Causes Consequences and Historical Legacy of the War of 1812

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War of 1812 and the Disputed Origins of Anglo-American Conflict

The War of 1812 was a well-known historical event not only in the United States and Great Britain, the countries involved, but also all over the world. Its causes, exact ultimate effects, and justification have all been subjects of debate among historians and political commentators over the past century (Spencer Tucker & Fredriksen, 2012). The aim of this paper specifically is to study the causes of the war, the events leading up to its occurrence, why the United States joined the war attacking only Britain, and the role the Republican congressmen played in the initiation and continuation of the war (Spencer Tucker & Fredriksen, 2012).

The war was a conflict involving the United States, Britain, and their allies between the years 1812 and 1815, lasting exactly two years and eight months. It was majorly fought in eastern and central North America, as well as the Pacific and Atlantic oceans, and culminated in the Treaty of Ghent, which finally signaled the end of the war (Spencer Tucker & Fredriksen, 2012). After the signing of the treaty, the initial status quo—the peace and good rapport between the two countries—returned to normalcy. However, what actually caused the war, as stated earlier, has been debated for quite a long time now (Spencer Tucker & Fredriksen, 2012).

One of the major causes of the war is believed to have been the desire of the American citizenry to uphold the honor of their nation and the feeling that this was going to be their second war of independence. This was because they felt that such an event as the Chesapeake-Leopard Affair was insulting to them. The affair involved two warships, the American Chesapeake and the British HMS Leopard, on the 22nd day of June 1807 (Spencer Tucker & Fredriksen, 2012), when the British ship chased after the American ship, forcefully boarded it, and began to search for deserters who had left the Royal Navy (Spencer Tucker & Fredriksen, 2012). The American ship had been caught unaware and was therefore vulnerable, so its commander had to surrender it to the British commander. This event was annoying to the American citizenry, and they saw it as belittling and another form of colonialism. It served as a prerequisite to a motivation for war five years later.

The Little Belt Affair and the Growth of Diplomatic

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Hostility

On the part of the British, the Little Belt affair was an insult and hence caused them to hold a grudge against the Americans. The affair involved two ships: the US frigate USS President, led by Captain John Rodgers, and the British HMS Little Belt, led by Captain Arthur Bingham, in which Rodgers attacked Bingham and later claimed it was accidental (Spencer Tucker & Fredriksen, 2012). The resulting conflicting accounts of what exactly led to the shoot-out between the two warships led to a cold relationship between the United States and the United Kingdom, the latter claiming the attack was intentional and was an insult and, therefore, an indication of the former wanting trouble.

Besides the warship provocations, other factors arose, causing more trouble between the two countries. In 1807, the United Kingdom initiated a number of trade sanctions through the Orders in Council to restrict free trade with France (Spencer Tucker & Fredriksen, 2012). The United States saw these restrictions as illegal and, therefore, challenged them under international law. The attempt by America to challenge the British restriction was viewed by the British as a threat to their maritime supremacy and, therefore, did not augur well with them, further causing a rift that could erupt into war in the future.

The Americans, for this reason, found justification to fight the Britons and no reason at all for initiating war against the French. Besides, all the while, the French had never found themselves in conflict with the United States. This was unlike Britain, which had, besides having colonized the Americans, had disputes over the warship attacks (Spencer Tucker & Fredriksen, 2012).

British Support for Native Resistance and the Road to War

The British support for the Native American wars on the Union was another catalyst for the future war. The Native Americans, particularly the Red Indians, wanted to establish their states in the northwest since the Americans apparently wanted all the land for themselves. As a result, they sought help from the British, who, finding it beneficial to themselves, financed the Indians. The Britons sought to gain the solidarity and loyalty of the Indians, hoping to use them as wartime allies in case war broke out between the Britons and Americans (Spencer Tucker & Fredriksen, 2012). As such, the Britons, knowing that only weapons were favorable in the eyes of the Indians, supplied them with plenty. This annoyed the Americans, and they, therefore, found it necessary to attack the Britons, who were their collateral enemies by default (Spencer Tucker & Fredriksen, 2012).

The Republican congressmen had quite an influence on the commencement and continuation of the war. Notable among the Republican congressmen were such men as Richard Johnson, John Harper, and Peter Porter, who greatly desired the expulsion of the British from American soil and the conjoining of Canada to the United States by any means possible. These legislators were part of the

‘war hawks’ in the United States that pushed for the signing of the declaration of war into law. It was after this signing that war was declared, showing what influence the Republican congressmen had in the commencement of the war.

The War of 1812 between the Americans and the British has been an interesting topic among historians, the most interesting issue being the actual cause of the war. However, most historians agree that the main cause of the whole problem was the desire for each country to show it was more powerful than the other, as was the case of the Chesapeake-Leopard affair and the Little Belt affair, which escalated into both sides fighting to end contempt and to flex war muscles (Spencer Tucker & Fredriksen, 2012). The American Republican congressmen, however, were the people responsible for officially starting the war by signing the declaration of war into law.

References

Spencer Tucker; James R. Arnold; Roberta Wiener; Paul G. Pierpaoli; John C. Fredriksen (2012). *The Encyclopedia of the War of 1812: A Political, Social, and Military History.* ISBN 968-1-85109-956-6.