



Year of Meteors: Stephen Douglas, Abraham Lincoln, and the Election That Brought on the Civil War

Douglas R. Egerton

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"Egerton tells the story of the dissolution of the Union as it should be told, not from the perspective of those looking back on the crisis, but from the clouded vision of those who lived through it." -Carol Berkin, author of *A Brilliant Solution: Inventing the American Constitution and Civil War Wives*

In early 1860, pundits across America confidently predicted the election of Illinois senator Stephen A. Douglas in the coming presidential race. Douglas, after all, was a national figure, a renowned orator, and led the only party that bridged North and South. But his Democrats fractured over the issue of slavery, creating a splintered four-way race that opened the door for the upstart Republicans, exclusively Northern, to steal the Oval Office. Dark horse Abraham Lincoln-not the first choice even of his own party-won the presidency with a record-low share of the popular vote. His victory instantly triggered the secession crisis.

With a historian's keen insight and a veteran political reporter's eye for detail, Douglas R. Egerton re-creates the cascade of unforeseen events that confounded political bosses, set North and South on the road to disunion, and put not Stephen Douglas but his greatest rival in the White House. *Year of Meteors* delivers a vibrant cast of characters-from the gifted, flawed Douglas to the Southern "fire-eaters," who gleefully sabotaged their own party, to the untested Abraham Lincoln-and a breakneck narrative of this most momentous year in American history.

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