

Lincoln: the negro has a 'humble' share of Declaration of Independence

Galesburg, Illinois, Oct. 7

After the pleasant summer afternoons of late September comes the harsh bite of early fall. The campus of Knox College is filled with people in their Sunday best braving the grounds after a storm yesterday. The stage is close to the Old Main and despite the raging wind, a window remains open. A banner spreads across the stage declaring favor for Mr. Lincoln, "Knox college for Lincoln" it says.

20,000 people are milling about the speaking area. There have been rumors of people arriving at dawn. Mr. Lincoln stayed overnight in Knoxville and will be coming along the nine-mile road after a stop at Mayor Henry Sanderson's home.

As is typical of Judge Douglas, he arrives by train and with a cannon blast. He is arriving from Bancroft. The audience is rowdier today than the other crowds have been. Once it gets closer to the determined time of the speech, the reason for the open window becomes apparent as both candidates crawl through it onto the speaking platform. Mr. Lincoln, as always keeps up an affable presence quipping that "at last, I've gone through college!"

Judge Douglas is the first to speak. He begins discussing his leadership on the Kansas-Nebraska Act, which allows new states to decide whether to be slave or free and puts an end to the Missouri Compromise that barred slavery in territories north of Missouri's southern border.

Douglas denies that this ensures new states will be slave

states, pointing out his opposition to the pro-slavery Lecompton constitution that would have brought Kansas into the Union as a slave state. He says he opposed that constitution because it had been voted down in an election.

Douglas says:

The Kansas and Nebraska bill declared...it was the true intent and meaning of the act not to legislate slavery into any State or Territory, nor 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 Constitution of the United States. For the last four years I have devoted all my energies, in private and public, to commend that principle to the American people.

Douglas calls out, with quotes from Mr. Lincoln's speech, the charges of the differences in Mr. Lincoln's rhetoric throughout the debates, citing the speeches in Charleston and the one in Chicago. In the north Mr. Lincoln says the Declaration of Independence included blacks, saying, "I should like to know, if taking this old Declaration of Independence, which declares that all men are equal upon principle, and making exceptions to it, where will it stop? If one man says it does not mean a negro, why may not another man say it does not mean another man?"

Yet Douglas points out that in Charleston Mr. Lincoln declared:

"I will say then, that I am not nor never have been in favor of bringing about in any way the social and political equality of the white and black races; that I am not nor never have been in favor of making voters of the free negroes, or jurors, or qualifying them to hold office, or having them to marry with white people..."

Douglas sums it up this way:

Fellow-citizens, here you find men hurraing for Lincoln and saying that he did right, when in one part of the State he stood up for negro equality, and in another part for political effect, discarded the doctrine and declared that there always must be a superior and inferior race. Abolitionists up north are expected and required to vote for Lincoln because he goes for the equality of the races, holding that by the Declaration of Independence the white man and the negro were created equal, and endowed by the Divine law with that equality, and down south he tells the old Whigs, the Kentuckians, Virginians, and Tennesseans, that there is a physical difference in the races, making one superior and the other inferior, and that he is in favor of maintaining the superiority of the white race over the negro. Now, how can you reconcile those two positions of Mr. Lincoln? He is to be voted for in the south as a pro-slavery man, and he is to be voted for in the north as an abolitionist.

Douglas says that no political creed is sound unless it can be expressed throughout the country.

Is there a Republican residing in Galesburg who can travel into Kentucky and carry his principles with him across Ohio? What Republican from Massachusetts can visit the Old Dominion without leaving his principles behind him when he crosses Mason and Dixon's line? Permit me to say to you in perfect good humor, but in all sincerity, that no political creed is sound which cannot be proclaimed fearlessly in every State of this Union where the Federal Constitution is not the supreme law of the land.

Then Mr. Lincoln begins his speech. He is greeted by cheers. Mr. Lincoln immediately takes on Douglas' claim that the Declaration of Independence does not include Negroes:

The Judge has alluded to the Declaration of Independence, and insisted that negroes are not included in that Declaration; and that it is a slander upon the framers of that instrument,

to suppose that negroes were meant therein...I believe the entire records of the world, from the date of the Declaration of Independence up to within three years ago, may be searched in vain for one single affirmation, from one single man, that the negro was not included in the Declaration of Independence;...And I will remind Judge Douglas and this audience, that while Mr. Jefferson was the owner of slaves, as undoubtedly he was, in speaking upon this very subject, he used the strong language that he trembled for his country when he remembered that God was just...

Lincoln says Douglas' claims that he is saying different things in different parts of the state is intentional misunderstanding. Lincoln says his belief that Negroes are included in the Declaration does not mean they are equal. He says:

...in so far as it should be insisted that there was an equality between the white and black races that should produce a perfect social and political equality, it was an impossibility.

Mr. Lincoln then returns to the Dred Scott decision and the power of the Supreme Court. Lincoln denies there is a political obligation to obey a wrongly decided Supreme Court decision and says Jefferson and Jackson agreed. And he says Dred Scott was wrongly decided because the Constitution nowhere says that slave owning is a protected property right. He says:

The essence of the Dred Scott case is compressed into the sentence which I will now read: "Now, as we have already said in an earlier part of this opinion, upon a different point, the right of property in a slave is distinctly and expressly affirmed in the Constitution." I repeat it, "The right of property in a slave is distinctly and expressly affirmed in the Constitution!" I believe that the right of property in a slave is not distinctly and expressly affirmed in the

Constitution, and Judge Douglas thinks it is. I believe that the Supreme Court and the advocates of that decision may search in vain for the place in the Constitution where the right of a slave (owner) is distinctly and expressly affirmed.

Judge Douglas, and whoever like him teaches that the negro has no share, humble though it may be, in the Declaration of Independence, is going back to the era of our liberty and independence, and, so far as in him lies, muzzling the cannon that thunders its annual joyous return; that he is blowing out the moral lights around us, when he contends that whoever wants slaves has a right to hold them; that he is penetrating, so far as lies in his power, the human soul, and eradicating the light of reason and the love of liberty, when he is in every possible way preparing the public mind, by his vast influence, for making the institution of slavery perpetual and national.

When Judge Douglas rises in rebuttal six cheers are called for from the crowd. Douglas again probes the tension between Mr. Lincoln's claim that the Declaration of Independence includes Negroes and that Negroes are not equal to whites. He says:

Mr. Lincoln asserts to-day as he did at Chicago, that the negro was included in that clause of the Declaration of Independence which says that all men were created equal and endowed by the Creator with certain inalienable rights, among which are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. (Ain't that so?) If the negro was made his equal and mine, if that equality was established by Divine law, and was the negro's inalienable right, how came he to say at Charleston to the Kentuckians residing in that section of our State, that the negro was physically inferior to the white man, belonged to an inferior race, and he was for keeping him always in that inferior condition. (Good.) I wish you to bear these things in mind. At Charleston he said that the negro belonged to an inferior race, and that he was for keeping him in that

inferior condition. There he gave the people to understand that there was no moral question involved, because the inferiority being established, it was only a question of degree and not a question of right; here, to-day, instead of making it a question of degree, he makes it a moral question, says that it is a great crime to hold the negro in that inferior condition. (He's right.) Is he right now or was he right in Charleston?

The three hours of bracing the bracing wind end with a round of applause and the arrival of a southbound train with people who were likely coming to observe the speech.