

LINCOLN LORE

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SEVENTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE LINCOLN-DOUGLAS DEBATES

JONESBORO, SEPTEMBER 15, 1858

Jonesboro, the site of the third joint debate between Lincoln and Douglas, is in the extreme southern part of the state, in the section of Illinois commonly called "Egypt." It is but ten miles from the Missouri line, twenty miles from the Kentucky line, and about thirty-five miles from where the Ohio River flows into the Mississippi.

In 1858 the town had a population of about twelve hundred, the nearest railroad being one and a half miles away. The debate took place at the fair grounds a little north of the town where a platform had been erected for the speakers. Douglas came to Jonesboro from Cairo where he had spoken the day before. Lincoln, arriving on Tuesday, and was the guest of Mr. Dresser, although it is said that both Lincoln and Douglas made their headquarters at the Union House.

Wednesday, September 15, was hot and sultry and a very small crowd of not more than fifteen hundred people gathered for the debate. There was little enthusiasm manifested and no demonstrations such as had been observed at both Ottawa and Freeport were attempted. On this occasion Douglas was the first speaker and followed the usual procedure of occupying one hour, after which Lincoln spoke for one hour and a half; and then came the Douglas rejoinder of one-half hour.

Speech of Douglas

Introduction

Debates arranged to discuss leading political topics which agitate the country (paragraph 1).

The old Whig and Democratic parties transformed (2-5).

Lincoln and Trumbull combined efforts to abolitionize both parties (6-8).

These two men changed their principles to suit different parts of the state (9-13).

Political history of Trumbull and Lincoln (14-19).

Argument

A. The "House Divided" Question.

Lincoln's speech containing phrase "a house divided against itself cannot stand" (20-21).

Lincoln is inviting warfare between the North and South to make all states uniform in their local and domestic institutions (22-23).

The government was formed on the principle of diversity in their local institutions and laws and not on that of uniformity (24).

B. Racial Equality.

Dred Scott decision right; negro not capable of self government (25-26).

Reference in Declaration of Independence to "all men" being created equal means "all white men" (27).

Status of negro in different states (28-31).

C. Popular Sovereignty.

Each state has the right to do as it pleases without meddling with its neighbors (32).

Reason for opposing the LeCompton Constitution (33).

The great mission of democracy is to unite fraternal feeling of whole country and restore peace and quiet by teaching each state to mind its own business (34).

We should act as our fathers did who made the government. There was no sectional strife. They were all brethren of a common confederacy. (35).

Speech of Lincoln

Rebuttal

No inclination to interfere with domestic institutions in the states, including slavery (paragraph 1).

Question of slavery not where the Fathers placed it but original policy has been changed by Judge Douglas and associates (2-5).

No bargain whatever with Judge Trumbull (6-7).

Argument

A. The Compromise of 1850.

Douglas right in that both parties agreed about finality of the compromise (8).

It did not repeal the Old Missouri Compromise (9).

Question put to Douglas: "Why, when we had peace under the Missouri Compromise could you not have let it alone" (10-11).

B. The "House Divided" Question.

The variety of institutions based on natural elements in the states do not make a house divided but are the props which hold it up (11-12).

There has always been trouble with slavery, especially when an effort has been made to spread it into a new territory (13).

Is there reason to expect that agitation over slavery will cease until it shall be placed back where it originally stood or until it shall master all opposition (14-15)?

C. The Democratic Resolutions.

The Springfield Democratic platform and the responsibility of a candidate towards political resolutions of his friends (16-19).

Interrogations and answers of Thomas Campbell (20-32).

Resolutions subscribed to by R. S. Maloney, Democratic nominee for Congress (32-44).

Resolutions at the Democratic Convention at Naperville (45-48).

Editorial in DeKalb County Sentinel on equality of blacks and whites (49-52).

Resolutions passed in Douglas's home state, Vermont (53-57).

D. Interrogatories.

First question put to Douglas at Freeport is not answered by an equivalent yes or no (59-60).

Second question in which Douglas claimed slavery could lawfully be excluded from a territory by withholding legislation or by unfriendly legislation discussed by Lincoln as follows (60-64):

a. How can any power exclude slavery from a territory without violating the Constitution which expressly recognizes property in slaves as indicated by Supreme Court (64)?

b. Did not Judge Douglas say the question of excluding slavery was to be decided by the Supreme Court and does he not now advocate that it is not a question for the court but for the people (65-66)?

c. The proposition that slavery cannot enter a new country is historically false as illustrated by case of Dred Scott (67-68).

d. Can an official swear to support the Constitution of the United States, guaranteeing the right to hold slaves, and then withhold legislation for the purpose of defeating that right, and clear his oath in so doing (69)?

e. Is not Congress itself bound to give legislative support to any right that is established in the Constitution (70-71)?

Lincoln presents the fifth question in his series of interrogations and comments upon it (72-77).

E. Personal References.

Statement that he (Lincoln) had to be carried off platform at Ottawa alluded to (78-81).

Douglas's threat to "trot me down to Egypt" (82).

Discusses ethics of methods Douglas is using to make people feel that I (Lincoln) am in his clutches (83).

Mr. Douglas's Rejoinder

Remarks about Lincoln being carried from the platform said in a playful manner (paragraphs 1-2).

Lincoln's reply to question about voting any more slave states into the Union; says Lincoln will not answer directly (3-8).

Can prove that Trumbull and Lincoln were in political bargain (9).

Campbell's and Maloney's resolutions repudiated (10-11).

Lincoln's own party is a house divided again itself (12).

Personal reference to Lincoln's Indiana and Kentucky environments and his own Vermont experiences (15).

Lincoln's fifth question answered as follows: "There should be no interference and no intervention by Congress with slavery in the states and territories" (16).

If the people of a territory want slavery they will have it, and if they do not want it you cannot force it on them (17-21).