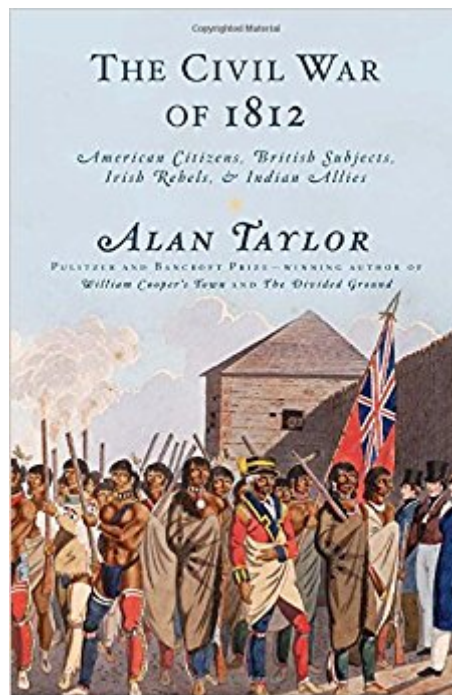




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The Civil War Of 1812: American Citizens, British Subjects, Irish Rebels, & Indian Allies



Synopsis

In this deeply researched and clearly written book, the Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Alan Taylor tells the riveting story of a war that redefined North America. During the early nineteenth century, Britons and Americans renewed their struggle over the legacy of the American Revolution. Soldiers, immigrants, settlers, and Indians fought in a northern borderland to determine the fate of a continent. Would revolutionary republicanism sweep the British from Canada? Or would the British empire contain, divide, and ruin the shaky American republic? In a world of double identities, slippery allegiances, and porous boundaries, the leaders of the republic and of the empire struggled to control their own diverse peoples. The border divided Americans—former Loyalists and Patriots—who fought on both sides in the new war, as did native peoples defending their homelands. Serving in both armies, Irish immigrants battled one another, reaping charges of rebellion and treason. And dissident Americans flirted with secession while aiding the British as smugglers and spies. During the war, both sides struggled to sustain armies in a northern land of immense forests, vast lakes, and stark seasonal swings in the weather. In that environment, many soldiers panicked as they fought their own vivid imaginations, which cast Indians as bloodthirsty savages. After fighting each other to a standstill, the Americans and the British concluded that they could safely share the continent along a border that favored the United States at the expense of Canadians and Indians. Both sides then celebrated victory by forgetting their losses and by betraying the native peoples. A vivid narrative of an often brutal (and sometimes comic) war that reveals much about the tangled origins of the United States and Canada.

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Customer Reviews

Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Taylor (William Cooper's Town) presents the War of 1812 not as the conventionally understood second war for independence, but as a civil war waged in the context of a U.S.-Canadian boundary barely separating kindred peoples, recently and incompletely divided by the revolution. Upper Canada (Ontario) was the scene of bitter conflict between two sets of immigrants: Loyalist refugees from the Revolutionary War and more recent American arrivals hoping to bring the region into the U.S. In New England, antiwar sentiment was strong enough to bring the region close to secession. Irish immigrants, many of them republican in sympathy, found Canada, with its developing monarchical ethos, less than welcoming. The Indians of the Northwest found themselves sandwiched between two alien and expansionist cultures unconcerned for Native Americans' welfare. The result was a drawn-out, indecisive war, but in the long run the four-way conflict that Taylor so convincingly describes was decisive in transforming a permeable frontier into a boundary separating the king's subject and the republic's citizen. 80 illus.; 2 maps. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Geographically situated along Lakes Erie and Ontario, Taylor's thoroughly researched history of the War of 1812 examines the political predicaments of the region's settlers and Indians. The ambiguity of allegiance that prevailed before the war evaporated; British officials insisted that if born a subject, one was forever a subject owing loyalty. Illustrating such wartime pressure on individuals, Taylor perceptively portrays how people coped with or capitalized on the unsettled times. The question of allegiance to empire or republic animates many of Taylor's mininarratives, such as the treatment meted out to each side's prisoners of war and spies. American-born Canadians, Irish immigrants, and Indian tribes: each group, Taylor explains, experienced a sort of civil war, not in organized battles, but in being polarized by the overt military war waged along the Great Lakes and the Niagara River. In discussing dissenters, recruitment for armies, and despoliation of farms and villages, Taylor illuminates an arena generally omitted from military histories of the war. Battles and campaigns do connect his account, however, which will stand history collections in good stead for a very long while. --Gilbert Taylor

As an American who has lived and travelled throughout Canada, I found this book to be particularly interesting. It is well written and left quite an impression on me, particularly since one of my ancestors got a Darwin Award while trying to sink a British ship on Lake Erie from a row boat. I found the discussion about how the War of 1812 was crucial in the development of a national

consciousness in both countries to be particularly compelling. It was also fascinating to read about how poorly conceived and managed much of the American war effort proved to be, and how the war was so interrelated with the international and national politics of the time. This was a really good historical read.

This work concentrates on the conflict between the Canadians, British and Indians against the Americans along the Canadian border, specifically the western Canadian or Upper Canadian border, during the War of 1812. It is a valuable addition to the literature on the war, particularly since so many works concentrate on the Battle of New Orleans, the burning of Washington and the British attempt to take Baltimore, and sometimes the Battle of Plattsburgh. The author takes pains to develop the ethnic divisions between Canadians and Americans, or lack thereof, before and during the war. Surprisingly, the author identifies the immigrants from Ireland all as "Irish", mostly adherents to the "United Irishmen", calling them a "mixture of Protestants and Catholics." In actuality, they were almost all Presbyterian Irish, more commonly called Scotch-Irish, of mixed Irish and Scot ancestry. He is correct in his depiction of many settlers having become somewhat disillusioned with the nascent United States government, being forced to pretty much provide for their own security against the Indians with the Whiskey Rebellion fresh in their minds. The group that had emigrated to Upper Canada was up for grabs in respect to their loyalty, but the American forces, particularly through their reliance on militia and with incompetent leadership, squandered their chances to bring Upper Canada into the United States. Of course, there was never any chance of gaining the loyalty of Catholic Lower Canada that was steeped in Civil Law and adherence to a crown. For the American reader, this conflict takes on a dreary litany of defeats, mistakes, heavy casualties, much suffering, and woeful leadership. Seen from the Canadian side, however, it is not much better. Very fortunately for the US, Great Britain was more interested at the time in defeating Napoleon than in re-acquiring the US as a colony. New England considered secession and from New York eastwards, Americans were unreliable and even seditious. All the opportunities, attitudes and failures on both sides are brought to light in a masterly account, even if it is not thrilling. The Canadian loyalists considered British rule as necessary to defend their property rights and maintain law and order. The Americans considered the Republican Government of the US as necessary to defend their property rights and maintain law and order. And both sides came from the same ethnic stock -- that of the Scotch-Irish. Both sides were suspicious of their governments and relatively unhappy with their situation. The situation was made for muddle and suffering, particularly on the American side that was essentially unprepared for war on any level, militarily, economically,

financially, and politically. In the end Upper Canada remained as a British Colony (to rebel unsuccessfully twenty years later) and the US remained sovereign. The main losers were the Indians whose power was broken, and who were abandoned by the British and no longer able to maintain their independence facing the pressure of American westward-moving settlers. The only major discussion the author failed to fully develop, in spite of a yeoman attempt, was why the Scotch-Irish of Upper Canada, many of whom were recent immigrants from the US, ultimately chose mostly to remain loyal to England. This is a very complex question, since only thirty-five years before that same group had been the backbone of the American Continental Army. Some were repelled by American looting and poor treatment, some were skeptical of republicanism, some felt the English would protect them from the Indians, some were willing to trade freedom and voting rights for security. The author makes all these points, but somehow the discourse is unsatisfying. Oh, well, maybe in the next book. All in all, this is a very fine work, and there is much to learn from its pages. Highly recommended to all history students.

Highly readable. Neat overview of what was happening on the Canadian border before, during & after the War of 1812. Fresh new perspectives.

Reading five pages of this book learned more about Canada than I ever knew before. Fascinating story of early United States, Indian Confederacy and British Canada the almost 14th State that we tried to steal on more than one occasion. After reading it I had respect for the loyalist cause and pondered if alive then would I have gone to Canada to escape the uncertainty for established order and principals of the British system of government.

Alan Taylor hits a homerun, again. One of, if not the best, of historians on the early days of the American republic. Well documented, engaging and easy to read

Historian Alan Taylor received his Ph.D. from Brandeis University in 1986, having studied under Marvin Meyers, a specialist in the Jacksonian period of US history. Taylor is best known for his Bancroft/Pulitzer prize winning study William Cooper's Town: Power and Persuasion on the Frontier of the Early American Republic published in 1996, but has also published other volumes on the American Revolution and the early American Republic. In his latest work, Taylor argues that the War of 1812, one which is often overlooked in survey courses of US history, had much more importance than it is often credited with having. Furthermore, he argues this war was pivoted on

the contentious boundary between the king's subject and the republic's citizen. (loc. 85) Furthermore, Taylor argues that this war was not fought between rivals of two distinct nations (France against Spain as an example) but was a civil war, fought between brothers and people who, in the recent past might have been neighbors. Indeed, the war, according to Taylor, was fought in a borderland of mixed peoples that lay in between British Canada, Republican American and Native North America. (loc.138) Indeed, Taylor uses a borderlands history as his conceptual framework to shape his argument, noting "borderlands history examines the peoples on both sides of a new and artificial border, as they often defied the control of their rival governments." (loc. 207) Thus, he is not only arguing against decades of historians who either ignored the war entirely or treated it as being of minimal importance, he is doing so with techniques developed in what is a burgeoning field in history. In creating his argument, Taylor uses some of the big names one would expect to see in a study of this time period (as well as a study in borderlands history) including Joyce Applebee, Colin Calloway, David Hackett Fischer, Reginald Horsman, Richard White, and Gordon S. Wood. As for primary sources, Taylor consulted a number of archives in Canada and the United States. Furthermore, his primary sources are a good mixture of diary/journal entries, government documents and newspaper and journal reports. The weaknesses of this work are few and far between. If anything, I think he could have discussed in greater detail just what the United States was in the aftermath of the US Constitution. The author seems to ignore the idea of the compact theory of the union and quickly brushes over this important period, one which he spends some time discussing. Having said that, the strengths outnumber the weaknesses, and the strengths of Taylor's work lay not only in his meticulous attention to detail, but in his use of a borderlands framework (one not often used by historians of this time period to be sure) and his exceptional narrative skill. The author is adept at synthesizing large quantities of primary and secondary sources into a story which is a joy to read and, at the same time, adds to our understanding of what is, at the end of the day, a much overlooked period in US history. Published on the eve of the 200th anniversary of the war, this book is a timely and substantial addition to the literature from one of our most talented historians.

a great book to help you understand what went on during the War of 1812. reads like a text book, so be ready for that.

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