

*A Woman of Valor: Clara Barton and the Civil War*, Steven Oates.

I happened onto this book because a friend was reading a biography of Florence Nightingale, but couldn't find a suitable work. That made me think of Clara Barton, about whom I knew nothing except that she was Civil War era and founded the Red Cross.

As the title suggests, Oates focuses on Clara and the Civil War, with hardly a mention of the Red Cross—just Clara's Civil War experiences that created her as a person.

The author makes Clara come alive and personal by always referring to her as "Clara," not "Barton." Nice touch. I've read a great deal on the Civil War, but in this work we see the "incalculable suffering" of war, not the "glory" of war. We see the war through a woman's and a nurse's eyes. This might be the best "anti-war" book I've ever read. She nursed the suffering and dying at several great battles: Bull Run, Antietam, Fredericksburg, Petersburg, and Cold Harbor. After a while, the narrative seems repetitive because Oates recounts the same suffering at every battle—it's not: The author is enabling us to feel four years of horror upon horror. And Oates is making sure that we grasp Clara's drive and heroism.

Of particular interest were Clara's contributions in founding the Andersonville National Cemetery. At this point, the book becomes intriguing and hard to put down. This section is lengthy. Is Clara going to be able to outrun her jealous male nemesis? If you were going to visit Andersonville today, you would want to read this lengthy section to pique your interest and grasp of its history.

The book is replete with ill treatment of women in that era. Clara overcomes all this discrimination and prejudice. The point is driven home: blacks weren't American citizens—but neither were women.

I know this gets old, but I can't for the life of me understand why Americans scroll TikTok and Facebook for hours, when they could digest and be inspired by Clara's epic life.