AP EDITION · DBQ + LEQ · CLASSROOM

1808

James Madison vs Charles C. Pinckney

A 105-minute lesson on the 1808 U.S. presidential election. Includes lesson plan, DBQ pairing, student worksheet, answer key, and discussion prompts.

ERA First Party System	ELECTORAL VOTES 175 total
WINNER James Madison (Democratic-Republican) · 122 EV	RUNNER-UP Charles C. Pinckney (Federalist) · 47 EV
KEY ISSUE Embargo Act and neutral trade rights amid the Napoleonic Wars	TURNOUT 36.8%

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3. Background: vocabulary + primary source A
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1808: James Madison vs Charles C. Pinckney

AP framework alignment

AP US History · Period varies by cycle · Reasoning skills: contextualization, comparison, causation, sourcing. CCSS · CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.2 (central ideas), RH.11-12.6 (point of view), RH.11-12.7 (multiple sources). NCSS · D2.His.5.9-12, D2.His.14.9-12, D2.His.16.9-12.

Timing

5 min	**Warm-up**	Identify two structural features of the U.S. political system by 1808 that would constrain any incumbent party's ability to manage international economic crisis. For each, identify the specific 1789-1808 development most responsible.
15 min	**Reading + vocab**	The 1808 election is the textbook case of an incumbent party surviving a major policy failure through institutional advantage rather than substantive defense. James Madison defeated Charles Cotesworth Pinckney 122 to 47 electoral votes despite the Embargo Act of 1807 having produced the largest single-year contraction in U.S. economic history to that point. The Democratic-Republican coalition's structural advantages - the Virginia Dynasty, the congressional caucus nomination system, the Federalist Party's post-1800 collapse - were sufficient to absorb the embargo damage even where they could not deflect it. The immediate context was the December 1807 Embargo Act. The Act had been Jefferson's response to Britain's 1807 Orders in Council and France's 1806 Berlin Decree, which together had reduced American shipping to a kind of legal limbo: neutral American ships were subject to seizure by either belligerent depending on which port they had visited last. The June 22, 1807 Chesapeake-Leopard incident, in which HMS Leopard fired on USS Chesapeake off Virginia and forcibly impressed four sailors (one of whom was later hanged in Halifax), had brought the U.S. to the brink of war. Jefferson chose the Embargo as a peaceful alternative. The policy theory - peaceful coercion through trade restriction - had been articulated by Jefferson and Madison since the 1790s. The Embargo was its most ambitious application. The Embargo crippled the U.S. shipping industry. American exports fell from $108 million in 1807 to $22 million in 1808 - an 80 percent collapse. American customs revenue fell from $16.4 million (1807) to $7.3 million (1808). New England merchant fleets rotted at anchor; sailors went unemployed; smuggling along the Canadian border exploded. The Treasury Department deployed federal troops to Vermont and northern New York to enforce the Embargo against organized civil resistance. The Embargo Force Act of January 1809 authorized federal officials to seize property believed to be in transit to foreign markets without warrants - an extraordinary expansion of federal coercive power that Jefferson, the leading 1798 critic of the

Alien and Sedition Acts, signed despite his strict-construction principles.

The political consequences were geographically concentrated. New England Federalists organized petitions, public meetings, and ultimately the threat of secession. The June 1808 Massachusetts and Connecticut legislative resolutions declared the Embargo unconstitutional and refused to enforce it - applying Jefferson's and Madison's own 1798 Kentucky and Virginia Resolutions doctrine of state nullification of federal law against the policies of the very administration that had drafted those resolutions. The irony was widely noted.

The Democratic-Republican congressional caucus nominated Madison in January 1808. Madison's nomination was not unanimous within the party. Vice President George Clinton of New York wanted the nomination but was 69 and lacked Madison's national reach. James Monroe, then U.S. minister to Britain, was the candidate of the Quids - strict-construction Virginia Republicans (including John Randolph) who thought Madison and Jefferson had drifted toward Hamiltonian loose-construction. The caucus nominated Madison decisively; Monroe withdrew his quiet Virginia challenge by July 1808. The intra-party Quid critique would resurface during the War of 1812.

The Federalist Party again nominated Pinckney. The party was structurally damaged. It controlled no federal branch and only six state governments by 1808. Hamilton was dead. The 1804 Essex Junto secession plot had embarrassed the party nationally. The Federalists ran their 1808 campaign almost entirely against the Embargo, framing Madison as Jefferson's heir who would continue the policy. The campaign was strategically rational but politically constrained: the Federalists had no positive program beyond reversal of Embargo-related policies.

The electoral count was 122 Madison to 47 Pinckney. Madison carried 12 states for 122 EV. Pinckney carried Connecticut (9), Delaware (3), Massachusetts (19), New Hampshire (7), Rhode Island (4), and 3 of Maryland's 11 electors. The Federalist popular vote share rose from 27 percent (1804) to 33 percent (1808). The party gained 27 House seats but remained in the minority. The recovery was real but regional - it tracked the Embargo's economic geography rather than any broader Federalist resurgence.

Madison was inaugurated March 4, 1809. The Embargo Act was repealed March 1, 1809 - three days before his inauguration - and replaced by the Non-Intercourse Act, which banned trade only with Britain and France. The Non-Intercourse Act also failed. The May 1810 Macon's Bill No. 2 reopened trade with both belligerents while threatening to reimpose restrictions on whichever country continued to interfere with American shipping. Napoleon exploited the bill by appearing to comply while continuing French seizures. Madison reimposed embargo on Britain alone in November 1810. The diplomatic spiral led directly to the June 1, 1812 declaration of war against Britain.

		The 1808 election is therefore the structural inflection point between the Jefferson administration's peaceful-coercion experiment and the Madison administration's eventual resort to war. The election confirmed the Democratic-Republican coalition's electoral durability while exposing the limits of trade-based diplomacy as a constraint on great-power behavior. The War of 1812 would be the consequence of the failure the 1808 election had absorbed.
20 min	**Source A**	Read aloud once; students annotate individually for tone, evidence, and audience.
20 min	**Source B**	Compare/contrast against Source A. Pair-share on the DBQ comparison question.
20 min	**Worksheet**	Eight questions: 5 short-answer, 2 stimulus-based MCQ, 1 long-essay framing.
20 min	**LEQ planning**	Students sketch a thesis + outline for the LEQ comparison prompt. Submit for next-day full essay.
5 min	**Closure**	Exit ticket: one sentence summarizing the comparison.

Background

Before the worksheet, review the key terms below and then read the primary source carefully. The two source-analysis questions on the worksheet (questions 6 and 7) ask you to quote from the excerpt.

Key terms

Embargo Act
The December 1807 federal law banning U.S. ships from all foreign trade. Intended as peaceful coercion to force Britain and France to respect American shipping. Crippled the U.S. shipping industry; American exports fell 80 percent. Repealed March 1, 1809.

Chesapeake-Leopard incident
The June 22, 1807 incident in which HMS Leopard fired on USS Chesapeake off Virginia, killing three Americans and forcibly impressing four sailors. Nearly triggered war; directly preceded the Embargo Act.

Non-Intercourse Act
The March 1, 1809 federal law replacing the Embargo Act. Banned trade only with Britain and France. Failed to produce concessions from either.

Quids
The 1805-1812 faction of strict-construction Virginia Republicans (including John Randolph) who opposed Madison and Jefferson's drift toward Hamiltonian loose-construction. Ran James Monroe quietly against Madison in 1808.

Hartford Convention
The December 1814-January 1815 secret New England Federalist meeting that considered secession from the Union over the War of 1812. The convention's timing - just as news of the December 1814 Treaty of Ghent reached the U.S. - destroyed the Federalist Party as a national force.

Embargo Force Act
The January 1809 federal law authorizing federal officials to seize property believed to be in transit to foreign markets without warrants. The most coercive expansion of federal authority since the 1798 Alien and Sedition Acts, signed by Jefferson despite his strict-construction principles.

Orders in Council
The 1807 British government decrees authorizing seizure of any neutral ship trading with Napoleonic France. The British counterpart to France's 1806 Berlin Decree. Both interfered with American shipping during the Napoleonic Wars.

Macon's Bill No. 2
The May 1810 federal law reopening trade with both Britain and France while threatening to reimpose restrictions on whichever country continued interfering with American shipping. Napoleon exploited the bill by appearing to comply while continuing French seizures.

Virginia Dynasty
The 1801-1825 succession of Virginia-born Democratic-Republican presidents: Jefferson, Madison, Monroe. The longest single-state presidential run in U.S. history. The 1808 caucus nomination of Madison continued the dynasty.

First Inaugural Address

JAMES MADISON, MARCH 4, 1809

Madison took the oath in the chamber of the House of Representatives in Washington, DC. The address was carefully balanced: it had to acknowledge the economic damage the Embargo had caused while defending the Jefferson administration's broader record. The Embargo Act had been repealed three days earlier; the Non-Intercourse Act had just replaced it. Madison's framing of the international situation as "without a parallel" deliberately positioned the U.S. economic damage as the consequence of European wars rather than American policy choices.

> *"The present situation of the world is indeed without a parallel, and that of our own country full of difficulties. The pressure of these, too, is the more severely felt because they have fallen upon us at a moment when the national prosperity being at a height not before attained, the contrast resulting from the change has been rendered the more striking. Under the benign influence of our republican institutions, and the maintenance of peace with all nations whilst so many of them were engaged in bloody and wasteful wars, the fruits of a just policy were enjoyed in an unrivaled growth of our faculties and resources."*

Madison, "First Inaugural Address" (Washington, DC, March 4, 1809). Public domain.

Document-based question

Source A is on the Background page; Source B is below. Use both as evidence for the worksheet's source-analysis questions and the LEQ.

SOURCE A

First Inaugural Address

JAMES MADISON, MARCH 4, 1809

“The present situation of the world is indeed without a parallel, and that of our own country full of difficulties. The pressure of these, too, is the more severely felt because they have fallen upon us at a moment when the national prosperity being at a height not before attained, the contrast resulting from the change has been rendered the more striking. Under the benign influence of our republican institutions, and the maintenance of peace with all nations whilst so many of them were engaged in bloody and wasteful wars, the fruits of a just policy were enjoyed in an unrivaled growth of our faculties and resources.”

Madison, "First Inaugural Address" (Washington, DC, March 4, 1809). Public domain.

SOURCE B

Annual Message to Congress (the War Message)

JAMES MADISON, JUNE 1, 1812

“The Royal Government has not been content with treating in the present war the merchant vessels of the United States as if they had been the vessels of the enemy of Great Britain. Their cruisers have been in the practice also of violating the rights and the peace of our coasts. The conduct of her Government presents a series of acts hostile to the United States as an independent and neutral nation. We behold our seafaring citizens still the daily victims of lawless violence committed on the great common and highway of nations, even within sight of the country which owes them protection.”

Madison, "Special Message to Congress" (Washington, DC, June 1, 1812). Public domain.

The 1808 Election

Answer the eight questions below. Source A is on the Background page; Source B is on the DBQ Pair page.

QUESTION 1 · SHORT-ANSWER

Identify the key phrase in Source A (Madison's 1809 Inaugural) that locates U.S. economic damage in European wars rather than American policy. Quote it verbatim.

QUESTION 2 · SHORT-ANSWER

Identify the key phrase in Source B (Madison's 1812 war message) that names British shipping practices as an act of hostility against U.S. sovereignty. Quote it verbatim.

QUESTION 3 · SHORT-ANSWER

Both sources are Madison documents, but they characterize the same British shipping interference differently. Identify the specific framing each source uses.

QUESTION 4 · SHORT-ANSWER

Source A was delivered in 1809; Source B in 1812. What does the three-year gap tell you about how Madison's framing of the underlying U.S.-British dispute evolved across the Embargo, Non-Intercourse, and Macon's Bill periods?

QUESTION 5 · SHORT-ANSWER

Source B names impressment as a primary justification for war. Identify the specific 1807 incident that had brought the U.S. to the brink of war over impressment five years earlier.

QUESTION 6 · MULTIPLE-CHOICE

The 1810 federal law that reopened trade with both Britain and France while threatening to reimpose restrictions on whichever continued shipping interference was:

( ) A. Embargo Act
( ) B. Non-Intercourse Act
( ) C. Macon's Bill No. 2
( ) D. Force Act

QUESTION 7 · MULTIPLE-CHOICE

The faction of strict-construction Virginia Republicans (including John Randolph) who opposed Madison in 1808 were the:

( ) A. Old Republicans
( ) B. Quids
( ) C. Yazoo men
( ) D. Halfway Federalists

QUESTION 8 · SHORT-ANSWER

Sketch your thesis sentence for the LEQ (next page). State your position: was the 1812 war inevitable, contingent, or strategic? Identify one piece of evidence from each source you will use.

Long-essay-question

LEQ PROMPT

Madison's 1809 First Inaugural (Source A) frames the U.S. economic damage of the Embargo era as the consequence of European wars rather than American policy choices. His 1812 war message (Source B) reframes the same long pattern of British shipping interference as an "act hostile to the United States as an independent and neutral nation" justifying war. Using BOTH sources and your knowledge of the 1804-1815 period, evaluate the extent to which the 1812 war was (a) the inevitable consequence of the Embargo era's failure of peaceful coercion, (b) a contingent escalation produced by Macon's Bill No. 2 and the May 1812 British Orders in Council, or (c) a strategic choice Madison made to preserve Democratic-Republican coalition unity. Defend a clear thesis.

GRADING RUBRIC

Thesis (1 pt): must take a defensible position on the inevitable-vs-contingent-vs-strategic axis. Contextualization (1 pt): mention at least two of the Chesapeake-Leopard incident, the Embargo Force Act, the Macon's Bill exploit, the War Hawks, the Hartford Convention. Evidence (2 pts): must quote at least one phrase from each source. Analysis (1 pt): must explicitly evaluate the extent rather than treating the three framings as equivalent. Total 5 points.

Answer key

QUESTION 1

Accept any of: "the present situation of the world is indeed without a parallel", "the pressure of these ... have fallen upon us at a moment when the national prosperity being at a height not before attained", "the maintenance of peace with all nations whilst so many of them were engaged in bloody and wasteful wars". The "without a parallel" phrase is the cleanest articulation of the European-cause framing.

Madison's 1809 framing is one of the most-cited examples of an incumbent administration externalizing the cause of its own policy failures. AP students should recognize the rhetorical move.

QUESTION 2

Accept any of: "a series of acts hostile to the United States as an independent and neutral nation", "the daily victims of lawless violence committed on the great common and highway of nations", "even within sight of the country which owes them protection". The "acts hostile to the United States as an independent and neutral nation" phrase is the most direct sovereignty framing.

Madison's 1812 framing reframes the same dispute he had described in 1809 as a consequence of European wars now as a direct challenge to U.S. sovereignty. The shift is structurally important.

QUESTION 3

Source A frames British shipping interference as an unfortunate side effect of the Napoleonic Wars, beyond U.S. control and not specifically directed at the U.S. Source B reframes the same interference as a deliberate British policy hostile to U.S. sovereignty and independence. The first framing positions the U.S. as a bystander to European wars; the second positions the U.S. as a directly targeted nation requiring military response. The two framings are politically incompatible: they imply different policy responses (continued peaceful coercion vs. war).

AP students should be able to identify the rhetorical shift from passive externalization to active sovereignty defense as a deliberate political choice with major policy consequences.

QUESTION 4

The temporal gap covers the Non-Intercourse Act (March 1809), the failure of negotiations with Britain (1809-1810), Macon's Bill No. 2 (May 1810), Napoleon's tactical exploitation of the bill (1810), Madison's reimposition of embargo on Britain alone (November 1810), the rise of the War Hawks in the Twelfth Congress (1811-12), Tecumseh's Native American confederation building (1811-12), and the May 1812 British announcement of continued Orders in Council. The 1809 "external cause" framing was politically sustainable as long as Madison could argue that diplomatic negotiation would eventually produce results. By June 1812 the three-year diplomatic record was unambiguously one of failure. The framing shift from "European wars caused our problems" to "British policy is hostile to our sovereignty" reflects the diplomatic record's accumulating evidence that peaceful coercion would not produce concessions.

The framing-shift analysis is structurally important for understanding why the 1812 war happened despite the Democratic-Republican Party's deep ideological aversion to military force.

QUESTION 5

The Chesapeake-Leopard incident. On June 22, 1807, HMS Leopard fired on USS Chesapeake off Virginia, killing three Americans and forcibly impressing four sailors (one of whom, Jenkin Ratford, was hanged in Halifax). The incident brought the U.S. to the brink of war and directly preceded the Embargo Act. By 1812, no equivalent single incident had occurred, but the cumulative pattern of British impressment was the largest specific grievance Madison named in his war message.

The Chesapeake-Leopard incident is one of the most-cited examples of a casus belli that did not produce immediate war but generated long-term political pressure for one. AP students should be able to connect the 1807 incident to the 1812 war message.

QUESTION 6

Macon's Bill No. 2.

The May 1810 federal law reopened trade with both Britain and France while threatening to reimpose restrictions on whichever country continued interfering with American shipping. Napoleon exploited the bill by appearing to comply while continuing French seizures. Madison reimposed embargo on Britain alone in November 1810.

QUESTION 7

Quids.

The Quids were a 1805-1812 faction of strict-construction Virginia Republicans (including John Randolph) who opposed Madison and Jefferson's drift toward Hamiltonian loose-construction. They ran James Monroe quietly against Madison in 1808.

QUESTION 8

Open-ended thesis sketch. Acceptable answers should: (1) take a defensible position on the inevitable-vs-contingent-vs-strategic axis, (2) avoid treating them as equivalent, (3) signal at least one piece of evidence from each source. Award credit for any defensible thesis that meets these three conditions.

The thesis sketch is preparatory. The LEQ rubric evaluates the full essay.