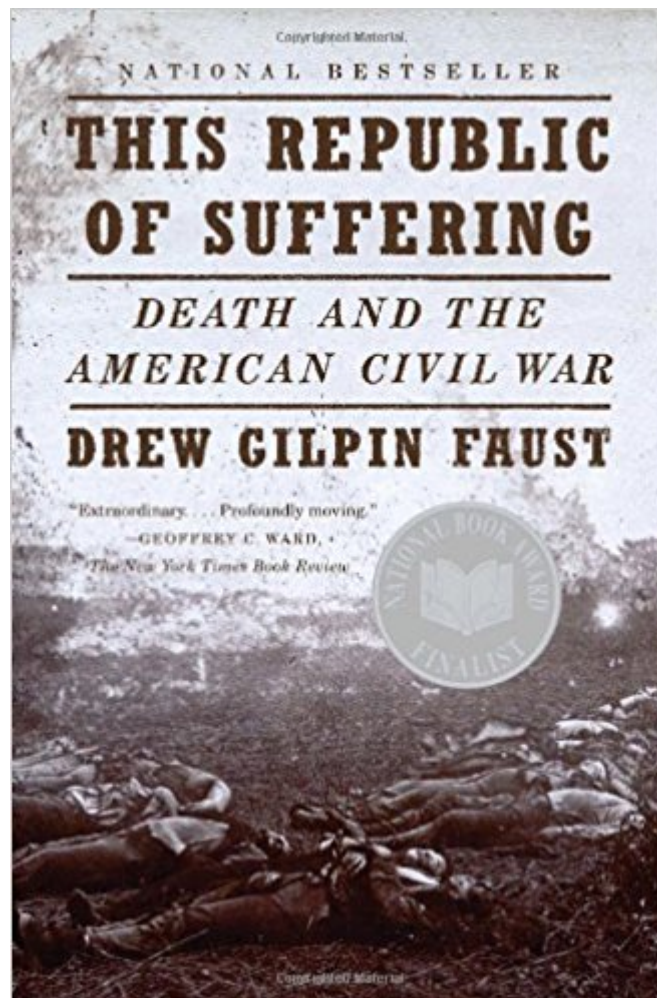




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# This Republic Of Suffering: Death And The American Civil War (Vintage Civil War Library)



## Synopsis

More than 600,000 soldiers lost their lives in the American Civil War. An equivalent proportion of today's population would be six million. In *This Republic of Suffering*, Drew Gilpin Faust reveals the ways that death on such a scale changed not only individual lives but the life of the nation, describing how the survivors managed on a practical level and how a deeply religious culture struggled to reconcile the unprecedented carnage with its belief in a benevolent God. Throughout, the voices of soldiers and their families, of statesmen, generals, preachers, poets, surgeons, nurses, northerners and southerners come together to give us a vivid understanding of the Civil War's most fundamental and widely shared reality.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Battle is the dramatic centerpiece of Civil War history; this penetrating study looks instead at the somber aftermath. Historian Faust (*Mothers of Invention*) notes that the Civil War introduced America to death on an unprecedented scale and of an unnatural kind—grisly, random and often ending in an unmarked grave far from home. She surveys the many ways the Civil War generation coped with the trauma: the concept of the Good Death—conscious, composed and at peace with God; the rise of the embalming industry; the sad attempts of the bereaved to get confirmation of a soldier's death, sometimes years after war's end; the swelling national movement to recover soldiers' remains and give them decent burials; the intellectual quest to find meaning—or its absence—in the war's carnage. In the process, she contends, the nation invented the modern

culture of reverence for military death and used the fallen to elaborate its new concern for individual rights. Faust exhumes a wealth of material—condolence letters, funeral sermons, ads for mourning dresses, poems and stories from Civil War—era writers—to flesh out her lucid account. The result is an insightful, often moving portrait of a people torn by grief. Photos. (Jan. 10) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Those who fret over the state of American universities will embrace this history by Drew Gilpin Faust. Academics appreciate how Faust explains so many social and cultural changes by recentring the story of the war on its massive toll in lives: the estimated 2 percent who died, or 620,000, would be equivalent to 6 million today. She also breaks new ground by reexamining the relationship of the war to modern institutions like the welfare state. Yet Faust constructs This Republic of Suffering in a way that will appeal to every reader—from the Civil War buff to the casual nonfiction reader. Some critics were a little queasy about the book's level of detail, both in describing death and the lives of its victims. But as more than one reviewer pointed out, for a nation at war, such writing and such reading are a duty. Copyright © 2004 Phillips & Nelson Media, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This is a monumentally important book about American religious beliefs, and the cultural and familial traditions deeply affected by the mass deaths and carnage of the Civil War. The author lays a sensitive and profound foundation of the religious meaning of death before and during the outbreak of the war. The beloved cultural and familial traditions were such that when the time came, each soul required family support to die a "good death". This entailed carefully tending to the dying, aiding (if necessary) and witnessing his/her verbal readiness to meet God. As the war became more brutal and overwhelming, burial traditions broke down. With tens of thousands of men away from home, the military was unprepared to bury, much less record, massive deaths for what all thought would be a short war. Most men died without family, although soldiers wounded on the field still tried to die a "good death" if they survived long enough and had a witness to tell their family. Others died instantly with nothing left to bury. Others were buried by military buddies, but without a lasting marker. Others were piled together in quickly dug pits for shallow burial. And for every son, brother, father, etc., a family was left behind, devastated in its tortured grieving: did he die a "good death", where is he buried, is he truly dead, and how could God allow such brutality and carnage - on both sides ("... how could God be on both sides?") Many came to question their religion and the existence of God.

Military burials changed after Lincoln's address, giving us Gettysburg National Cemetery, and then others. Garden-like, well-maintained, burial location without regard to rank. The aftermath of so much bloodshed on families was extensive in most churches and faiths, also thoroughly researched by the author. This review is very much a 5 star and would have been a 6 if I could have. Will read it again.

This was a fantastic book, though sometimes hard to stomach. Most Civil War books are about great battles and specific generals. Drew Gilpin Faust's book, *This Republic of Suffering*, covers something much more personal. The tremendous change that swept the United States due to the horrendous number of war dead. The US had never experienced anything like this; especially not in a short four year period. Gilpin Faust covers a number of issues related to how Americans dealt with death. There was the issue of whether the relative had a "good" death, meaning essentially they were ready to face their maker. There was identification and burial of war dead. Many were lucky to be able to identify dead loved ones. Many others were not so lucky, and so had to take solace that their loved ones were buried with comrades. Gilpin Faust discusses the different ways each side dealt with war dead. The north had the advantage in being able to identify and transport back war dead because of resources. The south was stretched thin. All round this was a fantastic book, touching on a little discussed or studied aspect of our great civil war. I highly recommend this book.

Been doing Civil War reenacting and teaching High School History for about 40 years and could not understand the cynicism behind the post war statement made by two former Union Army Generals at a dedication of a National cemetery "We finally got them to line up in ranks." This book was a present I probably would not have picked up myself, but has turned out to be one of the most thought provoking books I have read. It is one that you will want to take time and digest the information as you read. This makes it easy to put down but likely to be picked up again. The 19th century concept of "the Good Death" from religious and social conventions is very difficult for a person in the 21st century to understand. Then there is the cultural shock of so many casualties in such a short time making it comparable to the Taiping Rebellion in China or the Soviet losses in World War II. What to do to honor the fallen has been a national issue for the United States in all of our post Civil War conflicts to today. The idea of death in the military would absolve your past sins because one is sacrificing themselves for a higher cause comes forward from this period. This is a very thorough and well documented review of all of the concepts involved in dealing with this issue in a national consciousness. Many different sides are presented fairly and it is easy to see how they

have shaped our national views and still do.

This is a grim topic, obviously, but added significantly to my understanding of the mindset of the time of the civil war. The whole concept of "the good death" was new to me, and while I knew of the fanatic religious idiocy that was then prevalent (for example Jackson's reluctance to march on Sundays), this brought it home in a more concrete way than other books before had done. Also, the post-war difference in treatment of Yankee dead versus Confederate foreshadowed the many abuses that were soon to follow under the guise of "reconstruction". When we see the over-reaction of government and society to more recent small attacks (such as 9/11 and the political farce over Benghazi), it makes me wonder how this society would sustain huge losses such as those seen at Shiloh or Gettysburg.

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