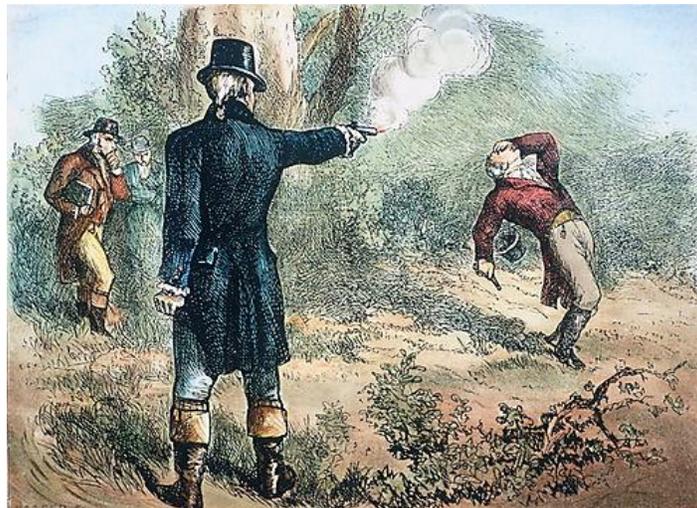


Neutrality under Jefferson and Madison

Thomas Jefferson had no problem defeating his Federalist opponent in 1804. Obtaining the Louisiana Purchase and accomplishing a reduction of the national debt assured him of an overwhelming electoral victory.

A troubled second term. The Republicans' elation at the results of the election did not last long. A disaffected Aaron Burr, whose political career ended when he killed Alexander Hamilton in a duel, became involved in a plot either to create an independent nation in the Louisiana-Mississippi-West Florida region or invade Mexico. Historians remain unsure. Burr was indicted in two states for Hamilton's death, and in early 1807, he was arrested on Jefferson's order and charged with treason. His trial before Chief Justice John Marshall ended in an acquittal because Marshall defined treason under the Constitution very narrowly. The Burr case is interesting from another constitutional perspective: Jefferson refused to turn over documents or appear in court to testify based on a claim of executive privilege.



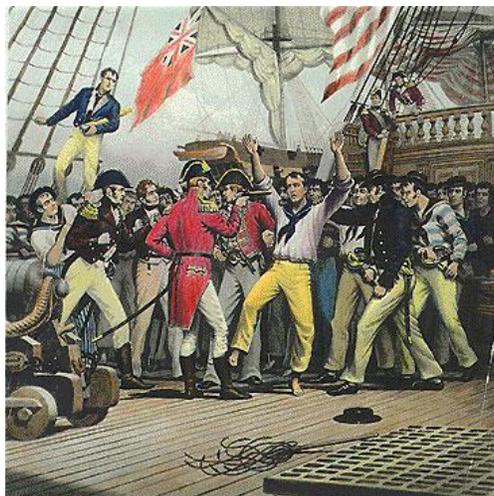
The Burr-Hamilton Duel

With the Federalist Party rapidly declining, Jefferson had to meet the challenge of growing factionalism within his own party. One group, known as the Quids, criticized the president for compromising Republican ideology. John Randolph, the Quid leader, refused to accept the idea that a political party on taking power might have to view things differently than when it was in opposition to the party in office. For example, Jefferson endured Randolph's attacks for agreeing to a compromise on the Yazoo land fraud, a Georgia-area land speculation scheme in which innocent buyers of fraudulently purchased land would have lost their investments. Foreign policy, rather than party or domestic issues, dominated his second term and the administration of his successor, James Madison.

The War between Napoleonic France and Great Britain.

The renewed fighting between Great Britain and France (1803) severely tested American neutrality. The situation became even more difficult when the British navy under Lord Nelson defeated the French fleet at the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805 and gained control of the seas. American merchants had been profiting from the war by shipping sugar and coffee brought from French and Spanish colonies in the Caribbean to Europe. Great Britain protested because the prices it was getting for its West Indies products were declining. Noting that French ports visited by neutral U.S. merchant ships (to preserve the French merchant marine from Great Britain) would have been closed to the United States in peacetime (allowing only French deliveries), Britain invoked the Rule of 1756, stating that such ports should not be open during war to neutral replacements. American traders got around the rule by taking French and Spanish products to American ports, unloading them, and then reloading them for European ports as "American" exports.

By 1805, Britain had had enough of such deceptions, and through a series of trade decrees began a blockade of French-controlled European ports. The British as well as the French ignored U.S. neutrality claims and seized American merchant ships. Great Britain resumed the policy of impressment, taking alleged British navy deserters off American vessels and returning them to British service. The life of an American sailor was hard but nothing like that in the Royal Navy with its harsh discipline and low pay. Many British deserters had become American citizens, but this did not stop British officials from impressing them, nor did the British hesitate in taking U.S.-born citizens, who could even prove their American birth. Between 1807 and 1812, the Royal Navy impressed some six thousand American seamen.



British impressment of American sailors

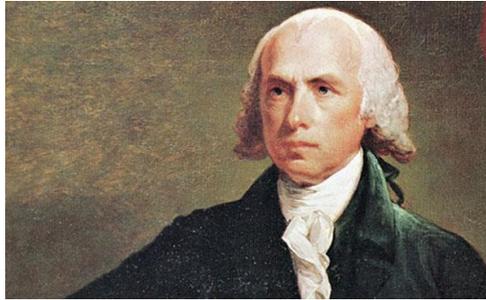
In June 1807, the British warship *Leopard* attacked the *Chesapeake*, an American navy frigate, and four alleged deserters were removed. Prior impressment actions had involved merchant ships; this one, however, involved a U.S. navy ship. Amid the public's cry for war against Britain, Jefferson turned to economic pressure to resolve the crisis.

The Embargo Act. Jefferson's solution to the problems with Great Britain and France was to deny both countries American goods. In December 1807, Congress passed the **Embargo Act**, which stopped exports and prohibited the departure of merchant ships for foreign ports. The act also effectively ended imports because foreign ships would not bring products to the United States if they had to leave without cargo. The British got around the Embargo Act by developing trade connections in South America, while in the United States, thousands of sailors were thrown out of work, merchants declared bankruptcy, and southern and western farmers had no outlet for their crops.

At the time, the Embargo Act was generally viewed as a failure. While the economic costs to Americans were high, trade did continue. Enforcement was lax, and American captains used a loophole in the law to claim that they had legally sailed into European ports only after being “blown off course” by adverse winds; there were a suspiciously great many instances of bad weather between 1807 and 1809. The Embargo Act did, however, result in an increase in manufacturing. The number of cotton mills in the United States, for example, increased from fifteen to eighty-seven in just two years, and other domestic industries took root to replace foreign imports.

The mood of the country in 1808 encouraged Jefferson not to seek a third term. Despite the nation's unhappiness over the embargo, Republican James Madison was elected president and the Republicans kept control of both houses of Congress. The Embargo Act was repealed on March 1, 1809, just before Madison took office.

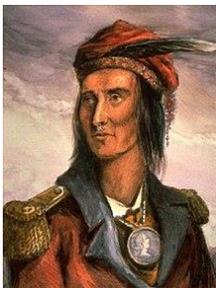
Madison and neutrality. Madison was just as committed as Jefferson to staying out of the European war, and he continued to rely on economic pressure. The **Non-Intercourse Act** of 1809 replaced the Embargo Act. The logic behind the law was that the United States would open its ports to all nations *except* Britain and France. If either of those two nations stopped violating American neutrality rights, the United States would reestablish commercial ties. Britain and France ignored the Non-Intercourse Act, and other seafaring nations had no desire to confront the Royal Navy. Many American merchants simply found ways to evade the law. Congress tried another tack in May 1810 with **Macon's Bill No. 2**. This time, the United States would trade with Britain and France, in spite of their neutrality violations. Should one of them end their restrictions on neutral shipping, the United States would stop trading with the other. A cynical Napoleon responded by promising to end French restrictions, and Congress proclaimed non-intercourse against Britain in February 1811, but France continued to seize American ships.



James Madison, Fourth President of the United States

Problems in the west. While Madison and Congress grappled with the neutrality issue, Native Americans renewed their objections to American settlement north of the Ohio River. Tribes were still being coerced into giving away or selling their land. Through the Treaty of Fort Wayne (1809), the Delaware and Miami gave up much of the central and western parts of the new Indiana Territory for only ten thousand dollars.

Two Shawnee leaders, Tecumseh, a brilliant chief, and his half-brother Tenskwatawa, known as the Prophet, took a stand against further encroachment by settlers. While Tecumseh did receive aid from the British in Canada, he was less their pawn than a man who clearly saw what alcoholism, disease, and loss of land were doing to his people. Tenskwatawa was a recovered alcoholic who urged Indians to reaffirm their traditional values and culture. William Henry Harrison, the governor of the Indiana Territory, perceived in Tecumseh and the Prophet a dangerous combination of military and religious appeal. In September 1811, Harrison set out with about one thousand men to attack Tecumseh's stronghold at Prophetstown on the Tippecanoe River. The Shawnee struck first, but Harrison was able to beat them back and claim a major victory. Tecumseh was away from the village trying to recruit tribes to join the confederacy, and Tenskwatawa fled. The Battle of Tippecanoe, as Harrison preferred to call the engagement, clearly did not resolve the conflict with the Indians on the frontier. It did, however, intensify anti-British feeling in the Northwest.



Tecumseh and the Battle of Tippecanoe

The War of 1812

Western senators and congressmen urged a more aggressive policy against Great Britain. Henry Clay of Kentucky became the leader of a faction in Congress called the **War Hawks**, which demanded an invasion of Canada and the expulsion of Spain from Florida. The War Hawks feared that the British in Canada were once again intriguing with the Indians, a concern that had provoked Harrison's move against Tecumseh.

Voting for war. On June 1, 1812, President Madison sent a war message to Congress. Frustrated at the failure of the neutrality measures and pressured by the War Hawks, Madison felt he had no choice. Ironically, Great Britain repealed its Orders in Council on June 23, 1812, relaxing its trade restrictions in the face of an economic depression. American leaders ignored this belated attempt at compromise, however. Few Republicans wanted war, but long-standing grievances and insults could no longer be tolerated. Madison's war message cited impressment, violation of neutral rights, Indian aggression, and British meddling in American trade as causes for war. The vote proceeded along party lines, the majority of Republicans voting for war and a Federalist minority voting against it. A somewhat divided United States thus fought Great Britain for a second time.



Burning of the "White House"



Shelling of Fort McHenry

Source of text: CliffsNotes.com. *Neutrality under Jefferson and Madison*. 12 Mar 2013
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