



Stephen A. Douglas the Political Apprenticeship, 1833-1843

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When newly elected Illinois State Representative Abraham Lincoln first saw 5'4" Stephen A. Douglas, he sized him up as "the least man I ever saw." With the introduction of Douglas's first bill in 1834, Lincoln soon thought differently. The General Assembly not only passed the bill, it appointed the 21-year-old Douglas State's Attorney of Illinois' largest judicial district, replacing John J. Hardin, one of Lincoln's most powerful political allies.

It was the first of many Douglas-Lincoln contests in the decade ahead. Struggles over banking, internal improvements, party organizations, the seat of government and slavery--even romantic rivalry--put them on opposing sides long before the 1860 presidential election. These battles were Douglas's political apprenticeship and he would use what he learned to obstruct Lincoln--his friend and nemesis--while becoming the most powerful Democrat in the nation.

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