

# Houses Divided: Lincoln, Douglas, and the Political Landscape of 1858

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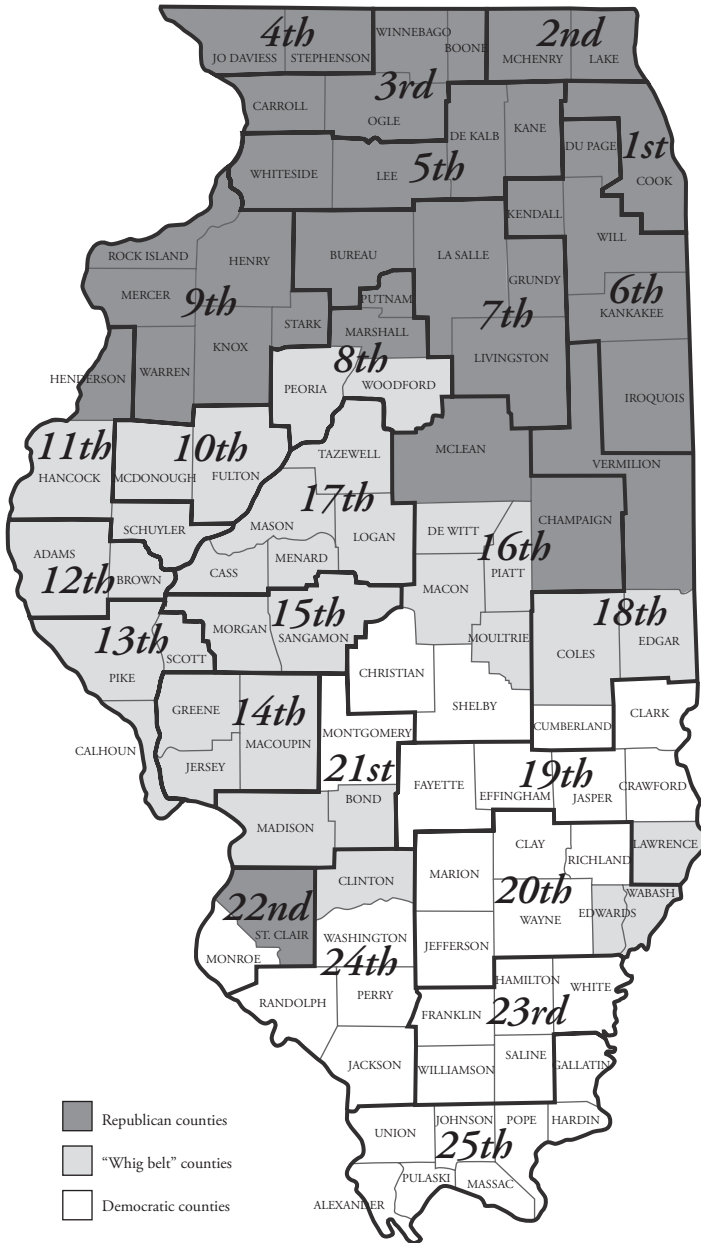
The year 1858 began with Illinois in the trough of a deep economic recession. The previous August the Ohio Life Insurance and Trust Company of Cincinnati had abruptly closed its doors and declared bankruptcy. That triggered a year of deflated land values, brought railroad construction to a halt on the Illinois Central and Michigan Central railroads, and reduced the supply of bank notes in circulation from \$215 million to \$155 million. Torrential rains flooded the Midwest in the early summer, sending the Ohio River up to forty-one feet at Cincinnati and flooding the southern-tip Illinois city of Cairo.<sup>1</sup> Tsar Alexander II took the first steps toward emancipating Russian serfs, the transatlantic cable carried its first message, and Donati's comet, with two brilliant tails easily visible to the naked eye, arced through the summer sky. But of all these events, not one took the attention of Illinois and the nation like the election campaigns that were carried on across Illinois in the late summer and autumn of 1858 by Abraham Lincoln and Stephen A. Douglas. In Dallas, Texas, the Lincoln-Douglas campaigns were termed "one of the most exciting political contests that has ever occurred." William Lloyd Garrison's *Liberator* reported that "Illinois is all in a blaze just now. Lincoln and Douglas, candidates for the United States Senate, are canvassing the State." At least "for the time being," one Washington, D.C., newspaper remarked, "Illinois becomes, as it were, the Union." Whatever else Illinois and the nation had to think about in 1858, they thought with a peculiar passion about Lincoln and Douglas.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Failures for 1857," *Springfield Illinois State Register*, Jan. 18, 1858; "The Ohio River Still Rising," *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, June 13, 1858; "The Ohio River Still Rising," *ibid.*, June 15, 1858.

<sup>2</sup> *Dallas (Tex.) Weekly Herald*, Aug. 14, 1858; Anson Miller to Abraham Lincoln, Nov. 15, 1858, Abraham Lincoln Papers (Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.); "The Vermont Convention—Greeley and the Tribune—Douglas and Lincoln in Illinois," *Liberator*, July 30, 1858, p. 124; "Douglas-Lincoln," *Montgomery County (Ill.) Herald*, Sept. 17, 1858; Alexander Davidson, *A Complete History of Illinois from 1673 to 1873* (Springfield, 1874), 709–10; Richard Allen Heckman, *Lincoln vs. Douglas: The Great Debates Campaign* (Washing-

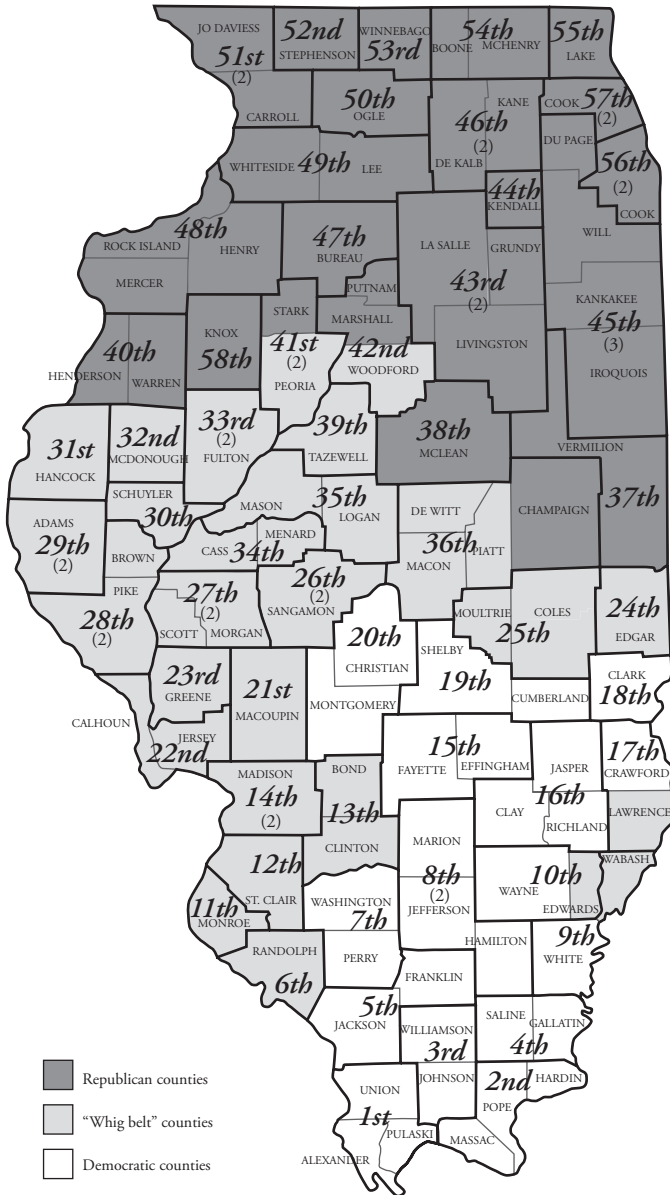


Illinois in 1858, showing state senate districts. In 1858 U.S. senators were elected indirectly. Illinois voters chose members of the state senate and house who then voted for the U.S. senatorial candidates of their parties. Both the Democratic candidate (Stephen Douglas) and the Republican (Abraham Lincoln) hoped to win voters in a belt of districts in the middle of the state where the two parties were competitive.

That very adulation has, however, generated subsequent waves of doubt that an isolated political event in an off-year election on the Illinois prairies could have had such im-

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ton, 1967), 78; "Letter from Ohio," *Philadelphia Press*, Oct. 22, 1858; Robert W. Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas* (New York, 1973), 645; *Washington States*, July 16, 1858.



Illinois in 1858, showing state house districts.

portance. Lincoln’s biographer Albert J. Beveridge, from the vantage point of the 1920s, dismissed the seven debates that became the central feature of the campaigns as utterly devoid of substance: “Solely on their merits, the debates themselves deserve little notice. For the most part, each speaker merely repeated what he had said before.” Likewise, the new political history promoted by Lee Benson, Richard P. McCormick, and Ronald P. Formisano in the 1960s and 1970s discouraged inclinations to see ideological debates as the formative influence on political decisions, and the revival of that skepticism in Glenn

C. Altschuler's and Stuart M. Blumin's *Rude Republic: Americans and Their Politics in the Nineteenth Century* implied that the Lincoln-Douglas campaigns might have been good political theater, but no more. Even to such a magisterial historian as David M. Potter, the debates appeared as "one of the great nonevents of American history."<sup>3</sup> At the core of Potter's and Beveridge's questions is an important point: the real problem in understanding the Lincoln and Douglas campaigns of 1858 may be that all we see of them *is* the seven debates. Nothing does more to confirm the skepticism of Beveridge and Potter that the debates were more folklore than politics than a focus on the solitary Lincoln and the solitary Douglas, squaring off gladiator-style on the debate platforms like *retiarus* and *secutor*; as though the world around them had dissolved into transparency.

For that reason, to understand the significance of Lincoln and Douglas in 1858 requires reconstructing the intricate political geography that underlay antebellum elections. In Illinois in 1858 that political geography embraced four things: the dependence of the U.S. Senate election (since senators were still elected by legislatures) on the outcomes of elections in fifty-eight state house districts and twenty-five state senate districts; the role played by out-of-state stakeholders, especially President James Buchanan, and the importance, vice versa, of local elections to national politics; the partisan demographics of the state (in which two large contiguous blocs of state legislative districts with consistent party identities in the north and south of the state and one swing bloc in the center dictated the strategy and movements of the candidates); and the deployment and organization of state committees, district conventions, and financial resources. The Lincoln-Douglas campaigns were not only about the great debates or even each man's eligibility for a national office or the two men's contrasting views on the expansion of slavery; they were also about the intricacies of Illinois politics, the inexorable movement from the ideological margins to the mainstream center by candidates, and the dynamic chain of political reactions that linked small-town politicking with the political center in Washington.

The first thing that needs to be understood about the Lincoln-Douglas race for the Senate in 1858 is that Lincoln and Douglas were not, metaphorically speaking, the only candidates. Stephen Arnold Douglas had emerged by the 1850s as the single greatest name in Democratic party politics, supported by a formidable political machine across Illinois constructed of federal patronage appointments that he oversaw and buttressed by major corporations (principally the Illinois Central Railroad) whose interests he was in a position to favor. But as a northerner and a promoter of the doctrine of "popular sovereignty" as the solution to the problem of slavery in the western territories, Douglas was mis-

<sup>3</sup> For an example of how skepticism itself can become folklore, see David Zarefsky, *Lincoln, Douglas, and Slavery: In the Crucible of Public Debate* (Chicago, 1990), x. Zarefsky underscored the irrelevance of the debates by observing that the *American Almanac* for 1859 does not mention the debates. That is because the *Almanac's* listing of "General Events for 1858" stopped at August 25, 1858—just after the first of the debates at Ottawa and nine weeks before the general legislative election in Illinois—in order to make a December press deadline. See *The American Almanac and Repository of Useful Knowledge for the Year 1859* (Boston, 1859), 371. Albert J. Beveridge, *Abraham Lincoln, 1809–1858* (2 vols., Boston, 1928), II, 635; Ronald P. Formisano, *The Birth of Mass Political Parties: Michigan, 1827–1861* (Princeton, 1971); Ronald P. Formisano, *The Transformation of Political Culture: Massachusetts Parties, 1790s–1840s* (New York, 1983); Richard P. McCormick, *The Second American Party System: Party Formation in the Jacksonian Era* (Chapel Hill, 1966); Lee Benson, *The Concept of Jacksonian Democracy: New York as a Test Case* (Princeton, 1961); Glenn C. Altschuler and Stuart M. Blumin, *Rude Republic: Americans and Their Politics in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, 2000), 152–53; David M. Potter, *The Impending Crisis, 1848–1861* (New York, 1976), 334–35, 338.

trusted by southern Democrats; Douglas for president booms in 1852 and 1856 failed, and Buchanan, who got the 1856 nomination instead, extended to his Illinois rival little more than polite formality. What turned formality into political warfare was Buchanan's decision to adopt the *Scott v. Sandford* decision as administration policy and demand the admission of Kansas as a slave state in February 1858 under the Lecompton Constitution. Douglas could not reconcile popular sovereignty with the Lecompton Constitution, and at the opening of the Thirty-fifth Congress in December 1857, Douglas broke with the administration and accused Buchanan of "a fundamental error" in endorsing the Lecompton Constitution.<sup>4</sup> There was no worse time for Douglas to pick a quarrel with the leadership of his own party than 1858, since he would be up for reelection that year and would need all the help loyal patronage appointees in Illinois could lend. But if the Buchanan administration was determined to rid itself of this troublesome clerk, it could pull the Illinois patronage foundation from under Douglas by firing diehard Douglasite officeholders and threatening to replace the rest, thus eliminating the election workers and salary kickbacks Douglas would need to provide hands and funds for his campaign. Illinois would thus become the testing ground of the relative strength of Douglas and Buchanan and, behind them, of popular sovereignty and southern control of the Democratic party. "The treachery of that Judas in the Senate," wrote one Buchananite in April, "should now be taught a lesson of remembrance. . . . Let every Douglas . . . man be made to walk the plank."<sup>5</sup>

Whether Buchanan actually turned so viciously on Douglas has been questioned over the years, since most of the accounts that refer to the "removals" are anecdotal and involve a handful of high-visibility federal patronage appointments.<sup>6</sup> But the evidence that Buchanan was willing and able to wreck the Democratic party in Illinois, if it took that to wreck Stephen A. Douglas, is substantial. Of the 26 Illinois postmasters with the most lucrative incomes (over \$1,000 per annum), 12 were replaced in 1858, largely in two rounds in July and October, at the height of the Lincoln-Douglas campaigns. Not only was the U.S. marshal for the Northern District of Illinois fired, but so were the U.S. marshal for the southern district and the federal district attorneys for both northern and southern districts. Likewise, half of the 12 major Treasury Department appointees in Illinois—including the collector of the Port of Chicago and the surveyors at Peoria, Quincy, and Alton—were dismissed. The state Democratic convention, which assembled in Springfield in April, tried to appease Buchanan by endorsing Douglas *without* condemning Buchanan. It did no good. "A squad of about forty or fifty persons, summoned here by the postmaster of Chicago," withdrew from the convention, set up a rump convention of their own, nominated candidates for state offices, and eventually put up Judge Sidney Breese as a rival "Buchaneer" Democratic candidate for Douglas's Senate seat. In the larg-

<sup>4</sup> Damon Wells, *Stephen Douglas: The Last Years, 1857–1861* (Austin, 1990), 27; David E. Meerse, "Origins of the Douglas-Buchanan Feud Reconsidered," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, 67 (April 1974), 160; O. M. Dickerson, "Stephen A. Douglas and the Split in the Democratic Party," *Proceedings of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association for the Year 1913–1914* (Cedar Rapids, 1914), 197–98; *Scott v. Sandford*, 19 How. 393 (1857); Stephen A. Douglas, "The President's Message," *Congressional Globe*, 35 Cong., 1 sess., Dec. 9, 1857, p. 18.

<sup>5</sup> James A. Farrell to Alexander H. Stephens, April 7, 1858, vol. 5, Alexander H. Stephens Papers (Manuscript Division, Library of Congress); "New Postmaster at Clinton," *Clinton Central Transcript*, June 26, 1858.

<sup>6</sup> Philip G. Auchampaugh, "The Buchanan-Douglas Feud," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, 25 (April–June 1932), 10–16; Meerse, "Origins of the Douglas-Buchanan Feud Reconsidered," 157, 165; Stephen L. Hansen, *The Making of the Third Party System: Voters and Parties in Illinois, 1850–1876* (Ann Arbor, 1978), 21, 24; James W. Sheahan, *The Life of Stephen A. Douglas* (New York, 1860), 395, 397.

est sense, Douglas's most serious opponent for his reelection to the Senate was not Abraham Lincoln, but James Buchanan.<sup>7</sup>

Douglas's Republican opponent had an insurgency of his own to deal with, whose source was no less than Stephen A. Douglas. According to Lyman Trumbull, the Republican junior senator from Illinois, Douglas's opposition to Lecompton "was so unexpected to many & was looked upon as such a God send that they could not refrain from giving him more credit than he deserves." However much Douglas's anti-Lecompton stand might have infuriated President Buchanan, it had (on the logic of the enemy of my enemy is my friend) charmed the East Coast leadership of the Republican party. Horace Greeley, the all-powerful Republican editor of the *New York Tribune*, even sent the Illinois Republican congressman Elihu Washburne back home to the state Republican committee with the message that if Illinois Republicans stood down in 1858, Douglas would cut his last ties to the Democratic party and join the Republicans.<sup>8</sup> In some versions Douglas was offering to withdraw from the Senate race and run for the House from his home district in Chicago if the Republicans would allow him to do so unopposed; in others he was leading "the Douglass Democrats" into a "union" with the "Republicans & Americans, thro' the influence of [William H.] Seward & [John J.] Crittenden." Douglas "invites such men as [Henry] Wilson, Seward, [Anson] Burlingame . . . to come & confer with him & they seem wonderfully pleased to go," Trumbull warned. Even Joseph Medill, the Republican editor of the *Chicago Tribune*, had been persuaded by an interview with Douglas that Douglas had burned too many bridges to the Democratic party and "will gradually drift toward our side and finally be compelled to act with us in 1860."<sup>9</sup> Douglas, for his part, did nothing to discourage such rumors, and considering his position, they may have been more than mere rumors. In March 1858 Douglas dispatched James W. Sheahan, who managed Douglas's organ, the *Chicago Times*, to the Republican state committee with an offer to back out of the Senate race "and take his chances by and by" if the Republicans would refrain from opposing the election of Douglas's candidates for the House of Representatives. When William Henry Herndon, Lincoln's law partner, traveled to Washington in spring 1858, he met with Douglas and bluntly asked him what his intentions were, but Douglas would only reply obliquely that he was not out to oppose Lincoln. "Tell him I have crossed the river and burned my boat"—whatever that meant. The Buchananites heard the same mutterings. "A Union was effected at the last session of Congress, between Seward-Douglas & Crittenden," Sen. George W. Jones of Iowa told Sidney Breese, "by

<sup>7</sup> *Register of Officers and Agents, Civil, Military, and Naval, in the Service of the United States* (Washington, 1857), 73, 168, 172–73, 326–49, 411–30; *Register of Officers and Agents, Civil, Military, and Naval, in the Service of the United States* (Washington, 1859), 52–76, 171, 174–76, 432–52; Henry Villard, "Illinois Politics," *New-Yorker Staats-Zeitung*, Aug. 3, 1858; Henry Villard, "Development of the Campaign," *ibid.*, Sept. 16, 1858; "Illinois," *Washington, D.C., National Era*, July 22, 1858; "Confirmed," *Quincy Daily Whig and Republican*, March 3, 1858; Frank E. Stevens, "Life of Stephen Arnold Douglas," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, 16 (Oct. 1923–Jan. 1924), 543; Henry S. Foote, *Casket of Reminiscences* (Washington, 1874), 135; "The State Convention—The Expression of the Democratic Party," *Springfield Illinois State Register*, April 22, 1858; Sheahan, *Life of Stephen A. Douglas*, 395, 397.

<sup>8</sup> Lyman Trumbull to Lincoln, Jan. 3, 1858, Lincoln Papers; Lloyd Wendt, *Chicago Tribune: The Rise of a Great American Newspaper* (Chicago, 1979), 84–85.

<sup>9</sup> Douglas L. Wilson and Rodney O. Davis, eds., *Herndon's Informants: Letters, Interviews, and Statements about Abraham Lincoln* (Urbana, 1998), 731; Robert W. Johannsen, *The Frontier, the Union, and Stephen A. Douglas* (Chicago, 1989), 237; Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas*, 593; Lyman Trumbull to Lincoln, Jan. 3, 1858, Lincoln Papers; Wendt, *Chicago Tribune*, 105; William Kellogg to Jesse K. DuBois, April 25, 1858, sc 427, Jesse K. DuBois Correspondence (Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum, Springfield, Ill.).

which it was stipulated & agreed that . . . Seward is to be made their candidate for Prest in 1860 . . . & that Douglas is to follow for the Presidency in 1864.”<sup>10</sup>

“God forbid Are our friends crazy,” erupted Jesse K. DuBois, the Republican state auditor, when Herndon reported on his mission. To Illinois Republicans the idea of striking a deal with Douglas was beyond belief. “Many of our people are greatly alarmed here that we shall be obliged to receive Douglas into the Republican party,” Charles H. Ray, who coedited the *Chicago Tribune* and sat on the state Republican committee, wrote to Trumbull. The national party leadership might be looking at Douglas through the lens of national issues and electoral futures, but Illinois Republicans were fixed to a deeply personal and local animosity to and distrust of Douglas. To no one among Illinois Republicans was a Douglas endorsement more incredible than to Lincoln. Lincoln had known Douglas since 1834, when the latter was campaigning for state’s attorney in the First Judicial Circuit. As fully committed a Whig as Douglas was a Democrat, Lincoln had not liked Douglas then—he referred to the five-foot-two-inch Douglas as “the least man I ever saw”—and the impression had not improved with time.<sup>11</sup> There was a respectful familiarity between the two men, but “there was nothing like comradeship between them. . . . Their demeanor on the platform was that of rather cool politeness.” In fact, Lincoln quietly nursed a slow burn of personal grievance against Douglas. “Douglas had got to be a great man, & [be]strode the earth,” Lincoln complained in 1852. In his eyes, Douglas was the Democratic golden boy who seemed to have effortlessly gotten everything in life handed to him, while Lincoln was left to struggle and lose, unappreciated and unsupported. “Twenty-two years ago Judge Douglas and I first became acquainted,” Lincoln wrote in 1856, “With me, the race of ambition has been a failure—a flat failure; with him it has been one of splendid success. His name fills the nation; and is not unknown, even, in foreign lands.” To see Douglas now step forward and snatch up the laurels of the Senate from the hands of Lincoln’s own party was more than he could bear. “What does the New-York Tribune mean by its constant eulogising, and admiring, and magnifying [of] Douglas?” Lincoln erupted, “Does it, in this, speak the sentiments of the republicans at Washington? Have they concluded that the republican cause, generally, can be best promoted by sacrificing us here in Illinois? If so we would like to know it soon; it will save us a great deal of labor to surrender at once.”<sup>12</sup>

Lincoln’s allies tried to assure him that Greeley was simply stepping off to another of his well-known explorations of cloud-cuckoo-land. “We have certainly received some injury by the N.Y. Tribune,” the Illinois state committee chairman Norman B. Judd soothed, “but not enough to alarm us.” Nevertheless, Judd was determined to forestall East Coast interference by making a Lincoln candidacy as quick and inevitable as possible. And Lincoln *was* the obvious choice. Whigs who had moved into the Republican party after

<sup>10</sup> Ebenezer Peck to Lyman Trumbull, April 15, 1858, vol. 13, Lyman Trumbull Papers (Manuscript Division, Library of Congress); David Donald, *Lincoln’s Herndon: A Biography* (New York, 1948), 114–15; Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas*, 555–56, 637–38; George W. Jones to Sidney Breese, Sept. 17, 1858, Sidney Breese Papers (Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum); Richard Allen Heckman, “Out-of-State Influences and the Lincoln-Douglas Campaign of 1858,” *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, 59 (Spring 1966), 34–35, 39.

<sup>11</sup> Donald, *Lincoln’s Herndon*, 116; C. H. Ray to Lyman Trumbull, March 8, 1858, vol. 13, Trumbull Papers (Library of Congress); “Arts of John Wentworth,” *Springfield Illinois State Register*, Jan. 4, 1858; “Illinois Senator,” *Concord New Hampshire Patriot and Gazette*, June 23, 1858. For Lincoln’s impression of Douglas in 1852, see Michael Burlingame, *The Inner World of Abraham Lincoln* (Urbana, 1994), 262.

<sup>12</sup> Stevens, “Life of Stephen Arnold Douglas,” 589–90; Abraham Lincoln, “Fragment on Stephen A. Douglas,” Dec. 1856, in *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Roy P. Basler (8 vols., New Brunswick, 1953), II, 382; Abraham Lincoln, “To Lyman A. Trumbull,” Dec. 28, 1857, *ibid.*, 430.

the Whig collapse in 1856 “for a long time felt sore over the defeat of Mr. Lincoln” in 1855. Lincoln had stood for election to the Senate that year, only to be forced to throw his votes to Lyman Trumbull in order to prevent a Douglasite from being elected. At the same time, Judd (an antislavery Democrat who had joined the Republicans in 1856) understood that he and other Democratic defectors to the Illinois Republican party had to make peace with the ex-Whigs. That need, Judd wrote, “under the circumstances, created a moral obligation upon us” to support Lincoln “which there was no wish to evade.” In April 1858 the Republican state committee resolved “spontaneously and heartily” to “call a general State Convention,” and when the state convention met in June, it made the decision (a novel one, because voters did not directly elect U.S. senators until 1912) to nominate Lincoln as the “first and only choice of the Republicans of Illinois for the U.S. Senate, as the successor of Stephen A. Douglas.” Not only did this pay off political debts and mollify political resentments; it cleared away any confusion within the Illinois Republican ranks about Douglas and upped the ante in the campaign by making it clear that every vote for a state legislator was also indirectly a vote for Lincoln or Douglas.<sup>13</sup>

Lincoln’s anxiety that the party leadership was going to sacrifice him in a bid to recruit Douglas faded quickly enough, but not his suspicion that he was being left to look out for himself in Illinois, without serious help or encouragement from the national party. Medill, of the pro-Lincoln *Chicago Tribune*, tried to solicit help from the Republican leaders Thomas Corwin and Benjamin F. Wade of Ohio and Caleb Blood Smith of Indiana, “but without success.” Sen. William Henry Seward of New York made no effort to speak publicly on Lincoln’s behalf, and Greeley rounded on Medill, telling him not to be surprised: “You have repelled Douglas, who might have been conciliated, and attached to our side. . . . Now go ahead and fight it through.” Even in Illinois, Lincoln may not have been the “first and only choice” of every Republican. Peoria’s Republicans believed that the national party was likely to win the 1860 presidential election, and with “Judge Douglas . . . bidding high for the nomination,” they conceded that it might be better to support Douglas now, rather than incur the Little Giant’s wrath if he both won the Senate seat in 1858 and became the party’s figurehead later on. “It was,” recalled the German-born Wisconsin Republican Carl Schurz, “well-known that Lincoln at the time did not have the sympathy and countenance of all Republicans in the country, nor even in his own state.” Despite having the right ideological profile and the right sheaf of political tools, Lincoln still had the reputation of being a loser. “Mr. Lincoln . . . is a man of inflexible political integrity,” wrote the antislavery *National Era*, but it may be that “he is too open, too honest, to succeed.” The Democratic newspapers were less complimentary: “Hon. Abe Lincoln is undoubtedly the most unfortunate politician that has ever attempted to rise in Illinois. In everything he undertakes, politically, he seems doomed to failure.” Another sneered that in 1855, Lincoln “had been diddled out of the place of Senator by the friends of Judge TRUMBULL, and the same thing may happen to him again.”<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Norman B. Judd to Lincoln, June 1, 1858, Lincoln Papers; Davidson, *Complete History of Illinois*, 690, 697; W. H. Herndon to Lyman Trumbull, April 12, 1858, vol. 13, Trumbull Papers (Library of Congress); Wendt, *Chicago Tribune*, 86; G. F. Ross to Lyman Trumbull, April 25, 1858, vol. 13, Trumbull Papers (Library of Congress); Ward Hill Lamon, *The Life of Abraham Lincoln, From His Birth to His Inauguration as President* (Boston, 1872), 236; Harry E. Pratt, “Abraham Lincoln in Bloomington, Illinois,” *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, 29 (April 1936), 43–44, 53, 56.

<sup>14</sup> Beveridge, *Abraham Lincoln*, 545; Mildred C. Stoler, “The Democratic Element in the New Republican Party in Illinois, 1856–1860,” in *Papers in Illinois History and Transactions for the Year 1942*, ed. Paul M. Angle (Springfield, 1944), 50–51; Joseph Medill to Elihu Washburne, Oct. 21, 1858, vol. 14, Elihu Washburne Papers (Manu-



Indeed it might, since no matter how resounding the state convention's endorsement, Lincoln had to reckon with the ambitions of other converts to Republicanism who saw in him nothing more Republican, or more deserving of the Senate, than they saw in themselves. Orville Hickman Browning had befriended Lincoln from their first days as Whig legislators in the 1830s, and he had chaired the committee that produced the resolutions of the Republican state convention in 1858. But he had "never been able to persuade [him]self that [Lincoln] was big enough for his position," and only four days before the state convention nominated Lincoln, Browning allowed his own name to go forward from the McDonough County Republican convention for "the place now filled by S. A. Douglas in the Senate." Browning made no appearances for Lincoln during the campaign and even took a pass on serving with the arrangements committee that was to welcome Lincoln to the sixth debate, held in Quincy, sending his law partner, Nehemiah Bushnell, instead.<sup>15</sup> Then there was Lyman Trumbull, who was not a rival to Lincoln in any literal sense since he was already in the Senate; he never got over the sense of being a more important man than Lincoln. There were a good many Illinoisans, including Stephen A. Douglas, who were inclined to see Lincoln as merely a proxy for Trumbull, conducting a statewide referendum on Douglas, rather than as a serious candidate in his own right. Nor did Trumbull exactly bolt to Lincoln's aid: the Senate adjourned on June 16, and Douglas opened his campaign on July 9 in Chicago, but Trumbull made no stir to come west until August, and then only after Norman Judd upbraided him.<sup>16</sup> As late as September, talebearers in the Douglas camp were whispering that Trumbull "considers [Lincoln] a dead dog, and therefore has no objection to appear as his disinterested friend and supporter, in order that he may reconcile himself with Lincoln's friends, who have cherished a bitter hatred for him ever since he cheated long Abe in 1856." Unless Lincoln could somehow get out of Trumbull's toplofty shadow, he might well end up a spectator at his own political funeral.<sup>17</sup>

Yet another wild card in the Illinois political deck was the mayor of Chicago, Long John Wentworth. By 1854 Douglas had become one of the great objects of Wentworth's political hatred. But Wentworth's antipathy to Judd was almost as great, and when Wentworth followed Judd into the Republican party in 1856, he discovered that Judd was the

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script Division, Library of Congress); Horace Greeley to Medill, July 24, 1858, in *The Lincoln Papers*, ed. David Mearns (2 vols., Garden City, 1948), I, 214–15; Carl Schurz, Frederic Bancroft, and William Archibald Dunning, *The Reminiscences of Carl Schurz* (3 vols., New York, 1907–1908), II, 87; "From Illinois," *Washington, D.C. National Era*, Nov. 18, 1858, p. 183; "Interesting Reminiscences," *Peoria Daily Telegraph*, March 16, 1858; *St. Louis Daily Missouri Republican*, July 11, 1858; Wendt, *Chicago Tribune*, 91.

<sup>15</sup> Orville Hickman Browning to Edgar Cowan, Sept. 6, 1864, in *An Oral History of Abraham Lincoln: John G. Nicolay's Interviews and Essays*, ed. Michael Burlingame (Carbondale, 1996), 127; "Hon. O. H. Browning," *Quincy Daily Whig and Republican*, June 14, 1858; William Richardson to Stephen A. Douglas, July 27, 1858, Stephen A. Douglas Papers (Special Collections, Regenstein Library, University of Chicago, Chicago, Ill.); entry, Sept. 14, 1858, in *The Diary of Orville Hickman Browning*, ed. Theodore Calvin Pease and James G. Randall (2 vols., Springfield, 1925), I, 336.

<sup>16</sup> Lyman Trumbull to John Trumbull, June 20, 1858, Lyman Trumbull Papers (Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum); Ralph J. Roske, *His Own Counsel: The Life and Times of Lyman Trumbull* (Reno, 1979), 1, 4–5, 50–51; Shelby M. Cullom, *Fifty Years of Public Service: Personal Recollections of Shelby M. Cullom* (Chicago, 1911), 42; Lyman Trumbull to J. M. Palmer, June 19, 1858, in "A Collection of Letters from Lyman Trumbull to John M. Palmer, 1854–1858," ed. G. T. Palmer, *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, 16 (April–July 1923), 38–40; Horace White, *The Life of Lyman Trumbull* (New York, 1913), 428–30; Mark M. Krug, "Lyman Trumbull and the Real Issues in the Lincoln-Douglas Debates," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, 57 (Winter 1964), 386, 389; Judd to Lyman Trumbull, July 11, 1858, vol. 14, Trumbull Papers (Library of Congress).

<sup>17</sup> Medill to Washburne, Aug. 24, 1858, Washburne Papers; "Another Intrigue of Trumbull—Cheating Round the Board," *Springfield Illinois State Register*, Sept. 22, 1858; Bruce Collins, "The Lincoln-Douglas Contest of 1858 and Illinois' Electorate," *Journal of American Studies*, 20 (Dec. 1986), 396.

principal obstacle to his plan for a grudge match with Douglas in 1858 for the Illinois U.S. Senate seat. Judd not only won control of the state committee but also arranged the popular acclamation at the Springfield state convention that nominated Lincoln, and not John Wentworth. Publicly, Wentworth agreed to join hands in promoting Lincoln; privately, he was communicating with Isaac Cook, the leader of the Illinois Buchanan loyalists, and the Buchanan Democrats in the hope that, if the Buchananites elected enough legislators in November, Wentworth could come forward as a compromise candidate and finally overthrow Douglas himself. "The height of Mr. Wentworth's ambition . . . is the seat Douglas holds in the Senate," warned Medill. "He wants to control a balance of power in the next legislature and compel the republican members to choose between him and Douglas."<sup>18</sup>

Lincoln's largest challenge, however, came not from within the Republican party, but from people he believed ought to have been there, the old Illinois Whigs who no longer had a national party to speak of yet were too worried about the "sectional" and "abolitionist" rhetoric of the Republicans to cross the aisle. While southern Illinois was settled by emigrants from the Deep South with deep attachments to the Democrats, the counties that formed a band across the center of the state were strongholds of the Whigs, and it was the congressional district formed from those Whig counties that in 1847 had sent Lincoln to Congress for his lone term there. But by the 1850s, the Whigs were squeezed on the north by free-soil Yankee emigrants with sharp inclinations toward abolitionism, and after 1856 they were orphaned by the collapse of the national Whig party. Many of them had briefly allied with the American party—the Know-Nothings—while many others, like Lincoln, finally "fused" with antislavery Democrats (such as Judd) to become Republicans. Much of the old Whig constituency, however, simply sat on the fence. Even those Whigs who joined the Republicans still rankled at the ex-Democrat Judd's chairmanship of the state Republican committee and at the indiscreet activism of Republican abolitionists, especially Owen Lovejoy, who won the Republican congressional nomination for the Third Congressional District over deep Whig-cum-Republican grumbling. "The Whig part of the Republican party is proscribed," complained David Davis, a longtime political ally of Lincoln, and "if it were not for saving Lincoln for the United States Senate a pretty great outbreak would follow." Whether Lincoln, as a former Whig, would be able to keep the Whig converts steady in the Republican ranks and to recruit undecided Whig voters to the Republican banner would become the most significant strategic questions of his campaign. For in 1858 the Whig counties held the balance; and within the Whig counties, the critical concentrations of undecided old Whig voters were (on the list sent to Lincoln by Gustave Koerner, another Democrat turned Republican and a former lieutenant governor) in "Morgan, Macoupin, St. Clair, Peoria, Randolph, McDonough & one or two more."<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Don E. Fehrenbacher, *Chicago Giant: A Biography of "Long John" Wentworth* (Madison, 1957), 102, 152–54, 156, 159; Hansen, *Making of the Third Party System*, 32, 97–98; Don E. Fehrenbacher, *Lincoln in Text and Context: Collected Essays* (Stanford, 1987), 40; Beveridge, *Abraham Lincoln*, II, 522, 565; Horace White, *The Lincoln and Douglas Debates: An Address before the Chicago Historical Society, February 17, 1914* (Chicago, 1914), 17; E. T. Bridges to Lincoln, May 18, 1858, Lincoln Papers. For Joseph Medill's statement, see Fehrenbacher, *Chicago Giant*, 148.

<sup>19</sup> Michael F. Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party: Jacksonian Politics and the Onset of the Civil War* (New York, 1999), 867; Isabel Wallace, *Life and Letters of General W. H. L. Wallace* (Chicago, 1909), 84; Pratt, "Abraham Lincoln in Bloomington, Illinois," 59; Gustave Koerner to Lincoln, July 17, 1858, Lincoln Papers.

Lincoln played hard for those voters. But the Republicans had too strong an aroma of abolitionism for many old Whig noses, and Lincoln reinforced it by the radical-sounding declaration, in his acceptance speech, that a “house divided against itself cannot stand.” (Leonard Swett, a longtime Lincoln legal associate, thought that “the first ten lines” of the “house divided” speech “defeated him.”) To Lincoln’s chagrin, the Whigs’ candidate for governor in 1856, Buckner Morris, endorsed Douglas, while Theophilus Lyle Dickey (“one of the most prominent and steadfast friends of [Henry] Clay and the old Whig party,” who had debated Lincoln on Millard Fillmore’s behalf during the 1856 presidential campaign) jumped onto the Douglas bandwagon on August 9, before the first debate in Dickey’s hometown of Ottawa. “The Republican party in Illinois, unfortunately, has passed under the control of the revolutionary element of the old Abolition party, and of those who have adopted or paid court to that element,” Dickey announced, “The leaders, and to some extent the voters of that party, have been poisoned—debauched by the baneful sentiments and delusive abstractions of that dangerous faction.” Dickey then waited to launch an “October surprise” at Lincoln a week and a half before the election in the form of a letter from John J. Crittenden, the heir apparent of Henry Clay, favoring the reelection of Douglas. With old friends like this, Lincoln had no need of enemies, and David Davis later blamed Douglas’s victory on the last-minute impact of Crittenden’s letter on the old Whig vote.<sup>20</sup>

Hence, Lincoln’s metaphor of a “house divided” that would fall if it remained so had other applications than to the national division over slavery, and the strategies of both candidates would have to reflect the realities imposed by their own divided houses.

Those strategies, however, would lie, not in the hands of either Lincoln or Douglas, but in those of their respective state committees, to whom fell the tasks of fund raising, inviting national political figures to bring their reputations to Illinois for the benefit of the candidates, coordinating local committees and “precincts, with a vigilance committee in each,” identifying campaign volunteers or hiring paid workers “in each precinct or election district with whom we can confer, and to whom we can send documents,” and above all, constructing speaking schedules. Illinois in 1858 comprised over 55,000 square miles and over 1.3 million people, but its most important political fact was the overlay of state house districts and state senate districts. (Each Illinois senate district elected one senator, but some Illinois house districts elected two or three representatives, with candidates of a particular party forming de facto joint tickets. All representatives were up for election in 1858. But since the senators served four-year terms on staggered schedules, not all were up in 1858, and the number of contested senate seats was not the same as in 1856. All told, there were one hundred seats in the state legislature.)<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Abraham Lincoln, “A House Divided: Speech at Springfield, Illinois,” June 16, 1858, *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Basler, II, 461; Leonard Swett to William Henry Herndon, Jan. 17, 1866, in *Herndon’s Informants*, ed. Wilson and Davis, 162–63; Kenneth J. Winkle, *The Young Eagle: The Rise of Abraham Lincoln* (Dallas, 2001), 310; Stephen Hansen and Paul Nygard, “Stephen A. Douglas, the Know-Nothings, and the Democratic Party in Illinois, 1854–1858,” *Illinois Historical Journal*, 87 (Summer 1994), 126, 129; “Judge T. L. Dickey for Douglas,” *Springfield Illinois State Register*, Aug. 9, 1858; “The Old Line Whigs for Douglas,” *Jacksonville (Ill.) Sentinel*, Aug. 18, 1858; “Judge Dickey’s Speech at Decatur—Letter from John J. Crittenden!,” *Springfield Illinois State Register*, Oct. 28, 1858; “The Crittenden Letter,” *Philadelphia Press*, Oct. 27, 1858; David Davis to Lincoln, Nov. 7, 1858, Lincoln Papers; Willard L. King, *Lincoln’s Manager: David Davis* (Cambridge, Mass., 1960), 125.

<sup>21</sup> *The American Almanac and Repository of Useful Knowledge for the Year 1858* (Boston, 1857), 325; Judd to Washburne, Sept. 20, 1858, Washburne Papers.

Anyone seeking the most strategic campaigning territory in 1858 needed to look no further than the district election results from the 1856 presidential election (as Lincoln did in a lengthy document he drew up in July 1858). James Buchanan had carried Illinois handily with 105,348 votes, beating the Republican candidate, John Charles Frémont, by a margin of almost 10,000. The raw numbers, however, did not really tell the tale. Millard Fillmore had also run for the presidency in 1856 as the last-gasp nominee of both the American party and the dispirited rump of the disintegrating Whig party. But acting for a disintegrating party or not, Fillmore, the last Whig to serve as president, polled more than 37,000 votes in Illinois. Those stubborn Illinois Whigs wanted nothing to do with what they supposed was Frémont's rabid abolitionism; more surprising, they had been so little charmed by Buchanan's stance as a "northern man with Southern principles" that they preferred throwing away their votes on Fillmore. If the 1856 election in Illinois is looked at as a referendum on the "bloody Kansas" imbroglio, it is evident Buchanan was overmatched. The combined anti-Buchanan vote exceeded the Buchanan vote by over 30,000. What was even more significant for the 1858 U.S. Senate race, Frémont had carried 20 state house districts (and won counties in 3 others) and 8 senate districts (and counties in 5 others); Fillmore had carried only 2 house districts, but the combined Fillmore and Frémont vote won majorities in 14 house districts and sizable blocs of counties in 4 others, while the state senate races gave 2 districts to Fillmore, and the combined Fillmore and Frémont voters formed majorities in 6 others. What this promised the Republican state committee members in 1858 was the possibility that, if they could lay hands on a politically committed Republican with solid Whig connections and a reasonably moderate (rather than abolitionist) stance on slavery—and it helped that Lincoln not only held the debts from 1855 but also fit the ideological description as well as anyone in Illinois—they could attract both Frémont and Fillmore voters of 1858 to their side, win the 29 state representatives and 8 state senators from the Frémont districts (who were clearly not going to go for *any* Democrat), and combine them with the 19 house districts and 5 senate districts in which the Frémont and Fillmore vote had outpolled Buchanan. Illinois Republicans would wind up with a grand total of 48 Republican state representatives and 13 Republican senators: more than enough, in a legislature of 100 members, to elect Lincoln in January. (In fact, 12 of the 25 senatorial districts were on staggered terms and not up for reelection, and of those, 5 were held by sitting Republicans.) Lincoln, ever the cautious calculator, held the gains in the state senate to the "certain" districts, which he pegged at 9, and he admitted that "with the advantages they have of us, we shall be very hard run to carry the Legislature." But even Lincoln believed that he could win the 48 state representatives whose districts had gone for Frémont or Fillmore or both, and their votes, along with those of the 5 Republican incumbents already in the state senate, would ensure that "the skies are bright and the prospects good."<sup>22</sup>

But not, however, if he failed to convince the "old Whigs of the Central counties" of his moderate credentials or if Douglas succeeded in painting him otherwise, which was

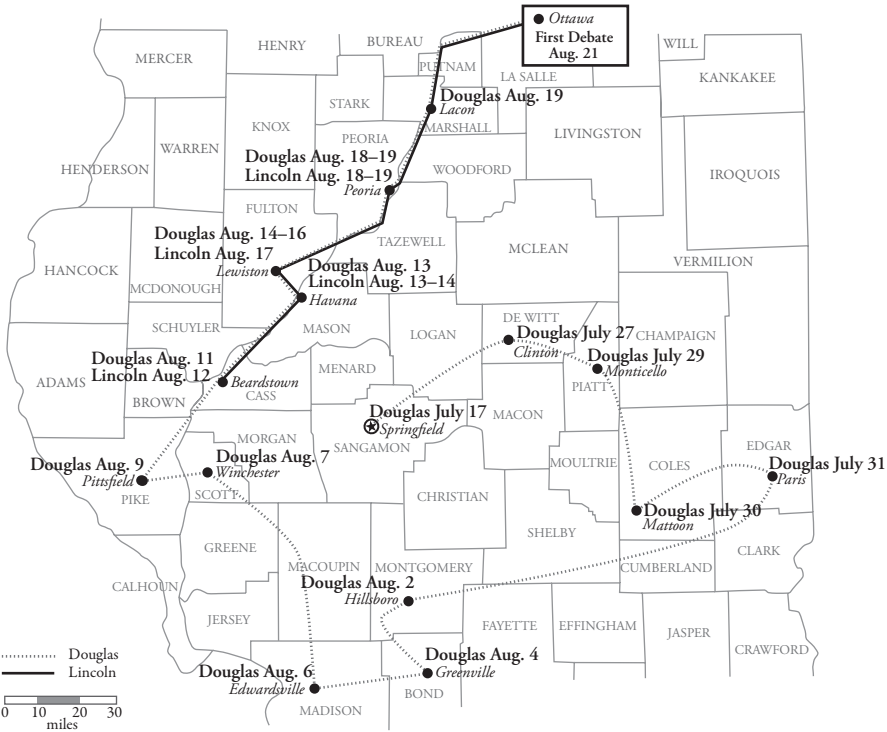
<sup>22</sup> Abraham Lincoln, "1858 Campaign Strategy," July 1858, in *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Basler, II, 476–81; Abraham Lincoln, "Response to a Serenade at Springfield, Illinois," Sept. 25, 1858, *ibid.*, III, 203; "Popular Vote of the State of Illinois," in *Illinois, Historical and Statistical: Comprising the Essential Facts of Its Planting and Growth as a Province, County, Territory, and State: Derived from the Most Authentic Sources, Including Original Documents and Papers, Together with Carefully Prepared Statistical Tables*, ed. John Moses (Chicago, 1892), 1156–57, 1208; *The Tribune Almanac for 1857, Comprehending the Politician's Register and the Whig Almanac* (New York, 1857), 60–61; Abraham Lincoln, "To Lyman Trumbull," June 23, 1858, in *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Basler, II, 472.

exactly what Douglas intended to do. Throughout the 1858 campaign, Douglas ceaselessly rang the changes on three themes, all of which worked on the anxieties and uncertainties of Illinoisans more than national issues did. The first and most lurid anxiety was race. Lincoln and the Republicans, claimed Douglas, advocated “perfect and entire equality of rights and privileges between the negro and the white man.” By that charge, Douglas hoped not only to alienate Whig conservatives from Lincoln but also to maneuver Lincoln into denials that would cost him abolitionist votes in the north of the state.<sup>23</sup> Second, Douglas tried to align himself with Whig expectations. He insisted that his principle of popular sovereignty was the same principle endorsed by Henry Clay, and he tried to recruit the Kentuckians John C. Breckinridge, James Clay, Lazarus Powell, and Beriah Magoffin to come to Illinois and confirm this. Lastly, Douglas routinely adopted the pose of honest indignation at Lincoln’s tactics, accusing Lincoln of misrepresenting himself as a moderate, of funneling support to Douglas’s Buchananite detractors, and of conspiring with Trumbull to “abolitionize” moderate Illinois Democrats and Illinois Whigs. Lincoln’s arguments, by contrast, could have been made almost anywhere in the North. He appealed from time to time to the racial self-interest of white Illinoisans in keeping the western territories free of unnatural competition from slavery, a freedom that would not survive if Douglas and popular sovereignty were allowed “to Nationalize slavery and Africanize this continent.” And he struggled to paint Douglas, rather than himself, as the radical—a radical proslavery partisan who had sold his allegiance to the South. But increasingly he resorted to an abstract objection to the injustice of slavery itself and to the moral wrong of allowing it a renewed lease on life in a free republic by permitting its legalized expansion through popular sovereignty. Natural law, he insisted, affirmed the natural equality of all humanity; slavery thus had no more business being a matter of popular sovereignty than did any other moral inequity. But then, to appease the fears of white supremacists, he followed that with disclaimers that a recognition of the natural equality of black and white necessarily translated into a violent demand for immediate abolition or an extension of natural equality into civil or social equality.<sup>24</sup>

Lincoln’s arguments would get few dissenters in the districts where Frémont had won majorities, which were ranged across the northern tier of Illinois, above a line that could be drawn from Monmouth and Galesburg in the west to Urbana and Danville in the east. Similarly, Douglas hardly needed to win new converts in the southern districts, below a line that slanted from Chester on the Mississippi River upward to Marshall and the Wabash River. It was in the middle tier of counties, from Edgar County on the east to Pike County on the Mississippi and then up the Illinois River to Peoria, that the “old-line Whigs” held the balance, and Lincoln and Douglas were told to devote almost all of their campaigning to those counties. “Let me advise you to Commence at once,” Douglas was urged a week after Lincoln’s nomination, but “for Gods sake don’t spend time in the

<sup>23</sup> “A Political Word or Two,” *Houston Weekly Telegraph*, Oct. 6, 1858; “The Mask Off in Illinois,” *Pittsfield (Mass.) Sun*, July 29, 1858; “Democratic Convention,” *Edwardsville (Ill.) Weekly Madison Press*, Oct. 6, 1858.

<sup>24</sup> David Davis to Lincoln, Nov. 7, 1858, Lincoln Papers; Sheahan, *Life of Stephen A. Douglas*, 300; John M. Rozett, “Racism and Republican Emergence in Illinois, 1848–1860: A Re-evaluation of Republican Negrophobia,” *Civil War History*, 22 (June 1976), 106–7; Hansen and Nygard, “Stephen A. Douglas, the Know-Nothings, and the Democratic Party in Illinois,” 123, 125. On the invitations to Kentuckians, see J. M. Stratton to Charles H. Lanphier, Sept. 23, 1858, in Charles H. Lanphier Papers (Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum); “Douglas’ Speech on Saturday Evening,” *Peoria Daily Transcript*, Oct. 26, 1858; Forrest L. Whan, “Stephen A. Douglas,” in *An Analysis of Lincoln and Douglas as Public Speakers and Debaters*, ed. Forrest L. Whan (Springfield, 1968), 145–47; Abraham Lincoln, “Speech at Augusta, Illinois,” Aug. 25, 1858, *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Basler, III, 38; Abraham Lincoln, “Speech at Carlinville, Illinois,” Aug. 31, 1858, *ibid.*, 79.

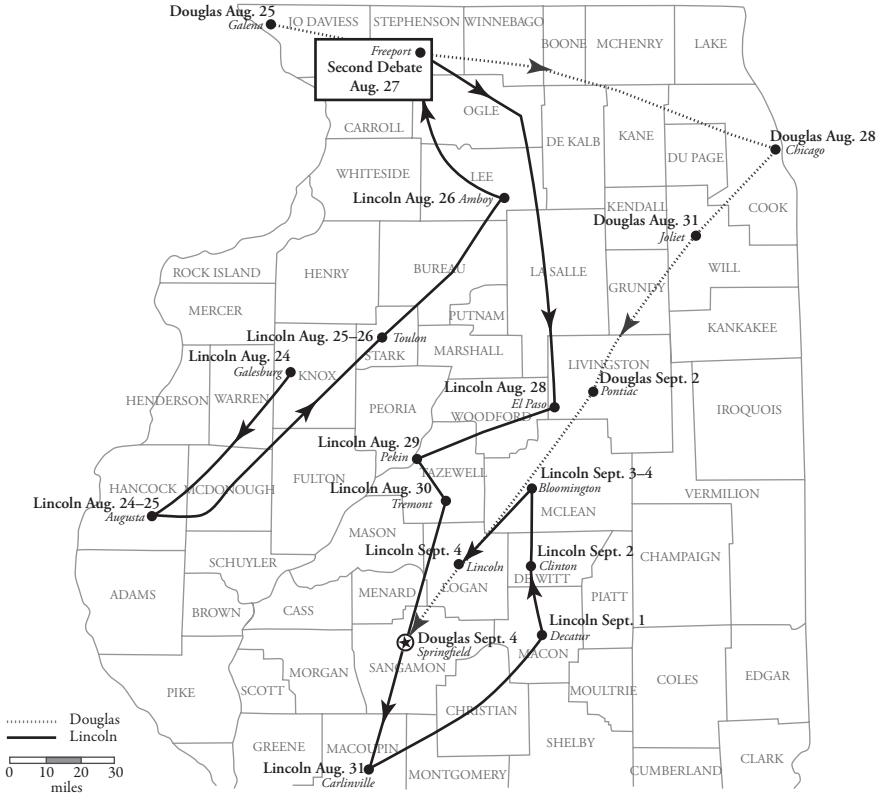


Partisan demographics shaped Illinois state politics. The Republican party controlled the northern counties and the Democratic party the southern, but the central counties formed an important swing bloc where Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas concentrated their efforts in their 1858 campaigns for the U.S. Senate. Phase one (July 17–August 21).

North part of the State where all is lost . . . but attend to the doubtful districts, such as Sangamon, Madison and Marshall, and Jo Daviess & Peoria Senatorial Districts.” Gustave Koerner had given Lincoln almost exactly the same advice, and Norman Judd seconded it in April: “If Lincoln expects to be Senator, he must make a personal canvass for it in the center of the State.” Just how carefully Lincoln and Douglas obeyed this imperative can be seen if each candidate’s schedule of “appointments” is plotted out on a map, where the campaigns fall into five phases over the summer and fall of 1858.<sup>25</sup>

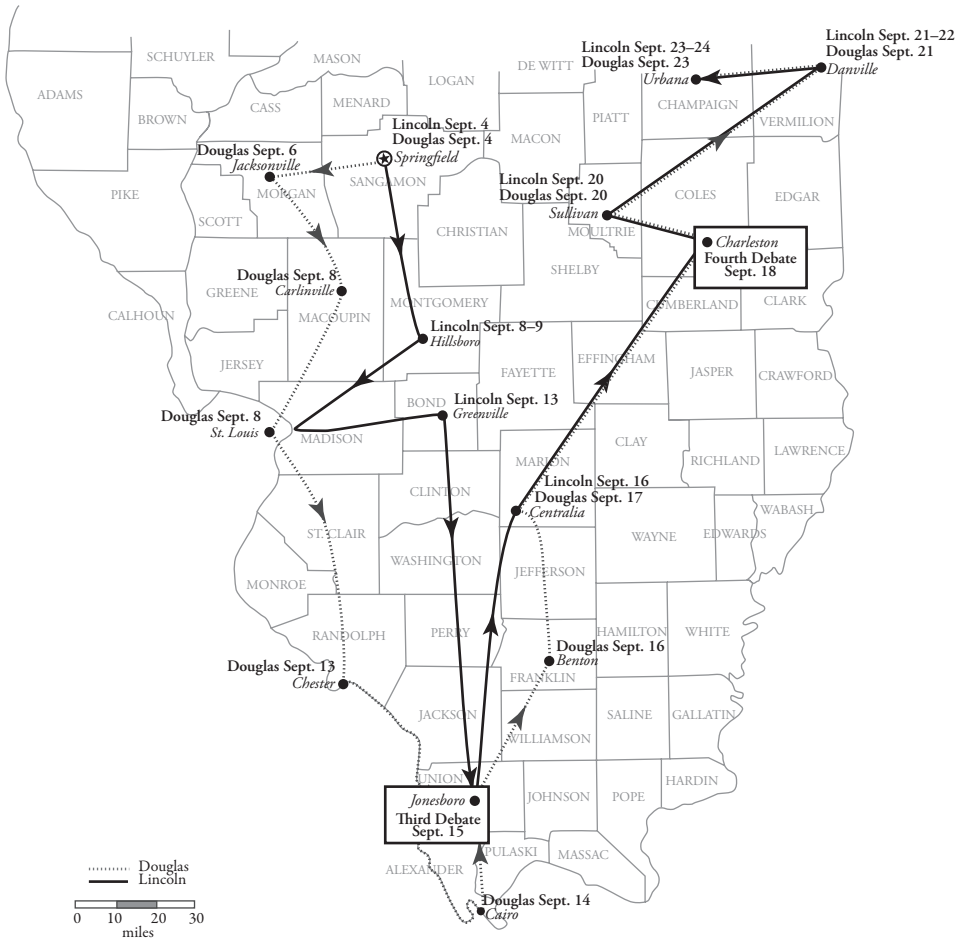
Although Douglas was endorsed by the divided state Democratic convention in April and Lincoln was formally nominated by the state Republican convention on June 16, the two campaigns did not begin in earnest until Douglas’s return to Illinois on July 9, when Douglas and Lincoln both made campaign-opening speeches in Chicago (Douglas on the ninth, Lincoln the following evening). After that, Douglas headed south to Springfield to meet with the Democratic state committee, speaking along the way at Bloomington on July 16. After ten days devoted to planning and scheduling, Douglas set out for Clinton, Monticello, Mattoon, and Paris—all county seats of the east-central Whig counties. He then shifted south to Hillsboro on August 2 and worked his way through the west-central

<sup>25</sup> William Gardner, *Life of Stephen A. Douglas* (Boston, 1905), 150, 158; Henry C. Whitney to Lincoln, Aug. 26, 1858, Lincoln Papers; Lyman Trumbull to Lincoln, June 12, 1858, *ibid.*; C. L. Higher to Douglas, June 24, 1858, Douglas Papers; Judd to Trumbull, April 19, 1858, vol. 13, Trumbull Papers (Library of Congress).



Phase two (August 24–September 4).

county seats and up the Illinois River. Lincoln shadowed Douglas at almost every point, until they met for the first of the famous seven debates at Ottawa, where the Illinois River turns toward Chicago. The second (and briefest) phase of the campaigns began the next day: Douglas lingered in northern Illinois for the second debate at Freeport on August 27, but then immediately doubled back via Chicago to central Illinois and Springfield by September 4; Lincoln also took off for central Illinois, working first the west and then the east side of the Illinois River, and then also crossing Douglas's path at Springfield on September 4. In the third phase, both candidates worked the west-central Illinois county seats below Springfield (Jacksonville, Carlinville, Hillsboro, Edwardsville, Greenville) and then lunged suddenly southward for the third debate in Jonesboro on September 15. They stayed in southern Illinois only long enough to catch a ride on the Illinois Central Railroad back to midstate Illinois for the fourth debate at Charleston on September 18, and from there both Lincoln and Douglas zigzagged through the east-central counties to Urbana on September 23. The fourth phase put both candidates back on the Illinois River (literally, since both used river steamers, festooned with campaign banners) and culminated in the fifth debate at Galesburg. For the fifth and final phase of their campaigns, Douglas and Lincoln marched through the west-central Illinois counties yet again, using the Mississippi River to arrive at the sixth debate at Quincy on October 13 and the seventh debate at Alton on October 15, and each making one last loop through central Illinois



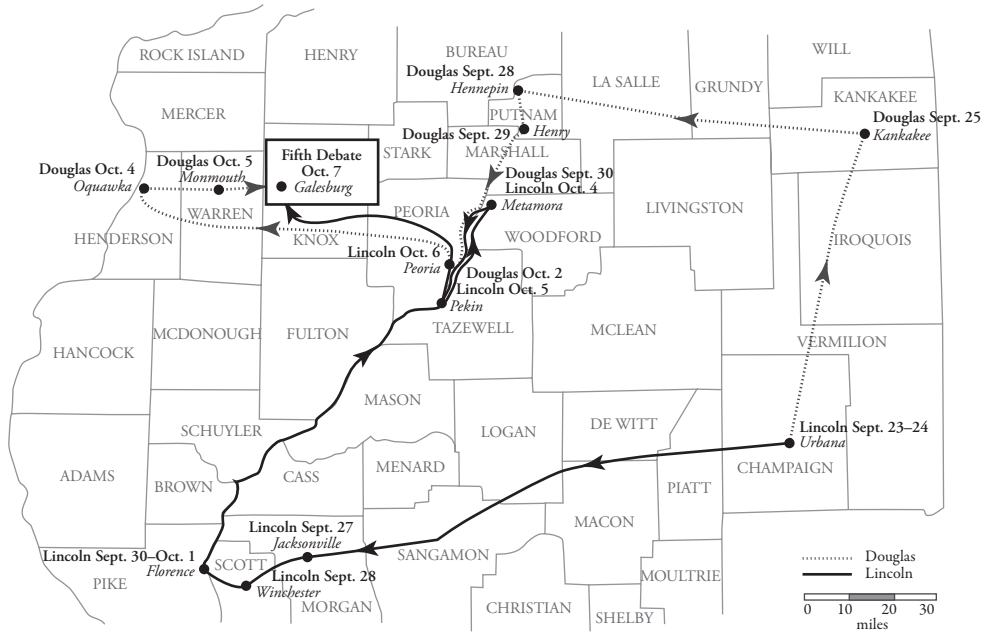
Phase three (September 5–September 23).

during the closing two weeks of October. Apart from the debates at Freeport and Jonesboro, northern and southern Illinois might never have seen Lincoln or Douglas at all; even east-central Illinois was scanted by comparison with the multiple crisscrossings of the west-central counties and the Illinois River towns undertaken by both campaigns.<sup>26</sup>

The rationale for the face-to-face debates was also dictated by expediency, in this case more economic than political. The Republicans, as the outsiders in Illinois and national politics, could not assess appointees to lucrative federal patronage jobs for salary kickbacks, and Judd, who faced the task of running the campaign “upon the most economical plan,” had to appoint a “guarantor” for each county to recruit “by subscription, the sum assessed to the said County.” But Douglas was not in a much better position because of the heavy threat of Buchanan hanging over the heads of Illinois’s Democratic patronage appointees, and so Douglas was forced to delay the beginning of his campaign in Illinois

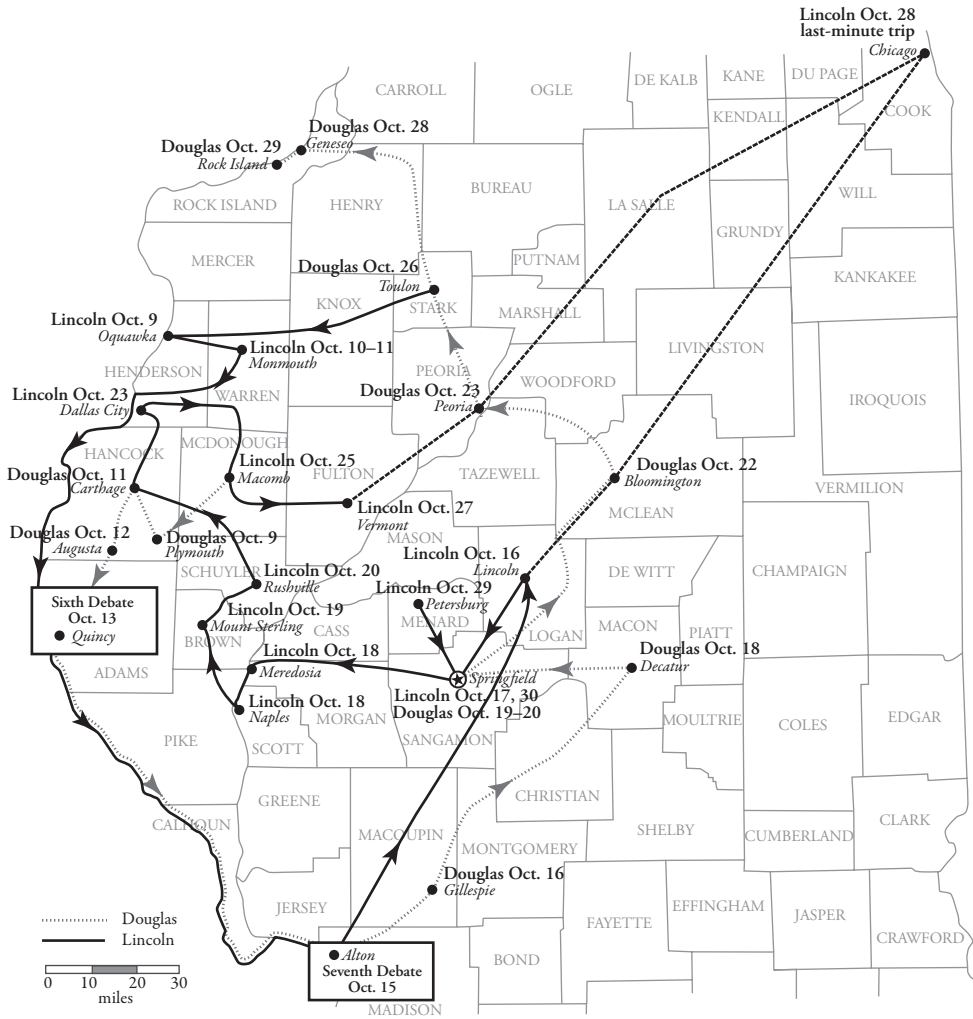
<sup>26</sup> *Lincoln Day-by-Day: A Chronology, 1809–1865*, ed. E. S. Miers (Dayton, 1991); “Senator Douglas’ Appointments,” *Springfield Illinois State Register*, Aug. 9, 1858; “Douglas’ Appointments,” *ibid.*, Sept. 2, 1858; “Senator Douglas’ Appointments,” *ibid.*, Sept. 20, 1858; “Senator Douglas’ Appointments,” *ibid.*, Sept. 27, 1858.





Phase four (September 24–October 7).

until July while he betook himself to New York to raise \$50,000 from Cornelius Vanderbilt and from New York Democrats with grievances against Buchanan. That was not going to be nearly enough to finance the kind of campaign a presumably triumphant incumbent should be seen undertaking, with “a general hurrah and big mass meetings.” The great reception in Chicago had cost over \$1,500, and Charles Wilson’s *Chicago Journal*, a Republican organ, observed sardonically that Chicago Democrats “have been begging and scraping together all the spare dollars, shillings, dimes and sixpences that could be obtained” to pay the bills. In the Twenty-eighth House District, the printer’s bill for campaign materials—posters for the convention, fifty posters for the polling places, eighty-five hundred Douglas tickets (that is, ballots)—alone amounted to \$52 (close to \$6,000 in today’s money), not to mention the money that had to be shelled out hiring, and paying the expenses of, campaign workers whose places would normally have been filled by patronage employees. (Henry Villard, who was supposed to be filing exclusive reports for the *New-Yorker Staats-Zeitung*, was moonlighting as a Douglas campaign worker, delivering “speeches in thirteen different locations” for Douglas and receiving no remuneration except “in a few of the visited places [where] the Democrats paid my hotel bill.”) To show the flag properly, Douglas leased the Illinois Central Railroad directors’ private passenger car; strung along the side of the baggage car was a banner announcing S. A. DOUGLAS, THE CHAMPION OF POPULAR SOVEREIGNTY, and attached to Douglas’s car was a flatbed with a baby brass howitzer and two gunners, in red militia shirts and “wearing cavalry sabers,” to “awaken the natives along route” to his arrival. Meanwhile Lincoln hopped along after him, with “no baggage, no secretary, no companion even,” trying to gather audiences in the towns Douglas had just left. Two weeks of this passed in the first phase of his cam-



Phase five (October 9–October 29).

paign, leaving Lincoln looking like a mere johnny-come-after to Douglas, “or in other words Douglas takes the crowd & Lincoln the leavings.” But with no particularly deep pockets to tap, there was little alternative, until Judd proposed to have Lincoln challenge Douglas to a series of face-to-face debates.<sup>27</sup>

The debates were not Lincoln’s idea. He was still protesting into September that “my recent experience shows that speaking at the same place the next day after D. is the very

<sup>27</sup> William E. Baringer, “Campaign Technique in Illinois, 1860,” *Transactions of the Illinois State Historical Society*, 37 (1932), 204–5; Judd to Lincoln, Nov. 15, 1858, Lincoln Papers; “Foreign Intervention in the Politics of Illinois,” *Chicago Press and Tribune*, Sept. 10, 1858; King, *Lincoln’s Manager*, 125; Cornelius Bushnell to Douglas, June 30, 1858, Douglas Papers; Henry Villard to Douglas, Aug. 24, 1858, *ibid.*; C. B. Buckner, “List of Distribution,” July 30, 1858, *ibid.*; “Cost of the Performance,” *Chicago Press and Tribune*, July 10, 1858; “The Ovation to Senator Douglas,” *Chicago Journal*, July 9, 1858; Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas*, 317, 656–57; “I. N. Higgins bill for Campaign in 1858,” Chauncey L. Higbee Papers (Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum); Mary Cunningham Logan, *Reminiscences of a Soldier’s Wife* (New York, 1913), 62–63; George Fort Milton, *The Eve of Conflict: Stephen A. Douglas and the Needless War* (Boston, 1934), 320; Wilson and Davis, ed., *Herndon’s Informants*, 728.

thing—it is, in fact, a concluding speech on him.” Horace Greeley broached the idea first in the *New York Tribune* on July 12, just after Douglas’s opening Chicago speech and Lincoln’s next-evening reply to it. “We trust Messrs. Lincoln and Douglas will speak together at some fifteen or twenty of the most important and widely accessible points throughout the State,” Greeley urged, “and that the controversy will be prosecuted through the rival candidates for the Lower House at every county seat and considerable town.” Judd and the state committee appear to have settled the matter without even consulting Lincoln, since the *Chicago Tribune* ran its own “suggestion” on July 22 that “Mr. Douglas and Mr. Lincoln agree to canvass the State together.” Lincoln, who had been perfectly content with the follow-up strategy, was not thrilled with the “suggestion.” Douglas, he argued, “was the idol of his party,” and in front of crowds that Douglas might pack to his own advantage, it was likely that “the imperious and emphatic style of his oratory” would allow *Judge Douglas said so* to clinch a debate and be written up in the newspapers as a Douglas triumph. But the state committee thirsted for something more from Lincoln than second-fiddle appearances in towns Douglas had just left “with a sort of Napoleon air.” Lincoln quickly acquiesced, and Judd hand carried a challenge from Lincoln to Douglas on July 24.<sup>28</sup>

The debates turned out to be a godsend for Lincoln as well as a cost-effective campaign device for the Republican state committee. Although he stumbled badly over the racial demagoguery that Douglas unfurled in the first three debates at Ottawa, Freeport, and Jonesboro, Lincoln gradually used the appeal to natural law to characterize Douglas as a moral and political relativist on slavery. By the fourth of the seven debates, at Charleston, David Davis was urgently advising his son, a student at Beloit College,

The joint debates between Mr. Douglass & Mr. Lincoln you must read. The one at Jonesboro and the one at Charleston have already taken place. You can purchase the Chicago Tribune & keep the papers that have the debates in them. Mr. Lincoln’s friends think he has sustained himself admirably in the debates & that his prospects for election are very fair. . . . Whether Mr. Lincoln or Judge Douglass shall go to the Senate, absorbs the people.<sup>29</sup>

The question this immediately provokes is: *Which* people? Much as the state committees managed the overall shape of Lincoln’s and Douglas’s campaigns, little about the Illinois senatorial campaigns of 1858 “point[s],” as Altschuler and Blumin wrote in 1997, “to a narrowly based system with an extraordinary concentration of lawyers, partisan publishers, officeholders, and rich men at its activist core,” especially in “any off-year election.” The committees could supervise, oversee, encourage, coordinate and rebuke, but they were in no practical position to exercise the comprehensive control that Altschuler and Blumin suggested party elites exercised. The Republican state convention that nominated Lincoln was a model of decorum and rehearsal, but even it almost lost a wheel over unscheduled nominations for state offices; the Democratic state convention was a disaster, which saw the state party slide toward a potentially fatal split. “Mr. Douglas will find that he does not carry the state of Illinois in his breeches pocket,” snarled one Democratic

<sup>28</sup> Abraham Lincoln, “To William Fithian,” Sept. 3, 1858, *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Basler, III, 84; “Senator Douglas at Chicago,” *New York Tribune*, July 12, 1858; Wendt, *Chicago Tribune*, 95; Lincoln to Alban Jasper Conant, n.d., in *Recollected Words of Abraham Lincoln*, comp. Don E. Fehrenbacher and Virginia Fehrenbacher (Stanford, 1996), 117; W. J. Ustrej to Lincoln, July 19, 1858, Lincoln Papers; Abraham Lincoln, “To Joseph Gillespie,” July 25, 1858, in *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Basler, II, 522; Abraham Lincoln, “To Stephen A. Douglas,” July 24, 1858, *ibid.*, 523.

<sup>29</sup> “Stump Speaking in Illinois,” *Richmond (Va.) Daily Dispatch*, Sept. 2, 1858; David Davis to George Davis, Sept. 22, 1858, David Davis Papers (Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum).

editor who had been slighted by Douglas and who now rose to the opportunity for revenge, “however much the people may have esteemed him, they will not bear always with his vagaries and inconsistencies.” Unrealistic as it is to think of antebellum electoral campaigns as spontaneous outbursts of democratic enthusiasm, it is also true, as Michael D. Pierson has asserted, that “the presence of an elite group . . . did not lead automatically to a sense of alienation or disenfranchisement.” Access to political power and influence was as much a function of “a person’s ability and willingness to work” as of a particular perch in the social hierarchy. And the organizing work of the state, county, and local committees would have been impossible had it been limited only to those characterizable as elite; nor is it clear that organization restrained popular participation. Villard, who had seen what political life looked like in Europe, where it was in the most literal sense a matter of elite direction, marveled at “the deep interest of the broad masses of the people” in the Lincoln and Douglas campaigns. “I estimate the number of people who convened in Ottawa alone to be approximately 15,000; that in Freeport even 20,000.”<sup>30</sup>

Nor is it merely the numbers in Illinois in 1858 that weigh in the balance against Altschuler and Blumin. When Douglas moved out from Chicago on the first leg of his campaign on July 16, “at every town en route flags were flying, cannons were booming, and immense crowds were gathered at the station.” Five thousand people converged at the station in Bloomington simply to greet him. And when Douglas spoke at Clinton on July 27, people streamed into the town “from daylight in the morning . . . on horseback, on foot, in every imaginable vehicle, on train, and every way possible” in processions that stretched for two miles “from the station to the grounds.” For the debate at Freeport, a traffic jam of “oxen and horse teams” clogged the roads, and wagons and people “had to stop every few rods and wait for the line to move.” Others had come into Freeport “the previous day and surrounded the city like an invading army,” sleeping “in their wagons in vacant lots, in the parks, and elsewhere.” At Charleston, on September 18, “the Lincoln and Douglas debate attracted to our town the largest assemblage of people” that one Charlestonian “had ever before or have since then seen here . . . 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.” Not even the debates, though, seemed to slake the enthusiasm for political stimulation. After the debate at Charleston, the crowds dispersed, but only to attend separate Democratic and Republican rallies into the night. “The enthusiastic supporters of Mr. Lincoln did not disperse until after midnight.” This does not suggest an entirely managed event, or even the possibility of one. Demonstrations were punctuated by much crude creativity. In Bloomington the parade that greeted Lincoln carried “a coffin, covered with black and hauled on a dray, which was labeled in large letters, ‘The Remains of the Democratic Party,’” while in Rushville Lincoln was welcomed by local Democrats with a black flag flying from the courthouse steeple and a clique of boys who hooted through his speech. When Douglas spoke at Joliet, he was heckled not only by the crowd, but by a Republican congressman on the platform. In Centralia Douglas traded insults with hecklers in the crowd;

<sup>30</sup> Glenn C. Altschuler and Stuart M. Blumin, “Limits of Political Engagement in Antebellum America: A New Look at the Golden Age of Participatory Democracy,” *Journal of American History*, 84 (Dec. 1997), 866, 869; “Illinois State Democratic Convention,” *Cairo (Ill.) Weekly Times and Delta*, April 28, 1858; Michael D. Pierson, “Prairies on Fire: The Organization of the 1856 Mass Republican Rally in Beloit, Wisconsin,” *Civil War History*, 48 (June 2002), 114, 120–21; Henry Villard, “Developments of the Campaign,” *New-Yorker Staats-Zeitung*, Sept. 16, 1858.

so did Lincoln in Dallas in October, where “he was interrupted often in his speech one Tom gates called him a liar. Lincoln requested him to stand up he done so, Great God how Lincoln scored him you could have heard the boys shout a mile.” Street brawls went on during the Freeport debate, and someone in the crowd shied a melon at Douglas when he stood up to speak.<sup>31</sup>

But a better, or at least less anecdotal, way of measuring the intersection between control and participation is to examine the local committees. The Republican “committee of arrangements” in Ottawa organized a welcoming parade for Lincoln, and out of the 19 “marshals” designated to direct the parade, 14 can be identified. One, John Tarbell, was a merchant and another, Azro Putnam, a physician, but the other marshals were a socially heterogeneous mix that included three farmers, a carpenter, an Irish-born “trunk manufacturer,” a 28-year-old German butcher, a 23-year-old bank teller from Wisconsin, and a 28-year-old “Ferryman” whose net worth was reported in the 1850 census as \$100. At Quincy the Republican “arrangements committee” met for the first time on October 5, with 23 members who included the Illinois lieutenant governor, John Wood; two lawyers (including Orville Hickman Browning’s partner, Nehemiah Bushnell); a well-to-do riverboat captain; a wealthy millowner (John Wheeler, “a sturdy Republican”); and a prosperous pork packer, George Bond, who was also a two-term city alderman. But the committee also included a 25-year-old German druggist, a 22-year-old unmarried “confectioner,” a farmer, and two wagonmakers (one of them a 25-year-old German immigrant). Ironically, the “rich men” whom Blumin and Altschuler expected to find at the “core” of party organization tend to show up more often among the Douglasites. Popular sovereignty notwithstanding, the platform committee at the Alton debate featured a “Buchaneer” physician, Thomas N. Hope; a lawyer, Joseph Sloss; and Zephaniah Job, a “speculator” whose real property valuation of \$99,800 made him one of the richest individuals in Illinois.<sup>32</sup>

The interaction of national and local interests in the Illinois senatorial campaign was not entirely one-way. Buchanan meddled in Illinois Democratic politics to destroy Douglas’s

<sup>31</sup> Logan, *Reminiscences of a Soldier’s Wife*, 62–63, 64, 67–68; W. T. Rawleigh, *Freeport’s Lincoln: Exercises Attendant upon the Unveiling of a Statue of Abraham Lincoln: Freeport, Illinois, August 27, 1929* (Freeport, 1930), 173, 198–99; Walter B. Stevens, “Theophilus van Deren,” in *A Reporter’s Lincoln*, ed. Michael Burlingame (Lincoln, 1998), 224; Simeon E. Thomas, “Lincoln-Douglas Debate: The Fourth Joint Debate between Abraham Lincoln and Stephen A. Douglas, held in Charleston,” *Eastern Illinois State Teacher’s College Bulletin*, Oct. 1, 1924, p. 11; Charles J. Stewart, “The People and the Lincoln-Douglas Campaign of 1858,” *Register of the Kentucky Historical Society*, 65 (Oct. 1967), 288–93; Don E. Fehrenbacher, *Prelude to Greatness: Lincoln in the 1850s* (Stanford, 1962), 102–3; “Douglas at Centralia,” *Chicago Press and Tribune*, Sept. 21, 1858; Alexander Sympson to John C. Bagby, Oct. 26, 1858, John C. Bagby Papers (Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum).

<sup>32</sup> “Lasalle County, Illinois, 1860 Federal Census,” 1993, typescript (Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum); “The 1850 Federal Census of Lasalle County, Illinois,” 1978, typescript, *ibid.*; Thomas S. Nelson and Mildred C. Nelson, “The Census of Adams County, Illinois, for the Year 1850 by Townships: Population Schedule of the Seventh Census of the United States,” 1972, typescript, *ibid.*; William H. Collins and Cicero F. Perry, “Past and Present of the City of Quincy and Adams County, Illinois,” 1905, typescript, p. 252, *ibid.*; “Portrait and Biographical Record of Adams County, Illinois: Containing Biographical Sketches of Prominent and Representative Citizens, Together with Biographies and Portraits of All the Presidents of the United States,” 1892, typescript, pp. 174, 381, 574, *ibid.*; W. T. Norton, “Centennial History of Madison County, Illinois, and Its People, 1812–1912,” 1912, typescript, p. 236, *ibid.*; Joy Wilson Upton, “Madison County, Illinois, 1860 Census,” 1986, typescript, *ibid.*; “Portrait and Biographical Record of Madison County, Illinois: Containing Biographical Sketches of Prominent and Representative Citizens, Together with Biographies and Portraits of All the Presidents of the United States,” 1894, typescript, p. 522, *ibid.*

national standing, and Greeley tried to use his own national leverage to redirect the Republican state convention. But sometimes influence ran in the other direction, with local and personal agendas reaching out to alter national politics, as they did with the so-called Freeport question.

In the first debate of the series, at Ottawa on August 21, Douglas had aggressively thrown Lincoln onto the defensive with a damaging smear about Lincoln's collusion with abolitionists and with four "interrogatories" intended to expose Lincoln's secret abolitionist schemes. "The effect was most damaging to Lincoln," wrote the Democratic newspaperman James Sheahan, and in the interval between Ottawa and the next debate at Freeport on August 27, the Republican state committee frantically signaled Lincoln that he had to regain the initiative. Thirty-seven years afterward, Joseph Medill described how Lincoln proposed to do this: Lincoln had drawn up "a few questions" of his own to ask at Freeport, featuring as the second question, a logical tiger trap for Douglas: Can the people of the United States Territory, in any lawful way, against the wishes of any citizen of the United States, exclude slavery from its limits prior to the formation of a State Constitution? If Douglas answered no, his popular sovereignty doctrine would deflate like a shot balloon and it would be apparent to everyone that he had no real plan to stop the expansion of slavery into the territories; that would be fatal to Douglas's chances for reelection in Illinois in 1858. But, Medill countered, if Douglas answered yes, as his doctrine of popular sovereignty dictated, it would "open the door through which Senator Douglas will be enabled to escape from the tight place in which he finds himself on the slavery question in this State." True, Lincoln conceded. But an affirmation by Douglas that popular sovereignty could stop slavery in its tracks would cost Douglas every Democratic vote in the South, and that would extinguish once and for all Douglas's hopes for a presidential nomination in 1860. Over the protests of Medill and the other members of the Republican state committee who met Lincoln before the Freeport debate, Lincoln barreled ahead. Douglas responded, as Medill had feared he would, with a yes. But Lincoln, according to Horace White's chapter on the debates in John Locke Scripps's campaign biography of 1860, waved aside the significance of Douglas's reply: That answer might get Douglas votes in Illinois in 1858, but not across the nation in 1860, and Lincoln claimed to be "killing larger game. The battle of 1860 is worth a hundred of this." By this means, Lincoln was shown to possess supernatural prescience about the outcome, not only of the senatorial election, but of a presidential election that interested him far more.<sup>33</sup>

This was all too melodramatic to be believed, and with good reason: The Freeport question, far from being original with Lincoln, had been placed on Douglas's doorstep by no less than Lyman Trumbull on the floor of the Senate in 1856. And Lincoln may have confected the critical second question from a list of eight suggested by Republican state committee member Charles Wilson in the *Chicago Journal* three days before the Freeport debate. (Wilson's first question read: "Do you believe that the people of a Territory, whilst a Territory, and before the formation of a State constitution, have the right to exclude slavery?") And from his own correspondence during the campaign, it was evident to Lincoln that the obsession with popular sovereignty had already cost Douglas what little

<sup>33</sup> Sheahan, *Life of Stephen A. Douglas*, 429; Joseph Medill, "A Reminiscence of Lincoln," in *The Lincoln-Douglas Debates of 1858*, ed. E. E. Sparks (Springfield, 1908), 204; Josiah Gilbert Holland, *Life of Abraham Lincoln* (Springfield, Mass., 1866), 189; Beveridge, *Abraham Lincoln*, II, 656; Smith D. Atkins, "The Freeport Debate," in *Abraham Lincoln: The Tribute of a Century, 1809-1909, Commemorative of the Lincoln Centenary and Containing the Principal Speeches Made in Connection Therewith*, ed. Nathan William MacChesney (Chicago, 1910), 141.

support he had left in the South. “He cares nothing for the South he knows he is already dead there,” Lincoln wrote to Henry Asbury on July 31. Nor was Douglas surprised when the question was asked at Freeport. He had been warned that “there is a determination on the part of the republicans to ask you . . . whether, under the Dred Scott decision, in your opinion, the territorial legislature would have power to prohibit slavery,” and in response to Lincoln’s asking, Douglas testily remarked that Lincoln had heard him answer that question “a hundred times from every stump in Illinois.” And far from trying to dissuade Lincoln from asking the Freeport question, Medill had actually written to him just before the Freeport debate on behalf of the state central committee, urging Lincoln to ask: “What becomes of your vaunted popular Sovereignty in Territories since the Dred Scott decision?”<sup>34</sup>

But why, then, did Lincoln bother to ask the question? Clark E. Carr, who debunked Medill’s story in his 1909 biography of Douglas, could only suggest that Lincoln was simply trying “to make up and so plainly define the issues of the campaign that they would be clear to everybody.” And it is true, as the historian David H. Donald remarked, that forcing Douglas to repeat this answer yet again—and in a public forum where shorthand reporters were, for the first time, taking down every word for the telegraph—sent southerners into raging tantrums, so that from then on, regardless of whether Douglas had articulated it before, his answer became “the Freeport doctrine.” (Two years later, as Douglas struggled to wrestle the presidential nomination from the Democratic national convention, the journalist Murat Halstead noticed anti-Douglas Mississippians with copies of “the Freeport speech of Douglas” in their hands, intending “to bombard him in the convention with ammunition drawn from it.”) What does not go away so gently is the repeated claim that in asking the Freeport question, Lincoln had his eye on the election of 1860 as he primarily exposed Douglas’s inconsistency in order to gain the presidency for himself. There is simply too much testimony—from Gustave Koerner, from Norman Judd, from Horace White (the *Chicago Tribune’s* reporter), from Isaac Arnold (an Illinois state representative and later a biographer of Lincoln)—that Lincoln really *did* expect the Freeport question to deny Douglas the presidency and that Lincoln really was “fighting for bigger game.” But unless we grant that Lincoln possessed supernatural prevision, how can we reconcile Lincoln’s own statement that Douglas was already “dead” in 1858 with the need to kill him all over again at Freeport? And why should Lincoln have thought that by deliberately taking a fall in 1858 he would make himself a suitable candidate for a Republican presidential nomination in 1860? Why—unless the presidency Lincoln sought to deny Douglas was not a Democratic, but a Republican one?<sup>35</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Lyman Trumbull, “Kansas Affairs,” *Congressional Globe*, 34 Cong., 1 sess., June 9, 1856, p. 1371; “Lincoln Refuses to Answer,” *Chicago Daily Journal*, Aug. 27, 1858; Lincoln to Henry Asbury, July 31, 1858, *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Basler, II, 530; Daniel Fish, *Legal Phases of the Lincoln and Douglas Debates: Annual Address before the State Bar Association of Minnesota at Minneapolis, July 14, 1909* (Minneapolis, 1909), 14; S. W. Randall to Douglas, Aug. 28, 1858, Douglas Papers; Stephen A. Douglas, “The Freeport Debate,” in *Lincoln-Douglas Debates*, ed. Sparks, 161; Fehrenbacher, *Prelude to Greatness*, 122–28; Medill to Lincoln, Aug. 27, 1858, Lincoln Papers.

<sup>35</sup> Clark E. Carr, “The So-Called ‘Freeport Doctrine,’” in *Stephen A. Douglas: His Life, Public Services, Speeches, and Patriotism*, ed. Clark E. Carr (Chicago, 1909), 283; David H. Donald, *Lincoln* (New York, 1995), 633. For Murat Halstead’s comment, see Ernest J. Wessen, “Debates of Lincoln and Douglas: A Bibliographical Discussion,” *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 40 (second quarter, 1946), 91–106, esp. 101–2. Thomas J. McCormack, ed., *Memoirs of Gustave Koerner, 1809–1896: Life-Sketches Written at the Suggestion of His Children* (2 vols., Cedar Rapids, 1909), II, 65; William H. Herndon to Horace White, Aug. 26, 1890, Horace White Papers (Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum); White, *Lincoln and Douglas Debates*, 22–23; Walter B. Stevens, “Wells H. Blodgett’s Experience,” in *Reporter’s Lincoln*, ed. Burlingame, 51. See also Norman Judd interview by William H. Herndon, Oct. 2, 1890, in *Herndon’s Informants*, ed. Wilson and Davis, 723–24; and Judd interview by John G.

No political rumor took on more undeserved life between Douglas's defiant anti-Lecompton speech in February and the beginning of the Illinois debates in August than the anticipation "that Mr. Douglas was coming over to the republican party as fast as he could carry his followers with him, and that his extraordinary hold upon the masses of the democratic party at the North would enable him to bring to the republican ranks a re-inforcement which would prove irresistible at the approaching presidential election." A Douglas presidential candidacy "supported by the Republicans" would, wrote one of Douglas's backers, garner Douglas "three-fourths if not more of all the Votes cast in this state" and would constitute a "complete 'coup d'etat.'" Not, however, if Douglas remained loyal to a doctrine of popular sovereignty that always opened the possibility, no matter how slim, that slavery could legally obtain a foothold in any territory without Congress having any veto. And that much the Freeport question made mercilessly clear, if not to Democrats, then certainly to East Coast Republicans. It is impossible to imagine Lincoln's thinking that the Freeport question would make him president, or even put him in nomination for the presidency, in 1860. But that he felt impelled to ask it suggests that he hoped to prevent Republicans from seeing Douglas as a potential 1860 Republican presidential nominee. Even if Lincoln did not win the senatorial campaign, there was at least one undeserved laurel he could deny Douglas. Chester Dewey, who had covered the debates for the *New York Post*, congratulated Lincoln even before the election that "the N.Y. Republicans who were in love with Douglas, are rather more inclined to take a different view now."<sup>36</sup>

Lincoln lost the election for the U.S. Senate. It was not without a heroic effort—he covered over forty-three hundred miles, made over 60 major speeches, speaking in 23 Illinois towns and never missing a single scheduled event. Douglas, who made 59 set-piece speeches and 42 less formal ones, ended the campaign hoarse and exhausted. At the Galesburg debate, "he was so hoarse" that he could not be clearly understood "by a third of his audience"; at the Alton debate, Douglas's "voice gave out, and his words came like barks." The abrupt change of the Illinois weather from hot and dry in August and September to wet and blustery at the beginning of October gave Douglas a cold that he tried to treat with liquor, only to reduce his rolling baritone to a slurred mush: "The peculiar way in which he spoke of Misha Linka was highly suggestive."<sup>37</sup>

The good news was that the Republicans had garnered a hefty majority across the state; the bad news was that it was not enough. The Buchananites failed miserably in their plan to siphon off votes from Douglas, but Lyle Dickey's publication of the endorsement from Crittenden gave Douglas just the edge he needed among uneasy old Whigs in central Illinois. The one-time Whig stronghold of the Fourteenth District, where two Democratic

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Nicolay, Feb. 28, 1876, in *Oral History of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Burlingame, 45.

<sup>36</sup> Holland, *Life of Abraham Lincoln*, 158; Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas*, 585–86, 634, 637, 638; Beveridge, *Abraham Lincoln*, II, 556, 558; P. W. Randle to Douglas, July 4, 1858, Douglas Papers; Chester Dewey to Lincoln, Oct. 30, 1858, Lincoln Papers.

<sup>37</sup> Heckman, *Lincoln vs. Douglas*, 45; Rawleigh, *Freeport's Lincoln*, 188; Seymour D. Thompson, "Lincoln and Douglas: The Great Freeport Debate," *American Law Review*, 39 (March–April 1905), 172–73; Thomas Wakefield Goodspeed, "Lincoln and Douglas: With Some Personal Reminiscences," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, 26 (Oct. 1933), 192; C. R. Parke to Peter D. Brown, Oct. 26, 1858, sc 1141, C. R. Parke Correspondence (Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum); "Onarga Correspondence," *Chicago Weekly Times*, Sept. 30, 1858. For this citation I am indebted to Michael Burlingame.



candidates for the house had lost by a 3.2 percent margin in 1856, now went Democratic in 1858 by almost exactly the same margin (the victors garnering 51.6 percent of the vote), so sending two Democratic state representatives and a Democratic state senator to Springfield to vote for Douglas when the new legislature convened. In the Twenty-eighth District (Pike and Brown counties, on the Illinois River) Democrats expanded the narrow 1.6 percent victory margin they had won by dividing Republicans and Whigs in 1856 by three percentage points in 1858. In the Twenty-seventh District (Morgan and Scott counties, across the Illinois River from the Twenty-eighth District) the two Democratic representatives, Cyrus Epler and Elisha Hitt, went from squeaking margins of 129 and 35 votes (respectively) in 1856 to reelection margins of 640 and 611 votes in 1858. The votes for the two Republican candidates for the legislature in the Twenty-seventh District actually went *down* by 10 votes and 11 votes. The conviction that “Lincoln has killed himself by his ultra Abolition-equality doctrine” sent Whig voters and new voters across the column to vote Democratic.<sup>38</sup>

Yet it was by no means a rout. Some of those districts fell to Douglas men by maddeningly narrow margins. In the Thirty-fifth District, the Douglasite victory was razor-close (78 votes, or 50.8 percent); in the Thirty-third District, the change of 150 votes would have given the district’s two representatives to the Republicans, while in the Thirty-ninth District (Tazewell County) the change of 90 votes would have elected a Republican. Adding just those three districts to the Republican column would have resulted in a Lincoln victory when the legislature convened to elect a senator in January. In fact, even with the results Lincoln actually garnered, he gained much more ground than it has seemed. Every account of the 1858 campaigns from Beveridge’s onward has measured Lincoln’s vote getting by using the figures for the two statewide offices up for election, state treasurer and state superintendent of public instruction, and extrapolating the vote for the legislative candidates from those figures. Horace Greeley’s *Tribune Almanac* gives 125,430 votes for the Republican candidate for state treasurer and 121,609 for his Democratic opponent; hence, it is assumed that the same votes must have been given for Lincoln and for Douglas candidates in the legislative races. But there were actually 366,983 votes cast in the state house elections (because of the districts that elected multiple representatives), of which 166,374 were for Democratic candidates and 190,468 for Republican, with a smattering of 9,951 for the Buchananites. If Illinois voters were consciously voting for legislative candidates who would in turn vote for Lincoln or Douglas, then Lincoln “won” the votes cast for the house races by about 24,000 votes—or, he “won” 51.9 percent of the votes cast, whereas Douglas “won” only 45.3 percent. The same story holds true in the state senate races. Of the 99,842 votes cast in the twelve open state senate races, 44,750 went to Democrats, but 53,784 went to Republicans (the Buchananite candidates garnered only 1,308). So, Lincoln also “won” the senate votes with a substantial 53.86 percent of the votes cast.<sup>39</sup>

But while in both senate and house races Lincoln candidates won substantial victories, they won them unevenly. The apportionment of representation in the legislature, based

<sup>38</sup> J. Henly Smith to Stephens, Aug. 3, 1858, Stephens Papers; “Illinois Election,” *Montgomery County (Ill.) Herald*, Nov. 12, 1858; “State Ticket,” *ibid.*; Illinois Election Returns, State House, 1856, p. 161 (microfilm, reel 30–45) (Illinois State Archives, Springfield); Illinois Election Returns, State House, 1860, p. 280, *ibid.*; “The Campaign in Illinois,” *Philadelphia Press*, Aug. 26, 1858.

<sup>39</sup> *The Tribune Almanac for the Years 1838 to 1868, Inclusive* (30 vols., New York, 1868), XXI, 60; Illinois Election Returns, State Senate, 1858, pp. 216–19 (microfilm, reel 30–45); Illinois Election Returns, State House, 1858, pp. 220–25, *ibid.*

on the 1854 Illinois reapportionment plan, rewarded votes cast in safe Democratic districts with greater representation than those cast in the Republican districts in the north of the state. "If the State had been apportioned according to population," complained Medill, "the districts carried by the Republicans would have returned forty-one Lincoln representatives, and fourteen Lincoln Senators, which of course would have elected him." As it was, however, in "Republican districts it requires on average a population of 19,635 inhabitants to elect a representative . . . while in the Democratic districts 15,675 for a Representative. . . . On a fair apportionment, Douglas would have been beaten seven in the House and three in the Senate."<sup>40</sup> Combined with the failure to win over enough of the Whig districts, the apportionment doomed Lincoln's chances of election. Lincoln had expected to do better than he did; but he still did almost well enough to snatch the Senate seat away from Douglas and send the Little Giant to the political junk heap. Oddly, it was the candidate whose gospel was popular sovereignty who would be reelected to the Senate on the basis of a popular vote he had, technically, lost. Even more oddly, when Lincoln and Douglas faced each other two years later for the 1860 presidential contest, it would be Lincoln who would win only 40 percent of the popular vote but win the presidency on the strength of northern control of the Electoral College.<sup>41</sup>

So, despite an overall Republican majority among votes cast, Douglasite Democrats retained control of the legislature and made Douglas's reelection a foregone conclusion. The final state legislative tally gave Douglas Democrats majorities in both the house and senate—40–35 in the house, 14–11 in the senate. When the legislature cast its electing vote on January 5, 1859, "The announcement of the result called forth much applause from the crowded galleries and lobbies, and the House adjourned in great confusion, while the victors exercised their lungs vigorously, and the noise of a cannon recalled to our mind the famous little one that Mr. D. used to trudge around with him during the canvass."<sup>42</sup>

Nevertheless, Lincoln was "glad I made the late race." He hoped, among other things, that the result would spur Judd and the Republican state committee to "draft an apportionment law" which would be "strictly & obviously just in all particulars." But much more important, from a starting point well in the shade of Lyman Trumbull and the schemes of James Buchanan, Lincoln emerged over the course of his campaign as an opponent of formidable intellectual stature on the slavery question. "It gave me a hearing on the great and durable question of the age, which I could have had in no other way," Lincoln wrote two weeks after the elections. "Douglas had the ingenuity to be supported in the late contest both as the best means to *break down*, and to *uphold* the Slave interest," but now "no ingenuity can keep those antagonistic elements in harmony long." Lincoln had forced Douglas into admitting that the Little Giant stood immovably by popular sovereignty in the territories, which ended forever any hope that Douglas could be embraced by the Republican national leadership and reduced to vanishing the possibility that he

<sup>40</sup> Heckman, *Lincoln vs. Douglas*, 45; Zarefsky, *Lincoln, Douglas, and Slavery*, 51; *Tribune Almanac for the Years 1838 to 1868, Inclusive*, XX, 60–61; Harry E. Pratt, *The Great Debates* (Springfield, 1956), 30; "The Apportionment," *Chicago Press and Tribune*, Nov. 6, 1858; Collins, "Lincoln-Douglas Contest of 1858 and Illinois' Electorate," 409.

<sup>41</sup> "Result of the Presidential Election of 1860," in *The Political History of the United States during the Great Rebellion, from November 6, 1860, to July 4, 1864*, ed. Edward McPherson (Washington, 1864), 1.

<sup>42</sup> "Illinois Legislature," *Clinton Central Transcript*, Jan. 7, 1859; "Douglas Elected," *Carlinville Free Democrat*, Jan. 6, 1859.

could be reconciled to the administration and the southern Democrats. "New splits and divisions will soon be upon our adversaries," he wrote, "and we shall have fun again."<sup>43</sup>

Just as important, however, was the outcome in terms of the political geography of Illinois. In a state and a region where Democratic majorities were usually taken easily for granted and against the most prominent northern Democratic politician, Lincoln had carved his way to within a few districts of toppling Douglas and winning the Senate seat he so craved. That, fully as much as the debates, gave Lincoln a national profile he had never enjoyed or thought to enjoy. "Until June," recalled Shelby Cullom, "Mr. Lincoln was unknown outside of Illinois and Indiana," but by September "Lincoln's character was understood and his ability was recognized in all the non-slaveholding States of the Union." Norman Judd assured Lincoln, "You have at once made a national reputation that cannot be taken away from you," and Charles Ray joked to Lincoln, "You are like Byron, who woke up one morning and found himself famous." Three days after the election, George W. Rives lamented to his fellow Illinois Republican Ozias M. Hatch, "My God, it is too bad." But he added, "Now I am for Lincoln for the nomination for president in 1860!"<sup>44</sup> That, in the end, turned out to be a more important victory, for it pointed Lincoln to his national political debut in New York City in 1860, the Republican national convention, and his election to the presidency.

<sup>43</sup> Abraham Lincoln, "To Henry Asbury," Nov. 19, 1858, in *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Basler, III, 339–40; Abraham Lincoln, "To Eleazar A. Paine," Nov. 19, 1858, *ibid.*; Abraham Lincoln, "To Anson G. Henry," Nov. 19, 1858, *ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Cullom, *Fifty Years of Public Service*, 34; Judd to Lincoln, Nov. 15, 1858, Lincoln Papers; Ray to Lincoln, July 27, 1858, *ibid.*; Baringer, "Campaign Technique in Illinois in 1860," 206–7; G. W. Rives to Ozias M. Hatch, Nov. 5, 1858, Ozias M. Hatch Papers (Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum).