

Skillbuilder: Compare Primary and Secondary Sources

“A house divided against itself cannot stand. I believe this government cannot endure, permanently half slave and half free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved—I do not expect the house to fall—but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing or all the other.”

—Abraham Lincoln, in an 1858 campaign speech to Illinois Republicans

Lincoln Becomes a Leading Antislavery Spokesperson

Americans began to learn of Abraham Lincoln’s views on slavery when he challenged Stephen Douglas in the 1858 Illinois Senate election. Lincoln did not speak to outlaw slavery in the South, but he did not think the country could continue to be half slave states and half free states. He believed that soon the country would have to become all slave or all free states.

Practice

1. Is Abraham Lincoln’s speech a primary or secondary source? How do you know? _____
2. What facts do the two sources share? _____

3. What do you learn from the passage that you do not learn from Lincoln’s speech? _____

Apply

Find a book that is an example of a primary source. Then find a book that is an example of a secondary source. On a separate sheet of paper, write a paragraph explaining how you identified each one.