossed over in high school history classes. I learned things about my own state that I didn't know and I found that fascinating. But really, the whole thing was fascinating, and I'm sure my fiance can attest to the amount of times I would read out parts to him that I was engaged in what I was reading.

At some point, it began to feel repetitive, particularly towards the end. I'm not sure if it's because the articles were indeed repeating things and covering very similar parts of the same narrative or if it was just reader fatigue.

It's very long though--probably not meant for a cover to cover read like I did. I believe it's only half of a collection with articles to appear in a later manual about the end of the war, and so on. I'd definitely be interested in finding that if/when it is published.

R.K. Byers says

really comprehensive and took more than one perspective I'd never even considered.

Josh Liller says

Essay compilations by a collection of authors are pretty much always a mixed bag and this book is no exception. There is a lot packed into the 444 pages of main text, covering 1860-1862. The format is good for short, easy reading. Some are pretty good, covering obscure but significant Civil War figures and other key topics. Two that I found particularly interesting were the drought of 1862 and its impact on the war, and the Minie bullet. There were a number of essays related to social history that didn't interest me. I also found some questionable claims and a couple outright mistakes which I would think would have been called out in the original blog posts before they ever got to this printed compilation. There are no citations and sometimes I wanted to scream "Citation needed!" at the book in frustration, either to have a contributing author support their claim or simply to find out more information about something they allude to in passing. I suppose for Civil War buffs who missed the original blog or who were big fans of the blog and want a 'Best Of' compiled in print form this will be worthwhile. However, it was such a mixed experience I can't make a strong

personal recommendation for or against.

Mac says

This book is a collection of essays from the New York Times blog series, "Disunion," plus a few new ones on general themes. If you've read some of the articles online, you'll know what to expect: short discussions of often-overlooked aspects of the Civil War and American life in that era. I ended up reading the book cover to cover, but it could easily be enjoyed piecemeal, as each essay stands alone.

As sources of interesting history, the articles are great. But I was disappointed that there were a number of typographical errors that should not have made it into print. For instance, I recall a figure like 35,0000 troops being mustered at one point. In addition, the selection of articles (not every blog post is included) tends to ignore most of the actual fighting, instead concentrating around the edges. Politics is a much bigger theme than military activity.

These are minor quibbles. If you've enjoyed "Disunion" online, you will enjoy this book.

Brian says

A good collection of essays about the civil from secession to the emancipation proclamation. I hope they have a sequel to this book.
