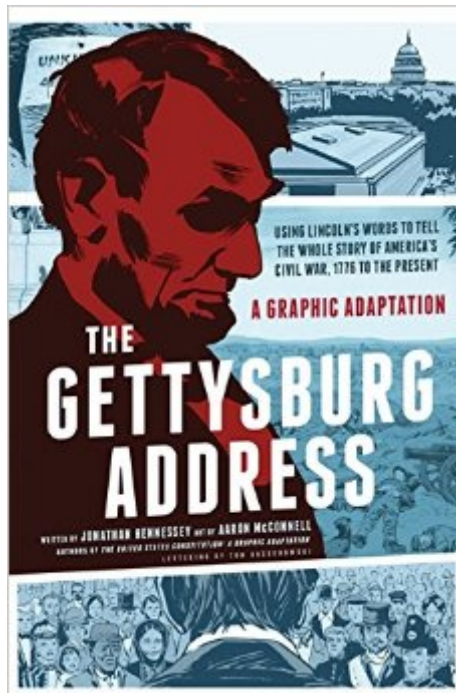


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The Gettysburg Address: A Graphic Adaptation



Synopsis

The Gettysburg Address: A Graphic Adaptation is a full-color illustrated look at Abraham Lincoln's most famous speech, the bloody battle of the Civil War that prompted it, and how they led to a defining point in the history of America. Most of us can recall "Four score and seven years ago," but much of what we know about Abraham Lincoln's oration has been forgotten after high school. Using Lincoln's words as a keystone, and drawing from first-person accounts, The Gettysburg Address shows us the events through the eyes of those who lived through the events of the War, from soldiers to slaves. Writer Jonathan Hennessey and illustrator Aaron McConnell illuminate history with vibrant, detailed graphics and captions that deliver a fresh understanding of this vital speech.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

At the outset, I should confess that I am not a reader of graphic novels. Indeed, The Gettysburg Address by Jonathan Hennessey (writer) and Aaron McConnell (artist) is the first one I have ever read from cover to cover, let alone with any enjoyment. I am, however, a lover of all things Lincoln, so in the sesquicentennial of his address, I resolved to purchase and read this graphic novel. A graphic novel has to be reviewed into parts: the substance of the writing and the form of the art. Let me start with the latter. Aaron McConnell has done a superb job illustrating the Jonathan Hennessey's text. As an avid reader of text-only books, I worried that the graphics might get in the way of the text. In fact, they enhanced it. One example, on page 22: Early in the Civil War, Abraham

Lincoln appointed general after general to lead the Union armies, each of whom he replaced when they didn't do an adequate job. A text-only approach would spend hundreds of words to explain what McConnell shows in a single picture: four Union generals marching through a revolving door. Brilliant! My only complaint is that in several frames, where Hennessy quotes historical documents, he uses a cursive type script that was hard to read, at least for me. (See Robert E. Lee's letter on page 26, for example.) That brings me to the substance of Jonathan Hennessy's writing. What Hennessy does is use the words of the Gettysburg Address to organize a historical brief of the historical forces that led to the Civil War, reached critical mass at Gettysburg, and then were channeled into Reconstruction and the Civil Rights Movement. On the whole, this organization works well, resulting in a coherent narrative. There is much to commend in this narrative.

While there is some confusion over the origin of the concept that "a picture is worth 1,000 words", Jonathon Hennessey's book certainly dramatically embodies the idea. I am a voracious reader and was, frankly, a bit skeptical of the effectiveness of using graphics to convey some fairly subtle and complex historical issues. After reading the book, however, I am amazed how effectively graphics were intertwined with incisive and clever prose to establish moods and tones that would have been very difficult to achieve with words alone. There is a section where a lady is stumbling around the battlefield after the fight looking for her husband among the dead and rotting corpses. She is shown holding a cloth to her nose for obvious reasons. Unfortunately, she finds him. The reader cannot help get caught up in the tragedy, sadness and chill of the moment. An extremely skillful use of graphics has served to convey heavy dose of reality. The depth of research is truly commendable, and the authors have uncovered numerous, but fascinating, sidebar areas that I found to be intriguing. The comparison of the number of Civil War dead, preponderance of southern presidents, and the evolution of the cemetery are examples. The book made me reflect on deeper issues as well. A Yankee by birth, I had always narrowly viewed the succession from the Union as evil and unjust. Hennessey's comprehensive comparison of the Declaration of Independence vs. the Constitution opened my eyes to a whole different interpretation of that process. In fact, he demonstrates the southern states viewed their actions as very much justified both legally and morally, and, indeed obligated, in the same spirit that we all broke away from the tyranny of England. That idea had never really occurred to me.

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