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History 209

McPhearson Acclaims and Critiques

The New York Times writer takes the most fair stance of the three reviews. McPhearson must wrestle with the same problems that all writers have which is to present as much information as possible while maintaining and generating interest. McPhearson is writing to an audience and he must maintain a compelling narrative. The Times reviewer's praise of the book illustrates this problem when he says, "It is comprehensive yet succinct, scholarly without being pedantic, eloquent but unrheterical. It is compellingly readable."

Unfortunately the limitation of keeping his book relative and selling copies leads to the greatest critiques of his book, personal bias. The second review written by a blogger is very similar to the first overall acclaim with a few critiques about McPherson's obvious biases. The most appealing aspect of this book to me is going to be the lead into the war. I am looking forward to his attempt to, "...carefully establish the political and social context of the time..."

The individuals who offered negative reviews of the book generally did so because of very focused shortfalls in the book. Most negative reviewers already had a predetermined bias that McPhearson failed to enforce. Some were upset with McPherson's general view of the events and causes, but I find it hard to critique a person's view. Unfortunately it is very hard to discount one person's account of events with another's. The more troubling aspect of the reviews are the alleged hard fact errors in the book, such as dates and poll figures.

As with all historical sources the views in this book must be taken with a grain of salt. I am however greatly anticipating learning about the Civil War and more about its causes. Ultimately I hope that McPhearson will bring a little more humanity to the causes of the darkest times in our nation.

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