

Address to Black Men on Colonization

Abraham Lincoln

August 14, 1862

This afternoon the President of the United States gave audience to
5 a Committee of colored men at the White House.

They were introduced by the Rev. J. Mitchell, Commissioner of
Emigration. E. M. Thomas, the Chairman, remarked that they were
there by invitation to hear what the Executive had to say to them.
Having all been seated, the President, after a few preliminary obser-
10 vations, informed them that a sum of money had been appropriated
by Congress, and placed at his disposition for the purpose of aid-
ing the colonization in some country of the people, or a portion of
them, of African descent, thereby making it his duty, as it had for a
long time been his inclination, to favor that cause; and why, he asked,
15 should the people of your race be colonized, and where? Why should
they leave this country? This is, perhaps, the first question for proper
consideration. You and we are different races. We have between us
a broader difference than exists between almost any other two races.
Whether it is right or wrong I need not discuss, but this physical dif-
20 ference is a great disadvantage to us both, as I think your race suffer
very greatly, many of them by living among us, while ours suffer
from your presence. In a word we suffer on each side. If this is ad-
mitted, it affords a reason at least why we should be separated. You
here are freemen I suppose.

25 A VOICE: Yes, sir.

The President—Perhaps you have long been free, or all your lives.
Your race are suffering, in my judgment, the greatest wrong inflicted
on any people. But even when you cease to be slaves, you are yet far
removed from being placed on an equality with the white race. You
30 are cut off from many of the advantages which the other race enjoy.
The aspiration of men is to enjoy equality with the best when free,
but on this broad continent, not a single man of your race is made the
equal of a single man of ours. Go where you are treated the best, and
the ban is still upon you.

35 I do not propose to discuss this, but to present it as a fact with
which we have to deal. I cannot alter it if I would. It is a fact, about
which we all think and feel alike, I and you. We look to our condi-
tion, owing to the existence of the two races on this continent. I need
not recount to you the effects upon white men, growing out of the
40 institution of Slavery. I believe in its general evil effects on the white
race. See our present condition—the country engaged in war!—our
white men cutting one another's throats, none knowing how far it
will extend; and then consider what we know to be the truth. But

for your race among us there could not be war, although many men
 45 engaged on either side do not care for you one way or the other. . . .

It is better for us both, therefore, to be separated. . . . There is an
 unwillingness on the part of our people, harsh as it may be, for you
 free colored people to remain with us. Now, if you could give a start
 to white people, you would open a wide door for many to be made
 50 free. . . . The above is merely given as the substance of the President's
 remarks.

The Chairman of the delegation briefly replied that "they would
 hold a consultation and in a short time give an answer." The Presi-
 dent said: "Take your full time—no hurry at all."

55 The delegation then withdrew.

Source: "Address on Colonization to a Deputation of Negroes," in
The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln, ed. Roy P. Basler, vol. 5 (New
 Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1953-55), pp. 370-375,
 60 online at <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/l/lincoln/lincoln5/>.