

HST 209: American History: Civil War W14 (Escobar 32165)

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Death and the Civil War



Forum 6

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Death and the Civil War



by Joe Escobar - Monday, March 3, 2014, 10:16 AM

To post, you will click the "reply" link MY post. If you want to reply to a specific comment made by another student, click the "reply" link located on that student's specific post.

IMPORTANT - SUBJECT LINES

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DO NOT attempt to answer all questions in a single post by writing a mini-essay that is difficult to respond to or discuss.

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preparation for deaths



by Austin Crook - Monday, March 3, 2014, 2:18 PM

Well there were many parts to the film that added to my perception and new knowledge about the Civil War. The main idea that I did not take into consideration before was the fact that the country as a whole could not have imagined what it would take to deal with the amount of deaths and casualties that would occur during the war. I had never thought about amount of money and people it would take to solely take care of the dead bodies left on the battlefield and bury them. The Civil War really opened up the minds of people who realized we needed organizations like the U.S. Sanitary Commission to initiate some support for the deaths of our soldiers. To identify those men and notify their own families in a somewhat organized and efficient fashion must have been even more difficult. Without those things in place prior to the war, I can now imagine the amount of horrific sights of thousands of bodies laying in fields for weeks or months at a time before being buried.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: preparation for deaths



by Lauren Grant - Sunday, March 9, 2014, 11:32 AM

Before watching the documentary, I also had never thought about the amount of money and time that it took for the army to care for the dead bodies on the battlefields. Without the Civil War I wonder how long it would have taken the government to realize that organization was needed. Trying to identify soldiers were lying on the fields after battles must had been a daunting task. And like you said, the trying to identify the families in an organized matter must had been nearly impossible. With no organization, many families probably never knew what happened to their loved ones.

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Re: preparation for deaths



by Austin Crook - Sunday, March 9, 2014, 4:58 PM

This is one subject that I think anyone would naturally take for granted in today's wars, but those people do not understand how much work and money it would take to have an organized system for removing and identifying dead bodies from battlefields. All I know is that I would not want to have the job of those who go into the field after battle and have to carry dead soldiers off and then try to identify them. I respect those men and women who volunteered to do that during the Civil War.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: preparation for deaths



by Keeler McJunkin - Sunday, March 9, 2014, 7:54 PM

This is a great point. I couldn't imagine the amount of time and effort it took to clean and take care of the dead bodies on the battlefields. This was something we had never dealt with before as a country. It seems almost an unimaginable task to bear to have to deal with this. The organization of the whole thing, the timing, having to notify families. All of it is difficult. No matter what part of it you look at, none of it is easy.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: preparation for deaths



by Jacob Nelson - Sunday, March 9, 2014, 6:47 PM

I completely agree that as a country the United States was simply not prepared for the sheer amount of death that took place during the Civil War. We have learned through

out this class about how the armed conflicts and wars that happened prior to the Civil War didn't have nearly as many casualties and deaths. The loss of life that took place during the Civil War was unprecedented. Thus, I think it would have been nearly impossible for the United States to have affectively prepared to deal with the large amounts of deaths and casualties that took place because they had simply never seen so much blood shed.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: preparation for deaths

by Benjamin Trautman - Sunday, March 9, 2014, 7:16 PM

You make a great point that it must have been very difficult to notify the families of the deceased in an organized and timely fashion. I think technology has been the only reason we can notify families in a more respectful and immediate response now. The telephone wasn't invented until 1875, and computers have given us the ability to send a report thousands of miles in a matter of seconds. I do not blame the government for their lackluster effort in their preparation of the dead in the Civil War, the wrong kind of war was fought in the wrong time era.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: preparation for deaths

by Keeler McJunkin - Sunday, March 9, 2014, 7:49 PM

I agree. It's really amazing to think about what it would be like to have to experience something like a civil war. Where all of the people dying on both sides could be family, friends, or neighbors. Everyone can know everyone else. It's no wonder the Country wasn't ready to have to deal with something like this. How can you plan for it? Get ready for it? In my opinion you can't. There is nothing that can prepare you for something like this. There isn't a way to prepare for fighting your friends and neighbors, Or a way to prepare for the aftermath of how to deal with it post war.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: preparation for deaths

by Debra Moran - Sunday, March 9, 2014, 10:38 PM

I had wondered who took care of the dead. I didn't realize that it was the citizens of the towns and the families that followed the soldiers. How tragic it must have been, I guess I just assumed that the Military took care of the dead at some point to have those soldiers lie out on the field for the length of time it took to bury thousands of men. I am so glad that the military has made so many changes since then.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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civil war era vs. today's society

by Austin Crook - Monday, March 3, 2014, 2:18 PM

The other aspect that I had never thought about was the way those people must have viewed death and how their religion affected their willingness to die for their country. I enjoyed learning that soldiers would surround themselves with pictures of loved ones and write letters to those they loved in order to prepare their idea of a perfect death. If I was to compare those men who were that willing to volunteer or be drafted without deserting to men in today's society, I would be surprised if the same percentage of men would willingly volunteer and do so with an openness or readiness to die. In our society today that has created this need for gaining as much material possession as possible, and the idea of "it's all about me", I do not think our country would have the same turnout or respect for our country's cause.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: civil war era vs. today's society

by Katherine Frank - Wednesday, March 5, 2014, 8:27 AM

Hi Austin,

I must disagree with the idea that today our young men would not fight for this country. I do think that, just as in the Civil War, the government will have to demonstrate the need and the correctness of the war. I think the government at times had some trouble getting and keeping soldiers during the Civil War and I believe that if it were demonstrated that we as a country were under attack, there would be no shortage of people available to fight for this country. Today we have religion being used to keep from fighting, and religion being used to kill innocents. Certainly a difference from the Civil War days.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: civil war era vs. today's society

by Austin Crook - Wednesday, March 5, 2014, 1:03 PM

Hey Katherine, I completely understand what you are saying. I do think that many men and women would be willing to volunteer to fight for our country. The part that I would second guess is the reasoning for why we would volunteer. I also would be curious to view the difference between the Civil War soldiers and their willingness and acceptance of death compared to today's men and women. I feel like today we would have people who wanted to volunteer because they are interested in the violence and "game" of war. Being excited to fight and use guns, but I don't think our generation would be as comfortable with themselves being brutally killed and knowing that when they die, that they want to die in a certain way. I do think our men and women would still have patriotism to volunteer but I do wonder the true reasoning for why they would and how comfortable they would actually be to knowing they were likely going to die. Because today's wars

are not even close to the Civil War in regards to the death rates and percentages compared to those who fight in wars now. The men fighting in the Civil War would go into battles knowing that they would be extremely lucky if they survived.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: civil war era vs. today's society

by Kylie Emory - Wednesday, March 5, 2014, 10:33 AM

I think you are completely right. As a military spouse I can personally tell you that the men and women in today's military are not exactly in it for "Love of Country" or a "sense of duty". There are certainly exceptions to that, but I believe the majority of our military now is composed of people who joined for the benefits, or because they didn't have other options. Which is fine. The men that enlisted in the Civil War certainly did not do it for themselves, the benefits, or because they didn't have other options. They received practically no benefits, and poor pay. Many of them left behind jobs, farms, and families. They made these sacrifices because they felt a duty to defend what they believed in. I strongly believe that the level of commitment they showed would not be matched in today's world.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: civil war era vs. today's society

by Austin Crook - Wednesday, March 5, 2014, 1:07 PM

Hey Kylie, I appreciate your point of view! It can give us a perspective from someone who is close to the situation. And I do not want it to seem like there are not men and women who join the military because they feel called to serve our country, but as you said there are many who join for many other reasons these days. And many people are joining with the understanding that it is not very likely that they will be killed or even to go to war unless something drastic happens. The men in the Civil War knew exactly what they were getting into after witnessing or reading about the first couple battles, and after that numbers continued to grow with draftees and volunteers.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: civil war era vs. today's society

by Christopher Plourde - Sunday, March 9, 2014, 9:18 PM

I think that most people are hesitant to say that the men and women in the military today are not just as patriotic and selfless as those during the Civil War as we do not want to seem to diminish their service in any way. I think that people during the time of the Civil War had a different sense of self than we do today. It was a far less materialistic society then, one's sense of

self was very much bound up in "God's" view" of the individual, demonstrations of courage were very prized and sought out by many, as was a good death and it was these things that defined what it was to be a "success". Today we could do none of those things and be a success. Certainly as a society we praise our fallen soldiers but our soldiers are not actively looking for a way to demonstrate their courage on the battlefield and I don't think anyone can blame them.

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Re: civil war era vs. today's society

by Kristine Wallace - Thursday, March 6, 2014, 7:27 PM

I have to defer on the subject of people enlisting if it was today's war. How many hundreds of thousands have already gone overseas to fight on foreign soil after 9-11 and than on?? So many of our young men have died over there in just recent years but they went over there fighting for something they believed in.

I agree that America is materialistic as with a good number of other nations but we still have the goodness in our hearts and the bravado that sent so many troops out there onto foreign soil. Had this been in the United States at this time....I absolutely believe we would have many of our people doing just what was done back then--enlisting and fighting for a common belief.

Of course, I know we can look at the record number of draft dodgers that came into light during the Vietnam War but again, in my opinion, the era that spawned the Vietnam War was one of turbulence where a lot of young people were trying to "find themselves" in an overwhelming drug culture. I could be wrong on this but from what I have read (small amount) and seen on television specials, this seemed to be the norm for that time and place. But I diverge!

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Re: civil war era vs. today's society

by Austin Crook - Thursday, March 6, 2014, 9:09 PM

I respect your opinion and agree with much of what you are saying. But my main argument would be that if we compared the percentage of men who fought in the civil war to total men in the U.S. during that time, and did the same for men during today for another war, I am not sure the percentages would match. Even though I do not disagree that many men and women would definitely volunteer and lay down their lives for our country. But of the men and women who would volunteer in today's society I also believe that many would not be doing it with the same compassion and understanding of death as the men did in the Civil War.

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Re: civil war era vs. today's society

by Debra Moran - Thursday, March 6, 2014, 9:26 PM

I feel that it would be so difficult for the families of the soldier, what if they were in multiple battles then the families would receive a "death" letter with every battle. I know that their faith in God and country helped them to march into battle and to die with dignity and honor with the newness of photography it must have been so comforting to them to be able to hold on to the likeness of their loved ones as they died.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: civil war era vs. today's society

by Joyce Garipey - Thursday, March 6, 2014, 11:17 PM

Your post led me to think about what it would have been like to not know what had happened to a loved one who was a soldier during the Civil War. How devastating that really had to have been to wait and wait and possibly never know. Then I think back to one of the photographers we discussed in a previous forum. What if you learned of your loved one's fate in battle through one of Alexander Gardner's photographs. At least you would know, but what if it was a photograph with a caption that Gardner made up about the soldier?

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: civil war era vs. today's society

by Debra Moran - Thursday, March 6, 2014, 9:31 PM

I believe that our country has a true patriotism even though it is not showing daily as in the past I believe that the men and women of this nation HAVE and would again rise up and take arms to protect this great nation, even those that are as you say feel that "it's all about me", I still believe that given great crisis they would also fight for their nation. Have Faith.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: civil war era vs. today's society

by Debra Moran - Sunday, March 9, 2014, 10:46 PM

Sorry Austin but I too must disagree with you. I believe that the men and women of this great nation would stand up and fight if our Country was in need. I used to think my son had an its all about me attitude, he is now serving his second tour in Afghanistan. Every soldier that is deployed at some point writes his "death" letter and they love to receive pictures. I think anyone faced with death would want to send those that they love a remembrance home.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Today's current Gov.

by Austin Crook - Monday, March 3, 2014, 2:21 PM

Our country is obviously much more prepared with provisions and organizations in place to handle deaths in our nation's military, and how we return them home. Our government also makes sure that the soldier's families are taken care of financially after their loved one dies. It is nice to see how much the effort to return fallen soldiers home from battle has increased tremendously since the times of the civil war. In our modern wars, our country will return home fallen soldiers from across the world, regardless of where their death took place.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: Today's current Gov.

by Jessica Mitchell - Wednesday, March 5, 2014, 4:13 PM

I think our government has come leaps and bounds from where it was when it comes to repaying it's citizens for the service they have rendered it in the form of respect and care for their health, injuries and in establishing the "logistics of death" into the everyday running of our nation. Care is provided for veterans well after their service has ended now, care is also provided them during their service in a better and not only more efficient but also more effective way now. Soldiers can now be identified by the wearing of dog tags, and next of kin can be properly and respectfully notified so there is no wonder or confusion over what has happened to someone. There was no space designated for their tribute, and now we have national cemeteries, and we can celebrate their memory on Memorial Day. This war gave birth to so many needed changes in these areas, and I think our government has done a good job of recognizing those needs then, and building them into the strong systems and traditions that they are today.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: Today's current Gov.

by Austin Crook - Thursday, March 6, 2014, 1:08 PM

Hey Jessica, I forgot about the method of "dog tags" for soldiers. That is another specific way our military identifies soldiers. It is definitely a major part of our country to respect fallen soldiers from all wars in the past with Memorial Day. That is something that I think helps our nation stay united and continue to strengthen a sense of patriotism.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: Today's current Gov.



by Joyce Garipey - Sunday, March 9, 2014, 10:54 PM

Before my sons deployed in 2009, I had to sign several forms agreeing to power of attorney as well as the beneficiary if they didn't come back. So this is tremendously different from Civil War days where no such documents were provided for families. The government does a much better job of making sure the family of a soldier is taken care of in the event of the soldier's death. In addition, today's soldier is afforded continued medical and mental care after they return from deployment as well as V.A. disability pay if injured in some capacity in the line of duty. These things were not available in the days of the Civil War.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: Better Understanding



by Katherine Frank - Tuesday, March 4, 2014, 8:00 PM

For me, the most significant parts of this film were the battles listed by date and the numbers of casualties. Listed separately were the deaths. I had assumed that the casualties listed in our text and Ken Burns film were the deaths. I also found the facts listed that we were so unprepared for, no hospitals, no way to identify, collect, or bury the dead and no way to notify the next of kin significant in that it would ultimately cause the government to do something to fix those problems. The fact that the war came at a time when technology had outpaced military strategy and everything had outpaced medical knowledge was brought home to me a little more clearly. Looking at it statistically, 2 1/2 % of the population died, and equating that with today also brought home the magnitude of the loss that the Civil War caused.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: Better Understanding



by Kylie Emory - Sunday, March 9, 2014, 8:43 AM

I also found the sheer numbers staggering. It is hard to imagine similar figures dying in a war of today. it is a tragedy when even one person dies in battle, catastrophic to lose five at a time, and unheard of practically to lose more.. Even for the soldiers who lived, they saw their friends and family members die by the dozens, horrors we can hardly imagine now.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: Better Understanding



by Jessica Mitchell - Sunday, March 9, 2014, 11:51 AM

I agree that it is baffling that any country going to war could go into it so unprepared. I guess in that way this represents the vast differences between who we are as a country now verses who we were as a country then. In the grand scheme of things we are a country in our teens, and then we were a country just past infancy and heading straight into the terrible twos. We learned so much from this war, and it changed us so much, as tragic and sad as all the casualties and damages were, I think these events are what gave the United States it's first chance to become truly great. So much knowledge was gained in these battles. It gave us the chance to mature and grow into a country that respects the people who make it possible to be the country that we are, our soldiers, and the people willing to sacrifice to keep what we have built.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: Better Understanding



by Debra Moran - Sunday, March 9, 2014, 11:15 PM

I think that both sides truly believed it wouldn't last more than a month at the most and had given no thought to the consequences of a long term war. As you say our country is in its youth and it didnt have a national military, so the men were called to arms for a ninety day service and we all know how that worked. This war as tragic as it was has taught us how to run a military.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re:Decline in Religion?



by Katherine Frank - Tuesday, March 4, 2014, 7:53 PM

Have we had a decline in religious devotion, or just a change? There are now many diverse religions vs the predominately protestant religion of the Civil War era, but only 16% of people in the US today are non-religious according to the Religious Landscape Survey. How each religion teaches its followers about death may be different but not necessarily wrong or a loss. I think we would all still like to die at home with love and family around us and last words possible.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re:Decline in Religion?





by Benjamin Trautman - Sunday, March 9, 2014, 7:27 PM

What a great question! "Is there a decline or a change in religious devotion?" I would say there is a decline but you make a very convincing point that people have been able to find faith now days in numerous religions, many have with the newer theology of Mormonism. The change in religious devotion and creation of new religions is a direct correlation to that statistic you found. I would have thought the number would be higher but you changed my mind.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re:Decline in Religion?



by Melinda Parks - Sunday, March 9, 2014, 8:14 PM

You make a very interesting point, and frankly I thought that the percentage you provided would have been higher! It is true, though, that different religions do teach their followers about death in very different ways. Today's religious diversity in the U.S. is much greater, I think, than it was 1800s, and I wonder what effect that would have should another event like the Civil War happen. I think that you are right to say that we would all still like to die with our family near.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re:Decline in Religion?



by Christopher Plourde - Sunday, March 9, 2014, 9:29 PM

But how much does religion really inform the daily lives of the people that call themselves "religious". Certainly there are those that can honestly answer this in the affirmative but there are a great many who may profess some belief in a religion but its reach is limited in their lives. During the Civil War I imagine that it played a far greater part in what they did from day to day and steeled them to the horrors that they had to endure on the battlefield. Can you imagine soldiers today calmly sewing their names to the back of their uniforms for later identification in anticipation of the murderous frontal assault at Cold Harbor and then make that assault? That act is not humanly possibly unless you firmly believe in some greater meaning and that your death, and the necessity of it, plays some part in that meaning to say nothing about a rock solid belief in some afterlife.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re:Decline in Religion?



by Debra Moran - Sunday, March 9, 2014, 11:20 PM

Not only did they have a rock solid belief in the afterlife they had a rock solid belief in what they were fighting for. To have the loyalty and honor to fight when

you have not eaten or have shoes or even enough ammo, let alone continue fighting when you have killed possibly hundreds of men. They definitely had some rock solid beliefs

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: Death Then and Now

by Katherine Frank - Tuesday, March 4, 2014, 8:13 PM

The Federal Government now has many programs in place to find, transport and care for the dead or injured. Notification policies, physical therapy, good hospitals, and help for families of the fallen. I would like to think that military strategy, technology and medical care are better matched today. We treat the dead with more respect today than during the Civil War. We believe in "none left behind" and while I think the Government still has some learning to do, this film shows just how far it has come.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Then and Now

by Eryne Grant - Wednesday, March 5, 2014, 10:31 AM

In the documentary, it talked about how death was seen differently during the Civil War time period as it is now. Our modern culture revolves dying around hospitals, medicine, doctors, etc. In the mid 1800s, death was seen as a very intimate matter. The loved ones surrounded the dying in their own homes and waited for them to let go into Heaven. Through this, I think that the culture shock of so many soldiers dying on the battlefield in a completely opposite situation was astonishing to the loved ones of the dead. No one wants their loved one to die in a battlefield. Our culture today has lost a sense of certain emotions when it comes to death. I feel like when a family member dies today, many people question what they could have done to keep them alive. But, back in the 1800s, they would know that they died in peace with the Lord.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: Then and Now

by Austin Crook - Thursday, March 6, 2014, 1:14 PM

I agree that the majority of our society views death in a frightened and intimidated sort of way. People are scared because of the un-known and mystery with death. People who do not have their own faith especially find it hard to accept death as a part of life, and as something not to fear. Many men in the Civil War seemed to be prepared and content with dying in the war because they knew that they had followed their faith, and understood what would happen to them after death, if they lived the proper way on earth. This is still common for U.S. citizens today, but I think there are many more who lived this way during the Civil War era compared to now.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: Then and Now

by Lauren Grant - Sunday, March 9, 2014, 12:58 AM

I agree with you that in today's world we think of death being something that happens in a hospital rather than in one's own home as it was in most situations during the mid 1800's. I definitely think that since people during that time thought of the "perfect death" as being surrounded by family members while in their home that the battlefield deaths shook them up more than it does today. Before this documentary I had never really thought about what a good death was considered to be during the Civil War. The number of battlefield deaths must have really shocked them as well. I also agree that people analyze the deaths of loved ones today more than people during the Civil War and that might be because religion isn't as universal as it was then. During the Civil War when someone you loved died you would know that they are in Heaven, like you said, while today many people do not have that assurance that religion brought them in the past.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: Then and Now

by Keeler McJunkin - Sunday, March 9, 2014, 8:00 PM

In this day and age I think we definitely look at death as something that happens in a hospital. For most of us we don't know anything different. This is a big change obviously from a time period like the civil war when medical care was completely different and less available to the public. Just the fact that there was such a different level of knowledge at the time regarding diseases, care, and the ability to provide the care needed to people. Death could and did happen in many different places at the time. A lot of people wanted to have the comfort of passing on in their own way, at their house and in their own comfort. It's hard to compare what it was like then to what it is today because of these differences.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: Then and Now

by Jessica Mitchell - Sunday, March 9, 2014, 1:21 PM

I think the biggest difference between the way we look at death now as opposed to then is that then people lived their entire life towards having a "good" death, everything they did was in preparation for it. Now a good portion of the population subscribes to the notion of living while you can because death can come at any time, rather than living in a way that your death can be at home surrounded by loved ones. I mean that is still an ideal I am sure, but we are realistic now that that will not happen. Families tend to be more spread out, we have hospitals, more likelihood of tragic accidents, so to be surrounded by family upon a deathbed at home is a less than common occurrence now. Just as our resources and everyday lives have changed drastically, so too has our relationship with death.

Sum of ratings: 2 (1)

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Re: Then and Now

by Christopher Plourde - Sunday, March 9, 2014, 9:38 PM

I think part of the reason for a greater intimacy with death is that average life expectancy was far lower before the Civil War. Age 38 was the average. This is somewhat misleading as there was a great deal of infant mortality, but even taking that into account the average was in the mid fifties. Death, therefore, could not be shoved out of sight as it is today. Denial, to the degree that we practice today, is not a successful strategy when you see it with greater frequency. Consequently having ideas such as "a good death" was a necessary part of coping with life, to give meaning to a far more real, and seemingly more capricious, possibility.

Sum of ratings: 2 (1)

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Death

by Melinda Parks - Wednesday, March 5, 2014, 3:38 PM

What struck me in this documentary was the statistics right at the very beginning: 2 1/2% of the United States' population died. If that same death rate were to happen today, approximately 7 million Americans would die. This really made me realize how horrifically catastrophic the death toll was. This clip also made me think about how horrible it would be to not know what had happened to your husband, father, son, or friend. The video did a good job of pointing out how there was no way of identifying the dead or notifying their next of kin.

Sum of ratings: 2 (1)

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Re: Death

by Joyce Garipey - Wednesday, March 5, 2014, 5:20 PM

I have two sons who were in Iraq from 2009-2010. Both made it back safe and sound, but this clip really does make me think about how horrible it would be if my sons had been soldiers in the Civil War. It is completely unimaginable to think that I might have never known what had happened to them if they didn't make it back.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: Death

by Eryne Grant - Sunday, March 9, 2014, 12:32 AM

I thought the statistics were incredible as well. If the death rates today were as high as they were now, everything would be drastically different. I think that the documentary put the viewer on a more personal level with the statistics.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: Death

by Keeler McJunkin - Sunday, March 9, 2014, 8:08 PM

That statistic is incredible. Its hard to even imagine something like 2.5% of the population dying in a single event like a war. Considering the fact we were fighting each other makes a big difference obviously, but It doesn't change that amazing number. Or make it any less incredible to try and imagine it happening today. Not having a way to identify bodies is something I had never thought about before the video either. It would be excruciating to know you have a family member fighting and have such a hard time finding out if they were dead or alive. I couldn't even imagine having to wait days, weeks, or even months to figure out what was going on.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Death Changed the Nation

by Lauren Grant - Wednesday, March 5, 2014, 3:40 PM

For me the most significant part of the documentary that added to my knowledge of the significance of the war was the way that the overwhelming number of deaths on the battlefield changed the relationship between the government and the people. I never really thought about how large the number of deaths really was for that time and how unprepared they were for it and how it caused the government to realize that they had a duty to the soldiers and their families. The fact that medical attention had to improve and grow in a short period of time is something that I personally find fascinating. Ambulances, military hospitals, cemeteries, and standards for medical attention were created because of the high number of deaths. Citizens felt a connection to the deaths and felt a responsibility to help, which is something that is something that is not always covered in most retellings of the Civil War. So many things that are now considered to be standard are because of the horrific number of deaths that the U.S. wasn't prepared for and I think that the documentary really covers how that changed the nation forever and improved my own knowledge of why

the Civil War was so important.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: Death Changed the Nation

by Joyce Garipey - Thursday, March 6, 2014, 4:32 PM

It is really unimaginable to comprehend that it took so many horrific deaths on the many battlefields of the Civil War before the United States could begin to develop methods to identify bodies and notify next of kin. It seems that with the previous wars such as the Revolutionary War, we already should have had cemeteries and hospitals at the ready, but I guess with the enormous amount of deaths from the Civil War, we were just not prepared for such a loss of life of that magnitude.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Death of a Soldier

by Joyce Garipey - Wednesday, March 5, 2014, 3:58 PM

This documentary starts out with a very sad letter from a young man who was dying from a shoulder wound received in a battle. This letter brings up the same kind of emotions that Ken Burns does in his Civil War series. It moves on to talk about the huge number of people that were killed in the war. "The unimaginable scale of the slaughter. The sheer numbers of the dead would be all but impossible to comprehend. Nearly 2 ½% of the population would die in the conflict. An estimated 750,000 people in all. More than in all other American wars combined. Never before and never since has so many Americans died in any war." This part of the documentary seems to be pretty significant. The United States was not prepared to handle the massive amount of deaths. The United States had to "find new ways of coping with death on an unimaginable scale." We didn't have any national cemeteries, no way to help identify the deceased soldiers, or for even notifying the next of kin, there were no adequate federal hospitals or ambulance corps, etc. The documentary makes it pretty clear that the Civil War changed the United States in more ways than just the end of slavery and states' rights.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: Death and the Civil War

by Melinda Parks - Wednesday, March 5, 2014, 5:15 PM

Watching this clip definitely made me wonder how today's culture would deal with mass death such as that in the Civil War.

I thought it was interesting that the video pointed out that back then death was viewed as part of life, whereas today's culture seems to try to avoid death at all costs. We advertise products to make us look younger and feel younger. We try to extend life for as long as possible. In my opinion, the decline of religious devotion has contributed to this. After all, if you believe that there is no life after death, naturally you'd want to extend your life for as long as possible!

I feel that today, death is viewed as failure, in a way, instead of a natural part of life. Though of course death was no less devastating back then as it is now, I think it also would have helped for a soldier to be able to feel at peace with his Lord and for his family to know that he died at peace (when they were lucky enough to know anything about his death).

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: Death and the Civil War

by Kristine Wallace - Saturday, March 8, 2014, 11:38 PM

Well, we do not need to look to far into the past to realize how today's culture would deal with mass death. 9-11 is not to far in the past to see just that. Granted, it was not as many people as the Civil War by any account, but it still shocked the people of this country and view the deaths of thousands of people. It made all of us, I believe, question our own mortality and start to think about how this would affect us if it was our own families involved.

Thankfully, as Americans we pulled together after this happened and showed how much humanity we have. It is amazing to think that the same country that killed one another on a grand scale ended up feeling a huge sense of American pride after this happened.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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National Consciousness

by Timothy Wilson-Haley - Wednesday, March 5, 2014, 5:37 PM

David Blight's comment that nobody predicted the horror and extent of destruction is interesting. If it had been predicted (as Sherman did) by others, would it have happened? I can't imagine a cause that would be worth the lives of 7 million Americans today. I don't think there are any words that can explain such things, even to oneself, as Blight asserted. The extent of death during the war is something that I had thought of frequently, but I hadn't thought of the ramifications on the nation's collective consciousness, as asked in The Atlantic. How was it justified? Was redemption found? If it was, I don't think it was the same for all Americans in all regions. For the South, their justification probably had a lot to do with the creation of the Lost Cause mythology; they at least had their honor. I have no idea how the North mentally grappled with it

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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The Impact

by Bryan Sanders - Wednesday, March 5, 2014, 8:53 PM

Ric Burns' documentary on death in the civil war definitely covered the aspects better than the one involving his brother. A large part of that success comes from the simple fact that Ken Burns' documentary was like a summary of all the major aspects of the American civil war, whereas Ric Burns focused on a more specific and intimate subject. It was like the Virginia documentary we viewed that focused on specific aspects around the time of the Petersburg siege. Documentaries like these can accomplish much.

The nature of how the country treated its dead and wounded changed drastically at this time, more than I had thought. Prior to the war, pension systems, healthcare, and other services for soldiers really didn't exist. Then the war happened. A new demand was created for these services, which was met by the federal government.

One thing that I remembered while listening to the letters being read was the Sullivan Ballou letter from the beginning of the term. In both documentaries the spoken words were meant to evoke a sympathetic response from the viewers. Whether the originals or not, they do help to paint a picture of the thoughts of the soldiers before and after battles.

Brotherhood was a theme I saw at work here. Soldiers would take it upon themselves to make sure that the families of the dead could hear what happened and how it happened. The religious beliefs of the day certainly helped fuel this brotherhood. There is no greater love than one laying down his or her life for friends.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: The Impact

by Timothy Wilson-Haley - Sunday, March 9, 2014, 8:36 AM

I hadn't thought about the Sullivan Ballou letter. That's an excellent point. It did strike me as an odd performance; I don't think somebody dying of a shell wound to the shoulder would be able to speak so calmly. However, as before with the Ballou letter, it helps us understand the mentality of the people at the time but doesn't give us very much reliable information. An interesting similarity between these two letters from opposing sides is the subtle pride for having died for the cause.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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The Responsibilities That Come With Death

by Jacob Nelson - Wednesday, March 5, 2014, 9:03 PM

I think the most significant part of this particular documentary that bolstered my existing knowledge of the Civil War was just how unprepared the entire country was for the magnitude of death that the Civil War created. In many ways the Civil War prepared our country for the right way to handle mass casualties and deaths during armed conflicts. This war probably helped initiate better infrastructure around the country, especially in the field of health care. Another aspect of this documentary I found extremely interesting was that of the "good death." This concept of a "good death" during a brutal conflict made me think

about how it may relate to soldiers dying around the world in modern day conflicts. Our modern culture today has lost the close relationship with death that people living during the Civil War previously had. Death back then was a concept that was constantly thought of in everyday life. The approach to death was generally based on Christian principles and values. People died with their loved ones around them and generally inside their very own home which was considered a "good death." Obviously our current federal government is doing much better now when it comes to soldiers who have been injured or killed in armed conflicts. Roughly seven million lives were lost in the Civil War, which is an almost unimaginable loss of life for a single war. There were greater amounts of loss of life in single battles than were fought prior to the Civil War. Since there were less people living in the United States during the Civil War era and such a huge number of people killed during the conflict, almost everyone was affected by this loss of life in one way or another. To add on to these horrors, there was little procedure on identifying individuals that were killed during battle, thus many just lay dead on the battlefield for weeks. During modern day times our federal government has taken a greater responsibility in dealing with death. For example, we now have more suitable hospitals and cemeteries solely meant for soldiers who have been killed in war. We also have different organizations that have been developed over time such as the Red Cross that play a positive role in dealing with casualties in various conflicts around the world. The Civil War essentially gave us the framework for how to respectfully care for an ailing soldier or person and to provide the most comfort possible for that individual.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: The Responsibilities That Come With Death



by Jacob Nelson - Wednesday, March 5, 2014, 9:15 PM

Roughly 1.2 million people died in the Civil War.* Sorry I misheard the women speaking in the documentary. My apologies!

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: Death and the Civil War



by Kristine Wallace - Wednesday, March 5, 2014, 9:35 PM

This was by far one of the saddest pieces I believe I have seen to date. If the stories of the dead, photos and music do not get to a person, I do not know what doesn't.

In saying that, I think the biggest thing that stood out for me was the overwhelming number of dead, 750,000 which would be comparatively 7 million to today's society. That number just dulls the mind to believe that our own country could bring such mass massacre on our own people.

As far as the religious aspect, although there is a large percentage of people that either go to church or practice prayer today, back then in the mid-1800s church/the bible/prayer was obviously MUCH more a part of daily life than today. I believe this had an enormous impact on people's views of death. They of course wanted people to have the "good death" as they called it and in light of the war, people saw that this did not happen to many, many

soldiers.

Today's society is also decentitized to death on a larger scale as we see it every day on television, movies and other media. It is appalling yes, but we see it on a much different scale than the people of the Civil War era did. I do not believe they were prepared AT ALL for what happened and the fact that almost every family in America was touched in some form.

It was extremely sad that a lot of soldiers prepared for their deaths by writing letters before the battles and carried the pictures of loved ones. I believe it was their only hope that if death did come, at least their loved ones would have some comfort in knowing that the soldier was thinking of them in what was to be their final hours.

Another interesting aspect, was the article which explained a good number of programs that came about because of the Civil War...from dog tags to Memorial Day, a large amount of things changed for the better. I have to say that this was a great final forum!!

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Importance of this war



by Bryan Sanders - Saturday, March 8, 2014, 1:13 AM

You brought up a good point. Memorial Day, dog tags, and so much more had their start in the civil war. This war changed everything, from the way we treat our soldiers to how government administers services. What it did was create things and practices we often take for granted today.

If the war had never happened, we may never have had a memorial day or dog tags. Soldier benefits would not have existed. Most importantly, there would not have been a great appreciation for the lives of our soldiers. The people whether in government or out came to care for the fallen and the soldier. The religious faith of the time helped complement this spirit of patriotism, compassion, and sacrifice.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: Death and the Civil War



by Kylie Emory - Saturday, March 8, 2014, 9:16 AM

Kristine,

I also agree that religion was a much larger part of people's everyday life than it is today. Families' entire social life was generally centered around their church community, from Sunday services, to bible studies, to prayer groups. So it seems only natural that this life centered around God is carried with the soldiers to the battlefield. I am sure it provided them peace and comfort and familiarity in their final moments. So while they may not have had a "good" death, they were at least able to surround themselves with these small comforts.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: Death and the Civil War

by Benjamin Trautman - Sunday, March 9, 2014, 7:42 PM

I really enjoyed your idea that our society has desensitized death. That the media, music, and movies have played a large role in our image of death. I could argue that we are a little more sensitive to death now days because we don't see it as often as during the Civil War era, we have vaccines to take our worries away about simple viruses, whereas people in the 1800s who got sick did not necessarily know what they had or if it was deadly. But I too agree that the things we watch on a screen and listen to have glorified death in a way and that allows us to think of it as a lesser thing. Or then again some movies and music focus on death as something very dark and mysterious, maybe allowing one to become more sensitive and worrisome to death. I think it matters for each individual, but the artificial deaths we see in movies do desensitize dieing.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Tragedy in death

by Debra Moran - Wednesday, March 5, 2014, 10:00 PM

This was a sad and tragic video I have known the numbers but now I heard the voices. I would like to watch more of the video. I think it becomes easy to forget about the death of soldiers when it is not affecting us personally it becomes a generalized thing and this video brought them to the forefront 152 years later. The Military has come a long way since the Civil War in regards to benefits, healthcare, and death benefits; it has come even further since post 9/11. They are very careful with our boys and provide well for the families of deceased soldiers. Soldiers fill out their wills and plan their funerals before deployment so the families don't have to worry about anything but grieving and counselors are provided for that.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: Civil War deaths

by Jacob Hutchins - Wednesday, March 5, 2014, 10:12 PM

I've often wondered how families coped with the terrible loss during this time. There were regiments that suffered 100% casualties- how hard it must have been for some small town in Alabama to lose every single young man that went away. I appreciate the length both Burns brothers have gone to in order to human a conflict that claimed lives in the hundreds of thousands. The documentary "Death and the Civil War" appears to also do a strong justice toward pressing home various detail of the conflict that ravaged families and communities. I find this alternative documentary fascinating, and in the process of downloading the full version for further study.....

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: Civil War deaths

by Melinda Parks - Sunday, March 9, 2014, 10:11 PM

One of the things I appreciate about the Burns videos is their use of personal letters and quotes. It makes it seem that much more real and immediate--and tragic. I, too, was struck whenever the video would mention that a regiment suffered 100% casualties. I cannot imagine how horrible that would be for those back home. I honestly don't know how I would cope with that--friends and family members gone, just like that.

I think Ric Burns is right when he says, "The Civil War is something that gets so easily converted into a military narrative, into, understandably, a narrative of emancipation." Often we see the big picture and miss the details that show the spirit of the people who fought in this war and the terrible losses their families suffered. I appreciate the efforts of the Burns brothers to bring some of the details to the public.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: Civil War deaths

by Debra Moran - Sunday, March 9, 2014, 11:31 PM

I am going to get the full version as well I think there is a lot to learn from this documentary, I feel that the Burns did an amazing job making these four years of incredible history come alive.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Focus

by Christopher Plourde - Wednesday, March 5, 2014, 10:15 PM

The first thing that came to mind in watching this documentary is the criticisms that were levied against Ken burns' Civil War documentaries talking about what it did not include. This documentary shows the wealth of detail that comes to the surface no matter how narrow of a focus you choose in creating any history. This shows, among other things, how vast a subject this conflict was and how we could read several books and watch several documentaries and still we would still have much to learn

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: Focus

by Keeler McJunkin - Wednesday, March 5, 2014, 11:29 PM

I agree. We've seen and heard lots of criticism throughout the term regarding the way Burns has presented things to us at times. Yet the fact the size of the information

regarding the conflict is so enormous gets overlooked at times as well. There is only so much you can fit into one book or one video. Even a set of videos isn't big enough to portray the entire amount of information.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: Focus

by Eryne Grant - Sunday, March 9, 2014, 12:34 AM

You make a great point about the focusing on certain aspects of the war. It is virtually impossible to include everything about the war into one film, yet the film's are critiqued in a way that expects them to do so. I think this also shows how it is beneficiary for us to be reading both the McPherson text and the Burns documentary simultaneously .

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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National Cemeteries

by Benjamin Trautman - Wednesday, March 5, 2014, 10:51 PM

One thing that added to my knowledge of the Civil War was the fact that there were no national cemeteries in the U.S. before the war happened. National cemeteries are defined by the dictionary as: a cemetery, maintained by the U.S. government, for persons who have served honorably in the armed forces. There were plenty of wars the U.S. became involved in before the Civil War. Though many of these wars were not nearly met with the magnitude of the Civil War, but there was the war of 1812, the Mexican-American war, and of course the revolutionary war. I am very surprised the U.S. government did not nationally recognize the fallen patriots in the Revolutionary War. The government did not build a cemetery for these noble people, how could they not even think of doing this, what kind of respect did the government have towards it's people back then? Or maybe death was looked at much differently back then, as explained in the documentary. It is dis-heartening to hear the lack of national cemeteries, but I guess some would argue that most of those fallen soldiers preferred to be buried at home, that's if they were found.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: National Cemeteries

by Joyce Garipey - Thursday, March 6, 2014, 4:38 PM

I just mentioned in another post that I couldn't understand the lack of cemeteries either. The Civil War was not the first war that Americans participated in. There were other wars that had plenty of casualties, although I do realize that the Civil War had a much higher amount of casualties, it still seems as though there still should have been a national cemetery.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: National Cemeteries



by Katherine Frank - Friday, March 7, 2014, 8:36 AM

Hi Benjamin

I wonder if not for the Civil War, would we have become The United States of America or would we still be Many States Next to Each Other in America? As in Europe and South Africa where there are many small countries next to each other with no common government. The war was a national catastrophe causing the government to really become a government of and for the people, to create hospitals, cemeteries, pensions and notification practices. Such a shame it took so much death to create this united country as shown by these films..

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: National Cemeteries



by Lauren Grant - Sunday, March 9, 2014, 10:46 AM

I did not know that there were no national cemeteries in the U.S. before the Civil War. I was also surprised that there were none for the past wars such as the Revolutionary War, but I guess that the deaths were low enough that people were able to bury their loved ones in their own cemeteries. I think that instead of them not recognizing them, most people were very religious and probably wanted the fallen men to be buried in the cemeteries in their home towns next to family members that have passed. The high number of deaths in the Civil War made sending all of the bodies back home to be buried and even identifying them all nearly impossible. I think that was the main reason for them to open national cemeteries as well as to recognize the men that had fallen during the war.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

2

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Re: Death and the Civil War



by Tiffani Brizendine Schnetzer - Wednesday, March 5, 2014, 11:49 PM

I still can't get over the sheer amount of death in the Civil War. I can see how it happened, new technologies led to unexplored tactics which in combination with so many other factors such as lack of hospitals and lack of medical understanding, meant the Civil War worked as a guinea pig for this new style of war. There were many trials and errors, causing devastating results. Even knowing this though, I don't think I'll ever be able to wrap my head around the number of casualties and deaths in the war, not to mention the way it impacted individuals who encountered it.

One of the many reasons I can't understand the way death was experienced by soldiers, is that times are so different from how they were then. Before the Civil War, as mentioned in the clip, death was extremely intimate and religious. Something that generally happened at home while you were surrounded by loved ones and religious figures. This makes the deaths during the war all the more horrible. As has been stressed throughout this class, the boys who died on the field were generally alone. Even if they were alive but injured, they

could be alone for hours before someone got to them. It must have been a shocking difference for them compared to what they had seen of death growing up, especially from a religious viewpoint.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: Death and the Civil War

by Jacob Nelson - Thursday, March 6, 2014, 6:30 PM

I agree with you that the sheer amount of death and destruction during the Civil War was simply appalling. I also agree that dying on a battlefield during the Civil War era was some what different from the way people currently die during conflict. In the video we watched for this forum we learned quite a bit about the "good death." Back then there was a huge emphasis at dying at peace with god and surrounded by family. Obviously during the Civil War there were huge scores of men on both sides that didn't die in such an ideal circumstance. Many died bleeding out on the battlefield, from infection, and disease. However, those who were lucky enough to be taken back to camp often died with their comrades by there side such as the man from the Confederacy mentioned in the video.

As much as I want to think that the people that die in armed conflicts around the world today die in more comfort than they did back then I still don't think thats the case. While medical care has drastically improved since the Civil War many people in wars still die dar away from there homes without the comfort of there families.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: Death and the Civil War

by Tiffani Brizendine Schnetzer - Sunday, March 9, 2014, 11:53 PM

While it can't be denied that people still die horrible and lonely deaths in war today, I would argue that most of them have a much better chance at life than they ever did in the Civil War. So many of the deaths in the Civil War could have been prevented with modern medicine. For example those who died while having limbs amputated, could have had those limbs removed today, lived, and we would have been able to prevent more of the pain than the soldiers of the Civil War had to suffer.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: Death and the Civil War

by Kylie Emory - Saturday, March 8, 2014, 9:38 AM

How is the federal government doing "now", as opposed to "then" when it comes to soldiers who have been injured or killed?

The soldiers in the Civil War were often unidentifiable when killed, families may never have received notice, and if they did it was in the form of a letter. Now we have dog tags to identify the soldiers, and extensive records kept on each member of the military and their families. Immediate family members are notified in person as soon as possible of the death of their loved ones. Spouses and children of the deceased receive many benefits including life insurance funds, continued healthcare, and continued emotional support from the military community.

Soldiers injured in the Civil War were lucky if they even received medical care in time to save them. If they did receive care it was unsanitary, rushed, and generally resulted in the amputation of the injured limb to reduce the risk of infection. If they survived they received no compensation for their injury from the government. Today, injured military have access to state of the art medical treatment, and disability benefits.

Thanks to the Civil War we now have these benefits. It brought about the Sanitary Commission, Memorial Day, dog tags, more modern types of weaponry to protect our soldiers, as well as many advances in medical care.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Religion and Death

by Lauren Grant - Sunday, March 9, 2014, 10:59 AM

Our modern culture has lost the assurance that religion brought to the loved one's of the one who died when it came to understanding their death. With religion they could understand that God was with them on the battlefield when they died while today most people would feel unsatisfied and troubled with burden. A perfect death before the Civil War was being surrounded by loved ones at home. Today, a good death is often in a hospital or retirement home when someone passes without pain and to many people having a family member near by is still important. I also think that since religion was such a big part of everyday life, communities would come together to help the people who lost a loved one. Church communities could pray for soldiers and give peace to the family remembers. Religion could have also helped the soldiers feel at peace with death when it came to them on the battlefield.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Religion, death, and prayer

by Bryan Sanders - Sunday, March 9, 2014, 11:09 PM

Religion did indeed bring meaning to the lives of soldiers on both sides of the conflict. It brought them comfort and assurance knowing that they were fighting for their country and their God

In the world we live in that is often dominated by church and state separation, it can be hard for people to realize just how important this was and often still is to soldiers.

I'll post a link with more info regarding what is currently happening to prayer in the armed forces.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: Religion, death, and prayer



by Timothy Wilson-Haley - Sunday, March 9, 2014, 11:36 PM

I agree that religion is an extremely important aspect in many soldiers lives, and deaths. As you wrote, soldiers on both sides of this conflict truly believed they were fighting for their god, that theirs was the greater good, that they couldn't fail if they kept their faith. Burns quoted Lincoln to have said something along the lines of "only one can be right, but both may be wrong". Just because a soldier claims to have deep faith in god doesn't mean their cause is noble and just. Sometimes the most horrible causes are fought by those with a deep belief in its righteousness. My point is, separation of church and state is not necessarily a bad thing, especially when there are many soldiers who have no faith in god but are forced to worship gods they don't believe in. How might it affect your will to fight if your country forced you to worship a god you don't have faith in? Or perhaps a god that is directly contrary to your values?

<http://militaryatheists.org/news/2012/04/army-chief-of-chaplains-approves-sectarian-prayer-at-mandatory-events/>

<https://www.aclu.org/religion-belief/aclu-calls-end-mandatory-prayer-us-naval-academy>

Just to be clear, the issue is not that religious military members are banned from praying and other religious practices. The issue is that many military members are being forced by the government to engage in religious practices that they don't want to participate in, as illustrated by this quote from the ACLU article. It is a very broad difference.

"In the letter, Jeon makes clear that the ACLU opposes compulsory religious services mandated by the government, not voluntary religious exercises by Academy midshipmen."

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: Religion and Death



by Tiffani Brizendine Schnetzer - Sunday, March 9, 2014, 11:48 PM

I'm not a particularly religious person, but if one of my friends or family members who are overseas died alone in battle, it would be comforting to believe that someone was with them. This is why I think during the Civil War, civilians most likely became even more religious. Believing God was with their missing loved ones, was a hope people held on to so tight, that I don't think they could bear to think otherwise, even if they weren't religious. Hope is such a powerful thing, and can hold a population together, even throughout war.

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Significance

by Eryne Grant - Sunday, March 9, 2014, 12:33 PM

To me, the most significant parts of this documentary that added to my existing knowledge of the war was the idea of a “good” death that was a part of modern life in the Civil War era. I’ve never thought about how the war could have changed the way that people viewed death. I found this fascinating and something that never came up in any other sources we evaluated during this course. Also, I think the facts that they included about the scale of death in the war was interesting. I think the other two sources heavily relied on the facts of battles and the people who were involved in the war rather than the other aspects that made it was it was.

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Emotional Injuries

by Eryne Grant - Sunday, March 9, 2014, 12:55 PM

When it comes to the federal government nowadays, I think that they have to acknowledge that PTSD is common in modern day soldiers and is a major injury to a veteran, even if it isn’t physical. I doubt in the 1800s the government thought about the mental injuries that war creates. This also made me wonder about how many soldiers wrote about the mental aspects of the war in relation to being home. It can be expected that PTSD was just as relevant then as it is now, but we never really heard about it in our sources. If it was mentioned, it was very briefly and never fully talked about.

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Re: Emotional Injuries

by Jacob Nelson - Sunday, March 9, 2014, 9:37 PM

This is a really interesting point that you have brought up. I too am curious to see whether there are any documented cases of mental anguish and PTSD in veterans of the Civil War. Obviously in the Burns documentary we have heard many personal anecdotes and letters describing the horrors and death witnessed by the men fighting in this war on both sides. While there isn't exactly a direct link to soldiers fighting in the Civil War suffering from PTSD described in the documentary I think we can all agree that the sheer amount of death witnessed by the men fighting in the Civil War undoubtedly led to some sort of PTSD like symptoms in war veterans.

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Re: Emotional Injuries

by Melinda Parks - Sunday, March 9, 2014, 9:55 PM



You're right! That's an aspect of the Civil War we hardly ever hear about, yet I'm sure there were many cases. It would be interesting to know how many soldiers suffered from it during and after the Civil War. I also wonder how it was viewed by their peers. After all, they wouldn't have known what it was, exactly...at least they wouldn't have had a name for it. It makes me wonder if any of those soldiers received any sort of treatment. This is a topic I'd be interested in learning more about!

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Civil War and Today

by Lauren Grant - Sunday, March 9, 2014, 1:32 PM

Today the federal government has benefits for soldiers who have been injured and benefits for the families of soldiers who have been killed, which did not exist during the Civil War. There are dog tags today to identify fallen soldiers and organized methods to safely deliver the soldieries back to their families, both which were not in place back then. There is better medical attention for soldiers who have been injured, both during war and after. Today there are ambulances, federal hospitals, national cemeteries, and many federal services for soldiers, veterans, and their families. Back during the Civil War medical attention, identifying bodies, and delivering them back home or even notifying next of kin was extremely disorganized while today there are systems put into place to properly do all of these things. Most of these systems were put into place though because of the disorganization that was discovered during the Civil War.

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Embalming vs Cremation

by Timothy Wilson-Haley - Sunday, March 9, 2014, 3:28 PM

The practice of embalming is another interesting remnant of the Civil War. I've always thought this was an odd custom of ours and that cremation makes much more sense. It is especially interesting to me that, instead of cultural attitudes adjusting to the reality that loved ones died far from home and their bodies need to be disposed of for sanitary reasons, the business of body preservation for transport popped up at government expense.

By no definition of the word do I consider myself an atheist, but I've never understood why people have such a hard time dealing with death, which means I also have a difficult time understanding why many funeral practices exist. While I'm alive, my body is me, but after I die, that body is no more me than the shoes and clothes I wore. From my perspective, this is a profoundly theistic way of viewing death. The loved ones I have lost in my life no longer have a connection to their deceased bodies. This is why I relate more to the contemporary attitude discussed in the video of the growing popularity of cremation. It is substantially cheaper, easier, and more frugal with limited land resources.

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Re: Embalming vs Cremation



by Tiffani Brizendine Schnetzer - Sunday, March 9, 2014, 11:30 PM

While I generally feel this way as well, I do understand why it was different in the 1800s. The intimate deaths that they had, meant that loved ones were there with the body the second it no longer held the person they had once knew. I feel like at the moment of death, it would be hard to dissociate the body from the person. In that moment and those just after, the body looks like it's host, it still feels like them, and all the person's family would want to do would be to keep the body that way as long as possible in a final attempt to hold onto their lost one.

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Religious Response



by Timothy Wilson-Haley - Sunday, March 9, 2014, 5:22 PM

I wasn't surprised at all about the role religion played in these events. In every society, religion plays a major role in all events and issues. None more than death. Of course there was a major religious response. The video interestingly notes that this level of crisis hadn't been seen in the country, forcing the country to revisit longstanding definitions of god, a good death, and the after-life. Society has always been forced to rethink such concepts as time moves forward and new crises arise. Some would say that's the purpose of religion: to help us grapple with the reality we're faced with, especially the reality we create. I would like to have seen and heard more on this subject, as The Atlantic article lamented as well.

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What our modern culture lost.



by Benjamin Trautman - Sunday, March 9, 2014, 6:33 PM

Many people will say religion has become less active over the years, that it has declined with time. Religion offers a way to cope with death, it can alleviate some anxiety people will have when thinking about death and what happens after we die. During the 1800s, before, and into the earlier years of the 1900s people often died in their home rather than in a hospital. Death was much more visible and surrounding to everyone because it happened where you lived or in the fields, or in the streets. It was not tucked away in a hospital. Because of this religion was sought out much more. Our culture has lost a lot with the decline of religion, I think we have been able to fill our lives with other things besides religion, maybe due to the technological advances we have made, or some of the scientific findings that state there was an earth some millions of years ago. I think a lot of people lean on religion to set them in the right path, but maybe we have become more of an independent society this century. I would say people who live in violent and unstable countries use religion much more than those who live in safer countries. Death came in masses during the Civil War and people needed a way to explain those losses, religion was a perfect thing to make any sense out of the senseless deaths. I think we have lost faith

over the years and become more selfish. I think death has always been looked at the same way though throughout mankind, there is a place after you die and it is a good one. Now days I think that heaven or place of rest is thought to be more attainable than it was back then, the thought that we don't have to follow a set of rules to end up in a nice place after we die. Maybe the idea of what is right and what is wrong has slowly been pushed into a grey area over the years.

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Re: What our modern culture lost.

by Kristine Wallace - Sunday, March 9, 2014, 7:19 PM

I believe your right with the correlation between religion and death. Back in the 1800's people did practice a lot of prayer because I believe that they did death on a much different scale. They did not have the medicines and scientific advances that we do today so when a person got sick during that time, there was a very good chance of death. There was also a greater chance of death in childbirth as compared to todays standards as well as life expectancy was shorter.

In seeing all this, faith in the afterlife and an all-encompassing God helped them to cope with the realities of the life that they were living.

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We care for the wounded!

by Benjamin Trautman - Sunday, March 9, 2014, 6:53 PM

I think it is safe to say the government is doing a much better job in treating wounded soldiers than they were during the Civil War. Now days you get a medal for being wounded, back then you could drown in inches of mud. It is surprising once again the government did not learn from previous wars that if the wounded were left untreated they would die a slow and agonizing death. Who knows, maybe the Confederates could have won if they tended to their wounded better than each side had. I wonder how many soldiers who were wounded could have gotten back on their feet after rest in a hospital and care from doctors. Did the Union have enough money and individuals to equip each regiment or battlefield with hospitals and vaccines? I think so. Did the south? I am not sure but I would like to say they could have done a little more. Maybe governments did not expect the war to produce such high amounts of casualties, but that still does not render a valid reason to not care for the people who were fighting to keep your fancy political office in one piece. Now days the care we provide for wounded soldiers is a sign of respect the government has for it's people, "that if you have our back, we will have yours." The patriots who die were given a little less respect than they do now, possibly due to the lack of resources or geographical locations of battles and more importantly that most of these battles were fought in warm climates. Preserving the bodies was much harder during the Civil War than it is now, I think the government would do more if they could back then. Generals could not spare an easy target to bring back the bodies of the fallen, nor do I think the opposing side would respect what they are doing and not pick them off the first chance they get.

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Re: We care for the wounded!



by Tiffani Brizendine Schnetzer - Sunday, March 9, 2014, 11:40 PM

It's interesting to wonder how the War could have changed had the fallen men been helped more quickly. I hadn't paused to think about that. It definitely could have changed a lot of things on both sides.

I think part of the reason no one was prepared for the large amount of death and what it would look like, regardless of having fought previous wars, is because at the time so many people still thought of war as a spectator's sport. It still baffles me that people came out to watch battles early on as if the battles were a show for their entertainment. On the other side of that though, after watching the battles, the civilians should have cried out to their governments for better treatment of their wounded soldiers. I can't imagine watching men fall to their deaths in my backyard with no one to come help them, and not running out to them or running to the government to fight for a better medical system.

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New Government Responsibilities



by Timothy Wilson-Haley - Sunday, March 9, 2014, 7:51 PM

The occurrence of soldiers pinning tags with their names and addresses on their backs before battle was also noted by Ken Burns. It's an interesting improvisational way for these soldiers to deal with their own impending death. Dog tags are a governmental bureaucratic way of doing this kindness for them. Likewise, the formal visitation from a military officer to families of perished soldiers today instead of the old way of having the families read their loved one's name in the newspaper is a responsibility we now expect our government to fulfill. It makes sense too. Someone gave their life to the country; the country owes something to that life

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Re: Significance of Death and the Civil War



by Jacob Hutchins - Sunday, March 9, 2014, 10:16 PM

The most significant, notable aspect of "Death and the Civil War", to me, is the quality with which it is made. The variety of contributors, such as David Blight, and even George Will, provided a rich backdrop of opinion and interpretation for discussion of the subject matter. I like to wiki people that contribute to documentaries to better understand the bias they have and decided if it detracts from what I am seeing. Here are the wiki pages for David Blight and George Will:

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Blight)

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Will

I was particularly concerned that Will, who is a journalist and *not* a historian, would color his commentary some how. That is not the case. I found his dialogue to fit right in with David Blight, for example, who is a highly accredited and decorated historian. This type of effective juxtaposition, I feel, shows high level of quality in the production of this film. As we all know, bias is hard to master in the educational arena, and I think Ric Burns did a good job of selecting information and speakers that emphasized and expanded on a subject rather than presenting an bias filed opinion piece,

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Re: Significance of Death and the Civil War, cont.



by Jacob Hutchins - Sunday, March 9, 2014, 10:36 PM

I felt that the other very significant aspect of Death and the Civil War was it's laser-focus on a discussion that I feel we tend not to see with regards to the conflict. In other words, I found the very existence of this film to be significant.

Since, as the review in *The Atlantic* points out, this film draws heavily from the book "This Republic of suffering", I thought it would be worthwhile to see what I could find out about it.

Suprise of supprises- the woman that authored the book, Drew Gilpin Faust, is not only a historian herself but the **President of Harvard!** Here is her wiki page:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Drew_Gilpin_Faust

I gotta say, I found it to be a huge plus for the quality and (most importantly) the credibility of this film that it is based on a book authored by a historical academic so accredited and noteworthy that she is, according to this wiki page, the first woman to ever serve as Harvard's President. With the issues that the first Burns documentary had, specifically its use of sometimes factually incorrect information and photographs hat are known to be falsified, I found the involvement of academics such as these to be a really good sign. I know it may seem like im reading to far into this whole thing, but I place a lot of importance on the authenticity of information i'm trying to educate myself with. This film has a significant degree of credibility that I wish others possessed.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: Death and the Civil War, Then and Now



by Jacob Hutchins - Sunday, March 9, 2014, 11:01 PM

I've thought a lot about how our military systems of today compare with that which existed before, during and after the Civil War. Eventually, it hit me: there really wasn't a system (as far as care and treatment for troops and civilians) in existence at all before the conflict. The specific details of what that would entail, however, have been brightly illuminated for me through this film. I found myself alternately cringing and dropping my jas at the staggering figures, details, and overall information provided about just what it was like to not only fight, but die in service during that time. There is a piece of dialogue near the beginning of the film (at about the 5:20 mark,) that really sank it home for me:

"With the coming of the Civil War, the first modern war, the first mass war of the modern age, death would enter the experience of the American people and the body politic of the American nation as it never had before, on a scale and in a manner none had imagined possible and under circumstances for which the nation would prove completely unprepared."

This quote touches on a number of point we are discussing here on the forum, and I think it fairly summarizes the intent of the film. It really stood out to me. This truly was the first mass war of the modern age.

Looking more closely at that quote, It is true that there were plenty of horrible, costly conflicts swirling around the globe during the 19th century (the French civil war comes to mind) but this war featured trench war far, rifled barrels on guns, and armored ships, all of which (in addition to rapid advancements in communication and more highly developed battlefield techniques) led to a clash of modern technology at a point in which the practices and mindset of times was not yet caught up.

In terms of the "body politic", this quote also shows an astute observation. Never before had our political system had to deal with a war of this size and scope. The Revolutionary War, as important as it was, does not compare in terms of cost and damage, and neither does any of the other conflicts our military had been involved in up to that point. our legislators suddenly found themselves with Representative Democracy that was trying to represent itself into two halves- and the bodies piled up in between, Suspension of habeus corpus, land siezures, staggering inflation- these problems swept out governmental system into something radically different than what they had known. How were we to cope with loss after loss, sometimes on a staggering scale, while also managing to both make it legal AND pay for it? These were not easy questions.

And, to top it all off, as the film elaborates to such good purpose, there was simply no system in place to deal with those rapidly stacking corpses and wounded . At 7:53 of the film, I was again taken aback when the narrator pointed out that there were no national cemeteries before the Civil War! That was shocking! I just assumed that our military had always had some special place to lay the dead, but having no place at all was surprising, to say the least. And if we didn't even have cemeteries to bury the dead, it's no small wonder that we didn't have much by the way of taking care of the wounded on their way to the cemetery, either. The PBs webpage Then and Now cites a number of equally jarring facts about pre-civil war America, and it all makes me extremely grateful that our men and women serving today can enjoy a robust system of care and treatment that basically cannot even compare to the horror servicemen used to endure.

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