

Congressman Joshua Giddings, Debate on the Mexican War, House of Representatives, Washington, May 13, 1846 (abridged)

. . . I apprehend that much blood and much treasure will be expended before the people of New Mexico will be compelled to unite with slave-holding Texas. Those Mexicans love freedom. They have abolished slavery, for which they entertain an unconquerable detestation . . . But the President says this Mexican country "is now included in one of our congressional districts." These thirty thousand people who, so soon as the bill which passed this House yesterday shall receive the sanction of the Senate, and shall be approved by the President, will be in a state of war with this nation, are to be represented on this floor because Texas has *on paper* attached them to one of her congressional districts . . .

I regard the message as having been put forth to divert public attention from the outrage committed by the President upon our own Constitution, and the exercise of usurped powers, of which he has been guilty in ordering our army to invade a country with which we are at peace, and of provoking and bringing on this war. I am led to this inevitable conclusion from the fact that he dare not rest his justification upon *truth*. He reminds us of the grievous wrongs perpetrated (as he says) by Mexico upon our people in former years, and alludes to the delay of that government in the payment of debts due our people, and mourns over the loss of our commerce with Mexico; all for the purpose of justifying himself in sending the army to the Rio Grande, and commencing the work of human butchery!

If the country be *ours*, why does he seek to justify the taking possession of it by reference to the fact that Mexico is indebted to some of our people? If it be not ours, and he has taken possession of it in order to compel Mexico to pay those debts, why not say so? The fact that Mexico has not paid the debts due to our citizens can have no legitimate connection with taking possession of our own soil. But the writer of the message was obviously conscious that this invasion of the Mexican territory could not be justified; and he endeavored to extenuate the act by assuring us that "the movement of the troops to the Del Norte was made under positive instructions to abstain from all aggressive acts toward Mexico or Mexican citizens unless she should declare war."

What aggressive acts toward a foreign power could our army commit while on our own territory? While the army was within the United States they could not commit violence upon Mexico. The order was also to abstain from all aggressive acts toward "Mexican citizens." It seems that the President expected General Taylor to find Mexican citizens located within the United States . . . The President obviously intended to involve us in war with Mexico. No sophistry can disguise that fact. That truth will stand on the page of history in all coming time, to the disgrace of this nation and of the age in which we live . . .

Sir, no man regards this war as *just*. *We know*, the country knows, and the civilized world are conscious, that it has resulted from a desire to extend and sustain an institution on which the curse of the Almighty most visibly rests. Mexico has long since abolished slavery. She has purified herself from its crimes and its guilt. That institution is now circumscribed on the southwest by Mexico, where the slaves of Texas find an asylum . . . It has therefore become necessary to extend our dominions into Mexico in order to render slavery secure in Texas.

. . . This war is waged against an unoffending people, without just or adequate cause, for the purposes of conquest; with the design to extend slavery; in violation of the Constitution, against the dictates of justice, of humanity, the sentiments of the age in which we live, and the precepts of the religion we profess. I will lend it no aid, no support whatever. I will not bathe my hands in the blood of the people of Mexico, nor will I participate in the guilt of those murders which have been and which will hereafter be committed by our army there. For these reasons I shall vote against the bill under consideration and all others calculated to support this war.