

Agina Hale

HST 209

I know that it might sound crazy to say that I fell in love with a time in history that equates to the bloodiest time in American history, but I have. In my high school history class, the Civil War was a quick and typical look at the war. It wasn't until my college history class that a lot of the questions I had in my head fell into place. I had an epiphany of sorts one day in class when we went over the actual numbers of supporters for the war, on both sides. Somehow 1.5% in the north and 2% of the south turned the country against each other and what followed was absolute chaos. I decided in that moment that if my academics could back up my love for history, I would love to major in the Civil War. I even daydreamed that somewhere in the question of 1.5% vs. 2% was a graduate thesis.

My point to all of this is that there was a time when I was being taught that the Civil War was a "good vs evil", hinged solely on the fact that slavery was bad. It wasn't until I did my own research that I got a bigger perspective on the war. I learned a long time ago how biases can really make a big influence. The war has been over for almost 150 years, yet the strain is still evident. I was born here in Oregon, and have lived here all but two years of my life. I am married to a southerner; we have often compared the differences in our education, and overall sentiment towards each region. It became quite clear how much each side holds the other at fault, and I don't think that it will ever go away.

After reading the negative book reviews, I honestly decided to purchase the Shelby Foote's trilogy. I have become so used to biases on both sides, that I really do look for the impartial truth. I find myself defensive when people make rude assumptions about

southerners, just as much as I defend some of the remarks of my own region. I study the “why” in history. Every event in history has multiple “strings” of cause. For example: World War II didn't just suddenly erupt out of nowhere. Politics, religion, culture, economics are just a few pieces of information in the big cause and effect.

I believe you can actually learn something from biases, but knowing them does help when you are taking in what you are learning. What I feel I learn, is the emotional connection. I will give an example from my personal life. Since my husband is a southerner, and a Texan specifically, he tends to be very defensive about slavery reaching Texas. He hates the assumption everyone makes about how much of the south had slaves. We are still talking about almost 150 years and it's something still personal. Another of his issues shows how bitter the south still feels about the Civil War. The fact that before the war, the south was an economically prosperous region. The war flipped the economics between the north and the south, and it's remained so to this day. This is still something that southerners haven't forgiven. Here in the north and those who side with the north have a view that we are superior because we were on the side of the righteous. History does have a tendency to lose track of facts over the years. It's like the longest game of telephone. These are all reasons to take everything you read with a grain of salt. Learn what someones perspective is as best you can before you read what they have to say. I will read this book with the biases I have learned on both sides, and try to find the middle road.