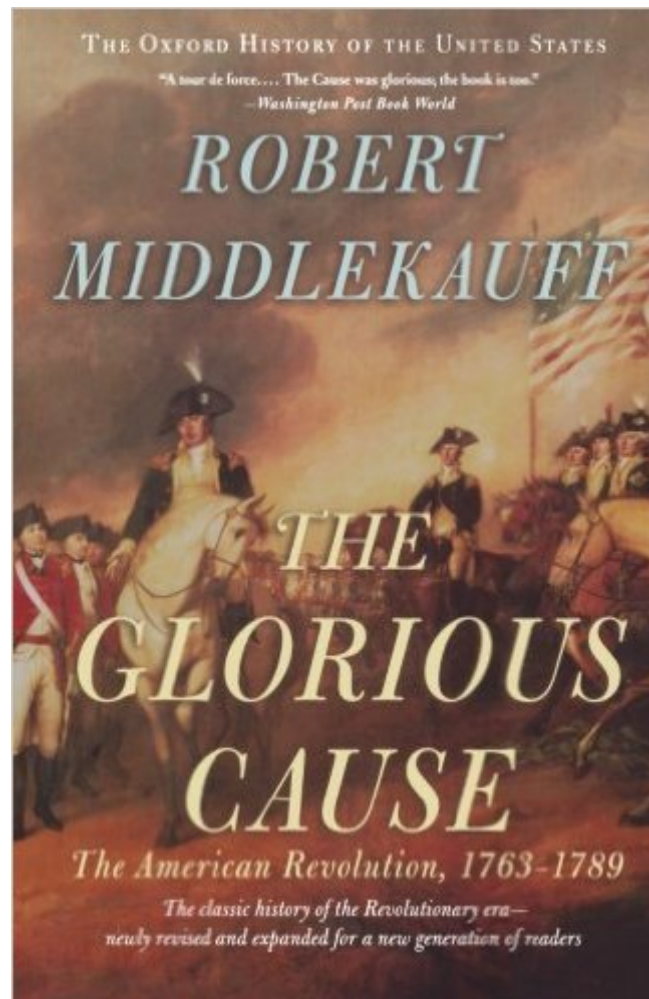


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The Glorious Cause: The American Revolution, 1763-1789 (Oxford History Of The United States)



Synopsis

The first book to appear in the illustrious Oxford History of the United States, this critically acclaimed volume--a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize--offers an unsurpassed history of the Revolutionary War and the birth of the American republic. Beginning with the French and Indian War and continuing to the election of George Washington as first president, Robert Middlekauff offers a panoramic history of the conflict between England and America, highlighting the drama and anguish of the colonial struggle for independence. Combining the political and the personal, he provides a compelling account of the key events that precipitated the war, from the Stamp Act to the Tea Act, tracing the gradual gathering of American resistance that culminated in the Boston Tea Party and "the shot heard 'round the world." The heart of the book features a vivid description of the eight-year-long war, with gripping accounts of battles and campaigns, ranging from Bunker Hill and Washington's crossing of the Delaware to the brilliant victory at Hannah's Cowpens and the final triumph at Yorktown, paying particular attention to what made men fight in these bloody encounters. The book concludes with an insightful look at the making of the Constitution in the Philadelphia Convention of 1787 and the struggle over ratification. Through it all, Middlekauff gives the reader a vivid sense of how the colonists saw these events and the importance they gave to them. Common soldiers and great generals, Sons of Liberty and African slaves, town committee-men and representatives in congress--all receive their due. And there are particularly insightful portraits of such figures as Sam and John Adams, James Otis, Thomas Jefferson, George Washington, and many others. This new edition has been revised and expanded, with fresh coverage of topics such as mob reactions to British measures before the War, military medicine, women's role in the Revolution, American Indians, the different kinds of war fought by the Americans and the British, and the ratification of the Constitution. The book also has a new epilogue and an updated bibliography. The cause for which the colonists fought, liberty and independence, was glorious indeed. Here is an equally glorious narrative of an event that changed the world, capturing the profound and passionate struggle to found a free nation.

The Oxford History of the United States
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narrative.

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Customer Reviews

The inaugural volume of the highly honored but still unfinished "Oxford History Of The United States" series is "The Glorious Cause: The American Revolution, 1763-1789," a superbly written, scholarly, and highly literate account of the America's War for Independence. Written by Robert L. Middlekauff, Professor of History... this is the finest account of the Revolutionary War I've found to date... even better than Benson Bobrick's "Angel in the Whirlwind," which I've already reviewed. "The Glorious Cause" is a comprehensive account of the American Revolution designed to give readers a well rounded overview of not only the causes of the war, but also of how the war was fought. The book succeeds admirably at its task. After finishing "The Glorious Cause," I felt a much greater appreciation for the men and women whose struggle for freedom brought forth on the North American continent a new and independent nation - the United States of America. "The Glorious Cause" begins by examining the causes of the American Revolution. In one of the book's earliest chapters, entitled "The Children of the Twice Born," Middlekauff carefully lays out his closely reasoned and well argued thesis: that the seeds of revolution were planted long before the war was actually fought. Those seeds, embodied in the economic, social, political, and religious fabric of American society, made the evolution to democracy on the North American continent almost inevitable. The earliest settlers came to the New World because of their disenchantment with authoritarian English laws and what they viewed as centralized, overly ritualistic, dogmatic Anglican

religion. When the settlers arrived with their ideals of political and congregationalist religious democracy, they found land cheap and plentiful. Whereas only about 20 percent of all Englishmen were landowners, and hence were eligible to participate in England's parliamentary democracy, over 50 percent of American colonists owned land and therefore could take part in colonial parliamentary government. The result: provincial representative assemblies tended to do the bidding of their constituents rather than the royal governors. After the Seven Years' War, tension between American political and economic interests and the interests of the British government was exacerbated by Parliament's intent to restore British prerogatives in America. Tension was bound to lead to conflict, and that conflict wasn't long in coming. The American colonies were left pretty much to their own economic and political devices during the Seven Years' War, so long as they provided support for Britain's war against the French. The colonists bore the brunt of the fighting during the war against the French in North America; at war's end, they expected to be permitted to return to some semblance of self-government. It was not to be, however. Under Britain's new King and a Parliament with a new-found awareness of the American colonies' potential to enrich their colonial masters, Parliament began enacting a series of laws (Stamp Act, Townshend Acts, Sugar Act, etc.) designed to bring the colonies to heel. The colonists, thoroughly imbued with the ideals of democracy and liberty, rebelled, first through political means, and finally, inevitably, through violence. Once "The Glorious Cause" completes its assessment of the causes of the war, it takes the reader on a fascinating journey through the war itself. The way the American Revolution was fought is frequently shrouded in the mists of legend, with great American heroes standing tall against the overwhelming might of the British and Hessian armies. There are strong elements of historical truth to that legend, but Middlekauff does an excellent job of portraying the war exactly as it was: a very closely contested fight between colonial masters and those who wished to throw off the yoke of colonialism. There's really almost nothing to criticize in "The Glorious Cause." It is, in nearly every respect, an outstanding work of history. It's comprehensive in its scope; thorough in its approach; obviously very well researched; and imbued with careful, thoughtful, and incisive historical analysis. Middlekauff's descriptions of Revolutionary War battles are first-rate. The author completely captures the flavor of eighteenth century warfare in general, and of the battles of the American Revolution in particular. When I finished reading "The Glorious Cause," I felt as if I had actually been there at some of the great battles of the war. One very minor caveat: because "The Glorious Cause" takes a fairly academic approach to studying the American Revolution, the book's somewhat lofty and scholarly sounding language may not appeal to readers with only a passing interest in history in general, and the American Revolution in particular. That's not to say the book

has only a narrow appeal to academics and history scholars, however; it is definitely written for the general reader with a love of American history. It will, in my view, prove a most satisfying experience for the vast majority of history lovers who decide to read it. "The Glorious Cause" is a winner of a book in every respect. With a dearth of excellent books about the American Revolution currently in print, this volume fills a crucial need for those who wish to learn about America's struggle for independence. As the inaugural volume of the "Oxford History Of The United States," "The Glorious Cause" also sets the tone for the whole series... highly readable, thoroughly imbued with first-rate scholarship and a polished, eloquent writing style; and simply a pleasure to read.

Middlekauff has read deeply in the history of the American revolution and the early republic. Moreover, he is interested in more than just a simple narrative; he is interested in causes and motives, as he shows in chaps. 20 and 21 of this book, which discusses why soldiers fought instead of ran. Unfortunately, the narrative in this book has holes, and Middlekauff often fails to put people and personalities into context, making the reading less interesting than it should be. He also makes high demands on readers' attention; this, plus the holes, made the book heavy going at times. Here are some examples of holes: 1) In his discussion of the Intolerable Acts, Middlekauff fails to say what the Quebec Act was, yet on pp. 239 and 280 he assumes you know. 2) 471: "They all knew what happened to Buford's men at Waxhaws when they tried to run away." This is the only time "Buford" and "Waxhaws" are mentioned in the book. 3) 340: "June also brought William Howe back to New York." I can't find where it says Howe had been in New York before. 4) 462: "Some hint of what was coming was given ...when the victors, shouting 'Tarleton's Quarter,' shot and stabbed the wounded..." There is no explanation of this anywhere in the book. 478: "... Lee's Legion rode in. Greene once more had his army in one piece." This is the first time that "Lee's Legion" is mentioned. I had to look in the index to find out that "Lee" was Henry Lee. It never explains how he got a legion. The last time we saw him, on 417, he was foraging in Delaware. No context for people and personalities: Isaac Barre gives a speech supporting the colonies in parliament (74-75), but Middlekauff never tells us who he is or why he speaks so strongly. Directly below, the American who thinks Barre's speech is "noble" is never identified. Apparently it was Jared Ingersoll, who appears in a very different light in other parts of the book. Demands on reader's attention: 406-7 "Amherst told the king..." This is Jeffrey Amherst. The last time we met him, also identified only as "Amherst", was page 276, where he was fighting Montcalm in Quebec for all of one sentence. Look up Amherst in the index, see where he appears, and see how easy it is to connect these references. This is very tough, demanding writing. Middlekauff knows the period, is a very intelligent writer, has interesting

views and judgments which he backs up effectively. However, if you want to understand what is going on, you will have to go to other books in addition to this one, and you will have to pay very close attention to Middlekauff, with pencil in hand and constant reference to the index. As an example of a book which brings people and personalities strongly into context, I recommend Barbara Tuchman's "March of Folly" which has an outstanding chapter on "The British Lose America." This will tell you who Barre was, why they were drinking toasts to John Wilkes in South Carolina in 1768, and what the Quebec Act was. It's only a tiny fragment of the history Middlekauff tries to cover, and occasionally falls down as well (Tuchman mangles the text of Barre's speech), but is a great example of fascinating historical writing which historians would do well to study.

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