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1-11-15

HST 209 McPherson Assignment #1

After reading professional and Amazon customer reviews of *Battle Cry of Freedom* by James McPherson, and reading a couple chapters of the text myself, I am rather surprised that he was able to write about such a delicate and often fiercely debated subject as the Civil War with such wide-ranging approval.

I fancy myself a very cautious or critical reader. I've taken two college-level writing courses and made my most significant gains in Writing 122 under Dr. Jeff Harrison, where our assigned text was *Ways of Reading*. Combined with my own daily reading regiment, I've learned how to calculate what I would refer to as "assigned potential values" to any given statement or remark, and to do it very quickly as I move through a text and try to observe possible intentions of the writer. And then properly digest the overall motivation with the points being made.

I am very impressed with the New York Times book review. After acknowledging what an enormous task it is to write something new, enjoyable, and meaningful about the Civil War, the reviewer goes on to give it extraordinary praise. I especially enjoyed the review's negative remarks, if for no other reason than, for me, it is a mark of genuine and honest service to the book and interested readers. I have a reasonable understanding of subjective and objective work. Negative reviews on Amazon often refer to the author having an opinion. I prefer this, even if it's wrong. From the two chapters I've read, Mr. McPherson has done an excellent job of giving both sides a fair argument, and this objectivity is critical to a work as this. But, as odd as it may sound, in the end, I prefer someone that does actually make a stand, or golly-gee, a conclusion, based on, and as a result of, very honest objective investigation. And it appears that is what we have here. And I'm very excited to continue reading this text.

The issues regarding historical accuracy that worry me the most, and what I will be keeping a careful eye out for, is the evolution of President Lincoln's positions regarding slave policy in the South as the war progressed. In Chapter 8, it was briefly mentioned that Lincoln had offered a deal whereby the South could keep their slaves, along with other compromises if they'd return to the Union. Obviously, I will be watching out for more of this, because I'd simply like to know the exact truth about Lincoln's position(s) on slavery juxtaposed to keeping the Union together. I like everything I've read so far, but will not appreciate any glossing as to make characters more heroic than perhaps they were. But of course, I don't know and I have a lot to learn. And I'm quite excited to do so.

Lastly, I'll close by saying that I have a great deal of confidence in our assigned text. The wide-ranging respect it has garnered, especially given the topics' contentious nature is astonishing. Earning the Pulitzer Prize is very disarming for me and will allow me to approach the text with confidence and comfort, as it is clearly top-shelf material. But as an honest and careful reader, with much experience, I will approach this text much

like I do any other: with my guard up.

Chapters 8 and 9 appeared refreshingly honest, and I have been impressed. I hope to see much more of this as I read on and learn more about the Civil War.