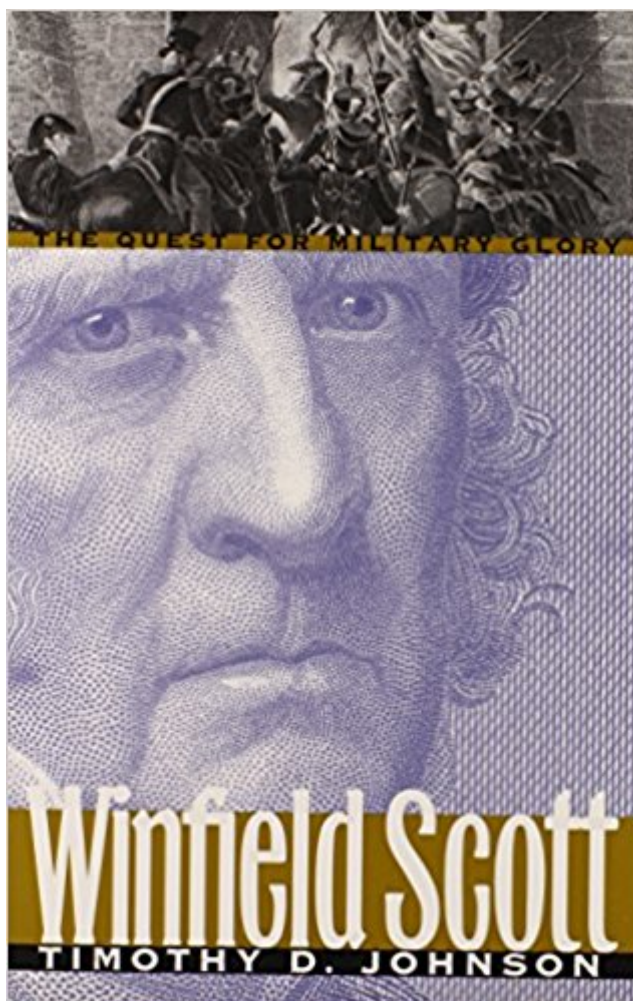


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# Winfield Scott: The Quest For Military Glory



## Synopsis

One of the most important public figures in antebellum America, Winfield Scott is known today more for his swagger than his sword. "Old Fuss-and-Feathers" was a brilliant military commander whose tactics and strategy were innovative adaptations from European military theory; yet he was often under appreciated by his contemporaries and until recently overlooked by historians. While John Eisenhower's recent *Agent of Destiny* provides a solid summary of Scott's remarkable life, Timothy D. Johnson's much deeper critical exploration of this flawed genius should become the standard work. Thoroughly grounded in an essential understanding of nineteenth-century military professionalism, it draws extensively on unpublished sources in order to reveal neglected aspects of Scott's life, present a more complete view of his career, and accurately balance criticism and praise. Johnson dramatically relates the key features of Scott's career: how he led troops to victory in the War of 1812 and the Mexican War, fought against the Seminoles and Creeks, and was instrumental in professionalizing the U.S. Army, which he commanded for two decades. He also tells how Scott tried to introduce French methods into army tactical manuals, and how he applied his study of the Napoleonic Wars during the Mexico City Campaign but found European strategy of little use against Indians. Johnson further suggests that Scott's creation of an officer corps that boasted Grant, Lee, McClellan and other veterans of the Mexican War raises important questions about his influence on Civil War generalship. More than a military history, this book tells how Scott's aristocratic pretensions placed him at odds with emerging notions of equality in Jacksonian America and made him an unappealing politician in his bid for the presidency. Johnson not only recounts the facets of Scott's personality that alienated nearly everyone who knew him but also reveals the unsavory methods he used to promote his career and the scandalous ways he attempted to relieve his lifelong financial troubles. Although his legendary vanity has tarnished his place among American military leaders, Scott is shown to have possessed great talent and courage. Johnson's biography offers the most balanced portrait available of Scott by never losing sight of the whole man.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

A full-dress study of a great general whose life spanned the life of his young nation from the Founding Fathers to the Civil War but who has been largely neglected by historians. Johnson (History/Lipscomb Univ.) has delved into vast but scattered primary and secondary sources to write a scholarly biography of Scott, who was one of the first US Army officers to make a formal study of European military manuals, whose regulations established a code that brought new professionalism into 19th-century American warfare. The US Army, under Scott's innovative leadership, thus became capable of withstanding the best European soldiers. Scott consulted with Lafayette and Prussian officers in Europe, and noted the fatal mistakes looting and pillage of Napoleon's armies in the Spanish and Russian campaigns. Although he blundered early in his career in the Indian Wars in Florida and Alabama, he performed brilliantly in the Mexican War, and his strong discipline and fair dealing with the Mexican civilian population limited guerrilla attacks on his army. He was responsible for the first large-scale construction of amphibious ships in American history, and put them to good use in the successful landing at Vera Cruz. Johnson views Scott's march from Vera Cruz and his capture of Mexico City in 1847 as the crowning achievements of his career; later, as a diplomat, Scott solved dangerous border disputes with Canada. Johnson shows that Scott never wore humility well: he was an aristocratic conservative forever in conflict with the strong egalitarian forces of his day. Scott's boldness, knowledge, and ability as a soldier were mixed with conceit, arrogance, impatience, and aggressiveness. Ironically, his overweening ambition and his self-serving nature caused him to fail in politics. The definitive study: Johnson's distinguished work gives a long-deserved but neglected credit to "Old Fuss and Feathers." (16 illustrations, not seen) (History Book Club selection) -- Copyright ©1998, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.

œA fascinating study of a nineteenth-century Douglas MacArthur. I'm extremely impressed by Johnson's writing style, ability to bring Scott's personality alive, clear explanations of the Army's command structure, and deft analyses of military strategy. His treatment of Scott's role in

the War of 1812 and the Mexican War, the most significant phases of Scott's extended career, is especially astute. "Robert E. May, author of *The Southern Dream of a Caribbean Empire*, 1854 "1861 a fresh and engaging biography of 'Old Fuss and Feathers,' who helped shape American history in the antebellum republic, only to be eclipsed by the generation of Civil War officers who learned the art of war from him. Will appeal to scholars and general readers alike." Richard Bruce Winders, author of *Mr. Polk's Army: The American Military Experience in the Mexican War*

Winfield Scott is one of the most important military leaders in American history. I started to read John Eisenhower's biography of Scott and, while it is clear that Eisenhower knows his military history, I found his writing was like reading a list of facts. Transitions were weak and development beyond the military angle was limited. I gave up about 40% of the way through and turned to Timothy Johnson's biography. Johnson's book is a much different reading experience. It goes into the context of Scott's life in more detail and the writing is clear, flows easily, and is a pleasure to read. If any personal traits followed Scott throughout his life, they were his arrogance and self-centeredness. But there were some reasons to justify these traits, though never nearly as much as Scott thought. As Johnson thoroughly details, Scott's work in the Mexican War was exemplary and became a model for later generals. (Many from his staff became Civil War generals on both sides.) Scott's ability to combine military strategy with diplomatic skills dealing with occupied territory was outstanding. (The maps in this book are very helpful.) But earlier in his life in the War of 1812, as Johnson shows, Scott's arrogance and extreme belief in his own ability needlessly cost many young men their lives. Scott's personality, love of pomp and strong tendency toward elitism prevented him from ever being a serious presidential candidate in his lifetime. He became a superb general but only after some major mistakes. His success turned on his training and appreciation for European-type tactics and when they succeeded, they succeeded brilliantly. When they did not fit the situation (as in Florida), they failed badly. Johnson spells out all the details of Scott's life and military campaigns in well-developed and clear language. Johnson's biography of Winfield Scott puts Scott into the context of his time and is a well-written and enjoyable reading experience.

An excellent biography of 'Old Fuss and Feathers'. From his initial involvement in the War of 1812, through his command of the army during the Mexican war, up until his retirement at the beginning of the Civil War, Gen. Scott set the standards for the U.S. Army. Like George C. Marshall after him,

Scott epitomized the idealized citizen soldier without whom our country's history may have had a different outcome. He nurtured and molded the professional military men of his day and gleaned the admiration of Presidents and Politicians, alike. An excellent source for anyone seriously interested in understanding what it took to be a Commander-in-Chief.

If you love reading American History, this is a must read. Outstanding book by an outstanding scholar and author, Dr. Timothy H. Johnson. His latest book is *Liberty vs Power: The Founding Fathers' Vision for America*. It is also outstanding for anyone to grasp a better understanding of what our founding fathers were thinking, based on documented fact.

New condition

This is a superlative bio of Scott, a man who spanned a considerable amount of time in the formative years of the United States and its army. The events of the Civil War, and all its eccentric generals and characters have tended to overlook Scott, but his overall influence on the period can not be denied. Often eccentric, and certainly arrogant, Scott virtually created the modern US army. His regulations and drill manuals professionalized this nation's army after its embarrassing and amateur performance in the War of 1812. Scott, who fought prominently in that conflict at both Chipawa and Lundy's Lane drilled his brigade to a standard that no other American units reached in that war. He saw the need first hand to improve the army's standards and drill. Heavily influenced by French and European models, he standardized the US army and paved the ground for its development and vast improvement. Scott was a vain and arrogant individual, he was not called Old Fuss and Feathers for nothing. Fond of gaudy uniforms, and pomp and ceremony these outward ego trips belied his inner genius. Many US Presidents disliked Scott's arrogance and his virtual control of the army. Scott in turn looked upon the likes of Jackson, Harrison and Tyler as the Dark Ages in American politics! Scott was an elitist, he was aristocratic in his outlook, and it is perhaps for this reason that he has often been overlooked in US History. To better understand the emergence of the US and the professionalism of its army, the need to understand Scott's contributions in that regard is paramount. The army he painstakingly created all through the first half of the 19th Century saw final fruition in the Mexican war of 1846. Here Scott's brilliant generalship and strategic outlook ensured his success against the Mexicans. The army he created not only could outmaneuver the enemy, but could outfight them as well. In every major action, the US Army inflicted two or three times the losses on the Mexicans, even while the latter were often defending in

fixed positions. All the future greats of the Civil War, Grant, Lee, etc. acknowledged Scott's genius. The Mexican campaign was a model for all to follow. Sherman's march to the sea was certainly inspired by it. In order to have a greater understanding of the Civil War, and antebellum America in general, we should not neglect the contributions of Winfield Scott. Timothy Johnson's biography is probably one of the most satisfying bios one can ever read. Unlike most bios it does not get bogged down with excessive details pertaining to an individual's life. Johnson keeps Scott's life and career moving at a comfortable pace, with ample time for reflection on the times he lived in. We see the great general in all his strengths and weaknesses. Johnson accomplishes this in a leisurely 240 odd pages, far more satisfying than many bios we encounter today which feel the need to be twice this length most of the time. In short, I cannot recommend this work highly enough for its depiction of the man, and the times he lived in.

It's ironic that after 60 years, two biographies of Winfield Scott appeared almost simultaneously. John Eisenhower's *Agent of Destiny* attracted more attention, but Johnson's book is by far the more satisfying of the two. A professional historian, Johnson places Scott within the context of his time, giving the reader a better appreciation of the general and his place in 19th century American history. I read both books, and I have to say I was surprised to be disappointed with the Eisenhower book as much as I was. I liked his book on the Mexican-American War "So Far From God", but I think he overreached with this one. He focuses on the man, while Johnson focuses on the man and his times. In doing so, it gives a more complete and ultimately more satisfying account. Highly recommended!

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