



# The Civil War: A Narrative: Red River to Appomattox

*Shelby Foote*

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**The Civil War: A Narrative: Red River to Appomattox** Shelby Foote

**Selected by the Modern Library as one of the 100 best nonfiction books of all time**

Twenty years ago, in 1954, novelist Shelby Foote began this monumental work with these words: "It was a Monday in Washington, January 21; Jefferson Davis rose from his seat in the Senate..."

In the third -- and last -- volume of this vivid history, he brings to a close the story of four years of turmoil and strife which altered American life forever. Here, told in vivid narrative and as seen from both sides, are those climactic struggles, great and small, on and off the field of battle, which finally decided the fate of this nation.

"Red River to Appomattox" opens with the beginning of the two final, major confrontations of the war: Grant against Lee in Virginia, and Sherman pressing Johnston in North Georgia. While the Virginia-Georgia fighting is in progress, Kearsarge sinks the Alabama and Forrest gains new laurels at Brice's Crossroads.

With Grant and Lee deadlocked at Petersburg, Sherman takes Atlanta -- assuring Lincoln's reelection, together with the certainty that the war will be fought (not negotiated) to a finish. These events are followed by Hood's bold northward strike through middle Tennessee while Sherman sets out on his march to the sea, to be opposed at its end by the ghost of the Army of Tennessee. Hood is wrecked by Thomas in front of Nashville--the last big battle -- and Savannah falls to Sherman, who presents it to Lincoln as a Christmas gift.

Meantime, Early has threatened Washington, Price has toured Missouri, Farragut has damned the torpedoes in Mobile Bay, Forrest has raided Memphis, and Cushing has single-handedly sunk the Albemarle. And Sherman heads north through the Carolinas, burning Columbia en route, while Sheridan rips the entrails out of the Shenandoah Valley.

Lincoln's second inaugural sets the seal on these hostilities, invoking "charity for all" on the Eve of Five Forks and the Grant-Lee race for Appomattox. Here is the dust and stench of war, a sort of Twilight of the Gods, with occasional lurid flare-ups, mass desertions, and the queasiness that accompanies the risk of being the last man to die.

Then, penultimately. Lee at Appomattox, the one really shining figure in this last act. Davis's flight south from fallen Richmond overlaps Lincoln's death from Booth's derringer, and his capture at Irwinville comes amid the surrender of the last Confederate armies, east and west of the Mississippi River. The epilogue is Lincoln in his grave: and Davis in his posthumous existence. "Lucifer in Starlight."

So ends a unique achievement -- already recognized as one of the finest histories ever fashioned by an American -- a narrative of over a million and a half words which recreates on a vast and brilliant canvas the events and personalities of an American epic: The Civil War

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