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# Consistency and Change in the Rhetoric of Stephen A. Douglas

Robert E. Terrill and David Zarefsky

Deciding how to relate one's current to one's previous beliefs is a difficult rhetorical problem for any politician. The public figure who changes positions too quickly or easily can be perceived as hypocritical, lacking principle, pandering to the immediate audience, or—in current usage—"waffling." Audiences may have trouble discerning what, if any, are the politician's true convictions. Both major Presidential candidates in 1996 suffered from this perception. On the other hand, to maintain one's position stubbornly in the face of changed circumstances can invite charges of rigidity, dogmatism, and irrelevance. The rhetor must decide when to emphasize the continuity between seemingly dissimilar positions and when to celebrate change, when to highlight nuances between seemingly similar positions and when to frame one as a reaffirmation of the other.

That careful choices between consistency and change are critical can be seen by considering questions such as these: Did the success of Richard Nixon's China policy depend on the boldness with which it was put forth as change? Would Lyndon Johnson have fared better had he acknowledged that he was changing the nature of the war by steadily increasing the number of American troops in Vietnam? Would the campaign for the Equal Rights Amendment have been more successful if it had been perceived as the natural extension of the 14th Amendment? What do politicians accomplish in claiming that they are guided by the same values as were the founding fathers?

The public discourse of Stephen A. Douglas exhibits the tensions that might be expected to characterize a rhetoric that attempts to negotiate consistency and change. In his own time, Douglas was both praised and reviled for changing his beliefs and also both praised and reviled for keeping them the same. Professional historians and biographers have continued this paradoxical appraisal of Douglas, who was one of the most powerful figures of American politics and known by the sobriquet of "the Little Giant."

In this essay, we will explicate the problem of characterizing Douglas, discuss our method of analysis, explore the evolution of his beliefs by examining the value premises in his rhetorical texts, and assess the significance and wider relevance of Douglas's decisions about how to position himself with respect to consistency and change.

## COMING TO TERMS WITH DOUGLAS

Stephen A. Douglas has not fared well in America's collective memory. He was one of the leading advocates of geographic expansion, the principal architect of the legislative strategy that enabled the Compromise of 1850 to pass, a staunch supporter of the transcontinental railroad, and one of the most prominent and powerful politicians of the 1850s. In popular understanding, though, Douglas is regarded primarily as the obstacle Abraham Lincoln overcame on his way to the presidency.<sup>1</sup> Even his most cherished political principle, popular sovereignty, has been misconstrued or contorted into a defense of slavery. And his important victory in the 1858 Senate contest has been discounted by our knowledge of what happened later.

This discrepancy between Douglas's glory in his own age and relative obscurity in our own is closely related to a disagreement among rhetorical critics and historians about how to characterize his rhetorical stance. As Forest L. Whan noted in 1960, Douglas "is still the subject of controversy," and "most [historians] have condemned him harshly as a sophist and a trickster, lacking in originality and constructive logic."<sup>2</sup> Historians, biographers, and rhetorical scholars have characterized him as an opportunist whose rhetoric lacks foundation in a consistent set of principles. Earl W. Wiley writes that Douglas, "like most men of the impetuous type ... always took the most convenient means to accomplish his ends. He certainly wasted no time in deciding on the ethics of any course of action he desired to pursue. Essentially he was a debater of the *killer* type."<sup>3</sup> Historian James Ford Rhodes suggests that Douglas was motivated by personal ambition and was willing to sacrifice any principle for the sake of that goal. He was blind to moral principles, but even "laying aside entirely the moral question, the action of Douglas as a statesman, as a politician and leader of a party, was characterized by a lamentable lack of foresight and the utter absence of the careful reflection which far-reaching measures of legislation demand."<sup>4</sup> Because Douglas lacked settled convictions, Rhodes argues, he could not realize that by introducing the Kansas-Nebraska Act he had "hastened the struggle; he precipitated the civil war."<sup>5</sup> Allan Nevins was more sympathetic in the late 1940s, but while he notes that Douglas was "a marvelously effective floor debater" he also suggests that he "had no real power of abstract thought."<sup>6</sup> Robert W. Johannsen, one of Douglas's most sympathetic biographers, explains that he was "a pragmatist in politics" who "distrusted ideologies and doctrinaire thinkers, partly, one suspects, because he proved unable himself to argue effectively from abstract grounds."<sup>7</sup> And James Jasinski has offered Douglas's work in crafting the compromise measures of 1850 as "perhaps the century's best example of the politics of maneuver," "the endless reshuffling of narrowly imagined materials into 'new' configurations" characterized by "the principles of accommodation, restraint, and blind imitation."<sup>8</sup>

On the other hand, there is persuasive evidence to suggest that Douglas did, indeed, display a certain rhetorical consistency and that he did, in fact, appear to argue from principle. David Zarefsky, for example, has noted that the debate over the Lecompton constitution was, for Douglas, "a question of political philosophy and morality: the [Lecompton] constitution did not represent the will of the people, and the vote had been fraudulent, violating the cherished principle of popular sovereignty."<sup>9</sup> David M. Potter, discussing the effects of the *Dred Scott* decision of 1857, notes that because that decision seemed to nullify popular sovereignty:

many a man ... might have decided to scuttle the popular sovereignty doctrine and to look for a vehicle by which to move into the antislavery camp. ... But Douglas, for all his tactical opportunism, all his consorting with spoilsmen, all his scorn for moralists in politics, was deeply committed to certain attitudes which had become, with him, matters of principle.<sup>10</sup>

His commitment to the procedural norms of majority rule and popular sovereignty was unshakable. Perhaps the most telling evidence of Douglas's principles is his behavior during the last months of his life. Sensing that his 1860 Presidential bid was doomed, he nevertheless continued to campaign, traveling through the South to urge the preservation of the Union. He denounced secession and, after the outbreak of hostilities, supported Lincoln's policies. These are not the actions of a person prompted only by the desire to advance his own political fortunes, and they suggest motives that outstretch the rhetorical possibilities of mere pragmatism.

The seeming discrepancies in Douglas's behavior are complex. Not only does he seem sometimes to operate from principle and sometimes not, but the principles themselves are in tension. The decision of the Southern states to secede, after all, was an

unmistakable example of popular sovereignty in action; Douglas's campaign for Union, then, seems to be a campaign against his own most cherished principle. The usual explanation for this anomaly is that Douglas underwent something of a conversion. Coming face to face with the realities of secession and war, he transformed his perceptions and attitudes, abandoning the commitment to popular sovereignty in order to save the Union. Rhodes, for example, after vigorously attacking his earlier record, wrote that in 1860 Douglas "said much that was trivial and undignified; but he also said much that was patriotic, unselfish, and pregnant with Constitutional wisdom. His love for the Union and devotion to the Constitution inspired all his utterances."<sup>11</sup> Randall and Donald see a rapid and radical conversion on Douglas's part following the attack on Fort Sumter, and McPherson likewise implies that Douglas's national-unity appeal was a consequence of the attack.<sup>12</sup>

Something seems too convenient about this explanation, however; the war is too much of a *deus ex machina*. To be sure, wars do change perceptions. The Civil War fostered nationalist thinking and World War II made internationalists out of some of the most stalwart prewar isolationists. But it may be too facile to assume such a comprehensive change in Douglas merely because of an election result or even the outbreak of hostilities. We suggest a competing hypothesis: Douglas's rhetoric is grounded in a hierarchy of values. He shifts terms within the hierarchy according to the shifting circumstances in which he finds himself, which accounts for his seeming to be an unprincipled opportunist; the hierarchy itself remains stable throughout Douglas's rhetorical career, which accounts for his seeming to operate from enduring principles. This hierarchy of values is implicated in the phases of Douglas's rhetorical career over time.

#### DELINEATION OF RHETORICAL PHASES

Douglas served in the Congress from 1843, at the age of thirty, until his death in 1861. Within this eighteen-year period, divisions could be made according to the dates of his elections or the key issues he confronted. Divisions could also be made according to various internal elements of his speeches, such as style or argument. However, divisions sensitive to the *rhetorical* dynamics of the speeches of Stephen A. Douglas must not be blind either to the external situation nor to the internal dynamics of his discourse. In other words, Douglas crafted his speeches to meet particular exigencies, and his speeches therefore bear the imprint of the way Douglas understood those situations. Thus, while the primary focus of our study is on a hierarchy of values that is evident within Douglas's discourse, our divisions of his public career necessarily reflect shifts in the rhetorical situations he faced and the way he interpreted those situations.

Other writers have made similarly rhetorically-sensitive divisions in the public careers of prolific speakers. Waldo W. Braden, for example, observes this interplay between internal and external elements in dividing Abraham Lincoln's speaking between 1854 and 1865 into four stages.<sup>13</sup> With a similar sensitivity to the interplay of text and context, we read most of the extant speeches across Douglas's public career. In particular, we noted the underlying values that Douglas appealed to in making his arguments. These values varied according to his rhetorical situation, but they clustered in three distinct groups: partisan advantage, "popular sovereignty," and preservation of the Union. Moreover, while each of these three values is evident in most examples of Douglas's discourse, the central appeals also were organized sequentially. That is, Douglas relied primarily upon appeals to party early in his career, then shifted to appeals to the principle of popular sovereignty, and finally his discourse was characterized by an appeal for the preservation of the Union.

Before we turn to a detailed account of the historical record, a brief overview of the relationship between Douglas's texts and their context is useful. From his election to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1842 until he emerged as a central player in the

Compromise of 1850, Douglas's rhetoric was primarily partisan. Douglas was a relatively young Representative and Senator whose party was in ominous flux ideologically. Throughout this period, Douglas tended to frame both local and national issues as political skirmishes that represented opportunities for partisan advantage. The 1850s constitute the second phase of his career, as Douglas became increasingly estranged from his own Democratic party leadership while at the same time claiming national attention as a perennial candidate for the Presidential nomination. Because of the length and complexity of this phase, we have chosen to treat it in two parts. At first, Douglas invoked the principle of popular sovereignty for partisan reasons, arguing that it was through this principle that the Democratic party might achieve unity. In 1857, however, when Douglas publicly broke with his party leadership, his rhetoric shifted from the defense of his party to the defense of his principle. Though he had first crafted this principle as an instrument of political advantage, after 1857 Douglas cultivated it as the ideological crystal around which much of his discourse congealed. The final phase of Douglas's rhetoric comprises the last months of his life, beginning with a campaign for the presidency that soon became a campaign for the preservation of the Union. As secession and civil war threatened to destroy the nation that he had served throughout his adult life, Douglas supplanted his defense of "popular sovereignty" with a call for the preservation of the Union — no matter how popular secession might be. Though Douglas shifted the locus of his arguments in response to shifts in his rhetorical situation, we argue that this implied hierarchy — party/popular sovereignty/Union — is present throughout the discourse of his public career.

## THE HISTORICAL RECORD

### *Phase One: Principled Partisanship*

The first major speech of Douglas's Congressional career was delivered in early January, 1844. House Democrats wanted to utilize their majority to refund to Andrew Jackson a \$1000 fine he had incurred nearly 30 years earlier, a result of his declaration of martial law in the 1815 defense of New Orleans.<sup>14</sup> Douglas supported Jackson; indeed, he had first gained attention in Illinois in 1834 for his defense of Jackson's withdrawal of funds from the Second Bank of the United States.<sup>15</sup> Predictably, Douglas's opening argument in support of the refund bill was that opposition to it was politically motivated, but he denied that the bill itself was so motivated. The Whigs who opposed the bill, Douglas charged, "have been pleased to stigmatize this act of justice to the distinguished patriot and hero as a humbug — a party trick — a political movement, intended to operate upon the next Presidential election. These imputations are as unfounded as they are uncourteous, and I hurl them back, in the spirit which they deserve."<sup>16</sup>

Douglas alleged that, in contrast, Democrats favored the refund not merely for partisan reasons but to recognize a higher value — the preservation of the political system. The Whig argument, he said, was tantamount to believing that Jackson "is not authorized to elevate the military above the civil authorities ... when it is certain that nothing but the power of the military law can save the civil laws and the Constitution of the country from complete annihilation." There are crises, Douglas argued, in which "necessity becomes the paramount law to which all other considerations must yield. ... I care not whether [General Jackson's] proceedings were legal or illegal, constitutional or unconstitutional, with or without precedent," Douglas declared, "*if they were necessary to the salvation of that city.*"<sup>17</sup> The advancement of party, in short, was justified by invoking the higher end of preservation of government.

This same pattern informs another speech Douglas delivered in the House later that same year. On June 3, he defended those planks of the Democratic Party's platform that concerned the annexation of Oregon and Texas.<sup>18</sup> He characterized the attacks as

"all of a political nature," and invoked higher values in his defense. Instead of acknowledging that annexation would help the Democrats politically, he stressed the "great importance of the Oregon Territory, in a commercial and military point of view," and asserted that without control of Texas and Cuba, "we could hardly be considered an independent nation."<sup>19</sup> In answer to the possibility of war with England, Douglas reached still higher, into the fecund realm of Manifest Destiny: "It is time that England was taught that North America has been set a part [*sic*] as a nursery for the culture of republican principles."<sup>20</sup> Douglas concluded by stating that:

interest and patriotism — national glory and security — all unite in prompting us to embrace the 'present golden opportunity' to extend the principles of civil and religious liberty over a large portion of the continent.<sup>21</sup>

In February of 1845, again defending the annexation of Oregon, Douglas declared that he believed "that this Union ought to be held sacred, and that every inch of its territory ought to be maintained at all hazards."<sup>22</sup>

In Douglas's other important rhetorical effort during his tenure in the U.S. House, his defense of the Mexican War, he included an appeal to Union that anticipated some of his later discourse.<sup>23</sup> He declared that "America wants no friend ... who, after war is declared, condemns the justice of her cause. ... All such are traitors in their hearts."<sup>24</sup> One must either support the U.S. unconditionally or be counted among her enemies. "To me," Douglas concluded, "our country, and all its parts, are one and indivisible. I would rally her standard for the defense of one portion as soon as the other — the South as soon as the North; for Texas as soon as Oregon." Adams hinted at the emerging tension between Northern and Southern Democrats, to which Douglas answered that his patriotism "is not of that kind which would lead me to go to war to enlarge one section of the Union out of mere hatred and vengeance towards the other."<sup>25</sup> Rifts, be they between Whigs and Democrats or between Northern and Southern interests, could and should be subsumed under the larger question of what was best for the *Union*.

During this first phase of his rhetorical career Douglas argued primarily as a parti- san. He attacked his opponents for being opportunists while maintaining that his own beliefs were prompted by unwavering principle — notwithstanding that his principles served the partisan interest of the Democratic party. At this node of his hierarchy of values, principles are called upon in support of the party.

### *Phase Two: Popular Sovereignty*

In the second, and longest, phase of Douglas's rhetorical career, popular sovereignty emerged as the primary node around which his arguments were constructed. He equated popular sovereignty with self-determination, majority rule, and non-interference by the federal government in local affairs. The emergence of popular sovereignty in his hierarchy of values was gradual and, as with partisanship, it was an expedient appeal defended as a matter of principle.

Like most Americans of his age, Douglas championed states' rights. In 1845, he defended the right of the people of Florida, coming into the Union as a state, to "form their constitution in their own way and in accordance with their own views." At this time, however, he was not willing to grant the people of a *territory* the same freedom.<sup>26</sup> Over the years, in fact, he had introduced bills in Congress that specifically disallowed territorial autonomy and maintained the principle of Congressional supremacy. It was during the 1848 election that he first extended autonomy to the territories as *well* as states. Campaigning throughout the South for party unity, he said in New Orleans:

I hold that the control of this subject [slavery] belongs entirely with the State or Territory which is called upon to determine upon what system or basis its

institutions and society shall be organized. The general government cannot touch the subject without a flagrant usurpation. ... Such are my sentiments. Such is the democratic creed.<sup>27</sup>

Douglas proposed to bypass growing sectional tension by denying either proslavery or antislavery advocates an *a priori* claim to new territories. Instead, the principle of territorial self-determination was being offered as a "creed" under which the Democratic factions could unify. And Douglas derived the creed by simple analogy from the universally- supported principle of states' rights. In effect, he now regarded territories as embryonic states rather than as regions directly under the control of the federal government.

By 1850, sectional tensions had increased dramatically, and secession was threatened; the added tension provided the crisis necessary for the invention of popular sovereignty as a viable mode of compromise. Douglas had written two bills, one for the admission of California as a free state and one for the admission of New Mexico and Utah without provisions as to slavery. These were reported out of committee to the Senate by Henry Clay on May 8.<sup>28</sup> During the lengthy debate on the Compromise of 1850, Jefferson Davis proposed modifying the language of the bills in order to allow the territorial governments to protect existing slavery. Douglas protested, and in so doing presented his most detailed discussion of popular sovereignty to date.

Douglas began by saying that he "rather regretted" the introduction into the bill of a clause regarding slavery at all, because it had always been his belief that "this and all other questions relating to the domestic affairs and domestic policy of the territories ought to be left to the decision of the people themselves, and that we ought to be content with whatever way they may decide the question."<sup>29</sup> Popular sovereignty — or non-intervention, as it became known during this debate — thus became articulated as a principle. The debate still was seen as a partisan combat. Douglas charged that the object of the inserted clause was to "stultify and disgrace the whole Democratic party" — but in conclusion he appealed again to principle:

We can stand where we stood in 1848, and where we have ever stood upon this question [non-intervention]. But, sir, when we are required to retrace our steps and renounce what we have alleged to be our principles, that becomes quite a different question.<sup>30</sup>

At first Douglas defended this principle as a matter of sound policy. Although acknowledging that Congress had the power to exclude slavery from the territories, he denied that the power should be used. As he said, he was not "prepared to say that, under the Constitution, we have not the power to pass laws excluding negro slaves from the territories But I do say that, if left to myself to carry out my own opinions, I would leave the whole subject to the people of the territories themselves, and allow them to introduce or to exclude slavery as they may see proper."<sup>31</sup> In the same speech, however, Douglas seemingly — though not explicitly — denied Congress's power to control the territories, by suggesting that they should have all the autonomy of states: "I do not wish to perpetuate any institution against the will of the people [of the territories]. I wish to leave them free to regulate their own institutions in their own way."<sup>32</sup> Early on, rather than seeming inconsistent, this ambiguity was a virtue. Because most of those concerned could support *some* interpretation of popular sovereignty, it was useful in quelling much of the agitation on the slavery question in 1850.<sup>33</sup>

Douglas had happened upon the principle as a practical solution to the case at hand but was not yet prepared to defend it as an *a priori* ideal. A critical transformation occurred, however, in 1854 during the debates on the Kansas-Nebraska Act. Unlike the Compromise of 1850, which referred to new territory, the Kansas-Nebraska Act concerned territory formerly closed to slavery by the Missouri Compromise. The repeal of that compromise became the flashpoint that made popular sovereignty more controversial

even as Douglas's rhetorical evolution made it more prominent.<sup>34</sup> Douglas's fullest defense of his new principle came during his closing arguments in the Kansas-Nebraska debate. There, he argued that the principle of popular sovereignty in the territories was not a new idea for him, but one that he had held consistently since at least 1850. "I could go on and multiply extract after extract," Douglas claimed, "to show that this doctrine of leaving the people to decide these questions for themselves is not an 'after-thought' with me."<sup>35</sup>

Douglas chose to base his bill on popular sovereignty, he said, for two reasons: "first, because we believed that the principle was right; and, second, because it was the principle adopted in 1850, to which the two great political parties of the country were solemnly pledged." This principle, once it is "recognized as a rule of action in all time to come" will be able "to destroy all sectional parties and sectional agitations."<sup>36</sup> Indeed, foreshadowing what would become his ultimate value, Douglas saw popular sovereignty as *required* in order to save the Union. "I believe," he said, "that the peace, the harmony, and perpetuity of the Union require us to go back to the doctrines of the Revolution, to the principles of the Constitution, to the principles of the compromise of 1850."<sup>37</sup> Under the aegis of Douglas's ambiguous principle, the party conflicts can be transcended for the purpose of preserving the Union. Thus, to this point, Douglas's principle and his loyalty to party continued to coexist.

### *Phase Three: Fatal Abstraction*

In 1857, as partisan disagreement careened toward irreconcilability, Douglas was forced to choose between his principle and his party. At this moment of choice, Douglas established popular sovereignty as the superior of the two values. The occasion was the dispute over the Lecompton constitution, according to which Kansas would enter the Union as a slave state. The constitution had been drafted by a clearly unrepresentative, though perfectly legal, convention. The question was whether or not it constituted popular sovereignty. President James Buchanan urged ratification by Congress because the convention had been duly elected and in order to resolve the issue and gain two more Senate seats for the Democratic Party. Douglas broke with the President over the issue, denouncing the Lecompton constitution as a violation of the popular sovereignty principle.

Douglas responded to Buchanan in a Senate speech on December 9, 1857. He declared that the principle of popular sovereignty transcended specific questions of morality as well as partisan politics: "it is no justification, in my mind, for the violation of a great principle of self-government, to say that the [Lecompton] constitution you are forcing on them is not particularly obnoxious, or is excellent in its provisions." For Douglas, a constitution might be "as pure as the Bible, as holy as the ten commandments" but it still must be "submitted to and ratified by the people of Kansas, in pursuance of the forms of law." This line of reasoning led to the famous quotation that would be taken out of context and used against him later: "It is none of my business which way the slavery clause is decided. I care not whether it is voted down or voted up."<sup>38</sup> Douglas was arguing for the supremacy of his principle against those who would charge him with opposing the Lecompton constitution only because it was pro-slavery; he was not arguing that slavery was a matter of personal indifference.

Earlier, Douglas thought that his commitments to popular sovereignty and partisan advantage could coexist. Now, he clearly placed popular sovereignty above party in his hierarchy of values. As he said, "I will sacrifice anything short of principle and honor for the peace of the party, but if the party will not stand by its principles, its faith, its pledge, I will stand there, and abide whatever consequences may result from the position.... I will stand on the great principle of popular sovereignty. ... I will follow that principle wherever its logical consequences may take me."<sup>39</sup> He made a similar statement

in closing Senate debate on the Lecompton constitution. On March 22, 1858, indicating that events had not caused him to waver from his principle, he said:

Neither the frowns of power nor the influence of patronage will change my action, or drive me from my principles. I stand firmly, immovably upon those great principles of self-government and State sovereignty upon which the campaign was fought and the election won. If, standing firmly by my principles, I shall be driven into private life, it is a fate that has no terrors for me.<sup>40</sup>

Douglas was not driven into private life. Instead, because of his stand against the administration, he enjoyed renewed prominence. As Johannsen puts it, Douglas "now appeared before the people as a champion of principle, a role to which he was not altogether accustomed."<sup>41</sup>

The Lecompton controversy was not the only challenge Douglas faced during 1857. In the *Dred Scott* decision, the Supreme Court found the Missouri Compromise unconstitutional because it denied property rights without due process of law, a violation of the fifth amendment. Congress, the Court held, lacked power to outlaw slavery in the territories.<sup>42</sup> On its face, this decision also challenged popular sovereignty. Territorial legislatures were creatures of Congress, so how could they exercise a power denied to Congress? But if they could not outlaw slavery, then popular sovereignty was doomed.

Douglas seemed on the horns of a dilemma. He could endorse the decision and strengthen his party ties, but only by abandoning his principle. Or he could maintain the principle, but only by abandoning his party and challenging the authority of the Court.<sup>43</sup> In a speech delivered in Springfield, Illinois, in June, 1857, the Little Giant tried to find a middle way. First, Douglas endorsed the decision. It was the decision of the federal court, and therefore stood above partisan wrangling. Indeed, Douglas asserted that if:

any considerable portion of the people allow partisan leaders to array them in violent resistance to the final decision of the highest judicial tribunal on earth, it will become the duty of all the friends of order and constitutional government ... to organize themselves and marshal their forces under the glorious banner of the Union.<sup>44</sup>

Even while endorsing the decision, though, Douglas denied that it undermined popular sovereignty. He insisted that the *Dred Scott* decision established only an abstract principle. The hypothetical right to take slaves into Kansas was of no benefit without laws protecting the slaveowner's property, and the territorial legislature was under no obligation to pass such legislation. As Douglas put it, the right to hold slaves:

necessarily remains a barren and worthless right, unless sustained, protected and enforced by appropriate police regulations and local legislation. ... These regulations ... must necessarily depend entirely upon the will and wishes of the people of the territory. ... Hence, the great principle of popular sovereignty and self-government is sustained and firmly established by the authority of this decision.<sup>45</sup>

Although Lincoln and others would challenge the logic of Douglas's position and demand that he declare whether he would help or hinder slavery, Douglas insisted that his principle was consistent with *Dred Scott* but undermined by Lecompton. On the defensive — but still with a vast political following — the Little Giant campaigned for re-election in 1858.

In the Lincoln-Douglas debates, the incumbent subtly reframed popular sovereignty. Where in the Senate he argued that it was the fundamental principle of the



Democratic party, in the debates he argued primarily that it was a mechanism for preserving the Union. For example, in the Ottawa debate of August 21, he suggested that "if we will only act conscientiously and rigidly upon this great principle of popular sovereignty ... we will continue at peace one with another."<sup>46</sup> He concluded the debates on the same note, arguing in Alton: "If the people of all the states will act on that great principle, and each state mind its own business, attend to its own affairs, take care of its own negroes and not meddle with its neighbors, then there will be peace between the North and the South, the East and the West, throughout the whole Union."<sup>47</sup> In the debates of 1858, then, popular sovereignty was solidified in Douglas's rhetoric as an enduring principle capable of preserving the Union.

Douglas did retain his Senate seat over Lincoln, but the Democrats lost most of the rest of the Illinois state ticket. In choosing principle over party, Douglas had achieved personal success and no little notoriety; and the fact that most other anti-Lecompton Democrats lost seemed to validate his position. But this same fact considerably weakened his power base in the Senate. Buchanan even saw to it that Douglas was removed from his powerful post as chair of the Committee on Territories, where he had sat for nearly twelve years.

Still on the defensive despite his re-election, Douglas during 1859 engaged in two rhetorical efforts to establish that it was the Buchanan Democrats, not himself, who had abandoned the party's (and the country's) great principle. The first effort was an article completed in midsummer and published in September in *Harper's Magazine*. Elaborating an analogy he had introduced the previous year, between the Western territories and the original thirteen colonies, he said that popular sovereignty "was familiar to the framers of the Constitution" because of the "long series of years they remonstrated against the violation of their inalienable rights of self-government under the British Constitution."<sup>48</sup> Popular sovereignty, argued Douglas, is therefore the guiding principle that informs the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation, and the Constitution itself. Thus, Douglas could claim that the Compromise of 1850 and the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 "are in perfect harmony with, and a faithful embodiment of the principle of popular sovereignty as it has pervaded American history."<sup>49</sup>

The second, and thematically related, rhetorical effort of 1859 was a speaking tour of Ohio, begun in September. Douglas spoke in Columbus, Cincinnati, and Wooster in support of Democratic candidates in the state elections there, possibly also as an opportunity to consolidate his party in preparation for the coming Presidential election. These speeches covered much of the same ground as the *Harper's* article. At Columbus on September 7, Douglas argued that:

the right of the people in their local legislatures to decide all internal questions to suit themselves is not a new doctrine. It is as old as the principles of free government on the American Continent. It was the first question that seriously divided the American Colonies from the British Government.<sup>50</sup>

In equating the territories struggling for popular sovereignty with colonies struggling for independence, Douglas argued that the Revolutionary War itself was precipitated by the unwillingness of early Americans to abandon popular sovereignty.

The increasingly speculative level of the debates over the fate of the territories was not lost on the public; as Johannsen reports, "by the end of 1859, the public was visibly tiring of the barrage. The feeling spread that the nation's leaders were losing themselves in a maze of abstractions."<sup>51</sup> By refusing to endorse any positive protection of slavery in the territories, Douglas had sacrificed much of his Southern support, and yet he could not assure the free-soil movements in the North that he would oppose any spread of slavery. Neither region remained content with a neutral, abstract principle; both increasingly valued popular sovereignty only contingent on its results.

*Phase Four: Defense of the Union*

Despite the shifting political winds, Douglas remained consistent and, in June of 1859, announced his candidacy for President in order to defend the popular sovereignty principle.<sup>52</sup> But his defense of that principle continued along the lines he had foreshadowed in the Lincoln-Douglas debates. Increasingly, he defended popular sovereignty not for its own sake but as a means to preserve the Union.

Douglas's decision to campaign actively for the Presidency is notable enough, being at the time almost without precedent, but his decision to campaign in the South is especially interesting because he knew that he had little hope for support there. "The only rational explanation of such behavior," Damon Wells suggests, was "that almost from the outset of the campaign he knew that he could not win the presidency. ... He came [to the South] less in the role of campaigner and more as the defender of common sense and the Union."<sup>53</sup>

On August 25, Douglas made the first important speech of his southern tour from the courthouse steps in Norfolk, Virginia. Much of the speech revisited the same ground as the *Harper's* article and the Ohio speeches, interweaving popular sovereignty with American history. But the Norfolk speech is especially notable because at the conclusion of his prepared address a local Breckinridge elector asked two questions.<sup>54</sup> The first question was: "If Abraham Lincoln be elected president of the United States, will the Southern States be justified in seceding from the Union?" Douglas replied, "To this I emphatically answer No." The preservation of the Union outweighed the results of any election, even for the highest political office in the land. The second question was more loaded: "If they [the Southern states] secede from the Union upon the inauguration of Abraham Lincoln ... will you advise or vindicate resistance by force to the decision?" While the crowd shouted "No!," Douglas said: "I answer emphatically that it is the duty of the president of the United States, and all others in authority under him to enforce the laws of the United States, passed by Congress, and as the courts expound them." Secession was illegal no matter how popular it might be. The integrity of the Union was not a matter to be submitted to popular vote.

Douglas's closing remarks at Norfolk contain phrases that he would repeat during both of his 1860 tours of the South:

I did not come here to purchase your votes. I came here to compare notes, and to see if there is not some common principle, some line of policy around which all Union-loving men, North and South, may rally to preserve the glorious Union against Northern and Southern agitators I desire no man to vote for me, unless he hopes and desires to see the Union maintained and preserved intact.<sup>55</sup>

The basic precepts of what became known as Douglas's "Norfolk Doctrine" remained stable throughout the rest of the campaign, the election of Lincoln, Southern secession, and to the brink of the Civil War. Speaking in Chicago on October 5, during a break in his Southern campaign, Douglas reiterated much of what he had said in Norfolk. He again assured his audience that:

It is not personal ambition that has induced me to take the stump this year. I say to you who know me, that the presidency has no charms for me. I do not believe that it is my interest as an ambitious man, to be president this year if I could. But I do love this Union. There is no sacrifice on earth that I would not make to preserve it.<sup>56</sup>

He went on to proclaim that he "has no more sympathy" with Northern abolitionists than he does with Southern secessionists, so he "was bound as an honest man to keep the flag of non-intervention waving in the breeze, and to hold it if there was no other

man to hold it." His closing remarks at Chicago were not unlike those in Norfolk: "I now call upon all Union whigs, all conservative men, all the opponents of sectional parties, to rally under the banner of the Constitution, the Union and the enforcement of the laws, to put down abolitionism and disunion."

After receiving news that both Pennsylvania and Indiana had elected Republican governors, Douglas became even more certain that Lincoln would win the presidency. He returned to the South, speaking in St. Louis, Memphis, Huntsville, Nashville, Atlanta, Montgomery, Selma, Mobile, and in other Southern cities between mid-October and Election Day. In Memphis on October 24, Douglas again told his audience that "I do not come to solicit your suffrages, but to make an appeal in behalf of this glorious Union by an exposition of those principles, which, in my opinion, can only preserve the peace of this country," and he again argued that popular sovereignty was that principle.<sup>57</sup> In Montgomery on November 2, four days before the election, Douglas declared, "There is no living man who would do more to defeat Lincoln than myself. There is no man more anxious to defeat him than myself." Still, now that his own election was unlikely, Douglas reminded his audience that "the election of any man on earth by the American people, according to the Constitution, is no justification for breaking up this government."<sup>58</sup>

Douglas received the expected election results while still in the South, in the offices of the *Mobile Register*. He saw some encouraging news in the Southern returns, in that the combined Bell-Douglas, or pro-Union, vote was 100,000 greater than the Breckinridge vote.<sup>59</sup> His campaign for the preservation of the Union had evidently had some effect.

From Mobile he traveled to New Orleans, and on November 13 responded in a widely published letter to a request signed by ninety-six of that city's prominent citizens:

No man in America regrets the election of Mr. Lincoln more than I do; none made more strenuous exertions to defeat him; none differ with him more radically and irreconcilably upon all the great issues involved in the contest. ... But, while I say this, I am bound, as a good citizen and law-abiding man, to declare my conscientious conviction that the mere election of any man to the Presidency of the American People does not of itself furnish any just cause or reasonable ground for dissolving the Federal Union.<sup>60</sup>

When Douglas returned to Washington on December 1, 1860, his first words were a brief plea to put aside partisan disagreements: "Let all asperities drop, all ill feeling be buried, and let all real patriots strive to save the Union."<sup>61</sup> He then began in the Senate a struggle to preserve the Union that would last into the next spring, seemingly frantic in his efforts to find an appropriate compromise amid a rapidly deteriorating situation. On January 3, Douglas even proposed a return to the Missouri Compromise, drawing the line out to the Pacific Ocean. It was a desperate measure, and was easily defeated, but it indicated that Douglas was willing even to compromise his cherished principle of popular sovereignty, at least temporarily, if it could save the Union.<sup>62</sup> All such efforts, of course, came to nought.

Douglas met with Lincoln before the inauguration, and despite their political differences pledged his support for the President-elect's efforts to preserve the Union. The day that Fort Sumter surrendered to Confederate forces, April 14, 1861, Douglas again met with Lincoln. The press release that Douglas prepared that evening reiterates that "while Mr D was unalterably opposed to the administration on all its political issues, he was prepared to sustain the President in the exercise of all his constitutional functions to preserve the Union, and maintain the government, and defend the Federal Capital."<sup>63</sup>

Douglas returned to Illinois on April 25, to address a special session of the State Legislature in Springfield the next evening. It was to be his penultimate rhetorical effort. Support for the Union was unstable in Illinois, particularly in the southern part

of the state, and Douglas argued passionately in the Union's defense. "So long as there was a hope of peaceful solution," Douglas told the crowded hall, "I prayed and implored for compromise." But, he continued, "when all propositions of peace fail, there is but one course left for the patriot." He called upon the assembled lawmakers to "lay aside your party creeds and party platforms," to be picked up again only after the crisis had passed. Invoking an explicitly vertical metaphor, he realized that not every man could be expected to "rise to the level of forgetting his partisan prejudices and sacrifice everything upon the altar of his country," but admonished that "the shortest way to peace is the most stupendous and unanimous preparation for war."<sup>64</sup>

Douglas's final public appearance was in Chicago on May 1. He arrived late in the evening, and his remarks were uncharacteristically brief. He described the "grand and imposing" reception celebration as expressing the crowd's "devotion to the Constitution, the Union and the Flag of our country." Douglas then reiterated much of what he had said in Springfield a few nights before. Partisan differences, he insisted, must be put aside for "it is the duty of every American citizen to rally round the flag of his country." Turning to the preservation of the Union, his statement was even more terse and precise: "There are only two sides to the question. Every man must be for the United States or against it. There can be no neutrals in this war, *only patriots-or traitors*."<sup>65</sup>

## ASSESSMENT AND IMPLICATIONS

Different values characterized the different periods of Douglas's career, but the relationship among them was consistent. Partisan advantage, if necessary, was subordinated to popular sovereignty; and popular sovereignty, if necessary, to the Union.

In his early years, Douglas regarded the advancement of his party as a critical value. But whereas he thought his opponents were motivated *only* by partisan advantage, he never regarded that value as an end in itself. It was a means to individual freedom and national self-preservation. When popular sovereignty emerged as his chief value, he thought it would promote party unity (by transcending factional divisions) and national self-preservation (by removing the slavery issue from the national forum and defusing it as a local matter). Party divisions might be overcome for a time through an ambiguous symbol into which groups could read divergent meanings.<sup>66</sup> Democrats might avoid having to confront such questions as who were the people, over what were they sovereign, and when did they exercise their sovereignty.

In thinking that appeals to party and to popular sovereignty could be reconnected, Douglas misjudged both the degree to which partisan divisions were repairable and the ability of such a principle to repair them. He predicted that his Kansas-Nebraska bill "will be as popular at the North as at the South" because it expresses "a great principle of universal application, which can be sustained ... in every time and in every corner of the Union."<sup>67</sup> The truth was that the possibility of any such resolution to the impending crisis was steadily dwindling. At one point in the Kansas-Nebraska debate, Douglas noted that the Abolitionists "are honoring me in Boston, and other places, by burning me in effigy." Lewis Cass assured him that "it will do you no harm," and Douglas agreed: "Well, sir, I know it will not."<sup>68</sup> As he traveled to Chicago in October of 1854, where the protests of an angry crowd would preclude his scheduled speech, Douglas heard that trouble was predicted; he shrugged it off in a letter to Charles H. Lanphier: "They threaten a mob but I have no fears. All will be right."<sup>69</sup> Douglas had remained consistent within his hierarchical framework, but he did not realize how rapidly his consistency was becoming politically troublesome. As he became aware of controversy, however, he stepped up his efforts to persuade audiences that popular sovereignty was the best, and indeed only, basis on which to resolve the growing sectional tensions. In the process, he elevated popular sovereignty above party.

In the debates with Lincoln, Douglas elaborated on his earlier belief that popular sovereignty was the way to heal sectional strife. As he did so, though, he began to articulate that the integrity of the Union was an even higher value. In Freeport, for example, after proclaiming Lincoln's doctrine dangerous to the Union, he contrasted his challenger with himself: "I am not for the dissolution of the Union under any circumstances. I will pursue no course of conduct that will give just cause for the dissolution of the Union."<sup>70</sup> As Wells suggests, "in Douglas' hierarchy of values, the nation-its health, preservation, and expansion-stood at the very top."<sup>71</sup> And, in the debates of 1858, Douglas made clear that popular sovereignty was the means for maintaining this greater value.

Because the party had deviated from its principles while he had remained firm, however, Douglas was almost forced to write himself out of the national Democratic party. He did not shrink from that consequence. In the Quincy debate, near the end of the hotly contested election, Douglas said he did not care "whether a man be [called] a Democrat or not on that platform, I intend to stay there as long as I have life." And in Alton two days later, he said, "I will never violate or abandon that doctrine if I have to stand alone."<sup>72</sup>

Likewise, in 1860 the Douglas Presidential campaign became a campaign for Union. Before the defection of the Southern Democrats who nominated John C. Breckinridge, Douglas had offered to withdraw his own nomination if the party could nominate someone else who might save the Union.<sup>73</sup> And, as noted above, his Southern campaign for Union, even in the face of his own certain defeat, made clear that he had relocated the locus of his motives even prior to the outbreak of the war.<sup>74</sup>

This realization helps to modify certain popular stereotypes of Douglas. It is not true that he was an apologist for slavery or a man without convictions, and it is not true that he was a rank opportunist who changed his beliefs merely in response to the shifting political winds. His hierarchy of values was procedural rather than substantive; he was less concerned with the outcome of particular issues than with the process by which they were decided. Of special importance were the questions of whether decisions were made in the right place or the right way. He championed popular sovereignty not because it led either to slavery or to freedom but because he did not believe that the federal government should regulate domestic institutions. He was a partisan not simply out of personal ambition but because he believed that the Democratic party was the best vehicle for social progress. Ultimately he concluded that fragmentation of the country would make it impossible to achieve other goals, whether political, social, or economic.

For Douglas individual freedom was a value regardless of what substantive choices any individual might make, and national survival was paramount no matter what policies the nation might adopt. This commitment to procedure gave Douglas's beliefs consistency, but it also disabled him from recognizing that the moral dimensions of the slavery question had become coequal with, and probably surpassed, the procedural. He was imprisoned in the world-view of the 1840s and 1850s even as time was passing it by. It may be for this reason that Douglas is often seen today as a relatively minor figure. But before too quickly endorsing this judgment, one should remember that Lincoln, too, as late as 1862 was asserting that *his* paramount object was to save the Union, not either to save or to destroy slavery.<sup>75</sup> Only in the ensuing months did he come to realize that the two goals of abolition and reunion were inseparable and that each was necessary for the other. Had he lived, Douglas might have come to the same realization over time, and could have reconciled that position with his hierarchy of procedural values.

Recently, James Jasinski has justified the study of the way orators long since dead addressed rhetorical problems long since resolved: "While substantive historical doctrines may ... exhaust their force in time, the force, vitality, and meaning of rhetorical principles fluctuates through time as a consequence of their recursive enactment in historically situated rhetorical performance."<sup>76</sup> In other words, these past oratorical performances

are worthy of study because they are living repositories of rhetorical invention, in which rhetorical strategies and principles are animated through a rhetor's attempt to address a particular situation. Douglas's adherence to a hierarchy of values while also managing change illustrates one such strategy. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, for example, explain the rhetorical significance of hierarchies, noting that hierarchies of values form the premises of a person's arguments. Disputes usually are not about values in the abstract, because competing advocates often will both defend values that are desirable in isolation. Controversies usually center on value hierarchies, with rhetors disagreeing about which are the primary and which are the subordinate values.<sup>77</sup>

Douglas constructed his value hierarchy, and shifted among its rungs, in response to a fundamental and enduring tension in American political rhetoric. James R. Andrews has reminded us that "one of the most persistent strains to which Americans have been subjected is that of dealing with the demands placed on them by professed moral imperatives while, at the same time, experiencing the strong urge to succeed."<sup>78</sup> In other words, American public discourse exhibits a tension between the demands of transcendent principle and localized expediency. American rhetors are expected to be flexible enough to respond in a fitting and effective manner to specific rhetorical situations, and are also expected to display a consistency that suggests their alignment with a resolute moral doctrine.<sup>79</sup> As Douglas negotiated this tension, he positioned Union as a constant value at the top of a hierarchy of values, and shifted among these values in response to specific exigencies. He was, at once, both constant and constantly shifting. Though this would seem to suggest that Douglas had crafted a rhetoric eminently fitting to the American political arena, he ultimately may have lost the election of 1860 and an honored place in American history because the procedural morality to which he clung placed severe limits on his flexibility. When the locus of public argument centered on a substantive question that could not be encompassed within Douglas's consistent hierarchy, he lost his rhetorical foothold.

Martin J. Medhurst demonstrates both that the American rhetorical situation continues to be characterized by these paradoxical demands and that rhetoricians continue to negotiate this situation through the use of hierarchies. Medhurst suggests that Ronald Reagan, during his 1980 Presidential campaign and throughout his first term in office, "systematically ... articulated and pursued a well-ordered hierarchy of issues." Reagan was able to emphasize one element of his hierarchy without abandoning the others, and thus to remain flexible enough to please conflicting constituents while also remaining true to the hierarchical ordering of these issues. Thus, Medhurst concludes, Reagan was able to "pursue his economic and defense policies, reassure conservatives about the social issues agenda, and avoid antagonizing the civil libertarian left, all at the same time."<sup>80</sup>

In our analysis of the rhetoric of Stephen A. Douglas, we share some assumptions with Medhurst, such as that a rhetor's hierarchy of values can best be studied across a series of speeches delivered at different times to differing audiences. But while Medhurst used his study of Reagan's speeches to predict the future course of Reagan's presidency, we, instead, see in Douglas's rhetoric a demonstration of the advantages and limitations of this hierarchically-bound rhetorical invention. We also do not mean to suggest, as Medhurst does about Reagan's hierarchy, that the value hierarchy evident in Stephen A. Douglas's rhetoric is a self-conscious strategy adopted, as David F. Ericson puts it, for the purposes of "easing his way into the White House."<sup>81</sup> Douglas was not a deep thinker; he might have been unable to articulate his value hierarchy or his movement among its rungs. But if challenged, he certainly would have maintained that his position was consistent. If he strained to reconcile popular sovereignty with *Dred Scott*, surely he would have insisted that his principles were consistent with one another over time. Our analysis suggests that there *was* a consistency to his value positions, so he would not have had to fear the charge that he was, in today's language, merely waffling.

Rather, Douglas's hierarchy of values is a precipitate of his habitual ways of thinking and judging. The entire hierarchy is implied even in some of Douglas's earliest speeches, and Douglas shifts the locus of his arguments up the hierarchy as the situation demands. As Medhurst notes, Kenneth Burke recognizes that hierarchies are governed and merged by key terms, "god terms," so that the emphasis on one of these key terms implies the entire hierarchic structure.<sup>82</sup> Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, similarly, suggest that "a single abstract principle, capable of repeated application, can establish the whole hierarchy."<sup>83</sup> In Douglas's case, the key term that governs the hierarchy is the preservation of the Union. The other rungs of the hierarchy — "popular sovereignty" and "political party" — participate in and support the maintenance of this overarching value.

Douglas, in his own way, was addressing the very contemporary issue of the dialectic between diversity and community. Just as today we are concerned with the recognition and celebration of cultural diversity, so Douglas was concerned with political diversity. He championed a system in which each community or state could make its own decisions about its own affairs. But just as diversity carried too far can lead to the fragmentation ("balkanization," in the current metaphor) of a common culture, so in Douglas's time the value of political self-determination could be carried so far that it undermined the national community. That was where Douglas drew the line. He recognized that the preservation of the Union was a prerequisite for the values of self-determination and political diversity that he championed. Consistently throughout his career, and especially during his last months, he made clear that the Union was perpetual; secession, unthinkable. Discourse requires a community, and once the community is broken up, rhetors are on a slippery slope. Others, of course, have given different answers from Douglas's to the question of what constitutes a political community. But the knowledge that Douglas and his contemporaries were wrestling with the same questions we confront today should give resonance and perspective to current controversies, situating them within an evolving rhetorical history.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The only article in a Speech Communication journal that deals exclusively with Douglas reads him in exactly this way, as the unfortunate opponent of the superior rhetorical genius of Abraham Lincoln. See Jeanette Anderson, "Man of the Hour or Man of the Ages? The Honorable Stephen A. Douglas," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 25 (1939): 75-93.
- <sup>2</sup> Forest L. Whan, "Stephen A. Douglas," *A History and Criticism of American Public Address*, ed. William N. Brigance (1943; rpt. New York: Russell & Russell, 1960) 777-778.
- <sup>3</sup> Earl W. Wiley, "A Footnote on the Lincoln-Douglas Debates," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 18 (1932): 217.
- <sup>4</sup> James Ford Rhodes, *History of the United States from the Compromise of 1850*, abbr. and ed. Allan Nevins (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966) 99, 135.
- <sup>5</sup> Rhodes 138.
- <sup>6</sup> Allan Nevins, *Ordeal of the Union: A House Dividing, 1852-1857* (New York: Scribner's, 1947) 25.
- <sup>7</sup> Robert W. Johannsen, ed., *The Letters of Stephen A. Douglas* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1961) xxiv.
- <sup>8</sup> James Jasinski, "The Forms and Limits of Prudence in Henry Clay's (1850) Defense of the Compromise Measures," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 81 (1995): 470.
- <sup>9</sup> David Zarefsky, *Lincoln, Douglas, and Slavery: In the Crucible of Public Debate* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990) 11.
- <sup>10</sup> David M. Potter, *The Impending Crisis, 1848-1861*, comp. and ed. Don E. Fehrenbacher (New York: Harper & Row, 1976) 171.
- <sup>11</sup> Rhodes 278.
- <sup>12</sup> J. G. Randall and David Donald, *The Civil War and Reconstruction* (Lexington, Mass.: Heath, 1969) 178-179; James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1988) 274.
- <sup>13</sup> Braden distinguishes among a partisan phase, the Senate race, the interstate speaking tours, and the quest for the Presidential nomination. See Waldo W. Braden, *Abraham Lincoln, Public Speaker* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1988) 27-42. Similarly, Lois J. Einhorn observes stages in the evolution of Lincoln's advocacy of emancipation. Like Braden and ourselves, Einhorn supports her argument primarily with evidence drawn from the texts of key addresses and with a discussion of the interplay between these texts and the rhetorical situation. See *Abraham Lincoln the Orator* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1992) 71-91.

<sup>14</sup> Robert W. Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973) 129.

<sup>15</sup> Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas* 24.

<sup>16</sup> *Congressional Globe* 28:1, app., 43.

<sup>17</sup> *Congressional Globe* 28:1, app., 4 5. There is a contradiction within this seemingly principled position. Douglas first argues that Jackson was fighting to preserve the Constitution and then that it does not matter if his actions were unconstitutional. If *any* action that preserves the Constitution is justified, that necessarily includes unconstitutional actions. Despite successive refinements, Douglas is never able to completely avoid this sort of contradiction. It may be unavoidable within a system of procedural morality such as Douglas develops.

<sup>18</sup> Douglas actually began this speech with a lengthy defense of the Democratic Party's newly-nominated Presidential candidate, James Knox Polk, against vehement Whig attack. This fact further emphasizes Douglas's consistent inclination to frame political agendas within higher-order principles.

<sup>19</sup> *Congressional Globe* 28:1, app., 600-601.

<sup>20</sup> *Congressional Globe* 28:1, app., 601. For a thorough discussion of Douglas's appropriation of Manifest Destiny, see Robert W. Johannsen, *The Frontier, the Union, and Stephen A. Douglas* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989) 77-102.

<sup>21</sup> *Congressional Globe* 28:1, app., 602.

<sup>22</sup> *Congressional Globe* 28:2, 226.

<sup>23</sup> Douglas was drawn into an exchange with John Quincy Adams, who was among the opponents of the war and who claimed that the area between the Nueces and Del Norte (Rio Grande) rivers, where hostilities had erupted, was not part of the United States. Douglas employs an argumentative strategy of which he will make famous use later. He and Adams argue at some length about the "particular point" Adams had designated as that at which the boundary of Texas diverged from the Rio Grande. During the debates with Lincoln in 1858, Douglas will accuse Lincoln of equivocating about the "spot" at which certain Republican resolutions were passed and avoiding the question of whether he is bound to those resolutions.

<sup>24</sup> *Congressional Globe*, 29:1, 815.

<sup>25</sup> *Congressional Globe*, 29:1, 817.

<sup>26</sup> Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas* 219.

<sup>27</sup> Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas* 233.

<sup>28</sup> Douglas had wanted the bills to be presented separately, because he felt they had a better chance of passing that way, but the committee united them. In so doing, the committee also changed one crucial line: instead of organizing the territories of New Mexico and Utah without reference to slavery, as Douglas had intended, the "omnibus" bill specifically prohibited those territorial governments from taking any action at all regarding slavery. This offending clause was eventually removed, during the ensuing three months of debate, but, as Douglas suspected, the "omnibus" bill could not pass. In a curious tum of events, it was fatally dismembered on July 31. Douglas took command of the proceedings from Clay, who walked off the floor in disgust, and by mid-August succeeded in guiding to passage the bill's original components, in four separate bills, very much in Douglas's original language. For a thorough discussion of Douglas's central role in the Compromise of 1850, see George D. Harmon, "Douglas and the Compromise of 1850," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, 21 (1929): 45-99. See also Jasinski 470.

<sup>29</sup> *Congressional Globe* 31:1, 1114.

<sup>30</sup> *Congressional Globe* 31:1, 1118. Of course, as noted above, Douglas was *not* standing where he "ever" had stood. He was presenting as continuous what in fact was a significant change in his position, although he had maintained the new position consistently since 1848.

<sup>31</sup> *Congressional Globe* 31:1, 1116.

<sup>32</sup> *Congressional Globe* 31:1, 1118.

<sup>33</sup> Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas*, 297; Damon Wells, *Stephen Douglas: The Last Years, 1857-1861* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971) 66-67.

<sup>34</sup> The change is illustrated by comparing the reaction to two speeches Douglas gave in Chicago. On October 23, 1850, Douglas defended his emerging principle and afterward was praised as a defender and preserver of the Union (Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas* 303). Almost exactly four years later, he returned again to defend himself and his principle. This time, however, the crowd was so hostile that Douglas was never allowed to speak (Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas* 45 54). In the intervening time, Douglas had virtually single-handedly written, introduced into debate, and guided to passage the Kansas-Nebraska Act, organizing two new territories on the foundation of popular sovereignty. The same principles for which he was hailed as the savior of the Union in 1850 were becoming unacceptable in 1854.

<sup>35</sup> *Congressional Globe* 33:1, 327. Douglas did protest too much. In 1850 he and others had defended popular sovereignty as a specific response to a particular situation; there is no suggestion that anyone had regarded it as a universal principle.

<sup>36</sup> *Congressional Globe* 33:1, 336-337.

<sup>37</sup> *Congressional Globe* 33:1, 338.

<sup>38</sup> *Congressional Globe* 35:1, 17-18. Lincoln would cite this line repeatedly to support his claim that Douglas was personally indifferent to the slavery issue.

<sup>39</sup> *Congressional Globe* 35:1, 18.

<sup>40</sup> *Congressional Globe* 35:1, app., 201.



<sup>41</sup> Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas* 618.

<sup>42</sup> For a detailed treatment of this case, see Don E. Fehrenbacher, *The Dred Scott Case: Its Significance in American Law and Politics* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1978).

<sup>43</sup> Wells points out that "the Dred Scott decision is usually portrayed by historians as an unmitigated political disaster for Stephen Douglas" (Wells 112). Given Douglas's creativity in meliorating its effects, however, "The best judgment upon the Dred Scott decision would seem to be that, although it thwarted Douglas at some points, it still left him room for maneuver" (Wells 114).

<sup>44</sup> *Kansas-Utah-Dred Scott Decision: Speech of Hon. S. A. Douglas Delivered at Springfield, Illinois, June 12, 1857* (Springfield: Lanphier & Walker, Printers, 1857) 4. Douglas did not expect to be called upon to speak on these subjects. He wrote out his comments after the fact, to be published as a pamphlet. These quotations are taken from that pamphlet.

<sup>45</sup> *Kansas-Utah-Dred Scott*, 6. Johannsen (*Stephen A. Douglas* 570) points out that this argument is itself consistent with some of Douglas's earlier statements. In 1850, "he had reminded the Senate that legislation passed by Congress to operate locally upon a people not represented, will always remain practically a dead letter upon the statute book, if it be in opposition to the wishes and supposed interests of those who are to be affected by it, and at the same time charged with its execution" (*Congressional Globe* 31:1, 369-370).

<sup>46</sup> Paul M. Angle, ed., *The Complete Lincoln-Douglas Debates of 1858* (1958; rpt. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1991) 107.

<sup>47</sup> Angle 375. Similarly, in the Quincy debate he pronounced: "I will stand by that great principle, no matter who may desert it. I intend to stand by it for the purpose of preserving peace between the North and the South, the free and the slave states" (Angle 351).

<sup>48</sup> Stephen A. Douglas, "The Dividing Line between Federal and Local Authority: Popular Sovereignty in the Territories," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* Sept. 1859: 521. Douglas wrote the article specifically to extend the historical argument he had developed in the Lincoln-Douglas debates: that his position, rather than Lincoln's, was consistent with the founding fathers. The analogy between the thirteen colonies and the Western territories originated in Douglas's closing speech of the Kansas-Nebraska debate, in which he contended that the American Revolution was fought for the popular sovereignty principle: "It is apparent that the Declaration of Independence had its origin in the violation of the great fundamental principle which secured to the people of the colonies the right to regulate their own domestic affairs in their own way" (*Congressional Globe* 33:1, 337).

<sup>49</sup> Douglas, "Dividing Line" 533. This claim, of course, contradicts his argument in 1850 that Congress *did* have power to legislate on behalf of the territories.

<sup>50</sup> Stephen A. Douglas, [Speech at Columbus, Ohio, Delivered September 7, 1859], *New York Times* 8 Sept. 1859.

<sup>51</sup> Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas* 714.

<sup>52</sup> Douglas announced his candidacy for the Democratic nomination in a letter dated June 22, 1859, to J.B. Dorr, editor of a Dubuque newspaper (Johannsen, *Letters* 446-447). The "Dorr Letter" was widely reprinted in newspapers throughout the nation.

<sup>53</sup> Wells 244.

<sup>54</sup> The Norfolk questions and answers are reported in Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas* 788; and in Lionel Crocker, "The Campaign of Stephen A. Douglas in the South, 1860," *Antislavery and Disunion, 1858-1861: Studies in the Rhetoric of Compromise and Conflict*, ed. J. J. Auer (New York: Harper & Row, 1963) 264. Crocker says that the questions came at the end of his prepared address, and Johannsen states that they were given to Douglas "midway through his speech." In either case, it is clear that they represent a deviation from his prepared remarks.

<sup>55</sup> Crocker 265.

<sup>56</sup> Stephen A. Douglas, [Speech at Chicago, Illinois, Delivered October 5, 1860], *Illinois State Register* (Springfield) 9 October 1860.

<sup>57</sup> Stephen A. Douglas, [Speech at Memphis, Tennessee, Delivered October 24, 1860], *Memphis Daily Appeal* 25 October 1860. Interestingly, when "popular sovereignty" became controversial, Douglas tried to repair the principle by giving it a new name. This effort was largely unsuccessful. Johannsen, in "Stephen A Douglas and the South," *The Journal of Southern History* 33 (1967): 43-48, argues that in Douglas's first tour of the South in 1860 his emphasis was more on popular sovereignty and that it was during his second tour that emphasis shifted to the preservation of the Union. If such a shift does occur in his speeches, it is extremely subtle. We read these speeches as essentially consistent.

<sup>58</sup> Stephen A. Douglas, "The Montgomery Speech of Stephen A. Douglas," *Journal of Southern History* 5 (1939): 551. The Montgomery speech may be the most interesting of these Southern speeches, and is the most widely available. It is a long and rambling affair, showing the strain both of Douglas's speaking schedule and of addressing a community that the previous evening had pelted his company with rotting eggs and tomatoes. David R. Barbee and Milledge L. Bonham, Jr., who edited it for the journal, call the speech "an excellent summary of the Douglas view of the slavery question" (528); Wells calls it the "worst performance of his tour" (254). These, of course, are not incompatible judgments.

<sup>59</sup> Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas* 804.

<sup>60</sup> Johannsen, *Letters* 499.

<sup>61</sup> Wells 261

<sup>62</sup> Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas* 819-822. In a private letter to August Belmont, Douglas indicates that he might "vote to extend the Missouri line as I proposed to do in 1848," but that it was not his preferred plan. His lingering support for non-intervention is evident in his declaration that "*Nothing will do any good which does not take the slavery question out of Congress forever*" (Johannsen, *Letters* 505, emphasis as in original).

<sup>63</sup> Johannsen, *Letters* 509.

<sup>64</sup> Stephen A. Douglas, [Speech to Illinois State Legislature, Springfield, Delivered April 25, 1861], *Illinois State Journal* 26 April 1861.

<sup>65</sup> Stephen A. Douglas, [Speech at Chicago, Delivered May 1, 1861], *Chicago Tribune* 2 May 1861. This language is nearly the same as that Douglas used in 1846 in defense of the Mexican War.

<sup>66</sup> A symbol that serves this purpose is known as a *condensation symbol* because it condenses a host of different meanings and connotations. See Edward Sapir, "Symbolism," *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences* (New York: Macmillan, 1934) 492.

<sup>67</sup> *Congressional Globe* 33:1, 338.

<sup>68</sup> *Congressional Globe* 33:1, 332.

<sup>69</sup> Johannsen, *Letters* 327.

<sup>70</sup> Angle 168.

<sup>71</sup> Wells 98.

<sup>72</sup> Angle 350, 374.

<sup>73</sup> Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas* 770.

<sup>74</sup> Zarefsky 133.

<sup>75</sup> On August 22, 1862, Lincoln answered an editorial that Horace Greeley had placed in the *New York Tribune*. Greeley had demanded emancipation for all slaves. Lincoln answered, in part, that: "My paramount object in this struggle *is* to save the Union, and is *not* either to save or to destroy slavery. If I could save the Union without freeing *any* slave I would do it, and if I could save it by freeing *all* the slaves I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone I would also do that. What I do about slavery, and the colored race, I do because I believe it helps to save the Union; and what I forbear, I forbear because I do *not* believe it would help to save the Union." Greeley printed Lincoln's response in the *Tribune* on August 25, 1862. See Roy P. Basler, ed., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, vol. 5 (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1953) 388-389.

<sup>76</sup> Jasinski 455.

<sup>77</sup> Chaim Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric*, trans. John Wilkinson and Purcell Weaver (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969) 80-83.

<sup>78</sup> James R. Andrews, "Reflections of the National Character in American Rhetoric," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 57 (1971): 316.

<sup>79</sup> Lincoln, in his response to Horace Greeley of August 22, 1862, seems to be attempting to negotiate a tension between the demands of the particular situation and an enduring principle of his own. He closes that letter: "I have here stated my purpose according to my view of official duty; and I intend no modification of my oft-expressed personal wish that all men everywhere could be free." See Basler 389.

<sup>80</sup> Martin J. Medhurst, "Postponing the Social Agenda: Reagan's Strategy and Tactics," *Western Journal of Speech Communication* 48 (1984): 263, 273.

<sup>81</sup> David F. Ericson, *The Shaping of American Liberalism: The Debates over Ratification, Nullification, and Slavery* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993) 119.

<sup>82</sup> Medhurst 270; Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* (1950; rpt. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969) 137-142.

<sup>83</sup> Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 80.