

Having read all the reviews of this book, I noticed a difference in the reviews, especially between the New York Times review and the Amazon.com reviews. Most of the Amazon reviews criticized the book for its bias, while the New York Times review barely touched on that subject. The Amazon reviewers said McPherson was buying into the party-line story of a morally superior North against an antagonistic South. Essentially it is accusations of moral absolutism.

The stories of the lost cause of the South and the North's crusade to free the slaves go back years. In the course of time, bias creeps even into the best accounts of this history. I'm thankful we will be cyphering through the details of this book because it will help us in the long run to see what fact is truly and what is not.

Another thing to be mindful of is our 21st century bias. It's easy to force 21st century views on the 19th century, but it blurs the facts and makes it hard to discern the reasoning of many individuals of the time.

The big issues of the day included slavery, but to say slavery was the defining issue of the war is wrong. There were issues related to the tariff, and issues related to the political power of the North and South. All of these issues have to be examined to gain a full understanding of the war.

I also recall the New York Times review when it took issue with McPherson calling chapters 7 and 8 the revolution and counterrevolution respectively. The revolution in question was the 1860 presidential election that brought Lincoln into the presidency, and the counterrevolution was one waged by the southern states. The reviewer claimed the real revolution was waged by the South, and Lincoln was the one who waged a counterrevolution that ultimately freed the slaves. The reviewer even goes as far as to equate the Southerner's efforts with those of the Bolsheviks and the French. This is definitely not fact, but rather a matter of opinion.

The second reviewer pointed out that the actual civil war itself didn't begin in the book until several chapters in, which is why we're starting the reading at chapter 8.

I'm confident the book will have most of the facts right, and I'll fact check if something pops up that may not be what it seems. Even the best accounts of history have a little bias in them. What you choose to talk about and not talk about reveals biases. It's true that in a 900 page book everything can't be covered, and in this book Lincoln's assassination isn't really discussed. In my bias I say this doesn't have to be discussed because most people are aware of his assassination.

In the end I remember that the best we can get on the civil war is first-hand accounts of the era. Even with the biases of that era, they reveal the motivations and personalities of the people at that time.