

Sherry Althaus
HST 209

McPherson Assignment 1

In my past history classes I have found that reading a history book is a lot like having an active conversation and this is my plan on approaching my book. The authors of history books want to tell me something that they believe to be true and important. The author, James McPherson is still trying to *persuade* you that *these* facts are important and that they are related to each other in a particular way. All works of history contain arguments even the ones that appear to be nothing more than stories. Therefore, my ultimate task as a reader will be to identify what the argument of this textbook will be and read the authors evidence and come to my own conclusions on whether or not they hold water.

According to reviews by both the New York Times and NotNews.Org the book appears to be written well and mostly historically accurate. One of the issues of accuracy that may be and issue is the fact that once the shots are fired at Fort Sumter and the war officially begins the book becomes more of a military history “concerned with the tactics and strategy of the war, with a secondary but significant emphasis on the political maneuvering and events of the era” says NotNews. One of the major complaints from the Amazon reviews is that the information appears to be anti-south and biased against slavery.

As an avid reader I have always trusted the New York Times. As far as a review that is the one that I think I would trust the most. The target audience is an intelligent, general-interest adult reader. I think that I fall into this demographic that they are attempting to target. The staff tend to be well educated and have experience in the literary world. The reviews that I would trust the least are the reviewers from Amazon. These reviewers only requirement is that they have purchased the book and as you can see by reading reviews, both good and bad, they are filled with a lot of negativity directed at the authors. Some reviews are downright rude. This makes it hard for me as a reader for me to take any of them seriously.

James McPherson has impressive credentials. He is a Pulitzer prize-winning historian and Professor Emeritus of United States History at Princeton University. What does this all mean to me? Well it means that he knows a whole lot more about history then I do. I look forward to reading this book and my level of confidence is high. I believe that the information provided in this book will provide me valuable insight into the civil war and I see no reason to doubt the validity of McPherson’s research into this topic.