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History 209, American History: Civil War

Assignment #1

After carefully reading the opinions expressed in the three sources we were to consider, I have come to have a high degree of confidence in McPherson's book. Although it is early in the term, and I still have a mass of information to sort through, the arguments against the validity of the book seem trivial for the most part. The overwhelming complaint seems to be McPherson's negative bias against the South. While it is hard for me to feel anything but bias against those who would keep slaves, I realize this was not the only thing that led to the Civil War. Yet, based on our early reading, I am not convinced the war would have started had slavery not been an issue, regardless of the other issues like states' rights. I do realize we have only begun our studies, however, and I have a lot to learn about the war.

The single author reviews were, for the most part, positive reviews of the book. And they, too, commented on his seemingly pro-Northern stance. The vast majority of the Amazon.com reviewers share that complaint. Based on that recurring criticism, that would be my primary concern about the book. I have always thought that the North was the pillar of morality, and the South was mostly evil plantation owners, or their supporters, greedy to keep slave labor. Obviously, I do not have the whole story, and I would hope that alleged bias toward the North in McPherson's book will not prevent me from attaining an accurate perspective of the war.

On the other hand, the book seems to have maintained a solid reputation through significant peer review. This is evidenced by McPherson's book being chosen as our main source of information in this very class. I feel it would be an impossible task to write a completely error-free piece of academic history, or one free from bias. By its very nature history is ambiguous and cloudy. All I would hope for is that an author did his due diligence. McPherson certainly seems to have done just that.

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