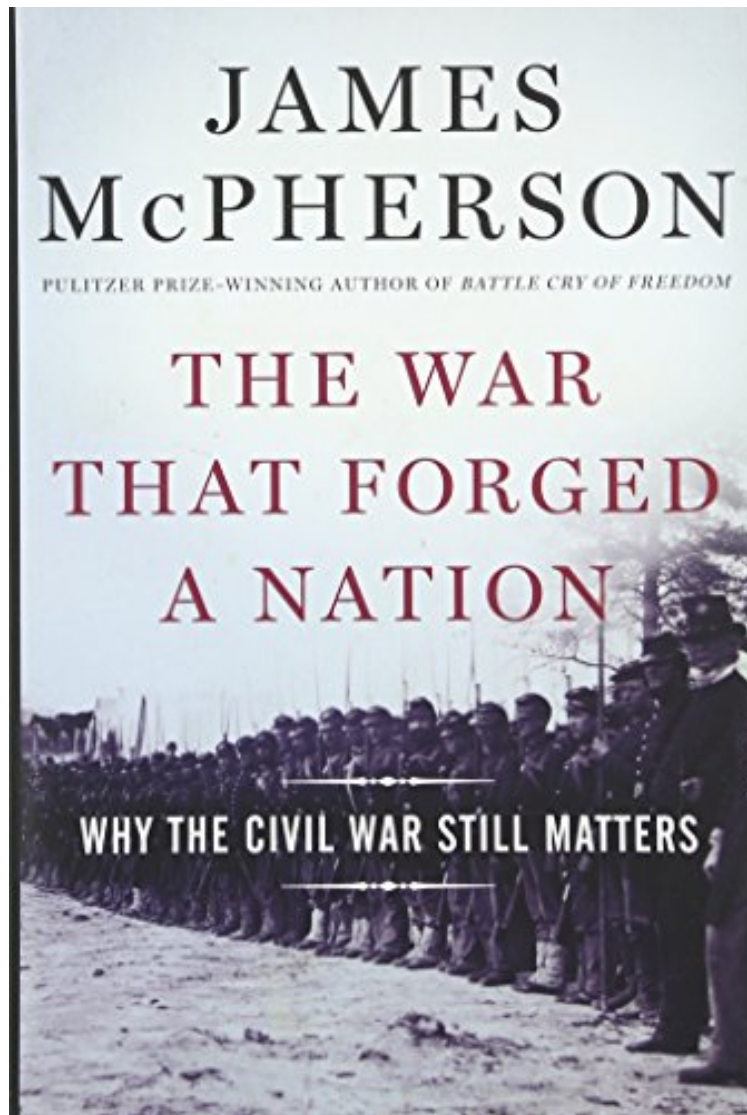


(Mobile ebook) The War That Forged a Nation: Why the Civil War Still Matters

# The War That Forged a Nation: Why the Civil War Still Matters

*James M. McPherson*

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**James M. McPherson : The War That Forged a Nation: Why the Civil War Still Matters** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The War That Forged a Nation: Why the Civil War Still Matters:

95 of 100 people found the following review helpful. Forget the subtitle - read this for McPherson's insightful essays. By Fan The War That Forged a Nation: Why the Civil War Still Matters is a collection of essays by author James McPherson, who is considered one of the preeminent scholars on the subject. His Pulitzer Prize winning Battle

Cry of Freedom is still considered to be the definitive book on the Civil War. With the exception of two chapters, the essays have all been previously published and cover a multitude of aspects of the conflict. Each is well written and informative but as some others have noted don't really answer the central question posed by the subtitle. McPherson fans will have likely already read most of the material here but for others, there is much to be learned in the vignettes. But I think the subtitle does the book a disservice since it is not an accurate representation of its contents and anyone looking for an answer to that question, particularly in light of the tension-filled race relations of today, will be left wondering why the Civil War still matters. If you forget about the subtitle and read this as an introduction to McPherson's insightful essays on the Civil War, you will not be disappointed. 84 of 89 people found the following review helpful. The chapter on the Mexican War and the conflict over the expansion of slavery into the territories was one of the best sections. By Ms Winston James McPherson has compiled a series of short essays, some never before published, on the issue of why, 150 years after it ended, the American Civil War still resonates in the memory of many Americans. 2015 marks the end of the 150th anniversary observances, yet I believe that interest in the war (the causes of the war, the events of the war itself, and the aftermath) has never been higher. As the author points out, correctly in my estimation, the interest now is far more intense than it was in the 1960s when the 100th anniversary was observed. As someone who was in high school and college during that time period, I remember that current events overshadowed the observance -- the Civil Rights movement, the Cuban Missile Crisis, the death of President John F Kennedy, followed by the murders of Martin Luther King Jr and Robert Kennedy. McPherson touches on these issues very briefly and also mentions the 13th and 14 Amendments to the Constitution, the latter of which still can cause controversy today, as provisions have been applied to the American-born children ("anchor babies") of people who have entered the United States illegally. McPherson in some regards brushes over the issue of secession as though it were, in his words, a "settled matter," but as one who regularly visits Civil War web sites and blogs, I can tell you that for some the issue is still as alive today as it was in 1860. There are even people today who question that the U.S. Constitution is a binding document because the original intent of the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia was to amend the Articles of Confederation. They are sometimes the same people who denigrate Lincoln as a "dictator" and they are not confined to the southern states, but rather represent a political point of view that, in my opinion, is antithetical to the aims of the original Republican Party. This is an issue that could have been covered in real depth in this book, but was not. It, along with the 20th century near deification of Confederate General R. E. Lee and the denigration of Union General U. Grant, has been explored in greater depth in other works, but are glossed over in McPherson's latest book. The chapter on the Mexican War and the conflict over the expansion of slavery into the territories was one of the best sections of the book, as the compromisers (Henry Clay being the most famous) began to fall away, either due to death or what some have said was just people getting tired of talking to each other and never getting a permanent fix. The fact that pro-slavery Southerners dominated in so many aspects of national government, coupled with weak presidents, is covered fairly extensively for such a slender book. The section on the concept of a just war is covered as well -- the justification for going to war and the conduct during the war. In the popular imagination, Union General Sherman generally gets the brunt of criticism for the famous march to the sea, while the average person probably knows little or nothing about the massacre of the United States Colored Troops by confederate troops at Ft Pillow and at Petersburg. McPherson points out that in the case of Ft Pillow confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest was present and did not stop his troops, any more than did Lee in the aftermath of the Battle of the Crater. The issue of civilian casualties vs military casualties, one of the reasons why Sherman's march tends to linger in the popular imagination, is covered briefly. McPherson explores the always controversial issue of Lincoln and his views on slavery, which is still today being debated in some quarters. Those who dislike Lincoln tend to endlessly comb his writings and what he said, or was supposed to have said, about "the Negro race" as it was called then. Was Lincoln a racist is discussed in this chapter, although not in depth because it is a short book, with what I see as McPherson coming down on the side of "no, he was not," but rather a political strategist .. a point of view that Frederick Douglass came to appreciate in his later years. There are other chapters on military aspects that those who are interested in the battles over the political and social aspects on the conflict will perhaps enjoy more and have your own set of opinions to debate. While I give this book four stars, I think that I am somewhat disappointed that more links to the controversies of today were not explored by the author. The election of the first bi-racial president in 2008, while of great importance, has not brought about the post-racial society that many thought it would..and race has once again become a major political and social issue in the 21st century. I recommend this book as a jumping off place for more in depth discussions of the war and its continued resonance in our country. 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Concisely Written Impressively Researched By Jim Brown James McPherson's newest work is a concise collection of highly analytical essays over his career. He covers many topics in under 200 pages--this is not a survey history of the American Civil War; rather, it is an analytical one with insightful perspectives and strong research. In the first few chapters, McPherson comes across attacking other historians' works and theses. He makes strong arguments and supports his points, but I was hoping he delved from this approach, which he does after the first three chapters. From then on, he largely supports others' work and analyzes it through his own historical perspective. As a longtime McPherson fan, I admire his ability to write concisely without missing a beat. I really enjoyed this

work—one reason is because I've read several of the works he consistently cites in these essays. The ones I did not read I readily ordered and will read soon. However, if you do not have the time to read those works, McPherson's analysis should provide you with a thesis for each work at the very least. Some chapters of note: McPherson's first chapter "Why the Civil War Still Matters" connects the Civil War and its ensuing three amendments to the US Constitution throughout history to the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and to today. Chapters five and six focus on the much-ignored American navies and its two most overlooked admirals, David Dixon Porter and more so David Glasgow Farragut. Chapters seven through eleven involve Lincoln and McPherson takes a different angle on the president in each—these essays are impressive. McPherson analyzes Lincoln's use of executive power and whether it was justified, Lincoln's effectiveness as a military man and commander in chief, and Lincoln's war strategy and how it changed throughout the war. He also focuses on Lincoln's feud with McClelland and highlights McClelland's private letters that shed light on his flawed character and military career. Lastly, his final chapter encapsulates the Reconstruction Era with concisely written research, including the rise of the KKK and the racial divide in Illinois even when it was an anti-slavery state. If you enjoyed this work I highly recommend reading another collection of his essays from a few years ago titled "This Mighty Scourge: Perspectives on the Civil War." This one features shorter essays but covers much more content.

More than 140 years ago, Mark Twain observed that the Civil War had "uprooted institutions that were centuries old, changed the politics of a people, transformed the social life of half the country, and wrought so profoundly upon the entire national character that the influence cannot be measured short of two or three generations." In fact, five generations have passed, and Americans are still trying to measure the influence of the immense fratricidal conflict that nearly tore the nation apart. In *The War that Forged a Nation*, Pulitzer Prize-winning historian James M. McPherson considers why the Civil War remains so deeply embedded in our national psyche and identity. The drama and tragedy of the war, from its scope and size—an estimated death toll of 750,000, far more than the rest of the country's wars combined—to the nearly mythical individuals involved—Abraham Lincoln, Robert E. Lee, Stonewall Jackson—help explain why the Civil War remains a topic of interest. But the legacy of the war extends far beyond historical interest or scholarly attention. Here, McPherson draws upon his work over the past fifty years to illuminate the war's continuing resonance across many dimensions of American life. Touching upon themes that include the war's causes and consequences; the naval war; slavery and its abolition; and Lincoln as commander in chief, McPherson ultimately proves the impossibility of understanding the issues of our own time unless we first understand their roots in the era of the Civil War. From racial inequality and conflict between the North and South to questions of state sovereignty or the role of government in social change—these issues, McPherson shows, are as salient and controversial today as they were in the 1860s. Thoughtful, provocative, and authoritative, *The War that Forged a Nation* looks anew at the reasons America's civil war has remained a subject of intense interest for the past century and a half, and affirms the enduring relevance of the conflict for America today.

"McPherson's mastery of the Civil War literature and the field's historiographic debates allows him to present nuanced answers to those questions and many others, and his gift for narrative clarifies even the most obscure scholarly disputes." -Foreign Affairs "Brisk and engrossing "The War That Forged a Nation" [McPherson] distills a lifetime of scrupulous scholarship into 12 essays--two new, the others extensively revised from previously published versions. Yet the book has none of the haphazard feel of an anthology, and readers will finish it with the sense that they have received a succinct history of the whole struggle, as well as numerous fresh and occasionally controversial observations." --Wall Street Journal Previous praise for *Battle Cry of Freedom*: "Deftly coordinated, gracefully composed, charitably argued and suspensefully paid out, McPherson's book is just the compass of the tumultuous middle years of the 19th century it was intended to be, and as narrative history it is surpassing. Bright with details and fresh quotations, solid with carefully-arrived-at conclusions, it must surely be, of the 50,000 books written on the Civil War, the finest compression of that national paroxysm ever fitted between two covers." --Los Angeles Times Book "The best one-volume treatment of [the Civil War era] I have ever come across. It may actually be the best ever published.... I was swept away, feeling as if I had never heard the saga before.... Omitting nothing important, whether military, political, or economic, he yet manages to make everything he touches drive the narrative forward. This is historical writing of the highest order." --Hugh Brogan, *The New York Times* Book "The finest single volume on the war and its background." --*The Washington Post* Book World About the Author James M. McPherson is an American Civil War historian, and is the George Henry Davis '86 Professor Emeritus of United States History at Princeton University. He is the author of many works of history, including *Battle Cry of Freedom*, which won the 1989 Pulitzer Prize.