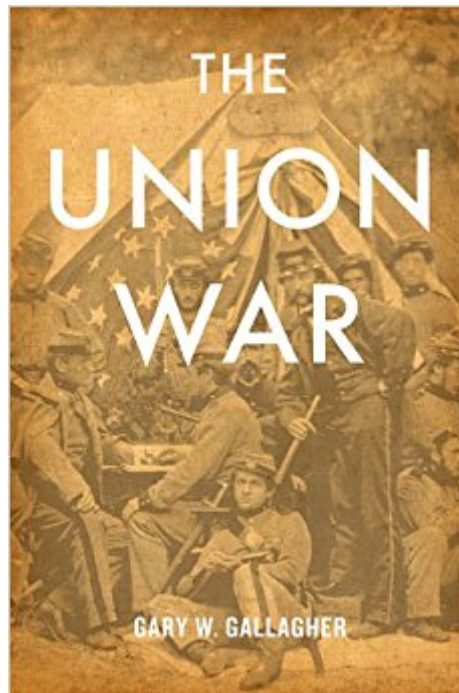


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# The Union War



## Synopsis

Even one hundred and fifty years later, we are haunted by the Civil War—by its division, its bloodshed, and perhaps, above all, by its origins. Today, many believe that the war was fought over slavery. This answer satisfies our contemporary sense of justice, but as Gary Gallagher shows in this brilliant revisionist history, it is an anachronistic judgment. In a searing analysis of the Civil War North as revealed in contemporary letters, diaries, and documents, Gallagher demonstrates that what motivated the North to go to war and persist in an increasingly bloody effort was primarily preservation of the Union. Devotion to the Union bonded nineteenth-century Americans in the North and West against a slaveholding aristocracy in the South and a Europe that seemed destined for oligarchy. Northerners believed they were fighting to save the republic, and with it the world's best hope for democracy. Once we understand the centrality of union, we can in turn appreciate the force that made northern victory possible: the citizen-soldier. Gallagher reveals how the massive volunteer army of the North fought to confirm American exceptionalism by salvaging the Union. Contemporary concerns have distorted the reality of nineteenth-century Americans, who embraced emancipation primarily to punish secessionists and remove slavery as a future threat to union—goals that emerged in the process of war. As Gallagher recovers why and how the Civil War was fought, we gain a more honest understanding of why and how it was won.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Gary Gallagher, more carefully and precisely than anyone else, enables the reader to understand

why so many citizen soldiers were willing to peril their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor to preserve the United States as one nation, indivisible and, in Lincoln's words at Gettysburg, to give the "new nation" brought forth in 1776 a "new birth of freedom" in 1863. (James M. McPherson, author of *Battle Cry of Freedom*)

The Union War reaffirms Gary Gallagher's reputation as one of the most astute and provocative writers on the American Civil War. This work places the Union at the heart of the war but also argues for the central role of armies and soldiers in understanding how the goals of reunion and emancipation were finally realized. With clarity and verve, Gallagher deals with large questions in an unfailingly profound way. (George C. Rable, author of *God's Almost Chosen Peoples*)

Gary Gallagher has written another gem in *The Union War*. A companion to his brilliant and controversial *The Confederate War*, this slender volume is sure to generate wide readership and debate. (Joseph T. Glatthaar, author of *General Lee's Army: From Victory to Defeat*)

A rare volume that forces us to reconsider how we think about the Civil War. Examining historic actors in the context of their own time and place, Gallagher reminds of the centrality of "Union" as the motivating force driving the Northern cause, and the significance of those citizen-soldiers who joined the Union Army in determining the results. (Matthew Gallman, author of *Northerners at War: Reflections on the Civil War Home Front*)

Brimming with insights, eloquent in argument, and filled with new evidence from the men who fought for the Union, this revisionist history will cause readers to rethink many of the now-standard Civil War interpretations. An essential work. (Randall M. Miller *Library Journal* (starred review) 2011-03-01)

This exceptionally fine book is in effect a companion piece to its author's *The Confederate War*, published in 1997... Now, in *The Union War*, Gallagher is back to take issue with what has become the new conventional wisdom, that the North fought the war in order to achieve the emancipation of the slaves. While welcoming the post-civil-rights-era emphasis on "slavery, emancipation, and the actions of black people, unfairly marginalized for decades in writings about the conflict," Gallagher makes a very strong case--in my view a virtually irrefutable one--that the overriding motive in the North was preservation of the Union... Gallagher, who holds a distinguished professorship in history at the University of Virginia, is far more interested in pursuing historical truth than in massaging whatever praiseworthy sentiments he may harbor on race, gender, class or anything else. He knows that for the historian the central obligation is to understand and interpret the past, not to judge it. This is what he has done, to exemplary effect, in *The Union War*. I suspect that one of his motives in writing it may have been to remind us of what a precious thing our Union is, a Union that we have come to take for granted. Fighting for its preservation was a noble thing, in and of itself. (Jonathan Yardley *Washington Post* 2011-04-15)

Gary Gallagher, a Civil War historian at the University of Virginia, aims to recover an antebellum understanding of the Civil War.

In his new book, *The Union War*, Gallagher argues that Northerners actually went to war to support the abstract idea of "Union"--a political idea, he writes, whose "meaning has been almost completely effaced" from our modern political consciousness. (Josh Rothman Boston Globe blog 2011-04-19)

In *The Union War*, Gallagher offers not so much a history of wartime patriotism as a series of meditations on the meaning of the Union to Northerners, the role of slavery in the conflict and how historians have interpreted (and in his view misinterpreted) these matters...At a time when only half the population bothers to vote and many Americans hold their elected representatives in contempt, Gallagher offers a salutary reminder of the power of democratic ideals not simply to Northerners in the era of the Civil War, but also to people in other nations, who celebrated the Union victory as a harbinger of greater rights for themselves. Imaginatively invoking sources neglected by other scholars--wartime songs, patriotic images on mailing envelopes and in illustrated publications, and regimental histories written during and immediately after the conflict--Gallagher gives a dramatic portrait of the power of wartime nationalism. (Eric Foner New York Times Book Review 2011-05-01)

While mindful of slavery's complex and deleterious role in fomenting disunion, Gallagher emphasizes the centrality of Northerners' devotion to the idea of the Union of their grandparents and their parents...Historians who stress emancipation over Union, Gallagher insists, miss the realities of antebellum inequalities based on class, gender and race...Gallagher's great contribution lies in contextualizing and underscoring the broad meaning of the Union, and later emancipation, to Northerners. (John David Smith News & Observer 2011-05-22)

Gallagher, one of the nation's preeminent Civil War scholars and a professor at the University of Virginia, deals in his latest book of the question of why did the North fight? His answer is in the volume's first sentence: The loyal American citizenry fought a war for Union that also killed slavery. This fast-paced review of the controversies that civil war historians have been arguing about is opinionated, well-informed, provocative and just the thing any American history buff needs to read this spring as our country gears up for the sesquicentennial of the conflict that made the United States begin to live up to the Declaration's words that "all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights." (Karl Rove Rove.com 2011-05-19)

Gallagher recaptures the meaning of Union to the generation that fought for it. He rescues the "Cause" for which they fought from modern historians who maintain that the abolition of slavery was the only achievement of the Civil War that justified all that death and destruction...He makes his point with force and clarity. (James M. McPherson New York Review of Books 2011-07-14)

Bold, fast-paced, and provocative...*The Union War* offers a searing critique of what Gallagher terms anachronistic scholarship that privileges emancipation and the agency of African-Americans during the war over loyal citizens' commitment

to the concept of a perpetual Union. Accusing historians of allowing "modern sensibilities" to skew their "view of how participants of a distant era understood the war," Gallagher finds, not surprisingly, that their scholarship exposes "the many ways in which wartime Northerners fell short of later standards of acceptable thought and behavior."...Gallagher reminds us of the centrality and importance of the Union to the war that forever ended serious threats of secession and racial slavery. (John David Smith Chronicle of Higher Education 2011-06-19)[An] important work. (Lawton Posey Charleston Gazette 2011-06-18)This slender volume offers a convincing demonstration of what motivated most white U.S. citizens during the Civil War. Theirs was not a quest to end slavery, although emancipation became a vital tactic in the epic conflict...Gallagher shows that participants fought to save a political arrangement they considered sacred, and begrudgingly supported emancipation as the best way to bring the secessionist serpent to heel. (E. R. Crowther Choice 2011-12-01)

Gary W. Gallagher is John L. Nau III Professor of History at the University of Virginia.

One key question that animates much thinking about the Civil War: Why did the soldiers, facing miserable conditions and fighting horrific battles leaving so many dead and disfigured, fight? Why did they persevere? In this book the question examine answers from the union side. The title "Union War" provides the answer.Gary Gallagher is an eminent historian of the Civil War. Thus, his analysis is worth thinking about. In some senses, the book begins with a straw man attack, as he notes questions about the popular view that the Civil War was about Union troops fighting for the end of slavery and emancipation. Frankly, that is hardly a majority view. But it does serve to juxtapose Gallagher's answers against that view. He contends that the northern troops fought for union.Gallagher uses many sources to make his case, including the artifacts of the soldiers themselves, such as letters and diaries. Three questions are at the fore in this work (Page 5): "What did the war for Union mean in mid-nineteenth century America? How and why did emancipation come to be part of the war for Union? How did armies of citizen-soldiers figure in conceptions of the war, the process of emancipation, and the shaping of national sentiment?"The book begins with the "Grand Review" of 1865, when the armies of East and West marched down the streets of Washington D. C. Then, the book goes back in time to explore answers to the questions noted above.Gallagher sensitively uses the information at his disposal to address these. In the end, a satisfactory volume.

Just when you think that you have read just about everything concerning the Civil War, Gary Gallagher masterfully weaves a superb synthesis of the reasons why men fought and died to preserve the Union. His work is balanced and reminds us of what was at stake for all who fought to preserve the Union first and secondly to eliminate the creation of a regressive slave holding oligarchy, which may well have led to the ultimate destruction of our great nation, created by the founding fathers, most of whom assumed that slavery would die a natural death, which indeed is what happened in the rest of the world by 1861.

not why it started. Gary Gallagher, professor at the University of Virginia and Penn State and noted Civil War historian, has written a short book on "why" the northern soldiers fought their southern brethren. Conventional wisdom aside - that it was the question of slavery and the righteousness of the practice - Gallagher says the real reason was the idea of "union". Many of the soldiers and lawmakers had fathers and grandfathers who had fought the British for Independence and the sense of "Union" of the "United States of America". To these men, "preserving" the Union was as important as their forefathers having attained it in the first place. Look at the word "union" and the phrase "the Union". Both mean virtually the same thing but only one applies to a specific entity. And these men were willing to die for that "union". But what about slavery and the idea of the North fighting to emancipate the slaves? The South may have begun with war with the yell of "states' rights" but the idea of fighting to keep those rights - including the practice of slavery - was a southern ideal. Gallagher states that while slavery was not well regarded in the north, he didn't feel it was the reason the north fought. He quotes Abraham Lincoln - on page 50 - of the three practicalities he had in freeing the slaves in the context of fighting and winning the war. Gallagher also writes about those thousands of immigrants who joined native-born Americans in the northern armies. What were they fighting for? Again, "union" and the idea of a country that was seen in Europe as a "bright spot" among nations. Many countries - France, the German States, the Austria/Hungary - had weathered uprisings in 1848 by citizens protesting traditional rule. Many of these people emigrated to the US and saw this country - this "union" - as something worth fighting for and preserving. Gary Gallagher is an elegant writer of history. He doesn't try to "pad" his text to make the book longer; he presents his ideas and supports them. Very good book.

Gallagher is a great lecturer (Listen to his lectures on the Teaching Company series) This book makes a simple point, really. The cause and inspiration of the Civil war, from the loyal Northern perspective was the cause of UNION. Modern interpretations have morphed this into a primary

battle for freedom and equality. Other historians insist that in reality, the blacks freed themselves by desertion and aiding the Union cause. Some downplay the role of the military in the outcome of the war. Gallagher takes to task all of these and many more misguided assertions. He is best in defending his claims against all-comers. He has the credentials and background to make his claims stick. But that does make this book a very interesting read. Citing journals, memoirs, diaries and other contemporary documents, over and over again he drives home his point. But really, can one find an equal number of diaries to refute his points and make counter arguments? I think my complaint about this book is that I feel it could have been condensed into a well written though long essay. I found part of the book to drag on, repeating over and over again his point. I love alternative points of view and realize that all history is colored by the historian himself. For an alternative to modern scholars, Gallagher is there to "set the record straight". But I wouldn't recommend this book to anyone except one who is absolutely convinced that the war was won by runaway slaves and that the only cause worth fighting for was freedom and emancipation.

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