

LINCOLN LORE

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THE COOPER INSTITUTE ADDRESS

The most important address which Abraham Lincoln made up to the time his first inaugural was delivered in New York City at Cooper Institute on February 27, 1860, just seventy-five years ago. Not only were his remarks the most logical and systematic presentation of the case against the extension of slavery which he had ever prepared, but the occasion itself contributed greatly to his advancement as the potential leader of the Republican Party.

His audience was composed of the intellectual and cultural leaders of the City of New York. The presiding officer at the meeting was William Cullen Bryant of whom Lincoln said it was worth a trip to New York to make his acquaintance. The press of the city was alert to the importance of what he had to say, and the four leading papers printed his address in full. His appearance in New York opened the way for a speaking itinerary in New England, which allowed the people to hear the man who had become known to them by reputation as the conqueror of Douglas.

Lincoln's pleasing manner and unique oratory won for him many followers and put him in the race for the presidency. A photograph taken in New York at the time the address was given was widely circulated and had much to do with introducing him to the people during the campaign which followed his nomination.

An attempt has been made to make a brief outline of the address at Cooper Institute in order that his argument may be followed easily:

OUTLINE

INTRODUCTION

a. Excerpt from Douglas speech furnishes text and starting point for discussion.

b. The text—"Our fathers, when they framed the Government under which we live, understood this question just as well, and even better, than we do now."

c. The inquiry—"What was the understanding those fathers had of the question mentioned?"

d. The fathers—The thirty-nine who signed the original instrument.

e. The question—"Does the proper division of local from federal authority, or anything in the Constitution, forbid our Federal Government to control as to slavery in our Federal territories?"

f. The issue—Douglas the affirmative and Republicans the negative.

ARGUMENT

1. Occasions when fathers acted on the issue:

a. 1784—Congress of Confederation: four fathers endorse measures.

b. 1787—Congress of Confederation: three fathers endorse measures.

c. 1789—First Congress under Constitution: sixteen fathers unanimous and George Washington also concurs.

d. 1789—Congress in Mississippi Territorial Act: three fathers endorse measure.

e. 1804—Congress in Louisiana Territorial Act: two fathers endorse measure.

f. 1820—Congress on Missouri question: two fathers express opinion.

2. Summary of the fathers' acts on the issue:

a. Twenty-three of thirty-nine acted on question which they "understood just as well and even better than we do now."

b. Sixteen not shown to have acted on issue. Left no record but no reason to imply they would have acted differently than contemporaries.

c. Twenty-one of twenty-three give positive evidence of attitude toward prohibition of slavery in federal territories.

d. Of the sixteen who left no direct record parallel questions show all but one of them to have shown same attitude towards prohibition of slavery.

3. Amendatory articles to Constitution considered:

a. Those who claim federal control of slavery in the territories is unconstitutional point to the amendments.

b. Supreme Court in Dred Scott case pointed to fifth amendment violating basic document.

c. Douglas and adherents point to tenth amendment as out of harmony with instrument.

d. Sixteen of the fathers acted on these amendments.

e. Presumptuous to affirm amendments inconsistent with the main body of instrument.

f. No man anywhere living in the century in which the Constitution was framed is on record as believing the Government was forbidden to control slavery in the territories.

4. Not bound to follow implicitly what fathers did:

a. Should not reject all progress and improvement.

b. If we supplant policy of fathers it must be shown by conclusive evidence and clear argument that their great authority cannot stand.

c. Anyone has a right to enforce his own position by truthful evi-

dence, but no right to mislead others as to the opinion of the fathers on a question they understood better than we do.

d. The fathers marked slavery as an evil not to be extended.

5. Reviews the South's charges against Republicanism:

a. Sectional—Denies the charge as presented and points to the right or wrong done to a section of the country as basic.

b. Revolutionary—Refutes the claim by showing allegiance to the old and tried policy of the fathers.

c. Agitators—Insists that those who are attempting to introduce innovations are the agitators.

d. Insurrectionists—Slave insurrections are no more common now than they were before Republican Party was organized. Slaves scarcely know there is a Republican party.

6. Reviews the aggressive attitude of the South:

a. Would break up the Republican Party but cannot destroy judgment and feeling by breaking up organizations that rally around it.

b. Would break up the Union unless allowed to construe and enforce Constitution as they please.

c. Constitutional right to take slaves into Federal territory as interpreted by Supreme Court.

d. Constitutional question of property in man decided by the fathers.

e. Would not abide the election of a Republican president but destroy the Union.

7. Admonishes Republicans:

a. Should make every effort towards peace and harmony in the country.

b. Do what is possible to satisfy southern people by leaving them alone.

8. The right and wrong of slavery:

a. The South would have us cease to call slavery wrong.

b. They would have us overthrow our Free State Constitutions which call slavery wrong.

c. They demand full national recognition that slavery is morally right.

d. In view of our moral, social, and political responsibilities, can we yield to their view?

e. Wrong as slavery is we can yet afford to let it alone where it is, but can we allow it to spread into territories and free states where our votes will prevent it?

CONCLUSION

"Let us have faith that right makes might, and in that faith, let us, to the end, dare to do our duty, as we understand it."