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Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War*. New York: Knopf, 2008. Pp. xviii, 346. ISBN 978-0-375-40404-7.

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Death has become a popular subject in recent Civil War scholarship. Of course, war by its very nature is a matter of death and killing, but the subject of death broadly construed and especially its lingering impact upon the society have received particular attention lately. Mark Neely's "Cult of Violence in the Civil War"¹ and Mark Schanz's *Awaiting the Heavenly Country*² concentrate upon the antebellum culture that enabled Americans to accept the unexpectedly massive casualties of the war. Drew Gilpin Faust's new book further expands this discussion into the culture, memory, and even industry of death that emerged after the Civil War.

Faust, Lincoln Professor of History and President of Harvard University, has a long publication record in the cultural impact of the Civil War. Her previous publications, notably *Mothers of Invention*,³ in their concentration on gender issues, slavery, and Southern nationalism, demonstrate her grasp of broad social contexts and the conscious and subconscious attitudes that weave themselves into the fabric of collective memory. *This Republic of Suffering* examines the shock that more than 600,000 deaths gave to the survivors of the battlefield carnage, a reaction observed in plenty of other publications. Faust, however, is the first to follow that shock beyond its initial stunning effect to show how, in subsequent years, the massive amount of death shaped Americans' perception of the war, its victims, and themselves as survivors.

The book's eight chapters, "Dying," "Killing," "Burying," "Naming," "Realizing," "Believing and Doubting," "Accounting," "Numbering," and a conclusion titled "Surviving" follow an obvious progression from the start of the killing process through the actions and consequences of killing, to the postwar significance of mass military slaughter as the country tried to fathom its national tragedy. With a strong focus on the psychological impact of killing, Faust describes the effect of Civil War death as a kind of "eight-step program" to national accommodation with the loss of a generation. One of the strengths of the book is its concern with the full effect of Civil War death in the long term, not just during the war years. Like any multi-step program, full realization does not come until the final stages, and Faust takes the reader through all of the difficult steps.

The chapters address three broad time frames: wartime, immediate postwar, and long-term postwar. The chapter on dying centers on the soldiers' concern with the "Good Death." Like a snapshot that froze the memory of an individual forever, the Good Death characterized survivors' moral and spiritual recollection of the deceased. Soldiers who died

¹ In *The Civil War and the Limits of Destruction* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U Pr, 2007).

² *Awaiting the Heavenly Country: The Civil War and America's Culture of Death* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell U Pr, 2008).

³ *Mothers of Invention: Women in the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: U North Carolina Pr, 1996).

well, through their religious conviction and stoic bravery, demonstrated the ideal passing, preserving a comforting image that the surviving family could cherish. Such an idealized demise, however, clashed with the realities of killing, the emphasis of the second chapter. Here, soldiers revealed the true carnage of the battlefield, where heroic death was rare and the horrors of mangled bodies and distant killing defied any attempt to arrange a Good Death. The number of unnamed graves in countless cemeteries was a clear indication of the impersonal nature of most Civil War deaths. The constant wartime task of immediate burial of the dead is the subject of chapter three. The sheer labor necessary to remove and inter the dead inflicted psychological wounds that persisted long after the war. Deprived of the solemn ceremony attached to antebellum funerals, dead soldiers became a problem to solve or a task to complete. The risk of disease required quick burial and the sensitivity of prewar ceremony disappeared into the mass graves of unidentified corpses. Burial was not an even process, as the author demonstrates. Class played a part, as officers warranted coffins and individual graves, while enlisted men found themselves segregated, even in death, in often unmarked mass graves. The belligerents naturally favored their own dead during the interment process, leaving the bodies of their enemies to lie where they had fallen, or perhaps to be buried last. Burials also first introduced civilians to the effect of the war, as those near major battlefields became unwilling witnesses and hosts of the bloodshed, responsible for interring the legions of dead. Chapter four examines the devastating effect of so many anonymous dead on surviving family members.

Chapters five and six speak to the immediate postwar consequences of Civil War fatalities. "Realizing" was the first step in accepting and adjusting to life after a soldier's death. Patterns of mourning changed, as thousands of widows created a culture of remembrance more in line with the Good Death than with actual battlefield realities. Fragments, tokens, and relics of a departed soldier became symbols of memory, replacements for a body denied (by prewar standards) proper burial. Mourning also became a collective activity, especially for prominent figures. Families mourned their own dead, but fallen heroes of the respective causes, especially Abraham Lincoln and Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson, became objects of national mourning.

"Believing and Doubting," on the other hand, reflects the inability of the country to comprehend the scope of death or the reasons men died in such numbers. The often anonymous nature of Civil War deaths caused many families to hope their sons, brothers, or fathers might still be alive, a hope maintained far too long in some cases. Spirituality increased as a consequence of death, as suffering families wanted desperately to believe that a reunification with their loved ones awaited them in the next life. For those who accepted that their relative was dead, the next process was to put his death into perspective and to justify his loss. To many, there was no justification, and instead of embracing religion's offer of a future joyous reunion, mourners questioned the wisdom and charity of a god who permitted such bloodletting. America endured one of its greatest periods of soul-searching.

The final chapters deal with the long-term implications of death on such a massive scale, as the dead created an industry of their own. The drive to assuage the grief of death and justify the war led to a massive postwar process of accounting for the dead. Families wanted to know what had happened to their missing relatives, and desired a physical form

to provide emotional closure. Some did not want their dead to rest in distant soil and transferred their remains—if they could be identified—to places closer to home or at least where someone could tend their graves. The recovery of remains began almost as soon as the war ended and continued for the next two decades. The government interred Union remains in new National Cemeteries, hallowed locations intended to honor the dead as saviors of the country, a belated version of the Good Death. Confederate dead received less organized treatment, but the collection and burial of Southern soldiers became an early exercise in the Lost Cause as survivors sought to commemorate the heroes of their lost nation.

The final chapter, on numbering, discusses the problems of establishing a precise number of Civil War dead and why arriving at such a number was so important. The absence or destruction of many Civil War records made casualty figures a guessing game. The large number of anonymous dead essentially made accurate post-battle rosters impossible, as officers had no idea if a soldier was dead, captured, in a hospital, or had deserted. Both armies tacitly accepted that arriving at exact numbers was virtually impossible. Yet establishing numbers became essential to defining the immense sacrifices and even the glory of specific victories. The memory and history of the war came to associate great victory, personal bravery, and national devotion to cause not merely with loss of life, but with loss of a *great number of lives*. Great things came only through great deaths.

Faust skillfully uses relevant primary and secondary sources and integrates them with the writings of such leading cultural figures of the postwar era as Walt Whitman, Mark Twain, and Ambrose Bierce. The purpose of the book is ultimately to find meaning in the mass deaths of the Civil War, and the sources provide that. Quotations, usually in brief snippets, convey the inability of the human mind to grasp the scale of death, the loss of loved ones, and the need to find a new reality in a culture obsessed with mortality.

Like many other scholars, Faust sets out to answer the question of the war's precise impact on the country. But while others define the question as political, economic, military, or racial, she answers it in its most elemental terms—killing and death and the effects of these on survivors. War is killing, and as William Sherman said, "You cannot refine it."⁴ By stripping away tangential circumstances and concentrating upon the facts of killing and its consequences, Faust has created a groundbreaking study of war in the American context.

⁴ Letter to the Mayor and City Council of Atlanta (12 Sep 1864).