

Lincoln on abolition in England and the United States, 1858

Abraham Lincoln
circa July 1858

I have never professed an indifference to the honors of official station; and were I to do so now, I should only make myself ridiculous. Yet I have never failed – do not now fail – to remember that in the republican cause there is a higher aim than that of mere office – I have not allowed myself to forget that the abolition of the Slave-trade by Great Britain [sic], was agitated a hundred years before it was a final success; that the measure had it's open fire-eating opponents; it's stealthy "don't care" opponents; it's dollars and cent opponents; it's inferior race opponents; it's negro equality opponents; and it's religion and good order opponents; that all these opponents got offices, and their adversaries got none – But I have also remembered that [inserted: though] they blazed, like tallow-candles for a century, at last they flickered in the socket, died out, stank in the dark for a brief season, and were remembered no more, even by the smell – School-boys know that Wilbe[r]force, and Granville Sharpe, helped that cause forward; but who can now name a single man who labored to retard it? Remembering these things I can not but regard it as possible that the higher object of this contest may not be completely attained within [2] the term of my [inserted: natural] life. But I can not doubt either that it will come in due time. Even in this view, I am proud, in my passing speck of time, to contribute an humble mite to that glorious consummation, which my own poor eyes may [struck: never] [inserted: not] last to see –

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Image Source: Abraham Lincoln, speech fragment concerning the abolition of slavery, ca July 1858 courtesy of the Papers of Abraham Lincoln; original in Gilder Lehrman Collection, New York City

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