Introduction

Why did Stephen Douglas become a Democrat, not a Whig? We ought to know, because he was an architect of the antebellum party system; he forged an uncommon bond with voters; and he embraced and reformulated the principles of the Democratic Party.[1] After his arrival in Illinois at the age of twenty,

[1] Historians differ in periodizing and labeling the evolution of political parties before the Civil War. Whether or not they recognize political divisions before 1820 as constituting a party system, they agree that a new two-party alignment arose in the middle to late 1830s. For an overview of the historiography on party development in the United States before 1860, see John L. Brooke, "To Be 'Read by the Whole People'; Press, Party, and Public Sphere in the United States, 1789–1840," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, 110:1 (2000), 41–118, esp. 49–50, 87–89. See also his "Print and Politics," in *An Extensive Republic: Print, Culture, and Society in the New Nation, 1790–1840*, ed. Robert A. Gross and Mary Kelley (Chapel Hill, NC, 2010), 179–190, esp. 186; Donald B. Cole, *Vindicating Andrew Jackson: The 1828 Election and the Rise of the Two-Party System* (Lawrence, KS, 2009), esp. 157–178, on party organization; John Ashworth, *Slavery, Capitalism, and Politics in the Antebellum Republic*, vol. 1: *Commerce and Compromise, 1820–1850* (New York, 1995), 369–381; Joel H. Silbey, *The American Political Nation, 1838–1893* (Stanford, CA, 1991), esp. 7, table; Paul Kleppner, ed., *The Evolution of American Electoral Systems* (Westport, CT, 1981), esp. essays by Ronald P. Formisano, William G. Shade, and Paul Kleppner.

On the emergence of the party as a central political institution in Illinois during the 1830s and the prominence of Douglas, whom he calls a "rabid partyist," see Gerald Leonard, *The Invention of Party Politics: Federalism, Popular Sovereignty, and Constitutional Development in Jacksonian Illinois* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2002), esp. 138–140.

Recently historians of antebellum America have taken a broader view of politics than of parties and governmental institutions, both enclaves of white men, by conceptualizing and investigating a more inclusive "civil society." See John L. Brooke, "Consent, Civil Society, and the Public Sphere in the Age of Revolution and the Early American Republic," in *Beyond the Founders: New Approaches to the Political History of the Early American Republic*, ed. Jeffrey L. Pasley, Andrew W. Robertson, and David Waldstreicher (Chapel Hill, NC, 2004), 209–250. Glenn C. Altschuler and Stuart M. Blumin, *The Rude Republic: Americans and Their Politics in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, NJ, 2000), find a gulf between antebellum party cliques and the people, who turned to nonpartisan ways of political participation. Understanding Douglas's rise to power in Illinois during the 1830s, in fact, requires us to look at the world beyond parties, and Chapter 4 draws on the insights of scholars of gender and the family. Nevertheless, as Joel H. Sibley argues, the role of party loyalty in preserving the social order in the 1830s and 1840s should not be

he became an essential builder of the Democratic Party in the 1830s, an influential voice for it the party in Congress during the 1840s and 1850s, and its standard bearer in 1860, when, accompanied by his wife, he was the first presidential candidate in American history to campaign across the country. While his three presidential rivals complied with the code against campaigning, he openly explained and defended the Democratic platform that he had shaped. Historians often focus less on his ideas than on his motives, but both merit attention, because the principles his party stood for mattered greatly to him.

Douglas believed that his political allegiance was "fixed" forever at the age of fifteen, during the presidential contest of 1828, when he and fellow apprentices supported Andrew Jackson against their employer's preference, John Quincy Adams.[2] Yet the full story of his adolescence makes it difficult to imagine his ever joining the Whigs, whom he associated with the discredited Federalists.[3] His crisis-laden journey from youth in Vermont to manhood in Illinois bent him toward the Democrats' vision of the Republic as an expanding union comprising disparate but equal states and territories.[4] Following his trials with family,

underappreciated. "Comment on Sean Wilentz's *The Rise of American Democracy*," *Journal of the Historical Society*, 6:4 (Dec. 2006), 521–525. Douglas became a consummate party politician, whose connection to the people, as depicted here, diverges from Altschuler's and Blumin's overall thesis. If popular interest in politics was "the most striking feature of Illinois life in the 1850's," as Don E. Fehrenbacher wrote, Douglas contributed mightily to making it such. *Prelude to Greatness: Lincoln in the 1850's* (Stanford, CA, 1962), 14.

[2] "Autobiographical Sketch," *Letters of SAD*, 58.

[3] Douglas was a staunch political secularist put off by Whig moralistic rhetoric. He and Illinois Democrats referred to Whigs as "Federalists" because of their elitism, nativism, central economic planning, opposition to territorial expansion, constitutionalism, and morality. Mark A. Noll suggests that the Whigs added "morality to the earlier confidence of the Federalists in the use of central governmental authority." *God and Race in American Politics: A Short History* (Princeton, NJ, 2008), 22. On evangelical morality and the Whigs, see also Daniel W. Howe, "Religion and Politics in the Antebellum North," in *Religion and American Politics: From the Colonial Period to the Present*, ed. Mark A. Noll and Luke E. Harlow, 2nd ed. (New York, 2007), 123–125, 130–131. On the Democrats regularly tarnishing Whigs as "Federalists," see Michael F. Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party* (New York, 1999), 2. Daniel W. Howe, *The Political Culture of the American Whigs* (Chicago, 1978), 90–91, contrasts Whigs and Federalists.

Scholars do not agree as to why Lincoln became or stayed a Whig; see Chapter 4, note 108. William L. Miller, *Lincoln's Virtues: An Ethical Biography* (New York, 2002), 108, suggests, admittedly "by superficial criteria," that "Lincoln and Douglas each by original identity belonged in the other's party." This suggestion owes more to Miller's discomfort with Lincoln as a Whig than with Douglas's background, which Miller describes in inflated terms.

[4] For a comparison of Democratic and Whig visions, see Daniel W. Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815–1848* (New York, 2007), 582–585. On the religious followers of each party see Richard Cawardine, "Methodists, Politics, and the Coming of the American Civil War," in *Religion and American Politics*, ed. Noll and Harlow, 169–202. There were major divergences within each party that are explored, respectively, by Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York, 2005), 483–507, which charts a "revolution in American conservatism" led by "New-School Whigs," and Yonatan Eyal, *The Young America Movement and the Transformation of the Democratic Party, 1828–1861* (New York, 2007), which depicts a younger generation of "forward-looking Democrats" featuring Douglas. For the influence of classical liberalism on the Van Burenites in the Democratic Party, see James A. Henretta, "The Rise of American Liberalism: New York, 1820–1860," in

romance, school, and illness between his fourteenth and twenty-first birthdays enables us to understand why he believed that every place did not suit every individual, that America should be large and diverse enough to enable every person to find the particular locale in which he or she could thrive. The emotionally intense years of his adolescence, which he revisited consciously time and again as an adult, provided the psychological foundation for his lifelong political disposition.[5]

This is not to suggest that his youthful development necessarily foreclosed later political turns. Douglas had an uncommon mind: he could assimilate a staggering amount of information, store it in a capacious memory, and draw on it at will to construct a telling argument. His effectiveness in legislative debates, party meetings, and on the stump came from a quick tongue, a charismatic personality, recall, and preparation. He usually did his homework and thought through his positions before he went public. He fortified himself with the history of American independence, constitution making, and congressional legislation. In short, he had the intellectual firepower to reverse or modify his viewpoints with credibility. Yet there was a striking consistency to Douglas's beliefs in national expansion, national unity, and local self-government. These pillars of his political faith had lasting emotional and empirical truth for him.[6]

Republicanism and Liberalism in America and the German States, 1750–1850, ed. Jürgen Heideking and James A. Henretta (Cambridge, 2002), 165–185.

[5] In a review essay on a biography of Lincoln, Adam I. P. Smith writes, "It is a conceit of the post-Freudian age … that the ultimate motivation for public behavior can be reduced to an individual's psychological make-up." "The Challenge of Biography: What Do They Know of Lincoln Who Only Lincoln Know?" *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association*, 31:2 (Summer 2010), 71. If "reduced" were replaced by "related," Smith's statement could apply also to my biography of Douglas. My "conceit" is that one cannot fully understand political behavior without connecting it to underlying psychological inclinations, uncovered by empirical research that is guided but not determined by theory. Indeed, recognizing the relationship between Douglas's adolescence and later political behavior requires no knowledge of psychological theory, only a measure of openness to emotional issues.

Social scientists have examined two major paths toward party affiliation: childhood socialization and policy preferences. Investigators of the former find that people are predisposed to follow the political attachment of their parents. The policy preference school stresses the correspondence between party platforms and individual attitudes. Douglas's case points to a variation of each approach. First, he believed that his lifelong affiliation began in opposition to a parental surrogate's presidential choice. His was a case of negative identification in which the significant influence was not a biological parent. Second, there was a fit between his transition to manhood and the central tenets of the Democratic Party. This suggests how the connection between a platform and a partisan can be grounded in one's earlier psychological development. For a succinct overview of the two approaches to party affiliation, see Jon A. Krosnick, Penny S. Visser, and Joshua Harder, "The Psychological Underpinnings of Political Behavior," in *The Handbook of Social Psychology*, ed. Susan T. Fiske, Daniel T. Gilbert, and Gardner Lindzey, 5th ed., 2 vols. (Hoboken, NJ, 2010), 2: 1288–1342, esp. 1311–1313.

[6] This consistency enabled him to become a leader of the progressive "Young America" group in his party without forfeiting his position among Democratic conservatives. On the group's emergence, see Eyal, *Young America Movement*, which broadens our perspective of Douglas and his party beyond the issue of slavery in the territories and states' rights in the late 1840s and early 1850s.

This consistency reinforced his sense of confidence in what he had to say. He displayed this attitude most dramatically in breaking the code against presidential campaigning. The fear of misspeaking kept his three opponents on the sidelines in 1860. In contrast, he traveled to more than 150 towns in twenty-three states in every section, except the Far West. And he spoke at stop after stop, from a few minutes to three hours, depending on his voice and the size of the crowd. Opposition newspapers waited to report his contradictions, especially between what he might say in the North and the South. The grueling campaign would surely reveal any doubts he himself harbored about his message, and the press was there to expose him. Yet Douglas never stopped talking. He evinced a seemingly guileless trust in the straightforwardness, clarity, and logic of what he spoke.

Douglas's confidence in what he said was strengthened by how he was received. His connection to the people in section after section, state after state, town after town was similar to what it had always been in Illinois – he made them feel good about their local institutions, and they reciprocated by cheering even if they did not vote for him. This mutual admiration and affection was at the core of his populism. He did not fake it and they knew it.

Although he and the white crowds he addressed shared a presumption of superiority over blacks, in one conspicuous way Douglas set himself apart from the American people in 1860: he took no stand on the morality or desirability of slavery. Without the benefit of polling, we can infer that while most white Americans were racist, they had divergent opinions about slavery, and few were indifferent to it.[7] Abraham Lincoln represented the position of most of the 1.8 million men who voted for him: he believed that blacks were inferior to whites but that slavery was abominable and ought not to be permitted to expand. Outside the South, many of the 1.3 million Douglas voters, unlike their candidate, also were antislavery.[8] Whatever their moral scruples about slavery, however, they supported Douglas's plea to push it aside from federal policymaking in the hope of dampening Southern ardor for secession.

Douglas's neutrality on slavery is the most off-putting facet of his career. It is difficult to approach someone who claimed to care not whether the institution was voted up or down, only that the decision be left to local majorities. How could Douglas not really care about slavery? In 1853 Frederick Douglass thanked Douglas publicly for sending him a copy of his speeches and expressed hope that the senator would live to "see not only that his course was morally,

[7] In its *Dred Scott* decision, the Supreme Court exemplified the racism of antebellum America. As two legal scholars put it, "To whom does America belong? Who are 'We the People' in whose name the Constitution is ordained? For Taney (and, equally important, for a majority of the Court), the answer was that America was a country of white persons who migrated to this continent from Europe." Jack M. Balkin and Sanford Levinson, "Thirteen Ways of Looking at Dred Scott," *Chicago-Kent Law Review*, 82 (2007), 54.

[8] On antislavery "as an abstract feeling" throughout the North, see Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* (New York, 1970), 308.

a crime, but that it is, politically, a mistake."[9] Even if Douglas was not expressing his personal sentiments but only his preferred national policy, Abraham Lincoln pressed him to acknowledge that slavery was wrong and that people did not have the right to choose wrong. "That is the real issue.... It is the eternal struggle between these two principles – right and wrong – throughout the world."[10] Douglas did not relent. "[Lincoln] tells you that I will not argue the question whether slavery is right or wrong. I tell you why I will not do it. I hold that under the Constitution of the United States, each State of the Union has a right to do as it pleases on the subject of slavery."[11]

Which was the greater sin, secession or slavery? To Douglas the answer was clear. He denounced the proposition to dissolve the American Union as "moral treason."[12] For more than a decade he foresaw civil war if the question of slavery in the territories was controlled by ultras on either side. He wanted to remove the issue from Washington politics because it endangered national coherence. He believed that the overriding purpose of the Constitution had been to achieve the Union; therefore, its preservation was the highest constitutional value.[13] He saw himself in the tradition of the founders, who were willing to compromise on slavery.[14] As Eric Foner and Olivia Mahoney have written, "Douglas was the last great political leader to build a career on sectional compromise."[15] On the question of perpetuating the Union, however, he was uncompromising.

[9] USN, *Frederick Douglass' Paper* (Rochester, NY), May 6, 1853. Douglas was known for sending his speeches to constituents and to correspondents who asked for them. USN, *Daily Register* (Raleigh, NC), May 25, 1853. Douglass became much more critical of Douglas after his debates with Lincoln. John Stauffer, *Giants: The Parallel Lives of Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln* (New York, 2008), 374–375.

[10] CWAL, 3: 315; L-DD, 285. On Lincoln's criticism of Douglas for ignoring the immorality of slavery, see Nicole Etcheson, " 'A living, creeping lie': Abraham Lincoln on Popular Sovereignty," *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association*, 29:2 (Summer 2008), 1–26.

[11] CWAL, 3: 266; L-DD, 233.

[12] CG, 31st Cong., 1st sess. (Feb. 8, 1850), 319.

[13] Nicole Etcheson suggests that "majority rule and self-government were the highest moral principles for Douglas and the Democrats." "The Great Principle of Self-Government: Popular Sovereignty and Bleeding Kansas," *Kansas History*, 27 (Spring–Summer 2004), 26. See also David Zarefsky, *Lincoln Douglas and Slavery in the Crucible of Public Debate* (Chicago, 1990, 1993), 166–197, which considers Douglas's commitment to local self-government to have been a moral stand, not an apology for slavery. Although he does not consider Douglas, George W. Van Cleeve provides a context for examining him when he writes of "two utterly irreconcilable visions of the moral foundations of America and its constitution" resulting from the Missouri controversy of 1819–1821. One anchored the Constitution in higher law, with a mandate to expand freedom and end slavery; the other ignored slavery and rested freedom on the expansion of popular sovereignty. *A Slaveholders' Union: Slavery, Politics, and the Constitution in the Early Republic* (Chicago, 2010), 226.

[14] David Waldstreicher writes, "[W]hile the notion of compromise may explain the Constitutional Convention, it does not tell the whole story, for if the framers' compromise intended to keep slavery out of national politics, it failed miserably." *Slavery's Constitution* (New York, 2009), 17.

[15] Eric Foner and Olivia Mahoney, *A House Divided: America in the Age of Lincoln* (New York, 1990), 77.

Opponents blamed outsize ambition for his position on slavery and his professed constitutional principles, which they dismissed as opportunistic and disingenuous. Some historians also have considered Douglas to be so driven by self-aggrandizement that he pushed principles aside in order to achieve personal gain. Even a sympathetic biographer has noted that he wanted to affect an arm's-length distance from slave owning while he received income from managing a Mississippi plantation that his sons inherited from their maternal grandfather.[16] His relationship to slavery there was in fact more complicit than he admitted even to himself, let alone the public. It merits special examination.[17] Nevertheless, it is necessary to bear in mind that his neutrality toward slavery long preceded his direct involvement with the institution. He is also accused of repealing the long-standing federal ban on slavery in territory covered by the Kansas–Nebraska Act in order to pave the way for a transcontinental railroad that purportedly would enhance the value of land he owned. His critics, however, have not given sufficient weight to a steadiness in his core beliefs. From early in his congressional career, he leaned toward granting territories a large measure of self-rule and urged colleagues to leave the slavery question to local resolution. "Nonintervention" and "popular sovereignty" became catchwords for principles he had long held.[18]

"Popular sovereignty" was for him less a product of political calculation than a reflex conditioned by an intimate relationship that he enjoyed with voters. The candidate who mingled with people from Massachusetts to Iowa and from Wisconsin to Alabama in 1860 had reveled in the crowd's embrace since he first stood up to speak in Illinois at the age of twenty. Unlike his rivals, he thrived on physicality with white men: he rose on their shoulders, sat on their laps, and clasped their hands.[19]

His physical ease with crowds flowed from his comfort with their choices. His own overnight prominence in Illinois had been due to the reception of a speech. The people who had carried him on their shoulders in Jacksonville instantaneously transformed him into a Morgan County celebrity, motivating him to settle there. This popular acclaim came unexpectedly and left him permanently grateful. When he urged yielding to local majorities, he had a personal

[16] Johannsen, *SAD*, 208–209, 211.

[17] See Chapter 9.

[18] Michael Morrison, *Slavery and the American West: The Eclipse of Manifest Destiny and the Coming of the Civil War* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1997), 142–147, offers a balanced analysis of the influences behind Douglas's territorial policies. He does not dismiss financial or partisan gain as motives, but places them alongside genuinely held principles. David H. Fischer, *Liberty and Freedom* (New York, 2005), 303–304, notes the criticism of Douglas on moral grounds but counters that he was guided by "strong ethical principles" his entire life.

[19] Douglas's racism targeted all nonwhite people. He specifically named Africans, Native Americans, Fijians, and Malays as inferior to whites. David R. Roediger, "The Pursuit of Whiteness: Property, Terror, and Expansion, 1790–1860," *Journal of the Early Republic*, 19:4 (1999), 592. His racism, however, was not the Anglo-Saxonism of New England intellectuals. See Nell I. Painter, "Ralph Waldo Emerson's Saxons," *Journal of American History*, 95:4 (Mar. 2009), 977–985. Douglas's physicality with men is explored in Chapter 4. His racism is placed in a broader context in Chapter 6.

framework. His insistence that geographical diversity was essential to American freedom was neither abstract nor dispassionate: he felt strongly that white men like himself needed to be able to find a place where they could bring their own baggage. And he knew a fundamental truth about his contemporaries: "In the nineteenth-century," Nicole Etcheson concludes, "few whites cared about the suffering of slaves, but they did care about their own political rights."[20]

From the moment he was appointed to the Illinois Supreme Court in 1841 until his death twenty years later, Douglas preferred to be called "Judge." Everyone who knew him, including family members, used that designation. In Congress the title had a double meaning. It conveyed respect for his previous service and an expectation for his manner as a legislator. His first assignment as a freshman congressman was to judge the legality of the election of four delegations. He wrote the majority report for his committee, laying out the Democratic Party's interpretation of the Constitution. As a legislator he balanced unevenly his primary responsibility as a policymaker with the obligation to determine what was constitutional. Like his congressional colleagues, Douglas was capable of invoking the Constitution to support or oppose bills. Yet, like many of them, he also took seriously the need to understand constitutional meaning. He did not use the document cynically as a weapon in debate. Although politicians did not follow the same rules as jurists in ferreting out the intention of constitutional text, Douglas approached the task with the earnestness of a judge.[21] The inherent tension between those roles occasionally produced strained arguments that weakened his credibility.[22]

[20] Nicole Etcheson, *Bleeding Kansas: Contested Liberty in the Civil War Era* (Lawrence, KS, 2004), 3.

[21] Legal scholars have given considerable attention to the extrajudicial understanding of the Constitution. Collectively their work elevates the historical importance of presidential, congressional, agency, and partisan constitutionalism. My thinking here has been influenced by Keith Whittington, *Constitutional Construction: Divided Powers and Constitutional Meaning* (Cambridge, MA, 1999); Whittington, *Political Foundations of Judicial Supremacy: The Presidency, the Supreme Court, and Constitutional Leadership in U.S. History* (Princeton, NJ, 2007); Mark A. Graber, *Dred Scott and the Problem of Constitutional Evil* (New York, 2006); Graber, "Constitutional Law and American Politics," in *The Oxford Handbook of Law and Politics*, ed. Keith Whittington, R. Daniel Kelemen, and Gregory A. Caldeira (New York, 2008), 300–320; Larry D. Kramer, *The People Themselves: Popular Constitutionalism and Judicial Review* (New York, 2004); William N. Eskridge, Jr., and John Ferejohn, *A Republic of Statutes: The New American Constitution* (New Haven, CT, 2010); Gerald Leonard, "Party as a 'Political Safeguard of Federalism': Martin Van Buren and the Constitutional Theory of Party Politics," *Rutgers Law Review*, 54 (Fall 2001), 221–281; Leonard, "Law and Politics Reconsidered: A New Constitutional History of Dred Scott," *Law and Social Inquiry*, 34 (Summer 2009), 747–785; and David P. Currie, *The Constitution in Congress, 1789–1861*, 5 vols. (Chicago, 1994–2005).

Nevertheless, legal scholars do not always credit the sincerity of Douglas's constitutionalism. For example, Louise Weinberg reduces his motives in the Kansas–Nebraska Act to seeking a Northern railroad route through Illinois and giving "a sop to the South for this blow to its ambitions for a Southern route." "Dred Scott and the Crisis of 1860," *Chicago-Kent Law Review*, 97 (2007), 113.

[22] This was particularly the case with his forced treatment of the Northwest Ordinance. See Chapter 6.

For Democratic lawmakers, representing constituents and respecting the Constitution were not principles that could be easily reconciled. If Douglas's early life explains his partisan allegiance and constitutional predisposition, his career illustrates the complex interplay between policymaking, partisan advocacy, and constitutional adherence experienced by congressional leaders. Douglas took his own constitutional principles seriously enough to weight them heavily before formulating various policy proposals.

His interpretation of the Constitution was rejected in 1860 and ultimately supplanted by the Republican vision enshrined in the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments, but he spoke for an understanding of American government that was widely shared before the Civil War. Indeed, although circumvention of the Supreme Court's decision in the *Dred Scott* case became a centerpiece of Douglas's last two campaigns, his constitutionalism was largely consistent with the jurisprudence of the Taney Court.[23] Had he won the presidency he would have pressed his view on territorial rights into a new constitutional construction.[24]

[23] On the Civil War amendments, see Michael J. Sandel, *Democracy's Discontent: America in Search of a Public Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA, 1996), 39. A major theme of Austin Allen, *Origins of the Dred Scott Case: Jacksonian Jurisprudence and the Supreme Court, 1837–1857* (Athens, GA, 2006), is that the Taney Court, composed of a Democratic majority, "developed an antielitist, fundamentally amoral conception of judicial authority that took deference to popular will as its foundation" (14). In the authority it accorded state legislatures as embodiments of popular sovereignty (13–35) and in its "acquiescence to slavery, whatever a justice's personal view regarding the institution" (79), Taney's Court, as described by Allen, shared the major principles of Democratic constitutionalism that Douglas absorbed and developed. Mark A. Graber suggests that "Stephen Douglas understood the constitutional order better than Abraham Lincoln" and associates Douglas's constitutionalism with Taney's. *Dred Scott and the Problem of Constitutional Evil*, 1. In his "John Brown, Abraham Lincoln, *Dred Scott*, and the Problem of Constitutional Evil," in *The Dred Scott Case: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on Race and Law*, ed. David T. Konig, Paul Finkelman, and Christopher A. Bracey (Athens, GA, 2010), 49–67, Graber refers to the constitutionalism of "Roger Taney / Stephen Douglas" (51). This identification, however, should not obscure Douglas's differences with Taney's decision in *Dred Scott*, which, as Paul Finkelman notes, placed Douglas "in an awkward position" because of his commitment to popular sovereignty. "The Strange Career of Dred Scott: From Fort Armstrong to Guanidnamo Bay," in *The Dred Scott Case*, ed. Konig, Finkelman, and Bracey, 231. Earl M. Maltz, *Slavery and the Supreme Court, 1825–1861* (Lawrence, KS, 2009), 148, finds that until 1856 Taney Court justices were Jacksonians "committed to the maintenance of sectional harmony." This was a core value for Douglas as well.

An otherwise excellent essay tracing the transformation of Roger Taney from antislavery lawyer to proslavery justice concludes that he reflected the way the Democratic Party shifted the discussion of slavery "from the nation's founding principles" to "protecting the property rights of southern slaveholders." Timothy S. Huebner, "Roger B. Taney and the Slavery Issue: Looking Beyond – and Before –Dred Scott," *Journal of American History*, 97:1 (2010), 37. Douglas's career, however, illustrates how "founding principles" remained a steady, powerful force for him and his party.

[24] On "construction," see Whittington, *Constitutional Construction*, 210–211. Lincoln's outrage at the *Dred Scott* decision reaffirmed his skepticism regarding claims to judicial supremacy and his belief in departmental constitutionalism, which he acted upon as president. Kramer, *The People Themselves*, 212–213. See also Daniel Farber, *Lincoln's Constitution* (Chicago, 2003), 177–188, which is more favorable to judicial supremacy.

Douglas's commitment to popular sovereignty came into conflict in 1857 with his even older commitment to party loyalty when President Buchanan, whom he helped elect, submitted the proslavery Lecompton constitution to accompany the admission of Kansas to statehood. The process by which the Lecompton document was produced was notoriously unrepresentative of the antislavery majority in the territory. If Douglas had backed it, he would have strengthened his ties to the administration and the Southern wing of his party and would have ensured his nomination at the next Democratic national convention. Lecompton, however, made a mockery of popular sovereignty, and Douglas never hesitated. His opposition to it cost him more politically than he gained; but it also involved a conflict of competing principles.[25] He had come of age in Illinois as an organizer of the new Democratic Party and now was one of its transcendent figures nationally. To split with the titular leader of his party was not an easy decision for him, no matter how deeply he felt about popular sovereignty. Yet he did so, winning praise from Republicans, some of whom wanted him to become their candidate for the Senate from Illinois in 1858, and historians, who applaud his stand against Buchanan as courageous.[26] His action, albeit principled and gutsy, contributed to what he certainly did not envision or want – the breakup of the Democratic Party, which imperiled the Union, the overriding value of his constitutionalism and politics. As brilliant as he was, Douglas could not anticipate, let alone control, the full consequences of his policy decisions.[27] His life and career exemplify the one certainty of history – its unpredictability.

Just as unexpected popular acclaim in Illinois propelled his transition into manhood, the unexpected greeting he received in Vermont during his presidential campaign tour closed the circle of his personal story, and the reception he met in all sections strengthened his resolve to preserve his beloved Union. His wife's contribution to his last campaign deserves recognition. Adele Douglas, unlike his first wife, was his soul mate and political partner. Despite the death of the couple's only child in June, she became the first wife to tour with a presidential candidate.[28] Assuming a role similar to that of her great-aunt Dolly

[25] His most recent biographers examine the tension between his principles and his political interests in his decision to oppose Lecompton: James L. Huston, *Stephen A. Douglas and the Dilemmas of Democratic Equality* (Lanham, MD, 2007), 135–137; Johannsen, *SAD*, 582–583; Damon Wells, *Stephen Douglas: The Last Years, 1857–1861* (Austin, TX, 1971), 42–47.

[26] On Republican wooing, see David M. Potter, *The Impending Crisis, 1848–1861*, completed and ed. Don E. Fehrenbacher (New York, 1976), 321; and Allen C. Guelzo, *Lincoln and Douglas: The Debates That Defined America* (New York, 2008), 24–25. His stand against Buchanan elicits admiration from Jean H. Baker, *James Buchanan* (New York, 2004), 104–106; Wilentz, *Rise of American Democracy*, 718; and Richard H. Sewell, *A House Divided: Sectionalism and Civil War, 1848–1865* (Baltimore, 1988), 65.

[27] In 1854 Douglas knew that his revocation of the Missouri Compromise in the Kansas–Nebraska Act would "raise a hell of a storm," but he could not anticipate the full impact on the party system. James M. McPherson, "Out of War, a New Nation," *Prologue Magazine*, 42:1 (Spring 2010), 6–13.

[28] A premature child had died after only a few hours in February 1858. Johannsen, *SAD*, 605.

Madison, she hosted levees, charmed politicians and reporters, stunned crowds with her beauty and grace, and encouraged her husband to go on without her after she sustained a serious injury in Alabama.[29] Most of the hundreds of thousands who saw them had no idea of their private grief because, while his presidential rivals stayed home and stayed silent, he stayed the course, pleading with Southerners to remain in the Union should Lincoln win.

After Lincoln won, Douglas did not ease up on either his need to remain a player or his desire to preserve the Union. From a dogged but futile effort to work out a compromise in Congress to a conspicuous attempt at courting and co-opting the new president, he tried to prevent national dissolution. It was not his finest hour, however, for he contradicted principles he had long stood for and tried to present himself in a more influential role than he actually had. Once the Confederacy attacked Fort Sumter, he accepted the irreconcilability of the conflict and spoke eloquently in defense of the president's call to arms. In his last major speech, two weeks before the onset of his final illness, he noted the credibility that he brought to a message of patriotism: "I believe I may with confidence appeal to the people of every section of the country to bear testimony that I have been as thoroughly national in my political opinions and actions as any man that has lived in my day."[30] It was a fitting reflection on what his overall career represented. He was in fact a man for every section.[31]

Although it encompasses all aspects of Douglas's personal and professional life, this is a thematic biography that does not unfold in strict linear progression.[32]

[29] For Dolly Madison as Washington wife, see Catherine Allgor, *Parlor Politics: In Which the Ladies of Washington Help Build a City and a Government* (Charlottesville, VA, 2000), 48–101. Her book deals astutely with the role of political wives in the early Republic. See also her "Political Parties: First Ladies and Social Events in the Formation of the Federal Government," in *The Presidential Companion: Readings on the First Ladies*, ed. Robert P. Watson and Anthony J. Eksterowicz (Columbia, SC, 2003), 35–53; and Shawn J. Parry-Giles and Diane M. Blair, "The Rise of the Rhetorical First Lady: Politics, Gender Ideology, and Women's Voice, 1789–2002," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs*, 5:4 (2002), 565–600, esp. 567–572. Rosemarie Zagarri, *Revolutionary Backlash: Women and Politics in the Early American Republic* (Philadelphia, 2007), covers the range of early female political activism, from that of an "operative" like Dolly Madison (133) to women who adorned their hats or dresses with partisan symbols (85–86).

[30] *Chicago Tribune*, June 6, 1861. Following Douglas's death, the paper printed his speech of April 25 before the Illinois legislature in its entirety for the first time.

[31] Even before the emergence of the Republicans as a sectional party, Democratic Party leaders portrayed themselves as truly national. In 1852 Franklin Pierce asked his campaign biographer to depict him "as a man for the whole country." Quoted in Jean H. Baker, *Affairs of Party: The Political Culture of Northern Democrats in the Mid-Nineteenth-Century* (Ithaca, NY, 1983), 323.

[32] Several narrative biographies have guided my way. The one to which I owe the greatest debt is Robert W. Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas* (New York, 1973). Johannsen made his notes available to scholars at the Illinois History and Lincoln Collections in the University of Illinois Library. James L. Huston's *Stephen A. Douglas and the Dilemmas of Democratic Equality* is a narrative biography that effectively pursues its titular theme. Gerald M. Capers's *Stephen A. Douglas: Defender of the Union* (Boston, 1959) is elegantly written, typical of the volumes in the once famous Library of American Biography series edited by Oscar Handlin. George M.