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SPEECH OF HON. J. BRENT.

Delivered from the 6th Congressional District of Maryland, in the Charleston Convention.

From the Charleston Mercury, May 1, 1860.]

MR. PRESIDENT: No man who has an American patriotic heart can witness this scene of apparent sectional strife without trembling, not only for the integrity of the great national Democratic party, but for the American Union itself, upon which the hopes of mankind and the world depend. Has it come to this, that in the Democratic party two antagonistic principles have arisen to come in collision with each other? I cannot think so. I claim, gentlemen, the far South as my birthplace. I am identified with the border States of Maryland—one of those border States most vitally interested in the whole slavery agitation—or, gentlemen, if the day shall come when there is united North and a united South, the dark and bloody ground, the debatable ground, will be the Border States of this Union. My loyalty to the South has grown with my growth and strengthened with my strength. I stand here in perfect unison with my southern friends upon the great principle at issue. I cannot cross a sword or break a lance with any extreme southern man on the subject of constitutional power—of constitutional right. I firmly believe in the constitutional power of Congress to legislate in the Territories for the protection of slavery. [Applause.] I firmly believe, gentlemen, in the doctrine of popular sovereignty in the Territories, nor in what is called squatter sovereignty, but in what I believe that the principle on which the colonists proclaimed the right of self-government against the act of the mother country was at all analogous to the consideration of the present territorial question; because, in considering the condition of the Territories of the Union, we are considering constitutional compacts between the States and the Union. How can any one deny the power of Congress to interfere in the Territories for the purpose of regulating the tenure of property, which is one of domestic concern, subject always to the Constitution of the United States? That is my platform of principle. While I hold to this principle—while I consider that the South has a fair right to the execution of the constitutional compact, yet, gentlemen, I can tolerate, as long as it is possible, an honest and patriotic difference of opinion between the members of the great Democratic family. [Applause.] I know that upon this question there are honest southern Democrats who agree with us in the South upon this question of principle. I know that there are honest patriotic southern men who do not agree with us upon this question. But, gentlemen, when I come to the consideration of the question of policy of what the South is to gain—of what is to be the practical result of intervention in the Territories—there, I lay leave to differ with my southern friends and brethren.

I have listened to this debate in vain to hear a vindication from my southern friends—from the distinguished gentleman from Alabama—of the expediency and policy of enforcing their constitutional right.

I understand that the platform of my Alabama friends in 1856 was predicated upon a full knowledge of their right to the exercise of constitutional power in the Territories, and yet they sent delegates to Cincinnati for the purpose of claiming the doctrine of non-intervention as the policy of the South to the Democratic party. What has occasioned this change? Is the Democratic party of the country called upon to reverse the settled landmark of the national policy of that party? It was just and proper at Baltimore in 1852 to proclaim the doctrine of non-intervention, and the Democratic party was pledged to never allow its delegates to come up then upon the subject of slavery in Congress, under whatever form or color it might present itself. If the same policy was enforced at Cincinnati, and the Democratic party was again pledged to resist all attempts to renew the agitation of slavery in or out of Congress, in what manner has the South changed? Do we are to establish a policy to-day and reverse it four years hence, then burn your platforms up—they are not worth taking. Take, then, what is the cause and the reverse of sentiment among my southern friends? Have we not, under the glorious and irresistible banner of non-intervention, won in succession two presidential elections, and have we not adopted since the days of Andrew Jackson—the Lord bless his memory as a national conservative—and I am as ardent a lover of the old national constitution as any man, I care not where the sun rises or sets? I will ask my southern friends differing with me upon this question of policy, differing, I hope, in no unkind spirit, I trust, differing as brothers and American patriots—what has occasioned this change of policy? Is it because Kansas has or is about to become a free State? I do not think that this consideration any adequate reason for this change. Kansas, with its soil and climate, was no battle field upon which to fight this slavery question. The same law of climate which has settled the question of freedom in the Northern States, has settled it in Kansas. Was it because California has become a free State? That is a peculiar and excepted case.

The immense influx of the mining population, the immediate climate of California, have made it a free State. Gentlemen, southern gentlemen, consider the fact that this question, the policy of non-intervention has carried slavery into New Mexico, south of the Missouri compromise line, which the refusal to exclude slavery in the Territories,