

Views of Slavery

Option A

Adapted from: <https://billofrightsinstitute.org/essays/slavery-and-the-constitution> and <https://billofrightsinstitute.org/essays/the-compromise-of-1850>

Lexile: 1240
Word Count: 948

Vocabulary

- | | | | | |
|------------|---------------|--------------|----------------|---------------|
| ▶ writings | ▶ pro-slavery | ▶ westward | ▶ abhorrence | ▶ slaveholder |
| ▶ enslave | ▶ importation | ▶ immorality | ▶ abolitionist | ▶ manumitting |

The Growth of Slavery in America

African slaves were imported and held as property in all of the American colonies for more than a century. Although the American Revolution and Founding limited slavery in several key ways, it persisted and spread into part of the West. The number of enslaved people steadily grew through natural increase and the importation of slaves from abroad for twenty years after the Constitution was ratified. Westward expansion further intensified disputes between the northern and southern sections of the new nation over slavery, leading Congress to address the conflict through a series of compromises—the Missouri Compromise, the Compromise of 1850, and the Kansas-Nebraska Act—until the sectional conflict ultimately was decided by civil war.



McConnell Map Co. McConnell's Historical Map: Kansas-Nebraska Act, 1854. 1919. Library of Congress. <https://www.loc.gov/resource/g370lsm.gct00482/?sp=32&r=-0.189,0.031,1.307,0.802,0>.

McConnell's historical map illustrates the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, a law passed by Congress in an effort to settle disputes between free and slave states as the nation expanded westward. Despite previous compromises, such as the Missouri Compromise and the Compromise of 1850, tensions over slavery continued to grow.

Founders' Moral Conflict with Slavery

The Founders understood slavery contradicted the “self-evident truth” of equality stated in the Declaration of Independence. They acknowledged its immorality and the need for action. These actions included gradual emancipation of slaves in the North, banning slavery in the Northwest Territory, thousands of individual slaveholders manumitting, or freeing, their enslaved. In addition, tens of thousands of enslaved people ran away during the Revolutionary War.

Many Founders also spoke against slavery in moral terms, even some

who held slaves, because they knew it violated the principles of the American Revolution and Founding. James Madison condemned it as “the most oppressive dominion ever exercised by man over man.” Gouverneur Morris labeled it a “nefarious institution.” John Adams declared slavery an “abhorrence.” Thomas Jefferson denounced the slave trade as a “cruel war against human nature.” At the Constitutional Convention, the Framers crafted compromises on slavery—like the Three-Fifths Clause, the Importation Clause, and the Fugitive Slave Clause—not out of endorsement but as a means to preserve the fragile Union. They intentionally avoided using the term ‘slave’ in the Constitution, referring instead to ‘persons.’ As James Madison wrote, the Constitution did not recognize a “property in man.” This choice reflected their hope that slavery would ultimately fade away.

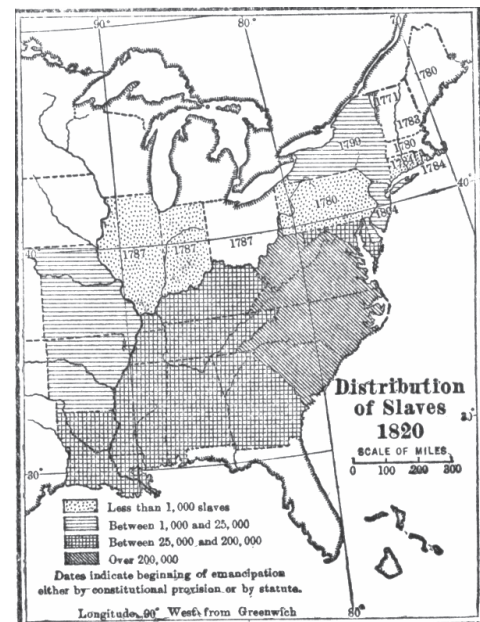
Political Parties and Their Views on Slavery

During the years leading up to the Civil War, political parties in the United States were deeply divided over the issue of slavery. Both believed that slavery was a local and state institution rather than one protected by federal law. The Democratic Party split into Northern and Southern factions, with Southern Democrats supporting the expansion of slavery and Northern Democrats often supporting popular sovereignty. The Whig Party was also deeply divided over slavery and eventually collapsed. Its remnants contributed to the formation of the Republican Party, which opposed the expansion of slavery into new territories. Founded in the 1850s, the Republican Party became the primary political voice for those who believed slavery should not spread any further, setting the stage for the election of Abraham Lincoln in 1860.

Pro-Slavery Advocates and the Defense of Slavery

While the Founders grappled with the contradictions of slavery, a later generation of politicians openly defended the institution as a moral principle. Figures like John C. Calhoun and George Fitzhugh embraced the idea that slavery was a “positive good” for society and justified it as beneficial for both the enslaved and their owners. Calhoun even criticized the Declaration’s natural rights language as “dangerous” and “erroneous.” Fitzhugh went further, arguing that slavery was not just a necessary evil but a system that benefited society as a whole, particularly in his writings like *Sociology for the South*.

The Confederate Constitution, in contrast with the U.S. Constitution, explicitly protected slavery and asserted the racial superiority of whites. Unlike the Founders, Confederate leaders rejected the universal principles of equality and enshrined slavery as a perma-



Johnson, Allen. *Union and Democracy*. Cambridge, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1915. Map titled “USA distribution of slaves 1820.” Wikimedia Commons. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Slavery_US_1820.png.

The Founders knew slavery violated the “self-evident truth” of the Declaration and the promise of equality in the Declaration of Independence. They were aware of the immorality of slavery and the need for action, yet were—sometime by their own admission—not active enough.

nent institution. While the U.S. Constitution's language left room for change and limited the institution, the Confederate Constitution made slavery an explicit right, highlighting the stark differences in foundational principles between the two governments.

Popular Sovereignty and the Right to Choose

Stephen A. Douglas, another influential politician, argued for popular sovereignty—the right of the people residing in a territory to decide for themselves whether to allow individuals to enslave others and violate their rights. During the Lincoln-Douglas debates, he asserted that the nation could endure being divided into free and slave states. His stance was supported by Chief Justice Roger B. Taney in the *Dred Scott* (1857) decision, which declared that African Americans were not, and could not be, citizens and “had no rights which the white man was bound to respect.” Douglas's belief that local choice among the democratic people should determine slavery's legality reflected a stark contrast to the Founders and Lincoln's view that slavery was a violation of moral principle.

Voices for Abolition and the Path Forward

Not all Americans accepted slavery as morally justified. Radical abolitionists like William Lloyd Garrison demanded immediate emancipation and condemned the Constitution as a pro-slavery document. His newspaper, *The Liberator*, called for moral clarity and immediate action against the injustice of slavery. Others, like Frederick Douglass, famously pointed out the absence of terms like “slave” or “slavery” in the Constitution as evidence that the Framers did not intend to enshrine slavery permanently. He argued that the Constitution was an anti-slavery document that he called “a glorious liberty document.”

Meanwhile, political figures like Daniel Webster sought to manage the sectional conflict over slavery, advocating for compromise to maintain the Union. Abraham Lincoln, too, believed slavery was morally wrong but argued that the federal government did not have the constitutional authority to ban it where it already existed. Instead, Lincoln focused on preventing its spread, hoping that limiting its expansion would place it “in the course of ultimate extinction.”

The Civil War & Emancipation

During the Civil War, Congress and the Lincoln administration took many actions against slavery including emancipating enslaved people with the military, banning slavery in the territories, and ending slavery in Washington, D.C. Finally, the Emancipation Proclamation and the Thirteenth Amendment permanently ended slavery in the United States.

Conclusion: The Constitution and the Path to Freedom

The Founders created a Constitution that left room for slavery to be placed on a path toward extinction, even if it required legislative action to manage national conflict and a moral reckoning over time. The Confederate Constitution's explicit protection of slavery only serves to highlight the difference in principle between the two constitutions and underscores the Founders' intentions to build a nation grounded in liberty and equality.

Views of Slavery

Option B

Lexile: 1050
Word Count: 792

Vocabulary

- ▶ abhorrence ▶ slaveholder ▶ enslave ▶ enslaved ▶ democratically
- ▶ westward ▶ sociology ▶ denounce ▶ cruel

The Growth of Slavery in America

Africans were enslaved and brought to all the thirteen American colonies for over a hundred years. Although the American Revolution and Founding limited slavery in several ways, slavery continued. The number of slaves increased as more babies were born into slavery, and more slaves were brought from Africa. As the nation grew westward, the northern and southern states argued more and more about slavery. Congress tried to solve these arguments through different agreements—the Missouri Compromise, the Compromise of 1850, and the Kansas-Nebraska Act—but the problem kept getting bigger.



McConnell Map Co. McConnell's Historical Map: Kansas-Nebraska Act, 1854. 1919. Library of Congress. <https://www.loc.gov/resource/g3701sm.gct00482/?sp=32&r=-0.189,0.031,1.307,0.802,0>.

McConnell's historical map illustrates the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, a law passed by Congress in an effort to settle disputes between free and slave states as the nation expanded westward. Despite previous compromises, such as the Missouri Compromise and the Compromise of 1850, tensions over slavery continued to grow.

The Founders' Views on Slavery

The Founders knew that slavery went against the idea that “all men are created equal” in the Declaration of Independence. The Founders took action. They ended slavery gradually in the North, banned slavery in the Northwest Territory, and thousands of people released their enslaved workers. Tens of thousands of enslaved people ran away during the Revolutionary War.

Many Founders also spoke against slavery in moral terms, even those who held

slaves, because they knew it violated the principles of the American Revolution and Founding. John Adams declared slavery an “abhorrence.” Thomas Jefferson denounced the slave trade as a “cruel war against human nature.” When writing the Constitution, the Founders made deals about slavery—like counting three out of every five slaves as part of the population of a state when determining how many representatives it should get, allowing the slave trade until 1808, and returning escaped slaves—not because they liked slavery, but because they wanted to keep the new country together. They carefully avoided using the word 'slave' in the Constitution, using 'persons' instead, hoping slavery would eventually end.

Political Parties and Slavery

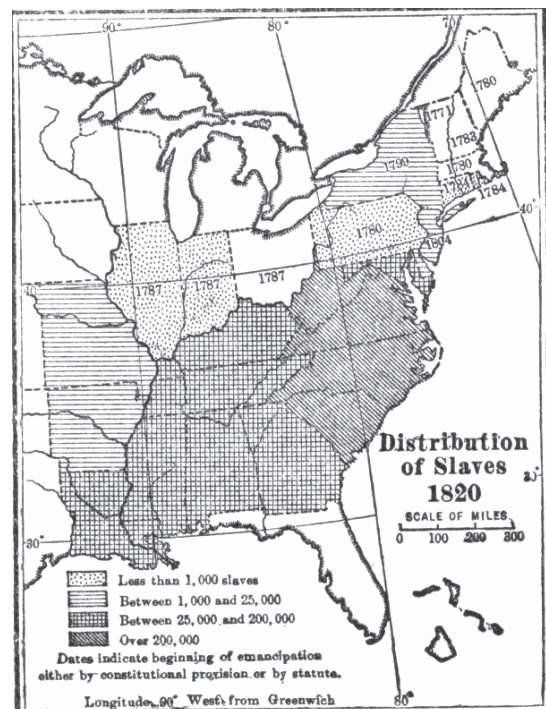
Before the Civil War, political parties in America were split over slavery. The Democratic Party divided into Northern and Southern groups. Southern Democrats wanted slavery to expand into new states in the west, while Northern Democrats often wanted states to choose for themselves. The Whig Party had similar debates about slavery, but the party fell apart. Some former Whigs then helped create the Republican Party, which didn't want slavery in new territories out West. Started in the 1850s, the Republican Party became the main voice against spreading slavery, leading to Abraham Lincoln becoming president in 1860.

People Who Supported Slavery

While the Founders struggled with slavery being wrong, some later politicians openly said it was good. John C. Calhoun and George Fitzhugh said slavery was helpful for both slaves and slaveholders. Calhoun even said the Declaration's words about equal rights were dangerous and wrong. Fitzhugh wrote in his book *Sociology for the South* that slavery was good for everyone. The Confederate Constitution clearly protected slavery and said white people were better than black people. Unlike the U.S. Constitution, which left room for change, the Confederate Constitution made slavery a permanent right.

Stephen A. Douglas and State Choice

Stephen A. Douglas believed states should choose whether to allow slavery democratically. He had no problem with the idea that people could vote to allow some humans to hold others as slaves. In his debates with Lincoln, he said America could survive with both free and slave states. Chief Justice Roger B. Taney agreed with him in the *Dred Scott* (1857) case, saying African



Johnson, Allen. *Union and Democracy*. Cambridge, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1915. Map titled "USA distribution of slaves 1820." Wikimedia Commons. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Slavery_US_1820.png.

The Founders knew slavery violated the “self-evident truth” of the Declaration and the promise of equality in the Declaration of Independence. They were aware of the immorality of slavery and the need for action, yet were—sometime by their own admission—not active enough.

Americans had “no rights which the white man was bound to respect.” Douglas's idea that local people everywhere should decide whether they wanted slaves or not was very different from what the Founders wanted.

People Who Fought Against Slavery

Many Americans fought against slavery. William Lloyd Garrison wanted slaves freed right away and said the Constitution supported slavery. His newspaper, *The Liberator*, called for immediate action. Frederick Douglass pointed out that the Constitution didn't use words like “slave” or “slavery,” showing the Founders thought it was wrong. He thought the Constitution was against slavery. Daniel Webster tried to find middle ground to keep the country together. Abraham Lincoln thought slavery was wrong and that the Constitution was against slavery but he believed the national government couldn't stop it where it already existed. Instead, he worked to stop it from spreading, hoping it would eventually die out.

Laws to End Slavery

During the Civil War, more and more efforts by President Lincoln and Congress were made to free slaves. Finally, the Emancipation Proclamation and the Thirteenth Amendment ended slavery in America forever.

Conclusion: The Path to Freedom

The Founders wrote a Constitution that made it possible for slavery to end over time, even though it would take laws and moral changes. The fact that the Confederate Constitution clearly protected slavery shows how different it was from the U.S. Constitution, which was meant to build a country based on freedom and equality.

