

The Chicago Tribune Report on the Lincoln - Douglas Debate

The first joint debate in pursuance of the agreement was at Ottawa, August 21. It took place in the open air, as did all the other debates. The State was now pretty well stirred up. Expectation was on tiptoe. . . . I had early taken a position on elevated ground overlooking the town and surrounding country. Some hours before the time fixed for the speaking, clouds of dust began to rise on the horizon along the roads leading to the place, from all points of the compass, and these clouds became more frequent and more dense as the hours rolled on.

There were large wagons with four-horse teams for the accommodation of political clubs, heavily loaded and bearing canvas signs indicating their habitation and their political belonging. Long before the speakers and reporters ascended the platform, the public square where the meeting took place, and the avenues leading thereto, were densely packed with human beings, who had also swarmed upon the platform itself and its timber supports, and had filled the windows of all houses within earshot. . . . At all the other joint debates, except those of Jonesboro and Alton, which were in the part of Illinois called "Egypt," similar crowds and scenes were witnessed, the largest assemblage of all, according to my memoranda, being at Galesburg.

Douglas ended in a whirlwind of applause [the opening debate at Ottawa] and Lincoln began to speak in a slow and rather awkward way. He had a thin tenor, or rather falsetto, voice, almost as high pitched as a boatswain's whistle. It could be heard farther and it had better wearing qualities than Douglas' rich baritone, but it was not so impressive to the listeners. Moreover, his words did not flow in a rushing, unbroken stream like Douglas'. He sometimes stopped for repairs before finishing a sentence, especially at the beginning of a speech. After getting fairly started, and lubricated, as it were, he went on without any noticeable hesitation, but he never had the ease and grace and finish of his adversary. . . . Lincoln required time to gather himself . . ., but he never failed to find his footing and to maintain it firmly when he had found it. What he lacked in mental agility and alertness he made up in moral superiority and blazing earnestness that came from his heart and went straight to those of his hearers.

The last debate took place at Alton, October 15. At this meeting Douglas' voice was scarcely audible. It was worn out by incessant speaking, not at the seven joint debates only, but at nearly a hundred separate meetings. At Alton he was so hoarse that he could not be distinctly heard more than twenty feet from the platform. Yet he maintained the same resolute bearing, the same look of calm self-confidence that he had shown at the beginning. Lincoln's voice was not in the least impaired although he had made as many speeches additional to the joint debates as Douglas had.

HORACE WHITE, *The Lincoln and Douglas Debates.*