

# Historic Southern Indiana

*Lincoln Institute, June 2005*

---

## Lesson Plan: Abraham Lincoln's Position on the Question of Slavery and its Extension

By James Percoco

### **Overview:**

Students will examine excerpts from Abraham Lincoln's speeches and letters between 1854 and 1861 for specific information relative to Lincoln's thoughts on the legal and Constitutional aspects of slavery.

### **Materials:** (can be found in the Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln)

Excerpt from 1854 Peoria Speech

Letter to Owen Lovejoy, 1855

Letter to Joshua Speed, 1855

Letter to Lyman Trumbull, 1856

Excerpt from 1858 House Divided Speech

Excerpt from 1860 Address at Cooper Union

Daguerreotype by P. Von Schneidau, Chicago, October 27, 1854

Photograph by Alexander Gardner, Washington, D.C., February 24, 1861

### **Aim/Essential Question**

How consistent and emphatic was Abraham Lincoln in his arguments regarding the expansion of slavery within the context of the westward movement in both his public remarks and private correspondence?

### **Background Information:**

Teacher says: "In 1854, in a response to the continued westward growth of the United States and the related political issue of the institution of slavery, Senator Stephen A. Douglas, the Democratic Senator from Illinois proposed a new plan for territorial admission to the Union that would scrap the Missouri Compromise Line of 1820 and institute a process known as "popular sovereignty." Under this arrangement territories

# Historic Southern Indiana

*Lincoln Institute, June 2005*

---

seeking admission to the Union as new states could hold popular public referendums on whether the territory would be deemed a free or a slave state. The passage of the Bill on May 30, 1854 reopened at a much deeper level the wound of slavery and the precious sectional balance that had permitted the nation to remain part free and part slave.

The Kansas Nebraska Bill set the stage for his Abraham Lincoln's political comeback. In December, 1859, a year after his famous Senate debates with Douglas, Lincoln wrote to Jesse W. Fell, who had solicited biographical information on Lincoln, "I was losing interest in politics when the repeal of the Missouri Compromise aroused me again."

In October, 1854 Lincoln returned to the stump offering a vocal and public reply to Douglas' Kansas Nebraska Bill, and his opposition to it. Between 1854 and his inauguration to his first term Lincoln continually refined and shaped his argument against the extension of slavery. His views were articulated not only in speeches but in letters to political figures, friends, and others concerned with the issue."

## **Objectives:**

1. Students will explain Lincoln's legal and moral arguments against the expansion institution of slavery.
2. Students will discuss the importance of personal correspondence and its relationship to 19<sup>th</sup> century American politics
3. Explain why Lincoln was willing to wage a war over the issue in 1861.

**Motivation:** Tell your students that they are going to assume the role of an historian and evaluate speeches and some images of a great American before he was President. Once they determine who the political figure is, ask them: "Why do you think Abraham Lincoln was so emphatic over his opposition to the expansion of slavery?"

## **Procedures:**

1. Provide students with a view of the Von Schneidau daguerreotype. Ask the students to describe the image that they see. Have them ascribe some adjectives to the image. Check to see if they recognize the man whose image they are studying.
2. Provide students with a view of the photograph taken by Alexander Gardner. Ask the students to identify the man in the photograph.
3. Ask students to draw up a list of terms that expresses the reasons there appears to be a transformation of sorts in the man. Ask students to consider what might have happened in the intervening years that helped complete this transformation.
4. Break the students into mixed-ability groups

# Historic Southern Indiana

*Lincoln Institute, June 2005*

---

5. Assign a recorder for each group
6. Provide each of the groups copies of the documents and have each member of the group read the documents.
7. In group discussion the recorder will list the main ideas of either each speech or letter, with a keen eye towards Lincoln's attitude towards slavery.
8. When the groups have completed the reading and recording of the information relative to their document have each group report out in the proper chronological sequence. Each group should specifically address Lincoln's attitude about slavery.
9. As a class, chart the attitudes that Lincoln holds regarding slavery. On the board or on an overhead list similar terms that appear in each document and speculate why these terms might reappear. Then ask the students what appears to have happened to Lincoln's attitude about slavery from 1854-1861?
10. After all groups have reported; hold a class discussion regarding Lincoln's consistency on the question of slavery and expansion.

## **Summary Questions:**

1. Ask students to consider why Lincoln might write letters to friends or colleagues concerning the issue of slavery? Have the students speculate what he might hope to gain by writing such letters.
2. Ask students to draw some links between the letters that Lincoln has written and the speeches that he makes concerning slavery. Are there any differences? Are there any similarities? If so, why?
3. Now return to the images of Lincoln. Have students speculate on the differences between the two photographs and consider what the photographs, taken as a pair, have to tell us about Lincoln and his attitudes towards slavery and the presentation he makes in each image. What message is conveyed by comparing the two images?

## **Application Questions:**

Have students research President Lincoln's legal and moral arguments against slavery. Ask them to explain, why Lincoln chose to emancipate the slaves in 1863, given that he was elected on a platform to only stop the expansion of slavery. Compare his attitudes during his years as President and compare those attitudes with the attitudes he held during the 1850s.