The Killer Angels By Michael Shaara

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Introduction

The Killer Angels, which was authored in 1974 by Michael Shaara, is a historical novel that aims to depict what really happened during the four-day Battle of Gettysburg. The novel is centered on a period between 1963, June 30th, when the northern and southern armies prepared for war, and 1873, July 1st and 3rd, when the war erupted. Michael tries to portray both factual elaboration of events and the emotional experience of the American people living it. From the book, the reader gets to the armies and individuals involved in the day-to-day action and the events that resulted in the war (U.S. National Park Service, 2025).

Historical Setting and the Battle of Gettysburg

Using the scenes present in the book, the readers get an opportunity to interact with some of the men involved and see the issues brought about by poor decision-making. Moreover, one gets an opportunity to see the personal and individual reactions brought about by the decisions being made. The book is able to cover the reality of war while presenting the facts of the war and gives the reader an opportunity to grasp what happened during the entire war. The novel begins with Harrison, who was Longstreet's spy, gathering information regarding the movement as well as the positioning of the federal army. The entire story is narrated from the perception of James Longstreet and Robert Lee, who were the generals of the Confederacy side, and John Buford and Joshua Lawrence, who were in charge of the Union's side.

The Civil War Turning Point

As depicted by Michael, the Battle of Gettysburg did act as a turning point for the American Civil War. When the war began, each side had its own objective and goal that they focused on. One of the goals of the Confederacy had been to secure complete independence from the North while establishing an independent country free from the repression of slavery and Northern politics. Their goal was based on the belief that the Constitution was in support of the continuation of slavery, but the Union rejected it. This forced the Southerners to secede with the aim of defending their right (Foner). The union, on the other hand, was focused on uniting states under a Union where slavery was unacceptable. Their goal was due to the belief that the South had no right to go ahead and secede

from the Union. As the war continued, the Confederacy's goal stayed intact, but the Union changed its objective. The North decided to change their reason for fighting to free slavery after it had become clear to President Abraham that the North would lose the war (Gentile et al., 2023).

Advantages of the Union

Regardless of the hardships experienced, the Union won the Civil War due to the numerous advantages it had over the Confederacy. One of the advantages the Union had over the Confederacy was good leadership. The Union mostly boasted the existence of valuable leaders on their side, such as Philip Sheridan and Abraham Lincoln, among others. Another advantage was their booming economy. The civil war began when they were in the middle of their industrial revolution, which had boosted their economy, and supplies were readily accessible. Another advantage was the presence of a large population. When compared to the Southern population, the North population was double their population, and the difference in numbers came in handy during the Civil War (Gettysburg Foundation, 2024).

Leadership of Longstreet and Lee

In the novel, James Longstreet and Robert Lee act as very paramount characters. Both of these characters are Confederacy soldiers who trust each other and care about each other safety. However, when it comes to opinions and tactics to employ during the war, the two vary entirely. As seen in the novel, Lee possessed profoundly excellent tactical skills, but his conventional policies, in most instances, conflicted with Longstreet's futurist strategies. As a Confederacy, Lee issued directives regarding the defensive positions to be employed. Lee is depicted in the novel as being wise and is well aware that his career is about to hit rock bottom. Throughout the novel, Lee is seen sticking firmly to his convectional thoughts of the war. He appreciates Longstreet's innovative ideas and acts as an inspiration to other soldiers (American Battlefield Trust, 2022).

His presence in the war did play a crucial role in maintaining the morale of other Confederacy soldiers. However, his confidence in his soldiers resulted in him overestimating his soldiers, which played a part in the Confederacy losing the war. Lee's poor judgment, as well as his poor decision-making skills, resulted in the South losing the Battle of Gettysburg. In the book, Lee is seen blaming himself for the South's failure as he says,"…..the army cannot be blamed for doing what I commanded….. I am the one to blame as I expected too much of my soldiers…we would have won if I had foreseen the sudden attack on the last day and employed a different approach…. (Pg 349). Despite the North having better ground coverage, Lee insisted on Confederate soldiers attacking the Union troops at Gettysburg. His mind was set and did not take into consideration other people's opinions.

Causes of the North-South Conflict

Even before the American Revolution, the conflict between the North and the South was still present. The social, political, and economic structure was different between the two regions, and around the 1800s, these disparities widened. In 1861, the Civil War began between these two areas, and what majorly caused the war was their regional differences. One of the reasons that resulted in the war included *Slavery.* Slavery was seen as one of the reasons for the civil war. Slavery had been nearly prohibited by the 1800s in the North, while in the South, it was a business that was embraced by the entire community. Nearly a hundred percent of the black population who resided in states such as Ohio and Massachusetts were free and not obligated to work for the whites as slaves. In the Confederate territory, it was contrasted to the Union's. In the South, few blacks were free, with Virginia having the largest number of blacks who were slaves.

Slavery and Political Division

This issue of slavery played a paramount part when it came to dividing the Northern and the Southern people, as every region had its own say. Another reason was *Political Identities*. When it came to matters dealing with political alignments, the two areas differed entirely. During the early one, the Southern people belonged to the Democrats while the Northern supported the Whig Party. By mid-1850, the Whig party had already collapsed, and many Northerners decided to become Republicans. The mere fact that the two regions never agreed, even when it came to political alignment, meant that a rift was always present between the two regions. *Industrialization was another reason for* the war. The slave business had blossomed and developed the Southern economy while providing support to agriculture. In the case of the Northern people, having a free slave society enabled industrialization to take place. By the moment the Civil War had begun, only 0ne-eith of the entire US industrial capacity had been situated in the South. The North, on the other hand, is where the industrial capacities lay. They were responsible for producing the state's pig irons and firearms. The presence of industrialization attracted European Migrants who came to build cities in the North. Instead of industrialization, the South only majored in agriculture.

Consequences and Legacy of the Civil War

The Civil War was intended to be a small battle that started because of disagreements and not a civil war. When it ended, millions of dollars had already been lost and soldiers dead. There were many factors that contributed to the war extending, such as good military strategies. To both sides, winning was their end game, and this motivated each side to continue fighting. After the end of the war, what followed was reconstruction. What the two regions had in common was the fact that the two regions wanted to stand up on their feet again. A lot of property had been destroyed, and the people wanted to overcome all these challenges. Though they didn't start working together directly, they both

expected a bright future. It was a future ruled by a great leader, and this called for a presidential reconstruction. Though the Southern individuals viewed themselves as superior to the Northern before the war, they had to work hand in hand to ensure the country was not affected by their war.

References

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