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This Republic of Suffering

This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War, authored by Drew Gilpin Faust, the current President of Harvard University, is chilling in its vivid depiction of the death toll of the Civil War. Faust comprehensively covers the theme of death, as well as its ensuing consequences from the historical perspective of American society. *This Republic of Suffering* qualifies as an authentic collection of Civil War statistics. The 399-page book delves into the history of the Civil War with an emphasis on death, evidenced by how Faust titles her chapters according to the eight aspects of death. The first three chapters are about dying, killing, and burying, with the remaining five chapters investigating issues of death. "Naming" marks the first chapter that tackles an aspect of death, followed by "Realizing," "Believing and Doubting," "Accounting," and lastly, "Numbering," all of which investigate the causes, effects, and obligations relating to death. Therefore, the themes of the book include the Civil War, the statistics of death, the impact of the death toll, and the harvest of death.

The Civil War occurred in the nineteenth century with the citizens of the US entering uncharted territory by turning against each other, divided by principles and regional loyalties. At the core of the controversy was President Abraham Lincoln's push to abolish slavery, which pitted the Confederates against the Yankees with the Southerners opposing Lincoln's policy

while the Northerners agreed with it. Faust records that the Civil War included one of the largest slaughters of Americans in history, surpassing the death tolls of all other conflicts. According to Faust, an estimated 620,000 American soldiers died in battle, more than in both World Wars and the Korean War combined. The heavy brunt of the war was borne by the Southern states, who were not as wealthy as the Northerners. Equally critical to the outcome of the war was the total population of the Northern states, which far outnumbered their Southern counterparts. The number of Americans who died in the Civil War would equate to 6 million fatalities based on the current population, 2% of the entire United States population. These statistics are chilling.

Concerning the precise statistics of death, Faust dwells on all the dead, not only the soldiers, as the military ignored civilian casualties. The most accurate picture of how many civilians must have died during the war vividly appears when an individual takes some specific facts into consideration. The war took place across the farm fields of America, resulting in the unavoidable collateral damage of civilian casualties. A battalion of soldiers from the North spread infectious diseases among the civilian population, and frustrated Confederate guerrillas unleashed their anger on women and children in retaliation. Dead bodies were a statistical tool battalion leaders used in measuring success or failure. Burials and nursing were the main activities away from the blood-filled battlefields. Faust records that an estimated 50,000 civilians perished, with the South being the most impacted, comparable only to the losses suffered in the Rhine and Volga regions during World War II. Therefore, America's Civil War period witnessed carnage unrivaled by anything in its history, a testament to the ideological divide and general inhumanity at the time.

On the theme of the impact of death, Faust delves into the lessons and consequences of the Civil War and how society evolved from this dark period. During the war, the universally acceptable sanctity of life was a foreign concept, and friends turned against each other, separated by virtual borders and human ideals on slavery and abolitionist policies. Faust opines that, during the Civil War, death was a familiar occurrence in all families, with statistics from the Confederates indicating that one in every five white males did not survive the ravages of the Civil War. According to Faust, the words of an episcopal bishop who gave a sermon in one region of the Confederacy captures the mood well. He said that all involved had their own dead to mourn and graves to visit, and that in the face of death, humanity responds differently from one generation to the next and from one place to another, aptly capturing how death impacted society during the conflict. The post-war period in America marked a communal deficiency of the youthful exuberance ideal for growth, as the conflict had claimed many young lives. The nation became united in grief, sacrifice, and the country was the same. The new responsibilities of freedom, citizenship, human dignity, and the union became the cornerstones of modern society, with the government acting in haste to honor its obligation. Faust contends that concerted efforts to create an all-inclusive government after the war resulted in an expansion of federal power marking the post-war era. National cemeteries and safety net programs for war veterans and their kin defined post-conflict America. In essence, the Civil War created a new America.

In the harvest of death, one thematic concern, Faust focuses on its commonality and proximity to society in how she highlights that everyone was affected, particularly in the Confederate states. According to Faust, halfway through the conflict, everyone had lost someone,

and the society was mourning. Death became the only common denominator shared by the warring nations, ever looming over loved ones for the duration of the conflict. The most excellent harvest of death during the Civil War apart from the monumental societal loss was equality. The battle defined the new America, one that was more attentive to the values of equality as envisioned by the founding fathers. Freedom and citizenship became more meaningful after the abolition of slavery and America as a society marked a new beginning for itself. A review of the governance model with central tenets ensued, emphasizing the oneness of America as a society under federalism as a style of governance. According to Faust, the Civil War injected modern economic thinking into the business front and set America on a path to global influence with a moral mission to perfect the world. However, for those who lived through the war, sorrow was a traditional harvest in society. Perhaps the most excellent yield of the conflict remains the shared pain that bonded Americans against regional differences such as race. After all, both black and white Americans had borne the brunt of the War and suffered unimaginable pain. The new era declared the difference of race as well as the definition of citizenship and nationhood, and established a new mantra for unity: sacrifice. The sacrifice continues to define generations of Americans in all aspects, from their interventions in war-torn countries globally to their response to all challenges they have faced in the history of their civilization. Through sacrifice, America overcame recessions and all the wars, and continues to meet modern threats of terrorism. Sacrifice is indeed the most excellent harvest of the Civil War.

Work Cited

Faust, Drew Gilpin. *This Republic of Suffering*. 2008. 13th February 2020.