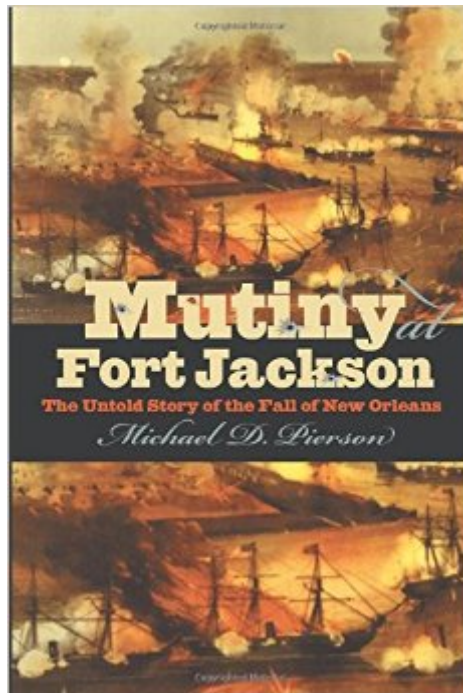


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Mutiny At Fort Jackson: The Untold Story Of The Fall Of New Orleans (Civil War America)



Synopsis

New Orleans was the largest city--and one of the richest--in the Confederacy, protected in part by Fort Jackson, which was just sixty-five miles down the Mississippi River. On April 27, 1862, Confederate soldiers at Fort Jackson rose up in mutiny against their commanding officers. New Orleans fell to Union forces soon thereafter. Although the Fort Jackson mutiny marked a critical turning point in the Union's campaign to regain control of this vital Confederate financial and industrial center, it has received surprisingly little attention from historians. Michael Pierson examines newly uncovered archival sources to determine why the soldiers rebelled at such a decisive moment. The mutineers were soldiers primarily recruited from New Orleans's large German and Irish immigrant populations. Pierson shows that the new nation had done nothing to encourage poor white men to feel they had a place of honor in the southern republic. He argues that the mutineers actively sought to help the Union cause. In a major reassessment of the Union administration of New Orleans that followed, Pierson demonstrates that Benjamin "Beast" Butler enjoyed the support of many white Unionists in the city. Pierson adds an urban working-class element to debates over the effects of white Unionists in Confederate states. With the personal stories of soldiers appearing throughout, *Mutiny at Fort Jackson* presents the Civil War from a new perspective, revealing the complexities of New Orleans society and the Confederate experience.

Book Information

Series: Civil War America

Paperback: 264 pages

Publisher: The University of North Carolina Press; Reprint edition (March 1, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1469629119

ISBN-13: 978-1469629117

Product Dimensions: 6.1 x 0.7 x 9.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.4 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (9 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #881,260 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #57 in [Books > History >](#)

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Customer Reviews

Author Pierson is a scholar at the University of Massachusetts at Lowell, and I guess one should not

be surprised that the primary hero of this work is Benjamin Butler, a powerful Democratic politician from Lowell, Massachusetts. But the title refers to the mutiny at Fort Jackson, one of two Confederate forts guarding the approach to New Orleans on the lower Mississippi River. The author essentially finishes with discussing the mutiny on page 34, and then starts his discourse on the Union sentiment in New Orleans and Southern Louisiana. Since the author was unable to locate any sources from the mutineers themselves, his entire discussion is built on evidence and clues from the actions and writings of others. His approach is scholarly, and for that he is to be commended, but in the end one wonders if the author's anti-southern bias that peeks through occasionally didn't have as great an effect as his evidence. For example, he repeatedly states his theme, "We will understand why the United States proved to be the nation of choice for so many of the world's people in the nineteenth century. We will see, rising out of pain and fear, the promise of America." And also, "Silent though they may be in the archives, their (the mutineers) actions will tell us a great deal about why the United States became the nation of choice for so many of the world's free people in the nineteenth century." The mutiny of over three hundred men facing eventual (but not immediate) defeat and capture evidently proves that for the author. Seems rather overblown and much like the non-historian, Ken Burns, to me.

This book is well written and easy to read and understand. The author proposed that the garrison of Fort Jackson, the major southern fort guarding New Orleans, intentionally performed poorly during the passage of the Union fleet to capture New Orleans and then mutinied, deserted, and that some even joined the Union ranks. There are many graphics scattered through the text, photographs of principles, numerous contemporary drawing and photographs of the restored fort to show the fort and its condition before and after the battle. The book is a unique look at an ignored incident. The loss of the forts guarding New Orleans, the largest city in the South, struck a heavy blow to southern hopes. This account of a mutiny by Southern troops in favor of Union occupation and victory is sure to arouse the ire of Lost Cause advocates who would prefer the view that all Southerners were brave and loyal to the cause. The author is hampered with no first-hand accounts left by the mutineers or their officers (one fearing reprisals and the other reprimand). Union records and accounts mention this Mutiny in describing the capture of the Forts. The author builds on period accounts of the conditions in New Orleans before and during the beginning of the Civil War to find the reasons behind the Mutiny. New Orleans was the most diverse southern city and after the initial enlistments of volunteers (troops that were sent to the east or north to Tennessee), new troops were literally pressed into service to defend the city. New Orleans had a large foreign-born population,

with lots of work available to skilled tradesman and laborers in the busiest port in America where the commerce of the Mississippi basin was offloaded, stored and reloaded onto oceangoing ships or riverboats.

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