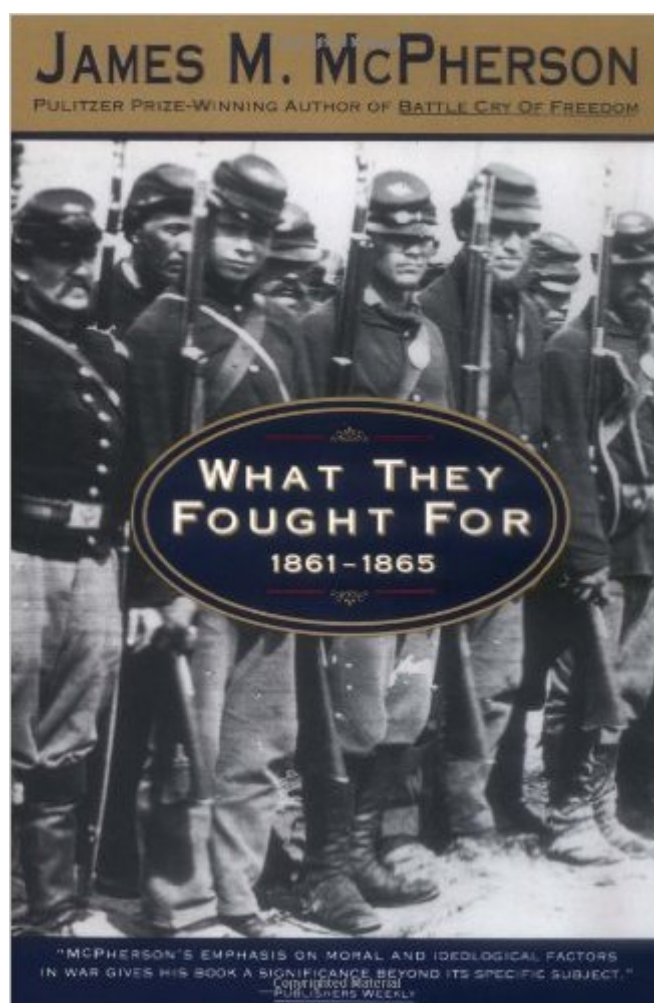


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Holt McDougal Library: What They Fought For 1861-1865 Grades 9-12 (Walter Lynwood Fleming Lectures In Southern History, Louisiana)



Synopsis

In *Battle Cry of Freedom*, James M. McPherson presented a fascinating, concise general history of the defining American conflict. With *What They Fought For*, he focuses his considerable talents on what motivated the individual soldier to fight. In an exceptional and highly original Civil War analysis, McPherson draws on the letters and diaries of nearly one thousand Union and Confederate soldiers, giving voice to the very men who risked their lives in the conflict. His conclusion that most of them felt a keen sense of patriotic and ideological commitment counters the prevailing belief that Civil War soldiers had little or no idea of what they were fighting for. In their letters home and their diaries--neither of which were subject to censorship--these men were able to comment, in writing, on a wide variety of issues connected with their war experience. Their insights show how deeply felt and strongly held their convictions were and reveal far more careful thought on the ideological issues of the war than has previously been thought to be true. Living only eighty years after the signing of the Declaration of Independence, Civil War soldiers felt the legacy and responsibility entrusted to them by the Founding Fathers to preserve fragile democracy--be it through secession or union--as something worth dying for. In *What They Fought For*, McPherson takes individual voices and places them in the great and terrible choir of a country divided against itself. The result is both an impressive scholarly tour de force and a lively, highly accessible account of the sentiments of both Northern and Southern soldiers during the national trauma of the Civil War.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Dr. McPherson's book, "What They Fought For, 1861-1865," explores the ideology of the Civil War soldier. His theme is that, in fact, Civil War soldiers knew why they fought and he rejects those historians' views who assert that Civil War soldiers had no idea for what they fought or that they just fought for their comrades. He maintains that: "a large number of those men in blue and gray were intensely aware of the issues at stake and passionately concerned about them" (4). The volunteer armies, the most literate to that time, were men who were concerned and knowledgeable about politics were fighting for, at the core, "liberty and republicanism." He supplies fewer quotations and more analyses than Bell Wiley and gives the demographics of his sources allowing one to better judge the veracity of his conclusions. His sources, uncensored letters and diaries, admittedly not statistically representative, are the best he could find to flesh out his thesis. His Confederate sources were biased because they were those who enlisted early in the war, were slaveholders, and were those who were in actual combat. The representative differences between the Union and Confederate samples were also stated: there were fewer class differences in the Union sample, and, the Union soldiers were more literate, better educated, and more politically aware. Union soldiers were similar to Confederates in that early enlistees were more patriotic than those who were drafted or enlisted after the first two years of the war and those who were in actual combat tended to express beliefs in "duty, honor and country" more than those in non combat assignments.

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