Lincoln Lore

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The mission of The Lincoln Museum is to interpret and preserve the history and legacy of Abraham Lincoln through research, conservation, exhibitry, and education.

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Stephen In Search of His Mother: Stephen A. Douglas and the Presidential Campaign of 1860

By Gerald J. Prokopowicz

From the first days of the Republic to the eve of the Civil War, candidates for the presidency of the United States took no active part in their own campaigns. The voting public considered it inappropriate and unseemly for a person to act as though he desired the highest office in the land for himself, so with the exception of a few innocuous and ineffective speeches by William Henry Harrison in 1840, presidential hopefuls left the campaigning to their supporters. When Stephen A. Douglas was nominated for president by the Northern wing of the Democratic Party in 1860, he was fully aware that he was expected to wait patiently for the call of the electorate, as George Washington had done, and not to seek votes for himself. Douglas thus made a point of announcing, in July 1860, that the long trip on which he was about to embark was personal rather than political: he was leaving New York City to see his father's grave in Vermont and attend his brother-in law's graduation from Harvard, and then going to visit his mother in upstate New York.

A month after starting his well-publicized trip, Douglas had yet to reach his mother's home in Clifton Springs. Having taken great care to send advance notice of his travel schedule to the places where his train would stop, Douglas professed surprise when he was met by large crowds eager to see and hear the "Little Giant." It was only courtesy, Douglas claimed, that required him to respond to these crowds by making political speeches in which he addressed the issues of the day, including his own candidacy. It was not long before his opponents began to mock his thinly disguised campaign tour with a broadside that advertised:

> 'BOY' LOST! Left Washington, D.C., some time in July, to go home to his mother, in New York... He is about five feet nothing in height, and about the same in diameter the other way. He has a red face, short legs, and a large belly. Answers to the name of "Little Giant." Talks a great deal, and very loud; ALWAYS ABOUT HIMSELF.[1]

(On the cover: Lincoln-Hamlin election broadside, 1860. The artifact is shown as originally acquired by The Lincoln Museum. It has since been conserved and is now on display in the permanent exhibit, "Abraham Lincoln and the American Experiment.")

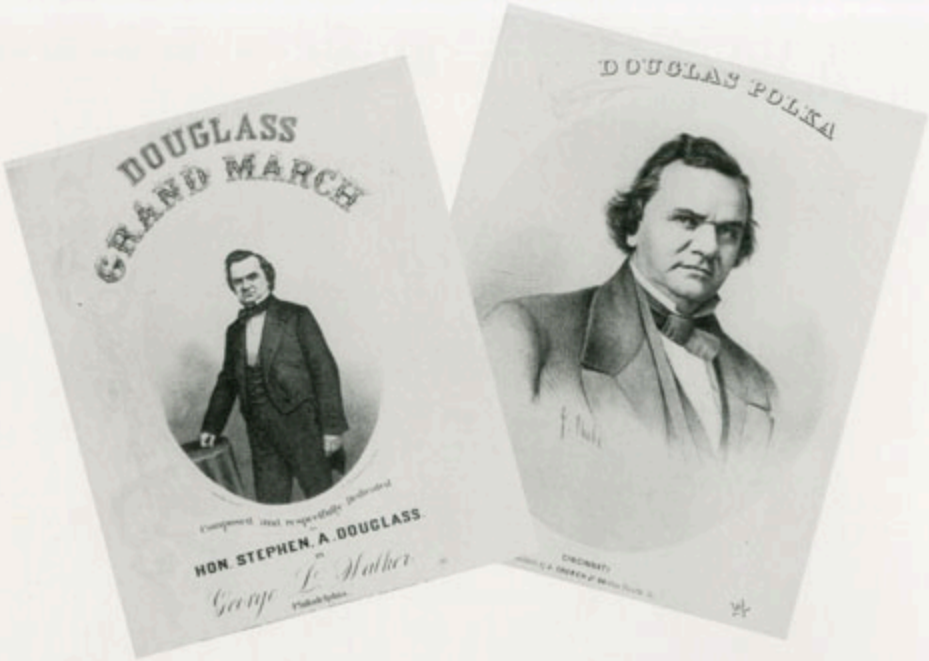
Douglas continued to travel. In August, he responded to reports that his candidacy had a chance of success in Maine by making a speaking excursion to the state. Later in the month, although his own mother was still waiting for him, he answered a request to settle the estate of the mother of his first wife, which required a trip to North Carolina. En route, he spoke in (among other places) Norfolk, Petersburg, and Raleigh, and (on the way back) Richmond and Baltimore.

Not until September, after further speechmaking in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania and New York City, did Douglas at last begin to find his way to upstate New York. As the mocking "Boy-lost" broadside noted, "He has not yet reached his mother, who is very anxious about him. He has been seen in Philadelphia, New York City, Hartford, Conn., and at a clam-bake in Rhode Island. He has been heard from at Boston, Portland, Augusta, and Bangor, Maine." The long-delayed maternal reunion took place on September 15, after which Douglas threw off all pretence of personal travel and made a whirlwind political tour of the Midwest, campaigning in Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Wisconsin, and Michigan. Indiana, Ohio and Pennsylvania held their elections in October rather than November; when those key states went Republican, Douglas recognized that the presidential election was lost, but he nonetheless embarked on a second visit to the South. He spoke in Tennessee, Georgia, and Alabama, spending election day in Mobile before returning to Illinois by steamboat up the Mississippi.

Stephen A. Douglas, the "Little Giant," c. 1859. (TLM #65)

The Douglas campaign of 1860 did not win the election, but it shattered forever the tradition of the silent presidential candidate. In its public visibility, speed of travel, distance covered, and volume of words spoken, the campaign created a model that presidential candidates still emulate today. Why did Douglas choose to break with tradition in such spectacular fashion? It was not because he expected that doing so would give him victory, since it was clear even to Douglas's own running mate as early as July that Abraham Lincoln would be the next President of the United States.[2] Nor was it in response to the behavior of his opponents, who maintained a dignified silence even after Douglas took to the stump. The potential political gains and costs that Douglas weighed before deciding to campaign for himself extended beyond victory at the polls in November; they included his future within the Democratic party, the survival of the party as a national institution, and the fate of the Union itself. To appreciate what Douglas did, and what he hoped to accomplish, it may be helpful to begin with a look at the conduct of earlier presidential campaigns, including those of 1852 and 1856 in which Douglas hoped to be a candidate.

When the Founding Fathers created a government with an elective executive, they were fearful of the excesses of democracy, which they believed could easily degenerate into mob rule and the tyranny of the majority. They did not anticipate or desire that candidates for the presidency would court the favor of the voters, and accordingly they set up an elaborate system that provided plenty of distance between the voice of the people and the selection of a president. The power of choosing the president was placed in the hands of a college of electors, who were to



While presidential candidates were expected to remain silent, their supporters promoted them in various media, including sheet music. (TLM #2820 & 2823)

be chosen as each state decided; some states held popular elections for electors, while in others the legislature chose them, thus adding still another layer of insulation between the people and the president. Anticipating that the Electoral College would often have difficulty mustering a majority for any one candidate, the Founding Fathers designated the House of Representatives to decide such elections, but with each state delegation in the House receiving a single vote, reducing the relative power of populous states in favor of sectional balance.[3]

By filtering the will of the individual voter through the presumably well-educated, virtuous and incorruptible members of the Electoral College, the framers of the Constitution sought to make it unprofitable for demagogues to seek power by soliciting the votes of the masses. Americans were keenly aware that previous republics like that of ancient Rome had decayed into tyranny when both the people and their leaders ceased to display the disinterested virtue necessary for self-government. Since no American politician wanted to be the Caesar of the New World, the first presidential candidates vied with one another to prove their civic virtue by proclaiming their reluctance to take power, and agreeing to do so only if the country insisted, in which case it would be their duty to accept. An obscure Southern politician, upon being nominated for president by his state legislature, summed up the prevailing ethos by stating that "The Presidency is not an office to be either solicited or declined." [4]

By the 1820s, however, the republic had grown in self-confidence. After the election of 1824, in which John Quincy Adams became president by making the so-called "Corrupt Bargain" with his rival Henry Clay, Americans began to see the principle threat to their system of self-government more in the corruption of their leaders than in the excesses of democracy. The right to vote became more widespread as laws restricting the franchise to property holders were repealed in Eastern states, and never enacted in Western ones, where the easy availability of land would have rendered them meaningless anyway. In 1828, Andrew Jackson's supporters appealed directly to the people in their zeal to defeat Adams, and by the mid-1830s two political parties, the Democrats and the Whigs, had taken shape as a way of organizing and giving expression to the political will of the new mass electorate. By 1840 most adult white males were eligible to vote, and between 1824 and 1856, participation in presidential elections quadrupled, measured as a percentage of the general population.[5]

The presidential campaigns of the 1830s were noisy affairs designed to appeal to the lowest common denominator among the voters. Both parties held parades and barbecues; they built floats that featured full-size log cabins or working printing presses that cranked out partisan broadsides as they lumbered along; they rolled giant balls of string from town to town; they distributed copious amounts of liquor; and their members gave interminable speeches on behalf of candidates that they affectionately referred to as Old Hickory, the Little Magician, Old Tippecanoe, and of course, Tyler too.

The candidates themselves, however, remained largely silent. The aristocratic John Quincy Adams followed tradition in 1828 by refusing to do anything that might aid his electoral chances, saying "If my country wants my services she must ask for them," but so too did his opponent, Andrew Jackson.[6] While Jackson's supporters campaigned raucously on his behalf, he refused to express any views on the issues of the day, noting that his friends didn't ask and that he never gratified his enemies. "Was I now to come forward and reiterate my public opinions on these subjects," Jackson said, "I would be charged with electioneering for selfish purposes." [7] When William Henry Harrison was put forward by the Whigs as one of four regional candidates in 1836, Nicholas Biddle wrote out the following strategy: "[L]et him say nothing — promise nothing. Let no Committee, no Convention, no town meeting ever extract from him a single word about what he thinks now and will do hereafter. Let the use of pen and ink be wholly forbidden as if he were a mad poet in Bedlam." [8] In 1840 Harrison violated the taboo by making a few inconsequential speeches, for which he was severely mocked by his opponents, but the next successful Whig candidate, Zachary Taylor in 1848, said nothing, in part because he had nothing to say, being so apolitical that he had never before voted in a presidential election. Taylor's rival in 1848, Democrat Lewis Cass, was cautioned to "Write no more letters" during the campaign, so as to avoid expressing any views on slavery that might offend potential voters in the South; the advice came from one of the Democratic party's rising young stars, Stephen A. Douglas. [9]

It was not just tradition, but good political sense, that dictated the silence of presidential candidates. The president (and vice president), then as now, were the only federal officers chosen by the national electorate. A successful presidential campaign had to appeal to a diverse body of voters, consisting of slaveholders and abolitionists, farmers and factory workers, immigrants and natives, rich and poor, Catholic and Protestant, Northerner and Southerner, and so on. The best way to do this was not to conduct a national campaign but a series of local ones. As long as the candidate himself said nothing to the contrary, it was possible for his local supporters in the North to promote him as pro-North, while his Southern partisans touted him as favorable to the South. Until the telegraph came into widespread use after the election of 1848, candidates could depend on the slow pace of overland communication to prevent voters in Maine from learning about contradictory campaign broadsides and speeches in Georgia until after the election.

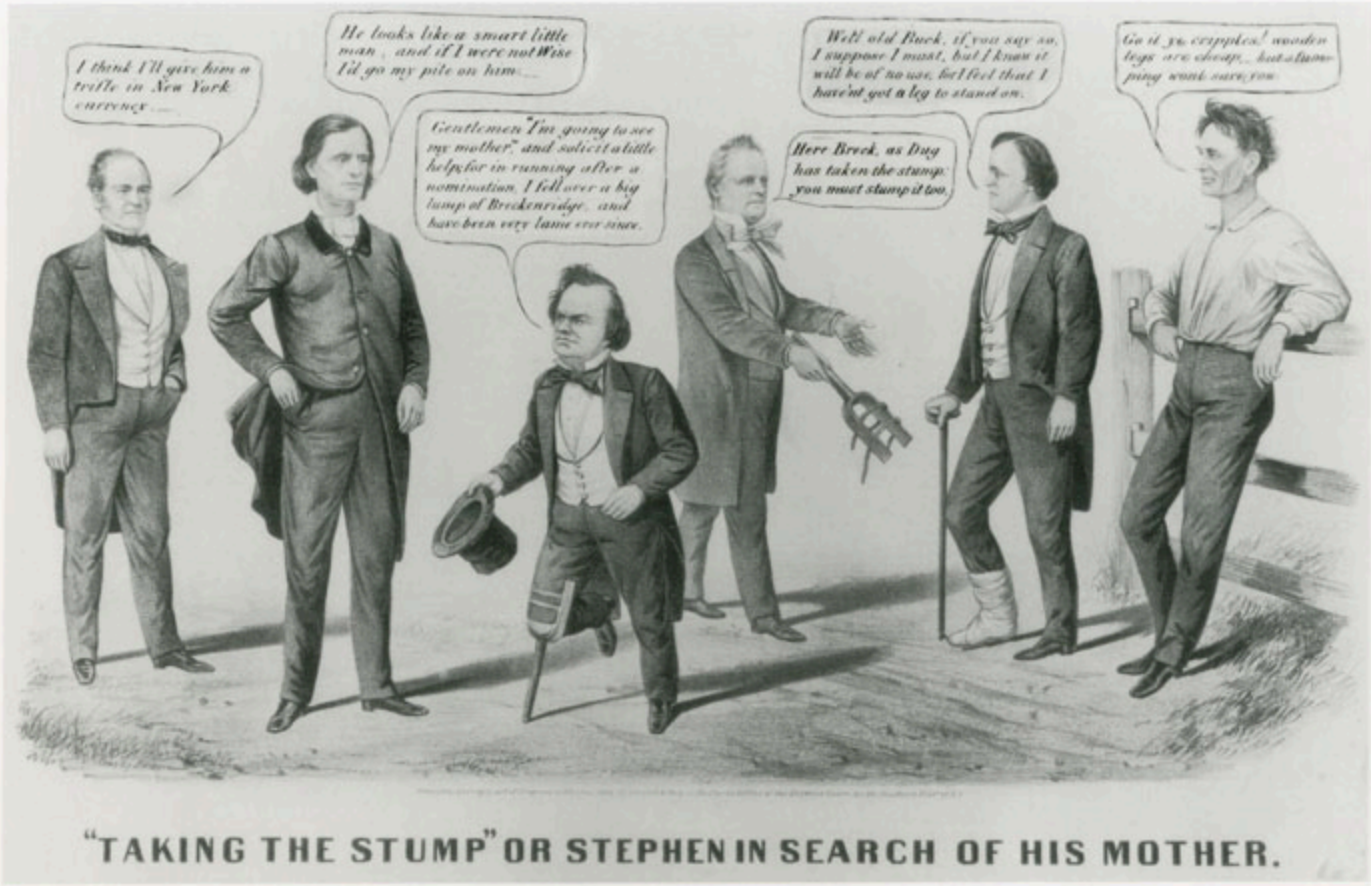
While presidential candidates were well-advised to keep quiet, local politicians were under no such restrictions. When Stephen A. Douglas first ran for the Illinois state legislature in 1836, at the age of 22, he was not bound by the fiction that he was merely awaiting the call of the public, and reported that he found "no difficulty in adopting the Western mode of Electioneering by addressing the people from the Stump."[10] In contrast to presidential candidates, local politicians like Douglas did not need to appeal to diverse audiences. Douglas could expect to win with a strong partisan Democratic message, for example, because most of his constituents were Democrats, and he could speak out clearly in favor of Western expansion, because all his constituents lived in the West. Conversely, he could not use the presidential trick of promising different things to different people, because he could expect that his opponent would soon expose and exploit any inconsistent statements he might make.

Douglas excelled at such self-promotional campaigning, and by 1848 he had served as a state supreme court judge, Congressman, and Senator. He was a national figure, strongly identified with his region, the Old Northwest, and with the cause of the further expansion of the United States and development of the West. In the early 1850s he also found himself aligned with a political and cultural movement known as "Young America," which embraced the dynamic pace of technological and territorial progress, and derided its opponents as "Old Fogies."

Douglas's political opponents mocked his principle of letting settlers decide whether to allow slavery in the territories as "squatter sovereignty"; this cartoon appeared in *Vanity Fair*, February 4, 1860. (TLM #2510)

In 1851 Douglas began his first serious bid to become president. Consistent with the brash and irreverent style of "Young America," Douglas was willing to break tradition where it suited what he perceived to be his best political prospects. Although he conformed to the custom of appearing not to seek the presidency, he conducted an aggressive behind-the-scenes effort to secure the Democratic nomination. He took the unprecedented step of letting it be known that his vice-presidential candidate would be Virginia senator R. M. T. Hunter, violating the custom of leaving the selection of the vice presidential candidate to the nominating convention. In the spring of 1851, he practiced for his 1860 effort by making a train trip from New York City to Illinois, stopping to visit his mother on the way, and working in a political speech or two. He traveled and spoke extensively on party issues through the rest of the year, and won early support for his candidacy, but his star fell as quickly as it rose. At the convention in June 1852 he lost the nomination to Franklin Pierce of New Hampshire, in large part because he had alienated many Democrats with what they considered his unseemly pursuit of the presidency.

Had Douglas's campaign for the nomination been nothing more than an act of personal lust for office, his defeat in 1852 might have ended his career. His style of self-promotion was redeemed, however, by its consistency with his political principles, which emphasized democracy and the right of the people to determine their own destiny. On the great political question of the day, whether to



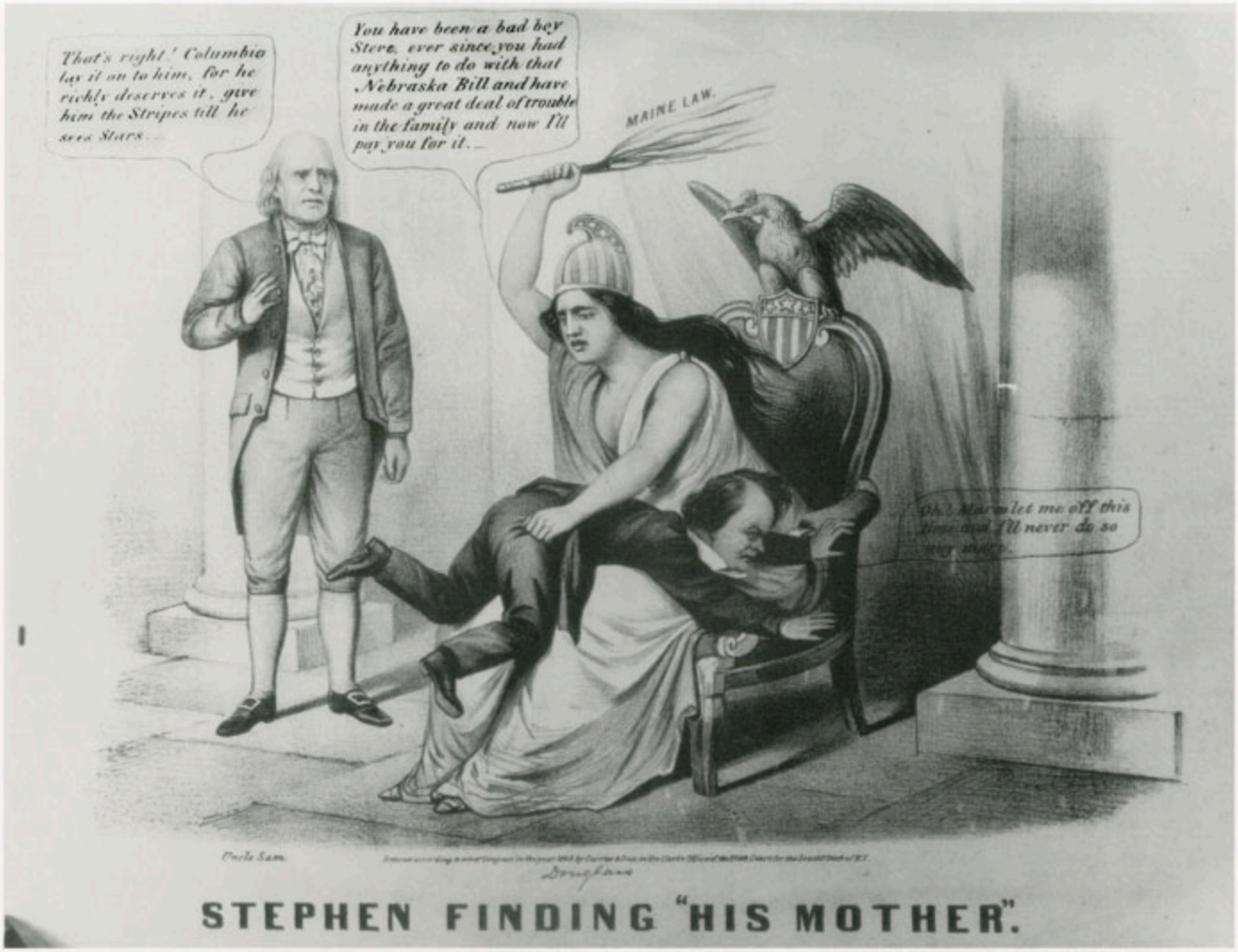
As a confident Lincoln looks on, Douglas "stumps" for votes, while Buchanan urges Southern Democrat John C. Breckinridge to do the same. (TLM #1943)

allow the expansion of slavery into the national territories of the West, Douglas adopted from Lewis Cass of Michigan the principle of popular sovereignty, under which the white settlers of the West could decide for themselves, democratically, whether they wished to live in slave territory or free. The principle had many practical flaws, as its opponents were quick to point out: when would the election take place? When the first settler moved in? the 10th? the 100th? when the population was large enough to qualify the territory for statehood? If the election were held too soon, a few voters would decide the fate of many later settlers; but if it were held later, then would it not be too late to ban slavery, once a substantial minority had imported slaves?

Moreover, Douglas's opponents charged, the problem of slavery in the United States could never be solved by ignoring its moral dimension and treating it as something that could be voted up or down with no more consequence than a bond issue to build a canal. Those who opposed slavery, like Abraham Lincoln, came to see popular sovereignty as a covert way of allowing the evil institution to spread across the continent; pro-slavery people, in contrast, later came to see the idea of allowing a territorial legislature the theoretical power to ban slavery as the thin end of an antislavery wedge that would one day penetrate into the South itself.

While the ambiguity of the doctrine of popular sovereignty would in the end come to haunt Douglas and destroy his chances for the presidency, in the short run it served him well. In the Compromise of 1850, of which he was the principle legislative architect, Douglas applied the principle to the territories of New Mexico and Utah, which had been seized from Mexico. It was the success of the Compromise that gave Douglas a start in his unsuccessful presidential campaign of 1852, and led him to consider wider applications of the principle of popular sovereignty in the future.

Douglas remained in the forefront of national politics after his defeat in 1852, largely by masterminding the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854. This law organized the enormous territory that today comprises all or part of Kansas, Nebraska, Colorado, Wyoming, Montana, and the Dakotas, under the principle of popular sovereignty. To win Southern support for the Act, Douglas had to revise it to repeal the Missouri Compromise of 1820, which had prohibited slavery north of the 36°30′ line anywhere within the old Louisiana Purchase territory. Douglas thought this was a minor point; he considered the 36°30′ line a dead letter by this time, since both pro-slavery and anti-slavery forces had at one time or another opposed the extension of the line across the West to the Pacific Ocean. He was thus astonished by the opposition his Kansas-Nebraska Act aroused in the North, where it was widely seen as a craven concession to slaveholders. In Chicago, a hostile audience shouted him off the stage, one of the few times anyone ever prevented Stephen A. Douglas from speaking to his heart's content, but he persisted in defending his policy. Controversy over the Act kept him in the public eye; by 1856, he was unquestionably the most well-known figure in the Democratic party.



The nation, personified as Columbia, gives the Little Giant a sound spanking for his role in stirring up sectional animosities with the Kansas-Nebraska Act. (TLM #3230)

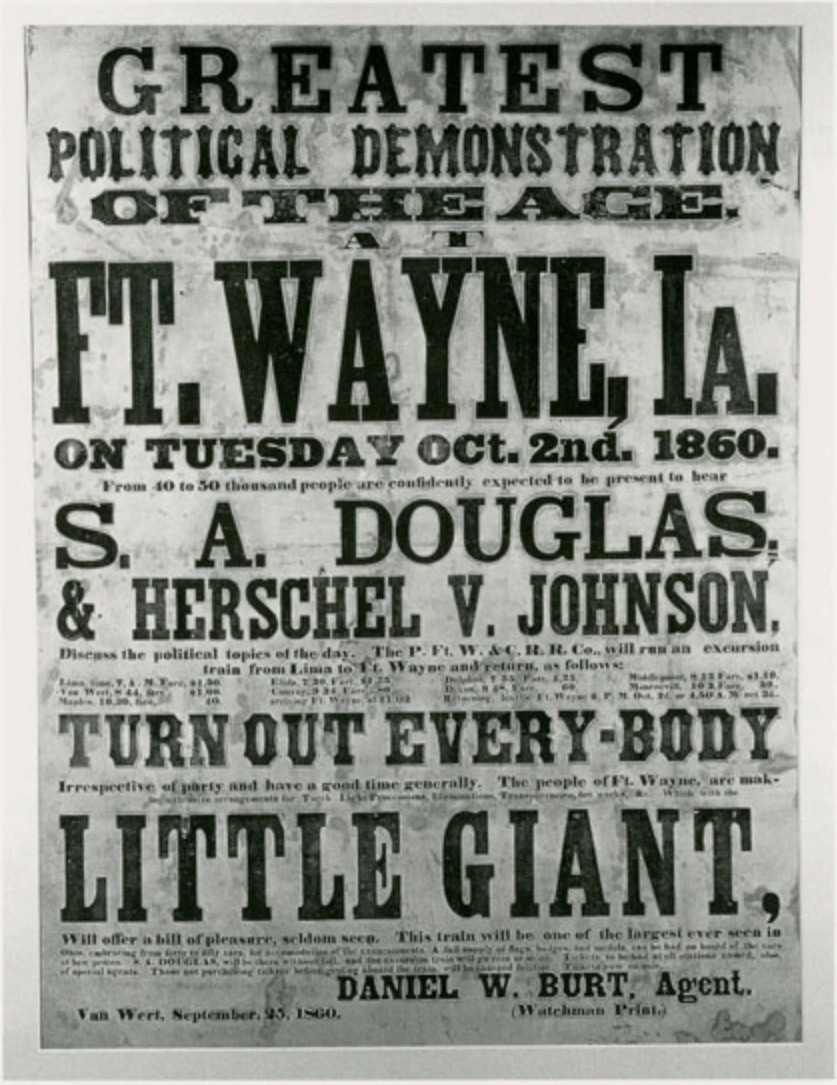
As the next presidential election campaign approached, Douglas showed that he had learned the lesson of 1852. In 1855 he expressly disavowed any interest in the presidency, thus taking the traditional first step toward becoming a candidate. He spent much of the year touring the country and speaking about the slavery issue in an attempt to repair the political damage that the Kansas-Nebraska Act had done, not only to his own career, but to the unity of the Democratic party. By 1856, the Democracy was the only remaining national political party; with astonishing suddenness, the Whig party had disintegrated under the pressure of the Kansas-Nebraska controversy. Slavery threatened to divide the Democrats as it had the Whigs, and Douglas worked hard to promote popular sovereignty as a means of maintaining the party's national unity.

While he continued to insist in public that he did not expect to be rewarded for his efforts with his party's nomination, he quietly organized his political friends toward that end. The time-honored strategy of combining public silence with private activity might have been successful, but for the presence of another candidate who was even more silent in public, and more active in private. James Buchanan of Pennsylvania had the good fortune of being safely out of the country, representing the United States as minister to Great Britain, during the Kansas-Nebraska controversy, and so had no opportunity to offend anybody by expressing his views on the subject. When the Democratic nominating convention met in Cincinnati, Douglas made a good showing, then graciously withdrew in favor of Buchanan after the sixteenth ballot, choosing to maintain harmony within the party rather than forcing a potentially divisive deadlock.

Douglas's concession to Buchanan marked the high point in the relationship between the two men, which deteriorated rapidly after Buchanan's election. Douglas's dedication to the principle of self-government in the territories caused him to break with the Buchanan administration over the issue of a constitution for the state-to-be of Kansas. After an election tainted by force and fraud, a group of proslavery delegates met at the town of Lecompton to produce a constitution for the Kansas territory, which they presented to Congress. Buchanan urged recognition of the proslavery Lecompton constitution, but Douglas opposed it because it did not fairly represent the will of the settlers of the territory. In rejecting the fraudulent Lecompton constitution, Douglas discov-

ered that Southerners who had embraced his doctrine of popular sovereignty were prepared to do so only as long as the populace exercised their sovereignty in defense of the right to own slaves. Douglas's argument that the people of a territory were equally empowered to exclude slavery as to admit it caused many Southern Democrats to join the Buchanan administration in turning against him. When the Dred Scott decision of 1857 seemed to rule that neither Congress nor the territorial legislations could prohibit slavery within a territory, Douglas dodged the issue by arguing that the territorial governments could still effectively prohibit slavery simply by refusing to take positive steps to support it; without friendly legislation to enforce it, he argued, slavery could not survive a minute.

This further alienated Douglas's Southern allies within the Democratic party, a split that Douglas's Republican challenger in the 1858 senatorial election was eager to widen. Abraham Lincoln confronted Douglas with the apparent contradiction between the doctrine of popular sovereignty and the Dred Scott decision, which led Douglas to reiterate his position during their debate at Freeport, Illinois.[11] The "Freeport Doctrine," that territorial governments could in essence prohibit slavery by not protecting it, was not a new statement of Douglas's views, but its clarity divided Northern and Southern Democrats so deeply that it appeared they might soon follow the fate of the Whig party. Although Douglas won re-election to the Senate and maintained his position as the nation's leading Democrat, the prospects of disunion between North and South were becoming more dangerous by the moment.


GREATEST
POLITICAL DEMONSTRATION
OF THE AGE.
AT
FT. WAYNE, IA.
ON TUESDAY Oct. 2nd. 1860.
From 40 to 50 thousand people are confidently expected to be present to hear
S. A. DOUGLAS.
& HERSCHEL V. JOHNSON.
Discuss the political topics of the day. The P. Ft. W. & C. R. R. Co., will run an excursion train from Lima to Ft. Wayne and return, as follows:
TURN OUT EVERY-BODY
Irrespective of party and have a good time generally. The people of Ft. Wayne, are mak-
LITTLE GIANT,
Will offer a bill of pleasure, seldom seen. This train will be one of the largest ever seen in
DANIEL W. BURT, Agent.
Van Wert, September, 25, 1860. (Watchman Print.)

Broadside advertising Douglas's 1860 campaign visit to Fort Wayne, Indiana. Douglas carried the city in the presidential election, but the state went for Lincoln. (TLM #2892)

It was in these circumstances that Douglas faced the presidential campaign of 1860. In his view, the Democratic party was the last institution that could hold the country together. The Whig party had been replaced by a purely sectional Republican party that had no support in the South, while the Supreme Court and the Buchanan administration were both regarded in the North as tools of the Slave Power, rather than as impartial adjudicators of national issues. Even the churches had long since divided over slavery, with the Southern Baptists and Southern Methodists seceding from their respective denominations as far back as the early 1840s. Only within the Democracy, Douglas believed, could Northerners and Southerners yet find some common ground, and there only on his doctrine of popular sovereignty, which neither required nor prohibited slavery.

But by 1860, federal non-interference with slavery in the territories was no longer enough for Southern Democrats, who spoke of reviving the importation of slaves from Africa (banned by federal law in 1808) and who insisted on Washington's active endorsement of slavery in the form of a slave code that would protect the institution in all federal territories, regardless of the will of territorial settlers. When Northern Democrats balked at the latter demand during the party's May 1860 convention in Charleston, South Carolina, Southern delegates bolted from the hall, forcing the convention to adjourn without selecting a candidate. The convention reconvened in Baltimore in June, and after the Southern delegates bolted again, Douglas was nominated by the remaining Northern wing of the party.

As the presidential campaign got underway in the summer of 1860, the tradition of the silent candidate was still in effect. Lincoln, the Republican candidate, had his secretary reply to people seeking new statements of his views with a form letter which said that "his positions were well known when he was nominated, and ...he must not now embarrass the canvass by undertaking to shift or modify them." Lincoln gave one extemporaneous

speech during the campaign, on August 8, in response to a large crowd that had gathered to see him at the Illinois State Fairgrounds in Springfield. Other than this brief talk, which he opened by saying "It has been my purpose, since I have been placed in my present position, to make no speeches," and which closed two paragraphs later, Lincoln was able to resist the temptation to answer the many calls he received to speak or write on the issues. This was politically wise, for as Lincoln wrote in response to one such request, a public repetition of his views would give "an appearance of weakness, and cowardice, which perhaps should be avoided." If people would not read what he had already written of his views, Lincoln asked rhetorically, "would they read, or heed, a repetition of them?"[12]

Temperamentally, Lincoln was suited to execute a strategy of silence. His law partner William Herndon called him "shut-mouthed," and said that his "nature was secretive, it was reticent, it was 'hush.' "[13] Douglas, in contrast, was perhaps the least shut-mouthed man in America. Although he stated shortly after his nomination that "If my political opinions are not known to the people of the United States, it is not worth while for me to attempt to explain them now," it was with obvious unease that he observed that this was the "first time in my life that I have been placed in a position where I had to look on and see a fight without taking a hand in it." [14]

Further, Douglas felt that even though he had been repeating his doctrine of popular sovereignty for the past ten years, his views were being distorted and misrepresented by "fire-eaters," Southern extremists bent on breaking up the Union. How else could it be that Southern Democrats were rejecting his platform, which was identical to the one that the entire party had endorsed in 1856? Douglas recognized that his chances of winning the election were slim, but he felt it vital to the future of the country that he at least defeat the Southern wing of the party, which had nominated Vice President John C. Breckinridge of Kentucky as its candidate. By doing so, Douglas hoped to reunite the party as a national institution under the banner of popular sovereignty. It was with the goal of convincing Democrats North and South that his was the only program that offered any hope of preserving the party, and with it the Union, that Douglas set off in search of his mother on July 14.

The public reaction to Douglas's unprecedented role in his own campaign was mocking. Editorials and cartoons portrayed "Stephen and his Anxious Mother," "Stephen in Search of His Mother," and "Stephen Finding his Mother,"and criticized him for demeaning the presidency by "strolling around the country begging for votes like a town constable" and not honestly admitting that "he is on an electioneering tour for the presidency."[15] While the criticism was widespread, its tone was not so much one of outrage at the violation of political etiquette as it was laughter at the cheek of the excuse.

If readers laughed at images of little Steve seeking his mother, they recognized the deadly seriousness of the issues that propelled Douglas to tour the country. Speaking in Norfolk, Virginia, Douglas confronted directly the possibility of secession and civil war. In response to questions from the audience, he courageously stood by his principles of popular government and Union to deny that the South would be justified in seceding under any circumstances, much less by the mere election of an antislavery president. He then went further and stated that the president, whoever he might be, would be not only justified but obligated (by his oath to uphold the Constitution) to use force to coerce a seceding state back into the Union.

Douglas's second campaign trip through the South, on the eve of an election he had no chance of winning, was his last-gasp effort to bring Southern Democrats back to their loyalties to the Union and the Constitution, to remind them of the principles on which the Democratic party had been founded, and to avert the calamity of civil war. Measured against those weighty goals, the tradition that counseled silence for presidential candidates lost its force for Douglas. So strenuously did he campaign, not for personal political advancement but for the good of the country, that his health was broken, leading to his death at the age of 48 within a year of the election. That his campaign was unsuccessful does not minimize the heroism of his efforts.

So thoroughly did Douglas change the etiquette of presidential politics that printmakers retroactively sent Lincoln out on the campaign trail as well. This post-1865 chromolithograph, titled "Abraham Lincoln's Return Home After His Successful Campaign for Presidency of the United States, October 1860," contains the additional inaccuracy of depicting Lincoln with the beard that he did not grow until 1861. (TLM #1927)

For most of his three decades as a public figure, Stephen A. Douglas represented some of the worst elements of American politics. He was a blustering expansionist who believed the United States had a right to grow as much it wanted, with no regard for the rights of the Mexicans, Cubans, Nicaraguans, or Indians who happened to be in the way. He was an overt racist who married into a slaveowning family, denied that the statement "all men are created equal" referred to anyone but Americans of European descent, and bragged that he "would not blot out the great inalienable rights of the white men for all the negroes that ever existed."[16] He seemed devoted in equal parts to the advancement of his own career and to what Abraham Lincoln mocked as his "gurreat purrinciple" of popular sovereignty, the simplistic belief that the troubling issue of slavery in the territories could be permanently settled by the will of the local (white) majority. Underlying his interest in popular sovereignty, however, was a genuine faith in the capacity of individuals to govern themselves, which he believed was at the heart of the Constitution. In the summer of 1860 Douglas's two passions, for tireless self-promotion and for the American system of constitutional government, came together to inspire him to shatter the long-held taboo against campaigning openly for the presidency. It was the characteristic act of his life, reflecting both his personality and his principles, and leaving us with the legacy, for good or ill, of presidential candidates who seek incessantly to engage the attention of every voter.

Endnotes

1. Stephen A. Douglas Papers, in the possession of the Martin F. Douglas Family, Greensboro, N.C., quoted in Robert W. Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1973), 781. Johannsen's biography remains the standard source for the life of Douglas.

2. Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas*, 784.

3. See M.J. Heale, *The Presidential Quest: Candidates and Images in American Political Culture, 1787-1852* (London: Longman, 1982), 1-22.

4. William Lowndes to James Hamilton, December 29, 1821, quoted in Heale, *Presidential Quest*, 1.

5. Congressional Quarterly, Inc., *Presidential Elections 1789-1992* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, 1995), 79.

6. Quoted in Paul F. Boller, Jr., *Presidential Campaigns* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 43.

7. Quoted in Stephan Lorant, *The Glorious Burden: The American Presidency* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 122.

8. Quoted in Boller, *Presidential Campaigns*, 70.

9. Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas*, 232.

10. Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas*, 45.

11. Roy P. Basler, ed., *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, 9 vols. (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1953-55), 3: 43, 51.

12. Basler, ed., *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, 4: 60, 91, 133.

13. William Herndon to Jesse Weik, January 22, 1887, quoted in Emanuel Hertz, *The Hidden Lincoln: from the Letters and Papers of William H. Herndon* (New York: Viking, 1938), 159.

14. Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas*, 777.

15. Quoted in Boller, *Presidential Campaigns*, 110; Gil Troy, *See How They Ran: The Changing Role of the Presidential Candidate* (New York: The Free Press, 1991), 65.

16. Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas*, 673.

Hollow, Halloo, Hallo and *Holler* — a Note on Usage

by Sarah Joan Ankeney

In his letter of June 22, 1848 to William H. Herndon, Lincoln urged Herndon to form a Rough and Ready Club in support of Zachary Taylor for president. He suggested that it consist of "the wild boys" of the town of Springfield. He wrote: "Let everyone play the part he can play best — some speak, some sing, and all hollow." [1]

In this letter to Herndon, the word "hollow" has been questioned by various scholars. Some have thought it to be an error of Lincoln's, and others have regarded it as a misinterpretation of Lincoln's handwriting. The Lincoln Museum, which quotes the phrase in its pamphlet, "Volunteer at The Lincoln Museum," has chosen to remain with what seems to be the original word, "hollow." Herndon, in his biography of Lincoln, used this variation: "...and all halloo." Another 19th century biographer, Isaac Arnold, used "hallo." Among modern writers, Reinhard Luthin, in *The Real Abraham Lincoln*, used the following: "...and all 'holler'," while David Donald also used "'holler'" in his *Lincoln's Herndon*. Stephen Oates wrote simply: "some speak, some sing, and some holler." (I will not deal with the fact that among these biographies there are also other minor variations on the original wording.) [2]

At first glance Lincoln's use of "hollow" seems inappropriate, because the particular use he probably meant for this word is now obsolete. To aid in our understanding of "hollow" we can turn to Herndon's "halloo" in H.W. Fowler's *Modern English Usage*. About *halloo*, which was (and is) a hunting term (urging hounds to the hunt) as well as simply a call to attract attention, Fowler says:

> The multiplicity of forms is bewildering; there are a round dozen at

least—hallo, halloa, halloo, hello, hillo, hilloa, holla, holler, hollo, holloa, *holler* [emphasis added], hullo. Holler may perhaps be put aside as an American verb, hillo and hilloa as archaic, and hollow as confusable with another word.[3]

In 1848, Lincoln proposed that Springfield's "wild boys" form a Rough and Ready Club to support Zachary Taylor for president; in 1860, Lincoln's campaign included parades of disciplined young "Wide Awakes," like those pictured here. (TLM #2043)

The alternate meaning of *hollow*, "empty space," has confused many a follower of Lincoln. Of the other variants, some have become greetings: *hallo, hello*, and *hullo*. Others, like *holler*, have come to refer to yelling or calling loudly, in situations other than the hunt. (Another meaning of holler will be mentioned later.) Still others, like *hollow*, are not used at all in this context, and remain attached to the mother word *halloo* only in the pages of Fowler.

It appears that Herndon (or his editors) used "halloo" to reinforce that tenuous attachment, replacing Lincoln's "hollow" with the mother word and all its hunting connotations. Arnold, too, seems to have been thinking of the urging of the hounds, as his "hallo" was (and is) rarely used by Americans as a greeting only.

Luthin, Oates, and Donald, with their "holler," seem to have translated the original Lincoln into the modern word that means "yell" in any situation, not just while hunting foxes. The word they use is an interesting one. It is a good substitute for "hollow" since, as Fowler says, it is uniquely American, and it describes what "the wild boys" could best do in support of their candidate. (Luthin and Donald do enclose "holler" in single quotes to indicate their changes; Oates does not indicate that he has employed an explanatory substitute.) But *holler* is more than just a variation of *hollow*. It is listed in *Webster's Dictionary* as a working song sung by Black field-workers. If *holler* is used as a substitute for *hollow* it can suggest that Lincoln was writing metaphorically, treating the "wild boys" as field workers. That sounds like Lincoln. But if Lincoln had meant the field song, or *holler*, he probably would have written "holler" instead of "hollow" because *holler* (the field song) is, as Fowler would say, another word. In other words, *holler* could mean *hollow*, but *hollow* could never have the "field song" meaning of *holler.*

Herndon's "halloo" is possibly the best substitute for "hollow," although like any editorial substitution, it should be footnoted. With Herndon's substitute, the reader understands Lincoln to be saying that the wild boys (playing the part of hunters) should urge on the speakers and the singers (playing the part of the baying hounds) to capture the presidency (the quarry of the hunt). This extended metaphor works well in the theatrical context ("Let everyone play the part") in which Lincoln gives the advice. (The field-worker metaphor works well also, but Lincoln's use of "hollow" forbids it.) The likelihood that Lincoln, a product of the American frontier, would have used a British hunting metaphor may at first seem slim, but the fox hunt was also a popular sport among the aristocracy of the American South, and it is likely that Lincoln would have been familiar with it, even if he himself chose not to engage in blood sports. Moreover, use of the terminology of hunting was not limited to those who hunted, any more than one would need to be a sailor to speak metaphorically of "running a tight ship."

This all may seem to be a minor point of usage, and in a minor Lincoln writing (as compared, say, to the Second Inaugural). And yet we can see from this just how far the unfootnoted editorial substitutions of biographers can lead us from Lincoln's original meaning. In this case, the use of *holler* in place of *hollow* takes the reader away from the possibility that Lincoln was imaginatively likening a political contest to a foxhunt, comparing party workers to baying hounds. If Lincoln was thus indulging in a humorous metaphor, laughing at the sport of politics (in which he was so deeply engaged), we can see this as an example of the humor that helped Lincoln maintain his perspective and overcome disappointments and defeats throughout his political career. While a single word such as "hollow" cannot tell us all, it can contribute to the picture of "the real Lincoln" that so many of us are attempting to paint.

In short, this brief note might lead us to believe that it will be better in the future to leave "hollow" as it is, and to leave each reader (armed with Fowler and whatever sources may be at hand) to interpret Lincoln's meaning from his original words.

Endnotes

1. Roy P. Basler, ed., *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, 9 vols. (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1953-55), 1:491.

2. *Volunteer at the Lincoln Museum,* pamphlet [1996]; William H. Herndon and Jesse W. Weik, *Herndon's Life of Lincoln,* intr. by Paul M. Angle (1889; repr. Cleveland: World Publishing Co., 1965), 227; Isaac N. Arnold, *The Life of Abraham Lincoln* (Chicago: Jansen, McClurg & Co., 1885), 80; Reinhard H. Luthin, *The Real Abraham Lincoln* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1960), 105; David Donald, *Lincoln's Herndon* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1948), 28; Stephen Oates, *With Malice Toward None* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 89.

3. H. W. Fowler, *A Dictionary of Modern English Usage* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1965), 237.

At The Lincoln Museum

Temporary Exhibit

His Final Journey: The Funeral Train of Abraham Lincoln

Now to Sunday, September 10, 2000

To commemorate the 135th anniversary of the death of Lincoln, the Museum offers an exhibit centered on an exact scale model of the Lincoln Funeral train, originally displayed at the Museum's grand re-opening in 1995. The exhibit, crafted by Dr. Wayne Wesolowski and featuring new graphics, will be permanently installed at Illinois Benedictine University following its appearance at The Lincoln Museum.

Special Events:

15th Annual Lincoln Colloquium "Now He Belongs to the Ages: Lincoln in the New Millennium"

Saturday, September 23, 10:00 a.m. — 5:00 p.m.

10:00 a.m. Museum opens. View the permanent exhibit, "Abraham Lincoln and the American Experiment," as well as the Colloquium's Exhibitor/Vendor area.

1:00 p.m. Program begins.

Presenters include:

- The Lincoln Museum staff, discussing the permanent exhibit "Abraham Lincoln and the American Experiment."
- Harold Holzer, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, author of *Dear Mr. Lincoln, The Lincoln Mailbag* and many other Lincoln-related titles.
- Thomas F. Schwartz, Illinois State Historian, co-curator of "The Last Best Hope of Earth."
- Allen C. Guelzo, Eastern College, author of *Abraham Lincoln: Redeemer President*.

The cost of the Colloquium and the McMurtry Lecture (including reception) is $35, or $30 for Museum members. Please call (219) 455-6087 for reservations.

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The 21st Annual R. Gerald McMurtry Lecture

Saturday, September 23, 2000 — 7:30 p.m.

The Honorable Frank J. Williams, Associate Justice of the Superior Court of Rhode Island, has a long record of service to the field of Lincoln studies. The former president of the Abraham Lincoln Association, founder of the Lincoln Forum, editor of *Abraham Lincoln: Contemporary* and other volumes, benefactor of the Frank and Virginia Williams Lincoln Lecture series at LSU-Shreveport, and collector of Lincolniana, has spoken on Lincoln to audiences throughout the country, and has made numerous appearances on C-SPAN's Lincoln-related programming.

Admission to the evening lecture and reception is included with registration for the 15th Annual Lincoln Colloquium; for those not attending the Colloquium, admission is $10 for Museum members, $15 for non-members. Please call (219) 455-6087 for reservations.

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