

# British – american essay



Assess British American Relations in the 1840's The 1840's was a period of American expansion and diplomacy. Throughout these years, tensions grew in British-American relations. By this time, The United States had extended its power and territories throughout the world, and the British Empire had problems in its government. Throughout the 1840's, the two countries disputed over many things. The main things the British and Americans disagreed over in the 1840's were borders and ownership of territory. However, the resolution of these disagreements was the greatest achievement of this period. The issues included the Creole affair in 1841, the Caroline Incident of 1837, and the Oregon territory dispute. These major disputes could have started a third war between the two nations. Because of the Manifest Destiny mentality of the Americans, they thought that all territory to the west belonged to, or would belong to the US. Supporters of the Manifest Destiny argued that more Western land was needed to provide space for the new Americans created by a high birth rate and increased immigration.

They pointed out that land governed by Mexico and Britain was sparsely populated and mostly unproductive. The supporters argued that the land should be given to American settlers who can put it to better use. British and American relations improved however by the Webster-Ashburton Treaty of 1842. By the 1840's, commerce between the US and Britain improved compared to prior decades. Some disagreements between merchants of the two nations still ensued. One major argument was the Creole Affair.

In the early 1840's, the British were interested in fighting the slave trade. They were against the importation of African slaves into the Americas. In

1841, on the American ship Creole, over 130 enslaved Africans overpowered the crew, murdering one man, while sailing from Virginia to New Orleans. 2 Led by Madison Washington, the slaves sailed the vessel to Nassau, Bahamas, where the British declared them free. 3 Americans argued that the property of US slave owners should be protected in foreign ports.

US-British relations grew tense from this incident, which was similar to how the war of 1812 was started. The Caroline was an American steamship that had been aiding rebels in Canada. Canadian militia, on orders of the British, seized the Caroline in American waters in 1837. They set the ship on fire, and sent it hurling over Niagara Falls. 4 These actions strained US relations with Great Britain, almost to the point of war, yet again. In 1840, a Canadian man was arrested for allegedly having a role in the attack. The British stated that his execution would mean war.

The US decided to release the Canadian prisoner and tensions temporarily subsided. In the 1830's, the American and Canadian boundary was still not settled. It included both Maine and especially the Oregon territory, which is now present day Southern British Columbia and the American Pacific Northwest. Most of the American Canadian border issue was settled after the war of 1812. The British-American Convention of 1818 set most of the border as the 49th parallel. The problem came west of the continental divide in the Oregon territory.

The British wanted the area that follows the Columbia river which ran south of the 49th parallel into fur trapping areas owned by the Hudson Bay Company. 5 In 1846, after putting off an agreement for over 20 years due to negotiators being unable to reach an agreement, the Treaty of Washington

was signed between the US and Britain. It set the boundary between Canada and the United States at the 49th parallel, from the Rocky Mountains to the coast. 6 The line was later extended southward through the Gulf Islands and then followed the mid-point through the Strait of Juan de Fuca, to the Pacific Ocean.

Navigation through the Gulf Islands and the Strait of Juan de Fuca was to be ensured for both nations. 7 A major turning point in U. S. relations with Great Britain came with the signing on August 9, 1842, of the Webster-Ashburton Treaty. This treaty settled several matters between the two nations. The new British Foreign Minister, Lord Aberdeen, sent Lord Ashburton to Washington to meet with Secretary of State Daniel Webster to negotiate some boundary issues. The two were friends so negotiations went smoothly.

Together, they developed a treaty that adjusted the Maine-New Brunswick boundary, which had been the cause of the Aroostook War (1838-1839). 8 The U. S. received most of the territory as well as navigational rights on the St. John River. The treaty also settled the question of the US - Canada boundary between Lake Superior and Lake of the Woods. 9 Some movement was made toward addressing extradition concerns between the two nations. This issue became sensitive following the Caroline affair, so a formal extradition treaty was signed later.

Also part of the treaty, the US agreed to station ships off the African coast in an effort to detect Americans engaging in the slave trade. In conclusion, the British-American relations during the 1840's teetered on the brink of a third war between the two nations. The Manifest Destiny mentality that the Americans had instilled in them played a major role in their conflicts with

Britain. They were determined to expand all the way to the Pacific Ocean, and didn't allow any move by the British or any other power to shorten their border, especially in the north with the Oregon treaty.