

Reviewing The Slavery Debate (1830–1860)

Key Concept 5.2: Intensified by expansion and deepening regional divisions, debates over slavery and other economic, cultural, and political issues led the nation into civil war.

- I. Ideological and economic differences over **slavery** produced an array of diverging responses from Americans in **the North** and **the South**.
 - A) The North’s expanding **manufacturing economy** relied on **free labor** in contrast to the Southern economy’s dependence on **slave labor**. Some Northerners did not object to slavery on principle but claimed that slavery would undermine the free labor market. As a result, a **free-soil movement** arose that portrayed the expansion of slavery as incompatible with free labor.
 - B) **African American** and **white abolitionists**, although a minority in the North, mounted a highly visible campaign against **slavery**, presenting moral arguments against the institution, assisting slaves’ escapes, and sometimes expressing a willingness to use violence to achieve their goals.
 - C) **Defenders of slavery** based their arguments on **racial doctrines**, the view that slavery was a **positive social good**, and the belief that slavery and **states’ rights** were protected by the Constitution.

Directions: Review the main ideas above and read the opposing views on slavery located on the back of this page. Using the chart below, *describe* the main argument for each viewpoint. Pay special attention to what “yes” and “no” mean for each question before describing the arguments “for” and “against.” In the third column, *explain how* each side in the debate use similar reasons based on religion, citizenship, and/or economics to defend their arguments.

ISSUES	ARGUMENT <i>FOR</i>	ARGUMENT <i>AGAINST</i>	SIMILARITY IN ARGUMENT
ISSUE #1: Is slavery a violation of fundamental moral and religious principles?			
ISSUE #2: Is slavery incompatible with the most fundamental American principles?			
ISSUE #3: Would the attempted abolition of slavery threaten the foundations of the Union?			
ISSUE #4: Should slavery be allowed to expand into the territories if the people of those territories want it?			

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Slavery: Is slavery an intolerable institution?

Yes: Antislavery forces: abolitionists, led by Garrison, Weld, and the Grimke sisters; Free Soil and Republican politicians, led by Lincoln, Seward, and Sumner.

No: Proslavery forces: white southerners, led by Calhoun, Davis, and Butler; northern moderates, led by Webster, Douglas, and Buchanan.

ISSUE #1: Is slavery a violation of fundamental moral and religious principles?

Yes: Angelina Grimke: “The great fundamental principle of abolitionists is, that man cannot rightfully hold his fellow man as property...It matters not what *motive* he may give for such a monstrous violation of the laws of God. The claim to him as *property* is an annihilation of his right to himself, which is the foundation upon which all his other rights are built. It is high-handed robbery of Jehovah; for he has declared, ‘All souls are mine.’”

No: Proslavery Senator Andrew Butler of South Carolina: “Inequality seems to characterize the administration of the providence of God. I will not undertake to invade that sanctuary, but I will say that the abolitionists cannot make those equal whom God has made unequal, in human estimation. That He has made the blacks unequal to the whites; human history...has pronounced its uniform judgment.”

ISSUE #2: Is slavery incompatible with the most fundamental American principles?

Yes: Antislavery leader Abraham Lincoln: “There is no reason in the world why the negro is not entitled to all the natural rights enumerated in the Declaration of Independence—the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. I hold that he is as much entitled to these as the white man. I agree with Judge Douglas that he is not my equal in many respects...But in the right to eat the bread, without the leave of anybody else, which his own hand earns, he is my equal and the equal of Judge Douglas, and the equal of every living man.”

No: Proslavery Senator Stephen A. Douglas: “At the time the Constitution was framed there were thirteen states in the Union, twelve of which were slaveholding states and one a free state...For one, I am opposed to negro citizenship in any and every form. I believe this government was made on the white basis. I believe it was made by white men for the benefit of white men and their posterity forever, and I am in favor of confining citizenship to white men...instead of conferring it upon negroes, Indians, and other inferior races....”

ISSUE #3: Would the attempted abolition of slavery threaten the foundations of the Union?

No: William Seward: “Hitherto the two systems have existed in different states, but side by side within the American Union. This has happened because the Union is a confederation of states. But in another aspect the United States constitute only one nation...It is an irrepressible conflict between opposing and enduring forces, and it means that the United States must and will, sooner or later, become either entirely a slaveholding nation or entirely a free-labor nation...Our forefathers knew it to be true, and unanimously acted upon it when they framed the constitution of the U.S.”

Yes: Proslavery Senator Alfred Iverson of Georgia: “Sir, I believe that the time will come when the slave states will be compelled, in vindication of their rights, interests, and honor, to separate from the free states and erect an independent confederacy...At all events, I am satisfied that one of two things is *inevitable*; either that the slave states must surrender their peculiar institutions or separate from the North...No union or no slavery will sooner or later be forced upon the choice of the southern people.”

ISSUE #4: Should slavery be allowed to expand into the territories if the people of those territories want it?

No: Antislavery leader Abraham Lincoln: “I believe we shall not have peace upon the question until the opponents of slavery arrest the further spread of it and place it where the public mind shall rest in the belief that it is in the course of ultimate extinction...Now I believe if we could arrest the spread, and place it where Washington and Jefferson and Madison placed it, it would be in the course of ultimate extinction and the public mind would, as for eighty years past, believe that it was in the course of ultimate extinction...The crisis would be past and the institution might be let alone for a hundred years—if it should live so long—in the states where it exists, yet it would be going out of existence in the way best for both the black and the white races.”

Yes: Proslavery Senator Stephen A. Douglas: “Whenever it becomes necessary, in our growth and progress, to acquire more territory, I am in favor of it, without reference to the question of slavery, and, when we have acquired it, I will leave the people free to do as they please, either to make it slave or free territory, as they prefer...If they prohibit slavery, it shall be prohibited. They can form their institutions to please themselves, subject only to the Constitution; and I, for one, stand ready to receive them into the Union.”