

National Writing Board

730 Boston Post Road, Suite 24, Sudbury, MA 01776 USA

Author Report

21 May 2003

Title of Paper: General William Hull's Path to Surrender Code Number: 0703-JUKA-00122

Author: Name Withheld

School: Public High School

Home Address: Newton, Massachusetts

Total Score: (5-30) Reader One **18** Reader Two **19** **Final 18.5 (Good) (4)**

28-30 = A+ Superior (reported score of 6) (1 in 100 papers rated)

23-27 = A Very Good (reported score of 5)

18-22 = B Good (reported score of 4)

13-17 = C Average (reported score of 3)

8-12 = D Poor (reported score of 2)

5-7 = F Very Poor (reported score of 1)

Category (check one): Short (1,500 to 2,500 words) Actual length: 4,805 words
x Long (4,000 to 6,000 words)

Each paper is read by two Readers, and significant differences in scores are mediated by a coordinator, all senior secondary instructors in history.

I. Reading (Sources)

Score: (1-6) Reader One 3 Reader Two 4

Reader One:

You place too much reliance on a limited number of sources (e.g. Clarke). Your bibliography is an interesting one—and not completely unproductive. Nonetheless, you are obliged to consult the most recent scholarship on your topic. This is not to suggest that one must always avoid “antique sources.” They can be helpful but, when they are employed, it is imperative that a researcher do it for a specific reason—and that purpose should be evident to the reader.

Reader Two:

The paper is based on an impressive array of sources, and all but three of the sources listed in the bibliography are quoted directly in the paper. There's an impressive historiography represented in the list, although the author is not mindful and explicit in the paper about how views of this case have changed over time, indeed how they differed even at that time, which is what makes the case so controversial and fascinating.

II. Thinking (Understanding)

Score: (1-6) Reader One 4 Reader Two 3

Reader One:

You demonstrate an ability to draw relationships from among the key issues and events. You are obviously motivated, and one hopes you will continue to involve yourself in scholarly enterprises of this kind.

Reader Two:

There is a critical question here that the paper avoids or ignores: Why did Hull's attitude toward American Indians change from 1793–1794, when he called them “civil...native proprietors,” to 1805–1807, when he sought to rid them of their lands? Did he willingly and wholeheartedly secure the infamous treaty that gave rise to Tecumseh and the Prophet? The paper fails to integrate its bifurcated focus on Hull's controversial command of Fort Detroit and the author's case that the land-hungry Americans, and not British instigation, riled American Indians on the eve of the War of 1812. What is the relevance of the latter to Hull's surrender? Might his fear of Indian reprisal have been stoked, too, by guilt? After all, wasn't it Hull who had prayed in his journal in 1794 (as the author mentions): “God grant, that the avarice of this country may never disturb these native proprietors.”

III. **Elaboration** (Use of evidence)

Score: (1–6) Reader One 3 Reader Two 4

Reader One:

Don't anticipate that simply “using” a source will dispose your reader to accepting its authority, much less the validity of the point you wish to make. You must frame an academic argument by constructing a preponderance of evidence (see, for example, page three, citation nine). Beware of unsupported generalizations. For example, where you say Hull “had not anticipated...” there is a need for convincing evidence. On page eight (first sentence), you really don't make the case that the British were not culpable...These are but two examples.

Reader Two:

The author cites sources only when directly quoting from them. Paraphrasing should also be cited, such as the author's reference to claims that Hull's retreat to Fort Detroit had demoralized his troops, and that sending a force to secure a supply line for the fort had been a strategic mistake, and that General Brock's superiors had considered him brash and perhaps too reckless.

IV. **Writing** (Use of language)

Score: (1–6) Reader One 4 Reader Two 4

Reader One:

Your writing style tends to draw the reader in. It attracts one not only to the subject matter, but to the controversies it engenders. Congratulations! That is an achievement. Nonetheless, you must tighten up on paragraph construction, keeping in mind that each paragraph should be limited to one main idea.

Reader Two:

The writing is clear and flows well. There are, however, some organizational problems resulting from the author's focus on the 1807 treaty apart from any apparent consideration of how Hull's part in that treaty contributed to his decision to surrender Fort Detroit five years later. The latter ought to have been the organizational focus of the paper.

V. **Overall Result**

Score: (1–6) Reader One 4 Reader Two 4

Reader One:

In order to grow in the skills that historical writing demands, you might consider making a detailed outline first. In that way, you will be in a better position to maintain your academic focus. As this paper proceeded, the reader was left wondering what you regarded as your main concern: A) Hull's fear led to the loss of Detroit. B) American land hunger as a cause of the War of 1812 and Indian alienation. C) The question of British culpability in the Northwest. D) Hull's incompetence. Although all of the issues must be examined, you must offer a clear thesis, and not lose sight of it as you develop your paper.

Reader Two:

This is a fascinating subject, well chosen and fairly well researched, although the author does not synthesize the history as well as s/he might. The paper falls short of a satisfactory answer to the critical question: Why did Hull surrender? Belying the title, which misleads one to expect that he was either a savior or a scapegoat (to which the paper never says), the author claims that Hull was a coward overwhelmed by fear. The author unwittingly raises doubts, though, that it might have been more complicated than that.

Total Score (5-30) Reader One: 18 Reader Two: 19

Final 18.5

Varsity Academics
Independent Assessment of Academic Writing
<http://www.tcr.org>; fitzhugh@tcr.org; 978-443-0022