From Silas Reed to Mrs. Abner Stone
Copperdom, Mo[.]
Aug. 16th 1854
Nebraska & Kansas turned out as I feared, but I hope New England people every where
will resolve that Kansas shall be on the side of freedom. The soil and climate are much the same
as Illinois, & the face of the country similar, and if free emmigration will only pour rapidly into
the Territory, the "compromise" outrage will be avenged. I see a colony of 30 active men have
already reached there from Mass. under the auspices of a society for that purpose, and I hope
hundreds will soon follow of the same stamp. If I were a young man I would go there at once.
But I shall tire you with the length of my epistle, so I will close.
Please make my regards to Mr. Stone and believe me

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

Upon the other point--that pertaining to the question of slavery in the Territories--it was the intention of the committee to be equally explicit. We took the principles established by the compromise act of 1850 as our guide, and intended to make each and every provision of the bill accord with those principles. Those measures established and rest upon the great principle of self-government--that the people should be allowed to decide the questions of their domestic institutions 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 leading feature of the compromise of 1850 was congressional non-intervention as to slavery in the Territories; that the people of the Territories, and of all the States, were to be allowed to do as they pleased upon the subject of slavery, subject only to the provisions of the Constitution of the United States. That, sir, was the leading feature of the compromise measures of 1850. Those measures therefore, abandoned the idea of a geographical line as the boundary between free States and slave States; abandoned it because compelled to do it from an inability to maintain it; and in lieu of that substituted a great principle of self-government, which would allow the people to do as they thought proper...Mr. President, I repeat, that so far as the question of slavery is concerned, there is nothing in the bill under consideration which does not carry out the principle of the compromise measures of 1850, by leaving the people to do as they please, subject only to the provisions of the Constitution of the United States. If that principle is wrong, the bill is wrong. If that principle is right, the bill is right. It is unnecessary to quibble about phraseology or words; it is not the mere words, the mere phraseology that our constituents wish to judge by. They wish to know the legal effect of our legislation. The legal effect of this bill, if it be passed as reported by the Committee on Territories, 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? I will especially address the argument to my own section of country, and ask why should any northern man object to this principle?
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 this principle, 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 silent but sure and irresistible working of that great principle of self-government which teaches every people to do that which the interests of themselves and their posterity morally and pecuniary may 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 your bidding? 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. I will show you by the history of the country that you did not accomplish any such thing. You prohibited slavery there by law, but you did not exclude it in fact. Illinois was a part of the Northwest Territory. With the exception of a few French and white settlements, it was a vast wilderness, filled with hostile savages, when the ordinance of 1787 was adopted. Yet, sir, 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.
...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 that has been abandoned, when it has been superseded, 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

**Abraham Lincoln, “Speech at Peoria in Reply to Senator Douglas,” October 16, 1854:**

This is the repeal of the Missouri Compromise. The foregoing history may not be precisely accurate in every particular, but I am sure it is sufficiently so for all the use I shall attempt to make of it, and in it we have before us the chief material enabling us to judge correctly whether the repeal of the Missouri Compromise is right or wrong. I think, and shall try to show, that it is wrong--wrong in its direct effect, letting slavery into Kansas and Nebraska, and wrong in its prospective principle, allowing it to spread to every other part of the wide world where men can be found inclined to take it. This declared indifference, but, as I must think, covert real zeal, for the spread of slavery, I cannot but hate. I hate it because of the monstrous injustice of slavery itself. I hate it because it deprives our republican example of its just influence in the world; enables the enemies of free institutions with plausibility to taunt us as hypocrites; causes the real friends of freedom to doubt our sincerity; and especially because it forces so many good men among 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. ...My faith in the proposition that each man should do precisely as he pleases with all which is exclusively his own lies at the foundation of the sense of justice there is in me. I extend the principle to, communities of men as well as to individuals. I so extend it because it is politically wise, as well as naturally just: politically wise in saving us from broils about matters which do not concern us. The doctrine of self-government is right, --absolutely and eternally right,-- but it has no just application as here attempted. Or perhaps I should rather say that whether it has such application depends upon whether a negro is not or is a man. If he is not a man, in that case he who is a man may as a matter of self-government do just what he pleases with him. But if the negro is a man, is it not to that extent a total destruction of self-government to say that he too shall not govern himself? When the white man governs himself, that is self-government; but when he governs himself and also governs another man, that is more than self-government--that is despotism. If the negro is a man, why then my ancient faith teaches , me that “all men are created equal,” and that there can be no moral right in connection with one man’s making a slave of another. Judge Douglas frequently, with bitter irony and sarcasm, paraphrases our argument by saying: “The white people of Nebraska are good enough to govern themselves, but they are not good enough to govern a few miserable negroes!” Well! I doubt not that the people of Nebraska are and will continue to be as good as the average of people elsewhere. I do not say the contrary. What I do say is that no man is good enough to govern another man without that other’s consent. I say this is the leading principle, the sheet-anchor of American republicanism. Our Declaration of Independence says: “We hold these truths to be self-evident: That all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, DERIVING THEIR JUST POWERS FROM THE CONSENT OF THE GOVERNED.”
I have quoted so much at this time merely to show that, according to our ancient faith, the just powers of governments are derived from the consent of the governed. Now the relation of master and slave is PRO TANTO [to that extent] a total violation of this principle.
... I particularly object to the NEW position which the avowed principle of this Nebraska law
gives to slavery in the body politic. I object to it because it assumes that there can be MORAL RIGHT in the enslaving of one man by another. I object to it as a dangerous dalliance for a free people--a sad
evidence that, feeling prosperity, we forget right; that liberty, as a principle, we have ceased to revere. I object to it because the fathers of the republic eschewed and rejected it. The argument of “necessity” was the only argument they ever admitted in favor of slavery; and so far, and so far only, as it carried them did they ever go. They found the institution existing among us, which they could not help, and they cast blame upon the British king for having permitted its introduction. BEFORE the Constitution they prohibited its introduction into the Northwestern Territory, the only country we owned then free from it. At the framing and adoption of the Constitution, they forbore to so much as mention the word “slave” or “slavery” in the whole instrument. In the provision for the recovery of fugitives, the slave is spoken of as a “ PERSON HELD TO SERVICE OR LABOR.” In that prohibiting the abolition of the African slave-trade for twenty years, that trade is spoken of as “the migration or importation of such persons as any of the States NOW EXISTING shall think proper to admit,” etc.
... Fellow-countrymen, Americans South, as well as North, shall we make no effort to arrest this? …In our greedy chase to make profit of the negro, let us beware lest we “cancel and tear in pieces” even the white man’s charter of freedom. Our republican robe is soiled and trailed in the dust. Let us repurify it. Let us turn and wash it white in the spirit, if not the blood, of the Revolution. Let us turn slavery from its claims of “moral right” back upon its existing legal rights and its arguments of “necessity.” Let us return it to the position our fathers gave it, and there let it rest in peace. Let us readopt the Declaration of Independence, and with it the practices and policy which harmonize with it. Let North and South--let all Americans-- let all lovers of liberty everywhere join in the great and good work. If we do this, we shall not only have saved the
Union, but we shall have so saved it as to make and to keep it forever worthy of the saving. We shall have so saved it that the succeeding millions of free, happy people, the world over, shall rise up and call us blessed to the latest generations.

What principle should regulate the “domestic institutions” of a people and what policy should not govern these “domestic institutions”?

What does Douglas call the “leading feature” of the 1850 Compromise?

What did the 1850 Compromise do to the Missouri Compromise line of 36º30’?

Regarding congressional action towards slavery in federal territories, what does Douglas say the 1854 Kansas-Nebraska Act has in common with the 1850 Compromise measures?

What caused the spread of freedom in the U.S., and what did not promote the spread of freedom?

What does Douglas argue about the status of slavery in his home state of Illinois, and what does he conclude about the role of Congress in regulating slavery in the federal territories?