

# Felix Grundy Calls for War Against Great Britain



**ABOUT THE SOURCE** Tensions between the United States and Britain flared up only a decade after the end of the Revolutionary War. In 1792 Great Britain went to war against France. The British navy then started seizing U.S. ships trading with the French. The British also kidnapped American sailors and forced them to serve in their navy. The British continued these policies through the first decade of the 1800s. In 1810 American voters elected a group of "War Hawks" to Congress. Mostly from western states, these young Congressmen called for military action against Britain. The passage below is from a speech delivered by Tennessee Representative Felix Grundy in December 1811.



*As you read note Grundy's reasons for wanting war against Great Britain. The following words may be new to you: **depredations**, **ostensible**, **capricious**, **interdicted**, **interposition**. You may want to use a dictionary to look them up.*

Sir, our vessels are now captured when destined to the ports of France, and condemned by the British Courts of Admiralty, without even the pretext of having on board contraband of war, enemies' property, or, having in any other respect violated the laws of nations. These **depredations** on our lawful commerce, under whatever **ostensible** pretence committed, are not to be traced to any maxims or rules of public law, but to the maritime supremacy, and pride of the British nation. This hostile and unjust policy of that country towards us, is not to be wondered at, when we recollect that the United States are already the second commercial nation in the world. The rapid growth of our commercial importance, has not only awakened the jealousy of the commercial interests of Great Britain, but her statesmen, no doubt, anticipate with deep concern, the maritime greatness of this Republic . . .

What, Mr. Speaker, are we now called on to decide? It is, whether we will resist by force the attempt, made by that Government, to subject our maritime rights to the arbitrary and **capricious** rule of her will; for my part I am not prepared to say that this country shall submit to have her commerce **interdicted** or regulated, by any foreign nation. Sir, I prefer war to submission.

Over and above these unjust pretensions of the British Government, for many years past they have been in the practice of impressing our seamen, from merchant vessels; this unjust and lawless invasion of personal liberty, calls loudly for the **interposition** of this Government. To those better acquainted with the facts in relation to it, I leave it to fill up the picture. My mind is irresistibly drawn to the West.

**Forging the New Republic****Primary Source**

Although others may not strongly feel the bearing which the late transactions in that quarter have on this subject, upon my mind they have great influence. It cannot be believed by any man who will reflect, that the savage tribes, uninfluenced by other Powers, would think of making war on the United States. They understand too well their own weakness, and our strength. They have already felt the weight of our arms; they know they hold the very soil on which they live as tenants at sufferance. How, then, sir, are we to account for their late conduct? In one way only; some powerful nation must have intrigued with them, and turned their peaceful disposition towards us into hostilities. Great Britain alone has intercourse with those Northern tribes; I therefore infer, that if British gold has not been employed, their baubles and trinkets, and the promise of support and a place of refuge if necessary, have had their effect . . .

This war, if carried on successfully, will have its advantages. We shall drive the British from our Continent—they will no longer have an opportunity of intriguing with our Indian neighbors . . . That nation will lose her Canadian trade, and, by having no resting place in this country, her means of annoying us will be diminished . . . I am willing to receive the Canadians as adopted brethren; it will have beneficial political effects; it will preserve the equilibrium of the Government. When Louisiana shall be fully peopled, the Northern States will lose their power; they will be at the discretion of others; they can be depressed at pleasure, and then this Union might be endangered—I therefore feel anxious not only to add the Floridas to the South, but the Canadas to the North of this empire.

Source: *The Debates and Proceedings in the Congress of the United States*, Twelfth Congress—First Session

**WHAT DID YOU LEARN?**

1. How did Grundy believe the British had wronged the United States in recent years?

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2. Why did Grundy think the British were acting unjustly towards the United States?

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3. What could the United States gain from a war against Great Britain?

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