

The 1850s: Prelude to Civil War

DIRECTIONS:

You will have 75 minutes to develop a Document-Based Question (DBQ-style) essay analyzing how events in the 1850s led to discord and tension in the pre-Civil War United States. This essay will be a take-home essay due _____. You will time yourself on this essay, providing yourself with 15 minutes to complete a graphic organizer and 60 minutes to write the essay. You may only use the information you have on institution of slavery and the Age of Crisis.

The DBQ question tests your ability to work with historical documents. Your answer should be derived mainly from a combination of outside information and the documents. You may also refer to historical facts and developments not mentioned in the documents and may assess the reliability of the documents as historical sources where relevant to your answer.

DBQ QUESTION:

“By the 1850s the Constitution, originally framed as an instrument of national unity, had become a source of sectional discord and tension and ultimately contributed to the failure of the union it had created.”

Using the documents and your knowledge of the period 1850-1861, assess the validity of this statement.

THEMATIC ESSAY FOR EXTRA CREDIT (9 pts):

Summarize the impact of three of the following events on sectional tensions in the 1850s:

- Compromise of 1850**
- Fugitive Slave Acts of 1850**
- Kansas-Nebraska Act**
- Dred Scott Decision**
- John Brown’s Raids**

1850s: Prelude to Civil War

Scoring Rubric

8-9 Essay

- * Contains a clear, well-developed thesis that discusses the underlying issues and events that caused discord and tension in the United States in the years between 1850 to 1861.
- * Develops the thesis with considerable, relevant supporting historical information.
- * Treatment of the sides of the controversies may be somewhat uneven.
- * Provides effective analysis of the events leading up to the Civil War, discussion of the controversies, and the underlying reasons for the political tensions between the North and South.
- * Effectively incorporated a large majority of the documents, citing those documents properly, and using OUTSIDE information as the basis for their arguments.
- * May contain minor errors.
- * Is well organized and well written

5-7 Essay

- * Contains a thesis that may be partially developed in discussing the underlying issues and events that caused discord and tension in the United States in the years between 1850 to 1861.
- * Supports the thesis with some relevant, historical information.
- * Demonstrates some analysis of the events and issues in the 1850s.
- * Discusses the influence of the events on the growing political tensions.
- * Demonstrates an ability to incorporate a majority of the documents, citing those documents somewhat properly, and using some OUTSIDE information as the basis for their arguments.
- * May contain errors that do not seriously detract from the quality of the essay.
- * Has acceptable organization and writing.

2-4 Essay

- * Contains a confused or unfocused thesis or simply paraphrases the question.
- * Provides a few relevant facts or lists facts with little or no application to the question.
- * May include broad generalizations or significant imbalance in factual support for the differences.
- * Demonstrates little or no analysis about the differences.
- * Incorporates some of the documents, citing those documents occasionally, and using very little OUTSIDE information as the basis for their arguments.
- * May contain major errors.
- * May be poorly organized and/or poorly written.

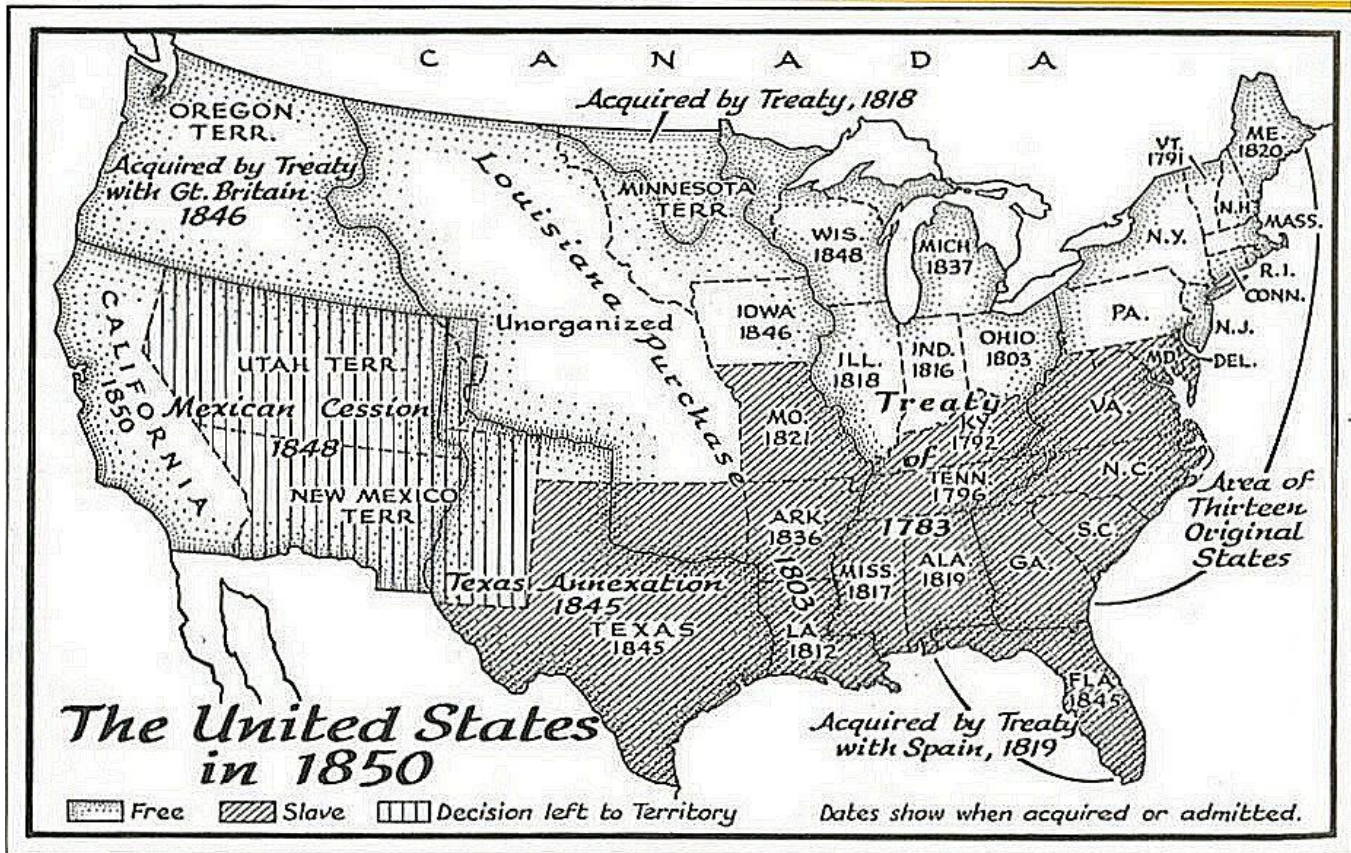
0-1 Essay

- * Lacks a thesis or simply restates the question.
- * Demonstrates an incompetent or inappropriate response.
- * Has little or no understanding of the question.
- * Contains substantial errors.

The ---- Essay

- * Is blank or completely off task.

Document A



Document B

Source: An Anonymous Georgian, "Plain Words for the North," *American Whig Review*, XII (December 1850)

"In a government where sectional interests and feelings may come into conflict, the sole security for permanence and peace is to be found in a Constitution whose provisions are inviolable....Every State, before entering into that compact, stood in a position of independence. Ere yielding that independence, it was only proper that provision should be made to protect the interests of those which would inevitably be the weaker in that confederacy.

"[The framers of the Constitution] acted wisely, and embodied in the Constitution all that the South could ask. But two Constitutional provisions are necessary to secure Southern rights upon this important question, --the recognition of slavery where the people choose it and the remedy for fugitive slaves....We hold that the Constitution of the Union does recognize slavery where it exists....

"A large portion of our states have adopted and allow slavery. The entire country becomes possessed of new territory, to the acquisition of which these slave States contribute mainly. The South admits the right of this new territory to choose for itself whether slavery shall or shall not exist there. But the North insists, that while the territory was partly acquired by Southern men, is partly owned by Southern men, that they shall be excluded from its soil,--that they shall not carry their property into their own land--land which is theirs by the right of purchase. Thus it is rendered, if these views are carried out, simply impossible for any new State representing the Southern interest ever to come into the Union. The equilibrium which alone can preserve the Constitution is utterly destroyed. And to do this, flagrant violations of the plainest rules of right and wrong are committed....

"The Union, without a living, vital Constitution, is but a vain and empty name. Nay, more, it is but a body powerless for good, strong for evil. Its destruction is inevitable unless the original guarantees are respected and maintained."

Document C

CAUTION!!

COLORED PEOPLE
OF BOSTON, ONE & ALL,
You are hereby respectfully CAUTIONED and advised, to avoid conversing with the
Watchmen and Police Officers
of Boston,
For since the recent ORDER OF THE MAYOR & ALDERMEN, they are empowered to act as
KIDNAPPERS
AND
Slave Catchers,
And they have already been actually employed in KIDNAPPING, CATCHING, AND KEEPING SLAVES. Therefore, if you value your LIBERTY, and the *Welfare of the Fugitives* among you, *Shun* them in every possible manner, as so many *HOUNDS* on the track of the most unfortunate of your race.

Keep a Sharp Look Out for
KIDNAPPERS, and have
TOP EYE open.

APRIL 24, 1851.

Document D

Source: Ralph Waldo Emerson, address on The Fugitive Slave Law (May 3, 1851)

“An immoral law makes it a man’s duty to break it, at every hazard. For virtue is the very self of every man. It is therefore a principle of law that an immoral contract is void, and that an immoral statute is void....The [Fugitive Slave Law] is a statute which enacts the crime of kidnapping,—a crime on one footing with arson and murder. A man’s right to liberty is as inalienable as his right to life....

“By the law of congress March 2, 1807, it is piracy and murder, punishable with death, to enslave a man on the coast of Africa. By law of Congress September, 1850, it is a high crime and misdemeanor, punishable with fine and imprisonment, to resist reenslaving a man on the coast of America....What kind of legislation is this? What kind of Constitution covers it?...

“I suppose the Union can be left to take care of itself....But one thing appears certain to me, that, as soon as the Constitution ordains an immoral law, it ordains disunion. The law is suicidal, and cannot be obeyed. The Union is at an end as soon as an immoral law is enacted. And he who writes a crime into the statute-book digs under the foundations of the Capitol to plan there a powder-magazine, and lays a train.”

Document E

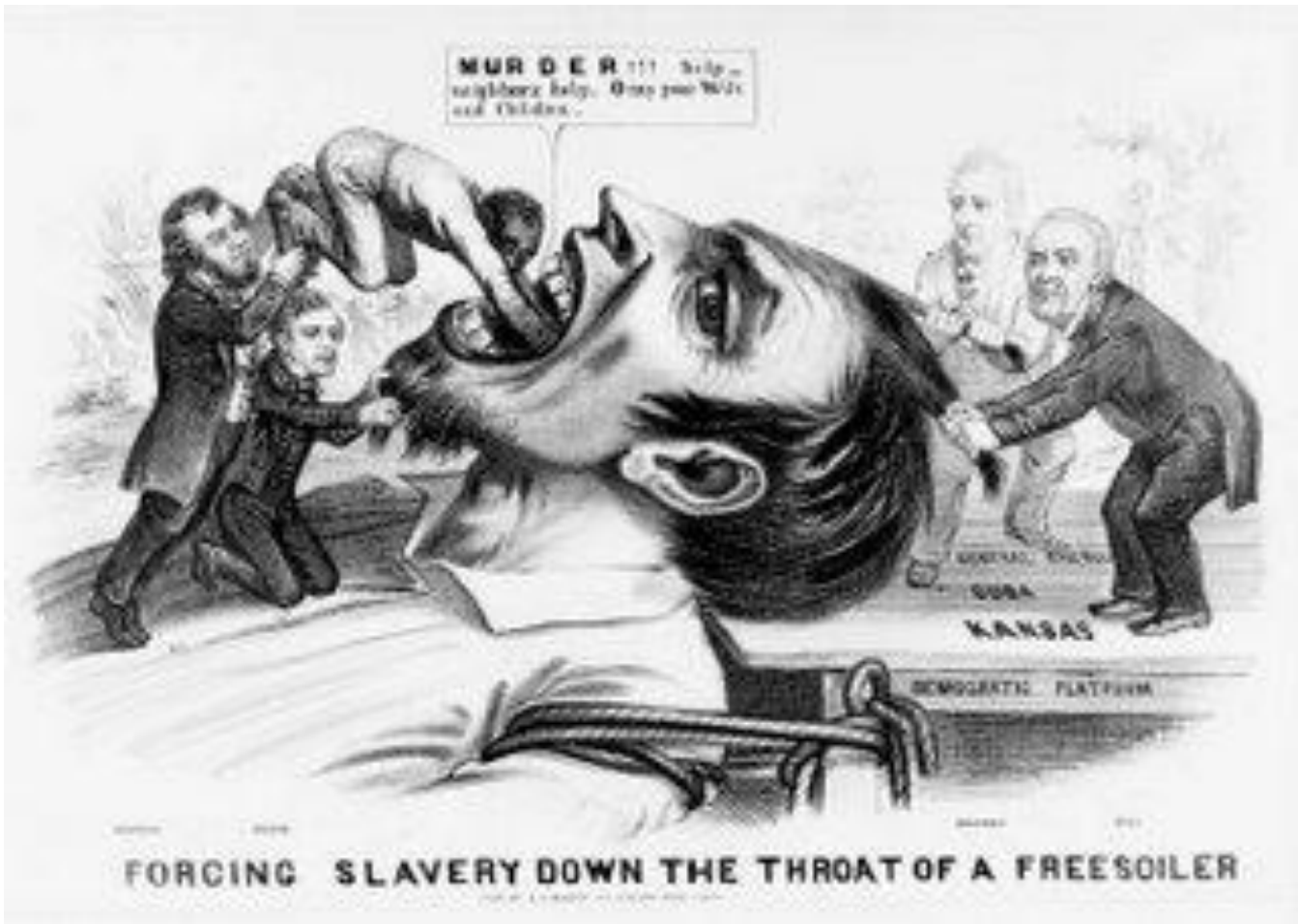
Source: William Lloyd Garrison, "The United States Constitution" (1852)

"We charge...that [the Constitution] was formed at the expense of human liberty, by a profligate surrender of principle, and to this hour is cemented with human blood...."

"To the argument, that the words 'slaves' and 'slavery' are not to be found in the Constitution, and therefore that it was never intended to give any protection or countenance to the slave system, it is sufficient to reply, that though no such words are contained in the instrument, other words were used, intelligently and specifically, to meet the necessities of slavery...."

"Three millions of the American people are crushed under the American Union! They are held as slaves, trafficked as merchandise, registered as goods and chattels! The government gives them no protection—the government is their enemy, the government keeps them in chains!...The Union which grinds them to the dust rests upon us, and with them we will struggle to overthrow it! The Constitution which subjects them to hopeless bondage is one that we cannot swear to support. Our motto is, 'No Union with Slaveholders.'...We separate from them,...to clear our skirts of innocent blood,...and to hasten the downfall of slavery in America, and throughout the world!"

Document F



Document G

Source: President James Buchanan, fourth annual message to Congress (December 3, 1860)

“...All for which the slave States have ever contended, is to be let alone and permitted to manage their domestic institutions in their own way. As sovereign States, they, and they alone, are responsible before God and the world for the slavery existing among them....

“The Southern States, standing on the basis of the Constitution, have a right to demand this act of justice from the States of the North. Should it be refused, then the Constitution, to which all the States are parties, will have been willfully violated by one portion of them in a provisions essential to the domestic security and happiness of the remainder. In that event the injured States, after having first used all peaceful and constitutional means to obtain redress, would be justified in revolutionary resistance to the Government of the Union....

“The question fairly stated is, Has the Constitution delegated to Congress the power to coerce a State into submission which is attempting to withdraw or has actually withdrawn from the Confederacy? If answered in the affirmative, it must be on the principle that the power has been conferred upon Congress to declare and to make war against a State. After much serious reflection I have arrived at the conclusion that no such power has been delegated to Congress....

“Congress can contribute much to avert [Southern withdrawal from the Union] by proposing and recommending to the legislatures of the several States the remedy for existing evils which the Constitution has itself provided for its own preservation,...an ‘explanatory amendment’ of the Constitution on the subject of slavery....

1. An express recognition of the right of property in slaves in the States where it now exists or may hereafter exist.
2. The duty of protecting this right in all the common Territories....
3. A like recognition of the right of the master to have his slave who has escaped from one State to another restored....

“In any event, [such an explanatory amendment] ought to be tried in a spirit of conciliation before any of these States shall separate themselves from the Union.”

Document H

Source: President Jefferson Davis, message to the Confederate Congress (April 29, 1861)

“It was by the delegates chosen by the *several States*...that the Constitution of the United States was framed in 1787 and submitted to the *several States* for ratification....[These] States endeavored in every possible form to exclude the idea that the separate and independent sovereignty of each State was merged into one common government and nation, and...to impress on the Constitution its true character—that of a compact between independent States.

“...Amendments were added to the Constitution placing beyond any pretense of doubt the reservation by the States of all their sovereign rights and powers not expressly delegated to the United States by the Constitution.

“Strange, indeed,...[the Constitution has] proved unavailing to prevent the rise and growth in the Northern states of a political school which has persistently claimed that the government thus formed was not a compact *between* States, but was in effect national government, set up *above* and *over* the States.”

Document I

Source: President Abraham Lincoln, message to Congress (July 4, 1861)

“The [Secessionists] invented an ingenious sophism, which, if conceded, was followed by perfectly logical steps, through all the incidents, to the complete destruction of the Union. The sophism itself is, that any state of the Union may, *consistently* with the national Constitution, and therefore *lawfully*, and *peacefully*, withdraw from the Union, without the consent of the Union, or of any other state....

“This sophism derives much—perhaps the whole—of its currency, from the assumption, that there is some omnipotent, and sacred supremacy, pertaining to a *State*—to each State of our Federal Union. Our States have neither more, nor less power, than that reserved to them, in the Union, by the Constitution—no one of them ever having been a State *out* of the Union, by the Constitution. The original ones passed into the Union even *before* they cast off their British colonial dependence; and the new ones each came into the Union directly from a condition of dependence....

“Having never been States, either in substance, or in name, *outside* of the Union, whence this magical omnipotence of ‘State rights,’ asserting a claim of power to lawfully destroy the Union itself?”