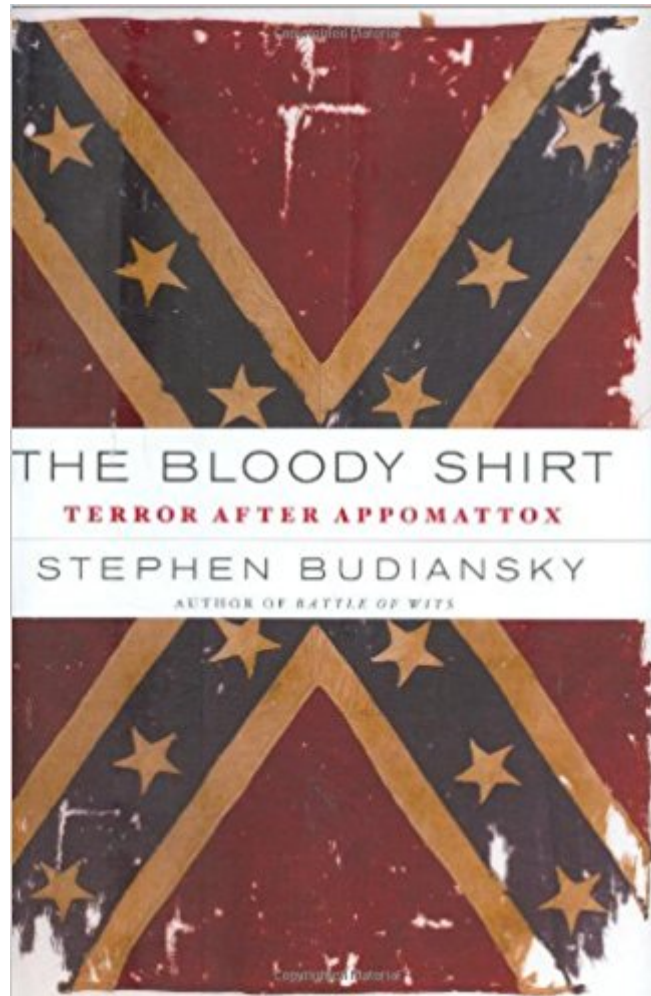




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The Bloody Shirt: Terror After Appomattox



Synopsis

From 1866 to 1876, more than three thousand free African Americans and their white allies were killed in cold blood by terrorist organizations in the South. Over the years this fact would not only be forgotten, but a series of exculpatory myths would arise to cover the tracks of this orchestrated campaign of atrocity and violence. Little memory would persist of the simple truth: that a well-organized and directed terrorist movement, led by ex-Confederates who refused to accept the verdict of Appomattox and the enfranchisement of the freedmen, succeeded in overthrowing the freely elected representative governments of every Southern state. Stephen Budiansky brings to life this largely forgotten but epochal chapter of American history through the intertwining lives of five courageous men who tried to stop the violence and keep the dream of freedom and liberty alive. They include James Longstreet, the ablest general of the Confederate army, who would be vilified and ostracized for insisting that the South must accept the terms of the victor and the enfranchisement of black men; Lewis Merrill of the 7th Cavalry, who fought the Klan in South Carolina; and Prince Rivers, who escaped from slavery, fought for the Union, became a state representative and magistrate, and died performing the same menial labor he had as a slave. Using letters and diaries left by these men as well as startlingly hateful diatribes published in Southern newspapers after the war, Budiansky proves beyond a doubt that terrorism is hardly new to America. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

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Customer Reviews

One of the abiding misconceptions about the American Civil War is that the opposing armies parted with dignity, mutual respect, and even a certain degree of amiability at war's end. Joshua Chamberlain, the hero of Little Round Top, famously writes that he ordered his men to salute the brave Confederate soldiers who laid down their arms at Appomattox. Thus began the myth of a happy ending. But historians have long recognized that civil wars are especially violent and acrimonious, and even after peace accords are signed, aftershocks of rage and recrimination continue. Given its horrible bloodletting, it would be strange if the American Civil War were an exception to this general rule. Author Stephen Budiansky, in one of the most horrifying books I've ever read, documents the decade following Appomattox and concludes two things: the war didn't really end in 1865, and the North didn't achieve the victory it thought it did. When the "official" war ended, die-hard Confederates and secessionists seethed with anger and a stubborn refusal to submit. John Richard Dennett, a young "Nation" reporter who traveled through the South for 8 months after the war ended, concluded that nearly every Southerner he encountered was convinced that the emancipation of the slaves had reversed the natural order of things, and would eventually mean that an "inferior" race, bolstered by Republican carpetbaggers, would dominate a "superior" one. Given that a black revolt was one of the antebellum South's worst nightmares, this post-war conviction was a powerful incentive to violence.

Stephen Budiansky has written a popular history of the Reconstruction era. His is no easy task, as Reconstruction falls far behind the Civil War as a subject of popular interest, despite their closeness on the historical timeline, and despite the fact that many of the Civil War's main players (such as James Longstreet, who's featured here) were very active in both. "The Bloody Shirt" is a well-researched and well-written account that focuses on several individuals and events rather than try to examine the period as a whole. The author explores Reconstruction in Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina--the Deep South states that were the heart of the large plantation economy. The main problem I had with the book was its emphasis on description rather than analysis. It reads like dispatches from the Reconstruction "front." That's fine, to a point, but at times it is more a string of primary sources than a monograph. Very often, letters and newspaper editorials, frequently printed whole, are left to speak for themselves. Much of this information could've been boiled down--and more importantly, should've been commented upon. For example, at one point, one Southern newspaper makes reference to "Colfax." Those familiar with the Reconstruction period will know this means the "Colfax Massacre" of 1873, which happened in Louisiana (if one wants to read about that, he/she can read the recent book "Redemption" by Nicholas Lemann). Most importantly, the

book lacks sufficient political context. The last portions of the book deal with the infamous Hamburg massacre (or, as Democrats fashioned it, the Hamburg "riot") in South Carolina. Budiansky unfortunately, doesn't give us much context about Reconstruction politics in that state.

Stephen Budiansky has written an interesting account of the post-Civil War Reconstruction era. Budiansky reminds us that from 1865 until 1877 the United States essentially fought an insurgency in the American South. And the sad fact is, that the United States lost the insurgency to the Confederacy. The Bloody Shirt is not a straightforward history of the era but rather follows the lives and careers of several people involved in this insurgency. Through these people's stories we gain an understanding of the wider insurgency and the mistakes made by the Union which allowed the Confederacy to overturn the gains won in the Civil War and continue on their way of life. The book focuses on people like; Albert Morgan, who was assigned as a soldier to police the Reconstruction South and later became a state senator from Mississippi, Lewis Merrill who commanded troops in reconstruction South Carolina, Adelbert Ames, also a soldier, who became the appointed governor of Mississippi, and Prince Rivers, a former slave who fought for the Union and became a county magistrate in South Carolina. Also making an appearance is General James Longstreet, the brilliant Confederate commander who later became a Republican and advocated the Union cause. These men confront the enormously difficult challenge of trying to change a hostile culture. This culture, which could not bring itself to admit wrongdoing or guilt in any of its activities, resisted the attempt to enfranchise the black population with the rights of citizenship granted to them under the 14th 15th and 16th amendments to the Constitution. What is lost to most modern Americans is the fact that this was truly a violent insurgency.

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