

# Handout B: Student Handout

## Document 1: Declaration of the Immediate Causes Which Induce and Justify the Secession of South Carolina from the Federal Union, December 24, 1860

### Source:

[http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th\\_century/csa\\_scarsec.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/csa_scarsec.asp)

### Introduction:

This ordinance officially declared South Carolina to be the first southern state to secede from the union in response to the election of Abraham Lincoln to the presidency. It was authored by the well-known “fire eater” and long-time advocate for secession, Thomas Barnwell Rhett.

### Text

We affirm that these ends for which this Government was 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 assume the right of deciding upon the propriety of our domestic institutions; and have denied the rights of property established in fifteen of the 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 and to eloign the property of the citizens of other States. They have encouraged and assisted thousands of our slaves to leave their homes; and those who remain, have been incited by emissaries, books and pictures to servile insurrection.

For twenty-five years this agitation has been steadily increasing, until it has now secured to its aid the power of the common Government. Observing the forms of the Constitution, a sectional party has found within that Article establishing the Executive Department, the means of subverting the Constitution itself. 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 is to be entrusted with the administration of the common Government, because 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. . . .

We, therefore, the People of South Carolina, by our delegates in Convention assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, have solemnly declared that the Union heretofore existing between this State and the other States of North America, is dissolved, and that the State of South Carolina has resumed her position among the nations of the world, as a separate and independent State; with full power to levy war, conclude peace, contract alliances, establish commerce, and to do all other acts and things which independent States may of right do.

## Questions:

1. What are the non-slaveholding states accused of doing that has, in the author's interpretation, destroyed the fundamental purpose of union government?
2. How do they characterize the beliefs on slavery held by the newly elected president?
3. How is Lincoln's quotation from 1858, that the "government cannot endure permanently half-slave and half-free" interpreted by the people of South Carolina?
4. How has South Carolina acted upon the perceived threat of a Lincoln presidency?

## Document 2: House Divided Speech by Abraham Lincoln, June 16, 1858

### Source:

<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/house-divided-speech/>

### Introduction:

Lincoln made this speech in accepting the Republican nomination for the Senate, and taking on incumbent Stephen A. Douglas. In the speech he attacks the moral ambiguity about slavery held by Douglas, and articulates his belief that the nation must inevitably end slavery or see it universally accepted in all states. This speech became the source most cited by his southern opponents who sought to portray him as a radical abolitionist.

Text
"A house divided against itself cannot stand." I believe this government cannot endure permanently half slave and half free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved—I do not expect the house to fall—but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing, or all the other. Either the opponents of slavery will arrest the further spread of it, and place it where the public mind shall rest in the belief that it is in the course of ultimate extinction; or its advocates will push it forward, till it shall become alike lawful in all the States, old as well as new—North as well as South. . . .
Let any one who doubts, carefully contemplate that now almost complete legal combination—piece of machinery, so to speak—compounded of the Nebraska doctrine, and the Dred Scott decision. Let him consider not only what work the machinery is adapted to do, and how well adapted; . . .
The new year of 1854 found slavery excluded from more than half the States by State Constitutions, and from most of the national territory by Congressional prohibition. Four days later, commenced the struggle which ended in repealing that Congressional prohibition. This opened all the national territory to slavery, and was the first point gained. . . .
Such a decision is all that slavery now lacks of being alike lawful in all the States. Welcome, or unwelcome, such decision is probably coming, and will soon be upon us, unless the power of the present political dynasty shall be met and overthrown. We shall lie down pleasantly dreaming that the people of Missouri are on the verge of making their State free, and we shall awake to the reality instead, that the Supreme Court has made Illinois a slave State. To meet and overthrow the power of that dynasty, is the work now before all those who would prevent that consummation. That is what we have to do. . . .
Two years ago the Republicans of the nation mustered over thirteen hundred thousand strong. We did this under the single impulse of resistance to a common danger, with every external circumstance against us. Of strange, discordant, and even hostile elements, we gathered from the four winds, and formed and fought the battle through, under the constant hot fire of a disciplined, proud and pampered enemy. Did we brave all then, to falter now? —now, when that same enemy is wavering, dissevered and belligerent? The result is not doubtful. We shall not fail—if we stand firm, we shall not fail. Wise counsels may accelerate, or mistakes delay it, but, sooner or later, the victory is sure to come.

### Questions:

1. How does Lincoln characterize the inevitable outcome of the conflict over slavery in the United States?
2. What developments does Lincoln see as making universal slavery in the union a possibility?
3. How does Lincoln describe the political goals of the Republican Party when it comes to slavery?

## Document 3: Georgia Articles of Secession, January 29, 1861

### Source:

[http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th\\_century/csa\\_geosec.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/csa_geosec.asp)

### Introduction:

These articles declare Georgia to be independent from the Union. They also explain the reasons Georgians felt this drastic step was necessary with the ascendance of Abraham Lincoln to the presidency.

Text
The people of Georgia having dissolved their political connection with the Government of the United States of America, present to their confederates and the world the causes which have led to the separation. For the last ten years we have had numerous and serious causes of complaint against our non-slave-holding confederate States with reference to the subject of African slavery. They have endeavored to weaken our security, to disturb our domestic peace and tranquility, and persistently refused to comply with their express constitutional obligations to us in reference to that property . . .
The party of Lincoln, called the Republican party, under its present name and organization, is of recent origin. It is admitted to be an anti-slavery party. . . .
The question of slavery was the great difficulty in the way of the formation of the Constitution. While the subordination and the political and social inequality of the African race was fully conceded by all, it was plainly apparent that slavery would soon disappear from what are now the non-slave-holding States of the original thirteen. . . .
The Constitution declares that persons charged with crimes in one State and fleeing to another shall be delivered up on the demand of the executive authority of the State from which they may flee, to be tried in the jurisdiction where the crime was committed. . . . This clause of the Constitution has no other sanction than their good faith; that is withheld from us; we are remediless in the Union; out of it we are remitted to the laws of nations.
A similar provision of the Constitution requires them to surrender fugitives from labor. This provision and the one last referred to were our main inducements for confederating with the Northern States. Without them it is historically true that we would have rejected the Constitution. . . .
Such are the opinions and such are the practices of the Republican party, who have been called by their own votes to administer the Federal Government under the Constitution of the United States. We know their treachery; we know the shallow pretenses under which they daily disregard its plainest obligations. If we submit to them it will be our fault and not theirs. The people of Georgia have ever been willing to stand by this bargain, this contract; they have never sought to evade any of its obligations; they have never hitherto sought to establish any new government; they have struggled to maintain the ancient right of themselves and the human race through and by that Constitution. But they know the value of parchment rights in treacherous hands, and therefore they refuse to commit their own to the rulers whom the North offers us.

### Questions:

1. How do the people of Georgia characterize Abraham Lincoln and the Republican Party?

2. How do they characterize the beliefs on slavery held by the newly elected president?
3. How is Lincoln's quotation from 1858, that the "government cannot endure permanently half-slave and half-free" interpreted by the people of South Carolina?
4. How has South Carolina acted upon the perceived threat of a Lincoln presidency?

## Document 4: Cornerstone Speech by Alexander Stephens, March 21, 1861

### Source:

<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/cornerstone-speech/>

### Introduction:

Alexander Stephens, the vice president of the Confederate states delivered this speech in an attempt to explain the founding principles of the Confederate states. He does this by contrasting them with the principles of the American founding, in which he sees grave errors.

### Text

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 cornerstone 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. This, our new government, is the first, in the history of the world, based upon this great physical, philosophical, and moral truth. . . .

Those at the North, who still cling to these errors, with a zeal above knowledge, we justly denominate fanatics. All fanaticism springs from an aberration of the mind from a defect in reasoning. It is a species of insanity. One of the most striking characteristics of insanity, in many instances, is forming correct conclusions from fancied or erroneous premises; so with the anti-slavery fanatics. Their conclusions are right if their premises were. They assume that the negro is equal, and hence conclude that he is entitled to equal privileges and rights with the white man. If their premises were correct, their conclusions would be logical and just but their premise being wrong, their whole argument fails. . . .

The surest way to secure peace, is to show your ability to maintain your rights. The principles and position of the present administration of the United States—the republican party—present some puzzling questions. While it is a fixed principle with them never to allow the increase of a foot of slave territory, they seem to be equally determined not to part with an inch “of the accursed soil.” Notwithstanding their clamor against the institution, they seemed to be equally opposed to getting more, or letting go what they have got.

### Questions:

1. What does Stephens cite as the fundamental difference between the U.S. Constitution and that of the Confederacy?
2. Why does Stephens characterize the Republicans in control of the Union government as “fanatics”?
3. Describe how Stephens makes the case that the Union view is fundamentally inconsistent.