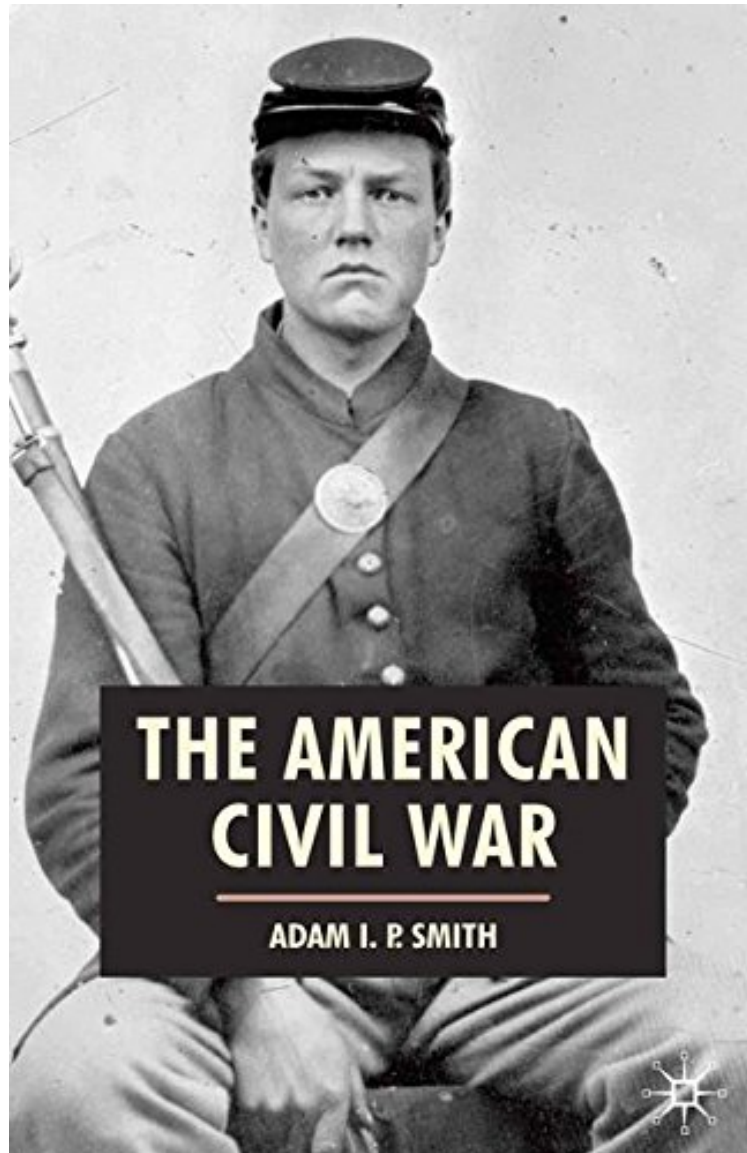


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Adam I. P. Smith

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Adam I. P. Smith : The American Civil War (American History in Depth) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The American Civil War (American History in Depth):

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Civil War, the Amish and their fellow Anabaptists such as the Mennonites were largely pacifists, preferring to stay away from secular politics and political movements, and the war created by regional differences within the country. Authors James O. Lehman and Steven M. Nolt have written a fascinating book that examines the Amish and Mennonites of Pennsylvania and other states during the Civil War. Published by Johns Hopkins Press, this book is perhaps the first detailed study of the pacifistic perspective of the local Amish and Mennonite communities. The book is wonderfully written, flows well, and offers fresh information and a new perspective on the home front in the Civil War that is rarely (if ever) covered in other works. *Mennonites, Amish, and the American Civil War* fills a hole in the historiography of the war, adding depth and color to the struggles of this peace-loving group who struggled with the decisions of faith versus Americanism, of individual free-will versus community pressure, and whether to take up arms and renounce their traditional values (and in some cases, risk being shunned by their families and friends to fight in the army). Scholarly and well-researched, this book is a must-read for York and Lancaster countians wishing to gain a better understanding of the internal conflicts within the region during the war years. The activities of the Quakers and the Pennsylvania German Lutherans are perhaps better publicized and studied, which is why Lehman and Nolt's book is of interest. The authors begin with a sweeping overview of religion, politics, religious minorities, and their place within the changing American society of the mid-19th century. The Anabaptists, already well established in many regions including Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Virginia, were faced with the soul-searching decision of loyalty to church and family or to the government that called for volunteers to fight a war that many in the Amish and Mennonite community believed was a direct violation of Biblical teachings on seeking peace and avoiding bloodshed. Contrary to popular belief, the Mennonites were not isolationists, but rather held public offices, were involved in setting local laws and policies, and swaying public opinion. Individual chapters focus on the Mennonites and Amish of Virginia and the controversial "war of self-defense" when the Federal government sent armies into the state. Of local interest, Lehman and Nolt spend considerable time exploring the Pennsylvania German Anabaptists of this region and their Civil War experiences, both on a macro level as well as on a very personal individual look. Early in the war, the decision to fight or to stay out of the war was simply a matter of one's interpretation of the scriptures and teachings versus personal beliefs. When the war came to the North in the summer of 1863, the decision became much more complex, as defending the region became more of a psychological stress. For example, 61-year-old Peter Nissley was a Mennonite minister who lived near Marietta, Pennsylvania, in rural Lancaster County. When the Confederate division of Major General Jubal Early invaded neighboring York County, with a full brigade sent eastward to threaten Columbia and Marietta, Nissley made the decision to stay at his home with his family, instead of fleeing as refugees deeper into the county. "We had some trying times," he later recalled, as the Rebels came within six miles of his home. He could hear the sound of the Confederate artillery shelling Wrightsville on the late afternoon of Sunday June 28 (the holy day to the Anabaptists) and later that evening could clearly see the flames coming from the burning Columbia-Lancaster Bridge. From July 1 through the 3rd, Nissley could hear the roar of the Battle of Gettysburg. He wrote, "What awful (sic) destruction of life and property this war has brought on us." Like others in the Pennsylvania German community, while trying to remain neutral, he sided with the Union in his thinking, remarking that at Wrightsville "Our few men resisted them (the Rebels), retreated to, and Fired that magnificent bridge." He, like most of his religious community, were thankful when the Rebels retired from Pennsylvania. In the mid-1950s, an excellent movie was produced entitled *Friendly Persuasion*, starring Gary Cooper. It told the fictional tale of a family of Indiana Quakers who were faced with the same decision as Nissley and the German Anabaptists - peaceful nonresistance or take up arms and join the fighting. The parents agonize when a son rejects his religious upbringing and joins the Union army. Their anguish increases when the Confederates enter their state, and Cooper's character has to make his own decision. I have watched that interesting movie several times, and it first brought attention to the religious conflict in morals that people of this area faced when their homes and livelihoods were threatened by war. Now, Lehman and Nolt's book brings a detailed examination of that same issue. Peppared with individual stories such as Peter Nissley's, this work is both fascinating and informative. It includes lists of conscientious objectors in places like Holmes County, Ohio, and explores the reasons why men chose not to fight (as well as why some turned their backs on their upbringings to enter the military). Also of strong interest is the authors' examination of the conflict brought upon Virginia's religious minorities in the Shenandoah Valley as armies criss-crossed the area for four years.

The American Civil War was by far the bloodiest conflict in American history. Arising out of a political crisis over the expansion of slavery, the war set the stage for the emergence of the modern American nation-state. This new interpretation of one of the most mythologized events in modern history combines narrative with analysis and an up-to-date assessment of the state of Civil War scholarship. *The American Civil War*: - emphasizes the importance of Northern public opinion in shaping the meaning and outcome of the crisis- argues that the war exposed deep social and political divisions within, as well as between, North and South- explores the experiences of ordinary soldiers and civilians, and the political and cultural context in which they lived- sets this distinctively American crisis over slavery and nationhood in the wider context of the nineteenth-century world. Concise and authoritative, this is an indispensable introduction to a critical period in modern American history.

'Smith's *The American Civil War* skillfully integrates political, economic, military and social history in a narrative format that should suit students and instructors alike.' - Amy S. Greenberg, Pennsylvania State University, USA 'An attractively written, well-informed and analytically sophisticated, but always accessible, account of the great crisis.' - Martin Crawford, Keele University, UK 'Adam I.P. Smith has written an outstanding one-volume history of the Civil War in the United States. In 229 closely printed pages of text, he gives thorough coverage to virtually all the important events and issues of the war, with well-informed treatments of social, political, military, and diplomatic history...For anyone who wants an up-to-date, comprehensive, and intellectually lively one-volume history of the U.S. Civil War, this volume is an ideal choice.' -Paul D. Escott, *American Nineteenth Century History*

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From the Back Cover

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