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# The private Navy of the United States: The effects of Privateers on the War of 1812

Anthony Green

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The Private Navy of the United States: The Effects of Privateers on the War of 1812

Anthony Green

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

In

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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## Abstract

The declaration of war in June of 1812 brought more questions than it did answers for the United States. Economically, the government was not prepared to fund a war with multiple fronts. To make matters worse, the government's primary source of income was through import duties, which they expected to decrease drastically as the war progressed. Militaristically, the United States Navy was too small to offer the protection that was needed from Britain, who possessed the world's strongest navy at the time. Luckily for the United States, Congress in conjunction with President James Madison authorized privately owned ships to participate in the war effort. These ships worked to supplement the United States Navy, while working primarily to disrupt the British shipping industry. While this was their primary objective, privateers provided much more through their involvement in the War of 1812.

This thesis looks at the contributions of American privateers during the War of 1812. The first chapter will look at the ways in which privateers negatively affected British shipping and the British Royal Navy. The second chapter focuses on the ways in which privateers were able to provide economic support to the United States, while simultaneously hurting the British economy. Finally, the third chapter focuses on the social aspect of privateering. This last chapter demonstrates the ways in which the men aboard these ships viewed their actions as patriotic, as well the way writers and newspaper editors viewed the actions at home.

## Introduction

At the onset of the War of 1812, Benjamin Brown, a poor adolescent from Salem, Massachusetts, set out to join a privateering vessel. With high aspirations of economic prosperity, Brown initially found no ships willing to take an undersized teenager who had no experience at sea. Despite being rejected by numerous owners and captains, Brown did not give up hope, eventually landing a job as a surgeon's assistant on a privateering vessel out of his home port. He, along with the rest of the crew, experienced a successful and prosperous four months at sea. One specific capture of note was when they overtook a British merchant vessel that was carrying cotton, sugar and dye woods. Three days later, they were able to capture another vessel carrying 10,000 bales of cotton. Through these early victories, privateering proved to be a rewarding economic endeavor for Brown and the rest of the crew.<sup>1</sup>

Following the end of his first cruise, Brown sought out additional privateering opportunities with the hopes of furthering his economic gain. Now having the experience that most captains desired, Brown quickly found a job as a captain's clerk aboard the privateering vessel *Frolic*. It was aboard this ship that Brown noted the particularities of the ship, paying close attention to the design of the ship's narrow wedged hull and the tall masts, which differed from the squared hull and shorter masts which the British employed. While Brown found these designs odd, he later noted the speed that these elements afforded the ship. Aboard this vessel, he and the rest of the crew found success when they infiltrated a British convoy by flying the British colors. Once inside the

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<sup>1</sup> Benjamin Brown, *The Yarn of a Yankee Privateer*, Edited by Nathaniel Hawthorne (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1926), 3-16.

convoy, Brown noted that they were able to capture and destroy multiple British merchant vessels a day. In total, they were able to destroy twelve ships without being caught by the British Royal Navy Escorts.<sup>2</sup>

However, not everything Brown recorded was about the captures and prizes he and his shipmates were able to take. Throughout his journal, he talks about the pride with which the crew and officers served aboard these vessels. About one man, Brown wrote, “He was a native of Marblehead, a town renowned in American history for the sturdy patriotism of its sons.”<sup>3</sup> Later, when referring to the entire crew, Brown wrote “I saw much of these gallant sons of the ocean...”<sup>4</sup> Not only did Brown appreciate the economic and militaristic effects of privateering on the war, he also saw the influence that privateers brought to the developing American identity.

Brown, along with thousands of other US citizens, would get the opportunity to participate in the War of 1812 as privateers due to the inadequate size of the United States Navy. When the United States government declared war in June of 1812, the United States Navy contained only seventeen vessels. In contrast, the British Royal Navy, which was the world’s strongest, contained close to 1,000 vessels at the onset of the war. With many believing the war would be fought primarily at sea, members of Congress would look to private individuals in order to bolster the American maritime force.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Brown, *The Yarn of a Yankee Privateer*, 19-32.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 39.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 42.

<sup>5</sup> Mark Collins Jenkins, and David A. Taylor, *The War of 1812 and the Rise of the U.S. Navy* (Washington DC: National Geographic Society, 2012), 24-26. George C. Daughan, *1812: The Navy's War* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 12-15.



The individuals who participated in privateering came from all over the fledgling country and were previously employed in numerous different occupations. Funding for the individual vessels came from the ship owners, politicians, merchants, lawyers, and other wealthy citizens. Those chosen to captain these ships were individuals who previously served as captains aboard merchant vessels or in the Continental Navy. Other officers aboard the ships previously served as sailors or individuals who had a specialty such as the ship doctor. The crew of these vessels were often poor young men who had little to no experience aboard a ship. These men were previously laborers, farmers, or young boys who were looking to establish themselves away from their parents. These individuals came from both rural and urban areas with the hopes of finding employment aboard privateering vessels.<sup>6</sup>

Having a ship and a crew did not guarantee that these individuals would be allowed to participate in the War of 1812. In order to gain permission to act as privateers during the war, ship owners and captains had to apply for a letter of marquee and reprisal. These letters, issued by President James Madison, allowed privateers to participate in the war with one of two objectives. First, privateers could fit their ships with a few guns and a relatively small crew. These privateers were traders, concerned primarily with the importation of goods into the country while avoiding the British blockade. While this group's primary mission was not to take prizes, they were instructed to do so whenever the opportunity presented itself. Second, there were privateers whose main mission was to capture British ships. This style of privateering required ships to have more guns and more men in order to seize prizes encountered while at sea. While doing so, these

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<sup>6</sup> Jerome R. Garitee, *The Republic's Private Navy: The American Privateering Business as Practiced by Baltimore during the War of 1812* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1977), 32-46.

privateers also imported goods into the country. While the government saw these two groups as having separate purposes, they often served the same function. Because of this, the effects of both groups are presented together in this thesis.<sup>7</sup>

Though the United States government only expected privateers to disrupt the British shipping industry during the War of 1812, this private maritime force contributed much more during the war effort. During the war, American privateers also provided militaristic and economic support, while their actions became revered as patriotic among themselves as well by others within the nation. These effects can all be seen with the discussion of Benjamin Brown and his involvement in privateering. Brown, like many other privateers, entered the war concerned with the captures and economic benefit the enterprise could bring. However, as the war progressed, Brown continued to seek the economic benefits while also realizing that a sense of pride in the nation was becoming more prevalent among the crew and himself.

The War of 1812 has been a popular topic among historians, with works first appearing on the topic not long after the official end of the war. Historians from the United States, Canada, and Britain have all contributed to the historiography on the subject. With this, almost every aspect of the war has been covered through numerous approaches to discussing the events and impacts of the war. One of the most popular ways of approaching the war can be seen with Reginald Horsemann's *The War of 1812*, Donald Hickey's *The War of 1812: A Forgotten Conflict*, and J.C.A. Stagg's *The War of*

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<sup>7</sup> George Coggeshall, *History of the American Privateers, and Letters-of-Marque, During Our War with England in the Years 1812, '13 and '14: Interspersed with Several Naval Battles Between American and British Ships-of-War* (New York, 1856), 32-36; Faye M. Kert, *Privateering: Patriots and Profits in the War of 1812* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015), 38-40.

*1812: Conflict for a Continent*. These monographs have become some of the most influential on the War of 1812, providing a general overview of almost every aspect of the war. Despite their attempts to cover every aspect of the war, privateering is only briefly mentioned by Hickey and Horseman, while Stagg omits this group entirely.

Additionally, several historians have approached the war by looking at the militaristic actions of the United States and the British at sea. Stephen Budiansky's *Perilous Fight: America's Intrepid War with Britain on the High Seas, 1812-1815*, Brian Arthur's *How Britain Won the War of 1812: The Royal Navy's Blockade of the United States, 1812-1815*, and Kevin McCranie's *Utmost Gallantry: The U.S. and Royal Navies at Sea in the War of 1812*. Despite their focus on the maritime activities of the war, each of these historians either ignore the impacts of privateering or they downplay the role privateers played on the war effort. In both the Budiansky and McCranie monographs, privateers barely receive a mention outside of the fact that they were involved in the war. Arthur, on the other hand, views privateers as being ineffective once the British blockade is established. However, in *Splintering the Wooden Wall: The British Blockade of the United States, 1812-1815*, Wade Dudley counteracts Arthur's argument by demonstrating the ways privateers and the American Navy were able to effectively counteract the British blockade.

The War of 1812 has also been addressed in terms of social history. In *1812: War and the Passions of Patriotism*, Nicole Eustace looks at the ways in which literature and art were used to help create a sense of patriotism among American citizens. Despite this, Eustace does not discuss the ways in which privateers were mentioned in this attempt to raise patriotic sentiment. Additionally, historians such as Donald Hickey has gone as far

as saying that, “Profit, not patriotism, was their motivation.”<sup>8</sup> While profit was the major motivator for individuals to get involved in privateering, my research demonstrates that patriotic sentiment rose among privateers as the war progressed.

Additionally, numerous historians have looked at the economic aspect of the War of 1812. In addition to the coverage the topic has received in works by Hickey, Stagg, and Horseman, the economics of the war have also been covered in Kenneth Ross’ dissertation *Socio-Economic Effects of the War of 1812* and Cassandra Radomski’s *Mr. Madison’s War: Causes and Effects of the War of 1812*. However, these works only describe the financial issues leading up to the war and the ways in which the United States borrowed money to fund the war. My research however expands on the current historiography to demonstrate the ways in which privateers were able to contribute to the U.S. economic situation.

While privateering is only briefly mentioned in most of the historiography on the War of 1812, a few works have been published focusing solely on this private maritime force. The most recent work to come out on privateering is Faye M. Kert’s *Privateering: Patriots and Profits in the War of 1812*. Despite the title’s hint at patriotism playing a role, Kert ultimately focuses on the ways in which privateers were able to affect the shipping industry. In doing so, Kert dismisses the privateers as having any real impact on the war effort outside of driving up insurance prices. However, not all monographs on privateers have worked to diminish the role of privateers. Edgar Stanton Maclay’s *A History of American Privateers*, celebrates privateers and their militaristic contribution to the war. While, Jerome R. Garitee’s *The Republic’s Private Navy: The American*

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<sup>8</sup> Donald Hickey, *Don’t Give Up the Ship!: Myths of the War of 1812* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 120

*Privateering Business as Practiced by Baltimore During the War of 1812*, which looks at the economics of privateering as it applied to Baltimore. While these works look at some of the effects of privateering on the War of 1812, none describe all of the contributions privateers had on the American war effort. However, this thesis looks to expand on those effects discussed by other historians, while also demonstrating that patriotism did play a role on the decisions privateers made during the War of 1812.

The first chapter of this thesis looks at the ways in which privateers contributed to the American military effort. Within this chapter there is a discussion of why the U.S. government turned to privateers and the advantages this private maritime force had entering the War of 1812. Additionally, this chapter also looks at the ways in which privateers affected the British shipping industry, the British Royal Navy, and the ways in which British citizens viewed the war effort. Chapter two shifts focus to the economic effects of privateering. This chapter focuses on how privateers contributed to the federal and local economies in the United States, while simultaneously negatively effecting the British economy. The final chapter looks at the social effects of privateering, paying attention to the ways in which patriotism is mentioned during the war. With this, the chapter looks at patriotism as it is mentioned by the privateers themselves, through songs, and through newspapers. Finally, the epilogue looks at the Treaty of Ghent, what privateers chose to do following peace, and the Declaration of Paris which ended the practice of privateering.

## Expanding the Navy: Privateers and the War Effort

The declaration of war in June of 1812 brought the United States more questions than it did answers. There were looming fears about fighting and financing the war, but there were also high hopes for the benefits privateers could bring to the war efforts. House of Representatives member Peter B. Porter, a Democratic-Republican from New York, expressed his hopes when he asserted during an address to Congress that hundreds of privateers would be willing to assist in the war effort within months of the declaration of war. Porter went on to say that privateers could, "...harass and destroy the vast and profitable commerce of Great Britain."<sup>9</sup> As Porter hoped with this statement, privateers did play a role in disrupting the British shipping industry, but their role was ultimately much larger and they provided more services for the war effort than the government had initially hoped. In addition to capturing British merchant vessels, privateers also captured British Royal Navy ships and packets, weakened the blockade, and affected the outlook of the war for British citizens.

The government's hopes for the usefulness of privateers led President James Madison to issue letter of Marque and reprisal soon after the declaration of war. After receiving letters of Marque, ships were legally permitted to set sail in hopes of capturing British merchant vessels. Madison included within the letters instructions describing what private vessels were permitted to do during the war effort. In the *Prince de Neufchatel's* letter, Madison wrote:

BE IT KNOWN, That in pursuance of an act of congress, passed on the 26th day of June one thousand eight hundred and twelve, I have Commissioned, and by these presents do commission, the private armed Brig called the Prince Neufchatel

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<sup>9</sup> *Annals of Congress*, House of Representatives, 12<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, 415-416. Accessed from the Library of Congress American Memory Website. <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lwsplink.html>

of the burden of three hundred & Nineteen tons, or thereabouts, owned by John Ordronaux & Peter E. Trevall of the City & State of New York and Joseph Beylle of Philadelphia in the State of Pennsylvania Mounting eighteen carriage guns, and navigated by one hundred & twenty nine men, hereby authorizing Nicholas Millin captain, and William Stetson lieutenant of the said Brig and the other officers and crew thereof, to subdue, seize, and take any armed or unarmed British vessel, public or private, which shall be found within the jurisdictional limits of the United States, or elsewhere on the high seas, or within the waters of the British dominions, and such captured vessel, with her apparel, guns, and appurtenances, and the goods or effects which shall be found on board the same, together with all the British persons and others who shall be found acting on board, to bring within some port of the United States; and also to retake any vessel, goods, and effects of the people of the United States, which may have been captured by any British armed vessel, in order that proceedings may be had concerning such capture or recapture in due form of law, and as to right and justice shall appertain. The said Nicholas Millin is further authorized to detain, seize, and take all vessels and effects, to whomsoever belonging, which shall be liable thereto according to the law of nations and the rights of the United States as a power at war, and to bring the same within some port of the United States, in order that due proceedings may be had thereon. This commission to continue in force during the pleasure of the president of the United States for the time being.<sup>10</sup>

Madison used the instructions to outline the laws of war privateers were expected to follow. Notably, Madison stressed the importance of respecting the rights of neutral powers. British failure to respect neutral powers was a major contributing factor leading up to the war, and he wanted to ensure that United States forces did not further exacerbate tensions. Madison also included instructions on how to treat captured British sailors. He instructed to treat captured sailors with, “justice and humanity, which characterizes the nation of which you are a member.”<sup>11</sup> Finally, Madison’s instructions ordered that all captured vessels be brought to a prize court in the United States. The letters warned that if the instructions were not followed, the captain and crew of the vessel could be tried in a military court. Madison’s instructions were able to successfully

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<sup>10</sup> Fred Hopkins, *Tom Boyle: Master Privateer* (Cambridge, Maryland: Tidewater Publishers, 1976), 14-15.

<sup>11</sup> Hopkins, *Tom Boyle*, 15.

shape the actions of some privateers. Yet, despite potentially severe consequences, his rules were not always followed.<sup>12</sup>

For example, privateers were supposed to send their captures into port to be judged by prize courts, but privateers did not always comply. In fact, privateers became less likely to send their captures to port as the war went on because privateers feared that the British Royal Navy would recapture the vessel before it reached port. As a result, privateers commonly removed sailors and cargo from captured ships and then burned enemy vessels. Captured sailors were later turned over to the United States government for a fee, and cargo was sent to prize courts to have its value determined.<sup>13</sup>

Regardless of whether a privateer ship ultimately followed Madison's instruction or not, all privateers had the same goal after receiving their letters of marque and instructions from President James Madison. They set sail in hopes of making as many captures as possible. Most often, privateers focused on sailing to regions where the British conducted most of their trade. As a result, the coasts of British Canada, Africa, England, and the Caribbean islands saw the majority of privateering action throughout the war. Each of these locations provided some opportunity for capture, but the English Channel and the area around the Caribbean islands ultimately provided the best chance to make captures because American privateers were able to sail faster and maneuver more smoothly through relatively confined areas.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Edgar Stanton Maclay, *A History of American Privateers* (New York: Appelton Press, 1899), 34-41.

<sup>14</sup> Faye M. Kert, *Privateering: Patriots and Profits in the War of 1812* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015), 38-40; Jerome R. Garitee, *The Republic's Private Navy: The American Privateering Business as Practiced by Baltimore During the War of 1812* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1977), 96-98.



From the beginning of the war, American privateers were at an advantage because their ships were faster and more maneuverable than British ships, allowing them to more easily make and avoid capture. Prior to the beginning of the War of 1812, American shipwrights began to change the design of their ships from the designs used by their European counterparts. The biggest design differences were within the hulls and masts of the ships.<sup>15</sup> Whereas the front of European ships was typically rounded, the front of newly designed American ships was sharp, allowing boats to cut through water better. The new, American design also changed the width of ships. While British vessels of the period were wider and prioritized carrying capacity over speed, American ships were built to be narrower and faster. Together, the changes to the ship body allowed American privateers to sail at much greater speeds. Meanwhile, changes to the mast allowed American privateers greater maneuverability.<sup>16</sup>

Masts are the tall upright posts on ships that carry the sails. During the War of 1812, most of the ship styles used by the British contained, at most, one or two masts, while American privateers typically used ships that had two or more masts. With more sails, privateers were able to move better with less wind. The change made by American shipwrights prior to the war allowed privateers a number of advantages when going up against British ships of similar size.<sup>17</sup>

In addition to the advantages from improved ship design, American privateers also implemented a number of tactics to increase their chances of making captures. One

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<sup>15</sup> Carl Cutler, *Greyhounds of the Sea: The Story of the American Clipper Ship* (Cornwall, New York: Cornwall Press, 1930), 46.

<sup>16</sup> Cutler, *Greyhounds of the Sea*, 46.

<sup>17</sup> Lincoln Paine, *Warships of the World to 1900* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000), 227-231.

method utilized by both sides during the war was flying false colors. Ships flying false colors flew a flag of either a neutral country or one of the countries they were at war with in order to approach an enemy vessel. Once they were in position, they fired a warning shot over the enemy ship, while raising the flag of their country. This tactic allowed many privateers to make captures without a battle from the merchant vessel.<sup>18</sup>

Together, the combination of better ships and the tactics employed allowed American privateers to fulfil the intent of the United States government and negatively impact the British shipping industry. Throughout the war, American privateers were responsible for the capture of 1,509 British Merchant vessels.<sup>19</sup> A representative of *Lloyd's List* presented a report to parliament in December 1814 which showed that the British had already lost 1,175 vessels as of October 1814. The representative later gave a chart (See Table 1) to parliament showing the most devastating portions of the war for the British shipping industry.<sup>20</sup>

**Table 1.** Average number of British Merchant vessel captures by American privateers, as reported by *Lloyd's List*.

| Date                                | Average Vessels Captured (per month) |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| August 1812 through September 1812  | 100                                  |
| October 1812 through March 1814     | 20                                   |
| April 1814 through October 1814     | 50                                   |
| November 1814 through February 1815 | 83                                   |

The first three rows demonstrate the numbers presented to parliament by the *Lloyd's List* representative. The last row comes from subtracting the number of vessels reported from this presentation from the total number of captures found within *Lloyd's List* from the beginning of the war to the end of the war.

<sup>18</sup> George Coggeshall, *History of the American Privateers, and Letters-of-Marque, During our War with England in the Years 1812, '13, and '14* (New York: The author, 1856), 104-106.

<sup>19</sup> This is the number of vessels recorded by *Lloyd's list* of London, however *Niles' Weekly Register* placed the number at 1,634 vessels. The lower number is used here, as *Niles' Weekly Register* often contained duplicate captures which leads to accuracy issues.

<sup>20</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 1<sup>st</sup> series, Volume 29 (1814), p.16. Accessed from Hathi Trust. <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/008888477>.

As Table 1 demonstrates, privateers were highly effective during the first couple months of the war. The success was partially due to the fact that the British government did not declare war on America until September 1812. As a result, American privateers were able to take merchant vessels without interference from the British Royal Navy. The *Dolphin*, a privateer ship out of Salem, Massachusetts, was able to capture fifteen British merchant vessels during the first two months of the war alone. One of its early captures, the *Mary* from Bristol, England, proved to be exceptionally helpful as it was carrying weapons and ammunition which were later used by the *Dolphin's* crew.<sup>21</sup> The *Rossie*, an American privateering vessel out of Baltimore, also encountered early success. On a cruise from late August to late September, the *Rossie* was able to capture 12 British ships with a total value of \$1,280,000. After the money was divided among the crew, ship owners, and United States government, several of the crew members decided to retire with their new fortunes. All in all, the early months of the war proved to be the most fruitful for privateers, and around 25% of all captures occurred during the first four months of the war.<sup>22</sup>

After the first two months of the war, Britain's declaration of war led to a drastic decline in captures for American Privateers. After the war declaration, American privateering efforts had to overcome obstacles imposed by the British Royal Navy. Most notably, the British Royal Navy imposed a blockade along the east coast of the United States. The blockade made it more difficult, though not impossible, for privateers to get to the regions where they made their most captures. In addition to the blockade, the

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<sup>21</sup> Timothy Good, *American Privateers in the War of 1812: The Vessels and Their Prizes as Recorded in Niles' Weekly Register* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland Press, 2012) 38.

<sup>22</sup> Good, *American Privateers in the War of 1812*, 81-82.

British also began to impose a compulsory convoy system, which required all merchant vessels to be escorted by the British Royal Navy to and from popular trading destinations.<sup>23</sup>

Despite British obstacles, privateers found some success. According to an 1814 report, British merchants voiced their frustration with privateering action and the inability of the British Royal Navy to prevent further captures during a merchant meeting in Glasgow. A portion of the meeting was published in the British newspaper *Examiner*. In their article, the newspaper reported:

...the number of American Privateers with which our channels have been infested, the audacity with which they approached our coasts, and the success with which their enterprize has been attended—have proved injurious to our commerce, humbling to our pride, and discreditable to the director of the naval power of the British Nation, whose flag, till of late, waved over every sea, and triumphed over every rival. That there is reason to believe, in the short space of less than twenty-four months, above eight hundred vessels have been captured by a power, whose maritime strength, we have hitherto impolitically held in contempt. That, at a time when we are at peace with the rest of the world, when the maintenance of our marine costs so large a sum to the country, when the mercantile and shipping interests pay a tax for protection, under the form of Convoy Duty, and when in the plentitude of our power, we have declared the whole American coast under Blockade; it is equally distressing and mortifying, that our ships cannot with safety traverse our own channels, that insurance cannot be effected by at excessive premium, and that a horde of American cruisers should be allowed, unheeded, unresisted, unmolested, to take, burn, or sink our own vessels, in our own inlets, and almost in sight of our own harbours.<sup>24</sup>

The article made clear that while the British Royal Navy was able to reduce the effects of privateers, it was not able to prevent privateers from continuing to impact the British shipping industry.

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<sup>23</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 1<sup>st</sup> Series, Volume 27 (1814), 368-370. Accessed from Hathi Trust. <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/008888477>.

<sup>24</sup> *Examiner*, September 18, 1814. Accessed from The British Newspaper Archive. <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/titles/the-examiner>.

The number of captures dropped to roughly twenty captures per month for the vast majority of the remainder of the war, but the privateers saw a brief increase in monthly captures following a peace in the Napoleonic Wars. The peace in Europe led many merchant vessels to believe they no longer needed to abide by a convoy system to conduct trade. The resulting failure to utilize the protection offered by the British Royal Navy allowed privateers to increase captures. In the first seven months following the peace, privateers increased their captures to fifty per month. The number increased again to eighty-three captures per month during the final four months of the war.<sup>25</sup>

The *Prince de Neufchatel* from New York had great success following the peace in Europe.<sup>26</sup> Beginning in April 1814, and continuing for the following ten months, the *Prince de Neufchatel*, made all thirty-four of its captures. The majority of the ship's captures occurred in the English and Irish Channels, which furthered the frustrations British merchants had voiced. In total, the *Prince de Neufchatel* was estimated to deal well over one million dollars worth of damages to the British shipping industry in the later part of the war. Despite the significant level of damages this one privateering ship was able to cause, it was only a small part of the overarching privateering effort to disrupt British trading.<sup>27</sup>

By the end of the war, American privateers had captured 1,509 British merchant vessels or around 7% of the Britain's merchant fleet. While 7% was only a small percentage of the overall merchant maritime fleet, the effects were undoubtedly felt

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<sup>25</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 1<sup>st</sup> Series, Volume 29 (1814), 16. Accessed from Hathi Trust. <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/008888477>.

<sup>26</sup> The *Prince de Neufchatel* is one of, if not the, only privateering vessel to be owned during a woman. The ship belonged to a Mrs. Charthen of New York.

<sup>27</sup> Good, *American Privateers in the War of 1812*, 75-77.

during the war effort, as demonstrated by the Glasgow merchant meeting where a large portion of the meeting revolved around the loss of the vessels. Although a significant portion of the ships captured by privateers were merchant vessels, merchant ships were not the only significant captures made by private maritime forces during the war effort.<sup>28</sup>

In addition to disrupting the British shipping industry, privateers also engaged with British Royal Navy vessels. Despite the fact that the United States government did not expect privateers to fight the British Royal Navy, the battles often occurred out of necessity. The first major encounter occurred in August 1813 when the privateering ship *Decatur* fought the *HMS Dominica*. According to the *Decatur*'s logbook, the battle was bloody and lasted for an hour. In the end, the *Decatur* was victorious and claimed the *HMS Dominica* as its prize.<sup>29</sup>

After returning to port, the captain of the *Decatur* turned the British Royal Navy vessel over to John Dent, the commanding naval officer of Charleston. Dent then wrote to the Secretary of the Navy, William Jones, to inform him of the privateers' accomplishment. In his letter, Dent wrote:

I have the honor to inform you that the privateer schooner *Decatur*, of this port, arrived here yesterday with H.B.M. schooner *Dominica*, her prize. She was captured on the 15<sup>th</sup> inst. After a most gallant and desperate action of one hour, and carried by boarding, having all her officers killed or wounded except one midshipman. The *Dominica* mounts 15 guns, one a 32-pounder on a pivot, and had a complement of 83 men at the commencement of the action, sixty of whom were killed or wounded. She was one of the best equipped and manned vessels of her class I have seen. The *Decatur* mounts seven guns and had a complement of 103 men at the commencement of the action, nineteen of whom were killed and wounded.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Frederick C. Leiner, "Yes, Privateers Mattered," *Naval History* 28, no. 2 (April 2014), 16-21.

<sup>29</sup> <sup>29</sup> Good, *American Privateers in the War of 1812*, 34-35.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

Dent's letter showed the importance of the *Decatur's* capture to the American maritime war effort.

Roughly eight months after the capture of the *HMS Dominica*, American privateers captured another British Royal Navy vessel. In April 1814, the privateering vessel *Perry* encountered the *HMS Ballahou* while sailing off the English coast. The battle between the ships lasted around one hour and caused little damage to either ship. In an attempt to justify the capture by American privateers, a British lawyer, William James, described the vessel as one of the smallest vessels in the navy's fleet.<sup>31</sup>

A third capture was made by the privateering vessel *Syren* just four months later. The *Syren* was sailing the English Channel in August 1814 when it encountered the *HMS Landrail*. The ships spent an hour and ten minutes firing canons at one another and another forty minutes battling with muskets. Before surrender, the *Landrail* threw several messages over-board, including instructions for several other British Royal Navy vessels. By the end of the battle, seven men aboard the *HMS Landrail* were injured, fifteen men on the *Syren* were injured, and three members of the *Syren's* crew were killed.<sup>32</sup>

Finally, the last privateering capture of a British Royal Navy ship occurred in February 1815. While sailing in the Caribbean, the *Chasseur* mistook the *HMS St. Lawrence* and began to chase the ship. Though the men aboard the *Chasseur* were not prepared to engage a British Royal Navy vessel, the battle only lasted for fifteen minutes. Four days after the battle Captain Thomas Boyle of the *Chasseur* wrote to the owner of

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 72-73; William James, *An Inquiry into the Merits of the Principal Naval Actions Between Great-Britain and the United States: Comprising an Account of all British and American Ships of War Reciprocally Captured and Destroyed Since the 18<sup>th</sup> of June 1812* (Halifax, Nova Scotia: Acadian Recorder Office, 1816), 42.

<sup>32</sup> Good, *American Privateers in the War of 1812*, 95; James, *An Inquiry into the Merits of the Principal Naval Actions Between Great-Britain and the United States*, 45.

the ship to inform him of the capture. Boyle began his letter by writing, “I have the honor to inform you...of the capture of the Britannic majesty’s schooner *St. Lawrence*.”<sup>33</sup> Of the thirty-nine captures Boyle made during the war, this was the only letter he wrote to the ship’s owner in regard to a single capture. By writing the letter, Boyle demonstrated the level of importance a British Royal Navy capture had for privateers and the nation.<sup>34</sup> While the four ships captured by American privateers were only a small portion of the British Royal Navy’s roughly 1,000 vessels, the captures proved beneficial to the war effort in multiple ways. First, the captures were valuable assistance to the United States Navy. Throughout the war, U.S. forces captured a total of only nineteen British Royal Navy Vessels; thus, the four captures made by privateers accounted for roughly 21% of all captures.<sup>35</sup> Second, the captures helped shape public opinion of the war in both the United States and England. In the United States, the captures were used by newspapers, poets, and song writers in an attempt to garner support for the war effort. On the other hand, English citizens used the captures to question Britain’s involvement in the war and the overall strength of the British military.

In addition to the capture of British merchant vessels and British Royal Navy Ships, during the War of 1812 American privateers captured twenty-eight British packets. Packets were responsible for delivering mail throughout the British empire during the war. When a packet was captured, or capture was feared, the mail was often thrown overboard to prevent privateers from turning the mail over to the government. The ships

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<sup>33</sup> Good, *American Privateers in the War of 1812*, 26

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> James, *An Inquiry into the Merits of the Principal Naval Actions Between Great-Britain and the United States*.



were also responsible for carrying spices and precious metals from British controlled territories back to England. As a result, when the privateering vessel *Governor Tompkins* captured the packet *Mary-Ann* in May 1813, the crew found \$50,000 worth of gold and bullion along with the mail.<sup>36</sup>

The twenty-eight captured packets were not only economically beneficial to privateers, but they also helped the United States to further its war efforts. Capturing packets often disrupted communication between war officials because mails was the major source of communication during the war. The disruption of communication became so severe that English politician Alexander Baring said to parliament, “It was not into the chops of the Channel alone that the Americans had penetrated, they had got into the Irish sea, and endangered the communication between Liverpool and Bristol and Ireland. Such a circumstance was hardly within the memory of man, that with such a naval force as ours, the Admiralty were not able to guard the narrow outlets of the Irish Sea.”<sup>37</sup> The capture of packets allowed privateers to disrupt English communications, making it difficult for the British to effectively plan land and maritime war activities.

Several privateering captains and their crews also helped the war effort by affecting the British Royal Navy blockade. One of the earliest examples of this occurred in 1813, when several privateering vessels joined the United States Navy to monitor actions of British ships. Beginning in the spring of 1813, the British Royal Navy established a blockade of the Chesapeake Bay that all but prevented ships from entering or leaving the bay. At this

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<sup>36</sup> Good, *American Privateers in the War of 1812*, 49-50

<sup>37</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 1<sup>st</sup> Series, Volume 29 (1814), 651. Accessed from Hathi Trust. <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/008888477>.

point in the war, the United States Navy did not possess any vessels with the appropriate size and maneuverability to effectively challenge the British Royal Navy in the confines of the Chesapeake Bay. As a result, the commanding officer of the Chesapeake Bay naval force, Captain Charles Gordon, need to find a way to effectively prevent the British from attacking costal settlements. Working with the Baltimore insurance agents, Gordon came up with a plan to have privateers who were docked in Baltimore assist in the defense of the bay. After the plan was developed, Gordon appealed to Secretary of the Navy, William Jones, to issue commissions in the United States Navy for the captains of the privateering ships chosen. The Navy ultimately agreed and assigned privateering captains the rank of Sailing Master, which was seen as a rank just below that of an officer in the Navy. Gordon reached out to the captains of the *Wasp*, *Revenge*, *Patapsco*, and *Comet* to assist in the defense of the bay.<sup>38</sup>

On April 15, 1813, all four privateering vessels accepted their commission into the Navy. While the privateers served in the Navy, Gordon noted their duties in letters to Secretary Jones. In one letter to Jones, Gordon noted that the *Comet* and *Revenge* had been assigned to move buoys in the bay throughout the month of May. In July, the *Comet* and *Revenge* were reassigned to the mouth of the bay to monitor the movements of British Royal Navy vessels. Nearly a month later, the Department of the Navy ended the privateer contracts. Although the privateers did not ultimately fight on behalf of the

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<sup>38</sup>Andrew J. Wahll, *Sea Raptors: Logs of the Private Armed Vessels Comet and Chasseur Commanded by Tom Boyle*, (Westminster, Maryland: Heritage Books, 2008), 24-25; Charles Gordon to William Jones. 1813. Accessed from the Library of Congress. <https://www.loc.gov/item/mjm016521/>.

Navy, they carried out a number of functions to help defend the bay against further attacks by the British.<sup>39</sup>

The British Royal Navy's blockade successfully prevented privateering movement for a short period, but the blockade was not always effective. Throughout the war effort, privateers were able to navigate around, or through, the blockade, by using the speed and maneuverability of their ships. Continued success is evident my looking at the table on page six. Although the number of captures declined, privateer effectiveness remained. Privateer ability to get around the blockade was important because it allowed privateers to make captures and bring in goods at a time when merchant vessels had difficulty getting in and out of U.S. harbors.<sup>40</sup>

In addition to getting around the blockade, privateers also weakened the blockade by making Parliament impose the convoy system. The convoy system required British Royal Navy vessels to leave the blockade to focus on transporting merchant vessels to and from trade destinations. Even when the compulsory convoy system was in place, privateers were still able to capture ships which were supposedly guarded by naval vessels. The tactics privateers used to accomplish these captures was best described by G.J. Marcus in the *Age of Nelson*, when he wrote the following:

They carried a large spread of canvas, particularly for use in light airs. With their large blocks and thinner ropes they did not present so smart an appearance as the British, but undoubtedly they were easier to work. They were faster and more skillfully maneuvered than any other vessels of their class. They could generally overhaul any merchantman and elude any man-of-war. With their light construction and immense spread of canvas they could wear or take and dart away under a frigate's gun long before their heavy opponent could come about. They

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<sup>39</sup> Charles Gordon to William Jones. 1813. Accessed from the Library of Congress. <https://www.loc.gov/item/mjm016521/>.

<sup>40</sup> <sup>40</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 1<sup>st</sup> series, Volume 29 (1814), p.16. Accessed from Hathi Trust. <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/008888477>.

were well adapted to attack either merchantman or running ship. By night they could run right into the midst of a convoy and cut out some unlucky merchantman; by day they could pounce on laggards and stragglers.<sup>41</sup>

Marcus explained how British Royal Naval vessels had difficulty stopping privateers from attacking convoys. Throughout the war, privateers were able to get around British naval vessels, whether they were part of the blockade or leading a convoy, because of their speed and maneuverability. As a result, privateers continued to have an effect on the war effort, despite British attempts to stop them.<sup>42</sup>

American privateers were able to contribute to the war effort through their capture of merchant vessels, British Royal Navy ships, and British packets. Their actions even helped lead British citizens to call for the end of the war. At the beginning of the war, the British Royal Navy was believed to be the strongest in the world. As the war progressed, British citizens began to question this belief as American privateers and the United States Navy began capturing British vessels. Even as early as March 20, 1813 an edition of *The London Times* published the following:

...This is an occurrence that calls for serious reflection-- this, and the fact stated in our paper of yesterday, that *Lloyd's List* contains notices of upwards of five hundred British vessels captured, in seven months, by the Americans. Five Hundred merchantmen and three frigates!<sup>43</sup> Can these statements be true; and can the English people *hear* them unmoved? Any one who had predicted such a result of an American war this time last year, would have been treated as a madman or a traitor. He would have been told. If his opponents had condescended to argue with him, that long ere seven months had elapsed, the American flag would be swept from the seas, the contemptible navy of the U.S. annihilated, and their maritime arsenals rendered a heap of ruins. Yet down to this moment, not a single

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<sup>41</sup> G.J. Marcus, *The Age of Nelson: The Royal Navy, 1793-1815* (New York: Viking Press, 1971), 461.

<sup>42</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 1<sup>st</sup> Series, Volume 27 (1814), 368-370. Accessed from Hathi Trust. <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/008888477>.

<sup>43</sup> This number is a combination of American Navy and privateering captures, with the majority of merchant vessels being captured at the hand of privateers and the three frigate captures occurring as a result of the Navy's effort.

American frigate has struck her flag. They insult and laugh at our want of enterprize and vigour. They leave their ports when they please, and return to them when it suits their convenience; they traverse the Atlantic; they beset the West India Islands; they advance to the very chops of the Channel; they parade along the coast of South America; nothing engages them but to yield them triumph. The friends of Ministers allow, that it 'does seem extraordinary' that the Americans should have such 'good fortune.' We say that it is still more extraordinary that strict enquiry has not yet been made into the causes to which that good fortune is owing. We say that such enquiry must terminate in overwhelming the managers of the war with the utmost disgrace. We may be accused of feeling too strongly on such a subject; but at least we are sure that it is not a party feeling that we indulge. It is an earnest and sincere feeling for the honour and interest of our country. Let it be seriously considered, that a very few years of such a warfare would annihilate our mercantile marine, and render our vaunted navy the laughing-stock of the universe. Let it be seriously considered, that the extraordinary losses have befallen us, not in a contest with a superior or equal maritime enemy, but with one whom, to name as a naval power, would a short while since, have been deemed absurd.<sup>44</sup>

By publishing this piece, the editors of *The London Times* made clear that American privateers were having a significant effect on the war effort. In particular, American privateers were led British citizens to question the strength of the British Royal Navy. Moreover, the article demonstrated how large of an impact privateering captures had on the British shipping industry. The initial stages of a call for the end of the war can be seen with the discussion of what could occur if the war were to continue.

One of the major factors leading to the end of the war was the opposition British leaders faced at the hands of their citizens. Many British citizens did not believe in going to war with the United States in the first place. Those who initially supported the war began to question the government's decisions, believing that losses from the war had

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<sup>44</sup> *The London Times*, 20 March 1813. Accessed from Gale. <https://www.gale.com/c/the-times-digital-archive>.

become too great. Privateers did not contribute to all of the issues that fostered negative sentiment, but they did play a significant role in British losses throughout the war.<sup>45</sup> Government leaders knew that a private maritime force aided military actions during war, but they did not anticipate the number of positive contributions privateers ultimately made during the War of 1812. In addition to their designated duty of disrupting British trade, privateers also captured British Royal Navy vessels and packets, affected the blockade, and were part of the reason British citizens began to call for an end to the war. Given the small size of the United States Navy during the War of 1812, the contributions of privateering likely prevented the United States from receiving further damage from the British.

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<sup>45</sup> Troy Bickham, *The Weight of Vengeance: The United States, the British Empire, and the War of 1812* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 204-205.

## On the Verge of Collapse: The Privateering Role in Financing the War of 1812

Insufficient funding was a recurring problem throughout the War of 1812. In March of 1813, Secretary of Treasury, Albert Gallatin, wrote to President James Madison, “We have hardly enough money to last till the end of the month.”<sup>46</sup> While the treasury ultimately found the funding to make it through the end of the month, financial conditions in the United States remained strained. In late 1814, Secretary of State James Monroe expressed to former president Thomas Jefferson, “Our finances are in a deplorable state.”<sup>47</sup> Prior to the war’s onset, the Republican party failed to appropriately plan and raise funds for the war. As the war went on, both Federalists and Republicans expressed concern over the financial state of the Union. It was clear to both parties that the nation was not adequately prepared to fund an expensive war. Luckily, the burden was lessened by privateers. American private maritime forces were able to provide significant funds for not only themselves but also for merchants, port cities, and the federal government while also negatively affecting the British economy.

The financial dilemma, which became a major point of contention for political leaders during the War of 1812, can be linked back to Jeffersonian Republican ideals. Policies that favored limited government, an emphasis on individual freedoms, and economic sanctions over military intervention in foreign relations were established during Thomas Jefferson’s presidency and carried over into President James Madison’s time in office. Both leaders believed in a small government that did not provide a large military

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<sup>46</sup> Albert Gallatin, *Albert Gallatin to James Madison, March 5, 1813*. Letter from Online Library of Liberty, *The Writings of Albert Gallatin*, vol 1. available from [https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/gallatin-the-writings-of-albert-gallatin-vol-1#f1358-01\\_head\\_345](https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/gallatin-the-writings-of-albert-gallatin-vol-1#f1358-01_head_345).

<sup>47</sup> James Monroe, *James Monroe to Thomas Jefferson, December 21, 1814*, Letter. From Library of Congress, *The Thomas Jefferson Papers 1606 to 1827*, <https://www.loc.gov/item/mtjbib021928/>.

or tax beyond necessity. Both Jefferson and Madison also saw the Bank of the United States as an unnecessary facet of the government, which led to the Bank losing its charter just before the onset of the war. The culmination of Jefferson and Madison's ideal contributed to a nation that was both financially and militarily unprepared for war.<sup>48</sup>

The issue of impressment was one of the biggest issues leading into the war and became a point of hostility between the United States and Britain beginning in 1803. British impressment policy enraged both President Thomas Jefferson and his Secretary of State James Madison, but the leaders decided to attempt to negotiate for the recognition of neutral shipping with Great Britain and to focus on creating a friendly relationship with the nation. In March of 1805, James Madison explained to James Monroe that the goal was to avoid "illiberal or hostile sentiments toward Great Britain," and to instead "...cherish friendly relations with Great Britain."<sup>49</sup>

Jefferson and Madison utilized a cordial approach in dealing with British impressment of American seamen until 1807 when the British warship *HMS Leopold* attacked the American Navy vessel *USS Constitution*. Following the attack, the United States issued the Embargo Act of 1807 in order to prevent United States merchant vessels from setting sail for any foreign port. Jefferson and Madison believed the Embargo Act would be an effective response because they saw the United States as the "principal remaining market for her manufactures."<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, the United States overestimated

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<sup>48</sup> Donald Hickey, *War of 1812: A Forgotten Conflict* (Chicago, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 5.

<sup>49</sup> James Madison, *James Madison to James Monroe, March 6, 1805*, Letter from Online Library of Liberty, *The Writings of James Madison, vol.7 Correspondence, 1803-1807*.  
<https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/madison-the-writings-vol-7-1803-1807>.

<sup>50</sup> James Madison *James Madison to James Monroe and Charles Pickney, May 20, 1807*, Letter from Online Library of Liberty, *The Writings of James Madison, vol.7 Correspondence, 1803-1807*.  
<https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/madison-the-writings-vol-7-1803-1807>.



its economic importance, which ultimately contributed to the devastated economy entering into the War of 1812. In fact, the effects of the embargo cut the nations revenue from import tariffs nearly in half from 1908 to 1809. Meanwhile, the nation's expenditures continued to rise. As a result, the financial surplus the United States had accrued during its time of peace nearly disappeared before the embargo was lifted in 1809.<sup>51</sup>

In addition to the economic sanctions imposed by the United States, similar sanctions passed by Great Britain during the period also negatively impacted the economic status of the United States. During both the Napoleonic Wars and the War of 1812, the Privy Council of the United Kingdom passed Orders in Council that restricted neutral trade and authorized a blockade of Napoleonic France.<sup>52</sup> The majority of the orders were intended to negatively impact the economy of France, but the orders passed in 1807 and 1809 were especially harmful to the American economy. The 1807 and 1809 orders prevented British merchants from trading with the United States.<sup>53</sup> As a result, United States was unable to receive duties from any goods, which further decreased the money available for the impending war.<sup>54</sup>

Even in the face of decreased revenue, Secretary of the Treasury, Albert Gallatin, believed that the United States would still be able to wage a war without excessive

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<sup>51</sup> *American State Papers*, 3, Finance, 2: 497. Accessed from the Library of Congress American Memory website, <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lwsplink.html>.

<sup>52</sup> Orders of Council were laws passed by the Privy Council in Parliament to prevent British merchants from trading with countries they were at war with, or with any nation who had placed economic sanctions against them.

<sup>53</sup> These Order of Council were not all bad for the United States. With the removal of British goods, Americans began manufacturing their own goods which likely sped up the industrialization process in America.

<sup>54</sup> Kenneth Ross Nelson, *Socio-Economic Effects of the War of 1812* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia, 1972,) 165.

taxation on the American citizens. He believed that the nation could finance the war through revenue from duties on tariffs, land sales, and the receiving of war loans. Gallatin also maintained that the United States would be able to quickly pay off any loans received during the war once the nation returned to peace. Nevertheless, Gallatin's plan to fund the war placed a large emphasis on the importance of the Bank of the United States and assumed that the Bank would be available throughout the war effort.<sup>55</sup>

The Bank of the United States was created in 1791 under the direction of Alexander Hamilton, the First Secretary of the Treasury. Both Hamilton and George Washington considered the Bank necessary to help build the credit of the United States government. While some government leaders agreed with Hamilton and Washington's perceived need, others believed that the Bank would give the federal government too much power. Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and several other southern members of Congress led the charge against the Bank. When he responded to the proposed Bank in 1791, Madison acknowledged the potential benefits of the bank. He admitted that he believed the Bank would increase the efficiency of the financial system and encourage effective government operations. Nevertheless, Madison was largely opposed to the creation of the bank. He did not believe in replacing specie with paper money, and he feared that the Bank had the potential to create a financial panic. Moreover, Madison disagreed with the concept of a centrally located government bank; instead, he believed that "several banks properly distributed" better suited the nation's need.<sup>56</sup> Overall,

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<sup>55</sup> *American State Papers*, 3, Finance, 2: 248; 479. Accessed from the Library of Congress American Memory website, <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lwsplink.html>.

<sup>56</sup> *Annals of Congress*, House of Representatives, 1<sup>st</sup> Congress, 3<sup>rd</sup> Session, February 2, 1791, 1950. Accessed from the Library of Congress American Memory website, <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lwsplink.html>.

Madison believed the Bank of the United States to be convenient but unnecessary.

Madison was ultimately unable to prevent the First Bank of the United States from being founded, but he had more say in the matter during his first term as President of the United States.<sup>57</sup>

When the Bank of the United States was founded, it received a charter that lasted for twenty years, allowing the bank to come up for review in 1811, just prior to the outbreak of the War of 1812. During its review, the bank received strong support from both Federalists and some Republicans, including Albert Gallatin. On the other hand, some other Republican leaders, such as Henry Clay, were strongly opposed to the idea of issuing a new charter for the bank. During the congressional debates on the bank charter, President James Madison remained relatively silent, but former presidents Thomas Jefferson and John Adams both publicly addressed their distrust of the bank. The issue of whether or not the bank should be chartered was split among Congress throughout the voting process. The strongest voice in support of a new bank charter was Secretary of the Treasury Gallatin, who issued several reports beginning in 1809 to voice his support for the institution. In his reports, Gallatin focused on the condition and operations of the bank and portrayed the bank as a convenient tool for the federal government.<sup>58</sup>

In contrast, Henry Clay was the strongest voice in opposition to the bank. In a speech made to Congress in 1811, Clay argued against the Bank and went as far as to insinuate that the bank had not been helpful in solving any of the issues that faced the United States government.<sup>59</sup> When the United States Senate ultimately voted on the future of the Bank

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<sup>57</sup> *Ibis.*, 1952.

<sup>58</sup> *American State Papers*, 3, Finance, 2: 480-481, Accessed from the Library of Congress American Memory website, <http://memory.loc.gov.ammem/amlaw/lwspink.html>.

<sup>59</sup> Robert Remini, *Henry Clay: Statesman for the Union* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co, 1991), 217.

on February 20, 1811, seventeen votes were cast in favor of renewing the charter and seventeen votes were cast in opposition. Vice President DeWitt Clinton broke the tie and decided to effectively end the Bank of the United States. Although the decision was manageable while at peace, it made funding the War of 1812 a difficult task for President James Madison and his cabinet.<sup>60</sup>

With the Bank of the United States gone and the declaration of war in June of 1812, Albert Gallatin was forced to turn to other measures to fund the war effort. One measure employed by Gallatin was the sale of \$5 million worth of treasury notes each year of the war.<sup>61</sup> The notes were able to offer some financial assistance, but alone, they were not enough to finance the rising costs faced by the nation. As a result, Gallatin had to seek out loans from state banks as a means of funding the war. Throughout the war, Gallatin turned to the Union and Massachusetts banks of Massachusetts, the Manhattan Co. and Mechanics Bank of New York, the Bank of Pennsylvania and the Farmers and Mechanics Bank of Pennsylvania, the Bank of Baltimore and Commercial and Farmers Bank of Maryland, the Bank of Virginia, the State Bank of South Carolina, and the Bank of Louisiana.<sup>62</sup> Relying on state banks for federal funding was problematic for several reasons. First, state banks were not required to redeem treasury notes, which led to an inadequate and inconsistent supply of income during the war effort. Second, state banks were not required to hold a certain amount of specie, which resulted in economic panics and financial crisis leading to the suspension of specie redemption. As a whole, state

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<sup>60</sup> David J. Cowen, "The First Bank of the United States and the Securities Market Crash of 1792," *The Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 60, No. 4 (December 2000), 1041-1053.

<sup>61</sup> Donald H. Kagin, "Monetary Aspects of the Treasury Notes of the War of 1812," *The Journal of Economic History*, 44 (March 1984), 73.

<sup>62</sup> *Annals of Congress*, House of Representatives, 12<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, "Public Deposits in Banks," January 8, 1812, 2059. Accessed from the Library of Congress American Memory website, <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lwsplink.html>.

banks were an unreliable source of money, even when paired with the income received through the sale of treasury notes and land and from import duties.<sup>63</sup>

To make matters worse for the federal government, the merchants who the government relied upon for import duties became less active during the course of the war. When the British Royal Navy imposed its blockade, many merchants were unwilling to risk capture and either impressment or imprisonment at the hand of the British. Moreover, insurance rates on cargo increased drastically during the war effort, making the transportation of goods too expensive for many merchants. In total, the number of merchants who were active at the end of the war was only around ten percent of the number who were active prior to the outbreak of the war.<sup>64</sup>

Albert Gallatin had the foresight to plan for the decrease in merchant vessels. In an 1812 report to Congress, Gallatin advised Congress not to expect more than \$2.5 million a year from import duties during the war.<sup>65</sup> His projections were ultimately too high, and import duties never dropped so low. Instead, the federal government saw minimal difference in import duties due to privateers. Captures by private maritime forces provided a significant amount of money throughout the war effort.

Although precise financial gain from privateers is difficult to determine, newspapers of the period often published individual captures and detailed the goods acquired and their value. By looking at the reported value and using the common duty percentages during the period, the amount of money the United States government made

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<sup>63</sup> Kaplan, *The Bank of the United States*, 38.

<sup>64</sup> Jerome R. Garitee, *The Republic's Private Navy: The American Privateering Business as Practiced by Baltimore During the War of 1812* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1977), XVI.

<sup>65</sup> *American State Papers*, 3, Finance, 2: 524. Accessed from the Library of Congress American Memory website, <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/lwsplink.html>.

from certain captures can be estimated. For example, Thomas Boyle's *Comet* captured the British merchant ship *John* out of Liverpool in 1812 on a voyage from South America to Liverpool. The *John*'s hull contained cotton, rum, and coffee and was deemed to hold a value of \$150,000 before it was put up for auction by the prize court. During the first year of the war, the duty rate on captured cargo ranged from 35% to 50%, depending on the location of the port and the terms of the letter of marquee issued to the privateer. Even using the lower number from this range, the federal government received at least \$52,500 from this one capture. During the first four months of the war, when more than 25% of all privateering captures occurred, the United States government's finances benefited greatly from its relationship with privateers.<sup>66</sup>

Due to the supplemental effect privateering actions had on the declining merchant fleet, Congress granted financial reprieve to privateers by reducing the duties they were required to pay on captured goods. In August of 1813, Congress voted to reduce the rate at which privateer captures were taxed by one third. The reduction brought duty rates for captures to between 23% and 33% of the cargo's value. By issuing the act, Congress did two things to demonstrate its need for privateers in the war effort. First, Congress demonstrated the importance of the revenue the government was receiving through privateers. If privateers had not been bringing in a significant amount of money, the government would have most likely left the duties on imports at the same level, especially considering that Congress was tasked with creating additional taxes to make up for the budget deficit during the war effort. Second, the act was used to encourage more

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<sup>66</sup> Faye M. Kert, *Privateering: Patriots and Profits in the War of 1812* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015, 2-4; Garitee, *The Republic's Private Navy*, 184; Timothy S. Good, *American Privateers in the War of 1812: The Vessels and Their Prizes as Recorded in Niles' Weekly Register*, (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company Inc., 2012), 28.

private ships to seek letters of marque. Since privateers were primarily concerned with making a profit for themselves and their investors, the act was able to encourage privateers to stay involved in the war effort or to become involved in hopes of higher profits.<sup>67</sup>

Even with the new duty rates in place, the United States government continued to financially benefit from the use of privateers. When Bristol, Rhode Island's the *Yankee* captured the Portuguese ship *St. Jose* on its voyage from Liverpool to Rio De Janeiro in July 1814, the ship was transporting dry goods and British manufactured tools. At prize court, the assessed value of these goods was determined to be \$600,000. Utilizing the new duty rates, the government was paid \$138,000 from this capture.<sup>68</sup>

In total, the monetary value of the goods captured by privateers that were recorded in the *Niles Weekly Register* was more than \$45.5 million at the wars end. Based on this number, privateering made the United States, at the very minimum, just shy of \$10.5 million by the wars end. However, due to the fact that the majority of the values for the captured cargo this number is much lower than the actual economic effects. While these numbers provide insight into the ways in which privateering provided money for the federal government, they are unable to provide a full insight into their full effects. To get a better, yet still incomplete, picture of the methods privateers provided income for the United States government, these numbers must be looked at in conjunction with the economic reports presented by the Secretaries of Treasury during the war.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Joseph Gales, *The Debates and Proceedings in the Congress of the United States, Thirteenth Congress, First and Second Sessions*, (Washington, DC: Gales and Seaton, 1837), 2761-2764.

<sup>68</sup> Timothy S. Good, *American Privateers in the War of 1812*, 105.

<sup>69</sup> Timothy S. Good, *American Privateers in the War of 1812*, 1-217.; Garitee, *The Republic's Private Navy, 184*.

Each year, the Secretary of the Treasury offered two reports to Congress on the financial standing of the United States government. The first report was presented in June and detailed the expected expenditures from June of one year to June of the next. The second report came in December and detailed the actual yearly income and expenses of the federal government.<sup>70</sup> In December of 1812, Albert Gallatin presented the first war time annual report. The report demonstrated the financial difficulties facing the United States. It showed that the government had received \$20 million from duties, loans, and treasury notes (Table 2).<sup>71</sup> However, without loans, income totaled only \$10.9 million, which did not allow the government to fully cover the \$11.1 million cost of funding the Army and Navy for the year. Despite the fact that the \$10.9 million of income was much higher than the \$2.5 million that Gallatin had estimated, the deficit still make clear to Gallatin and Congress that the United States would have to borrow a significant amount of money to fund the war in the coming years.<sup>72</sup>

**Table 2.** United States Government Finances from the Embargo of 1807 through the War of 1812

| Year | Revenue from Duties | Expenses       | Loans          | Treasury Notes |
|------|---------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| 1807 | \$15.8 Million      | \$12.6 Million | N/A            | N/A            |
| 1808 | \$10 Million        | \$13.8 Million | N/A            | N/A            |
| 1809 | \$6.5 Million       | \$13.8 Million | N/A            | N/A            |
| 1810 | \$12.5 Million      | \$14.1 Million | N/A            | N/A            |
| 1811 | \$7.5 Million       | \$15.8 Million | \$10.5 Million | \$5 Million    |
| 1812 | \$10.9 Million      | \$21.5 Million | \$4.1 Million  | \$5 Million    |
| 1813 | \$13.5 Million      | \$33 Million   | \$19 Million   | \$5 Million    |
| 1814 | \$11 Million        | \$47.3 Million | \$25 Million   | \$5 Million    |

<sup>70</sup> For the purpose of this paper I will only be using the reports from December, as they provided actual numbers for the year.

<sup>71</sup> See Table 2 for a full economic breakdown of the receipts received by the United States government from the years 1807 to 1814.

<sup>72</sup> *American State Papers*, 3, Finance, 2:508-581. Albert Gallatin, *Albert Gallatin to James Madison, March 5, 1813*. Letter from Online Library of Liberty, *The Writings of Albert Gallatin*, vol 1.

<https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/gallatin-the-writings-of-albert-gallatin-vol-1>.

Albert Gallatin, "State of Finances," December 7, 1812. Accessed from the Library of Congress American Memory website, <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lwspink.html>.



This table was created using the yearly economic figures for the United States government as they were presented by the Secretary of the Treasury to Congress in December of each year. The years represented demonstrate the effects of the Embargo of 1807, the British Orders of Council, and the War of 1812.

The following year, Albert Gallatin did not present the report to Congress because he stepped down from the Secretary of Treasury position in April after serving in the role through the Jefferson presidency and the first term of Madison's presidency. President James Madison appointed Secretary of the Navy, William Jones, to serve as acting Secretary of the Treasury, while also continuing in his role as Secretary of the Navy. Jones was tasked with presenting the 1813 financial report to Congress in January of 1814. The report showed that the United States had received \$37.5 million, with \$13.5 million coming from revenue and the other \$24 million coming from loans and treasury notes. Meanwhile, the expenses for the year amounted to a total of \$33 million. Jones concluded his report to Congress by stating that he believed Congress would need to find an additional \$29 million in funding for 1814.<sup>73</sup>

One month after giving his report, William Jones was relieved of his duty as Secretary of the Treasury, and President James Madison appointed Senator George Campbell of Tennessee to the position. Like the two secretaries before him, Campbell found the position to be overwhelming due to the United States' inability to afford the war. The stress led Campbell to step down before the war's end but not before presenting a report on the 1814 fiscal year.<sup>74</sup> In his report to Congress, Campbell noted that the federal government had spent a total of \$47.2 million dollars in 1814, with \$32.7 million going

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<sup>73</sup> *American State Papers*, House of Representatives, 13<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 651-569. "State of Finances," January 10, 1814. Accessed from the Library of Congress American Memory website, <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lwsplink.html>.

<sup>74</sup> *Annals of Congress*, Senate, 13<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 625, 651. Accessed from the Library of Congress American Memory website, <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lwsplink.html>

towards the military. Meanwhile, the government brought in only \$11 million in revenue and had taken out an additional \$34 million in loans and treasury bills.<sup>75</sup>

According to these three reports, a total of \$34.5 million dollars was generated through duties during the war effort. While the numbers from the *Niles' Weekly Register* indicated that there was only \$10.5 million in revenue from privateering captures, the amount was likely much higher. The amount reported in the *Niles'* was likely skewed because Hezekiah Niles was forced to use incomplete records for his paper. Throughout the war, Niles attempted to print as much information pertaining to privateering actions as possible, but records were not always available to him. As a result, the records printed by Niles only show a fraction of the cargo values captured by American privateers. In addition, there was a significant decline of merchant vessels during the war effort, so privateers likely contributed a significant portion of the \$34.5 million recorded. Beginning in 1813, the British Royal Navy blockade of the east coast reduced the number of merchants involved in foreign trade to roughly 10% of the prewar number. While the revenue numbers published by the government made no distinction on the duties collected due to privateering captures and the goods brought in by the merchant vessels still conducting foreign business, given the drastic decline in merchants, it can be inferred that privateers were making up a significant portion of the duties collected during the war. Thus, while the amount of revenue that privateers provided through their captures cannot be determined, the preceding factors indicate that American privateers had a significant impact on American finances during the War of 1812.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> *American State Papers*, 3, Finance, 2: 840. September 26, 1814, "State of Finances." Accessed from the Library of Congress American Memory website. <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lwsplink.html>.

<sup>76</sup> *American State Papers; Annals of Congress; Good, American Privateers in the War of 1812*, 5; Garitee, *The Republic's Private Navy*, 184.

In addition to providing a significant percentage of the revenue for the American government, privateers were also able to prevent the nation from experiencing a decrease in revenue from the time of peace before the war. Privateers were able to bring in more revenue than merchants were capable of providing before the war. In the three years leading up to the war, revenue from duties on goods brought into the nation averaged \$8.8 million a year. In comparison, revenue from duties averaged just under \$12 million a year during the war. The ability of privateers to effectively get goods into the nation decreased the deficit the government would have faced had it only relied on merchants.<sup>77</sup> Furthermore, with total expenditures for the war reaching over \$100 million dollars, privateering offered the United States government a way to supplement the Navy without incurring any cost. Instead, privateering was funded by individuals, or groups, throughout the war. These individuals and groups took the economic risk of losing captured cargo or even ships during the war effort. In total, privateering provided the United States with more than five hundred additional ships to supplement the seventeen naval vessels employed by the Navy at the start of the war. The supplementary ships allowed the federal government to spend less on expanding the Navy, further preventing the war expenses from expanding.<sup>78</sup>

In all, privateering actions during the War of 1812 played a significant role in providing a source of revenue for the United States government. Entering into the war, Republican economic policies made it difficult for the Secretary of Treasury to find funds for the war. The decrease in active merchant vessels led to a further decline in

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<sup>77</sup> *American State Papers* Finance, 2: 840. September 26, 1814,; *Annals of Congress, Senate, 13<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 625, 651.*

<sup>78</sup> *American State Papers*, 3, Finance, 3:1. December 7, 1815, "State of Finances." Accessed from the Library of Congress American memory website.

government revenue. Together, the conditions led many public officials to be fearful about the economic vitality of the nation. However, privateers were able to help fill the economic void. Through their captures, privateers prevented the United States government from seeing large deficits and helped reduce the number of loans needed to fund the war.

Throughout the war, privateering also helped to play a role in fostering the development of port cities. During the war, port cities helped privateers get to sea quickly. In port cities where privateering was prominent, almost all members of the local economy benefitted from the new, war-developed industry. Some of the economic gain came from the investments local citizens put into privateering. However, there was also an increase in jobs, requiring more people to move into the city, and the further development of local industries. The local effects of privateering led early historians on the topic to deem any war involving privateers to be a “war of the people.”<sup>79</sup> Overall, sustained economic growth continued throughout the war and lasted for several years after the declaration of peace.<sup>80</sup>

Privateering provided a large economic boom for a number of industries and individuals in port cities. The boom was primarily due to the sheer number of people who were involved in the process of outfitting, funding, and manning privateer vessels. In total, it has been estimated that around 10,000 of the roughly 50,000 citizens of Baltimore were somehow connected to privateering. The groups that profited from the private enterprise included, shipwrights, candle makers, riggers, sailors, and merchants. With

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<sup>79</sup> Garitee, *The Republic's Private Navy*, 9.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid*, 238-250.

such a large number of people investing time and money into the practice, it is easy to see why privateering was economically beneficial to port cities.<sup>81</sup>

The group of individuals who saw the biggest economic increase during the War of 1812, were those who held large investments in port cities. These investors owned the private ship yards, the vessels that the privateers used during the war, and had stakes in the local markets where merchandise came into America. Peter Arnold Karthaus was one investor who benefitted greatly from the war. Karthaus was an American investor living in Baltimore and was the sole owner of the privateering vessel *Kemp*. Throughout of the course of the war, Karthaus' investment in *Kemp* brought an estimated profit of \$140,000. In addition to being a ship owner, Karthaus also saw income from privateering by insuring local ships and performing work in shipyards. Throughout the war, hundreds of investors along the east coast saw substantial returns on their investment in privateering. When men, like Karthaus, saw returns on their investments, they continued to invest in privateering and the industries that supported it.<sup>82</sup>

The ship building industry experienced an economic boom during the War of 1812. The growth occurred due to the increased need for ships from the US Navy, merchant marines, and privateers. While the majority of privateering ships were built at the beginning of the war, privateers called upon ship builders throughout the war in order to replace the ships that were lost to the British. In addition to the increased need for ships, the privateering ships built prior to the war had to rely on ship yards to refit their boats for wartime activity. During this process, alterations were made to the ship's structure and weapons were added to the ship's hull. The overall increased usage of the

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 32-46.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, 265-267.

local ship building industries helped local economies in a number of ways. One of the most prominent effects it had on the economy was the creation of jobs. Throughout the war, shipyards required an increased number of carpenters to help build ships. Not to mention, additional carpenters were needed on ships in order to repair any damages that occurred at sea. The expansion of the ship building industry during the war helped cities develop economically and allowed cities to prepare themselves for the expansion of the navy that would come following the end of the war.<sup>83</sup>

Ship builders were not the only ones drawn to port cities during the war. Throughout the war, an increased number of people moved to the cities in hopes of becoming a crew member on a privateering vessel. While the war effort was in full effect, many of the cities also saw job openings as individuals went off to war. In addition, many new job opportunities became available as war-specific positions were created. The growth in population fostered by new jobs led to increased investment in the cities, meaning more individuals were buying goods, purchasing homes, and spending their money in local shops.<sup>84</sup>

Prior to the war, merchants brought goods into port cities. While some of the goods were sold to local citizens, the rest of the foodstuffs were sold to vendors outside of the port cities, meaning the money was not being directly invested back into the city. However, this dynamic began to change with privateers. When a ship and its cargo were captured and assessed a value by the prize court, the local port city auctioned the goods. This meant that all of the proceeds from selling the food were invested directly back into

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<sup>83</sup> *Ibid*, 11-31.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid*.

the port cities themselves. The investment not only stimulated the economy directly but also provided indirect stimulation with the creation of jobs.<sup>85</sup>

Baltimore saw the largest growth as a direct effect from the war. The city's growth lasted until 1819 and then began to taper. The majority of the growth was due to the number of privateers that called Baltimore home. The number of privateers in Baltimore led the shipbuilding industry to boom in the early war years. In addition, the privateers from Baltimore tried to send their captures back to the city, causing an influx of goods, and eventually money when the goods were sold at auction.<sup>86</sup>

Due to the boom in port cities, such as Baltimore, and the creation of prize courts, many of these locations saw an influx of goods auctioned from captured vessels. This increase in hard-to-find goods drew individuals from longer distances as the need arose. One example of this can be seen with sugar – an imported good. Due to the blockade, sugar was becoming increasingly hard to import, leading to a drastic increase in price. While merchants were not able to provide as much sugar, privateers were able to provide small quantities as they captured ships carrying rare foods. Local auctioneers auctioned off the goods after prize courts determined their value. Since the majority of prize courts were located in port cities, people seeking these goods would flock to the port cities for auctions.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Faye M. Kert, "The Fortunes of War: Commercial Warfare and Maritime Risk in the War of 1812," *Northern Mariner*, no. 4, (1998), 4.

<sup>86</sup> Garitee, *The Republic's Private Navy*, 11-31.

<sup>87</sup> Faye M. Kert, "The Fortunes of War: Commercial Warfare and Maritime Risk in the War of 1812," *Northern Mariner*, no. 4, (1998), 4.

While American privateers helped the US economy during the war, the British economy was negatively affected by privateer action. Throughout the war, the British government and British merchants faced increased financial difficulties. For the government, the difficulties came from lower revenue and an increased military budget in order to protect trade interests. For merchants, increased insurance rates, the loss of vessels, and the introduction of new duties created additional expenses throughout the war.<sup>88</sup>

The British government saw decreased revenue from duties and taxes. The decrease in revenue was approximately 11 million pounds over the course of the war, which was equivalent to roughly \$58 million in US dollars. The decrease was significant because defense spending was increasing at the same time. Not only was Britain engaged in the War of 1812, but it was also faced with the Napoleonic Wars with France. Still, the most significant drops occurred during lulls of the Napoleonic wars, while the War of 1812 was in full effect. This is mainly due to the efforts of privateers and the effects they had as they captured a significant number of British ships.<sup>89</sup>

In total, privateers were responsible for the capture of 1,509 British merchant vessels. The loss of these vessels played an important economic impact on the British merchants, as these ships often cost more than \$20,000. In addition, Britain did not have the raw material to build new ships and had to wait until the end of the war for the construction of new trading vessels. To make matters worse for the merchants, the loss of ships was not the biggest economic hit accrued during the war effort.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Faye M. Kert, "The Fortunes of War: Commercial Warfare and Maritime Risk in the War of 1812," *Northern Mariner*, no. 4, (1998), 3.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> Edgar Stanton Maclay, *A History of American Privateers* (New York: Appelton Press, 1899), 376.



While the loss of British ships was significant, lost cargo served as a bigger blow to the British economy. Throughout the war, cargo played an important role in both the British and American militaristic strategies. For the British, the goal of the blockade was to put a stranglehold on American shipping in hopes that a lack of supplies would bring about a faster end to the war. In comparison, American privateers were used to negatively affect the British shipping industry while simultaneously bringing goods into the nation. The American strategy caused a loss of nearly \$45 million in British ships and cargo. The majority of the cargo was sugar, flour, indigo, and rice. Many other types of cargo were also lost, including letters and packages. These losses negatively impacted British citizen's views of the war, making the war effort even more difficult to fund publicly.<sup>91</sup>

One of the major effects privateers had on the British shipping industry was an increase of shipping insurance rates. Prior to the start of the war, insurance rates hovered around 2.5% of the cargo's value. Throughout the course of the war, the rate rapidly increased, eventually reaching 20% of the cargo's value. This dissuaded some merchants from shipping their goods, creating a deficit in revenue, as the goods were not able to be sold. Some merchants who chose to continue shipping their goods decided not to purchase insurance due to the extremely high rates. If these ships were captured, the financial burden and responsibility fell squarely on the shoulders of the merchant. Merchants had severe, negative financial impacts as a result, and few even neared bankruptcy.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Faye M. Kert, "The Fortunes of War: Commercial Warfare and Maritime Risk in the War of 1812," *Northern Mariner*, no. 4, (1998), 4.

<sup>92</sup> W. Phillips, No. 4524, *Lloyds List* (London, England), January 1, 1811, accessed February 10, 2018; Kert, *Privateering* 13-15; Frederick C. Leiner, "Yes, Privateers Mattered," *Naval History* 28, no. 2 (April 2014): 16-21, accessed February 3, 2018.

In order to combat the financial burden faced by merchants, the British Royal Navy was forced to begin conducting compulsory escorts. The Compulsory Escort Act required the British Royal Navy to escort merchant vessels to and from their destinations. Nevertheless, the practice encountered many logistical issues. Slower merchant vessels often lagged behind the military ships, leaving them fair game for privateers and rendering the act completely ineffective. In addition, a number of ships left the escort early. Although leaving early was prohibited by the act, merchants were eager to be the first to port and make the most amount of money possible from their cargo. Unfortunately, privateers knew this and were then able to pick off ships that decided to leave the escort early. Another major issue with using military ships as escorts was that they had to leave the line of duty in the blockade in order to chaperone the merchant vessels' voyages. This created gaps in the blockade, which allowed privateers to get through and capture more prizes.<sup>93</sup>

While the escorts did cut back on privateering, it did not completely prevent the practice. American privateers often searched for prizes in packs. One or two of the privateering ships acted as a decoy to pull the military ships attention away from the merchant vessel. Additional privateers then descend upon the merchant vessel and capture it before the military vessel knew what was happening. This system created revenue for the US while taking it from the British.<sup>94</sup>

To pay for these compulsory convoys, the British government imposed a tax on merchant vessels. This upset merchants, as the blockade was not protecting them to the

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<sup>93</sup> Faye M. Kert, "The Fortunes of War: Commercial Warfare and Maritime Risk in the War of 1812," *Northern Mariner*, no. 4, (1998), 8.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid*

degree that they had hoped. In addition, the increased insurance rates along with the compulsory escort tax made it incredibly expensive to ship goods, increasing the negative impact on the economy. The negative views held by British merchants and citizens compounded with negative views held by politicians surrounding the war, led a large population of the British to call for an end to the war so that shipping, goods, and quality of life could return to normal.<sup>95</sup>

Throughout the war, the United States government issued letters of marque to privateers in hopes that they would disrupt the British shipping industry. While privateers were able to accomplish this, the government saw other benefits from their relationship with privateers. This private maritime force provided funds to the United States, helped build local economies, and contributed to economic losses experienced by the British government. While the overall economic impact of American privateering was nearly impossible to quantify, their economic effects were felt at the local, state, federal and international levels.

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid

### Patriotism: Privateering's Lasting Effect

While the economic and militaristic effects of the war impacted only the war efforts, the rise in patriotism which occurred during the period had lasting implications. The outward expression of patriotism by authors and artists directly benefitted the national government; yet, these two groups were not the only ones who contributed to the rise in patriotism. The private citizens who took to the ocean as privateers also directly contributed to the rise in love for country. Privateer contributions to the rise in patriotism can be seen through the individual efforts of privateering captains and their crew and the ways their actions were portrayed through public writings, songs, and newspapers.

In order to effectively discuss the rise in patriotism which occurred during the War of 1812, the terms nationalism and patriotism must be defined and differentiated. Thirteen years after the end of the war, Noah Webster compiled the first American-English dictionary. In the first volume, the word nationalism did not appear, but Webster did define the terms nation and national. Webster defined national as, "Public; general; common to a nation."<sup>96</sup> Meanwhile, he defined nation as, "a body of people inhabiting the same country, or united under the same sovereign government."<sup>97</sup> By combining Webster's definitions of these two terms, the origin of the definition of nationalism can be determined as: the people living within a common nation under a unified government who collectively carry out the nation's ideology. Being "national" implied that there should be consistency which can be applied to every citizen, such as beliefs, religion, and language that were consistent across the population.

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<sup>96</sup> Noah Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language Vol. 2* (1828; repr., New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1970).

<sup>97</sup> Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language*, Vol. 2.

In comparison, Webster defined patriotism as, “love of one’s country; the passion which aims to serve one’s country, either in defending it from invasion, or protecting its rights and maintaining its laws and institutions in vigor and purity. Patriotism is the characteristic of a good citizen, the noblest passion that animates a man in the character of a citizen.”<sup>98</sup> According to Webster’s early definition, patriotism was simply loving one’s country and possessing a willingness to uphold the ideas upon which the country is founded.

The unifying link between these two definitions is the focus on the citizen. In his first dictionary, Webster defined a citizen as: “an inhabitant who enjoys the freedoms and privileges of the city or country in which he resides.”<sup>99</sup> In addition, Webster also included an additional definition specifying what it meant to be a citizen in the United States. “In the United States, a person, native or naturalized, who has the privilege of exercising the elective franchise, or the qualifications which enable him to vote for rulers, and to purchase and hold real estate.”<sup>100</sup> While Webster’s initial definition seemed to include all individuals living within a city or country’s area, his expansion made evident that not all people living within the United States were afforded citizenship.

The major differentiating factor between nationalism and patriotism is the acting body. Nationalism focuses on the citizenry as a whole and intended that there were common beliefs and traits held among all people living within the nation. On the other hand, patriotism focuses more on individual actions and how the individual perceives

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Noah Webster, *American Dictionary*, Vol 1.

<sup>100</sup> Noah Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language Vol. 1* (1828; repr., New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1970).

their relationship to the nation. Due to these differences between patriotism and nationalism, patriotism is more fitting in this instance.

At the onset of the War of 1812, merchants and sailors began applying for commissions to become privateers almost immediately. The desire of private ship-owning men to become part of the war is made evident through documents such as James De Wolf's appeal to the Secretary of Defense to allow his brig *Yankee* to receive a privateering commission.<sup>101</sup> Just twelve days after the declaration of war, De Wolf writes:

Sir; I have purchased a now ready for sea, armed brig, (one of the most suitable in this country for a privateer) of one hundred and sixty tons burden, mounting eighteen guns, and carries one hundred and twenty men, called the *Yankee*, commanded by Oliver Wilson. Being desirous that she should be on her cruise as soon as possible I beg that you will cause a commission to be forwarded as soon as practicable to the Collector of the District, that this vessel may not be detained.

Like De Wolf, hundreds of other men up and down the east coast sent letters during the onset of the war to ask for permission to sail as privateers. In total, the United States government issued letters of marque to more than 500 American ships, with more than 50,000 crew members. The increase in sailors applying for commissions led the United States to find itself with an array of powerful ships and valuable resources that it could use to negatively affect the British shipping industry. The men volunteering to serve the United States without compensation up front were primarily driven to do so by the money they stood to gain if they captured a foreign merchant ship. Nevertheless, a sense of duty and the value of patriotism also played a role in the privateers' involvement. The

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<sup>101</sup> A brig is a sailing vessel containing two square-rigged masts. Brigs were commonly used during the War of 1812 due to the speed and maneuverability.

importance of national pride for the captains and crew became particularly apparent as the war progressed.<sup>102</sup>

One of the most prominent privateers who exemplified patriotism during the war was Commodore Joshua Barney. Barney was born in the British colony of Maryland in July of 1759 and became a prominent war hero in both the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812. He began his sailing career in 1771 at the age of twelve aboard his brother-in-law's merchant ship *Sidney*. It was on the *Sidney* that Barney had his first experience as a maritime captain after his brother-in-law died on a trip to Nice, France in 1775. After becoming the captain of the ship, Barney was faced with several challenges he had to overcome to complete the journey. First, the ship sprung a leak. To make matters more difficult, violent storms formed around the ship, threatening the survival of both the crew and cargo. In the face of these issues, Barney and his crew were able to patch the hull and navigate through the storm to reach Gibraltar. Barney's first experience leading a crew was not his last. By the time Barney returned the *Sidney* to America, the Revolutionary War had begun and Barney knew he wanted to be involved.<sup>103</sup>

Barney knew that he did not want to serve on a privateering vessel, so he traveled to Philadelphia, the capital of the new nation, in search of a commission in the newly formed Continental Navy. Upon his arrival, Barney quickly received interest and offers for office positions from the captains of both the *Wasp* and *Hornet*. Barney ultimately accepted the offer from the *Hornet* because it offered him the position of master's mate,

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<sup>102</sup> George C. Daughan, *1812: The Navy's War*, (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 147; Sir John Borlase Warren, *Sir John Borlase Warren to Secretary of the Admiralty John W. Croker, 29 December, 1812*. Letter from The National Archives, London, [https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/results/r/2?\\_q=December%2029%201812%20Warren](https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/results/r/2?_q=December%2029%201812%20Warren).

<sup>103</sup> Louis Norton, *Joshua Barney: Hero of the Revolution and 1812* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2000), 4-7; Hulbert Footner, *Sailor of Fortune: The Life and Adventures of Commodore Barney, USN* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1940), 3-5.

whereas the *Wasp* only offered the position of second mate. Barney's new position placed him third in line to become a captain and charged him with the duty of recruiting sailors to man the ship, all at the age of sixteen. Before setting sail on the *Hornet*, the ship and the crew received the flag of Grand Union, which served as an early prototype of the American Flag. Barney later recounted that receiving and raising this flag created a "patriotic stir" among those serving on the *Hornet*.<sup>104</sup>

In total, Barney spent less than one year on the *Hornet* before transferring to the *Wasp* to further his military service. During his time aboard the *Wasp*, the ship was involved in a two-day Battle in the Delaware. After the battle, Captain Charles Alexander made mention of Master's Mate Barney's "meritorious conduct," and urged his superiors to promote Barney. Following Captain Alexander's report, Barney received a letter asking him to report to the office of Robert Morris who promoted him to the position of Lieutenant in the Constitutional Navy and transferred him to the ship *Sachem*. Barney carried the rank of lieutenant for the remainder of his time in the Continental Navy, during which he served aboard the *Sachem* before he transferred one final time to the *Andrea Doria*.<sup>105</sup>

When Barney finished his career in the Continental Navy, his career at sea was far from over. Between the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812, Barney chose to focus on his political and business life. Barney turned down a commission as a captain in the United States Navy and instead became a merchant in Baltimore and ran for congress on several occasions. Although he was never elected to the United States Congress, Joshua

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<sup>104</sup> Norton, *Joshua Barney*, 19; Mary Barney, *Biographical Memoir of the Late Joshua Barney* (Whitefish, Montana: Kessinger Publishing, LLC 2007), 4.

<sup>105</sup> Norton, *Joshua Barney*, 25; M. Barney, *Memoir*, 44.



Barney felt as though he had more to offer his nation and continued to try to make his presence known. Following the *Chesapeake-Leopold* incident in 1807, Barney tried to serve his nation through alternate means when he reached out to President Thomas Jefferson to offer his services. Even though Jefferson did not push for military action at that point, Barney ultimately got the chance to serve his country again during the War of 1812.<sup>106</sup>

Following the declaration of war in June of 1812, Joshua Barney quickly decided to become involved in the war effort. He feared that he would not receive a commission in the United States Navy, since he had previously turned down an offer, and decided to turn to privateering as a means of participating in the war effort. In doing so, Barney became the captain of the eighty-eight-foot schooner *Rossie*. After taking control of the *Rossie*, Barney and the schooner's owners reached out to congress and President James Madison in hopes of securing a letter of marque. Twenty days after the declaration of war, Congress and the President rewarded Barney for his previous service by presenting him with the first letter of marquee issued in the War of 1812. After receiving the government's blessing to act as a privateer during the war, Barney ordered his men to get the *Rossie* ready for sail.<sup>107</sup>

As a privateer, Captain Joshua Barney conducted two cruises aboard the *Rossie*. During his first trip, Barney and his men sailed off the coasts of Canada and New England and captured eighteen British merchant vessels. While Barney found success at sea, not everything about his experience on the *Rossie* was positive. During his initial

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<sup>106</sup> Norton, *Joshua Barney*, 157-159; Barnet to Jefferson, 4 July 1807, Jefferson Correspondence, Library of Congress.

<sup>107</sup> Norton, *Joshua Barney*, 159-160.

trip, Barney was forced to deal with American civilians and even members of his own crew who did not meet the level of patriotism he had come to expect. One of the first examples was recounted on September 2, 1812 when Barney reprimanded a member of his crew for “cowardice and flying from his quarters in time of action.”<sup>108</sup> Another instance of occurred later in September after the *Rossie* captured the British ship *Jeanie*. When he searched the *Jeanie*'s crew, Barney discovered that one of the men serving aboard the ship was an American citizen working for and fighting amongst the British.

Barney sent the man and a letter to Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry stating:

I have sent on board your Vessel, a man by the name of Thomas Holden, he was taken by the private armed schooner *Rossie*, under my command, when Chief Mate of the British Ship *Jeanie* which ship engaged me. I find by his papers that he is a Citizen of the U.S. and that he has been employed onboard one of the public vessels, having taken him in Arms against his Country, I have thought proper to deliver him over to the Authority of the Country, and in consequence have sent him on board your Vessel and with him, the papers found in his possession proving his Citizenship, to be dealt according to the Law.<sup>109</sup>

Through these actions, Barney demonstrated that his involvement in privateering had just as much to do with patriotism as it did with profit.<sup>110</sup>

After handing off his prisoner to the U.S. Navy, Barney set sail for the Caribbean in hopes of capturing more British ships. Soon after arriving in the Caribbean, Barney encountered the packet *HMS Princess Amelia*. The encounter between the *Rossie* and *HMS Princess Amelia* lasted over an hour and left two British sailors dead and injured both six British sailors and six of the *Rossie*'s own crewmen. The battle effectively ended Captain Barney's career as a privateer because the *Rossie* was too damaged to continue sailing in search of prizes. When he returned to the United States, Barney was

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<sup>108</sup> Joshua Barney, Log of the *Rossie*, U.S. Naval Academy Library, Annapolis, MD.

<sup>109</sup> Joshua Barney, Log of the *Rossie*, U.S. Naval Academy Library, Annapolis, MD.

<sup>110</sup> Norton, *Joshua Barney*, 157-162.

quickly deemed to be a war hero for his actions in the battle with *HMS Princess Amelia*. In addition, the fight was later commemorated through a painting at demonstrating the patriotism and power of American maritime forces.<sup>111</sup>

Although Barney's time as a privateer lasted less than a year, his service to the United States continued throughout the war effort. After his return to Maryland, Barney reached out to the Secretary of the Navy, William Jones, with a detailed plan to protect the Chesapeake Bay. Barney's plan led him to receive a commission as a captain in the United States Navy. Barney was tasked with the management of a flotilla in the Chesapeake Bay that aimed to prevent the British from reaching Washington D.C. and Baltimore.<sup>112</sup> Unfortunately, Barney's flotilla was no match for the British Royal Navy and was pushed back into the Patuxent River where Barney was ultimately forced to destroy the majority of the ships under his command.<sup>113</sup>

Even after his naval force was defeated, Barney was not willing to allow the British to destroy the capital without at least one more fight. Barney saved some of the cannons from his vessels and ordered his men to drag them across land, as they were to be used in the August 24, 1814, Battle of Bladensburg. Again, Barney faced defeat, but this time, he also suffered the only major injury of his maritime career. During the course of Battle, Barney was shot in the leg, and the bullet was lodged so deep that surgeons were unable to remove it. The injury ended Barney's career in the Navy, and complications from the injury led to the patriot's death just three years after the end of the war.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> *Joshua Barney*, 163-166.

<sup>112</sup> A Flotilla is a formation of small warships.

<sup>113</sup> Norton, *Joshua Barney*, 169-179.

<sup>114</sup> Norton, *Joshua Barney*, 179-182.

While Captain Barney carried his sense of patriotism into the war, other privateers developed their patriotic sentiments as the war effort progressed. One privateering captain who demonstrated increased patriotism as the war progressed was Thomas Boyle. Boyle was born in Massachusetts and began his sailing career at a young age when he became a crew member of a merchant marine vessel at the age of eleven. Boyle quickly moved up the ranks and became a captain at the age of sixteen. Prior to the outbreak of the war, Boyle moved to Baltimore where he later captained the *Comet* and subsequently the *Chasseur* during the war. As a captain of these two ships, Boyle conducted five cruises, four of which produced a profit. During his cruises, Boyle became one of the most successful privateering captains and captured a total of fifty four British merchant vessels and one British Royal Navy ship.<sup>115</sup>

Although Boyle became involved in the war less than a month after it was declared by Congress, a sense of patriotism did not appear in his actions during the first year of the war. It was not until Boyle completed his second privateering voyage that his sense of patriotism became apparent. When Boyle returned from his section voyage in April of 1813, a blockade by the British Royal Navy made it extremely difficult for ships to leave the Chesapeake Bay. Instead of using time to take care of personal affairs, Boyle instead became a Sailing Master in the United States Navy. During his stint in the Navy, Boyle and his men were stationed in the bay to monitor movement of the British fleet. Although Boyle's service in the Navy demonstrated the development of his patriotism,

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<sup>115</sup> John A. McManemin, *Captains of the Privateers of the War of 1812* (Spring Lake, New Jersey: Ho-Ho-Kus Publishing, 1994), 97; Jerome R. Garitee, *The Republic's Private Navy: The American Privateering Business as Practiced by Baltimore During the War of 1812* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1977), 149-152.

his time in service did not last long. Instead, Boyle left the Navy at the end of August in 1813 to conduct another privateering cruise aboard the *Comet*.<sup>116</sup>

Nevertheless, following his time in the military, Thomas Boyle's patriotism only became more pronounced as the war progressed. His rise in patriotism was most apparent when he left the *Comet* to become captain of the *Chasseur*. By this point in the war, the British blockade had severely restricted the ability of American merchants to leave American ports. In response, when Boyle and his men found themselves off the coast of the British Isles in search of prizes, Boyle snuck in to London on October 24, 1814 and posted a notice on the Lloyd's Coffeehouse door. It read as follows:

Whereas, It has become customary with the admirals of Great Britain, commanding small forces on the coast of the United States, particularly with Sir John Borlaise Warren and Sir Alexander Cochrane, to declare all the coast of the said United States in a state of strict and rigorous blockade without possessing the power to justify such a declaration or stationing an adequate force to maintain said blockade; I do therefore, by virtue of the power and authority in me vested (possessing sufficient force), declare all the ports, harbors, bays, creeks, rivers, inlets, outlets, islands, and seacoast of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland in a state of strict and rigorous blockade. And I do further declare that I consider the force under my command adequate to maintain strictly, rigorously, and effectually the said blockade. And I do hereby require the respective officers, whether captains, commanders, or commanding officers, under my command, employed or to be employed, on the coasts of England, Ireland, and Scotland, to pay strict attention to the execution of this my proclamation. And I do hereby caution and forbid the ships and vessels of all and every nation in amity and peace with the United States from entering or attempting to enter, or from coming or attempting to come out of, any of the said ports, harbors, bays, creeks, rivers, inlets, outlets, islands, or seacoast under any pretense whatsoever. And that no person may plead ignorance of this, my proclamation, I have ordered the same to be made public in England. Given under my hand on board the *Chasseur*. Thomas Boyle by command of the commanding officer. J.J. Stanbury, Secretary.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>116</sup>Capt. Thomas Boyle, "Log of the *Comet*," Indiana University; McManemin, *Captains of the Privateers*, 106-107.

<sup>117</sup> Andrew J. Wahll, *Sea Raptors: Logs of the Private Armed Vessels Comet and Chasseur Commanded by Tom Boyle*, (Westminster, Maryland: Heritage Books, 2008), 119-120.

The note proclaimed that the British Isles were under a blockade conducted by Boyle and his men in response to the British Royal Navy's blockade in the United States. His note demonstrated true patriotism because he was willing to act on behalf of the United States when the United States Navy was unable to do so, despite the fact that there was no real benefit for him. Boyle's proclamation not only scared British merchants enough to lead to a hike in shipping insurance rates, but it also led the British Royal Navy to send out 14 ships in search of the *Chasseur*.<sup>118</sup>

Boyle's final and most famous displays of patriotism occurred with the attack and capture of the *HMS St. Lawrence* on February 26, 1815. During his last cruise as a privateer, Boyle mistook the *St. Lawrence* as a trading vessel and decided to approach. When he saw that it was not a trading vessel, he attacked, saying, "The honor of the flag entrusted to my charge was not to be disgraced by flight."<sup>119</sup> The battle lasted for 15 minutes, until the *St. Lawrence* surrendered to the *Chasseur*. As the exchange demonstrates, Boyle and his men possessed such patriotic sentiment that they were not willing to dishonor their country by fleeing from danger.<sup>120</sup>

Another privateer who became known for his patriotism was Jean Lafitte.<sup>121</sup> Lafitte, who is of French origin, operated out of the Gulf of Mexico and became involved in both the War of 1812 and the Mexican War for Independence. While he only offered his services to the United States for a short period of time during the War of 1812, he had

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<sup>118</sup> Andrew J. Wahll, *Sea Raptors: Logs of the Private Armed Vessels Comet and Chasseur Commanded by Tom Boyle*, (Westminster, Maryland: Heritage Books, 2008), 119-120.

<sup>119</sup> Andrew J. Wahll, *Sea Raptors: Logs of the Private Armed Vessels Comet and Chasseur Commanded by Tom Boyle*, (Westminster, Maryland: Heritage Books, 2008), 100.

<sup>120</sup> Andrew J. Wahll, *Sea Raptors: Logs of the Private Armed Vessels Comet and Chasseur Commanded by Tom Boyle*, (Westminster, Maryland: Heritage Books, 2008), 100.

<sup>121</sup> For the majority of the war, Lafitte was considered a pirate by both the British and the United States Government. It would not be until after his contributions in New Orleans that the US offered him a letter of marquee and grant him immunity for his previous actions.

a profound effect on the Battle of New Orleans. Lafitte's actions during this battle demonstrated his patriotism.

Lafitte was not always a likely ally to the US in the Battle of New Orleans. He had strained relations with the US government because the government classified Lafitte and his men as pirates. The US often sent military forces to Lafitte's base on an island in Barataria Bay, Louisiana. On November 14, 1814, the governor of Louisiana even offered \$500 for the capture of Jean Lafitte.<sup>122</sup> Lafitte was ultimately captured but managed to escape. As a result, the US Navy decided to burn six of his ships so that he was not able to continue on in his piracy.<sup>123</sup>

Given the strained relationship between Lafitte and the US government, the British government offered Lafitte and his crew a package in exchange for their aid against the Americans at the Battle of New Orleans. The British Royal Navy sent Captain Nicholas Lockyer to Barataria in August of 1814 and offered to grant Lafitte and his men British citizenship and land in the United States following the end of the war in return for their assistance. Lafitte was also presented with a letter from the Commander of the British Royal Navy that offered him captaincy and 1,000 pounds for payment. In response, Lafitte instructed his men to lock Lockyer up overnight. Lockyer was ultimately released the next morning and sent back to his ship with a letter asking for time to think about the offer.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> In response to this action, Lafitte offered a reward of \$15,000 to anyone who captured the governor and bring him to his island.

<sup>123</sup> Jean Lafitte, *The Journal of Jean Lafitte: The Privateer-Patriot's Own Story*, Luke Walter, ed. (Orlando, Florida: Moonglow Publications, 2009), 49-50.

<sup>124</sup> Percy to Lockyer, August 30, 1814, in Arsene Lacarriere Latour, *Historical Memoir of the War in West Florida and Louisiana, 1814-1815*, (Philadelphia, 1816), Appendix 3, pp x-xi; 5 Nicolls, Pensacola, to Lafitte, August 31, 1814, in Latour, *Historical Memoir of the War in West Florida and Louisiana, 1814-1815*, (Philadelphia, 1816), Appendix 3, pp. ix; 5 Lafitte, Barataria, to Lockyer, September 4, 1814, in Latour, *Historical Memoir*, pp. xi-xii.

After Lockyer's departure, Jean Lafitte turned over information of the British plan to United States officials. The Governor of Louisiana, William C.C. Claiborne, responded by writing to General Andrew Jackson saying, "Lafitte and his associates might be useful to us."<sup>125</sup> Meanwhile, Lafitte's lawyer, Edward Livingston, began writing letters to President James Madison and Andrew Jackson asking that the Lafitte brothers and their men be offered pardons in exchange for helping the United States defend Louisiana from British attack.<sup>126</sup> Despite the valuable information Lafitte provided and Governor Claiborne's insistence that Lafitte and his men be allowed to help, the United States government did not negotiate with Livingston before the arrival of the British in New Orleans. Andrew Jackson still harbored too much animosity and referred to the pirates from Baratavia as "hellish banditti."<sup>127</sup>

After the British arrived in New Orleans, the United States realized that they needed the help of Lafitte, his men, and his supplies. Governor Claiborne and the Louisiana State government offered Lafitte and his men a pardon in exchange for their military service. Both Jean and Pierre Lafitte found themselves assigned to Andrew Jackson's headquarters staff, where they served as guides and messengers. In addition to the two brothers, nearly three hundred of Lafitte's men also served during the battle, the majority of which were assigned to man artillery teams. The service these men provided

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<sup>125</sup> Claiborne to Jackson, September 8, 1814, in John Spencer Bassett., *The Correspondence of Andrew Jackson*, (Washington: 1926-1935), 6:439.

<sup>126</sup> Edward Livingston was a Democratic-Republican was the fourth mayor of New York City. Additionally, Livingston served as a member of the House of Representatives for New York and later Louisiana. Livingston would serve as Secretary of the State under President Andrew Jackson.

<sup>127</sup> Jackson to Claiborne, September 20, 1814, Bassett, *The Correspondence of Andrew Jackson*, 2:63; Robert C. Vogel, "Jean Lafitte, the Baratarians, and the Battle of New Orleans: A Reappraisal," *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 41, no. 3 (2000): 261-76.



led General Andrew Jackson's proclamation following the battle to have a section dedicated to the Baratarians. Jackson stated:

Captains Dominique and Belluche, lately commanding privateers at Baratavia, with part of their former crew and many brave citizens of New Orleans, were stationed at [batteries] Nos. 3 and 4. The general cannot avoid giving his warm approbation of the manner in which these gentlemen have uniformly conducted themselves while under his command, and of the gallantry with which they have redeemed the pledge they gave at opening of the campaign to defend the country. The brothers Lafitte have exhibited the same courage and fidelity; and the general promises that the government shall be duly apprised of their conduct.<sup>128</sup>

During the battle, these pirates turned privateers placed themselves in harm's way in order to further the American cause.<sup>129</sup>

Jean Lafitte's reasons for fighting alongside the Americans during the Battle of New Orleans can be seen as being beneficial to himself and his men, but his patriotic values also played at least some part in his involvement. His actions leading up to the battle make the value of his patriotism clear. For example, Lafitte received an offer from the British Royal Navy and could have decided to fight for the British. Instead, he decided not to because he felt as though the United States was his home. Even after the end of the war when Lafitte continued to smuggle goods into the country, he also continued to publicly announce his support for the United States. Lafitte was even quoted as saying, "Whether I am traveling or at home, I always have the American flag hoisted and have always revered and cherished it with great respect."<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Jackson to Lafitte, January 25, 1815, Bassett, *The Correspondence of Andrew Jackson*, 2:323.

<sup>129</sup> Robert C. Vogel, "Jean Lafitte, the Baratarians, and the Battle of New Orleans: A Reappraisal," *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 41, no. 3 (2000): 261-76.

<sup>130</sup> Jean Lafitte, *The Journal of Jean Lafitte: The Privateer-Patriot's Own Story*, Luke Walter (Orlando, Florida: Moonglow Publications, 2009), 50-68.

Captains were not the only ones enticed to take up privateering in hopes of gaining a profit. Many amateur sailors and even some farmers throughout the eastern United States left their homes in hopes of joining a privateering vessel in pursuit of economic gain. While profit was the goal for the majority of men who joined privateering crews, patriotic sentiment among members of the crew began to increase as they participated in subsequent cruises. The journal of a privateersman aboard the *Yankee* showed the rise in patriotism. Noah Johnson, who referred to himself as a wanderer during his first two cruises aboard the ship, kept a daily journal where he documented what occurred aboard the ship. The journal from the first cruise stated only factual information, but the journal from the second cruise began to record a number of his personal thoughts and beliefs.

In particular, the second journal began to discuss the rise in patriotic values amongst Johnson and the other crew members. On the first day of the second cruise, Johnson noted some of the customs carried out by the privateers on the ship. One custom Johnson described was cheering on other privateers they encountered because they were seen as beneficial for the nation. In addition to this, Johnson noted that whenever the ship passed a United States military base, the privateers appeared on deck to salute the members of the military. Johnson specifically recounted the feelings of one of his crewmates: “Horatio deeply felt all the emotions of the lover, friend, relation, and patriot.”<sup>131</sup> The entries made by Johnson signifies that privateering was more than just a

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<sup>131</sup> Noah Johnson, *Journals of Two Cruises Aboard the American Privateer Yankee*, (New York, Macmillan company, 1967), 70.

way to make money; crewmembers truly felt as though the sacrifices and danger they faced were contributing to the larger success of the nation as a whole.<sup>132</sup>

While it is unlikely that all 50,000 plus men who participated in privateering during the war felt patriotic sentiment, surviving journals and ship logs make it apparent that a large number of men did develop some level of patriotism during the course of the war. The patriotic values and their resulting actions did not go unnoticed by the United States government. Several years after the war, in 1817, the Senate introduced a reparation to a privateering vessel that demonstrated bravery and courage on behalf of the nation. The general of the ship, Captain Reid, engaged in a battle with the British Royal Navy that he knew he could not win. Still, Captain Reid was able to disable three British Royal Naval vessels before being forced to abandon his own ship and set it on fire. Given his actions, the Senate allotted \$10,000 to be split among the captain and crew of the ship. The United States government publicly acknowledged the patriotism privateers showed through their actions.<sup>133</sup>

Privateers were not the only ones who initially motivated to join the war effort for financial gain. The merchants who provided their vessels to privateers also hoped to earn a profit. Yet, over time, the effect of growing patriotism in the United States also came to play some role in the merchants' actions. Throughout the war, the majority of the privateers received their ships from northern merchants. Many of these northern merchants belonged to the federalist party and initially opposed the war, but their position

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<sup>132</sup> John A. Tures, "A Word of 'Captain Caution': Myths About Privateers in the War of 1812," *The War of 1812 Magazine* 14 (October 2010): 70-96. Noah Johnson, *Journals of Two Cruises Aboard the American Privateer Yankee*, (New York, Macmillan company, 1967), xxvii.

<sup>133</sup> United States, Congress, House, Select Committee on Naval Affairs. "Reward to the officers and crew of a privateer for extraordinary services. Communicated to the House of Representatives, March 4, 1818." 15th Congress, 1st Session, *American State Papers: Naval Affairs* 1, no. 157, 1818: 493-496.

shifted as privateers brought them increased profit. Moreover, more than one-fifth of each port city was invested in privateering, which led people throughout port cities to become more involved in one another's lives and to give one another greater support. While there was economic interest attached to the greater sense of communal support, it also demonstrated that people within port cities wanted the privateers and other Americans to succeed. Overall, merchants and investors in the war may have been motivated primarily by profit, but patriotic support became a byproduct of their experience.<sup>134</sup>

The increase in patriotic sentiment was not limited to those involved in the war effort. There was also an increase in patriotism at home. One measure of the rise in support is the music American citizens were creating. Throughout the war, US citizens began writing songs about almost every aspect of the world around them. One of the more popular topics during the period became the effects of privateers on the war effort. The songs about privateers began to appear at the beginning of the war and continued to be created well after the war's end.

Songs were written about numerous privateering ships, but the *General Armstrong* of New York had more songs written about it than any other. In total, the ship was the subject of five songs. The first song, "The General Armstrong," was published in March of 1813 and recounted the bravery of the ship's men when they were under the attack of a British Royal Navy ship. Through the song, the author made clear that the captain of the ship placed patriotism above all else. The author described the captain's actions after receiving an injury, writing: "His wound was quickly dress'd, while he in his cabin lay;

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<sup>134</sup> Jerome R. Garitee, *The Republic's Private Navy: The American Privateering Business as Practiced by Baltimore During the War of 1812* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1977), 32-46.

The doctor, while attending, these words he heard him say: Our “Our Yankee flag shall flourish,” our noble captain cried, “Before that we do strike, my boys, we’ll sink alongside.” The author’s writing demonstrated that, for the privateering captain, honoring the nation and the flag by fighting was more important than the possibility of dying. The ship survived the encounter described in, “The General Armstrong,” but subsequent songs were written only after the ship sank.<sup>135</sup>

In September of 1814, the *General Armstrong* anchored off the coast of the Portuguese island of Fayal. While anchored, the ship was approached by two British Royal Navy vessels and was sunk after a long battle. After the ship was sunk, four more songs were written about it. Tales of the bravery of the captain and crew reached America, and songs discussing bravery on the ship quickly began to appear. The most famous of these songs was Philip Freneau’s “On the Loss of the Privateer Brigantine General Armstrong.”<sup>136</sup> In his song, Freneau recounted the bravery demonstrated by the captain and crew of the *General Armstrong* and the damage they were able to cause before they met their fateful end. Freneau ended the song with an attempt to bring about a sense of patriotism by writing: “Now in bumpers of reason, success to brave Reid! Himself and his heroes are heroes indeed! In conquests, like this, can an Englishman glory, One traitor among us, one Halifax tory? If they can let them brag Here’s success to our flag! May it ever be ready, the britons to maul, As the *Armstrong* behaved in the road of Fayal.”<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Robert W. Nesser, *American Naval Songs and Ballads* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1938), 149-151.

<sup>136</sup> In addition to Freneau’s poem the three other songs are “Reid at Fayal,” “The Armstrong at Fayal,” and “The Fight of the Armstrong Privateer.”

<sup>137</sup> Nesser, *American Naval Songs and Ballads*, 241-244.

Another patriotic expression came about in October of 1813 after the capture of a British packet by the privateering vessel *Saratoga*.<sup>138</sup> During the battle, the *Saratoga* had only seven guns while the packet it faced had eighteen. Despite its disadvantage, the privateering vessel was able to capture the British after a little over an hour of fighting. Following the capture, a song was soon written to honor the *Saratoga* and its accomplishment. In the song, “Another Glorious Victory,” the author writes, “The genius replied, Of my sons I’m quite proud/Their glory is bright, nor is stain’d with a cloud/And they ne’er shall disgrace of their country the name/But shall fill with their deeds many pages of fame.” The lyrics demonstrated the pride that citizens felt toward the privateers and their actions. The line, “They ne’er shall disgrace of their country the name,” signified that the author and those around him recognized the *Saratoga*’s bravery in the face of danger, and ultimate sacrifice they were willing to make to defend their country.<sup>139</sup>

Privateering vessels had a duty to capture British merchant ships and their cargo. Their duty did not include engaging with the British Royal Navy; yet, many encounters with the British Royal Navy still occurred. In fact, all of the privateering songs pay homage to the encounters between privateers and the British Royal Navy. Privateers were not responsible for engaging in these encounters, and the crew of privateering ships were largely untrained as fighters. As a result, when privateers defeated the British at battle it created a sense of superiority and pride in the country. In the song, “Brilliant Victory,” the author wrote about the “bravery, skill and courage” of the privateering vessel

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<sup>138</sup> Packets are boats designed to transporting mail, people, and freight. The capture of one of these vessels particularly important to the war effort, as they disrupted communication between Britain and the British military leaders in America.

<sup>139</sup> Nesser, *American Naval Songs and Ballads*, 205-207.

*Decatur*, which defeated a 16-gun British Schooner, *Dominico*.<sup>140</sup> In the description of the battle, the author wrote about the “valor most undaunted” and “destruction to them dealt/Such as Freemen give to Tyrants.” This, paired with imagery of a jovial and triumphant crew as “their Flag of Union dowsed/When the Yankee flag appeared,” signified the actions taken by privateers solely to defend their country. While the *Decatur* was not required to overtake the British ship, the crew chose to do so because of the sense of duty and pride they felt towards their country.<sup>141</sup>

A final song that focused on the actions of privateers is the “Yankee Privateer.” In this song, the author looked at a whale-boat from Portland, Maine and its ability to succeed in making a capture, despite its inability to sail far from shore. The author wrote, “Then on the deck as raised, The little privateer, And full of fun and humor, Away from home they steer. So proud the little whale-boat, Which runs along the side, Of a large British vessel, Upon her deck did ride. Ye Jolly Privateersmen, Now fill the flowing can, And toast the vent’rous seaman, Who the little boat did man. The Britons who so haughty, Have rode upon the sea, Have found that e’en a whale-boat, A match for them can be.” The author used these lyrics to create a sense of superiority among American’s, as compared to the British. Furthermore, the author demonstrated that there should be pride in American privateers because even the smallest ones were productive in the war effort.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> A type of sailing vessel with two or more masts. Typically, the ship contains two masts with the front being shorter than the rear.

<sup>141</sup> Nesser, *American Naval Songs and Ballads*, 218-219.

<sup>142</sup> Nesser, *American Naval Songs and Ballads*, 285-287.

Music was not the only published medium that demonstrated support for privateering actions during the war. Newspapers were also widely used to express patriotic ideologies. Throughout the country, editors published the captures, heroic actions, and triumphs of privateers. The *Niles Weekly Register*, published by Hezekiah Niles in Baltimore, compiled and published all of the actions of privateers throughout the week. The paper focused on the positive aspects of privateering and often left out any British captures of American crews. The paper wanted to demonstrate how successful American privateers were in order to encourage support from citizens during the war. On April 15, 1815, Niles published some of the captures made by American privateers during August of 1814. He listed more than 40 ships taken by American privateers and stated what they were carrying and any known values.<sup>143</sup>

Newspapers did not have to focus on the positive aspects of privateering in order to influence the patriotic sentiment felt among the general population. Another tactic was for newspapers to print ways the public could support the privateers. For example, in the August issue of the *American and Commercial Daily Advertiser*, the author discussed the ship building industry and how ship builders demonstrated patriotism through their contribution to the privateering industry. The paper also considered men who funded the building of additional ships to be patriotic because they allowed an increased number of privateers to sail under the American flag.<sup>144</sup>

Newspapers also called into question the patriotism of the individuals who did not support the privateers. The *Essex Register* of Salem, Massachusetts published an article

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<sup>143</sup>Timothy S. Good, *American Privateers in the War of 1812: The Vessels and Their Prizes as Recorded in Niles' Weekly Register*, (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company Inc., 2012), 3;110.

<sup>144</sup>“Ferry Point,” *American and Commerical Daily Advertiser* (Baltimore, Maryland), Aug. 8, 1812.



titled “Outrage,” on July 25, 1812 that discussed a privateering vessel that was sunk by an unknown group while it was sitting in port being fitted for voyage. The author of the article placed the blame on Federalist supporters, as they had been in opposition to the war, and called into question the patriotism of the Federalists in the area. The article emphasized the patriotic nature of privateering because it deemed those who did not support privateers and their actions to be unpatriotic themselves.<sup>145</sup>

Other instances of privateering vessels being destroyed or tampered with in American ports called for the public’s patriotism to shine through to help find the culprits. On August 20, 1812, John Everingham and Thomas Jervey took out an ad in the *City Gazette* of Charleston, South Carolina to look for help identifying the people who destroyed seven guns on the privateer *Saucy Jack*. In the ad, the two men wrote “It is confidently hoped that every good citizen and real American will exert himself to find out and drag to light the secret enemies of our country, who thus daringly attempt to set at naught the patriotic efforts of our citizens and clandestinely cooperate with our implacable enemy.”<sup>146</sup> In comparison to the article in the *Essex Register*, Federalists were not called into question because the Republican party dominated the south. Instead, the ad used language that was intended to give the citizenry a sense of patriotism by claiming that any “real American” would help find the culprit. Moreover, the ad used the term union and American, which demonstrated how the sense of patriotism and unity were spreading throughout the nation. Finally, by calling people to action in support of the

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<sup>145</sup> “Outrage,” *Essex Register* (Salem, Massachusetts), July 29, 1812.

<sup>146</sup> John Everingham and Thomas H. Jervey, “The Enemy in our Camp!,” *City Gazette* (Charleston, South Carolina), Aug. 20, 1812.

privateering vessel, the ad demonstrated how highly people thought of the privateers and the role they played in the rising American patriotic ideology.<sup>147</sup>

During the war, newspapers began to focus on Baltimore as a patriotic city because the city sent out more privateers than any other port city. In an August issue of the *American and Commercial Daily Advertiser*, the author of an article stated, “Fifty-six privateers are ascertained to have already gone to sea from the several ports in the United States. With pride and pleasure we think that the patriotic order of Baltimore has placed her far above the union on the list.”<sup>148</sup> While this paper had some bias because it was printed in Baltimore, it still demonstrated that the entire city of Baltimore was seen as patriotic because they produced so many privateers.

By the end of the war, American citizens from nearly every socioeconomic status had begun to show patriotism and appreciation for those who served during the war. These feelings became particularly evident as privateers returned following their cruises. During the first few years of the war, there were very few instances where crowds gathered in order to welcome home the privateers and offer gratitude for their contributions to the war. By the end of the war, an increased number of privateering ship ledgers noted the welcome home parties that awaited their return. For example, when the *Chasseur* returned to Baltimore following its last voyage one onlooker recorded, “On entering the port, the *Chasseur* saluted Fort McHenry in a handsome style. Her brave captain and crew were welcomed by all classes of the community for their service to state

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<sup>147</sup> John Everingham and Thomas H. Jervey, “The Enemy in our Camp!,” *City Gazette* (Charleston, South Carolina), Aug. 20, 1812.

<sup>148</sup> “Privateers,” *American and Commercial Daily Advertiser* (Baltimore, Maryland), Aug. 18, 1812.

and country.”<sup>149</sup> The onlooker’s statement demonstrated that during the war, privateers were seen as patriotic men. In addition, the large crowds that showed up to greet these men at port indicated that American citizens felt at least some degree of patriotic support for the actions of privateers.<sup>150</sup>

Historical documents and media sources from the period show that the War of 1812 was important in shaping the cultural identity of America. Although almost 30 years had passed since the Revolutionary War ended in 1783, the country as a whole had still yet to find its identity as an independent nation. While many authors and historians do not directly attribute this rise in cultural identity and patriotic values to privateers, their efforts and bravery in the face of danger contributed to the rise in patriotism that swept through the nation.

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<sup>149</sup> Andrew J. Wahll, *Sea Raptors: Logs of the Private Armed Vessels Comet and Chasseur Commanded by Tom Boyle*, (Westminster, Maryland: Heritage Books, 2008), 119-120.

<sup>150</sup> Wahll, *Sea Raptors*, 119-120.

## Epilogue

Throughout the War of 1812, American privateers became an active part of the United States government's strategy to defeat the British. This private maritime force provided militaristic support by affecting both the British Royal Navy as well as the British shipping industry. Additionally, privateering efforts contributed a significant amount financially to a government that was not economically prepared for a costly war. Finally, privateers demonstrated patriotic sentiment and became active members of an overall growing sense of pride within the nation. While these individuals positively contributed in a number of ways during the overall war effort, their effects were not enough to help the United States defeat the British. Instead, both sides gained no real advantage over the other, leading to discussions of peace beginning in August of 1814.

With both sides agreeing that the war needed to end, leaders from the United States and Britain began negotiations in Ghent, United Netherlands.<sup>151</sup> On the American side of the table, John Quincy Adams led the discussion with help from Albert Gallatin, Henry Clay, James A. Bayard, and Johnathan Russel. Their British counterparts included several minor British officials who were in close contact with their superiors in England. While both groups entered the negotiations seeking peace, neither began without seeking concessions from the other. Coming into the negotiations, president James Madison advised American leaders to push for an agreement to end the impressment of American sailors and seek to gain the Canadian territories from Britain. Counter to these points, British officials sought to establish an Indian barrier territory in the northwestern United States and gain transit rights along the Mississippi River. Both sides rejected the other's

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<sup>151</sup> Present day Belgium.

propositions leading to nearly four more months of war before a treaty was agreed upon.<sup>152</sup>

In December of 1814, British and American leaders finally came to this agreement. In this, neither side made concessions, but both agreed to return all captured prisoners, ships, and land to the opposing nation. In addition, Britain also agreed to return any captured American slaves or pay for those which they had already freed. While both nations agreed to these terms, the United States was able to secure the rights of the sailors which had been a major factor leading to the declaration of the war. These terms formed the Treaty of Ghent and were agreed upon on December 24, 1814, effectively ending the war after ratification by both nations.<sup>153</sup>

With a formal declaration of peace in place, the majority of soldiers, sailors, and privateers were able to return home to their normal lives. For some privateers, this meant returning to the jobs they had before the war either aboard merchant ships or as farmers. Others enjoyed a lengthy retirement living on the money they made from their shares of captures. Still others were not so willing to give up the lucrative privateering lifestyle. This meant sailing to South and Central American territories which had begun their own fights for independence from European nations. In total, more than three thousand American sailors headed to Central and South America in order to continue their work as privateers. While thousands of American sailors saw this opportunity as a chance to make money, their actions placed American political leaders in a difficult position. For a nation

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<sup>152</sup> Robert Remini, *Henry Clay: Statesman for the Union* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991), 117; A.T. Mahan "The Negotiations at Ghent in 1814," *The American Historical Review* 11, no. 1 (1905): 68-87.

<sup>153</sup> Fred Engelman, "The Peace of Christmas Eve," *American Heritage* 12, no. 1 (1960); *Treaty of Ghent, 1814*, "The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy," Yale Law School, accessed 28 March 2019, [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th\\_century/ghent.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/ghent.asp).

who was pushing for safe, secure, and neutral waterways, having Americans attacking and looting Spanish, British, and French ships created a complex political landscape for American presidents and secretaries of state.<sup>154</sup>

With privateering playing such a large role in the fight against European control of the Americas in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the practice of employing a private maritime force came under attack later in the century. This charge against privateering came into full effect with the Paris Declaration Respecting Maritime Law of 1856. In this, France and Britain co-wrote a set of maritime laws to govern those nations which signed the pact. Key features of this document included laws governing free trade, blockades, and most importantly privateering. While this agreement acted as the precursor for banning the practice of using a private maritime force, it only affected those nations which signed the declaration from using privateers against one another. However, the United States refused to sign the pact, as the nation believed they may need privateers to supplement their small navy in the future. While the American government did not sign the declaration, they have not used privateers since the War of 1812.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> David Head, *Privateers of the Americas: Spanish American Privateering from the United States in the Early Republic* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2015), 4.

<sup>155</sup> Nancy Barker and Marvin Brown, *Diplomacy in the Age of Nationalism: Essays in Honor of Lynn Marshall Case* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971), 44-66.

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