

Introduction

Robert Penn Warren declared in 1961 that “the Civil War is our only ‘felt’ history—history lived in the national imagination.” His explanation for the imaginative appeal of the conflict reflected his literary craftsmanship as well as his historical vision. The war did not recede into the past like previous events, Warren argued in The Legacy of the Civil War, because “that mystic cloud from which emerged our modernity” permanently marked the beginning of the present. In transforming the shaky antebellum union into a nation, the ordeal had established Americans’ “most significant sense of identity, limited as that may be, and the best and most inclusive hope for our future.” The struggle had introduced a potent industrial state with “a new sense of military and economic competence” and nurtured a distinctive pragmatic style of thought. The defeated South had become a more coherent region than it had ever been before, sharing a “great alibi” that sheltered white racism and stunted social progress. Meanwhile, the overthrow of slavery had invested the rest of the United States with a “treasury of virtue” that encouraged hubristic self-delusion. Warren’s alertness to such ironies illustrated the storytelling expertise that informed his more structural observations about the significance of the historical moment. Unlike the Revolution, which lacked “inner drama” in Warren’s judgment, the psychological struggles of Lincoln and Grant and Lee and Jackson were self-divisions that mirrored the turmoil of the country and stirred the empathy of later generations. The importance of locality and community in the Civil War demonstrated a “right and natural relation of man to place and man to man” for a subsequently rootless American society. The twists and turns of the saga provided not only suspenseful excitement but also a field for contemplating the scope of human will and the force of destiny.¹

This collection of essays takes the occasion of the Civil War sesquicentennial anniversary to reconsider the influential claims that Warren put forward at the centennial anniversary. Like Warren, the contributors focus on the ways in which the imaginative appeal of the war extends beyond the framework of professional scholarship. We draw this distinction not because we regard that literature as any less creative or important than the work we address, but because academic institutions maintain an independent momentum in intellectual attention to the Civil War that fills shelves every month with volumes which vary widely in their implications for non-specialists. Doubtless other publications will survey new research.² In this book, students of art, literature, and history pool resources to offer a revealing perspective on contemporary America by examining other recent uses of the war.

Reassessment of Warren's argument begins with the premise he asserted so confidently. If the Civil War was "for the American imagination, the great single event of our history" in 1961, the evidence is not clear that it remains so in 2011. Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen reported in 1998 that few Americans felt a connection to any aspect of the national past, in contrast with the many respondents enthusiastic about "petit narratives" of family history.³ The finding was especially striking because Rosenzweig and Thelen conducted their survey at the end of a flurry of events bringing public attention to the Civil War. That surge began at the origins of the contemporary period in the early 1980s, when the basic framework of recent American society and politics consolidated at the outset of the Reagan administration. John Jakes's trilogy of novels about the Civil War and Reconstruction era spent seventy-four weeks on the New York Times bestseller list between 1982 and 1987 and spawned two of the most widely watched television miniseries of all time. Gore Vidal's Lincoln (1984) was a comparable commercial

success in print and broadcast. The movies Glory (1989) and Gettysburg (1993) bracketed the immense popularity of Ken Burns's television documentary The Civil War (1990), which spawned a cable television series entitled Civil War Journal. James McPherson, Garry Wills, and David Herbert Donald found wide readership for original scholarship on the war. Gone With the Wind extended its astonishing record of persistent success, returning to the Times bestseller list in 1986 on the fiftieth anniversary of Margaret Mitchell's novel and again five years later amid the hoopla that surrounded the publication of Alexandra Ripley's widely distributed sequel, Scarlett (1991). Charles Frazier's Cold Mountain (1997) spent sixty-one weeks on the Times bestseller list.⁴ Display of the Confederate battle flag became a burning political issue in several southern states. Despite this burst of activity, sociologist Barry Schwartz seconded the verdict of Rosenzweig and Thelen in a study that focused on the most durable element of the Civil War legacy, the stature of Abraham Lincoln. The cultural authority of Lincoln and all of the American past had eroded sharply since the early 1960s, Schwartz concluded in 1998. The Civil War still commanded a residual attachment, he acknowledged, but popular identification with the grand narrative had declined demonstrably.⁵

Warren's assertions about the uniqueness of the Civil War are now as debatable as his underlying claims about the scale of national interest in any phase of history. Perhaps he did not yet regard the Second World War as part of history in 1961, but memory of that conflict is likely to remain the most formative event in the American imagination well after the last member of the so-called greatest generation passes from the scene. Setting aside other new challengers to the primacy of the Civil War, interest in the Revolution has narrowed the gap that Warren considered the starting point for understanding the importance of the sectional conflict. Of the

ten top-selling nonfiction books published during the first decade of the twenty-first-century that focused on either the Revolution or the Civil War, eight were about the Revolutionary era, which Warren deemed “too simple” to sustain attention.⁶ Perhaps Americans have developed a more nuanced understanding of the Revolution; perhaps they have developed a taste for conflicts they consider clear-cut; perhaps a political conservatism claiming the mantle of the Founders has achieved broad cultural influence; perhaps public indifference toward the past now manifests itself in random tides of fashion. Surely, the student of non-academic interest in the Civil War should no longer begin by taking the singularity of that interest for granted.

As this book abundantly demonstrates, the Civil War continues to attract remarkably rich imaginative engagement. The ubiquitous presence of Abraham Lincoln during the presidential campaign and inauguration of Barack Obama shows that at least some invocations of the war still have the potential to “go viral” in American culture. The wealth of fresh art and literature related to the war required this volume to be selective in its coverage of new works. We focus primarily on the twenty-first century, although some essays address the previous two decades, and we aim to move the discussion of our topic beyond the well-examined examples of *Glory* and Burns’s television documentary. We take up only one of the relatively few newer cinematic or broadcast interpretations of the Civil War, and we similarly pass lightly over references to the war in contemporary music and its presence in video games and on the Internet.⁷ We devote particular attention to initiatives of African Americans and white southerners, groups for whom the Civil War has long been regarded as a defining event. As a result we do not discuss fiction on the war and its preliminaries published during the last fifteen years by such important writers

as Russell Banks, Geraldine Brooks, E. L. Doctorow, Marilynne Robinson, Jane Smiley, and Stephen Wright.⁸ Our exclusion of scholarship extends to forays into the Civil War by Roy Blount, Jr., Adam Gopnik, and other wide-ranging authors of nonfiction.⁹ We do not offer a comprehensive report on the observance of the bicentennial anniversary of Lincoln's birth, though we treat in detail the most significant aspect of that occasion. Despite its inevitable incompleteness, this volume provides a much more thorough investigation of the current uses of the Civil War than any previous study. The essayists look at works of more than thirty artists and writers as well as three national or regional political movements that have invoked the war in different ways.

Such a range of material defies subordination to a single comprehensive interpretation. The authors have not attempted to develop a common thesis but instead present independent and sometimes divergent views of the current significance of the war. Those differences reflect not only the authors' judgments but also the variety of a contemporary culture in which Americans look toward the war from separate directions. The contributors find fresh examples for Warren's belief that "the 'inwardness' of the experience of the Civil War, in both personal and national terms," makes the event an inspiring point of historical reference.¹⁰ At the same time, the essays show that the visibility of the Civil War in American culture today, including the most thoughtful manifestations, often reflects an interest in surface rather than depth and demonstrates the extent to which visual images have achieved ascendancy over stories.

This newer pattern has drawn little attention from previous commentators on the legacy of the Civil War. For example, discussions of the rising interest in the war during the 1980s rarely take notice of Robert Wilson's extravaganza the CIVIL warS: a tree is best measured

when it is down, though the commission for the arts festival accompanying the 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles involved leading artists in a dramatic conflict on a prominent stage. For all of its aggressive idiosyncrasy, Wilson's work anticipated some characteristic tendencies of Civil War interpretations during the following three decades. The subtitle of the avant-garde production typified a new interplay with the national canon of Civil War memory, aping Carl Sandburg's use of a folk aphorism as the title for the concluding chapter of his monumental Lincoln biography. The characters and action extended far beyond the mid-nineteenth-century United States and into the realm of directorial arbitrariness. Frederick the Great of Prussia was the main character in the section of the opera prepared in Cologne; Marie Curie, William the Silent, and Hercules figured in sections prepared in Marseilles, Rotterdam, and Rome. Robert Penn Warren's inward-looking narrative of the Civil War was decidedly not the appeal of the event for Robert Wilson. Instead the war furnished a repertory of well-known, manipulable visual images that served as connective tissue in a theatrical production without a conventional plot. Wilson's research into the 1860s focused on pictures rather than events or characters. The work of Matthew Brady's studio was a primary inspiration, and the opera featured a poem about photography by Pope Leo XIII. Robert E. Lee delivered an aria while spinning weightlessly in a space capsule. "We come to the theater already knowing a story, so there was no need to tell a story," Wilson explained after his immensely successful collaboration with composer Philip Glass on Einstein on the Beach (1976), which provided the template for their work together on the CIVIL warS. The proposed epic was controversial. Plans for rock star David Bowie to deliver the Gettysburg Address in Japanese particularly troubled potential sponsors. The Olympic arts festival let the work go unpresented at Los Angeles for lack of funding, and the

Pulitzer Prize board awarded no prize for drama in 1986 rather than accept a unanimous jury recommendation that the honor be given to a production of the Cologne section at the American Repertory Theater. But Wilson's postmodernism offered a model for creative engagement with familiar Civil War images in a rumination on familial conflict.¹¹

Similarly, even scholars interested specifically in recent Civil War cinema have failed to reckon adequately with Ross McElwee's Sherman's March: A Meditation on the Possibility of Romantic Love in the South in an Era of Nuclear Weapons Proliferation (1986), the most thoughtful film about the Civil War in the past twenty-five years. The conceit of the movie is that McElwee has received a grant to make a documentary film about the lingering regional impact of Sherman's march but instead decides, after his girlfriend dumps him, to wander toward his North Carolina hometown along the route of the march, mingling autobiographical and historical musings with new adventures. The picaresque send-up of the documentary genre challenges ideals of manhood and patterns of storytelling epitomized by Civil War tradition. McElwee contrasts himself with the passé virility of a Civil War military commander and contrasts his film with the passé monumentality of a Civil War equestrian statue. Sherman's March invites comparison with classic white southern interpretations of modernity as an exercise in wrestling with the Civil War. McElwee's departure from his proposed documentary lacks the foreboding with which graduate history student Jack Burden abandons his doctoral dissertation in Robert Penn Warren's All the King's Men (1946) and the angst with which the narrator leaves the walled graveyard in Allen Tate's "Ode to the Confederate Dead" (1927-1937). At the same time, McElwee's bemusement lacks the derisiveness with which Flannery O'Connor satirized glorification of the Lost Cause in "A Late Encounter with the Enemy" (1953). Awareness of

ideological and psychological distance from Confederate tradition is not a crisis for McElwee. Sherman's march is instead a time-honored cultural narrative that the filmmaker cuts, manipulates, and splices into a stimulating new work.¹²

The examples of Wilson and McElwee illustrate the extent to which the Civil War has come to thrive as a storehouse of famous characters, images, and stories available for recycling in ways that subordinate history to fiction and reminiscence. John Updike made the challenge of postmodernism the central theme of his Memories of the Ford Administration (1992), in which a college history professor looks back at his failed attempts to marry the wife of the deconstruction expert on the faculty and write a life of James Buchanan. The passionate biographer finds creative license indispensable to the project that the memoir excerpts, including an extended account of the Fort Sumter crisis. Michael Cunningham's Specimen Days (2005) a triptych of apocalyptic novellas, never mentions the nineteenth-century ordeal of the Union but borrows the title of Walt Whitman's autobiographical compendium and turns repeatedly to the wound-dresser for a prophetic voice to rise over the carnage.¹³ In such works the Civil War is a potent presence disconnected from the exactions of the past.

The longrunning television program The Simpsons, an influential demonstration of contemporary American uses of cultural allusion, offers a revealing measure of the resonance of the Civil War. The comedy has mentioned Lincoln more often than any other president. The most common motif in these references is the sheer fame of Lincoln. He appears on pennies, on five-dollar bills, on classroom walls, on Mount Rushmore, in the Lincoln Memorial. That stature provides a springboard for parody. Miniature golf courses feature obstacles in his image; Miss Illinois dresses as Lincoln in a beauty pageant; an immigrant convenience-store proprietor

renames a child Lincoln to seem more patriotic.¹⁴ These jokes lampoon the pieties of orthodox American hero worship, much like the consistent description of Ulysses S. Grant as a bumbling drunk. Emphasis on Lincoln's cultural availability also provides context for a fascination with his assassination. Springfield news reporters announce the discovery, and soon the assassination, of a squirrel that resembles Lincoln; a Lincoln impersonator in a theater balcony shoots himself in the head; Homer Simpson notes that Lincoln and Kennedy had the same golf handicap, supplementing the widely circulated list of parallels between the two presidential murders. Assassination becomes an extension not of politics but of celebrity, a fate suffered by John Lennon as well as John Kennedy.

The surge of interest in Lincoln's assassination, the climax of cultural availability, is one of the most striking reconfigurations of American priorities in recent attention to the Civil War. Schwartz shows that attendance has declined at Lincoln's birthplace, boyhood home, Springfield home, and tomb and has stagnated at the Lincoln Memorial over the last several decades but has mushroomed at Ford's Theater since the early 1980s. Robert Wilson's CIVIL warS was again a harbinger: its Lincoln was shot while watching Gone With the Wind on television. Gore Vidal's Lincoln was conspicuous not only for its detailed attention to the Booth conspiracy but also for a convergence between that plotline and the suggestion that the president, whom the novelist presented to the reader from the perspectives of multiple observers without entering into Lincoln's consciousness, was hollow at the core; Lincoln's genius in Lincoln was his ability to be what others wanted him to be. Over the next quarter-century the Lincoln assassination continued to feature prominently in imaginative works like Thomas Mallon's Henry and Clara (1994) and Suzan Lori-Parks's America Play (1994) and Topdog/Underdog (2001) as well as

two of the three Civil War books that spent the longest period of time on the New York Times hardcover bestseller list during the first decade of the twentieth century. A taboo subject in American humor from Mark Twain through Johnny Carson, the killing of Lincoln has become a commonplace theme in comedy. The online cartoon series Hard Drinkin' Lincoln (2000), written by a producer of The Simpsons, made the president “a loud, lewd, obnoxious guy in a big hat—the kind of guy you sit behind in a theater and just want to shoot.” Every episode of the series featured an assassination of Lincoln.¹⁵

The most vivid depiction of presidential assassination as cultural appropriation is the Stephen Sondheim-John Weidman musical Assassins, which first opened off-Broadway in 1990 and won several Tony Awards for a 2004 production. The musical also served as a starting point for humorist Sarah Vowell’s bestselling travelogue Assassination Vacation (2005).¹⁶ Lincoln is central to the show and Vowell’s book. The historical mélange of assassins and would-be assassins who make up the cast does not include Richard Lawrence, who fired two pistols at Andrew Jackson in the Capitol from close range in 1835. Assassins begins with Booth and Lincoln, with the actor getting bad reviews who unintentionally ensures that his victim will always get good reviews. Booth is the mentor to the other assassins in the group, many of whom have deep imaginative ties to the world of celebrity. John Hinckley sings his solo to a framed photograph of Jodie Foster. Squeaky Fromme and Sara Jane Moore look back nostalgically at the Charles Manson gang that murdered actress Sharon Tate as part of a twisted fantasy centered on obsession with the Beatles. The musical concludes logically with Booth and his fellow assassins convincing Lee Harvey Oswald to shoot John F. Kennedy, a president who reinforces the convergence of politics and celebrity. Assassins is the story of an America divided not into

classes or races or ideological factions but between the famous and the obscure. Booth is in danger of falling from the stage into the shadows, but he and the other assassins can achieve fame with a gun. The beginning and ending anthem of the musical, “Everybody’s Got the Right,” emphasizes that the president is a public figure whom “everybody’s got the right” to appropriate, or assassinate.

Like the Lincoln assassination, costumed re-enactment of the Civil War is an important site of historical reflection in the contemporary American culture of homage. Reenactment marks a recent shift in the forms taken by popular interest in the war. The roots of re-enactment reach back to commemorations organized by Civil War veterans, but the hobby began to take its current shape during the Civil War centennial—amid considerable controversy—and remained small in scale even after expansion during the centennial anniversary of the American Revolution. Only two thousand participants accepted an invitation to join in a costumed re-enactment of the battle of Gettysburg in July 1976 despite the prospect of national television coverage. Another re-enactment at Gettysburg five years later drew a similar crowd. But more than twelve thousand costumed re-enactors appeared for the one-hundred-twenty-fifth anniversary of the battle in 1988, a figure that doubled in the next ten years.¹⁷ Though connected to such trends as the introduction of costumed actor-guides at museums like Plimoth Plantation and the proliferation of Elvis impersonators and “tribute bands” imitating popular music groups, Civil War re-enactment has secured its own distinct and prominent position in American culture. That visibility is the result not only of the number of hobbyists but also the extent to which popular writers like Tony Horwitz and Elmore Leonard and numerous television comedies have treated the practice as a representative expression of contemporary American life.¹⁸

Although based on an ideal of authenticity superficially antithetical to postmodern appropriation, re-enactment also takes a frankly subjective and non-narrative approach to historical interpretation. The re-enactor's goal is a perceived experience of transportation across time, a privatized "period rush" achieved through careful attention to sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and textures rather than immersion in the moral or psychological depths of stories.¹⁹ This individualization of historical meaning embodies one of the major themes most firmly associated with the Civil War today: the fragmentation of what many Americans understood in the early 1960s to be a unified mass culture. The Civil War buff has become a standard symbol of the national splintering into the pursuit of countless separate, sometimes bizarre, interests. Horwitz's Confederates in the Attic and Andrew Ferguson's Land of Lincoln (2004) both take the form of reports on an outsider's introduction to Civil War subcultures and, by extension, to a United States united by zealous devotion to personal passions. When Civil War relic hunter and restorer Sam White of Chester, Virginia, died in February 2008 in the explosion of a cannonball he was polishing, national news coverage described him as a paradigmatic American consumed by fascination with his hobby.²⁰

Like the works of Robert Wilson and Ross McElwee and John Updike, recent interest in the Lincoln assassination and costumed re-enactment illustrates a tendency to approach the Civil War as a problem in the stability of cultural representation. The authority of the national saga now excites imaginations at least as much as the historical event itself, inviting challenges that range from laughing at the murder of Lincoln to asserting the superiority of "living history" to rewriting the narrative of the sectional conflict. Revision of the most influential accounts of the Civil War is a typical strategy for these challenges to the received tradition. Alice Randall has

reanimated Gone With the Wind in The Wind Done Gone. Geraldine Brooks has returned to Little Women in March; DJ Spooky has reworked Birth of a Nation. John Huddleston has revisited scenes of Civil War photographs. Kara Walker has riffed on Harper's Pictorial History of the War. Dario Robleto has fabricated Civil War relics. Similar concerns inform works often regarded merely as straightforward, emotionally charged narratives of the sectional conflict. Glory is a meditation on the current vitality of Augustus Saint-Gaudens's memorial to Robert Gould Shaw and the 54th Massachusetts Regiment no less than Sherman's March is a meditation on the relevance of Saint-Gaudens's equestrian statue of Sherman, though the two films advance different interpretations of the relationship between the era of monuments and the era of movies.²¹ The Civil War is an homage to photography in the age of Matthew Brady as well as a hypnotic recitation of the Civil War saga, reinforcing period ballads with the ersatz nostalgia of the "Ashokan Farewell."

If the Civil War was for Warren in 1961 an event that lived in the American imagination, it is now an event undead in the American imagination, like the ex-Confederate antihero of the subversive comic book series and 2010 movie Jonah Hex. The war is not so much "our only felt history" as our most frequently rehearsed, most solemnly enshrined, most commercially exploited, and therefore most readily appropriated history. Warren's "mystic cloud from which emerged our modernity" has given way to the artificial lights of our postmodernity.

Although Remixing the Civil War addresses many different contemporary interpretations of the war, the remix format recurs throughout the book. The pattern appears in essays focused on political and social movements as well as essays focused on literary and visual representations

of the war. C. Wyatt Evans's opening discussion of "the Lincoln-Obama phenomenon" enriches the substantial recent scholarship on the politics of commemoration with more direct analysis of the use of memory in electoral politics. Moving well beyond the standard emphasis on reputational entrepreneurs who have shaped the popular image of Lincoln since the 1860s, the essay looks at a doubling initiated but by no means controlled by Obama and opened by digital technology to a rapid, multifaceted development. In addition to updating familiar mobilizations of the American past, the diffuse process demonstrated the newer appropriation of Lincoln's image. As a result, "the Lincoln-Obama phenomenon" warrants comparison with earlier political invocations of Lincoln and also with Seth Grahame-Smith's semi-reverent novel Abraham Lincoln, Vampire Hunter (2010).

The next two contributions take up additional political and social movements that remix memory of the Civil War. Thomas Brown's essay on state displays of the Confederate battle flag stresses that enthusiasm for the southern cross illustrates a shift from a quasi-religious form of social identification, reinforced by such rituals as the observance of Confederate Memorial Day, to a consumer-based form of social identification, centered on the purchase of merchandise related to the Civil War only by an emblazoned emblem. The transformation of the flag into a marketing logo has caused the gender, religious, and class dynamics of disputes over the battle flag to differ sharply from the alignments that characterized the Lost Cause for decades after Appomattox. Meanwhile, the moral defense of Confederate soldiers has borrowed an explicitly post-Vietnam ideology. Mitch Kachun finds other discontinuities in the proliferation of Juneteenth festivals since the mid-1990s, which collide with federal efforts to commemorate the Thirteenth Amendment and also with locally based observances of emancipation. Even some

communities with longstanding independent freedom festivals have imported the image of local tradition associated with the Texas holiday.

Four essays focus on recent works of art and literature. Robert Brinkmeyer's survey of recent southern fiction finds few writers treating the Civil War as the decisive epic that Warren described. Black authors interested in history have devoted their primary attention to slavery, which has in some instances prompted powerful meditations on the war but has often produced fiction set firmly in the period before the firing on Fort Sumter. White authors have reversed the Homeric tradition by approaching the Civil War not as the Iliad but as the Odyssey, in Brinkmeyer's apt phrase. Brilliant as this work sometimes is, the novels rarely imagine the war as a regional communal narrative whether describing events in the nineteenth century or the shadow of the war in the contemporary South.

Remix strategies are particularly central in the essays that concentrate on visual and theatrical arts. Elizabeth Young highlights the manipulation of photographic images in wartime visual culture as a precedent for recent work. Her essay invites the reflection that the Civil War flourishes in contemporary American culture not only because of the political issues the war involved and the human costs it exacted but also because the war was a signal event in the history of the immensely influential medium of photography. Gerard Brown juxtaposes satirical and earnest pastiches of Civil War representations in his discussion of conceptual artists Allison Smith and Dario Robleto. Smith's appropriation of the Civil War reenactment and Robleto's adaptations of Civil War relics are excellent examples of work highly regarded within a particular discipline but little known to audiences interested specifically in current views of the war. W. Fitzhugh Brundage's essay on African Americans' recent uses of the Civil War ranges

from visual arts, theater, and cinema to fiction and poetry. One of the strongest connecting threads in this work is a persistent cultural cross-referencing that builds on a black tradition of “signifying” that extends back to slavery.

The mashed-up Civil War found in these essays corresponds in technique to the substantive theme most clearly highlighted in this volume, the contemporary fluidity of formerly rigid social categories. National identity is a social category fundamentally implicated in the American model of civil war, as Robert Wilson underscored by proposing to present the CIVIL warS at an art festival organized in conjunction with an Olympic gathering of nations that had widely experienced violent disintegration and shared a long history of mutual conquest. The candid celebration of the entertainment industry and other consumer structures in current attention to the Civil War points toward a post-national imagination at odds with previous remembrance of the conflict. Gender is another social category long associated with warfare that has developed a new fluidity in the last several decades, including an increased acceptance of homosexuality that is one of the hallmarks of the contemporary period. The effort to add Lincoln to the list of eminent gay Americans has been a major form of interest in the Civil War era over the past fifteen years.²² This book points out that renewed awareness of the Civil War as a mainspring of the American military tradition in the wake of the hostilities in Afghanistan and Iraq has brought further emphasis on the blurring of gender and sexual boundaries in the crisis of the Union.

Race is the formerly rigid social category most thoroughly problematized in this volume. Unlike nationality or gender, this category was in the forefront of Robert Penn Warren’s thinking in 1961. But race has come to influence representations of the Civil War in ways that Warren

could not foresee amid the rising crest of the civil rights movement. He defined “the race question in the South” as the conflict between Jim Crow and the demand for racial equality, an approach appropriate for a centennial anniversary that shattered when a segregated hotel in Charleston refused to accommodate a black delegate to the national assembly of the Civil War Centennial Commission visiting South Carolina from New Jersey. Decades later, the unfinished work of the civil rights movement continues to reshape American memory of the Civil War. In an effort to clarify that the sectional conflict centered on the future of slavery, for example, Congress asked the National Park Service in 2000 to devote attention at battlefield parks to the origins and stakes of the war rather than maintaining a narrow focus on military tactics.²³ But if the politics of morality plumbed by Warren remain unresolved and pressing, recent interpretations of the war often turn less on relations between social groups than on the subjective construction of individual racial identity. Many of the essays describe works that in different ways revel in the permeability of the color line. These emphases parallel Stephen Wright’s dazzling novel The Amalgamation Polka (2006), which recounts young abolitionist Liberty Fish’s wartime journey into the plantation heart of the South to confront his grandfather, a diabolical slaveowner who seeks to pervert and control racial instability by turning blacks into whites through chemical experiments and incestuous breeding. After vanquishing the villain, the hero cheerfully concludes that life “makes mongrels of us all.”²⁴

The instability of cultural representations and social categories is the motif that most consistently unites the separate contributions to this collection, but the authors address many additional features of the United States in the early twenty-first century. The volume repeatedly demonstrates that conflict between blue and gray serves as a field onto which Americans project

partisan fervor in the blue-red era of competition between Democrats and Republicans.

Contributors explore the complex relations between the civil religion grounded in the Civil War and the evangelical mode in recent American politics. Several essays observe that pleas to preserve Civil War battlefields have become a standard and sometimes powerful symbol of the cultural costs of sprawling property development. These and other topics are defining characteristics of contemporary life that Warren did not imagine to be implicated in the legacy of the war.

Although this book treats academic research as an enterprise institutionally committed to the importance of the Civil War in a way that precludes survey alongside other representations, that compartmentalization implies the possibility of a deeper divide worthy of at least a brief concluding notice. Warren saw no such schism in 1961, the year after C. Vann Woodward dedicated The Burden of Southern History to the poet and novelist, and The Legacy of the Civil War plausibly indicates that Woodward, David Donald, Kenneth Stampp, Allan Nevins, and other leading experts shared Warren's understanding of the war.²⁵ Fifty years later, research specialists called upon to analyze the lasting appeal of the war routinely echo Warren's emphasis on the narrative traction of the conflict even though writers, artists, and broad-based political movements of the past quarter-century have pointed toward alternative explanations.²⁶ The outstanding works of Civil War scholarship that have earned a position on the New York Times bestseller list during the first decade of the twenty-first century have in original and important ways stressed themes that Warren considered central a half-century ago: the making of modernity, the establishment of national identity, the consolidation of the white South, the

emergence of pragmatism, the drama of personal struggle, the delineation of contingency, the call of stories.²⁷ Perhaps even the most widely admired scholarship no longer follows lines of development closely related to other popular and profound interpretations of the past. Idiosyncratic pastiche does not transfer easily to the norms of academic research.

But recent work also suggests opportunities for renewed synergy between scholarship and other creative genres. Specialists in the Civil War era have of course shared in the broader interest in instabilities of racial, gender, and national identity. Scholars have also explored several stylistic parallels to the remix approaches introduced in the 1980s. Stephen Cushman's Bloody Promenade (1999) introduces a subjective first-person narrator. Christopher Benfey's A Summer of Hummingbirds (2008) is organized around a visual image. One of the most important developments in Civil War scholarship during the past generation has been the intensity of interest in the conflict as not only a story uncovered retrospectively, perhaps through research, but as a cultural narrative that Americans began to invent even before the outbreak of the war and that has remained under contested construction ever since.²⁸ Students of the Civil War will only be able to assess the most promising avenues for scholarship in making use of the past when they know more about the other forms of interpretation circulating in contemporary American culture. This collaborative effort seeks to inform that evaluation.

1. Robert Penn Warren, The Legacy of the Civil War: Meditations on the Centennial (New York: Random House, 1961), 4, 6-7, 46, 49, 54, 83, 92.

2. For an important example from the Lincoln bicentennial, see Sean Wilentz, “Who Lincoln Was,” The New Republic (July 15, 2009). Drew Gilpin Faust, “‘We Should Grow Too Fond of It’: Why We Love the Civil War,” Civil War History 50 (Dec. 2004): 368-383, presents thoughtful reflections on the growth of scholarly interest in the Civil War since the late 1980s.

3. Warren, Legacy of the Civil War, 1; Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

4. John Jakes, North and South (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982); John Jakes, Love and War (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984); John Jakes, Heaven and Hell (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1987); Gore Vidal, Lincoln: A Novel (New York: Random House, 1984); Alexandra Ripley, Scarlett: The Sequel to Margaret Mitchell’s *Gone With the Wind* (New York: Warner Books, 1991); Charles Frazier, Cold Mountain (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1997). All information about New York Times bestseller list is from www.hawes.com, accessed Nov. 30, 2009; references are to the hardcover bestseller lists. On the persistence of Gone With the Wind, see Helen Taylor, Scarlett’s Women: *Gone with the Wind* and Its Female Fans (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1989).

5. Barry Schwartz, "Postmodernity and Historical Reputation: Abraham Lincoln in the Late Twentieth Century," Social Forces 77 (1998): 63-103. Schwartz has more recently elaborated on his conclusion in Abraham Lincoln in the Post-Heroic Era: History and Memory in Twentieth-Century America (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), in which he reports at 148-152 that during the 1950s the New York Times index averaged fifty references to Lincoln each year; in the 1990s, it averaged seven references to Lincoln per year. The Congressional Record index showed twenty-nine Lincoln entries per year in the 1950s and eight references per year in the 1990s. Cf. Edward L. Ayers, "Worrying about the Civil War," in Moral Problems in American Life: New Perspectives on Cultural History, ed. Karen Halttunen and Lewis Perry (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1998), 145-165, which opens with the assertion that "the Civil War has never been more popular."

6. Warren, Legacy of the Civil War, 83. "Top-selling" is defined here as the number of weeks that a book was included in the New York Times list of bestselling hardcover books. The works on the Revolution were David G. McCullough, John Adams (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001) (sixty weeks); Joseph Ellis, Founding Brothers: The Revolutionary Generation (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000) (forty-three weeks); David G. McCullough, 1776 (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005) (thirty-four weeks); Walter Isaacson, Benjamin Franklin: An American Life (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003) (twenty-six weeks); Joseph Ellis, His Excellency: George Washington (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004) (fifteen weeks); Ron Chernow, Alexander Hamilton (New York: Penguin Press, 2004) (twelve weeks); Cokie Roberts, Founding Mothers: The Women Who Raised Our Nation (New York: William Morrow, 2004)

(eleven weeks); and Joseph J. Ellis, American Creation (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007) (nine weeks). The Civil War books were Doris Kearns Goodwin, Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005) (twenty weeks) and James L. Swanson, Manhunt: The Twelve-Day Chase for Lincoln's Killer (New York: William Morrow, 2006) (thirteen weeks). The Revolution has also been the subject for more widely watched film treatments in the past decade, the 2008 Home Box Office miniseries based on McCullough's John Adams and the 2000 cinematic release The Patriot.

7. On Glory, see Martin H. Blatt, "Glory: Hollywood History, Popular Culture, and the Fifty-Fourth Massachusetts Regiment," and Thomas Cripps, "Glory as a Meditation on the Saint-Gaudens Monument," both in Hope and Glory: Essays on the Legacy of the Fifty-Fourth Massachusetts Regiment, eds. Martin H. Blatt, Thomas J. Brown, and Donald Yacovone (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), 215-274, which cite previous studies. On The Civil War, see especially Tara McPherson, Reconstructing Dixie: Race, Gender, and Nostalgia in the Imagined South (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), 115-127; David Glassberg, "Watching The Civil War," in Sense of History: The Place of the Past in American Life (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), 88-108; and Robert Brent Toplin, ed., Ken Burns's The Civil War: Historians Respond (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996). On the Civil War in more recent film, see Jenny Barrett, Shooting the Civil War: Cinema, History, and American Identity (London: I. B. Tauris & Co., 2009); Gary W. Gallagher, Causes Won, Lost, and Forgotten: How Hollywood and Popular Art Shape What We Know about the Civil War (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008); Bruce Chadwick, The Reel Civil War: Mythmaking in American Film (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001). On

popular music, the starting points are Will Kaufman, The Civil War in American Culture (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 80-84, and Andrew K. Smith and James E. Akenson, "The Civil War in Country Music Tradition," in Country Music Goes to War, ed. Charles K. Wolfe and James E. Akenson (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2005), 1-25. On video games and cyber-communications see Kaufman, Civil War in American Culture, 120-124, and McPherson, Reconstructing Dixie, 105-115. The limited presence of the Civil War in all of these important venues should caution specialists in the war not to exaggerate its cultural visibility.

8. Russell Banks, Cloudsplitter: A Novel (New York: HarperCollins, 1998); Geraldine Brooks, March (New York: Viking, 2005); E. L. Doctorow, The March (New York: Random House, 2005); Marilynne Robinson, Gilead (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004); Jane Smiley, The All-True Travels and Adventures of Lidie Newton (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998); Stephen Wright, The Amalgamation Polka (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006).

10. Roy Blount, Jr., Robert E. Lee: A Penguin Life (New York: Lipper/Viking Books, 2003); Adam Gopnik, Angels and Ages: A Short Book about Darwin, Lincoln, and Modern Life (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009).

10. Warren, The Legacy of the Civil War, 85.

11. Katharina Otto-Bernstein, Absolute Wilson: The Biography (Munich: Prestel, 2006), 145; see also Arthur Holmberg, The Theatre of Robert Wilson (New York: Cambridge University

Press, 1997). Glass has since returned to the Civil War in Appomattox, an opera first produced at the San Francisco Opera in 2007. Merrill D. Peterson, Lincoln in American Memory (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 390, sniffs that the CIVIL warS “had little to do with Lincoln or the Civil War. The palpable human being, if found anywhere, was found at last in Ken Burns’s historical documentary film The Civil War.”

12. McPherson, Reconstructing Dixie, 127-140, provides an insightful assessment of Sherman’s March, which does not appear in any of the other three recent books about Civil War movies cited in n. 7. For a similar white southern sensibility, see Jim Cullen’s discussion of singer-songwriter Randy Newman in The Civil War in Popular Culture: A Reusable Past (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), 131-136.

13. John Updike, Memories of the Ford Administration: A Novel (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992); Michael Cunningham, Specimen Days (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005).

14. All references to The Simpsons are drawn from The Simpsons Archive, www.snpp.com, particularly the list of references to U. S. presidents, accessed Nov. 30, 2009. Schwartz, Lincoln in the Post-Heroic Era, 159-160, similarly notes that the original dust-jacket cover of Jon Stewart’s Naked Pictures of Famous People (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1998) featured an image of Lincoln, the American embodiment of a famous person.

15. Schwartz, 163, 292-294; Thomas Mallon, Henry and Clara (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1994). The bestsellers are Swanson, Manhunt, and Jay Winik, April 1865: The Month That Saved America (New York: HarperCollins, 2001). Another widely distributed book on the topic

was Michael W. Kauffman, American Brutus: John Wilkes Booth and the Lincoln Conspiracies (New York: Random House, 2004). The world premiere production of the Eric Sawyer-John Shoptaw opera about the Lincoln assassination, Our American Cousin, took place at the Academic of Music Theater in Northampton, Massachusetts, in 2008. Robert Redford announced plans in August 2009 to direct a Hollywood movie about the Lincoln assassination. See also Robert Friedman, A Simple Assassination (play; date?).

16. Sarah Vowell, Assassination Vacation (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005).

17. Robert J. Cook, Troubled Commemoration: The American Civil War Centennial, 1961-1965 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007), 126-131; Gordon L. Jones, “‘Gut History’: Civil War Reenacting and the Making of an American Past” (Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 2007), 173, 177.

18. Tony Horwitz, Confederates in the Attic: Dispatches from the Unfinished Civil War (New York: Pantheon, 1998); Elmore Leonard, Tishomingo Blues (New York: William Morrow, 2002).

19. In addition to Jones, “‘Gut History,’” see Lisa A. Long, Rehabilitating Bodies: Health, History, and the American Civil War (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), and Jim Weeks, Gettysburg: Memory, Market, and an American Shrine (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 2003), 171-225, for discussions of Civil War reenacting.

20. Andrew Ferguson, Land of Lincoln: Adventures in Abe’s America (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2007); “140-Yr.-Old Cannonball Kills Civil War Fan,”

www.cbsnews.com/stories/208/05/02/national/main4068415.shtml, accessed April 27, 2010.

21. See Cripps, “Glory as a Meditation on the Saint-Gaudens Monument.”

22. See Charles E. Morris III, “My Old Kentucky Homo: Abraham Lincoln, Larry Kramer, and the Politics of Queer Memory,” in Queering Public Address: Sexualities in American Historical Discourse ed. Charles E. Morris III (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2007), 93-120.

23. Warren, Legacy of the Civil War, 58; Robert K. Sutton, Rally on the High Ground: The National Park Service Symposium on the Civil War (n.p.: Eastern National, 2001).

24. Stephen Wright, The Amalgamation Polka (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 311. Robert Burgoyne, Film Nation: Hollywood Looks at U.S. History (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 16-37, offers a penetrating analysis of the malleability of race in Glory, a film often treated as a straightforward celebration of the recognition of black citizenship.

25. Warren, Legacy of the Civil War, 17, 65, 73, 93; C. Vann Woodward, The Burden of Southern History (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1960).

26. See, e.g., James M. McPherson, “The War That Never Goes Away,” in Drawn with the Sword: Reflections on the Civil War (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 55-65.

27. Drew Gilpin Faust, This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008); James M. McPherson, Tried by War: Abraham Lincoln as Commander in Chief (New York: Penguin Press HC, 2008); James M. McPherson, Crossroads

of Freedom: Antietam (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Louis Menand, The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001).

28. Stephen Cushman, Bloody Promenade: Reflections on a Civil War Battle (University Press of Virginia, 1999); Christopher Benfey, A Summer of Hummingbirds: Love, Art, and Scandal in the Intersecting Worlds of Emily Dickinson, Mark Twain, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Martin Johnson Heade (New York: Penguin Press, 2008). Thomas J. Brown, "Civil War Remembrance as Reconstruction," in Reconstructions: New Perspectives on the Postbellum United States ed. Thomas J. Brown (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 206-236, offers an overview of the scholarship on representations and memory of the war.