

Into The Midst Of Chaos': Young Adult Title Recounts The Demise Of Fort Sumter

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Review

'INTO THE MIDST OF CHAOS'

Young adult title recounts the demise of Fort Sumter

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Colbert, Nancy A. *The Firing on Fort Sumter: A Splintered Nation Goes to War.* Morgan Reynolds, Incorporated, 2000-10-01. ISBN 188384651X

Major Robert Anderson, USA, has achieved the unenviable position of opening civil war," shouted the headlines. The *Charleston Courier* interpreted Anderson's removal of federal troops in December 1860 from Fort Moultrie to Fort Sumter as hostile. His move, even though "under cloak of night," was, in fact, Anderson's attempt to maintain peace, as Charlestonians were becoming increasingly unfriendly. The major's albatross was his vague order from Washington: avoid confrontation; defend the fort. But Moultrie wasn't defensible!

For any rendering of an historical event to satisfy an audience, the author must organize, summarize, and communicate the Big Picture - including the conditions preceding and influencing the specific event - in this case, the eventual surrender of Sumter. Nancy Colbert adheres to these guidelines in **The Firing on Fort Sumter**. Skillfully leading us into the midst of chaos (misdirected orders, undelivered requests, misinterpreted events), Colbert sets the stage well. She baits the hook in the first chapter by introducing the men of Moultrie, specifically Anderson, who is forced to make heroic choices by himself. These are the enlisted men and officers who will hold their position until starved and burned out, finally using their *socks* for cartridge bags. Introduced, too, are the forts that become pawns between patriots and statriots.

In the second chapter, Colbert relates the preceding events, depicting James Buchanan as an out-of-political-shape president eager to pass the reins to Lincoln. Shifting again in the chapters that follow, Colbert returns to the harbor where the drama unfolds, patching us back and forth between the players who orchestrate the pageantry. Portraits of these characters are included. Since

readers' appetites may be whetted, as well, for detailed photos of the fortresses, a "trip to the library" may be an indirect bonus of this book. One cannot help but wonder about the condition of Moultrie, which after years of wind and wave now rests so far down in the sand dunes that grazing cows accidentally fall inside, and of Sumter, unfinished when Anderson first moved in and slapped together by its new in-habitants, only to be rubble by cannon fire.

Colbert's first book, *Lou Henry Hoover* was reviewed as thorough but sometimes lackluster. **The Firing on Fort Sumter** does not lack luster. It is organized (with index, glossary, references), expansive, and, more importantly, gives a feel for the soldiers who waited while politicians, citizens, secessionists, anti-secessionists, and profiteers made up their minds about war.

It is fitting that Colbert closes with Anderson's celebrated repossession of Fort Sumter exactly four years after he surrendered it. It's discomfiting, however, to learn that Lincoln was invited to attend but already had tickets to Ford's Theatre. Appropriate for a young adult audience, these pages offer much to fire a discussion, splintered or not.

Mary Bahr Fritts, author of If Nathan Were Here (2000) and The Memory Box (1995), has written more than 150 stories and articles. She currently is working under a grant to finish a book on Abraham Lincoln.