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This Republic of Suffering by Drew Gilpin Faust, Knopf (Vintage, reprint edition 2009)

Susan Sutherlin
Butler University, ssutherl@butler.edu

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Recommended Readings

This Republic of Suffering
by Drew Gilpin Faust, Knopf (Vintage, reprint edition 2009)
Reviewed by Susan Sutherlin

With an historian's curiosity and a humanist's sensibility, author Drew Gilpin Faust, the current President of Harvard University, meticulously examines the cultural and social impact of mass death on the American consciousness in the aftermath of the Civil War in his book, This Republic of Suffering. From the sheer magnitude of identifying the dead and ministering to the wounded, to burying the dead and informing the family, the Battle of Antietam still imparts a stinging reminder of the single bloodiest day in American history, September 17, 1862, which left twenty-three thousand dead or wounded along with thousands of horses and mules lying in the same fields. Where battles were enormous, hospitals sometimes even more dangerous, and mourning a national undertaking, the poignancy of some of the smallest acts, soldiers pinning their names to their uniforms before going into battle certain they would die, a letter written on the only paper available with an urgency and earnestness to convey that it had been a 'good death,' the power of consolation as a parent dresses the body of a son on the field-is magnified and emblematic of what national character could possibly mean.

- Susan Sutherlin is an instructor of English at Butler University.