

# Battle of New Orleans

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

Jean Lafitte National Historical Park  
and Preserve  
Chalmette Battlefield Unit



## Important Educational Concepts

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There were four main causes of the War of 1812.

Great Britain's powerful navy enforced restrictive trade rules and forcibly removed American citizens from ships on the high seas, compelling them to serve in the Royal Navy, a practice known as "impressment." "Free Trade and Sailors' Rights" were the two causes

most often cited by the war's supporters.

In addition, some believed that the British were encouraging American Indian uprisings against new settlements in the West. Others hoped to invade Canada and make it part of the American republic.

The British targeted New Orleans to gain control of the Mississippi River.

In a time before airplanes, cars or trains, waterways were used to transport people and goods. The Mississippi River was a major highway of commerce, moving 40 % of American trade. Since New Orleans was the port located between the heartland and the rest of the world,

control of the city meant control of the American economy.

For the young American nation, losing the city of New Orleans to the British would have threatened the very independence and future of the country.

The British thought it would be easy to conquer New Orleans...

New Orleans joined the United States in 1803 as part of the Louisiana Purchase; Louisiana became a state in 1812. When the War of 1812 began, many of the Catholic citizens still thought of themselves as French or Spanish and resented how the new Protestant, English speaking Americans changed the laws and their way of life.

These cultural differences and a general lack of support for the American government convinced the British that few New Orleanians would take up arms to defend the city. They also hoped that enslaved Africans would join their forces in return for their freedom.

...but it wasn't.

The British failed to consider the negative attitudes Louisianians had towards Great Britain. Many Acadians (Cajuns) still hated the British for expelling them from their homes in French Canada in the 1750s, forcing them to seek refuge in Louisiana.

Throughout the War of 1812, The

British had pillaged homes and destroyed towns along the east coast of the United States. New Orleanians feared that the British would use similar tactics in their city and realized that their only hope was to set aside their cultural differences and stand as a united front.

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Many different people helped defend New Orleans.

American troops included professional soldiers, sailors, and marines as well as volunteers who had fought in the recent wars against some American Indian tribes. Volunteer militias came from Kentucky, Tennessee, Mississippi, and Louisiana. Among the troops were free men of color, Choctaw Indians, New Orleans businessmen, Creoles, Irish immigrants and even pirates from the swamps of Barataria.

of New Orleans from the well-seasoned, experienced British "regulars" had never picked up a weapon before.

Although many of the American troops had little training, were poorly armed, and were outnumbered, the American's strong defensive position, good leadership, and a unified commitment to the defense of the city, influenced their victory.

Many of the men defending the city

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Civilian families contributed to the defensive efforts.

Although only men fought on the battlefield, women also contributed significantly to the war effort by making uniforms and blankets for the troops and by bringing hot meals to the damp and cold battlefield. Perhaps most importantly, New Orleans women acted as medics for both the American and British troops.

Families who lived on what became the battlefield contributed their entire homes. The Americans destroyed the Chalmet family plantation so the British could not use it as a defensive position. Other buildings like the Villeré, Rodriguez and Macarty plantations were taken over as military headquarters.

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The New Orleans campaign was fought on both water and on land.

The Battle of New Orleans started at Lake Borgne, about 10 miles east of Chalmette and continued at the Villeré and Macarty plantations on December 23, 1814. This minor skirmish

on the river escalated, culminating in the major (though short) battle fought on the Chalmette plantation on the morning of January 8, 2015 .

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The Battle of New Orleans was the last major battle of the War of 1812...

By the time American and British forces were squaring off on the Chalmette field, British and American diplomats were already en route to Washington, D.C. with a peace treaty.

offer the New England states a separate treaty if they seceded and rejoined Britain. However, since the Americans won the Battle of New Orleans, and the British had gained no territory, the Americans were eager to make peace. The Treaty of Ghent was ratified on February 17, 1815.

The British were not confident that the Americans would agree to their terms, and in fact were prepared to

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...and changed forever how the world saw the United States of America and how Americans saw themselves.

The War of 1812 changed very little about the territory or trading rights of the United States of America. The peace treaty in fact declared that Britain and the United States would return to the *status quo ante bellum*, or the way things were before the war broke out. But it proved to the world, and especially to Great Britain, that the democratic model could really work.

from different backgrounds could come together for a common cause.

For the next 50 years, Americans celebrated January 8 with fireworks and parades, just like we celebrate July 4. Today some people consider January 8, 1815 the real birthday of the United States. The American victory at the Battle of New Orleans, was a day when all kinds of Americans worked together to defend their nation, the day that the United States earned the world's respect and the day that the United States of America truly became united.

Even more importantly, winning the Battle of New Orleans taught Americans across the country that people