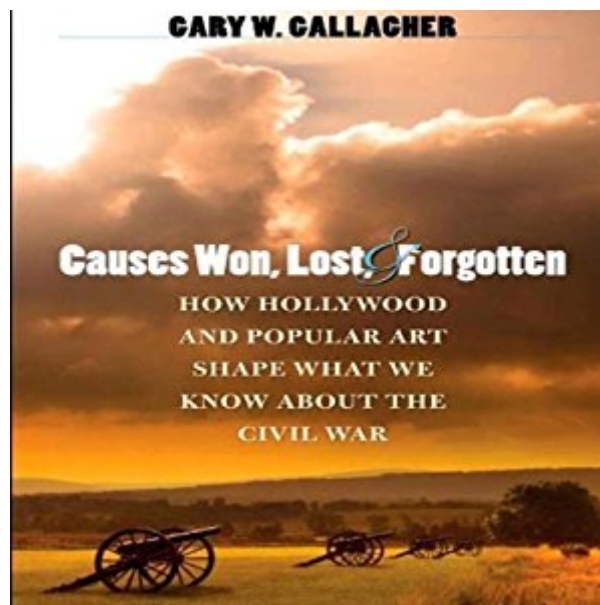




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Causes Won, Lost, And Forgotten: How Hollywood And Popular Art Shape What We Know About The Civil War



Synopsis

More than 60,000 books have been published on the Civil War. Most Americans, though, get their ideas about the war why it was fought, what was won, what was lost not from books but from movies, television, and other popular media. In an engaging and accessible survey, Gallagher guides listeners through the stories told in recent film and art, showing how they have both reflected and influenced the political, social, and racial currents of their times. The most influential perspective for the Civil War generation, says Gallagher, is almost entirely absent from the Civil War stories being told today. This lively investigation into what popular entertainment teaches us and what it reflects about us will prompt listeners to consider how we form opinions on current matters of debate, such as the use of the military, the freedom of dissent, and the flying of the Confederate flag.

Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 6 hours 16 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Audible Studios

Audible.com Release Date: February 24, 2014

Whispersync for Voice: Ready

Language: English

ASIN: B00IMO7FCM

Best Sellers Rank: #118 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Arts & Entertainment > Art #385 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Arts & Entertainment > Performing Arts #1432 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > History > United States & Canada

Customer Reviews

Gary Gallagher is an outstanding historian and provides an interesting analysis of the Civil War in film and popular art. It is quite good as far as it goes, although I would have preferred a deeper look into the historical accuracies and inaccuracies in Hollywood's treatment of the Civil War. The author chooses to focus more on which of four categories (Lost Cause, Union, Emancipation, or Reconciliation) that such films fall under.

This is an excellent book. What Dr. Gallagher does is outline how works of art, fiction, movies and

so on shape modern perspectives of Civil War events and personalities. His meticulous study is demonstrated page after page as he reviews countless works of modern art, movies and other images. He particularly emphasizes how Ken Burns' DVD series "The Civil War," Shaara's Trilogy and Turner Pictures "Gettysburg" and to a lesser extent "Gods & Generals" have shaped modern consciousness about events and characters of the CW era. And I was a victim. I have seen lots of movies, including those mentioned previously and read Shaara. What I think Gallagher does is to expertly remove some of the glitter and shine of these modern works and compare those images to what really occurred. I found it an eye-opening book and one I'd recommend to others.

I purchased this book for a class, and expected it to read like a dry textbook as most do, but was pleasantly surprised. The book was not only informative but entertaining and brought my attention to a phenomenon I had never consciously noticed. Definitely worth your while. The actual examples in the book spurred an interest that had me watching movies and looking up art that I otherwise wouldn't have taken to time to enjoy.

OK history. GG has written better

I have reviewed quite a few Civil War books before. This is another of the genre--but with an interesting difference. This is not so much about the conduct of the war itself as about how Hollywood and popular art have treated the Civil War and how their portrayals might be related to what people know about the Civil War. The methodology of this study is pretty straightforward: Gallagher explores a limited number of movies about the conflict--from "Birth of a Nation" and "Gone with the Wind" to "Gettysburg," "Glory," "Red Badge of Courage," "Cold Mountain," "The Horse Soldiers," with passing references to other movies such as "The Outlaw Josie Wales." In addition, he examines the art of such well known Civil War artists as Dan Troiani. He begins by positing four images of the Civil War--(a) The Lost Cause (the Confederacy as doomed by superior Union resources, while fighting for Constitutional purity; (b) The Union Cause (the attempt by the North to preserve a national republic in the face of secession); (c) The Emancipation Cause (an interpretation of the Civil War as attempting to end slavery); (d) the Reconciliation Cause (emphasizing the common traditions and values of both parties in the struggle). In addition, he notes how coverage sometimes emphasizes heroes/actions that may overplay some actors and underplay the work of others. This is an interesting book to consider. Gallagher does a nice job examining each of the movies that he discusses (and the art that he considers, many pieces of which are displayed

in the penultimate chapter). He also makes a strong case that the recent focus on Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain may be explainable by three events: Ken Burns' PBS series on the Civil War, the book "The Killer Angels," and the movie "Gettysburg." He suggests that there were other Union units facing even more difficult circumstances at Gettysburg--and did not get half the acclaim as the stand of the 20th Maine. Indeed, there are those who claim that Chamberlain did a nice job of self-promotion with his various books and speeches after the Civil War (personally, given his entire body of work as an officer, I think he had an estimable record--but I do understand the argument very well, exemplified by his rather churlish response to his opponent, Colonel Oates, years later). Still, how much can one claim based on a small set of movies? What is the evidence that these selected movies and objets d'art have had much impact on our view of the Civil War? I think that Gallagher raises important issues and questions. I'm not so sure that he attains the goals he set for himself. Nonetheless, an interesting view of the Civil War through the prism of popular art.

How we remember the past doesn't reflect on historical events as much as it reflects on the persons remembering them, individually as people, or collectively as a community or a nation. Studying how we choose interpret and remember the Civil War, and how our interpretations of it have changed over time, tells us where we've been, where we are now and how far we've come. Gary Gallagher, in his book, "Causes Won, Lost & Forgotten: How Hollywood and Popular Art Shape What We Know About the Civil War," has given us just such a study. Mr. Gallagher has chosen to focus his study to the last twenty-five years or so in films and the last forty years in popular art. Before he tells us where we are in our remembrances on the Civil War he tells us where we've been, and to do that he defines the four narrative traditions that emerged after the Civil War: 1.) "The Lost Cause," The Confederacy fighting against overwhelming odds 2.) The Union Cause, 3.) The Emancipation Cause and 4.) The Reconciliation Cause. Of the four narrative traditions The Union Cause, popular both during and immediately after the war has fallen by the wayside in modern times, in part because it is not so easily depicted. To be able to tell us where we are as a society in our remembrances of the Civil War, Mr. Gallagher first briefly tells us where we've been by taking a look at how motion pictures have portrayed the Civil War from the development of the medium until the mid 1960's. Though he briefly mentions many movies, two stand out far and above the others, "The Birth of a Nation" and "Gone with the Wind." Both films rely heavily on their "Lost Cause" foundations. Other films of the era focus to a greater or lesser degree on The Lost Cause and Reconciliation traditions. Films dealing with the Civil War practically vanished during the Vietnam era. But starting with the observances of the quasiquicentennial of the Civil War in the mid to late

1980s and Ken Burns' 1991 PBS documentary "The Civil War," the war itself has made a comeback in American memory. For his study, Mr. Gallagher looked at 14 films: Glory, Dances With Wolves, Gettysburg, Sommersby, Little Women, Pharaoh's Army, Andersonville, Ride with the Devil, Gangs of New York, Gods and Generals, Cold Mountain, The Last Samurai, The Confederate States of America and Seraphim Falls. With the notable exception of Gods and Generals the Lost Cause tradition has fallen by the wayside in film to join its brother The Union Cause. And in its place the Emancipation and the Reconciliation causes have taken root and blossomed. In popular art however, Mr. Gallagher has observed just the opposite. Looking at advertisements for works of art in Civil War magazines over the last forty years, Mr. Gallagher has noted that pictures with a Lost Cause theme or featuring Confederate Army and its leaders by far and away out sell artworks featuring Union themes, the Federal Army or its leaders. So why would the Lost Cause be in decline in films and be on the rise in art? Films are a greater reflection of the public in general, while works of art are often a personal choice and not displayed in public, but rather in the privacy of ones home or office. So while the Lost Cause may be vanishing from public view it certainly is firmly imbedded in our private psyches.

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