

Caustic Causes

IMPRESSMENT

The British practice of forcing merchants and sailors to work in the Royal Navy. The British had authorized this practice during every war fought over the course of the 17th and 18th centuries; they did NOT just start this practice in the early 19th century. Working in the British Navy was a terrible job, and often included serious injury and illness. The British called for volunteers but usually fell short of the sailors needed, so impressing was the answer. This practice was not looked upon favorably in Britain or America. But in 1743 a British court ruled the practice legal. The United States Government denounced impressment. The British claimed that an Englishman could not change his nationality or escape the obligations to the England without the Crown's consent.

CHESAPEAKE AFFAIR

On June 22, 1807, the HMS Leopard stopped the US Frigate Chesapeake off the coast of Virginia. The crew of the Leopard had direct orders to search the Chesapeake for deserters. The Leopard was denied an onboard inspection so the Leopard fired on the Chesapeake. Three people were killed and 18 were wounded. The British then boarded the Chesapeake and removed four sailors. Three of them happened to be American citizens. The three Americans were taken to a prison in Nova Scotia and one of them died while in custody. The remaining two prisoners were returned before the War of 1812 had started.

ORDERS-IN-COUNCIL

On January 1, 1807 the British passed these measures to keep neutral nations (America) from trading between enemy ports. On November 2, 1807 the British forced neutral nations to have their cargo checked in a British port before going to Europe to unload. Then, on April 3, 1809 the British scrapped the previous 2 orders and instituted a strict blockade and forbade trade with all European ports. The British targeted mostly the ports which were under French control. By doing this the United States felt their rights as a neutral nation were being infringed upon. The British were simply using a strategy which has been used in previous conflicts: strangle your enemy!

NATIVE AMERICANS

The Americans felt that the British were aiding the Native Americans and encouraging raids on frontier settlements. The British were trading with the Native Americans and so were the French. The British did not control the Natives but fostered a good relationship with them. Britain did trade weapons with the Native Americans and those weapons were eventually used to attack the frontier settlements. By 1811 the British actually reduced the amount of gunpowder that was traded to the Natives. The sentiment among most Americans was still that the British had enticed the Natives to attack.

WAR HAWKS

The War Hawks were Congressmen from mostly the South and West. This group was headed by Henry Clay, the great orator from Kentucky. As a member of the United States Legislature he encouraged debates with other Congressmen and urged for a second war with Britain. The chief reason behind this movement was the desire to take land from the British. This land was called British Canada at this time and would add thousands of acres of farmland to America. Henry Clay had a way about him and could convince anyone to do whatever he pleased.