Caleb B. Smith’s Opposition to the Mexican War

Hal W. Bochin*

The spring of 1846 found Democrats well in control of the national government. Supported by majorities of 143 to 77 in the House and 31 to 25 in the Senate, President James K. Polk was actively constructing national policy from the planks of his 1844 platform.1 Within a week of his inauguration he had fulfilled his pledge to offer annexation to Texas.2 A promised reduction of tariff rates seemed imminent and Polk had offered no encouragement to those who sought federal assistance for the construction of roads or harbors.3 Members of the Whig opposition, traditional advocates of a high protective tariff and of federal assistance for internal improvements, desperately needed an issue with which to discredit the administration. When news reached Washington on May 9, 1846, that American and Mexican forces had clashed on the Texas border, congressional Whig leaders, typified by Representative Caleb B. Smith of Indiana, suddenly found themselves involved in a rhetorical situation filled with promise and risk.4 If they handled the war issue properly, they

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2 Polk modified the message offering annexation which John Tyler had dispatched the day before Polk assumed the presidency. Charles Sellers, James K. Polk, Continentalist, 1843-1846 (Princeton, 1966), 216-17.

3 The House and Senate approved a low revenue tariff on July 28, 1846, and Polk vetoed a river and harbors bill on August 3, 1846. Ibid., 465-72.

4 The three constituents of a rhetorical situation (an exigence or
might weaken the position of the President and his party. If they acted injudiciously, they might commit political suicide.

Since 1840 the Mexican government had been unwilling or unable to pay the more than $5 million in debts it owed to Americans. Furthermore, it had refused to accept Polk's claim that the Rio Grande marked the border between Texas and Mexico. When the government of Mariano Paredes refused to accept John Slidell, the American minister sent by Polk to negotiate the debt and border questions, the President felt he had "ample cause" for war. Then, even as a war message was being prepared, word arrived that the small military force under General Zachary Taylor, which Polk had sent to the Rio Grande to put pressure on the Mexican government, had been attacked by Mexican troops. The initiation of hostilities brought the war message to Congress a day earlier than anticipated, and on May 11, 1846, Polk formally asked Congress for permission to enroll volunteers in a war begun "by the act of the Republic of Mexico."

With the major exception of John C. Calhoun, most Democrats lined up behind the President. Calhoun, who argued that the existence of hostilities did not mean that the country was at war, since only Congress could declare war, tried to limit the scope of the fighting. He feared that a conflict between the North and South would arise if any territory were conquered from Mexico. Although some northern

urgent problem, an audience or decision maker, and constraints or factors which influence both speaker and audience) are explained in Lloyd F. Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation," Philosophy and Rhetoric, 1 (Winter, 1968), 1-14.

* For Polk's view of the debt question, see his message to Congress of December 8, 1846, in James D. Richardson, ed., A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897 (10 vols., Washington, 1896-1899), IV, 473-79; or in Congressional Globe, 29 Cong., 2 Sess., 4-5.

Kohl states: "The great cause of the war was expansion, the great pretext under which it worked was the claims." Clayton Kohl, Claims as a Cause of the Mexican War (New York, 1914), 77.

* An excellent account of the border dispute between Texas and Mexico is found in Frederick Merk, The Monroe Doctrine and American Expansionism, 1843-1848 (New York, 1966), 128-68.


* Ibid., 385-87.

* By adding the words cited as a preamble to the volunteer bill, the Democratic leadership hoped to compel Congress to endorse the administration's version of the cause of the war or vote against assisting the American forces on the Rio Grande. Sellers, James K. Polk, 416.

* Margaret L. Colt, John C. Calhoun: American Portrait (Boston, 1950), 440-44.
Democrats felt the real purpose of the war was to acquire territory for the expansion of slavery, they did not openly manifest their opposition to it.11

Unwilling to criticize the war while the fate of the American army was unknown, most Whigs joined the Democrats in supporting the volunteer bill, which passed on May 12, 1846, by votes of 174 to 14 in the House and 40 to 2 in the Senate.12 Led by Joshua R. Giddings of Ohio, the Whig solons who voted against the bill in the House became the spearhead of congressional opposition to the war.13 Throughout the two year conflict most of the “immortal fourteen” refused to vote the men and supplies requested by the President.14 Giddings even refused to support messages of congratulations offered to victorious military commanders. He would not praise those “who have voluntarily engaged in this work of slaughtering our race.”15

Moderate members of the Whig party, including Indiana’s Representative Smith, sought a more conservative and, they hoped, a more popular position. Newspaper editor John Defrees of the Indianapolis Indiana State Journal explained the strategy in a “confidential” letter to Daniel Pratt: “So long as the war lasts, our flag and those who uphold it must be sustained, while at the same time, those who placed that flag where it is, must be denounced. . . .”16 The Terre

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12 The fourteen Whigs in the House voting against the volunteer bill were John Quincy Adams, George Ashmun, Joseph Grinnell, Charles Hudson, and Daniel King of Massachusetts; Henry Cranston of Rhode Island; Erastus Culver of New York; Luther Severance of Maine; John Strohm of Pennsylvania; Columbus Delano, Joseph Root, Daniel Tilden, Joseph Vance, and Joshua Giddings of Ohio. Whig senators opposed to the measure were Thomas Clayton of Delaware and John Davis of Massachusetts. In the House 50 Whigs supported the bill and 13 abstained. In the Senate 16 Whigs voted for the bill and 6 did not vote. Congressional Globe, 29 Cong., 1 Sess., 795, 804.

13 Giddings’ leadership role is discussed in James Brewer Stewart, Joshua R. Giddings and the Tactics of Radical Politics (Cleveland, 1970), 114. See also Joshua R. Giddings to Mrs. Laura Giddings, May 17, 1846, Joshua R. Giddings Papers (Ohio Historical Society, Columbus).

14 Whig voting patterns on war issues are analyzed in Silbey, Shrine of Party, 172-88. Giddings often referred to his group as the “immortal fourteen.” Joshua R. Giddings to J. Addison Giddings, May 30, 1846, January 13, 1847, Giddings Papers.

15 Joshua R. Giddings, Speeches in Congress (Boston, 1853), 319.

16 John Defrees to Daniel Pratt, April 17, 1847, Daniel Pratt Papers
Haute Wabash Express, a Whig paper, condemned the war, but added that "for the soldiers' sake we should have given the President and his Cabinet almost anything they wished, and held them to a strict accountability before their masters—the people." That was in fact the position taken by Smith and most other congressional Whigs. They never ceased denouncing the war as unnecessary and unconstitutional, but they were equally consistent in voicing their support for the men who were waging it. Ill at the time of the voting on the first volunteer bill, Smith later admitted that he would have voted for it because "[a]t that time our little army was in a hostile country, surrounded by an enemy of greatly superior numbers."

Recently appointed to the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Smith's importance in the national Whig party was on the rise. A member of the Indiana House of Representatives from 1833 to 1837 and again in 1840 and 1841, Smith had served as speaker from 1835 to 1837. In a triangular election in 1841, he was defeated in his first bid for Congress, but he won a seat easily in 1843 and again in 1845. After waiting two months to make his first House pronouncement about the conflict with Mexico, Smith attracted an attentive congressional audience on July 16, 1846, when he announced that although he had seen dissent "met by violent denunciation" and had heard criticism of the President decried as "treason to the country" he would add his name to the list of critics of the war.

Smith's position probably did not surprise his colleagues. Like Henry Clay, whom he had long supported, Smith had opposed the annexation of Texas and had predicted blood-
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shed should it be accomplished. Furthermore, he had strong support from his Fourth District constituents. The four counties comprising the district—Fayette, Henry, Union, and Wayne—had consistently given majorities to Whig candidates for Congress since 1837. The Quakers of Wayne County, and others who opposed war in general and the Mexican War in particular, comprised one of the largest interest groups in Smith's district.

Although he was addressing the Democratically controlled House, Smith was in reality speaking directly to the people of Indiana: "My constituents desire information. . . . I intend to give them this information. . . ." He divided his well organized speech into two parts: the first, a point by point rebuttal of Polk's May 12 justification of the war; the second, a listing of what he believed were the real reasons for America's involvement in the conflict. Before attacking Polk, however, Smith attempted to strengthen his own credibility. He sought to build rapport with his Hoosier audience by announcing that he would not allow them to be "kept in ignorance. . . ." The Democratic administration had tried to keep the truth from the people, but he would give them the facts. Furthermore, he would report the truth even "at the hazard of incurring a portion of that vituperation which has been so liberally heaped upon others." Donning the mantle of the patriot, he recognized "the obligation which patriotism imposes upon every citizen to defend his country," but he would not support a war unjustly declared by the President. Thus armed as a courageous and patriotic friend of the people, he began his attack on the President's justification for the war.

The strength of Smith's presentation rested in his careful examination of the debt owed by Mexico to American citizens and in his analysis of the Texas-Mexico boundary issue. In simple, direct language Smith offered an historical

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CALEB BLOOD SMITH
CONGRESSMAN, 1843-1849
SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR, 1861-1863

Courtesy Indiana Division, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis
narrative in which he reviewed the negotiations between Mexico and the United States on the debt question and found "nothing which would justify a resort to war, or which can be urged as a pretext or excuse for the war in which we are engaged." Referring to the debts owed by several states to Great Britain, he repeated a common Whig analogy when he suggested that if debts justified war, "several sovereign States of this Confederacy . . . would be in imminent danger of war."

Smith added nothing new to the debate on the border question. However, in presenting his constituents with his version of the circumstances surrounding the outbreak of hostilities, he selected the facts most damaging to the administration and presented them in a clear and vivid manner. He refuted Polk's assertion that the legislative acts of Texas showed that she had a title to the disputed territory: "As well might he contend that we could acquire a title to the Canadas by passing a legislative act declaring them to be ours." He asserted, but offered no evidence, that Texas "had no settlements beyond the Nueces . . . ." He also argued that an examination of the congressional debates on annexation would show that "the united opinion of members" of both Houses was that the question was unsettled. Finally, he pointed out that Santa Fe, east of the Rio Grande and thus claimed by Polk, contained "a Mexican population . . . ." The Mexican laws were "regularly administered there" and all her officers were "supported by the Mexican Government."

Although the Democratically dominated House Foreign Relations Committee had defended the President's movement of General Zachary Taylor to the Rio Grande, Smith, a member of the committee, vigorously dissented from its report. Charles J. Ingersoll, Pennsylvania Democrat and chairman of the committee, claimed that hostilities had begun on American soil; but Smith declared that eighteen months earlier Ingersoll had referred to the desert between the Nueces and the Rio Grande as the border. In writing the committee's report, Smith asserted, the chairman had largely relied upon "his imagination for his facts." Its readers must be wary: "He who relies upon its conclusions will be as far from the truth as are many of the statements which it contains. The cause must be bad which its friends find necessary
to defend by such means."  

Ingersoll was at his seat during the speech and Smith "looked him in the face while he was holding him up to scorn," but, reportedly, it was not in Ingersoll's "power to blush."  

Smith suggested that Polk had sent the troops to the Rio Grande "with the deliberate design of acquiring California, and perhaps other provinces of Mexico."  

Effectively using one of the few pieces of evidence offered in the speech, Smith read a letter from William Marcy, secretary of war, to Colonel J. D. Stevenson of New York, asking him to raise a regiment of volunteers composed of such men "as would be likely to remain, at the end of the war, either in Oregon, or any territory in that region of the Globe which may then be a part of the United States."  

The letter showed that as early as June, 1846, the government felt it would possess new territory in the West at the end of the conflict. Forecasting the future, Smith expected that "[w]hen the war shall be ended, California and other northern provinces will be in the possession of our armies. If she [Mexico] cannot pay the money, our Government will demand a cession of her territory as an equivalent. . . ."  

He considered the administration "a Southern one" and believed that "[t]he acquisition of California is desired as a means of extending and perpetuating the power and influence of the South."  

To this point in the speech, Smith's remarks might well have been written by Joshua Giddings or another member of the "immortal fourteen."  

Smith diverged from the radical Whig position, however, when he declared that it was "not the desire of the Whigs in the House to embarrass the Administration by withholding the supplies necessary to bring the war to a close. Wanton and unjustifiable as they view the war, still we are engaged in it, and our army must be sustained."  

Just as Giddings had clearly staked out the minority Whig position of denying the President all men and supplies requested, Smith's statements exemplified the pragmatic course preferred by the moderate majority of the party. Determined to make support for the troops something quite apart from support of the war, he rejected the idealistic

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26 Columbus Ohio State Journal, quoted in Indianapolis Indiana State Journal, August 19, 1846.
Smith's views were well received on both the national and state levels. The Washington, D.C., *National Intelligencer* reported that he had spoken “with great earnestness and fervor in condemnation of the war.” The Baltimore *Patriot* characterized the speech as “one of the most terrible philippics against Mr. Polk... uttered during the session.” The *Indiana State Journal* reprinted the speech, noting that the reporter for the Columbus *Ohio State Journal* had praised Smith’s effort and that the speech “was highly spoken of” by several other Whig papers in eastern cities. When Smith returned to Indiana in late August it was reported that large and enthusiastic audiences greeted him at Richmond, Centerville, Liberty, and New Castle. The Whig Richmond *Palladium* asserted, probably more as wishful thinking than as fact, that “Mr. Smith is listened to with much attention, and his exposition of the conduct of the administration is awakening the eyes of the honest Democrats.” The success of Smith’s speaking tour apparently upset some Democrats. A township Democratic meeting in Waterloo resolved that “we believe the statements of C. B. Smith... to be gross misrepresentations... his extraordinary labors to defame Mr. Polk are mere political freaks designed to tell in his favor in a coming contest.”

Smith returned to Washington in December, 1846, to hear Polk’s annual message, which contained the magnificent understatement: “It is a source of high satisfaction to know that the relations of the United States with all other nations, with a single exception, are of the most amicable character.” The “single exception” forced the President to make a lengthy defense of his policies toward Mexico and of his claim that American territory had been violated. The significance of the message, however, lay in Polk’s public repetition of a charge which at least one Ohio paper and probably other

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27 Congressional Globe, 29 Cong., 1 Sess., Appendix, 1118.
29 Richmond *Palladium*, August 21 [sic], 25, September 8, 1846. The *Palladium* for August 18, 1846, is misdated August 21 on the front page.
30 Ibid., September 8, 1846.
Democratic journals had been making for some time and which now received a new aura of credibility. In a statement which was quoted and misquoted until the war's end, Polk complained that criticism of the war had been extensively circulated in Mexico and added: "A more effectual means could not have been devised to encourage the enemy and protract the war than to advocate and adhere to their cause, and thus give them 'aid and comfort.'" 

Smith responded to Polk on January 6, 1847, during debate on a bill before the House to raise ten additional regiments. He had little to say about the bill itself, except to comment that he believed its only object was a "vast increase of Executive patronage. . . ." However, it did provide him with an opportunity to express his views on "the existing state of our public affairs"—of vital concern since he believed the government was "daily and hourly sinking under the utter imbecility of the Administration which controls it." Combining a rhetorical question with an analogy, Smith justified his remarks: "Shall the mariner, when he sees the vessel, in which his life and that of all the crew is embarked, plunging madly upon the breakers, through the wickedness or unskilfulness of the pilot, sit still and hold his peace?"

Besides leading the country into the war, Polk was waging it poorly: "Our Democrat friends assured us that they would end the war. . . . in ninety days. . . . Well, sir, it is now about eight months since the war commenced, and although we have expended many millions of dollars, and sacrificed several thousand lives, it seems to be generally supposed that we are no nearer a peace than when it began." Smith's language strengthened the force of his attack. He used many rhetorical questions, usually in groups of three or four. Instead of relying on similes or metaphors, he painted vivid descriptions with series of adjectives. He pictured the Mexican leader Santa Anna, for example, as "cruel," "rapacious," "blood-thirsty," "remorseless," "avaricious," "perfidious," and "deceitful."

Smith's speech might be dismissed as mere political invective had he not turned from his attack on Polk to look to the future and to offer a solution to the problem of how to

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33 Cleveland Plain Dealer, August 21, November 18, 1846.
34 Congressional Globe, 29 Cong., 2 Sess., 3-4.
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Smith admitted, what Giddings had claimed for some time, that “the question of slavery, in connexion with the territory of which we are seeking to despoil Mexico, cannot be avoided.” Like Giddings, he believed the slavery question would “admit of no compromise,” but his idea of “no compromise” differed radically from the notion of the tall spokesman for the Western Reserve. While Giddings claimed that the North should rely on the Wilmot Proviso, a congressional measure to forbid slavery in new territories, Smith, who consistently voted for the Proviso, desired to avoid the question of new territories entirely. Afraid that a congressional debate on admitting new territories into the Union would “come attended with a train of consequences more alarming than any which attended the admission of Missouri into the Union,” Smith offered a solution, saying, “the only ground of safety—the only ground which will secure the peace and harmony of the country—. . . is to keep the territory, with all the distracting questions connected with it, out of the Union.” Although he called it a “no compromise” position, Smith had in fact offered middle ground between those forces who would bring free territory into the Union through the Wilmot Proviso and those Southerners who wanted additional slave territory. Neither side would lose if no new territory were annexed.

Smith sat down to the approbation of his Whig colleagues who no doubt recognized the speech for what it was—a partisan political attack designed to stimulate and to unite the Whig party for the coming congressional and presidential elections. As in his first speech Smith offered no constitutional argument against Polk’s conduct, nor did he present the philosophical or moral grounds on which he claimed the war was unjust. He preferred to engage in ad hominem attacks against the President, whom he characterized as a “despot” of “small mind” and “low cunning” who engaged in “usurpation” and “imbecility.” Even the apparently genuine concern Smith evinced over the slavery question may have been an attempt to find in rejecting any annexation common ground on which northern and southern Whigs could unite and thus avoid the sectional division
which the Wilmot Proviso had rent in the Democratic party.\textsuperscript{35} When Smith referred to "safe ground," he probably thought of his party as well as of his nation.\textsuperscript{36}

Those who agreed with Smith found it "a very able and forcible, as well as an eloquent speech. . . ."\textsuperscript{37} The Cleveland \textit{True Democrat} declared that Smith was "the ablest delegate from his State." The Richmond \textit{Palladium} and the Indianapolis \textit{Indiana State Journal} printed the entire address.\textsuperscript{38} On the Democratic side, the Richmond \textit{Jeffersonian} reported that Smith had been "blowing out in Congress against the Mexican war." The editor thought the speech "would have been very creditable to him had it been delivered before a Mexican Congress. It partakes of the wordy, windy character of Mexican proclamations, speeches, etc."\textsuperscript{39} Giddings and other House members who opposed the granting of any appropriations to carry on the war were again disappointed that Smith had refused to add the weight of his prestige to their cause.\textsuperscript{40} However, Smith's position probably pleased his Quaker constituents. He was selected to present to the House on January 27, 1847, "the memorial of the Society of Friends, of Indiana, in yearly meeting assembled, praying the adoption of such

\textsuperscript{35} Quotations from the speech are taken from \textit{Speech of Mr. C. B. Smith, of Indiana, on the Mexican War. Delivered in the House of Representatives of the U. States, Jan. 6, 1847} (Washington, 1847). The text may also be found in Indianapolis \textit{Indiana State Journal}, February 16, 1847, and in Richmond \textit{Palladium}, February 2, 1847. A third person report of the speech is in \textit{Congressional Globe}, 29 Cong., 2 Sess., 122-24. The Wilmot Proviso was an amendment offered on August 8, 1846, by Representative David Wilmot, a Democrat from Pennsylvania, to a two million dollar appropriation bill. The amendment would have excluded slavery from any territory acquired from Mexico by virtue of the appropriation. The amended bill passed the House by a vote of 85 to 79, but the Senate adjourned for the session without voting on it. For the effects of the Wilmot Proviso issue on the Democratic party, see Morrison, \textit{Democratic Politics and Sectionalism}, passim. Smith voted for versions of the Proviso on February 15 and March 3, 1847. \textit{Congressional Globe}, 29 Cong., 2 Sess., 425, 573.

\textsuperscript{36} One Whig editor saw political value in arguing against annexation of any Mexican territory "because it affords common ground upon which the Whigs of the North and South can stand and cooperate harmoniously." Columbus \textit{Ohio State Journal}, August 18, 1847. Among southern Democrats, Calhoun also supported avoiding the issue of territories. Col. John C. Calhoun, 448.

\textsuperscript{37} Baltimore \textit{Patriot}, quoted in Richmond \textit{Palladium}, January 19, 1847.

\textsuperscript{38} Cleveland \textit{True Democrat}, January 12, 1847; Richmond \textit{Palladium}, February 2, 1847; Indianapolis \textit{Indiana State Journal}, February 16, 1847.

\textsuperscript{39} Richmond, Indiana, \textit{Jeffersonian}, January 13, 1847.

\textsuperscript{40} Compare Cleveland \textit{True Democrat}, January 12, 1847, and Joshua R. Giddings to J. Addison Giddings, January 23, 1849, Giddings Papers.
measure as will effect a speedy termination of the war with Mexico.”

Although the Whigs of the Fourth District would not meet to select a congressional candidate until April and the election would not be held until the first week of August, the *Palladium*, on February 2, without Smith’s knowledge, “in accordance with . . . the wishes of the Whigs of this district,” announced him as a candidate for reelection. In March, Democrat William Dailey issued a challenge that he would “deliver speeches upon the war question” at Connersville, Liberty, and Centerville, and that “C. B. Smith, Esq., is requested to meet me at each of those places.” Dailey spoke as advertised, but a debate never occurred. Although Smith was present in Connersville and wished to reply, the Democrats claimed “it was a locofoco meeting and they did not wish to hear Whig speeches.”

The Whig convention confirmed Smith as the party’s congressional candidate, and the Democratic convention which met in May selected Charles H. Test, a popular attorney and former Whig, to oppose him in the August election. The Whig journal in Cambridge City described Test as “a gentleman, whose talents command our respect, and besides this he preaches, occasionally, from a Whig text.” Not everyone, however, took Test’s candidacy seriously. The *Indiana State Journal* believed that Test was running for the fun of it: “He has so long been a candidate that he can’t live without the excitement.” Smith confidently wrote Giddings that he was “in the field and canvassing the district in opposition to the war.” He claimed that he would be reelected by as large a majority as he had ever had. Whig papers began to speculate that following Smith’s triumph and a nationwide Whig victory, Smith might be selected Speaker of the House.

The campaign halted for a two week period in late May.

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42 *Richmond Palladium*, February 2, March 30, April 13, 1847.
45 Smith to Joshua R. Giddings, May 21, 1847, Giddings Papers.
46 Indianapolis *Indiana State Journal*, June 15, 1847.
and early June while Smith and Test represented clients at the federal circuit court in Indianapolis, but once it resumed the Mexican War quickly became the main issue between the candidates. Smith claimed that the war was "unconstitutionally commenced—that it was unnecessary, and wrong—that it might and should have been avoided, and that the President and his party are responsible for the evils the war has brought upon the country. That Congress, at any early day, should bring the war to a close, and tender to Mexico an honorable peace, disclaiming any wish to dismember Mexico of any of her territory." In the Palladium's biased view Judge Test's speech was "fight, fight, fight! That the Mexicans had committed great outrages upon the commerce of this country, and they should be punished for it. . . . In short, that the war was all right, and should be vigorously prosecuted until Mexico shall sue for peace, and will pay all indemnities due American citizens . . . in money or in land."46

For four weeks Smith and Test made joint appearances throughout the Fourth District, speaking at Hagerstown, Williamsburg, Centerville, and numerous other small Indiana farming communities. Test, on the one occasion fully reported, opened and closed the debate with half hour speeches, bracketing Smith's one hour presentation.49 On the stump, Smith attacked the war with the same vigor he had demonstrated in his House speeches; Test upheld the President and his party's platform which highly approved "of the course of the present democratic administration in the vigorous prosecution of the war against Mexico, and of its acts generally."48 Test referred to critics of the war as "broad-brims," and with "astonishment" the Cambridge Reveille quoted or perhaps misquoted him saying, "should the Priests approve of guerrilla warfare against our troops in the south, he [Test] would go in for robbing every church in Mexico!!"51 The possibility that a popular third party candidate might enter the race and draw off some of Smith's aboli-

47 Cambridge City Cambridge Reveille, June 9, 1847.
48 Richmond Palladium, July 20, 1847.
49 Ibid., June 22, 29, July 6, 13, 20, 27, 1847. The description of the debate is in ibid., June 29, 1847.
50 Ibid., June 15, 1847. See also ibid., May 25, June 29, 1847.
51 Cambridge City Cambridge Reveille, June 9, 16, 1847.
tionist support, as had occurred in 1845 when the Liberty party offered a candidate, posed the only serious threat to his reelection. The Liberty party did nominate Thomas R. Stanford in 1847, but he declined the nomination, expressed his determination to vote for Smith, and urged his friends to do the same.

As the campaign closed, the Richmond Jeffersonian called for Test's election "not because he is a democrat, nor because he has claims on the democracy of the 4th district, but merely, because he is the advocate of his country's cause, the vindicator of her honor, the sworn foe of her enemy, and the supporter of her rights." The editor of the rival Palladium simply asked: "Are we for peace or war?" If, as both sides claimed, a vote for Smith was a vote against the war, then the Fourth District voted against the war. On August 2, 1847, Smith collected 4,988 of the ballots cast as against 3,540 for Test, an increase of two per cent over Smith's winning margin in 1845 when there had been three candidates in the field. Following his victory Smith campaigned for antiwar Whig candidates in other states. The Democratic press in Robert Schenck's Ohio district did not appreciate Smith's presence: "Caleb B. Smith, of Indiana, a man of ability, and an effective public speaker, certainly, but who ought, in a local election, to have remained in his own bailiwick, is to speak again."

On September 27 Smith brought Schenck and Senator Tom Corwin of Ohio to an antiwar rally in Richmond attended by "[a]n immense number of the citizens" from Ohio and Indiana. Corwin delivered the main address, but Smith added "a few brief but eloquent remarks." Seeing a revival of the Whig party across the country, Smith thought his own chances of becoming speaker of the house were "reasonably fair," and he attempted to gain the support of a solid Indiana

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52 Ibid., July 14, 1847; Riker and Thornbrough, Indiana Election Returns, 111.
53 Cambridge City Cambridge Revellle, July 28, 1847; Richmond Palladium, July 20, 1847.
54 Richmond Jeffersonian, June 16, 1847, quoted in Richmond Palladium, July 6, 1847.
55 Riker and Thornbrough, Indiana Election Returns, 111, 115.
56 Dayton, Ohio, Western Empire, September 23, 1847.
57 Richmond Palladium, September 28, 1847.
delegation. Searching for support for his candidacy from Whigs opposed to the presidential aspirations of Zachary Taylor—but not wanting to appear too eager for the position—Smith wrote Giddings: “I am anxious to see an antiwar, anti-Taylor, Northern Whig elected Speaker and if our friends shall conclude they can be more likely to succeed with any man besides myself, I will cheerfully acquiesce.” Smith attracted strong western newspaper support for his candidacy. Both the Indiana State Journal and the Ohio State Journal endorsed his selection, and the Cleveland True Democrat urged: “Let those who are determined to maintain the Proviso stand firm for Caleb B. Smith, of Indiana, and he will be elected. He is every way qualified in head, heart, and experience, for that station.” Smith’s friends were disappointed, however, when the Whig caucus gave Robert C. Winthrop of Massachusetts a thirty-two vote majority over Smith and, eventually, the speaker’s chair. Test graciously wrote Smith that he would like to have seen a Democrat elevated to the speakership, “but since that could not be under the circumstances it would have gratified me that our District should have been honored with the office.” Smith’s sister reported that one friend felt he had not been selected because he had come out “so bitterly against the war.”

With the first session of the Thirtieth Congress under way, Smith wrote Pratt on January 25, 1848, that a rumor of a peace with Mexico was circulating throughout Washington and that he believed there was some foundation to the rumor. Nevertheless, on February 3 he delivered his third major address on the war which was “unnecessarily and unconstitutionally commenced by the President. . . .” Without

59 Smith to Elisha Embree, August 26, 1847, Elisha Embree Papers (Indiana Division, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis).
60 Smith to Joshua R. Giddings, September 3, 1847, Giddings Papers.
61 Indianapolis Indiana State Journal, September 7, 1847; Columbus Ohio State Journal, September 14, 1847; Cleveland True Democrat, December 1, 1847.
64 Sarah Hankins to Smith, December 18, 1847, Smith Papers.
65 Smith to Daniel Pratt, January 25, 1848, Pratt Papers.
wasting time on the question of the origin of the war, a subject which "has been very ably and thoroughly discussed, not only at this session, but during the last Congress," Smith chose to examine the cost of the war and the war's effect on the national debt. As in his previous speeches, he asserted that he spoke to reveal information which the government had attempted to withhold from the public. Using official Treasury Department figures, Smith undoubtedly bored many of his colleagues by detailing federal costs to the penny. He made the important point, however, that throughout the war the administration had consistently underestimated expenses and overestimated revenues. In the 1846-1847 fiscal year a $19,000,000 error had been made. "Are we," Smith wondered, "to attribute it to the errors of the Secretary of the Treasury . . . . [or] has there been an attempt to cover up and conceal from the country the enormous expenses of the war, and the alarming national debt it is creating?" Smith's arguments about the dangers involved with being in debt would have had great influence with westerners who had recently seen the unhappy effects of debt in their own states.

In words which show the hazards of making political forecasts, Smith predicted that no peace treaty would be signed until after the presidential election in November so that as much Mexican territory as possible could be taken. Apparently he did not completely accept the peace rumors he had mentioned in his letter to Pratt, and he had no way of knowing that the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo had been signed in Mexico the day before he rose to speak. Smith concluded with the plea he had made in his second speech, that no Mexican territory be taken: "If we can succeed in wringing from the distress and suffering of Mexico, a cession of more of her territory, every foot which we thus acquire will prove a curse and a calamity to us."66

66 Quotations from the speech are taken from Speech of Mr. Caleb B. Smith, of Indiana, on the War and Its Cost Delivered in the House of Representatives of the U. States, February 3, 1848 (Washington, 1848). The text may also be found in Cambridge City Cambridge Reveille, March 8, 1848, and in Richmond Palladium, March 1, 1848. For a third person report of the speech, see Congressional Globe, 30 Cong., 1 Sess., 294-97. The debt issue was probably very much alive to the people of Indiana, who had seen their state bankrupted in the late 1830s and early 1840s by an over ambitious program of internal improvements construction. See John D. Barnhart and Donald F. Carmony, Indiana: From Frontier to Industrial Commonwealth (4 vols., New York, 1954), I, 333-38.
Whigs reacted favorably to Smith's address. A friend wrote: "Your Speech . . . has just been published in the [New Castle, Indiana,] 'Courier' at full length and gave general Satisfaction to the Whigs."^67 The Cambridge Reveille and the Richmond Palladium also published the speech.^68

News of the signed peace treaty soon reached Washington, and on February 22 Polk submitted it to the Senate where it was ratified on March 10.^69 The war was over, but Smith's antiwar activities and his determination to avoid a sectional split within the Whig party placed him in opposition to Zachary Taylor's nomination for the presidency. To long time friend Allen Hamilton, Smith confided that "if Gen Taylor shall adhere to his present position and refuse to give his opinions upon the war and other great questions . . . our Convention ought not and will not nominate him. . . ."^70 Taylor's only claim to support rested on his prosecution of a war that the Whigs opposed. Smith preferred Justice John McLean of the Supreme Court, whom he felt would be a compromise candidate for supporters of both Taylor and Taylor's principal rival, Henry Clay.^71 Smith energetically supported McLean at the Whig national convention in Philadelphia, but the Whigs ultimately nominated Taylor.^72 In spite of his once having claimed that running Taylor was "absolutely absurd and ridiculous," Smith stumped Indiana for the Whig ticket.^73 In a public letter to his constituents in which he discussed Taylor's character, he reduced the issues to the single one of whether to elect a Democrat who would continue the Polk policies or a Whig who would not. From that point of view, he could claim that it was "entirely consistent" with his principles "to support General Taylor against General [Lewis] Cass."^74

Following the national Whig victory, many Hoosiers and Smith himself thought that Taylor would appoint him post-

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^67 Joshua Holland to Smith, February 27, 1848, Smith Papers.
^68 Cambridge City Cambridge Reveille, March 8, 1848; Richmond Palladium, March 1, 1848.
^69 Congressional Globe, 30 Cong., 1 Sess., 456n.
^70 Smith to Allen Hamilton, February 16, 1848, Allen Hamilton Papers (Indiana Division, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis).
^71 Smith to Hamilton, March 26, 1848, ibid.
^73 Smith to Joshua R. Giddings, September 3, 1847, Giddings Papers.
^74 Richmond Palladium, July 4, 1848.
master general. A letter writing campaign for Smith was quickly organized and his qualifications were sent to leading Whigs and to friends of Taylor across the country. John C. Crittenden received a petition from sixty-nine Indiana Whigs asking his support in finding Smith “some position in the Administration of the Government at Washington.” Smith asked friends for newspaper support and Schuyler Colfax secured for Smith “the unanimous recommendation of Michigan’s prominent Whigs . . . & also many from Illinois and Wisconsin.” Colfax added: “Mr. Smith says he may not need any of these recommendations, but as Colonel E[dward] D. Baker of Illinois is coming on with a pocketful, he thinks it best to be fully armed.” At least one supporter believed so strongly that Smith would be selected for the cabinet that he sent him a request for a patronage position. Unfortunately for Smith, Baker, and a host of other potential officeholders, Jacob Collamer of Vermont became postmaster general. Smith, ironically, received an appointment to the Board of Commissioners set up by Taylor to adjust American claims against Mexico.

Smith’s switch from opposition of Taylor to support of his candidacy did not go unnoticed. Giddings complained: “Caleb B. Smith and [Richard W.] Thompson have manifested such detestable servility that I think neither will again be elected. I intend if I speak again to place Smith on the shelf. I am told I have the power, if so I will try to exert it.” Giddings never tested his power since neither Thompson nor Smith ran for national elective office after 1847.

Political considerations seemingly influenced Caleb Smith’s antiwar rhetoric as much as did the moral principles he espoused. Having waited more than two months to deliver a House speech about the war, he spurned the opportunity to join those Whigs who based their opposition to the

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67 Schuyler Colfax to Pratt, January 29, 1849, Pratt Papers.
68 John Defrees to Smith, February 27, 1849, Smith Papers.
69 Holman Hamilton, Zachary Taylor: Soldier in the White House (Indianapolis, 1951), 152.
70 Joshua R. Giddings to J. Addison Giddings, January 23, 1849, Giddings Papers.
71 Biographical Directory of the American Congress, 1710, 1811.
conflict on principle. Instead, like most members of his party, he adopted those positions which he felt would enlist the most popular support. He condemned Polk for initiating the war, but supplied and praised the soldiers who waged it. Fearing that the slavery question might disrupt the Whig party, he sought to avoid the issue by advocating that no territory be taken from Mexico. When most Whigs favored the presidential candidacy of a man whom Smith felt unqualified for the office, he, nevertheless, campaigned vigorously for him. John Defrees may have summarized Smith's feelings and those of many another Whig when he described the notion of refusing any support to an unjust war as "pure, unadulterated Christianity, but, unfortunately, that has very little to do in determining elections."

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82 Defrees to Pratt, April 17, 1847, Pratt Papers. Defrees was commenting on a speech by Senator Thomas Corwin of Ohio in which Corwin claimed that if the war deserved condemnation so, too, did the activities (such as supplying troops) which prolonged it. The speech is in Congressional Globe, 29 Cong., 2 Sess., Appendix, 211-18.