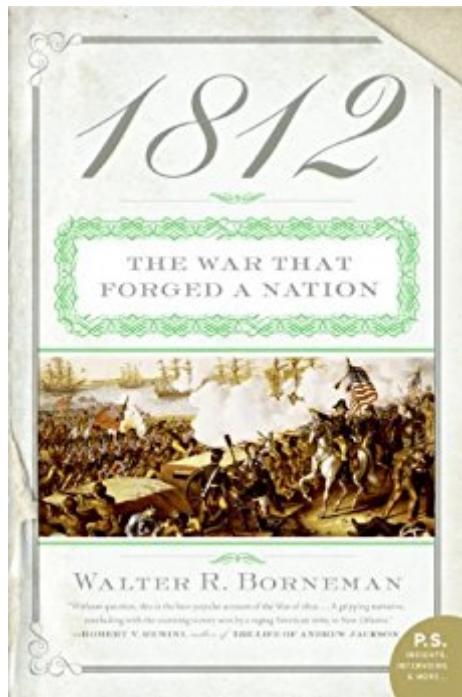


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1812: The War Of 1812



Synopsis

In June 1812 the still-infant United States had the audacity to declare war on the British Empire. Fought between creaking sailing ships and armies often led by bumbling generals, the ensuing conflict featured a tit-for-tat "You burned our capital, so we'll burn yours" and a legendary battle unknowingly fought after the signing of a peace treaty. During the course of the war, the young American navy proved its mettle as the USS Constitution, "Old Ironsides," sent two first-rate British frigates to the bottom, and a twenty-seven-year-old lieutenant named Oliver Hazard Perry hoisted a flag exhorting, "Don't Give Up the Ship," and chased the British from Lake Erie. By 1814, however, the United States was no longer fighting for free trade, sailors' rights, and as much of Canada as it could grab, but for its very existence as a nation. With Washington in flames, only a valiant defense at Fort McHenry saved Baltimore from a similar fate. Here are the stories of commanding generals such as America's Henry "Granny" Dearborn, double-dealing James Wilkinson, and feisty Andrew Jackson, as well as Great Britain's gallant Sir Isaac Brock, overly cautious Sir George Prevost, and Rear Admiral George Cockburn, the man who put the torch to Washington. Here too are those inadvertently caught up in the war, from heroine farm wife Laura Secord, whom some call Canada's Paul Revere, to country doctor William Beanes, whose capture set the stage for Francis Scott Key to write "The Star-Spangled Banner." 1812: The War That Forged a Nation presents a sweeping narrative that emphasizes the struggle's importance to America's coming-of-age as a nation. Though frequently overlooked between the American Revolution and the Civil War, the War of 1812 did indeed span half a continent -- from Mackinac Island to New Orleans, and Lake Champlain to Horseshoe Bend -- and it paved the way for the conquest of the other half. During the War of 1812, the United States cast aside its cloak of colonial adolescence and -- with both humiliating and glorious moments -- found the fire that was to forge a nation.

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Customer Reviews

1812: The War That Forged A Nation, by Walter R. Borneman, is a comprehensive, if somewhat superficial, look at the war that gave the United States a national identity, even as it ended in essentially a stalemate. Borneman is mostly known for history books dealing with the western United States, and he even mentions in his Acknowledgements how this book seems to be out of his field. However, Borneman maintains that the war set the United States on a course that would result in the western expansion that is his bread and butter, and thus deserves to be looked at more closely. It's a very interesting book that covers the entire war that tells everything that happened, though it doesn't quite go into as much detail as I would have liked. Borneman sets the stage for the war by discussing the relations between Great Britain and the United States in the first decade of the 1800s, including one of the main reasons for the United States to go to war: the impressments of American sailors into British naval service on the high seas. The United States was still considered an extremely minor power and was bullied by pretty much everybody. While the French didn't impress sailors, they did do other things, and some hawks in the American government actually advocated going to war with both Britain and France! One other reason for the war, not as popularly known, was that many westerners wanted to steal Canada out from under Great Britain while they were distracted by Napoleon on the continent. They didn't see any reason why Canada shouldn't be part of the United States, by force if necessary. Thus, the war drums were beaten, and war was declared.

The War of 1812 is often passed over very quickly in American history class because it is supposedly neither very interesting nor important. Walter Borneman seems to have taken exception to this idea and has set about to show his readers just how interesting and important this war was. His writing style and his ability to guide the reader along through a maze of events and people in a

clearly understandable way help him to accomplish his first goal. I think however, that he may have overreached on the importance of the war, at least when it comes to national unity. Borneman writes much like a novelist and his prose keeps the story of this conflict going in a quick paced and highly engaging manner. He is in fact, a little too conversational at times and although I did find this to be a little distracting it wasn't a big problem at all. The most amazing aspect of Mr. Borneman's writing style is that he manages to tie all of the action into the bigger picture with what appears to be very little effort. This is no small feat when one considers that this was a war that was pretty much divided into at least five separate little wars that were connected only tenuously to each other. Add to that the several Indian Nations involved, most of which sided with the British but not all, and one tribe that divided up and fought each other and one has the makings of a convoluted mess. Borneman somehow manages to tie it all together without getting his readers completely lost and on top of that he keeps it interesting. Not only interesting I might add, but fascinating. Borneman's main contention is that the War of 1812 made the United States into a confident and united nation.

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