

A DISCUSSION BY MR. LINCOLN AND MR. DOUGLAS

by Robert L. Crowe



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[This is a fictional discussion between Stephen Douglas and Abraham Lincoln. The conversation is based upon the comments and issues presented in the first of seven Lincoln-Douglas debates held in Ottawa, Illinois, on August 21, 1858, in a campaign for one of the Illinois U.S. Senate seats. The debates were intended to influence the Illinois voters to select state representatives sympathetic to the relative positions of the two men. The state legislators selected the U.S. Senators. Douglas who had served in the U.S. senate eventually won the 1858 appointment. The two men would again oppose each other in presidential race of 1860. This discussion reflects some of the wording of the debate but does not assume the form of the debate that was 30 minutes for Douglas, an hour for Lincoln, and 30 minutes for Douglas.]

MR. DOUGLAS: Mr. Lincoln and I appear before you for the purpose of discussing the leading political topics which now agitate the public mind. We are present here today for the purpose of having a joint discussion, as the representatives of the two great political parties of the State and Union, and upon the principles in issue between those parties.

MR. LINCOLN: We do not intend to imply the lack of knowledge or schooling of the audience today but remind you that a few key events have brought us to this point in history. In 1820 the Missouri Compromise admitted Missouri as a slave state with the stipulation that all future northern states would be free. While not universally accepted, it did provide for 11 free states and 11 slave states. This compromise held until Judge Douglas, who was chairman of the Committee on Territories in the United States Senate, introduced the Kansas-

Nebraska Act which repealed the Missouri Compromise. It is my contention that this act, championed by Judge Douglas, opened the wounds of the nation and pushes us toward the specter of armed conflict between our own citizens.

MR. DOUGLAS: That argument belies the fact that the question of slavery was not introduced by me. It has been with us since the inception of this country. My proposal was adopted because it establishes a reasonable decision. Let me read a portion of the Kansas Nebraska Act: "It is the true intent and meaning of this act not to legislate slavery into any State or Territory or to exclude it therefrom, but to leave the people thereof perfectly free to form and regulate their domestic institutions in their own way, subject only to the Federal Constitution."

MR. LINCOLN: I think that it is wrong; wrong in its direct effect by letting slavery into Kansas and Nebraska, and wrong in its prospective principle, allowing it to spread to every other part of the wide world where men are inclined to take it. I hate it because of the monstrous injustice of slavery itself. I hate it because it deprives our nation of its just influence in the world; it enables the enemies of free institutions to taunt us as hypocrites; causes the real friends of freedom to doubt our sincerity, and especially because it forces good men into an open war with the very fundamental principles of civil liberty - criticizing the Declaration of Independence, and insisting that there is no right principle of action but that of self-interest. This is the effect of the 1854 Kansas-Nebraska Act penned by Judge Douglas.

MR. DOUGLAS: Prior to 1854 this country was divided into two great political parties, known as the Whig and Democratic parties. Both were national and patriotic, advocating principles that were universal in their application. An old-line Whig could proclaim his principles in Louisiana and Massachusetts alike. Whig principles had no boundary line of North and South. Then Mr. Lincoln and some others dissolved the old Whigs, rounded

up some old Democrats and formed the Abolitionists under the guise of a Republican Party. The 1854 Kansas and Nebraska bill was brought into Congress for the purpose of carrying out the principles which both parties had endorsed and approved. There had been no division in this country in regard to that principle except the opposition of the Abolitionists. Indeed, even the founders of our country approved a society that included slave and free states.

MR. LINCOLN: It is historically evident that the founders of our country never intended slavery as a permanent condition.

MR. DOUGLAS: I contend to the contrary. Many of our founders were slave holders and I don't believe you can specify their intent just to serve the purposes of argument.

MR. LINCOLN: The institution of slavery has existed for eighty years in some States, and yet it does not exist in some others. I account for it by looking at the position in which our fathers originally placed it -- restricting it from the new Territories where it had not gone, and legislating to cut off its source by the abrogation of the slave-trade, thus putting the seal of legislation against its spread. I think, that Judge Douglas, and those acting with him, have placed that institution on a new basis, which looks to the perpetuity and nationalization of slavery. I believe if we could arrest the spread, and place it where Washington and Jefferson and Madison placed it, it would be in the course of ultimate extinction.

MR. DOUGLAS: The question then arises, what rights and privileges are consistent with the public good? This is a question which each State and each Territory must decide for itself. Illinois has decided it for herself. We have provided that the Negro shall not be a slave, and we have also provided that he shall not be a citizen, but protect him in his civil rights, in his life, his person and his property, only depriving him of all



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