



The Negro question for Lincoln

Racial elements in Lincoln's views and his colonization plan



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Preface.

The thesis.

This thesis is about Lincoln's views on race and his colonization plan. The key question to answer was to what extent racist elements and racial motives can be attributed to his views and colonization plan. The thesis has been divided in three chapters. In the first chapter Lincoln's colonization plan was analysed. In chapter two the controversial debate on Lincoln's position towards race and racism was analysed. In the third chapter, theoretical concepts were discussed and an analysis was made by comparing these concepts to Lincoln's colonization plan and views on race.

Conclusion of thesis.

It all depends on the analysis you follow of the concept race and racism, that will define the answer to the question whether Lincoln had racial element and or motives.

Introduction.

The central question and Abraham Lincoln.

Abraham Lincoln had no legal grounds to abolish slavery. Lincoln was bound by the Constitution of the United States. The Constitution protected slavery in any state where citizens wanted it.¹ The fact that he was bound by the Constitution did not stop him. The South was using slaves to help with the war and Lincoln's position enabled him to seize any enemy property that was being used to wage war against the United States. This became his argument to emancipate slaves.

But as will be shown in this thesis, Lincoln had shown interest in proposals or ideas of colonization of the African Americans. As he was finishing up the final document for the Emancipation Proclamation, he also signed a contract to use federal funds to ship black slaves from the United States to an island off the coast of Haiti.² This brings up questions regarding Lincoln's own position regarding coloured people in general. The question that this thesis will try to answer is: to what extent the Negro question for Abraham Lincoln included racial (or racist) elements?

Relevance.

It is relevant to look at Lincoln's views and colonization plan, because as mentioned before, emancipation became his legacy. He believed in the natural rights of the African American but not the socially equal rights. This racial view did not exactly change. The black man was still seen as inferior and dangerous. Segregation became the standard in the community but then it seemed to be going better when segregation became something of the past. African Americans got to vote, they got to do jury duty. But then suddenly, the race talk became important again. Police officers are shooting African Americans because they are black and dangerous. It seems like nothing has changed.

¹ Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, Simon & Schuster (2006).

² Michael Vorenberg, "Abraham Lincoln and the Politics of Black Colonization", *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association*, 14 (Summer, 1993) 2, 22 – 45, there 23.

Thesis layout and methodology.

To find the answer to whether Lincoln had racial elements in his policies or not, the thesis will be divided in three chapters. In the first chapter Lincoln's colonization plan will be brought forward and how it came to be. What will be discussed in chapter one is what is known as the Negro question; what to do with the slaves when they were freed. Especially his plan to colonize the black population after abolishing slavery. To do this I will look at government documentation where the colonization plans are brought forward (e.g. Lincoln's speeches towards Congress). This will show how Lincoln envisioned the colonization and how we wanted to bring it about. Next to this, it might give insight on the reason for his colonization plan.

According to Jörg Nagler "[Lincoln's] legacy as the Great Emancipator has generated a controversial debate on Lincoln's position towards race and racism."³ That debate will come forward in chapter two. Lincoln's own attitude towards slavery and race and the different opinions and interpretations of Lincoln's speeches will be discussed.⁴ Also, I will analyse what other authors have said about Lincoln and his position regarding slavery and race. A picture will be painted regarding Lincoln and how he viewed race, racial diversity and slavery. This is important because it will bring a nuance since the opinions are so different. I will also look at speeches and statements that Lincoln made, because these are Lincoln's own words and represent what his own views were.⁵

In the third chapter, theoretical concepts will be discussed and at the same time an analysis will be made by linking these concepts to Lincoln's colonization plan and views on race. Concepts such as race, racism will be discussed. The relations of black and white people presented by Dienne Hondius will also come forward. It is of interest because it shows how white people saw black people and how they formed their relationship. It is also important to talk about racial politics and how the concept of race shapes the social system, because it includes race and colour *and* the science politics and philosophy underlying racial categories. To do this, I will look at Ashley Doane's

³ Jörg Nagler, "Abraham Lincoln's Attitudes on Slavery and Race", *American Studies Journal*, number 53 (2009), 1.

⁴ Roy P. Basler, ed., Marion Dolores Pratt and Lloyd A. Dunlap, asst. eds., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, 9 vols. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1953-55)

⁵ Roy P. Basler, ed., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, 9 vols.

article “What is Racism? Racial Discourse and Racial Politics”. She explains the concepts and applies them to the United States. Her argument will be combined with Schmid’s definitions of racism. But what has been said until now about Lincoln’s ideas and colonization plan?

Historiography.

Race doesn’t play a role.

According to Nagler, Lincoln had politically and morally detested the system of slavery throughout his life. In one of his statements on slavery he emphasized that fact in front of a group of slavery advocates in the White House: “I am naturally anti-slavery. If slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong. I cannot remember when I did not so think, and feel.” He declared a moment later that the power granted to him through his office would not allow breaking the Constitution by abusing his powers to selfishly enforce his opinion. But why come with the plan to colonize African Americans?

Frederick Douglass was an African American abolitionist and statesman. He was an important writer of his time because he wrote a lot about in reaction to what Lincoln said and did. At the unveiling of a monument to Lincoln, Douglass felt like he needed to remind his (black) audience that “Abraham Lincoln was not, in the fullest sense of the word, either our man or our model. (..) He was preeminently the white man's President, entirely devoted to the welfare of white men. He was ready and willing at any time during the first years of his administration to deny, postpone, and sacrifice the rights of humanity in the colored people to promote the welfare of the white people of this country.”⁶ George M. Frederickson thought that even though these statements seem contradictory, they provide a good point of departure for a reconsideration of Lincoln's racial attitudes.⁷

This is because they suggest that Lincoln was neither a common Negrophobe nor a principled champion of racial equality. This brings us to the different opinions Lincoln

⁶ Douglass, “Oration Delivered on the Occasion of the Unveiling of the Freedman's Monument in Memory of Abraham Lincoln, Washington, D. C., April 14, 1876”, in: Benjamin Quarles, ed., *Frederick Douglass*, Englewood Cliffs: New Jersey (1968), 74.

⁷ George M. Frederickson, “A Man but Not a Brother: Abraham Lincoln and Racial Equality”, *The Journal of Southern History*, 41 (1975) 1, 39-58, there 39.

has brought forward regarding slavery and the black race. Since authors like Breiseth said that Lincoln was making different statements to different audience for political gain. Frederickson also acknowledged this by saying that “as a professional politician Lincoln had to make his compromises and adjustments, and he was always careful to work within the limits allowable by public opinion at a given time.”⁸ But why colonization? According to Frederickson and Nagler, the people of the North were either absolutely opposed to a complete social integration of freed slaves, or viewed integration quite sceptically. But this opposition was not necessarily combined with racist attitudes but rather with the fear that after all the sufferings of enslaved African Americans a harmonious life between black and white would be unthinkable.

Race does play a role.

Allen Guelzo disagrees with this argument. According to him, the colonization plan was disguised as benevolence to blacks while at its core it was more protectionism for whites. But for Lincoln it was always voluntary. Lincoln would have indeed preferred for them to leave but he would not force them.⁹ Lincoln believed to be able to solve this problem of how to socially and culturally integrate free and freed African Americans by the idea of colonization. Frederickson continues to argue that Lincoln on the one hand understood the concept of colonization as a chance to get rid of the problem of slavery and an interracial society with all its socio-political and moral issues. And on the other hand, the colonization plan politically gave the opportunity to gain more acceptance for the abolition of slavery in North *and* South.¹⁰ After all, the main argument against the complete abolition of slavery or equality in both regions of the nation had repeatedly been that emancipated African Americans could not be integrated into a white society. Therefore, colonization seemed like a logical idea.

⁸ George M. Frederickson, “A Man but Not a Brother”, 41 – 42.

⁹ Allen C. Guelzo, *Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation. The End of Slavery in America*, Simon & Schuster (2004).

¹⁰ Jörg Nagler, “Abraham Lincoln’s Attitudes on Slavery and Race”, *American Studies Journal*, number 53 (2009), 5.

In contrast, Eric Foner says that Lincoln's one and only goal was to win the Civil War.¹¹ As mentioned before, the slaves played a huge role in the war for the Southerners. This means that by proclaiming all the slaves free and "seizing" them when they cross the border states to the North it would mean a loss for the South. Moreover, allowing the slaves in the military would mean a greater chance of success of the Union winning the war. In other words, Lincoln was not thinking about the race issue going on nor was he worried about the consequences. He just wanted to win the war. Foner and Guelzo do not explicitly mention racist motives behind Lincoln's colonization plans. Foner tries to insinuate that Lincoln was indifferent and that he only wanted to win the war. Guelzo says it was to protect the whites which insinuates Lincoln didn't have positive feelings or even trust towards the slaves. But another author which gives a little bit more than this is Michael Vorenberg. He says that Lincoln did not solely want to win the war, because when the South said that they would consider peace if Lincoln dropped the proclamation emancipation, Lincoln rejected this by stating that he will listen to terms of peace so long they include the terms of Union and emancipation.¹² This shows that slavery was indeed something moral for Lincoln. Nagler also brings forward that Lincoln does have some racial motives or racial bias because he denied that the authors of the Declaration of Independence had included people of black skin colour into their central statement that "all men are created equal." Even though Lincoln did grant black people human dignity and natural rights, he remained hesitant in conceding them equal rights.

A lot of authors are hesitant to really investigate if Lincoln had racist motives or racial motivation (in a negative way) for his colonization plan. It seems like they have a fear of painting the Lincoln in a negative light. The only one whom outright said in his book that Lincoln was a racist was Lerone Bennett Jr..¹³ But I found that a little too negative way of looking at everything Lincoln had said and done, there was barely any

¹¹ Eric Foner, *Reconstruction. America's unfinished revolution 1863 – 1877*, Harper & Row Publishers, New York (1988).

¹² Emancipation Lincoln & the 13th Amendment, Michael Vorenberg, Youtube, Dole Institute of Politics (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rLoolxsmNNQ>) 26 January 2017.

¹³ Lerone Bennett Jr., *Forced into Glory: Abraham Lincoln's White Dream* (Chicago: 2000)

nuance. And that is what I intend to do in this thesis. I do not want to investigate whether Lincoln was a racist or not, but I want to look at how his ideology about race and slavery was included in his plan of black colonization. In other words, I want to look for racial aspects in his views and colonization and put them into perspective; with some nuance.

Chapter 1: The Negro question.

Introduction.

"We think slavery a great moral wrong, and while we do not claim the right to touch it where it exists, we wish to treat it as a wrong in the territories, where our votes will reach it."¹⁴ This is what Lincoln said during a speech at New Haven, Connecticut on March 6, 1860. Paul D. Escott wrote a book in which he extensively discussed the question: what to do with the black people? According to Escott, Lincoln's public record showed that Lincoln had a nuanced set of positions: an inaugural pledge not to interfere with slavery in the South and a continually brought forward preference for colonization in Africa or other areas abroad.¹⁵ In this chapter I will analyse Lincoln's gradual emancipation and colonization plan. When did the colonization plan come into the picture? Was it for the sake of the whites? Was there a racial aspect to this?

Freeing slaves and emancipation.

The first legal act of Congress was that it passed the first Confiscation Act (CA). This was a turning point in the relations of the federal government to slavery. Before this act, the Fugitive Slave Act was the norm. Slaves that would flee to the North were required to be returned to their masters. The act authorized court proceedings to strip the fled slaves' owners of any claim to them and the slaves became property in care of the U.S. government.¹⁶ The way the federal government saw slaves changed. It is striking because the way slaves were seen at that time was as property. According to Eric Foner, slaves were being treated as persons "held to labour", instead of just chattel property.¹⁷ But the question remained: "what do we do with the slaves?"

¹⁴ Roy P. Basler, ed., Marion Dolores Pratt and Lloyd A. Dunlap, asst. eds., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln, Volume IV*, "Speech at New Haven, Connecticut" (March 6, 1860), 16.

¹⁵ Paul D. Escott, *"What Shall We Do with the Negro?": Lincoln, White Racism, and Civil War America*, University of Virginia Press (2009) 26.

¹⁶ James McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, Oxford University Press (1988), 356; Abraham Lincoln, XVI President of the United States: 1861 – 1865. First Annual Message on December 3, 1861. Accessible on <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=29502>, 6 March 2017.

¹⁷ Eric Foner, *The Fiery Trial. Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery* (New York, London 2010) 175.

Lincoln had repeatedly pledged to respect the rights of the men of the South. This can be seen from the fact that Lincoln tried to avoid offending the whites of the South by refusing the help offered by black volunteers in the North during the Civil War.¹⁸ How did he address the surfacing pressure to end slavery? According to Escott, his views were “grounded in acceptance of the power and scope of American racism and in the principles of voluntary state action and national responsibility.”¹⁹ The next thing he did was draw up two bills laying out alternative paths to voluntary and compensated emancipation. The first would free one-fifth of Delaware’s slaves each year until slavery ended in 1867. The second bill provided for a slower process. Slavery would continue legally for 31 years, until 1893. What both bills show is that Lincoln had a slow, gradual emancipation in mind. But when did the colonization plan come forward?

Colonization and gradual emancipation.

On December 3rd, 1861 during Lincoln’s first annual address to Congress he brought this element forward.²⁰ But the colonization idea was not something new for Lincoln. According to Philip Shaw Paludan, Lincoln had identified himself with the colonization movement. Lincoln took a leading role in the Illinois Colonization Society in the 1850s.²¹ In his first annual message, he started by mentioning that the Confiscation Act had liberated some slaves already and that they consequently were “dependent on the United States”. He suggested that Congress should find a way to give the states financial support for the freed slaves. Moreover, he said that “in any event steps [should] be taken for colonizing [them] at some place or places in a climate congenial to them.” Lincoln also asked for funds to buy territory to carry out the plan of colonization. He continued by acknowledging that some may object to the idea because “the only legitimate object of acquiring territory is to furnish homes for white men”. But whites

¹⁸ C. Peter Ripley, ed., Roy E. Finkenbine, Michael F. Hembree, Donald Yacovone, asst. eds., *The Black Abolitionist Papers*, Volume 5: The United States, 1859-1865, The University of North Carolina Press (Chapel Hill and London 2000) 177.

¹⁹ Paul D. Escott, “*What Shall We Do with the Negro?*”, 34.

²⁰ Abraham Lincoln, XVI President of the United States: 1861 – 1865. First Annual Message on December 3, 1861. Accessible on <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=2950>, 6 March 2017.

²¹ Philip Shaw Paludan, *The Presidency of Abraham Lincoln* (Kansas 1994) 130.

would benefit from this, because “the emigration of coloured men leaves additional room for white men remaining or coming here.”²²

Then he argued that his proposal amounted to “absolute necessity” and asked Congress if it is not with which “the Government itself cannot be perpetuated?”. On one hand, he seemed to fear that if the conflict would continue the government would not be able to solve the conflict amicably. On the other hand, he believed that a policy to compensate combined with colonization would respect the rights of slaveholders and address their passionate objections to living in a country with freed slaves. Less than a week later, on March 6th he was asking Congress to support his proposal for gradual and compensated emancipation. He brought forward that the United States “ought to cooperate with any State which may adopt gradual abolishment of slavery” by giving the states “pecuniary aid” to “compensate for the inconveniences, public and private, produced by such change of system”. He insisted that “the Federal Government would find its highest interest in such a measure, as one of the most efficient means of self-preservation”. Here too Lincoln emphasised that he stands for gradual emancipation: “in my judgement, gradual and not sudden emancipation is better for all”.²³

Congress cooperated with Lincoln by passing a resolution early in April in which Congress stated its willingness to support Lincoln’s plan for colonization. And in July 1862 Lincoln invited the representatives of the border states to the White House. He emphasised that *they* had the power to bring an end to the rebellion. According to Foner, for Lincoln and most Republicans, the long road to emancipation ran through the border states.²⁴ If the border states were to accept the proposal for gradual emancipation with federal compensation, the rebels would have no other choice but to come to the realization that they could not win. Lincoln also said that it was in their best interest, because if they did not act the “mere friction and abrasion” of war would

²² Abraham Lincoln, XVI President of the United States: 1861 – 1865. First Annual Message on December 3, 1861 (<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=29502>) 6 March 2017.

²³ Abraham Lincoln, XVI President of the United States: 1861 – 1865. Message to Congress Recommending Compensated Emancipation on March 6, 1862 (accessible on <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=70130>) 7 March 2017.

²⁴ Eric Foner, *The Fiery Trial. Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery* (New York, London 2010) 168.

indeed ultimately make an end to slavery. And this is not a good thing, because it would rob the border states of slavery's value. To avoid this the states should let the nation buy them out.

In Lincoln's words, it was "better for you, as seller, and the nation as buyer, to sell out, and buy out than to sink both the thing to be sold, and the price of it, in cutting one another's throats."²⁵ He reassured them that he did not want an emancipation at once. "I do not", he said, "speak of emancipation at once, but of a decision at once to emancipate gradually." Moreover, he did not miss the opportunity to advocate and assure the colonization plan. He explained that "room in South America for colonization, can be obtained cheaply, and in abundance; and when numbers shall be large enough to be company and encouragement for one another, the freed people will not be so reluctant to go."²⁶

Racial elements.

Later in August Lincoln sought an interview with a committee of black leaders at the White House. What he wanted to do at this meeting was to push the committee to support a colonization project that his cabinet and he had been discussing since October 1861. Apparently Congressional legislation had already made money available to support colonization. By the time this meeting was taking place, plans were already in place to send "500 able-bodied Negroes as the first colony." What Lincoln was hoping was that this committee of black leaders not only would join his plan but also recruit others for the expedition.²⁷

What is noticeable from the gradual emancipation is that it seems to call for the prolongation of slavery or a proposal for a condition of apprenticeship that can be compared to slavery. They do not offer intermediate states of transition. According to David Brion Davis, Lincoln "assumed that the most intelligent and capable slaves would

²⁵ Roy P. Basler, ed., Marion Dolores Pratt and Lloyd A. Dunlap, asst. eds., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln, Volume V*, "The President to Congressional Representatives from the Border States" (July 12, 1862), 317 – 319.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid. *Volume V*, 370 – 375, 375n

win their freedom at an early stage.”²⁸ But why advocate so much for a gradual emancipation and therefore prolonging it? Were there any racial motives?

The answer is yes. Looking back at the bill that was proposed to Delaware, the arguments of the opponents were exactly race related. Foner shows that the opponents’ argument was that “emancipated slaves would demand citizenship rights and that the end of slavery would lead to ‘equality with the white man’.” George P. Fisher, who was the Delaware’s only member of the House of Representatives, went to great trouble to argue that that isn’t true. He insisted that colonization of blacks would follow emancipation and not equality.²⁹ It was apparent that the white population was worried about what would happen after emancipation. Therefore, the prospect of colonization was always brought forward.³⁰

In contrast, Paludan says that the reason why the talk of colonization kept coming back is because Lincoln clearly recognized the “power of racism in the nation and the impact it had on blacks”. Escott showed that Lincoln did have racial motives to promote colonization, because when Lincoln was asked why black Americans should leave the country, the answer Lincoln gave is very remarkable. He said that blacks and whites are different races. According to him there is a broader difference between black people and white people than any other two races. He did not want to discuss whether it was right or wrong, but the physical difference is a great disadvantage to them both, as Lincoln thinks the black race suffers very greatly, many of them, by living among the whites, while the whites suffer from the black’s presence.³¹

Paludan goes again a little bit further trying to show that Lincoln made it seem like he was doing it for the black’s own good. Lincoln pointed out that slavery caused the war and concluded that there would be no conflict without the presence of the blacks. He continued by saying that “on this broad continent not a single man of your race is made the equal of a single man of ours”. Therefore, it would be better for both races, according to Lincoln, that they be separated. Thus, he urged them to accept the

²⁸ David Brion Davis, “The Emancipation Moment”, in: Gabor S. Boritt, ed., *Lincoln, the war president* (New York, Oxford 1992) 86.

²⁹ Eric Foner, *The Fiery Trial*, 184.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 184.

³¹ Paul D. Escott, “*What Shall We Do with the Negro?*”, 53.

inconveniences that come with moving to another country so that their race can build a future for themselves free from white oppression.³²

Why colonization?

The emancipation of the slaves was a big problem for the whites because of the question of what to do with the freed black people. A lot of the white people – and slave owners – were worried for repercussions. The thought that all men are created equal except for when it is regarding the blacks was the thought that was dominant among the whites. But at the same time, it was not all based on racial bias. Generally, it was a question that had a right to be asked. Suddenly a whole group of people, which had no social standing among the whites, are “free”. Therefore, it was logical that something must be done regarding the black people after the emancipation. So, the answer to the question why the colonization plan come into the picture is that it seemed the most logical thing at the time. What people were most worried about is the position the black population would get in the community. Therefore, colonization would mean no headaches for the whites regarding the equality of black and white and the black population would not have to be eternally oppressed by the whites. At least that was Lincoln’s argumentation. The government and public statements made by Lincoln and his public actions all indicate that colonization was an integral plan of the emancipation. He was actively advocating for it everywhere he talked about gradual emancipation.

³² Philip Shaw Paludan, *The Presidency of Abraham Lincoln*, 131.

Chapter 2: The Black Race.

Introduction.

"I do not wish to be misunderstood upon this subject of slavery. I suppose it may long exist, and perhaps the best way for it to come to an end peaceably is for it to exist for a length of time. But I say that the spread and strengthening and perpetuation of it is an entirely different proposition. There we should in every way resist it as a wrong, treating it as a wrong, with the fixed idea that it must and will come to an end."³³ That is a quote from a speech Lincoln gave in Chicago, Illinois on March First, 1859. It shows that Lincoln was against slavery. But how did he feel about the (social) equality of the white and black men? According to Escott, Lincoln believed that "African Americans, though they are not equal, were human beings and should be entitled to some basic rights."³⁴ In this chapter I want to analyze Lincoln's ideas about slavery and particularly his ideas about race. This will be done by analyzing some of his speeches during the Lincoln-Douglas debates. The Lincoln-Douglas debates were a series of seven debates between Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas. Even though these debates were before his presidency, they are important because they reflect how he thought race. The point is not to argue whether Lincoln was a racist or not, but to look at the racial aspects of his ideas about race.

Different opinions and views expressed.

It is safe to say that Lincoln was not a racial equalitarian. During one of the Lincoln-Douglas debates, the Charleston debate on the 18th of September 1858, he made it very clear that he was not for racial equality. During his speech at the debate he said was asked if he was really in favour of producing a perfect equality between the Negroes and white people. His response was that he was not, nor ever had been, in favour of bringing about in any way the social and political equality of the white and black races, that he was not nor ever had been in favour of making voters or jurors of Negroes, nor of qualifying them to hold office, nor to intermarry with white people. He

³³ Roy P. Basler, ed., Marion Dolores Pratt and Lloyd A. Dunlap, asst. eds., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, Volume VIII, "Speech at Chicago, Illinois" (March 1, 1859), 370.

³⁴ Paul D. Escott, *"What Shall We Do with the Negro?"*, 26.

even said that there is a physical difference between the white and black races which will forever forbid the two races living together on terms of social and political equality.”³⁵

Stephen Douglas was one of the first people who became very frustrated by the inconsistent opinions of Abraham Lincoln about racial equality. During the Galesburg debate on the 7th of October 1858, Douglas mentioned Lincoln’s inconsistency in his speech³⁶: “Abolitionists up north are expected and required to vote for Lincoln because he goes for the equality of the races, (...) down south he tells (...) that there is a physical difference in the races, making one superior and the other inferior, and that he is in favor of maintaining the superiority of the white race over the Negro. Even Douglas asked the question of how you can reconcile those two positions of Lincoln. He is to be voted for “in the south as a pro-slavery man, and he is to be voted for in the north as an Abolitionist.”

Natural rights.

Indeed, Lincoln did say different things on the subject in the North than he did in the South. Getting to the bottom of Lincoln’s ideas on race has proven to be a difficult task. The reason for this is because the evidence on his views regarding racial equality is very contradictory. If a few quotes are gathered and bundled together, Lincoln can be perceived as a white supremacist. This is of course extremely controversial. But if you put together another set of evidences, Lincoln can come off as the purest racial egalitarian. On the one hand, he was trying to win an election. He had to say some things that would please the audience he was talking to. On the other hand, that does not mean that he was *just* trying to win the election. Despite of the fact that he agreed with the inferior position of the black race, he did admit later in his speech that inferiority does not mean that the black race must be denied everything. Furthermore, inferiority

³⁵ Fourth Debate: Charleston, Illinois on September 18, 1858
(accessible on <https://www.nps.gov/liho/learn/historyculture/debate4.htm>) 12 March 2017.

³⁶ Fifth Debate: Galesburg, Illinois on October 7, 1858
(accessible on <https://www.nps.gov/liho/learn/historyculture/debate5.htm>) 12 March 2017.

does not mean being a slave either. In his words he said: "it seems to me quite possible for us to get along without making either slaves or wives of Negroes."³⁷

In other words, Lincoln did make a distinction between being inferior and being a slave. Historian Harry V. Jaffa clarifies Lincoln's argument by saying that "Lincoln makes his obeisance to the dominant conviction of Negro inferiority when he says that the black woman is not his equal 'in some respects.' Lincoln makes this disclaimer as a prologue to the affirmation of the equality of natural rights of all human beings. The equal natural right of black human beings to put into their mouths the bread that their hands have earned is repeated almost as a mantra or incantation throughout Lincoln's speeches in this period."³⁸ What Lincoln means is that the Negro does have some basic rights; natural rights. But social politically, that was a different story.

But all men are created equal, right? To this Lincoln always had the same answer: all men are created equal and that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights.³⁹ In other words, the rights mentioned in the Declaration of Independence are God-Given, and therefore *unalienable*. As Harry Jaffa would say: No man has a natural right to rule over any other man, as God does over man. Therefore, a man may rule over another, his equal, only with his consent.⁴⁰

This raises another question: what kind of rights were 'unalienable rights' for Lincoln? According to Oakes, Lincoln believed that race relations were regulated at three different levels."⁴¹ At the first level was the natural rights that are guaranteed by the Constitution. At this level, Lincoln favoured the equality of blacks and whites. At the

³⁷ Fourth Debate: Charleston, Illinois on September 18, 1858 (accessible on <https://www.nps.gov/liho/learn/historyculture/debate4.htm>) 12 March 2017.

³⁸ Harry V. Jaffa, *A New Birth of Freedom: Abraham Lincoln and the Coming of the Civil War*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers (2004) 299.

³⁹ Lewis Lehrman, Mr. Lincoln and the Declaration from the Lehrman Institute (accessible on <http://www.mrlincolinandthefounders.org/commentary/>) 12 March 2017.

⁴⁰ Harry V. Jaffa, *Crisis in the House Divided: An Interpretation of the Issues in the Lincoln-Douglas Debates, 50th Anniversary Edition*, University Of Chicago Press (2009) passim.

⁴¹ James Oakes, "Natural Rights, Citizenship Rights, States' Rights, and Black Rights: Another Look at Lincoln and Race", in: Eric Foner, ed., *Our Lincoln: New Perspectives on Lincoln and His World*, W.W. Norton & Company (New York, London: 2008) 110.

second level were the privileges and immunities of citizenship. At this level, during the 1850s Lincoln was cautiously egalitarian and explicitly so during his presidency. At the third level were the aspects of race relations that fell only within the purview of the states, e.g. law regulating marriage, voting, and jury duty. Oakes continues to say that basically every concession Lincoln made to racial prejudice concerned this third level. In other words, Lincoln supported the fundamental human equality of blacks, but not the political and social equality of blacks (the third level). This can be traced back to his speech during the fourth debate in Charleston. He gave four areas in which he supported discrimination: voting, serving in juries, holding elective office, and intermarriage. According to Oakes, the reason why he endorsed the third level of race relations was a combination of his own prejudice and his commitment to the rights of states.⁴²

But still a racist.

In contrast, Lerone Bennett, Jr., who is an African-American scholar and social historian, had an opposite argument and conclusion about Lincoln's racial views. According to him, Lincoln explicitly supported the doctrine of white supremacy. Bennett continues to argue that as a President Lincoln spent the first eighteen months of his administration "in a desperate and rather pathetic attempt to save slavery. Lincoln was no idealist, but a "cautious politician" who was never committed to abolishing slavery but only to preventing its extension. He was motivated by a concern for the interests of his white constituents, not the needs of the oppressed blacks.⁴³ Bennett argues that Lincoln's reconstruction policies virtually ignored the needs of the blacks. Therefore, "Lincoln must be seen as the embodiment, not the transcendence, of the American tradition, which is, as we all know, a racist tradition."⁴⁴ Not everybody agreed with Bennett.

Herbert Mitgang, a Lincoln scholar, was one of the first reply to Bennett's accusations. Mitgang wrote an article with the title: "Was Lincoln Just a Honkie?"⁴⁵ The

⁴² James Oakes, "Natural Rights, Citizenship Rights, States' Rights, and Black Rights", 130.

⁴³ Lerone Bennett, "Was Abe Lincoln a White Supremacist?", *Ebony Magazine* (1968), 35-42.

⁴⁴ Lerone Bennett, "Was Abe Lincoln a White Supremacist?", 35 – 37 and 42

⁴⁵ A "honkie" is a derogatory term for a Caucasian person whom is a racist.

answer he gave in his article was a “no”. Mitgang was clear about the context of the controversy. The article starts with: “One hundred and five years after the Emancipation Proclamation? And (...) Abraham Lincoln is being called a false Great Emancipator.”⁴⁶

What Lincoln said at the Charleston debate is frequently used by historians to support their argument that Lincoln might have been a white supremacist.⁴⁷ Those who defend Lincoln make the attempt to dismiss these remarks as unimportant. For example, Mitgang, gives as argument that at the debate “had backed Lincoln to the wall and forced him to temporize”, and that late in his presidential career, Lincoln did, in fact, come out for full Negro citizenship.⁴⁸ In contrast, Fawn Brodie, a biographer, argued that during the debates with Douglas, Lincoln was not only debating his opponent but was also “conducting a kind of inner dialogue with himself, coming to terms with his own ambivalence to black men.”⁴⁹

Just political gain?

Historian George M. Fredrickson argues that although Lincoln argued in the Ottawa debate that he agreed with Douglas that the Negro was not his equal in many respects, the only respect that he was certain about was the physical trait of colour. According to Fredrickson, Lincoln was tentative in identifying ways in which Negroes were “perhaps” not the equal of whites. Furthermore, Lincoln frequently avoided using words like “innate” in describing the inequalities between the races. This had a consequence that the question of whether those differences were the result of circumstance was left open.⁵⁰ A historian that makes a somewhat similar argument is E. B. Smith. According to him, the words Lincoln used in the Ottawa speech reveal that

⁴⁶ Herbert Mitgang, “Was Lincoln Just a Honkie?”, *New York Times Magazine* (February 11, 1968), 35, 100-107.

⁴⁷ He said he is in favour of bringing about the social and political equality of the white and black races, nor making voters or jurors of Negroes, qualifying them to hold office, or to intermarry with white people.

⁴⁸ Herbert Mitgang, “Was Lincoln Just a Honkie?”, 103.

⁴⁹ Fawn Brodie, “The Political Hero in America”, *Virginia Quarterly Review*, 46 (1970), 50-51

⁵⁰ George M. Fredrickson, “A Man but Not a Brother: Abraham Lincoln and Racial Equality”, *Journal of Southern History*, 41 (1975), 46-48; Roy P. Basler, ed., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln, Volume III*, “Speech at Ottawa, Illinois” (August 21, 1858) 16.

“Lincoln was obviously playing to his audience, but . . . was also hedging for the benefit of his conscience.”⁵¹ Don E. Fehrenbacher, a Lincoln historian, says that Lincoln's statements on race are “essentially disclaimers rather than affirmations.”⁵²

According to Fehrenbacher, those statements “indicated, for political reasons, the maximum that he was willing to deny the Negro and the minimum that he claimed for the Negro. They were concessions on points not at issue, designed to fortify him on the point that was at issue, namely the extension of slavery.”⁵³ Christopher N. Breiseth, a Lincoln scholar, argues that Lincoln was giving statements about race that pleases his audience for political gain. He argued that Lincoln adopted the least racist position that would not disqualify him from consideration in the context of a racist society.⁵⁴

As can be seen, historians give very different interpretation to the words Lincoln used during the Lincoln-Douglas debates. Some indicate, for example Breiseth, that he was only saying the things he said to satisfy his audience with the hope it will give him success in his political career. Others, for example Fredrickson and Brodie, say that he was just talking out loud to himself and therefore still trying to figure out the issue at hand. But how can Lincoln's views and ideas in combination with his colonization plan be interpreted when looking at race and racism? This will be discussed in chapter three.

⁵¹ E. B. Smith, “Abraham Lincoln, Realist”, *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 52 (winter 1968 – 1969) 2.

⁵² Fehrenbacher, “Only His Stepchildren: Lincoln and the Negro”, *Civil War History*, 20 (1974) 4, 293 – 310, there 303.

⁵³ Fehrenbacher, “Only His Stepchildren”, 300 – 303.

⁵⁴ Christopher N. Breiseth, “Lincoln, Douglas, and Springfield in the 1858 Campaign”, in: Cullom Davis et al., eds., *The Public and the Private Lincoln*, Carbondale (Southern Illinois University Press, 1979), 101-120.

Chapter 3: Racism?

Introduction.

In this chapter Dienne Hondius' five relations of black and white will be brought forward to show how Lincoln may have seen the relationship between black and whites.⁵⁵ Even though Hondius does her analysis in Western Europe, it is of importance because she gives five relations between whites and blacks. These five relations can be compared to Lincoln's colonization plan and his ideas of race. Next to this, it is also important to explain how the concept *racism* is interpreted in this thesis and how it can be connected to Lincoln's ideas about race and plan to colonize the blacks. This will be done by looking at the article of W. Thomas Schmid "The Definition of Racism". Schmid presents three approaches to racism: behavioural, motivational and cognitive.⁵⁶ In this way a link can be made to how Lincoln unconsciously may or may not have included racist ideals in his plans. But it is also important to look at the concept race. Race is a modern concept and it should be explained before a conclusion is made if Lincoln's views had racial aspects in it or not.

Five relations.

The five relations between white and black that Hondius brought forward were: infantilization, exoticism, bestialization, exclusion and distancing and exceptionalism. There is only two of these relations that can be related to how slaves were seen by Lincoln. The first is infantilization, because black people were seen as children, dumb and sometimes incapable of even learning. Lincoln suggested in his most in his speeches that freed slaves must stay under guidance of their former master until a certain age. He called this gradual emancipation. The second can be interpreted in another way if it is compared to Lincoln's colonization plan. Exclusion and distancing in the U.S. was different. One way that they were trying to exclude and or distance the slaves was by opposing the idea of social equal rights for the black population. The other way exclusion

⁵⁵ Dienne Hondius, *Blackness in Western Europe: Racial Patterns of Paternalism and Exclusion* (New Brunswick, New Jersey 2014) Introduction.

⁵⁶ W. Thomas Schmid, "The definition of racism", *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 13 (1996) 1, 31 - 40.

and distancing can be seen is in the colonization plan of Lincoln. But how can this be related to racism? This is an important question, but first it is needed to look at the word race because race is part of the word racism.

Race.

Race has always been a significant sociological subject. At its most basic level, race can be seen as a “concept that signifies and symbolizes socio-political conflicts and interests in reference to different types of human bodies”.⁵⁷ The concept of race has always appealed to biologically based human characteristics, which are called phenotypes. This can be seen from the distinction made between black and white people. Howard Winant says that the selection of human characteristics for “purposes of racial signification is always and necessarily a social and historical process.”⁵⁸

But there is no biological basis for distinguishing human groups along lines of race.⁵⁹ Pierre W. Orelus argues that the racialization of people has been happening a long time. And with racialization he means that it is directly linked to social, economic, and political hierarchy factors. It is important to point out that during the time of Darwin, racial categories were based on phenotypes, as mentioned before. The only difference is, is that the racial categories were not socially constructed.⁶⁰ But race has been socially constructed to dominate, subjugate and exploit people. This led to unequal power relations we see today between whites and blacks.

Ashley Montagu calls the idea that people have about race “man’s most dangerous myth”. This myth of race refers, according to her, not to the fact that groups of people who are physically distinguishable exist, but the belief that races are populations or people whose physical differences are innately linked with significant differences in, for example, mental capacities.⁶¹ This can directly be linked to Lincoln’s

⁵⁷ Howard Winant, “Race and Race Theory”, *Annual Review of Sociology*, volume 26 (2000), 169 – 185, there 172.

⁵⁸ Howard Winant, “Race and Race Theory”, 172.

⁵⁹ Michael Omi, Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: from the 1960s to the 1990s*, (New York: Routledge 1994).

⁶⁰ Pierre W. Orelus, “Unpacking the Race Talk”, *Journal of Black Studies*, 44 (2013) 6, 572 – 589, there 578.

⁶¹ Ashley Montagu, *Man’s Most Dangerous Myth: The Fallacy of Race*, AltaMira Press (1997) 44.

views on race. Moreover, it can be linked to Hondius' infantilization. According to Winant race began to take shape with the rise of a world political economy. The concept formed over time as a kind of "world-historical bricolage, an accretive process that was in part theoretical, but much more centrally practical." Even though racial categorization gained ground throughout the world, it was a European invention. Hondius also brings this forward in her introduction saying that the Europeans contributed a lot to the racial categorization.

But in this thesis, race will be understood at what has been mentioned before, its most basic level. The categorization of humans based on their different bodies, namely colour. If this is compared to Lincoln's case, this is exactly how Lincoln defined race. In chapter one was made clear that he thought that blacks and whites are completely different races. What is unclear is if he was only talking about colour. But what he did say was is that the physical difference was way too big. Thus, Lincoln was also looking at human characteristics. How race is seen in this thesis is clear, but how about racism?

Racism.

Arthur Zilversmit uses the definition for racism of what Fehrenbacher called "the doctrine" of racism. This means a rationalized theory of inherent Negro inferiority.⁶² This kind of approach already insinuates that the racism is towards black people and assumes that the black people are inferior. But there are other ways of approaching racism. W. Thomas Schmid brings three approaches forward: behavioural, motivational and cognitive. The behavioural approach is "the failure to give equal consideration, based on the fact of race alone."⁶³ Schmid does not agree with this definition, because it does not distinguish between 'true' and 'ordinary' racism. What he calls ordinary racism is the inclination to "prefer one's own kind". But according to Schmid, this is not the kind of racism we should have in mind when we call someone a racist, because it just shows

⁶² Arthur Zilversmit, "Lincoln and the Problem of Race: A Decade of Interpretations", *Papers of the Abraham Lincoln Association*, volume 2 (1980), 45.

⁶³ Peter Singer, "All animals are equal", in J. White, ed., *Contemporary Moral Problems*, West Publishing (1985) 266 – 279.

some discomfort with another race.⁶⁴ He gave an example of someone who just felt some loathing or hatred for blacks and that such feelings carry with them the desire to harm. But even if this is the case, the object one wishes to harm is nonetheless useful, the rational thing to do is to subjugate and exploit it to one's own benefit (e.g. slavery).

But when suddenly you cannot show dominion over them, and fear reprisal, Schmid suggests the definition of racism which links it to domination. If we look at Lincoln and his plan, he had no plans whatsoever to dominate anybody. The only thing he was concerned about was that blacks and white could never be equal and therefore the blacks would always be inferior to the whites. But Lincoln himself was not interested in the whites keeping dominance over the blacks. Which bring us to the motivational approach. Schmid favours the motivational approach, because it identifies the essence of the racist attitude and practice. The motivational approach is guided by considerations of motives. A definition according to Schmid would be: "the infliction of unequal consideration, motivated by the desire to dominate, based on race alone". According to him, it calls our attention to "the positive intention of the racist and of racist acts rather than merely calling attention to its lack of fairness."

If you look at it this way, the racist is not just a person who prefers his own, he's someone "who wishes to put down the other race, who wishes to suppress them and assert his own superiority, whether it is through an act of overt violence. If racism is defined in terms of the desire to dominate other people based on race, it is in fundamental opposition to the principle of human equality.⁶⁵ Before comparing this to Lincoln, I want to look at the cognitive approach. This is defined as "unequal consideration, out of a belief in the inferiority of another race". The cognitive approach sees acts of discrimination as paradigmatic, even if they do not derive from the domination motivation. They derive from racial beliefs. Intuitively, this might seem correct, particularly if we follow the historical orientation. If one believes in one's own racial superiority, that constitutes the essence of racism. Because after all, how could you regard people of another race as innately inferior, and not consider yourself to be a racist?

⁶⁴ W. Thomas Schmid, "The Definition of Racism", *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 13 (1996) 1, 33

⁶⁵ W. Thomas Schmid, "The Definition of Racism", 34 – 35

But still Schmid prefers the motivational approach because he believes that “belief in the essential factual inequality of the races is not necessarily racist, nor is action based on that belief; the belief is so only to the extent that it was arrived at or retained through the domination motivation”.⁶⁶ He gives the example of a missionary that goes into a remote region of New Guinea. He compares the intellectual abilities of the people to Down Syndrome people in his home country. He concludes that the people are what Aristoteles called “natural slaves”, i.e. they are innately incapable of the normative human life of self-government and rational judgment. But the difference is he has no desire to dominate and exploit them, but to help them lead their lives and save their souls. According to Schmid, such people we should not call racist.

But racial politics and ideologies also play a huge role. According to Doane, historically dominant racial ideologies in the United States have been used to explain or legitimize conquest and dispossession, enslavement, exclusion, discrimination, and the continuing existence of racial stratification. Moreover, racial ideologies and racial politics are challenged by “counterideologies” that to redefine and eventually overturn the existing racial order. Consequently, racial ideologies and racial politics are in a state of constant flux, as intellectuals and social movements challenge and defend the status quo.⁶⁷ In other words, the racial ideologies and racial politics of 1860 to 1864 are different from the current racial ideologies and racial politics. Racial politics is the basing of political strategies or decisions based on the division of the human species into races on grounds of physical characteristics. And this is what was going on in the 19th century and afterwards; look at segregation and apartheid. The difference is with Lincoln is that he didn’t think of that himself, the only solution he saw was colonization; complete removal from the society. If this should be held against him is the question.

If we follow Schmid’s argumentation and favour his motivational approach, Lincoln’s views nor colonization plan would and should be considered racist or racial. According to Lincoln, he too, wanted to help and better the blacks lives and had no desire whatsoever to dominate or exploit them. But he did believe in the superiority of the whites, but this does not necessarily mean that he is racist. If we, like Schmid, have

⁶⁶ Ibid, 36

⁶⁷ Ashley Doane, “What is Racism? Racial Discourse and Racial Politics”, *Critical Sociology*, 32 (2006) 2 – 3, 256

preference for the motivational approach to racism then we can say that Lincoln's views on race and plan to colonize the black population cannot be seen as racism. But if this is combined with Hondius' relations that we have identified that are applicable to Lincoln, and the categorization of human beings Lincoln made based on human characteristics does show that Lincoln's views on race and his plan of colonization does indeed include racial aspects on which he also made his speeches.

Conclusion

Recapitulation.

This thesis was about Lincoln's views on race and his colonization plan. The key question to answer was to what extent racist elements and racial motives can be attributed to his views and colonization plan. The thesis has been divided in three chapters. In the first chapter Lincoln's colonization plan was brought forward and was explained how it came to be. In chapter two the controversial debate on Lincoln's position towards race and racism was discussed. Lincoln's own attitude towards slavery and race was analysed. In the third chapter, theoretical concepts were discussed more in-depth and at the same time an analysis was made by comparing these concepts to Lincoln's colonization plan and views on race.

Lincoln favoured a gradual process of emancipation and not sudden emancipation. But when did colonization become an element in the emancipation? The first time he brought it up in official matter was in his first annual address to Congress. But the colonization idea was not something new for Lincoln. He had identified himself with the colonization movement. In his first annual message, he mentioned that the Confiscation Act had liberated slaves already and that they consequently already were "dependent on the United States". And that is the moment where he suggested that colonizing the freed slaves should be an option. But were there any racial motives? Arguments against voluntary and compensated emancipation were race related. For example, that freed slaves would demand citizenship rights and that the end of slavery would lead to equality with the white man. It was apparent that the white population was really worried about what would happen after emancipation. It seemed like that was the reason colonization was always brought forward. But Lincoln did recognize the power of racism in the nation and the impact it had on the black population.

Furthermore, it was showed that Lincoln did have racial motives to promote colonization. When Lincoln was asked why black Americans should leave the country, the answer was that blacks and whites are different races. According to him the physical difference is a great disadvantage to them both, and he thinks that the black race suffers very greatly by living among the whites, while the whites suffer from the black's presence. This made it seem like he was doing it for the black's own good.

It has been made clear that Lincoln had said different things about race. But he had one consistent statement that he made: being inferior does not mean being a slave. Lincoln thought that slaves or black people had 'unalienable rights'. Those were the natural rights that are guaranteed by the Constitution. Lincoln made the distinction between natural rights and (socio-political) equal rights. When regarding the natural rights, Lincoln always favoured the equality of blacks and whites. In other words, in that sense he believed black and white had the same natural rights. At the same time, he believed that the Negro is inferior to the white men. He gave four areas in which he supported discrimination: voting, serving in juries, holding elective office, and intermarriage. Why? Because these are all race relations that fall within the purview of the states. But still the question remains if racial elements can be found in his views. Different opinions were brought forward. For example, that Lincoln explicitly supported the doctrine of white supremacy, and he opposed granting civil and political rights to Negroes. To argue against this was mentioned that Lincoln was not only debating his opponent but was also conducting a kind of inner dialogue with himself, coming to terms with his own ambivalence to black men. Moreover, that Lincoln adopted the least racist position that would not disqualify him from consideration in the context of a racist society.

The analysis of the concepts race and racism.

The five relations between white and black that Hondius brought forward in her book was discussed. These were two of these relations that can be related to how slaves were seen in America during Lincoln's presidency. The first was infantilization, because black people were seen as children, dumb and sometimes incapable of even learning. Lincoln also suggested in his most in his speeches that freed slaves must stay under guidance of their former master until a certain age. The second was interpreted in another way. Exclusion and distancing. One way that the U.S. was trying to exclude and or distance the slaves was by opposing the idea of social equal rights for the black population. The other way exclusion and distancing can be seen is in the colonization plan of Lincoln.

Racism was understood at its most basic level. The categorization of humans based on their different bodies, namely colour. If this is compared to Lincoln's case, this

is exactly how Lincoln defined race in his thought too. Race was understood as a group of people belonging to that group because of their shared characteristics. If racism is defined in terms of the desire to dominate other people based on race, it is in fundamental opposition to the principle of human equality. Three approaches to racism were brought forward: behavioural, motivational and cognitive. Schmid favoured the motivational approach because it identifies the essence of the racist attitude and practice. The motivational approach is guided by considerations of motives.

If Schmid's argumentation is followed, Lincoln's views nor colonization plan would be considered racist. According to Lincoln, he wanted to help and better the blacks lives too and had no desire to dominate or exploit them. Nonetheless, he did believe in the superiority of the whites, but this does not necessarily mean that he is racist. If Schmid's preference for the motivational approach to racism is kept then it can be said that Lincoln's views on race and colonization plan cannot be seen racial. If this is combined with Hondius' relations between black and whites, and the categorization of human beings Lincoln made based on human characteristics, then it does show that there is some nuance on the fact if Lincoln's views on race and his plan of colonization does indeed include racial aspects.

The final answer.

To answer the central question of this thesis; did the Negro question for Lincoln include racial elements? In combination with Schmid, it all depends on the approach that is chosen that will define the answer to the question. For example, if the cognitive approach is chosen then it can be said that Lincoln is had racial elements in his plan and speeches. But what is important is that nuance is shown, because it is easy to go to the extremes of the answer; that there indeed racial elements or not at all. What can be said for sure is that there is to some extend racial elements because of the thought at that time about race and society.

Looking at how the concept race is seen today and how socially constructed it is, a conclusion can be drawn. After the emancipation and freeing of the slaves, the whites could not let go of their inferior views of the blacks. The idea of race became more of a socially constructed concept and was incorporated in everything. It has become a big problem, especially looking at the debate going on in the US about racism and how the

police are acting towards the African Americans. This social construction with how it manifests is an interesting subject for further research. Lincoln believed in the natural rights of the African American but not the socially equal rights. The African Americans can vote, become senators and even presidents, but still it seems like they are still fighting for their equal rights.

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