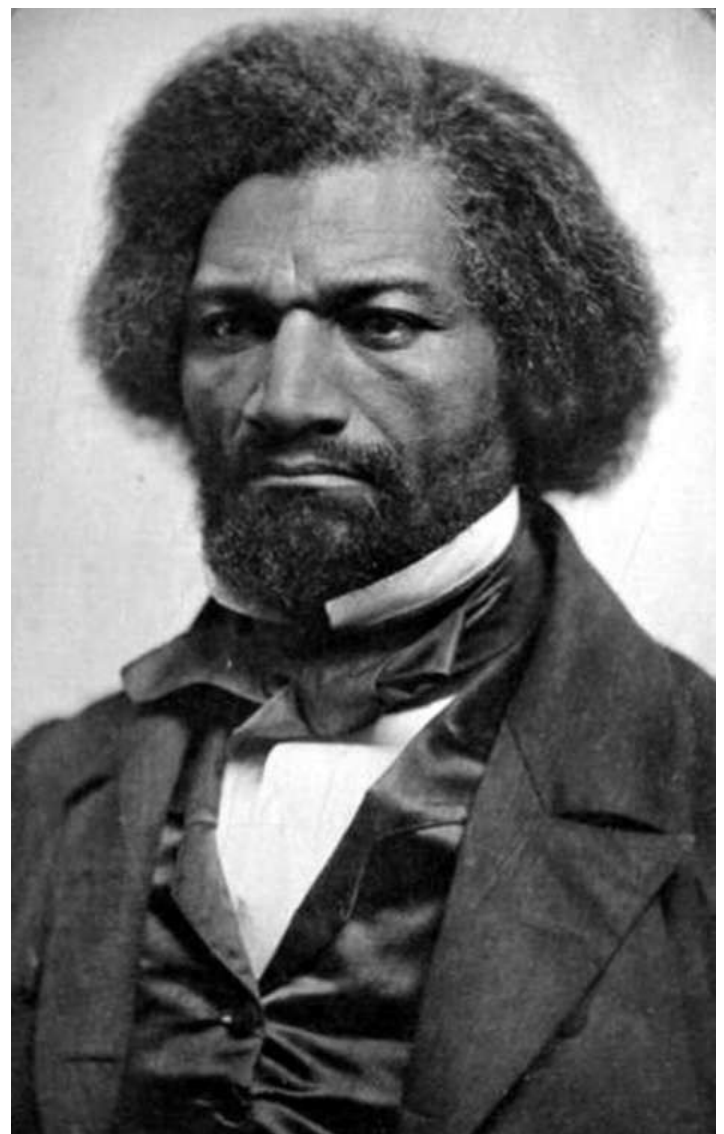


Giants: The Life, Leadership, and Legacy of Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass.

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Frederick Douglass: Life, Leadership, and Legacy

Selected Readings

Session 1: Douglass and Lincoln on the Declaration and America's Founding

Readings:

1. Joe Fornieri, "Frederick Douglass, The Columbian Orator, and the 1619 Project," Quillette (October 30, 2019) (pg.1)
2. Douglass, Change of Opinion Announced (May 23, 1851) (pg. 6)
3. Frederick Douglass, What to the Slave is the Fourth of July? (July 5, 1852) (pg. 8)
4. Abraham Lincoln, Peoria Address (October 16, 1854) (pg. 33)

Focus Questions:

What were the circumstances of Douglass's early life? How does Douglass's work fit into the context of nineteenth-century slave narratives? What does Douglass note about his mother and his father? Why does Douglass include the story about the whipping of Aunt Hester? How does Douglass describe his master's family? How did Douglass learn to read? What were the impediments and stratagems of his remarkable self-education? What influence did the Columbian Orator have on Douglass? Who wrote it? What was this work about and what famous speeches did it include? When did Douglass first hear the word "abolition" and what influence did it have on him? What does this say about freedom of the press? How was Douglass's confrontation with Covey a turning point in his life? What are the details of Douglass's escape? Who was William Lloyd Garrison and what was his relationship to Douglass? What are the elements of Garrisonian abolitionism? What was Garrison's view of the Constitution and the Union? When did Douglass break with Garrison and what were his reasons for doing so?

What is the difference between political abolitionism and Garrisonian abolitionism? What is Douglass's view of the Founders in "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?" What is the rhetorical structure of Douglass's Fourth of July Speech in terms of ethos, pathos, and logos? How does Douglass make use of rhetorical reversal and of the jeremiad? What is Douglass's perspective as the author of the speech? How does Douglass make use of biblical symbolism in the speech? What were the historical circumstances at the time of the speech? How does Douglass's speech mix both praise and blame? What does Douglass say about the Declaration and the Constitution in his Fourth of July Speech? What does Douglass say about proving the humanity of the African American in the speech?

Speech on the Repeal of the Missouri Compromise, October 16, 1854

A. Explain Lincoln's distinction between the existing institution of slavery and its extension. What historical precedents did Lincoln appeal to in support of the federal government's restriction of slavery? What did Lincoln propose to do about slavery? What limits did he recognize in doing so? How did popular sovereignty's declared indifference to slavery lead to "an open war" with "the fundamental principles of civil liberty" in the Declaration of Independence? Identify Lincoln's references to the Bible in the speech. How were they used? What was the "ancient faith" and how did it differ from the "new faith" of popular sovereignty? Explain Lincoln's understanding of the Constitution and slavery. What was his view of the Founders? What evidence did Lincoln provide in support of the view that Southerners themselves recognized the humanity of the slave? What did Lincoln mean when he described slavery as a "necessary evil"? What is the relationship between the doctrine of self-government and consent? What did Lincoln mean when he said, "Stand with anybody that stands right"? How is the principle of slavery comparable to the divine right of kings?

B. Compare and contrast what Lincoln said about colonization in the Missouri Compromise speech in Peoria with what he said to the delegation of African Americans in August 1862 (Document 17). How did Lincoln's First Inaugural Address (Document 14) acknowledge the distinction made in the Peoria speech between the existing institution of slavery and its extension? To what extent was Lincoln's view of black freedom in his Last Public Address (Document 26) consistent with what he said about race and equality in the Peoria speech? Is Lincoln's position on the question of black suffrage and racial equality different in the Peoria speech and later speeches, such as Document 26? If so, what do you think accounts for the change?

Session 2: Douglass and Lincoln on the Constitution

Readings:

1. Frederick Douglass, *The Constitution of the United States: Is it Proslavery or Antislavery?* (March 26, 1860) (pg. 68)
2. Abraham Lincoln, *Reply to the Dred Scott Decision* (June 26, 1857) (pg. 81)
3. Abraham Lincoln, *Address at Cooper Union* (February 27, 1860) (pg. 93)

Focus Questions:

What is Douglass's argument in favor of the Constitution as an antislavery document? What provisions of the Constitution does Douglass cite in support of his argument? How does Douglass construe the Preamble of the Constitution? How does he interpret the allegedly "proslavery" provisions of the Constitution? Explain Douglass's literal interpretation of the Constitution's text. What are Douglass's principles of Constitutional interpretation? What does Douglass exclude as a basis of sound constitutional interpretation? What are the strengths and

weaknesses of this interpretation? Compare and contrast what Douglass says about the Constitution and Slavery to the 1619 Project.

Session 3: The War

Readings:

1. Abraham Lincoln, First Inaugural Address, (March 4, 1861) (pg. 112)
2. Frederick Douglass, The Inaugural Address, (April 1861) (pg. 121)
2. Frederick Douglass, The Slaveholder's Rebellion, (July 4, 1862) (pg. 126)
3. Abraham Lincoln, Letter to James Conkling, (August 26, 1863) (pg. 145)

Focus Questions:

What was Douglass's assessment of Lincoln's First Inaugural? What particular passages does Douglass focus upon in this speech? Where does Douglass praise and blame Lincoln? What is his overall assessment? Do you agree? What arguments does Douglass make in support of black recruitment? How does he tie black military service to citizenship? What are the main arguments against black military service? What are Douglass's arguments against colonization in his letter to Blair? What is the history of colonization and why was it proposed? What is Douglass's intent in "Slaveholder's Rebellion?" What, according to Douglass, is the cause of the Civil War? What kind of Union does Douglass envision? Compare and contrast what Douglass says in "Slaveholder's Rebellion" to "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?" To what extent, if any, is Douglass patriotic in both speeches? Does he become more patriotic during the war?

Session 4: Douglass on Lincoln's Legacy

Readings:

1. Frederick Douglass, Eulogy to Abraham Lincoln, (1865) (pg.150)
2. Frederick Douglass, Oration in Memory of Abraham Lincoln, (April 14, 1876) (pg. 167)

Focus Questions:

What are the qualities of self-made men according to Douglass? To what extent is Douglass's Self-Made Men speech autobiographical? What role does government and society play in the cultivation of self-made man? How do self-made men contribute to society? Is Douglass a "rugged individualist?" To what extent does Douglass's Self-Made Men speech reflect the American dream of equal opportunity? Compare and contrast what Douglass says about Lincoln in his earlier speech on the First Inaugural, in 1865 and then in his Oration of 1876. What accounts for Douglass's evolving view of Lincoln? Was Lincoln the "black man's president" or

the “white man’s president”? How does Douglass’s Oration make use of a rhetorical reversal that resolves seeming contradictions and criticisms through a broader context, much like his view of the Founders and the American regime in the Fourth of July Speech?

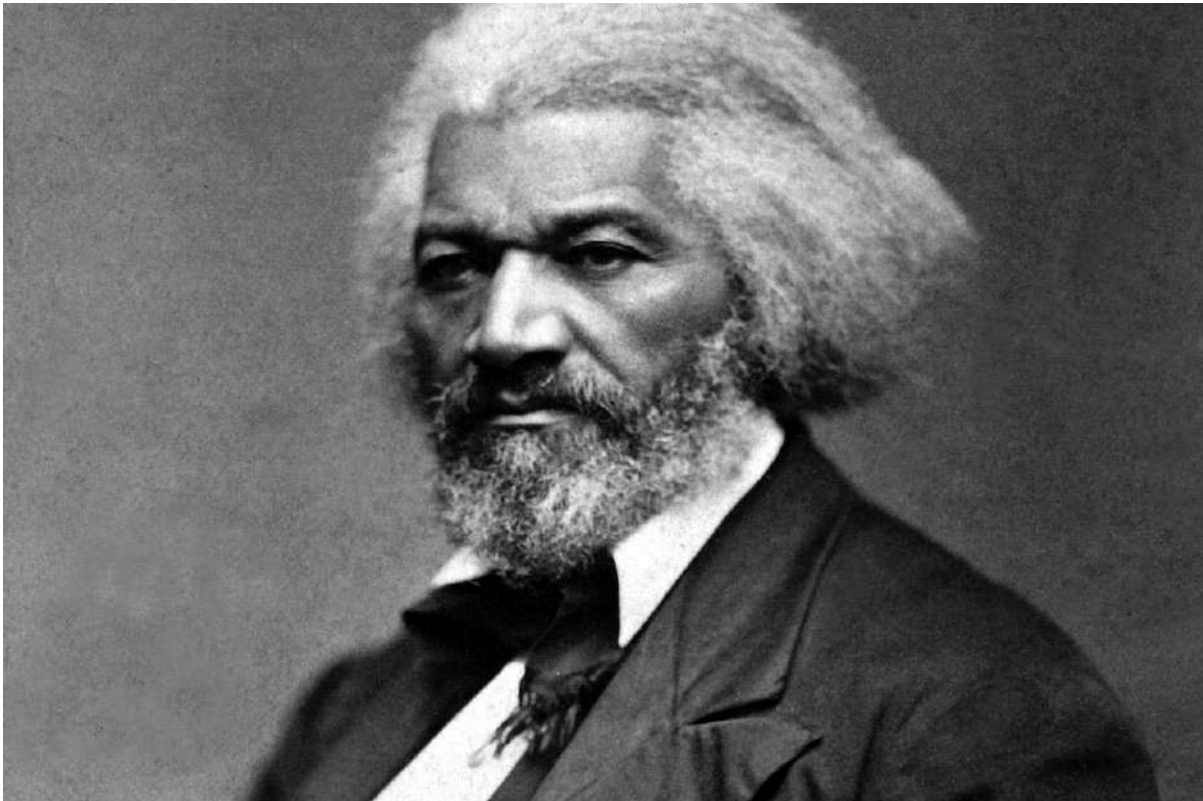
Quillette

<https://quillette.com/2019/10/30/frederick-douglass-the-columbian-orator-and-the-1619-project/>

Published on [October 30, 2019](#)

Frederick Douglass, The Columbian Orator, and the 1619 Project

written by [Joseph R. Forniari](#)



On September 3, 1838, the most famous slave in American history began his escape to freedom. Dressed as a free black sailor and equipped with forged identification papers, Frederick Douglass fled Maryland. Remarkably, this fugitive carried with him a book, which was perhaps his sole possession: [The Columbian Orator](#).

In his three autobiographies, written over the five decades of a very public life, Douglass consistently paid tribute to *The Columbian Orator*. He describes the book as an intellectual turning point that liberated him from the mental shackles of slavery. Indeed, the connection

between slavery of the mind and slavery of the body is a recurrent theme in Douglass's political thought. In his autobiographical *Narrative* (1845), he explains:

I have found that, to make a contented slave, it is necessary to make a thoughtless one. It is necessary to darken his moral and mental vision, and, as far as possible, to annihilate the power of reason. He must be able to detect no inconsistencies in slavery; he must be made to feel that slavery is right; and he can be brought to that only when he ceases to be a man.

Thus, reading and education were the first steps in his journey to freedom. Considered a quick learner by his Baltimore owner Lucrezia Auld, who taught him his ABCs, the lessons abruptly stopped when Thomas Auld discovered that his wife was teaching their slave, something strictly prohibited at the time. But Douglass developed creative stratagems to learn to read and write, including trading bread to "poor white boys" in exchange for lessons. His remarkable account of his early self-education in these autobiographies includes a touching report of his companions' universal sympathy to his plight as a slave. He states that he did not "remember to have met with a boy...who defended the slave system; but I have often had boys to console me, with the hope that something would yet occur, by which I might be made free. Over and over again, they have told me, that they believed I had as good a right to be free as they had...." Contrary to our current obsession with racial consciousness, he never considered that these young boys, being white, cannot understand him, nor does he doubt their sincerity.

After hearing some "little boys," perhaps some of the "hungry little urchins" who taught him to read, reciting pieces from *The Columbian Orator*, Douglass purchased a copy of the book for fifty hard-earned cents. He studied it closely. He was most moved by a fictional dialogue in the book between a master and slave who had been recaptured after three attempted escapes. The master upbraids him for ingratitude, claiming that he had generously provided all of life's necessities. The slave is then allowed to speak freely in response, and effectively refutes all of the master's arguments. In his second autobiography, *My Bondage, My Freedom*, Douglass observed that, "The master was vanquished at every turn in the argument; and seeing himself to be thus vanquished, he generously and meekly emancipates the slave, with his best wishes for his prosperity." Recalling his first foiled escape attempt, Douglass again mentioned the inspiration of *The Columbian Orator*: "That...gem of a book...with its eloquent orations and spicy dialogues, denouncing oppression and slavery—telling of what had been dared, done and suffered by men, to obtain the inestimable boon of liberty—was still fresh in my memory."

The Columbian Orator was a collection of political writings, published in 1797, and edited by Caleb Bingham, a devout Congregationalist, New England educational reformer, and valedictorian at Dartmouth. Politically, Bingham was a Jeffersonian in a Federalist region. As clearly reflected in his book, he shared his party's enthusiasm for the French Revolution and the universal rights of man. He displayed a life-long sympathy to Native Americans and opened the first private school for women in Boston. In its time, *The Columbian Orator* was so popular that it went through 23 editions. Consisting of 84 short selections of inspiring political speeches, poems, and dialogues, it included such diverse authors as Socrates, Philo, John Milton, Cicero, Benjamin Franklin, and George Washington. Though supportive of the ideals of the French Revolution, it also included British statesmen who were sympathetic to the colonies and the

cause of human rights, some of whom made a lasting impression on Douglass. Its pedagogical intent was to prepare the youth of the revolutionary generation for the responsibilities of republican citizenship. In so doing, it united a concern for both elocution style and moral substance. Its ethical, religious, and political teachings drew upon four great traditions that Bingham believed had shaped the American mind: Enlightenment rationalism, Greco-Roman republicanism, British constitutionalism, and protestant Christianity.

The historian David Blight, who was recently awarded a Pulitzer Prize for his [outstanding biography of Frederick Douglass](#), sums up the legacy of *The Columbian Orator* as “more than a collection of stiff Christian moralisms for America’s youth. It was the creation of a school reformer of decidedly antislavery sympathies, a man determined to democratize education and instill in America’s youth the immediate heritage of the American Revolution the habits and structures of republicanism.” And historian John Stauffer notes in his book [Giants—The Parallel Lives of Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln](#) that it “was one of two books that started Douglass on his journey to eloquence and freedom.... The other book was the King James Bible.” Given its antislavery message, *The Columbian Orator* was placed on a blacklist of abolitionist works and banned by prominent southern newspapers during the sectional crisis of the 1850s.

What *The Columbian Orator* reminds us, and what Douglass himself passionately argued over a lifetime of advocacy, is that the United States was a nation with a complex history, that it was based on great ideals that it had failed to live up to. This is quite the opposite of the view presented in *New York Times’ 1619 Project*, the [stated goal of which](#) is “to reframe American history, making explicit how slavery is the foundation on which this country is built.” According to the *Times*, such reframing is necessary since slavery “grew nearly everything that has truly made America exceptional.” The very title of the project comes from the *Times’* extraordinary claim that 1619—the date that the first Africans were brought to Virginia—should replace 1776 as the symbolic birth of the American experiment. [Emblazoned in bold print](#) on the first page of the lead article is the cynical declaration that, “Our founding ideals of liberty and equality were false when they were written.” This brash assertion confuses the important distinction between principle and practice made by Douglass and many of the Founders themselves. On the contrary, as confirmed by *The Columbian Orator* and Douglass’s own testimony, there were significant antislavery voices in America who hoped to close the gap between the ideal of equality and the reality of slavery. The struggle for equality would nonetheless continue, leading ultimately to the Civil War and the cost of over 700,000 American lives.

As Andrew Sullivan [has aptly noted](#), the *Times* has exchanged news reporting for political activism. Its message is that the stated ideals of the United States were never sincere, but were just a cover for racism—and that such structural racism and insincerity continues today. To propagate its message, the *Times* offers resources, websites, and links for teachers to re-educate impressionable students about a Manichean racial struggle that has no foreseeable end. In this narrative, all whites were oppressors or complicit in oppression and the stated principles of the Revolution were a mask to conceal the operations of naked power.

This re-framing of American history by the *1619 Project* is not entirely new. Ironically, the *Times* is uncritically repeating Chief Justice [Roger B. Taney's opinion](#) in the infamous case of [Dred Scott v. Sandford](#), 1857. Surveying the American Founding, Taney similarly concluded that blacks “had no rights which the white man was bound to respect, and that the negro might justly and lawfully be reduced to slavery for his benefit.” Taney’s pro-slavery narrative, repudiated by Douglass, Abraham Lincoln, and the Republican Party at the time, often reads like contemporary critical race theory: “This opinion was at that time fixed and universal in the civilized portion of the white race. It was regarded as an axiom in morals treated as well as in politics which no one thought of disputing or supposed to be open to dispute, and men in every grade and position in society daily and habitually acted... without doubting for a moment the correctness of this opinion.” But as the popularity of *The Columbian Orator* and as Douglass’s experience both make clear, Taney was not reporting “fixed and universal” opinions.

For Douglass, the struggle for equality and human rights transcended racial lines. Given his view of our common humanity, he extolled the speeches of British and Irish statesmen found in *The Columbian Orator* for helping to articulate and support the cause of liberty. In particular, he lauded the efforts for Irish emancipation, because they contained “a bold and powerful denunciation of oppression, and a most brilliant vindication of the rights of man.” These speeches, he confesses, were “choice documents to me. I read them over and over again with unabated interest. They gave tongue to interesting thoughts of my own soul, which had frequently flashed through my mind, and died away for want of utterance.” Douglass has no notion like the contemporary one of “whiteness,” which reduces all thinking to racial struggle. Nor does he worry about “cultural appropriation” in his appeal to western ideals. On the contrary, he considered the British and Irish statesmen as fellow travelers in the cause of universal human rights. Appealing to our common humanity rather than particular racial consciousness, he confessed: “The moral which I gained from the dialogue was the power of truth over the conscience of even a slaveholder. What I got from Sheridan was a bold denunciation of slavery and a powerful vindication of human rights.”

While prophetically rebuking America for its hypocrisy in failing to live up to its stated ideals, the mature Frederick Douglass nonetheless struggled mightily to distinguish between principle and practice in American politics. Repudiating the proslavery re-interpretation of the Constitution advanced by Taney and southern Fire-Eaters, on March 26, 1860 he stated:

[T]he constitutionality of slavery can be made out only by disregarding the plain and common sense reading of the Constitution itself; by discrediting and casting away as worthless the most beneficent rules of legal interpretation; by ruling the Negro outside of these beneficent rules; by claiming everything for slavery; by denying everything for freedom; by assuming that the Constitution does not mean what it says, and that it says what it does not mean; [and] by disregarding the written Constitution. It is in this mean, contemptible, and underhanded method that the American Constitution is pressed into the service of slavery.

Although the *1619 Project* may contribute to our understanding of slavery and the African-American experience, its major premise that our founding ideals were insincere, and that slavery

was the foundation and motivation for our regime, ignores antislavery voices of the Founding era in works like *The Columbian Orator* that Douglass affirmed so eloquently in his biographies.

As fate would have it, a young Abraham Lincoln was reading the *Columbian Orator* around the same time as Frederick Douglass. The two would famously meet on three different occasions during the Civil War. For both, that treasured book would express the principles they carried with them throughout their lives. Although Lincoln and Douglass differed over how best to achieve black freedom, they shared a common antislavery vision of the American idea that was clearly reflected in Bingham's now forgotten book. This vision of universal human rights based on our common humanity was the common ground shared by these two antislavery giants in American history, and it is the common ground now renounced by the *1619 Project*.

Joseph R. Fornieri is a Professor of Political Science at the Rochester Institute of Technology and author of several books on Abraham Lincoln's political thought and statesmanship, including [Abraham Lincoln, Philosopher Statesman](#). He is also the Founder and Director of the non-partisan Center for Statesmanship, Law, and Liberty.



Change of Opinion Announced

by **Frederick Douglass**

May 23, 1851

The debate on the resolution relative to anti-slavery newspapers [at the annual meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society] assumed such a character as to make it our duty to define the position of the *North Star* in respect to the Constitution of the United States. The ground having been directly taken, that no paper ought to receive the recommendation of the American Anti-Slavery Society that did not assume the Constitution to be a pro-slavery document, we felt in honor bound to announce at once to our old anti-slavery companions that we no longer possessed the requisite qualification for their official approval and commendation; and to assure them that we had arrived at the firm conviction that the Constitution; construed in the light of well established rules of legal interpretation, might be made consistent with its details with the noble purposes avowed in its preamble; and that hereafter we should insist upon the application of such rules to that instrument, and demand that it be wielded in behalf of emancipation. The change in our opinion on this subject has not been hastily arrived at. A careful study of the writings of Lysander Spooner, of Gerrit Smith, and of William Goodell, has brought us to our present conclusion. We found, in our former position, that, when debating the question, we were compelled to go behind the letter of the Constitution, and to seek its meaning in the history and practice of the nation under it — a process

always attended with disadvantages; and certainly we feel little inclination to shoulder disadvantages of any kind, in order to give slavery the slightest protection. In short, we hold it to be a system of lawless violence; that it *never was lawful, and never can be made so*; and that it is the first duty of every American citizen, whose conscience permits so to do, to use his *political* as well as his *moral* power for its overthrow. Of course, this avowal did not pass without animadversion, and it would have been strange if it had passed without some crimination; for it is hard for any combination or party to attribute good motives to any one who differs from them in what they deem a vital point. Brother Garrison at once exclaimed, "There is roguery somewhere!" but we can easily forgive this hastily expressed imputation, falling, as it did, from the lips of one to whom we shall never cease to be grateful, and for whom we have cherished (and do now cherish) a veneration only inferior in degree to that which we owe to our conscience and our God.



"What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?"

by **Frederick Douglass**

July 5, 1852

Mr. President, Friends and Fellow Citizens:

He who could address this audience without a quailing sensation, has stronger nerves than I have. I do not remember ever to have appeared as a speaker before any assembly more shrinkingly, nor with greater distrust of my ability, than I do this day. A feeling has crept over me, quite unfavorable to the exercise of my limited powers of speech. The task before me is one which requires much previous thought and study for its proper performance. I know that apologies of this sort are generally considered flat and unmeaning. I trust, however, that mine will not be so considered. Should I seem at ease, my appearance would much misrepresent me. The little experience I have had in addressing public meetings, in country schoolhouses, avails me nothing on the present occasion.

The papers and placards say, that I am to deliver a 4th [of] July oration. This certainly sounds large, and out of the common way, for it is true that I have often had the privilege to speak in this beautiful Hall, and to address many who now honor me with their presence. But neither their familiar faces, nor the perfect gage I think I have of Corinthian Hall, seems to free me from embarrassment.

The fact is, ladies and gentlemen, the distance between this platform and the slave plantation, from which I escaped, is considerable — and the difficulties to be overcome in getting from the latter to the former, are by no means slight. That I am here to-day is, to me, a matter of astonishment as well as of gratitude. You will not, therefore, be surprised, if in what I have to say I evince no elaborate preparation, nor grace my speech with any high sounding exordium. With little experience and with less learning, I have been able to throw my thoughts hastily and imperfectly together; and trusting to your patient and generous indulgence, I will proceed to lay them before you.

This, for the purpose of this celebration, is the 4th of July. It is the birthday of your National Independence, and of your political freedom. This, to you, is what the Passover was to the emancipated people of God. It carries your minds back to the day, and to the act of your great deliverance; and to the signs, and to the wonders, associated with that act, and that day. This celebration also marks the beginning of another year of your national life; and reminds you that the Republic of America is now 76 years old. I am glad, fellow-citizens, that your nation is so young. Seventy-six years, though a good old age for a man, is but a mere speck in the life of a nation. Three score years and ten is the allotted time for individual men; but nations number their years by thousands. According to this fact, you are, even now, only in the beginning of your national career, still lingering in the period of childhood. I repeat, I am glad this is so. There is hope in the thought, and hope is much needed, under the dark clouds which lower above the horizon. The eye of the reformer is met with angry flashes, portending disastrous times; but his heart may well beat lighter at the thought that America is young, and that she is still in the impressible stage of her existence. May he not hope that high lessons of wisdom, of justice and of truth, will yet give direction to her destiny? Were the nation older, the patriot's heart might be sadder, and the reformer's brow heavier. Its future might be shrouded in gloom, and the hope of its prophets go out in sorrow. There is consolation in the thought that America is young. Great streams are not easily turned from channels, worn deep in the course of ages. They may sometimes rise in quiet and stately majesty, and inundate the land, refreshing and fertilizing the earth with their mysterious properties. They may also rise in wrath and fury, and bear away, on their angry waves, the accumulated wealth of years of toil and hardship. They, however, gradually flow back to the same old channel, and flow on as serenely as ever. But, while the river may not be turned aside, it may dry up, and leave nothing behind but the withered branch, and the unsightly

rock, to howl in the abyss-sweeping wind, the sad tale of departed glory.
As with rivers so with nations.

Fellow-citizens, I shall not presume to dwell at length on the associations that cluster about this day. The simple story of it is that, 76 years ago, the people of this country were British subjects. The style and title of your "sovereign people" (in which you now glory) was not then born. You were under the British Crown. Your fathers esteemed the English Government as the home government; and England as the fatherland. This home government, you know, although a considerable distance from your home, did, in the exercise of its parental prerogatives, impose upon its colonial children, such restraints, burdens and limitations, as, in its mature judgment, it deemed wise, right and proper.

But, your fathers, who had not adopted the fashionable idea of this day, of the infallibility of government, and the absolute character of its acts, presumed to differ from the home government in respect to the wisdom and the justice of some of those burdens and restraints. They went so far in their excitement as to pronounce the measures of government unjust, unreasonable, and oppressive, and altogether such as ought not to be quietly submitted to. I scarcely need say, fellow-citizens, that my opinion of those measures fully accords with that of your fathers. Such a declaration of agreement on my part would not be worth much to anybody. It would, certainly, prove nothing, as to what part I might have taken, had I lived during the great controversy of 1776. To say now that America was right, and England wrong, is exceedingly easy. Everybody can say it; the dastard, not less than the noble brave, can flippantly discant on the tyranny of England towards the American Colonies. It is fashionable to do so; but there was a time when to pronounce against England, and in favor of the cause of the colonies, tried men's souls. They who did so were accounted in their day, plotters of mischief, agitators and rebels, dangerous men. To side with the right, against the wrong, with the weak against the strong, and with the oppressed against the oppressor! here lies the merit, and the one which, of all others, seems unfashionable in our day. The cause of liberty may be stabbed by the men who glory in the deeds of your fathers. But, to proceed.

Feeling themselves harshly and unjustly treated by the home government, your fathers, like men of honesty, and men of spirit, earnestly sought redress. They petitioned and remonstrated; they did so in a decorous, respectful, and loyal manner. Their conduct was wholly unexceptionable. This, however, did not answer the purpose. They saw themselves treated

with sovereign indifference, coldness and scorn. Yet they persevered. They were not the men to look back.

As the sheet anchor takes a firmer hold, when the ship is tossed by the storm, so did the cause of your fathers grow stronger, as it breasted the chilling blasts of kingly displeasure. The greatest and best of British statesmen admitted its justice, and the loftiest eloquence of the British Senate came to its support. But, with that blindness which seems to be the unvarying characteristic of tyrants, since Pharaoh and his hosts were drowned in the Red Sea, the British Government persisted in the exactions complained of.

The madness of this course, we believe, is admitted now, even by England; but we fear the lesson is wholly lost on our present ruler.

Oppression makes a wise man mad. Your fathers were wise men, and if they did not go mad, they became restive under this treatment. They felt themselves the victims of grievous wrongs, wholly incurable in their colonial capacity. With brave men there is always a remedy for oppression. Just here, the idea of a total separation of the colonies from the crown was born! It was a startling idea, much more so, than we, at this distance of time, regard it. The timid and the prudent (as has been intimated) of that day, were, of course, shocked and alarmed by it.

Such people lived then, had lived before, and will, probably, ever have a place on this planet; and their course, in respect to any great change, (no matter how great the good to be attained, or the wrong to be redressed by it), may be calculated with as much precision as can be the course of the stars. They hate all changes, but silver, gold and copper change! Of this sort of change they are always strongly in favor.

These people were called Tories in the days of your fathers; and the appellation, probably, conveyed the same idea that is meant by a more modern, though a somewhat less euphonious term, which we often find in our papers, applied to some of our old politicians.

Their opposition to the then dangerous thought was earnest and powerful; but, amid all their terror and affrighted vociferations against it, the alarming and revolutionary idea moved on, and the country with it.

On the 2d of July, 1776, the old Continental Congress, to the dismay of the lovers of ease, and the worshipers of property, clothed that dreadful idea with all the authority of national sanction. They did so in the form of a resolution; and as we seldom hit upon resolutions, drawn up in our day whose transparency is at all equal to this, it may refresh your minds and help my story if I read it. "Resolved, That these united colonies are, and of right, ought to be free and Independent States; that they are absolved from all allegiance to the British Crown; and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain is, and ought to be, dissolved."

Citizens, your fathers made good that resolution. They succeeded; and to-day you reap the fruits of their success. The freedom gained is yours; and you, therefore, may properly celebrate this anniversary. The 4th of July is the first great fact in your nation's history — the very ring-bolt in the chain of your yet undeveloped destiny.

Pride and patriotism, not less than gratitude, prompt you to celebrate and to hold it in perpetual remembrance. I have said that the Declaration of Independence is the ring-bolt to the chain of your nation's destiny; so, indeed, I regard it. The principles contained in that instrument are saving principles. Stand by those principles, be true to them on all occasions, in all places, against all foes, and at whatever cost.

From the round top of your ship of state, dark and threatening clouds may be seen. Heavy billows, like mountains in the distance, disclose to the leeward huge forms of flinty rocks! That bolt drawn, that chain broken, and all is lost. Cling to this day — cling to it, and to its principles, with the grasp of a storm-tossed mariner to a spar at midnight.

The coming into being of a nation, in any circumstances, is an interesting event. But, besides general considerations, there were peculiar circumstances which make the advent of this republic an event of special attractiveness.

The whole scene, as I look back to it, was simple, dignified and sublime.

The population of the country, at the time, stood at the insignificant number of three millions. The country was poor in the munitions of war. The population was weak and scattered, and the country a wilderness unsubdued. There were then no means of concert and combination, such

as exist now. Neither steam nor lightning had then been reduced to order and discipline. From the Potomac to the Delaware was a journey of many days. Under these, and innumerable other disadvantages, your fathers declared for liberty and independence and triumphed.

Fellow Citizens, I am not wanting in respect for the fathers of this republic. The signers of the Declaration of Independence were brave men. They were great men too — great enough to give fame to a great age. It does not often happen to a nation to raise, at one time, such a number of truly great men. The point from which I am compelled to view them is not, certainly, the most favorable; and yet I cannot contemplate their great deeds with less than admiration. They were statesmen, patriots and heroes, and for the good they did, and the principles they contended for, I will unite with you to honor their memory.

They loved their country better than their own private interests; and, though this is not the highest form of human excellence, all will concede that it is a rare virtue, and that when it is exhibited, it ought to command respect. He who will, intelligently, lay down his life for his country, is a man whom it is not in human nature to despise. Your fathers staked their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor, on the cause of their country. In their admiration of liberty, they lost sight of all other interests.

They were peace men; but they preferred revolution to peaceful submission to bondage. They were quiet men; but they did not shrink from agitating against oppression. They showed forbearance; but that they knew its limits. They believed in order; but not in the order of tyranny. With them, nothing was “settled” that was not right. With them, justice, liberty and humanity were “final;” not slavery and oppression. You may well cherish the memory of such men. They were great in their day and generation. Their solid manhood stands out the more as we contrast it with these degenerate times.

How circumspect, exact and proportionate were all their movements! How unlike the politicians of an hour! Their statesmanship looked beyond the passing moment, and stretched away in strength into the distant future. They seized upon eternal principles, and set a glorious example in their defense. Mark them!

Fully appreciating the hardship to be encountered, firmly believing in the right of their cause, honorably inviting the scrutiny of an on-looking world,

reverently appealing to heaven to attest their sincerity, soundly comprehending the solemn responsibility they were about to assume, wisely measuring the terrible odds against them, your fathers, the fathers of this republic, did, most deliberately, under the inspiration of a glorious patriotism, and with a sublime faith in the great principles of justice and freedom, lay deep the corner-stone of the national superstructure, which has risen and still rises in grandeur around you.

Of this fundamental work, this day is the anniversary. Our eyes are met with demonstrations of joyous enthusiasm. Banners and pennants wave exultingly on the breeze. The din of business, too, is hushed. Even Mammon seems to have quitted his grasp on this day. The ear-piercing fife and the stirring drum unite their accents with the ascending peal of a thousand church bells. Prayers are made, hymns are sung, and sermons are preached in honor of this day; while the quick martial tramp of a great and multitudinous nation, echoed back by all the hills, valleys and mountains of a vast continent, bespeak the occasion one of thrilling and universal interest — a nation's jubilee.

Friends and citizens, I need not enter further into the causes which led to this anniversary. Many of you understand them better than I do. You could instruct me in regard to them. That is a branch of knowledge in which you feel, perhaps, a much deeper interest than your speaker. The causes which led to the separation of the colonies from the British crown have never lacked for a tongue. They have all been taught in your common schools, narrated at your firesides, unfolded from your pulpits, and thundered from your legislative halls, and are as familiar to you as household words. They form the staple of your national poetry and eloquence.

I remember, also, that, as a people, Americans are remarkably familiar with all facts which make in their own favor. This is esteemed by some as a national trait — perhaps a national weakness. It is a fact, that whatever makes for the wealth or for the reputation of Americans, and can be had cheap! will be found by Americans. I shall not be charged with slandering Americans, if I say I think the American side of any question may be safely left in American hands.

I leave, therefore, the great deeds of your fathers to other gentlemen whose claim to have been regularly descended will be less likely to be disputed than mine!

My business, if I have any here to-day, is with the present. The accepted time with God and his cause is the ever-living now.

*Trust no future, however pleasant,
Let the dead past bury its dead;
Act, act in the living present,
Heart within, and God overhead.*

We have to do with the past only as we can make it useful to the present and to the future. To all inspiring motives, to noble deeds which can be gained from the past, we are welcome. But now is the time, the important time. Your fathers have lived, died, and have done their work, and have done much of it well. You live and must die, and you must do your work. You have no right to enjoy a child's share in the labor of your fathers, unless your children are to be blest by your labors. You have no right to wear out and waste the hard-earned fame of your fathers to cover your indolence. Sydney Smith tells us that men seldom eulogize the wisdom and virtues of their fathers, but to excuse some folly or wickedness of their own. This truth is not a doubtful one. There are illustrations of it near and remote, ancient and modern. It was fashionable, hundreds of years ago, for the children of Jacob to boast, we have "Abraham to our father," when they had long lost Abraham's faith and spirit. That people contented themselves under the shadow of Abraham's great name, while they repudiated the deeds which made his name great. Need I remind you that a similar thing is being done all over this country to-day? Need I tell you that the Jews are not the only people who built the tombs of the prophets, and garnished the sepulchres of the righteous? Washington could not die till he had broken the chains of his slaves. Yet his monument is built up by the price of human blood, and the traders in the bodies and souls of men shout — "We have Washington to *our father*." — Alas! that it should be so; yet so it is.

*The evil that men do, lives after them,
The good is oft-interred
with their bones.*

Fellow-citizens, pardon me, allow me to ask, why am I called upon to speak here to-day? What have I, or those I represent, to do with your national independence? Are the great principles of political freedom and of natural justice, embodied in that Declaration of Independence, extended to us? and am I, therefore, called upon to bring our humble offering to the national altar, and to confess the benefits and express devout gratitude for the blessings resulting from your independence to us?

Would to God, both for your sakes and ours, that an affirmative answer could be truthfully returned to these questions! Then would my task be light, and my burden easy and delightful. For who is there so cold, that a nation's sympathy could not warm him? Who so obdurate and dead to the claims of gratitude, that would not thankfully acknowledge such priceless benefits? Who so stolid and selfish, that would not give his voice to swell the hallelujahs of a nation's jubilee, when the chains of servitude had been torn from his limbs? I am not that man. In a case like that, the dumb might eloquently speak, and the "lame man leap as an hart."

But, such is not the state of the case. I say it with a sad sense of the disparity between us. I am not included within the pale of this glorious anniversary! Your high independence only reveals the immeasurable distance between us. The blessings in which you, this day, rejoice, are not enjoyed in common. — The rich inheritance of justice, liberty, prosperity and independence, bequeathed by your fathers, is shared by you, not by me. The sunlight that brought life and healing to you, has brought stripes and death to me. This Fourth [of] July is *yours*, not *mine*. *You* may rejoice, *I* must mourn. To drag a man in fetters into the grand illuminated temple of liberty, and call upon him to join you in joyous anthems, were inhuman mockery and sacrilegious irony. Do you mean, citizens, to mock me, by asking me to speak to-day? If so, there is a parallel to your conduct. And let me warn you that it is dangerous to copy the example of a nation whose crimes, lowering up to heaven, were thrown down by the breath of the Almighty, burying that nation in irrecoverable ruin! I can to-day take up the plaintive lament of a peeled and woe-smitten people!

"By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down. Yea! we wept when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. For there, they that carried us away captive, required of us a song; and they who wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion. How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land? If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth."

Fellow-citizens; above your national, tumultuous joy, I hear the mournful wail of millions! whose chains, heavy and grievous yesterday, are, to-day, rendered more intolerable by the jubilee shouts that reach them. If I do forget, if I do not faithfully remember those bleeding children of sorrow this day, "may my right hand forget her cunning, and may my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth!" To forget them, to pass lightly over their wrongs, and to chime in with the popular theme, would be treason most scandalous and shocking, and would make me a reproach before God and the world. My subject, then, fellow-citizens, is AMERICAN SLAVERY. I shall see, this day, and its popular characteristics, from the slave's point of view. Standing, there, identified with the American bondman, making his wrongs mine, I do not hesitate to declare, with all my soul, that the character and conduct of this nation never looked blacker to me than on this 4th of July! Whether we turn to the declarations of the past, or to the professions of the present, the conduct of the nation seems equally hideous and revolting. America is false to the past, false to the present, and solemnly binds herself to be false to the future. Standing with God and the crushed and bleeding slave on this occasion, I will, in the name of humanity which is outraged, in the name of liberty which is fettered, in the name of the constitution and the Bible, which are disregarded and trampled upon, dare to call in question and to denounce, with all the emphasis I can command, everything that serves to perpetuate slavery — the great sin and shame of America! "I will not equivocate; I will not excuse;" I will use the severest language I can command; and yet not one word shall escape me that any man, whose judgment is not blinded by prejudice, or who is not at heart a slaveholder, shall not confess to be right and just.

But I fancy I hear some one of my audience say, it is just in this circumstance that you and your brother abolitionists fail to make a favorable impression on the public mind. Would you argue more, and denounce less, would you persuade more, and rebuke less, your cause would be much more likely to succeed. But, I submit, where all is plain there is nothing to be argued. What point in the anti-slavery creed would you have me argue? On what branch of the subject do the people of this country need light? Must I undertake to prove that the slave is a man? That point is conceded already. Nobody doubts it. The slaveholders themselves acknowledge it in the enactment of laws for their government. They acknowledge it when they punish disobedience on the part of the slave. There are seventy-two crimes in the State of Virginia, which, if committed by a black man, (no matter how ignorant he be), subject him to the punishment of death; while only two of the same crimes will subject a

white man to the like punishment. What is this but the acknowledgement that the slave is a moral, intellectual and responsible being? The manhood of the slave is conceded. It is admitted in the fact that Southern statute books are covered with enactments forbidding, under severe fines and penalties, the teaching of the slave to read or to write. When you can point to any such laws, in reference to the beasts of the field, then I may consent to argue the manhood of the slave. When the dogs in your streets, when the fowls of the air, when the cattle on your hills, when the fish of the sea, and the reptiles that crawl, shall be unable to distinguish the slave from a brute, *then* will I argue with you that the slave is a man!

For the present, it is enough to affirm the equal manhood of the Negro race. Is it not astonishing that, while we are ploughing, planting and reaping, using all kinds of mechanical tools, erecting houses, constructing bridges, building ships, working in metals of brass, iron, copper, silver and gold; that, while we are reading, writing and cyphering, acting as clerks, merchants and secretaries, having among us lawyers, doctors, ministers, poets, authors, editors, orators and teachers; that, while we are engaged in all manner of enterprises common to other men, digging gold in California, capturing the whale in the Pacific, feeding sheep and cattle on the hill-side, living, moving, acting, thinking, planning, living in families as husbands, wives and children, and, above all, confessing and worshipping the Christian's God, and looking hopefully for life and immortality beyond the grave, we are called upon to prove that we are men!

Would you have me argue that man is entitled to liberty? that he is the rightful owner of his own body? You have already declared it. Must I argue the wrongfulness of slavery? Is that a question for Republicans? Is it to be settled by the rules of logic and argumentation, as a matter beset with great difficulty, involving a doubtful application of the principle of justice, hard to be understood? How should I look to-day, in the presence of Americans, dividing, and subdividing a discourse, to show that men have a natural right to freedom? speaking of it relatively, and positively, negatively, and affirmatively. To do so, would be to make myself ridiculous, and to offer an insult to your understanding. — There is not a man beneath the canopy of heaven, that does not know that slavery is wrong *for him*.

What, am I to argue that it is wrong to make men brutes, to rob them of their liberty, to work them without wages, to keep them ignorant of their relations to their fellow men, to beat them with sticks, to flay their flesh with the lash, to load their limbs with irons, to hunt them with dogs, to sell them at auction, to sunder their families, to knock out their teeth, to burn

their flesh, to starve them into obedience and submission to their masters? Must I argue that a system thus marked with blood, and stained with pollution, is *wrong*? No! I will not. I have better employments for my time and strength than such arguments would imply.

What, then, remains to be argued? Is it that slavery is not divine; that God did not establish it; that our doctors of divinity are mistaken? There is blasphemy in the thought. That which is inhuman, cannot be divine! Who can reason on such a proposition? They that can, may; I cannot. The time for such argument is passed.

At a time like this, scorching irony, not convincing argument, is needed. O! had I the ability, and could I reach the nation's ear, I would, to-day, pour out a fiery stream of biting ridicule, blasting reproach, withering sarcasm, and stern rebuke. For it is not light that is needed, but fire; it is not the gentle shower, but thunder. We need the storm, the whirlwind, and the earthquake. The feeling of the nation must be quickened; the conscience of the nation must be roused; the propriety of the nation must be startled; the hypocrisy of the nation must be exposed; and its crimes against God and man must be proclaimed and denounced.

What, to the American slave, is your 4th of July? I answer: a day that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim. To him, your celebration is a sham; your boasted liberty, an unholy license; your national greatness, swelling vanity; your sounds of rejoicing are empty and heartless; your denunciations of tyrants, brass fronted impudence; your shouts of liberty and equality, hollow mockery; your prayers and hymns, your sermons and thanksgivings, with all your religious parade, and solemnity, are, to him, mere bombast, fraud, deception, impiety, and hypocrisy — a thin veil to cover up crimes which would disgrace a nation of savages. There is not a nation on the earth guilty of practices, more shocking and bloody, than are the people of these United States, at this very hour.

Go where you may, search where you will, roam through all the monarchies and despotisms of the old world, travel through South America, search out every abuse, and when you have found the last, lay your facts by the side of the everyday practices of this nation, and you will say with me, that, for revolting barbarity and shameless hypocrisy, America reigns without a rival.

Take the American slave-trade, which, we are told by the papers, is especially prosperous just now. Ex-Senator Benton tells us that the price of men was never higher than now. He mentions the fact to show that slavery is in no danger. This trade is one of the peculiarities of American institutions. It is carried on in all the large towns and cities in one-half of this confederacy; and millions are pocketed every year, by dealers in this horrid traffic. In several states, this trade is a chief source of wealth. It is called (in contradistinction to the foreign slave-trade) "*the internal slave trade*." It is, probably, called so, too, in order to divert from it the horror with which the foreign slave-trade is contemplated. That trade has long since been denounced by this government, as piracy. It has been denounced with burning words, from the high places of the nation, as an execrable traffic. To arrest it, to put an end to it, this nation keeps a squadron, at immense cost, on the coast of Africa. Everywhere, in this country, it is safe to speak of this foreign slave-trade, as a most inhuman traffic, opposed alike to the laws of God and of man. The duty to extirpate and destroy it, is admitted even by our DOCTORS OF DIVINITY. In order to put an end to it, some of these last have consented that their colored brethren (nominally free) should leave this country, and establish themselves on the western coast of Africa! It is, however, a notable fact that, while so much execration is poured out by Americans upon those engaged in the foreign slave-trade, the men engaged in the slave-trade between the states pass without condemnation, and their business is deemed honorable.

Behold the practical operation of this internal slave-trade, the American slave-trade, sustained by American politics and America religion. Here you will see men and women reared like swine for the market. You know what is a swine-drover? I will show you a man-drover. They inhabit all our Southern States. They perambulate the country, and crowd the highways of the nation, with droves of human stock. You will see one of these human flesh-jobbers, armed with pistol, whip and bowie-knife, driving a company of a hundred men, women, and children, from the Potomac to the slave market at New Orleans. These wretched people are to be sold singly, or in lots, to suit purchasers. They are food for the cotton-field, and the deadly sugar-mill. Mark the sad procession, as it moves wearily along, and the inhuman wretch who drives them. Hear his savage yells and his blood-chilling oaths, as he hurries on his affrighted captives! There, see the old man, with locks thinned and gray. Cast one glance, if you please, upon that young mother, whose shoulders are bare to the scorching sun, her briny tears falling on the brow of the babe in her arms. See, too, that girl of thirteen, weeping, yes! weeping, as she thinks of the mother from whom

she has been torn! The drove moves tardily. Heat and sorrow have nearly consumed their strength; suddenly you hear a quick snap, like the discharge of a rifle; the fetters clank, and the chain rattles simultaneously; your ears are saluted with a scream, that seems to have torn its way to the center of your soul! The crack you heard, was the sound of the slave-whip; the scream you heard, was from the woman you saw with the babe. Her speed had faltered under the weight of her child and her chains! that gash on her shoulder tells her to move on. Follow the drove to New Orleans. Attend the auction; see men examined like horses; see the forms of women rudely and brutally exposed to the shocking gaze of American slave-buyers. See this drove sold and separated forever; and never forget the deep, sad sobs that arose from that scattered multitude. Tell me citizens, WHERE, under the sun, you can witness a spectacle more fiendish and shocking. Yet this is but a glance at the American slave-trade, as it exists, at this moment, in the ruling part of the United States.

I was born amid such sights and scenes. To me the American slave-trade is a terrible reality. When a child, my soul was often pierced with a sense of its horrors. I lived on Philpot Street, Fell's Point, Baltimore, and have watched from the wharves, the slave ships in the Basin, anchored from the shore, with their cargoes of human flesh, waiting for favorable winds to waft them down the Chesapeake. There was, at that time, a grand slave mart kept at the head of Pratt Street, by Austin Woldfolk. His agents were sent into every town and county in Maryland, announcing their arrival, through the papers, and on flaming "*hand-bills*," headed CASH FOR NEGROES. These men were generally well dressed men, and very captivating in their manners. Ever ready to drink, to treat, and to gamble. The fate of many a slave has depended upon the turn of a single card; and many a child has been snatched from the arms of its mother by bargains arranged in a state of brutal drunkenness.

The flesh-mongers gather up their victims by dozens, and drive them, chained, to the general depot at Baltimore. When a sufficient number have been collected here, a ship is chartered, for the purpose of conveying the forlorn crew to Mobile, or to New Orleans. From the slave prison to the ship, they are usually driven in the darkness of night; for since the antislavery agitation, a certain caution is observed.

In the deep still darkness of midnight, I have been often aroused by the dead heavy footsteps, and the piteous cries of the chained gangs that passed our door. The anguish of my boyish heart was intense; and I was often consoled, when speaking to my mistress in the morning, to hear her

say that the custom was very wicked; that she hated to hear the rattle of the chains, and the heart-rending cries. I was glad to find one who sympathized with me in my horror.

Fellow-citizens, this murderous traffic is, to-day, in active operation in this boasted republic. In the solitude of my spirit, I see clouds of dust raised on the highways of the South; I see the bleeding footsteps; I hear the doleful wail of fettered humanity, on the way to the slave-markets, where the victims are to be sold like *horses, sheep, and swine*, knocked off to the highest bidder. There I see the tenderest ties ruthlessly broken, to gratify the lust, caprice and rapacity of the buyers and sellers of men. My soul sickens at the sight.

*Is this the land your Fathers loved,
The freedom which they toiled to win?
Is this the earth whereon they moved?
Are these the graves they slumber in?*

But a still more inhuman, disgraceful, and scandalous state of things remains to be presented. By an act of the American Congress, not yet two years old, slavery has been nationalized in its most horrible and revolting form. By that act, Mason and Dixon's line has been obliterated; New York has become as Virginia; and the power to hold, hunt, and sell men, women, and children as slaves remains no longer a mere state institution, but is now an institution of the whole United States. The power is co-extensive with the Star-Spangled Banner and American Christianity. Where these go, may also go the merciless slave-hunter. Where these are, man is not sacred. He is a bird for the sportsman's gun. By that most foul and fiendish of all human decrees, the liberty and person of every man are put in peril. Your broad republican domain is hunting ground for *men*. Not for thieves and robbers, enemies of society, merely, but for men guilty of no crime. Your lawmakers have commanded all good citizens to engage in this hellish sport. Your President, your Secretary of State, our *lords, nobles*, and ecclesiastics, enforce, as a duty you owe to your free and glorious country, and to your God, that you do this accursed thing. Not fewer than forty Americans have, within the past two years, been hunted down and, without a moment's warning, hurried away in chains, and consigned to slavery and excruciating torture. Some of these have had wives and

children, dependent on them for bread; but of this, no account was made. The right of the hunter to his prey stands superior to the right of marriage, and to *all* rights in this republic, the rights of God included! For black men there are neither law, justice, humanity, nor religion. The Fugitive Slave *Law* makes mercy to them a crime; and bribes the judge who tries them. An American judge gets ten dollars for every victim he consigns to slavery, and five, when he fails to do so. The oath of any two villains is sufficient, under this hell-black enactment, to send the most pious and exemplary black man into the remorseless jaws of slavery! His own testimony is nothing. He can bring no witnesses for himself. The minister of American justice is bound by the law to hear but *one* side; and *that* side, is the side of the oppressor. Let this damning fact be perpetually told. Let it be thundered around the world, that, in tyrant-killing, king-hating, people-loving, democratic, Christian America, the seats of justice are filled with judges, who hold their offices under an open and palpable *bribe*, and are bound, in deciding in the case of a man's liberty, to *hear only his accusers!*

In glaring violation of justice, in shameless disregard of the forms of administering law, in cunning arrangement to entrap the defenseless, and in diabolical intent, this Fugitive Slave Law stands alone in the annals of tyrannical legislation. I doubt if there be another nation on the globe, having the brass and the baseness to put such a law on the statute-book. If any man in this assembly thinks differently from me in this matter, and feels able to disprove my statements, I will gladly confront him at any suitable time and place he may select.

I take this law to be one of the grossest infringements of Christian Liberty, and, if the churches and ministers of our country were not stupidly blind, or most wickedly indifferent, they, too, would so regard it.

At the very moment that they are thanking God for the enjoyment of civil and religious liberty, and for the right to worship God according to the dictates of their own consciences, they are utterly silent in respect to a law which robs religion of its chief significance, and makes it utterly worthless to a world lying in wickedness. Did this law concern the "*mint, anise, and cumin*" — abridge the right to sing psalms, to partake of the sacrament, or to engage in any of the ceremonies of religion, it would be smitten by the thunder of a thousand pulpits. A general shout would go up from the church, demanding *repeal, repeal, instant repeal!* — And it would go hard with that politician who presumed to solicit the votes of the people without inscribing this motto on his banner. Further, if this demand were not

complied with, another Scotland would be added to the history of religious liberty, and the stern old Covenanters would be thrown into the shade. A John Knox would be seen at every church door, and heard from every pulpit, and Fillmore would have no more quarter than was shown by Knox, to the beautiful, but treacherous queen Mary of Scotland. The fact that the church of our country, (with fractional exceptions), does not esteem "the Fugitive Slave Law" as a declaration of war against religious liberty, implies that that church regards religion simply as a form of worship, an empty ceremony, and *not* a vital principle, requiring active benevolence, justice, love and good will towards man. It esteems sacrifice above mercy; psalm-singing above right doing; solemn meetings above practical righteousness. A worship that can be conducted by persons who refuse to give shelter to the houseless, to give bread to the hungry, clothing to the naked, and who enjoin obedience to a law forbidding these acts of mercy, is a curse, not a blessing to mankind. The Bible addresses all such persons as "scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites, who pay tithe of *mint*, *anise*, and *cumin*, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy and faith."

But the church of this country is not only indifferent to the wrongs of the slave, it actually takes sides with the oppressors. It has made itself the bulwark of American slavery, and the shield of American slave-hunters. Many of its most eloquent Divines, who stand as the very lights of the church, have shamelessly given the sanction of religion and the Bible to the whole slave system. They have taught that man may, properly, be a slave; that the relation of master and slave is ordained of God; that to send back an escaped bondman to his master is clearly the duty of all the followers of the Lord Jesus Christ; and this horrible blasphemy is palmed off upon the world for Christianity.

For my part, I would say, welcome infidelity! welcome atheism! welcome anything! in preference to the gospel, *as preached by those Divines!* They convert the very name of religion into an engine of tyranny, and barbarous cruelty, and serve to confirm more infidels, in this age, than all the infidel writings of Thomas Paine, Voltaire, and Bolingbroke, put together, have done! These ministers make religion a cold and flinty-hearted thing, having neither principles of right action, nor bowels of compassion. They strip the love of God of its beauty, and leave the throng of religion a huge, horrible, repulsive form. It is a religion for oppressors, tyrants, man-stealers, and *thugs*. It is not that "*pure and undefiled religion*" which is from above, and which is "*first pure, then peaceable, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.*" But a religion which favors the rich against the poor; which exalts the proud

above the humble; which divides mankind into two classes, tyrants and slaves; which says to the man in chains, *stay there*; and to the oppressor, *oppress on*; it is a religion which may be professed and enjoyed by all the robbers and enslavers of mankind; it makes God a respecter of persons, denies his fatherhood of the race, and tramples in the dust the great truth of the brotherhood of man. All this we affirm to be true of the popular church, and the popular worship of our land and nation — a religion, a church, and a worship which, on the authority of inspired wisdom, we pronounce to be an abomination in the sight of God. In the language of Isaiah, the American church might be well addressed, “Bring no more vain ablations; incense is an abomination unto me: the new moons and Sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth. They are a trouble to me; I am weary to bear them; and when ye spread forth your hands I will hide mine eyes from you. Yea! when ye make many prayers, I will not hear. YOUR HANDS ARE FULL OF BLOOD; cease to do evil, learn to do well; seek judgment; relieve the oppressed; judge for the fatherless; plead for the widow.”

The American church is guilty, when viewed in connection with what it is doing to uphold slavery; but it is superlatively guilty when viewed in connection with its ability to abolish slavery. The sin of which it is guilty is one of omission as well as of commission. Albert Barnes but uttered what the common sense of every man at all observant of the actual state of the case will receive as truth, when he declared that “There is no power out of the church that could sustain slavery an hour, if it were not sustained in it.”

Let the religious press, the pulpit, the Sunday school, the conference meeting, the great ecclesiastical, missionary, Bible and tract associations of the land array their immense powers against slavery and slave-holding; and the whole system of crime and blood would be scattered to the winds; and that they do not do this involves them in the most awful responsibility of which the mind can conceive.

In prosecuting the anti-slavery enterprise, we have been asked to spare the church, to spare the ministry; but *how*, we ask, could such a thing be done? We are met on the threshold of our efforts for the redemption of the slave, by the church and ministry of the country, in battle arrayed against us; and we are compelled to fight or flee. From *what* quarter, I beg to know, has proceeded a fire so deadly upon our ranks, during the last two years, as from the Northern pulpit? As the champions of oppressors, the

chosen men of American theology have appeared — men, honored for their so-called piety, and their real learning. The Lords of Buffalo, the Springs of New York, the Lathrops of Auburn, the Coxes and Spencers of Brooklyn, the Gannets and Sharps of Boston, the Deweys of Washington, and other great religious lights of the land have, in utter denial of the authority of *Him* by whom they professed to be called to the ministry, deliberately taught us, against the example of the Hebrews and against the remonstrance of the Apostles, they teach *that we ought to obey man's law before the law of God*.

My spirit wearies of such blasphemy; and how such men can be supported, as the "standing types and representatives of Jesus Christ," is a mystery which I leave others to penetrate. In speaking of the American church, however, let it be distinctly understood that I mean the great mass of the religious organizations of our land. There are exceptions, and I thank God that there are. Noble men may be found, scattered all over these Northern States, of whom Henry Ward Beecher of Brooklyn, Samuel J. May of Syracuse, and my esteemed friend (Rev. R. R. Raymond) on the platform, are shining examples; and let me say further, that upon these men lies the duty to inspire our ranks with high religious faith and zeal, and to cheer us on in the great mission of the slave's redemption from his chains.

One is struck with the difference between the attitude of the American church towards the anti-slavery movement, and that occupied by the churches in England towards a similar movement in that country. There, the church, true to its mission of ameliorating, elevating, and improving the condition of mankind, came forward promptly, bound up the wounds of the West Indian slave, and restored him to his liberty. There, the question of emancipation was a high religious question. It was demanded, in the name of humanity, and according to the law of the living God. The Sharps, the Clarksons, the Wilberforces, the Buxtons, and Burchells and the Knibbs, were alike famous for their piety, and for their philanthropy. The anti-slavery movement *there* was not an anti-church movement, for the reason that the church took its full share in prosecuting that movement: and the anti-slavery movement in this country will cease to be an anti-church movement, when the church of this country shall assume a favorable, instead of a hostile position towards that movement. Americans! your republican politics, not less than your republican religion, are flagrantly inconsistent. You boast of your love of liberty, your superior civilization, and your pure Christianity, while the whole political power of the nation (as embodied in the two great political parties), is solemnly pledged to support and perpetuate the enslavement of three millions of your countrymen. You

hurl your anathemas at the crowned headed tyrants of Russia and Austria, and pride yourselves on your Democratic institutions, while you yourselves consent to be the mere *tools* and *body-guards* of the tyrants of Virginia and Carolina. You invite to your shores fugitives of oppression from abroad, honor them with banquets, greet them with ovations, cheer them, toast them, salute them, protect them, and pour out your money to them like water; but the fugitives from your own land you advertise, hunt, arrest, shoot and kill. You glory in your refinement and your universal education yet you maintain a system as barbarous and dreadful as ever stained the character of a nation — a system begun in avarice, supported in pride, and perpetuated in cruelty. You shed tears over fallen Hungary, and make the sad story of her wrongs the theme of your poets, statesmen and orators, till your gallant sons are ready to fly to arms to vindicate her cause against her oppressors; but, in regard to the ten thousand wrongs of the American slave, you would enforce the strictest silence, and would hail him as an enemy of the nation who dares to make those wrongs the subject of public discourse! You are all on fire at the mention of liberty for France or for Ireland; but are as cold as an iceberg at the thought of liberty for the enslaved of America. You discourse eloquently on the dignity of labor; yet, you sustain a system which, in its very essence, casts a stigma upon labor. You can bare your bosom to the storm of British artillery to throw off a threepenny tax on tea; and yet wring the last hard-earned farthing from the grasp of the black laborers of your country. You profess to believe “that, of one blood, God made all nations of men to dwell on the face of all the earth,” and hath commanded all men, everywhere to love one another; yet you notoriously hate, (and glory in your hatred), all men whose skins are not colored like your own. You declare, before the world, and are understood by the world to declare, that you “*hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal; and are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; and that, among these are, life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness;*” and yet, you hold securely, in a bondage which, according to your own Thomas Jefferson, “*is worse than ages of that which your fathers rose in rebellion to oppose,*” a *seventh part* of the inhabitants of your country.

Fellow-citizens! I will not enlarge further on your national inconsistencies. The existence of slavery in this country brands your republicanism as a sham, your humanity as a base pretence, and your Christianity as a lie. It destroys your moral power abroad; it corrupts your politicians at home. It saps the foundation of religion; it makes your name a hissing, and a by-word to a mocking earth. It is the antagonistic force in your government, the only thing that seriously disturbs and endangers your *Union*. It fetters

your progress; it is the enemy of improvement, the deadly foe of education; it fosters pride; it breeds insolence; it promotes vice; it shelters crime; it is a curse to the earth that supports it; and yet, you cling to it, as if it were the sheet anchor of all your hopes. Oh! be warned! be warned! a horrible reptile is coiled up in your nation's bosom; the venomous creature is nursing at the tender breast of your youthful republic; *for the love of God*, tear away, and fling from you the hideous monster, and *let the weight of twenty millions crush and destroy it forever!*

But it is answered in reply to all this, that precisely what I have now denounced is, in fact, guaranteed and sanctioned by the Constitution of the United States; that the right to hold and to hunt slaves is a part of that Constitution framed by the illustrious Fathers of this Republic.

Then, I dare to affirm, notwithstanding all I have said before, your fathers stooped, basely stooped

*To palter with us in a double sense:
And keep the word of promise to the ear,
But break it to the heart.*

And instead of being the honest men I have before declared them to be, they were the veriest imposters that ever practiced on mankind. This is the inevitable conclusion, and from it there is no escape. But I differ from those who charge this baseness on the framers of the Constitution of the United States. It is a slander upon their memory, at least, so I believe. There is not time now to argue the constitutional question at length — nor have I the ability to discuss it as it ought to be discussed. The subject has been handled with masterly power by Lysander Spooner, Esq., by William Goodell, by Samuel E. Sewall, Esq., and last, though not least, by Gerritt Smith, Esq. These gentlemen have, as I think, fully and clearly vindicated the Constitution from any design to support slavery for an hour.

Fellow-citizens! there is no matter in respect to which, the people of the North have allowed themselves to be so ruinously imposed upon, as that of the pro-slavery character of the Constitution. In that instrument I hold there is neither warrant, license, nor sanction of the hateful thing; but, interpreted as it ought to be interpreted, the Constitution is a GLORIOUS

LIBERTY DOCUMENT. Read its preamble, consider its purposes. Is slavery among them? Is it at the gateway? or is it in the temple? It is neither. While I do not intend to argue this question on the present occasion, let me ask, if it be not somewhat singular that, if the Constitution were intended to be, by its framers and adopters, a slave-holding instrument, why neither slavery, slaveholding, nor slave can anywhere be found in it. What would be thought of an instrument, drawn up, legally drawn up, for the purpose of entitling the city of Rochester to a track of land, in which no mention of land was made? Now, there are certain rules of interpretation, for the proper understanding of all legal instruments. These rules are well established. They are plain, common-sense rules, such as you and I, and all of us, can understand and apply, without having passed years in the study of law. I scout the idea that the question of the constitutionality or unconstitutionality of slavery is not a question for the people. I hold that every American citizen has a right to form an opinion of the constitution, and to propagate that opinion, and to use all honorable means to make his opinion the prevailing one. Without this right, the liberty of an American citizen would be as insecure as that of a Frenchman. Ex-Vice-President Dallas tells us that the Constitution is an object to which no American mind can be too attentive, and no American heart too devoted. He further says, the Constitution, in its words, is plain and intelligible, and is meant for the home-bred, unsophisticated understandings of our fellow-citizens. Senator Berrien tells us that the Constitution is the fundamental law, that which controls all others. The charter of our liberties, which every citizen has a personal interest in understanding thoroughly. The testimony of Senator Breese, Lewis Cass, and many others that might be named, who are everywhere esteemed as sound lawyers, so regard the constitution. I take it, therefore, that it is not presumption in a private citizen to form an opinion of that instrument.

Now, take the Constitution according to its plain reading, and I defy the presentation of a single pro-slavery clause in it. On the other hand it will be found to contain principles and purposes, entirely hostile to the existence of slavery.

I have detained my audience entirely too long already. At some future period I will gladly avail myself of an opportunity to give this subject a full and fair discussion.

Allow me to say, in conclusion, notwithstanding the dark picture I have this day presented of the state of the nation, I do not despair of this country. There are forces in operation, which must inevitably work the downfall of

slavery. "The arm of the Lord is not shortened," and the doom of slavery is certain. I, therefore, leave off where I began, with hope. While drawing encouragement from the Declaration of Independence, the great principles it contains, and the genius of American Institutions, my spirit is also cheered by the obvious tendencies of the age. Nations do not now stand in the same relation to each other that they did ages ago. No nation can now shut itself up from the surrounding world, and trot round in the same old path of its fathers without interference. The time was when such could be done. Long established customs of hurtful character could formerly fence themselves in, and do their evil work with social impunity. Knowledge was then confined and enjoyed by the privileged few, and the multitude walked on in mental darkness. But a change has now come over the affairs of mankind. Walled cities and empires have become unfashionable. The arm of commerce has borne away the gates of the strong city. Intelligence is penetrating the darkest corners of the globe. It makes its pathway over and under the sea, as well as on the earth. Wind, steam, and lightning are its chartered agents. Oceans no longer divide, but link nations together. From Boston to London is now a holiday excursion. Space is comparatively annihilated. Thoughts expressed on one side of the Atlantic, are distinctly heard on the other. The far off and almost fabulous Pacific rolls in grandeur at our feet. The Celestial Empire, the mystery of ages, is being solved. The fiat of the Almighty, "Let there be Light," has not yet spent its force. No abuse, no outrage whether in taste, sport or avarice, can now hide itself from the all-pervading light. The iron shoe, and crippled foot of China must be seen, in contrast with nature. Africa must rise and put on her yet unwoven garment. "Ethiopia shall stretch out her hand unto God." In the fervent aspirations of William Lloyd Garrison, I say, and let every heart join in saying it:

*God speed the year of jubilee
The wide world o'er
When from their galling chains set free,
Th' oppress'd shall vilely bend the knee,

And wear the yoke of tyranny
Like brutes no more.
That year will come, and freedom's reign,*

*To man his plundered rights again
Restore.*

*God speed the day when human blood
Shall cease to flow!
In every clime be understood,
The claims of human brotherhood,
And each return for evil, good,
Not blow for blow;
That day will come all feuds to end.
And change into a faithful friend
Each foe.*

*God speed the hour, the glorious hour,
When none on earth
Shall exercise a lordly power,
Nor in a tyrant's presence cower;
But all to manhood's stature tower,
By equal birth!
That hour will come, to each, to all,
And from his prison-house, the thrall
Go forth.*

*Until that year, day, hour, arrive,
With head, and heart, and hand I'll strive,
To break the rod, and rend the gyve,
The spoiler of his prey deprive —
So witness Heaven!
And never from my chosen post,
Whate'er the peril or the cost,
Be driven.*

Source: *Oration, Delivered in Corinthian Hall, Rochester by Frederick Douglass, July 5, 1852* (Rochester: Lee, Mann & Co., 1852), available at <https://archive.org/details/orationdelivered00fred/page/n1/mode/2up>.

Document 4

Speech on the Repeal of the Missouri Compromise Peoria, Illinois

October 16, 1854

Lincoln's speech at Peoria marked a "turning point" in his life. Following his single term in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1847 to 1849, Lincoln returned to his law practice, leaving public service behind. But the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854, roused him to action. The author of the law, Illinois' Democratic senator Stephen A. Douglas (1813–1861), based the law on the principle of popular sovereignty: the people in the territories, and not Congress, had the right to vote to allow or prohibit slavery in the territory. Douglas argued that popular sovereignty was the most democratic way to resolve the slavery question. In giving the population of a territory the right to decide on slavery, however, the Kansas-Nebraska Act repealed the Missouri Compromise of 1820, which had affirmed Congress' right to prohibit the extension of slavery into the territories. Specifically, the Kansas-Nebraska Act opened the territories north of the latitude line 36° 30' to slavery, whereas the Missouri Compromise had prohibited it north of that line.

The Kansas-Nebraska Act inflamed sectional tensions, encouraging a political realignment that drew antislavery Americans, including some Democrats in the North, into the new Republican party, which ran its first candidate for president in 1856. Recognizing the danger that his Act posed to the Democratic party and his own ambitions to be president, Douglas undertook a speaking tour in Illinois in 1854 in support of the Act. Lincoln's three hour speech at Peoria was a reply to a speech by Douglas given on this tour. Lincoln's speech criticized slavery on moral, political, legal, and historical grounds. Lincoln agreed with Douglas that popular sovereignty—the people's right to rule—was the basis of democracy. He denied, however, that the slavery question could be decided by the vote of territorial settlers. Equality for Lincoln was a principle of right that imposed a limit on what the people could do with their votes.

Lincoln's task as a statesman was to persuade the people to accept limits to their power, by persuading them not to allow slavery to extend beyond its current

limits. At Peoria, he undertook this task with a speech that consisted of four parts: (1) an introduction that disclaims radicalism and positioned Lincoln as an anti-slavery moderate; (2) a historical overview of the precedents for the federal government's restriction of slavery in the territories; (3) a consideration of whether or not popular sovereignty and its "avowed principle" of moral neutrality were "intrinsically right"; and (4) a rebuttal to Douglas' claim that the historical record sanctioned popular sovereignty, thereby superseding earlier compromises and policies in regard to the restriction of slavery. Lincoln repeated many of the arguments he used in the Peoria speech in the famous Lincoln-Douglas debates of 1858 (Document 9) and throughout the remainder of his public life.

Source: *Life and Works of Abraham Lincoln*, centenary edition, vol. 2, ed. Marion Mills Miller (New York: Current Literature Publishing, 1907), 218–275, <https://archive.org/details/lifeworks02lincuoft/page/274>.

The repeal of the Missouri Compromise, and the propriety of its restoration, constitute the subject of what I am about to say.

As I desire to present my own connected view of this subject, my remarks will not be, specifically, an answer to Judge Douglas; yet, as I proceed, the main points he has presented will arise, and will receive such respectful attention as I may be able to give them.

I wish further to say, that I do not propose to question the patriotism, or to assail the motives of any man, or class of men; but rather to strictly confine myself to the naked merits of the question.

I also wish to be no less than national in all the positions I may take; and whenever I take ground which others have thought, or may think, narrow, sectional, and dangerous to the Union, I hope to give a reason which will appear sufficient, at least to some, why I think differently.

And, as this subject is no other than part and parcel of the larger general question of domestic slavery, I wish to *make* and to *keep* the distinction between the *existing* institution and the *extension* of it so broad, and so clear, that no honest man can misunderstand me, and no dishonest one successfully misrepresent me.

In order to get a clear understanding of what the Missouri Compromise is, a short history of the preceding kindred subjects will perhaps be proper. When we established our independence, we did not own, or claim, the country to which this compromise applies. Indeed, strictly speaking, the confederacy then owned no country at all; the states respectively owned

the country within their limits; and some of them owned territory beyond their strict state limits. Virginia thus owned the Northwest Territory—the country out of which the principal part of Ohio, all Indiana, all Illinois, all Michigan, and all Wisconsin have since been formed. She also owned (perhaps within her then limits) what has since been formed into the state of Kentucky. North Carolina thus owned what is now the state of Tennessee; and South Carolina and Georgia, in separate parts, owned what are now Mississippi and Alabama. Connecticut, I think, owned the little remaining part of Ohio—being the same where they now send Giddings to Congress, and beat all creation at making cheese. These territories, together with the states themselves, constituted all the country over which the confederacy then claimed any sort of jurisdiction. We were then living under the Articles of Confederation, which were superseded by the Constitution several years afterward. The question of ceding these territories to the general government was set on foot. Mr. Jefferson, the author of the Declaration of Independence, and otherwise a chief actor in the Revolution; then a delegate in Congress; afterward twice president; who was, is, and perhaps will continue to be the most distinguished politician of our history; a Virginian by birth and continued residence, and withal, a slaveholder; conceived the idea of taking that occasion to prevent slavery ever going into the Northwest Territory. He prevailed on the Virginia legislature to adopt his views and to cede the territory, making the prohibition of slavery therein a condition of the deed. Congress accepted the cession, with the condition; and in the first ordinance (which the acts of Congress were then called) for the government of the territory, provided that slavery should never be permitted therein. This is the famed ordinance of '87 so often spoken of. Thenceforward, for sixty-one years, and until in 1848 the last scrap of this territory came into the Union as the state of Wisconsin, all parties acted in quiet obedience to this ordinance. It is now what Jefferson foresaw and intended—the happy home of teeming millions of free, white, prosperous people, and no slave amongst them.

Thus, with the author of the Declaration of Independence, the policy of prohibiting slavery in new territory originated. Thus, away back of the Constitution, in the pure fresh, free breath of the Revolution, the state of Virginia, and the national Congress put that policy in practice. Thus through sixty odd of the best years of the Republic did that policy steadily work to its great and beneficent end. And thus, in those five states, and five million free, enterprising people, we have before us the rich fruits of this policy.

But now new light breaks upon us. Now Congress declares this ought never to have been; and the like of it must never be again. The sacred right of

self-government is grossly violated by it! We even find some men, who drew their first breath, and every other breath of their lives, under this very restriction, now live in dread of absolute suffocation, if they should be restricted in the "sacred right" of taking slaves to Nebraska. That perfect liberty they sigh for—the liberty of making slaves of other people—Jefferson never thought of; their own father never thought of; they never thought of themselves, a year ago. How fortunate for them they did not sooner become sensible of their great misery! Oh, how difficult it is to treat with respect such assaults upon all we have ever really held sacred.

But to return to history. In 1803 we purchased what was then called Louisiana, of France. It included the now states of Louisiana, Arkansas, Missouri, and Iowa; also the territory of Minnesota, and the present bone of contention, Kansas and Nebraska. Slavery already existed among the French at New Orleans; and, to some extent, at St. Louis. In 1812 Louisiana came into the Union as a slave state, without controversy. In 1818 or '19, Missouri showed signs of a wish to come in with slavery. This was resisted by northern members of Congress; and thus began the first great slavery agitation in the nation. This controversy lasted several months and became very angry and exciting; the House of Representatives voting steadily for the prohibition of slavery in Missouri, and the Senate voting as steadily against it. Threats of breaking up the Union were freely made; and the ablest public men of the day became seriously alarmed. At length a compromise was made, in which, like all compromises, both sides yielded something. It was a law passed on the sixth day of March 1820, providing that Missouri might come into the Union *with* slavery, but that in all the remaining part of the territory purchased of France, which lies north of 36 degrees and 30 minutes north latitude, slavery should never be permitted. This provision of law is *the Missouri Compromise*. In excluding slavery north of the line, the same language is employed as in the ordinance of '87. It directly applied to Iowa, Minnesota, and to the present bone of contention, Kansas and Nebraska. Whether there should or should not be slavery south of that line, nothing was said in the law; but Arkansas constituted the principal remaining part, south of the line; and it has since been admitted as a slave state without serious controversy. More recently, Iowa, north of the line, came in as a free state without controversy. Still later, Minnesota, north of the line, had a territorial organization without controversy. Texas principally south of the line, and west of Arkansas; though originally within the purchase from France, had, in 1819, been traded off to Spain in our treaty for the acquisition of Florida. It had thus become a part of Mexico. Mexico revolutionized and became independent of Spain.

American citizens began settling rapidly with their slaves in the southern part of Texas. Soon they revolutionized against Mexico and established an independent government of their own, adopting a constitution, with slavery, strongly resembling the constitutions of our slave states. By still another rapid move, Texas, claiming a boundary much further west than when we parted with her in 1819, was brought back to the United States, and admitted into the Union as a slave state. There then was little or no settlement in the northern part of Texas, a considerable portion of which lay north of the Missouri line; and in the resolutions admitting her into the Union, the Missouri restriction was expressly extended westward across her territory. This was in 1845, only nine years ago.

Thus originated the Missouri Compromise; and thus has it been respected down to 1845. And even four years later, in 1849, our distinguished Senator, in a public address, held the following language in relation to it:

The Missouri Compromise had been in practical operation for about a quarter of a century, and had received the sanction and approbation of men of all parties in every section of the Union. It had allayed all sectional jealousies and irritations growing out of this vexed question, and harmonized and tranquilized the whole country. It had given to Henry Clay, as its prominent champion, the proud sobriquet of the "*Great Pacificator*" and by that title and for that service, his political friends had repeatedly appealed to the people to rally under his standard, as a presidential candidate, as the man who had exhibited the patriotism and the power to suppress, an unholy and treasonable agitation, and preserve the Union. He was not aware that any man or any party from any section of the Union, had ever urged as an objection to Mr. Clay, that he was the great champion of the Missouri Compromise. On the contrary, the effort was made by the opponents of Mr. Clay, to prove that he was not entitled to the exclusive merit of that great patriotic measure, and that the honor was equally due to others as well as to him, for securing its adoption—that it had its origin in the hearts of all patriotic men, who desired to preserve and perpetuate the blessings of our glorious Union—an origin akin that of the Constitution of the United States, conceived in the same spirit of fraternal affection, and calculated to remove forever the only danger which seemed to threaten, at some distant day, to sever the social bond of union. All the evidences of public opinion at that day, seemed to indicate that this compromise had been canonized in the hearts of

the American people, as a sacred thing which no ruthless hand would ever be reckless enough to disturb.

I do not read this extract to involve Judge Douglas in an inconsistency. If he afterward thought he had been wrong, it was right for him to change. I bring this forward merely to show the high estimate placed on the Missouri Compromise by all parties up to so late as the year 1849.

But, going back a little, in point of time, our war with Mexico broke out in 1846. When Congress was about adjourning that session, President Polk asked them to place two million dollars under his control, to be used by him in the recess, if found practicable and expedient, in negotiating a treaty of peace with Mexico and acquiring some part of her territory. A bill was duly got up for the purpose, and was progressing swimmingly in the House of Representatives, when a member by the name of David Wilmot, a Democrat from Pennsylvania, moved as an amendment "Provided that in any territory thus acquired, there shall never be slavery."

This is the origin of the far-famed "Wilmot Proviso." It created a great flutter; but it stuck like wax, was voted into the bill, and the bill passed with it through the House. The Senate, however, adjourned without final action on it, and so both appropriation and proviso were lost, for the time. The war continued, and at the next session, the president renewed his request for the appropriation, enlarging the amount, I think, to three million. Again came the proviso; and defeated the measure. Congress adjourned again, and the war went on. In Dec. 1847, the new Congress assembled. I was in the lower House that term. The "Wilmot Proviso," or the principle of it, was constantly coming up in some shape or other, and I think I may venture to say I voted for it at least forty times during the short term I was there. The Senate, however, held it in check, and it never became law. In the spring of 1848 a treaty of peace was made with Mexico, by which we obtained that portion of her country which now constitutes the territories of New Mexico and Utah, and the now state of California. By this treaty the Wilmot Proviso was defeated, as so far as it was intended to be a condition of the acquisition of territory. Its friends, however, were still determined to find some way to restrain slavery from getting into the new country. This new acquisition lay directly west of our old purchase from France, and extended west to the Pacific Ocean—and was so situated that if the Missouri line should be extended straight west, the new country would be divided by such extended line, leaving some north and some south of it. On Judge Douglas' motion a bill, or provision of a bill, passed the Senate to so extend the Missouri line. The Proviso men in the

House, including myself, voted it down, because by implication, it gave up the southern part to slavery, while we were bent on having it *all* free.

In the fall of 1848 the gold mines were discovered in California. This attracted people to it with unprecedented rapidity, so that on, or soon after, the meeting of the new congress in Dec. 1849, she already had a population of nearly a hundred thousand, had called a convention, formed a state constitution, excluding slavery, and was knocking for admission into the Union. The Proviso men, of course, were for letting her in, but the Senate, always true to the other side would not consent to her admission. And there California stood, kept *out* of the Union because she would not let slavery *into* her borders. Under all the circumstances perhaps this was not wrong. There were other points of dispute, connected with the general question of slavery, which equally needed adjustment. The South clamored for a more efficient fugitive slave law. The North clamored for the abolition of a peculiar species of slave trade in the District of Columbia, in connection with which, in view from the windows of the Capitol, a sort of negro livery stable, where droves of negroes were collected, temporarily kept, and finally taken to southern markets, precisely like droves of horses, had been openly maintained for fifty years. Utah and New Mexico needed territorial governments; and whether slavery should or should not be prohibited within them was another question. The indefinite western boundary of Texas was to be settled. She was received a slave state; and consequently the farther west the slavery men could push her boundary, the more slave country they secured. And the farther east the slavery opponents could thrust the boundary back, the less slave ground was secured. Thus this was just as clearly a slavery question as any of the others.

These points all needed adjustment; and they were all held up, perhaps wisely to make them help to adjust one another. The Union, now, as in 1820, was thought to be in danger; and devotion to the Union rightfully inclined men to yield somewhat, in points where nothing else could have so inclined them. A compromise was finally effected. The South got their new fugitive slave law; and the North got California (the far best part of our acquisition from Mexico) as a free state. The South got a provision that New Mexico and Utah, when admitted as states, may come in with or without slavery as they may then choose; and the North got the slave trade abolished in the District of Columbia. The North got the western boundary of Texas, thence further back eastward than the South desired; but, in turn, they gave Texas ten million dollars with which to pay her old debts. This is the Compromise of 1850.

Preceding the presidential election of 1852, each of the great political parties, Democrats and Whigs, met in convention and adopted resolutions

endorsing the Compromise of '50; as a "finality," a final settlement, so far as these parties could make it so, of all slavery agitation. Previous to this, in 1851, the Illinois legislature had endorsed it.

During this long period of time Nebraska had remained substantially an uninhabited country, but now emigration to, and settlement within it began to take place. It is about one-third as large as the present United States, and its importance so long overlooked, begins to come into view. The restriction of slavery by the Missouri Compromise directly applies to it; in fact, was first made, and has since been maintained, expressly for it. In 1853, a bill to give it a territorial government passed the House of Representatives, and, in the hands of Judge Douglas, failed of passing the Senate only for want of time. This bill contained no repeal of the Missouri Compromise. Indeed, when it was assailed because it did not contain such repeal, Judge Douglas defended it in its existing form. On January 4th, 1854, Judge Douglas introduces a new bill to give Nebraska territorial government. He accompanies this bill with a report, in which last, he expressly recommends that the Missouri Compromise shall neither be affirmed nor repealed.

Before long the bill is so modified as to make two territories instead of one; calling the southern one Kansas.

Also, about a month after the introduction of the bill, on the Judge's own motion, it is so amended as to declare the Missouri Compromise inoperative and void; and, substantially, that the people who go and settle there may establish slavery, or exclude it, as they may see fit. In this shape the bill passed both branches of Congress and became a law.

This is the *repeal* of the Missouri Compromise. The foregoing history may not be precisely accurate in every particular; but I am sure it is sufficiently so, for all the uses I shall attempt to make of it, and in it, we have before us, the chief material enabling us to correctly judge whether the repeal of the Missouri Compromise is right or wrong.

I think, and shall try to show, that it is wrong; wrong in its direct effect, letting slavery into Kansas and Nebraska—and wrong in its prospective principle, allowing it to spread to every other part of the wide world where men can be found inclined to take it.

This *declared* indifference, but as I must think, covert *real* zeal for the spread of slavery, I cannot but hate. I hate it because of the monstrous injustice of slavery itself. I hate it because it deprives our republican example of its just influence in the world—enables the enemies of free institutions, with plausibility, to taunt us as hypocrites—causes the real friends of freedom to doubt our sincerity, and especially because it forces so many really good men

amongst ourselves into an open war with the very fundamental principles of civil liberty—criticizing the Declaration of Independence, and insisting that there is no right principle of action but *self-interest*.

Before proceeding, let me say I think I have no prejudice against the southern people. They are just what we would be in their situation. If slavery did not now exist amongst them, they would not introduce it. If it did now exist amongst us, we should not instantly give it up. This I believe of the masses North and South. Doubtless there are individuals, on both sides, who would not hold slaves under any circumstances; and others who would gladly introduce slavery anew, if it were out of existence. We know that some southern men do free their slaves, go north, and become tip-top abolitionists; while some northern ones go south and become most cruel slave-masters.

When southern people tell us they are no more responsible for the origin of slavery than we; I acknowledge the fact. When it is said that the institution exists; and that it is very difficult to get rid of it, in any satisfactory way, I can understand and appreciate the saying. I surely will not blame them for not doing what I should not know how to do myself. If all earthly power were given me, I should not know what to do, as to the existing institution. My first impulse would be to free all the slaves and send them to Liberia—to their own native land. But a moment's reflection would convince me that whatever of high hope (as I think there is) there may be in this, in the long run, its sudden execution is impossible. If they were all landed there in a day, they would all perish in the next ten days; and there are not surplus shipping and surplus money enough in the world to carry them there in many times ten days. What then? Free them all and keep them among us as underlings? Is it quite certain that this betters their condition? I think I would not hold one in slavery, at any rate; yet the point is not clear enough for me to denounce people upon. What next? Free them, and make them politically and socially our equals? My own feelings will not admit of this; and if mine would, we well know that those of the great mass of white people will not. Whether this feeling accords with justice and sound judgment, is not the sole question, if indeed, it is any part of it. A universal feeling, whether well or ill-founded, cannot be safely disregarded. We cannot, then, make them equals. It does seem to me that systems of gradual emancipation might be adopted; but for their tardiness in this, I will not undertake to judge our brethren of the South.

When they remind us of their constitutional rights, I acknowledge them, not grudgingly, but fully, and fairly; and I would give them any legislation for the reclaiming of their fugitives, which should not, in its stringency, be

more likely to carry a free man into slavery, than our ordinary criminal laws are to hang an innocent one.

But all this; to my judgment, furnishes no more excuse for permitting slavery to go into our own free territory, than it would for reviving the African slave trade by law. The law which forbids the bringing of slaves *from* Africa; and that which has so long forbid the taking them *to* Nebraska, can hardly be distinguished on any moral principle; and the repeal of the former could find quite as plausible excuses as that of the latter.

The arguments by which the repeal of the Missouri Compromise is sought to be justified, are these:

First, that the Nebraska country needed a territorial government.

Second, that in various ways, the public had repudiated it, and demanded the repeal; and therefore should not now complain of it.

And lastly, that the repeal establishes a principle which is intrinsically right.

I will attempt an answer to each of them in its turn. First, then, if that country was in need of a territorial organization, could it not have had it as well without as with the repeal? Iowa and Minnesota, to both of which the Missouri restriction applied, had, without its repeal, each in succession, territorial organizations. And even, the year before, a bill for Nebraska itself was within an ace of passing, without the repealing clause; and this in the hands of the same men who are now the champions of repeal. Why no necessity then for the repeal? But still later, when this very bill was first brought in, it contained no repeal. But, say they, because the public had demanded, or rather commanded the repeal, the repeal was to accompany the organization, whenever that should occur.

Now, I deny that the public ever demanded any such thing—ever repudiated the Missouri Compromise—ever commanded its repeal. I deny it, and call for the proof. It is not contended, I believe, that any such command has ever been given in express terms. It is only said that it was done *in principle*. The support of the Wilmot Proviso is the first fact mentioned to prove that the Missouri restriction was repudiated in *principle*, and the second is, the refusal to extend the Missouri line over the country acquired from Mexico. These are near enough alike to be treated together. The one was to exclude the chances of slavery from the *whole* new acquisition by the lump; and the other was to reject a division of it, by which one *half* was to be given up to those chances. Now whether this was a repudiation of the Missouri line, in *principle*, depends upon whether the Missouri law contained any *principle* requiring the line to be extended over the country acquired from Mexico. I

contend it did not. I insist that it contained no general principle, but that it was, in every sense, specific. That its terms limit it to the country purchased from France is undenied and undeniable. It could have no principle beyond the intention of those who made it. They did not intend to extend the line to country which they did not own. If they intended to extend it, in the event of acquiring additional territory, why did they not say so? It was just as easy to say, that "in all the country west of the Mississippi, which we now own, or may hereafter acquire there shall never be slavery," as to say what they did say; and they would have said it if they had meant it. An intention to extend the law is not only not mentioned in the law, but is not mentioned in any contemporaneous history. Both the law itself and the history of the times are a blank as to any *principle* of extension; and by neither the known rules for construing statutes and contracts, nor by common sense, can any such *principle* be inferred.

Another fact showing the specific character of the Missouri law—showing that it intended no more than it expressed—showing that the line was not intended as a universal dividing line between free and slave territory, present and prospective—north of which slavery could never go—is the fact that by that very law, Missouri came in as a slave state, *north* of the line. If that law contained any prospective *principle*, the whole law must be looked to in order to ascertain what the *principle* was. And by this rule, the South could fairly contend that inasmuch as they got one slave state north of the line at the inception of the law, they have the right to have another given them *north* of it occasionally—now and then in the indefinite westward extension of the line. This demonstrates the absurdity of attempting to deduce a prospective *principle* from the Missouri Compromise line.

When we voted for the Wilmot Proviso, we were voting to keep slavery *out* of the whole Missouri [Mexican?] acquisition; and little did we think we were thereby voting to let it *into* Nebraska, laying several hundred miles distant. When we voted against extending the Missouri line, little did we think we were voting to destroy the old line, then of near thirty years' standing. To argue that we thus repudiated the Missouri Compromise is no less absurd than it would be to argue that because we have, so far, forbore to acquire Cuba, we have thereby, *in principle*, repudiated our former acquisitions and determined to throw them out of the Union! No less absurd than it would be to say that because I may have refused to build an addition to my house, I thereby have decided to destroy the existing house! And if I catch you setting fire to my house, you will turn upon me and say I *instructed* you to do it! The most conclusive argument, however, that, while voting for the Wilmot

Proviso, and while voting against the *extension* of the Missouri line, we never thought of disturbing the original Missouri Compromise, is found in the facts, that there was then, and still is, an unorganized tract of fine country, nearly as large as the state of Missouri, lying immediately west of Arkansas, and south of the Missouri Compromise line; and that we never attempted to prohibit slavery as to it. I wish particular attention to this. It adjoins the original Missouri Compromise line, by its northern boundary; and consequently is part of the country into which, by implication, slavery was permitted to go, by that compromise. There it has lain open ever since, and there it still lies. And yet no effort has been made at any time to wrest it from the South. In all our struggles to prohibit slavery within our Mexican acquisitions, we never so much as lifted a finger to prohibit it, as to this tract. Is not this entirely conclusive that at all times, we have held the Missouri Compromise as a sacred thing; even when against ourselves, as well as when for us?

Senator Douglas sometimes says the Missouri line itself was, *in principle*, only an extension of the line of the ordinance of '87—that is to say, an extension of the Ohio River. I think this is weak enough on its face. I will remark, however that, as a glance at the map will show, the Missouri line is a long way farther south than the Ohio; and that if our Senator, in proposing his extension, had stuck to the principle of jogging southward, perhaps it might not have been voted down so readily.

But next it is said that the Compromises of '50 and the ratification of them by both political parties in '52, established a *new principle*, which required the repeal of the Missouri Compromise. This again I deny. I deny it, and demand the proof. I have already stated fully what the compromises of '50 are. The particular part of those measures, for which the virtual repeal of the Missouri Compromise is sought to be inferred (for it is admitted they contain nothing about it, in express terms) is the provision in the Utah and New Mexico laws, which permits them when they seek admission into the Union as states, to come in with or without slavery as they shall then see fit. Now I insist this provision was made for Utah and New Mexico, and for no other place whatever. It had no more direct reference to Nebraska than it had to the territories of the moon. But, say they, it had reference to Nebraska, *in principle*. Let us see. The North consented to this provision, not because they considered it right in itself; but because they were compensated—paid for it. They, at the same time, got California into the Union as a free state. This was far the best part of all they had struggled for by the Wilmot Proviso. They also got the area of slavery somewhat narrowed in the settlement of the boundary of Texas. Also, they got the slave trade abolished in the District of Columbia. For all

these desirable objects the North could afford to yield something; and they did yield to the South the Utah and New Mexico provision. I do not mean that the whole North, or even a majority, yielded when the law passed; but enough yielded, when added to the vote of the South, to carry the measure. Now can it be pretended that the *principle* of this arrangement requires us to permit the same provision to be applied to Nebraska, *without any equivalent at all*? Give us another free state; press the boundary of Texas still further back, give us another step toward the destruction of slavery in the District, and you present us a similar case. But ask us not to repeat, for nothing, what you paid for in the first instance. If you wish the thing again, pay again. That is the principle of the compromises of '50, if indeed they had any principles beyond their specific terms – it was the system of equivalents.

Again, if Congress, at that time, intended that all future territories should, when admitted as states, come in with or without slavery, at their own option, why did it not say so? With such a universal provision, all know the bills could not have passed. Did they, then – could they – establish a *principle* contrary to their own intention? Still further, if they intended to establish the principle that wherever Congress had control, it should be left to the people to do as they thought fit with slavery, why did they not authorize the people of the District of Columbia at their adoption to abolish slavery within these limits? I personally know that this has not been left undone, because it was unthought of. It was frequently spoken of by members of Congress and by citizens of Washington six years ago; and I heard no one express a doubt that a system of gradual emancipation, with compensation to owners, would meet the approbation of a large majority of the white people of the District. But without the action of Congress they could say nothing; and Congress said “no.” In the measures of 1850 Congress had the subject of slavery in the District expressly in hand. If they were then establishing the *principle* of allowing the people to do as they please with slavery, why did they not apply the *principle* to that people?

Again, it is claimed that by the resolutions of the Illinois legislature passed in 1851, the repeal of the Missouri Compromise was demanded. This I deny also. Whatever may be worked out by a criticism of the language of those resolutions, the people have never understood them as being any more than an endorsement of the compromises of 1850; and a release of our senators from voting for the Wilmot Proviso. The whole people are living witnesses, that this only, was their view. Finally, it is asked, “If we did not mean to apply the Utah and New Mexico provision to all future territories, what did we mean, when we, in 1852, endorsed the compromises of '50?”

For myself, I can answer this question most easily. I meant not to ask a repeal, or modification of the fugitive slave law. I meant not to ask for the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia. I meant not to resist the admission of Utah and New Mexico, even should they ask to come in as slave states. I meant nothing about additional territories, because, as I understood, we then had no territory whose character as to slavery was not already settled. As to Nebraska, I regarded its character as being fixed, by the Missouri Compromise, for thirty years—as unalterably fixed as that of my own home in Illinois. As to new acquisitions I said “sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.” When we make new acquisitions we will, as heretofore, try to manage them some how. That is my answer. That is what I meant and said; and I appeal to the people to say, each for himself, whether that was not also the universal meaning of the free states.

And now, in turn, let me ask a few questions. If by any, or all these matters, the repeal of the Missouri Compromise was commanded, why was not the command sooner obeyed? Why was the repeal omitted in the Nebraska bill of 1853? Why was it omitted in the original bill of 1854? Why, in the accompanying report, was such a repeal characterized as a *departure* from the course pursued in 1850? and its continued omission recommended?

I am aware Judge Douglas now argues that the subsequent express repeal is no substantial alteration of the bill. This argument seems wonderful to me. It is as if one should argue that white and black are not different. He admits, however, that there is a literal change in the bill; and that he made the change in deference to other senators, who would not support the bill without. This proves that those other senators thought the change a substantial one; and that the Judge thought their opinions worth deferring to. His own opinions, therefore, seem not to rest on a very firm basis even in his own mind—and I suppose the world believes, and will continue to believe, that precisely on the substance of that change this whole agitation has arisen.

I conclude, then, that the public never demanded the repeal of the Missouri Compromise.

I now come to consider whether the repeal, with its avowed principle, is intrinsically right. I insist that it is not. Take the particular case. A controversy had arisen between the advocates and opponents of slavery, in relation to its establishment within the country we had purchased of France. The southern, and then best part of the purchase, was already in as a slave state. The controversy was settled by also letting Missouri in as a slave state; but with the agreement that within all the remaining part of the purchase, north of a certain line, there should never be slavery. As to what was to be done with

the remaining part south of the line, nothing was said; but perhaps the fair implication was, that it should come in with slavery if it should so choose. The southern part, except a portion heretofore mentioned, afterward did come in with slavery, as the state of Arkansas. All these many years since 1820, the northern part had remained a wilderness. At length settlements began in it also. In due course, Iowa, came in as a free state, and Minnesota was given a territorial government, without removing the slavery restriction. Finally the sole remaining part, north of the line, Kansas and Nebraska, was to be organized; and it is proposed, and carried, to blot out the old dividing line of thirty-four years' standing, and to open the whole of that country to the introduction of slavery. Now, this, to my mind, is manifestly unjust. After an angry and dangerous controversy, the parties made friends by dividing the bone of contention. The one party first appropriates her own share, beyond all power to be disturbed in the possession of it; and then seizes the share of the other party. It is as if two starving men had divided their only loaf; the one had hastily swallowed his half, and then grabbed the other half just as he was putting it to his mouth!

Let me here drop the main argument, to notice what I consider rather an inferior matter. It is argued that slavery will not go to Kansas and Nebraska, *in any event*. This is a *palliation* – a *lullaby*. I have some hope that it will not; but let us not be too confident. As to climate, a glance at the map shows that there are five slave states – Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, Kentucky, and Missouri – and also the District of Columbia, all north of the Missouri Compromise line. The census returns of 1850 show that, within these, there are 867,276 slaves – being more than one-fourth of all the slaves in the nation.

It is not climate, then, that will keep slavery out of these territories. Is there anything in the peculiar nature of the country? Missouri adjoins these territories, by her entire western boundary, and slavery is already within every one of her western counties. I have even heard it said that there are more slaves, in proportion to whites, in the northwestern county of Missouri than within any county of the state. Slavery pressed entirely up to the old western boundary of the state, and when, rather recently, a part of that boundary, at the northwest was moved out a little farther west, slavery followed on quite up to the new line. Now, when the restriction is removed, what is to prevent it from going still further? Climate will not. No peculiarity of the country will – nothing in *nature* will. Will the disposition of the people prevent it? Those nearest the scene, are all in favor of the extension. The Yankees, who are opposed to it, may be more numerous; but in military phrase, the battlefield is too far from *their* base of operations.

But it is said, there now is *no* law in Nebraska on the subject of slavery; and that, in such case, taking a slave there operates his freedom. That *is* good book-law; but is not the rule of actual practice. Wherever slavery is, it has been first introduced without law. The oldest laws we find concerning it are not laws introducing it; but *regulating* it, as an already existing thing. A white man takes his slave to Nebraska now; who will inform the negro that he is free? Who will take him before court to test the question of his freedom? In ignorance of his legal emancipation, he is kept chopping, splitting, and plowing. Others are brought, and move on in the same track. At last, if ever the time for voting comes, on the question of slavery, the institution already in fact exists in the country, and cannot well be removed. The facts of its presence, and the difficulty of its removal will carry the vote in its favor. Keep it out until a vote is taken, and a vote in favor of it, cannot be got in any population of forty thousand, on earth, who have been drawn together by the ordinary motives of emigration and settlement. To get slaves into the country simultaneously with the whites, in the incipient stages of settlement, is the precise stake played for, and won in this Nebraska measure.

The question is asked us, "If slaves will go in, notwithstanding the general principle of law liberates them, why would they not equally go in against positive statute law?—go in, even if the Missouri restriction were maintained?" I answer, because it takes a much bolder man to venture in, with his property, in the latter case, than in the former—because the positive congressional enactment is known to, and respected by all, or nearly all; whereas the negative principle that *no* law is free law, is not much known except among lawyers. We have some experience of this practical difference. In spite of the ordinance of '87, a few negroes were brought into Illinois, and held in a state of quasi slavery; not enough, however, to carry a vote of the people in favor of the institution when they came to form a constitution. But in the adjoining Missouri country, where there was no ordinance of '87—was no restriction—they were carried ten times, nay a hundred times, as fast, and actually made a slave state. This is fact—naked fact.

Another *lullaby* argument is that taking slaves to new countries does not increase their number—does not make any one slave who otherwise would be free. There is some truth in this, and I am glad of it, but it [is] not *wholly* true. The African slave trade is not yet effectually suppressed; and if we make a reasonable deduction for the white people amongst us, who are foreigners, and the descendants of foreigners, arriving here since 1808, we shall find the increase of the black population outrunning that of the white, to an extent unaccountable, except by supposing that some of them, too, have

been coming from Africa. If this be so, the opening of new countries to the institution increases the demand for, and augments the price of slaves, and so does, in fact, make slaves of freemen by causing them to be brought from Africa, and sold into bondage.

But, however this may be, we know the opening of new countries to slavery, tends to the perpetuation of the institution, and so does *keep* men in slavery who otherwise would be free. This result we do not *feel* like favoring, and we are under no legal obligation to suppress our feelings in this respect.

Equal justice to the South, it is said, requires us to consent to the extending of slavery to new countries. That is to say, inasmuch as you do not object to my taking my hog to Nebraska, therefore I must not object to you taking your slave. Now, I admit this is perfectly logical, if there is no difference between hogs and negroes. But while you thus require me to deny the humanity of the negro, I wish to ask whether you of the South yourselves, have ever been willing to do as much? It is kindly provided that of all those who come into the world, only a small percentage are natural tyrants. That percentage is no larger in the slave states than in the free. The great majority, South as well as North, have human sympathies, of which they can no more divest themselves than they can of their sensibility to physical pain. These sympathies in the bosoms of the southern people manifest in many ways, their sense of the wrong of slavery, and their consciousness that, after all, there is humanity in the negro. If they deny this, let me address them a few plain questions. In 1820 you joined the North, almost unanimously, in declaring the African slave trade piracy, and in annexing to it the punishment of death. Why did you do this? If you did not feel that it was wrong, why did you join in providing that men should be hung for it? The practice was no more than bringing wild negroes from Africa, to sell to such as would buy them. But you never thought of hanging men for catching and selling wild horses, wild buffaloes, or wild bears.

Again, you have amongst you, a sneaking individual, of the class of native tyrants, known as the "*slave-dealer*." He watches your necessities, and crawls up to buy your slave, at a speculating price. If you cannot help it, you sell to him; but if you can help it, you drive him from your door. You despise him utterly. You do not recognize him as a friend, or even as an honest man. Your children must not play with his; they may rollick freely with the little negroes, but not with the "*slave-dealer's* children." If you are obliged to deal with him, you try to get through the job without so much as touching him. It is common with you to join hands with the men you meet; but with the slave dealer you avoid the ceremony—instinctively shrinking from the snaky

contact. If he grows rich and retires from business, you still remember him, and still keep up the ban of non-intercourse upon him and his family. Now, why is this? You do not so treat the man who deals in corn, cattle, or tobacco. And yet again; there are in the United States and territories, including the District of Columbia, 433,643 free blacks. At \$500 per head they are worth over \$200 million. How comes this vast amount of property to be running about without owners? We do not see free horses or free cattle running at large. How is this? All these free blacks are the descendants of slaves, or have been slaves themselves, and they would be slaves now, but for *something* which has operated on their white owners, inducing them, at vast pecuniary sacrifices, to liberate them. What is that *something*? Is there any mistaking it? In all these cases it is your sense of justice, and human sympathy, continually telling you, that the poor negro has some natural right to himself—that those who deny it, and make mere merchandise of him, deserve kickings, contempt, and death.

And now, why will you ask us to deny the humanity of the slave? and estimate him only as the equal of the hog? Why ask us to do what you will not do yourselves? Why ask us to do for *nothing*, what \$200 million could not induce you to do?

But one great argument in the support of the repeal of the Missouri Compromise, is still to come. That argument is “the sacred right of self-government.” It seems our distinguished Senator has found great difficulty in getting his antagonists, even in the Senate to meet him fairly on this argument—some poet has said “Fools rush in where angels fear to tread.”¹

At the hazard of being thought one of the fools of this quotation, I meet that argument—I rush in, I take that bull by the horns.

I trust I understand, and truly estimate the right of self-government. My faith in the proposition that each man should do precisely as he pleases with all which is exclusively his own lies at the foundation of the sense of justice there is in me. I extend the principles to communities of men, as well as to individuals. I so extend it, because it is politically wise, as well as naturally just; politically wise, in saving us from broils about matters which do not concern us. Here, or at Washington, I would not trouble myself with the oyster laws of Virginia, or the cranberry laws of Indiana.

The doctrine of self-government is right—absolutely and eternally right—but it has no just application as here attempted. Or perhaps I should rather

¹ A proverbial expression by Lincoln’s day, it occurred first in Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Criticism*.

say that whether it has such just application depends upon whether a negro is *not* or *is* a man. If he is *not* a man, why in that case, he who *is* a man may, as a matter of self-government, do just as he pleases with him. But if the negro *is* a man, is it not to that extent, a total destruction of self-government, to say that he too shall not govern *himself*? When the white man governs himself that is self-government; but when he governs himself, and also governs *another* man, that is *more* than self-government—that is despotism. If the negro is a *man*, why then my ancient faith teaches me that “all men are created equal”; and that there can be no moral right in connection with one man’s making a slave of another.

Judge Douglas frequently, with bitter irony and sarcasm, paraphrases our argument by saying, “The white people of Nebraska are good enough to govern themselves, *but they are not good enough to govern a few miserable negroes!!*”

Well I doubt not that the people of Nebraska are, and will continue to be as good as the average of people elsewhere. I do not say the contrary. What I do say is, that no man is good enough to govern another man *without that other’s consent*. I say this is the leading principle—the sheet anchor of American republicanism. Our Declaration of Independence says:

We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, *deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed*.

I have quoted so much at this time merely to show that according to our ancient faith, the just powers of governments are derived from the consent of the governed. Now the relation of masters and slaves is, *pro tanto*,² a total violation of this principle. The master not only governs the slave without his consent; but he governs him by a set of rules altogether different from those which he prescribes for himself. Allow *all* the governed an equal voice in the government, and that, and that only is self-government.

Let it not be said I am contending for the establishment of political and social equality between the whites and blacks. I have already said the contrary. I am not now combating the argument of *necessity*, arising from the fact that the blacks are already amongst us; but I am combating what is set up as *moral* argument for allowing them to be taken where they have never yet

² *Pro tanto* means “to such an extent.”

been—arguing against the *extension* of a bad thing, which where it already exists, we must of necessity manage as we best can.

In support of his application of the doctrine of self-government, Senator Douglas has sought to bring to his aid the opinions and examples of our revolutionary fathers. I am glad he has done this. I love the sentiments of those old-time men; and shall be most happy to abide by their opinions. He shows us that when it was in contemplation for the colonies to break off from Great Britain, and set up a new government for themselves, several of the states instructed their delegates to go for the measure *provided each state should be allowed to regulate its domestic concerns in its own way*. I do not quote; but this in substance. This was right. I see nothing objectionable in it. I also think it probable that it had some reference to the existence of slavery amongst them. I will not deny that it had. But had it, in any reference to the carrying of slavery into *new countries*? That is the question; and we will let the fathers themselves answer it.

This same generation of men, and mostly the same individuals of the generation, who declared this principle—who declared independence—who fought the War of the Revolution through—who afterward made the constitution under which we still live—these same men passed the ordinance of '87, declaring that slavery should never go to the Northwest Territory. I have no doubt Judge Douglas thinks they were very inconsistent in this. It is a question of discrimination between them and him. But there is not an inch of ground left for his claiming that their opinions—their example—their authority—are on his side in this controversy.

Again, is not Nebraska, while a territory, a part of us? Do we not own the country? And if we surrender the control of it, do we not surrender the right of self-government? It is part of ourselves. If you say we shall not control it because it is *only* part, the same is true of every other part; and when all the parts are gone, what has become of the whole? What is then left of us? What use for the general government, when there is nothing left for it to govern?

But you say this question should be left to the people of Nebraska, because they are more particularly interested. If this be the rule, you must leave it to each individual to say for himself whether he will have slaves. What better moral right have thirty-one citizens of Nebraska to say, that the thirty-second shall not hold slaves, than the people of the thirty-one states have to say that slavery shall not go into the thirty-second state at all?

But if it is a sacred right for the people of Nebraska to take and hold slaves there, it is equally their sacred right to buy them where they can buy them cheapest; and that undoubtedly will be on the coast of Africa; provided you

will consent to not hang them for going there to buy them. You must remove this restriction too, from the sacred right of self-government. I am aware you say that taking slaves from the state of Nebraska does not make slaves of freemen; but the African slave-trader can say just as much. He does not catch free negroes and bring them here. He finds them already slaves in the hands of their black captors, and he honestly buys them at the rate of about a red cotton handkerchief a head. This is very cheap, and it is a great abridgement of the sacred right of self-government to hang men for engaging in this profitable trade!

Another important objection to this application of the right of self-government, is that it enables the first *few*, to deprive the succeeding *many*, of a free exercise of the right of self-government. The first few may get slavery *in*, and the subsequent many cannot easily get it *out*. How common is the remark now in the slave states—"If we were only clear of our slaves, how much better it would be for us." They are actually deprived of the privilege of governing themselves as they would, by the action of a very few, in the beginning. The same thing was true of the whole nation at the time our constitution was formed.

Whether slavery shall go into Nebraska, or other new territories, is not a matter of exclusive concern to the people who may go there. The whole nation is interested that the best use shall be made of these territories. We want them for the homes of free white people. This they cannot be, to any considerable extent, if slavery shall be planted within them. Slave states are places for poor white people to remove *from*; not to remove *to*. New free states are the places for poor people to go to and better their condition. For this use, the nation needs these territories.

Still further, there are constitutional relations between the slave and free states, which are degrading to the latter. We are under legal obligations to catch and return their runaway slaves to them—a sort of dirty, disagreeable job, which I believe, as a general rule the slaveholders will not perform for one another. Then again, in the control of the government—the management of the partnership affairs—they have greatly the advantage of us. By the constitution, each state has two senators—each has a number of representatives; in proportion to the number of its people—and each has a number of presidential electors, equal to the whole number of its senators and representatives together. But in ascertaining the number of the people, for this purpose, five slaves are counted as being equal to three whites. The slaves do not vote; they are only counted and so used, as to swell the influence of the white people's votes. The practical effect of this is more aptly shown by a comparison of the

states of South Carolina and Maine. South Carolina has six representatives, and so has Maine; South Carolina has eight presidential electors, and so has Maine. This is precise equality so far; and, of course they are equal in senators, each having two. Thus in the control of the government, the two states are equals precisely. But how are they in the number of their white people? Maine has 581,813—while South Carolina has 274,567. Maine has twice as many as South Carolina, and 32,679 over. Thus each white man in South Carolina is more than the double of any man in Maine. This is all because South Carolina, besides her free people, has 384,984 slaves. The South Carolinian has precisely the same advantage over the white man in every other free state, as well as in Maine. He is more than the double of any one of us in this crowd. The same advantage, but not to the same extent, is held by all the citizens of the slave states, over those of the free; and it is an absolute truth, without an exception, that there is no voter in any slave State, but who has more legal power in the government, than any voter in any free state. There is no instance of exact equality; and the disadvantage is against us the whole chapter through. This principle, in the aggregate, gives the slave states, in the present Congress, twenty additional representatives—being seven more than the whole majority by which they passed the Nebraska bill.

Now all this is manifestly unfair; yet I do not mention it to complain of it, in so far as it is already settled. It is in the Constitution; and I do not, for that cause, or any other cause, propose to destroy, or alter, or disregard the Constitution. I stand to it, fairly, fully, and firmly.

But when I am told I must leave it altogether to *other people* to say whether new partners are to be bred up and brought into the firm, on the same degrading terms against me. I respectfully demur. I insist, that whether I shall be a whole man, or only the half of one, in comparison with others, is a question in which I am somewhat concerned; and one which no other man can have a sacred right of deciding for me. If I am wrong in this—if it really be a sacred right of self-government, in the man who shall go to Nebraska, to decide whether he will be the *equal* of me or the *double* of me, then after he shall have exercised that right, and thereby shall have reduced me to a still smaller fraction of a man than I already am, I should like for some gentleman deeply skilled in the mysteries of sacred rights, to provide himself with a microscope, and peep about, and find out, if he can, what has become of my sacred rights! They will surely be too small for detection with the naked eye.

Finally, I insist, that if there is *any thing* which it is the duty of the *whole people* to never entrust to any hands but their own, that thing is the preservation and perpetuity, of their own liberties, and institutions. And if they

shall think, as I do, that the extension of slavery endangers them, more than any, or all other causes, how recreant to themselves, if they submit the question, and with it, the fate of their country, to a mere hand-full of men, bent only on temporary self-interest. If this question of slavery extension were an insignificant one—one having no power to do harm—it might be shuffled aside in this way. But being, as it is, the great Behemoth of danger, shall the strong gripe of the nation be loosened upon him, to entrust him to the hands of such feeble keepers?

I have done with this mighty argument, of self-government. Go, sacred thing! Go in peace.

But Nebraska is urged as a great Union-saving measure. Well I, too, go for saving the Union. Much as I hate slavery, I would consent to the extension of it rather than see the Union dissolved, just as I would consent to any *great* evil, to avoid a *greater* one. But when I go to Union saving, I must believe, at least, that the means I employ has some adaptation to the end. To my mind, Nebraska has no such adaptation.

It hath no relish of salvation in it.³

It is an aggravation, rather, of the only one thing which ever endangers the Union. When it came upon us, all was peace and quiet. The nation was looking to the forming of new bonds of Union; and a long course of peace and prosperity seemed to lie before us. In the whole range of possibility, there scarcely appears to me to have been any thing, out of which the slavery agitation could have been revived, except the very project of repealing the Missouri Compromise. Every inch of territory we owned, already had a definite settlement of the slavery question, and by which, all parties were pledged to abide. Indeed, there was no uninhabited country on the continent which we could acquire; if we except some extreme northern regions, which are wholly out of the question. In this state of case, the genius of Discord himself, could scarcely have invented a way of again getting us by the ears, but by turning back and destroying the peace measures of the past. The councils of that genius seem to have prevailed, the Missouri Compromise was repealed; and here we are, in the midst of a new slavery agitation, such, I think, as we have never seen before.

Who is responsible for this? Is it those who resist the measure; or those who, causelessly, brought it forward, and pressed it through, having reason

³ *Hamlet*, act III, scene 3.

to know, and, in fact, knowing it must and would be so resisted? It could not but be expected by its author, that it would be looked upon as a measure for the extension of slavery, aggravated by a gross breach of faith. Argue as you will, and long as you will, this is the naked *front* and *aspect*, of the measure. And in this aspect, it could not but produce agitation. Slavery is founded in the selfishness of man's nature – opposition to it, is [in?] his love of justice. These principles are an eternal antagonism; and when brought into collision so fiercely, as slavery extension brings them, shocks, and throes, and convulsions must ceaselessly follow. Repeal the Missouri Compromise – repeal all compromises – repeal the Declaration of Independence – repeal all past history, you still can not repeal human nature. It still will be the abundance of man's heart, that slavery extension is wrong; and out of the abundance of his heart, his mouth will continue to speak.

The structure, too, of the Nebraska bill is very peculiar. The people are to decide the question of slavery for themselves; but *when* they are to decide; or *how* they are to decide; or whether, when the question is once decided, it is to remain so, or is it to be subject to an indefinite succession of new trials, the law does not say. Is it to be decided by the first dozen settlers who arrive there? or is it to await the arrival of a hundred? Is it to be decided by a vote of the people? or a vote of the legislature? or, indeed by a vote of any sort? To these questions, the law gives no answer. There is a mystery about this; for when a member proposed to give the legislature express authority to exclude slavery, it was hooted down by the friends of the bill. This fact is worth remembering. Some Yankees, in the east, are sending emigrants to Nebraska, to exclude slavery from it; and, so far as I can judge, they expect the question to be decided by voting, in some way or other. But the Missourians are awake too. They are within a stone's throw of the contested ground. They hold meetings, and pass resolutions, in which not the slightest allusion to voting is made. They resolve that slavery already exists in the territory; that more shall go there; that they, remaining in Missouri will protect it; and that abolitionists shall be hung, or driven away. Through all this, bowie-knives and six-shooters are seen plainly enough; but never a glimpse of the ballot-box.⁴ And, really, what is to be the result of this? Each party *within*, having numerous and determined backers *without*, is it not probable that the contest will come to blows, and bloodshed? Could there be a more apt invention to bring about collision and violence, on the slavery question, than this Nebraska project is? I do not charge, or believe,

⁴ In connection with Lincoln's remarks here, see Document 1, the Lyceum Speech.

that such was intended by Congress; but if they had literally formed a ring, and placed champions within it to fight out the controversy, the fight could be no more likely to come off than it is. And if this fight should begin, is it likely to take a very peaceful, Union-saving turn? Will not the first drop of blood so shed be the real knell of the Union?

The Missouri Compromise ought to be restored. For the sake of the Union, it ought to be restored. We ought to elect a House of Representatives which will vote its restoration. If by any means, we omit to do this, what follows? Slavery may or may not be established in Nebraska. But whether it be or not, we shall have repudiated—discarded from the councils of the nation—the *spirit of compromise*; for who after this will ever trust in a national compromise? The spirit of mutual concession—that spirit which first gave us the Constitution, and which has thrice saved the Union—we shall have strangled and cast from us forever. And what shall we have in lieu of it? The South flushed with triumph and tempted to excesses; the North, betrayed, as they believe, brooding on wrong and burning for revenge. One side will provoke; the other resent. The one will taunt, the other defy; one agrees [aggresses?], the other retaliates. Already a few in the North defy all constitutional restraints, resist the execution of the fugitive slave law, and even menace the institution of slavery in the states where it exists.

Already a few in the South claim the constitutional right to take to and hold slaves in the free states—demand the revival of the slave trade; and demand a treaty with Great Britain by which fugitive slaves may be reclaimed from Canada. As yet they are but few on either side. It is a grave question for the lovers of the Union, whether the final destruction of the Missouri Compromise, and with it the spirit of all compromise will or will not embolden and embitter each of these, and fatally increase the numbers of both.

But restore the compromise, and what then? We thereby restore the national faith, the national confidence, the national feeling of brotherhood. We thereby reinstate the spirit of concession and compromise—that spirit which has never failed us in past perils, and which may be safely trusted for all the future. The South ought to join in doing this. The peace of the nation is as dear to them as to us. In memories of the past and hopes of the future, they share as largely as we. It would be on their part, a great act—great in its spirit, and great in its effect. It would be worth to the nation a hundred years' purchase of peace and prosperity. And what of sacrifice would they make? They only surrender to us, what they gave us for a consideration long, long ago; what they have not now asked for, struggled, or cared for; what has been thrust upon them, not less to their own astonishment than to ours.

But it is said we cannot restore it; that though we elect every member of the lower house, the Senate is still against us. It is quite true, that of the senators who passed the Nebraska bill, a majority of the whole Senate, will retain their seats in spite of the elections of this and the next year. But if at these elections, their several constituencies shall clearly express their will against Nebraska, will these senators disregard their will? Will they neither obey nor make room for those who will?

But even if we fail to technically restore the compromise, it is still a great point to carry a popular vote in favor of the restoration. The moral weight of such a vote can not be estimated too highly. The authors of Nebraska are not at all satisfied with the destruction of the compromise—an endorsement of this *principle*, they proclaim to be the great object. With them, Nebraska alone is a small matter—to establish a principle, for *future use*, is what they particularly desire.

That future use is to be the planting of slavery wherever in the wide world, local and unorganized opposition cannot prevent it. Now if you wish to give them this endorsement—if you wish to establish this principle—do so. I shall regret it; but it is your right. On the contrary if you are opposed to the principle—intend to give it no such endorsement—let no wheedling, no sophistry, divert you from throwing a direct vote against it.

Some men, mostly Whigs, who condemn the repeal of the Missouri Compromise, nevertheless hesitate to go for its restoration, lest they be thrown in company with the abolitionist. Will they allow me as an old Whig to tell them good humoredly, that I think this is very silly? Stand with anybody that stands *right*. Stand with him while he is right and *part* with him when he goes wrong. Stand *with* the abolitionist in restoring the Missouri Compromise; and stand *against* him when he attempts to repeal the fugitive slave law. In the latter case you stand with the southern disunionist. What of that? you are still right. In both cases you are right. In both cases you oppose the dangerous extremes. In both you stand on middle ground and hold the ship level and steady. In both you are national and nothing less than national. This is good old Whig ground. To desert such ground, because of any company, is to be less than a Whig—less than a man—less than an American.

I particularly object to the *new* position which the avowed principle of this Nebraska law gives to slavery in the body politic. I object to it because it assumes that there *can* be *moral right* in the enslaving of one man by another. I object to it as a dangerous dalliance for a free people—a sad evidence that, feeling prosperity we forget right—that liberty, as a principle, we have ceased to revere. I object to it because the fathers of the republic eschewed and

rejected it. The argument of "Necessity" was the only argument they ever admitted in favor of slavery; and so far, and so far only as it carried them, did they ever go. They found the institution existing among us, which they could not help; and they cast blame upon the British King for having permitted its introduction. *before* the Constitution, they prohibited its introduction into the Northwest Territory – the only country we owned, then free from it. *At* the framing and adoption of the Constitution, they forbore to so much as mention the word "slave" or "slavery" in the whole instrument. In the provision for the recovery of fugitives, the slave is spoken of as a "*person held to service or labor.*" In that prohibiting the abolition of the African slave trade for twenty years, that trade is spoken of as "The migration or importation of such persons as any of the states *now existing*, shall think proper to admit," etc. These are the only provisions alluding to slavery. Thus, the thing is hid away, in the Constitution, just as an afflicted man hides away a wen or a cancer, which he dares not cut out at once, lest he bleed to death; with the promise, nevertheless, that the cutting may begin at the end of a given time. Less than this our fathers *could* not do; and *more* they *would* not do. Necessity drove them so far, and farther they would not go. But this is not all. The earliest Congress, under the Constitution, took the same view of slavery. They hedged and hemmed it in to the narrowest limits of necessity.

In 1794, they prohibited an out-going slave-trade – that is, the taking of slaves *from* the United States to sell.

In 1798, they prohibited the bringing of slaves from Africa, *into* the Mississippi Territory – this territory then comprising what are now the states of Mississippi and Alabama. This was *ten years* before they had the authority to do the same thing as to the states existing at the adoption of the Constitution.

In 1800 they prohibited *American citizens* from trading in slaves between foreign countries – as, for instance, from Africa to Brazil.

In 1803 they passed a law in aid of one or two state laws, in restraint of the internal slave trade.

In 1807, in apparent hot haste, they passed the law, nearly a year in advance to take effect the first day of 1808 – the very first day the Constitution would permit – prohibiting the African slave trade by heavy pecuniary and corporal penalties.

In 1820, finding these provisions ineffectual, they declared the trade piracy, and annexed to it the extreme penalty of death. While all this was passing in the general government, five or six of the original slave states had adopted systems of gradual emancipation; and by which the institution was rapidly becoming extinct within these limits.

Thus we see, the plain unmistakable spirit of that age, toward slavery, was hostility to the *principle*, and toleration, *only by necessity*.

But *now* it is to be transformed into a "sacred right." Nebraska brings it forth, places it on the high road to extension and perpetuity; and, with a pat on its back, says to it, "Go, and God speed you." Henceforth it is to be the chief jewel of the nation—the very figure-head of the ship of State. Little by little, but steadily as man's march to the grave, we have been giving up the *old* for the *new* faith. Near eighty years ago we began by declaring that all men are created equal; but now from that beginning we have run down to the other declaration, that for *some* men to enslave *others* is a "sacred right of self-government." These principles can not stand together. They are as opposite as God and mammon; and whoever holds to the one, must despise the other. When Pettit, in connection with his support of the Nebraska bill, called the Declaration of Independence "a self-evident lie" he only did what consistency and candor require all other Nebraska men to do. Of the forty-odd Nebraska senators who sat present and heard him, no one rebuked him. Nor am I apprized that any Nebraska newspaper, or any Nebraska orator, in the whole nation, has ever yet rebuked him. If this had been said among Marion's men, southerners though they were, what would have become of the man who said it? If this had been said to the men who captured Andre, the man who said it would probably have been hung sooner than Andre was. If it had been said in old Independence Hall, seventy-eight years ago, the very door-keeper would have throttled the man, and thrust him into the street.

Let no one be deceived. The spirit of '76 and the spirit of Nebraska are utter antagonisms; and the former is being rapidly displaced by the latter.

Fellow countrymen—Americans south, as well as north, shall we make no effort to arrest this? Already the liberal party throughout the world, express the apprehension "that the one retrograde institution in America is undermining the principles of progress, and fatally violating the noblest political system the world ever saw." This is not the taunt of enemies, but the warning of friends. Is it quite safe to disregard it—to despise it? Is there no danger to liberty itself in discarding the earliest practice, and first precept of our ancient faith? In our greedy chase to make profit of the negro, let us beware, lest we "cancel and tear to pieces" even the white man's charter of freedom.

Our republican robe is soiled, and trailed in the dust. Let us repurify it. Let us turn and wash it white, in the spirit, if not the blood, of the Revolution. Let us turn slavery from its claims of "moral right" back upon its existing legal rights, and its arguments of "necessity." Let us return it to the

position our fathers gave it; and there let it rest in peace. Let us readopt the Declaration of Independence, and with it, the practices, and policy, which harmonize with it. Let North and South—let all Americans—let all lovers of liberty everywhere—join in the great and good work. If we do this, we shall not only have saved the Union; but we shall have so saved it as to make, and to keep it, forever worthy of the saving. We shall have so saved it that the succeeding millions of free happy people, the world over, shall rise up, and call us blessed, to the latest generations.

At Springfield, twelve days ago, where I had spoken substantially as I have here, Judge Douglas replied to me—and as he is to reply to me here, I shall attempt to anticipate him by noticing some of the points he made there.

He commenced by stating I had assumed all the way through, that the principle of the Nebraska bill, would have the effect of extending slavery. He denied that this was *intended*, or that this *effect* would follow.

I will not reopen the argument upon this point. That such was the intention, the world believed at the start, and will continue to believe. This was the *countenance* of the thing; and, both friends and enemies instantly recognized it as such. That countenance cannot now be changed by argument. You can as easily argue the color out of the negroes' skin. Like the "bloody hand" you may wash it, and wash it, the red witness of guilt still sticks, and stares horribly at you.

Next he says, congressional intervention never prevented slavery, anywhere—that it did not prevent it in the Northwest Territory, nor in Illinois—that in fact, Illinois came into the Union as a slave state—that the principle of the Nebraska bill expelled it from Illinois, from several old states, from everywhere.

Now this is mere quibbling all the way through. If the ordinance of '87 did not keep slavery out of the Northwest Territory, how happens it that the northwest shore of the Ohio River is entirely free from it; while the south-east shore, less than a mile distant, along nearly the whole length of the river, is entirely covered with it?

If that ordinance did not keep it out of Illinois, what was it that made the difference between Illinois and Missouri? They lie side by side, the Mississippi River only dividing them; while their early settlements were within the same latitude. Between 1810 and 1820 the number of slaves in Missouri *increased* 7,211; while in Illinois, in the same ten years, they *decreased* 51. This appears by the census returns. During nearly all of that ten years, both were territories—not states. During this time, the ordinance forbid slavery to go

into Illinois; and *nothing* forbid it to go into Missouri. It *did* go into Missouri, and did *not* go into Illinois. That is the fact. Can anyone doubt as to the reason of it?

But, he says, Illinois came into the Union as a slave State. Silence, perhaps, would be the best answer to this flat contradiction of the known history of the country. What are the facts upon which this bold assertion is based? When we first acquired the country, as far back as 1787, there were some slaves within it, held by the French inhabitants at Kaskaskia. The territorial legislation admitted a few negroes, from the slave states, as indentured servants. One year after the adoption of the first state constitution the whole number of them was—what do you think? just 117—while the aggregate free population was 55,094—about 470 to 1. Upon this state of facts, the people framed their constitution prohibiting the further introduction of slavery, with a sort of guaranty to the owners of the few indentured servants, giving freedom to their children to be born thereafter, and making no mention whatever, of any supposed slave for life. Out of this small matter, the Judge manufactures his argument that Illinois came into the Union as a slave state. Let the facts be the answer to the argument.

The principles of the Nebraska bill, he says, expelled slavery from Illinois. The principle of that bill first planted it here—that is, it first came, because there was no law to prevent it—first came before we owned the country; and finding it here, and having the ordinance of '87 to prevent its increasing, our people struggled along, and finally got rid of it as best they could.

But the principle of the Nebraska bill abolished slavery in several of the old states. Well, it is true that several of the old states, in the last quarter of the last century, did adopt systems of gradual emancipation, by which the institution has finally become extinct within their limits; but it *may* or *may not* be true that the principle of the Nebraska bill was the cause that led to the adoption of these measures. It is now more than fifty years, since the last of these states adopted its system of emancipation. If Nebraska bill is the real author of these benevolent works, it is rather deplorable that he has, for so long a time, ceased working all together. Is there not some reason to suspect that it was the principle of the *Revolution*, and not the principle of Nebraska bill, that led to emancipation in these old states? Leave it to the people of those old emancipating states, and I am quite sure they will decide that neither that, nor any other good thing, ever did, or ever will come of Nebraska bill.

In the course of my main argument, Judge Douglas interrupted me to say, that the principle of the Nebraska bill was very old; that it originated when God made man and placed good and evil before him, allowing him to

choose for himself, being responsible for the choice he should make. At the time I thought this was merely playful; and I answered it accordingly. But in his reply to me he renewed it, as a serious argument. In seriousness then, the facts of this proposition are not true as stated. God did not place good and evil before man, telling him to make his choice. On the contrary, he did tell him there was one tree, of the fruit of which he should not eat, upon pain of certain death. I should scarcely wish so strong a prohibition against slavery in Nebraska.

But this argument strikes me as not a little remarkable in another particular—in its strong resemblance to the old argument for the “divine right of kings.” By the latter, the King is to do just as he pleases with his white subjects, being responsible to God alone. By the former the white man is to do just as he pleases with his black slaves, being responsible to God alone. The two things are precisely alike; and it is but natural that they should find similar arguments to sustain them.

I had argued that the application of the principle of self-government, as contended for, would require the revival of the African slave trade—that no argument could be made in favor of a man’s right to take slaves to Nebraska which could not be equally well made in favor of his right to bring them from the coast of Africa. The Judge replied that the Constitution requires the suppression of the foreign slave trade; but does not require the prohibition of slavery in the territories. That is a mistake, in point of fact. The Constitution does *not* require the action of Congress in either case; and it does *authorize* it in both. And so, there is still no difference between the cases.

In regard to what I had said, the advantage the slave states have over the free, in the matter of representation, the Judge replied that we, in the free states, count five free negroes as five white people, while in the slave states, they count five slaves as three whites only; and that the advantage, at last, was on the side of the free states.

Now, in the slave states, they count free negroes just as we do; and it so happens that besides their slaves, they have as many free negroes as we have, and thirty-three thousand over. Thus their free negroes more than balance ours; and their advantage over us, in consequence of their slaves, still remains as I stated it.

In reply to my argument, that the compromise measures of 1850 were a system of equivalents; and that the provisions of no one of them could fairly be carried to other subjects, without its corresponding equivalent being carried with it, the Judge denied outright that these measures had any connection with, or dependence upon, each other. This is mere desperation. If they

have no connection, why are they always spoken of in connection? Why has he so spoken of them, a thousand times? Why has he constantly called them a *series* of measures? Why does everybody call them a compromise? Why was California kept out of the Union six or seven months, if it was not because of its connection with the other measures? Webster's leading definition of the verb "to compromise" is "to adjust and settle a difference, by mutual agreement with concessions of claims by the parties." This conveys precisely the popular understanding of the word compromise. We knew, before the Judge told us, that these measures passed separately, and in distinct bills; and that no two of them were passed by the votes of precisely the same members. But we also know, and so does he know, that no one of them could have passed both branches of Congress but for the understanding that the others were to pass also. Upon this understanding each got votes, which it could have got in no other way. It is this fact, that gives to the measures their true character; and it is the universal knowledge of this fact, that has given them the name of compromise so expressive of that true character.

I had asked, "If in carrying the provisions of the Utah and New Mexico laws to Nebraska, you could clear away other objection, how can you leave Nebraska 'perfectly free' to introduce slavery *before* she forms a constitution—during her territorial government?—while the Utah and New Mexico laws only authorize it *when* they form constitutions, and are admitted into the Union?" To this Judge Douglas answered that the Utah and New Mexico laws, also authorized it *before*; and to prove this, he read from one of their laws, as follows: "That the legislative power of said territory shall extend to all rightful subjects of legislation consistent with the Constitution of the United States and the provisions of this act."

Now it is perceived from the reading of this, that there is nothing express upon the subject; but that the authority is sought to be implied merely, for the general provision of "all rightful subjects of legislation." In reply to this, I insist, as a legal rule of construction, as well as the plain popular view of the matter, that the *express* provision for Utah and New Mexico coming in with slavery if they choose, when they shall form constitutions, is an *exclusion* of all implied authority on the same subject—that Congress, having the subject distinctly in their minds, when they made the express provision, they therein expressed their *whole* meaning on that subject.

The Judge rather insinuated that I had found it convenient to forget the Washington territorial law passed in 1853. This was a division of Oregon, organizing the northern part, as the territory of Washington. He asserted that, by this act, the ordinance of '87 theretofore existing in Oregon was

repealed; that nearly all the members of Congress voted for it, beginning in the H.R., with Charles Allen of Massachusetts, and ending with Richard Yates, of Illinois; and that he could not understand how those who now oppose the Nebraska bill so voted then, unless it was because it was then too soon after both the great political parties had ratified the compromises of 1850, and the ratification therefore too fresh to be then repudiated.

Now I had seen the Washington act before; and I have carefully examined it since; and I aver that there is no repeal of the ordinance of '87, or of any prohibition of slavery, in it. In express terms, there is absolutely nothing in the whole law upon the subject—in fact, nothing to lead a reader to *think* of the subject. To my judgment, it is equally free from every thing from which such repeal can be legally implied; but however this may be, are men now to be entrapped by a legal implication, extracted from covert language, introduced perhaps, for the very purpose of entrapping them? I sincerely wish every man could read this law quite through, carefully watching every sentence, and every line, for a repeal of the ordinance of '87 or any thing equivalent to it.

Another point on the Washington act. If it was intended to be modeled after the Utah and New Mexico acts, as Judge Douglas, insists, why was it not inserted in it, as in them, that Washington was to come in with or without slavery as she may choose at the adoption of her constitution? It has no such provision in it; and I defy the ingenuity of man to give a reason for the omission, other than that it was not intended to follow the Utah and New Mexico laws in regard to the question of slavery.

The Washington act not only differs vitally from the Utah and New Mexico acts; but the Nebraska act differs vitally from both. By the latter act the people are left “perfectly free” to regulate their own domestic concerns, etc.; but in all the former, all their laws are to be submitted to Congress, and if disapproved are to be null. The Washington act goes even further; it absolutely prohibits the territorial legislation [legislature?], by very strong and guarded language, from establishing banks, or borrowing money on the faith of the territory. Is this the sacred right of self-government we hear vaunted so much? No sir, the Nebraska bill finds no model in the acts of '50 or the Washington act. It finds no model in any law from Adam till today. As Phillips says of Napoleon, the Nebraska act is grand, gloomy, and peculiar; wrapped in the solitude of its own originality; without a model, and without a shadow upon the earth.

In the course of his reply, Senator Douglas remarked, in substance, that he had always considered this government was made for the white people and not for the negroes. Why, in point of mere fact, I think so too. But in

this remark of the Judge, there is a significance which I think is the key to the great mistake (if there is any such mistake) which he has made in this Nebraska measure. It shows that the Judge has no very vivid impression that the negro is a human; and consequently has no idea that there can be any moral question in legislating about him. In his view, the question of whether a new country shall be slave or free, is a matter of as utter indifference, as it is whether his neighbor shall plant his farm with tobacco, or stock it with horned cattle. Now, whether this view is right or wrong, it is very certain that the great mass of mankind take a totally different view. They consider slavery a great moral wrong; and their feeling against it, is not evanescent, but eternal. It lies at the very foundation of their sense of justice; and it cannot be trifled with. It is a great and durable element of popular action, and, I think, no statesman can safely disregard it.

Our Senator also objects that those who oppose him in this measure do not entirely agree with one another. He reminds me that in my firm adherence to the constitutional rights of the slave states, I differ widely from others who are cooperating with me in opposing the Nebraska bill; and he says it is not quite fair to oppose him in this variety of ways. He should remember that he took us by surprise—astounded us—by this measure. We were thunderstruck and stunned; and we reeled and fell in utter confusion. But we rose each fighting, grasping whatever he could first reach—a scythe—a pitchfork—a chopping axe, or a butcher’s cleaver. We struck in the direction of the sound; and we are rapidly closing in upon him. He must not think to divert us from our purpose, by showing us that our drill, our dress, and our weapons, are not entirely perfect and uniform. When the storm shall be past, he shall find us still Americans; no less devoted to the continued Union and prosperity of the country than heretofore.

Finally, the Judge invokes against me, the memory of Clay and of Webster. They were great men; and men of great deeds. But where have I assailed them? For what is it, that their lifelong enemy shall now make profit, by assuming to defend them against me, their lifelong friend? I go against the repeal of the Missouri Compromise; did they ever go for it? They went for the Compromise of 1850; did I ever go against them? They were greatly devoted to the Union; to the small measure of my ability, was I ever less so? Clay and Webster were dead before this question arose; by what authority shall our Senator say they would espouse his side of it, if alive? Mr. Clay was the leading spirit in making the Missouri Compromise; is it very credible that if now alive, he would take the lead in the breaking of it? The truth is that some support from Whigs is now a necessity with the Judge, and for thus it is, that the names

of Clay and Webster are now invoked. His old friends have deserted him in such numbers as to leave too few to live by. He came to his own, and his own received him not, and Lo! he turns unto the Gentiles.

A word now as to the Judge's desperate assumption that the Compromises of '50 had no connection with one another; that Illinois came into the Union as a slave state, and some other similar ones. This is no other than a bold denial of the history of the country. If we do not know that the Compromises of '50 were dependent on each other; if we do not know that Illinois came into the Union as a free state—we do not know anything. If we do not know these things, we do not know that we ever had a revolutionary war, or such a chief as Washington. To deny these things is to deny our national axioms, or dogmas, at least; and it puts an end to all argument. If a man will stand up and assert, and repeat, and reassert, that two and two do not make four, I know nothing in the power of argument that can stop him. I think I can answer the Judge so long as he sticks to the premises; but when he flies from them, I cannot work an argument into the consistency of a maternal gag, and actually close his mouth with it. In such a case I can only commend him to the seventy thousand answers just in from Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Indiana.



The Constitution of the United States: Is It Pro-Slavery or Anti-Slavery?

by **Frederick Douglass**

March 26, 1860

...I proceed to the discussion. And first a word about the question. Much will be gained at the outset if we fully and clearly understand the real question under discussion. Indeed, nothing is or can be understood. This are often confounded and treated as the same, for no better reason than that they resemble each other, even while they are in their nature and character totally distinct and even directly opposed to each other. This jumbling up things is a sort of dust-throwing which is often indulged in by small men who argue for victory rather than for truth. Thus, for instance, the American Government and the American Constitution are spoken of in a manner which would naturally lead the hearer to believe that one is identical with the other; when the truth is, they are distinct in character as is a ship and a compass. The one may point right and the other steer wrong. A chart is one thing, the course of the vessel is another. The Constitution may be right, the Government is wrong. If the Government has been governed by mean, sordid, and wicked passions, it does not follow that the Constitution is mean, sordid, and wicked. What, then, is the question? I will state it. But first let me state what is not the question. It is not whether slavery existed in the United States at the

time of the adoption of the Constitution; it is not whether slaveholders took part in the framing of the Constitution; it is not whether those slaveholders, in their hearts, intended to secure certain advantages in that instrument for slavery; it is not whether the American Government has been wielded during seventy-two years in favour of the propagation and permanence of slavery; it is not whether a pro-slavery interpretation has been put upon the Constitution by the American Courts — all these points may be true or they may be false, they may be accepted or they may be rejected, without in any wise affecting the real question in debate. The real and exact question between myself and the class of persons represented by the speech at the City Hall may be fairly stated thus: — 1st, Does the United States Constitution guarantee to any class or description of people in that country the right to enslave, or hold as property, any other class or description of people in that country? 2nd, Is the dissolution of the union between the slave and free States required by fidelity to the slaves, or by the just demands of conscience? Or, in other words, is the refusal to exercise the elective franchise, and to hold office in America, the surest, wisest, and best way to abolish slavery in America?

To these questions the Garrisonians say Yes. They hold the Constitution to be a slaveholding instrument, and will not cast a vote or hold office, and denounce all who vote or hold office, no matter how faithfully such persons labour to promote the abolition of slavery. I, on the other hand, deny that the Constitution guarantees the right to hold property in man, and believe that the way to abolish slavery in America is to vote such men into power as well use their powers for the abolition of slavery. This is the issue plainly stated, and you shall judge between us. Before we examine into the disposition, tendency, and character of the Constitution, I think we had better ascertain what the Constitution itself is. Before looking for what it means, let us see what it is. Here, too, there is much dust to be cleared away. What, then, is the Constitution? I will tell you. It is not even like the British Constitution, which is made up of enactments of Parliament, decisions of Courts, and the established usages of the Government. The American Constitution is a written instrument full and complete in itself. No Court in America, no Congress, no President, can add a single word thereto, or take a single word thretereto. It is a great national enactment done by the people, and can only be altered, amended, or added to by the people. I am careful to make this statement here; in America it would not be necessary. It would not be necessary here if my assailant had shown the same desire to be

set before you the simple truth, which he manifested to make out a good case for himself and friends. Again, it should be borne in mind that the mere text, and only the text, and not any commentaries or creeds written by those who wished to give the text a meaning apart from its plain reading, was adopted as the Constitution of the United States. It should also be borne in mind that the intentions of those who framed the Constitution, be they good or bad, for slavery or against slavery, are so respected so far, and so far only, as we find those intentions plainly stated in the Constitution. It would be the wildest of absurdities, and lead to endless confusion and mischiefs, if, instead of looking to the written paper itself, for its meaning, it were attempted to make us search it out, in the secret motives, and dishonest intentions, of some of the men who took part in writing it. It was what they said that was adopted by the people, not what they were ashamed or afraid to say, and really omitted to say. Bear in mind, also, and the fact is an important one, that the framers of the Constitution sat with doors closed, and that this was done purposely, that nothing but the result of their labours should be seen, and that that result should be judged of by the people free from any of the bias shown in the debates. It should also be borne in mind, and the fact is still more important, that the debates in the convention that framed the Constitution, and by means of which a pro-slavery interpretation is now attempted to be forced upon that instrument, were not published till more than a quarter of a century after the presentation and the adoption of the Constitution.

These debates were purposely kept out of view, in order that the people should adopt, not the secret motives or unexpressed intentions of any body, but the simple text of the paper itself. Those debates form no part of the original agreement. I repeat, the paper itself, and only the paper itself, with its own plainly written purposes, is the Constitution. It must stand or fall, flourish or fade, on its own individual and self-declared character and objects. Again, where would be the advantage of a written Constitution, if, instead of seeking its meaning in its words, we had to seek them in the secret intentions of individuals who may have had something to do with writing the paper? What will the people of America a hundred years hence care about the intentions of the scribes who wrote the Constitution? These men are already gone from us, and in the course of nature were expected to go from us. They were for a generation, but the Constitution is for ages. Whatever we may owe to them, we certainly owe it to ourselves, and to mankind, and to God, to maintain the truth of our own language, and to allow no villainy, not even

the villainy of holding men as slaves — which Wesley says is the sum of all villainies — to shelter itself under a fair-seeming and virtuous language. We owe it to ourselves to compel the devil to wear his own garments, and to make wicked laws speak out their wicked intentions. Common sense, and common justice, and sound rules of interpretation all drive us to the words of the law for the meaning of the law. The practice of the Government is dwelt upon with much fervour and eloquence as conclusive as to the slaveholding character of the Constitution. This is really the strong point and the only strong point, made in the speech in the City Hall. But good as this argument is, it is not conclusive. A wise man has said that few people have been found better than their laws, but many have been found worse. To this last rule America is no exception. Her laws are one thing, her practice is another thing. We read that the Jews made void the law by their tradition, that Moses permitted men to put away their wives because of the hardness of their hearts, but that this was not so at the beginning. While good laws will always be found where good practice prevails, the reverse does not always hold true. Far from it. The very opposite is often the case. What then? Shall we condemn the righteous law because wicked men twist it to the support of wickedness? Is that the way to deal with good and evil? Shall we blot out all distinction between them, and hand over to slavery all that slavery may claim on the score of long practice? Such is the course commended to us in the City Hall speech. After all, the fact that men go out of the Constitution to prove it pro-slavery, whether that going out is to the practice of the Government, or to the secret intentions of the writers of the paper, the fact that they do go out is very significant. It is a powerful argument on my side. It is an admission that the thing for which they are looking is not to be found where only it ought to be found, and that is in the Constitution itself. If it is not there, it is nothing to the purpose, be it wheresoever else it may be. But I shall have no more to say on this point hereafter.

The very eloquent lecturer at the City Hall doubtless felt some embarrassment from the fact that he had literally to *give* the Constitution a pro-slavery interpretation; because upon its face it of itself conveys no such meaning, but a very opposite meaning. He thus sums up what he calls the slaveholding provisions of the Constitution. I quote his own words: — “Article 1, section 9, provides for the continuance of the African slave trade for the 20 years, after the adoption of the Constitution. Art. 4, section 9, provides for the recovery from the other States of fugitive slaves. Art. 1, section 2, gives the slave States a representation of the

three-fifths of all the slave population; and Art. 1, section 8, requires the President to use the military, naval, ordnance, and militia resources of the entire country for the suppression of slave insurrection, in the same manner as he would employ them to repel invasion.” Now any man reading this statement, or hearing it made with such a show of exactness, would unquestionably suppose that he speaker or writer had given the plain written text of the Constitution itself. I can hardly believe that the intended to make any such impression. It would be a scandalous imputation to say he did. Any yet what are we to make of it? How can we regard it? How can he be screened from the charge of having perpetrated a deliberate and point-blank misrepresentation? That individual has seen fit to place himself before the public as my opponent, and yet I would gladly find some excuse for him. I do not wish to think as badly of him as this trick of his would naturally lead me to think. Why did he not read the Constitution? Why did he read that which was not the Constitution? He pretended to be giving chapter and verse, section and clause, paragraph and provision. The words of the Constitution were before him. Why then did he not give you the plain words of the Constitution? Oh, sir, I fear that the gentleman knows too well why he did not. It so happens that no such words as “African slave trade,” no such words as “slave insurrections,” are anywhere used in that instrument. These are the words of that orator, and not the words of the Constitution of the United States. Now you shall see a slight difference between my manner of treating this subject and what which my opponent has seen fit, for reasons satisfactory to himself, to pursue. What he withheld, that I will spread before you: what he suppressed, I will bring to light: and what he passed over in silence, I will proclaim: that you may have the whole case before you, and not be left to depend upon either his, or upon my inferences or testimony. Here then are several provisions of the Constitution to which reference has been made. I read them word for word just as they stand in the paper, called the United States Constitution, Art. 1, sec. 2. “Representatives and direct taxes shall be apportioned among the several States which may be included in this Union, according to their respective numbers, which shall be determined by adding to the whole number of free persons, including those bound to service for a term years, and excluding Indians not taxed, three-fifths of all other persons; Art. 1, sec. 9. The migration or importation of such persons as any of the States now existing shall think fit to admit, shall not be prohibited by the Congress prior to the year one thousand eight hundred and eight, but a tax or duty may be imposed on such importation, not exceeding tend dollars for each person; Art. 4, sec. 2. No person held to service or labour in one State, under the laws

thereof, escaping into another shall, in consequence of any law or regulation therein, be discharged from service or labour; but shall be delivered up on claim of the party to whom such service or labour may be due; Art. I, sec. 8. To provide for calling for the militia to execute the laws of the Union, suppress insurrections, and repel invasions.” Here then, are those provisions of the Constitution, which the most extravagant defenders of slavery can claim to guarantee a right of property in man. These are the provisions which have been pressed into the service of the human fleshmongers of America. Let us look at them just as they stand, one by one. Let us grant, for the sake of the argument, that the first of these provisions, referring to the basis of representation and taxation, does refer to slaves. We are not compelled to make that admission, for it might fairly apply to aliens — persons living in the country, but not naturalized. But giving the provisions the very worse construction, what does it amount to? I answer — It is a downright disability laid upon the slaveholding States; one which deprives those States of two-fifths of their natural basis of representation. A black man in a free State is worth just two-fifths more than a black man in a slave State, as a basis of political power under the Constitution. Therefore, instead of encouraging slavery, the Constitution encourages freedom by giving an increase of “two-fifths” of political power to free over slave States. So much for the three-fifths clause; taking it at its worst, it still leans to freedom, not slavery; for, be it remembered that the Constitution nowhere forbids a coloured man to vote. I come to the next, that which it is said guaranteed the continuance of the African slave trade for twenty years. I will also take that for just what my opponent alleges it to have been, although the Constitution does not warrant any such conclusion. But, to be liberal, let us suppose it did, and what follows? Why, this — that this part of the Constitution, so far as the slave trade is concerned, became a dead letter more than 50 years ago, and now binds no man’s conscience for the continuance of any slave trade whatsoever. Mr. Thompson is just 52 years too late in dissolving the Union on account of this clause. He might as well dissolve the British Government, because Queen Elizabeth granted to Sir John Hawkins to import Africans into the West Indies 300 years ago! But there is still more to be said about this abolition of the slave trade. Men, at that time, both in England and in America, looked upon the slave trade as the life of slavery. The abolition of the slave trade was supposed to be the certain death of slavery. Cut off the stream, and the pond will dry up, was the common notion at the time.

Wilberforce and Clarkson, clear-sighted as they were, took this view; and the American statesmen, in providing for the abolition of the slave trade, thought they were providing for the abolition of the slavery. This view is quite consistent with the history of the times. All regarded slavery as an expiring and doomed system, destined to speedily disappear from the country. But, again, it should be remembered that this very provision, if made to refer to the African slave trade at all, makes the Constitution anti-slavery rather than for slavery; for it says to the slave States, the price you will have to pay for coming into the American Union is, that the slave trade, which you would carry on indefinitely out of the Union, shall be put an end to in twenty years if you come into the Union. Secondly, if it does apply, it expired by its own limitation more than fifty years ago. Thirdly, it is anti-slavery, because it looked to the abolition of slavery rather than to its perpetuity. Fourthly, it showed that the intentions of the framers of the Constitution were good, not bad. I think this is quite enough for this point. I go to the “slave insurrection” clause, though, in truth, there is no such clause. The one which is called so has nothing whatever to do with slaves or slaveholders any more than your laws for suppression of popular outbreaks has to do with making slaves of you and your children. It is only a law for suppression of riots or insurrections. But I will be generous here, as well as elsewhere, and grant that it applies to slave insurrections. Let us suppose that an anti-slavery man is President of the United States (and the day that shall see this the case is not distant) and this very power of suppressing slave insurrections would put an end to slavery. The right to put down an insurrection carries with it the right to determine the means by which it shall be put down. If it should turn out that slavery is a source of insurrection, that there is no security from insurrection while slavery lasts, why, the Constitution would be best obeyed by putting an end to slavery, and an anti-slavery Congress would do the very same thing. Thus, you see, the so-called slave-holding provisions of the American Constitution, which a little while ago looked so formidable, are, after all, no defence or guarantee for slavery whatever. But there is one other provision. This is called the “Fugitive Slave Provision.” It is called so by those who wish to make it subserve the interest of slavery in America, and the same by those who wish to uphold the views of a party in this country. It is put thus in the speech at the City Hall: — “Let us go back to 1787, and enter Liberty Hall, Philadelphia, where sat in convention the illustrious men who framed the Constitution — with George Washington in the chair. On the 27th of September, Mr. Butler and Mr. Pinckney, two delegates from the State of South Carolina, moved that the Constitution

should require that fugitive slaves and servants should be delivered up like criminals, and after a discussion on the subject, the clause, as it stands in the Constitution, was adopted. After this, in the conventions held in the several States to ratify the Constitution, the same meaning was attached to the words. For example, Mr. Madison (afterwards President), when recommending the Constitution to his constituents, told them that the clause would secure them their property in slaves." I must ask you to look well to this statement. Upon its face, it would seem a full and fair statement of the history of the transaction it professes to describe and yet I declare unto you, knowing as I do the facts in the case, my utter amazement at the downright untruth conveyed under the fair seeming words now quoted. The man who could make such a statement may have all the craftiness of a lawyer, but who can accord to him the candour of an honest debater? What could more completely destroy all confidence in his statements? Mark you, the orator had not allowed his audience to hear read the provision of the Constitution to which he referred. He merely characterized it as one to "deliver up fugitive slaves and servants like criminals," and tells you that this was done "after discussion." But he took good care not to tell you what was the nature of that discussion. He have would have spoiled the whole effect of his statement had he told you the whole truth. Now, what are the facts connected with this provision of the Constitution? You shall have them. It seems to take two men to tell the truth. It is quite true that Mr. Butler and Mr. Pinckney introduced a provision expressly with a view to the recapture of fugitive slaves: it is quite true also that there was some discussion on the subject — and just here the truth shall come out. These illustrious kidnappers were told promptly in that discussion that no such idea as property in man should be admitted into the Constitution. The speaker in question might have told you, and he would have told you but the simple truth, if he had told you that he proposition of Mr. Butler and Mr. Pinckney — which he leads you to infer was adopted by the convention that from the Constitution — was, in fact, promptly and indignantly rejected by that convention. He might have told you, had it suited his purpose to do so, that the words employed in the first draft of the fugitive slave clause were such as applied to the condition of slaves, and expressly declared that persons held to "servitude" should be given up; but that the word "servitude" was struck from the provision, for the very reason that it applied to slaves. He might have told you that the same Mr. Madison declared that the word was struck out because the convention would not consent that the idea of property in men should be admitted into the Constitution. The fact that Mr. Madison can be cited on

both sides of this question is another evidence of the folly and absurdity of making the secret intentions of the framers the criterion by which the Constitution is to be construed. But it may be asked — if this clause does not apply to slaves, to whom does it apply?

I answer, that when adopted, it applies to a very large class of persons — namely, redemptioners — persons who had come to America from Holland, from Ireland, and other quarters of the globe — like the Coolies to the West Indies — and had, for a consideration duly paid, become bound to “serve and labour” for the parties to whom their service and labour was due. It applies to indentured apprentices and others who have become bound for a consideration, under contract duly made, to serve and labour, to such persons this provision applies, and only to such persons. The plain reading of this provision shows that it applies, and that it can only properly and legally apply, to persons “bound to service.” Its object plainly is, to secure the fulfillment of contracts for “service and labour.” It applies to indentured apprentices, and any other persons from whom service and labour may be due. The legal condition of the slave puts him beyond the operation of this provision. He is not described in it. He is a simple article of property. He does not owe and cannot owe service. He cannot even make a contract. It is impossible for him to do so. He can no more make such a contract than a horse or an ox can make one. This provision, then, only respects persons who owe service, and they only can owe service who can receive an equivalent and make a bargain. The slave cannot do that, and is therefore exempted from the operation of this fugitive provision. In all matters where laws are taught to be made the means of oppression, cruelty, and wickedness, I am for strict construction. I will concede nothing. It must be shown that it is so nominated in the bond. The pound of flesh, but not one drop of blood. The very nature of law is opposed to all such wickedness, and makes it difficult to accomplish such objects under the forms of law. Law is not merely an arbitrary enactment with regard to justice, reason, or humanity. Blackstone defines it to be a rule prescribed by the supreme power of the State commanding what is right and forbidding what is wrong. The speaker at the City Hall laid down some rules of legal interpretation. These rules send us to the history of the law for its meaning. I have no objection to such a course in ordinary cases of doubt. But where human liberty and justice are at stake, the case falls under an entirely different class of rules. There must be something more than history — something more than tradition. The Supreme Court of the United States lays down this rule, and it meets the case exactly — “Where

rights are infringed — where the fundamental principles of the law are overthrown — where the general system of the law is departed from, the legislative intention must be expressed with irresistible clearness.” The same court says that the language of the law must be construed strictly in favour of justice and liberty. Again, there is another rule of law. It is — Where a law is susceptible of two meanings, the one making it accomplish an innocent purpose, and the other making it accomplish a wicked purpose, we must in all cases adopt that which makes it accomplish an innocent purpose. Again, the details of a law are to be interpreted in the light of the declared objects sought by the law. I set these rules down against those employed at the City Hall. To me they seem just and rational. I only ask you to look at the American Constitution in the light of them, and you will see with me that no man is guaranteed a right of property in man, under the provisions of that instrument. If there are two ideas more distinct in their character and essence than another, those ideas are “persons” and “property,” “men” and “things.” Now, when it is proposed to transform persons into “property” and men into beasts of burden, I demand that the law that completes such a purpose shall be expressed with irresistible clearness. The thing must not be left to inference, but must be done in plain English. I know how this view of the subject is treated by the class represented at the City Hall. They are in the habit of treating the Negro as an exception to general rules. When their own liberty is in question they will avail themselves of all rules of law which protect and defend their freedom; but when the black man’s rights are in question they concede everything, admit everything for slavery, and put liberty to the proof. They reserve the common law usage, and presume the Negro a slave unless he can prove himself free. I, on the other hand, presume him free unless he is proved to be otherwise. Let us look at the objects for which the Constitution was framed and adopted, and see if slavery is one of them. Here are its own objects as set forth by itself: — “We, the people of these United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, ensure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution of the United States of America.” The objects here set forth are six in number: union, defence, welfare, tranquility, justice, and liberty. These are all good objects, and slavery, so far from being among them, is a foe of them all. But it has been said that Negroes are not included within the benefits sought under this declaration. This is said by the slaveholders in America — it is said by the City Hall orator — but it is not said by the

Constitution itself. Its language is “we the people;” not we the white people, not even we the citizens, not we the privileged class, not we the high, not we the low, but we the people; not we the horses, sheep, and swine, and wheel-barrows, but we the people, we the human inhabitants; and, if Negroes are people, they are included in the benefits for which the Constitution of America was ordained and established. But how dare any man who pretends to be a friend to the Negro thus gratuitously concede away what the Negro has a right to claim under the Constitution? Why should such friends invent new arguments to increase the hopelessness of his bondage? This, I undertake to say, as the conclusion of the whole matter, that the constitutionality of slavery can be made out only by disregarding the plain and common-sense reading of the Constitution itself; by discrediting and casting away as worthless the most beneficent rules of legal interpretation; by ruling the Negro outside of these beneficent rules; by claiming that the Constitution does not mean what it says, and that it says what it does not mean; by disregarding the written Constitution, and interpreting it in the light of a secret understanding. It is in this mean, contemptible, and underhand method that the American Constitution is pressed into the service of slavery. They go everywhere else for proof that the Constitution declares that no person shall be deprived of life, liberty, or property without due process of law; it secures to every man the right of trial by jury, the privilege of the writ of habeas corpus — the great writ that put an end to slavery and slave-hunting in England — and it secures to every State a republican form of government. Anyone of these provisions in the hands of abolition statesmen, and backed up by a right moral sentiment, would put an end to slavery in America. The Constitution forbids the passing of a bill of attainder: that is, a law entailing upon the child the disabilities and hardships imposed upon the parent. Every slave law in America might be repealed on this very ground. The slave is made a slave because his mother is a slave. But to all this it is said that the practice of the American people is against my view. I admit it. They have given the Constitution a slaveholding interpretation. I admit it. They have committed innumerable wrongs against the Negro in the name of the Constitution. Yes, I admit it all; and I go with him who goes farthest in denouncing these wrongs. But it does not follow that the Constitution is in favour of these wrongs because the slaveholders have given it that interpretation. To be consistent in his logic, the City Hall speaker must follow the example of some of his brothers in America — he must not only fling away the Constitution, but the Bible. The Bible must follow the Constitution, for that, too, has been interpreted for slavery by American

divines. Nay, more, he must not stop with the Constitution of America, but make war with the British Constitution, for, if I mistake not, the gentleman is opposed to the union of Church and State. In America he called himself a Republican. Yet he does not go for breaking down the British Constitution, although you have a Queen on the throne, and bishops in the House of Lords.

My argument against the dissolution of the American Union is this: It would place the slave system more exclusively under the control of the slaveholding States, and withdraw it from the power in the Northern States which is opposed to slavery. Slavery is essentially barbarous in its character. It, above all things else, dreads the presence of an advanced civilisation. It flourishes best where it meets no reproofing frowns, and hears no condemning voices. While in the Union it will meet with both. Its hope of life, in the last resort, is to get out of the Union. I am, therefore, for drawing the bond of the Union more completely under the power of the Free States. What they most dread, that I most desire. I have much confidence in the instincts of the slaveholders. They see that the Constitution will afford slavery no protection when it shall cease to be administered by slaveholders. They see, moreover, that if there is once a will in the people of America to abolish slavery, this is no word, no syllable in the Constitution to forbid that result. They see that the Constitution has not saved slavery in Rhode Island, in Connecticut, in New York, or Pennsylvania; that the Free States have only added three to their original number. There were twelve Slave States at the beginning of the Government: there are fifteen now. The dissolution of the Union would not give the North a single advantage over slavery, but would take from it many. Within the Union we have a firm basis of opposition to slavery. It is opposed to all the great objects of the Constitution. The dissolution of the Union is not only an unwise but a cowardly measure — 15 millions running away from three hundred and fifty thousand slaveholders. Mr. Garrison and his friends tell us that while in the Union we are responsible for slavery. He and they sing out “No Union with slaveholders,” and refuse to vote. I admit our responsibility for slavery while in the Union but I deny that going out of the Union would free us from that responsibility. There now clearly is no freedom from responsibility for slavery to any American citizen short to the abolition of slavery. The American people have gone quite too far in this slaveholding business now to sum up their whole business of slavery by singing out the cant phrase, “No union with slaveholders.” To desert the family hearth may place the recreant husband out of the presence of his

starving children, but this does not free him from responsibility. If a man were on board of a pirate ship, and in company with others had robbed and plundered, his whole duty would not be preformed simply by taking the longboat and singing out, "No union with pirates." His duty would be to restore the stolen property. The American people in the Northern States have helped to enslave the black people. Their duty will not have been done till they give them back their plundered rights. Reference was made at the City Hall to my having once held other opinions, and very different opinions to those I have now expressed. An old speech of mine delivered fourteen years ago was read to show — I know not what. Perhaps it was to show that I am not infallible. If so, I have to say in defence, that I never pretended to be. Although I cannot accuse myself of being remarkably unstable, I do not pretend that I have never altered my opinion both in respect to men and things. Indeed, I have been very much modified both in feeling and opinion within the last fourteen years. When I escaped from slavery, and was introduced to the Garrisonians, I adopted very many of their opinions, and defended them just as long as I deemed them true. I was young, had read but little, and naturally took some things on trust. Subsequent experience and reading have led me to examine for myself. This had brought me to other conclusions. When I was a child, I thought and spoke as a child. But the question is not as to what were my opinions fourteen years ago, but what they are now. If I am right now, it really does not matter what I was fourteen years ago. My position now is one of reform, not of revolution. I would act for the abolition of slavery through the Government — not over its ruins. If slaveholders have ruled the American Government for the last fifty years, let the anti-slavery men rule the nation for the next fifty years. If the South has made the Constitution bend to the purposes of slavery, let the North now make that instrument bend to the cause of freedom and justice. If 350,000 slaveholders have, by devoting their energies to that single end, been able to make slavery the vital and animating spirit of the American Confederacy for the last 72 years, now let the freemen of the North, who have the power in their own hands, and who can make the American Government just what they think fit, resolve to blot out for ever the foul and haggard crime, which is the blight and mildew, the curse and the disgrace of the whole United States.

Document 5

Reply to the *Dred Scott* Decision

June 26, 1857

On March 6, 1857, the Supreme Court announced its decision in the case of *Dred Scott v. Sandford*. *Dred Scott's* owner had taken him into a free state. Scott sued for his freedom, arguing that his residence in a free state made him a free man. On appeal, the case reached the Supreme Court, which ruled that African Americans were not citizens and were never intended to be citizens, and thus Scott had no standing to sue in federal court. The Court further ruled that Congress had no power to prohibit slavery in the territories. This ruling struck at the existence of the Republican Party, Lincoln's party, because the central plank of the Republican platform was that Congress had the right and the duty to prohibit slavery in the territories.

Lincoln responded to the ruling in this speech given in Springfield, Illinois. His response was also part of his ongoing campaign against Democratic senator Stephen A. Douglas (1813–1861) (Documents 4, 6, 7, 9), the leading proponent of policies that Lincoln thought would spread the evil of slavery into the territories and ultimately destroy the American Republic. In his response, Lincoln explained why the *Dred Scott* decision was wrong and why the decision should not be accepted as a final and controlling precedent. He also explained his understanding of the Declaration of Independence, contrasting it with Douglas' understanding. Finally, in response to Douglas' claim that the Republicans wanted amalgamation of the races, Lincoln explained why the policies of the Democrats and Douglas were more likely to bring that about. In this context, Lincoln explained why he supported the return of African Americans to Africa.

Source: *Life and Works of Abraham Lincoln*, Centenary Edition, vol. 3, ed. Marion Mills Miller (New York: Current Literature Publishing, 1907), 15–30, <https://archive.org/details/lifeworks03lincuoft/page/n3/mode/2up?view=theater>.

Fellow citizens:

I am here tonight, partly by the invitation of some of you, and partly by my own inclination. Two weeks ago, Judge Douglas spoke here on the several

subjects of Kansas, the *Dred Scott* decision, and Utah. I listened to the speech at the time, and have read the report of it since. It was intended to controvert opinions which I think just, and to assail (politically, not personally) those men who, in common with me, entertain those opinions. For this reason I wished then, and still wish, to make some answer to it, which I now take the opportunity of doing. . . .

And now, as to the *Dred Scott* decision. That decision declares two propositions – first, that a negro cannot sue in the United States courts; and secondly, that Congress cannot prohibit slavery in the territories. It was made by a divided court – dividing differently on the different points. Judge Douglas does not discuss the merits of the decision, and in that respect, I shall follow his example, believing I could no more improve upon McLean and Curtis, than he could on Taney.¹

He denounces all who question the correctness of that decision, as offering violent resistance to it. But who resists it? Who has, in spite of the decision, declared Dred Scott free, and resisted the authority of his master over him?

Judicial decisions have two uses – first, to absolutely determine the case decided; and secondly to indicate to the public how other similar cases will be decided when they arise. For the latter use, they are called “precedents” and “authorities.”

We believe as much as Judge Douglas (perhaps more) in obedience to, and respect for the judicial department of government. We think its decisions on constitutional questions, when fully settled, should control not only the particular cases decided, but the general policy of the country subject to be disturbed only by amendments of the Constitution, as provided in that instrument itself. More than this would be revolution. But we think the *Dred Scott* decision is erroneous. We know the court that made it has often overruled its own decisions, and we shall do what we can to have it overrule this. We offer no resistance to it.

Judicial decisions are of greater or less authority as precedents, according to circumstances. That this should be so, accords both with common sense, and the customary understanding of the legal profession.

If this important decision had been made by the unanimous concurrence of the judges, and without any apparent partisan bias, and in accordance with legal public expectation, and with the steady practice of the departments,

¹ Chief Justice Roger Taney (1777–1864) wrote the majority opinion in *Dred Scott*. Justices John McLean (1785–1861) and Benjamin Curtis (1809–1874) wrote dissenting opinions.

throughout our history, and had been in no part based on assumed historical facts which are not really true; or, if wanting in some of these, it had been before the court more than once, and had there been affirmed and reaffirmed through a course of years, it then might be, perhaps would be, factious, nay, even revolutionary, not to acquiesce in it as a precedent.

But when, as is true, we find it wanting in all these claims to the public confidence, it is not resistance, it is not factious, it is not even disrespectful, to treat it as not having yet quite established a settled doctrine for the country. But Judge Douglas considers this view awful. Hear him:

The courts are the tribunals prescribed by the Constitution and created by the authority of the people to determine, expound, and enforce the law. Hence, whoever resists the final decision of the highest judicial tribunal, aims a deadly blow to our whole republican system of government—a blow which, if successful, would place all our rights and liberties at the mercy of passion, anarchy, and violence. I repeat, therefore, that if resistance to the decisions of the Supreme Court of the United States, in a matter like the points decided in the *Dred Scott* case, clearly within their jurisdiction as defined by the Constitution, shall be forced upon the country as a political issue, it will become a distinct and naked issue between the friends and enemies of the Constitution—the friends and enemies of the supremacy of the laws.

Why, this same Supreme Court once decided a national bank to be constitutional; but General Jackson, as president of the United States, disregarded the decision, and vetoed a bill for a re-charter, partly on constitutional ground, declaring that each public functionary must support the Constitution “as he understands it.” But hear the General’s own words. Here they are, taken from his veto message:

It is maintained by the advocates of the bank, that its constitutionality, in all its features, ought to be considered as settled by precedent, and by the decision of the Supreme Court. To this conclusion I cannot assent. Mere precedent is a dangerous source of authority, and should not be regarded as deciding questions of constitutional power, except where the acquiescence of the people and the states can be considered as well settled. So far from this being the case on this subject, an argument against the bank might be based on precedent. One Congress,

in 1791, decided in favor of a bank; another, in 1811, decided against it. One Congress, in 1815, decided against a bank; another, in 1816, decided in its favor. Prior to the present Congress, therefore, the precedents drawn from that source were equal. If we resort to the states, the expression of legislative, judicial, and executive opinions against the bank have been probably to those in its favor as four to one. There is nothing in precedent, therefore, which, if its authority were admitted, ought to weigh in favor of the act before me.

I drop the quotations merely to remark, that all there ever was, in the way of precedent up to the *Dred Scott* decision, on the points therein decided, had been against that decision. But hear General Jackson further:

If the opinion of the Supreme Court covered the whole ground of this act, it ought not to control the coordinate authorities of this government. The Congress, the Executive, and the Court, must each for itself be guided by its own opinion of the Constitution. Each public officer, who takes an oath to support the Constitution, swears that he will support it as he understands it, and not as it is understood by others.

Again and again have I heard Judge Douglas denounce that bank decision, and applaud General Jackson for disregarding it. It would be interesting for him to look over his recent speech and see how exactly his fierce philippics against us for resisting Supreme Court decisions fall upon his own head. It will call to mind a long and fierce political war in this country, upon an issue which, in his own language, and, of course, in his own changeless estimation, was "a distinct issue between the friends and the enemies of the Constitution," and in which war he fought in the ranks of the enemies of the Constitution.

I have said, in substance, that the *Dred Scott* decision was, in part, based on assumed historical facts which were not really true, and I ought not to leave the subject without giving some reasons for saying this; I, therefore, give an instance or two, which I think fully sustain me. Chief Justice Taney, in delivering the opinion of the majority of the Court, insists at great length, that negroes were no part of the people who made, or for whom was made, the Declaration of Independence, or the Constitution of the United States.

On the contrary, Judge Curtis, in his dissenting opinion, shows that in five of the then thirteen states, to wit: New Hampshire, Massachusetts, New

York, New Jersey, and North Carolina, free negroes were voters, and, in proportion to their numbers, had the same part in making the Constitution that the white people had. He shows this with so much particularity as to leave no doubt of its truth; and as a sort of conclusion on that point, holds the following language:

The Constitution was ordained and established by the people of the United States, through the action, in each state, of those persons who were qualified by its laws to act thereon in behalf of themselves and all other citizens of the state. In some of the states, as we have seen, colored persons were among those qualified by law to act on the subject. These colored persons were not only included in the body of "the people of the United States," by whom the Constitution was ordained and established; but in at least five of the states they had the power to act, and, doubtless, did act, by their suffrages, upon the question of its adoption.

Again, Chief Justice Taney says:

It is difficult, at this day to realize the state of public opinion in relation to that unfortunate race, which prevailed in the civilized and enlightened portions of the world at, the time of the Declaration of Independence, and when the Constitution of the United States was framed and adopted.

And again, after quoting from the Declaration, he says:

The general words above quoted would seem to include the whole human family, and if they were used in a similar instrument at this day, would be so understood.

In these the Chief Justice does not directly assert, but plainly assumes, as a fact, that the public estimate of the black man is more favorable now than it was in the days of the Revolution. This assumption is a mistake. In some trifling particulars, the condition of that race has been ameliorated; but as a whole, in this country, the change between then and now is decidedly the other way; and their ultimate destiny has never appeared so hopeless as in the last three or four years. In two of the five states—New Jersey and North

Carolina—that then gave the free negro the right of voting, the right has since been taken away; and in the third—New York—it has been greatly abridged; while it has not been extended, so far as I know, to a single additional state, though the number of the states has more than doubled. In those days, as I understand, masters could, at their own pleasure, emancipate their slaves; but since then such legal restraints have been made upon emancipation as to amount almost to prohibition. In those days legislatures held the unquestioned power to abolish slavery in their respective states; but now it is becoming quite fashionable for state constitutions to withhold that power from the legislatures. In those days by common consent, the spread of the black man's bondage to the new countries was prohibited; but now, Congress decides that it will not continue the prohibition—and the Supreme Court decides that it could not if it would. In those days our Declaration of Independence was held sacred by all, and thought to include all; but now, to aid in making the bondage of the negro universal and eternal, it is assailed, sneered at, construed, hawked at, and torn, till, if its framers could rise from their graves, they could not at all recognize it. All the powers of earth seem rapidly combining against him. Mammon is after him; ambition follows, philosophy follows, and the theology of the day is fast joining the cry. They have him in his prison-house; they have searched his person and left no prying instrument with him. One after another they have closed the heavy iron doors upon him; and now they have him, as it were, bolted in with a lock of a hundred keys, which can never be unlocked without the concurrence of every key; the keys in the hands of a hundred different men, and they scattered to a hundred different and distant places; and they stand musing as to what invention, in all the dominions of mind and matter, can be produced to make the impossibility of his escape more complete than it is.

It is grossly incorrect to say or assume, that the public estimate of the negro is more favorable now than it was at the origin of the government.

Three years and a half ago, Judge Douglas brought forward his famous Nebraska bill.² The country was at once in a blaze. He scorned all opposition and carried it through Congress. Since then he has seen himself superseded in a presidential nomination by one endorsing the general doctrine of his measure, but at the same time standing clear of the odium of its untimely agitation, and its gross breach of national faith; and he has seen that successful rival constitutionally elected, not by the strength of friends but by the

² The Kansas-Nebraska Act (1854). See Document 4.

division of his adversaries, being in a popular minority of nearly 400,000 votes.³ He has seen his chief aids in his own state, Shields and Richardson,⁴ politely speaking, successively tried, convicted, and executed, for an offense not their own, but his. And now he sees his own case, standing next on the docket for trial.

There is a natural disgust, in the minds of nearly all white people, to the idea of an indiscriminate amalgamation of the white and black races; and Judge Douglas evidently is basing his chief hope upon the chances of his being able to appropriate the benefit of this disgust to himself. If he can, by much drumming and repeating, fasten the odium of that idea upon his adversaries, he thinks he can struggle through the storm. He therefore clings to this hope, as a drowning man to the last plank. He makes an occasion for lugging it in from the opposition to the *Dred Scott* decision. He finds the Republicans insisting that the Declaration of Independence includes *all* men, black as well as white, and forthwith he boldly denies that it includes negroes at all, and proceeds to argue gravely that all who contend it does, do so only because they want to vote, eat and sleep, and marry with negroes. He will have it that they cannot be consistent else. Now, I protest against the counterfeit logic which concludes that because I do not want a black woman for a slave I must necessarily want her for a wife. I need not have her for either. I can just leave her alone. In some respects she certainly is not my equal; but in her natural right to eat the bread she earns with her own hands, without asking leave of anyone else, she is my equal, and the equal of all others.

Chief Justice Taney, in his opinion in the *Dred Scott* case, admits that the language of the Declaration is broad enough to include the whole human family; but he and Judge Douglas argue that the authors of that instrument did not intend to include negroes, by the fact that they did not at once actually place them on an equality with the whites. Now, this grave argument comes to just nothing at all by the other fact, that they did not at once, or ever afterward, actually place all white people on an equality with one another. And

³ Lincoln referred to Douglas' unsuccessful bid for the presidency in 1856 and the election of James Buchanan. The "breach of national faith" was the repeal of the Missouri Compromise. See Document 4.

⁴ James Shields (1806–1879) was a political ally of Stephen Douglas in the U.S. Senate. Shields failed to win reelection to the Senate in 1854, losing to the antislavery Democrat Lyman Trumbull. William Alexander Richardson (1811–1875), another ally of Douglas, was an Illinois Democratic politician. In 1856 he lost the race for governor of Illinois to a Republican.

this is the staple argument of both the Chief Justice and the senator for doing this obvious violence to the plain, unmistakable language of the Declaration.

I think the authors of that notable instrument intended to include all men, but they did not intend to declare all men equal in all respects. They did not mean to say all were equal in color, size, intellect, moral developments, or social capacity. They defined with tolerable distinctness in what respects they did consider all men created equal—equal with “certain inalienable rights, among which are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” This they said, and this meant. They did not mean to assert the obvious untruth that all were then actually enjoying that equality, nor yet that they were about to confer it immediately upon them. In fact, they had no power to confer such a boon.

They meant simply to declare the *right*, so that the *enforcement* of it might follow as fast as circumstances should permit. They meant to set up a standard maxim for free society, which should be familiar to all, and revered by all; constantly looked to, constantly labored for, and even though never perfectly attained, constantly approximated, and thereby constantly spreading and deepening its influence, and augmenting the happiness and value of life to all people of all colors everywhere. The assertion that “all men are created equal” was of no practical use in effecting our separation from Great Britain; and it was placed in the Declaration not for that, but for future use. Its authors meant it to be, thank God, it is now proving itself, a stumbling block to those who in after times might seek to turn a free people back into the hateful paths of despotism. They knew the proneness of prosperity to breed tyrants, and they meant when such should reappear in this fair land and commence their vocation they should find left for them at least one hard nut to crack.

I have now briefly expressed my view of the meaning and objects of that part of the Declaration of Independence which declares that “all men are created equal.”

Now let us hear Judge Douglas’ view of the same subject, as I find it in the printed report of his late speech. Here it is:

No man can vindicate the character, motives, and conduct of the signers of the Declaration of Independence except upon the hypothesis that they referred to the white race alone, and not to the African, when they declared all men to have been created equal—that they were speaking of British subjects on this continent being equal to British subjects born and residing in Great Britain—that they were entitled to the same inalienable rights, and among them were enumerated life,

liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. The Declaration was adopted for the purpose of justifying the colonists in the eyes of the civilized world in withdrawing their allegiance from the British Crown and dissolving their connection with the mother country.

My good friends, read that carefully over some leisure hour, and ponder well upon it—see what a mere wreck—mangled ruin—it makes of our once glorious Declaration.

“They were speaking of British subjects on this continent being equal to British subjects born and residing in Great Britain”! Why, according to this, not only negroes but white people outside of Great Britain and America are not spoken of in that instrument. The English, Irish, and Scotch, along with white Americans, were included to be sure, but the French, Germans, and other white people of the world are all gone to pot along with the Judge’s inferior races. I had thought the Declaration promised something better than the condition of British subjects; but no, it only meant that we should be equal to them in their own oppressed and unequal condition. According to that, it gave no promise that having kicked off the king and lords of Great Britain, we should not at once be saddled with a king and lords of our own. I had thought the Declaration contemplated the progressive improvement in the condition of all men everywhere; but no, it merely “was adopted for the purpose of justifying the colonists in the eyes of the civilized world in withdrawing their allegiance from the British Crown and dissolving their connection with the mother country.” Why, that object having been effected some eighty years ago, the Declaration is of no practical use now—mere rubbish—old wadding left to rot on the battlefield after the victory is won.

I understand you are preparing to celebrate the “Fourth,” tomorrow week. What for? The doings of that day had no reference to the present; and quite half of you are not even descendants of those who were referred to at that day. But I suppose you will celebrate; and will even go so far as to read the Declaration. Suppose after you read it once in the old-fashioned way, you read it once more with Judge Douglas’ version. It will then run thus: “We hold these truths to be self-evident that all British subjects who were on this continent eighty-one years ago were created equal to all British subjects born and then residing in Great Britain.”

And now I appeal to all—to Democrats as well as others—are you really willing that the Declaration shall be thus frittered away?—thus left no more at most than an interesting memorial of the dead past? thus shorn of its vitality,

and practical value; and left without the germ or even the suggestion of the individual rights of man in it?

But Judge Douglas is especially horrified at the thought of the mixing blood by the white and black races: agreed for once—a thousand times agreed. There are white men enough to marry all the white women, and black men enough to marry all the black women; and so let them be married. On this point we fully agree with the Judge; and when he shall show that his policy is better adapted to prevent amalgamation than ours we shall drop ours, and adopt his. Let us see. In 1850 there were in the United States, 405,751 mulattoes. Very few of these are the offspring of whites and free blacks; nearly all have sprung from black slaves and white masters. A separation of the races is the only perfect preventive of amalgamation, but as an immediate separation is impossible the next best thing is to keep them apart where they are not already together. If white and black people never get together in Kansas, they will never mix blood in Kansas. That is at least one self-evident truth. A few free colored persons may get into the free states, in any event; but their number is too insignificant to amount to much in the way of mixing blood. In 1850 there were in the free states 56,649 mulattoes; but for the most part they were not born there—they came from the slave states, ready made up. In the same year the slave states had 348,874 mulattoes all of home production. The proportion of free mulattoes to free blacks—the only colored classes in the free states—is much greater in the slave than in the free states. It is worthy of note too, that among the free states those which make the colored man the nearest to equal the white, have, proportionably the fewest mulattoes, the least of amalgamation. In New Hampshire, the state which goes farthest toward equality between the races, there are just 184 mulattoes while there are in Virginia—how many do you think? 79,775, being 23,126 more than in all the free states together.

These statistics show that slavery is the greatest source of amalgamation; and next to it, not the elevation, but the degeneration of the free blacks. Yet Judge Douglas dreads the slightest restraints on the spread of slavery, and the slightest human recognition of the negro, as tending horribly to amalgamation.

This very *Dred Scott* case affords a strong test as to which party most favors amalgamation, the Republicans or the dear Union-saving Democracy. Dred Scott, his wife, and two daughters were all involved in the suit. We desired the Court to have held that they were citizens so far at least as to entitle them to a hearing as to whether they were free or not; and then, also, that they were in

fact and in law really free. Could we have had our way, the chances of these black girls ever mixing their blood with that of white people would have been diminished at least to the extent that it could not have been without their consent. But Judge Douglas is delighted to have them decided to be slaves, and not human enough to have a hearing, even if they were free, and thus left subject to the forced concubinage of their masters, and liable to become the mothers of mulattoes in spite of themselves – the very state of case that produces nine tenths of all the mulattoes – all the mixing of blood in the nation.

Of course, I state this case as an illustration only, not meaning to say or intimate that the master of Dred Scott and his family, or any more than a percentage of masters generally, are inclined to exercise this particular power which they hold over their female slaves.

I have said that the separation of the races is the only perfect preventive of amalgamation. I have no right to say all the members of the Republican Party are in favor of this, nor to say that as a party they are in favor of it. There is nothing in their platform directly on the subject. But I can say a very large proportion of its members are for it, and that the chief plank in their platform – opposition to the spread of slavery – is most favorable to that separation.

Such separation, if ever effected at all, must be effected by colonization; and no political party, as such, is now doing anything directly for colonization. Party operations at present only favor or retard colonization incidentally. The enterprise is a difficult one; but “when there is a will there is a way”; and what colonization needs most is a hearty will. Will springs from the two elements of moral sense and self-interest. Let us be brought to believe it is morally right, and, at the same time, favorable to, or, at least, not against, our interest, to transfer the African to his native clime, and we shall find a way to do it, however great the task may be. The children of Israel, to such numbers as to include 400,000 fighting men, went out of Egyptian bondage in a body.

How differently the respective courses of the Democratic and Republican parties incidentally bear on the question of forming a will – a public sentiment – for colonization, is easy to see. The Republicans inculcate, with whatever of ability they can, that the Negro is a man; that his bondage is cruelly wrong, and that the field of his oppression ought not to be enlarged. The Democrats deny his manhood; deny, or dwarf to insignificance, the wrong of his bondage; so far as possible, crush all sympathy for him, and cultivate and excite hatred and disgust against him; compliment themselves as Union-savers for doing so; and call the indefinite outspreading of his bondage “a sacred right of self-government.”

The plainest print cannot be read through a gold eagle; and it will be ever hard to find many men who will send a slave to Liberia and pay his passage while they can send him to a new country, Kansas for instance, and sell him for fifteen hundred dollars, and the rise.

Document 11

Address at Cooper Union

February 27, 1860

Lincoln's debates with Stephen Douglas (1813–1861; Document 9) in 1858 brought him nationwide attention. His reputation continued to grow as he spoke to audiences across the Midwest in 1859 (Document 10). He was now spoken of as a possible Republican candidate for president. Stephen Douglas, hoping to be the Democratic presidential candidate in 1860, continued to defend his doctrine of popular sovereignty in speeches around the country and in a widely read article in Harper's New Monthly Magazine in September 1859. John Brown's attack on the federal armory in Harper's Ferry, Virginia, in October 1859, part of a plot to foment a rebellion of slaves in the South, outraged slaveholders and their sympathizers. They linked the views of Republicans with those of abolitionists like Brown and claimed that Republican opposition to slavery was the cause of Brown's raid and a threat to the Union.

In the midst of this fraught political situation, New York Republicans invited Lincoln to give a speech in February 1860. Lincoln believed that if Douglas became president, slavery would spread throughout the nation (Documents 6 and 7). To keep slavery local and on the path of ultimate extinction, he had to beat Douglas. But to beat Douglas, he needed first to win the Republican nomination for president; and to do that he needed the support of eastern Republicans. The consequences of Lincoln's speech could not have been greater—for him and for the country.

Lincoln prepared for his speech with a thorough study of historical records. He presented the evidence he found with commanding clarity and precision, building a compelling case that the Founders intended the federal government to regulate slavery in the territories. Lincoln then defended the policy of the founding generation to limit the spread of slavery as still the best policy. Finally, he defended Republicans against the charge that they were a regional party, indistinguishable from abolitionists. Republicans, he said, stood for a principled moderation between the extremism of both slaveholders and abolitionists, and were thus best suited to lead the country through the coming political crisis. He concluded his speech with a warning about the intentions of Douglas and the Democrats and with a resounding call for Republicans to do their duty.

Lincoln's speech was a triumph and helped him secure the Republican nomination for president in 1860.

Source: "Republicans at Cooper Institute; Address by Hon. Abraham Lincoln, of Illinois. Remarks of Messrs. Wm. Cullen Bryant, Horace Greeley, Gen. Nye and J. A. Briggs. Speech of Wm. Cullen Bryant. Speech of Mr. Lincoln, *New York Times*, February 28, 1860, <https://www.nytimes.com/1860/02/28/archives/republicans-at-cooper-institute-address-by-hon-abraham-lincoln-of.html>.

The facts with which I shall deal this evening are mainly old and familiar; nor is there anything new in the general use I shall make of them. If there shall be any novelty, it will be in the mode of presenting the facts, and the inferences and observations following that presentation.

In his speech last autumn, at Columbus, Ohio, as reported in the *New York Times*, Senator Douglas said: "Our fathers, when they framed the government under which we live, understood this question just as well, and even better, than we do now."

I fully endorse this, and I adopt it as a text for this discourse. I so adopt it because it furnishes a precise and an agreed starting point for a discussion between Republicans and that wing of the Democracy¹ headed by Senator Douglas. It simply leaves the inquiry: "What was the understanding those fathers had of the question mentioned?"

What is the frame of government under which we live?

The answer must be: "The Constitution of the United States." That Constitution consists of the original, framed in 1787 (and under which the present government first went into operation), and twelve subsequently framed amendments, the first ten of which were framed in 1789.

Who were our fathers that framed the Constitution? I suppose the "thirty-nine" who signed the original instrument may be fairly called our fathers who framed that part of the present government. It is almost exactly true to say they framed it, and it is altogether true to say they fairly represented the opinion and sentiment of the whole nation at that time. Their names, being familiar to nearly all, and accessible to quite all, need not now be repeated.

I take these "thirty-nine," for the present, as being "our fathers who framed the government under which we live."

¹ Democratic Party.

What is the question which, according to the text, those fathers understood “just as well, and even better than we do now?”

It is this: Does the proper division of local from federal authority, or anything in the Constitution, forbid our *federal government* to control as to slavery in *our federal territories*?

Upon this, Senator Douglas holds the affirmative, and Republicans the negative. This affirmation and denial form an issue; and this issue—is this question—is precisely what the text declares our fathers understood “better than we.”

Let us now inquire whether the “thirty-nine,” or any of them, ever acted upon this question; and if they did, how they acted upon it—how they expressed that better understanding?

In 1784, three years before the Constitution—the United States then owning the Northwestern Territory, and no other, the Congress of the Confederation had before them the question of prohibiting slavery in that territory; and four of the “thirty-nine” who afterward framed the Constitution were in that Congress, and voted on that question. Of these, Roger Sherman, Thomas Mifflin, and Hugh Williamson voted for the prohibition, thus showing that, in their understanding, no line dividing local from federal authority, nor anything else, properly forbade the federal government to control as to slavery in federal territory. The other of the four—James McHenry—voted against the prohibition, showing that, for some cause, he thought it improper to vote for it.

In 1787, still before the Constitution but while the Convention was in session framing it, and while the Northwestern Territory still was the only territory owned by the United States, the same question of prohibiting slavery in the territory again came before the Congress of the Confederation; and two more of the “thirty-nine” who afterward signed the Constitution were in that Congress, and voted on the question. They were William Blount and William Few; and they both voted for the prohibition—thus showing that, in their understanding, no line dividing local from federal authority, nor anything else, properly forbids the federal government to control as to slavery in federal territory. This time the prohibition became a law, being part of what is now well known as the ordinance of '87.²

The question of federal control of slavery in the territories seems not to have been directly before the Convention which framed the original Constitution; and hence it is not recorded that the “thirty-nine,” or any of them,

² The Northwest Ordinance (1787).

while engaged on that instrument, expressed any opinion on that precise question.

In 1789, by the first Congress which sat under the Constitution, an act was passed to enforce the ordinance of '87, including the prohibition of slavery in the Northwestern Territory. The bill for this act was reported by one of the "thirty-nine," Thomas Fitzsimmons, then a member of the House of Representatives from Pennsylvania. It went through all its stages without a word of opposition, and finally passed both branches without yeas and nays, which is equivalent to a unanimous passage. In this Congress there were sixteen of the thirty-nine fathers who framed the original Constitution. They were John Langdon, Nicholas Gilman, Wm. S. Johnson, Roger Sherman, Robert Morris, Thos. Fitzsimmons, William Few, Abraham Baldwin, Rufus King, William Paterson, George Clymer, Richard Bassett, George Read, Pierce Butler, Daniel Carroll, James Madison.

This shows that, in their understanding, no line dividing local from federal authority, nor anything in the Constitution, properly forbade Congress to prohibit slavery in the federal territory; else both their fidelity to correct principle, and their oath to support the Constitution, would have constrained them to oppose the prohibition.

Again, George Washington, another of the "thirty-nine," was then president of the United States, and as such approved and signed the bill; thus completing its validity as a law, and thus showing that, in his understanding, no line dividing local from federal authority, nor anything in the Constitution, forbade the federal government to control as to slavery in federal territory.

No great while after the adoption of the original Constitution, North Carolina ceded to the federal government the country now constituting the state of Tennessee; and a few years later Georgia ceded that which now constitutes the states of Mississippi and Alabama. In both deeds of cession it was made a condition by the ceding states that the federal government should not prohibit slavery in the ceded territory. Besides this, slavery was then actually in the ceded country. Under these circumstances, Congress, on taking charge of these countries, did not absolutely prohibit slavery within them. But they did interfere with it—take control of it—even there, to a certain extent. In 1798, Congress organized the territory of Mississippi. In the act of organization, they prohibited the bringing of slaves into the territory, from any place without the United States, by fine, and giving freedom to slaves so bought. This act passed both branches of Congress without yeas and nays. In that Congress were three of the "thirty-nine" who framed the original Constitution. They were John Langdon, George Read, and Abraham Baldwin. They

all, probably, voted for it. Certainly they would have placed their opposition to it upon record if, in their understanding, any line dividing local from federal authority, or anything in the Constitution, properly forbade the federal government to control as to slavery in federal territory.

In 1803, the federal government purchased the Louisiana country. Our former territorial acquisitions came from certain of our own states; but this Louisiana country was acquired from a foreign nation. In 1804, Congress gave a territorial organization to that part of it which now constitutes the state of Louisiana. New Orleans, lying within that part, was an old and comparatively large city. There were other considerable towns and settlements, and slavery was extensively and thoroughly intermingled with the people. Congress did not, in the territorial act, prohibit slavery; but they did interfere with it—take control of it—in a more marked and extensive way than they did in the case of Mississippi. The substance of the provision therein made, in relation to slaves, was:

First. That no slave should be imported into the territory from foreign parts.

Second. That no slave should be carried into it who had been imported into the United States since the first day of May 1798.

Third. That no slave should be carried into it, except by the owner, and for his own use as a settler; the penalty in all the cases being a fine upon the violator of the law, and freedom to the slave.

This act also was passed without yeas and nays. In the Congress which passed it, there were two of the “thirty-nine.” They were Abraham Baldwin and Jonathan Dayton. As stated in the case of Mississippi, it is probable they both voted for it. They would not have allowed it to pass without recording their opposition to it if, in their understanding, it violated either the line properly dividing local from federal authority or any provision of the Constitution.

In 1819-20 came and passed the Missouri question. Many votes were taken, by yeas and nays, in both branches of Congress, upon the various phases of the general question. Two of the “thirty-nine”—Rufus King and Charles Pinckney—were members of that Congress. Mr. King steadily voted for slavery prohibition and against all compromises, while Mr. Pinckney as steadily voted against slavery prohibition and against all compromises. By this, Mr. King showed that, in his understanding, no line dividing local

from federal authority, nor anything in the Constitution, was violated by Congress prohibiting slavery in federal territory; while Mr. Pinckney, by his votes, showed that, in his understanding, there was some sufficient reason for opposing such prohibition in that case.

The cases I have mentioned are the only acts of the "thirty-nine," or of any of them, upon the direct issue which I have been able to discover.

To enumerate the persons who thus acted, as being four in 1784, two in 1787, seventeen in 1789, three in 1798, two in 1804, and two in 1819-20—there would be thirty of them. But this would be counting John Langdon, Roger Sherman, William Few, Rufus King, and George Read each twice, and Abraham Baldwin three times. The true number of those of the "thirty-nine" whom I have shown to have acted upon the question, which, by the text, they understood better than we, is twenty-three, leaving sixteen not shown to have acted upon it in any way.

Here, then, we have twenty-three out of our thirty-nine fathers "who framed the government under which we live," who have, upon their official responsibility and their corporal oaths, acted upon the very question which the text affirms they "understood just as well, and even better than we do now"; and twenty-one of them—a clear majority of the whole "thirty-nine"—so acting upon it as to make them guilty of gross political impropriety and willful perjury if, in their understanding, any proper division between local and federal authority, or anything in the Constitution they had made themselves, and sworn to support, forbade the federal government to control as to slavery in the federal territories. Thus the twenty-one acted; and, as actions speak louder than words, so actions, under such responsibility, speak still louder.

Two of the twenty-three voted against congressional prohibition of slavery in the federal territories, in the instances in which they acted upon the question. But for what reasons they so voted is not known. They may have done so because they thought a proper division of local from federal authority, or some provision or principle of the Constitution, stood in the way; or they may, without any such question, have voted against the prohibition on what appeared to them to be sufficient grounds of expediency. No one who has sworn to support the Constitution can conscientiously vote for what he understands to be an unconstitutional measure, however expedient he may think it; but one may and ought to vote against a measure which he deems constitutional if, at the same time, he deems it inexpedient. It, therefore, would be unsafe to set down even the two who voted against the prohibition as having done so because, in their understanding, any proper division

of local from federal authority, or anything in the Constitution, forbade the federal government to control as to slavery in federal territory.

The remaining sixteen of the "thirty-nine," so far as I have discovered, have left no record of their understanding upon the direct question of federal control of slavery in the federal territories. But there is much reason to believe that their understanding upon that question would not have appeared different from that of their twenty-three compeers, had it been manifested at all.

For the purpose of adhering rigidly to the text, I have purposely omitted whatever understanding may have been manifested by any person, however distinguished, other than the thirty-nine fathers who framed the original Constitution; and, for the same reason, I have also omitted whatever understanding may have been manifested by any of the "thirty-nine" even, on any other phase of the general question of slavery. If we should look into their acts and declarations on those other phases, as the foreign slave trade, and the morality and policy of slavery generally, it would appear to us that on the direct question of federal control of slavery in federal territories, the sixteen, if they had acted at all, would probably have acted just as the twenty-three did. Among that sixteen were several of the most noted antislavery men of those times—as Dr. Franklin, Alexander Hamilton, and Gouverneur Morris—while there was not one now known to have been otherwise, unless it may be John Rutledge, of South Carolina.

The sum of the whole is that of our thirty-nine fathers who framed the original Constitution, twenty-one—a clear majority of the whole—certainly understood that no proper division of local from federal authority, nor any part of the Constitution, forbade the federal government to control slavery in the federal territories; while all the rest probably had the same understanding. Such, unquestionably, was the understanding of our fathers who framed the original Constitution; and the text affirms that they understood the question "better than we."

But, so far, I have been considering the understanding of the question manifested by the framers of the original Constitution. In and by the original instrument, a mode was provided for amending it; and, as I have already stated, the present frame of "the government under which we live" consists of that original, and twelve amendatory articles framed and adopted since. Those who now insist that federal control of slavery in federal territories violates the Constitution, point us to the provisions which they suppose it thus violates; and, as I understand, that all fix upon provisions in these amendatory articles, and not in the original instrument. The Supreme Court, in the *Dred Scott* case, plant themselves upon the fifth amendment, which

provides that no person shall be deprived of "life, liberty, or property without due process of law"; while Senator Douglas and his peculiar adherents plant themselves upon the tenth amendment, providing that "the powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution" "are reserved to the states respectively, or to the people."

Now, it so happens that these amendments were framed by the first Congress which sat under the Constitution—the identical Congress which passed the act already mentioned, enforcing the prohibition of slavery in the Northwestern Territory. Not only was it the same Congress, but they were the identical, same individual men who, at the same session, and at the same time within the session, had under consideration, and in progress toward maturity, these constitutional amendments, and this act prohibiting slavery in all the territory the nation then owned. The constitutional amendments were introduced before, and passed after the act enforcing the ordinance of '87; so that, during the whole pendency of the act to enforce the ordinance, the constitutional amendments were also pending.

The seventy-six members of that Congress, including sixteen of the framers of the original Constitution, as before stated, were preeminently our fathers who framed that part of "the government under which we live," which is now claimed as forbidding the federal government to control slavery in the federal territories.

Is it not a little presumptuous in any one at this day to affirm that the two things which that Congress deliberately framed, and carried to maturity at the same time, are absolutely inconsistent with each other? And does not such affirmation become impudently absurd when coupled with the other affirmation from the same mouth, that those who did the two things, alleged to be inconsistent, understood whether they really were inconsistent better than we—better than he who affirms that they are inconsistent?

It is surely safe to assume that the thirty-nine framers of the original Constitution, and the seventy-six members of the Congress which framed the amendments thereto, taken together, do certainly include those who may be fairly called "our fathers who framed the government under which we live." And so assuming, I defy any man to show that any one of them ever, in his whole life, declared that, in his understanding, any proper division of local from federal authority, or any part of the Constitution, forbade the federal government to control as to slavery in the federal territories. I go a step further. I defy anyone to show that any living man in the whole world ever did, prior to the beginning of the present century (and I might almost say prior to the beginning of the last half of the present century), declare that,

in his understanding, any proper division of local from federal authority, or any part of the Constitution, forbade the federal government to control as to slavery in the federal territories. To those who now so declare, I give, not only “our fathers who framed the government under which we live,” but with them all other living men within the century in which it was framed, among whom to search, and they shall not be able to find the evidence of a single man agreeing with them.

Now, and here, let me guard a little against being misunderstood. I do not mean to say we are bound to follow implicitly in whatever our fathers did.

To do so would be to discard all the lights of current experience – to reject all progress – all improvement. What I do say is, that if we would supplant the opinions and policy of our fathers in any case, we should do so upon evidence so conclusive, and argument so clear, that even their great authority, fairly considered and weighed, cannot stand; and most surely not in a case whereof we ourselves declare they understood the question better than we.

If any man at this day sincerely believes that a proper division of local from federal authority, or any part of the Constitution, forbids the federal government to control as to slavery in the federal territories, he is right to say so, and to enforce his position by all truthful evidence and fair argument which he can. But he has no right to mislead others, who have less access to history, and less leisure to study it, into the false belief that “our fathers who framed the government under which we live” were of the same opinion – thus substituting falsehood and deception for truthful evidence and fair argument. If any man at this day sincerely believes “our fathers who framed the government under which we live” used and applied principles, in other cases, which ought to have led them to understand that a proper division of local from federal authority or some part of the Constitution, forbids the federal government to control as to slavery in the federal territories, he is right to say so. But he should, at the same time, brave the responsibility of declaring that, in his opinion, he understands their principles better than they did themselves; and especially should he not shirk that responsibility by asserting that they “understood the question just as well, and even better, than we do now.”

But enough! *Let all who believe that “our fathers, who framed the government under which we live, understood this question just as well, and even better, than we do now,” speak as they spoke, and act as they acted upon it. This is all Republicans ask—all Republicans desire—in relation to slavery. As those fathers marked it, so let it be again marked, as an evil not to be extended, but to be tolerated and protected only because of and so far as its actual presence among us makes that toleration and protection a necessity. Let all the guarantees those fathers gave it be,*

not grudgingly, but fully and fairly, maintained. For this Republicans contend, and with this, so far as I know or believe, they will be content.

And now, if they would listen—as I suppose they will not—I would address a few words to the southern people.

I would say to them: You consider yourselves a reasonable and a just people; and I consider that in the general qualities of reason and justice you are not inferior to any other people. Still, when you speak of us Republicans, you do so only to denounce us as reptiles, or, at the best, as no better than outlaws. You will grant a hearing to pirates or murderers, but nothing like it to “Black Republicans.” In all your contentions with one another, each of you deems an unconditional condemnation of “Black Republicanism” as the first thing to be attended to. Indeed, such condemnation of us seems to be an indispensable prerequisite—license, so to speak—among you to be admitted or permitted to speak at all. Now, can you, or not, be prevailed upon to pause and to consider whether this is quite just to us, or even to yourselves? Bring forward your charges and specifications, and then be patient long enough to hear us deny or justify.

You say we are sectional. We deny it. That makes an issue; and the burden of proof is upon you. You produce your proof; and what is it? Why, that our party has no existence in your section—gets no votes in your section. The fact is substantially true; but does it prove the issue? If it does, then in case we should, without change of principle, begin to get votes in your section, we should thereby cease to be sectional. You cannot escape this conclusion; and yet, are you willing to abide by it? If you are, you will probably soon find that we have ceased to be sectional, for we shall get votes in your section this very year. You will then begin to discover, as the truth plainly is, that your proof does not touch the issue. The fact that we get no votes in your section is a fact of your making, and not of ours.³ And if there be fault in that fact, that fault is primarily yours, and remains until you show that we repel you by some wrong principle or practice. If we do repel you by any wrong principle or practice, the fault is ours; but this brings you to where you ought to have started—to a discussion of the right or wrong of our principle. If our principle, put in practice, would wrong your section for the benefit of ours, or for any other object, then our principle, and we with it, are sectional, and are justly opposed and denounced as such. Meet us, then, on the question of whether our principle, put in practice, would wrong your section; and so

³ Southern states prevented or discouraged the expression of antislavery views and also prevented Republican candidates appearing on ballots.

meet it as if it were possible that something may be said on our side. Do you accept the challenge? No! Then you really believe that the principle which "our fathers who framed the government under which we live" thought so clearly right as to adopt it, and endorse it again and again, upon their official oaths, is in fact so clearly wrong as to demand your condemnation without a moment's consideration.

Some of you delight to flaunt in our faces the warning against sectional parties given by Washington in his Farewell Address. Less than eight years before Washington gave that warning, he had, as president of the United States, approved and signed an act of Congress, enforcing the prohibition of slavery in the Northwestern Territory, which act embodied the policy of the government upon that subject up to and at the very moment he penned that warning; and about one year after he penned it, he wrote LaFayette⁴ that he considered that prohibition a wise measure, expressing in the same connection his hope that we should at some time have a confederacy of free states.

Bearing this in mind, and seeing that sectionalism has since arisen upon this same subject, is that warning a weapon in your hands against us, or in our hands against you? Could Washington himself speak, would he cast the blame of that sectionalism upon us, who sustain his policy, or upon you who repudiate it? We respect that warning of Washington, and we commend it to you, together with his example pointing to the right application of it.

But you say you are conservative—eminently conservative—while we are revolutionary, destructive, or something of the sort. What is conservatism? Is it not adherence to the old and tried, against the new and untried? We stick to, contend for, the identical old policy on the point in controversy which was adopted by "our fathers who framed the government under which we live"; while you with one accord reject, and scout, and spit upon that old policy, and insist upon substituting something new. True, you disagree among yourselves as to what that substitute shall be. You are divided on new propositions and plans, but you are unanimous in rejecting and denouncing the old policy of the fathers. Some of you are for reviving the foreign slave trade; some for a congressional slave-code for the territories; some for Congress forbidding the territories to prohibit slavery within their limits; some for maintaining slavery in the territories through the judiciary; some for the "gur-reat pur-rinciple" that "if one man would enslave another, no third man

⁴ Marie-Joseph Paul Yves Roch Gilbert du Motier, Marquis de La Fayette (1757-1834) was a French aristocrat who fought with the Americans in the Revolution. He and Washington became friends.

should object," fantastically called "popular sovereignty"; but never a man among you is in favor of federal prohibition of slavery in federal territories, according to the practice of "our fathers who framed the government under which we live." Not one of all your various plans can show a precedent or an advocate in the century within which our government originated. Consider, then, whether your claim of conservatism for yourselves, and your charge or destructiveness against us, are based on the most clear and stable foundations.

Again, you say we have made the slavery question more prominent than it formerly was. We deny it. We admit that it is more prominent, but we deny that we made it so. It was not we, but you, who discarded the old policy of the fathers. We resisted, and still resist, your innovation; and thence comes the greater prominence of the question. Would you have that question reduced to its former proportions? Go back to that old policy. What has been will be again, under the same conditions. If you would have the peace of the old times, readopt the precepts and policy of the old times.

You charge that we stir up insurrections among your slaves. We deny it; and what is your proof? Harper's Ferry! John Brown!! John Brown was no Republican; and you have failed to implicate a single Republican in his Harper's Ferry enterprise. If any member of our party is guilty in that matter, you know it or you do not know it. If you do know it, you are inexcusable for not designating the man and proving the fact. If you do not know it, you are inexcusable for asserting it, and especially for persisting in the assertion after you have tried and failed to make the proof. You need to be told that persisting in a charge which one does not know to be true is simply malicious slander.

Some of you admit that no Republican designedly aided or encouraged the Harper's Ferry affair, but still insist that our doctrines and declarations necessarily lead to such results. We do not believe it. We know we hold to no doctrine, and make no declaration, which were not held to and made by "our fathers who framed the government under which we live." You never dealt fairly by us in relation to this affair. When it occurred, some important state elections were near at hand, and you were in evident glee with the belief that, by charging the blame upon us, you could get an advantage of us in those elections. The elections came, and your expectations were not quite fulfilled. Every Republican man knew that, as to himself at least, your charge was a slander, and he was not much inclined by it to cast his vote in your favor.

Republican doctrines and declarations are accompanied with a continual protest against any interference whatever with your slaves, or with you about your slaves. Surely, this does not encourage them to revolt. True, we do, in

common with "our fathers who framed the government under which we live," declare our belief that slavery is wrong; but the slaves do not hear us declare even this. For anything we say or do, the slaves would scarcely know there is a Republican party. I believe they would not, in fact, generally know it but for your misrepresentations of us in their hearing. In your political contests among yourselves, each faction charges the other with sympathy with Black Republicanism; and then, to give point to the charge, defines Black Republicanism to simply be insurrection, blood, and thunder among the slaves.

Slave insurrections are no more common now than they were before the Republican party was organized. What induced the Southampton insurrection,⁵ twenty-eight years ago, in which at least three times as many lives were lost as at Harper's Ferry? You can scarcely stretch your very elastic fancy to the conclusion that Southampton was "got up by Black Republicanism." In the present state of things in the United States, I do not think a general, or even a very extensive slave insurrection is possible. The indispensable concert of action cannot be attained. The slaves have no means of rapid communication; nor can incendiary freemen, black or white, supply it. The explosive materials are everywhere in parcels; but there neither are, nor can be supplied, the indispensable connecting trains.

Much is said by southern people about the affection of slaves for their masters and mistresses; and a part of it, at least, is true. A plot for an uprising could scarcely be devised and communicated to twenty individuals before some one of them, to save the life of a favorite master or mistress, would divulge it. This is the rule; and the slave revolution in Haiti⁶ was not an exception to it, but a case occurring under peculiar circumstances. The gunpowder plot of British history,⁷ though not connected with slaves, was more in point. In that case, only about twenty were admitted to the secret; and yet one of them, in his anxiety to save a friend, betrayed the plot to that friend, and, by consequence, averted the calamity. Occasional poisonings from the kitchen, and open or stealthy assassinations in the field, and local revolts extending to a score or so will continue to occur as the natural results of slavery; but no general insurrection of slaves, as I think, can happen in this country for a long time. Whoever much fears, or much hopes for such an event, will be alike disappointed.

⁵ Nat Turner's Rebellion (1831). Turner (1800–1831) was a slave who led a rebellion among slaves in Southampton County, Virginia.

⁶ A rebellion in Haiti in 1791 that led to the eventual independence of Haiti in 1804.

⁷ A failed attempt to kill King James I in 1605.

In the language of Mr. Jefferson, uttered many years ago, "It is still in our power to direct the process of emancipation, and deportation, peaceably, and in such slow degrees, as that the evil will wear off insensibly; and their places be, *pari passu*,⁸ filled up by free white laborers. If, on the contrary, it is left to force itself on, human nature must shudder at the prospect held up."⁹

Mr. Jefferson did not mean to say, nor do I, that the power of emancipation is in the federal government. He spoke of Virginia; and, as to the power of emancipation, I speak of the slaveholding states only. The federal government, however, as we insist, has the power of restraining the extension of the institution—the power to ensure that a slave insurrection shall never occur on any American soil which is now free from slavery.

John Brown's effort was peculiar. It was not a slave insurrection. It was an attempt by white men to get up a revolt among slaves, in which the slaves refused to participate. In fact, it was so absurd that the slaves, with all their ignorance, saw plainly enough it could not succeed. That affair, in its philosophy, corresponds with the many attempts, related in history, at the assassination of kings and emperors. An enthusiast broods over the oppression of a people till he fancies himself commissioned by Heaven to liberate them. He ventures the attempt, which ends in little else than his own execution. Orsini's¹⁰ attempt on Louis Napoleon and John Brown's attempt at Harper's Ferry were, in their philosophy, precisely the same. The eagerness to cast blame on old England in the one case, and on New England in the other, does not disprove the sameness of the two things.

And how much would it avail you if you could, by the use of John Brown, Helper's Book,¹¹ and the like, break up the Republican organization? Human action can be modified to some extent, but human nature cannot be changed. There is a judgment and a feeling against slavery in this nation, which cast at least a million and a half of votes. You cannot destroy that judgment and feeling—that sentiment—by breaking up the political organization which rallies around it. You can scarcely scatter and disperse an army which has been formed into order in the face of your heaviest fire; but if you could, how

⁸ At the same rate, that is, as the former slaves leave the United States, their places will be taken by free white laborers.

⁹ Lincoln quoted from Jefferson's *Autobiography* (1820).

¹⁰ Felice Orsini attempted to assassinate Louis Napoleon, Napoleon III, on January 14, 1858.

¹¹ Southerner Hilton Helper (1829–1909) published an antislavery book, *The Impending Crisis of the South: How to Meet It*, in 1859.

much would you gain by forcing the sentiment which created it out of the peaceful channel of the ballot-box, into some other channel? What would that other channel probably be? Would the number of John Browns be lessened or enlarged by the operation?

But you will break up the Union rather than submit to a denial of your constitutional rights.

That has a somewhat reckless sound; but it would be palliated, if not fully justified, were we proposing, by the mere force of numbers, to deprive you of some right, plainly written down in the Constitution. But we are proposing no such thing.

When you make these declarations, you have a specific and well-understood allusion to an assumed constitutional right of yours to take slaves into the federal territories, and to hold them there as property. But no such right is specifically written in the Constitution. That instrument is literally silent about any such right. We, on the contrary, deny that such a right has any existence in the Constitution, even by implication.

Your purpose, then, plainly stated, is that you will destroy the government unless you be allowed to construe and enforce the Constitution as you please, on all points in dispute between you and us. You will rule or ruin in all events.

This, plainly stated, is your language. Perhaps you will say the Supreme Court has decided the disputed constitutional question in your favor. Not quite so. But waiving the lawyer's distinction between dictum and decision,¹² the Court have decided the question for you in a sort of way. The Court have substantially said, it is your constitutional right to take slaves into the federal territories, and to hold them there as property. When I say the decision was made in a sort of way, I mean it was made in a divided Court, by a bare majority of the judges, and they not quite agreeing with one another in the reasons for making it; that it is so made as that its avowed supporters disagree with one another about its meaning, and that it was mainly based upon a mistaken statement of fact – the statement in the opinion that “the right of property in a slave is distinctly and expressly affirmed in the Constitution.”

¹² Lincoln referred to *obiter dictum*, a judge's opinion offered in a decision that has no bearing on the decision and does not establish a precedent. In *Dred Scott*, Chief Justice Taney ruled that the slave Dred Scott was not a citizen and thus had no right to bring a case before the Court. That could have been the end of his decision, but he went on to claim that the federal government had no constitutional authority to prohibit slavery in the territories.

An inspection of the Constitution will show that the right of property in a slave is not "*distinctly and expressly* affirmed" in it. Bear in mind, the judges do not pledge their judicial opinion that such right is *impliedly* affirmed in the Constitution; but they pledge their veracity that it is "*distinctly and expressly*" affirmed there—"distinctly," that is, not mingled with anything else—"expressly," that is, in words meaning just that, without the aid of any inference, and susceptible of no other meaning.

If they had only pledged their judicial opinion that such right is affirmed in the instrument by implication, it would be open to others to show that neither the word "slave" nor "slavery" is to be found in the Constitution, nor the word "property" even, in any connection with language alluding to the things slave, or slavery; and that wherever in that instrument the slave is alluded to, he is called a "person"; and wherever his master's legal right in relation to him is alluded to, it is spoken of as "service or labor which may be due," as a debt payable in service or labor. Also, it would be open to show, by contemporaneous history, that this mode of alluding to slaves and slavery, instead of speaking of them, was employed on purpose to exclude from the Constitution the idea that there could be property in man.¹³

To show all this, is easy and certain.

When this obvious mistake of the judges shall be brought to their notice, is it not reasonable to expect that they will withdraw the mistaken statement, and reconsider the conclusion based upon it?

And then it is to be remembered that "our fathers, who framed the government under which we live"—the men who made the Constitution—decided this same constitutional question in our favor, long ago—decided it without division among themselves, when making the decision; without division among themselves about the meaning of it after it was made, and, so far as any evidence is left, without basing it upon any mistaken statement of facts.

Under all these circumstances, do you really feel yourselves justified to break up this Government unless such a court decision as yours is, shall be at once submitted to as a conclusive and final rule of political action? But you will not abide the election of a Republican president! In that supposed event, you say, you will destroy the Union; and then, you say, the great crime of having destroyed it will be upon us! That is cool. A highwayman holds a pistol to my ear, and mutters through his teeth, "Stand and deliver, or I shall kill you, and then you will be a murderer!"

¹³ In the Constitutional Convention, on August 25, James Madison said he "thought it wrong to admit in the Constitution the idea that there could be property in men."

To be sure, what the robber demanded of me—my money—was my own; and I had a clear right to keep it; but it was no more my own than my vote is my own; and the threat of death to me, to extort my money, and the threat of destruction to the Union, to extort my vote, can scarcely be distinguished in principle.

A few words now to Republicans. *It is exceedingly desirable that all parts of this great confederacy shall be at peace, and in harmony, one with another. Let us Republicans do our part to have it so. Even though much provoked, let us do nothing through passion and ill temper. Even though the southern people will not so much as listen to us, let us calmly consider their demands, and yield to them if, in our deliberate view of our duty, we possibly can.* Judging by all they say and do, and by the subject and nature of their controversy with us, let us determine, if we can, what will satisfy them.

Will they be satisfied if the territories be unconditionally surrendered to them? We know they will not. In all their present complaints against us, the territories are scarcely mentioned. Invasions and insurrections are the rage now. Will it satisfy them, if, in the future, we have nothing to do with invasions and insurrections? We know it will not. We so know, because we know we never had anything to do with invasions and insurrections; and yet this total abstaining does not exempt us from the charge and the denunciation.

The question recurs, what will satisfy them? Simply this: We must not only let them alone, but we must somehow, convince them that we do let them alone. This, we know by experience, is no easy task. We have been so trying to convince them from the very beginning of our organization, but with no success. In all our platforms and speeches we have constantly protested our purpose to let them alone; but this has had no tendency to convince them. Alike unavailing to convince them, is the fact that they have never detected a man of us in any attempt to disturb them.

These natural, and apparently adequate means all failing, what will convince them? This, and this only: cease to call slavery *wrong*, and join them in calling it *right*. And this must be done thoroughly—done in *acts* as well as in *words*. Silence will not be tolerated—we must place ourselves avowedly with them. Senator Douglas' new sedition law must be enacted and enforced, suppressing all declarations that slavery is wrong, whether made in politics, in presses, in pulpits, or in private.¹⁴ We must arrest and return their fugitive slaves with greedy pleasure. We must pull down our free state

¹⁴In the first session of the thirty-sixth Congress, which convened in December 1859, Douglas proposed the sedition law Lincoln described.

constitutions. The whole atmosphere must be disinfected from all taint of opposition to slavery before they will cease to believe that all their troubles proceed from us.

I am quite aware they do not state their case precisely in this way. Most of them would probably say to us, "Let us alone, do nothing to us, and say what you please about slavery." But we do let them alone—have never disturbed them—so that, after all, it is what we say which dissatisfies them. They will continue to accuse us of doing, until we cease saying.

I am also aware they have not, as yet, in terms, demanded the overthrow of our free-state constitutions. Yet those constitutions declare the wrong of slavery with more solemn emphasis than do all other sayings against it; and when all these other sayings shall have been silenced, the overthrow of these constitutions will be demanded, and nothing be left to resist the demand. It is nothing to the contrary that they do not demand the whole of this just now. Demanding what they do, and for the reason they do, they can voluntarily stop nowhere short of this consummation. Holding, as they do, that slavery is morally right and socially elevating, they cannot cease to demand a full national recognition of it as a legal right, and a social blessing.

Nor can we justifiably withhold this, on any ground save our conviction that slavery is wrong. If slavery is right, all words, acts, laws, and constitutions against it are themselves wrong, and should be silenced and swept away. If it is right, we cannot justly object to its nationality—its universality; if it is wrong, they cannot justly insist upon its extension—its enlargement. All they ask, we could readily grant, if we thought slavery right; all we ask, they could as readily grant, if they thought it wrong. Their thinking it right, and our thinking it wrong, is the precise fact upon which depends the whole controversy. Thinking it right, as they do, they are not to blame for desiring its full recognition as being right; but, thinking it wrong, as we do, can we yield to them? Can we cast our votes with their view, and against our own? In view of our moral, social, and political responsibilities, can we do this?

Wrong as we think slavery is, we can yet afford to let it alone where it is, because that much is due to the necessity arising from its actual presence in the nation; but can we, while our votes will prevent it, allow it to spread into the national territories, and to overrun us here in these free states? If our sense of duty forbids this, then let us stand by our duty, fearlessly and effectively. Let us be diverted by none of those sophistical contrivances wherewith we are so industriously plied and belabored—contrivances such as groping for some middle ground between the right and the wrong, vain as the search for a man who should be neither a living man nor a dead man—such

as a policy of “don’t care” on a question about which all true men do care—such as Union appeals beseeching true Union men to yield to disunionists, reversing the divine rule, and calling not the sinners but the righteous to repentance—such as invocations to Washington, imploring men to unsay what Washington said, and undo what Washington did.

Neither let us be slandered from our duty by false accusations against us, nor frightened from it by menaces of destruction to the government nor of dungeons to ourselves. LET US HAVE FAITH THAT RIGHT MAKES MIGHT, AND IN THAT FAITH, LET US, TO THE END, DARE TO DO OUR DUTY AS WE UNDERSTAND IT.

Document 14

First Inaugural Address

March 4, 1861

Lincoln was one of four presidential candidates in 1860, a reflection of the deep divide over slavery. One of his opponents was his longtime antagonist Stephen A. Douglas (1813–1861), who was the Democratic nominee. His other opponents were John C. Breckinridge (1821–1875) of Kentucky, who was the nominee of the southern Democratic Party, and John Bell (1796–1869) of Tennessee, who was the nominee of the Constitutional Union Party. Lincoln won a plurality of the popular vote (40 percent; Douglas was second in the popular vote with 30 percent), and a large majority of the Electoral College votes. Even if the electoral votes that went to the other three candidates had all gone to one of them, Lincoln would still have won the Electoral College vote.

Following Lincoln's election, South Carolina became the first state to enact a secession ordinance (December 20, 1860). Six more states followed by the first week of the following February (Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas), and the eight remaining slaveholding states were considering the question seriously. On February 4, 1861, delegates from the first seven secessionist states met in Montgomery, Alabama, to proclaim the birth of the Confederate States of America.

In his Inaugural Address, Lincoln affirmed that, as the Constitution required, he would see that the laws were faithfully executed throughout the Union. At the same time, however, he tried to pacify Southerners by convincing them that they had nothing to fear from a Republican administration. In part a thoughtful treatise on the nature of the Union, the address also reminded Americans of the practical problems with separating North and South. Appealing to "the better angels of our nature," Lincoln concluded with an urgent plea for peace that fell on deaf ears. Four more states—Virginia, Arkansas, North Carolina, and Tennessee—seceded after President Lincoln called into federal service 75,000 men of the militias from several states on April 15, less than twenty-four hours after the garrison at Fort Sumter surrendered. The Civil War had begun.

Source: Abraham Lincoln, First Inaugural Address, Abraham Lincoln papers, Series 1: General Correspondence, Manuscript/Mixed Material, Library of Congress, <http://www.loc.gov/item/mal0773800/>.

Fellow citizens of the United States:

In compliance with a custom as old as the government itself, I appear before you to address you briefly and to take, in your presence, the oath prescribed by the Constitution of the United States, to be taken by the president "before he enters on the execution of this office."

I do not consider it necessary at present for me to discuss those matters of administration about which there is no special anxiety or excitement.

Apprehension seems to exist among the people of the southern states, that by the accession of a Republican administration, their property, and their peace and personal security are to be endangered. There has never been any reasonable cause for such apprehension. Indeed, the most ample evidence to the contrary has all the while existed, and been open to their inspection. It is found in nearly all the published speeches of him who now addresses you. I do but quote from one of those speeches when I declare that "I have no purpose, directly or indirectly, to interfere with the institution of slavery in the states where it exists. I believe I have no lawful right to do so, and I have no inclination to do so." Those who nominated and elected me did so with full knowledge that I had made this, and many similar declarations, and had never recanted them. And more than this, they placed in the platform, for my acceptance, and as a law to themselves, and to me, the clear and emphatic resolution which I now read:

Resolved, That the maintenance inviolate of the rights of the states, and especially the right of each state to order and control its own domestic institutions according to its own judgment exclusively, is essential to that balance of power on which the perfection and endurance of our political fabric depend; and we denounce the lawless invasion by armed force of the soil of any state or territory, no matter what pretext, as among the gravest of crimes.

I now reiterate these sentiments; and in doing so, I only press upon the public attention the most conclusive evidence of which the case is susceptible, that the property, peace, and security of no section are to be in any wise endangered by the now incoming administration. I add too, that all the protection which, consistently with the Constitution and the laws, can be given, will be cheerfully given to all the states when lawfully demanded, for whatever cause—as cheerfully to one section as to another.

There is much controversy about the delivering up of fugitives from

service or labor. The clause I now read is as plainly written in the Constitution as any other of its provisions:

No person held to service or labor in one state, under the laws thereof, escaping into another, shall, in consequence of any law or regulation therein, be discharged from such service or labor, but shall be delivered up on claim of the party to whom such service or labor may be due.

It is scarcely questioned that this provision was intended by those who made it, for the reclaiming of what we call fugitive slaves; and the intention of the law-giver is the law. All members of Congress swear their support to the whole Constitution – to this provision as much as to any other. To the proposition, then, that slaves whose cases come within the terms of this clause “shall be delivered,” their oaths are unanimous. Now, if they would make the effort in good temper, could they not, with nearly equal unanimity, frame and pass a law, by means of which to keep good that unanimous oath?

There is some difference of opinion whether this clause should be enforced by national or by state authority; but surely that difference is not a very material one. If the slave is to be surrendered, it can be of but little consequence to him, or to others, by which authority it is done. And should any one, in any case, be content that his oath shall go unkept, on a merely unsubstantial controversy as to *how* it shall be kept?

Again, in any law upon this subject, ought not all the safeguards of liberty known in civilized and humane jurisprudence to be introduced, so that a free man be not, in any case, surrendered as a slave? And might it not be well at the same time to provide by law for the enforcement of that clause in the Constitution which guarantees that “the citizens of each state shall be entitled to all privileges and immunities of citizens in the several states”?

I take the official oath today with no mental reservations, and with no purpose to construe the Constitution or laws by any hypercritical rules. And while I do not choose now to specify particular acts of Congress as proper to be enforced, I do suggest that it will be much safer for all, both in official and private stations, to conform to, and abide by, all those acts which stand unrepealed, than to violate any of them, trusting to find impunity in having them held to be unconstitutional.

It is seventy-two years since the first inauguration of a president under our national Constitution. During that period fifteen different and greatly distinguished citizens have, in succession, administered the executive branch

of the government. They have conducted it through many perils; and, generally, with great success. Yet, with all this scope for [of] precedent, I now enter upon the same task for the brief constitutional term of four years, under great and peculiar difficulty. A disruption of the federal Union, heretofore only menaced, is now formidably attempted.

I hold that in contemplation of universal law, and of the Constitution, the Union of these states is perpetual. Perpetuity is implied, if not expressed, in the fundamental law of all national governments. It is safe to assert that no government proper ever had a provision in its organic law¹ for its own termination. Continue to execute all the express provisions of our national Constitution, and the Union will endure forever—it being impossible to destroy it, except by some action not provided for in the instrument itself.

Again, if the United States be not a government proper, but an association of states in the nature of contract merely, can it, as a contract, be peaceably unmade by less than all the parties who made it? One party to a contract may violate it—break it, so to speak; but does it not require all to lawfully rescind it?

Descending from these general principles, we find the proposition that, in legal contemplation, the Union is perpetual, confirmed by the history of the Union itself. The Union is much older than the Constitution. It was formed in fact by the Articles of Association in 1774. It was matured and continued by the Declaration of Independence in 1776. It was further matured, and the faith of all the then thirteen states expressly plighted and engaged that it should be perpetual, by the Articles of Confederation in 1778. And finally, in 1787, one of the declared objects for ordaining and establishing the Constitution was “*to form a more perfect Union.*” But if the destruction of the Union, by one, or by a part only, of the states, be lawfully possible, the Union is *less* perfect than before the Constitution, having lost the vital element of perpetuity.

It follows from these views that no state, upon its own mere motion, can lawfully get out of the Union—that *resolves* and *ordinances* to that effect are legally void, and that acts of violence, within any state or states, against the authority of the United States are insurrectionary or revolutionary, according to circumstances.

I therefore consider that in view of the Constitution and the laws, the Union is unbroken; and to the extent of my ability I shall take care, as the

¹Organic law is the law or system of laws that form the foundation of a political order or nation.

Constitution itself expressly enjoins upon me, that the laws of the Union be faithfully executed in all the states. Doing this I deem to be only a simple duty on my part; and I shall perform it, so far as practicable, unless my rightful masters, the American people, shall withhold the requisite means, or in some authoritative manner direct the contrary. I trust this will not be regarded as a menace, but only as the declared purpose of the Union that will constitutionally defend and maintain itself.

In doing this there needs to be no bloodshed or violence; and there shall be none, unless it be forced upon the national authority. The power confided to me will be used to hold, occupy, and possess the property and places belonging to the government, and to collect the duties and imposts; but beyond what may be necessary for these objects, there will be no invasion—no using of force against or among the people anywhere. Where hostility to the United States in any interior locality shall be so great and so universal as to prevent competent resident citizens from holding the federal offices, there will be no attempt to force obnoxious strangers among the people for that object. While the strict legal right may exist in the government to enforce the exercise of these offices, the attempt to do so would be so irritating, and so nearly impracticable with all, that I deem it better to forgo, for the time, the uses of such offices.

The mails, unless repelled, will continue to be furnished in all parts of the Union. So far as possible, the people everywhere shall have that sense of perfect security which is most favorable to calm thought and reflection.

The course here indicated will be followed, unless current events and experience shall show a modification or change to be proper; and in every case and exigency my best discretion will be exercised according to circumstances actually existing, and with a view and a hope of a peaceful solution of the national troubles, and the restoration of fraternal sympathies and affections.

That there are persons in one section or another who seek to destroy the Union at all events, and are glad of any pretext to do it, I will neither affirm nor deny; but if there be such, I need address no word to them. To those, however, who really love the Union may I not speak?

Before entering upon so grave a matter as the destruction of our national fabric, with all its benefits, its memories, and its hopes, would it not be wise to ascertain precisely why we do it? Will you hazard so desperate a step while there is any possibility that any portion of the ills you fly from have no real existence? Will you, while the certain ills you fly to, are greater than all the real ones you fly from? Will you risk the commission of so fearful a mistake?

All profess to be content in the Union if all constitutional rights can be

maintained. Is it true, then, that any right, plainly written in the Constitution, has been denied? I think not. Happily the human mind is so constituted that no party can reach to the audacity of doing this. Think, if you can, of a single instance in which a plainly written provision of the Constitution has ever been denied. If by the mere force of numbers, a majority should deprive a minority of any clearly written constitutional right, it might, in a moral point of view, justify revolution—certainly would, if such right were a vital one. But such is not our case. All the vital rights of minorities, and of individuals, are so plainly assured to them, by affirmations and negations, guaranties and prohibitions, in the Constitution, that controversies never arise concerning them. But no organic law can ever be framed with a provision specifically applicable to every question which may occur in practical administration. No foresight can anticipate, nor any document of reasonable length contain, express provisions for all possible questions. Shall fugitives from labor be surrendered by national or by state authority? The Constitution does not expressly say. *May* Congress prohibit slavery in the territories? The Constitution does not expressly say. *Must* Congress protect slavery in the territories? The Constitution does not expressly say.

From questions of this class spring all our constitutional controversies, and we divide upon them into majorities and minorities. If the minority will not acquiesce, the majority must, or the government must cease. There is no other alternative; for continuing the government, is acquiescence on one side or the other. If a minority, in such case, will secede rather than acquiesce, they make a precedent which, in turn, will divide and ruin them; for a minority of their own will secede from them whenever a majority refuses to be controlled by such minority. For instance, why may not any portion of a new confederacy, a year or two hence, arbitrarily secede again, precisely as portions of the present Union now claim to secede from it? All who cherish disunion sentiments are now being educated to the exact temper of doing this.

Is there such perfect identity of interests among the states to compose a new Union, as to produce harmony only and prevent renewed secession?

Plainly, the central idea of secession is the essence of anarchy. A majority, held in restraint by constitutional checks and limitations, and always changing easily with deliberate changes of popular opinions and sentiments, is the only true sovereign of a free people. Whoever rejects it does, of necessity, fly to anarchy or to despotism. Unanimity is impossible; the rule of a minority, as a permanent arrangement, is wholly inadmissible; so that, rejecting the majority principle, anarchy or despotism in some form is all that is left.

I do not forget the position assumed by some, that constitutional questions

are to be decided by the Supreme Court; nor do I deny that such decisions must be binding in any case upon the parties to a suit; as to the object of that suit, while they are also entitled to very high respect and consideration in all parallel cases by all other departments of the government. And while it is obviously possible that such decision may be erroneous in any given case, still the evil effect following it, being limited to that particular case, with the chance that it may be overruled, and never become a precedent for other cases, can better be borne than could the evils of a different practice.

At the same time, the candid citizen must confess that if the policy of the government upon vital questions, affecting the whole people, is to be irrevocably fixed by decisions of the Supreme Court, the instant they are made, in ordinary litigation between parties, in personal actions, the people will have ceased to be their own rulers, having to that extent practically resigned their government into the hands of that eminent tribunal. Nor is there in this view any assault upon the court or the judges. It is a duty from which they may not shrink, to decide cases properly brought before them; and it is no fault of theirs if others seek to turn their decisions to political purposes.

One section of our country believes slavery is *right*, and ought to be extended, while the other believes it is *wrong*, and ought not to be extended.

This is the only substantial dispute. The fugitive slave clause of the Constitution, and the law for the suppression of the foreign slave trade, are each as well enforced, perhaps, as any law can ever be in a community where the moral sense of the people imperfectly supports the law itself. The great body of the people abide by the dry legal obligation in both cases, and a few break over in each. This, I think, cannot be perfectly cured, and it would be worse in both cases *after* the separation of the sections, than before. The foreign slave trade, now imperfectly suppressed, would be ultimately revived without restriction in one section; while fugitive slaves, now only partially surrendered, would not be surrendered at all by the other.

Physically speaking, we cannot separate. We cannot remove our respective sections from each other, nor build an impassable wall between them. A husband and wife may be divorced, and go out of the presence, and beyond the reach of each other; but the different parts of our country cannot do this. They cannot but remain face to face; and intercourse, either amicable or hostile, must continue between them. Is it possible, then, to make that intercourse more advantageous or more satisfactory *after* separation than *before*? Can aliens make treaties easier than friends can make laws? Can treaties be more faithfully enforced between aliens than laws can among friends?

Suppose you go to war, you cannot fight always; and when, after much loss on both sides, and no gain on either, you cease fighting, the identical old questions, as to terms of intercourse, are again upon you.

This country, with its institutions, belongs to the people who inhabit it. Whenever they shall grow weary of the existing government, they can exercise their *constitutional* right of amending it, or their *revolutionary* right to dismember or overthrow it. I cannot be ignorant of the fact that many worthy and patriotic citizens are desirous of having the national Constitution amended. While I make no recommendation of amendments, I fully recognize the rightful authority of the people over the whole subject to be exercised in either of the modes prescribed in the instrument itself; and I should, under existing circumstances, favor rather than oppose a fair opportunity being afforded the people to act upon it.

I will venture to add that to me the convention mode seems preferable, in that it allows amendments to originate with the people themselves, instead of only permitting them to take or reject propositions originated by others not especially chosen for the purpose, and which might not be precisely such as they would wish to either accept or refuse. I understand a proposed amendment to the Constitution, which amendment, however, I have not seen, has passed Congress, to the effect that the federal government shall never interfere with the domestic institutions of the states, including that of persons held to service. To avoid misconstruction of what I have said, I depart from my purpose not to speak of particular amendments, so far as to say that holding such a provision to now be implied constitutional law, I have no objection to its being made express and irrevocable.

The chief magistrate derives all his authority from the people, and they have referred none upon him to fix terms for the separation of the states. The people themselves can do this if also they choose; but the executive, as such, has nothing to do with it. His duty is to administer the present government, as it came to his hands, and to transmit it, unimpaired by him, to his successor.

Why should there not be a patient confidence in the ultimate justice of the people? Is there any better or equal hope in the world? In our present differences, is either party without faith of being in the right? If the Almighty Ruler of nations, with his eternal truth and justice, be on your side of the North, or on yours of the South, that truth, and that justice, will surely prevail, by the judgment of this great tribunal of the American people.

By the frame of the government under which we live, this same people

have wisely given their public servants but little power for mischief; and have, with equal wisdom, provided for the return of that little to their own hands at very short intervals.

While the people retain their virtue and vigilance, no administration, by any extreme of wickedness or folly, can very seriously injure the government in the short space of four years.

My countrymen, one and all, think calmly and *well* upon this whole subject. Nothing valuable can be lost by taking time. If there be an object to *hurry* any of you, in hot haste, to a step which you would never take *deliberately*, that object will be frustrated by taking time; but no good object can be frustrated by it. Such of you as are now dissatisfied still have the old Constitution unimpaired, and, on the sensitive point, the laws of your own framing under it; while the new administration will have no immediate power, if it would, to change either. If it were admitted that you who are dissatisfied hold the right side in the dispute, there still is no single good reason for precipitate action. Intelligence, patriotism, Christianity, and a firm reliance on Him, who has never yet forsaken this favored land, are still competent to adjust, in the best way, all our present difficulty.

In *your* hands, my dissatisfied fellow countrymen, and not in *mine*, is the momentous issue of civil war. The government will not assail *you*. You can have no conflict without being yourselves the aggressors. *You* have no oath registered in Heaven to destroy the government, while *I* shall have the most solemn one to "preserve, protect, and defend it."

I am loath to close. We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield, and patriot grave, to every living heart and hearthstone, all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.

by no means to offer them any resistance. Hereafter, if his prescriptions are followed, the overthrow of a Government, instead of being the most solemn and hazardous undertaking in which men can engage, will be one of the lightest and safest pastimes and sports.

Next to Mr. Buchanan, we are indebted to the Northern wing of the Democratic party for the success of the South in breaking up the Union. Its presses, and its leaders, smarting under defeat, have most unpatriotically and scandalously used the disunion movement of the South to frighten the Republican party into an utter abandonment of their principles, and thus to accomplish the demoralization and destruction of the party. The game has been admirably played, and not without a large measure of success. Encouraged by the signs of wavering in the ranks of the Republicans, they have followed up the work with ever increasing vigor and pertinacity. Upon all supposed weak points they have directed their force with effect. They have urged the repeal of Personal Liberty Bills, the enforcement of the inhuman Fugitive Slave Bill, the passing of the Crittenden Compromise,¹ opposed Coercion—that is, the enforcement of the Laws of the Union—and have thus encouraged the arrogance and audacity which, as good citizens, they should have been foremost in frowning down. Their policy has been not the salvation of the country, but the distraction of the Republicans. Every fact and argument which could be pressed into this service, whether touching the pockets or the prejudices of the people have been skillfully wielded to this one malign purpose.

Happily, up to this time, within twelve days of the inauguration of the Republican President, no word has fallen from the Leader of the party which can be construed into an abandonment of the principles upon which he was elected. So far so good; but how long this may remain the case, no man can tell.—The atmosphere of the Capital has hitherto been fatal to the moral health of nearly all Northern men, and may prove so to that of Mr. Lincoln, though all our hopes are on the opposite side.

Douglas/ Monthly, March, 1861

THE INAUGURAL ADDRESS

Elsewhere in the columns of our present monthly, our readers will find the Inaugural Address of Mr. Abraham Lincoln, delivered on the occasion of his induction to the office of President of the United States. The circumstances under which the Address was delivered, were the most extraordinary and portentous that ever attended any similar occasion in the history of the country. Threats of riot, rebellion, violence and assassination had been freely, though darkly circulated, as among the probable events to occur on that memorable day. The life of Mr. Lincoln was believed, even by his least timid friends, to be in most imminent danger. No mean courage was required to face the probabilities of the hour. He stood up before the pistol or dagger of the sworn assassin, to meet death from an unknown hand, while upon the very threshold of the office to which the suffrages of the nation had elected him. The outgoing Administration, either by its treachery or weakness, or both, had allowed the Government to float to the very verge of destruction. A fear, amounting to agony in some minds, existed that the great American Republic would expire in the arms of its newly elected guardian upon the very moment of his inauguration. For weeks and months previously to the 4th of March, under the wise direction and management of General Scott, elaborate military preparations were made with a view to prevent the much apprehended outbreak of violence and bloodshed, and secure the peaceful inauguration of the President elect. How much the nation is indebted to General Scott for its present existence, it is impossible to tell. No doubt exists that to him, rather than to any forbearance of the rebels, Washington owes its salvation from bloody streets on the fourth of March. The manner in which Mr. Lincoln entered the Capital was in keeping with the menacing and troubled state of the times. He reached the Capital as the poor, hunted fugitive slave reaches the North, in disguise, seeking concealment, evading pursuers, by the underground railroad, between two days, not during the sunlight, but crawling and dodging under the sable wing of night. He changed his programme, took another route, started at another hour, travelled in other company, and arrived at another time in Washington. We have no censure for the President at this point. He only did what braver men have done. It was, doubtless, galling to his very soul to be compelled to avail himself of the methods of a fugitive slave, with a nation howling on his track. The great party that elected him fairly wilted under it. The act, in some sense, was an indication of

the policy of the new Government—more cunning than bold, evading rather than facing danger, outwitting rather than bravely conquering and putting down the enemy. The whole thing looked bad, but it was not adopted without reason. Circumstances gave to an act which, upon its face, was cowardly and mean, the merit of wisdom, forethought and discretion.

Once in Washington, Mr. Lincoln found himself in the thick atmosphere of treason on the one hand, and a cowardly, sentimental and deceitful profession of peace on the other. With such surroundings, he went to work upon his Inaugural Address, and the influence of those surroundings may be traced in the whole character of his performance. Making all allowance for circumstances, we must declare the address to be but little better than our worst fears, and vastly below what we had fondly hoped it might be. It is a double-tongued document, capable of two constructions, and conceals rather than declares a definite policy. No man reading it could say whether Mr. Lincoln was for peace or war, whether he abandons or maintains the principles of the Chicago Convention upon which he was elected. The occasion required the utmost frankness and decision. Overlooking the whole field of disturbing elements, he should have boldly rebuked them. He saw seven States in open rebellion, the Constitution set at naught, the national flag insulted, and his own life murderously sought by slave-holding assassins. Does he expose and rebuke the enemies of his country, the men who are bent upon ruling or ruining the country? Not a bit of it. But at the very start he seeks to court their favor, to explain himself where nobody misunderstands him, and to deny intentions of which nobody had accused him. He turns away from his armed enemy and deals his blows on the head of an innocent bystander. He knew, full well, that the grand objection to him and his party respected the one great question of slavery extension. The South want to extend slavery, and the North want to confine it where it is, "where the public mind shall rest in the belief of its ultimate extinction." This was the question which carried the North and defeated the South in the election which made Mr. Abraham Lincoln President. Mr. Lincoln knew this, and the South has known it all along; and yet this subject only gets the faintest allusion, while others, never seriously in dispute, are dwelt upon at length.

Mr. Lincoln opens his address by announcing his complete loyalty to slavery in the slave States, and quotes from the Chicago platform a resolution affirming the rights of property in slaves, in the slave States.

He is not content with declaring that he has no lawful power to interfere with slavery in the States, but he also denies having the least "*inclination*" to interfere with slavery in the States. This denial of all feeling against slavery, at such a time and in such circumstances, is wholly discreditable to the head and heart of Mr. Lincoln. Aside from the inhuman coldness of the sentiment, it was a weak and inappropriate utterance to such an audience, since it could neither appease nor check the wild fury of the rebel Slave Power. Any but a blind man can see that the disunion sentiment of the South does not arise from any misapprehension of the disposition of the party represented by Mr. Lincoln. The very opposite is the fact. The difficulty is, the slaveholders understand the position of the Republican party too well. Whatever may be the honied phrases employed by Mr. Lincoln when confronted by actual disunion; however silvery and beautiful may be the subtle rhetoric of his long-headed Secretary of State, when wishing to hold the Government together until its management should fall into other hands; all know that the masses at the North (the power behind the throne) had determined to take and keep this Government out of the hands of the slave-holding oligarchy, and administer it hereafter to the advantage of free labor as against slave labor. The slaveholders knew full well that they were hereafter to change the condition of rulers to that of being ruled; they knew that the mighty North is outstripping the South in numbers, and in all the elements of power, and that from being superior, they were to be doomed to hopeless inferiority. This is what galled them. They are not afraid that Lincoln will send out a proclamation over the slave States declaring all the slaves free, nor that Congress will pass a law to that effect. They are no such fools as to believe any such thing; but they do think, and not without reason, that the power of slavery is broken, and that *its* prestige is gone whenever the people have made up their minds that Liberty is safer in the hands of freemen than in those of slaveholders. To those sagacious and crafty men, schooled into mastery over bondmen on the plantation, and thus the better able to assume the airs of superiority over Northern doughfaces, Mr. Lincoln's disclaimer of any power, right or inclination to interfere with slavery in the States, does not amount to more than a broken shoe-string! They knew *it* all before, and while they do not accept it *as* a satisfaction, they do look upon such declarations as the evidence of cowardly baseness, upon which they may safely presume.

The slaveholders, the parties especially addressed, may well inquire

if you, Mr. Lincoln, and the great party that elected you, honestly entertain this very high respect for the rights of slave property in the States, how happens it that you treat the same rights of property with scorn and contempt when they are set up in the Territories of the United States?—If slaves are property, and our rights of property in them are to be so sacredly guarded in the States, by what rule of law, justice or reason does that property part with the attributes of property, upon entering into a Territory owned in part by that same State? The fact is, the slaveholders have the argument all their own way, the moment that the right of property in their slaves is conceded under the Constitution. It was, therefore, weak, uncalled for and useless for Mr. Lincoln to begin his Inaugural Address by thus at the outset prostrating himself before the foul and withering curse of slavery. The time and the occasion called for a very different attitude. Weakness, timidity and conciliation towards the tyrants and traitors had emboldened them to a pitch of insolence which demanded an instant check. Mr. Lincoln was in a position that enabled him to wither at a single blast their high blown pride. The occasion was one for honest rebuke, not for palliations and apologies.

The slaveholders should have been told that their barbarous system of robbery is contrary to the spirit of the age, and to the principles of Liberty in which the Federal Government was founded. and that they should be ashamed to be everlastingly pressing that scandalous crime into notice. Some thought we had in Mr. Lincoln the nerve and decision of an Oliver Cromwell; but the result shows that we merely have a continuation of the Pierces and Buchanans, and that the Republican President bends the knee to slavery as readily as any of his infamous predecessors. Not content with the broadest recognition of the right of property in the souls and bodies of men in the slave States, Mr. Lincoln next proceeds, with nerves of steel, to tell the slaveholders what an excellent slave hound he is, and how he regards the right to recapture fugitive slaves a constitutional duty; and lest the poor bondman should escape being returned to the hell of slavery by the application of certain well known rules of legal interpretation, which any and every white man may claim in his own case, Mr. Lincoln proceeds to cut off the poor, trembling Negro who had escaped from bondage from all advantages from such rules. He will have the pound of flesh, blood or no blood, be it more or less, a just pound or not. The Shylocks of the South, had they been after such game, might have exclaimed, in joy, an Abraham come to judgment! But they were not to be caught with such fodder.

The hunting down a few slaves, the sending back of a few Lucy Bagleys, young and beautiful though they be, to the lust and brutality of the slave-breeders of the Border States, is to the rapacity of the rebels only as a drop of water upon a house in flames. The value of the thing was wholly in its quality. "Mr. Lincoln, you will catch and return our slaves if they run away from us, and will help us hold them where they are;" what cause, then, since you have descended to this depth of wickedness, withholds you from coming down to us entirely? Indeed, in what respect are you better than ourselves, or our overseers and drivers who hunt and flog our Negroes into obedience?—Again, the slaveholders have a decided advantage over Mr. Lincoln, and over his party. He stands upon the same moral level with them, and is in no respect better than they. If we held the Constitution, as held by Mr. Lincoln, no earthly power could induce us to swear to support it. The fact is, (following the lead of the Dred Scott decision, and all the Southern slaveholding politicians, with all the doughfaces of the North who have been engaged in making a Constitution, for years, outside of the Constitution of 1789,) Mr. Lincoln has taken everything at this point in favor of slavery for granted. He is like the great mass of his countrymen, indebted to the South for both law and gospel.

But the Inaugural does not admit of entire and indiscriminate condemnation. It has at least one or two features which evince the presence or something like a heart as well as a head. Horrible as is Mr. Lincoln's admission of the constitutional duty of surrendering persons claimed as slaves, and heartily as he seems determined that that revolting work shall be performed, he has sent along with his revolting declaration a timid suggestion which, tame and spiritless as it is, must prove as unpalatable as gall to the taste of slaveholders. He says: "In any law on this subject, ought not all the safeguards of liberty known in humane and civilized jurisprudence be introduced, so that a free man be not in any case surrendered as a slave." For so much, little as it is, let the friends of freedom thank Mr. Lincoln. This saves his Address from the gulf of infamy into which the Dred *Scott* decision sunk the Supreme Court of the United States. Two ideas are embraced in this suggestion: First, a black man's rights should be guarded by all the safeguards known to liberty and to humane jurisprudence; secondly, that slavery is an inhuman condition from which a free man ought by all lawful means to be saved. When we remember the prevailing contempt for the rights of all persons of African descent, who are mostly exposed to the operation of these slave,

catching laws, and the strenuous effort of the American Church and clergy to make slavery a divine relation, and especially blissful to our much hated variety of the human family, we are disposed to magnify and rejoice over even this slight recognition of rights, and this implied acknowledgment of the hatefulness of slavery. One of the safeguards of liberty is trial in open court. Another is the right of bringing evidence in one's own favor, and of confronting and questioning opposing witnesses. Another is the trial by a jury of our peers. Another is that juries are judges both of the law and the evidence in the case. There are other safeguards of liberty which we might specify, any one of which, faithfully applied, would not only make it difficult to surrender a free man as a slave, but would make it almost impossible to surrender any man as such.

Thanking Mr. Lincoln for even so much, we yet hold him to be the most dangerous advocate of slave-hunting and slave-catching in the land.

He has laid down a general rule of legal interpretation which, like most, if not all general rules, may be stretched to cover almost every conceivable villainy. *"The intention of the law-giver is the law,"* says Mr. Lincoln. But we say that this depends upon whether the *intention* itself is lawful. If law were merely an arbitrary rule, destitute of all idea of

right and wrong, the intention of the lawgiver might indeed be taken as the law, provided that intention were certainly known. But the very idea of law carries with it ideas of right, justice and humanity. Law, according to Blackstone, commands that which is right and forbids that which is wrong. A law authorizing murder is now law, because it is an outrage upon all the elements out of which laws originate. Any man called to administer and execute such a law *is* bound to treat such an edict as a nullity, having no binding authority over his action or over his conscience.

He would have a right to say, upon the authority of the Supreme Court, that "laws against fundamental morality are void"; that a law for murder is an absurdity, and not only from the purpose of all law and government, but wholly at war with every principle of law. It would be no avail in such a case to say that the "intention of law-makers is the law."

To prove such an intention is only to destroy the validity of the law.

But the case is not murder, but simply the surrendering of a person to slavery who has made his or her escape from slavery into a free State. But what better is an act of this kind than murder? Would not Mr. Lincoln himself prefer to see a dagger plunged to the hilt into the heart of his own daughter, than to see that daughter given up to the lust and brutality of the slaveholders of Virginia, as was poor, trembling Lucy

Bagley given up a few weeks ago by the Republicans of Cleveland? What is slavery but a slow process *of* soul murder? What but murder *is* its chief reliance? How do slaveholders hold their slaves except by asserting their right and power to murder their slaves if they do not submit to slavery? Does not the whole slave system rest upon a basis of murder? Your money or your life, says the pirate; your liberty or your life, says the slaveholder. And where *is* the difference between the pirate and the slaveholder?

But the "intention of the law is the law." Well, suppose we grant it in the present case, that the intention of the law-maker *is* the law, and two very important questions arise—first, as to who were the makers, and, secondly, by what means are we required to learn their intentions? Who made the Constitution? The preamble to the Constitution answers that question. "We, the people, do ordain and establish this Constitution." The people, then, made the law. How stood their intention as to the surrender of fugitive slaves? Were they all agreed in this intention to send slaves to bondage who might escape from it? Or were only a part? and if a part, how many? Surely, if a minority only were of the intention, that intention could not be the law, especially as the law *itself* expresses no such intention. The fact *is*, there is no evidence whatever that any considerable part of the people who made and adopted the American Constitution intended to make that instrument a slave-hunting or a slave-holding instrument, while there *is* much evidence to prove the very reverse. Daniel Webster, even in his famous 7th of March speech, was sufficiently true to the letter of the Constitution, and to the history of the times in which the Constitution was framed and adopted, to deny that the Constitution required slaves to be given up, and quoted Mr. James Madison in corroboration of his statement. This is Mr. Webster's language: "It may not be important here to allude to that—I had almost said celebrated—opinion of Mr. Madison. You observe, sir, that the term slavery is not used in the Constitution. The Constitution does not require that fugitive slaves shall be delivered up; it requires that persons bound to service in one State escaping into another, shall be delivered up. Mr. Madison opposed the introduction of the term slave, or slavery, into the Constitution; for he said he did not wish to see *it* recognized by the Constitution of the United States of America, that there could be property in men."

How sadly have the times changed, not only since the days of Madison—the days of the Constitution—but since the days even of

Daniel Webster. C. Old and dead as that great bad man was to the claims of humanity, he was not sufficiently removed from the better days of the Republic to claim, as Mr. Lincoln does, that the surrender of fugitive slaves is a plain requirement of the Constitution.

But there comes along a slight gleam of relief. Mr. Lincoln tremblingly ventures to *inquire* (for he is too inoffensive to the slaveholders to assert and declare, except when the rights of the black men are asserted and declared away) if it "might not be well to provide by law for the enforcement of that clause in the Constitution which guarantees that the citizens of each State shall be entitled to all the privileges and immunities of citizens in the several States...

Again we thank Mr. Lincoln. He has, however, ventured upon a hazardous suggestion. The man has not quite learned his lesson. He had not been long enough in Washington to learn that Northern citizens, like persons of African descent, have no rights, privileges or immunities that slaveholders are bound to respect. To break open a man's trunk, to read the letters from his wife and daughters, to tar and feather him, to ride him on a rail and give him the alternative of being hanged or of leaving town the same hour, simply because he resides in a free State, is a privilege and immunity which our Southern brethren will not give up, though the requirement were made in every line of the Constitution. Yet, we say, we are thankful. It is something even to have a sickly intimation that other American citizens, not belonging to the privileged slaveholding class, have rights which it "*might be weir'* to secure by law, and that the mere fact of living in a free State ought not to subject the unfortunate traveler either to being whipped, hanged or shot. Yes, this is something to be thankful for and is more than any other American President has ever ventured to say, either in his Inaugural Speech or Annual Message. It is, perhaps, this latter fact that gives Mr. Lincoln's casual remark its chief importance. Hitherto our Presidents had pictured the South as the innocent lamb, and the greedy North as the hungry wolf, ever ready to tear and devour.

From slave-catching, Mr. Lincoln proceeds to give a very lucid exposition of the nature of the Federal Union, and shows very conclusively that this Government from its own nature and the nature of all Governments, was intended to be perpetual, and that it is revolutionary, insurrectionary and treasonable to break it up. His argument is excellent; but the difficulty is that the argument comes too late. When men deliberately arm themselves with the avowed intention of breaking up the Govern-

ment; when they openly insult its flag, capture its forts, seize its munitions of war, and organize a hostile Government, and boastfully declare that they will fight before they will submit, it would seem of little use to argue with them. If the argument was merely for the loyal citizen, it was unnecessary. If it was for those already in rebellion, it was casting pearls before swine. No class of men in the country understood better than the rebels themselves the nature of the business on which they are engaged. They tell us this in the thousands of pounds of powder they have been buying, and the millions of money and arms they have been stealing. They know that unless the Government is a miserable and contemptible failure, destitute of every attribute of a Government except the name, that that Government must meet them on the field and put them down, or be itself put down. To parley with traitors is but to **increase** their insolence and audacity.

It remains to be seen whether the Federal Government is really able to do more than hand over some John Brown to be hanged, suppress a slave insurrection, or catch a runaway slave-whether it is powerless for liberty, and only powerful for slavery. Mr. Lincoln says, "I shall take care that the laws of the Union shall be faithfully executed in all the States"-that is, he will do so as "*a.t far as fraeticable,*" and *unle.u* the American people, his masters, shall, in some authoritative manner direct the contrary. To us, both these provisions had better have been omitted. They imply a want of confidence in the ability of the Government to execute its own laws, and open its doors to all that border tribe who have nothing but smiles for the rebels and peace lectures for the Government.

The American people have placed the Government in the hands of Abraham Lincoln for the next four years, and his instructions are in the Constitution. He had no right to suppose that they will reverse those instructions in a manner to give immunity to traitors; and it was a mistake to admit such a possibility, especially in the presence of the very traitors themselves. But we are dwelling longer upon Mr. Lincoln's speech than we had intended, and longer than we are warranted either by the patience of our readers, or the extent of our space. The perusal of it has left no very hopeful impression upon our mind for the cause of our down-trodden and heart-broken countrymen. Mr. Lincoln has avowed himself ready to catch them if they run away, to shoot them down if they rise against their oppressors, and to prohibit the Federal Government *i"evocably* from interfering for their deliverance. With such declarations before them, coming from our first modern anti-slavery Presi-



The Slaveholders' Rebellion

by **Frederick Douglass**

July 04, 1862

FELLOW CITIZENS: Eighty-six years ago the fourth of July was consecrated and distinguished among all the days of the year as the birthday, of American liberty and Independence. The fathers of the Republic recommended that this day be celebrated with joy and gladness by the whole American people, to their latest posterity. Probably not one of those fathers ever dreamed that this hallowed day could possibly be made to witness the strange and portentous Events now transpiring before our eyes, and which even now cast a cloud of more than midnight blackness over the face of the whole country. We are the observers of strange and fearful transactions.

Never was this national anniversary celebrated in circumstances more trying, more momentous, more solemn and perilous, than those by which this nation is now so strongly environed. We present to the world at this moment, the painful spectacle of a great nation, undergoing all the bitter pangs of a gigantic and bloody revolution. We are torn and rent asunder, we are desolated by large and powerful armies of our own kith and kin, converted into desperate and infuriated rebels and traitors, more savage, more fierce and brutal in their modes of warfare, than any recognized barbarians making no pretensions to civilization.

In the presence of this troubled and terrible state of the country, in the appalling jar and rumbling of this social Earthquake, when sorrow and

sighing are heard throughout our widely extended borders, when the wise and brave men of the land are everywhere deeply and sadly contemplating this solemn crisis as one which may permanently decide the fate of the nation I should greatly transgress the law of fitness, and violate my own feelings and yours, if I should on this occasion attempt to entertain you by delivering anything of the usual type of our 4th of July orations.

The hour is one for sobriety, thoughtfulness and stern truthfulness. When the house is on fire, when destruction is spreading its baleful wings everywhere, when helpless women and children are to be rescued from devouring flames a true man can neither have ear nor heart for anything but the thrilling and heart rending, cry for help. Our country is now on fire. No man can now tell what the future will bring forth. The question now is whether this great Republic before it has reached a century from its birth, is to fall in the wake of unhappy Mexico, and become the constant theatre of civil war or whether it shall become like old Spain, the mother of Mexico, and by folly and cruelty part with its renown among the nations of the earth, and spend the next seventy years in vainly attempting to regain what it has lost in the space of this one slaveholding rebellion.

Looking thus at the state of the country, I know of no better use to which I can put this sacred day, I know of no higher duty resting upon me, than to enforce my views and convictions, and especially to hold out to reprobation, the short sighted and ill judged, and inefficient modes adopted to suppress the rebels. The past may be dismissed with a single word. The claims of our fathers upon our memory, admiration and gratitude, are founded in the fact that they wisely, and bravely, and successfully met the crisis of their day. And if the men of this generation would deserve well of posterity they must like their fathers, discharge the duties and responsibilities of their age.

Men have strange notions now[a]days as to the manner of showing their respect for the heroes of the past. They everywhere prefer the form to the substance, the seeming to the real. One of our Generals, and some of our editors seem to think that the fathers are honored by guarding a well, from which those fathers may have taken water, or the house in which they may have passed a single night, while our sick soldiers need pure water, and are dying in the open fields for water and shelter. This is not honoring, but dishonoring your noble dead. Nevertheless, I would not

even in words do violence to the grand events, and thrilling associations, that gloriously cluster around the birth of our national Independence. There is no need of any such violence. The thought of to-day and the work of to-day, are alike linked, and interlinked with the thought and work of the past. The conflict between liberty and slavery, between civilization and barbarism, between enlightened progress and stolid indifference and inactivity is the same in all countries, in all ages, and among all peoples. Your fathers drew the sword for free and independent Government, Republican in its form, Democratic in its spirit, to be administered by officers duly elected by the free and unbought suffrages of the people; and the war of to-day on the part of the loyal north, the east and the west, is waged for the same grand and all commanding objects. We are only continuing the tremendous struggle, which your fathers, and my fathers began eighty-six years ago. Thus identifying the present with the past, I propose to consider the great present question, uppermost and all absorbing in all minds and hearts throughout the land.

I shall speak to you of the origin, the nature, the objects of this war, the manner of conducting, and its possible and probably results.

ORIGIN OF THE WAR It is hardly necessary at this very late day of this war, and in view of all the discussion through the press and on the platform which has transpired concerning it, to enter now upon any elaborate enquiry or explanation as to whence came this foul and guilty attempt to break up and destroy the national Government. All but the willfully blind or the malignantly traitorous, know and confess that this whole movement, which now so largely distracts the country, and threatens ruin to the nation, has its root and its sap, its trunk and its branches, and the bloody fruit it bears only from the one source of all abounding abomination, and that is slavery. It has sprung out of a malign selfishness and a haughty and imperious pride which only the practice of the most hateful oppression and cruelty could generate and develop. No ordinary love of gain, no ordinary love of power, could have stirred up this terrible revolt. The legitimate objects of property, such as houses, lands, fruits of the earth, the products of art, science and invention, powerful as they are, could never have stirred and kindled this malignant flame, and set on fire this rebellious fury. The monster was brought to its birth, by pride, lust and cruelty which could not brook the sober restraints of law, order and justice. The monster publishes its own parentage. Grim and hideous as this rebellion is, its shocking practices, digging up the bones of our dead soldiers slain in battle, making drinking

vessels out of their skulls, drumsticks out of their arm bones, slaying our wounded soldiers on the field of carnage, when their gaping wounds appealed piteously for mercy, poisoning wells, firing upon unarmed men, stamp it with all the horrid characteristics of the bloody and barbarous system and society from which it derived its life.

Of course you know, and I know that there have been and still are, certain out of the way places here at the north, where rebels, in the smooth disguise of loyal men, do meet and promulgate a very opposite explanation of the origin of this war, and that grave attempts have been made to refute their absurd theories. I once heard Hon. Edward Everett entertain a large audience by a lengthy and altogether unnecessary argument to prove that the south did not revolt on account of the fishing bounty paid to northern fisherman, nor because of any inequalities or discriminations in the revenue laws. It was the Irishman's gun aimed at nothing and hitting it every time. Yet the audience seemed pleased with the learning and skill of the orator, and I among the number, though I hope to avoid his bad example in the use of time.

There is however one false theory of the origin of the war to which a moment's reply may be properly given here. It is this. The abolitionists by their insane and unconstitutional attempt to abolish slavery, have brought on the war. All that class of men who opposed what they were pleased to call coercion at the first, and a vigorous prosecution of the war at the present, charge the war directly to the abolitionists. In answer to this charge, I lay down this rule as a basis to which all candid men will assent. Whatever is said or done by any class of citizens, strictly in accordance with rights guaranteed by the constitution, cannot be fairly charged as against the union, or as inciting to a dissolution of the Union.

Now the slaveholders came into the union with their eyes wide open, subject to a constitution wherein the right to be abolitionists was sacredly guaranteed to all the people. They knew that slavery was to take its chance with all other evils against the power of free speech, and national enlightenment. They came on board the national ship subject to these conditions, they signed the articles after having duly read them, and the fact that those rights, plainly written, have been exercised is no apology whatever for the slaveholders' mutiny and their attempt to lay piratical hands on the ship, and its officers. When therefore I hear a man denouncing abolitionists on account of the war, I know that I am listening

to a man who either does not know what he is talking about, or to one who is a traitor in disguise.

THE NATURE OF THE REBELLION. There is something quite distinct and quite individual in the nature and character of this rebellion. In its motives and objects it stands entirely alone, in the annals of great social disturbances. Rebellion is no new thing under the sun. The best governments in the world are liable to these terrible social disorders. All countries have experienced them. Generally however, rebellions are quite respectable in the eyes of the world, and very properly so. They naturally command the sympathy of mankind, for generally they are on the side of progress. They would overthrow and remove some old and festering abuse not to be otherwise disposed of, and introduce a higher civilization, and a larger measure of liberty among men. But this rebellion is in no wise analogous to such. The pronounced and damning peculiarity of the present rebellion, is found in the fact, that it was conceived, undertaken, planned, and persevered in, for the guilty purpose of handing down to the latest generations the accursed system of human bondage. Its leaders have plainly told us by words as well as by deeds, that they are fighting for slavery. They have been stirred to this perfidious revolt, by a certain deep and deadly hate, which they warmly cherish toward every possible contradiction of slavery whether found in theory or in practice. For this cause they hate free society, free schools, free states, free speech, the freedom asserted in the declaration of independence, and guaranteed in the constitution. Herein is the whole secret of the rebellion. The plan is and was to withdraw the slave system from the hated light of liberty, and from the natural operations of free principles. While the slaveholders could hold the reins of government they could and did pervert the free principles of the constitution to slavery, and could afford to continue in the union, but when they saw that they could no longer control the union as they had done for sixty years before, they appealed to the sword and struck for a government which should forever shut out all light from the southern conscience, and all hope of Emancipation from the southern slave. This rebellion therefore, has no point of comparison with that which has brought liberty to American, or with those of Europe, which have been undertaken from time to time, to throw off the galling yoke of despotism. It stands alone in its infamy.

Our slaveholding rebels with an impudence only belonging to themselves, have sometimes compared themselves to Washington, Jefferson, and the

long list of worthies who led in the revolution of 1776, when in fact they would hang either of those men if they were no living, as traitors to slavery, because, they each and all, considered the system an evil.

THE CONFLICT UNAVOIDABLE. I hold that this conflict is the logical and inevitable result of a long and persistent course of national transgression. Once in a while you will meet with men who will tell you that this war ought to have been avoided. In telling you this, they only make the truth serve the place and perform the office of a lie. I too say that this war ought never to have taken place. The combustible material which has produced this terrible explosion ought long ago to have been destroyed. For thirty years the abolitionists have earnestly sought to remove this guilty cause of our troubles. There was a time when this might have been done, and the nation set in permanent safety. Opportunities have not been wanting. They have passed by unimproved. They have sometimes been of a character to suggest they very work which might have saved us from all the dreadful calamities, the horrors and bloodshed, of this war. Events, powerful orators, have eloquently pleaded with the American people to put away the hateful slave system. For doing this great work we have had opportunities innumerable. One of these was presented upon the close of the war for Independence; the moral sentiment of the country was purified by that great struggle for national life. At that time slavery was young and small, the nation might have easily abolished it, and thus relieved itself forever of this alien element, the only disturbing and destructive force in our republican system of Government. Again there was another opportunity, for putting away this evil in 1789, when we assembled to form the Constitution of the United States. At that time the anti-slavery sentiment was strong both in church and State, and many believed that by giving slavery no positive recognition in the Constitution and providing for the abolition of the slave trade, they had given slavery its death blow already. They made the great mistake of supposing that the existence of the slave trade was necessary to the existence of slavery, and having provided that the slave trade should cease, they flattered themselves, that slavery itself must also speedily cease. They did not comprehend the radical character of the evil. Then again in 1819 the Missouri question gave us another opportunity to seal the doom of the slave system, by simply adhering to the early policy of the fathers and sternly refusing the admission of another State into the Union with a Constitution tolerating slavery. Had this been done in the case of Missouri, we should not now be cursed with this terrible rebellion. Slavery would have fallen into gradual decay. The

moral sentiment of the country, instead of being vitiated as it is, would have been healthy and strong against the slave system. Political parties and politicians would not as they have done since, courted the slave power for votes and thus increased the importance of slavery.

THE FIRST PALPABLE DEPARTURE FROM RIGHT POLICY. The date of the Missouri Compromise forms the beginning of that political current which has swept us on to this rebellion, and made the conflict unavoidable. From this dark date in our nation's history, there started forth a new political and social power. Until now slavery had been on its knees, only asking time to die in peace. But the Missouri Compromise gave it a new lease of life. It became at once a tremendous power. The line of thirty-six degrees, thirty minutes, at once stamped itself upon our national politics, our morals, manners, character and religion. From this time there was a south side to everything American, and the country was at once subjected to the slave power, a power as restless and vigilant as the eye of an escaping murderer. We became under its sway an illogical nation. Pure and simple truth lost its attraction for us. We became a nation of Compromisers.

It is curious to remark the similarity of national, to individual demoralization. A man sets out in life with honest principles and with high purposes inspired at the family hearthstone, and for a time steadily and scrupulously keeps them in view. But at last under the influence of some powerful temptation he is induced to violate his principles and push aside his sense of right. The water from the first moment is smooth about him, but soon he finds himself in the rapids. He has lost his footing. The broad flood, resistless as the power of fate, sweeps him onward, from bad to worse, he becomes more hardened, blind and shameless in his crimes till he is overtaken by dire calamity, and at last sinks to ruin. Precisely this has been the case with the American people. No people ever entered upon the pathway of nations, with higher and grader ideas of justice, liberty and humanity than ourselves. There are principles in the Declaration of Independence which would release every slave in the world and prepare the earth for a millennium of righteousness and peace. But alas! We have seen that declaration intended to be viewed like some colossal statue at the loftiest altitude, by the broad eye of the whole world, meanly subjected to a microscopic examination and its glorious universal truths craftily perverted into seeming falsehoods. Instead of treating it, as it was intended to be treated, as a full and comprehensive declaration of the equal and sacred

rights of mankind, our contemptible negro-hating and slaveholding critics, have endeavored to turn it into absurdity by treating it as a declaration of the equality of man in his physical proportions and mental endowments. This gross and scandalous perversion of the true intents of meaning of the declaration did not long stand alone. It was soon followed by the heartless dogma, that the rights declared in that instrument did not apply to any but white men. The slave power at last succeeded, in getting this doctrine proclaimed from the bench of the Supreme Court of the United States. It was there decided that "all men" only means some men, and those white men. And all this in face of the fact, that white people only form one fifth of the whole human family—and that some who pass for white are nearly as black as your humble speaker. While all this was going on, lawyers, priests and politicians were at work upon national prejudice against the colored man. They raised the cry and put it into the mouth of the ignorant, and vulgar and narrow minded, that "this is the white man's country," and other cries which readily catch the ear of the crowd. This popular method of dealing with an oppressed people has while crushing the blacks, corrupted and demoralized the whites. It has cheered on the slave power, increased its pride and pretension, till ripe for the foulest treason against the life of the nation. Slavery, that was before the Missouri Compromise couchant, on its knees, asking meekly to be let alone within its own limits to die, became in a few years after rampant, throttling free speech, fighting friendly Indians, annexing Texas, warring with Mexico, kindling with malicious hand the fires of war and bloodshed on the virgin soil of Kansas, and finally threatening to pull down the pillars of the Republic, if you Northern men should dare vote in accordance with your constitutional and political convictions. You know the history, I will not dwell upon it. What I have said, will suffice to indicate the point at which began the downward career of the Republic. It will be seen that it began by bartering away an eternal principle of right for present peace. We undertook to make slavery the full equal of Liberty, and to place it on the same footing of political right with Liberty. It was by permitting the dishonor of the Declaration of Independence, denying the rights of human nature to the man of color, and by yielding to the extravagant pretensions, set up by the slaveholder under the plausible color of State rights. In a word it was by reversing the wise and early policy of the nation, which was to confine slavery to its original limits, and thus leave the system to die out under the gradual operation of the principles of the constitution and the spirit of the age. Ten years had not elapsed, after this compromise, when the demon disunion lifted its ugly front, in the shape of nullification. The plotters of this treason,

undertook the work of disunion at that time as an experiment. They took the tariff, as the basis of action. The tariff was selected, not that it was the real object, but on the wisdom of the barber, who trains his green hands on wooden heads before allowing them to handle the razor on the faces of living men.

You know the rest. The experiment did not succeed. Those who attempted it were thirty years before their time. There was no BUCHANAN in the Presidential chair, and no COBBS, and FLOYDS in the Cabinet. CALHOUN and his treasonable associates were promptly assured, on the highest authority that their exit out of the Union was possible only by one way and that by way of the Gallows. They were defeated, but not permanently. They dropped the tariff and openly adopted slavery as the ostensible, as well as the real ground of disunion. After thirty years of persistent preparatory effort, they have been able under the fostering care of a traitorous Democratic President, to inaugurate at last this enormous rebellion. I will not stop here to pour out loyal indignation on that arch traitor, who while he could find power in the Constitution to hunt down innocent men all over the North for violating the thrice accursed fugitive slave Bill, could find no power in the Constitution to punish slaveholding traitors and rebels, bent upon the destruction of the Government. That bad old man is already receiving a taste of the punishment due to his crimes. To live amid all the horrors, resulting from his treachery is of itself a terrible punishment. He lives without his country's respect. He lives a despised old man. He is no doubt still a traitor, but a traitor without power, a serpent without fangs, and in the agony of his torture and helplessness will probably welcome the moment which shall remove him from the fiery vision of the betrayed and half ruined country.

THE CONDUCT OF THE WAR. To-day we have to deal not with dead traitors, such as James Buchanan, Howell Cobb, Floyd, Thompson and others, but with a class of men incomparably more dangerous to the country. They are our weak, paltering and incompetent rulers in the Cabinet at Washington and our rebel worshipping Generals in the field, the men who sacrifice the brave loyal soldiers of the North by thousands, while refusing to employ the black man's arm in suppressing the rebels, for fear of exasperating these rebels: men who never interfere with the orders of Generals, unless those orders strike at slavery, the heart of the Rebellion. These are the men to whom we have a duty to discharge to-day, when the country is bleeding at every pore, and when disasters

thick and terrible convert this national festal day, into a day of alarm and mourning. I do not underrate the power of the rebels, nor the vastness of the work required for suppressing them. Jefferson Davis is a powerful man, but Jefferson Davis has no such power to blast the hope and break down the strong heart of this nation, as that possessed and exercised by ABRAHAM LINCOLN. With twenty millions of men behind him, with wealth and resources at his command such as might pride the heart of the mightiest monarch of Europe, and with a cause which kindles in every true heart the fires of valor and patriotism, we have a right to hold Abraham Lincoln, sternly responsible for any disaster or failure attending the suppression of this rebellion. I hold that the rebels can do us no serious harm, unless it is done through the culpable weakness, imbecility or unfaithfulness of those who are charged with the high duty, of seeing that the Supreme Law of the land is everywhere enforced and obeyed. Common sense will confess that five millions ought not to be a match for twenty millions. I know of nothing in the mettle of the slaveholder which should make him superior in any of the elements of a warrior to an honest Northern man. One slaveholder ought not longer to be allowed to maintain the boast that he is equal to three Northern men: and yet that boast will not be entirely empty, if we allow those five millions much longer to thwart all our efforts to put them down. It will be most mortifyingly shown that after all our appliances, our inventive genius, our superior mechanical skill, our great industry, our muscular energy, our fertility in strategy, our vast powers of endurance, our overwhelming numbers, and admitted bravery, that the eight or ten rebel slave States, sparsely populated, and shut out from the world by our possession of the sea, are invincible to the arms, of the densely populated, and every way powerful twenty free States. I repeat, these rebels can do nothing against us, cannot harm a single hair of the national head, if the men at Washington, the President and Cabinet, and the commanding Generals in the field will but earnestly do their most obvious duty. I repeat Jeff. Davis and his malignant slaveholding Republic, can do this union no harm except by the permission of the reigning powers at Washington.

I am quite aware that some who hear me will question the wisdom of any criticisms upon the conduct of this war at this time and will censure me for making them. I do not dread those censures. I have on many occasions, since the war began, held my breath when even the stones of the street would seem to cry out. I can do so no longer. I believe in the absence of martial law, a citizen may properly express an opinion as to the manner in which our Government has conducted, and is still

conducting this war. I hold that it becomes this country, the men who have to shed their blood and pour out their wealth to sustain the Government at this crisis, to look very sharply into the movements of the men who have our destiny in their hands.

Theoretically this is a responsible Government. Practically it can be made the very reverse. Experience demonstrates that our safety as a nation depends upon our holding every officer of the nation strictly responsible to the people for the faithful performance of duty. This war has developed among other bad tendencies, a tendency to shut our eyes to the mistakes and blunders of those in power. When the President has avowed a policy, sanctioned a measure, or commended a general, we have been told that his action must be treated as final. I scout this assumption. A doctrine more slavish and abject than this does not obtain under the walls of St. Peter's. Even in the Rebel States, the Confederate Government is sharply criticized, and Jefferson Davis is held to a rigid responsibility. There is no reason of right or of sound policy for a different course towards the Federal Government. Our rulers are the agents of the people. They are fallible men. They need instruction from the people, and it is no evidence of a factions disposition that any man presumes to condemn a public measure if in his judgment that measure is opposed to the public good.

This is already an old war. The statesmanship at Washington with all its admitted wisdom and sagacity, utterly failed for a long time to comprehend the nature and extent of this rebellion. Mr. Lincoln and his Cabinet will have by and by to confess with many bitter regrets, that they have been equally blind and mistaken as to the true method of dealing with the rebels. They have fought the rebels with the Olive branch. The people must teach them to fight them with the sword. They have sought to conciliate obedience. The people must teach them to compel obedience.

There are many men connected with the stupendous work of suppressing this slaveholding rebellion, and it is the right of the American people to keep a friendly and vigilant eye upon them all, but there are three men in the nation, from whose conduct the attention of the people should never be withdrawn: the first is President Lincoln, the Commander in chief of the army and navy. The single word of this man can set a million of armed men in motion: He can make and unmake generals, can lift up or cast down at will. The other two men are MCCLELLAN, AND HALLECK.

Between these two men nearly a half a million of your brave and loyal sons are divided. The one on the Potomac and the other on the Mississippi. They are the two extended arms of the nation, stretched out to save the Union.

Are those two men loyal? are they in earnest? are they competent? We have a right, and it is our duty to make these inquiries, and report and act in reference to them according to the truth.

Whatever may be said of the loyalty or competency of McClellan, I am fully persuaded by his whole course that he is not in earnest against the rebels, that he is to-day, as heretofore, in war, as in peace a real pro-slavery Democrat. His whole course proves that his sympathies are with the rebels, and that his ideas of the crisis make him unfit for the place he holds. He kept the army of the Potomac standing still on that river, marching and countermarching, giving show parades during six months. He checked and prevented every movement which was during that time proposed against the rebels East and West.

Bear in mind the fact that this is a slaveholding rebellion, bear in mind that slavery is the very soul and life of all the vigor which the rebels have thus far been able to throw into their daring attempt to overthrow and ruin this country. Bear in mind that in time of war, it is the right and duty of each belligerent to adopt that course which will strengthen himself and weaken his enemy.

Bear in mind also that nothing could more directly and powerfully tend to break down the rebels, and put an end to the struggle than the Insurrection or the running away of a large body of their slaves, and the read General McClellan's proclamation, declaring that any attempt at a rising of the slaves against their rebel masters would be put down, and put down with an iron hand. Let it be observed too, that it has required the intervention of Congress, by repeated resolutions to prevent this General from converting the Army of the Potomac from acting as the slave dogs of the rebels, and that even now while our army are compelled to drink water from muddy swamps, and from the Pamunky river, forbidden by George B. McClellan to take pure water from the Rebel General LEE's well. Let it be understood that Northern loyal soldiers, have been compelled by the orders of this same General, to keep guard over the property of a leading rebel, because of a previous understanding between the loyal, and the traitor General. Bear in mind the fact that this

General has, in deference to the slaveholding rebels, forbidden the singing of anti-slavery songs in his camp, and you will learn that this General's ideas of the demands of the hour are most miserably below the mark, and unfit for the place he fills. Take another fact into account, General McClellan is at this moment the favorite General of the Richardsons, the Ben Woods, the Vallandighams, and the whole school of pro-slavery Buchanan politicians of the north, and that he is reported in the *Richmond Dispatch*, to have said that he hated to war upon Virginia, and that he would far rather war against Massachusetts. This statement of the *Richmond Dispatch* in itself is not worth much, but if we find as I think we do find, in General McClellan's every movement an apparent reluctance to strike at Virginia rebels, we may well fear that his words have been no better than his deeds. Again, take the battles fought by him and under his order, and in every instance the rebels have been able to claim a victory, and to show as many prisoners and spoils taken as we. At Ball's Bluff, McClellan's first battle on the Potomac, it is now settled, that our troops were marched up only to be slaughtered. Nine hundred and thirty of our brave northern soldiers were deliberately murdered, as much so as if they had each been stabbed, bayoneted, shot, or otherwise killed when asleep by some midnight assassin, for they were so ordered and handled, that they were perfectly harmless to their deadly foes, and helpless in their own defense. Then the battle of Seven Pines, where General Casey's Division was pushed out like an extended finger four miles beyond the lines of our army, towards the rebels, as if for no other purpose than to be cut to pieces or captured by the rebels, and then the haste with which this same Division was censured by Gen. McClellan, are facts looking all the same way. This is only one class of facts. They are not the only facts, nor the chief ones that shake my faith in the General of the Army of the Potomac.

Unquestionably, Time is the mightiest ally that the rebels can rely on. Every month they can hold out against the Government gives them power at home, and prestige abroad, and increases the probabilities of final success. Time favors foreign intervention, time favors heavy taxation upon the loyal people, time favors reaction, and a clamor for peace. Time favors fevers, and pestilence, wasting and destroying our army. Therefore *time, time* is the great ally of the rebels.

Now I undertake to say that General McClellan has from the beginning so handled the Army of the Potomac as to give the rebels the grand advantage of time. From the time he took command of the Potomac army

in August 1861 until now, he has been the constant cause of delay, and probably would not have moved when he did, but that he was compelled to move or be removed. Then behold his movement. He moved upon Manassas when the enemy had been gone from there seven long days. When he gets there he is within sixty miles of Richmond. Does he go on? Oh! no, but he just says hush, to the press and the people, I am going to do something transcendently brilliant in strategy. Three weeks pass away, and knowing ones wink and smile as much as to say you will see something wonderful soon. And so indeed we do; at the end of three weeks we find that General McClellan has actually marched back from Manassas to the Potomac, gotten together an endless number of vessels at a cost of untold millions, to transport his troops to Yorktown, where he is just as near to Richmond and not a bit nearer than he was just three weeks before, and where he is opposed by an army every way as strongly posted as any he could have met with by marching straight to Richmond from Manassas. Here we have two hundred and thirty thousand men moved to attack empty fortifications, and moved back again.

Now what is the state of facts concerning the nearly four months of campaign between the James and the York Rivers? The first is that Richmond is not taken, and in all the battles yet fought, the rebels have claimed them as victories. We have lost between thirty and forty thousand men, and the general impression is that there is an equal chance that our army will be again repulsed before Richmond, and driven away.

You may not go the length that I do, in regard to Gen. McClellan, at this time, but I feel quite sure that this country will yet come to the conclusion that Geo. B. McClellan, is either a cold-blooded Traitor, or that he is an unmitigated military Impostor. He has shown no heart in his conduct, except when doing something directly in favor of the rebels, such as guarding their persons and property and offering his service to suppress with an iron hand any attempt on the part of the slaves against their rebel masters.

THE POLICY OF THE ADMINISTRATION. I come now to the policy of President Lincoln in reference to slavery. An Administration without a policy, is confessedly an administration without brains, since while a thing is to be done, it implies a known way to do it and he who professes his ability to do it, but cannot show how it is to be done, confesses his own imbecility. I do not undertake to say that the present administration

has no policy, but if it has, the people have a right to know what it is, and to approve or disapprove of it as they shall deem it wise or unwise.

Now the policy of an administration can be learned in two ways. The first by what it says, and the second by what it does, and the last is far more certain and reliable, than the first. It is by what President Lincoln has done in reference to slavery, since he assumed the reins of government that we are to know what he is likely to do, and deems best to do in the premises. We all know how he came into power. He was elected and inaugurated as the representative of the anti-slavery policy of the Republican party. He had laid down and maintained the doctrine that Liberty and Slavery were the great antagonistic political elements in this country. That the Union of these States could not long continue half free and half slave, that they must in the end be all free or all slave.

In the conflict between these two elements he arrayed himself on the side of freedom, and was elected with a view to the ascendancy of free principles. Now what has been the tendency of his acts since he became Commander in chief of the army and navy? I do not hesitate to say, that whatever may have been his intentions, the action of President Lincoln has been calculated in a marked and decided way to shield and protect slavery from the very blows which its horrible crimes have loudly and persistently invited. He has scornfully rejected the policy of arming the slaves, a policy naturally suggested and enforced by the nature and necessities of the war. He has steadily refused to proclaim, as he had the constitutional and moral right to proclaim, complete emancipation to all the slaves of rebels who should make their way into the lines of our army. He has repeatedly interfered with, and arrested the anti-slavery policy of some of his most earnest and reliable generals. He has assigned to the most important positions, generals who are notoriously pro-slavery, and hostile to the party and principles which raised him to power. He has permitted rebels to recapture their runaway slaves in sight of the capital. He has allowed General Halleck, to openly violate the spirit of a solemn resolution by Congress forbidding the army of the United States to return the fugitive slaves to their cruel masters, and has evidently from the first submitted himself to the guidance of the half loyal slave States, rather than to the wise and loyal suggestions of those States upon which must fall, and have fallen, the chief expense and danger involved in the prosecution of the war. It is from such action as this, that we must infer the policy of the Administration. To my mind that policy is simply and solely to reconstruct the union on the old and corrupting basis of

compromise; by which slavery shall retain all the power that it ever had, with the full assurance of gaining more, according to its future necessities.

The question now arises, "Is such a reconstruction possible or desirable?" To this I answer from the depths of my soul, no. Mr. Lincoln is powerful, Mr. Lincoln can do many things, but Mr. Lincoln will never see the day when he can bring back or charm back, the scattered fragments of the Union into the shape and form they stood when they were shattered by this slaveholding rebellion.

What does this policy of bringing back the union imply? It implies first of all, that the slave States will promptly and cordially, and without the presence of compulsory and extraneous force, co-operate with the free States under the very constitution, which they have openly repudiated, and attempted to destroy. It implies that they will allow and protect the collection of the revenue in all their ports. It implies the regular election of the members of the Senate and the House of Representatives and the prompt and complete execution of all the Federal laws within their limits. It implies that the rebel States will repudiate the rebel leaders, and that they shall be punished with perpetual political degradation. So much it implies on the part of the rebel States. And the bare statement, with what we know of the men engaged in the war, is sufficient to prove the impossibility of their fulfillment while slavery remains.

What is implied by a reconstruction of the union on the old basis so far as concerns the northern and loyal States? It implies that after all we have lost and suffered by this war to protect and preserve slavery, the crime and scandal of the nation, that we will as formerly act the disgusting part of the watch dogs of the slave plantation, that we will hunt down the slaves at the north, and submit to all the arrogance, bluster, and pretension of the very men who have imperilled our liberties and baptized our soil with the blood of our best and bravest citizens. Now I hold that both parties will reject these terms with scorn and indignation.

Having thus condemned as impossible and undesirable the policy which seems to be that of the administration you will naturally want to know what I consider to be the true policy to be pursued by the Government and people in relation to slavery and the war. I will tell you: Recognise the fact, for it is the great fact, and never more palpable than at the

present moment, that the only choice left to this nation, is abolition or destruction. You must abolish slavery or abandon the union. It is plain that there can never be any union between the north and the south, while the south values slavery more than nationality. A union of interest is essential to a union of ideas, and without this union of ideas, the outward form of the union will be but as a rope of sand.

Now it is quite clear that while slavery lasts at the south, it will remain hereafter as heretofore, the great dominating interest, overtopping all others, and shaping the sentiments, and opinions of the people in accordance with itself. We are not to flatter ourselves that because slavery has brought great troubles upon the south by this war, that therefore the people of the south will be stirred up against it. If we can bear with slavery after the calamities it has brought upon us, we may expect that the south will be no less patient. Indeed we may rationally expect that the south will be more devoted to slavery than ever. The blood and treasure poured out in its defense will tend to increase its sacredness in the eyes of southern people, and if slavery comes out of this struggle, and is retaken under the forms of old compromises, the country will witness a greater amount of insolence and bluster in favor of the slave system, than was ever shown before in or out of Congress.

But it is asked, how will you abolish slavery? You have no power over the system before the rebellion is suppressed, and you will have no right or power when it is suppressed. I will answer this argument when I have stated how the thing may be done. The fact is there would be no trouble about the way, if the government only possessed the will. But several ways have been suggested. One is a stringent Confiscation Bill by Congress. Another is by a proclamation by the President at the head of the nation. Another is by the commanders of each division of the army. Slavery can be abolished in any or all these ways.

There is plausibility in the argument that we cannot reach slavery until we have suppressed the rebellion. Yet it is far more true to say that we cannot reach the rebellion until we have suppressed slavery. For slavery is the life of the rebellion. Let the loyal army but inscribe upon its banner, Emancipation and protection to all who will rally under it, and no power could prevent a stampede from slavery, such as the world has not witnessed since the Hebrews crossed the Red Sea. I am convinced that this rebellion and slavery are twin monsters, and that they must fall or flourish together, and that all attempts at upholding one while putting

down the other, will be followed by continued trains of darkening calamities, such as make this anniversary of our national Independence, a day of mourning instead of a day of transcendent joy and gladness.

But a proclamation of Emancipation, says one, would only be a paper order. I answer so is any order emanating from our Government. The President's proclamation calling his countrymen to arms, was a paper order. The proposition to retake the property of the Federal Government in the Southern States, was a paper order. Laws fixing the punishment of traitors are paper orders. All Laws, all written rules for the Government of the army and navy and people, are 'paper orders,' and would remain only such were they not backed up by force, still we do not object to them as useless, but admit their wisdom and necessity. Then these paper orders, carry with them a certain moral force which makes them in a large measure self-executing. I know of none which would possess this self-executing power in larger measure than a proclamation of Emancipation. It would act on the rebel masters, and even more powerfully upon the slaves. It would lead the slaves to run away, and the masters to Emancipate, and thus put an end to slavery. The conclusion of the whole matter is this: The end of slavery and only the end of slavery, is the end of the war, the end of secession, the end of disunion, and the return of peace, prosperity and unity to the nation. Whether Emancipation comes from the North or from the South, from Jeff. Davis or from Abraham Lincoln, it will come alike for healing of the nation, for slavery is the only mountain interposed to make enemies of the North and South.

FELLOW CITIZENS: let me say in conclusion. This slavery begotten and slavery sustained, and slavery animated war, has now cost this nation more than a hundred thousand lives, and more than five hundred millions of treasure. It has weighed down the national heart with sorrow and heaviness, such as no speech can portray. It has cast a doubt upon the possibility of liberty and self Government which it will require a century to remove. The question is, shall this stupendous and most outrageous war be finally and forever ended? or shall it be merely suspended for a time, and again revived with increased and aggravated fury in the future? Can you afford a repetition of this costly luxury? Do you wish to transmit to your children the calamities and sorrows of to-day? The way to either class of these results is open to you. By urging upon the nation the necessity and duty of putting an end to slavery, you put an end to the war, and put an end to the cause of the war, and make any repetition of it

impossible. But, just take back the pet monster again into the bosom of the nation, proclaim an amnesty to the slaveholders, let them have their slaves, and command your services in helping to catch and hold them, and so sure as like causes will ever produce like effects, you will hand down to your children here, and hereafter, born and to be born all the horrors through which you are now passing. I have told you of great national opportunities in the past[;] a greater [one] than any in the past is the opportunity of the present. If now we omit the duty it imposes, steel our hearts against its teachings, or shrink in cowardice from the work of to-day, your fathers will have fought and bled in vain to establish free Institutions, and American Republicanism will become a hissing and a by-word to a mocking earth.

Document 22

To James C. Conkling

August 26, 1863

Along with his replies to Horace Greeley (Document 18) and Erastus Corning (Document 21), Lincoln's letter to James Conkling (1816–1899) is among his most important public letters. Looking forward to his reelection campaign in 1864, Lincoln addressed the policy of the Emancipation Proclamation (Document 19) and the controversial enrollment of black soldiers in the Union Army that was part of this policy.

Democrats desiring peace were strong in the southern part of Lincoln's home state of Illinois. Indeed, the state's legislature passed a resolution condemning the Emancipation Proclamation a few days after Lincoln signed it. In June 1863, in Springfield—Lincoln's hometown—a large Democratic rally had passed a resolution calling for a restoration of the Union as it was, presumably with slavery where it had been allowed. Opposition to Lincoln's policies and actions with regard to civil liberties (Documents 15 and 21), the draft (instituted March 1863), and black military service was evident throughout the country. The extent of northern racial animosity was reflected in draft riots in New York City in July 1863 that led to lynchings and the burning of a black orphanage.

In response to such developments, James Conkling, Lincoln's political ally, organized a reelection rally for Lincoln in Springfield. Lincoln sent Conkling a letter with instructions to read it to the assembly "very slowly." The letter was direct, defending Lincoln's decisions and motives, and questioning the motives and purposes of his opponents. Lincoln defended black freedom and the sacrifices of black soldiers on the battlefield. Resolved to defend the measures he had taken, he nevertheless left room for those who disagreed to rally with him behind the common goal of preserving the Union by defeating the Confederate army.

Source: Abraham Lincoln to James C. Conkling, Abraham Lincoln papers: Series 1, General Correspondence. Manuscript/Mixed Material, Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/mal2584600/>.

My dear Sir:

Your letter inviting me to attend a mass meeting of unconditional Union men, to be held at the capital of Illinois on the third day of September, has been received. It would be very agreeable to me to thus meet my old friends at my own home, but I cannot just now be absent from here so long as a visit there would require.

The meeting is to be of all those who maintain unconditional devotion to the Union; and I am sure my old political friends will thank me for tendering, as I do, the nation's gratitude to those and other noble men whom no partisan malice or partisan hope can make false to the nation's life.

There are those who are dissatisfied with me. To such I would say: You desire peace, and you blame me that we do not have it. But how can we attain it! There are but three conceivable ways: First, to suppress the rebellion by force of arms. This I am trying to do. Are you for it? If you are, so far we are agreed. If you are not for it, a second way is to give up the Union. I am against this. Are you for it? If you are, you should say so plainly. If you are not for force, nor yet for dissolution, there only remains some imaginable compromise. I do not believe any compromise embracing the maintenance of the Union is now possible. All I learn leads to a directly opposite belief. The strength of the rebellion is its military—its army. That army dominates all the country and all the people within its range. Any offer of terms made by any man or men within that range, in opposition to that army, is simply nothing for the present, because such man or men have no power whatever to enforce their side of a compromise, if one were made with them.

To illustrate: Suppose refugees from the South and peace men of the North get together in convention, and frame and proclaim a compromise embracing a restoration of the Union. In what way can that compromise be used to keep Lee's army out of Pennsylvania! Meade's army can keep Lee's army out of Pennsylvania, and, I think, can ultimately drive it out of existence. But no paper compromise to which the controllers of Lee's army are not agreed can at all affect that army. In an effort at such compromise we should waste time which the enemy would improve to our disadvantage; and that would be all. A compromise, to be effective, must be made either with those who control the rebel army, or with the people first liberated from the domination of that army by the success of our own army. Now, allow me to assure you that no word or intimation from that rebel army, or from any of the men controlling it, in relation to any peace compromise, has ever come

to my knowledge or belief. All charges and insinuations to the contrary are deceptive and groundless. And I promise you that if any such proposition shall hereafter come, it shall not be rejected and kept a secret from you. I freely acknowledge myself the servant of the people, according to the bond of service—the United States Constitution, and that, as such, I am responsible to them.

But to be plain. You are dissatisfied with me about the negro. Quite likely there is a difference of opinion between you and myself upon that subject. I certainly wish that all men could be free, while I suppose you do not. Yet, I have neither adopted nor proposed any measure which is not consistent with even your view, provided you are for the Union. I suggested compensated emancipation, to which you replied you wished not to be taxed to buy negroes. But I had not asked you to be taxed to buy negroes, except in such way as to save you from greater taxation to save the Union exclusively by other means.

You dislike the Emancipation Proclamation, and perhaps would have it retracted. You say it is unconstitutional. I think differently. I think the Constitution invests its commander in chief with the law of war in time of war. The most that can be said—if so much—is that slaves are property. Is there—has there ever been—any question that by the law of war, property, both of enemies and friends, may be taken when needed? And is it not needed whenever taking it helps us, or hurts the enemy? Armies, the world over, destroy enemies' property when they cannot use it; and even destroy their own to keep it from the enemy. Civilized belligerents do all in their power to help themselves or hurt the enemy, except a few things regarded as barbarous or cruel. Among the exceptions are the massacre of vanquished foes and non-combatants, male and female.

But the proclamation, as law, either is valid or is not valid. If it is not valid, it needs no retraction. If it is valid, it cannot be retracted any more than the dead can be brought to life. Some of you profess to think its retraction would operate favorably for the Union. Why better after the retraction than before the issue? There was more than a year and a half of trial to suppress the rebellion before the proclamation issued, the last one hundred days of which passed under an explicit notice that it was coming unless averted by those in revolt returning to their allegiance. The war has certainly progressed as favorably for us since the issue of the proclamation as before. I know, as fully as one can know the opinions of others, that some of the commanders of our armies in the field, who have given us our most important successes,

believe the emancipation policy and the use of the colored troops constitute the heaviest blow yet dealt to the rebellion, and that at least one of these important successes could not have been achieved when it was but for the aid of black soldiers. Among the commanders holding these views are some who have never had any affinity with what is called abolitionism, or with Republican party politics, but who hold them purely as military opinions. I submit these opinions as being entitled to some weight against the objections often urged that emancipation and arming the blacks are unwise as military measures, and were not adopted as such in good faith.

You say you will not fight to free negroes. Some of them seem willing to fight for you; but no matter. Fight you, then, exclusively, to save the Union. I issued the proclamation on purpose to aid you in saving the Union. Whenever you shall have conquered all resistance to the Union, if I shall urge you to continue fighting, it will be an apt time then for you to declare you will not fight to free negroes.

I thought that in your struggle for the Union, to whatever extent the negroes should cease helping the enemy, to that extent it weakened the enemy in his resistance to you. Do you think differently? I thought that whatever negroes can be got to do as soldiers, leaves just so much less for white soldiers to do in saving the Union. Does it appear otherwise to you? But negroes, like other people, act upon motives. Why should they do anything for us if we will do nothing for them? If they stake their lives for us they must be prompted by the strongest motive, even the promise of freedom. And the promise, being made, must be kept.

The signs look better. The Father of Waters again goes unvexed to the sea.¹ Thanks to the great Northwest for it. Nor yet wholly to them. Three hundred miles up they met New England, Empire, Keystone, and Jersey, hewing their way right and left.² The sunny South, too, in more colors than one, also lent a hand. On the spot, their part of the history was jotted down in black and white. The job was a great national one, and let none be banned who bore an honorable part in it. And while those who have cleared the great river may well be proud, even that is not all. It is hard to say that anything has been more bravely and well done than at Antietam, Murfreesboro, Gettysburg,

¹ The Mississippi River. The Union gained control of the river after it captured Vicksburg, Mississippi, July 4, 1863.

² Lincoln referred to the places from which the troops that captured Vicksburg came using common nicknames for the old Northwest Territory, New York, and Pennsylvania, respectively.

and on many fields of lesser note.³ Nor must Uncle Sam's web feet be forgotten.⁴ At all the watery margins they have been present. Not only on the deep sea, the broad bay, and the rapid river, but also up the narrow, muddy bayou, and wherever the ground was a little damp, they have been and made their tracks. Thanks to all: for the great Republic—for the principle it lives by and keeps alive—for man's vast future—thanks to all.

Peace does not appear so distant as it did. I hope it will come soon, and come to stay; and so come as to be worth the keeping in all future time. It will then have been proved that among free men there can be no successful appeal from the ballot to the bullet, and that they who take such appeal are sure to lose their case and pay the cost. And then there will be some black men who can remember that with silent tongue, and clenched teeth, and steady eye, and well-poised bayonet, they have helped mankind on to this great consummation, while I fear there will be some white ones unable to forget that with malignant heart and deceitful speech they strove to hinder it. Still, let us not be over-sanguine of a speedy final triumph. Let us be quite sober. Let us diligently apply the means, never doubting that a just God, in his own good time, will give us the rightful result.

³ Recent Union victories.

⁴ That is, the U.S. Navy.

Frederick Douglass

Eulogy for Abraham Lincoln *Address at Cooper Union, New York City*

On June 1 a large, mostly African-American audience filled Cooper Union in New York City to hear the nation's leading black abolitionist eulogize the slain President. Frederick Douglass (1818–1895) had written favorably about Lincoln during the 1860 campaign, then harshly criticized him after the election for his attempts to conciliate the South and willingness to enforce the Fugitive Slave Law. From the beginning of the war Douglass had called for immediate emancipation and the arming of black troops, and had judged the President to be inexcusably slow in adopting these measures. Once Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, and especially after the two men met at the White House to discuss policy in August 1863 and August 1864, Douglass altered his views and began to publicly praise Lincoln. His speech at Cooper Union was summarized in *The New York Times* and *New York Tribune*, but has never been printed in full. The text presented here is taken from the manuscript in the Library of Congress, and preserves Douglass's spelling, capitalization, and punctuation. In two places a bracketed space, i.e., [], is used to indicate where an unknown word, or words, was omitted from the manuscript.

I come before you this evening with much diffidence: The rarest gifts, the best eloquence, the highest order of genius to which the nation has given birth, might well be employed here and now, and yet fail of justice to the dignity and solemnity of this occasion.

The character of the illustrious deceased, the position he occupied at the head of our Government, the extraordinary manner of his death, with all the attendant circumstances of the country, are fruitful themes, of the most interesting nature;— themes which must depend upon the historian, rather than upon the orator, for elaborate and appropriate celebration.

Had Abraham Lincoln died from any of the numerous ills to which flesh is heir, and by which men are removed from the scenes of life; Had he reached that good old age, of which his vigorous constitution, and his temperate habits gave promise: Had he seen the end of the great work which it was his good fortune to inaugurate; Had the curtain of death been but gradually drawn around him;— our task this evening, though sad, and painful would be very simple.

But dying as he did die, by the red hand of violence, snatched suddenly away from his work without warning; — killed, murdered, assassinated, not because of personal hate, for no man who knew Abraham Lincoln, could hate him; but solely because he was the President, the faithful, loyal President of the United States — true to his country, and true to the cause of human freedom, taking care that the Constitution and the laws were obeyed; for this reason he was slain, murdered, assassinated, and for this all commanding reason he to day commands our homage and the homage of good men every where as a glorious martyr — one who must be viewed if viewed rightly, in connection with his country and with all that pertains to his country.

Very evidently here is a large field opened, but the most any man can do, with a subject like this, and at a time like this, when every faculty of thought and feeling, is intensely active, when the press, the pulpit and the platform, when poetry and art in all her departments, has been occupied with this one great event for weeks: I say, the most I can do, the most any man can do, is in some humble measure, to give back to the country, the thoughts and feelings which are derived from the country: — The speaker upon occasions like this, is but as the wave to the ocean; he borrows all his weight and volume; from the sea out of which he rises.

To day all over this country — men have been thinking of Abraham Lincoln: Our statesmen scholars and poets — have been celebrating as never before the memory of our martyred President. It is well. He is worthy of it all — and it is becoming in all — to join however humbly in these tokens of respect and veneration.

One thing will be at once conceded by all generous minds; no people or class of people in this country, have a better reason for lamenting the death of Abraham Lincoln, and for desiring to honor and perpetuate his memory, than have the colored people; and yet we are about the only people who have been in any case forbidden to exhibit our sorrow, or to show our respect for the deceased president publicly. The attempt to exclude colored people from his funeral procession in New York — was one of the most disgraceful; and sickening manifestations of moral emptiness, ever exhibited by any nation or people professing to be civilized. But what was A. Lincoln to the colored people or they to him? As compared with the long line of his predecessors, many of whom were merely

the facile and servile instruments of the slave power, Abraham Lincoln, while unsurpassed in his devotion, to the welfare of the white race, was also in a sense hitherto without example, emphatically the black mans President: the first to show any respect for their rights as men.

To our white fellow countrymen therefore we say, follow your martyred president to his grave, lay the foundation of his monument broad and strong – let its capstone rise towards the sky – do homage to his character, forever perpetuate his memory, but as you respect genuine sorrow, unfeigned grief, and sincere bereavement, let the colored people of this country – for whom he did so much, have space at least, for one stone in that monument – one which shall tell to after-coming generations the story of their love and gratitude to Abraham Lincoln.

Those love most to whom most is forgiven. One of the most touching scenes connected with the funeral of our lamented President, occurred at the gate of the Presidential mansion. A colored woman standing at the gate weeping, was asked the cause of her tears; Oh! Sir she said we have lost our Moses. But said the gentleman, the Lord will send you another: That may be said the weeping woman, but Ah! we had him. To her mind one as good, or better might come in his stead – but no such possibility to her was equal to – to the reality, actual possession in the person of Abraham Lincoln.

The colored people, from first to last, and through all, whether through good or through evil report, fully believed in Abraham Lincoln. Even though he sometimes smote them, and wounded them severely, yet they firmly trusted in him: This was however, no blind trust unsupported by reason: They early caught a glimpse of the man, and from the evidence of their senses, they believed in him. They viewed him not in the light of separate individual facts – but in the light of his mission – as his manifest relation to events – and in the philosophy of his statesmanship – Viewing him thus they trusted him – as men are seldom trusted. They did not care what forms of expression the President adopted, whether it were justice, expediency, or military necessity so that they saw slavery abolished – and Liberty was established in the country.

Under Abraham Lincolns beneficent rule, they saw themselves being gradually lifted to the broad plain of equal manhood: Under his rule, and by measures approved by him, they saw gradually fading the hand writing of ages which was against them: Under his rule, they saw millions of

their bretheren proclaimed free and invested with the right to defend their freedom: Under his rule, they saw the Confederate states – that boldest of all conspiracies against the just rights of human nature, broken to peices, overpowered conquered, shattered to fragments – ground to powder and swept from the face of existence: Under his rule, they saw the Independence of Hayti and Liberia recognized – and the whole colored race steadily rising into the friendly consideration of the American people. In their broad practical common sense, they took no captious exceptions to the unpleasant incidents of their transition from slavery to freedom. All they wanted to know was that those incidents were only transitional not permanent.

But we speak here to night not merely as colored men, but as men among men, and as American citizens – having the same interest in the welfare permanence and prosperity, of the country – that any other class of citizens may be supposed to have. We survey the facts of the hour with reference to this relation to our fellow citizens: – From this outlook we find the prospect bright & glorious.

The greatness and grandeur of the American republic never appeared more conspicuously than in connection with the death of Abraham Lincoln: Though always great and always powerful, we have seemed to need the presence of some great, and widespread calamity, some over whelming sorrow, to reveal to our selves and the world, in glorified forms, all the elements of our national strength and greatness. While it cannot be affirmed, that our long torn and distracted country, has already reached the desired condition of peace, it may be said, and said in the face of all prophecies of failure – freely indulged in at one time, at home as well as abroad that we have survived the terrible agonies of a feirce and sanguinary rebellion, and have before us a fair prospect of a just and lasting peace, a peace which if *we are wise*, and just, can never be disturbed or broken by the remains of still insolent and designing slave oligarchy.

Already a strong hand is felt upon the helm of state; Already the key note of justice has been sounded; Already the majesty of the Law and the power of the Government are bringing order out of confusion, by making the Law a terror to evil doers, as well as a praise to those who do well: The word has gone forth that traitors and assassins whether of low or of high degree, whether male or female, are to be punished: that loyal and true men are to be rewarded and protected: That slavery the haggard

and damning offense of many generations, is to be entirely and for ever abolished: that the emancipated negro, so long outraged and degraded is to be enfranchised and clothed with the dignity of American citizenship: That the poor white man of the south – scornfully denominated by the rich slaveholders, as the poor white trash, so long deceived, misled and plundered by the slaveholding aristocracy – are to be delivered from their political and social debasement: That the loyal and patriot dead, whether dying of wounds on the field or of starvation in Rebel prisons, whether falling in open combat or by the stealthy dagger of the assassin – are to be gratefully remembered and honored forever. That the toil worn, scarred, maimed and battered veterans, of all nationalities and of all colors, now returning home from the scenes of strife, are to be welcomed home, and taught by the respect and gratitude they receive from their country – that they have been fighting for *their* country – and not merely for the empty and delusive hope of a country.

Henceforth we have a new date, a new era for our great Republic: Henceforth a new account is opened, between the government and the people of the United States: Henceforth there is to be no north no south in American politics, but a common country of all for all: Henceforth the nation assumes a new position and a new relation to the nations of the Earth: Henceforth an American citizen may defend his country at the tribunal of the world's judgement, without defending a glaring inconsistency and a scandalous crime: Henceforth there is an end to that compromising statesmanship – which has so deeply demoralized both the Government and the people: Henceforth we shall stand an acknowledged power among the great powers of Europe and exert a beneficent influence in the destiny of nations. Out of the vast and dreadful concatenation of evils which have environed us, brought upon us during these four years of treason rebellion and assassination, we shall yet be the recipients of immeasurable and priceless blessings: It is something that the crash has come and that the worst is known – that the storm cloud has burst, and sent down its bolt and has left the blue sky above, calm and bright as when the morning stars sang to gether for joy!

Spanning the horrible gulf, the fearful chasm – made by the sad, the mournful, and tragic death of our greatly loved; greatly honored greatly trusted and greatly lamented President, we behold from side to side,

a perfect bow of promise with all its beautiful beams undimmed, dispelling fear, and kindling hope anew for the future of the Republic.

This occasion therefore, though sad and solemn when we contemplate our martyred president, is not one of gloom, when we consider the future of the country. There is here joy as well as sorrow, gratulation as well as grief, great gain as well as great loss. This last drop in our cup of bitterness was perhaps needed: No nation ever passed an ordeal better fitted to try its strength, or to test the value of its institutions. Know thyself is a wise admonition to nations as well as to individuals, such national self knowledge has been imparted by the war and by this last act of the war. It had long been the settled opinion of European statesmen and philosophers, that our ship of state was too weak for stormy weather. They predicted that though beautiful to the eye, strong to the touch and swift upon the wave, our gallant bark would go down in the first great storm. They had little faith in the wisdom or virtue of the people. And as little in the form and substance of popular government. I have no reproaches for these foreigners of little faith, for it cannot be denied that many thoughtful and patriotic men at home, have doubted and trembled while contemplating the possibility of just such a conflict as that through which we have now so nearly and happily passed.

The cost of the experiment in blood and treasure has been vast, but the results attained and made attainable by it will fully compensate for all loss: Already we are realizing its blessings: At this moment as never before in our history we are enjoying not, I trust, a haughty but a healthy consciousness of our strength: Already there is a feeling of national repose, an assured faith in the ability of the people, and in the stability of Republican Government — such as never before existed.

Happily too: this confidence is not limited to our own country — It is defusing itself through all countries — and over all continents. Writhing under the heel of an imported despotism, the worst of all the despotisms of Europe — Mexico to day, lifts up her dejected and woe smitten head, with revived and reinvigorated hope, and the friends of free institutions throughout the world, will recognize in our great national triumph over rebellion and slavery, a powerful guarantee, of the ultimate universal establishment of free institutions.

But I will not stop here to argue the value of the results thus far of our conflict. When measured by the hardships endured, and the fearful loss

of human life involved, such arguments however just, may savour too much of indifference to human suffering.

A more tranquilizing thought comes to us on this occasion. That thought is the inevitability of the conflict. It was beyond the power of human will or wisdom – to have prevented just what has happened. We should never forget that this dreadful war with all its incidents was a part of – and sprung out of the fundamental elements of our national structure – and was in the nature of things unavoidable. We have but reaped where we had sown. Its hour had come, and there was nothing left but to make room for it, to accept it, and derive from it, whatever advantage it brought. We could no more evade it, than we could unmake our antecedents.

When slavery was first planted in the national soil, treason, rebellion and assassination were planted with it and their bloody fruit was bequeathed to the present generation. And if in the coming reconstruction, we shall incorporate any of the seeds of injustice, any of the remains of slavery, we shall repeat the mistake of our fathers, with the certainty that our children after us will reap a similar harvest of blood to that we have just experienced.

All the great nations of the Earth, no matter how isolated their location, no matter how iron like their ruler no matter how conservative their statesmen, no matter how carefully they exclude the light of new ideas – are fated to pass through what may be termed their historical periods – certain grand epochs, made up by the irrepressible tendencies of their inherent social forces, coming upon them whether they will or not.

Their political astrologers and wisemen, look upward and read as they think the signs of the times they see the crises coming just as they see the storm gathering in the sky. They may utter their warning, but can neither avert nor hinder the event. There is however nothing aimless capricious arbitrary or blind in the oncoming of such periods. They are prepared for – provided for by violation of law, they come when they are ready and they depart when their work is done. Such epochs occurring at different points of time and in different nations, are the great teachers of mankind, they disclose in striking forms and colors, the active elements of the national life good and bad, of each individual nation, making each better acquainted with itself and better known to all other nations.

As a people though less disturbed and more fortunate than most

other nations we are no exception to the general rule applying to all. One such period as this happened to us, four score and nine years ago. It was when our delegates sat in solemn assembly in Philadelphia and openly declared our independence of Great Britain – and when the American people, with a courage that never quailed – and a faith that knew no doubt marched through bloody fields during all the length of seven years to make that declaration a solid reality.

Another and mightier than that, is the one compressed within the narrow limits of the last four years. There is not one jot of all this space from the first of June sixty one, to the first of June sixty-five, which is not studded with stupendous events, destined to engage the thoughts, and thrill the hearts of mankind away into the depths of coming ages. I repeat nothing strange has happened unto us. We have been simply playing our appointed parts in the subtle machinery of human advancement and civilization. We had within our midst a gigantic system of injustice, and barbarism, a shocking offense against the enlightened judgement of mankind – a system which the world had out grown, one which we were required by the necessity of our existence and our relations to mankind to put away. Peaceably if we could, forcibly if we must.

In doing this great work for ourselves, we have done other, if not greater service.

To the grand sum of human knowledge as to what men have done, will do, as to what great nations and states have done and will do, when vital interests are involved and powerful human passions are stirred, we have during these four years – added our special and peculiar contribution, such an one as no other nation of modern times could add.

Our experience has been full of instruction and our example brilliant and striking beyond a parable: The very ends of the earth may look and learn. During this tremendous struggle for national [], so fierce, bitter and sanguinary, so long protracted and so desperate, we have illustrated both extremes of human possibilities. As a nation we have exemplified the best and noblest qualities – which distinguish human nature, as well as those which most blot and disgrace it.

The history of this war for the union and for Free Institutions, will possess many thrilling Chapters full of moving incidents, full of battles, sieges, hair breadths escape, of gallant achievements upon flood and field, but it will have none, which will so interest, so *astound* and amaze

mankind as that which shall contain a faithful record of the events and scenes which have transpired in our country during the last seven weeks:

We have here the concentrated *virus* the moral poison, accumulated by more than two centuries of human slavery, pouring itself out upon the nation as a vial of wrath in one dreadful and shocking crime the first of its kind in the annals of the country.

The accursed thing, so long defended in the name of the Bible and religion—defended thus while known to live upon blood and tears—the hateful crime, so long defended in the name of law and order, properly celebrates its own death by a crime that sends a shudder around the world.

England, France, Germany all European nations have been literally struck dumb, by this appropriate exhibition of slaveholding hate. It is well that slavery should give this mean and bloody sign of its death, cradled in theft, and living by robbery, it is meet that it should go to its grave under a storm of execration from every quarter of the globe.

Hereafter when men think of slavery, they will think of murder, Hereafter when men think of slaveholders, they will think of assassins: Hereafter when men think of southern chivalry they will think of our starving prisoners at Andersonville, Hereafter when men think of southern honor, they will think of the assassination of Abraham Lincoln.

Deny it who will, Doubt it who may—that hell black deed sprung from the very heart of the aristocratic class of the south.

I know that some of the leaders of the rebellion have affected to deplore it, Some have even ventured to plead their honorable character as proof their innocence of that foul and ghastly crime. But such pleas cannot be received. They are utterly vain and worthless—These slaveholders know, we know, and the world knows where the responsibility for this crime belongs.

The assassin not less than any member of the late Confederate Government, represented a cause, and was the very image and superscription of that cause. Those who have by fraud, treachery robbery broken oaths and piracy, carried on a war during four years to break up this union, with no better or other motive than to make human bondage perpetual, will have to bring better evidence than their own word of honor, to remove from their shoulders this heavy responsibility.

Booth the assassin is of the south. His affiliations such as they were,

are of the south. He fired his deadly shot in the interest of the south. His motto of defense after committing the atrocious crime, was copied from the south; From the first of the war he took sides with the south. His first thought upon the commission of the crime, was escape to the south; There is nothing in his morals or manners, or in the crime itself to separate him from the south—or that should make the south disown him. As types, and representative men of southern civilization—Booth and Brooks stand well together. Brooks, attempted to assassinate Mr Sumner of Massachusetts—a noble representative of New England culture—and statesmanship—and was applauded, publicly applauded all over the south. And I undertake to say, knowing the south as I do—that the same south, or what is left of it, which applauded the assassination of Hon. Charles Sumner—at its inmost heart will applaud the assassination of Abraham Lincoln.

Let us not, mistake public opinion either at the north or the south. This mistake is the danger, the imminent danger of the hour. We have done too much of this in other days.

Public journals, there are all over the north—which have sympathised from the first with the rebels and traitors—just so far as they could do so with safety—are endeavoring to serve their old friends and allies to day by persuading their readers—that the south disowns Booth—and laments as sincerely as we do the death of Abraham Lincoln. To this there is just one word to be said—It comes entirely too late, and is utterly inconsistent with the past. Take the federal soldiers from the so called Confederate states and tomorrow the very elite of the south will drink to the memory of Booth the assassin.

Besides, the crime accords well, with the several attempts to burn up sleeping women and innocent children in hotels. It accords well with the attempt to throw crowded Railway trains from the tracks. It accords well with the torpedo and infernal machine mode of warfare, so universally adopted by the chivalry of the south. It accords well with the horrid profanation of the graves of our brave soldiers, and making ornaments of their bones: It accords well with the massacre at Fort Pillow—It accords well with the system of starvation adopted by the Confederate government in its treatment of our prisoners. And it accords generally with the cowardly ferocity—with which the system of slavery naturally inspires her worshippers:

Men who whip women with their hands tied, and burn their names into their flesh with hot irons – can not be allowed any especial abhorrence of assassination – or for any other crime it may seem for their interest to commit.

Another strong argument in favor of this theory of southern responsibility for the assassination, is found in the fact, that that crime was freely talked of at the south, and the time and the place were specified previously to Mr Lincoln's first inauguration: His journey to Washington was the time and Baltimore was the appointed place for the tragedy. Even men here at the North, by winks and nods, and other intimations, which would not now be tolerated, gave us to understand then, that though elected, Mr Lincoln could never be inaugurated.

That their evil prophecies were not fulfilled, we all know was owing to his travelling by an irregular train and arriving in Baltimore at an unexpected time.

Booth the miserable assassin only did at the last what was meditated threatened, and expected at the very outset of the rebellion.

Great as was his crime, he is at this moment not one whit guiltier, than is General Lee and other Leaders of the rebellion.

The beginning of the rebellion is assassination. The end of the rebellion is assassination – It is consistent throughout. It ends as it began, not a line of analogy is missing. Booth and Beauregard, Payne and President Davis Adzerot and Breckenridge, were servants of a common cause, and will go down in history as clansmen and kinsmen – and brothers beloved in a common conspiracy and a common crime.

It has been sometimes regretted that Booth was not captured alive, that he might have been regularly tried, condemned, sentenced and executed.

I shall waste no unavailing regrets, upon this point. The ends of justice in his case have been satisfied. His punishment has been indeed swift and terrible.

Men at the North where they have dared do so, have been heard to extol the bravery of Booth.

That he had more courage than his captain may be freely admitted. Yet in no honorable or desirable sense was Booth a brave man. His courage was the courage of the thief – the burglar, the highway robber, who murder at midnight and escape in the darkness – by plans and appliances arranged weeks in advance.

His courage was no bar to his suffering: In his ten days wanderings after committing his crime he must have suffered more than a hundred deaths.

I can conceive of no torture more exquisite and extreme than his. Reckless of life as he affected to be, when captured no criminal ever made a more desperate effort to save his life than he did, while there seemed the least chance of saving it.

To imagine the intense anguish he suffered those ten days we need not track him in his perilous flight, with a broken leg at the start, inflamed by liquor and swelling with pain: we need not follow him as he hobbled along — on either side of the Potomac in the darkness seeking safety and finding none. We need not go with him into that dismal swamp wherein he whirled about upon his crutch, startled by every sound like a hunted wolf in an iron trap — hemmed in all sides, all chance of escape cut off, with sleep murdered appetite gone, his broken limb all the while getting worse no friend daring to approach him with succor, the lines of his pursuers steadily drawing more closely around him: as certain for days of final capture, as though the iron hand of the law had already fallen heavily upon him. I say we need not follow him through these scenes to imagine his terrible suffering, nor even to that last scene of all, wherein he piteously begs the by standers to kill him — to put an end to his pains, and remove him from the horrible thing he was — to his own sight.

The simple fact that he had shed innocent blood, and that a whole nation was roused for his capture — and that no assylum awaited him — in any country except the south — and that the south was now utterly impossible to him, will give a distressing idea enough — of the living death through which he dragged himself during those ten terrible days.

No: assassination finds no encouragement in the fate of Booth — as treason finds no countenance in the capture of Davis.

But let us turn away from the hateful assassin, and think of the loved and honored martyr who fell by the hand of the assassin.

The world is old, and its experience vast, but was there ever such an hour caused by the announcement of the death of any monarch, as was caused by the news of the death of Abraham Lincoln? Was ever any people so instantly and so universally overwhelmed with grief? Did ever a great and victorious nation so suddenly pass from triumph to tears — from exaltation and joy to the very dust and ashes of mourning. I know of none and the world knows of none.

The monstrous blow came when, as at no time before during all the war, we were rejoicing in great and decisive victories, the rebel capital had fallen, General Lee had surrendered: Mobile was in our hands; the rebel army was scattered, blown away like the fine dust, before the strong North wind: the press, the loyal press, had put off the wrinkled front of war – and was appealing for clemency in behalf of the defeated rebels. The feeling of resentment and wrath was everywhere giving way to a spirit of forgiveness and oblivion; the whole national horizon seemed fringed with the golden dawn of peace; when all at once, we were startled, amazed, struck down, overwhelmed, by this most foul and dreadful murder. The gentle, the amiable, character of the man – the man, with malice towards none, but charity towards – all – the last man in the world – one would think to tempt the assassins dagger – The thought was full of astonishment as well as horror. The event itself, was so sudden, so tragic, and so out of joint with all seeming probability, so in contradiction to all our feelings that few could at the first believe the dreadful news.

You remember all the circumstances, and yet it seems fit in an address like this that we reiterate their leading features. The story is soon told: While seated with his wife, in a private box at Ford's theatre, set apart by its proprietor, for the President and his family; – while putting off the burdens of state for the moment, observing the play entitled *Our American Cousin*, which he had been specially invited to witness – all unconscious of danger to himself or to the state: Abraham Lincoln was shot down by an assassin who stood behind him – and died from the wound the ensuing morning: such was the shocking news flashed from Washington on the Fifteenth April – Along with it also came the stunning announcement that Hon: William H. Seward – Secretary of State had been assassinated in his chamber, upon a bed where some thought he had days before laid down to die: and that both himself and his son, the assistant Secretary of State must die from the terrible wounds inflicted by the assassin.

Further on still, there came the intimation hardly needed, that their assassinations were not the self moved, individual outbreaks of the malign passions of miscreants: That they were representative men. They were but as the hands of the clock, in front and in sight, but the cunning machinery that moved them was behind and out of sight. It was

seen at the moment that the assassins had only accomplished a part of the bloody work, marked out for their hands. Murder was to have had a more extended circle. All the heads of the State – and the head of the Army, were to have fallen: Men everywhere recognized in it the hand and heart of the rebellion: The life taken was not the life the murderer sought. It was not the President, but the country – they would strike down through him.

But what a day! What a day to the American people was that fourteenth of April. For the moment we seemed suspended over the howling abyss of Anarchy and social chaos: At that moment a breath or an atom might have detached us from the moorings of civil order – and plunged us into national ruin.

One feature of the moment was the feeling of astonishment: In the condition of the country – and the threats so frequently made, the event ought to have been looked for. Men are men, here as elsewhere. History is but repeating itself – said Mr Seward – as soon as able to speak – The remark is strictly philosophical. We ought to have expected it. – Yet it caught us all unprepared.

Had the solid earth opened and swallowed up one of our chief cities, had the tombs, burst beneath our feet, and the sheeted dead walked forth from the dust of ages, the sensation of astonishment and horror could not have been more profound and all pervading.

A hush, a solemn stillness went out over the land, as though each man had heard a voice from heaven, an uninterpreted sound from the sky, and had tremblingly paused to learn its meaning.

Men spoke to each other with bated breath, with voices – broken and scarcely audible. The heads of the people were bowed – like the waves of the sea when first swept by the tempest, only to rise higher later in the storm.

I shall not undertake to describe the grand tumult of emotions that throbbed in all loyal hearts that day. A thought of the assassin caused a shudder, as if one had in the darkness of a lonely way come upon the fierce glaring eyes of a ferocious beast – or trodden upon a poisonous reptile. We were smitten with a feeling of shame for the fiendish possibilities of human nature.

For a moment there stole through men's hearts a strange distrust of each other. They looked at their fellow citizens with a searching glance,

which said not so much who are you but what are you and how do you feel at this mournful hour? for none could tell how far the dark spirit of assassination had travelled north nor where the blow would next fall.

Still as I look back to that day, and analyze the emotions every where excited, I must say, the one sentiment, the one feeling, — vastly more intense, more prominent and all pervading, than all others; the one that stirred deepest, the hearts of men, and caused their eyes to alternate between tears at one moment, and sparks of fire at another, was a feeling of sorrow — a sense of personal bereavement — in the death of Abraham Lincoln. This one great feeling — overlapped and interlaced all others — and colored every object to the eye and spirits.

What was the real cause of this deep sorrow? Who can explain whence the hold this man had upon the American people? His high official character, no doubt had something to do with it — but very evidently this was not all. Other Presidents have died, though none have been assassinated before President Lincoln — yet none were ever so mourned.

So far as the contingency of the loss of the president was concerned, it was already provided for. It is one of the marvels to the outside world that the confidence of the country — was so easily and promptly transferred from the President dead to the President Living. The death of a monarch is looked to as an event of great political changes if not of revolution — but we have shown that even in times of great troubles and calamities — our country can pass from the hands of one ruler to those of another without noise or detriment of any sort: In this fact we have a renewed guarantee of the perpetuity of Republican Institutions.

What then was the cause of our grief? Whence our bereavement: If I affirm that it was not because the country had lost a president, but because the world had lost a man — one whose like we may not see again.

The fact is the people in the very depths of their souls loved Abraham Lincoln. They knew him, *and* knew him as one brother knows another, and they loved him as one brother loves another. He was not only the President of the country, but a member of each loyal family in the country. The very picture of his plain American face, was loved — as the picture of a dear relation.

Abraham Lincoln was no exotic, — no imported growth of king craft or of Priest craft. He was no imitator of foreign customs or copiest of foreign manners, but thoroughly American in all that distinguished his

character — There was not a fibre in his whole composition — that did not identify him with his country to the fullest extent. He was a self-made man, the architect of his own fortune. And the American people — indebted to themselves for themselves, saw in him, a full length portrait of themselves. In him they saw their better qualities represented — incarnated, and glorified — and as such they loved him.

Other men have, perhaps, been as much honored, but no American has been so much loved — by the American people.

But we stand even yet, too near the newly made grave of Abraham Lincoln, either for a just analysis of his character — or for a dispassionate review of his official life. The wound caused by his death is yet too deep — too fresh, the sorrow too lasting, and the mind too excited with the scenes of sorrow for just criticism or unbiased Eulogy.

The sad and solemn pageantry of his funeral has not yet faded from our vision: The long and imposing procession winding its way through distant states, towards the setting sun is still in sight. The sable drapery of mourning has scarcely ceased to sadden on dwellings or streets, the booming of distant cannon proclaiming a nation's grief, has hardly ceased to reverberate. Muffled drums are still beating funeral marches to his grave, the national flag still waves sadly at half mast against the hollow sky. While the image of him who has gone, lingers in our hearts, like the last smile of a loving mother — just quitting the shores of time.

It was my privilege to know Abraham Lincoln and to know him well. I saw and conversed with him at different times during his administration, and upon two occasions at least by his special invitation. He was the first American President, who thus rose above the prejudices of his times, and country.

I mention it as a proof of his independence. He knew that he could do nothing — which would call down upon him more feircely the ribaldry of the vulgar — than by showing any respect to a colored man.

I found him as you all know him to have been a plain man. There was neither paint nor varnish about him. His manners were simple, unaffected unstudied. His language was like himself — plain strong, sinewy — and earnest. He stated his views with great clearness and strength. Few men could state a case so strongly and convincingly. His utterances were always to the point and without ornament. Though a western man — he was entirely free from extravagance or exaggeration in thought or

speech: He was conscious of the vast responsibilities resting upon him, but bore himself — as one able to bear them successfully. His dignity as the President, never stood in the way of his amiability as a man. He was like his pictures, the same man from whichever side you viewed him. He was neither awed by his silence nor silenced by the volubility or authority of his speech. While willing to give, he was equally willing to receive: and so far from feeling ostracised in his presence, he acted upon me as all truly great men act upon their fellow men, as a Liberator, — He set me at perfect Liberty — to state where I differed from him as freely, as where I agreed with him. From the first five minutes I seemed to myself, to have been acquainted with him during all my life. He was one of the most solid men I ever met, and one of the most transparent.

What Mr Lincoln was among white men, How he bore himself towards them, I do not know, but this much I am bound to say, that he was one of the very few white Americans who could converse with a negro without any thing like condescension, and without in anywise reminding him of the unpopularity of his color.

If you will pardon the seeming egotism I will mention a fact or two in further illustration of the character of President Lincoln and of his kindly disposition towards colored people. He seemed to want to know them thoroughly. Born in Kentucky — living in Illinois — accustomed to seeing the colored man in most unfavorable conditions it was natural to expect from him at the first — as those [] made to the colored people he called about him during the first years of the war. But Mr Lincoln soon outgrew his colonization ideas and schemes — and came to look upon the Blackman as an American citizen.

On one occasion while conversing with him, his messenger twice announced that Governor Buckingham of Connecticut was in an adjoining room, and was very desirous of seeing him. Tell the Governor to wait — said Mr Lincoln — I want to have a long talk with my friend Douglass. I remained a full hour after this with the President. While Governor Buckingham waited patiently in an adjoining room the Presidents pleasure to see.

This was probably the first time in the history of the country when the Governor of a state, was required to wait for an interview, because the President of the United States, was engaged in conversation with a negro.



An Oration in Memory of Abraham Lincoln

by Frederick Douglass

April 14, 1876

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Delivered at the Unveiling of The Freedmen's Monument in Lincoln Park, Washington, D.C.

Friends and Fellow-citizens:

I warmly congratulate you upon the highly interesting object which has caused you to assemble in such numbers and spirit as you have today. This occasion is in some respects remarkable. Wise and thoughtful men of our race, who shall come after us, and study the lesson of our history in the United States; who shall survey the long and dreary spaces over which we have traveled; who shall count the links in the great chain of events by which we have reached our present position, will make a note of this occasion; they will think of it and speak of it with a sense of manly pride and complacency.

I congratulate you, also, upon the very favorable circumstances in which we meet today. They are high, inspiring, and uncommon. They lend grace, glory, and significance to the object for which we have met. Nowhere else in this great country, with its uncounted towns and cities, unlimited wealth, and immeasurable territory extending from sea to sea, could conditions be found more favorable to the success of this occasion than here.

We stand today at the national center to perform something like a national act—an act which is to go into history; and we are here where every pulsation of the national heart can be heard, felt, and reciprocated. A thousand wires, fed with thought and winged with lightning, put us in instantaneous communication with the loyal and true men all over the country.

Few facts could better illustrate the vast and wonderful change which has taken place in our condition as a people than the fact of our assembling here for the purpose we have today. Harmless, beautiful, proper, and praiseworthy as this demonstration is, I cannot forget that no such demonstration would have been tolerated here twenty years ago. The spirit of slavery and barbarism, which still lingers to blight and destroy in some dark and distant parts of our country, would have made our assembling here the signal and excuse for opening upon us all the flood-gates of wrath and violence. That we are here in peace today is a compliment and a credit to American civilization, and a prophecy of still greater national enlightenment and progress in the future. I refer to the past not in malice, for this is no day for malice; but simply to place more distinctly in front the gratifying and glorious change which has come both to our white fellow-citizens and ourselves, and to congratulate all upon the contrast between now and then; the new dispensation of freedom with its thousand blessings to both races, and the old dispensation of slavery with its ten thousand evils to both races—white and black. In view, then, of the past, the present, and the future, with the long and dark history of our bondage behind us, and with liberty, progress, and enlightenment before us, I again congratulate you upon this auspicious day and hour.

Friends and fellow-citizens, the story of our presence here is soon and easily told. We are here in the District of Columbia, here in the city of Washington, the most luminous point of American territory; a city recently transformed and made beautiful in its body and in its spirit; we are here in the place where the ablest and best men of the country are sent to devise the policy, enact the laws, and shape the destiny of the Republic; we are here, with the stately pillars and majestic dome of the Capitol of the nation looking down upon us; we are here, with the broad earth freshly adorned with the foliage and flowers of spring for our church, and all races, colors, and conditions of men for our congregation—in a word, we are here to express, as best we may, by appropriate forms and ceremonies, our grateful sense of the vast, high, and preëminent services rendered to ourselves, to our race, to our country, and to the whole world by Abraham Lincoln.

The sentiment that brings us here to-day is one of the noblest that can stir and thrill the human heart. It has crowned and made glorious the high places of all civilized nations with the grandest and most enduring works of art, designed to illustrate the characters and perpetuate the memories of great public men. It is the sentiment which from year to year adorns with fragrant and beautiful flowers the graves of our loyal, brave, and patriotic soldiers who fell in defence [sic] of the Union and liberty. It is the sentiment of gratitude and appreciation, which often, in the presence of many who hear me, has filled yonder heights of Arlington with the eloquence of eulogy and the sublime enthusiasm of poetry and song; a sentiment which can never die while the Republic lives.

For the first time in the history of our people, and in the history of the whole American people, we join in this high worship, and march conspicuously in the line of this time-honored custom. First things are always interesting, and this is one of our first things. It is the first time that, in this form and manner, we have sought to do honor to an American great man, however deserving and illustrious. I commend the fact to notice; let it be told in every part of the Republic; let men of all parties and opinions hear it; let those who despise us, not less than those who respect us, know that now and here, in the spirit of liberty, loyalty, and gratitude, let it be known everywhere, and by everybody who takes an interest in human progress and in the amelioration of the condition of mankind, that, in the presence and with the approval of the members of the American House of Representatives, reflecting the general sentiment of the country; that in the presence of that august body, the American Senate, representing the highest intelligence and the calmest judgment of the country; in the presence of the Supreme Court and Chief-Justice of the United States, to whose decisions we all patriotically bow; in the presence and under the steady eye of the honored and trusted President of the United States, with the members of his wise and patriotic Cabinet, we, the colored people, newly emancipated and rejoicing in our blood-bought freedom, near the close of the first century in the life of this Republic, have now and here unveiled, set apart, and dedicated a monument of enduring granite and bronze, in every line, feature, and figure of which the men of this generation may read, and those of after-coming generations may read, something of the exalted character and great works of Abraham Lincoln, the first martyr President of the United States.

Fellow-citizens, in what we have said and done today, and in what we may say and do hereafter, we disclaim everything like arrogance and assumption. We claim for ourselves no superior devotion to the character, history, and memory of the illustrious name whose monument we have here dedicated today. We fully comprehend the relation of Abraham Lincoln both to ourselves and to the white people of the United States. Truth is proper and beautiful at all times and in all places, and it is never more proper and beautiful in any case than when speaking of a great public man whose example is likely to be commended for honor and imitation long after his departure to the solemn shades, the silent continents of eternity. It must be admitted, truth compels me to admit, even here in the presence of the monument we have erected to his memory, Abraham Lincoln was not, in the fullest sense of the word, either our man or our model. In his interests, in his associations, in his habits of thought, and in his prejudices, he was a white man.

He was preëminently the white man's President, entirely devoted to the welfare of white men. He was ready and willing at any time during the first years of his administration to deny, postpone, and sacrifice the rights of humanity in the colored people to promote the welfare of the white people of this country. In all his education and feeling he was an American of the Americans. He came into the Presidential chair upon one principle alone, namely, opposition to the extension of slavery. His arguments in furtherance of this policy had their motive and mainspring in his patriotic devotion to the interests of his own race. To protect, defend, and perpetuate slavery in the states where it existed Abraham Lincoln was not less ready than any other President to draw the sword of the nation. He was ready to execute all the

supposed guarantees of the United States Constitution in favor of the slave system anywhere inside the slave states. He was willing to pursue, recapture, and send back the fugitive slave to his master, and to suppress a slave rising for liberty, though his guilty master were already in arms against the Government. The race to which we belong were not the special objects of his consideration. Knowing this, I concede to you, my white fellow-citizens, a preëminence in this worship at once full and supreme. First, midst, and last, you and yours were the objects of his deepest affection and his most earnest solicitude. You are the children of Abraham Lincoln. We are at best only his step-children; children by adoption, children by forces of circumstances and necessity. To you it especially belongs to sound his praises, to preserve and perpetuate his memory, to multiply his statues, to hang his pictures high upon your walls, and commend his example, for to you he was a great and glorious friend and benefactor. Instead of supplanting you at his altar, we would exhort you to build high his monuments; let them be of the most costly material, of the most cunning workmanship; let their forms be symmetrical, beautiful, and perfect; let their bases be upon solid rocks, and their summits lean against the unchanging blue, overhanging sky, and let them endure forever! But while in the abundance of your wealth, and in the fullness of your just and patriotic devotion, you do all this, we entreat you to despise not the humble offering we this day unveil to view; for while Abraham Lincoln saved for you a country, he delivered us from a bondage, according to Jefferson, one hour of which was worse than ages of the oppression your fathers rose in rebellion to oppose.

Fellow-citizens, ours is no new-born zeal and devotion—merely a thing of this moment. The name of Abraham Lincoln was near and dear to our hearts in the darkest and most perilous hours of the Republic. We were no more ashamed of him when shrouded in clouds of darkness, of doubt, and defeat than when we saw him crowned with victory, honor, and glory. Our faith in him was often taxed and strained to the uttermost, but it never failed. When he tarried long in the mountain; when he strangely told us that we were the cause of the war; when he still more strangely told us that we were to leave the land in which we were born; when he refused to employ our arms in defence [sic] of the Union; when, after accepting our services as colored soldiers, he refused to retaliate our murder and torture as colored prisoners; when he told us he would save the Union if he could with slavery; when he revoked the Proclamation of Emancipation of General Fremont; when he refused to remove the popular commander of the Army of the Potomac, in the days of its inaction and defeat, who was more zealous in his efforts to protect slavery than to suppress rebellion; when we saw all this, and more, we were at times grieved, stunned, and greatly bewildered; but our hearts believed while they ached and bled. Nor was this, even at that time, a blind and unreasoning superstition. Despite the mist and haze that surrounded him; despite the tumult, the hurry, and confusion of the hour, we were able to take a comprehensive view of Abraham Lincoln, and to make reasonable allowance for the circumstances of his position. We saw him, measured him, and estimated him; not by stray utterances to injudicious and tedious delegations, who often tried his patience; not by isolated facts torn from their connection; not by any partial and imperfect glimpses, caught at inopportune moments; but by a broad survey, in the light of the stern logic of great events, and in view of that divinity which shapes our ends, rough hew them how we will, we came to the conclusion that the

hour and the man of our redemption had somehow met in the person of Abraham Lincoln. It mattered little to us what language he might employ on special occasions; it mattered little to us, when we fully knew him, whether he was swift or slow in his movements; it was enough for us that Abraham Lincoln was at the head of a great movement, and was in living and earnest sympathy with that movement, which, in the nature of things, must go on until slavery should be utterly and forever abolished in the United States.

When, therefore, it shall be asked what we have to do with the memory of Abraham Lincoln, or what Abraham Lincoln had to do with us, the answer is ready, full, and complete. Though he loved Caesar less than Rome, though the Union was more to him than our freedom or our future, under his wise and beneficent rule we saw ourselves gradually lifted from the depths of slavery to the heights of liberty and manhood; under his wise and beneficent rule, and by measures approved and vigorously pressed by him, we saw that the handwriting of ages, in the form of prejudice and proscription, was rapidly fading away from the face of our whole country; under his rule, and in due time, about as soon after all as the country could tolerate the strange spectacle, we saw our brave sons and brothers laying off the rags of bondage, and being clothed all over in the blue uniforms of the soldiers of the United States; under his rule we saw two hundred thousand of our dark and dusky people responding to the call of Abraham Lincoln, and with muskets on their shoulders, and eagles on their buttons, timing their high footsteps to liberty and union under the national flag; under his rule we saw the independence of the black republic of [Haiti], the special object of slaveholding aversion and horror, fully recognized, and her minister, a colored gentleman, duly received here in the city of Washington; under his rule we saw the internal slave-trade, which so long disgraced the nation, abolished, and slavery abolished in the District of Columbia; under his rule we saw for the first time the law enforced against the foreign slave-trade, and the first slave-trader hanged like any other pirate or murderer; under his rule, assisted by the greatest captain of our age, and his inspiration, we saw the Confederate States, based upon the idea that our race must be slaves, and slaves forever, battered to pieces and scattered to the four winds; under his rule, and in the fullness of time, we saw Abraham Lincoln, after giving the slaveholders three months' grace in which to save their hateful slave system, penning the immortal paper, which, though special in its language, was general in its principles and effect, making slavery forever impossible in the United States. Though we waited long, we saw all this and more.

Can any colored man, or any white man friendly to the freedom of all men, ever forget the night which followed the first day of January, 1863, when the world was to see if Abraham Lincoln would prove to be as good as his word? I shall never forget that memorable night, when in a distant city I waited and watched at a public meeting, with three thousand others not less anxious than myself, for the word of deliverance which we have heard read today. Nor shall I ever forget the outburst of joy and thanksgiving that rent the air when the lightning brought to us the emancipation proclamation. In that happy hour we forgot all delay, and forgot all tardiness, forgot that the President had bribed the rebels to lay down their arms by a promise to withhold the bolt which would smite the slave-system with destruction; and we were thenceforward willing to allow the President all the latitude of time, phraseology, and

every honorable device that statesmanship might require for the achievement of a great and beneficent measure of liberty and progress.

Fellow-citizens, there is little necessity on this occasion to speak at length and critically of this great and good man, and of his high mission in the world. That ground has been fully occupied and completely covered both here and elsewhere. The whole field of fact and fancy has been gleaned and garnered. Any man can say things that are true of Abraham Lincoln, but no man can say anything that is new of Abraham Lincoln. His personal traits and public acts are better known to the American people than are those of any other man of his age. He was a mystery to no man who saw him and heard him. Though high in position, the humblest could approach him and feel at home in his presence. Though deep, he was transparent; though strong, he was gentle; though decided and pronounced in his convictions, he was tolerant towards those who differed from him, and patient under reproaches. Even those who only knew him through his public utterances obtained a tolerably clear idea of his character and personality. The image of the man went out with his words, and those who read them knew him.

I have said that President Lincoln was a white man, and shared the prejudices common to his countrymen towards the colored race. Looking back to his times and to the condition of his country, we are compelled to admit that this unfriendly feeling on his part may be safely set down as one element of his wonderful success in organizing the loyal American people for the tremendous conflict before them, and bringing them safely through that conflict. His great mission was to accomplish two things: first, to save his country from dismemberment and ruin; and, second, to free his country from the great crime of slavery. To do one or the other, or both, he must have the earnest sympathy and the powerful coöperation of his loyal fellow-countrymen. Without this primary and essential condition to success his efforts must have been vain and utterly fruitless. Had he put the abolition of slavery before the salvation of the Union, he would have inevitably driven from him a powerful class of the American people and rendered resistance to rebellion impossible. Viewed from the genuine abolition ground, Mr. Lincoln seemed tardy, cold, dull, and indifferent; but measuring him by the sentiment of his country, a sentiment he was bound as a statesman to consult, he was swift, zealous, radical, and determined.

Though Mr. Lincoln shared the prejudices of his white fellow-countrymen against the Negro, it is hardly necessary to say that in his heart of hearts he loathed and hated slavery. The man who could say, "Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war shall soon pass away, yet if God wills it continue till all the wealth piled by two hundred years of bondage shall have been wasted, and each drop of blood drawn by the lash shall have been paid for by one drawn by the sword, the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether," gives all needed proof of his feeling on the subject of slavery. He was willing, while the South was loyal, that it should have its pound of flesh, because he thought that it was so nominated in the bond; but farther than this no earthly power could make him go.

Fellow-citizens, whatever else in this world may be partial, unjust, and uncertain, time, time! is impartial, just, and certain in its action. In the realm of mind, as well as

in the realm of matter, it is a great worker, and often works wonders. The honest and comprehensive statesman, clearly discerning the needs of his country, and earnestly endeavoring to do his whole duty, though covered and blistered with reproaches, may safely leave his course to the silent judgment of time. Few great public men have ever been the victims of fiercer denunciation than Abraham Lincoln was during his administration. He was often wounded in the house of his friends. Reproaches came thick and fast upon him from within and from without, and from opposite quarters. He was assailed by Abolitionists; he was assailed by slaveholders; he was assailed by the men who were for peace at any price; he was assailed by those who were for a more vigorous prosecution of the war; he was assailed for not making the war an abolition war; and he was bitterly assailed for making the war an abolition war.

But now behold the change: the judgment of the present hour is, that taking him for all in all, measuring the tremendous magnitude of the work before him, considering the necessary means to ends, and surveying the end from the beginning, infinite wisdom has seldom sent any man into the world better fitted for his mission than Abraham Lincoln. His birth, his training, and his natural endowments, both mental and physical, were strongly in his favor. Born and reared among the lowly, a stranger to wealth and luxury, compelled to grapple single-handed with the flintiest hardships of life, from tender youth to sturdy manhood, he grew strong in the manly and heroic qualities demanded by the great mission to which he was called by the votes of his countrymen. The hard condition of his early life, which would have depressed and broken down weaker men, only gave greater life, vigor, and buoyancy to the heroic spirit of Abraham Lincoln. He was ready for any kind and any quality of work. What other young men dreaded in the shape of toil, he took hold of with the utmost cheerfulness.

“A spade, a rake, a hoe,
A pick-axe, or a bill;
A hook to reap, a scythe to mow,
A flail, or what you will.”

All day long he could split heavy rails in the woods, and half the night long he could study his English Grammar by the uncertain flare and glare of the light made by a pine-knot. He was at home on the land with his axe, with his maul, with his gluts, and his wedges; and he was equally at home on water, with his oars, with his poles, with his planks, and with his boat-hooks. And whether in his flat-boat on the Mississippi River, or at the fireside of his frontier cabin, he was a man of work. A son of toil himself, he was linked in brotherly sympathy with the sons of toil in every loyal part of the Republic. This very fact gave him tremendous power with the American people, and materially contributed not only to selecting him to the Presidency, but in sustaining his administration of the Government.

Upon his inauguration as President of the United States, an office, even when assumed under the most favorable conditions, fitted to tax and strain the largest abilities, Abraham Lincoln was met by a tremendous crisis. He was called upon not merely to administer the Government, but to decide, in the face of terrible odds, the fate of the Republic.

A formidable rebellion rose in his path before him; the Union was already practically dissolved; his country was torn and rent asunder at the center. Hostile armies were already organized against the Republic, armed with the munitions of war which the Republic had provided for its own defence [sic]. The tremendous question for him to decide was whether his country should survive the crisis and flourish, or be dismembered and perish. His predecessor in office had already decided the question in favor of national dismemberment, by denying to it the right of self-defence [sic] and self-preservation—a right which belongs to the meanest insect.

Happily for the country, happily for you and for me, the judgment of James Buchanan, the patrician, was not the judgment of Abraham Lincoln, the plebeian. He brought his strong common sense, sharpened in the school of adversity, to bear upon the question. He did not hesitate, he did not doubt, he did not falter; but at once resolved that at whatever peril, at whatever cost, the union of the States should be preserved. A patriot himself, his faith was strong and unwavering in the patriotism of his countrymen. Timid men said before Mr. Lincoln's inauguration, that we had seen the last President of the United States. A voice in influential quarters said, "Let the Union slide." Some said that a Union maintained by the sword was worthless. Others said a rebellion of 8,000,000 cannot be suppressed; but in the midst of all this tumult and timidity, and against all this, Abraham Lincoln was clear in his duty, and had an oath in heaven. He calmly and bravely heard the voice of doubt and fear all around him; but he had an oath in heaven, and there was not power enough on earth to make this honest boatman, back-woodsman, and broad-handed splitter of rails evade or violate that sacred oath. He had not been schooled in the ethics of slavery; his plain life had favored his love of truth. He had not been taught that treason and perjury were the proof of honor and honesty. His moral training was against his saying one thing when he meant another. The trust that Abraham Lincoln had in himself and in the people was surprising and grand, but it was also enlightened and well founded. He knew the American people better than they knew themselves, and his truth was based upon this knowledge.

Fellow-citizens, the fourteenth day of April, 1865, of which this is the eleventh anniversary, is now and will ever remain a memorable day in the annals of this Republic. It was on the evening of this day, while a fierce and sanguinary rebellion was in the last stages of its desolating power; while its armies were broken and scattered before the invincible armies of Grant and Sherman; while a great nation, torn and rent by war, was already beginning to raise to the skies loud anthems of joy at the dawn of peace, it was startled, amazed, and overwhelmed by the crowning crime of slavery — the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. It was a new crime, a pure act of malice. No purpose of the rebellion was to be served by it. It was the simple gratification of a hell-black spirit of revenge. But it has done good after all. It has

filled the country with a deeper abhorrence of slavery and a deeper love for the great liberator.

Had Abraham Lincoln died from any of the numerous ills to which flesh is heir; had he reached that good old age of which his vigorous constitution and his temperate habits gave promise; had he been permitted to see the end of his great work; had the solemn curtain of death come down but gradually—we should still have been smitten with a heavy grief, and treasured his name lovingly. But dying as he did die, by the red hand of violence, killed, assassinated, taken off without warning, not because of personal hate—for no man who knew Abraham Lincoln could hate him—but because of his fidelity to union and liberty, he is doubly dear to us, and his memory will be precious forever.

Fellow-citizens, I end, as I began, with congratulations. We have done a good work for our race today. In doing honor to the memory of our friend and liberator, we have been doing highest honors to ourselves and those who come after us; we have been fastening ourselves to a name and fame imperishable and immortal; we have also been defending ourselves from a blighting scandal. When now it shall be said that the colored man is soulless, that he has no appreciation of benefits or benefactors; when the foul reproach of ingratitude is hurled at us, and it is attempted to scourge us beyond the range of human brotherhood, we may calmly point to the monument we have this day erected to the memory of Abraham Lincoln.