

THE REPUBLICAN PARTY VINDICATED—THE DEMANDS
OF THE SOUTH EXPLAINED.

Sen. Lib.
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SPEECH
OF
HON. ABRAHAM LINCOLN,
OF ILLINOIS,
AT THE
COOPER INSTITUTE, NEW YORK CITY,

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Mr. President and Fellow-Citizens of the City of New York: 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. [Applause.] I so adopt it, because it furnishes a precise and agreed starting-point for a discussion between Republicans and that wing of the Democracy 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."

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, Douglas holds the affirmative, and Republicans the negative. This affirmative and denial form an issue; and this issue, this question, is precisely what the text declares our fathers understood better than we. [Cheers.] 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 afterwards 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 three more of the "thirty-nine" who afterwards signed the Constitution were in that Congress, and voted