

Document Sixteen

PRESIDENT JAMES MADISON'S WAR MESSAGE OF JUNE 1812

British cruisers have been in the continued practice of violating the American flag on the great highway of nations and carrying off persons sailing under it.

What does President Madison mean when he says the great highway of nations?

No such right exists under international law; the British do so under a local law of England dealing with British subjects. Thus, they have extended this local law to all neutral vessels on the high seas.

Why is it important to note that there is no international law that allows for such captures? What would that mean if there was such a law?

This practice has caused thousands of American citizens, under the safe guard of our flag, to be torn from their country and from everything dear to them. They have been dragged on board ships of war of a foreign nation and exposed, under the severity of their discipline, to be exiled to the most distant and deadly lands, and to risk their lives in the battles of their oppressors.

What is this practice called?

British ships now hover over and harass our entering and departing commerce (*act of buying and selling*). They insult us by wantonly (*in a deliberate or unprovoked manner*) spilling American blood within our territorial waters. They plunder our commerce on every sea. Under the Orders of Council our commerce has been destroyed, hundreds of American ships lie impounded in British ports, their cargoes sold as contraband.

What are the English doing with the goods on US merchant ships?

It has become, indeed, sufficiently certain that the commerce of the United States is to be sacrificed for the success of Britain.

In reviewing the conduct of Great Britain towards the United States, our attention is necessarily drawn to the warfare just renewed by the savages on one of our extensive frontiers.

What is Madison referring to here; who are the 'savages'?

A warfare which is known to spare neither age nor sex and to be distinguished by features particularly shocking to humanity. It is not difficult to account for the activity and combinations which have for some time been developing themselves among tribes in constant contact with the British traders and agents. Westerners believe that the British will not hesitate to loose upon the frontier all the horrors and miseries of an Indian War.

Why do you think Madison does not mention the justifiable actions of the Natives on account of their land being taken by the United States? Think about this

question in terms of trying to convince those to one's side and what Madison's purpose is in this document.

It appears, gentlemen, we have reached a point of complete submission or war. The Constitution wisely confides to the legislative department of the Government that power. I am happy in the assurance that the decision will be worthy of a free and powerful nation.

Who has the power to declare war according to the United States Constitution?