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8.70 Examine the arguments presented by Stephen Douglas and Abraham Lincoln in the Illinois Senate race debate of 1858. (H,P)

***EXTENDED RESPONSE LESSON

[Image of Lincoln and Douglas]

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2cYWUIEV3Mg

The Lincoln-Douglas Debates
The 7th and final debate between Senatorial candidates Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas was held on October 15, 1858, in Alton, Illinois. Today bronze statues of Douglas and Lincoln stand to commemorate the event at Lincoln Douglas Square in Alton.

In 1858, as the country moved ever closer to disunion, two politicians from Illinois attracted the attention of a nation. From August 21 until October 15, Stephen Douglas battled Abraham Lincoln in face to face DEBATES around the state. The prize they sought was a seat in the Senate. Lincoln challenged Douglas to a war of ideas. Douglas took the challenge. The debates were to be held at 7 locations throughout Illinois. The fight was on and the nation was watching.

The spectators came from all over Illinois and nearby states by train, by canal-boat, by wagon, by buggy, and on horseback. They briefly swelled the populations of the towns that hosted the debates. The audiences participated by shouting questions, cheering the participants as if they were prizefighters, applauding and laughing. The debates attracted tens of thousands of voters and newspaper reporters from across the nation.

During the debates, Douglas still advocated "popular sovereignty," which maintained the right of the citizens of a territory to permit or prohibit slavery. It was, he said, a sacred right of self-government. Lincoln pointed out that
Douglas’s position directly challenged the Dred Scott decision, which decreed that the citizens of a territory had no such power.

“If we could first know where we are and whither we are tending, we could better judge what to do and how to do it. We are now far into the fifth year since a policy was initiated with the avowed object and confident promise of putting an end to slavery agitation. Under the operation of that policy, that agitation has not only not ceased but has constantly augmented. In my opinion, it will not cease until a crisis shall have been reached and passed. "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. Either the opponents of slavery will arrest the further spread of it and place it where the public mind shall rest in the belief that it is in the course of ultimate extinction, or its advocates will push it forward till it shall become alike lawful in all the states, old as well as new, North as well as South.

Excerpt from Abraham Lincoln’s speech, "A House Divided"

"The next question propounded to me by Mr. Lincoln is, can the people of a Territory in any lawful way, against the wishes of any citizen of the United States, exclude slavery from their limits prior to the formation of a State Constitution? I answer emphatically, as Mr. Lincoln has heard me answer a hundred times from every stump in Illinois, that in my opinion the people of a Territory can, by lawful means, exclude slavery from their limits prior to the formation of a State Constitution. Mr. Lincoln knew that I had answered that question over and over again. He heard me argue the Nebraska bill on that principle all over the State in 1854, in 1855, and in 1856, and he has no excuse for pretending to be in doubt as to my position on that question. It matters not what way the Supreme Court may hereafter decide as to the abstract question whether slavery may or may not go into a Territory under the Constitution, the people have the lawful means to introduce it or exclude it as they please, for the reason that slavery cannot exist a day or an hour anywhere, unless it is supported by local police regulations. Those police regulations can only be established by the local legislature, and if the people are opposed to slavery they will elect representatives to that body who will by unfriendly legislation effectually prevent the introduction of it into their midst. If, on the contrary, they are for it, their legislation will favor its extension. Hence, no matter what the decision of the Supreme Court may be on that abstract question, still the right of the people to make a slave Territory or a free Territory is perfect and complete under the Nebraska bill. I hope Mr. Lincoln deems my answer satisfactory on that point."

Excerpt from Stephen Douglas’s Freeport Doctrine speech at Freeport, Illinois.

In what became known as the FREEPORT DOCTRINE, Douglas replied that whatever the Supreme Court decided was not as important as the actions of the citizens. If a territory refused to have slavery, no laws, no Supreme Court ruling, would force them to permit it. This sentiment would be taken as betrayal to many southern Democrats and would come back to haunt Douglas in his bid to become President in the election of 1860.
(Pictured Above: Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas met at each of Illinois’ 7 Congressional districts for the debates which preceded the election for U.S. Senator in 1858.)

Time and time again, Lincoln made that point that "A HOUSE DIVIDED COULD NOT STAND." Douglas refuted this by noting that the founders, "left each state perfectly free to do as it pleased on the subject." Lincoln felt that blacks were entitled to the rights enumerated in the Declaration of Independence, which include "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Douglas argued that the founders intended no such inclusion for blacks.

Neither Abraham Lincoln nor Stephen Douglas won a popular election that fall. Under rules governing Senate elections, voters cast their ballots for local legislators, who then choose a Senator. The Democrats won a majority of district contests and returned Douglas to Washington. But the nation saw a rising star in the defeated Lincoln. The entire drama that unfolded in Illinois would be played on the national stage only two years later with the highest of all possible stakes.

From Edu - Creations, watch and learn about the Lincoln/Douglass debates, the Dred Scott Case, Bleeding Kansas and the Election of Abraham Lincoln in 1860.

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