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Description

President Thomas Jefferson institutes the Embargo Act of 1807 which is aimed at keeping America out of the war between Britain and France. The embargo ultimately hurts the American economy more than it helps it and is repealed by Congress.

Keywords


Citation

MLA
"Thomas Jefferson and the Embargo Act." Albert Hibbs, correspondent. NBC News. NBCUniversal
Dr. ALBERT HIBBS (historian): While Lewis and Clark explored the western territory, Europe exploded into war. The money Napoleon had received in exchange for the Louisiana Territory was already financing his campaign against Great Britain. To carry on the war, France needed mountains of new supplies from wherever she could get them, including the United States. England, too, traded with America, though she had her own great merchant fleet. So, American merchants and businessmen profited handsomely by trading with both sides and commercial American grew out of its infancy. Imports and exports increased four times over and kept rising. 1807 was a record year for foreign trade. England’s long-range concern was that if American commerce continued its rapid expansion, the United States would become a formidable competitor for British merchants and shippers. By a series of decrees known as the Orders of Council, England forbade American ships to enter French ports. Not to be outdone, Napoleon every nation in the world to carry on trade with the British. Yankee merchants replied in a characteristic fashion. They said very little, but they ignored all the decrees and they began the highly profitable but dangerous practice of running the blockades. As incidents at sea mounted, Jefferson feared war with one or the other the two great powers. At his urging, Congress passed the Embargo Act, which forbade American trading with foreign nations. American commerce began to decline. New England, the commercial center of the United States, echoed to the angry shouts of merchants, ship owners, and bankers, demanding repeal of the Embargo Act. Some went so far as to accuse Jefferson, the gentleman farmer of the South, of deliberately trying to ruin the city-based commerce of the North. And an old whisper made the rounds once again: “If a state did not approve of the acts of the national government, did it not have the right to secede from a union which it had voluntarily joined in the first place?” The pressure was too great. Three days before Jefferson retired from the presidency of the United States, the Embargo Act was repealed by Congress.