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## Drawn with the Sword: Reflections on the American Civil War

By James M. McPherson

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**Drawn with the Sword: Reflections on the American Civil War** By James M. McPherson

James M. McPherson is acclaimed as one of the finest historians writing today and a preeminent commentator on the Civil War. *Battle Cry of Freedom*, his Pulitzer Prize-winning account of that conflict, was a national bestseller that Hugh Brogan, in *The New York Times*, called "history writing of the highest order." Now, in *Drawn With the Sword*, McPherson offers a series of thoughtful and engaging essays on some of the most enduring questions of the Civil War, written in the masterful prose that has become his trademark.

Filled with fresh interpretations, puncturing old myths and challenging new ones, *Drawn With the Sword* explores such questions as why the North won and why the South lost (emphasizing the role of contingency in the Northern victory), whether Southern or Northern aggression began the war, and who really freed the slaves, Abraham Lincoln or the slaves themselves. McPherson offers memorable portraits of the great leaders who people the landscape of the Civil War: Ulysses S. Grant, struggling to write his memoirs with the same courage and determination that marked his successes on the battlefield; Robert E. Lee, a brilliant general and a true gentleman, yet still a product of his time and place; and Abraham Lincoln, the leader and orator whose mythical figure still looms large over our cultural landscape. And McPherson discusses often-ignored issues such as the development of the Civil War into a modern "total war" against both soldiers and civilians, and the international impact of the American Civil War in advancing the cause of republicanism and democracy in countries from Brazil and Cuba to France and England. Of special interest is the final essay, entitled "What's the Matter With History?", a trenchant critique of the field of history today, which McPherson describes here as "more and more about less and less." He writes that professional historians have abandoned narrative history written for the greater audience of educated general readers in favor of impenetrable tomes on minor historical details which serve only to edify other academics, thus leaving the historical education of the general public to films and television programs such as *Glory* and Ken Burns's PBS documentary *The Civil War*.

Each essay in *Drawn With the Sword* reveals McPherson's own profound knowledge of the Civil War and of the controversies among historians, presenting all sides in clear and lucid prose and concluding with his own measured and eloquent opinions. Readers will rejoice that McPherson has once again proven by example that history can be both accurate and interesting, informative and well-written. Mark Twain wrote that the Civil War "wrought so profoundly upon the entire national character that the influence cannot be

measured short of two or three generations." In *Drawn With the Sword*, McPherson gracefully and brilliantly illuminates this momentous conflict.

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### Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

McPherson's scholarly breadth and intellectual depth place him in the front rank of Civil War historians. All but one of the 15 pieces in this anthology have appeared elsewhere, but in a spectrum of publications so wide that their appearance between one set of covers is especially welcome. They cover four themes: the war's origins, its social consequences, the reasons for its outcome and Abraham Lincoln's central role. Topics range from an analysis of Uncle Tom's Cabin to an argument that the Confederacy almost won. The essays are, however, connected by McPherson's conviction that the Civil War's origins and outcome were in no way predetermined: the campaigns, battles and elections that determined the war's course were shaped by specific contingencies. The final piece, provocatively dissecting the failure of contemporary academic historians to reach general audiences, is by itself worth the price of a book that belongs in all Civil War collections. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc.

From Library Journal

Historian McPherson (Battle Cry of Freedom, LJ 3/1/88) has compiled a series of thoughtful essays on some of the most thought-provoking questions of the Civil War. All of the essays were published earlier but have been updated and revised for this compilation. The topics deal with such subjects as the origins of the Civil War, the slavery question in both North and South, why the North won the war and why the South lost, President Abraham Lincoln, and the change in historical writing. In these essays the author has proven that history can be accurate, informative, and interesting. For informed readers. ?W. Walter Wicker, Louisiana Tech Univ., Ruston Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc.

From [Booklist](#)

The Civil War endures as a topic of fascination for scholar and buff alike. The latest "gift" --as we, his grateful readers, perceive it--from one of our finest Civil War historians is a collection of essays, all but one of which previously appeared in various journals and as book chapters and are now updated. The essays are gathered under five general headings, including "Origins of the Civil War" and "The Enduring Lincoln." Within these categories appear such specific titles as "The *Glory* Story," a critique of the well-received movie *Glory*, about a black regiment in the Union army; "Antebellum Southern Exceptionalism," a fresh look at whether the South before the war was a unique and separate entity from the rest of the nation, and if so, why and how; and "Lee Dissected," a separation of the real from the mythical Robert E. Lee. Clear, luminous writing matched by incisive, original thinking makes this collection irresistible to anyone interested in U.S. history. *Brad Hooper*

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