**DBQ 8: HOW DID SLAVERY LEAD TO THE CIVIL WAR?**

**Historical Background**

In colonial times, slavery of Africans existed in every American colony, North and South. The first arrival of African slaves into the colonies occurred in 1619. A Dutch ship brought twenty Africans to Virginia, where they were sold into slavery. Slavery gradually spread through all thirteen colonies. By 1776, almost 600,000 slaves lived in our country. This totaled almost 20 percent of the nation’s population—one in every five people.

But the extent of America’s slave population in 1776 was uneven. In many of the northern states, slaves made up less than 1 percent of the population. New York and New Jersey were the northern states with the largest number of slaves. Even there, slaves made up only about 7 percent of the total population. In the southern states, however, African slavery was more strongly rooted. In Virginia and South Carolina, slaves counted for close to 40 percent of the population. Slaves made up over 25 percent of the population in North Carolina, Maryland, and Georgia. So slavery existed all through the nation at the time of American independence. But it was largely confined to the South.

The American Revolution had a great impact on slavery in America. The Declaration of Independence stated that “all men are created equal.” The Revolution itself was said to be a fight for freedom. Thoughtful Americans, North and South, found it difficult to square these ideals with the existence of slavery. During and soon after the Revolution, slavery came under attack. By 1800, all northern states had ended slavery or begun the process of ending it over time. Even in the South, many people began to question slavery. In the state legislatures of Maryland, Virginia, and Delaware, serious efforts were made to abolish slavery. But these efforts ultimately failed. No southern states put an end to slavery. Still, many southern leaders spoke out publicly about the injustices of slavery. These leaders included slave owners such as Thomas Jefferson and George Washington.

Many Southerners did see that slavery clashed with democratic ideals. But most white people in the South continued to support slavery. For some, there seemed no other choice. Slavery was, as Jefferson said, like “holding a wolf by the ears . . . we can neither hold him, nor safely let him go.” For others, slavery was a basic economic need. The South had a farming economy. Slaves were needed to raise the cotton, tobacco, sugar cane, and other farm produce. Slavery was too strongly rooted in the South. Ending it seemed, for many, not possible.

By the late 1700s, slavery was dead or dying throughout the North. In the South, its support was growing stronger. For growing numbers of Southerners, an end to slavery was unthinkable. In 1790, Congressman St. George Tucker of South Carolina issued an ominous warning. Abolition of slavery, he said, “. . . [will] never be submitted to by the South without a civil war.”

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Directions: The following question is based on the documents (1–7) that follow. Before reading these documents, be sure to

1. Carefully read and think about the document-based question that follows these directions.

2. Ask yourself: What do I already know about this question and its topic? What did I learn from reading the Historical Background section? If I had to answer the document-based question without reading any of the documents, what would I say?

3. Take a few minutes to jot down the major things you already know about this topic and question. What important names, dates, events, and major ideas do you already know?

4. Now read each document carefully. Ask yourself: How does this document help to answer the document-based question? Underline things of special importance and jot notes in the margins. If you’re confused by or don’t understand a document, go on to the next one. Later, if you have time, you can go back.

5. Develop a thesis statement that directly answers the document-based question. You’ll want to state this thesis early in your essay.

6. Briefly outline your entire essay. Make sure that what you say in it supports and proves your thesis statement. In your essay, plan how you’ll use the information found in the documents and what you know already about this topic.

7. Carefully write your essay. As you include supportive information from documents, be sure to cite the sources of this information. This will add authority and credibility to what you’re saying.

Question: How did slavery grow to become the issue that, more than anything else, split the United States, North and South, causing secession and the Civil War?

PART A

The following documents will help you answer the document-based question. Read each document carefully. Answer the question or questions that follow each document.
As the U.S. population spread westward, new states asked to join the Union. This caused the divisive issue of slavery to rise again and again. Would slavery move west with new settlement? Would the number of slave states increase? Or would the South and its support of slavery slowly be outnumbered by the addition of new states that were free of slavery?

As years passed, the proposed addition of new states sparked anger and bitterness between the northern and southern states. In 1818, the Territory of Missouri asked to enter as a slave state. This request quickly became a crisis that threatened the unity of the nation. Slavery had existed in this area years before it became part of U.S. territory. But now Missouri sought statehood, and as a slave state. At this time, there were an equal number of slave and free states. With the addition of Missouri, the slave states would outnumber the free states in the U.S. Senate.

Many in Congress refused to allow the admission of Missouri as a slave state. New York Congressman James Tallmadge was one of these men. Tallmadge hated slavery. He proposed that Missouri be allowed to enter the union, but only if slavery were abolished there over a period of time. This “Tallmadge Amendment” passed the House of Representatives. Southern supporters of slavery sprang to the defense. For almost two years, a bitter and angry debate took place in Congress and all through the United States over slavery.

Former president Thomas Jefferson was now an old man nearing the age of eighty. He closely followed the Missouri debate in newspaper reports and in his own letters exchanged with political leaders. Years earlier, back in the 1780s, Jefferson had said of slavery, “I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just . . . his justice cannot sleep forever.” Now these fears seemed to be coming true. The crisis over slavery in Missouri seemed to threaten the unity of the nation. The following are excerpts from two letters Jefferson wrote to friends. (Portentous means “ominous and fearful.”)

The Missouri question is the most portentous one which ever threatened our Union. In the gloomiest moment of the Revolutionary War I never had any apprehensions equal to what I feel from this. . . .

—letter to Hugh Nelson, February 1820

But this momentous question, like a fire bell in the night, awakened and filled me with terror. I considered it at once as the knell* of the Union.

—letter to John Holmes, April 1820

* Jefferson is referring to a death knell, which is an omen of death or a bell rung to signal a death.
Why was Jefferson so frightened about the Missouri Compromise crisis? _______________
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Document 2

The political leaders of the South demanded over and over again that slavery be allowed to spread west. They wanted slavery in the new territories and states. The South tried to unite with the West for political purposes. Both regions were largely based on farming. So this alliance made sense. Also, as long as the alliance held, the people of the South felt secure on two counts. They felt that slavery would not be abolished where it existed. They also felt confident that slavery would spread west with the growth of new settlement.

Here are political maps showing the state votes for U.S. president in a series of elections between 1800 and 1860.

1800

1828

(continued)
DBQ 8: HOW DID SLAVERY LEAD TO THE CIVIL WAR?  CONTINUED

1844

1856

(continued)
How was the result of the election of 1860 different from the earlier election results?

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Why did the result of the election of 1860 frighten the South?

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Document 3

For years, the Missouri Compromise of 1820 seemed to settle the issue of slavery. This law drew a line running from the southern state line of Missouri west into the territories. All areas to the north of this line were closed to slavery. Only those areas to the south of this line were open to any growth of slavery.

For over thirty years, an uneasy truce lasted. Then, in 1854, it ended. Senator Stephen Douglas, of Illinois, proposed a new law. It would open the Kansas and Nebraska territories to slavery if their residents voted for this. Both areas were north of the Missouri Compromise line.

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Quickly the Northern opponents of slavery joined together to condemn Douglas’s Kansas-Nebraska Act. One of the leading opponents was Senator Salmon Chase of Ohio. He spoke out against the law on the floor of the U.S. Senate. Here is an excerpt from that speech.

And what does slavery ask for now? . . . it demands that a time-honored and sacred agreement [the Missouri Compromise of 1820] be taken back. . . . [If this bill is passed into law, it will show] all thinking people that compromises with slavery will endure only as long as they serve the interests of slavery. It will convince them that the only safe and honorable ground for non-slaveholders to stand upon is that of restricting slavery within state limits and excluding it absolutely from all areas of federal jurisdiction [the Western territories].

Why did Chase (and many others) oppose passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act?
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What did Chase and other opponents of slavery learn from this crisis? ____________
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Document 4

In 1858, Abraham Lincoln ran for the U.S. Senate seat from Illinois. His opponent was Senator Stephen Douglas. Lincoln and Douglas traveled around the state debating major issues. They spoke in front of large crowds of interested citizens. On October 16 they met in Alton, a town in southern Illinois. It was not far from the city of St. Louis, Missouri. Lincoln said the following during that debate.

I desire no concealment of my opinions in regard to the institution of slavery. I look upon it as a great evil . . . “A house divided against itself cannot stand.” I believe this government [of the United States] cannot endure permanently half slave and half free. I do not expect the house to fall—but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing, or all the other.

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Lincoln took the “house divided” allusion from the Bible. In Matthew 12:25 Jesus said, “Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand.”

What was Lincoln’s prediction for the future of the United States? __________________________
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Document 5

Lincoln lost the 1858 U.S. Senate election to Stephen Douglas. But two years later, in 1860, he was nominated as the Republican Party’s candidate for U.S. president. That year the Republican Party platform included this statement:

... the normal condition of all the territory of the United States is that of freedom ... we deny the authority of Congress, or a territorial legislature, or of any individuals to give legal existence to slavery in any territory of the United States.

What did Lincoln’s Republican Party say about the possible expansion of slavery into the new western territories? __________________________
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Document 6

On November 6, 1860, Abraham Lincoln was elected U.S. president. As you saw in Document 2, Lincoln’s support was only in the North. He won no electoral votes in any southern slaveholding states. Six weeks after the election, South Carolina became the first of the southern states to leave the Union. South Carolina’s leaders wrote and voted for a declaration of secession stating the reasons for this action. The declaration was modeled on the 1776 Declaration of Independence. Here are some excerpts from South Carolina’s declaration.

(continued)
What, according to the declaration of secession, did the 1860 election of Lincoln mean to South Carolina and the South?

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Document 7

On March 4, 1861, Abraham Lincoln became president of the United States. In the previous four months, seven southern states had seceded from the Union. They created the Confederate States of America. These Confederate states were South Carolina, Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas. At his inauguration, Lincoln gave a firm but also calming and peaceful speech. He hoped that no war would break out. One very short part of his speech focused on the crux of the problem between North and South.

What, according to Lincoln, was the only major issue between the northern and southern states?

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Document-Based Assessment for U.S. History

PART B

Essay: How did slavery grow to become the issue that, more than anything else, split the United States, North and South, causing secession and the Civil War?