Abraham Lincoln, A Response to Polk’s War Message
House of Representatives, January 12, 1848

Mr. Chairman:
… The President, in his first war message of May 1846, declares that the soil was ours on which hostilities were commenced by Mexico; and he repeats that declaration, almost in the same language, in each successive annual message, thus showing that he esteems that point, a highly essential one. In the importance of that point, I entirely agree with the President. To my judgment, it is the very point, upon which he should be justified, or condemned. …

Now, admitting for the present, that the Rio Grande, was the boundary of Louisiana, what, under heaven, had that to do with the present boundary between us and Mexico? How, Mr. Chairman, the line, that once divided your land from mine, can still be the boundary between us, after I have sold my land to you, is, to me, beyond all comprehension. … His next piece of evidence is that "The Republic of Texas always claimed this river (Rio Grande) as her western boundary." That is not true, in fact. Texas has claimed it, but she has not always claimed it. There is, at least, one distinguished exception. Her state constitution.--the republic's most solemn, and well considered act--that which may, without impropriety, be called her last will and testament revoking all others--makes no such claim. But suppose she had always claimed it. Has not Mexico always claimed the contrary? … Now all of this is but naked claim; and what I have already said about claims is strictly applicable to this. If I should claim your land, by word of mouth, that certainly would not make it mine…

But next the President tells us, the Congress of the United States understood the state of Texas they admitted into the union, to extend beyond the Nueces. Well, I suppose they did. I certainly so understood it. But how far beyond? That Congress did not understand it to extend clear to the Rio Grande, is quite certain by the fact of their joint resolutions, for admission, expressly leaving all questions of boundary to future adjustment. …

[Let the President answer the interrogatories, I proposed, as before mentioned, or some other similar ones. Let him answer, fully, fairly, and candidly. Let him answer with facts, and not with arguments. … And if, so answering, he can show that the soil was ours, where the first blood of the war was shed--that it was not within an inhabited country, or, if within such, that the inhabitants had submitted themselves to the civil authority of Texas, or of the United States, and that the same is true of the site of Fort Brown, then I am with him for his justification. … But if he can not, or will not do this--if on any pretence, or no pretence, he shall refuse or omit it, then I shall be fully convinced, of what I more than suspect already, that he is deeply conscious of being in the wrong that he feels the blood of this war, like the blood of Abel, is crying to Heaven against him. … He is a bewildered, confounded, and miserably perplexed man. God grant he may be able to show, there is not something about his conscious, more painful than all his mental perplexity!}