

The Civil War: Biographies

My Bondage and My Freedom

by Frederick Douglass (1855, various editions)

With Malice Toward None: The Life of Abraham Lincoln

by Stephen Oates (1977, Harper)

Collected Black Women's Narratives

intro by Anthony G. Barthelemy (1988, Oxford)

Judah P. Benjamin: The Jewish Confederate

by Eli N. Evans (1988, Free Press)

Portraits of American Women

ed. G.J. Barker-Benfield & Catherine Clinton (1991, St. Martin's)

These five works of biography and autobiography provide an in-depth, personal view of life during the Civil War era. The experiences of these Americans—women and men, slave and free, Northern and Southern, famous and unsung—illustrate the close connection between individual lives and the larger events we call “history.”

My Bondage and My Freedom is Frederick Douglass's second autobiography and a literary classic of the American Renaissance. In it, the famous escaped slave and abolitionist leader gives a moving account of his emergence into a life on the mind in freedom. Interweaving his personal story with the political events of the 1850's leading up to the War, Douglass created an enduring statement on the meaning of slavery and race in America.

Stephen Oates' *With Malice Toward None* is a biography of Abraham Lincoln which replaces the historical icon with a complex and far from flawless human being. Oates's account discusses the Presidential election of 1864, the divisions of opinion in the North, and Lincoln's views on race and slavery. His frank but compassionate portrait compels us to examine our own images of humanity and greatness.

Collected Black Women's Narratives contains compelling autobiographical account by four women: Nancy Prince, a free Northern black who travelled as far as Russia yet experienced racial oppression in New England; Bethany Veney, a slave who preserved her own identity and values with the help of religious faith; Louisa Picquet, an “octoroon slave and concubine,” who sold her life story to purchase her mother's freedom; and Susie King Taylor who worked as nurse and teacher for one of the first black regiments in the Union Army.

Judah P. Benjamin: The Jewish Confederate is a joint biography of Jefferson Davis and the brilliant Jewish intellectual who served as his Attorney General, Secretary of War, and Secretary of State between 1861 and 1865. Called “the brains of the Confederacy,” Benjamin was immensely influential, in spite of the virulent anti-Semitism of the times. The dramatic events of his personal life are combined with a behind-the-scenes look at Southern strategy and diplomacy and a moving account of the Confederacy's reaction to defeat.

Portraits of American Women, in its section on abolitionism and the Civil War, presents studies of four diverse and intriguing women—Mary Todd Lincoln and Varina Davis, the First Ladies of the North and the South; Charlotte Forten, a black Northern teacher of freedpeople; and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, the Yankee abolitionist who became a leader of the nineteenth-century struggle for women's rights.

Suggestions for Further Reading

Biography

Beating Against the Barriers: Biographical Essays in Nineteenth Century Afro-American History. Richard Blackett. 1986, LSU. Brief biographies of five African-Americans who were active in the abolitionist movement.

Celia: A Slave. Melton A. McLaurin. 1992, U. Georgia. In 1885 a young woman slave was tried and hanged for killing her abusive master; this powerful account also focuses on the reactions of the white community to the issues raised by the trial.

The Children of Pride. Robert Manson Myers, ed. 1972, Yale. A Pulitzer Prize-winning work drawn from the diaries and letters of a large Southern clan, this readable book touches on all the major issues the Confederacy struggled with during the Civil War years.

Frederick Douglass: A Life. William McFeeley. 1992, Norton. Emphasizing Douglass's private life, this engaging biography recounts his early years in slavery, his escape, and the personal stresses of his life as an activist and celebrity.

Jefferson Davis Gets His Citizenship Back. Robert Penn Warren. 1980, U. Kentucky. This brief book interweaves Davis's life and career with a Southern writer's thoughts on the factors that led to armed conflict and the defeat of the South.

R. E. Lee. Douglas Freeman. 1934-36, Scribner. Still a classic biography of Lee, this detailed four-volume study presents him as the embodiment of Southern ideals.

Two Roads to Sumter. William and Bruce Catton. 1963, McGraw Hill. A joint biography of Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson Davis, tracing the lives of the two men up to the beginning of the War.

We Are Your Sisters: Black Women in Nineteenth Century America. Dorothy Sterling. 1984, Norton. A moving portrait of black women, both slave and free, during the War and after, based on excerpts from diaries, autobiographies, letters, and interviews.

A Woman Doctor's Civil War: Esther Hill Hawks' Diary. Gerald Schwarz, ed. 1984, So. Carolina U. The diary of a white Northern teacher, school administrator, suffragist, abolitionist, and doctor who went south to minister to black Union troops and freed slaves.

General Background

Army Life in a Black Regiment. Thomas Wentworth Higginson. 1896. Rev. 1984, Norton. The white leader of a regiment of ex-slaves, Higginson was also a gifted writer and observer who sensitively described the character, experiences, and folk culture of the black troops.

Battlecry of Freedom: The Civil War Era. James McPherson. 1988, Oxford. This engaging best-seller combines social history, political analysis, vivid portraits of personalities, and a clear exposition of events into a single compelling narrative.

Before Freedom Came: African-American Life in the Antebellum South. Edward D. Campbell, ed. with Kym S. Rice. 1991, U. Virginia Press. Readable and beautifully illustrated with

photographs, this book examines life for blacks on plantations and in cities during the years of crisis leading to the Civil War.

The Brother's War: Civil War Letters to their Loved Ones From the Blue and Gray. Annabel Tappert, ed. 1988 Times Books. Ninety letters spanning the course of the war, illustrated with historic photographs.

The Civil War: A Narrative. Shelby Foote. 1958-74, Random House. The beautifully written three-volume narrative includes many of the anecdotes the author related on the PBS series "The Civil War."

Civil Wars: Women and the Crisis of Southern Nationalism. George Rable. 1989, U. Illinois Press. A fresh, new interpretation of the key role played by Southern women during the struggle for Confederate independence and its subsequent defeat.

The Confederacy as a Revolutionary Experience. Emory Thomas. 1971, Prentice Hall. A lively exploration of Southern ideology that sees the movement to secession as part of the American tradition of revolution and independence.

Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War. Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber, eds. 1992, Oxford. An inclusive collection of essays on men and women, soldiers and children, blacks and whites, using the prism of gender to humanize the experience of the Civil War.

The Legacy of the Civil War. Robert Penn Warren. 1961, Random. A Southerner's insights into the simplifications that still color Northern and Southern ideas about the War.

The Negro's Civil War. James McPherson, ed. 1965, U. Illinois Press. An extensive collection of documents illuminating the experience of black soldiers, runaways, contrabands, and spies during the tumultuous times of black liberation.

On the Altar of Freedom: A Black Civil War Soldier's Letters from the Front. James Henry Gooding. Virginia M. Adams, ed. U. Mass. Press. Gooding was a newspaper correspondent and a soldier in the Massachusetts 54th Regiment; these dispatches eloquently defend the blacks' right to fight and report on the pay dispute and the attack on Fort Wagner depicted in the film "Glory."

A People's Contest: The Union and the Civil War. Philip Shaw Paludan. 1989, Harper. A readable, thorough social history of the war's impact on life in the North.

Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution 1863-1877. Eric Foner. Harper and Rowe (abridged) [orig. 1988]. In this prizewinning treatment of one of the most complex periods in our history, Foner traces in detail the course of the South's failure to adjust to the revolution that brought the Civil War.