

Abraham Lincoln papers

Abraham Lincoln, Resolutions and Preamble Offered in Congress on the Mexican War¹, [December 22, 1847]

¹These are the famous "Spot" resolutions, which Lincoln introduced soon after taking his seat in the House of Representatives. They made Lincoln notorious as "Spotty Lincoln" among Congressional Democrats and with other proponents of the Mexican War at home in Illinois in 1848 and 1849. Stephen A. Douglas reminded him of them in the Senatorial campaign in 1858, saying Lincoln had distinguished himself by "taking the side of the common enemy against his own country." Though he had been noncommittal about the Mexican War during and before his election to Congress (save for a speech in May of 1846 encouraging volunteering for the conflict), upon arrival in Washington Lincoln joined his House Whig colleagues in attacking the president and his party over the origins of the war.

RESOLUTIONS

Mr. LINCOLN moved the following preamble and resolutions, which were read and laid over under the rule:

Whereas the President of the United States, in his message of May 11, 1846, has declared that "the Mexican Government not only refused to receive him, [the envoy of the United States,] or listen to his propositions, but after a long-continued series of menaces, have at last invaded *our territory* and shed the blood of our fellow-citizens on *our own soil*."

And again, in his message of December 8, 1846, that "we had ample cause of war against Mexico long before the breaking out of hostilities; but even then we forbore to take redress into our own hands until Mexico herself became the aggressor, by invading *our soil* in hostile array and shedding the blood of our citizens."

"And yet again, in his message of December 7, 1847, that the Mexican Government refused even to hear the terms of adjustment which he [our minister of peace] was authorized to propose, and finally, under wholly unjustifiable pretexts, involved the two countries in war, by invading the territory of the State of Texas, striking the first blow, and shedding the blood of our citizens on *our own soil*."

And whereas this House is desirous to obtain a full knowledge of all the facts which go to establish whether the particular spot on which the blood of our citizens was so shed was or was not at that

time *our own soil*: Therefore, *Resolved by the House of Representatives*, That the President of the United States be respectfully requested to inform this House —

1st. Whether the spot on which the blood of our citizens was shed, as in his messages declared, was or was not within the territory of Spain, at least after the treaty of 1819 until the Mexican revolution.

2d. Whether that spot is or is not within the territory which was wrested from Spain by the revolutionary Government of Mexico.

3d. Whether that spot is or is not within a settlement of people, which settlement has existed ever since long before the Texas revolution, and until its inhabitants fled before the approach of the United States army.

4th. Whether that settlement is or is not isolated from any and all other settlements by the Gulf and the Rio Grande on the south and west, and by wide uninhabited regions on the north and east.

5th. Whether the people of that settlement, or a majority of them, or any of them, have ever submitted themselves to the government or laws of Texas or of the United States, by consent or by compulsion, either by accepting office, or voting at elections, or paying tax, or serving on juries, or having process served upon them, or in any other way.

6th. Whether the people of that settlement did or did not flee from the approach of the United States army, leaving unprotected their homes and their growing crops, *before* the blood was shed, as in the messages stated; and whether the first blood, so shed, was or was not shed within the enclosure of one of the people who had thus fled from it.

7th. Whether our *citizens*, whose blood was shed, as in his messages declared, were or were not, at that time, armed officers and soldiers, sent into that settlement by the military orders of the President, through the Secretary of War.

8th. Whether the military force of the United States was or was not so sent into that settlement after Gen. Taylor had more than once intimated to the War Department that, in his opinion, no such movement was necessary to the defence or protection of Texas.