

# **Sam Houston's Speech Opposing the Kansas-Nebraska Act**

**February 15, 1854**

I am aware, Mr. President, that in presenting myself as the advocate of the Indians and their rights, I shall claim but little sympathy from the community at large, and that I shall stand very much alone, pursuing the course which I feel it my imperative duty to adhere to. It is not novel for me to seek to advocate the rights of the Indians upon this floor and elsewhere. A familiar knowledge of them, their manners, their habits, and their intercourse with this Government for the last half century, from my early boyhood through life, have placed within my possession facts, and, I trust, implanted in me a principle enduring as life itself. That principle is to protect the Indian against wrong and oppression, and to vindicate him in the enjoyment of rights which have been solemnly guaranteed to him by this Government; and that is the principle, Mr. President, which I shall insist grows out of the course of policy avowed by this Government as far back as 1785. The Hopewell treaty was then negotiated with the Cherokee Indians of Tennessee....

Successive promises were made from 1785 to 1802, during the administration of General Washington; and the pledges of amity and regard that were made to the Indians by him, inured to Mr. Jefferson, for he, in 1809, made solemn promises to them, provided they would migrate west of the Mississippi.... They continued there up to 1814, 1816 and 1817, under the promises of the Government, battling against the hostile, wild Indians, and relying upon the pledges of the different Presidents of the United States, their great father, that they should not be molested in their settlement there.... After that, the policy of the Government became more stringent upon them; and a disposition arising, owing to pressure from surrounding States, to remove them to Arkansas, it was proposed that the whole nation of Cherokees east of the Mississippi should migrate, and exchange their lands on the east for lands lying to the far west....

These were the suggestions, and the most solemn pledges were made by this Government—that if they would remove to the west of the Mississippi they should never again be surrounded by white men, and that they should have a boundless and interminable outlet, as far as the jurisdiction of the United States extended.... I need not rehearse to gentlemen who are familiar with the past, the tragedies that followed, the sanguinary murders and massacres, the mid-night conflagrations—these attest the inharmonious action which arose from this faithless conduct on the part of the Government or its agents. I know this may appear a very harsh assertion to make here, that our Government acts in bad faith with the Indians.... Look at the Creeks, at the Choctaws, the Chickasaws; look at every tribe that has ever been within our

jurisdiction, and in every instance our intercourse has resulted in their detriment or destruction....

It seems to be a foregone conclusion that the Indians must yield to the progress of the white man—that they must surrender their country—that they must go from place to place, and that there is to be no rest for them. Is not the earth wide enough for all the creatures the Almighty has placed upon it? But they seem not to be regarded in the light of human beings, and are driven like wild beasts; and when their habitation is made in one place, they are only considered as temporary residents, to be transferred at will to some more distant station....

I have a proposition to make, and I will submit it to the intelligence of Senators, though the destruction of the Indians seems to be a foregone conclusion.

Military posts are distributed throughout New Mexico and Texas, along the borders of the Rio Grande, to a great extent. It takes an immense amount of money to supply the various garrisons and to carry on the transportation for the provisioning of the troops.... If you appropriate that money to the Indians, you can civilize every Indian east of the Rocky Mountains. Place capable men among them—men who feel higher impulses than a disposition to rob the defenseless—and you will be enabled to collect these people together, and to teach them the arts of agriculture and mechanics. You will civilize them preparatory to their christianization; you can do all this, and yet have a large surplus left out of the money which you are now expending for the support of these garrisons....

I will speak in reference to the Indians, and the advantage which arises when they are justly treated.

Within my recollection, the first missionary, or schoolmaster, went to the Cherokee nation on the Tennessee river; for that was the northern boundary of the nation; and I found myself in boyhood located within six miles of that boundary, and every scene upon the banks of the river and its adjacent tributaries are as familiar to me as my right hand. I had every opportunity of becoming acquainted with them.... I was familiar with them then. They were in a savage state; they had no refinement.... What are they now? They are a civilized people....

Sir, aid them in their progress.... They are not inferior in intellect, sagacity, or moral excellence to any people who are born upon the earth; and though the charge of perfidy has been made against them for ages back, I have lived for many years in connection with them, and, as a strict observer, can bear testimony that I never knew an Indian

nation violate a treaty which was made in good faith, and observed by the white man....

Here, Mr. President, I shall terminate my remarks on the subject of the Indians.... As my position in relation to the repeal of the Missouri compromise, if unexplained, might not exactly be comprehended, I must speak of it.... Although I stood alone in the South, with the exception of a southwestern Senator [Mr. Benton, of Missouri], I expressed my opinion, and voted my principle upon it. I supported the Missouri compromise, Mr. President, in its application to Oregon.... Although I had determined to vote against the bill, and the Indian provisions furnished insuperable objections to it, I have not denounced its general features....

I adopt no new course, but have heretofore maintained my present position; and the reasons which I gave on that occasion I will take care, sir, to reassert on this, and will show that it is no new ground to me; that it is one which I have maintained since Texas was annexed to the United States, and since she formed one star of our constellation.

If I voted, Mr. President, on a former occasion, in 1848, for the Missouri Compromise, I voted for it in accordance with the sanction of Texas.... Among the conditions expressed in that enactment, to which the consent of the Republic of Texas was peremptorily exacted, as a prerequisite to her admission into the Union, will be found the following. It provides that all new States formed north of 36°ree;30', within the limits of Texas, as she then rightfully claimed, slavery should be prohibited; that in all south of that, they could come into the Union with or without slavery, as they might think proper. This was accepted by Texas, with all the sanctity and solemnity that could attach to any compact whatever. She adopted the Missouri compromise....

The Missouri compromise has been repeatedly recognized and acted upon by Congress as a solemn compact between the States; and as such, it has received the sanction of each individual member of the Confederacy. I consider that the vital interests of all the States, and especially of the South, are dependent, in a great degree, upon the preservation and sacred observance of that compact.... I assert the principle that Congress has no right to legislate upon the subject of slavery in any of our territories of this Union....

I would oppose to the last by all means of rational resistance the repeal of the Missouri compromise, because I deem it essential to the preservation of this Union, and to the very existence of the South. It has heretofore operated as a wall of fire to us....

I do not wish to be sectional. I do not wish to be regarded as for the South alone. I need not say that I am for the whole country. If I am, it is sufficient without rehearsing it here. But, sir, my all is in the South. My identity is there. My life has been spent there.... I claim the Missouri compromise, as it now stands, in behalf of the South. I ask Senators to let its benefits inure to us. I do not want it taken away....

I am now called upon to vote for the repeal of the Missouri compromise, which I esteem everything to the South—under which it has prospered, and in which we have always acquiesced since its adoption—which the South united in applying to Texas when it was admitted into the Union; and even Texas has prospered under the infliction....

Mr. President, in the far distant future I think I perceive those who come after us, who are to be affected by the action of this body upon this bill. Our children have two alternatives here presented. They are either to live in after times in the enjoyment of peace, of harmony, and prosperity, or the alternative remains for them of anarchy, discord, and civil broil. We can avert the last. I trust we shall. At any rate, so far as my efforts can avail, I will resist every attempt to infringe or repeal the Missouri Compromise.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Class Period: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Analyzing a Document, Speech, Treaty, Letter, or other Historical Items**

1. Name of the item: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Who is the author? \_\_\_\_\_

3. What was the purpose of the item? \_\_\_\_\_

4. Date the item was ratified, sent, entered into, issued, or accepted \_\_\_\_\_

5. Describe the item; was it a letter, a treaty, a speech? \_\_\_\_\_

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6. Brief background of the item (purpose of the item)

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7. List what you think the author was trying to convey to the reader or listener.

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8. List some of the things the item tells you about life in the United States at the time it was written; or project as to how it is applicable to the United States. .

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9. What questions has the author/item left unanswered?  
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10. How would you respond to the document, speech, or letter if you were the intended recipient or audience?

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