

CIVIL WAR 150 • READER #1

SECESSION and UNION

Introduction by Manisha Sinha



CIVIL WAR 150: Exploring the War and Its
Meaning Through the Words of Those Who Lived It
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Introduction

SECESSION AND UNION

The election of Abraham Lincoln to the presidency on a free-soil Republican platform in November 1860 precipitated an unprecedented political and constitutional crisis in the country. South Carolina, where some planter politicians had called for secession for nearly thirty years, took the lead in seceding from the Union a month later, inaugurating the secession winter of 1860–61. While most southern states had resisted the siren calls for disunion emanating from the Palmetto State for most of the antebellum period, this time the other states of the lower South—Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas—followed it in quick succession out of the Union. Increasingly desperate attempts in and out of Congress to broker a sectional compromise failed because of Republican opposition to any further extension of slavery and because southern secessionists no longer believed slavery could be preserved within the Union. The southern Confederacy was formed in February 1861 and Lincoln inaugurated in March. Not surprisingly, it was in South Carolina that Confederates fired the first shot of the conflict at Fort Sumter in April. The states of the upper South—Arkansas, Tennessee, North Carolina, and Virginia—where secession had been rejected earlier in state conventions or by popular vote, were forced to choose between the Union and the Confederacy. They chose secession, while the border slave states of Missouri, Kentucky, Maryland, and Delaware remained in the Union.

The secession crisis of 1860–61 had been long in the making. During the nullification crisis of 1828–32, South Carolinian extremists claimed that federal tariff laws formed a dangerous precedent for the national government to interfere with slavery. John C. Calhoun reworked the states' rights theories of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison into more radical form by asserting that the Constitution was a compact among fully sovereign states, and that each state had the right to nullify

federal laws and, if necessary, secede from the Union. The rise of the abolition movement and the continuing controversy over fugitive slaves further convinced southern slaveholders they were facing a northern onslaught against slavery. But it was the revival of the conflict over the expansion of slavery into the West, which had lain relatively dormant since the Missouri Compromise of 1820, that finally succeeded in creating an antislavery majority in the North and a secessionist one in the slave South.

The emergence of the Republican Party in the North was a direct result of the slavery expansion controversy inaugurated by the U.S.-Mexican War of 1846–48, the repeal of the Missouri Compromise by the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, and the subsequent fight over the status of slavery in “bleeding Kansas” that became a dress rehearsal for the Civil War. The disintegration of the Whig party created a solid Democratic South in the cotton states, which started to resemble the one party, radical separatist politics of South Carolina. These were the states that led the first wave of disunion, their secession ordinances and declarations of causes justified by the protection of slavery against the dangers posed by the election of an anti-slavery president.

In the North, third-party politics, earlier attempted by the abolitionist Liberty Party and the Free Soil Party in the 1840s, bore fruit with the formation of the Republican Party committed to the non-extension of slavery. Southern slaveholders, who dominated the federal government through much of the republic’s history, succeeded in enacting a stringent new Fugitive Slave Law, opening territories north of the Missouri Compromise line to slavery, and having the Supreme Court declare the platform of the Republican Party unconstitutional in the *Dred Scott* case. In response, northerners alarmed by the encroaching “slave power” embraced the Republicans, making it a successful alternative to the Democratic Party in the North. When pressured to compromise with southern secessionists, President-elect Lincoln was open to guaranteeing the permanence of slavery where it existed and enforcing the fugitive slave clause of the Constitution, but he refused to budge on the party’s non-extension platform. To do so would have been to repudiate the results of a legal election and disavow the

principles that elevated him to the nation's highest office. Lincoln would later equate the survival of the Union with the preservation of democratic government.

Secession was a profoundly anti-democratic and proslavery movement. The lower South states refused to acquiesce to the results of a presidential election in order to protect slavery, and the upper South states that seceded in the second wave of secession chose slavery over Union. In fact, the progress of the secession movement followed the political geography of slavery, with states in the deep South with the largest percentages of slave and slaveholding population seceding first, those in the upper South with lower percentages of slave and slaveholding population seceding second, and those border states with slave populations below twenty percent casting their lot with the Union.

Most northerners, including those who had not voted for the Republican Party, rallied behind the Union during the secession crisis. With a few prominent exceptions, their reactions, epitomized in the private musings of letter writers and diarists, ranged from disbelief to a firm desire to combat disunion. African Americans, slave and free, abolitionists, and Radical Republicans made sure the war for the Union became a war against slavery. Abolitionists had long declared that slavery must end, and the nation would eventually accept their judgment. Ironically, secession, a movement inaugurated to preserve racial slavery, sounded its death knell.

MANISHA SINHA

*Professor of Afro-American Studies and History,
University of Massachusetts, Amherst*

CALLING A SECESSION CONVENTION:
NOVEMBER 1860

*Charleston Mercury: What Shall
the South Carolina Legislature Do?*

November 3, 1860

Three days before the 1860 presidential election, this editorial appeared in the *Charleston Mercury*, a newspaper owned by Robert Barnwell Rhett and edited by his son, Robert Barnwell Rhett Jr. The elder Rhett had advocated secession during the 1850 sectional crisis, and in a speech delivered on July 4, 1859 declared that the South should secede if a Republican president was elected in 1860. In its editorial anticipating a Republican victory, the *Mercury* addressed a question that divided many secessionists in 1860: should the slaveholding states secede individually by “separate action,” or first hold a general convention and then secede together by “co-operative action.” Circumstances favored immediate action in South Carolina, where the legislature would meet on November 5 to choose presidential electors (in 1860 South Carolina was the only state that chose electors by this method). After learning of Lincoln’s victory, the legislature called for the election of a state convention that would meet on January 15, 1861. (The editorial repeats the allegation that Maine Senator Hannibal Hamlin, the Republican candidate for vice president, was a mulatto, although there was no evidence to support it.)

THE ISSUE before the country is the extinction of slavery. No man of common sense, who has observed the progress of events, and who is not prepared to surrender the institution, with the safety and independence of the South, can doubt that the time for action has come—now or never. The Southern States are now in the crisis of their fate; and, if we read aright the signs of the times, nothing is needed for our deliverance, but that the ball of revolution be set in motion. There is sufficient readiness among the people to make it entirely successful. Co-operation will follow the action of any State. The example of a forward movement only is requisite to unite Southern States in

a common cause. Under these circumstances, the Legislature of South Carolina is about to meet. It happens to assemble in advance of the Legislature of any other State. Being in session at this momentous juncture—the Legislature of that State which is most united in the policy of freeing the South from Black Republican domination—the eyes of the whole country, and most especially of the resistance party of the Southern States, is intently turned upon the conduct of this body. We have innumerable assurances that the men of action in each and all of the Southern States, earnestly desire South Carolina to exhibit promptitude and decision in this conjuncture. Other States are torn and divided, to a greater or less extent, by old party issues. South Carolina alone is not. Any practical move would enable the people of other States to rise above their past divisions, and lock shields on the broad ground of Southern security. The course of our Legislature will either greatly stimulate and strengthen, or unnerve the resistance elements of the whole South. A Convention is the point to which their attention will be chiefly directed.

The question of calling a Convention by our Legislature, does not necessarily involve the question of separate or co-operative action. That is a question for the Convention when it assembles, under the circumstances which shall exist when it assembles. All desire the action of as many Southern States as possible, for the formation of a Southern Confederacy. But each should not delay and wait on the other. As these States are separate sovereignties, each must act separately; and whether one or the other acts first or last, we suppose is of no sort of consequence. What is really essential is this—that by the action of one or more States, there shall be the *reasonable probability* that a Southern Confederacy will be formed. We say *probability*,—because there is no certainty in the future of human affairs; and in the position in which the South will be placed by the election of an Abolitionist white man as President of the United States, and an Abolitionist colored man as Vice-President of the United States, we should not hesitate, somewhat to venture. The existence of slavery is at stake. The evils of submission are too terrible for us to risk them, from vague fears of failure, or a jealous distrust of our sister Cotton States. We think, therefore, that the approaching Legislature should provide for the assembling of a Convention of the people

of South Carolina, as soon as it is ascertained that Messrs. LINCOLN and HAMLIN will have a majority in the Electoral Colleges for President and Vice-President of the United States. The only point of difficulty is as *to the time when the Convention shall assemble*. In our judgment, it should assemble *at the earliest possible time* consistent with the opportunity for co-operative action of other Southern States, which may, like ourselves, be determined not to submit to Black Republican domination at Washington. Delay is fatal; while our move will retard no willing State from co-operation. South Carolina, as a sovereign State, is bound to protect her people, but she should so act as to give the other Southern States the opportunity of joining in this policy. The Governors of Alabama, Mississippi and Georgia can act simultaneously. With this qualification, *the earliest time is the best*, for the following reasons:

1. Our great agricultural staples are going to market. The sooner we act, the more of these staples we will have on hand, to control the conduct of the people of the North and of foreign nations, to secure a peaceful result for our deliverance. Thousands at the North, and millions in Europe, need our Cotton to keep their looms in operation. Let us act, before we have parted with our agricultural productions for the season.

2. The commercial and financial interests of the South require that we should act speedily in settling our relations towards the North. Suspense is embarrassment and loss. Decision, with separation, will speedily open new sources of wealth and prosperity, and relieve the finances of the South through the establishment of new channels. In all changes of Government, respect should be had to all classes of the people, and the least possible loss be inflicted on any.

3. The moral effect of promptitude will be immense. Delay will dispirit our friends, and inspire confidence in our enemies. The evils against which we are to provide are not the growth of yesterday. They have been gathering head for thirty years. We have tried, again and again, to avert them by compromise and submission. Submission has failed to avert them; and wise, prompt and resolute action is our last and only course for safety.

4. Black Republican rule at Washington will not commence until the 4th of March next—four short months. Before that time all that South Carolina or the other Southern States

intend to do, should be done. The settlement of our relations towards the General Government, in consequence of our measures of protection, should be completed during the existing Administration.

5. It is exceedingly important, also, that our measures should be laid as soon as possible before *the present Congress*. The secession of one or more States from the Union must be communicated to the President of the United States. He has done all he could to arrest the sectional madness of the North. He knows that we are wronged and endangered by Black Republican ascendancy, and he will not, we have a right to suppose, lend himself to carry out their bloody policy.

6. By communication from the President of the United States, as well as by the withdrawal from Congress of the members of the seceding States, the question of the right of a State to secede from the Union, with the question of a Force Bill, must arise in Congress for action. The Representatives from the other Southern States will most probably be forced either to continue members of a body which orders the sword to be drawn against the seceding States, or they must leave it. They will most probably leave it; and thus the South will be brought together by action in Congress, even though they fail to co-operate at once by their State authorities. It will not be wise to pretermitt either of these instrumentalities for the union and co-action of the Southern States; but, it is our opinion, that Congress is the best place to unite them. By prompt action, and through the question of secession in Congress, the agitations which must ensue, will not only tend to unite the Southern members of Congress, but to unite and stimulate State action in the States they represent.

We conclude, therefore, by urging the Legislature about to assemble, to provide for the calling a Convention, as soon as it is ascertained that Messrs. LINCOLN and HAMLIN have the majority in the Electoral Colleges for President and Vice-President of the United States; and that this Convention shall assemble at the earliest day practicable, consistent with the knowledge of our course by our sister Southern States. To this end we would respectfully suggest Nov. 22d and 23d as the day of election, and December 15th as the time of assembling the Convention of the people of South Carolina.

“THIS DANGEROUS GAME”:
MISSOURI, NOVEMBER 1860

Edward Bates: Diary, November 22, 1860

A successful lawyer and former congressman from St. Louis, Missouri, Edward Bates was a candidate for the Republican presidential nomination in 1860, receiving 48 out of 466 votes on the first ballot. Bates recorded his appraisal of the movement toward secession in his diary.

Wednesday night. Nov 22.

The news from *the South*, as to secession, does not improve. The leaders of the movement, in Alabama, Georgia, and especially S. Carolina, are more urgent than ever, taking every means to get their followers pledged to extreme measures, and to draw in and commit the timid and the doubtful, without allowing time to look to the consequences and reflect upon the bottomless pit that lies before them.

Still I think that (except with a few demented fanatics) it is all brag and bluster, hoping thus to make a better compromise with the timid patriotism of their opponents. In playing this dangerous game, they may go farther than they now intend, and actually commit their states to open rebellion and civil war. If they *will* push it to that dread extremity, the Government, having been as mild and forbearing as possible, up to that point, will no doubt, find it wise policy to make the war as sharp and prompt as possible, in order to shorten it, and prevent its running into social and servile war, and chronic anarchy, such as prevails in Mexico.

The letters and telegrams from *the South*, bear plain evidence of exagiration, and make a false shewing of the unanimity of the people, in support of the traitorous design. A very little time will show.

If we must have civil war, perhaps it is better now, than at a future day.

Frederick Douglass: The Late Election

December 1860

In the spring of 1860 Frederick Douglass returned to his home in Rochester, New York, from a lecture tour of Britain. Writing in June in his abolitionist journal *Douglass' Monthly*, he described the recently nominated Abraham Lincoln as "a man of unblemished private character; a lawyer, standing near the front rank at the bar of his own State, has a cool, well balanced head; great firmness of will; is perseveringly industrious; and one of the most frank, honest men in political life." Although Douglass wished the Republican platform had called for "'Death to Slavery,' instead of 'No more Slave States,'" he expressed his hopes for Lincoln's election. (Douglass would himself vote for his longtime friend Gerrit Smith, the Radical Abolition candidate, on whose ticket he served as an elector in New York State.) Following the election he reassessed Lincoln and the Republican Party in an article in the December *Douglass' Monthly*.

OUR LAST monthly paper announced the probable election of Abraham Lincoln and Hannibal Hamlin, the Republican candidates for President and Vice President of the U. S. What was then only speculation and probability, is now an accomplished fact. Pennsylvania, in her State election of October, it is true, had made this result, to a degree, certain; but there were efforts and appliances resorted to by the enemies of the Republican party, which could not fail to cause doubt and anxiety in the minds of the most sanguine.—The deed is, however, now done, and a new order of events connected with the great question of slavery, is now fairly opening upon the country, the end whereof the most sagacious and far-sighted are unable to see and declare. No preceding election resembles this in its issues and parties, and none resembles it in the effects it has already produced, and is still likely to produce. It was a contest between sections, North and South, as to what shall be the

principles and policy of the national Government in respect to the slave system of the fifteen Southern States. The broadest assertion of a right of property in man, holding such property equally innocent, sacred and legal under the Constitution, as property in houses, lands, horses, sheep, and horned cattle, and like the latter entitled to Congressional protection in all the Territories, and by parity of reasoning, in all the States of the American Union. The Southern candidate for the Presidency, Mr. Breckinridge, fully represented this broad assertion of what Lord Mansfield well declared to be so opposed to nature, that nothing short of positive law could support it, and Brougham denounced as the "wild and guilty fantasy" of property in man. Mr. Lincoln, the Northern Republican candidate, while admitting the right to hold men as slaves in the States already existing, regards such property as peculiar, exceptional, local, generally an evil, and not to be extended beyond the limits of the States where it is established by what is called positive law. We thus simply state the issue, more for the benefit of our trans-Atlantic friends and readers, than for those at home, who have heard and read little else during the last three or four months. The clamor now raised by the slaveholders about "Northern aggression," "sectional warfare," as a pretext of dissolving the Union, has this basis only: The Northern people have elected, against the opposition of the slaveholding South, a man for President who declared his opposition to the further extension of slavery over the soil belonging to the United States. Such is the head and front, and the full extent of the offense, for which "minute men" are forming, drums are beating, flags are flying, people are arming, "banks are closing," "stocks are falling," and the South generally taking on dreadfully.

By referring to another part of our present monthly, our respected readers will find a few samples of the spirit of the Southern press on the subject. They are full of intrigue, smell of brimstone, and betoken a terrific explosion. Unquestionably, "secession," "disunion," "Southern Confederacy," and the like phrases, are the most popular political watch words of the cotton-growing States of the Union. Nor is this sentiment to be entirely despised. If Mr. Lincoln were really an Abolition President, which he is not; if he were a friend to the Abolition

movement, instead of being, as he is, its most powerful enemy, the dissolution of the Union might be the only effective mode of perpetuating slavery in the Southern States—since if it could succeed, it would place slavery beyond the power of the President and his Government. But the South has now no such cause for disunion. The present alarm and perturbation will cease; the Southern fire-eaters will be appeased and will retrace their steps.—There is no sufficient cause for the dissolution of the Union. Whoever lives through the next four years will see Mr. Lincoln and his Administration attacked more bitterly for their pro-slavery truckling, than for doing any anti-slavery work. He and his party will become the best protectors of slavery where it now is, and just such protectors as slaveholders will most need. In order to defeat him, the slaveholders took advantage of the ignorance and stupidity of the masses, and assured them that Lincoln is an Abolitionist. This, Mr. Lincoln and his party will lose no time in scattering to the winds as false and groundless. With the single exception of the question of slavery extension, Mr. Lincoln proposes no measure which can bring him into antagonistic collision with the traffickers in human flesh, either in the States or in the District of Columbia. The Union will, therefore, be saved simply because there is no cause in the election of Mr. Lincoln for its dissolution. Slavery will be as safe, and safer, in the Union under such a President, than it can be under any President of a Southern Confederacy. This is our impression, and we deeply regret the facts from which it is derived.

With an Abolition President we should consider a successful separation of the slave from the free States a calamity, greatly damaging to the prospects of our long enslaved, bruised and mutilated people; but under what may be expected of the Republican party, with its pledges to put down the slaves should they attempt to rise, and to hunt them should they run away, a dissolution of the Union would be highly beneficial to the cause of liberty.—The South would then be a Sicily, and the North a Sardinia. Mr. Lincoln would then be entirely absolved from his slave-hunting, slave-catching and slave-killing pledges, and the South would have to defend slavery with her own guns, and hunt her Negroes with her own dogs. In truth, we really wish those brave, fire-eating, cotton-growing States

would just now go at once outside the Union and set up for themselves, where they could be got at without disturbing other people, and got away from without encountering other people. Such a consummation was "one devoutly to be wished." But no, cunning dogs, they will smother their rage, and after all the dust they can raise, they will retire within the Union and claim its advantages.

What, then, has been gained to the anti-slavery cause by the election of Mr. Lincoln? Not much, in itself considered, but very much when viewed in the light of its relations and bearings. For fifty years the country has taken the law from the lips of an exacting, haughty and imperious slave oligarchy. The masters of slaves have been masters of the Republic. Their authority was almost undisputed, and their power irresistible. They were the President makers of the Republic, and no aspirant dared to hope for success against their frown. Lincoln's election has vitiated their authority, and broken their power. It has taught the North its strength, and shown the South its weakness. More important still, it has demonstrated the possibility of electing, if not an Abolitionist, at least an *anti-slavery reputation* to the Presidency of the United States. The years are few since it was thought possible that the Northern people could be wrought up to the exercise of such startling courage. Hitherto the threat of disunion has been as potent over the politicians of the North, as the cat-o'-nine-tails is over the backs of the slaves. Mr. Lincoln's election breaks this enchantment, dispels this terrible nightmare, and awakes the nation to the consciousness of new powers, and the possibility of a higher destiny than the perpetual bondage to an ignoble fear.

Another probable effect will be to extinguish the reviving fires of the accursed foreign slave trade, which for a year or two have been kindled all along the Southern coast of the Union. The Republican party is under no necessity to pass laws on this subject. It has only to enforce and execute the laws already on the statute book. The moral influence of such prompt, complete and unflinching execution of the laws, will be great, not only in arresting the specific evil, but in arresting the tide of popular demoralization with which the successful prosecution of the horrid trade in naked men and women was overspreading the country. To this duty the Republican party will be

prompted, not only by the conscience of the North, but by what perhaps will be more controlling party interests.

It may also be conceded that the election of Lincoln and Hamlin, notwithstanding the admission of the former that the South is entitled to an efficient Fugitive Slave Law, will render the practice of recapturing and returning to slavery persons who have heroically succeeded, or may hereafter succeed in reaching the free States, more unpopular and odious than it would have been had either Douglas, Bell or Breckinridge been elected. Slaves may yet be hunted, caught and carried back to slavery, but the number will be greatly diminished, because of the popular disinclination to execute the cruel and merciless Fugitive Slave Law. Had Lincoln been defeated, the fact would have been construed by slave-holders, and their guilty minions of the country, as strong evidence of the soundness of the North in respect to the alleged duty of hounding down and handing over the panting fugitive to the vengeance of his infuriated master. No argument is needed to prove this gain to the side of freedom.

But chief among the benefits of the election, has been the canvass itself. Notwithstanding the many cowardly disclaimers, and miserable concessions to popular prejudice against the colored people, which Republican orators have felt themselves required, by an intense and greedy desire of success, to make, they have been compelled also to recur to first principles of human liberty, expose the baseless claim of property in man, exhibit the hideous features of slavery, and to unveil, for popular execration, the brutal manners and morals of the guilty slave-masters.—The canvass has sent all over the North most learned and eloquent men to utter the great truths which Abolitionists have for twenty years been earnestly, but unsuccessfully endeavoring to get before the public mind and conscience. We may rejoice in the dissemination of the truth by whomsoever proclaimed, for the truth will bear its own weight, and bring forth its own fruit.

Nevertheless, this very victory threatens and may be the death of the modern Abolition movement, and finally bring back the country to the same, or a worse state, than Benj. Lundy and Wm. Lloyd Garrison found it thirty years ago. The Republican party does not propose to abolish slavery anywhere, and is

decidedly opposed to Abolition agitation. It is not even, by the confession of its President elect, in favor of the repeal of that thrice-cursed and flagrantly unconstitutional Fugitive Slave Bill of 1850. It is plain to see, that once in power, the policy of the party will be only to seem a little less yielding to the demands of slavery than the Democratic or Fusion party, and thus render ineffective and pointless the whole Abolition movement of the North. The safety of our movement will be found only by a return to all the agencies and appliances, such as writing, publishing, organizing, lecturing, holding meetings, with the earnest aim not to prevent the extension of slavery, but to abolish the system altogether. Congress should be at once memorialized for the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia, and the slave trade between the States. The same zeal, activity, energy and earnestness should be displayed in circulating petitions, as in the earlier stages of the movement. We have the pen, voice and influence of only one man, and that man of the most limited class; but with few or many, in whatever vicissitudes which may surround the cause, now or hereafter, we shall join in no cry, and unite in no demand less than the complete and universal *abolition* of the whole slave system. Slavery shall be destroyed.

ADVOCATING SECESSION:
GEORGIA, DECEMBER 1860

*Joseph E. Brown to
Alfred H. Colquitt and Others*

December 7, 1860

Joseph E. Brown had defeated Benjamin Hill in 1857 to become governor of Georgia. In this public letter in support of secession, Brown argued that the poor whites of the Georgia mountains had a vital interest in preserving slavery. On January 19, 1861, the state convention voted, 164–133, not to delay action until after Lincoln took office, and then approved, 208–89, an ordinance of secession.

Gentlemen: Your letter requesting me to give to the people of Georgia my views upon the issues involved in the election of delegates to the State Convention, which is to assemble in January next, has been received.

Such is the extent of my official labors at present, that I can devote but little time to the preparation of a reply. If, however, any importance is attached to my opinions, in the present perilous times, I cheerfully give them to my fellow citizens. I propose to discuss briefly three propositions.

1st. Is the election of Mr. Lincoln to the Presidency, sufficient cause to justify Georgia and the other Southern States in seceding from the Union?

2d. What will be the results to the institution of slavery which will follow submission to the inauguration and administration of Mr. Lincoln as the President of one section of the Union?

3d. What will be the effect which the abolition of Slavery will have upon the interests and the social position of the large class of nonslaveholders and poor white laborers, who are in the South?

First, is the election of Mr. Lincoln sufficient cause to justify the secession of the Southern States from the Union? In my

opinion the election of Mr. Lincoln, viewed only in the light of the triumph of a successful candidate, is not sufficient cause for a dissolution of the Union. This, however, is a very contracted and narrow view of the question. Mr. Lincoln is a mere mote in the great political atmosphere of the country, which, as it floats, only shows the direction in which the wind blows. He is the mere representative of a fanatical abolition sentiment—the mere instrument of a great triumphant political party, the principles of which are deadly hostile to the institution of Slavery, and openly at war with the fundamental doctrines of the Constitution of the United States. The rights of the South, and the institution of slavery, are not endangered by the triumph of Mr. Lincoln, as a man; but they are in imminent danger from the triumph of the powerful party which he represents, and of the fanatical abolition sentiment which brought him into power, as the candidate of the Northern section of the Union, over the united opposition of the Southern section against him. The party embracing that sentiment, has constantly denied, and still denies, our equality in the Union, and our right to hold our slaves as property; and avows its purpose to take from us our property, so soon as it has the power. Its ability to elect Mr. Lincoln as its candidate, shows it now has the power to control the Executive branch of the Government. As the President, with the advice and consent of the Senate, appoints the Judges of the Supreme Court of the United States, when vacancies occur, its control of the Executive power will, in a few years, give it the control of the Judicial Department; while the constant increase of abolition sentiment, in the Northern States, now largely in the majority in Congress, together with the admission of other free States, will very soon, give it the power in the Legislative Department. The whole Government will then be in the hands of our enemies. The election of Mr. Lincoln is the first great step in this programme. It is the triumph of the Northern over the Southern section of the Union: of Northern fanaticism over Southern equality and Southern rights. While, therefore, the election of Mr. Lincoln, as a man, is no sufficient cause to justify secession, the triumph of the Northern section of the Union over the Southern section, upon a platform of avowed hostility to our rights, does, in my opinion, afford ample cause to justify the South in withdrawing from a confederacy where her equality,

her honor, and the rights of her people, can no longer be protected.

Second, What will be the result to the institution of slavery, which will follow submission to the inauguration and administration of Mr. Lincoln as the President of one section of the Union? My candid opinion is, that it will be the total abolition of slavery, and the utter ruin of the South, in less than twenty-five years. If we submit now, we satisfy the Northern people that, come what may, we will never resist. If Mr. Lincoln places among us his Judges, District Attorneys, Marshals, Post Masters, Custom House officers, etc., etc., by the end of his administration, with the control of these men, and the distribution of public patronage, he will have succeeded in dividing us to an extent that will destroy all our moral powers, and prepare us to tolerate the running of a Republican ticket, in most of the States of the South, in 1864. If this ticket only secured five or ten thousand votes in each of the Southern States, it would be as large as the abolition party was in the North a few years since. It would hold a balance of power between any two political parties into which the people of the South may hereafter be divided. This would soon give it the control of our elections. We would then be powerless, and the abolitionists would press forward, with a steady step, to the accomplishment of their object. They would refuse to admit any other slave States to the Union. They would abolish slavery in the District of Columbia, and at the Forts, Arsenals and Dock Yards, within the Southern States, which belong to the United States. They would then abolish the internal slave trade between the States, and prohibit a slave owner in Georgia from carrying his slaves into Alabama or South Carolina, and there selling them. These steps would be taken one at a time, cautiously, and our people would submit. Finally, when we were sufficiently humiliated, and sufficiently in their power, they would abolish slavery in the States. It will not be many years before enough of free States may be formed out of the present territories of the United States, and admitted into the Union, to give them sufficient strength to change the Constitution, and remove all Constitutional barriers which now deny to Congress this power. I do not doubt, therefore, that submission to the administration of Mr. Lincoln will result in the

final abolition of slavery. If we fail to resist now, we will never again have the strength to resist.

3rd, What effect will the abolition of slavery have upon the interest and social position of the large class of nonslaveholders and poor white laborers in the South? Here would be the scene of the most misery and ruin. Probably no one is so unjust as to say that it would be right to take from the slaveholder his property without paying him for it. What would it cost to do this? There are, in round numbers, 4,500,000 slaves in the Southern States. They are worth, at a low estimate, 500 dollars each. All will agree to this. Multiply the 4,500,000 by 500 and you have twenty-two hundred and fifty millions of dollars, which these slaves are worth. No one would agree that it is right to rob the Southern slaveholders of this vast sum of money without compensation. The Northern States would not agree to pay their proportion of the money, and the people of the South must be taxed to raise the money. If Georgia were only an average Southern State, she would have to pay one fifteenth part of this sum, which would be \$150,000,000. Georgia is much more than an average State, and she must therefore pay a larger sum. Her people now pay less than half a million of dollars a year, of tax. Suppose we had ten years within which to raise the \$150,000,000, we should then have to raise, in addition to our present tax, \$15,000,000 per annum, or over thirty times as much as we now pay.—The poor man, who now pays one dollar, would then have to pay \$30.00. But suppose the Northern States agreed to help pay for these slaves, (who believes they would do it?) the share of Georgia would then be about one thirtieth of the twenty-two hundred and fifty millions of dollars, or over seventy-five millions; which, if raised in ten years, would be over fifteen times as much as our present tax. In this calculation, I have counted the slaveholder as taxed upon his own slaves to raise money to pay him for them. This would be great injustice to him. If the sum is to be raised by the tax upon others, the nonslaveholders and poor white men of the South, would have to pay nearly the whole of this enormous sum, out of their labor. This would load them and their children with grievous indebtedness and heavy taxes for a long time to come. But suppose we were rid of this difficulty, what shall be done with these 4,500,000 negroes, when set free? Some of the

Northern States have already passed laws prohibiting free negroes from coming into their limits. They will help to harbor our runaway slaves, but will not receive among them our free negroes. They would not permit them to go there and live with them. Then what? One may say, send them to Africa. To such a proposition I might reply, send them to the moon. You may say that is not practicable. It is quite as much so as it is for us to pay for and send this vast number of negroes to Africa, with the means at our command.

No one would be so inhuman as to propose to send them to Africa and set them down upon a wild, naked sea coast, without provisions for at least one year. What will it cost to take them from their present home to Africa, and carry provisions there to keep them a single year? (if left with only one year's supply, many of them would starve to death.) It cannot be done for \$250.00 each. At that sum it would amount to eleven hundred and twenty-five millions of dollars. Where will we get the money? Our people must be taxed to raise it. This would be half as large a sum as the above estimate of the value of the negroes. If the Southern States had it to raise Georgia's part would be over \$75,000,000, which added to the part of the amount to be paid to owners for the negroes, would amount to \$225,000,000; which must be raised by taxing the people, or loading them with a debt which would virtually enslave our whole people for generations to come. It must be remembered that we own no territory in Africa large enough to colonize 4,500,000 people. This too must be bought at a very heavy cost. The Northern people would not consent to be taxed to raise these enormous sums, either to pay for the negroes, or to pay for sending them to Africa, or to pay for land upon which to colonize them; as they do not wish to do either. They wish to take them from their owners without pay, and set them free, and let them remain among us. Many people at the North, say that negroes are our fit associates; that they shall be set free, and remain among us—intermarrying with our children, and enjoying equal privileges with us. But suppose we were over the difficulty of paying the owners for the negroes, and they were taken from their masters without pay, and set free and left among us, (which is the ultimate aim of the Black Republicans,) what would be the effect upon our society? We should still have rich men and

poor men. But few of our slave owners have invested all they have in negroes. Take their negroes from them unjustly, and they will many of them still be more wealthy than their neighbors. If all were left for a time with equal wealth, every person who has noticed man and society knows that, in a few years, some would grow rich and others poor. This has always been the case, and always will be. If we had no negroes, the rich would still be in a better condition to take care of themselves than the poor. They would still seek the most profitable and secure investment for their capital. What would this be? The answer suggests itself to every mind: it would be land. The wealthy would soon buy all the lands of the South worth cultivating. Then what? The poor would all become tenants, as they are in England, the New England States, and all old countries where slavery does not exist. But I must not lose sight of the 4,500,000 free negroes to be turned loose among us. They, too, must become tenants, with the poor white people for they would not be able to own lands. A large proportion of them would spend their time in idleness and vice, and would live by stealing, robbing and plundering. Probably one fourth of the whole number would have to be maintained in our penitentiary, prisons, and poor houses. Our people, poor and rich, must be taxed to pay the expense of imprisoning and punishing them for crime. This would be a very heavy burden. But suppose three fourths of the whole number would work for a living. They would have to begin the world miserably poor, with neither land, money nor provisions. They must therefore become day laborers for their old masters, or such others as would employ them. In this capacity they would at once come in competition with the poor white laborers. Men of capital would see this, and fix the price of labor accordingly. The negro has only been accustomed to receive his victuals and clothes for his labor. Few of them, if free, would expect anything more. It would therefore be easy to employ them at a sum sufficient to supply only the actual necessities of life. The poor white man would then go to the wealthy land-owner and say, I wish employment. Hire me to work. I have a wife and children who must have bread. The land-owner would offer probably twenty cents per day. The laborer would say, I cannot support my family on that sum. The landlord replies, That is not my business. I am sorry for you, but

I must look to my own interest. The black man who lives on my land has as strong an arm, and as heavy muscles as you have, and can do as much labor. He works for me at that rate, you must work for the same price, or I cannot employ you. The negro comes into competition with the white man and fixes the price of his labor, and he must take it or get no employment.

Again, the poor white man wishes to rent land from the wealthy landlord—this landlord asks him half the crop of common upland or two thirds or even three fourths, for the best bottom land. The poor man says this seems very hard. I cannot make a decent support for my family at these rates. The landlord replies, here are negroes all around me anxious to take it at these rates; I can let you have it for no less. The negro therefore, comes into competition with the poor white man, when he seeks to rent land on which to make his bread, or a shelter to protect his wife and his little ones, from the cold and from the rain; and when he seeks employment as a day laborer. In every such case if the negro will do the work the cheapest, he must be preferred. It is sickening to contemplate the miseries of our poor white people under these circumstances. They now get higher wages for their labor than the poor of any other country on the globe. Most of them are land owners, and they are now respected. They are in no sense placed down upon a level with the negro. They are a superior race, and they feel and know it. Abolish slavery, and you make the negroes their equals, legally and socially (not naturally, for no human law can change God's law) and you very soon make them all tenants, and reduce their wages for daily labor to the smallest pittance that will sustain life. Then the negro and the white man, and their families, must labor in the field together as equals. Their children must go to the same poor school together, if they are educated at all. They must go to church as equals; enter the Courts of justice as equals, sue and be sued as equals, sit on juries together as equals, have the right to give evidence in Court as equals, stand side by side in our military corps as equals, enter each others' houses in social intercourse as equals; and very soon their children must marry together as equals. May our kind Heavenly Father avert the evil, and deliver the poor from such a fate. So soon as the slaves were at liberty, thousands of them would leave the cotton and rice fields in the lower parts of our State, and make their

way to the healthier climate in the mountain region. We should have them plundering and stealing, robbing and killing, in all the lovely vallies of the mountains. This I can never consent to see. The mountains contain the place of my nativity, the home of my manhood, and the theatre of most of the acts of my life; and I can never forget the condition and interest of the people who reside there. It is true, the people there are generally poor; but they are brave, honest, patriotic, and pure hearted. Some who do not know them, have doubted their capacity to understand these questions, and their patriotism and valor to defend their rights when invaded. I know them well, and I know that no greater mistake could be made. They love the Union of our fathers, and would never consent to dissolve it so long as the constitution is not violated, and so long as it protects their rights; but they love liberty and justice more; and they will never consent to submit to abolition rule, and permit the evils to come upon them, which must result from a continuance in the Union when the government is in the hands of our enemies, who will use all its power for our destruction. When it becomes necessary to defend our rights against so foul a domination, I would call upon the mountain boys as well as the people of the lowlands, and they would come down like an avalanche and swarm around the flag of Georgia with a resolution that would strike terror into the ranks of the abolition cohorts of the North. Wealth is timid, and wealthy men may cry for peace, and submit to wrong for fear they may lose their money: but the poor, honest laborers of Georgia, can never consent to see slavery abolished, and submit to all the taxation, vassalage, low wages and downright degradation, which must follow. They will never take the negro's place; God forbid.

I know that some contemptible demagogues have attempted to deceive them by appealing to their prejudices, and asking them what interest they have in maintaining the rights of the wealthy slaveholder. They cannot be deceived in this way. They know that the government of our State protects their lives, their families and their property; and that every dollar the wealthy slaveholder has, may be taken by the government of the State, if need be, to protect the rights and liberties of all. One man, in a large neighborhood, has a mill. Not one in fifty has a mill. What would be thought of the public speaker who would appeal to

the fifty, and ask them what interest they have in defending their neighbor's mill, if an abolition mob were trying to burn it down? Another has a store. Not one in fifty has a store. Who would say the fifty should not help the one if an invader is about to burn his store? Another has a blacksmith shop. Not one in fifty has a blacksmith shop. Shall the shop be destroyed by the common enemy and no one protect the owner because no one near, has the same peculiar kind of property? It may be that I have no horse, and you have a horse; or that I have a cow, and you have no cow. In such case, if our rights of property are assailed by a common enemy, shall we not help each other? Or I have a wife and children, and a house, and another has neither wife and children, nor house. Will he, therefore, stand by and see my house burned and my wife and children butchered, because he has none? The slaveholder has honestly invested the money, which it has cost him years of toil to make, in slaves, which are guaranteed to him by the laws of our State. The common enemy of the South seeks to take the property from him. Shall all who do not own slaves, stand by and permit it to be done? If so, they have no right to call on the slaveholder, by taxation, or otherwise, to help protect their property or their liberties. Such a doctrine is monstrous; and he who would advance it, deserves to be rode upon the sharpest edge of one of Lincoln's rails. The doctrine strikes at the very foundation of society, and if carried out, would destroy all property, and all protection to life, liberty and happiness.

The present is a critical time with the people of the South. We all, poor and rich, have a common interest, a common destiny. It is no time to be wrangling about old party strifes. Our common enemy, the Black Republican party, is united and triumphant. Let us all unite. If we cannot all see alike, let us have charity enough towards each other, to admit that all are equally patriotic in their efforts to advance the common cause. My honest convictions are, that we can never again live in peace with the Northern abolitionists, unless we can have new constitutional guarantees, which will secure our equal rights in the Territories, and effectually stop the discussion of the slavery question in Congress, and secure the rendition of fugitive slaves. These guarantees I do not believe the people of the Northern States will ever give, while we remain together in the Union. Their

opinion is, that we will always compromise away a portion of our rights, and submit, for the sake of peace. If the Cotton States would all secede from the Union before the inauguration of Mr. Lincoln, this might possibly lead to a Convention of all the States, which might terminate in a reunion with the new constitutional guarantees necessary for our protection. If the Northern States then failed to give these guarantees, there can be no doubt that Virginia, Maryland, North Carolina, Delaware, Kentucky, Missouri, and Tennessee would unite with the Cotton States in a Southern Confederacy and we should form a Republic in which, under the old Constitution of our fathers, our people could live in security and peace. I know that many of our people honestly believe that it would be best to wait for these border slave States to go out with us. If we wait for this, we shall *submit*; for some of those States will not consent to go, and the North will then consent to give us no new guarantees of peace. They will say that we have again blustered and submitted, as we always do.

In my late message to the General Assembly, I recommended the enactment of retaliatory laws against these Northern States which have nullified the fugitive slave law. I think those laws should still be enacted. They would have been equally applicable had either of the other candidates for the Presidency been successful. Now that Mr. Lincoln is successful, they should be upon our statute book, so long as we remain in the Union. There can no longer be a reasonable doubt, that the gallant State of South Carolina will secede from the Union very soon after her Convention meets. The States of Florida, Alabama and Mississippi will follow in quick succession. While our Convention is in session, we shall probably be surrounded on every side but one, with free and independent States out of the Union. With these States, we have a common interest. Thus surrounded, shall Georgia remain under abolition rule, and refuse to unite with her sister States around her? I trust not. If so, we forfeit all claim to our proud title of Empire State of the South. Why remain? Will the Northern States repeal their personal liberty bills and do us justice? No. The Legislature of one of the nullifying States (Vermont) has just adjourned. A bill has been introduced for the repeal of those unconstitutional and offensive laws. The question has been discussed, and it is reported that the House in

which the bill was introduced, has refused to pass the repealing law, by a vote of over two-thirds. This action has been had with full knowledge of the state of things now existing in the South, and shows a deliberate determination not to do us justice. Is further notice to Vermont necessary? I am aware that the fears of some have been appealed to, and they have been told that if we secede, the United States Government will attempt to coerce us back into the Union, and we shall have war.

The President in his late message, while he denies our Constitutional right to secede, admits that the General Government has no Constitutional right to coerce us back into the Union, if we do secede. Secession is not likely, therefore, to involve us in war. Submission may. When the other States around us secede, if we remain in the Union, thousands of our people will leave our State, and it is feared that the standard of revolution and rebellion may be raised among us, which would at once involve us in civil war among ourselves. If we must fight, in the name of all that is sacred, let us fight our common enemy, and not fight each other.

In my opinion, our people should send their wisest and best men to the Convention, without regard to party distinctions, and should intrust much to their good judgment and sound discretion, when they meet. They may, then, have new lights before them, which we do not now have; and they should be left free to act upon them.

My fervent prayer is, that the God of our fathers may inspire the Convention with wisdom, and so direct their counsels as to protect our rights and preserve our liberties to the latest generation.

I am, gentlemen, with great respect,
Your fellow citizen,
JOSEPH E. BROWN

*Benjamin F. Wade:
from Remarks in the U.S. Senate*

December 17, 1860

Benjamin Wade of Ohio entered the Senate as a Whig in 1851 and was subsequently elected as a Republican. He made these remarks during a debate over whether the Senate should appoint a special committee to address the sectional crisis. After engaging in an extended exchange with several Southern senators over the enforcement of the fugitive slave law, Wade defended the 1860 Republican platform and discussed the possibility of compromise before turning to the subject of secession.

THERE IS one other subject about which I ought to say something. On that side of the Chamber, you claim the constitutional right, if I understand you, to secede from the Government at pleasure, and set up an adverse Government of your own; that one State, or any number of States, have a perfect constitutional right to do it. Sir, I can find no warrant in the Constitution for any doctrine like that. In my judgment, it would be subversive of all constitutional obligation. If this is so, we really have not now, and never have had, a Government; for that certainly is no Government of which a State can do just as it pleases, any more than it would be of an individual. How can a man be said to be governed by law, if he will obey the law or not just as he sees fit? It puts you out of the pale of Government, and reduces this Union of ours, of which we have all boasted so much, to a mere conglomeration of States, to be held at the will of any capricious member of it. As to South Carolina, I will say that she is a small State; and probably, if she were sunk by an earthquake to-day, we would hardly ever find it out, except by the unwonted harmony that might prevail in this Chamber. [Laughter.] But I think she is

unwise. I would be willing that she should go her own gait, provided we could do it without an example fatal to all government; but standing here in the highest council of the nation, my own wishes, if I had any, must be under the control of my constitutional duty.

I do not see how any man can contend that a State can go out of this Union at pleasure, though I do not propose now to argue that question, because that has been done by men infinitely more able to argue it than I am. When it was raised some thirty years ago, and challenged the investigation of the best minds of this nation of all parties, it received a verdict that I supposed had put it at rest forever. General Jackson, with all the eminent men that surrounded him in his Cabinet, and in the councils of the nation, with hardly any exception, except Mr. Calhoun, held that the doctrine was a delusion, not to be found in the Constitution of the United States; and not only so, but utterly destructive of all Governments. Mr. Calhoun held the contrary. Mr. Webster, in his great controversy with Mr. Hayne upon that subject, was supposed to have overthrown him, even upon nullification, so utterly, that it was believed at the time that the doctrine could never arise or sprout up again. But here it is today in full bloom and glory: a State has a right to secede. Mr. Calhoun did not hold so. He held that a State had a right to nullify a law of Congress that they believed to be unconstitutional. He took that distinction between the power of a State to nullify a law of Congress and secession. Grounding herself upon the resolutions of 1798-99, he held that a State, in her sovereign capacity, judging in the last resort as to whether a law was warranted by the Constitution or not, must be the sole judge of the infraction of the Constitution by the enactment of a law, and also of the mode of remedy. In that, he hardly had a second at that period. But when you come to the doctrine of secession, he himself says that that is not a constitutional remedy. He did not treat it as such. Nay, sir, he goes much further than the President of the United States has gone in his message, in which he declares that the United States has no power to make war upon a seceding State. Mr. Calhoun says we undoubtedly have that power. One remedy he calls peaceable and constitutional, and the other not. I have not the book with me; I intended to have

brought it, but forgot it; but you will find this doctrine laid down in his famous letter to Governor Hamilton, taking and working out the distinction between peaceable nullification and secession, that puts an end to all the relationship between the General Government and the State, and enables the General Government, if they see fit, to declare war upon such a State. Therefore I take it that a State has no constitutional right to go out of this Government.

I acknowledge, to the fullest extent, the right of revolution, if you may call it a right, and the destruction of the Government under which we live, if we are discontented with it, and on its ruins to erect another more in accordance with our wishes. I believe nobody at this day denies the right; but they that undertake it, undertake it with this hazard: if they are successful, then all is right, and they are heroes; if they are defeated, they are rebels. That is the character of all revolution: if successful, of course it is well; if unsuccessful, then the Government from which they have rebelled treats them as traitors.

I do not say this because I apprehend that any party intends to make war upon a seceding State. I only assert their right from the nature of the act, if they see fit to do so; but I would not advise nor counsel it. I should be very tender of the rights of a people, if I had full power over them, who are about to destroy a Government which they deliberately come to the conclusion they cannot live under; but I am persuaded that the necessities of our position compel us to take a more austere ground, and hold that if a State secedes, although we will not make war upon her, we cannot recognize her right to be out of the Union, and she is not out until she gains the consent of the Union itself; and that the Chief Magistrate of the nation, be he who he may, will find under the Constitution of the United States that it is his sworn duty to execute the law in every part and parcel of this Government; that he cannot be released from that obligation; for there is nothing in the Constitution of the United States that would warrant him in saying that a single star has fallen from this galaxy of stars in the Confederacy. He is sworn not to know that a State has seceded, or pay the least respect to their resolutions that claim they have. What follows? Not that we would make war upon her, but we should have to exercise every Federal right over her if we had the

power; and the most important of these would be the collection of the revenues. There are many rights that the Federal Government exercises over the States for the peculiar benefit of the people there, which, if they did not want, they could dispense with. If they did not want the mails carried there, the President might abolish the offices, and cease to carry their mails. They might forego any such duty peculiarly for the benefit of the people. They might not elect their officers and send them here. It is a privilege they have; but we cannot force them to do it. They have the right under the Constitution to be represented upon equal terms with any other State; but if they see fit to forego that right, and do not claim it, it is not incumbent upon the President to endeavor to force them to do an act of that kind.

But when you come to those duties which impose obligations upon them, in common with the other members of the Confederacy, he cannot be released from his duty. Therefore, it will be incumbent on the Chief Magistrate to proceed to collect the revenue of ships entering their ports, precisely in the same way and to the same extent that he does now in every other State of the Union. We cannot release him from that obligation. The Constitution, in thunder tones, demands that he shall do it alike in the ports of every State. What follows? Why, sir, if he shuts up the ports of entry so that a ship cannot discharge her cargo there or get papers for another voyage, then ships will cease to trade; or, if he undertakes to blockade her, and thus collect it, she has not gained her independence by secession. What must she do? If she is contented to live in this equivocal state all would be well, perhaps; but she could not live there. No people in the world could live in that condition. What will they do? They must take the initiative and declare war upon the United States; and the moment that they levy war force must be met by force; and they must, therefore, hew out their independence by violence and war. There is no other way under the Constitution, that I know of, whereby a Chief Magistrate of any politics could be released from this duty. If this State, though seceding, should declare war against the United States, I do not suppose there is a lawyer in this body but what would say that the act of levying war is treason against the United States. That is where it results. We might just as well look the matter right in the face.

The Senator from Texas says—it is not exactly his language—we will force you to an ignominious treaty up in Faneuil Hall. Well, sir, you may. We know you are brave; we understand your prowess; we want no fight with you; but, nevertheless, if you drive us to that necessity, we must use all the powers of this Government to maintain it intact in its integrity. If we are overthrown, we but share the fate of a thousand other Governments that have been subverted. If you are the weakest, then you must go to the wall; and that is all there is about it. That is the condition in which we stand, provided a State sets herself up in opposition to the General Government.

I say that is the way it seems to me, as a lawyer. I see no power in the Constitution to release a Senator from this position. Sir, if there was any other, if there was an absolute right of secession in the Constitution of the United States when we stepped up there to take our oath of office, why was there not an exception in that oath? Why did it not run “that we would support the Constitution of the United States unless our State shall secede before our term was out?” Sir, there is no such immunity. There is no way by which this can be done that I can conceive of, except it is standing upon the Constitution of the United States, demanding equal justice for all, and vindicating the old flag of the Union. We must maintain it, unless we are cloven down by superior force.

Well, sir, it may happen that you can make your way out of the Union, and that, by levying war upon the Government, you may vindicate your right to independence. If you should do so, I have a policy in my mind. No man would regret more than myself that any portion of the people of these United States should think themselves impelled, by grievances or anything else, to depart out of this Union, and raise a foreign flag and a hand against the General Government. If there was any just cause on God’s earth that I could see that was within my reach, of honorable release from any such pretended grievance, they should have it; but they set forth none; I can see none. It is all a matter of prejudice, superinduced unfortunately, I believe, as I intimated before, more because you have listened to the enemies of the Republican party and what they said of us, while, from your intolerance, you have shut out all light as to what our real principles are. We have been called

and branded in the North and in the South and everywhere else, as John Brown men, as men hostile to your institutions, as meditating an attack upon your institutions in your own States—a thing that no Republican ever dreamed of or ever thought of, but has protested against as often as the question has been up; but your people believe it. No doubt they believe it because of the terrible excitement and reign of terror that prevails there. No doubt they think so, but it arises from false information, or the want of information—that is all. Their prejudices have been appealed to until they have become uncontrolled and uncontrollable.

Well, sir, if it shall be so; if that “glorious Union,” as we all call it, under which the Government has so long lived and prospered, is now about to come to a final end, as perhaps it may, I have been looking around to see what policy we should adopt; and through that gloom which has been mentioned on the other side, if you will have it so, I still see a glorious future for those who stand by the old flag of the nation. There lie the fair fields of Mexico all before us. The people there are prejudiced against you. They fear you intend to overrun and enslave them. You are a slavery propaganda, and you are fillibusters. That has raised a violent antagonism between you and them. But, sir, if we were once released from all obligation to this institution, in six months they would invite us to take a protectorate over them. They owe England a large debt, and she has been coaxing and inviting us to take the protectorate of that nation. They will aid us in it; and I say to the commercial men of the North, if you go along with me, and adopt this policy, if we must come to this, you will be seven-fold indemnified by the trade and commerce of that country for what you lose by the secession. Talk about eating ice and granite in the North! Why, sir, Great Britain now carries on a commerce with Mexico to the amount of nearly a hundred million dollars. How much of it do we get? Only about eight million. Why so? Because, by our treatment of Mexico, we have led them to fear and to hate us; and they have been compelled, by our illiberal policy, to place themselves under the shadow of a stronger nation for their own protection.

The Senator from Illinois [Mr. DOUGLAS] and my colleague [Mr. PUGH] have said that we Black Republicans were advocates

of negro equality, and that we wanted to build up a black government. Sir, it will be one of the most blessed ideas of the times, if it shall come to this, that we will make inducements for every free black among us to find his home in a more congenial climate in Central America or in Lower Mexico, and we will be divested of every one of them; and then, endowed with the splendid domain that we shall get, we will adopt a homestead policy, and we will invite the poor, the destitute, industrious white man from every clime under heaven, to come in there and make his fortune. So, sir, we will build up a nation, renovated by this process, of white laboring men. You may build yours up on compulsory servile labor, and the two will flourish side by side; and we shall very soon see whether your principles, or that state of society, or ours, is the most prosperous or vigorous. I might say, sir, that, divested of this institution, who doubts that the provinces of Canada would knock at our doors in a day? Therefore, my friends, we have all the elements for building up an empire—a Republic, founded on the great principles of the Declaration of Independence, that shall be more magnificent, more powerful, and more just than this world has ever seen at any other period. I do not know that I should have a single second for this policy; but it is a policy that occurs to me, and it reconciles me in some measure to the threatened loss or secession of these States.

But, sir, I am for maintaining the Union of these States. I will sacrifice everything but honor to maintain it. That glorious old flag of ours, by any act of mine, shall never cease to wave over the integrity of this Union as it is. But if they will not have it so, in this new, renovated Government of which I have spoken, the 4th of July, with all its glorious memories, will never be repealed. The old flag of 1776 will be in our hands, and shall float over this nation forever; and this Capitol, that some gentlemen said would be reserved for the southern republic, shall still be the Capitol. It was laid out by Washington; it was consecrated by him; and the old flag that he vindicated in the Revolution shall still float from the Capitol. [Applause in the galleries.]

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Sergeant-at-Arms will take proper measures to preserve order in the gallery or clear it.

Mr. WADE. I say, sir, I stand by the Union of these States. Washington and his compatriots fought for that good old flag.

It shall never be hauled down, but shall be the glory of the Government to which I belong, as long as my life shall continue. To maintain it, Washington and his compatriots fought for liberty and the rights of man. And here I will add that my own father, although but a humble soldier, fought in the same great cause, and went through hardships and privations sevenfold worse than death, in order to bequeath it to his children. It is my inheritance. It was my protector in infancy, and the pride and glory of my riper years; and, Mr. President, although it may be assailed by traitors on every side, by the grace of God, under its shadow I will die.

CHARLESTON, DECEMBER 1860

*South Carolina Declaration
of the Causes of Secession*

December 24, 1860

On December 20, 1860, South Carolina became the first state to break away from the Union when its convention approved an ordinance of secession, 169-0. Four days later the convention approved the declaration that follows, as well as an address calling for the formation of a "Confederacy of Slaveholding States."

DECLARATION OF THE IMMEDIATE CAUSES
WHICH INDUCE AND JUSTIFY THE SECESSION OF
SOUTH CAROLINA FROM THE FEDERAL UNION.

The People of the State of South Carolina, in Convention assembled, on the 26th day of April, A. D., 1852, declared that the frequent violations of the Constitution of the United States, by the Federal Government, and its encroachments upon the reserved rights of the States, fully justified this State in then withdrawing from the Federal Union; but in deference to the opinions and wishes of the other slaveholding States, she forbore at that time to exercise this right. Since that time, these encroachments have continued to increase, and further forbearance ceases to be a virtue.

And now the State of South Carolina having resumed her separate and equal place among nations, deems it due to herself, to the remaining United States of America, and to the nations of the world, that she should declare the immediate causes which have led to this act.

In the year 1765, that portion of the British Empire embracing Great Britain, undertook to make laws for the government of that portion composed of the thirteen American Colonies. A struggle for the right of self-government ensued, which resulted, on the 4th of July, 1776, in a Declaration, by the

Colonies, "that they are, and of right ought to be, FREE AND INDEPENDENT STATES; and that, as free and independent States, they have 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."

They further solemnly declared that whenever any "form of government becomes destructive of the ends for which it was established, it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it, and to institute a new government." Deeming the Government of Great Britain to have become destructive of these ends, they declared that the Colonies "are absolved from all allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain is, and ought to be, totally dissolved."

In pursuance of this Declaration of Independence, each of the thirteen States proceeded to exercise its separate sovereignty; adopted for itself a Constitution, and appointed officers for the administration of government in all its departments—Legislative, Executive and Judicial. For purposes of defence, they united their arms and their counsels; and, in 1778, they entered into a League known as the Articles of Confederation, whereby they agreed to entrust the administration of their external relations to a common agent, known as the Congress of the United States, expressly declaring, in the first Article "that each State retains its sovereignty, freedom and independence, and every power, jurisdiction and right which is not, by this Confederation, expressly delegated to the United States in Congress assembled."

Under this Confederation the war of the Revolution was carried on, and on the 8d September, 1783, the contest ended, and a definite Treaty was signed by Great Britain, in which she acknowledged the independence of the Colonies in the following terms:

"ARTICLE I.—His Britannic Majesty acknowledges the said United States, viz: New Hampshire, Massachusetts Bay, Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia, to be FREE, SOVEREIGN AND INDEPENDENT STATES; that he treats with them as such; and for himself, his heirs and successors,

relinquishes all claims to the government, propriety and territorial rights of the same and every part thereof.”

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. And concurrent with the establishment of these principles, was the fact, that each Colony became and was recognized by the mother Country as a FREE, SOVEREIGN AND INDEPENDENT STATE.

In 1787, Deputies were appointed by the States to revise the Articles of Confederation, and on 17th September, 1787, these Deputies recommended, for the adoption of the States, the Articles of Union, known as the Constitution of the United States.

The parties to whom this Constitution was submitted, were the several sovereign States; they were to agree or disagree, and when nine of them agreed the compact was to take effect among those concurring; and the General Government, as the common agent, was then to be invested with their authority.

If only nine of the thirteen States had concurred, the other four would have remained as they then were—separate, sovereign States, independent of any of the provisions of the Constitution. In fact, two of the States did not accede to the Constitution until long after it had gone into operation among the other eleven; and during that interval, they each exercised the functions of an independent nation.

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. On 23d May, 1788, South Carolina, by a Convention of her People, passed an Ordinance assenting to this Constitution, and afterwards altered her own Constitution, to conform herself to the obligations she had undertaken.

Thus was established, by compact between the States, a Government, with defined objects and powers, limited to the

express words of the grant. This limitation left the whole remaining mass of power subject to the clause reserving it to the States or to the people, and rendered unnecessary any specification of reserved rights.

We hold that the Government thus established is subject to the two great principles asserted in the Declaration of Independence; and we hold further, that the mode of its formation subjects it to a third fundamental principle, namely: the law of compact. We maintain that in every compact between two or more parties, the obligation is mutual; that the failure of one of the contracting parties to perform a material part of the agreement, entirely releases the obligation of the other; and that where no arbiter is provided, each party is remitted to his own judgment to determine the fact of failure, with all its consequences.

In the present case, that fact is established with certainty. We assert that fourteen of the States have deliberately refused, for years past, to fulfil 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 great number of the contracting parties held slaves, and they had previously evinced their estimate of the value of such a stipulation by making it a condition in the Ordinance for the government of the territory ceded by Virginia, which now composes the States north of the Ohio River.

The same article of the Constitution stipulates also for rendition by the several States of fugitives from justice from the other States.

The General Government, as the common agent, passed laws to carry into effect these stipulations of the States. For many years these laws were executed. But an increasing hostility on the part of the non-slaveholding States to the institution of

slavery, has led to a disregard of their obligations, and the laws of the General Government have ceased to effect the objects of the Constitution. The States of Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New York, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Wisconsin and Iowa, have enacted laws which either nullify the Acts of Congress or render useless any attempt to execute them. In many of these States the fugitive is discharged from the service or labor claimed, and in none of them has the State Government complied with the stipulation made in the Constitution. The State of New Jersey, at an early day, passed a law in conformity with her constitutional obligation; but the current of anti-slavery feeling has led her more recently to enact laws which render inoperative the remedies provided by her own law and by the laws of Congress. In the State of New York even the right of transit for a slave has been denied by her tribunals; and the States of Ohio and Iowa have refused to surrender to justice fugitives charged with murder, and with inciting servile insurrection in the State of Virginia. Thus the constituted compact has been deliberately broken and disregarded by the non-slaveholding States, and the consequence follows that South Carolina is released from her obligation.

The ends for which this Constitution was framed are declared by itself to be "to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquillity, provide for the common defence, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity."

These ends it endeavored to accomplish by a Federal Government, in which each State was recognized as an equal, and had separate control over its own institutions. The right of property in slaves was recognized by giving to free persons distinct political rights, by giving them the right to represent, and burthening 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 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 assumed 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 the 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.

This sectional combination for the submersion of the Constitution, has been aided in some of the States by elevating to citizenship, persons, who, by the supreme law of the land, are incapable of becoming citizens; and their votes have been used to inaugurate a new policy, hostile to the South, and destructive of its peace and safety.

On the 4th of March next, this party will take possession of the Government. It has announced that the South shall be excluded from the common territory, that the judicial tribunals shall be made sectional, and that a war must be waged against slavery until it shall cease throughout the United States.

The guaranties of the Constitution will then no longer exist; the equal rights of the States will be lost. The slaveholding States will no longer have the power of self-government, or self-protection, and the Federal Government will have become their enemy.

Sectional interest and animosity will deepen the irritation,

and all hope of remedy is rendered vain, by the fact that public opinion at the North has invested a great political error with the sanctions of a more erroneous religious belief.

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.

WASHINGTON, D.C., MARCH 1861

Abraham Lincoln: First Inaugural Address

March 4, 1861

Lincoln began drafting his inaugural address in Springfield in January 1861 and completed it after his arrival in Washington on February 23. The final version incorporated revisions suggested by his Illinois friend, Orville H. Browning, and by William H. Seward. By the time he was inaugurated, seven states in the lower South had voted to secede.

FELLOW CITIZENS of the United States:

In compliance with a custom as old as the government itself, I appear before you to address you briefly, and to take, in your presence, the oath prescribed by the Constitution of the United States, to be taken by the President “before he enters on the execution of his office.”

I do not consider it necessary, at present, for me to discuss those matters of administration about which there is no special anxiety, or excitement.

Apprehension seems to exist among the people of the Southern States, that by the accession of a Republican Administration, their property, and their peace, and personal security, are to be endangered. There has never been any reasonable cause for such apprehension. Indeed, the most ample evidence to the contrary has all the while existed, and been open to their inspection. It is found in nearly all the published speeches of him who now addresses you. I do but quote from one of those speeches when I declare that “I have no purpose, directly or indirectly, to interfere with the institution of slavery in the States where it exists. I believe I have no lawful right to do so, and I have no inclination to do so.” Those who nominated and elected me did so with full knowledge that I had made this, and many similar declarations, and had never recanted them. And more than this, they placed in the platform, for my acceptance, and as a law to

themselves, and to me, the clear and emphatic resolution which I now read:

“*Resolved*, 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 power on which the perfection and endurance of our political fabric depend; 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.”

I now reiterate these sentiments: and in doing so, I only press upon the public attention the most conclusive evidence of which the case is susceptible, that the property, peace and security of no section are to be in anywise endangered by the now incoming Administration. I add too, that all the protection which, consistently with the Constitution and the laws, can be given, will be cheerfully given to all the States when lawfully demanded, for whatever cause—as cheerfully to one section, as to another.

There is much controversy about the delivering up of fugitives from service or labor. The clause I now read is as plainly written in the Constitution as any other of its provisions:

“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.”

It is scarcely questioned that this provision was intended by those who made it, for the reclaiming of what we call fugitive slaves; and the intention of the law-giver is the law. All members of Congress swear their support to the whole Constitution—to this provision as much as to any other. To the proposition, then, that slaves whose cases come within the terms of this clause, “shall be delivered up,” their oaths are unanimous. Now, if they would make the effort in good temper, could they not, with nearly equal unanimity, frame and pass a law, by means of which to keep good that unanimous oath?

There is some difference of opinion whether this clause should be enforced by national or by state authority; but surely that difference is not a very material one. If the slave is to be

surrendered, it can be of but little consequence to him, or to others, by which authority it is done. And should any one, in any case, be content that his oath shall go unkept, on a merely unsubstantial controversy as to *how* it shall be kept?

Again, in any law upon this subject, ought not all the safeguards of liberty known in civilized and humane jurisprudence to be introduced, so that a free man be not, in any case, surrendered as a slave? And might it not be well, at the same time, to provide by law for the enforcement of that clause in the Constitution which guarranties that "The citizens of each State shall be entitled to all privileges and immunities of citizens in the several States?"

I take the official oath to-day, with no mental reservations, and with no purpose to construe the Constitution or laws, by any hypercritical rules. And while I do not choose now to specify particular acts of Congress as proper to be enforced, I do suggest, that it will be much safer for all, both in official and private stations, to conform to, and abide by, all those acts which stand unrepealed, than to violate any of them, trusting to find impunity in having them held to be unconstitutional.

It is seventy-two years since the first inauguration of a President under our national Constitution. During that period fifteen different and greatly distinguished citizens, have, in succession, administered the executive branch of the government. They have conducted it through many perils; and, generally, with great success. Yet, with all this scope for precedent, I now enter upon the same task for the brief constitutional term of four years, under great and peculiar difficulty. A disruption of the Federal Union heretofore only menaced, is now formidably attempted.

I hold, that in contemplation of universal law, and of the Constitution, the Union of these States is perpetual. Perpetuity is implied, if not expressed, in the fundamental law of all national governments. It is safe to assert that no government proper, ever had a provision in its organic law for its own termination. Continue to execute all the express provisions of our national Constitution, and the Union will endure forever—it being impossible to destroy it, except by some action not provided for in the instrument itself.

Again, if the United States be not a government proper, but

an association of States in the nature of contract merely, can it, as a contract, be peaceably unmade, by less than all the parties who made it? One party to a contract may violate it—break it, so to speak; but does it not require all to lawfully rescind it?

Descending from these general principles, we find the proposition that, in legal contemplation, the Union is perpetual, confirmed by the history of the Union itself. The Union is much older than the Constitution. It was formed in fact, by the Articles of Association in 1774. It was matured and continued by the Declaration of Independence in 1776. It was further matured and the faith of all the then thirteen States expressly plighted and engaged that it should be perpetual, by the Articles of Confederation in 1778. And finally, in 1787, one of the declared objects for ordaining and establishing the Constitution, was “*to form a more perfect union.*”

But if destruction of the Union, by one, or by a part only, of the States, be lawfully possible, the Union is *less* perfect than before the Constitution, having lost the vital element of perpetuity.

It follows from these views that no State, upon its own mere motion, can lawfully get out of the Union,—that *resolves* and *ordinances* to that effect are legally void; and that acts of violence, within any State or States, against the authority of the United States, are insurrectionary or revolutionary, according to circumstances.

I therefore consider that, in view of the Constitution and the laws, the Union is unbroken; and, to the extent of my ability, I shall take care, as the Constitution itself expressly enjoins upon me, that the laws of the Union be faithfully executed in all the States. Doing this I deem to be only a simple duty on my part; and I shall perform it, so far as practicable, unless my rightful masters, the American people, shall withhold the requisite means, or, in some authoritative manner, direct the contrary. I trust this will not be regarded as a menace, but only as the declared purpose of the Union that it *will* constitutionally defend, and maintain itself.

In doing this there needs to be no bloodshed or violence; and there shall be none, unless it be forced upon the national authority. The power confided to me, will be used to hold, occupy, and possess the property, and places belonging to the

government, and to collect the duties and imposts; but beyond what may be necessary for these objects, there will be no invasion—no using of force against, or among the people anywhere. Where hostility to the United States, in any interior locality, shall be so great and so universal, as to prevent competent resident citizens from holding the Federal offices, there will be no attempt to force obnoxious strangers among the people for that object. While the strict legal right may exist in the government to enforce the exercise of these offices, the attempt to do so would be so irritating, and so nearly impracticable with all, that I deem it better to forego, for the time, the uses of such offices.

The mails, unless repelled, will continue to be furnished in all parts of the Union. So far as possible, the people everywhere shall have that sense of perfect security which is most favorable to calm thought and reflection. The course here indicated will be followed, unless current events, and experience, shall show a modification, or change, to be proper; and in every case and exigency, my best discretion will be exercised, according to circumstances actually existing, and with a view and a hope of a peaceful solution of the national troubles, and the restoration of fraternal sympathies and affections.

That there are persons in one section, or another who seek to destroy the Union at all events, and are glad of any pretext to do it, I will neither affirm or deny; but if there be such, I need address no word to them. To those, however, who really love the Union, may I not speak?

Before entering upon so grave a matter as the destruction of our national fabric, with all its benefits, its memories, and its hopes, would it not be wise to ascertain precisely why we do it? Will you hazard so desperate a step, while there is any possibility that any portion of the ills you fly from, have no real existence? Will you, while the certain ills you fly to, are greater than all the real ones you fly from? Will you risk the commission of so fearful a mistake?

All profess to be content in the Union, if all constitutional rights can be maintained. Is it true, then, that any right, plainly written in the Constitution, has been denied? I think not. Happily the human mind is so constituted, that no party can reach to the audacity of doing this. Think, if you can, of a single

instance in which a plainly written provision of the Constitution has ever been denied. If, by the mere force of numbers, a majority should deprive a minority of any clearly written constitutional right, it might, in a moral point of view, justify revolution—certainly would, if such right were a vital one. But such is not our case. All the vital rights of minorities, and of individuals, are so plainly assured to them, by affirmations and negations, guaranties and prohibitions, in the Constitution, that controversies never arise concerning them. But no organic law can ever be framed with a provision specifically applicable to every question which may occur in practical administration. No foresight can anticipate, nor any document of reasonable length contain express provisions for all possible questions. Shall fugitives from labor be surrendered by national or by State authority? The Constitution does not expressly say. *May* Congress prohibit slavery in the territories? The Constitution does not expressly say. *Must* Congress protect slavery in the territories? The Constitution does not expressly say.

From questions of this class spring all our constitutional controversies, and we divide upon them into majorities and minorities. If the minority will not acquiesce, the majority must, or the government must cease. There is no other alternative; for continuing the government, is acquiescence on one side or the other. If a minority, in such case, will secede rather than acquiesce, they make a precedent which, in turn, will divide and ruin them; for a minority of their own will secede from them, whenever a majority refuses to be controlled by such minority. For instance, why may not any portion of a new confederacy, a year or two hence, arbitrarily secede again, precisely as portions of the present Union now claim to secede from it. All who cherish disunion sentiments, are now being educated to the exact temper of doing this. Is there such perfect identity of interests among the States to compose a new Union, as to produce harmony only, and prevent renewed secession?

Plainly, the central idea of secession, is the essence of anarchy. A majority, held in restraint by constitutional checks, and limitations, and always changing easily, with deliberate changes of popular opinions and sentiments, is the only true sovereign of a free people. Whoever rejects it, does, of necessity, fly to

anarchy or to despotism. Unanimity is impossible; the rule of a minority, as a permanent arrangement, is wholly inadmissible; so that, rejecting the majority principle, anarchy, or despotism in some form, is all that is left.

I do not forget the position assumed by some, that constitutional questions are to be decided by the Supreme Court; nor do I deny that such decisions must be binding in any case, upon the parties to a suit, as to the object of that suit, while they are also entitled to very high respect and consideration, in all parallel cases, by all other departments of the government. And while it is obviously possible that such decision may be erroneous in any given case, still the evil effect following it, being limited to that particular case, with the chance that it may be over-ruled, and never become a precedent for other cases, can better be borne than could the evils of a different practice. At the same time the candid citizen must confess that if the policy of the government, upon vital questions, affecting the whole people, is to be irrevocably fixed by decisions of the Supreme Court, the instant they are made, in ordinary litigation between parties, in personal actions, the people will have ceased, to be their own rulers, having, to that extent, practically resigned their government, into the hands of that eminent tribunal. Nor is there, in this view, any assault upon the court, or the judges. It is a duty, from which they may not shrink, to decide cases properly brought before them; and it is no fault of theirs, if others seek to turn their decisions to political purposes.

One section of our country believes slavery is *right*, and ought to be extended, while the other believes it is *wrong*, and ought not to be extended. This is the only substantial dispute. The fugitive slave clause of the Constitution, and the law for the suppression of the foreign slave trade, are each as well enforced, perhaps, as any law can ever be in a community where the moral sense of the people imperfectly supports the law itself. The great body of the people abide by the dry legal obligation in both cases, and a few break over in each. This, I think, cannot be perfectly cured; and it would be worse in both cases *after* the separation of the sections, than before. The foreign slave trade, now imperfectly suppressed, would be ultimately revived without restriction, in one section; while

fugitive slaves, now only partially surrendered, would not be surrendered at all, by the other.

Physically speaking, we cannot separate. We cannot remove our respective sections from each other, nor build an impassable wall between them. A husband and wife may be divorced, and go out of the presence, and beyond the reach of each other; but the different parts of our country cannot do this. They cannot but remain face to face; and intercourse, either amicable or hostile, must continue between them. Is it possible then to make that intercourse more advantageous, or more satisfactory, *after* separation than *before*? Can aliens make treaties easier than friends can make laws? Can treaties be more faithfully enforced between aliens, than laws can among friends? Suppose you go to war, you cannot fight always; and when, after much loss on both sides, and no gain on either, you cease fighting, the identical old questions, as to terms of intercourse, are again upon you.

This country, with its institutions, belongs to the people who inhabit it. Whenever they shall grow weary of the existing government, they can exercise their *constitutional* right of amending it, or their *revolutionary* right to dismember, or overthrow it. I can not be ignorant of the fact that many worthy, and patriotic citizens are desirous of having the national constitution amended. While I make no recommendation of amendments, I fully recognize the rightful authority of the people over the whole subject, to be exercised in either of the modes prescribed in the instrument itself; and I should, under existing circumstances, favor, rather than oppose, a fair opportunity being afforded the people to act upon it.

I will venture to add that, to me, the convention mode seems preferable, in that it allows amendments to originate with the people themselves, instead of only permitting them to take, or reject, propositions, originated by others, not especially chosen for the purpose, and which might not be precisely such, as they would wish to either accept or refuse. I understand a proposed amendment to the Constitution—which amendment, however, I have not seen, has passed Congress, to the effect that the federal government, shall never interfere with the domestic institutions of the States, including that of persons held to service. To avoid misconstruction of

what I have said, I depart from my purpose not to speak of particular amendments, so far as to say that, holding such a provision to now be implied constitutional law, I have no objection to its being made express, and irrevocable.

The Chief Magistrate derives all his authority from the people, and they have conferred none upon him to fix terms for the separation of the States. The people themselves can do this also if they choose; but the executive, as such, has nothing to do with it. His duty is to administer the present government, as it came to his hands, and to transmit it, unimpaired by him, to his successor.

Why should there not be a patient confidence in the ultimate justice of the people? Is there any better, or equal hope, in the world? In our present differences, is either party without faith of being in the right? If the Almighty Ruler of nations, with his eternal truth and justice, be on your side of the North, or on yours of the South, that truth, and that justice, will surely prevail, by the judgment of this great tribunal, the American people.

By the frame of the government under which we live, this same people have wisely given their public servants but little power for mischief; and have, with equal wisdom, provided for the return of that little to their own hands at very short intervals.

While the people retain their virtue, and vigilance, no administration, by any extreme of wickedness or folly, can very seriously injure the government, in the short space of four years.

My countrymen, one and all, think calmly and *well*, upon this whole subject. Nothing valuable can be lost by taking time. If there be an object to *hurry* any of you, in hot haste, to a step which you would never take *deliberately*, that object will be frustrated by taking time; but no good object can be frustrated by it. Such of you as are now dissatisfied, still have the old Constitution unimpaired, and, on the sensitive point, the laws of your own framing under it; while the new administration will have no immediate power, if it would, to change either. If it were admitted that you who are dissatisfied, hold the right side in the dispute, there still is no single good reason for precipitate action. Intelligence, patriotism, Christianity,

and a firm reliance on Him, who has never yet forsaken this favored land, are still competent to adjust, in the best way, all our present difficulty.

In *your* hands, my dissatisfied fellow countrymen, and not in *mine*, is the momentous issue of civil war. The government will not assail *you*. You can have no conflict, without being yourselves the aggressors. *You* have no oath registered in Heaven to destroy the government, while *I* shall have the most solemn one to “preserve, protect and defend” it.

I am loth to close. We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battle-field, and patriot grave, to every living heart and hearthstone, all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.

*Alexander H. Stephens:
from the "Corner-Stone" Speech*

March 21, 1861

A former congressman who had opposed immediate secession in the Georgia convention, Stephens was unanimously elected as the provisional vice-president of the Confederacy in February 1861. The text of his speech at the Savannah Atheneum first appeared in the *Savannah Republican* and was accompanied by a reporter's note stating that it was not "a perfect report, but only such a sketch of the address" that embraced the most important points. Stephens would claim after the war that the printed text of his Savannah speech contained "several glaring errors" and exaggerated the importance of his use of the "corner-stone" image to describe the role of slavery in the Confederacy. In a speech delivered in Atlanta nine days before he spoke at Savannah, Stephens had employed the same metaphor, asserting that the founders of the Confederacy had "solemnly discarded the pestilent heresy of fancy politicians, that all men, all races, were equal, and we had made African *inequality* and subordination, and the *equality* of white men, the chief corner stone of the Southern Republic."

BUT NOT to be tedious in enumerating the numerous changes for the better, allow me to allude to one other—though last, not least. The new constitution 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. [Applause.]

This, our new government, is the first, in the history of the world, based upon this great physical, philosophical, and moral truth. This truth has been slow in the process of its development, like all other truths in the various departments of science. It has been so even amongst us. Many who hear me, perhaps, can recollect well, that this truth was not generally admitted, even within their day. The errors of the past generation still clung to many as late as twenty years ago. 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 ar-

gument fails. I recollect once of having heard a gentleman from one of the northern States, of great power and ability, announce in the House of Representatives, with imposing effect, that we of the South would be compelled, ultimately, to yield upon this subject of slavery, that it was as impossible to war successfully against a principle in politics, as it was in physics or mechanics. That the principle would ultimately prevail. That we, in maintaining slavery as it exists with us, were warring against a principle, a principle founded in nature, the principle of the equality of men. The reply I made to him was, that upon his own grounds, we should, ultimately, succeed, and that he and his associates, in this crusade against our institutions, would ultimately fail. The truth announced, that it was as impossible to war successfully against a principle in politics as it was in physics and mechanics, I admitted; but told him that it was he, and those acting with him, who were warring against a principle. They were attempting to make things equal which the Creator had made unequal.

In the conflict thus far, success has been on our side, complete throughout the length and breadth of the Confederate States. It is upon this, as I have stated, our social fabric is firmly planted; and I cannot permit myself to doubt the ultimate success of a full recognition of this principle throughout the civilized and enlightened world.

As I have stated, the truth of this principle may be slow in development, as all truths are and ever have been, in the various branches of science. It was so with the principles announced by Galileo—it was so with Adam Smith and his principles of political economy. It was so with Harvey, and his theory of the circulation of the blood. It is stated that not a single one of the medical profession, living at the time of the announcement of the truths made by him, admitted them. Now, they are universally acknowledged. May we not, therefore, look with confidence to the ultimate universal acknowledgment of the truths upon which our system rests? It is the first government ever instituted upon the principles in strict conformity to nature, and the ordination of Providence, in furnishing the materials of human society. Many governments have been founded upon the principle of the subordination and serfdom of certain classes of the same race; such were and

are in violation of the laws of nature. Our system commits no such violation of nature's laws. With us, all of the white race, however high or low, rich or poor, are equal in the eye of the law. Not so with the negro. Subordination is his place. He, by nature, or by the curse against Canaan, is fitted for that condition which he occupies in our system. The architect, in the construction of buildings, lays the foundation with the proper material—the granite; then comes the brick or the marble. The substratum of our society is made of the material fitted by nature for it, and by experience we know that it is best, not only for the superior, but for the inferior race, that it should be so. It is, indeed, in conformity with the ordinance of the Creator. It is not for us to inquire into the wisdom of his ordinances, or to question them. For his own purposes, he has made one race to differ from another, as he has made "one star to differ from another star in glory."

The great objects of humanity are best attained when there is conformity to his laws and decrees, in the formation of governments as well as in all things else. Our confederacy is founded upon principles in strict conformity with these laws. This stone which was rejected by the first builders "is become the chief of the corner"—the real "corner-stone"—in our new edifice. [Applause.]

I have been asked, what of the future? It has been apprehended by some that we would have arrayed against us the civilized world. I care not who or how many they may be against us, when we stand upon the eternal principles of truth, *if we are true to ourselves and the principles for which we contend*, we are obliged to, and must triumph. [Immense applause.]

Thousands of people who begin to understand these truths are not yet completely out of the shell; they do not see them in their length and breadth. We hear much of the civilization and christianization of the barbarous tribes of Africa. In my judgment, those ends will never be attained, but by first teaching them the lesson taught to Adam, that "in the sweat of his brow he should eat his bread," [applause,] and teaching them to work, and feed, and clothe themselves.

But to pass on: Some have propounded the inquiry whether it is practicable for us to go on with the confederacy without further accessions? Have we the means and ability to maintain

nationality among the powers of the earth? On this point I would barely say, that as anxiously as we all have been, and are, for the border States, with institutions similar to ours, to join us, still we are abundantly able to maintain our position, even if they should ultimately make up their minds not to cast their destiny with us. That they ultimately will join us—be compelled to do it—is my confident belief; but we can get on very well without them, even if they should not.

Biographical Notes

Edward Bates (September 4, 1793–March 25, 1869) Born Belmont, Virginia, the son of a planter and merchant. Attended Charlotte Hall Academy in Maryland for three years. Served in militia company in 1813 but did not see action. Moved to St. Louis, Missouri, in 1814. Admitted to the bar, 1816. Delegate to the state constitutional convention in 1820. Attorney general of Missouri, 1820–21. Married Julia Coalter in 1823. Served in state house of representatives, 1822–24 and 1834–36, and state senate, 1830–34. U.S. attorney for Missouri, 1824–26. Served in Congress, 1827–29, but was defeated for reelection. Became leader of Whig Party in Missouri. Candidate for 1860 Republican presidential nomination. Served as attorney general in the Lincoln administration, March 1861–November 1864, before resigning. Opposed Radical Reconstruction in Missouri. Died in St. Louis.

Joseph E. Brown (April 15, 1821–November 30, 1894) Born in Pickens District, South Carolina, son of a farmer. Family moved to Union County, Georgia. Attended Calhoun Academy in Anderson District, South Carolina. Taught school and studied law in Canton, Georgia. Admitted to the Georgia bar, 1845. Attended Yale Law School, 1845–46. Married Elizabeth Grisham in 1847. Served in state senate, 1850, and as circuit judge, 1855–57. Won Democratic nomination for governor and defeated American (Know-Nothing) candidate Benjamin Hill in 1857. Governor of Georgia, 1857–65. Supported secession; came into conflict with Jefferson Davis over assertion of state sovereignty and opposition to conscription. Chief justice of the Georgia Supreme Court, 1868–70. President of the Western and Atlanta Railroad, 1870–90. Served as a Democrat in the U.S. Senate, 1880–91. Died in Atlanta.

Frederick Douglass (February 1818–February 20, 1895) Born Frederick Bailey in Talbot County, Maryland, the son of a slave mother and an unknown white man. Worked on farms and in Baltimore shipyards. Escaped to Philadelphia in 1838. Married Anna Murray, a free woman from Maryland, and settled in New Bedford, Massachusetts, where he took the name Douglass. Became a lecturer for the American Anti-Slavery Society, led by William Lloyd Garrison, in 1841. Published *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* (1845). Began publishing *North Star*, first in a series of anti-

slavery newspapers, in Rochester, New York, in 1847. Broke with Garrison and became an ally of Gerrit Smith, who advocated an antislavery interpretation of the Constitution and participation in electoral politics. Published *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855). Advocated emancipation and the enlistment of black soldiers at the outbreak of the Civil War. Met with Abraham Lincoln in Washington in August 1863 and August 1864, and wrote public letter supporting his reelection in September 1864. Continued his advocacy of racial equality and woman's rights after the Civil War. Served as U.S. marshal for the District of Columbia, 1877–81, and as its recorder of deeds, 1881–86. Published *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (1881). After the death of his wife Anna, married Helen Pitts in 1884. Served as minister to Haiti, 1889–91. Died in Washington, D.C.

Abraham Lincoln (February 12, 1809–April 15, 1865) Born near Hodgenville, Kentucky, the son of a farmer and carpenter. Family moved to Indiana in 1816 and to Illinois in 1830. Settled in New Salem, Illinois, and worked as a storekeeper, surveyor, and postmaster. Served as a Whig in the state legislature, 1834–41. Began law practice in 1836 and moved to Springfield in 1837. Married Mary Todd in 1842. Elected to Congress as a Whig and served from 1847 to 1849. Became a public opponent of the extension of slavery after the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854. Helped found the Republican Party of Illinois in 1856. Campaigned in 1858 for Senate seat held by Stephen A. Douglas and debated him seven times on the slavery issue; although the Illinois legislature reelected Douglas, the campaign brought Lincoln national prominence. Received Republican presidential nomination in 1860 and won election in a four-way contest; his victory led to the secession of seven Southern states. Responded to the Confederate bombardment of Fort Sumter by calling up militia, proclaiming the blockade of Southern ports, and suspending habeas corpus. Issued preliminary and final emancipation proclamations on September 22, 1862, and January 1, 1863. Appointed Ulysses S. Grant commander of all Union forces in March 1864. Won reelection in 1864 by defeating Democrat George B. McClellan. Died in Washington, D.C., after being shot by John Wilkes Booth.

Alexander H. Stephens (February 11, 1812–March 4, 1883) Born in Taliaferro County, Georgia, the son of a farmer. Graduated from the University of Georgia in 1832. Admitted to the bar in 1834. Served in the Georgia house of representatives, 1836–41, and the Georgia senate, 1842. Elected to Congress as a Whig and then as a Democrat

and served from 1843 to 1859. Opposed immediate secession at the Georgia convention in January 1861. Elected provisional vice president of the Confederate States of America in February 1861 and vice president in November 1861. Opposed conscription, the suspension of habeas corpus, and other measures of the Davis administration, and spent much of the war in Georgia. Held unsuccessful peace conference with Abraham Lincoln and William H. Seward at Hampton Roads, Virginia, on February 3, 1865. Arrested by Union troops on May 11, 1865, and imprisoned for five months in Boston. Published *A Constitutional View of the Late War Between the States* (1868–70). Elected to Congress as a Democrat and served from 1873 to 1882. Governor of Georgia from 1882 until his death in Atlanta.

Benjamin F. Wade (October 27, 1800–March 2, 1878) Born in Feeding Hills, Massachusetts, the son of a farmer. Moved with family to Andover, Ohio, in 1821. Worked as a laborer on the Erie Canal, taught school, and studied medicine in Albany, New York, before being admitted to the Ohio bar in 1828. Served in Ohio senate as a Whig, 1837–38 and 1841–42. Married Caroline Rosekrans, 1841. Judge of circuit court of common pleas, 1847–51. Served in the U.S. Senate as a Whig and then as a Republican, 1851–69. Chairman of the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War, 1861–65. Co-sponsored the Wade-Davis Bill on Reconstruction, 1864, which was pocket vetoed by President Lincoln. Elected president pro tempore of the Senate in 1867, he would have succeeded Andrew Johnson as president had Johnson been convicted during his impeachment trial. Unsuccessful candidate for Republican vice-presidential nomination in 1868. Died in Jefferson, Ohio.

Chronology, 1860–1865

- 1860 Republican candidate Abraham Lincoln wins presidential election, November 6, defeating Stephen Douglas (Northern Democratic), John C. Breckinridge (Southern Democratic), and John Bell (Constitutional Union). Lincoln receives 180 out of 303 electoral votes, all of them from free states. South Carolina convention votes to secede from the Union, December 20.
- 1861 Conventions in Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas vote to secede, January 9–February 1. Delegates meet in Montgomery, Alabama, and elect Jefferson Davis provisional president of the Confederate States of America, February 8. Lincoln is inaugurated, March 4. Confederates open fire on Fort Sumter in Charleston, South Carolina, April 12. Lincoln calls forth 75,000 militia, April 15. Virginia votes to secede, April 17. Lincoln proclaims blockade of southern ports, April 19. Arkansas, Tennessee, and North Carolina join the Confederacy, May 6–20. Confederates win battle of Manassas (Bull Run) in Virginia, July 21. Davis is elected without opposition to six-year term, November 6.
- 1862 Ulysses S. Grant captures Fort Donelson, Tennessee, February 16. Confederate defeat at Pea Ridge in northwestern Arkansas, March 7–8, secures Union control of Missouri. Grant wins battle of Shiloh in southeastern Tennessee, April 6–7. Union navy captures New Orleans, April 25. Robert E. Lee defeats Union army outside of Richmond, Virginia, June 25–July 1, and wins second battle of Manassas, August 28–30. Battle of Antietam, September 17, ends Lee's invasion of Maryland. Lincoln issues preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, September 22, to take effect in all territory still in rebellion on January 1, 1863. Battle of Perryville, October 8, ends Confederate invasion of Kentucky. Lee defeats Union army at Fredericksburg, Virginia, December 13. Battle of Stones River (Murfreesboro) begins in central Tennessee, December 31.

- 1863 Lincoln issues Emancipation Proclamation, January 1, freeing all slaves in Confederate-held territory and authorizing enlistment of blacks in the Union army. Battle of Stones River ends, January 2, with Confederate retreat. Grant crosses Mississippi River, April 30, beginning campaign to take Vicksburg. Lee defeats Union army in Virginia in battle of Chancellorsville, May 1–4. Grant begins siege of Vicksburg, May 22. Lee is defeated at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, July 1–3. Confederate army at Vicksburg surrenders to Grant, July 4. Victory at Port Hudson, Louisiana, July 9, gives Union control of entire Mississippi River. Confederates win battle of Chickamauga in northern Georgia, September 19–20, and besiege Union army in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Lincoln gives address at Gettysburg, November 19. Grant defeats Confederates at Chattanooga, November 23–25.
- 1864 Grant is named commander of the Union armies, March 10, and begins spring campaign in Virginia, May 4. Lee and Grant fight battle of the Wilderness, May 5–6. William T. Sherman begins Union campaign in northern Georgia, May 7. Grant and Lee fight at Spotsylvania, May 8–20, and Cold Harbor, May 31–June 12, as Union army moves closer to Richmond. After crossing James River, Grant attacks Petersburg, Virginia, June 15–18, then begins prolonged siege. Sherman captures Atlanta, September 2. Lincoln defeats Democratic candidate General George B. McClellan, November 8, winning 212 of 233 electoral votes. Sherman leaves Atlanta, November 16, and begins march through Georgia. Union victory at Nashville, December 15–16, ends Confederate invasion of Tennessee. Sherman occupies Savannah, December 21.
- 1865 Congress proposes Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution abolishing slavery, January 31. Sherman begins march through the Carolinas, February 1. Lincoln delivers his Second Inaugural Address, March 4. Sherman reaches Goldsboro, North Carolina, March 23. Grant assaults Confederate lines at Petersburg, April 2, forcing evacuation of Richmond. Lee surrenders to Grant at Appomattox Court House, Virginia, April 9. Lincoln is shot, April 14, and dies, April 15; Vice President Andrew Johnson becomes president. Remaining Confederate armies surrender, April 26–May 26. Ratification of the Thir-

teenth Amendment is declared, December 18. At least 360,000 Union soldiers, 260,000 Confederate soldiers, and 50,000 civilians were killed or died from disease, hunger, and exposure during the war.

Questions for Discussion

1. The editorial in the *Charleston Mercury* calls for the convening of a secession convention “*at the earliest possible time.*” Why was time such an issue? What did the election of Abraham Lincoln as president signify to the *Mercury*? Judging from this piece, do you think contemporary southerners anticipated war as a consequence of secession?
2. How does Edward Bates greet “the news from *the South*”? What assumptions does he make about southern political opinion? What kind of war does he believe the North can fight?
3. What, according to Frederick Douglass, are the positive effects of the election of 1860? Why does he then call Abraham Lincoln the abolition movement’s “most powerful enemy”? What assumptions does he make about the Republican Party?
4. In his speech before the Senate, how does Benjamin F. Wade make the case against secession? What does he identify as the “real principles” of the Republican Party? Does his speech offer evidence either to challenge or confirm Douglass’s skepticism?
5. Does Wade’s speech offer justification for the fears expressed by Georgia Governor Joseph E. Brown? In 1860, less than one-third of adult white men in Georgia were slaveholders. Why, according to Brown, did the state’s non-slaveholding majority have a vital stake in the preservation of slavery?
6. Both the South Carolina Declaration of the Causes of Secession and Lincoln’s First Inaugural Address deal with the nature of the American federal union, while offering very different views of the Constitution. How would you characterize the difference? Are there echoes of this debate in American politics today?
7. The South Carolina Declaration of Causes looks back to Jefferson’s Declaration of Independence as a model and as the source of the core principles of the new slaveholding republic. On what basis, then, does Alexander H. Stephens, vice president of the Confederacy, argue that the founders were “fundamentally wrong”?

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8. According to a 2011 Pew Research Center poll, 48% of Americans believe that the Civil War was fought “mainly about state’s rights” while 38% believe that slavery was the root cause. Based on the testimony of participants gathered here, how would you have responded? Why?
 9. How does reading these firsthand accounts affect your sense of the purpose and meaning of the war? Does it change how you understand the role of individuals—their words and actions—in historical events? What are the differences between exploring the war through participant accounts and reading a historical narrative of the same events?
 10. What did you find most surprising or unexpected about these writings?
 11. Choosing one of the pieces, what do you think was the author’s purpose for writing it? Do you think it achieves its purpose? How might the act of writing it have helped the author to make sense of his or her experience of the Civil War?
 12. How are the experiences of the Civil War reflected in the language, tone, attitude, and style of the writing?