

# 1812 - A World at War

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**The United States' decision to declare war in 1812 was the result of years of foreign interference.**

By 1812, Britain and France had been at war for nearly 20 years. Napoleon Bonaparte had conquered most of Europe, and the Royal Navy was Britain's only defense against his planned invasion across the English Channel.



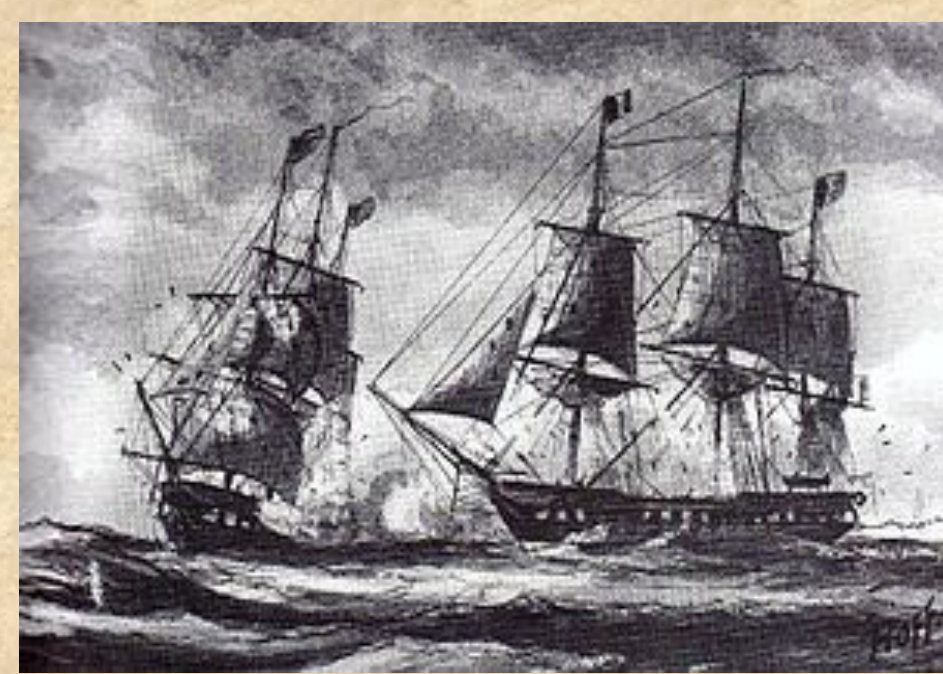
French Troops at Austerlitz



British Fleet Blockading the Port of Brest

Blockades were a major tool of war, as each side tried to stop the flow of food and supplies to the other.

The British 'Orders in Council' and the French 'Milan Decrees' interfered with the commerce of any neutral country, so American ships and cargoes were being seized by both sides. The U.S. fought a 'Quasi War' at sea with France in 1798 over such seizures, and now interference with our trade by both sides is having disastrous effects on the



Constellation vs. L'Insurgente, 1798



Ridiculing the 1807 Embargo

U.S. economy. Between 1805 and 1811 diplomatic efforts and self-imposed embargoes failed to resolve the impasse. Ships were laid-up, exports sat on the docks, and U.S. merchants lost fortunes.



***"We consider a neutral flag, on the high safeguard to those sailing under it."*** - James Madison



Impressment is another serious grievance. With over 650 ships spread throughout the world, the Royal Navy's manpower needs are huge. To man their ships, the British resort to impressment: seizing any sailor they think might be British, regardless of their true citizenship, and forcing them to serve for indefinite periods. "Press gangs"

round-up men in the seaports, and British officers can stop any merchant ship at sea to search for suspected deserters or other seamen to fill their crews.

U.S. sailors are vulnerable due to their Anglo-American roots, and the fact that British laws do not recognize the right to renounce citizenship. Even "protection" documents issued by the U.S. government to verify a person's identity and citizenship are ignored. Between 1798 and 1811 over 6,000 American sailors were pressed into British service.



U.S. Seaman's Protection Document, 1807

These were the issues that provide the rallying cry for war with Britain that overshadows all the others:

**FREE TRADE**

**AND**

**SAILORS' RIGHTS**



**Next: The War and Privateering Begins**

