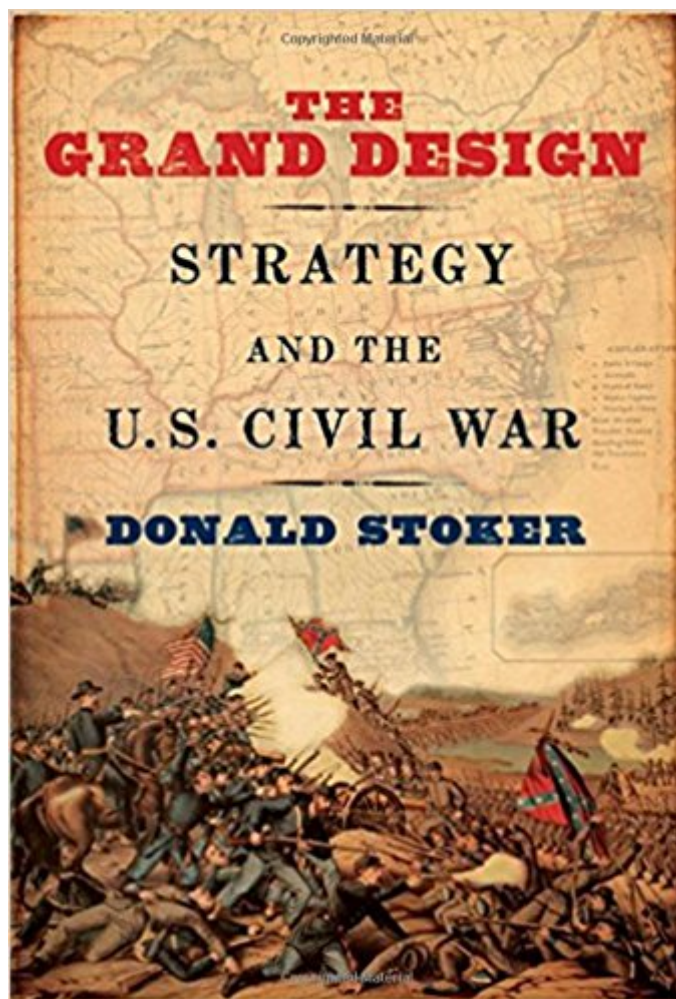


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# The Grand Design: Strategy And The U.S. Civil War



## Synopsis

Despite the abundance of books on the Civil War, not one has focused exclusively on what was in fact the determining factor in the outcome of the conflict: differences in Union and Southern strategy. In *The Grand Design*, Donald Stoker provides for the first time a comprehensive and often surprising account of strategy as it evolved between Fort Sumter and Appomattox. Reminding us that strategy is different from tactics (battlefield deployments) and operations (campaigns conducted in pursuit of a strategy), Stoker examines how Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson Davis identified their political goals and worked with their generals to craft the military means to achieve them--or how they often failed to do so. Stoker shows that Davis, despite a West Point education and experience as Secretary of War, ultimately failed as a strategist by losing control of the political side of the war. Lincoln, in contrast, evolved a clear strategic vision, but he failed for years to make his generals implement it. And while Robert E. Lee was unerring in his ability to determine the Union's strategic heart--its center of gravity--he proved mistaken in his assessment of how to destroy it. Historians have often argued that the North's advantages in population and industry ensured certain victory. In *The Grand Design*, Stoker reasserts the centrality of the overarching plan on each side, arguing convincingly that it was strategy that determined the result of America's great national conflict.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Winner of the 2010 Fletcher Pratt Award "The Grand Design provides readers with a handy guide to Civil War strategies and strategists. It makes a convincing case that the North won the war in large

part because Lincoln and the best of his generals were better strategists than their counterparts in Dixie."--James M. McPherson, *North and South Magazine*"Finally, a Civil War study that reveals why strategy mattered to Union victory. Clearly and forcefully, *The Grand Design* shows how the Union learned to use its military force in pursuit of its political objectives."--William L. Barney, author of *The Making of a Confederate* "A superbly written, well-researched, and detailed analysis.... Stoker's first-rate study revives the role of strategy in the conversation on why the Union won the Civil War." --Howard Jones, University of Alabama, author of *Mutiny on the Amistad* "Donald Stoker breaks with a generation's worth of clichés in this stimulating and persuasive demonstration that the Civil War's crucial contrast was not between ideas or resource bases. It involved strategy.... As good a book on the Civil War as I've read for a decade."--Dennis Showalter, author of *Patton and Rommel: Men of War in the 20th Century* "Stoker's grand overview of strategy is a welcome introduction to the big picture of the Civil War. Too often, the American Civil War is read as an ill-fitting string of tactical incidents, determined almost entirely by the personalities of successful generals. Looked at in Stoker's bird's-eye fashion, the large-scale strategic picture, as well as the large-scale strategic mistakes, finally begin to become clear."--Allen C. Guelzo, Director, Civil War Era Studies at Gettysburg College, author of *Lincoln and Douglas* "Donald Stoker's book offers a new way of looking at both the military and political history of the Civil War, and does so from a strategic vantage point far above that to which we have been accustomed. *The Grand Design* represents an important advance in our understanding of this momentous event."--Steven E. Woodworth, author of *Nothing but Victory: The Army of the Tennessee, 1861-1865* "A signal contribution to understanding the dynamics of the war." --*Library Journal* "Mr. Stoker has written a fascinating study of why strategy mattered in the American Civil War. With excellent maps at important points in his narrative, he clearly leads the reader through the conflict. He also makes it evident that Lincoln masterfully managed the resources at his disposal; and his counterpart did not. Mr. Stoker's work should be on the shelf of anyone interested in the American Civil War. --*NY Journal of Books* "The *Grand Design* examines how Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson Davis identified their political goals and worked with their generals to craft the military means to achieve them--or how they often failed to do so. This is not a book for the causal history reader. For those who wish to drill down, this is an excellent book and worth reading."--*The Order of Civil War Obsessively Compulsed -- Informed Amateurs Blog the American Civil War*"Stoker examines all aspects of the war, blending political and military details very successfully, to assert his belief that the war's outcome boiled down, primarily, to President Lincoln's superior strategic plan."--*Confederate Book Review* "Despite some doubts over the book's fundamental perspective, one cannot praise too

highly the depth and acuity of the analysis that Stoker deploys in a trenchant and refreshingly well-written book, mercifully free of dreary jargon. Stoker touches upon most of the debates among Civil War historians. He downplays the overall significance of technology, arguing that it mainly affected tactics, not strategy, though such an assertion underestimates the strategic significance of railroads.... Yet there can be no denying that henceforth no historian of the subject can afford to ignore Stoker's views, and the legions of Civil War readers must be prepared to have their horizons stretched."--Brian Holden Reid, *Civil War Book Review* "Military-minded Civil War aficionados will find much appeal in the treatment of strategy emphasized in this book."--St. Louis Post-Dispatch "Stoker's book on the changing strategies of the military and civilian leaders in the North and South during the conflict casts a fresh light on what remains the most decisive and harrowing war in U.S. history. Stoker presents us with a picture of what Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson Davis and their respective generals thought they should be doing, and with the advantage of hindsight, he evaluates the strategic concepts on both sides of the divide. Students of the Confederacy will find it interesting that he criticizes both Davis and General Joseph Johnston. The study of grand strategy is undergoing a much-needed revival at American universities; this clear and incisive book is a useful addition to the syllabus."--Foreign Affairs "Superb examination of Civil War strategy. Of the numerous books on the American Civil War, few have explored in depth the critical role of strategy in determining the outcome of this nation's bloodiest conflict. On the eve of the sesquicentennial of that war, Donald Stoker fills that gap with a superb examination of the larger employment of military power beyond the battlefield."ARMY Magazine "For the Civil War buff: As we head into the 150th anniversary of the War Between the States, armchair historians will want to keep up with the sesquicentennial. There is no shortage of excellent guides to the conflict. A recent one that I've enjoyed dipping into is *The Grand Design: Strategy and the U.S. Civil War*, by Donald Stoker. Rather than a blow-by-blow account of battles and operations, it describes the strategic objectives of North and South and how civilian and military leaders tried to realize them."--National Review Online "The Grand Design is not for your basic Civil War buff, but it is an intense read on tactics, operations, and strategies that lead you to a deeper understanding of what we were really fighting for and how chance, vision, and perseverance actually led to the restoration of our country."--Sacramento Book Review "This book will most likely generate controversy. The author has written a study that merits attention. He crafts the work with extensive use of correspondence between the governments and their generals as the civilians and military officers wrestled with the difficulties of implementing strategy. While not everyone will agree with the author's judgments and conclusions, Stoker's book is well worth reading."--Civil War News "The Grand Design is an

excellent look at Civil War strategy with lessons that can be applied today."--Military Review "Stoker takes his readers on a fascinating tour of the big picture that offers lessons on military theory that are accessible to the layperson. Within this book are surprising, but well argued, assessments of the successes and mistakes of familiar Civil War figures." - The Civil War Monitor

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Stoker's book will appeal to armchair generals like myself. Inspired by James McPherson's "Battle Cry of Freedom," Stoker attempts to re-examine the entire war through a strategist's lens, with mixed results. In brief, the Union developed a strategy and won, but the Confederacy never did and lost. The Union eventually learned to concentrate its power on destroying the South's armies and resources. This strategy didn't get going, really, until 1864, with the help of Grant and Sherman. Implicit in this retelling is that the Union did not win much sooner because it focused more on taking landmarks (for example, Vicksburg, attempts at Richmond) rather than striking the enemy's heart. Stoker relays all this by relying on primary sources such as the OR, and other resources such as Davis's collected papers and Grant's memoirs. Being a nerd for footnotes, I got the sense that his historical homework is sound given his focus. Still, the book misses on a few key counts for me. First, I was never clear about terms of reference. Instead of evaluating the war in retrospect, it may be better and fairer to review the war in terms that the generals thought based on what they read: so, this would primarily be Jomini, but maybe Clausewitz, too. Stoker's references to Sun Tzu, which frequently served as a strategic touchstone at points throughout the book, therefore seemed out of place. Of course, Sun Tzu wrote many timeless military truisms, but whether these were known to Civil War leaders is doubtful and never demonstrated. So, to evaluate the leaders strategically, in the end we have to rely on Stoker's own analysis, which is certainly valid but also may be too colored by hindsight. Second, one of the constant themes of the book is the role of leadership. While the Union political and military leaders clashed at the start of the war, they found a dream team by the end of it (namely Lincoln-Grant-Sherman). The Southern leadership never seemed to get along at any point and suffered accordingly. While the importance of leadership is clear from this account (among others), the importance of this factor goes unexplored by Stoker. On a deeper level, the examination of each side's leadership problems seems to de-emphasize the strategic elements. On balance, it seems that the Union could get the right men in the right places, while the South never did and may not have had a deep and talented bench. Davis's command

relationships with Joseph Johnston and Braxton Bragg stand out in this regard and are thoroughly described by Stoker through various letters and papers. In any event, one is left to wonder whether teamwork and management skills were just as important as military strategy in this war, if not more so. Third, I found that the book lacked a certain amount of depth, as it focused mainly on land campaigns, in a sort of descriptive retelling of the major military events. Elements of political strategy (otherwise known as "grand strategy" according to Stoker) sometimes flit in and out. Stoker does include the Emancipation Proclamation and praises Lincoln for it, and describes the hopes of the South to gain recognition from France and Great Britain. Still, neither slavery or the South's hopes for recognition receive as much as attention as they do in say, "Battle Cry of Freedom," and a reader may sense that Stoker shies away from certain topics to focus on military campaigns. Describing the interrelationship between political goals and military execution seems vital to an account like this. Too, I didn't come away with a sense of each side's naval strategies and how those fit into the larger strategic goals. So, for example, was taking New Orleans helpful to the blockade strategy or a diversion, and how should we evaluate that and other port seizures? Or what was the economic impact of Union naval control of the Mississippi on the South's ability to wage war? Also, I expect an account like this to explain the military-intellectual underpinnings of the war and how that collective mindset evolved during it; I can't say that Stoker improved my understanding of this. Perhaps this would have been helped by some discussion of doctrine, West Point education, and the influence of the Mexican-American War on this generation of military thinkers. On the Kindle version, the maps were too small to read on a device, and they certainly would have been helpful to follow some of the campaigns described. I also found Stoker's prose style opaque at times and other times clear. He also focuses a lot on the Western theater, which is often considered the most important area of the conflict. However, Stoker ultimately undercuts this narrative focus by suggesting that controlling the Mississippi was less important than, say, destroying the Army of Virginia. Too, Stoker up front admits a fondness for "Battle Cry of Freedom" and attempts to mirror that in some way. Yet, in doing so, he sets a very high bar for himself, and for the expectations of his readers, which he never achieves. All in all, most newcomers to the Civil War will get more out of "Battle Cry," while Stoker's book may provide a refresher or an occasionally thought-provoking diversion for veterans of the period. Have your atlas handy.

Just OK. Nothing special. Story jumps around. Very little about the actual battles, which I guess was the author's intent.

The book looks at the Civil War from a strategy perspective that I had not read about before. It expanded my ideas about the strategy (and lack of) of the two sides in fighting this war. A very good view. The author still spent a lot of time on individual campaigns but he did keep them in line with the larger points he was trying to make. I did get a bit of Monday Morning Quarterback in this book given the author has definite ideas of how the two sides should have conducted hostilities in terms of goals and movement (objectives in general, not with specific battle tactics). However the on the scene commanders were not privy to the overall view of campaigns and were thus forced to guess what their opponent was up to. But that is a minor criticism as over all this is a very good read. I was surprised at his assessment of McClellan and Bragg for their strategic thinking. But he makes good points about them in support of his views.

Great book very informative

great stuff

Dr Stoker presents a very lucid explanation of the three levels of war: strategic, operational, and tactical. Throughout this book, he reminds the reader what level of war is being discussed. This is a great strategic overview of the Civil War, presenting strategic and operational reasons for campaigns such as Arkansas-Missouri, as well as the political rationale. A very good read.

Stoker's book is an excellent read. It is in my opinion the most comprehensive review of the strategic situation in the civil war. The book is an excellent complement to Brent Nosworthy's book *The Bloody Crucible of Courage*.

I have read a lot about the Civil War. This book gives a view of the war from a different perspective - strategy. Well written, easy to read. I recommend it to anyone interested a fresh perspective on the Civil War...

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