

SPEECH OF  
COL. ROBERT M. DOUGLAS,  
OF WASHINGTON, D. C.,

DELIVERED AT A REPUBLICAN MASS MEETING HELD AT SMITHFIELD, N. C.,  
JULY 12TH, 1870.

*Fellow Citizens of Johnston County:—*

Disinclined as I am to commence a speech with the conventional apology, I must offer a few words in extenuation of the many imperfections that will appear in the course of my remarks. Late last night, while sitting in the *Standard* office totally unexpecting such an honor, some gentlemen called and insisted upon my accompanying them to-day, stating that I would be expected to address you upon some of the issues of the canvass. I told them I was unprepared; but upon their insisting, I felt it my duty to come, and if you desired it, tell you in a few plain words a few plain truths. The gentlemen who have proceeded me so eloquently, and at such length, have left but little for me to say; but there is one topic of such vital importance that it cannot be exhausted—the sanctity of human life and of the human person. Forming the fundamental principle and chief end of all law, its discussion is rendered of still more importance to us now by the frequent violations of it by armed bands of disguised desperadoes and assassins. It is needless for me to recount the almost nightly outrages which occur: you all know them, and know that they are committed by a secret oath bound society, which, whatever may be its proper name, is generally known as the Kuklux Klan. These men have violated with impunity every law of God and man. The courts have been unable to reach them; or if any of them have ever been brought to trial, by the aid of stocked juries and suborned witnesses they have invariably been acquitted. Justice has been paralyzed, and in many counties the officers of the law, if they themselves do not belong to the organization, are afraid to attempt its suppression, or the arrest of any of its members. The Legislature has passed stringent laws; and the Governor has issued proclamation after proclamation offering large rewards for the arrest and conviction of the offenders, and calling upon all good citizens to aid the legally constituted authorities in the vindication of the law. All, however, has been powerless to suppress the wide spread and growing evil. Finding that the State authorities were unable

by any ordinary process of law to reach the matter, the General Assembly determined to interfere. Congress passed an act, approved May 21, 1870, entitled an act to enforce the right of citizens of the United States, to vote in the several States of this Union, and for other purposes. From this act, a copy of which I hold in my hand, I propose to read three sections.

Sec. 5. And be it further enacted, That if any person shall prevent, hinder, control or intimidate, or shall attempt to prevent, hinder, control or intimidate, any person from exercising or in exercising the right of suffrage, to whom the right is secured or guaranteed by the fifteenth amendment to the Constitution of the United States, or by means of bribery, threats, or threats of depriving such person of employment or occupation, or of ejecting such person from rented house, lands, or other property, or by threats of refusing to renew leases or contracts for labor, or by threats of violence to himself and family, such person so offending shall be deemed guilty of a misdemeanor, and shall on conviction thereof, be fined not less than five hundred dollars, or be imprisoned not less than one month, and not more than one year, or both, at the discretion of the court.

This section does not apply to what is commonly called Kukluxing, for that we have a more stringent one, but to bribery or intimidation of any kind. Should a man threaten to turn you out of employment, refuse to rent you land, or do any other act, which otherwise he might have the right to do, contingent upon your voting in a certain manner, he renders himself liable to the provisions of this section. Whether he fulfills his threat or not is of no consequence.

Sec. 6. And be it further enacted, That if two or more persons shall band or conspire together or go in disguise upon the public highway, or upon the premises of another, with intent to violate any provision of this act, or to injure, oppress, threaten, or intimidate any citizen with intent to prevent or hinder his free exercise and enjoyment of any right or privilege granted or secured to him by the Constitution or laws of the



United States, or because of his having exercised the same, such persons shall be held guilty of felony, and on conviction thereof, shall be fined or imprisoned, or both, at the discretion of the court—the fine not to exceed five thousand dollars, and the imprisonment not to exceed ten years—and shall moreover, be therafter ineligible to, and disabled from holding any office or place of honor, profit, or trust created by the Constitution or laws of the United States.

This section especially applies to Kukluxism, and was intended to reach the condition of affairs in these Southern States. Notice particularly the provisions and penalties of this section. Five thousand dollars fine and ten years imprisonment for those who band together for purposes of Kukluxism, whether or not they commit any subsequent act of violence. This will reach not only the depraved wretch who carries out the instructions of their secret council, but also those of higher rank and cooler judgment who, afraid to risk their own lives, advise and direct. It should also apply to those, no matter what their political position or social standing may be, who publicly justify or excuse these acts of lawlessness; though I doubt whether a court of justice would so hold. A court of morals would undoubtedly thus decide.

Section 4 imposes a fine of not less than five hundred dollars, or imprisonment for not less than one month, or both, upon every lawful officer who shall refuse to register a legally qualified voter. It further specifies that such officer shall for every offense pay the sum of five hundred dollars to the injured party. Section 8 gives the United States courts exclusive jurisdiction over all offenses against the provisions of this act. Republicans, I would add Conservatives, were it not a well-known fact that none of you are ever interfered with, you have a right to cast your vote as freemen in the coming election. It is not only a right, but a duty, you owe to yourself and to your children; and in the exercise of which you will be protected by the National Government. You especially, colored men, show yourselves worthy of the ballot that has been conferred upon you. If any of you desire to vote the Conservative ticket, do so without fear of interruption, and on your heads and your posterity be the consequences of your folly if our enemies carry the State. But I do not believe there is one of you so false to the interests of your race, as to vote for the party who even now, if they had the power, would deprive you of every right you enjoy. Vote to a man for the nominees of the great National Republican party; and if any one dare to interfere with you, report him to the proper authorities. If you do not know the right course to pursue, ask some of your Republican friends, and they will tell you.

Since I see some Conservatives among my hearers, I will address a few words to them; and in the beginning wish to disclaim anything personal. I know few of you, either by sight or by reputation; and those of you who are good and true men, I hope will take no offense. But if there are any among you whose consciences tell you that you come within the category of those to whom my denunciations apply, and may feel disposed to take my remarks as intended for yourselves, you are at perfect liberty to do so. They are meant for such as you, and so is this Enforcement Act. You charge upon our party that we are proscriptive. Nothing can be more unjust. When a Convention was elected under the reconstruction acts, we had an overwhelming majority in that body, and framed a Constitution to suit ourselves. What was the result? Not a single political disabling clause is to be found in that glorious instrument. The last legislature, which was largely Republican, even went so far as to recommend a general amnesty act. What has been your conduct in return? You have bitterly denounced us politically and personally, and have attempted socially to ostracise us. Your Kuklux Klan, scattered throughout the State and fostered by the controlling majority of your party, have killed, maimed and scourged men, both white and colored, guilty of no other crime than that of being Republicans. You have even taken women from their beds, stripped, and whipped them till the blood streamed from their lacerated persons. We know why all this has been done. Not from petty spite, or feelings of private revenge; but as part of a general plan to obtain by intimidation of Republican voters, possession of the government of these Southern States. Your plan goes further, and looks to the ultimate disruption of the Union. You hoped to obtain by political strategy what you failed to win by arms; but you are mistaken if you think the national government will ever again place itself in the position in which it was in 1861. Call it consolidation, centralization, or what you will, the United States has a strong government, one able and determined to maintain its authority and enforce its laws. You should love your country from the glorious memories that clustered round it, and because it is your country. You should respect and obey its authority from a natural regard for law and order. But if you render neither affection nor willing obedience, you will be taught both to respect and obey at the point of a Federal bayonet. Section 13, of this act reads thus:

Sec 13. And be it further enacted, That it shall be lawful for the President of the United States to employ such part of the land or naval forces of the United States, or of the militia, as shall be necessary to

aid in the execution or judicial process issued under this act.

If the military forces of the United States are not sufficient, the President is empowered to call upon the militia; and it would not take long to rally round our glorious flag an army of gallant men, who have already borne it triumphant over many a bloody field. You know too well how northern men will fight.

Turn to the unnumbered graves, where sleep many of the bravest and the best of Carolina's sons, who were opposed to the war; but when they were forced out of the Union by the machinations of unprincipled politicians, fought and died like men. Far better would it be for our country if God in His providence could have spared them to serve the State they loved so well, and have filled their places with some of the men who, to day, taking as their cardinal principle, "rule or ruin," are keeping this land in constant turmoil to further their own political ends. Concerning the militia, that is now being organized, I have but little to say. If you need them, you will get them in time; and when they come, take a good look at them, and see how you like them. I can only say that I speak what I know in stating that the President will give a firm support to Gov. Holden in his efforts to suppress the disorders that exist in this State. We do not wish to interfere with any man in the lawful exercise of his rights. We do not desire to prevent the polling of a single Conservative vote by any means, save legitimate argument, at the coming election. But we know our rights as freemen, and will assert and maintain them. There is a fair republican majority in this State if the full colored vote is polled; and ample protection will be given for the polling of that vote.

I do not come here to make a speech abounding in flowing sentences and well rounded periods, but as I stated in the beginning, to tell simple truths in unequivocal terms. However clear my words are, the gleam of a bayonet and the flash of a rifle will speak a plainer language.

We hear a great deal about Radical corruption and extravagance, but see very little of the proof. It is true there has been both corruption and extravagance; but neither party can be held responsible for it, since members of both parties were engaged in it, and the larger share of the bonds in question passed into the hands of men who have never voted the Republican ticket. Who introduced the resolution making seven dollars the per diem of members? Judge Osborne, the accomplished Conservative leader in the Senate; and the resolution was supported by eight of the nine Conservatives present. Did not your members, by factious opposition to bills which

they knew must inevitably pass, greatly lengthen the session of the Legislature? Did they not spend thousands of dollars of the people's money in investigating committees with the single result of proving that one of the most prominent Conservative Senators took a bribe of twenty dollars from poor murdered Stephens? That man, proved corrupt by a committee he himself had advocated, has since been foremost in the cry of Radical corruption. To fasten these charges upon the Republican party, as a party, you must show that they exist in the party throughout the Union, since, unlike the chaotic mass representing every shade of political opinion save loyalty to the government, led by unprincipled demagogues and disappointed aspirants, who call themselves Democrats, Conservatives, Citizens, and whatever other name they think will suit the local prejudices of their section, the great Republican party claims to be a national party, and as such has a national platform. A decrease in the national debt of twenty millions in the month of June, shows Radical corruption and extravagance. The enormous decrease, since the inauguration of the present administration one hundred and thirty-eight million of dollars has enabled Congress to reduce taxation, and if this decrease continues, they will be able at the next session to greatly reduce, or entirely abolish, the present tax on fruit distillation and tobacco, which proves so burdensome to our people. This decrease of debt and reduction of taxation are the fruits of Republican rule throughout the country. I said that the so-called Democratic or Conservative party was not a national party, but a chaotic mass formed of different local parties with local platforms; and this is an undoubted fact. In this State you call yourselves Conservatives, through the country at large you generally call yourselves Democrats. You have usurped that name, hoping that the glorious memories of the past that clustered round it, will give you strength before the people, and serve to cover your treasonable principles. But you cannot deceive the people. They well know that the National Democratic party died with the war. The Breckinridge rebel Democracy went into the rebellion, while the Douglas or war Democrats joined with the then Republican party to form what was known throughout the war as the Union party. This party has since assumed the title of "National Republican." Your impudent claim to be the true representatives of the old Democracy, as Mr. Lincoln would say, reminds me of a little story. There was once a good old man who, in early life, got a vinegar barrel, which lasted for the remainder of his days. This old man lived into the generation of his grandchildren, and was greatly loved and respected by them,—so much so that on his death they

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determined to preserve the vinegar barrel as a sacred relic. Years passed on, and the hoops were eaten up with rust, and fell off. They were replaced by new ones. Another lapse of time, and the heads fell in. New heads were inserted. The barrel was of no use; but it was grandfather's, and must be preserved. A year longer—the old staves gave place to new ones. About this time some member of the family suggested that the present barrel was entirely new, and was not the same old vinegar barrel to which grandfather was so much attached. About this a family council was held, and the committee of investigation reported that the only point of identity between the two barrels was the *bung hole*. It is the same with the two Democratic parties. Your leaders took out one by one every plank that was put there by Jackson and his associate patriots—extracted every good wrought nail, and changed every timber—until the only thing left of the glorious old party was the narrow opening by which all the true and loyal men left it forever.

Conservatives of North Carolina, you call on all to join you who, no matter under what name, oppose the Republican party.—Conservative and Opposition!—well are the names chosen, and well do they agree with your principles.

Conservative of slavery, the whipping-post, high poll tax, and every law calculated to degrade the poor man to the condition of a slave, that disgraced the code of our fathers. Opposition to emancipation, equal civil and political rights, the homestead, and every act of the Republican party designed to elevate the dignity of labor, and raise the laboring class to their proper sphere of independent freemen.

Conservative of every treasonable principle! Opposition to every effort to maintain the authority of the government, and to protect the citizen in the exercise of his inalienable rights! You talk of the injury done to the State by Radical extravagance and corruption, when you know that your acts of violence and midnight assassination have done more to ruin its credit than any possible amount of extravagant appropriation. As long as this Kukluxism continues the emigrant will shun the State like

he would the den of a moccasin; and the capital we need so much to improve our magnificent country, will seek some safer channel of investment.

And now, fellow Republicans, a few words of advice to you. Support, one and all, the nominees of the party. If you had objections to any of the men, you should have urged them in the nominating convention; but since they have been fairly nominated, they cease to be simple men, and become exponents of the eternal principles of Republicanism; and, as such, are entitled to your unqualified support. Let me urge you especially, white Republicans, to labor earnestly to secure the election of James H. Harris. He is a man who, if his skin were white, would be called in any circle an accomplished gentleman. Shall we yield to the petty prejudice which we so much condemn in our opponents? If he is elected, and I trust he will be, I, for one, will not be ashamed of our representative in Washington; and I can say frankly, that I can point to more than one Congressman, Democratic or Republican, who is not his equal in intellectual power. The colored men have stood nobly by us when we were running for office, and asked their votes. Shall we now desert one of their number who is fully qualified for the position he seeks? You have too just a sense of right, to act in so unfair a manner; and I doubt not will rally to a man to the support of both our nominees.

Fellow-citizens of Johnston County, let me thank you sincerely for your kindness to me to-day. I have been more than pleased at this, my first, visit here, and if I ever again have the pleasure of addressing you, I hope to do so in a manner more worthy of the earnest attention you have given me, than I have done on this occasion. Rally around the standard bearers of our glorious cause; and let old Johnston give her share to the grand Republican majority that will sweep the State from the mountains to the sea.—Then we will crush out the last vestige of disorder; and with capital and emigration pouring into our borders, our native State will go on in the magnificent career of prosperity it is evident the God of nature intended her to pursue.

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