Annotated Bibliography


This is a book review of Paul Angle’s, Created Equal?: The Complete Lincoln-Douglas Debates of 1858. Angle’s book is simply the debates in their entirety and some background information, so Catton makes his own interpretation of the Great Debates after detailing the contents of Angle’s work. Catton’s thesis in this book review is that Douglas and Lincoln failed to acknowledge what the relationship between the races in America should be, which was a contemporary issue in the mid-1950s. His main argument is that Lincoln and Douglas only discussed whether or not slavery should be abolished in new territories. He notes that both candidates formally agreed not to debate over the issue of race. Catton asserts that Lincoln and Douglas did this for their own political gain, which was successful considering both men became presidential nominees. By avoiding the question of race, the author argues that the debates are no use to the present-day problems of his time. Catton uses social history methodology in his review of Angle’s book. He analyzes the Lincoln-Douglas debates in order to understand its relevance to a present-day issue of racial equality. In doing so, he determines that the Lincoln-Douglas debates are of little help in this aspect.

Catton’s interpretation of the Great Debates is credible. He uses the title of Angle’s book to pose the question of human equality and its presence in the debates. However, I disagree with Catton’s assertion that Lincoln and Douglas entirely avoided the issue of racial equality. Although it is not discussed in detail, both candidates do state that they believed blacks should be inferior to whites during the debates. Further, considering Catton’s work is written one-hundred years after the debates, it is unfair to criticize Lincoln and Douglas for spending most of their time on their own contemporary issue and not one in the future.

Catton’s work is important because he brings a different perspective to the Lincoln-Douglas debates that is not popular amongst historians during this time period. Although he does acknowledge that the debates were significant in terms of the 1860 election, he questions whether they should be praised because of the lack of discussion on the issue of race. It is true that the Lincoln-Douglas debates were about slavery, but the issue of racial equality certainly relates to the issue that Lincoln and Douglas were discussing. Thus, Catton poses a valuable question that historians may consider.


In his article, Fehrenbacher’s thesis is that both Lincoln and Douglas benefited from the Great Debates. However, Lincoln’s election for president in 1860 serves as evidence that Lincoln was the true benefactor. His main argument is that Lincoln and the Republican party asserted
their prominence in battling the popular Douglas Democrats. Additionally, Lincoln’s House Divided speech and inquiries at the Freeport debate demonstrate his ambitions to become president in the future. Fehrenbacher also argues that Douglas benefited from the debates. Pushing back against the idea that Douglas lost the presidency in 1858, he credits the debates for helping Douglas become the leading Democratic nominee in the North. In his opinion, the split in the Democratic party lost Douglas the election, not the debates with Lincoln. Ferhenbacher alludes to the historical significance of the debates in a different sense as well. In discussing the issue of slavery, he claims that Lincoln and Douglas should be credited for sparking the mid-twentieth century public concern over human rights. Further, he acknowledges Lincoln and Douglas’ impact on the adoption of the Seventeenth Amendment, which allowed voters to directly elect state Senators. Ferhenbacher is a political historian. He uses political methodology to explain the impacts of the Lincoln-Douglas debates on the 1860 presidential election. He utilizes the history of politics and a voter analysis to assert that both candidates benefitted from having debated each other. He also could be seen as a social historian for noting that Lincoln and Douglas sparked concern over human rights issues.

Ferhenbacher’s work is credible. Born in Illinois, he received his PhD from the University of Chicago. Ferhenbacher specialized in the study of slavery and Abe Lincoln. He uses the work of other historians and the dialogue of the both candidates to support his claims. I agree with his assertion that Lincoln benefited from the debates, but Douglas’ gain from the Senator race is less noticeable. In terms of his opinion on the historical significance of the debates, I think Lincoln and Douglas’ impact should certainly be considered. However, these claims hold less weight than their direct impact on the 1860 presidential election.

Fehrenbacher’s work is important because he acknowledges the significance of the Great Debates in terms of Lincoln’s presidential nomination. Additionally, he disapproves of the common narrative that Douglas lost the presidential election at the Freeport debate. In this sense, his work is an outlier in comparison to other historians. Fehrenbacher is not afraid to shed light on Lincoln and Douglas’ impact on other historical issues, which should be recognized as well.


In his book, Eric Foner’s thesis is that Lincoln was always antislavery, but his stance on the issue was complex and changed over time. He asserts that Lincoln was antislavery even in his early years as a politician, but mostly kept his opinions private. However, Foner explains that Lincoln’s stance on slavery was moderate. Lincoln merely wanted to prevent the expansion of slavery, not interfere with the institution in the South. Foner also acknowledges that Lincoln supported the colonization of freed enslaved people at one time. While these beliefs of Lincoln support that he strongly opposed slavery, Foner notes that Lincoln held racist viewpoints, most notably evident in the Lincoln-Douglas debates of 1858. In defense of Lincoln, the author argues that Lincoln had to maintain a moderate stance on slavery out of political necessity. Lincoln’s stance allowed him to appeal to abolitionists, while also not appearing too radical for his time period. Finally, Foner bolsters his claim that Lincoln’s stance on slavery was everchanging by noting his issuing of the Emancipation Prolamation. Foner uses a biography of Lincoln to explain the former President’s stance on slavery. He works through Lincoln’s life chronologically in his book. This allows Foner to display Lincoln’s changing stance on slavery. Foner analyzes Lincoln from his early private hatred for slavery, then to his more publicized antislavery stance,
albeit racist beliefs, and finally to Lincoln’s powerful statement with the Emancipation Proclamation. Because he analyzes Lincoln’s views from a political perspective, Foner implements political methodology into his book as well.

Foner’s book holds scholarly merit. Eric Foner is a well-respected and widely popular historian. He received his doctorate at Columbia University, and he is now a history professor at the institution. He uses the letters and speeches of Lincoln to support his claims. Also, he does not draw from other historians’ perspectives, which adds to the credibility of this biography. Foner uses sufficient evidence to support his claim that Lincoln’s stance on slavery evolved over time, and I agree with the author on this point.

Foner’s book is important because it provides insight into historians’ long debate over whether Lincoln should be credited for emancipating enslaved people or scrutinized for his racist beliefs. While most historians argue on behalf of one side or the other, Foner takes a middle ground stance. He acknowledges that Lincoln was antislavery, but recognizes his racist beliefs as well. However, Foner makes an important point that Lincoln’s moderate stance on slavery was a result of the contemporary racial beliefs of his time period. While utilizing Lincoln’s speeches in the Great Debates in his book, Foner takes a fair and justified position on Lincoln’s true beliefs.


In his article, George Fredrickson’s thesis is that both Lincoln and Douglas’ political beliefs were rooted in racism, but to different degrees. His main argument is that Lincoln was in fact antislavery, but Lincoln was also a white supremest. Fredrickson argues that Lincoln believed blacks were inferior to whites, but mostly because it was necessary for him, in terms of political advancement, to conform to a racist society. On the other hand, Douglas strongly believed that blacks were subhuman and should not have equal rights. These differences between Lincoln and Douglas demonstrate the extent to which both men were racist. Fredrickson is an example of a social historian. He analyzes the Lincoln-Douglas debates to understand the racist beliefs of the time. Fredrickson points out the separate, albeit racist, stances on the issue of slavery during the mid-nineteenth century.

Fredrickson’s arguments hold scholarly merit. Fredrickson was a history professor at Stanford University, and he focused his studies on race and racism in the U.S. He quotes other historians extensively throughout his work, and he relies heavily on the words of both Lincoln and Douglas during their debates to support his claims. While it is clear that both Lincoln and Douglas held racist viewpoints, Fredrickson makes a fair argument that the extent of their racism was different. I agree with the author’s assertion that Lincoln’s racism was “closer to racism as conformity than to racism as pathology.”

Fredrickson’s work is significant because it acknowledges the racist beliefs of the time period. In knowing that most white people held racist beliefs in the time period that Lincoln lived, we can better understand why he was so passive in his arguments for racial equality. Additionally, in noting that there are different degrees of racism, he brings a different, but important, perspective to the idea of Lincoln as a racist. Also, Fredrickson argues that Lincoln’s different degree of racism better set him up for political success, and thus, his demonstration of these beliefs during the Lincoln-Douglas debates allowed him to become a frontrunner for the upcoming presidential election.

In his book, Michael Green provides an analysis of how Abraham Lincoln won the presidential election of 1860. Green’s main thesis is that Lincoln’s attributes and political skills, the collapse of his running mates, and help from allies and friends allowed Lincoln to become president. His main argument is that Lincoln himself was most beneficial to his victory. Green argues that Lincoln’s background in life and politics allowed him to build a successful presidential campaign. Green's chronological organization of his book follows the events that led to Lincoln’s victory. Green mostly uses political history in his book. He explains how Lincoln’s moderate stance on slavery and political agenda helped him win the Republican seat, while the collapse of the Democratic candidates further aided him during his presidential campaign. Green also credits Lincoln’s background as a Whig and his demonstration of political skills during the Lincoln-Douglas Debates of 1858 for catapulting him into a presidential candidacy. He provides a brief voter analysis of the 1860 election in his book as well. Additionally, Green implements an academic biography of Lincoln to tie in with his political methodology. He uses Lincoln’s background to credit the shrewdness, patience, and ambition of Lincoln throughout his campaign.

Green’s book has scholarly merit. Michael Green is an associate professor at UNLV and has spent much of his career studying the Civil War era and life of Abraham Lincoln. Green utilizes several quotes from Lincoln and other candidates, letters to and from Lincoln, and stories surrounding the subject to back up his claims and ideas. However, Green is particularly pro-Lincoln, and his arguments reflect his support of the former President.

Green’s book is important because it provides a political analysis of how Lincoln won the election of 1860. Also, he notes the importance of the Lincoln-Douglas Debates throughout his book. According to Green, the Great Debates served as a life-changing event for Lincoln, as Lincoln was able to display his political skills and develop himself as a tough and honorable political figure. Green’s book provides insight as to how the debates with Douglas shaped Lincoln’s political career, and ultimately aided his presidential campaign.


In his article, Richard Heckman’s thesis is that politicians and journalists outside of the state of Illinois had a considerable impact on the Lincoln-Douglas debates. His main argument is that the feud between Douglas and President James Buchanan over the Lecompton Constitution created a divide in the Democratic party. The author acknowledges that, due to the Democratic divide, several politicians and journalists outside of Illinois attended the debates or pledged their support in writing for either Lincoln or Douglas. Most notably, Vice President John C. Breckinridge of Kentucky vouched for Douglas, while Horace Greeley of the *New-York Tribune* pledged to support Lincoln. While Douglas retained the Senate in Illinois, Heckman argues that the attraction that the Illinois Senate race received from leading figures outside of the state
demonstrated the impact that the debates would have in the future. Heckman uses political methodology in this article. While most political historians covering the Great Debates focus on Lincoln and Douglas’ policies, he looks at the political influence of figures outside of the state. He asserts that the divide between the Democrats, fueled by Buchanan and Douglas, had a massive impact on the future of the party. Heckman’s political analysis demonstrates how Douglas was able to win the Illinois Senate, but it also shows how Lincoln ultimately became a frontrunner for the Republican presidential candidate in 1860.

The author’s scholarly merit is credible. He utilizes letters between Lincoln and Douglas and other politicians outside of the state to uphold his ideas. In their speeches, Lincoln and Douglas both refer to conspiracies between Douglas and politicians in other states, which further supports the author’s claims. From having read the debates, it is apparent that Lincoln and Douglas valued the opinions of other politicians. Thus, I agree with Heckman that out-of-state leaders had an impact on the campaigns of both candidates.

Heckman’s article is important because it provides a different perspective of political methodology. The attention that the Illinois Senate race received from the rest of the nation speaks to the significance of the Great Debates. The fact that so many outside political figures were attracted to the race between Lincoln and Douglas sheds light on the political scene of the time period. While Douglas and the Democrats became split over the issue of slavery, Lincoln and the Republicans received stronger support. Heckman’s work implies that the Great Debates helped Lincoln obtain the presidency in 1860.


In this chapter of his book dedicated to discussing Abraham Lincoln, Hofstadster’s thesis is that historians’ traditional perceptions of Abraham Lincoln as a self-made politician and abolitionist is untrue. His main argument is that Lincoln’s stance on slavery was strategic. Hofstadter argues that Lincoln’s moderate stance on the issue allowed him to receive support from both abolitionists and “Negrophopes”. He also claims that Lincoln’s inconsistent remarks regarding slavery during the Lincoln-Douglas debates made him a “half-abolitionist”, whose goal was not to fully abolish the institution but to use this stance for votes. Additionally, Hofstadter asserts that Lincoln’s stance on slavery are reflective of his beliefs in free labor and the right for people to move upward in the social scale. Hofstadter is a revisionist historian who attempts to change the way in which others think about Abraham Lincoln. He uses political methodology in explaining that Lincoln’s moderate stance on slavery provided him with an opportunity to advance in politics and ultimately become the president. Additionally, Hofstadter relies on economic methodology. He explains that Lincoln’s economical beliefs in free labor supported his policies against the institution of slavery. He also utilizes Lincoln’s biography and background in life to explain Lincoln’s motives. For example, he acknowledges that Lincoln’s childhood and background as a politician and lawyer allowed Lincoln to become an ambitious and intelligent politician.

Hofstadter’s book holds scholarly merit. He draws upon Lincoln’s background and economic beliefs to uphold his claim that Lincoln’s stance on slavery was solely strategic. Additionally, he uses Lincoln’s own words in letters and speeches in the Lincoln-Douglas debates to support his ideas. In showing Lincoln’s inconsistencies regarding the issue of the slavery, Hofstadter makes a strong case against Lincoln supporters. While making a case against
the traditional beliefs about Lincoln, Hofstadter often utilizes the work of William Herndon. By using the work of an ally and friend of Lincoln to assist his claims, he significantly increases his credibility.

Hofstadter’s work is important because it provides a different perspective of Lincoln’s true motives. He pushes back against the mainstream ideology of Lincoln as an abolitionist and hero. Also, Hofstadter implies that the debates between Douglas and Lincoln were significant because they provided a platform for Lincoln to display his moderate stance on slavery, which ultimately allowed him to become president. As a well-respected historian, his work had a significant impact on the perception of Lincoln in years to come.


Harry Jaffa explores the significance of the Lincoln-Douglas debates through his book. His thesis is that Lincoln and Douglas were full-heartedly debating against each other because of their differing beliefs on the issue of slavery. His main argument is that Lincoln based his political career on a commitment to constitutionalism and abolition, which is reflected in his speeches throughout the Great Debates. In the eyes of Jaffa, Lincoln believed that there would always be a divide between the people and government if popular sovereignty was granted to new territories, which is why Lincoln was in favor of keeping slavery out of the expanded territories. Jaffa uses political history in his book. He credits his book for exploring the political truths of the Lincoln-Douglas debates. He notes that Lincoln’s Whiggish background is reflected in the Great Debates as well. Throughout his book, Jaffa utilizes his political methodology to oppose revisionist historians who believed Lincoln’s stance on slavery was solely a political strategy.

Jaffa’s book holds commendable credibility. He draws upon both the speeches of Lincoln and Douglas during their debates to support his claims. Also, Jaffa uses speeches from Lincoln both before and after the debates to further conclude that Lincoln believed in abolition. His critiquing of revisionist historians back up his arguments as well.

Jaffa’s work is important because it reflects upon the significance of the debates about one-hundred years after the event happened. Jaffa not only provides a political analysis of the debates, but credits the debates for Lincoln becoming president in 1860. Jaffa’s book helps to explain the meaning of the Lincoln-Douglas debates and describes how the debates benefitted Lincoln’s political career. Additionally, he pushes back against revisionist historians in stating that Lincoln was a true abolitionist.


James Lander’s thesis is that Abraham Lincoln and Charles Darwin had a shared interest in science and were skeptical of religion. His main argument is that both men’s belief in science caused them to be abolitionists, who strongly opposed slavery throughout their lives. He argues that Lincoln and Darwin had shared views on racism and worked to disprove those who used science to justify racism. Further, he advocates for the impact that both men had on the social changes of the nineteenth century. Lander uses biographical history in his book. He draws on the events in the lives of Darwin and Lincoln in order to compare their similarities. Lander organizes
the events of both men’s lives in chronological order. In specific, Lander dedicates much of his
book to comparing Lincoln and Darwin through their debates with their respective opponents,
Stephen Douglas and Louis Agassiz.

James Lander holds history degrees from American and British universities, and he has
taught American and European history in England for much of his career. Lander’s book is
dedicated to an interesting cause, but he does make important arguments. He uses the work of
other historians to support his claims throughout his book. I do believe that Lander’s comparison
of Lincoln and Douglas is compelling, but I disagree with his claim that Lincoln was a
full-hearted abolitionist. He is pro-Lincoln through and through, and his arguments demonstrate
this fact.

Lander’s book is important because it provides insight into Lincoln’s beliefs on race and
slavery. Additionally, he discusses how Lincoln used his beliefs about science and race to oppose
Douglas. Lander shows how Lincoln’s shared views with Darwin could be used to interpret
Lincoln’s true beliefs on slavery and abolition.

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In his article, Gerald McMurtry’s thesis is that the publication of the Lincoln-Douglas
debates in the form of a book increased Lincoln’s popularity, helping him win the election of
1860. His main argument is that the publication of the book was pushed by Lincoln and the
Republican party. McMurtry acknowledges that the publication of the book was fair to both men,
as Lincoln’s speeches were taken from the Republican newspaper, the Chicago Press-Tribune,
and Douglas’ speeches were presented as they appeared in the Democratic Chicago Times.
Further, he argues that the publication of the Lincoln-Douglas debates demonstrates the public
attraction to the issue of slavery of the time period. On this point, he notes that both men were
aware of the publication of their speeches and adamant about making corrections to their words
and phrases. In this article, McMurtry portrays himself as a literary historian. He breaks down
the publication of the Lincoln-Douglas debates in order to understand the significance of the
event. Because Lincoln and Douglas altered their speeches as they became more popular, the
author notes the differences between the six volumes of the book that were published.

Gerald McMurtry was a history professor and specialized in the study of Abe Lincoln.
McMurtry’s article is credible and has scholarly merit. He utilizes letters from both Lincoln and
Douglas to the publisher to uphold his points. I agree with the author that publication of the
Lincoln-Douglas debates demonstrates the significance of the issue of slavery during this time
period. The fact that 50,000 copies were sold supports his claim.

McMurtry’s work is important because it provides insight into the importance of the
Lincoln-Douglas debates. Although the debates took place only in Illinois, the publication of
them to the rest of nation shows the significance of the issue of slavery in the country and
Douglas and Lincoln’s impact on it. Also, McMurtry’s notes that Lincoln became more popular
through the publication of the debates, which demonstrates that the country became more
accepting of Lincoln’s stance on slavery during the time between the 1858 debates and the 1860
election. This provides insight into the impact of the Great Debates on Lincoln’s political career.

In his book, James Oates’ thesis is that Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass shared similar beliefs, and combined to work towards a common cause during their respective lives. His main argument is that Lincoln and Douglass both held a shared hatred for slavery, but attacked the issue in their own, yet similar ways. The author notes that both men had no contact with each other for much of their lives, but still impacted one another throughout their careers. He asserts that Lincoln, through his political savviness, maneuvered through the difficult task of becoming president so that he could eventually abolish slavery. In comparison, Douglass worked as an abolitionist to fight for the emancipation of enslaved people. Oates also argues that Douglass and Lincoln changed throughout their lives, becoming even more alike. He explains that Lincoln, who denied to be an abolitionist early in his career, became radical in his political policies and racial beliefs as the U.S. President. Further, Oates claims that Douglass hated politics and politicians early on, but became heavily involved in politics late in his life. Additionally, he points to Stephen Douglas’ false references to Frederick and Abe being acquaintances during the Great Debates as proof that Douglass and Lincoln were more alike than most people thought. Oates uses a biography of Lincoln and Douglass in his book. He utilizes the events of their lives, their speeches, and their actions to compare the two of them. He analyzes both men from a political perspective as well, so he ties his biography of Lincoln and Douglas to political methodology. Along with this, he implements social history into his book in order to determine Lincoln and Douglass’ impact on racial equality.

Oates’ work holds scholarly merit. He references multiple historians, and draws upon the speeches and actions of both men to support his claims. He notes that he admires both Lincoln and Douglass, and his work is reflective of this. His comparison of Douglass and Lincoln is compelling and I agree that both men were working towards the common goal of abolishing slavery. However, I disagree with the author’s claim that Lincoln became a radical abolitionist. Rather than promoting abolitionism, Lincoln was firm on his moderate stance on slavery, and one could argue that his eventual move to abolish slavery was out of necessity to preserve the Union.

Oates’ work is important because he takes a pro-Lincoln stance in terms of Lincoln’s true goals on the issue of slavery. He is one of the few historians to refer to Lincoln as a radical for his time period, and he brings his ideas to light in comparing the famous President to a true abolitionist. His interpretations of the Lincoln-Douglas debates in his book demonstrate how historians use the debates to praise Lincoln’s accomplishments. Because Lincoln and Douglass eventually worked together during the Civil War, his arguments are valuable and should be considered.


James Randall’s thesis in this book is that Lincoln’s policies before and during his Presidency caused the Civil War. His main argument is that Lincoln, through demanding that slavery should not be permitted in new territories, created a divided between the North and South and an unnecessary war. Further, he argues that Lincoln used his agenda on slavery for a political gain, rather than truly wanting to abolish the institution. Randall also argues that Stephen Douglas’s idea of popular sovereignty would have better equipped the country to deal with the
issue of slavery, and thus, Douglas’s work is commendable and deserving of praise. Randall pushes back against the traditional praising of Lincoln, making him a revisionist historian. He uses political methodology through his analysis of the Lincoln-Douglas debates and Lincoln’s political policies to support his claims as well. While mostly leaning on political analysis in his book, Randall could be portrayed as a military historian, as he does dive into the military strategies of the Civil War.

James Randall received his Ph.D in history from the University of Chicago. Because he lived through the havoc of the First World War, he focused his work on the damages of the American Civil War and thought it was a mistake. Randall’s interpretation of the Lincoln-Douglas debates does put his scholarly merit into question. While he does rely on the speeches of both Lincoln and Douglas and the work of other historians, he makes interesting interpretations of both men’s agendas that are not fully backed up with sufficient evidence. I disagree with Randall’s idea that Lincoln’s stance on slavery made the Civil War inevitable. However, Randall specialized his work in the study of Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War, and his opinion should be considered.

Randall’s work is important because he is one of few advocates of Douglas, and thus, a critic of Lincoln. He offers a different perspective that most historians ignore to mention in their praising of Lincoln. Also, Randall makes the case that the Lincoln-Douglas debates were of little importance because of the principles of Lincoln’s policies. Randall’s book is an example of historical work that devalues the Great Debates and exposes Lincoln’s political agenda.


In his article, James Stevenson’s thesis is that the debates between Lincoln and Douglas were about which candidate’s beliefs aligned more with the traditional republican ideal of the United States. His main argument is that Lincoln’s belief in equal opportunity aligned with the plentiful, working middle-class of Illinois, while Douglas’ white-only, popular sovereignty agenda supported the economic interests of white people. Additionally, Stevenson argues that both candidates’ agendas appealed to religious audiences. Lincoln’s stance that slavery was wrong appealed to the morals of Protestants, but Douglas’ free choice policies met the American cores of the freedom to practice religion. Stevenson mainly uses economic methodology in this article. He provides a breakdown of the classes and occupations in Illinois in 1858, which mostly included small farmers and laborers. Stevenson utilizes this information to explain how Douglas and Lincoln appealed to the people of Illinois. Additionally, the author analyzes the Lincoln-Douglas debates through religious aspects. He notes that Lincoln and Douglas altered their speeches and words to attract the attention of the various religious groups in the state. Last, Stevenson implements political methodology into his work with a voter analysis and by explaining how both men interpreted the Declaration of Independence.

James Stevenson holds degrees in history and economics. Stevenson’s work is credible because he uses the work of other historians, the speeches of both Lincoln and Douglas, and the Illinois census to support his claims. I agree with his assertion that both Lincoln and Douglas’ utilized their ideas to appeal to the economic interests of Illinoisiens. Also, while Lincoln and Douglas do not directly reference religion in their speeches, it is clear that both men were making an effort to align with those in their audience who were religious. Stevenson’s claims certainly have scholarly merit.
This article is important because it analyzes the Lincoln-Douglas debates through an economical scope, which is not commonly discussed amongst historians. By discussing the religious appeal of the debates, Stevenson provides another unique perspective as well. Further, Stevenson acknowledges that Lincoln’s beliefs, as well as Douglas’, were embedded in racism. While he does note that this was consistent with the racial prejudice of the time, this is a common belief amongst recent historians.


Taylor’s thesis in his article is that the principles of the Lincoln-Douglas debates apply to the issues of the early twentieth century. In Taylor’s opinion, the principles of the debates between Lincoln and Douglas were based on whether or not territories had local authority to decide if slavery should be allowed or not within its own boundaries. Taylor asserts that human liberty and constitutional government were among the main concerns of Lincoln and Douglas, which were still two principles that applied to the present-day in 1909. Lincoln believed that the slavery question was a national concern, while Douglas, under the idea of popular sovereignty, called slavery a local issue. His main argument is that when Lincoln asked Douglas to answer a question at the Freeport debate, he ruined Douglas’ chances of becoming president in 1860. He also asserts that the adoption of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments aligned with Lincoln’s argument in the Great Debates. He says, “Lincoln’s contention, that all local questions that affect all are the common concern of all, has become the corner-stone of our new national life.” Taylor uses political methodology in his article. He uses Lincoln and Douglas’ interpretations of the Constitution, Declaration of Independence, Compromise of 1850, Dred Scott Supreme Court ruling, and Kansas-Nebraska Act to better understand their policies. An analysis of these historical documents helps Taylor explain Lincoln and Douglas’ beliefs on the issue of slavery. His political methodology is utilized to demonstrate how the Great Debates impacted present-day issues in the early 1900s.

Hannis Taylor was an American lawyer and writer and focused on constitutional studies. Taylor’s article is credible. His analysis of historical documents is valid. Lincoln and Douglas refer to these documents throughout their debates, ensuring that both candidates understood the importance of their meanings. The argument that Lincoln’s disagreement with Douglas over the issue of slavery diminished Douglas’ chances of becoming president is fair. Also, I agree with Taylor’s assertion that Lincoln’s role in the debates impacted the future events that took place in America.

Taylor’s article is important because he focuses on the principles of the Lincoln-Douglas debates. In understanding the principles of Lincoln and Douglas’ disagreement, historians can understand how Lincoln eventually became president in 1860. In this sense, Taylor notes the significance of the Great Debates. Additionally, he refers to Lincoln as a patriot for his efforts in ending slaving and taking on the well-known political figure that Douglas was. Under Taylor’s discretion, the Lincoln-Douglas debates, as well as Lincoln himself, had a considerable impact on what America looked like in the early twentieth century.