



# Civic Engagement

## Richmond National Battlefield Park Visitors Answer a Probing Question

In 2005, more than 217,500 visitors experienced at least one of the 12 units that comprise Richmond National Battlefield Park, and about 70,000 visited the main visitor center at Tredegar. Visitor satisfaction and understanding are reported to be high, but very few visitors have much in depth conversation with park staff. One purpose of the park's interpretative messages is to help visitors understand the context of the Civil War battles before and after they were fought; other goals are to help visitors find, understand, and appreciate the battlefields themselves. In the spirit of civic engagement, while personal interaction is not usually possible and conversations are not recorded, the park positioned a desk and notepaper at the entrance/exit to the Tredegar Visitor Center that invites visitors to record their thoughts on the statement:

*"What the Civil War means to me."*

Many seem pleased that we ask. We have copied the comments into a folder that we update for visitors to read at the same spot. Here is a sample of the responses:

"Two of my ancestors fought with the Union and one with the Confederacy. I tend to agree with the idea that states should have more power and the federal government less. If only the South had defended other rights than the right to own slaves."

"We consider the Civil War as a turning



Richmond National Battlefield Park visitor responds to the question "What the Civil War means to me."

point for our nation and its people. Your center is critical for the youth of today to help them learn the story of Independence and then the story of the Civil War—two powerful stories."

"Long live the South."

"I think in a way it means losses and wins. We won our freedom but how many lives did we waste to gain it? What is peace if you get by war? Why go to war to get so called peace? The price of freedom is not cheap."

"The statue of Lincoln on this hallowed ground is a disgrace."

Many of the comments reflect deep thought, emotion, and appreciation as well as disparate personal experiences. The opportunity is more than a gesture although it is simple and inexpensive.

Since we aim to make these places meaningful, hearing from our visitors is a way to gauge the success of the connection.

See the following page for more responses. For more information, please contact Richmond National Battlefield Park Superintendent, Cynthia MacLeod, at 804-226-1981.

## **Tredegar Visitor Center Comments**

### **"What The Civil War Means To Me?"**

Union General Thomas at Chickamaqa said "Give me union artillery and rebel infantry and I can conquer the world!" In the year 2004 we have both in Iraq. Lets get the job done!

It means to me that the Civil War was a battle to determine whether or not that black slaves would be free.

History of forefathers, lessons learned not to be repeated.

I think the Civil War was to free the African-Americans from slavery.

I think the Civil War plays a part in all of our lives. We should all know about it.

The Civil War is arguably one of the defining moments in American history. It helped shape and defining moments in American history. It helped shape and define our nation and should be taught thoroughly to all.

A time period were our people lost many love ones in the hope to find peace, freedom, and a dream. Many lives taken that can not be replace. A time when many prayed to God for help.

Imagine an entire Nation divided against itself. To me it means total courage through not only enemy opposition but opposition within oneself to face death, hunger and hopelessness. I truly respect the soldiers who fought for future generations.

The Civil War was a staggering event; very difficult to understand given the many issues, loss of life, and principles involved. It is amazing that it all occurred with such devastation and that a strong Nation has emerged. Unbelievable!!!

My thoughts reflect the realization of how blessed I have been in my life to live in this great land and how fortunate it has been for me to have the thousands and thousands of men and women who have paid the ultimate sacrifice---many in their youth and prime of life—to allow me to have shuch glorious freedom. May we never forget.

Everyone should honor their ancestors. However, the confederates are certainly not respected, nor allowed their right to honor their ancestors. A perfect example is the Stature of Lincoln on this precious land.

Although many died and our state and our country was left with scars that will always show. I am humbled that our ancestors fought so bravely for what they believed in. I have learned more about the Civil War since visiting the museums in Richmond. I am a Virginia and I love our state, but I can't help thinking that the war turned out for the best. What would it have been like otherwise.

What I think about the War is that it was not kindly.

To me the Civil War means a war between brothers.

What I think about the War is that it is not right.

To me it meant a political upheaval which later defined our socio-economic growth and diversity. While slavery was an issue, it was not the main thrust of the war. I feel it was such a waste of love ones on both sides, but possibly a necessary part of history to define who we would become.

In studying the Civil War in school—it was names and places and dates---none of which I remembered after the test was taken. Finally, today, I get it!!!! What a story---sad and grave---Our country has gone through so many growing pains, continuing yet today.