

Why they fought

Excerpts from *For Cause & Comrades, Why Men Fought in the Civil War* by James M. McPherson

“Most Union and Confederate soldiers were neither long-term regulars nor draftees, but wartime volunteers from civilian life whose values remained rooted in the homes and communities from which they sprang to arms and to which they longed to return. They did not fight for the money. The pay was poor and unreliable... What prompted them to give up several of the best years of their lives -- indeed, to give up life itself in this war that killed almost as many Americans soldiers as all of the rest of the wars this country has fought combined? What enabled them to overcome the most basic of human instincts – self-preservation? ... This is the question this book (*For Cause & Comrades, Why Men Fought in the Civil War* by James M. McPherson) seeks to answer. It does so by going to the writings of the men who did the fighting... Civil War armies were the most literate in history to that time. More than 90 percent of white Union soldiers and more than 80 percent of Confederate soldiers were literate most of them wrote frequent letters to families and friends...” (McPherson 5, 10-11)

Directions: Below are quotes used by McPherson to support his conclusions in his book, use the quotes to predict central arguments of *For Cause & Comrades*

Brothers, one in Illinois one in Virginia

James: “Jeff Davis and his crew of pirates [had committed] treason and nothing more nor less”

John: “very much pained to find... that I have a brother who would advocate sending men here to butcher his own friends and relations... I have always opposed secession but I shall vote for it today because I don’t intend to submit to black Republican rule... [James, by becoming a Republican you have forsworn] home, mother, father, and brother and are willing to sacrifice all for the dear nigger”

James: “[I never dreamed my brother would] raise a hand to tear down the glorious Stars and Stripes, a flag that we have been taught from our cradle to look on with pride...I would strike down my own brother if he dare raise a hand to destroy that flag. We have We have to rise in our might as a free independent nation and demand that law must and shall be respected or we shall find ourselves wiped from the face of the earth and our name become a byword and the principles of free government will be dashed to the ground forever.”

Brothers one a South Carolina planter, one a US Navy Commander:

James: “I felt that my blood was cold in my veins...my Brother a Traitor to his Mother County...where lie the bones of his Father, Mother, & many dear relatives [how could] a Brother in whose veins flows the same blood, Southern, true Southern...ever allow Northern principles to contaminate his pure soul...those fanatics to interfere with our domestic affairs [and deny us the right] to keep our slaves in peace & quietness...we all expect you (Charles) to do your duty to your God, your State, and Truth.”

Charles: “I am as I have always been a Union man—I know no North or South...all that I know is my duty to flag & country under which I have served for the last 30 years.”

Diarist from Philadelphia:

“A wild state of excitement [exists] everyone I saw, with the exception of two or three Democrats, is filled with rage and resentment.”

Illinois Farmer to his fiancée

“My heart burns with indignation” against “armed rebels and traitors to their country and their country’s flag.” My hope “has always been for a peaceful, quiet home of my own, with you as a companion,” but “I have concluded to volunteer in the service of my country.... This step will cause you pain and sorrow I know.... I love you still and always shall,” but “I can’t stay behind, no, no.”

New Recruit from Nashville

“nothing else is talked of anywhere but War War...the scum of the North cannot face the chivalric spirit of the South.”

Lumber Clerk from Massachusetts

“I am going.... I am not laboring under any ‘sea fit,’ as I once was, but a duty which everyone ought to perform,—love of country”

Indiana Farm Boy

“[I am] decidedly homesick [but I must]... aid my country in her desperate struggle against oppression and slavery, against Rebels and Trai-tors.”

Michigan Clerk

“the state of the country” required “all true patriots to sustain her government.... They admitted that our country needed men but their plea was that there was anuff without me but I had made up my mind to enlist so there was no stoping me.”

Michigan Farmer

“The Government must be sustained if the union is split up the government is distroid and we will be a Rewind [ruined] nation.... Do not borrow eny trouble about me if I dy in the batle feild I [do so] with plasure.”

Indiana Lawyer

“it is better to have war for one year than anarchy & revolution for fifty years—If the government should suffer rebels to go on with their work with impunity there would be no end to it & in a short time we would be without any law or order.”

Immigrant from Philadelphia

“If the Unionists let the South secede the West might want to seperate next Presidential Election...others might want to follow and this country would be as bad as the German states.... There would have to be another form of a constitution wrote and after it was written who would obey it?”

Iowa Volunteer

“this wicked rebellion to secure the extension of that blighting curse—slavery—o’er our fair land.”

Officer from Ohio

“will not be ended until the subject of slavery is finally and forever settled. It has been a great curse to this country.”

Officer from Massachusetts

“Slavery has brought death into our own households already in its wicked rebel-lion.... There is but one way [to win the war] and that is emancipation.... I want to sing ‘John Brown’ in the streets of Charleston, and ram red-hot abolitionism down their unwilling throats at the point of the bayonet.”

Virginia School Teacher

“use its utmost endeavors for the abolishment of slavery [After all, Lincoln himself] has declared that one of the peculiar institutions of the South, which involves the value of four billions...is ‘a moral evil...Better, far better! endure all the horrors of civil war than to see the dusky sons of Ham leading the fair daughters of the South to the altar.”

Georgia Farmer

“our homes our firesides our land and negroes and even the virtue of our fair ones is at stake,”

Kentucky Physician

“who are battling for their rights and for an institution in which Kentucky, Virginia, and Tennessee are [as] interested...The vandals of the North...are determined to destroy slavery.... We must all fight, and I choose to fight for southern rights and southern liberty.”

Tennessee Farmer

"life liberty and property are at stake...any man in the South would rather die battling for civil and political liberty, than submit to the base usurpations of a northern tyrant."

Volunteer from South Carolina

"a stand must be made for African slavery or it is forever lost."

Alabama Planter

"Liberty and Independence...What would we be without our liberty?...[We] would prefer Death a thousand times to recognizing once a Black Republican ruler...altho' he is my brother in law."

Volunteer from Virginia

"If we should suffer ourselves to be subjugated by the tyrannical government of the North our property would all be confiscated...& our people reduced to the most abject bondage & utter degradation...every Southern heart [must] respond to the language of the great Patrick Henry in the days of '76 & say give me Liberty or give me death."

Georgia Planter

"glorious" to die "in defence of innocent girls & women from the fangs of the lecherous Northern hirelings, who from the accounts here stated, are indeed engaging in this strife, for 'beauty & booty.'"

Union Volunteer

"I went from a sense of duty"

Union Volunteer

"I performed—but a simple duty—a duty to my country and myself...to give up life if need be...in this battle for freedom & right, opposed to slavery & wrong."

New York Farmer

"was so much opposed to my going to do my duty towards putting down this awful rebellion," but "I ought to and I must" fight for the "rights & Freedom" of "our adopted Country"

Volunteer from Michigan

"No jenny...while your happiness is as dear to me as life duty prompts me to go my country first home and friends next jenny what would friends be to me if I had no country?"

Volunteer from Mississippi

"Life is sweet but I would always prefer a honorable death to a disgraceful and shameful life, I much rather be numbered amongst the slain than those that stay at home for it will be a brand upon their name as long as a southern lives."

South Carolina Planter

"I would be disgraced if I staid at home, and unworthy of my revolutionary ancestors, I stand alone in my family. There is no one bearing my name left to fight for our freedom. The honor of our family is involved.... A man who will not offer up his life...does dishonor to his wife and children."

Arkansas Planter

"on your account & that of my children I could not bear the idea of not being in this war. I would feel that my children would be ashamed of me when in after times this war is spoken of & I should not have figured in it."

Tennessee Planter

"Duty, patriotism and, aye, honour calls him to the field."

Baltimore Youth

"I determined to enlist in the hope that I should at some time be engaged in a battle, and there have an end put to my worthless and disgraceful career...made a man of me."

Officer from Virginia

"who does not in his heart believe that he can whip three Yankees, he would consider it beneath his manhood to count on whipping a less number."

Volunteer from Pennsylvania

"How often in boyhood's young days when reading the account of soldiers' lives have I longed to be a man, and now the opportunity has offered."

Son of a New York Farmer

"when I was quite young, and listened with pleasure to hear you sing Old Kentucky Boys, and other war songs; and thought how I would like to become a soldier: that childish wish has now come to pass."

Officer from Indiana

"they all pretend to be ill whenever there is anything to do.... Nine tenths of them enlisted just because somebody else was going, and the other tenth was ashamed to stay at home."

Mississippi Volunteer

"Why am, I here was it merely that I might be an actor in Seenes noval and exciting that I turned my back on all the delights of home and subjected myself to the untold trials and privations of camp life and the feareful dangers of the battle field?" No, he answered, "I am here because a numerous and powerful enemy has invaded our country and threatened our subjugation."

Pennsylvania Volunteer

"When we enlisted in this war, we did no idle thing, we were in earnest. One year has passed away, and all the fancied romance of campaign life has proved itself to be stern reality to us, yet we are still in earnest, ready for another year of harder, bloodier work, if such is necessary to crush this wicked rebellion."

Mississippi Soldier

"This country without slave labor would be completely worthless We can only live & exist by that species of labor: and hence I am willing to fight to the last."

Louisiana Artilleryman

"I never want to see the day when a negro is put on an equality with a white person. There is too many free niggers...now to suit me, let alone having four millions."

Indiana Officer

We are "fighting for the maintenance of law and order, to assert the strength of dignity of the government [against] dissolution, anarchy, and ruin"

Wisconsin Private

"In the evening a general discussion took place on the nigger question, politics, etc. All agree on 'Old Abe' for president" Later in another letter "[thank God that] the sin of slavery [is no more] I can cheerfully bear all discomforts of a soldier's life for the overthrow of the monster evil"

Ohio Corporal

"We are now fighting to destroy the cause of these dangerous diseases, which is slavery and the slave power. The war will not end until we end slavery"

Ohio Colonel

"I am sick of the war...I do not fight or want to fight for Lincoln's Negro proclamation a day longer" later from Louisiana "since I [came] here I have learned and seen more of what the horrors of Slavery was than I ever knew before... I am [in] favor of doing away with the...accursed institution...I am [now] a strong abolitionist."

Advantages and Disadvantages

Directions: Below is a list of the advantages and disadvantages that the book cites for each side headed into the war, place each in the correct box and explain

Lost 1/3 of its officers, government levied not direct tax, had never imposed a draft, no tax structure, no navy, lacked factories, poor transportation systems, had to provide their own horses and uniforms, elected officers, instituted an exam for officers, passed a conscription law, complaints about “a rich man’s war a poor man’s fight,” able to produce adequate munitions for battles, lacked food, shortage of shoes, adequate supplies for soldiers, had loop holes that allowed people to escape the draft, imposed a property tax, imposed an income tax, sold war bonds, issued paper money that was legal tender, issued paper money that was not legal tender, suffered inflation, established a national banking system, leader struggled to maintain unity and demand respect, leader struggled to balance demands for state’s rights and the need for a strong central government to win the war, managed its political divisions more affectively, population of 22 million, population of 9 million, 90% of the countries manufacturing capacity, had to move troops greater distances, had higher morale, poor training for troops, high disease rates, by wars end had the largest navy in the world, depended on imports for war material

Northern Advantages	Northern Disadvantages
Southern Advantages	Southern Disadvantages

