

I believe I will be approaching this book just as I would any other work of non-fiction—by taking everything with a grain of salt and supplementing my reading with other research. I doubt that it is possible to write a history book that will please everyone and reveal the truly “full” picture. Therefore, I will learn what I can from this book, but will certainly keep in mind that there is always more knowledge to be gained. This book is not the definitive word on the Civil War.

After reading all three types of reviews, the historical accuracy issue that most concerns me is that the author did not always manage to stay objective and keep his personal views out of the narrative. I hope to find that the South’s perspective and actions are better represented than the Amazon reviews seem to indicate. I tend to agree with the last Amazon review provided, which states, “Worth reading but don't use it as your sole resource.”

I’m inclined to trust all of these reviews to some extent. The writers of each review (excluding a few of the Amazon ones) seem to have a working knowledge of Civil War history. The reviews penned by the newspaper reviewer and the blogger have a more intelligent voice, yet the voices of several of the Amazon reviews tended to appeal to me because, while still coming off as intelligent, they kept a “real world” voice, so to speak—that is, they wrote the way many of us talk. This could be viewed as off-putting, but from my perspective it actually added to their believability. Each type of review brought up different issues with the book, but I tended to trust the newspaper review and blogger review the most overall because they seemed to be the most knowledgeable, although I was impressed by the Civil War knowledge of a couple of the Amazon reviewers. While reading the Amazon reviews, I tended to mistrust those that basically added an advertisement for another book at the end, such as “Why anyone would prefer this book over J. G. Randall's "The Civil War and Reconstruction" is beyond me.” Although this reviewer wrote out a long and thoughtful review that took issue with several statements made by MacPherson, the last sentence made me wonder whether the book is really as bad as they said it is.

I am optimistically confident in this book. While I will keep in mind that it may not be completely unbiased and certainly isn’t totally comprehensive, I still view it as a mostly reliable source. I will take care not to view it as the last word on the subject, however, and will strive to be discerning as I read.