



# Abraham Lincoln, the 1860 Election and the Future of the American Union and Slavery

Student Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Group 2: Textual Analysis of Frederick Douglass’s Speeches

Frederick Douglass, “The Meaning of July Fourth for the Negro” (July 5, 1852):

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4h2927t.html>

Question	Answer
What is Douglass's opinion of the American Founders?	
Given the occasion for his speech, why does he call for mourning and not rejoicing?	
How does he show that everyone in America, North and South, knows that the enslaved African is a human being?	
What gives Douglass hope for the future of blacks in America?	

**Frederick Douglass, “The Constitution of the United States: Is it Pro-Slavery or Anti-Slavery?” (March 26, 1860):**

The way to abolish slavery in America is to vote such men into power, as will use their powers for the abolition of slavery. . . .

My argument against the dissolution of the American Union is this: It would place the slave system more exclusively under the control of the slave-holding States, and withdraw it from the power in the Northern States which is opposed to slavery. Slavery is essentially barbarous in its character. It, above all things else, dreads the presence of an advanced civilization. It flourishes best where it meets no reproving frowns, and hears no condemning voices. While in the Union it will meet with both. Its hope of life in the last resort is to get out of the Union. I am, therefore, for drawing the bond of the Union more closely, and bringing the slave States more completely under the power of the free States. What they most dread, that I most desire. I have much confidence in the instincts of the slave-holders. They see that the Constitution will afford slavery no protection, when it shall cease to be administered by slave-holders. They see, moreover, that if there is once a will in the people of America to abolish slavery, there is no word, no syllable in the Constitution to forbid that result. They see that the Constitution has not saved slavery in Rhode Island, in Connecticut, in New York, or Pennsylvania; that the free States have increased from one up to eighteen in number, while the slave States have only added three to their original number. There were twelve slave States at the beginning of the Government: there are fifteen now. There was one free State at the beginning of the Government: there are eighteen now. The dissolution of the Union would not give the North a single advantage over slavery, but would take from it many. Within the Union we have a firm basis of opposition to slavery. It is opposed to all the great objects of the Constitution. The dissolution of the Union is not only an unwise but a cowardly measure—fifteen millions running away from three hundred and fifty thousand slave-holders. Mr. Garrison and his friends tell us that while in the Union we are responsible for slavery. He and they sing out “No union with slave-holders,” and refuse to vote. I admit our responsibility for slavery while in the Union; but I deny that going out of the Union would free us from that responsibility. There now clearly is no freedom from responsibility for slavery to any American citizen short of the abolition of slavery. The American people have gone quite too far in this slave-holding business now, to sum up their whole business with slavery by singing out the cant phrase, “No union with slave-holders!” To desert the family-hearth may place the recreant husband out of the presence of his starving children, but this does not free him from responsibility. If a man were on board of a pirate ship, and, in company with others, had robbed and plundered, his whole duty would not be performed simply by taking the long-boat and singing out, “No union with pirates.” His duty would be to restore the stolen property. The American people in the Northern States have helped to enslave the black people. Their duty will not have been done until they give them back their plundered rights. Reference was made at the City Hall to my having once held other opinions, and very different opinions to those I have now expressed. An old speech of mine, delivered fourteen years ago, was read to show, I know not what, that I am not infallible. If so, I have to say in defense that I never pretended to be. Although I cannot accuse myself of being remarkably unstable, I do not pretend that I have never altered my opinion both in respect to men and things. Indeed, I have been very much modified both in feeling and opinion within the last fourteen years. When I escaped from slavery, and was introduced to the Garrisonians, I adopted very many of their opinions, and defended them just as long as I deemed them true. I was young, had read but little, and naturally took some things on trust. Subsequent experience and reading have led me to examine for myself. This has brought me to other conclusions. When I was a child, I thought and spoke like a child. But the question is not as to what were my opinions fourteen years ago, but what they are now. If I am right now, it really does not matter what I was fourteen years ago. My position now is one of reform, not of revolution; I would act for the abolition of slavery through the Government—not over its ruins. If slave-holders have ruled the American Government for the last fifty years, let the anti-slavery men rule

for the next fifty years. If the South has made the Constitution bend to the purposes of slavery, let the North now make that instrument bend to the cause of freedom and justice. If three hundred and fifty thousand slave-holders have, by devoting their energies to that single end, been able to make slavery the vital and animating spirit of the American Confederacy for the last seventy-two years, now let the freemen of the North, who have the power in their own hands, and who can make the American Government just what they think fit, resolve to blot out forever the foul and haggard crime, which is the blight and mildew, the curse and the disgrace of the whole United States.

Question	Answer
Does Douglass think preserving or dissolving the Union is the best means of abolishing slavery?	
Does Douglass think the Constitution needs to be amended to abolish slavery?	
Why does Douglass think leaving the Union would be irresponsible on the part of northern states?	