

# War of 1812



The war of 1812, supposedly fought over neutral trading rights, was a very peculiar conflict indeed. Britain's trade restrictions, one of the main causes, were removed two days before the war started; the New Englanders, for whom the war was supposedly fought, opposed it; the most decisive battle, at New Orleans, was fought after the war ended.

During the Napoleonic wars, Britain and France had disrupted US shipping, confiscated American goods, taking US seamen into the British navy, and both sides had blockaded each other's ports. This caused great annoyance to American traders, and Britain's abduction of American sailors especially caused great uproar and indignation at home. Many called for war, although it is interesting to note that it was southerners and westerners, the so-called war hawks led by Clay and Calhoun, who supported war who were least affected by Britain's actions. Some historians attribute this to their desire to take British Canada and Spanish Florida in the process of war. The Republican administration, traditionally supportive of France, finally declared war on Britain in 1812, ironically two days after Britain had lifted their trade embargo. Two and a half years of fighting commenced, and when the peace treaty was eventually signed in Ghent, there was no mention whatsoever of neutral rights.

The treaty gave neither side anything they did not have before the war, nor resolved any long-standing disputes over trade or neutral rights. However, it is accepted by many historians that America actually gained far more than the British from the war. The course of the war had led America to build up her industry as she could not trade at the time.

She had strengthened her army, healed old Republican/Federalist splits, and showed Europe that fighting with America was not worthwhile. Finally, she was able to turn her back on Europe and get on with developing and progressing. The war of 1812 was both unnecessary and dangerous. Trade with Europe was severely disrupted during the war, when the end of the Napoleonic wars would have allowed American trade back into Europe more profitably than ever.

She suffered humiliation when a feeble and cowardly militia fled, abandoning Washington for the British to ransack. Her best victory, although it did not gain anything and was caused mainly by British tactical incompetence, at New Orleans, came after the end of the war. Development of industry and an army did not need the 1812 war; it merely needed people to recognize that Hamilton was right all along. Bloodshed and destruction were totally unnecessary, and America was lucky that Britain was still recovering from the Napoleonic wars. No gains were made in Canada, nor Florida. America held New Orleans, but her capital was ransacked.

Perhaps the greatest achievement of the war was to highlight the inherent weakness of both state militia and certain Republican ideas. ;,?