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Ulysses S. Grant: An American Hero

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By [Timothy D. Naegele\[1\]](#)

It is been said that Ulysses S. Grant's memoirs are the finest written by an American president, and this assessment may well be true, which is among the reasons why I wanted to read them. Abraham Lincoln held Grant in very high regard, and credited both Grant and General William Tecumseh Sherman with winning the Civil War militarily and thereby preserving the Union. Grant returned Lincoln's respect and praise, both in the words that he wrote and in his decision not to become a presidential candidate in 1864—and probably become a very formidable rival, according to Lincoln's keen political judgment.

It is a shame that Grant did not write about his own two-term presidency, and instead concluded his memoirs with the war's end. However, he died of throat cancer in 1885, twenty years after the "rebellion" ended and less than a week after completing work on the memoirs, which were written in large part to provide much-needed financial security for his beloved wife, Julia Dent Grant. They accomplished their purpose, and were encouraged and edited by his friend, Mark Twain.

While I am not a student of the Civil War, nor of the other campaigns in which Grant served—all of which are discussed in great detail—his memoirs give the reader a window into the man and the war that wrenched and transformed this nation, and produced so much carnage on both sides. Like Dwight D. Eisenhower and

other famous generals, Grant concludes: “[T]his war was a fearful lesson, and should teach us the necessity of avoiding wars in the future.”

However, Grant adds: “To maintain peace in the future it is necessary to be prepared for war. . . . [U]nless we are prepared for it we may be in danger of a combined movement being some day made to crush us out.” With respect to former slaves, Grant writes: “[H]e was brought to our shores by compulsion, and he now should be considered as having as good a right to remain here as any other class of our citizens.”

As to the future of our nation and the healing of its wounds, he concluded:

The war has made us a nation of great power and intelligence. . . . I feel we are on the eve of a new era, when there is to be great harmony between the [North and South]. I cannot stay to be a living witness to the correctness of this prophecy; but I feel it within me that it is to be so.

The universally kind feeling expressed for me at a time when it was supposed that each day would prove my last, seemed to me the beginning of the answer to “Let us have peace.”

The expressions of these kindly feelings were not restricted to a section of the country, nor to a division of the people. They came from individual citizens of all nationalities; from all denominations—the Protestant, the Catholic, and the Jew; and from various societies of the land—scientific, educational, religious, or otherwise. Politics did not enter into the matter at all.

Grant dedicated his memoirs to the “American Soldier And Sailor”; and it seems true, as Geoffrey Perret has written, “he was modest, sensitive, generous, honest, and superlatively intelligent. Grant’s courage, both moral and physical, was a matter of record.” He lives on through his words and deeds, having saved a nation—albeit not being recognized fully as the American hero that he was.

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[2] See http://www.amazon.com/Personal-Memoirs-Ulysses-Modern-Library/dp/0375752285/ref=cm_cr-mr-title


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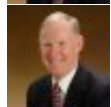
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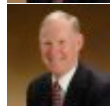
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