Causes of the War of 1812:

Impressment:

Starting in the mid-1790s the Royal Navy, short of manpower, began boarding American merchant ships in order to seize American and British sailors from American vessels. Although this policy of impressment was supposed to recover only British citizens, the law of Britain and most countries defined nationality by birth whereas the United States allowed individuals who had been resident in America for some time to adopt American citizenship. There were, therefore, large numbers of individuals who were British by British law but American by American law. The confusion was compounded by the refusal of Jefferson and Madison to issue any official citizenship documents: their position was that all persons serving on American ships were to be regarded as US citizens and that no further evidence was required.

To fill the need for some sort of identification, US ambassadors provided unofficial papers. However, these papers were unverifiable and the individual remained concerned for true evidence of citizenship. Also, the large fees paid for the documents made them a profitable side job for officials creating them. In turn, British officers, who were short of personnel and convinced (not entirely unreasonably) that the US flag covered a large number of British deserters, tended to treat such papers with scorn. Between 1806 and 1812 about 6,000 seamen were impressed and taken against their will into the Royal Navy of which 3,800 were subsequently released.

Indian Raids:

The Northwest Territory, comprising the modern states of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin, was the battleground for conflict between the Indian Nations and the United States. The British Empire had given the area to the United States in the Treaty of Paris in 1783, both sides ignoring the fact that the land was already inhabited by various Indian nations.

Some natives, who had left their nations of origin, followed Tenskwatawa, the Shawnee Ruler/Prophet and the brother of Tecumseh. Tenskwatawa had a vision of purifying his society by expelling the "children of the Evil Spirit": aka the American settlers. Tenskwatawa and Tecumseh formed a confederation of numerous tribes to block American expansion. The British saw the Indian nations as valuable allies and a buffer to its Canadian colonies and provided arms. Attacks on American settlers in the Northwest further aggravated tensions between Britain and the United States. The confederation's raids and existence hindered American expansion into rich farmlands in the Northwest Territory.

Raiding grew more common in 1810 and 1811; Westerners in Congress found the raids intolerable and wanted them permanently ended. The westerners were convinced that their problems could best be solved by forcing the British out of Canada."
American Expansionism:

American expansion into the Northwest Territory was being blocked by native leaders like Tecumseh, who were supplied and encouraged by the British. Americans on the western frontier demanded that interference be stopped. There is dispute, however, over whether or not the American desire to annex Canada brought on the war. Several historians believe that the capture of Canada was intended only as a means to secure a bargaining chip, which would then be used to force Britain to back down on the maritime issues. It would also cut off food supplies for Britain’s West Indian colonies, and temporarily prevent the British from continuing to arm the Indians. Upper Canada (modern southern Ontario) had mostly been settled by Revolution-era refugees from the United States. The Loyalists were hostile to union with the United States, while the immigrant settlers were generally uninterested in politics and remained neutral or supported the British during the war. The Canadian colonies were thinly populated and only lightly defended by the British Army. Americans then believed that many men in Upper Canada would rise up and greet an American invading army as liberators. That did not happen. Annexation was supported by American businessmen who wanted to gain control of Great Lakes trade.

Pride and Patriotism:

A powerful motivation for the Americans was the desire to uphold "national honor" in the face of what they considered to be British insults such as the Chesapeake affair: a naval engagement that occurred off the coast of Norfolk, Virginia, on June 22, 1807. An unprepared American naval vessel was captured by the British who were looking for navy deserters. This was an embarrassment for the Americans and due to anger the commander of the American ship was unjustly court marshaled. Many who supported this unfair trial were "War Hawks", who consisted of Democratic-Republicans and were primarily from southern and western states. (The American West then consisted of Kentucky, Tennessee, and Ohio, as well as territories in the Northwest Territory that did not yet have votes in Congress). The War Hawks advocated going to war against Britain. They used political newspapers, speeches, and pamphlets to argue their points and sway popular opinion. They declared that the approaching conflict was about violations of American rights, but was it also about justification of American identity. War Hawks grew up only one generation removed from the American Revolution. Therefore many grew up hearing about British injustices and war crimes. There were still many hard feelings left over from the previous conflict. People at the time and historians since often called it America's "Second War of Independence."