The Lincoln-Douglas debates were a series of formal political debates between Abraham Lincoln and Stephen A. Douglas in a campaign for one of Illinois' two United States Senate seats. Although Lincoln lost the election, these debates launched him into national prominence which eventually led to his election as President of the United States.
Abraham Lincoln, Republican

- Lincoln was a relative unknown at the beginning of the debates. In contrast to Douglas' Popular Sovereignty stance, Lincoln stated that the US could not survive as half-slave and half-free states. The Lincoln-Douglas debates drew the attention of the entire nation.

- Although Lincoln would lose the Senate race in 1858, he would beat Douglas out in the 1860 race for the US Presidency.
Stephan Douglas, Democrat

• In 1858, Stephen Douglas, a Democrat, was the incumbent Senator, having been elected in 1847. He had chaired the Senate Committee on Territories.

• He helped enact the Compromise of 1850. Douglas then was a proponent of Popular Sovereignty, and was responsible for the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854. The legislation led to the violence in Kansas, hence the name "Bleeding Kansas"
Issues of the Debates

Explain Stephen Douglas's and Lincoln's positions on the central issues of debate:

Expansion of slavery
Popular sovereignty
Dred Scott decision
Freeport Doctrine
African American Citizenship
For Whom Were The Candidates Campaigning?

- The U.S. Constitution, as originally drafted, provided for the election of U.S. Senators by the state legislatures (Article 1, Section 3), not by the general electorate.

- Therefore, Douglas and Lincoln were actually campaigning for the election of state representatives and senators, who, if elected, would then support their respective senatorial hopefuls.
Illinois Republican Convention, 1858

• In June, 1858, Illinois Republicans met in convention and nominated Lincoln as their candidate for the U.S. Senate. Senators were then chosen by the state legislature, so neither Douglas nor Lincoln appeared on the ballot in the subsequent election.

• Lincoln delivered his memorable "House Divided" speech at the convention, dramatically declaring that the "government cannot endure, permanently half slave and half free."
JOHN BROWN – THE MARTYR
ELECTION OF 1860—DEMOCRATS

• In 1860 Democrats prepared for their national convention in Charleston
• They did so in the wake of John Brown’s Raid, which had not only occasioned fear in the South but had made northerners persona non grata (an unwelcomed person)
• Most southern democrats approached convention with goal of destroying Stephen Douglas
ELECTION OF 1860—DEMOCRATS

• WHY did they want to destroy Douglas?
  – In 1858 when the Senate had been presented with Kansas’ request for admission as a state under the pro-slavery and false Lecompton constitution (rammed down throat of voters, free-soilers not even vote), Douglas had led the opposition
  – Southern delegations came to the convention with demand for a plank pledging a federal slave code for the territories

• Douglas supporters would never let happen so the party split

• Southern Democrats nominated John C. Breckinridge of Kentucky on a slave code platform

• Northern Democrats nominated Stephen Douglas
ELECTION OF 1860—REPUBLICANS

- Held convention in Chicago where William H. Seward expected to win the nomination
- Yet the problem for Republicans was that they needed to carry nearly all the free states to win; expecting to lose California, Oregon, and perhaps New Jersey, they must capture Pennsylvania and either Indiana or Illinois
- Seward’s NY political cronies had the taint of corruption about them and he was strong in the very upper north states the Republicans were guaranteed to win no matter what
- Result was a Stop Seward movement
ELECTION OF 1860—REPUBLICANS

- Other potential candidates:
  - **Salmon P. Chase, OH** ➔ radical reputation and did not have unanimous support of even own state
  - **Simon Cameron, PA** ➔ notoriety as a spoilsman who had been in about every party there was
  - **Edward Bates, MO** ➔ backed by Horace Greeley and powerful Blair family seemed front runner but was colorless, had owned slaves, been a Know Nothing and in 1856 had supported Millard Fillmore ➔ alienated too many people
ELECTION OF 1860—REPUBLICANS

• Abraham Lincoln, IL—turned out had strongest hand:
  – was former anti-slavery Whig in a party full of these
  – had reputation as a moderate
  – had opposed Know Nothings
  – had reputation for integrity and honesty
  – embodied ideology of upward mobility
  – came from crucial state
ELECTION OF 1860—REPUBLICANS

• Abraham Lincoln nominated on third vote
• Republican party closed ranks behind him
• Only exception was group of Whig-Americans on right who formed Constitutional Union Party and, a week before Republican convention, nominated wealthy slave holder John Bell of Tennessee
ELECTION OF 1860

- Unique in American history because came down to two separate races: Lincoln vs. Douglas in the North and Breckinridge vs. Bell in the South
- In 10 southern states, Lincoln did not even have a ticket and in 5 remaining slave states received 4% of popular vote
- Lincoln won by carrying northern states plus OR and CA—purely sectional victory with less than 40% of popular vote