

The War of 1812

MAIN IDEA

War broke out again between the United States and Britain in 1812.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

The War of 1812 confirmed American independence and strengthened nationalism.

Terms & Names

- blockade
- impressment
- embargo
- William Henry Harrison
- Tecumseh
- war hawk
- Andrew Jackson
- Treaty of Ghent
- armistice

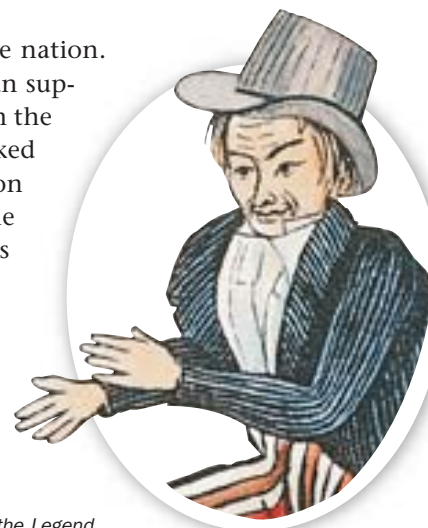
One American's Story

During the War of 1812, Samuel Wilson became a symbol for the nation. The owner of a meat-packing business in Troy, New York, he began supplying barrels of salted meat to the army, stamping the barrels with the initials "U.S.," for United States. One of Wilson's employees joked that the letters stood for "Uncle Sam," Wilson's nickname. Soon army recruits were calling themselves "Uncle Sam's soldiers." One of Wilson's great-nephews, Lucius Wilson, spoke about his famous relative in 1917.

A PERSONAL VOICE LUCIUS E. WILSON

"He was the old original Uncle Sam that gave the name to the United States. . . . [He] engaged in many enterprises, employed many hands [workers], had extensive acquaintance, was jolly, genial, generous, and known [as] and called "Uncle Sam" by everyone."

—*Uncle Sam: The Man and the Legend*



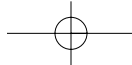
▲ One of the earliest depictions of Uncle Sam

The story took on the features of a legend. Uncle Sam came to symbolize American values of honesty and hard work. The war during which the phrase caught on was just around the corner for the United States.

The War Hawks Demand War

Jefferson's popularity soared after the Louisiana Purchase, and he won reelection in 1804. During his second term, renewed fighting between Britain and France threatened American shipping. In 1806, Napoleon decided to exclude British goods from Europe. In turn, Great Britain decided that the best way of attacking Napoleon's Europe was to **blockade** it, or seal up its ports and prevent ships from entering or leaving. By 1807, Britain had seized more than 1,000 American ships and confiscated their cargoes, and France had seized about half that number.

GRIEVANCES AGAINST BRITAIN Although both France and Britain engaged in these acts of aggression, Americans focused their anger on the British. One reason was the British policy of **impressment**, the practice of seizing Americans at sea



and “impressing,” or drafting, them into the British navy. Another reason was the *Chesapeake* incident. In June 1807, the commander of a British warship demanded the right to board and search the U.S. naval frigate *Chesapeake* for British deserters. When the U.S. captain refused, the British opened fire, killing 3 Americans and wounding 18.

MAIN IDEA

Analyzing Issues

A What was Jefferson’s reasoning behind the embargo of 1807?

Jefferson convinced Congress to declare an **embargo**, a ban on exporting products to other countries. He believed that the Embargo Act of 1807 would hurt Britain and the other European powers and force them to honor American neutrality. The embargo hurt America more than Britain, and in 1809 Congress lifted the ban on foreign trade—except with France and Britain. **A**

TECUMSEH’S CONFEDERACY Another source of trouble appeared in 1809, when General **William Henry Harrison**, the governor of the Indiana Territory, invited several Native American chiefs to Fort Wayne, Indiana, and persuaded them to sign away three million acres of tribal land to the U.S. government.

Not all chiefs gave in. Like Little Turtle and chiefs from other tribes, the Shawnee chief **Tecumseh** believed that the only way for Native Americans to protect their homeland against intruding white settlers was to form a confederacy, a united Native American nation.

Tecumseh was aided by his younger brother, known as the Prophet. Around 1805, the Prophet had started a reform movement within the Shawnee tribe to cast off all traces of the white “civilization,” including Christianity. Both the Prophet and Tecumseh warned that the Great Spirit was angry with all of the tribes who had abandoned their traditional practices and beliefs. The time had come to return to those beliefs, they urged, and to implore the aid of the Great Spirit in driving out the invaders.

More practical than his brother, Tecumseh was a brilliant strategist and a skillful diplomat. While continuing to press Harrison to withdraw from Native American land, Tecumseh began negotiations with the British for assistance in what seemed like an inevitable war with the Americans. Throughout 1810 and 1811, Tecumseh traveled throughout the Midwest and the South, trying to win followers to his confederacy. Unfortunately, many tribes had already accepted payment for their lands. Others were reluctant to give up tribal autonomy by joining the kind of confederacy that Tecumseh proposed.

THE WAR HAWKS In November 1811, while Tecumseh was absent, his brother led the Shawnee in an attack on Harrison and his troops. Harrison struck back. On the banks of the Tippecanoe river, he burned the Shawnee capital known as Prophetstown to the ground. Harrison’s victory at what came to be known as the Battle of Tippecanoe made him a national hero, but his troops suffered heavy losses. When it was discovered that the Native American confederacy was using arms from British Canada, a group of young congressmen from the South and the West known as the **war hawks** called for war against Britain. Led by Senator John C. Calhoun of South Carolina and Henry Clay of Kentucky, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the war hawks rallied behind their motto: “On to Canada!” **B**

MAIN IDEA

Analyzing Motives

B Why did the war hawks call for the war with Britain?



“The Great Spirit gave this great land to his red children.”

TECUMSEH



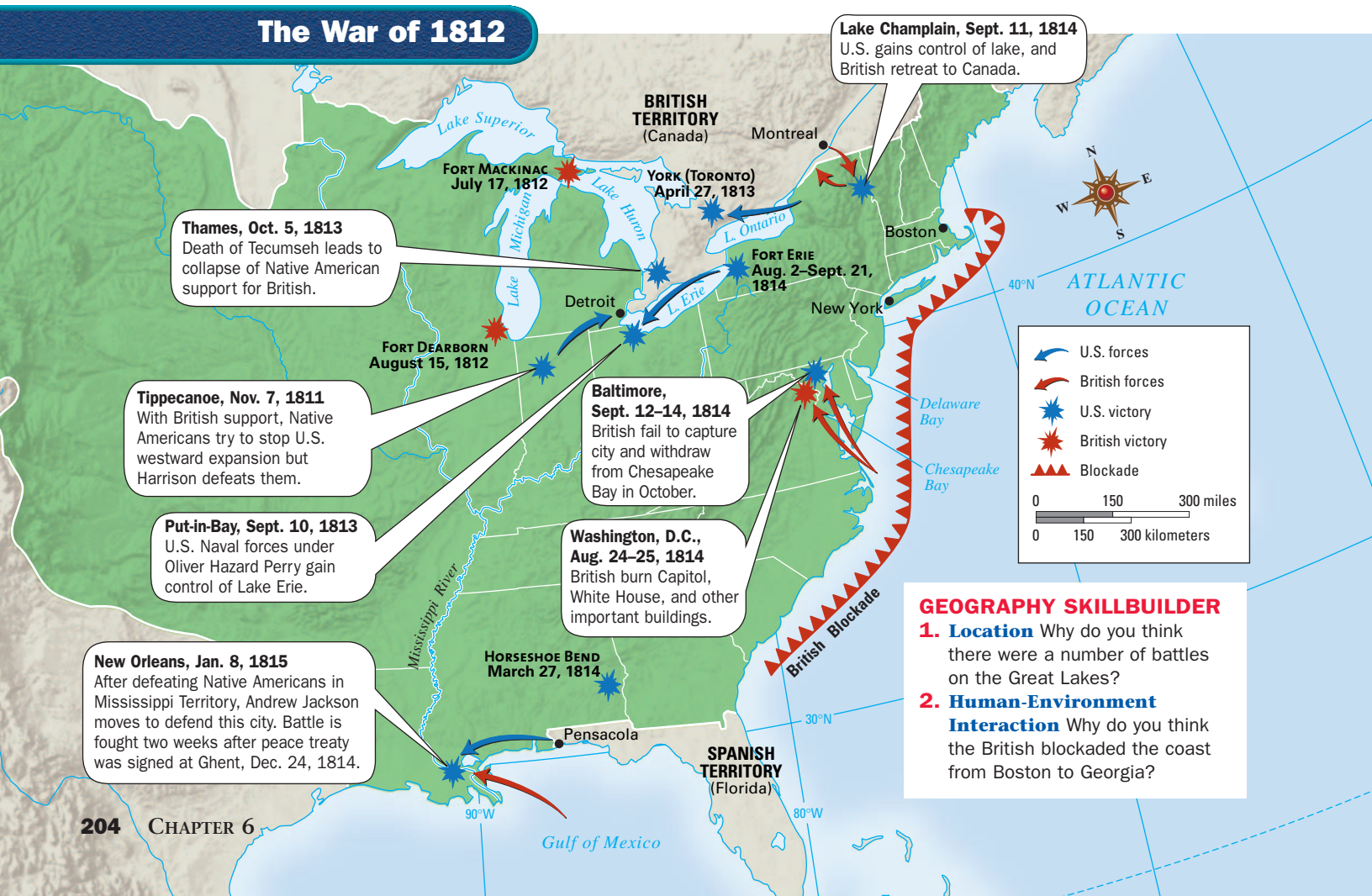
The War Brings Mixed Results

In the election of 1808, another Virginia Democratic-Republican—James Madison—coasted to victory against a weak Federalist opponent, Charles C. Pinckney. By the spring of 1812, President Madison had decided to go to war against Britain. Madison believed that Britain was trying to strangle American trade and cripple the American economy. Congress approved the war declaration in early June.

THE WAR IN CANADA Declaring war was one thing—but fighting it was another. The American military was unprepared for war. Detroit was captured by the British shortly after war was declared and the Americans suffered numerous setbacks, including a failed attempt to take Montreal. The following year, a fleet commanded by Oliver Hazard Perry defeated a British fleet on Lake Erie, and American soldiers retook Detroit and won several battles. Different Native American groups allied with British or U.S. forces, depending on relationships they had developed before the war. Tecumseh, like many Native Americans, had fought for the British with the hopes of continuing British aid in stopping U.S. expansion. The Shawnee leader was killed at the Battle of the Thames in 1813.

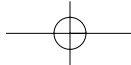
THE WAR AT SEA The war was an opportunity for the relatively young U.S. Navy to test its ability. Badly outnumbered with only 16 ships, the United States was aided by its three 44-gun frigates, or warships, the *President*, the *United States*, and the *Constitution*. Known for their speed and ability to sail close to enemy vessels and open fire, these ships sailed alone. Each scored victories against British vessels.

However, the superior numbers of the British navy began to tell. In November of 1812, the British government ordered a blockade of the Chesapeake and Delaware bays (see the map below). As the war progressed and U.S. frigates scored



GEOGRAPHY SKILLBUILDER

- 1. Location** Why do you think there were a number of battles on the Great Lakes?
- 2. Human-Environment Interaction** Why do you think the British blockaded the coast from Boston to Georgia?



more victories against British ships, the blockade was extended along the east coast. By the end of 1813, most American ships were bottled up in port.

BRITISH BURN THE WHITE HOUSE By 1814, the British were raiding and burning towns all along the Atlantic coast. The redcoats brushed aside some hastily assembled American troops and entered Washington, D.C. In retaliation for the U.S. victory at the Battle of York, the capital of Upper Canada, in which U.S. forces burned the governor's mansion and the legislative assembly buildings, the British burned the Capitol, the White House, and other public buildings. On August 24, Madison and other federal officials had to flee from their own capital.

THE BATTLE OF NEW ORLEANS At the same time, a general from Tennessee named **Andrew Jackson** was winning a series of battles that gained him national fame. After a six months' campaign involving four battles, Jackson defeated Native Americans of the Creek tribe at the battle of Horseshoe Bend in March of 1814. The Creeks had earlier been victorious at the battle of Fort Mims in which all but 36 of the fort's 553 inhabitants were killed. Jackson's victory at Horseshoe Bend destroyed the military power of Native Americans in the south.

Ironically, Jackson's greatest victory came after the war was over. On January 8, 1815, Jackson's troops defeated a superior British force at the Battle of New Orleans. Hundreds of British troops died, while just a handful of Americans lost their lives.

THE TREATY OF GHENT Unknown to Jackson, British and American diplomats had already signed a peace agreement. The **Treaty of Ghent**, signed on Christmas Eve 1814, declared an **armistice**, or end to the fighting. Although it did not address the issues of impressment or neutral shipping rights, Americans were eager for peace and welcomed the treaty.

Within a few years, the United States and Great Britain were able to reach agreement on many of the issues left open at Ghent. In 1815, a commercial treaty reopened trade between the two countries. In 1817, the Rush-Bagot agreement limited the number of warships on the Great Lakes. In 1818, a British-American commission set the northern boundary of the Louisiana Territory at the 49th parallel as far west as the Rocky Mountains. The two nations then agreed to a ten-year joint occupation of the Oregon Territory. But at home, Americans were unable to resolve differences that had already begun to divide the nation.

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ASSESSMENT

1. TERMS & NAMES For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.

- blockade
- impressment
- embargo

- William Henry Harrison
- Tecumseh

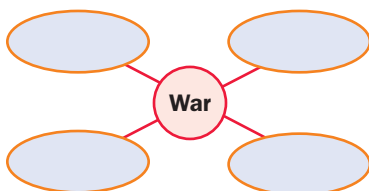
- war hawk
- Andrew Jackson

- Treaty of Ghent
- armistice

MAIN IDEA

2. TAKING NOTES

In the web below, show the reasons why the war hawks wanted war with Great Britain.



CRITICAL THINKING

3. EVALUATING

What was the most important achievement of the U.S. in this period? **Think About:**

- relations between the U.S. and Britain
- the results of the war

4. ANALYZING

Even though it was fought after an armistice had been signed, why was the Battle of New Orleans an important victory for the Americans?

5. EVALUATING

Do you think that Tecumseh's confederacy helped or hurt the cause of Native Americans? **Think About:**

- the loss of Native American lands
- the reluctance of certain tribes to join the confederacy
- Tecumseh's role in the War of 1812