8. Lincoln-Douglas Debates (1858)

The Lincoln-Douglas debates were a series of seven debates between Abraham Lincoln, a Republican, and Stephen A. Douglas, a Democrat, held during the summer and fall of 1858 in Illinois. They were candidates in the Illinois race for U.S. Senator. Lincoln and Douglas had been debating each other for more than twenty years before their famous contest for the US Senate in 1858. They were longtime rivals with contrasting styles and sharp differences in philosophy. Douglas saw no reason why the nation could not go on half-slave and half-free, and felt the Dred Scott decision had put the slavery issue to rest. Lincoln disagreed and was against the Dred-Scott decision, believing that slavery was a moral issue. Lincoln lost the election, but the debates were widely reported, and helped make Lincoln a national figure.
9. “A House Divided” Speech (1858)

**Background:** The House Divided Speech was an address given by Abraham Lincoln on June 16, 1858 at the Illinois State Capitol in Springfield, after he had accepted the Illinois Republican Party's nomination as that state's U.S. senator. Lincoln believed that the recent Supreme Court decision on the Dred Scott case was part of a Democratic conspiracy that would lead to the legalization of slavery in all states. After Lincoln’s speech, several of his friends expressed dismay at its “radical” content. Leonard Swett, a lawyer and friend of Lincoln’s, later wrote that Lincoln’s talk of using federal power to end slavery was “unfortunate and inappropriate,” although Swett admitted that in retrospect Lincoln was ultimately correct. At the time, the people of Illinois agreed with Swett. Lincoln lost the close Senate race to the more moderate Stephen Douglas, but Lincoln’s eloquent speech earned him national attention.

**ABRAHAM LINCOLN: A HOUSE DIVIDED SPEECH, JUNE 16, 1858 [EXCERPTS]**

Mr. PRESIDENT and Gentlemen of the Convention.

We are now far into the fifth year, since a policy was initiated, with the avowed object, and confident promise, of putting an end to slavery agitation.

Under the operation of that policy, that agitation has not only, not ceased, but has constantly augmented [having been made greater in size or value].

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 the further spread of it, and place it where the public mind shall rest in the belief that it is in course of ultimate extinction; or its advocates will push it forward, till it shall become alike lawful in all the States, old as well as new---North as well as South...
10. John Brown’s Raid (1859)

On Sunday evening, October 16, 1859, radical abolitionist John Brown led a party of twenty-one men into the town of Harpers Ferry, Virginia, with the intention of seizing the federal arsenal there. Encountering no resistance, Brown’s men seized the arsenal, an armory, and a rifle works. Brown then sent out men to round up hostages and liberate slaves. Brown’s plan soon did not go as planned. Angry townspeople and local militia companies trapped his men in the armory. About twenty-four hours later, U.S. troops commanded by Colonel Robert E. Lee arrived and stormed the engine house. Five of Brown’s party escaped, ten were killed, and seven, including Brown himself, were taken prisoner. Brown was tried in a Virginia court, although he had attacked federal property. The Virginia court found him guilty of treason, conspiracy, and murder. He was sentenced to death, and was hanged on December 2, 1859.
10. John Brown's Speech (Excerpts)

Background: At the end of his trial, John Brown was permitted to make a speech, which convinced many northerners that he was not an extremist but rather a martyr [someone who is killed for their beliefs] for the cause of freedom. His speech appeared on a broadside printed in December 1859 by the abolitionist newspaper, the Liberator.

I have, may it please the court, a few words to say. In the first place, I deny everything but what I have all along admitted -- the design on my part to free the slaves. I intended certainly to have made a clean thing of that matter, as I did last winter when I went into Missouri and there took slaves without the snapping of a gun on either side, moved them through the country, and finally left them in Canada. I designed to have done the same thing again on a larger scale. That was all I intended. I never did intend murder, or treason, or the destruction of property, or to excite or incite slaves to rebellion, or to make insurrection.

I have another objection; and that is, it is unjust that I should suffer such a penalty. Had I interfered in the manner which I admit...it would have been all right; and every man in this court would have deemed it an act worthy of reward rather than punishment.

This court acknowledges, as I suppose, the validity of the law of God. I see a book kissed here which I suppose to be the Bible, or at least the New Testament. That teaches me that all things whatsoever I would that men should do to me, I should do even so to them. It teaches me, further, to "remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them." I endeavored to act up to that instruction.

Let me say one word further.

I feel entirely satisfied with the treatment I have received on my trial. Considering all the circumstances it has been more generous than I expected. But I feel no consciousness of guilt. I have stated that from the first what was my intention and what was not. I never had any design against the life of any person, nor any disposition to commit treason, or excite slaves to rebel, or make any general insurrection. I never encouraged any man to do so, but always discouraged any idea of that kind.