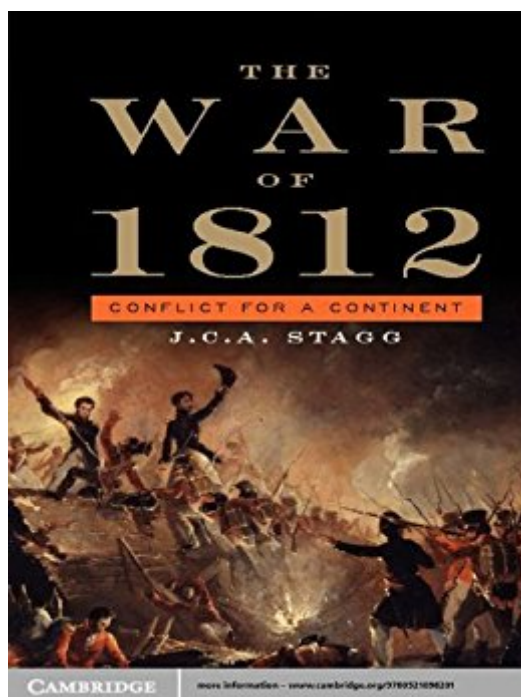


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The War Of 1812 (Cambridge Essential Histories)



Synopsis

This book is a narrative history of the many dimensions of the War of 1812 - social, diplomatic, military and political - which places the war's origins and conduct in transatlantic perspective. The events of 1812-1815 were shaped by the larger crisis of the Napoleonic Wars in Europe. In synthesizing and reinterpreting scholarship on the war, Professor J. C. A. Stagg focuses on the war as a continental event, highlighting its centrality to Canadian nationalism and state development. The book introduces the war to students and general readers, concluding that it resulted in many ways from an emerging nation-state trying to contend with the effects of rival European nationalisms, both in Europe itself and in the Atlantic world.

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Pre-Confederation

Customer Reviews

The title and promotional reviews led me to expect more than I found in this short essay by J.C.A. Stagg. Phrases like a "judicious general overview" and statements like, "he (the author) has been able to condense his immense expertise into such a readable and insightful book" had let me to

anticipate an exciting read. It was not to be found. The fact that J.C.A. Stagg is said to be James Madison's official biographer also created anticipation. The book was not bad. It was just disappointing. To start with, it appears it was designed visually to save cost and money. The style of writing and organizing does not lead to visual interest. There is an introduction so long it should have been a separate chapter, and 5 chapters, titled, simply, War, 1812, 1813, 1814 and Peace. Sections within each chapter are not titled with a clue to the coming content, but simply, I, II, III, IV, V, VI, etc. The plainness of the print distracts from the interest, at least for this reader. I will not use the word "boring". It certainly was NOT boring, but even in this short 198 page presentation, I found myself in a hurry for the story to get more interesting. I would use the word "dry". The book is replete with interesting information which I did not know, as well as excellent analyses, and a very refreshing lack of severity toward American commanders and military. I just finished reading another 1812 history, titled "The Civil War of 1812: American Citizens, British Subjects, Irish Rebels & Indian Allies" by Alan Taylor. Mr. Taylor gave a rather harsh analysis of American "know-how" and execution. Stagg presented the same basic information in a more understanding manner that did not overly castigate soldiers who were trying to serve their country, but merely bereft of understanding and skill.

The War of 1812 is remembered by Americans on a curious level. On the one hand it created some of our most memorable national imagery --- Francis Scott Key writing the national anthem while held prisoner on a British warship in Baltimore harbor; Andrew Jackson at New Orleans shouting "elevate them guns a little lower" while blasting the King's Army with his own makeshift army of militiamen and pirates; of Commodore Stephen Decatur shouting "I have not yet begun to fight" after the British blew his own ship out of the water; and of Oliver Hazard Perry writing of the great victory on Lake Erie: "We have met the enemy and they are ours!" There is also the less happy memory of Dolly Madison scurrying out of the White House with a portrait of George Washington just before the British set fire to the place. These immortal snapshots aside, the details of the war haven't remained prominent in the national consciousness. That may be because the conduct of the war was so uneven. It was characterized by some of the most heroic military actions in our history but also by some of the most humiliating episodes of incompetence and dereliction of duty. This was true of the British and Canadian side as well. The war wasn't won militarily by anybody, but all parties gained by the improvement in Anglo-American relations that followed it. The United States was later destined to fight its most costly war with itself in 1861 through 1865. The British were later destined to fight wars within their own Empire. But the USA and Great Britain never again fired so

much as a single shot across the thousands-miles border separating their immense territories in North America. The war thus established the legitimacy of the USA in the eyes of Great Britain and of Canada in the eyes of the Americans.

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