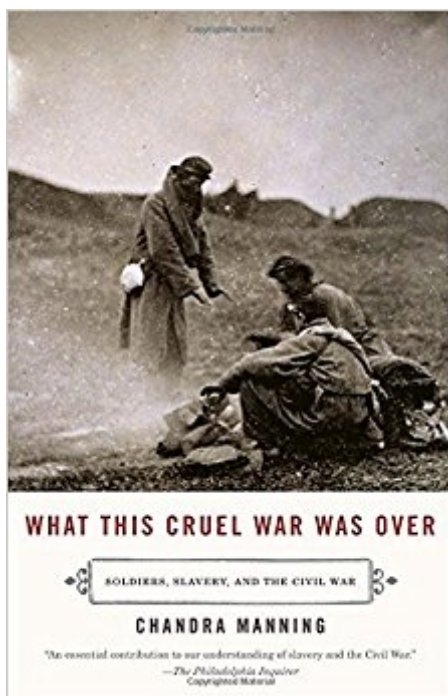


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# What This Cruel War Was Over: Soldiers, Slavery, And The Civil War



## Synopsis

In this unprecedented account, Chandra Manning uses letters, diaries, and regimental newspapers to take the reader inside the minds of Civil War soldiers-black and white, Northern and Southern-as they fought and marched across a divided country. With stunning poise and narrative verve, Manning explores how the Union and Confederate soldiers came to identify slavery as the central issue of the war and what that meant for a tumultuous nation. This is a brilliant and eye-opening debut and an invaluable addition to our understanding of the Civil War as it has never been rendered before.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Starred Review. For this impressively researched Civil War social history, Georgetown assistant history professor Manning visited more than two dozen states to comb through archives and libraries for primary source material, mostly diaries and letters of men who fought on both sides in the Civil War, along with more than 100 regimental newspapers. The result is an engagingly written, convincingly argued social history with a pointâ that those who did the fighting in the Union and Confederate armies "plainly identified slavery as the root of the Civil War." Manning backs up her contention with hundreds of first-person testimonies written at the time, rather than often-unreliable after-the-fact memoirs. While most Civil War narratives lean heavily on officers, Easterners and men who fought in Virginia, Manning casts a much broader net. She includes immigrants, African-Americans and western fighters, in order, she says, "to approximate cross sections of the actual Union and Confederate ranks." Based on the author's dissertation, the book is free of

academese and appeals to a general audience, though Manning's harsh condemnation of white Southerners' feelings about slavery and her unstinting praise of Union soldiers' "commitment to emancipation" take a step beyond scholarly objectivity. Photos. (Apr.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Manning's subject--slavery as the prime cause of the Civil War--is hardly unusual, but what makes this study unique, provocative, and immensely valuable is her approach. She utilizes the letters, diaries, and regimental newspapers, all written during the war, to glean the attitudes, hopes, and even the fears of soldiers toward the institution of slavery and emancipation. Unlike many previous works on the subject, Manning ignores the writings of elites and emphasizes the opinions of common soldiers, North and South, white and black. Some of her conclusions are striking and likely to generate intense debate. Although acknowledging that many Union soldiers enlisted to preserve the Union rather than to fight slavery, she asserts that both slavery and emancipation were constant topics of discussion as early as 1861. She disputes that nonslaveholding Confederate soldiers (who were the overwhelming majority) fought primarily to defend hearth and home from Yankee invaders. Rather, she maintains that the defense of slavery was intimately tied to their sense of manhood, honor, and their place in the Southern social structures. A well-argued examination. Jay Freeman Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

In Chandra Manning's work, *What This Cruel War Was Over*, Manning utilizes a plethora of personal thought of soldiers in the Civil War. This fresh perspective on the war gives new light to the most sought after topic in American history. In this monograph one will not find an account of historical military, political or social events. However, this does provide what individual soldiers' feelings toward the lack of food and provisions in the Confederacy, or how they dealt with no shoes as the war went on, or even why they felt God was preventing their victory through their own indulgences. Manning takes on a whole new level of individual social-history which is smartly written and quite thorough in its own respect. This is a great work to better understand public thought during the war rather than the political thought which ever other historian has already written on. I recommend this in compilation with any other political Civil War monograph to better understand the full picture of the war and era.

I thought I knew everything about the Civil War, but this gave me a fresh perspective, particularly on the evolving attitudes of the Union soldiers. Sure, it was about slavery, but that's not all.

Absolutely fantastic book  
Nice use of source materials including the unit newspapers  
If you enjoy reading about the Civil War this is a book you just have to read

This is a book well worth reading because of all the quotes from the diaries and letters of soldiers (white and black, Union and Confederate) and from their military newsletters. The words of the men who fought this horrible war tell us what they were thinking and why they were fighting. Manning organizes her book by the year of conflict, one chapter per year. She titles each from a song popular at the time, a song that expressed the desires of the people. The organization serves the author's purpose (to show that the men fighting the war changed their thinking) and also makes for easier reader comprehension. The writing, however, is academic: long sentences with little variety, and long paragraphs, generally two per page, with little white space -- so while the content of this book is interesting and very worth reading, the reading itself is not an easy matter.

A treasure trove of first person accounts, not of the usual suspects, but of the grunts who actually fought this war. Ms. Manning presents and analyzes the working man's evolving view of why we fought at every stage of the process. Especially insightful (though this point is not overtly made) is how the differing worldviews represented by North and South are still the source of our present political grievances. This book also leaves no reasonable doubt whatsoever as to why we fought, and to such exhaustion, so we can stop kidding ourselves or listening to latter day romanticism.

In *What This Cruel War Was Over*, Chandra Manning writes her first book about the Civil War. Nevertheless, it is a powerful one that demonstrates insightful analysis and dedication to the subject. Using primary sources from soldiers, including camp newspapers, letters, and diaries, Manning argues that the wartime experience of soldiers shaped their views on slavery. Though Northern soldiers were originally opposed to ending slavery, by fighting the Civil War in the South, Northern soldiers were convinced of its great harm, and conceived of the Civil War as God's way of punishing America for allowing the sin of slavery to exist. As Civil War battles became bloodier and casualties mounted, Northerners searched for a noble cause to justify the bloodshed, and concluded that slavery must end. Chandra Manning tells an effective story, using chronological order to present the war in an organized fashion. Overall, *What This Cruel War Was Over* is an

excellent and worthwhile read for history buffs and ordinary readers alike.

This book allowed me to better understand what motivated non-slave owning Confederate soldiers to continue fighting as long as they did. It also provides good insight into Northern and Southern societies and racial attitudes at that time. It obviously took a great deal of research using diaries, letters and newspapers.

This book has been quickly reviewed by major hitters among American historians. Chandra Manning has been described as the "rising star of new American historians." Such high praise might make one assume this is a book geared to knowledgeable scholars and enjoyable only by them. The truth is Dr. Mannings writing style and skill make this work both enlightening and enjoyable to the scholar and the history enthusiast. Any one interested in this "cruel war" will find enlightenment not shown by the earlier greats in historic writing and teaching. We can only hope that Professor Manning does not make us wait long for her next work. What William Freehling offers us in antebellum literature Chandra Manning provides in the psychology of the war itself.

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