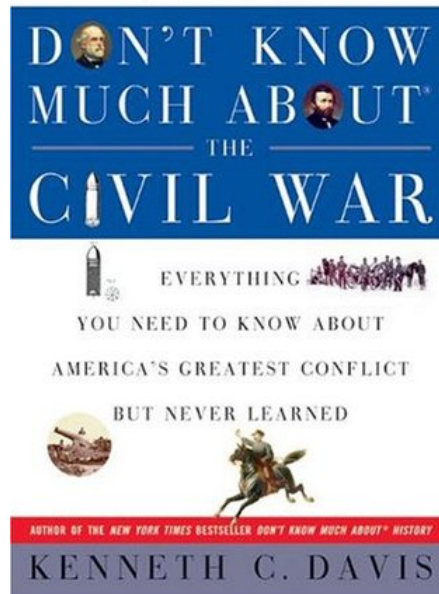


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Don't Know Much About the Civil War: Everything You Need to Know About America's Greatest Conflict but Never Learned

Kenneth C. Davis

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“Highly informative and entertaining...propels the reader light years beyond dull textbooks and *Gone with the Wind*.”

—*San Francisco Chronicle*

It has been 150 years since the opening salvo of America's War Between the States. *New York Times* bestselling author Ken Davis tells us everything we never knew about our nation's bloodiest conflict in *Don't Know Much About ® the Civil War*—another fascinating and fun installment in his acclaimed series.

Don't Know Much About the Civil War: Everything You Need to Know About America's Greatest Conflict but Never Learned Details

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Lisa Houlihan says

My own fault for reading such a book. I can forgive someone being "find" \$50: that could be a typesetting error. But "On December 20, 1865, a special convention met in Charleston, and South Carolina became the first state to leave the Union" is a ludicrous oversight that makes me doubt the author's validity.

Mallory says

This is a really helpful book in better understanding the Civil War, not only because the author goes through all the events chronologically, but also because he starts at the very beginnings of America itself to provide a full look at what ultimately brought the country to that divisive point. I liked Davis' continued insertion of relevant quotes, songs, and documents throughout the book. His way of writing is certainly not boring or dry. He presents the human side of the war, as well as the battles and facts that come with it.

Favorite quotes: "For slaves, Christianity might put them on the stairway to heaven, but it didn't save them from hell on earth."

"While the people retain their virtue and vigilance, no administration, by any extreme of wickedness or folly, can very seriously injure the government in the short space of four years." – Abraham Lincoln, First Inaugural Address

Michael says

I really didn't know much about the Civil War before picking up this book. I had vague shapes in my head, rumors about battles, ideas that one side wore gray, the other blue. Basically crap I'd picked up from terrible John Jakes miniseries watched with one eye open in the eighties. So this book really did put a lot of information in context and fired me up about a topic that before then I'd given little care to.

bsc says

A great book of facts but not a great audio book.

Rebecca says

Zzz...zzzz....zzz.... Oh, I'm sorry, I was reviewing a book? Yeah, the thing about this book was, it was so boring, even thinking about it puts me to sleep. Dry and dull, it's full of disconnected factoids that read like

so many lists rather than an overall coherent narrative. Although the author acts like he's digging deep into history, anyone who reads this without a good prior understanding is going to walk away with the trite and oft-disproved overview that the war was fought only over slavery, the North was all good and the South was all bad. I'm keeping this as a reference book, because it does have some good quotes and information, but I wouldn't read it as a book again.

Chandler Jechura says

I think it is not a stretch to say that this is one of my favorite nonfiction books about the Civil War. This text describes every major event of the Civil War era, both what was leading up to it, and it's aftermath, in excellent detail, given the magnitude of the topic presented. This is because this is perhaps the most well written book that I have read in the nonfiction genre yet. It is extremely readable, and is a text that I would suggest to reluctant students of history for that reason alone. But there is even more to this book. Davis not only explores many different aspects of the Civil War, but he also includes smaller things that just take this book over the top for me as far as recommendations go. One thing he includes is a list of famous people who took part in the Civil war and gives the reader more information about what happened to them until their death. This is excellent for a reference guide. Then there is an excellent and copious list of book recommendations included in the back of the book covering nearly every topic imaginable.

On the other hand there are a few things to be aware of. Firstly, This is a book for those people who do not know a lot about the Civil War, and if you already know a lot, then you won't find much new information, but that is what you can gather from the title. Secondly, for those of you that have the 1996 edition, the USS Monitor was actually raised back in 2002, which, obviously, is not included in this edition of the book.

Still, these are extremely small pickings compared to what is on offer here. If you are a reluctant student who has to write a report, or if you are someone like me who just wants a quick reminder of what important events happened during this time, then this is the book for you. I give it a five out of five.

Susan says

Some of you might know I'm on a trivia team. We do okay, but we were a little light on military knowledge. We assigned each member a war, and my war was the Civil War, so I picked this up as my 'beginner book' on it. It turns out, it was a pretty good beginner book, and it also turns out that I'm starting to get into learning *everything* I can about the Civil War.

If you want to bob in and out of what happened where, getting deeper at times, this is the book for you. This book starts well before The War of Northern Aggression, getting into the triangle route of trading rum and sugar cane for slaves, etc. It gets into the Haitian rebellion. It gets into how the Founding Fathers felt about slavery. Like I said, bits and bobs, with deeper dives here and there.

Then, onwards to the slow boil leading up to the Civil War, where you start nodding your head and thinking about how people who don't remember the past are doomed to repeat it and you shake your head and try not to think about the Tea Party and what all this means and Rick Perry and his suggestion that Texas secede from the United States and you wonder how people can be so ignorant to this day because wow the Civil War was kind of a Big Deal and not to be glib, but it *sucked*, yeah? Yeah.

As a person who was born in Wisconsin but then moved to North Carolina when I was 13 and lived there

until I was 26, and then moved to Chicago and have now lived here (I am now 38), it is interesting to remember and realize how the Civil War, yes, certainly has shaped Southern beliefs to this day. But I never realized it living there. I don't think people do, really, nor would they admit it. It's just a small trickle running through the South, certainly nothing large. But it was huge, this war, and in the grand scheme of things, it wasn't that long ago either. I've got a lot to chew over, and to think over, and if this review offended anyone, my apologies. I'm still processing what I learned.

Jen says

Though I am from Richmond, I feel I completely missed out on learning about the civil war. I really knew NOTHING about it, but this book helped. A lot. It also sparked an interest and may actually get to me to learn more about this. It's a sad thing that I know more about British history than American, but I'm trying to change this.

Grace says

I read this book in conjunction with several other books in order to gain an in-depth knowledge of the Civil War through several authors' perspectives. I like that this book contained so many primary sources so that I could understand what people were thinking and feeling. Davis sometimes includes light-hearted and humorous stories, which makes this book even more interesting and fun.

In addition, I like the timelines and the fact that they include events, which were occurring outside of the Civil War, such as Indian battles in Colorado, or books being written by famous authors. Most of what is written about this time period focuses primarily on the Civil War, and I have often wondered what else was occurring during this period. One example would be the westward migration of settlers. I also like the appendices in the back of the book, which compared the economies of the North and South. It really helped me to understand what each side was working with in terms of number of states, population, economy, factories, railroads, etc.

One of my favorite parts of the book, however, was the 'Whatever Became Of?' section near the end. It names many of the primary players in the Civil War, and tells what they went on to do after the war. It was interesting seeing so many connections between these people and the roles they played in our country's history. Finally, I appreciated the fact that this book was written in small increments. You can pick up the book, read a few pages, set it down, and come back to it later. This is great for when you are busy.

Joe says

A must read for those of us who don't know their Mason from their Dixon. It got a little repetitive and I've never been a big fan of reading about battles, but Davis ultimately did a great job of showing what led to the Civil War, who all the players were, and, most delightfully, what happened to many of the surviving players after the fact.

I'm glad that Davis acknowledges what the Civil War was really about (Slavery), and what it wasn't (States Rights). It was about one State right: The right to own slaves. Granted, I think the Republicans did what they did for political reasons but that's good, they're politicians. That means the system is working. For the record,

I believe teachers should do things for educational reasons, priests for religious reasons, and gluttons should do things for tacos.

Fran Soto says

A must-read book!

Belinda says

Loved it....lots of tidbits that I never knew! Doesn't get too bogged down in the details of the battles like some history books do. Talks more about the thought processes behind the Generals and Lincoln and the politics of the time. Very interesting. I must say that I did listen to it on audio...that may have made some difference.

Alex says

A brilliantly written history. He let's the people of the era do most of their own talking.

Mom says

I am really torn on this one. I love finding out any information on the Civil War but this book had a very argumentative tone that put me off. And then I was unsure if this information was actually factual. I couldn't wait to get to the end so I could read something else.

Elena Timofeeva says

Hello, I'm Elena Timofeeva from Moscow, Russia.

In Russian schools we never learn deeply American history, so generally speaking, all the information we have comes from Hollywood movies, in fact I was the one who knew about the American Civil war only from "Gone with the Wind" movie/book.

Well what I can say, my English is pretty intermediate as you can see from my comment,)Even though I enjoyed that book, and it was quiet easy to read even for me, so I'm a bit surprised to read some comments here that say this book is boring, because it is not at all and an Author uses very clear and understandable language.

I'm really impressed, and I'm so thankful to Keneth.C.Davis , practically, I discovered new United States that I've never known before, I was shocked by the number of victims, I never knew that as well..

I understood a lot, even about modern history after this book.

It's strange, but, at the beginning of the book, I hated slavery, and horrors that were on southern plantations, but by the end, I was terrified by the cruelty of Northerners who completely destroyed towns, in some

Southern states and killed innocent people, woman and children.

As foreigner I don't have any prejudicial view, I can only say, that I'm sorry for that generation of strong young Americans , who were full of dignity but gave their lives in vain , because no one can say that the Civil war changed life of African Americans, they continued to suffer even after the Civil War, and no one thought to protect them, but the South and it's best people, truly heroes and great officers such as "Stonewall "Jackson were obliterated by that war.

Again I'm not here to judge, I only think that every American must remember what happened, and this book will be a good provider for those who would like to know more about that dark period of the American history.

Jay Connor says

I'm pretty well read on the Civil War, but I'll have to say that I picked up some nuggets here.

Perhaps the most interesting is to upend my "conventional wisdom" understanding of the Impeachment of Andrew Johnson. Elementary and High School history left the impression that Lincoln's assassination was all the worse because it left the Presidency in the hands of the disreputable, Andrew Johnson. He was so disreputable that he was impeached.

As the new novel "The Impeachment of Abraham Lincoln" by the wonderful Stephen Carter, imagines, almost any politician would have had a hard time navigating the cross-currents of retribution and reconstruction in the post-civil war America. When you look at the Articles of Impeachment against Johnson, you see that he was actually on the "malice toward none" end of the spectrum that Lincoln framed in his second inaugural. Johnson was impeached for opposing the clearly un-constitutional "Tenure of Office Act," which was specifically drafted to keep the Republican (retribution) Radical, Edwin Stanton, in position as Secretary of War, over Johnson's objections.

Stanton plays a central role in many of the causes which made reconstruction after the civil war so unsuccessful. Another stain on Stanton's record is his maneuverings behind the scenes in the conspiracy trial of Mary Surratt. (Well chronicled in Robert Redford's recent "Conspititor"). Surratt, perhaps a small player in the conspiracy to assassinate Lincoln, bore the brunt of the nation's urge for revenge due to Secretary of War, Stanton's manipulation of her military tribunal. It was military, lacking the civil protections, much the same way the Bush/Cheney insisted that many of the post-911 trials be military.

Davis, also, does a good job of shining light on the under documented roles of women and African Americans before and during the war.

Another very interesting facet is the string of Compromises -- 3/5s, Missouri, 1850, etc. -- the latter two spearheaded by Henry Clay. Slavery was recognized as a vile institution, yet whenever lawmakers addressed it in the years leading to the Civil War it was merely to "kick the can" down the road. Democracy is often about compromise -- we certainly hear passionate calls for that in this election year -- yet compromise does not equate to solution. We would be a better people if we created a vision of where we wanted to go and not just compromise around the journey's potholes.

Sparkie Allison says

I have read dozens upon dozens of books on the Civil War. This is a great overview and has some fun facts probably not in other books. Every student should read this book. Excellent.

Bart Breen says

Entertaining, but somewhat Shallow

I listened to this book on tape and enjoyed it overall. I confess, I had some issues as I listened to the book as I am apparently in that class of people who actually does enjoy and study history. I found the anecdotes entertaining and overall found the book appropriate for its purpose as a primer for a majority of the populace who apparently doesn't have even a cursory grasp of the keystone event in American History. It does have a tendency however to oversimplify some of the issues in an apparent effort to create a framework to understand not only the events, but their socio-economic-political implications.

You have only to read the other reviews of this work for evidence that many of the philosophical and political battles of the civil war are still being fought in American Society.

Most criticism of this work seems to be directed at Davis' contention that slavery was the issue of the Civil War. Davis does go to great lengths to make this point. It is by no means a slam dunk as there are many reputable historians who downplay this claim as an over-simplification.

However, Davis is not writing this book as a competitor or replacement for the weighty works of academia that address this question. Davis is writing to a more general audience that he appears to perceive as attempting to sluff over or bypass this issue from the civil way, perhaps in some effort to minimize or bypass the issues of racism and civil rights inequities today.

In those terms, Davis seems to be going to great lengths to address the issue in order to convince them that:

1. Slavery is not a new issue.
2. Slavery was integrally entwined within many of the issues cited then and since for the Civil War.

States rights were an issue? Of course they were! What were the states primarily asserting their rights to control that they believed the North and then Lincoln were threatening? Slavery was primary in this regard.

Were taxes and tariffs tied into the argument. Yes it was. What were the taxes and tariffs centered around? Issues related to the agricultural South and the industrial North who preferred to see these applied to the others and not themselves. What drove the southern agricultural system and undergirded it in the context of the times? Was it state's rights? Yes, but primarily as those state's rights applied to slavery!

Are detractors correct when they claim that many who fought the war from the North were equally racist and had no real desire to benefit negro slaves? Yes, that is undeniably true. Were there many who fought on the Southern side who did not own slaves and would have been just as happy to see slavery ended? Absolutely.

The truth of the matter is, however, that slavery as a political issue was inextricably in the weave of all the issues leading up to Lincoln's election and succession.

is already familiar with the events of and surrounding the civil war. The point to be made, is perhaps he needs to do this with his intended audience of neophytes and newcomers who need to be slapped in the face with it to dispel the opposite error which seems to have diminished the role of slavery and then civil rights development within the US.

That said, if you have questions after reading or listening to this book, then you'll at least have a platform from which to do further research.

So, I recommend this book. It does what it sets out to do which is to introduce people with little or no historical background not only into the events of the Civil War, but the political and societal context of it.

In order to do that you have to take a stand and make a case for what you are saying. Like it or not; agree with it or not; Davis does just that and he does a credible job.

Those criticizing it on that basis are beyond the purpose of the book and for whatever reasons still fighting the original battles.

Better here than on the battlefield!

Read it. Learn. Then move on and question the premises in additional reading after this fine introduction.

Elise says

I could have saved myself a lot of time in high school if I had had this book instead. Of course, it wasn't written when I was in high school. But, if it had been it would have been the perfect book for learning about the civil war. It was a concise yet substantive look at the reasons for the war, the run up to the war and how it took place plus the aftermath.

Jason Robinson says

I finally finished this book after about 7 weeks of occasional reading in between while I was reading other things. Chock full of information and a good complement to the novels I have been reading the last few months about the civil war.
