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Confederates in the Attic: Dispatches from the Unfinished Civil War, by Tony Horwitz is available at the Moraine Valley Library and Bookstore.

STUDY QUESTIONS

What responsibility do we hold for decisions that were made in the past? When we benefit from unethical acts of the past, what responsibility do we have to make reparations? How do we think about our ancestors who supported a society that practiced slavery and oppression?

Throughout the book, Horwitz encounters feelings from Southerners that their grievances go unheard by a country controlled by Northern interests. Where do these feelings come from? How do societal leaders use these feelings? How are these feelings addressed within racial contexts?

Many Americans (especially Northerners) are descended from immigrants who arrived after the Civil War. Yet, they are still drawn into its history and the debates surrounding it. Why does this happen? Are there differences between the way Northerners and Southerners remember the Civil War?

Americans typically have a poor knowledge of their own history. The War of 1812, Mexican War, Spanish American War, and Korean War are hardly mentioned or celebrated in mainstream life. Why does the Civil War hold such a command of our attention?

What differences exist between the popular conceptualization of the Civil War and the views held by historians? How has the Civil War evolved in popular mind over the last 150 years?

Horwitz interviews many individuals who are at the fringes of American society. By the end of the book, is the reader left with a fair view of American society? How does the radical fringe impact larger society?

There are several instances when the theme of shame emerges in Horwitz's exploration. What are these instances? How do they come up? Are there times where shame is over emphasized and times when it is ignored?

Horwitz examines symbols and the meaning of symbols at several points in the book, especially around the Confederate Battle Flag and Confederate monuments. What are other images that act as flashpoints for debate? Can these symbols be used in non-offensive ways? Does the removal of these symbols insult our heritage? Where else are symbols debated in America and around the world?

Over the centuries, veterans have faced many challenges in acclimating to society as they return home. The Civil War veterans of both sides were celebrated and even came together to commemorate battles. What challenges do veterans face today? What similarities or differences do our veterans today have with veterans of the Civil War? How has our society dealt with or ignored the realities of post traumatic stress disorder resulting from war?

Horwitz has been demonized as an apologist for the Confederate cause and as a leading opponent of it. What does this say about our views of the Civil War?

Do people have a desire to romanticize history? Do we gloss over inconvenient truths that shed a negative light on our relatives or country?

In the 21st century, the South has greatly diversified, including Northerners and immigrants moving south seeking work. Has this demographic change impacted the Southern memory of the Civil War? How did the war and reconstruction affect migration patterns in the U.S.?

A central question within the U.S. Constitution was whether our nation was a grouping of individual states working together to address common needs or a single country made up of smaller sub-units at the state level. The Northern victory cemented the supremacy of the federal government. Where does this tension arise today? How is this issue different today than it was in 1860?