

The War of 1812

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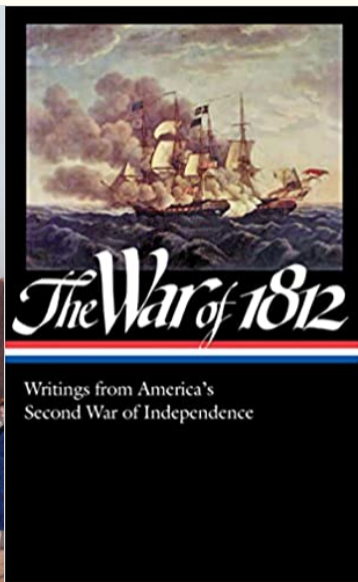
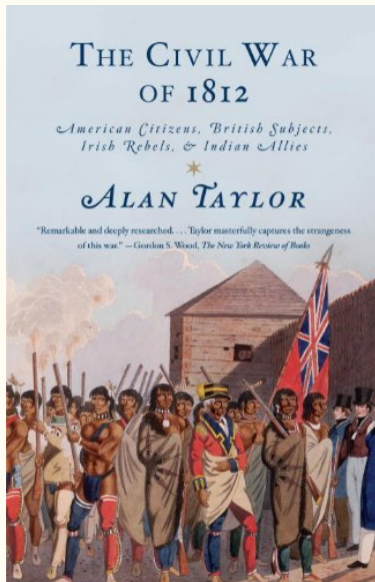
¹University of Pennsylvania



THE WAR OF 1812

A FORGOTTEN CONFLICT
BICENTENNIAL EDITION

DONALD R. HICKEY

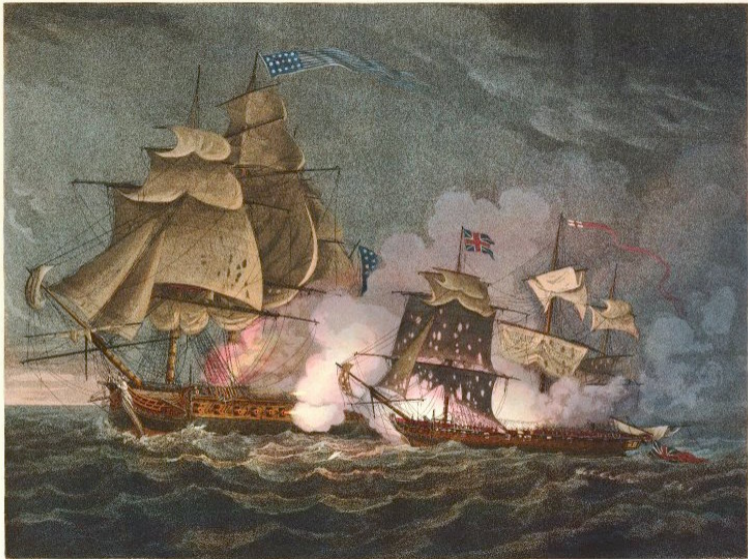


The road to war, I

- Non-intercourse legislation expires in early 1810, and Madison wants it replaced by an embargo.
- Instead, Congress restores open trade to both Great Britain and France.
- However, with a provision: If either Great Britain or France reinitiates their policy of harassing U.S. shipping, the U.S. will resume nonimportation against the other party.
- The depressed trade also depresses revenue, and the government runs a deficit.

The road to war, II

- When France hints that it would stop harassment, Madison imposes non-importation on Britain in March 1811.
- French does not follow through, but Madison keeps the non-importation policy against Great Britain.
- *Little Belt* affair on May 16, 1811.
- The Battle of Tippecanoe on November 7, 1811: William Henry Harrison of the Indiana Territory against Native American forces associated with Shawnee leader Tecumseh and his brother Tenskwatawa.



THE LITTLE BELT, SLOOP OF WAR, CAP. Bingham, acting, supporting the Honor of the British Flag, against the President United States Frigate, Commodore Rogers, May 1812.

Painted by Sir J. M. W. Turner, R.S.A. in 1812. Reproduced by permission of the Trustees of the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London.







TECUMSEH AND THE PROPHET

THE SHAWNEE
BROTHERS
WHO DEFIED
A NATION

PETER COZZENS

Author of
THE EARTH IS WEEPING



The War Congress

- Regional political tensions surface. Non-importation hurts New England shippers and New York merchants, but allowing exports served mid-Atlantic grain and flour producers and southern staples producers.
- Secessionist sentiments reappear in New England over non-importation with Great Britain.
- 12th Congress (the “War Congress”), which convened on November 4, 1811, has an entirely different attitude.
- Populated by the “war hawks” such as Henry Clay and John Calhoun who wanted to take military action against Great Britain.
- Henry Clay and John Calhoun (together with Daniel Webster) will shape much of the U.S. political and economic life during the next few decades.

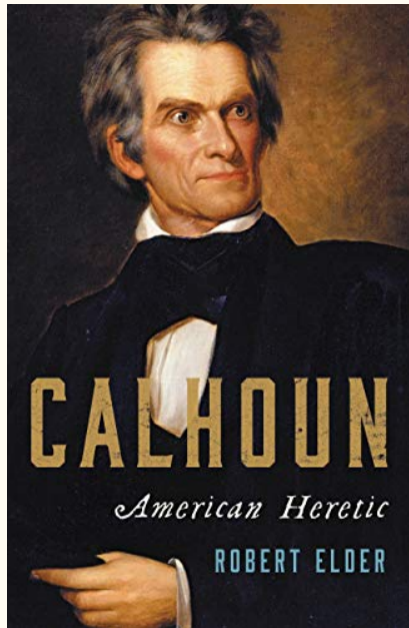
David S. Heidler AND Jeanne T. Heidler

A detailed oil painting of Henry Clay, an elderly man with thinning grey hair, looking slightly to the left. He is wearing a dark, high-collared coat over a white shirt with a high collar. The background is a dark, neutral tone.

HENRY CLAY

THE ESSENTIAL
AMERICAN

"[A] splendid biography ... Between Washington's time and Lincoln's,
it is probable that no American was more influential than Clay."
—DAVID S. BRODER, *The Washington Post*



"A historical spellbinder. . . A lively, vivid, and thoroughly researched account of a time when discord gripped the nation and wouldn't let go."

—*The Christian Science Monitor*

HEIRS OF THE FOUNDERS

HENRY CLAY,
JOHN CALHOUN AND
DANIEL WEBSTER,



THE SECOND
GENERATION OF
AMERICAN GIANTS

H. W. BRANDS

AUTHOR OF *THE FIRST AMERICAN*, PULITZER PRIZE FINALIST

The nationalist program

- Patriotic rhetoric about redeeming the nation's honor.
- Sparked by continued impressment of sailors and confiscation of goods.
- Blame the low price of southern staples on British trade policies.
- Want direct trade to the continent and West Indies.
- Growing nationalism and antagonism with British support for Native Americans on the western frontier.
- Push Britain, who is engaged in an all-out war with France, out of North America once and for all:
 1. Wrest Florida from Spain and Canada from Britain.
 2. End British control of fishing grounds off Newfoundland.

Additional points

- The war is seen as the outcome of repeated failed peaceful coercions.
- The U.S. has been in commercial warfare with Great Britain and France since 1806.
- Nationalists feel the need to assert the U.S. right to unrestricted access to foreign markets. A long-held Republican philosophy.
- “We have exhausted every means in our power to preserve the peace. We have tried negotiations until it is disgraceful to think of renewing it, and commercial restrictions have operated to our injury. War or submission alone remain.” (Wilson Cary Nicholas to Jefferson in 1810).
- War will revitalize the national character: a second war for independence.
- Also, it will unify the Democratic-Republican party. Growing resentment against the preponderance of the “Virginia dynasty.”

The situation in the U.S.

- Federalists and antiwar Democratic-Republicans argue that starting a war will not improve the price of staples: war will worsen matters.
- But they are a minority: majority thinks the U.S. will win concessions from Great Britain and gain power and land.
- Monroe (Secretary of State) assures in late 1811 that the administration will support a declaration of war by May 1812 if the situation with Britain does not improve.
- April 1812: Congress enacts a 90-day total embargo on trade with Great Britain to get U.S. ships out of harm's way.

The situation in Britain

- At the moment, the British economy is in a slump, and manufacturers believe an end to non-importation would increase the demand for goods.
- Unemployed workers in British industrial towns petition Parliament demanding a repeal of the Orders in Council.
- Given heavy taxes and the burden of war with France, they do not want another war in North America.
- More in general: Britain will conduct the war depending on its fortunes in Europe against Napoleon (and later, depending on how the peace settlement moves).
- Ultimate goal: control U.S.'s naval expansion and undermine its power in North America as much as possible.

The outbreak of the war

- June 16, Orders in Council are suspended.
- June 18, U.S. declares War: Madison's reasons for asking for a Declaration of War include impressment, seizure of ships, Orders in Council, and arming Native Americans in the West.
- June 23, new British Government provisionally repeals the orders (Prime Minister Spencer Perceval was assassinated in London on May 11).
- Great Britain learns of the U.S. declaration on July 29, 41 days after war was declared, and Madison learns of the repeal on August 12, 51 days after the repeal.
- U.S. does not halt hostilities because it does not know how Britain will react to the declaration of war.
- Respective ships bearing the news passed each other in the North Atlantic.
- Better communications would have avoided war.

Opposition to the war

- All 39 Federalists in Congress oppose the war: “Mr. Madison’s war.”
- Federalists are appalled that the U.S. would rashly start a war the country is unprepared for.
- Unimaginable that the U.S. would take the side of a French despot against a constitutional government and country that happened to be an important customer.
- Decision for war is sectional: Supported in South and West, while Northern Republicans and Federalists opposed.
- Voting is rather strange. The region suffering most from ships being seized and seamen impressed does not want war, and the West, which is little affected by trade, is the most vocal for war. Pennsylvania provides the most votes for war.
- This suggests that the economic cost of the Orders in Council was not sufficient to merit war.

The military balance

- The U.S. is woefully overmatched.
- An army of fewer than 7,000 men compared to Great Britain with 250,000 men.
- A navy of 16 ships compared to almost 1,000 in the Royal Navy.
- Also, the U.S. wants to fight a war based on republican principles. In particular, Congress does not want to incur debt, perpetual taxation, or create a military establishment.
- Gallatin's proposals for financing the war through taxes and debt are watered-down.

The lack of preparations

- The U.S. never seriously prepares for battle.
- Finally, in January 1812, Congress authorizes completing the existing 10,000 soldiers army, adding 25,000 new regular troops, 50,000 one-year volunteers with the states appointing their officers, and in April authorized the President to call out 100,000 six-month militia, run by the states in a highly decentralized way.
- No building of a navy: Langdon Cheves' proposal to build 10 new frigates is defeated.
- No general staff. Situation confuses British minister: Can a country go to war with a war department consisting of a secretary and a dozen clerks?
- No Bank of the United States to raise funds and issue debt: expensive credit.

The outcome

- War goes badly.
- Fail to annex Canada.
- By year's end, growing sentiment to end the war.
- War drags on for two years.
- It ends in a draw, with neither side accomplishing its objectives.
- U.S. economy suffers terribly.

The economic consequences of Mr. Madison, I

- To help fund the war, Congress doubles all import duties until one year after the cessation of hostilities.
- Additionally, a 10% surcharge imposed on goods arriving in foreign ships.
- Tonnage duties on foreign ships quadrupled.
- Non-importation of British goods continued, and restrictions were placed on exports to Canada.
- December 1813: a complete embargo is enacted, and U.S. ships must remain in port.
- Royal Navy blockade stretches from New England to New Orleans. Only allow smuggled goods intended for Royal Navy through. After that, it exempts New England, which is sympathetic to Great Britain.
- U.S. trade squeezed to the lowest level in history, with perhaps the exception of the Revolutionary War.

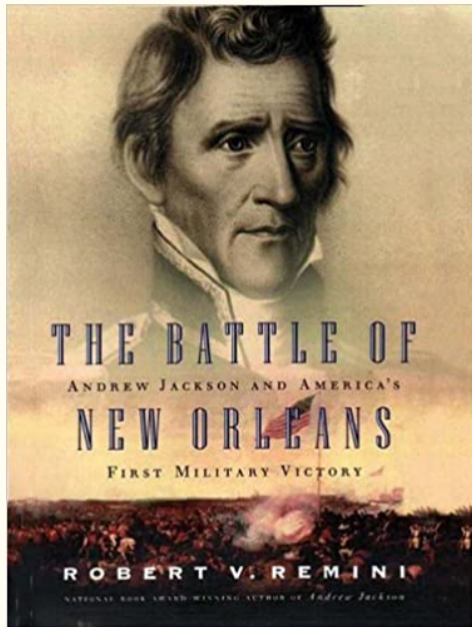
The economic consequences of Mr. Madison, II

- Between 1811-1814 exports drop by 90% (\$108m in 1807 to \$7m in 1813). Imports shrink by 80% (\$138 to \$13m).
- Customs revenue shrivels, and debt triples between 1812 and 1816.
- After British victory against Napoleon, European ports reopened to U.S. ships.
- Not much of an effect because with Napoleonic wars winding down, Britain shifts its forces to confront the U.S. and continues its blockade. Now includes New England.
- Sail up the Potomac and burns the White House and Capitol.
- At this point, both sides have no interest in prolonging the conflict.

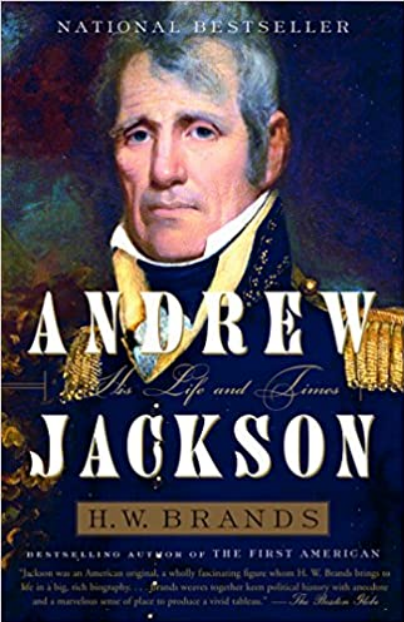


A consolation prize

- However, with British failure at Baltimore and the inability to gain access to the Great Lakes. The U.S. succeeds in getting *status quo ante bellum* at the Treaty of Ghent without mentioning impressment or neutral rights.
- In that sense, the U.S. does not get the recognition it sought. It just gets peace, and the British abandon the land captured in Maine.
- Madison already resigned to this: tells his negotiators not to insist. Just get peace.
- In terms of men lost, the war was not costly. More die in a typical battle in the Napoleonic War.
- Jackson's victory at New Orleans, after the treaty already signed, lets Americans believe they won the War.
- Country feels vindicated.



NATIONAL BESTSELLER

A detailed oil painting of Andrew Jackson, showing him from the chest up. He has grey hair, a serious expression, and is wearing a dark blue military-style coat with gold epaulettes and a white cravat. The background is dark and textured.

ANDREW
The Life and Times
JACKSON

H. W. BRANDS

BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *THE FIRST AMERICAN*

"Jackson was an American original, a wholly fascinating figure whom H. W. Brands brings to life in a big, rich biography. . . . Brands weaves together keen political history with anecdote and a marvelous sense of place to produce a vivid tableau." —*The Boston Globe*

The costs of the war

- Other costs of the War involved regional opposition of New England, where both seditious and treasonous activities occurred.
 - Bought British bonds and smuggled goods.
 - Withheld militia requests from the national Government.
 - By not overreacting and believing that most Federalists remained loyal, Madison could hold the country together.
- Talk of New England seceding. Many are rethinking the breakup with Great Britain. But recall, Massachusetts is the most rebellious of colonies.
- Britain seemed increasingly “the country of our forefathers, and the country to which we are indebted for all the institutions held dear to freemen.” Timothy Pickering
- Democratic-Republicans horrified at such thoughts. They see war with Great Britain as a second war for independence.

A final assessment

- The War of 1812 does not seriously jeopardize the U.S. experiment in limited republican government.
- Madison was cognizant of this, and it was his continued goal. He resisted relaxing the axioms of republican politics. War does not infringe on rights: not one trial for treason or one suit of libel.
- 57 counties and towns are named after Madison, the most of any U.S. president.
- Madison's administration had "acquired more glory, and established more Union than all his three predecessors..." John Adams to Jefferson in 1817.
- Firmly establishes the nationhood of the United States. Gives the beginning of a national character. People "are more American; they feel and act more as a nation." (Albert Gallatin)