



This Mighty Scourge: Perspectives on the Civil War

By James M. McPherson

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The author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Battle Cry of Freedom* and the *New York Times* bestsellers *Crossroads of Freedom* and *Tried by War*, among many other award-winning books, James M. McPherson is America's preeminent Civil War historian. In this collection of provocative and illuminating essays, McPherson offers fresh insight into many of the enduring questions about one of the defining moments in our nation's history.

McPherson sheds light on topics large and small, from the average soldier's avid love of newspapers to the postwar creation of the mystique of a Lost Cause in the South. Readers will find insightful pieces on such intriguing figures as Harriet Tubman, John Brown, Jesse James, and William Tecumseh Sherman, and on such vital issues as Confederate military strategy, the failure of peace negotiations to end the war, and the realities and myths of the Confederacy. *This Mighty Scourge* includes several never-before-published essays--pieces on General Robert E. Lee's goals in the Gettysburg campaign, on Lincoln and Grant in the Vicksburg campaign, and on Lincoln as Commander-in-Chief. All of the essays have been updated and revised to give the volume greater thematic coherence and continuity, so that it can be read in sequence as an interpretive history of the war and its meaning for America and the world.

Combining the finest scholarship with luminous prose, and packed with new information and fresh ideas, this book brings together the most recent thinking by the nation's leading authority on the Civil War.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Prolific and much-honored historian McPherson (*Battle Cry of Freedom*, etc.) weighs in on the Civil War in this compilation of 16 essays, most of which have appeared in print before—seven of them in *The New York Review of Books*. Revised and edited for this collection, the essays read like chapters in a smooth narrative that addresses some of the biggest questions of the Civil War: why did it start? why did the South lose? what motivated the men who fought on both sides? how do we evaluate the top leaders—including Lincoln, Jefferson Davis, Robert E. Lee and Ulysses G. Grant? McPherson goes about answering these and other questions in his usual graceful style, underscored by a thorough grasp of myriad primary and secondary sources on virtually every aspect of the conflict. He forthrightly expresses his opinions while backing them up with well-reasoned arguments, whether challenging the "Lost Cause" argument about why the South lost, or supporting the proposition that it was slavery—and not states' rights—that was the main cause of the war. This strong addition to the massive Civil War canon will appeal to all readers. (Feb.)

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From [Bookmarks Magazine](#)

James M. McPherson has written and edited nearly 30 books, including the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Battle Cry of Freedom*. Turf battles aren't uncommon in Civil War studies, and McPherson has a wide reputation as a thoughtful, fair, and readable historian whose insight brings fresh perspective to some often-scrutinized topics. Although McPherson intended some of the essays for an academic audience, each is accessible and worthwhile, and "displays an admirable transparency, showing the historian at work" (*Baltimore Sun*). All pieces have been updated and revised, and each bears the stamp of McPherson's keen intellect applied to topics that continue to generate discussion among Civil War historians and buffs.

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From [Booklist](#)

McPherson is one of the most prolific and esteemed of contemporary Civil War historians. In this collection of essays, he examines a broad array of topics; many of them continue to bedevil those who study our nation's seminal conflict. In his opening essay, McPherson takes on revisionist historians who discount slavery as the fundamental cause of the war. McPherson's consideration of the career and "martyrdom" of John Brown is both fascinating and incisive, as he illustrates how imagery can be used to portray a man as a crazed murderer or a secular saint. Other topics of note include Lee's goals during the Gettysburg campaign, Grant's reputation as a "butcher" who lacked strategic insight, and Lincoln's use (or abuse) of executive wartime power. As always, McPherson writes with a sharp, succinct style and displays a willingness to challenge current orthodoxies. This work will be an outstanding addition to every library's Civil War holdings. *Jay Freeman*

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Users Review

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Ana Smith:

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