

Chapter Thirteen

“A David Greater than the Democratic Goliath”:

The Lincoln-Douglas Debates (1858)

In 1860, the radical abolitionist Parker Pillsbury, who called Lincoln “the Kentucky clodhopper,” scoffed at his antislavery record, saying there was “no essential difference” between him and Stephen A. Douglas.¹ In fact, the two Illinois rivals disagreed fundamentally about slavery, the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, the role of the U.S. Supreme Court, racial equality, and American history.² Their battle served as a dress rehearsal for the presidential race two years later, when once again they clashed, with a different outcome.

Herndon predicted that “the Race in Ills for 1858 & 9 -- for the Senatorial seat . . . will be hot – energetic – deadly; it will be broader – wider, and deeper in principle than the race in 1856.”³ But it would also be marred by Douglas’s brazen appeals to racial

¹ Pillsbury to Wendell Phillips, New York, 17 March 1864, Phillips Papers, Harvard University; Pillsbury, speech at Framingham, Massachusetts, 4 July 1860, The Liberator (Boston), 20 July 1860. Some historians have echoed Pillsbury. James G. Randall, Lincoln the President: From Springfield to Gettysburg (2 vols.; New York: Dodd, Mead, 1945), 1:104-28; Morton J. Frisch, “The Lincoln-Douglas Debates and History,” Lincoln Herald 57 (1956): 17-19.

² The best studies of the debates are Allen C. Guelzo, Lincoln and Douglas: The Debates that Defined America (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008); Harry V. Jaffa, Crisis of the House Divided: An Interpretation of the Issues in the Lincoln-Douglas Debates (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959); David Zarefsky, Lincoln, Douglas and Slavery: In the Crucible of Debate (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); Don E. Fehrenbacher, Prelude to Greatness: Lincoln in the 1850’s (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962), 96-142; Kenneth M. Stampp, “Race, Slavery, and the Republican Party of the 1850s,” in Stampp, The Imperiled Union: Essays on the Background of the Civil War (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 123-35.

³ Herndon to William Lloyd Garrison, Springfield, 29 May 1858, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library.

prejudice, which earned him an unenviable reputation as the “most arrogant demagogue that ever disgraced humanity.”⁴

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As the Little Giant and his challenger girded for battle, odds makers would have probably favored Douglas, despite some potential handicaps, including the split within his party; the reluctance of some former Whigs to back a Democrat; the growing population of the northern part of the state, where hostility to slavery was intense; and the hard times produced by the Panic of 1857, which were blamed on the Democrats. Outweighing those disadvantages were the Little Giant’s obvious strengths: he was much better known than Lincoln; his leadership in the struggle against the Lecompton Constitution had won respect among Illinoisans who had earlier lost faith in him because of his authorship of the Kansas-Nebraska Act; his forceful personality endeared him to many; his party had long dominated politics in Illinois, a fiercely Negrophobic state where his appeals to race prejudice had great resonance; and his skills as a debater were legendary. In addition, the Illinois General Assembly, which would choose the next senator, was mal-apportioned; the heavily Democratic southern counties of the state had more than their fair share of legislative seats, depriving the Republicans of six to ten votes that they would have had if a reapportionment had been undertaken based on the most recent census. The twenty-five-member State Senate contained Democratic holdovers from districts that by 1858 had Republican majorities.

Lincoln acknowledged that Douglas’s eminence benefited the Democrats.

“Senator Douglas is of world wide renown,” he observed. “All the anxious politicians of

⁴ David Davis to his wife Sarah, Clinton, Illinois, 10 October 1860, Davis Family Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library.

his party, or who have been of his party for years past, have been looking upon him as a certainty, at no distant day, to be the President of the United States. They have seen in his round, jolly, fruitful face, postoffices, landoffices, marshalships, and cabinet appointments, chargéships and foreign missions, bursting and sprouting out in wonderful exuberance ready to be laid hold of by their greedy hands.” Hoping for such patronage rewards, these politicians “rush about him, sustain him, and give him marches, triumphal entries, and receptions beyond what even in the days of his highest prosperity they could have brought about in his favor.” Lincoln, on the other hand, had no such support: “nobody has ever expected me to be President. In my poor lean, lank, face, nobody has ever seen that any cabbages were sprouting out.”⁵

Helping to make Douglas formidable in debate was his lack of scruples. As William Herndon told a friend in Massachusetts, Illinois Republicans “have a clever villain to combat. Douglas is an ambitious and an unscrupulous man; he is the greatest liar in all America; he misrepresents Lincoln throughout, and our people generally are not logical enough to see the precise manner, point & issue of [the] deception.”⁶ In addition, Douglas’s “overplus of words” and “air of assurance” enabled him to impress audiences, even though he might be uttering non sequiturs.⁷ (A sympathetic analyst of Douglas’s rhetoric noted that the Little Giant was often guilty of employing such logical fallacies as

⁵ Speech in Springfield, 17 July 1858, Roy P. Basler et al., eds., The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln (8 vols. plus index; New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1953-55), 2:506.

⁶ Herndon to Theodore Parker, Springfield, 24 July 1858, Herndon-Parker Papers, University of Iowa.

⁷ Horace White, “The Lincoln and Douglas Debates: An Address before the Chicago Historical Society, February 17, 1914” (pamphlet; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1914), 20-21.

arguing beside the point, making ad hominem attacks, and resorting to ad verecundiam reasoning.)⁸

Lincoln possessed offsetting advantages: his party was comparatively unified; the appeal of the antislavery cause was waxing; the sincerity of his commitment to that cause was palpable and persuasive; he was an effective, seasoned debater with political skills honed over a quarter of a century; his psychological maturity and paternal qualities predisposed men to regard him with the affection and trust bestowed on a wise father; his self-effacing modesty and keen sense of humor made him likable; and his reputation for integrity had won him an unusual measure of respect.

Nevertheless, some Republicans were nervous about the debates. The unpopularity of Lincoln's stands on the Mexican War and on racial issues, along with the opposition of prominent Eastern Republicans like Horace Greeley, whose New York Tribune was widely read in Illinois, boded ill. Shortly before the debates began, Lincoln asked Hiram W. Beckwith of Danville how the party leaders in his area felt. When told that they anticipated the contest "with deep concern," Lincoln at first looked pained but quickly changed his expression as he described two men about to fight: "one of them brags about what he means to do. He jumps high in the air, cracking his heels together, smites his fists, and wastes his breath trying to scare somebody." His opponent "says not a word." His "arms are at his side, his fists are closely doubled up, his head is drawn to the shoulder, and his teeth are set firm together. He is saving his wind for the fight, and as sure as it comes off he will win it, or die a-trying."⁹

⁸ Forest L. Whan, "Stephen A. Douglas," in William Norwood Brigance, ed., A History and Criticism of American Public Address (2 vols.; New York: McGraw-Hill, 1943), 819-20.

⁹ Ida M. Tarbell, The Life of Abraham Lincoln (2 vols.; New York: McClure, 1902), 1:308-9.

The first debate took place at Ottawa before a crowd of over 10,000, more than doubling the population of that county seat. People flocked there on special trains from LaSalle, Peru, and Chicago (eighty-four miles to the northeast); from less distant locales they poured in on horseback, on foot, on hayracks, and in wagons and carriages. Boats conveyed others along the Illinois and Michigan Canal, which passed through the town. Many arrived the night before the debate, quickly filling the hotels and private houses; latecomers were forced to camp wherever they could find space. The “campfires that spread up and down the valley for a mile made it look as if an army was gathered.”¹⁰

Like “some great deliverer, some mighty champion,” Douglas arrived in a splendid carriage drawn by four horses and flanked by bands playing martial music. Adding to the din, cannons fired volleys, well-wishers cheered lustily, and street vendors loudly hawked their wares. Several hundred supporters waved flags and banners.¹¹ Lincoln made a less grandiose entrance into town aboard a train full of supporters from Chicago. Accompanying him was Henry C. Whitney, who recalled that the challenger “sat with me throughout the journey” exhibiting “not the slightest trace of excitement or nervousness.” They talked about matters other than the upcoming debate, and when finally Whitney alluded to that event, Lincoln “calmly and indifferently replied that he was fully prepared.”¹²

A large crowd holding aloft banners emblazoned with pro-Republican mottos greeted him at the depot: “Abe the Giant-Killer,” “Edgar County for the Tall Sucker,”

¹⁰ Recollections of George Beatty, undated manuscript, Ida M. Tarbell Papers, Allegheny College.

¹¹ Philadelphia Press, 26 August 1858.

¹² Henry C. Whitney, Life on the Circuit with Lincoln, ed. Paul M. Angle (1892; Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton Press, 1940), 408.

“Illinois born under the Ordinance of '87.”¹³ His friend W. H. L. Wallace escorted him to the home of Mayor Joseph O. Glover, where he would spend the night.¹⁴ Because the weather had been unusually dry, so much dust was stirred up that “the streets and avenues resembled a vast smoke house.”¹⁵ Under a blazing sun, the audience jammed into the shadeless public square, where for three hours they stood patiently listening to the debaters.¹⁶ With difficulty the speakers and dignitaries made their way through the mass of humanity to reach the platform, which was so crowded that part of it collapsed.¹⁷

Douglas opened the debate by repeating many of his earlier arguments, denying that he had conspired to nationalize slavery and charging that Lincoln endorsed racial equality. He spoke fiercely and emphatically. His favorite gesture “was to raise his hand diagonally up toward the heavens.” His “fist would be closed with the exception of the index finger. His arms were short and he made this movement with such furor that it never failed to add in driving in his idea.”¹⁸ The Little Giant delivered his remarks “in a quick, jerky, fiery way” and emphasized points “by shaking his head and seeming to dart forward.” Some observers thought he resembled a springing panther, while others were

¹³ Chicago correspondence, 23 August, New York Evening Post, 27 August 1858; Tarbell, Lincoln 1:313-14.

¹⁴ Whitney, Life on the Circuit, ed. Angle, 408. T. Lyle Dickey alleged that in Ottawa, Lincoln made his headquarters at his house. Dickey, interviewed by John G. Nicolay, Washington, 20 October 1876, Michael Burlingame, ed., An Oral History of Abraham Lincoln: John G. Nicolay's Interviews and Essays (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996), 48.

¹⁵ Chicago Press and Tribune, 23 August 1858.

¹⁶ Chicago correspondence, 23 August, New York Evening Post, 27 August 1858. On the hardships that the attendees at speeches and debates endured, see Charles J. Stewart, “The People and the Lincoln-Douglas Campaign of 1858,” Register of the Kentucky Historical Society 65 (1967): 284-93.

¹⁷ White, “Lincoln-Douglas Debates,” 18.

¹⁸ Recollections of George Beatty, undated manuscript, Ida M. Tarbell Papers, Allegheny College.

reminded of “a mastiff ahold of a root, pulling and tugging as if determined never to loosen his grip.”¹⁹

Douglas’s histrionics put off some listeners, including one who thought that “he pounded out his propositions in a manner too dogmatic” and “too often he left the main question to indulge in personal charges and explanations. He was occasionally coarse in his expressions.”²⁰ A local paper reported that Douglas’s “face was livid with rage and despair; he threw himself into contortions, shook his head, shook his fists; his whole body shook as with a palsy; his eyes protruded from their sockets; he raved like a mad bull. His voice at times descended to a demonized howl; and such looks as he gave his antagonist!”²¹ A Democratic schoolmaster objected to Douglas’s “sledge-hammer style,” and a former admirer of the senator found it “disgusting” to observe how “he shuns and avoids the real solid matter and marrow of the matter, avoids everything that looks like fair debate upon questions of national or even of State policy; how he quibbles, how he misrepresents, how he prevaricates; nay – it must be said – how he lies, how he panders to the lowest portions of the lowest classes, with slang, with coarse jokes, with ribaldry, with vile abuse.”²²

¹⁹ Congressman William Cullen, undated statement, Ida M. Tarbell Papers, Allegheny College; Roxbury, Massachusetts, Journal, n.d., copied in the Cincinnati Commercial, 1 June 1860. Democrat Cullen (1826-1914) represented his Illinois district in the U.S. House from 1881 to 1884. At the time of the debate he lived in Adams Township in La Salle County near Ottawa.

²⁰ Charles W. Marsh, Recollections, 1837-1910 (Chicago: Farm Implement News Company, 1910), 74.

²¹ Ottawa Republican, 28 August 1858. Another Republican paper said he “howled, he ranted, he bellowed, he pawed dirt, he shook his head, he turned livid in the face, he struck his right hand into his left, he foamed at the mouth, he anathematized, he cursed, he exulted, he domineered.” Chicago Press and Tribune, 26 August 1858.

²² Marsh, Recollections, 74; letter from “Sandwich,” De Kalb County, n.d., Chicago Press and Tribune, 26 August 1858.

Douglas began by praising his opponent's character, then abruptly asked the audience: "are you in favor of conferring upon the negro the rights and privileges of citizenship? ["No, no."] Do you desire to strike out of our State Constitution that clause which keeps slaves and free negroes out of the State, and allow the free negro to flow in ["never"] and cover our prairies with his settlements? Do you desire to turn this beautiful State into a free negro colony ["no, no"], in order that when Missouri shall abolish slavery, she can send us these emancipated slaves to become citizens and voters on an equality with you? ["Never, no."] If you desire negro citizenship – if you desire them to come into the State and stay with white men – if you desire to let them vote on an equality with yourselves – if you desire to make them eligible to office – to have them serve on juries and judge of your rights – then go with Mr. Lincoln and the Black Republicans in favor of negro citizenship. ["Never, never."] For one, I am opposed to negro citizenship in any form. [Cheers.]"

(Other Democrats pointed to Connecticut, where the state House of Representatives had recently passed a bill to enfranchise blacks. "This is republican policy where that party has full sweep," the Illinois State Register declared. "When seeking power, as in this state, they endeavor to cover up their real designs. – Let them once secure the power, and, as in Connecticut, they will raise the negro to the political level of the native white." If blacks were allowed to vote in Illinois, the Chicago Times predicted, thousands of them "will drift into this State.")²³

Blacks were hopelessly inferior, Douglas argued. Snidely he remarked, "I do not question Mr. Lincoln's conscientious belief that the negro was made his equal, and hence

²³ Illinois State Register (Springfield), 28 June, 30 July 1858; Chicago Weekly Times, 5 August 1858.

is his brother. [Laughter.] But, for my own part, I do not regard the negro as my equal, and I positively deny that he is my brother, or any kin to me whatever. [“Never.” “Hit him again,” and cheers.]” Citing history, he added: “I do not believe the Almighty ever intended the negro to be the equal of the white man. [“Never, never.”] If he did he has been a long time demonstrating the fact. [Laughter, cheers.] For six thousand years the negro has been a race upon the earth, and during that whole six thousand years – in all latitudes and climates wherever the negro has been – he has been inferior to whatever race adjoined him. The fact is he belongs to an inferior race and must occupy an inferior position. [“Good,” “that’s so,” &c.]”²⁴

Douglas may have said “nigger” instead of “Negro.” The Quincy Whig sarcastically noted that the Little Giant used “elegant terms,” among them an accusation that Lincoln espoused “the doctrine that ‘niggers were equal to white men.’” Asked the Whig: “Isn’t this beautiful language to come from a United States Senator?”²⁵ A journalist who interviewed Robert R. Hitt, the shorthand journalist who covered the debates for the Chicago Press and Tribune, wrote that during the second debate (held at Freeport), Owen Lovejoy “became thoroughly aroused by Douglas’ reference to ‘the nigger’ – Douglas said ‘nigger’ not ‘negro’ as the Times reported him on that occasion.”²⁶ At Hillsboro, Douglas gave a speech in which “he uttered scarcely a

²⁴ Chicago Press and Tribune, 23 August 1858. I have used the Press and Tribune’s version of the debates rather than the Chicago Times’ because the latter deliberately garbled Lincoln’s words and applied cosmetic changes to Douglas’s. Michael Burlingame, “The Accuracy of Newspaper Accounts of the 1858 Lincoln-Douglas Debates,” in Walter B. Stevens, A Reporter’s Lincoln, ed. Michael Burlingame (1916; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 229-36. The audience responses are taken from both newspapers.

²⁵ Quincy Whig, 26 August 1858.

²⁶ Stevens, A Reporter’s Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 75. Throughout the debate, “Douglas said ‘nigger,’” though his “organ printed ‘negro.’” Ibid., 85.

sentence which had not the word ‘nigger’ in it.”²⁷ In the later Alton debate, a reporter had difficulty hearing the Little Giant, but could make out some “emphatic words” like “nigger equality” and an assertion that the Declaration of Independence was not made for “niggers.”²⁸

Douglas made several false allegations in addition to the charge that Lincoln favored social and political equality for blacks. He accused Lincoln and Trumbull of having conspired in 1854 to break up the Whig and Democratic parties, with the former to succeed Shields in the senate the following year and the latter to take Douglas’s seat in 1859.²⁹ Douglas followed this falsehood with another, which would significantly undermine his credibility: he charged that Lincoln had helped write an antislavery platform allegedly drawn up at Springfield in October 1854. The Little Giant read portions of what he said was that document, calling for the repeal of the Fugitive Slave Act, the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia, the elimination of the interstate slave trade, and a ban on the acquisition of more slave territory, among other things. He asked if Lincoln agreed with that platform.

When transcribing Douglas’s remarks, Robert R. Hitt discovered that the Little Giant was quoting a radical platform adopted in 1854 at Aurora, not the more moderate

²⁷ Hillsboro correspondence, 2 August, Chicago Press and Tribune, 7 August 1858.

²⁸ Alton correspondence, 15 October, New York Tribune (semi-weekly ed.), 26 October 1858, in Edwin Erle Sparks, ed., The Lincoln-Douglas Debates of 1858 (Collections of the Illinois State Historical Library, vol. 3; Lincoln Series, vol. 1; Springfield: Illinois State Historical Library, 1908), 504.

²⁹ This was untrue, though Douglas was able to give as his source Lincoln’s friend James H. Matheny. In 1856, Matheny had made this charge in a speech, the text of which appears in the Chicago Weekly Times, 1 July 1858.

one endorsed at Springfield.³⁰ Douglas later claimed that he had relied on an 1856 speech by Congressman Thomas L. Harris, who cited a resolution adopted by what he termed the “first State convention of the Black Republican party in Illinois.”³¹ (The day before the Ottawa debate, this resolution appeared in the Illinois State Register, which mistakenly alleged that it had been written by a committee on which Lincoln had served.)³² In mid-August, Douglas had asked Harris where and when that convention was held.³³ Charles H. Lanphier, editor of the Illinois State Register, replied for the indisposed Harris, saying that it had occurred in Springfield in October 1854. Lanphier also provided an article from the Illinois State Register containing the Aurora platform, which was misidentified as the Springfield platform.³⁴ Republicans at the time pointed out the Register’s gaffe, and some leading party newspapers, like the Chicago Journal and Democrat, had opposed those Aurora resolutions.³⁵

When the Chicago Press and Tribune revealed Douglas’s error, he recounted this tale and asked rhetorically at Galena on August 25, “Had I not abundant reason for supposing they were the Republican State platform of 1854?”³⁶ This was a lame

³⁰ Charles S. West, “The Lincoln-Douglas Debates,” part 2, Phonographic Magazine (Cincinnati), 1 December 1896, 361-62. For the text of the platform adopted in Springfield, see Chicago Press and Tribune, 23 August 1858.

³¹ Congressional Globe, 34th Congress, 1st Session, Appendix, 1274 (9 August 1856).

³² Illinois State Register (Springfield), 20 August 1858.

³³ Douglas to Charles H. Lanphier, n.p., [15 August 1858], Robert W. Johannsen, ed., The Letters of Stephen A. Douglas (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1961), 426-27.

³⁴ Illinois State Register (Springfield), 16 October 1854.

³⁵ Morgan Journal (Jacksonville), 19 October 1854; Chicago Democrat, 24 August 1858.

³⁶ Douglas’s speech at Galena, 25 August 1858, quoted in the Galena correspondence, 25 August 1858, Chicago Press and Tribune, 27 August 1858; Galena correspondence, 25 August, New York Evening Post, 1 September 1858; Douglas to Lanphier, n.p., [15 August 1858], Johannsen, ed., Letters of Douglas, 426-27; Douglas’s speech at Quincy, 13 October 1858, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 3:258.

argument, for Douglas in 1856 had made the same mistake in a speech on the senate floor, where Trumbull set him straight.³⁷ In October, Douglas repeated his explanation and scornfully declared, “it will not do for him [Lincoln] to charge forgery on Charles H. Lanphier or Thomas L. Harris. No man on earth who knows these men or Lincoln could believe Lincoln on oath against either of them. . . . Any man who attempts to make such charges as Mr. Lincoln has indulged in against them, only proclaims himself a slanderer.”³⁸ The Chicago Press and Tribune scoffed at Douglas’s “evasion of responsibility of his own act,” which it called “mean and pitiful to the last degree, second only to the pusillanimity of trying to fasten it upon an absent friend.”³⁹ Clearly Douglas had not made an honest error, his protestations to the contrary notwithstanding.

Lanphier, unfazed by Douglas’s attempt to blame him for the mix-up, insouciantly argued that it mattered little whether the convention at Aurora adopted a platform different from the Springfield platform, for they were all Republicans.⁴⁰ This assertion was disingenuous, for the moderate platforms adopted by the Republican state conventions at Bloomington in 1856 and Springfield in 1858 were far more representative of the state party’s views than the more radical ones adopted earlier by county conventions in northern Illinois.

Angry Republicans condemned Douglas’s forgery as the “shameful” and

³⁷ Galena correspondence, 25 August, New York Evening Post, 1 September 1858; Congressional Globe, 34th Congress, 1st session, appendix, 861 (9 July 1856).

³⁸ Douglas in the debate at Quincy, 13 October 1858, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 3:259.*change

³⁹ Chicago Press and Tribune, 27 August 1858.

⁴⁰ Lanphier to Douglas, Springfield, 26 August 1858, Douglas Papers, University of Chicago; Robert W. Johannsen, Stephen A. Douglas (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 674; Illinois State Register (Springfield), 26, 28 August and 15 October 1858.

“outrageous” act of a “little coward.”⁴¹ The Illinois State Journal pointed out that in 1854 some local Democratic conventions in northern Illinois had adopted resolutions endorsing the principle of “no more slave states” and calling for the abolition of both the domestic slave trade and slavery in the District of Columbia. It deemed the Little Giant’s misrepresentation of the Springfield platform “an act that, in the ordinary business transactions of life, would consign its authors and abettors to a position outside out the pale of honorable men, and place them in the society of thieves and blacklegs” and remarked that the “leader of the Mulatto Democracy comes out of his first encounter with the champion of Republican principles with the brand of the forger upon his forehead.”⁴² The Chicago Press and Tribune indignantly observed that “in making the assertion Mr. Douglas knew that he basely, maliciously and willfully LIED. He not only lied circumstantially and wickedly; but he spent the first part of his speech in elaborating the lie with which he set out, and the entire latter part, in giving the lie application and effect. . . . Men of Illinois, here is your Senator! The lion’s skin is stripped off his back, and he proves to be a petty prevaricator, who complains that his opponents are abusing him. Here is the man who is traversing the State from end to end in pursuit of votes, bellowing as he goes – ‘You lie! you lie!’” It “was purely and essentially a trick – mean and dastardly.”⁴³ The Chicago Journal expressed disbelief “that such wanton falsehoods will obtain for their author consideration from honorable men.”⁴⁴

⁴¹ Charles Henry Ray to E. B. Washburne, n.p., n.d., [filed at the end of 1858], Washburne Papers, Library of Congress.

⁴² Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 9 September, 25 and 26 August 1858.

⁴³ Chicago Press and Tribune, 23 and 27 August 1858.

⁴⁴ Chicago Journal, 23 August 1858.

Because the debates drew national attention, newspapers from other states joined the chorus of criticism. The Louisville Journal declared that “Douglas has done a deed of shame”; the “minuteness of detail” in his charge “utterly precluded any idea that he was simply and innocently mistaken.”⁴⁵ Chester P. Dewey of the New York Evening Post reported that “Douglas waded very deeply into the mire of mendacity” and concluded that his error “takes the very heart and core out of Douglas’s Ottawa speech. It strips it to the very bone, and leaves only a hollow and baseless frame behind. . . . The very audacity of this charge gave Douglas this seeming advantage; that it put Lincoln on the explanatory and defensive, in regard to a series of resolutions which, whether passed at a ‘one-horse meeting in Kane county’ or at Springfield, he could know nothing about it, as he had no hand in making them; and it is asking too much, to require a politician to have at his tongue’s end all the resolutions of four-year-old conventions.”⁴⁶

Douglas further bent the truth by implying that Lincoln was a drinker. In complimenting his challenger, the Little Giant remarked: “I have known him for nearly twenty-five years. We had many points of sympathy when I first got acquainted with him. We were both comparatively boys – both struggling with poverty in a strange land for our support. I was an humble school teacher in the town of Winchester, and he a flourishing grocery [i.e., saloon] keeper in the town of Salem. [Laughter.] . . . He could beat any of the boys wrestling – could outrun them at a foot race – beat them at pitching quoits or tossing a copper, and could win more liquor than all the boys put together.” (The Times’ account said “ruin more liquor.”)

Yet another misleading charge concerned Lincoln’s record in Congress, where,

⁴⁵ Louisville Journal, n.d., copied in the Chicago Press and Tribune, 28 August 1858.

⁴⁶ Chicago correspondence, 23 August, New York Evening Post, 27 August 1858.

Douglas said, he “distinguished himself by his opposition to the Mexican war, taking the side of the common enemy, in time of war, against his own country. [Cheers and groans. That’s true.]”

Lincoln was not entirely surprised by the Little Giant’s mendacity, for he had told a friend the previous month, “Douglas will tell a lie to ten thousand people one day, even though he knows he may have to deny it to five thousand the next.”⁴⁷ In October he stated flatly, “the truth is Douglas is a liar.”⁴⁸ Two years later, when asked by about the Little Giant’s truthfulness, he replied: “Douglas don’t tell as many lies as some men I have known. But I think he keers as little for the truth for truth’s sake, as any man I ever saw.”⁴⁹

When Lincoln’s turn to speak came, he responded to what he called “very gross and palpable” misrepresentations which he parried by treating them as amusing rather than provoking. As he spoke, he “used his arms with all the sweep of a windmill. He would bring his right arm over his head and then down. He followed the same move with his left. Then, he’d use both together.”⁵⁰ He thanked Douglas for calling him “a kind, amiable, and intelligent gentleman,” a compliment that truly gratified him. “I was a little ‘taken,’ for it came from a great man. I was not very much accustomed to flattery, and it came the sweeter to me. I was rather like the Hoosier, with the gingerbread, when he said he reckoned he loved it better than any other man, and got less of it. [Roars of laughter.]”

⁴⁷ Jesse W. Weik, The Real Lincoln: A Portrait, ed. Michael Burlingame (1922; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 231.

⁴⁸ Thomas J. Henderson, interview with Ida M. Tarbell, 15 July 1895, Tarbell Papers, Allegheny College.

⁴⁹ Walcott Hamlin to John Hay, Amherst, Massachusetts, 17 March 1887, Nicolay-Hay Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield. Lincoln said this while visiting his son Robert at Phillips Exeter Academy in Exeter, New Hampshire.

⁵⁰ William Cullen, undated statement, Ida M. Tarbell Papers, Allegheny College.

With more good humor Lincoln denied the charge that he and Trumbull had conspired to seize the Senate seats and to destroy the Whig and Democratic parties. Because he did not recognize Douglas's mistake in attributing to the Springfield Republicans of 1854 the radicalism of the Aurora Republicans, he failed to call attention to it. Instead, he found himself on the defensive, protesting that he had not helped frame the Springfield platform.

As for his alleged saloon-keeping, Lincoln said Douglas "is awfully at fault about his early friend Lincoln being a 'grocery-keeper.' [Laughter.] I don't know as it would be a great sin if I had been, but he is mistaken. Lincoln never kept a grocery anywhere in the world. [Laughter.] It is true that Lincoln did work the latter part of one winter in a small still house, up at the head of a hollow. [Roars of laughter.]" He also asserted that Douglas was "grossly and altogether mistaken" in conveying "the idea that I withheld supplies from the soldiers we were fighting in the Mexican war, or did anything else to hinder the soldiers."

Shrewdly, Lincoln did not respond to the charge that he "could win [or ruin] more liquor than all the boys put together." Horace White believed that Douglas knew full well that this allegation was false and yet made it "in order to get a denial from him that he was a drinking man, in which event he [Douglas] would have enlarged upon it & given particulars which he could easily have invented & would have assured L[incoln] that he did not wish to injure him, etc, etc, leading off the debate into a personal quagmire as was his habit, when he was getting the worst of it. But Lincoln was too smart. He never noticed that charge at all. So Douglas never repeated it."⁵¹

⁵¹ Horace White to Jesse W. Weik, New York, 14 December 1913, Weik, Real Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 382.

In defending his conspiracy charge against Douglas, Lincoln pointed out that five months earlier the Little Giant had arraigned the Buchanan administration for plotting with pro-Lecompton forces in Congress, with the Washington Union, and with the authors of the Lecompton Constitution to make slavery national. If Lincoln had a “corrupt heart” for daring to state that Douglas had conspired to promote that same end, did not the Little Giant have an equally “corrupt heart” for daring to say that Buchanan et al. had done the same thing?

Lincoln rejected the charge of abolitionism and racial egalitarianism, quoting from his 1854 Peoria address to illustrate the point. “This is the whole of it,” he said, “and anything that argues me into his idea of perfect social and political equality with the negro, is but a specious and fantastic arrangement of words, by which a man can prove a horse chestnut to be a chestnut horse. [Applause, laughter.]” He then elaborated: “I have no purpose directly or indirectly to interfere with the institution of slavery in the States where it exists. I believe I have no lawful right to do so, and I have no inclination to do so. I have no purpose to introduce political and social equality between the white and black races. There is a physical difference between the two, which in my judgment will probably forever forbid their living together upon the footing of perfect equality, and inasmuch as it becomes a necessity that there must be a difference, I, as well as Judge Douglas, am in favor of the race to which I belong, having the superior position. I have never said anything to the contrary, but I hold that notwithstanding all this, there is no reason in the world why the negro is not entitled to all the natural rights enumerated in the Declaration of Independence, the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. [Applause, loud cheers.] I hold that he is as much entitled to these as the white man. I

agree with Judge Douglas that he is not my equal in many respects – certainly not in color, perhaps not in moral or intellectual endowment. But in the right to eat the bread, without the leave of anybody else, which his own hand earns, he is my equal and the equal of Judge Douglas and the equal of every living man. [“Bully for you,” “all right,” great applause.]”

Eloquently Lincoln gave his reasons for fearing that the Little Giant was paving the way for a second Dred Scot decision making it illegal for any state to exclude slavery. “In this and like communities,” Lincoln argued, “public sentiment is everything. With public sentiment, nothing can fail; without it nothing can succeed. Consequently he who moulds public sentiment, goes deeper than he who enacts statutes or pronounces decisions. He makes statutes and decisions possible or impossible to be executed.” As a “man of vast influence” and a party leader, Douglas had the power to shape public opinion significantly. And the senator was doing so by stating repeatedly that Supreme Court decisions must be obeyed without cavil, even though he himself had undermined the independence of the Illinois Supreme Court in 1841 when he helped engineer the legislative coup by which the court was packed. (Douglas had then been named a justice of the court.) So the Little Giant, a man traditionally contemptuous of the sacredness of court decisions, was helping persuade the public to abide docilely by any ruling handed down the U. S. Supreme Court, presumably even if that body decided that no state could outlaw slavery.

In his peroration, Lincoln appealed to the authority of Henry Clay, “my beau ideal of a statesman, the man for whom I fought all my humble life.” That Kentuckian “once said of a class of men who would repress all tendencies to liberty and ultimate

emancipation, that they must, if they would do this, go back to the era of our Independence, and muzzle the cannon which thunders its annual joyous return; they must blow out the moral lights around us; they must penetrate the human soul, and eradicate there the love of liberty; and then and not till then could they perpetuate slavery in this country! [Loud cheers.]” Douglas, Lincoln charged, was blowing out those candles, muzzling those cannons, and eradicating that love of liberty by proclaiming his indifference to the morality of slavery, by asserting that the black man “has nothing in the Declaration of Independence,” and by stating he “cares not whether slavery is voted down or voted up.” Once he persuades the public to adopt his amoral attitude, “then it needs only the formality of the second Dred Scott decision which he endorses in advance, to make Slavery alike lawful in all the States – old as well as new, North as well as South.”⁵²

Douglas sprang up to deliver his half-hour rejoinder, his face wearing a “peculiar intellectual and demolishing look,” “livid with passion and excitement” and “distorted with rage;” he “rose to such a pitch of arrogance and audacity as is seldom witnessed.”⁵³ When he alleged that his challenger in 1854 had met with the Republicans in Springfield as they drafted their platform, Lincoln interrupted “excitedly and angrily” to deny it. Republican committeemen silenced him, saying: “What are you making such a fuss for? Douglas didn’t interrupt you, and can’t you see that the people don’t like it?” The Little Giant went on at length, asking Lincoln if he agreed with the Springfield (actually Aurora) platform of 1854 and denouncing his “miserable quibbles.” He insisted that

⁵² Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 3:12-30.

⁵³ Philadelphia Press, 26 August 1858; Chicago Press and Tribune, 23 August 1858; Chicago correspondence, 23 August, New York Evening Post, 27 August 1858.

Lincoln was responsible for that platform, for he “was the leader of that party, and on the very day that he made his speech there in reply to me, preaching up the same doctrine of the Declaration of Independence that niggers were equal to white men – that very day this Republican Convention met there. [“Three cheer for Douglas.”]” Passionately the Little Giant rejected the conspiracy charge, calling it “an infamous lie.” (Lincoln’s face registered indignation at this point.)⁵⁴ The senator further protested that “Mr. Lincoln has not character enough for integrity and truth, merely on his own ipse dixit to arraign President Buchanan and President Pierce, and the Judges of the Supreme Court, any one of whom would not be complimented if put on a level with Mr. Lincoln. [“Hit him again,” three cheers, &c.]”

At the close of the debate, “the Republican Marshal called half a dozen men, who, lifting Lincoln in their arms, carried him along. By some mismanagement the men selected for this office happened to be very short in stature, and the consequence was, that while Lincoln’s head and shoulders towered above theirs, his feet dragged on the ground. Such an exhibition as the ‘toting’ of Lincoln from the square to his lodgings was never seen at Ottawa before.”⁵⁵ Lincoln protested in vain, saying “Don’t boys! Let me down!” but they did not until they deposited him at Mayor Grover’s house. There “he looked pleased” and, turning to one of the gang that had transported him, “shook his

⁵⁴ Whitney, Life on the Circuit, ed. Angle, 408.

⁵⁵ Ottawa correspondence, n.d., Chicago Times, n.d., copied in the Jacksonville Sentinel, 27 August 1858. See also Chicago correspondence, 23 August, New York Evening Post, 27 August 1858; Philadelphia Press, 26 August 1858; Illinois State Register (Springfield), 24 August 1858. According to Henry Villard, a German-born reporter covering the debates, it “was really a ludicrous sight to see the grotesque figure holding frantically on to the heads of his supporters, with his legs dangling from their shoulders, and his pantaloons pulled up so as to expose his underwear almost to his knees.” Henry Villard, Memoirs of Henry Villard, Journalist and Financier: 1838-1900 (2 vols.; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1904), 1:93.

finger and said good naturedly ‘never mind, never mind! I’ve get even with you, you rascal!’”⁵⁶

The following day Lincoln described the debate to a friend: “the fur flew some, and I am glad to know I am yet alive. There was a vast concourse of people – more than could [get] near enough to hear.”⁵⁷ Years later, he told a friend that of all his speeches during the 1858 campaign, “I was better pleased with myself at Ottawa than at any other place.”⁵⁸

Democrats lauded Douglas for exposing Lincoln’s “nigger-loving propensities” and for showing that he himself was no “nigger worshipper.”⁵⁹ The Milwaukee News declared that the Little Giant had put his opponent “on the defensive and kept him there.”⁶⁰ The Chicago Times reported that Douglas’s “excoriation of Lincoln was so severe, that the Republicans hung their heads in shame,” while the Democrats “were loud in their vociferation.”⁶¹

Douglas himself “was highly pleased with the result,” believing that he now had Lincoln where he wanted him, for he had “dodged on the platform.” Even if Lincoln in the next debate were to answer interrogatories which the Little Giant had posed, “it

⁵⁶ Richard Hughes, undated statement, Ida M. Tarbell Papers, Allegheny College.

⁵⁷ Lincoln to Joseph O. Cunningham, Ottawa, 22 August 1858, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 3:37.

⁵⁸ Thomas J. Pickett, “Reminiscences of Lincoln,” Lincoln, Nebraska, Daily State Journal, 12 April 1881.

⁵⁹ Freeport correspondence, 27 August, Missouri Republican (St. Louis), 31 August 1858; Boston Courier, 23 and 24 August 1858, in William Francis Hanna, “Abraham Lincoln and the New England Press, 1858-1860” (Ph.D. dissertation, Boston College, 1980), 24.

⁶⁰ Milwaukee News, n.d., copied in the Chicago Weekly Times, 2 September 1858.

⁶¹ Chicago Times, 22 August 1858, in Sparks, ed., The Lincoln-Douglas Debates, 142.

would be too late.”⁶² An astute Douglas supporter thought Lincoln seemed to repudiate his “House Divided” and Chicago speeches and speculated on the reason why: “Lincoln has killed himself by his ultra Abolition-equality doctrine. His declaration that the negro is the equal of the white man, and that our laws should be uniform throughout the United States, has aroused the people and put them to thinking. They now see that such monstrous doctrines are repugnant to the genius and spirit of our institutions.” So at Ottawa Lincoln was “endeavoring to shape a new course, by denying that the negro is the equal of the white man.”⁶³ Though oversimplified, that conclusion is not far from the truth; Lincoln’s comments in Ottawa about black equality sounded far different from his Chicago speech, in which he called for an end to “all this quibbling about this man and the other man, this race and that race and the other race being inferior.” It is noteworthy that this disavowal of any intention to promote racial equality was delivered in northern Illinois, where abolitionist sentiment was far stronger than it was in the more Negrophobic central and southern parts of the state.

Not all Democrats were pleased, however. An “eager Douglass man” recalled that the Little Giant “had not made quite so convincing a speech as was expected. I think his more ardent followers among us felt that he had not quite overwhelmed us with the candor and justice of his views.” He thought the challenger had outstripped the favorite: “When Lincoln got up and said in his slow, frank style that when a fellow heard himself misrepresented a little, he felt ugly, but when he was misrepresented a good deal, it seemed funny, it was plain to see he had caught the crowd considerably better than did

⁶² Gus Herrington, a close friend of Douglas, told this to Henry C. Whitney. Whitney to Lincoln, Chicago, 26 August 1858, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

⁶³ Philadelphia Press, 26 August 1858.

Douglass in his opening.” Though Lincoln's “gestures were awfully awkward,” they appeared “weighty.” There was an obvious sincerity “that carried you with him. You could not help it, for he made you feel that he was so honest. When he got through, it was pretty clear that, in the mind of the crowd, he was ahead.”⁶⁴ The Democratic Providence Post in Rhode Island conceded that Douglas's speech “contains a little more of gall and wormwood . . . than we can heartily endorse.”⁶⁵

Illinois Republicans rejoiced over Lincoln's performance.⁶⁶ All party members present at the debate “felt entirely satisfied, and the general opinion is that in the Third Congressional District, at least, Douglas is ‘a dead cock in the pit.’”⁶⁷ Republican leaders unable to attend were “delighted” and “well satisfied” with the challenger's “complete triumph over the little pettifogger.”⁶⁸ L. D. Whiting of Bureau County told Lincoln that “in common with every Republican I have heard express himself, I think you in most respects proved yourself his [Douglas's] superior.”⁶⁹ According to the Ottawa Republican, “Candid, intelligent men of all parties are free to say that Lincoln won the field – Douglas lost friends and lost votes by the exhibition he made of himself.”⁷⁰ Herndon judged that “Lincoln whipped Douglas badly – very badly” and opined that

⁶⁴ Recollections of George Beatty, undated manuscript, Ida M. Tarbell Papers, Allegheny College.

⁶⁵ Providence Post, 25 August 1858, in Hanna, “Abraham Lincoln and the New England Press,” 25.

⁶⁶ William H. Herndon to Theodore Parker, Springfield, 31 August 1858, Herndon-Parker Papers, University of Iowa.

⁶⁷ Chicago Journal, 23 August 1858

⁶⁸ Richard Yates to Lincoln, n.p., [26? August 1858]; Lyman Trumbull to Lincoln, Alton, 24 August 1858; David Davis to Lincoln, Bloomington, 25 August 1858, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

⁶⁹ L. D. Whiting to Lincoln, Tiskilwa, 23 August 1858, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

⁷⁰ Ottawa Republican, 28 August 1858.

“Douglas’ forgery hurts him. . . . This fraud – this base forgery would kill ‘Hell.’”⁷¹

Republicans outside Illinois also rejoiced. Schuyler Colfax of Indiana congratulated Lincoln for having “so signally triumphed.”⁷² From Ohio, Samuel Galloway wrote to John Locke Scripps, editor of the Chicago Press and Tribune, asking “who is this new man; he has completely worsted the little giant. You have a David greater than the Democratic Goliath or any other I ever saw.”⁷³ The correspondent of the New York Evening Post informed his readers that Lincoln “is altogether a more fluent speaker than Douglas, and in all the arts of debate fully his equal. The Republicans of Illinois have chosen a champion worthy of their heartiest support, and fully equipped for the conflict with the great ‘squatter Sovereign.’”⁷⁴ The New York Tribune said: “Of the two, Lincoln and Douglas, all partiality being left out of the question, we think Mr. Lincoln has decidedly the advantage. Not only are his doctrines truer and better than those of his antagonist, but he states them with more propriety, and with an infinitely better temper.”⁷⁵

Abolitionists were not entirely happy with Lincoln. Theodore Parker objected to his evasiveness, for he “did not meet the issue. He made a technical evasion; ‘he had nothing to do with the Resolutions [adopted at Aurora] in question.’ Suppose he had not, admit they were forged; still they were the vital questions, pertinent to the issue, &

⁷¹ Herndon to Richard Yates, Springfield, 26 August 1858, Richard Yates and Catharine Yates Pickering, Richard Yates: Civil War Governor, ed. John H. Krenkel (Danville, Illinois: Interstate Printers, 1966), 132-33.

⁷² Schuyler Colfax to Lincoln, Oxford, Indiana, 25 August 1858, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

⁷³ R. R. Hitt to Horace White, Washington, 10 December 1892, White Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield. Hitt added that Scripps, Horace White, and other Illinois Republican leaders were “delighted . . . at the recognition of the new man’s ability.”

⁷⁴ Chicago correspondence, 23 August, New York Evening Post, 27 August 1858.

⁷⁵ New York Tribune, 27 August, quoted in the Galena Weekly Northwest Gazette, 7 September 1858.

L[incoln] dodged them. That is not the way to fight the battle of Freedom.”⁷⁶

Some Republicans thought Lincoln “did not press home upon him [Douglas] the points which he should have done.”⁷⁷ Herndon explained that Lincoln “is too much of a Kentucky gentleman to debate with Douglas; i e, he will not condescend to lie: he will not bend to expediency: he will not hug shams, and so he labors under a disadvantage in this State.”⁷⁸ Charles H. Ray implored a friend, “When you see Abe at Freeport, for God’s sake tell him to ‘Charge Chester! Charge!’ Do not let him keep on the defensive. Let him be fortified with his proofs and commence thus: ‘I charge so and so, and prove it thus.’ ‘I charge so-and-so, and prove it thus!’ and so on until the end of his hour, charging in every paragraph. Let him close the hour with a charge, and in his half hour following, let him pay no attention to Douglas’ charges, but lump all his own together and fling them at his head, and end up by shrieking a loud note for Freedom! We must not be parrying all the while. We want the deadliest thrusts. Let us see blood flow every time he closes a sentence.”⁷⁹ Lincoln received similar advice from others, including a Republican in Jacksonville who urged him to attack Douglas’s lies. “He has shown you no mercy and treated you with no honor or decency. All delicacy and tenderness towards him who has called you a liar and has basely slandered all your party, is unjust to your friends and to yourself. Hold him to a severe reckoning. . . . Mercy to Douglass is treachery to the cause

⁷⁶ Theodore Parker to William H. Herndon, Boston, 9 September 1858, Herndon-Parker Papers, University of Iowa.

⁷⁷ Springfield, Massachusetts, Republican, 27 August 1858, in Hanna, “Lincoln and the New England Press,” 24; James W. Grimes to William H. Herndon, Burlington, Iowa, 28 October 1866, Douglas L. Wilson and Rodney O. Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants: Letters, Interviews, Letters, and Statements about Abraham Lincoln (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 378.

⁷⁸ Herndon to Theodore Parker, Springfield, 23 August 1858, Herndon-Parker Papers, University of Iowa.

⁷⁹ Ray to Washburne, n.p., n.d., [filed at the end of 1858], Washburne Papers, Library of Congress.

of Right and Humanity.”⁸⁰ Henry C. Whitney informed Lincoln that his friends “think that you ought not to treat him [Douglas] tenderly: – he is going to try to intimidate you: – you have got to treat him severely I don’t of course mean that you ought to call him a liar or anything of that sort but that you ought to let him know that you are ‘terribly in earnest.’”⁸¹

One reporter believed Lincoln had made it clear that he was in earnest. Chester P. Dewey of the New York Evening Post, in describing the Ottawa debate, said the Republican champion might be ugly in repose, but “stir him up, and the fire of his genius plays on every feature. His eye glows and sparkles, every lineament, now so ill formed, grows brilliant and expressive, and you have before you a man of rare power and of strong magnetic influence. He takes the people every time, and there is no getting away from his sturdy good sense, his unaffected sincerity, and the unceasing play of his good humor, which accompanies his close logic and smoothes the way to conviction.”⁸²

Dewey’s Republican sympathies may have colored his assessment, but a similar judgment was rendered by a pro-Douglas reporter and stump speaker, the German-born Henry Villard, who recalled that the Little Giant had been more polished, for he “commanded a strong, sonorous voice, a rapid, vigorous utterance, a telling play of countenance, impressive gestures, and all the other arts of the practiced speaker.” Lincoln, on the other hand, made a poor first impression, with his “lean, lank, indescribably gawky figure” and his “odd-featured, wrinkled, inexpressive, and

⁸⁰ Norman B. Judd to Lincoln, [Chicago, late August 1858]; B. Lewis to Lincoln, Jacksonville, 25 August 1858, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

⁸¹ Henry C. Whitney to Lincoln, Chicago, 26 August 1858, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

⁸² Chicago correspondence, 23 August, New York Evening Post, 27 August 1858.

altogether uncomely face.” He “used singularly awkward, almost absurd, up-and-down and sidewise movements of his body to give emphasis to his arguments.” Yet, Villard recollected, “the unprejudiced mind felt at once that, while there was on the one side a skilful dialectician and debater arguing a wrong and weak cause, there was on the other a thoroughly earnest and truthful man, inspired by sound convictions in consonance with the true spirit of American institutions.” Douglas failed to appeal “to the higher instincts of human nature,” whereas Lincoln “always touched sympathetic chords and his “speech excited and sustained the enthusiasm of the audience to the end.”⁸³

Another German-American observer of the debates, Gustave Koerner, recollected Lincoln “impressed his audiences by his almost too extreme fairness, his always pure and elevated language, and his appeals to their higher nature,” whereas the “impetuous, denunciatory” Douglas “frequently lost his temper” but nevertheless “magnetized the big crowd by his audacity and supreme self-confidence.” Koerner deplored the way that he “roused the existing strong prejudices against the negro race to the highest pitch, and not unfrequently resorted to demagogism unworthy of his own great reputation as a

⁸³ Villard, Memoirs, 1:92-93. In his reminiscences, Villard failed to reveal that he had campaigned for Douglas. In August, he gave a speech at Joliet in favor of the Little Giant during which “he surveyed the whole ground occupied by the democratic party at the present time. He took special pains to explain the true position in reference to the slavery question, by a full illustration of the doctrine of Popular Sovereignty. He also took occasion to reduce the imaginary terrors of the Dred Scott decision, and to show its merits in the true light. He then proceeded to pay a glowing tribute to the talents and achievements of Senator Douglas; to exhort his hearers to exert every nerve to bring about the victory of Democratic principles, the election of democratic candidates, and the return of the great anti-Lecompton champion of the United States Senate, and concluded by denouncing in the strongest terms, the treason and defection of the so called Nationals. The speaker was rapturously cheered throughout, and the intensity of enthusiasm proved beyond contradiction, that the sentiments of the audience were in strict harmony with the spirits of his remarks. Some of the Republicans attempted to discountenance the speaker by a cross examination, but he promptly responded to their calls for information and repelled the insinuations implied in some of their interrogatories in so effective a manner, that their principal spokesman thought it best to leave the hall in disgust. His retirement took place under a perfect storm of hisses.” Joliet correspondence, 17 August, Chicago Times, n.d., copied in the Jacksonville Sentinel, 27 August 1858.

statesman.”⁸⁴

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Casting further doubt on Douglas’s claim to statesmanship was the conduct of his organ, the Chicago Times, which ran a hopelessly “emasculated and absurd” version of Lincoln’s remarks at Ottawa, making them resemble “the weak effusions of an immature school-boy, or the incoherent utterances of an obscured mind.”⁸⁵ Hundreds of discrepancies exist between its version of Lincoln’s words and the one published in the Press and Tribune. The Times’ account is briefer; occasionally it amounts to gibberish.⁸⁶ The Press and Tribune declared that a “more cowardly and knavish trick was never undertaken by a desperate politician,” a trick which “betokens a meanness so despicable, a malignity so purely fiendish, and a nature so lost to honor that we know not where to look for a parallel.”⁸⁷ Chester P. Dewey called it “altogether a shameful instance of the

⁸⁴ Koerner, Memoirs, 2:63.

⁸⁵ Chicago Press and Tribune, 26 August 1858; Chicago correspondence, 24 August, New York Evening Post, 28 August 1858. See Burlingame, “The Accuracy of Newspaper Accounts of the 1858 Lincoln-Douglas Debates.”

⁸⁶ Toward the end of his speech, Lincoln said (according to the Times): “But when I speak of all these things, I cannot make the judge fall loose from his adherence to this Dred Scott decision; if I may say so, and I mean by it no disrespect, he is like some creature that will hang on which he has got his hold to a thing; you may cut his arms and limbs off, and still he is hanging on. He is bespattered from the beginning of his life with war upon the courts, and at last he hangs with desperation to the Dred Scott decision.” The Press and Tribune reported this passage differently: “But I cannot shake Judge Douglas’s teeth loose from the Dred Scott decision. Like some obstinate animal (I mean no disrespect) that will hang on when he has once got this teeth fixed, you may cut off a leg or you may tear away an arm, still he will not relax his hold. And so I may point out to the Judge, and say, that he is bespattered all over, from the beginning of his political life to the present time, with attacks upon judicial decisions; I may cut off limb after limb of his public record, and strive to wrench him from a single dictum of the court, – yet I cannot divert him from it. He hangs, to the last, to the Dred Scott decision.” Earlier in his speech Lincoln said, in the Times’ version: “A man cannot prove a negative at all but he has the right to ask the man who asserts a state of case to prove it.” The Press and Tribune reported this sentence thus: “A man cannot prove a negative; but he has a right to claim that when a man makes an affirmative charge, he must offer some proof to show the truth of what he says.” The Times substituted “perverting the human soul” for “penetrating the human soul,” and “a conspiracy to make the Constitution national” for “a conspiracy to make the institution of slavery national.”

⁸⁷ Chicago Press and Tribune, 24 and 28 August 1858.

dishonorable warfare practiced by the Douglasites.”⁸⁸

This pattern persisted throughout the debates, leading other papers to echo that charge. The Democrat of Galesburg, site of the fifth debate, complained that the Times’ account of Lincoln’s speech there contained “scarcely a correctly reported paragraph in the whole speech! Many sentences are dropped out which were absolutely necessary for the sense; many are transposed so as to read wrong end first; many are made to read exactly the opposite of the orator’s intentions.” The paper counted over 180 errors in the Times’ version.⁸⁹ Speaking of Times’s account of that debate, the Press and Tribune complained: “Not a paragraph has been fairly reported, from the commencement to the conclusion of his speech. Some of his finest passages are disemboweled, and chattering nonsense substituted in their stead. Wherever Lincoln made a ‘hit,’ the sentence containing it is blurred, and the point carefully eviscerated.” After the following debate at Quincy, the Press and Tribune again deplored the Times’s account of Lincoln’s speech, which was “so shockingly mutilated that it could hardly be recognized by those who heard it.” It lodged a similar complaint about the Times’ account of the final debate at Alton, which was so “horribly garbled” that it made Lincoln sound “like a half-witted booby.”⁹⁰

The shorthand reporter for the Times deliberately mangled Lincoln’s remarks. Robert R. Hitt gave an interview many years later to a journalist who wrote that the “misrepresentation of Lincoln in the Times was in accordance with the purpose to make him appear ignorant and uncouth in language beside Douglas. Among the reporters it was

⁸⁸ Chicago correspondence, 24 August, New York Evening Post, 28 August 1858

⁸⁹ Galesburg Democrat, 13 October 1858, in Sparks, ed., The Lincoln-Douglas Debates, 83-84.

⁹⁰ Chicago Press and Tribune, 11, 16, 18, 19 October 1858.

well understood that the report of Lincoln for the Times was to be done in a slovenly manner, to carry out the Democratic estimate of Lincoln.” James B. Sheridan, a shorthand expert for the Philadelphia Press, temporarily on assignment to the Chicago Times, “was above lending himself to such a dishonorable practice” and took down only Douglas’s speeches. Sheridan “frequently talked privately about this treatment of Lincoln, but did not go further than to express his confidential opinion of it.”⁹¹

Because Sheridan would not misrepresent Lincoln’s words, the Times employed another shorthand reporter, Henry Binmore, whose character was suspect.⁹² For Binmore the Press and Tribune expressed contempt: “If mutilating public discourses were a criminal offense, the scamp whom Douglas hires to report Lincoln’s speeches would be a ripe subject for the Penitentiary.” Those speeches “are shamefully and outrageously garbled.”⁹³ According to that paper, Binmore “was dismissed from the employ of the St. Louis Republican for lying. He has no political principles, and is simply a mercenary alien, detailed by Douglas to write the lying accounts of Lincoln’s meetings for the Times, caricaturing and mangling his speeches.”⁹⁴ Hitt, who in July had teamed up with Binmore to report the Chicago speeches of Lincoln and Douglas, found him unimpressive

⁹¹ Stevens, A Reporter’s Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 77. The editor of the Press called Sheridan “one of the best shorthand writers in the country” and “a very estimable young man.” John W. Forney to Douglas, n.p., 8 February 1858, Douglas Papers, University of Chicago. Sheridan became close to Douglas and served as his personal secretary. Sheridan to Douglas, Philadelphia, 23 April 1859, *ibid.*; Johannsen, Douglas, 659.

⁹² A brief sketch of the English-born Binmore (1833-1907) can be found in Sparks, ed., The Lincoln-Douglas Debates, 80. See also an interview with Binmore in old age, unidentified clipping from a Kansas City newspaper, Reference Files of the Abraham Lincoln Association, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

⁹³ Chicago Press and Tribune, 11 October 1858.

⁹⁴ Chicago Press and Tribune, 20 September 1858. It was rumored that Douglas had purchased an interest in the Missouri Republican and was permitted to use its shorthand reporter, Binmore, as part of the deal. Springfield correspondence, 12 August 1858, Chicago Herald, n.d., copied in the New York Times, 23 August 1858.

in his “old battered wool hat” and “winter clothing though the weather was hot.” Binmore “was not too nice in his linen and generally looked seedy.” Hitt called him “a complete little fop and fool” with “no common sense,” a man “hard to get along with” and “always needy.” On one occasion, Binmore “asked for the loan of a quarter,” explaining that “he had nothing but a hundred-dollar check with him.” Along with other matters, this made Hitt doubt his veracity; he confided to his diary, “I have . . . seldom known Binmore to tell the truth about his family.” In addition, Hitt complained about his “fondness for telling stories about his connections, the amounts of money he has made and the familiarity of his acquaintance with every great man ever named in his presence.” With irritation, Hitt complained that “No land can be mentioned in his presence but he has been there and is perfectly familiar with the greatest men in the country.” All this caused Hitt “to place but little confidence in many of his assertions.”⁹⁵

Five years later another journalist, Sylvanus Cadwallader, discovered that while serving on the staff of General Stephen Hurlbut, Binmore had introduced an “abandoned woman” as his wife, had refused to pay his laundry bills in Memphis, and had behaved disreputably in Cairo. Binmore’s service record shows that in 1863 he was dismissed from the Union army for conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman after being arrested for drunkenness and disorderly conduct. He had been driving General Hurlbut’s hack after the midnight curfew through the streets of Memphis with a woman who was not his wife. In an appeal for mercy, Binmore explained that he had married at the age of eighteen against his parents’ wishes, settled in New York, found no work, was evicted by a hard-hearted landlord, sired children, abandoned them and their mother, established a

⁹⁵ Hitt, Journal, entry for 28 July 1858, Hitt Papers, Library of Congress.

liaison with another woman, then led a vagabond existence, flitting from Utah to Nicaragua, “everywhere where excitement was to be found.” After his expulsion from the service, Binmore returned to the Chicago Times, where, according to Cadwallader, he “was heartily despised by all who knew him.”⁹⁶

It seems entirely plausible that a man like Binmore would deliberately garble Lincoln’s words if told to do so. A quip by Binmore’s colleague Sheridan confirms that hypothesis. Because Douglas frequently repeated himself, Hitt would cut and paste passages from the Little Giant’s earlier speeches rather than take down his words in shorthand. On observing this, Sheridan remarked: “Hitt mutilates Douglas for the Press and Tribune, while [Binmore] mutilates Lincoln for the Times.”⁹⁷ In light of this evidence about Binmore, the Times’ insistence that “the high characters of our reporters of these debates” belied the charges of deliberate mutilation rings hollow.⁹⁸ Sheridan, to be sure, fit the Times’ description, but Binmore emphatically did not. Lincoln doubtless had him in mind when referring to the Times’ “villainous reporters.”⁹⁹

Just who instructed Binmore to perform that mutilation is unclear. The Press and Tribune alleged that Douglas himself, with the assistance of two lawyers and editor Sheahan, had dictated “interlineations, [and] mutilations, destroying the sense and turning awry the grammar of his adversary!” Binmore had “undoubtedly defaced and garbled”

⁹⁶ Benjamin P. Thomas, ed., Three Years with Grant: As Recalled by War Correspondent Sylvanus Cadwallader (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955), 128-31; Special Orders 526, Washington, 27 November 1863; Binmore to Hurlbut, Memphis, n.d. [ca. 14 July 1863], Record Group 94, Entry 158, Office of the Adjutant General, Staff Papers, box 5, file for Henry Binmore, National Archives, Washington.

⁹⁷ Stevens, A Reporter’s Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 78.

⁹⁸ Chicago Daily Times, 12, 16 October 1858.

⁹⁹ Lincoln to Martin P. Sweet, Centralia, 16 September 1858, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 3:144.

Lincoln's words at the "express orders" of Douglas. No hard evidence corroborates this charge, though the Press and Tribune alleged that Binmore had "offered to do for us, for pay, in behalf of Lincoln, what he is now doing for Douglas," namely, "vilify and caricature him, as he is now vilifying and caricaturing his opponent."¹⁰⁰ The Little Giant's lies about Lincoln's record, his claim that Lincoln had helped write the 1854 "Springfield" Republican platform, and his general unscrupulousness make it seem likely that either directly or indirectly Douglas commanded Binmore to misrepresent Lincoln.

Badly as the Times garbled Lincoln's words, a pamphlet version of the debate at Charleston mangled them even worse. Published anonymously, it presented Douglas's speech in larger type than his opponent's. This was probably issued by the Douglas campaign and further strengthens the suspicion that the Little Giant was behind the misrepresentation of Lincoln's remarks.¹⁰¹ "Abraham Lincoln and His Doctrines," a similar pamphlet of "garbled and mutilated" excerpts from Lincoln's speeches, was issued without an imprint.¹⁰²

The Times denied the charge and alleged in return that "the Republicans have a candidate for the Senate of whose bad rhetoric and horrible jargon they are ashamed," and that "they called a council of 'literary' men to discuss, re-construct and re-write" Lincoln's words before allowing them to be published, for "they dare not allow Lincoln to go into print in his own dress." Those who heard Lincoln's speeches, said the Times,

¹⁰⁰ Chicago Press and Tribune, 24, 26 August, 11, 13, 16, 18 October 1858.

¹⁰¹ Chicago Press and Tribune, 13 October 1858; Galesburg Democrat, 13 October 1858, Sparks, ed., The Lincoln-Douglas Debates, 591.

¹⁰² Chicago Press and Tribune, 14 October 1858.

“must know that he cannot speak five grammatical sentences in succession.”¹⁰³ With justice the Press and Tribune objected that everyone “who has ever heard Abraham Lincoln address the people from the stump, a jury in the box, or judges in banc, knows that in these reports [by the Times] he is grossly caricatured; knows that he is forcible, agreeable and correct in his delivery, and that he never did and never can talk the nonsense which the Times attributes to him.”¹⁰⁴

In fact, the Press and Tribune editors may have lightly retouched the text of Lincoln’s speeches, which had been transcribed from Hitt’s notes by an assistant named Larminie. Horace White noted that some rewriting was done “where confusion on the platform, or the blowing of the wind, had caused some slight hiatus or evident mistake in catching the speaker’s words.” White explained that the “debates were all held in the open air, on rude platforms hastily put together, shaky, and overcrowded. The reporters’ tables were liable to be jostled and their manuscript agitated by the wind. Some gaps were bound to occur in the reporters’ notes.” White himself italicized passages where Lincoln’s “manner of delivery had been especially emphatic.”¹⁰⁵ Accommodations for reporters were inadequate. The Chicago Press and Tribune protested that “two chairs and a wash-stand eighteen inches square” were not “sufficient furniture for half a dozen men to work on.” The newspaper suggested that “the chairs and tables be placed where they will not be jarred or overthrown by the people on the platform, and where there will be no room for persons to crowd between the reporters and the speakers – and that somebody with authority and physical strength enough to secure obedience, be appointed to keep

¹⁰³ Chicago Weekly Times, 26 August, 2 September 1858.

¹⁰⁴ Chicago Press and Tribune, 16 October 1858.

¹⁰⁵ White in Sparks, ed., The Lincoln-Douglas Debates, 77.

loafers out of the reporting corner.”¹⁰⁶

Another problem in reproducing Lincoln’s words was his habit of qualifying his statements. His sentences, according to Hitt, “were not finished and harmonious like those of Douglas but broken with endless explanation and qualifications and parentheses, which made it difficult to write or read it. Often he repeated what he had to say two or three times and each time qualified in some new way. His mind seems to be one of excessive caution and no statement that he makes will he suffer to go forth without a qualification that will prevent all misunderstanding, but which at the same time deprived the statement of its vigorous and independent tone.”¹⁰⁷ Lincoln would, Hitt remembered, “dwell upon and emphasize several important words, perhaps in the middle of a sentence, and the rest of it would be spoken with great rapidity, and quickly followed by another sentence in the same manner, convincing to his hearers, but annoying and fatiguing to the reporters.”¹⁰⁸ Horace White concurred, noting that Lincoln’s “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.”¹⁰⁹ A Democratic observer of the Ottawa debate noted the same pattern. Lincoln’s speech there “was made up with such expressions as ‘I think it is so,’ ‘I may be mistaken,’ ‘I guess it was done,’ &c., &c. There

¹⁰⁶ Chicago Press and Tribune, 5 October 1858.

¹⁰⁷ Hitt, journal entry for 23 July 1858, Hitt Papers, Library of Congress.

¹⁰⁸ Charles S. West, “The Lincoln-Douglas Debates,” part 1, Phonographic Magazine (Cincinnati), 15 November 1896, 346.

¹⁰⁹ White, “Lincoln and Douglas Debates,” 20.

were no straightforward assertions.”¹¹⁰

Even if Binmore had tried to render Lincoln’s speeches accurately, he could not have done so, for he was unable to keep pace with Lincoln when the candidate spoke rapidly. On July 10, both Hitt and Binmore recorded Lincoln’s speech at Chicago. Hitt noted in his journal that “so fast did his words follow each other that it was with the utmost difficulty that I could follow him and I was aware all the time that I was not writing my notes in such a neat and legible style.” The following day, as he helped Binmore transcribe his shorthand notes, Hitt discovered that “there was much matter that Binmore had omitted in his report. These passages were just where I remember Lincoln spoke the fastest.”¹¹¹ In old age, Binmore told an interviewer, “I never became a record-breaker. Two hundred words a minute for a short time was the best I could do.”¹¹² Some of Douglas’s supporters in Chicago acknowledged that the Times presented Lincoln’s words inaccurately but ascribed “the mutilation entirely to the incompetency of the reporter.” To the Chicago Press and Tribune, it seemed that “if this charge of incompetency were true, it is quite as dishonorable for Douglas to keep the man employed for the specific purpose of reporting his opponent, as it would be to compel a competent reporter to mutilate his speeches.”¹¹³ Whatever cosmetic surgery the editors at the Press and Tribune may have performed on Lincoln’s text, it surely did far less

¹¹⁰ Philadelphia Press, 26 August 1858. This correspondent was Henry Villard. Villard, Memoirs, 1:91n.

¹¹¹ Hitt’s journal, entry for 23 July 1858, Hitt Papers, Library of Congress.

¹¹² Unidentified clipping from a Kansas City newspaper, reference files of the Abraham Lincoln Association, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield. Binmore may have taken down Douglas’s speech in Chicago following the election. It was so full of errors that the Chicago Times had to run a revised version. Chicago Daily Times, 19 November 1858. After the campaign of 1858, Binmore became one of Douglas’s private secretaries. Johannsen, Douglas, 659.

¹¹³ Chicago Press and Tribune, 13 October 1858.

violence than did the carelessness, incapacity, and partisan malice of Henry Binmore and the Times' editors.¹¹⁴

Lincoln may not have been surprised by the Times' distortions. On August 12, he declared that he “would cheerfully allow any gentleman to report his speeches, but at the same time he would not be responsible for a perverted, distorted or patched up report which might appear in the Douglas prints concerning his Beardstown speech.”¹¹⁵

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After the Ottawa debate, Douglas, feeling beleaguered, wired Usher F. Linder: “For God’s sake, Linder, come up into the Northern part of the State and help me. Every dog in the State is let loose after me – from the bull-dog Trumbull to the smallest canine quadruped that has a kennel in Illinois.”¹¹⁶ (When this telegram appeared in newspapers, Linder acquired the sobriquet “For God’s Sake Linder.”)¹¹⁷ Douglas received help from others, including prominent Democrats like Vice-President John C. Breckinridge and Virginia Governor Henry A. Wise, who wrote public letters urging his reelection, and former Senator James C. Jones of Tennessee, who stumped Illinois for the Little Giant.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ See Burlingame, “The Accuracy of Newspaper Accounts of the 1858 Lincoln-Douglas Debates.”

¹¹⁵ Beardstown correspondence, 11 August, Chicago Press and Tribune, 16 August 1858.

¹¹⁶ Douglas to Linder, [August 1858], telegram, in Johannsen, ed., Letters of Douglas, 427. Linder reportedly said “that he will be handsomely remunerated or paid for his services.” A. Compton to Lincoln, Charleston, 7 September 1858, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

¹¹⁷ Usher F. Linder, Reminiscences of the Early Bench and Bar of Illinois (Chicago: Chicago Legal News, 1879), 79.

¹¹⁸ John C. Breckinridge to John Moore, Versailles, Kentucky, 4 October 1858, Missouri Republican (St. Louis), 24 October 1858; Henry A. Wise to John Moore, Richmond, 13 October 1858, Missouri Republican (St. Louis), 23 October 1858; speech of James C. Jones at Springfield, 15 September, Chicago Weekly Times, 23 September 1858.

These efforts severely undermined the pro-Buchanan candidates.¹¹⁹ Lincoln was assisted by Lyman Trumbull, Richard J. Oglesby, Owen Lovejoy, William H. Herndon, and John M. Palmer, all of whom campaigned actively. (“I am out all the time at the school-houses & village churches where good can be done and where the ‘big bugs’ do not go,” Herndon reported in October.)¹²⁰ In addition, the twenty-seven-year-old black abolitionist H. Ford Douglas of Chicago made speeches on behalf of Lincoln, prompting the Illinois State Register to observe: “he spoke in one of the Ottawa churches, much to the edification and delight of his abolition republican brethren, who seem in duty bound . . . to swallow every greasy nigger that comes along. They certainly need all the assistance, be it white or black, to bolster up the rapidly declining prospects of Abraham – hence it is perfectly right that he should take a nigger to his bosom.”¹²¹ The Ottawa Little Giant remarked that “We heard a prominent Republican tell another the other day that Mr. Schlosser should have been kicked out of the court house for presuming that a Nigger was going to speak at the Free church, although the object of his address was to help Lincoln. Every fool knows that his speech would do Lincoln more harm than good.”¹²² Lincoln also had assistance from some, but not many, Republicans outside Illinois, including Governor Salmon P. Chase of Ohio and Congressman Frank P. Blair, Jr., of

¹¹⁹ Isaac Cook to James Buchanan, Chicago, 28 November 1858, Buchanan Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Cook also complained about the efforts of Ohio politicians, including James Blair Steedman, as well as Whigs like Crittenden and Reverdy Johnson.

¹²⁰ William H. Herndon to Theodore Parker, Springfield, 3 October 1858, Herndon-Parker Papers, University of Iowa.

¹²¹ Illinois State Register (Springfield), 27 September 1858. On H. Ford Douglas, see Robert L. Harris, Jr., “H. Ford. Douglas: Afro-American Antislavery Emigrationist,” Journal of Negro History 62 (1977): 217-29.

¹²² Ottawa Little Giant, 22 September 1858, in C. C. Tisler and Aleita G. Tisler, “Lincoln Was Here for Another Go at Douglas,” (pamphlet; Jackson, Tennessee: McCowat-Mercer Press, 1958), 52.

Missouri.¹²³ (The Little Giant charged Blair “with laboring to abolish slavery in Missouri, and to ship off the free blacks to Illinois,” where they were “to be made citizens and our equals!”)¹²⁴ In appealing to the German vote, Republicans also enjoyed the support of Carl Schurz of Wisconsin, among others. “The black Republicans have a half dozen German hirelings traveling and spouting niggerism through this region,” sneered the Illinois State Register.¹²⁵ Several nationally prominent Republicans were invited to stump Illinois (including Caleb B. Smith, Benjamin F. Wade, Cassius M. Clay, and Joseph Galloway), but they declined.¹²⁶ In 1859, Lincoln expressed gratitude to Chase for “being one of the very few distinguished men, whose sympathy we in Illinois did receive last year, of all those whose sympathy we thought we had reason to expect.”¹²⁷ Though his letter to Chase seemed tinged with bitterness at the failure of more prominent Republicans to come to his aid, Lincoln had in June 1858 advised against employing outsiders: “I think too much reliance is placed in noisy demonstrations – importing

¹²³ William Ernest Smith, The Francis Preston Blair Family in Politics (2 vols.; New York: Macmillan, 1933), 1:412; Frank Blair to Francis P. Blair, Sr., n.p., 10 September 1858, Blair and Lee Family Papers, Princeton University. Chase gave several speeches in northern Illinois. Chase to Edward Lillie Pierce, Columbus, 10 November 1860, Pierce Papers, Harvard University. In the final weeks of the campaign, Schuyler Colfax of Indiana delivered several speeches endorsing Republican principles but not Lincoln specifically. O. J. Hollister, Life of Schuyler Colfax (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1886), 132-33.

¹²⁴ Jacksonville correspondence, 6, 7 September, Chicago Press and Tribune, 9, 13 September 1858.

¹²⁵ Illinois State Register (Springfield), n.d., quoted in the Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 21 October 1858.

¹²⁶ Joseph Medill to E. B. Washburne, Chicago, 18 October 1858, Washburne Papers, Library of Congress.

¹²⁷ Lincoln to Chase, Springfield, 30 April 1859, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 3:378. According to James A. Briggs, who met with Lincoln in March 1860, “Mr. Lincoln of Ill. told me [he] had a very warm [side?] towards you for of all the prominent Rep[ublican]s you were the only one who gave him ‘aid & comfort.’” Briggs to Chase, New York, 17 March 1860, Chase Papers, Library of Congress.

speakers from a distance and the like. They excite prejudice and close the avenues to sober reason.”¹²⁸

En route to the next debate at Freeport, Douglas spoke in Galena, where he “dilated luxuriously for half an hour upon negro equality, amalgamation, marriages of black and white in Boston, and gave the African a general overhauling.” He “grew even blacker in the face than usual as he said he was no kin to, and never meant to be kin to, the negro.”¹²⁹

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Two days after the Ottawa event, Lincoln asked Ebenezer Peck and Norman B. Judd to meet him for consultation. “Douglas is propounding questions to me,” he explained, “which perhaps it is not quite safe to wholly disregard. I have my view of the means to dispose of them.” But he wanted his friends’ advice.¹³⁰ The night before the Freeport debate, Judd and Peck met with Lincoln at Macomb, where they arrived at 2 a.m and awakened the candidate, who “looked very comical sitting there on one side of his bed in his short night shirt.” When he read to them his proposed replies to Douglas’s queries, Judd suggested modifications to suit the strong antislavery sentiment of northern Illinois. “But I couldn[’]t stir him,” Judd recalled. “He listened very patiently to both Peck and myself, but he wouldn’t budge an inch from his well studied formulas.”¹³¹

¹²⁸ Lincoln to Andrew McCallen, Springfield, 19 June 1858, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:469

¹²⁹ Galena correspondence, 25 August, New York Evening Post, 1 September 1858.

¹³⁰ Lincoln to Peck, Henry, 23 August 1858, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, First Supplement, 32-33.

¹³¹ Norman B. Judd interviewed by John G. Nicolay, Washington, 28 February 1876, Burlingame, ed., Oral History of Lincoln, 45; James K. Magie to Joseph Medill, Springfield, Illinois, 25 February 1875, Truman Bartlett Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

Earlier that day, Judd and Peck had met in Chicago with Joseph Medill, Martin Sweet, Steven Hurlbut, and Herman Kreismann to discuss Lincoln's tactics. They recommended answers to Douglas's interrogatories and urged him to ask "a few ugly questions" of the Little Giant, including this fateful one: "What becomes of your vaunted popular Sovereignty in [the] Territories since the Dred Scott decision?"¹³² Lincoln had anticipated Douglas's reply to such a query. In late July, when Henry Asbury suggested to Lincoln that he pose that very question, he replied: "You shall have hard work to get him directly to the point whether a territorial Legislature has or has not the power to exclude slavery. But if you succeed in bringing him to it, though he will be compelled to say it possesses no such power; he will instantly take ground that slavery can not actually exist in the ter[r]itories, unless the people desire it, and give it protective territorial legislation. If this offends the South he will let it offend them; as at all events he means to hold on to his chances in Illinois."¹³³

Medill and his colleagues recommended that Lincoln put two other questions to Douglas: "Will you stand by the adjustment of the Kansas question on the basis of the English bill compromise?" and "Having given your acquiescence and sanction to the Dred Scott decision that destroys popular sovereignty in the Territories will you acquiesce in the other half of that decision when it comes to be applied to the states, by the same court?" They also counseled Lincoln to be aggressive: "Don't act on the

¹³² Joseph Medill to Lincoln, n.p. [27 August 1858], Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress. This letter casts serious doubt on claims that Lincoln's friends advised him not to ask this question of Douglas. Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 723-24; Horace White in Scripps, Life of Lincoln, ed. Basler and Dunlap, 146-47; Whitney, Lincoln the Citizen, 276-77; Joseph Medill's reminiscences in Sparks, ed., Lincoln-Douglas Debates, 203-6. But see Joseph Logsdon, Horace White: Nineteenth Century Liberal (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood, 1971), 51-58.

¹³³ Henry Asbury to Lincoln, Quincy, 28 July 1858, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress; Lincoln to Asbury, Springfield, 31 July 1858, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:530.

defensive at all. . . . Hold Dug up as a traitor & conspirator a proslavery, bamboozling demagogue Above all things be bold, defiant and dogmatic Make short work of his nigger equality charges For once leave modesty aside. You are dealing with a bold, brazen, lying rascal & you must ‘fight the devil with fire.’ Be saucy with the ‘Cataline’ & permit no browbeating – in other words give him h[el].”¹³⁴

While drawing up the questions that he intended to ask, Lincoln reviewed the Little Giant’s speech at Bloomington, where Douglas maintained (as Lincoln had predicted he would) that despite the Dred Scott decision, “slavery will never exist one day, or one hour, in any Territory against the unfriendly legislation of an unfriendly people. I care not how the Dred Scott decision may have settled the abstract question so far as the practical result is concerned.”¹³⁵ So Lincoln knew how the senator would respond and he wanted those answers “to get into print, under the fierce light of the debates, and to reach the whole country.”¹³⁶ It might well undermine Douglas’s support in the South and also among the pro-Buchanan forces in Illinois.

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A crowd one-third larger than the one at Ottawa converged on the Republican stronghold of Freeport, a town of 7,000 a hundred miles west of Chicago.¹³⁷ Hoteliers

¹³⁴ Medill to Lincoln, n.p. [27 August 1858], Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

¹³⁵ Political Debates between Abraham Lincoln and Stephen A. Douglas (Cleveland: O. S. Hubbell, 1895), 52. He made the same point in his Springfield address of July 17. Illinois State Register (Springfield), 19 July 1858.

¹³⁶ Stevens, A Reporter’s Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 82-83.

¹³⁷ Chicago Press and Tribune, 30 August 1858. Henry Villard estimated the crowd at 15,000. “Die zweite Discussion in Freeport, Ill.,” New Yorker Staats-Zeitung, 4 September 1858. The Rock Island Commercial estimated it at 20,000. Galesburg Semi-Weekly Democrat, 1 September 1858. The Freeport Weekly Bulletin estimated the crowd at 10-15,000 (issue of 2 September 1858).

and saloon keepers stood “aghast at the multitudes to be fed,” and the streets were “fairly black with people.”¹³⁸ Arriving by train the morning of the debate, Lincoln was greeted by cannons, bands, and “a host of staunch friends, who roared themselves hoarse.” He tried “to enjoy a few hours of retirement at the hotel,” but “the multitude insisted upon his ‘showing himself’ again on the balcony, and of greeting him with hearty shakes of his good right hand.” After lunch, Lincoln boarded a plain Conestoga wagon which conveyed him and a dozen “good, solid, old-fashioned farmers” to a nearby grove, where the speakers’ platform had been erected. Lincoln “was placed in or near the rear of the box on the wagon, and his legs extended forward several feet, and resembled the skeleton of some greyhound.”¹³⁹ This arrangement contrasted sharply with Douglas’s regal entourage. (Upon arriving the previous night, Douglas had been “made to be the recipient of honors which would well become the crowned head of a monarch.”)¹⁴⁰ Fearful that his customary triumphalism might offend the egalitarian sensibilities of Freeporters, the Little Giant abandoned plans to ride in a “splendid carriage, drawn by white horses,” and instead walked to the debate site.¹⁴¹

As he was about to open the debate on that cool, windy, cloudy afternoon, Lincoln was interrupted by William “Deacon” Bross of the Chicago Press and Tribune, who said: “Hold on, Lincoln. You can’t speak yet. Hitt ain’t here, and there is no use of your speaking unless the Press and Tribune has a report.” Lincoln asked: “Ain’t Hitt

¹³⁸ Freeport correspondence, 27 August, New York Evening Post, 2 September 1858.

¹³⁹ Freeport Weekly Bulletin, 2 September 1858; Seymour D. Thompson, “Lincoln and Douglas: The Great Freeport Debate,” American Law Review 39 (1905): 168-69.

¹⁴⁰ Freeport correspondence, 27 August, Missouri Republican (St. Louis), 31 August 1858.

¹⁴¹ Freeport Journal, 2 September 1858, Sparks, ed., The Lincoln-Douglas Debates, 196-97; reminiscences of William Askey and General Smith D. Atkins, ibid., 209-11; Chicago Journal, 25 August, copied in the Alton Weekly Courier, 2 September 1858; .

here? Where is he?”¹⁴² Eventually that shorthand reporter was found, and as Lincoln rose to open the debate, Bross heard him say to E. W. Brewster as he handed him his shawl, “There, Father Brewster, hold my clothes while I stone Stephen.”¹⁴³ During his opening speech, the Little Giant “sat near him smoking a cigar, and puffing out its fumes for the benefit of the Speaker and the Ladies who were so unfortunate as to be in the immediate vicinity.”¹⁴⁴

Lincoln began by answering the seven interrogatories Douglas had posed at Ottawa. He did not, he said, “stand pledged” to the unconditional repeal of the Fugitive Slave Act, nor to the admission of more slave states into the Union, nor to admitting new states into the Union with a constitution approved by the people, nor to the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia, nor to the abolition of the domestic slave trade. He did believe that Congress had a right and duty to prohibit slavery in all the territories and would oppose the admission of a new territory if it would “aggravate the slavery question among ourselves.”

These remarks evidently did not sit well with some antislavery auditors, who, according to Henry Villard’s report, “thought that by his seven answers Lincoln had repudiated the whole Republican creed.” They “began to be restive, to grumble and otherwise express their displeasure in undertones.” Villard observed that “these seven answers may still give Mr. Lincoln much trouble and we should not be surprised if the

¹⁴² Chicago Times, 29 August 1858, Sparks, ed., The Lincoln-Douglas Debates, 189.

¹⁴³ Undated statement by William Bross, enclosed in Bross to John Hay and John G. Nicolay, Chicago, 31 December 1886, Nicolay Papers, Library of Congress.

¹⁴⁴ Freeport Journal, 2 September 1858, Sparks, ed., The Lincoln-Douglas Debates, 197.

Republicans in Northern Illinois might label them ‘Lincoln’s seven deadly sins.’”¹⁴⁵
(Villard’s account is not entirely unbiased, for he told Douglas that he was “as enthusiastic & faithful a supporter of your political claims as any can be found anywhere in the State of Illinois.” The senator hired him as a campaigner, in which capacity he delivered speeches at thirteen localities and organized Douglas clubs.)¹⁴⁶

After succinctly responding to the Little Giant, Lincoln elaborated on his answers. The Fugitive Slave Act, he said, “should have been framed so as to be free from some of the objections that pertain to it, without lessening its efficiency,” but since that statute was not now a matter of controversy, he did not favor making it one. He “would be exceedingly sorry” to have to vote on the admission of a new slave state, but he thought it highly unlikely that such an application from a territory would be made in the future if Congress prohibited slavery from entering the territory in the first place. He “would be exceedingly glad to see Congress abolish slavery in the District of Columbia, and, in the language of Henry Clay, ‘sweep from our Capital that foul blot upon our nation.’ [Loud applause.]” But he would favor such a step only if it were carried out in accordance with the provisions he had incorporated into his 1849 emancipation bill (gradualism, compensation for owners, and approval by a majority of the voters of the District.) If Congress were to abolish the domestic slave trade, it should be done in accordance with those same provisions.

Having answered Douglas’s questions, Lincoln read slowly and “with great

¹⁴⁵ New Yorker Staats-Zeitung, 4 September 1858.

¹⁴⁶ H. Villard to Douglas, Chicago, 24 August 1858, Douglas Papers, University of Chicago. I am indebted to Professor Allen Guelzo for calling this letter to my attention.

distinctness” four questions to the Little Giant:¹⁴⁷

1) Would he favor the admission of Kansas if it did not have the population called for in the English Bill compromise (i.e., 93,000)?

2) In light of the Dred Scott decision, could the inhabitants of a territory lawfully “exclude slavery from its limits prior to the formation of a State Constitution” if a citizen wished to bring slaves into that territory?

3) Would he support a second Dred Scott decision forbidding states to exclude slavery?

4) Would he support the acquisition of new territory “in disregard of how such acquisition may affect the nation on the slavery question?”

By far the most important question was the second, which placed Douglas in an awkward position. He would alienate Illinois voters if he stated that the Supreme Court’s ruling forbade settlers from excluding slavery in the territories; to maintain that the court’s decision did not do so would antagonize the South. Lincoln told a friend, “If he sticks to the Dred Scott decision, he may lose the Senatorship; if he tries to get around it, he certainly loses the Presidency.”¹⁴⁸ Lincoln did not demonstrate any particular originality in posing this question. In July, a Quincy attorney had suggested it, and the Republican newspapers had included it among several queries for the Little Giant.¹⁴⁹ Two years earlier, Trumbull and other members of Congress had posed the same question to

¹⁴⁷ E. B. Washburne in Allen Thorndike Rice, ed., Reminiscences of Abraham Lincoln by Distinguished Men of His Time (New York: North American Review, 1886), 26.

¹⁴⁸ Koerner, Memoirs, 2:65.

¹⁴⁹ Henry Asbury to Lincoln, Quincy, 28 July 1858, alluded to in Lincoln to Asbury, 31 July 1858, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:530-31; Bloomington Pantagraph, n.d., copied in the Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 17 July 1858; Chicago Journal, 24 August 1858.

Douglas, who replied that it was up to the courts.¹⁵⁰

Lincoln scolded Douglas for confusing the radical Aurora Republican platform of 1854 with the more moderate one of the Springfield Republicans. Caustically he observed that the discovery of the Little Giant's error did not relieve Lincoln of anything, for he had participated in neither convention. "I am just as much responsible for the resolutions at [Aurora in] Kane county as those at Springfield, the amount of the responsibility being exactly nothing in either case; no more than there would be in regard to a set of resolutions passed in the moon. [Laughter and loud cheers.]" Douglas had not qualified his allegations but "stated them roundly as being true." How could such an eminent man make such a mistake? When "we consider who Judge Douglas is – that he is a distinguished Senator of the United States – that he has served nearly twelve years as such – that his character is not at all limited as an ordinary Senator for the United States, but that his name has become of world-wide renown – it is most extraordinary that he should so far forget all the suggestions of justice to an adversary, or of prudence to himself, as to venture upon the assertion of that which the slightest investigation would have shown him to be wholly false. [Applause, cheers.]" Witheringly Lincoln speculated about the cause of such a blunder, emphasizing Douglas's amorality: "I can only account of his having done so upon the supposition that that evil genius which has attended him through his life, giving to him an apparent astonishing prosperity, such as to lead very many good men to doubt there being any advantage in virtue over vice – I say I can only account for it on the supposition that the evil genius has at last made up its mind to forsake him. [Continued cheers and laughter.]" How hypocritical of Douglas to make

¹⁵⁰ Fehrenbacher, Prelude to Greatness, 130-31.

such a mistake when “he is in the habit, in almost all the speeches he makes, of charging falsehood upon his adversaries.” In fact, he would often “stand upon his dignity and call people liars” rather than answer questions.

Lincoln betrayed annoyance at Douglas’s condescending remarks about “an insignificant individual like Lincoln” daring to charge conspiracy against such eminent men as presidents, Congressional leaders, and Supreme Court justices. Again Lincoln asked if it were not the case that Douglas had leveled a charge of conspiracy against Buchanan et al.

As Douglas took the podium to respond, a melon hurled from the predominantly Republican crowd glanced off his shoulder.¹⁵¹ Unfazed, the Little Giant replied to Lincoln’s interrogatories, which the challenger had written out and left on the podium. Douglas picked up the paper on which they appeared, read the questions aloud, and answered them. In response to the first interrogatory, he asserted that he would support the admission of Kansas with a small population even if its voters rejected the Lecompton Constitution. (This angered the Buchanan administration, which regarded it as a betrayal of an earlier agreement. Promptly more pro-Douglas office holders in Illinois were fired.)¹⁵² After reciting the crucial second question, the Little Giant “threw down the slip of paper as if he was disposing of a most trifling matter” and offered what became known as the Freeport Doctrine, a proposition that he had made earlier (most notably in his June 1857 speech at Springfield and his addresses at Bloomington and Springfield in July

¹⁵¹ Chicago Weekly Times, 7 October 1858.

¹⁵² David Edward Meerse, “James Buchanan, the Patronage, and the Northern Democratic Party, 1857-1858” (Ph. D. dissertation, University of Illinois, 1969), 405-11, 552-55. Attempts to heal the breach between Douglas and the administration rested upon a mutual agreement to back the English bill. Ibid., 564.

1858) but which now became much better known.¹⁵³ The Dred Scott decision may have officially forbidden the people of a territory to exclude slavery, he said, but informally they could do so by refusing to pass “local police regulations” guaranteeing the rights of slaveholders. Slavery “cannot exist a day or an hour anywhere unless supported by local police regulations,” which “can only be furnished by the local legislature. If the people of the Territory are opposed to slavery they will elect members to the legislature who will adopt unfriendly legislation to it.”

Douglas also argued that the judgment of the court regarding the power of Congress to prohibit slavery in the territories was obiter dictum (that is, an opinion regarding matters other than those at issue in a case) and therefore lacked the force of law. Presumably he similarly viewed the passage in Taney’s majority decision which stated that “if Congress itself cannot do this [i.e., prohibit slavery in the territories] – if it is beyond the powers conferred on the Federal Government – it will be admitted, we presume, that it could not authorize a territorial government to exercise them. It could confer no power on any local government, established by its authority, to violate the provisions of the Constitution.”¹⁵⁴

Douglas’s answer, Lincoln knew, would sit well with Illinoisans but not with Southerners, who had been led to believe that the Little Giant’s seemingly neutral popular sovereignty doctrine really favored the interests of slaveholders. He allegedly predicted that if the senator argued that territorial legislatures could effectively exclude slavery by

¹⁵³ Letter by “Sangamon,” Springfield, 14 July, Chicago Press and Tribune, 20 July 1858; Stevens, A Reporter’s Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 82; Johannsen, Douglas, 670.

¹⁵⁴ Fehrenbacher, Dred Scott Case, 379. Taney’s statement was clearly obiter dictum.

passing “unfriendly” laws, “he will never be president.”¹⁵⁵ The correspondent of the New York Evening Post accurately predicted that when Douglas’s Freeport remarks “shall go forth to all the land, and be read by men of Georgia and South Carolina, their eyes will doubtless open.”¹⁵⁶ Southern newspapers called the Freeport Doctrine “radically unsound,” a “snare and a swindle, full of mean cunning, rank injustice, and insolence . . . more dangerous and fatal to the interests of the South than any ever advocated by the rankest abolitionist.” It added “insult to injury, for it mocks and derides the just claim of the slaveholder” and constituted the “scurviest possible form of all possible heresies. . . . [William Lloyd] Garrison, with all his fanatical and demoniacal hatred of slavery, has never in his whole life uttered an opinion at once so insulting and injurious to the South.” The Little Giant had earned “the contempt and abhorrence of honest men in all sections.”¹⁵⁷ The Cincinnati Gazette asked Southerners “to consider this fresh and faithless conduct of a man who reported the Kansas Nebraska Bill for the purpose of cheating the North into his support, and thought he had purchased the vote of the South.”¹⁵⁸ Douglas’s presidential chances were doomed, the Missouri Democrat prophetically declared: “If his opposition to the Lecompton Constitution could be forgiven, his Freeport speech, equivocal as it is, would put him out of the ring.”¹⁵⁹ The

¹⁵⁵ Reminiscences of General Smith D. Atkins, Rushville Weekly Times, 12 February 1903.

¹⁵⁶ Chicago correspondence, 2 September, New York Evening Post, 7 September 1858.

¹⁵⁷ Wilmington, North Carolina, Journal, n.d., in Sparks, ed., The Lincoln-Douglas Debates, 526; Louisville Journal, n.d., copied in the Chicago Press and Tribune, 4 September 1858 and in the Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 4 October 1858; Memphis Avalanche, 8 September 1858 and 2 July 1859, in Fehrenbacher, *Dred Scott Case, 513, 705. Similar criticism appeared in the Charleston Mercury, the Mobile Register, the Columbus, Georgia, Times, and the Jackson Mississippian. Sparks, ed., The Lincoln-Douglas Debates, 579.

¹⁵⁸ Cincinnati Gazette, n.d., copied in the Chicago Press and Tribune, 10 September 1858.

¹⁵⁹ Missouri Democrat (St. Louis), 11 September 1858.

New York Herald exclaimed: “To this ‘lame and impotent conclusion’ has Judge Douglas’s championship of the rights of the South come at last!” Could this possibly be “the feast to which the author of the Kansas-Nebraska bill invited the South?”¹⁶⁰ The Washington Union remarked that Douglas “backs out from the doctrine of the Nebraska-Kansas bill, abandons the Cincinnati platform, and repudiates the Dred Scott decision; and . . . he does so by reasserting the odious squatter-sovereignty doctrine in its most radical and obnoxious form.”¹⁶¹

In response to the Freeport Doctrine, several Democratic papers began insisting on a federal slave code for the territories.¹⁶² That cry was taken up by Southern Senators, including James M. Mason of Virginia, a supporter of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, who told Douglas: “You promised us bread, and you have given us a stone; you promised us a fish, and you have given us a serpent; we thought you had given us a substantial right; and you have given us the most evanescent shadow and delusion.”¹⁶³ Jefferson Davis of Mississippi called the Freeport Doctrine “worse than even the Wilmot Proviso.”¹⁶⁴ Mississippi’s other Senator, Albert Gallatin Brown, also denounced it, saying: “I would rather see the Democratic party sunk, never to be resurrected, than to see it successful only that one portion of it might practice a fraud on another.”¹⁶⁵ Senators Clement C. Clay of Alabama and William M. Gwin of California echoed Brown’s objections.

Republicans were equally harsh. “Douglas’ answer to Mr. Lincoln’s question

¹⁶⁰ Johannsen, Douglas, 670.

¹⁶¹ Washington Union, 4 September 1858, in Sparks, ed., The Lincoln-Douglas Debates, 522-23.

¹⁶² Missouri Democrat (St. Louis), 15 September 1858.

¹⁶³ Johannsen, Douglas, 694-95.

¹⁶⁴ Davis, speech at Vicksburg, n.d., quoted in the Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 29 November 1858.

¹⁶⁵ Brown, speech in Senate, Congressional Record, 35th Congress, 2nd session, 1243 (23 February 1859).

amounts to nothing more nor less than Mob Law to keep slavery out of the Territories, and the Dred Scottites cannot help seeing it,” said the Chicago Press and Tribune. “What sort of ‘police regulations’ enable old [Milton] McGee, of Ruffian notoriety, to hold slaves in Kansas? According to Douglas, he holds them simply because his neighbors don’t club him and his niggers out of the Territory!”¹⁶⁶ The Missouri Democrat called the Freeport Doctrine “the most odious embodiment of higher law,” contemplating “an appeal from the Supreme Court, to ‘tumultuous town meetings’ – to use Douglas’ own language,” and “an ascription of sovereignty and supremacy to mobocracy.”¹⁶⁷

At Freeport, Lincoln may not have been the first to expose this weakness in Douglas’s popular sovereignty doctrine, but he did help to publicize it and thus reduce the senator’s chances of retaining Southern support. His tactic also widened the breach within the Illinois Democracy.¹⁶⁸ The enunciation of the Freeport doctrine “is drawing the attention of the whole country to that matter,” observed the Washington States.¹⁶⁹ (Douglas had not invented the notion that slavery could not exist in territories where the settlers did not want it. Senators Alexander H. Stephens of Georgia, Lewis Cass of Michigan, Jefferson Davis of Mississippi, and Jacob Collamer of Vermont, as well as Congressmen William A. Montgomery of Pennsylvania, James L. Orr of South Carolina, and Samuel O. Peyton of Kentucky, had expressed similar sentiments.)¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁶ Carlinville correspondence by “Upper Egyptian,” 31 August 1858, Chicago Press and Tribune, 3 September 1858.

¹⁶⁷ Missouri Democrat (St. Louis), 15 September 1858.

¹⁶⁸ Fehrenbacher, Prelude to Greatness, 121-42.

¹⁶⁹ The States (Washington, D.C.), 9 October 1858.

¹⁷⁰ Richard Allen Heckman, Lincoln vs. Douglas: The Great Debates Campaign (Washington: Public Affairs Press, 1967), 95-96; Allan Nevins, The Emergence of Lincoln (2 vols; New York: Scribner’s,

In his rejoinder, Douglas continued to patronize Lincoln, sneering at his “miserable impositions,” broadly implying that he was a “demagogue,” contemptuously likening him to “a school boy” for feigning ignorance of the senator’s stand on slavery in the territories, and suggesting that Lincoln was a hypocrite who would fear to espouse opinions in southern Illinois that he voiced at Freeport. He ridiculed Lincoln’s intellect, saying of his four interrogatories: “He racked his brain so much in devising these few questions that he exhausted himself, and has not strength enough to invent another. [Laughter.]” Inaccurately he stated that Lincoln had “been driven into obscurity” because of his “political sins” (i.e., his denunciation of the way President Polk had led the U.S. into war with Mexico.) Condescendingly he said “I don’t think there is much danger” of Lincoln’s being elected. Douglas claimed that his challenger had tried to deceive voters in 1854 by pretending to be a Whig while he was secretly an abolitionist Republican.

In an appeal to the deep-seated race prejudice of white Illinoisans, the Little Giant predicted that as soon as Lincoln “can hold a council of his advisers, by getting [Congressman Owen] Lovejoy, and [Congressman John F.] Farnsworth [Cheers], and Fred. Douglass together, he will then frame and propound the other interrogator[ies] [“Good, good,” &c. Renewed laughter, in which Mr. Lincoln feebly joined, saying that he hoped with their aid to get seven questions, the number asked him by Judge Douglas, and so make conclusions again.] I have no doubt you think they are all good men – good Black Republicans. [“White, white.”]” (Douglas uttered the word black “with an angry and contemptuous emphasis.” At first the “taunt was received in silence,” but in time “loud cries of ‘white, white’ began to come from all directions, every time he used the

1950), 1:382; Douglas at the Alton debate, 15 October 1858, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 3:295; Fehrenbacher, Dred Scott Case, 499-500.

offensive epithet.”)¹⁷¹ “I have reason to recollect that some people in this country think that Fred. Douglass is a very good man. The last time I came here to make a speech, while I was talking . . . I saw a carriage, and a magnificent one too, drive up and take its position on the outside of the crowd, with a beautiful young lady on the front seat, with a man and Fred. Douglass, the negro, on the back seat, and the owner of the carriage in front driving the negro. [Laughter, cheers, cries of “Right, what have you to say against it,” &c.] I witnessed that here in your own town.” When a member of the audience cried out, “What of it?” Douglas exclaimed: “What of it! All I have to say is this, if you Black Republicans think that the negro ought to be on a social equality with your wives and daughters, and ride in the carriage with the wife while the master of the carriage drives the team, you have a perfect right to so do. [Laughter; “Good, good,” and cheers, mingled with shouting and cries of “White, white.”] I am told also that one of Fred. Douglass’ kinsmen [evidently an allusion to H. Ford Douglass, who was not related to Frederick Douglass], another rich black negro, is now traveling this part of the State making speeches for his friend Mr. Lincoln, who is the champion of the black man’s party. [Laughter; “White men, white men,” “what have you got to say against it.” “That’s right,” &c.] All I have to say on that subject is this, that those of you who believe that the nigger is your equal, and ought to be on an equality with you socially, politically and legally, have a right to entertain those opinions, and of course will vote for Mr. Lincoln. [“Down with the negro,” “no, no,” &c.]”

Such crude race-baiting further diminished Douglas’s claims to statesmanship.

¹⁷¹ Stephen A. Forbes to Charles Beneuly Johnson, Urbana, 27 March 1917, in Johnson, Illinois in the Fifties, or A Decade of Development, 1851-1860 (Champaign: Flanigan-Pearson, 1918), 166. Forbes was fourteen years old when he attended the Freeport debate.

When he referred to “you Black Republicans,” and audience members shouted “white, white,” he contemptuously observed: “there was not a Democrat here vulgar enough to interrupt Mr. Lincoln when he was talking [Great applause and cries of “hurrah for Douglas”]. I know the shoe is pinching you when I am clinching Lincoln, and you are scared to death for the result. [Cheers.]” (A youngster in the crowd shouted in response, “Lincoln didn’t use any such talk.”)¹⁷² Melodramatically the Little Giant declared, “I have seen your mobs before and I defy your wrath. [These remarks were followed by considerable disturbance in the crowd, ending in a cheer.]” When he again taunted “Black Republicans” in his audience, they repeated their earlier calls of “white, white,” to which the Senator rejoined: “I know your name, and always call things by their right name.”

Republican newspapers denounced the Little Giant’s racial demagoguery, asserting that Douglas “deliberately insulted the audience, in order to provoke them to interrupt him, so that he might make capital for himself by the cry of persecution and unfairness.”¹⁷³ The Illinois State Journal reported that Douglas’s “platitudes about amalgamation and nigger equality – his only political stock in trade – were too old, too stupid to be listened to with patience.”¹⁷⁴ The Missouri Democrat asked rhetorically, “How can there be negro equality, when the negro is intrinsically inferior to the child of Circassian blood? When Nature has made him inferior, how can a political party, if it

¹⁷² Stephen A. Forbes to Charles Beneulyn Johnson, Urbana, 27 March 1917, in Johnson, Illinois in the Fifties, 166.

¹⁷³ Chicago correspondence, 1 September, New York Tribune, 9 September 1858.

¹⁷⁴ Freeport correspondence, 27 August, Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 30 August 1858.

were so insane as to attempt it, make him equal?”¹⁷⁵ In dealing with the mistake he had made at Ottawa – confusing the Aurora platform of 1854 with the one adopted at Springfield – Douglas offered no apology but explained that he had obtained the document from the Springfield Illinois State Register. Refusing to acknowledge his error, he pledged to investigate the matter when he next visited the capital. He aggressively argued that it made little difference where the platform had been adopted. Alluding to Lincoln’s 1847 “spot resolutions,” he observed sarcastically, “Lincoln is great in the particular spots at which a thing is to be done.” Instead of citing the state Republican platforms of 1856 or 1858, Douglas then read the platform adopted by the Republicans of the Freeport district when they chose their Congressional candidate in 1854 and quoted resolutions introduced into the legislature in 1855. These he illogically used to illustrate Republican doctrine in 1858. Chastising Lincoln for his alleged failure to state clearly whether he would vote for the admission of new slave states, Douglas boasted: “I have stood by my principles in fair weather and foul – in the sunshine and in the rain. I have defended the great principle of self-government here among you, when Northern sentiment ran in a torrent against it. [That is so.] I have defended the same great principle of self-government, when Southern sentiment came down with its avalanche upon me. I was not afraid of the test they put to me.” He again denounced Lincoln’s conspiracy charge as “an infamous lie.” As for the contention that he had accused the Washington Union, President Buchanan, and the framers of the Lecompton Constitution of a conspiracy to nationalize slavery, Douglas maintained that he had criticized only the newspaper’s editor, whom he called “that most corrupt of all

¹⁷⁵ Missouri Democrat (St. Louis), 22 September 1858.

corrupt men.”¹⁷⁶ (How a conspiracy could be carried out by one party he did not explain.)

Elihu B. Washburne thought Douglas’s speech “was not up to his usual standard. He was evidently embarrassed by the questions, and floundered in his replies.”¹⁷⁷ The Dixon Republican and Telegraph found the Little Giant’s language “coarse, blustering and insulting, while the Rockford Republican condemned the Senator for his “Marat-like rant and invective.”¹⁷⁸ One observer reported that Douglas “had evidently been drinking very strongly, it is said, of brandy.”¹⁷⁹

Henry Villard, however, reported that “Douglas’s address was undeniably one of the best and most brilliant of his life.”¹⁸⁰ The independent Cincinnati Commercial said that never before had he appealed “with more skill to the prejudices of the white people against the African race, to the political self-righteousness of American citizens, or to the love of Conquest and Dominion, the passion of the extension of Territory and National and self-aggrandizement.”¹⁸¹

In closing the debate, Lincoln expressed irritation with the Little Giant’s habit of insulting opponents. Contrasting his own restraint with the senator’s intemperate oratory, he said, “in regard to Judge Douglas’s declaration about the ‘vulgarity and blackguardism’ in the audience – that no such thing, as he says, was shown by any Democrat while I was speaking. Now, I only wish . . . to say, that while I was speaking, I

¹⁷⁶ Douglas had accused the editors of the Union of being “engaged in a conspiracy and is carrying out a scheme by which its managers hope to break down the Democratic Party by creating dissensions in our ranks.” Speech at Paris, 31 July, New York Times, 9 August 1858.

¹⁷⁷ Washburne in Rice, ed., Reminiscences of Lincoln, 27.

¹⁷⁸ Dixon Republican and Telegraph, 2 September 1858; Rockford Republican, 2 September 1858.

¹⁷⁹ Thompson, “Lincoln and Douglas: The Great Freeport Debate,” 173.

¹⁸⁰ New Yorker Staats-Zeitung, 4 September 1858.

¹⁸¹ Cincinnati Commercial, 1 September 1858.

used no ‘vulgarity or blackguardism’ toward any Democrat.” He insisted that he had “never tried to conceal my opinions, nor tried to deceive any one in reference to them.” He pointed out that the radical platform statements of northern Illinois Republicans in 1854 were moderated at the Bloomington convention in 1856 to accommodate the downstate opponents of slavery. He emphatically promised to honor every plank in that platform and indignantly declared, “I hope to deal in all things fairly with Judge Douglas, and with the people of the State, in this contest. And if I should never be elected to any office, I trust I may go down with no stain of falsehood upon my reputation – notwithstanding the hard opinions Judge Douglas chooses to entertain of me.” In an evident allusion to the question of black citizenship rights, he urged the antislavery members of the audience to “waive minor differences on questions which either belong to the dead past or the distant future.” Lincoln said he turned almost “with disgust” from Douglas’s distortions of his House Divided speech and urged people to read that address to “see whether it contains any of those ‘bugaboos’ which frighten Judge Douglas.” He denied ducking the question about the admission of new slave states, reiterating that he would vote to admit one in the highly unlikely event that such a question were ever to arise. He objected to the Little Giant’s “working up these quibbles.” At some length he quoted from Douglas’s speech denouncing the editor of the Washington Union as well as President Buchanan and the framers of the Lecompton Constitution.

The correspondent for the New York Tribune, who judged that Lincoln had made the “best impression,” called him “an earnest, fluent speaker, with a very good command of language, and he run the Judge so hard that the latter quite lost his temper.”¹⁸² The

¹⁸² Chicago correspondence, 1 September, New York Tribune, 9 September 1858.

New York Times declared that Lincoln's speech was "full of good hits," while the Missouri Democrat praised the challenger's "Comprehensiveness, tact, temper, logic, and . . . most racy humor."¹⁸³ From Kentucky, Cassius Clay wrote that "Lincoln is conducting the canvass in Illinois with marked ability: I think success will crown his efforts."¹⁸⁴

Not all Republicans were pleased. Joseph Medill thought that "Lincoln is not a match for him [Douglas] on the stump before a mob."¹⁸⁵ The Marengo Press, a Republican paper in McHenry County, disapproved of Lincoln's answer to Douglas' questions at Freeport. The Press asked: "Are such really his views? And are Douglas' much worse? If this is bringing Lincoln to his milk, why the Judge of course has done it; and it proves to be of a quality that some, at least, cannot get down. We think he must have been browsing quite too long in Egypt. Let him be kept till November, in a good Northern pasture. We think it would improve him."¹⁸⁶

The Democratic press ridiculed Lincoln. In the New York Staats-Zeitung, Henry Villard portrayed him as "the apostle of the abolitionists, negro-amalgamationists, nativists, and all other conceivable –ists" and "a would-be statesman who adorns his speeches with platitudes, with ordinary, shopworn puns, and with a kind of crude backwoods humor," a man "who grounds his arguments in Bible quotations, and instead of appealing to the intelligence of his listeners merely tries to tickle their funny bones!"¹⁸⁷

¹⁸³New York Times, 9 September 1858; Missouri Democrat (St. Louis), 3 September 1858.

¹⁸⁴ Clay to Edwin D. Morgan, 2 September 1858, Morgan Papers, New York State Library.

¹⁸⁵ Medill to John A. Gurley, Chicago, 28 August 1858, Medill Papers, Chicago Historical Society.

¹⁸⁶ Marengo Press, n.d., copied in the Freeport Weekly Bulletin, 30 September 1858.

¹⁸⁷ [Henry Villard], "Douglas und Lincoln, Die dritte Discussion zu Jonesboro, Ill., am 15. Sept." New-Yorker Staats-Zeitung, 22 September 1858, and "Der Verlauf der Kampagne," Illinois, 9 September 1858, ibid., 16 September 1858.

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In the three weeks before the next debate, both candidates stumped central Illinois, where most of the 37,351 Fillmore voters of 1856 lived. Lincoln spoke in El Paso, Tremont, Carlinville, Clinton, Bloomington, Monticello, Mattoon, Paris, Hillsboro, Edwardsville, Highland, and Greenville. With good reason, David Davis was especially worried about Tazewell County, which he visited at Lincoln's request. There he found "a deadness" worse than anywhere else. Though he believed the county could be carried "by energy," in mid-August there was little enthusiasm, and Republicans were "generally dispirited." The main problem was "with the charge of abolition at Lincoln. Lincoln is liked personally in the Co. better than any man in the state. It needs canvassing, active, thorough, old fashioned canvassing, to dissipate this charge." Davis arranged for Lincoln to speak in Tremont on August 30.¹⁸⁸

At Bloomington on September 4, Joseph Fifer, a future governor of Illinois, stood close to the speaker's stand and heard Leonard Swett introduce Lincoln, who began awkwardly. "His first sentence didn't seem to suit him," Fifer recalled, "and he came back to try it again." Fifer's brother whispered, "Swett is the better speaker; maybe he'd make a better Senator." But as Lincoln warmed up, he mesmerized his audience. "Every one had faces up to Lincoln with their attention riveted on him. They looked as though they were hewn out of rock. They were sober and serious."¹⁸⁹ A week later, Lincoln was unusually eloquent at a rally in Edwardsville, a "quaint old town" where his good friend

¹⁸⁸ David Davis to O. M. Hatch, Springfield and Bloomington, 18 August 1858, For the People: A Newsletter of the Abraham Lincoln Association vol. 4, no. 3 (Autumn 2002): 6-7.

¹⁸⁹ Joseph Fifer, interview with Carl Sandburg, Bloomington, 1923, Sandburg Papers, University of Illinois; speech of Joseph Fifer, 4 December 1935, Bloomington Pantagraph, 5 December 1935.

Joseph Gillespie resided.¹⁹⁰ Gillespie, who had been among the leading Fillmore supporters in Illinois, now backed the Republicans. Lincoln sought to win other Fillmore men by appealing to their moral sense. He had been asked to summarize the differences between the Republican and Democratic parties. Succinctly he replied that Republicans “consider slavery a moral, social and political wrong,” whereas Democrats “do not consider it either a moral, social or political wrong.” The Democrats shared Douglas’s amoral neutrality on the subject. “The Republican party, on the other contrary, hold that this government was instituted to secure the blessings of freedom, and that slavery is an unqualified evil to the negro, the white man, to the soil, and to the State.” Republicans “will use every constitutional method to prevent the evil from becoming larger and involving more negroes, more white men, more soil, and more States in its deplorable consequences.” Arguments in favor of Douglas’s popular sovereignty doctrine “are logical if you admit that slavery is as good and as right as freedom and not one of them is worth a rush if you deny it.”

Appealing to former Whigs, as he had done on many prior occasions,¹⁹¹ he quoted extensively from Henry Clay’s anti-slavery writings, including an 1849 letter in which the Great Compromiser said: “I know there are those who draw an argument in favor of slavery from the alleged intellectual inferiority of the black race. Whether this argument is founded in fact or not, I will not now stop to inquire, but merely say that if it proves anything at all, it proves too much. It proves that among the white races of the world any one might properly be enslaved by any other which had made greater advances in

¹⁹⁰ Horace White in Herndon’s Lincoln, 2nd ed., 2:114.

¹⁹¹ See Lincoln’s speeches at Augusta and Macomb (August 25), Tremont (August 30), Carlinville (August 31), and Clinton (September 4), Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 3:37-38, 76-90.

civilization. And, if this rule applies to nations there is no reason why it should not apply to individuals; and it might easily be proved that the wisest man in the world could rightfully reduce all other men and women to bondage.”¹⁹² (In a memorandum probably written in the 1850s, Lincoln paraphrased Clay’s argument, imagining a dialogue with a defender of slavery in which this question was addressed: “If A. can prove, however conclusively, that he may, of right, enslave B. – why may not B. snatch the same argument, and prove equally, that he may enslave A? – You say A. is white, and B. is black. It is color, then; the lighter, having the right to enslave the darker? Take care. By this rule, you are to be slave to the first man who meet, with a fairer skin than your own. You do not mean color exactly? – You mean the whites are intellectually the superiors of the blacks, and, therefore have the right to enslave them? Take care again. By this rule, you are to be slave to the first man you meet, with an intellect superior to you own. But, say you, it is a question of interest; and, if you can make it your interest, you have the right to enslave another. Very well. And if he can make it his interest, he has the right to enslave you.”)¹⁹³

At the close of his Edwardsville address, Lincoln reflected on what the future might hold if Douglas’s moral neutrality prevailed and a second Dred Scot decision were handed down: “Now, when by all these means you have succeeded in dehumanizing the negro; when you have put him down, and made it forever impossible for him to be but as beasts of the field; when you have extinguished his soul, and placed him where the ray of

¹⁹² Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 3:93. This passage, in slightly different language, appeared in Clay’s public letter to Richard Pindell, New Orleans, 17 February 1849, in Melba Porter Hay and Carol Reardon, eds., Candidate, Compromiser, Elder Statesman, 1844-1852 (vol. 10 of The Papers of Henry Clay; Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1991), 575.

¹⁹³ Fragment on slavery [July 1, 1854?], Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:222-23. The date is a guess that may be years off.

hope is blown out in darkness like that which broods over the spirits of the damned; are you quite sure the demon which you have roused will not turn and rend you?”

Rhetorically he asked, “What constitutes the bulwark of our own liberty and independence?” Not “our frowning battlements” or “bristling sea coasts,” or “the guns of our war steamers,” not even “the strength of our gallant and disciplined army.” These assets “are not our reliance against a resumption of tyranny in our fair land,” for they all “may be turned against our liberties, without making us stronger or weaker for the struggle.” Instead “Our reliance is in the love of liberty which God has planted in our bosoms. Our defense is in the preservation of the spirit which prizes liberty as the heritage of all men, in all lands, every where. Destroy this spirit, and you have planted the seeds of despotism around your own doors. Familiarize yourselves with the chains of bondage, and you are preparing your own limbs to wear them. Accustomed to trample on the rights of those around you, you have lost the genius of your own independence, and become the fit subjects of the first cunning tyrant who rises. And let me tell you, all these things are prepared for you with the logic of history, if the elections shall promise that the next Dred Scott decision and all future decisions will be quietly acquiesced in by the people.”¹⁹⁴

After this memorable address, Gillespie drove Lincoln to Highland, a German community on the road to his next scheduled appointment at Greenville. The residents of Highland “were perfectly enraptured,” Gillespie recalled. “The bare sight of the man threw them into extacies.” There Gillespie “got the first inkling of the amazing popularity

¹⁹⁴ Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 3:95-96.

of Mr Lincoln among the Germans.”¹⁹⁵ (The previous year, at a party following the inauguration of Governor Bissell, Hiram W. Beckwith observed a similar phenomenon. Among the social elite of Illinois who crowded into the governor’s mansion, Lincoln stood out. He was, Beckwith recalled, “full of life and becoming glee. Whenever he halted, . . . groups composed largely of women quickly crystallized about his person. . . . There was a magic in his person that seemed to draw everybody to him.”)¹⁹⁶ The next day as the challenger and Gillespie continued on toward Greenville, Lincoln “said that he had but one serious charge to make against Douglass,” namely, “that Douglass arrogated to himself a superiority on account of having a national reputation.” He added: “I would not do that, if we occupied each others places.”¹⁹⁷

On September 6, as Lincoln was approaching Monticello, a crowd came out to escort his carriage into town. When he saw Henry C. Whitney, he invited the young attorney to join him. “I’m mighty glad you are here,” said the candidate. “I hate to be stared at, all by myself; I’ve been a great man such a mighty little time that I’m not used to it yet.”¹⁹⁸

That same day, Douglas told a crowd at Jacksonville that his friends had chided him for being “too courteous by half to Lincoln” and that he “would show the lying, wooly-headed abolitionist how he would talk to him.” Rhetorically he asked the audience: “Have any of you an old father in Kentucky, or perhaps a mother in Virginia? Then don’t let those dear ties be broken by a demagogue like Lincoln throwing bomb-

¹⁹⁵ Undated memorandum by Gillespie, Gillespie Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

¹⁹⁶ Hiram W. Beckwith, “Lincoln: Personal Recollections of Him, His Contemporaries and Law Practice in Eastern Illinois,” Chicago Tribune, 29 December 1895.

¹⁹⁷ Undated memorandum by Gillespie, Gillespie Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

¹⁹⁸ Whitney, Life on the Circuit, ed. Angle, 59.

shells across the Ohio at 'em!"¹⁹⁹ Two days later at Carlinville he characterized his opponents as “Yankees and intimates of niggers” and “miserable abolitionists” who were “unacquainted with the true courtesies of civilized life.” He also boasted that “I am much like Gen. Jackson. He didn’t understand Latin, neither do I; and when I was presented the Latin sheepskin making me L. L. D., I couldn’t read it.”²⁰⁰ Of the Washington Union and its supporters, the Little Giant said: “I intend to expose their treachery, their treason and their infamy, in their coalition with abolitionists everywhere.”²⁰¹ The Democratic press echoed Douglas’s arguments, calling Lincoln “a red-hot abolitionist” who would, if chosen Senator, “be the worst enemy of the Slave States to be found in that body.”²⁰²

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In contrast to Ottawa and Freeport, the 800 residents of Jonesboro, site of the third debate, seemed indifferent to the event. Located 350 miles south of Chicago in the poorest, most backward and most heavily Democratic part of the state, Jonesboro did little to welcome either the candidates or the 1400 people who came to hear them, many traveling in dilapidated wagons drawn by stunted oxen.²⁰³ On the morning of the debate, only one procession paraded through the streets, a pitiful delegation from Johnson County “consisting of two yoke of steers and a banner inscribed ‘Stephen A. Douglas,’

¹⁹⁹ Jacksonville correspondence, 6 September, Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 8 September 1858.

²⁰⁰ Carlinville correspondence, 8 September, Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 10 September 1858.

²⁰¹ Douglas, speech at Paris, Illinois, 31 July, Illinois State Register (Springfield), 4 August 1858.

²⁰² Missouri Republican (St. Louis), 7 September 1858.

²⁰³ John Y. Simon, “Union County in 1858 and the Lincoln-Douglas Debate,” Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society 62 (1969): 272, 275; White in Herndon’s Lincoln, 2nd ed., 2:118; Jonesboro correspondence, 15 September, Chicago Journal, n.d., copied in the Missouri Democrat (St. Louis), 20 September 1858. In 1856, Union County, where Jonesboro was located, Republicans had won forty-six of the 1,575 ballots cast.

turned bottom upwards.”²⁰⁴ A bystander remarked to Lincoln, “Do you see that? Here where Douglas holds sway is ignorance; up north where you are the champion we would find no such display of ignorance, we would see intelligence.” Lincoln chuckled mildly but offered no reply.²⁰⁵ When trains arrived bearing the candidates, no cheering greeted them.²⁰⁶ The county was a hotbed of pro-Buchanan supporters, who were led by the U. S. Marshal for Southern Illinois, John Dougherty.²⁰⁷

Conditions were far from ideal; the weather was hot, the railroads “poorly constructed,” the country roads “bad,” the taverns “wretched,” and food and lodging “simply abominable.” Henry Villard recalled painfully “the day of semi-starvation and the night with half a dozen roommates I passed at Jonesboro.”²⁰⁸ Lincoln was less disappointed in the town, for he stayed at the elegant home of David L. Phillips, the Republican candidate for Congress in that district.²⁰⁹ He arrived the night before the debate and sat with Horace White observing Donati’s comet, which Lincoln “greatly admired.”²¹⁰

After lunch on September 15, a desultory crowd ambled to the fair grounds to attend the debate. There “was no order in the procession, no one in charge, every fellow seemed to be taking care of himself.” All the “preparations at the grounds were very

²⁰⁴ Chicago Press and Tribune, 17 September 1858.

²⁰⁵ Amy Davis Winship, My Life Story (Boston: Richard G. Badger, 1920), 101. Mrs. Winship, whose husband at the time, John A. Davis, represented the 52nd district in the Illinois House of Representatives, also attended the debates at Freeport, Alton, Quincy, and Charleston.

²⁰⁶ Chicago Press and Tribune, 17 September 1858.

²⁰⁷ Horace White in Herndon’s Lincoln, 2nd ed., 2:118.

²⁰⁸ Villard, Memoirs, 1:95

²⁰⁹ Simon, “Union County,” 280-81.

²¹⁰ White in Herndon’s Lincoln, 2nd ed., 2:119.

simple. There was a stand or platform built to a tree for support” but “no seats arranged for the audience at all. People stood about and listened till they got tired and then they changed their position.”²¹¹ While Douglas delivered the opening speech, his opponent “sat in a chair that was rather low, and as his feet were drawn in well toward the chair his knees were elevated to such a height and at such a sharp angle that it gave him a ludicrous appearance.”²¹²

At Jonesboro, where Douglas had threatened to bring Lincoln “to his milk,” the Little Giant once again stressed the race issue, for, as the challenger had been advised, “in Egypt there is little sympathy for the nigger.”²¹³ Recounting the history of the birth of the Republican party in 1854, the Little Giant alleged that New York antislavery forces had adopted a platform “every plank of which was as black as night, each one relating to the nigger, and not one referring to the interests of the white man.” Republicans throughout the North followed suit, Douglas asserted. Leaders of that new party were “restless mortals and discontented politicians.” In northern Illinois they “brought out men to canvass the State of the same complexion with their political creed, and hence you find Fred. Douglass, the negro, following Gen. Cass, the illustrious Senator from Michigan, and attempting to speak in behalf of Mr. Lincoln and Trumbull and abolitionism against that illustrious Senator. [Applause; renewed laughter.] Why they brought Fred. Douglass to meet me when I was addressing the people at Freeport as I am here, in a carriage with a white lady and her daughter in the carriage sitting by his side, and the owner of the

²¹¹ Recollections of John P. Reese, in George W. Smith, When Lincoln Came to Egypt (Herrin, Illinois: Trovillian Press, 1940), 127-28.

²¹² John McLean, One Hundred Years in Illinois, 1818-1918 (Chicago: Peterson Linotyping Company, 1919), 118-19.

²¹³ Sydney Spring to Lincoln, Grayville, 8 September 1858, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress. See Simon, “Union County,” 272-73.

carriage having the honor to drive the coach to convey the negro. [Applause. “Shame.”]”

In addition to his usual arguments about “the negro, the savage Indians, the Fejee, the Malay” and “any other inferior or degraded race,” the Senator introduced a new element into the debates: expansionism. Since 1843, Douglas has been calling for the annexation of Cuba.²¹⁴ He told the Jonesboro audience that the “time may come, and has come, when our interests would be advanced by the acquisition of the island of Cuba. [Terrific applause.] When we get Cuba we must take it as we find it, and leave the people of Cuba to decide the question of slavery for themselves without the interference of the federal government, or of any other State in the Union.” If other areas in the Western Hemisphere are to become part of the United States, “I will take them with slavery or without it, just as the people shall determine. [“That’s good.” “That’s right,” and cheers.]” (At Belleville on September 10, he had speculated about how voters in Cuba might act: “I have no doubt what their decision will be, since they will never turn loose a million free negroes to desolate that beautiful island.”²¹⁵ Though he had not raised this point in previous debates, Douglas had asked at Joliet on August 31: “I want to know if when we take Cuba, Lincoln will oppose its becoming a part of the Territory of the United States ‘unless slavery is first prohibited therein?’ . . . Will he go for the admission of Cuba after slavery has been abolished therein? Will he set loose a million of slaves and then annex the Island with a million and a half of negroes and less than half a million of white men? Will he go for annexing it as a free negro colony, and making out of it a free negro State with two negro Senators and as many negro representatives as it may be

²¹⁴ Johannsen, Douglas, 147, 326-27, 528-29, 683-84, 692.

²¹⁵ Richmond South, n.d., quoted in the New York Evening Post, 21 September 1858.

entitled to elect?”²¹⁶ In December, Douglas would announce: “It is our destiny to have Cuba, and it is folly to debate the question. It naturally belongs to the American Continent.”²¹⁷

When Lincoln began his reply, he was “evidently embarrassed by the apparent uniform democratic hue of his audience.” A faint cheer arose, “followed by derisive laughter from the Douglas men, and solemn silence from the ‘Danites.’” Lincoln’s backers “took courage from this and burst into a loud cheer, which for the first time satisfied the statesmen on the platform, that matters were not all one way.” Lincoln “proceeded in his accustomed sincere, earnest and good-humored way to present his side of the case.”²¹⁸ At first he was unimpressive, for “he began his address in a high-pitched, treble voice, all out of proportion to his massive head and frame, and accompanied it with rather an awkward carriage and gesture.”²¹⁹ One observer noted that “he got around about as gracefully as a woman climbs a rail fence,” but another recalled that “as he warmed into his subject, I became unconscious of his appearance and his voice in the realization that I was listening to a wonderful message from a great soul.”²²⁰ A clergyman stated that during one of the debates, Lincoln “planted himself squarely on his feet at the beginning of his speech” and moved about so little during its delivery that if a silver dollar had

²¹⁶ Speech at Joliet, 31 August, Missouri Republican (St. Louis), 10 September 1858.

²¹⁷ Speeches of Senator S. A. Douglas on the Occasion of His Public Receptions by the Citizens of New Orleans, Philadelphia, and Baltimore (pamphlet; Washington: Lemuel Towers, 1860), 9 (speech of 6 December 1858 at New Orleans).

²¹⁸ Jonesboro correspondence, 15 September, New York Evening Post, 20 September 1858.

²¹⁹ John McLean, One Hundred Years in Illinois, 1818-1918 (Chicago: Peterson Linotyping Company, 1919), 118-19.

²²⁰ Frank M. Daulton, who covered the debates for the Quincy Herald, quoted in the Macon, Missouri, correspondence, 26 November, New York Sun, 27 November 1904; McLean, One Hundred Years in Illinois, 118-19.

“been laid on the platform, between his feet at the beginning,” it would have remained untouched.²²¹

Lincoln’s voice and height gave him an advantage over Douglas, as a lawyer who heard several of the debates testified. The Little Giant “could make a powerful impression at close range,” but “he could not reach, with both physical influence and voice, the outskirts of a mass of five or ten thousand listeners, with his short though affirmative body, as could Lincoln with his towering form on fire with earnest and convincing words.” To see Lincoln “at his best you needed to be at least ten rods in front of him, space to get the effect of his personal appearance and time to think over what he said and how he said it. . . . It was a sight never to be forgotten to see the tall form of Lincoln side by side with the stumpy and fiery Douglas.”²²²

Responding to the allegation that he and Trumbull had conspired to abolitionize the two parties, the exasperated Lincoln said: “I don’t want any harsh language indulged in, but I do not know how to deal with this persistent insisting on a story that I know to be utterly without truth. It used to be the fashion amongst men that when a charge was made, some sort of proof was brought forward to establish it, and if no proof was found to exist, the charge was dropped. I don’t know how to meet this kind of an argument. I don’t want to have a fight with Judge Douglas, and I have no way of working an argument up into the consistency of a corn-cob and stopping his mouth with it at all. [Laughter and

²²¹ A Campbellite preacher who heard Lincoln speak on several occasions told this to Charles W. Moores in September 1908. The preacher was about sixteen or eighteen years old when the debates took place and was a student of forensics. Moores to Truman H. Bartlett, Indianapolis, 6 May 1909, Bartlett Papers, Boston University.

²²² A lawyer friend of Lincoln, quoted in Truman Bartlett, “The Cooper Institute Portrait of Abraham Lincoln,” pp. 23-24, typescript, Bartlett Papers, Boston University. This is a draft of his article, “An Old Likeness of Lincoln: An Analysis of the Man as He Appears in the Cooper Institute Portrait,” Harper’s Weekly, 10 February 1912.

applause.] All I can do is, good-humoredly to say to that story about a bargain between Judge Trumbull and myself, there is not a word of truth in it. [Applause.]” As for James Matheny’s speech about that alleged conspiracy, Lincoln chided his opponent: “I hope the Judge will pardon me for doubting the genuineness of this document since his production of those Springfield Resolutions at Ottawa.” At this, the “audience burst into loud applause, and the Judge, who was quietly smoking on the platform, smiled grimly, and looked a little confused.”²²³

Lincoln devoted much of his time at Jonesboro to reading Democratic antislavery platforms and resolutions adopted in 1850 throughout northern Illinois. These documents were doubtless provided by Herndon, whom Lincoln “kept quite busy hunting up old speeches and gathering facts and statistics at the State library.” Years later Herndon, recalling the 1858 campaign, said: “I made liberal clippings bearing in any way on the questions of the hour from every newspaper I happened to see, and kept him supplied with them; and on one or two occasions, in answer to letters and telegrams, I sent books forward to him.”²²⁴

Lincoln argued that if Douglas were justified in holding him responsible for radical resolutions endorsed by Republicans in Aurora and other northern Illinois towns, the Little Giant should also be held responsible for the 1850 documents he read. He even introduced resolutions adopted by Democrats in Douglas’s home state of Vermont.

Lincoln denied the central tenet of Douglas’s Freeport Doctrine, that slavery could not exist without “friendly legislation” to protect it. After all, he pointed out, Dred Scott had been held in slavery in Minnesota, which had no police regulations supporting

²²³ Jonesboro correspondence, 15 September, New York Evening Post, 20 September 1858.

²²⁴ Angle, ed., Herndon’s Lincoln, 336.

slavery; in fact, Congress had explicitly forbidden slavery in that region. “It takes not only law but the enforcement of law to keep it out.” Before 1857, Douglas had maintained that the Supreme Court should decide whether the people of a territory could exclude slavery; at Freeport (and on earlier occasions) he asserted that the settlers in a territory could make an end-run around the Supreme Court and were not obliged to abide by its explicit decision. Was not Douglas oath-bound to support laws protecting the right of slaveholders to take their slaves into the territories, just as opponents of slavery like Lincoln were honor-bound to support the Fugitive Slave Act, even though they found it “distasteful”? Pointedly Lincoln asked how Douglas could swear to uphold the Constitution and simultaneously “assist in legislation intended to defeat that right?” Lincoln then posed to Douglas a fifth interrogatory to supplement the ones he had asked at Ottawa: “If the slaveholding citizens of a United States Territory should need and demand Congressional legislation for the protection of their slave property in such Territory, would you, as a member of Congress, vote for or against such legislation?” Lyman Trumbull had advised him to ask Douglas that question, anticipating that the Little Giant would “answer promptly that Congress possessed no such power, or that he was opposed to its exercise if it did.” Prophetically Trumbull argued that such a response “would effectually use him up with the South & set the whole pro-slavery Democracy against him.”²²⁵

Lincoln’s patience was tried beyond endurance by Douglas’s August 31 speech at Joliet, where the Little Giant alleged that at the close of the Ottawa debate his opponent was so frightened by the prospect of having to defend his views in Jonesboro that it

²²⁵ Trumbull to Lincoln, St. Louis, 14 September 1858, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

“made him tremble in the knees, so that he had to be carried from the platform.”²²⁶

Indignantly Lincoln expostulated: “I have really come to the conclusion that I can explain it in no other way than by believing the Judge is crazy. [Renewed laughter.]” When the senator asked, “Wasn’t you carried off at Ottawa?” Lincoln exclaimed: “There! That is Douglas – just like him!” and denied that he had to be carried.²²⁷ (In July at Bloomington, Douglas himself had been carried by supporters to the speakers’ platform.)²²⁸ Again Lincoln asserted that when the Little Giant made that claim he “must have been crazy and wholly out of his sober senses.” (Perhaps Lincoln meant to imply that Douglas was drunk. The Chicago Press and Tribune observed that Douglas presented “unaccountable falsehoods” which “no sober man could ever have uttered.”²²⁹ Herndon commented that “Douglas is mad – is wild & sometimes I should judge ‘half seas over [i.e., drunk].’”)²³⁰ Lincoln denied that he feared speaking in Jonesboro. “Why, I know this people better than he does. I was raised just a little east of here. I am a part of this people.” (Actually Lincoln’s boyhood home in Indiana was 140 miles distant.) There “was a visible warming of the audience toward Lincoln when he put forward the claim of neighbor and friend.”²³¹ The Little Giant, Lincoln added, “has set about seriously trying to make the impression that when we meet at different places I am literally in his clutches – that I am a poor, helpless, decrepit mouse, and that I can do nothing at all. This is one of the ways

²²⁶ Joliet speech, 31 August, Missouri Republican (St. Louis), 9 September 1858.

²²⁷ Jonesboro correspondence, 15 September, New York Evening Post, 20 September 1858.

²²⁸ Fulton Democrat, 24 July 1858.

²²⁹ Chicago Press and Tribune, 17 September 1858.

²³⁰ William H. Herndon to Theodore Parker, Springfield, 2 September 1858, Herndon-Parker Papers, University of Iowa.

²³¹ Winship, My Life Story, 103.

he has taken to create that impression. I don't know any other way to meet it, except this. I don't want to quarrel with him – to call him a liar – but when I come square up to him I don't know what else to call him. [Cheers and laughter.]”

Lincoln ended his remarks ten minutes early, prompting Henry Villard to comment: “if he were a man of intelligence, of talent and political wit he could have pressed a masterful speech into those ten minutes.”²³² The Louisville Journal observed that Lincoln's “searching, scathing, stunning” remarks “belong to what some one has graphically styled the tomahawking species.”²³³

In his rejoinder, Douglas protested that at Joliet he “in a playful manner” asserted that Lincoln had to be carried off from the platform at Ottawa. (An account in the Peoria Transcript, whose “nigger-worshipping proclivities” were condemned by the Illinois State Register, noted that this explanation left “the inference that he was probably drunk.”)²³⁴ In commenting on Lincoln's assertion that he had been raised nearby, Douglas accused him of dishonoring his parents: “I don't know that a native of Kentucky who was raised among slaves, and whose father and mother were nursed by slaves, is any more excusable when he comes to Illinois and turns Abolitionist, to slander the grave of his father and the institutions under which he was born and where his father and mother lived.”

Responding to Lincoln's question about a federal slave code for the territories, the Little Giant declared that “there shall be non-interference, non-intervention by Congress

²³² [Henry Villard], “Douglas und Lincoln, Die dritte Discussion zu Jonesboro, Ill., am 15. Sept.” New-Yorker Staats-Zeitung, 22 September 1858.

²³³ Louisville Journal, n.d., copied in the Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 4 October 1858.

²³⁴ Illinois State Register (Springfield), 28 October 1858; Peoria Transcript, 20 September 1858, Sparks, ed., The Lincoln-Douglas Debates, 263.

in the States and Territories.” Though this was an “evasive common place” that constituted “no answer,” it “brought down the house.”²³⁵ As Trumbull had predicted, this stance would cost Douglas dearly, for Southerners were to interpret it as an affront to their section.

An Illinois reporter thought Douglas’s “delivery was remarkably tame.”²³⁶ The Little Giant’s performance, according to Chester P. Dewey of the New York Evening Post, “was not marked by his usual ability, and the delivery was very bad – a sort of school boy monotone, with an especial aplomb on every emphatic syllable.” On the other hand, Dewey thought Lincoln’s speech “the best I have heard from him.”²³⁷ The following day Lincoln wrote that the meeting at Jonesboro “was not large; but, in other matters altogether respectable. I will venture to say that our friends were a little better satisfied with the result than our adversaries.”²³⁸ One such friend was Governor William H. Bissell, who told E. B. Washburne in late September that the Republican “cause is unquestionably gaining daily. . . . Lincoln is doing well. He has made much, much in Egypt. There is no mistake about it.”²³⁹

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At Centralia two days after the Jonesboro debate, the Little Giant, evidently drunk, delivered an ill-tempered “harangue” which “was particularly severe on the unfortunate odor of the black man.” Douglas “asked if his audience wished to eat with,

²³⁵ Jonesboro correspondence, 15 September, New York Evening Post, 20 September 1858.

²³⁶ Galesburg Semi-Weekly Democrat, 18 September 1858.

²³⁷ Jonesboro correspondence, 15 September, New York Evening Post, 20 September 1858.

²³⁸ Lincoln to Joseph Gillespie, Centralia, 16 September 1858, Basler and Basler, eds., Collected Works of Lincoln, Second Supplement, 16.

²³⁹ Bissell to E. B. Washburne, Springfield, 23 September 1858, Washburne Papers, Library of Congress.

ride with, go to church with, travel with, and in other ways bring Congo odor into their nostrils and to their senses.” He concluded that blacks were meant to be servants and averred that “if God Almighty intended them for anything else, he was a long time bringing it about.”²⁴⁰ This prompted an indignant response from a Republican editor: “The redoubtable Little Giant asks a re-election; he goes through the State to let the people know what principles he professes, and what opinions he holds, which, he insists, should cause the people to re-elect him. And what is the ground upon which he asks the support of freemen? It is nothing more nor less than his ability to kick a nigger. It is the staple of all his speeches, it is the great one idea of his Statesmanship! When it is urged that our Fathers expected, and took such action as they thought would cause, the ultimate extinction of Slavery, Douglas valiantly ‘pitches into the nigger.’ If he is reminded that Freedom is on grounds of public policy, preferable to Slavery, that Free Territory will prove immensely more valuable to the Union than Slave Territory, and that our public domain should be kept free for the European emigrants, and the white inhabitants of this country, he summons all his courage to his aid, shakes his shaggy locks, and amid the roar of his cannon, again pitches into the negro. He threshes the nigger in the fence, and the nigger in the field, the free nigger and the nigger slave, declares that he ought to be a slave, and says if it is otherwise the Almighty has been a long time in demonstrating it!”²⁴¹

Lincoln also visited Centralia, attending the state fair with Henry C. Whitney and Jesse K. Dubois. The night before the next debate, to be held at Charleston, Whitney and Lincoln caught an Illinois Central train bound for that town. On board, local politicians

²⁴⁰ Centralia correspondence, 17 September, Chicago Press and Tribune, 20 September 1858.

²⁴¹ Galena Weekly Northwest Gazette, 5 October 1858.

pestered him so much that Lincoln could get no sleep. When Whitney asked a conductor if the candidate, in dire need of rest, could use the empty apartment car at the end of the train, he was refused. Whitney, who managed to gain access to that car “by a stratagem,” was outraged that his friend should be so shabbily treated while Douglas traveled in a luxurious car on a special train. Bitterly Whitney recalled that “every interest of that Road and every employee was against Lincoln and for Douglas.”²⁴² Republican newspapers made similar charges about other railroads.²⁴³

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On September 18 the candidates clashed again at Charleston, shire town of Coles County in east central Illinois, known as the “Buckle on the Corn Belt.” From surrounding villages like Greasy Creek, Muddy Point, Dog Town, Pinhook, Bloody Hutton, and Goosenest Prairie (where Lincoln’s stepmother resided and his father lay buried), some 12,000 people streamed to hear the debate.²⁴⁴ Chester P. Dewey of the New York Evening Post remarked that “I have seen and watched these other demonstrations, but have failed to notice the hot and fevered flush which has marked this one.” Dewey painted a graphic picture of the debates in general: “It is astonishing how deep an interest in politics this people take. Over long, weary miles of hot and dusty prairie, the processions of eager partisans come – on foot, on horseback, in wagons drawn by horses or mules; men, women and children, old and young; the half sick, just out of the last

²⁴² Whitney, statement for Herndon [November 1866?], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 406; Whitney, Life on the Circuit, ed. Angle, 409-10.

²⁴³ Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 24 July 1858.

²⁴⁴ Charles H. Coleman, “The Lincoln-Douglas Debate at Charleston, Illinois, September 18, 1858” (pamphlet; Eastern Illinois University Bulletin no. 249 [December 1963]), 43. Sarah Bush Lincoln was quite proud of her stepson. A. H. Chapman to Lincoln, Charleston, 24 July 1858, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

‘shake’; children in arms, infants at the maternal fount, pushing on in clouds of dust beneath a blazing sun; settling down at the town where the meeting is, with hardly a chance for sitting, and even less opportunity for eating, waiting in anxious groups for hours at the places of speaking, talking, discussing, litigious, vociferous, while the roar of artillery, the music of bands, the waving of banners, the huzzas of the crowds, as delegation after delegation appears; the cry of pedlars vending all sorts of wares, from an infallible cure for ‘augur’ to a monster watermelon in slices to suit purchasers – combine to render the occasion one scene of confusion and commotion.” At one o’clock, “a perfect rush is made for the grounds; a column of dust rising to the heavens and fairly deluging those who are hurrying on through it. Then the speakers come, with flags, and banners, and music, surrounded by cheering partizans. Their arrival at the ground and immediate approach to the stand is the signal for shouts that rend the heavens. They are introduced to the audience amid prolonged and enthusiastic cheers; they are interrupted by frequent applause, and they sit down finally amid the same uproarious demonstrations. The audience sit or stand patiently throughout, and as the last word is spoken, make a break for their homes, first hunting up lost members of their families, gathering their scattered wagon loads together, and as the daylight fades away, entering again upon the broad prairies and slowly picking their way back ‘to the place of beginning.’”²⁴⁵

Among the banners was one emblazoned with a quotation from the Little Giant:

“This government was made for white men – Douglas for life.”²⁴⁶ The badges, flags, bunting, and other campaign “etceteras” were far more elaborate and numerous than they

²⁴⁵ Charleston correspondence, 18 September, New York Evening Post, 25 September 1858.

²⁴⁶ Simeon E. Thomas, “Lincoln-Douglas Debate,” The Teachers College Bulletin (Quarterly of the Eastern Illinois State Teachers College), no. 86 (1924), 7; Chicago Times, 21 September 1858, Sparks, ed., The Lincoln-Douglas Debates, 312.

had been at previous debate sites.²⁴⁷ One Charlestonian recalled that the event drew “the largest assemblage of people that I had ever before or since seen here, as it seemed that all of the streets, the highways leading in this direction, with long processions of persons in wagons, carriages, and on horseback, with banners flapping in the breeze, were densely packed.” The fairgrounds “appeared to be filled with a breathing, earnest mass of humanity, with every one of the thousands eager to hear the orators, and in an effort to occupy a position as near as possible to the speaker’s stand.”²⁴⁸

On the hot, clear day of this fourth debate, Lincoln approached Charleston from nearby Mattoon, accompanied by many of its residents, mostly of northern origin. In the procession was a float carrying thirty-two young women, each representing a state of the Union, with a banner reading “Westward the star of Empire takes its way, The girls link-on to Lincoln, as their mothers did to Clay.” In addition, a comely maiden on horseback carried a banner with the motto, “Kansas – I will be free.” (Horace White thought that because she was so attractive that “she would not remain free always.”)²⁴⁹ Upon arriving, Lincoln was greeted by his friend H. P. H. Bromwell, who delivered a warm welcoming address. The challenger replied graciously, with special praise for the float bearing the young women, whom he likened to a “beautiful basket of flowers.”²⁵⁰

After lunch, as Lincoln and Douglas proceeded to the fair grounds, the Little Giant erupted in anger at a banner showing Lincoln clubbing him to the ground. With his “face swollen with rage,” he declared that “he would not be treated with such indignity.”

²⁴⁷ Chicago Press and Tribune, 21 September 1858.

²⁴⁸ Theophilus Van Deren, in Stevens, A Reporter’s Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 224.

²⁴⁹ White in Herndon’s Lincoln, 2nd ed., 2:121.

²⁵⁰ Chicago Press and Tribune, 21 September 1858.

Petulantly he added, “If I can’t be treated with some respect, I’ll get out of the procession.”²⁵¹

At 2:45 p.m., as Lincoln rose to speak, several Democrats pushed their way to the platform and unfurled a huge banner with a caricature of a white man, a black woman, and a black child, bearing the caption “Negro Equality.” When Republican demands that it be removed were ignored, two men leapt from the platform and tore it down.²⁵²

Lincoln had been warned that Negrophobia was intense in Coles County. His friend William M. Chambers, an influential American party leader in Charleston, told him after reading his Chicago speech of July 10 that he should attack Douglas’s “political inconsistencies and tergiversations” and give his audiences “less of the favouring of negro equality.” Appeals for racial justice pleased neither Fillmore voters nor Republicans around Charleston.²⁵³ The town’s leading Republican, Thomas A. Marshall, with whom Lincoln stayed, recommended that he tell Dr. Chambers that “as for negro equality in the sense in which the expression is used you neither believe in it nor desire it. You desire to offer no temptations to negroes to come among us or remain with us, and therefore you do not propose to confer upon them any further social or political rights than they are now entitled to.”²⁵⁴ This counsel echoed what David Davis had told Lincoln about Tazewell County: “Among all the Kentuckians it is industriously circulated that, you favor negro equality. All the [Republican] Orators should distinctly & emphatically

²⁵¹ Charleston Courier, 22 September 1858.

²⁵² Thomas, “Lincoln-Douglas Debate,” 8; Charleston correspondence, 18 September, Chicago Journal, 20 September 1858; Paris Prairie Beacon News, 24 September 1858.

²⁵³ W. M. Chambers to Lincoln, Charleston, 22 July 1858, and Thomas A. Marshall to Lincoln, Charleston, 2 June 1858, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

²⁵⁴ Thomas A. Marshall to Lincoln, Charleston, 22 July 1858, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

disavow negro suffrage – negro holding office, serving on juries, & the like—”²⁵⁵ Similar advice came from Jediah F. Alexander, who wrote in August from Greenville, ninety miles southwest of Charleston: “You must be full and explicit in explaining that . . . the Republicans are not in favor of making the Blacks socially and politically equal with the Whites.”²⁵⁶ In July the Republican district convention at Dixon in northern Illinois had adopted a resolution declaring that “the republican party has not held and does not hold to the political and social equality of the races or individually, and has re-affirmed and ever will re-affirm with the declaration of independence, the equality of all men of whatever race or color, in natural right, to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”²⁵⁷ A Republican in Shawneetown declared that the only way his party could win was “to satisfy the people the republicans are not amalgamationists.”²⁵⁸

In his opening remarks, Lincoln showed that he had taken the advice of Chambers, Marshall, Davis, et al. to heart. “When I was at the hotel to-day,” he began, “an elderly gentleman called upon me to know whether I was really in favor of producing a perfect equality between the negroes and white people. [Great laughter.]” Lincoln had not planned to “say much on that subject,” but since he was asked, he thought he “would occupy perhaps five minutes in saying something in regard to it.” He declared bluntly: “I am not, nor ever have been, in favor of bringing about in any way the social and political

²⁵⁵ David Davis to Lincoln, Bloomington, 3 August 1858, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress. See also David Davis to O. M. Hatch, Springfield and Bloomington, 18 August 1858, For the People: A Newsletter of the Abraham Lincoln Association vol. 4, no. 3 (Autumn 2002): 6-7, and Willard King, Lincoln’s Manager: David Davis (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), 124-25.

²⁵⁶ Jediah F. Alexander to Lincoln, Greenville, 5 August 1858, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

²⁵⁷ Illinois State Register (Springfield), 31 July 1858.

²⁵⁸ Orville Sexton to Lyman Trumbull, Shawneetown, 25 September 1857, Trumbull Papers, Library of Congress.

equality of the white and black races [applause]; that I am not, nor ever have been, in favor of making voters or jurors of negroes, nor of qualifying them to hold office, nor to intermarry with white people; and I will say, in addition to this, that there is a physical difference between the white and black races which I believe will forever forbid the two races living together on terms of social and political equality. And inasmuch as they cannot so live, while they remain together there must be the position of superior and inferior, and I as much as any other man am in favor of having the superior position assigned to the white race.”

Lincoln qualified this stark avowal: “I do not perceive that because the white man is to have the superior position the negro should be denied everything. I do not understand that because I do not want a negro woman for a slave I must necessarily want her for a wife. [Cheers and laughter.] My understanding is that I can just let her alone. I am now in my fiftieth year, and I certainly never had had a black woman for either a slave or a wife. So it seems to me quite possible for us to get along without making either slaves or wives of negroes. I will add to this that I have never seen, to my knowledge, a man, woman, or child who has been in favor of producing a perfect equality, social and political, between negroes and white men. I recollect of but one distinguished instance that I ever heard of so frequently as to be entirely satisfied of its correctness, and that is the case of Judge Douglas’s old friend Colonel Richard M. Johnson. [Laughter and cheers.]”

Continuing in a satirical vein, Lincoln added that “I have never had the least apprehension that I or my friends would marry negroes if there was no law to keep them from it [laughter]; but as Judge Douglas and his friends seem to be in great apprehension

that they might, if there were no law to keep them from it, [roars of laughter] I give him the most solemn pledge that I will to the very last stand by the law of this State, which forbids the marrying of white people with negroes. [Continued laughter and applause.]” In concluding his remarks on the subject of black citizenship, Lincoln observed that only state legislatures could alter “the social and political relations of negro and the white man,” and “as I do not really apprehend the approach of any such thing myself, and as Judge Douglas seems to be in constant horror that some such danger is rapidly approaching, I propose as the best means to prevent it that the Judge be kept at home, and placed in the State Legislature to fight the measure. [Uproarious laughter and applause.]”

Lincoln devoted most of his opening speech to a repetition of Lyman Trumbull’s accusation that Douglas had thwarted an 1856 bill framed by Georgia Senator Robert Toombs which would have allowed Kansas settlers to vote on the proposed state constitution. Thus, he argued, the Little Giant was no true friend of popular sovereignty, and his opposition to the Lecompton Constitution was hypocritical. Toombs’ measure had been referred to Douglas’s Committee on Territories, which removed the provision calling for submission of the constitution to the voters of Kansas. The issue had resonance in Coles County; a Charlestonian told Douglas “that Toombs matter is a great bugaboo with the nigger party here.”²⁵⁹ Lincoln’s friends thought that he should attack Douglas for his evisceration of the Toombs bill.²⁶⁰ Mark Delahay reported to Lincoln that Trumbull’s charge “hit the right c[h]ord, from the uneasiness & fluttering which is discoverable among the Douglas bolters.” If Lincoln were to criticize Douglas for

²⁵⁹ J. J. Brown to Douglas, Charleston, 26 August 1858, typed copy, George Fort Milton Papers, Library of Congress. The original is not in the Douglas Papers at the University of Chicago.

²⁶⁰ Whitney to Lincoln, Chicago, 26 August 1858, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

altering the Toombs bill, it would compel the Little Giant “to defend these charges and When ever he does you have got the ‘Word on him.’”²⁶¹ From Cincinnati, J. H. Jordan counseled Lincoln to emphasize the “charge of altering Toombs’ Bill – taking out the ‘Popular Sovereignty’ – It is true – therefore make him eat it.”²⁶² Douglas’s supporters in the Jacksonville area were “staggered” and “reeling” in part because of “Trumbull’s charge in regard to the Toombs bill.”²⁶³ Newspapers devoted much attention to that statute.²⁶⁴

At Charleston, Lincoln forced Douglas to “eat” Trumbull’s charge. Earlier in the campaign, the challenger had not directly addressed the Toombs bill, but he had vouched for the honesty and integrity of Trumbull, which prompted Douglas to hold Lincoln responsible for Trumbull’s “slanders.”²⁶⁵ In reply, Lincoln pointed out that, according to Democratic Senator William Bigler of Pennsylvania, a senatorial conference headed by Douglas had agreed to strike from Toombs’s bill the provision for submitting the constitution to a vote of the Kansas settlers. Douglas’s allegation that Trumbull “forges his evidence from beginning to end” Lincoln denied: “upon my own authority I say that it is not true. [Great cheers and laughter.]” The Toombs bill, Bigler’s speech, and Douglas’s own speech of December 9, 1857, were part of the public record, not forgeries. “I have always wanted to deal with every one I meet, candidly and honestly,” Lincoln averred. “If I have made any assertion not warranted by facts, and it is pointed out to me, I will

²⁶¹ Delahay to Lincoln, Alton, 13 August 1858, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

²⁶² J. H. Jordan to Lincoln, Cincinnati, 24 August 1858, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

²⁶³ B. Lewis to Lincoln, Jacksonville, 25 August 1858, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

²⁶⁴ Whan, “Douglas,” 804n1.

²⁶⁵ Jacksonville correspondence, 6 September, Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 8 September 1858.

withdraw it cheerfully. But I do not choose to see Judge Trumbull calumniated, and the evidence he has brought forward branded in general terms, ‘a forgery from beginning to end.’”

Lew Wallace, an admirer of Douglas, initially thought Lincoln’s remarks risible, but in time he changed his mind. “The pleasantry, the sincerity, the confidence, the amazingly original way of putting things, and the simple, unrestrained manner withal, were doing their perfect work; and then and there I dropped an old theory, that to be a speaker one must needs be graceful and handsome.” Wallace found Douglas’s reply disappointing. “His face was darkened by a deepening scowl, and he was angry,” a sure sign that his opponent had the upper hand. “He spoke so gutturally, also, that it was difficult to understand him.”²⁶⁶

The Little Giant began with a disingenuous boast: “I am glad to have gotten an answer from him upon that proposition, to wit: the right of suffrage and holding office by negroes, for I have been trying to get him to answer that point during the whole time that the canvass has been going on.” This was misleading for Lincoln had said a month earlier at Ottawa: “I have no purpose to introduce political and social equality between the white and black races. There is a physical difference between the two, which in my judgment will probably forever forbid their living together upon the footing of perfect equality, and inasmuch as it becomes a necessity that there must be a difference, I, as well as Judge Douglas, am in favor of the race to which I belong, having the superior position.”

In dealing with the Toombs bill, Douglas asked why Trumbull and Lincoln had not objected in 1856, when that legislation was introduced and then modified. He chided

²⁶⁶ Lew Wallace, Lew Wallace: An Autobiography (2 vols.; New York: Harper & Brothers, 1906), 1:254, 255.

Lincoln for devoting inordinate time to rehashing Trumbull's "vile charge," asserted that Senator Bigler had retracted his allegation, and protested that a requirement for a popular referendum on the Lecompton constitution was implicit and that none of the statehood bills before 1856 stipulated that the constitution must be ratified by a vote of the people.

The Little Giant expressed contempt for the "petty, malicious assaults" made against him. Without evident irony he declared, "I despair ever to be elected to office by slandering my opponent and traducing other men, [cheers]. Mr. Lincoln asks you to-day for your support in electing him to the Senate solely because he and Trumbull can slander me." While Lincoln had not mentioned his conspiracy theory, Douglas offered one of his own: "here is a conspiracy to carry an election by slander or not by fair means. Mr. Lincoln's speech this day is conclusive evidence of the fact." Scornfully he ridiculed his opponent for trying "to ride into office on Trumbull's back and Trumbull is going to carry him by falsehood into office." With disdain he added: "It won't do for Mr. Lincoln, in parading his calumny against me, to put Trumbull between him and the odium and the responsibility that attaches to such calumny. I tell him that I am as ready to prosecute the endorser as the maker of a forged note. [Applause; cheers.]" With a characteristic air of injured innocence he voiced regret that he had to spend time on "these petty personal matters. It is unbecoming the dignity of a canvasser for an office of the character for which we are candidates." He implied that he would now withdraw the compliments he had earlier paid Lincoln. "If there is anything personally disagreeable, unkind or disrespectful in these personalities, the sole responsibility is on Mr. Lincoln, Trumbull and their backers." Averring that he had "no charges to make against Mr. Lincoln," Douglas immediately thereafter said: "If Mr. Lincoln is a man of bad character, I leave it to you to

find out. If his voting in the past was not satisfactory to you, I leave others to ascertain the fact, and if his course on the Mexican war was not in accordance with your opinions of patriotism and duty in defence of our country against a public enemy, I leave you to ascertain the fact. I have no assault to make against him.”

The Little Giant again appealed to the Negrophobia of his audience by attacking Frederick Douglass. Four years earlier in northern Illinois, he recalled, “I passed Lincoln’s ally there, in the person of Fred. Douglass, the negro, preaching revolutionary principles, while Lincoln was discussing the same principles down here, and Trumbull a little further down attempting to elect members of the Legislature, and acting in harmony each with the other.” At Chicago he observed an effort by “Lincoln’s then associates and new supporters to put Fred. Douglass on the stand at a Democratic meeting, to reply to the illustrious Gen. Cass, when he was addressing the people there. [“Shame on them.”] They had the same negro hunting me down, and same as they have a negro canvassing the principal counties of the North in behalf of Lincoln. [“Hit him again.” “He’s a disgrace to the white people,” &c.]” Lincoln, said the Little Giant, knew that when they were debating at Freeport, “there was a distinguished colored gentleman there, [laughter] who made a speech that night and the night after, a short distance from Freeport, in favor of Lincoln, and showing how much interest his colored brethren felt in the success of their brother, Abraham Lincoln [Laughter].” The Little Giant then offered to read a speech by Frederick Douglass “in which he called upon all who were friends of negro equality and negro citizenship to rally around Abraham Lincoln, as the chief embodiment of their principles, and by all means to defeat Stephen A. Douglas. [Laughter; “it can’t be done.”]”

(In fact, Frederick Douglass on August 2 at Poughkeepsie, New York, assailed the Senator, quoted from Lincoln’s House Divided speech, which he called “great,” and thanked Lincoln and his party colleagues “because they have nobly upheld and made prominent the principles of the Republican Party in Illinois, which seemed about to be compromised and sacrificed at the very heart of Government.” Democratic newspapers in Illinois found great significance in Douglass’s endorsement of the House Divided speech, which showed “that Mr. Lincoln has reached the very top round of ultra abolitionism, where he now stands, side by side with Fred Douglas.” They also asked ominous questions: “Can the white men of Illinois fail to see in this adoption of Mr. Lincoln’s position as a text for a negro agitator’s glorification speech, in favor of the equality of the races, the tendency of black republican policy to that end?” “Will you elect a man your Senator whose words fit so well the mouth of a negro?”)²⁶⁷

The Little Giant reiterated his opposition to black citizenship. “I say this Government was created on the white basis by white men for white men and their posterity forever, and never should be administered by any except white men. [Cheers.] I declare that a negro ought not to be a citizen whether he was imported into this country or born here, whether his parents were slave or not. It don’t depend upon the question where he was born, or where his parents were placed, but it depends on the fact that the negro belongs to a race incapable of self-government, and for that reason ought not to be on an equality with the white man. [Immense applause.]” (In December, Douglas would tell an audience in New Orleans: “It is a law of humanity, a law of civilization, that whenever a

²⁶⁷ John W. Blasingame et al., eds., The Frederick Douglass Papers, Series 1: Speeches, Debates, and Interviews (5 vols.; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979-91), 3:233-37; Illinois State Register (Springfield), 7 August 1858; Chicago Weekly Times, 12 August 1858; Jacksonville Sentinel, 20 August 1858.

man, or a race of men, show themselves incapable of managing their own affairs, they must consent to be governed by those who are capable of performing the duty. It is on this principle that you establish those institutions of charity, for the support of the blind, or the deaf and dumb, or the insane. In accordance with this principle, I assert that the negro race, under all circumstances, at all times and in all countries, has shown itself incapable of self-government.”²⁶⁸

The Senator charged that his opponent had been inconsistent in the previous debate: “I admired many of the white sentiments contained in Lincoln’s speech at Jonesboro, and could not help but contrast them with the speeches of the same distinguished orator made in the Northern part of the State.” Douglas erred; while it was true that Lincoln in Egypt said he would be willing to admit new slave states, he had said nothing different at Ottawa or Freeport. Instead of statements by his rival, the Little Giant cited utterances by Republican congressional candidates Owen Lovejoy, John Farnsworth, and E. B. Washburne, all of whom opposed admitting new slave states.²⁶⁹ (Farnsworth assured Lincoln that while he personally refused to support the admission of new slave states, he was careful to “say that it is not the position of the republican party.”)²⁷⁰ Obviously Lincoln had not contradicted himself, and Douglas’s argument did him little credit.

Douglas himself was guilty of talking one way in the northern part of the state and another way in the southern part when dealing with the Dred Scott decision. At Freeport

²⁶⁸ Speeches of Senator S. A. Douglas on the Occasion of His Public Receptions by the Citizens of New Orleans, Philadelphia, and Baltimore (pamphlet; Washington: Lemuel Towers, 1860), 5 (speech of 6 December 1858 at New Orleans).

²⁶⁹ Douglas at Charleston, 18 September 1858, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 3:176.

²⁷⁰ Farnsworth to Lincoln, Chicago, 20 September 1858, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

he de-emphasized the significance of the Supreme Court ruling, calling it an “abstraction”; in Egypt he spoke of it with much greater respect as “the supreme law of the land.”²⁷¹ The Chicago Press and Tribune demanded that the senator “be one thing or another, fish, flesh, or fowl, and not be dodging and skulking about, sometimes one thing, sometimes another, and sometimes both at once.”²⁷²

In closing the debate, Lincoln denied that Douglas had ever asked him specifically about black citizenship rights and protested against the Little Giant’s misinterpretation of his criticism of the Dred Scott decision. As for the charge that he espoused radical views in the north and conservatives ones in the south, Lincoln said: “I dare him to point out any different between my speeches north and south. [Great cheering.]” Defending his House Divided doctrine, Lincoln estimated that slavery might not be abolished any time soon. “I do not suppose that in the most peaceful way ultimate extinction would occur in less than a hundred years at least; but that it will occur in the best way for both races, in God’s own good time, I have no doubt. [Applause.]”

Addressing the Little Giant’s allusion to his record during the Mexican war, Lincoln grew angry, though he began moderately: “I don’t want to be unjustly accused of dealing illiberally or unfairly with an adversary, either in court, or in a political canvass, or anywhere else. I would despise myself if I supposed myself ready to deal less liberally with an adversary than I was willing to be treated myself.” He complained that Douglas “revives the old charge against me in reference to the Mexican war,” even though “the more respectable papers of his own party throughout the State [like the Illinois State Register and the Mattoon Gazette] have been compelled to take it back and acknowledge

²⁷¹ Jonesboro correspondence, 15 September, New York Evening Post, 20 September 1858.

²⁷² Chicago Press and Tribune, 7 September 1858.

that it was a lie. [Continued and vociferous applause.]”²⁷³ He then turned to Congressman Orlando B. Ficklin, sitting on the platform. Lincoln “reached back and took Ficklin by the coat-collar, back of his neck, and in no gentle manner lifted him from his seat as if he had been a kitten.”²⁷⁴ To the crowd Lincoln explained, “I do not mean to do anything with Mr. Ficklin except to present his face and tell you that he personally knows it to be a lie!” Ficklin had served in Congress with Lincoln and could testify that the Representative from Springfield had always voted to supply the army. A Democrat who was hosting Douglas, Ficklin artfully dodged the question, merely stating that Lincoln had voted for the Ashmun amendment declaring that the war had been unnecessarily and unconstitutionally commenced by President Polk. A spectator recalled that when Lincoln grabbed Ficklin by the “coat collar and dragged him to the front of the stand,” the Congressman “looked so surprised and the whole performance was so grotesque and unexpected [that] everybody burst into a roar of laughter.”²⁷⁵

In reviewing Douglas’s charges, Lincoln compared his opponent to a cuttlefish, “a small species of fish that has no mode of defending itself when pursued except by throwing out a black fluid, which makes the water so dark the enemy cannot see it, and thus it escapes. [Roars of laughter.]” Insisting that Douglas had evaded the central question about his role in gutting the Toombs bill, Lincoln emphatically scolded the Little Giant: “I suggest to him it will not avail him at all that he swells himself up, takes on dignity, and calls people liars. [Great applause and laughter.]”

²⁷³ Mattoon Gazette, n.d., copied in the Chicago Press and Tribune, 24 August 1858; Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 28 June 1858.

²⁷⁴ Lamon, Recollections, 24.

²⁷⁵ Richard J. Oglesby to Isaac N. Arnold, Lincoln, Illinois, 7 March 1883, Coleman, Lincoln and Coles County, 182.

During Lincoln's rejoinder, Douglas and his friends on the platform "were so nervously excited and the latter so boisterously profane that the reporters could with difficulty hear the words of the speaker." Thrice Robert R. Hitt asked the Douglasites to quiet down, and the correspondent of the Paris Prairie Beacon News was unable to make out Lincoln's remarks. Finally the Senator, who had been nervously glancing at his watch, "broke in excitedly," saying that his opponent "has overspoken his time two minutes now."²⁷⁶ Lincoln replied, "I will quit when the Moderator so says."²⁷⁷ Wryly a gentleman on the platform told Lincoln, "Yes, Douglas has had enough; it is time you let up on him."²⁷⁸ The Chicago Press and Tribune was unusually enthusiastic about Lincoln's performance, particularly his reply to Douglas's rejoinder: "We regard this debate as the GREAT TRIUMPH of the campaign for the friends of Mr. Lincoln. It is unquestionably the strongest effort put forth by that gentleman since the inauguration of the joint discussions, and in its immediate effects upon the audience his concluding half hour surpassed anything yet brought forward in the heated contest." Douglas had, the newspaper observed, demonstrated little more than an "uncommon fertility of quibbles, an opulence of sophistry, and a faculty of obscuring the issues."²⁷⁹ The Charleston Courier observed that Lincoln's riposte "was the most effectual and perpetual and incessant pouring of hot shot upon the head of Douglas that ever poor mortal was the

²⁷⁶ Chicago Press and Tribune, 21 September 1858; Paris Prairie Beacon News, 24 September 1858. The reporter for the Paris paper said "Great a demagogue as we knew him to be, from reading and hearing his speeches, we were not prepared for such an exhibition of ill manners in Judge Douglas."

²⁷⁷ Undated statement by Hiram W. Beckwith, Ida M. Tarbell Papers, Allegheny College.

²⁷⁸ Francis Fisher Browne, The Every-Day Life of Abraham Lincoln (New York: N. D. Thompson, 1886), 287.

²⁷⁹ Chicago Press and Tribune, 21 and 23 September 1858.

victim of.”²⁸⁰ Chester P. Dewey wrote that the challenger’s retort “was especially eloquent and convincing.”²⁸¹

Lincoln’s friends were also delighted. David Davis told him: “Your concluding speech on Douglass at Charleston was admirable.”²⁸² Three days after the debate Richard J. Ogelsby reported that the challenger had scored “the most full and complete triumph . . . in the speeches, the crowds, the turnout and the sympathy, I have ever seen. Lincoln’s last speech was absolutely terrible and Douglas so felt it that he writhed and winced and at last left the stand in a bad humor.”²⁸³ Years later Oglesby recalled that the Charleston debate “was a day of triumph and glory. Douglas was manifestly tiring of that joint discussion. Lincoln, on the contrary, like a precious stone in the rough, was growing constantly brighter and more brilliant by the attrition of the contest. Douglas was petulant. Lincoln was calm, grave, and impressive.”²⁸⁴ Horace White remembered that “we all considered that our side had won a substantial victory. The Democrats seemed to be uneasy and dissatisfied, both during the debate and afterward.”²⁸⁵ Hiram W. Beckwith thought that the final fifteen minutes of Lincoln’s rejoinder constituted the turning point of the campaign: “Putting his opening argument in epitome, his remorseless logic toppled pillar after pillar from the Senator’s cunningly devised subterfuges. One could see the fabric tottering to its fall. Republicans saw it. The Democrats felt it. A panic among them

²⁸⁰ Charleston Courier, 22 September 1858.

²⁸¹ Charleston correspondence, 18 September, New York Evening Post, 25 September 1858.

²⁸² Davis to Lincoln, Lincoln, Illinois, 25 September 1858, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

²⁸³ Oglesby to Sheridan Wait, 21 September 1858, Otto Kyle, Abraham Lincoln in Decatur (New York: Vantage, 1957), 98.

²⁸⁴ Oglesby to Isaac N. Arnold, Lincoln, Illinois, 7 March 1883, Coleman, Lincoln and Coles County, 182.

²⁸⁵ Horace White in Herndon’s Lincoln, 2nd ed., 2:122.

began near the speakers stand and spread outward and onward over the great mass of upturned faces. . . . From this time on none doubted who was to be the winner in the fight.”²⁸⁶ One Democrat told Henry C. Whitney that he had gone to Charleston expecting to see Douglas pulverize his opponent, but came away from the debate “the most astonished squatter sovereign you ever saw. Who the — was Lincoln? What in thunder was the matter with Douglas? I was sick – very sick.”²⁸⁷

The Paris Prairie Beacon News thought that reasonable persons must be convinced that Lincoln did not favor political and social equality for blacks. If they were not convinced, the only way the candidate could persuade them would be if he were to “arm himself with a huge cleaver, and at the next meeting between himself and his competitor, with appropriate formality and due solemnity, kill at least one nigger.” Said one auditor when Lincoln denied that he favored racial amalgamation, “If they can’t believe that, you might as well talk to stumps.”²⁸⁸

The Democrats rushed into print a garbled version of the Charleston debate. A Republican in Naperville told Lincoln that “your speech is so badly mutilated that it is well calculated to work a great injury to yourself & our party’s cause. . . . We look upon this here abouts as the most shameful and dishonest imposition & fraud, yet Committed by our unscrupable opponents.”²⁸⁹

In Massachusetts, the Springfield Republican also deplored Douglas’s tactics, though it had been sympathetic to him before the debate at Charleston. There, the

²⁸⁶ Undated statement by Hiram W. Beckwith, Ida M. Tarbell Papers, Allegheny College.

²⁸⁷ Whitney, Life on the Circuit, ed. Angle, 410.

²⁸⁸ Paris Prairie Beacon News, n.d., and the Illinois State Chronicle, 9 September, both copied in the Missouri Democrat (St. Louis), 16 September 1858.

²⁸⁹ James G. Wright to Lincoln, Naperville, 11 October 1858, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

Republican protested, the Little Giant had appealed to “the ignorance and prejudices of the people to sustain him in a coarse tirade against the blacks.”²⁹⁰ Similarly, the Missouri Democrat observed that Douglas “entertains but a poor opinion of the intellectual capacities of the people.”²⁹¹

Some abolitionists objected to Lincoln’s remarks about black citizenship. “Our standard bearer has faltered thus soon,” lamented the Chicago Congregational Herald. “Lincoln deliberately, and with repetition, declared himself to be opposed to placing colored men on a political equality with white men. He made color and race the ground of political proscription. He forsook principle, and planted himself on low prejudice.” The editors declared that “[w]it, sharp repartee, readiness of speech, good humor, [and] effective stump oratory, amount to something; but they cannot compensate for moral cowardice, or ignorance of the first truths of liberty.” If he had “proposed to restrict the right of suffrage to all who could read and write and were possessed of a reputable character, whether white or black, American, European, Asiatic or African, we would have assented,” but “when he proscribes an entire class of the population, irrespective of intelligence or character, merely because of color and race, we hesitate not to affirm that he has fallen from a position which we can respect, and has planted himself on the Douglas platform.”²⁹² Some disenchanted Republicans in northern Illinois allegedly

²⁹⁰ Springfield Republican, 4 October 1858, in Hanna, “Lincoln and the New England Press,” 30.

²⁹¹ Missouri Democrat (St. Louis), 22 September 1858.

²⁹² Chicago Congregational Herald, [30 September], copied in the Chicago Daily Times, 9 October 1858; Stevens, A Reporter’s Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 86.

schemed to replace Lincoln with Judd as their Senatorial candidate.²⁹³ Democrats complained that he was hypocritical on the slavery issue. Belying his radical talk was the bill he had planned to introduce in Congress nine years earlier, which contained a clause calling for the rendition of slaves fleeing to Washington.²⁹⁴ (In 1860, the radical abolitionist Wendell Phillips would criticize Lincoln on the same grounds.)²⁹⁵ Moreover, they argued plausibly, his statement at Charleston about black citizenship stood in marked contrast to the idealism of his Chicago speech.²⁹⁶

In response to such criticism, the National Anti-Slavery Standard sensibly remarked that “a certain degree of anxiety to escape the odium of abolitionism is pardonable on the part of our Republican friends, especially in election times.”²⁹⁷ The abolitionist Maria Chapman made a similar point to Lyman Trumbull.²⁹⁸ Herndon told Theodore Parker, “Reformers must get so low – crawl along in the mud till a working majority sticks.”²⁹⁹

Like Lincoln, several other committed opponents of slavery shared his views on citizenship rights for blacks and expressed skepticism about racial equality.³⁰⁰ A conspicuous example was Lincoln’s old friend Joshua R. Giddings, who in 1859 declared

²⁹³ Elgin Gazette, n.d., copied in the Illinois State Register (Springfield), 8 October 1858. The Chicago Times alleged that it had received letters from many disenchanted Republicans who condemned Lincoln’s Charleston remarks about black citizenship. Chicago Weekly Times, 7 October 1858.

²⁹⁴ Chicago Weekly Times, 16 September 1858.

²⁹⁵ See above, chapter 8.

²⁹⁶ Illinois State Register (Springfield), 8 August 1858.

²⁹⁷ The National Anti-Slavery Standard (New York), 17 November 1860.

²⁹⁸ Chapman quoted in Stamp, “Race, Slavery, and the Republican Party of the 1850s,” 120.

²⁹⁹ William H. Herndon to Theodore Parker, Springfield, 23 November 1858, Herndon-Parker Papers, University of Iowa.

³⁰⁰ See supra, chapter 10.

on the floor of the House: “We do not say the black man is, or shall be, the equal of the white man; or that he shall vote or hold office.”³⁰¹ “I have always opposed introducing into the Republican platform any doubtful issue,” Giddings said. “The right of suffrage is not a natural right. God never gave the right of suffrage, or of holding office, to an infant who never dreamed of voting or of holding office.”³⁰² Though Congressman Owen Lovejoy hated slavery with a passion inspired by the murder of his abolitionist brother Elijah, he conceded that blacks were inferior to whites. “I know very well that the African race, as a race, is not equal to ours,” he told a Chicago audience in 1860. He added that he also knew “that, in regard to the great overwhelming majority, the Government may be considered, in a certain sense, a Government for white men.”³⁰³ Lovejoy insisted that the white and black races were not equal “in gracefulness of motion, or loveliness of feature; [or] in mental endowment, moral susceptibility, and emotional power; not socially equal; not of necessity politically equal.”³⁰⁴ In 1860 Senator William Henry Seward, one of the foremost antislavery members of Congress, declared on the campaign trail: “The great fact is now fully realized that the African race here is a foreign and feeble element like the Indians, incapable of assimilation” and “is a pitiful exotic unwisely and unnecessarily transplanted into our fields, and which it is unprofitable to cultivate at the cost of the desolation of the native vineyard.”³⁰⁵ Seward

³⁰¹ Congressional Globe, 35th Congress, 2nd session, 346 (12 January 1859).

³⁰² Giddings to the Ashtabula Sentinel, n.d., in the Chicago Press and Tribune, 12 October 1860.

³⁰³ Lovejoy, speech in Chicago, 15 October 1860, The Liberator (Boston), 9 November 1860.

³⁰⁴ Lovejoy quoted in William Barney, The Road to Secession: A New Perspective on the Old South (New York: Praeger, 1972), 62.

³⁰⁵ Seward, “The National Divergence and Return,” speech of 4 September 1860, in George E. Baker, ed. The Works of William Henry Seward (5 vols.; Boston: Houghton Mifflin 1884-87), 4:317.

maintained that “the motive of those who have protested against the extension of slavery [has] always been concern for the welfare of the white man, not an unnatural sympathy for the negro.”³⁰⁶

In 1859 another leading antislavery Senator, Lyman Trumbull, voiced similar opinions: “When we say that all men are created equal, we do not mean that every man in organized society has the same rights. We do not tolerate that in Illinois. I know that there is a distinction between these two races because the Almighty himself has marked it upon their very faces; and, in my judgment, man cannot, by legislation or otherwise, produce a perfect equality between these two races, so that they will live happily together.”³⁰⁷ When asked if he would favor admitting Arizona as a state if it were “colonized and filled up with free colored people,” Trumbull replied that he “did not believe these two races could live happily and pleasantly together, each enjoying equal rights, without one domineering over the other; therefore he advocated the policy of separating these races by adopting a system to rid the country of the black race, as it becomes free. He would say that he should not be prepared under the existing state of state of affairs to admit as a sovereign member of the Union, a community of negroes or Indians either.”³⁰⁸ In recommending that free blacks leave the country, he told Chicagoans: “I want to have nothing to do either with the free negro or the slave negro. We, the Republican party, are the white man’s party. [Great applause.] . . . I would be glad to see this country relieved of

³⁰⁶ Seward in 1860, quoted in Michael F. Holt, The Political Crisis of the 1850s (New York: Wiley, 1978), 191.

³⁰⁷ Congressional Globe, 36th Congress, 1st session, 58-59 (8 December 1859).

³⁰⁸ Unidentified clipping attached to a letter from Charles Taintor, Jr., to Trumbull, [Jackson, Michigan], December 1859, Trumbull Family Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

them.”³⁰⁹ (In 1866, Trumbull would write the path-breaking Civil Rights Act, outlawing discriminatory legislation adopted by the recently defeated Confederate states.) Henry Wilson of Massachusetts, another eminent opponent of slavery, stated on the floor of the Senate, during an 1860 debate on educating black children in the District of Columbia: “I do not . . . believe in the mental or moral or physical equality of some of the races, as against this white race.”³¹⁰ “So far as mental or physical equality is concerned,” Wilson said, “I believe the African race inferior to the white race.”³¹¹ “I have studied the negro character,” declared one of Kentucky’s foremost abolitionists, Cassius M. Clay. “They lack self reliance – we can make nothing out of them. God has made them for the sun and the banana!” Clay thought the country “must spew out the negro.”³¹² The New York Tribune asserted that it did not believe in “the intellectual equality of the Colored with the White man.”³¹³ Similarly, a Republican campaigner in 1860 declared that his party was “not the nigger party. We are the white man’s party. It’s the Democrats who are the nigger party.”³¹⁴ In September, Frank P. Blair, a leader of the antislavery forces in Missouri, told audiences in New York and Pennsylvania that the “Republican party is the

³⁰⁹ Speech of Lyman Trumbull in Chicago, 7 August 1858, National Era (Washington), 2 September 1858.

³¹⁰ Speech of Henry Wilson, Congressional Globe, 36th Congress, 1st session, 1685 (12 April 1860).

³¹¹ Rowland Dunbar, ed., Jefferson Davis, Constitutionalist: His Letters, Papers and Speeches (10 vols.; Jackson, Mississippi: Mississippi Department of Archives and History, 1923), 4:234, quoted in Harry V. Jaffa, A New Birth of Freedom: Abraham Lincoln and the Coming of the Civil War (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000), 226.*CHECK

³¹² Clay to the editor of the New York World, n.p., 19 February 1861, Richard W. Thompson Collection, Lincoln Museum, Fort Wayne.

³¹³ New York Tribune, 26 September 1857.

³¹⁴ Speech of Samuel Carey of Cincinnati, Cincinnati Commercial, n.d., copied in the Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 10 September 1860.

white man's party, and will keep the Territories for white men."³¹⁵

Lincoln and Douglas differed sharply on race, though neither was a racial egalitarian. Lincoln used the pejorative term "nigger" far less often than his opponent; unlike Douglas, he never claimed that his party was the white man's party; he seldom argued that slavery should be contained primarily to preserve the territories for whites; Lincoln did not raise the race issue except in response to Douglas's race baiting; and Lincoln's statements regarding black inferiority were much more guarded, mild, and tentative than Douglas's blatant assertions of white superiority.³¹⁶

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Two days after the Charleston debate, Douglas virtually accused Lincoln of treason for his stand on the Mexican War. The Little Giant denied alleging that Lincoln had voted against supplies for troops in Mexico; to an audience in Sullivan, he explained what he actually had done at Charleston: "I took occasion to say that I had no charges to make against Mr. Lincoln; that I should not hunt up the records of congress to prove how he voted on this question or on that question, that I would not go back to see how he voted upon the questions of banks, or upon the Mexican war or any of those issues, but I would have you to form your own judgment upon his actions recorded in the history of our country. He said my allusion to the Mexican war implied a charge that he had voted against the supplies. Now mark that I had not said a word about supplies! Then he went on to say that he never voted against the supplies. I never alluded to his vote on the Mexican war in a public speech in my life, but he said that the mere allusion, that I would not enquire how he voted on the Mexican war meant a charge, and he was not going to

³¹⁵ New York Times, 27, 28 June 1860.

³¹⁶ Stampp, "Race, Slavery, and the Republican Party of the 1850s," 124-30.

stand it, and then he went on to say that I had slandered him by implying that that he voted against the supplies.

“As he has brought it up and made that charge on me, I will say something about it, and I will make it so distinct that he will not misunderstand me.

“I now say Abraham Lincoln was the opponent of the Mexican war. I now say that during the war, and after it was declared, and while the battles were being fought in Mexico, Lincoln took the side of the common enemy against his own country. He called Col. Ficklin forward on Saturday, as a witness about supplies, and drew him right up on the stand and said, ‘come now, just tell them it is a lie.’ ‘Well, said Ficklin, I will tell them all I know about it. All I recollect is that you voted for Ashmun’s resolutions declaring the war unconstitutional and unjust.’ Lincoln replied, ‘That is true, I did. [Cries of “that’s so.”] Thus he acknowledged that he voted for a resolution declaring the Mexican war unconstitutional and unjust. [A voice – “That’s enough; when did he do that?”] He did it after the war had begun, after the battles of Palo Alto, Resaca de la Palma, Monterey and Buena Vista had been fought. He did it when our army was in Mexico, ten thousand men combating an enemy 180,000 strong. – He did it at the time when the American army was in great peril of being destroyed. The enemy took that and other votes and Corwin’s speech and published it in pamphlet form in Mexico, and distributed it all over the army to show that there was a Mexican party in America, hence if the army could stand out a little longer, if the guerrillas would keep murdering our soldiers, or poisoning them a little longer, the Mexican party in America would get the control and decide all questions in favor of Mexico. [A voice, “My God! That is worse than his abolitionism.”] I say that his vote was sent to Mexico and circulated there at the

head of the Mexican army as an evidence of the influence of the Mexicans in the American congress. [A voice – “I was there and saw it.”] You may appeal to every soldier that was there for the truth of what I say, and I add that vote. – This record made by Lincoln and others and sent to Mexico to be circulated there, did more harm than the withholding of thousands of loads of supplies.

“The fact was this. Lincoln did not vote against any supplies, for they had been voted before and sent out before Lincoln got to congress.” By the time he took his seat in the House of Representatives, the army had been well supplied by the previous Congress. “The next session Lincoln got in, and when Mexico was full of men and provisions and supplies, all he could do was to make a speech and give votes that would encourage the enemy, and now he comes forward and says he did not vote against the supplies. – His mind was racked about supplies, and he saw how he could frame an answer that would make the people believe he voted for supplies, and his head fell when Ficklin answered his question.”³¹⁷

At that point, Lincoln’s friends, en route to their meeting, came by with their band and distracted the Little Giant’s crowd. (Unaware that Douglas had scheduled a speech for September 20 at Sullivan, Lincoln arranged to speak there that day. When he learned of the conflict, he told Douglas he would not attend his event and would postpone his own speech so as not to conflict with that of the Little Giant.) Indignant Democrats attacked the musicians, and blows were exchanged. Douglas charged that it “was a deliberate attempt on the part of his [Lincoln’s] friends to break up a democratic meeting. It was started at the very time when I was making a point upon Mr. Lincoln, from which

³¹⁷ Sullivan correspondence, 20 September, Illinois State Register (Springfield), 28 September 1858.

all of his friends shrunk in despair, and it was begun suddenly, in order to break off the chain of my argument. It was evidently a preconcerted plan and therefore I say that I am warranted under this state of facts in charging that Mr. Lincoln, as well as his friends, have been a party this day to break up this meeting, in order to prevent me from exposing his alliance with the abolitionists, and repelling the false charges which he made against me at Charleston, and to which I had no opportunity to reply at that place.”³¹⁸

Republicans averred that Douglas’s followers had been the aggressors, attacking their procession at the behest of the Little Giant.³¹⁹ (Violence had broken out elsewhere.

Earlier that month on the streets of Springfield, the former Democratic Congressman John A. McClernand caned the editor of the Illinois State Journal and threatened to shoot a bystander attempting to intervene.)³²⁰

At Springfield on October 20, Douglas repeated his charge about Lincoln’s opposition to the Mexican War, alleging that his vote on the Ashmun resolution, along with the text of that document and Thomas Corwin’s anti-war speech, “were all sent to Mexico and printed in the Mexican language, and read at the head of the Mexican army, to prove to them that there was Mexican party in the congress of the United States, taking the Mexican side of the question. Thus you find that Lincoln’s vote and Corwin’s speech did more to encourage the Mexicans and the Mexican army than all of the soldiers that

³¹⁸ Sullivan correspondence, 20 September, Chicago Times, 24 September 1858, in Paul M. Angle, ed., Created Equal? The Complete Lincoln-Douglas Debates of 1858 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 276-80; Sullivan correspondence, 20 September, Illinois State Register (Springfield), 28 September 1858; Sullivan correspondence, 20 September, Chicago Press and Tribune, 25 September 1858; Sullivan correspondence, 20 September, Missouri Republican (St. Louis), 23 September 1858; Chicago Weekly Times, 30 September 1858.

³¹⁹ Private letter dated Sullivan, 21 September 1858, quoted in J. G. Kearney to the editor, Kinderhook, 4 October, Quincy Whig and Republican, 11 October 1858.

³²⁰ Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 11 September 1858.

were brought into the field; they induced the Mexicans to hold out the longer, and the guerrillas to keep up their warfare on the roadside, and to poison our men, and to take the lives of our soldiers wherever and whenever they could.”³²¹

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During the three weeks following the Charleston debate and before the next one at Galesburg in early October, Lincoln spoke at Danville, Urbana, Jacksonville, Winchester, Pittsfield, Metamora, and Pekin, in addition to Sullivan. En route to Winchester, he stopped in Jacksonville, where he encountered the president of Illinois College, Julian Sturtevant, who solicitously observed: “you must be having a weary time.” Lincoln replied: “I am, and if it were not for one thing I would retire from the contest. I know that if Mr. Douglas’ doctrine prevails it will not be fifteen years before Illinois itself will be a slave state.”³²²

Lincoln may have been tired, but he was not discouraged. In Danville, he attracted a huge, enthusiastic crowd. There his supporters raised a banner proclaiming: “Free territory for white men.”³²³ En route to the speaking site outside town, he pointed to an undertaker’s parlor and morbidly remarked, “that’s what we are all speeding to.”³²⁴ A local newspaper described him unflatteringly as having “a sand-hill crane like body, surmounted by head which looks like a starved canvassed ham.” But it acknowledged that he “talked away at least fifty percent of his ugliness” with “clear articulation” in a

³²¹ Douglas, speech at Springfield, 20 October, Illinois State Register (Springfield), 22 October 1858.

³²² Julian M. Sturtevant, An Autobiography (New York: F. J. Revell Company, 1896), 292.

³²³ Vermilion County Press (Danville), 29 September 1858, in Donald G. Richter, Lincoln: Twenty Years on the Eastern Prairie (Mattoon, Illinois: United Graphics, 1999), 213.

³²⁴ Reminiscences of Elizabeth Harmon, Vermilion County Museum, in. Richter, Lincoln: Twenty Years on the Eastern Prairie, 216.

voice “shrill, and not a little harsh.” The audience “seemed to be convinced, not charmed or captivated.”³²⁵ From that town Lincoln reported on September 23: “We had a fine and altogether satisfactory meeting here yesterday. . . . I believe we have got the gentleman [Douglas], unless they overcome us by fraudulent voting.”³²⁶

Texts of Lincoln’s speeches delivered between the Charleston and Galesburg debates have not survived, but notes evidently written at that time reveal what Lincoln may have said. In those jottings he emphasized the danger posed to whites by the moral indifference of Douglas and his allies. Citing not only the Little Giant’s speeches during the campaign but also editorials in the Richmond Enquirer and the New York Day Book, both of which endorsed the idea of white slavery, and the assertion by Senator John Pettit of Indiana that the Declaration of Independence was “a self-evident lie,” Lincoln concluded that they were all “laboring at a common object,” namely, “to deny the equality of men, and to assert the natural, moral, and religious right of one class to enslave another.” Acknowledging that Douglas “does not draw the conclusion that the superiors ought to enslave the inferiors, he evidently wishes his hearers to draw that conclusion. He shirks the responsibility of pulling the house down, but he digs under it that it may fall of its own weight.”³²⁷

³²⁵ Lafayette Daily Courier, 23 September 1858, in Richter, Lincoln: Twenty Years on the Eastern Prairie, 216.

³²⁶ Lincoln to Norman B. Judd, Danville, 23 September 1858, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 3:202.

³²⁷ Fragment: Notes for Speeches, [1 October 1858?], Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 3:205. Quotes from the New York Day Book and the Richmond Enquirer illustrating Lincoln’s argument were published in the Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 16 October 1858. They may have inspired Lincoln’s comments, or he may have had them reprinted in the Springfield paper.

In October, Douglas repeatedly accused Lincoln of favoring the interests of the unpopular Illinois Central Railroad over those of the people.³²⁸ Three months earlier, Henry C. Whitney had urged Lincoln to “turn the hatred of the people to the I. C. R. Rd. against Douglas.”³²⁹ Some Republicans, but not Lincoln, took that advice.³³⁰ Douglas understood the advantage of making his opponent appear a tool of the Illinois Central, which the previous year had gone into receivership and then foreclosed on 4,000 mortgages; the company was also asking to be relieved of its tax obligation to the state. After denying that he had ever worked as an attorney for the corporation or recommended that it be exempted from state taxation, the Little Giant suggested that his listeners pose questions to the challenger: “Ask him whether he did not hire out to the Company, to make a good bargain for the Company, against the State; and ask him how much money he got for having induced the Legislature to reduce the per centage from fifteen to seven per cent; and then ask him whether he is not to-day in the pay of that Company, and whether he is not now living and getting his bread from that Company.” He implied that Lincoln favored eliminating the seven per cent tax and denounced anyone who favored such a step “as an enemy to the State of Illinois – as a traitor to her best interests.” The Little Giant declared that he had, in the late 1840s, persuaded the Senate to grant land to the state of Illinois, not directly to the Illinois Central, for promoting the growth of the rail network. But the House of Representatives, in which Lincoln then sat, defeated the measure. “We tried it over and again got beaten,” he recalled, “and we never could pass

³²⁸ Between October 4 and 11, Douglas made the charge at Pekin, Monmouth, Oquaka, and Carthage; he repeated it in Springfield on the 20th.

³²⁹ Whitney to Lincoln, Chicago, 7 August 1858, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

³³⁰ See Bruce Collins, “The Lincoln-Douglas Contest of 1858 and Illinois’ Electorate,” Journal of American Studies 20 (1986): 411-12.

that bill as long as Lincoln was there. Lincoln was then regarded as an abolitionist, making war upon the south, as a sectional man.” He further implied that Lincoln was one of the lobbyists for the Illinois Central who managed to get the tax rate set at seven percent, below what Douglas thought fair, and attacked Lincoln for receiving a \$5000 fee as payment for representing the company in the suit brought by McLean County, money which would be used “toward defraying his campaign expenses.” Douglas added, “notwithstanding the enormous fee that Lincoln was paid, he is still the agent and attorney of that company. . . . I applied to the company not three weeks ago and ascertained that he is now in their employment.” Indignantly he protested that “Lincoln and his friends might as well charge me with a conspiracy to murder my own children as to deprive the state of that [seven per cent tax] fund.”³³¹

Lincoln, who had never charged Douglas with any impropriety involving the Illinois Central, denied supporting the elimination of the tax on that company, explained how he and Herndon won their large fee in the McLean County tax case, protested against the implication that he had “received any of the people’s money” or was “on very cozy terms with the Railroad company,” and urged his audience to ask candidates for the state legislature how they stood on taxing the Illinois Central.³³²

Douglas also charged that Lincoln was on cozy terms with the pro-Buchanan Democrats: “He has control of that body of men who are active as the agents of Presidential aspirants in other States, and through patronage are trying to destroy the

³³¹ Douglas’s speech at Oquawka, 4 October 1858, Oquawka correspondence, 4 October, Missouri Democrat (St. Louis), 9 October 1858, and Oquawka correspondence, 4 October, Quincy Herald, 8 October 1858; Douglas’s speech at Springfield, 20 October, Illinois State Register (Springfield), 29 October 1858; Douglas’s speech at Henry, 29 September, summarized in the Chicago Journal, 5 October 1858.

³³² Speeches at Pekin, 5 October 1858, and Carthage, 22 October 1858, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 3:206, 330-31.

Democracy in this State. Lincoln knows that these men are all his allies, all his supporters and his only hope, and the only hope of the Republican party is in that unholy and unnatural alliance with these federal officeholders, to break me down.” Lincoln was thus part of “a combination for selfish and unworthy and malicious purposes to hunt me down.”³³³ This was an effective tactic, for, as a Philadelphia paper observed, “The negative strength of the Administration . . . is virtually with Lincoln, being bitterly directed against Douglas, and instructed to defeat him, no matter who else may be elected. This is the hardest load Lincoln has to carry, for the suspicion of even indirect and undesired aid from that quarter, is damaging.”³³⁴

In reply, Lincoln said that while he did not conspire with the Danites, he was not chagrined to see factions of the Democracy fighting each another. Jocularly he alluded to a well-known story about a disenchanted wife observing her spouse wrestle with a bear; “Go it husband! – Go it, bear!” she exclaimed.³³⁵ According to Herndon, Lincoln paid little attention to the seamier side of the campaign. But he was kept informed of the anti-Douglas Democrats’ efforts. In early July, a Danite leader had “told Lincoln that the National Democracy intended ‘to run in every County and District a National Democrat for each and every office’ –. Lincoln replied to this by saying – ‘If you do this the thing is settled – the battle is fought.’”³³⁶ He may also have subsidized a Danite newspaper, the Springfield State Democrat, edited by James A. Clarkson. In September, Clarkson said

³³³ Speech at Danville, 22 September 1858, Danville correspondence, 22 September, Missouri Republican (St. Louis), 27 September 1858.

³³⁴ Philadelphia North American and United States Gazette, 15 October, copied in the Missouri Democrat (St. Louis), 19 October 1858.

³³⁵ See Paul M. Zall, ed., Abe Lincoln Laughing: Humorous Anecdotes from Original Sources by and about Abraham Lincoln (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 20.

³³⁶ William Herndon to Lyman Trumbull, Springfield, 24 June, 8 July 1858, Lyman Trumbull Papers, Library of Congress. That leader was Col. John Dougherty.

that he “expected \$500 of Mr. Lincoln in a day or two.”³³⁷ When Douglas charged that the Republicans had formed an “unholy alliance” with the Danites, Lincoln disavowed “any contact with either wing of the Democratic party.”³³⁸

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On October 7, the debate at Galesburg, a Republican town 175 miles southwest of Chicago, drew the biggest crowd of the series, exceeding the turnout at Ottawa and Freeport by 2000 or 3000 and far outnumbering the 5500 residents of the town.³³⁹ Abolitionism flourished at Knox College, where the debate took place on a platform adjacent to Old Main, the largest structure on campus. (To reach that platform, speakers and dignitaries had to enter the building, walk down a corridor, then step through a window. After Lincoln did so, he quipped: “At last I have gone through . . . college.”)³⁴⁰

Though the sun shone, the day was “cold and raw,” with “a fiercely blowing, cutting wind” that ripped and tore banners, including one that proclaimed “Small-fisted Farmers, Mud Sills of Society, Greasy Mechanics, for A. Lincoln.”³⁴¹ This alluded to a

³³⁷ A. Sherman to Ozias Hatch, Springfield, 27 September 1858, Hatch Papers, Illinois State Historical Library, quoted in Rodney O. Davis, “Dr. Charles Leib: Lincoln’s Mole?” Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association 24 (2003): 23. Col. R. B. Carpenter, a Buchaneer, was allegedly bought off by the Republicans for \$500 to edit a newspaper. Henry S. Fitch to James Buchanan, Chicago, 17 August 1858, Buchanan Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania. On Carpenter, see Clifton H. Moore to Lincoln, Clinton, Illinois, 10 August 1858, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress. W. H. Bristol, the editor of a Democratic paper in Kankakee, was allegedly bought off by the Buchaneers. Douglas was informed by an ally that “We could buy Bristol back again cheap & would do so if we were satisfied he would stay bought.” T. [Huling?] to Douglas, Kankakee City, 31 May 1858, Douglas Papers, University of Chicago. Horace Greeley was sure that John Wentworth was working hand-in-glove with the Buchaneer leader, Ike Cook. Greeley to Schuyler Colfax, New York, 17 May 1858, Greeley Papers, New York Public Library.

³³⁸ Herndon to Trumbull, Springfield, 24 June 1858, Trumbull Papers, Library of Congress.

³³⁹ Chicago Press and Tribune, 9 October 1858.

³⁴⁰ This is a tradition in Galesburg, though no source is cited. Stewart W. McClelland, “A. Lincoln, LL.D.” Lincoln Herald, vol. 41, no. 3 (May 1939): 3.

³⁴¹ Chicago Press and Tribune, 9 October 1858; Galesburg Democrat, 9 October 1858, Sparks, ed., The Lincoln-Douglas Debates, 372-73.

statement made earlier that year by South Carolina Senator James H. Hammond: “In all social systems there must be a class to do the mean duties, to perform the drudgery of life. . . . It constitutes the very mud-sills of society.”³⁴² The wind made it difficult to hear Douglas, though his inaudibility was not due solely to the weather; he “was very hoarse, his voice rough and harsh and carrying only a comparatively short distance.”³⁴³ At Onarga on September 24 and Kankakee the following day, Douglas announced that he was suffering from a cold. A week later at Oquawka, his articulation “was observed to be very difficult, as though his tongue was much swollen. The peculiar manner in which he spoke of Misha Linka [Mr. Lincoln] was highly suggestive.”³⁴⁴

The Little Giant opened the debate complaining about the Buchanan administration’s efforts to defeat him through an “unholy and unnatural” alliance with the Republicans. Contemptuously he remarked that Lincoln “has no hope on earth, and has never dreamed that he had a chance of success, were it not for the aid that he is receiving from Federal office-holders, who are using their influence and the patronage of the Government against me in revenge for my having defeated the Lecompton Constitution.” In denouncing the Republican party for its sectionalism, he asked: “What Republican from Massachusetts can visit the Old Dominion without leaving his principles behind him when he crosses Mason and Dixon’s line?” Instead of criticizing the South for its intolerance, he blamed Northerners for holding views that Southerners disliked. (Earlier

³⁴² Congressional Globe, 35th Congress, 1st session, 962 (7 December 1857).

³⁴³ J. H. Dunn to an unidentified correspondent, Galesburg, 27 July 1929, Freeport’s Lincoln, 142. See also Thomas Wakefield Goodspeed, “Lincoln and Douglas, with Some Personal Reminiscences,” Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society 26 (1933): 192.

³⁴⁴ Onarga correspondence, 24 September, Chicago Weekly Times, 30 September 1858; Journal de l’Illinois, 1 October, copied in the Chicago Press and Tribune, 8 October 1858; Oquawka Plaindealer, n.d., copied in the Chicago Journal, 16 October 1858.

he had asserted that the “whole stock in trade of our opponents is an appeal to northern prejudice, northern interest and northern ambition against the southern states, southern people and southern rights.”³⁴⁵ The Little Giant with some justice said that there was a dramatic difference between Lincoln’s speech in Chicago and his statement at Charleston that “there is a physical difference between the races which, I suppose, will forever forbid the two races living together upon terms of social and political equality.” He taunted the Republicans for using different names in different parts of the state; in southern and central Illinois they called themselves “Lincoln men” and the “Free Democracy” instead of using the more radical term, Republican. (An editor in Pekin had informed Lincoln, “You are stronger here than Republicanism and in all of our meetings instead of heading them ‘Republican’ I shall say ‘Meeting of the friends of Lincoln.’” Thus “we can gain some thing from the old whigs, who may be wavering, and soften down the prejudices of others.”)³⁴⁶ Pointing out that the author and many of the signers of the Declaration of Independence owned slaves, Douglas asked how it could be inferred that they meant to include blacks in the proposition that “all men are created equal.”

Lincoln, whose “high tenor” voice “had extraordinary carrying power,”³⁴⁷ replied that Thomas Jefferson, though a slaveholder, had said that “he trembled for his country when he remembered that God was just.” He challenged Douglas to “show that he, in all his life, ever uttered a sentiment at all akin to that of Jefferson.” He also noted that no signers of the Declaration of Independence ever stated that blacks were excluded from that document’s statement that “all men are created equal.”

³⁴⁵ Douglas’s speech in Springfield, 5 September, Illinois State Register (Springfield), 6 September 1858.

³⁴⁶ Thomas J. Pickett to Lincoln, Pekin, 3 August 1858, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

³⁴⁷ Goodspeed, “Lincoln and Douglas,” 192.

In dealing with the charge that he spoke out of both sides of his mouth on the race issue, Lincoln ridiculed Douglas's logic: "the Judge will have it that if we do not confess that there is a sort of inequality between the white and black races which justifies us in making them slaves, we must then insist that there is a degree of equality that requires us to make them our wives." Lincoln reiterated that he would not interfere with slavery where it already existed, but "I have insisted that, in legislating for new countries where it does not exist, there is no just rule other than that of moral and abstract right!" In the territories the right "to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" should be denied to no one.

If the inability of Republicans to preach their doctrines in the South indicated that those doctrines were unsound, then would democracy itself be considered unsound because Douglas could not espouse it in Russia? "Is it the true test of the soundness of a doctrine that in some places people won't let you proclaim it?" Was popular sovereignty unsound because Douglas could not defend it before a hostile crowd at Chicago in 1854? He challenged the Little Giant to discuss the state platform adopted by Republicans in 1858 rather than the county platforms of 1854.

The central issue dividing the parties, Lincoln maintained, was the morality of slavery. Douglas and his friends denied "that there is any wrong in slavery." The Republicans disagreed. "I confess myself as belonging to that class in the country who contemplate slavery as a moral, social, and political evil" and who "desire a policy that looks to the prevention of it as a wrong, and looks hopefully to the time when as a wrong it may come to an end."

As for the purported alliance between the Republican and the pro-Buchanan Democrats, Lincoln acknowledged that he “had no objection to the division in the Judge’s party.” Republicans viewed the internecine warfare among the Democrats the same way that Democrats in 1856 regarded the split between Frémont and Fillmore supporters.

Heatedly Lincoln attacked Douglas for the “fraud” and “absolute forgery” that he had introduced at the Ottawa debate. A month earlier the Little Giant had promised to look into the matter when next in the capital, but he had yet to issue any explanation of how the Aurora Republican platform was palmed off as the work of the Springfield anti-Nebraska conclave of 1854. In that year, Douglas and Thomas L. Harris both used the Aurora document to discredit their opponents, then blamed the mistake on the editor of the Springfield Register, Charles Lanphier, who would not explain how his paper made the error. (Lanphier’s paper had run a garbled version of Lincoln’s 1857 speech on the Dred Scott case.)³⁴⁸ Since the Register had reported accurately most of the proceedings of the anti-Nebraskaites at Springfield, it was “absurd” to say that the substitution of the Aurora platform for the Springfield platform “was done by mistake.” Clearly Lanphier was responsible, but was he put up to it by Douglas or Harris or both of them, who were in Springfield at the time of the anti-Nebraska meeting? The stratagem had worked in 1854, helping to defeat Congressman Richard Yates’s bid for reelection; in 1856 it was revived by Harris to attack Congressman Jesse O. Norton and by Douglas to assail Lyman Trumbull; at Ottawa it was trotted out again to discredit Lincoln. The recycling of the original fraud reminded Lincoln of “the fisherman’s wife, whose drowned husband

³⁴⁸ William H. Herndon to Theodore Parker, Springfield, 4 July 1857, Herndon-Parker Papers, University of Iowa.

was brought home with his body full of eels.” When asked what to do with the corpse, she replied: “Take the eels out and set him again.” In the absence of an explanation from Douglas, Lincoln inferred that blame for the fraud could be equally divided among the Little Giant, Lanphier, and Harris.

Lincoln repeated his interrogatory about a second Dred Scott case forbidding states to outlaw slavery. Douglas, Lincoln said, had not answered the question but merely “sneered at me” for asking it. Citing the language of the majority opinion in Dred Scott v. Sanford – “The right of property in a slave is distinctly and expressly affirmed in the Constitution” – Lincoln asked why the court might not eventually rule that the supremacy clause of the Constitution would forbid Free States to continue making slavery illegal. It was a good question.

Unlike Douglas, Lincoln empathically denied that the Constitution recognized the right of property in slaves. He offered as “the opinion of one very humble man” his belief that the Dred Scott decision would not have been handed down if the Democrats had not won the presidential election of 1856. Should that party retain its hold the White House, a second Dred Scott decision was likely to follow. Paving the way for the new Dred Scott decision was Douglas’s insistence that he “don’t care whether slavery is voted up or down,” that “whoever wants slavery has a right to have it,” that “upon principles of equality it should be allowed to go everywhere,” that “there is no inconsistency between free and slave institutions.” Abandoning the conspiracy theory that he had put forward in the House Divided speech, Lincoln did not allege that Douglas was deliberately “preparing the way for making the institution of slavery national,” but insisted that his actions had that effect even if he did not intend it. This represented a sensible

modification of his earlier charge. The Little Giant’s amoral neutrality on slavery “is penetrating the human soul, and eradicating the light of reason and the love of liberty.”

Lincoln deplored the Little Giant’s indifference to the status of slavery in newly acquired territory. “If Judge Douglas’s policy upon this question succeeds, . . . the next thing will be a grab for the territory of poor Mexico, an invasion of the rich lands of South America, then the adjoining islands will follow, each one of which promises additional slave-fields.” Since the struggle over slavery alone presented a threat to the Union, Lincoln counseled that it would be unwise to acquire new territory that might intensify that struggle.³⁴⁹

Edward Beecher, pastor of the First Congregational Church in Galesburg and a militant opponent of slavery, reported that Lincoln “spoke with a power that we have seldom heard equaled. There was a grandeur in his thoughts, a comprehensiveness in his arguments, and a binding force in his conclusions, which were perfectly irresistible. The vast throng was silent as death; every eye was fixed upon the speaker, and all gave him serious attention.” His face “glowed with animation, and his eye glistened with an intelligence that made it lustrous.” Douglas “had been quietly smoking up to this time; but here he forgot his cigar and listened with anxious attention. When he rose to reply, he appeared excited, disturbed, and his second effort seemed to us vastly inferior to his first. Mr. Lincoln had given him a great task, and Mr. Douglas had not time to answer him, even if had had the ability.”³⁵⁰ Another spectator remembered that Douglas “labored under great mental excitement, lost his temper and became violent, his grand manner was

³⁴⁹ Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 3:219-37.

³⁵⁰ Galesburg correspondence, 7 October, Boston Evening Transcript, 13 October 1858. Beecher (1803-95), the brother of Harriet Beecher Stowe and Henry Ward Beecher, had been president of Illinois College and a minister in Boston (1844-56).

gone. He shook his fist in wrath and he walked the platform. A white foam gathered upon his lips, giving him a look of ferocity.”³⁵¹

The Little Giant huffily dismissed Lincoln’s charge of conspiracy against himself, Harris, and Lanphier. Approaching his rival and making “that peculiar emphatic movement of the hand which is so natural to the man,” Douglas said: “I do not believe that there was an honest man in the State of Illinois who did not believe that it was an error I was led into innocently I do not believe that there is an honest man in the face of this State that don’t abhor with disgust his insinuation of my complicity with that forgery, as he calls it.” Insouciantly he maintained that the Aurora Republican platform of 1854 reflected the party’s ideology throughout the state in 1858 (an assertion which was demonstrably untrue). With great vehemence he denounced Lincoln’s stand on the Dred Scott decision and the finality of rulings by the Supreme Court.³⁵²

Though the Chicago Times complained that “Lincoln limps, equivocates, and denies,” Republicans were jubilant.³⁵³ The Illinois State Journal noted that whereas Douglas at the beginning of the debate cycle had “entered upon the discussion with a grand flourish of trumpets from his followers, and from the name he has managed to acquire, they expected to see him literally ‘swallow his adversary whole,’” by the close of the Galesburg debate “what is their surprise and mortification to see him badly worsted at every encounter he undertakes with ‘Old Abe.’”³⁵⁴

³⁵¹ Joseph F. Evans, “Lincoln at Galesburg – A Sketch Written on the Hundred and Seventh Anniversary of the Birthday of Abraham Lincoln,” Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society 8 (1916): 563.

³⁵² Chicago correspondence, 8 October, Missouri Democrat (St. Louis), 11 October 1858.

³⁵³ Chicago Daily Times, 9 October 1858.

³⁵⁴ Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 12 October 1858.

The New York Herald, however, judged that the “controversy in Illinois between Douglas and Lincoln, on Kansas, the Kansas-Nebraska bill, Lecompton, popular sovereignty, Dred Scott, the Declaration of Independence, States rights and niggers in every style” had “degenerated into the merest twaddle upon quibbles, ‘forgeries,’ falsehoods, and mutual recriminations of the most vulgar sort.”³⁵⁵ The Missouri Democrat lamented that “the canvass has turned so much on personal issues, but as Mr. Douglas and his friends commenced the onslaught upon Mr. Lincoln and the Republican party, there was probably no way of avoiding this result – and certainly the instigators of this course suffer most severely from it.”³⁵⁶ Similar criticism was leveled by the Cincinnati Commercial, which called the antagonists “a pair of unscrupulous office-seekers” and “political pettifoggers” who “have insulted the people of Illinois and of the country, by the daily utterance . . . of the most transparent fallacies and the most vulgar personalities.” That newspaper found “very little . . . that merits much attention, or that can be esteemed as of interest to the public, or calculated to add to the reputation of the parties. Few debates less dignified in their external manifestations, or containing so little that was worthy to be remembered, have fallen under our observation. . . . Falsehood and personal vituperation are among the most common of the offenses committed, upon one side at least, if not upon both.”³⁵⁷

There is little doubt that the side that the Commercial alluded to was Douglas’s, for Lincoln had taken the moral high ground at Galesburg. Horace White thought

³⁵⁵ New York Herald, 13 October 1858.

³⁵⁶ Quincy correspondence, 13 October, Missouri Democrat (St. Louis), 15 October 1858.

³⁵⁷ Cincinnati Commercial, 23, 25 September 1858.

Lincoln's speech there "the best of the series."³⁵⁸ Indeed, it represented a considerable advance over the earlier debates in which he had tended to stress his opposition to black citizenship and to accuse Douglas of conspiring to nationalize slavery. As he had done earlier at Lewiston and Edwardsville, Lincoln de-emphasized legal and historical arguments, which often involved logic-chopping and hair-splitting, in favor of broad moral appeals, which he would make even more eloquently in the final two debates. Earlier he had often acted as if he were in court, scoring points before a jury; now he would shed the role of lawyer for that of statesman and consistently speak to the conscience and heart of his audience.³⁵⁹

All the while he eschewed personal attacks. In late September a correspondent of the Missouri Democrat accurately noted that Lincoln "treats his opponent with a deference which the latter is incapable of reciprocating." More "than any other public man of the present time," Lincoln "infuses the milk of human kindness, and the frankness and courtesy of a gentleman of the old school into his discussions." Whereas he "says nothing calculated to wound the feelings of Douglas," the Little Giant "deals in exaggerated statements, glaring sophistries, and coarse, fierce declamation. Douglas has cast his fortunes on a sentiment – the antipathy of the white to the black race. . . . Whatever incidental topics he may treat, it will be found that the substance of his speeches in this canvass is an invocation of prejudice." Lincoln avoided "exaggeration or

³⁵⁸ Horace White in Herndon's Lincoln, 2nd ed., 2:123.

³⁵⁹ David Zarefsky, Lincoln, Douglas and Slavery: In the Crucible of Public Debate (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 62, 236.

vindictiveness” and “acerbity of temper,” while his opponent “has fallen into an impotent passion several times.”³⁶⁰

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Less than week after the Galesburg event, the candidates clashed again at Quincy, a Democratic stronghold where Douglas had lived for a time.³⁶¹ On the train carrying him there, Lincoln met Carl Schurz, a fiery young German-born orator from Wisconsin who recalled that the challenger “wore a somewhat battered ‘stove-pipe’ hat.” Surrounding his “long and sinewy” neck was “a white collar turned down over a thin black necktie,” and covering his “lank, ungainly body” was “a rusty black dress coat with sleeves that should have been longer; but his arms appeared so long that that sleeves of a ‘store’ coat could hardly be expected to cover them all the way down to the wrists.” Equally ill-fitting were his black trousers, which “permitted a very full view of his large feet.” Carrying a grey wool shawl, a bulging cotton umbrella, and a shopworn black satchel, he shook hands with his fellow passengers. Schurz had seen “several public men of rough appearance; but none whose looks seemed quite so uncouth, not to say grotesque, as Lincoln’s.” The Republican candidate received Schurz “with an off-hand cordiality, like an old acquaintance” and “talked in so simple and familiar a strain, and his manner and homely phrase were so absolutely free from any semblance of self-consciousness or pretension to superiority, that I soon felt as if I had known him all my life and we had long been close

³⁶⁰ St. Louis correspondence, 29 September, Missouri Democrat (St. Louis), 30 September 1858. This dispatch deals with Lincoln’s appearance at Jacksonville on September 27. The correspondent covering the campaign for that paper was Clarendon Davisson, whom Lincoln would later appoint consul at Bordeaux. Catherine Newbold, “The Antislavery Background of the Principal State Department Appointees in the Lincoln Administration” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1962), 337. Walter B. Stevens inaccurately identified this correspondent as John Hay. Stevens, “Lincoln and Missouri,” Missouri Historical Review 10 (1916): 68.

³⁶¹ Johannsen, Douglas, 97.

friends.”³⁶²

The crowd at Quincy, though large, was smaller than the one that witnessed the Galesburg debate. The event began inauspiciously when the railing of the speakers’ platform gave way, sending a dozen people crashing to the ground.³⁶³ Once order was restored, Lincoln delivered the opening speech. He seemed to be “bearing up under the fatigue and labor of a four months’ canvass, as though it were nothing more than the regular routine of his business.”³⁶⁴ In Burlington, Iowa, where he spoke a few days earlier, Lincoln had seemed “fresh and vigorous,” with “nothing in his voice, manner or appearance to show the arduous labor of the last two months.”³⁶⁵

Lincoln’s condition contrasted sharply with Douglas’s, according to the Chicago Democrat: “Habits of temperance in all things, commend themselves nowhere so highly as in the ways of Lincoln and Douglas. Douglass is all worn out, while Lincoln is as fresh as the morning.”³⁶⁶ A reporter noted that “Bad whiskey and the wear and tear of conscience have had their effects” on the Little Giant.³⁶⁷

Schurz testified that Lincoln’s voice was “not musical, rather high-keyed, and apt to turn into a shrill treble in moments of excitement; but it was not positively disagreeable. It had an exceedingly penetrating, far-reaching quality. The looks of the

³⁶² The Reminiscences of Carl Schurz (3 vols.; New York: McClure, 1907-08), 2: 90-91.

³⁶³ Chicago Press and Tribune, 15 October 1858.

³⁶⁴ Quincy correspondence, 13 October, Missouri Democrat (St. Louis), 15 October 1858.

³⁶⁵ Iowa Citizen (Des Moines), 17 November 1858, in F. I. Herriott, Iowa and Abraham Lincoln: Being an Account of the Presidential Discussion and Party Preliminaries in Iowa, 1856-1860 ([Des Moines]: n.p., 1911), 73.

³⁶⁶ Chicago Democrat, n.d., quoted in Norman Corwin, “Lincoln and Douglas: The Tangled Weave,” in Allan Nevins and Irving Stone, eds., Lincoln: A Contemporary Portrait (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1962), 87.

³⁶⁷ Unidentified newspaper, quoted ibid.

audience convinced me that every word he spoke was understood at the remotest edges of the vast assemblage.”³⁶⁸ Horace White recalled that Lincoln’s “thin, piping treble voice” could be “heard at a long distance much further than Douglas’s deep, oratorical voice.”³⁶⁹ Helping to make Lincoln audible was his clear enunciation, for he “had a way of throwing his head forward and his lips and features away from his teeth that allowed his words to come forth and his auditors heard his clearness and distinctness with pleasure.”³⁷⁰ Schurz found Lincoln’s gestures “awkward.” He “swung his long arms sometimes in a very ungraceful manner.” Occasionally “he would, to give particular emphasis to a point, bend his knees and body with a sudden downward jerk, and then shoot up again with a vehemence that raised him to his tip-toes and made him look much taller than he really was – a manner of enlivening a speech which at that time was . . . not unusual in the West.” Despite his awkwardness, there was “in all he said, a tone of earnest truthfulness, of elevated, noble sentiment, and of kindly sympathy, which added greatly to the strength of his argument, and became, as in the course of his speech he touched upon the moral side of the question in debate, powerfully impressive.” Even while “attacking his opponent with keen satire or invective, which, coming from any other speaker, would have sounded bitter and cruel, there was still a certain something in his utterance making his hearers feel that those thrusts came from a reluctant heart, and that he would much rather have treated his foe as a friend.” In Lincoln’s speech Schurz detected “occasionally a flash of . . . lofty moral inspiration; and all he said came out with

³⁶⁸ Schurz, Reminiscences, 2:93. On Lincoln’s voice, see Waldo W. Braden, “Lincoln’s Voice,” Lincoln Herald 67 (1965): 111-16.

³⁶⁹ Page proofs of an undated interview with White, White Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

³⁷⁰ Unidentified informant, “Random Tales About Lincoln,” Boston Globe, 12 February 1927. This source claimed that Robert R. Hitt imitated Lincoln’s speaking style.

the sympathetic persuasiveness of a thoroughly honest nature, which made the listener feel as if the speaker looked him straight in the eye and took him by the hand, saying: ‘My friend, what I tell you is my earnest conviction, and, I have no doubt, at heart you think so yourself.’”³⁷¹

Addressing Douglas’s complaint about the use of “hard names” like “forgery,” “fraud,” and “conspiracy,” Lincoln insisted that the Little Giant had been the first to engage in personalities. At Bloomington on July 16 the senator had made “an imputation upon my veracity and my candor.” At Ottawa on August 21 he had “implicated my truthfulness and my honor.” At Galesburg he had impeached “my honor, my veracity and my candor.” Therefore, Lincoln said, he had been forced to respond in kind, but would abandon that tactic if Douglas would do the same. In response to the Little Giant’s question if he wished to “push this matter to the point of personal difficulty,” Lincoln said no. The senator, he asserted, “did not make a mistake, in one of his early speeches, when he called me an ‘amiable’ man, though perhaps he did when he called me an ‘intelligent’ man. It really hurts me very much to suppose that I have wronged anybody on earth. I again tell him, no! I very much prefer, when this canvass shall be over, however it may result, that we at least part without any bitter recollections of personal difficulties.”

At Galesburg, Douglas had alleged that Lincoln was trying “to divert the public attention from the enormity of his revolutionary principles by getting into personal quarrels, impeaching my sincerity and integrity.” To rebut that charge, Lincoln reiterated his understanding of the fundamental difference between the two parties: “I suggest that

³⁷¹ Schurz, Reminiscences, 2:93-94, 96.

the difference of opinion, reduced to its lowest terms, is not other than the difference between the men who think slavery a wrong and those who do not think it wrong. The Republican party think it wrong – we think it is a moral, a social and a political wrong.” On the other hand, “there is a sentiment in the country contrary to me – a sentiment which holds that slavery is not wrong, and therefore it goes for a policy that does not propose dealing with it as a wrong. That policy is the Democratic policy, and that sentiment is the Democratic sentiment.” He insisted that “in all the arguments sustaining the Democratic policy, and in that policy itself, there is a careful, studied exclusion of the idea that there is anything wrong in slavery.” Douglas, said Lincoln, “has the high distinction, so far as I know, of never having said slavery is either right or wrong.” To those Democrats who might object to this characterization, Lincoln posed questions: “You say it [slavery] is wrong; but don’t you constantly object to anybody else saying so? Do you not constantly argue that this is not the right place to oppose it? You say it must not be opposed in the slave States, because it is there; it must not be opposed in politics, because it will make a fuss; it must not be opposed in the pulpit, because it is not religion. [Loud cheers.] Then where is the place to oppose it? There is no place in the country to oppose this evil overspreading the continent, which you say yourself is coming.”

As Douglas stepped forward to respond, he “looked very much the worse for wear,” according to a Republican newspaper. “Bad whisky and the wear and tear [of] conscience have had their effect. . . . He speaks very slowly – making a distinct pause at the end of each word, but giving as much force and accent as possible.”³⁷² Another

³⁷² Quincy correspondence, 13 October, Missouri Democrat (St. Louis), 15 October 1858.

journal noted that Douglas “had to confine his attempts to make himself understood to a small crowd gathered closely about the stand.”³⁷³ Schurz recollected that Douglas “stood almost like a dwarf, very short of stature, but square-shouldered and broad-chested, a massive head upon a strong neck, the very embodiment of force, combativeness, and staying power. . . . The deep, horizontal wrinkle between his keen eyes was unusually dark and scowling. While he was listening to Lincoln’s speech, a contemptuous smile now and then flitted across his lips, and when he rose, the tough parliamentary gladiator, he tossed his mane with an air of overbearing superiority, of threatening defiance, as if to say: ‘How dare anyone stand up against me?’” The Little Giant’s “voice, naturally a strong baritone, gave forth a hoarse and rough, at times something very like a barking sound. His tone was, from the very start, angry, dictatorial, and insolent in the extreme. In one of his first sentences he charged Lincoln with ‘base insinuations,’ and then he went on in that style with a wrathful frown upon his brow, defiantly shaking his head, clenching his fists, and stamping his feet. No language seemed to be too offensive for him, and even inoffensive things he would sometimes bring out in a manner which sounded as if intended to be insulting.” His “sentences were well put together, his points strongly accentuated, his argumentation seemingly clear and plausible, his sophisms skillfully woven so as to throw the desired flood of darkness upon the subject and thus beguile the untutored mind, his appeals to prejudice unprincipled and reckless, but shrewdly aimed, and his invective vigorous and exceedingly trying to the temper of the assailed party.”³⁷⁴

The Chicago Times said that Lincoln behaved in a “most improper and

³⁷³ Springfield correspondence, 16 October, New York Evening Post, 20 October 1858.

³⁷⁴ Schurz, Reminiscences, 2: 94-95.

ungentlemanly” fashion during Douglas’s remarks. Sitting where his opponent could not see him, Lincoln would, “whenever a point was made against him,” rudely “shake his head at the crowd, intimating that it was not true, and that they should place no reliance on what was said. This course was in direct violation of the rules of the debate, and was a mean trick, beneath the dignity of a man of honor.”³⁷⁵

Curiously the Little Giant devoted much of his rebuttal to a defense against charges leveled by the Buchanan administration’s organ, the Washington Union. He also continued to attack Lincoln personally. In reiterating his explanation of the Ottawa forgery, he insisted that Lincoln was a “slanderer” and denied the conspiracy charge yet again. Boastfully he compared himself to Lincoln: “When I make a mistake, as an honest man, I correct it without being asked to do so, but when he makes a false charge he sticks to it, and never corrects it.” Douglas again contrasted Lincoln’s opening statement at Charleston (“I am not nor ever have been in favor of bringing about in any way, the social and political equality of the white and black races”) and the conclusion of his Chicago speech (“let us discard all this quibbling about this man and the other man – this race and that race and the other race being inferior”). Addressing Lincoln’s analysis of the Dred Scott decision, the Little Giant grew reminiscent: “When I used to practice law with Lincoln, I never knew him to be beat in a case that he did not get mad at the judge and talk about appealing; (laughter) and when I got beat I generally thought the court was wrong, but I never dreamed of going out of the court house and making a stump speech to the people against the judge, merely because I had found out that I did not know the law as well as he did. (Great laughter.)” Touting popular sovereignty, Douglas declared that

³⁷⁵ Chicago Daily Times, 17 October 1858.

“it does not become Mr. Lincoln, or anybody else, to tell the people of Kentucky that they have no consciences, that they are living in a state of iniquity, and that they are cherishing an institution to their bosoms in violation of the law of God. Better for him to adopt the doctrine of ‘judge not lest ye be judged.’” Rather than caring about blacks, Douglas counseled Lincoln and other antislavery proponents to focus on “our own poor, and our own suffering, before we go abroad to intermeddle with other people’s business.” Besides, he argued, Northerners “know nothing” of the condition of slaves.

The Little Giant denounced as inhumane Lincoln’s plan to contain slavery. If the peculiar institution were bottled up in the states where it already existed, then “the natural laws of increase will go on until the negroes will be so plenty that they cannot live on the soil. He will hem them in until starvation seizes them, and by starving them to death, he will put slavery in the course of ultimate extinction.” Though this argument was specious, Douglas here did raise a question on which Lincoln was vulnerable: just how would the containment of slavery necessarily lead to its demise? To be sure, if more Free States were admitted to the Union, the Slave States’ power in Congress and the Electoral College would wane, but they would long be able to block a constitutional amendment abolishing the peculiar institution.

With justice an auditor recalled that “Douglas was the demagogue all the way through. There was no trick of presentation that he did not use. He suppressed facts, twisted conclusions, and perverted history. He wriggled and turned and dodged; he appealed to prejudices.”³⁷⁶

³⁷⁶ David R. Locke in Rice, ed., Reminiscences of Lincoln, 444.

In his rejoinder, Lincoln picked up on Douglas's allusion to starvation, ridiculing popular sovereignty as "do nothing sovereignty" and asking a propos of the Freeport Doctrine: "Has it not got down as thin as the homoeopathic soup that was made by boiling the shadow of a pigeon that had starved to death? [Roars of laughter and cheering.]" It was one of his more telling metaphors.

As for Douglas's complaint that Lincoln would not utter in downstate Illinois what he said in Chicago, the challenger cited his address on the Dred Scott case, delivered in Springfield the previous year, which contained "the substance of the Chicago speech."³⁷⁷ He once again protested against Douglas's contention that if people believed that blacks were incorporated in the statement that "all men are created equal" in the Declaration of Independence, they must therefore support racial intermarriage. "He can never be brought to understand that there is any middle ground on this subject. I have lived until my fiftieth year, and have never had a negro woman either for a slave or a wife, and I think I can live fifty centuries, for that matter, without having had one for either."

Lincoln disputed Douglas's boast that he had voluntarily come forward when he discovered the Ottawa forgery. In fact, Lincoln argued, it was only after the Republican press had exposed the fraud that Douglas acknowledged his error, an acknowledgement that he now sought to make a virtue, though the newspapers had made it a necessity.

The Illinois State Journal regarded the Quincy debate "as the most damaging to Douglas in the series. Lincoln carried the war into Africa, and came off with flying

³⁷⁷ Lincoln referred to a speech given at Springfield two years ago, but it is clear from the context and from the debate in Alton that he meant the 1857 speech on the Dred Scott decision. At Quincy he held a printed copy of it in his hand. Lincoln did give a speech in Springfield in 1856, but it was not published. The passage similar to the Chicago speech of 1858 was quoted by Lincoln at Alton.

colors.”³⁷⁸ Many Iowans crossed the Mississippi River to hear the debate and returned favorably impressed with Lincoln.³⁷⁹ The Chicago Times called Lincoln’s effort “the lamest and most impotent attempt he has yet made to bolster up the false position he took at the outset of the fight.”³⁸⁰

After the debate, Lincoln met at a hotel with the humorist David R. Locke, creator of the comic character Petroleum V. Nasby. Explaining that “I like to give my feet a chance to breathe,” the candidate removed his boots. He said of a recently deceased Illinois politician, “If General ____ had known how big a funeral he would have had, he would have died years ago.” Lincoln predicted that the Republicans would carry the state but that Douglas would retain his Senate seat. “You can’t overturn a pyramid,” he said, “but you can undermine it; that’s what I have been trying to do.”³⁸¹

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Two days later the final debate took place at Alton, a “dull inanimate” town on the Mississippi River twenty-five miles north of St. Louis.³⁸² There Lincoln and James Shields had once met to conduct a duel, and there Elijah Lovejoy had been killed by a proslavery mob. On the morning of the debate, Lincoln suggested to Gustave Koerner that they call on Mrs. Lincoln, who was attending a clash of the candidates for the first time. As he introduced Koerner to his wife, Lincoln said: “Now, tell Mary what you think of our chances! She is rather dispirited.” Koerner gave an optimistic prognostication,

³⁷⁸ Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 18 October 1858.

³⁷⁹ Hawkins Taylor to Lincoln, Keokuk, 26 April 1860, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

³⁸⁰ Chicago Daily Times, 17 October 1858.

³⁸¹ David R. Locke in Rice, ed., Reminiscences of Lincoln, 441-43.

³⁸² William Allan Bryan to Horatio King, Alton, 3 November 1860, Horatio King Papers, Library of Congress.

which was not shared by Lincoln, who seemed “a little despondent.”³⁸³

Others also grew pessimistic as the election day approached. On October 28, Salmon P. Chase reported from northern Illinois that it was not “certain that Lincoln will be elected: as it is possible that the Senate may be held by the Dems. & the House by the Republicans.” If that were the case, the Senate Democrats could block Lincoln’s election by refusing to go into joint session with the House Republicans.³⁸⁴

The crowd of approximately 5,000 was smaller than usual, because of “the staid character of the population of Madison County,” home to many Old Line Whigs; because both men had spoken in that county earlier in the campaign; and because few believed that anything new would be said.³⁸⁵ The event was subdued, with “very little excitement in the city during the forenoon” and “no processions or other demonstrations of enthusiasm.”³⁸⁶ When Douglas began his address, Koerner “was really shocked at the condition he was in. His face was bronzed . . . but it was also bloated, and his looks were haggard, and voice almost extinct. In conversation he merely whispered. In addressing his audience he made himself understood only by an immense strain, and then only to a very small circle immediately near him.”³⁸⁷ Journalists reported that the Little Giant

³⁸³ Koerner, Memoirs, 2:66-67.

³⁸⁴ Salmon P. Chase to Kate Chase, Warren, Illinois, 28 October 1858, Chase Papers, Pennsylvania Historical Society.

³⁸⁵ Missouri Democrat (St. Louis), 16 October 1860; Chicago Press and Tribune, 18 October 1858; Cincinnati Gazette, 20 October 1858, Sparks, ed., The Lincoln-Douglas Debates, 510, 509; Alton correspondence, 16 October, Illinois State Register (Springfield), 18 October 1858.

³⁸⁶ Chicago Press and Tribune, 18 October 1858.

³⁸⁷ Koerner, Memoirs, 2:66-67. John Hume, a Missouri abolitionist, echoed Koerner’s remarks about his voice, which was “in tatters”: “for the first minute or two [he] was utterly unintelligible.” Because his “voice seemed to be all worn out,” he “simply bellowed.” In time he “gradually he got command of his organ, and pretty soon, in a somewhat laborious and painful way . . . he succeeded in making himself understood.” Anyone “who wanted to understand Douglas had to press up close to the platform from which

appeared exhausted and in a sour temper, and that his “voice has suffered badly by this out-door speaking. It is very indistinct. He has voice enough, but it cannot be heard any distance. He speaks slowly, and gives every syllable an emphasis, but it seems as if every tone went forth surrounded and enveloped by an echo, which blunts the sound and utterly destroys the word. You hear a voice, but catch no meaning.”³⁸⁸

At the start of the debate, Douglas lost his composure when Dr. Thomas M. Hope, a Buchanan Democrat and editor of the Alton Democratic Union, asked him if territorial legislatures should pass laws protecting slavery. In reply, the Little Giant “flew into a terrible rage,” saying “in a most violent manner if he [Hope] wished to help Republicans beat Democrats he could do so.”³⁸⁹ After brushing off Dr. Hope, the Little Giant, in addition to rehearsing earlier arguments, “gave President Buchanan a savage overhauling.”³⁹⁰ Proudly he declared that even though the Chief Executive had dismissed many of Douglas’s friends from their government posts, “Mr. Buchanan cannot provoke me to abandon one iota of Democratic principles out of revenge or hostility to his course.” A Republican paper noted that Douglas’s “friends were not prepared for this bold step on the part of their leader, and opened wide their eyes in astonishment. What – had their Little Giant – their terrible leader stood so long calmly and meekly by when the heads of his friends, one after another in rapid succession, rolled before him in the dust,

he was speaking.” John F. Hume, The Abolitionists, Together with Personal Memories of the Struggle for Human Rights, 1830-1864 (New York: G. P. Putnam’s, 1905), 95, 99.

³⁸⁸ Burlington Hawk-Eye, 11 October 1858, in Herriott, Iowa and Lincoln, 20; Springfield correspondence, 16 October, New York Evening Post, 20 October 1858.

³⁸⁹ Isaac H. Sturgeon to John F. Snyder, St. Louis, 5 May 1860, John F. Snyder Papers, Missouri Historical Society; Isaac H. Sturgeon to James Buchanan, St. Louis, 6 September 1860, Buchanan Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

³⁹⁰ Hume, The Abolitionists, 98.

and not a word of rebuke or condemnation! and now, at the very heels of an election, more important to him than any other of his life, he plucks up courage and denounces the President in terms admitting of no mistake as to his feelings.”³⁹¹

When Lincoln arose, he seemed to Koerner “as fresh as if he had just entered the campaign, and as cool and collected as ever.” He replied to Douglas “without a quaver or any sign of huskiness.”³⁹² His voice and articulation were “so clear and distinct that every word was heard to the farthest extreme of the assembly – a voice natural, not strained, various in its modulations, and pleasant to listen to.”³⁹³ One observer recalled that he spoke slowly and “did not rise to his full height, leaning forward in a stooping posture at first, his person displaying all the angularities of limb and face; for the first five or ten minutes he was both awkward and diffident, as in almost monotonous tones he commenced to untangle the meshes of Douglas’ sophistry.” As he gradually gained confidence, “his voice rang out in clearness, rose in strength, his tall form towered to its full height, and there came an outburst of inspiring eloquence and argument.”³⁹⁴

Lincoln finally got around to declaring “untrue” the Little Giant’s repeated allegation that his primary objection to the Dred Scott decision was its denial of black citizenship rights. “I have done no such thing; and Judge Douglas, so persistently insisting that I have done so, has strongly impressed me with the belief of a predetermination on his part to misrepresent me.” Emphatically he denounced Douglas’s

³⁹¹ Alton Courier, 16 October 1858.

³⁹² Koerner, Memoirs, 2:66-67; Hume, The Abolitionists, 95-96.

³⁹³ Alton correspondence, 15 October 1858, New York Tribune (semi-weekly ed.), 26 October 1858, Sparks, ed., The Lincoln-Douglas Debates, 505.

³⁹⁴ J[eriah] B[onham], “Recollections of Abraham Lincoln,” Chicago Tribune, 12 May 1895; Jeriah Bonham, Fifty Years’ Recollections (Peoria: J. W. Franks & Sons, 1883), 175-76.

assertion that in 1855 nobody thought that blacks were included in the Declaration of Independence's statement that "all men were created equal." Lincoln said, "I combat it as having an evil tendency, if not an evil design. I combat it as having a tendency to dehumanize the negro, to take away from him the right of ever striving to be a man. I combat it as being one of the thousand things constantly done in these days to prepare the public mind to make property, and nothing but property, of the negro in all the States of this Union."

To support his position, Lincoln quoted a passage from Henry Clay's reply to an abolitionist in 1842. (Many admirers of Lincoln lived in the Alton area.) The Great Compromiser had said of slavery: "I look upon it as a great evil, and deeply lament that we have derived it from the parental government, and from our ancestors. I wish every slave in the United States was in the country of his ancestors. But here they are, and the question is, how they can be best dealt with? If a state of nature existed, and we were about to lay the foundations of society, no man would be more strongly opposed than I should be, to incorporate the institution of slavery among its elements."³⁹⁵

³⁹⁵ Speech in Richmond, Indiana, 1 October 1842, in Robert Seager et al., eds., The Papers of Henry Clay (10 vols.; Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1959-91), 9:779. Democrats criticized Lincoln for quoting selectively from Clay's speech, in which he drew a different lesson from the Declaration than the one Lincoln drew. Clay said: "what is the foundation of this appeal to me in Indiana, to liberate the slaves under my care, in Kentucky? It is a general declaration in the act announcing to the world the independence of the thirteen American colonies, that all men are created equal. Now, as an abstract principle, there is no doubt of the truth of that declaration; and it is desirable, in the original construction of society, and in organized societies, to keep it in view as a great fundamental principle. But, then, I apprehend that in no society that ever did exist, or ever shall be formed, was or can the equality asserted among the members of the human race, be practically enforced and carried out. There are portions of it, large portions, women, minors, insane, culprits, transient sojourners, that will always probably remain subject to the government of another portion of the community. That declaration, whatever may be the extent of its import, was made by the delegations of the thirteen States. In most of them slavery existed, and had long existed, and was established by law. It was introduced and forced upon the colonies by the paramount law of England. Do you believe that, in making that declaration, the States that concurred in it intended that it should be tortured into a virtual emancipation of all the slaves within their respective limits? Would Virginia and other southern States have ever united in a declaration which was to be interpreted into an abolition of slavery among them? Did any one of the thirteen States entertain such a design or expectation? To impute

With passionate eloquence Lincoln effectively challenged Douglas's claims to statesmanship. The agitation over slavery expansion, he argued, was not caused by politicians' selfish desire for power; it had, after all, divided the largest Protestant churches (Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian) into northern and southern wings, as well as the American Tract Society and, in Alton, the Unitarian church. Douglas urged people to stop talking about the slavery issue and let settlers in the territories decide the matter. "But where is the philosophy or statesmanship which assumes that you can quiet that disturbing element in our society which has disturbed us for more than half a century, which has been the only serious danger that has threatened our institutions, – I say where is the philosophy or statesmanship based on the assumption that we are to quit talking about it, and that the public mind is all at once to cease being agitated by it? Yet this is the policy here in the North that Douglas is advocating, – that we are to care nothing about it! I ask you if it is not a false philosophy. Is it not a false statesmanship that undertakes to build up a system of policy upon the basis of caring nothing about the very thing that everybody does care the most about? – a thing which all experience has shown we care a very great deal about?" They were good questions.

Setting aside for the moment the moral aspect of the slavery controversy, Lincoln asserted that "I am still in favor of our new Territories being in such a condition that white men may find a home, – may find some spot where they can better their condition; where they can settle upon new soil and better their condition in life. I am in favor of this,

such a secret and unavowed purpose would be to charge a political fraud upon the noblest band of patriots that ever assembled in council; a fraud upon the confederacy of the Revolution; a fraud upon the union of those States, whose Constitution not only recognized the lawfulness of slavery, but permitted the importation of slaves from Africa, until the year 1808. And I am bold to say, that, if the doctrines of ultra political abolitionists had been seriously promulgated at the epoch of our Revolution, our glorious independence would never have been achieved — never, never." Ibid., 778-79. For a Democratic complaint about Lincoln's use of this speech, see the Jacksonville Sentinel, 29 October 1858.

not merely . . . for our own people who are born amongst us, but as an outlet for free white people everywhere, the world over, – in which Hans, and Baptiste, and Patrick, and all other men from all the world, may find new homes and better their condition in life.”

After making this pragmatic point, Lincoln then stressed the moral dimension of the antislavery cause in the most eloquent language of the campaign. In trying to get at the nub of the dispute between himself and Douglas, he denied that he wanted “to make war between the Free and Slave States” or that he favored “introducing a perfect social and political equality between the white and black races.” Those were “false” issues that Douglas invented. “The real issue in this controversy – the one pressing upon every mind – is the sentiment on the part of one class that looks upon the institution of slavery as a wrong, and of another class that does not look upon it as a wrong. The sentiment that contemplates the institution of slavery in this country as a wrong is the sentiment of the Republican party. It is the sentiment around which all their actions, all their arguments, circle, being a moral, social, and political wrong; and while they contemplate it as such, they nevertheless have due regard for its actual existence among us, and the difficulties of getting rid of it in any satisfactory way, and to all the constitutional obligations thrown about it.” Yet the Republicans “insist that it should, as far as may be, be treated as a wrong; and one of the methods of treating it as a wrong is to make provision that it shall grow no larger. [Loud applause.]” Lincoln repeated an earlier injunction: “if there be a man amongst us who does not think that the institution of slavery is wrong in any one of these aspects of which I have spoken, he is misplaced, and ought not to be with us. And if there be a man amongst us who is so impatient of it as a wrong as to disregard its actual presence among us and the difficulty of getting rid of its suddenly in a satisfactory way,

and to disregard the constitutional obligations thrown about it, that man is misplaced if he is on our platform.”

The Democratic party regards slavery “as not being wrong.” Lincoln hastened to add that not every Democrat “positively asserts that it is right. That class will include all who positively assert that it is right, and all who, like Judge Douglas, treat it as indifferent and do not say it is either right or wrong.” Thus the morality of slavery was the crux of the matter. Passionately he continued: “That is the real issue. That is the issue that will continue in this country when these poor tongues of Judge Douglas and myself shall be silent. It is the eternal struggle between these two principles – right and wrong – throughout the world. They are the two principles that have stood face to face from the beginning of time, and will ever continue to struggle. The one is the common right of humanity, and the other the ‘divine right of kings.’ It is the same principle in whatever shape it develops itself. It is the same spirit that says, ‘You work and toil and earn bread, and I’ll eat it.’ [Loud applause.] No matter in what shape it comes, whether from the mouth of a king who seeks to bestride the people of his own nation and live by the fruit of their labor, or from one race of men as an apology for enslaving another race, it is the same tyrannical principle.” (An auditor recalled that the “melting pathos with which Mr. Lincoln said this and its effect on his audience cannot be described.”)³⁹⁶

Optimistically Lincoln predicted that once the public became fully aware of this fundamental difference between the parties, and the opponents of slavery united, then “there will soon be an end” of the controversy, and that end will be the “ultimate extinction” of slavery. “Whenever the issue can be distinctly made, and all extraneous

³⁹⁶ Jonathan Birch, in Weik, Real Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 201.

matter thrown out so that men can fairly see the real difference between the parties, this controversy will soon be settled, and it will be done peaceably too. There will be no war, no violence.”

With unwonted heat Lincoln denounced the Freeport Doctrine as “a monstrous sort of talk about the Constitution of the United States! [Great applause.] There has never been as outlandish or lawless a doctrine from the mouth of any respectable man on earth.” Logically the notion that the people of a territory could in effect overrule the Supreme Court by “unfriendly legislation” was no different from the argument that the people of a state could effectively overrule the Fugitive Slave Act. Thus, Lincoln argued, “there is not such an Abolitionist in the nation as Douglas, after all. [Loud and enthusiastic applause.]”

Douglas concluded the debates by once again attacking Lincoln’s stand on Mexican War, prompted by his rival’s expression of approval of the Buchanan administration’s war against the Little Giant. “It is one thing to be opposed to the declaration of a war, another and a very different thing to take sides with the enemy against your own country after the war has commenced.” Lincoln’s vote in favor of the Ashmun amendment was “sent to Mexico and read at the head of the Mexican army, to prove to them that there was a Mexican party in the Congress of the United States who were doing all in their power to aid them. That a man who takes sides with the common enemy against his own country in time of war should rejoice in a war being made on me now, is very natural.” (Some of Douglas’s supporters spread a rumor that during the war American soldiers had burned Lincoln in effigy.)³⁹⁷

³⁹⁷ Chicago Journal, 12 October 1858.

Replying to Lincoln's charge that Douglas wanted slavery to continue indefinitely, the Senator declared: "He says that he looks forward to a time when slavery shall be abolished everywhere. I look forward to the time when each State shall be allowed to do as it pleases. If it chooses to keep slavery forever, it is not my business, but its own; if it chooses to abolish slavery, it is its own business, – not mine. I care more for the great principle of self-government, the right of a people to rule, than I do for all the niggers in Christendom. [Cheers.] I would not endanger the perpetuity of this Union, I would not blot out the great inalienable rights of the white men, for all the niggers that ever existed."

Evidently thinking that Lincoln's antislavery statements and the Senator's reply would win friends for the Little Giant below the Mason Dixon line, one Douglas supporter issued a pamphlet version of the Alton debate and distributed it throughout the South by the thousands. Its introduction belittled Lincoln as an "artful dodger" and alleged that he sought to "palm himself off to the Whigs of Madison county as a friend of Henry Clay and no abolitionist, AND IS EXPOSED!"³⁹⁸

This final debate had "passed off with rather less than the ordinary amount of applause."³⁹⁹ The subdued response was curious, for, as one reporter noted, "in many respects it was the greatest discussion yet held. Both speakers applied themselves to their work with new power and energy."⁴⁰⁰ After the debate, while dining with several

³⁹⁸ The Campaign in Illinois, Last Joint Debate, Douglas and Lincoln at Alton, Illinois (pamphlet; Washington: Lemuel Towers, 1858). Daniel McCook had 14,000 copies printed and sent to southern newspapers and post offices. McCook obtained Jefferson Davis's mailing list and used A. G. Brown's frank to distribute them. Daniel McCook to Douglas, Washington, 7 November 1858, Douglas Papers, University of Chicago.

³⁹⁹ Chicago Press and Tribune, 18 October 1858.

⁴⁰⁰ Springfield correspondence, 18 October, New York Evening Post, 20 October 1858.

Republican leaders, Lincoln asked Lyman Trumbull, a resident of nearby Belleville, about the crowd's reaction. The Senator replied "that public meetings in Madison County were usually undemonstrative, but he thought a favorable impression had been made." Then Mrs. Lincoln invited Horace White and Robert R. Hitt to spend a few days at her home in Springfield; Hitt tactfully declined, saying "that he would never call at her house until she lived in the White House. She laughed at the suggestion, and said there was not much prospect of such a residence very soon."⁴⁰¹

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Four days after the Alton debate, Lincoln's campaign suffered a grievous blow when T. Lyle Dickey publicly read a pro-Douglas letter he had received months earlier from Kentucky Senator John J. Crittenden, widely revered by Old Line Whigs.⁴⁰² Congressman Thomas L. Harris had informed the Little Giant that Crittenden "would write to any body – & give his views & wishes in your favor in any mode in which they would be most effective. If he will write a letter or come here & make a speech he will control 20,000 American or old line Whig votes in the center & south."⁴⁰³ Hearing rumors that Crittenden was "anxious" for the reelection of Douglas and had "pledged to write letters to that effect" to friends in Illinois, Lincoln asked the Kentucky Senator in early July if that was in fact the case and predicted that Crittenden's Illinois admirers would be "mortified exceedingly" by any such correspondence.⁴⁰⁴ On July 29 Crittenden replied that he admired the Little Giant's opposition to the Lecompton Constitution and

⁴⁰¹ Reminiscences of John Hitt, in Stevens, A Reporter's Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 58.

⁴⁰² Crittenden's letter to Dickey, Frankfort, 1 August 1858, is quoted in Dickey's speech 19 October, in Decatur correspondence, 20 October, Illinois State Register (Springfield), 23 October 1858.

⁴⁰³ Harris to Douglas, Springfield, 7 July 1858, Stephen A. Douglas Papers, University of Chicago.

⁴⁰⁴ Lincoln to Crittenden, Springfield, 7 July 1858, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:484.

deplored his “persecution” by the Buchanan administration and that he had so expressed himself to several men at Washington during the last session of Congress. Now he was besieged by Illinoisans, including Dickey, for confirmation of those discussions and would answer their requests honestly. He added that he had “no disposition for officious intermeddling” and that he “should be extremely sorry to give offense or cause mortification to you or any of my Illinois friends.”⁴⁰⁵ Three days later, Crittenden wrote Dickey recounting the praise he had bestowed upon Douglas in April and authorizing him to repeat what he had said.⁴⁰⁶

Dickey kept the letter private until October 19, when he incorporated it into a speech denouncing Lincoln as an apostate from Clay’s Whiggery.⁴⁰⁷ The Democrats cited that document as proof positive the Old Line Whigs should not support Lincoln, though in fact it was hardly a ringing endorsement of Douglas’s bid for reelection. Crittenden, like many Republicans, applauded the Little Giant’s attack on the Lecompton Constitution, but that document had ceased being an issue when voters in Kansas decisively rejected it in August. (The Louisville Journal, edited by Crittenden’s friend George D. Prentice, declared: “We hailed him [Douglas] with applause when he mounted the solid ground of constitutional justice, but we feel under no obligation to extol him when he plunges back into the mire of Democracy.”)⁴⁰⁸

The Illinois State Journal mistakenly suggested that Crittenden’s letter was a

⁴⁰⁵ Crittenden to Lincoln, Frankfort, 29 July 1858, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

⁴⁰⁶ Crittenden to Dickey, Frankfort, 1 August 1858, Decatur correspondence, 20 October, Illinois State Register (Springfield), 23 October 1858. To Henry C. Whitney, Crittenden explained how he had come to write the letter. Crittenden to Whitney, Frankfort, 9 November 1858, Lincoln Collection, Brown University.

⁴⁰⁷ Decatur correspondence, 20 October 1858, Illinois State Register (Springfield), 23 October 1858.

⁴⁰⁸ Louisville Journal, 26 October, copied in the Chicago Press and Tribune, 27 October 1858.

forgery and erroneously claimed that the Kentucky Senator had written to a leading resident of Springfield expressing “himself heartily in favor of the triumph of the united opposition against Douglas, and bids them God speed in the good work.”⁴⁰⁹ The Springfield Register alleged that the “leading resident” was Lincoln and denied that the letter supported the opposition to Douglas. “On the contrary,” it stated, “that letter expresses no such thing, but gives Mr. Abraham Lincoln a cold bath. . . . Will Mr. Lincoln, through the Journal, trot out that letter?” Democrats asked Crittenden if he had written in support of Lincoln, to which he telegraphed a reply: “I have written no such letter.”⁴¹⁰ This telegram was published in the Missouri Republican at the behest of Owen G. Cates of St. Louis, who had seen a copy of the letter from Crittenden to Lincoln. Cates complained to the editor of the Missouri Republican that Lincoln knew Crittenden’s letter was being misrepresented, yet he remained silent.⁴¹¹ The Kentucky Senator’s telegram and Dickey’s speech profoundly affected the Old Line Whigs of central Illinois. Crittenden apologized to Lincoln, disclaiming any responsibility for the release of their correspondence to the press.⁴¹²

Compounding Lincoln’s problems were pro-Douglas public letters from two other Kentuckians, Vice President John C. Breckinridge and Congressman James B. Clay, son

⁴⁰⁹ Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 25 and 29 October 1858; Illinois State Register (Springfield), 26 October 1858.

⁴¹⁰ William H. Townsend, Lincoln and the Bluegrass: Slavery and Civil War in Kentucky (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1955), 235-36.

⁴¹¹ O. G. Cates to Crittenden, St. Louis, 4 November 1858, Crittenden Papers, Library of Congress.

⁴¹² Crittenden to Lincoln, Frankfort, 27 October 1858, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

of Henry Clay.⁴¹³ On top of that, James W. Singleton of Quincy, a former Whig but now a Democrat, reported that Lincoln had abandoned Clay in 1847 and worked hard to defeat his nomination for the presidency.⁴¹⁴ Douglas, T. Lyle Dickey, and others repeated Singleton's accusation, and the Democratic press insisted that Lincoln had betrayed the principles of Clay.⁴¹⁵ To counter this attack, Republican newspapers ran extracts of speeches by Clay and Lincoln, showing the similarity of their views on slavery, race, amalgamation, squatter sovereignty, and the Constitution.⁴¹⁶

The day that Dickey exploded his bombshell, Lincoln addressed a large crowd in Mt. Sterling, where one auditor noted that "his phiz is truly awful," his "pronunciation is bad, his manners uncouth, and his general appearance anything but prepossessing."⁴¹⁷

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The race issue continued to dog Lincoln during the closing days of the campaign. The Chicago Times spelled out eleven principles for which the Democratic party stood;

⁴¹³ John C. Breckinridge to John Moore, Versailles, Kentucky, 4 October 1858, Missouri Republican (St. Louis), 24 October 1858; James B. Clay to W. Loucks, et al., Lexington, 11 October, Philadelphia Press, 21 October 1858.

⁴¹⁴ Jacksonville correspondence, 20 September, Quincy Herald, 24 September 1858. According to Douglas, Lincoln "replied to this speech of Singleton's in the town of Lincoln last Saturday, when he admitted the fact of his hostilities to Clay, and then excused himself by a bitter attack on Gen. Singleton." Douglas's speech in Springfield, 20 October 1858, Illinois State Register (Springfield), 22 October 1858.

⁴¹⁵ Douglas's speech at Pekin, 2 October, paraphrased in the Galesburg correspondence, 3 October, Missouri Democrat (St. Louis), 8 October 1858 and his speech at Springfield, 20 October, Illinois State Register (Springfield), 22 October 1858; Dickey's speech of October 19, Decatur correspondence, 20 October 1858, Illinois State Register (Springfield), 23 October 1858; "Lincoln vs. Henry Clay," Illinois State Register (Springfield), 14 October 1858. In October at Rushville, Lincoln allegedly said: "He [Clay] had got too old; he was broken down, and he could stand no longer without propping, and that for his part, he thought it was time for the whig party to be looking about for some more popular candidate!" This was alleged by Col. L. W. Ross of Fulton, who attended Lincoln's speech at Rushville in 1858. Rushville Times, n.d., copied in the Illinois State Register (Springfield), 22 June 1860.

⁴¹⁶ Chicago Press and Tribune, 26 October 1858.

⁴¹⁷ Journal of William L. Gross, 19 October 1858, in Harry E. Pratt, ed., Concerning Mr. Lincoln, in which Abraham Lincoln Is Pictured As He Appeared to Letter Writers of His Time (Springfield: Abraham Lincoln Association, 1944), 20.

heading the list was the assertion that Illinois Democrats “affirm the original and essential inferiority of the negro.” The Times declared that the election of Lincoln would disgrace Illinois. Rhetorically its editor asked voters, “Shall you by your want of zeal and inattention allow the Republicans to elect Abraham Lincoln, and send him, the advocate of negro equality and negro citizenship to the United States Senate, and thus forever put a blot upon the proud name of Illinois? Let Massachusetts, and Rhode Island, and Vermont, if they choose, send to the national councils men glorying in the profession of negro loving, negro equality, and negro citizenship doctrines, but must Illinois be brought to the shameful acknowledgment that her people, too, claim an equality for the negro with the white race, and claim for the negro all the political rights of the white man?” The Times denounced Lincoln for “shamelessly” promoting the “revolting” and “odious” principle of black equality.⁴¹⁸

In an undated manuscript, perhaps written at that time, Lincoln exclaimed:

“Negro equality! Fudge!! How long, in the government of a God, great enough to make and maintain this Universe, shall there continue knaves to vend, and fools to gulp, so low a piece of demagoguism as this.”⁴¹⁹ On October 18, Lincoln gave to James N. Brown, a Republican candidate for the state legislature who was concerned about the charges of black equality, a small notebook with clippings from his speeches dealing with black citizenship. In a cover letter, Lincoln reiterated that “I think the negro is included in the word ‘men’ used in the Declaration of Independence” but added that “it does not follow that social and political equality between the whites and blacks, must be incorporated,

⁴¹⁸ Chicago Times, n.d., copied in the Indiana State Sentinel, Indianapolis, 13 November 1858; Chicago Daily Times, 2 October 1858; Chicago Weekly Times, 30 September 1858.

⁴¹⁹ Fragments: notes for speeches [ca. September, 1859?], Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 3:399.

because slavery must not. The declaration does not so require.”⁴²⁰ Two days later, he spoke at Rushville, a Democratic town where he passed a group of socially prominent young women, some of whom were “very dark complected.” To taunt him for his antislavery views, “one of the darkest of the girls stepped in front of Lincoln and dangled a little negro doll baby in his face.” He “turned to her quietly and said: ‘Madam, are you the mother of that?’”⁴²¹

Other hecklers fared poorly when attacking Lincoln. In Dallas City on October 23, one Tom Gates interrupted the candidate, charging that he had lied. Lincoln asked him to rise. An observer remarked, “great God how Lincoln scored him[;] you could have heard the boys shout a mile.”⁴²² In Clinton, when the crowd began to eject a heckler, Lincoln instructed them to stop: “No, don’t throw him out. Let him stay and maybe he’ll learn something.”⁴²³

He ridiculed visual as well as verbal taunts. Democrats hung a huge banner depicting a black man with the motto “Equality” written around the head of the image. In his speech, Lincoln quipped “that the democrats had honored them with their favorite banner, that it had been a peculiar favorite banner ever since they had [nominated?] Richard M. Johnson to the vice Presidency and that the motto encircling the head” was

⁴²⁰ Lincoln to James N. Brown, Springfield, 18 October 1858, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 3:327-28.

⁴²¹ Thomas Lowry, Personal Reminiscences of Abraham Lincoln (London: Privately printed, 1910), 15; Chicago Press and Tribune, 23 October 1858.

⁴²² Alexander Sympson to John C. Bagby, Carthage, 25 October 1858, Bagby Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

⁴²³ Reminiscences of Robert B. Clark in Lawrence Beaumont Stringer, “From the Sangamon to the Potomac: More Light on Abraham Lincoln,” typescript of an unpublished manuscript, p. 134, Edgar Dewitt Jones Papers, Detroit Public Library. Robert B. Clark, who said he heard Lincoln say this, was

appropriate because “Dick had shown proof of the fact.”⁴²⁴

A week later in Springfield, as Lincoln delivered his final speech of the long contest to a wildly enthusiastic crowd of 10,000, he was again interrupted, this time by “a well-dressed, self-important looking man on a fine horse,” who rode close to the speaker’s stand and shouted: “How would you like to sleep with a nigger?” Lincoln stared “as if he felt sorry for him.” The rider tried to leave, but “the crowd held him, spitting all over him. Some took wet tobacco out of their mouths and threw it in his face.”⁴²⁵

After this unfortunate episode, Lincoln alluded to Crittenden, Dickey, and others, sadly remarking that the “the contest has been painful to me,” for he and his allies “have been constantly accused of a purpose to destroy the union; and bespattered with every imaginable odious epithet; and some who were friends, as it were but yesterday[,] have made themselves most active in this. I have cultivated patience, and made no attempt at a retort.” In a similar vein, he said: “I have meant to assail the motives of no party, or individual; and if I have, in any instance (of which I am not conscious) departed from my purpose, I regret it.” As for the charges of disunionism, he protested that “I have labored for, and not against the Union. As I have not felt, so I have not expressed any harsh sentiment towards our Southern brethren. I have constantly declared, as I really believed, the only difference between them and us, is the difference of circumstances.” Frankly he acknowledged his ambition, but emphasized that he cared more for the success of the

⁴²⁴ Alexander Sympson to John C. Bagby, Carthage, 25 October 1858, Bagby Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

⁴²⁵ Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 1 November 1858; Springfield correspondence, 30 October, Chicago Press and Tribune, 2 November 1858; John H. Morgan letter dated Petersburg, Illinois, 1 February 1922, in Oliver H. Barrett, ed., Lincoln’s Last Speech in Springfield in the Campaign of 1858 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1925), 9-10.

antislavery cause than he did for merely attaining power. “God knows how sincerely I prayed from the first that this field of ambition might not be opened. I claim no insensibility to political honors; but today could the Missouri restriction be restored, and the whole slavery question replaced on the old ground of ‘toleration[’] by necessity where it exists, with unyielding hostility to the spread of it, on principle, I would, in consideration, gladly agree, that Judge Douglas should never be out, and I never in, an office, so long as we both or either, live.”⁴²⁶ The Illinois State Journal called this peroration “one of the most eloquent appeals ever addressed to the American people.”⁴²⁷

As election day drew near, the Chicago Press and Tribune reviewed Lincoln’s conduct: “From first to last he has preserved his well-earned reputation for fairness, for honor and gentlemanly courtesy, and more than maintained his standing as a sagacious, far-seeing and profound statesman. Scorning the use of offensive personalities and the ordinary tricks of the stump, his efforts have been directed solely to the discussion of the legitimate issues of the campaign and the great fundamental principles on which our government is based.”⁴²⁸ Two years later the Springfield, Massachusetts, Republican, which had urged Illinois Republicans not to run a candidate against Douglas, said that the “judgment of all men of mind upon the Illinois canvass is in favor of Lincoln as against Douglas.” Lincoln “handled Douglas as he would an eel – by main strength.”⁴²⁹

Thanks to the rapid expansion of the railroad network in Illinois, the campaign had been unusually extensive. Douglas traveled 5227 miles in 100 days; Lincoln in less

⁴²⁶ Speech at Springfield, 30 October 1858, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 3:334.

⁴²⁷ Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 1 November 1858.

⁴²⁸ Chicago Press and Tribune, 29 October 1858.

⁴²⁹ George S. Merriam, The Life and Times of Samuel Bowles (2 vols.; New York: Century, 1885), 1:240.

than four months had covered almost as much ground (350 miles by boat, 600 by carriage, and 3400 by train). Excluding short responses, Lincoln by his own count gave sixty-three addresses; Douglas claimed that he delivered twice as many, though a journalist counted fifty-nine set speeches, seventeen brief responses to serenades, and thirty-seven replies to addresses of welcome. In forty towns they both spoke; Douglas addressed crowds at twenty-three sites where his opponent did not, and Lincoln did so in a dozen where the Little Giant did not.⁴³⁰

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National attention focused on the Prairie State as voters trooped to the polls on November 2 to choose members of the General Assembly, a State Treasurer, and a State Superintendent of Public Instruction. “What a night next Tuesday will be all over the Union!” exclaimed the Burlington, Iowa, Gazette. “The whole Nation is watching with the greatest possible anxiety for the result of that day. No State has ever fought so great a battle as that which Illinois is to fight on that day. Its result is big with the fate of our Government and the Union, and the telegraph wires will be kept hot with it until the result is known all over the land.”⁴³¹

Like many of his party colleagues, Lincoln anticipated electoral fraud.⁴³² To Norman B. Judd he expressed “a high degree of confidence that we shall succeed, if we are not over-run with fraudulent votes to a greater extent than usual.” In Naples he had noticed several Irishmen dressed as railroad workers carrying carpetbags; he reported that

⁴³⁰ Harry E. Pratt, “The Great Debates of 1858” (pamphlet; Springfield: Illinois State Historical Library, 1956), 5-9; Johannsen, Douglas, 658.

⁴³¹ Burlington, Iowa, Gazette, n.d., in Corwin, “Lincoln and Douglas,” 92.

⁴³² Urbana correspondence, 23 September, Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 27 September 1858.

hundreds of others were rumored to be leaving districts where their votes were superfluous in order to settle briefly in hotly contested counties. To thwart this so-called “colonization” of voters, Lincoln offered Judd “a bare suggestion,” namely, that where “there is a known body of these voters, could not a true man, of the ‘detective’ class, be introduced among them in disguise, who could, at the nick of time, control their votes? Think this over. It would be a great thing, when this trick is attempted upon us, to have the saddle come up on the other horse.”⁴³³ It is not entirely clear what Lincoln intended; the “true man of the detective class” was perhaps a bag man to distribute bribes.⁴³⁴

Not all Republicans were averse to using ethically questionable means to carry elections. In July 1857, O. M. Hatch, a close friend of Lincoln and the secretary of state in Illinois, wrote: “let us colonize – some four or five districts, and begin now – this fall – without fail – this must be done – and can be done, with money – and the end Justifies the means in this instance, certainly, in my Judgment – I have written this much after a talk with Mr Dubois & Herndon.”⁴³⁵ (Three years later, David Davis declared that “the Democracy are pipe laying for the Legislature” by “transferring Irish voters from the Northern part of the State into the doubtful districts. This can only be counteracted by like means on our behalf.”)⁴³⁶ Colonizing voters was a common electoral strategy in the 1850s, when

⁴³³ Lincoln to Judd, Rushville, 20 October 1858, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 3:330.

⁴³⁴ Heckman, Lincoln vs. Douglas, 135.

⁴³⁵ O. M. Hatch to Lyman Trumbull, Springfield, 13 July 1857, Trumbull Papers, Library of Congress.

⁴³⁶ David Davis to E. D. Morgan, Bloomington, 22 September 1860, Edwin D. Morgan Papers, New York State Library, Albany.

registry laws were weak or non-existent.⁴³⁷ Some Republicans even contemplated using violence. On election eve, Herndon explained to a Massachusetts correspondent that Illinois Republicans “have this question before us – ‘What shall we do? Shall we tamely submit to the Irish, or shall we rise and cut their throats?’ If blood is shed in Ill[inoi]s to maintain the purity of the ballot box, and the rights of the popular will, do not be at all surprised.”⁴³⁸ Lincoln’s

suspicion was widely shared. A St. Louis newspaper reported that hundreds of men were “being hired, publicly in our streets to go to Illinois, ostensibly to work on the Railroads, but really to vote for the Democratic candidates for the Legislature.”⁴³⁹ A resident of Princeton complained that “Irishmen are sent into the doubtful districts along the lines of railroads by the hundreds, with the intention, no doubt, of getting their votes into the ballot boxes if possible.” He also warned that even if Republican candidates prevailed, Democratic clerks might certify their opponents as the victors, as they had done in two districts in 1856.⁴⁴⁰ Chester P. Dewey reported in mid-October that a “gentle colonization of voters is going on, almost imperceptibly.” A newcomer “is seen for a moment at a depot, and then merged in the general population of the region. Here and there a few Irishmen leave the [rail] cars, and either go to work upon railroads or seek employment in cutting corn among the farmers.”⁴⁴¹ Governor Matteson, whose corruption would be

⁴³⁷ Mark W. Summers, The Plundering Generation: Corruption and the Crisis of the Union, 1849-1861 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 51-67.

⁴³⁸ Herndon to Theodore Parker, Springfield, 30 October 1858, Herndon-Parker Papers, University of Iowa.

⁴³⁹ Missouri Democrat (St. Louis), 22 October 1858. That paper ran a series of editorials on this theme. Ibid., 23-27 October 1858.

⁴⁴⁰ Princeton correspondence, 18 October, New York Evening Post, 21 October 1858.

⁴⁴¹ Springfield correspondence, 18 October, New York Evening Post, 20 October 1858.

exposed the following year, allegedly said that he had so arranged things that the Democrats would carry McLean, Sangamon, Madison, and Morgan counties.⁴⁴² Those were the swing districts where the outcome of the election would be determined.⁴⁴³ On election eve, David Davis told a friend, “Lincoln has made a magnificent canvass. There would be no doubt of Douglas’ defeat if it was not from the fact that he is colonizing Irish votes.”⁴⁴⁴ Herndon predicted that “there is nothing which can well defeat us but the elements, & the wandering roving robbing Irish, who have flooded over the State.”⁴⁴⁵ out: the Republicans won the two statewide offices but failed to gain control of the legislature.⁴⁴⁶

The Illinois State Register lamented that the “treachery of Danite officials” gave “niggerism this preponderance.”⁴⁴⁷ In races for the General Assembly, already controlled by the Democrats going into the election, they gained one Senate seat (in the Madison-Bond-Montgomery district) and six House seats: two in Madison County, two in Sangamon County, one in Wabash and White Counties combined, and one in Mason and Logan Counties combined. In Morgan County, Lincoln had hoped that Richard Yates

⁴⁴² Charles Henry Ray to O. M. Hatch, Chicago, 31 August 1858, Hatch Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

⁴⁴³ Madison County was especially critical, for it elected two representatives and had 55% of the voters in its senatorial district. Collins, “The Lincoln-Douglas Contest,” 408-9.

⁴⁴⁴ King, David Davis, 125.

⁴⁴⁵ William H. Herndon to Theodore Parker, Springfield, 30 October 1858, Herndon-Parker Papers, University of Iowa. See same to same, Springfield, 31 August 1858, ibid.

⁴⁴⁶ James Miller, the Republican candidate for State Treasurer, received 125,430 votes to his Democratic opponent’s 121,609 and his Danite opponent’s 5,071. Newton Bateman, the Republican candidate for Superintendent of Public Instruction, received 124,557 votes to his Democratic opponent’s 122,413 and his Danite opponent’s 5,173.

⁴⁴⁷ Illinois State Register (Springfield), 9 November 1858. One Democrat alleged that the Danite vote caused the defeat of Democratic candidates for the Illinois House in the Peoria, Marshall-Putnam-Woodford, St. Clair, Edgar, and Piatt-Macon-DeWitt-Champaign districts. Daniel McCook to Douglas, Washington, 7 November 1858, Douglas Papers, University of Chicago.

would run for the legislature, just as he had done to help Yates four years earlier; Yates, however, did not reciprocate.⁴⁴⁸

The Republican margin of victory in the popular vote was considerably greater than Governor Bissell had enjoyed in 1856. The margin might have been greater a result if Republicans in northern Illinois had turned out in full strength. The Chicago Press and Tribune estimated that 5,000 to 10,000 faithful did not bother to vote because of bad weather (election day was cold and raw) and because they rightly assumed that their legislative candidates would win easily. In addition, they believed that Douglas “had permanently broken with the Democratic party” and were influenced by “the persistent manner in which Eastern Republicans and newspapers” backed the Little Giant.⁴⁴⁹

Republicans also blamed apostate Old Line Whigs for the party’s failure to capture the legislature. As they had done in the Frémont campaign, those Whigs balked, especially in Sangamon, Madison, Jersey, and Tazewell counties.⁴⁵⁰ David Davis, who was grieved “beyond measure,” complained bitterly to Lincoln that the “Pharisaical old Whigs in the Central counties, who are so much more righteous than other people, I cant talk about with any patience– The lever of Judge Dickeys influence has been felt– He drew the letter out of Mr Crittenden & I think, in view of every thing, that it was perfectly outrageous in Mr Crittenden to have written any thing– It was very shameful in my opinion for Dickey, to have kept that letter from 1st Augt & then published it a week

⁴⁴⁸ Jack Nortrup, “Lincoln and Yates: The Climb to Power,” Lincoln Herald 73 (1971): 250-51.

⁴⁴⁹ Chicago Press and Tribune, 16 February and 23 March 1860.

⁴⁵⁰ Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 8 November 1858; H. S. Thomas to Lincoln, Vermont, Illinois, 29 January 1859, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

before the election—”⁴⁵¹ (Lincoln also felt that Dickey’s efforts had helped defeat him, but he bore no grudge.)⁴⁵² Henry C. Whitney thought “Crittenden’s letter was the dominating influence in the election and controlled the result.”⁴⁵³

The Chicago Press and Tribune also ascribed the Republican’s defeat primarily to Crittenden’s intervention and the coolness shown by Eastern Republicans. Of the latter it exclaimed: “with a madness that is incomprehensible – with a degree of fatuity that never was equaled – with a violation of the rules of political warfare that is without parallel, every effort of our friends abroad was for our enemies at home!”⁴⁵⁴ (In fact, the pro-Seward New York Times had lauded Douglas on the eve of the election, and the New York Tribune admitted that its relative silence during the campaign “was damaging in a State where more people read this paper than any other.”)⁴⁵⁵ Equally indignant was Ebenezer Peck, who bitterly complained to Trumbull: “Now that Seward Greel[e]y & Co have contributed so much to our defeat, they may expect us, in the true christian spirit to return good for evil – but in this I fear they will find themselves mistaken. If the vote of Illinois can nominate another than Seward – I hope it will be so cast. The coals of fire, I

⁴⁵¹ David Davis to Lincoln, Danville, 7 November 1858, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress; David Davis to George Perrin Davis, Danville, 7 November 1858, Davis Papers, Illinois State Historical Library, Springfield; Davis to Julius Rockwell, 26 October 1858, in King, Davis, 125.

⁴⁵² Reminiscences of Charles Dickey, son of T. Lyle Dickey, in an autobiography published in 1926, in Tisler and Tisler, “Lincoln Was Here for Another Go at Douglas,” 26.

⁴⁵³ Whitney, Lincoln the Citizen, 271.

⁴⁵⁴ Chicago Press and Tribune, 5, 17 November 1858.

⁴⁵⁵ “The Douglas Contest,” New York Times, 25 October 1858; “Mr. Lincoln’s Abilities,” New York Tribune, 24 May 1860. The nationwide influence of the Tribune caused Herndon to be especially critical of its stance during the campaign. William H. Herndon to Theodore Parker, Springfield, 25 September, 4 October 1858, Herndon-Parker Papers, University of Iowa.

would administer, will be designed to raise a severe blister.”⁴⁵⁶ John M. Palmer, who believed that Lincoln had been “betrayed by the eastern Republicans,” suggested that the antislavery forces in Illinois make the struggle a “contest for free homes for free white people.”⁴⁵⁷ The heartsick George W. Rives declared: “I say D[am]n Greeley & Co. – they have done more harm to us in Ills. than all others beside not excepting the D[am]n Irish.” Lincoln “is too good a man to be thus treated by these D[amned] Sons [of] bitches.” John Tilson of Quincy echoed Rives’s suggestion and claimed that he could identify twenty “ardent Republicans” who “swear they never will vote for Wm. H. Seward.” Among those twenty, Tilson probably counted his neighbor Jackson Grimshaw, who feared that “Seward will be forced on us for President. I cant work for him or any man that actively or quietly endorsed or aided Douglas.”⁴⁵⁸ To a friend in Massachusetts, Herndon complained that “Greeley has done us infinite harm.” Republicans in the Prairie State “were like innocent fools waiting out here to hear Greeley open in his great Tribune: we expected that he would open the ball, but no signal boom came, and we grew restively cold, and our party slumbered as with a chill – a bivouac of death upon an iceberg.”⁴⁵⁹ David Davis told another Bay State resident that “Greeley – Truman Smith &c have thrown cold water on the election of Lincoln. Their conduct is shameful. . . . To think of

⁴⁵⁶ Ebenezer Peck to Lyman Trumbull, Chicago, 22 November 1858, Trumbull Papers, Library of Congress.

⁴⁵⁷ Palmer to Trumbull, n. d., quoted in Palmer, Conscientious Turncoat, 54-55.

⁴⁵⁸ G. W. Rives to O. M. Hatch, Paris, Illinois, 5 and 10 November 1858; Jackson Grimshaw to O. M. Hatch, Quincy, 14 November 1858; John Tillson to O. M. Hatch, Quincy, 15 November 1858, Hatch Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

⁴⁵⁹ William H. Herndon to Theodore Parker, Springfield, 11, 25 September 1858, Herndon-Parker Papers, University of Iowa.

Greeley taking no part in the contest.”⁴⁶⁰ To Lincoln, Davis bitterly remarked: “Some of you may forgive him [Crittenden], & Gov Seward & Mr Greeley but I cannot.”⁴⁶¹

A few Republicans in the East were equally disenchanted with their party confreres in Illinois. Senator Henry Wilson of Massachusetts maintained that “the course of the Republicans in that state was a great political crime, that if they had supported him [Douglas], he would have ensured us the North as a unity & at the same time not been the leader – but now he can dictate terms.”⁴⁶²

To reduce tension between the Illinois Republicans and their counterparts in the East, Herndon (probably at the behest of Lincoln) tried to placate Seward by praising his “irrepressible conflict” doctrine and apologizing for hotheads in the Prairie State. “Some of our more fiery – passionate – quick boys may have uttered, in moments when the blood was hot, things that were wrong – foolish, by words spoken, or through the Press, against the Eastern men and Press,” he acknowledged, adding that that he and his party colleagues “will all forgive and forget the past whether the charges made therein were true or false. We will fight to the bitter end our common enemy – the pro-slavery Democratic party,” no matter who led the Republicans in 1860, “Seward – Chase -- Banks etc.”⁴⁶³

Herndon offered a plausibly complex analysis of Lincoln’s defeat: “We never got a smile or a word of encouragement outside of Ill[inoi]s from any quarter – during all this

⁴⁶⁰ Davis to Julius Rockwell, 26 October 1858, in King, Davis, 125.

⁴⁶¹ David Davis to Lincoln, Danville, 7 November 1858, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

⁴⁶² E. L. Pierce to Salmon P. Chase, Milton, Massachusetts, 5 November 1858, Chase Papers, Library of Congress.

⁴⁶³ Herndon to Seward, Springfield, 28 December 1858, Miscellaneous Manuscripts, New-York Historical Society.

great canvass. The East was for Douglas by silence. This silence was terrible to us. . . . Crittenden wrote letters to Ill[inoi]s urging the Americans and old line whigs to go for Douglas, and so they went ‘helter-skelter.’ Thousands of whigs dropt us just on the eve of the election, through the influence of Crittenden. . . . All the pro-slavery men, North as well as South, went to a man for Douglas. They threw into this State money, and men, and speakers. These forces & powers we were wholly denied by our Northern & Eastern friends. This cowed us somewhat.” Herndon was especially indignant at the “hell-doomed Irish.” (Herndon identified Douglas Democrats as “a mob . . . composed mostly of Irish whisky sellers.”) He complained that “thousands of wild roving robbing bloated pock-marked Irish” were “imported upon us from Phila[delphia], N[ew] Y[ork], St. Louis, and other cities.” No single “one of all these causes beat us – defeated Lincoln; . . . it was the combination . . . that ‘cleaned us out.’” Herndon emphasized especially the critical importance of the southern-born Old Line Whigs, whom he described as “timid – shrinking, but good, men.”⁴⁶⁴

The Chicago Democrat

thought Crittenden’s intervention more damaging than the attitude of the Eastern Republicans. “The Seward papers in New York and other places may have done us a little injury upon the popular vote, but the loss of no member of the legislature can be attributed to them. It was in the Old Whig and American portions of the State; it was among the Fillmore voters that Mr. Lincoln was slaughtered. The Republican papers there that made Senator Crittenden much stronger than he ever was before, and he was

⁴⁶⁴ Herndon to Theodore Parker, Springfield, 31 August, 3, 26 October, 8 November 1858, Herndon-Parker Papers, University of Iowa; Herndon to Lyman Trumbull, Springfield, 8 November 1858, Trumbull Papers, Library of Congress.

always strong among the emigrants from the slave States. He did all he could against Lincoln. Thus was Lincoln slain in Old Kentucky.”⁴⁶⁵

Lincoln shared this view. Two days after the election he told Crittenden: “The emotions of defeat, at the close of a struggle in which I felt more than a merely selfish interest, and to which defeat the use of your name contributed largely, are fresh upon me; but even in this mood, I can not for a moment suspect you of anything dishonorable.”⁴⁶⁶ (The following year, Lincoln publicly described Crittenden as a man “I have always loved with an affection as tender and endearing as I have ever loved any man.”)⁴⁶⁷ To Anson G. Henry he complained that “nearly all the old exclusive silk-stocking whiggery is against us. I do not mean nearly all the old whig party; but nearly all the of nice exclusive sort. And why not? There has been nothing in politics since the Revolution so congenial to their nature, as the present position of the great democratic party.”⁴⁶⁸ Lincoln remarked that attorney William W. Danenhower was one of the very few prominent members of the American party in Illinois who supported him.⁴⁶⁹

The “emotions of defeat” were mixed. On January 7, Lincoln “good-naturedly” told a journalist “that he felt like the Kentucky boy, who, after having his finger squeezed pretty badly, felt ‘too big to cry, and too badly hurt to laugh.’”⁴⁷⁰ Years later he recalled

⁴⁶⁵ Chicago Democrat, n.d., copied in the Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 13 November 1858.

⁴⁶⁶ Lincoln to Crittenden, Springfield, 4 November 1858, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 3:335-36.

⁴⁶⁷ Speech at Cincinnati, 17 September 1859, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 3:452.

⁴⁶⁸ Lincoln to Anson G. Henry, Springfield, 19 November 1858, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 3:339.

⁴⁶⁹ Lincoln to Salmon P. Chase, Washington, 11 April 1861, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:327.

⁴⁷⁰ Springfield correspondence, 7 January, Cincinnati Commercial, 12 January 1859.

that on the “dark, rainy, and gloomy” night when the election returns showed that the Democrats had won the legislature, he started to walk home. “The path had been worn hog-back & was slippery. My foot slipped from under me, knocking the other one out of the way, but I recovered myself & lit square, and I said to myself, ‘It’s a slip and not a fall.’”⁴⁷¹ He told friends that even though he lost, he felt “ready for another fight,” predicted that “it will all come out right in the end,” and remarked: “Douglas has taken this trick, but the game is not played out.”⁴⁷² Henry Villard, who spoke with Lincoln shortly after the election, reported that the defeat “did not seem to grate upon his mind. He was resigned. He knew that he had made a good fight – no matter what the result. His talk was cheerful. His wit and humor had not deserted him.”⁴⁷³

But they did desert him on January 5, 1859, when the legislature formally reelected Douglas by a vote of 54 to 46, despite attempts by the Danites to prevent a quorum and thus leave the Senate seat vacant.⁴⁷⁴ Supporters of the Little Giant paraded through the streets shouting “for Douglas, the white man’s champion!”⁴⁷⁵ Later that day Henry C. Whitney found him alone in his office “gloomy as midnight . . . brooding over his ill-fortune.” Whitney “never saw any man so radically and thoroughly depressed.”

⁴⁷¹ Michael Burlingame and John R. Turner Ettliger, eds., Inside Lincoln's White House: The Complete Civil War Diary of John Hay (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1997), 244 (entry for 8 November 1864).

⁴⁷² Reminiscences of Bushrod E. Hoppin, typescript dated April 1921, Lincoln Collection, Watkinson Library, Trinity College, Hartford, Connecticut; Shelby M. Cullom, interviewed by Frank G. Carpenter, Washington Evening Star, [3 November] 1895, clipping in scrapbook, Frank G. Carpenter Papers, Library of Congress; Charles S. Zane, “Lincoln as I Knew Him,” Sunset Magazine 29 (October 1912): 430-38, reprinted in the Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society 14 (1921-22): 79-80.

⁴⁷³ Springfield correspondence, 26 November, New York Herald, 1 December 1860.

⁴⁷⁴ Isaac Cook to James Buchanan, Chicago, 28 November 1858, Springfield, 11 January 1859, Buchanan Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

⁴⁷⁵ Kankakee City, Illinois, Democrat, 5 January 1859.

Lincoln, “completely steeped in the bitter waters of hopeless despair,” said “several times, with bitterness, ‘I expect everybody to desert me.’”⁴⁷⁶

Lincoln did not commit such sentiments to paper; indeed, when writing to friends he was stoic. In mid-November he told Norman B. Judd: “I am convalescent, and hoping these lines may find you in the same improving state of health. Doubtless you have suspected for some time that I entertained a personal wish for a term in the U. S. Senate; and had the suspicion taken the shape of a direct charge, I think I could not have truthfully denied it. But let the past as nothing be.”⁴⁷⁷ To his old friend Anson G. Henry he declared, “I am glad I made the late race. It gave me a hearing on the great and durable question of the age, which I could have had in no other way; and though I now sink out of view, and shall be forgotten, I believe I have made some marks which will tell for the cause of civil liberty long after I am gone.”⁴⁷⁸ (Henry assured him that he had not disappeared from sight and predicted that the people “will bear you on their memories until the time comes for putting you in possession of their House in Washington.”)⁴⁷⁹ Three weeks later Lincoln wrote in a similar vein, “While I desired the result of the late canvass to have been different, I still regard it as an exceeding small matter. I think we have fairly entered upon a durable struggle as to whether this nation is to ultimately become all slave or all free, and though I fall early in the contest, it is nothing if I shall

⁴⁷⁶ Whitney, Life on the Circuit, ed. Angle, 51, 411; Whitney to Herndon, Chicago, 18 July 1887, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 622. Don E. Fehrenbacher and Virginia Fehrenbacher doubt this story, but it is consistent with Lincoln’s reaction to previous defeats. Recollected Words of Abraham Lincoln (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 492-93.

⁴⁷⁷ Lincoln to Judd, Springfield, 15 November 1858, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, First Supplement, 34.

⁴⁷⁸ Lincoln to Anson G. Henry, Springfield, 19 November 1858, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 3:339.

⁴⁷⁹ Anson G. Henry to Lincoln, Lafayette, Oregon, 16 February 1859, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

have contributed, in the least degree, to the final result.”⁴⁸⁰

Lincoln derived consolation from the history of the British movement to abolish the African slave trade. “I have never professed an indifference to the honors of official station,” he wrote during the campaign, “and were I to do so now I should only make myself ridiculous.” But, he added, “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, 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 dollar and cent opponents; it’s inferior race opponents; its negro equality opponents; that all these opponents got offices, and their adversaries got none. But I have also remembered that 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.” But the champions of the movement to abolish the slave trade achieved enduring fame. “School-boys know that [William] 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 the term of my 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

⁴⁸⁰ Lincoln to H. D. Sharpe, Springfield, 8 December 1858, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 3:344.

contribute an humble mite to that glorious consummation, which my own poor eyes may not last to see.”⁴⁸¹

Lincoln was also confident that Douglas would eventually be crushed between the upper and nether millstones, for he could not continue to please both the South and the North. To Charles H. Ray, who was “feeling like h-ll,” Lincoln wrote in late November: “Quit that. You will soon feel better. Another ‘blow-up’ is coming; and we shall have fun again. Douglas managed to be supported as the best instrument to put down and to uphold the slave power; but no ingenuity can long keep these antagonisms in harmony.”⁴⁸² In 1860, Lincoln voiced similar amazement at another feat of Douglas’s. More than any man he had ever known, the Little Giant “has the most audacity in maintaining an untenable position. Thus, in endeavoring to reconcile popular sovereignty and the Dred Scott decision, his argument, stripped of sophistry, is: ‘It is legal to expel slavery from a territory where it legally exists.’ And yet he has bamboozled thousands into believing him.”⁴⁸³

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What the Democratic press called “Mr. Lincoln’s niggerism,” which Douglas emphasized heavily, played a key role in the election. On election eve, the leading Democratic paper of downstate Illinois proclaimed in extra large print: “PEOPLE OF SANGAMON REMEMBER, A VOTE FOR [Republican legislative candidates John] COOK AND [James N.] BROWN IS A VOTE FOR LINCOLN AND NEGRO

⁴⁸¹ Fragment on the struggle against slavery [c. July, 1858], Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:482.

⁴⁸² Lincoln to Charles H. Ray, Springfield, 20 November 1858, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 3:342. He offered similar predictions to several other correspondents, among them Dr. B. C. Lundy.

⁴⁸³ Springfield correspondence, 21 June, Utica, New York, Herald, 27 June 1860, copied in the New York Tribune, 9 July 1860.

EQUALITY.” The next day that journal warned readers: “Lincoln says that a negro is your equal.”⁴⁸⁴ On election day, the Chicago Times thrice proclaimed, in large capital letters: “A VOTE FOR THE REPUBLICAN CANDIDATES IS A VOTE TO CROWD WHITE LABORERS OUT OF, AND BRING NEGROES INTO THE CITY.”⁴⁸⁵ The town of Lincoln voted against its namesake because, as one resident put it, “We had too many honest incorruptable boys who did not nor would [not] believe a negro their equal.”⁴⁸⁶ A Democrat in Prairie City reported that the local coroner “has just held an inquest over the defunct Black Republican party, and . . . the verdict of the jury is ‘died from a surfeit of negro wool.’”⁴⁸⁷ Republicans in eastern Illinois complained that “in taking his stand in favor of negro equality, Mr. Lincoln has placed them in a false light before their people, and that he has given them a heavier load to carry than they can bear.”⁴⁸⁸ The Illinois State Register harped on the race question throughout the campaign. A typical example of its rhetoric appeared in a description of the menu for the Republicans of Sangamon County at a local convention. The choices, said the Register, consisted of “nigger in the soup, nigger in the substantials, nigger in the desert – Lincoln and nigger equality all through.” Douglas’s victory prompted the Register to declare that Lincoln “has failed in the first open fight upon the proposition of negro equality.”⁴⁸⁹ Many Illinois voters evidently agreed with a journalist who declared that Douglas, for all

⁴⁸⁴ Illinois State Register (Springfield), 6 August, 1, 2 November 1858.

⁴⁸⁵ Chicago Daily Times, 2 November 1858.

⁴⁸⁶ W. D. Wyatt to Douglas, Lincoln, 8 November 1858, Douglas Papers, University of Chicago.

⁴⁸⁷ Charles Sweney to Douglas, Prairie City, Illinois, 11 November 1858, Douglas Papers, University of Chicago.

⁴⁸⁸ Paris, Illinois, correspondence, 31 July, Illinois State Register (Springfield), 4 August 1858.

⁴⁸⁹ Illinois State Register (Springfield), 28 August, 9 November 1858.

his faults, “is sound on niggers,” especially when compared with Lincoln, “a crazy fanatic, who openly proclaims the equality of the black and white races, and advocates the abolishing of the Supreme Court for its decision in the Dred Scott Case.”⁴⁹⁰

Leonard Swett ascribed Lincoln’s defeat to the first ten lines of his House Divided speech; they were simply too radical for moderate voters.⁴⁹¹ A report prepared for Douglas indicated that while two thirds of the state’s Germans were Republicans, they were “wavering and malcontent since . . . Mr. Lincoln’s speeches and the disclosures of his past. He is evidently almost too much for them, and it will not take a superhuman labor to bring them over in squads.”⁴⁹²

The mal-apportionment of the legislature, based on the census of 1850, also helped defeat Lincoln. Between that year and 1858, the state’s population had grown significantly, especially in the north. The Republican party won 50% of the votes for statewide office but only 46% of seats in the legislature, whereas Douglas’s faction won 48% of the statewide vote and 54% of seats in the legislature. According to the 1855 census, the forty House districts carried by the Democrats had a population of 606,278; the thirty-three Republican districts had 699,840 inhabitants.⁴⁹³ In Madison County, where 4300 votes were cast, the Democrats won by a margin of 200 and sent two representatives to the General Assembly; in McLean County, where 4900 votes were cast, the Republicans won by a majority of 600 and sent one member to the Illinois

⁴⁹⁰ J. Henly Smith to Alexander H. Stephens, Washington, 3 August 1858, Stephens Papers, Library of Congress, quoted in Fehrenbacher, Dred Scott Case, 497.

⁴⁹¹ Swett to Herndon, Chicago, 17 January 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 162.

⁴⁹² Louis Didier, undated memo [ca. August 1858], “A Report to the Honorable S. A. Douglas, U.S.S., on the German Press and German politics in the State of Illinois,” Douglas Papers, University of Chicago.

⁴⁹³ Chicago Press and Tribune, 13 June 1860.

House. Adams County, where 6000 votes were cast, went Democratic by a margin of 200 and sent two representatives to the House; in the Republican counties of La Salle, Livingston, and Grundy, 11,000 votes were cast yet only two members were sent to the House. Fulton County, with 5500 votes, also had two legislators, while Cook, with nearly four times the voting population (19,000) had only four representatives. Will County with 10,000 voters had but three representatives. A switch of 400 votes in Sangamon and Madison Counties would have given the Republicans a majority of the House and the ability to elect Lincoln. According to calculations made by the Illinois State Journal, if the legislature had been apportioned on a one-man-one-vote basis, the Republicans would have elected forty-one Representatives and fourteen Senators, giving Lincoln the Senate seat.⁴⁹⁴ Joseph Medill calculated that the mal-apportionment gave Douglas an extra three senators and eight representatives.⁴⁹⁵

The election results are somewhat difficult to compute with precision, but generally speaking Republican candidates for the Illinois House of Representatives won a total of 190,468, their Democratic opponents 166,374, and the Danites 9951. If in fact all votes for Democratic candidates were cast to indicate a preference for Douglas over Lincoln (and that may well not have always been the case), and all Republican votes were deliberately cast to indicate a preference for Lincoln over Douglas, then the challenger beat the incumbent handily, receiving 52% of the votes cast to the Little Giant's 45%.⁴⁹⁶

⁴⁹⁴ Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 9 November 1858. But see Fehrenbacher, Prelude to Greatness, 118-20.

⁴⁹⁵ Medill to John A. Gurley, Chicago, 28 August 1858, Medill Papers, Chicago Historical Society.

⁴⁹⁶ I am indebted to Professor Allen Guelzo for this information. He consulted the official returns for each House district in the Illinois State Archives and generously shared his findings with me. He acknowledges that a complication in computing these tallies arises is that in the race for House seats, the 8th, 12th, 14th, 26th, 27th, 28th, 29th, 33rd, 41st, 45th, 46th, 51st, 54th, 56th, and 57th Districts elected more than one

Similarly, in the twelve races for senate seats, Republican candidates won 54% of the votes cast.⁴⁹⁷ Obviously many who voted in the legislative election failed to vote for the state treasurer or state superintendent of education. If in 1858, U. S. senators had been popularly elected, Lincoln would have trounced Douglas. The Little Giant clearly owed his victory to a mal-apportioned legislature.⁴⁹⁸

The Little Giant's status as a martyr aided his cause. From Springfield it was reported that "Douglas has made more friends out of the Lecomptonites on account of the proscription of his friends, than he could have hope to have gained without. . . . It is very natural that one who is persecuted from within, and without, should excite the sympathies of all honest men."⁴⁹⁹ The Chicago Press and Tribune plausibly speculated that "if the Administration had supported instead of opposing him, the Republicans would have carried the Legislature by a decided majority."⁵⁰⁰ Many opponents of the Lecompton Constitution believed that Douglas's defeat would be regarded as a triumph for Buchanan.⁵⁰¹

Douglas prevailed in part because he outspent the Republicans significantly.

representative (usually two, sometimes three). So how should votes for Republican candidates in such districts be counted? In the 57th District, for example, Professor Guelzo counted a vote for Peck and Butz (Republican) as two votes rather than one because the totals for each candidate differed (6241 vs. 6223), indicating that some voters split their tickets. But even if the results in multiple-representative districts were calculated the other way, the final percentage figures would remain the same.

⁴⁹⁷ Democratic senate candidates won 44,750 votes, Republicans 53,784, and Danites 1308.

⁴⁹⁸ The Republicans ran no legislative candidates in several southern Illinois counties, where the Republican candidates for statewide office received 577 votes. In the 9th Congressional District, in Egypt, the Republican candidate for Congress, David L. Phillips, received 2,796 votes.

⁴⁹⁹ Springfield correspondence, 11 October, Missouri Republican (St. Louis), 13 October 1858.

⁵⁰⁰ Chicago Press and Tribune, 5 November 1858. The Illinois State Journal made the same point (issue of 8 November 1858).

⁵⁰¹ Anson G. Henry to Lincoln, Lafayette, Oregon, 16 February 1859, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

Lincoln's expenditures amounted to about \$1,000, while the Little Giant's were approximately \$50,000.⁵⁰² (Evidently believing that he had been extravagant, Lincoln said at the end of the campaign: "I do not believe I have spent a cent less than \$500 in this canvass.")⁵⁰³ In late October, the Peoria Union published copies of mortgages recently made by Douglas on his Chicago property amounting to \$52,000; New York boss Fernando Wood was the main mortgagee. The Quincy Whig and Republican commented that with those funds, "Douglas expects to carry the election. He thinks that he can buy enough votes for that purpose. He pays for the puffs he gets in the newspapers. He carries around with him hirelings whose business it is to manufacture crowds and enthusiasm. The occupation of this toady is the same as that of the man who is hired to puff some quack medicine into notoriety: 'the greatest wonder of the age! one dose cures the most obdurate cases! certificates from some of the most distinguished clergymen, who have been miraculously saved through its instrumentality!' This is the way Douglas' hired quacks talk about him, and about what he is saying and doing in his perambulations through the State; and Douglas pays for the piping out of this \$52,000. He carries a big cannon with him, to give him a puff wherever he goes, and he pays for that. He has somebody to go around and shoot it for him and he pays for that also. In fact,

⁵⁰² Pratt, "Great Debates," 8; Johannsen, Douglas, 659. Horace Greeley asserted that Douglas "borrowed and dispensed no less than eighty thousand dollars; incurring a debt which weighed him down to the grave." Horace Greeley, "Greeley's Estimate of Lincoln," written ca. 1868, Century Magazine 42 (July 1891): 375. Shortly after the election, Norman B. Judd estimated the debt of the Republican State Committee at \$3000, a figure that presumably covered expenses for Congressional races as well as state legislative contests. Judd to O. M. Hatch, Chicago, 9 November 1858, Hatch Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield. A month later he reported that the outstanding debt was \$1500. During the campaign, attempts to raise funds in the East had been futile. Judd to Lyman Trumbull, Chicago, 26 December 1858, Trumbull Papers, Library of Congress.

⁵⁰³ Isaac N. Arnold, Congressional Globe, 38th Congress, 1st session, 1198 (19 March 1864).

he has to throw his money right and left, and with a liberal hand, to keep up the little fictitious enthusiasm which has been manufactured by his creatures.”⁵⁰⁴

Lincoln said that the “whole expense of his campaign with Douglas did not exceed a few hundred dollars.”⁵⁰⁵ During the canvass, when his friend William H. Hanna, a Bloomington attorney, offered to give him \$500, Lincoln replied: “I am not so poor as you suppose – don’t want any money – don’t know how to use money on such occasions – Can’t do it & never will – though much obliged to you.”⁵⁰⁶ But in late June he did ask Alexander Campbell for financial assistance: “In 1856 you gave me authority to draw on you for any sum not exceeding five hundred dollars. I see clearly that such a privilege would be more available now than it was then. I am aware that times are tighter now than they were then. Please write me at all events; and whether you can now do anything for not, I shall continue grateful for the past.”⁵⁰⁷

Some Republicans blamed Lincoln’s defeat on mismanagement by Norman B. Judd, head of the party’s state central committee.⁵⁰⁸ David Davis, who complained that Judd’s “policy at the head of that Committee was unwise,” thought that central committee

⁵⁰⁴ Quincy Whig & Republican, n.d., copied in the Dixon Republican and Telegraph, 28 October 1858. David Davis reported that Douglas “borrowed \$39,000 of Fernando Wood, ex-Mayor of New York & \$13,000 from a money lender in New York. Gave mortgage on his property in Chicago. This money is used for colonizing Irish voters.” Davis to Julius Rockwell, 26 October 1858, in King, Davis, 125. Douglas received loans from Wood and August Belmont. The total amount was estimated by the New York Herald at \$100,000. Johannsen, Douglas, 620.

⁵⁰⁵ Springfield correspondence, 21 June, Utica, New York, Herald, 27 June 1860, copied in the New York Tribune, 9 July 1860.

⁵⁰⁶ William H. Hanna, interview with Herndon, [1865-66], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 459.

⁵⁰⁷ Lincoln to Campbell, Springfield, 25 June 1858, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:473. In 1856, Campbell had given Lincoln between \$200 and \$300. Alexander Campbell to Jesse W. Weik, La Salle, Illinois, 12 December 1888, typed copy, Lincoln Collection, Chicago History Museum.

⁵⁰⁸ Among them were Charles L. Wilson, Edwin T. Bridges, and Samuel L. Baker Lincoln to Judd, Springfield, 9 December 1859, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

should have been based in Springfield “and composed of men of intellect and accustomed to a political campaign.” In mid-August he was appalled that to find that there was “no plan of a campaign yet laid down.”⁵⁰⁹ John Wentworth criticized Judd for making the committee too large and unwieldy and for convening it too infrequently. “The triumph of Douglas falls heavily upon me,” Wentworth said, “& I feel as if he might have been beaten had the promptings of all political experience been followed.”⁵¹⁰ Lincoln emphatically branded the charge “false and outrageous” but could not convince several party leaders of Judd’s innocence.⁵¹¹

Douglas’s forces may have worked harder than Lincoln’s. From Galena, where the Democrats won handily, Elihu B. Washburne reported on election day that “such unheard-of efforts as have been made by the Douglas party are without parallel.” To his wife he confided that “I am utterly disgusted with politics and I have no desire ever to be at another election. Drunkenness, rowdyism, whiskey have been in the ascendant to-day.”⁵¹²

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Though defeated, Lincoln had accomplished much. The Illinois Republican organization had survived a fateful challenge, thanks largely to his efforts. A supporter congratulated him saying, “you have made a living Strong party. I consider that your

⁵⁰⁹ David Davis to Lincoln, Bloomington, 21 February 1860, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress; David Davis to O. M. Hatch, Springfield and Bloomington, 18 August 1858, For the People: A Newsletter of the Abraham Lincoln Association vol. 4, no. 3 (Autumn 2002): 6-7.

⁵¹⁰ John Wentworth to David Davis, n.d., quoted in Davis to Lincoln, Bloomington, 1 January [1859, misdated 1858 by Davis], Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress. See also Charles L. Wilson to Lincoln, Chicago, 3 March 1859, ibid.

⁵¹¹ Lincoln to Judd, Springfield, 9 December 1859, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

⁵¹² E. B. Washburne to Adele Washburne, Galena, 2 November 1858, Washburn Family Papers, Norlands, Maine.

Campaign permanently established the Republican party.”⁵¹³ Late in the canvass, Herndon speculated plausibly that “had we not organized the Republican forces in Ill[inoi]s this year, we should have been disorganized in 1860, and thrown into the great Traitor’s arms – Douglas’ arms; and he would have sold us to the Charleston Convention in 1860; or if he could not we would have been powerless, because disorganized. The whole People of all the U States may thank us in Ill[inoi]s.”⁵¹⁴

The Chicago Press and Tribune observed that Lincoln had gained “a splendid national reputation. Identified all his life long with the old Whig party, always in a minority in Illinois, his fine abilities and attainments have necessarily been confined to a very limited sphere. He entered upon the canvass with a reputation confined to his own State – he closed it with his name a household word wherever the principles he holds are honored, and with the respect of his opponents in all sections of the country.” His speeches, the editor predicted, “will become landmarks in our political history.”⁵¹⁵

The debates were shortly to become landmarks, for Lincoln, obviously believing that he had won those seven encounters, had the text of both his speeches and Douglas’s published in book form. When that volume appeared early in 1860, it became a best seller and helped Lincoln secure the Republican presidential nomination. In the campaign that year, the New York Tribune asked, “Did you ever hear a Douglas man urge or advise any candid inquirer to read the discussions between Messrs. Lincoln and Douglas?”⁵¹⁶ The published debates became a handbook for Republicans. The Tribune recommended that

⁵¹³ H. S. Thomas to Lincoln, Vermont, Illinois, 29 January 1859, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

⁵¹⁴ Herndon to Theodore Parker, Springfield, 25 September, 23, 24 November 1858, Herndon-Parker Papers, University of Iowa.

⁵¹⁵ Chicago Press and Tribune, 29 October and 10 November 1858.

⁵¹⁶ New York Tribune, 20 August 1860.

spokesmen for the party obtain “a copy of the Illinois Discussions between Lincoln and Douglas, and master the arguments, not on one side only, but on both sides of the great question.”⁵¹⁷ Some prominent Democrats conceded that Lincoln won the debates. In 1860, Caleb Cushing declared that “Lincoln is a much abler man than is generally supposed, even in his own party. In his canvass with Douglas he beat him in law, beat him in argument, and beat him in wit; and the published debates of that canvass will sustain this assertion.”⁵¹⁸

Other papers agreed with the Press and Tribune, including the Cincinnati Commercial, which proclaimed that the “reputation of Mr. Lincoln has gone all over the country. It is in extent, undoubtedly national. He has won high honors and made troops of friends.”⁵¹⁹ The Ottawa Republican noted that Lincoln “has created for himself a national reputation that is both envied and deserved.”⁵²⁰ The Peoria Message declared that “Defeat works wonders with some men. It has made a hero of Abraham Lincoln.” In Lowell, Massachusetts, an editor observed that “No man of this generation has grown more rapidly before the country than Lincoln in this canvass.”⁵²¹ The Iowa Citizen judged that Lincoln “had linked himself to the fortunes of the Republicans by hooks of steel. The name of Lincoln will be a household word for years to come. He has a brilliant future.”⁵²² Another Iowa paper speculated that Lincoln would become the party’s vice-presidential

⁵¹⁷ “Just a Word,” New York Tribune, 29 May 1860.

⁵¹⁸ New York Tribune, 18 August 1860.

⁵¹⁹ Cincinnati Commercial, 29 October 1858.

⁵²⁰ Ottawa Republican, 13 November 1858.

⁵²¹ Sparks, ed., The Lincoln-Douglas Debates, 582.

⁵²² Iowa Citizen (Des Moines), 17 November 1858, in Herriott, Iowa and Lincoln, 73.

nominee in 1860.⁵²³ According to the Rochester, New York, Democrat, “Lincoln has won a reputation as a statesman and orator which eclipses that of Douglas as the sun does the twinklers of the sky.”⁵²⁴ In Indiana, the Greensburg Republican observed that he “has won for himself a fame that will never die,” and the Indianapolis Journal called Lincoln “an able man, in close logical argument superior to Douglas himself, honest, tried, and true.”⁵²⁵ Unsurprisingly the Springfield Register speculated with some wonder: “If the Republican journals are to be taken as an index, Mr. Lincoln is to be made a presidential candidate upon the creed which he enunciated here in his June convention speech.”⁵²⁶

Individuals concurred. Anson Miller declared that “Lincoln has made a brilliant canvass. He has achieved a National reputation and has gallantly & powerfully defended and sustained the Republican Cause. There is a future for him.”⁵²⁷ William Hanna of Bloomington told Lincoln: “You have made a national reputation that I would much rather have this day, than that of S. A. Douglas, or any other Locofoco.”⁵²⁸ Another Bloomingtonian, David Davis, echoed Hanna: “You have made a noble canvass – (which, if unavailing in this state) has earned you a National reputation, & made you friends every where.”⁵²⁹ From Charleston arrived similar word from H. P. H. Bromwell:

⁵²³ Marshall, Iowa, Times, 24 November 1858.

⁵²⁴ Quoted in Herriott, Iowa and Lincoln, 35.

⁵²⁵ Greensburg, Indiana, Decatur Republican, 26 November 1858, quoted in Elmer Duane Elbert, “Southern Indiana Politics on the Eve of the Civil War, 1858-1861” (Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University, 1967), 73; Indianapolis Journal, 5 November 1858.

⁵²⁶ Illinois State Register (Springfield), 1 December 1858.

⁵²⁷ Anson Miller to E. B. Washburne, Rockford, 5 November 1858, Washburne Papers, Library of Congress.

⁵²⁸ William H. Hanna and John Wickizer to Lincoln, Bloomington, 5 November 1858, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

⁵²⁹ David Davis to Lincoln, Danville, 7 November 1858, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

“you come out of the fight with Laurals as the champion of those principles for which the free states contend, with the applause of the whole Republican host. The way seems paved for the presidential victory of 1860. Douglas can do no more than he has done if he were a candidate for the presidency. You have shown that you can carry the vote of Illinois under the most unfavorable circumstances, and as your Defeat is only due to unfortunate circumstances by which he has had an unfair advantage, I look with anxiety to the nominations of 1860 which will give you a chance upon a wider field to meet our enemies where they Cannot skulk behind gerrymandered District lines to deprive you of the fruits of honest victory.”⁵³⁰ Horace White offered Lincoln this consoling message: “I don’t think it possible for you to feel more disappointed than I do, with this defeat, but your popular majority in the state will give us the privilege of naming our man on the national ticket in 1860 either President or Vice Pres’t. Then, let me assure you, Abe Lincoln shall be an honored name before the American people. . . . I believe you have risen to a national reputation & position more rapidly than any other man who ever rose at all.”⁵³¹

Dr. James Smith, pastor at the First Presbyterian Church of Springfield, comforted Lincoln by assuring him that the work he had performed would make him president one day. “If I am President,” Lincoln replied, perhaps jocularly, “I will make you Consul at Dundee.”⁵³² (Three years later he did so.)

⁵³⁰ Bromwell to Lincoln, Charleston, 5 November 1858, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

⁵³¹ White to Lincoln, Chicago, 5 November 1858, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

⁵³² Robert Todd Lincoln to Isaac Markens, Manchester, Vermont, 4 November 1917, Paul M. Angle, ed., A Portrait of Abraham Lincoln in Letters by His Oldest Son (Chicago, Chicago Historical Society, 1968), 47.

Lincoln was also gaining respect in the East. From Rochester, New York, Chester P. Dewey wrote him in late October: “I find that the N. Y. Republicans who were in love with Douglas, are rather more inclined to take a different view now. They find much to admire & praise in your conduct of the campaign & be assured that you have made hosts of warm friends at the East.”⁵³³ Another resident of the Empire State, John O. Johnson, reported that the debates had won Lincoln “golden opinions” and “hosts of friends here.”⁵³⁴ In the Portland, Maine, Advertiser, James G. Blaine observed that the debates secured for Lincoln “a wide-spread and most honorable reputation as a man of fine intellect, of ready and condensed power, and of chivalric and statesmanlike bearing.”⁵³⁵

Horace Greeley declared that “the man who stumps a State with Stephen A. Douglas, and meets him, day after day, before the people, has got to be no fool. Many a man will make a better first speech than Douglas, but, giving and taking, back and forward, he is very sharp. . . . I don’t believe we have got another man living who would have fought through that campaign so effectively and at the same time so good-naturedly as he did Lincoln went through with perfect good nature and entire suavity, and beat Stephen A. Douglas.”⁵³⁶

Lincoln’s future concerned his party colleagues, one of whom suggested that he run for the seat of Congressman Thomas Harris, who had died in November.⁵³⁷ Other

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⁵³³ Chester P. Dewey to Lincoln, Rochester, N.Y., 30 October 1858, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

⁵³⁴ John O. Johnson to Ozias M. Hatch, New York, 17 February 1860, Hatch Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

⁵³⁵ Portland Advertiser, 18 November, copied in the Alton Courier, 30 November 1858.

⁵³⁶ Speech by Greeley, 22 May, New York Tribune, 23 May 1860.

⁵³⁷ B. F. Johnson to O. M. Hatch, West Urbana, 28 November 1858, Hatch Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

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Republicans began referring to Lincoln as presidential timber. George W. Rives said of the election results: “I am One of the Sickest men you ever Saw. I can Stand it as to myself but the thought of Lincoln’s defeat is almost too much for me to Stand.” Yet, he added, “We Must bear it – Now I am for Lincoln for the nomination for president in 1860.”⁵³⁸ A leading Indiana Republican, John D. Defrees, told a friend that in 1860 the party must nominate “a man of conservative views and he must be a Western man The prominence given Lincoln by his recent contest with Douglass, will make him strong, -- and . . . I am inclined to go for him.”⁵³⁹

The first known public suggestion that Lincoln should receive the presidential nomination came from Israel Green, who had helped found the Republican party in Ohio in 1854 and two years later served as a delegate to the party’s national convention. Writing on November 6 to the Cincinnati Gazette, Green proposed Lincoln for president and John Pendleton Kennedy of Maryland as his running mate.⁵⁴⁰ In Mansfield, Ohio, several Republican leaders made a similar suggestion.⁵⁴¹ (Two years later, Lincoln praised Mansfield as “a great place,” for it was the town “that first saw my fitness for the presidency.”)⁵⁴² On November 8, the Illinois Gazette of Lacon declared that Lincoln

⁵³⁸ Rives to Ozias M. Hatch, 5 and 10 November 1858, Hatch Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

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⁵³⁹ Defrees to Henry S. Lane, Indianapolis, 10 November 1858, Lane Papers, Indiana University.

⁵⁴⁰ Israel Green to his daughter, n.p., n.d., “First to Name Lincoln,” Washington Post, 3 October 1915; [Green] to the editor, Findlay, Ohio, 6 November 1858, 12 March 1859, Cincinnati Gazette, 10 November 1858, copied in the Ohio State Journal (Columbus), 13 November 1860. Green later supported Salmon P. Chase. Green to Chase, Findlay, Ohio, 21 March 1859, Chase Papers, Library of Congress.

⁵⁴¹ Sandusky, Ohio, Commercial Register, 6 November 1858; Mansfield, Ohio, Herald, 30 May 1860.

⁵⁴² Thomas B. Webster, Jr., to John Sherman, St. Louis, 15 November 1860, Sherman Papers, Library of Congress.

“should be the standard-bearer of the Republican party for the Presidency in 1860.”⁵⁴³ Soon thereafter the Chicago Democrat recommended that Illinois Republicans “present his name to the National Republican Convention, first for President, and next for Vice President.”⁵⁴⁴ In November and December, other papers, both in state (the Illinois State Journal, the Illinois State Register, the Olney Times, the Rockford Republican) and out of state (the New York Herald, the Mansfield, Ohio, Herald, and the Reading, Pennsylvania, Journal), mentioned Lincoln as a potential presidential candidate.⁵⁴⁵ The following spring, when the editor of the Central Illinois Gazette in West Urbana suggested to him that he should seek the presidency, Lincoln modestly pooh-poohed the idea. The editor nonetheless endorsed him on May 4.⁵⁴⁶ In the summer of 1859, Josiah M. Lucas reported from Washington that “I have heard various prominent men lately freely express themselves to me, and in crowds also, that Lincoln is the best man that we have got to run for the next President.”⁵⁴⁷

While the debates significantly improved Lincoln’s chances for the presidency, they materially injured Douglas’s. Disillusioned by the “Freeport heresy,” and even more by the Little Giant’s refusal to support the Lecompton Constitution and a federal slave

⁵⁴³ Illinois Gazette (Lacon), 8 November 1858, in J[eriah] B[onham], “Recollections of Abraham Lincoln,” Chicago Tribune, 12 May 1895.

⁵⁴⁴ Chicago Daily Democrat, 11 November 1858, Sparks, ed., The Lincoln-Douglas Debates, 588.

⁵⁴⁵ William E. Baringer, Lincoln's Rise to Power (Boston: Little, Brown, 1937), 48-64; Mansfield, Ohio, Herald, 30 May 1860 (quoting from an undated editorial from 1858).

⁵⁴⁶ John Walker Scroggs to Herndon, Champaign, 3 October 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 365.

⁵⁴⁷ Josiah M. Lucas to O. M. Hatch, Washington, July [1859, no day of the month indicated], Hatch Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield. Not everyone agreed. A Massachusetts Republican predicted that if nominated he would lose “as he is in the habit of doing. We want a man like Banks that always wins.” E. A. Studley to O. M. Hatch, Boston, 7 September 1859, Hatch Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

code for the territories, Southerners lost their enthusiasm for the senator; in December, his Democratic colleagues deposed him from the chairmanship of the Senate Committee on Territories.⁵⁴⁸ In 1860, the South refused to support his presidential bid for reasons spelled out by Louisiana Senator Judah P. Benjamin: “We accuse him of this, to wit: that having bargained with us upon a point upon which we were at issue [slavery in the territories], that it should be considered a judicial point; that he would abide the decision; that he would act under the decision, and consider it a doctrine of the party; that having said that to us here in the Senate, he went home, and under the stress of a local election, his knees gave way; his whole person trembled. His adversary stood upon principle and was beaten; and lo he is the candidate of the mighty party for the Presidency of the United States. The Senator from Illinois faltered. He got the prize for which he faltered, but lo, the grand prize of his ambition slips from his grasp because of his faltering which he paid as the price for the ignoble prize – ignoble under the circumstances under which he attained it.”⁵⁴⁹

Many Northerners were also disenchanted with the Little Giant. Horace Greeley, who had championed the senator’s candidacy, expressed disappointment in Douglas’s campaign, which “has stamped him first among county or ward politicians” and “has evinced a striking absence of the far higher qualities of statesmanship.” His speeches lacked “the breadth of view, the dignity, the courtesy to his opponent” that mark the true statesman. “They are plainly addressed to an excited crowd at some railway station, and seem uttered in unconsciousness that the whole American People are virtually his deeply

⁵⁴⁸ Johannsen, Douglas, 685-86.

⁵⁴⁹ Congressional Globe, 36th Congress, 1st session, 2241 (22 May 1860).

interested though not intensely excited auditors. They are volcanic and scathing, but lack the repose of conscious strength, the calmness of conscious right.”⁵⁵⁰

Though he had won, Douglas was clearly espousing an idea whose time had come and gone; popular sovereignty no longer suited either the North or the South.

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In 1859, looking back on the race against Douglas, Lincoln took some pride in its results. “Slavery is doomed,” he told David R. Locke, “and that within a few years. . . . In discussing it we have taught a great many thousands of people to hate it who would have never given it a thought before. What kills the skunk is the publicity it gives itself. What a skunk wants to do is to keep snug under the barn – in the day-time, when men are around with shot-guns.”⁵⁵¹

With determination he insisted that the “fight must go on. The cause of civil liberty must not be surrendered at the end of one, or even, one hundred defeats.”⁵⁵² The future looked bright, for “the Republican star gradually rises higher everywhere.”⁵⁵³ He had “abiding faith that we shall beat them in the long run.”⁵⁵⁴ Perhaps that victory might

⁵⁵⁰ New York Tribune, 5 November 1858.

⁵⁵¹ David R. Locke in Rice, ed., Reminiscences of Lincoln, 447. Lincoln said this at Columbus in conversation with Locke in 1859.

⁵⁵² Lincoln to Henry Asbury, Springfield, 19 November 1858, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 3:339.

⁵⁵³ Lincoln to Salmon P. Chase, Springfield, 30 April 1859, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 3:378,

⁵⁵⁴ Lincoln to Alexander Symphon, Springfield, 12 December 1858, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 3:346.

even occur in the short run because, he predicted, “it is almost certain that we shall be far better organized for 1860 than ever before.”⁵⁵⁵ It proved to be an accurate prediction.

⁵⁵⁵ Lincoln to Lyman Trumbull, Springfield, 29 January 1859, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 3:351. The Republicans did indeed become better organized between 1858 and 1860. They established county central committees which systematically raised money and distributed documents. Norman B. Judd et al. to Jesse W. Fell, Chicago, 9 June 1859; Republican Central Committee to Fell, Bloomington, 8 May 1860; Horace White to Fell, Chicago, 23 June 1860, Fell Papers, Library of Congress.