

Why Did the South Secede?



“Dividing the National Map,” an 1860 editorial cartoon. Available through the Library of Congress.

Supporting Questions

1. In what ways did states attempt to compromise on the issues of slavery, state sovereignty and territorial expansion?
2. In what ways did the election of 1860 divide the nation?
3. What did Southerners say about secession?
4. What did Northerners say about secession?

High School Southern Secession Inquiry

Why Did the South Secede?

Framework for Teaching American Slavery	Summary Objective 16: Students will discuss the 1860 election of Abraham Lincoln and the subsequent decision of several slave states to secede from the Union to ensure the preservation and expansion of slavery.
Staging the Question	Examine a map of the United States showing the Union and the Confederacy to analyze and respond to three statements outlining potential reasons for southern secession.

Supporting Question 1	Supporting Question 2	Supporting Question 3	Supporting Question 4
In what ways did states attempt to compromise on the issues of slavery, state sovereignty and territorial expansion?	In what ways did the election of 1860 divide the nation?	What did Southerners say about secession?	What did Northerners say about secession?
Formative Performance Task	Formative Performance Task	Formative Performance Task	Formative Performance Task
Construct an annotated timeline detailing the compromises over issues of slavery, state sovereignty and territorial expansion.	Write a paragraph describing the ways in which the election of 1860 divided the nation over the preservation of southern power, the expansion of slavery in the territories and federal regulation of enslaved people in free states.	Create a Venn diagram and construct an evidence-based claim that answers the supporting question.	Complete the Venn diagram and construct an evidence-based claim that answers the supporting question.
Featured Sources	Featured Sources	Featured Sources	Featured Sources
Source A: The Missouri Compromise, Excerpt (1820). Source B: Henry Clay's Resolutions for the Compromise of 1850, Excerpt. Source C: The Fugitive Slave Act, Excerpt (1850). Source D: The Kansas-Nebraska Act, Excerpt (1854). Source E: <i>Dred Scott v. Sandford</i> , Excerpt (1857).	Source A: "Dividing the National Map," editorial cartoon (1860). Source B: "Election of 1860 Results Map" by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley. Source C: Election of 1860 Party Platforms. Source D: "The Union is Dissolved!" Broadside. <i>Charleston Mercury</i> (1860).	Source A: "Declaration of the Immediate Causes Which Induce and Justify the Secession of South Carolina ..." Excerpt (1860). Source B: "Who Is Responsible for this War?" by Alexander H. Stephens, Excerpt (1861). Source C: "Nashville Convention Speech" by Robert Rhett, Excerpt (1850). Source D: "Thanksgiving Sermon" by B.M. Palmer, Excerpt (1860). Source E: "Corner Stone Speech" by Alexander H. Stephens, Excerpt (1861).	Source A: "The Dis-United States. Or the Southern Confederacy," editorial cartoon (1861). Source B: "South Carolina Topsey in a Fix," wood engraving by Thomas W. Strong (1861). Source C: Letter to Abraham Lincoln from Horace Greeley, Excerpt (1860). Source D: Letter to Abraham Lincoln from the New York Republicans, Excerpt (1861).

Summative Performance Task	ARGUMENT Why did the South secede? Construct an argument (e.g., detailed outline, poster or essay) that addresses the compelling question using specific claims and relevant evidence from contemporary sources while acknowledging competing views. EXTENSION Participate in a Structured Academic Controversy by arguing a claim that answers the compelling question.
Taking Informed Action	UNDERSTAND Research an issue within your own state that created tension between federal and state power (e.g., environmental regulation, energy conservation, civil rights investigations, border control, etc.) ASSESS Take a position on whether your state or the federal government has the power to govern the issue you selected. ACT Draft a letter to your state or federal representative stating your position on the selected issue, including claims and evidence to support your position.

Overview

Inquiry Description

This inquiry leads students through an in-depth investigation of a series of primary sources that highlight the events surrounding the secession of South Carolina and other Confederate states. Investigating the compelling question, “Why did the South secede?” students will need to consider the historical events leading up to the decision to secede, the role of political parties in secession and the views of both Southerners and Northerners on the issue of secession.

In investigating the various perspectives surrounding the southern secession movement of 1860 and 1861 that ultimately led to the American Civil War, students will develop a nuanced understanding of the complicated process of secession and the conflicting moral, political and social tensions inherent in what history often paints as a straightforward decision. This inquiry can be used as a tool to introduce the Civil War or as a way to have students reflect on the aftermath of the Civil War.

Structure of the Inquiry

In addressing the compelling question, “Why did the South secede?” students will work through a series of supporting questions, performance tasks and primary sources to construct an argument with evidence and counterevidence derived from the sources.

Length of the Inquiry

This inquiry is designed to take five to seven 40-minute class periods. Inquiries are not scripts, so you are encouraged to modify and adapt them to meet the needs and interests of your students. The inquiry time frame could expand if you think your students need additional instructional experiences (i.e., supporting questions, formative performance tasks and featured sources). Resources should be modified as necessary to meet individualized education programs (IEPs) or Section 504 Plans for students with disabilities.

Staging the Compelling Question: Why did the South secede?

Compelling Question	Why did the South secede?
Featured Source	"Secession 1860–1861," <i>Hart American History Series</i> map (1917).

THIS INQUIRY OPENS WITH THE QUESTION, "Why did the South secede?" The compelling question could be staged by having students first examine the featured source.

THE FEATURED SOURCE provides is a map of the United States showing the extent of southern secession before and after April 14, 1861. The map breaks the Union into "Free States" and "Loyal Slave States," providing students with a visualization of the border states where slavery would remain legal within the Union even after the Emancipation Proclamation. Finally, the map allows students to see which territories remained loyal to the Union and which aligned with the Confederacy.

The image could be presented to each student or projected for the whole class to study. Give students about five minutes to write down what they believe the map is showing. Then present the following three statements:

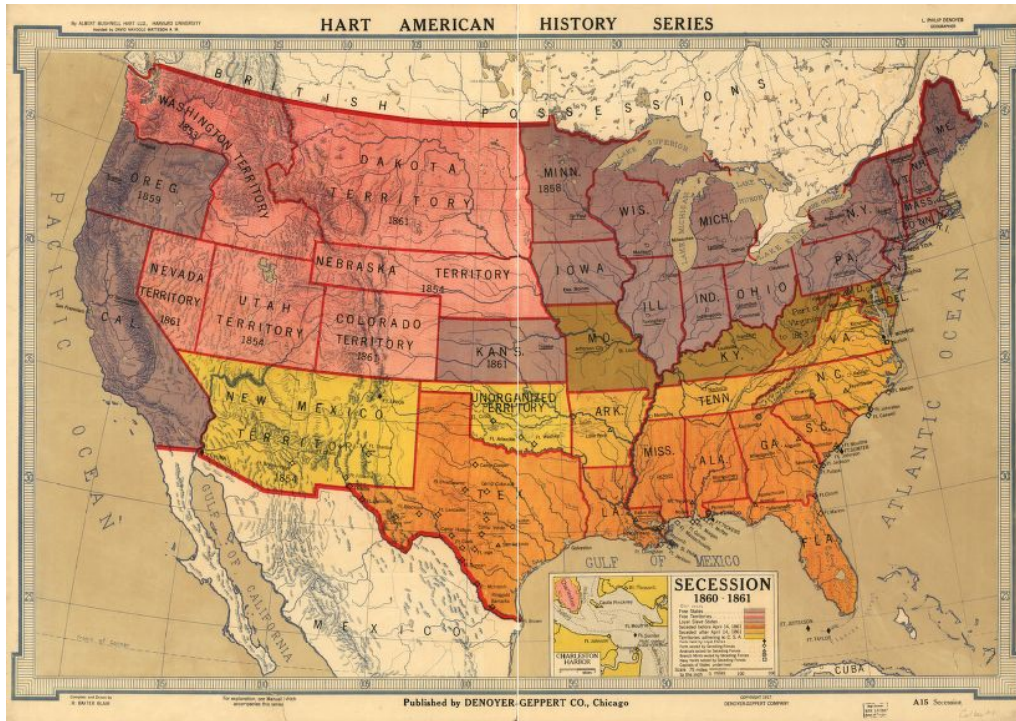
- "States have the right to leave/secede from the rest of the United States."
- "Slavery was the reason for the secession of the South."
- "The protection of state sovereignty was the reason for the secession of the South."

Instruct each student to write down whether they agree or disagree with each statement. Designate one side of the room as "agree" and the other side of the room as "disagree." Then re-state each of the claims. Have students move to the side of the room that best represents their own perspective. Students who do not know should be encouraged to choose based on what they think they know about southern secession and the Civil War. After each claim, ask a few students why they chose the side they did. This short exercise helps instructors gauge students' previous knowledge about secession and allows students to see a few simple claims regarding the complicated subject matter they are about to investigate. This exercise is flexible and will act as a baseline for understanding as the inquiry unfolds.

Staging the Compelling Question: Why did the South secede?

Featured Source

“Secession, 1860–1861,” *Hart American History Series* map (1917). Available through the Library of Congress.



Supporting Question 1: In what ways did states attempt to compromise on the issues of slavery, state sovereignty and territorial expansion?

Supporting Question	In what ways did states attempt to compromise?
Formative Performance Task	Construct an annotated timeline detailing the compromises over issues of slavery, state sovereignty and territorial expansion.
Featured Sources	<p>Source A: The Missouri Compromise, Excerpt (1820). Source B: Henry Clay’s Resolutions for The Compromise of 1850, Excerpt. Source C: The Fugitive Slave Act, Excerpt (1850). Source D: The Kansas-Nebraska Act, Excerpt (1854). Source E: <i>Dred Scott v. Sanford</i>, Excerpt (1857).</p>

THE FIRST SUPPORTING QUESTION—“In what ways did states attempt to compromise?”—establishes a foundational timeline for the events leading up to the secession of South Carolina in 1860.

A NOTE ON THE FEATURED SOURCES: While this task is meant to provide foundational knowledge of the events leading up to secession, students may also find that the sources (many of which are drawn from legislation) will speak directly to the compelling question, “Why did the South secede?” As such, students should be encouraged not just to read carefully as they complete the task, but to also make note of the language used and the issues discussed and debated in each source.

FEATURED SOURCE A is an excerpt from The Missouri Compromise of 1820. The excerpt includes a section explaining Missouri’s admission to the United States and a section setting the northern limit for legal slavery, along with the provision that enslaved people who escape to free territories can legally be abducted and returned to slavery.

FEATURED SOURCE B is drawn from Henry Clay’s Resolutions for The Compromise of 1850. The excerpts include the admission of California, the Utah Territory, and the New Mexico Territory to the Union. They outline the banning of the slave trade in Washington D.C. (though not slavery itself). They call for stronger fugitive slave laws, and they establish limits on congressional powers to regulate the slave trade.

FEATURED SOURCE C is an excerpt from The Fugitive Slave Act. Included is the provision that revoked the rights of those escaping from slavery to testify in their own defense.

FEATURED SOURCE D is an excerpt from The Kansas-Nebraska Act allowing the voters of Kansas and Nebraska to choose whether they want to allow slavery within the territories.

FEATURED SOURCE E is drawn from the Supreme Court decision in *Scott v. Stanford*. In this excerpt, the justices rule that Scott is not a citizen because he is of African descent and therefore he has no standing to sue for his freedom.

THE FIRST FORMATIVE PERFORMANCE TASK directs students to create and annotate a timeline that details the actions taken by federal and state governments to compromise over issues of slavery, state sovereignty and territorial expansion to avert the breaking up of the United States.

The timeline will be useful as a record of important events and ideas, since many of the sources throughout the inquiry make direct references to the sources presented with this first supporting question. For example, the excerpt from the Missouri Compromise of 1820 highlights several issues that would later be debated by southern states, including the expansion of American territory, the rights of states to govern themselves, and the legality of slavery within individual states.

Supporting Question 1: In what ways did states attempt to compromise on the issues of slavery, state sovereignty and territorial expansion?

Featured Source

Source A: [The Missouri Compromise](#), Excerpt (1820). Available through the Teaching Hard History Text Library.

An Act to authorize the people of the Missouri territory to form a constitution and state government, and for the admission of such state into the Union on an equal footing with the original states, and to prohibit slavery in certain territories.

SEC. 1. Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America, in Congress assembled, That the inhabitants of that portion of the Missouri territory ... shall be admitted into the Union, upon an equal footing with the original states, in all respects whatsoever ...

SEC. 8. And be it further enacted. That in all that territory ceded by France to the United States, under the name of Louisiana, which lies north of thirty-six degrees and thirty minutes north latitude, not included within the limits of the state [Missouri], contemplated by this act, slavery and involuntary servitude ... is hereby, forever prohibited: Provided always, That any person escaping into the same [North], from whom labour or service is lawfully claimed, in any state or territory of the United States, such fugitive may be lawfully reclaimed and conveyed to the person claiming his or her labour or service as aforesaid.

APPROVED, March 6, 1820.

Supporting Question 1: In what ways did states attempt to compromise on the issues of slavery, state sovereignty and territorial expansion?

Featured Source

Source B: [Henry Clay's Resolutions for the Compromise of 1850](#), Excerpt. Available through Our Documents.

CLAY'S RESOLUTIONS January 29, 1850

It being desirable, for the peace, concord, and harmony of the Union of these States, to settle and adjust amicably all existing questions of controversy between them arising out of the institution of slavery upon a fair, equitable and just basis: therefore,

1. Resolved, That California ... be admitted as one of the States of this Union, without the imposition by Congress of any restriction in respect to the exclusion or introduction of slavery within those boundaries.

2. Resolved, That as slavery does not exist by law, and is not likely to be introduced into any of the territory acquired by the United States from the republic of Mexico ... and that appropriate territorial governments ought to be established by Congress in all of the said territory ... without the adoption of any restriction or condition on the subject of slavery.

[...] 6. But, resolved, That it is expedient to prohibit, within the District, the slave trade in slaves brought into it from States or places beyond the limits of the District, either to be sold therein as merchandise, or to be transported to other markets without the District of Columbia.

7. Resolved, That more effectual provision ought to be made by law, according to the requirement of the constitution, for the restitution and delivery of persons bound to service or labor in any State, who may escape into any other State or Territory in the Union. And,

8. Resolved, That Congress has no power to promote or obstruct the trade in slaves between the slaveholding States; but that the admission or exclusion of slaves brought from one into another of them, depends exclusively upon their own particular laws.

Supporting Question 1: In what ways did states attempt to compromise on the issues of slavery, state sovereignty and territorial expansion?

Featured Source

Source C: [The Fugitive Slave Act](#), Excerpt (1850). Available through the Teaching Hard History Text Library.

SEC. 6. And be it further enacted, That when a person held to service or labor in any State or Territory of the United States ... shall hereafter escape into another State or Territory of the United States, the person or persons to whom such service or labor may be due ... may pursue and reclaim such fugitive person, either by procuring a warrant from some one of the courts, judges, or commissioners ... or by seizing and arresting such fugitive, where the same can be done without process, and by taking, or causing such person to be taken, forthwith before such court, judge, or commissioner, whose duty it shall be to hear and determine the case of such claimant in a summary manner.

[...] In no trial or hearing under this act shall the testimony of such alleged fugitive be admitted in evidence; and the certificates in this and the first [fourth] section mentioned, shall be conclusive of the right of the person or persons in whose favor granted, to remove such fugitive to the State or Territory from which he escaped.

APPROVED, September 18, 1850

Supporting Question 1: In what ways did states attempt to compromise on the issues of slavery, state sovereignty and territorial expansion?

Featured Source

Source D: [The Kansas-Nebraska Act](#), Excerpt (1854). Accessed through Our Documents.

An Act to Organize the Territories of Nebraska and Kansas.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That all that part of the territory of the United States included within the following limits...and the same is hereby, created into a temporary government by the name of the Territory Nebraska; and when admitted as a State or States, the said Territory or any portion of the same, shall be received into the Union with or without slavery, as their constitution may prescribe at the time of the admission.

Supporting Question 1: In what ways did states attempt to compromise on the issues of slavery, state sovereignty and territorial expansion?

Featured Source

Source E: *Dred Scott v. Stanford*, Excerpt (1857). Available through Our Documents.

4. A free negro of the African race, whose ancestors were brought to this country and sold as slaves, is not a “citizen” within the meaning of the Constitution of the United States.

5. When the Constitution was adopted, they were not regarded in any of the States as members of the community which constituted the State, and were not numbered among its “people or citizen.” Consequently, the special rights and immunities guaranteed to citizens do not apply to them. And not being “citizens” within the meaning of the Constitution, they are not entitled to sue in that character in a court of the United States, and the Circuit Court has not jurisdiction in such a suit.

6. The only two clauses in the Constitution which point to this race, treat them as persons whom it was morally lawful to deal in as articles of property and to hold as slaves.

[...] 9. The change in public opinion and feeling in relation to the African race, which has taken place since the adoption of the Constitution, cannot change its construction and meaning, and it must be construct and administered now according to its true meaning and intention when it was formed and adopted.

10. The plaintiff having admitted ... that his ancestors were imported from Africa and sold as slaves, he is not a citizen of the State of Missouri according to the Constitution of the United States, and was not entitled to sue in that character in the Circuit Court.

Supporting Question 2: In what ways did the election of 1860 divide the nation?

Supporting Question	In what ways did the election of 1860 divide the nation?
Formative Performance Task	Write a paragraph describing the ways in which the election of 1860 divided the nation over the issues of the preservation of southern power, the expansion of slavery in the territories and federal regulation of enslaved people in free states.
Featured Sources	<p>Source A: “Dividing the National Map,” editorial cartoon (1860). Source B: “Election of 1860 Results Map” by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley. Source C: Election of 1860 Party Platforms. Source D: “The Union Is Dissolved!” Broadside. <i>Charleston Mercury</i> (1860).</p>

AS THEY CONSIDER THE SECOND SUPPORTING QUESTION—“In what ways did the election of 1860 divide the nation?”—students will build on their understanding of the process of secession by examining political opinions on this issue.

Students are presented with four sources:

FEATURED SOURCE A is an editorial cartoon depicting the divisive nature of the election. Students might be asked to compare the attitudes of the four candidates depicted with the language of the party platforms outlined in Featured Source C.

FEATURED SOURCE B is an election map of 1860, detailing the results of the election. Students might compare this map to the one in Featured Source A, and consider how the party platforms in Featured Source C spoke to different regions of the country.

FEATURED SOURCE C is the text of the platforms for the four parties—Constitutional Union, Democratic, Republican, and Southern Democratic—involved in the election of 1860.

FEATURED SOURCE D is a broadside from the *Charleston Mercury* published December 20, 1860 and announcing the secession of South Carolina from the Union.

The image of the map used for Staging the Compelling Question could also be brought back to show students how politically divided the country had become and how that division played out regionally.

THE SECOND FORMATIVE PERFORMANCE TASK—writing a paragraph describing the ways the election of 1860 divided the nation—should allow students to easily see how the election brought out ideological, geographical and political divisions that had been plaguing the country for the preceding five decades. Students will also gain knowledge of how the two major parties differed on issues of the preservation of southern power, the expansion of slavery in the territories and federal regulation of enslaved people in free states. This task will build on the knowledge gained from the first supporting question by highlighting the political motivations behind the legislative decisions represented on students’ timelines.

Supporting Question 2: In what ways did the election of 1860 divide the nation?

Featured Source

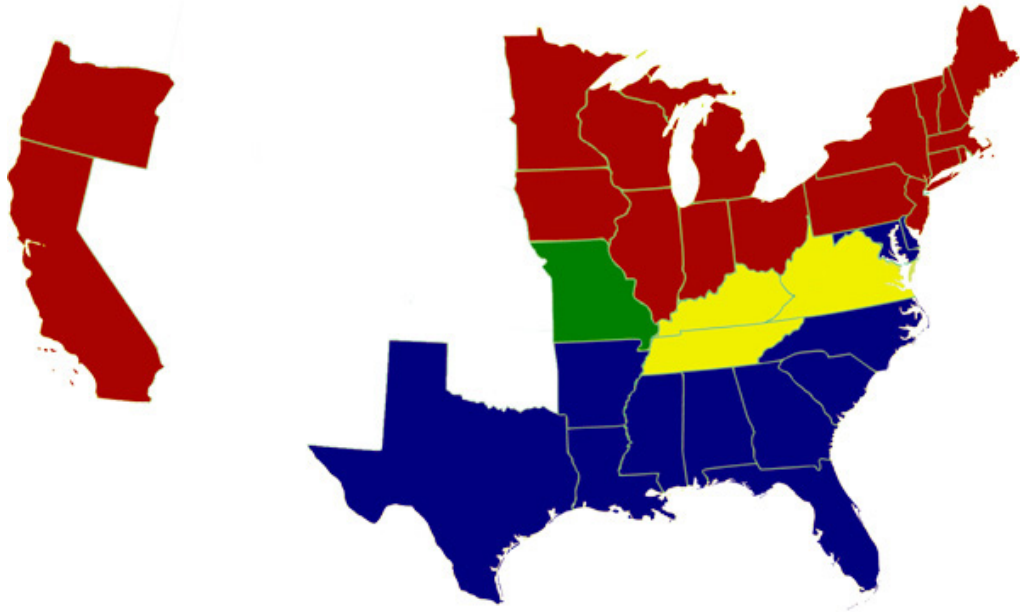
Source A: "Dividing the National Map," editorial cartoon (1860). Available through the Library of Congress.



Supporting Question 2: In what ways did the election of 1860 divide the nation?

Featured Source

Source B: “[Election of 1860 Results Map](#)” by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley. Available through The American Presidency Project.



Reprinted with permission.

Supporting Question 2: In what ways did the election of 1860 divide the nation?

Featured Source

Source C: [National Presidential Party Platforms in 1860](#). Available through The American Presidency Project.

PASSAGE 1

Constitutional Union Party Platform of 1860

Whereas, Experience has demonstrated that Platforms adopted by the partisan Conventions of the country have had the effect to mislead and deceive the people, and at the same time to widen the political divisions of the country, by the creation and encouragement of geographical and sectional parties; therefore

Resolved, that it is both the part of patriotism and of duty to recognize no political principle other than THE CONSTITUTION OF THE COUNTRY, THE UNION OF THE STATES, AND THE ENFORCEMENT OF THE LAWS, and that, as representatives of the Constitutional Union men of the country, in National Convention assembled, we hereby pledge ourselves to maintain, protect, and defend, separately and unitedly, these great principles of public liberty and national safety, against all enemies, at home and abroad; believing that thereby peace may once more be restored to the country; the rights of the People and of the States re-established, and the

Government again placed in that condition of justice, fraternity and equality, which, under the example and Constitution of our fathers, has solemnly bound every citizen of the United States to maintain a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquillity, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity.

PASSAGE 2

1860 Democratic Party Platform

1. Resolved, That we, the Democracy of the Union in Convention assembled, hereby declare our affirmance of the resolutions unanimously adopted and declared as a platform of principles by the Democratic Convention at Cincinnati, in the year 1856, believing that Democratic principles are unchangeable in their nature, when applied to the same subject matters; and we recommend, as the only further resolutions, the following:

2. Inasmuch as difference of opinion exists in the Democratic party as to the nature and extent of the powers of a Territorial Legislature, and as to the powers and duties of Congress, under the Constitution of the United States, over the institution of slavery within the Territories,

Resolved, That the Democratic party will abide by the decision of the Supreme Court of the United States upon these questions of Constitutional law.

3. Resolved, That it is the duty of the United States to afford ample and complete protection to all its citizens, whether at home or abroad, and whether native or foreign born.

4. Resolved, That one of the necessities of the age, in a military, commercial, and postal point of view, is speedy communication between the Atlantic and Pacific States; and the Democratic party pledge such Constitutional Government aid as will insure the construction of a Railroad to the Pacific coast, at the earliest practicable period.

5. Resolved, That the Democratic party are in favor of the acquisition of the Island of Cuba on such terms as shall be honorable to ourselves and just to Spain.

6. Resolved, That the enactments of the State Legislatures to defeat the faithful execution of the Fugitive Slave Law, are hostile in character, subversive of the Constitution, and revolutionary in their effect.

7. Resolved, That it is in accordance with the interpretation of the Cincinnati platform, that during the existence of the Territorial Governments the measure of restriction, whatever it may be, imposed by the Federal Constitution on the power of the Territorial Legislature over the subject of the domestic relations, as the same has been, or shall hereafter be finally determined by the Supreme Court of the United States, should be respected by all good citizens, and enforced with promptness and fidelity by every branch of the general government.

PASSAGE 3

Republican Party Platform of 1860

Resolved, That we, the delegated representatives of the Republican electors of the United States in Convention assembled, in discharge of the duty we owe to our constituents and our country, unite in the following declarations:

1. That the history of the nation during the last four years, has fully established the propriety and necessity of the organization and perpetuation of the Republican party, and that the causes which called it into existence are permanent in their nature, and now, more than ever before, demand its peaceful and constitutional triumph.

2. That the maintenance of the principles promulgated in the Declaration of Independence and embodied in the Federal Constitution, “That all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed,” is essential to the preservation of our Republican institutions; and that the Federal Constitution, the Rights of the States, and the Union of the States must and shall be preserved.
3. That to the Union of the States this nation owes its unprecedented increase in population, its surprising development of material resources, its rapid augmentation of wealth, its happiness at home and its honor abroad; and we hold in abhorrence all schemes for disunion, come from whatever source they may. And we congratulate the country that no Republican member of Congress has uttered or countenanced the threats of disunion so often made by Democratic members, without rebuke and with applause from their political associates; and we denounce those threats of disunion, in case of a popular overthrow of their ascendancy as denying the vital principles of a free government, and as an avowal of contemplated treason, which it is the imperative duty of an indignant people sternly to rebuke and forever silence.
4. That the maintenance inviolate of the rights of the states, and especially the right of each state to order and control its own domestic institutions according to its own judgment exclusively, is essential to that balance of powers on which the perfection and endurance of our political fabric depends; and we denounce the lawless invasion by armed force of the soil of any state or territory, no matter under what pretext, as among the gravest of crimes.
5. That the present Democratic Administration has far exceeded our worst apprehensions, in its measureless subserviency to the exactions of a sectional interest, as especially evinced in its desperate exertions to force the infamous Lecompton Constitution upon the protesting people of Kansas; in construing the personal relations between master and servant to involve an unqualified property in persons; in its attempted enforcement everywhere, on land and sea, through the intervention of Congress and of the Federal Courts of the extreme pretensions of a purely local interest; and in its general and unvarying abuse of the power intrusted to it by a confiding people.
6. That the people justly view with alarm the reckless extravagance which pervades every department of the Federal Government; that a return to rigid economy and accountability is indispensable to arrest the systematic plunder of the public treasury by favored partisans; while the recent startling developments of frauds and corruptions at the Federal metropolis, show that an entire change of administration is imperatively demanded.
7. That the new dogma that the Constitution, of its own force, carries slavery into any or all of the territories of the United States, is a dangerous political heresy, at variance with the explicit provisions of that instrument itself, with contemporaneous exposition, and with legislative and judicial precedent; is revolutionary in its tendency, and subversive of the peace and harmony of the country.
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, ordained that “no persons should be deprived of life, liberty or property without due process of law,” it becomes our duty, by legislation, whenever such legislation is necessary, to maintain this provision of the Constitution against all attempts to violate it; and 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 reopening 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.

10. That in the recent vetoes, by their Federal Governors, of the acts of the legislatures of Kansas and Nebraska, prohibiting slavery in those territories, we find a practical illustration of the boasted Democratic principle of Non-Intervention and Popular Sovereignty, embodied in the Kansas-Nebraska Bill, and a demonstration of the deception and fraud involved therein.

11. That Kansas should, of right, be immediately admitted as a state under the Constitution recently formed and adopted by her people, and accepted by the House of Representatives.

12. That, while providing revenue for the support of the general government by duties upon imports, sound policy requires such an adjustment of these imports as to encourage the development of the industrial interests of the whole country; and we commend that policy of national exchanges, which secures to the workingmen liberal wages, to agriculture remunerative prices, to mechanics and manufacturers an adequate reward for their skill, labor, and enterprise, and to the nation commercial prosperity and independence.

13. That we protest against any sale or alienation to others of the public lands held by actual settlers, and against any view of the free-homestead policy which regards the settlers as paupers or suppliants for public bounty; and we demand the passage by Congress of the complete and satisfactory homestead measure which has already passed the House.

14. That the Republican party is opposed to any change in our naturalization laws or any state legislation by which the rights of citizens hitherto accorded to immigrants from foreign lands shall be abridged or impaired; and in favor of giving a full and efficient protection to the rights of all classes of citizens, whether native or naturalized, both at home and abroad.

15. That appropriations by Congress for river and harbor improvements of a national character, required for the accommodation and security of an existing commerce, are authorized by the Constitution, and justified by the obligation of Government to protect the lives and property of its citizens.

16. That a railroad to the Pacific Ocean is imperatively demanded by the interests of the whole country; that the federal government ought to render immediate and efficient aid in its construction; and that, as preliminary thereto, a daily overland mail should be promptly established.

17. Finally, having thus set forth our distinctive principles and views, we invite the co-operation of all citizens, however differing on other questions, who substantially agree with us in their affirmance and support.

PASSAGE 4

Southern Democratic Party (Breckinridge Faction) Platform of 1860

Resolved, That the platform adopted by the Democratic party at Cincinnati be affirmed, with the following explanatory resolutions:

1. That the Government of a Territory organized by an act of Congress is provisional and temporary, and during its existence all citizens of the United States have an equal right to settle with their property in the Territory, without their rights, either of person or property, being destroyed or impaired by Congressional or Territorial legislation.

2. That it is the duty of the Federal Government, in all its departments, to protect, when necessary, the rights of persons and property in the Territories, and wherever else its constitutional authority extends.

8. That when the settlers in a Territory, having an adequate population, form a State Constitution, the right of sovereignty commences, and being consummated by admission into the Union, they stand on an equal footing with the people of other States, and the State thus organized ought to be admitted into the Federal Union, whether its Constitution prohibits or recognizes the institution of slavery.

Resolved, That the Democratic party are in favor of the acquisition of the Island of Cuba, on such terms as shall be honorable to ourselves and just to Spain, at the earliest practicable moment.

Resolved, That the enactments of State Legislatures to defeat the faithful execution of the Fugitive Slave Law are hostile in character, subversive of the Constitution, and revolutionary in their effect.

Resolved, That the Democracy of the United States recognize it as the imperative duty of this Government to protect the naturalized citizen in all his rights, whether at home or in foreign lands, to the same extent as its native-born citizens.

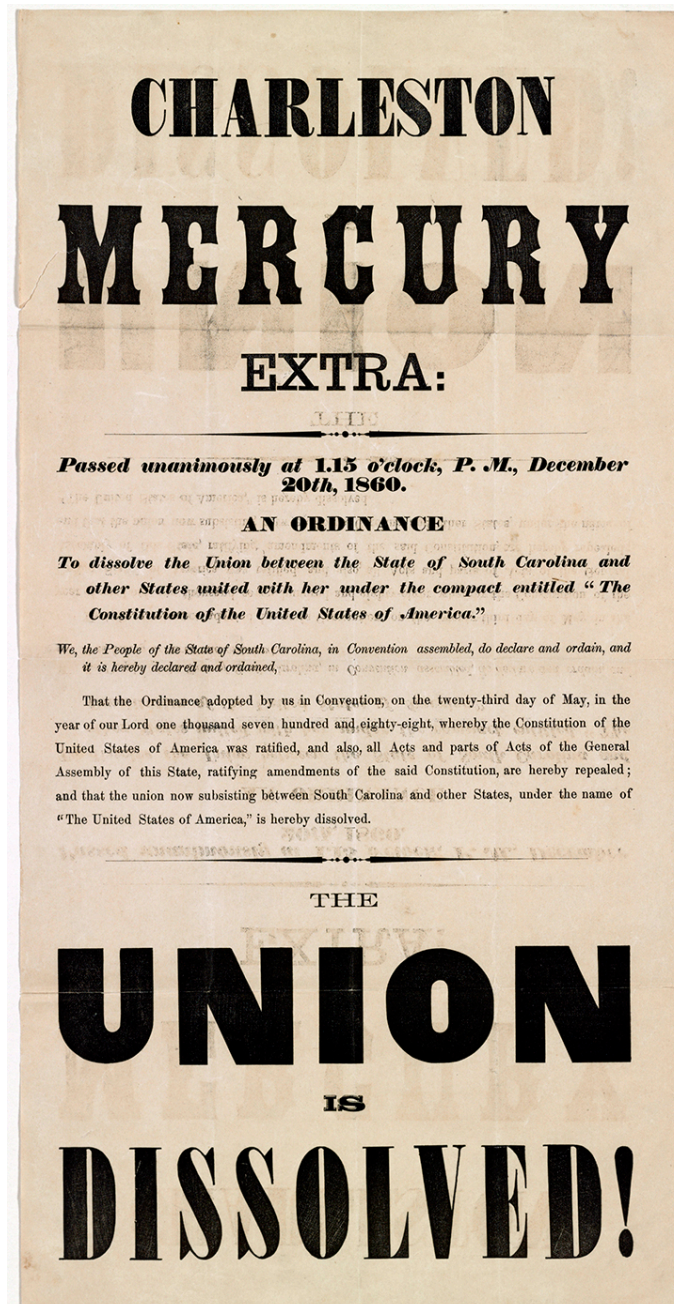
WHEREAS, One of the greatest necessities of the age, in a political, commercial, postal and military point of view, is a speedy communication between the Pacific and Atlantic coasts. Therefore be it

Resolved, That the National Democratic party do hereby pledge themselves to use every means in their power to secure the passage of some bill to the extent of the constitutional authority of Congress, for the construction of a Pacific Rail road from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean, at the earliest practicable moment.

Supporting Question 2: In what ways did the election of 1860 divide the nation?

Featured Source

Source D: “The Union Is Dissolved!” Broadside. *Charleston Mercury*, December 20, 1860. Available through the Library of Congress.



Supporting Question 3: What did Southerners say about secession?

Supporting Question	What did Southerners say about secession?
Formative Performance Task	Create a Venn diagram and construct an evidence-based claim that answers the supporting question.
Featured Sources	<p>Source A: “Declaration of the Immediate Causes Which Induce and Justify the Secession of South Carolina from the Federal Union,” Excerpt (1860).</p> <p>Source B: “Who Is Responsible for this War?” by Alexander H. Stephens, Excerpt (1861).</p> <p>Source C: “Nashville Convention Speech” by Robert Rhett, Excerpt (1850).</p> <p>Source D: “Thanksgiving Sermon” by B.M. Palmer, Excerpt (1860).</p> <p>Source E: “Corner Stone Speech” by Alexander H. Stephens, Excerpt (1861).</p>

THE THIRD SUPPORTING QUESTION— “What did Southerners say about secession?”— pushes students to further investigate the viewpoints of influential Southerners on the issue of secession. While the sources here represent a range of southern arguments about secession, they are by no means exhaustive.

A NOTE ON THE FEATURED SOURCES: Arguments about slavery from the 19th century are often deeply racist. It is important to prepare students before diving into these sources so that they know what to expect. You should also consider how you’ll address the racism of some of these arguments in your class discussion.

FEATURED SOURCE A was issued only four days after the broadside from Supporting Question 2 was published. Students should review the document to determine the reasons that South Carolina provided to justify its secession.

FEATURED SOURCE B is an excerpt from a speech delivered by Alexander H. Stephens in 1861 to the Secession Convention of Georgia and reprinted in the *Southern Almanac*. In it, Stephens argues against a war and suggests that compromise is still attainable.

FEATURED SOURCE C is drawn from a speech that Robert Rhett, a senator from South Carolina, gave over a decade before secession. In his address to the Nashville Convention in 1850, Rhett encouraged his fellow Southerners to secede rather than compromise with free states.

FEATURED SOURCE D is an excerpt of the 1860 “Thanksgiving Sermon” of New Orleans Reverend B.M. Palmer. In the widely-reprinted sermon, Palmer uses religion as a justification for slavery and calls on his listeners to support the Confederate cause.

FEATURED SOURCE E is an excerpt from the famous 1861 “Corner Stone Speech” by Alexander H. Stephens. In it, Stephens argues that slavery and white supremacy are foundational U.S. values.

THE THIRD FORMATIVE PERFORMANCE TASK asks students to fill out part of a Venn diagram summarizing the southern arguments about secession. Students should fill out only half of the diagram: they will complete it as the formative task for Supporting Question Four. Once half of the Venn diagram is finished, students should create a claim (preferably one sentence) that answers the supporting question.

Supporting Question 3: What did Southerners say about secession?

Featured Source

Source A: “Declaration of the Immediate Causes Which Induce and Justify the Secession of South Carolina from the Federal Union,” Excerpt (1860). Available through the Teaching Hard History Text Library.

Under this Confederation [Articles of Confederation] the war of the Revolution was carried on, and on the 3rd of September, 1783, the contest ended, and a definite Treaty was signed by Great Britain in which she acknowledged the independence of the Colonies ... thus were established the two great principles asserted by the Colonies, namely: the right of a State to govern itself; and the right of a people to abolish a Government when it becomes destructive of the ends for which it was instituted.

[...] By this Constitution, certain duties were imposed upon the several States, and the exercise of certain of their powers was restrained, which necessarily implied their continued existence as sovereign States. But to remove all doubt, an amendment was added, which declared that the powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States, respectively, or to the People.

[...] In the present case, the fact is established with certainty, We assert the fourteen [Northern] of the States have deliberately refused, for years past, to fulfill their constitutional obligations, and we refer to their own Statutes for the proof.

The Constitution of the United States, in its fourth Article, provides as follows: “No person held to service or labor in one State, under the laws thereof, escaping into another shall, in consequence of any law or regulation therein, be discharged from such service or labor, but shall be delivered up, on claim of the party to whom such service or labor may be due.”

This stipulation was so material to the compact, that without it that compact would not have been made. The greater number of the contracting parties held slaves, and they have previously evinced their estimate of the value of such a stipulation by making [slavery] a condition [outlawed] in the Ordinance of the government of the territory ceded by Virginia, which now composes the States north of the Ohio River.

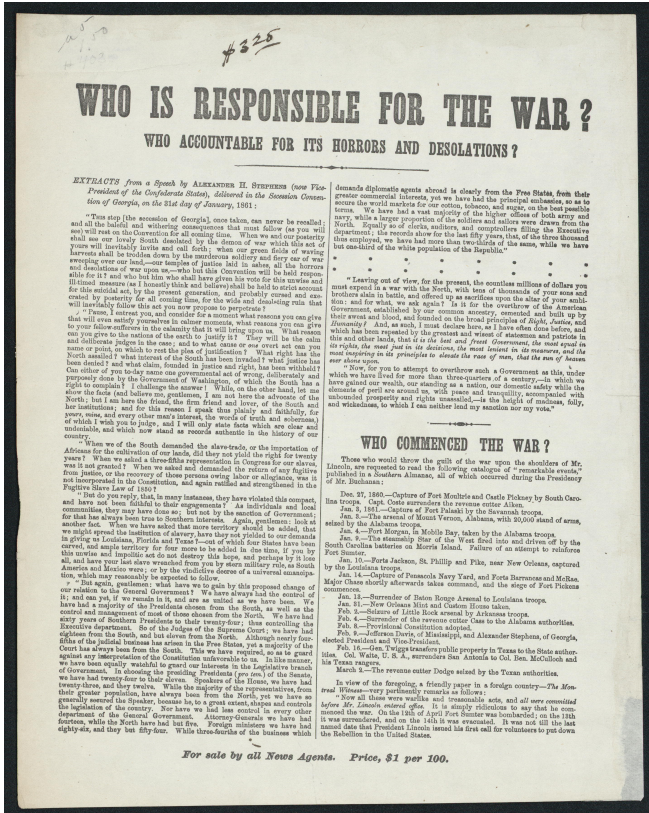
[...] The right of property in slaves was recognized by giving to free persons distinct political rights ... and [burdening] them with direct taxes for three-fifths of their slaves; by authorizing the importation of slaves for twenty years; and by stipulating for the rendition of fugitives from labor.

We affirm that these for which this Government instituted have been defeated, and the Government itself has been made destructive of them by the action of the non-slaveholding States. Those States have assumed the right of deciding upon the propriety of our domestic institutions; and have denied the rights of property established in fifteen of the [slaveholding] States and recognized by the Constitution; they have denounced as sinful the institution of slavery; they have permitted open establishment among them of societies whose avowed object is to disturb the peace... They have encouraged and assisted thousands of our slaves to leave their homes.

Supporting Question 3: What did Southerners say about secession?

Featured Source

Source B: "Who Is Responsible for the War?" by Alexander H. Stephens, speech published in the *Southern Almanac*, Excerpt (1861). Available through the Teaching Hard History Text Library.



This step [the secession of Georgia] once taken, can never be recalled; and all the useful and withering consequences that must follow (as you will see) will rest on the Convention [Georgia secession convention] for all coming time.

[...] Pause, I entreat, you, and consider for a moment what reasons you can give that will even satisfy yourselves in calmer moments, what reasons you can give to your fellow-sufferers [Southerners] in the calamity that it will bring upon us. What reason can you give to the nations of the earth to justify [secession]? They will be the calm and deliberate judges in this case; and to what cause or *one* overt act can you name or point, on which to rest the plea of justification? What rights have the North assailed? What interest of the South has been invaded? What justice has been denied? And what claim, founded in justice and right, has been withheld? Can either of you to-day name one governmental act of wrong, deliberately and purposely done by the Government of Washington, of which the South has a right to complain?

[...] When we of the South demanded the slave-trade, or the importations of Africans for the cultivation of our lands, did they not yield the right for twenty years? When we asked a three-fifths representation in Congress for our slaves, was it not granted? When we asked and demanded the return of any fugitive from justice, or the recovery of those persons owing labor or allegiance, was it not incorporated in the Constitution, and again ratified and strengthened in the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850?

[...] Again, gentlemen: look at another fact. When we have asked that more territory should be added, that we might spread the institution of slavery, have they not yielded to our demands in giving us Louisiana, Florida, and Texas?—out of which four States have been carved, and ample territory for four more to added in due time, if you by this unwise and impolitic act do not destroy this hope, and perhaps by it lose all, and have your last slave wrenched from you by stern military rule ... or by the vindictive decree of a universal emancipation, which may reasonably be expected to follow."

Supporting Question 3: What did Southerners say about secession?

Featured Source

Source C: “[Nashville Convention Speech](#)” by Robert Rhett, Excerpt (1850). Available through the Teaching Hard History Text Library.

Speaking of the possibility of the emancipation of slavery, [the previous speaker] very happily showed to non-slaveholders here, what their condition would be in such an event [as emancipation]. It would terminate in amalgamation or extermination. . . . Shall the African rule here? No! We will not be governed by the African, neither will we be by the Yankees! We must secede. Georgia will lead off, South Carolina will go with her, Alabama will soon follow, and Mississippi will not be long behind her. . . . Within eighteen months we will have the whole South with us, and more than that; we will extend our borders, we will have New Mexico, Utah, and California. Utah already has slaves. We will march into California, and we will ask them if they will have slaves, and her people well answer, Ay, we will have slaves. And what of Mexico? Why, when we are ready for them, and her people are fitted to come among us, we will take her too, or as much of her as we want.

Supporting Question 3: What did Southerners say about secession?

Featured Source

Source D: “[Thanksgiving Sermon](#)” by Benjamin Morgan Palmer, Excerpt. (1860). Available through the Teaching Hard History Text Library.

If then the South is such a people, what . . . is their providential trust? I answer, that it is to conserve and to perpetuate the institution of domestic slavery as now existing.

[. . .] Let us, my brethren, look our duty in the face. With this institution assigned to our keeping, what reply shall we make to those who say that its days are numbered? My own conviction is, that we should at once lift ourselves, intelligently, to the highest moral ground and proclaim to all the world that we hold this trust from God, and in its occupancy we are prepared to stand or fall as God may appoint. If the critical moment has arrived at which the great issue is joined, let us say that, in the sight of all perils, we will stand by our trust; and God be with the right! The argument which enforces the solemnity of this providential trust is simple and condensed. It is bound upon us, then, by the principle of self preservation, that “first law” which is continually asserting its supremacy over all others. Need I pause to show how this system of servitude underlies and supports our material interests; that our wealth consists in our lands and in the serfs who till them; that from the nature of our products they can only be cultivated by labor which must be controlled in order to be certain; that any other than a tropical race must faint and wither beneath a tropical sun? Need I pause to show how this system is interwoven with our entire social fabric; that these slaves form parts of our households, even as our children; and that, too, through a relationship recognized and sanctioned in the Scriptures of God even as the other? Must I pause to show how it has fashioned our modes of life, and determined all our habits of thought and feeling, and moulded the very type of our civilization? How then can the hand of violence be laid upon it without involving our existence?

[. . .] The worst foes of the black race are those who have intermeddled on their behalf. We know better than others that every attribute of their character fits them for dependence and servitude. By nature the most affectionate and loyal of all races beneath the sun, they are also the most helpless; and no calamity can befall them greater than the loss of that protection they enjoy under this patriarchal system. Indeed, the experiment has been grandly tried of precipitating them upon freedom which they know not how to enjoy; and the dismal results are before us in statistics that astonish the world.

[. . .] It is a remarkable fact that during these thirty years of unceasing warfare against slavery, and while a lying spirit has inflamed the world against us, [the] world has grown more and more dependent upon it for sustenance and wealth. . . . To

the North we have cheerfully resigned all the profits arising from manufacture and commerce. Those profits they have, for the most part, fairly earned, and we have never begrudged them. We have sent them our sugar and bought it back when refined; we have sent them our cotton and bought it back when spun into thread or woven into cloth. Almost every article we use, from the shoe-latchet to the most elaborate and costly article of luxury, they have made and we have bought; and both sections have thriven by the partnership, as no people ever thrived before since the first shining of the sun ... Even beyond this the enriching commerce which has built the splendid cities and marble palaces of England, as well as of America, has been largely established upon the products of our soil; and the blooms upon Southern fields gathered by black hands have fed the spindles and looms of Manchester and Birmingham not less than of Lawrence and Lowell. Strike now a blow at this system of labor and the world itself totters at the stroke. Shall we permit that blow to fall?

[...] The moment must arrive when the conflict must be joined and victory decide for or the other. As it has been a war of legislative tactics, and not of physical force, both parties have been maneuvering for a position; and the embarrassment has been, whilst dodging amidst constitutional forms, to make an issue that should be clear, simple, and tangible. Such an issue is at length presented in the result of the recent Presidential election ... the North ... have cast their ballot for a candidate [Abraham Lincoln] who is sectional, who represents a party that is sectional, and the group that sectionalism, prejudice against the established and constitutional rights and immunities and institutions of the South. What does this declare—what can it declare, but that from henceforth this is to be a government of section over section; a government using constitution forms only to embarrass and divide the section ruled, and as fortresses through show embrasure the cannon of legislation is to be employed in demolishing the guaranteed institutions of the South? ... I say it with solemnity and pain, this Union of our forefathers is already gone. It existed but in mutual confidence that bonds of which were ruptured in the late election.

[...] The whole influence of the Executive Department of the Government, while in his [Lincoln's] hands, will be thrown against the extension of slavery into the new territories of the Union, and the re-opening of the African slave-trade ... He does not accede to the alleged decision of the Supreme Court [*Dred Scott v. Sanford*], that the Constitution places slaves upon the footing of other property, and protects them as such where its jurisdiction extends...

Supporting Question 3: What did Southerners say about secession?

Featured Source

Source E: “Corner Stone Speech” by Alexander H. Stephens, Excerpt (1860). Available through the Teaching Hard History Text Library.

The new constitution [of the Confederate States of America] has put at rest, forever, all the agitating questions relating to our peculiar institution African slavery as it exists amongst us the proper status of the negro in our form of civilization. This was the immediate cause of the late rupture and present revolution. Jefferson in his forecast, had anticipated this, as the “rock upon which the old Union would split.” He was right. What was conjecture with him, is now a realized fact. But whether he fully comprehended the great truth upon which that rock stood and stands, may be doubted. The prevailing ideas entertained by him and most of the leading statesmen at the time of the formation of the old constitution, were that the enslavement of the African was in violation of the laws of nature; that it was wrong in principle, socially, morally, and politically. It was an evil they knew not well how to deal with, but the general opinion of the men of that day was that, somehow or other in the order of Providence, the institution would be evanescent and pass away. This idea, though not incorporated in the constitution, was the prevailing idea at that time. The constitution, it is true, secured every essential guarantee to the institution while it should last, and hence no argument can be justly urged against the constitutional guarantees thus secured, because of the common sentiment of the day. Those ideas, however, were fundamentally wrong. They rested upon the assumption of the equality of races. This was an error. It was a sandy foundation, and the government built upon it fell when the “storm came and the wind blew.”

[...] Our new government is founded upon exactly the opposite idea; its foundations are laid, its corner-stone rests, upon the great truth that the negro is not equal to the white man; that slavery subordination to the superior race is his natural and normal condition.

Supporting Question 4: What did Northerners say about secession?

Supporting Question	What did Northerners say about secession?
Formative Performance Task	Complete the Venn diagram and construct an evidence-based claim that answers the supporting question.
Featured Sources	<p>Source A: “The Dis-United States. Or the Southern Confederacy,” editorial cartoon (1861).</p> <p>Source B: “South Carolina Topsey in a fix,” wood engraving by Thomas W. Strong (1861).</p> <p>Source C: Letter to Abraham Lincoln from Horace Greeley, Excerpt (1860).</p> <p>Source D: Letter to Abraham Lincoln from the New York Republicans, Excerpt (1861).</p>

THE FOURTH SUPPORTING QUESTION—“What did Northerners say about secession?”—asks students to investigate the viewpoints of influential Northerners on the issue of secession. At this point in the inquiry, students will want to begin answering the compelling question, since they know why many Southerners wanted to secede. You might prevent their jumping ahead by stressing the importance of bringing in other voices to provide counterevidence and to show how secession—and southern justifications for it—were received throughout the United States.

A NOTE ON THE FEATURED SOURCES: These four sources from 1860 and 1861 include political cartoons and letters to President Lincoln. Intentionally absent are the voices of Abraham Lincoln and other prominent abolitionists. Instead, students will be presented with editorial cartoons and letters that are more ambivalent on the issue of secession.

FEATURED SOURCE A was published in New York ca. 1861. This political cartoon satirizes the secession of South Carolina, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia and Louisiana in an attempt to show the disunity of the new Confederacy.

FEATURED SOURCE B is an 1861 cartoon by Thomas W. Strong. In it, Strong turns southern arguments in favor of slavery against the South. He creates an anti-secessionist message by depicting South Carolina as an enslaved woman (likely a reference to Topsy from *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*) incapable of making her own decisions.

FEATURED SOURCE C is a December 22, 1860 letter from Horace Greeley, founder and editor of the New York Tribune, to President Lincoln. Greeley urges Lincoln to take a stand against the South, arguing that even southern secession would be preferable to “another nasty compromise.”

FEATURED SOURCE D is an 1861 letter to President Lincoln from the New York Republicans that makes the opposite argument. The Republicans ask Lincoln to compromise and condemn those who would prefer Civil War to the continuance of slavery.

THE FOURTH FORMATIVE TASK builds off of the last. Using the featured sources, students will finish their Venn diagrams to provide a more complete picture of why the South seceded. After completing the diagrams, they should create a new claim that answers the final supporting question, “What did Northerners say about secession?”

Supporting Question 4: What did Northerners say about secession?

Featured Source

Source A: “The Dis-United States. Or the Southern Confederacy” (1861). Available in the Teaching Hard History text library.



Transcription of Captions (L to R):

South Carolina: “South Carolina claims to be the file leader and general whipper in the new Confederacy, a special edict! Obey and tremble!”

Florida: “We want it distinctly understood that all the lights on the Coast shall be put out in order to facilitate wrecking business.”

Alabama: “Alabama proclaims that ‘Cotton is King,’ and the rest of the Confederacy must obey that Sovereign.”

Mississippi: “We come in, with the understanding that we shall issue bonds to an unlimited extent, with our ancient right of repudiation when they come due.”

Georgia: “Georgia must have half the honors, and all the profits, or back she goes to old ‘E Pluribus Unum.’”

Louisiana: “A heavy duty must be levied on foreign sweetening in order to make up for what we have sacrificed in leaving the Union, otherwise we shall be like a ‘Pelican in the wilderness.’”

Supporting Question 4: What did Northerners say about secession?

Featured Source

Source B: “South Carolina Topsey in a Fix” (1861). Available through the Teaching Hard History text library.



Transcription of Captions:

Lady Columbia (Woman holding the damaged American flag): “So, Topsey, you’re at the bottom of this piece of wicked work—picking stars out of the sacred Flag! What would your forefathers say, do you think? I’ll just hand you over to the new overseer, Uncle Abe [i.e., President Abraham Lincoln]. He’ll fix you!”

Topsey (Enslaved woman facing Lady Columbia): “Never had no father, nor mother, nor nothing! I was raised by speculators! I’s mighty wicked, anyhow! ‘What makes me ack so?’ Dun no, missis—I ’spects cause I’s so wicked!”

Man Running Away: “Hand us over to ole Abe, eh? Ize off!”

Supporting Question 4: What did Northerners say about secession?

Featured Source

Source C: [Letter to Abraham Lincoln from Horace Greeley \(December 22, 1860\)](#). Available through the Library of Congress.

New York, Decr. 22nd 1860

My dear Sir,

I have yours [letter] of the 19th. Let me try to make my views a little more clear:

1. I do not believe that a State can secede at pleasure from the Union, any more than a stave may secede from a cask of which it is a component part.
2. I do believe that a people—a political community large and strong enough to maintain a National existence—have a right to form and modify their institutions in accordance with their own convictions of justice and policy. Hence if seven or eight contiguous States (not one small one) were to come to Washington saying, “We are tired of the Union—let us out!”—I should say, “There’s the door—go!” and I think they would have a right to go, even though no one recognized it. If they should set to fighting and whip us, every one would say they had a right to govern themselves; and I do not see how their having a few more or less men, or a better or worse government general than we, can make or mar their right of self-government...
4. We shall never have peace nor equality in the Union till the Free States shall say to the Slave, “If you want to go, go; we are willing.” So long as they threaten secession and we deprecate it, they will always have us at a disadvantage.
5. The Cotton States are going. Nothing that we can offer will stop them. The Union-loving men are cowed and speechless; a Reign of Terror prevails from Cape Fear to the Rio Grande. Every suggestion of reason is drowned in a mad whirl of passion and faction. You will be President over no foot of the Cotton States not commanded by Federal Arms. Even your life is not safe, and it is your simple duty to be very careful of exposing it. I doubt whether you ought to go to Washington via Wheeling and the B. & O. Railroad unless you go with a very strong force. And it is not yet certain that the Federal District will not be in the hands of a Pro-Slavery rebel array before the 4th of March.
6. I fear nothing, care for nothing, but another disgraceful back-down of the Free States. That is the only real danger. Let the Union slide—it may be reconstructed; let Presidents be assassinated—we can elect more; let the Republicans be defeated and crushed—we shall rise again; but another nasty compromise whereby everything is conceded and nothing secured will so thoroughly disgrace and humiliate us that we can never again raise our heads, and this country becomes a second edition of the Barbary States as they were sixty years ago. “Take any form but that!”

Excuse me fore boring you at such length, when you must be drowned in letters. I hope not to do so again.

Yours,

Horace Greeley

Supporting Question 4: What did Northerners say about secession?

Featured Source

Source D: [Letter to Abraham Lincoln from the New York Republicans](#) (January 29, 1861). Available through the Library of Congress.

New York 29th January 1861

Dear Sir,

The undersigned Republicans of the State of New York taking advantage of Mr Bacon's proposed return to St Louis, have requested him to hand you this letter in order that you might more fully understand the true position of the Republican party in this State.

The great crisis through which our Government is now passing is admitted by all, to be the most serious and alarming which has occurred since its foundation. It is impossible longer to deny that the people of all the Slaveholding States are on the verge of revolution and in nearly one half this revolution is already accomplished.

To those of your supporters who believe that parties and their platforms should in all cases be subservient to the Union and the welfare and peace of all the States the questions constantly recur, what is our duty, what is the duty of our party in this emergency?

In order fully to understand and appreciate our position merely as party men it is proper that we should say to you most distinctly that while your adherents in this State admitted the doctrines laid down in the platform of Chicago, the question as to the Status of Slavery in the territories was with the most of them a sentiment rather than a fixed principle and that a very large minority of our party voted for you for reasons in no way whatever connected with this question.

Many of those who voted with the Republican party at the late election did so with no view of pronouncing definitely upon the question of Slavery in the territories; they were disgusted with the abuses which had grown up with the party which had for so many years been dominant and desired a change. Having confidence in your integrity and Statesmanship they cast their votes for you. This class of men shudder at the thought of risking the advantages of the Union, in all its integrity, on the territorial question.

[...] In our judgment the plan [of compromise] submitted to Congress by the Border States, if it will accomplish the same results, is far preferable and might be carried through with far less danger to our party organization, though it is useless to expect that any concessions or compromises...can be adopted without incurring the opposition and hostility of the extreme wing of our party, embracing those who look upon Slavery in all its aspects as a moral rather than as a political question and most of whom would witness with calm indifference if not with pleasure the dissolution of this great Government and be unmoved by the horrors of civil war, provided Slavery was thereby restrained or impaired—

[...] While we do not suggest the propriety of an abandonment of cherished principles and while we deprecate as good Citizens the lawless haste which has exhibited itself in many of the Southern States, we take this occasion to say to you that in our judgment our duty to our common Government imperatively demands that some compromise of the territorial question broad and liberal enough to save our Country from the dreadful calamities which now threaten it should be made without delay.

We appreciate most fully the reasons which may be urged against action in advance of power. Unfortunately whatever is done must be accomplished almost immediately—We are advised that in default of speedy action the most Union loving of the remaining Slave states will join their Southern Bretheren before your inauguration and then the dangers of collision added to the insane wishes of some of the Southern leaders, for a perpetual separation, will render a peaceable reconstruction of the Union almost hopeless.

[...] We know that the feeling of all Republicans is that they have never had the wish or power to wrong any interest in any Southern State— that they have never meditated the infringement of any constitutional right and that it is not incumbent upon them to propose or support measures of compromise, in advance of the assumption of the administrative powers of the Government. Under an ordinary state of affairs this would undoubtedly be a proper view— But the exigencies of the times, the imminence of the peril, and the deplorable consequences which are almost sure to follow, if reasonable and sufficient Constitutional guaranties are not submitted, in advance by the incoming administration, to the Border Slave States, to give the truly conservative citizens of those States a standpoint to which they can rally, induces us thus strongly to urge upon you the wisdom of indicating to your friends in Washington the propriety of the course that we have suggested.

[...] With sentiments of great personal respect and esteem we are,

Sir

Your Obedt Servts,

Summative Performance Task

Compelling Question	Why did the South secede?
Summative Performance Task	Construct an argument (e.g., detailed outline, poster or essay) that addresses the compelling question using specific claims and relevant evidence from contemporary sources while acknowledging competing views.

ARGUMENT

By this point, students have created their own chronology of the events leading up to the 1860 secession of South Carolina, compared the views of the two dominant political parties and examined in detail the arguments of Southerners and Northerners about the South's secession from the Union. You will want to refer students back to the work they have completed, including the annotated timeline, election of 1860 analysis paragraph, and the detailed Venn diagram showing the reasons why the South seceded from the perspectives of both Southerners and Northerners.

In the summative performance task, students construct an evidence-based argument responding to the compelling question, "Why did the South secede?" Students' arguments could take on a variety of forms, including a detailed outline, poster presentation or formal essay.

Because this inquiry has stressed the use of primary sources to answer the compelling question, you should also plan to spend time discussing the value and limitations of primary and secondary sources in historical analysis. Students should feel secure in sharing their claims, as their claims should be representative of the evidence and not necessarily their own personal views on this highly contentious issue. This would also be an excellent opportunity for you to formatively assess the depth to which students have prepared their arguments prior to submitting a final paper or outline.

Students' arguments will likely vary, but could include any of the following:

- Southern states seceded for a variety of reasons, but the main factor was the protection and continuation of the institution of slavery.
- While the protection of slavery was an important factor, the primary motivation for secession was the protection of states' rights.
- Both the concept of states' rights and the protection of slavery were important factors in the motivation for secession. Southerners would not have made the distinction between the two as main factors.
- Both slavery and the concept of states' rights played major roles in the decision to secede, but the South may have remained in the United States had Lincoln and the Republican Party not won the election of 1860.

EXTENSION

Students could extend these arguments by participating in a Structured Academic Controversy activity, arguing a claim that answers the compelling question. This activity involves students working in groups of four and gradually building consensus. The National History Education Clearinghouse provides useful [guidelines for organizing a Structured Academic Controversy](#). This style of classroom argumentation encourages students to test the strength of their arguments by allowing their peers to question and challenge their views.

Taking Informed Action

Compelling Question	Why did the South secede?
Taking Informed Action	<p>UNDERSTAND Research an issue within your own state that created tension between federal and state power (e.g., environmental regulation, energy conservation, civil rights investigations, border control, etc.)</p> <p>ASSESS Take a position on whether your state or the federal government has the power to govern the issue you selected.</p> <p>ACT Draft a letter to your state or federal representative stating your position on the selected issue, including claims and evidence to support your position.</p>

While this inquiry is designed to provide students with a chance to see the interplay among state authority, slavery, economics and social pressures during the mid-1800s, the inquiry also provides an entry point into a broader discussion about federal and state power and how modern disputes over environmental regulation, civil rights, immigration and energy conservation are often battlegrounds for those supporting increased state or federal power. Students have the opportunity to take informed action by researching an issue within their own state that has created tension between federal and state authority.

Encourage students to select topics of current concern to make a stronger connection to their own lives. After individual or group research, students should take a position on whether the state or federal government has the power to govern the issue they selected. Using their research and conclusions, students could then draft a letter to their state or federal representative stating their position on the selected issue, complete with claims and evidence. It is important to emphasize that this outreach is a natural result of the inquiry, and that part of the process of becoming an active citizen involves the labor of becoming an informed citizen.