What About the Republican Party?

July 14, 1994 *by Phyllis Schlafly*

This year, C-Span will reenact the most famous political debates in American history, the Lincoln-Douglas Debates of 1858. During those seven debates up and down the State of Illinois, Abraham Lincoln enunciated the position of the then-new Republican Party that slavery was "a moral, a social and a political wrong."

Stephen A. Douglas countered with the arguments of "choice," "state sovereignty," and opposition to dictation by the Federal Government. He argued that "each State of this union has a right to do as it pleases on the subject of slavery."

In Quincy, Illinois, Lincoln argued that we should "deal with [slavery] as with any other wrong, insofar as we can prevent its growing any larger, and deal with it that, in the run of time, there may be some promise of an end to it. We have a due regard to the actual presence of it amongst us and the difficulties of getting rid of it in any satisfactory way ... [but] we oppose it as an evil . . ."

Where did Lincoln get his authority for saying that slavery was "wrong"? He cited our nation's founding document, the Declaration of Independence, which asserts as a "self-evident" truth that each of us is "endowed by [our] Creator" with unalienable rights of life and liberty, and that government is instituted for the purpose of securing those rights.

The Declaration of Independence does not mention slavery. But, in the Galesburg debate, Lincoln pointed to the clear meaning of the Declaration's words that "all" of us are endowed with "unalienable rights," and he challenged Douglas that "the entire record of the world, from the date of the Declaration of Independence up to three years ago, may be searched in vain for one single affirmation, from one single man, that the negro was not included in the Declaration of Independence. "

"The real issue in this controversy," Lincoln said in the Alton debate, is that the Republican Party "looks upon the institution of slavery as a wrong, and [the Democratic Party] does not look upon it as a wrong." Lincoln proclaimed that the slavery issue represented "the eternal struggle between these two principles - right and wrong."

When Lincoln aggressively injected this "moral" issue into partisan politics, his enemies didn't attack him for being the "religious right" or a "Christian fundamentalist who wants to impose his morality on others." They smeared him in other ways.

In reporting the Lincoln-Douglas debates, the biased press of the 1850s called Lincoln "a dead dog" walking to his "political grave," and reported Douglas's arguments as "logical" and "powerful." However, the verdict of history is that Lincoln's argument was correct.

The issue of abortion in the 1990s offers striking parallels to the Lincoln-Douglas debates. We hear many of the same arguments about "choice" and "keeping government out of our lives." But all the incantations of "Out, damned spot!" cannot take abortion out of public controversy.

Abortion is a moral issue because it confronts fundamental issues of right and wrong, of life and death. It is a social issue because it goes to the most deeply held of human relationships and our respect for the worth of our fellow human beings. It is a political issue because, every

year, dozens of bills pertaining to abortion are introduced into the Congress and state legislatures, and public officials must vote aye or nay on those bills.

The authority for saying that abortion (like slavery) is "wrong" is also the Declaration of Independence. It does not mention abortion, but you will search in vain for a single affirmation that the Creator-endowed right to life was to be withheld from a baby until the moment of birth.

Every new advance in science, especially DNA testing and the ultra-sound photographs of babies in the womb, confirms that the unique, individual identity of each of us is present, human, alive and growing before the mother realizes she is pregnant.

When *Roe v. Wade* legalized the termination of the unborn baby, that effectively made the baby the property of the mother to dispose of as she wishes. The *Dred Scott* decision, which Lincoln criticized and Douglas defended, specifically made the slave the property of his master.

The Republican Party, as well as the candidacy of Lincoln as the first Republican President, was grounded on the principle that no human being should be considered the property of another, and on a repudiation of the *Dred Scott* decision by the U.S. Supreme Court which had ruled otherwise. It would be a monumental mistake for the Republican Party to acquiesce in current demands that the Party abandon its fundamental and traditional position.

It is a usually a fatal mistake, anyway, for a politician to reverse his position for pragmatic reasons. In 1992, George Bush gave us a bitter lesson in the high cost of reneging on a major campaign promise about tax.es, and Republicans would be very foolish to repeat the Bush mistake.