

1.4 WAR OF 1812

The Second War with England

The cause of this contest, barely 27 years from the first:
Napoleon ordered British ports to close to American vessels,
England then demanded “No U.S. ships in French ports”.
The heart of U.S. trade skipped a beat.
England feigned American vessels were leaking through;
Hundreds of U.S. ships were thus arrested.
England declared America held British sailors aboard.
Many seamen naturalized or born in the U.S. were forcibly withdrawn,
Transfusing fresh corpuscles into the British Navy.

James Madison declared war and spats began:
The British captured Detroit, America took York,¹
Then grabbed Fort George. Tit for Tat,
England raided, plundered and burned northern New York,
Dolly Madison fled the White House,
Managing to preserve a carriage of art and artifacts²
As Redcoats entered another door.



Americans captured many English warships.
One hero was Captain Perry. After a horrible volley,
Only 14 of his crew of 100 were unhurt, his ship
Lay upon the water a wreck. With the battle-flag,
They took to an open boat and made their way under sore fire
Toward the American “Niagara”. Actually reaching the ship
Gave courage to the American fleet. They turned on the British
With all guns, and in 15 minutes the entire British squadron surrendered.

Perry’s dispatch: “We have met the enemy, and they are ours.”

—Based on information from First Lessons in Our Country’s History: Bring-
ing Out Its Salient Points, Aiming to Combine Simplicity with Sense by William
Swinton, A.M., 1871, pp. 132-136. Purchased by one-room school teacher Ella A.
Moore, Crystal, Iowa, May 20, 1875. From family archives.

¹Now Toronto, Canada.

²President Obama in 2016 credited Paul Jennings, James Madison’s 15-year-old slave in 1814,
who helped save Washington, D.C.’s treasures. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Burning_of_Washington

Freedom Run

Way I see it, I have a choice and a chance.
These threatenin' times of 1813 is my ticket.
I bought passage with my bloody back last time,
I can do no worse now. Picked my time.
Stole away in the night, crossed two rivers,
A swamp, an' run like a demon pursued all night,
Barefoot, soaked to the bone, a sliver a'bread inside m'shirt.
Already done plenty work to earn m'keep so the slate's clean.
On my books I'm a free man of color now.

—Chronicles in Slavery in the United States: A Narrative of the Life of Charles Ball, A Black Man, who lived Forty Years in Maryland, South Carolina, and Georgia as a Slave, by John S. Taylor, 1837.

The British fleet was moored in the Chesapeake Bay. A runaway could offer his services to the King, or he could volunteer for the fledgling American navy and defend his country. Ball chose the latter and he was not alone. In 1813 African Americans made up at least 15% of U.S. naval corps. Although official U.S. policy at the start of the war forbade the recruitment of black sailors, a chronic shortage of manpower compelled the navy to accept any able-bodied man. Captain Oliver Hazard Perry complained about having blacks on his ship but Commodore Isaac Chauncey replied, "I have nearly fifty blacks on this boat and many of them are among the best of my men." At the Battle of Lake Erie, where Perry's fleet overcame the British, his black soldiers performed so well that he wrote to the Secretary of the Navy, praising their courage.

Orders given to the British Royal Navy's Admiral Sir George Cockburn specifically said to focus on gaining "the cordial support of the black population," according to Harper's Magazine. Cockburn was told to strike in places that would draw in black families, who would then be told they wouldn't be given back to owners, according to Harper's. Adult men were reportedly trained to the Colonial Marines regiment, which took part in many battles—like the British attack on Fort McHenry, and the effort to burn Washington, D.C.

"An estimated 6000 blacks (one source mentioned 4000. Perhaps it was 4000 men plus their families.), both runaway slaves and freedmen, did defect to the British. According to custom, a slave arriving on British soil was free; a British ship at war had the status of British land itself. The British offered the Colonial Marines farmland in Trinidad in February 1816, nearly a year after the end of the war. Their descendants live in Trinidad still, in freedom, and call themselves 'the Merikans'. Others were deposited on Canada's shores. The British were true to their word and refused to return slaves even though the U.S. government demanded it." —<http://www.pbs.org/wned/war-of-1812/essays/black-soldier-and-sailors-war/>

The Flag Was Still There

Lawyer Francis Scott Key negotiated for the release
Of American prisoners of war sequestered in a ship off shore.
The British Admiral agreed to a one-for-one exchange of POWs
And Key opened the hold belowdecks to tell the men.
When he came back up, the Admiral would keep the agreement but it
Had become merely academic: all would be British subjects in a day;
The entire English war fleet was upon the horizon to attack Fort McHenry.
Yet England offered leniency: lower your flag and our cannons fall silent;
The fort becomes British—and the rest of the country, too.
It was particularly difficult for the men, knowing
The Fort housed mostly families:

Women,



Children,



With but a few soldiers.

Key freed the news to caged men; they spontaneously went to prayer
That the flag would stay in place.¹

Through the volleys of the night, he reported back to those captives.
All the firepower of the English fleet was trained on the fort, then in rage,
At the flag. It suffered several direct hits, yet remained inexplicably aloft.
When the fleet had expended its wares, the flag was still there.
After an on-shore inspection,

Key unlocked the mystery:

The flag was held up by piles of Patriot's bodies large and small,
Each one having taken a turn holding up that flag.²

—Based on <https://www.youtube.com/embed/YaxGNQE5ZLA>

¹Be mindful of how prayers are framed. What if they had asked for cannon balls to be deflected?

²Author unable to find support or denial of the story, other than differences in reporting the tone of the Admiral and numbers stationed at the fort. That the battle was so noteworthy as to create a stirring poem becoming the national anthem commemorating the event, battle circumstances must surely have been remarkable.

Pictured on previous page are: wooden box, ladle, clay and glass marbles, and Hill's Wooden Alphabet Blocks of the era, from family archives.



The Battle of Ft. McHenry, North America's decisive turning point in the struggle to govern itself, ended the War of 1812, and the Treaty of Ghent at the Belgium Peace Talks sealed it. U.S. Commemorative stamp, 2014.

The star-spangled banner that Francis Scott Key saw flying over Fort McHenry is now at the Smithsonian. Photo: <https://abagond.files.wordpress.com/2016/08/star-spangled-banner.jpg>



“Defence of Fort M’Henry”

Oh, say, can you see by the dawn's early light,
What so proudly we hail'd at the twilight's last gleaming?
Whose broad stripes and bright stars thro' the perilous fight,
O'er the ramparts we watch'd were so gallantly streaming?
And the rockets' red glare, the bombs bursting in air,
Gave proof thro' the night that our flag was still there.
O say, does that star-spangled banner yet wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave?

—Francis Scott Key

On first reading we note that Key is asking us if the flag is still waving. Then I'd like to believe that he is asking himself, a slave owner, if this land really is "free" for everyone. A poet's introspection should ask, "Have I fought, not just for my own freedom from British rule, but for the right to freedom for my own slaves?" Perhaps it was a thought that in 1814 could not find the light of day. Key's verse 3 reads:

"And where is that band who so vauntingly swore,
That the havoc of war and the battle's confusion
A home and a country should leave us no more?
Their blood has wash'd out their foul footsteps' pollution.
No refuge could save the hireling and slave
From the terror of flight or the gloom of the grave,
And the star-spangled banner in triumph doth wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave."

Some read this verse to mean Key hoped escaped and freed slaves seeking refuge by fighting on the British side would get their just deserts, which, he hoped, not even those killed in battle could avoid.

"You can decide for yourself whether there's some connection between what happened 200 years ago and what professional athlete Colin Kaepernick (who in 2016 is refusing to stand respectfully for the National Anthem) is angry about today," Jon Schwarz posited. "Maybe it's all ancient, meaningless history. Or maybe it's not, and Kaepernick is right, and we really need a new national anthem."

—Jon Schwarz. <http://readersupportednews.org/opinion2/277-75/38844-colin-kaepernick-is-righter-than-you-know-the-national-anthem-is-a-celebration-of-slavery>

Or, maybe we need to pay more attention to verse 4 of The Star Spangled Banner, as suggested in 2014 by Duluth citizen Roger Morris, which prompted this editorial in 2017:

"The fourth verse easily is the most poignant, the most powerful and the most patriotic of Francis Scott Key's signature work. Set to music, it became the national anthem in 1931. So sing that fourth verse for the Fourth this year. Every year. Make it a tradition. Heck, sing all four verses." Verse 4:

Oh! thus be it ever, when freemen shall stand,
Between their loved home and the war's desolation!
Blest with victory and peace, may the heav'n rescued land,
Praise the Pow'r that hath made and preserved us a nation.
Then conquer we must, when our cause it is just,

And this be our motto: 'In God is our trust.'
And the star-spangled banner in triumph shall wave,
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave.

—“Sing Forth the Fourth for the Fourth”, by Duluth News Tribune Editorial Board on 7/2/2017 at 8:21 p.m. (Reprinted 7/4/2017 in Mesabi Daily News, Virginia, MN.)

On Another Front: A Native American Perspective

“The largest conflict presented itself after those efforts to contain us disintegrated into punitive strategy. Andrew Jackson was elected in 1829 largely because the government needed to ‘take care of the Indian problem’. The white missionaries were unfortunately used by both the legalism of religion and the policy of government to try to change us into the white man. The missionaries were strictly trained in dogma and not open-minded enough to understand our spirituality, those elements of great meaning we use to worship the Creator of all things. They came with their own man-created shame and expectation heaped upon them. The government could not wipe us out, so they developed a policy to remove our language and ways from us by convincing parents they needed to move with the times and send their children to boarding schools. If they did not relent, their children were forcibly removed from them and submitted to re-education plans, not unlike POWs in a concentration camp.

For example, my own uncle was taken from his parents at age 8 in Sisseton, SD. His hair was cut, he had kerosene applied to his head, his clothes were stripped off and he was re-dressed like a Lakota Jesuit. He knew no English. The first time he responded to a question in Lakota, he was laid on the floor, had his ankles tied together, his wrists were tied to his waist, then he was hung by the ankles upside-down in a doorframe and the bottoms of his feet were beaten. They didn't lower him to the floor until the blood dripped to his forehead. Then they told him to “go outside and play.” He got to the yard with no small difficulty and answered a concerned friend—in Lakota. The schoolmaster heard it and took him right back to the doorframe and repeated the process. He walked with a limp until he died in old age.

With that influence, it became unreasonable from a spiritual point of view that we could co-exist as 2 nations on one soil. One-on-one at the human level still worked, though, and still does. When we get to know individuals and see their good character, it is still possible to trust. It is possible to be as gentle with each other as though we had an owl's fingertips.”

—Wally Inyun Walkon