

***Between the Lines:
Reading about the Civil War
Book Discussion Group***

**A Partnership between Linebaugh Library and
the Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area**

The Legacy of the Civil War (1961), by Robert Penn Warren

Questions

What was the most thought-provoking assessment or description that you read in the book? (Do you have a favorite quote?)

RPW makes a clear distinction between the Founding Fathers and the leaders of the Civil War period. He also claims that the Civil War made the United States a united nation as it had not been before—the ideal of the founders became a reality. Do you agree with this assessment?

What does he say about the abolitionists? Does he give them more power than they actually had?

What is his take on the southern constitutionalists and defenders of slavery?

Were you surprised by the attention that he gave to slavery and to the experience of black people?

Two of his most famous descriptions are of the “Treasury of Virtue” and the “Great Alibi” as the two major psychological costs of the war. Did those hit home with any of you?

Back to Page 101, when RPW talks about the “present momentous crisis of our history, when our national existence may be at stake.” Clearly, this is a reference to the Cold War. What was going on in 1961 that gave the country this sense?

What are our comparable crises today, and how do they influence how we see the war?

Reading from RPW’s 1971 interview with RPW regarding the “black revolt”—are our history courses doing a good job at teaching about the CW? Does the Confederate flag still have the symbolism he refers to, of opposition to desegregation?

Regarding C. Vann Woodward's essay ("Reflections on a Centennial: The American Civil War," *Yale Review* L (June, 1961), pp. 481-490)—do you think it did a good job of summarizing the RPW book? Do you agree with the sentence on Page 483—"It is the elusive persistence of the tragic past in the present that is the major theme of his book."

Like CVW, I think the inwardness of the war is part of its appeal—the idea that the country, individual states, communities, families, and individuals were divided over the issues that led to the war and over the war itself. This seems particularly true of TN, don't you think?