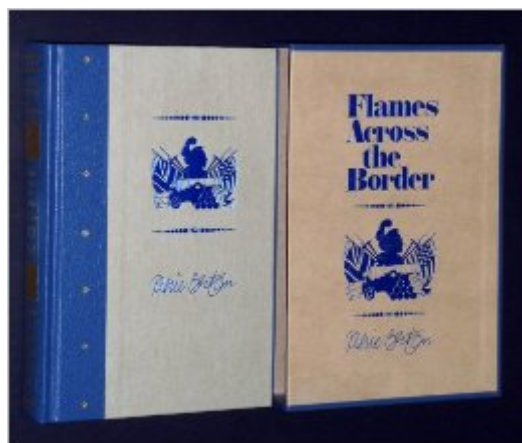


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Flames Across The Border 1813-1814



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Customer Reviews

Pierre Berton's second volume of the history of the War of 1812 is as polished, accurate, and gripping as his first volume. In fact, he even goes into detail over the hardships and difficulties endured by the US diplomatic delegation seeking an end to the war, and the internal turmoil the war causes in the New England states of the new republic. He details the rise of a younger and more competent officer corps, in both the US Navy and the US Army, which greatly improves US performance in period battles compared to the earlier military disasters of the war. He further details the improved performance of Canadian militia in upper Canada, and goes into some detail of the burning of Washington DC (and documents the reasons leading up to it in suitable depth). In summation, an excellent companion to the first volume, concentrating on relevant occurrences and facts, and using excellent narrative prose to hold the reader's interest throughout. Highly recommended.

In almost a half century of reading, I can recall about a dozen books that were absolutely captivating, as much for the author's narrative skills as through the subject matter. This is one, and Pierre Berton is almost the only author whose works made that list more than once. The War of 1812 is a generally neglected subject in America, except perhaps for the New Orleans campaign of 1815. Berton writes from a distinctly Canadian viewpoint, although he writes so wonderfully that even the most chauvinistic American will hardly notice and won't care. Any time I begin to write something that I hope readers will enjoy beyond simple information, I try to look back over a little of

Berton's work in vain hopes of picking up something of his incomparable style.

If you want to learn about the war of 1812, the books you should read are the two Pierre Berton offerings, *Flames Across the Border* and *The Invasion of Canada*, and two from Donald E. Graves on the battles of Lundy's Lane and Crysler farm. They are quite simply the best work out there.

The War of 1812 is often rated as obscure, and inconsequential, but the frequent qualifying remarks about Pierre Berton's Canadian nationality reveal that quite a few people are indeed sensitive about that war, and its outcome. While one of my ancestors tried but failed to join General Hull's army at Detroit, therefore missing capture (or worse), I have no particular bias concerning the War of 1812 as opposed to the Civil War where numerous ancestors on both sides of my family proudly wore the blue. By chance, I picked up the first volume of Berton's history at a local used book shop, was totally blown away by it, and ordered the complete set on . Reading these books really incited in me a desire of invade Canada! (Kidding.) I developed a really profound interest in this fascinating conflict. Berton's history is admittedly light on some facets of the war, but it has an immediacy of tone owing partly to having been written in the present tense. Not every writer can manage this in any literary genre: Albert Castel wrote his history of the Civil War 1864 Georgia Campaign that way, and it worked well, but the practice requires much detailed research in order to avoid appearing superficial. Berton's bibliography is exhaustive, particularly in primary sources. One point he makes, a point aimed more particularly at Canadians, is that the participation of Native Americans was largely responsible for defeating the US invasion. Canada owes its independence to Tecumseh, and other Indian leaders. The War of 1812 was a turning point in the history of Indian resistance: the Indians were the real losers. Ineptitude, and malice characterized both parties in this conflict. These books deflate patriotic myths of all involved. This is the way history should be done, and I can't understand why Berton's history isn't better known.

It is a pity that Americans do not understand nor have any knowledge of the War of 1812. Our relationship with Canada would be better understood and accepted if it did. Pierre Berton, a Canadian, has told the story of the war from a Canadian perspective but in such a manner that we can all relate and sympathize. He has taken reality/history and written it like historical fiction while maintaining a scholarly credibility.

Few people know the details of the War of 1812; heck, most Americans have no idea that we were

ever in a shooting war with Canada! "Flames" is the second of two books by Berton that cover this war, and picks up in the spring of 1813, with the war in full swing. But don't think of this as some dusty dry old history tome. Berton uses hundreds of primary and secondary sources to put you right there on the battlefield. The result is a story told more in the fashion of a war novel than a simple chronology of events. It's one of the very rare history books that's harder to put down than to pick up! The book covers all of the major battles on both sides of the border, as well as the naval warfare on the Great Lakes. It also covers the British marching on, and then burning, Washington. But there are much more than military details, there is a fascinating look at the pressure on both sides to end the war, and the work of mediators to achieve a peace settlement. Although the author is Canadian, the coverage is extremely even-handed. Major players on both sides made some incredible mistakes, and no one's reputation is spared. In the Author's Note, he says: "This is . . . a social history of the war ... I have tried to tell not only what happened but also what it was like . . ." I would say he succeeded brilliantly. I highly recommend this book to everyone, on both sides of the 49th parallel!

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