



Mr. and Mrs. Madison's War: America's First Couple and the War of 1812

Hugh Howard

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August 28, 1814. Dressed in black, James Madison mourns the nation's loss. Smoke rises from the ruin of the Capitol before him; a mile away stands the blackened shell of the White House. The British have laid waste to Washington City, and as Mr. Madison gazes at the terrible vista, he ponders the future-his country's defeat or victory-in a war he began over the unanimous objections of his political adversaries. As we approach its bicentennial, the War of 1812 remains the least understood of America's wars. To some it was a conflict that resolved nothing, but to others, it was our second war of independence, settling once and for all that America would never again submit to Britain. At its center was James Madison-our most meditative of presidents, yet the first one to declare war. And at his side was the extraordinary Dolley, who defined the role of first lady for all to follow, and who would prove perhaps her husband's most indispensable ally.

In this powerful new work, drawing on countless primary sources, acclaimed historian Hugh Howard presents a gripping account of the conflict as James and Dolley Madison experienced it. *Mr. and Mrs. Madison's War* rediscovers a conflict fought on land and sea-from the shores of the Potomac to the Great Lakes-that proved to be a critical turning point in American history.

Advance praise for *Mr. and Mrs. Madison's War* :

"Hugh Howard has turned the least known and understood war in American history into a Technicolor, wide-screen epic of thrilling naval battles, brutal backwoods skirmishes, villainous intrigue, and stirring heroism. Thanks to Howard's prodigious research, fine eye for the telling detail, and vivid prose, the War of 1812 seems as contemporary and compelling as yesterday's battlefield dispatches from the Middle East."-**Thurston Clarke, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Last Campaign***

Mr. and Mrs. Madison's War: America's First Couple and the War of 1812 Details

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From Reader Review **Mr. and Mrs. Madison's War: America's First Couple and the War of 1812** for online ebook

Sol says

Boring!

Jack says

1812. Much was occurring during this time of American history. Mr. Madison was our president, another of the founding fathers. Napoleon was still the scourge of Europe. England's Royal Navy essentially blockaded the continent. A young man named Wellington was bogging down the Tyrant's troops in the Peninsula War. Barbary pirates were also launching their corsair predators against Mediterranean shipping. Also a young country, the United States, was being harassed by the European conflict between France and England. War was declared. Strategically, the risk was small for the United States since England's power (naval and land) were occupied with Bonaparte. But that did not last. With a succession of defeats, France was overcome. England could now focus on America.

The US land campaigns were dismal. Forays into Canada led to utter defeats. Our land component's leadership of old Revolutionary veterans were no match to English veterans. The Royal Navy blockaded the US coast and eventually controlled our rivers. That control led to ultimate humiliation with the burning of the Capitol and the White House. But not all was well for England either. The new US Navy was more than a match for the seasoned Royal Navy. Old Ironsides became and is still the longest serving ship in the Navy as well as the only one to have sunk an enemy vessel. Battles on Lake Champlain and the Great Lakes were smashing successes. The English attack on New Orleans against Old Hickory and his ragtag band of Kentuckians, pirates, and slaves led to a bloody repulse.

Overall, I say the War Of 1812 was a draw. Militarily. Politically, the war was a right of passage. The new world had twice bested England and was on its way to punish the Barbary pirates. European powers would think twice about meddling in the affairs of the young nation. Economically, it also unleashed the cotton trade, the steam engine, and westward expansion. The War of 1812 was the end of the beginning of our young nation.

Mr. and Mrs. Madison's War is a focused book upon the president and first lady's conduct during the war. It is a welcome addition to any 1812 history since it covers the political as well as the military events quite well. I would say this book is essential for anyone wishing to gain further understanding of our Second War Of Independence.

Patricia O'Sullivan says

In 1807 the HMS Leopard attacked the USS Chesapeake off the coast of Virginia. After blowing twenty-two holes in the Chesapeake's hull, the British boarded her and impressed a handful of sailors, most of them American, into the Royal Navy. So began a series of skirmishes between the British and the Americans that led to America's second war of independence, the War of 1812.

In a narrative style, Hugh Howard introduces his readers to the personalities and key events of the war. Dominating Howard's tale is Dolly Madison, the quiet Quaker widow who became Washington's most formidable socialite. Because she was frequently called upon to be a diplomat, hostess, and private secretary to her ailing husband, Dolly Madison is, in Howard's view, a natural center to the story of the war. Written with meticulous detail, Mr. and Mrs. Madison's War has a wonderful visual quality that allowed me to feel I was standing on the deck the HMS Constance as Captain Downie was struck by a canon barrel and mingling with members of congress at one of Dolly Madison's Wednesday gatherings.

Darlene says

Excellent portrait of Washington's first "power couple", the Madisons. Dolly gets her due as a woman who helped shape Washington society, and a model for what First Ladies became in later years--partners who helped their husbands navigate the rocky politics of the nation's capitol and made a positive impression on the American people, and on foreign dignitaries and world leaders as well.

It's especially relevant during this anniversary of the War of 1812, and the description of the British invasion and burning of the capitol was extremely detailed and informative.

T.P. Williams says

Fast paced history of War of 1812. Could have done without CSI type datelines beginning the chapters, but overall very good. Interesting how battles in the war were few and far between, contrary to what my impression had been. Section on burning of Washington extremely interesting.

Claudette says

This is a fascinating look at the War of 1812. Well worth a read.

Thebruce1314 says

I struggled with this book. The author states in the introduction that he prides himself on storytelling, and I agree that many of the personal episodes in the book were written very much like a fictional narrative. The author discusses feelings and emotions, and what was seen, but how do we *know* This is also very much a look at the War of 1812 from an American perspective. Though many battles took place on Canadian soil, those bits are glossed over and the author, though he included many thanks for the help in research, did not actually consult any Canadian archives.

I was really hoping to learn a bit more about a war that greatly affected the area in which I live, but I'm left as confused as ever. Why exactly were we in a fight again?

Michael Ramirez says

Although interesting, the book started strong and unfortunately left me a bit frustrated towards the end. It included some interesting anecdotes about the war, but the author clearly took some liberties with his storytelling. Quite frequently, from basic facts he presumed intimate details of what the individuals were thinking and feeling. After doing it often enough, I found myself questioning whether the account could be trusted fully. The flow of the narrative was also confusing in that the author chose to focus on some events more than others, sometimes spending pages on side stories that did not seem overly significant or even relevant before speeding through years at a time. Still, the book was an interesting look into the Madisons' time during the war. Although glossing over many important issues, it informed me of some additional topics of the war to explore.

Jim Savage says

Heroic Americans de-ice Toronto, dasterdly British de-louse Washington. Both invited to Sugar Bowl, whence term "meaningless post-season extravaganza" was coined.

Laura Horne says

Was a little disappointed that few books are dedicated to Dolley Madison and her influence on both James Madison and the War of 1812. This one does better than most but the title is a bit misleading. Although it's very well written and devotes a fair number of pages to Dolley, it is mostly a play-by-play of the war tactics and less about the influence of Dolley, or that of her husband for that matter, on the war.

Tim says

A very readable history from a period I knew little about.

Monty says

Hugh Howard presents an interesting perspective on the War of 1812 from the viewpoint of James and Dolley Madison. This mild-mannered and geeky President was married to one of the most interesting, vivacious and colorful first-ladies of the 19th century. They were indeed an odd couple. Madison was very short (5 ft. 4 in. max) and dressed mostly in black. He did not smoke, drink, gamble, swear, or lose his temper. He was studious and introverted, and did not deliver a single speech during his term as president. His wife, Dolley dressed colorfully--in fashionable gowns and turbans, used snuff, played cards, danced well, and was taller than James. This first family occupied the White House (President's Mansion) when James declared war on Great Britain, June 18, 1812.

The road leading to war had been paved for several years. The British government did not recognize American citizenship. Its navy impressed any men of service age it desired, so long as they spoke English. The manpower needs of the Royal Navy were far more important than the honor of the lilliputian American

nation. King George and his ministers claimed they could "piss on the American Navy and sink the entire fleet". Alternately, any American who chose to live in Canada was forced to take an oath to the Royal Crown of England.

England never abandoned its forts on the Ohio and Canadian frontier. The British government incited Native American uprisings to keep Americans away from rich trapping and fishing areas that the British Canadians and Natives wanted to themselves. The British also invaded fishing areas in New England without care or worry of infringement. The capture of the U.S.S. Chesapeake by the H.M.S. Shannon was a shameful and despicable act, and the publishing of the British "Orders in Council" placing extreme limits on American trade was unacceptable. These factors all led to war.

America was woefully underprepared. The navy comprised less than twelve warships, none carrying more than 45 guns. The Royal Navy had many large Ships-of-the-line which bore over 70 guns. They also had a large army fighting Napoleon on the Continent of Europe. The army in the U.S. was mostly comprised of militia. The odds for America avoiding catastrophe were not good.

Things looked bleakest on August 24, 1814 when the U.S. Capitol was burned.

--Then the tide began to turn and some very interesting things happened.

Louise says

Lasting three years, the War of 1812 needs a better name. In its time "Mr. Madison's War" was a name of scorn. A byproduct of this war, admitted by even those who opposed it, was that it brought the US great prestige. Author Hugh Howard, noting that the president's wife was his true partner in work as well as life, gives this war a more modern name as a term of respect.

While Pres. Madison was able to get the required votes by Congress, the war was far from popular, particularly among the New England Federalists. The risks of not winning this war were huge for the country as were the political risks for Madison. Before it ended, Madison had the problem of its waning relevance: with the defeat of Napoleon/France, the British would no longer need to "impress" American sailors.

The book describes the ups and downs of the military, legal, diplomatic situation at different points of the war. Portraits of some of history's lesser known players, such as Isaac Hull, Commodore Joshua Barney, Dr. William Thornton, Richard Rush and others, add to the narrative.

There are interesting stories that depict the times. Some ships were built at the site where they'd be launched into battle. In the burning of Washington, Dr. Thornton, the head of the patents office, and a citizen next to a burning target were able to convince British Admiral Cockburn not to burn their buildings... a far cry from today where targets are called in from thousands of miles away. Communication is all by courier whether it is personal letters between the Madison's, news or orders to commanders. It took weeks for those in Washington to learn that the British were stopped in New Orleans or that a Peace Treaty was negotiated in Ghent. The treaty was delivered to President Madison in a leather covered wooded box with a domed top with "hinged with brass lock set."

The issue of slavery is only touched upon. Howard notes Madison's writings that show strongly against it, but, Howard does not note that like many of his peers, he never freed one slave; Dolley inherited them, and unlike Martha Washington, didn't free them, but sold them. Paul Jennings, the "body servant" to the deceased president is sold to Daniel Webster who freed him: (see: A Slave in the White House: Paul Jennings and the Madisons)

While Dolley comes through history as a hostess who saved George Washington's portrait, she was much more than this. Throughout, Howard demonstrates how the Madison's were a team. Their partnership is not hidden, people transact the nation's business with her, as they would with her husband which in itself makes the telling of this part of history a good contribution to the literature on this not often cited war.

Matt Deets says

An exciting read about the war of 1812. From Naval battles to the burning of Washington, to the eventual peace treaty, Howard does a wonderful job narrating the people and events of this lesser studied war. He gives a pretty in-depth look at the first power couple of politics and how they helped each other through some very trying times. If you want to learn more about one of the more unappreciated founding fathers and the War of 1812 this book is a great place to start.

Jason Walker says

I have read a lot of books on the Revolution Era and I know that the War of 1812 was often referred to as Jimmie Madison's war in newspapers. The fact that the war happened during his Presidency is really irrelevant. The fact the British burned Washington during his presidency is also irrelevant. The fact is the US was at a weak moment, Madison wanted to make a statement, the U.S. fleet was at the Barbary coast. The UK thought it would be a simple thing to reinstate themselves. Nothing is ever simple. The rest of the story is fun.
