



Northern Democrats

“Mind Your Own Business, and Let Territories Alone”

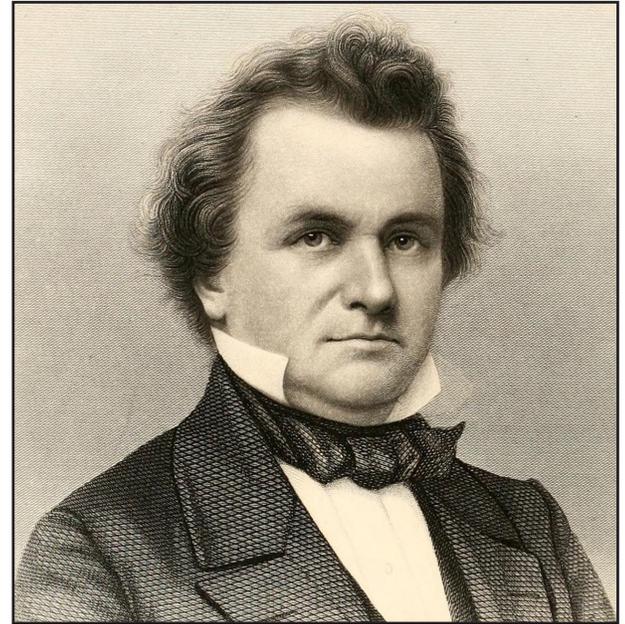
Candidate: Stephen A. Douglas

After winning the White House twice in the 1850s, Democrats saw nothing but greatness in the forecast for 1860. Also known as “The Democracy,” this dominant alliance of southern slave owners and western farmers had already vanquished strong challenges from the Whig and Know-Nothing parties. Stephen A. Douglas, their expected candidate for 1860, already forewent the nomination in the 1852 and 1856 elections, stepping aside for winners Franklin Pierce and James Buchanan. Both he and his party believed continued triumph lay ahead.

That all changed at the party’s conventions in Charleston and Baltimore. Douglas was nominated, but only after most southern delegates (and their states’ electoral votes) had left in disgust. The remaining Democrats battled Republicans for votes in northern states. They condemned their “sectional” opponents and claimed to be the only national party left in the election.

Their electoral platform reached back to ideas that won in 1852 and 1856: defending the possible expansion of slavery westward, but only on the basis of Douglas’ idea of “popular sovereignty,” where a territory’s citizens would vote whether or not to approve slavery within their borders when they submitted for statehood.

The fate of Northern Democrats was closely tied to that of Douglas, who undertook a precedent-setting campaign of the Northeast in the summer of 1860. By October, he was convinced that Lincoln would win the election; so he set out upon a perilous speaking tour of the South in a last ditch effort to avoid secession and Civil War.



This likeness of Stephen Douglas was published during the 1860 campaign. Image Courtesy Library of Congress.

Taking the Stump: Stephen Douglas’ New England Campaign

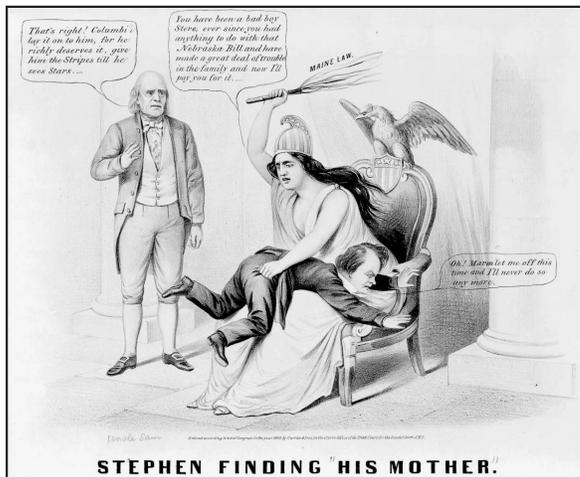


Image Courtesy Library of Congress

“It is not a seemly or a welcome sight to see any man whom a large portion of his countrymen have thought fit for the Presidency, traversing the country and soliciting his own elevation thereto... [T]he Presidency is still a high office-- too high to be reached by a *mere stump-speaker* [and] too dignified to be canvassed for like... a seat in Congress. A candidate for that place is supposed to have either friends who can speak for him; or a history which speaks for itself. Mr. Douglas ought not to lack either.”

-- The *New York Times*, August 10, 1860 (emphasis added)

This political cartoon (*above left*) and quote (*above right*) were published during the 1860 campaign. Presidential nominees doing their own stump speaking was unheard of before the election of 1860. With this in mind, Douglas tried to disguise his northern campaign as a visit to see his mother. These sources show he was unsuccessful.