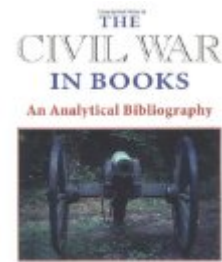


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

David J. Eicher. *The Civil War in Books: An Analytical Bibliography*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1996. xxiii + 407 pp. \$39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-252-02273-9.

Reviewed by T. Michael Parrish (LBJ Library, University of Texas)
Published on H-CivWar (January, 1997)



The year 1996 was extremely bountiful for Civil War scholars and readers who appreciate guidance from good bibliographies. These sterling works are included from Gary Gallagher's sage picks of "best" titles comprising "The Civil War 200" (in *Civil War Magazine*, February 1995: 49; and February 1996: 55):

* Paolo Coletta's "A Selectively Annotated Bibliography of Naval Power in the American Civil War" (published in *Civil War History*, volume 42, March 1996). * Steven E. Woodworth's formidable edited guide *The American Civil War: A Handbook of Literature and Research* (Westport, Ct.: Greenwood Press, 1996). * Domenica M. Barbuto's and Martha Kreisel's eclectic *Guide to Civil War Books: An Annotated Selection of Modern Works on the War between the States* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1996).

Making a big splash of its own is David Eicher's masterpiece of selection and commentary, a labor of love that required more years than he intended, but that grew far more valuable in the process. Although the work ultimately represents Eicher's personal view of the ever-expanding universe of outstanding Civil War books, he wisely solicited advice from Professors Gallagher, James McPherson, Mark Neely, James I. Robertson Jr., John H. Eicher, and the dean of Civil War booksellers, Ralph Newman. Thus, by combining determined study and expert help, Eicher rendered a sweeping, crystal-clear, authoritative guide. Clearly, few bibliographers have come as close to achieving such rigor and sophistication.

In a lengthy foreword, Gary Gallagher provides an excellent overview of publishing trends and evolving historiography on the Civil War. Citing a persistent rift between historians interested in the war's "nonmilitary" topics and those who cater to the army of readers de-

voted to military titles, Gallagher concludes forcefully, "Too many historians on both sides of this debate missed the point that the war cannot be understood without exploring the myriad reciprocal influences between the home and the battlefield"—a clarion call to aspiring and seasoned scholars alike.

Eicher identified 1,100 essential books (almost a million pages of text), arranged the titles into logical categories, and provided brief reviews—usually no more than two or three paragraphs—for each title. The result is a bibliographic smorgasbord, an all-you-can-read extravaganza of scholarly information and critical insight. A large format (8 1/2 x 11-inches) and well-designed double-column text make for a pleasant presentation of what otherwise might be considered a staggering amount of information. Two useful appendices are also present: one is a select list of names and addresses for "Prolific Publishers of Civil War Books"; the other is "A Short List of Civil War Bibliographies," a convenient guide to other works for the eager scholar and reader interested in pursuing further bookish adventures. Finally, there are two indices: one listing authors and editors, the other listing book titles.

Pitching his selections toward a wide audience, Eicher emphasizes campaign and battle studies, biographies and memoirs of mostly well-known figures, and solid "general works" on the Civil War. Military topics do receive particularly generous coverage, but political, social, diplomatic, and other "nonmilitary" subjects get their fair share by and large. The most useful reference works also garner plenty of attention. Eicher's annotations are splendid examples of economy and purpose, providing pointed summaries of each book's strengths, weaknesses, peculiarities, and mistakes (even minor

spelling errors).

Modest estimates place the total number of Civil War books at more than 50,000, a figure proliferating at an astounding rate. Many of Eicher's selections (fully 27 percent) have appeared since 1981, testimony to the growing ranks of well-trained and talented Civil War historians, as well as good news for a book-buying, battlefield-touring, video-viewing public so enthusiastic about the Civil War that predictions of a "fading fad" are seldom heard anymore. Like the New York Stock Exchange, the "market" for Civil War books shows no sign of abating, much less crashing. With such an embarrassment of

riches to enjoy, beginners and veterans alike will turn to Eicher's bibliography as the starting point for their research, collecting, and reading. If he is up to continuing the task, supplementary volumes every decade or so would be exceedingly welcome.

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Citation: T. Michael Parrish. Review of Eicher, David J., *The Civil War in Books: An Analytical Bibliography*. H-CivWar, H-Net Reviews. January, 1997.

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