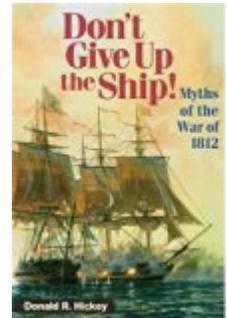


**Donald R. Hickey.** *Don't Give Up the Ship!: Myths of the War of 1812.* Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006. xxvi + 430 pp. \$34.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-252-03179-3.



**Reviewed by** Claire Phelan

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#### Mr. Madison's Forgotten War

In *Don't Give Up the Ship: Myths of the War of 1812*, historian Donald R. Hickey ably demonstrates his vast knowledge of a subject largely ignored in the collective public memory. In this highly entertaining work, Hickey recounts the most memorable incidents and personalities of the period and attempts to debunk the prevailing myths that have so long surrounded them. Dividing the book into six sections--(1) "The Causes of the War"; (2) "Battles and Campaigns"; (3) "The Maritime War"; (4) "Soldiers, Sailors, and Civilians"; (5) "The Mechanics of Waging War"; (6) "The End of the War"--allows the reader, both casual and professional, to follow the progress of the conflict as it unfolded. Such an approach suits Hickey's engaging and succinct writing style and offers the reader an encyclopedic work made all the more appealing by the stoutly held opinions of the author. The prologue neatly details the consequences for the United States of the ongoing conflict in Europe while the epilogue describes how the War of 1812 left the American people with "a

buoyant self-confidence, a clearer ... identity, and a new-found sense of purpose" (p. 310).

The first section of the book describes a growing national resentment against the British. Fuelled by the Orders-in-Council, the *Chesapeake* Affair, and American suspicions that Indian hostility was a consequence of British incitement, the stage was set for latent hostilities to grow more open. Section 2 follows the most notable battles and campaigns of the war, but does not get dragged into a solely military portrait; the inclusion of anecdotes, such as the circumstances surrounding the British who dined at the White House and the creation of the Star-Spangled Banner, infuse military history with some human interest.

Hickey devotes an entire section to the maritime aspects of the war and analyzes the effectiveness of the British blockade and the national origins of crewmembers serving on board Royal Navy vessels and aboard ships belonging to the United States. He also assesses the effectiveness of Jefferson's gunboats and concludes that both the British and Americans made frequent good use of shallow-draft vessels. As expected, the author

pays particular attention to notable officers such as Master Commandant Oliver Hazard Perry and Captain James Lawrence, who famously enjoined his men not to give up the ship.

Despite the limited documentation detailing the efforts and actions of women, Native Americans, and blacks during the conflict, Hickey does include some general information describing the responses of these men and women to the war. He also includes some fascinating insights into the origin of "Uncle Sam," the reasons prompting sailors and soldiers to desert their posts, and a brief but insightful discussion explaining the reasons why America failed to conquer Canada.

Whilst Hickey acknowledges the difficulty of finding a consensus on what caused the War of 1812, he also identifies the reasons for the divergence of opinions. He suggests that many misunderstandings have arisen because the vast majority of today's historians have either ignored the diplomatic correspondence of the two countries or have relied on older diplomatic analyses, "or, worse yet, on newer studies that draw heavily on older studies" (p. 13). Lamenting the decline in popularity of diplomatic history, Hickey unreservedly argues for a closer examination of pertinent government documents.

With three appendices and a selection of maps, this work will appeal to those seeking a logical overview of the conflict. Hickey's engaging style, witty prose, and keen familiarity of the topic will ensure this book's longevity.

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