Thomas Corwin’s speech to Congress in 1847

What is the territory, Mr. President, which you propose to wrest from Mexico? ... You have taken from Mexico one-fourth of her territory, and you now propose to run a line comprehending about another third, and for what? ...

Sir, had one come and demanded Bunker Hill of the people of Massachusetts, had England’s lion ever showed himself there, is there a man over thirteen and under ninety who would not have been ready to meet him; is there a river on this continent that would not have run red with blood; is there a field but would have been piled high with the unburied bones of slaughtered Americans before these consecrated battlefields of liberty should have been wrested from us? But this same American goes into a sister republic and says to poor, weak Mexico, “Give up your territory—you are unworthy to possess it—I have got one-half already—all I ask of you is to give up the other!” ...

Mr. President, this uneasy desire to augment our territory has depraved the moral sense and blunted the otherwise keen sagacity of our people. What has been the fate of all nations who have acted upon the idea that they must advance! Our young orators cherish this notion with a fervid but fatally mistaken zeal. They call it by the mysterious name of “destiny.” “Our destiny,” they say, is “onward,” and hence they argue, with ready sophistry, the propriety of seizing upon any territory and any people that may lie in the way of our “fated” advance ...

Sir, look at this pretense of want of room. With twenty millions of people, you have about one thousand millions of acres of land, inviting settlement by every conceivable argument, bringing them down to a quarter of a dollar an acre, and allowing every man to squat where the pleases. ... 

There is one topic connected with this subject which I tremble when I approach, and yet I cannot forbear to notice it...I allude to the question of slavery. Opposition to its further extension, it must be obvious to everyone, is a deeply rooted determination with men of all parties in what we call the non-slaveholding states. ... Gentlemen of the South may call it prejudice, passion, hypocrisy, fanaticism. I shall not dispute with them now on that point. You and I cannot alter or change this position, if we would. ... How is it in the South? Can it be expected that they should expend in common their blood and their treasure in the acquisition of immense territory, and then willingly forgo the right to carry thither their slaves, and inhabit the conquered country if they please to do so? Sir, I know the feelings and opinions of the South too well to calculate on this. Nay, I believe they would even contend to any extremity for the mere right, had they no wish to exert it. I believe (and I confess I tremble when the conviction presses upon me) that there is equal obstinacy on both sides of this fearful question.

1 Thomas Corwin was a Whig senator from Ohio.
2 take by force
3 Bunker Hill was the first battle in the war of independence.
4 to massacre
5 weaken
6 to abandon
7 there
8 to fight for
If, then, we persist in war, which, if it terminates in anything short of a mere wanton⁹ waste of blood as well as money, must end (as this bill proposes) in the acquisition of territory, ...-this bill¹⁰ would seem to be nothing less than a bill to produce internal commotion¹¹. Should we prosecute this war another moment, or expend one dollar in the purchase or conquest of a single acre of Mexican land, the North and the South are brought into collision on a point where neither will yield¹²...Why, then, shall we, the representatives of the sovereign states of the Union--the chosen guardians of this confederated Republic, why should we precipitate this fearful struggle, by continuing a war the result of which must be to force us at once upon a civil conflict? Sir, rightly considered, this is treason, treason to the Union, treason to the dearest interests, the loftiest aspirations, the most cherished hopes of our constituents¹³...

Let us abandon all idea of acquiring further territory and by consequence cease at once to prosecute this war. Let us call home our armies, and bring them at once within our own acknowledged limits... Let us then close forever the approaches of internal feud¹⁴, and so return to the ancient concord and the old ways of national prosperity and permanent glory. Let us here, in this temple consecrated to the Union, perform a solemn lustration; let us wash Mexican blood from our hands, and on these altars, and in the presence of that image of the Father of his Country that looks down upon us, swear to preserve honorable peace with all the world and eternal brotherhood with each other.

---

⁹ needless  
¹⁰ the decision to declare war passed by Congress  
¹¹ agitation  
¹² to abandon  
¹³ voters, electors  
¹⁴ enmity