

Selections from Speeches by Abraham Lincoln

"House Divided" Speech

June 16, 1858
Springfield, IL

Mr. President, Gentlemen of the Convention:

If we could just know where we are and whither we appear to be tending, we could all better judge of what to do, and how to do it. We are now well into our fifth year since a policy was initiated with the avowed object and confident purpose of putting an end to slavery agitation.

However, under the operation of that policy, that agitation has not only not ceased, but has constantly augmented. In my opinion, it will not cease until a crisis shall have been reached and passed. "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. Either the opponents of slavery will arrest this further spread and place it where the public mind shall rest in the belief that it is on a course of ultimate extinction; or its advocates shall press it forward, until it shall become alike lawful in all of the States, old as well as new, North as well as South.

Have we no tendency to this latter condition?

Our cause, then, must be entrusted to, and conducted by, its own undoubted friends -- those whose hands are free and whose hearts are in the work—who do care for the result. Two years ago the Republicans of this nation mustered some thirteen hundred thousand strong. We did this under a single impulse of resistance to a common danger, with every external circumstance against us. Of strange, discordant, even hostile elements, we gathered from the four winds; we fought the battle through under the constant hot fire of a pampered, proud, disciplined army. Did we brave all then only to falter now? -- now, when that same enemy is wavering, dissevered, and belligerent? The result is not doubtful. We shall not fail -- if we stand firm, we shall not fail. Wise counsels may accelerate, or mistakes delay, but sooner or later the victory is sure to come.