

Lincoln-Douglas Debates
Third Joint Debate at Jonesboro

Mr. Douglas' Response
September 15, 1858

MY friends, while I am very grateful to you for the enthusiasm which you show for me, I will say in all candor, that your quietness will be much more agreeable than your applause, inasmuch as you deprive me of some part of my time whenever you cheer.

I will commence where Mr. Lincoln left off, and make a remark upon this serious complaint of his about my speech at Joliet. I did say there in a playful manner that when I put these questions to Mr. Lincoln at Ottawa he failed to answer, and that he trembled and had to be carried off the stand, and required seven days to get up his reply. That he did not walk off from that stand he will not deny. That when the crowd went away from the stand with me, a few persons carried him home on their shoulders and laid him down, he will admit. I wish to say to you that whenever I degrade my friends and myself by allowing them to carry me on their backs along through the public streets, when I am able to walk, I am willing to be deemed crazy. I did not say whether I beat him or he beat me in the argument. It is true I put these questions to him, and I put them not as mere idle questions, but showed that I based them upon the creed of the Black Republican party as declared by their conventions in that portion of the State which he depends upon to elect him, and desired to know whether he indorsed that creed. He would not answer. When I reminded him that I intended bringing him into Egypt and renewing my questions if he refused to answer, he then consulted and did get up his answers one week after,—answers which I may refer to in a few minutes and show you how equivocal they are. My object was to make him avow whether or not he stood by the platform of his party; the resolutions I then read, and upon which I based my questions, had been adopted by his party in the Galena Congressional District, and the Chicago and Bloomington Congressional Districts, composing a large majority of the counties in this State that give Republican or Abolition majorities. Mr. Lincoln cannot and will not deny that the doctrines laid down in these resolutions were in substance put forth in Lovejoy's resolutions, which were voted for by a majority of his party, some of

them, if not all, receiving the support of every man of his party. Hence, I laid a foundation for many questions to him before I asked him whether that was or was not the platform of his party. He says that he answered my questions. One of them was whether he would vote to admit any more Slave States into the Union. The creed of the Republican party as set forth in the resolutions of their various Conventions was, that they would under no circumstances vote to admit another Slave State. It was put forth in the Lovejoy resolutions in the Legislature; it was put forth and passed in a majority of all the counties of this State which give Abolition or Republican majorities, or elect members to the Legislature of that school of politics. I had a right to know whether he would vote for or against the admission of another Slave State in the event the people wanted it. He first answered that he was not pledged on the subject, and then said:—"In regard to the other question, of whether I am pledged to the admission of any more Slave States into the Union, I state to you very frankly that I would be exceedingly sorry ever to be put in the position of having to pass on that question. I should be exceedingly glad to know that there would never be another Slave State admitted into the Union; but I must add that if slavery shall be kept out of the Territories during the territorial existence of any one given Territory, and then the people, having a fair chance and clean field when they come to adopt a constitution, do such an extraordinary thing as adopt a slave constitution, uninfluenced by the actual presence of the institution among them, I see no alternative, if we own the country, but to admit them into the Union."

Now analyze that answer. In the first place, he says he would be exceedingly sorry to be put in a position where he would have to vote on the question of the admission of a Slave State. Why is he a candidate for the Senate if he would be sorry to be put in that position? I trust the people of Illinois will not put him in a position which he would be so sorry to occupy. The next position he takes is that he would be glad to know that there would never be another Slave State, yet, in certain contingencies, he might have to vote for one. What is that contingency? "If Congress keeps slavery out by law while it is a Territory, and then the people should have a fair chance and should adopt slavery, uninfluenced by the presence of the institution," he supposed he would have to admit the State. Suppose Congress should not keep slavery out during their territorial existence, then how would he vote when the people applied

for admission into the Union with a slave constitution? That he does not answer; and that is the condition of every Territory we have now got. Slavery is not kept out of Kansas by act of Congress; and when I put the question to Mr. Lincoln, whether he will vote for the admission with or without slavery, as her people may desire, he will not answer, and you have not got an answer from him. In Nebraska, slavery is not prohibited by act of Congress, but the people are allowed, under the Nebraska bill, to do as they please on the subject; and when I ask him whether he will vote to admit Nebraska with a slave constitution if her people desire it, he will not answer. So with New Mexico, Washington Territory, Arizona, and the four new States to be admitted from Texas. You cannot get an answer from him to these questions. His answer only applies to a given case, to a condition,—things which he knows do not exist in any one Territory in the Union. He tries to give you to understand that he would allow the people to do as they please, and yet he dodges the question as to every Territory in the Union. I now ask why cannot Mr. Lincoln answer to each of these Territories? He has not done it, and he will not do it. The Abolitionists up North understand that this answer is made with a view of not committing himself on any one Territory now in existence. It is so understood there, and you cannot expect an answer from him on a case that applies to any one Territory, or applies to the new States which by compact we are pledged to admit out of Texas, when they have the requisite population and desire admission. I submit to you whether he has made a frank answer, so that you can tell how he would vote in any one of these cases. “He would be sorry to be put in the position.” Why would he be sorry to be put in this position if his duty required him to give the vote? If the people of a Territory ought to be permitted to come into the Union as a State, with slavery or without it, as they pleased, why not give the vote admitting them cheerfully? If in his opinion they ought not to come in with slavery, even if they wanted to, why not say that he would cheerfully vote against their admission? His intimation is that conscience would not let him vote “No,” and he would be sorry to do that which his conscience would compel him to do as an honest man.

In regard to the contract, or bargain, between Trumbull, the Abolitionists, and him, which he denies, I wish to say that the charge can be proved by notorious historical facts. Trumbull, Lovejoy, Giddings, Fred Douglass, Hale, and Banks, were traveling the State at that time

making speeches on the same side and in the same cause with him. He contents himself with the simple denial that no such thing occurred. Does he deny that he, and Trumbull, and Breese, and Giddings, and Chase and Fred Douglass, and Lovejoy, and all those Abolitionists and deserters from the Democratic party did make speeches all over this State in the same common cause. Does he deny that Jim Matheny was then, and is now, his confidential friend, and does he deny that Matheny made the charge of the bargain and fraud in his own language, as I have read it from his printed speech? Matheny spoke of his own personal knowledge of that bargain existing between Lincoln, Trumbull, and the Abolitionists. He still remains Lincoln's confidential friend, and is now a candidate for Congress, and is canvassing the Springfield District for Lincoln. I assert that I can prove the charge to be true in detail if I can ever get where I can summon and compel the attendance of witnesses. I have the statement of another man to the same effect as that made by Matheny, which I am not permitted to use yet; but Jim Matheny is a good witness on that point, and the history of the country is conclusive upon it. That Lincoln up to that time had been a Whig, and then undertook to Abolitionize the Whigs and bring them into the Abolition camp, is beyond denial; that Trumbull up to that time had been a Democrat, and deserted, and undertook to Abolitionize the Democracy, and take them into the Abolition camp, is beyond denial; that they are both now active, leading, distinguished members of this Abolition Republican party, in full communion, is a fact that cannot be questioned or denied.

But Lincoln is not willing to be responsible for the creed of his party. He complains because I hold him responsible; and in order to avoid the issue, he attempts to show that individuals in the Democratic party, many years ago, expressed Abolition sentiments. It is true that Tom Campbell, when a candidate for Congress in 1850, published the letter which Lincoln read. When I asked Lincoln for the date of that letter he could not give it. The date of the letter has been suppressed by other speakers who have used it, though I take it for granted that Lincoln did not know the date. If he will take the trouble to examine, he will find that the letter was published only two days before the election, and was never seen until after it, except in one county. Tom Campbell would have been beat to death by the Democratic party if that letter had been made public in his district. As to Molony, it is true he uttered sentiments of the kind referred to by Mr. Lincoln, and the best Democrats would not

vote for him for that reason. I returned from Washington after the passage of the Compromise measures in 1850, and when I found Molony running under Wentworth's tutelage and on his platform, I denounced him and declared that he was no Democrat. In my speech at Chicago, just before the election that year, I went before the infuriated people of that city and vindicated the Compromise measures of 1850. Remember the City Council had passed resolutions nullifying acts of Congress and instructing the police to withhold their assistance from the execution of the laws; and as I was the only man in the city of Chicago who was responsible for the passage of the Compromise measures, I went before the crowd, justified each and every one of those measures; and let it be said, to the eternal honor of the people of Chicago, that when they were convinced by my exposition of those measures that they were right, and they had done wrong in opposing them, they repealed their nullifying resolutions, and declared that they would acquiesce in and support the laws of the land. These facts are well known, and Mr. Lincoln can only get up individual instances, dating back to 1849-50, which are contradicted by the whole tenor of the Democratic creed.

But Mr. Lincoln does not want to be held responsible for the Black Republican doctrine of no more Slave States. Farnsworth is the candidate of his party to-day in the Chicago District, and he made a speech in the last Congress in which he called upon God to palsy his right arm if he ever voted for the admission of another Slave State, whether the people wanted it or not. Lovejoy is making speeches all over the State for Lincoln now, and taking ground against any more Slave States. Washburne, the Black Republican candidate for Congress in the Galena District, is making speeches in favor of this same Abolition platform declaring no more Slave States. Why are men running for Congress in the northern districts, and taking that Abolition platform for their guide, when Mr. Lincoln does not want to be held to it down here in Egypt and in the center of the State, and objects to it so as to get votes here? Let me tell Mr. Lincoln that his party in the northern part of the State hold to that Abolition platform, and that if they do not in the South and in the center, they present the extraordinary spectacle of a "house divided against itself," and hence "cannot stand." I now bring down upon him the vengeance of his own Scriptural quotation, and give it a more appropriate application than he did, when I say to him that his party, Abolition in one end of the State and opposed to it in the other, is

a house divided against itself, and cannot stand, and ought not to stand, for it attempts to cheat the American people out of their votes by disguising its sentiments.

Mr. Lincoln attempts to cover up and get over his Abolitionism by telling you that he was raised a little east of you, beyond the Wabash in Indiana, and he thinks that makes a mighty sound and good man of him on all these questions. I do not know that the place where a man is born or raised has much to do with his political principles. The worst Abolitionists I have ever known in Illinois have been men who have sold their slaves in Alabama and Kentucky, and have come here and turned Abolitionists whilst spending the money got for the negroes they sold; and I do not know that an Abolitionist from Indiana or Kentucky ought to have any more credit because he was born and raised among slaveholders. I do not know that a native of Kentucky is more excusable because, raised among slaves, his father and mother having owned slaves, he comes to Illinois, turns Abolitionist, and slanders the graves of his father and mother, and breathes curses upon the institutions under which he was born, and his father and mother bred. True, I was not born out west here. I was born away down in Yankee land, I was born in a valley in Vermont, with the high mountains around me. I love the old green mountains and valleys of Vermont, where I was born, and where I played in my childhood. I went up to visit them some seven or eight years ago, for the first time for twenty odd years. When I got there they treated me very kindly. They invited me to the commencement of their college, placed me on the seats with their distinguished guests, and conferred upon me the degree of LL. D., in Latin (doctor of laws),—the same as they did Old Hickory, at Cambridge, many years ago; and I give you my word and honor I understand just as much of the Latin as he did. When they got through conferring the honorary degree, they called upon me for a speech; and I got up, with my heart full and swelling with gratitude for their kindness, and I said to them, “My friends, Vermont is the most glorious spot on the face of this globe for a man to be born in, *provided* he emigrates when he is very young.”

I emigrated when I was very young. I came out here when I was a boy, and I found my mind liberalized, and my opinions enlarged, when I got on these broad prairies, with only the heavens to bound my vision, instead of having them circumscribed by the little narrow ridges that

surrounded the valley where I was born. But I discard all flings of the land where a man was born. I wish to be judged by my principles, by those great public measures and constitutional principles upon which the peace, the happiness, and the perpetuity of this Republic now rest.

Mr. Lincoln has framed another question, propounded it to me, and desired my answer. As I have said before, I did not put a question to him that I did not first lay a foundation for by showing that it was a part of the platform of the party whose votes he is now seeking, adopted in a majority of the counties where he now hopes to get a majority, and supported by the candidates of his party now running in those counties. But I will answer his question. It is as follows: "If the slaveholding citizens of a United States Territory should need and demand Congressional legislation for the protection of their slave property in such Territory, would you, as a member of Congress, vote for or against such legislation?" I answer him that it is a fundamental article in the Democratic creed that there should be non-interference and non-intervention by Congress with slavery in the States or Territories. Mr. Lincoln could have found an answer to his question in the Cincinnati platform, if he had desired it. The Democratic party has always stood by that great principle of non-interference and non-intervention by Congress with slavery in the States and Territories alike, and I stand on that platform now.

Now, I desire to call your attention to the fact that Lincoln did not define his own position in his own question. How does he stand on that question? He put the question to me at Freeport whether or not I would vote to admit Kansas into the Union before she had 93,420 inhabitants. I answered him at once that it having been decided that Kansas had now population enough for a Slave State, she had population enough for a Free State.

I answered the question unequivocally; and then I asked him whether he would vote for or against the admission of Kansas before she had 93,420 inhabitants, and he would not answer me. To-day he has called attention to the fact that, in his opinion, my answer on that question was not quite plain enough, and yet he has not answered it himself. He now puts a question in relation to the Congressional interference in the Territories to me. I answer him direct, and he has not answered the

question himself. I ask you whether a man has any right, in common decency, to put questions in these public discussions, to his opponent, which he will not answer himself, when they are pressed home to him. I have asked him three times whether he would vote to admit Kansas whenever the people applied with a Constitution of their own making and their own adoption, under circumstances that were fair, just, and unexceptionable; but I cannot get an answer from him. Nor will he answer the question which he put to me, and which I have just answered in relation to Congressional interference in the Territories, by making a slave code there.

It is true that he goes on to answer the question by arguing that under the decision of the Supreme Court it is the duty of a man to vote for a slave code in the Territories. He says that it is his duty, under the decision that the court has made; and if he believes in that decision he would be a perjured man if he did not give the vote. I want to know whether he is not bound to a decision which is contrary to his opinions just as much as to one in accordance with his opinions. If the decision of the Supreme Court, the tribunal created by the Constitution to decide the question, is final and binding, is he not bound by it just as strongly as if he was for it instead of against it originally? Is every man in this land allowed to resist decisions he does not like, and only support those that meet his approval? What are important courts worth unless their decisions are binding on all good citizens? It is the fundamental principle of the judiciary that its decisions are final. It is created for that purpose; so that when you cannot agree among yourselves on a disputed point you appeal to the judicial tribunal which steps in and decides for you, and that decision is then binding on every good citizen. It is the law of the land just as much with Mr. Lincoln against it as for it. And yet he says that if that decision is binding he is a perjured man if he does not vote for a slave code in the different Territories of this Union. Well, if you [turning to Mr. Lincoln] are not going to resist the decision, if you obey it, and do not intend to array mob law against the constituted authorities, then, according to your own statement, you will be a perjured man if you do not vote to establish slavery in these Territories. My doctrine is, that even taking Mr. Lincoln's view that the decision recognizes the right of a man to carry his slaves into the Territories of the United States if he pleases, yet after he gets there he needs affirmative law to make that right of any value. The same doctrine

not only applies to slave property, but all other kinds of property. Chief Justice Taney places it upon the ground that slave property is on an equal footing with other property. Suppose one of your merchants should move to Kansas and open a liquor store: he has a right to take groceries and liquors there; but the mode of selling them, and the circumstances under which they shall be sold, and all the remedies, must be prescribed by local legislation; and if that is unfriendly it will drive him out just as effectually as if there was a constitutional provision against the sale of liquor. So the absence of local legislation to encourage and support slave property in a Territory excludes it practically just as effectually as if there was a positive Constitutional provision against it. Hence, I assert that under the Dred Scott decision you cannot maintain slavery a day in a Territory where there is an unwilling people and unfriendly legislation. If the people are opposed to it, our right is a barren, worthless, useless right; and if they are for it, they will support and encourage it. We come right back, therefore, to the practical question, 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. And this is the practical question, the great principle, upon which our institutions rest. I am willing to take the decision of the Supreme Court as it was pronounced by that august tribunal, without stopping to inquire whether I would have decided that way or not. I have had many a decision made against me on questions of law which I did not like, but I was bound by them just as much as if I had had a hand in making them and approved them. Did you ever see a lawyer or a client lose his case that he approved the decision of the court? They always think the decision is unjust when it is given against them. In a government of laws, like ours, we must sustain the Constitution as our fathers made it, and maintain the rights of the States as they are guaranteed under the Constitution; and then we will have peace and harmony between the different States and sections of this glorious Union.