

Born to Battle: Grant and Forrest: Shiloh, Vicksburg and Chattanooga: The Campaigns That Doomed the Confederacy

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Review

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Hurst, Jack *Born to Battle: Grant and Forrest: Shiloh, Vicksburg and Chattanooga: The Campaigns that Doomed the Confederacy*. Basic Books, \$32.00 ISBN 978-0-465-02018-8

Analyzing Civil War Leadership

Both Ulysses Grant and Nathan Bedford Forrest left indelible legacies during the American Civil War. Both men came from humble beginnings, although Forrest earned a fortune in slaves and cotton and Grant attended the United States Military Academy at West Point. With their natural military abilities, both men rose rapidly through the ranks in the Western Theater, from Fort Donelson to Shiloh, the Vicksburg Campaign and the Siege of Chattanooga. Author Jack Hurst traces the careers of these two men through the early years of the war contextualizing their experiences through descriptions of the battles of Fort Donelson, Shiloh, Vicksburg and Chattanooga. The author does a superb job of describing these battles and campaigns, writing about the engagements in their entirety while emphasizing the roles of Grant and Forrest. Hurst emphasizes the “common” background of both of these legendary military men, and how the relative attitudes of the Union and Confederate high commands affected their careers. Hurst maintains that the Union high command and Abraham Lincoln were more accepting of Grant’s “common” background and this allowed him to rise through the ranks, while the Confederacy’s insistence on having “blue blooded” commanders kept Forrest from higher command and greater responsibility. This, Hurst maintains, elevated the Union to victory over the Confederacy, arguing that If the Confederates had promoted Forrest as far as the Union promoted Grant, the rebel raider might have saved his cause from ultimate defeat.

Hurst’s book is well-researched and documented and he has all the natural flair of a storyteller, but the main argument he sets forward is problematic. Neither Lincoln nor Davis set out consciously to wage class warfare with any of

the generals under their command, and the promotion of Grant over Forrest was more a product of the respective personalities of Davis and Lincoln than anything else. Furthermore, Grant constantly exhibited humility and military discipline, the kind of discipline that warranted his promotion. Forrest, on the other hand, possessed very little military discipline and his penchant for questioning his superiors, violently in some cases, certainly did not help his case. Grant operated more like a general, Forrest more like a primitive chieftain. This characteristic made Forrest an excellent cavalry commander, but nothing more. The fact that he even made the rank of lieutenant general was more a product of public pressure on Davis and the Confederate Congress to promote this "common" hero of the masses. Grant, on the other hand, displayed the patience, humility and willingness to learn that Forrest so often lacked.

The intriguing juxtaposition of Forrest, Grant and their careers makes *Born to Battle* a worthy read, and the goal of good scholarship is to make one think and shake up accepted models and stereotypes. By these standards, *Born to Battle* is a good contribution to the literature of the Civil War, even if scholars may disagree about the degree to which class warfare in this instance actually doomed the Confederacy.

John R. Lundberg is an instructor of history at Collin College in Plano, Texas and holds a Ph.D. in American history from Texas Christian University. He is the author of Granbury's Texas Brigade: Diehard Western Confederates, among other books and articles on the American Civil War.