



Lincoln Lore

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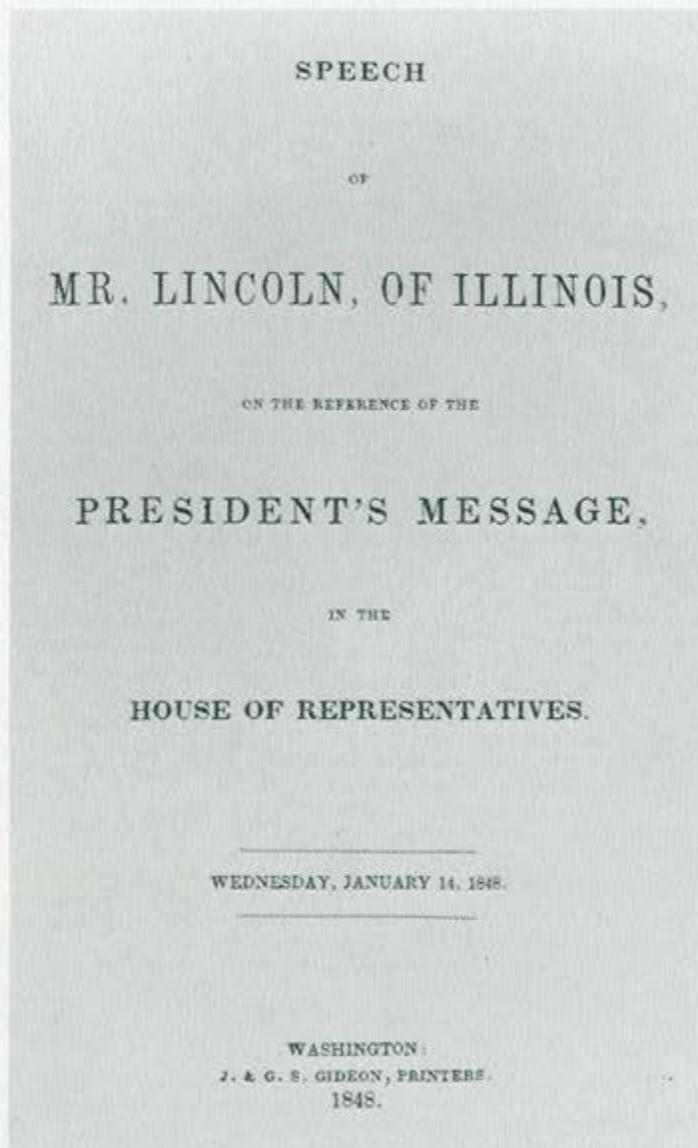
February 1968

The Spot Resolutions

The October 6, 1967 issue of *Time* magazine contains an article entitled "Divided We Stand: The Unpopularity of U.S. Wars." In a section entitled "Mexican War" Daniel Webster is said to have declared that conflict to be "A war of pretexts — a pretext that Mexico had invaded U.S. territory, a pretext that Mexico had declined to receive a U.S. emissary, a pretext that Mexico had refused to pay just U.S. claims." Webster suggested James K. Polk's impeachment for involving the United States in a war without congressional consent, and Abraham Lincoln (a one term Whig Congressman from Illinois) like many other Americans "suspected that United States troops had provoked the incident inside Mexico."

Like Webster, Henry Clay, and other prominent Whigs, Lincoln embarked upon a plan of action on December 22, 1847 by offering in the United States House of Representatives what are known as the "Spot" Resolutions. These resolutions are an attack on the President's messages of May 11th, December 7th and 8th when Polk accused the Mexican government of, among other things, "invading our territory (sic), and shed (shedding) the blood of our fellow citizens on our own soil." Lincoln offered a preamble and a series of eight resolutions which is probably the most obscure public effort of all of his actions as a politician, law maker and statesman. Several years ago, when T. V. quiz shows were in vogue, the Spot Resolutions constituted a favorite "sixty-four dollar" question.

Because of their length, the Spot Resolutions are not given here (except the First, Second, Third and Fifth), but can be found on pages 420-422 in volume I of *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*. A note by the editor of the *Works* indicates that the resolutions as printed in the *Congressional Globe* were considerably altered from Lincoln's original. However, Lincoln's original draft is followed in detail in the *Collected Works*.



From the Lincoln National Life Foundation
This speech, delivered by Abraham Lincoln on January 12, 1848 containing arguments favoring the "Spot Resolutions," is incorrectly dated January 14, 1848 (M.4).

the Spot Resolutions and his denunciation of the President (January 12, 1848).

Immediately before taking his seat in Congress Lincoln had given a lot of thought to the question of war guilt, especially after listening, on November 13, 1847, to Henry Clay's eloquent speech (which embodied eight resolutions) at Lexington, Kentucky, on the causes of the Mexican conflict. Then, too, it had become the national Whig party line to accuse the Democratic President of

Lincoln's First, Second and Third resolutions have reference to the "spot."

First: Whether the spot of soil on which the blood of our citizens was shed, as in his messages declared, was, or was not, within the territories (sic) of Spain, at least from the treaty of 1819 until the Mexican revolution.

Second: Whether that spot is, or is not, within the territory which was wrested from Spain, by the Mexican revolution.

Third: Whether that spot is, or is not, within a settlement of people, which settlement had existed ever since long before the Texas revolution, until its inhabitants fled from the approach of the U.S. Army.

These resolutions implied that the "spot" was an isolated area never acquired by the United States and that the President's statement justifying the war was the "sheerest deception."

Lincoln had written William H. Herndon in Springfield, Illinois, on December 13, 1847 stating, among other things, that "As you are all so anxious for me to distinguish myself, I have concluded to do so, before long." His plan of action followed with the Spot Resolutions (December 22, 1847), his vote for the resolutions of the Whig Congressman, George Ashmun of Massachusetts, declaring that the war had been "unnecessarily and unconstitutionally," begun by Polk (January 3, 1848) and his speech in the House containing arguments favoring

provoking the hostilities. According to Reinhard H. Luthin, author of *The Real Abraham Lincoln*, Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1960, this charge against the Whig party has been confirmed as a political maneuver by scholarly historians. Needless to state, this new political stance of Lincoln's was not to the satisfaction of some of his constituents back home, even though some of them may have agreed with him before he left for Washington.

When Lincoln campaigned for Congress he did not publicly oppose the Mexican War; on one occasion he participated in a war recruitment rally. Lincoln was elected to the lower house of Congress on August 3rd, 1846, almost three months after the Mexican War was declared (May 13, 1846), and his term of office did not begin until the winter session of 1847-1848, so he had more than a year's interval before going to Washington. It is, of course, to be assumed that Lincoln carefully followed the activities of the national legislative body while he was a Congressman-elect. Certainly, he had had ample time to reach some mature and definite conclusions about the causes of the Mexican War.

When Lincoln took his seat on December 6, 1847, all of the battles of the war had been fought and peace negotiations were to be culminated with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo on February 2, 1848. In later years Lincoln was always careful to assert that he supported the supply bills and measures favorable to officers, soldiers and their families.

Perhaps the most scholarly and detailed study of the Spot Resolutions has been undertaken by Donald W. Riddle in his book *Congressman Abraham Lincoln*, University of Illinois Press, 1957, pages 56-69. This author is of the opinion that the crux of the Spot Resolutions was the Fifth resolution:

Fifth: Whether the people of that settlement, or a majority of them, or any of them, had ever, previous to the bloodshed, mentioned in his messages, submitted themselves to the government as laws of Texas, or of the United States, by consent, or by compulsion, either by accepting office, or voting at elections, or paying taxes, or serving on juries, or having process served upon them, or in any other way.

Answering Lincoln's assertions, point by point, Riddle's conclusions are that the war was not unconstitutionally begun by the President, and that Polk acted in accordance with the correct interpretation of the Constitution. Riddle further states: "However, it was a debatable question when Lincoln was in Congress. Lincoln cannot be convicted of error because the later development, which has made the fact indisputable, had not then occurred."

Riddle had defined Lincoln's party's Mexican War position in Congress by quoting a statement by Justin Smith to the effect that the Whigs "denounced the war enough to incriminate themselves when they supported it, and they supported it enough to stultify themselves when they condemned it."

Certainly, no one should question Lincoln's right to criticize administration policies in wartime or in peacetime, but the Spot Resolutions, his vote for the Ashmun resolutions and his speech of January 12, 1848 must be appraised as being purely political to aid the Whig party in coming elections. Such tactics were not unique then and are not unique today. The upshot of Lincoln's political actions was that some of Lincoln's Whig constituents were offended as well as the Illinois Democrats. Lincoln had made a mistake in his estimate of a political situation.

Some of the people of Illinois reacted violently to Lincoln's Anti-Mexican War attitude, and particularly the Spot Resolutions, even though they were just read to the Thirtieth Congress, First Session, and then laid upon the table. Albert J. Beveridge in his book *Abraham Lin-*



From the Lincoln National Life Foundation

JAMES K. POLK

Although today considered among the near-great of the Presidents of the United States, James K. Polk was not a leader of public opinion in the years 1845 to 1849 when he served as the 11th President.

coln 1809-1858, Houghton-Mifflin Company, 1928, volume I, pages 428-433, gave considerable space in his book to Lincoln's so-called political blunder. This topic has also been thoroughly treated in the Riddle book.

While Polk never mentioned Lincoln or his resolutions in his voluminous diary (four volumes) and little notice was taken in Washington political circles of the Whig Congressman's attack on the Administration, there was one exception in the form of a severe tongue lashing by Congressman John Jameson of Missouri:

"Strange position before the American Congress for such a Representative; the representative of a district which sent Hardin who fell at Buena Vista, and Baker who, in the bloody battle, and at Cerro Gordo commanded when the noble Shields fell with a grape (shot)

through his lungs."

In fact, Beveridge made the statement in a note (vol. I, page 428) that "Existing papers of no member of Congress while Lincoln was in the House made any mention of Lincoln's speech (January 12, 1848) or, indeed of Lincoln himself, so far as the author has seen them." Because Lincoln's stand was not different from that of the Whig party leaders, the Washington newspapers ignored the attack and even Lincoln's political colleagues from Illinois did not mention the resolutions or the speech in their letters to party affiliates when they wrote of the political situation.

According to Beveridge, Lincoln's action in Congress was not mentioned by Illinois Congressman John A. McClernand who was a kind of correspondent for the Springfield Democratic paper: "Neither did Winthrop, nor Ashmun, nor Giddings, nor Toombs, nor Stephens, nor any Whig leader, whether from the North or the South mention Lincoln as an anti-war agitator in the early months of 1848.

But Herndon, back in Springfield, was upset, and he forthrightly expressed his fears to Lincoln in a letter dated January 19, 1848. Lincoln replied from Washington on February 1st and wrote specifically about his vote for the Ashmun amendment: "... you fear that you and I disagree about the war. I regret this, not because of any fear we shall remain disagreed, after you shall have read this letter, but because, if you misunderstand, I fear other good friends will also. That vote affirms that the war was unnecessarily and unconstitutionally commenced by the President; and I will stake my life that if you had been in my place, you would have voted just as I did. Would you have voted what you felt you knew to be a lie? I know you would not. Would you have gone out of the House — skulked the vote? I expect not. If you had skulked one vote, you would have had to skulk many more, before the end of the session... You are compelled to speak; and your only alternative is to tell the truth or tell a lie. I can not doubt which you would do."

But Herndon was so concerned over his law partner's political future that he wrote him again on January 29th. The gist of the second Herndon letter was that the President could in a defensive war invade the enemy's country. Lincoln replied on February 15th, taking up the Constitutional argument. He wrote: "Allow the President to invade a neighboring nation, whenever he shall deem it necessary to repel an invasion, and you allow him to do so, whenever he may choose to say he deems it necessary for such purpose — and you allow him to make war at pleasure... The provision of the Constitution giving the war-making power to Congress, was dictated, as I understand it, by the following reasons. Kings had always been involving and impoverishing their people in wars, pretending generally, if not always, that the good of the people was the object. This, our Convention understood to be the most oppressive of all Kingly op-

pressions; and they resolved to so frame the Constitution that *no one man* should hold the power of bringing this oppression upon us. But your view destroys the whole matter, and places our President where Kings have always stood."

Some of Lincoln's Illinois friends apparently would not buy his argument and their reaction was immediately vociferous. They had not expected their Congressman to oppose the war. An editorial that appeared in the *Illinois State Register* entitled "Out Damned Spot" stated that Lincoln had made his *debut* in Congress by an assault on the war. The issues finally led to a newspaper war between the political parties, and the Democratic party in some Illinois counties passed resolutions "in fervent support of the war and in wrathful denunciation of the 'treasonable assaults of guerillas at home; party demagogues; slanderers of the President, defenders of the butchery at the Alamo, traducers of the heroism at San Jacinto.'" Lincoln's defamers went so far as to state that "Henceforth will this Benedict Arnold of our district be known here only as the Rancho Spotty of one term." The Illinois Democrats as expected made the most of this political ammunition.

Most certainly Lincoln was dismayed and except to Herndon, he made only one explanation of his course in regard to his opposition to the war. This came about after the Rev. J. M. Peck's Belleville oration celebrating the first anniversary of the battle of Buena Vista. The Rev. Mr. Peck was a prominent Baptist clergyman of St. Clair County, Illinois.

In his letter to Peck, dated March 21, 1848, Lincoln reasserted the main points of his speech of January 12th. The Illinois Congressman presented what he considered facts, facts, facts and concluded that "if you admit that they are facts, then I shall be obliged for a reference to any law of language, law of states, law of nations, law of morals, law of religion — any law human or divine, in which an authority can be found for saying those facts constitute 'no aggression.'"

Perhaps historians have had a tendency to over-emphasize Lincoln's so-called political collapse following his congressional term because of the Herndon volumes. The fact that the law partner differed from Lincoln on the Mexican question does not go unnoticed in the Herndon-Weik *Life of Lincoln*. It is hard to comprehend how Lincoln could have been so devoid of Illinois political friends, particularly Whigs as Herndon would lead us to believe.

It appears that in Illinois Whig caucuses in the early 1840s, a rather vague agreement was reached that such leaders of the party of John J. Hardin, Edward D. Baker, Abraham Lincoln and Stephen T. Logan who wished to serve in Congress should follow the slogan "Turn about is fair play." Lincoln had had his turn, and it was fortunate that he had publicly announced that he would not be a candidate to succeed himself.

It was now Logan's turn to run on Lincoln's record in the Seventh District, and on August 7, 1848 he was defeated by Thomas L. Harris, the Democratic candidate who received a majority of 106 votes. The Whig majority in 1846, when Lincoln was elected, was 1,511. Apparently, most of the veterans of the Mexican war voted at the polls in 1848.

Lincoln, who would serve in Congress until March 4, 1849, now worked aggressively in the field of national politics and for the promotion of the Whig candidacy of Zachary Taylor, the popular hero who had made such an enviable reputation in the Mexican War. (See *Lincoln Lore* No. 855, "The Spot Resolutions," August 27, 1945.)

Lincoln And The Theatre

Editor's Note: On January 30, 1968 The Lincoln National Life Insurance Company sponsored the CBS televised Inaugural Program at Ford's Theatre in Washington, D.C. The opening of the restored theatre was in a sense a premiere because no dramatic presentation has been offered at Ford's in more than one hundred years. The program, other than entertainment, was a report of an historic occasion, and a televised performance of *A President's Cabinet Evening*. This was a gala affair for which The Lincoln National Life Insurance Company could be proud in that the company's Foundation contributed \$250,000 as a challenge grant to the Ford Theatre Society for the presentation on that stage of historical plays (plays about Lincoln, plays of the Civil War period and plays which Lincoln witnessed) for many theatrical seasons to come. The National Repertory Theatre Foundation has set up a special resident company at Ford's, and the season began on February 12th with the presentation of *John Brown's Body* by Stephen Vincent Benet. In providing some of the publicity for the inaugural program, the editor prepared a short feature story entitled "Lincoln And The Theatre."

R. G. M.

Was Lincoln "hopelessly stage-struck?" True, in Illinois he witnessed a play or two by traveling theatrical groups, attended a few minstrel shows, was sometimes among those who applauded visiting elocutionists, was seen occasionally at church entertainments and was captivated with the wonders of the magic lantern. But, certainly, he knew very little about the theatre during the period of his married life in Springfield.

However, in Washington, D.C. President Lincoln frequently attended the theatre. Leonard Grover, a capital city theatre proprietor, stated that Abraham Lincoln during the four years of his administration visited his theatre more than a hundred times. While this statement may be an exaggeration, we do know that Lincoln attended ten of the four hundred and ninety-five performances offered by the Ford's Theatre management during the period of 1862 to 1865. From newspaper reports and reliable witnesses we can pinpoint about fifty different occasions when Lincoln visited the theatre to see some of the greatest theatrical talent that ever graced the American stage. Considerable additional evidence can be produced to indicate that his attendance at other times in Washington theatres escaped the attention of the newspaper reporters.

After Lincoln's inauguration as

President, no record of his attendance at a Washington theatre has been found for the critical months of 1861. Perhaps one reason for Lincoln's lack of interest in the theatre during the early months of his administration was the death of his son Willie in February 1862. Also, during that period, there were not many show houses in Washington given over to the "legitimate drama." Mr. Lincoln did not enjoy vaudeville and was said to have visited the Canteberry Hall, the variety house, on only two occasions.

As the legitimate theatre enjoyed boom times during the Civil War, two new theatres opened for business. The one theatre already an established institution in the city was the Washington, located on Eleventh Street near C. It was usually crowded and uncomfortable, and it was noted for its indifferent productions. John T. Ford opened a theatre called the Washington Athenaeum on Tenth Street near E, which was destroyed by fire. Out of the ruins of the Athenaeum, he built the new Ford Theatre which opened its doors on August 27, 1863.

During the Buchanan Administration the Old National Theatre burned, and out of its rubble sprang the New National Theatre, just off Pennsylvania Avenue (near Willard's Hotel) which was opened for business on April 22, 1862, under the management of Leonard Grover.

As the Civil War slowly wore on, and as Lincoln found the theatre relaxing, his attendance increased. Grover stated that "He often came alone, but many times brought his little son Tad, and on special occasions Mrs. Lincoln." The President was very fond of Edwin Booth (the assassin's elder brother) upon the stage, and he usually went to see him perform when the actor was in Washington. Lincoln once made the statement, after witnessing "The Merchant of Venice," that "it was a good performance but I had a thousand times rather read it at home if it were not for Booth's playing."

Lincoln's attendance at theatres presenting Shakespearean plays increased his understanding of the comedies and tragedies in actual production. He witnessed John B. McCullough in the role of Edgar in the play "King Lear," E. L. Davenport and J. W. Wallack in "Othello," James H. Hackett as Falstaff in "Henry IV" parts I and II, and "The Merry Wives of Windsor."

Other notable actors and actresses Lincoln saw in historic roles during his life time were Joseph Jefferson III, William E. Burton, Clara Louise Kellogg, Mrs. John Wood, Barney Williams, Maggie Mitchell, Edwin Forrest, Felicita Vestvali, Charlotte Cushman and Laura Keane.

Of all the Presidents, Lincoln is most closely associated with the theatre — largely because of his assassination at Ford's Theatre on April 14, 1865.

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Selections approved by a Bibliography Committee consisting of the following members: Arnold Gates, 289 Hyde Park Road, Garden City, New York; Carl Haverlin, 8619 Louis Avenue, Northridge, California; E. B. Long, 708 Kenilworth Ave. Oak Park, Ill.; Ralph Newman, 18 E. Chestnut Street, Chicago, Ill.; Dr. Kenneth A. Bernard, Boston University, Boston, Mass.; James T. Hickey, Illinois State Historical Library, Centennial Bldg., Springfield, Ill.; Judge Warren L. Jones, U. S. Court of Appeals, Jacksonville, Fla.; Hon. Fred Schwengel, 636 Union Arcade, Davenport, Iowa. New Items available for consideration may be sent to the above addresses or to the Lincoln National Life Foundation.

— 1966 —

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— 1967 —

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Book, cloth, 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ " x 6", 481 pp., price \$10.00.

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JUDSON, CLARA INGRAM 1967-12

(device) /Abraham Lincoln/by Clara Ingram Judson/Illustrated by Polly Jackson/Follett Publishing Company/Chicago. [1967 reprint of 1961 Copyright by Follett Publishing Co. See 1961-57.]

Brochure cloth, 8" x 6 $\frac{1}{4}$ ", 29 (2) pp., illus., price \$1.00. (A Beginning-to-Read Book for children.)

LEWIS, EDWARD AND JACK BELCK 1967-13

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Brochure, stiff boards, 7 $\frac{1}{2}$ " x 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ ", 62 pp., illus., price \$2.50. [Illustrations from collection of Bernard H. Hall, Topeka, Kansas.]

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Pamphlet, flexible boards, 10" x 7", 48 pp., illus., price per single issue, \$1.00.

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Pamphlet, paper, 10 $\frac{1}{4}$ " x 7 $\frac{1}{4}$ ", (9) pp., illus.

THOMPSON, H. KEITH JR. AND CHARLES HAMILTON 1967-20

Sale No. 22/Comprising the world-famous Lincoln Collection/of Justin G. Turner/The Waldorf-Astoria, October 25, 1967 — 7:30 P.M. [Caption title]

Brochure, flexible boards, 9 $\frac{1}{4}$ " x 6", 71 pp., illus.

McMurtry's Speaking Itinerary

1968

South Bend, Indiana	Jan. 10 & 11
Milwaukee, Wisconsin	Jan. 17 & 18
Kansas City, Kansas	Jan. 19 (20, 21) 22
Little Rock, Arkansas	Feb. 1 & 2
Memphis, Tennessee	Feb. 5 & 6
Chattanooga, Tennessee	Feb. 7 & 8
Charlotte, N. Carolina	Feb. 9 (10, 11) 12
Cincinnati, Ohio	Feb. 13 & 14
Youngstown, Ohio	Feb. 15 & 16
Akron, Ohio	Feb. 19 & 20
Canton, Ohio	Feb. 21 & 22
Cleveland, Ohio	Feb. 26 & 27

Those persons interested in learning of the schedule in detail in the various cities named above, may contact the general agency offices of The Lincoln National Life Insurance Company.