

San Jose CA 95131-3202

5 Oct 1994

*rais
V.D*

Dear Brian, et al.,

Thank you for your superb programming at C-SPAN, and in particular the Lincoln/Douglas Debates. Since early this year I have been focusing my reading on topics leading up to and subsequent to the debates to enhance my understanding of the period issues, including: Uncle Tom's Cabin, Sandburg's Lincoln, Life & Times of Frederick Douglass, Congressman JQ Adams, the War with Mexico, and sundry extracts, letters, speeches and court rulings.

I thought I would submit three instances from my readings which were of special interest to me and may be topics for discussion with your guests: slavery and abolition in other countries, the Dred Scott ruling, and Lincoln's love of Shakespeare.

Many abolitionists like Harriet Stowe, "Moses" Tubman and Sojourner Truth made frequent references to the Hebrew's emancipation from Egyptian slavery. Frederick Douglass claimed that England's abolition of slavery in 1834 gave a great stimulus to the U.S. abolition movement. And I would think that Latin America's abolition of slavery during their war for independence from Spain in the 1820's would have had some effect on U.S. sentiments.

In 1857 Chief Justice Taney claimed that constitutionally "negroes are deemed to have no rights which white men are bound to respect". (I hear an ominous echo in Justice Blackmun's words 116 years later that "the unborn have never been recognized in the law as persons...") So far in the debates, I view Stephen Douglas as PRO territorial CHOICE for upholding Taney's ruling and promoting popular sovereignty in Kansas. I think Lincoln's position, on the other hand, was best described by Fred Douglass as "a statesman, the proper standard-bearer of all the moral and political forces which could be united and wielded against the slave power". Although conceding that the Constitution did not establish immediate freedom for all, Lincoln argued in 1856 that "its constant working has been a steady progress towards the practical equality of all men". And in 1859..."he who would be no slave, must consent to

have no slave. Those who deny freedom to others, deserve it not for themselves; and, under a just God, can not long retain it." "These 'popular sovereigns' are...blowing out the moral lights around us; teaching that the negro is no longer a man but a brute; that the Declaration (of Independence) has nothing to do with him." As iron sharpens iron so one man sharpens another and it is noteworthy that Lincoln and Douglas were reconciled by the advent of the civil war and working in consensus for the greater cause of the Union.

Finally, it has been a delight for me to discover Lincoln's love of Shakespeare. Lincoln's correspondence in 1863 with James Hackett, a Shakespearean scholar and actor, is a signal instance. Lincoln recounts his favorite plays and that "nothing equals Macbeth". He poses a criticism of conventional scholars who claim that Hamlet's soliloquy "To be, or not to be" is Shakespeare's greatest, arguing instead that the soliloquy of Hamlet's uncle/stepfather "O, my offence is rank" is superior. Upon review, I find Lincoln's critique consistent with his personality and, best of all, he has persuaded me! It intrigues me to ponder how well suited Shakespeare was for Lincoln and how Lincoln may have tempered his life and career with a view to those marvelous characters.

Thank you again for the integrity of C-SPAN. Your unbiased, magnanimous comity of programs has enriched my life.

Sincerely,

Macbeth: If chance will have me king, why, chance may crown me without my stir.

If th' assassination could trammel up the consequence, and catch with his surcease, success: that but this blow might be the be-all and the end-all... I have no spur to prick the sides of my intent, but only vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself...

Out, out, brief candle! Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player, that struts and frets his hour upon the stage, and then is heard no more.