

Abraham lincoln, first debate with stephen assignment

[History](#)



Independence, and insisting that there is no right principle of action but self-interest. Before proceeding, let me say I think have no prejudice against the Southern people. They are just what we would be in their situation. If slavery did not now exist among them, they would not introduce it. If it did now exist amongst us, we should not instantly give it up. This I believe of the masses North and South. Doubtless there are individuals on both sides, who would not hold slaves under any circumstances; and others who would gladly introduce slavery anew, if it were out of existence.

We know that some Southern men do free their slaves, go North, and become tiptop Abolitionists; while some Northern ones go South, and become most cruel slave-masters. When Southern people tell us they are no more responsible for the origin of slavery than we, acknowledge the fact. When it is said that the institution exists, and that it is very difficult to get rid of it, in any satisfactory way, can understand and appreciate the saying. I surely will not blame them for not doing what should not know how to do myself.

If all earthly power were given me, I should not know what to do, as to the existing institution. My first impulse would be to free all the slaves, and send them to Liberia, - to their own native land. But a moment's reflection would convince me, that whatever of high hope, (as I think there is) there may be in this, in the long run, its sudden execution is impossible. If they were all landed there in a day, they would all perish in the next ten days; and there are not surplus shipping and surplus money enough in the world to carry them there in many times ten days.

What then? Free them all, and keep them among us as underlings? Is it quite certain that this betters their condition? Think I would not hold one in slavery at any rate; yet the point is not clear enough to me to denounce people upon. What next? Free them, and make them politically and socially our equals? My own feelings will not admit of this; and if mine would, we well know that those of the great mass of white people will not. Whether this feeling accords with justice and sound judgment, is not the sole question, if, indeed, it is any part of it.

A universal feeling, whether well or ill-founded, cannot be safely disregarded. We cannot, then, make them equals. It does seem to me that systems of gradual emancipation might be adopted; but for their tardiness in this, will not undertake to judge our brethren of the South. When they remind us of their constitutional rights, I acknowledge them, not grudgingly, but fully and fairly; and would give them any legislation for the reclaiming of their fugitives, which should not, in its stringency, be more likely to carry a free man into slavery, than our ordinary criminal laws are to hang an innocent one.

But all this, to my judgment, furnishes no more excuse for permitting slavery to go into our own free territory, than it would for reviving the African slave-trade by law. The law which forbids the bringing of slaves from Africa, and that which has so long forbid the taking of them to Nebraska, can hardly be distinguished on any moral principle; and the repeal of the former could find quite as plausible excuses as that of the latter. " I have reason to know that Judge Douglas knows that I said this. Hint he has the answer here to one of

the questions he put to me. I do not mean to allow him to catechist me unless he pays back for it in kind. Will not answer questions one after another, unless he reciprocates; but as he has made this inquiry, and I have answered it before, he has got it without my getting anything in return. He as got my answer on the Fugitive Slave law. Now, gentlemen, I don't want to read at any greater length, but this is the true complexion of all I have ever said in regard to the institution of slavery and the black race.

This is the whole of it, and anything that argues me into his idea of perfect social and political equality with the negro, is but a specious and fantastic arrangement of words, by which a man can prove a horse-chestnut to be a chestnut horse. [Laughter.] I will say here, while upon this subject, that have no purpose, directly or indirectly, to interfere with the institution of slavery in the States here it exists. I believe I have no lawful right to do so, and have no inclination to do so. I have no purpose to introduce political and social equality between the white and the black races.