

Nov[ember] 13, 1856

Douglass, H. Ford

*Proceedings of the State Convention of the
Colored Citizens of the State of Illinois*

Presscopy – Harvard University, Cambridge – Rare Books & Manuscripts

“SIR,—The extreme ultraism of John C. Calhoun that had been crushed by the iron hand of Jackson, only to spring up again, ere his grave was green with the verdure of four summers, has been permitted to blossom and bring forth fruit under the administration of *Franklin Pierce*.

Judge Kane decided that a slaveholder had the same right to carry his slave with him into a Free State that he had to take his carpet-bag. The doctrine that Slavery goes wherever the Constitution goes is now openly maintained by Toombs and others in the South, and dough-faces innumerable in the North. This is the only consistent course for the man who admits the constitutional right of the slaveholder to make merchandize of men. If it permit slavery to exist in Missouri—the right of one man to enslave another; if it sanctions that infernal doctrine that had its birth amidst the darkest conceptions of atheism—that one man can own the blood, bones, and muscles of his fellow-man; traffic in the blood-bought image of Christ; shut out from their immortal souls the light of God’s glorious sun, then indeed is it a national institution, having rights in common with any other institution in the country, that the Constitution recognizes, to go wherever it goes.

But, sir, I do not assent to the doctrine. This is not a great slave empire—a barbarian people—third-rate civilization. To borrow the undying inspirations of another, like the Roman who looked back upon the glory of his ancestors, in great woe exclaiming,

“Great Scipio’s ghost complains that we are slow,
And Pompey’s shade walks unrevenged among us.”

The great dead of this Republic—the founders of our government—have left their testimony on record, in opposition to the doctrine of slavery’s constitutional legality. Mr. Sherman would not have the word slave in the Constitution. Mr. Madison thought it wrong to admit that man could hold property in man. It was the glowing effulgency of this heavenly light, that touched the lips of Brougham, who in after years, upon the floor of the House of Lords, gave utterance to that strain of mighty eloquence that still rings through the world like the trumpet voice of God; that so long as man shall hate fraud, loathe rapine, and abhor blood, he will reject with indignation

“Sir,—The extreme ultraism of John C. Calhoun that had been crushed by the iron hand of Jackson, only to spring up again, ere his grave was green with the verdure of four summers, has been permitted to blossom and bring forth fruit under the administration of *Franklin Pierce*.

Judge Kane decided that a slaveholder had the same right to carry his slave with him into a Free State that he had to take his carpet-bag. The doctrine that Slavery goes wherever the Constitution goes is now openly maintained by Toombs and others in the South, and dough-faces innumerable in the North. This is the only consistent course for the man who admits the constitutional right of the slaveholder to make merchandize of men. If it permit slavery to exist in Missouri—the right of one man to enslave another; if it sanctions that infernal doctrine that had its birth amidst the darkest conceptions of atheism—that one man can own the blood, bones and muscles of his fellow-man; traffic in the blood-bought image of Christ; shut out from their immortal souls the light of God’s glorious sun, then indeed is it a national institution, having rights in common with any other

institution in the country, that the Constitution recognizes, to go wherever it goes.

But, sir, I do not assent to the doctrine. This is not a great slave empire—a barbarian people—third-rate civilization. To borrow the undying inspirations of another, like the Roman who looked back upon the glory of his ancestors, in great woe exclaiming,

“Great Scipio’s ghost complains that we are slow,
And Pompey’s shade walks unrevenged among us.”

The great dead of this Republic—the founders of our government—have left their testimony on record, in opposition to the doctrine of slavery’s constitutional legality. Mr. Sherman would not have the word slave in the Constitution. Mr. Madison thought it wrong to admit that man could hold property in man. It was the glowing effulgency of this heavenly light, that touched the lips of Brougham, who in after years, upon the floor of the House of Lords, gave utterance to that strain of mighty eloquence that still rings through the world like the trumpet voice of God; that so long as man shall hate fraud, loathe rapine, and abhor blood, he will reject with indignation

the wild and guilty phantasy that man can hold property in man.

The doctrine now advanced by anti-Slavery men, that Freedom is national while Slavery is sectional, is in itself destructive and fatal to American liberty. There is an axiom, progressively grand, of deeper political wisdom and of a more enlarged democracy, that teaches that Freedom should prevail everywhere and Slavery nowhere. This, and this only, is true anti-Slavery. It is the saving hope of the Republic. Any other principle is political suicide. To advocate the sectional right of Slavery would be to break up the throne of God and spit in the face of the Deity.

The Republican movement was one of the wildest delusions that ever entered into the conceptions of men professing anti-Slavery. And I now address this solemn invocation to my Heavenly Father, that he will, in much mercy, forgive this erring son for the greatest sin of his life, that of making three speeches in favor of the Republican party. Men who had gloried in the name of abolition all their lives were swallowed up in the Republican maelstrom, and after its terrible baptism how changed. That great man, Frederick Douglass, while stumping for Mr. Fremont and the success of the Republican movement, could find it in his soul to defend that party from the charge of abolition. Why has the term become disagreeable to men who are themselves the strongest argument in favor of the correctness of the principle? Is a man to be despised because he hates Slavery? What is Slavery? What is Freedom? Gaze in upon unclouded glory of God's moral universe, and up to the eternal stars "amid whose field of azure my raised spirit now walks in glory," and then descend—down, down, and still down to the dark sulphurous caverns of Hell's mid-night—described by Milton's immortal genius; then again let me press the interrogation: What is Freedom? What is Slavery!

Oh! if I should go to Boston, in search of an abolitionist, I would not look for Wendell Phillips, that inflexible champion of the right. Oh! no, friends, I would look for another object; I would look over to that shaft pointing up from *Bunker's classic ground*, whose granite brow mid-way leaves the storm chanting forever in the music of the

the wild and guilty phantasy that man can hold property in man.
The doctrine now advanced by anti-Slavery men, that Freedom is national while Slavery is sectional, is in itself destructive and fatal to American liberty. There is an axiom, progressively grand, of deeper political wisdom and of a more enlarged democracy, that teaches that Freedom should prevail everywhere and Slavery nowhere. This, and this only, is true anti-Slavery. It is the saving hope of the Republic. Any other principle is political suicide. To advocate the sectional right of Slavery would be to break up the throne of God and spit in the face of the Deity.

The Republican movement was one of the wildest delusions that ever entered into the conceptions of men professing anti-Slavery. And I now address this solemn invocation to my Heavenly Father, that he will, in much mercy, forgive this erring son for the greatest sin of his life, that of making three speeches in favor of the Republican party. Men who had gloried in the name of abolition all their lives were swallowed up in the Republican maelstrom, and after its terrible baptism how changed. That great man, Frederick Douglass, while stumping for Mr. Fremont and the success of the Republican movement, could find it in his soul to defend that party from the charge of abolition. Why has the term become disagreeable to men who are themselves the strongest argument in favor of the correctness of the principle? Is a man to be despised because he hates Slavery? What is Slavery? What is Freedom? Gaze in upon unclouded glory of God's moral universe, and up to the eternal stars "amid whose field of azure my raised spirit now walks in glory," and then descend—down, down, and still down to the dark sulphurous caverns of Hell's mid-night—described by Milton's immortal genius; then again let me press the interrogation: What is Freedom? What is Slavery!

Oh! if I should go to Boston, in search of an abolitionist, I would not look for Wendell Phillips, that inflexible champion of the right. Oh! no, friends, I would look for another object; I would look over to that shaft pointing up from *Bunker's classic ground*, whose granite brow mid-way leaves the storm chanting forever in the music of the

winds the glorious anthems of the Revolutionary Freedom.

Why, sir, this grand old temple of the universe is nothing more nor less than an abolition meeting-house, vocal with the anti-Slavery eloquence of nature, pouring its resistless tide through every avenue of human activity.

One word to my colored friends and I have done. We want education and we want money. With these two potent instruments we have the “Archimedean lever” with which we may turn the wicked institution of this country up side down, and pour Slavery into the pit below, its only congenial abiding place. This is what we can do if we will only assert our manhood in the right way. One of old England’s philosophers said that “*Knowledge was Power.*” He had learned this from her history; he had read Britain’s story from the days when the beak-headed eagles of Rome, borne by the rapacious legions of Julius Caesar, first landed on her shores, till bursting off that bubble of proud Spain’s invasion, the “Spanish Armada,” ere the Castilian conqueror’s foot could press her “chalky shore.” He had seen the little green isle of Briton, a mere speck on the ocean, important only as a watering place upon the commercial highway of nations, spring up—through the silent and mysterious operations of the brain—to the first power in the world; her white-winged commerce cleaving every wave, her strains of martial music encircling the globe.

Let us profit from the teachings of history, until each one of us shall fully realize the truth of which Lord Bacon taught, that “*Knowledge is Power.*”

winds the glorious anthems of Revolutionary Freedom.
Why, sir, this grand old temple of the universe is nothing more nor less than an abolition meeting-house, vocal with the anti-Slavery eloquence of nature, pouring its resistless tide through every avenue of human activity.
One word to my colored friends and I have done. We want education and we want money. With these two potent instruments we have the “Archimedean lever” with which we may turn the wicked institution of this country up side down, and pour Slavery into the pit below, its only congenial abiding place. This is what we can do if we will only assert our manhood in the right way. One of old England’s philosophers said that “*Knowledge was Power.*” He had learned this from her history; he had read Britain’s story from the days when the beak-headed eagles of Rome, borne by the rapacious legions of Julius Caesar, first landed on her shores, till bursting off that bubble of proud Spain’s invasion, the “Spanish Armada,” ere the Castilian conqueror’s foot could press her “chalky shore.” He had seen the little green isle of Briton, a mere speck on the ocean, important only as a watering place upon the commercial highway of nations, spring up—through the silent and mysterious operations of the brain—to the first power in the world; her white-winged commerce cleaving every wave, her strains of martial music encircling the globe.
Let us profit from the teachings of history, until each one of us shall fully realize the truth of which Lord Bacon taught, that “*Knowledge is Power.*”