

# The Civil War: Fiction

## *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

by Harriet Beecher Stowe (1852, various editions)

## *The Red Badge of Courage*

by Stephen Crane (1918/95, various editions)

## *Absalom, Absalom!*

by William Faulkner (1936, Random)

## *Beloved*

by Toni Morrison (1987, Knopf)

## *Civil Wars*

by Rosellen Brown (1984, Knopf)

Beginning with the best-selling novel that was said to be one of the causes of the conflict, this series of five novels brings the drama of the Civil War and its aftermath to life. It also reveals, through the insights of major authors, what the Civil War has meant to American over a span of 140 years.

Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is still a page-turner, captivating modern readers with its graphic indictment of slavery, its vivid characters, and its insight into the ambiguities in both Southern and Northern attitudes toward race. This classic work reflects the values of its won era and is also fascinating as an enduring yet changeable force in our popular culture.

In *The Red Badge of Courage*, Stephen Crane takes us into battle with a young Northern soldier. Considered to be the first modern war novel, this work depicts in words the horrors conveyed by the battlefield photographs in Ken Burns' TV series "The Civil War", reflecting a profound disillusionment with the traditions of military heroism.

*Absalom, Absalom!* is a Southern writer's examination of one family's experience before, during, and after the Civil War. Tracing the story of a poor white man's rise to social prominence, Faulkner depicts the stresses between classes, races, genders, and generations, both in Antebellum Virginia and in the upheavals resulting from the War.

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* is the story of a black woman's endurance, both in slavery and in the troubled freedom of the black community in post-War Cincinnati. In this emotionally powerful work Morrison explores the deepest complexities of human cruelty and dignity, freedom and bondage, hatred and reconciliation.

In *Civil Wars*, Rosellen Brown examines the lingering heritage of the War through the problematic marriage of a Southern man and Northern woman, both veterans of the Civil Rights movement. Set in Mississippi in the 1980's, the novel presents this family's conflict in a context of deteriorating race relations in the community and persisting clashes between Southern and Northern culture.

## Suggestions for Further Reading

### Fiction

*American Falls*. John Calvin Batchelder. 1986, Norton. Set in 1864, this is a fictional account of the failed Confederate attempts to sabotage Northern cities from Canada.

*High Hearts*. Rita Mae Brown. 1986, Bantam. An entertaining best seller about the adventures of a woman who passes as a Confederate soldier in order to fight by the side of her husband.

*Iola Leroy, or Shadows Lifter*. Frances Ellen Watkins Harper. 1892. Rep. 1987, Beacon. One of the earliest Civil War novels by an African-American woman, this is the story of a slaveowner's daughter who is discovered to be a mulatto and sold into slavery. The novel depicts her struggle to recover her family, reconstruct her identity, and strengthen the black community during the turmoil of War and Reconstruction.

*Jubilee*. Margaret Walker. 1966, Houghton Mifflin. Tracing the experiences of blacks in Georgia both during and after the Civil War, this novel also reflects the Civil Right era during which it was written.

*The Killer Angels: A Novel About the Four Days of Gettysburg*. Michael Shaara. 1974, McKay. This Pulitzer-prize winning novel tells the story of the Battle of Gettysburg from both the Southern and Northern points of view. A film version appeared in late 1992.

*Lincoln: A Novel*. Gore Vidal. 1984, Random. In this highly controversial novel, Vidal creates a convincing human portrait of Lincoln and of the political world around him.

*Miss Ravenel's Conversion from Secession to Loyalty*. John W, De Forest. 1867, Harper (out of print). One of the earliest Civil War Novels, this romance between a Northern man and a Southern woman heralds the national mood of reconciliation in the late nineteenth century.

*Shiloh*. Shelby Foote. 1951, rep. Vintage 1991. A fictional account of the battle of Shiloh, told from the perspectives of high ranking officers and ordinary soldiers on both sides.

*Patriotic Gore: Studies in the Literature of the American Civil War*. Edmund Wilson. 1962, Oxford. A classic historical review of the literature inspired by the Civil War, reflecting on what the War has meant to generations of American writers.

### General Background

*Army Life in a Black Regiment*. Thomas Wentworth Higginson. 1896. Rev. 1984, Norton. The white leader of a regiment of ex-slaves, Higginson was also a gifted writer and observer who sensitively described the character, experiences, and folk culture of the black troops.

*Battlecry of Freedom: The Civil War Era*. James McPherson. 1988, Oxford. This engaging best-seller combines social history, political analysis, vivid portraits of personalities, and a clear exposition of events into a single compelling narrative.

*Before Freedom Came: African-American Life in the Antebellum South.* Edward D. Campbell, ed. with Kym S. Rice. 1991, U. Virginia Press. Readable and beautifully illustrated with photographs, this book examines life for blacks on plantations and in cities during the years of crisis leading to the Civil War.

*The Brother's War: Civil War Letters to their Loved Ones From the Blue and Gray.* Annabel Tappert, ed. 1988 Times Books. Ninety letters spanning the course of the war, illustrated with historic photographs.

*The Civil War: A Narrative.* Shelby Foote. 1958-74, Random House. The beautifully written three-volume narrative includes many of the anecdotes the author related on the PBS series "The Civil War."

*Civil Wars: Women and the Crisis of Southern Nationalism.* George Rable. 1989, U. Illinois Press. A fresh, new interpretation of the key role played by Southern women during the struggle for Confederate independence and its subsequent defeat.

*The Confederacy as a Revolutionary Experience.* Emory Thomas. 1971, Prentice Hall. A lively exploration of Southern ideology that sees the movement to secession as part of the American tradition of revolution and independence.

*Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War.* Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber, eds. 1992, Oxford. An inclusive collection of essays on men and women, soldiers and children, blacks and whites, using the prism of gender to humanize the experience of the Civil War.

*The Legacy of the Civil War.* Robert Penn Warren. 1961, Random. A Southerner's insights into the simplifications that still color Northern and Southern ideas about the War.

*The Negro's Civil War.* James McPherson, ed. 1965, U. Illinois Press. An extensive collection of documents illuminating the experience of black soldiers, runaways, contrabands, and spies during the tumultuous times of black liberation.

*On the Altar of Freedom: A Black Civil War Soldier's Letters from the Front.* James Henry Gooding. Virginia M. Adams, ed. U. Mass. Press. Gooding was a newspaper correspondent and a soldier in the Massachusetts 54th Regiment; these dispatches eloquently defend the blacks' right to fight and report on the pay dispute and the attack on Fort Wagner depicted in the film "Glory."

*A People's Contest: The Union and the Civil War.* Philip Shaw Paludan. 1989, Harper. A readable, thorough social history of the war's impact on life in the North.

*Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution 1863-1877.* Eric Foner. Harper and Rowe (abridged) [orig. 1988]. In this prizewinning treatment of one of the most complex periods in our history, Foner traces in detail the course of the South's failure to adjust to the revolution that brought the Civil War.