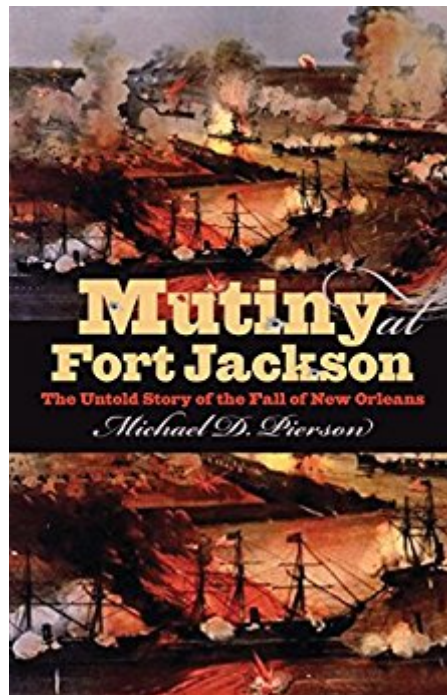




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# Mutiny At Fort Jackson: The Untold Story Of The Fall Of New Orleans (Civil War America)



## 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

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## Customer Reviews

This is a good, easily understood book on a little known chapter in the American Civil War. I'm well-read on this subject and I learned quite a bit about Southern Unionists from this book. It will be an eye-opener for anyone who believes the tired old Lost Cause Myth that all white people in the Confederate States supported secession. Pierson presents a good discussion of who these Southern Unionists were, how they pulled off the mutiny, and how the mutiny led to the fall on New Orleans, the Confederacy's largest city, barely one year into the war. When the reader finishes this book, she can pick up one or two others that look to an even greater depth into the backgrounds of Southern Unionists: Virginia Bynam's *The Free State of Jones*, and Stephanie McCurry's *Confederate Reckoning*. *The Mutiny at Fort Jackson* is a good start to an education.

This book completely blew me away. I live in New Orleans but had no idea there was such a large Unionist population here during the Civil War. The politics and social structure of the city become alive in this examination of who the soldiers that mutinied were, why they did it, and how important the fall of New Orleans was. This does not detail the naval battle in any significant way, but instead treads what was to me completely new ground.

Read in anticipation of visiting New Orleans and being Civil War enthusiast. I found the historical facts fun BUT the implications for considering modern day issues is undeniable.

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. The policies of the Confederacy and the attitude of its people come in for substantial criticism, and not only over slavery, but also for the treatment of immigrants, most notably from Germany and Catholic Ireland. The author overlooks the contributions from individuals such as Pat Cleburne, and the fact that most recent immigrants to the Confederacy were loyal to the Confederacy. However, he is correct that pockets of Unionism among the immigrants existed, most notably among the Germans in Texas (Fredericksburg, New Braunfels) where disloyalty was punished by massacres by the Texans, and among the Catholics of Southern Louisiana. They had brought with them Civil Law adherence and the class warfare politics then convulsing Europe. As the author must surely know, conscription became the policy of both the Union and the Confederacy during the war, and conscripts almost always performed less well than volunteers, but actual mutinies or refusal to fight were extremely rare occurrences. I am only aware of one in the Army of Northern Virginia (the refusal of Jackson's men under Stuart at Chancellorsville to attack on the second day), and that was clearly in response to the loss of their leader. Perhaps other readers can come up with more examples, but the Fort Jackson incident was clearly the most egregious in that a large group of soldiers who were in no immediate danger chose to mutiny, abandon their positions, and essentially go over to the enemy, taking the oath of allegiance so as not to be considered prisoners of war. The reason for the mutiny is concluded by the author to be the Union sympathies of the German and Irish Catholic soldiers who were either coerced into enlisting or found themselves in Fort Jackson after joining the army for the economic benefits allowing them to escape poverty and joblessness. In any case, supposedly they were more Unionist in sympathy than for the Southern society that they supposedly saw as oppressing them. One wonders why the Irish Catholics in the North when faced with similar oppression from nativists fought so well for the oppressors on their side. However, the critical question concerning how the mutiny became so well-organized and came as such a surprise to the officers in the Fort is skipped over. As the padding in the message from Nimitz to Halsey said, "The world wonders." Lastly, the author's lauding of Butler's rule by martial law is at the very least suspect. The local Confederate

politicians and their big-city machine in New Orleans is depicted as odious, inept, and injurious to immigrants and those of Unionist sentiment. Supposedly Butler corrected all that. The reader should note that this is a revisionist approach, and would be well advised to seek other, more traditional sources. Americans are well acquainted with big city political machines and their faults, so little more needs to be said. Suffice it to say that at least two Presidents have come out of big city political machines (Obama and Truman), as have a number of high ranking politicians (Nancy Pelosi, the daughter of D'Alesandro, the Baltimore boss, comes immediately to mind.) The book is relatively short, but in many respects the author has worked hard to even achieve the length that it is (191 pages.) I thought the treatise to be more appropriate to a magazine article with the stuff left out about how the immigrants voted with their feet, hearts and minds for the United States instead of the evil Confederacy. That being said, there is much good and scholarly work here, even if the analysis rests on little or inferential evidence. It is worthy of a read, but not of much discussion or contemplation. In my opinion, there is an excellent story here, but quite possibly the passage of time and obliteration of the sources has made it impossible to unearth. I'm surprised some fiction writer hasn't grabbed on this incident and written a best seller from it -- it is wide open for one.

In my opinion the author had a poor understanding of the battle or the times and the text is filled with inaccuracies. The obvious is restated page after page for him to make some point that few would dispute. Yes, the troops left to defend New Orleans were not first line troops those had long ago departed for the fronts in Tennessee or Virginia. New Orleans was the least Southern city in the confederacy, it was filled with recent foreign immigrants and northerners, it was also very dependent on trade which dried up with the onset of the blockade. We can agree not all people in the region supported the Confederacy and when times got tough many more loss faith in the Southern cause. But the mutiny was strategically unimportant as once the forts were past there was no defense of the city. Contrary to his assertions the CSS Louisiana was not a threat to the northern fleet and it was never going to become one, it was at best a poorly positioned gun platform. There were no facilities at Fort Jackson to get it seaworthy and carpenters could not fix the problems it had. Inaccuracies abound, there was no road north of Fort Livingston to surrender on as Fort Livingston was and is on an Island, no road has ever gone there; Camp Street has never been in the French Quarter, his dates and service of the few soldiers mentioned are often in conflict with the "Records of Louisiana Soldiers and Commands" which I believe are accurate. Uninteresting, tedious and uninformative. If there was any value it was in the footnotes which provide references to materials that may be of some interest in their own right.

This is not an actual review since I haven't read the book. I just wanted to input what I know about the area. Across the Miss. River from Ft. Jackson is a much lesser known and less often visited fort called Ft. St. Phillip. It also has a very interesting history and took part in the War of 1812. That fort is still there, though not maintained at all. It is only accessible by boat and anyone venturing there should do so in winter. I visited Ft. St. Phillip in my float equipped ultralight aircraft in the mid-1980s. At that time the three barracks buildings/hippie commune were still standing and the Fort was much more substantial. Hurricane Katrina destroyed all of the wood structures and some of the brick work surrounding the fort. A sad end to an historic old structure. I put 3 stars in there just to do so. Again, this is only to inform people of the "other side" of that historic area.

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