2. Representative Felix Grundy Demands War (1811)

Following Tecumseh’s speech and the subsequent Indian raids on the frontier, Governor Harrison led an army provocatively toward the headquarters of the Indians. On the night of November 7, 1811, at Tippecanoe near the Wabash River (Indiana), he succeeded in beating back an Indian attack. This hollow but costly victory further inflamed the West, from which came Henry Clay and other leaders of the war hawks to Congress in 1811. Among them was Felix Grundy of Tennessee, three of whose brothers had been killed by the Indians. As the most famous criminal lawyer in the Southwest, he had often cheated the gallows by reducing the jury to tears. In this eloquent speech in Congress, which grievances were peculiarly western, and which ones were nationwide? What interest did westerners have in freedom of the seas?

I will now state the reasons which influenced the Committee [on Foreign Affairs] in recommending the [war] measures now before us.

It is not the [Atlantic] carrying trade properly so called about which this nation and Great Britain are at present contending. Were this the only question now under consideration, I should feel great unwillingness (however clear our claim might be) to involve the nation in war for the assertion of a right in the enjoyment of which the community at large are not more deeply concerned.

The true question in controversy is of a very different character; it involves the interest of the whole nation. It is the right of exporting the productions of our own soil and industry to foreign markets. 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 pretense 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 the [British] 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. Although others may not strongly feel the bearing which the late transactions in that quarter [Tippecanoe] 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 in 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 dispositions 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.

If I am right in this conjecture, war is not to commerce by sea or land. It is already begun; and some of the richest blood of our country has already been shed. . . . The whole Western country is ready to march; they only wait for our permission. And, sir, war once declared, I pledge myself for my people—they will avenge the death of their brethren. . . .
Ask the Northern man, and he will tell you that any state of things is better than the present. Inquire of the Western people why their crops are not equal to what they were in former years; they will answer that industry has no stimulus left, since their surplus products have no markets. . . .

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 and setting on the ruthless savage to tomahawk our women and children. That nation will lose her Canadian trade, and, by having no resting place in this country, her means of annoying us will be diminished.

3. Causes of the War (1812, 1813)

The "Second War for American Independence" was prompted by events on the frontier as well as on the high seas. The first print below, entitled A Scene on the Frontiers as Practiced by the Humane British and Their Worthy Allies, may have been inspired by the August 1812 "Massacre of Chicago," in which it was reported that British officers had purchased American scalps from Indians. The second scene, The Tory Editor and His Apes Giving Their Pitiful Advice to the American Sailors, presumably takes place in an Atlantic seaport, where American sailors are rejecting the counsel being offered. Why were the British depicted so differently in these two prints? What view of themselves would Americans get from these images? What do these views suggest about the relative importance of the various causes of the War of 1812?