



George B. McClellan and Civil War History: In the Shadow of Grant and Sherman

Thomas J Rowland

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Perhaps no other Union commander's legacy in the Civil War has been the subject of as much controversy as George B. McClellan's. Since the midpoint of this century, however, he has emerged as the complex general who, though gifted with administrative and organizational skills, was unable and unwilling to fight with the splendid army he had created. Thomas J. Rowland argues that this interpretation rests squarely within the context of general historical verdicts of the way in which the North eventually triumphed. Civil War scholars have found the quality of Union leadership in the early years of the war wanting, and that it was not until U.S. Grant and W. TA. Sherman emerged that success was ensured. On the other hand, Grant and Sherman knew failure but were judged less harshly than was McClellan. In *George B. McClellan and Civil War History*, Rowland presents a framework in which early Civil War command can be viewed without direct comparison to that of the final two years. Such comparisons, in his opinion, are both unfair and contextually inaccurate. Only by understanding how very different was the context and nature of the war facing McClellan, as opposed to Grant and Sherman can one discard the traditional "good general-bad general" approach to command performance. In such a light, McClellan's career, both his shortcomings and accomplishments, can be viewed with clearer perspective.

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