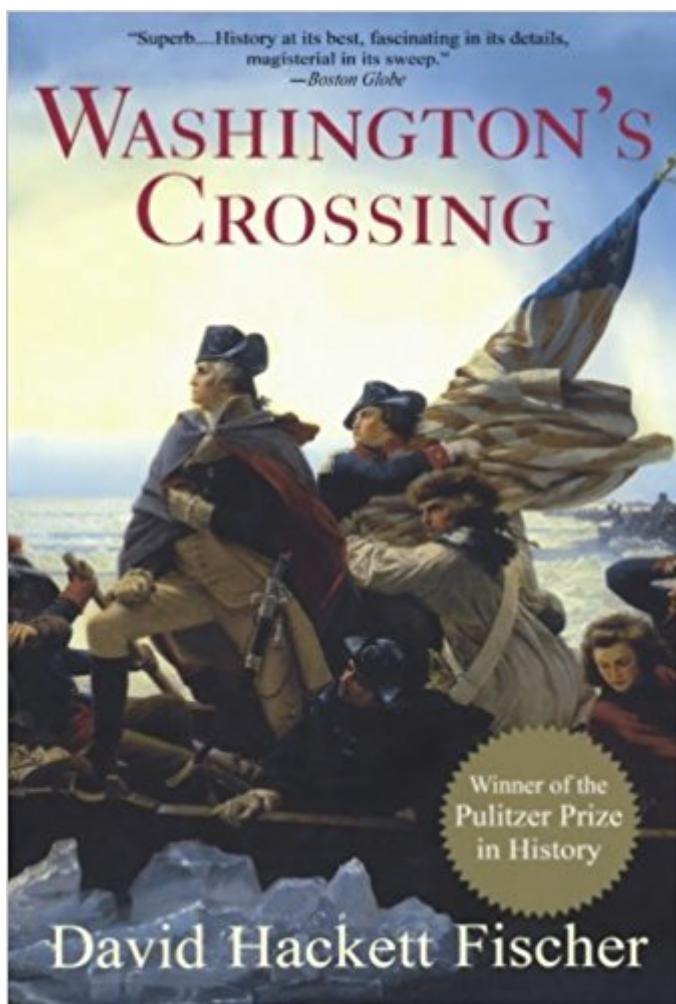


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# Washington's Crossing (Pivotal Moments In American History)



## Synopsis

Six months after the Declaration of Independence, the American Revolution was all but lost. A powerful British force had routed the Americans at New York, occupied three colonies, and advanced within sight of Philadelphia. Yet, as David Hackett Fischer recounts in this riveting history, George Washington--and many other Americans--refused to let the Revolution die. On Christmas night, as a howling nor'easter struck the Delaware Valley, he led his men across the river and attacked the exhausted Hessian garrison at Trenton, killing or capturing nearly a thousand men. A second battle of Trenton followed within days. The Americans held off a counterattack by Lord Cornwallis's best troops, then were almost trapped by the British force. Under cover of night, Washington's men stole behind the enemy and struck them again, defeating a brigade at Princeton. The British were badly shaken. In twelve weeks of winter fighting, their army suffered severe damage, their hold on New Jersey was broken, and their strategy was ruined. Fischer's richly textured narrative reveals the crucial role of contingency in these events. We see how the campaign unfolded in a sequence of difficult choices by many actors, from generals to civilians, on both sides. While British and German forces remained rigid and hierarchical, Americans evolved an open and flexible system that was fundamental to their success. The startling success of Washington and his compatriots not only saved the faltering American Revolution, but helped to give it new meaning.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

At the core of an impeccably researched, brilliantly executed military history is an analysis of George Washington's crossing of the Delaware River in December 1776 and the resulting destruction of the Hessian garrison of Trenton and defeat of a British brigade at Princeton. Fischer's perceptive discussion of the strategic, operational and tactical factors involved is by itself worth the book's purchase. He demonstrates Washington's insight into the revolution's desperate political circumstances, shows how that influenced the idea of a riposte against an enemy grown overconfident with success and presents Washington's skillful use of what his army could do well. Even more useful is Fischer's analysis of the internal dynamics of the combatants. He demonstrates mastery of the character of the American, British and Hessian armies, highlighting that British troops, too, fought for ideals, sacred to them, of loyalty and service. Above all, Brandeis historian Fischer (Albion's Seed) uses the Trenton campaign to reveal the existence, even in the revolution's early stage, of a distinctively American way of war, much of it based on a single fact: civil and military leaders were accountable to a citizenry through their representatives. From Washington down, Fischer shows, military leaders acknowledged civil supremacy and worked with civil officials. Washington used firepower and intelligence as force multipliers to speed the war for a practical people who wanted to win quickly in order to return to their ordinary lives. Tempo, initiative and speed marked the Trenton campaign from first to last. And Washington fought humanely, extending quarter in battle and insisting on decent treatment of prisoners. The crossing of the Delaware, Fischer teaches, should be seen as emblematic of more than a turning of the war's tide. 91 halftone, 15 maps. 3-city author tour. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Adult/High School-Another stirring effort by the author of *Paul Revere's Ride* (Oxford, 1994). Readers will again cheer American perseverance, inventiveness, and improvisation as Washington, his officers, and their men turn the early military defeats of Long Island and New York City into victory at Trenton and Princeton. The opening chapter is devoted to the painting *Washington Crossing the Delaware*. Then the author discusses the British, Hessian, and American military units that were involved in these campaigns and gives background on their officers. This is Fischer's strong suit: he tells stories and gives details that bring history alive. He makes the point that decisions made for varying reasons by converging sets of people determine history. In the hands of such a thorough researcher and talented writer, this is powerful stuff. The bulk of the book deals with the battles and their aftermath. The text is enriched by small reproductions of portraits, many by Charles Willson Peale, of the major players. The last chapter summarizes Fischer's points and

would make a good teaching tool by itself.Judy McAloon, Potomac Library, Prince William County, VA  
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Washington's Crossing was an excellent read, with a very engaging narrative. Growing up we think of "The Crossing" as the big event of the the engagement that it preceded. However, it was a small part of a much larger campaign. In fact, the actual crossing only occupies a handful of pages. Fischer does an outstanding job of bringing us into the context of the times, the lives and players in the campaign and the outside factors. He does this in a way that provides a great deal of texture and makes the reader feel as if they were there and knew all the players. While it naturally highlights the tactics and engagements, it's not a heavy tactical study. Those details are only provided to the degree they add to the overall story. This is a must read for fans of history and in particular the Revolutionary War period. Well done!

If there were more stars than 5 to give, this book by this finest of historians, David Hacket Fischer, would receive them....because in my love for reading all history (early American history always the one that keeps me up often into the wee hours of the morning,) there are few like this that, for me, seemed near to taking me into the very history Mr Fischer is telling us about. I can speak a lot on James Flexner's Washington bio and a number of things about Jefferson besides the great Dumas Malone...Walter Isaacson on Franklin....BUT, back to the book reviewed here....I cannot recall reading any early American history that so took me as this story.Perhaps the best way I can describe it is that Mr Fischer has written this book in such a manner that avid readers who dream they will get their hands on that rare kind of book(s) that "take you there", well, they will have their dream fulfilled here.....& if it could be made into a movie and made exactly the way this story is told, it would be a blockbuster never forgotten...and be a great contribution to our history. I have bought and given out copies of this book and I had to go back and re-read it a few months later for it stuck so in my mind. I simple cannot say enough about this story of the times when things were so bad for us, it appearing that General Howe would soon be wrapping up a victory for King George...but all at once, in the dead of winter, an exceptionally horribly cold winters night in December of 1776, Fischer tells in detail the whole story and paints a picture in the minds eye of all that transpired in the preparation and the step by step of these amazing men who slogged through the cold, across the Delaware in those huge cumbersome boats with animals and weaponry while ice flows begin to make it near impossible for them to ever get across....and then nearly impossible for any reader to

conceive of this happening...they do get across, unload, every minute so crucial before daylight or there will be no surprise attack...then they surprise the Hessians and capture all the men, the big stores of food, ammunition, weapons, etc. So effectively is this whole story told from first to last that I "felt the cold," I am with the men and can imagine what they felt as best as I could...they are cold, bone tired, some with rags wrapped around their feet for often they did not have proper clothing and their weapons were wet and unable to fire if needed. Comrades in arms would try and keep their fellow soldiers awake, some were so tired and just for a few minutes of rest some did lie down, only to never get up...exhausted they died in the cold. The book has near exhausted me at this point, especially "going with the soldiers over the river, mentally it is so moving and one feels as if you even want to have been there and be awake and alert and help that soldier who needed rest but death was the consequence of not staying awake....for in a while they will be where it is warm, there is food, drink, rest! I should be better prepared for this review, I am not a writer though I wished I would have been, esp one like Mr David Hacket Fischer. All I can say is get a copy of this book that reads similar to Philbricks "Mayflower" story or Captain Cooks stories of exploration. You will NOT be disappointed with this book, one of the very best I ever read. There is so much you will think of re our country then just after declaring independence from the "mother country." You will think of something that was happening back in the 18th century that is lost now, ie, people helping people, more than than now I think, a lot of hard work and people happy to be just safe, have a decent place for family to live in, food and clothing, a few good books (or more books so to learn and have some education.) I am sure that after Teddy Roosevelt's time is when the real push of greed and big business and the rich/poor gap came on and now has built up so much that the ones you read of...leaders and/or the common man then...if here now seeing how America is, they would be shocked to say the least and some sort of revolution would come I suppose. Even before Teddy R, things were getting bad...always the wealthy cannot be wealthy enough and many who have much do not even give thought of the common person, the poor or middle class person. This book, after reading all that it is about has a lot more to say to us because of who we are reading about and how they treated one another...so this is not just the best and most exciting and enlightening thing I ever read on Washington's crossing the Delaware alone.....it is about what Americans were like and what they were about...I hope, pray that our greed and power will not take us down one day and that when we see what America was back then, all they held dear and strived for (decent and fair shake, etc)...I hope it is not too late and now that we are for some time the "American Empire" just as the U.K. once was and we the ones working with (or at times alone as well) to dominate or take over other nations...that it is not too late to stop that course we are on. I simply end by saying there is the

main story here but whether on purpose or not, Mr Fischer has given me much knowledge of how different America was then in all her ways and the goals to build a nation for all the people was held by most...we have deviated from that now by both national parties. In the 1970's or late 70's I believe is when the Democratic Party merged with the Republicans and the current Democrats are in a moderate to right place and the Republicans are gone...or simply off the map to the right...soon the small amount of moderates will be gone unless true Progressives can band together and change things....it is not anywhere near David H Fischer's America, nothing like it at all.

Much like his widely acclaimed 1994 book "Paul Revere's Ride", David Hackett Fischer's "Washington's Crossing" is an impeccably-researched account of the story behind a familiar event from the Revolutionary War. The book deals with far more than just George Washington's famous attack on the Hessian garrison at Trenton, N.J. in December 1776, however. Fischer argues that Washington's crossing and the ensuing winter campaign in New Jersey changed the momentum of the war. They ended a long string of American defeats, ruined Sir William Howe's plans to suppress the rebellion with a show of military force and reconciliation, and convinced many British and German officers that the war was unwinnable. Overall, Fischer argues that Washington's crossing marked a key turning point in Western, not just American, history: American independence became a real possibility, and Europeans started to question the old order, as exemplified by the "Soldatenhandel" -- i.e., the soldier trade (p. 261). Equally important, Washington developed a way of war that provided for the humane treatment of wounded and captured soldiers, something that European troops frequently had not attempted. One of Fischer's key themes in "Washington's Crossing" is the clash between a society based on "liberty and freedom" and one based on "order and discipline" (p. 5). He repeatedly notes how Washington learned to develop consensus within an army composed of Virginia planters, rugged backwoodsmen, New Englanders steeped in the militia tradition, and Pennsylvania Associators. Fischer contrasts Washington's methods with the authoritarian British model in which generals directed operations with little regard for divergent opinions. He also stresses the importance of contingency, "the sense of people making choices, and choices making a difference in the world" (p. 364). In this context, readers are introduced to or learn more about Philemon Dickinson, John Cadwalader, Charles Cornwallis, and even Betsy Ross, among others. In addition to these broader themes, Fischer is very good on the details of war, and he enhances these with numerous maps. Drawing on both standard and previously overlooked sources, he paints a vivid picture of the war in the middle states between March 1776 and March 1777. He describes German troops looting their way across New Jersey and the subsequent civilian

response. Fischer also provides a gripping narrative of exhausted American soldiers marching through a howling nor'easter on their way to Trenton. Once there, they found an able Hessian garrison, not drunk after Christmas revelry, but worn out by repeated alarms. Many readers will find Fischer's descriptions of the second battle of Trenton and the "Forage War" illuminating. This is a highly readable and entertaining book that deserves a wide audience. The footnotes contain a wealth of interesting information, as do the 24 appendices that cover topics ranging from troop strength to ice conditions on the Delaware River. Fischer also includes an historiographic essay on how portrayals of Washington's crossing have changed over time and why. While some scholars might be put off by the book's popular tone and positive message, most readers will welcome it and gain a greater appreciation for the men and women who created the United States.

No "Pivotal" moment can be summed up in one day and Mr. Fischer makes that very clear. The failures of the New York battles and the retreat flowing it leading up to The Crossing (and as we find out there were actually two crossings) lays the ground work for what made The Crossing so amazing. And Mr. Fischer gives a well written account of what happened as well as some little known facts and stories (with respects to Paul Harvey), The Story Behind The Story. What I enjoyed most was the Conclusion of the book with the Reprise where Mr Fischer ties everything up with contingency. It wasn't just Washinton crossing the Delaware and defeating the British and Hessians that is the story but everything being interconnected and being affected by individual choices that the people made. A truly great read.

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