

War of 1812: Six Nations Perspectives

Six Nations Legacy Consortium

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Why was there a war?

There were three reasons for this war, from a Six Nations perspective:

- a) Great Britain and the new United States had lingering animosities from the American Revolutionary War. The British felt that they had the right to control traffic on international waters and began to interfere in U.S. shipping, which generated much ire among the American politicians who called for war.
- b) The U.S. accused the British of fostering dissent among the Native Nations of the Old Northwest Territory, and supplying them with the weapons of war. The Native Nations were upset that the U.S. wanted to assert their jurisdiction over their lands. Tecumseh was just one of many Native leaders opposed to western expansion and called for armed resistance to land loss.
- c) Great Britain had refused to give up their old forts that were on the U.S. side of the boundary line. The U.S. wanted to claim sovereignty over the lands they had acquired from France in the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, much of which was already occupied by Native Nations. Americans had the eyes on the western lands and used this war as a way to win dominance over Native territory.

Why did our ancestors fight in that war?

There were five reasons why the Grand River Warriors participated in this war:

- a) They were fearful of an American invasion, recalling the Indian Expedition in 1779 that destroyed over 50 Haudenosaunee settlements in New York State. First and foremost, the Grand River warriors wanted to protect their land, communities and families.
- b) There was lingering animosity towards Americans because of their victory in the American Revolution. Grand River community resented the fact that they had to leave their homelands and relocate to Canada, and they resented their relatives at Buffalo Creek, Tuscarora and Oneida who had sided with the Americans during that war. They had spilled each other's blood in 1777 and that created a blood feud.
- c) The Covenant Chain Treaty with Great Britain that dated back to 1667 obligated the Six Nations to defend the King's Interests. Many felt that their honour was at stake if they failed to fulfil the request of their ally, the King.
- d) Individual War Captains had more influence on the young warriors than did the Confederacy Chiefs or the Clan Mothers. John Norton and John Brant rallied the warriors despite pleas from the Chiefs to remain neutral in the war. Young warriors wanted to make their mark in the world, just as their older relatives had done in previous wars.