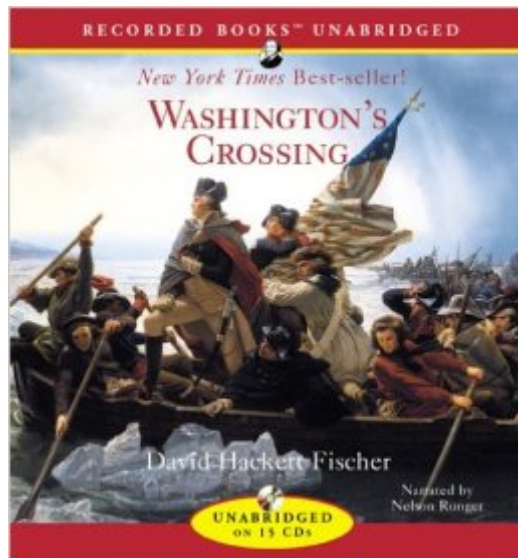


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Washington's Crossing



Synopsis

Although most Americans probably have at least a passing familiarity with Washington's surprise victory over the Hessians at Trenton on the day after Christmas, 1776, Fischer's account highlights an equally crucial, yet barely remembered, battle at Trenton a week later when the American forces withstood a counterattack by Lord Cornwallis's forces, setting the stage for a daring overnight march by Washington around the British army to win another victory at Princeton and reverse the momentum of the war. Within a few months British generals who has believed the rebellion almost crushed found that the path to victory had vanished in the snow and mud.

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Customer Reviews

On a number of occasions I have recommended David Hackett Fischer's "Paul Revere's Ride" as one of the finest American history books I have ever read, a display of deep research, perceptive analysis, and a highly compelling prose narrative. With "Washington's Crossing" Fischer has matched his earlier book. Just as the title incident in "Paul Revere's Ride" served to signify Fischer's broader study of the earliest days of the American Revolution and the battles at Lexington and Concord, here Emmanuel Leutze's 1851 painting "Washington Crossing the Delaware" is the emblem chosen to represent the most crucial days at the end of 1776 when that Revolution seemed on the edge of collapse, but George Washington and his army in battles at Trenton and Princeton and in the little-known actions afterwards reversed the course of the war and set the British on the path to ultimate defeat. Although most Americans probably have at least a passing familiarity with Washington's surprise victory over the Hessians at Trenton on the day after Christmas, 1776,

Fischer's account highlights an equally crucial, yet barely remembered, battle at Trenton a week later when the American forces withstood a counterattack by Lord Cornwallis's forces, setting the stage for a daring overnight march by Washington around the British army to win another victory at Princeton. Over the next several weeks, the British and Hessian occupation of central New Jersey collapsed as the Americans, heartened by the events at Trenton and Princeton, struck repeatedly and successfully at detachments of foragers who discovered that the supposedly pacified countryside was suddenly hostile territory.

Washington's Crossing is at once both rich with detail and eminently readable, scholarly, yet approachable. In it, the author covers the period from which Washington took control of the Colonial army, through the disastrous, nearly fatal campaign in New York, to the Battles of Trenton, Princeton, and finally the forage war skirmishes that rage through the end of the winter of 1776-77. He illustrates how this winter campaign of Washington's was much more than the small, symbolic victory that it has often been characterized as; that it in fact had a major impact on the war by destroying the Howe brother's strategy of ending the Revolution through conciliation, and reviving the spirits of the Americans to fight on. Fischer begins with an examination of the make up of the Colonial army, with its wide sectional and cultural differences, and examines the daunting task Washington had in forging it into an effective fighting force capable of fighting the world's most professional and successful army. He then goes into some detail describing the make up and culture of the British army and the Hessian forces that the Americans faced, giving a context to the challenge. Washington emerges from his pages as a genius simply for being able to adapt to the situation at hand and create and lead what became the Continental Army. Fischer is vividly descriptive in his portraits of Washington and his officers, the Howe brothers and their principle officers, and the commanders of the Hessian forces. In addition, he provides the perspectives of common soldiers from all the armies, private citizens, members of the Continental Congress, and Tom Paine, the Revolution's propagandist who was pivotal in the success of the winter campaign.

There are a number of authors whose books you pick up to read despite the purported subject matter. David Hackett Fischer is one of those authors. Having read *Albion's Seed*, which I thought was a truly outstanding book, I was not thrilled to see that he had written a book titled *Paul Revere's Ride*. What could someone have to say that would make this overworked piece of historical minutia worth reading? Wrong! Hiding behind the bland title was another gem about colonial American culture. All this is background to explain why I wasn't surprised by *Washington's Crossing*. Once

again, he has produced an amazingly informative and well-written book and disguised it with a pabulum title. I thought I knew this part of Revolutionary history very well. However, Washington's Crossing not only brought out details about Trenton and Princeton that I had never known before, it presented a lot of very germane background material that I had never seen before, and most importantly, it explained why these were really significant engagements. They were not minor skirmishes, or as one historian had described them "Washington beating up Howe's outposts". True, the numbers of men involved were small, but then so were the armies, and for that matter so was the population of the colonies. As important as the physical beating the British took in these battles was the psychological damage. These were not minor skirmishes that were blown up as propaganda victories, they inflicted real losses on the British and showed that under the right circumstances, the Americans could stand up to both the Hessians and the British.

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