A House Divided

The Lincoln-Douglas Debates

In 1858, Republican Abraham Lincoln ran to represent Illinois in the U.S. Senate. His opponent

was Senator Stephen Douglas, a Democrat. The two men toured the state giving speeches that drew large

crowds and received national attention in the newspapers. The issue that drew the most attention was slavery. What did each man have to say about slavery?

# I. Abraham Lincoln

## Document 1

“A house divided against itself cannot stand. I believe that this government cannot endure, permanently half slave and half free.... It will become all one thing or all the other.”

--- Lincoln’s speech accepting the nomination for Senator

## Document 2

“I will say here...that I have no purpose directly or indirectly to interfere with the institution of

slavery in the States where it exists. I believe I have no lawful right to do so, and I have no inclination to do so. I have no purpose to introduce political and social equality between the black and white races... but I hold... there is no reason in the world why the negro is not entitled to the natural rights enumerated in the Declaration of Independence, the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.... I agree with Judge Douglas he is not my equal in many respects....But in the right to eat the bread without leave of anybody else, which his own hand earns, *he is my equal and the equal of Judge Douglas and the equal of every living man*.”

--- Lincoln speech at Ottowa, Illinois

## Document 3

“I am not nor ever have been in favor of making voters or jurors of negroes, nor of qualifying

them to hold office, nor to intermarry with white people;....there is a physical difference between the white and black races which I believe will for ever forbid the two races living together on terms of

social and political equality.... I do not perceive that because the white man is to have the superior position the negro should be denied everything. I do not understand that because I do not want a negro woman for a slave I must necessarily want her for a wife. [Laughter and cheers.]”

--- Lincoln at Charleston, Illinois

## Document 4

“While the opinion of the Court, by Chief Justice Taney, in the Dred Scott case, and the separate opinions of all the concurring Judges, expressly declare the Constitution of the United States neither permits Congress nor a Territorial legislature to exclude slavery from any United States territory, they all omit (leave out) to declare whether or not the same Constitution permits a state, or the people of a State, to exclude it.”

---Lincoln’s speech accepting the nomination for Senator

# II. Stephen Douglas

## Document 5

“We are told by Lincoln that he is utterly opposed to the Dred Scott decision, and will not submit to it, for the reason that he says it deprives the negro of the rights of.... citizenship. [laughter and applause]... I ask you, are you in favor of conferring upon the negro the rights and privileges of citizenship? [“No! No!] Do you desire to strike out of our State Constitution that clause which keeps slaves and free negroes out of the State, and allow free negroes to flow in, [“Never!”] and cover your prairies with black settlements? Do you desire to turn this beautiful State into a free negro colony...?

If you desire negro citizenship, if you desire to allow them to come into the State and settle with the white man, if you desire them to vote on an equality with yourselves, and to make them eligible for office,... then support Mr. Lincoln and the Black Republican party, who are in favor of the citizenship of the negro.”

---- Stephen Douglas at Ottawa, Illinois

## Document 6

“The last time I came here to make a speech, while talking from the stand to you, people of Freeport, as I am doing to-day, I saw a carriage and magnificent one it was, drive up and take a position on the outside of the crowd; a beautiful young lady was sitting on the box seat, whilst Frederick Douglass and her mother reclined inside, and the owner of the carriage acted as driver. [Laughter.].... All I have to say of it is this, that if you, Black Republicans, think that a negro ought to be on a social equality with your wives and daughters, and ride in a carriage with your wife, whilst you drive the team, you have a perfect right to do so. [Hoots and cheers]”

--- Stephen Douglas at Freeport, Illinois

## Document 7

“The signers of the Declaration of Independence never dreamed of the negro when they were writing that document. They referred to white men.... I say to you, frankly, that in my opinion this government was made by our fathers on the white basis. It was made by white men for the benefit of white men and their posterity forever, and was intended to be administered by white men in all time to come... I hold that under our constitution and political system the negro is not a citizen, cannot be a citizen, and ought not to be a citizen...”

--- Stephen Douglas at Galesburg, Illinois

## Document 8

“It matters not what way the Supreme Court may hereafter decide as to the... question whether slavery may or may not go into a territory under the constitution, the people have the lawful means to introduce it [slavery] or exclude it as they please, for the reason that slavery cannot exist a day or an hour anywhere, unless it is supported by local police regulations... Hence, no matter what the decision of the Supreme Court may be on that abstract question, still the right of the people to make a slave territory or a free territory is perfect and complete under the Nebraska bill.”

--- Stephen Douglas at Freeport, Illinois

## Document 9

“...[I]n my opinion our government can endure forever, divided into free and slave states as our fathers made it,---- each State having the right to prohibit, abolish, or sustain [keep, preserve] slavery, just as it pleases. This government was made upon the great basis of the sovereignty of the States...”

--- Stephen Douglas at Alton, Illinois

The Lincoln-Douglas Debates

Lincoln Douglas

How do they disagree

about slavery?

What do they think

about the Dred Scott

Case?

How do they disagree

about the Declaration

of Independence?

How do they disagree

about African Americans?

How do they disagree

About America as a

“House divided?”

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