



America's First Crisis: The War of 1812

Robert P. Watson

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Engaging and accessible account of the war that helped forge the American nation.

The War of 1812, sometimes called “America’s forgotten war,” was a curious affair. At the time, it was dismissed as “Mr. Madison’s War.” Later it was hailed by some as America’s “Second War for Independence” and ridiculed by others, such as President Harry Truman, as “the silliest damned war we ever had.” The conflict, which produced several great heroes and future presidents, was all this and more.

In *America’s First Crisis* Robert P. Watson tells the stories of the most intriguing battles and leaders and shares the most important blunders and victories of the war. What started out as an effort to invade Canada, fueled by anger over the harassment of American merchant ships by the Royal Navy, soon turned into an all-out effort to fend off an invasion by Britain. Armies marched across the Canadian border and sacked villages; navies battled on Lake Ontario, Lake Champlain, and the world’s oceans; both the American and Canadian capitals were burned; and, in a final irony, the United States won its greatest victory in New Orleans—after the peace treaty had been signed.

“Watson has produced a highly readable and lively account of the key battles, commanders, and events of this ‘forgotten war.’ Watson presents this important war as not only unnecessary and filled with intrigue, but a conflict that ended up shaping both American nationalism and the geopolitical future of the continent. This book accomplishes its goal of providing a new understanding of the importance of this underappreciated war.” — Richard M. Yon, United States Military Academy

“This thorough, informative, and engaging narrative of the War of 1812 will be of great interest to scholars, students, and anyone interested in military history and American politics. It brings battles from over two hundred years ago to life and illustrates why studying this war is essential to understanding conflicts over US foreign and defense policy today. It combines skillful historical research with careful attention to major institutional developments in the American political system.” — Meena Bose, Hofstra University

“Professor Watson provides marvelous insights into America’s first declared—though least known and understood—war. From British impressments to diplomatic missteps, the reasons for this war that almost started in 1807 are illuminated. The rookie mistakes that nearly cost America her newly won independence, the defensive stands that serve as a source of pride for many Canadians, and the exhausted adventures of British crusaders are brought to life, as the characters, ships, and battles are described with vivid detail and in a straightforward manner. This book will please students of American history interested in both diplomacy and war and also satisfy the casual reader looking for greater knowledge and awareness about the War of 1812.” — Sean D. Foreman, coeditor of *The Roads to Congress 2012*

Robert P. Watson is Professor of American Studies at Lynn University. His many books include *The Obama Presidency: A Preliminary Assessment*, *George W. Bush: Evaluating the President at Midterm*, and *Life in the White House: A Social History of the First Family and the President’s House*; all published by SUNY Press. He lives in Boca Raton, Florida.

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