

Customer Reviews Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era (Oxford History of the United States)

19 of 32 people found the following review helpful:

2.0 out of 5 stars **Too much, too small**, September 19, 2007

This review is from: Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era (Oxford History of the United States) (Paperback)

First, prior to reading "Battle Cry for Freedom", I read "Team of Rivals" by Doris Kearns Goodwin which encompassed the political aspect of the era. "Team of Rivals" was one of the best books I have read in a while which made "Battle Cry of Freedom" pail in comparison. My saving hope was "Battle Cry of Freedom" would cover more of the war aspect which is done, sort of.

The beauty of this books 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). It truly is comprehensive in terms of it being a single volume. To that point, simply the vast amount of information is crammed into the book and much detail is left out. For example, less than 40 pages (out of approx 850 pages) are dedicated to the closing year of the war when Grant took over command of the entire army. Numerous major battles and campaigns took place where a lot of detail was not allotted. I felt the author rushed through this part especially since it being a climatic part of the war. Another example is the assassination of Lincoln (and attempts of cabinet members) was limited to one paragraph in the approx. 8 page epilogue. So with the ending of the war, the book ended just as abruptly. The book itself was all bones and very little meat. In this respect, this is a good book for one who would like a light, general background on the Civil War and the era. But for those who are truly interested in this American War and the politics, I find there are far better books and one book simply will not suffice.

The book read more or less like a text book (dry) vs. a good novel. There was a review in which someone said "ever hear of a movie in which everyone was saying how great a film it was but when you watched it, you scratched your head wondering if you didn't get it cause it wasn't that good to justify the rave over it?" Well my sentiments exactly. This book gets high praise but I failed to see why it was so good. I

contemplated putting it down numerous times and being satisfied with reading "Team of Rivals" for the politics and Shelby Foote's trilogy (for the war itself). But I persevered. I did learn a lot for this book, do not get me wrong. But it was a chore to remain interested with the author's style and drudge forward reading on. I probably would not recommend it to a friend but rather the Kern's or Foote's books instead.

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Was this review helpful to you? [Yes](#) [No](#)

~~9 of 17 people found the following review helpful:~~

~~2.0 out of 5 stars **Kindle Edition has problems**, August 21, 2008~~

~~This review is purely as to the flaws of the Kindle transfer the book itself is a masterpiece I've reread with pleasure on paper over the years. Unfortunately the transfer is a rough scanned PDF type that is MUCH harder to read than other Kindle books. Caveat Emptor.~~

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~~Was this review helpful to you? [Yes](#) [No](#)~~

~~25 of 55 people found the following review helpful:~~

~~2.0 out of 5 stars **Disappointing and very biased**, February 24, 2001~~

~~By A Customer~~

~~Seeing all the great reviews of this book, I read it and found many things disappointing with it. The prelude to the war is actually very well ordered and readable. Right off the bat though, McPherson shows that he is applying revisionist standards to the whole conflict. The Civil War was in the 1860's, not the 1990's, but McPherson judges the conflict by today's standards. In case after case, McPherson bends over backwards to downplay the actions of the Union cause. Grant and Sherman applied total war in the last year of the conflict, which viewed from afar was necessary, but McPherson applies a different standard to the Confederacy in every way. I agree with the comment here that the Confederates had legitimate grievances and acted accordingly when they were invaded. The issue of slavery is dealt with in a predictable fashion, in a good vs. evil way instead of a more even handed approach. For those who want a great history of the war itself, try Shelby Foote's great trilogy (sorry it is NOT biased towards the south, it is impartial, which is why some are hostile to it) and especially Bruce Catton's Army of the Potomac trilogy, which brings~~

the war to a human level.

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Was this review helpful to you? [Yes](#) [No](#)

27 of 60 people found the following review helpful:

2.0 out of 5 stars **McPherson takes the easy way out and sides with his own bias,**
November 6, 1998

By **A Customer**

James McPherson did an admirable job compiling a wealth of information and presenting it in the early stages of "Battle Cry of Freedom," then dismissed with a wave of his pen to embark upon an anti-Southern crusade. He fell back upon the old trick of painting the Confederate Army as a sea of amorphous white faces, devoid of racial or ethnic diversity. He tiptoed around the thousands of African Americans, Hispanics, Native Americans, and the multiple immigrant groups who joined the Confederate Army and fought side-by-side. Where did he document the Emerald Guard, the Mobile German Fusiliers, the 1st Choctaw (or the other 28 tribes who fought in gray), or the Spanish Legion? This book is awash with personal antipathy and politically correct revisionist historical claptrap.

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Was this review helpful to you? [Yes](#) [No](#)

33 of 79 people found the following review helpful:

2.0 out of 5 stars **Does This Pulitzer Make Me Look Fat?,** July 8, 2007

This review is from: Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era (Oxford History of the United States) (Paperback)

This is an update of my review of a few years ago.

pg. 298- "The events of 1861 brought to a head the longstanding western sentiment for separate statehood. Only five of the thirty-one delegates from northwest Virginia voted for the secession ordinance on April 17."

On April 17 the vote from the future counties of West Virginia was 17 to 30 in favor, with 2 abstentions. Usually left out of this count is McDowell County, which had two

delegates who also represented Tazewell and Buchanan counties and voted in favor of the Ordinance. Lt. Gov. Daniel Polsley of the Unionist government asked his fellow legislators on Aug. 16, 1861 (just 4 days before they passed the statehood ordinance) who was asking for action on statehood. "He endeavored to find out if this was an imaginary or a real clamor" (Lewis, *How West Virginia Was Made*, pg. 231) and was told there were three or four petitions of some 700 names. How out of touch Lt. Gov. Polsely must have been not to have known that there was a "longstanding western sentiment for separate statehood."

pg. 298- "Voters in this region rejected ratification by a three to one margin."

The margin was less than two to one. See Richard O. Curry's "A House Divided". And in the 32 counties below the B&O rail line, there was actually a combined majority in favor of the Ordinance of Secession.

pg. 303- "Union military control of western Virginia was firm enough to permit the statehood referendum to take place as scheduled on October 24, 1861. The voters overwhelmingly endorsed a new state, but the turnout was small."

Small indeed, turnout for the 48 counties was 28%.

pg. 303- "Pro-Confederate voters in more than a dozen counties boycotted the election."

Both a) inaccurate and b) one-sided.

a) Inaccurate, because there were no polls at all in thirteen counties, and polls were opened in over a dozen more counties by force, using Ohio soldiers, who also provided most of the vote for statehood in Hampshire County. Some of those counties had voted heavily against secession, yet they needed soldiers to guard the polls.

b) One-sided, because it implies that only Confederates boycotted the polls. We would have to assume that the Wheeling area was 70% Confederate, since Ohio County only had 30% voter participation.

pg. 304- "About 4 percent of the people in the proposed new state were slaves...Congress did indeed require emancipation as a condition of West Virginia's statehood in a bill passed... in July 1862... West Virginians accepted this condition. The

new state came into the Union on June 20, 1863, with a constitution freeing the slaves born after July 4, 1863, and all others on their twenty-fifth birthday."

Wrong. 5% were slaves. The Willey Amendment freed no slaves at all on June 20, 1863. There was no provision for the freeing of any slaves over the age of 21. Children of slaves born after July 4, 1863 would be free. Slaves under the age of 10 would be free on their 21st birthday. Slaves over 10 years of age would be freed on their 25th birthday. There was no other provision for emancipation in the amendment. Without the 13th Amendment slavery could technically have continued in West Virginia until well into the 20th Century.

While I am only concerned with his story of West Virginia, if he does this badly on just one small area, how can you trust him on anything else? Why anyone would prefer this book over J. G. Randall's "The Civil War and Reconstruction" is beyond me.

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Was this review helpful to you? [Yes](#) [No](#)

2 of 18 people found the following review helpful:

2.0 out of 5 stars **You'll Cry If You Don't Like Politics**, March 7, 2010

This review is from: Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era (Oxford History of the United States) (Paperback)

If you a political fanatic and Civil War buff well then this book is for you. Personally, I am not into politics so that portion of the book was not for me. It took over 300 pages to finally get to the first battle of the civil war, The Battle of Bull Run. Everything up to that point was laden with hard core political reasons as to why the civil war was fought.

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Was this review helpful to you? [Yes](#) [No](#)

21 of 69 people found the following review helpful:

2.0 out of 5 stars **Fatally Flawed**, July 28, 2003

Don't let the Pulitzer Prize and the Princeton credentials dazzle: this book has a fatal weakness. McPherson shows flashes of brilliance in his thinking and his writing. The content is sensibly balanced and tastefully presented. The first half of the book covers

events before the Civil War, yet the ominous pre-war political crosscurrents are interesting reading.

The underlying problem is the relativistic intellectual framework McPherson applies to his work. His post-modernist lens distorts virtually all of his thinking. Thus, the South is viewed as "paternalistic". Lincoln's Christian perspectives are ignored. The central role of American churches in abolitionism is left out (intentionally?). In other words, the scholarship often gets lost in left-leaning ideological distortions.

Even more strange, we get psychoanalysis of leading Civil War political and military figures presented as if it is objective research. This is politically correct balderdash and McPherson and the Pulitzer Prize Committee should know better.

If you subscribe to the mythology of contemporary American liberalism, here's another slanted product from academia. But if you're a student of real history look elsewhere.

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Was this review helpful to you? [Yes](#) [No](#)

2 of 25 people found the following review helpful:

2.0 out of 5 stars **Historians should avoid exposing personal bias**, December 6, 2009

This review is from: Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era (Oxford History of the United States) (Paperback)

Many will debate the quality of writing, turning history into a readable and understandable subject to non-professional scholars. The very basic rule of any professional historian/writer should be free of any bias. Those of us who read these books are seeking knowledge. We are tired of mediocre media that lights from one subject to another. I would suggest that the author's bias towards the South is so evident that it eclipses all arguments regarding the War that is still debated today. As a Northerner who was educated in the North and never had any doubts that the North was victorious and correct was probably determined by teachers and history texts.

Then I moved to the South. I began reading History written by Southern Historians from Southern Presses and Universities. In addition, I have lived in the Shenandoah Valley, which due to the religious beliefs of the most of the citizens did not have slaves, nor do their descendants have the bias towards blacks that are so endemic in the

large Northern City in which I became an adult.

One of the books I have read compared two cities located in the Shenandoah Valley with one city located south of the Mason-Dixon line, and one north. What happened in these two small cities happened AFTER the victory of the North.

In addition to the tremendous loss of life and property, the end of slavery did not create a better life for the former slaves. Since moving to the South, I have observed the bias towards blacks as that in the North. Despite the fact that we now have a Black President, my unprofessional judgement is that the bias towards blacks in the North is equal to any in the South, and is tainted with hypocrisy that began after the Northern victory and claims of moral superiority. My conclusion to McPherson's book is that Northern Scholars are still fighting Our Civil War as an moral and superior victory of one region over another.

Scholars by definition of their calling, should avoid using descriptions that are more editorial than simply reporting the facts. For example Chief Justice Taney who wrote the majority opinion of the Dred Scott Case exonerates him. He writes that Taney was influenced by Buchanan and other Southerners. However he omits the influence of the other side on this issue. At the time the Dred Scott decision was made, Scott's case was deliberately brought into the courts and more importantly paid by the anti-slave movement. McPherson could have reported these facts, supported by documentation available to him, rather than rely on alleged connections between President Buchanan, which I do not believe are documented other than editorial opinions in anti-slave papers and pulpits.

McPherson describes John Brown as a "misguided" zealot but goes on to consecrate him. He states the South misinterpreted Brown's actions. He does not mention that Brown's action was also misinterpreted in the North by separating the action with their belief that the blow was struck against the evil of slavery. One wonders why McPherson does not mention what nearly everyone would agree. Good intentions do not excuse actions against individuals or society that are reprehensible.

If the North was morally correct in fighting this war, and John Brown became, and remains an icon in most of the North; which side was on the morally correct side.

No war in history has had the complete support of its populations. Certainly children and women of that age did not have a vote or interest in the arguments of the time.

Despite horrors committed by both sides, the rape of the Shenandoah Valley and Sherman's march to the Sea from Atlanta eclipsed any horror committed by the south.

The war was fought primarily in the South that did not intend to invade the North. The south claimed it had a constitutional right to leave the Union. McPherson, like most books and persons I know seem to gloss over the the main contention with getting all the States to agree to signing, was the issue of the right for any state to leave. Mass. was the first state to consider leaving the Union when Jefferson was elected President.

Speaking of Jefferson, McPherson continues to canonize him. Although a great writer, Jefferson basically was a great politician, with all that implies. Furthermore the man who wrote so eloquently of the rights of man maintained his slaves to the end of his life. A fact. And there is no record that he considered women entitled to the rights of white, landed men. Although McPherson exoriates the "greed" of those who wanted the southwest. The purchase of land "belonging" to the Dictator Napoleon with money the the new Federal government did not have nor approve. Nor did the sale consider the rights of Native Americans. The Purchase was perhaps the greatest success of any President then and now.

As someone who lives one county from West Virginia, I have become aware that the state is a black and white example of the North ignoring the Consition which specifically states that none of the original states were to be subdivided. If the dictates of war required such drastic action, one can ask why the Western Counties of Virginia were not returned after the War.

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Was this review helpful to you? [Yes](#) [No](#)

7 of 15 people found the following review helpful:

3.0 out of 5 stars **Great for reference, terrible for a read**, November 11, 2005

This review is from: Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era (Oxford History of the United States) (Paperback)

Have you ever watched a movie or read a book that was both critically acclaimed by professional critics and the public at large and were left saying "what did I miss". Well this is the feeling that I got with this book. I bought the book several years ago and I only got half way through it, since then it has sat on my shelf, occasionally used for

reference. Late last month I picked it up again thinking that perhaps now that I'm older (hopefully wiser) I would appreciate it. Once again I was left with the same old feeling.. what did I miss.

Yes the book is long (close to 800 pages) but I normally work through books at least this long. What I don't like about the book is that the author takes a very long time to make a point. I feel that his prose sometimes comes off a little long winded.

He goes on for pages to describe several events in the Antebellum South when a few paragraphs would have been better.

Anyway, I was left wondering "what did I miss" and once again the book is going back on my shelf. Although this time,I'm afraid I'll only be using the index when I want a quick answer to a question I have.

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Was this review helpful to you? [Yes](#) [No](#)

29 of 57 people found the following review helpful:

3.0 out of 5 stars **Personal Bias Taints Scholarly Work**, July 30, 1998

By **A Customer**

It is indeed a shame that James McPherson allowed his anti-southern bias from ruining what would otherwise have been a masterful book. He forgets that he was commissioned to write an unbiased account of the Civil War, not an indictment of the antebellum southern states. That McPherson is an undisputed scholar cannot be disputed. His book demonstrates an incredible command of the facts surrounding the people and events of the Civil War. Unfortunately, his personal views deny him the same depth of insight into the attitudes of those people. After devoting the first part of the book to the confluence of many social, economic, and political forces shaping the development of our country prior to the war, McPherson then ignores them all and lays the entire war at the doorstep of slavery!

Anyone who has studied the Civil War and, more importantly, the attitudes of the combatants, knows that two million soldiers and an entire nation did not go to war to free the slaves. ! Very few southerners actually owned slaves and even fewer were inclined to fight for the institution. Similarly, the northern soldiers fought for the preservation of the union, not the freedom of the black man, about whom they knew little and cared less. Undoubtedly, slavery was an important issue (and I certainly do

not condone it), but it was one of many factors which combined to bring the country to war. To mislead the uninformed reader into believing that the south went to war solely to preserve slavery is intellectually irresponsible and personally insulting.

McPherson was entrusted to write an objective history of the war and its origins. He breeched his fiduciary duty by superimposing his personal bias upon historical fact. Hopefully, the discerning student will know the difference.

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Was this review helpful to you? [Yes](#) [No](#)

25 of 54 people found the following review helpful:

3.0 out of 5 stars **A cleverly hidden ideology**, September 30, 2000

By **A Customer**

I gave this book 3 stars because of the amount of work that was required to write it. It is a work from a biased perspective. The Civil Rights movement in the 1960s made a profound impact on McPherson and in nearly all of his works and lectures on the American Civil War the theme of the abused African American lies just under the surface. He does not understand the mindset of the typical southern soldier, 99.9% of whom cared not one whit for the institution of slavery, but rather fought an invading Union force on the basis of honor and principle.

To this day McPherson **still** does not understand the southern people. On November 3, 1999, McPherson appeared on a Pacifica Network radio broadcast. Also on the broadcast was Ed Sebesta, alias "The Crawfish," which the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) considers "a notorious hater of all things Confederate who operates a Web page that is especially slanderous of the UDC."

On that broadcast, Professor McPherson said:

"I think I agree a hundred percent with Ed Sebesta, though, about the motives or the hidden agenda -- not too deeply hidden, I think -- of such groups as the United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Sons of the Confederate Veterans. They are dedicated to celebrating the Confederacy and rather thinly veiled support for white supremacy."

It is a shame that McPherson can not see beyond his own deeply held misconceptions of the southern people who fought the Civil War nor the southern people of today.

"Battle Cry of Freedom" is revisionist history told through the prism of the Civil Rights struggle of the 1960s. Try a search here at Amazon and on the web in general to get a flavor of McPherson's writing. If you are among the "politically correct" you should enjoy this book.

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Was this review helpful to you? [Yes](#) [No](#)

13 of 38 people found the following review helpful:

3.0 out of 5 stars **Good, but biased**, August 12, 2004

This review is from: Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era (Oxford History of the United States) (Paperback)

McPherson gives a good history of the war, but his opinions are evident. This professor is a strong Unionist, staunchly supports the idea that slavery was the cornerstone for the war, and has denied fact-based evidence of black Confederate soldiers. Worth reading but don't use it as your sole resource

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Was this review helpful to you? [Yes](#) [No](#)