

1990

The World Turned Upside Down

David Syrett

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

Syrett, David (1990) "The World Turned Upside Down," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 43 : No. 3 , Article 12.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol43/iss3/12>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.

women. In contrast to the historians of the 1880s and 1890s, today we are reluctant to declare victory or defeat, but, instead, have sought to use various forms of evidence in trying to understand a range of human activities in the complex world of the 16th century.

Ferling, John, ed. *The World Turned Upside Down: The American Victory in the War of Independence*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1988. 250pp. \$39.95

In this book, eleven essayists—ten Americans and a Canadian—attempt to answer the question “Why did America win the Revolutionary War?” They fail.

True enough, there are some good pieces. Fred Anderson traces very well the development of American military institutions and shows how they diverged from their British forebears at the beginning of the American Revolutionary War. James Kirby Martin shows how and why the Continental Army was formed and then goes on to show that the Army not only produced victory on the battlefield, but it also broke down the “localist-oriented horizon” of many Americans. It was a truly national institution and set a standard for civil-military relations for America.

In a well-written and well-researched essay, Paul David Nelson tries to answer why the American soldier fought despite the conditions, which at times were awful. This essay is a study of what makes soldiers carry on to the bitter end despite lack of food, equipment,

clothing, and everything else required to keep body and soul together.

With skill, Mark Edward Lender’s essay on the army’s logistical support shows how the Americans—standing on a legal and monetary sand castle—were able, just barely, to procure the supplies needed, and managed to keep their forces in the field. James H. O’Donnell’s excellent essay on frontier warfare portrays the complexity and savage nature of war on the frontier.

John Ferling’s essay, “Washington and American Victory,” hits all the usual points but adds nothing to our knowledge of Washington. Neither do Hugh F. Rankin’s thumbnail sketches of Generals Charles Lee, Horatio Gates, Nathanael Greene, the Marquis de Lafayette, and Henry Knox add much to what we already know about these men. Jonathan G. Rossie’s “Politics and American Victory” should be entitled “The Politics of Who Commands What.” There is nothing new here. The author published this information in book form in 1975.

W.J. Eccles’ “The French Alliance and American Victory” is an account of how, for reasons of *realpolitik*, the French became involved in the American Revolu-

tionary War. At the end the author forgets about the realities of diplomacy and takes the Americans to task for double-crossing the French at the peace talks before the French could double-cross the Americans.

Sylvia R. Frey paints a standard picture of the King's army during the American Revolutionary War. Only her colors are new. Mary B. Wickwire is simply in over her head on the role of naval warfare. For example, she takes Admiral Lord Howe to task for failing to effectively blockade the rebellious American colonies in the first years of the war. The admiral's instructions called for him to support operations ashore and to blockade the ports. If one counts the number and type of ships under his command, and how and why they were deployed, it becomes clear that the admiral did not have enough ships of the right type to do both tasks.

More important than their individual qualities or shortcomings, the reason the essays in *The World Turned Upside Down* do not achieve the editor's objective of showing why the Americans won the Revolution is that nothing in the book addresses the strategic problems confronting Britain after 1778 when the conflict exploded into a worldwide naval war. The American Revolutionary War after 1778 can be understood only if the strategic and political objectives of France, Spain and Holland are taken into account along with those of the Americans and British. It is the absence of any work on such matters that, despite some

good parts, dooms this book to failure.

DAVID SYRETT
Queens College
New York

Wheeler, Richard. *Sword over Richmond: An Eyewitness History of McClellan's Peninsula Campaign*. New York: Harper & Row, 1986. 354pp. \$21.95

Few generals in the Union Army in the spring of 1862 had the opportunity to potentially end the Civil War in a single short campaign. George McClellan, however, was given that chance. The Peninsula Campaign of 1862 and McClellan's failure to take advantage of the opportunity presented him is the subject of this book. Wheeler has crafted an interesting and informative account of the Peninsula Campaign from his use of representative writings and diaries of Union and Confederate politicians, officers and soldiers.

The author provides a useful appraisal of why the campaign failed, and the reader is given an analysis of the manner in which the events of this campaign impacted on the ultimate course of the war.

Despite the title, Stonewall Jackson's Valley Campaign is included, as well as the naval actions between the *Monitor* and the *Merrimack*. It is interesting reading, but it is the selections dealing with McClellan that merit the reader's attention.