

Transcription

Shall this Government be "rent into fragments"

Mr. President, I think that there was never a body assembled on the face of the earth having before it so important a duty to perform as this Convention has, and upon the result of whose deliberations so much depends. Sir, consequences, the most momentous that ever depended upon the action of any assembly, ancient or modern, depend upon our action here. These consequences are no less than the existence and the preservation of the fairest fabric of government that ever was erected. They involve the question whether thirty millions of people shall continue to enjoy peace and prosperity, or whether this Government shall be rent into fragments, and with it the last hope of freedom in the world shall expire.

Citation: Excerpt from speech of Jubal A. Early in the Virginia Convention on March 6, 1861, printed in George H. Reese and William H. Gaines Jr., ed., *Proceedings of the Virginia Convention of 1861* (Richmond: Virginia State Library, 1965), 1:427.