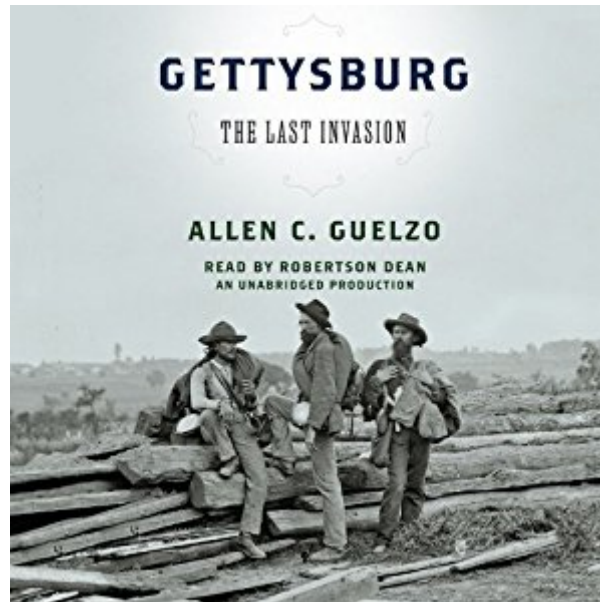




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Gettysburg: The Last Invasion



Synopsis

From the acclaimed Civil War historian, a brilliant new history-the most intimate and richly readable account we have had-of the climactic three-day battle of Gettysburg (July 1-3, 1863), which draws the reader into the heat, smoke, and grime of Gettysburg alongside the ordinary soldier, and depicts the combination of personalities and circumstances that produced the greatest battle of the Civil War, and one of the greatest in human history. Of the half-dozen full-length histories of the battle of Gettysburg written over the last century, none dives down so closely to the experience of the individual soldier, or looks so closely at the sway of politics over military decisions, or places the battle so firmly in the context of nineteenth-century military practice. Allen C. Guelzo shows us the face, the sights, and the sounds of nineteenth-century combat: the lay of the land, the fences and the stone walls, the gunpowder clouds that hampered movement and vision; the armies that caroused, foraged, kidnapped, sang, and were so filthy they could be smelled before they could be seen; the head-swimming difficulties of marshaling massive numbers of poorly trained soldiers, plus thousands of animals and wagons, with no better means of communication than those of Caesar and Alexander. What emerges is an untold story, from the trapped and terrified civilians in Gettysburg's cellars to the insolent attitude of artillerymen, from the taste of gunpowder cartridges torn with the teeth to the sounds of marching columns, their tin cups clanking like an anvil chorus. Guelzo depicts the battle with unprecedented clarity, evoking a world where disoriented soldiers and officers wheel nearly blindly through woods and fields toward their clash, even as poetry and hymns spring to their minds with ease in the midst of carnage. Rebel soldiers look to march on Philadelphia and even New York, while the Union struggles to repel what will be the final invasion of the North. One hundred and fifty years later, the cornerstone battle of the Civil War comes vividly to life as a national epic, inspiring both horror and admiration.

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Customer Reviews

On April 15, 2015, on the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the death of Abraham Lincoln, Allen C. Guelzo lectured at the Kirby Center of the Hillsdale College (Washington) on what would Reconstruction have been if Lincoln had lived. His lecture was knowledgeable, thought provoking and elegantly presented. His lecture led to the reading of this superbly written history of the Battle of Gettysburg on those fateful three (3) days in July 1963. The paperback version of 486 pages has more than 100 pages of footnotes. The first 140 pages address the lead up to the battle, the internal politics of the Union and the Confederacy, the jockeying for leadership among the Union military, and in a stunningly and beautifully written introduction on the very important topography of central Maryland and south central Pennsylvania as if one were an Indian scout looking off east from the South Mountain. Guelzo effortlessly and thoroughly moves through each of the three days of the Battle interspersing each day's events with military tactics, maps of troop movements, portraits of the military leadership and diary quotes from soldiers and generals. He is surprisingly non judgmental on Lee and Meade allowing contemporary opinions to add to the historical record, vividly descriptive, and clever by weaving together the disparate parts of this complex history with the many players, events, and the momentous results. His concluding chapters deal with the horrific casualties on both sides; for the Confederacy over 20,000 and for the Union over 22,000.00. The carnage of warfare shocks and saddens any reader. His ending chapter dissects Lincoln's Gettysburg Address phrase by telling phrase so Americans can truly appreciate what has occurred and how this has impacted this nation. Allen Guelzo's masterful "The Last Invasion" can now join the ranks of America's great histories on the Battle of Gettysburg.

An excellent book, putting you right into the swirl of battle but, as others have noted, it has insufficient maps. The finest Gettysburg map ever made is not in any book, but can be found as part of a board game called "Guns of Gettysburg," by Bowen Simmons. I have no interest in games, but the map inside, which is 3 feet long, 2 feet wide, and board mounted, displays a stunning array of symbols for woods, orchards, fields, swamps, roads, railroad tracks, streams, ridges, hills, elevation shades, and even boulders. It also uses small cannon symbols for all cannon emplacements, sight

lines for cannon, location of all key buildings, such as the Lutheran Seminary, Penn College, Belmont School, various farm houses, and small symbols for all the main houses and buildings in the streets of Gettysburg. And all this in beautiful and varying shades of green, overlaid with gold for roads and railroad tracks, and light blue for all creeks and runs. I read Guelzo's superb book while keeping this "Guns of Gettysburg" map (which folds its large size neatly up into 11 inches by 8) on a small chairside table for easy reference, and it greatly helped to clarify this splendid book and bring the battle to life for me.

I have read many books on the greatest battle of our Civil War and have a new "favorite". While it lacks the magisterial prose of a Bruce Catton this book made me feel like I was at a conference with Meade and his Generals deciding whether to retreat after the first day's reverses or stick it out and fight at a place that had no importance to either side except that it was where they happened to bump into one another. The narrative is a page turner even if you know (or think you know) what will happen next. This is "The Killer Angels" written by a first class historian with a gift with words and whose research into the little events and "little" people who made up the real tapestry of this monumental struggle allows you to be there in a cupola of a steeple in Gettysburg watching the battle from the viewpoint of Lee or some adventurous children who eventually were forced down by the bullets whining around them. All the main players are powerfully described in all their heroic valor (i.e. the Union troops fighting off the rebel advance on Culp's Hill) or professional incompetence (Sickle's mishandling the 3rd Corp almost leading to the loss of Cemetery Ridge and perhaps the battle itself). No one, save Lincoln, in a masterful description of the construct of the "Address", is a full villain or hero. Even Stuart, often blamed for the Confederate defeat for depriving Lee of his "eyes" comes across as merely human, capable of being in the wrong place at the wrong time. This is a "must" addition to your Civil War library..

This chronicle of the nearly decisive battle of the Civil War reads like a novel; it immerses the reader in the action and it's hard to put down. This is a must read for anyone who is interested in the Civil War. (Spoiler alert for fans of The Killer Angels by novelist Michael Shaara: The author reveals that Maine's Joshua Chamberlain did not save the Union single-handed at Little Round Top, as depicted in Shaara's novel, and in "Gettysburg", the movie based on his book. There were equally, if not more important fights waged below that hill, where federal troops fought mostly losing battles much of the afternoon of July 2, but held off General James Longstreet's attacking rebels long enough and wore them down sufficiently to dissuade Longstreet from trying to turn the Union Army's left

flank, as planned, before nightfall ended the fighting.) One caution for Kindle readers, I read this book both on my Kindle and Android tablet. The book incorporates many maps of the unfolding battle with the text. They're essential for visualizing the fighting, especially if you've never visited Gettysburg. I found the maps hard to make out on my Kindle, which is not a "Paper White" model, so I switched to my larger Android tablet. Anyone who puts a premium on more legible maps and/or is a collector of Civil War accounts, will probably want the hardbound book.

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