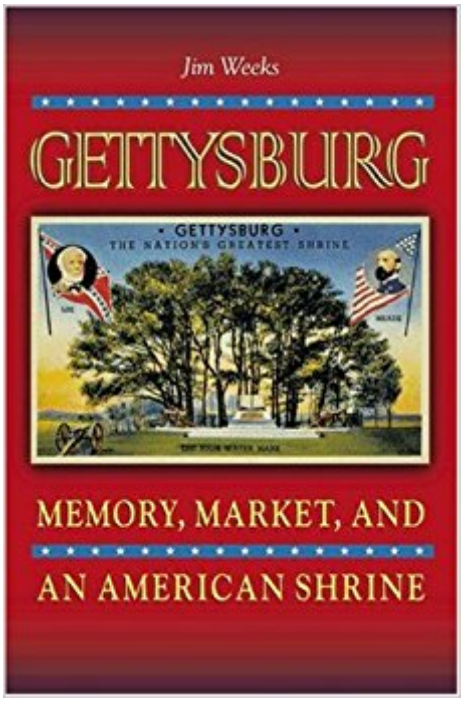
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Gettysburg: Memory, Market, And An American Shrine



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Synopsis

The site of North America’s greatest battle is a national icon, a byword for the Civil War, and an American clichÃƒÂ©. Described as "the most American place in America," Gettysburg is defended against commercial desecration like no other historic site. Yet even as schoolchildren learn to revere the place where Lincoln delivered his most famous speech, Gettysburg’s image generates millions of dollars every year from touring, souvenirs, reenactments, films, games, collecting, and the Internet. Examining Gettysburg’s place in American culture, this book finds that the selling of Gettysburg is older than the shrine itself. Gettysburg entered the market not with recent interest in the Civil War nor even with twentieth-century tourism but immediately after the battle. Founded by a modern industrial society with the capacity to deliver uniform images to millions, Gettysburg, from the very beginning, reflected the nation’s marketing trends as much as its patriotism. Gettysburg’s pilgrims--be they veterans, families on vacation, or Civil War reenactors--have always been modern consumers escaping from the world of work and responsibility even as they commemorate. And it is precisely this commodification of sacred ground, this tension between commerce and commemoration, that animates Gettysburg’s popularity. Gettysburg continues to be a current rather than a past event, a site that reveals more about ourselves as Americans than the battle it remembers. Gettysburg is, as it has been since its famous battle, both a cash cow and a revered symbol of our most deeply held values.

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Customer Reviews

"A book of rare intelligence and eloquence."--Library Journal "Thoughtfully written, well illustrated with contemporary imagery, and meticulously documented, this volume makes a valuable contribution to our understanding of the utility of the past."--Choice "The story told here is a multifaceted one. Most obviously it offers a fresh perspective on the contested memory of the Civil War. It is no less important as a window on the social history of leisure and tourism."--Adam Smith, History Today "Weeks makes a convincing case that Gettysburg owes its special status to the marketplace. Nationalists might not like to hear it, but the shrine that prompts so much flag waving and solemn devotion is also a major moneymaker."--Damon W. Root, Reason "As both hallowed shrine and theme park, Gettysburg paradoxically offers Americans a sacred haven from our obsessive commercialism and an exciting marketplace experience. How local promoters began this process almost as soon as the shooting stopped, and how even today's park purists maintain this subtle, clever masking, make Weeks' Gettysburg an absorbing venture in cultural history."--Blue & Gray Magazine "[This] work not only fills a long-unaddressed gap in Gettysburg's vast historiography but also provides a noteworthy contribution to the larger debate over battlefield preservation and interpretation."--Joseph Pierro, Civil War History

"Looking at succeeding generations of tourists and pilgrims to the site--the genteel, the veterans, the masses, and finally the reenactors--Weeks gives us a lively, engaging, argumentative, and very well-written analysis of the commercial uses made of Gettysburg since before the bones were buried until the present day."--Michael Fellman, author of The Making of Robert E. Lee and Citizen Sherman

The subject matter in this book is fascinating, particularly from one who works in the marketing department of a large company. It is full of details and provides an interesting alternate look at the development of the Gettysburg National Military Park and the tourist trade that accompanies it. The only drawback is the ponderous writing style; it can be quite difficult to read sometimes, causing the reader to backtrack in order to decipher without consulting the dictionary regularly. But that is easy to bypass as the information is extremely interesting and important to understanding why Gettysburg has become such a mecca for the history buff.

I'm trying to think of something good to say about this book but truth is I really can't. This is the worst book about Gettysburg I have ever read....and I've read quite a few. The goal of the book I thought was to trace the history of Gettysburg and how tourism and America's view of it has

changed in relation to it. I couldn't wait to get this book when I read about it. I am an avid reader about Gettysburg and I was very much interested in reading this different viewpoint about it and it's history. Unfortunately this book is more of an liberalistic view of American culture using Gettysburg as a backdrop, and a rather egotistical one at that.Weeks can't help but talking down anyone and everyone associated with Gettysburg. They all seem to be below his level of understanding. The tourists who visit the battlefield are ignorants who should be going to Disneyland instead and the battlefield is now nothing but a theme park, at least according to Weeks. He even makes fun of people talking about Gettysburg on the Internet in discussion groups. Re-enactors, preservationists and park officials all are criticized by Weeks who talks condescending about all of them. He is incapable of hiding his belief that he is intellectually superior to them. I'm not a Re-enactor but I'm sure those that are are not nearly the nit wits that Weeks makes them out to be.As for the writing style, the book has all the dryness of a high school text book. Weeks has a tendency to ramble and to make matters worse he doesn't give the reader any credit for intelligence (no surprise since he doesn't give anyone in the book credit for intelligence either). To make sure we understand the point he is trying to make he will make it over and over again.I really did have high hopes for this book but unfortunately it failed to live up to any of my expectations. There are a lot of great books about Gettysburg out there. This isn't one of them.

Jim Weeks' has created a fascinating study of American culture, class, and capitalism, over the past one hundred and forty years by chronicling and dissecting our changing relationship to the Gettysburg Battlefield National Park. This shrine became a tourist attraction before the bodies were buried, and remains one of our best known national shrines and most popular of tourist attractions to this day. Yet for each generation, Gettysburg has had a different meaning, appealed to different social classes for different reasons, and has been marketed differently. Weeks has examined the changing appeal of Gettysburg to the American psyche to draw some conclusions on how we view our history and see ourselves through it, how and why we create our national myths, and, in short, how we imagine and re-imagine ourselves as a people.This book hit close to home for me, because my childhood experience fit squarely within its scope. My father was a Civil War buff, and our family made several pilgrimages to Gettysburg. Numerous black and white photos show me as a kid posing with Yankee cap, sword and gun on various cannons and monuments throughout the park. Our oft told family legend even claims that Dad took Mom to Gettysburg on their honeymoon. When Weeks wrote chapter six; `Automobiles and Family Touring', he could have been working from our family albums.This is a book of social historical criticism, and if you prefer to take our national

mythology at face value rather than questioning it, you should probably pass on it. Weeks is aggressive, perhaps even elitist, in the way he questions our social conventions, and he seems to like to poke sacred cows just to hear them moo. None of that changes the fact that he has written a fascinating book full of intriguing ideas. Despite his somewhat arrogant tone, Weeks' book is well worth reading.Theo Logos

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