



U.S. HISTORY

War Message to Congress *James Madison*

Synopsis: We won the Revolutionary War but Great Britain never truly gave us respect as a new nation. The British continued maintaining forts on our Western frontier, dealing with Native Americans hostile to our citizens, and forcing American captured sailors to join their own ships on the seas (impressment). James Madison had had enough!

THE FOLLOWING IS AN ABRIDGED (shorter, edited) VERSION. For the full version go to:

<http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/hlaw:@field%20%28DOCID+@lit%28hj008201%29%29>

June 1, 1812

To the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States:

I communicate to Congress certain documents, being a continuation of those heretofore laid before them on the subject of our affairs with Great Britain.

Without going back beyond the renewal in 1803 of the war in which Great Britain is engaged, and omitting unrepaired wrongs of inferior magnitude, the conduct of her Government presents a series of acts hostile to the United States as an independent and neutral nation.

British cruisers have been in the continued practice of violating the American flag on the great highway of nations, and of seizing and carrying off persons sailing under it, not in the exercise of a belligerent right founded on the law of nations against an enemy, but of a municipal prerogative over British subjects. British jurisdiction is thus extended to neutral vessels in a situation where no laws can operate but the law of nations and the laws of the country to which the vessels belong....

...under the pretext of searching for these (*British subjects*), thousands of American citizens, under the safeguard of public law and of their national flag, have been torn from their country and from everything dear to them; have been dragged on board ships of war of a foreign nation and exposed, under the severities of their discipline, to be exiled to the most distant and deadly climes, to risk their lives in the battles of their oppressors....

...British cruisers have been in the practice also of violating the rights and the peace of our coasts. They hover over and harass our entering and departing commerce. To the most insulting pretensions they have added the most lawless proceedings in our very harbors, and have wantonly spilt American blood....

...our commerce has been plundered in every sea, the great staples of our country have been cut off from their legitimate markets, and a destructive blow aimed at our agricultural and maritime interests....

...Great Britain...formally avowed (*declared*) a determination to persist in them (*violations of American maritime/naval rights*) against the United States until the markets of her enemy (*Britain's enemy, France*) should be laid open to British products, thus asserting an obligation on a neutral power (*America*) to require one belligerent (*war-like*) to encourage by its internal regulations the trade of another belligerent....

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...In reviewing the conduct of Great Britain toward the United States our attention is necessarily drawn to the warfare just renewed by the savages (*Native Americans*) on one of our extensive frontiers — a warfare which is known to spare neither age nor sex and to be distinguished by features peculiarly shocking to humanity. It is difficult to account for...their hostility...without recollecting the authenticated examples of such interpositions (*British dealings with Native Americans*)....

...We behold, in fine, on the side of Great Britain, a state of war against the United States, and on the side of the United States a state of peace toward Great Britain.

Whether the United States shall continue passive (*not taking any action*)...or, opposing force to force in defense of their national rights, shall commit a just cause into the hands of the Almighty Disposer of Events...is a solemn question which the Constitution wisely confides to the legislative department of the Government. In recommending it to their early deliberations I am happy in the assurance that the decision will be worthy the enlightened and patriotic councils of a virtuous, a free, and a powerful nation.

...the communications last made to Congress on the subject of our relations with France will have shewn that since the revocation of her decrees, as they violated the neutral rights of the United States, her Government has authorized illegal captures by its privateers and public ships, and that other outrages have been practised on our vessels and our citizens...I abstain (*stop, hold back*) at this time from recommending to the consideration of Congress definitive measures with respect to that nation (*France*), in the expectation that the result of...discussions between our minister...at Paris and the French Government will speedily enable Congress to decide with greater advantage on the course due to the rights, the interests, and the honor of our country.

Assignment/Questions

After you read the SYNOPSIS and the MESSAGE, answer the following on another sheet of paper.
YOU MUST USE FULL SENTENCES IN YOUR ANSWERS!

[1] War Hawks in Congress, men such as John Calhoun and Henry Clay, had been pressing Madison to go to war for sometime. When he finally decided to approach Congress, Madison gave this speech. How did President Madison build a case that Congress should consider declaring war with Great Britain? (use specific examples)

[2] Do you think these reasons are justification for war? Why or why not?