

Documents for Structured Academic Controversy

Document #1:

In 1858, Abraham Lincoln ran against Stephen A. Douglas for a seat in the U.S. Senate. The two engaged in a series of seven public debates which attracted national attention. Although Lincoln lost the election, he became widely known for his views on slavery. The following is an excerpt from Douglas' address to Lincoln in their first debate at Ottawa, Illinois, August 21, 1858

If you desire Negro citizenship, if you desire to allow them to come into the State and settle with the White man, if you desire them to vote on an equality with yourselves, and to make them eligible to office, to serve on juries, and to judge your rights, then support Mr. Lincoln and the Black Republican party, who are in favor of the citizenship of the Negro. For one, I am opposed to Negro citizenship in any and every form. I believe this government was made . . . by White men, for the benefit of White men and their posterity forever, and I am in favor of confining citizenship to White men, men of European birth and descent, instead of conferring it upon Negroes, Indians and other inferior races.

Mr. Lincoln, following the example and lead of all the little abolition orators, who go around and lecture in the basements of schools and churches, reads from the Declaration of Independence, that all men were created equal, and then asks how can you deprive a Negro of that equality which God and the Declaration of Independence awards to him. He and they maintain that Negro equality is guaranteed by the laws of God, and that it is asserted in the Declaration of Independence. . . . I do not question Mr. Lincoln's conscientious belief that the Negro was made his equal, and hence his brother, but for my own part, I do not regard the Negro as my equal, and positively deny that he is my brother. . . . [Lincoln] holds that the Negro was born his equal and yours, and that he was endowed with equality by the Almighty, and that no human law can deprive him of these rights. . . . Now, I do not believe that the Almighty ever intended the Negro to be the equal of the White man. . . . For thousands of years the Negro has been a race upon the earth, and during all that time, in all latitudes and climates, wherever he has wandered or been taken, he has been inferior to the race which he has there met. He belongs to an inferior race, and must always occupy an inferior position.

(Cited in Abraham Lincoln, *Speeches and Writings*, [Vols. 1 and 2], [New York, 1989], 504-5.)

Document #2

From Abraham Lincoln's reply to Stephen A. Douglas at Ottawa, Illinois, August 21, 1858.

I will say here . . . that I have no purpose directly or indirectly to interfere with the institution of slavery in the States where it exists. I believe I have no lawful right to do so, and I have no inclination to do so. I have no purpose to introduce political and social equality between the white and black races. There is a physical difference between the two, which in my judgment will probably forever forbid their living together upon the footing of perfect equality, and inasmuch as it becomes a necessity that there must be a difference, I, as well as Judge Douglas, am in favor of the race to which I belong, having the superior position. I have never said anything to the contrary, but I hold that notwithstanding all this, there is no reason in the world why the Negro is not entitled to all the natural rights enumerated in the Declaration of Independence, the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. I hold that he is as much entitled to these as the White man. I agree with Judge Douglas [that the Negro] is not my equal in many respects--certainly not in color, perhaps not in moral or intellectual endowment. But in the right to eat the bread. . . which his own hand earns, he is my equal and the equal of Judge Douglas, and the equal of every living man.

(Cited in Lincoln, *Speeches*, 512.)

Document #3:

Abraham Lincoln, writing in a letter to Mary Speed, a personal friend, September 27, 1841.

By the way, a fine example was presented on board the boat for contemplating the effect of condition upon human happiness. A gentleman had purchased twelve Negroes in different parts of Kentucky and was taking them to a farm in the South. They were chained six and six together. A small iron clevis was around the left wrist of each so that the Negroes were strung together precisely like so many fish upon a trot-line. In this condition they were being separated forever from the scenes of their childhood, their friends, their fathers and mothers, and brothers and sisters, and many of them, from their wives and children, and going into perpetual slavery . . . yet amid all these distressing circumstances . . . they were the most cheerful and apparently happy creatures on board. One, whose offense for which he had been sold was an over-fondness for his wife, played the fiddle almost continually; and the others danced, sung, cracked jokes, and played various games with cards from day to day. How true it is that 'God renders the worst of human conditions tolerable. . . ."

(Cited in Lincoln, *Speeches*, 74.)

Document #4

Colonization of freed Blacks was an idea proposed early in the nineteenth century. Many Whites who opposed slavery actively advocated colonization, maintaining that true freedom and equality could be realized only by relocating the Black population. Abraham Lincoln had long favored the idea, and, in 1862, a sum of money was appropriated by Congress to aid in a colonization program. The following is from Lincoln's "Address on Colonization" delivered to a group of free Black men at the White House on August 14, 1862.

Why . . . should the people of your race be colonized, and where? If we deal with those who are not free at the beginning, and whose intellects are clouded by slavery, we have very poor materials to start with. If intelligent colored men . . . would move in this matter, much might be accomplished. It is exceedingly important that we have men at the beginning capable of thinking as White men, and not those who have been systematically oppressed The place I am thinking about having for a colony is in Central America. . . . The country is a very excellent one for any people, and with great natural resources and advantages, and especially because of the similarity of climate with your native land--thus being suited to your physical condition.

(Cited in Lincoln, *Speeches*, 368.)