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Clint Johnson. *The 25 Best Civil War Sites: The Ultimate Traveler's Guide to Battlefields, Monuments and Museums.* San Francisco: Greenline Publications, 2005. i + 263 pp. $19.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-9759022-4-0.

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History, Memory, and Travel

In this splendid compact travel guide, author Clint Johnson raises the fundamental issue why the U.S. Civil War, which concluded nearly 150 years ago, still interests so many people today. The answer, Johnson says, is because "the war took place here in the South" (p. 12). Numerous battlefield parks, monuments, and museums provide visual testimony of arguably the greatest conflict in U.S. history, measured not only in the sheer number of soldier and civilian lives lost, but as the violent conclusion to the decades-long ideological struggles waged over states' rights and the existence of slavery since the founding of the American Republic. As a descendant of Confederate soldiers from several states, the author, along with many of his fellow Civil War re-enactors, will not allow the nation to forget "The Lost Cause" though that is not the guide's explicit intent.[1]

Johnson's guide is really for everyone. Its stated purpose is to show the "historic traveler" the best Civil War sites, defined as those that had the greatest impact upon the overall war strategy and not necessarily size and location within "noteworthy or beautiful surroundings" (p. 12). For Johnson, seeing is believing and fully understanding the horrendous nature of warfare that history books cannot convey. Yet the guide also provides a reason for the "less historically inclined travelers" to learn about the Civil War that otherwise overwhelmed, dazed, or confused many in school. Especially helpful are Johnson's descriptions of each site through a brief historical discussion of the war years, current map with major roads, and points of interest. Even non-travelers among the general public and history buffs may appreciate references to African American and Native American soldiers: for example, the U.S. Colored Troops buried at the Vicksburg National Cemetery in Mississippi, or the two regiments of Confederate Cherokees, about 1,000 strong, who broke through Union lines at Pea Ridge, Arkansas.

This work reaches out to a broader audience beyond what the author believes is the source of its greatest strength, the Civil War buffs. Surely, the serious history traveler will want to see the best sites, but Johnson's guide provides a clear, concise primer to Civil War History 101, while tantalizing readers into wanting to hear more about various aspects of the Civil War that touched the lives of virtually everyone in the United States, and, dare say, coaxing the non-traveler, from any region, into traveling and reading one or more of the sources listed for each of their favorite sites.

Johnson's guide is a balanced, sympathetic portrayal of soldiers, generals, and politicians on both sides of the war. For example, in the points of interest section for Richmond, Virginia, the second-ranked site on his list, Johnson mentions the exchange of letters between President Lincoln and President Davis, consoling the other after the loss of a son each had suffered in their respective White House. In this manner, and through straightforward presentation of the battlefield sites, the author eludes historiographic debates about its origins and modern-day controversy over who was to blame, making this particular guide all the more fresh for beginners to learn about the Civil War and then decide whether to pursue academically oriented books. In addition, Johnson's brief discussion of each military campaign and contingencies may satisfy specialists in the James McPherson camp. Perhaps only in such a format as a travel guide could Johnson brilliantly accomplish so much for so many readers in such relatively short space.

The only criticism is actually minor and merely reflects the geographic limit of the guide. Naturally, nine of the top ten sites on Johnson's list should come from Virginia, since defense of the Confederate capital at Richmond and the state was the primary goal of Southern military strategy. Only two of the rebellious states are omitted, Florida and Texas, which have become tourist destinations for many would-be travelers. However, the author includes ten additional bonus sites as if to suggest his publisher imposed the guide's scope and length.

This reviewer modestly proposes the inclusion of the Oklahoma History Center in Oklahoma City that has a blue room and a red room with interesting, yet little-known, discussion of the civil war within the Civil War among the Native American nations formerly of the southeastern United States, especially the Creeks, who favored the North, and the Cherokees, who sided with the South. The list of sources may also benefit from the addition of historian Jerry D. Thompson's book, *Vaqueros in Blue & Gray* (2000, second edition), which focuses upon the divided loyalties of Mexican Americans on the South Texas frontier where the last battle of the Civil War occurred in May 1865 nearly one month after Lee's surrender at Appomattox.

A highly enjoyable, user-friendly guide such as Johnson's can only accomplish so much, but his work successfully conveys his overarching goal for "readers to take the time to go see these sites themselves" (p. 13). As part of the Greenline Historic Travel Series, Johnson's Civil War guide joins others about the best sites of Colonial America, the American Revolution, and the Pacific and European Theatres of World War Two that befits historic struggles for freedom and democracy that the world has known. Johnson's guide also serves as a great companion to tour books of the AAA (American Automobile Association) and its more entertainment-oriented tourists to assure that a vacation spot can include something for everyone in the family.

Note

[1]. Andrew Curry, "The Better Angels: Why We Are Still Fighting over Who Was Right and Who Was Wrong in the Civil War," *U.S. News & World Report* (September 30, 2002): 56-63.

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