

LINCOLN LORE

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LINCOLN IN MICHIGAN

From the top of an Indian mound in Kalamazoo, Michigan, on the twenty-seventh of August, 1856, Abraham Lincoln delivered one of the most important speeches of his career. Early in the year he was mentioned as a candidate for the governorship of Illinois, and in June at the Republican Convention in Philadelphia he received 110 votes as a nominee for vice president of the United States. Hence it was no obscure speaker who addressed the 10,000 citizens of Michigan on behalf of the Fremont and Dayton ticket in 1856.

Just what induced Lincoln to accept an invitation to speak in Michigan is not known. On July 12 he wrote to a friend who had invited him to come to Iowa, "I am superstitious. I have scarcely known a party preceding an election to call in help from the neighboring states but that they lost the state." He said he would come, however, if the Democrats had called in "foreign" speakers. It is not known that he went to Iowa in this campaign. One might conclude from this communication that the presence of Lincoln in Michigan was due to the fact that the Buchanan forces of Michigan had called in "foreign" speakers. Later on Lincoln was invited to speak at a big Republican rally to be held on the Tippecanoe battleground in Indiana. This invitation was not accepted. There is no evidence that Lincoln left the state of Illinois during the campaign of 1856 except for the Michigan engagement.

Through the effort of the Lincoln-Joy Research the text of the address discovered in the Detroit Daily Advertiser has recently been made available to the public. It has immediately taken its place as a significant contribution to Lincoln's early reaction towards the extension of slavery in the territories and makes possible a trustworthy account of the political doctrine which he advocated during the Fremont campaign.

The main question Lincoln discussed at Kalamazoo as well as at other points during the campaign was the extension of slavery. He said, "The question is simply this; shall slavery be spread into the new territories, or not? This is the naked question." One or two paragraphs to suggest his approach to the subject follow:

"Have we no interest in the free territories of the United States—that they should be kept open for the homes of free white people? As our northern states are growing more and more in wealth and population, we are continually in want of an outlet, through which it may pass out to enrich our

country. In this we have an interest—a deep and abiding interest. There is another thing . . . the greatest interest of all. It is the doctrine, that the people are to be driven from the maxims of our free government, that despises the spirit which for 80 years has celebrated the anniversary of our national independence.

"We are a great empire. We are 80 years old. We stand at once the wonder and admiration of the whole world, and we must enquire what it is that has given us so much prosperity, and we shall understand that to give up that one thing, would be to give up all future prosperity. This cause is that every man can make himself. It has been said that such a race of prosperity has been run nowhere else. We find a people on the Northeast, who have a different government from ours, being ruled by a queen.

"Turning to the South, we see a people who, while they boast of being free, keep their fellow beings in bondage. Compare our free states with either, shall we say here that we have no interest in keeping that principle alive? Shall we say—'Let it be.' No—we have an interest in the maintenance of the principles of the government, and without this interest, it is worth nothing."

Lincoln himself was not aware that this Kalamazoo speech had been preserved as is evident from a biographical sketch prepared in the third person for Mr. Scripps in 1860 in which he said:

"In the canvass of 1856 Mr. Lincoln made over fifty speeches, no one of which, so far as he remembers, was put in print. One of them was made at Galena, but Mr. Lincoln has no recollection of any part of it being printed; nor does he remember whether in that speech he said anything about a Supreme Court decision. He may have spoken upon that subject, and some of the newspapers may have reported him as saying what is now ascribed to him; but he thinks he could not have expressed himself as represented."

It would have been of very great assistance to Lincoln had he been able to refer his political opponents of 1860 to the Michigan speech of 1856, as it is a vindication of his consistent political ideals in this campaign.

The following outline gives one some idea of the contents of the Lincoln speech at Kalamazoo, which must have been much like the fifty other political addresses he made for Fremont during the presidential campaign of 1856 in which he came very near being the vice presidential candidate instead of Dayton:

Introduction

Another presidential contest approaches.

Ascertain what we differ about.

View on slavery the sole question.

The Question—Shall slavery be spread into the new territories or not?

Argument

A. *Slavery Extension Views of Fremont and Buchanan.*

B. *We Have Always Deplored Slavery.*

Condemned Great Britain for not preventing it in our colonies.

Policy of Buchanan in countenancing slavery in territories same as Great Britain's.

C. *The Kansas Question.*

Douglas says Supreme Court should decide.

Northerners say people should decide.

Southerners say no power in the people.

D. *The Nebraska Party.*

Teach those opposed to slavery to look on it with complacency.

The Nebraska Bill has opened a door for the spread of slavery in the territories.

Fillmore denounces those who opened door but does not care if it is open.

E. *Appeal to Lovers of Freedom to Keep Territories Free.*

Representatives in Congress in proportion to population of free men.

Territories should be kept open for the homes of free white people.

Nation's prosperity due to equal opportunity for all men.

Territories should be kept open for settlement of free laborers.

F. *The Charge of Sectionalism.*

It is said Union will be dissolved if Fremont is elected.

If Fremont expects to be elected by northern votes, Buchanan expects to be elected by southern votes.

Fillmore most national man, no prospects of having a single vote north or south.

A majority will never dissolve the Union. Can a minority do it?

Conclusion

Appeal to Democrats.

The Democratic party prides itself as the friend of individual universal freedom.

Has not the Nebraska Bill forced your whole party to be turned away from your love of liberty?

Comes under the banner of the principle of equality.