

Andrew Ellsworth

1/8/2013

Overall, the source *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* seems like it will be quite reliable. The numerous positive reviews and recommendations for this book from both normal readers and historians alike is a good sign. It is important for readers to approach the book not as if it is a factual recounting of events, but more like a story. This story is the author's own narrative and according to many sources has somewhat of a pro-North stance. This does not discredit the source altogether but more so just reinforces the fact that it is not completely objective. That is understandable and means that the author was just being honest as he wrote the book.

The reviews from the more credible historians are quite positive, and make me feel like I can learn a lot from the book. Even if there are some events omitted or certain things glossed over, I believe this book will be informative. I enjoy learning about history and with all of the good opinions I have read so far on this source, I can imagine I will like it. Both of the New York Times review and the shorter one state that the book is an accomplishment in many ways, and could be the best text recounting of the period yet.

There are multiple points in the reviews that say McPherson has a military focus throughout much of his writing. This is something that can affect many factors of the text. Naturally, the novel is said to be less about every political change and idea floating around during the time and more about specific battles and military action. This intrigues me and also is something that could discredit the novel somewhat, since political movements and changes are very important to history.

Reading reviews from amazon show that some readers are upset by the novel and it's seemingly anti-Southern take. There is opinion and bias everywhere so it is not surprising for some readers to find the book offensive while some see it as spot-on. The way to deal with this type of writing is just to read with an intentionally objective mindset, and to keep in mind that the book is not inherently factual. There is not a reason to see the source as anything other than a very accurate and well-written account of the Civil War for the most part. Both historians and everyday readers alike agree that the novel is enjoyable.

I know that reading this book will be very informative and also a new experience. It is hard to find this type of history textbook, and the Civil War period is one of the most misconstrued times ever. I look forward to learning a lot and also just need to keep in mind the stance the author may have. Knowing the way other people reacted to the bias of the book will help me to approach the source the correct way.

Austin Crook

History 209

Civil War Era

McPherson #1

Battle Cry of Freedom Review

After reading the various reviews about this textbook, I am confident in saying this book will be informative and most importantly, truthful. The different reviews had many positive comments about this book. Comments such as “It is the best one-volume treatment of its subject I have ever come across”(New York Times), and “It is informative and fair” which came from the second forum. After reading each of these reviews, I believe I can trust the New York Times review the most. The review came across as the most professional and objective of the numerous articles.

The review from the New York Times seems to be a well-written and very objective critique of the textbook. It starts by acknowledging some background about the Civil War and explains that it is the most written about historical event in the world. I did not feel as though the author was biased or trying to persuade me to either side of the review. It did however make some very persuasive and general comments at times, such as “May be the best ever published”. These comments could be seen as uneducated or without factual evidence. But according to the rest of his review he seems to defend this claim with solid evidence. This particular comment referred to all books written about the Civil War and definitely would give readers a positive feeling about the book. Yet, it also gave what seemed to be very honest and critical comments as well. Some of these passages started with “Not quite perfect” or “Lets his vocabulary run away from him”. These critiques help create a informative piece of writing, rather than persuasive, because he writes from perspectives as a fan and as a critic. The writer also criticizes the maps drawn in the book. Later he goes into detail about reasons why the titles for chapters seven and eight were not as accurate as they could be. Due to these specific and honest critiques it seems as though this is a non-biased and trustworthy review.

Reading the second forum review along with the individual customer reviews, could lead you to second-guess yourself about certain aspects of this book. I was finding

myself believing that there are portions of this story that may be partially biased toward the Northern Union and Abe Lincoln. Even though this is a natural feeling for anyone to have when discussing the Civil War, it leads you to think that this book may be missing some important views or stories from the Confederate perspective. During the New York Times Review when it critiques the seventh and eighth chapter titles, it starts to explain that McPherson may allow his vocabulary to alter the perspective or thoughts behind the Confederates philosophy. One interesting fact from the New York Times review as well was when it stated that there “never was a Kingdom of Palermo”. I am not familiar with the Kingdom of Palermo to begin with, but when a critic announces that a textbook refers to a location that apparently does not exist it definitely does lead you to question some validity. But overall each review and critic consistently came back to comments of praise and truthfulness behind this textbook, which gives me great confidence and excitement about reading this textbook.

Two chapters in and I am thoroughly enjoying James McPherson's, "Battle Cry of Freedom." I approach college level reading with more curiosity than judgment. I want to know why and how people acted in trying times. What their mistakes may have been or their accomplishments. I feel as if it is duty to know about our past, paying respect to those who have lived before us. I do not seem to care what political views historical authors may have. If the facts are facts then leave it at that. If bias is found in a historical book then possibly you are bias to their word choice or placement of events in the text. Being bias in writing historical events may also benefit the reader. Say the author favored one side, wouldn't that side be written about more? More facts given and in greater detail. I think the question it all comes down to is the validity of the author.

Being historically accurate about every detail that you did not witness first hand can't be easy. I have confidence that James McPherson used all the records, books, and his knowledge of the subject to back his writing. What troubles me the most about historical accuracy is that people can be dishonest for any kind of reason. May it be the author or the soldier counting the dead bodies that lay on a battlefield. Or the Lieutenant told to explain his actions during a battle. I feel as if there are too many variables to tell a completely accurate historic event. As a reader we have to decide for ourselves what to believe.

I tend to trust the experts rather than the common reader for a review. The expert is most likely paid, it is their profession or they have a strong passion for reading historical books. The expert has their own site, either a part of a newspaper or magazine. It may be shallow but I trust the one getting paid over a person on the Amazon comment board. The Internet has allowed everybody to have their opinion voiced and heard. Seems to be much harder now days to sift through the bull crap.

I am very confident in this book and looking forward to the course. Though James McPherson may favor the guys in blue I'm sure it won't take away from the historical accuracy. The way he went into detail about the inner workings of the government before the war great. The process states and legislators had to go through if they were going to succeed or not was interesting. James McPherson is a professor at Princeton, and if you live in the same world I do then he needs no more credibility. The author sounds like a distinguished individual and he has my trust.

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.

Christopher Plourde

Instructor: Joe Escobar

Class: HST209

Date: January 11, 2014

It is difficult, at best, to come to a conclusion as to the veracity of any historical text. The copyright of “Battle Cry of Freedom”(1988) by James McPherson, comes 123 years after the end of the American Civil War. All who were there to witness those events are long dead, so any historian has only their words, deeds, various statistical data, government documents of the time etc.. to fashion a narrative that not only encompasses the events that have occurred but also set them in proper relation to one another, to weigh their relative importance, to establish the causal relationships between them, and, in so doing, give clarity and insight to the ebb and flow of events. To do so requires not only the honed instincts and skill of a scholar, but also a considerable immersion in the subject at hand. The list of James McPherson's books in the front of our text certainly shows he has “plowed the field” of this subject for a considerable time. No less impressive is his position as professor of American history at Princeton University, one of the most prestigious institutions of higher learning in this country, if not the world. While these facts give weight and credibility to “Battle Cry of Freedom”, they cannot, in and of themselves, establish its contents beyond doubt, or render his narrative of events beyond challenge.

But how can one not similarly endowed by experience and knowledge render judgment on such a text? Certainly through careful reading we detect flaws in his reasoning, a sequence of events that seems contradictory, or a cause, or series of causes, that does not seem sufficient to produce the effect that he ascribes to them. We can also fact check. This has been made easier with the internet but has it's own pitfalls due to loads of bad information. But without the primary sources at hand or knowledge of several different interpretations given to the same subject, our attempts to do so seem inadequate at best, as if we were trying to summit Mt. Everest with tennis shoes. This same difficulty applies to the reviews given as well. How are we to know what criticism is valid and what is not? Would we not have to know the qualifications of the reviewer as well? How knowledgeable are they?

There is one other facet that is of importance, that is mentioned in several critical reviews, and that is of bias. Several of the Amazon reviews harped on McPherson's “anti-southern” stance and that his book was “not balanced”. But if the reviewer was biased than anything that disagreed with their point of view would look biased, would it not? I have actually had some experience with this having lived in North Carolina for 20 years. There they still call the Civil War “The War of Northern Aggression” and insist that slavery was not the true cause of the war nor was it what southerners were fighting for.... they were fighting for the right of self-determination. While I can see their point of view, and know for a fact that they were not racist and know that they considered slavery

abhorrent, it still seems evasive. It as if they can spin enough verbiage the elephant in the room (slavery) will shrink to insignificance, giving them the right to a long sought victim-hood and, therefore, moral ascendancy over those damn Yankees. If slavery did not exist in the south, would the civil war have ever occurred? I doubt it. As for the term “balanced” I have always had a problem with this. The idea that the “truth” lies between two opposing opinions is problematic at best. Truth relies on facts. Of course, interpretation is the tricky part. But as long as belief proceeds analysis the process will always be corrupted.

The New York Time's reviewer criticism of the titles of chapter 7 and 8 seemed a bit labored. If you read chapter 7 the word “revolution” was used by the people of the time so it did not seem so much a judgment on the part of McPherson as it was an “embedding” of the history within his chapter title. The other review takes on McPherson’s contention that the outcome was not certain:

“While there is a certain merit to this contingency-based approach, and the doubt about the outcome of the war that follows as a consequence makes McPherson's narrative that much more engaging to read, it is possible he takes it too far. The North had a tremendous advantage in industrial capacity that allowed it to turn out guns, uniforms, and other military supplies while still keeping the citizenry prosperous; the Southern army was desperate for shoes and other staples by the end of the war. The Union also held a considerable edge in population, so that it could afford to wage a war of attrition against the Confederacy and simply wear it down. “

This does not take into account the war wariness that the north felt at the end of the conflict and that the will to continue fighting is just as important. By the reviewers reasoning the U.S. should have never lost the Vietnam war.....but we did.

I personally have an admission to make...I have read the text about 15-20 years ago. I enjoyed it then and I am really enjoying it now (I went ahead and read the first 7 chapters anyway). I have always enjoyed history and have been reading it for nearly 35 years now. I would like to think I have become a more critical reader with time so I will approach the text with a watchful eye.

After reading the positive and negative reviews for, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, by James McPherson, I will approach this book with the mindset that, like most books dealing with major points in history, this one may be a bit biased due to the author's personal point of view. While reading I will also keep in mind that there are three sides to every story, and if I ever feel that McPherson has inserted too much of his own opinion, then I will look up other sources and see how they match up.

The word "bias" was used in multiple negative reviews on amazon, and as far as historical accuracy goes, issues related to an author's biased view point is a bit worrisome. When a book leans drastically to one point of view or another the reader doesn't get a fair idea of what actually happened. However, unless they want to read a book full of statistical fact after statistical fact, they have to expect that there will be at least a small amount of the author's view point infused into the material.

Of the negative reviews the ones I trusted the most were the ones that also highlighted what they felt McPherson did right. The first review called "Too much, too small" states, "The beauty of this book is its scope in which it covers the war, the politics, daily lifestyles, North and South (I think its focused more on the Union), the economics, the issues and leaders of the era (1850's to 60's)." Then they go into the parts of the book that they didn't like and end it with a suggestion of a different book. This shows that they enjoy learning about the Civil War, and that they took the time to at least put thought into their review rather than just saying, "The book was bad."

Of the good reviews, I found the "This Is Not News" review and the New York Times review to be fairly similar and the most trustworthy. Both authors found at least one thing that they didn't agree with, and used reasoning to support these ideas. In the New York Times one the writer states, "revolution is a much abused word." And because of that he takes issue with the titles of chapter 8 and 9. The writer then goes on to explain why the over use of the word "revolution" in chapter titles might lead to reader misconceptions of the actual revolution.

My level of confidence in this book as our main source is pretty high. One reason is that it won't be our *only* source. The next reason being that as a student you put trust in your teachers to pick out material that will best help you learn, and I don't believe that a teacher would use a book that they felt wasn't up to par. I highly doubt that this material for this class is an exception to that.

Battle Cry of Freedom, a Pulitzer prize-winning book by historian James McPherson is a text book of great merit, but reading critical analysis and customer analysis of the book leads to several conclusion that can be made about the book. These conclusions will directly affect how the book will be approached. The New York Times review states a dislike for the titles to chapter 7 and 8. The word revolution being used the author of the article felt that this word was being over used, in the context of it describing the rise of the republican party, and that he should not have understated their gradual growth in american politics. This mirror an idea that is represented in the other review article from the forum post. In this article the author states that Mcpherson may have understated facts in regards to the north's industrial power, and population. So when reading this book I must understand that at times Mcpherson may understate the facts of some parts of history to give more power to other ideas he has in his book.

The source review I trust the most would have to be the New York Times review. This being a reputable newspaper, and its credential and merits it has received. In an analytical sense this was the most in depth review, providing the most critical analysis. It summarizes its strong points, while at the same time eloquently describing the way in which Mcpherson goes about describing the war from the republic in mid century, to after Lincolns assassination.

I believe this will be a good source for its historical depth, and its ability to delve into all aspects of the war. I believe that the book has value in describing what happened in the events that proceed the first shot fire at fort Sumter. The book also provides many illustrations, and in depth looks into the battles that the war composed of. The book is reviewed very well both by customers, and Critical review thus increasing its credentials.

Assignment 1: Battle Cry Freedom Textbook

“To each eye, perhaps, the outlines of a great civilization present a different picture. In the wide ocean upon which we venture, the possible ways and directions are many; and the same studies which have served for my work might easily, in other hands, not only receive a wholly different treatment and application, but lead to essentially different conclusions”. This quote by Jacob Burckhardt represents my approach to not just history, but education in general, as each individual has a different learning styles, it stands to reason that they would interrupt the knowledge differently and then put that knowledge to diverse use. My approach to this book will be to trust that the information is historically accurate, yet may have a flavor, or personal bias that differs from mine.

History is a montage of fact proven by documentation or papers and laws passed and written under oath, physical evidence, eyewitnesses, and oral teachings. I have always had a love of history; “old” things have always fascinated me. And history is much more than just the hard fact, it depends on the bias of the people living it. Having grown up in the South I understand the importance of oral history or as my grandfather called it storytelling. It was a way to pass down family history, and community history, or what my grandma called “gossip” which he would always say “its not gossip if I seen it with my own eyes”. History is taken seriously in the south, especially the Civil War, which is still passionately debated on many a front porch, and I have learned over time that if I have any issues with its accuracy, I need to do the research myself.

I am just not able to rely on the views of the consumers. Especially Amazon customers, as anyone can write a review and I don’t know the purpose behind their reading of the material. If they read the book for pleasure, as a textbook, or used it for research. If I were to take to heart any of the reviews that I read I would have to go with the newspapers review as I know he read it because it is his job. So he has less reason to either pump it up or knock it down and is more likely to just say it as he sees it.

I am hopefully confident in this as a source of information about the Civil War, as it was chosen to be used as a textbook in a college level class and with the high level of credentials of the author it does tend to raise my expectations for the book. Also the high amount of good versus bad reviews is also encouraging, even if it is Amazon customers the sheer volume of good reviews tends to impress. I do have to say that I will continue to reserve judgment as I have only read three chapters.

Through a thorough examination of various reviews of the book *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* by James McPherson, I have come to an early decision that I see the book as a very researched, accurately depicted novel about both sides of the Civil War. The Civil War era could possibly be a very difficult to write about due to the fact that the author would not have first-hand knowledge about the events, but readers have seemed to prove that this book is worth the while of reading. I am going to go into reading this book in a neutral stance so I can fully assess how I interpret the book and how the author stated his ideas. From the reviews I have read, previous readers have been impressed by the amount of citation and research that McPherson put into his work. I am very glad to hear about this specific fact about the book because I am very interested in factual learning and knowing that the information I am being told is historically accurate. Historical accuracy can be devastating in a non-fiction book if it is incorrect or under-researched. A reader of any sort wants to know that what they're being told is correct to have a peace of mind while reading more of the author's work (or, at least I feel this way). The sources I personally trust the most are academic journals and publications. I like to think that I have a good "eye" when it comes to spotting out faulty facts or iffy publications. Academic journals and publications are written with (generally) correct statistics and come from highly educated learners. I am very picky about what types of citations I use in my personal writings for classes, and I expect authors to do the same within their own writings. I am a little worried on how McPherson doesn't write about the Lincoln assassination. I do understand that it isn't crucial into the understanding of the Civil War era, but I very much enjoy learning about Lincoln's death and the conspiracies evolving around John Wilkes Booth. But, I'm glad that I am worried about this topic because I will have room for my own opinion about how McPherson handles this dilemma in his novel. Overall, I am quite excited to start reading this novel. Although it is "dry" like a textbook, the content seems extensively researched and well thought out. I'm highly doubting that I will be let down from this novel, and from the reviews, I don't think many people are who read it. The reviews give great insight into the piece and makes me very interested to see how I perceive his writing style.

Battle cry of freedom:

I will approach this book as I would any history book with some precautions but with knowledge that it is a story told from someone else. With all history books you must understand that someone is telling a story in their account of how things happened. This can be very disconcerting to some but to me I am alright with it and I try to just take in the information that is given. I think the biggest problems with this book were that it was too small and didn't cover enough information. Truthfully I am not worried about this book not covering enough information because the civil war was such a big subject you would really need a gigantic book to cover the entire civil war. Some saw that the book was biased and you really can't expect a non-biased view on this subject from someone trying to write about it. The issues that worry me the most would just be that for a current author this person has to be getting the information from other outside sources because obviously he wasn't alive during this time. That means he had to have researched and found information from these sources even though maybe some of the information was not completely accurate. That is to be expected though out of any war history book and I really don't have to big an issue with some small inaccuracies of this book. I believe from reviews that this book overall is pretty accurate and give a good description of this time in history. I trusted the reviews that had the most information in them and the ones that didn't seem to just try and downplay the book. I really liked the New York Times book review that had been published because that is a national news source and I felt I could trust that the person writing that article was honest. I also liked that was the longest review which gave a lot of information allowing you to really judge how good this book is. They gave a good overview of what the book was going to be like and broke down the information inside the book. I liked how they said it was a deeply satisfying book and the scholarship was up to date and very complete. This made me feel as if the book was to be trusted and it was correct in the information it was giving. I have good confidence in reading this book due to the reviews and information I have learned about this book. It seems like this was a good choice for a civil war history book to be assigned to this class and it will allow us to learn about the civil war from a correct account. One thing good about any information we can always check on this internet which is a good tool of any information we may question.

Assignment 1

Jacob Hutchins

1/12/2014

Hist 209 Online

Word count: 643

In answer to the crux of the assignments question, my early instinct is to approach the book quite hopeful of a great read and a useful piece of scholarly-based work. My bias, right from the beginning, is that I am already a fan of McPherson's work. I have read other books authored by him and have found them to be engaging, factually sound works that fuel my desire to learn more about the subject. My other bias, if all cards are going on the table, is a distinct aversion to Southern apologist/revisionist history that, I believe, can paint a much more favorable picture of pre/post-war Southern states than is historically accurate (based on my understanding of the subject). I have never found McPherson to demonstrate those qualities., and my reading of chapters 8-9 confirms this to my satisfaction.

My primary reason for having such great concern over southern revisionist attitudes toward the Civil War, known more specifically as the "Lost Cause" movement, is because much of the work done during the post-war period and into the 20th century was written in this flavor, including historical fiction novels such as "Gone With The Wind". I remember reading "The Red Badge of Courage" in school, which is a distinctly Lost Cause book. A quick wikipedia search of the subject (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lost_Cause_of_the_Confederacy) indicates that Lost Cause was a pervasive intellectual movement within the reconstructed states, and I always approach the subject of the Civil War with this in the back of my mind.

On that note, it is worth mentioning that I approach any area of Civil War discussion with this in the back of my mind, including book reviews. I felt the New York Times review was frank and honest about the books strengths and weaknesses. The author of the review clearly enjoyed the book, but still had enough impartial sense to acknowledge that nothing is perfect, including this book. I agree with his criticism of the chapter titles as well. I think the term "revolution" is not quite appropriate for the election of 1860; although it represented the beginning of a major change in American politics, that change would only come about much later and largely as a response to what I believe the review author correctly describes as the "real" revolution, that being the secession of the states. This type of honest insight makes me trust the author more than I would without it.

The second review author did not seem to be of particular use to me. He gave a short summary of some areas covered by McPherson, but most of what he said could be summarized with "Good book. I like it".

The negative reviews were, not surprisingly, largely critical of McPherson's bias. While it is clear to me that the McPherson does, indeed, have bias in his writing, I would

challenge the authors of these reviews (if it was possible to speak to them) to find me a single piece of scholarly work that is 100% free of bias. As Professor Escobar points out at the beginning of each term, *authors have bias*. The important part is to determine what that bias is and then make a conclusion as to how reliable you believe their work can be based on it. I have concluded that McPherson's bias does not take away from the historical accuracy of his claims and his work. The negative review that cited a number of historical inaccuracies in his work, ironically, failed to cite their own sources for that information. I'm sure McPherson got some things wrong, somewhere in such a complicated book, but another quick wikipedia search (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_M._McPherson) indicates that he is very highly regarded in the area of Civil War history, with numerous published scholarly works over several decades of academia.

That is good enough for me.

I will be approaching this book with optimism and more excitement after having read the reviews, than I had prior to reading them. My experience with textbooks has been that they can be overbearing and tedious in nature, and all too often redundant and boring. Having read the reviews, I can conclude that if nothing else it is an easily readable narrative.

I anticipate the book to make an attempt to be unbiased, but am prepared, after having read these reviews, to see the Southern Confederates to be painted in a less than good light in contrast to the Union. Though as stated in some of the reviews, an effort is made to both praise some of the Confederates and, as well, offer criticism for members of the Union.

I think it is important for the sake of accuracy and for the purposes of learning for the writer to come from a place of complete impartiality. When I set out to learn about something I want to learn about it completely, including from opposing perspectives, morals, and ideals. I feel that it is only then that a true understanding can be achieved.

Some of the reviews I read indicate that much of the Southern Confederate's disputes are not addressed in this book, and, "gloss over the main contention." Though I tend to trust more, the professional book reviewers than I do the ones of the personal reader, as far as overall accuracy, I do depend on the readers reviews to have value even if not always completely impartial, due to the fact that they are sharing their opinions out of a desire to share them, rather than for any form of gain or as their job.

I am reasonably confident that this book will be a realistic, and true account for the most part. Rare is a narrative that is not partial in some fashion or another. So long as in general the ideas and concerns of what transpired are accurate I will be content with what I learn. I think I am objective enough to be able to note that there maybe a few slight inaccuracies, and still take away a great deal of knowledge from this source.

That is not, however, to say that I will take and use this as my only source for a truthful recounting of these important events in our nation's history. I will supplement my assigned reading with other sources of information as well, to get as rounded a view as I can, while still remembering that this is the material I will be tested on.

Overall I am certain that this text will be an enlightening one, and will greatly develop my understanding of this part of the history of the United States and I am looking forward to digging into its pages.

Jessie Williams
History: Civil War Era
Assignment #1
1/11/2014

Book Review

Can you come to an early decision about how you will be approaching this book?

From the moment, I picked up this book I knew it was going to be one of those books that is going to be a lot of intense reading. Just by fanning through the pages, I could tell that I will need a notebook for side notes and thoughts on McPherson's viewpoints. Although I have to say, the maps I came across really intrigued me. After reading over the reviews however, I became nervous about how I will be able to understand McPherson's viewpoints as it seems to be a very political filled book on the Civil War.

What issues related to historical accuracy worry you the most?

I am taking this course to have a better understanding of the Civil War since my grandfather was in it. I have to be honest when it came to high school paying attention in class wasn't my strongest qualities. My understanding of this question is a little foggy. If I had to choose a worry, I suppose it would be how the Civil War has been reenacted over time and if their stories are what really happened or just some made up version of something someone once said in passing.

What sources/reviews do you trust the most, and why?

I would choose the Amazon reviews more than the professional reviews. More so because I felt like I could understand their choice of words and descriptions rather than just reading about how McPherson chose to write his book in such a political way. The views from amazon were about the story he told, not how he wrote it or lack of information to a historical moment in the past.

What level of confidence do you have in this, our main source of historical information about the Civil War.

Considering this book is 900 pages long, I would feel confident that there is a good amount of information. Dave Thomer's review helped build up my confidence in this book. The way he said, "Here he pulls no punches," made me laugh as if McPherson is fighting with the characters he writes about. History can be viewed a million different ways and everyone will always have their opinions on how something happened or how something should be done, with that said I am confident that this source of information will be just as good as any other person's opinion.

As intimidating as the book looks and how the views of others are not all that positive, I am still very interested in attacking this massive beast of a book head on. I believe that

the sources that are given in this course outside of the book will help with my understanding this era.

I rarely read reviews of books or movies because I find that my opinion of the book or movie often varies greatly from the reviews. There are so many movies or books that critics give low reviews to, but after I have perused the same material I find that the critics view is not that important in the grand scheme of things. In regards to our textbook, "Battle Cry of Freedom," after having read the reviews, I will approach it with interest and with some knowledge that there may be areas that are not entirely accurate. I am not a big Civil War buff, so I am not by any means an expert on the subject, not even close. However, there isn't enough bad reviews to make me think that it isn't worth my time and again, just because there are bad reviews does not necessarily make it unworthy of a student's time and effort.

As mentioned above, I am not a Civil War expert and it has been many years since I was enrolled in any type of History class, so any historical inaccuracies would most likely not be noticed by me. There is a slight possibility that I might notice that something doesn't sound like what I have learned in the past, so I would be on the lookout for anything of that nature. From the reviews, it sounds as though for the most part the book is fairly accurate. The reviews do state that there are some inaccuracies, so that does cause a little bit of concern. I am taking this class, for one to fulfill a history requirement, but also to gain some understanding and knowledge of an important part of history. As I have gotten older, I have slowly started to gain an interest in history of the United States, so I would want to feel that I am learning information that is accurate.

I am not sure of which of the sources of the reviews that I would trust the most. The reviews on Amazon are from anonymous people, so I have no idea of their credentials. What makes them feel as though they can fairly and with relative accuracy review a book about the Civil War? I have no idea, so I would not feel secure in entirely trusting everything in those reviews. The online blogger also doesn't mention any credentials, so how am I to know that he knows what he is talking about? Maybe his take on the book is inaccurate. Is the newspaper book reviewer an expert on the Civil War? Again, I have no idea. The book reviewer does mention that it is the best one-volume treatment of its subject that he has ever come across. But how are we to know how many other books about the Civil War he has come across? And what were those books? With all things considered, I think I would trust the book reviewer over the online blogger and the Amazon reviewers. It seems as though, since he is employed by a newspaper to give reviews, that his take on it should be the most trustworthy.

I think that my level of confidence in this book is fairly high. I think that since it is a book that is being used in this class as our textbook, that it should be fairly accurate. That is my hope anyways.

History of the Civil War

I don't believe I can come to an early decision about whether or not this book is entirely accurate so I guess that means I will approach this book with an open mind. I always worry that books or articles written about wars are politically slanted to the writers views and this book is no different. It seems "southern" writers put the Civil War in a different perspective than "northern" writers and now I wonder about "Republican" and "Democratic" as may be told in this book. Given today's governmental mess, won't it be interesting to see how much has changed? Or maybe not?

I come from the Viet Nam era, so all information obtained is to be questioned and sources are to be researched. I guess that the misleading news reports, government cover-ups and even battle result errors of that time have caused me to question all such information. My hope is that at this point there is nothing to be gained by misleading people about the Civil War era politics, policies, battles or people involved.

I would have to say I don't "trust" any reviews as I prefer to make up my own mind. I certainly will store the information from all 3 reviews and keep them in mind as we progress through this class. One review says "compelling read" and the other "dry, text like" so right there you have conflicting opinions. Since reviews are just that, opinions, we will see.

I do feel that this book will be accurate as far as the battles are concerned. Battles won/lost are a matter of absolute history in this case, but the political climate, the reasons behind the battles can be slanted toward the writers beliefs. Two reviews did say this book seems to focus on the north, or be slanted toward the north. I have another book called "The Civil War Day By Day". It will be interesting to see if there are any differences of opinions or historical differences between these two accounts and I believe we will be watching some videos also.

I have been to all the big battlefields and read many Civil War accounts of battles, watched Lincoln, the movie, and I am still confused as to the political climate of that time and the real reasons for the war. I have read that northern settlers came to create good lives and a good society, but for the most part, southern settlers came to make money, as much money as possible and then leave with no thought to anything but themselves. An obvious bias I hope we don't find in this book. I have heard that slavery was not the main cause of the Civil War and that Lincoln had not decided to free the slaves. I wonder where the South's holding on to white supremacy and segregation comes from. I am hoping for some clarity from this book and this class.

Keeler McJunkin

McPherson Assignment

HST 209

The topic of this assignment intrigued me right away due to the fact I purchased my copy of the book from Amazon. I noticed when ordering the book that it had very high ratings from Amazon reviewers, including a majority of those reviews being of the five star

variety. Right then I thought this would be a good book to be using for this class. I couldn't

help but get excited to begin reading it. While at the same time, being a customer of

Amazon myself I know you can't always trust the reviews on the site completely. There will

always be people posting reviews that have a certain bias one way or the other and they will post their reviews in favor or not due to this. It was nice to read a couple positive reviews from different sources as well. Getting the view of a newspaper columnist and a blogger helped to reinforce the quality of the book with me.

I don't really get a feeling of needing to worry about historical accuracy very much with

this book. From all of the reviews I have seen, people seem very confident in the accuracy

of it's parts. It seems there will be a lot of information regarding the various battles of the war. This should be very interesting. To me the biggest parts of the war that could be disputed for accuracy are the battles. Due to varying personal accounts of what happened and also depending on what side of the war the information is coming from. I look forward to

getting into the book and see how this is done.

I tend to put about the same amount of weight into all three of the different sources for reviews on the book. Considering they are three different types of sources, I'd like to put stock in each of them and then come to my conclusions after reading the book. If I had to pick a single source of the three to trust most it would probably be the Amazon reviewers. This is due to the fact they are the most numerous and also the most diverse of the three sources we looked at.

Overall, after looking at all of these reviews I feel great about this book being our main source of information for the class. The reviews we have seen are all overwhelmingly positive, and they are from three very different sources. This by itself makes me feel good about it being our choice of book for the term. I look forward to getting into it and learning more about the Civil War.

After reading through the various reviews on the book “Battle Cry of Freedom”, I have to say that

it very interesting that there can be such differing views on the same book. Some people seemed to

love it and give a good amount of praise for the author as well as the material. Others had a complete

distaste for what was written as well as for McPherson himself, condemning him for being overly

biased in favor of the Northern side of view. This should not amaze me though as in the past I have

seen quite often completely differing views on works of literature. Anyone can read a novel and

form an opinion, but to see such a difference in opinion is strange.

I, myself, am very eager to begin reading this book and seeing what information I can gleam from the

text. I have to say, I was a bit nervous after reading some reviews and started to wonder if this

would be a waste of my time. But, as I have noticed in the past, I have differed quite a good deal

on other peoples opinions concerning novels as well as cinema. I feel that I have to come to my

own conclusions by reading and analyzing the material before I can take another persons opinion as

factual.

I wholeheartedly want to a piece of literature, especially one geared for a college class, to be factual in

historical accuracy and would like to think that the authors prejudices would not cloud over the

information I should be gathering. But, since this is required reading and because I love to read new

material, I will go into this book with an open mind and get what I can out of it.

Of course, in reading reviews, most people should take into account whether the opinions themselves

come from scholars ,professionals in the field, experts on the Civil War or from just your average

person. But even in this, a person should trust their own judgment in reading. This is where

things like fact checking and further readings on the subject come into play. I can read this novel

but along side of it check to make sure the material is correct and that the biases of the author are

not influencing something that may not be completely factual.

With this all in mind, I will go into the readings of this book with an open mind and pursue gaining

a more historical knowledge of what I feel was was one of the most interesting wars of our time. I will also take into account the thoughts and conclusions my peers in the class have. In discussing and

debating the subject matter we can all come to truths that maybe we ourselves had not thought of.

After reading the reviews on our textbook, I am aware that there are some possible errors in the book that will need to be looked over carefully. It also seems that the beginning of the book is more about the politics leading up to the war, not the war itself as we are studying, so I understand why we are not beginning the book in Chapter one, but rather chapter eight. Overall though it seems from the reviews that the book is well written and a fairly complete overview of the Civil War Era, and it appears to be an appropriate choice as our text.

Reading the reviews will not determine the way I plan to approach the book. When reading anything that is non-fiction I try to simply listen to what the author is trying to convey, without worrying about what other people have said about the information. This allows me to form my own opinions as I consume the information without being biased. When I have finished reading the book, or a particular section, I will take into consideration others opinions on the subject.

Certainly one of the main things I will consider after reading the book is McPherson's northern bias, and that there is a possibility some truths of the southern part in the war could have been left out, or that facts about the north could have been embellished upon, or perhaps omitted if they were not favorable.

It appears that the majority of the historical inaccuracies mentioned by the reviewers are small. I am studying the civil war just to gain a better understanding of the event as a whole, I am not really worried about the few inaccuracies mentioned. I am worried that the book may be biased towards the union, and I would prefer that it were a completely objective publication. One issue mentioned that I will keep an eye out for though is that the advantage the north had in men and supplies is apparently ignored. This seems like a pretty large fact to leave out.

I actually trust the amazon reviewers the most. They are not being paid to write their reviews as the blogger and newspaper journalist are. Therefore their reviews do not have to please anybody, and they are able to write the most honestly. The journalist has to please the editors at the paper, and his review is going to be biased towards whatever they want to hear. The blogger has to write to please his readers so that they will continue to frequent the blog, so he is going to write what he thinks they want to hear.

I have a high level of confidence in it as a source to learn the general facts and outlines of the war. If I wanted to learn about every minute detail of the war I would look for a different source that possibly comes in more volumes, as well as sources from authors in both the north and the south. I trust it because McPherson is a United States History Professor Emeritus at Princeton, and the book is a Pulitzer Prize winner. If it was not an

accurate well written account of the Civil War it would not have won this award.

In review, I am looking forward to studying the context of McPherson's text on the civil war, and I will be keeping an open mind as we study it. Who knows, maybe when we finish the course I will move on to more in depth books?

After considering the arguments for and against the book *Battle Cry of Freedom*, I have come to the decision that I will try to approach the book with an open mind. Since I have not read more than a couple of chapters I can not be certain whether I will agree more with the negative or positive reviews. If I try to approach the book with the mindset that it will be historically inaccurate or overall uninteresting then it will distract me from obtaining any new information. However, at the same time if I take McPherson's word as the absolute truth then I may learn some facts that are incorrect. By going into reading the book without any biases then I think I will be able to learn the most from it.

When it comes to historical accuracy I am most concerned with information and interpretation of the Confederacy and the main reason for the Civil War in general. Many of the reviews from Amazon complained about the obvious bias against the Confederacy by McPherson. This concerns me because if McPherson writes about the Civil War as a battle against good and evil then the interpretation of the Confederacy may not be completely accurate. Even the positive reviews express concern about some inaccuracies that the book has. However, since the Civil War is a difficult event to summarize into one book I think that inaccuracies are bound to happen.

I trusted parts of most of the reviews of the book. The review that I trusted the most was the New York Times review. Since it was from the New York Times I started out with greater sense of trusting than I did with some of the Amazon reviews because of the credentials. It is easier to trust a review that is published by a nationally recognized paper than it is to trust online reviews made by shoppers. The New York Times review was mostly positive and gave a large amount of praise for a book but also explained a couple of concerns which helped me trust it a bit more than I would a review that is completely positive or negative.

As a whole I am going into this class with a fairly positive amount of confidence in our main source of historical information, *Battle Cry of Freedom*. Although I will be attempting to read the book unbiased, I am slightly concerned about some of the historical inaccuracies due to the eleven pages of negative reviews. Since all of the reviews, including the positive ones, did not suggest using the book as your one and only source of information on the Civil War my confidence is not as high as it could be. The credentials and praise that *Battle Cry of Freedom* has gained keeps my confidence in the book positive.

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.

Nikolaus Torgrimson

Instructor Escobar

HST 209

1/12/2014

McPherson Assignment One

My early decision about the book would be to give it a shot and read it. The reviews had some small disagreements with the author, but most of them agreed that the information was fairly accurate and informative. If the read is too slow I can always put the book down. If the information is presented in a somewhat interesting manner than should be an easy read. I have had somewhat entertaining text books before. I believe the newspaper book reviewer is the most reliable source because they do that for a living, and they are well practiced at what they are doing. An amazon customer could be anyone who happened to purchase that book. I would hope that the book reviewer would be less bias than the others.

I have a fairly high level of confidence in the book because a history teacher chose it, and I would imagine that a teacher would choose a fairly accurate book while clarifying any possible mistakes. Also I appreciate any book that is not specifically intended as a text book. Typically they are more entertaining, although not always.

From reading reviews of our text book we are able to approach our assigned reading with foreknowledge of the author's bias. The New York Times article quoted "these defenders of the South doth protest too much," from McPherson and stated that "[it] is a horrible solecism." Hugh Brogan shows that pro slavery Southerners are the aggressors and that Lincoln was the great leader in the narrative Battle Cry of Freedom. Brogan also states that though the author is obviously pro Union he both praises the Confederacy and offers criticism for the Union, or at least certain individuals on either side. The third reviewer source, the Amazon.com book reviews, widely agrees that McPherson looks back on the history of the civil war in a relative or modern framework. Also one Amazon.com book reviewer points out that McPherson's knowledge of West Virginia may be slightly off and the reviewer poses the question "if he does this badly on one small area how can you trust him on anything else?" Without seeing the names and credentials listed from Amazon.com book reviewers it is important for me to take their factoids with a grain of salt, at least he or she concedes that McPherson states his sources often. The main issue that I would worry about McPherson's historic accuracy is whether or not he chooses to negate facts about the civil war while showing his bias for the Union. It's difficult to believe that he would win a Pulitzer prize for a single volume civil war history book by making up any facts but it isn't too far of a stretch to think that McPherson may leave out things that he didn't like. As far as which source I would trust the most to review our text book, it's a toss up between the New York Times article and Hugh Brogan's "Byline." The New York Times is a widely accepted news source for a lot of people, however, the author of the article, and his credentials, are unknown to me. Hugh Brogan wrote a book that I've never read that has the word "History" in it, his legitimacy is about as big a mystery as the author of the NYT article. Amazon.com book reviews are helpful when trying to get a consensus as to whether or not folks like a book, the reviewers' opinions carry about as much validity as mine though, they are anonymous people reviewing a book on the internet. I'm fairly

confident that the text you have chosen for our class will be interesting and largely based on historical fact, the book is twenty-six years old and has held up to scrutiny since it's publishing back in 1988. I don't mind the idea of reading a text who's bias lies on the same side as my own, had McPherson glorified the Confederacy I probably wouldn't be as interested in reading his book.

I feel like I should add that the first shot fired in the civil war is covered on page 275 apparently, which I think is why we're starting on chapter 8. Also the author of the NYT article found the names of chapters seven and eight inappropriate because he or she didn't see Lincoln's coming into power as a revolution in the same way they saw Stalin's 1917 takeover in Russia as a revolution.

Suzanne LeGro

History 209

Assignment #1

01/11/14

Through reading many reviews of *Battle Cry of Freedom*, by James McPherson, I have come to quite a few conclusions about this work. First, I have decided to approach this book with an open mind. Many of the reviewers complained of biases on McPherson's part that detract from the facts about the war. There were many reviewer issues with his supposedly anti-southern sentiments, one example being that slavery was (and is) the main cause of the Civil War. I have decided that I will approach this intimidating volume with a desire to analyze it in the best way I can. Whenever I peruse reviews of anything, from books to bars to restaurants, I take each review with a big grain of salt. I am the type of person who likes to know what I'm getting myself into, so I can then form my own opinion. So, when it comes to this book, I am going to approach it with an open mind, and a hope to expand on my limited knowledge of the Civil War.

In approaching this work with an open mind, I also need to remember that our biases can affect our work. I trust that this work was chosen because of its accuracy and depiction of the war. However, I am also aware that McPherson's personal biases could have had an impact on this work. Again, I am going to keep an open mind, reminding myself to double check any information that I feel is not fully accurate. If I need to take the time to do some additional research, I am willing to do that in order to gain the most from the reading and to have a deeper understanding of various aspects of the civil war.

I have very hard time trusting any reviews and/or reviewers because I feel that all of these people have some sort of bias. As I mentioned, I take any review with a grain of salt, and I have done the same with these. I feel inclined to appreciate the New York Times book review the most because of the authority behind it. However, the review itself was challenging to read and took time analyzing itself. For that reason I also appreciate the reviews by "regular" people because feel that I can relate more on a personal level to these people and thus can grasp more of what they are trying to express. I do find that their reviews often lack a level of intelligence and understanding that I have a hard time getting past when I am reading their reviews. All in all, I can appreciate what the reviewers have to say, but I will form my own opinion of this book and everything it has to offer.

At this point, having read a couple of chapters and many reviews of this text, I am confident that this book was chosen for this class because it contains information necessary to the study of the Civil War. I am just a novice, seeking to gain more knowledge of this event; I have to trust that experts in this field would not lead me astray

in my efforts to learn all that I can. I am going to dive head first into this text and all other materials that are presented in this class, so that I may begin to develop a great understanding of this war and its consequences. I am sure there are many more resources out there that can further help me comprehend the many facets of the Civil War, and I can seek out any information that will help me cultivate deeper knowledge of our country's history.

Tim Wilson-Haley

The study of history is a conversation. Contributions to that conversation must enter with facts and verifiable evidence. Such contributions can even be argumentative, but they must not assume there isn't more and equally relevant information that supports different arguments. Multiple truths exist. Plurality of perspectives is a strength. It forces consideration of as many frames of reference as possible. Constructive criticisms serve to scrutinize evidence and remind scholars and students of the potential plurality of truth, which drives the conversation into new apprehensions. Skepticism should be encouraged and all sources should be scrutinized to determine credibility. Hopefully, deeper understanding will result.

On one hand, criticisms that highlight the multiplicity of perspectives and evaluate evidence should be taken seriously. On the other hand, criticisms that make complaints of bias or too much emphasis on a particular aspect should also be criticized. Criticism of a perspective does not negate that perspective. Important questions to ask include: Is there evidence to support the need for emphasis? Is the author trying to help make history speak to contemporary society? What are the reviewer's biases? If there is credible evidence, it should be taken into consideration that certain points of history hit cultural sore spots. Of all the criticisms that arise, some are bound to exist for no reason other than that critic didn't want to hear it. Any source, review, or comment that denies the complexity of an issue should be neglected. History, especially, can be a hard pill to swallow. If anything, these reviews and internet comments illustrate how heated this subject still is, one and a half centuries later.

Precision with words is vitally important. Critics remind scholars and other experts that hyperbole and exaggeration are to be completely avoided. For this reason, the New York Times review is warranted in its semantic objections over chapter titles. Words such as "revolution" should be used sparingly in order to preserve the seriousness of their meanings. However, when new and significant changes occur, it can be difficult to find appropriate adjectives that accurately convey the situation to contemporaries. The New York Times is correct in raising such questions, but that doesn't automatically mean McPherson is incorrect in his word choices. These are issues for readers to contemplate.

Skepticism is always important no matter what is being studied or who the source is. However, the opinion stated in the eighth Amazon.com comment that "the very basic rule of any professional historian/writer should be free of any bias" is simply wrong. The incomplete nature of this sentence aside, complete, unbiased, and objective truth cannot be achieved by any single person. Everyone has a bias. Bias often simply means the author has a perspective and an opinion. Again, if there is reliable evidence to back up the claims, then the perspective should be included in the greater conversation. To insist that one source is biased, but another source is not, is inherently biased. This is the value of formal education. It teaches to include and scrutinize as many credible and relevant sources as possible. Part of this practice requires students to both search out puzzle pieces that have been left out, and understand the source's point on its own terms.

It is true that no single person's writings will encompass all truth. However, some writings contain more truth than others, and often times, truth gets vehemently criticized.

Raised objections to a perspective do not always negate that perspective's credibility or usefulness. All perspectives should be scrutinized. They shouldn't be discarded simply because they take a position, make an argument, and back it all up with evidence. Students must begin their studies somewhere. Source scrutinizing is an important practice. Equally important is giving due consideration to sources that present abundant evidence and research.