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Andy Rodgers APAS 2 February 2013 DBQ: The War of 1812 In June of 1812, President James Madison formally asked Congress for a declaration of war on Britain. Following years of difficult neutrality under the leadership of Washington, Adams, and Jefferson, the United States' conflicts with Britain and France finally escalated into a war. President Madison had tried to create a diplomatic solution for three long years, but all attempts were unsuccessful. The War of 1812 was caused by the impressment of American sailors and the seizure of ships and their cargo, problems on the Western Frontier and land hunger, and a growing sense of party politics and nationalism. The biggest problems with Britain came on the high seas. British naval vessels had been stopping American cargo ships for years prior to 1812 and impressing American sailors. British officers boarded the American ships in search of British deserters. They left with American citizens with no connection to the British navy. The number of American men who had been impressed by the start of the war was close to 10, 000. Document 1 is a congressional report that describes Britain's violations of our right " to use the ocean, which is the common and acknowledged highway of nations, for the purposes of transporting, in their own vessels, the products of their own soil and the acquisitions of their own industry, " The report calls Britain's impressment and seizure of ships a direct violation of our rights as a neutral nation. The report exaggerates the frequency of these occurrences, "[Great Britain] captures every American vessel, bound to, or returning from, a port where her commerce is not favored; " Most of the ships trading with Britain had no problems, but some were stopped. One of the most well known incidents was an engagement between the American U. S. S. Chesapeake

and the British H. M. S. Leopard. The Chesapeake was approached by the Leopard and the British officers tried to board. The captain of the Chesapeake refused. The Leopard proceeded to fire upon the Chesapeake. Document 2 is an excerpt from a speech by John C Calhoun. He says, "•which shall we do, abandon or defend our own commercial and maritime rights, and the personal liberties of our citizens employed in exercising them? " The United States was founded on the belief that the rights of the citizen should be protected. Calhoun calls impressment an attack on our rights. He says war is the only way to respond. Document 4 is an excerpt from Madison's Declaration of War. He says, " our seafaring citizens still the daily victims of lawless violence..." Madison believes that this and the seizure of ships by the British are the primary reasons to declare war on Britain. Documents 1, 2, and 4 support the declaration of war in response to the impressment of American sailors and the seizure of American ships. The impressment of American sailors and the seizure of ships helped to bring about the War of 1812. Instead of the impressment and seizure of ships, some believed that problems on the Western Frontier and a hunger for land were behind the decision for war. In the years leading up to 1812, American settlers had been having problems with Native Americans and British soldiers on the Western border of the country. Britain had been supplying the Native Americans with guns with which to combat the white settlers who were gradually moving into Indian territory. If Britain lost, they would be driven out of North America and the United States would be able to quash the Native American uprisings. Document 3 is an excerpt from a speech by John Randolph. He says, " Agrarian cupidity, not maritime right, urges the war. "

He thinks that the Northern states have an interest in taking Canada from Britain. If the United States could once again beat Britain in war, Britain would cede Canada. Document 5 is the map of the House of Representatives vote for war. The states that were heavily involved in trade with Britain were strongly opposed to the war. This seems to contradict the view of Documents 1, 2, and 4, that impressment was the main issue. It seems that if your ships were being seized and your crews impressed, then you might want to go to war. It turns out that a war with Britain would practically halt most of America's overseas commerce. The merchants and ship-owners decided that they would rather lose some profit than all of it. The map shows that the Western states were extremely in favor of war. The Western and Southern states would benefit most from the acquisition of Canada. The possible acquisition of Canada was a factor in the decision to declare war on Britain. A desire for land and problems with Native Americans helped to push to decision to declare war through Congress. Probably the most important factor in the decision for war, party politics and growing nationalism contributed greatly to Congress' decision. 1812 was an election year and Madison was up for re-election. Madison was one of the leaders of the Democratic- Republican party. Most of his party consisted of farmers who lived in the West and South. Madison knew that the Western and Southern states were strongly in favor of the war. If he asked for a declaration of war, he knew he would probably be re-elected. Document 8 shows the election results. Madison took the West and South. His reach even extended into the Northwest. The cession of Canada by Britain would yield a territory that was governed by similar rules to those of the Northwest Territory. These states

would be agricultural, and therefore, Democratic-Republican. The already fading Federalist party would lose even more power in the House and Senate, and with it, their chances of ever having the Presidency again. Naturally, the Federalists opposed anything the Democratic-Republican president did. But, according to Document 6, it wasn't enough. The vote by party shows 0 yeas and 40 nays by the Federalists and 98 yeas and 22 nays by the Democratic-Republican. This shows a support of the war that was enough to pass through Congress. Growing nationalism, as well as party politics played a role in the decision. Document 7 is an excerpt from a letter by Hugh Nelson explaining why he voted for war. He says, " to show that our republican government was competent to assert its rights, to maintain the interests of the people, " He is trying to send a message to the world; that the United States is not afraid to do whatever it takes to protect its rights and those of its citizens. He sees the impressment and attack on the Chesapeake as attacks on America itself and that we should declare war. The growing sense of nationalism and party politics contributed to the declaration of war on Britain in 1812. The War of 1812 was caused by many things. Among these were the impressment of American sailors, desire for land, and a growing sense of party politics. President Madison considered all of these when making his decision whether to ask Congress to declare war on Britain.