

A Pro-Slavery Argument (1850)

George Fitzhugh, a writer from Virginia, was the most articulate defender of the institution of slavery. Read the following excerpts from his pamphlet entitled "Sociology For The South" and answer the questions below.

...slaves are always dependent, never the rivals of their master. Hence, though men are often found at variance with wife or children, we never saw one who did not like his slaves, and rarely a slave who was not devoted to his master. 'I am thy servant !' Disarm me of the power of master. Every man feels the beauty, force and truth of this sentiment of Sterne. But he who acknowledges its truth, tacitly admits that dependence is a tie of affection, that the relation of master and slave is one of mutual good will.... The slave always has a home, always an interest in the proceeds of the soil.... At the slaveholding South all is peace, quiet, plenty and contentment. We have no mobs, no trades unions, no strikes for higher wages, no armed resistance to the law, but little jealousy of the rich by the poor. We have but few in our jails, and fewer in our poor houses. We produce enough of the comforts and necessaries of life for a population three or four times as numerous as ours. We are wholly exempt from the torrent of pauperism, crime, agrarianism, and infidelity which Europe is pouring from her jails and alms houses on the already crowded North. Population increases slowly, wealth rapidly.... Wealth is more equally distributed than at the North, where a few millionaires own most of the property of the country.

From Eric L. McKittrick, ed., Slavery Defended--The Views of the Old South (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall Inc., 1963), pp. 34-50.

1. What reason does Fitzhugh offer for a slave's loyalty to his master?
2. What kind of picture does Fitzhugh offer of life in the South?
3. What justification does he give for his remarks?
4. The majority of Southern whites did not own slaves. Why do you think Fitzhugh made the statement "Wealth is more equally distributed?"

Frederick Douglass Speech on July 4, 1852

Frederick Douglass, former slave and abolitionist leader, was invited to speak in Rochester, NY, on July 4, 1852. Read the following excerpts from his speech and answer the questions below.

...America is false to the past, false to the present, and solemnly binds herself to be false to the future. Standing with God and the crushed and bleeding slave on this occasion, I will, in the name of humanity which is outraged, in the name of liberty which is fettered, in the name of the Constitution and the Bible which are disregarded and trampled upon, dare to call in question and to denounce, with all the emphasis I can command, everything that serves to perpetuate slavery-- the great sin and shame of America!...

Would you have me argue that man is entitled to liberty? That he is the rightful owner of his own body? You have already declared it. Must I argue the wrongfulness of slavery?...To do so would be to make myself ridiculous and to offer an insult to your understanding. There is not a man beneath the canopy of heaven that does not know that slavery is wrong for him....

What, to the American slave, is your Fourth of July? I answer: a day that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim. To him, your celebration is a sham; your boasted liberty, an unholy license; your national greatness, swelling vanity; your sounds of rejoicing are empty and heartless; your denunciation of tyrants, brass-fronted impudence; your shouts of liberty and equality, hollow mockery; your prayers and hymns, your sermons and thanksgivings, with all your religious parade and solemnity, are, to Him, mere bombast, fraud, deception, impiety, and hypocrisy a thin veil to cover up crimes which would disgrace a nation of savages. There is not a nation on the earth guilty of practices more shocking and bloody than are the people of the United States at this very hour.

Go where you may, search where you will, roam through all the monarchies and despotism's of the Old World, travel through South America, search out every abuse, and when you have found the last, lay your facts by the side of the everyday practices of this nation, and you will say with me that, for revolting barbarity and shameless hypocrisy, America reigns without a rival.

From Diane Ravitch, ed., The American Reader-- Words That Moved A Nation, pp. 114-118.

1. Why does Douglass claim that America is false to the past, present, and future?
2. According to Douglass who should own a person?
3. How would Douglass suggest anyone would answer the question, "Do you want to be a slave?"
4. According to Douglass, what does the Fourth of July mean to the American slave?
5. What does Douglass mean by the words "America reigns without a rival?" Where does he say one should look for the answer?
6. Is this the complete text of the speech? How do you know?
7. How would Fitzhugh answer Douglass's statement that "There is not a man beneath the canopy of heaven that does not know that slavery is wrong for him...?"

Bleeding Kansas (1856)

The Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 divided the Nebraska Territory into Kansas and Nebraska and provided for popular sovereignty in the newly formed territories. Pro- and anti-slavery forces poured into Kansas trying to sway the vote. Read the following description of the events of 1856 and answer the questions below.

...In Washington, in the chamber of the U.S. Senate, a South Carolina congressman had attacked and severely beaten Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts, a Republican who'd recently given an anti-Southern speech on "The Crime Against Kansas." At almost the same time, another Missouri mob had sacked Lawrence, Kansas, destroying free-state printing presses, blowing up the free-state hotel, and robbing and burning homes there. In retaliation, John Brown and his little free-state company had massacred five proslavery men down on Pottawatomie Creek, dragging them out of their cabins in the dead of night and assassinating them with broadswords. A reign of terror had broken out in eastern Kansas, as Missouri militia and their Kansas allies burned and pillaged free-state communities from Lawrence to Osawatimie. As Lincoln had predicted would happen under popular sovereignty, civil war now raged on the Kansas prairie-- proof indeed that slavery was too volatile ever to be solved as a purely local matter.

From Stephen B. Oates, With Malice Toward None: The Life of Abraham Lincoln (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), p. 136.

1. Gather information on Charles Sumner in an encyclopedia or biographical dictionary. Who was he? Who beat him? What happened to his assailants? What happened to Sumner?
2. What did Sumner mean by "The Crime Against Kansas?"
3. Who was John Brown? What other part would he play in the road to war?
4. How was the Kansas situation settled? (See your text or another resource.)
5. Explain the ways this act contributed to the conflict between the North and the South?

Dred Scott Decision (1857)

Dred Scott, a slave from Missouri, was taken to the free state of Illinois and then the free territory of Wisconsin by his master where he lived for over a year. Dred Scott sued for his freedom on the grounds that he had lived in free territory. The case reached the United States Supreme Court. The court needed to determine whether Dred Scott was a citizen and also whether he was free. Read the following excerpt from the Supreme Court decision written by Chief Justice Taney and answer the questions below.

Now...the right of property in a slave is distinctly and expressly affirmed in the Constitution. The right to traffic in it, like an ordinary article of merchandise and property, was guaranteed to the citizens of the United States, in every State that might desire it, for twenty years. And the Government in express terms is pledged to protect it in all future time, if the slave escapes from his owner....And no word can be found in the Constitution which gives Congress a greater power over slave property, or which entitles property of that kind to less protection than property of any other description. The only power conferred is the power coupled with the duty of guarding and protecting the owner in his rights.

Upon these considerations, it is the opinion of the court that the Act of Congress which prohibited a citizen from holding and owning property of this kind in the territory of the United States north of the line therein mentioned, is not warranted by the Constitution, and is therefore void; and that neither Dred Scott himself, nor any of his family, were made free by being carried into this territory; even if they had been carried there by the owner, with the intention of becoming a permanent resident....

Upon the whole, therefore, it is the judgement of this court, that it appears by the record before us that the plaintiff in error is not a citizen of Missouri, in the sense in which that words is used in the Constitution....

From Henry Steele Commager, ed., Documents of American History, pp. 339-345.

1. What does "traffic" mean in this excerpt?
2. According to Taney, what is a slave? Where can he/she be taken?
3. Taney refers to "the Act of Congress" in his decision. What is the name of this law which he describes?
4. What two questions did Taney decide? What were his answers?
5. Explain the ways this decision contributed to the conflict between the North and the South

Abraham Lincoln's "House Divided" Speech (1858)

In 1858 Abraham Lincoln became the Republican candidate for a United States Senate seat from Illinois. Read the following excerpt from his acceptance speech and answer the questions below.

In my opinion, 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.

From Diane Ravitch, ed., The American Reader--Words That Moved a Nation, p. 119.

1. What does "a house" represent in the speech?
2. What did Lincoln mean by the phrase "A house divided against itself can not stand?"
3. Does Lincoln believe that the house will remain divided? Justify your answer.
4. How might these ideas contribute to the conflict between the North and the South?

William Seward's Speech (1858)

William Seward was a Senator from New York when he made the following predictions in a speech in 1858. Read the excerpts from that speech and answer the questions that follow.

Our country is a theater, which exhibits, in full operation, two radically different political systems, the one resting on the basis of servile or slave labor, the other on the basis of voluntary labor of freemen....

The two systems are at once perceived to be incongruous [unrelated]. But they are more than incongruous--they are incompatible. They never have permanently existed together in one country, and they never can....

Hitherto, the two systems have existed in different States, but side by side within the American Union. This has happened because the Union is a confederation of States. But in another aspect the United States constitute only one nation. Increase of population, which is filling the States out to their very borders, together with a new and extended network of railroads and other avenues, and an internal commerce which daily becomes more intimate [closely related], is rapidly bringing the States into a higher and more perfect social unity of consolidation. Thus, these antagonistic systems are continually coming into closer contact, and collision results. Shall I tell you what this collision means? They who think that is accidental, unnecessary, the work of interested and fanatical agitators, and therefore ephemeral, mistake the case altogether. It is an irrepressible conflict between opposing and enduring forces, and it means that the United States must and will, sooner or later, become either entirely a slave holding nation, or entirely a free-labor nation. Either the cotton and rice fields of South Carolina and the sugar plantations of Louisiana will ultimately be tilled by free labor, and Charleston and New Orleans become marts for legitimate merchandise alone, or else the rye fields and wheat fields of Massachusetts and New York must again be surrendered by their farmers to slave culture and to the production of slaves, and Boston and New York become once more markets for trade in the bodies and souls of men. It is the failure to apprehend this great truth that induces so many unsuccessful attempts at final compromise between the slave and free States, and it is the existence of this great fact that renders all such pretended compromises, when made, vain and ephemeral....

From Eyewitnesses and Others--Readings in American History, vol. 1, pp. 358-361.

1. According to William Seward, what are the two systems of labor in the United States?
2. How does he view the two systems of labor? Why?
3. Seward believes the country is on a collision course. Discuss three examples he gives to justify this belief.
4. What part does he believe compromise will play in the final result.
5. How might these ideas contribute to the conflict between the North and the South?

John Brown's Raid (1859)

John Brown, a northern abolitionist, participated in the Kansas violence in 1856. In 1859, he tried to free slaves in Virginia. Read the following description of his attempt and southern reaction to it. Answer the questions below.

...the papers blazed with reports from Harpers Ferry in northern Virginia. According to the Chicago Press & Tribune, a band of Northern abolitionists -- most of them young, five of them black -- had tried to capture the remote mountain town, seize the federal arsenal there, and ignite a full-scale rebellion. For two days the raiders shot it out with local militia and threw Harpers Ferry into bedlam, until a column of U.S. horse marines under Colonel Robert E. Lee arrived and captured them. The leader of the attack was old John Brown, late of Kansas fame, who warned Southerners that God had appointed him to liberate their slaves 'by some violent and decisive move.'

Though no slave uprising had occurred and Brown has been jailed, Harpers Ferry produced 'a profound sensation' in the Southern states, where people reacted with even greater hysteria than had followed Nat Turner's rebellion back in 1831. For thousands of Southerners, from poor whites in Virginia to rich planters in South Carolina and Mississippi, Harpers Ferry was hardly the work of a handful of independent Yankee revolutionaries. On the contrary, Southerners thought it the vanguard of a Northern abolitionist - Republican juggernaut that would plunge the South into a racial blood bath.

From Stephen B. Oates, *With Malice Toward None: The Life of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 181.

1. What United States military officer led U.S. troops in capturing John Brown?
2. According to Brown, by what authority was he acting?
3. Were any slaves freed?
4. Using information from the article and from what you have learned, why would Southerners feel they would be plunged "into a racial blood bath?"
5. Explain the ways this act contributed to the conflict between the North and the South.

Republican Party Platform (1860)

Leaders of the Republican Party met in Chicago, Illinois, in May of 1860. They adopted a "platform" that included many of the political beliefs they shared. Read the following excerpt from that platform and answer the questions below.

8. That the normal condition of all the territory of the United States is that of freedom; That as our Republican fathers, when they had abolished slavery in all our national territory, ...we deny the authority of Congress, of a territorial legislature, or of any individuals, to give legal existence to Slavery in any Territory of the United States.

9. That we brand the recent re-opening of the African slave-trade, under the cover of our national flag, aided by perversions of judicial power, as a crime against humanity and a burning shame to our country and age; and we call upon Congress to take prompt and efficient measures for the total and final suppression of that execrable traffic.

From Henry Steele Commager, ed., Documents of American History, pp. 363-365.

1. The Northwest Ordinance (1787) banned slavery in the Northwest Territory yet provided for the return of fugitive slaves. What stand does the Republican party take on the existence of slavery in the territories?

2. How do Republicans view the slave trade?

3. Abraham Lincoln won the 1860 Presidential election. How do you think slave-owners reacted to Lincoln's election based on this reading?

4. How might these ideas contribute to the conflict between the North and the South?

Secession (1860)

South Carolina seceded from the Union in December 1860. Harry Macarthy wrote "The Bonnie Blue Flag" in honor of the new "rebel" flag adopted by South Carolina. The song became popular throughout the Confederacy. Read the lyrics of the song and answer the questions below.

We are a band of brothers, and native to the soil,
Fighting for the property we gained by honest toil;
And when our rights were threatened, the cry rose near and far:
Hurrah! for the bonnie blue flag that bears a single star.

CHORUS:

Hurrah! hurrah! For Southern rights! hurrah!
Hurrah! for the bonnie blue flag that bears a single star.

As long as the Union was faithful to her trust,
Like friends and like brothers, kind were we and just;
But now, when Northern treachery attempts our rights mar,
We hoist, on high, the bonnie blue flag that bears a single star.

First gallant South Carolina nobly made the stand,
Then came Alabama who took her by the hand;
Next, quickly Mississippi, Georgia and Florida,
All raised, on high, the bonnie blue flag that bears a single star.

Ye men of valor, gather 'round the banner of the right,
Texas and fair Louisiana join us in the fight;
Davis, our loved President, and Stephens, statesman rare,
Now rally 'round the bonnie blue flag that bears a single star.

And here's to brave Virginia, the old Dominion State,
With the young Confederacy, at length, has linked her fate;
Impelled by her example now other States prepare
To hoist, on high, the bonnie blue flag that bears a single star.

Then cheer, boys, cheer, raise the joyous shout--
For Arkansas and North Carolina now have both gone out;
And let another rousing cheer for Tennessee be given--
The single star of the bonnie blue flag has grown to be eleven.

Then here's to our Confederacy--strong we are and brave,
Like patriots of old, we'll fight our heritage to save;
And rather than submit to shame, to die we would prefer--
So cheer for the bonnie blue flag that bears a single star.

From Diane Ravitch, ed., *The American Reader-Words That Moved A Nation*, pp. 143-144.

1. Define "secede."

2. According to the lyrics, how did these Southern states justify secession?

3. On the "Civil War Map," locate and write the name of the eleven states that seceded. Also write in the dates of each secession. Color these eleven states one color and add a key to the map.

