

## Student Response

### Section A

#### Senator Stephan Douglas and the Kansas-Nebraska Act 1854

“Douglas’s policy of applying the principle of popular sovereignty to the Kansas-Nebraska issue was entirely reasonable. As Jones wrote in the limits of liberty it was quite unclear what Douglas’ ulterior motive in introducing the Kansas-Nebraska Act were, but to say that he had sound reasons for it is possible, and can be drawn from some of his speeches and actions. To say his policy was entirely reasonable needs a closer analysis at the sources given and the amount of political controversy that the issue stirred.

Sources B, C, D, and E seem to lean in the direction that Douglas’ policy was reasonable, if not entirely, then to some extent. However, it is important to note that sources B and E may be reliable to some extent as they are written by modern historians over a century after the events, with some hindsight on what actually occurred. They were not present to feel the turmoil of emotions that they issue caused in its day. Thus B reasons out that they Democrats needed a good issue for the 1865 elections, Douglas though it well to introduce this bill which would also get Southerners support as it, was relying on popular sovereignty. It is also arguable that Douglas’ intentions when displayed the way they are in B were selfish to some extent. He wanted transcontinental railroads from Chicago to San Francisco because he had business interests in those areas and also because he had presidential ambitions thus needed people’s support, especially southerners. In this case, popular sovereignty would be his ticket to access all this but at what cost?!

Buchanan’s speech reads like the speech of one who was undecided about how to deal with the issues and would gladly accept anything that would seem to calm down problems in those days considering that the Democrats were fighting over the Congress’ right to legislate slavery into any territory or to exclude it, Buchanan was glad to have found a “solution” that would end the question of Congress authority. It seemed reasonable enough to him, but he did not take into consideration that the Kansas-Nebraska act was re-igniting the issue of slavery in the territories which was thought to have been settled by the 1850 Compromise. Douglas also made the same mistake that Buchanan did, as reflected in sources D and E. Rendering the Missouri Compromise “inoperative and void” was a mistake. Southern pro-slavery Democrats were exhilarated with joy over this popular sovereignty, but Northern abolitionists and even

moderates considered him a southern puppet. Also his policy of popular sovereignty went against the compromise of 1850 which stated that only Utah and New Mexico could decide by popular vote, now Douglas extended this to Kansas and Nebraska. It was inevitable that the issue would cause an uproar both in the North and South. As source A depicts, Independent Democrats as early as 1854 did not want the extension of slavery to territories where it did not exist. Already there had been an uproar when Pierce's administration had tried to annex Cuba because Northerners were against acquiring a slave state slavery in the North was deemed a moral. Political and social wrong which should not be given a chance to spread, which popular sovereignty provided for, and must be set on a path to "ultimate extinction."

Due to Douglas' policy Northern anti-slavery people sent in paid people to vote and so did southerners also pay pro-slavery people to move into Kansas to vote, which meant that the votes were unrealistic and unfair. The results were establishment of two governments, one anti-slavery and the other pro-slavery. Even Douglas himself was displeased with the results of the Lecompton issue. The idea of popular sovereignty had failed instead it had brought violence with the results of uprisings such as John Brown at Harper's Ferry.

Thus in retrospect it is only in theory that Douglas' policy was reasonable. However, judging with the sparky attitudes at that time, carrying out such a policy proved unreasonable entirely but rather selfish and not carefully thought out as a consequences showed.

An alternative to the hypothesis would be that "Douglas's policy of applying the principle of popular sovereignty to Kansas-Nebraska issue seemed ideologically reasonable, but did not consider the consequences of putting such a policy into play."