

CQ: In 1846, should the United States wage war on Mexico?

Perspective: Representative Garrett Davis, 1846, Whig party congressman from Kentucky, says no

Mr. GARRETT DAVIS. . . . Sir, if the bill contained any recitation upon that point in truth and justice, it should be that this war was begun by the President. The river Nueces is the true western boundary of Texas. The country between that stream and the Del Norte is part of Mexico; and that Power had people and establishments on it. Months ago the President, of his own will, orders General Taylor and his army to take post at Corpus Christi, on the west bank of the Nueces, where they remained until a considerable time after the beginning of this session of Congress. In March last, under the positive orders of the President, he moves through the disputed country upon Del Norte. The Mexican authorities meet him at several points with the declaration that he has invaded their country, and with protests against the aggression. They warn him that unless he retires east of the Nueces, he will be deemed to be making war upon Mexico, and they will resort to force. . . . The Mexican commander treats all these as acts of war; and, on the 25th of April, General Taylor is informed, by a messenger from the Mexican camp, that hostilities exist, that the Mexicans will prosecute them according to the usages of civilized nations. That night a detachment of the Mexican army crosses the Rio Grande, General Taylor sends out a scouting party to reconnoiter, which attacks the Mexicans, and is defeated and captured by the Mexicans, and thus war is raging in bloody earnestness. It is our own President who began the war. He has been carrying it on for months in a series of acts. Congress, which is vested exclusively by the Constitution with the war-making power, he has not deigned to consult, much less to ask it for authority.

Questions to consider:

1. Who does Davis specifically blame for the beginning of hostilities with Mexico? What evidence does he cite for this belief?
2. Which river does Davis believe to be the western boundary of Texas? Why is this significant to his claims? (See Map)
3. According to Davis, which side attacked first? On whose territory did the attack occur?
4. Why does Davis believe Polk's actions are in violation of the limits of his authority? What Constitutional basis does Davis use in making this claim?