

**EDGERTON
JOSEPH
KETCHUM**

THE RELATIONS OF THE
FEDERAL GOVERNMENT
TO SLAVERY

Joseph Edgerton

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Government to Slavery**

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The Relations of the Federal Government to Slavery / J. Edgerton —
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The Relations of the Federal
Government to Slavery / Delivered at
Fort Wayne, Ind., October 30th 1860

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"The constitution which we now present is the result of a spirit of amity, and of that mutual deference and concession which the peculiarity of our political situation rendered indispensable."
George Washington, President of the Federal Convention of 1787 to the President of Congress.

PREFACE

The publication at this time of a speech of the Presidential Canvass of 1860, may seem uncalled for, and be imputed to other than the motives that influence me. I nevertheless submit it to the candid consideration of the public, and especially of such as having heretofore entertained wrong views on the chief question involved in the canvass of 1860 and the position of the lamented Douglas, may desire truthful information. The speech at the time of its delivery was intended as a vindication of that noble-hearted, but then much-abused and misrepresented patriot. The grave of Douglas now shields him from the shafts of partisan animosity. Even his enemies concede, that in his last and self-sacrificing efforts to unite the Democracy of the North in support of an insulted government and outraged constitution, he earned the meed due to eminent patriotism. A perusal of the following pages may, perhaps, convince some, before doubting, that Douglas was as wise a statesman and as true a patriot in November, 1860, as he was in May, 1861, when the people of Chicago with one accord united in a grand ovation to do him honor, not as a partisan leader, but as a pillar and hope of the Republic in its day of mortal peril. If what I have written shall induce but even a few candid men to think better of the departed Douglas, as a statesman and patriot, than they were wont to think, I will be more than rewarded for my own labor in his vindication. But I have other motives than this.

The time is not far distant, and I would gladly accelerate its advance, when the conservative sentiment of the nation will revive and have utterance, and demand the re-enthronement of the spirit of compromise and peace – the guardian genius of the unity of the nation. Men of extreme and violent opinions, both North and South, whose fanaticism, folly and ambition have brought our great American Republic to its present sad estate, must give way before the incoming tide of a just public opinion on the relations of the Federal government to slavery. The people of the United States have neither the heart nor the means for a protracted warfare with each other in regard to negro slavery. The war is mainly the result of misunderstandings and erroneous opinions in both the slaveholding and non-slaveholding sections of the Union, which dispassionate investigation will remove. When the deluded men of the South shall come to understand by abundant evidence, which the good sense and patriotism of true Union men will furnish, that the spirit of the war on the part of the loyal States is one springing not from hatred to the Southern people and their institutions, but from earnest love of the Federal Union, and a determination to defend and re-establish it in all the integrity of its principles, they will gladly return to their first love and welcome the protection of the banner which has ever been the symbol of the power and glory of the United American people. If, however, the war on the part of professedly loyal men shall be guided by any other feeling than love for the Union and a sacred regard for all the obligations of its Constitution, the preservation of the Union will be impossible. The non-slaveholding States may, perhaps, bind the seceded States to them by the stern power of military subjugation, as Poland is bound to Russia, or Hungary to Austria, but the subjugation of one section of the Republic by another will never unite their people in the fraternal bonds of a true Federal Union.

The traditions and historic glory that surround the Federal Government as our fathers formed it, are yet dear to the hearts of the whole American people. That government still belongs to them – it is their heritage, and they, I trust, will yet restore and preserve it. The horoscope of the future daily brightens with hopeful signs, not the least of which is the fact that the President of the United States, who was elected to his high office upon a declaration of political principles logically involving the extermination of slavery as existing in fifteen States of the Federal Union, and which could not therefore be carried out without making the Union "a divided house," has himself become the supporter of a constitutional and conservative policy in regard to slavery. Let us thank God and take courage. If the government will but stand firmly on constitutional ground, we will not despair of the Republic.

It is also due to truth to say that one object I have in the present publication is to disabuse the minds of some of my fellow-citizens, whose good opinion I value, who have been misled by false statements charging me with sympathy with the Southern rebellion. The opinions now published were the result of patient investigation, and are still held with earnest conviction, confirmed by the events of the past year. Of their justice and patriotism, and whether or not they are the opinions of a sympathizer with rebellion, candid men will judge.

The speech is published with a few verbal alterations, as it was delivered, for the reason that in that form its true spirit can best be understood. Due allowance will therefore be made for its style, which is that of a popular address.

JOSEPH K. EDGERTON

Fort Wayne, Ind., December, 1861.

SPEECH

Fellow-Citizens: – In early youth, almost in boyhood I may say, I attached myself to the Whig party. It was a conservative, rather than a progressive party, but it was one of noble principles and aims, and it had noble leaders, the greatest of whom now sleep in death. It was, and therefore I loved it, eminently a party for the Union and Constitution. It was a *national*, not a *sectional* party.

With the death of Webster and Clay, the Whig party, like a headless army, was broken and dispersed. Its victories and defeats are alike things of the past. Its history is written in the annals of the nation. The question of its patriotism is enrolled in the Capitol. Posterity will do it justice.

Bound by no party ties, I appear before you neither as a partisan nor a politician, but as an American citizen, to state freely my views upon the great political question that agitates our country and threatens its national existence, and to give you the reasons which constrain me to sustain Stephen A. Douglas and the National Democratic party, which he leads, in the presidential election near at hand, and I trust I will have your patient and candid attention.

The Federal government, under the existing Constitution of the United States, went into operation on the 4th of March, 1789, under the administration of George Washington as first President. It is seventy-one years since that event. During that period the number of the States has increased from thirteen to thirty-three, and another will soon be added to the number when Kansas, now waiting at the door of the Union with a republican and a free Constitution, shall come in "on an equal footing with the original States in all respects whatsoever."

When the Constitution was adopted, the area of the United States was 820,680 square miles. At the present time that area has been increased to 2,963,666 square miles, or, I may say 3,000,000 of square miles – a territory ten times as large as that of France and Great Britain combined, and equal in extent to the empire of the Romans, or of Alexander.

At equal pace with the expansion of our territory has moved on and spread out the tide of human life, bearing on its bosom the religious faith of the christian, and the laws and institutions of the Celtic and German races purified by christianity and the love of freedom.

At the first census in 1790, the population of the United States amounted to within a fraction of 4,000,000 of people. In 1860 it will reach, if not exceed 30,000,000, and it is no vain boast to say, that in no other nation of equal population, is there so much of individual freedom, or so large an aggregate of rational, substantial, human happiness.

Such are the fruits of over seventy years trial and experience of the Federal Union and Constitution, and the heart of every true American patriot swells with a just and noble pride as he contemplates them, and more than this, it swells with an earnest longing – an ardent desire – that prompts him as he looks into the future, to breathe to the Sovereign Ruler of the Universe, the prayer – "God save the Union and the Constitution!"

No American heart that honors God, and truly loves America and the human race, has ever yet dared to think, much less to say, of the Constitution of the United States, as William Lloyd Garrison has said, "*It is a covenant with death and an agreement with hell.*"

The United States embrace a territory not touching either extreme of torrid heat or arctic cold, but within those extremes – various in soil, in climate, in productions – a land we may say in the oriental style of Scripture language, "flowing with milk and honey," "a land of corn, and wine and oil," fitted by Providence for the home of races of differing constitutions, habits, capacities and pursuits; and practically we know, that within our borders we have alike the European, the Asiatic, the aboriginal American and the African races, with all their strongly marked constitutional peculiarities; but our system of State and Federal Government can give to each race the measure of power and protection due to each.

The admirer of natural scenery, who from some commanding point of view, surveys an expanse of mountain and valley, and plain and lake and river, clothed in the summer sunlight, does not pause and check his pleasing and elevated emotions, to note with cynical eye, each stagnant pool, or noxious weed, or unsightly decaying tree that may lie within the limits of the noble vision. He rather admires the harmony and beauty of the whole, though he may know that there are within the scene before him imperfect, unbeautiful and unwholesome things. Such is the feeling of the patriot of well-balanced mind, when he contemplates the Union and the Constitution as they are. While he knows the imperfection of all work of human hands, he accepts and admires in the political work of our fathers, the grandeur and symmetry of the whole, and will not condemn or destroy it because it is not in all its parts a perfect work.

But such is not the feeling of every American mind. There are men assuming to be philosophical and practical statesmen – men who rank with a great political party as their representative men, who in all their views and studies of the American Union, see only or chief of all, "*the mean and miserable rivulet of black African slavery, stealing along turbid and muddy, as it is drawn from its stagnant sources in the Slave States.*" I quote the language of William H. Seward, in his speech at Chicago on Oct. 2d, 1860.

This Republican statesman, familiar with the pages of history, which teaches him that the rivulet of domestic servitude has run among the nations almost coeval with the stream of time; familiar by personal observation with the aspect and condition of the civilization of Europe, where constitutional freedom is almost unknown; familiar also with the history, the institutions and the society of every portion of the American Union, and with the blessings which that Union, above all other systems of government the world has ever known, confers upon its people; sees all the glories of the Union dimmed, all its harmony destroyed, all its substantial benefits turned like Dead sea fruit to ashes and bitterness, when he beholds "the mean and miserable rivulet of black African slavery, stealing along turbid and muddy from its stagnant sources in the Slave States."

With this *one idea* ruling his mind, Mr. Seward labors in the Senate and before the people with all the learning and ability he possesses to rouse one half of the nation against the other to dam up, dry up or blot out "this mean and miserable rivulet." From Boston to Kansas, like another Peter the Hermit, he preaches a crusade against the institutions and people of the Southern States. He proclaims an irrepressible conflict between free labor and slave labor, between Free States and Slave States, between white suffrage and equality and black suffrage and equality, and he utters as he goes the atrocious sentiment, not of the statesman, but of the demagogue, "*Henceforth I put my trust not in my native countrymen, but I put it in the exile from foreign lands.*" I, the oracle of the Republican party, in effect says Mr. Seward, will not trust as the conservators of the American principle of freedom and the American system of free government, the sons of the men who fought the battles of American Independence, but I and they will trust the exiles from foreign lands – from Europe, from Asia and from Africa, to establish here upon the battle fields, rich with the blood of our fathers, the principles of universal suffrage and universal equality.

Mr. Seward hangs out the signal of uncompromising conflict. This, in effect, if not in words, says he, is the Holy Land of freedom and universal equality. Infidels and barbarians possess it in all its Southern borders, and hold there black christians their coequals in all the rights of men in an inhuman bondage. Let us then by the aid of the exiles from foreign lands overcome the infidels and barbarians, and plant in all that fair domain the standard of the higher law, of universal suffrage and universal equality; and forthwith all through the North, Republican *Wide-Awakes* muster their forces for this great political crusade. I am drawing no fancy picture. What I say is but a legitimate comment upon the language of Mr. Seward in his Chicago speech, already referred to, and in other speeches he has made during his recent pilgrimage through the North-west. Mr. Seward is the self-constituted exponent of the *higher law* in its application to political parties and measures, and to Constitutions and systems of government, but in his pursuit of one idea, he seems to forget that the sacred volume

to which we all look as the source of our best and truest knowledge of the will and purposes of Providence concerning man, if it clearly reveals to us any thing, clearly reveals this fact, which all human history confirms: that man is not a perfect being; that this earth is not a perfect state; that disorder, and imperfection, and inequality, and change must ever pervade it, and mark all human institutions. This earth and its mortal life is but the threshold – the vestibule of human destiny – that reaches far into the eternal ages. Believe, as he may, in human equality or in the perfectibility of humanity, no such theory has ever yet been realized, nor will it ever be realized in this probationary state of man. Philosophy may teach – political constitutions may declare, and political parties may attempt to enforce as a practical truth, that all men are equal. No such theory will ever find a perfect realization in any system of human government.

In his speech at Chicago, before referred to, Mr. Seward vauntingly asserts, as the idea or creed of the Republican party, as if to that party alone were committed the oracles of freedom – "That civilization is to be maintained and carried on upon this continent by Federal States, based upon the principles of free soil, free labor, free speech, equal rights and universal suffrage." I pause but a moment here to note the pregnant meaning of this authoritative declaration of the representative man of the Northern sectional party. It means no less than that there shall be no Federal States on this continent where free soil, free labor, free speech, equal rights and universal suffrage shall not prevail. In other words it means that domestic servitude as now known in the Southern States of the American Union, *shall be abolished*, and that there shall be equal rights and universal suffrage among all the races who may inhabit the American continent. Herein is the end or ultimate goal of the higher law of Mr. Seward, and its coadjutor, "the irrepressible conflict."

Conceding that all these ends shall have been attained and African slavery forever blotted out, still will the doctrine of human equality, which lies at the base of the whole abolition movement in this country, be as far from its perfect realization as now, for the reason that it is not the will of Providence that such a doctrine can ever support a permanent system of human society; and yet, because of its supposed conflict with this utopian theory of equality, it is, that the Federal Constitution, which has been called by George Washington "the palladium of American liberty," has been pronounced by the radical apostle of abolition, "a covenant with death and an agreement with hell."

In pursuit of this delusive theory of equality and universal suffrage, the masses of the Republican party, who would deem it an insult to be charged with entertaining the traitorous sentiments of Garrison, are inaugurating and sustaining a political movement, the inevitable result of which will be to destroy the Union and Constitution as they are. That the abolition of slavery is the necessary logical result and end of the political doctrines of Mr. Seward, no man who understands the force of language can deny, and until it shall have been fully explained how this end is to be attained consistently with the peace, the safety and constitutional rights of the slaveholding States, and how we are to deal with the millions of the African race, who by the establishment of free labor, free speech, free soil, equal rights and universal suffrage, are to become the peers of their masters and of each and every one of us, I shall fail to believe that the abolition of slavery by any Federal action can coexist with the American Union under its present Federal Constitution.

I shall not pause now to speak in detail as to what are to be the fruits of the irrepressible conflict, nor shall I stop to inquire as to the purity or sincerity of the motives of Mr. Seward and his compeers in their crusade. When the christian crusaders of the middle ages precipitated the hosts of Europe upon Asia, the weary, wayworn soldiers of those countless hosts, as they traversed the burning sands of Syria, doubtless thought they were doing God service – their cause in their minds, was the cause of christianity and of humanity, and as Godfrey of Bouillon set the standard of the cross upon the walls of Jerusalem, recovered from the power of the infidel Moslem, he was ready like Mr. Seward, when he contemplates the results of the repeal of the Missouri compromise in the victories of the Republican party, to take up and exult in the song of Miriam, the prophetess. But as history proves in the case of the old crusades, so will it prove in the case of the crusade of abolition, that any

premature attempt by material or political armaments to forestall and hurry on the great purposes and movements of Providence, cannot succeed. History tells us the result of the crusades.

"Every road leading to Palestine was drenched with blood, and along its dreary track lay scattered at no distant intervals the skeletons and the wrecks of nations. After four years of toil and misery and victory, Jerusalem was conquered by the crusaders; but as their conquests were not the work of wisdom and prudence, but the fruit of a blind enthusiasm and an ill-directed heroism, they laid the foundation of no permanent settlements, and in fact soon melted away like frost-work in the sun."

For seven hundred years since the crusades to free the christian people of Asia from Moslem rule, that rule has been maintained in all its despotic power.

When will men learn by severe experience that political and religions ideas have conquered more in defence than in offence and aggression, and that reason is the true leader of ideas, and the paths of peace their certain way to victory?

In this one idea then of "black African slavery," as Mr. Seward calls it, we have reached the central fact, or as Abraham Lincoln would say, "*the particular spot*" upon which sectional parties are staking the destiny of the American Union. All other political questions have sunk to insignificance when compared with this. It would seem as if reckless men were determined that from "this mean and miserable rivulet," are to go out the poisonous waters that shall blast the fair face of this promised land of freedom.

"Slavery agitation, in my opinion," says Abraham Lincoln, "will not cease until a crisis has been reached and passed. 'A house divided against itself cannot stand.'" We are now in the midst of that crisis. It is the pendency of that crisis which has prompted me to address you to-night. For the first time in the history of the government, we have the spectacle of purely sectional parties struggling for the control of the Federal government, each determined to warp and bend to its own sectional end, the Constitution and power of the Federal Union. Never before could patriotic citizens so earnestly lay to heart the counsel of Washington to avoid the formation of sectional parties.

On the 17th of September, 1796, exactly nine years after he, as President of the Convention and Deputy from Virginia, had signed his name to the Federal Constitution, Washington thus addressed his fellow-citizens:

"The unity of government which constitutes you one people is now dear to you. It is justly so; for it is a main pillar in the edifice of your real independence, the support of your tranquillity at home, your peace abroad, of your safety, of your prosperity, of that very liberty which you so highly prize. But as it is easy to foresee that from different causes and from different quarters, much pains will be taken, many artifices employed to weaken in your minds the conviction of this truth – as this is the point in your political fortress against which the batteries of internal and external enemies will be most constantly and actively (though often covertly and insidiously), directed, it is of infinite moment that you should properly estimate the immense value of your National Union to your collective and individual happiness; that you should cherish a cordial, habitual, and immovable attachment to it, – accustoming yourselves to think and speak of it as of the palladium of your political safety and prosperity; watching for its preservation with jealous anxiety; discountenancing whatever may suggest even a suspicion that it can in any event be abandoned; and indignantly frowning upon the first dawning of every attempt to alienate any portion of our country from the rest, or to enfeeble the sacred ties which now link together the various parts."

Fellow-Citizens, the portentous evil which Washington thus deprecated in his Farewell Address to the people of the United States is now upon us. I repeat we are in the midst of the crisis of sectional parties. How shall it be passed, so that the Union shall not fall?

It seems to me that no man who knows our history, who understands truly the genius of our people, and who understands also the principles upon which the Union and the Constitution are based, can fail to believe that it is not by the conflict of sectional parties and their triumph, but by the

defeat of sectional parties by a stronger and more patriotic national party, that the divided house can be reconciled and the house itself made to stand in safety. The safety of the Union depends upon maintaining the Federal government in the hands of a national party, which shall carry out the spirit of the Federal Constitution. A solemn responsibility rests upon every citizen in this regard.

I propose then to inquire —

1st – What is the true spirit of the Constitution, and what the true policy of the Federal government on the subject of slavery? and,

2d – How do the parties and the candidates now before the people stand in regard to it?

I wish distinctly to say that I do not propose to consider the question of slavery in its moral or religious aspects, but as a political question under the Federal Constitution.

As to my personal opinion in regard to slavery, I am free to say I consider it an evil, which I hope will be eradicated from the earth, but I do not regard it as the greatest of evils, nor do I consider that it requires political action from the Federal government. On the contrary, I believe that while the question of slavery might be safely agitated, with a view to political action, in a consolidated or imperial government, or even in an American Federal State, it cannot under our Federal system of government be safely or rightly agitated as a national question. Its agitation as such has done more to alienate and embitter the two sections of our Union – more to rouse the spirit of slavery aggression and extension, and to tighten the bonds and increase the burdens of the slave, than it has done to effect emancipation. Slavery is an evil permitted by Providence for ends that time will reveal. From this form of social evil, he is still educing good, far more good to the slaves, as a class, than to the masters as a class. It must not be suddenly nor rashly dealt with. Like a disease that pervades the blood or the whole constitution of a man, it needs not, for it cannot be reached by, the exterminating knife or cautery of the surgeon; it requires the gradual, purifying and alterative influences of gentle medicines, that work their way almost imperceptibly to the very principle and seat of the malady.

For my part, while I yield to no man in my love of liberty and the rights of man, I frankly say I had rather that the "rivulet of African slavery" flow on for five hundred years to come, than to see around me the fragments of a dissevered Union. In that Union, and the silent steady workings of its glorious principles, more than in the conflict of antagonist and angry parties, rest the hopes, not alone of African emancipation, but of unborn nations.

The American Union grew out of the exigencies of the times. A common cause and a common danger united the colonies first in resistance to the aggressions and exactions of the British government, and finally in the overthrow of its power over them. With the declaration of their independence, came the conviction of the necessity of their permanent Union, and this conviction after much of doubt and debate, resulted in the adoption of the Articles of Confederation by the final ratification of Maryland, on 1st March, 1781, which continued in force until the present Constitution went into operation.

So long as the States were engaged in the war of the Revolution, although the confederation was found to be in many things weak and imperfect, amid the dangers and anxieties of those years of trial its defects were overlooked or supplied by the earnest patriotism of our fathers, and it accomplished its end in the triumph of independence. But it was not long after the peace of 1783, when the Congress came to carry on the Federal government with reference to the ends of peace and the commercial policy and general prosperity of the United States, that it was found that the Articles of Confederation could no longer answer as the Constitution of the United States. A leading writer of that day in addressing the public upon the subject, after enumerating many of the defects of the Confederation with reference to the powers of the Congress, summed up the whole in these brief words, "In short, they may declare everything but do nothing."

Judge Story remarks in speaking of this period of our history – "That the confederation had at least totally failed as an effectual instrument of government. It stood the shadow of a mighty name."

Judge Marshall on the same subject says – "The confederation was apparently expiring from mere debility."

Judge Story further says – "*It is, indeed, difficult to over-charge any picture of the gloom and apprehension which pervaded the public councils, as well as the private meditations of the ablest men of the country.*"

It was under such circumstances that the convention for forming the present Constitution of the Union was called.

Into this convention were brought by the delegates of the States, the same unceasing jealousy and watchfulness, which had marked the formation of the confederation, in respect to the powers to be confided to the general government.

In the Articles of Confederation it had been declared "that each State retained its sovereignty, freedom and independence, and every power, jurisdiction and right not expressly delegated to the United States."

The States were generally unwilling to surrender anything of their internal sovereignty. They claimed then as they claim now, full right and power to regulate their own domestic institutions in their own way, and were willing to surrender to the general government only such powers as were necessary to the complete efficiency of a Federal government in attaining the purposes of the Union. These were in the language of Alexander Hamilton:

"The common defence of the members; the preservation of the public peace as well against internal convulsions as external attacks; the regulation of commerce with other nations and between the States; the superintendence of our intercourse, political and commercial, with foreign countries."

The difficulty of obtaining a ratification of the Constitution by the people of the States, was not less than the difficulty of framing it in convention. Georgia, New Jersey and Delaware unanimously approved the Constitution. It was supported by large majorities in Pennsylvania, Connecticut, Maryland and South Carolina. It was carried in Massachusetts, New York and Virginia only by a small majority. North Carolina and Rhode Island were the last to adopt it, and the former at first rejected it.

In the address of the convention to Congress on presenting the Constitution with the recommendation for its submission to and approval by the States, the convention say: "The Constitution which we now present, *is the result of a spirit of amity, and of that mutual deference and concession* which the peculiarity of our political situation rendered indispensable." In these few words of the framers of the Constitution, expressing its reason or spirit, we find the true guide to its interpretation and administration. The spirit of compromise, so far as relates to the clashing views or conflicting interests of different States or sections of the Union, pervades the Constitution in every part, and especially is this the case in reference to the now all-absorbing question of negro slavery.

What was the state of this institution at the adoption of the Constitution, and how did the Constitution deal with it?

The first introduction of African slaves into the American colonies was in 1620. The total number imported by means of the African slave trade between 1715 and 1790, was about 300,000. When the Constitution was ratified in 1790, the total number of slaves in all the States and territories was near 700,000. All the States ratifying the Constitution, except Massachusetts, held slaves; Virginia the largest number – over 293,000; New Hampshire the smallest number – 158. Even the granite hills of New Hampshire were not then free from the feet of bondmen.

Our fathers were not responsible for the existence of slavery in their midst. As already stated, the introduction of slaves had commenced in 1620, 156 years before the declaration of independence, and the institution had under the patronage of the British government, insidiously grown up and strengthened itself, especially in the Southern States, which were adapted to negro labor. There it had interwoven itself with the entire fabric of the social and domestic relations, and could not be suddenly or rashly severed without involving greater evils than its own existence.

It is undoubtedly true that a large number of the framers of the Constitution were themselves slaveholders, among them George Washington himself. With these men domestic slavery, though it might have been regarded as an evil, was certainly not looked upon as a mortal sin, nor were they, whatever might have been their theoretical opinions, practical believers in the doctrine of universal equality of rights or universal suffrage.

Here then, coeval with the organization of the Federal government, was the domestic institution of slavery, existing in all the States but one, and embracing over one sixth of their entire population. There were two very plain methods by which it might have been dealt with. One was by an express declaration of the Constitution, affirming as the Republican sectional party affirm, that slavery is a relic of barbarism, and therefore slavery shall be abolished in all the States and territories of the American Union. Another method was to have declared in the Constitution, as ultra men of the South now declare, that slavery is a benign institution, deserving of protection, encouragement and extension by the Federal government, and therefore slavery shall be protected and extended in all the States and territories of the American Union. Had the constitutional convention been a sectional and not a national organization; had its members been governed by a sectional and not a national spirit, they would doubtless have taken one or the other of the horns of this dilemma, but in that "*spirit of amity, mutual deference and concession,*" which governed their lofty patriotism, they took neither of the extremes. They took the position that the institution of domestic slavery was of local origin and of local concern – a matter directly pertaining to the internal sovereignty of each State; that it was not a legitimate subject for national or Federal legislation, and so far as related to its extension or its abolition within the States, they left it where they found it, with the people of the States whom it most concerned, the Congress assuming only the right, after the period of twenty years, to prohibit the importations of slaves from beyond the limits of the United States. The political reason of this prohibition is apparent. Without it the principle of non-intervention with slavery by the Federal government which pervades the Constitution, could not have been carried out. So long as the foreign traffic in slaves was made lawful to any of the States, slavery was nationalized. American slave ships, engaged in a lawful commerce, and bearing the national flag, would be as much entitled to national protection as any other of the American mercantile marine. Permission of the African slave trade was essentially intervention in favor of slavery, and the right to prohibit it, and the exercise of that right, in no wise conflict with the principle of non-interference with it within the States.

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