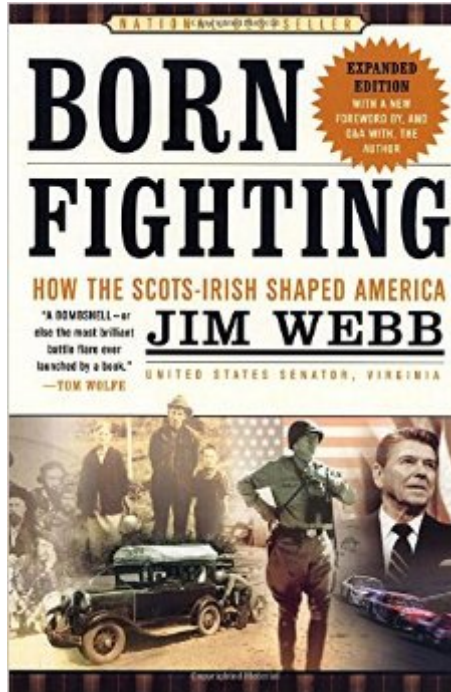


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# Born Fighting: How The Scots-Irish Shaped America



## Synopsis

More than 27 million Americans today can trace their lineage to the Scots, whose bloodline was stained by centuries of continuous warfare along the border between England and Scotland, and later in the bitter settlements of England's Ulster Plantation in Northern Ireland. Between 250,000 and 400,000 Scots-Irish migrated to America in the eighteenth century, traveling in groups of families and bringing with them not only long experience as rebels and outcasts but also unparalleled skills as frontiersmen and guerrilla fighters. Their cultural identity reflected acute individualism, dislike of aristocracy and a military tradition, and, over time, the Scots-Irish defined the attitudes and values of the military, of working class America, and even of the peculiarly populist form of American democracy itself. *Born Fighting* is the first book to chronicle the full journey of this remarkable cultural group, and the profound, but unrecognized, role it has played in the shaping of America. Written with the storytelling verve that has earned his works such acclaim as "captivating . . . unforgettable" (the Wall Street Journal on *Lost Soldiers*), Scots-Irishman James Webb, Vietnam combat veteran and former Naval Secretary, traces the history of his people, beginning nearly two thousand years ago at Hadrian's Wall, when the nation of Scotland was formed north of the Wall through armed conflict in contrast to England's formation to the south through commerce and trade. Webb recounts the Scots' odyssey—their clashes with the English in Scotland and then in Ulster, their retreat from one war-ravaged land to another. Through engrossing chronicles of the challenges the Scots-Irish faced, Webb vividly portrays how they developed the qualities that helped settle the American frontier and define the American character. *Born Fighting* shows that the Scots-Irish were 40 percent of the Revolutionary War army; they included the pioneers Daniel Boone, Lewis and Clark, Davy Crockett, and Sam Houston; they were the writers Edgar Allan Poe and Mark Twain; and they have given America numerous great military leaders, including Stonewall Jackson, Ulysses S. Grant, Audie Murphy, and George S. Patton, as well as most of the soldiers of the Confederacy (only 5 percent of whom owned slaves, and who fought against what they viewed as an invading army). It illustrates how the Scots-Irish redefined American politics, creating the populist movement and giving the country a dozen presidents, including Andrew Jackson, Teddy Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, Ronald Reagan, and Bill Clinton. And it explores how the Scots-Irish culture of isolation, hard luck, stubbornness, and mistrust of the nation's elite formed and still dominates blue-collar America, the military services, the Bible Belt, and country music. Both a distinguished work of cultural history and a human drama that speaks straight to the heart of contemporary America, *Born Fighting* reintroduces America to its most powerful, patriotic, and individualistic cultural group—one too often ignored or taken for granted.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Born Fighting by James Webb is the history of the Scots-Irish over the last 2000 years. A few highlights:1. Scotland was effectively created by the Roman Empire when Hadrian's Wall was built across Britain at the approximate location of the current border between England and Scotland. Rome controlled Britain south of the wall and the native Celtic tribes controlled the north. (Rome also effectively created the modern boundary between France and Germany when Caesar conquered Gaul but stopped at the Rhine.)2. After the Norman Conquest, English kings attempted repeatedly to subdue the Scots and extend their rule to all of Britain. The victories of William Wallace and Robert the Bruce maintained Scottish independence through the rein of Elizabeth I. Upon her death, the throne passed to James I of the House of Stuart who already ruled Scotland as James VI. One could almost say that Scotland thereby absorbed England, but the relative population sizes of the two countries gave England the upper hand almost from the beginning.3. In the meantime, the Protestant Reformation had been underway in northern Europe, leaving Scotland strongly protestant (Presbyterian), England more mildly protestant (Anglican), and Ireland still Roman Catholic. To bring Ireland into the protestant fold and increase its loyalty to the British Crown, James I established the Ulster Plantation and encouraged protestant Scots to settle in Ulster starting in about 1610. These settlers from Scotland to Ireland became the Scots-Irish (or Scotch-Irish).4. In the Glorious Revolution of 1688, the English Parliament deposed King James II principally because he attempted to reestablish a Catholic monarchy. The deposed king, with

French (Catholic) aid landed in Ireland, rallied the Catholic Irish in southern Ireland and attacked the protestant settlers in Ulster. James was again defeated and exiled to France.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, various Test Acts had been enacted by the English Parliament and Crown that established the Anglican Church as the official Church of England and excluded non-Anglican Protestants, primarily Presbyterians and Puritans, from public office. A particularly harsh version was enacted in 1703 and led to the heavy migration of Scots-Irish from Ulster to America throughout the 1700s. They settled primarily in the Appalachian highlands, starting in Pennsylvania and migrating southwest to Virginia, the Carolinas, Kentucky, Tennessee and beyond. In numbers, the Scots-Irish far exceed the other groups of British settlers described in David Hackett Fischer's *Albion's Seed: the New England Puritans from East Anglia, the Virginia Cavaliers from the south and West of England, and the Pennsylvania Quakers from the Midlands*.<sup>6</sup> The Scots-Irish were characterized by poverty, family ties that extended both linearly across generations and collaterally to many degrees of cousins, strongly protestant beliefs, independence, distrust of governments in general, and a readiness to fight both individually as part of a local militia. Although the Scots-Irish Presbyterians shared a faith based on Calvinism with the Puritans of East Anglia and New England, there appears to have been little love lost between these groups.<sup>7</sup> The Scots-Irish provided the bulk of the Confederate Army although few held any slaves. During the decades following the Civil War, their poverty was worse than before the war, reaching a nadir during the Great Depression of the 1930s. This poverty prompted another mass migration to other parts of America which was accelerated by the mobilization for World War II. As a consequence, the Scots-Irish have been distributed through most of America, except perhaps New England. Their numbers and characteristics, especially their willingness to accept and absorb spouses from other ethnic groups into their extended families, have made the Scots-Irish folkways a key part of the American character. So, is this a recommendation of *Born Fighting* to others? Yes, but a conditional recommendation. First, one should read David Hackett Fischer's *Albion's Seed* (see my review) which describes and contrasts the four British groups, including the Scots-Irish, that settled America. Fischer's book is better written, broader in scope, more objective, and based on real scholarship. In contrast, *Born Fighting* is repetitive, focused on one ethnic group alone (making conflicts with others harder to understand), strongly Scots-Irish partisan rather than objective, and draws much of its best material from other modern authors, including extensive quotes from Fischer's book and Churchill's *Birth of Britain*. Still, *Born Fighting* was worth reading and gave me new insights, especially on the history of the Scots-Irish before their migration to America. For the record, my heritage is largely Scots-Irish. Here are two additional suggestions. (1) David Hackett Fischer's *Bound Away* (see my review) which

describes the migrations of Scots-Irish and others to, within and from Virginia. This book repeats some of the content of Albion's Seed but also presents new material on the migrations within and from Virginia. (2) Kevin Phillips' The Cousins' Wars which traces the recurring conflicts between the Puritans of East Anglia and New England and the Anglican Aristocracy of South and West England and the American coastal south through the English Civil War, American Revolution, and American Civil War. This book also draws heavily on Albion's Seed but adds much detail on the three wars that are its central focus. However, it appears to have a mild bias to the Puritan side.

I had to log on and write a review of James Webb's brilliant and wonderful book "Born Fighting : How the Scots-Irish Shaped America." I bought the book in November, and after skimming through it and reading the first two chapters, I immediately ordered a copy for my father as a Christmas present. After finishing it, he told me it was the greatest present he had ever received, and that many of Webb's passages brought tears to his eyes. I highly recommend this book to anyone interested in American History, and for those millions of Scots-Irish Americans unaware of their heritage this is a must-read. In "Born Fighting" author James Webb chronicles the millennial struggle of the Scots-Irish people from fighting to preserve their independence against the Romans and the English, through their migration to Ireland, then to the hardscrabble Appalachian frontier and beyond. Webb describes how the values of these fiercely independent, determined and impoverished people pervaded the society and culture of America, and how their influence is reflected in such diverse institutions as NASCAR auto racing, country music, the evangelical movement, the U.S. Armed Forces, and American Democracy itself. Weaving distant history with personal family history, Webb details the struggle of these proud, impoverished people through their oppression by and resistance to the Romans, the English, the Irish Catholics, the Anglo-American pseudo-aristocracy of the Colonies, and the latter's successors, the so-called "Eastern Establishment." Through it all, the Scots-Irish survive oppression, scorn, war and poverty by drawing on their bottom-up, rather than top down social and political structure, and their collective fighting spirit to triumph. Webb's wonderful personal stories of his own family history cannot help but resonate with those Scots-Irish of today with similar backgrounds and experiences. It certainly did with me. Until I read this book, like many of the millions of Americans of Scots-Irish descent, I never knew I had an ethnic heritage. I am now glad to know that not only do I have one, it is a proud one and storied one. I owe a debt of gratitude to Webb for imparting this to me through this magnificent book. My father used to tell us as children that we were "Scotch-Irish." I didn't know what that meant at all until I took European History in high school. As an adult, I did some genealogical research on

my family, gleaning what seemed to me to be loosely connected facts from church and census records. "Born Fighting" was invaluable in providing some context to what little I was able to learn. Along with my aunt, I traced my family history to the mid-1700s in western Virginia, through my Great-Great Grandfather who enlisted in the Confederate Army in Charlottesville, VA on the day after First Manassas. He served in the 57th Virginia Infantry, part of Gen. Pickett's division at Gettysburg that was virtually wiped out on the third and decisive day of that bloody battle. My aunt found a picture of him at the Gettysburg Battlefield Visitors Center in his uniform, of which I have a copy. My father, the son of a five-and-ten-cent store manager in the Depression-era South became the first of our Scots-Irish family to graduate high school. If that wasn't enough his high school grades got him into an Ivy League school, borrowing, washing dishes, waiting tables, and tending bar to pay his tuition and earn his degree. His sacrifice and hard work smoothed the road for his four children, two of whom are lawyers, one an economist, and the other a mathematics teacher. After reading this book, my father told me he had always been ashamed of his modest "white trash" or "redneck" background, but having read this book he could finally be proud of who he is and where he came from. I have a 4 year old son and I am going to give him a copy of this wonderful account of our ancestors as soon as he is old enough to appreciate it. I want him to know what I now know about the hardships and difficulties of our ancestors and how they got us to where we are now. Their story has made me appreciate how far we have come. To Mr. Webb, I say thank you for telling the story of our colorful and prominent ethnic heritage, and the role our forebears played in the evolution of our great republic.

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