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April 1865: The Month That Saved America



Synopsis

April 1865 was a month that could have unraveled the nation. Instead, it saved it. Here Jay Winik offers a brilliant new look at the Civil War's final days that will forever change the way we see the war's end and the nation's new beginning. Uniquely set within the larger sweep of history, filled with rich profiles of outsize figures, fresh iconoclastic scholarship, and a gripping narrative, this is a masterful account of the thirty most pivotal days in the life of the United States. It was not inevitable that the Civil War would end as it did, or that it would end at all well. Indeed, it almost didn't. Time and again, critical moments could have plunged the nation back into war or fashioned a far harsher, more violent, and volatile peace. Now, in a superbly told story, Winik captures the epic images and extraordinary history as never before. This one month witnessed the frenzied fall of Richmond; a daring last-ditch Southern plan for guerrilla warfare; Lee's harrowing retreat; and then Appomattox. It saw Lincoln's assassination just five days later, and a near-successful plot to decapitate the Union government, followed by chaos and coup fears in the North, collapsed negotiations and continued bloodshed in the South, and finally, the start of national reconciliation. In the end, April 1865 emerges as not just the tale of the war's denouement, but the story of the making of our nation. Provocative, bold, exquisitely rendered, and stunningly original, April 1865 is the first major reassessment of the Civil War's close and is destined to become one of the great stories of American history.

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Customer Reviews

Wish I could give this book 4.8 stars. I do agree with the bulk of the praise given it, and I especially

like the author's ability to view the end of the war and reestablishment of our nation from his professional and modern perspective. The book doesn't lack for insight. Still, there are times when jarring errors pop up. Winik treats Gen. James "Pete" Longstreet as 2 men, James Longstreet and Pete Longstreet. Even gives them separate index listings. When he goes into reverent and affectionate nicknames Lee's troops had for him, he lumps such derisive ones as "Granny" and "King of Spades" (from when he assumed command in 1862 and his men were less than impressed) as among the compliments paid him. Winik also bites on LaSalle Pickett's creation of deep friendship between Lincoln and George Pickett. The bulk of current opinion is that the relationship is one of the myths Gen Pickett's widow created about him. My view is that any historian who wishes to present that relationship as factual should state what he bases his movement against the tide upon. Winik doesn't. My overall view is that Winik did an exceptional amount of research outside his area of specialty and did the bulk of it very well. The book is both enjoyable and important. Much so because of his professional assessment of the unstable state of our nation in April of 1865. For that reason it transcends small issues such as the ones raised above. At the same time, the fact that such issues can be raised, suggests to me that while his range and scope are impressive, other matters of nuance and context might also have been missed or misstated as well. His attempt to make his end notes more 'readable' make it difficult to verify some of his assertions. This remains an excellent book.

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