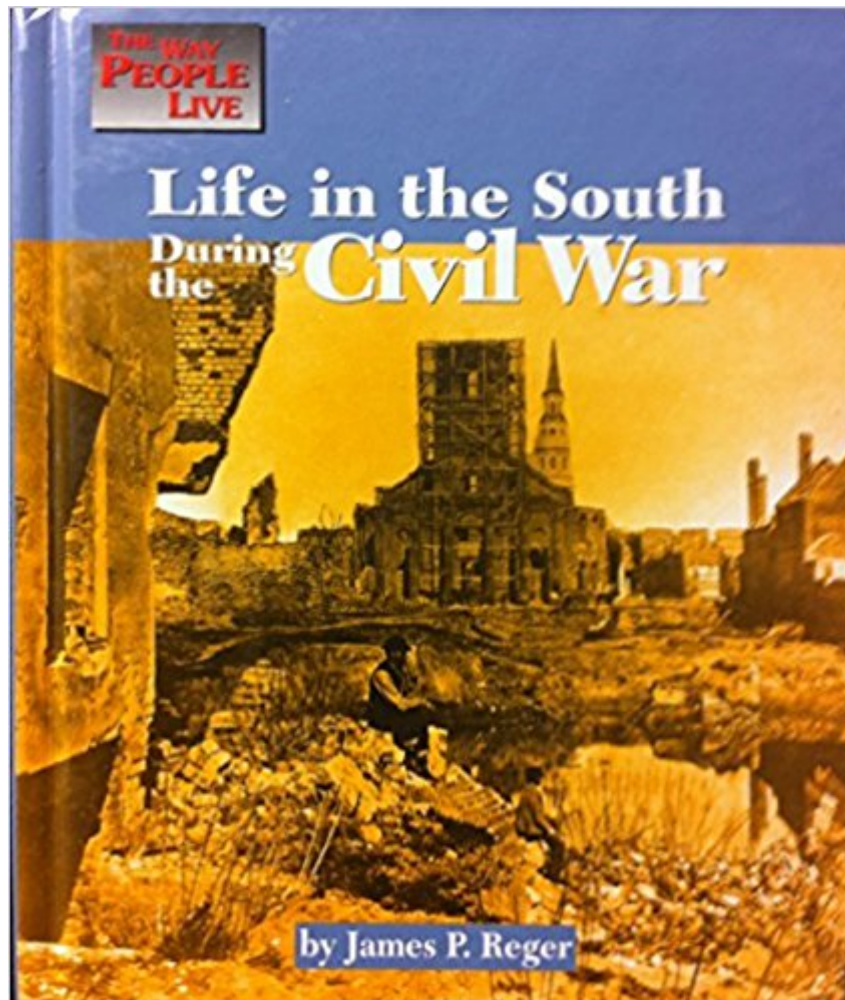




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# Life In The South During The Civil War (Way People Live)



## Synopsis

Describes the daily life, in the Confederacy, of ladies and gentlemen, slaves, middle class whites, and marginal characters.

## Book Information

Series: Way People Live

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## Customer Reviews

The Way People Live Series focuses on pockets of human culture. Using a wide variety of primary quotations, each book in the series attempts to show an honest and complete picture of a culture removed from our own by time or space. In this book, within the series, focuses on life during the 1800s in America which was already difficult for many people. Of course there were rich factory owners in the North and plantation owners in the South, but the average farmer and his family worked extremely hard just to survive. When the Civil War started, living conditions became even more difficult for the average American. Many of the men joined the army or were drafted. The women were left at home to work the farm or to find jobs and support the family on their own. A book about the Civil War for kids, describes the daily life, in the Confederacy, of ladies and gentlemen, slaves, middle class whites, and marginal characters through photos, facts and detailed accounts from people during this time period. A great reference, "Life in the South During the Civil War " should be in any classroom and home, as a guide to a different era in the American History.

I do not usually review children's books, but this one is so extraordinary that I feel I should recommend it to a broader audience. As I have nourished a life-long interest in history, I am

sometimes asked for information or advice on related topics by younger relatives, and it was in such a context that I came into contact with Mr. Reger's little masterpiece. "Life in the South During the Civil War" presents what the Germans call *Alltagsgeschichte*, or "Everyday History" -- A look at the lives of ordinary people of the various classes in the South prior to and during the Civil War. It is not a political, economic, or military history, save tangentially; the focus is on human experience. Various chapters describe the lives of the elite plantation owners; the majority of middle- and lower-class professionals, farmers, and workers; the marginal and poor rural families; and of course, the Negro slaves who were the backbone of the plantation system. A final section ties together the narrative and shows the upheavals of the late Civil War years and their immediate aftermath. Reger's descriptions are both exceedingly well researched and sourced, and at the same time convey an impressive immediacy and vividness, much aided by the frequent use of quotations from primary sources. The portrait he paints is judiciously balanced and scrupulously free of bias. He does not fall into either of the "traps" common to writing on this period: Life in the South (and, as will inevitably be the case, this means in large part the system of Negro slavery) is not idealized, as was sometimes formerly the case, but neither is it mindlessly demonized as is often done in more recent works. Within the constraints of his medium, Reger shows in a very nuanced and humane manner this troubling institution's many ambiguities and shades of gray, especially the interplay between official ideology and actual practice. The author's sensitive hand demonstrates very convincingly that this society was one run and inhabited by people very much like ourselves -- With all that entails in terms of human virtue and frailty alike. Above all, this is a book about people. The story is told of the plantation-owner gentleman and the small farmer; the slave butler and the field hand; the Virginia Military Institute cadet and the desperate Confederate conscription-evader -- And, where appropriate, their wives and children. Generalities are supplemented by well-chosen individual examples, from Secession ideologist Edmund Ruffin and posthumously famous diarist Sarah Morgan to slave women named Mary Rice or Harriet Payne whose names history has largely forgotten. One can almost hear the gangs singing as they go off to work ... Or smell the smoke as Sherman burns Atlanta to the ground. In all, this is a truly remarkable little book. I am no novice when it comes to the topic of the Antebellum South, but I am not ashamed to admit that I myself actually learned a new detail or two from this Young Readers' history! Reger's account manages to be at the same time scholarly, balanced, sane, humane, and vivid -- And all this without going over the heads of his intended audience. It is amazing how so much real content can be crammed into a hundred-some large-print pages; hardly a word is wasted, yet the text never feels overloaded or forgets whom it addresses. Verily, a masterful pedagogical writer at work. The format is also perfect

for young but inquisitive students: Clear, easy to read, and richly illustrated with relevant and interesting pictures and photographs. A comprehensive index is also provided, and endnotes and an annotated bibliography ably assist the teacher or older student who wishes to build further on the solid foundations Reger establishes. If you wish to strike a blow for the teaching of good history to our children, buy a copy of "Life in the South During the Civil War" and donate it to your local school library.

Although a YA book, this is a perfect book for anyone wanting to know about daily life in the south during the Civil War. It is part of a series called *The Way People Live*, which focuses on "cultural pockets" which share the distinction of having "been viewed before but not completely understood". The author believes that removing stereotypes, both positive or negative, is the only way to really understand any culture. The emphasis in this Lucent series is on the personal aspects of life in the culture that is being examined and "seeing humans as victims, heroes, and onlookers". To do this, the book uses a large number and wide variety of primary quotations and illustrations. Everyday Southern life is examined in this book, along with the effects of the Civil War on daily life. Plantation life is described and the roles of the men, the women, and the slaves on them are explained. The author then brings his focus to the vast majority of those in the South during the Civil War -- the poor and the middle class. The men and boys of these classes comprised most of the Confederate Army, not the wealthy. A good resource for those wishing to delve into the culture of the Civil War South.

I recently discovered Lucent's "The Way People Live" series through my public library, and I have to say I'm glad I did. This is the first volume I've actually read; if they're all as good, they should be found in every library, and on the bookshelves of every history-loving home, in the country. Despite his title, author Reger actually gives much of his attention to the way Southerners lived *before* the War. He covers every level of Southern society, from planters through the "yeoman farmer" on down to slaves and "po' white trash," and while he necessarily does so rather briefly, he manages to cover a lot of ground and even impart some information I had never seen before (which is always the biggest test of a nonfiction volume to anyone who has spent 40 years studying this very period and the eras immediately before and after!). One thing I especially like about his treatment is that he's not politically correct and has the good sense to report that slave-owning Southerners thoroughly understood how, according to one quote he offers, "A Negro's life is too valuable to be risked...Do not kill the goose that lays the golden egg." Many revisionist historians would have you believe that all Negroes were treated brutally in slavery days, but Reger states that "more than 70% of the

[former slaves] interviewed [in the 1930's by the WPA] reported dominantly positive recollections of their time in captivity."The book treats its subject in a vivid and interesting way, admitting to the faults as well as the positive aspects of a vanished system and bolstering its assertions with many quotes from primary sources, as well as dozens of black-and-white illustrations, both photographic and otherwise. There is also a brief bibliography and a good index. Though seriously curious students will need to seek out more books to get a broader picture of the time and place, this is definitely a good one to start with, and should prove useful to adults too.

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