Critique Of Essay, Research Paper

Critique of “Clara Barton s Finest Hour By Stephen B. Oates”

Clara Barton is best known for establishing the American Red Cross. However, as Stephen Oates points out, her greatest achievement came during the Civil War, as an independent wartime nurse. He tells of her struggle to be accepted in a field that was exclusively male. He describes her as having emotional problems that derived from low self-esteem. He tells how the Civil War turned that struggle into a self-awareness, which gave her confidence that lasted throughout her life. He tells how such an unconventional lady turned into the angel of the battlefield. Oates called her the forgotten hero of the Civil War.

Clara was the youngest of five children. Oates states she was raised largely by her warrior father. She could ride a horse and shoot a pistol as well as any man. Oates informs the readers that she thought of marriage as murder. He states that she suffered from low self-esteem, which was caused from neglect by her mother and older siblings. However, he also states that she had an implacable will and a strong physical constitution. I have a hard time believing that Clara had self-esteem problems. Oates neglects to mention that her parents were very liberal and unconventional. Clara s mother was very outspoken on women s rights. Her parents encouraged her educational pursuits. This was a time when girls were discouraged against academic achievements. I believe she may have suffered from shyness instead. I definitely do not believe Clara was neglected by anyone.

At the age of forty, she dedicated her life to voluntary service. She began by advertising for supplies for wounded soldiers and later was granted permission to deliver those supplies to the front lines. She had many obstacles to overcome. Women were not allowed on the battlefield. It was only because of a shortage of male nurses that women were considered to nurse. Oates states that she had to overcome both government and societal restraints against the presence of a woman on the battlefield. Not all of the men she met accepted her with courtesy or respect. Nevertheless, through persistence, determination, and courage she won them over. She became known as the angel of the battlefield. The courage she demonstrated on the battlefield was amazing. She would care for her boys while bullets were landing around her. All of this was done with little or no training in either war or medicine.

Oates insinuates being a wartime nurse during the Civil War gave her the confidence she lacked. The conditions of the medical profession were horrible. Medical supplies were almost impossible to obtain. No one knew what caused infections. Doctors would use contaminated tools on wounded soldiers. Often doctors would toss out amputated limbs in a pile just outside of the door. The conditions sickened and appalled Miss. Barton. It was said that if the fighting did not kill you, the doctors would. She was able to perform her duties as a nurse without the supplies and training. All of her training was on the job. The years of working in the battlefield gave Clara a sense of accomplishment. Because of all she had suffered during the war, she became stronger and more confident. Her greatest satisfaction came from the appreciation of the soldiers she treated.

Oates states that she suffered from low self-esteem but he repeatedly showed instances of a very confident woman. She took care of her brother for 2 years after he was injured. She was a teacher and she started a free school that flourished under her supervision. She was one of only a few women that found employment in the United States Patent Office. At forty years of age, she changed the course of her life by becoming a volunteer. When the war broke out she organized supplies and delivered those supplies to the front lines. When the war was over she began a search agency for missing soldiers. She did this as an independent, without regard for her own life. It was a time when women all over America realized that they could do a man s job and do it well. The Civil War not only released blacks from the bondage of slavery; it empowered women.

The essay was well organized. It flowed easily from one paragraph to the next. I have to say that Stephen Oates did write a very interesting piece. I tried to research information about Clara and the Civil War. However, I found very little information. I wish Oates had given a source for the anecdotes he wrote about.