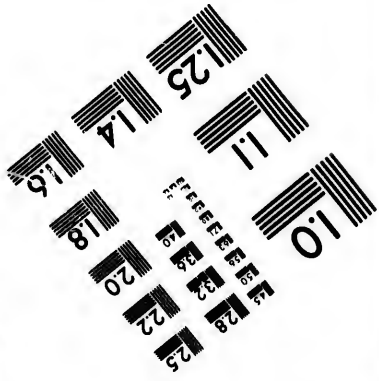
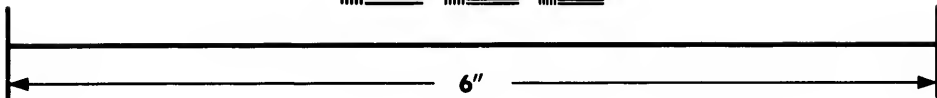
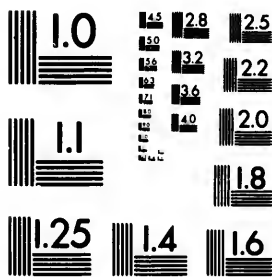
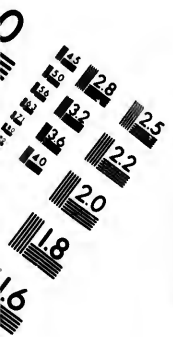


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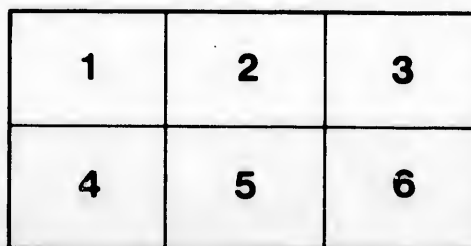
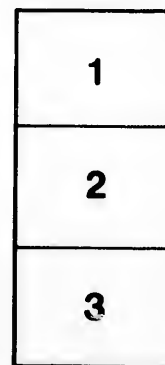
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SPEECH
OF
MR. WASHINGTON HUNT,
OF NEW YORK,
ON
THE OREGON QUESTION.

Delivered in the House of Representatives, U. S., February 6th, 1846.

The resolution reported by the Committee on Foreign Affairs directing notice of twelve months to be given to terminate the Convention with Great Britain for the joint occupation of Oregon, being under consideration in Committee of the Whole on the State of the Union—

Mr. HUNT said, that, wearied as he knew the House to be by this protracted debate, if he were to consult his personal inclinations, he would not, at that late hour, prolong the discussion; but he had endeavored, for several days, amid a throng of eager competitors, to obtain the floor, feeling it due to the magnitude of the question that he should briefly submit the views which influenced his mind and governed his action in the vote he intended to give. He felt it due to the rights of a constituency who are deeply concerned in all measures calculated to affect the pacific relations between the United States and Great Britain.

He represented a people who have been taught to appreciate the blessings of peace from their experience of the vicissitudes of war. Whilst much had been said of the exposed condition of our sea-board, and the defenceless condition of some portions of the country, he would venture to affirm, that no section is more directly interested in preserving the public tranquility than the Niagara frontier, from which he came. Was it necessary to remind the House of the thrilling events and stirring conflicts which, in our last contest with England, had made that border memorable in American annals?

It was the theatre of noble daring and brilliant exploits, which had invested scenes of natural sublimity with the additional grandeur of historical interest and association. It was there that Scott, Porter, and other gallant leaders, with the brave men who followed them, by their valor and prowess, had won immortal laurels for themselves, whilst they vindicated the power of the American arms, and contributed so largely to our national glory and renown. On her bloody fields their heroic deeds and victorious intrepidity had shed unfading lustre on the military fame of the country. But if it was a theatre of victory and glory, it was also a scene of calamity and dismay. The frontier towns were desolated by fire and sword, and our people were driven from their homes in pursuit of safety and shelter. Truth forced him to add, that the disasters of war were aggravated by the cold injustice of our own Government; few of those who were deprived of their property and their homes, whilst they perilled their lives in the national defence, having received any adequate remuneration. Congress had turned a deaf ear upon their just and repeated demands for redress, till many of them have ceased to hope for justice or reparation at your hands.

In the event of another contest with England, that devoted frontier will again become the theatre of conflict, and the people, of whom it was his pride to be the humble representative, will be among the first to hear the strife of battle and the din of arms. The scenes of the last war will be renewed on a broader scale, with the more potent enginery of destruction which modern invention has fabricated.

In these allusions to his own section of the country, its past incidents and present posture, he hoped he might not be misunderstood. He was actuated by no sectional spirit. It was not his purpose, justified as he would be by the example of many gentlemen in this debate, to boast of the superior courage or patriotism of his constituents. He regarded such comparisons as invidious, if not unjust. He confided in the patriotism and fidelity of the American people in all quarters of the Union; and never doubted their readiness or ability to maintain the rights of the country with determined vigor and fearless spirit in every emergency. When the trial comes, (if come it shall,) those for whom he spake will be first to obey the summons of their country, and among the foremost where danger is to be found. Whilst no people cherish a more ardent desire for peace, there are none in whom the contemplation of war excites a smaller degree of personal fear or apprehension.

They demand, as they have a right to expect, that those who are entrusted with the management of national affairs shall not involve us in war without clear, manifest, and overruling necessity. They will hold the Government responsible to use all just and honorable endeavors to avert the calamity. If sincere and patriotic efforts to preserve the peace of the country shall prove unavailing, and an appeal to arms in defence of national honor or national rights becomes inevitable, then they will require of those whose duty it is to foresee the impending storm, that they adopt timely measures of preparation, and place the country in a strong attitude of defence. Any neglect of this imperative duty will bring down upon the Government the consuming indignation of the people.

Mr. H. said he was one of those who desired to preserve the peace of the country on the lasting foundations of national honor and integrity. Some gentlemen appear to regard the national honor as incompatible with peace. On the contrary, he contended, that a spirit of moderation, which cherishes the peace of nations, is in harmony with the noblest dictates of honor and duty. Our true policy, as a nation, is eminently pacific. If we are to advance in improvement, civilization, and happiness, our progress must be made through the paths of tranquillity, under the benignant sway of peaceful counsels. He would not dwell upon the genial blessings of peace, or descant upon the frightful train of suffering, degradation, and crime of which war is the prolific source. These topics have been exhausted by others. With but few exceptions, we hear expressions, on all sides, of a desire for peace. It is true, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. DOUGLASS) declared, in a strain of sublime indifference, that he neither knew or cared whether war might result from our action. In the management of a complicated question, which has employed the diplomatic skill of the Government for nearly thirty years, he proclaims that it matters not to him whether peace or war may ensue; and that his course, is not to be influenced by any regard to consequences of that nature. But he deceives himself if he believes the people of the country are prepared to adopt a sentiment so offensive to humanity, and so abhorrent to the civilization of the age in which we live.

In deliberating upon questions of such grave importance, it is our first duty, as rational and responsible representatives, to consider well the probable tendency and result of our action. To defy consequences, in a spirit of reckless and vain-glorious bravado, is to sport with the destinies of the nation, and the happiness of mankind. May God save the country from the statesmanship and patriotism which cares not for consequences!

Mr. H. said he intended to direct his remarks chiefly to the question immediately under consideration, and to discuss the expediency of authorizing the President to terminate the convention with Great Britain for the joint occupation of the Oregon territory; but, before proceeding to that subject, he desired to say a few words in relation to the extent and value of our rights in Oregon.

That we have a clear title to all that portion of the territory which is drained by the Columbia river—and which, in his opinion, was the only part of much real importance to our national interests—there was no room for doubt; but he was forced to admit, that, in his judgment, our claim to the more northern portion, which is drained by Frazer's river, does not rest upon the same clear and unquestionable foundation. Satisfactory as our title north of 49 degrees may be in our own estimation, an impartial mind can hardly deny that England presents a plausible claim of title, resting on priority of discovery and settlement. To deny it, is an implied reflection upon the wisdom and patriotism of every administration of our own Government for the last thirty years. If our title to the whole is clear and indisputable up to 54° 40', and England has no rights, why is it that we have allowed her to enjoy a joint possession since 1828? And why have we repeatedly proposed to divide with her on the 49th parallel? Will it be said, that, whilst negotiating for a quarter of a century, we have not known our rights, or have not dared to maintain them? Did Gen. Jackson, during the eight years that he filled the Executive chair, quietly permit the British to occupy American territory to which we have a clear and unquestionable title?

To say nothing of the complicated questions which surround the title to the northern portion of the country, the repeated concessions of our own Government conclusively prove that the conflicting rights of the two nations are the appropriate subject of negotiation, and he regarded it as alike the duty and interest of both to proceed to an early adjustment of the controversy in a spirit of mutual forbearance and concession.

In regard to the value of the southern part of Oregon, including the Columbia river, to which our title is unquestionable, he believed few gentlemen had formed a higher estimate than himself. He considered it of immense national importance, not so much for its soil and productions, as its commercial position. Its possession will ultimately secure to us an ascendancy in the trade of the Pacific, thereby making "the uttermost parts of the earth" tributary to our enterprise, and pouring into our lap "the wealth of Ormus and of Ind." Though he had been sceptical at first, he was now convinced that the time is approaching when a railroad communication will be accomplished, over our own national soil, from the Atlantic to the Pacific. It is not in the power of human discernment to foresee the mighty results, political and commercial, which are to be produced by opening this new highway across the continent; but that it will elevate the American nation to a proud pre-eminence and ascendancy in the commercial world, is sufficiently obvious, without the aid of prophetic power. When this mighty work is consummated, it will open a new era in the commerce of the world. Our position, as compared with the commercial nations of Europe, will place us in speedy communication and near proximity with China and the East Indies.

There are many who continue to view this continental railway as a chimerical project; but may not the same be said of most of the stupendous undertakings which have been consummated in our country by the bold enterprise of the present generation? Thirty years ago many wise men viewed the Erie canal as a wild, visionary, and impracticable scheme, and denounced its advocates as mad enthusiasts. A railway to the Pacific is not so bold and formidable a project at this day, as was the Erie canal in its original conception, when you consider the progress of invention and the comparative ability of the country.

But (Mr. H. said) he must abandon these collateral topics, and proceed to the question more distinctly before the committee. For twenty-eight years the Oregon territory has been occupied by the United States and Great Britain, under the treaties of 1818 and 1827, which placed the country open to both, and gave to each an equal right of settlement and occupation whilst the treaty shall continue in force; either party having the right, under the treaty of 1827, to terminate the compact by giving twelve months' notice to the other. The President of the United States, to whom the Constitution has entrusted the conduct of our foreign relations, has recommended that this notice be given. If we would form a safe opinion of the probable effect of the measure, and ascertain the course to which duty and policy would guide us, we must carefully consider the actual posture of affairs. Deeply as we may regret the existing attitude of the question, we are compelled to meet it as it stands, in view of facts from which we, who are not responsible for them, have no power of escape. He would repeat what he had already said, that he viewed this Oregon controversy as the appropriate subject of amicable negotiation and settlement. That it might now be adjusted on terms honorable to both countries, but for the party aspects which the question has been made to assume within the last two years, he entertained no doubt.

At the opening of the last Presidential campaign, the party now in the ascendant were reduced to a desperate extremity. Their legitimate candidates, to whom public attention had been directed, and their prominent party measures, were known to be unacceptable to the country, and it was sagaciously determined to infuse into the canvass new elements of agitation. Candidates before unheard of were placed before the country, and new issues were invented, to excite the public imagination. Texas and Oregon were proclaimed by the Baltimore convention as "great Democratic measures," and a spirit of conquest was aroused which set at naught the peaceful and moderate policy which had directed the previous counsels of the country. Our title to the whole of Oregon was declared to be clear and unquestionable. A question of foreign relations which had embarrassed preceding administrations, and to the successful management of which the highest skill, forbearance, and concert of parties, were indispensable, was seized upon as a party affair, and dragged down from its national position to the arena of political contest and domestic strife. It was from no desire to disturb party feelings in any quarter that he alluded to these unfortunate events, but because they had become so incorporated with the question, as to form a material part of the subject. This ill-starred conjunction of foreign affairs with internal politics was the chief cause of our present difficulty. In respect to our relations with other countries, there should be but one party, and the American people ought to present an united front to the world. In the name of justice, patriotism, and decency, he would inquire by what right, or with what good motive, any political party seized upon questions of foreign policy as their own exclusive property and concern? He hoped the embarrassments in which we now find ourselves involved, will serve as a warning to the people in all future time.

Upon this Oregon question, artfully intermingled with other issues, the new Administration finds itself seated in power. The President enters upon negotiations, under the responsibility of constitutional obligations, his hands tied by previous declarations and party resolves. To exercise his authority in accordance with the pretensions by which he acquired it is found impossible, and he wisely decides to propose a surrender of nearly half the territory which he had previously declared to be ours by clear and unquestionable title. Far be it from me to censure that proposal. It had received the general approbation of the country. In making the proffer, the Executive had shown that he felt his obligations to preserve the peace of the country, notwithstanding the authority of the

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proceed to the Baltimore resolutions, which have been read here so frequently to silence the refractory into submission, as if they possessed a binding force and validity paramount to the Constitution.

But the efforts of the two Governments to settle the controversy have thus far failed, and now the President calls upon Congress to provide for giving the requisite notice to terminate the joint occupation. The real question for us to determine, in view of the present posture of affairs, is, whether a compliance with this recommendation will be calculated to increase the danger of war, or to embarrass the endeavors of the two countries to bring the subject to a friendly adjustment. On this point (Mr. H. said) he confessed his mind had not been entirely free from embarrassment; but mature reflection had led him to the conclusion that it is safer and wiser to give the President full, discretionary power over the subject, than to leave the question in its present doubtful, indefinite condition. He was prepared to vote for a resolution conferring authority upon the Executive to give the notice at his own proper discretion, with an additional clause, expressive of the sense of Congress that the controversy ought to be settled by peaceful negotiation.

Several considerations concurred to bring his mind to this conclusion. In his opinion, the President now has full constitutional power to give the notice and terminate the treaty, whenever in his judgment the public interest requires it; and his authority, in this respect, cannot be enlarged by any resolution of Congress. But, since he doubts or disclaims the sufficiency of his power, and refers the subject to the legislative branch of the Government, he was unwilling, for one, to furnish him or his advisers any ground or temptation to keep the question open for purposes of political agitation and excitement. The people have chosen to entrust him with the conduct of our foreign affairs, and as the constitutional responsibility rests upon him, let the power and the responsibility be united beyond all cavil, and the country will hold him answerable for their proper exercise. Whatever difference of opinion may exist as to the power of the President to give the notice, all must perceive that his control over the negotiations is such as to make the settlement of the question dependant upon his will and pleasure.

Mr. H. said it was obvious to him, that the difficulty had reached a crisis which made early action necessary to preserve the peace of the country. He felt convinced that delay is more dangerous than action. Unless it is brought to a speedy settlement, he believed it never would be terminated by friendly negotiation. Every year will produce new obstacles, and render its adjustment more difficult. If Congress decline to act, and withhold from the President the authority he asks, we assume a great responsibility, whilst we have no power to control the negotiations, and virtually subject ourselves to imputation for any evil consequences that may follow. Suppose we resist the recommendation of the Executive, and refuse to authorize the notice, what will have been gained by the friends of national tranquility? The country will be harassed and convulsed by a system of popular agitation. The partisan press of the country, the organs, great and small, which pander to popular prejudice and passion, will proclaim that the whole of Oregon is ours. "The whole or none!" will be made the touchstone of patriotism, and the watchword of the faithful. They will inflame the national susceptibility. They will insist that our rights have been betrayed, and that the nation is humbled at the footstool of a foreign power. Demagogues will grow brave, defy the British, and make the welkin ring with swelling words of patriotic purpose—fighting, with impunity, tremendous battles and bloody sieges in prospective. Partisan assemblages and Oregon clubs will echo back the war-cry, proclaim their desperate resolves, and assert a clear title to 54° 40'. The spirit of conquest will stalk abroad, and national antipathy towards Britain will be aroused by perpetual appeals. It is but too apparent

that, with all this enginery of clamor and commotion, the public feeling will be inflamed till it is placed beyond the power of any Administration to compromise or adjust the difficulty, and then war becomes inevitable. For one, he was unwilling to expose the peace of the country, on a question like this, to the winds and waves of popular agitation. He preferred to locate the responsibility at one where the Constitution had intended to place it, upon the Executive branch of the Government, to be exercised under the restraints of official accountability.

If these apprehensions are deemed visionary in any quarter, he would reply that the events of 1844 are still fresh in his recollection, and after having seen a majority of the country enlist in the crusade for Texas and Oregon, with every probability that the peace of the country would be the forfeit, he must be permitted to hesitate before he consented to tempt ambition or recklessness to a renewal of the experiment.

He wished to present another consideration which deserved serious weight. If this question is kept open for the sport of demagogues, the prosperity of the country will be blighted by warlike rumors and apprehensions. In an uncertain, precarious peace, business is paralyzed, enterprise comes to a stand, and a complete stagnation is produced in the circulation and employment of capital. Distrust and panic pervade the commercial world, and there is an end of large undertakings. The presence of the enemy is not more disastrous, in some respects than the constant dread of his coming. It is our duty, if possible, to place the question on such grounds as shall promote its speedy settlement. By no other means can we impart to the country that confidence and security which sustain honest industry and enterprise, and ensure prosperity in the varied pursuits of life. In this view of the subject, he was convinced that inaction on our part will expose the country to more serious embarrassment than can result from the adoption of a resolution in proper form conferring ample powers on the Executive.

Mr. H. said, if the considerations that he had suggested had not removed all doubt from his mind, there was yet another view of the subject which appeared to him conclusive. A bill had passed the House at the last session to extend our laws and jurisdiction over the American population in Oregon, and a similar measure is now pending. It is proposed to establish military and civil authority there, to create military posts, courts of justice, Indian agencies, post offices, land offices, and such other institutions as are necessary to the practical assertion and maintenance of our sovereignty over the country. It seems to be conceded on all sides, that we are to enforce our jurisdiction at least to the same extent that Great Britain has done by her acts of Parliament. It must be admitted that there are many reasons in favor of extending protection to our citizens who have settled there, and it cannot be deferred for any considerable period. What ever may be thought of the wisdom or the folly of our people in severing the ties of home, and abandoning the comforts and blessings of civilized society, to encounter the hardships of a dreary, perilous march over the Rocky Mountains, and the privations of the wilderness in a country inferior in most respects to the soil of their nativity, still they are American citizens, and so long as they do not transcend our territorial limits, they are entitled to the protection and care of the Government.

But it was evident to him, that this measure is far more liable to disturb our peaceful relations with England, than any other step that has been proposed. That two separate Governments can at once exercise an independent jurisdiction over the same country without coming into collision, is, in the nature of things, a moral impossibility. Though British subjects may be specially excepted from the operation of our laws, that precaution will not remove the danger of conflict. For it must be borne in mind, that the Americans and British, dwelling in near proximity, are in daily intercourse, and mutual dealings are carried on between

public feeling will be. When controversies arise between an American and a British subject, or for one, he was us- When an individual of one nation commits an offence upon the other, which class like this, to the wind courts is to have jurisdiction of the case? Will Americans submit to be ar- responsibility at one ked by British officers and tried by British judges; or will British subjects Executive branch ceasably consent to become amenable to our authorities? It is idle to expect al accountability. Under the most favorable auspices, a double system of Government, each im- claiming a separate allegiance, and asserting its control over members of the d after having seen ame community, cannot harmoniously co-exist in the exercise of lawful autho- l Oregon, with ever- ity. Amongst wild and adventurous men, impatient of legal restraint—men feit, he must be pe- who have overleaped the Rocky Mountains, and who carry arms in their hands ver recklessness to a r- his intricate machinery of double government, can be successfully conducted, without conflict or violence, betrays a degree of credulity in which he could not

participate. It presupposes that the men of Oregon, bold and reckless spirits as many of them are known to be, are too perfect to require the restraints of civil Government and authority. Of all the plans that have been advanced, he considered this scheme or extending our laws over that country the most warlike in itself, and the most certain to produce collision and bloodshed. Yet it is viewed as a peace measure by many of those who consider the giving of notice an inevitable cause of war. It seems to be believed, that a belligerent act will be innocent and inoffensive, but to give notice of your *intention* would prove fatal to the peace of the country. He could not restrain his surprise at the opposition which is made to con- ferring authority upon the President to give the notice, by several gentlemen, friends of the Administration, whilst they insist that our title is clear to the whole of Oregon, and avow their readiness to establish our sovereignty over it at once by the erection of civil and military establishments.

Whilst they see imminent peril in authorizing the notice, which is in accordance with the treaty, they perceive no peril in direct practical measures for taking possession of the territory in contravention of the spirit and purpose of the convention. Alarmed at a measure peaceful in itself, and which England cannot regard as indicative of hostility, yet they are ready to rush onward to the brink of the precipice, and at once adopt the system of policy which alone can make the notice offensive; for, it must be obvious, that unaccompanied by the proposed acts of sovereignty and settlement, the notice must be harmless and inoperative.

The certainty that we are about to exercise jurisdiction over the territory, constituted the strongest reason, in his mind, for terminating the joint occupation. Before entering upon acts of sovereignty there, he maintained, that we are first bound to ascertain our rights and fix our limits in such mode as shall entitle us to exclusive and undisputed possession. It is contended, that, whilst the notice would be received as the signal for war, if we proceed quietly to take possession and assert our sway, England will acquiesce without complaint, and we will thus secure the country without a struggle. Nothing can be more fallacious than this argument, or more unreasonable than the anticipation that Great Britain will view with indifference the spread of our population and laws over Oregon. To counteract our progress she will extend her own establishments, and the difficulties of the controversy will continue to accumulate. If the two countries cannot now agree on terms of compromise, will the increase of population and capital in the territory serve to subdue their tenacity and produce more liberal dispositions? On the contrary, if we would preserve the peace of the country, and avert the calamities of ultimate war, it must be consummated, not by delay, but by such wise, moderate, yet decisive action, as shall constrain the proper authorities of the two Governments to bring this matter to an arrangement without further procrastination. As the friend of peace, he hoped a proposition

may be adopted which will give the President ample powers, accompanied by an expression of the sense of Congress, that the controversy ought to be settled by pacific negotiation.

For the proper exercise of its powers, let the Administration stand amenable to the country and to posterity. He hoped our action would be such as to impress upon the Executive authority of both nations the necessity of bringing this contest to a conclusion. It is evident that England desires its termination; and he believed she is prepared to unite with us in conditions of settlement, alike honorable to both parties. Under a proper expression from Congress, he was unwilling to believe the President will fail to make an honest endeavor to bring the difficulty to an adjustment. In this respect, he confessed he felt less apprehension than some others; for he was fully convinced that the administration neither intends or expects a war with England. If bold language had been employed, it was intended for domestic effect, and not to break the peace of the world. Let us look at the official action of the Executive as the true exponent of his intentions. Has he recommended to Congress any measures of preparation for defence, any increase of military or naval force, any augmentation of the public resources? In a word, any measure whatever indicating an apprehension that the peaceful relations of the country are to be disturbed? So far from asking an increase of revenue, he recommends a reduction of imposts. That he or his cabinet council intend to pursue a war policy, and expose the country to an attack from the most powerful nation of the world, whilst they fail to suggest to Congress any measures whatever in anticipation of the emergency would involve a responsibility, and indicate an atrocious enormity of purpose, which he was not prepared to impute, and he would not believe it without proof. If he was deceived, and it shall appear that the Administration are determined to delay or prevent a friendly arrangement of the controversy, we all know that the power of the Executive is ample already; and if he shall exercise it for the subversion of the national peace and happiness, upon his head the consequences must rest.

That the differences between the countries are susceptible of fair and equitable arrangement, on principles eminently honorable to both, seems too clear to admit of dispute. Fearful must be the retribution that will be visited upon either Government which, by sullen pertinacity or extreme pretensions, shall shock the civilization of the age, and violate the peace of the world.

In conclusion, Mr. H. made an earnest appeal to the friends of the measure to place the resolution in such proper and fitting form as shall enable moderate, rational men, who cherish the peace, honor, and dignity of the country, to unite in its support. He trusted the friends of the Administration, who brought it into power, and confide in its wisdom and patriotism, will consent to the modification proposed by the gentleman from Alabama. (Mr. HILLIARD,) by which the power to be conferred will be exercised upon the official judgment and discretion of the President. In this form it cannot embarrass pending negotiations, but may serve to fortify and strengthen the hands of the Executive. He appealed to them to give an united expression in favor of peaceful negotiation, that our action may not be misinterpreted by the country or the world. Nothing will more surely tend to preserve peace than a display of union and concert in our national councils. Let our proceedings be such as shall deserve to be approved by the enlightened judgment and patriotism of the country, and then, if war shall come, a spirit of justice will sanction the conflict, and the honor of the country will be vindicated by the resistless energies of a united people.

In our action upon a question like the present, involving the issues of peace and war, it becomes us to proceed in a spirit of moderation, patriotism, and magnanimity worthy the fame and the destiny of a great nation.

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