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# Historic Speeches

## Abraham Lincoln

*This historic speech of ABRAHAM LINCOLN on slavery, delivered October 16th 1854, had become the famous speech that led him to becoming President of the United States.*

**ABRAHAM LINCOLN:** 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 the monstrous injustice of slavery itself. I hate it because it deprives our republican example of its 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...

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 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 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 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* he governed an equal voice in the government, and that, and that only, is self-government...

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.

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...

Fellow countrymen – American 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 a 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 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...