
Lasting differences

DAVID ARMITAGE
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writes Alan Taylor, who has now produced almost the longest by
far
the
most
illuminating
study
of
the
conflict.
It
looms
even
smaller
British
democracy.

“The
War
of
1812?

What
did
Britain
and
America
have
to fight about in 1812?"

the great historian Lawrence Stone once a

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Canadians might recall it for the American destruction of York.
now Toronto.

And if Americans remember it at all, it is for the Brits.
burning of the Capitol and the White House, the origins of the Star -
Spangled Banner at the siege of Fort McHenry in 1814, or Andrew Jackson.
n, s
victory at New Orleans in January 1815, allegedly after peace had
been signed.
The Civil War of 1812 devotes only half a line each to the
American 
anational 
anthem 
and 
the 
arson 
of 
Washington, 
, D.C., and it
debut of the myth of the battle of New Orleans.

(The treaty had in
deed been signed, but not yet ratified.

Taylor focuses instead on a r
the northeastern
borderland
between the
United States
and Canada.

Then either
or the

united states
and
Canada.
bulk of the fighting took place between Detroit and Montreal, where
the imperial frontier formed the early nineteenth-century equivalent.
lent of the 38th Parallel, a tense boundary between two opposed ideologies.
In this case, hierarchies: British monarchical and rambunctious A
American republicanism.

Four cross-border peoples there - the emergent
arrived after 1798 - fought among themselves even as they collided with...
as a British lieutenant confessed to an American office.
In 1813, it was all “uncomfortably like a civil war.” The War of 1812...
was in fact rather like the last British civil war, or first "American"
an
civil
war",
in
which
fellow
English-speakers
had
defended
their
common
American War of Independence in 1783 propelled nearly 40,000 Loyalists
into Canada from the United States.
They were joined between 1792 and
1812
by
some
30,000
“Late Loyalists”
drawn to the newly founded Brit
is
pro
vice
of
Upper
Canada
(now Southern Ontario)
by
the
promise
of
cheap
land
and
low
taxes.
British
authorities
refused
to
accept
the
Am
American assumption that citizenship was voluntary and continued to belief.
event that Britons - even those who now thought themselves Americans -
etained
thei
right
subjecthood
forever.
Upper
Canada
soon
had
a
majority

population
drawn
from
the
United
States,
while
their
masters
back
in
Britain
still
saw
most
Americans,
especially
Americans
sailors,
as perpetual members of the Empire.

It would take a war to resolve this.
these differences by finally affirming American independence and security.
George Cranfield Berkeley called "the Glittering TinSEL of American F"
American freedom may have been levelling but it was also raci...
ally
stratified.
Indians were potential allies for the British Empire.
wherever they lived, even in American territory; for the United States
they were dependents to be removed or absorbed, just as the enslaved
could not be trusted to fight even when Americans were drastically sh
orthanded.

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cannon fodder during its wars with Napoleon, and impressed 11,000
American sailors for its navy. All these differences sparked America
pressments,

British intrigues

with the Indians,

and British murders"
with one hand tied behind their backs. Tayloror studs his richly detailed
led and impeccably researched narrative with lively portraits of the
political and military leaders on each side and with dramatic account
t s o f t h e m a n y i n c o n c l u s i v e s i e g e s, b u r n i n g s a n d b a t t l e s t h a t s c a r r e d
the borderland.

Yet the always keeps the bigger picture, both British and...
and American, in view. His treatments of Native Americans, of ordinary
soldiers and of prisoners of war, are ground breaking contributions to
indigenous history and the new social history of war respectively.

He
shows how the conflict settled the borders of two states, stabilized p
their fate as "domestic dependent nations" inside the United States.
The War of 1812 closed one phase of the American Revolution by determining...
n ing once and for all who was British and who was not in North America
tinent.

Although Taylor or ends his Canadian story in 1867 with Confederation.
tion,
wise
resisting
including
the
Confederacy
his
American
narr
A series of sesquicentennials of events in the US Civil War, for
om secession in 1860 to surrender in 1865, has already begun to look o
The American historical landscape. The Civil War of 1812 is a time...
Second, civil war fought in Anglophone America.