



West Wing Reports @WestWingReport Mon Aug 24 22:55:06 +0000 2020

Thread

One reason Jefferson bought the Louisiana territory in 1803? National security. He thought it would guard America's western flank. Yet the worst attack Washington, DC ever endured happened when British invaders sailed up the Chesapeake Bay and attacked - this night in 1814

/2

British troops marched into Washington, burning federal buildings, including the then-unfinished Capitol building. Here: An artist's rendering of the aftermath. The invaders then marched sixteen blocks west - to the President's House <https://t.co/iKKeddc3jy>



/3

President James Madison, who earlier in the day had gone to the front in Bladensburg, Maryland, had returned to the White House to find it deserted. He fled as well, never to live in the mansion again. He had no idea where his wife - Dolley Madison was

/4

Mrs. Madison, among the greatest of First Ladies, had fled earlier, but not until she helped save one of the mansion's first and to this day most important works of art: Gilbert Stuart's famous portrait of George Washington <https://t.co/vTLPK00z5X>



/5

Even before British troops arrived, the White House had another set of invaders—local citizens who looted the mansion. It was "a rabble," one servant said. Then the British arrived. They patiently ate and drank the president's food and wine

before setting the mansion ablaze <https://t.co/pCf8eHZOiP>



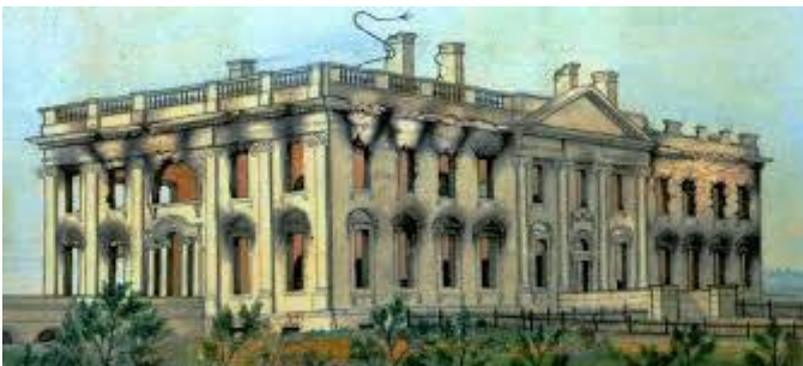
/6

The fires set in Washington this night by the British were so vast that they were seen in Baltimore, about 40 miles away. They burned until a series of storms - possibly including tornadoes - dumped torrential rains, putting the blazes out <https://t.co/GLcb8Tgn9y>



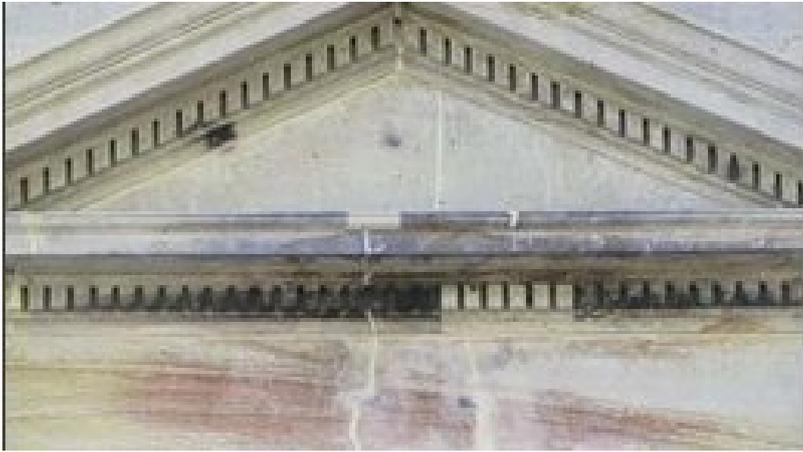
/7

The President's House, as the White House was generally called in 1814, would be uninhabitable for more than three years. President and Mrs. Madison, returning to the city on the 27th, were heckled by residents. It was an utter humiliation for "Little Jemmy" (he was 5' 4") <https://t.co/q2sTVhArH9>



/8

In 1990, after several coats of paint were scraped away, workers found original scorch marks from the 1814 fire. The attack on Washington - this night 206 years ago <https://t.co/rCEcfsPnNI>

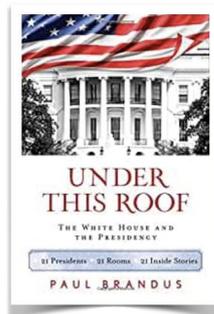


After the attack on Washington this night in 1814, Congress considered moving the nation's capital further inland. Where? Here's an excerpt from "Under This Roof," the 2015 book by WWR's Paul Brandus <https://t.co/J3siluGJe8> <https://t.co/x4UUimVnDq>

of the French ambassador at 18th Street and New York Avenue NW.

The nation's capital had been moved from Philadelphia in 1800 in part for security reasons: Congress had been attacked in 1783 by four hundred soldiers of the Continental Army.⁷⁹ Ironically, one of the biggest proponents of relocating the capital to a new location had been Madison himself. Now, with Washington exposed as vulnerable, there was new talk about moving the capital yet again—perhaps west, behind the safety of the Shenandoah or Allegheny Mountains. Cincinnati, in the new state of Ohio, was one suggestion.⁸⁰ Such talk was quickly squashed, however, with both a defiant President Madison and Congress deciding that the federal city would stay right where it was.

Two months after the fire, a report to Congress determined that the walls of both the Capitol and the President's House remained sound, and, with not inconsiderable repairs, both buildings could be rebuilt.⁸¹ Several banks in the District of Columbia, anxious to keep the federal government in their city, offered to lend the government \$500,000, at an interest rate of 6 percent.⁸² In February 1815, Congress approved the loan. It was less than what was needed, but enough to get going.⁸³ The nation's capital, built from scratch not even a generation earlier, would rise again—this time literally from the ashes. But it would be too late for James and Dolley Madison; they would never live in the President's House again.



-from "Under This Roof," by Paul Brandus (Lyons Press, 2015)