

“The Union Is Dissolved!”: Southern Secession, 1857-1860

Suggested Grade Levels: 8th Grade (Advanced), 11th Grade (Regular)

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Directions: As a refresher for this time period, please read the historical background and each of the attached documents. In order to structure your paragraphs most effectively, answer the scaffolding questions at the end of each document. Write an essay incorporating your prior knowledge of the topic as well as any information gathered from each document.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

American military success in the Mexican War had positive and negative consequences. The positive consequence of defeating Mexico was the acquisition of over 500,000 acres of land that would make up the vast majority of the American Southwest. Along with nearly realizing Polk's dream of the country stretching from ocean to ocean, there were some unforeseen results as well. A massive flow of adventurers and fortune-seekers looking to stake their claim to Californian gold meant that the Bear Flag Republic could skip the territorial phase of joining the Union and almost immediately apply for statehood. Because of this turn of events, the United States was forced to deal with the issue of slavery head-on in the early 1850s.

Henry Clay (with the Compromise of 1850) and Stephen A. Douglas (with the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854) provided extremely temporary solutions to the issue threatening to tear the country apart along lines of latitude. Northerners sympathetic to putting an end to African-American enslavement all but ignored the foreboding precepts of the new, harsher Fugitive Slave Law enacted through Clay's compromise. Later, the issue of popular sovereignty played out to the ugliest conclusion possible, resulting in hundreds dead on both sides of the issue of slavery in what became known as "Bleeding Kansas." Indeed, by the latter portion of the decade it was painfully clear to many that the country was hurtling towards separation.

Given the course of events in the years preceding secession and war, was the South justified in breaking away from the Union? Was a split with the industrial North the only way to preserve their agriculturally-based slave economy? Choose at least three of the following to write a well-organized essay of five to seven paragraphs detailing the events immediately preceding the secession of the southern states, focused on these major events from 1857 to 1860:

Document A: excerpt from Justice Taney's majority opinion in the *Dred Scott* decision

Only three days after President James Buchanan was inaugurated, the Supreme Court handed down the momentous decision in the Dred Scott case¹. Use your prior knowledge and the following short passages from the lengthy decision to begin to build your essay:

"The question is simply this: can a negro whose ancestors were imported into this country and sold as slaves become a member of the political community formed and brought into existence by the Constitution of the United States, and as such become entitled to all the rights, and privileges, and immunities, guaranteed by that instrument to the citizen, one of which rights is the privilege of suing in a court of the United States in the cases specified in the Constitution?"

¹ *Scott v. Sandford*, Majority Opinion of the Supreme Court – C.J. Taney. Retrieved June 3, 2007, from Cornell Law School LII – Legal Information Institute: http://supct.law.cornell.edu/supct/html/historics/USSC_CR_0060_0393_ZO.html.

...

“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 judgment of this court that it appears by the record before us that [Scott] is not a citizen of Missouri in the sense in which that word is used in the Constitution, and that the Circuit Court of the United States, for that reason, had no jurisdiction in the case...”

1. What was Dred Scott’s argument in favor of his freedom?
2. Did the Supreme Court rule for or against Scott? What reasoning did the Court use to reach its decision?
3. What other Congressional agreement, reached over thirty years prior to this decision, was ruled unconstitutional in this case?
4. How did opinions regarding the *Dred Scott* decision differ in the North from those reached by southerners?

Document B: excerpt from the Lincoln-Douglas debates at Freeport, Illinois, August 27, 1858

Lincoln’s responses to questions posed in print by his opponent in these senatorial debates, Stephen A. Douglas²:

“I do not now, nor ever did, stand in favor of the unconditional repeal of the Fugitive Slave law. [*Cries of "Good," "Good."*]

...

² “Second Debate With Stephen A. Douglas, Freeport, Illinois – August 27, 1858.” Retrieved June 3, 2007, from the National Park Service, Lincoln Home National Historic Site: <http://www.nps.gov/archive/liho/debate2.htm>.

"I do not now, or ever did, stand pledged against the admission of any more slave States into the Union.

...

"I do not stand pledged to the prohibition of the slave-trade between the different States.

...

"I am impliedly, if not expressly, pledged to a belief in the *right* and *duty* of Congress to prohibit slavery in all the United States Territories.

...

[part of Douglas' response] "All I have to say of it is this, that if you, Black Republicans, think that the negro ought to be on a social equality with your wives and daughters, and ride in a carriage with your wife, whilst you drive the team, you have perfect right to do so. I am told that one of Fred Douglass' kinsmen, another rich black negro, is now traveling in this part of the State making speeches for his friend Lincoln as the champion of black men. ("*White men, white men,*" and "*what have you to say against it?*" *That's right,&c.*) All I have to say on that subject is, that those of you who believe that the negro is your equal and ought to be on an equality with you socially, politically, and legally, have a right to entertain those opinions, and of course will vote for Mr. Lincoln."

5. Why did Abraham Lincoln and Stephen A. Douglas agree to have these debates? Over what political position were they fighting?
6. What was the official position of the Republican Party regarding slavery when it began in 1854?
7. Compare Lincoln's remarks to those of Douglas. What do you think were Douglas' intentions in getting the crowd to focus on the Republican Party's explicit cooperation with free African-Americans?
8. Which candidate emerged victorious after these debates? Why was the outcome of this particular election extremely significant?

Document C: mural from the Kansas State House depicting John Brown's influence on North-South relations in the 1850s

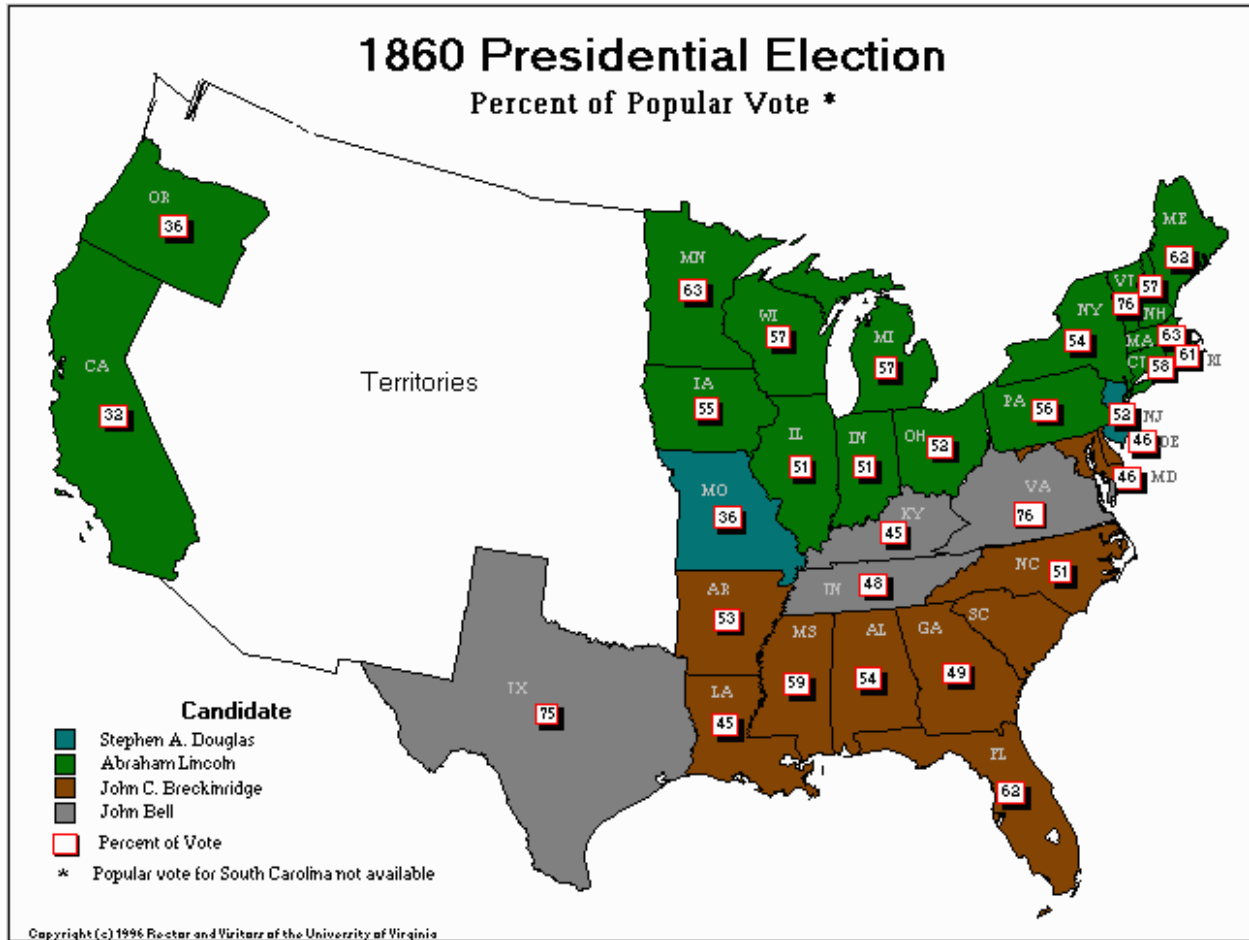


¹. See Note Below

1. What did John Brown hope to accomplish when he seized the federal armory at Harpers Ferry?
2. Briefly describe Brown's raid. Why was his plan ultimately unsuccessful?
3. Describe the results of Brown's trial. How did Northerners sympathetic to putting an end to slavery react to this course of events?
4. How did those reactions differ from those in the South?

¹ John Brown Mural, in the Kansas State House. Retrieved June 3, 2007, from Kansas Kaleidoscope, October/November 2003: <http://www.kshs.org/publicat/kaleidoscope/2003october.htm>

Document D: Map of the popular vote results from the election of 1860



As the map above indicates³, the election of 1860 was really two separate races. Use your prior knowledge and the map above to answer the following questions within a well-organized paragraph:

13. Match each candidate with the political party they represented.
14. Why did the Democratic Party nominate two of the four candidates in this election?
15. What was the party platform of the Constitutional Union Party?
16. What was the main reason why Abraham Lincoln failed to win a single southern state?

³ (2004). US Presidential Election Maps: 1860-1996. Retrieved June 3, 2007, from the University of Virginia, Geospatial and Statistical Data Center: <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/elections/maps/>.

17. How did the southern states react to the results of the election?

Document E: excerpt from South Carolina's "Causes of Secession" document from December 24, 1860

Declaration of the Immediate Causes Which Induce and Justify the Secession of South Carolina from the Federal Union

C. G. Memminger⁴

"The people of the State of South Carolina...declared that the frequent violations of the Constitution of the United States, by the Federal Government, and its encroachments upon the reserved rights of the States, fully justified this State in then withdrawing from the Federal Union;

We assert that fourteen of the States have deliberately refused, for years past, to fulfill their constitutional obligations...

But an increasing hostility on the part of the non-slaveholding States to the [institution of slavery](#), has led to a disregard of their obligations...

the non-slaveholding States...have assume[d] the right of deciding upon the propriety of our domestic institutions; and have denied the rights of property established in fifteen of the States and recognized by the Constitution; they have denounced as sinful the institution of slavery; they have...encouraged and assisted thousands of our slaves to leave their homes; and those who remain, have been incited by emissaries, books and pictures to servile insurrection...

A geographical line has been drawn across the Union, and all the States north of that line have united in the election of a man to the high office of President of the United States, whose opinions and purposes are hostile to slavery. He is to be entrusted with the administration of the common Government, because he has declared that that "Government cannot endure permanently half slave, half free," and that the public mind must rest in the belief that slavery is in the course of ultimate extinction...

We, therefore, the People of South Carolina...have solemnly declared that the Union heretofore existing between this State and the other States of North America, is dissolved, and that the State of South Carolina has resumed her position among the nations of the world, as a separate and independent State..."

18. What justification did Southern states in general (and South Carolina in particular) give that they were able to break away from the Union?

19. Analyze the reasons for breaking away from the Union given in this document. How did the events of the 1850s lead directly to secession?

⁴ "Declaration of the Immediate Causes Which Induce and Justify the Secession of South Carolina from the Federal Union," by C.G. Memminger. Retrieved June 3, 2007 from South Carolina Secession Causes: http://www.sonofthesouth.net/leefoundation/secession_causes.htm.

20. Before the attack on Fort Sumter how many Southern states had withdrawn from the Union?

21. What were the major differences between the Constitution of the United States and the Constitution of the newly-formed Confederate States of America?

A complete analysis of the events in question will include cause/effect relationships and demonstrate a firm grasp on not only what happened, but also the overall historical significance of each action with regards to secession and the onset of war.

Grading Rubric

1. Historical Accuracy

- 5 = Essay is completely historically accurate. No factual errors.
- 4 = Essay is mostly historically accurate, with minor, easily overlooked factual errors (for instance, saying the Lincoln-Douglas Debates happened in Indiana, not Illinois).
- 3 = Essay is basically historically accurate, with noticeable factual errors.
- 2 = Essay is only marginally historically accurate, with several glaring factual errors (for instance, saying the North seceded from the Union).
- 1 = Essay shows little or no evidence of historical accuracy.

2. Flow of Ideas

- 5 = Essay shows evidence of brainstorming and/or an outline. Student uses a clearly-defined introduction and conclusion with several well-developed paragraphs to support his/her thesis statement. Student uses effective transitions between paragraphs.
- 4 = Essay shows some evidence of brainstorming and/or an outline. Student attempts to write an introduction and/or a conclusion. Paragraphs are fairly well developed with some choppiness. Some transitions between paragraphs.
- 3 = Essay shows little evidence of brainstorming and/or an outline. Introduction and/or conclusion are poorly developed or nonexistent. Little or no cohesion between paragraphs. Paragraphs are only loosely connected, with very little evidence of transition.
- 2 = Essay lacks brainstorm and/or outline. Student fails to include introduction or conclusion. Writing is disjointed and train of thought is hard to follow.
- 1 = Essay shows no flow of ideas whatsoever. Fails to address question properly.

3. Spelling/Punctuation

- 5 = Essentially accurate with one or two minor spelling/punctuation errors.
- 4 = Contains a few minor spelling/punctuation errors.
- 3 = Contains spelling/punctuation errors marring the overall effectiveness.

- 2 = Contains glaring errors that make it extremely difficult to read successfully.
- 1 = Completely overloaded with errors, and is essentially unreadable.

4. Overall Score

- 5 = Outstanding – student shows a flair for historical writing. Essay was cohesive and effectively answered the question.
- 4 = Above average – student answers the questions adequately, with some stylistic embellishments. Quality of writing is at or above grade level.
- 3 = Average – student answers the question with adequately.
- 2 = Below average – student fails to answer question adequately, with major improvements needed to bring the essay to a standard of acceptability.
- 1 = Unsatisfactory – student gives little or no effort towards addressing the question, much less answering it adequately.