The War of 1812, often called the “second war of independence,” is one of the most overlooked and misunderstood events in United States history. It marked the second time the United States declared war on the British Empire, in a move that would threaten the survival of the young nation. Ultimately, it would grant the United States true recognition as an independent nation in the eyes of major European powers, and helped to bolster its reputation in international politics. It also marked the second time the United States would attempt (and fail) to conquer Canada. It was a relatively short war, lasting only two years and eight months. There was no clear winner, and not much changed as a result of the war. It represents the last great attempt to unite Native Americans against the expansive power of the United States. The War of 1812 produced some of the most recognizable symbols of American history, like “The Star Spangled Banner” and Uncle Sam. It saw the burning of the White House, and produced its share of heroes. The war stirred what many historians pinpoint as the root of American nationalism, while at the same time marked a deeply-rooted facet of sectionalism that would help lay the groundwork for the Civil War nearly fifty years before it began.

Why then is the legacy of the War of 1812 so often forgotten? Part of the reason may be that, unlike other conflicts, the war has no easily definable causes. Some arguments point to almost a decade of ineffective and restrictive policies put forth by both American and British politicians. These policies include the British impressment – or seizure – of American seaman in U.S. waters. Others attribute the war to the rise of American expansionism and the desire to acquire Canada to “secure additional farm land” and “put an end to British influence over American Indians.” Some historians have argued that sectional differences between the main political parties in the United States pushed the country to war, while others claim that ideological factors of upholding national honor and republican values were to blame. Donald R. Hickey argues that the war was the result of a combination of factors, not least of which was a lingering resentment of the British by Americans, and the perceived threat of British encroachment on American independence. Indeed, relations between Great Britain and the United States following the end of the Revolutionary War resembled a rivalry more than an alliance, but that alone does not explain the war. Reginald Horsman argues that the true impetus of war was not the achievement of American independence from Great Britain, but rather the “outbreak of war between Great Britain and France in 1793,” and the short peace that followed. Independently, these issues were not enough to spark a war between the United States and Great Britain, but together they helped create an atmosphere of tension and distrust between the countries.
The years leading up to the war were tumultuous at best, both locally and internationally. With the election of Thomas Jefferson, Republicans had gained power of the White House in 1801 after a decade of Federalist rule. Jefferson's administration worked diligently to reverse Federalist policies dealing with everything from the economy to the size of the military. By 1803, Great Britain and France had gone to war again, marking the beginning of the Napoleonic Wars. While the United States remained a neutral power during this time, it still weathered difficulties because of it. France had re-opened trade with the United States and the French West India colonies, and Great Britain attempted to subvert this by invoking the Rule of 1756 which had stated that trade with a neutral party could not be opened in a time of war. The United States responded by inaugurating a system of “broken voyage” where shipments bound for France were first taken to the United States. The practice of “re-export trade” proved to be incredibly profitable for the United States, topping off at around $53 million by 1805.

That same year British officials ruled with the Essex decision that “landing goods and paying duties in the United States was no longer proof of bona fide importation,” meaning that American merchants would have to provide proof that ships bound for France had indeed broken their voyages when landing in U.S. ports. Another problem was the impressment of American ships and seaman by the British navy. Because American ships offered higher pay and better working conditions, “probably a quarter of the 50,000 to 100,000 seaman employed on American ships” were British.

To overcome shortages in their own ranks, British “press gangs” would board American ships in an effort to reclaim British subjects – and sometimes American citizens – for service on their own ships. In an effort to end impressment and reinstatement of the re-export trade, American and British diplomats put forth a renewal of the Jay Treaty of 1795, called the Monroe-Pinkney Treaty. Under the terms of the treaty the United States would have given up the “promise of benevolent neutrality” while gaining British allowance of the re-export trade so long as American ships paid a small duty when breaking voyage in the U.S. advanced notice of British blockades, and the promise that the British would no longer involve themselves in American trade within five miles of the U.S. coast. Jefferson, however, rejected the treaty and refused to send it to the Senate for ratification in 1806, and relations between the powers rapidly deteriorated.

On June 22, 1807 the U.S.S. Chesapeake, an American frigate, was approached by the H.M.S. Leopard, a British vessel. The British navy demanded that a boarding party be allowed to board the Chesapeake, which employed a large number of British citizens, to search for deserters. The Americans refused and the Leopard fired at the ship, killing three and wounding eighteen others. While Jefferson ordered “all British warships out of American waters,” he waited for Britain’s response. The British condemned the attack and offered to pay reparations, which staved off a war. Between 1807 and 1810 four pieces of legislation put forth by the United States attempted to satisfy relations with Great Britain. The Embargo Act (1807), issued by Jefferson restricted international trade by American ships without permission; the Non-Intercourse Act (1807) eased up the restrictions of the Embargo Act and instead limited the restriction to Great Britain and France; the Erskine Agreement (1809) offered to resume trade with Great Britain and cease trade with France if the British would stop impressment of American sailors (it was denied); Macon’s Bill No. 2 (1810) again forbade trade with France and Great Britain, but offered to open trade up with the first nation that lifted trade restrictions on neutral parties. France agreed, and trade resumed.

By 1811, relations with Great Britain had all but failed, but this was not the only problem for the United States. 1811 also marked the “outbreak of a new Indian war on the western front.” Angered by the continued aggression of American imperialism against Native Americans, Shawnee brothers Tecumseh and Tenskwatawa (or Prophet) had started building an “Indian confederation based on the rejection of the white man’s ways” around 1805. Having steadily grown more militant and larger in size, on November 7, 1811 the confederation attacked an U.S. army camp led by William Henry Harrison, who would later become the ninth U.S. president. Despite catching the soldiers off-guard, the Battle of Tippecanoe proved to be an American victory, although the confederation did not disband until Tecumseh’s death in 1813 at the Battle of the Thames.

Tensions with Great Britain had deteriorated completely by the time James Madison, who had succeeded Jefferson in the presidency in 1809, made the declaration of war on June 18, 1812. It was a move that deeply divided the country, exposing sectionalism between the Republicans and the Federalists. Republicans had grown overwhelmingly supportive of going to war, while the Federalists were vehemently against it. Two days after the declaration the Federal Republican, a Federalist
Uncle Sam – U.S. 19th Century personification of the United States. The Treaty of Ghent restored the status quo ante bellum – or the state that existed before the war. Both sides agreed to evacuate enemy territories and return property and prisoners within 120 days. Both the U.S. and Britain agreed to make peace with the Native Americans, and do their best to abolish the slave trade. But the speed of communication meant that immediate peace could not yet be achieved and the most famous battle of the war had yet to be fought.

In November 1814, Major General Andrew Jackson had invaded and neutralized Florida with an army of roughly 4,100 men and met with little opposition before racing to meet the British in New Orleans. On January 8, 1815, Jackson and his army defeated British forces in the city. The British had been attempting to gain control over territory the United States had acquired from France in the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, which included what is now the state of Kansas. The British lost over 2,000 men at the battle, compared to seventy on the U.S. side. Jackson’s success launched him into the limelight as a national hero, and helped win him the presidency in 1828. Reports of the peace treaty had been steadily spreading through the nation in the meantime. Madison submitted the treaty to the Senate on February 15, 1815, and the treaty was unanimously accepted the next day, ratified by Madison shortly after.

After two years and eight months, the war ended in a draw. Roughly 2,260 Americans were killed, and 4,505 wounded, and the war had cost the United States approximately $158 million. The War of 1812 had started partly a result of decades of unresolved tension with Great Britain, and the end of the war marked no major changes for either country. But although the war seemed inconsequential, this was not the case. The war helped launch four presidencies, and dramatically influenced the American economy. Although the Treaty of Ghent specified that all land acquisitions be returned to the pre-war status quo, the United States had permanently acquired part of Florida in 1813 from Spain, a neutral power. The U.S. had broken the power of the Native Americans in the Northwest and Southwest, and Great Britain had failed to negotiate a permanent reservation for
them, which would become an issue in the coming years. The war also marked a divide in the United States that would come into play again in the years leading up to the Civil War.

But ultimately, the war confirmed that the U.S. was a major political power. Why then has the war been forgotten over the course of the past 200 years? Perhaps the confusion surrounding the start of the war, and the absence of victory played a part in that, but one thing is clear. The War of 1812 had far-reaching consequences that affected the future of the United States in many ways and deserves to be studied further.

**Literature Cited**


**Author Bio**

Ryann Brooks is currently a graduate student in History at Emporia State University where she is working on her thesis about Progressive era women in Emporia, Kansas, and holds a BA in History from ESU. She is a graduate teaching assistant for the Department of Social Sciences and volunteers at the Lyon County Historical Archives Center in her free time.

**Online Resources**

**War of 1812 Fun Facts**


**War of 1812 Fun Facts**

Fact Monster hosts a webpage with many details of the war. There are ten facts ranging from the number of US troops in battle, to the Treaty of Ghent. http://www.factmonster.com/ipka/A0769973.html

**Morning Routine of Soldier**

This website goes through the routine of the typical British Soldier in the War of 1812. The question “What did a soldier do during the day?” is answered clearly for students to understand. http://www.warof1812.ca/morningroutine.htm

**Causes of War of 1812**

Four main causes of the war are listed and explained here. There are also advantages and disadvantages that the United States held during the war and those are listed as well. http://www.essortment.com/war-1812-21611.html

**Various Pictures/Text/Audio of 1812**

This history site has several images, text, and audio pertaining to the War of 1812. There are pictures of weapons, documents, maps, and photographs. http://images.ourontario.ca/1812/results?q=1812

**War of 1812 Aftermath**

This webpage re-lives the history and aftermath of the War of 1812. It discusses the voting on the Treaty of Ghent, negotiations, and boundary problems. http://library.thinkquest.org/22916/exafter.html
Who/What/When/Where of Battles
A list of war heroes, battle locations, and items from the War of 1812. This site breaks down the who/what/when/where of the war.

Weapons
Several different rifles, muskets, and swords were used throughout the War of 1812. Pictures, background, and specifications of the weapons are explained thoroughly.
http://www.warof1812.ca/weapons.html

War of 1812 Timeline
This social studies site for kids breaks the War of 1812 down into several different parts. Each part is separated from the others, and you click next page to continue on with the breakdown.
http://www.socialstudiesforkids.com/articles/ushistory/thewarof18121.htm

War of 1812 Breakdown
The Washington Post breaks down the War of 1812. Questions such as “why go to war?” and “where was the battlefield?” are answered here.
http://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/kidspost/the-war-of-1812-for-kids/2012/06/07/gJQAHWKcNV_story.html

Online Resources for Teachers

Downloadable Lesson Plans for Teachers
Grade 7
Ten lesson plans based off of the War of 1812. These lesson plans are used to use resources to gather information, process, and communicate about the information obtained. Students will record main ideas, key phrases, and observations. In the end, students should gain a better understanding of the political and social climate of the war.
http://www.1812history.com/teachers.html

Baltimore and the War of 1812 Activities
Grade 4-12
Three activities are set up on worksheets for teachers to hand out to students. This Maryland Exploration helps teach students how characteristics such as being big and powerful or small and agile affected the War of 1812. It covers independence and expansion, the Embargo Act, the declaration of war, American Exports, and much more.
http://www.pride2.org/NewPrideSite/MD/Lesson10/Lesson10_1.html

History of the War and Star Spangled Banner
Grades K-12
After this Star-Spangled Banner project, students will know the origins and outcome of the War of 1812. This project requires reading, chronological thinking, and map-making. It covers content areas such as language arts, and social studies.
http://americanhistory.si.edu/starspangledbanner/pdf/SSB_History_Overview.pdf

What was Francis Scott Key Writing About?
Grade 4/5
At the end of this lesson over the Star-Spangled Banner, students will understand the lyrics of the National Anthem. Students will determine whether the Star Spangled Banner is an acceptable National Anthem to this day.

War of 1812 Unit Lesson Plans
Grade 2
This unit for second graders contains a set of thirteen lessons for students to learn about the country's history. Students will understand time and chronology, develop historical empathy, and gain understanding on how an event in history can have many different causes and effects.
http://www.coreknowledge.org/mimik/mimik_uploads/lesson_plans/570/The%20War%20of%201812%20Lesson%20Plans.pdf

War of 1812 Quiz
Grades 6-12
The War of 1812 Website has a general knowledge quiz over questions involving presidents, dates, and more. The quiz is 20 questions long, and you can obtain your score instantly by pushing a button that says “Get Score”. The answers are also corrected if a student answers wrong.
http://www.warof1812.ca/quiz1.htm

War of 1812 Animated Picture
Grades 6-12
This .gif shows a step by step battle in the War of 1812. The different pictures are spaced out enough for a teacher to address each of the points on the picture.
http://www.warof1812.ca/image/crysler_farm.gif

War of 1812 Online Game
Grades 4-12
This game, called “A Sailor’s Life for Me!” makes you feel as if you are one of the boys joining the Navy. You start out by packing your bag, taking only necessities. You move along to middle watch, morning watch, forenoon watch, afternoon watch, first dog watch, last dog watch, and first watch. The game is great because it puts you in the shoes of a Navy boy and lets you make decisions on how you would do things if you were in their situation.
http://www.asailorslifeforme.org/ironsides.php
Books

**Francis Scott Key's Star Spangled Banner (Step into Reading Book Series: A Step 3 Book)**
By Monica Kulling, Richard Walz (Illustrator)
Random House Children's Books, 2012
ISBN: 9780375867255
Ages 5-8 years

**Once on This Island**
By Gloria Whelan
ISBN: 9780064406192
Ages 8-12 years

**The War of 1812**
By Lucia Raatma
Capstone Press, 2005
ISBN: 9780756508487
Ages 8-11 years

**The Town That Fooled the British**
By Lisa Paap
Sleeping Bear Press, 2011
ISBN: 9781585364848
Ages 6-10 years

**Little House by Boston Bay (Little House Series: The Charlotte Years)**
By Melissa Wiley
ISBN: 9780061148286
Ages 8-12 years

**Famous People of the War of 1812**
By Robin Johnson
Crabtree Publishing Company, 2011
ISBN: 9780778779643
Ages 10-13 years

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By Gordon Clarke
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ISBN: 9780816081943
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**The Battle of New Orleans: The Drummer's Story**
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Pelican Publishing Company, Incorporated, 2005
ISBN: 9781589803008
Ages 5-8 years

**Son of The Hounds**
By Robert Sutherland
Fitzhenry & Whiteside, Limited, 2004
ISBN: 9781550419061
Age 10 years