

### Fields of Fury: The American Civil War

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## Review

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**McPherson, James M.** *Fields of Fury: The American Civil War*. Atheneum Books for Young Readers, \$22.95 ISBN 689848331

Battle primer

Scholar reaches out to young audience

There can be little doubt with regard to James M. McPherson's rank as a Civil War scholar; he ranks among the very best. Aside from his seminal one volume history of the war, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, a partial list of his less ambitious but equally well written and insightful books might include *The Negro's Civil War*, *The Abolitionist Legacy*, *For Cause and Comrades*, or his more recent study of the Battle of Antietam. In quite another vein is his work as editor of the *American Heritage New History of the Civil War*. He is also generous with his time and his judgments in numerous reviews of the writings of others.

To this body of work must now be added **Fields of Fury**, a book for young readers. The book is comprehensive and divided into short sections beginning with The Origins of the Civil War and ending with Reconstruction. Nearly every imaginable subject is given its due, although the battles in what is certainly a traditional approach to the war perhaps take up a little too much space. There is, however, a wealth of other topics such as The Home-Front Battles, Women at War, Caring for the Wounded and most surprisingly and certainly welcome, Paying for the War in which the reader can learn such facts as the origin of the word shoddy. Important issues such as slavery and the roles of leaders receive their deserved attention. The only subject that is slighted is the war in the Trans-Mississippi West, an all too common occurrence in books on the Civil War.

The entire book is written in a direct and simple prose that is appropriate for a young audience. The sections begin with a boxed and colored column of Quick

Facts that provide central background material as well as a few bits of interesting trivia. Following the Quick Facts is a short narrative describing the subject at hand. The narratives often end with a relevant personal story to dramatize and humanize the topic. An effective example is the completion of the narrative on the Emancipation Proclamation that contrasts the dissatisfaction and disgust of the slave owning plantation woman, Sarah Morgan, with the delight of the former slave, Susie King Taylor, to the Proclamation.

The book contains ample and beautiful illustrations that range from helpful maps to photographs and reproductions of original paintings. The inside covers provide a useful chronology of the major events of the war. The book has a glossary of useful terms and a carefully chosen, one page bibliography. In short, this is a handsome well-crafted book for young readers, not to mention that it might delight many an adult reader as well.

*Larry Olpin, olpin@socket.net, is Professor Emeritus of English at Central Missouri State University and is currently working on a book on the novels of the Civil War written between 1950 and 2000.*