My intent in this paper is to write a book review of James M. McPherson’s, *For Cause and Comrades* which I will utilize in my APUS history course along with excerpts from other sources. I want to apply a “people up” approach to my methodology on the issues leading to and including the Civil War with the desire to entice students through the rich analysis provided by McPherson in his study. Further, I want my students to understand the ethos of leading figures like Frederick Douglass, Abraham Lincoln, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and others, as well as the counterpoint views of Southerners. Lastly, the “people up” approach personalizes the history of this crucial era in American history allowing students to explore through the lens of letters, and other writings the reasons why ordinary people fought, were willing to die, and did die in droves for their cause.

First a word on the methodology I intend using in teaching the antebellum and Civil War era. Upon reading the *Narrative* by Frederick Douglass I was convinced of its value in terms of teaching the abolitionist movement, slavery, and other topics of the era through the eyes of this extraordinary individual and his story. I will have my AP students read this book constructing for them guiding questions making connections to pertinent antebellum issues including the political arguments over the value of Free labor over Slavery, the revelations of the socio-economic impacts of slavery in terms of each section, the prejudice issue including a analysis of the inhumanity of slavery, and lastly, his impacts on the evolution into radical abolitionism, including the conscription of the *Constitution* in the cause. Other excerpts will be taken from Lincoln’s *House Divided*
Speech, his First Inaugural, the Proclamation, the Gettysburg Address, and his second Inaugural. Additionally, I will excerpt Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Uncle Tom’s Cabin chapter revealing the fate of Tom, and make critical references to the Second Great Awakening and her families’ connections to the cause. To draw out the Southern perspective I will include excerpts from Chief Justice Tanney’s Dred Scott ruling, and The Ordinance of Secession of South Carolina. McPherson’s book is a kind of culmination of views taken from the Confederate and Union officers and soldiers who had been formulating for at least a generation. As stated above guiding questions will help focus student’s attention on the theme and sub-themes within this book. I hope his analysis will break down for students some myths of the Civil War, take a little look at historiography, but also help us explore intriguing personal stories, swaying moral, its brutality, the ethos of duty & honor, political impacts, and the war’s evolution in terms of defining and expanding the union cause while spelling the end of the Confederacy.

McPherson does a nice job in the preface framing guiding prompts for his study. Not satisfied with his own knowledge on the topic, and astonished at the raw statistics of men killed or wounded revealed while visiting Civil War battlefields he embarks on a quest to unveil via the reading of over a thousand letters of both Union and Confederate officers and soldiers the following guiding themes: What did they fight for?, How did they cope with the stresses of war?, How did they sustain a far higher level of casualties than any other army in American history and keep on fighting? (McPherson i – xi) Exploring why men fought is a complicated topic. We must first acknowledge that most of the soldiers who fought in the Civil War were volunteers. (McPherson 5) Secondly, this war was not
fought purely for religious purposes nor for conquest, but mainly for deep rooted beliefs. This was a war similar to WWII in which many felt its impacts, and enduring affects. (McPherson 6, 112)

The more poignant reasons why men volunteered and fought that are revealed in the letters include honor, sense of duty, patriotism, and moral suasion. To evoke a bit of historiography McPherson builds on the great work of Bell I Wiley who wrote two corresponding histories *The Life Of Johnny Reb* in 1943, and *The Life of Billy Yank* in 1951. In his work Wiley states that the prime motivator in the letters he read was a sense of glory, adventure, excitement, and desire to see far off places. (Wiley, *The Life of Billy Yank* 37) McPherson does not dispel that for many this “seeing of the elephant” was, especially in the early onset of the war a motivator, a call to adventure if you will, but he adds other factors namely the sense of honor and duty men felt to their respective section. (McPherson 25-27) In the case of Charles Francis Adams Jr. for example he rejected his father’s advice to keep out of the war stating that it was a sense of the Adams’ family honor as anti-slavery advocates that compelled him to join. (McPherson 25) However, in its initial phase most Northern volunteers fought for preserving the union and not to free slaves. Lincoln’s call for volunteers to defend the union and stop the rebellious secessionists was the main Northern patriotic cause during the first two years of the war. It galvanized around their interpretation of the “spirit of 76” which included the idea of a unbreakable union under a virtuous republican form of government bound by a unbreakable Constitution which respected law, and order for all. The rebellion represented chaos, anarchy, and was the greatest threat facing the otherwise splendid
example of republican government on the planet. (McPherson 18-19, 112)

For the Southern soldier patriotism burned with the desire to protect home, family, country, and personal honor which meant fulfillment of their manhood. This Victorian notion of duty was a powerful incentive and motivator in that it shaped, and defined men’s character and lives. The idea carried to its conclusion meant that you fought out of patriotic moral obligation to your country. This was also a masculine concept with the opposite to honor being shame, the ultimate in humiliation and failure. (McPherson 22-23) Much has been said about the tenacity of the Southern soldiers who were after all in their mindset defending their homes, their wives, their daughters, and their liberties. In their view the “spirit of 1776” promised state and local rights, including the right to own slave property. Yankee interference in their affairs had already adversely affected their “way of life” via the stirrings of the abolitionists who were aiding a slow but steadily increasing flow of escaping slaves to their freedom a movement which accelerated after the very controversial Fugitive Slave Bill passed in 1851.

Abolitionists like William Lloyd Garrison and Wendell Phillips the originators of the American Anti-Slavery Society, had began a movement in the early 1830s calling slavery a sin which needed to be immediately eradicated. They got huge boosts during the Great Awakening era when prominent Evangelical sermons were given by Lyman Beecher who’s daughter Harriet later wrote the national bestseller (at least in the north) *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. The conscripting into their ranks of a freed slave in Frederick Douglass was a formidable asset who provided spellbound audiences and his readers later in his radical *North Star* publication a primary glimpse into the horrors and injustices of the
institution. By mid century radicals like Douglass, Wendell Philips, Theodore Parker and John Brown were advocated use of violence or applied it and were making national impressions and slowly having affect upon their readers, but mostly they were infuriating Southerners who’s own opinions were becoming more and more radicalized. But as McPherson reminds us few union soldiers initially fought for abolition or racial equality. The union men learned first hand the lies spun by the plantation aristocracy when they witnessed for themselves the backwardness in the South and the discontent of the slaves. (McPherson 117-119).

Another trial and serious challenge to Northern moral was when Lincoln issues the Emancipation order. But this pragmatic argument along with some timely union victories, and the engagement of black regiments like James Beecher’s Black regiment and Colonel Gould Shaw’s 54th turned the tide of many soldiers’ opinions in 64 and beyond towards the dual causes of union and emancipation. (McPherson 125-129) On the other hand this was a future which most Southerners wanted no part of and which threatened their notions of liberty, which for many southerners also meant the freedom to possess, extend, and or to acquire slaves. (McPherson 20-21) The primary source document The Ordinance of Secession of South Carolina encapsulates the Southern perspective while making the tyrannical north out as the enemy of liberty. Their tenacity during the war centered on the idea of NOT being subjugated or simply put to never give up on slavery and the Southern way of life. (McPherson 21)

To be sure their were a decent share of men on each side according to McPherson known as skulkers or those who did not fight during battle or did everything they could to
fake it. (McPherson 6) And while it is not his main focus he depicts throughout his book excerpts from letters of men verifying their inability to rise to action during the heat of combat, or the vehement complaints aimed at the skulkers from those who did the heavy fighting during battle. In these circumstances it was possible to experience reprimands which included re-assignments to rear action duties, being ostracized from the company, or even extreme measures like the utilization of the cavalry to force the men into the engagement, court martial’s, and even executions. Ostracized men could and did risk humiliation in their civilian lives leaving them with no honor and potentially no future. 

As the war entered its third year volunteer enlistments fell off primarily because of the brutality of the war which had claimed so many lives. As mentioned before, morale in the North fell off too due to incompetency of its top leaders, and the shifting of the cause to include a new birth of freedom for blacks. At this stage new type of skulkers appeared which were bounty men signing up for one year enlistments in the place of another person who paid them to get out of serving. (McPherson 49-51) Still, McPherson argues that the primary group cohesion idea was strong and continued to be instilled as men who survived battles became experienced veterans who developed into a true band of brothers where mutual dependence for each others lives and mutual support created the cohesion necessary as a fighting unit. (McPherson 85)

An investigation into the moral reasons also offers students a glimpse of the fortitude faith provided in terms of sustained commitment. According to McPherson this generation of soldiers was a product of the 2nd Great Awakening. But he describes it as Christian fatalism in which an all powerful God did not reveal to mortals his rational.
Still most Americans north and south believed in a form of Protestantism which made possible man’s will to choose one’s path to salvation. Further Evangelical revivalism was more hopeful with the idea that death in battle for a worthy cause brought deliverance into heaven. This rational did a lot to enhance men’s bravery. In many letters soldiers echoed to the disapproval of their wives the notion that this life was temporary and that in the event of their death eternity spent together awaited them. This helped many soldiers overcome their fears and reconcile that one day they would again be re-united with their loved ones. Another dilemma for the very faithful was the taking of another person’s life which was directly against god’s wishes. But in this struggle each side invoked the idea of a “holy just” war with god on their side. Indeed, Lincoln’s speeches during his presidency drip in this vivid sentiment, particularly his Second Inaugural. (McPherson 67-75)

On the topic ideology McPherson draws a sharper contrast than Wiley’s thesis. Wiley and other historians in the past suggest that Civil War soldiers were not conscious of the major issues with respect to their section or to the era. Wiley who was gathering records from interviews given to aged Civil War vets in the 1920s and from his own experience from men fighting in World War II may have undermined the reality that most were well informed and held idealistic values. McPherson’s study revealed that these young men lived in a time of heated partisan debates on contentious issues like slavery’s expansion, its morality, the legitimacy of the Constitution, the Compromise debates in 1850, the Kansas Nebraska Bill, and so forth. He points out that many were subscribing to magazines and reading newspapers. And from the many letters it is revealed that many
had opinions worth fighting and dying for. Many of the immigrants who served had similar sentiments.

A private in the famous 28th Massachusetts Irish Brigade rebuked his relatives including his wife for questioning his judgment in fighting for the “black republican” Lincoln. In his view defending against those who would tear down a republic was the foremost test and this would keep tyrants in Europe at bay. (McPherson 114) Further, this was the Victorian romantic era when literature, music, art, and philosophy evoked sentimentality, a real pathos translated into deep seated convictions. His research also reveals greater uniformity amongst Northern soldiers and differentiations in the class distinctive Southern society, and still further variances between the deep Southern states where patriotic sentiment ran hotter. Southern non-slave owning men who were married appeared more bitter on the idea of conscription thinking it a, “rich man’s war and a poor man’s fight.” McPherson compels his reader to think about the rational Colonel Robert G Shaw provides in leading his all black Massachusetts 54th into the heat of battle in an attempt to take the confederate Fort Wagner where the regiment sustained 272 casualties including the life of Shaw but proved to pro union men, to Lincoln, and to the whole country that African Americans could take on serious duties and perform with valor towards the dual causes of Union and Freedom. This battle occurring on the heels of The battle of Gettysburg were key affirmations in part allowing Lincoln to make his now infamous Address on the battlefield. Idealism indeed appears to have been unlike some other more recent American conflicts a strong factor leading to and during the Civil War.
The McPherson book for *Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought In the Civil War* is an exceptional study revealing that at this critical juncture of US history passions indeed ran high in all sections of the nation. The student reading this book understands that ordinary men and women had embedded ideals that were formulating for at least a generation or more and also rooted to the Revolutionary era, but what this fascinating study does is show the reader a nation deeply divided on the issues of slavery, republican government, and outlook. A nation so deeply divided that Americans killed each other in droves. This was a transformational experience fulfilling the convictions of a few like the abolitionists who finally saw their dream come true, the evolution of leaders like Lincoln who in part played a role though his leadership in transforming the opinion of a nation to fight for a higher cause, and the devastation of lives wholesale but mostly in the South where romantic idealism behind their “way of life” died a hard death. Still the two primary northern causes of preservation of the union and emancipation prevailed thanks to the sustained dedication, conviction, and sacrifice of many Americans.
Works Cited


Professor Harvey has both contacted Buddhism culturally and continues to make an honest attempt to put Buddhism into practice. An introduction to Buddhism is one of the best overall introductions to this vast subject now available, superseding equivalent good books which are by now up to 50 years too old. Harvey combines scholarship including a knowledge of Pali and Sanskrit along with sensitivity to the contexts in which the various scriptures can be seen. In the forest of competing books out now, this one can be recommended without reservation. Read more. Comment| 23 people found this helpful

Sometimes doubtful Americans ask, ‘But why should doctors treat you properly if they are being paid by the state rather than the patient?’ This is a question that rightly enrages British doctors. They are decently paid, and being human, some are better than others. In a typical health centre there will be, for example, five or six personal doctors called ‘General Practitioners’ or GPs; two nurses; a health visitor; a specialist midwife who looks after pregnant women and mothers who have just given birth; two trainee doctors working part-time in this centre; a part-time paediatrician, a dentist, a chiropodist and assorted receptionists and secretaries.