

Sectional Conflict before the Civil War

A. Interpreting Primary Resources

I do not...hesitate to avow before this House and the country, and in the presence of the living God, that if by your legislation you seek to drive us from the territories of California and New Mexico, purchased by the common blood and treasure of the whole people, and to abolish slavery in this District, thereby attempting to fix a national degradation upon half the States of this Confederacy, I am for disunion.

Representative Robert Toombs of Georgia, 1849

With the ever watchful eye that the Slave Power has had over its own interests...with slaveholding Presidents and Cabinets of their selection, forty-nine years out of sixty-one....The Slave Power, like the power of the pit, never lacks for a stratagem....The embargo [of 1807]...was levelled at the commercial prosperity of the free North....From the beginning of the first embargo, therefore, in Dec., 1807, until the peace of Dec., 1814...the commerce of the free States was either totally prohibited, or rendered of little pecuniary power....

In 1811, the charter of the old National Bank expired, and was not permitted by the dominant Slave Power to be renewed, on the alleged ground that a national bank was unconstitutional....The real reason was that the South had become bankrupt...throwing off the greater part of its indebtedness upon its creditors in some other community....The Slave Power now demanded a war...."Free trade and sailors' rights" was now the southern watchword....the war party was led on by John C. Calhoun....New England would be the sufferer by the war and the North would be burdened with the chief expense of the affliction...despoiling it of half its remaining wealth....

Thus Slavery controls all the leading measures of the nation and moulds its political economy.

William Goodell, 1852

We are now far into the fifth year since a policy was initiated with the 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. 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....Either the opponents of slavery will arrest the further spread of it...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. Have we no tendency to the latter condition?

The new year of 1854 found slavery excluded from more than half the States by State constitutions, and from most of the national territory by congressional prohibition. Four days later commenced the struggle which ended in repealing that congressional prohibition. This opened all the national territory to slavery....While the Nebraska bill was passing through Congress, a law case involving the question of a Negro's freedom...was passing through the United States Circuit Court....The Negro's name was Dred Scott....

The several points of the Dred Scott decision...constitute the piece of machinery in its present state of advancement....The working points of that machinery are:

(1) That no Negro slave, imported as such from Africa, and no descendant of such slave, can ever be a citizen of any State, in the sense of that term as used in the Constitution of the United States....

(2) That, "subject to the Constitution of the United States," neither Congress nor a territorial legislature can exclude slavery from any United States Territory....

We cannot absolutely know that all these exact adaptations are the result of preconcert. But when we see a lot of framed timbers, different portions of which we know have been gotten out at different times and places

and by different workmen--Stephen, Franklin, Roger, and James, for instance--and we see these timbers joined together, and see they exactly make the frame of a house or a mill, all the tenons and mortises exactly fitting, and all the lengths and proportions of the different pieces exactly adapted to their respective places, and not a piece too many or too few...in such a case we find it impossible not to believe that Stephen and Franklin and Roger and James all understood one another from the beginning, and all worked upon a common plan or draft drawn up before the first blow was struck.

Abraham Lincoln, 1858

They had for more than a century before been regarded as beings of an inferior order; and altogether unfit to associate with the white race, either in social or political relations; and so far inferior that they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect...This opinion was at the time fixed and universal in the civilized portion of the white race.

Chief Justice Roger Taney, Dred Scott case

If the cotton States shall decide that they can do better out of the Union than in it, we insist on letting them go in peace. The right to secede may be a revolutionary one, but it exists nevertheless....Whenever a considerable section of our Union shall deliberately resolve to go out, we shall resist all coercive measures designed to keep it in. We hope never to live in a republic, whereof one section is pinned to the residue by bayonets.

New York Tribune, 1860

I firmly believe that the slave-holding South is now the controlling power of the world--that no other power would face us in hostility. Cotton, rice, tobacco, and naval stores command the world; and we have sense to know it, and are sufficiently Teutonic to carry it out successfully. The North without us would be a motherless calf, bleating about, and die of mangle and starvation.

Senator James H. Hammond of South Carolina

Questions to Think About:

- 1. Why did sectional tensions strengthen during the 1850s?**
- 2. Do you see any grounds for compromise between supporters and opponents of slavery expansion?**
- 3. Why didn't the United States try to solve the slavery crisis the way Britain did in the Caribbean--by adopting compensation for slaveowners and a system of gradual emancipation and apprenticeship for slaves?**
- 4. Was slavery--either as a moral issue or an economic reality--the single most important cause of the sectional conflict?**
- 5. Do you think that the sectional conflict was an irrepressible conflict or do you think it was the work of bungling politicians, fanatics, and agitators?**
- 6. Do you find the arguments advanced in the quotations moralistic and abstract? calm and carefully reasoned? impassioned and paranoid?**

Comparison of Union and Confederate Resources, 1861		
	North	South
Proportion of nation's population	71	29
Proportion of nation's:		
white population	79	21
black population	13	87
Proportion of nation's railroads	71	29
Proportion of nation's farm acreage	65	35
Proportion of nation's manufacturing workers	92	8
Proportion of nation's manufacturing output	92	8
Number of factories	110,000	18,000
Railroad mileage	22,000	9,000

Personal Income per capita by region as a percentage of U.S. average		
	1840	1860
Northeast	135	139
West	68	68
South	76	72

B. Interpreting Statistics

Questions

- 1. What material advantages did the North possess on the eve of the Civil War?**
- 2. Do you think material advantages are decisive in the outcome of wars? Why or why not?**