

Chicago Speech of 1858

by Stephen Douglas



ABOUT THE READING As a U.S. Senator, Stephen Douglas, was chairman of the Committee on Territories. He supported popular sovereignty, which allowed individual territories to determine whether or not to allow slavery. The following excerpt is from a speech Douglas gave in Chicago in 1858, which was part of the debates held between Douglas and Abraham Lincoln.

VOCABULARY

vindication defense
sustaining supporting
controverted argued against
cordial sincere



As you read the passage below, think about the challenges faced by Stephen Douglas and other lawmakers during this time.

Mr. Chairman and Fellow-Citizens: I can find no language which can adequately express my profound gratitude for the magnificent welcome which you have extended to me on this occasion. This vast sea of human faces indicates how deep an interest is felt by our people in the great questions which agitate the public mind, and which underlie the foundations of our free institutions. . .

Fellow-citizens, while I devoted my best energies—all my energies, mental and physical—to the **vindication** of the great principle, and whilst the result has been such as will enable the people of Kansas to come into the Union with such a Constitution as they desire, yet the credit of this great moral victory is to be divided among a large number of men of various and different political creeds. I was rejoiced when I found in this great contest the Republican party coming up manfully and **sustaining** the principle that the people of each Territory, when coming into the Union, have the

What image does the first paragraph reveal?

Source: Bartleby.com; Political Debates Between Lincoln and Douglas/Speech of Senator Douglas

right to decide for themselves whether slavery shall or shall not exist within their limits. I have seen the time when that principle was **controverted**. I have seen the time when all parties did not recognize the right of a people to have slavery or freedom, to tolerate or prohibit slavery as they deemed best, but claimed that power for the Congress of the United States, regardless of the wishes of the people to be affected by it; and when I found upon the Crittenden-Montgomery bill the Republicans and Americans of the North, and I may say, too, some glorious Americans and old-line Whigs from the South, like Crittenden and his patriotic associates, joined with a portion of the Democracy to carry out and vindicate the right of the people to decide whether slavery should or should not exist within the limits of Kansas, I was rejoiced within my secret soul, for I saw an indication that the American people, when they come to understand the principle, would give it their **cordial** support.

To better understand this long sentence, break it into sections for easier reading.

Whigs refers to the members of the Whig party—a political party whose members opposed Andrew Jackson in 1834 and supported a strong legislature.

ANALYZING LITERATURE

- 1. Main Idea** What is Stephen Douglas's opinion regarding slavery in territories like Kansas?

- 2. Critical Thinking: Drawing Conclusions** How would you describe Stephen Douglas's tone in this speech?

- 3. Activity** You have just attended one of the Lincoln-Douglas debates. Draw a campaign poster supporting your candidate for the senate.