

Eyewitness Reports: The Inquirer's Live Coverage of the American Civil War

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Review

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Colimore, Edward *Eyewitness Reports: The Inquirer's Live Coverage of the American Civil War*. Philadelphia Newspapers, Inc., \$39.95, hardcover ISBN 1588220168

Civil War journalism

A new style of coverage

The title of **Eyewitness Reports**, a new coffee table-style book on the Civil War coverage of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, is tinged with a bit of irony. Given the logistical difficulties inherent in being a reporter in the 1860s, most news stories were decidedly not eyewitness reports, and instead were a mixture of second-hand information, innuendo, and invention. Still, the notion that it was important to collect this information by whatever means necessary, and to get it to the readership as quickly as possible, was a development of the Civil War era, and is justification enough for a book of this sort.

The book's author is Edward Colimore, an *Inquirer* staff reporter whose usual job is covering reenactments, museum openings, and other history-related stories for the paper. Because the *Philadelphia Inquirer* is one of the few major newspapers of the Civil War era that is still in print, its editors saw an opportunity when the technology became available to digitize all of the issues from the Civil War era. The result was both this book and a comprehensive web archive, available for an additional fee from <http://www.philly.com/store/>.

The book is very thoughtfully designed, particularly for those readers whose familiarity with the Civil War is only passing. Included are a timeline of the Civil War, dozens of pictures, several indices, and, of course, the newspaper reproductions themselves. The facsimiles are very clean and clear, although too small to read anything besides headlines easily. All of this material is accompanied by a series of seven essays written by Colimore, one for each year of the war, plus an introduction and postscript.

The essays in **Eyewitness Reports**, based almost entirely on secondary sources, are competently written. For those already familiar with the story of Civil War journalism and with the maneuvering of the Union armies, there will be little new here. Others, however, will learn a little something about the logistical difficulties in being a reporter, the ethical challenges raised, the new style of coverage, and the pressure to compete with the great New York triad of the *Herald*, the *Times* and the *Tribune*.

Colimore's essays are focused almost entirely on the story of *Inquirer* reporters as they struggled to keep up with the Army of the Potomac. As such, other issues--the paper's political stance, its relationship with Lincoln, its coverage of the Western theater of the war--get short shrift. Perhaps the most disappointing oversight is any discussion of how the paper's readership--the denizens of the city that Frederick Douglass called the most racist in America--influenced its coverage. Still, for the reader looking for a brief, easily digestible entrance into the story of Civil War journalism, **Eyewitness Reports** would be an excellent choice.

Christopher Bates is a teaching fellow at the University of California at Los Angeles who has published articles on both journalism during the Civil War and on Civil War reenactment. He can be reached via email at jrhtp@ucla.edu.