

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/264238534>

The War of 1812 as the Second War of Independence

Conference Paper · July 2012

CITATIONS

0

READS

1,012

1 author:



H.G. Callaway

Temple University

100 PUBLICATIONS 51 CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE

Some of the authors of this publication are also working on these related projects:



What is Interest-group Pluralism? [View project](#)



The Varieties of Contemporary Quantum Gravity Theories [View project](#)

The War of 1812 as the Second War of Independence¹

H.G. Callaway
Philadelphia, PA

Abstract

The War of 1812 has been called America's second War of Independence.² This paper takes up that view, and it aims to elucidate the war objectives and geopolitical perspective of the Madisonian Republicans who launched the War in June of 1812. Given that the Revolutionary War was America's anti-colonial war, which successfully removed Great Britain's direct political and economic control, then, taking account of the geopolitical circumstances of the early republic as outlined below, it is reasonable to view the War of 1812 as America's war against neo-colonialism—understanding neo-colonialism as a matter of economic, political or cultural policies designed or functioning so that a greater power maintains *indirect* control over another area or people.

Some have argued, in spite of this, that Napoleonic France posed a greater long-term threat to U.S. security in 1812;³ and, in fact, many of America's complaints against Great Britain were also raised against France. Moreover, the Federalist party in Congress opposed the war, and they took a contrasting view of the danger of France, looking to the protection of the British navy to impede possible French imperial control of North America and its trade. Drawing on a newly published edition of Alexander James Dallas' *Exposition of the Causes and Character of the War*⁴—which originally appeared in 1815 while Dallas was Secretary of the Treasury under President James Madison— and other sources, this paper will lay out the Madisonian perspective and explain the significance of the War of 1812 in American history and in Anglo-American relations.

The conclusion of the war marked, in significant degree, the failure of the Federalist party and facilitated an internal political transformation toward the Whigs of the second American party system. It shifting business interests away from emphasis on centralized finance and foreign trade and toward projects of internal development, it settled the northern border with Canada, and diminished the threat

-
1. Originally presented at the conference of the Transatlantic Studies Association, University College, Cork, Ireland, July 2012.
 2. Cf. Gordon S. Wood, *Empire of Liberty, A History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 669. As Wood makes clear, this is a view of the war consistent with those of its Republican advocates.
 3. See for example, the reaction to my edition of Dallas' *Exposition* by Francis P. Sempa in *American Diplomacy*, May 2011; and contrast the more neutral review in *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, Vol. 23, 181.
 4. Callaway, H.G. ed. Alexander James Dallas, *An Exposition of the Causes and Character of the War, An Annotated Edition* (Edinburgh: Dunedin, 2011).

of colonial designs in North America. It also established a firm basis for America's independent role in the Atlantic world of the first half of the nineteenth century. In general terms, the War of 1812 was a reasonable republican response to the threats to American independence which arose from the excesses of the Napoleonic Wars; and its outcome gave new reality to our claims to determine our own course in the world.

I. Colonialism and neo-colonialism

Using the term “neo-colonialism” in this paper, I want to remove from the outset any hint of anachronism. The term was not employed by the defenders of the War of 1812, nor were the war aims formulated by use of the term. I assume that the term “neo-colonialism” is of much later coinage. Indeed the term “colonialism” itself appears to date only from the middle of the nineteenth century.⁵ The idea of a colony is, of course, much older, and we can say without hesitation that the Romans, for instance, established colonies around the Mediterranean, and that there were 13 British colonies in the area of the present-day United States prior to 1776. The concept of colonialism develops various systematic considerations of what is involved or aimed for in having colonies and in colonial status. To speak of neo-colonialism here is to suggest the persistence of colonial vintage relations and attitudes after formal independence has been established.

Though the political concept and theory of “neo-colonialism” clearly postdates the War of 1812, since we can understand the application of the term “colonialism” to eighteenth and early nineteenth century world affairs, we will have little trouble with the application of “neo-colonialism” to the same period, as a matter of economic, political or cultural policies of a greater power aimed at maintain *indirect* control over another area or people—as contrasted with direct colonial administration.⁶ The point illustrates how the development of political theory can illuminate the historical record.

Discussing the past, we speakers of the twenty-first century can recognize in the historical record particular policies of a greater power designed or functioning to maintain *indirect* control over other areas and peoples. Much of this has traditionally been discussed under the headings of imperialism and mercantilism. Translating the concerns of the early American republic into contemporary parlance, the evidence supports the claim that the War of 1812 was a war against neo-colonialism. In particular, the War arose from the Jeffersonian Republican rejection of British policies—contrasting with related Federalist acquiescence—which failed to recognize the citizenship of American sailors, interfered with American trade and its neutrality in European wars—and also cast a shadow over American settlement of the trans-Appalachian West.

In an important sense, the War of 1812 was a renewal of the American War of Independence which had been officially ended by the Treaty of Paris in 1783—some 29 years before. Madison himself put the decision for war in the following terms:

5. Webster's Dictionary gives the date 1853 for the earliest usage of “colonialism” .

6. See my brief discussion of contemporary neo-colonialism in H.G. Callaway, *Memories and Portraits, Explorations in American Thought* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 122ff.

To have shrunk from resistance, under such circumstances would have acknowledged that, on the element which forms three quarters of the globe which we inhabit, and where all independent nations have equal and common rights, the American people are not an independent people, but colonists and vassals. With such an alternative, war was chosen.⁷

Madison writes here of avoiding the status of “colonist and vassals,” though the U.S. was already formally independent. More precisely, the aim was to avoid a dependent or subservient neo-colonial status—which was more acceptable to the Federalist opposition. However imperative the maritime interests—British military coercion of American trade practically forced a commercial alliance against France—and the insult to American citizenship involved in impressment of American sailors into the British navy, in the decision for war, these united with America’s interest in westward expansion.

The outcome of the war aroused a rebirth of national feeling, unity and consciousness, including such symbols as the White House (often said to have been whitewashed, after the British burned the public building of Washington), the “Star Spangled Banner” (commemorating the successful American resistance to the British invasion at Baltimore) and the prominence of Andrew Jackson (victor over the British at the Battle of New Orleans). President Madison and his supporters, in spite of many grave problems, ultimately proved the strength and vitality of the young republic. The outcome of the war was to prove fatal to the Federalist party which resisted it. The war proved that America, a nation so largely built upon immigration, was able to control or limit the most important of the resulting foreign influences, *viz.*, the Englishness of America—or, more precisely, its Anglophile financial and commercial interests. It was able to do so without compromise to its founding, republican principles.

II. The Jay treaty and geopolitics

At the time the Jay Treaty was under consideration by President Washington and the U.S. Senate, Alexander James Dallas, the Philadelphia Republican, was deeply involved in active opposition. His related writings are indicative of the general, negative reaction of the Jeffersonian Republicans and helped provide early formulations of the problems which eventuated in the War of 1812. The treaty had been signed by John Jay and Lord Grenville in London in November 1794, but was not submitted to the Senate until June of 1795. Dallas’ pamphlet, “Features of Mr. Jay’s Treaty,” was published and widely circulated while the treaty was under consideration. In it, he argued against the ratification of the treaty, because it compromised American neutrality, generally weighted toward Great Britain and its trading interest in contrast to those of France, because it sanctioned impositions on American trade lacking any genuine reciprocity—and because it was detrimental to the U.S. interests in developing western settlement. The treaty implicitly accepted the very narrow British conception of neutral trading rights, and explicitly prohibited American discrimination against British trade for a period of

7. Madison, quoted in Thomas Bender, *A Nation Among Nations* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006), 111.

10 years; this was to surrender the weapon of trade sanctions which the Jeffersonian Republicans hoped to use to loosen the British hold on American commerce and society.⁸

The problems had started at the beginning of the Franco-British wars. In 1794, the British navy, based on an unannounced change of policy, seized over 250 American ships involved in the trade with the French West Indies. Almost as soon as the French Revolution took place (and Revolutionary France declared war on all monarchies), the British decided on war against France and began to interdict American trade with French colonies and ports. In 1793, the Royal navy started routine inspection of American ships—looking for British subjects who were then impressed into the British navy. Many Americans were included, since British officials did not recognize the right of any British subject to become American. Within the context of American politics, divided between the Anglophile Federalists and the Francophile Jeffersonian Republicans, this was a quite divisive development and a threat to America's self-conception. In consequence, and in order to avoid the prospect of war, President Washington sent John Jay to London to negotiate with the British government.

In accordance with the treaty, the British were allowed to temporarily retain their forts and trading posts inside the territory of the United States (i.e., within the boundaries acknowledge in the Treaty of Paris of 1783, which recognized the Mississippi river as the U.S.'s western border). This compromised American independence. Although the British king promised, by the terms of Jay's treaty, to "withdraw all his troops and garrisons from all posts and places within the boundary lines assigned by the Treaty of Peace to the United States,"⁹ the promise was immediately undermined, because the treaty also allows that "All settlers and traders, within the precincts or jurisdiction of the said posts, shall continue to enjoy, unmolested, all their property of every kind, and shall be protected therein."¹⁰ One might suspect that if British soldiers were transformed into settlers or fur traders after June of 1796, then the British posts in the American West would have remain otherwise unchanged. The British were left to define who was entitled to stay in the posts and even their size.¹¹

Dallas objected that the treaty "postpones the surrender, and affords no compensation for the detention of the western posts," since the official withdraw of troops was put off to June 1796, and no payment by the British for the use of the posts was envisaged; and the treaty "cedes without any equivalent an indefinite extent of territory to the settlers under British titles within the precincts and jurisdiction of those posts,"¹²—which is to say that the settlers and posts could stay on, in an undefined region of U.S. territory around the posts, in spite of the treaty, even after June of 1796, and without anyone needing to become an American citizen.

8. Cf. Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 197.

9. See Appendix Two, "The Jay Treaty" in Callaway, ed., Alexander James Dallas, *Exposition*, 122.

10. *Ibid.*, see pp 122-123.

11. Cf. James Madison's letter of 23 August 1795, where he comments that "The British settlers and traders, within an undefined tract of country, are allowed to retain both their lands and their allegiance at the same time; and consequently to keep up a foreign and unfriendly influence over the Indians within the limits of the United States."

12. See A.J. Dallas, "Memorial to George Washington, President of the United States" (1795); reprinted in George Mifflin Dallas, *Life and Writings of Alexander James Dallas* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1871), 51-52.

To understand the significance of these elements of the treaty, on the Jeffersonian Republican view, one should keep in mind that the British plausibly aimed to retain control of the Great Lakes and a large area of the old Northwest. In February 1794, the British royal Governor of Canada, Lord Dorchester, speaking at an Indian council, denied U.S. territorial claims North of the Ohio river and urged his listeners to destroy the American settlements in the old Northwest; soon thereafter British troops build a new garrison on U.S. soil at Fort Miami, near the present location of Toledo, Ohio—one of eight similar British forts in U.S. territory.¹³ After defeating the French in Europe, the British hoped or expected to connecting their holdings in Canada with the commerce of their Caribbean colonies via the Mississippi river—where they had retained a right of navigation by the treaty which ended the War of Independence. The British posts in the old Northwest Territory along the Great Lakes, had been the scene of military defeats and massacres by British-allied Indians when President Washington ordered troops into the area in the early 1790's.¹⁴ The continuation of the posts was thus a threat to American settlement and development of the area. If this threat could be maintained while Great Britain was tied down in a great European war, then the prospects for American settlement and development in the old Northwest Territory, once the European war was concluded on British terms, were not promising. There was a danger of re-colonization, or a continuing disruptive influence, in the Northwest territory. Moreover connecting the trade of Canada and the Caribbean via the Mississippi and from there to the home country might have eventually cut American ships and producers out of the lucrative transatlantic trade.

When Dallas turned his critical, lawyerly eye upon the proposed “Treaty of Amity, Commerce, and Navigation,” which Jay had brought back from London, it began to look like a surrender to British interests. Dallas opposed the treaty, “because by the treaty the federal government accedes to restraints upon the American commerce and navigation, internal as well as external, that embrace no principle of real reciprocity, and are inconsistent with the rights and destructive of the interests of an independent nation.”¹⁵ All the old complaints of British abuse of American rights, by impressment and confiscation of neutral trade were repeated in Dallas’ criticism of the Jay Treaty, although these were the very complaints which Jay had been sent to London to remedy.

The Jay Treaty lays down the following stipulation regarding commerce on the Mississippi:

The river Mississippi, shall however, according to the Treaty of Peace be entirely open to both parties; And it is further agreed, that all the ports and places on its eastern side, to whichsoever of the parties belonging, may freely be resorted to, and used by both parties, in as ample a manner as any of the Atlantic ports or places of the United States, or any of the ports or places of His Majesty in Great Britain.¹⁶

13. See Dallas, *Exposition*, 31; Paul S. Boyer, *et al.*, *The Enduring Vision, A History of the American People* (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath, 1993), 224.

14. Dallas, *Exposition*, 31.

15. Dallas, “Memorial,” 52.

16. See Appendix Two, “The Jay Treaty” in Callaway, ed., Dallas, *Exposition*, 123.

The Treaty of Paris (1783), which ended the War of Independence, did allow British access to the Mississippi river, but Dallas replied with a question: “What ports has Great Britain on the eastern banks of the Mississippi?” The correct answer was that it had none. They looked to the treaty as an opportunity to establish or continue related claims and as a means to eventually obtain such ports; and it is pretty obvious that Dallas and the Jeffersonian Republicans thought that the Federalist John Jay should have known better than to allow the presumption. The border area in the vicinity of the Great Lakes and the source of the Mississippi river was still in question.

While the Jay treaty of 1794 prevented war with Great Britain, it was widely regarded as excessively pro-British, and it accomplished little to amend British practices or to avoid American complaints. The Jeffersonians argued that it was essentially an unequal agreement which protected American shipping and commercial interests only by making them subsidiary to Great Britain’s war aims and general commercial policies. France regarded the Jay treaty as abrogating its own commercial treaty with the U.S. and as a betrayal of the French-American alliance which had won America’s war for independence. The resulting tensions with France resulted in the “quasi war” of 1798-1800, an undeclared naval war during the administration of President John Adams. Britain and France the two greatest powers of the age both sought to control and limit American freedom of trade in the interest of their own war aims and commercial ambitions. Given the strength of the British navy, the British policies were more effective and the threat from Great Britain correspondingly greater. Only Great Britain had sufficient power to drive its American competition out of world trade entirely.

Francophile sentiment on the part of the Jeffersonian Republicans cooled considerably after Napoleon disowned republican principle and crowned himself emperor in December of 1804. Still, with the start of Thomas Jefferson’s presidency in 1800, his re-election to serve again from 1804, and the subsequent election of his Secretary of State, James Madison as president from 1809 to 1817, political developments cast the nation into a decidedly anti-British mood. As part of this development, any possible threat from France was considerably diminished by the Louisiana Purchase of 1803 and the prior defeat of a French army in the Caribbean at the hands of the slave revolt and the revolution in Haiti. Though the Napoleonic wars raged on in Europe until 1815, France became increasingly a continental power—especially after Nelson’s defeat of the French-Spanish fleet at the battle of Trafalgar in 1805. Even Napoleon’s hold on Europe weakened when Tsar Alexander withdrew from Napoleon’s closed Continental trading system and opened Russian ports to neutrals in 1811. This was a sure sign of the diminishing hold of Napoleonic France on its continental European empire. In 1809, President Madison sent John Quincy Adams to Russia to represent the United States. He arrived at St. Petersburg just as the Tsar had decided to break with Napoleon; and by September 1812, Alexander was offering to mediate in the war between the Americans and the British. The French threat to U.S. security was greatly diminished by the time of the declaration of war in June of 1812. The British navy, on the other hand, and intrusions from Canada, were continual threats to a broad range of vital American interests. While it would have made little sense for the U.S. to take on the British navy, the

U.S. enjoyed a considerable advantage both in population and land forces, on the North American continent, in comparison to the British colonies and forces in Canada.

III. America's war aims

The United States declared war on Great Britain by act of Congress, signed by President James Madison on June 18, 1812. Madison had called for war in his message of June 1, 1812,¹⁷ arguing on the basis of British impressment of American sailors on the high seas, the seizure of American ships and cargos engaged in foreign trade and British incitement of their native American allies on the western frontier. The measure was hotly debated in Congress, and passed on a partisan basis: 79 to 49 in the House of Representatives and 19 to 13 in the U.S. Senate; all the Federalist members of Congress voted against the declaration of war, and all the supporting votes came from the Jeffersonian Republicans.¹⁸ Madison and the Republicans had finally decided for war in order to defend the America's neutral rights in international trade from threats arising from the wars of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars. Still, the U.S. was deeply divided by the war. The war was supported by the Republicans and there was strong support from the South and the West. Opposition was concentrated in New England, among the Federalists, and in America's international commercial interests. Much trading with the enemy went on throughout the war, especially across the Canadian border.

In his war message, President Madison summed up the British impositions on America's trade with the claim that the British aimed to eliminate the U.S. as a commercial competitor. "It has become, indeed, sufficiently certain," he wrote, "that the commerce of the United States is to be sacrificed, not as interfering with the belligerent rights of Great Britain; ... but as interfering with the monopoly which she covets for her own commerce and navigation."¹⁹ The claim is reiterated by A.J. Dallas, writing in 1814, and in light of the initial reports from Ghent at the opening of the peace negotiations:

But experience has shown, that the confidence and respect of Great Britain are not to be acquired, by such acts of impartiality and independence. Under every administration of the American government, the experiment has been made, and the experiment has been equally unsuccessful: for, it was not more effectually ascertained in the year 1812, than at antecedent periods, that an exemption from the maritime usurpation, and the commercial monopoly, of Great Britain, could only be obtained upon the condition of becoming an associate, in her enmities and her wars.²⁰

President Washington had declared American neutrality from the very start of the Franco-British wars in 1793, and that effort, along with all subsequent efforts to maintain peaceful, neutral commercial relations, or to influence British policy by withdraw of American trade, were substantially ignored.

17. See Ralph Louis Ketcham, ed., *Selected Writings of James Madison*. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2006), 286-291.

18. Cf. William Earl Weeks, "War of 1812," in Paul S. Boyer, ed., *The Oxford Guide, United States History*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 814.

19. See Madison's War Message in Ketcham, *Selected Writings*, 286-291.

20. Dallas, *Exposition*, p. 32.

Leastwise in pursuing her war aims, Great Britain was antagonistic to neutral rights which did not serve her own purposes, and as the experience under the terms of the Jay treaty suggest, trade of neutral countries would only be tolerated if it supported British interests. America's expressed desire for peace was "upon terms of reciprocity, consistent with the rights of both parties, as sovereign and independent nations."²¹

President Madison mentioned British influence among the native Americans of the Great Lakes region only briefly in his war message, saying "It is difficult to account for the activity and combinations which have for some time been developing themselves among tribes in constant intercourse with British traders and garrisons without connecting their hostility with that influence and without recollecting the authenticated examples of such impositions heretofore furnished by the officers and agents of that government."²² But the western "War Hawks," especially those who came into Congress in 1810, including Henry Clay, were doubtlessly less restrained about the British influence on the Indians, and it seems clear in retrospect that the British aimed to threaten and inhibit American western settlement.

Evidence for this comes in part from the opening British demands in the negotiations to end the war. The negotiations started on August 8, 1814, just 2 weeks before a British force attacked on the Chesapeake and burned the public building in Washington. The British put forward significant demands at Ghent. They expected American concessions to settle the war on the basis of the territory they then occupied. They wanted a recognized Indian territory in the northwest, accepted as a British ally and guaranteed by both sides, cessation of territory in northern Maine, to connect New Brunswick with Quebec, and territory along the Canadian boarder in the west to provide access to the Mississippi river plus British control of the Great Lakes.²³

These opening demands were predicated, however, on expected British military successes in North America—which failed to materialize. Of particular importance was the failure of the British army, commanded by General George Prevost, and assembled near Montreal, to succeed in its plan to march down the west side of Lake Champlain, past Plattsburg, New York, and presumably cut off New York City and New England from the rest of the country—a strategic position the British had long maintained during the Revolutionary War. Though the British army assembled in Canada was the most formidable ever sent to North America, including many veterans of Wellington's victory over Napoleon, the plan was frustrated by the American army at Plattsburg and the success of Thomas MacDonough (1773-1825) and his flotilla on Lake Champlain in September 1814. Also remarkable was the success of American arms at Baltimore against the British navy in the Chesapeake. General Andrew Jackson's victory over the invading British army at New Orleans actually took place after the

21. See Secretary of State James Monroe's letter to Lord Castlereagh dated January 1814, quoted in Dallas, *Exposition*, 27.

22. See Madison's War Message in Ketcham, *Selected Writings*, 286-291.

23. See Dallas, *Exposition*, 28-29; President Madison's letter to Thomas Jefferson dated October 10, 1814; reprinted in Gaillard Hunt, ed., *The Writings of James Madison* (New York: G.P. Putnam's, 1900-1910), vol. VIII, 313ff.

Treaty of Ghent was signed, though news of the treaty would take another month to reach Washington, D.C. The victory was far from useless, however, since it served to discourage any lingering colonial schemes from the British or Spanish focused on the gulf coast and the mouth of the Mississippi river.

Although a generous treaty of peace was signed at Ghent on Christmas Eve, December 24, 1814, and the British territorial demands were rejected, the American diplomats had to settle for less than what they initially wanted.²⁴ The Treaty of Ghent makes no mention of impressment in particular, nor is there much concern for neutral trade expressed in the treaty. The Americans came to regard addressing the original causes of the war as unnecessary in view of the peace in Europe and the end of oppressive practices at sea. The American invasion of Canada, though far from a conquest, had shown the vulnerability of British colonial aims in North America—in spite of the fact that the colonial Canadians had not rushed to support the American cause. The treaty chiefly addressed settlement of the Canadian boarder. News of victory at New Orleans and of the Treaty of Ghent reached Washington, D.C. at about the same time, in February of 1815; the nation celebrated, and Madison's popularity soared. The U.S. had shown that it could stand up to a major European power and defend its interests by force of arms. With the Canadian border secured, and the Great lakes open to American shipping, the settlement of the old Northwest territory was also secured; Andrew Jackson had seen to it that much the same was true of the old Southwest, the Gulf coast and the mouth of the Mississippi.

IV. The consequences of the peace and the character of the war

It snowed in Boston in August of 1816, which was called “the year without a Summer.” Though this was in fact a distant effect of the massive April 1815 eruption of Mt. Tambora in the East Indies, we might well imagine that more religious inhabitants of New England may have taken this as a sign from on high concerning their recent conduct during the war. When Rufus King, originally from Massachusetts and later from New York, ran, unsuccessfully, against James Monroe in the presidential election of 1816, he became the last of the presidential candidates of the Federalist party. By 1820, the opposition to Republican James Monroe came from John Quincy Adams, who had been President Madison's minister to the Russian court during the war and one of the American negotiators at Ghent. Adams ran as an Independent Republican in that year, receiving exactly one electoral vote. He was subsequently elected President in 1824 as the candidate of the regular Republican party, then known as the Democratic-Republican party, and which subsequently became the Democratic party of Presidents Jackson and Van Buren.

By the end of the 1820's even the traditional Federalist domination of Boston had disappeared.²⁵ It is worth noting that in every decade between 1800 and 1860, the population of the United States grew by over 30%, and it has never grown as forcefully in any subsequent period. The period between the

24. The Treaty of Ghent is reproduced and annotated in Appendix Three in my edition of Dallas, *Exposition*, 143-152.

25. See Boyer *et al.*, “Bullfinch's Boston,” in *The Enduring Vision*, 267a-267b: “By the late 1820's, new political alignments had shattered Federalist domination of Boston's politics.”

end of the War of 1812 and the start of the Civil War in 1861, in spite of injustices and growing sectional conflict, was a period of growth, expansion, and classic American social and entrepreneurial freedom—the American celebrated by De Tocqueville and *Democracy in America*. Remarkably, it was also the period of the New England Renaissance; and in the present perspective, one might view its chief representative, Ralph Waldo Emerson as leading an intellectual and moral conversion of the old New England Federalists into good, liberal, abolitionist New England Whigs—who would eventually become Lincoln Republicans. By the same token, Emerson might be considered as teaching the nation how to be Anglophile in “nonconformist” style, i.e., without economic linkages or advantages, since he was so successful in taking this traditional British religious term and generalizing it for American usage.

Looking back to Dallas’ *Exposition* of 1815 helps us see what had been overcome. There was an element of cupidity, contempt, crime and perhaps even class warfare in the British treatment of the Americans—both at sea and in the battles on the North American continent. Before and after the agreement on Jay’s treaty, the British navy boarded American ships at sea, and, beyond directing these ships to British ports and confiscating their cargoes, they impressed American seamen into the service of the British navy. The brutality typically shown to British seamen in those times was extended to Americans, though this was poorly hidden behind a claim to merely be recovering British deserters. It was as if the entire American nation was being treated as a deserter from the war against the French Revolution and Napoleon, and the ancient conception of subservience to aristocracy was much in evidence.

The attack on the USS *Chesapeake*, an American warship, under sail off Hampton Roads and near Chesapeake Bay, epitomized British contempt and arrogance. In June of 1807 HMS *Leopard*, a 50 gun frigate of the British navy, attacked the *Chesapeake*, and with the support of a British squadron, forced its surrender and took several men from the ship, one of whom was eventually hanged as a deserter. America was outraged, but the Jefferson administration persisted in its policy of neutrality and responded by forbidding the entrance of British warships into American waters.

As part of their 1813 campaign on Chesapeake Bay, the British attacked Craney Island, Virginia, which guarded the entrance to Elizabeth Bay and the approach to old Norfolk. That attack was repelled by the Virginia militia, at which point the British turned their attention to the nearby town of Hampton, drove off the small contingent of defending militia, and according to the American report,

A defenseless and unresisting town was given up to indiscriminate pillage; though civilized warfare tolerates this only, as to fortified places carried by assault, and after summons. Individuals, male and female, were stripped naked; a sick man was stabbed twice in the hospital; another sick man was shot in his bed, and in the arms of his wife, who was also wounded, long after the retreat of the American troops; and females, the married and the single, suffered the extremity of personal abuse from the troops of the enemy, and from the infatuated Negroes, at their instigation.²⁶

26. See Dallas, *Exposition*, 94-95.

In effect, the British defeat at Carney Island, a matter of one military force against another, was revenged by an attack on, and humiliation, of unarmed civilians in the next town.

Dallas reports similar attacks on unarmed civilians at Stonington, Connecticut; Lewes, Delaware; on Chaptico and at St. Inigoes on the western shore of Maryland, where the Catholic churches were desecrated; and on Tappahannock, Virginia. Dallas puts it this way:

Armed parties, led by officers of rank, landed daily from the British squadron, making predatory incursions into the open country; rifling and burning the houses and cottages of peaceable and retired families; pillaging the produce of the planter and the farmer; (their tobacco, their grain, and their cattle;) committing violence on the persons of the unprotected inhabitants; seizing upon slaves, wherever they could be found, as booty of war; and breaking open the coffins of the dead, in search of plunder, or committing robbery on the alters...²⁷

It is not too difficult to imagine the contempt of the British raiders toward the defenseless American civilians, and toward any sign of resistance to their own power and self-conception. The arrogance and violence displayed against the Jesuit mission and settlement at St. Inigoes, Maryland is particularly revealing, and we should not believe for a moment that this was simply a matter of American war propaganda. There was more to come as the British briefly captured Washington, D.C., drove the President and his wife from the executive mansion, ate the dinner that had been prepared for them, and proceeded to burn the public building of the capitol before going on to attempt more of the same, unsuccessfully, against the stiffer defenders at Baltimore and Fort McHenry. Though there was indeed opposition to slavery in British society, any supposition of British sympathy for American slaves must be balanced by considering that the British retained slavery in their Caribbean colonies at the time of the War of 1812.

On the Canadian frontier, there were several more examples of arrogance, contempt, cupidity and violence—unwarranted by military necessity—, and the British generally encouraged the Indians to do the dirty work, knowing full well that they were customarily unconstrained by European conceptions of civilized warfare and military conduct. Though we may certainly sympathize with the plight and tragedy of the native Americans, so often displaced, murdered and massacred by waves of European and American settlers, and we resist the related talk of “savages,” their situation was not improved by the British exploitation of their cause to instigate armed resistance and alliance with their colonial aims in North America.

No one could have stopped the European and American settlement across the temperate middle of North America, a mass movement of theretofore unknown proportions, not the French, Spanish or British colonialists and not even the American government—short of using the native Americans against the settlers. Colonialism proved itself less than viable, throughout the Americas, and it lasted longer, until Canadian Independence in 1867, only where the stream of European settlement was somewhat weaker. The only real choice for the native Americans was to follow the course of Inde-

²⁷. *Ibid.*, p. 95.

pendence or to accept European colonial protection, and though neither course was genuinely appealing, given their pre-existing values and way of life, armed resistance and protection by a colonial power was clearly not a viable alternative—as this played out across the middle of the continent.

In spite of Jefferson's philanthropic aims to have the Indians settle down as farmers, in accordance with his plan for a western agricultural empire of small landholders, and his attempts to prevent their interaction with the settlers, no one could stop the inroads of the settlers and their destruction of the Indian hunting grounds and way of life—leastwise not without using the Indians against the settlers. As Henry Adams observed, regarding the interaction on the North-western frontier, “No acid ever worked more mechanically on a vegetable fiber than the white man acted on the Indian. As the line of American settlements approached, the nearest Indian tribes withered away.”²⁸ British encouragement of the Indians to armed resistance only strengthened the hand of the more determined Indian fighters by reinforcing their alliance with the republican (anti-monarchist, anti-aristocratic), anti-colonialist American mainstream. It was always implausible that societies based on hunting and gathering could maintain themselves against a technologically and numerically superior society of agriculturalists.

The Democratic-Republicans, Presidents Jefferson, Madison and Monroe, and their supporters, over a joint period of 24 years and 6 Presidential elections, had hitched their success to the political organization of the flood of European-American settlement on the basis of republican principle and political independence. In that circumstance, armed resistance of the Indians, in alliance with the British, had even less chance of survival than the Federalist party or the short-lived thought, at the Hartford Convention, of separating New England from the Union in alliance with Great Britain. The British would surely have liked to connect Canada to the commerce of the Mississippi river and thus to their colonies in the Caribbean. They may have aimed to fuse the northern territories of the United States with Canada, and the South with their Caribbean colonies (as is also suggested by their positive orientation to the South during the Civil War), but whatever the colonial designs, Jefferson, Madison and Independence won out over the long run. While we cannot say, perhaps, that the native Americans should have understood this, understanding it or not, they could not have resisted it. The British were in a better position to understand the general geopolitical situation, and they wagered the lives and fortune of native Americans on the viability their colonial plans.

It is in this context that we must view the Indian alliance with the British and the connected battles and massacres. Dallas reports on the invasion of western New York state in the following terms:

A few days after the burning of Newark, the British and Indian troops crossed the Niagara, for this purpose; they surprised and seized Fort Niagara, and put its garrison to the sword; they burned the villages of Lewistown, Manchester, Tuscarora, Buffalo, and Black Rock; slaughtering and abusing the unarmed inhabitants; until, in short, they had laid waste the whole of the Niagara frontier, leveling

28. Henry Adams, *History of the United States during the Administration of James Madison* (New York: Library of America, 1986), 343.

every house and every hut, and dispersing, beyond the means of shelter, in the extremity of the winter, the male and the female, the old and the young.²⁹

Newark, across the Niagara river in Ontario, together with Queenstown, had been burned by the retreating American forces, in an act eventually repudiated by the American government, but with a view to denying winter quarters to the British troops. The revenge on the American forces at Fort Niagara was especially brutal, and afterward the British “let loose” their Indian allies on the American towns and villages along the Niagara river; though undefended, from Lake Ontario to Buffalo, they were all destroyed.³⁰

There is some inclination to regard Presidents Jefferson and Madison as naïve, provincial or unworldly as the American experiment in self-government faced the great powers of Europe. But, in the words of Gordon Wood, they aimed to offer “a new and grand experiment in international politics.”

They believed that the American Revolution opened up the possibility of a different kind of world from what hitherto had been experienced, a new republican world free of warring monarchies. Like other eighteenth-century enlightened liberals, Madison and Jefferson were taken with the possibility of eliminating war and creating a universal peace. If only the states of the world could become republics and end the dynastic rivalries and monarchical militarism of the several previous centuries, then peace might come at last to the Atlantic community. In a republicanized world the war-making ambitions of kings would be eliminated and states would be tied together only by commerce.³¹

Their aim regarding the native Americans was not fundamentally different. The passage directly above suggests how we should understand American commercial policy in the early republic—peace and free trade vs. colonialism, mercantilism and aristocratic domination. The Jeffersonian Republicans sought to include the native Americans as small farmers—which is not to say they would tolerate savagery. The policy of the Jacksonian Democrats toward the native Americans was significantly more aggressive, of course; and one will recall here the story of the “trail of tears.” Yet, consider, too, that without a British invasion at New Orleans, there might have been no President Andrew Jackson as a legacy of the War of 1812. I am reminded of a quotation from Ralph Waldo Emerson, writing, much later in the essay “Success” from *Society and Solitude*. Emerson warns:

Nature knows how to convert evil to good; Nature utilizes misers, fanatics, show-men, egotists, to accomplish her ends; but we must not think better of the foible for that. The passion for sudden success is rude and puerile, just as war, cannons, and executions are used to clear the ground of bad, lumpish, irreclaimable savages, but always to the damage of the conquerors.³²

29. Dallas, *Exposition*, 74.

30. See Adams, *Madison*, 761-763.

31. Gordon S. Wood, “Rambunctious American Democracy,” in *The New York Review of Books*, vol. 49.8, 9 May 2002.

32. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Society and Solitude, Twelve Chapters* (1870); reprinted in H.G. Callaway ed., Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Society and Solitude, Twelve Chapters* (Lewiston, NY: Mellon Press, 2008), 183.

Emerson's message, published in 1870 after the trauma of the American Civil War, is surely consistent with William James' more famous warning against the "bitch goddess" of success, and this is an additional reason to dwell on the foreign policy of the early republic and its long resistance to being drawn into war. While Andrew Jackson had great success as a warrior, this is a kind of success that the founders long sought to avoid.

V. Conclusion

It has been shown in this paper that the conception of the War of 1812 as America's second war of independence is fundamentally sound. It aimed to reduce British power and influence over American commerce and society, and it achieved this aim both internally and as a matter of foreign policy. Notice, in this connection, that the issue of impressment, though not mentioned in the Treaty of Ghent, was never heard of again in American-British relations after 1815; America's interest in the trading rights of neutrals was sustained and generally respected right up until 1914 and the issue of Germany's unrestricted submarine warfare in WWI; the prior conflicts concerning the border with Canada were substantially settled by the war. In addition, the assembled evidence and argument shows that the aims and accomplishments of the war fit comfortably with understanding it as a war fought in opposition to neo-colonialism—as it was put in those times, as a matter of American "honor." Foreign influence over American commerce was resisted and eventually reduced substantially, and the domestic Anglophile Federalists suffered a debilitating defeat at the hands of the party of Jefferson, Madison and Monroe. These developments paved the way for greater emphasis on internal development, western settlement, canals, roads and railroads; and it decreased the power of foreign commerce in American political life. The power of the Federalist party was substantially extinguished, and the way was made clear for the second American party system. President Madison, known as "father of the constitution" and the chief author of the Bill of Rights, was also the author of *Federalists Papers*, No. 10—where the focus falls on how the large-scale republic may better resist the dangers of factions and factionalism. Though clearly not the classical man of action, as President, Madison succeeded in substantially diminishing the Anglophile vs. Francophile factionalism of the early republic.