

Book review on evidence, argument and conclusions

[Countries](#), [England](#)



\n[[toc title="Table of Contents"](#)]\n

\n \t

1. [Book Report: Robert Remini, The Battle of New Orleans](#) \n \t
2. [Summary](#) \n \t
3. [REFERENCES](#) \n

\n[/toc]\n \n

Book Report: Robert Remini, The Battle of New Orleans

Introduction and Thesis

Robert Remini was correct that the War of 1812 was mostly a disaster for the United States except at the very end, when Andrew Jackson defeated a superior British force at the Battle of New Orleans in January 1815. Three attempts to invade and annex Canada had failed, and although these events are forgotten in the U. S. today, they are remembered north of the border as a key aspect in creating a sense of Canadian national identity. At sea, the British navy was far superior to the Americans and easily able to blockade the ports and destroy many coastal towns. Remini's thesis is that New Orleans was " not only a stupendous military victory that helped define the country" but it also created a " towering hero who became a symbol of what was best in American society" (Remini, 1999, p. xi). This was certainly how Gen. Jackson regarded himself and how his political handlers and the Democratic newspapers presented him to the voters, although more recent historians like Edward Pessen have been far less likely to idealize Old Hickory (Ward 1955). Compared to the previous generation of American leaders, Jackson was a westerner and self-made man, with poor grammar and

spelling and little formal education. Yet the voters thought that the presidency was the “ appropriate reward for the man who had helped them prove the superiority of their free republic over all other forms of government” (Remini, p. 198). For Old Hickory personally and for the general public, this victory against “ 8, 000 disciplined regulars of the British army” was so unexpected that it was thought to be an act of divine Providence (Remini, p. 5).

Summary

Remini’s narrative of the battle and the events leading up to it is in chronological order, with the first chapter devoted to Jackson’s campaigns against the Creeks in the South, his successful defense of Mobile against the British and abortive attempt to capture Pensacola from the Spanish (Remini, p. xiii). He then prepared to defend New Orleans against the long-anticipated British attack, placing the city under martial law and enlisting the assistance of anyone willing to fight, including free blacks, Native Americans and the pirate brothers Jean and Pierre Lafitte. Jackson successfully blunted two British attacks on the city before defeating them decisively on January 8, 1814. By that time, the war was already over, but due to the slow communications of the time no one in New Orleans was even aware that the Treaty of Ghent had been signed until March. Jackson still expected the British to renew their attacks again and was surprised that they had withdrawn back to the ships, and was also anticipating another offensive on Mobile (Remini, p. 183). It was a war of mostly defensive victories against the British, and in any event they were eager to end it by 1814.

Nevertheless, it did prove that the ordinary soldiers were capable of “ an extraordinary degree of heroism”, particularly because British officers always seemed to have great difficulty giving up the tactic of hurling thousands of men against well-organized defenders (Remini, p. xi). Many generals continued to make the same fatal errors in the Civil War and World War I, and perhaps Jackson’s great genius in this battle was to recognize that his smaller, poorly trained, polyglot force was best used on the defensive.

Remini probably underestimates the success of American defensive operations in other regions of the country, although historians generally agree that the offensive operations against Canada were catastrophic. Nor did he point out that the British had followed an almost identical strategy during both the American Revolution and the War of 1812, but in neither case was it able to win the war for them. In the War of 1812 and the Revolution, they attempted to divide up the U. S. by region, launching invading forces from Canada and organizing a Southern campaign as well, but the Americans were far more successful on the defensive in both wars. Even though the British could occupy territory in the wars of 1775-81 and 1812-15, they could not really conquer the country (Black, 2007, p. 107). During both conflicts, they offered freedom to any black slaves who would join them and to respect the land and cultural rights of any Native Americans who joined them, and they had considerable sympathy and support from these groups who were severely mistreated by white America.

Most contemporary historians of the Jacksonian era like Edward Pessen paint a far less complimentary picture of Old Hickory as a hero than Remini, given

the fact that he was an aggressive expansionist and Indian fighter who opened up vast new regions of the country for the spread of slavery. Jackson first became nationally famous by defeating the Creek Red Sticks at the Battle of Horseshoe Bend in 1814, just as William Henry Harrison became presidential timber by the defeat of Tecumseh and his British allies that year (Remini, pp. 20-24). One key difference between the wars, however, was that in the Revolution the U. S. had massive assistance from France and Spain, but in the War of 1812 Spain was supporting the British while France under Napoleon was fully preoccupied with the anti-Napoleonic Coalition, especially after the disastrous campaign in Russia (Dull, 1985, pp. 106-07). In 1812-15, the U. S. was on its own, but it obtained at least a draw or a defensive victory against the British, and an offensive victory against the Native Americans in the West.

Remini correctly notes that one of the major effects of the war was the impetus it gave to American nationalism of the economic and political variety, and this is a very familiar story to historians of the era. The fact that the Americans were really no match for the British on land or at sea, Britain could not win either war no matter how many battles it won or towns that were destroyed because they had no way of establishing political control over the Americans. Even though New England was threatening to secede by 1814 and make a separate peace, there were actually no real Tories or Loyalists in the War of 1812 compared to the Revolution. As Remini points out, the Americans of Andrew Jackson's generation were very different from those of the 1770s in that they no longer spoke or thought like Englishmen, and no longer felt any great attachment to Europe. Jackson would have been

the first to declare proudly that “ nothing about him was European”, which was also true of his contemporaries, and for that reason alone Britain lacked a plausible ‘ end game’ or ‘ scenario’ for victory in the War of 1812—even more so that in 1776 (Remini, p. 197).

Remini is right that America’s sense of national pride swelled in 1815 after three years of defeat. This was because “ they had achieved something that no other nation could match: the thorough and complete thrashing of a British army that had just defeated Napoleon in Spain, and then marched on to Paris to force his abdication (Remini, pp. 185-86). Compared to those events, the War of 1812 was a costly, irrelevant and unwanted sideshow for the British, but from their point of view the Americans were tacitly on the side of Napoleon in this war rather than freedom, liberty and democracy. This was not at all how most Americans saw the conflict, but rather a necessary war to both expand the country to the West and to give the “ Americans the self-confidence they needed to face a hostile Europe with its kings, czars and dictators” (Remini, p. 7). For this reason, January 8th was celebrated as a great national holiday like July 4th, for decades after the war, no matter that virtually no one today would even be aware of its significance.

REFERENCES

Black, J. (2007). *European Warfare in a Global Context, 1660-1815*.

Routledge.

Dull, J. R. (1985). *A Diplomatic History of the American Revolution*. Yale University Press.

Remini, R. (1999). *The Battle of New Orleans: Andrew Jackson and America's First Military Victory*. Penguin Books.

Ward, J. W. (1955). *Andrew Jackson: Symbol for an Age*. Oxford University Press.