

March 2023

## Lincoln-Douglas Debates: The Continuation of the American Revolution

Robert A. Tober  
*Liberty University*, [robtober757@aol.com](mailto:robtober757@aol.com)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/ljh>



Part of the [Political History Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

### Recommended Citation

Tober, Robert A. (2023) "Lincoln-Douglas Debates: The Continuation of the American Revolution," *Bound Away: The Liberty Journal of History*. Vol. 5: Iss. 2, Article 5.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/ljh/vol5/iss2/5>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Scholars Crossing. It has been accepted for inclusion in Bound Away: The Liberty Journal of History by an authorized editor of Scholars Crossing. For more information, please contact [scholarlycommunications@liberty.edu](mailto:scholarlycommunications@liberty.edu).

---

## Lincoln-Douglas Debates: The Continuation of the American Revolution

### Abstract

This Article deals with the Lincoln-Douglas Debate and how Abraham Lincoln articulated the meaning of American Nationalism and the true meaning of the Revolution and how the advocates of slavery and those who would form "The Confederate States of America" betrayed the Revolution and committed treason. The article address scholarship such as how Lincoln used his arguments based on the words of the founding fathers and how neo-Confederate groups such as the Abbeville Institute and neo-Confederate scholars/apologists such as Donald W.Livingston are the anti-thesis of what it means to be an American.

### Cover Page Footnote

Notes 1. Brian Lamb and Susan Swain, eds., Abraham Lincoln: Great American Historians on our sixteenth president, (National Cable Satellite Corporation, 2008) 299. 2. Harold Holzer, ed., The Lincoln-Douglas Debates, (New York, Fordham University Press, 2004) 60-61 3. Harold Holzer, ed., The Lincoln-Douglas Debates, (New York, Fordham University Press, 2004) 62. 4. Harold Holzer, ed., The Lincoln-Douglas Debates, (New York, Fordham University Press, 2004) 63. 5. Harold Holzer, ed., The Lincoln-Douglas Debates, (New York, Fordham University Press, 2004) 65-66. 6. Harold Holzer, ed., The Lincoln-Douglas Debates, (New York, Fordham University Press, 2004) 66. 7. Harold Holzer, ed., The Lincoln-Douglas Debates, (New York, Fordham University Press, 2004) 371 9. James W. Loewen and Edward H. Sebesta, The Confederate and Neo-Confederate Reader, The "Great Truth" about the "Lost Cause". (Jackson, University Press of Mississippi, 2010) 116. 10. James W. Loewen and Edward H. Sebesta, The Confederate and Neo-Confederate Reader, The "Great Truth" about the "Lost Cause". (Jackson, University Press of Mississippi, 2010) 128. 11. James W. Loewen and Edward H. Sebesta, The Confederate and Neo-Confederate Reader, The "Great Truth" about the "Lost Cause". (Jackson, University Press of Mississippi, 2010) 131-132. 12. James W. Loewen and Edward H. Sebesta, The Confederate and Neo-Confederate Reader, The "Great Truth" about the "Lost Cause". (Jackson, University Press of Mississippi, 2010)134,137. 13. James W. Loewen and Edward H. Sebesta, The Confederate and Neo-Confederate Reader, The "Great Truth" about the "Lost Cause". (Jackson, University Press of Mississippi, 2010), 142. 14. James W. Loewen and Edward H. Sebesta, The Confederate and Neo-Confederate Reader, The "Great Truth" about the "Lost Cause". (Jackson, University Press of Mississippi, 2010) 152.

# Tober: Lincoln-Douglas Debates: The Continuation of the American Revolution

Rob Tober

2/20/2022

HIST 711

Professor Strickland

## **Summative Essay: 17th Century to the 20th Century Assignment**

In August and September of 1858 two men in the United States performed a series of debates that stated the issues for the whole nation. These two men were Senator Stephen A. Douglas from Illinois and a former one term congressman and prominent Springfield, Illinois attorney named Abraham Lincoln. We of course know who Mr. Lincoln is thought of, as the great emancipator and the savior of the United States. But in 1858 he had no political power, had lost the 1855 Senate election and before these debates was not well known outside the State of Illinois. These debates were a turning point and a watershed monument for not only Mr. Lincoln but for the entire nation as well. From these debates there would be only one version of America. As Lincoln stated, "a house divided against itself cannot stand. I believe this Government cannot endure, permanently half slave and half free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved. I do not expect the house to fall but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing, or all the other." (1) Mr. Lincoln's prophesy came true and he was vindicated through the victory of the United States during the Civil War. Mr. Lincoln's arguments in the debates are the arguments that make the American Nation unique, that being that our nation is based on our constitution, one nation of states in that nation. Therefore, we are not a nation of separated individual nation states. Mr. Lincoln's arguments emphasize the ideas of the Republican Party, the opposition to slavery to territories and the support of The Northwest Ordinance of 1787. Mr. Lincoln's arguments are

therefore a continuation of the American Nation and eliminate the idea that secession is American, but in fact what it is is treason.

In the first debate at Ottawa, Illinois Lincoln stated:

Kansas and Nebraska {Kansas-Nebraska Act is wrong} in its prospective principal, allowing it to spread to every part of the wide world, where men can be found inclined to take it this declared difference, but as I must think, covet real zeal for the spread of slavery, I cannot but hate it. I hate it because of the monstrous injustice of slavery itself. I hate it because it deprives our republican example of free institutions, with plausibility, to taunt us as hypocrites, cause the real friends of freedom to doubt our sincerity, and especially because it forces so many good men amongst ourselves into an open war with the fundamental principle of civil liberty, criticizing the Declaration of Independence, and insisting that there is no principle but self-interest.(2)

Lincoln's argument is that the Kansas-Nebraska act which was the brainchild of Senator Steven A.

Douglas argued that people should decide for themselves whether or not slavery should be allowed in a new State or the Western Territories. Lincoln argued that any expansion of slavery was unconstitutional because of the Northwest Ordinance, the brainchild of Thomas Jefferson, Nathan Dane and Rufus King which stated that all future creations of states had to exclude slavery. So, Lincoln is following the Jeffersonian example and the pro-slavery forces and the South are following the anti-Jeffersonian argument in this particular case. Lincoln would argue that the framers of the constitution by outlawing the African slave trade and by passing the Northwest Ordinance stated unequivocally that slavery would not be allowed in any new territory. In other words, to go against Lincoln's argument is to go against the Founding Fathers. Lincoln stated, "the law which forbids the bringing of slaves from Africa; and that which has so long forbid the taking them to Nebraska, can hardly be distinguished on any moral principle; and the repeal of the former can find quite as plausible excuses as that of the latter." (3)

## Tober: Lincoln-Douglas Debates: The Continuation of the American Revolution

Lincoln acknowledges the racial problems in the country when he states:

There is a physical difference between the two, which in my judgment will probably forever forbid their living together on terms of respect, social and political equality, and inasmuch as it becomes a necessity...but I hold that because of all that the Declaration of Independence holds out, which is, life, Liberty and the pursuit of happiness...but in the right to the bread which his own hands earns; he is my own equal and Judge Douglas's equal and the Equal of every living man. (4)

Lincoln acknowledged that the United States had racial problems. He also stated that whites are in some ways superior and he wanted to be part of the superior race. Many scholars have interpreted what this means. The liberal/left wing historian would say this is an example of Lincoln's racism. The neo-Confederate historian would argue the same thing. But a more logical look at it would be that Lincoln is acknowledging that blacks do not have the same advantages of whites because of slavery. He likes being free and not a person who has no say in government so that is what is meant by being part of the "superior race." But Lincoln is saying that this nation will have to work to achieve racial harmony but until then Blacks have basic human rights like the right to the fruits of their own labor.

The neo-Confederate right wing and people who oppose the policies of Mr. Lincoln say that they are following "conservative" principles of the constitution. However, the evidence suggests that Mr. Lincoln used more references to the founding fathers than the southern and neo-confederate and fundamentalist Christian views. For example Lincoln stated, "what is popular sovereignty...my understanding of it is that popular sovereignty, applied to the question of slavery, and as now applied, does allow the people of a territory, to have slavery if they want it.(5) Lincoln would go on to add, "I am fighting in favor of the old principle of Washington, Jefferson and Madison.(6) Mr. Lincoln would sum up the issue at the seventh debate in Alton, Illinois:

That is the real issue! An issue that will continue in this country when these poor tongues of Douglas and myself shall be silent. These are the two principles that are made the eternal struggle between right and wrong. They are the two principles that have stood face to face from the beginning of time; and will ever continue to struggle, one of them asserting the divine right of kings, the same principle that says you work, you toil, you eat bread, and I will eat it. It is the same old serpent, whether it comes from the mouth of a king who seeks to bestride the people of his nation, and to live upon the fat of his neighbor or, whether it comes from one race of men as an apology for enslaving of another race of men. (7)

Mr. Lincoln stated that the founding fathers acknowledge that slavery was going to die and that the future of America was universal freedom for all. With the passing of time the states of the northern United States still kept the values of the nation. The southern United States based on a feudalistic class system fell away from the founding principles of the nation which eventually led to their ultimate treason and the triumph of the American Nation over its enemies.

In the end Senator Douglas won the election because the Democratic party won a majority in the state legislature. It was not until the XVII Amendment to the Constitution that the people of the United States had direct election of Senators. However, the data shows that Republicans won state offices such as treasurer and amassed more total votes in the Congressional districts meaning Lincoln would have won if we had direct election of senators in 1858 (8) The coming of the Civil War proved Lincoln was right, this country could not endure half slave and half free. Lincoln's views proved to be more American and more like what the founding fathers suggested and was as opposed to as for example, the proclamations of the southern states for secession. Every single southern state stated that slavery was the reason for committing treason or would have it in their statement later. South Carolina stated, "those states have assumed the right of deciding upon the propriety of our domestic institutions; and have denied the rights of property in fifteen of the States and recognized by the Constitution they have denounced as the sinful the institution of slavery." (9) Mississippi would state, "it advocates negro

## Tober: Lincoln-Douglas Debates: The Continuation of the American Revolution

equality and politically, and promotes insurrection and incendiarism in our midst.”(10) Alabama would state, “the recent election of Abraham Lincoln to the office of President, and Hannibal Hamlin to the office of Vice President of these United States upon the avowed principle that the Constitution of the United States does not recognize property in slaves, and that the government should prevent its extension into the territories of the United States...sectional party, avowedly hostile to their domestic institutions and to the peace and security of the people of the State of Alabama”(11)

Georgia would state, “while the subordination and the political and social inequality of the African race were fully conceded by all...the prohibition of slavery in the territories, hostility to it everywhere, the equality of the black and white races, disregard of all Constitutional guarantees in its favor, were boldly proclaimed by its leaders, and applauded by its followers.”(12) Texas would state, “based upon the unnatural felling of hostility to these southern states and their beneficent and patriarchal system of African slavery, proclaiming the debasing doctrine of the equality of all men, irrespective of race or color-a doctrine at war with nature, in opposition to the experience of mankind, and in violation of the plainest revelations of the divine law.”(13) Perhaps nothing more summed up southern folly and anti-intellectualism than the quotation of the Georgian secession commissioner to the Virginia House Of Burgesses:

But this is not all. The white race having been exterminated the land will go into the exclusive possession of the black, and will, in consequence, rapidly pass into the condition of St. Domingo, and become a howling wilderness. The north, looking on, will declare that this goodly land and the fullness thereof are the Lord’s and he made it not for these black heathens, but for his saints-and we are his saints. And they will take possession of it and exterminate the blacks. This the end will be that the Yankee will walk our soil as the sole lord, having exterminated both us and our slaves. This is what abolition in the cotton states would be. Sir, can you blame us for flying to any measure to prevent this?  
(14)

Whether neo-Confederates want to acknowledge it, like scholars such as Professor Donald W. Livingston or neo-confederate groups such as Abbeville Institute or the Sons/Daughters of the Confederate Veterans, Mr. Lincoln's words spoke to a truth that happened . Mr. Lincoln's words are based on the continuous teaching of our founding fathers and our constitution. To oppose Mr. Lincoln is to oppose America and our revolution. Mr. Lincoln's words are based on our founding. Mr. Lincoln's opponents' arguments are about keeping an antiquated, anti-capitalist, feudalist Southern society that some Southerners don't want to acknowledge or do and show it in ways with the neo-Confederate movements. Mr. Lincoln's words therefore contain the values of our revolution which help defeat traitors.



Notes

1. Brian Lamb and Susan Swain, eds., *Abraham Lincoln: Great American Historians on our sixteenth president*, (National Cable Satellite Corporation, 2008) 299.
2. Harold Holzer, ed., *The Lincoln-Douglas Debates*, (New York, Fordham University Press, 2004) 60-61
3. Harold Holzer, ed., *The Lincoln-Douglas Debates*, (New York, Fordham University Press, 2004) 62.
4. Harold Holzer, ed., *The Lincoln-Douglas Debates*, (New York, Fordham University Press, 2004) 63.
5. Harold Holzer, ed., *The Lincoln-Douglas Debates*, (New York, Fordham University Press, 2004) 65-66.
6. Harold Holzer, ed., *The Lincoln-Douglas Debates*, (New York, Fordham University Press, 2004) 66.
7. Harold Holzer, ed., *The Lincoln-Douglas Debates*, (New York, Fordham University Press, 2004) 359.
8. Harold Holzer, ed., *The Lincoln-Douglas Debates*, (New York, Fordham University Press, 2004) 371
9. James W. Loewen and Edward H. Sebesta, *The Confederate and Neo-Confederate Reader, The "Great Truth" about the "Lost Cause"*. (Jackson, University Press of Mississippi, 2010) 116.
10. James W. Loewen and Edward H. Sebesta, *The Confederate and Neo-Confederate Reader, The "Great Truth" about the "Lost Cause"*. (Jackson, University Press of Mississippi, 2010) 128.
11. James W. Loewen and Edward H. Sebesta, *The Confederate and Neo-Confederate Reader, The "Great Truth" about the "Lost Cause"*. (Jackson, University Press of Mississippi, 2010) 131-132.
12. James W. Loewen and Edward H. Sebesta, *The Confederate and Neo-Confederate Reader, The "Great Truth" about the "Lost Cause"*. (Jackson, University Press of Mississippi, 2010) 134, 137.
13. James W. Loewen and Edward H. Sebesta, *The Confederate and Neo-Confederate Reader, The "Great Truth" about the "Lost Cause"*. (Jackson, University Press of Mississippi, 2010), 142.

14. James W. Loewen and Edward H. Sebesta, *The Confederate and Neo-Confederate Reader, The "Great Truth" about the "Lost Cause"*. (Jackson, University Press of Mississippi, 2010) 152.