Constitutionalizing Racism

George H. Williams’s Appeal for a White Utopia

by Philip Thoennes and Jack Landau

During the mid nineteenth century, migrants to Oregon created public policy around two issues then dominating national attention — race and slavery. The technologies of that age, in matters of transportation and communication, made Oregon isolated and far-removed from the rest of the country. This did not, however, mean that Oregon was cut off from traditions, legacies, and policies of White supremacy. Powerful ideas on slavery and race, formulated by the United States’ founding fathers, and especially Thomas Jefferson, influenced framers of the Oregon Constitution in 1857. It is not difficult to draw connections between Jefferson’s defense of slavery and belief that America could not succeed as a multi-racial society and White Oregonians’ adopting Black exclusion laws during the Provisional and Territorial periods.

BEGINNING WITH THE FOUNDING of a provisional government in 1843 and continuing through the writing of the Oregon Constitution in 1857, the framers of Oregon’s legal systems designed laws to exclude racial minorities — not only African Americans, but also Native Americans and people of Chinese descent — from enjoying equality before the law, participating in civic life, and living among White Oregonians. Indeed, one of the provisional legislature’s first official actions was to simultaneously ban slavery in Oregon and make black immigration to the region a crime punishable by whipping. Many of Oregon’s founders rejected slavery for the same reason they sought to exclude free Blacks: the desire for a White utopia.

In the summer of 1857, sixty men gathered in Salem to draft Oregon’s first state constitution. The month-long convention proved a microcosm of the concerns and prejudices that animated political debate in mid-nineteenth-century Oregon — namely, fiscal conservatism, the question of slavery, and exclusionary racism. On July 28, 1857, just days before the Oregon Constitutional Convention began, the front page of the Oregon Statesman featured a letter to the editor, “Slavery in Oregon,” written by George H. Williams, a delegate to the convention, prominent Democrat, and Chief Justice of the Territorial Supreme Court. That letter, reprinted here in its original form, is an important primary document to consider when examining the power of language and the structures of Oregon’s White supremacy. Williams’s arguments against slavery in Oregon helped set the political tone during the days leading up to the constitutional convention, and undoubtedly played a role in the eventual admission of Oregon as a free state — not because slavery was an abhorrent practice, but for the harm it would do to the “hardy pioneer” who had resettled the land.

Two events in the 1850s provide a context for the political environment surrounding Williams’s opinions. The first was the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854. The Kansas-Nebraska Act advanced the idea of popular sovereignty by giving the people of the newly created Kansas and Nebraska Territories the right to decide for themselves whether to allow slavery. The act had the effect of nullifying the Missouri Compromise of 1820, legislation that simultaneously admitted Maine as a free state and Missouri as a slave state to maintain balance between North and South, and prevented slavery in newly admitted territories north of the 36° 30’ parallel. Violence nevertheless erupted in subsequent years over the legality of slavery in new states. Williams decried the violence that erupted in other states over slavery and expressed hope that in Oregon “good feeling and moderation may prevail in all that is said or done about the matter.” This wish for tempered political discussions quickly moved to a racist argument about how slavery would be a burden in Oregon: “negroes are naturally lazy, and as slaves actuated by fear of the whip — are only interested in doing enough to avoid punishment.” The second event, two months before Williams wrote his letter, was the U.S. Supreme Court’s declaration in the Dred Scott v. Sandford decision that the framers had
GEORGE H. WILLIAMS, pictured here in about 1863, was appointed to the Supreme Court of Oregon Territory in 1852 and served as a Marion County delegate to the Oregon Constitutional Convention in 1857.

never considered citizenship for African Americans:

on the contrary, they were at that time considered as a subordinate and inferior class of beings who had been subjugated by the dominant race, and, whether emancipated or not, yet remained subject to their authority, and had no rights or privileges but such as those who held the power and the Government might choose to grant them.5

The court went on to opine that the Missouri Compromise of 1820 was an unconstitutional infringement of the rights of slave owners to take their property into any state or territory they wished. Chief Justice Taney wrote that Congress lacked the authority to prohibit slavery in federal territories and could not delegate that authority to the territories themselves.6

The process of drafting a constitution and applying for statehood would reveal, in sharp relief, the lengths to which Oregonians would go to ensure the exclusion of African Americans. Williams acknowledged that many of his contemporaries, such as Matthew Deady and Joseph Lane, held pro-slavery views and that his letter represented a break with prevailing party ideology. Williams, however, did not object to slavery as an institution. Indeed, his letter is full of sympathy and admiration for Southern slaveowners — “as high-minded, honorable, and humane a class of men as can be found in the world.” He attributed the entire controversy over slavery to northern abolitionists, whose “foolish zeal” hardened the views of the South and only exacerbated the national crisis. Williams opposed slavery in Oregon on economic grounds, arguing that his fellow Democrats were incorrect in looking to enslavement as a means to address the labor shortage in Oregon.

In Williams’s view, such arguments were short-sighted for two reasons. First, Oregon’s climate did not support the type of agriculture that made the capital-intensive slave trade economically feasible: “To argue that slavery is a good thing in Alabama, and must therefore be a good thing in Oregon, is illogical, for Alabama has a hot climate and cotton bearing soil, which Oregon has not.” Second, he argued that the presence of slaves in Oregon would “degrade [the] labor” of white workers because it puts them “upon a level with negroes.” Williams even claimed that the presence of Black slave labor in Oregon would degrade society as a whole:

Moral differences when they meet, like water, seek a common level, and therefore if white men and negroes are brought in contact without that perfect subjugation and rigid discipline which prevail among the slaves of the South, the white men will go down and the negroes go up, till they come to resemble each other in the habits, tastes and actions of their lives.

He closed the letter with a final plea for Black exclusion: “Taking everything into consideration, I ask if it is not the true policy of Oregon to keep as clear as possible of negroes, and all the exciting questions of negro servitude? Situated away here on the Pacific, as a free state, we are not likely to be troubled much with free negroes or fugitive slaves.”

It is impossible to know how much impact the Williams letter had on the proceedings of the constitutional convention of 1857. The letter itself, however, offers valuable insight to the logic that prevailed in Oregon’s founding as a state that excluded both slavery and free Black people. A transcription of the original letter is reproduced on the following pages.

JUDGE GEORGE H. WILLIAMS
A TIMELINE OF HIS POLITICAL AND LEGAL LIFE

1844: Admitted to the New York bar
1852: Appointed by President Zachary Taylor to serve as chief justice of the Supreme of Oregon Territory; arrived in Portland in 1853; reappointed in 1857
August 1857: Marion County delegate to Oregon Constitutional Convention; chair of the Committee on Judiciary; member of the Committee on Corporations and Internal Improvement
1859: Went into private practice
1865: Left Democratic Party and became a Republican; elected U.S. Senator (served until 1871)
1873?: Ulysses S. Grant makes him U.S. Attorney General (served until 1877); authored what would become the Fourteenth Amendment to the US Constitution
1886: Among the first directors of Commercial National Bank, opened this year
1902: Elected Mayor of Portland at 79 years old. Won by 643 votes out of 13,000 total cast.
1902: Member of the new police commission, a subcommittee of the new Executive Board that succeeded the Board of Public Works and approved all city expenditures and franchise applications
1905: Lost re-election as Mayor of Portland
I do not reproach the slaveholders of the South for holding slaves. I consider them as high-minded, honorable, and humane a class of men as can be found in the world, and throughout the slavery agitation have contended that they were "more sinned against than sinning."

I have no pleasure in the question — nothing directly to gain — perchance something to lose by its discussion. Expecting however to have my home in this country, I confess to some solicitude that a question so deeply affecting all its interests should be fully discussed and wisely decided. Views like those here presented are not premature at this time. Much has been said for Slavery. Candidates for office have become its champions on the stump — documents have been circulated — a paper has been set up for its advocacy. These things invite, in fact, force discussion. Men are rapidly, perhaps inconsiderately taking sides, and determining as to their votes upon this question. Differing reluctantly from many friends for whose opinions I have respect, I am constrained to think that Oregon had better become a non-slaveholding State. I shall argue with facts and figures in favor of this position, I ask those concerned carefully and dispassionately to consider the subject in all its bearings, then do in reference thereto, what judgment dictates to be done. I appreciate the magnitude of the theme. To discuss all its features and effects, one must know, like a spirit of the past, and speak like a Sybil of the future. Conscious that this slavery discussion has shaken the pillars of the republic — has rent the most powerful church of the nation in twain — has appeared upon the plains of Kansas with fierce strife and bloodshed; I address myself to it, feeling somewhat as I would to approach a cloud charged with lightning and a whirlwind. I hope however, that the controversy will not grow up in bitterness, and bear its fruit in convulsions here, as it has elsewhere, but that good feeling and moderation may prevail in all that is said or done about the matter.

Whatever else may be alleged against those who oppose slavery in Oregon, they cannot, as it seems to me, be charged with commencing the contest about it. Daniel Webster said in his celebrated speech of March 7th, 1850, in the Senate of the U.S., that God had fixed the natural limits of slavery southward of this, and though dead, his words yet live and are true. On the 26th day of July, A.D. 1845, the real pathfinders and pioneers to the Pacific coast resolved that "slavery or involuntary servitude should not exist in this Territory." — On the 14th of August, 1848, the Congress of the United States, by a law voted for by Stephen A. Douglas, and approved by Jas. K. Polk, declared that "slavery should not exist in Oregon." People came here — laws have been enacted — social habits formed — an entire system of polity set up, and I and those who think with me now, seek nothing but a continuation of this state of things, which these laws of God and man have established.

I quarrel with no one whose honest feelings or prejudices incline him to favor the institution of slavery, but when any man says that slavery would be an advantage to Oregon if adopted here, I must be permitted respectfully to dispute the correctness of his judgment. So far as I am able to judge of myself, I have no objections not local slavery. I do not reproach the slaveholders of the South for holding slaves. I consider them as high-minded, honorable, and humane a class of men as can be found in the world, and throughout the slavery agitation have contended that they were “more sinned against than sinning.”

Wise, patriotic and just were the fathers of the Republic, and their opinions and acts come down to us like the voice of departed experience to those just entering upon the stage of life. Thomas Jefferson was a great man — towering, like Saul, above his fellows for sagacity and judgment — born and bred in Virginia, and a slaveholder all his life. — On the 19th of July, 1787, the Congress of the Confederation that Slavery be prohibited in all the territory of the United States north of the 31st parallel of north latitude. Now slavery would have been either a benefit or an injury to that country. Jefferson must have determined that it would be an injury, and no man was ever more competent to decide such a question. On the 13th of July, 1787, the Congress of the Confederation voted unanimously to exclude slavery from the Northwest Territory. Massachusetts and South Carolina stood together in favor of that measure. South Carolina, exasperated by sectional strife, would no doubt at this time, condemn that vote, but I appeal from Philip drunk to Philip sober. I appeal from South Carolina of nullification to the South Carolina of the revolution. I argue from this vote in 1787, that it was then the deliberate judgment of the whole United States in Congress assembled, that Slavery would be an injury to the Northwest Territory, and therefore it was excluded. North Carolina, in 1786 declared the introduction of slaves into that State “of evil consequences and highly impolitic,” and imposed a duty of $5 per head thereon. Virginia, in 1778, passed an act prohibiting the further introduction of slaves, and in 1782, removed all restrictions to emancipation. Maryland followed her example. Gradually these States were preparing to get rid of slaves, when abolitionism from the North, with a foolish zeal which has characterized it from that time to this, wounded their pride and awakened their jealousy, and then the movement went backwards, and slavery was forever enthroned in the heart and interests of southern society. I cite these facts simply to show that before the slave question was dragged...
into the political arena, the judgment of all parts of the country was against the advantages of slavery.

I will now produce a case quite analogous if not exactly parallel to ours, to prove the impolicy of slavery in Oregon. Indiana and Oregon are both north of the forty-second degree of north latitude. They resemble each other in the productions of the soil. In 1803, Indiana was a new country, and almost as inaccessible as Oregon now is. — Railroads, canals and steamboats were then unknown. Emigration was therefore slow and labor scarce. Prairies were “few and far between.” Farms were generally made by cutting down the trees, and digging up the stumps. With his axe in one hand and his rifle in the other, the hardy pioneer went forth to his work, felling the forests with the one, and fighting the savage with the other. Trouble was of course incident to this state of things. The settlers looked to his work, felling the forests with the onehand, and digging up the stumps.

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vote for slavery in Oregon? Would he vote for a “moral impossibility?”

Stephen A. Douglas, in a speech delivered in the Senate on the 14th day of February, 1857, says: “I am aware, sir, that the act of Congress was passed prohibiting slavery in Oregon, but it was never passed here until six years after the people of that Territory had excluded it by their own law, unanimously adopted. So Oregon was consecrated to freedom by act of their local legislature six years before the Congress of the United States by the Wilmot Proviso undertook to do what had been done and well done.” Standing in the presence of a listening Senate, and pointing away to the Pacific, the “little giant” refers to the squatter sovereigns of Oregon and their slavery prohibition of 1845, and pronounces upon them the plaudit of “well done.”

May not a man safely follow in the footsteps of Jefferson, Randolph and Clay, or stand with Buchanan, [Cass] and Douglas upon this question?

I will now proceed to show from the nature of the case that slavery would be a burden and not a blessing to Oregon. Slavery is involuntary servitude — labor forced by power from unwilling laborers. There is no ambition, no enterprise, no energy in such labor. Like the horse to the tread-mill, or the ox to the furrow, goes the slave to his task. Compare this with the labor of free white men. Take the young man without family or property — no bondage fills the little horizon of his life with its unchangeable destiny. Conscious of his equality, of his right to aspire to, and attain any position in society, he will desire the respect and confidence of his fellow men. All the world is his for action, and all the future is his for hope. Employ the head of a family to do your work. Anxious to make his home comfortable, to educate his children, to provide a competency for old age, he will have strong inducements to be diligent and faithful in business. These motives energize free labor, but have little or no influence upon the slave. One free white man is worth more than two negro slaves in the cultivation of the soil, or any other business which can be influenced by zeal or the exercise of discretion. I do not claim that this is so where slaves are worked in gangs by a task-master, but it would be so in Oregon; for no man here can have slaves enough to justify the employment of an overseer and therefore every owner must manage his own slaves, or leave them to self-management. Situated as the farmer is in Oregon, he wants a laborer to be something more than a mere slave. He wants a man who can act sometimes in the capacity of agent — to whom he can entrust his business when absent from home, and who will go to the field and work without watching or driving. Negroes are naturally lazy and as slaves actuated by fear of the whip — are only interested in doing enough to avoid punishment. Now, if what I have said be true, it is perfectly manifest that a farmer in Oregon cannot afford to pay as much for the labor of a negro slave, as for the labor of a free white man. I say in the language of John Randolph, that slave labor is “demonstrably the dearest of any.” And I affirm that it will cost the farmer in this country, more to obtain the services of one slave, than one free man. To show the high price of slaves in the States, I might refer to different public journals, but I will quote from but one. The Central Organ, published in the parish of Avoyelles, Louisiana, says that, “13 field hands were recently sold in that place, at prices ranging from $1,365 to $2,360. The lowest sum was paid for a lad ten years — the highest was paid for a man 31 years of age. Four of the negroes were women, and nine of them under twenty years of age. Their aggregate value was $24,260.” Now from this statement, it is entirely safe to assume that a good, healthy negro man in Missouri, would be worth $1000, and the prospect in Kansas will not reduce the price. Horses and cattle more than double in value by importation from the States to this country, and without doubt the rule would hold good in reference to slaves, so that a good man in Oregon would be worth $2,000. Now the interest on this sum at 20 per cent would be $400 per annum, which would hire a white man for ten months, at $40 per month. State the facts in any way, and it will appear that the interest on the value of a good slave man will hire a white laborer from April to November, and there is little help needed by the farmer during the other portion of the year. But there are many other things to be considered. You employ a free man and you have nothing to do with him but to provide him with employment and food, and pay his wages. But with a slave it is different. Your house must be his home. You must provide everything for him, and pay all his expenses sick or well. You must watch him when he works and when he plays. You must tell him what to do, and whip him if he fails to do it. — Drunken, depraved and vicious as he may be, you must control his passions and be responsible for his acts. I remember that a slaveholder in St. Louis told me that the vicious behavior of a female slave which for some reason he could not or would not sell, caused him more trouble than all the other cares of his life.

Suppose a farmer to own two or three negroes. They may be of profit to him in the summer, but what can they do in the winter. They cannot then plow or sow, or reap, or thresh. What could a negro, fitted by nature for the blazing sun of Africa, do at chopping wood, splitting rails, or making fence in the cool drenching rains of an Oregon winter? One season of such exposure would endanger his life. The fact is that negro slaves other than house servants

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would be perfect leeches upon the farmer during our long rainy winters. They would be more useless here than in New England, for there the winter is cold and dry, and a man can work in the barn or in the woods, but the reverse is true in this country.

There is another thing in this connection to be noticed. When a man proposes to make an investment, the risk of its loss is always taken into the account. If you loan money on doubtful security, you ask more for its use than when the security is perfectly good. Mr. Buchanan said “that it was morally impossible for slavery to exist in California, because every facility was there afforded for the slave to escape from his master, and such property would be entirely insecure.” What is true of California in this respect is certainly true of Oregon. Slaves might accompany their masters to Oregon from attachment, but suppose a slave-dealer to start for the Oregon market, across the plains, with a band of slaves bought here and there; what regard would they have for a man who had bought them to sell again upon speculation, and who was taking them a returnless distance from the “old folks at home?” With all the safeguards of law and public sentiment, slaves are manacled to be taken by the trader from one slave State to another; how then could they be safely transported thousands of miles across a wilderness country with feelings of hatred and revenge ranking in their dark bosoms? To bring them by water, to say nothing about the expense, is a hazardous and almost impracticable thing. Suppose, however, all these difficulties overcome, and your slaves safe upon the soil of Oregon, then they would stay with you or not, just as they pleased. North is the Territory of Washington with its sparse settlements — its vast forests and mountain ranges, in which a fugitive slave might hide from an army of pursuers. Eastward dwell numerous Indian tribes, to whose welcome embrace a slave might fly and be safe. No fugitive slave law would avail there, or friends of the master be found to assist in his recapture. South is the free State of California, where doubtless the fugitive slave could find friends to speed him on to a more perfect freedom in Mexico.

Isolated as Oregon is by thousands of miles from other slave States, and all the supports of slavery, an effort to maintain the institution here would be almost as impotent as the command of the vain Canute to the waves of the ocean. Some say that slave property will not be so unsafe here as I pretend, for negroes will not go to and consort with Indians, but otherwise is the evidence. Gen. Jackson found fugitive slaves fighting with the Creeks in the war of 1812. Maj. Dade’s command of 112 (excepting four) was slaughtered in the Florida war by a party of Seminoles and forty fugitive slaves, the negroes outstripping the Indians in ferocity and brutal treatment of the dead. There is another reason outweighing all others for the unsafeness of slaves in this country. I refer to public sentiment, and I say that slavery can no more stand as a useful institution with one-half of public opinion arrayed against it than a house can stand with one corner stone.

Look at the southern States. What a unanimity of sentiment exists there in favor of slavery. Look at the laws enacted and the pains taken to preserve this unanimity. This is a necessity of the system. Every man of common sense must see that slaves would not only be unsafe as property, but dangerous if their ears were filled with discussions as to the legality or justice of their bondage.

Much is said about the necessity of slaves in Oregon for domestic servants. I admit that there is a great want of household help in this country at the present time, but I deny that slavery would remove the evil. Various are the privations attending the settlement of a new country. People in Oregon cannot reasonably expect to have at this early day all the comforts and conveniences of an old community. Indiana, Iowa and the new States have suffered in this respect as we do now, but time brought to them as it will bring relief to us. Immigration is the natural, and as the experience of other States attests, the most efficient remedy for this complaint. Slavery, as it seems to me, would aggravate the trouble. Now there is not one family in ten in Oregon able to own a slave woman, (worth from $1000 to $1500,) so that if one family would be benefitted, nine would probably be worse off than they are at this time. Introduce slavery, and the chance of hiring a white girl to do housework is gone. White girls will hardly consent for wages to occupy in one family a position like that which a negro slave-woman occupies in another. Slavery might provide the favored few with domestic help, but a large majority of the people would be left to help themselves. What is it that we most need in Oregon? We have a beautiful country — a healthful climate — a rich soil — mountains big with minerals — rivers for highways, and an ocean stretching away to India for our commerce. We want more people, intelligent, enterprising and industrious people. Some profess to think that the establishment of slavery here would be the most speedy and effective way of supplying this want, but exactly the reverse is demonstrably true. I refer to the census of 1850 for evidence. Ohio and Kentucky are contiguous States, and nearly equal in size. Ohio has no advantages of climate or soil. — In 1800 the population of Ohio was 45,028, and the population of Kentucky was 179,871, but in 1850 the population of Ohio was 1,955,050, and the population of Kentucky 971,594, including 210,981 slaves. Can any reason be given for this immense difference in the growth of the two States only that the one was a free and the other a slave State. Take Indiana and Kentucky. They are adjoining States, and Kentucky has the larger territory. In 1810, Indiana had 23,890 people, and Kentucky 324,237, but in 1850 Indiana was ahead, and had 977,154. Illinois had in 1810, 11,501, but in 1850 she had 846,034. I compare these adjacent States, and contend that the figures show beyond controversy that slavery has been an obstacle to the

Introduce slavery, and the chance of hiring a white girl to do housework is gone.
Establish slavery here and the effect will be as it has been elsewhere. You will turn aside that tide of free white labor which has poured itself like a fertilizing flood across the great States of Ohio, Indiana and Illinois, and is now murmuring up the eastern slope of the Rocky Mountains.

Have not the former sprung forward to giant greatness, while the latter have slowly dragged the overburdening car of Slavery.

Men who emigrate are not usually men of large fortunes, who own slaves, and live at their ease, but they are generally men whose limbs are made sinewy by hard work; who go to new countries to get land and homes, and who expect to depend chiefly upon their own labor. Slave States are objectionable to such men, for they are too poor to be slaveholders, and too proud spirited to wear the badge of slavery. Slavery has a terror in its very name to foreign immigration. Oppressed at home, they look to America as the "land of the free." — When they come to us, they are generally ready to work on our farms, canals and railroads with white laborers, but they are not willing to take their places under the same task master with negro slaves. Establish slavery here and the effect will be as it has been elsewhere.

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Will slaveholders in view of the fact that large quantities of land are being thrown upon the market, and that the negroes worth one or two millions of dollars. The exports of the South exceed those of the North, but that proves nothing for slavery here, for 84 per cent of exports of the slaveholding States are cotton, rice and sugar, which cannot be cultivated in Oregon.

I have heard it said that slavery would increase the price of lands in this country, but this is a very great mistake. I find by the census of 1850 that the average value of land per acre in New England is $20.27. In middle States it is $28.07 per acre, while the average value of land per acre in the Southern States is $5.34. None who are familiar with current events, can be ignorant of the fact that large quantities of land in the South have been worn out and reduced to a value merely nominal by slave labor. One very common argument for slavery is that laborers, if free, will engage in mining where they are wanted by the farmers. Admit such to be the fact, is the labor of a man lost to the country who makes $25 or $50 per month more in the mines than he would on a farm. Now the question is, what is good for the country, not what is of benefit to A or B, or any class of individuals, and I say that is best for the country which gives to labor its greatest reward, whether it be mining, farming, or any other business. Labor ought to be free so that it can go into that pursuit which pays the best, or produce that for which there is the greatest demand, and thus enrich and improve the country.

Scarcely as laborers have been, and loud as are the complaints about the state of things here, no where is the diligent farmer more prosperous than in this much abused Territory of Oregon.
California has mines, and her farmers obtain help, and so it will be here if the laws of free labor and free trade are left to work out their natural results. I am opposed to slavery in Oregon because it will degrade labor. Cavilled with as this objection may be, it is vain to deny it. Suppose A and B have adjoining farms. A is rich and can buy slaves to do his work. B is less wealthy and must hire white men. Now does not the hired white man of B seem to take the same position with the negro slave of A’s. Does not this system inevitably beget a sentiment that the man or woman who hires out to do farm or house work is put upon a level with negroes.

Society if true to itself will seek to elevate and not to degrade labor. Labor changes waste places and the wilderness into the fruitful field and the beautiful city. Laboring men deserve to be the honorable of earth. They make the country and fight the battles for its defense. They fill up with vigor of mind and body where riches and luxury produce decay. They give to humanity and fame the Franklin’s, the Fulton’s and the Webster’s of history. Every community ought to have a system of free or slave labor. To mix them aggravates the evils of both, and subtracts from the benefits of each.

Negro slaves . . . are an ignorant and degraded class of beings, and therefore they will vitiate to some extent those white men who are compelled to work or associate with them.

Slaves in Oregon, if they do any thing at all, must necessarily be “Jacks of all work.” They will go every where and do every thing. They will be free enough to see and learn all the vices of society, and slaves enough to practice them without pride or self respect. I do not see how white men who expect to labor in Oregon, can consent to have negro slaves brought here to labor with them. Slaveholders, as a general thing, are not willing to sell their good men and women to be taken thousands of miles from relatives and home, but will sell the worthless and vicious, so that the Oregon market would probably be supplied with cheap negroes, which are a curse to any country. Slavery is intended to supersede the necessity of white labor; but I deny that any system is an evil which compels white people to work. Industry invigorates mind and body. It makes the appetite good and the sleep sweet. It leads to contentment, virtue and happiness. Suppose a farmer has slaves to do his work, and sons to rear. Will these sons be as industrious as they otherwise would be, and is any father willing to have his children grow up without habits of industry? Indolence is a dangerous luxury for young people, and there is good sense in the Spanish proverb that “an idle brain is the devil’s work shop.” What will be the political effect of making Oregon a slave State? This is a grave question and ought to be carefully considered. Surrounded by non-slaveholding territory — her geographical position — her climate — the productions of her soil and the nature of her commerce, all unite and identify her with the northern States. Suppose we go into the Union as a free State, the North will be pleased and the South satisfied. No statesman ever dreamed that slavery would ever exist in Oregon, and for that reason Douglas voted for, and Polk approved its prohibition in our organic Act. And last winter, Mr. Stevens of Georgia, said in Congress, that he would be glad to have the northwest Territories come in as slave States, but did not expect it, for the laws of climate, production, and population would prevent. I believe that we could go into the Union as a free State, without objection or excitement upon that ground, for this is what all parts of the country expect; but as a slave State we should arouse the prejudices of the whole North; for, as there is nothing in our circumstances or interests to justify such a thing, it would be regarded as a mere political movement to extend the institution of slavery. I contend that we have a perfect right to have slavery or not, as we please, but we know what the sentiment of the North is upon this question, and we must take things as they are, and not as they should be. Can Oregon, with her great claims, present and prospective, upon the Government, afford to throw away the friendship of the North — the overruling power of the nation, for the sake of slavery? Would it be advisable, when we can avoid it, to go into the Union in a tempest of excitement upon the negro question? Oregon would have more influence in the councils of the country, as a free, than as a slave State. Free, conservative, and impartial, she would be like California, of the family of the North, and of the friends of the South; but as a slave State, she could only depend upon the sympathies of the slaveholding power! Slavery it is said, will save us from fanaticism, but this is not true. Fanaticism is not altogether confined to the free States. South Carolina is not behind Massachusetts in this respect. Garrison, Phillips & Co., occupy one extreme, and Adams, Rhett & Co. the other. The Tribunes and Couriers of the north, are seconded in their sectional warfare by the Mercurys and Deltas of the South. Political fanaticism within the last year, has desecrated elections in four of the chief cities of the South with violence and bloodshed. I admit that there is more intensity of thought and energy of action in the North than in the South, and that these produce many excesses which I condemn as much as any man, but at the same time they work miracles in science and art, and all the improvements of the age. Fanaticism, even if we have it as a free State, will waste itself upon abstrac-
tions and ideals of something thousands of miles away, while with slavery there will come a fanaticism like the Promethean vulture to prey upon our very vitals. Slavery here, in the nature of things, must be a weak institution. Fanaticism from the North would therefore assail it, and from the South rush in to its defense. Torn and distracted in this way, our happiness and prosperity would be sacrificed to a miserable strife about negroes.

Some argue that Oregon should become a slave State so as to make the slaveholding and non-slaveholding States equal in the Senate. Admitted now as a slave State, we might make the States nominally equal in that body, but how soon would Minnesota, Kansas, Nebraska, or some other Territory come in and destroy it. We might set to work to balance the Union, but have we any assurance that other Territories will concur in the movement. Territories ought and will consult their own best interests upon this subject, and Congress has no right to regulate the admission of States so as to preserve the balance of power between different sections of the Confederacy. I will quote upon this point from a speech made last winter by Mr. Douglas, in the Senate: “Is it, (says he,) to be a struggle to winter by Mr. Douglas, in the Senate: this point from a speech made last winter by Mr. Douglas, in the Senate: “Is it, (says he,) to be a struggle to winter by Mr. Douglas, in the Senate: this point from a speech made last winter by Mr. Douglas, in the Senate: “Is it, (says he,) to be a struggle to winter by Mr. Douglas, in the Senate: this point from a speech made last winter by Mr. Douglas, in the Senate: “Is it, (says he,) to be a struggle to winter by Mr. Douglas, in the Senate: “Is it, (says he,) to be a struggle to winter by Mr. Douglas, in the Senate: “Is it, (says he,) to be a struggle to winter by Mr. Douglas, in the Senate: “Is it, (says he,) to be a struggle to winter by Mr. Douglas, in the Senate: “Is it, (says he,) to be a struggle to winter by Mr. Douglas, in the Senate: “Is it, (says he,) to be a struggle to winter by Mr. Douglas, in the Senate: “Is it, (says he,) to be a struggle to winter by Mr. Douglas, in the Senate: “Is it, (says he,) to be a struggle to winter by Mr. Douglas, in the Senate: “Is it, (says he,) to be a struggle to winter by Mr. Douglas, in the Senate: “Is it, (says he,) to be a struggle to winter by Mr. Douglas, in the Senate: “Is it, (says he,) to be a struggle to winter by Mr. Douglas, in the Senate: “Is it, (says he,) to be a struggle to winter by Mr. Douglas, in the Senate: “Is it, (says he,) to be a struggle to winter by Mr. Douglas, in the Senate: “Is it, (says he,) to be a struggle to winter by Mr. Douglas, in the Senate: “Is it, (says he,) to be a struggle to winter by Mr. Douglas, in the Senate: “Is it, (says he,) to be a struggle to winter by Mr. Douglas, in the Senate: “Is it, (says he,) to be a struggle to winter by Mr. Douglas, in the Senate: “Is it, (says he,) to be a struggle to winter by Mr. Douglas, in the Senate: “Is it, (says he,) to be a struggle to winter by Mr. Douglas, in the Senate:

I hold, too, that a man’s views as to slavery in Oregon are no test of his Democracy. To be national, the Democratic party must necessarily embrace those who prefer a free and those who prefer a slave State. Cobb no doubt upholds slavery in Georgia, where he lives, and Dickinson would oppose it in New York, where he lives, and both are good democrats. Buchanan, Cass and Douglas would vote against slavery in the States where they respectively reside, and if they mean what they say, would vote against it here if they lived in Oregon.

Taking everything into consideration, I ask if it is not the true policy of Oregon to keep as clear as possible of negroes, and all the exciting questions of negro servitude? Situated away here on the Pacific, as a free State we are not likely to be troubled much with free negroes or fugitive slaves, but as a slave state there would be a constant struggle about laws to protect such property — fierce excitement about running off or stealing negroes, for which this country is so favorable, and there would be no peace.

I have faith in the future of this country, but I do not conceive that its prosperity depends upon the spiritless efforts of enslaved labor, but upon the energies of a free and intelligent people. New routes of travel are being opened across the continent. New lines of steamships and clippers are being put upon the ocean. Facilities for traveling are increasing and expenses being reduced. The Pacific railroad is a proximate reality. Men who can lift their eyes above the little precincts of a day, will see in these things the promise of our growth and greatness as a people.

I know what syren song self love sings for slavery, how pleasant it seems in prospect to have a slave to till our ground, to wait upon us while we wake, and fan us when we sleep, but are these the ideas to possess men whose business it is to lay the foundations of a State? History, philosophy, and posterity plead with us not to be wholly absorbed in the present, but to learn from the past and look to the future, and if we hear and obey this appeal, the lapse of 25 or 50 years, which is as nothing in the life of a State, will find Oregon teeming with a people, intelligent, prosperous and happy, and every man a freeman.

Geo. H. Williams.