James McPherson. 2002. *Crossroads of Freedom Antietam: The Battle that Changed the Course of the Civil War.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 203.

James M. McPherson has an excellent resume to write such a book. As an American Civil War historian, he is also the George Henry Davis '86 Professor Emeritus of United States History at Princeton University. In addition, he received the 1989 Pulitzer Prize for *Battle Cry of Freedom*, considered by many to be the best single-volume treatment of the American Civil War. This book is more than another dramatic reinterpretation of a Civil War battle. Rather, McPherson is intent on recalling for readers the seminal nature of the war. Reviewing this book is particularly prescient in light of the current sesquicentennial of the Civil War. Beginning in 2011 and until 2015, all across America, there have been and will continue to be significant observances of battles, campaigns and other relevant events which occurred during the fratricidal conflict. In an important sense, this book can inspire us to view the Civil War as a metric for considering how we can use knowledge from the past to inform our understanding of contemporary political issues and events.

McPherson provides the reader with a number of reoccurring themes which run throughout the text. The first of these concerns the idea of "whistling past the cemetery." He uses this metaphor in light of both Confederate and Union supporters denying certain facts or exaggerating others to support their desired outcome for the war. This is significant from the perspective that we can ask in comparison to today, do we ourselves commit the same mistake in our modern politics? Why or why not? How so? Another metaphor he employs

concerns the fact that the South had a very practical calculation regarding how they might gain foreign recognition of the CSA. They believed "King Cotton" was the key to this. However, they failed to take notice of developments that would complicate this calculus, such as overproduction of cotton in the waning days of the antebellum period, and the ability of the British and French to identify alternative supplies of cotton. He explores the roots of this myopic view of the world in the culture of the south and the view that southerners had of themselves in relation to the outside world. Again, this text is helpful in a contemporary sense by asking the question, what can we learn today about not being so blind in our own foreign policy issues and their potential complications?

A second important feature of his work concerns the significant personality clashes of Lincoln, Stanton, McClellan and others in the Union hierarchy. Besides their personal and political differences, they sometimes impugned the motives and even the patriotism of each other. He considers how these clashes were managed and the extraordinary task which faced Lincoln in managing the executive branch.

He also challenges readers to rethink some of the long-held views which many of us have considered unchallengeable. For example, many see slavery as the cardinal sin of the Confederate States of America. However, what about the idea of inviting foreign recognition and therefore foreign influence and intrusion into American politics? Wasn't this a violation of the long-standing Monroe Doctrine of John Quincy Adams since the 1820's? Another of these long-standing assumptions concerns the venerable and often unquestioned leadership of General Robert E. Lee. McPherson invites the question, was Lee correct to adopt and promote an offensive strategy by invading Maryland, or should he have conducted a defensive war and force the Union "to come at him?" In regards to this, he explores the diverse and varied political, military, economic and social factors which might account for this decision on the part of the Confederate high

command. Such questions are important to ask for the "what if crowds" of American historians.

Another contemporary issue which some state governments have recently discussed concerns the issue of secession. McPherson's analysis causes us to rethink the logistics of this issue. After reading the book, one may ask, how can southerners or anyone else justify secession in the name and the spirit of the founders such as George Washington when he and many of the other prominent Federalists advocated so strongly for the need for a perpetual union of the states?

Finally, McPherson invites a reexamination of Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation in light of the complex and convoluted political realities of his day. Many have criticized Lincoln's initial and final Emancipation Proclamation documents in that they only freed certain slaves in certain places. McPherson details the complex political realities both in the North and within the Republican Party that compelled Lincoln to such a compromise.

In terms of the resources used to document and research the book, McPherson employs a variety of materials to fully develop the subject at hand. He employs the use of traditional books, as well as a series of primary sources such as letters, government reports, diaries and soldiers' memoirs designed to provide the reader with a rich tapestry of source material. The research notes he employs are quite discernible and can be used by any subsequent researcher seeking additional information regarding the topic at hand.

In sum, the book is an interesting read concerning an important topic. As such, it is heartily recommended for all with even a passing interest in American history in general and or the Civil War in particular.

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