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Description

This complete issue of Niles' Weekly Register (Baltimore) discusses the Hartford Convention, the possibility that American forces at New Orleans can rebuff a British invasion, and African Americans' participation in the war effort.

Keywords

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Transcript

Niles’ Weekly Register on the War of 1812

New England Convention

It is universally known that the causes for which we declared war are no obstruction to peace. The practice of blockade and impressment having ceased by the general pacification of Europe, our government is content to leave the principle as it was--referring to the settlement to some future arrangement or the common opinion of the civilized world--or in reserving the right again to resist both, or either, if repeated, hereafter....

Having, as before observed, and for the reasons stated, proffered peace on the terms that we stood upon before the war was declared, we have no further business in hostility, than such as is purely defensive; while that of Great Britain is to humble or subdue us. The war, on our part, has become a contest for life, liberty and property--on the part of our enemy, of revenge or ambition. No matter for what cause it was waged--such is the principle of its duration; and one might have thought that such a state of things would have united the whole people to repulse the enemy. But alas! it certainly appears that the more outrageous he is, the more impudent are the jacobins to distract the measures of government and enkindle the spirit of party....

When I hear a man clamor for peace, ardently desired by all--I ask him how he would proceed to obtain it-
-what he would do that our ministers at Ghent are not authorized to do? I have put these questions to several, and never got an answer but once; when the jacobin said, he would get it by changing the president.... I am not, perhaps, the most ardent admirer of Mr. Madison--I have thought that other men might be found better fitted for the times in which we live, (though I know that many of the faults attributed to him, justly belong to congress; whose half-way measures at the last, and disgraceful waste of time in the present session, had nearly brought the country to ruin.)--Yet were he to me the most offensive of beings, I would not sacrifice the freedom of choice in the people, or violate the provisions of the constitution to "depose him"...and though I might vote against him myself, I can hardly conceive any danger that I would not encounter to support him in his legal authority, against the dictation, or power of a foreign nation....
The war then, on our part, is entirely defensive--and the enemy wagers it with a degree of barbarity unknown to their history of modern times. He allies himself with the savages--he allies himself with Negro slaves--he would desolate the frontiers with the tomahawk, and give up the interior to all the horrors that exterminated the white population of St. Domingo. He avows his object, to "destroy all places assailable"....
[2]What then are we to do? Are we to encourage him by divisions among ourselves--to hold out the hope of a separation of the states and a civil war--to refuse to bring forth the resources of the country against him....
I did think that in a defensive war--a struggle for all that is valuable--that all parties would have united. But it is not so--every measure calculated to replenish the treasury or raise men is opposed as though it were determined to strike the "star spangled banner" and exalt the bloody cross. Look at the votes and proceedings of congress--and mark the late spirit (now, perhaps, "laid" for a time) that existed in Massachusetts, and see with what unity of action every thing has been done to harass and embarrass the government. Our loans have failed; and our soldiers have wanted their pay, because those who had the greater part of the monied capital covenanted with each other to refuse its aid to the country. They had a right, legally, to do this; and perhaps, also, by all the artifices of trade or power that money gave them, to oppress others not of their "stamp" and depress the national credit--but history will shock posterity by detailing the length to which they went to bankrupt the republic....
With a perfect knowledge of these transactions, how could Great Britain be better encouraged to persevere in the war, to "cripple us for fifty years"...?
Divide et impera [divide and conquer] is the everlasting principle of arbitrary power....
The English have talked of the inordinate ambition of Napoleon Bonaparte--Villainous hypocrites!--all that Bonaparte attempted in Europe was but a type of what they themselves had done in Asia, where they boast of from sixty to eighty millions of slaves. What the "detestable Napoleon" did was angelic, compared with their deeds in India....
Such are the monsters that set themselves up as the preservers of the religion, the liberty and the morals of the world!....
"In union there is strength," and were our people united, the war would immediately end; or be prosecuted with different success.
If the negotiations at Ghent shall not have very considerably advanced before the news of the "Hartford convention" reaches the cabinet of London, I am clearly of opinion, that they will be suspended, or shuffled off, until the proceedings are known; for nothing is more evident than that the war is prosecuted for revenge or ambition; and what, under heaven, is so well calculated to aid it, as the ideas that were held out as to the objects of that assembly—"to withhold the resources of the N[ew] E[ngland] States and make a separate peace?" It is indubitable that she regards us with envy and hate. Our manufacturers and commerce, the glory of our little navy and the steady valor of our army, excite horrid sensations in her bosom....

"Westward the course of empire takes its way;" and she is quite jealous of the prosperity of the United States....

To conclude—why does the war continue? It is not the fault of the government—we demand no extravagant thing. I answer the question, and say—it lasts because Great Britain depends on the exertions of her "party" in this country to destroy our resources, and compel "unconditional submission."

Thus the war began, and is continued, by our divisions.

[7]

Events of the War

MISCELLANEOUS

NEW ORLEANS – We are yet without definite intelligence from New-Orleans. The news will probably arrive this day, that will, at least, relieve our suspense....

One letter says that Jackson engaged them with only about 2000 men—he had about 9000 then under his command—it also says that the British had not been able to land their artillery, and expresses an idea that the whole of them would be made prisoners that day—that is, December 24.

The whole British force is variously stated by the prisoners at from 7 to 15,000 men—the probable number is 6000, commanded by major-general Keane.

Such is the substance of our intelligence. We think New-Orleans is safe, and anticipate the details of a glorious victory—if it has fallen, it has been dearly purchased.

On Sunday the 18th Dec. general Jackson reviewed the militia of the city....

To the Embodied Militia.

Fellow citizens and soldiers!...

Long strangers to the perils of war, you have embodied yourselves to face them with the cool countenance of veterans—and with motives of disunion that might operate on weak minds, you have forgotten the difference of language and the prejudices of national pride, and united with a cordiality that does honor to your understandings as well as to your patriotism. Natives of the United States! They are the oppressors of your infant political existence, with whom you are to contend—they are the men your fathers conquered whom you are to oppose. Descendants of Frenchmen! natives of France!

[8] they are English, the hereditary, the eternal enemies of your ancient country, the invaders of that you have adopted, who are your foes. Spaniards! remember the conduct of your allies at St. Sebastians, and recently at Pensacola, and rejoice that you have an opportunity of avenging the brutal injuries inflicted by men who dishonor the human race.
Fellow citizens, of every description! remember for what and against whom you contend. For all that can render life desirable--for a country blest with every gift of nature--for property, for life--for those dearer than either, your wives and children--and for liberty, without which country, life, property, are no longer worth possessing; as ever the embraces of wives and children become a reproach to the wretch who could deprive them by his cowardice of those invaluable blessings. You are to contend for all this against an enemy whose continued effort is to deprive you of the least of these blessings--who avows a war of vengeance and desolation, carried on and marked by cruelty, lust, and horrors unknown to civilized nations…

To the Men of Color

Soldiers--From the shores of Mobile I collected you to arms--I invited you to share in the perils and to divide the glory of your white countrymen. I expected much from you, for I was not uninformed of those qualities which must render you so formidable to an invading foe--I knew that you could endure hunger and thirst, and all the hardships of war--I knew that you loved the land of your nativity, and that, like ourselves, you had to defend all that is most dear to man---but you surpass my hopes. I have found in you, united to those qualities, that noble enthusiasm which impels to great deeds.