

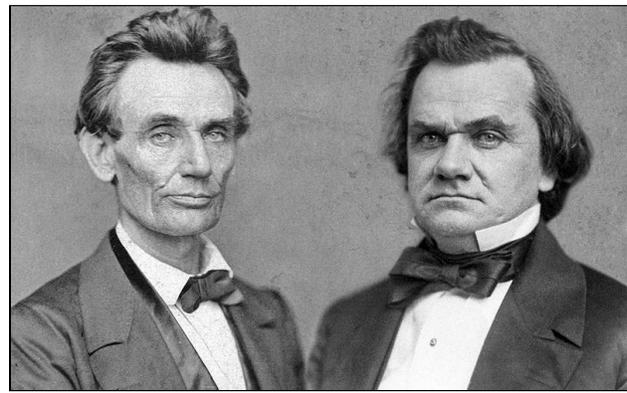
Name: _____ Class: _____

The Election of 1860

By USHistory.org
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This text explains how Abraham Lincoln won the election of 1860 due to a split Southern vote between three other candidates. While there were warning signs that the northern and southern states were growing too divided, this controversial election was one of the last events that led to the outbreak of the Civil War, where northern states fought and won out against rebellious southern states. As you read, note Lincoln's and Douglas' main arguments and who agrees with them.

[1] The Presidential Election of 1860 was a watershed moment¹ in American history. In the decade leading up to the election, Americans witnessed rising tensions between northern and southern states, largely over states' rights and the future of slavery in America. ;



"Composite image of portrait photographs of Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas" by Marsh & Vannerson is in the public domain.

As territories tried to join the Union² as new states, the question of slavery repeatedly arose. Was it up to the states to decide whether or not to continue the unfair institution of slavery? Or should the federal government intervene³ to keep slave states and free states equal in Congress or promote the decline of slavery? This led to the Missouri Compromise of 1820, which prohibited slavery in new states north of the southern border of Missouri. In 1854, the Kansas-Nebraska Act repealed⁴ the Missouri Compromise, with Congress allowing states to decide for themselves on whether to allow slavery.

The controversy⁵ continued to build in 1858 when two men running for senator of Illinois held a series of 7 public debates on the issue. Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas argued throughout the state for two months, drawing huge crowds. Douglas, who had supported the Kansas-Nebraska Act, argued that citizens of a territory had the right to decide whether to permit or prohibit⁶ slavery. This idea was called "popular sovereignty." When Lincoln countered that this violated⁷ Supreme Court rulings, Douglas famously replied that whatever the Supreme Court decided was not as important as the actions of the citizens. In the debates, Lincoln argued that Douglas' position of "popular sovereignty" would perpetuate⁸ slavery in the U.S. when national policy was to limit it. To support his point, Lincoln repeated again and again the idea that, "A house divided against itself cannot stand." While Douglas was elected senator of Illinois, many kept their eyes on Lincoln.

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1. A watershed moment is a point in time that is important because it often marks a major change.
 2. In this usage, "Union" is a synonym for "United States."
 3. **Intervene (verb):** to become involved in something in order to influence the outcome
 4. **Repeal (verb):** to officially make no longer law
 5. **Controversy (noun):** argument that involves many people who strongly disagree
 6. **Prohibit (verb):** to say that something is not allowed
 7. **Violate (verb):** to do something that is not allowed
 8. **Perpetuate (verb):** to cause to continue

Lincoln and Douglas met to oppose each other once again in the Presidential Election of 1860. But they were not the only two candidates in the running.

- [5] The Democratic Party⁹ was divided on whom they would nominate for president. Northern Democrats wanted to support Douglas, as they were in favor of his popular sovereignty argument that states should decide on slavery for themselves. While Douglas supported slavery, southern Democrats did not think he went far enough — they were angry with him for supporting states that chose not to permit slavery.¹⁰ When all of the Democrats met in Charleston, South Carolina, in April 1860 to select their presidential candidate, it was turmoil.¹¹ Southern Democrats stormed out of the convention without choosing a candidate. Six weeks later, the northern Democrats chose Douglas. At a separate convention, the southern Democrats nominated then Vice President John C. Breckenridge. Breckenridge, who was pro-slavery and had also supported the Kansas-Nebraska Act, was extremely popular in the South.

Meanwhile, the Republicans¹² met in Chicago that May to select a nominee. The fairly new party recognized that the Democrat's turmoil actually gave them a chance to take the election. They needed to select a candidate who could carry the North. To do that, the Republicans needed someone who could win New Jersey, Illinois, Indiana and Pennsylvania — four important states that remained uncertain. There were plenty of potential candidates, but in the end Abraham Lincoln emerged as the best choice. Lincoln had become the symbol of the frontier¹³ and hard work. He was a self-made man who represented the American Dream. And of course, his debates with Douglas had made him a national figure and brought the anti-slavery Republican movement into the limelight.¹⁴ Lincoln became the Republican's nominee for president.

Still more citizens felt the need for a moderate candidate. A number of aging politicians and distinguished citizens, calling themselves the Constitutional Union Party, nominated John Bell of Tennessee for President. Bell was a wealthy slave owner who would take no stand on the issues that divided the North and the South.

With four candidates in the field, Lincoln received only 40% of the popular vote and 180 electoral votes — enough to narrowly win the crowded election.¹⁵ This meant that 60% of the voters selected someone other than Lincoln. With the results tallied,¹⁶ the question was, would the South accept the outcome? The answer was no. A few weeks after the election, South Carolina seceded¹⁷ from the Union. Many more would follow, leading to the outbreak of the Civil War.

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9. At the time, the Democratic Party favored states' rights over a strong federal government.
 10. For the most part, southern Democrats fully supported slavery, as much of the southern economy was based on slave labor.
 11. **Turmoil** (*noun*): a state of confusion or disorder
 12. Anti-slavery activists founded the Republican Party in the northern states in 1854, largely in response to the Kansas-Nebraska Act.
 13. The American frontier was a shifting region on the western border of the growing United States, defined by uncertainty, adventure, high risk, and high reward.
 14. **Limelight** (*noun*): a position of public attention or notice
 15. The popular vote is the final tally of every citizen's individual vote in an election. The Electoral College is a small group of people who vote for the president and vice president according to the popular vote of the people they represent. The final tally of the Electoral College votes determines the winner in an election.
 16. **Tally** (*verb*): to count
 17. **Secede** (*verb*): to separate from a nation and become independent

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Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. Which statement best expresses the central idea in this text? [RI.2]
 - A. The Election of 1860 revealed the country's deep disagreements over its future that could no longer be ignored.
 - B. The Election of 1860 revealed the need to end the two-party system of American government.
 - C. Abraham Lincoln was a divisive public character with unclear ideas about the future of slavery in the U.S.
 - D. Abraham Lincoln's divisive anti-slavery language surprised a nation that accepted widespread slavery and forced the South to secede.

2. PART A: What does Lincoln's metaphor "A house divided against itself cannot stand" mean as used in paragraph 3? [RI.4]
 - A. Lincoln thought that slavery was a poor economic foundation upon which to build the United States.
 - B. Lincoln thought that the United States would not last while divided on such a major issue as slavery.
 - C. Lincoln thought that the Civil War would destroy the democracy of the United States.
 - D. Lincoln thought that a political system founded on disagreement and debate could not reach positive compromises.

3. PART B: What phrase from the text best supports the answer to Part A? [RI.1]
 - A. "In the decade leading up to the election, Americans witnessed rising tensions between northern and southern states, largely over states' rights and the future of slavery in America." (Paragraph 1)
 - B. "Douglas, who had supported the Kansas-Nebraska Act, argued that citizens of a territory had the right to decide whether to permit or prohibit slavery." (Paragraph 3)
 - C. "When Lincoln countered that this violated Supreme Court rulings, Douglas famously replied that whatever the Supreme Court decided was not as important as the actions of the citizens." (Paragraph 3)
 - D. "Lincoln had become the symbol of the frontier and hard work. He was a self-made man who represented the American Dream." (Paragraph 6)

4. How does paragraph 2 contribute to the development of ideas in the text? [RI.5]
 - A. It provides background on the rise of pro-slavery feelings in the United States.
 - B. It details how Congress pushed for increased slavery in the west to help the American economy.
 - C. It provides background on the growing debate over states' rights to permit slavery.
 - D. It reveals that national policy had always been to eventually prohibit slavery in the U.S.

5. Explain the connection between the Lincoln-Douglas debates and the start of the Civil War, using evidence from the text in your answer. [RI.3]
