

In the current information age, skepticism is more necessary than ever before. The easier content creation becomes; proper review of that content will become more difficult. It appears an age of 'Jenny McCarthyism' wherein pseudo-scientific claims rest on pseudo-scientific data. From cereal advertisements to college level textbooks, a critical and skeptical eye is required. As a reader, I hope to apply a critical eye to "Battle Cry of Freedom".

The reviews present issues of varying degrees. The New York Times offers that his choice of language is flawed. McPherson and the critic both allow that revolution occurred in 1860 but they disagree on the revolutionary party. Some Amazon reviewers note that only political fanatics and those that ascribe to a "mythology of contemporary American liberalism" would enjoy the text. At their tamest they suggest an anti-southern bias and at their worst they claim it's propaganda.

The most negative response is clearly from the Customer Reviews from Amazon.com but that seems the least surprising. Personally, I feel that the more anonymous a speaker can be the less I trust their arguments. Writing a review without attaching a name doesn't exactly require investment of reputation. Controversy, in its own way, seems to foster debate and dialogue. This is something that should always be encouraged in any field but in the age of the internet it is all too easy for discussion to break down into constructive-less vitriol. Bias can't be truly removed but it can and should be the intention of the scholar to present the material as candidly as possible. A sound assertion stands on its own and the most successful debaters are those that make an art of trying to break down their own arguments. If "truth" can be found it's found through criticism.

History is an especially difficult discipline to ascertain "truth". Even during periods when primary source materials appear abundant the information is often fogged by bias or subconscious assumptions. It is also enticing to view history as a series of dominoes or a simple cause and effect. The North had a larger population and industrial capacity therefore it would inevitably overcome the less populated and economically "backwards" South. Assumptions like these are easy in retrospective but they undercut a level of complexity that human activity always illustrates. It is my hope that the text presents more than just demography and production estimates. If the New York Times reviewer is any indication then this is not the case. I am excited for the literary skill they note in McPherson's work. No one wants to read a humorless recitation of dates and events.

Ultimately, a good scholar's intention is to foster a the desire for knowledge or understanding in others. A work that has value is something that provides a jumping off point for the reader. It is self critiquing and invites response. There is never a final word on any particular subject and new details emerge constantly that demand reassessment.