

# The War of 1812

## Causes:

The British policies of impressment and seizure of American ships, forced President James Madison to formally ask Congress for a Declaration of War against Britain in June of 1812. Many Federalist opposed the declaration (Great Britain has been a valued trade partner and its citizenry were people "like themselves"). To other Americans, President Madison's insistence that American political and economic rights have been violated, proved convincing. The War Hawks, under the guidance of Henry Clay (Kentucky), and John Calhoun (South Carolina) felt the war could potentially allow the United States to gain territory to the West... which would enable economic growth.

An underlying cause for the war, revolved around the alliance between Britain and its Indian allies to the west.... In 1812, Tecumseh and his brother Tenkwatawa decided to take a stand against American settlements between the Appalachian Mountains and the Mississippi River. Tecumseh was able to unite many tribes and began to attack settlers within the region. Madison and many members of Congress were convinced that Native Americans were being encouraged by British who had settled into Canada. Adding additional irritation to the situation was the attack on Prophet town (home of Tecumseh) by General William Henry Harrison in 1811.

## Outbreak of War:

The United States was in no ways prepared for the onset of the war... The army consisted of 6,000 poorly trained men and the navy consisted of 17 ships. The strategy was simple, a three prong attack into Canada (Detroit, Niagara, and northward toward Montreal) would destroy Indian villages, demoralize the Canadian/British forces, and allow Montreal to be taken. The efforts were unsuccessful and American troops retreated south for safety and defensive purposes.

The American navy had some initial successes, but American ships were soon driven back and blockaded in their own ports. The naval victories of 1812 boosted the morale of the American public. Native Americans generally fought on the side of the British and their most important leader was killed by troops led by William Harrison just east of Fort Detroit... the American General Andrew Jackson enjoyed similar success in Tennessee.

## Washington Burns:

In 1814, Napoleon's war effort against Great Britain came to a conclusion and as a result, Britain was able to allocate more of its resources to the war in America. The onslaught began in 1814 with the British invasion of New York and quickly turned their attention to taking Washington DC. The small American force dispatched to defend Washington was defeated quickly. President Madison and other important dignitaries had left Washington when the British forces arrived.

As the British burnt DC and many of its government buildings, peace negotiations were progressing in Ghent, Belgium. With the conflict with France over, pressing concerns over impressment and trade issues became less relevant. The Treaty of Ghent (which ended the war) doesn't address either issue and restored diplomatic relations with Great Britain. Two weeks after peace was declared, Andrew Jackson defeated British forces outside of New Orleans.

Political Effects:

Prior to the signing of the Treaty of Ghent, Federalist met in Hartford, CT (Hartford Convention). They saw the war as a disaster to their interest and viewed the growing political power of western leaders as a threat. Proposals regarding nullification and secession was debated. With the victory at New Orleans and favorable diplomacy, the actions of the Federalist were perceived as foolish and eventually a political disaster for the Federalist party.