

EXPANDING THE "VARYING VIEWPOINTS"

- Reginald Horsman, *The Causes of the War of 1812* (1962)

A view of the War of 1812 centering on naval issues:

"British commercial decrees provided a convenient scapegoat for all the ills of American farmers and planters. . . . The increasing demand for war after 1809 arose naturally out of the failure of economic coercion as a means of resisting British maritime policy. . . . America in 1812 was acting essentially in reaction to British maritime policy."

- Henry Adams, *The History of the United States of America during the Administrations of Jefferson and Madison* (1967)

A view of the war as centering on American character:

"Only by slow degrees the country learned to appreciate the extraordinary feat which had been performed, not so much by the people as by a relatively small number of individuals. Had a village rustic, with one hand tied behind his back, challenged the champion of the prize-ring, and in three or four rounds obliged him to draw the stakes, the result would have been little more surprising than the result of the American campaign of 1814. . . . No European nation could have conducted a war as the people of America conducted the War of 1812. The possibility of doing so without destruction explained the existence of the national trait, and assured its continuance."

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE "VARYING VIEWPOINTS"

1. How would each of these historians understand the significance of the War of 1812?
2. According to which of these viewpoints would the war be seen as having more enduring consequences? Why?
3. To which developments and events of the war might each of these historians attach greatest importance?