

Republican Party Platform, 1856
June 18, 1856

This Convention of Delegates, assembled in pursuance of a call addressed to the people of the United States, without regard to past political differences or divisions, who are opposed to the repeal of the Missouri Compromise; to the policy of the present Administration; to the extension of Slavery into Free Territory; in favor of the admission of Kansas as a Free State; of restoring the action of the Federal Government to the principles of Washington and Jefferson; and for the purpose of presenting candidates for the offices of President and Vice-President, do resolve as follows:

Resolved: That the maintenance of the principles promulgated in the Declaration of Independence, and embodied in the Federal Constitution are essential to the preservation of our Republican institutions, and that the Federal Constitution, the rights of the States, and the union of the States, must and shall be preserved.

Resolved: That, with our Republican fathers, we hold it to be a self-evident truth, that all men are endowed with the inalienable right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, and that the primary object and ulterior design of our Federal Government were to secure these rights to all persons under its exclusive jurisdiction; that, as our Republican fathers, when they had abolished Slavery in all our National Territory, ordained that no person shall be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law, it becomes our duty to maintain this provision of the Constitution against all attempts to violate it for the purpose of establishing Slavery in the Territories of the United States by positive legislation, prohibiting its existence or extension therein. That we deny the authority of Congress, of a Territorial Legislation, of any individual, or association of individuals, to give legal existence to Slavery in any Territory of the United States, while the present Constitution shall be maintained.

Resolved: That the Constitution confers upon Congress sovereign powers over the Territories of the United States for their government; and that in the exercise of this power, it is both the right and the imperative duty of Congress to prohibit in the Territories those twin relics of barbarism--Polygamy, and Slavery.

Resolved: That while the Constitution of the United States was ordained and established by the people, in order to "form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty," and contain ample provision for the protection of the life, liberty, and property of every citizen, the dearest Constitutional rights of the people of Kansas have been fraudulently and violently taken from them.

Their Territory has been invaded by an armed force;

Spurious and pretended legislative, judicial, and executive officers have been set over them, by whose usurped authority, sustained by the military power of the government, tyrannical and unconstitutional laws have been enacted and enforced;

The right of the people to keep and bear arms has been infringed.

Test oaths of an extraordinary and entangling nature have been imposed as a condition of exercising the right of suffrage and holding office.

The right of an accused person to a speedy and public trial by an impartial jury has been denied;

The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, has been violated;

They have been deprived of life, liberty, and property without due process of law;

That the freedom of speech and of the press has been abridged;

The right to choose their representatives has been made of no effect;

Murders, robberies, and arsons have been instigated and encouraged, and the offenders have been allowed to go unpunished;

That all these things have been done with the knowledge, sanction, and procurement of the present National Administration; and that for this high crime against the Constitution, the Union, and humanity, we arraign that Administration, the President, his advisers, agents, supporters, apologists, and accessories, either before or after the fact, before the country and before the world; and that it is our fixed purpose to bring the actual perpetrators of these atrocious outrages and their accomplices to a sure and condign punishment thereafter.

Resolved, That Kansas should be immediately admitted as a state of this Union, with her present Free Constitution, as at once the most effectual way of securing to her citizens the enjoyment of the rights and privileges to which they are entitled, and of ending the civil strife now raging in her territory.

Resolved, That the highwayman's plea, that "might makes right," embodied in the Ostend Circular, was in every respect unworthy of American diplomacy, and would bring shame and dishonor upon any Government or people that gave it their sanction.

Resolved, That a railroad to the Pacific Ocean by the most central and practicable route is imperatively demanded by the interests of the whole country, and that the Federal Government ought to render immediate and efficient aid in its construction, and as an auxiliary thereto, to the immediate construction of an emigrant road on the line of the railroad.

Resolved, That appropriations by Congress for the improvement of rivers and harbors, of a national character, required for the accommodation and security of our existing

commerce, are authorized by the Constitution, and justified by the obligation of the Government to protect the lives and property of its citizens.

Resolved, That we invite the affiliation and cooperation of the men of all parties, however differing from us in other respects, in support of the principles herein declared; and believing that the spirit of our institutions as well as the Constitution of our country, guarantees liberty of conscience and equality of rights among citizens, we oppose all legislation impairing their security.

Source: Republican Party Platforms: "Republican Party Platform of 1856," June 18, 1856. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=29619>.

**Letter of J. Hamilton Cowper to John Murray Forbes
November 6, 1856**

I deny that Congress has any constitutional right to say to a future sovereign State that it shall be curtailed of a power possessed by other States, viz.: to decide for itself whether it shall or shall not establish slavery. The union of the States is of equals and not of inferiors. I deny the power of Congress to exclude a part of the Union from equal participation in common property. . . . Be assured, my dear sir, that a dissolution of the Union is inevitable whenever the free-soil principles of the North shall in any instance be enforced. If that principle be dearer to the North than the Union, let it avail itself of its numerical superiority and enforce it; but let it not deceive itself into the belief that any fear of consequences will deter the Southern States from meeting the issue. I love the Union, and rank among the conservatives of the South, but I am prepared for a dissolution of our government rather than yield a right which is essential to the very existence of the South."

**Letter of John Murray Forbes to J. Hamilton Cowper
December 4, 1856**

I thank you for the warning, which coming on top of the election of Mr. Buchanan assures me that we are doomed to continued agitation until 1860, and then to the first real experiment of the strength of our confederacy. . . . I owe it to you in return to tell you what seems to me the state of public opinion here. . . . We are . . . all united here in the opinion that either Congress or the squatters (some looking to one and some to the other) have a clear right to prohibit slavery in the territories from the moment that settlement begins. We have been brought up in the faith that this was settled constitutional doctrine, held as it has been by all the men we are accustomed to look upon as great authorities at the North, and by many of your own best men, and confirmed too by the adoption of the Ordinance of 1787, at the very time when the Constitutional Convention was in session, as also by the adoption of the Missouri compromise when Mr. Calhoun was a member of the Cabinet. . . . [T]here is, as nearly as possible, unanimity, since the repeal of the Missouri compromise, in favor of exercising that (real or supposed) right at all hazards

whenever practically necessary to prevent the extension of slavery into territories now free.

Beyond and above all this, the conviction is being daily forced upon the North that the designs of the South do not stop with introducing slavery into our own territories, but that the question to be settled in Kansas is whether the whole power of the confederacy shall be exercised for buying or conquering all the territory and islands north of Panama for the mere extension of your institution. Some of your more bold and ultra men plainly avow this intention so far as Cuba, Mexico, and Central America are concerned [I]t is my belief that the issue has been so sharply defined to be a struggle for political power between the North and the South, that it is too late to change it until one or the other side yield, or until we separate and begin again on a new basis. I believe that the public mind in the non-slaveholding States has been in a state of revolution for some years, but of active change since the passage of the Nebraska Bill, and that the change will go on in the next four years in a progressive ratio, until in 1860 there will be not the ghost of a chance for any man's getting an electoral vote in the North and West who is not sharply opposed to the extension of slavery at home and abroad. . . . The abolitionists have never had much direct influence, and they have been losing ground for several years; they may be thrown entirely out of account. . . . [I]t is the masses, the democracy (call it by what name we may), which must rule; and they are hopelessly against the Southern policy, whether it be called the extension of slavery, or the establishment of a balance of power between the two sections. . . . [M]y dear sir, depend upon it the Northern democracy can never again be depended upon for a Southern alliance. Fifteen or twenty years ago the abolition men and women were mobbed everywhere, and their lives endangered and their halls burned; now the mob are all the other way, but it is not that they have become abolitionists. The wrong of slavery preached to them from the pulpit, the waste and inexpediency of slavery reiterated to them by the press, doubtless weigh with the masses, but all other influences sink into insignificance compared with that brought to bear for two years past, and especially during the past four months from the stump and by the tremendous machinery of the campaign press, to convince the laboring classes here of the aristocratic nature of the institution of slavery; of the small number of slaveholders compared with the white population North and South, and of the coming issue being whether this small class (supposed to rule the South) shall own half the Senate and shall use the national arm to extend their institution at home and abroad.

So long as there is a pretext, a color, for holding up to the people such an issue, there can be but one result.

The masses in all countries can be roused upon two points, their nation's interests and their own prejudices; and if there is anything in this country fixed, it is the prejudice against aught which has the appearance even of aristocracy."

Source: Sarah Forbes Hughes, ed. *Letters and Recollections of John Murray Forbes*. 2 vols. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1899, 1: 150-57.