

# **City Builder: The Reconstruction of the District of Columbia, 1814**

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Middle School Crisis Committee

Co-Chairs: Ashnie Trikha & Julia Shi

Director: Ruhaan Singh

Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology

## **Introduction To the Reconstruction of the District of Columbia, 1814**

Delegates, welcome to the City Builder crisis committee on the Construction of the District of Columbia. Washington D.C. was established by the Constitution in July of 1790 to serve as the capital of the United States and was then founded in 1791. It was purposed as the center for politics, sectional conflicts, racial issues, national identity, diplomatic affairs, negotiations, and power. The location of the city was also a compromise between the northern and southern states. The Northern states wanted the federal government to represent Revolutionary War debts, but the southern states wanted it placed in a location that had slave-trading and agricultural interests in mind. Thus, George Washington chose the placement of D.C. to be from land both Maryland and Virginia allocated and made the city distinct from other states. The Residence Act, adopted on July 16, 1790, approved the capital district's creation along the Potomac River, and in 1800, the 6th Congress held their first session in the unfinished Capitol building after the capitol's move from Philadelphia.

The capital city of our nation was successfully founded after the establishment of the Residence Act. In the early 1800s, several notable buildings were constructed in Washington D.C., with some prominent landmarks including the United States Capitol, the White House, the Smithsonian Institution, and the United States Department of the Treasury Building. However, conflicts are starting to rise between the USA and Great Britain. The war of 1812 between the United States and Britain exacerbated tensions that stemmed from trade disputes between the two nations. In the month of August of 1814, the British forces burned down Washington D.C., resulting in the widespread destruction of key governmental buildings and historical records. These catastrophic events have called for a national crisis, placing an emphasis on collaborative efforts to safeguard from future attacks, and creating an urgent need for innovative, long-term solutions to ensure the nation's resilience and growth.

## **Topic A: Combatting the British Invasion**

### **Introduction**

The development of D.C. was not without its difficulties or obstacles, and in 1812, the War of 1812 brought detrimental effects to the capital's development.

Ever since the Revolutionary War, the United States of America and Great Britain have had tension. The British often took hold of American sailors in the high seas, and even assisted Native American efforts to usurp the efforts Americans made for expansion, the most famous example being Tecumseh's War. This war took place when Native American chief Tecumseh led a war against the American forces expanding into a region now known as Indiana. While the Americans won, many congressmen in Washington D.C. blamed Britain for aiding the Native Americans and providing them alliances with multiple tribes.

Moreover, with America's independence and these tensions with Britain, Britain was slowly separating from America in trading, instead favoring their colonies in Canada and the Caribbean as trade partners. As Britain was one of the two major world powers at the time, this increasing disinterest from them caused America to fear losing Britain as a valuable connection.

### **Relevant Issues**

The War of 1812 was caused when, on June 12th, 1812, government officials who wanted war—war-hawks—pushed for a bill that declared the start of a war in response to Britain's movements combatting American interests. The United States then established a trade ban against Britain in favor of the French, so France would stop attacking American ships.



The two years after the beginning of the war was mostly spent in Canada and took place around a stalemate between the British and American forces. Because the British were already fighting the Napoleonic Wars, they were using a detachment from their main army to fight the Americans. However, the American army was still not strong enough because Congress could not decide how large the army should be or how to dedicate trained soldiers to fight. As such, the Americans relied heavily on the much less effective civilian-led groups of militia, and neither the British or the Americans could make significant progress in the war. When the British began their campaign in the Chesapeake Bay, they began strategizing methods to win the war. In order to dampen American morale, the British began raiding the eastern shores.

### **Possible Solutions**

As of now, America is on the losing side of the war, and things are not looking good. The British have gotten their main army back, and they're willing to do anything to win this war and reassume or destroy America, starting with its capital. In the month of August, 1814, the British annihilated our capital city by burning key governmental buildings including our white house down. With the War of 1812 and constant British invasions that bring increasingly destructive impacts on America, members involved in the construction of D.C. must act now to save the city and America's national will before the British cause something irreversible.

The City Builders must find solutions that can create a force to match the British main army. Not only must they gather the materials, manpower, technology, and possible allies to do so, they must consider the opinions of the people in their solutions. Maintaining unity within the country during an international conflict is important when solving this conflict. Further, members need to be able to rebuild towns massacred by the British and prevent future invasions.

## Questions to Consider

- 1.) How will America defend against the British raids?
- 2.) How can America form relations with other countries to help them in the War of 1812?
- 3.) What practices and strategies can be implemented to improve the current American army?
- 4.) How can America expand its influence over Britain to overcome its now reinforced army?

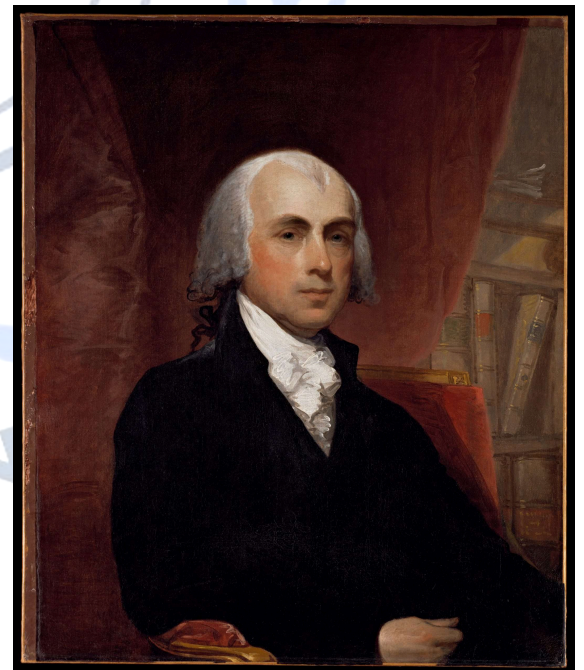


## Topic B: Navigating the Effects of the British Burning of Washington D.C.

### Introduction

During the month of August in 1814, Great Britain initiated raids on the Eastern shores in order to dishearten the American soldiers. Since the British had already successfully defeated Napoleon's army, they increased their focus on their war efforts in America through invading the South in order to direct America's army away from Canada. Therefore, Great Britain chose to infiltrate the nation's capital, Washington D.C, due to their lack of resources. The British also planned to invade Baltimore since the location had important trading ports in the Baltimore Harbor. The intrusion resulted in the Battle of Bladensburg outside of Washington D.C. August 24th, 1814, between the American and British forces. The Americans suffered a large defeat due to the outcome of this battle, creating an opening for the British soldier's to advance to D.C.

Recently, on the evening August 24th, the British proceeded to D.C. with the intention of ravaging the city. Since there was a lack of protection or security from the Americans, the British began to burn the city down. Authoritarian figures including our president James Madison and First Lady Dolley Madison were forced to flee the white house, leaving behind the entire property except a few possessions including George Washington's portraits and other important artifacts. As instructed by Admiral George Cockburn, the British burned down the White House, Capitol Building, the Library of Congress, the Treasury, and many other buildings as well, only preserving private residences. The next day, a storm waged and put a stop to the fires,



however the inclement weather was so violent that a hurricane formed and destroyed all of the private residences the British had spared previously.



### **Relevant Issues**

Because of the British's invasion and the destruction of our capital city, America is now facing a national crisis. The annihilation of the capital by the British's burning and natural disasters has resulted in the destruction of key government buildings that control the basis of our nation. Important governmental records, including those stored in the Capitol building, have been burned down by the British. After president Madison returned to D.C., he criticized the British for the destruction of "depositories of the public archives, not only precious to the nation as the memorials of its origin and its early transactions, but interesting to all nations as contributions to the general stock of historical instruction and political science." People are beginning to blame the government for not adequately protecting the city throughout the British attack. American looters have begun to steal the remains of the city to take the valuables for themselves.

### **Possible Solutions**

In order to overcome the losses that have ensued in Washington D.C. and build new opportunities for the future growth of the nation, it is essential to collaborate to implement effective, innovative, and long-term solutions. Delegates must come up with plans for

reconstruction efforts to rebuild key government buildings and infrastructure that were destroyed by the British invasion. However, delegates must not only focus on rebuilding the White House, Capitol Building, Library of Congress, and Treasury, but also prioritize the restoration of public utilities and historical landmarks. Washington D.C. should be fortified to prevent future attacks and ensure the safety of both citizens and infrastructure. Investing in protection measures and increasing military presence will increase security in our nation's capital. It is crucial to foster unity as a nation during these tough times in order to promote patriotism within Americans. Overall, a comprehensive and multifaceted plan must be put into place in order to rise as a nation.

### **Questions to Consider**

- 1.) How can the destroyed government buildings be rebuilt effectively and efficiently in order to restore the capital?
- 2.) What initiatives can be taken to boost the morale of the American people?
- 3.) How can the security and protection of key government buildings be enhanced to prevent damage from future attacks?
- 4.) How can resources be provided for the communities and private residences that have suffered from this attack?

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