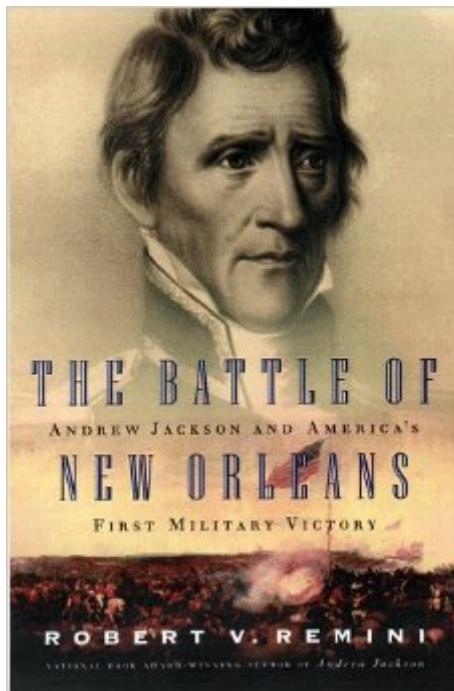


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The Battle Of New Orleans: Andrew Jackson And America's First Military Victory



Synopsis

The first cannon-fire filled narrative of a defining moment in American history--from "the foremost Jacksonian scholar of our time" (The New York Times) Only Robert Remini--whose "majestic biography" (The New Yorker) of Andrew Jackson won the National Book Award--could have brought to life this famous, pivotal, but almost forgotten battle. In 1815, Britain's crack troops, fresh from victories against Napoleon, were stunningly defeated near New Orleans by a rag-tag army of citizen soldiers under the fledgling commander they dubbed "Old Hickory." It was this battle that defined the United States as a military power to be reckoned with, and an independent democracy here to stay. A happenstance coalition of Militiamen, regulars, untrained frontiersmen, free blacks, pirates, Indians, and townspeople--marching to "Yankee Doodle" and "La Marseillaise"--pepper The Battle of New Orleans with a rich array of characters and scenes. Swashbuckling Jean Lafitte and his privateers. The proud, reckless British General Pakenham, and his miserable men ferried across a Louisiana lake in a Gulf storm. Partying Creoles who drew the line at blacking out their street lamps. The agile Choctaw and Tennessee "dirty shirt" sharpshooters, who made a sport of picking off redcoat sentries by night. And Jackson himself--tall, gaunt, shrewd, by turns gentle and furious, declaring "I will smash them, so help me God!" His improbable victory, uniting a rainbow of dissident groups, finally proved the United States' sovereignty to the world. It was a battle that catapulted a once-poor, uneducated, orphan boy into the White House and forged a collection of ex-colonies into a true nation.

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Customer Reviews

This is a subject I thought I had thoroughly studied, most significantly in Remini's definitive Jackson three-volume biography. However, as with his other books, The Battle of New Orleans is replete with new information, new perspectives, and new insights. Above all, Professor Remini always makes his topics, (even those the reader thought he knew well), exciting. Like a good novel, I had trouble putting down the book.

Remini has filled a gap for lovers of American history. The War of 1812, which the Battle of New Orleans ended convincingly (allowing the previously negotiated Treaty of Ghent to be accepted by both the British and our side as negotiated), has had too few treatments in recent years. Yet the Battle of New Orleans, as the author argues, perhaps was the event that convinced hostile Europeans that America was here to stay as a free nation. I would not completely agree with Remini's contention that the Battle of New Orleans was America's first major victory over European arms (he dismisses Yorktown and Saratoga as mere surrenders doing in my opinion a disservice to the aggressive American commanders and troops who did fight and convincingly beat the British at Saratoga). The author makes a case that this neglected Battle of a forgotten war earned our country the grudging respect it would need to grow unmolested over the next few decades. That having been said, the book is a very well written account of a stirring and fascinating story. General Andrew Jackson, after defeating the Creek Indians and punishing Spanish Florida for aiding that foe as well as the British, leads his American volunteers to Louisiana to defend against the expected British move on New Orleans. The British proceed to the bayous of the Mississippi delta and engage in another European style campaign against wily American back country fighters. One wonders why the English high command did not learn the lessons of Gen. Braddock's defeat in the French and Indian War or numerous defeats during the American Revolution. Doctrinaire plans and rigid troop handling along the lines of European war were not very successful against citizen soldiers who know how to use their weapons with skill and fight from behind cover. Using first person sources to illustrate the events in December 1814 to January of 1815, Remini gives voice to the events and people who helped make New Orleans a stirring American victory. Unsurprisingly, this biographer of Jackson paints a good portrait of the man whose talents and traits were sorely needed by our side in facing British regiments who had recently faced down Napolean's best troops. The hodge-podge of defenders are given colorful treatment. The pirate Laffite brothers and their outlaw band who manned our artillery, backwoodsmen in buckskin (giving the name the British used for our troops -- 'dirty shirts'), freed blacks, Creols and New Orleans first citizens all manned the barricades to await the onslaught. The British, with their straight ahead determination, poor avenue of attack and lack of

planning aided the American cause. But Jackson earned much of the glory that surrounded his victory. He cajoled troops and supplies, built a well fortified line, attacked before the British were all up and ready and worked to keep together an army that in reality was more like today's UN peacekeeping forces than a coherent American corps. The battle scenes are well told, particularly the Jan. 8th main assault in front of New Orleans. Remini's writing is good enough that the unfamiliar (to most) details of an unknown battlefield come alive in the reader's mind. So do the personalities on both sides. His descriptions are aided by three very good maps that allow one to fully picture the terrain. This book is a quick read. The author tells just enough of the main characters to separate them from one another in the story without bogging it down with a lot of background. The battles themselves come alive and are given a full description and dramatic rendering. You'll enjoy this book.

A fine account. Lucid, flowing prose and an interesting subject. The author is able to relate the details that make battles interesting from the point of view of the common soldier to the officers in charge, yet also connects the events of battle to the war itself and larger diplomatic and political issues thus highlighting their significance. This book also has what some good military histories foolishly lack -- good, detailed battlefield maps that make the action understandable. Take it from a former soldier (US Army 1966-69, Vietnam service 1968-69) you will enjoy this book.

Robert Remini, a noted and prolific scholar on Andrew Jackson, has narrowed his focus to write a colorful and informative account of the Battle of New Orleans, the final battle in Britain's unsuccessful war of invasion of the United States, the "War of 1812". Most Americans' grasp of the battle boils down to a few factoids: Andy Jackson won, pirate Jean Lafitte helped, and the battle was fought after the treaty marking its end (the Treaty of Ghent) was signed, but before news of the treaty reached the new world. Remini's success is in providing a wonderful and interesting background for the events of the battle: the polyglot and stratified society of New Orleans; continued British designs in North America even after the American colonies won their independence; and most starkly, the stalwart, near fanatical patriotism of Andrew Jackson. The British campaigning is well recounted, from attacks at Mobile Bay to the laborious transfer of troops through the Louisiana bayous, to the final disastrous assaults on entrenched American lines. This book is informative without being overly-dense to a newcomer to the material. A must-read for Americans who've let the battle and its significance slip from the national consciousness. Remini does pay a bit of lip service to the British by doing some research on their commanders and setting them in the context of their

career paths. He also wraps up by noting that the Battle of New Orleans was, for decades, seen as a defining coming-of-age moment for the young American republic, it launched Jackson to the White House and was the final and true declaration of independence for newly-empowered Americans. However, Remini's unabashed flag-waving and affection for his hero create some awkward passages. Time and again he gnashes teeth at British arrogance and nearly weeps at the ragtag nature of the American army, held together by the immense will of great Jackson. At times the book borders on hero worship and veers away from analytical political/military history. So that in the end, this is a readable and interesting history, but a flawed one. An informative ride to the gates of New Orleans, but one taken from the American side.

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