

American Party Platform of 1856

[Also known as the "Know Nothing Party".]

February 21, 1856

1. An humble acknowledgment to the Supreme Being, for his protecting care vouchsafed to our fathers in their successful Revolutionary struggle, and hitherto manifested to us, their descendants, in the preservation of the liberties, the independence, and the union of these States.
2. The perpetuation of the Federal Union and Constitution, as the palladium of our civil and religious liberties, and the only sure bulwarks of American Independence.
3. *Americans must rule America*; and to this end *native-born* citizens should be selected for all State, Federal and municipal offices of government employment, in preference to all others. *Nevertheless*,
4. Persons born of American parents residing temporarily abroad, should be entitled to all the rights of native-born citizens.
5. No person should be selected for political station (whether of native or foreign birth), who recognizes any allegiance or obligation of any description to any foreign prince, potentate or power, or who refuses to recognize the Federal and State Constitutions (each within its sphere) as paramount to all other laws, as rules of political action.
6. The unqualified recognition and maintenance of the reserved rights of the several States, and the cultivation of harmony and fraternal good will between the citizens of the several States, and to this end, non-interference by Congress with questions appertaining solely to the individual States, and non-intervention by each State with the affairs of any other State.
7. The recognition of the right of native-born and naturalized citizens of the United States, permanently residing in any territory thereof, to frame their constitution and laws, and to regulate their domestic and social affairs in their own mode, subject only to the provisions of the Federal Constitution, with the privilege of admission into the Union whenever they have the requisite population for one Representative in Congress: *Provided, always*, that none but those who are citizens of the United States, under the Constitution and laws thereof, and who have a fixed residence in any such Territory, ought to participate in the formation of the Constitution, or in the enactment of laws for said Territory or State.

8. An enforcement of the principles that no State or Territory ought to admit others than citizens to the right of suffrage, or of holding political offices of the United States.

9. A change in the laws of naturalization, making a continued residence of twenty-one years, of all not heretofore provided for, an indispensable requisite for citizenship hereafter, and excluding all paupers, and persons convicted of crime, from landing upon our shores; but no interference with the vested rights of foreigners.

10. Opposition to any union between Church and State; no interference with religious faith or worship, and no test oaths for office.

11. Free and thorough investigation into any and all alleged abuses of public functionaries, and a strict economy in public expenditures.

12. The maintenance and enforcement of all laws constitutionally enacted until said laws shall be repealed, or shall be declared null and void by competent judicial authority.

13. Opposition to the reckless and unwise policy of the present Administration in the general management of our national affairs, and more especially as shown in removing "Americans" (by designation) and Conservatives in principle, from office, and placing foreigners and Ultraists in their places; as shown in a truckling subserviency to the stronger, and an insolent and cowardly bravado toward the weaker powers; as shown in reopening sectional agitation, by the repeal of the Missouri Compromise; as shown in granting to unnaturalized foreigners the right of suffrage in Kansas and Nebraska; as shown in its vacillating course on the Kansas and Nebraska question; as shown in the corruptions which pervade some of the Departments of the Government; as shown in disgracing meritorious naval officers through prejudice or caprice; and as shown in the blundering mismanagement of our foreign relations.

14. Therefore, to remedy existing evils, and prevent the disastrous consequences otherwise resulting therefrom, we would build up the "American Party" upon the principles herein before stated.

15. That each State Council shall have authority to amend their several constitutions, so as to abolish the several degrees and substitute a pledge of honor, instead of other obligations, for fellowship and admission into the party.

16. A free and open discussion of all political principles embraced in our Platform.

Appeal of the Independent Democrats in Congress to the American People

January 19, 1854

Fellow-Citizens: As Senators and Representatives in the Congress of the United States, it is our duty to warn our constituents whenever imminent danger menaces the freedom of our institutions or the permanency of our Union. Such danger, as we firmly believe, now impends, and we earnestly solicit your prompt attention to it.

At the last session of Congress, a bill for the organization of the Territory of Nebraska passed the House of Representatives with an overwhelming majority. That bill was based on the principle of excluding slavery from the new Territory. It was not taken up for consideration in the Senate, and consequently failed to become a law.

At the present session, a new Nebraska bill has been reported by the Senate Committee on Territories, which, should it unhappily receive the sanction of Congress, will open all the unorganized territory of the Union to the ingress of slavery.

We arraign this bill as a gross violation of a sacred pledge; as a criminal betrayal of precious rights; as a part and parcel of an atrocious plot to exclude from a vast unoccupied region immigrants from the Old World, and free laborers from our own States, and convert it into a dreary region of despotism, inhabited by masters and slaves.

Take your maps, fellow citizens, we entreat you, and see what country it is which this bill, gratuitously and recklessly, proposes to open to slavery. . . .

This immense region, occupying the very heart of the North American Continent, and larger, by thirty-three thousand square miles, than all the existing free States, excluding California—this immense region, well-watered and fertile, through which the middle and northern routes from the Atlantic to the Pacific must pass—this immense region, embracing [almost] all the unorganized territory of the nation, . . . and now far more than thirty years regarded by the common consent of the American people as consecrated to freedom by statute and by compact—this immense region, the bill now before the Senate, without reason and without excuse, but in flagrant disregard of sound policy and sacred faith, purposes to open to slavery.

We beg your attention, fellow citizens, to a few historical facts.

The original settled policy of the United States, clearly indicated by the Jefferson proviso of 1784, and by the ordinance of 1787, was non-extension of slavery.

In 1803, Louisiana was acquired by purchase from France. At that time there were some twenty-five or thirty thousand slaves in this Territory, most of them within what is now the State of Louisiana; a few only, further north, on the west bank of the Mississippi. Congress, instead of providing for the abolition of slavery in this new Territory, permitted its continuance. In 1812 the State of Louisiana was organized and admitted into the Union with slavery.

In 1818, six years later, the inhabitants of the Territory of Missouri applied to Congress for authority to form a State constitution and for admission into the Union. There were, at that time, in the whole territory acquired from France, outside of the State of Louisiana, not three thousand slaves.

There was no apology in the circumstances of the country for the continuance of slavery. The original national policy was against it, and, not less, the plain language of the treaty under which the Territory had been acquired from France.

It was proposed, therefore, to incorporate in the bill authorizing the formation of a State Government, a provision requiring that the constitution of the new State should contain an article providing for the abolition of existing slavery, and prohibiting the further introduction of slaves.

This provision was vehemently and pertinaciously opposed, but finally prevailed in the House of Representatives by a decided vote. In the Senate it was rejected, and in consequence of the disagreement between the two Houses, the bill was lost.

At the next session of Congress, the controversy was renewed with increased violence. It was terminated at length by a compromise. Missouri was allowed to come into the Union with slavery; but a section was inserted in the act authorizing her admission, excluding slavery forever from all the Territory acquired from France, not included in the new State, lying north of 36° 30'. . .

The question of the constitutionality of this prohibition was submitted by President Monroe to his cabinet. John Quincy Adams was then Secretary of State; John C. Calhoun was Secretary of War; William H. Crawford was Secretary of the Treasury; and William Wirt was Attorney-General. Each of these eminent men, three of them being from slave States, gave a written opinion, affirming its constitutionality, and thereupon the act received the sanction of the President himself, also from a slave State.

Nothing is more certain in history than the fact that Missouri could not have been admitted as a slave State had not certain members from the free States been reconciled to the measure by the incorporation of this prohibition into the act of admission. Nothing is more certain than that this prohibition has been regarded and accepted by the whole country as a solemn compact against the extension of slavery into any part of the Territory acquired from France, lying North of 36° 30', and not included in the new State of Missouri. The same act—let it be ever remembered—which authorized the formation of a Constitution for the State, without a clause forbidding slavery, consecrated beyond question, and beyond honest recall, the whole remainder of the Territory to freedom and free institutions forever. For more than thirty years—during more than half the period of our National existence under our present Constitution—this compact has been universally regarded and acted upon as inviolable American law. In conformity with it, Iowa was admitted as a free State and Minnesota has been organized as a free Territory.

It is a strange and ominous fact well calculated to awaken the worst apprehension, and the most fearful forebodings of future calamities, that it is now deliberately purposed to repeal this prohibition, by implication or directly—the latter certainly the manlier way—and thus to subvert this compact, and allow slavery in all the yet unorganized territory.

We cannot, in this address, review the various pretenses under which it is attempted to cloak this monstrous wrong; but we must not altogether omit to notice one.

It is said that the Territory of Nebraska sustains the same relations to slavery as did the territory acquired from Mexico prior to 1850, and that the pro-slavery clauses of the bill are necessary to carry into effect the compromises of that year.

No assertion could be more groundless.

Three acquisitions of territory have been made by treaty. The first was from France. Out of this territory have been created the three slave States of Louisiana, Arkansas, and Missouri, and the single free State of Iowa. The controversy which arose in relation to the then unorganized portion of this territory was closed in 1820 by the Missouri act, containing the slavery prohibition as has been already stated. This controversy related only to territory acquired from France. The act by which it was terminated was confined, by its own express terms, to the same territory, and had no relation to any other.

The second acquisition was from Spain. Florida, the territory thus acquired, was yielded to slavery without a struggle, and almost without a murmur.

The third was from Mexico. The controversy which arose from this acquisition is fresh in the remembrance of the American people. Out of it sprung the acts of Congress, commonly known as the compromise measures of 1850, by one of which California was admitted as a free State; while two others, organizing the Territories of New Mexico and Utah, exposed all the residue of the recently acquired territory to the invasion of slavery.

These acts were never supposed to abrogate or touch the existing exclusion of slavery from what is now called Nebraska. They applied to the territory acquired from Mexico, and to that only. They were intended as a settlement of the controversy growing out of that acquisition, and of that controversy only. They must stand or fall by their own merits. . . .

The pretenses, . . . that the territory, covered by the positive prohibition of 1820, sustains a similar relation to slavery with that acquired from Mexico, covered by no prohibition except that of disputed constitutional or Mexican law, and that the compromises of 1850 require the incorporation of the pro-slavery clauses of the Utah and New Mexico bill in the Nebraska Act, are mere inventions, designed to cover up from public reprehension meditated bad faith. Were he living now, no one would be more forward, more eloquent, or more indignant in his denunciation of that bad faith than Henry Clay, the foremost champion of both compromises.

In 1820 the slave States said to the free States: "Admit Missouri with slavery and refrain from positive exclusion south of 36° 30' and we will join you in perpetual prohibition north of that line." The free States consented. In 1854 the slave States say to the free States: "Missouri is admitted; no prohibition of slavery south of 36° 30* has been attempted; we have received the full consideration of our agreement; no more is to be gained by adherence to it on our part, we therefore propose to cancel the compact." If this be not Punic faith, what is it? Not without the deepest dishonor and crime can the free States acquiesce in this demand.

We confess our total inability properly to delineate the character or describe the consequences of this measure. Language fails to express the sentiments of indignation and abhorrence which it inspires; and no vision less penetrating and comprehensive than that of the All-Seeing, can reach the evil issues.

To some of its more immediate and inevitable consequences, however, we must attempt to direct your attention.

What will be the effect of this measure, should it unhappily become a law, upon the proposed Pacific Railroad? We have already said that two of the principal routes, the central and the northern, traverse this territory. If slavery be allowed there, the settlement and cultivation of the country must be greatly retarded.

Inducements to the immigration of free laborers will be almost destroyed. The enhanced cost of construction, and the diminished expectation of profitable returns, will present almost insuperable obstacles to building the road at all; while, even if made, the difficulty and expense of keeping it up, in a country from which the energetic and intelligent masses will be virtually excluded, will greatly impair its usefulness and value.

From the rich lands of this large territory, also, patriotic statesmen have anticipated that a free, industrious, and enlightened population will extract abundant treasures of individual and public wealth. There, it has been expected, freedom-loving emigrants from Europe, and energetic and intelligent laborers from our own land, will find homes of comfort and fields of useful enterprise. If this bill shall become a law, all such expectation will turn to grievous disappointment. The blight of slavery will cover the land. The homestead law, should Congress enact one, will be worthless there. Freemen, unless pressed by a hard and cruel necessity, will not, and should not, work beside slaves. Labor cannot be respected where any class of laborers is held in abject bondage.

We earnestly request the enlightened conductors of newspapers printed in the German and other foreign languages to direct the attention of their readers to this important matter.

It is of immense consequence, also, to scrutinize the geographical character of this project. We beg you, fellow citizens, to observe that it will sever the East from the West of the United States by a wide slaveholding belt of country, extending from the Gulf of Mexico to British North America. It is a bold scheme against American liberty, worthy of an accomplished architect of ruin. . . . Thus, you see, fellow citizens, that the first operation of the proposed permission of slavery in Nebraska will be to stay the progress of the free States westward, and to cut off the free States of the Pacific from the free States of the Atlantic. It is hoped, doubtless, by compelling the whole commerce and the whole travel between the East and West to pass for hundreds of miles through a slave-holding region in the heart of the continent, and by the influence of a Federal Government controlled by the slave power to extinguish freedom and establish slavery in the States and Territories of the Pacific, and thus permanently subjugate the whole country to the yoke of a slave-holding despotism. Shall a plot against humanity and democracy so monstrous, and so dangerous to the interests of liberty throughout the world, be permitted to succeed?

We appeal to the people. We warn you that the dearest interests of freedom and the Union are in imminent peril. Demagogues may tell you that the Union can be maintained only by submitting to the demands of slavery. We tell you that the

safety of the Union can only be insured by the full recognition of the just claims of freedom and man. The Union was formed to establish justice, and secure the blessings of liberty. When it fails to accomplish these ends it will be worthless, and when it becomes worthless it cannot long endure.

We entreat you to be mindful of that fundamental maxim of democracy—equal rights and exact justice for all men. Do not submit to become agents in extending legalized oppression and systematized injustice over a vast territory yet exempt from these terrible evils.

We implore Christians and Christian ministers to interpose. Their divine religion requires them to behold in every man a brother, and to labor for the advancement and regeneration of the human race.

Whatever apologies may be offered for the toleration of slavery in the States, none can be urged for its extension into Territories where it does not exist, and where that extension involves the repeal of ancient law and the violation of solemn compact. Let all protest, earnestly and emphatically, by correspondence, through the press, by memorials, by resolutions of public meetings and legislative bodies, and in whatever other mode may seem expedient, against this enormous crime.

For ourselves, we shall resist it by speech and vote, and with all the abilities which God has given us. Even if overcome in the impending struggle, we shall not submit. We shall go home to our constituents, erect anew the standard of freedom, and call on the people to come to the rescue of the country from the domination of slavery. We will not despair; for the cause of human freedom is the cause of God.

S. P. CHASE, *Senator from Ohio.*

CHARLES SUMNER, *Senator from Mass.*

J. R. GIDDINGS, *Representative from Ohio.*

EDWARD WADE, *Representative from Ohio.*

GERRIT SMITH, *Representative from New York.*

ALEX. DE WITT, *Representative from Mass.*

Speech to the Senate on the Nebraska Territory

by Stephen A. Douglas

January 30, 1854

. . . Upon [that] point . . . pertaining to the question of slavery in the territories—it was the intention of the committee to be equally explicit. We took the principles established by the Compromise Act of 1850 as our guide, and intended to make each and every provision of the bill accord with those principles. Those measures established and rest upon the great principle of self-government—that the people should be allowed to decide the questions of their domestic institutions for themselves, subject only to such limitations and restrictions as are imposed by the Constitution of the United States, instead of having them determined by an arbitrary or geographical line. . . .

The leading feature of the compromise of 1850 was congressional non-intervention as to slavery in the territories; that the people of the territories, and of all the states, were to be allowed to do as they pleased upon the subject of slavery, subject only to the provisions of the Constitution of the United States.

That, sir, was the leading feature of the compromise measures of 1850. Those measures, therefore, abandoned the idea of a geographical line as the boundary between free states and slave states; abandoned it because compelled to do it from an inability to maintain it; and in lieu of that substituted a great principle of self-government, which would allow the people to do as they thought proper. Now, the question is, when that new compromise, resting upon that great fundamental principle of freedom, was established, was it not an abandonment of the old one—the geographical line? Was it not a supersedure of the old one within the very language of the substitute for the bill which is now under consideration? . . .

Mr. President, I repeat, that so far as the question of slavery is concerned, there is nothing in the bill under consideration which does not carry out the principle of the compromise measures of 1850, by leaving the people to do as they please, subject only to the provisions of the Constitution of the United States. If that principle is wrong, the bill is wrong. If that principle is right, the bill is right. It is unnecessary to quibble about phraseology or words; it is not the mere words, the mere phraseology that our constituents wish to judge by. They wish to know the legal effect of our legislation.

The legal effect of this bill, if it be passed as reported by the Committee on Territories, is neither to legislate slavery into these territories nor out of them, but to leave the people do as they please, under the provisions and subject to the limitations of the Constitution of the United States. Why should not this principle prevail? Why should any man, North or South, object to it? I will especially address the argument to my own section of country, and ask why should any Northern man object to this principle? If you review the history of the slavery question in the United States, you will see that all the great results on behalf of free institutions which have been worked out, have been accomplished by the operation of this principle, and by it alone.

When these states were colonies of Great Britain, every one of them was a slave-holding province. When the Constitution of the United States was formed, twelve out of the thirteen were slave-holding states. Since that time six of those states have become free. How has this been effected? Was it by virtue of abolition agitation in Congress? Was it in obedience to the dictates of the federal government? Not at all; but they have become free states under the silent but sure and irresistible working of that great principle of self-government which teaches every people to do that which the interests of themselves and their posterity morally and pecuniarily may require.

Under the operation of this principle New Hampshire became free, while South Carolina continued to hold slaves; Connecticut abolished slavery, while Georgia held on to it; Rhode Island abandoned the institution, while Maryland preserved it; New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania abolished slavery, while Virginia, North Carolina, and Kentucky retained it. Did they do it at your bidding? Did they do it at the dictation of the federal government? Did they do it in obedience to any of your Wilmot provisos or ordinances of '87? Not at all; they did it by virtue of their right as freemen under the Constitution of the United States, to establish and abolish such institutions as they thought their own good required. . .

I do not like, I never did like, the system of legislation on our part, by which a geographical line, in violation of the laws of nature, and climate, and soil, and the laws of God, should be run to establish institutions for a people; yet, out of a regard for the peace and quiet of the country, out of respect for past pledges, and out of a desire to adhere faithfully to all compromises, I sustained the Missouri compromise so long as it was in force, and advocated its extension to the Pacific. Now, when that has been abandoned, when it has been superseded, when a great principle of self-government has been substituted for it, I choose to cling to that principle, and abide in good faith, not only by the letter, but by the spirit of the last compromise. . .

Newspaper Editorials on the Kansas-Nebraska Act

The Evening Journal.

[A Whig newspaper from Albany, NY]

23 May 1854.

The crime is committed. The work of Monroe, and Madison, and Jefferson, is undone. The wall they erected to guard the domain of Liberty, is flung down by the hands of an American Congress, and Slavery crawls, like a slimy reptile over the ruins, to defile a second Eden.

They tell us that the North will not submit. We hope it will not. But we have seen this same North crouch lower and lower each year under the whip of the slave driver, until it is hard to tell what it will not submit to now. Who, seven years ago, would not have derided a prophecy that Congress could enact the kidnapping of free citizens, without judge or jury? Who would have believed that it could enact that white men have a right to hold black in slavery wherever it is their sovereign will and pleasure? And yet, who now will deny that that prophecy is more than realized?

It was fitting that the Law should be passed as it was. It was in accordance with its spirit that it should be conceived in treachery, sprung upon the House by a fraud, and forced through it by a Parliamentary lie. It was appropriate that one member should be bribed and another bullied, and another bought, until the ranks of Slavery were full. Had Law or Order or Honesty had aught to do with its passage, there would have been a strange incongruity between the means and the end.

We cannot read the future. We cannot predict what will be the consequences of this last and most fatal blow to Liberty. But we can see what the duty of Freemen is, and we mean it shall be through no fault of ours if it is left undone.

The Mississippian
[A Democratic journal from Jackson, Mississippi]

31 March 1854.

A paper before us, says, that Isaac Toucey, a Connecticut Senator, who advocated the bill, has been hung in effigy, by a portion of his constituents. On his heart was a broad label, bearing the words, "Toucey, the traitor." It further remarks, that for thus betraying the "cause of freedom and his constituents" he deserved a "still more stinging rebuke." A public meeting at Leesburg, Ohio, resolves that "such member of Congress who votes for, or in any way gives countenance to, the bill for the organization of the Nebraska Territory, as reported by Senator Douglas, of Illinois, is a traitor to his country, to freedom and to God, worthy only of everlasting infamy." A remonstrance against the bill, signed by more than three thousand Clergymen of New England, characterizes it as a "great moral wrong," a "breach of faith," -- a measure full of danger to the peace and even existence of the Union, and exposing us to the righteous judgment of the Almighty. A newspaper which is everywhere regarded as the most influential organ of those who oppose the bill [New York Tribune], asks, "If the slave power, aided by a few deserters from freedom, intend to deliberately crowd and plunder the North as they propose in this Nebraska bill, how long can this government go harmoniously on?" A meeting at Amsterdam, New York, Resolves, "That the territory of Nebraska and Kansas is the sworn heritage of freedom -- That it shall never be reduced to slavery. That if by the degradation and treachery of demagogues, whom the North has honored to her own shame, freedom may be wounded in the house of her friends, we shall hold it to be our solemn duty, God helping us, through whatever peril the path may lie, to aid in restoring to the North and to humanity, all the rights and immunities of which they shall have been, through such degradation and treachery, deprived."

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The contrast between the attitude of the opposers of the Nebraska Bill at the North, and its advocates at the South, is very striking, and affords much food for agreeable reflection to those who feel a just pride in the sound sense, and the calm, deliberate judgment which characterize the action of the people of the slave-holding States, upon questions of public interest.

Look to the North, and what do we realize? We are regaled by the coarse vituperation of the New York Tribune, and the insane ranting of [Maine Senator] Fessenden, (who was once appropriately toasted at a free negro festival as a "white brudder with a black heart,") the sickly cant of [Massachusetts Senator] Sumner, -- the detestable demagogism of [New York Senator] Seward, -- the horrid screeching of [abolitionist and feminist] Lucy Stone, and her unsexed compatriots, -- the sacrilegious imprecations of ministers who degrade the holy calling, and the disgraceful orgies of tumultuous assemblages of all ages, colors, and conditions, who make night hideous with their frantic howlings.

In the South, scarce a ripple seems to agitate the surface of society. All is calmness and equanimity. Here and there we read of resolutions adopted by Conventions of the people, or their legislature, but they are distinguished by no mark of intemperance and unnecessary excitement. We hear of no burnings in effigy, -- we witness no wild demonstrations; we listen to no furious declamation, -- we have no fanatical women roving over the country and bringing reproach upon the community in which they live, by mingling in affairs which pertain to the sterner sex, we have no preachers who convert the sacred desk into an arena of sectional strife, and whose blasphemies make the very angels weep.

<http://www1.assumption.edu/ahc/Kansas/>

Lincoln Letter to Joshua F. Speed

August 24, 1855

by Abraham Lincoln

[Lincoln's longtime friend, Joshua Speed, was a Kentuckian who was the son of an owner of a large plantation. He opposed the antislavery cause. They had worked together in Illinois during the 1830s and remained close, despite political differences. Speed did remain loyal to the Union and to Lincoln during the War, and assisted Union activities in Kentucky. In this famous letter (which is heavily excerpted), written during a period before Lincoln joined the Republican Party, Lincoln discusses many political topics related to slavery upon which they disagree, as well as (in the excerpted part) his strong views on nativism – views that he did not ever repeat so strongly in public. In the views of many historians Lincoln neither wished to alienate nativists who might eventually join into the coalition against expansion of slavery nor to offend immigrants who might also be interested in joining. (In fact, sizeable numbers of ex-nativists and Upper Mid-West Germans did join the Republican coalition.). Although Lincoln never publicly attacked the Nativists, he did work behind the scenes to undercut the influences of nativist policies within the Republican Party.]

Dear Speed:

. . . You inquire where I now stand. That is a disputed point — I think I am a Whig; but others say there are no Whigs, and that I am an abolitionist. When I was in Washington I voted for the Wilmot Proviso as good as forty times, and I never heard of anyone attempting to unwhig me for that. I now do no more than oppose the *extension* of slavery.

I am not a Know-Nothing. That is certain. How could I be? How can anyone who abhors the oppression of negroes, be in favor of degrading classes of white people? Our progress in degeneracy appears to me to be pretty rapid. As a nation, we began by declaring that "*all men are created equal.*" We now practically read it "all men are created equal, *except negroes.*" When the Know-Nothings get control, it will read "all men are created equal, except negroes, and *foreigners, and Catholics.*" When it comes to this I should prefer emigrating to some country where they make no pretense of loving liberty — to Russia, for instance, where despotism can be taken pure, and without the base alloy of hypocrisy.

Mary will probably pass a day or two in Louisville in October. My kindest regards to Mrs. Speed. On the leading subject of this letter [slavery], I have more of her sympathy than I have of yours. And yet let me say I am

Your friend forever

A. Lincoln

Lincoln Speech on the Repeal of the Missouri Compromise -- The Peoria Address

by Abraham Lincoln

October 16, 1854

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

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.

. . . . [W]e 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. . . .

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 . . . did come in with slavery, as the state of Arkansas. All these many years since 1820, the northern part had remained a wilderness. . . . 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. . . .

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 dealers” 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 two hundred millions of dollars. 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 two hundred million dollars 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.”

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 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, 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 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 afterwards made the Constitution under which we still live—these same men passed the ordinance of '87, declaring that slavery should never go to the north-west 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. . . .

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. . . .

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 states to 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 anything 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 grip 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.”

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 anything, 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. . . . In this state of case, the genius of discord himself, could scarcely have invented a way of again setting 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 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, 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 cannot 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 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 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 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 cannot 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 expose 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 north-western 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,” 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. . . .

Thus, we see, the plain unmistakable spirit of that age, towards 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 figurehead 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 cannot stand together. They are as opposite as God and mammon; and whoever holds to the one, must despise the other. When [Indiana Senator] 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 [South Carolina revolutionary leader] 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 [British spy] André, 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 seventy-six 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 re-adopt 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.

Excerpt from Thomas R. Whitney, *A Defence of the American Policy* (1856)

[This excerpt is from an 1856 tract authored by an American Party (“Know-Nothing”) congressman from New York, Thomas R. Whitney arguing the inherent incompatibility of the Roman Catholic religion with republican institutions.]

[W]e set out to show that Romanism is diametrically opposed to Republicanism. . . [T]he Romish Church, in its whole character and spirit, is hostile to the character and spirit of our free institutions. The simple fact that one is an absolute government, and the other a popular government, establishes the antipodal. These are the extremes of social organism, and when extremes meet, decomposition of one or the other must ensue, unless the repulsive power is sufficient in the one or the other to prevent an actual contact.

American Republicanism cultivates intelligence among the people. Romanism suppresses intelligence.

American Republicanism recognizes and secures to all men the right of trial by jury. Romanism adjudicates in the somber dungeon of the inquisition, or through the will of a single prelate, who may be at once the accuser, the judge, and the executioner.

American Republicanism ensures the freedom of the press, and the right of free speech. Romanism silences, or else muzzles the press and forbids discussion; it puts a bridle on the lips of its subjects, as we do on the lips of our state-prison convicts.

American Republicanism secures to its citizens the right of suffrage in the choice of their rulers, with the power to impeach and remove. Romanism chooses its executive officer or sovereign, by a vote of the college of cardinals; that sovereign holds his authority, which is absolute for life, and the cardinals are appointed by him. The people have no voice.

American Republicanism secures the full liberty of conscience to all its people, and to the stranger within its gates. Romanism pronounces liberty of conscience to be a wicked heresy.

American Republicanism permits every human creature to read and study the Word of God. Romanism forbids it. In a word, American Republicanism is FREEDOM; Romanism is slavery.

. . . “The hierarchy [of the Romish Church] in the United States, professes attachment to the government, and her children from the Emerald Isle (made desolate and repulsive through priestcraft), avail themselves of the liberty we give to them, and weave the harp of the oppressed, downtrodden Erin, in the folds of the unsullied ensign of American Liberty. What a mockery of their own vassalage! What a contrast! The relic of national degradation blended with the emblem of national glory and might!

. . . American Republicanism is the parent of progress; it encourages the development of human energy, and gives free play to the faculties. It expands the intellect, invigorates the soul, and elevates the standard of the individual man. It builds locomotives, erects manufactories, disembowels the earth, causing her to yield up her treasures to the uses of man. It encourages commerce and sends it smoking steamships to the far ends of the earth. It strikes out into the wilderness, talks with the savage without enslaving the soul, and develops the resources of the earth. Romanism gives to the red man a cross and a rosary; American Republicanism places in his hands a Bible and a hoe. It builds a schoolhouse for his children, and teaches him that sowing and reaping are more manly and more profitable than hunting and fishing.

. . . Where Romanism prevails, there is stagnation and public lethargy. Where American Republicanism prevails, there is industry, intelligence, energy, and public prosperity.

Thomas R. Whitney, *A Defence of the American Policy*, 1856, excerpted in John Gjerde, ed., *Major Problems in American Immigration & Ethnic History* (Houghton Mifflin, 1998), 144-146.

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