

Abraham Lincoln and the US Civil War

The sources below are aimed to get you started on researching Lincoln's attitude to slavery and why the Civil War started in the USA. Read them carefully, then answer the questions at the end.

Source A: 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. This is part of Douglas' speech 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. . .

Mr. Lincoln believes 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."

**Vocabulary Posterity: future generations*

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

"I have no purpose directly or indirectly to interfere with the institution of slavery in the States where it exists. 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 in perfect equality, and. . .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 there is no reason in the world why the Negro is not entitled to all the natural rights 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 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 every living man."

**Vocabulary - *Endowment: ability*

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

"Today, on board a boat, I saw a gentleman who 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 chain 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 overfondness 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. . ."

Vocabulary - *Renders: makes

Source D : From Pictures of Slavery and Anti-Slavery: Advantages of Negro Slavery and the Benefits of Negro Freedom Morally, Socially, and Politically Considered by John Bell Robinson, a White proslavery spokesperson, Pennsylvania, 1863, p. 42.

"God himself has made them for usefulness as slaves, and requires us to employ them as such, and if we betray our trust, and throw them off on their own resources, we reconvert them into barbarians. Our Heavenly Father has made us to rule, and the Negroes to serve, and if we . . . set aside his holy arrangements . . . and tamper with his laws, we shall be overthrown and eternally degraded, and perhaps made subjects of some other civilized nation . . . If they could all be colonized on the coast of Africa, they would fall back into heathenism* and barbarism* in less than fifty years."

Vocabulary *Heathenism: not having a religion

*Barbarism: not having culture or civilization

Things to do:

1. Source A:

(a) What are two things that Douglas warns will happen if Lincoln is elected?

(b) Based on this document, what do you think Douglas's views were on African Americans?

2. Source B: Carefully read Lincoln's response to Douglas. On what points is Lincoln willing to agree with Douglas? On what points does he differ from Douglas?

3. Source C: What amazes Lincoln about the scene he sees on the boat?

4. Source D: How do Lincoln's views on slavery compare with John Bell Robinson?