Although senators were not elected directly by the people in 1858, everyone in Illinois knew that the contest was between Stephen Douglas, a Democrat, and Abraham Lincoln, a Republican. And the issue was slavery—particularly the extension of "the peculiar institution" into the new western territories. Gustave Koerner, the German political leader who wrote this account of the debates, followed the candidates for most of their encounters. Judging from the following excerpts from Koerner’s observations, which debater do you think seems more forceful?

The Convention met again in the evening. Mr. Lincoln, having been requested to address the Convention, took his stand on the right hand of the President, and delivered the ever-memorable speech containing the passage: "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 to 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 the course of ultimate extinction,—or its advocates will push it forward until it shall become alike lawful in all the States, old as well as new, North as well as South. Have we no tendency to the latter condition?"

Other speakers followed him and the Convention adjourned amid the wildest enthusiasm.

The first speech Judge Douglas made was at Chicago. His friends had made the most ample preparations for an ovation. Notice had been given for weeks, half-price excursion trains carried large numbers from the country into town. Bands of music and torch-light processions brought large masses to the front of the Tremont House, from the balcony of which he addressed the crowd. Bengal fires illuminated the scene, and when he appeared he was greeted with tumultuous cheers. He was fighting for his political life. His massive form supported his ample head, covered with a thick growth of black hair. His deep-set, dark blue eyes shone under his heavy brows. The features of his firm, round face were wonderfully expressive of the working of his feelings. Calm in stating facts, passionate when he attacked, disdainful when he was forced to defend, his gestures were sometimes violent, and often exceptionally so. His voice was strong, but not modulated. Bold in his assertions, maledictory [hateful] in his attacks, impressive in language, not
caring to persuade, but intent to force the assent of his hearers, he was Danton, not the Mirabeau [both French revolutionists], of oratory... 

Lincoln, who happened to be in the city, sat quietly on the same balcony. After Douglas got through, he was loudly called for. He rose, and stated that this ovation was gotten up for his friend Judge Douglas, but that if the good people of Chicago would listen to him, he would speak to them tomorrow evening at the same time and place. Without time for parade or showy demonstration the throng that listened to Lincoln next evening, as might have been expected from the political complexion of the city, was larger and really more enthusiastic than the one of the night before.

No greater contrast could be imagined than the one between Lincoln and Douglas. The latter was really a very little giant physically, measuring five feet and nothing, while Lincoln, when standing erect, towered to six feet three inches. Lincoln, awkward in his posture and leaning a little forward, stood calm and collected, addressing his hearers in a somewhat familiar, yet very earnest, way, with a clear, distinct, and far-reaching voice, generally well modulated, but sometimes rather shrill. When unmoved, his features seemed overshadowed by an expression of sadness, though at times he could assume a most humorous, and even comical, look, but, when aroused, he appeared like a prophet of old. Neither he nor Douglas indulged in rhetoric; both were mainly argumentative [presented reasonable arguments rather than using exaggeration for effect]. But while Douglas, powerful as was his speech, never showed anything like genius, there came from Lincoln occasionally flashes of genius and burning words, revelations as it were from the unknown, that will live as long as the English language lives. Lincoln was deeply read in the Bible and Shakespeare. He did not quote from them, but his style showed plainly his close intimacy with the Scriptures and the great bard [poet]. Douglas was eminently talented; Lincoln was original. But what made Lincoln vastly more effective in this contest was that even the most obtuse [the dullest] hearer could see at once that Douglas spoke for himself, and Lincoln for his cause.

The day after Lincoln's speech, July 15th, both went down on the train to Springfield,—Lincoln as a quiet passenger, Douglas as a sort of triumphtor. He had a special car, had a secretary and a reporter, and a number of devoted friends with him. A band of music accompanied him, and on an attached platform car a gun was planted, which was fired off to announce his arrival at every station. His car was decorated with flags and emblems. Preparations had been made at every station to receive him with music and the booming of cannon. The station platforms were crowded with men, women and children.

At Bloomington, where an appointment had been made for Douglas to speak, processions, salutes of cannon, fireworks, an immense crowd,—everything, in fact,—had been ready to glorify the idol of the Illinois Democracy. Lincoln listened quietly. At Springfield Douglas met with a similar reception, and he spoke in the afternoon at Edwards' Grove for three hours. His friends pronounced it the best speech of his campaign. But now came Lincoln's turn. He spoke in Springfield at night. His speech was not only a masterpiece of argument, but so full of splendid humor that it kept the audience in roars of laughter...

Lincoln now had measured swords, and in spite of his innate [natural] modesty was sagacious [wise] enough to see that he was Douglas's match in every respect.
Horace Greeley, editor of the New York Tribune, had a great influence on the views held by his readers concerning slavery. The readers were mostly farmers and village people, and the weekly and semi-weekly issues of the Tribune often carried sensational articles about the abuses of slavery that—over time—profoundly affected their opinions. In 1859 a reporter from the Tribune covered a great slave auction in Savannah, Georgia, and published his account in Greeley’s newspaper. As you read the following excerpts from the reporter’s article, note why the sale attracted so much attention. From the New-York Daily Tribune, March 9, 1859.

The largest sale of human chattels that has been made in Star-Spangled America for several years took place on Wednesday and Thursday of last week, at the Race Course near the City of Savannah, Georgia. The lot consisted of four hundred and thirty-six men, women, children and infants, being that half of the negro stock remaining on the old Major Butler plantations which fell to one of the two heirs to that estate.

The sale had been advertised largely for many weeks, and as the negroes were known to be a choice lot and very desirable property, the attendance of buyers was large. The breaking up of an old family estate is so uncommon an occurrence that the affair was regarded with unusual interest throughout the South. For several days before the sale every hotel in Savannah was crowded with negro speculators from North and South Carolina, Virginia, Georgia, Alabama and Louisiana, who had been attracted hither by the prospects of making good bargains.

Nothing was heard for days, in the bar-rooms and public rooms but talk of the great sale, criticisms of the business affairs of Mr. Butler, and speculations as to the probable prices the stock would bring. The office of Joseph Bryan the negro broker who had the management of the sale, was thronged every day by eager inquirers in search of information, and by some who were anxious to buy, but were uncertain as to whether their securities would prove acceptable. Little parties were made up from the various hotels every day to visit the Race-Course, distant some three miles from the city, to look over the chattels, discuss their points, and make memoranda for guidance on the day of sale. The buyers were generally of a rough breed, slangy, profane and bearish, being for the most part, from the back river and swamp plantations, where the elegancies of polite life are not perhaps developed to their fullest extent.

The negroes came from two plantations, the one a rice plantation near Darien... and the other a cotton plantation...

None of the Butler slaves have ever been sold before, but have been on these two plantations since they were born...

It is true they were sold “in families,” but let us see: a man and his wife were called a “family,” their parents and kindred were not taken into account... And no account could be taken of loves that were as yet unconsummated by marriage, and how many aching hearts have been divorced by this summary proceeding, no man can ever know...

The slaves remained at the race-course, some of them for more than a week and all of them for four days before the sale. They were brought in thus early that buyers who desired to inspect them might enjoy that privilege, although none of them were sold at private sale. For these preliminary days their shed was constantly visited by speculators. The negroes were examined with as little consideration as if they had been brutes indeed, the buyers pulling their mouths open to see their teeth, pinching their...
limbs to find how muscular they were, walking them up and down to detect any signs of lameness, making them stoop and bend in different ways that they might be certain there was no concealed rupture or wound, and in addition to all this treatment, asking them scores of questions relative to their qualifications and accomplishments. All these humiliations were submitted to without a murmur, and in some instances with good-natured cheerfulness—where the slave liked the appearance of the proposed buyer, and fancied that he might prove a kind “mas’r.”

The buyers, who were present to the number of about two hundred, clustered around the platform, while the negroes, who were not likely to be immediately wanted, gathered into sad groups in the background to watch the progress of the selling in which they were so sorrowfully interested. The wind howled outside, and through the open side of the building the driving rain came pouring in, the bar down stairs ceased for a short time its brisk trade; the buyers lit fresh cigars, got ready their catalogues and pencils, and the first lot of human chattels are led upon the stand, not by a white man, but by a sleek mulatto, himself a slave, and who seems to regard the selling of his brethren, in which he so glibly assists, as a capital joke. It had been announced that the negroes would be sold in “families,” that is to say, a man would not be parted from his wife, or a mother from a very young child. There is perhaps as much policy as humanity in this arrangement, for thereby many aged and unserviceable people are disposed of, who otherwise would not find a ready sale.

The expression on the faces of all who stepped on the block was always the same, and told of more anguish than it is in the power of words to express. Blighted homes, crushed hopes and broken hearts was the sad story to be read in all the anxious faces. Some of them regarded the sale with perfect indifference, never making a motion save to turn from one side to the other at the word of the dapper Mr. Bryan, that all the crown might have a fair view of their proportions, and then, when the sale was accomplished, stepping down from the block without caring to cast even a look at the buyer, who now held all their happiness in his hands. Others, again, strained their eyes with eager glances from one buyer to another as the bidding went on, trying with earnest attention to follow the rapid voice of the auctioneer.

Sometimes, two persons only would be bidding for the same chattel, all the others having resigned the contest, and then the poor creature on the block, conceiving an instantaneous preference for one of the buyers over the other, would regard the rivalry with the intensest interest, the expression of his face changing with every bid, settling into a half smile of joy if the favorite buyer persevered unto the end and secured the property, and settling down into a look of hopeless despair if the other won the victory.

And so the Great Sale went on for two long days, during which time there were sold 429 men, women and children. There were 436 announced to be sold, but a few were detained on the plantations by sickness.

The total amount of the sale foots up [adds up to] $303,850—the proceeds of the first day being $161,480, and of the second day $142,370.

Leaving the Race buildings, where the scenes we have described took place, a crowd of negroes were seen gathered eagerly about a man in their midst. The man was Mr. Pierce M. Butler of the free city of Philadelphia, who was solacing [soothing] the wounded hearts of the people he had sold from their firesides and their homes, by doling out to them small change at the rate of a dollar a head. To every negro he had sold, who presented his claim for the paltry pittance, he gave the munificent stipend [magnificent sum] of one whole dollar, in specie, he being provided with two canvas bags of 25 cent pieces, fresh from the mint, to give an additional glitter to his munificent generosity.