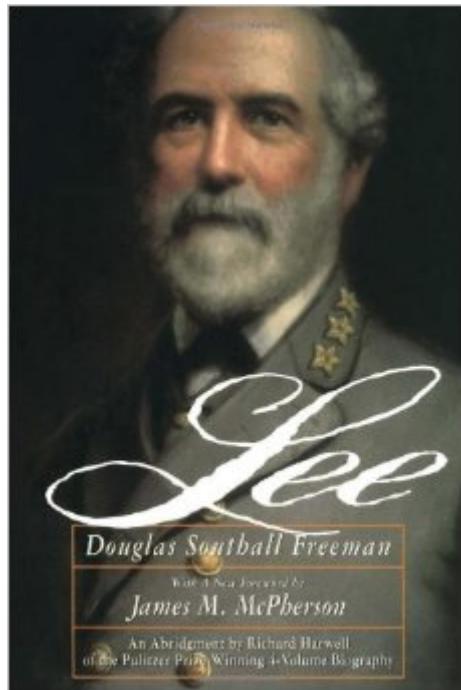


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Lee



Synopsis

Douglas Southall Freeman's Pulitzer Prize-winning biography of Robert E. Lee was greeted with critical acclaim when it was first published in 1935. This reissue chronicles all the major aspects and highlights of the general's military career, from his stunning accomplishments in the Mexican War to the humbling surrender at Appomattox. More than just a military leader, Lee embodied all the conflicts of his time. The son of a Revolutionary War hero and related by marriage to George Washington, he was the product of young America's elite. When Abraham Lincoln offered him command of the United States Army, however, he chose to lead the confederate ranks, convinced that his first loyalty lay with his native Virginia. Although a member of the planter class, he felt that slavery was a moral and political evil. • Aloof and somber, he nevertheless continually inspired his men by his deep concern for their personal welfare. Freeman's biography is the full portrait of a great American: "a distinguished, scholarly, yet eminently readable classic that has linked Freeman to Lee as irrevocably as Boswell to Dr. Johnson.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Such was the talent and ability of Douglas Freeman that a work which is now more than sixty-five years old still remains the best work written on Robert E. Lee. Time has made some of Freeman's work dated. In reading this condensed version of Freeman's four volume masterpiece, one will discover little about the social lives of soldiers in the Army of Northern Virginia, Confederate politics, or the role slaves played in the Confederacy. Yet what remains still has real value. Freeman's

purpose was to write an engaging biography of Lee which would reveal every known fact and convey it in such a way that would be interesting. Yet the larger work is in many ways inaccessible to a general audience. The four volumes which have been compressed into this one volume lose little of Freeman's original thought. Pruned from Freeman's original are footnotes, bibliographies, and everything that is superfluous. Yet the reader will find the single volume still a remarkable achievement, and that it conveys the heart of the argument. Freeman's main accomplishment is to be able to get inside the head of Robert E. Lee. It is very much a book which seeks to convey Lee's life, to show how he made critical decisions, and what were important qualities which contributed to his character. Freeman has little doubt as to Lee's greatness, who he considers to be a shining example of a model Christian gentleman. While Freeman is not an apologist of the Confederacy, always a committed nationalist, he recognized that Southern defeat was in many ways a blessing. Nevertheless, Freeman as a Virginian sought to honor those who suffered, bled, and died for the Confederate cause by examining the commander of the Army of Northern Virginia.

Douglas Southall Freeman's multivolume "R.E. Lee" may have been published nearly three-quarters of a century ago, but this abridged version remains the best single biography ever written about the legendary Confederate general. Although there have been numerous books written about Lee, none have come as close to capturing Lee's military genius, or why so many Southerners enthusiastically fought and died under his banner, as does Freeman's work. When it was first published "Lee" was a sensation, and in the 1930's only Margaret Mitchell's wildly fictionalized "Gone With the Wind" surpassed it in sales and publicity. Senator Harry Truman read every volume, as did other famous political and military leaders. Freeman's work did much to spread the "Lee Legend" outside the South and made Lee into a national, and not merely regional, icon. Of course, Freeman has since been criticized, and in some ways justly so, for his overwhelming pro-Lee bias. In Freeman's elegant prose Robert Edward Lee is nearly perfect in every respect - he is a modest, deeply religious man who dislikes slavery and secession but reluctantly agrees to side with his native state of Virginia when the Civil War begins. If the rest of Freeman's story sounds familiar it is because this book made it so. Lee, despite facing constant shortages of men and supplies, meets the overwhelming forces of the Northern States and defeats them in battle after battle. Yet after each defeat the Northerners simply recruit new soldiers, resupply their vast armies, and come after Lee's valiant but shrinking forces again and again. In the end not even Lee's tactical genius can save the outnumbered and outgunned Confederates from eventual (and in Freeman's opinion, inevitable) defeat.

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