

Stephen Douglas, “Nebraska Territory,” January 30, 1854

[Page 275] We took the principles established by the compromise act of 1850 as our guide. Those measures rest upon the great principle of self-government--that the people should be allowed to decide the questions of their states for themselves, subject only to such limitations and restrictions as are imposed by the Constitution of the United States, instead of having them determined by an arbitrary or geographical line.

The legal effect of this bill is neither to legislate slavery into these Territories nor out of them, but to leave the people do as they please. Why should not this principle prevail? Why should any man, North or South, object to it? If you will review the history of the slavery question in the United States, you will see that all the great results in behalf of free institutions which have been worked out, have been accomplished by the operation of popular sovereignty, and by it alone.

When these States were colonies of Great Britain, every one of them was a slave-holding province. When the Constitution of the United States was formed, twelve out of the thirteen were slave-holding States. Since that time six of those States have become free. How has this been effected? Was it by virtue of abolition agitation in Congress? Was it in obedience to the dictates of the Federal Government? Not at all; but they have become free States under the working of that great principle of self-government which teaches every people to do that which their self interests and their future generations may morally require.

Under the operation of this principle New Hampshire became free, while South Carolina continued to hold slaves; Connecticut abolished slavery, while Georgia held on to it; Rhode Island abandoned the institution, while Maryland preserved it; New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania abolished slavery, while Virginia, North Carolina, and Kentucky retained it. Did they do it at the dictation of the Federal Government? Did they do it in obedience to any of your Wilmot provisoes or ordinances of '87? Not at all; they did it by virtue of their right as freemen under the Constitution of the United States, to establish and abolish such institutions as they thought their own good required.

Let me ask you where have you succeeded in excluding slavery by an act of Congress from one inch of the American soil? You may tell me that you did it in the northwest territory, by the ordinance of 1787. You prohibited slavery by law, but you did not exclude it in fact. Illinois was a part of the northwest territory. When Illinois was organized into a territorial government it established and

protected slavery, and maintained it in spite of your ordinance, and in defiance of its express prohibition.

[Page 279] I do not like, I never did like, the system of legislation on our part, by which a geographical line, in violation of the laws of nature, and climate, and soil, and the laws of God, should be run to establish institutions for a people; yet, out of a regard for the peace and quiet of the country, out of respect for past pledges, and out of a desire to adhere faithfully to all compromises, I sustained the Missouri compromise so long as it was in force, and advocated its extension to the Pacific. Now, when a great principle of self-government has been substituted for it, I choose to cling to that principle, and abide in good faith, not only by the letter, but by the spirit of the last compromise (Compromise of 1850).

Questions...	...Response.
What principle should regulate the local and state decisions of a people? Should the government be involved?	
What are the three components of the 1850 Compromise?	
What did the Compromise of 1850 do to the Missouri Compromise line of 36 30'?	
Why does Douglas go against the Missouri Compromise? (Hint: Final paragraph)	
What is self government (popular sovereignty)?	
Does the Kansas Nebraska Act legislate whether the territories will be slave or free by mandate?	

Questions...	...Response.
<p>How many colonies had slaves? How many of those original 13 had slavery at the time of the Constitution? How many of those original 13 had slavery at the time of the speech? What does this support in term sof Douglas' arguments?</p>	
<p>What does Douglas say happened in his home state of Illinois in terms of governmental regulation of slavery?</p>	