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

SPEECH
OF
HON. ABRAHAM LINCOLN,
OF ILLINOIS,
AT THE
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FEBRUARY 27, 1860.

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 presen-
tation. In his speech last autumn, at Colum-
bus, 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 start-
ing-point for a discussion between Republicans
and that wing of the Democracy headed by Sen-
ator Douglas. It simply leaves the inquiry, What
was the understanding these fathers had of the
question mentioned? What is the frame of gov-
ernment 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; and 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-
ine," 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 author-
ity, 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 nega-
tive. This affirmative and denial form an issue;
and this issue, 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 Con-
gress 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
two, James McHenry, voted against the prohibi-
tion—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 prohibi-
ting 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


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