

The war of 1812: was the war of 1812 justified? essay sample

[War](#)



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For America, the War of 1812 was justified. Clearly there were sufficient reasons for America to declare war with Great Britain. Time after time the British violated American rights and freedoms. Acts such as impressments, the attack on the USS Chesapeake, the violation of American neutral rights and waters, blockades on U. S. ports, and the ignoring of stipulations of Jay's Treaty and their Treaty of Paris all imposed threats on America. To prevent further altercation, America tried to solve the problems peacefully by using economic warfare. After the failure of economic warfare, and the continuation of British wrongdoings, there was no other choice but war.

Tension had been building for a little less than thirty years due to Great Britain's disregard of certain stipulations of the Jay and Paris treaties. This disregard resulted in the failure of these treaties. Problems with the Treaty of Paris included border disputes, and vagueness. The boundaries were never clearly stated which led to future turmoil. Britain, who was ordered to evacuate posts on the northwest frontier, never did. Due to the problems in the Treaty of Paris, John Jay was sent to Europe in 1794 to form a new treaty. This treaty later became known as Jay's Treaty. This treaty called for the evacuation of British posts on the northwestern frontier of the U. S., and to define boundaries between the U. S. and Canada. In addition it was to determine America's compensation from Britain for the illegal seizure of ships, and for the payment by Americans of prewar debts owed to British merchants. The problem with Jay's Treaty was that it only provided America's compensation for past seizures, and was never required to stop seizing ships and sailors in the future. Since the treaty never put a stop to it, impressments and ship seizing continued.

Ten years after the signing of the Jay Treaty many events occurred that could be considered direct causes of the War of 1812. In 1803 when the Napoleonic Wars erupted, tensions between the United States and Great Britain began to rise. When the war broke out blockades were proclaimed on hundreds of miles of coastline in both Great Britain and France. American merchants sought to become rich through neutral trade. By trading with both Great Britain and France the United States would become the leader in foreign trade. The British did not hesitate to seize merchant ships headed for blockaded ports in order to keep France from getting supplies from the U. S and vice versa. Although both the French and British were guilty of seizing American merchant ships, Britain had a greater fault. To preserve Britain's naval strength British Royal Navy Officers were practicing impressments in which thousands of American seamen were forced into the British Royal Navy. The British also impressed naturalized Americans of British origin claiming that they were either deserters or British subjects. Impressments not only involved the right to search ships for deserters but the right of any officer of the Royal Navy to make a decision on the spot. (Taylor, 71)

In 1807 relations between the United States and Great Britain reached the breaking point. On June 1, 1807 the British frigate "Leopard" fired upon the "USS Chesapeake" in American territorial waters. The "Leopard" was on a mission to search for deserters. . The "Leopard" waited until the "Chesapeake" left Norfolk bound for the Mediterranean and then made its move. The British captain demanded that the deserter's surrender but the captain of the "Chesapeake" refused. Then the "Leopard" fired three shots on the American vessel, killing three Americans and wounding eighteen. A

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British search party boarded the ship and removed four crewmen. These four men were later executed. The attack on the “ Chesapeake” outraged the Americans. Never before had the British so blatantly violated United States sovereignty. The whole country was angered by this act and many people began to form protests. (Taylor, 72)

The U. S. at first decided to respond with economic constraint rather than war. In 1807, Congress passed the Embargo Act, which prohibited virtually all American ships from putting to sea. Many American industrialists saw the Embargo Act as a way to keep the United States from gaining foreign trade supremacy and it was later repealed. It was replaced in 1809 by the Non-Intercourse Act, which allowed American ships to sail but forbade all trade with France and Great Britain. President Jefferson had intended for these two acts to keep Americans safe and economically punish the British. The only problem was that Jefferson was not receiving any support from his country. (Perkins, 32-37)

By 1810 things had not gotten any better. Macon’s Bill No. 2 reopened American trade with all nations on the basis that if either France or Great Britain repealed their anti-neutral measures the United States would impose an embargo on the other. In 810 President James Madison accepted French statements of lifting their anti-neutral decrees. Madison accepted even though Napoleon was still seizing American vessels in French ports. (Perkins, 38-41)

Later in 1810 President Madison reimposed the ban on British trade. The United States demanded that the British lift their antineutron decree as a

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condition to resume American and British trade. Britain refused to comply. In November of 1811 President Madison summoned Congress into session to prepare for war with Great Britain. On June 1, 1812 Madison asked Congress for a declaration of war, on four major grounds: impressments of American seamen, violation of American neutral rights and territorial waters, blockade of United States ports, and British refusal to revoke the Orders in Council of 1807, which barred all neutral trade with France and her colonies. Despite objections by some states, Congress approved Madison's recommendation. War was declared on June 18, 1812. (Perkins, 41-45)

In conclusion the War of 1812 was justified because of the violation of American neutral rights by the British. The stipulations set forth by Jay's Treaty and the Treaty of Paris were being ignored. In addition Britain was violating America's neutral waters, imposing blockades on U. S. ports, and using acts of impressments on American sailors. Although the U. S. tried to stay neutral and friendly with other foreign nations, Britain provoked a fight, which led to war.