

Lincoln vs. Douglas Over the Republican Ideal

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In accepting the Illinois Republican Party's nomination to oppose incumbent Stephen A. Douglas in the 1858 United States Senate race, Abraham Lincoln quoted the Bible to captivate his audience and to prophetically inform his fellow citizens that the "ultimate extinction" of slavery was a national obligation¹:

"A house divided against itself cannot stand." I believe this government cannot endure permanently half slave and half free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved—I do not expect the house to fall—but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing, or all the other. Either the opponents of slavery will arrest the further spread of it, and place it where the public mind shall rest in the belief that it is in the course of ultimate extinction; or its advocates will push it forward, till it shall become alike lawful in all the States, old as well as new—North as well as South.²

Coming in the wake of "the great revival which swept across the country" in early 1858,³ it was neither the first nor the last time that Lincoln used Biblical allusions to invite his mostly Protestant listeners to recall the hoary traditions of their free wage labor culture and to look toward a future in which those traditions would be forever secure.

On July 9, 1858, Douglas responded to Lincoln's attack on his doctrine of popular sovereignty, which claimed the country could remain half slave and half

free if local citizens so desired, with similarly evocative and prophetic language. As he uttered the impassioned thoughts which, forty-three days later, would be repeated in the first of their seven historic debates, he endeavored to make all Americans realize that they must harken to the past if they were to maintain the future “status of slavery” as a “local responsibility”⁴:

The fathers of the Revolution, and the sages who made the Constitution, well understood that . . . the great varieties of soil, of production and of interests, in a Republic as large as this, required different local and domestic regulations in each locality, adapted to the wants and interests of each separate State, and for that reason it was provided in the Federal Constitution that the thirteen original States should remain sovereign and supreme within their own limits in regard to all that was local, and internal, and domestic. . . .

The framers of the Constitution well understood that . . . Uniformity in local and domestic affairs would be destructive of State rights, of State sovereignty, of personal liberty and personal freedom. Uniformity is the parent of despotism the world over, not only in politics, but in religion.⁵

As this advocacy of popular sovereignty and self-government reverberated through the following debates, it clashed with many of Lincoln’s contrasting arguments and generated a boisterous discussion about the American republican experiment.

The discussion itself came in the dramatic aftermath of such tumultuous events as the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska bill, the beating of Senator Charles Sumner, the Dred Scott decision, and the violence in “Bleeding Kansas.” In the context of that crisis-ridden atmosphere, Lincoln and Douglas argued their most deeply held convictions before huge crowds⁶ of a highly politicized and largely Protestant Illinois electorate of farmers, craftsmen, shopkeepers, and wage laborers. These people were deeply imbued with a set of beliefs, values, and social practices that have been collectively described as the republican ideal.⁷ And, since the controversy over popular sovereignty and slavery in the territories reflected as well as evoked the electorate’s republican beliefs about equality, self-government, and personal independence, the two debaters argued over which of them was correct in his claim to be preserving the true inheritance and goals of the founding fathers. In this respect, the contest became a verbal battle which each man sought to win by emphasizing a different aspect of a venerated republican ideal. The Lincoln-Douglas debates were not just about slavery and popular sovereignty but about the republican ideal itself.

While spreading their views to larger statewide and national audiences through the press, Douglas, in defense of his whites-only popular sovereignty

doctrine, emphasized the feature of the ideal related to self-government, and Lincoln, in defense of his concept of equality of opportunity, stressed the equal rights and mutualistic tradition of the ideal.⁸ Lincoln was, after all, the quintessential product of a culture in which mutualism may be denoted as a non-hierarchical social network of independent but mutually helpful producers who practiced self-help and who shared a belief that limits should be placed on individual free choice. Yet, while Lincoln asserted a view of human equality which meshed with the equal rights and mutualistic tradition, Douglas's stress on self-government was accompanied by a more modern market-place notion of free choice. Even as Douglas spoke to men with the language of the past, he unwittingly let them glimpse a future that was at odds with the residual values of mutualism and equal rights that still influenced their social practices. Lincoln's argument for equality of opportunity, on the other hand, looked backward in the direction of the artisan, small producer, and farming heritage of the Illinois household economy.

While Lincoln's outlook on human equality had a dynamic and progressive social dimension, most of the economic modernity found in his mid-nineteenth century idea of equality of opportunity is much more the product of historical hindsight than the product of Lincoln's foresight. Lincoln's lifelong devotion to a society that promoted the right "to rise" did not make him as forward-looking as historians such as Charles Beard and Gabor S. Boritt have asserted.⁹ In fact, while Richard Hofstadter and David Wrono have found that Lincoln neither anticipated nor desired the form of the U.S. economy that arose after the Civil War,¹⁰ Lincoln critic Melvin E. Bradford has contended that Lincoln was merely a political opportunist who was no more devoted to his "right-to-rise" concept than he was to any other principle that served his short-range political interest.¹¹ Daniel Walker Howe, on the other hand, has strongly argued that Lincoln's economic ideas were considerably more backward-looking than futuristic. In Howe's opinion:

The triumph of the northern bourgeoisie ushered in an era very different from anything Lincoln could have expected or wanted. His objective, in the broadest sense, was to defend and extend the kind of free society he had known in Springfield. This was a society of small entrepreneurs, market-oriented farmers, young men working for others until they could save enough to set up for themselves, and striving professionals like himself.¹²

These, then, were the social contours and the human aspirations of people in a society that Lincoln hoped would "not pass away."¹³

Indeed, as Howe indicated, Lincoln always propounded economic ideas, including the concept of equality of opportunity, which were never far from the Jeffersonian vision of a nation of yeoman farmers. In fact, Lincoln revealed this

economic predisposition less than a year after the last Lincoln-Douglas debate by arguing against greed and vast disparities of wealth to an assembly of people at the Wisconsin State Agricultural Society:

The ambition for broad acres leads to poor farming, even, with men of energy. I scarcely ever knew a mammoth farm to sustain itself; much less to return a profit upon the outlay. I have more than once known a man to spend a respectable fortune upon one; fail and leave it; and then some man of more modest aims, get a small fraction of the ground, and make a good living upon it. Mammoth farms are like tools or weapons, which are too heavy to be handled. Ere long they are thrown aside, at a great loss.¹⁴

Although Lincoln constantly advocated the elimination of artificial barriers to economic advancement, he did not promote his concept of equality of opportunity as a means of obtaining great wealth and certainly not as a means to dominate others. He shared, in short, the republican and egalitarian outlook of his frontier contemporaries, and, in keeping with the small producers' aversion to monopolies, argued that "advancement—improvement in condition—is the order of things in a *society of equals*."¹⁵

This outlook meant that Lincoln envisioned a society in which individuals and society would advance together. He imagined that such an opportunity would exist only within the economic context of a society of independent, small producers. In that context, his outlook on racial equality was rooted in an equal rights tradition that contended all producers were deserving of the full product of their labor. Indeed, before Illinois voters, Lincoln dramatized the injustice of black slavery by showing that, because it deprived blacks of their rightful earnings, its extension threatened to erode white liberties and prosperity as well. Even that contention—at once practical and principled—was politically effective only because most Illinoisans were still immersed in an economy that spawned powerful republican ideal sentiments.

Although only the remnants of a true household economy existed in Illinois by the late 1850s, that economy was barely a few decades in the past, and memories of that lifestyle still survived. Those memories were sustained by the agrarian nature of the Illinois economy, which, in 1860, was still more than eighty-five percent rural.¹⁶ In that year, the closest existing economic profile to conditions of 1858, 1,466,406 people were living on the land.¹⁷ The data on this farming population indicate that, of those who held land, more than sixty-seven percent held between 3-100 acres, thirty-two percent held between 100-500 acres, and less than one percent held more than 500 acres.¹⁸ (See TABLE I.) Creating a large middling farming class, this widespread ownership of land and, more importantly, an eighty-eight percent increase in new farms between 1850

and 1860,¹⁹ meant that the material basis for the republican and small producer ideal was still intact in the 1858 Illinois countryside.

Likewise, Illinois had the urban socio-economic infrastructure for a flourish-

TABLE I Illinois Farm Ownership in 1860				
ACRES & OWNERS				
Acres:	3-20	20-100	100-500	500 and Above
Owners:	8,414	87,210	45,532	1,182
Source: <i>Agriculture of the U.S. in 1860: Compiled from the Eighth Census.</i> Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1864, 197.				

ing republican ideal. Data indicate that, in the category of people who were not farm owners, farm laborers or their dependents, very few people were wage laborers or factory workers. The 1860 census listed only 33,928 people as laborers, and, significantly, only twenty-seven people were listed, or listed themselves, as “factory hands.”²⁰ While many of the laborers undoubtedly were outdoor workers, hundreds of others worked in small manufacturing establishments. Still, there were only 4,268 manufacturing firms in 1860,²¹ and very few of them employed more than ten persons per firm. In Cook county (including Chicago), for example, there was an average of only 11.9 persons per firm.²² In no other county with manufacturers with capital investments of over one million dollars was the average number of employees per firm so high.²³ Thus, excluding common laborers and considering only those occupations in which over one thousand people were listed, only 4,919 machinists, miners, and railroadmen were employed by firms that were likely to hire more than ten persons. These people were vastly outnumbered by the 49,751 people who held occupations that identified them as small shopkeepers or skilled workers in the artisan or independent producer tradition.²⁴ (See TABLE II.) In short, out of a state population of 1,711,951 people, only 22,968 people were employed as wage earners in manufacturing establishments in 1860.²⁵ Their numbers were growing but only slightly more rapidly than the growth of new farms.²⁶ And since a mere twenty-seven people were identified as “factory hands” in 1860, it appears that, among Illinois urban wage workers, very few were conscious of the dependent

TABLE II

Illinois Non-farm Occupations in 1860

INDUSTRIAL and MANUFACTURING OCCUPATIONS
with OVER 1,000 PEOPLE

Machinists	1,356
Miners	1,049
Railroadmen	2,514
TOTAL	4,919

SKILLED TRADES and SHOPKEEPER OCCUPATIONS
with OVER 1,000 PEOPLE

Blacksmiths	6,404	Merchants	5,325
Butchers	1,343	Painters & Varnishers	2,053
Cabinet-makers	1,183	Printers	1,004
Carpenters	12,668	Seamstresses	1,999
Coopers	2,803	Shoemakers	3,947
Grocers	1,936	Tailors & Tailoresses	2,589
Innkeepers	1,054	Wheelwrights	3,098
Masons	2,318	TOTAL	49,751

Source: *Population of the U.S. in 1860: Compiled from the Eighth Census.*
Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1864, 656-79.

condition which lurked over the economic horizon.

Given such mid-nineteenth century socio-economic conditions, Douglas's advocacy of free choice, on the part of voters, had a distinctly modern quality. Moreover, by promoting his whites-only, self-government, free choice idea, Douglas confined his notion of equality to one race and explicitly created an artificial barrier to advancement that ignored work and merit. This could have been perceived by many farmers and workers in the more developed areas of Illinois as potentially threatening their social mobility and the fruit of their labor.²⁷ At the very least, the extension of slavery was perceived by some as truncating

white economic opportunities in the territories.

Giving credence to this view, the partisan Republican *Daily Illinois State Journal* occasionally ran news items that testified to a public sentiment that saw slavery and its extension as threatening white, free labor advancement and prosperity. For instance, less than a month before the opening of the Lincoln-Douglas debates, a Missouri correspondent could be found not only decrying the economic disadvantages of slavery but also extolling the promise of free labor in these words: "Look at free Illinois . . . and see what the fires of electric free labor can accomplish . . . Why may not Missouri? . . . What lacks she yet? One thing only—she lacks free white labor."²⁸ Then, on the eve of the 1858 election, the *Journal* challenged its white readers to remember the past and to stand up for their economic futures:

Freemen of Illinois [have] you thoughtfully considered . . . the effect of [your vote] . . . upon the land of your choice and the free institutions you have cherished from your youth, and fondly hoped to transmit to those who are to succeed you . . . [if you claim] for white laborers the right to settle in any territory of the Republic apart from the contact or competition of slaves and slave drivers [vote Republican]. If [on the contrary] you stand on the platform of the Slave Democracy, then vote for Stephen A. Douglas.²⁹

Some months later, the focus of the *Journal's* concern was more pointedly on the Democratic Party's effort to curb free labor's economic opportunities in the territories. At first, in January and then in February of 1859, Congressional Democrats, Douglas included, almost unanimously blocked Republican efforts to secure homestead rights for settlers in the territories. Trumpeting the Republican, albeit soon defeated, effort, the pro-Lincoln *Journal* looked to the past in order to editorialize on behalf of a future Jeffersonian society of yeoman farmers. Writing that Congressman Grow's "amendment" for protecting the existing territorial settlers on public lands from the claims of land speculators and slave owners "looks for the basis of the government in yeomanry, and not a landed aristocracy," the editor claimed that Grow's amendment "prefers the farmer to the planter, the many to the few, [and] those who labor with their own hands not oligarchs who subsist upon the labor of others." Based on this perspective, the editor contended, "Being thus a [d]emocratic measure, the [bill] was supported by every member of the Republican party." On the other hand, the *Journal* editor concluded, "The South" and its Northern Democratic "allies" will "oppose the bill . . . as a measure unpropitious to the spread of slavery."³⁰

Facing such Jeffersonian rhetoric and its economic claims on the future, Douglas confined his comments about whites-only free choice to local community decision making. But, the logical extension of his outlook presaged the

coming of an industrial society. It unintentionally forecast a fragmented society of individuals who would assert the market-place ethic of a free choice in everything. Indeed, as if anticipating that development, the partisan Democratic *Daily Illinois State Register* noted:

Judge Douglas believes that popular sovereignty has some other questions on which to exert itself besides the institution of slavery—that there are other questions and other interests in relation to which the people have an inalienable right to be consulted.³¹

Already, in his speech in Chicago on July 9, 1858, Douglas not only propounded his recurrent self-government theme, but he pointed toward a future filled with individual choices. “You must,” he argued, “allow the people to decide for themselves whether [slavery] is a good or an evil.” After all, he continued, “You allow them to decide for themselves whether they desire a Maine liquor law or not; you allow them to decide for themselves what kind of common schools they will have.” And, he went on, “You allow them to decide for themselves the relations between husband and wife, parent and child, guardian and ward.” Finally, he emphasized, “Whenever you put a limitation upon the right of any people to decide what laws they want, you have destroyed the fundamental principle of selfgovernment.”³² Illustrating its full accord with the fundamental principle underlying such remarks, the *Register*, five months after Douglas’s Chicago speech, printed a news item which extolled the virtue of free choice even in extremis:

In Vermont, recently, a young man flogged his brother severely for preventing his father from hanging himself. On being remonstrated with for whipping his brother for saving his father’s life, he replied: “I wanted him to know that it was his business *to let father have his own way!*”³³

Opposing the *Register* and Douglas’s view that white voters should have unrestricted, legal, free choices in virtually everything, Lincoln tapped into the household economy’s residual and mutualistic notion that limits should be set on individual free choice.³⁴ Then, basing his claims on the historical assertion that the founders had set slavery on a course toward ultimate extinction,³⁵ he argued that the voters of a territory did not have a right to vote in favor of a “wrong.” At Ottawa, he paraphrased his deceased Whig mentor, Henry Clay, to shrewdly appeal to people who had been raised on Biblical moral precepts. With such words as “moral lights,” “sacred,” “judgment,” and “soul,” Lincoln created a deliberate religious aura for his political opposition to popular sovereignty and free choice:

When [Douglas] invites any people, willing to have slavery, to establish it, he is blowing out the moral lights around us. When he says he “cares not whether slavery is voted down or voted up”—that it is a sacred right of self-government—he is, in my judgment, penetrating the human soul and eradicating the light of reason and the love of liberty in this American people.³⁶

According to Lincoln, Douglas’s “new” principle of “allowing the people to do as they please”³⁷ was selfish, dangerous, and anti-traditional. In the Ottawa debate, Lincoln mentioned the selfish aspect:

This *declared* indifference, but, as I must think, covert *real* zeal for the spread of slavery, I cannot but hate. I hate it because . . . it forces so many really good men amongst ourselves into an open war with the very fundamental principles of civil liberty—criticizing the Declaration of Independence, and insisting that there is no right principle of action but *self-interest*.³⁸

In the Charleston debate, he used language which implied the looming danger:

To be sure, if we will all stop and allow Judge Douglas and his friends to . . . plant the institution [of slavery] all over the nation . . . there will be peace. But let me ask Judge Douglas how he is going to get the [wrangling] people to do that.³⁹

In the Jonesboro debate, he pressed the anti-traditional point:

I say when this Government was first established, it was the policy of its founders to prohibit the spread of slavery . . . But Judge Douglas and his friends have broken up that policy, and placed it upon a new basis by which it is to become national and perpetual.⁴⁰

While such arguments presumed that Douglas’s notion of a free choice in everything (morality included) lay outside the inherited small producer/mutualistic and republican beliefs of many voters, the contemporary validity of such a presumptive judgment is powerfully suggested by a *Journal* news item which appeared during the Lincoln-Douglas debates. It noted that the Springfield court house was filled to its “utmost capacity” by those “men of strong arms and generous hearts” who had come to hear the blacksmith Tom Cowan speak. Yet, significantly, the account centered on the crowd’s roaring approval of Republican James C. Conkling’s attack on those who would tolerate unlimited free choice

regarding “diversity of institutions” and “polygamy” as well as his attack on Douglas’s version of self-government, i.e., “bogus Democracy.” “J. C. Conkling,” the news item read, “laid bare the hypocritical [sic] pretensions of the bogus Democracy.” And, the account continued, he “exposed their new fangled doctrine of diversity of institutions, (particularly the institution of polygamy, which is now openly defended by the orators of the bogus) to the keen edge of his satire.” When Conkling concluded, the *Journal* reported, “His speech was . . . repeatedly and vociferously cheered and applauded.”⁴¹ Long favoring such popular sentiments, it is no surprise that the Republican editor of the *Journal* habitually expressed a similar and mutualistic outlook about placing community limits on free choice. Maintaining, for example, that the larger national community should limit free choice and should dictate ethical standards, the editor wrote, “But to exterminate polygamy, Congress must take the matter into its own hands—cast aside its absurd notions about popular sovereignty and pass laws making a plurality of wives a high crime.”⁴² While such Republican arguments against popular sovereignty were usually focused on the extension of slavery, these few samples of public sentiment, regarding individual religious preference, illustrate that some people not only believed that the principle of free choice was morally dangerous but also new.

In fact, many writers in the *Journal*, like Lincoln and other Republicans, denounced the nature of Douglas’s notions of choice and diversity as ahistorical. Conveying something of the popularity of this viewpoint, the *Journal* carried the lengthy remarks which Mr. M. Hay made to the Young Men’s Republican Club in August of 1858. Hay’s expressions were typical of the predominant Republican view that neither political tradition nor inherited ethics gave the residents of a territory the right to legalize slavery. Making clear reference to not only a public sentiment opposing slavery but to the mutualistic idea that individual free choice was rightly limited by the larger community, Hay claimed that for “fifty years in our history, there had been comparative unanimity in the public mind in reference to slavery. . . . That sentiment was that slavery . . . was . . . an evil.” Indeed, Hay argued, “These were the sentiments of Washington, Franklin, Jefferson, Patrick Henry and all the Revolutionary sages.” Moreover, he continued, the “mass of the people concurred with those Statesmen in these views.” And, he maintained, the policy of “our early statesmen . . . of excluding slavery from the new Territories was not selfish or sectional; it had in view the common welfare of the whole country.” But, now, he complained, “How different the object of this *new policy* [popular sovereignty], engrafted into the Democratic creed!”⁴³ In short, along with Lincoln, the partisan writers in the Republican *Journal* enrolled history and the lingering social practices of mutualistic republicanism to oppose free choice for the white people of a territory.

It was enough to make the pro-Democratic *Register* complain about the Republican proclivity to interfere in the historic right of people “to rule themselves.” The *Register* maintained that the Republicans were wrong in harping that

“congress, the representatives of some other people, have that right.”⁴⁴ And, Douglas, opposing the onslaught of the Republican view of tradition, led his fellow Democrats by charging that he, and not Lincoln or the Republicans, was the man who was attempting to preserve tradition. On the 1858 campaign trail, his arguments and his style of speaking contrasted sharply with the self-deprecating humility of his tall rival. And, although Douglas had not resided in his Chicago home since 1843, he was well-acquainted with his state and very adept at campaigning among its constituents. When on the platform, the five foot four inch “Little Giant” used his deep voice and his extraordinary energy to diminish the physical presence of his six-foot, four-inch opponent. Douglas appeared especially adept at altering his forensic style to suit the “character of his audiences.”⁴⁵ As reprinted in the *Register*, the Portsmouth, New Hampshire *Gazette* praised Douglas for having

“. . . a popular manner, under all circumstances adapting itself exactly to his audience, with just enough egotism to give his harangues the force and piquancy of personal appeal, and just enough fire to kindle the enthusiasm of his hearers.”⁴⁶

Douglas certainly could be combative before crowds when the vote, one way or the other, was not in doubt. But he was more conciliatory and defensive before crowds when votes might still be gained. In either case, while his speeches were delivered with a “spontaneous quality,” they were always “carefully organized.”⁴⁷ Moreover, when he spoke, he had a commanding habit of bowing, smiling, gesturing, and pacing. His voice carried far, and many of his arguments struck responsive chords with his listeners.

At the outset of the first debate, the “Little Giant” won the applause of many when he challenged Lincoln’s assertion that “A house divided against itself cannot stand.” In repeating the white-only, free choice theme of his pre-debate Chicago speech, he argued that the founders realized that the U.S. required a diversity in its “laws and institutions in different localities.”⁴⁸ Lincoln and the Republicans, he contended, were attempting to destroy the founders’ “great principle of self-government”⁴⁹ and to create a “uniformity in the local laws and institutions of the different States.”⁵⁰ Such an effort, Douglas declared at Jonesboro, openly invited “warfare between the North and the South, to be carried on with ruthless vengeance, until the one section or the other shall be driven to the wall, and become the victim of the rapacity of the other.”⁵¹ Besides, he continued, Lincoln and the so-called black Republicans (alleged white abolitionists) were seeking to upset the founders’ original views on human equality. At this point, Douglas made a direct challenge to Lincoln’s concept of equality of opportunity and so to the equal rights tradition which underlay it.

When, in Jonesboro (and elsewhere), Douglas argued that the principle of equality was restricted to whites, he not only attacked Lincoln’s opposing claim, but he asserted a white supremacist position that was sustained by a conventional

racist wisdom that Lincoln, albeit a racist himself, did not fully share.⁵² Douglas had a powerful argument because it not only harmonized with widespread, pro-white, racial sentiments, but it was sustained by the traditional political practice of whites-only voting. Pressing these advantages, Douglas contended that the signers of the Declaration of Independence had excluded non-whites from the principle that all men are created equal. As he explained, “They desired to express by that phrase white men, men of European birth and European descent, and had no reference either to the negro . . . or any other inferior and degraded race, when they spoke of the equality of men.”⁵³ His own position, meanwhile, was established in the unmistakable language of white power: “I hold that this Government was made on the white basis, by white men, for the benefit of white men and their posterity forever.”⁵⁴ In Charleston he drove home the same point and added, “I declare that a negro ought not to be a citizen” because “he is a negro, belonging to a race incapable of self-government, and for that reason ought not to be on an equality with white men.”⁵⁵ After granting whites a superiority over the “mongrel” races, Douglas gave whites, with the principle of self-government, the unequivocal freedom to determine, by voting, all questions pertaining to state and local concerns. Empowered with popular sovereignty, whites could do as they pleased “on all things, local and domestic.”⁵⁶

In Douglas’s view, such untrammled self-government already had built a nation that “double[d] our geographical extent,” and had “increased in [its] population, in wealth, and in power” until “we have risen from a weak and feeble power to become the terror and admiration of the civilized world.”⁵⁷ This American example of white self-government and free choice, Douglas maintained at Freeport, was the “hope of the friends of freedom throughout the world.”⁵⁸ But, Douglas worried, such an achievement in white self-rule was put at risk by Lincoln’s erroneous concepts of equality and uniformity. Those ideas, Douglas argued, threatened to tear the Union apart, and, thus, to deprive the “downtrodden and oppressed people who are suffering under European despotism” of “the only resting place . . . of freedom and self-government” in the world.⁵⁹ Yet, all could still be saved, he replied to Lincoln at Charleston, if the “fundamental principle that the people of each State and each Territory ought to be left free to form and regulate their own domestic institutions in their own way” were followed.⁶⁰ This argument—part of a tradition of whites-only equality in America—was especially persuasive when taken, as it was, from the wardrobe of an inherited republican ideal and cloaked in the garb of a self-government tradition.

To oppose such contentions, Lincoln had to be very careful in his statements. While he shared some of Douglas’s racial prejudices, he was not an ideological white supremacist, and he had to challenge Douglas’s views without placing himself too far outside of the predominately pro-white racist attitudes of his listeners. Besides, if Douglas’s vision of a society composed of individuals making free choices in everything were prescient, Lincoln’s vision of human

equality also went beyond the mid-nineteenth century racial confines of a white skin. Still, if Lincoln's argument for human equality awakened problematic racial sentiments, it remained logically within the republican ideal's equal rights and mutualistic tradition. And, given the popular sentiments expressed in such Republican newspapers as the *Journal*, he had reason to believe that his argument would find favor with many in the electorate.

Certainly, the editor of the *Journal* believed that even Democrats could sympathize with Lincoln's small "r" republican appeal. On one occasion, for example, the editor quoted several pro-Democratic party papers which had denigrated the free labor system and had praised slavery as natural. Then, after noting their stand, he called upon Illinois Democrats to remember their equal rights and small producer roots and to switch their votes. "Democrats of Illinois," he wrote, "mechanics, laboring men, farmers . . . will you countenance and sustain a [Democratic] party which openly makes such avowals . . . Is it," he strongly emphasized, "Jeffersonian Democracy?" Then, following the rhetorical sting of his question, he proclaimed, "We want the working men of Illinois and of the country at large to understand that a party which will thus proscribe and make slaves of one class, has violated the rights of all classes."⁶¹

Despite the force of this logic, it met powerful resistance in the tradition and practice of whites-only self-rule. "The very idea," the pro-Democratic *Register* stated for its sympathetic readers, "of making the colored race the equal of the white, is revolting."⁶² Considering the popularity of this opinion, Lincoln was obliged to shape a message about equality that did not completely alienate racist voters. He attempted to calm white racial concerns by stating his belief that whites should be in a superior social and political position to blacks. At Charleston, he commented that inasmuch as "there is a physical difference between the white and black races which I believe will forever forbid the two races living together on terms of social and political equality. . . . I as much as any other man am in favor of having the superior position assigned to the white race."⁶³ Yet, despite such a comment, it is significant that Lincoln's view of the principle of equality was such that he maintained that all people had the same rights. At Galesburg, he made this point very clear:

The Judge has alluded to the Declaration of Independence, and insisted that negroes are not included in that Declaration . . . I believe the entire records of the world, from the date of the Declaration of Independence up to within three years ago, may be searched in vain for one single affirmation, from one single man, that the negro was not included in the Declaration of independence.⁶⁴

Throughout the seven debates, Lincoln's fundamental position on this subject did not vary.⁶⁵

So, while creating a definition of equality that was consistent with the racial prejudice of his time, Lincoln, nevertheless, tried to draw racially proud whites toward a more complete understanding of the Declaration's great ideal. Indeed, it is likely that, among the free wage laboring and small producing class, even some of the most anti-black of Lincoln's listeners could sympathize with Lincoln's Ottawa definition of equality:

I hold that . . . the negro . . . is not my equal in many respects— certainly not in color, perhaps not in moral or intellectual endowment. But in the right to eat the bread, without the leave of anybody else, which his own hand earns, *he is my equal and the equal of Judge Douglas, and the equal of every living man.*⁶⁶

Terming this understanding of equality “distributive justice or proportional equality,” political philosopher Harry V. Jaffa has pointed out that such a view of equality meant that it did not guarantee equality of outcome, only an equal right to receive the “fruit” of one's own productivity.⁶⁷ And, within the Illinois electoral milieu, it meant that, in a practical sense, Lincoln surpassed Douglas in asserting a principle that was not only consistent with the racial prejudice of the times, but one that was consistent with the small producer and equal rights belief in receiving a full reward for the value of one's labor.

Beyond that, Lincoln and his fellow Republican party members blunted the charges that their ideas on equality made them racial egalitarians or abolitionists or racial integrationists (“amalgamationists”) by adroitly blending the campaign against the extension of slavery with the sort of familiar cultural practices that would appeal to the pro-white sentiments of both the native-born and former Know-Nothings.⁶⁸ As when he anchored his concept of equal opportunity in the equal rights tradition, Lincoln proved especially gifted at harmonizing his ideas with strong cultural currents. In accordance with his party's effort and despite his private contempt for Know-Nothing bigotry, he had no difficulty in publicly attempting to attract former Know-Nothing voters to his position on race and slavery.⁶⁹ Indeed, in Lincoln's battle to overcome Douglas's assertion that he favored complete racial equality, Lincoln appealed to some of the same cultural sentiments that had given rise to the Illinois Know-Nothing movement (love of republicanism, belief in internal conspiracies against liberty, and a desire for crusading activity). What is noteworthy about this appeal, however, is that the success which Lincoln had in this endeavor may well have further undermined the cultural attraction which Douglas's whites-only concept of free choice had for some voters.

At Ottawa, for instance, Lincoln fought the fire of Douglas's pro-white racial appeal with the ice of a powerful cultural symbol that appealed to another aspect of the Know-Nothing and native-born sense of republicanism. In repeating the primary claim that he had made in his “House Divided” speech, Lincoln

suggested that Douglas was part of a pro-slavery “*tendency*.”⁷⁰ Through the use of a splendid literary device, Lincoln implied that Douglas was part of an anti-republican conspiracy. In depicting this conspiracy, Lincoln created a metaphorical house which was being constructed by four pro-slavery craftsmen (Stephen Douglas, Franklin Pierce, Roger Taney, and James Buchanan). As a compelling analogy for the slave system advocates who, Lincoln warned, were threatening to tear down the original house of the fathers, he said,

We cannot absolutely know that these exact adaptations are the result of preconcert, but when we see a lot of framed timbers, different portions of which we know have been gotten out a different times and places, and by different workmen—Stephen [Douglas], Franklin [Pierce], Roger [Taney] and James [Buchanan], for instance—and when we see these timbers joined together, and see they exactly make the frame of a house or a mill, all the tenons and mortises exactly fitting, and all the lengths and proportion of the different pieces exactly adapted to their respective places, and not a piece too many or too few—not omitting even scaffolding—or if a single piece be lacking [the next Supreme court pro-slavery decision], we see the place in the frame exactly fitted and prepared yet to bring such a piece in—in such a case we find it impossible not to believe that Stephen and Franklin and Roger and James, all understood one another from the beginning, and all worked upon a common plan or draft drawn before the first blow [Kansas-Nebraska bill] was struck.⁷¹

By portraying Douglas as actively facilitating a conspiracy-like plot to foster the spread of slavery, the great strength of Lincoln’s metaphor came from its psychological appeal to those thousands of voters who lived in a republican political culture that had long stressed the “existence of internal conspiracies designed to overthrow republican government.”⁷²

Then, allowing his listeners but little time for a dread of an anti-republican conspiracy to sink in, Lincoln went on to chide Douglas’s views on self-government because they ignored the greater principle of the Declaration of Independence. In words teeming with both spoken and unspoken cultural reminders of the small producers’ anti-monopoly, anti-aristocratic, and pro-egalitarian heritage, Lincoln condemned Douglas’s pernicious popular influence and his white, free choice idea because such ideas helped the class of men who would “repress all tendencies to liberty and ultimate emancipation” by claiming that the “negro has nothing in the Declaration of Independence.”⁷³ Amid so many powerful cultural symbols invoked in the debate, this type of argument, when joined to the larger Republican party campaign effort, helped to reverse the

priorities of the Know-Nothings from nativist xenophobia to an opposition to slavery's expansion, and it won a substantial number of new and younger voters to Republican ranks.⁷⁴

Unable to shake the conspiratorial, pro-slavery image which Lincoln's literary device had cast over him, Douglas was on the defensive in debate after debate. During his rejoinder in the first debate, he merely moaned sarcastically, "His [Lincoln's] vanity is wounded because I will not go into that beautiful figure of his about the building of a house."⁷⁵ But in the second debate, at Freeport, he was forced by the continuing pressure of the house metaphor and by Lincoln's shrewdly designed questions⁷⁶ to commit, as far as many voters were concerned, political suicide. Hoisted upon his own petard of popular sovereignty and his acceptance of the Supreme Court's Dred Scott decision, Douglas could not extricate himself from the conspiratorial implications of Lincoln's house metaphor, and he could not assure pro-slavery voters that he supported the effort to extend slavery. By the sixth debate, in Quincy, Douglas had admitted that his policies would perpetuate slavery "forever."⁷⁷ This admission, as Lincoln's metaphor had undertaken to illustrate, made Douglas a leading architect on a "house" that would become *all slave* if Douglas and his allies had their way. In the end, Douglas could only assert that his doctrine of whites-only free choice made the voters, and not himself, the true creators of the "house"—whatever it might become.

To combat this assertion, Lincoln blended the small producer and free labor economic interest with morality to show whites that it was not black slaves but white slave owners who constituted the gravest threat to white liberties and ethical conduct. And it was to his great advantage that he was speaking to people who easily thought and spoke to him in a religio-political language similar to that with which he addressed them. Verifying the truth of this observation, the *Chicago Press and Tribune*, as reprinted in the *Journal*, used the rhetoric and offered the sentiments that demonstrated the existence of such people in the rapidly growing Republican party. With words like "temptation" and "God-given," the *Tribune* automatically linked religious terminology with political republicanism in its expression of praise for Lincoln. "'The Republicans owe him much,'" the writer contended, "'but the weight of their debt is chiefly in this: that under no temptation . . . has he let down our standard in the least.'" And, having avoided "temptation," Lincoln, or so the *Tribune* stated, upheld the "God-given and glorious principle which is the head and front of Republicanism: 'All men are created equal and are entitled to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.'"⁷⁸

Like the editor of the *Tribune*, Lincoln appealed to people by using a religio-moral rhetoric that was very much in the spirit of the Protestant evangelical tradition. His diction and argument allowed him to appeal to both the anti-monarchical heritage of the small producer and to the moral perspective that took shape within a republican social framework of mutualism and Protestantism. By employing a religious-sounding rhetoric that intensified as the debates pro-

gressed, Lincoln's words reflected his view that the main issue had become the rightness or the wrongness of slavery itself. In the dominant Protestant milieu of Illinois, this gave Lincoln the advantage of debating a man who could be portrayed as morally "indifferent." Besides, as the husband of a Catholic, Douglas was even more vulnerable than the religiously unaffiliated Lincoln to suspicions about his religious outlook.⁷⁹ Sensing Douglas's vulnerability, as the two men approached the last of their debates, Lincoln nagged at Douglas by stressing the immorality of slavery more frequently. Until the fourth debate, he had barely mentioned the word "wrong" when referring to slavery. But, with escalating moral conviction, he denounced slavery as a "wrong" dozens of times in his final two debate appearances.

As he exhorted against the "wrong" of slavery, Lincoln's oratorical style became decidedly more evangelical. Abolitionist speakers were famous for employing that style. And Lincoln was not only around such people, but, as a youth, he had practiced his oratory by copying enthusiastic preachers.⁸⁰ Moreover, concerning the aesthetics of his speeches, the *Journal*, although intensely partisan and panegyric in its praise, was historically prescient in its observation that Lincoln's captivating "speeches are . . . in advance of the age . . . and thus contain those elements which . . . [carry] them beyond the present and makes them useful and beautiful in the future."⁸¹ They were also, it must be added, ethical speeches which had "a moral and religious quality that transcended . . . evangelical dominations."⁸² Indeed, according to the detailed findings in Stephen Hansen's study of 1858 and 1860 Illinois voting patterns, Lincoln's anti-slavery position, his sense of moral urgency, his temperance, and his middle-class respectability all combined to attract even non-evangelicals to his position.⁸³

Seeking the votes of such people in the final debate at Alton, Lincoln surpassed all his previous efforts to capitalize on the ethical beliefs of Christian people submerged in the current and residual values of mutualism and the equal rights tradition.⁸⁴ After Douglas sat down, Lincoln rose to denounce all those who did not look upon slavery as "wrong" in a virtual drumbeat of negatives. Within what must have been an estimated twelve to fifteen emotion-packed minutes, Lincoln used the word "wrong" over thirty-five times.⁸⁵ By redundantly using the word *wrong*, he brilliantly associated his training as a lawyer (repetition and logic) with his inherited religious concepts of right and wrong (moral judgment) to reach an attentive audience. Then, when he claimed that there were only two classes of people on the slavery issue—those who look upon it as wrong and those who do not look upon it as wrong—he polarized his audience in precisely the manner of the abolitionist speakers who saw slavery as a sin and who contended that there could be no compromise with sin. Indifference toward a wrong, Lincoln declared, was tantamount to accepting it as a right. In his words, "all who[,] like Judge Douglas[,] treat it [slavery] as indifferent and do not say it is either right or wrong . . . fall within the general class of those who do not look upon it as a wrong."⁸⁶ Following this damning condemnation and his veritable crescendo of

“wrongs,” Lincoln restated his impassioned belief that slavery was definitely “wrong,” and he vividly asserted that the controversy over it was part of the common man’s “eternal struggle” for justice. In a rhetoric easily associated with Tom Paine’s passionate republicanism, Lincoln appealed to the small producer, anti-monarchical heritage of his republican listeners:

It is the eternal struggle between these two principles—right and wrong—throughout the world. . . . The one is the common right of humanity and the other the divine right of kings. . . . It is the same spirit that says, “You work and toil and earn bread, and I’ll eat it.” No matter in what shape it comes, whether from the mouth of a king . . . or from one race of men . . . enslaving another race, it is the same tyrannical principle.⁸⁷

For Protestants sharing an equal rights tradition, these words not only condemned slavery’s proponents on both economic and ethical grounds, but they demonstrated Lincoln’s literary gift for synthesizing practical interests with lofty ideals.⁸⁸ In the end, when men of the free wage labor class voted for Lincoln, they could not only feel that they were serving their economic interests, but they could feel righteous in doing so.

In effect, Lincoln’s words urged people to use their inherited code of personal morality as a basis for judging a political issue. And, of course, the large portion of the Illinois public who saw life in Protestant moral terms knew that the Biblical punishment for immorality was divine retribution. But Lincoln took them further. He asked them to understand that the secular punishment for condoning the extension of black slavery would be white enslavement. In making this claim, his rhetoric often used evocative spiritual imagery to play on the voters’ fear of losing their personal liberties. His words could even, upon occasion, take on an apocalyptic tone when he referred to the powers of retribution in order to politicize his listeners’ moral sensibilities. For instance, in a passionate post-debate speech in Edwardsville, Illinois, Lincoln employed such spiritually charged diction as “soul,” “hope,” “darkness,” “spirits,” “damned,” and “demon.” With words that were meant to sting the conscience, he asked,

Now when by all these means [popular sovereignty, Supreme Court decisions, Democratic moral indifference] you have succeeded in dehumanizing the negro; when you have put him down, and made it forever impossible for him to be but as the beasts of the field; when you have extinguished his soul, and placed him where the ray of hope is blown out in darkness like that which broods over the spirits of the damned; are you quite sure the demon which you have roused will not turn and rend you?⁸⁹

Despite Douglas's success among southern Illinois Baptists and liturgical immigrants,⁹⁰ his free choice appeal fell short of matching either Lincoln's religious imagery or Lincoln's ethical fervor.

While Lincoln embellished his equal rights message with culturally inherited religious language, style, and symbolism, Douglas tried to justify his self-government message with a secular and futuristic notion of free choice. Eschewing the moral impulse to speak for others, the attitude of Douglas, and other like-thinking Democrats, may have been captured best by a pro-Democratic *Register* editorial which related slavery and popular sovereignty to the right of a free choice in religion. In chiding Republican party leaders for their presumptuous tendency to interfere in that act of free choice, the editor first praised his own party. In his opinion, the "democratic party to-day occupy the ground that our fathers assumed . . . They," he continued, "plant themselves upon the immutable principle, the right of the people to determine this [religious] question for themselves." But, he added, this was "not so with the black republican party." Its "object" was that of intolerantly attacking "the Catholic church." And, he ominously warned, its next object "may be some other denomination, whose members will not vote just to please the republican leaders."⁹¹

In his own effort to sanctify the heritage of self-government, Douglas could only call upon his audience to ignore its neighbors' moral choices. At Quincy, while he lifted his rhetoric to attack Lincoln's intent to oppose the "evil" of slavery's spread,⁹² Douglas had to lower it to accommodate the dictates of his whites-only free choice principle. As he said,

I do not discuss the morals of the people of Missouri, but let them settle that matter for themselves. . . . It is for them to decide, therefore, the moral and religious right of the slavery question for themselves within their own limits. . . . let each State mind its own business and let its neighbors alone, and there will be no trouble on this [slavery] question. If we will stand by that principle, then Mr. Lincoln will find that this Republic can exist forever divided into free and slave States . . .⁹³

In starker language at Alton, Douglas did not flinch from exposing his audience to the brutal premise that underlay his lofty advocacy of self-government:

I care more for the great principle of self-government, the right of the people to rule, than I do for all the negroes in Christendom. . . . I would not blot out the great inalienable rights of the white men for all the negroes that ever existed.⁹⁴

Such blunt language rendered hollow Douglas's much repeated contention that "Humanity" and "Christianity" required whites to "extend to the negro race, and to all other dependent races all the rights, all the privileges, and all the immunities which they can exercise consistently with the safety of society."⁹⁵ After all, when Douglas urged his white audiences to embrace the morality of noblesse oblige, he qualified that admonition with the statement that it was up to each state and territory to decide the nature and the extent of racial privileges. This stand meant that he washed his hands of any moral responsibility for his neighbors' actions. In the end, Douglas's free choice stance not only liberated white men from external moral constraints, but it left his rhetoric barren of the captivating Biblical phraseology and the evangelical tone which Lincoln employed. For an electorate familiar with a mutualistic tradition that was connected to Protestantism and the republican ideal, it appears that Lincoln's overall message was the more persuasive.⁹⁶

While more research on voter motivation and the Illinois elections of 1858 and 1860 must be done, it is important to note that neither the foreign nor the native-born supporters of Lincoln had to sacrifice any fundamental small producer beliefs or practices in order to accept his concept of equality of opportunity.⁹⁷ In the aftermath of the 1858 election, for instance, the *Republican Journal* reprinted an account from the *Chicago Press and Tribune* which provided graphic evidence that German-Americans had enthusiastically embraced republicanism and Lincoln's equal rights argument for human equality. "The German Americans of Illinois," it reported, "have covered themselves with glory in the contest which has just drawn to a close. Throughout the length and breadth of the State," the news story continued, "they have [rallied to?] human liberty—to the grand enunciation of the Declaration of Independence—in almost every quarter they have added largely to the vote for the Republican ticket." Indeed, the writer exulted, "They have put to shame their fellow citizens of American birth in their zeal for Republican liberty."⁹⁸

Besides supporting republicanism, these immigrant voters joined their pro-Republican, native-born counterparts, and both groups could have maintained a subtle equilibrium between a belief an egalitarian social system and a belief in a market system exclusively devoted to economic self-advancement and self-enrichment. In that case, they may have found the full implication of Douglas's free choice idea disturbing. Large numbers of both groups absorbed a mutualistic legacy, and they maintained some of its values and practices. Indeed, their attitude and economic outlook, antithetical to the values of a completely free choice market place, were expressed in several revealing news articles in the *Journal*.

After the 1857 depression, for example, the *Journal* stressed a mutualistic and equal rights concept of "duty" and equality rather than something more akin to the anarchistic-individualism of the future market place society. Implying an ethic of mutualistic service to each other, the Republican editor called on his readers to act as a classless community:

... let every one ... go forward in the path of *duty* fearlessly. Although for a time profits may be smaller and the return for labor appear less remunerative; yet in the general assimilation of values ... there will be found a corresponding gain sufficient to make *all equal*.⁹⁹

A month later, the *Journal* embellished this position by quoting some traditional republican sentiments from the *Illinois Farmer* to admonish its readers that excessive wealth and selfishness were not praiseworthy features of a decent society. “The wealthy fall,” declared the writer, “as history and our own observation informs us, by over-luxuriousness.” Indeed, he bemoaned, “There is much idleness in the world ... but there is more selfishness, and it is the greater sin.” Yet, he pointed out that it “may be that ... those whose efforts are not equal to success have more virtues ... than those whose minds are wholly engrossed by business and accumulation.”¹⁰⁰

Within fourteen days, another *Journal* correspondent, faithfully reflecting the equal rights and mutualistic tradition’s dread of a future tyranny based on the power of money, joined in the egalitarian spirit of the earlier writer to argue the hoary republican belief that capitalists and laborers had a “duty” to look out for each other. “Just let the farmers and other producers,” he wrote, “offer their goods ... at reasonable prices ... and to capitalists we would say, keep up trade, pay living prices [i.e., wages] ... and buyers will find stock.” After all, he stressed the “*duty* of all ... requires this.” Still, the writer worried. In his opinion, the egalitarian and mutualistic principles of the past were being threatened by the anti-republican vice of excessive wealth. Indignantly, he went on to state, “But for the rich, who ... oppose the poor common people, who ... trample on the feelings of humanity, and profit by the necessities of the weak ... no one dares question their motives or their Christianity.” And, he warned his republican readers, “Power is not mere essentially a characteristic of the landed dukes and earls of Europe, than of the moneyed princes and speculators of republican America.” So, he despairingly concluded, “even here in Illinois ... there are those now alive who may one day see a scepter more absolute held over their heads ... than Louis Napoleon now sways over France.”¹⁰¹ While looking less pessimistically toward the future than this writer, the *Journal’s* editor was nevertheless like him in connecting the nation’s prosperity with its early egalitarian principles and the republicanism of a yeoman farming era.¹⁰² Then, during the cold winter following the Lincoln-Douglas debates, the *Journal* tellingly called for a community effort to take care of the unfortunates in its midst. By again asserting a sentiment about “duty” that is more appropriately located in the mutualistic past of the household economy than in the free choice market economy of the future, the editor illustrated the grip which mutualistic thinking and ethics still had. His secular wording only emphasized the point that mutualistic “duty,” rather than Christian charity, animated his thinking: “It is certainly a *duty*—and it ought to be a

pleasure—for every one to do whatever he can toward allaying the distress which, without such aid will be unavoidable.” And, as he continued his efforts against self-centered individualism, he voiced the opinion that the rich could still profit from the exercise of community selflessness. “The great mass of our rich men are also men of liberal hearts . . . and even if selfishness were appealed to,” he wrote, “there are few hearts that will not be made happier by the endeavor . . . to relieve something of the sorrow that clusters so thickly around us.”¹⁰³

Given such mutualistic expressions and republican sentiments, it appears that Lincoln could rely on a constituency of people who believed that an egalitarian social system and equality of opportunity were not only the tandem features of the society in which they already lived, but the society that they wanted to see perpetuated. Thus, it is not paradoxical that such people may not have been willing to embrace the primacy of Douglas’s modernistic principle of free choice. They could well have been, at once, so backward-looking and so forward-looking that his restricted definition of equality not only seemed an obstacle to the past but a barrier to the future as well. Lincoln and the Republican party, on the other hand, appreciated the complexity of this viewpoint. In the words of one leading authority on the party, the Republicans

. . . juxtaposed a celebration of the blessings of free labor and republicanism . . . Like many political ideologies, it looked both forward and backward, lauding the forces of enterprise, innovation, and economic development while simultaneously endorsing certain anachronistic assumptions of republicanism and clinging to a dream of a society that was already vanishing.¹⁰⁴

As with virtually all political campaigns, the Lincoln-Douglas 1858 campaign was about the past, present, and future. And, while Lincoln’s slim popular lead over Douglas indicates that he best enunciated the outlook which Illinois voters preferred, Douglas articulated an aspect of the republican ideal—self-government—that had widespread voter support. More importantly, he espoused the free choice vision that ultimately gripped the nation. Apparently too advanced for people still embracing the residual values of a mutualistic society, the idea that individuals should have a free choice in everything not only anticipated the business ethic of the post Civil War era, but it forecast the prevailing ethos of our modern capitalist culture. Douglas’s glimpse of a nation based on an amoral market-place of ideas and products, from which individuals and groups might select whatever they want, has become our present culture of consumerism. Carried to its extreme, that culture creates an environment of such moral indifference that it serves only, as Lincoln once warned, “narrow self-interest.”

As for Lincoln, while he envisioned an economic future similar to the past, his social vision contained a notion of racial equality that many nineteenth-

century Americans could only grudgingly accept. Although founded on the logic of an inherited equal rights tradition and the idea of natural law enunciated in the Declaration of Independence, Lincoln's concept of equality of opportunity ultimately went beyond the scope of the social practices of 1858. It even, as Jaffa has noted, went beyond "Jefferson's horizon" of equality by asserting that "he who wills freedom for himself must simultaneously will freedom for others."¹⁰⁵ In the end, it became Lincoln's historic role to help make Americans understand that equality had to transcend race if white equality were not to be truncated. As he said in the splendid peroration of his Second Annual Message to Congress: "In giving freedom to the *slave*, we assure freedom to the *free*."¹⁰⁶ To be sure, many nineteenth century white Americans found it difficult to accept the limitation which black freedom implied for white freedom, but Lincoln succeeded, through words and war, in imposing a more fulfilled version of the ideal that "all men are created equal" on the nation. After the Civil War, it would take more than another hundred years for many Americans to accept even that Constitutional transformation, but African-Americans have finally won some recognition that they too are entitled to share in the free choice culture of whites. Indeed, it is ironic that, in a manner that would probably displease both Lincoln and Douglas, Americans of all races and conditions of life now have an equal right to pursue, with money or credit, the dominant American life-style of self-gratification and self-indulgence.

Notes

1. Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas, *The Lincoln-Douglas Debates*, ed. Robert W. Johannsen (New York, 1965), 8 (Cited as *Debates*).

2. *Ibid.*, 14.

3. Don E. Fehrenbacher, *Prelude to Greatness: Lincoln in the 1850's* (Stanford, 1962), 14.

4. *Debates*, 8.

5. *Ibid.*, 29, 30.

6. Waldo W. Braden, *Abraham Lincoln, Public Speaker* (Baton Rouge, 1988), 26. Braden placed the size of the crowds as large as 12,000-20,000.

7. Defined as a pervasive cultural phenomenon which transcends specific political, economic, and social ideologies, the mid-nineteenth century republican ideal ought to be understood as a blending of many aspects of life and thought. For any single individual holding and living the ideal, it had, in varying degrees, a political dimension (a belief in personal liberty and in the political ideology of republicanism), an economic dimension (a belief in free labor values and in economic independence based on the ownership of productive private property), and a social dimension (a belief in a non-elite, egalitarian and mutualistic society of small, independent producers who have an equal opportunity for social mobility). In sum, the republican ideal was held by those of the small producing and laboring class who maintained and/or practiced an equal rights tradition, the labor theory of value, an egalitarian-anti-monopoly outlook, respect for the dignity of labor, faith in unlimited social mobility, personal independence based on the ownership of productive private property, and mutualism.

Although historians have stressed that one or another dimension of the ideal has been fundamental in motivating nineteenth century voters, it is likely that such voters could not, and did not, compartmentalize the ideal's various dimensions or its influence. Moreover, in view of the fact that Protestantism played such a vital role in the history and the culture of eighteenth and nineteenth century American life, it too is one of the prisms through which the values of the republican ideal were filtered. In other words, after 1850, the belief in the republican ideal had become so culturally amorphous that the bulk of the middle and lower-class voters for the Whig, Democratic, American, Free Soil, and Republican Parties were men who shared a common republican ideal heritage. And,

during the hectic decade when the Illinois Whig Party disintegrated, the Know-Nothings rose and declined, and the Republican party triumphantly captured the White House, most political aspirants, sensitive to their constituents, appealed to some aspect of the ideal. See William E. Gienapp, *The Origins of the Republican Party, 1852-1856* (New York, 1987), 357, 365, 4 (Cited as *Origins*); Stephen L. Hansen, *The Making of the Third Party System: Voters and Parties in Illinois, 1850-1876* (Ann Arbor, 1980), 7-8, 37; William Gerald Shade, *Banks or No Banks: The Money Issue in Western Politics, 1832-1865* (Detroit, 1972), 197, 183, 196.

The theoretical foundation for the concept of the republican ideal was established by J. G. A. Pocock. See J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought & the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, 1975). For approaches based on the republican ideal in relation to Northern, New England, and Southern societies, see Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* (New York, 1971); Alan Dawley, *Class and Community: The Industrial Revolution in Lynn* (Cambridge, 1980); Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City & The Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850* (New York, 1986); Steven Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850-1890* (New York, 1983).

8. For information on printed distribution of the debates, see: Library of Congress, *The Illinois Political Campaign of 1858: A facsimile of the Printer's Copy of his Debates with Senator Stephen Arnold Douglas as Edited and Prepared for Press by Abraham Lincoln*. Introd. by David C. Mearns. (Washington, D. C., 1958), 12-15, 19.

In the mid-nineteenth century context, equal rights may be defined as the small producer (i.e., artisans or skilled laborers, small and middling farm owners, and common laborers) view that all such people were entitled to equality before the law and equality of opportunity within the context of a republican society that had no vast disparities of wealth or income and which condemned monopolies as unnatural.

9. *Origins*, 353; Gabor S. Boritt, "Lincoln and the Economics of the American Dream," in *The Historian's Lincoln: Pseudohistory, Psychohistory and History*. Gabor S. Boritt and Norman O. Forness, eds., (Chicago, 1988), 92.

10. Richard Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition and the Men Who Made It* (New York, 1958), 105-107; David R. Wrone, "Abraham Lincoln's Idea of Property," *Science & Society* 33 (Winter 1969), 69.

11. Melvin E. Bradford, "Against Lincoln: An Address at Gettysburg—Commentary on 'Lincoln and the Economics of the American Dream,'" in *The Historian's Lincoln: Pseudohistory, Psychohistory and History*. Gabor S. Boritt and Norman O. Forness, eds., (Chicago, 1988), 109, 110; Melvin E. Bradford, "The Lincoln Legacy: A Long View," *Modern Age* 24 (1980), 357-58.

12. Daniel Walker Howe, *The Political Culture of the American Whigs* (Chicago, 1979), 297.

13. *Ibid.*

14. Abraham Lincoln, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*. Roy P. Basler et al., eds. (New Jersey, 1953) Vol. III, 475-76 (Cited as CW).

15. CW, III, 462. Emphasis added. In his study *Lincoln and the Economics of the American Dream*, Gabor S. Boritt has contended that Lincoln changed Jefferson's idea of equality to mean the "equality of opportunity to get ahead in life." But, divorced from the concept of the republican ideal, this interpretation distorts his outlook by suggesting that he favored the development of a modern acquisitive and industrial economy. Actually, Lincoln, as even Boritt has noted, had a "very restricted" understanding of the coming "wage-earning society" and accepted factories as "perhaps only as a somewhat peripheral part of the system." See Gabor S. Boritt, *Lincoln and the Economics of the American Dream* (Memphis, 1978), 161, 158, 180-81.

16. *Historical Statistics of the United States, 1790-1970: The Midwest*, Donald B. Dodd and Waynelle S. Dodd, compilers, (Birmingham, 1976), Vol. 2, 2; (Cited as *Historical*).

17. *Ibid.*

18. U.S., Department of the Interior, *Seventh Census of the United States: 1850* (Washington, D.C., 1853), 727-28 (Cited as *Seventh*); U.S., Department of the Interior, *Agriculture of the United States in 1860: The Eighth Census*, Joseph C. G. Kennedy, compiler, (Washington, D.C., 1864), 197 (Cited as *Agriculture*); U.S., Department of the Interior, *Population of the United States in 1860: The Eighth Census*, Joseph C. G. Kennedy, compiler, (Washington, D.C., 1864), 662 (Cited as *Population*).

19. *Historical*, 2.

20. *Population*, 666, 662.

21. U.S., Department of the Interior, *Manufactures of the United States in 1860: The Eighth Census*, (Washington, D.C., 1865), 111 (Cited as *Manufactures*).

22. *Ibid.*, 110.

23. *Ibid.*, 110-111.

24. *Population*, 656-79; *Manufactures*, 110-11, 85-109. Several thousand more people could be added to the ranks of the independent producer category if all of the occupations of less than a thousand people were included in the figures.

25. *Historical*, 2; *Manufactures*, 111.

26. *Historical*, 2, 4.

27. Ironically, while it was Douglas and not Lincoln who asserted the more modern, market-place notion of freedom of choice, the 1858 and 1860 Illinois election returns (always handicapped by a lack of complete data and full knowledge of voter motivations) show that Douglas did not gain many supporters in those areas closest in development to the future factory system. Instead, Douglas received his strongest support from the southern areas of the state that were the least modernized, the least urbanized, and the least populated. The irony of espousing a modernistic notion of free choice and yet receiving one's greatest support from the least developed areas of the state is partly explained by focusing on the decisive role which place of origin and cultural conflict had in determining the southern Illinois vote for Douglas. Indeed, the pro-Southern sympathies held by transplanted Southerners in Illinois' southern counties simply overwhelmed whatever uneasiness Douglas's free choice ideas may have aroused. Yet, even then, Gienapp has argued that, between 1856 and 1860, the Republicans increased their electoral strength in southern Illinois by "2 1/2-fold." After stating that "Lincoln apparently won many more votes among transplanted Southerners than had Fremont," Gienapp placed Lincoln's 1860, "Southern counties" voting strength at 32.4 percent. It is possible that this increased Republican support may have been due to a growing discomfort which southern Illinois pietists and Baptists (evangelical Protestants) felt toward Douglas's morally indifferent free choice idea. For support of these points, see: William E. Gienapp, "Who Voted for Lincoln" in *Abraham Lincoln and the American Political Tradition*. John L. Thomas ed. (Amers, 1986), 67, 74, 82 (Cited as "Who"); *Origins*, 428, 430; Hansen, 102; *Seventh*, 701-702; *Population*, 86-87; Athur C. Cole, *The Era of the Civil War, 1848-1870* (Springfield, 1919), 178, 201.

28. *Daily Illinois State Journal*, July 27, 1858, 2 (Cited as *Journal*). For other examples, see *Journal*, August 7, 1858, 2; August 9, 1858, 2.

29. *Ibid.*, October 30, 1858, 2.

30. *Ibid.*, January 31, 1859, 2; The bill with Grow's amendment was defeated 95 to 91; over 85 Democrats sided with the majority. See also *Journal*, February 14, 1859, 1 and March 1, 1859, 2. The "Homestead Bill" was defeated in the Senate 29 to 19 with Douglas reported as having voted against it.

31. *Daily Illinois State Register*, July 23, 1858, 2 (Cited as *Register*).

32. *Debates*, 28.

33. *Register*, December 7, 1858, 3. Emphasis added.

34. Although the census and voting data for 1858 and 1860 reveal that Lincoln's political appeal was strongest in the Illinois counties with more manufacturing investments and greater urbanization, that does not mean that voters in those areas supported him because they perceived him as promoting modernization. In fact, between 1856 and 1860, the Republican party did not stress the values of modernization but the values of the past. While pointing out that the Illinois voting patterns of 1858 and 1860 reveal a range of voting configurations that are inconsistent with an analysis that simply pictures Republican voters as wanting to develop a market economy and Democratic voters as opposing such a goal, Gienapp observed that as early as 1856, Republican stress on "the social ideal of the independent farmer, shopkeeper, and skilled worker" had built an "amazingly heterogeneous" party.

Certainly, much more research into the socio-cultural history and voting motives of nineteenth century Illinois workers remains to be done, but some clues to their behavior have already been offered by the social history of small producers and laborers in other times and places. In a range of works dealing with the Luddites in the eighteenth and nineteenth century to the Southeast Asian peasants of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, historians have found that people's reaction to profound economic transformation are shaped more by the lingering cultural influence of residual values than by any foresight on future economic events or institutions. So, if an extrapolation based on these studies is made, it suggests that the Illinoisans facing the most rapid economic changes in their state were also the ones most keenly conscious of the residual values of mutualism and the equal rights tradition. They, even forward-looking capitalist entrepreneurs, could well have been of two minds about economic "progress" and very susceptible to Lincoln's equal rights and mutualistic appeal in favor of equality of opportunity. For findings which support this information, see: *Manufactures*, 110-11; Dean W. Burnham, *Presidential Ballots: 1836-1892* (Baltimore, 1955), 368-88; Shade, 197; "Who," 59-60, 68-72, 83; *Origins*, 356, 437, 439; E. J. Hobsbawn, *Labouring Men: Studies in the History of Labour* (New York, 1964), 5-17; James C. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia* (New Haven, 1976), passim; E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York, 1963), 24-101, 711-832).

35. *Debates*, 132.

36. *Ibid.*, 67.

37. *Ibid.*, 107.

38. *Ibid.*, 50-51.

39. *Ibid.*, 198-99.

40. *Ibid.*, 132.

41. *Journal*, September 18, 1858, 3.
42. *Ibid.*, May 5, 1858, 2.
43. *Ibid.*, August 24, 1858, 2. Emphasis added. For additional examples of the mutually-derived contention that history and tradition supported the view that the voters of the states could, through Congress, deny the residents of a territory the legal right to adopt slavery, see the *Journal* for: January 25, 1858, 2; January 26, 1858, 2; August 10, 1858, 2; August 16, 1858, 2; October 20, 1858, 2; November 13, 1858, 2; December 15, 1858, 2; January 14, 1859, 2.
44. *Register*, October 4, 1858, 2.
45. Robert W. Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas* (New York, 1973), 660.
46. *Register*, July 29, 1858, 2.
47. Johannsen, 660.
48. *Debates*, 44.
49. *Ibid.*, 48.
50. *Ibid.*, 45.
51. *Ibid.*, 125-26.
52. For an appraisal of the significant historiography dealing with Lincoln's racial views as well as his incredible capacity for intellectual evolution on this issue, see: LaWanda Cox, *Lincoln and Black Freedom: A Study in Presidential Leadership* (Columbia, 1981), 25, 21, 35, 20, 36.
53. *Debates*, 128.
54. *Ibid.*, 127.
55. *Ibid.*, 196.
56. *Ibid.*, 48.
57. *Ibid.*, 126.
58. *Ibid.*, 105.
59. *Ibid.*
60. *Ibid.*, 187.
61. *Journal*, January 25, 1858, 2.
62. *Register*, October 9, 1858, 2.
63. *Debates*, 162.
64. *Ibid.*, 219.
65. Harry V. Jaffa, *Crisis of the House Divided: An Interpretation of the Issues in the Lincoln-Douglas Debates* (Chicago, 1959), 364-70.
66. *Debates*, 52-53.
67. Jaffa, 307.
68. "Who," 61. In only one example of this effort, Gienapp noted that the Republican Wide Awakes "were closely modeled on earlier Know-Nothing marching organizations."
69. *Ibid.*, 57.
70. *Debates*, 56.
71. *Ibid.*, 56-57.
72. "Who," 74; See also *Origins*, 365, 388, 360.
73. *Debates*, 66-67.
74. *Origins*, 445-46. For differing analyses of the degree of Know-Nothing support for Lincoln and the Republican party, see: Hansen, 72, 114, 73, 123, 125; "Who," 63-66, 73-74, 76-77).
75. *Debates*, 71.
76. For Lincoln's famous interrogatives at Freeport, see *Ibid.*, 79.
77. *Ibid.*, 276, 277.
78. *Journal*, November 12, 1858, 2. The editor(s) and writers of the *Journal* often created arguments which linked religious terminology with political republicanism. Such usage not only helps to demonstrate the extent to which the Protestant religion and republicanism were integrated but also the social existence of people who linked the two and who supported Lincoln. See *Journal*: January 25, 1858, 2; February 1, 1858, 2; August 30, 1858, 2; September 1, 1858, 3; September 18, 1858, 2.
79. Although Lincoln, unlike some other Republican politicians, did not attempt to get votes by evoking the Protestant animus toward Catholics, he was fully aware that fear of Catholicism was a powerful force in the American cultural tradition. Nurtured on this fear, American Protestants, including the foreign born, were receptive, albeit not uniformly, to Lincoln's and the Republican Party's "image of morality, Protestantism, middle class respectability, and even self-righteousness." See *Origins*, 434. For examples of the anti-Catholic bias that were rooted in the American republican tradition, see: *Journal*, August 30, 1858, 2; September 1, 1858, 3.
80. Mildred Berry, "Abraham Lincoln: His Development in the Skills of the Platform," in *A History and Criticism of American Public Address*, ed. William Norwood Brigance, (New York, 1960), 832-33.
81. *Journal*, November 15, 1858, 1.
82. *Origins*, 435.
83. Hansen, 93, 101, 115, 125; *Origins*, 434; "Who," 70.

84. Apart from the evidence and argument in the body and notes of this essay, the evidence of the existence of people who adhered to an equal rights and mutualistic tradition is suggested by editorials, news items, and correspondence in the following issues of the *Journal*: January 26, 1858, 2; August 7, 1858, 2; August 10, 1858, 2; August 16, 1858, 2; October 20, 1858, 2; November 13, 1858, 2; November 16, 1858, 2; November 20, 1858, 2; December 22, 1858, 2; January 14, 1859, 2.

85. *Debates*, 316-20.

86. *Ibid.*, 318.

87. *Ibid.*, 319.

88. In describing Lincoln's forensic ability to transform such listeners' inarticulate experiences into aesthetic and moral utterances, speech critic Earl Wiley stated that Lincoln had a "knack of saying the right thing in the right way to the right people . . . at the right time and place." Earl W. Wiley, "Abraham Lincoln: His Emergence as the Voice of the People," in *A History and Criticism of American Public Address*, ed. William Norwood Brigance, (New York, 1960), 859.

89. *CW*, III, 95.

90. Hansen, 101-102, 155, 123.

91. *Register*, August 31, 1858, 2.

92. *Debates*, 255.

93. *Ibid.*, 275-76.

94. *Ibid.*, 326.

95. *Ibid.*, 299; see also comparable remarks, *Ibid.*, 46, 216.

96. Lincoln, of course, narrowly lost to Douglas in the 1858 Senatorial race. And, because he carried Illinois in the 1860 Presidential contest, it would appear that he correctly stressed an understanding of the republican ideal which was closest to the voters beliefs, expectations, and experiences. While Douglas received just over forty-seven percent (47.2%) of the Illinois popular vote in 1860, Lincoln captured almost fifty-one percent (50.7%) of the vote, and he carried the state with a plurality of 11,956 votes. This victory represented an increase in Lincoln's popularity which surpassed his 1858 showing. Yet, even in the 1858 election, Lincoln might be called the victor because the Republican candidates throughout the state received a popular vote of 125,430 and the Douglas Democratic candidates got only 121,609 votes. Numerous voters, at any rate, judged him, rather than Douglas, to be more consistent with their outlook. In the Illinois State Legislature, Lincoln lost his 1858 U.S. Senatorial bid by a vote of fifty-four to forty-six. See Robert A. Diamond, ed., *Congressional Quarterly: Guide to U.S. Elections* (np: 1976), 271; Johannsen, 677.

97. By 1860, Illinois was providing a home for 130,804 German and 87,573 Irish immigrants. These two ethnic groups made up the bulk of the Illinois immigrant population in 1858 and 1860. And, while Irish Catholic immigrants (long the targets of vicious Know Nothing, temperance, anti-Catholic, and Republican attacks) were virtually unanimous in voting Democratic, the Germans, if Protestant, went strongly for Lincoln. While observing that the "backbone" of the Republican vote in the 1858 Illinois election remained the "Yankees, English and Scandinavians," Hansen indicated that the Republicans got forty-one percent of the French and over seventy percent of the Protestant German vote. Moreover, according to Gienapp's findings, the Republicans, between 1856 and 1860, increased their share of the Protestant German vote. Hansen, too, discovered an increase in the Republican share of the French and Scandinavian vote. Such voting figures suggest that Lincoln's appeal to the equal rights tradition and to the idea that "all men are created equal" did not fall on entirely deaf ears among Illinois' foreign-born population. See *Population*, 621; Hansen, 93, 123, 125; "Who," 74.

98. *Journal*, November 9, 1858, 2.

99. *Ibid.*, February 10, 1858, 2. Emphasis added.

100. *Ibid.*, March 8, 1858, 1.

101. *Ibid.*, March 22, 1858, 2. Emphasis added.

102. *Ibid.*, November 25, 1858, 2.

103. *Ibid.*, January 10, 1859, 3. Emphasis added.

104. *Origins*, 372.

105. Jaffa, 327.

106. *CW*, V, 537.