

Winter History & Heritage -- #4 (January 21)

This week's post addresses, in the main, some of Abraham Lincoln's more famous public utterances and viewpoints.

"House Divided" Speech --- (America, Vol. 1, pp. 296-301; Bennett)

In **this 1854 Peoria, Illinois, speech**, Abraham Lincoln used, memorably, one of Christ's sayings to suggest the U.S. could not go on indefinitely half-slave and half-free? Lincoln told his fellow Republicans that he didn't expect the Union to fall, but he did expect it to become all one thing or all another (a uniform nation-state, whether slave or free). Jesus, as recorded in the gospels and as nearly all Americans in Lincoln's day knew, had said that no kingdom divided against itself could stand.

Lincoln-Douglas Debates --- (America, Vol. 1, pp. 296-301; Bennett)

These Illinois debates (1858) pitted a well-known incumbent U.S. senator (a Democrat) against a somewhat obscure former congressman & lawyer (a Republican)? The incumbent stumbled trying to explain how his "popular sovereignty" solution to slavery in the territories concurred with Justice Taney's remarks in the *Dred Scott* case. The challenger, who lost the U.S. senate race despite an effective showing, was hard pressed to reveal whether he believed in the equality of the races.

The Secret Six --- (teacher commentary)

This New England/N.Y. cabal bankrolled abolitionist John Brown's 1859 campaign, aborted at Harpers Ferry, Virginia, to incite a slave rebellion in the South? The wealthy band of do-gooders included two prominent Unitarian ministers, a N.Y. congressman, and a physician celebrated for his service to the blind and deaf. The latter, Dr. Samuel Gridley Howe, was the husband of Julia Ward Howe, famed author of *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*, a moralistic doxology to the Union cause in the Civil War.

First Inaugural Address [of A. Lincoln] -- (America, Vol. 1, pp. 309-310)

"You have not oath registered in heaven to destroy the government, while I shall have the most solemn one to 'preserve, protect, and defend it.'" Thus spoke Abraham Lincoln with urgency to the seven seceded states of the South on March 4, 1861, in **this keynote speech of his presidency?** The president also, in his appeal to national unity, recalled Americans' "mystic chords of memory stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone."

Lincoln on Race Relations in America --- (teacher commentary)

There is little doubt Lincoln disapproved of slavery, and he may well have sympathized deeply with the plight of the African-American. What he said about the social status of Negroes, however, was conflicted at best, and what he and many other prominent leaders proposed for their future was improbable and unlikely to relieve their burdens.

Take, for instance, the following examples from the 1858 Lincoln-Douglas Debates in Illinois. On one occasion, Lincoln says 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 of 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 he 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, without leave of anybody else, which his own hand earns, he is my equal, and the equal of Judge Douglas, and the equal of every other man.”

However, on another occasion in the debate series, Lincoln says, in answer to a question pressed several times upon him by Douglas, “Make Negroes politically and socially our equals? My own feelings will not admit of this. I will say that I am not nor ever have been in favor of bringing about in any way the social and political equality of the white and black races, that I am not nor have ever been in favor of making voters or jurors of Negroes, nor of qualifying them to hold office, nor to intermarry with white people. And I will say in addition to this that there is a physical difference between the white and black races which I believe will forever forbid the two races living together on terms of social and political equality. And in as much as they cannot so live, while they do remain together, there must be the position of superior and inferior. And I, as much as any other man, am in favor of having the superior position assigned to the white race.”

With accuracy although little known to Americans today, author Lenore Bennett, Jr., outlined what Lincoln favored for slaves (or even for free blacks provided they consented): “What Lincoln proposed officially and publicly was that the United States government buy the slaves and deport them to Africa or South America. This was not a passing whim. In five major policy declarations, including two State of the Union addresses and the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, the sixteenth president of the United States publicly and officially called for the deportation of blacks. On countless other occasions, in conferences with cronies, Democratic and Republican leaders, and high government officials, he called for colonization of blacks or aggressively promoted colonization by private and official acts.”

Thus, it's safe to say Lincoln was not the apostle of race equality that American myth has made him out to be. Far more often than not, he refused to put blacks and whites on the same plane. Like his contemporaries and his forbears he had to deal with what seemed to be, at that time, vast differences in intellectual and political capacities between the races. Opposing slavery and clearly uncomfortable with inequality of any sort, he advocated the deportation and colonization of a people with deep, multi-generational roots in American soil. Whether such advocacy was wise or not is left to history, and ultimately to God, to decide.