



Conversation between James K. Polk and a Congressman from Illinois

While most of the nation supported President James K. Polk's prosecution of the Mexican-American War, there was at least one congressman who voiced opposition. This congressman claimed that the Mexican-American War was immoral, proslavery, and a threat to the nation's Republican values. He also accused President Polk of justifying war with exaggerations and half-truths.

Based on your knowledge of Manifest Destiny and the Mexican-American War, construct a fictional conversation between these men. Some of the prompts are provided.

Congressman: President Polk, thank you for taking the opportunity to speak with me.

President Polk: You're welcome, congressman. What's on your mind?

Congressman: If I may be honest, President Polk, I am concerned about our role in the war against Mexico. I find it to be an example of one country simply stealing the land of another. This war is referred to as Mr. Polk's War in the North. Can you explain?

President Polk:

President Polk (Now asking the question): Congressman, you have been called the "Benedict Arnold of our district," by other members of Congress in your own home state. They liken you to a traitor for your stance against the War and against the progress of our nation, Mr. Lincoln. I know you disagree with my reasons for declaring war, but what would you say to those who call you a traitor?

Congressman:

Do you know who the "congressman" is? _____

Possible Answers



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President Polk:

I declared war on Mexico, sir, because the Mexicans fired at our men standing guard at the Rio Grande. This was act of aggression that could not be tolerated. Mexico wanted this war and we gave them exactly what they wanted. That said, this war is about more than that. We are a great nation. We have a decree from God to spread our ideals across the North American continent. It is not a choice, but a duty to let nothing stand in the way of that noble endeavor.

President Polk (Now asking the question): Congressman, you have been called the "Benedict Arnold of our district," by other members of Congress in your own home state. They liken you to a traitor for your stance against the War and against the progress of our nation, Mr. Lincoln. I know you disagree with my reasons for declaring war, but what would you say to those who characterized you as such?

Congressman:

Those who have called me "Benedict Arnold" must have no regard for my love of this nation. I do not wish for the destruction of America, only for the true intentions of the war to be revealed. Does this war have nothing to do with the acquisition of land? Does this war have nothing to do with the extension of slavery? Does this war have nothing to do with the spread of empire? I believe this war has less to do with the aggression of the Mexicans and more to do with my aforementioned questions.

Do you know who the "congressman" is? ABRAHAM LINCOLN