

LINCOLN LORE

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SEVENTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE LINCOLN-DOUGLAS DEBATES

FREEPORT, AUGUST 27, 1858

Freeport, scene of the second debate, is in the extreme northern part of the state. In 1858 it was a town of about four or five thousand inhabitants. It boasted an excellent hotel called the Brewster House, and it was not until recently that this well-built structure was razed.

Douglas arrived in Freeport the evening before the debate and a celebration was arranged for him at the Brewster House. Lincoln came on the special train Friday morning and was also received by the reception committee at the Brewster House. While Lincoln made his headquarters at this hotel Douglas was entertained at the home of Mr. Brawley.

The weather, on Friday, October 27, was cold, cloudy, and threatening, but even the unfavorable weather did not keep the people away. A larger crowd than attended the debate at Ottawa was on hand, estimated by some to reach 20,000 but possibly those present did not exceed 15,000. The platform for the debaters was constructed in Goddard Grove, adjoining the city on the north.

Plans had been made for Mr. Douglas to be taken to the place of meeting in a splendid six-horse coach, but when it was observed that Lincoln's conveyance from the Brewster House to Goddard Grove was a Conestoga wagon Douglas abandoned the coach.

The debate began at two o'clock, Lincoln speaking first for one hour. Douglas followed for one hour and a half, and the final half hour was taken up by Lincoln in rebuttal. During the entire three hours the vast audience remained standing as no seating facilities were available.

Speech of Lincoln

Introduction

Outlines his plan of procedure, giving one hour of his time to the Douglas speech at Ottawa (paragraph 1).

Argument

A. Interrogatories.

The seven questions asked by Douglas at Ottawa considered and then answered as follows (2-18):

1. Under the Constitution the people of the southern states are entitled to a congressional fugitive slave law (19).
2. If we own the country there is no alternative but to admit slave states into the Union (20).
3. Answer to third question same as second (21).
4. Would be very glad to see Congress abolish slavery in the District of Columbia if proper provisions were made for it (22).

5. States he is not sufficiently informed to give opinion about abolition of slave trade between the states (23).

6. Written answer submitted about prohibition of slavery in all the territories (24).

7. Written answer also submitted with reference to acquisition of new territories unless slavery is first prohibited (24).

Submits four interrogations for Douglas to answer, including the now famous second question (25-31).

B. The Republican Resolutions.

Disclaims any responsibility for the set of resolutions read by Douglas at Ottawa (32).

The resolutions were not passed at Springfield as Douglas alleged (33-35).

C. The Pro-Slavery Conspiracy.

Introduction of Nebraska Bill evidence of conspiracy (36).

It is possible for men to conspire to do "a good and blessed thing" (37).

Douglas's voting against amendment to Nebraska Bill cited as evidence of his part in conspiracy (38).

Vote could only be rational and intelligent as it contemplated a decision of the Supreme Court (39).

The Chase amendment voted down made room for the Dred Scott decision which goes far to make slavery national (40-43).

Douglas in the LeCompton Constitution controversy occupied the identical position which he (Lincoln) occupies in the present discussion over the pro-slavery conspiracy (44-46).

Speech of Douglas

Introduction

Compliments vast audience on respectful attention paid Mr. Lincoln (paragraph 1).

Argument

A. Interrogatories.

Comments on bringing Lincoln to define his position and proceeds to answer questions Lincoln put to him (2).

1. It having been decided that Kansas has enough people for a slave state, I hold that she has enough for a free state (3-5).

2. The people of a territory can, by lawful means, exclude slavery from their limits prior to the formation of a state constitution (6-8).

3. Implies he will abide by decision of Supreme Court and rebukes

Lincoln for inferring that it would violate the Constitution of the United States (9-10).

4. Whenever it becomes necessary, in our growth and progress, to acquire more territory I am in favor of it, without reference to the question of slavery (11-16).

B. The Republican Resolutions.

Admits resolutions credited to Springfield may not have been drawn up on right spot (17-18).

Presents evidence on which he relied for statement about resolutions being written at Springfield (19-22).

Reads resolutions adopted at Rockford Convention (23-29).

Lincoln attempted to dodge responsibility of platform (30-33).

Compares old Whig and "Black Republican" parties and states Lincoln and Trumbull are trying to abolish both Republican and Democratic parties (34-41).

Reads resolutions demanded by Lovejoy and shows those who voted for them voted for Lincoln (42-54).

C. The "House Divided" Question.

Reads paragraph from Lincoln's "House Divided" speech (55-56).

If the states of the Union cannot exist half slave and half free as Lincoln claims, then Lincoln must be in favor of making them all free (57-59).

D. The Pro-Slavery Conspiracy.

Lincoln's argument about a pro-slavery conspiracy a charge of corruption against the Supreme Court and two presidents (60).

Reviews his own attitude toward the Washington Union and denies allegation of Lincoln (61-64).

Mr. Lincoln's Rejoinder

Introduction and comment on Douglas's charge of "vulgarity and black-guardism" in the audience (paragraphs 1-2).

Comments on Douglas's reference to the resolutions and platform of the Republican party and his own relation to them (3-5).

Asks audience to read his "House Divided" speech and see if they discover any of the "bugaboos" which frighten Judge Douglas (6).

Refers to his answer to Douglas's question about slave states entering the Union (7-8).

Claims Douglas made charges against higher dignitaries than the editor of the Washington Union. Shows that Douglas in his speech of March 22, 1858, refers to a "fatal blow" that was being struck by higher authorities (9-23).