

The 1850s: Prelude to Civil War

DIRECTIONS:

You will use documents below to develop a Document-Based Question (DBQ-style) essay analyzing how events in the 1850s led to discord and tension and secession of the South in the pre-Civil War United States and to the eventual start of the Civil War.

The DBQ question tests your ability to work with historical documents.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.

DOCUMENT 1



HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:

The Compromise of 1850 introduced into Congress by Henry Clay was designed to settle the slavery question in the new western lands acquired after the Mexican War. California entered the Union as a free state; Utah and New Mexico Territories were opened to slavery on the basis of popular sovereignty. It also included a strict Fugitive Slave Law that required Northerners to return escaped slaves to their owners.

1. What was the Fugitive Slave Law?
2. How many slave states are there in 1850?
3. How many free states are there in 1850?

DOCUMENT 2

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:

Harriet Beecher Stowe published the best-selling antislavery novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, in 1852. She wrote this book to show that slavery was evil and that the Fugitive Slave Law was unjust. Many Northerners viewed slavery as wrong. Abolitionists wanted to end slavery and some helped slaves escape to the North and Canada while the Southerner's believed that the Northerner's were stealing their property.

Mrs. Webb's reading of Uncle Tom's Cabin was reviewed in Boston's *The Liberator* (1855)

"Mrs. Webb read to an audience of 1300 persons. We trust that the story of 'Uncle Tom' may find access to thousands of hearts, and so hasten the day when the millions of whom he is the representative shall shake off the fetters (chains) of cruel bondage, and stand erect in the dignity of that freedom."

1. What did Harriet Beecher Stowe write about in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*?
2. What reaction was the author of the review of Mrs. Webb's reading of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* hoping for?

DOCUMENT 3

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:

The sectional division between North and South began in colonial times and resulted from geographical differences. In the South, the earliest settlers found the warm climate and fertile soil ideal for growing tobacco. They started many tobacco plantations and brought in black slaves from Africa to provide most of the labor. In time, other plantation crops, especially cotton, sugar cane, and sugar beets, were found to thrive in the South. The South thus quickly established a rural way of life supported by an agricultural economy based on slave labor.

The cooler climate and rocky soil in the North were not suitable for establishing plantations or large farms. As a result of those and other factors, the North's economy came to depend more on trade than on agriculture. Industry and commerce were centered in the North. Many factories using mass-production methods had sprung up there with a focus on the textile industry and cities grew rapidly in the North.



Southern Cotton Plantations 1850's



Northern Factories 1850's

1. Describe the economy of the South. What was needed for this type of economy?
2. Describe the economy of the North. What was needed for this type of economy?
3. What is the difference between the Northern and Southern economies in the 1850's?

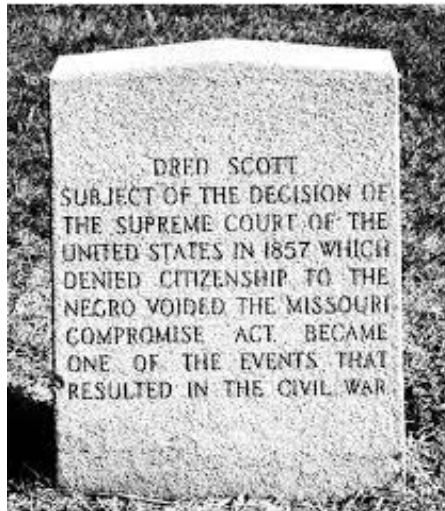
DOCUMENT 4

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:

St. Louis' old courthouse was the site of one of the most important events in American history. Dred Scott, a slave aged some 50 years, and his wife Harriet, petitioned for their freedom in 1846. The Scotts' two trials, in 1847 and 1857 in Missouri, instigated a series of complex events, which resulted in a Supreme Court decision, and ultimately hastened the onset of the American Civil War.

Supreme Court Decision Dred Scott v. Sanford 1857

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



1. What were the **two** results from the decision of the U.S. Supreme Court Case Dred Scott v. Sanford in 1857?
2. What effect did the court ruling have on the United States on its path to Civil War?

DOCUMENT 5

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:

In 1860, Abraham Lincoln was elected as the 16th President after winning EVERY Northern state and the South believed that Lincoln was anti-slavery and in favor of Northern interests. EFFECT was that the South moved to cede from the Union, and on December 12, 1860 South Carolina was the first state to cede from the Union.

From the Republican Party platform:

. . . 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.

From the (Southern) Democratic Party platform:

[Speaking of any territory of the United States] . . . 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 . . . impaired. . .

1. Over what issue did the Southern Democratic and the Northern Republican parties seem totally at odds?
2. Do you feel that either side was willing to compromise?

DOCUMENT 6

This excerpt is from the South Carolina ordinance of secession, unanimously approved by the State Legislature on December 20, 1860.

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

1. What reason(s) did the state of South Carolina give for seceding from the Union?

DBQ Writing Prompt:

Using the information from the DBQ documents and your knowledge of the factors that lead to the start of the Civil War, answer the questions to create an essay that explains the differences between the North and the South economically and three (3) factors that led to the start of the Civil War.