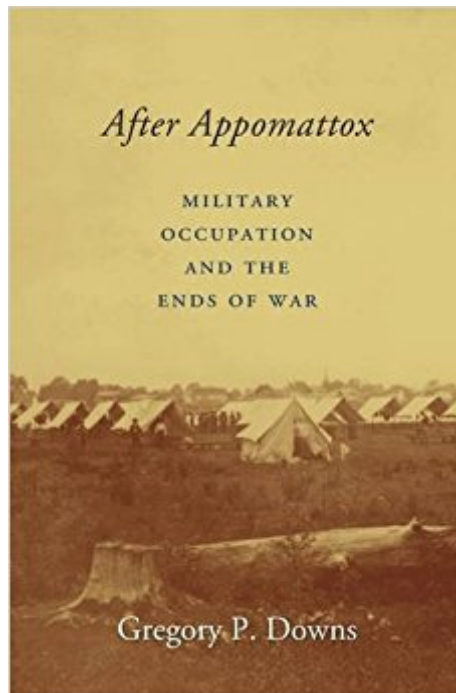




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# After Appomattox: Military Occupation And The Ends Of War



## Synopsis

On April 8, 1865, after four years of civil war, General Robert E. Lee wrote to General Ulysses S. Grant asking for peace. Peace was beyond his authority to negotiate, Grant replied, but surrender terms he would discuss. As Gregory Downs reveals in this gripping history of post-Civil War America, Grant's distinction proved prophetic, for peace would elude the South for years after Lee's surrender at Appomattox. After Appomattox argues that the war did not end with Confederate capitulation in 1865. Instead, a second phase commenced which lasted until 1871—not the project euphemistically called Reconstruction but a state of genuine belligerency whose mission was to shape the terms of peace. Using its war powers, the U.S. Army oversaw an ambitious occupation, stationing tens of thousands of troops in hundreds of outposts across the defeated South. This groundbreaking study of the post-surrender occupation makes clear that its purpose was to crush slavery and to create meaningful civil and political rights for freed people in the face of rebels' bold resistance. But reliance on military occupation posed its own dilemmas. In areas beyond Army control, the Ku Klux Klan and other violent insurgencies created near-anarchy. Voters in the North also could not stomach an expensive and demoralizing occupation. Under those pressures, by 1871, the Civil War came to its legal end. The wartime after Appomattox disrupted planter power and established important rights, but the dawn of legal peacetime heralded the return of rebel power, not a sustainable peace.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

After Appomattox demonstrates how a long and ambitious military occupation aimed to secure freedom for the newly emancipated in the violent, lawless, and chaotic South. Original and revelatory, it has tremendous potential to change our understanding of American Reconstruction. (David W. Blight, author of *American Oracle: The Civil War in the Civil Rights Era*) Moving brilliantly between the lived experience of the Civil War's forgotten final six years and the fierce legal debates in Washington, *After Appomattox* is the definitive work on a great paradox of American democracy: the post-Civil War expansion of rights arose out of and depended upon the awesome powers of the wartime state. Downs masterfully reveals how controversies over war powers shaped the course of American freedom. A fundamental rethinking of what we can now call America's Ten Years' War. (John Fabian Witt, author of *Lincoln's Code: The Laws of War in American History*) Downs demonstrates that the end of the Civil War marked the beginning of another war: the violent struggle for the rights of African Americans that resulted from military occupation of the South and political battles in Washington. *After Appomattox* is a landmark account of the death throes of slavery and the stormy rise of Reconstruction. (David S. Reynolds, author of *John Brown, Abolitionist* and *Walt Whitman's America*) Downs examines Reconstruction as primarily a military operation. In order to secure civil rights for freed slaves, Northern republicans had to rely on additional constitutional war powers. From a legal standpoint, the Civil War did not end with the surrender of Confederate armies but lasted until 1871 when Georgia's senator was seated. While many opponents of Reconstruction were motivated by racism, others were compelled by a fear of unchecked military power. How to approach Reconstruction even divided radical Republicans. Downs convincingly argues that the U.S. government should have expanded and extended the use of war powers in the South in order to secure justice and freedom for freed slaves. This work will appeal to general readers as well as specialists interested in a fresh understanding of Reconstruction. (Michael Farrell *Library Journal* 2015-05-01) Downs persuasively argues that a long and persistent military occupation occurred for at least three years, and perhaps as long as six years, after the end of actual hostilities in spring, 1865. Downs also demonstrates that, although a massive demobilization of Union troops occurred in 1865-66, the United States Army has been far too neglected as a player--a force--in the history of Reconstruction. Downs wants his work to speak to the present, and indeed it should. (David W. Blight *The Atlantic* 2015-04-08) Downs resets our sights on the military occupation that did occur, and he argues for its centrality in helping to fashion whatever gains African-Americans managed to achieve. In talking about military occupation, numbers matter, and his research has fixed them with a precision previously lacking. *After Appomattox* is a timely, important book that casts new

light on the meaning of occupation during Reconstruction, and raises challenging questions about the relationship between military power and civil rights in today's climate of never-ending war. (Louis P. Masur Chronicle of Higher Education 2015-05-04)

Downs makes a persuasive case that virtually none of the achievements of Reconstruction--there were more than is generally supposed--could have taken place without the use or at least the threat of military force. He challenges the view that defeated Confederates in 1865 were ready to acquiesce in whatever reorganization the federal government imposed on them, including the bestowal of civil rights on blacks.

Downs rightly regards the appalling white-on-black violence of the late 1860s and early 1870s as systemic terrorism.

In Downs's telling, Reconstruction was also one of the finest hours of the U.S. Army. (Fergus M. Bordewich Wall Street Journal 2015-05-01)

In *After Appomattox*, Downs makes the case that the final end to slavery, and the establishment of basic civil and voting rights for all Americans, was born in the face of bayonets.

Put simply, the military occupation created democracy as we know it.

Downs's book couldn't come at a more opportune time, as American forces once again face the difficult question of how long, and to what ends, an occupying army must stay in conquered territory. After more than a decade of fighting abroad, we may be too war-weary to see that military occupations are sometimes a good, even necessary thing.

The brilliance of Downs's argument is that he steals the central complaint of the apologists, yet reverses the conclusion: The federal government was overzealous--and that was a good thing. Congress had to impose martial law in order for blacks to gain basic freedoms. If military officers sometimes vacated racist local laws, if they removed ruthless sheriffs and judges, if they tried white supremacists in unfair military tribunals--all of which they did--they did so for necessary ends. Equality would come to the South no other way.

Downs has produced a remarkable, necessary book. (Eric Herschthal Slate 2015-04-09)

In a striking new book, *After Appomattox*, historian Gregory Downs chronicles the years of military occupation that followed Lee's surrender to Grant in 1865--a military occupation that was indispensable to the uprooting of slavery and the political empowerment of freed slaves. In the face of Southern white supremacist hostility, it was only the continuing presence of federal troops in the South that could break up remaining pockets of rebellion, establish the right of blacks to vote and seek election, void discriminatory laws, and unilaterally remove disloyal or racist sheriffs and judges from office. (Jeff Jacoby Boston Globe 2015-05-07)

Downs has written an important book challenging assumptions about the post-Civil War era and the ways in which historians define wartime and peacetime.

He contends that Lee's surrender at Appomattox did

not bring peace, but rather a second phase of war— an insurgency and war of occupation that did not end until 1871. Downs problematizes the idea of Reconstruction. Whatever accomplishments came in that era— civil rights, a national definition of citizenship— came as a result of military force rather than deliberative politics. Challenging scholars who argue that too few Union troops for a meaningful occupation remained in the postwar South, Downs demonstrates through impressive research that there was actually a significant military presence, both numerically and geographically. But even this presence had its limits, and outside the pale, terrorists and violence plagued the South. By framing the period as an occupation and insurgency, the author has done much to reveal the violent, contested, and contingent nature of the post-Civil War US. Required reading for scholars of the Civil War era. (K. M. Gannon Choice 2015-09-01)

Gregory P. Downs is Associate Professor of History at the University of California, Davis.

Very interesting approach and extremely detailed use of sources. The only flaw is that it is overly repetitive of details. But this is an important enough contribution that all serious amateur historians of the Civil War should read it to better understand where the country was after the end of formal hostilities, how the early years of Reconstruction proceeded across the Confederate states, and why the military part of the story matters to not only that history, but to our subsequent development.

The clearest explanation of the Reconstruction Era I have ever read and I was a history major in college.

An interesting and not very well reported topic. The book disputes a number of generally accepted facts about the post Civil War South.

Great book on the need for military force in the south after the Civil War.

Too much detail of each and every state after the close of the war.

Very good book. I highly recommend it to any one interested in Civil War history.

ADDRESSES THE INCOMPLETELY TOLD STORY OF RECONSTRUCTION  
Gregory Downs  
After

Appomattox: Military occupation & the ends of war Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2015. 9 longitudinal maps on military post locations. 6 images. Notes. Index. 8 statistical appendices on the number of U.S. Army posts, soldiers, & soldiers / post; mostly longitudinally with some by region. TOPICS COVERED: gunpoint emancipation, reinstituting civil gov't, an illusion of peace, enfranchisement through martial law, & attempting to govern without force. An excellent book interweaving military and presidential / Congressional political history to examine the attempts to control Southern resistance to social & cultural change amidst US political factionalism, the Northern desire to end the war so soldiers could return home & the fiscal burden of the war could begin to be addressed, the struggle to institute, protect & preserve the new rights for freedMEN; and how to readmit the seceded States to the Union without granting them even greater postwar national political power in Congressional representation and the Electoral College while black suffrage was being actively suppressed within those States. The actual attainment of Union war goals was sufficiently endangered that the South was within reach of being the de facto victor.

Tedious at times, the main points could have been made in 50% fewer pages. Still, a lot of interesting details about a crucial period in the history of the South and the USA

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