*Lincoln started his campaign for the Senate with a statement of what he thought was the crucial issue in his most dramatic statement, the House Divided Speech in Chicago in June 1858.*

LINCOLN (quoting the Bible): "'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. Either the opponents of slavery will arrest the further spread of it, and place it where the public mind shall rest in the belief 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."

*As for the famous debates themselves, Lincoln's actual racial views as expressed in the debate at Charleston, Illinois, might surprise many readers.*

LINCOLN: "I will say then 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 ever have 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 inasmuch 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 in favor of having the superior position assigned to the white race."

*Lincoln said much the same thing on other occasions, as in the debate at Ottawa.*

LINCOLN: ". . .I have no purpose, directly or indirectly, to interfere with the institution of slavery in the States where it exists. I believe I have no lawful right to do so, and I have no inclination to do so. 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 judgement, will probably forever forbid their living together upon the footing of perfect equality, and inasmuch as it becomes a necessity that there must be a difference, 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 I hold that notwithstanding all this, 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 intellectual and moral endowments; but in the right to eat the bread without the leave of any body else which his own hand earns, he is my equal and the equal of Judge Douglas, and the equal of every living man."

*Douglas responded to these assertions by Lincoln (specifically the first quote) by claiming Lincoln was inconsistent in his racial views*

DOUGLAS: ". . .that is good doctrine, but Mr. Lincoln is afraid to advocate it in the [north Illinois antislavery] latitude of Chicago, where he hopes to get his votes. It is good doctrine in the anti-abolition [southern Illinois] counties for him. . . .Let me ask him why he cannot the same in the North as in the South--the same in every county, if he has a conviction that they are just? He would not be a Republican, if his principles would apply alike to every part of the country. The party to which he belongs is bounded and limited by geographical lines. With their principles they cannot even cross the Mississippi river on your ferry boats. They cannot cross over the Ohio into Kentucky. Lincoln himself cannot visit the land of his fathers, the scenes of his childhood, the graves of his ancestors, and carry his Abolition principles, as he declared them at Chicago, with him."

*Lincoln did try to avoid the topic of racial equality and instead emphasize his views on the core issue of slavery and its expansion.*

LINCOLN:

" I suggest that the difference of opinion, reduced to its lowest terms, is no other than the difference between the men who think slavery a wrong and those who do not think it wrong. The Republican party think it wrong--we think it is a moral, a social and a political wrong. We think it a wrong not confining itself merely to the persons or the States where it exists, but that it is a wrong in its tendency, to say the least, that extends itself to the existence of the whole nation. Because we think it wrong, we propose a course of policy that shall deal with it as a wrong. We deal with it as with any other wrong, in so far as we can prevent its growing any larger, and so deal with it that in the run of time there may be some promise of an end to it. We have a due regard to the actual presence of it amongst us and the difficulties of getting rid of it in any satisfactory way, and all the Constitutional obligations thrown about it. I suppose that in reference both to its actual, existence in the nation, and to our Constitutional obligations, we have no right at all to disturb it in the States where it exists, and we profess that we have no more inclination to disturb it than we have the right to do it. We go further than that; we don't propose to disturb it where, in one instance, we think the Constitution would permit us. We think the Constitution would permit us to disturb it in the District of Columbia. Still we do not propose to do that, unless it should be in terms which I don't suppose the nation is very likely soon to agree to--the terms of making the emancipation gradual and compensating the unwilling owners. . . .

"If there be a man in the Democratic party who thinks it is wrong, and yet clings to that party, I suggest to him in the first place that his leader don’t talk as he does, for he never says that it is wrong. In the second place, I suggest to him that if he will examine the policy proposed to be carried forward, he will find that he carefully excludes the idea that there is any thing wrong in it. If you will examine the arguments that are made on it, you will find that every one carefully excludes the idea that there is any thing wrong in slavery. Perhaps that Democrat who says he is as much opposed to slavery as I am, will tell me that I am wrong about this. I wish him to examine his own course in regard to this matter a moment, and then see if his opinion will not be changed a little. You say it is wrong; but don't you constantly object to any body else saying so? Do you not constantly argue that this is not the right place to oppose it? You say it must not be opposed in the free States, because slavery is not here; it must not be opposed in the slave States, because it is there; it must not be opposed in politics, because that will make a fuss; it must not be opposed in the pulpit, because it is not religion. Then where is the place to oppose it? [The Democrats seem to think that] there is no suitable place to oppose it. . . .

So I say again, that in regard to the arguments that are made, when Judge Douglas says he 'don’t care whether slavery is voted up or voted down,' whether he means that as an individual expression of sentiment, or only as a sort of statement of his views on national policy, it is alike true to say that he can thus argue logically if he don't see any thing wrong in it; but he cannot say so logically if he admits it is wrong. He cannot say that he would as soon see a wrong voted up as voted down. When Judge Douglas says that whoever or whatever community wants slaves, they have a right to have them, he is perfectly logical if there is nothing wrong with the institution; but if you admit that it is wrong, he cannot logically say that anybody has a right to do wrong. When he says that slave property and horse and hog property are, alike, to be allowed to go into the Territories, upon the principles of equality, he is reasoning truly, if there is no difference between them as property; but if the one is property, held rightfully, and the other is wrong, then there is no equality between the right and wrong; so that, turn it in any way you can, in all the arguments sustaining the Democratic policy, and in that policy itself, there is a careful studied exclusion of the idea that there is anything wrong in slavery.

*Douglas on the contrary tried to emphasize the race issue, using Lincoln's earlier comments to prove that he was a racial liberal.*

DOUGLAS: "Up at Chicago, in the open he reviewed my reception speech, and under my argument attacking his favorite doctrine of Negro equality I had shown that it was a falsification of the Independence to pretend that that instrument applied and included Negroes in the clause declaring that all men were created equal. What was Lincoln's reply? I will read from his Chicago speech and the one which he did not quote, and dare not quote, in this [southern] part of the State. He [Lincoln] said:

**'I should like to know, if taking this old Declaration of Independence, which declares that all men are equal upon principle, and making exceptions to it, where will it stop? If one man says it does not mean a Negro, why may not- another man say it does not mean another man? If that declaration is not the truth, let us get this statute book in which we find it and tear it out.'**

There you find that Mr. Lincoln told the Abolitionists of Chicago that if the Declaration of Independence did not declare that the Negro was created by the Almighty the equal of the white man, that you ought to take that instrument and tear out the clause which says that all men were created equal. But let me call your attention to another part of the same speech. You know that in his Charleston speech, an extract from which he has read, he declared that the Negro belongs to an inferior race; is physically inferior to the white man, and should always be kept in an inferior position. I will now read to you what he said at Chicago on that point. In concluding his speech at that place, he [Lincoln] remarked:

**'My friends, I have detained you about as long as I desire to do, and I have only to say let us discard all this quibbling about this man and the other man--this race and that race, and the other race being inferior, and therefore they must be placed in an inferior position, discarding our standard that we have left us. Let us discard all these things, and unite as one people throughout this land until we shall once more stand up declaring that all men are created equal.'**

Thus you see, that when addressing the Chicago Abolitionists he declared that all distinctions of race must be discarded and blotted out, because the Negro stood on an equal footing with the white man; that if one man said the Declaration of Independence did not mean a Negro when it declared all men created equal, that another man would say that it did not mean another man; and hence we ought to discard all difference between the negro race and all other races. . . .He knew that I alluded to his negro-equality docrines when I spoke of the enormity of his principles, yet he did not find it convenient to answer on that point. . . ."

LINCOLN: Judge Douglas asks you, "why cannot the institution of slavery, or rather, why cannot the nation, part slave and part free, continue as our father made it forever?" In the first place, I insist that our fathers did not make this nation half slave and half free, or part slave and part free. I insist that they found the institution of slavery existing here. They did not make it so, but they left it so because they knew of no way to get rid of it at that time. When Judge Douglas undertakes to say that, as a matter of choice, the fathers of the Government made this nation part slave and part free, he assumes what is historically falsehood. More than that: when the [Founding F]athers of the Government cut off the source of slavery by the abolition of the slave-trade, and adopted a system of restricting it from the new Territories where is had not existed, I maintain that they placed it where they understood, and all sensible men understood, it was in the course of ultimate extinction; and when judge Douglas asks me why it cannot continue as our fathers made it, I ask him why he and his friends could not let it remain as our fathers made it?

I hope nobody has understood me as trying to sustain the doctrine that we have a right to quarrel with Kentucky, or Virginia, or any of the slave States, about the institution of slavery-thus giving the judge an opportunity to make himself eloquent and valiant against us in fighting for their rights. I expressly declared in my opening speech, that I had neither the inclination to exercise, nor the belief in the existence of the right to interfere with the States of Kentucky or Virginia in doing as they pleased with slavery or any other existing institution. Then what becomes of all his eloquence in behalf of the rights of States, which are assailed by no living man?

. . .When I sometimes, in relation to the organization of new societies in new countries, where the soil is clean and clear, insisted that we should keep that principle in view, Judge Douglas will have it that I want a Negro wife. He never can be brought to understand that there is any middle ground on this subject. I have lived until my fiftieth year, and have never had a Negro woman either for a slave or a wife, and I think I can live fifty centuries, for that matter, without having had one for either."