

ESSENTIAL CIVIL WAR CURRICULUM

Twenty Good Reasons to Study the Civil War

By **John C. Waugh**

It is not possible to fully know America and Americans without knowing about the Civil War. Its drama, pathos, irony and people make it compelling and endlessly fascinating. Of course there are more than twenty reasons to study the Civil War but these are the ones that resonate with me.¹

1 Because It Was Unique

The Civil War was a disaster in its toll of human lives, in the anguish and sorrow it left in its track, in its political, social and emotional upheaval--it is unparalleled in American history. But it also brought a new birth of freedom by ending slavery and made the United States truly united. Robert Penn Warren called the Civil War “the great single event of our history.” Over 700,000 died, 500 a day for every day of the war, savaging a generation of young men. On September 17, 1862, the single bloodiest day in American history, 23,000 Americans were killed, wounded or missing.²

Unique also was why the war was fought. With the question of slavery unresolved by the Constitution, the nation was divided over slavery. Crisis and compromise succeeded crisis and compromise as the slaveholding South sought to preserve its way of life against an increasingly abolitionist North. As each new state was considered for admission to the Union the issue of whether it would be free or slave divided the nation. The Louisiana Purchase of 1803 followed by the Missouri Compromise of 1820; the war with Mexico in 1846-1848 followed by the Compromise of 1850; all were crises deferred not resolved. With the election of Abraham Lincoln in 1860, eleven Southern States seceded, believing this was the only way to preserve the Southern way of life against aggressive Northern abolitionists dominating a government in which the South felt it no longer had an equal voice. They went to war to defend their way of life and the North went to war to preserve the Union.

The Civil War was a source of incredible ironies. On the battlefield a Union soldier might find the body of a Confederate soldier who was his brother. After First Manassas two wounded soldiers, one Confederate one Union, lying side by side in a

¹ This essay is a summary of: John C. Waugh, *20 Good Reasons to Study The Civil War* (Abilene, TX: McWhiney Foundation Press, 2004)

² Robert Penn Warren, *Legacy of the Civil War: Meditations on the Centennial* (New York: Random House, 1961).

hospital were brothers who had not seen one another for years. Families and neighbors went to war against each other. Poignant, gut-wrenching irony was everywhere in the Civil War.

2 Because It Was a Watershed in American History

By the eve of the Civil War the nation was not one and the Union's continued existence was still not assured. Growing pains from the War of 1812 with Great Britain, the War with Mexico in 1846-1848, economic, social and political upheavals, and the great issue of slavery—all raised the question of union and disunion. Abraham Lincoln understood the issue “this government cannot endure, permanently half slave and half free...I do not expect the house to fall—but I do expect it will cease to be divided.”³

The Civil War was the event in American history that defined the United States as a nation. Before the Civil War the nation was a grouping of independent states. After it became “one nation, indivisible.”

Zachary Taylor said of the Union “Upon its preservation must depend our own happiness and that of countless generations to come.” It was the Civil War that preserved the Union.⁴

3 Because It Was a War of Firsts

The Civil War, perhaps more than most, was a war of firsts. War is generally accompanied by an upwelling of inventiveness. Many of these inventions had lasting impacts and more constructive uses that far outlived the war itself.

For the first time in any war there was conscription, the Secret Service, income tax, withholding tax, tobacco and cigarette tax, flag signal codes, battlefield photography, and African American army officers, the Medal of Honor, military flares and a trumpet call called *Taps*. For the first time in American history a president was assassinated.

The railroad, in its infancy, grew dramatically and was used for military transportation. Though the telegraph existed before the war it was used for the first time in a mobile form by the Union Major General George B. McClellan early in the war.

For the first time in history in the midst of a Civil War a presidential election was conducted, and for the first time soldiers voted in the field in an election campaign. For the first time in any war reconnaissance was conducted from the air, in this case by the use of gas filled balloons. And these for the first time gave birth to anti-aircraft fire,

³ On June 17, 1858, at what was then the Illinois State Capitol in Springfield, Lincoln gave what is now known as his “House Divided” speech upon accepting the Illinois Republican Party's nomination as that state's United States senator from which this quotation is taken.

⁴ This quotation comes from the concluding paragraph of Zachary Taylor's State of the Union 1849 address to Congress on 4 December 1849.

blackouts and camouflage on the ground. These early aeronauts even attempted to use air to ground telegraphic communications, although these failed.

Although the main antidote for ghastly wounds was a ghastly amputation under unsanitary conditions the medical arts were forced out of the medieval ages and set on the course to what we know today as modern medicine. For the first time there were hospital ships, and organized medical and nursing care and ambulances to carry the wounded to them. The war gave birth as well to the first widespread use of anesthetics.

Many of these firsts now ease our labors, lessen our pain and save our lives.

4 Because It Saved Republican Government

At the time of the Civil War Republican government was a new idea uniquely in place in the United States. At stake was not only the existence of the Union but also whether such a new form of government would survive a life-threatening crisis from within. In Lincoln's words in the Gettysburg address the issue was that "government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth." For "Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether this nation, or any nation, so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure."⁵

The Civil War settled this issue and that our Republican form of government survived is alone reason enough to make the Civil War one of the great critical passages in world history, and worthy of everlasting study.

States' Rights, the idea that the Union was only a loose Confederation of states and not an unbreakable union, led many Southerners to the belief that their first allegiance was to their native state and not to the United States. States' Rights was a driving value that Southerners evoked to justify secession. They thought it essential to preserving their way of life, the right to own slaves, and their ability to run their individual states as they saw fit without outside interference. States' Rights was their safe harbor from the mounting, aggressive antislavery sentiment in the North. Perhaps the greatest irony was that the objective the South sought through secession—preserving its way of life against the majority bent on destroying slavery—did just the opposite. It took decades for the South to recover.

But perhaps secession was necessary to create a more permanent Union.

⁵ Lincoln gave the speech now known as the Gettysburg address on November 19, 1863 on the occasion of the dedication of the Soldiers' National Cemetery at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania.

5 Because It Killed Slavery

In the beginning the Civil War was not waged to destroy slavery. President Lincoln was prepared either to save or abolish slavery, whatever it took, to achieve the central aim of the war which he declared to be to preserve the Union.

When the war began slavery was protected in the Constitution in those states where it already existed. While Lincoln deplored slavery personally he believed that slavery had to be left alone in those states but that it should be prevented from expanding into the new territories. And in an August 1862 letter to Horace Greeley, the editor of the *New York Tribune*, Lincoln stated “My paramount object in this struggle is to save the Union, and it is not either to save or to destroy slavery.”⁶

The Emancipation Proclamation was issued by Lincoln in September 1862 after the Battle of Antietam, to take effect January 1, 1863. It turned the war into a war not just to preserve the Union but also to destroy slavery. The Emancipation Proclamation only freed slaves in those parts of the Confederate states still in Confederate hands on January 1, 1863. It was the postwar Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution which outlawed slavery everywhere in the United States. The Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments began to give freed slaves equal rights.

While slavery died in the Civil War racism did not and has not to this day.

6 Because It Originated New Ways of Waging War

New weaponry introduced in the Civil War forced radical changes in the strategy and tactics of warfare.

Single shot smoothbore muzzle loading muskets that dominated at the war’s beginning were made obsolete by the war’s end by rifled muskets and repeating rifles and carbines. These weapons made traditional tactics of mass frontal charges against well-defended positions obsolete.

Just as striking was the evolution of artillery. Rifled artillery complementing the more common smoothbore cannon allowed killing en masse at longer ranges with greater accuracy and foreshadowed the massive firepower of the artillery of the future.

Other developments included artillery fired for the first time from flatbed railroad cars, land minefields, wire entanglements, rudimentary flamethrowers, telescopic sights, the first revolving gun turret, and the first machine gun.

As important as the new weapons were the new strategies. This was the first time the concept of “total war” embraced by William Tecumseh Sherman was introduced. In

⁶ “A Letter from the President,” *New York Tribune*, August 23, 1862”

previous wars armies lined up in packed ranks charging a packed rank of enemies. In Sherman's March through Georgia the Union armies destroyed a wide swath of civilian infrastructure, aiming to break the rebellion by breaking the will of Southerners through this destruction.

7 Because It Revolutionized War on the Water

The Civil War brought a new era of naval warfare through the development of nascent technologies such as the steam engine, screw propeller and more powerful naval ordinance.

On March 9, 1862 there was an epic battle at Hampton Roads Virginia between two ships with iron sides. The USS *Monitor* and CSS *Virginia* were the first ironclads to fight each other at sea. Built on wooden hulls these two ships fought an inconclusive engagement for four hours that made every wooden hulled ship of war everywhere in the world obsolete, changing naval warfare forever.

The first rudimentary submarine, the Confederate ship *Hunley* sank the USS *Housatonic* in February 1864, sinking with all her crew afterwards.

The first naval mines, called torpedoes during the Civil War, were also introduced. Hulking ironclad riverboats up to half a football field in length were introduced and used on the Tennessee, Cumberland and Mississippi rivers.

These changes were also the harbingers of the naval forces developed and used in 20th century warfare.

8 Because It Teaches Us Brotherhood

We have never seen brotherhood stretched so far, absorb such blows, pass through such fire, and survive as intact as it was in the Civil War. Many of the men who wound up fighting one another were the dearest of friends.

Confederate Lieutenant General Richard Stoddart Ewell, then a prisoner in a Union prison, wept at the news of the death of Abraham Lincoln whose armies had put him there. When Union Major General George Brinton McClellan died in 1885 former Confederate generals came to mourn his passing. When President Ulysses Simpson (Hiram Ulysses) Grant died that same year Confederate generals sadly followed his casket wearing their gray sashes. Union Major General William Tecumseh Sherman died in 1891. The man whom he had defeated and who surrendered to him at the end of the war, Confederate General Joseph Eggleston Johnson, was a mourner at his funeral.

During the war often at night regimental bands of both armies played while both sides listened across the battlefield. These concerts often ended in a mournful rendering

of the song “Home Sweet Home” by both sides. There was as George McClellan once described it a “sacred brotherhood of arms” that arose in the Civil War.⁷

9 Because It Showcases Undaunted Courage

The phrase that Civil War soldiers used for the first experience of battle was “seeing the elephant.” Horace Porter, one of Grant’s staff officers, said “courage, like most other qualities, is never assured until it has been tested. No man knows precisely how he will behave in battle until he comes under fire.” Though there were many who turned and ran there were many more who showed incredible courage. We study the Civil War to learn about both but more to learn about the greatness of the human spirit.⁸

Ulysses Grant sat in his saddle under fire without moving a muscle or blinking an eye. As one of the soldiers said “Ulysses don’t scare worth a damn.” Confederate General Thomas Jonathan “Stonewall” Jackson was similarly brave, casually inquiring once amid a rain of bullets of his companion “General are you a man of family man?” as casually as if they were sitting in chairs on the front porch at home.⁹

As great as the courage shown by the generals was the courage shown by the common soldier of both sides and the study of the Civil War will yield countless anecdotes of courage of the most incredible kind.

10 Because It Made Heroes

Most of the heroes we associate with the Civil War are presidents and generals who are the most vivid in our memories now—Abraham Lincoln, Jefferson Davis, Robert E. Lee, Stonewall Jackson, Nathan Bedford Forrest, Ulysses S. Grant, William Tecumseh Sherman, and many others North and South—and who are also now part of our collective American memory. They were not all men. For example Clara Barton became a symbol in the war of caring and courageous womanhood.

They were heroes because they were tested in the fire that touched them all. They were not all successful but they proved themselves to be heroes by their mettle. These heroes are role models for us even now, possessing characteristics against which we can measure ourselves. They show us a century and a half later the courage and nobility of which man is capable.

⁷ This quotation is taken from a speech given on June 15, 1864 by Major General George Brinton McClellan at the dedication of the site for the proposed Battle Monument at West Point.

⁸ Horace Porter, “The Philosophy of Courage” in *Century Magazine*, June (1888):249.

⁹ Kate Havelin, *Ulysses S. Grant* (Minneapolis: Lerner Publishing, 2004), 32; William B. Taliaferro, “Personal Reminiscences of ‘Stonewall’ Jackson,” *Civil War Times*, vol.34, no. 2, May-June (1995):18, (Address of William Booth Taliaferro to the Lee Camp of United Confederate Veterans in Richmond Virginia).

11 Because It Created a New Industrial America

The differences between the antebellum South and antebellum North did not relate to slavery alone. In the South before the war there was little industry. In virtually every home most of the essentials of life were made from scratch—from food to clothing to implements. Most things that could not be homemade but had to be manufactured were not produced in the South. They were imported from the North or from abroad. There was little indication that this would change in the southern, slave-dependent agrarian society.

The antebellum North was industrializing, moving from an agrarian base towards a future based on manufacturing and technology. It was on the cusp of the Industrial Revolution, which began in Great Britain and was spreading. These stirrings of technological development in the decade before the war still left the North a nation of farmers working the land, more agrarian than industrial. The Civil War gave a tremendous jolt of creative energy to the North and launched it full-blown into the new economic world of big city, big industry, big manufacturing, big technology and the big business society that America is today.

The Civil War could not have been won without the growth of a tremendous industrial plant supporting a huge unprecedented fighting machine and creating the weapons and materials that war required. The war also required a different kind of banking system. From a balkanized collection of state banks the country emerged from the war with a national banking system on which the economic present was built.

12 Because It Produced Men of Fabulous Fortunes

Out of the Civil War emerged three men who epitomized the brand of antihero who knew how to build a fortune and did it. While their contemporaries went to war, these three—Andrew Carnegie, John Pierpont Morgan, and John Davison Rockefeller dodged the war and build the foundations for three of the colossal fortunes and most notable careers in American business, industry and finance. Instead of going to war with their young contemporaries they turned their talents to doing business and beginning to build their fortunes.

Of these Carnegie is the most heroic in what he accomplished and how he chose to use what he accomplished for the benefit of his fellow man. When the war began Carnegie was 26 years old, a young business phenomenon, working for the Pennsylvania Railroad. He worked briefly in the war office in Washington before returning to his job at the railroad. He soon left the railroad and entered the steel business. In 1889 he wrote an article widely known as “The Gospel of Wealth.” In it he argued that the life of a man with the talent to make a fortune fell into two periods—the first to make millions and the second to distribute and share them. He built 2,800 Carnegie free libraries and poured millions into churches and colleges, education, and international peace. He died in 1919 an American hero not for his money but for his good works.

J.P. Morgan was 24 years old at the beginning of the Civil War. He chose not to volunteer and when conscription came he hired a substitute. Early on he was involved in questionable gold speculation and selling the government obsolete weapons. After the war he became an international financier unmatched in American history. In the national treasury crisis of 1895 he led a syndicate and raised a \$65 million gold payment that steered the country's economy out of trouble. Like Carnegie, Morgan also gave back mainly to churches, cathedrals, art galleries, and hospitals. He died in 1913.

John D. Rockefeller was only 21 when the war came and clearly saw it as an opportunity to make a fortune. He wasn't about to become a soldier, first claiming exemption as the sole support of his mother and four brothers and then hiring a substitute. In 1863 he became involved in an oil refining venture on which he was to build his fabulous fortune after the war. Rockefeller was ruthless in business but he and his progeny became noted in American life for the multi-millions poured into philanthropy. He died in 1937.

These antiheroes, lacking in the qualities of idealism and courage associated with heroes on the battlefield were formed in the same mix and at the same time by the Civil War.

13 Because It Was a War of Political Oddities

The Civil War years of 1862-1865 produced one of the most unique half decades of politics in American history.

The Democratic Party held a convention in Charleston South Carolina in the spring of 1860 only to fail to nominate a candidate as southern Democrats walked out. They tried again in Baltimore and succeeded in nominating Stephen A. Douglas, but southern Democrats, who had walked out, met down the street, proclaimed themselves the real Democratic Party, and nominated John C. Breckinridge.

The new Republican Party met in Chicago and passed over a famous politically seasoned New Yorker, William H. Seward, for a dark horse Illinois lawyer politician named Abraham Lincoln.

A fourth party not comfortable with any of the other three tickets nominated their own candidate, John Bell, thus launching a four-way race.

Lincoln was elected president having not given a single speech, receiving no votes in the southern states—indeed not even being on the ballots there—and without receiving a popular majority.

Shortly after Lincoln's election, seven states seceded from the Union, met in convention in Montgomery Alabama, and called themselves the Confederate States of

America. Here they wrote a constitution, and named a provisional president, Jefferson Davis, who did not want to be president. He was later elected to the single six-year term contemplated by the Confederate Constitution and his inauguration was held February 22, 1862.

One month after Lincoln was inaugurated as president, the Confederate government fired on Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor, inaugurating the Civil War. President Lincoln's immediate call for 75,000 volunteers to serve for 90 days to put down the rebellion, led four more states to secede.

In 1864 for the first time in history a presidential election was held during the Civil War, but only in the North. This was the first time in 30 years that a sitting president was running for reelection. The Democratic Party candidate was a popular general, George Brinton McClellan who had been fired as general in command of the Union military forces two years earlier by Lincoln.

The Confederate government sent agents to try to buy influence election in favor of the Democrats who they believed would be more sympathetic to peace and southern independence.

Soldiers in the army voting in the field for the first time in American history favored Lincoln over their former popular commander.

In the spring of 1865 a little over a month after his inauguration for a second term and after General Robert E Lee's surrender to General Ulysses Grant, President Lincoln was assassinated, the first chief executive in American history to be slain in office.

14 Because It Pioneered a New Journalism

Newspapers in the 19th century were powerful opinion makers and their editors were major players in their times. The editors were anything but objective, inserting themselves and their newspapers, their opinions and their gratuitous advice into the middle of affairs. The reporting, such as it was, reflected the newspapers' political point of view. Injecting that point of view not only into editorials but also into what passed as new stories was accepted practice.

For example pro-Lincoln Republican newspapers hailed Lincoln's Gettysburg address as the masterpiece that it was. But Democratic newspapers following their anti-Lincoln biases derided it.

The Civil War forced new thinking in journalism as it did in many other things. The war was the biggest news event of the mid-19th century and demanded more than editorial opinion.

James Gordon Bennett, editor of the *New York Herald*, led the way. Even before the war, while he dished out opinion and insult, he also delivered genuine reporting of events. In the antebellum years his newspaper was the most readable, popular, and sensational one in the country, mixing editorial opinions with reporting news. The *Herald* was the first general-interest newspaper to cover sports, business, stocks, and crime.

When the war came Bennett sent a stable of well-paid correspondents to cover and report what they saw. Other newspapers soon followed his example.

Not only did newspapers send reporters to the battlefield, they also sent artists to sketch what they saw. Photography was not sufficiently developed in the Civil War years to picture war as it happened. However, a handful of pioneering photographers, most famously Mathew Brady, appeared on the major battlefields within hours or days after the fighting stopped to set up their bulky equipment and capture the resulting carnage on film.

The reporters, artists and photographers of the Civil War were the forerunners of ubiquitous print and TV war correspondents that we know today. And the germ of all that now comprises the modern day style of journalism was incubated in the Civil War.

15 Because it Inspired Great Literature

One of the giants of American literature in the 19th century occupied the White House during the Civil War. Abraham Lincoln was a great writer, the force and clarity of whose words still resonate today. The Gettysburg Address and the Second Inaugural Address stand out among the many examples of his masterful writing.

The Civil War has left us a beautiful legacy of words. Many people—on both sides of the war, of both genders, of all ages and persuasions and social strata, those fighting it or living through it—wrote what they were seeing feeling and experiencing. Many diaries and journals, vivid memoirs, an ocean of correspondence some of it beautifully written, was put on paper during the Civil War and survives today.

Think of the letter of Sullivan Ballou written to his wife Sarah on the eve of the Battle of Bull Run in which he died. Such writing from the soul and from the heart moves us as little else can.

There has also of course been some compelling fiction written about the war—Stephen Crane’s *Red Badge of Courage*, Margaret Mitchell’s *Gone with the Wind*, Michael Shaara’s *The Killer Angels*.

Literally hundreds of books about the Civil War are being written and published annually. Some of the writing has been good, some not, and some of it has attained the level of literature.

Some of the best historical writing has been by historians and writers writing about the Civil War—Bruce Catton’s works, Shelby Foote’s three volume history, Allan Nevins’ eight volumes on the war for the Union, the biographies of Douglas Southall Freeman on Lee and Carl Sandburg on Lincoln and the writings of such modern-day historians as James M McPherson, David Donald, James I. Robertson Jr., William C. Davis, and Grady McWhinney.

The Civil War has left a body of literature that continues to grow and to fascinate us again and again.

16 Because It Tested Our Faith

Of all institutions caught in the Civil War none were more unnaturally stressed than religion. The United States in 1861 was one of the world’s leading Christian nations with almost all in the North and South believing in the one and same God. When the split came, most people on both sides believed they had to have God on their side if they were going to win.

Many believed and many preached that God was on their side because their cause was the righteous one. When the battle was won it was often pointed to by the victor as proof that God was with them. It became common ecclesiastical wisdom to measure success or failure in battle against the wrath or benevolence of the Almighty, to assume that defeat meant you didn’t have things straight with God. Get right with God and victory would follow.

Soldiers facing death on the battlefield believed in an Almighty who controlled man’s destiny and guided his fate. Perhaps no man in the war believed this more strongly than Thomas Jonathan “Stonewall” Jackson. Jackson saw God’s hand in every one of his victories and invariably give Providence full credit in each. As he lay dying in 1863 he was content, believing it was God’s will, and therefore the right thing to be happening.

That kind of faith sustained many in the war and it is a faith that sustains many of us still. But if the Civil War teaches us anything it is that we can’t necessarily count on God’s being on our side when we begin fighting one another.

17 Because it is Our Own Direct Tie to the Past

The genealogy craze that has gripped the country in recent years owes much to the Civil War.

The Civil War was an exclusively American experience and our ties to those who fought in it or lived through it are but a few short generations in the past. Nearly all of us have ancestors or personal interest, direct or indirect, dating back to the Civil War. Rarely has there been an experience in the past that so directly relates to so many of us in such a

personal way. The knowledge that a direct ancestor experienced such a monumental event in history has driven the past home to us as nothing else can. And the sense of immediacy that this knowledge gives convinces us of history's abiding relevance to us in our own time.

By linking us to the past, the Civil War has restored its great drama to our lives. Thousands have traced their Civil War ancestors in genealogical collections, libraries, city and county records, and cemeteries. TV programs and books feed the desire to know and understand our past and our own relationship to it. In learning about our ancestors and the Civil War we learn about ourselves.

In reading these materials we learn that our ancestors suffered the same sorrows, thrilled to the same events, thought the same thoughts as we do today. To understand their feelings and emotions is to better understand our own. To know them helps us to know ourselves.

Our kinship with the past is tight and inseparable.

18 Because It Makes Us Remember

Reunions are the mechanisms by which we remember and relive times in our lives that we don't want to forget, things that are such a vital part of who we were and who we are. History is reunion on a large canvas—going back to our roots, invoking our memories of the city, county, state, nation, world, and universal scale. History has been defined by many great minds in many different ways but Winston Churchill's definition is the one I prefer: "history, stumbles along the trail of the past, trying to reconstruct its scenes, to revive its echoes, and kindle with pale gleams the passion of former days."

The study of the Civil War makes us remember something we must never forget—how it was that we came to a crisis of such enormous moment in our history and lived and fought through it and came out in the end not only preserved as a unique democratic republic, but made better by it.

19 Because It Is Great Drama

There are two basic kinds of history—studies by academic historians and stories that writers and teachers of narrative history tell. And history as stories is great drama. History, taught and written as drama in all of its nuances, is irresistible and more engaging than any book of fiction ever written.

History is a story about people beginning and ending in the hearts of those who lived it. And passing history down the ages is like the passing of a flame from one age to another. By telling the stories of the heroes of the Civil War we give our listeners the foundation of what this country is all about.

When you read about the Civil War read about the people in it. Read the biographies. Anybody who reads about the Civil War as the great human drama that it was will never tire of reading about it.

20 Because It Speaks to Us Still

The Civil War still continues to stir the American imagination, bulking larger in our minds than any single event in our history. No event in our past evoked such an outpouring of telling and retelling. The books about it have become virtually uncountable and are still pouring forth every year.

Its most spectacular leap into our present-day imagination was triggered by Ken Burns' eleven part TV documentary which injected the war into the national psyche again as nothing ever had, bringing it dramatically back to us as large as life. It helped spawn the growing subculture of the Civil War with people reading, visiting the preserved battlefields, and re-enacting the battles they had read about.

The Civil War subculture is populated by a vast network of Civil War Round Tables, Sons of Confederate Veterans, Sons of Union Veterans, Daughters of the Confederacy and organizations dedicated to preserving battlefields.

The Civil War's traces and remnants are everywhere. National Battlefield Parks are magnets for those fascinated by the Civil War. Much of the land where battles were fought has been saved from development by organizations like the Civil War Preservation Trust and its allies. Artifacts of the war abound and are bought by eager collectors.

The Civil War is such a vibrant part of our past that lives so vividly still in the present that to know ourselves we must know it. So many aspects of our lives today took root in some way in that unique and stormy period of our history. That is reason enough in its own right, powerful enough to drive our memories indefinitely back to it, as doubtless it always will as long as we exist as a people and a nation.
