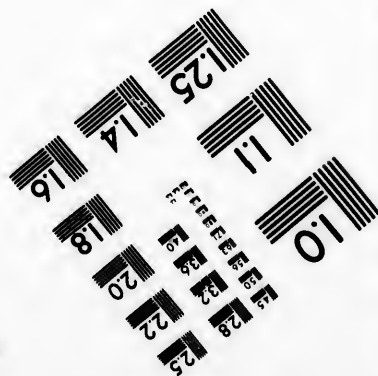
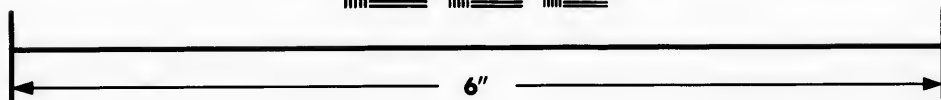
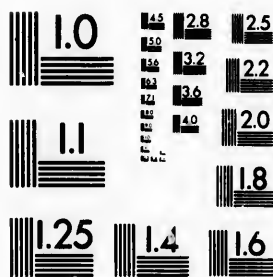


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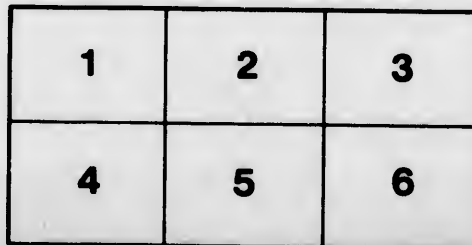
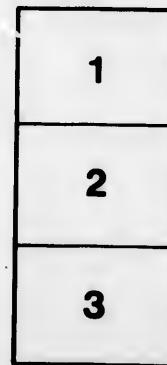
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S P E E C H

OF

HON. JOSHUA R. GIDDINGS, OF OHIO,

ON

THE OREGON QUESTION.

DELIVERED

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, MONDAY, JANUARY 5, 1846.

WASHINGTON:

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THE OREGON QUESTION.

The resolution from the Committee on Foreign Affairs, requiring the President to notify Great Britain of the intention of the United States to terminate the joint occupancy of Oregon, and to abrogate the convention of 1827, being under consideration in Committee of the Whole—

Mr. GIDDINGS said it was due to himself to state, that when this subject was before a former Congress, he had been opposed to giving the notice contemplated by the resolution before the House. I then (said he) acted with a view to the circumstances with which we were surrounded.

But as the circumstances which led me to oppose the measure at that period have undergone a great change, I am compelled to shape my present policy to the situation in which the Government is placed. When this subject was before us at a former session, our Government had not adopted the policy of extending its powers, by the acquisition of new territory. I then preferred that the Union, which had been formed by our fathers of the Revolution, should remain, and be perpetuated. I saw, or thought I saw, difficulties and dangers in attempting to bring other governments under our jurisdiction. I had seen in this Hall, since the day on which I first entered it, a conflict of interest between different portions of the Union, which in my view threatened the final overthrow of our Government, if confined to its then existing limits. Even then, a spirited contest had been carried on for many years between the southern and northern portions of the Union, in regard to our protective tariff. At one time it had actually arrayed in arms one member of the confederacy against the power of the Federal Government. That controversy still continues, and is likely to increase in interest.

Another controversy, between the eastern and western portions of the Union, has long been carried on in respect to the disposition of our public lands. That controversy still continues. But, sir, a conflict of a more absorbing character, between the slaveholding interests of the South and the advocates of freedom at the North, had been increasing and extending among all classes of society, both in the free and in the slave States. There was, then, a large balance of political power in favor of the free States; while a liberal and perhaps commendable policy, on the part of the North, had given to the slaveholding territory an equal number of States, and of course an equal representa-

tion in the Senate with that of the free States. I then believed, notwithstanding all these sectional conflicts, that our Union might be preserved, if the Government were confined to its then existing limits; but I was most solemnly impressed with the opinion, that, if our territory were extended, and the interests of different sections thereby rendered more conflicting, the permanency of the Union would be endangered. These views were based upon the irrevocable laws of nature. The soil, and climate, and products of Texas are totally different from the soil, and climate, and products of New England; but they are not more different than are the real interests of the people in those sections of the country. It will be as impossible for Congress by any laws of our enactment, to reconcile the interests of Texas and Massachusetts, as it would for us to compel the cotton and sugar of Texas to grow on New England soil, or the manufactures of New England to flourish in Texas. So, too, with Oregon. The principal commerce of that territory must be with the Sandwich Isles and with China; ours with Europe. No law of ours can reverse or reconcile these interests, founded upon the different positions of the Atlantic and Pacific coasts. We may extend our laws over Oregon. We may admit her as a new State to our Union, as we have already admitted Texas; but time will demonstrate to the people of Texas, and of Oregon, that they gain nothing by the association; and our people of the East and the North will find, by future experience, that a union with Oregon and Texas will require of them the sacrifice of a portion of their own interests, without in any degree adding to the happiness of the human family. When these things shall be fully seen and felt by all portions of the Union, a separation will be inevitable, and such new confederations will then be formed as shall be thought more conducive to the general good. With these views, I preferred the independence of both Texas and Oregon, rather than see them united with us. I was fully aware that the tide of emigration, which was setting from our western States to Oregon, would people that territory with those who understand the value of our free institutions, and who are devoted to the cause of civil liberty. Their wisdom and patriotism would soon erect a Government there, modelled after our own, while it would be free from the errors to which ours is subjected. Under these circumstances and with these impressions, I felt that the great interests of all would be far better

subverted by their becoming independent Governments, than they would by their being members of our confederacy. Indeed, I felt that the policy of receiving them as members of our Union, would eventually prove fatal to our confederation. Of that result, I entertained no doubt. Nor do I now entertain any doubt whatever on that point. I therefore voted against terminating our joint occupation of Oregon, and against all political association with Texas. Yet, sir, the policy of territorial aggrandizement *has been adopted*. It has been done without my consent, and against my will. For the resulting consequences, I am not responsible; nor is the party with whom I have had the honor to act. But, sir, since this subject of Oregon was before us during a former Congress, the policy of the nation has been changed. Indeed, the Government itself has been changed in its essential elements; its fundamental principles have been overthrown. The Union, formed by our venerated predecessors, has been dissolved, and a new slaveholding confederacy with a foreign Government has been formed.

It is true that the action of this body and of the Executive in regard to the annexation of Texas, has imposed no moral or political obligation upon the people of Ohio, or of any free State, to enter into this new slaveholding confederacy. But, from present indications, they will all submit, and become parties to the new Union. This cannot be fully determined until after the Senators and Representatives of Texas shall take their seats in Congress. Then, if Ohio shall thereafter elect members of Congress to come here, and act with those of Texas in passing laws to govern our people, we shall thereby become parties to the new compact. But, sir, our State will become a party under the expectation that the policy of adding new States shall be continued, until the balance of power shall be restored to the northern section of the Union. It is the annexation of Texas that has rendered the *whole* of Oregon necessary to restore that balance of power. By the annexation of Texas the slave States now have a majority in the Senate. They will continue to retain that majority, unless we add territory to our northwestern border. By the annexation of Texas the protection of the free labor of the North has been surrendered to the control of the slave power; our constitutional rights and the honor of our free States are delivered over to the keeping of slaveholders. Indeed, our people of the free States have been politically bound hand and foot and surrendered to the rule and government of a slaveholding oligarchy. This has been done by the party in power, under the declared policy of obtaining Texas and retaining the *whole* of Oregon. But, having obtained Texas, a portion of the party now propose to give up a part of Oregon. Their plan is, to add territory to the South, and surrender up territory on the North; to increase their power, to decrease ours; to enlarge the area of slavery, to diminish the area of freedom. But while, by their acts, they are saying these things, they appear to have suddenly conceived a sort of holy horror of sectional views, and of sectional feelings. Last year they openly avowed their anxiety for Texas, in order to increase their political power. They have obtained Texas, and with it an increase of political power, and they have now suddenly become impressed with the impropriety of section-

al feeling. But if anything be well calculated to excite sectional feelings, it is sectional injustice.

We have had abundant demonstrations of southern feelings in regard to northern interests. We know it is vain for us to talk of maintaining the interests of the manufacturers of Pennsylvania, New York, and New England, while the political power of the nation is swayed by those who have always been inexorably opposed to them. No man of reflection can for a moment believe that southern statesmen, who have from time immemorial striven to destroy all protection of northern labor, will now turn around, when they have the power in their hands, and, for the first time, lend their aid to sustain northern industry. No, Mr. Speaker, it becomes us to act like men; to look our difficulties in the face, and to pursue the best mode of retrieving the advantages which have been thrown away. That can only be done by restoring the balance of power, by adding new States at the west and northwest. To admit new States on that border, we must have the territory out of which such States may be formed. But southern gentlemen, whose voices at the last session were heard, loud and long, in favor of Texas and the *whole* of Oregon, now see "a lion in the way." They were then chivalrous; now they are all for peace. Then they waxed valiant when war with Mexico and England was alluded to; now they "roar you gently as sucking doves." But a year ago their motto was, *Now or never*; at this time, "*a masterly inactivity*" is their maxim. Last year they spoke in strains of fervid eloquence of the glory of extending the American sway over new territory, and of adding new States to our brilliant constellation; now they call upon their northern friends to stop this mad career of extending the power of our Government, and to leave the political control of the nation in their hands for a few years, until Great Britain shall quietly give up her claims to that territory. The northern portion of the Democratic party say, that they stand pledged to maintain our rights to the *whole* of Oregon by their Baltimore resolutions; and they demand of their southern allies to aid in carrying out their solemn pledge. Here, then, is the issue between the southern and northern portions of the Democratic party. The North desire to act in *good faith*, and the South insist upon a violation of their pledge; and the Whigs are called upon to decide which shall be done! I have no hesitation whatever in answering for myself. I shall vote to give the notice, and to terminate the joint occupancy of that territory. It is said, that the giving of notice will produce a war. But war, in my opinion, will not necessarily follow the notice; still, it is said that the subsequent taking possession of the whole of Oregon will be followed by a war. I am inclined to that opinion. On this point, I differ from my venerable friend from Massachusetts, [Mr. ADAMS.] I do so, however, with the greatest diffidence; for, in nine cases out of ten, I have found myself in error when I have differed from him. Yet, being impressed with this opinion, I am bound to look to that as a possible, or rather as a probable result, from taking possession of the *whole* of Oregon.

Under these circumstances, I must choose between a war with England on the one hand, and a supine inglorious submission to the slaveholding power on the other. I have seen enough of war

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to form an idea of the suffering it brings upon a nation. I have witnessed its devastating effects upon public morals, and the consequent misery which it inflicts upon those who are doomed to feel its curse. Yet, sir, with all its horrors, revolting as they are to the feelings of humanity, I prefer meeting it for a few years rather than see the people of the free States sit down in quiet indifference under the control of the slaveholding power. I am aware that some who have reflected but little upon the subject will disagree with me on this point; but when I reflect upon the manner in which this Government has been used as the instrument to uphold the institution of slavery for the last half century, and to sustain the slave trade in this district and on the southern coast; the manner in which our army has been employed in murdering fugitive slaves; and when I reflect that the people of the free States are thus involved in crimes of the deepest guilt, and of the greatest magnitude; when I reflect that the whole people of the nation are, to some extent, involved in the sacrifice of thirty thousand human lives annually to the Moloch of slavery; when I look back but a few days to the vote of northern men in this Hall to unite in political brotherhood with a State whose constitution provides for eternal slavery; and when I reflect that this heaven-provoking iniquity has scarcely called for a note of disapprobation from the public press;—when these things rush upon the recollection, I am compelled to say that I prefer war to seeing the people of the free States submit, in supine apathy, to the government of those accustomed to torture their fellow men into subjection, and who deal in human flesh. I have sons whom I tenderly love; and I declare that I would rather see them fall in battle, contending for freedom, than to see our people of the North ingloriously surrender up the blood-bought privileges, won by the valor of our fathers to the keeping of men who deny the "self-evident truths" on which our hopes of freedom are founded; dooming those who shall bear my name, in coming time, to the degradation of living and dying the subjects of a slaveholding tyranny.

I am aware that a war with England must be attended with great destruction to the commercial wealth of the North. Their ships will be captured, their ports blockaded, and their commerce for the time being destroyed. I fully appreciate the feelings and motives of the gentleman from Massachusetts, [Mr. WINTHROP,] who the other day made so able and so eloquent a speech in favor of peace. He represents the great commercial emporium of New England, and must of course feel deeply anxious on the subject. But it is well known that that gentleman was the first distinguished statesman of New England who publicly avowed his submission to the new slaveholding confederation with Texas. His State, like Ohio, Vermont, Rhode Island, and Connecticut, had declared, in substance, that neither this body nor the Federal Government could impose any obligation upon the people of her State, to enter into this new union with Texas. The proposition is so obviously correct, that I think few statesmen will deny it. No, sir, if Ohio shall unite in the proposed confederacy, it will be from the choice of her people, and not in consequence of any obligation which the action of Congress has laid them under

to unite with slaveholding Texas. If our gallant State shall become a party to the new compact, it will not be done because we believe that the exercise of usurped powers by this Government, can transfer us from the Union formed by our fathers to a new confederation formed with a foreign people upon the principles of eternal slavery. The people of the free States are not yet the subjects of sale and transfer, like oxen in the shambles, or slaves in a southern market. I have at all times desired that the people of Ohio should not enter into the new union. Before Heaven, I think it would be far better for them not to do so; and if my colleagues agreed in opinion with me, no representative of Ohio would retain a seat in this Hall beside those of Texas, until the voice of our people should be distinctly known.

But the gentleman from Massachusetts yielded his assent, in advance, of the people of his State. He must have been aware of the position in which they would be placed, by becoming a party to this new compact. He was aware that the dominant party had pledged themselves to maintain our claim to the *whole of Oregon*. If dangers of a war now arise, from carrying out that policy, it will be no more than he had reason to expect. Indeed, I cannot believe that he would now be willing to leave the nation subject to the policy of the slave States. It is very questionable whether the commercial interest of his State would suffer more by a war than the manufacturing interest would, by being subjected to southern rule. I have very serious doubts whether a state of war would prove more destructive to New England commerce, than southern control would prove to New England manufactures. So far as the mere pecuniary interests of the free States are concerned, I think it quite immaterial whether we have war or peace. If Massachusetts shall voluntarily unite in the new confederacy, knowing the policy that controls it, she ought cheerfully to submit to the consequences.

The leading merchants of Boston, distinguished for their statesmanship, are said to have been among the first citizens of Massachusetts who declared "that the time for opposing the political connexion with Texas had gone by." Being the first to submit to this gross usurpation of power, they ought to be the last to complain of consequences which must have been clearly foreseen. Indeed, it would be wrong for them now to oppose this measure, in order to save their interest, and, by its defeat, to surrender up the whole manufacturing interest of the nation to that destructive policy recently avowed by the Executive. How will the Representatives of Pennsylvania act on this subject? A distinguished citizen of that State said to me yesterday, that the repeal of the tariff would be worse for the pecuniary interests of that Commonwealth than a war with England. Of the correctness of the proposition I entertain no doubt whatever; nor have I any doubt that it would apply to the whole of New England with as much force as it would to Pennsylvania. I verily believe that the laborers of the free States would suffer less, in a pecuniary point of view, by a war with England, than they will by a quiet surrender of their interests to the control of the slave power of the South. I mention the laborers of the free States, including the agricultural interests of the West, as well as the manufacturing interests of New England and

Pennsylvania. Indeed, a war with England would create a market for our provisions, and increase the price of our products generally.

I am aware that I shall be charged with entertaining sectional views and sectional feelings. The charge is true. When, at the last session of Congress, I read the Executive correspondence, speaking of southern institutions, southern interests, southern policy, and the extension of southern influence; and when I heard those sentiments reiterated in this Hall by almost every southern speaker, proclaimed by every southern political convention, and heralded forth in every southern newspaper, I began to think it was time for us to speak of northern interests, northern rights, and northern honor.

When I reflect that the Executive has been deeply engaged in efforts for the last year and a half to extend and perpetuate slavery, and that Congress has lent its efforts to the same purpose, I really think it time for the lovers of liberty to begin to speak in favor of freedom, of those self-evident truths on which our fathers based their political faith. The slave power has compelled us to think and speak of our rights, and of the rights of man; and if we tamely surrender them to the keeping of those who deny their existence, we may bid a final adieu, not only to our prosperity, but to our honor and to our political privileges.

If war should result from carrying out this measure, as it may, the people of the North possess within themselves the means of defence. There, sir, all are freemen, and all have an interest in sustaining our institutions and our laws. We have the industry, the energy, the patriotism, which may well defy the world in arms. But, sir, our greatest difficulty will not consist in defending ourselves, or in taking Canada. No, sir; our principal burden will be the protection of the South—the weak, helpless, dependent, slaveholding South. Should a war with England take place, Massachusetts and Ohio, and, indeed, each of the free States, will be compelled to contribute double the amount of money and of blood to protect the miserable slaveholders of Texas, that they will in defending themselves. The millions—nay, the tens of millions—which we shall be compelled to expend, and the thousands of lives which must be sacrificed in defending the heaven-provoking institution of slavery, and those who sustain it in Texas, will constitute a most striking illustration of the argument urged upon us at the last session of Congress, “that it was necessary to annex Texas in order to protect our south-western frontier.” The protection of Texas will require fifty thousand troops, and an expenditure of ten millions of dollars annually.

But, sir, we shall not only be compelled to protect Texas, but we shall be under the necessity of furnishing troops from the North to defend every slave State lying upon the Atlantic coast. Each of those States contains a large population, who are not only the most bitter and unrelenting foes to those who scourge, and torture, and oppress them; but they are equally hostile to the Government that lends its aid and power to degrade and to hold them in bondage. In case of war, they will be more dangerous than four times their number of foreign enemies. We are all aware that in 1789 South Carolina sent a special delegation to

the Continental Congress, informing that body that it required all her troops to protect the people against their slaves, and that that chivalrous State must depend upon her northern sisters to defend her against the common enemy. These scenes will again be acted if we should engage in another war. In such case, all the slave States collectively would be unable to do more than protect themselves against their internal foes, and northern troops must be relied upon to defend the coast from the Delaware Capes to the Rio del Norte, the Mexican frontier, and the whole western boundary. The expense would be enormous; but, in my opinion, not more destructive to the pecuniary interests of the free States than the free-trade policy of the present Administration. I am fully aware that the southern portion of the Union must suffer most in case of war. I have noticed the alarm manifested in southern papers at the distant prospect of war with England. They now anticipate destruction to the cotton-growing interest. Slave labor, they say, will be depreciated, and slave property will become valueless. That is doubtless correct. But this policy of extending our territory is theirs, not mine. It originated with southern statesmen, and was forced upon the nation for the express purpose of perpetuating slavery. If God, in his providence, shall overrule their wicked designs to the subversion of that curse, I shall greatly rejoice. Last year our southern friends expressed great anxiety for “Texas and the whole of Oregon.” Having obtained Texas, and with it the balance of political power, they now demand an abandonment of their policy, and that the Government of the nation be left in their hands, and Oregon remain as it is. They now see difficulties before them; dangers present themselves to the further pursuit of their plan of territorial aggrandizement. They have suddenly called to mind the declaration of British statesmen, that “a war with the United States will be a war of emancipation.” They see in prospect the black regiments of the British West India islands landing among them, and their slaves flocking to the enemy’s standard. Servile insurrections torment their imaginations; rapine, blood, and murder dance before their affrighted visions. They are now seen in every part of the Hall, calling on Whigs and Democrats to save them from the dreadful consequences of their own policy. Well, sir, I reply to them, This is your policy, not ours: You have forced us into it against our will and our utmost opposition: you have prepared the poisoned chalice, and we will press it to your lips until you swallow the very drops.

I would not be understood as desiring a servile insurrection; but I say to southern gentlemen, that there are hundreds of thousands of honest and patriotic men who “will laugh at your calamity, and will mock when your fear cometh.” If blood and massacre should mark the struggle for liberty of those who for ages have been oppressed and degraded, my prayer to the God of Heaven shall be, that justice—stern, unyielding justice—may be awarded to both master and slave. I desire that every human being may enjoy the rights with which the God of nature has endowed him. If those rights can be regained by the down-trodden sons of Africa in our southern States by quiet and peaceful means, I hope they will pursue such

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peaceful measures. But if they cannot regain their God-given rights by peaceful measures, I nevertheless hope they will regain them; and if blood be shed, I should certainly hope that it might be the blood of those who stand between them and freedom, and not the blood of those who have long been robbed of their wives and children and all they hold dear in life. It is true, that when those scenes shall occur, northern freemen, our sons and neighbors, must march to Texas, and bare their breasts to the shafts of battle, in a soul-degrading defence of slavery. In such a cause who would not be a coward? Our fathers fought for the inalienable rights of man; our sons must face the cannon's mouth in defence of slavery. Should the black regiments of the West Indies land upon our southern coast, our freemen of the North will be placed in a position the contemplation of which is most revolting to the feelings of humanity. For the people of the free North to march to our southern States, and stand between the emancipated slaves of the West Indies and southern slaveholders, and defend them while they flog their bondmen into submission, will be degradation without a parallel, except it be found in the quiet submission of our people to the political control of those who buy and sell their fellow-men, and make merchandise of human flesh.

Should the scenes to which I have alluded take place, one great advantage would result. Perhaps no statesman doubts that a war with England must prove the death of slavery. The British Government now have no slaves in their West India islands, as in the last war, to restrain them from raising the flag of emancipation. The paralyzing effects which that institution exerts upon the physical energies of the nation would be exhibited to the world. Our people of the North would be constrained to look upon the evil as it really is.

The slave power would lose its charm—our citizens of the North would be aroused from the lethargy which, for half a century, has held their sensibilities in a torpid inactivity toward the oppressed of our land. We should then find means to sever the cords which have so long, unconstitutionally, bound us to the putrescent carcass of slavery. Great Britain would not be likely again to pay southern slaveholders *twelve hundred thousand dollars* for human cattle, who shall have strayed from their owners, as was done at the close of the last war.

But another consequence would, in all human probability, result from a war with England. We should obtain the Canadas, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick, adding, at least, six new States to the northern portion of the Union, each possessing double the population of Texas. These States would restore to the North that balance of power which was surrendered up by the annexation of Texas. It would be in strict accordance with the policy avowed by the party in power, and which was in part carried into practice by the annexation of Texas. I therefore say to the members of that party, *Carry out your policy!* By adopting it, you have brought us under the power of the slaveholding States; continue your policy, and you will relieve us from our present position, and restore to us the rights you have taken from us. I will

vote to render you every facility for carrying forward your plans; it being understood at all times, that I regard the measure as ultimately fatal to the Union; but not as immediately so as it would be to leave the Government where it now is. The responsibility must rest upon those who have avowed and adopted the system. To them belong the honors and the responsibilities of the policy; we claim no portion of one, nor will we share in the other.

But, Mr. Speaker, I am unwilling to resume my seat until I express my perfect conviction that this policy cannot be carried out by the party in power. The northern Democrats will soon be deserted by their southern slaveholding allies. They have been betrayed by the slave power. Texas is admitted, and the southern wing of the Democratic party will now desert their northern friends, and leave Oregon where it is. They are like the militia captain who, when going into battle, informed his men that, "as he was lame, he would commence his retreat then; but his soldiers being quick upon the foot, he thought they could overtake him if they waited until after the battle." If this resolution should be adopted, the Executive would find means to escape from the dilemma into which this southern policy has precipitated him. It is most obvious to my judgment that he cannot be driven into a war with England. As I have already stated, a war with that nation must prove the total overthrow of slavery. Every reflecting statesman must see this as clearly as any event can be foretold by human perception. I do not think the slaveholding portion of the Democratic party were aware, that the carrying out of their Baltimore resolutions would sacrifice that institution. They rather believed that, by obtaining Texas, the price of human flesh would be enhanced, and slavery supported. The consequences of seizing upon "*the whole of Oregon*" were not considered. Mr. Polk, in his Inaugural Address, and in his annual Message, evidently overlooked the momentous effect which his twice-declared policy would produce upon the slave interest, to which he is indissolubly wedded. He, and his cabinet, and his party, have made a fatal blunder. They will soon discover their error, and will recede from their position. With the same degree of confidence that I have in my own existence, I declare that *they will, before the nation and the world, back out from their avowed policy, and will surrender up all that portion of Oregon north of the 49th parallel of latitude, or let the subject remain as it now is.* I wish to place this prediction on record for future reference. Nor would I confine my remarks to the Democratic party. Those southern slaveholding Whigs who voted for Texas will now, if necessary, turn round and vote to give up a part of Oregon. It is a question between the slave States and the free States; and the vote when taken will, with few exceptions, exhibit that character. The great master-spirit of southern policy has left his retirement, and taken his position in the other end of the Capitol, for the avowed purpose of now defeating the identical policy, the promotion of which occupied his whole attention only twelve months since. He is an adept in this political versatility. He will, however, carry the President and the southern statesmen generally with him, and will defeat the measure to which he and his party stand solemnly pledged.

Yes, sir; should this resolution pass both Houses of Congress, the President will find means to give up a part of Oregon, or even the whole of it, rather than subject the institution of slavery to the sure destruction which a war with England would bring upon it. I again repeat, what I have endeavored to impress upon gentlemen, that this policy is not mine; I was a my hands of it. I feel a deep and an abiding conviction, that, if carried out, it will inevitably overthrow our Government, and dissolve the Union; but that these consequences will

be retarded by a continuance of the policy, rather than by leaving the Government subject to the slave power, as it now is. By carrying out the policy it will place the northern and southern portions of the Union upon terms approximating to equality. And when, from its broad extent, this Republic like the Roman Empire, shall fall asunder of its own weight, the free States will redeem and purify themselves from the foul disgrace of supporting an institution hated of men and cursed of God.

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