

Jan[uary] 15-18, 1851

Douglass, H. F.

[Proceedings] – Minutes of the State Convention of the
Colored Citizens of Ohio Convened at Columbus ...

Presscopy – Harvard University -- Anti-Slavery Pamphlets

Mr. Chairman—I am in favor of the adoption of the resolutions. I hold, sir, that the Constitution of the United States is pro-slavery, considered so by those who framed it, and construed to that end ever since its adoption. It is well known that in 1787, in the Convention that framed the Constitution, there was considerable discussion on the subject of slavery. South Carolina and Georgia refused to come into the Union, without the Convention would allow the continuation of the Slave Trade for twenty years. According to the demands of these two States, the Convention submitted to that guilty contract, and declared that the Slave Trade should not be prohibited prior to 1808. Here we see them engrafting into the Constitution, a clause legalizing and protecting one of the vilest systems of wrong ever invented by the cupidity and avarice of man. And by virtue of that agreement, our citizens went to the shores of Africa, and there seized upon the rude barbarian, as he strolled unconscious of impending danger, amid his native forests, as free as the winds that beat on his native shores. Here, we see them dragging these bleeding victims to the slave-ship by virtue of that instrument, compelling them to endure all the horrors of the “middle passage,” until they arrived at this asylum of western Liberty, where they were doomed to perpetual chains. Now, I hold, in view of this fact, no colored man can consistently vote under the United States Constitution. That instrument also provides for the return of fugitive slaves. And, sir, one of the greatest lights now adorning the galaxy of American Literature, declares that the “Fugitive Law” is in accordance with that stipulation;—a law unequalled in the worst days of Roman despotism, and unparalleled in the annals of heathen jurisprudence. You might search the pages of history in vain, to find a more striking exemplification of the compound of all villainies! It shrouds our country in blackness; every green spot in nature, is blighted and blasted by that withering Upas. Every monument of national greatness, erected to commemorate the virtuous and the good, whether its foundation rests upon the hallowed repositories that contain the ashes of the first martyrs in the cause of American Liberty, or lifts itself in solemn and majestic grandeur, from that sacred spot where the first great battle of the Revolution was fought, no matter how sacred the soil,

Mr. Chairman—I am in favor of the adoption of the resolutions. I hold, sir, that the Constitution of the United States is pro-slavery, considered so by those who framed it, and construed to that end ever since its adoption. It is well known that in 1787, in the Convention that framed the Constitution, there was considerable discussion on the subject of slavery. South Carolina and Georgia refused to come into the Union, without the Convention would allow the continuation of the Slave Trade for twenty years. According to the demands of these two States, the Convention submitted to that guilty contract, and declared that the Slave Trade should not be prohibited prior to 1808. Here we see them engrafting into the Constitution, a clause legalizing and protecting one of the vilest systems of wrong ever invented by the cupidity and avarice of man. And by virtue of that agreement, our citizens went to the shores of Africa, and there seized upon the rude barbarian, as he strolled unconscious of impending danger, amid his native forests, as free as the winds that beat on his native shores. Here, we see them dragging these bleeding victims to the slave-ship by virtue of that instrument, compelling them to endure all the horrors of the “middle passage,” until they arrived at this asylum of western Liberty, where they were doomed to perpetual chains. Now, I hold, in view of this fact, no colored man can consistently vote under the United States Constitution. That instrument also provides for the return of fugitive slaves. And, sir, one of the greatest lights now adorning the galaxy of American Literature, declares that the “Fugitive Law” is in accordance with that stipulation;—a law unequalled in the worst days of Roman despotism, and unparalleled in the annals of heathen jurisprudence. You might search the pages of history in vain, to find a more striking exemplification of the compound of all villainies! It shrouds our country in blackness; every green spot in nature, is blighted and blasted by that withering Upas. Every monument of national greatness, erected to commemorate the virtuous and the good, whether its foundation rests upon the hallowed repositories that contain the ashes of the first martyrs in the cause of American Liberty, or lifts itself in solemn and majestic grandeur, from that sacred spot where the first great battle of the Revolution was fought, no matter how sacred the soil,

whether fertilized by the blood of a Warren, or signalized by the brilliant and daring feats of Marion! We are all, according to Congressional enactments, involved in the horrible system of human bondage; compelled, sir, by virtue of that instrument, to assist in the black and disgraceful avocation of re-capturing the American Hungarian, in his hurried flight from that worse than Russian or Austrian despotism, however much he may be inspired with that love of liberty which burns eternal in every human heart. Sir every man is inspired with a love of liberty—a deep and abiding love of liberty. I care not where he may dwell—whether amid the snows of the polar regions, or weltering beneath an African sun, or clanking his iron fetters in this free Republic—I care not how degraded the man—that Promethian spark still lives, and burns, in secret and brilliant grandeur, upon his inmost soul, and the iron-rust of slavery and uninterrupted despotism, can never extinguish it. Did not the American Congress, professing to be a constitutional body, after nine months' arduous and patriotic legislation, as Webster would have it, strike down in our persons, the writ of *Habeas Corpus*, and *Trial by Jury*—those great bulwarks of human freedom, batpized by the blood, and sustained by the patriotic exertions of our English ancestors.

The gentleman from Franklin, (Mr. Jenkins), alluded to the Free Soil candidate for Governor. I will here state, that I had the pleasure, during the Gubernatorial campaign, to hear Mr. Smith make a speech in opposition to the "Fugitive Law," in which he remarked, that it was humiliating to him to acknowledge that our forefathers did make a guilty compromise with Slavery in order to form this Union; and so far as the validity of that agreement was concerned, he felt that it was not binding upon him as a man, and that he never would obey any law which conflicts with that higher law, that has its seat in the bosom of God, and utters its voice in the harmony of the world.

whether fertilized by the blood of a Warren, or signalized by the brilliant and daring feats of Marion! We are all, according to Congressional enactments, involved in the horrible system of human bondage; compelled, sir, by virtue of that instrument, to assist in the black and disgraceful avocation of re-capturing the American Hungarian, in his hurried flight from that worse than Russian or Austrian despotism, however much he may be inspired with that love of liberty which burns eternal in every human heart. Sir every man is inspired with a love of liberty—a deep and abiding love of liberty. I care not where he may dwell—whether amid the snows of the polar regions, or weltering beneath an African sun, or clanking his iron fetters in this free Republic—I care not how degraded the man—that Promethian spark still lives, and burns, in secret and brilliant grandeur, upon his inmost soul, and the iron-rust of slavery and uninterrupted despotism, can never extinguish it. Did not the American Congress, professing to be a constitutional body, after nine months' arduous and patriotic legislation, as Webster would have it, strike down in our persons, the writ of *Habeas Corpus*, and *Trial by Jury*—those great bulwarks of human freedom, batpized by the blood, and sustained by the patriotic exertions of our English ancestors.

The gentleman from Franklin, (Mr. Jenkins), alluded to the Free Soil candidate for Governor. I will here state, that I had the pleasure, during the Gubernatorial campaign, to hear Mr. Smith make a speech in opposition to the "Fugitive Law," in which he remarked, that it was humiliating to him to acknowledge that our forefathers did make a guilty compromise with Slavery in order to form this Union; and so far as the validity of that agreement was concerned, he felt that it was not binding upon him as a

man, and that he never would obey any law which conflicts with that higher law, that has its seat in the bosom of God, and utters its voice in the harmony of the world.