

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)

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From 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 recentering 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 the edition.

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