



## The Arts and Culture of the American Civil War

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In 1864, Union soldier Charles George described a charge into battle by General Phil Sheridan: "Such a picture of earnestness and determination I never saw as he showed as he came in sight of the battle field . . . *What a scene for a painter!*" These words proved prophetic, as Sheridan's desperate ride provided the subject for numerous paintings and etchings as well as songs and poetry. George was not alone in thinking of art in the midst of combat; the significance of the issues under contention, the brutal intensity of the fighting, and the staggering number of casualties combined to form a tragedy so profound that some could not help but view it through an aesthetic lens, to see the war as a concert of death. It is hardly surprising that art influenced the perception and interpretation of the war given the intrinsic role that the arts played in the lives of antebellum Americans. Nor is it surprising that literature, music, and the visual arts were permanently altered by such an emotional and material catastrophe. In *The Arts and Culture of the American Civil War*, an interdisciplinary team of scholars explores the way the arts – theatre, music, fiction, poetry, painting, architecture, and dance – were influenced by the war as well as the unique ways that art functioned during and immediately following the war. Included are discussions of familiar topics (such as Ambrose Bierce, Peter Rothenmel, and minstrelsy) with less-studied subjects (soldiers and dance, epistolary songs). The collection as a whole sheds light on the role of race, class, and gender in the production and consumption of the arts for soldiers and civilians at this time; it also draws attention to the ways that art shaped – and was shaped by – veterans long after the war.

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