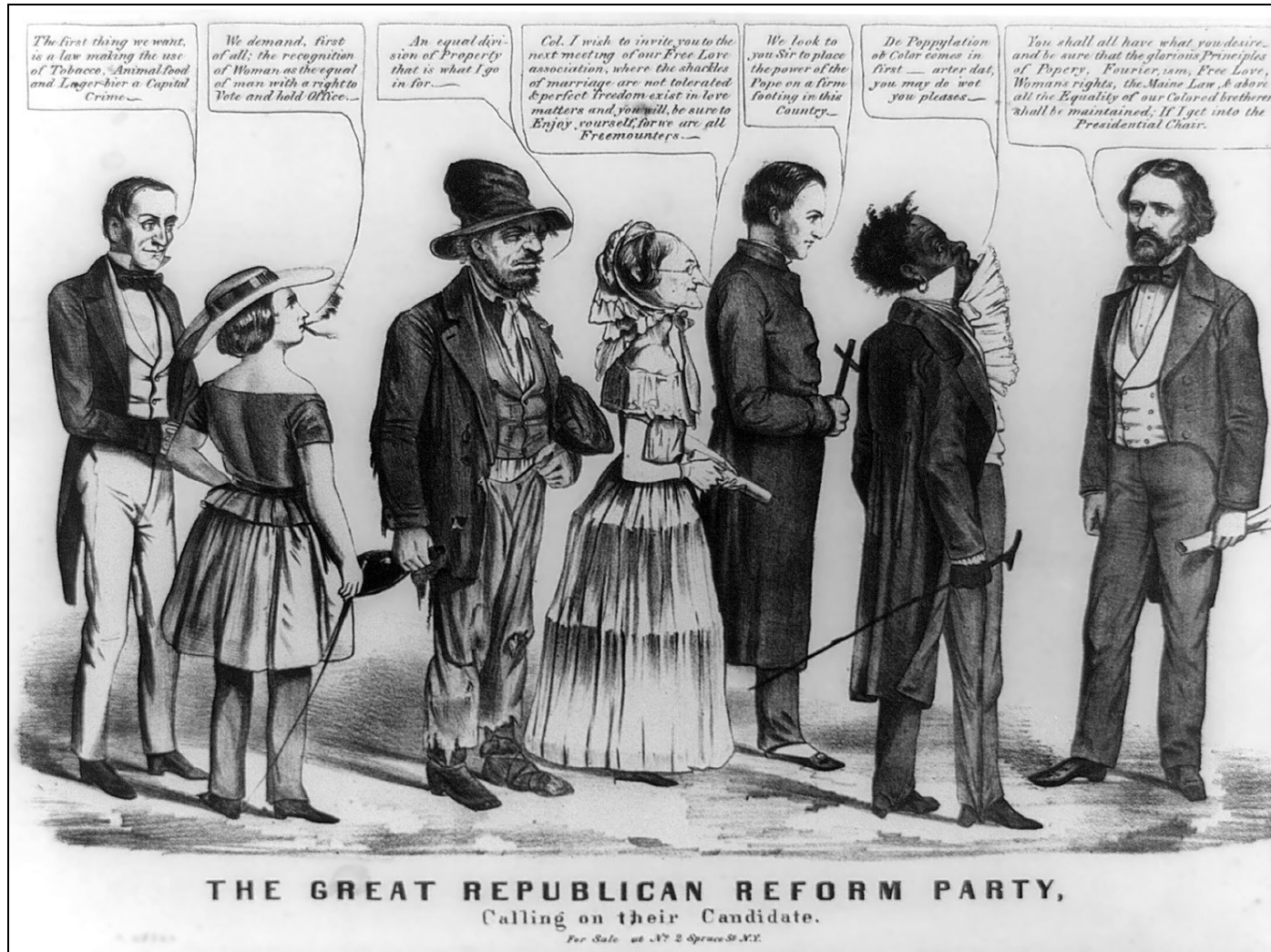


The New Republican Party



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The New Republican Party

When Abraham Lincoln entered politics there were two main political parties, the Democratic and the Whig. The Democratic Party, originally started by Thomas Jefferson and retooled by Andrew Jackson, had elected nine presidents before the election of 1860. Democrats claimed to represent the common people, especially farmers. They wanted a weaker central government that protected states' rights. They did not favor regulations on slavery nor the use of federal tax dollars to fund internal improvements.

One of Abraham Lincoln's political heroes was Kentucky's own Henry Clay (a.k.a. "The Great Compromiser") of the Whig Party. The Whig Party was in favor of high protective tariffs, internal improvements (especially roads and canals) and a firm Federal government grip over monetary policy. Lincoln joined the Whig Party in the early 1830s and was elected to the Illinois legislature as a Whig four times. When he served in Congress (1847-1849) he was a loyal member of the Whig Party. In 1854, Congress experimented with the concept of "popular sovereignty" when it passed the Kansas-Nebraska

Act. As the Whig party began to fall apart, pro-slavery Whigs joined the Southern Democratic Party. Anti-slavery Whigs helped form the Republican Party.

The Republican Party was composed mostly of anti-slavery people who had been members of other dying or insignificant parties such as northern Whigs, Free-Soilers, Know-Nothings, and even some anti-slavery Democrats. At first, because of so many varied interests, the Republican Party struggled to define itself clearly. However, people outside the party, especially southerners, believed Republicans not only wanted to thwart (stop) the spread of slavery, but to abolish it completely.

The Republicans fielded their first presidential candidate in 1856, John C. Fremont, and the party slogan became "Free soil, free labor, free speech, free men and Fremont." Although Fremont lost the election to the Democratic candidate, John Buchanan, Lincoln made numerous speeches in support of the Republican candidate and cause. Lincoln was becoming a nationally known, anti-slavery politician.