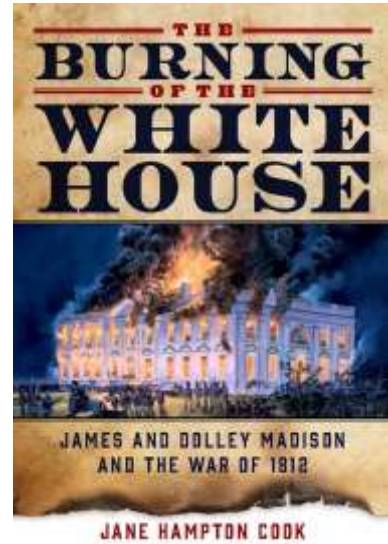


STUDY GUIDE/BOOK CLUB QUESTIONS

Study Guide for *The Burning of the White House: James and Dolley Madison and the War of 1812* by Jane Hampton Cook, janecook.com.

Inspired by the author's 9-11-01 evacuation from the White House, *The Burning of the White House* is a nonfiction historical drama that takes place from 1813 to 1815. A patriotic story of contrasts, the story features a female heroine in Dolley Madison, who resembles the characters in Jane Austin's *Pride and Prejudice*, and invokes the vigilance of George Washington. The emotional connection between Dolley and James reveals an intimate portrait of a married couple who care deeply for each other and their nation.



Similar to the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, *The Burning of the White House* captures both the shock of the burning the U.S. Capitol and White House and the feeling of triumph as Dolley transforms from a hostess into a humanitarian and becomes the first, first lady. No longer a lackluster decision-maker, President Madison emerges as a strong executive leader. *The Burning of the White House* is relevant to today through a rich combination of action, emotional connections, strong characters, an epic setting, and cinematic events.

PART ONE

The Normal World

The Burning of the White House, starts in 1813 with the introduction of the three main characters: Admiral George Cockburn, President James Madison and his wife, Dolley Madison. Two of the three main characters experience an organic character arc not often seen in non-fiction.

Main Characters

1. How did Americans view Admiral George Cockburn? p. 4
2. What town did George Cockburn attack in May 1813? p. 4
3. What is on James Madison's mind in May 1813? p. 12
4. How did Dolley react to the news that Havre de Grace had been burned by Cockburn? p. 23
5. How is Dolley viewed in her role as the wife of the president of the United States? p. 50
6. What contradiction does Dolley face as a Quaker married to a wartime president? p. 24
7. Admiral Cockburn is compared to a pirate. Is this an apt simile? p. 4, 27

8. Madison is described as the mighty little Madison. Why? p. 11-16

The epic story of the burning of the White House also involves several minor characters. Their different viewpoints provide contrasts and conflicts throughout the story.

Supporting characters

9. What does Benjamin Latrobe's reaction to Havre de Grace's burning foreshadow? p. 29.
10. Latrobe is the first minor character introduced in the book. What could that signify for the end of the story? p. 29.
11. Why is Latrobe bitter about his role as the U.S. Capitol's architect? p. 31.
12. Who coined the term "knickerbockers?" How does he describe James and Dolley Madison? P. 51.
13. What would Edward Coles rather be doing than serving as President Madison's secretary and overseer of Dolley's parties? p. 38.
14. How could wanting to be president affect General Armstrong's actions and attitudes? p. 42.
15. How does Senator Rufus King hold Madison accountable for sending peace commissioners to Russia without Congressional approval? p. 48.
16. What do Rufus King and General Armstrong have in common? p. 45-57.
17. They say that opposites attract. How are Dolley and James opposite each other?
18. Latrobe led the remodeling of the White House interior for the Madisons. What role do the state floor rooms of the White House serve for the Madisons? How did Dolley's entertaining benefit her husband's presidency? p. 50.
19. What location is General Armstrong most concerned about? p. 52.
20. What did Senator King think about the fact that Albert Gallatin was both Madison's treasury secretary and a peace commissioner? p. 48, 71.

Background

21. When the British attacked the *USS Chesapeake* in 1807 off the coast of Virginia, President Thomas Jefferson responded by placing an embargo on shipping, which devastated the economy and led to the War of 1812. The British showed they did not respect American sovereignty when they took American sailors from the *Chesapeake* and other ships and denied the validity of U.S. citizenship. Today, America is considered a super power. How was America viewed back then on the world stage? p. 67.
22. What accomplishment was James Madison most proud of? p. 73-77.
23. Any wife would be concerned about her husband becoming deathly ill. Dolley was no exception. What in her background made Madison's illness a greater concern? p. 24.

Summer of 1813

24. The title of the chapter, *Chesapeake Fever*, has a double meaning. What does *Chesapeake Fever* refer to? p. 67-69.

25. Who did Dolley snub when Madison was ill? p. 81, 138.
26. What country did Senator King view as America's greatest foe? England or France? p. 85.
27. What were some of the atrocities committed by the British military in Hampton, Virginia? p. 101-04.
28. Senator King and General Armstrong secretly met in the summer of 1813 to embarrass Madison politically by ousting Albert Gallatin as a peace commissioner and treasury secretary. Were they putting their nation first or themselves? p. 104.
29. Fear of deadly disease motivated Congress to leave Washington City in the summer every year. Each of the main characters leave Washington in August 1813 for different places. The Madisons return to their home in Orange, VA and Admiral Cockburn goes to Bermuda for the winter. Disease does not motivate General Armstrong to go to Canada. What does? p. 116.
30. What does a newspaper report say about Senator King that reveals his true motive and goal? P. 117-8.
31. Occasionally the author uses Biblical references. What two Biblical references conclude Part I? p. 118.

PART TWO

Background

32. The term *White House* was used in newspapers as a negative term against President Jefferson and President Madison. How did it become a positive term? p. 123-7.
33. How did Dolley respond to Thomas Jefferson's insult to the British diplomat, Anthony Merry and his wife? What does Dolley's ability to charm her husband's enemies say about her character? p. 134-6.
34. Admiral Cockburn also had a history with the Merrys. What happened to his crew after he escorted them to New York and how did that impact his view of America? p. 136-8.

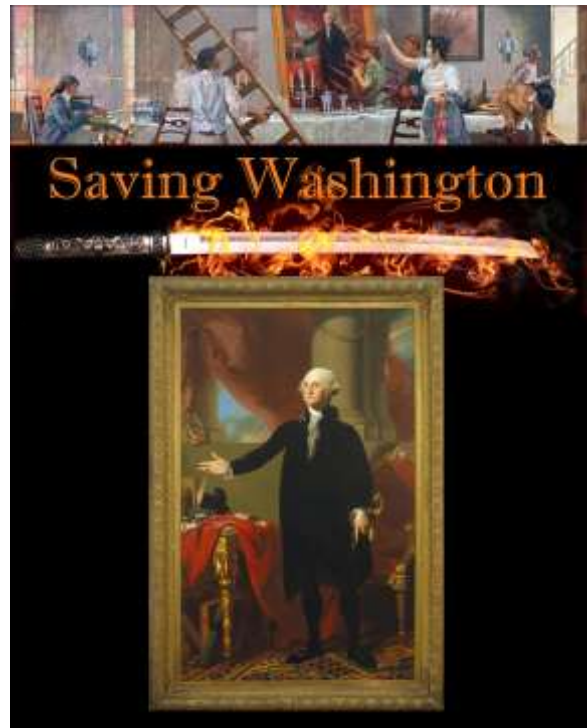
Summer of 1814

35. When the Madison returned to Washington, President Madison delivered a message, saying "That the union of these states, the guardian of the freedom and safety of all and of each, is strengthened by every occasion that puts it to the test." What do you think of his statement. Does it ring true to today? Why or why not? p. 128.
36. What action does Commodore Joshua Barney take to defend the Chesapeake Bay? How is this different from the actions and/or attitude of General Armstrong toward the Washington City region? P. 133.
37. After his return from Canada, General Armstrong communicates through intermediaries with Senator King. What does this say about Armstrong's loyalty to Madison? Why do Armstrong and King both agree that a New Yorker, not a Virginian, should be the next president? p. 141-3.
38. Dolley was known for her strong fashion sense. What regal role was she compared to? p. 143-4.

39. Why did Admiral Cockburn think he could attack Washington City? p. 146-7.
40. After France's Napoleon was defeated, what did Senator King think would happen between England and America? p. 151, 165.
41. What news did President Madison receive from Albert Gallatin in June 1814? How did Madison respond? p. 169-71.
42. Did President Madison trust General Armstrong in the summer of 1814? Why or why not? p. 174-5.
43. Though she would not dare say so publicly, where did Dolley say she wished she was in the summer of 1814 because it was better protected? p. 184.
44. Where did General Armstrong think the British would attack? p. 192.
45. Cockburn pressed in his attack on Washington and convinced General Ross to proceed, despite being ordered to return to the ships by his commanding admiral. What quality motivated Cockburn above all else? p. 189-91.
46. What did Madison ask of Dolley on August 22, 1814? Why did he trust her to take care of the cabinet papers and his private and public papers? p. 202.
47. Why did Madison go to Bladensburg? p. 214-7.
48. The author occasionally uses alliteration, the occurrence of the same letter or sound at the start of adjacent words, such as "blazing blood heat blanketed Bladensburg." How does pointing out sensory details, such as temperature, help make a historical story more relatable? p. 217.
49. What quality did Dolley demonstrate as she pointed her spyglass from the White House windows throughout the day on August 24, 1814? Why didn't she leave earlier? p. 221-2.
50. Why did Dolley plan a dinner party while her husband was in Bladensburg? p. 223.
51. What finally convinced Dolley to leave the White House? Who helped Dolley remove the portrait of George Washington from the White House? p. 227-9.
52. What did Cockburn and the British soldiers think of the Capitol's appearance? p. 239-42.
53. In what ways did Admiral Cockburn gloat over burning the U.S. Capitol and the White House? p. 235-7, 246.
54. How was General Ross different from Admiral Cockburn? p. 253.
55. Dolley found herself on the road with average Americans as they fled from Washington City. How was she received when her identity was discovered? How might this have affected her? p. 255, 258.
56. Where did Madison take refuge when the British occupied Washington? p. 260.
57. What drove the British military from Washington City? p. 259.

PART THREE

58. What metaphor did Congressman Ingersoll use to describe the burning of the Capitol and White House? p. 263, 268-9.
59. The newspapers declared that Madison's reign was at an end. Was it? p. 265.
60. Who received the blame for failing to defend Washington City? What actions did Madison take when he returned to Washington City? How did Madison emerge a stronger leader after the burning of the White House? p. 269-72, 278-9.
61. How did Senator King respond to the burning of the White House? How did he change? p. 281.
62. How did Francis Scott Key respond to the burning of the White House? p. 276.
63. How did average Americans rally to fight the British? p. 282.
64. Who won the Battle of Baltimore? P. 305.
65. What political battle did the Madisons face after returning to Washington? Why did some want to move the Capitol to Philadelphia or New York? Was this playing politics during a tragedy? p. 311-2.
66. How did Francis Scott Key's *The Star-Spangled Banner* lift the spirits of Americans? P. 305-6, 315.
67. How did Benjamin Latrobe respond to the burning of the Capitol? What role did he play in ensuring that the Capitol was rebuilt in Washington and not moved to another city? p. 319, 349-50.
68. With her entertaining stage gone through the burning of the White House, Dolley took stock of her life. What action did she take that was a first for the wife of a president? How did that impact her legacy? How did Dolley incorporate faith in the orphanage? Dolley saved Washington three times—the painting, Washington City as the nation's capital city and the orphans of Washington. p. 353-9.



AUTHOR

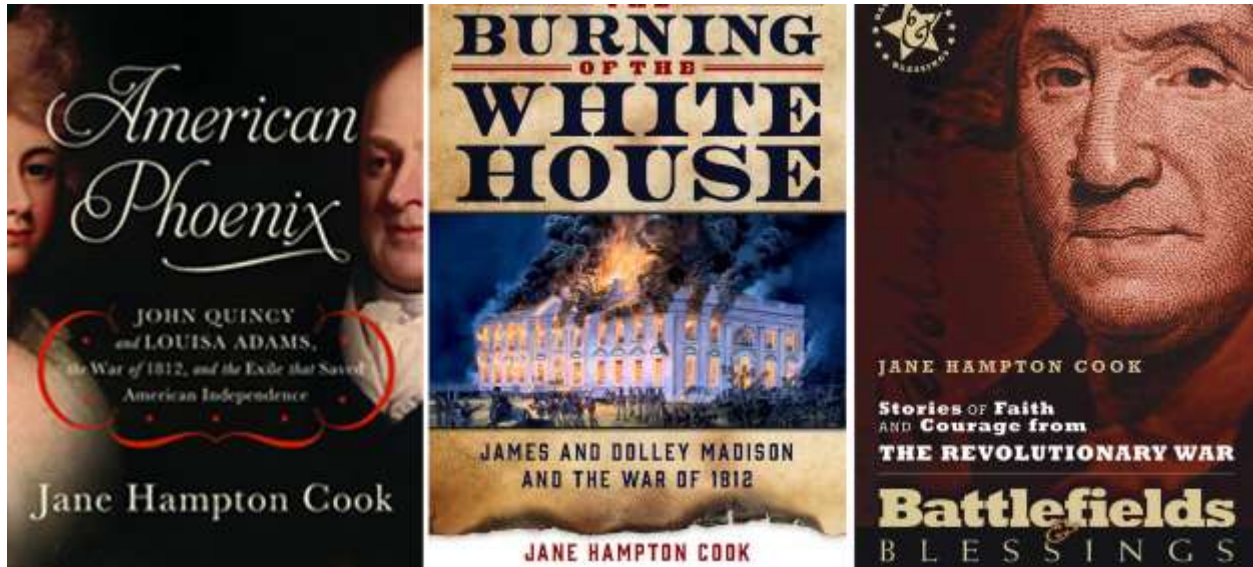
JANE HAMPTON COOK

After being evacuated from the White House on 9-11, Jane wondered if Americans sought to live life differently and experienced a surge of patriotism after the “9-11 of the War of 1812,”—the burning of the White House by the British military. She discovered that the burning of the White House led to the creation of the role of first lady, which inspired her to write SAVING WASHINGTON.



Jane Hampton Cook makes history and biography relevant to news, current events, politics, faith and modern life. She is an award-winning author of nine books. Receiving a recommend, her feature screenplay SAVING WASHINGTON placed third out of 1,000 entries in ScreenCraft’s 2018 drama contest. She has since received producer’s notes from WME, Lionsgate, New Republic Pictures, Entertainment One, the Gersh Agency and others. Inspired by her 9-11 evacuation experience from the White House, SAVING WASHINGTON is adapted from her book, *The Burning of the White House: James and Dolley Madison and the War of 1812*.

A national media commentator and former White House webmaster, Jane has been a frequent guest on the Fox News Channel, BBC, SKY News, and other TV and radio outlets. She was a cast member and on-camera storyteller for THE FIRST AMERICAN, a documentary about George Washington, FOX NATION documentaries, and the History Channel’s UNITED STUFF OF AMERICA. She received a bachelor’s degree from Baylor University and a master’s degree from Texas A&M University. Jane lives with her husband and their children near Washington D.C. www.janecook.com.



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- Resilience on Parade: Short Stories of Suffragists & Women's Battle for the Vote*
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- The Burning of the White House* (Regnery History, 2016)
- American Phoenix* (Thomas Nelson, HarperCollins imprint, 2013)
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- The Faith of America's First Ladies* (AMG, 2006)

FOR CHILDREN

- What Does the President Look Like?* (Kane Miller, 2011)
- B is for Baylor* (Baylor Press, 2010), *Maggie Houston* (Hendrick Long, 2002)