

**Speech [excerpts] of Hon. Charles Sumner, of Massachusetts  
in the Senate of the United States, May 19, 1856**

It belongs to me now, in the first place, to expose the Crime against Kansas, in its origin and extent. Logically, this is the beginning of the argument. I say Crime, and deliberately adopt this strongest term, as better than any other denoting the consummate transgression. I would go further, if language could further go. It is the Crime of Crimes — surpassing far the old *crimen majestatis*, pursued with vengeance by the laws of Rome, and containing all other crimes, as the greater contains the less. I do not go too far, when I call it the Crime against Nature, from which the soul recoils, and which language refuses to describe. To lay bare this enormity, I now proceed. The whole subject has already become a twice-told tale, and its renewed recital will be a renewal of its sorrow and shame; but I shall not hesitate to enter upon it. The occasion requires it from the beginning.

The Missouri compromise of 1820 provided for the admission of Missouri as a slaveholding State, and the prohibition of Slavery in all the remaining territory west of the Mississippi, and north of 36 degrees 30 minutes, leaving the condition of other territory, south of this line, or subsequently acquired, untouched by the arrangement. Here was a solemn act of legislation, called at the time a compromise, a covenant, a compact, first brought forward in this body by a slaveholder, vindicated by slaveholders in debate, finally sanctioned by slaveholding votes, also upheld at the time by the essential approbation of a slave-holding President, James Monroe, and his Cabinet, of whom a majority were slaveholders, including Mr. Calhoun himself; and this compromise was made the condition of the admission of Missouri, without which that State could not have been received into the Union. The bargain was simple, and was applicable, of course, only to the territory named. Leaving all other territory to await the judgment of another generation, the South said to the North, Conquer your prejudices so far as to admit Missouri as a slave State, and, in consideration of this much-coveted boon, Slavery shall be prohibited forever in all the remaining Louisiana Territory above 36 degrees 30; and the North yielded.

In total disregard of history, the President, in his annual message, has told us that this compromise "was reluctantly acquiesced in by the Southern States." Just the contrary is true. It was the work of slaveholders, and was crowded by their concurring votes upon a reluctant North. At the time it was hailed by slaveholders as a victory. Charles Pinckney, of South Carolina, in an oft quoted letter, written at three o'clock on the night of its passage, says, "It is considered here by the slaveholding States as a great triumph." At the North it was accepted as a defeat, and the friends of Freedom everywhere throughout the country bowed their heads with mortification.

Time passed, and it became necessary to provide for this Territory an organized government. Suddenly, without notice in the public press, or the prayer of a single petition, or one word of open recommendation from the President — after an acquiescence of thirty-three years, and the irreclaimable possession by the South of its special share under this compromise — in violation of every obligation of honor, compact, and good neighborhood — and in contemptuous disregard of the out-gushing sentiments of an aroused North, this time-honored prohibition, in itself a Landmark of Freedom, was over-turned, and the vast region now known as Kansas and Nebraska was opened to Slavery....

Sir, the Nebraska Bill was in every respect a swindle. It was a swindle by the South of the North. It was, on the part of those who had already completely enjoyed their share of the Missouri Compromise, a swindle of those whose share was yet absolutely untouched.... Urged as a Bill of Peace, it was a swindle of the whole country. Urged as opening the doors to slave-masters with their slaves, it was a swindle of the asserted doctrine of Popular Sovereignty.... It was a swindle of a great cause, early espoused by Washington, Franklin, and Jefferson, surrounded by the best fathers of the Republic. Sir, it was a swindle of God-given inalienable rights. Turn it over, look at it on all sides, and it is everywhere a swindle; and, if the word I now employ has not the authority of

classical usage, it has, on this occasion, the indubitable authority of fitness. No other word will adequately express the mingled meanness and wickedness of the cheat....

Mr. President, men are wisely presumed to intend the natural consequences of their conduct, and to seek what their acts seem to promote. Now, the Nebraska Bill, on its very face, openly cleared the way for Slavery, and it is not wrong to presume that its originators intended the natural consequences of such an act, and sought in this way to extend Slavery. Of course, they did. And this is the first stage in the Crime against Kansas.

But this was speedily followed by other developments. The bare-faced scheme was soon whispered, that Kansas must be a slave State. In conformity with this idea was the Government of this unhappy Territory organized in all its departments; and thus did the President, by whose complicity the Prohibition of Slavery had been overthrown, lend himself to a new complicity — giving to the conspirators a lease of connivance, amounting even to copartnership. The Governor, Secretary, Chief Justice, Associate Justices, Attorney, and Marshal, with a whole caucus of other stipendiaries, nominated by the President and confirmed by the Senate, were all commended as friendly to Slavery. No man, with the sentiments of Washington, or Jefferson, or Franklin, found any favor; nor is it too much to say, that, had these great patriots once more come among us, not one of them, with his recorded unretracted opinions on Slavery, could have been nominated by the President or confirmed by the Senate for any post in that Territory. With such auspices the conspiracy proceeded. Even in advance of the Nebraska Bill, secret societies were organized in Missouri, ostensibly to protect her institutions, and afterwards, under the name of “Self-Defensive Associations,” and of “Blue Lodges,” these were multiplied throughout the western counties of that State, before any countermovement from the North. It was confidently anticipated, that, by the activity of these societies, and the interest of slaveholders everywhere, with the advantage derived from the neighborhood of Missouri, and the influence of the Territorial Government, Slavery might be introduced into Kansas, quietly but surely, without arousing a conflict; that the crocodile egg might be stealthily dropped in the sunburnt soil, there to be hatched unobserved until it sent forth its reptile monster.

But the conspiracy was unexpectedly balked. The debate, which convulsed Congress, had stirred the whole country. Attention from all sides was directed upon Kansas, which at once became the favorite goal of emigration. The Bill had loudly declared that its object was “to leave the people perfectly free to form and regulate their domestic institutions in their own way;” and its supporters everywhere challenged the determination of the question between Freedom and Slavery by a competition of emigration. Thus, while opening the Territory to Slavery, the Bill also opened it to emigrants from every quarter, who might by their votes redress the wrong. The populous North, stung by a sharp sense of outrage, and inspired by a noble cause, poured into the debatable land, and promised soon to establish a supremacy of numbers there, involving, of course, a just supremacy of Freedom.

Then was conceived the consummation of the Crime against Kansas. What could not be accomplished peaceably, was to be accomplished forcibly. The reptile monster, that could not be quietly and securely hatched there, was to be pushed full-grown into the Territory. All efforts were now given to the dismal work of forcing Slavery on Free Soil. In flagrant derogation of the very Popular Sovereignty whose name helped to impose this Bill upon the country, the atrocious object was now distinctly avowed. And the avowal has been followed by the act. Slavery has been forcibly introduced into Kansas, and placed under the formal safeguards of pretended law.

**SOURCE:** Sumner, Charles. *The Crime against Kansas. Speech of Hon. Charles Sumner, of Massachusetts. In the Senate of the United States, May 19, 1856.* New York: Greeley & McElrath, 1856