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Nationalism and the Pressures of War in 1812

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Nationalism and the Pressures of War in 1812

Cover Page Footnote

The War of 1812 is likely one of the least understood and most forgettable wars of the nineteenth century, especially of those which included at least one major power. “Mr. Madison’s War”, as it is ironically called, is at first glance a meaningless conflict from which neither party benefitted. The treaty of Ghent clearly records that the war ended in a draw; the United States (who declared war) did not reach a trade agreement with Great Britain, nor did they gain any land. Great Britain failed to prevent further commercial intercourse between France and the United States, however, it could be argued that they benefitted by successfully defending their colonies in Canada. Upon further examination, however, analysis of the war has much to offer: it is one notable exception to several basic theories of international politics, such as perpetual peace of republics, and that indecisive wars lead to further conflict. Oddly enough, though the war provided no material benefits, it did provide a moral victory for the young republic; in the end, they had gone to war against one of the world’s foremost powers (and previous proprietor of the American colonies) and came out little worse for the wear—which Americans believed signified the legitimacy of their independence. The United States also learned from their failures during the course of the war. They developed a better understanding of methods of expansion, the importance of a standing army, and how to make strategic decisions (including the importance of ranks, selection of Generals, and defensive versus offensive battle). Above all, the young nation learned how (and how not) to conduct its foreign affairs preceding and during wartime.

The United States won its independence from Great Britain in 1783; in the short time thereafter they had drafted and implemented two national ruling charters (the Articles of Confederation and the Constitution), and were still settling into the concepts of republican domestic politics when they declared war on the single greatest naval power (and likely overall power) in the world—again. The Second War of Independence, as it is sometimes called, was practically impossible for the United States to win. Not only did America have no standing army, a president (Madison) with no experience in war, a damaged economy from their previous trading diplomatic practices, and a discordant congress-- also “the forces available to the two powers were extremely lopsided. The U.S. navy had just 16 ships to the Royal Navy’s 400”.¹ Based on statistics alone, it was nonsensical for the United States to declare war on Britain-- but as the adage goes, those who have the motive lack the means. Though a preemptive war with such a strong nation is on the verge of suicidal, Americans found themselves in a position where the options were ‘attack and perhaps die, or slowly asphyxiate under the British stranglehold on our economy’. America was at the end of its patience with the British government; she had exhausted her diplomatic options to no avail, and was suffering from the consequences of her belligerence, specifically not ceding to Britain the right to search their ships and charge a duty for exporting to other countries.² In addition, a ‘new breed’ of representative was being voted into congress; war hawks in the Democratic - Republican Party believed that a war with Britain was vital in the sustained independence of the United States. In the midst of this swirl of domestic concern stood James Madison, the mild-mannered legislator and father of the Constitution.

¹Careless, James. "British Navy Played a Central Role in the War of 1812." National Post. October 11, 2012. <http://news.nationalpost.com/2012/11/10/british-navy-played-a-central-role-in-the-war-of-1812/> (accessed December 3, 2013).

² Brown, Roger H. *The Republic in Peril: 1812*. United States of America: Columbia University Press, 1964.

James Madison was well versed in the legal responsibilities and expectations of the presidency; after all he was a major player in the drafting of the Constitution. He also was closely involved in the administrations of the previous three presidents. Notably, he served as Jefferson's Secretary of State both terms, which allowed him the opportunity to get an in-depth understanding of the pre-war Anglo-American discourse. His relationship to Jefferson was close; in fact, together they founded the Democratic- Republican (or as it is commonly known Republican) party as the ideological opposition to the Hamiltonian Federalists.³ He and Jefferson, among many of their generation, had a fear of centralized power (including a national standing army and bank) and especially of monarchy, which was a foundational basis of their party. His relationship with Jefferson and the following he had gained through the Republican Party gave him the advantage to be Jefferson's obvious successor, though he was not necessarily the best-suited leader during this time period. Though there is no doubt of his intelligence, Madison lacked the decisive fervor of a good war-time leader. "Madison's sensitive respect for the opinions, motives, and feelings of others was so much a part of the man that few who knew him- no matter in what capacity—failed to comment on it".⁴ This personality trait made him extremely moldable by his party and the public opinion which, combined with his fear of a powerful executive, was troublesome for a young nation on the brink of war.

James David Barber's book "The Presidential Character: Predicting Performance in the White House" categorizes presidents based on their personality traits and how these will affect the decisions and policies they implement during their presidency. There are four categories in which presidents can be classified: Passive Negative, Active Negative, Active Positive, and finally Passive Positive. Positive and negative refer to the way that president feels about his position in office and active or passive describes the amount of effort that he exerts in office.⁵ James Madison is adeptly described by Barber's concept of the "Passive Positive" President:

"This is the receptive, compliant, other-directed character whose life is a search for affection as a reward for being agreeable and cooperative rather than personally assertive. The contradiction is between low self-esteem (on grounds of being unlovable, unattractive) and a superficial optimism. A hopeful attitude helps dispel doubt and elicits encouragement from others. Passive-positive types help soften the harsh edges of politics. But their dependence and the fragility of their hopes and enjoyments make disappointment in politics likely."⁶

Using this description as a guide for a first-image analysis of Madison's effect on politics, one could identify his disposition as a major factor in the cause for war. Ironically, though typically leaders with neurosis and aggression are perceived as most dangerous to a nation, Madison's introverted and loyal nature proved to be equally so for America in 1812.

From the outset of his first term, Madison was already at a disadvantage due to the mess of navigation laws, embargos, and diplomatic breakdowns leftover from Jefferson's presidency. Anglo- American relations, which were never ideal, had been strained further by America's

³ Wills, Garry. James Madison. New York: Times Books, 2002.

⁴ McCoy, Drew R. The Last of the Fathers: James Madison and the Republican Legacy. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

⁵ Barber, James David. The Presidential Character. Prentice-Hall inc., 1985.

⁶ Barber, James David. The Presidential Character. Prentice-Hall inc., 1985.

claim to neutrality in the Napoleonic wars. Agricultural raw-good exports were essential to the economy of the United States, as were imports of manufactured goods from other nations since its earliest establishments. This meant that trade relations with Spain, France, and Great Britain needed to stay healthy for America to thrive. However, after the British naval victory at Trafalgar, their grip on the Atlantic tightened significantly.⁷ Britain wished to maintain as much control over the seas as possible, including civilian neutral trade. Most offensively, British ships (even in American harbors) were boarding American shipping vessels searching for deserters and seizing these soldiers. “Though a slap at American sovereignty, the recovery of deserters alone might have been tolerable, but careless British officers dragged many native-born, as well as naturalized, American into the Royal Navy (a common newspaper estimate was six thousand by 1806).”⁸ Britain was also threatened by any commercial intercourse between America and other European nations, seeing it as a violation of neutrality. As the lone-standing adversary to powerful France, Britain was cautious to allow any favorable circumstances for their enemy. In addition, Napoleon clearly had the advantage of land after the battle of Austerlitz⁹ and Britain the advantage at sea, leaving them at a strategic stalemate—economic warfare was Britain’s last resort.¹⁰ The Rule of the War of 1756 was reapplied to American merchants, denying them the right to participate in any trade that was not open to them during peace-time.¹¹ Relations continued to progressively decay when in 1805, as a loophole to the Rule of the War of 1756, U.S. trading vessels were making “broken voyages” in which they ported and paid duties in the United States between picking up an item in one nation and delivering it to another.¹² One ship, the *Essex*, was intercepted by British officials after it departed in America while on route between Spain and Cuba; this was condemned as a violation of the rule, and prompted *The Essex Decision*, the first in a series of harsh resolutions which made war seem inevitable for the United States.

In 1807, the British stranglehold on the seas reached its peak. In January, an Order in Council was declared which blockaded the entirety of Europe, and neutral ships were required to port first in Britain to be searched and pay duties; any non-British ship in violation was liable to have the goods on board confiscated by the British navy.¹³ It should also be noted that the French were equally harsh upon the United States, especially with its enactment of the Milan Decrees, “Napoleon had been responsible for 469 seizures”¹⁴, “but Americans directed most of their wrath at Britain. Most French seizures occurred in French ports, while Britain interfered with our commerce on the high seas in apparent violation of international law”.¹⁵ In addition, America was generally much more bitter toward Great Britain due to their past relations.

Later that year, a catastrophe took place that pushed American patience past its threshold. A previously decommissioned frigate called *The Chesapeake* was being refitted due to the deteriorating international situation, and was headed on a trial run out of Norfolk, Virginia. Incidentally, some British deserters were part of its crew, and while it was in the bay, a British

⁷ Risjord, Norman K. *Jefferson's America 1760-1815*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publisher, 2010.

⁸ Risjord, Norman K. *Jefferson's America 1760-1815*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publisher, 2010.

⁹ Horsman, Reginald. *The Causes of the War of 1812*. London: Oxford University Press, 1962.

¹⁰ Risjord, Norman K. *Jefferson's America 1760-1815*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publisher, 2010.

¹¹ Brown, Roger H. *The Republic in Peril: 1812*. United States of America: Columbia University Press, 1964.

¹² Brown, Roger H. *The Republic in Peril: 1812*. United States of America: Columbia University Press, 1964.

¹³ Brown, Roger H. *The Republic in Peril: 1812*. United States of America: Columbia University Press, 1964.

¹⁴ Brown, Roger H. *The Republic in Peril: 1812*. United States of America: Columbia University Press, 1964.

¹⁵ Risjord, Norman K. *Jefferson's America 1760-1815*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publisher, 2010.

vessel *Leopard* demanded to board the Chesapeake. Upon the captain's refusal, the *Leopard* fired on the (unarmed) Chesapeake, killing three and wounding twenty.¹⁶ Until this point, Jefferson had no intention to take action against Great Britain, and in fact had been attempting to improve their friendship via diplomacy, but James Monroe—the American minister to Britain—knew that the British government was not prepared to make any concessions on their terms.¹⁷ To make matters worse, Charles James Fox, a Pro-American Whig who won the Premiership in 1806 died only nine months into his service¹⁸, which decimated the last chance for America to come to a non-aggressive solution. “Petitions and memorials from all over the country, particularly from the merchants of the principal cities urged congress to gain redress for the many commercial injuries”¹⁹ and America finally decided to strike back.

America's first retaliatory action was the “Non-Intercourse Act” in July of 1807, which prevented the import of specific British goods, in an attempt to damage the British economy.²⁰ However, Britain barely flinched at the attempt and, in October, still was adamant concerning its right to impressment. In desperation, Jefferson banned all British ships from American waters, and called congress into early session- “the choice lay between ‘War, embargo, or nothing’”²¹. On December 22, congress enacted ‘The American Embargo Act’ which forbade all international trade to or from the United States.²² This radical experiment was the last real weapon the U.S. possessed short of physical attack, and hopes were high both in the legislature and executive that war would be prevented. The embargo was strictly enforced by the government, to the point that it perhaps infringed upon the fourth amendment rights of search and seizure, which ironically went unnoticed by President Jefferson and Secretary of State Madison.²³

In 1809, James Madison was sworn into an office which came with the burdens of this open-ended embargo that was clearly damaging the American economy, but perhaps was beginning to take effect in Britain and France. In 1810, it was set to expire, and Madison had to make the tough decision on whether or not to inflict further difficulties on American farmers and merchants for the sake of preventing war. Madison put the Republicans in congress to work, and they produced Macon's bill, which proposed that British and French goods could be admitted only if they were carried upon American vessels.²⁴ This bill was voted down by the senate, at which time Macon's Bill Number Two was proposed, which finally granted to America a valuable bargaining chip. This bill lifted the non-intercourse act, and offered to Britain and France that whichever one would come to American terms for navigation and shipping first, the restrictions of the act would be placed upon the other.²⁵ This allowed America to play both sides of the table, in hopes that American goods would be important enough to Britain to agree to American terms, or that damaging Britain and gaining an ally in America would appeal to France.²⁶ Napoleon could not spare his navy to enforce the Milan Decrees anyway at that

¹⁶ Risjord, Norman K. *Jefferson's America 1760-1815*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publisher, 2010.

¹⁷ Horsman, Reginald. *The Causes of the War of 1812*. London: Oxford University Press, 1962.

¹⁸ Risjord, Norman K. *Jefferson's America 1760-1815*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publisher, 2010.

¹⁹ Horsman, Reginald. *The Causes of the War of 1812*. London: Oxford University Press, 1962.

²⁰ Brown, Roger H. *The Republic in Peril: 1812*. United States of America: Columbia University Press, 1964.

²¹ Horsman, Reginald. *The Causes of the War of 1812*. London: Oxford University Press, 1962.

²² Risjord, Norman K. *Jefferson's America 1760-1815*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publisher, 2010.

²³ Risjord, Norman K. *Jefferson's America 1760-1815*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publisher, 2010.

²⁴ Risjord, Norman K. *Jefferson's America 1760-1815*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publisher, 2010.

²⁵ Wills, Garry. *James Madison*. New York: Times Books, 2002.

²⁶ Wills, Garry. *James Madison*. New York: Times Books, 2002.

moment, and decided he had much to gain from the American denial of goods to Britain, so France was the first to bite (later, however, Napoleon again began again to seize American ships).²⁷ It may be that America had a skewed idea of its own bargaining power, but in any case, at least Napoleon took the bait at the time.

Madison was only minutely influential in any of these circumstances, primarily because he was conscious of the powers of congress versus his own powers. He knew that it would ultimately be up to congress whether or not to declare war on Great Britain or France, and of course he preferred it that way. It was not until 1811 that the pressures upon Madison for leadership from his party and the American public prompted him to have a more audible opinion on the impending war with Europe. Over the course of the past seven years of British political misconduct, a 'new breed' of Republican had begun to be voted into congress. These individuals were hungry for expansion, lived and breathed republicanism, and were sore from the British actions at sea—even to the point of Anglophobia. "Conspiratorial Anglophobes believed, or purported to believe, that behind Britain's disparate anti-American actions and policies (some real, some imagined) loomed a larger, well-orchestrated plot to recolonize the United States".²⁸ Not only was Britain restricted the trade necessary for the economic growth to fuel the development of the nation, there had been rumors of British partnerships with Native American tribes, who had already begun to violently retaliate against American settlers. Fear of a preemptive strike by Britain by way of Native Americans was a real concern for frontiersmen in the United States. This paranoia fueled the fire behind an ideological argument for a war with Great Britain to add on to the economic and diplomatic frustration that Americans had already endured for the past seven years. The defense of Republicanism was clearly not tethered only to members of the Republican Party; much of the public (especially in the south) was pro-war.²⁹ This began a spiral of nationalism that caused the opinion on the war to mirror itself completely in only a span of a few years. The country's newspapers, universities, societies, and communities buzzed with talk about the possibility of war, and many feared that their republic was in danger.

The development of this surge in nationalism fits neatly into the 'three-phase structure of national movements' postulated by Miroslav Hroch during his study of East European nationalism.³⁰ Most of the nations he applied this structure were developing or newly independent countries, which applies nicely to the characteristics of the United States in the early nineteenth century. The process goes as follows: first, a group of well-informed experts on a country draw attention to an idea or concept that embodies the spirit of a nation, and then the concept becomes widely popularized via clubs, associations, universities, etc. until it permeates all sectors of society. Finally, it develops a power of its own which can force governments to act or makes concrete changes to the country.³¹ This is evident from the time of the Revolutionary War in America; republicanism and democracy were the bases for the desire for independence, and were almost unanimously adopted; if one word were used to define the zeitgeist of young

²⁷ Risjord, Norman K. *Jefferson's America 1760-1815*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publisher, 2010.

²⁸ Peskin, Lawrence A. "Conspiratorial Anglophobia and the War of 1812." *Journal of American History*, 2011: 647-669.

²⁹ Peskin, Lawrence A. "Conspiratorial Anglophobia and the War of 1812." *Journal of American History*, 2011: 647-669.

³⁰ Trautsch, Jasper M. "'Mr. Madison's War' or the Dynamic of Early American Nationalism?" *Early American Studies*, 2012: 630-670.

³¹ Trautsch, Jasper M. "'Mr. Madison's War' or the Dynamic of Early American Nationalism?" *Early American Studies*, 2012: 630-670.

and modern America, it would likely be republicanism (or a synonym of it). This concept was popularized in partisan newspapers, universities, clubs, and through the development of the Republican Party: "At the same time, the Aurora and other Republican newspapers accused Britain and its agents of conspiring to destroy American manufacturing".³² The loyalty of the American public to this ideal was only reinforced by the Anglophobia of many Republicans, which prompted them to elect more Republicans to congress, and by 1812, over 75% of seats in congress were held by Republicans.³³ The decision to go to war was simply the transition between steps two and three in the process; nationalism and republicanism was buried deep enough into the hearts of Americans and it spanned throughout the government enough to prompt its actions. The movement clears up two major questions that historians have asked in terms of reasons for war: "why would America risk going to a war it can't win?" and "How did such a mild-mannered president lead a country in a depression whole-heartedly to war?". It is evident that the violation of republicanism was grave enough of an offense to mobilize America toward a war with Great Britain.

War was inevitable for a country that had experienced such a swell of pride in their nationalism, especially when they still were sore from the previous injuries inflicted by Britain. Congress was filled with war hawks who sat idle long enough while Britain had taken advantage of young America, and by 1812, they knew their President would not hold them back any longer. Though there was still a stand for peace made by the Federalist Party and their support in the Northeast, they were simply outnumbered. "In the spring of 1812, when petitions against the orders were flooding into London, and the War Hawks striving for war in Washington, the British shipping interest was making its last stand against any concession to the United states".³⁴ Britain knew it would lose most of its shipping business to America if it lifted the Orders, but finally on August 3, 1812 they were repealed:

"Aris' Birmingham Gazette printed an account of a public dinner held to celebrate the repeal of the Orders in Council, at which was given the toast 'May the revocation of Orders in Council be the means of establishing permanent friendship between Britain and the United States'. The toast was a bitter one, for the same paper contained news of the American declaration of war. Concession had come too late".³⁵

Under the pressure of the call for leadership from his party and the American nation, Madison wrote his War Message on June 1, 1812. The document contains a detailed record of his logical deliberation on the subject; in reading it, one can envision the struggle of his mental process before coming to the conclusion of war.

"We behold, in fine, on the side of Great Britain, a state of war against the United States, and on the side of the United States a state of peace toward Great Britain... In recommending [war] to [congress'] early deliberations I am happy in the assurance that

³² Peskin, Lawrence A. "Conspitatorial Anglophobia and the War of 1812." *Journal of American History*, 2011: 647-669.

³³ Peskin, Lawrence A. "Conspitatorial Anglophobia and the War of 1812." *Journal of American History*, 2011: 647-669.

³⁴ Horsman, Reginald. *The Causes of the War of 1812*. London: Oxford University Press, 1962.

³⁵ Horsman, Reginald. *The Causes of the War of 1812*. London: Oxford University Press, 1962.

the decision will be worthy the enlightened and patriotic councils of a virtuous, a free, and a powerful nation”.³⁶

His rhetoric was pleasing to his audience: pro-republican and sympathetic to the struggles the nation had withstood in the pre-war years. Though not formally required, Republicans in congress finally got the approval of their president and a leader in their party to preemptively strike against Great Britain. Seventeen days later, congress voted in favor of war.

The war itself was a catastrophe—the American land forces were unorganized with poor leadership in terms of Generals, and the navy experienced intermittent success because of their modern ships and, arguably, because they were on the defensive. The only successful campaigns for the Americans were defensive; it would be generous to consider the invasions of Canada merely as failures, a much more apt word would be devastation. The combination of the guerilla tactics of the Native Americans, the strategy of the British, and the regrettable decisions of the inept Generals selected by James Madison consistently spelled out defeat for American “troops”.³⁷ Even while they were preoccupied with Napoleon “in the northwest the British flag waved undisputed. On the Niagara frontier, after a great deal of effort, marching and fighting on both sides, the Americans managed to retain only Fort Erie”.³⁸ The hopes of expansionists had been squandered completely before the war was even half-over, and the reality of the possibility of losing land loomed over America’s head. This realization set in fully on August 19th, 1814 when British troops marched up the Patuxent River toward the capital.³⁹ For the first time, the British were “unduly impressed by the American defensive position... just past Bladensburg. ‘They were strongly posted on very commanding heights, formed in two lines... the advance occupying a fortified house, with which artillery covered the bridge over the Eastern Branch, across which the British troops had to pass’”.⁴⁰ Though, humiliatingly, they lost control of the capital, the White House had to be evacuated, and the city was burnt to the ground, they had finally begun to understand how a proper campaign is conducted. They applied these tactics successfully at the defense of New Orleans only a few months later. The Battle at New Orleans, if it had not occurred after the Treaty of Ghent had been signed and the war had officially ended (word spread slowly in these days) would be considered the most decisive victory for the United States of the whole war. Britain had hoped that by invading Louisiana, it could separate it from the rest of the United States, which would have been a devastating loss. However, competent leadership and a learned army allowed for a momentous final stand; General Andrew Jackson and the American army killed two British commanders and seriously wounded one other.⁴¹ All in

³⁶ Madison, James. *Historic Speeches: James Madison War Message to Congress*. June 1, 1812.

<http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/historicspeeches/madison/warmessage.html> (accessed November 20, 2013).

³⁷ Hitsmen, J. Mackay. *The Incredible War of 1812: A Military History*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965.

³⁸ Hitsmen, J. Mackay. *The Incredible War of 1812: A Military History*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965.

³⁹ Hitsmen, J. Mackay. *The Incredible War of 1812: A Military History*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965.

⁴⁰ Hitsmen, J. Mackay. *The Incredible War of 1812: A Military History*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965.

⁴¹ Hitsmen, J. Mackay. *The Incredible War of 1812: A Military History*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965.

all “there were more than 2,000 other British casualties, while the American defenders of the earthworks had only 71 killed and wounded”.⁴²

The treaty officially ended the war in a draw, but the Battle of New Orleans sealed what the Americans were after all along. It has been asked: ‘what good came out of the War of 1812?’. Evidence for the answer cannot be quantified materially, but it is clear that America was not disappointed with the outcome of the war. Madison’s popularity with the public was at its highest in 1815⁴³, and nationalism soared to unprecedented levels. Even the national anthem had been a product of the pride felt by Americans when they saw their flag still flying over the battlefield. America had successfully defended its precious republicanism against the strongest military power in the world, and had taken its first step toward hegemony in the West. The experience the military—both in the field and in terms of strategic leadership—was invaluable. Madison had learned that a standing army was fundamental, the army had many an opportunity to analyze their offensive deficiencies, and it had learned how to make a defensive stand. In three years, American forces were transformed from unorganized militia to a flanked, strategic military which withstood a full-on offensive at short notice. The moral victories provided by the stands of the Frigates at Lake Erie, army at New Orleans, and the other minor footholds maintained by America during the war overshadowed the embarrassing missteps and failures of the inexperienced republic. In the end, that republic still stood, stronger and wiser than it had been before-- this was cause for rejoicing in a nation which was enamored with its own ideals.

One deeper question still remains: what about this economic spat allowed the relationship of two republics to become so deficient that from it sprung war? Political philosophers, especially the likes of Immanuel Kant, are adamant that a world full of republics is a world free of violent conflict, but the War of 1812 is one of the only dark spots on this otherwise generally unblemished theory. Though Great Britain was not technically a republic at this time, it would certainly have been considered an extremely liberal monarchy with a Prime Minister and a variety of other governmental ministers who conducted much of the day-to-day practices of the government. America, though young, was locked solidly into a republican Constitution which allowed for indirect participation of a select demographic of citizens in the decisions of the government. According to the definition of a republic in the words of Kant, both should qualify: “This constitution is established, firstly, by principles of the freedom of the members of a society (as men); secondly, by principles of dependence of all upon a single common legislation (as subjects); and, thirdly, by the law of their equality (as citizens)”.⁴⁴ The first defection in the application to this theory is, of course, America’s perception of Britain—not as a republic but rather a tyrannical monarchy. The stains from their previous relations with Great Britain were not lifted after they gained independence, and were probably deepened by the trade conflicts when the nation partially relived the trauma of their days as British colonies.

The most conspicuous disparity between Kant’s theory and the War of 1812 is a false assumption made by Kant concerning the aversion of the citizens of republics to war. “The reason is this: if the consent of the citizens is required in order to decide that war should be

⁴² Hitsmen, J. Mackay. *The Incredible War of 1812: A Military History*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965.

⁴³ McCoy, Drew R. *The Last of the Fathers: James Madison and the Republican Legacy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

⁴⁴ Kant, Immanuel. *Perpetual peace*. New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1957.

declared (and in this constitution it cannot but be the case), nothing is more natural than that they would be very cautious in commencing such a poor game, decreeing for themselves all the calamities of war".⁴⁵ In reference to the development of nationalism discussed above, actuality was completely to the contrary of Kant's prediction. The great majority of American voters and congressional representatives were prepared to dive head-first into a war with England, and even after the war they felt no semblance of regret for this stance. Alexander Hamilton, in *Federalist Number Six*, was much more accurate in predicting the tendencies of citizens inflamed by a 'cause'.

"To presume a want of motives for such contests as an argument against their existence, would be to forget that men are ambitious, vindictive, and rapacious. To look for a continuation of harmony between a number of independent, unconnected sovereignties in the same neighborhood, would be to disregard the uniform course of human events, and to set at defiance the accumulated experience of ages... There have been, if I may so express it, almost as many popular as royal wars. The cries of the nation and the importunities of their representatives have, upon various occasions, dragged their monarchs into war, or continued them in it, contrary to their inclinations, and sometimes contrary to the real interests of the State".⁴⁶

One theme that is revisited throughout the *Federalist* papers is that a majority can be more dangerous to a nation to a belligerent monarch. Though the results ended considerably in favor of the United States in this war, it is not indisputable that the American public has been a driving force in the decision to go to war in less propitious circumstances. Think, most recently, to the drive behind the 'War on Terrorism'. The same nationalistic tendencies lead to the War of 1812, it just so happens that the perpetrator was another republic.

This leads to one of the coincidental reasons that Kant theories stays relatively airtight: republics often have congruent interests, and when they don't, rarely are they conflicting enough to legitimize physical retaliation. Timing was what really led America and Britain to be in contention; the Napoleonic War left Britain marooned and wary of anything that could tip the scales in France's favor. America, which was already fearful of British monarchy, found themselves accidentally tripping a wire which brought them onto Britain's radar. Their shipping interest conflicted not only with Britain's, but it also was considered assistance to their enemy. Unfortunately, both the third image and second image composition of America and Britain were in contention with one another, leading to failed diplomacy and ultimately war. These exceptional circumstances, combined with the nationalism that was being bred into citizens of the new excitable republic caused a rare repudiation to Kant's thesis on democratic peace.

Incidentally, after the War of 1812, it seems that America got 'the need to prove itself to Britain' out of its system, so to speak. The Battle of New Orleans was the very last time American and British guns ever fired at one another, which is contentious with yet another basic international relations theory. A cornerstone of Geoffrey Blainey's theory on the causes of war is that "indecisive wars... tended to produce shorter periods of peace".⁴⁷ The War of 1812 left no

⁴⁵ Kant, Immanuel. *Perpetual peace*. New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1957.

⁴⁶ Hamilton, Alexander. "The *Federalist* No. 6: Concerning Dangers from Dissensions Between the States." *Constitution.Org*. November 14, 1787. <http://www.constitution.org/fed/federa06.htm> (accessed December 7, 2013).

⁴⁷ Blainey, Geoffrey. *The Causes of War*. New York: The Free Press, 1973.

clear winner; though Britain had technically won more battles, the treaty officially ended the war in a draw. According to Blainey, this would suggest that both states would be left with a lack of understanding of “rank” in the international system⁴⁸, which would lead to further conflict in order to more permanently settle the score. Perhaps it was unimportant to America and to Britain who was more powerful; America was satisfied to know it was safe from re-colonization, and Britain had bigger fish to fry in Europe. Only eight years later, the Monroe Doctrine declared that the Western hemisphere was no longer the property of Europe and that their interference would not be tolerated. After this time period, America and Great Britain maintained very close diplomatic relations frequently referred to as a “special relationship”. There would never be another major conflict between the two that could strain their diplomacy enough (since they have been allies) to cause them to be preoccupied with who was more powerful. From the time of American hegemony in the West, Kant’s theories on perpetual peace definitely seem to ring true for Anglo-American relations.

The War of 1812, though it is considered the war that never should have happened, revealed much about the international as well as the American domestic political scene. It allowed for a mindset to be developed in the United States of “defending republicanism” that still is a great factor in their international relations. It is a peculiar war in terms of conventional international relations theory, in that it was a preemptive strike by the weaker country, brought about almost entirely by nationalism, recommended by one of the most mild-mannered presidents in history, and it contradicted two major political theories. This war is arguably one of the most educational and foundational wars in America’s history; the nation gained valuable knowledge and experience and also closed the door on a long history of Anglophobia and conflict with Britain.

⁴⁸ Blainey, Geoffrey. *The Causes of War*. New York: The Free Press, 1973.

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