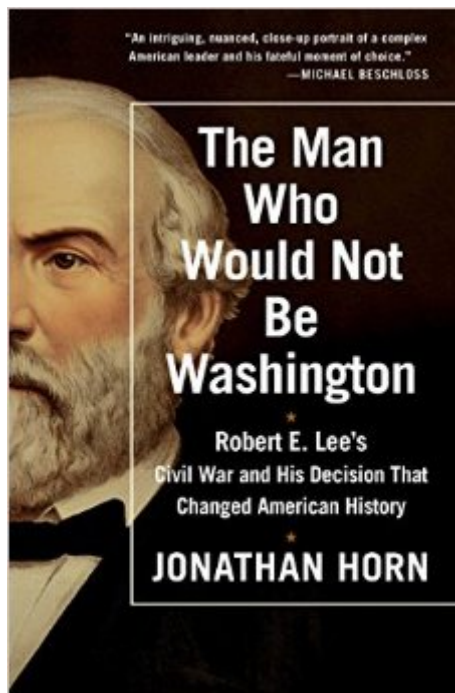


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The Man Who Would Not Be Washington: Robert E. Lee's Civil War And His Decision That Changed American History



Synopsis

The âœcompellingâ |modern and readable perspectiveâ • (USA TODAY) of Robert E. Lee, the brilliant soldier bound by marriage to George Washingtonâ™s family but turned by war against Washingtonâ™s crowning achievement, the Union. On the eve of the Civil War, one soldier embodied the legacy of George Washington and the hopes of leaders across a divided land. Both North and South knew Robert E. Lee as the son of Washingtonâ™s most famous eulogist and the son-in-law of Washingtonâ™s adopted child. Each side sought his service for high command. Lee could choose only one. In *The Man Who Would Not Be Washington*, former White House speechwriter Jonathan Horn reveals how the officer most associated with Washington went to war against the union that Washington had forged. This extensively researched and gracefully written biography follows Lee through married life, military glory, and misfortune. The story that emerges is more complicated, more tragic, and more illuminating than the familiar tale. More complicated because the unresolved question of slaveryâ”the driver of disunionâ”was among the personal legacies that Lee inherited from Washington. More tragic because the Civil War destroyed the people and places connecting Lee to Washington in agonizing and astonishing ways. More illuminating because the battle for Washingtonâ™s legacy shaped the nation that America is today. As Washington was the man who would not be king, Lee was the man who would not be Washington. The choice was Leeâ™s. The story is Americaâ™s. A must-read for those passionate about history, > introduces Jonathan Horn as a masterly voice in the field.

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Customer Reviews

General Robert E. Lee has always stood as something of an enigma to me. I've read a lot of books about the Civil War tending to those more sympathetic to the Union, but not exclusively so. In his new biography of Lee, Jonathan Horn (*The Man Who Would Not Be Washington: Robert E. Lee's Civil War and the Decision that Changed American History* (Scribner, 2015, 384 pages, \$28.00/12.74) presents a comprehensive, intriguing, sympathetic, and convincing picture of this most enigmatic and conflicted of Confederate generals. Forever connected to George Washington, by proximity and marriage, yet burdened by the obligations, moral and legal, thus placed on him, Lee is a fascinating, conflicted man. Horn, a third of whose book consists of extensive footnotes and an exhaustive bibliography, has thoroughly done his work to present a full biographical picture successfully capturing Lee's huge strengths, which, as with many great men, become his greatest liabilities. This book is highly readable and useful for anyone interested in Civil War history. R.E. Lee was the son of Revolutionary War general Light Horse Harry Lee, one of George Washington's most trusted aides and a general of slashing creativity. Because The Father of His Country had no natural children, Harry Lee became almost like a son to Washington. After the war, however, the Lee family fell into disrepute, never living up to its promise and amassing significant debts. Lee's life was further complicated, by his marriage to Mary Custis, Martha Washington's great grand-daughter. Both the Custis and Lee branches of the family led lives more dedicated to exploiting their relationships to Washington than to become productive in their own right, thus leading to extensive problems for Robert E. Lee throughout his life and, perhaps, influencing many of his later choices. The web of responsibilities for the Custis slaves, inherited from Martha Washington, placed financial and moral burdens on Lee to support causes (slavery and secession) which he did not personally wish to do. His sense of honor directed him to make the choices he made. Read the remainder of this review on my blog and please consider ordering it through the portal there.

This book about the life of Robert E. Lee and a critical period in American history captured my interest and would not let go. Once having begun to read, putting it down became difficult because the important and interesting facts and associations just kept coming, and the author presents them with unmatched skill. First was the title, *“The Man Who Would Not Be Washington.”* Huh? What does Washington have to do with Robert E. Lee and how could Lee ever have been Washington? It turns out that there were many connections between the Washington family and that of Lee. But there is more to the title; Lee's choice to abandon the union was directly entwined with Washington's legacy as father of the union. Like the rest of us, Lee was

trapped in his slice of history. Unlike most of the rest of us, he had a chance to guide that history. What was he thinking as he faced his many challenges? Why did he and others around him do what they did at each stage? Why was J. E. B. Stuart not there when Pickett made his fateful charge at Gettysburg, for example? In fact, why was Lee at Gettysburg to start with? And on-and-on. Was Robert E. Lee a patriot, a traitor or was he an honorable man dealing with the choices open to him and seeking only to do his duty as he saw it? Before you judge Robert E. Lee please read this book. But be warned that when you begin to read it you will not want it to end. Let's hope this author's next book is out soon. History could become accessible under his pen.

As an old Civil War buff I have read the great biographies of Lee from Douglas Southall Freeman to Emory Thomas, Michael Korda, William C Davis, Frank Vandiver and a host of other scholars. Therefore I must be honest and confess I found Horn's survey of Lee's service in the Civil War to be old hat though adequate to general reader not very conversant with Lee or the Civil War. What was good about this book was in the way in which General George Washington the Father of His Country influenced Robert E. Lee throughout the latter's sad and tragic life. Horn points out that:"a. George Washington's granddaughter Mary married Robert E Lee. Mrs. Lee bore an uncanny resemblance to Martha Washington the spouse of George.b. Many of the artifacts of Washington were kept at the Lee estate at Arlington which was at one time owned by members of the George Washington Family.c. Lee reasoned that if Washington had fought the French during the French and Indian War while fighting on the side of Great Britain and then reversed himself by allying with the French in the American Revolution he had done much the same by serving as a Colonel in the United States Army and then fighting against the Federals in the Civil War.d. Lee and Washington both loved Virginia and were men of honor, integrity and self-control.e. Both Washington and Lee faced overwhelming odds:" Washington against the might of Great Britain and Lee who faced the huge Northern armies sent against his troops.f. Unlike the childless Washington., Lee had seven children.g. Both Washington and Lee were slaveholders though Lee freed the slaves he had inherited from Mary's family.h. Lee served as President of Washington College in the post-Civil War era. The school is now known as Washington and Lee. Horn follows Lee from his birth to Light Horse Harry Lee a famous cavalryman in the American Revolution who was a friend of George Washington. The elder Lee served as governor of Virginia and a US Congressman but died deeply in debt due to gambling, drinking and failed land speculation in the West. Robert E. Lee rarely indulged in spirits and was a faithful husband to Mary. Light Horse Harry Lee and a cousin both signed the Declaration of Independence. Light Horse Harry eulogized Washington as "":First in

War, first in Peace and first in the Hearts of his countrymen.": This is a relatively short and easy to read book which is based on sound research. It is the kind of volume which could well whet the appetite of younger persons to become interested in American History and the Civil War.

Recommended

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