

Primary Source Set

Underlying and Immediate Causes of the Civil War

Northwest Ordinance (1787)

Source: <https://constitutioncenter.org/the-constitution/historic-document-library/detail/the-northwest-ordinance>

On July 13, 1787, Congress passed the Northwest Ordinance—an act that established a framework for governing the Northwest Territory, admitting new states, and protecting the civil liberties of settlers. It also banned slavery in the new territories.

Text	Vocabulary and Context
There shall be neither slavery nor involuntary servitude in the said territory, otherwise than in the punishment of crimes whereof the party shall have been duly convicted : Provided, always, That any person escaping into the same, from whom labor or service is lawfully claimed in any one of the original States, such fugitive may be lawfully reclaimed and conveyed to the person claiming his or her labor or service as aforesaid .	involuntary servitude- a condition in which someone must work without pay duly convicted- found guilty after a fair and legal trial conveyed- returned, transported aforesaid- previously mentioned

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Missouri Compromise (1820)

Source: <https://billofrightsinsstitute.org/activities/missouri-compromise-annotated>

Text of the Missouri Compromise which outlines how the new territory of Missouri can apply for statehood and limits slavery in the west.

Text	Vocabulary and Context
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.	authorize- allow
[B]y this act, slavery and involuntary servitude , ... shall be, and is hereby, forever prohibited : Provided always, That any person escaping into the same, 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 .	involuntary servitude- a condition in which someone must work without pay prohibited- not allowed conveyed- returned, transported aforesaid- previously mentioned

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Letter from Thomas Jefferson to John Holmes (1820)

Source: <https://teachingamericanhistory.org/document/letter-to-john-holmes-2/>

Jefferson describes the Missouri Compromise as a “firebell in the night” that awakened him to the threat of disunion.

Text	Vocabulary and Context
I thank you, dear sir, for the copy you have been so kind as to send me of the letter to your constituents on the Missouri question... this momentous question, like a fire bell in the night, awakened and filled me with terror. ... I regret that I am now to die in the belief, that the useless sacrifice of themselves by the generation of 1776 , to acquire self-government and happiness to their country, is to be thrown away by the unwise and unworthy passions of their sons.	constituents- the people a government official represents fire bell- an alarm notifying people of an emergency sacrifice- giving up something of value for a greater purpose generation of 1776- period of the Declaration of Independence

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Abraham Lincoln, Speech on the Repeal of the Missouri Compromise, 1854

Source: <https://teachingamericanhistory.org/document/speech-on-the-repeal-of-the-missouri-compromise/>

The Kansas-Nebraska Act effectively repealed the Missouri Compromise and further divided the country over slavery. Former Representative Abraham Lincoln was an attorney who was involved in politics and who gave the following commentary on the bill's passing.

Text	Vocabulary and Context
This declared indifference , but as I must think, covert real zeal for the spread of slavery, I can not but hate. I hate it because of the monstrous injustice of slavery itself. I hate it because it deprives our republican example of its just influence in the world — enables the enemies of free institutions, with plausibility , to taunt us as hypocrites — causes the real friends of freedom to doubt our sincerity , and especially because it forces so many really good men amongst ourselves into an open war with the very fundamental principles of civil liberty — criticizing the Declaration of Independence, and insisting that there is no right principle of action but self-interest.	indifference - lack of interest or concern covert - not openly displayed zeal - enthusiasm deprives - to lack or to take away plausibility - likelihood or reason hypocrites - people who say one thing but do something against it sincerity - seriousness and honesty

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Fugitive Slave Act (1850)

Source: <https://billofrightsinstitute.org/activities/fugitive-slave-act-1850>

The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 was passed as part of the Compromise of 1850 between Northerners who opposed slavery and its expansion and Southerners who wanted to protect their slaveholding rights and prevent their enslaved workers from escaping to the North.

Text	Vocabulary and Context
. . [T]o use such reasonable force and restraint as may be necessary, under the circumstances of the case, to take and remove such fugitive person back to the State or Territory whence he or she may have escaped as aforesaid . 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 ...	restraint- control whence- where aforesaid- previously mentioned conclusive- enough to prove

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Daniel Webster, “7th of March” Speech, 1850

Source: <https://billofrightsintstitute.org/activities/daniel-webster-7th-of-march-1850>

In this speech, Daniel Webster, a prominent senator from Massachusetts, laid the groundwork for what would become the Compromise of 1850.

Text	Vocabulary and Context
I speak to-day for the preservation of the Union. “Hear me for my cause.” I speak to-day, out of a solicitous and anxious heart, for the restoration to the country. Peaceable secession! Peaceable secession! The concurrent agreement of all the members of this great republic to separate!... Where is the flag of the republic to remain? Where is the eagle still to tower? or is he to cower, and shrink, and fall to the ground?	preservation- to keep intact or whole solicitous- concerned restoration- rebuilding concurrent- occurring at the same time cower- crouch in fear

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John C. Calhoun, Speech to the Senate, March 5, 1850

Source: <https://www.visitthecapitol.gov/artifact/john-c-calhouns-speech-senate-march-4-1850>

In his last speech, John C. Calhoun from South Carolina argued against California becoming a free state. He said the North was too powerful and was keeping the South out of new territories, which he believed was forcing the South to consider leaving the United States.

Text	Vocabulary and Context
How can the Union be preserved ?... To this question there can be but one answer — that the immediate cause is the almost universal discontent which pervades all the States composing the Southern section of the Union. This widely extended discontent is not of recent origin. It commenced with the agitation of the slavery question and has been increasing ever since.	preserved - kept intact or whole discontent - unhappiness pervades - spread throughout commenced - began or started agitation - disruption



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Henry Clay, Speech on Preserving the Union, 1850

Source: <https://teachingamericanhistory.org/document/speech-on-preserving-the-union/>

Senator Henry Clay from Kentucky tried to diffuse tensions by suggesting ideas about slavery and new western land. The Senate discussed his ideas for seven months. When his plan didn't work, Congress broke it into several smaller laws called the Compromise of 1850.

Text	Vocabulary and Context
If blood is to be spilt by whose fault is it to be spilt? Upon the supposition , I maintain it would be the fault of those who raised the standard of disunion and endeavored to prostrate this government, and, Sir, when that is done, as long as it please God to give me voice to express my sentiments , or an arm, weak and enfeebled as it may be by age, that voice and that arm will be on the side of my country, for the support of the general authority, and for the maintenance of the power of this Union.	supposition - belief endeavored - to try hard prostrate - to make helpless or defenseless sentiments - feelings or attitude enfeebled - to be weak or disabled

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Underlying and Immediate Causes of the Civil War

First Debate for the Illinois Senate between Stephen Douglas and Abraham Lincoln (1858)

Source: <https://billofrightsintstitute.org/activities/first-debate-for-the-illinois-senate-between-stephen-douglas-and-abraham-lincoln-ottawa-illinois-august-21-1858>

Senator Stephen Douglas was a Democrat from Illinois and the mastermind behind the Kansas-Nebraska Act. He was also a proponent of the “popular sovereignty” doctrine. In 1858, was challenged for his seat in the Senate by Republican Abraham Lincoln.

Text	Vocabulary and Context
“[The Founders] knew when they framed the Constitution that in a country as wide and broad as this... the people necessarily required different laws and institutions in different localities . They knew that the laws and regulations which would suit the granite hills of New Hampshire would be unsuited to the rice plantations of South Carolina, and they therefore provided that each State should retain its own Legislature and sovereignty , with the full and complete power to do as it pleased within its own limits, in all that was local and not national. One of the reserved rights of the States was the right to regulate the relations between master and servant, on the slavery question....	localities - locations sovereignty -power or authority

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Underlying and Immediate Causes of the Civil War

An Act to Organize the Territories of Nebraska and Kansas (1854)

Source: https://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/kanneb.asp

By 1850, the expansion of slavery intensified national tensions, leading to the Missouri Compromise, the Compromise of 1850, and the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, which introduced "popular sovereignty" as a means for settlers to decide on slavery in new territories.

Text	Vocabulary and Context
... the eighth section of the act preparatory to the admission of Missouri into the Union approved March sixth, eighteen hundred and twenty, which, being inconsistent with the principle of non-intervention by Congress with slaves in the States and Territories, as recognized by the legislation of eighteen hundred and fifty, commonly called the Compromise Measures, is hereby declared inoperative and void; it being the true intent and meaning of this act not to legislate slavery into any Territory or State, nor to exclude it therefrom, but to leave the people thereof perfectly free to form and regulate their domestic institutions in their own way, subject only to the Constitution of the United States.	the eighth section of the act preparatory to the admission of Missouri into the Union- a section of the Missouri Compromise inconsistent- goes against non-intervention- to not get involved legislation of eighteen hundred and fifty, commonly called the Compromise Measures- the Compromise of 1850 inoperative and void- no longer valid domestic institutions- laws and systems

Underlying and Immediate Causes of the Civil War

Dred Scott v. Sandford (1875) Majority Opinion (Chief Justice Taney)

Source: <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/60/393/>

In the Dred Scott decision, Chief Justice Roger B. Taney's majority opinion declared African-Americans were not citizens and had no legal standing to sue, while also ruling that Congress lacked the authority to prohibit slavery in federal territories, deeming such measures unconstitutional.

Text	Vocabulary and Context
It is difficult at this day to realize the state of public opinion in relation to that unfortunate race which prevailed in the civilized and enlightened portions of the world at the time of the Declaration of Independence and when the Constitution of the United States was framed and adopted. But the public history of every European nation displays it in a manner too plain to be mistaken. They had for more than a century before been regarded as beings of an inferior order, and altogether unfit to associate with the white race either in social or political relations, and so far inferior order, and altogether unfit to associate with the white race either in social or political relations, and so far inferior that they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect, and that the negro might justly and lawfully be reduced to slavery for his benefit.	public opinion- what most people thought or believed prevailed- common or widespread inferior-less than unfit to associate- not allowed to interact with

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Abraham Lincoln, Speech on Dred Scott Decision, June 26, 1857

Source: <https://billofrightsinstitute.org/primary-sources/speech-on-dred-scott-decision>

In the landmark Dred Scott decision, the Supreme Court ruled African-Americans were not citizens and that Congress could not regulate slavery, prompting Abraham Lincoln to express his disappointment and hope for continued debate on the issue.

Text	Vocabulary and Context
We believe, as much as Judge Douglas , (perhaps more) in obedience to, and respect for the judicial department of government. We think its decisions on Constitutional questions, when fully settled, should control, not only the particular cases decided, but the general policy of the country, subject to be disturbed only by amendments of the Constitution as provided in that instrument itself . More than this would be revolution. But we think the Dred Scott decision is erroneous . We know the court that made it, has often overruled its own decisions, and we shall do what we can to have it to over-rule this. We offer no resistance to it.	Judge Douglas - Stephen A. Douglas judicial department - the judicial branch, such as the Supreme Court that instrument itself - the Constitution erroneous - wrong

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Abraham Lincoln, Springfield, Illinois speech, Jun 16, 1858

Source: <https://billofrightsinstitute.org/activities/lincoln-douglass-debates-1858>

In the landmark Dred Scott decision, the Supreme Court ruled African-Americans were not citizens and that Congress could not regulate slavery, prompting Abraham Lincoln to express his disappointment and hope for continued debate on the issue.

Text	Vocabulary and Context
“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; . . .	“A house divided against itself cannot stand”- internal conflict will lead toward downfall dissolved- to be closed down opponents- people against arrest- stop extinction- to no longer exist

Underlying and Immediate Causes of the Civil War

John Brown's Last Speech, 1859

Source: <https://billofrightsinstitute.org/activities/john-browns-last-speech-1859>

John Brown, a radical abolitionist, led a failed raid on the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry in 1859 to incite a slave rebellion, resulting in his execution and intensifying national divisions, with abolitionists viewing him as a martyr and Southerners as a villain.

Text	Vocabulary and Context
... The court acknowledges, as I suppose, the validity of the law of God. I see a book kissed here which I suppose to be the Bible, or at least the New Testament. That teaches me that all things whatsoever I would that men should do to me, I should do even so to them. It teaches me further to “remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them.” I endeavored to act up to that instruction. I say, I am too young to understand that God is any respecter of persons. I believe that to have interfered as I have done — as I have always freely admitted I have done — in behalf of His despied poor, was not wrong, but right. Now if it is deemed necessary that I should forfeit my life for the furtherance of the ends of justice, and mingle my blood further with the blood of my children and with the blood of millions in this slave country whose rights are disregarded by wicked, cruel, and unjust enactments . — I submit; so let it be done!	validity- truthfulness, factually endeavored- to try hard despied (despised)- disliked or hated forfeit- give up enactments- laws

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South Carolina Secession Debate, 1860

Source: <https://billofrightsinstitute.org/activities/south-carolina-secession-debate-1860>

On December 17, 1860, South Carolina convened a convention to decide on secession, becoming the first state to leave the Union, followed by six others before Lincoln's inauguration, driven by the desire to protect slavery and assert states' powers.

Text	Vocabulary and Context
The one great evil, from which all other evils have flowed, is the overthrow of the Constitution of the United States. The Government of the United States is no longer the Government of Confederate Republics, but of a consolidated Democracy. It is no longer a free government, but a Despotism . It is, in fact, such a Government as Great Britain attempted to set over our fathers; and which was resisted and defeated by a seven years' struggle for independence. . . . The Southern States now stand exactly in the same position towards the Northern States that the Colonies did towards Great Britain.	consolidated - combined Despotism - absolute power, in a cruel or oppressive way

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I thank you, dear sir, for the copy you have been so kind as to send me of the letter to your constituents on the Missouri question... this momentous question, like a fire bell in the night, awakened and filled me with terror. ... I regret that I am now to die in the belief, that the useless sacrifice of themselves by the generation of 1776 , to acquire self-government and happiness to their country, is to be thrown away by the unwise and unworthy passions of their sons.	constituents- the people a government official represents fire bell- an alarm notifying people of an emergency sacrifice- giving up something of value for a greater purpose generation of 1776- period of the Declaration of Independence

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The Kansas-Nebraska Act effectively repealed the Missouri Compromise and further divided the country over slavery. Former Representative Abraham Lincoln was an attorney who was involved in politics and who gave the following commentary on the bill’s passing.

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... [T]o use such reasonable force and restraint as may be necessary, under the circumstances of the case, to take and remove such fugitive person back to the State or Territory whence he or she may have escaped as aforesaid. 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 ...	restraint- control whence- where aforesaid- previously mentioned conclusive- enough to prove

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In this speech, Daniel Webster, a prominent senator from Massachusetts, laid the groundwork for what would become the Compromise of 1850.

Text	Vocabulary and Context
I speak to-day for the preservation of the Union. "Hear me for my cause." I speak to-day, out of a solicitous and anxious heart, for the restoration to the country. Peaceable secession! Peaceable secession! The concurrent agreement of all the members of this great republic to separate!... Where is the flag of the republic to remain? Where is the eagle still to tower? or is he to cower, and shrink, and fall to the ground?	preservation- to keep intact or whole solicitous- concerned restoration- rebuilding concurrent- occurring at the same time cower- crouch in fear

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First Debate for the Illinois Senate between Stephen Douglas and Abraham Lincoln (1858)

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Dred Scott v. Sandford (1875) Majority Opinion (Chief Justice Taney)

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In the landmark Dred Scott decision, the Supreme Court ruled African-Americans were not citizens and that Congress could not regulate slavery, prompting Abraham Lincoln to express his disappointment and hope for continued debate on the issue.

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We believe, as much as Judge Douglas , (perhaps more) in obedience to, and respect for the judicial department of government. We think its decisions on Constitutional questions, when fully settled, should control, not only the particular cases decided, but the general policy of the country, subject to be disturbed only by amendments of the Constitution as provided in that instrument itself . More than this would be revolution. But we think the Dred Scott decision is erroneous . We know the court that made it, has often overruled its own decisions, and we shall do what we can to have it to over-rule this. We offer no resistance to it.	Judge Douglas- Stephen A. Douglas judicial department- the judicial branch, such as the Supreme Court that instrument itself- the Constitution erroneous- wrong

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Abraham Lincoln, Springfield, Illinois speech, Jun 16, 1858

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John Brown, a radical abolitionist, led a failed raid on the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry in 1859 to incite a slave rebellion, resulting in his execution and intensifying national divisions, with abolitionists viewing him as a martyr and Southerners as a villain.

Text	Vocabulary and Context
. . . The court acknowledges, as I suppose, the validity of the law of God. I see a book kissed here which I suppose to be the Bible, or at least the New Testament. That teaches me that all things whatsoever I would that men should do to me, I should do even so to them. It teaches me further to "remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them." I endeavored to act up to that instruction. I say, I am too young to understand that God is any respecter of persons. I believe that to have interfered as I have done — as I have always freely admitted I have done — in behalf of His despied poor, was not wrong, but right. Now if it is deemed necessary that I should forfeit my life for the furtherance of the ends of justice, and mingle my blood further with the blood of my children and with the blood of millions in this slave country whose rights are disregarded by wicked, cruel, and unjust enactments. — I submit; so let it be done!	validity- truthfulness, factually endeavored- to try hard despied (despised)- disliked or hated forfeit- give up enactments- laws

Underlying and Immediate Causes of the Civil War

South Carolina Secession Debate, 1860

Source: <https://billofrightsinstitute.org/activities/south-carolina-secession-debate-1860>

On December 17, 1860, South Carolina convened a convention to decide on secession, becoming the first state to leave the Union, followed by six others before Lincoln's inauguration, driven by the desire to protect slavery and assert states' powers.

Text	Vocabulary and Context
The one great evil, from which all other evils have flowed, is the overthrow of the Constitution of the United States. The Government of the United States is no longer the Government of Confederated Republics, but of a consolidated Democracy. It is no longer a free government, but a Despotism . It is, in fact, such a Government as Great Britain attempted to set over our fathers; and which was resisted and defeated by a seven years' struggle for independence. . . . The Southern States now stand exactly in the same position towards the Northern States that the Colonies did towards Great Britain.	consolidated- combined Despotism- absolute power, in a cruel or oppressive way