

S P E E C H

OF

PRESIDENT ^{James} BUCHANAN, 1774-1868

ON

THE EVENING OF MONDAY, JULY 9, 1860.

WASHINGTON CITY:

ISSUED BY THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE.

1860.

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THE BRITISH AND FOREIGN DOCUMENTS

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GREAT NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC DEMONSTRATION.

THE PEOPLE BY THOUSANDS RATIFYING THE NOMINATIONS OF BRECKINRIDGE AND LANE.

THE CONSTITUTION AND THE UNION UPHELD.

GRAND AND ENTHUSIASTIC RALLY!

SPEECH OF PRESIDENT BUCHANAN.

ON the evening of Monday, July 9, 1860, by far the largest, most imposing, and enthusiastic political demonstration that has been made by any party in Washington City, or perhaps in the country, during the present campaign, was made in the large square in front and around the City Hall of Washington. The people were out by thousands upon thousands, and from the steps of the Mall to the distant sidewalks opposite, as well as up and down the street, the whole space was filled by an enthusiastic, eager, and determined multitude, anxious to show their devotion to the national cause. The capital, with its congregated masses from all the States, sends greeting to the country.

So far as the means of estimating the numbers of the crowd, without being upon the platform, enable us to judge, we have no hesitation in saying that TEN THOUSAND people were gathered in the space devoted to the meeting. The outskirts of the multitude were not within hearing distance of the orators!

It was a glorious rally of the democracy!

If the temper of the people elsewhere resemble that displayed on that night, our noble candidates, Messrs. BRECKINRIDGE and LANE will be elected by the popular vote!

This meeting was especially significant in many aspects, well deserving the thoughtful attention of the country. It was presided over by the Mayor of the Metropolis; its various officers were of the most respectable and leading citizens, chosen from every profession and pursuit of life. In fact, the people of the District of Columbia have rendered the verdict of the "jury of the vicinage."

Early in the evening a considerable assemblage gathered around the speakers' stand, which was tastefully decorated with a full-length portrait of the National Democratic

nominees on each side, and the American flag floating above. In the rear of the stand, in an elevated position and in conspicuous letters, the following inscription was visible:

"THE CONSTITUTION AND THE EQUALITY OF STATES—THESE ARE THE SYMBOLS OF EVERLASTING UNION. LET THESE BE THE RALLYING CRIES OF THE PEOPLE."—BRECKINRIDGE.

Underneath was—"The Sentiment of Our Candidate: the Motto of Our Party!"

Below the stand was—"Equal Protection to the Citizens of the States."

Shortly after 8 o'clock the Fifth and Sixth Ward delegations, forming a long procession, with music, banners, and fireworks, approached, and deposited their banners in front of the stand. Among the sentiments inscribed upon the banners were the following:

"Union and State rights—Breckinridge and Lane."

"The gallant young orator of Kentucky—the young men of the country are for him."

"Joe Lane. An honest man's the noblest work of God. The true democracy delight to honor him."

"Non-intervention by Congress or Territorial Legislatures."

"Democracy is good for all,
And 'Old Abe' must have a dose next Fall."

"The Union—we love it for the memories of the past; we cling to it for the blessings of the present."

Soon after the speaking commenced, the First and Second Ward delegations, with the delegation from Georgetown, with a long line of transparent banners, and preceded by music, joined the assembled multitude, and were received with enthusiastic cheers. The foremost transparency in this procession bore the couplet:

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"Let millions join the loud refrain—
Hurrah for Breckinridge and Lane!"

And other mottoes were—

"No rail party or Union splitters!"

"Cuba must be ours!"

"Iron bands shall soon unite the Atlantic and Pacific!"

"General Joe Lane, the Marion of the Mexican war."

"Joe Lane was fighting the battles of his country in Mexico when Abe Lincoln was voting against supplies for the soldiers!"

The following we take at random, without undertaking to select the best, and we have not space for all:

"General Joseph Lane raised the siege at Puebla!"

"General Lane, the Marion of the Army!"

"Breckinridge, the Man of Destiny!"

"State Sovereignty, Honesty, Fair Dealing, Good Money, and Low Taxes!"

At 8:30 P. M., Mr. William Flinn called the meeting to order, and nominated the Hon. James G. Berrit, Mayor of Washington, as presiding officer, who was enthusiastically elected to that position. On taking the chair, Col. Berrit made a few appropriate remarks, returning thanks to the assembled multitude for this mark of their confidence.

The organization was then completed by the choice of the following gentlemen:

Vice Presidents—William T. Dove, Jonah D. Hoover, William W. Corcoran, John M. Brodhead, W. B. B. Cross, W. D. Davidge, J. C. McGuire, Hugh Caperton, Dr. B. Bohrer, Alexander Provost, R. W. Carter, W. H. Thomas, T. J. Fisher, Esau Pickrell, Jno. F. Coyle, C. W. C. Dunnington, Dr. C. Boyle, T. Hutchinson, Dr. A. W. Miller, Z. D. Gilman, F. McNerhany, C. S. Wallach, Wm. Brown, Dr. F. B. Culver, S. Pumphrey, B. B. Curran, William E. Spalding, Reuben Cleary, Joseph Hamlin, G. E. Jillard, John Pettibone, J. W. Drane, G. A. Bohrer, G. E. Kirk, and Andrew Coyle.

Secretaries—J. E. Kendall, E. B. Robinson, Thos. W. Berry, Wm. J. Donohoo, James Espey, L. F. Clarke, J. M. Stake, J. D. O'Donnell, W. G. Hunt, James Maguire, and Frank Reilly.

Walter Lenox, Esq., submitted the following resolutions, which were unanimously adopted:

Resolved by the Democratic citizens of the District of Columbia, That they view with deep anxiety the present distracted condition of the country; that they esteem it to be the duty of every citizen, North and South, to sacrifice his party and personal prejudices, and to unite in one common earnest effort to suppress domestic strife, and to

restore to our beloved land the blessings of peace and tranquillity.

Resolved, That the principles of the National Democratic party, agreed to at the National Democratic Convention which assembled at the Maryland Institute, Baltimore, have our most hearty and cordial concurrence.

Resolved, That we reprobate and condemn the intolerant and anti-democratic action taken by the Convention at the Front Street Theatre, Baltimore, in excluding the regularly elected delegates from several of the sovereign States of this Union; that we deem such action revolutionary and disorganizing in its character, and as justly deserving the condemnation of the American democracy.

Resolved, That we render our special thanks to the members of the Convention for presenting the names of John C. Breckinridge, of Kentucky, and Joseph Lane, of Oregon, for the offices of President and Vice-President—citizens worthy not only of their party, but of their country. Ripe in council, earnest in action, disciplined in the school of life by its stern realities, clear in their robes of office, they stand forth proud exemplars of the nobility of American citizenship. In their lives and characters we have the highest guarantees that under their guidance the honor of the country would be maintained abroad, its prosperity and peace upheld at home.

Resolved, That we sternly condemn the doctrines and purposes of the political party known as the Black Republican. We regard them as subversive of the Constitution, the rights of the slaveholding States, and this District. Of necessity, they foment strife between the North and the South, interrupt the peaceful flow of their business intercourse, and if persisted in, directly or indirectly, must endanger the perpetuity of the Union, bringing not only dishonor upon the American name, but untold calamities upon our country. To repel such a foe from the citadel of the "Constitution," to preserve the "Union" of our Fathers, and, as we trust, of our children's children, let us all, citizens by birth or adoption, stand pledged heart with heart, hand in hand.

Resolved, That, both as fellow-democrats and as citizens and neighbors, it is a most pleasing and grateful duty to express our high estimation of the ability and integrity with which our Government has been administered by our venerable and experienced President, JAMES BUCHANAN. We approve the policy of his administration, and we believe that his maligners and traducers will only be saved from oblivion, if saved at all, by the record of their infamous assaults on his personal character and public administration.

The meeting was then addressed by James M. Carlisle, Esq., a distinguished member of the Washington bar, the Hon. A. B. Meek, of Mobile, Ala., Hon. Isaac I. Stevens, of Washington Territory, Hon. A. G. Brown, and Hon. Jefferson Davis, U. S. Senators from Mississippi, and the Hon. Thomas B. Florence, of Pennsylvania.

Numerous letters were received from distinguished gentlemen, regretting their inability to attend. Amongst them one from a distinguished Statesman of the Empire State, as follows:—

“BINGHAMTON, July 6, 1860.

“MY DEAR SIR: I am duly honored by your favor of the 3d, inviting me to attend and address a democratic meeting at Washington on the 9th, called to ratify the nominations of Breckinridge and Lane by the National Democratic Convention at Baltimore. I thank you for your courteous invitation, and regret that circumstances prevent its acceptance, for I have some things to say to the whole people of this Union, and I would prefer to say them at the national capital. But I am engaged; if I can leave home, to speak in New York city on the 10th, and cannot consistently visit both places now.

I shall support the nomination of Breckinridge and Lane not only because I regard them as personally and politically worthy, but because their nomination emanates from States which can give democratic votes in the electoral college, and because they are, therefore, representatives of democracy and its principles.

“Sincerely yours,
“D. S. DICKINSON.”

HON. ISAAC I. STEVENS, Chairman Committee, &c.

The vast assemblage then gave three enthusiastic cheers for the nominees, and adjourned to the Executive Mansion to pay their respects to the Chief Magistrate of the nation. On arriving there, the band performed some spirit-stirring airs when the President appeared, and spoke as follows:—

FRIENDS AND FELLOW-CITIZENS: I thank you from my heart for the honor of this visit. I cordially congratulate you on the preference which you have expressed for Major Breckinridge and General Lane as candidates for the presidency and vice-presidency of the United States over all competitors. [Applause.] They are men whose names are known to the country; they need no eulogy from me. They have served their country in peace and in war. They are statesmen as well as soldiers, and in the day and hour of danger they will ever be at their post. They are conservative men; and in the course of their administration they will be equally just to the North and to the South, to the East and to the West. [Applause.]

Above all, and first of all, they are friends of the Constitution and of the Union, [cheers,] and they will stand by them to the death. [Renewed cheers.] But we ought not to forget that they are also friends to the equality of the sovereign States of this Union in the common Territories of the country. [Cries of “Good!”] They will maintain that principle, which should receive the cordial approbation of us all. Equality is equity. Every citizen of the United States is equal before the Constitution and the Laws; and why should not the equality of the sovereign States composing this Union be held in like reverence? This is good democratic doctrine. Liberty and equality are the birth-right of every American citizen; and just as certainly as the day succeeds the night, so certainly will this principle of democratic justice eventually prevail over all opposition. [Cheers.] But, before I speak further upon this subject—and I shall not detain you very long—I wish to remove one stumbling-block out of the way.

I have ever been the friend of regular nominations. I have never struck a political ticket in my life. Now, was there anything done at Baltimore to bind the political conscience of any sound democrat, or to prevent him from supporting Breckinridge or Lane? [“No! no!”] I was contemporary with the abandonment of the old Congressional convention or caucus. This occurred a long time ago; very few, if any, of you remember it. Under the old Congressional convention system, no person was admitted to a seat except the democratic members of the Senate and House of Representatives. This rule rendered it absolutely certain that the nominee, whoever he might be, would be sustained at the election by the democratic States of the Union. By this means it was rendered impossible that those States which could not give an electoral vote for the candidate when nominated, should control the nomination and dictate to the democratic States who should be their nominee.

This system was abandoned—whether wisely or not, I shall express no opinion. The National Convention was substituted in its stead. All the States, whether democratic or not, were equally to send delegates to this Convention according to the number of their senators and representatives in Congress.

A difficulty at once arose which never could have arisen under the Congressional convention system. If a bare majority of the National Convention thus composed could nominate a candidate, he might be nominated mainly by the anti-democratic States against the will of a large majority of the democratic States. Thus the nominating power would be separated from the electing

power, which could not fail to be destructive to the strength and harmony of the democratic party.

To obviate this serious difficulty in the organization of a National Convention, and at the same time to leave all the States their full vote, the two-thirds rule was adopted. It was believed that under this rule no candidate could ever be nominated without embracing within the two-thirds the votes of a decided majority of the democratic States. This was the substitute adopted to retain, at least in a great degree, the power to the democratic States which they would have lost by abandoning the congressional convention system. This rule was a main pillar in the edifice of national conventions. Remove it and the whole must become a ruin. This sustaining pillar was broken to pieces at Baltimore by the Convention which nominated Mr. Douglas. After this the body was no longer a national convention; and no democrat, however devoted to regular nominations, was bound to give the nominee his support; he was left free to act according to the dictates of his own judgment and conscience. And here, in passing, I may observe that the wisdom of the two-thirds rule is justified by the events passing around us. Had it been faithfully observed no candidate could have been nominated against the will and wishes of almost every certain democratic State in the Union, against nearly all the democratic senators, and more than three-fourths of the democratic representatives in Congress. [Cheers.]

I purposely avoid entering upon any discussion respecting the exclusion from the Convention of regularly-elected delegates from different democratic States. If the Convention, which nominated Mr. Douglas, was not a regular democratic Convention, it must be confessed that Breckinridge is in the same condition in that respect. The Convention that nominated him, although it was composed of nearly all the certain democratic States, did not contain the two-thirds; and therefore every democrat is at perfect liberty to vote as he thinks proper, without running counter to any regular nomination of the party. [Applause and cries of "three cheers for Breckinridge and Lane."] Holding this position, I shall present some of the reasons why I prefer Mr. Breckinridge to Mr. Douglas. This I shall do without attempting to interfere with any individual democrat or any State democratic organization holding different opinions from myself. The main object of all good democrats, whether belonging to the one or the other wing of our unfortunate division, is to defeat the election of the republican candidates; and I shall never oppose any honest and honorable course calculated to accomplish this object.

To return to the point from which I have digressed, I am in favor of Mr. Breckinridge, because he sanctions and sustains the perfect equality of all the States within their common territories, and the opinion of the Supreme Court of the United States establishing this equality. The sovereign States of this Union are one vast partnership. The Territories were acquired by the common blood and common treasure of them all. Each State, and each citizen of each State, has the same right in the Territories as any other State and the citizens of any other State possess. Now what is sought for at present is, that a portion of these States should turn around to their sister States and say, "We are holier than you are, and while we will take our property to the Territories and have it protected there, you shall not place your property in the same position." That is precisely what is contended for. What the democratic party maintain, and what is the true principle of democracy is, that all shall enjoy the same rights, and that all shall be subject to the same duties. Property—this Government was framed for the protection of life, liberty, and property. They are the objects for the protection of which all enlightened governments were established. But it is sought now to place the property of the citizen, under what is called the principle of squatter sovereignty, in the power of the territorial legislature to confiscate it at their will and pleasure. That is the principle sought to be established at present; and there seems to be an entire mistake and misunderstanding among a portion of the public upon this subject. When was property ever submitted to the will of the majority? ["Never."] If you hold property as an individual, you hold it independent of Congress or of the State legislature, or of the territorial legislature—it is yours, and your Constitution was made to protect your private property against the assaults of legislative power. [Cheers.]

Well, now, any set of principles which will deprive you of your property, is against the very essence of republican government, and to that extent makes you a slave; for the man who has power over your property to confiscate it, has power over your means of subsistence; and yet it is contended, that although the Constitution of the United States confers no such power—although no State legislature has any such power, yet a territorial legislature, in the remote extremities of the country, can confiscate your property! [A VOICE. "They can't do it; they ain't going to do it."]

There is but one mode, and one alone, to abolish slavery in the Territories. That mode is pointed out in the Cincinnati platform, which has been as much misrepresented as anything I have ever known.

That platform declares that a majority of the actual residents in a Territory, whenever their number is sufficient to entitle them to admission as a State, possess the power to "form a constitution with or without domestic slavery, to be admitted into the Union upon terms of perfect equality with the other States." If there be squatter sovereignty in this resolution I have never been able to perceive it. If there be any reference in it to a Territorial legislature it has entirely escaped my notice. It presents the clear principle that, at the time the people form their constitution, they shall then decide whether they will have slavery or not. And yet it has been stated over and over again that, in accepting the nomination under that platform, I endorsed the doctrine of squatter sovereignty. I suppose you have all heard this repeated a thousand times.

[A VOICE. "We all knew it was a lie!"]
Well, I am glad you did.

How beautifully this plain principle of constitutional law corresponds with the best interests of the people! Under it, emigrants from the North and the South, from the East and the West proceed to the Territories. They carry with them that property which they suppose will best promote their material interests; they live together in peace and harmony. The question of slavery will become a foregone conclusion before they have inhabitants enough to enter the Union as a State. There will then be no "bleeding Kansas" in the Territories; they will all live together in peace and harmony, promoting the prosperity of the Territory and their own prosperity, until the time shall arrive when it becomes necessary to frame a constitution. Then the whole question will be decided to the general satisfaction. But, upon the opposite principle, what will you find in the Territories? Why, there will be strife and contention all the time. One Territorial legislature may establish slavery and another Territorial legislature may abolish it, and so the struggle will be continued throughout the Territorial existence. The people, instead of devoting their energies and industry to promote their own prosperity, will be in a state of constant strife and turmoil, just as we have witnessed in Kansas. Therefore, there is no possible principle that can be so injurious to the best interests of a Territory as what has been called squatter sovereignty.

Now, let me place the subject before you in another point of view. The people of the Southern States can never abandon this great principle of State equality in the Union without self-degradation. ["Never!"] Never without an acknowledgment that they are inferior in this respect to their

sister States. Whilst it is vital to them to preserve their equality, the Northern States surrender nothing by admitting this principle. In doing this they only yield obedience to the Constitution of their country as expounded by the Supreme Court of the United States. While for the North it is comparatively a mere abstraction, with the South it is a question of co-equal State sovereignty in the Union.

If the decrees of the high tribunal established by the Constitution for the very purposes are to be set at naught and disregarded, it will tend to render all property of every description insecure. What, then, have the North to do? Merely to say that, as good citizens, they will yield obedience to the decision of the Supreme Court, and admit the right of a Southern man to take his property into the Territories, and hold it there, just as a Northern man may do; and it is to me the most extraordinary thing in the world that this country should now be distracted and divided because certain persons at the North will not agree that their brethren at the South shall have the same rights in the Territories which they enjoy. What would I, as a Pennsylvanian, say or do, supposing anybody was to contend that the legislature of any Territory could outlaw iron and coal within the Territory? [Laughter and cheers.] The principle is precisely the same. The Supreme Court of the United States have decided—what was known to us all to have been the existing State of affairs for fifty years—that slaves are property. Admit that fact, and you admit everything. Then that property in the Territories must be protected precisely in the same manner with any other property. If it be not so protected in the Territories, the holders of it are degraded before the world.

We have been told that non-intervention on the part of Congress with slavery in the Territories is the true policy. Very well. I most cheerfully admit that Congress has no right to pass any law to establish, impair or abolish slavery in the Territories. Let this principle of non-intervention be extended to the Territorial legislatures, and let it be declared that they in like manner have no power to establish, impair or destroy slavery, and then the controversy is in effect ended. This is all that is required at present, and I verily believe all that will ever be required. Hands off by Congress and hands off by the Territorial legislature. [Loud applause.] With the Supreme Court of the United States I hold that neither Congress nor the Territorial legislature has any power to establish, impair, or abolish slavery in the Territories. But if, in the face of this positive prohibition, the Territorial legislature should exercise the power

of intervening, then this would be a mere transfer of the Wilmot proviso and the Buffalo platform from Congress, to be carried into execution in the Territories to the destruction of all property in slaves. [Renewed applause.]

An attempt of this kind, if made in Congress, would be resisted by able men on the floor of both houses, and probably defeated. Not so in a remote Territory. To every new Territory there will be a rush of free-soilers from the Northern States. They would elect the first Territorial legislature before the people of the South could arrive with their property, and this legislature would probably settle forever the question of slavery according to their own will.

And shall we for the sake of squatter sovereignty, which, from its nature, can only continue during the brief period of Territorial existence, incur the risk of dividing the great Democratic party of the country into two sectional parties, the one North and the other South? Shall this great party which has governed the country in peace and war, which has raised it from humble beginnings to be one of the most prosperous and powerful nations in the world—shall this party be broken up for such a cause? That is the question. The numerous, powerful, pious and respectable Methodist Church has been thus divided. The division was a severe shock to the Union. A similar division of the great Democratic party, should it continue, would rend asunder one of the most powerful links which binds the Union together.

I entertain no such fearful apprehensions. The present issue is transitory, and will speedily pass away. In the nature of things it cannot continue. There is but one possible contingency which can endanger the Union, and against this all Democrats, whether squatter sovereigns or popular sovereigns, will present a united resistance. Should the time ever arrive when Northern agitation and fanaticism shall proceed so far as to render the domestic firesides of the South insecure, then and not till then will the Union be in danger. A united North-

ern Democracy will present a wall of fire against such a catastrophe!

There are in our midst numerous persons who predict the dissolution of the great Democratic party, and others who contend that it has already been dissolved. The wish is father to the thought. It has been heretofore in great peril; but when divided for the moment, it has always closed up its ranks and become more powerful, even from defeat. It will never die whilst the Constitution and the Union survive. It will live to protect and defend both. It has its roots in the very vitals of the Constitution, and, like one of the ancient cedars of Lebanon, it will flourish to afford shelter and protection to that sacred instrument, and to shield it against every storm of faction. [Renewed applause.]

Now, friends and fellow-citizens, it is probable that this is the last political speech that I shall ever make. [A voice, "We hope not!"] It is now nearly forty years since I first came to Washington as a member of Congress, and I wish to say this night, that during that whole period I have received nothing but kindness and attention from your fathers and from yourselves. Washington was then comparatively a small town; now it has grown to be a great and beautiful city; and the first wish of my heart is that its citizens may enjoy uninterrupted health and prosperity. I thank you for the kind attention you have paid to me, and now bid you all a good night. [Prolonged cheering.]

The Hon. Howell Cobb being loudly called for, responded in a few brief remarks, cordially endorsing the nominations of Breckinridge and Lane.

The immense procession then moved to the residence of our candidate for the Presidency, the Hon. John C. Breckinridge, and serenaded him, which compliment was appropriately acknowledged by him.

Thus closed one of the most enthusiastic demonstrations of the Democracy that has ever been witnessed in the Federal Metropolis.