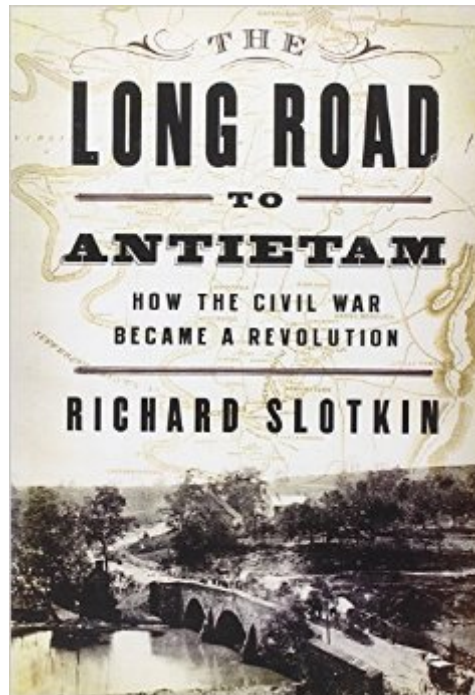


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The Long Road To Antietam: How The Civil War Became A Revolution



Synopsis

A masterful account of the Civil War's turning point in the tradition of James McPherson's *Crossroads of Freedom*. In the summer of 1862, after a year of protracted fighting, Abraham Lincoln decided on a radical change of strategy—one that abandoned hope for a compromise peace and committed the nation to all-out war. The centerpiece of that new strategy was the Emancipation Proclamation: an unprecedented use of federal power that would revolutionize Southern society. In *The Long Road to Antietam*, Richard Slotkin, a renowned cultural historian, reexamines the challenges that Lincoln encountered during that anguished summer 150 years ago. In an original and incisive study of character, Slotkin re-creates the showdown between Lincoln and General George McClellan, the "Young Napoleon" whose opposition to Lincoln included obsessive fantasies of dictatorship and a military coup. He brings to three-dimensional life their ruinous conflict, demonstrating how their political struggle provided Confederate General Robert E. Lee with his best opportunity to win the war, in the grand offensive that ended in September of 1862 at the bloody Battle of Antietam. 10 illustrations; 8 maps

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Customer Reviews

The reader's drawn though a compelling narrative of Union military failures, social unrest, political divisions, and diplomatic crises during the Civil War's second year. Especially convincing is the author's account of Gen. McClellan's behavior. New (to me) information explains many of his actions, and illustrates the toxic effect he had on the Federal war effort. Noteworthy are the

descriptions of McClellan's entourage: A Snake Pit of fawning opportunists whose disloyalty to the civilian government was exceeded only by their military incompetence. If you've been perplexed about how a Union army twice the size of its adversary's, better equipped and fed, could be serially whipped by Lee & Co., go no further. You'd probably have to reference the French army in 1940 for something comparable. And, oh, yes, the price was paid by thousands of northern killed and wounded. It's more than likely that the McClellan animus remained after his dismissal: Genls. Burnside, Hooker, and a couple of other criminally negligent officers insured further (costly) Federal reverses and prolonged the war. With all due respect to the reputations of the Confederacy's legendary commanders, after reading this book one is less impressed with their achievements, because the competition was so pathetically inept. I'd recommend savoring the passages in which the author depicts McClellan's glee when a rival officer is defeated at Bull Run II. Never mind that the dead and wounded were men of McClellan's own command. Then somehow the coach turns into a pumpkin. The deft analysis is abandoned for a slogging blow-by-blow of the campaign and battle of Antietam. Even die-hard war buffs may just yawn their way through this. I can't imagine why the author felt compelled to include it.

Richard Slotkin has provided a very comprehensive work on the battle and politics of Antietam and it offers up several good points and important considerations, even for those of us who are familiar with the battle and the American civil war. Having read in other works McClellan's disrespect and hostility to Lincoln, this work takes it more than a step further. McClellan for a while had designs on being made a dictator of all military operations, and through his power initiating talks with the generals of the Confederacy in an effort to bring them back into the Union and allow slavery to prosper. I suppose he had little regard for Lincoln's firm belief stated in 1858 that a house divided could not stand. McClellan is the only general in my belief that had a bigger ego than Douglas MacArthur. He surrounded himself with his favorites, entertained no difference of opinion and was a dangerous man. It was obvious that he had great plans but was not a great general. His strength was in building the army and his soldiers loved him for it, but his weakness was his constant fear of defeat. He proved that during the Seven Days when it appeared the Union was well on the way to Richmond. When Lee assumed command and began viciously striking at the Army of the Potomac, Mac could not handle it and the operation was a failure. His later and deliberate "slows" in reinforcing John Pope at Second Bull Run was on the border of treason and Salmon P. Chase wanted him shot, but Lincoln went back to him once again to engage Lee, who had moved into Maryland. The contrast between the Davis/Lee combo and the Lincoln/McClellan effort is staggering.

I read the lowest ranked reviews for this book before writing a review to determine what objections other readers had to this book. Both 2 * reviews were unhappy with the amount of battle detail and/or the confusion of keeping track of what was going on during battle and those are legitimate complaints. The battle (and a description of battle in some detail seems to be an issue of establishing bona fides with the very intense Civil War aficionados for any writer who discusses the war and who wants to sell books) is covered extensively- difficult in itself since it lasted only one day and not much really happened except that a lot of soldiers on both sides were killed. Taking the other perspective however the battle itself is integral to one of the author's main themes-McClellan's personality. The manner in which he fought the battle gives insight into McClellan's fascinating psyche no mere words can otherwise accomplish. The episode of Antietam provides an up close view of one of the most dramatic side bars to the Civil War- how Lincoln dealt with the very popular paradoxically insecure megalomaniac McClellan- the darling of the northern war Democrats who hoped to beguile the south back into the union by a combination of war victories that never shattered the southern army or southern pride and promises that they could keep slavery as it was after reconciliation. Slotkin also contrasts Lincoln's subtle political strategy with Lee's subtle military strategy- both needing to take big risks for big rewards. Lee was fully backed by Davis in his endeavor; Lincoln's general McClellan fought Lincoln at every turn.

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