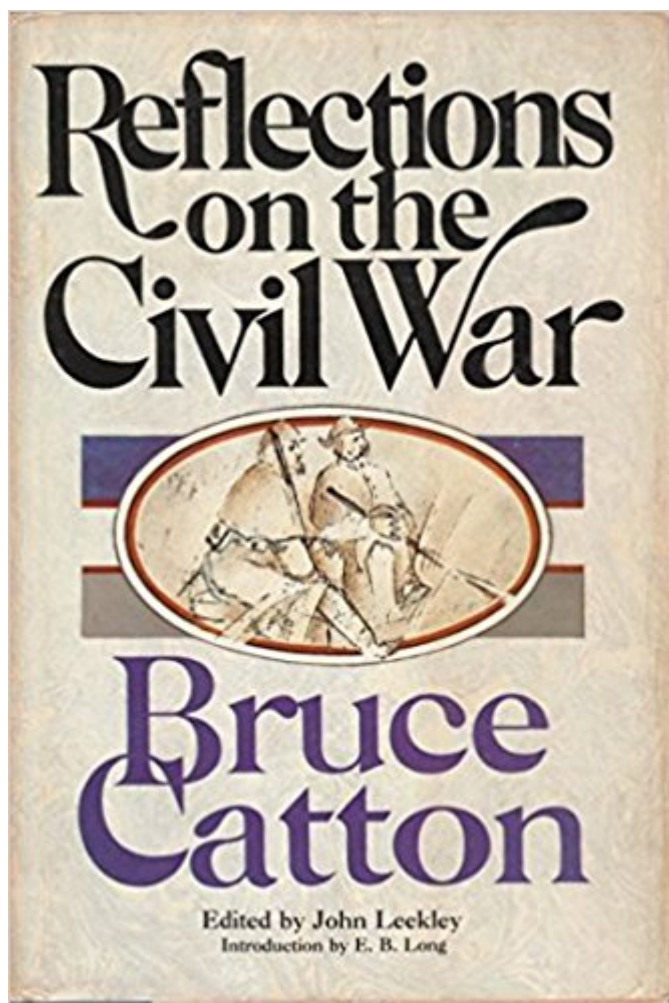




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# Reflections On The Civil War



## Synopsis

Edited from tapes that the Pulitzer prize-winning historian made before his death, this moving, informative book paints an intimate portrait of war. It's a chronicle of motives and emotions, from larger than life figures Lincoln and Lee to young John B. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This eclectic collection of historical musings, published posthumously from educational tape recordings Catton made during his life, is must reading for Civil War buffs. The tone is conversational and the text never demanding, although it contains several deeply penetrating insights. Asking why the Civil War didn't leave irreconcilably angry feelings between the North and South (such as those found in the Middle East or Ireland), Catton comments: "I think the chief reason for this is the legend of Robert E. Lee and the heroic confederate soldiers ... [who] suffered mightily in a great but lost cause. The point is that this very phrase accepts the cause as having been lost. There was no hint in this legend of biding one's time and waiting for a moment when there could be revenge. This was the lost cause; something to be cherished, to be revered, to be the outlet for emotions, but not to be the center of a new outbreak of violence." A great book by a great historian. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Bruce Catton's *Reflections on the Civil War* is the magisterial summary of a great historian who thought deeply on the Civil War and its meaning over the course of a lifetime. The chapter titled "A Dark Indefinite Shore" at the end of the book recounts Abraham Lincoln's recurring -- and last --

dream. In a way that seems as significant today as ever, that dream and this book tell the story of a nation founded on ideals that often conflict with current reality, a nation that has struggled since the first to meet the grand vision of its founding documents even when they, themselves, could not do so. The Civil War was a crucial episode in a story that has not yet reached its conclusion and Bruce Catton remains one of the great narrators of the story, a writer whose human compassion and political imagination infuse history with life.

It was very interesting but not very long. I felt as though I was just getting started when the book ended.

Bruce Catton always includes interesting tidbits of history that you never see from other authors. The editor put his recorded recollections in a very easy to read form.

Somewhat redundant.

Reflections on the Civil War was published in 1981, three years after the death of Bruce Catton. John Leekley reworked and restructured audio tapes that he and Catton had been compiling for an oral history into the essays that form the basis for this fascinating book. For the most part this transformation was successful and achieves a natural narrative style. Reflections on the Civil War should particularly appeal to readers seeking a concise, and yet insightful introduction to the Civil War. This relatively short book, about 250 pages, would be ideal for supplementary reading for advanced high school students or undergraduates. The essays target five major topics: Lincoln's leadership; life in the army; the war itself - strategy and execution; the Civil War as the first modern war, and There Was a Young Soldier. This last section, the experiences of John Geyser from Pennsylvania in an engineer battalion in the Army of the Potomac, was riveting, and is a remarkable description of soldiering under General McClellan. John Geyser carefully penned thoughtful sketches of camp life, individual soldiers, and military action. These drawings add substantial value to this work. Geyser's sketches had only recently come available and had not been published previously. In the 1960s Bruce Catton, winner of the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award, helped Americans understand and commemorate the centennial of the Civil War. His books - Mr. Lincoln's Army, Terrible Swift Sword, Gettysburg: the Final Fury, A Stillness at Appomattox, two volumes on Ulysses S. Grant, and others - were widely admired. His writings gave meaning and life to the Civil War in a way unmatched by previous writers. In recent decades American interest in the

Civil War was similarly revitalized by the monumental documentary on the Civil War by Ken Burns and later by the film Gettysburg. Newer studies by outstanding historians like Shelby Foote and James M. McPherson, and Civil War novels like those of Michael and Jeff Shaara, have perhaps unfairly displaced the writings of Bruce Catton. In my view Bruce Catton's major works compare favorably with Shelby Foote and James McPherson, two authors that I greatly respect. *Reflections on the Civil War* is a quick way to become acquainted with this remarkable writer and historian.

The first books I ever read about the Civil War were by Bruce Catton, starting with his novel *BANNERS AT SHENANDOAH* and continuing with his two overall histories and ending with his U.S. Grant trilogy. There is something effortless about the way Catton integrates his sources and spins his tale. If one may say he is not really a scholar, he is at least a brilliant popularizer and integrator. *REFLECTIONS* is like the capstone of his career. Now that I've read scores of books on the subject, Catton somehow manages to revivify the entire period. By far my favorite chapter is the story of an Army Engineer who also created a sketchbook of his battle experiences. Catton follows him throughout the war and even after, until his later years are spent in pain from an injury received in battle decades before. Also brilliant is his short summary of the war from the point of view of opportunities lost. (It appears that the commanding generals of the Army of the Potomac have a lot to answer for.) If you want a single book to give you a good feeling of what the Civil War was like without dragging you company by company through all the gory details, this is the book for you. There are many great writers about the Civil War, but I definitely feel that, now that Catton has gone, the vital spark is no longer there.

This book was compiled from audio tapes Catton made before his death,,, his "reflections" on the Civil War. In it Catton brings the lessons of his life long study of the war into very human focus. It is the best book I know of for anyone who is seeking their first Civil war book because it tells the stories of the war in such human terms. It is the best book I know of for the Civil war "expert" for the very same reason. One cannot lose focus on the essential human war experiences once this book is read. It is an outstanding achievement. There is fact here to be sure but Catton always provided more than fact. He provided understanding. And in "Reflection On The Civil War" he provides passion and compassion, intrigue and daring, and deep respect for the simple common people of the 1860's. Here, he speaks of their wisdom, their dedication and their courage. One of the most masterful pieces of writing I have ever read comes late in the book when he traces two trajectories. The first

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