Springfield, Feb. 14. 1860

Messrs. O. P. Hall
J. R. Fullinwider
& W. H. Correll.

Gentlemen.

Your letter, in which, among other things, you ask "what I meant when I said this Union could not stand half slave and half free - and also what I meant when I said a house divided against itself could not stand" is received, and I very cheerfully answer it, as plainly as I may be able - You misquote, to some material extent, what I did say; which induces me to think you have not, very carefully, read the speech in which the expressions occur which to puzzle you to understand - For this reason, and because the language I used is as plain as I can make it, I now quote at length the whole paragraph in which the expressions which puzzle you occur - It is as follows: "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 constantly augmented. I believe it will not cease until a crisis shall have been reached, and passed— "A house divided against itself can not stand— I believe this government can not 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"—

That is the whole paragraph; and it puzzles me to make my meaning plainer— Look over it carefully, and conclude I meant all I said, and did not mean anything I did not say, and you will have my meaning— Douglas attacked me upon this, ~~as~~ saying it was a declaration of war between the slave and the free states— You will perceive I said no such thing; and I assure you I thought of no such thing—

If I had said "I believe this government can not last always, half slave and half free", would you understand it any better than you do? "Endure permanently" and "last always" have exactly the same meaning—

If you, or any of you, will state to me some meaning which you suppose I had, I can, and will instantly tell you whether that was my meaning—

Yours very truly
A. Lincoln

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Abraham Lincoln

Letter to Oliver P. Hall, Jacob N. Fullinwider, and William F. Correll

February 14, 1860

One of Lincoln's most famous and memorable speeches was the "House Divided" speech delivered at the Illinois State Republican Convention in Springfield, June 16, 1858. Lincoln had just been nominated to oppose Stephen A. Douglas in the senatorial race, a campaign which included the historic Lincoln-Douglas debates and launched him on the road to the White House. Eighteen months later, three Sangamon County farmers, Hall, Fullinwider and Correll, wrote asking him to explain more clearly his meaning in the much-quoted first paragraph of the Convention speech.

On exhibit is Lincoln's "cheerful" reply to this request. Since he was not sure that the enquirers had read the text accurately, he quoted the entire significant paragraph. Then he said that he could not think how his meaning could possibly have been expressed more plainly—"conclude that I meant all I said and did not mean anything I did not say, and you will have my meaning."

From the William E. Barton Collection of Lincolniana

Springfield, Feb. 14. 1860

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J. R. Fullinwider
& W. F. Correll.

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Lincoln explains his "House Divided" speech to three Sangamon County farmers.

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