

THE PORTAL TO TEXAS HISTORY

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SENATOR HOUSTON, OF TEXAS, ON THE NEBRASKA AND KANSAS BILL,

PREVIOUS TO THE FINAL PASSAGE OF THE SAME BY THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES,

FRIDAY NIGHT, MARCH 3, 1854.

The Senate having under consideration the bill to organize the Territories of Nebraska and Kansas—

Mr. HOUSTON said: Mr. President, this unusual night sitting is without precedent in the history of any previous Congress at this stage of the session. The extraordinary circumstances in which we find ourselves placed would seem to indicate a crisis in the affairs of the country of no ordinary importance; a crisis that portends either good or evil to our institutions.

The extraordinary character of the bill before the Senate, as well as the manner in which it is presented to the body, demands the gravest deliberation. This, sir, is the anniversary of a protracted session, in which the organization of the Territory of Nebraska was elaborately discussed on the last day of the last session. In that discussion which, like this, had kept us in our seats to the morning dawn, the prominent points of opposition were such as related to the Indian tribes. Such a bill at the present session would have met with no insuperable objections; but what do we now find? A bill entirely variant, and a bill which involves new and important principles. It has come an unexpected measure without a harbinger, for no agitation was heard of, and the breeze bore no whisper to our ears that the Missouri compromise was to be repealed.

Its presentation has been as sudden as the measure itself is bold; and the excitement of the public mind is of corresponding intensity. We are told, to be sure, that there is no necessity for agitation, and that soon the public mind will be tranquil, and the country will be in a state of repose and quiet—as it was at the introduction of this measure. The honorable Senator who has just taken his seat, [Mr. DOUGLAS,] the chairman of the Committee on Territories, in his lecture to the South, exhorted them to stand by the principle of this bill, with the assurance that it will be good for them, and that the country will maintain it. Sir, under proper circumstances, I should recognize the exhortation; but is the principle such a one as should be adopted by this body, or can it be sanctioned by

the nation? Whether it is expedient and useful at this time I shall take the liberty to examine.

Mr. President, I cannot believe that the agitation created by this measure will be confined to the Senate Chamber. I cannot believe, from what we have witnessed here to-night, that this will be the exclusive arena for the exercise of human passions, and the expression of public opinions. If the Republic be not shaken I will thank Heaven for its kindness in maintaining its stability. To what extent is it proposed to establish the principle of non-intervention? Are you extending it to a domain inhabited by citizens, or to a barren prairie, a wilderness, or even to forty thousand wild Indians? Is this the diffusive excellence of non-intervention? I, sir, am for non-intervention upon the principles which have heretofore been recognized by this Government. Hitherto Territories have been organized—within my recollection Alabama, Missouri, Florida, Arkansas, Mississippi, Wisconsin, and Iowa have been organized—and the principle now proposed was not deemed essential to their well-being; and is there any infirmity in their constitutions or their growth? Sir, has any malign influence attached to them from their simple, economical organization? It may be that the word "economy" is deemed obsolete in the present condition of our Treasury. Were it otherwise, I am simple enough to confess that the organization of two Territories—when there are not people to constitute an ordinary county in one of the populous States of this Union, and when those who do inhabit the Territories are United States soldiers, who are not entitled to vote at elections in the States or Territories—is not a procedure that can be characterized as economical. If the principle of non-intervention be correct, it is correct where the Territories have been governed by laws of Congress until they are prepared to make application for admission as States. Then they have a right to elect their delegates to convention, for the purpose of framing State constitutions, which, if accepted by Congress, invest them with all the sovereign rights of States; and then, for the first time, they have the complete power of