

shall use every instrumentality within our power to effect our object. We shall employ agents, circulate tracts, petition the State and National legislatures, and endeavor to enlist the pulpit and the press in our behalf. We hope this Convention will be followed by a series of Conventions embracing every part of the country.

### Questions

1. What are the key demands, other than the right to vote, put forward by the Seneca Falls Convention?
2. How does the Declaration seem to define freedom for women?

## CHAPTER 13

# A House Divided, 1840–1861

### 77. John L. O'Sullivan, Manifest Destiny (1845)

*Source, John L. O'Sullivan, "Annexation," United States Magazine, and Democratic Review, Vol. 17 (July/August 1845), pp. 5–10.*

The expansionist spirit of the 1840s was captured in the phrase "manifest destiny," coined by John L. O'Sullivan, a New York journalist. O'Sullivan, employed it to suggest that the United States had a divinely appointed mission to occupy all of North America. This right to the continent was provided by the nation's mission to extend the area of freedom. In the excerpt that follows, O'Sullivan defends the annexation of Texas, and suggests that California, then a province of Mexico, would be the next area to be absorbed into the United States, linked to the rest of the country by a new transcontinental road. O'Sullivan foresees the day when one government will control the entire North American continent. The spirit of manifest destiny would soon help to justify the Mexican War and, half a century later, the annexation of Puerto Rico and the Philippines as a result of the Spanish-American War.

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IT IS TIME now for all opposition to annexation of Texas to cease . . . Texas is now ours. Already before these records are written, her convention has undoubtedly ratified the acceptance, by her congress, of our proffered invitation into the Union; and made the requisite changes in her already republican form of constitution to

adapt it to its future federal relations. Her star and stripe may already be said to have taken their place in the glorious blazon of our common nationality; and the sweep of our eagle's wing already includes within its circuit the wide extent of her fair and fertile land.

She is no longer to us a mere geographical space—a certain combination of coast, plain, mountain, valley, forest, and stream. She is no longer to us a mere country on the map . . . It is time when all should cease to treat her as alien, and even adverse . . . and cease . . . thwarting our policy and hampering our power, limiting our greatness and checking the fulfillment of our manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions.

. . .

It is wholly untrue, and unjust to ourselves, the pretense that the annexation has been a measure of spoliation, unrightful and unrighteous of military conquest under forms of peace and law of territorial aggrandizement at the expense of justice. . . .

The independence of Texas was complete and absolute. It was an independence, not only in fact, but of right. . . . If Texas became peopled with an American population, it was by no contrivance of our government, but on the express invitation of that of Mexico herself; accompanied with such guaranties of state independence, and the maintenance of a federal system analogous to our own . . . She was released, rightfully and absolutely released, from all Mexican allegiance, or duty of cohesion to the Mexican political body, by acts and fault of Mexico herself, and Mexico alone. There was never a clearer case. It was not revolution; it was resistance to revolution: and resistance under such circumstances as left independence the necessary resulting state, caused by the abandonment of those with whom her former federal association had existed.

Nor is there any just foundation for the charge that annexation is a great pro-slavery measure calculated to increase and perpetuate that institution. Slavery had nothing to do with it. Opinions were

and are greatly divided, both at the North and South, as to the influence to be exerted by it on slavery and the slave states. . . .

Every new slave state in Texas will make at least one free state from among those in which that institution now exists—to say nothing of those portions of Texas on which slavery cannot spring and grow—to say nothing of the far more rapid growth of new states in the free West and Northwest, as these fine regions are overspread by the emigration fast flowing over them from Europe, as well as from the Northern and Eastern states of the Union as it exists. . . .

California will, probably, next fall away from the loose adhesion which, in such a country as Mexico, holds a remote province in a slight equivocal kind of dependence on the metropolis. Imbecile and distracted, Mexico never can exert any real government authority over such a country. . . .

In the case of California this is now impossible. The Anglo-Saxon foot is already on its borders. Already the advance guard of the irresistible army of Anglo-Saxon emigration has begun to pour down upon it, armed with the plough and the rifle, and marking its trail with schools and colleges, courts and representative halls, mills and meetinghouses. A population will soon be in actual occupation of California, over which it will be idle for Mexico to dream of dominion. They will necessarily become independent. All this without agency of our government, without responsibility of our people. . . .

And they will have a right to independence—to self-government—to the possession of the homes conquered from the wildness of their own labors and dangers, sufferings and sacrifices—a better and a truer right than the artificial title of sovereignty in Mexico, a thousand miles distant, inheriting from Spain a title good only against those who have none better. Their right to independence will be the natural right of self-government belonging to any community strong enough to maintain it. . . . This will be their title to independence; and by this title, there can be no doubt that the population now fast streaming down upon California will both assert and maintain that independence.

Whether they will attach themselves to our Union or not is not to be predicted with any certainty. Unless the projected railroad across the continent to the Pacific be carried into effect, perhaps they may not; though even in that case, the day when the empires of the Atlantic and Pacific would again flow together into one, as soon as their inland border should approach each other. But that great work, colossal as appears the plan on its first suggestion, cannot remain long unbuilt.

Its [the transcontinental railroad] necessity for this very purpose of binding and holding together in its iron clasp our fast settling Pacific region with that of the Mississippi Valley, the natural facility of the route, the ease with which any amount of labor for the construction can be drawn in from the overcrowded populations of Europe, to be paid in the lands made valuable by the progress of the work itself and its immense utility, to the whole commerce of the world with the whole eastern coast of Asia, alone almost sufficient for the support of such a road—these considerations give assurance that the day cannot be distant which shall witness the conveyance of representatives from Oregon and California to Washington [D.C.] within less time than a few years ago was devoted to a similar journey by those from Ohio; while the magnetic telegraph will enable the editors of the *San Francisco Union*, the *Astoria Evening Post*, or the *Nootka Morning News*, to set up in type the first half of the President's inaugural before the echoes of the latter half shall have died away beneath the lofty porch of the Capitol, as spoken from his lips.

Away, then, with all idle French talk of balances of power on the American continent. There is no growth in Spanish America! Whatever progress of population may be in British Canada, is only for their own early severance of their present colonial relation to the little island 3,000 miles across the Atlantic; soon to be followed by annexation, and destined to swell the still accumulating momentum of our progress.

And whosoever may hold the balance, though they should cast into the opposite scale all the bayonets and cannon, not only of

France and England, but of Europe entire, how would it kick the beam against the simple, solid weight of the 250, or 300 million, and American millions destined to gather beneath the flutter of the stars and stripes, in the fast hastening year of the Lords 1845!

## Questions

1. What connection does O'Sullivan see between manifest destiny and the idea of American freedom?
2. What does O'Sullivan mean when he describes America's destiny to rule the entire continent as "manifest"?

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## 78. A Protest Against Anti-Chinese Prejudice (1852)

Source: *Daily Alta California (San Francisco)*, May 5, 1852.

The discovery of gold in California in 1848 unleashed a massive influx of migrants hoping to make their fortunes. The non-Indian population, under 15,000 in 1848, rose to over 360,000 by 1860. Prospectors came to the gold fields from all over the world—the eastern states, Europe, Latin America, and Asia. Nearly 25,000 Chinese landed between 1849 and 1852, most of them young men who had signed long-term labor contracts and went to work for the state's mines and railroads. Anti-Chinese sentiment quickly developed and in 1852 the state's governor, Democrat John Bigler, proposed that the legislature restrict Chinese immigration (even though the Constitution gives power over immigration to the federal government). In response, Norman Asing, a naturalized American citizen and leader of the Chinese community of San Francisco, issued an eloquent appeal for equal rights for the Chinese.

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SIR: I AM a Chinaman, a republican, and a lover of free institutions; am much attached to the principles of the government of the United States, and therefore take the liberty of addressing you as the chief of the government of this State. Your official position gives you a great opportunity of good and evil. . . . The effect of your late message has been thus far to prejudice the public mind against my people, to enable those who wait the opportunity to hunt them down, and rob them of the rewards of their toil. You may not have meant that this should be the case, but you can see what will be the result of your propositions.

I am not much acquainted with your logic, that by excluding population from this State you enhance its wealth. I have always considered that population was wealth; particularly a population of producers, of men who by the labor of their hands or intellect, enrich the warehouses or the granaries of the country with the products of nature and art. You are deeply convinced you say "that to enhance the prosperity and preserve the tranquility of this State, Asiatic immigration must be checked." This, your Excellency, is but one step towards a retrograde movement of the government, which, on reflection, you will discover; and which the citizens of this country ought never to tolerate. It was one of the principal causes of quarrel between you (when colonies) and England; when the latter pressed laws against emigration, you looked for immigration; it came, and immigration made you what you are—your nation what it is. It transferred you at once from childhood to manhood and made you great and respectable throughout the nations of the earth. I am sure your Excellency cannot, if you would, prevent your being called the descendant of an immigrant, for I am sure you do not boast of being a descendant of the red man. But your further logic is more reprehensible. You argue that this is a republic of a particular race—that the Constitution of the United States admits of no asylum to any other than the pale face. This proposition is false in the extreme, and you know it. The declaration of your independence, and all the acts of your government, your people, and your history are all against you. . . .

We would beg to remind you that when your nation was a wilderness, and the nation from which you sprung barbarous, we exercised most of the arts and virtues of civilized life; that we are possessed of a language and a literature, and that men skilled in science and the arts are numerous among us; that the productions of our manufactories, our sail, and workshops, form no small share of the commerce of the world; and that for centuries, colleges, schools, charitable institutions, asylums, and hospitals, have been as common as in your own land. That our people cannot be reproved for their idleness, and that your historians have given them due credit for the variety and richness of their works of art, and for their simplicity of manners, and particularly their industry. And we beg to remark, that so far as the history of our race in California goes, it stamps with the test of truth the fact that we are not the degraded race you would make us. We came amongst you as mechanics or traders, and following every honorable business of life. . . .

I am a naturalized citizen, your Excellency, of Charleston, South Carolina, and a Christian, too; and so hope you will stand corrected in your assertion "that none of the Asiatic class" as you are pleased to term them, have applied for benefits under our naturalization act. I could point out to you numbers of citizens, all over the whole continent, who have taken advantage of your hospitality and citizenship, and I defy you to say that our race have ever abused that hospitality or forfeited their claim on this or any of the governments of South America, by an infringement on the laws of the countries into which they pass. You find us peculiarly peaceable and orderly. It does not cost your state much for our criminal prosecution. We apply less to your courts for redress, and so far as I know, there are none who are a charge upon the state, as paupers.

### Questions

1. Why does Asing argue that the governor's proposal violates the Constitution and the principles of the Declaration of Independence?

2. How does he invoke the history of China to bolster his criticism of the idea of excluding Chinese immigrants from the United States?

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### 79. George Henry Evans, "Freedom of the Soil" (1844)

Source: *Working Man's Advocate* (New York, June 1, 1844).

The economic depression that lasted from 1837 into the early 1840s inspired a rash of plans to improve the conditions of American workers. One idea, popularized by George Henry Evans, was land reform. An immigrant from England who in 1829 became the editor of *The Working Man's Advocate*, a pro-labor newspaper published in New York City, Evans argued that the monopolization of land by large owners was destroying ordinary citizens' prospects for economic independence. Appealing to the traditional equation of landownership with economic freedom, Evans pointed to access to western land as a way of combating unemployment and low wages in the East and the only alternative to permanent economic dependence for American workers. Evans's plan for the government to provide free land in the West to settlers would be enacted into law in the Homestead Act of 1862.

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AFTER THE REVOLUTION, which placed a vast increase of power in the hands of the people in this country, the masses thought, and thought truly, that they had the means of establishing the best government that the world ever saw. They made their first essay, they completed their machine, and its workings were so far superior to the operations of the old monarchical machinery, that they thought their machine had attained perfection, and they began to grow vain of the applause of the great and good throughout the world. Land was cheap and easily accessible, and every thing went on prosperously for a time. . . . Yet . . . although *national* improvements

progressed rapidly, and *national* wealth increased, yet the condition of the working man was not improved! *The rich were growing richer and the poor poorer!* The non-producer was getting *more* and the producer *less* of the fruits of industry! How was this? . . . A simple remedy is now discovered, and one that will go far toward *perfecting* this machine of self government. The great defect, which has hitherto enabled a few to live sumptuously without labor on the labor of the many . . . is now discovered to be the Monopoly of the Soil. . . .

It is urged by the aristocracy in England, as an argument against universal suffrage, that we have *made no use of it* to ameliorate our condition, and that we still tolerate slavery. . . . Monarchy, to use a comprehensive phrase of a black writer, "stole the black man from his land, and his land from the red man," and then he apportioned the stolen bodies and the stolen land among a few of his own color to whom he made the remainder of the whites as dependent for the means of existence as were the blacks themselves. And now, because in seventy years Democracy has not freed itself from the gigantic, complicated trifold scheme of plunder entailed upon her, she is to be taunted as though the original sin was hers! We hurl back the charge in old Monarchy's teeth, and tell him that infant Democracy is now perfecting a plan that will not only restore their rights to the blacks, the Indians, and the landless whites of this continent, but will contribute essentially, we trust, to the liberation of universal man; for all this good will result from a restoration of the Equal right to the Land. . . .

Evidently, it seems to us, it is the *first* duty of Democracy to decree the freedom of the soil.

### Questions

1. How does Evans try to explain the existence of economic inequality in a country of political democracy?
  2. Does Evans appear to be a critic of slavery as well as land monopoly?
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## 80. William Henry Seward, "The Irrepressible Conflict" (1858)

*Source: The Irrepressible Conflict: A Speech by William H. Seward, Delivered at Rochester, Monday, Oct. 25, 1858 (New York, 1858), pp. 1-6.*

As the controversy over the expansion of slavery intensified during the 1850s, a new political party, the Republican party, rose to dominance in the North. The party's appeal rested on the idea of "free labor." Republicans glorified the North as the home of progress, opportunity, and freedom.

One of the most powerful statements of the Republican outlook was delivered in 1858 by William H. Seward, a senator from New York. Seward described the nation's division into free and slave societies as an "irrepressible conflict" between two fundamentally different social systems. Although Seward condemned slavery as immoral, his essential argument had to do with economic development and national unity. The market revolution, he argued, was drawing the entire nation closer together in a web of transportation and commerce, thus heightening the tension between freedom and slavery. The United States, he predicted, "must and will, sooner or later, become either entirely a slaveholding nation, or entirely a free-labor nation."

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OUR COUNTRY IS a theater, which exhibits, in full operation, two radically different political systems; the one resting on the basis of servile or slave labor, the other on the basis of voluntary labor of freemen.

The laborers who are enslaved are all Negroes, or persons more or less purely of African derivation. But this is only accidental. The principle of the system is, that labor in every society, by whomsoever performed, is necessarily unintellectual, groveling and base; and that the laborer, equally for his own good and for the welfare of the State, ought to be enslaved. The white laboring man, whether native or foreigner, is not enslaved, only because he cannot, as yet, be reduced to bondage. . . .

. . .

One of the chief elements of the value of human life is freedom in the pursuit of happiness. The slave system is not only intolerant, unjust, and inhuman, toward the laborer, whom, only because he is a laborer, it loads down with chains and converts into merchandise, but is scarcely less severe upon the freeman, to whom, only because he is a laborer from necessity, it denies facilities for employment, and whom it expels from the community because it cannot enslave and convert him into merchandise also. It is necessarily improvident and ruinous, because, as a general truth, communities prosper and flourish or droop and decline in just the degree that they practice or neglect to practice the primary duties of justice and humanity. The free-labor system conforms to the divine law of equality, which is written in the hearts and consciences of men, and therefore is always and everywhere beneficent.

The slave system is one of constant danger, distrust, suspicion, and watchfulness. It debases those whose toil alone can produce wealth and resources for defense, to the lowest degree of which human nature is capable, to guard against mutiny and insurrection, and thus wastes energies which otherwise might be employed in national development and aggrandizement.

The free-labor system educates all alike, and by opening all the fields of industrial employment, and all the departments of authority, to the unchecked and equal rivalry of all classes of men, at once secures universal contentment, and brings into the highest possible activity all the physical, moral, and social energies of the whole State. In States where the slave system prevails, the masters, directly or indirectly, secure all political power, and constitute a ruling aristocracy. In States where the free-labor system prevails, universal suffrage necessarily obtains, and the State inevitably becomes, sooner or later, a republic or democracy. . . .

. . .

The two systems are at once perceived to be incongruous. But they are more than incongruous—they are incompatible. They

never have permanently existed together in one country, and they never can. It would be easy to demonstrate this impossibility, from the irreconcilable contrast between their great principles and characteristics. But the experience of mankind has conclusively established it. . . .

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. Increase of population, which is filling the States out to their very borders, together with a new and extended network of railroads and other avenues, and an internal commerce which daily becomes more intimate, is rapidly bringing the States into a higher and more perfect social unity or consolidation. Thus, these antagonistic systems are continually coming into closer contact, and collision results.

Shall I tell you what this collision means? . . . 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. Either the cotton and rice fields of South Carolina and the sugar plantations of Louisiana will ultimately be filled by free labor, and Charleston and New Orleans become marts for legitimate merchandise alone, or else the rye-fields and wheat-fields of Massachusetts and New York must again be surrendered by their farmers to slave culture and to the production of slaves, and Boston and New York become once more markets for trade in the bodies and souls of men. . . .

Thus far, the course of that contest has not been according to the humane anticipations and wishes [of the founding fathers]. In the field of federal policies, Slavery, deriving unlooked-for advantages from commercial changes, and energies unforeseen from the facilities of combination between members of the slaveholding class and between that class and other property classes, early rallied, and has at length made a stand, not merely to retain its original defensive position, but to extend its sway throughout the whole Union. . . .

This is a Constitution of Freedom. It is being converted into a Constitution of Slavery.

## Questions

1. How does Seward expand the antislavery argument beyond the moral appeal of the abolitionists?
2. To whom does Seward seem to be addressing his remarks?

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## 81. Hinton R. Helper, *The Impending Crisis* (1857)

*Source: Hinton R. Helper, The Impending Crisis of the South (New York, 1857), pp. 21-41.*

Northerners were not the only ones to criticize slavery during the 1850s. In 1857, the North Carolinian Hinton R. Helper wrote *The Impending Crisis of the South*, which argued that slavery was responsible for the South lagging further and further behind the northern states in economic and social development. Non-slaveholding whites, Helper insisted, were as much victims of the system as slaves—both were oppressed by the planter aristocracy. Helper called on poorer whites to use their right to vote to take power in the South, abolish slavery, colonize blacks outside the country, and transform the region into an area of small farms and thriving manufacturing centers modeled on the North. Although Helper won little support in his own region, his book was widely circulated by northern Republicans to demonstrate the superiority of free society.

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IT IS A fact well known to every intelligent Southerner that we are compelled to go to the North for almost every article of utility and adornment, from matches, shoepegs and paintings up to cotton-

mills, steamships and statuary; that we have no foreign trade, no princely merchants, nor respectable artists; that, in comparison with the free states, we contribute nothing to the literature, polite arts and inventions of the age; that, for want of profitable employment at home, large numbers of our native population find themselves necessitated to emigrate to the West, whilst the free states retain not only the larger proportion of those born within their own limits, but induce, annually, hundreds of thousands of foreigners to settle and remain amongst them; . . . that, owing to the absence of a proper system of business amongst us, the North becomes, in one way or another, the proprietor and dispenser of all our floating wealth, and that we are dependent on Northern capitalists for the means necessary to build our railroads, canals and other public improvements; . . . and that nearly all the profits arising from the exchange of commodities, from insurance and shipping offices, and from the thousand and one industrial pursuits of the country, accrue to the North, and are there invested in the erection of those magnificent cities and stupendous works of art which dazzle the eyes of the South, and attest the superiority of free institutions! . . .

All the world sees . . . that, in comparison with the Free States, our agricultural resources have been greatly exaggerated, misunderstood and mismanaged; and that, instead of cultivating among ourselves a wise policy of mutual assistance and co-operation with respect to individuals, and of self-reliance with respect to the South at large, instead of giving countenance and encouragement to the industrial enterprises projected in our midst, and instead of building up, aggrandizing and beautifying our own States, cities and towns, we have been spending our substance at the North, and are daily augmenting and strengthening the very power which now has us so completely under its thumb. . . .

The causes which have impeded the progress and prosperity of the South, which have dwindled our commerce, and other similar pursuits, into the most contemptible insignificance; sunk a large majority of our people in galling poverty and ignorance, rendered a small

minority conceited and tyrannical, and driven the rest away from their homes; entailed upon us a humiliating dependence on the Free States; disgraced us in the recesses of our own souls, and brought us under reproach in the eyes of all civilized and enlightened nations—may all be traced to one common source . . . *Slavery!*

Reared amidst the institution of slavery, believing it to be wrong both in principle and in practice, and having seen and felt its evil influences upon individuals, communities and states, we deem it a duty, no less than a privilege, to enter our protest against it, and to use our most strenuous efforts to overturn and abolish it! . . . We are not only in favor of keeping slavery out of the territories, but, carrying our opposition to the institution a step further, we here unhesitatingly declare ourself in favor of its immediate and unconditional abolition, in every state in this confederacy, where it now exists! Patriotism makes us a freesoiler; state pride makes us an emancipationist; a profound sense of duty to the South makes us an abolitionist; a reasonable degree of fellow feeling for the negro, makes us a colonizationist. . . .

Nothing short of the complete abolition of slavery can save the South from falling into the vortex of utter ruin. Too long have we yielded a submissive obedience to the tyrannical domination of an inflated oligarchy; too long have we tolerated their arrogance and self-conceit; too long have we submitted to their unjust and savage exactions. Let us now wrest from them the sceptre of power, establish liberty and equal rights throughout the land, and henceforth and forever guard our legislative halls from the pollutions and usurpations of pro-slavery demagogues. . . .

It is not so much in its moral and religious aspects that we propose to discuss the question of slavery, as in its social and political character and influences. To say nothing of the sin and the shame of slavery, we believe it is a most expensive and unprofitable institution; and if our brethren of the South will but throw aside their unfounded prejudices and preconceived opinions, and give us a fair and patient hearing, we feel confident that we can bring them to the



same conclusion. Indeed, we believe we shall be enabled—not alone by our own contributions, but with the aid of incontestable facts and arguments which we shall introduce from other sources—to convince all true-hearted, candid and intelligent Southerners . . . that slavery, and nothing but slavery, has retarded the progress and prosperity of our portion of the Union; depopulated and impoverished our cities by forcing the more industrious and enterprising natives of the soil to emigrate to the free states; brought our domain under a sparse and inert population by preventing foreign immigration; made us tributary to the North, and reduced us to the humiliating condition of mere provincial subjects in fact, though not in name. . . .

Agriculture, it is well known, is the sole boast of the South; and, strange to say, many pro-slavery Southerners, who, in our latitude, pass for intelligent men, are so puffed up with the idea of our importance in this respect, that they speak of the North as a sterile region, unfit for cultivation, and quite dependent on the South for the necessities of life! Such rampant ignorance ought to be knocked in the head! We can prove that the North produces greater qualities of bread-stuffs than the South! Figures shall show the facts. Properly, the South has nothing left to boast of; the North has surpassed her in everything, and is going farther and farther ahead of her every day. . . .

We have two objects in view; the first is to open the eyes of the non-slaveholders of the South, to the system of deception, that has so long been practiced upon them, and the second is to show slaveholders themselves—we have reference only to those who are not too perverse, or ignorant, to perceive naked truths—that free labor is far more respectable, profitable, and productive, than slave labor. In the South, unfortunately, no kind of labor is either free or respectable. Every white man who is under the necessity of earning his bread, by the sweat of his brow, or by manual labor, in any capacity, no matter how unassuming in deportment, or exemplary in morals, is treated as if he was a loathsome beast, and shunned with the utmost disdain. His soul may be the very seat of honor and integrity, yet without slaves—himself a slave—he is accounted as nobody, and

would be deemed intolerably presumptuous, if he dared to open his mouth, even so wide as to give faint utterance to a three-lettered monosyllable, like yea or nay, in the presence of an august knight of the whip and the lash.

## Questions

1. How does Helper describe the economic and social conditions of non-slaveholding white southerners?
2. How does Helper explain what he considers the South's economic backwardness?

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## 82. The Lincoln-Douglas Debates (1858)

**Source:** *Political Debates Between Honorable Abraham Lincoln and Honorable Stephen Douglas, in the Celebrated Campaign of 1858 (Columbus, Ohio, 1860)*, pp. 71, 75, 178–82, 204, 209, 234, 238.

The depth of Americans' divisions over slavery were brought into sharp focus in 1858 in the election campaign that pitted Illinois senator Stephen A. Douglas, the North's most prominent Democratic leader, against the then little-known Abraham Lincoln.

The Lincoln-Douglas debates, held in seven Illinois towns and attended by tens of thousands of listeners, remain classics of American political oratory. Clashing definitions of freedom lay at their heart. To Lincoln, freedom meant opposition to slavery. Douglas insisted that the essence of freedom lay in local self-government. A large, diverse nation could survive only by respecting the right of each locality to determine its own institutions. He attempted to portray Lincoln as a dangerous radical whose positions threatened to degrade white Americans by reducing them to equality with blacks.

Douglas was reelected. But the campaign created Lincoln's national reputation.

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. . .

**DOUGLAS:** Do you desire to strike out of our state constitution that clause which keeps slaves and free negroes out of the state, and allow the free negroes to flow in, and cover your prairies with black settlements? Do you desire to turn this beautiful state into a free negro colony, in order that when Missouri abolishes slavery she can send one hundred thousand emancipated slaves into Illinois, to become citizens and voters, on an equality with yourselves? If you desire negro citizenship, if you desire to allow them to come into the state and settle with the white man, if you desire them to vote on an equality with yourselves, and to make them eligible to office, to serve on juries, and to adjudge your rights, then support Mr. Lincoln and the Black Republican party, who are in favor of the citizenship of the negro. 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 for ever, and I am in favor of confining citizenship to white men, men of European birth and descent, instead of conferring it upon negroes, Indians and other inferior races.

Mr. Lincoln, following the example and lead of all the little Abolition orators, who go around and lecture in the basements of schools and churches, reads from the Declaration of Independence, that all men were created equal, and then asks how can you deprive a negro of that equality which God and the Declaration of Independence awards to him. He and they maintain that negro equality is guaranteed by the laws of God, and that it is asserted in the Declaration of Independence. If they think so, of course they have a right to say so, and so vote. I do not question Mr. Lincoln's conscientious belief that the negro was made his equal, and hence is his brother, (laughter,) but for my own part, I do not regard the negro as my equal, and positively deny that he is my brother or any kin to me whatever.

. . .

**LINCOLN:** Now gentlemen, I don't want to read at any greater length, but this is the true complexion of all I have ever said in regard to the

institution of slavery and the black race. This is the whole of it, and anything that argues me into his idea of perfect social and political equality with the negro, is but a specious and fantastic arrangement of words, by which a man can prove a horse chestnut to be a chestnut horse. I will say here, while upon this subject, 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. I have no purpose to introduce political and social equality between the white and the black races. There is a physical difference between the two, which in my judgment will probably forever forbid their living together upon the footing of perfect equality, and inasmuch as it becomes a necessity that there must be a difference, I, as well as Judge Douglas, am in favor of the race to which I belong, having the superior position. I have never said anything to the contrary, but I hold that notwithstanding all this, 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 he is not my equal in many respects—certainly not in color, perhaps not in moral or intellectual endowment. But in the right to eat the bread, without 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.*

. . .

**DOUGLAS:** He tells you that I will not argue the question whether slavery is right or wrong. I tell you why I will not do it. I hold that under the Constitution of the United States, each state of this Union has a right to do as it pleases on the subject of slavery. In Illinois we have exercised that sovereign right by prohibiting slavery within our own limits. I approve of that line of policy. We have performed our whole duty in Illinois. We have gone as far as we have a right to go under the Constitution of our common country. It is none of our business whether slavery exists in Missouri or not. Missouri is

a sovereign state of this Union, and has the same right to decide the slavery question for herself that Illinois has to decide it for herself. ("Good.") Hence I do not choose to occupy the time allotted to me discussing a question that we have no right to act upon.

...

**LINCOLN:** The real issue in this controversy—the one pressing upon every mind—is the sentiment on the part of one class that looks upon the institution of slavery *as a wrong*, and of another class that *does not* look upon it as a wrong. The sentiment that contemplates the institution of slavery in this country as a wrong is the sentiment of the Republican party. It is the sentiment around which all their actions—all their arguments circle—from which all their propositions radiate. They look upon it as being a moral, social and political wrong; and while they contemplate it as such, they nevertheless have due regard for its actual existence among us, and the difficulties of getting rid of it in any satisfactory way and to all the constitutional obligations thrown about it. Yet having a due regard for these, they desire a policy in regard to it that looks to its not creating any more danger. They insist that it should as far as may be, *be treated as a wrong*, and one of the methods of treating it as a wrong is to *make provision that it shall grow no larger*. They also desire a policy that looks to a peaceful end of slavery at sometime, as being wrong. . . .

That is the real issue. That is the issue that will continue in this country when these poor tongues of Judge Douglas and myself shall be silent. It is the eternal struggle between these two principles—right and wrong—throughout the world. They are the two principles that have stood face to face from the beginning of time; and will ever continue to struggle. The one is the common right of humanity and the other the divine right of kings. It is the same principle in whatever shape it develops itself. It is the same spirit that says, "You work and toil and earn bread, and I'll eat it." [Loud applause.] No matter in what shape it comes, whether from the mouth of a king who seeks to bestride the people of his own nation and live by the fruit of their labor, or from one race of men as an apology for enslaving another

race, it is the same tyrannical principal. I was glad to express my gratitude at Quincy, and I re-express it here to Judge Douglas—that *he looks to no end of the institution of slavery*. That will help the people to see where the struggle really is. It will hereafter place with us all men who really do wish the wrong may have an end. And whenever we can get rid of the fog which obscures the real question—when we can get Judge Douglas and his friends to avow a policy looking to its perpetuation—we can get out from among them that class of men and bring them to the side of those who treat it as a wrong. Then there will soon be an end of it, and that end will be its "ultimate extinction." Whenever the issue can be distinctly made, and all extraneous matter thrown out so that men can fairly see the real difference between the parties, this controversy will soon be settled, and it will be done peaceably too.

...

## Questions

1. How do Douglas and Lincoln differ in their views on what rights black Americans ought to enjoy?
2. What is Douglas's response to antislavery criticism of slavery in the southern states?

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## 83. South Carolina Ordinance of Secession (1860)

Source: Frank H. Moore, ed., *The Rebellion Record (New York, 1861-1868)*, Vol. 1, pp. 3-5.

In the three months that followed Abraham Lincoln's election as president in November 1860, seven states seceded from the Union. First

to act was South Carolina, the state with the highest percentage of slaves in its population and a long history of political radicalism. On December 20, 1860, the legislature unanimously voted to leave the Union. In justifying the right to secede, the legislature issued an *Ordinance of Secession*. It restated the compact theory of the Constitution that had become more and more central to southern political thought during the three decades since the nullification controversy and placed the issue of slavery squarely at the center of the crisis. Rather than accept permanent minority status in a nation governed by their opponents, South Carolina's leaders boldly struck for their region's independence. At stake, they believed, was not a single election but an entire way of life based on slavery.

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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 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. . . .

Thus was established by compact between the States, a Government with defined objects and powers, limited to the express words of the grant. . . . 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 arrangement, 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.

. . .

We affirm that the 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 of and eloin [take away] 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 intrusted with the administration of the common Government, because he has declared 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 subversion 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 tribunal shall be made

sectional, and that a war must be waged against Slavery until it shall cease throughout the United States.

The guarantees 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 the 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.

### Questions

1. Why do secessionists place so much emphasis on the growth of antislavery public opinion in the North?
2. What appears to be the main motivation for South Carolina's secession?

## CHAPTER 14

# A New Birth of Freedom: The Civil War, 1861–1865

### 84. Alexander H. Stephens, *The Cornerstone of the Confederacy* (1861)

*Source: Frank H. Moore, ed., The Rebellion Record (New York, 1861–1868), Vol. 1, pp. 45–46.*

Alexander H. Stephens, one of Georgia's most prominent political leaders, opposed secession in the winter of 1860–1861, but once his state had acted, he agreed to serve as the vice president of the Confederacy. In March 1861, he delivered a speech in Savannah that laid out his explanation for the dissolution of the Union and argued that the Confederate Constitution represented a significant improvement over that of the United States. After the war, Stephens would write a long book arguing that the Civil War was caused not by slavery but by a constitutional question—the South's insistence on preserving state sovereignty against an overly powerful national government. In his 1861 speech, however, he forthrightly identified the defense of slavery and white supremacy as the fundamental motivation of the Confederacy, the “cornerstone” of the new southern nation. Apparently, Stephens's speech embarrassed Confederate President Jefferson Davis, who hoped to gain recognition from European powers by downplaying the role of slavery in the secession movement.