

This Day in History... June 16, 1858

Lincoln Delivers House Divided Speech

On June 16, 1858, Abraham Lincoln delivered his famous House Divided Speech in Springfield, Illinois.

In June 1858, 49-year-old Abraham Lincoln was nominated as the Republican Party's choice for United States Senator. Lincoln prepared a special speech for the occasion, one that would "rouse people to the peril of the times." That speech became known as the House Divided Speech. Lincoln took the name, and most famous phrase, from the Bible (Mark 3:25).



1875 Lincoln issue similar to the 1866 mourning stamp

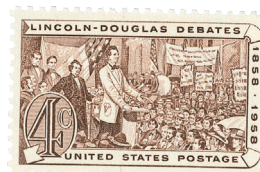


Lincoln stamp from the Prominent Americans Series

On June 16, 1858 at 5:00 p.m., the delegates to the Republican State Convention officially selected Lincoln as their candidate. Three hours later, at 8:00 p.m., he delivered his speech to his fellow Republicans in the Hall of Representatives.

The focus of Lincoln's speech was slavery, particularly concerning the Dred Scott decision. In this controversial case, the Supreme Court had ruled that Dred Scott could live in a free state, but must still remain a slave. To this, Lincoln responded, "what Dred Scott's master might lawfully do with Dred Scott, in the free state of Illinois, every other master may lawfully do with any other one, or one thousand slaves, in Illinois, or in any other free state."

Lincoln's other point of concern in his speech was the passage of the Kansas and Nebraska Act of 1854, which repealed the 1820 Missouri Compromise. The Act supported popular sovereignty, which allowed for the white residents of territories, rather than Congress, to determine the future of slavery in each state. Lincoln claimed that, "individual men may now fill up the Territories with slaves," and that instituting popular sovereignty would guarantee continued slavery across the nation.



Stamp pictures a scene from the subsequent Lincoln-Douglas debates.

Although many of Lincoln's friends believed his speech was too radical for the time, it was one of the driving forces behind the eventual Lincoln-Douglas debates that were held just a few months later. Lincoln ended up losing the Senate seat to Stephen Douglas, but many credit the exposure Lincoln received from the speech as contributing to his popularity in the presidential campaign of 1860.

Lincoln regarded the speech as one of his favorites, once saying, "If I had to draw a pen across my record, and erase my whole life from sight, and I had one poor gift or choice left as to what I should save from the wreck, I should choose that speech and leave it to the world unerased."



These stamps picture Lincoln throughout his life, including a scene from the Lincoln-Douglas debates.

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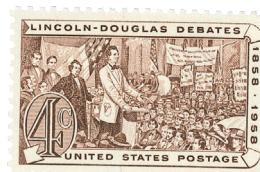


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