

# The War of 1812

## One American's Story

From 1801 to 1805, the United States was at war with Tripoli, a state on the Barbary coast of North Africa. The war began because of attacks on American merchant ships by Barbary pirates. The United States had been paying protection money, or **tribute**, but the pasha (ruler) of Tripoli wanted more money.

In February 1804, President Thomas Jefferson sent U.S. Navy Lieutenant Stephen Decatur to destroy the U.S. ship *Philadelphia*, which was in the hands of Barbary pirates. Decatur set fire to the *Philadelphia* and then escaped under enemy fire. Later, he issued this rallying cry.

### PRIMARY SOURCE

“Our country! In her [relationships] with foreign nations may she always be in the right; but our country, right or wrong.”

—Stephen Decatur, 1816

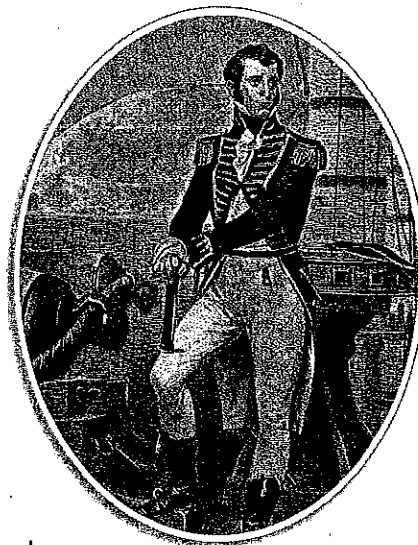
The conflict with Tripoli showed how hard it was for the United States to stay out of foreign affairs while its citizens were involved in overseas trade.

## The Path to War

**KEY QUESTION** What conflicts with other nations did the United States have in the early 1800s?

Jefferson wanted the United States to seek the friendship of all nations but have “entangling alliances with none.” However, his desire to keep the United States out of conflict with other nations was doomed from the start. American merchants were engaged in trade all over the world. Besides, the United States had little control over the actions of foreign powers.

**Problems with France and England** War broke out between France and Great Britain in 1803. The United States tried to stay out of the war. But many American trading ships made stops in Europe. The British captured any ship bound for France, and the French stopped all ships bound for Britain.



Stephen Decatur was a hero of the war between the United States and the North African state of Tripoli.

Another conflict grew out of Britain's shortage of sailors. Life in the British navy was so bad at the time that few British citizens chose to join—and many deserted. To fill its need for sailors, Britain used the policy of **impressment**, or kidnapping, of American merchant sailors. Between 1803 and 1812, the British impressed about 6,000 Americans to work on British ships.

**No More Trade** Instead of declaring war, Jefferson asked Congress to pass legislation that would stop all foreign trade. The president described his policy as "peaceable coercion." Coercion means forcing someone to act in a certain way by pressure or threats. Jefferson believed that the legislation would prevent further bloodshed.

In December, Congress passed the **Embargo Act of 1807**, which forbade American ships from sailing to foreign ports. The act also closed American ports to British ships. The policy harmed the United States more than it harmed France or Britain. American farmers lost key markets for their products. Shippers lost income, and many chose to violate the embargo by making false claims about where they were going.

The embargo became an issue in the election of 1808, which James Madison won. By then, Congress had repealed the act. Madison's solution to the problem was a law that allowed merchants to trade with any country except France and Britain. Trade with them would resume when they agreed to respect U.S. ships. This law was no more effective than the embargo.

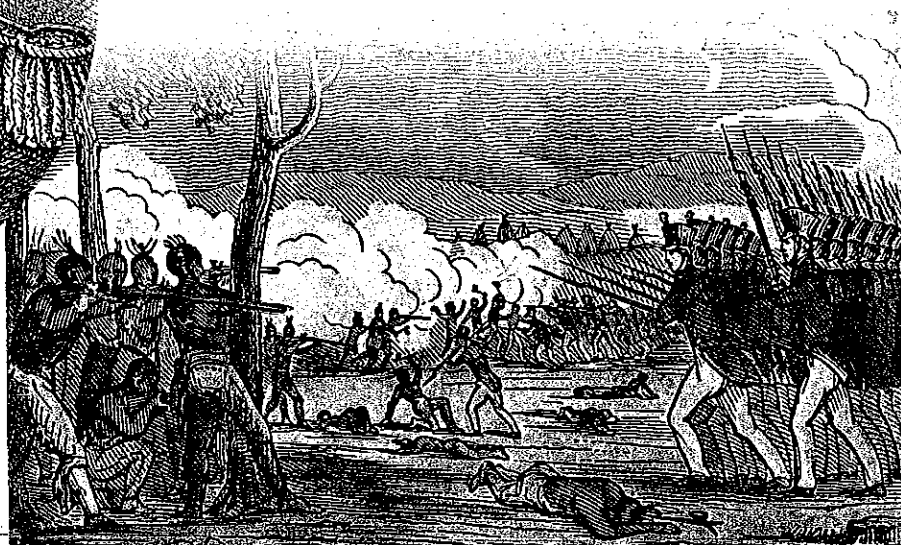
**Tecumseh and Native American Unity** British interference with American shipping and impressment of U.S. citizens made Americans angry. Many also believed the British were trying to stop American expansion in the Northwest by stirring up Native American resistance to frontier settlements.

Since the Battle of Fallen Timbers in 1794, Native Americans had continued to lose their land to white settlers. **Tecumseh**, a Shawnee chief, vowed to stop this. He believed that Native American tribes had to unite in order to protect their land. Events in 1809 proved him right. That September, William Henry Harrison, governor of the Indiana Territory, signed the Treaty of Fort Wayne with chiefs of the Miami, Delaware, and Potawatomi tribes. They agreed to sell more than three million acres of land. But Tecumseh declared the treaty void. He believed that the sale could go through only with the agreement of all tribes, not just some.

(below right) The Shawnee were defeated at the Battle of Tippecanoe. How did the Battle of Tippecanoe affect Tecumseh's hopes for unity?



Chief Tecumseh



Many Native Americans did answer Tecumseh's call for unity. But he was too late. In late 1811, while Tecumseh was away recruiting for his alliance, Harrison's forces defeated the Shawnee at the Battle of Tippecanoe. Following this defeat, Tecumseh sided with the British in Canada. Tecumseh's welcome in Canada increased anti-British feelings in the West.

**SUMMARIZE** Explain what conflicts with other nations the United States had in the early 1800s.

## The War of 1812

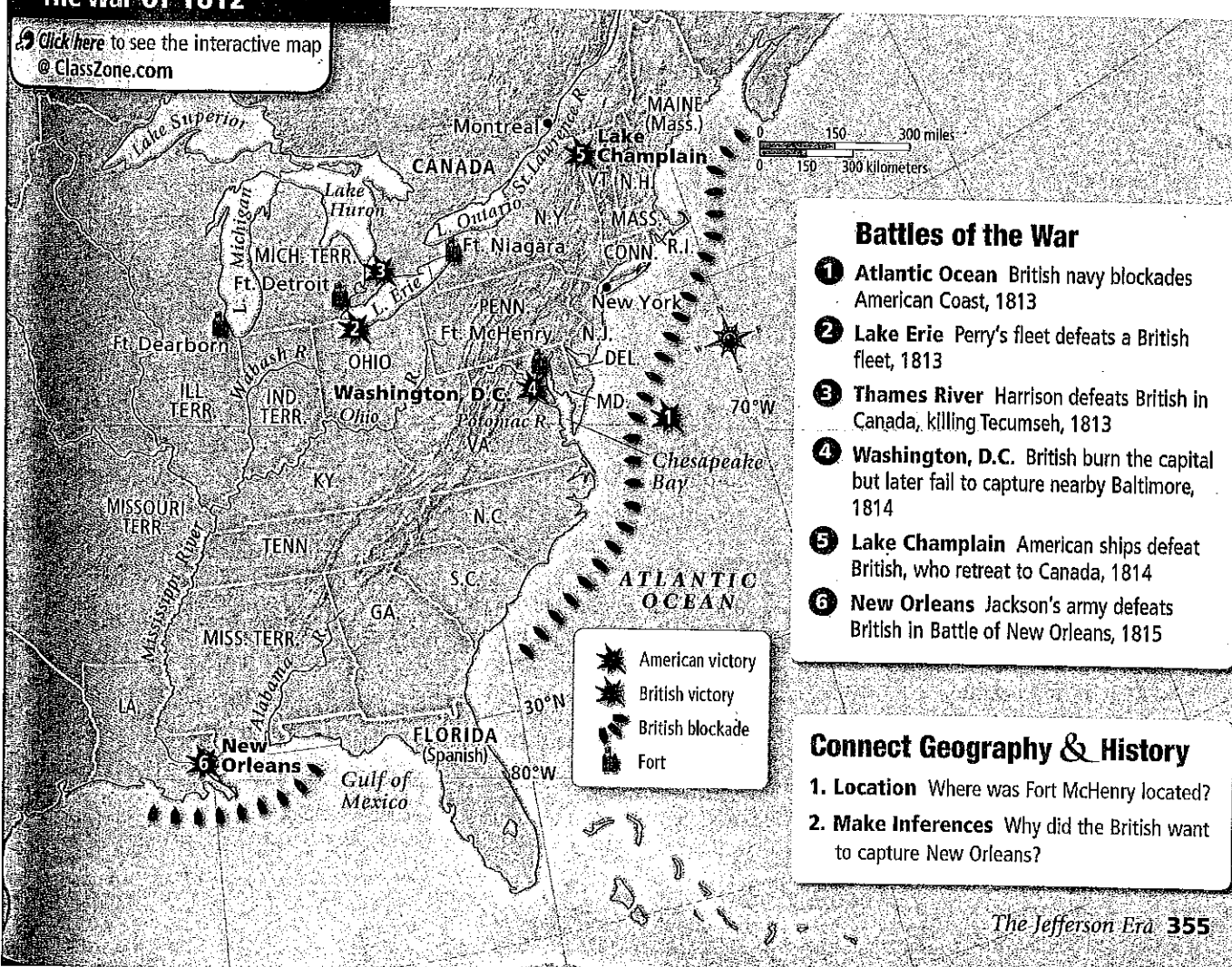
**KEY QUESTION** What were the effects of the War of 1812?

By 1812, more and more Americans were calling for war against Britain for its role in helping Native Americans and its policy on the high seas. Those who supported war were called **war hawks**. Many of them came from the western part of the country. Those in the Northeast, which had business ties with Britain, were less eager for war. The American government wanted all Americans to feel that their country could protect them. Finally on June 18, 1812, President James Madison asked Congress to declare war on Britain.

### Animated GEOGRAPHY

#### The War of 1812

Click here to see the interactive map @ ClassZone.com



#### Battles of the War

- 1 **Atlantic Ocean** British navy blockades American Coast, 1813
- 2 **Lake Erie** Perry's fleet defeats a British fleet, 1813
- 3 **Thames River** Harrison defeats British in Canada, killing Tecumseh, 1813
- 4 **Washington, D.C.** British burn the capital but later fail to capture nearby Baltimore, 1814
- 5 **Lake Champlain** American ships defeat British, who retreat to Canada, 1814
- 6 **New Orleans** Jackson's army defeats British in Battle of New Orleans, 1815

#### Connect Geography & History

1. **Location** Where was Fort McHenry located?
2. **Make Inferences** Why did the British want to capture New Orleans?

**The First Phase of the War** The War of 1812 had two main phases. From 1812 to 1814, Britain concentrated on its war with France. It spent little energy on its conflict in North America, although it did send ships to blockade the American coast.

The American military was weak at the beginning of the war. Democratic-Republicans had reduced the size of the American armed forces. The U.S. Navy had only 16 warships. In spite of its small size, the U.S. Navy rose to the challenge. Ships such as the *Constitution* and the *United States* won stirring victories that boosted American confidence.

**Triumph on Lake Erie** The most important U.S. naval victory took place on Lake Erie. In September 1813, a small British force on the lake set out to attack a new fleet of American ships. Commodore **Oliver Hazard Perry**, who had taken charge of the fleet, sailed out to meet the enemy. Perry's ship, the *Lawrence*, flew a banner reading, "Don't give up the ship."

For two hours, the British and Americans exchanged cannon shots. Perry's ship was demolished and the guns put out of action. Under British fire, Perry grabbed the banner as he and four companions escaped and rowed to another ship. Commanding the second ship, Perry soon forced the British to surrender. In a message to General William Henry Harrison, commander



## CONNECT to the Essential Question

**How did the events of the Jefferson Era strengthen the nation?**

EVENT	EFFECTS
<p>1801 1804</p> <p>Jefferson takes office; Democratic-Republicans in power</p> <p>Jefferson purchases Louisiana Territory</p> <p>Lewis and Clark expedition charts important information about the West</p>	<p>Many Federalist policies end, though Federalists retain control of Judiciary</p> <p>Doubles size of the United States</p> <p>Western settlement fever begins</p>
<p>1807 1812</p> <p>Congress passes Embargo Act of 1807</p> <p>Shawnee defeated at the Battle of Tippecanoe</p> <p>Congress declares war on Britain</p>	<p>American shipping and trade suffer</p> <p>Shawnee chief Tecumseh sides with British in Canada</p> <p>Britain and the United States are at war</p>
<p>1814 1815</p> <p>British defeat Napoleon, turn focus to war with the United States</p> <p>Treaty of Ghent is signed</p> <p>At Battle of New Orleans, Jackson's forces defeat British</p>	<p>British burn Capitol building, White House; attack Fort McHenry</p> <p>War ends, but news reaches the United States too late to prevent further hostilities</p> <p>Increases American patriotism; weakens Native American resistance; strengthens American manufacturing</p>



**CRITICAL THINKING Synthesize** How would you describe the characteristics of the Jefferson Era?

of the Army of the Northwest, Perry wrote: "We have met the enemy and they are ours."

After General Harrison received Perry's note, he set out to attack the British. But when Harrison transported his army across Lake Erie to Detroit, he discovered that the British already had retreated into Canada. Harrison pursued the British and defeated their forces at the Battle of the Thames in October 1813. This American victory put an end to the British threat to the Northwest—and took the life of Tecumseh, who died in the battle, fighting for the British.

**The Second Phase of the War** The second phase of the War of 1812 began after the British defeated Napoleon in Europe in April 1814. Britain's army and navy were then free to attack the United States. In August 1814, President Madison and other officials fled Washington, D.C., as British forces neared the nation's capitol. Dolley Madison, the president's wife, stayed behind to rescue important objects from the White House. (See *History Through Art* at right.) She barely escaped before the British burned the White House and the Capitol building. The British then attacked Fort McHenry at Baltimore.

The commander of Fort McHenry had earlier requested a flag "so large that the British will have no difficulty in seeing it." Detained on a British ship, a Washington lawyer named Francis Scott Key watched the all-night battle. At dawn, Key saw that the flag was still flying. He expressed his pride in a poem that is now known as "The Star-Spangled Banner." It became the American national anthem.

Meanwhile, in the North, the British sent a force from Canada across Lake Champlain. Its goal was to push south and cut off New England. The plan failed when the American fleet defeated the British in the Battle of Lake Champlain in September 1814.

**The Battle of New Orleans** In the South, the British began to move against the strategically located port of New Orleans, in Louisiana. In December 1814, dozens of ships carrying some 7,500 British troops approached the coastline of Louisiana. To defend themselves, the Americans patched together an army under the



### History through Art

#### George Washington, by Gilbert Stuart

As British troops closed in on Washington, D.C., in August 1814, most civilians fled the city. Even the 100 troops guarding the White House and First Lady Dolley Madison left. But Madison herself refused to leave until she had rescued one treasure: this full-length portrait of George Washington by renowned painter Gilbert Stuart. Madison was determined to save the painting or destroy it herself rather than let the British ruin it. When newly elected president James Monroe moved into the rebuilt White House in 1817, he restored this symbol of America to its rightful place.

**CRITICAL VIEWING** How does the artist show that Washington is an important person?

## Connecting History

### Leadership

Jackson's heroism at New Orleans helped him to win the presidency in 1828. A self-made man who was known for his toughness, Jackson considered himself a champion of the "common people." You will learn about his presidency in Chapter 12.


command of General Andrew Jackson. The British attacked Jackson's forces on January 8, 1815. American riflemen, who had protected themselves by building defenses out of earth, shot at advancing British troops. It was a great victory for Jackson. American casualties totaled 71, compared to Britain's 2,000.

The Battle of New Orleans made Jackson a hero. Nevertheless, the battle itself did not affect the course of the war. Slow mails from Europe had delayed news of the Treaty of Ghent, which had already ended the war. British and American diplomats had signed this treaty two weeks earlier. Americans, eager for an end to the fighting, welcomed the treaty.

**The Legacy of the War** The Treaty of Ghent showed that the War of 1812 had no clear winner. No territory changed hands, and trade disputes were left unresolved. Neither side made any significant gains. Still, the war had important consequences for America.

First, heroic exploits of men such as Jackson and Perry increased American patriotism. Second, the war broke the strength of Native Americans, who had sided with the British. Native American resistance was significantly weakened, especially in the South. Finally, when war interrupted trade, Americans were forced to make many of the goods they had previously imported. This encouraged the growth of American manufacturing.

The American victory also increased optimism about the nation's future. The United States had defended itself against one of the mightiest military powers of the era. For perhaps the first time, many Americans believed that their young nation would survive and prosper.

 **SYNTHESIZE** Explain how the War of 1812 led to changes in America.

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## Section Assessment



### ONLINE QUIZ

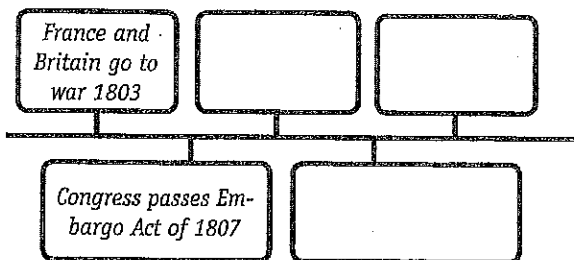
For test practice, go to  
Interactive Review @ [ClassZone.com](http://ClassZone.com)

### TERMS & NAMES

1. Explain the importance of
  - impressment
  - war hawk
  - Embargo Act of 1807
  - Oliver Hazard Perry
  - Tecumseh

### USING YOUR READING NOTES

2. **Sequence Events** Complete the diagram you started at the beginning of this section.



### KEY IDEAS

3. How did foreign powers affect American shipping?
4. Why did many Americans in the western part of the country support the war?

### CRITICAL THINKING

5. **Evaluate** How did Jefferson use trade as a weapon prior to the start of the war?
6. **Causes and Effects** What effects did Native American unity have on the United States?
7. **Connect @ Today** How do you think overseas trade affects America's relations with other nations today?
8. **Writing Poem** Use the Internet to research the U.S.S. *Constitution*. Write a poem or speech to commemorate one of its victories.