Using Confederate Documents to Teach About Secession, Slavery, and the Origins of the Civil War

“Our position is thoroughly identified with the institution of slavery, the greatest material interest of the world... [A] blow at slavery is a blow at commerce and civilization... There was no choice left us but submission to the mandates of abolition, or a dissolution of the Union...”
— Mississippi Declaration of Secession, January 9, 1861.

Working with the American public to understand the causes of the Civil War can be an exercise in frustration. Confederate leaders themselves made it plain that slavery was the key issue sparking secession. And yet, four of five Americans—including many teachers—hold basic misconceptions about the era, revolving around a vague, abstract concept of “states’ rights.” Questions about why the South seceded, what the Confederacy was about, and the nature of its symbols and ideology usually give rise to flatly wrong “answers.” Because the states’ rights perspective on the Civil War is so pervasive, it can be difficult for teachers to get beyond this framework in their classrooms. But fortunately, there is a wealth of primary Confederate documents that teachers can use. Moreover, with the arrival of the Civil War sesquicentennial, public attention will be focused on the topic for some time to come. The time is right for teachers to help students grapple with the powerful evidence that slavery was the central factor in the formation of the Confederacy.

The sesquicentennial also provides a wonderful opportunity for teachers to get the concept of historiography across to their students. Historiography—the history of historical writing—asks us to scrutinize how a given piece of history came to be. Who wrote it? When? What difference does that make? With whom were its authors in debate? What were they trying to prove? Who didn’t write it? Especially on the subjects of slavery, secession, and race—the issues intertwined with the formation of the Confederacy—statements change depending upon which people wrote or spoke, when, and why. This article explores the possibilities of using primary Confederate documents and later neo-Confederate writings to illuminate the histories of secession, slavery, and the Civil War (1).

Why did the South secede?
Since 1998, I have been asking general audiences, college undergraduates, people who run historic sites, and K–12 history and social studies teachers, “Why did South Carolina, and then ten other Southern states, secede?” Invariably I get four answers:

1. slavery
2. states’ rights
3. tariffs and taxes (or issues about tariffs and taxes)
4. the election of Lincoln.

Repeatedly, I then ask these audiences to vote.

All my audiences weigh in similarly, whether they are teachers, students, or historic site staff. Nor does region make a difference: from south Florida to North Dakota, responses are the same. States’ rights draws fifty-five to seventy-five percent of the votes. Slavery usually receives about twenty percent. The election of
Lincoln usually gets only a handful—two percent. Tariffs and taxes varies from ten to twenty percent, depending largely on how many votes go to states’ rights.

Teachers can modify what I do next into an activity for students. I ask my audiences, “What do we do now? Does majority rule? Is that how we do history?” “No, no,” they chorus. “We need evidence.” “OK,” I reply, “what would be good evidence to resolve the matter?” Student audiences may say, “Google it!” to which one reply might be, “Google what?” Googling does not replace the human judgment required to sift through the results and decide what is credible. Teachers typically volunteer, “Newspaper articles”—on the right track, but vague. I reply, “From the 1993 Portland Oregonian? ‘No, no,’ they chorus. “From South Carolina in 1860.” Now we can discuss the meaning of primary sources and the important role they should play in this exploration. South Carolina newspapers are good, I admit, but they are hardly the best source. Audience members may volunteer, “Diaries from the time.” Again, these are primary sources, but hardly the best. Eventually, someone will usually say, “Wasn’t there some sort of convention? Didn’t it say why South Carolina was leaving the Union?” If no one does, teachers can pull out the document discussed below, read its title, and ask if it might be relevant. Students will immediately grasp that it is the “smoking gun.”

Such a convention did, of course, in Charleston. For a generation, South Carolina had been the state most likely to secede. In 1850, politicians from South Carolina had tried to get other states to leave the union, but the Compromise of 1850, then in the works, caused other states to hold back. During the 1850s, the “Fire Eaters”—proslavery extremists—won concession after concession in Washington. The 1854 Kansas-Nebraska Act opened territories north of the northern border of Arkansas, previously closed to slavery by the Missouri Compromise, to slavery, based on “popular sovereignty.” In 1857, the U.S. Supreme Court Dred Scott decision went further, requiring the federal government to guarantee slavery in all territories, without regard to the views of their residents. (For the story behind the lawsuit, see Lea VanderVelde’s article in this issue.)

By the late 1850s, however, even these victories were not enough. Any interference with slavery in the territories—indeed, any suggestion that slavery was wrong—became unacceptable to the South Carolina political establishment. In 1856, its governor demanded the reopening of the international slave trade. In 1858, the legislature passed laws to discourage Northerners from merely traveling through the state, since they might be unsound on slavery. Meanwhile, most Northern Democrats could not stomach the idea that territories must accept slavery regardless of the wishes of their inhabitants. When they rejected a proposed proslavery plank in the party platform at the 1860 Democratic convention in Charleston, delegates from the Deep South walked out. The party split, ensuring a Republican victory in 1860.

Lincoln’s election galvanized South Carolina’s extremists. The legislature immediately called for a convention to consider secession. More than ninety percent of its members were slaveowners; more than sixty percent were wealthy planters who owned more than twenty slaves. Half were over fifty; most were public figures; five had been governors of the state; four had been U.S. senators. All were Southern Democrats, staunchly proslavery and white supremacist.

Not only was South Carolina distinctively anti-Union; it stood out in other ways. In 1787, it had insisted that the U.S. Constitution guarantee slavery. Almost sixty percent of its people were enslaved, the highest proportion in the nation. It did not tolerate dissent and for years had been a one-party state. South Carolina did not even let its citizens vote for president; the legislature took care of that formality. Nor did it allow a popular vote on secession. Instead, on December 20, the convention voted to take South Carolina out of the United States. Not one delegate dared vote against secession, although at least two probably did not vote at all. Thus the ordinance passed without dissent. Four days later, delegates explained why, in a document titled “Declaration of the Immediate Causes Which Induce and Justify the Secession of South Carolina from the Federal Union” (Figure 4).

The Declaration begins with an eleven-paragraph account of the formation of the United States. This political history stresses the independence of each state before and during the brief period when the U.S. operated under the Articles of Confederation. It fails to mention that South Carolina was one of the states that decreed the looseness of this arrangement and called for a convention to set up a more powerful central government, resulting in the U.S. Constitution (2). (See Figure 2.) Teachers who previously emphasized the differences between the Constitution and the Articles of Confederation may find a teachable moment here, helping students compare what happened in 1787 with South Carolina’s account.

Then South Carolina gets to why it is seceding. It lists its grievances against the North:

We assert that fourteen of the States have deliberately refused, for years past, to fulfill their constitutional obligations, and we refer to their own Statutes for the proof.

“Constitutional obligations” sounds vague, but the convention immediately proceeds to quote that part of the Constitution that was on its mind:

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 is, of course, the fugitive slave clause, Article IV, Section 3. The federal government “passed laws to carry into effect these stipulations of the States,” the Declaration goes on. “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.”

Delegates Oppose States’ Rights

South Carolina then makes its accusations more specific:

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 service or labor claimed, and in none of them has the State Government complied with the stipulation made in the Constitution.

Northern states further infuriated South Carolina by no longer allowing “slavery transit”—short-term bondage, such as bringing one’s enslaved cook along to New York City when one vacations there. New York says it’s a free state, so slaves brought into New York become free.
New England angers South Carolina by letting African Americans vote, even though determining who could vote in the U.S. was a state’s right until the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to the U.S. Constitution were ratified two eras later, during Reconstruction. South Carolina is further upset that Northern states “have permitted open establishment among them of [abolitionist] societies.” Presumably Northern states do not have the right to let their citizens assemble and speak freely—not if what they say might oppose slavery.

In short, students are confronted with evidence that South Carolina was not for states’ rights but against them. This was only to be expected, of course, since Southern planters had been in power in Washington during the 1850s. Presidents Buchanan and Pierce were both members of the proslavery wing of the Democratic Party. Indeed, through most of our history to that moment, slaveowners had dominated Washington. In an oft-quoted phrase, James Henry Hammond, senator from South Carolina, had noted in 1858 that Southerners had ruled the nation “for sixty out of seventy years of her existence.” The party in power always opposes states’ rights. It’s in their interest to do so.

Instead, the document is suffused with concern about slavery. To be sure, Lincoln’s victory also triggered secession and South Carolina says so. Delegates lamented “the election of a man to the high office of President of the United States whose opinions and purposes are hostile to Slavery.” As that clause noted, however, it all came back to slavery in the end. About “tariffs and taxes” delegates said nothing. Why would they? South Carolina had helped write the tariff under which the U.S. was functioning.

Several other states, when justifying secession from the Union, incorporated passages and ideas from South Carolina’s document. The secession convention in Texas, for example, listed about the same states in about the same order when charging them with violating the same fugitive slave clause. Mississippi even recycled South Carolina’s title, calling its document, “Declaration of the Immediate Causes Which Induce and Justify the Secession of Mississippi from the Federal Union.” Other states similarly emphasized slavery. Virginia noted, “African slavery is a vital part of the social system of the States wherein it exists.” Arkansas complained, “People of the northern states have
organized a political party . . . the central and controlling idea of which is, hostility to the institution of African slavery.” Mississippi began its explanation of secession with these words:

Our position is thoroughly identified with the institution of slavery, the greatest material interest of the world, . . . [A] blow at slavery is a blow at commerce and civilization. . . . There was no choice left us but submission to the mandates of abolition, or a dissolution of the Union. . . .

Secession declarations are not the only evidence showing that the Confederacy was about slavery and white supremacy. The seven states that seceded initially sent ambassadors to other slave states, trying to persuade them to join. These envoys used similar language, stressing slavery throughout their presentations. Georgia’s Henry Benning, for instance, speaking to Virginia’s secession convention, predicted that without secession, the North would eventually abolish slavery in all states. Then the Deep South “will have black governors, black judges, black legislators, black juries, black witnesses, everything black.” After that, Benning went on, “our men will be all exterminated or expelled to wander as vagabonds over a hostile earth, and as for our women, their fate will be too horrible to contemplate even in fancy” (3).

Like Benning, other speakers around the time of secession made clear that slavery was so crucial because of its tie to white supremacy. In his first important address after taking office, Alexander Stephens, Vice President of the Confederacy, said, “Our new Government[s] . . . foundations are laid, its cornerstone 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 moral condition.” Applause interrupted him at this point, and the address became known as the “Cornerstone Speech.” To Confederates, then, slavery was necessary to preserve white supremacy. Most Southern whites, even those with little hope of becoming large-scale slaveowners, feared a society with large numbers of African Americans who were not slaves. In the 1860s, no one doubted that secession was for slavery (and white supremacy). When Abraham Lincoln said in his second inaugural, “All knew that this interest [slavery] was somehow the cause of the war,” he was not trying to convince his audience. He was merely stating the obvious, en route to some searing statements about slavery, God, and justice. When teachers ask students to read this speech slowly, aloud, an interesting discussion ensues.

To be sure, even given all these sources, a handful of students, usually influenced by parents who have not seen them, may still insist that secession was for the “states’ right to secede.” Secession for the right to secede is a tautology, however. No state, as it claimed the right to secede, argued that it seceded for the right to secede. Even had secession been a states’ right, which the Civil War determined it was not, that right could never explain why states seceded, but only how. The secession documents tell why.

**Why do some teachers and textbooks err?**

Many teachers feel pressured to “teach their textbooks,” which have grown considerably and now average 1,152 pages. When teachers do
this, they have little time for primary documents. Unfortunately, of eighteen recent high school textbooks that I surveyed, not a single one quotes any statement as to why the South seceded (4). *Holt American Nation*, for example, says, "Within days of the election, the South Carolina legislature called a convention and unanimously voted to leave the Union. Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas soon passed similar acts of secession." Similar to what? One book, *The American Pageant*, does quote the South Carolina document in a box, but manages to select three long sentences that do not mention slavery. To accomplish this, the authors resort to ellipses and leave out phrases pointing to Confederate anger at Northern states for denouncing slavery and assisting "thousands of our slaves to leave their homes." Not only do textbooks avoid the documents, the feeble accounts they do provide contradict the historical record. Some actually claim secessionists seceded for "states' rights," although the documents make clear this is counter-factual. Other books throw tariffs into the mix, even though no document seriously suggests that states seceded over tariffs.

Why don’t authors quote the critical documents, easily available to them? Why would *Pageant* use ellipses to cover up slavery as the cause? It is likely that Houghton Mifflin took pains to avoid the subject lest some southern state textbook adoption board take offense. All southern states adopt textbooks statewide, and marketing departments worry that they might lose out owing to some affront. As historian William C. Davis put it in 1996, “All peoples part with their myths reluctantly, and historians are at some risk when they try to dismantle those of the Confederacy” (5).

**Retelling the story**

Almost as soon as the war ended, ex-Confederates began to mystify the origins of secession and dethrone slavery as its chief cause. In 1868, Alexander Stephens claimed that slavery “was of infinitely less importance to the Seceding States, than the recognition of this great principle,” secession itself. In short, he now held that Southern states had seceded for the right to secede—a circular claim no one had made at the time. After 1890, such obfuscations came to rule the day in the South. Some old Confederates were appalled. In 1907, John Singleton Mosby, Virginia cavalry leader known as the "Gray Ghost" of the Confederacy, wrote in "disgust" about these attempts:

>The South went to war on account of Slavery. South Carolina went to war—as she said in her Secession Proclamation—because slavery would not be secure under Lincoln. South Carolina ought to know what was the cause for her seceding (6).

But Mosby’s voice went unheeded.

Instead, around 1900, during that terrible period that African American historian Rayford Logan dubbed the Nadir (or low point) of race relations, some northern historians and publishers began to obfuscate secession as well. In his 1906 textbook, for example, Harvard professor Albert Bushnell Hart led a list of five reasons for leaving the union with these two items:

>(1) That the North was bent on making money for itself, and was no longer interested in the general welfare of the Union . . .

>(2) That the North misinterpreted the Constitution, and would not admit the doctrine of state rights . . . (7).

After item five, Hart wrote, “The main and the deciding grievance is in essence that the North disliked slavery, wanted to check it, and allowed people to discuss it.” Hence Hart could claim that he did give slavery its due. But he began his list of grounds ostensibly given “by secession conventions and public men” with two reasons that simply do not appear in the declarations by South Carolina, Florida, Mississippi, and most other seceding states.

In their two-volume 1959 textbook, Columbia professor Richard Hofstadter et al. continued the mystification with this “analysis”:

>The long-dreaded civil war had finally begun, but what really caused it? The answer to that most difficult question hinges upon the answers to equally subtle and complicated problems. What lay behind the hostility between the sections in the 1850s? Why did Lincoln win in 1860? What prompted the secession of the lower South? Why did compromise efforts fail? . . . For our purpose, it is enough to say that the war did break out and that no simple explanation will suffice (8).

Hofstadter devoted seven thousand words to secession and the lead-up to war without quoting a single word from a document or speech from the time. Instead, he included passages by Vice President Stephens and other Confederate leaders written after the conflict, accounts that pictured Southerners “aggrieved by the action and tendencies of the Federal Government.” Students will search in vain to find such complaints in the documents of 1860–61.

**Textbook Historiography**

As students come to be familiar with the reasons Southern states gave to justify leaving the United States, they will gain the ability to critique the treatment of secession in their own textbooks. Now they are learning to read critically, and not just cynically, but based on important information that the textbooks do not supply. The next step is to get them thinking about why textbooks are so inadequate. Having many textbooks in the room, published in different eras, is a good way to get students thinking critically. For a very modest expense teachers can accumulate an assortment of textbooks. They often can be found at used bookstores selling for rock-bottom prices. But for the purposes of historiography, they are worth their weight in gold. Some current textbooks have been in print for decades. *Holt American Nation*, for instance, was formerly published as *The American Nation*, *Todd and Curti’s American Nation*, *Triumph of the American Nation*, and began life as *Rise of the American Nation* in 1950. Comparing earlier editions of the students’ own textbook helps them grasp that *when* authors write about secession helps determine *what* they write about secession—and other topics. Now students are doing historiography.

The shift away from explaining the true origins of secession occurred during the Nadir. Segregation swept through public accommodations, and not just in the south. Describing the day-to-day interactions of whites and blacks in the Midwest, historian Frank Quillen observed in 1915 that race prejudice “is increasing steadily, especially during the last twenty years.” Town after town across the north flatly banned African Americans within their city limits after dark. In short,
during the Nadir, white Americans—north and south—joined hands to restrict African Americans’ civil and economic rights (9). In this climate, publishers had no desire to claim that white supremacy prompted Southern secession. White supremacy was then national dogma. With their triumph, neo-Confederates—a new generation, with a somewhat different agenda—got to rewrite the history of the Civil War. Now they claimed that secession had been misunderstood all along: South Carolina and the other Southern states had seceded for states’ rights. Moreover, blacks liked slavery and hardly bothered to run away (Figure 3).

The triumphs of the civil rights movement in the 1950s and 60s made it harder to sustain this interpretation. But mystifying why the South seceded has become a textbook tradition, hard for today’s publishers to buck. Slavery now appears in the textbooks as a secondary cause. Nevertheless, that’s not good enough. Teaching or implying that the Confederate states seceded for states’ rights is not accurate history. It bends—even breaks—the facts of what happened, seeking explanations that will not upset white parents or textbook adopters. Taught that way, history especially alienates people of color. As a result, African American, Native American, and Latino students view U.S. history with a special dislike. They also learn it especially poorly; the racial achievement gap is larger in history/social studies than in any other high school subject. Few students of any background will find textbooks’ treatment of secession adequate, once they have read South Carolina’s “Declaration of the Immediate Causes.” Teachers can encourage them to write the publisher or author, perhaps as a class, showing what’s wrong and asking why the document was not quoted. Teachers who use Pageant can invite students to infer why it uses ellipses to omit telling phrases about slavery; again, they might ask the authors themselves. Now students have not only become critical readers but also active citizens.

Conclusion

Today, the secession documents are widely available on the web and in our new reader. Even though the textbooks still mystify the causes of secession and the origins of the Civil War, teachers can break their grip on the classroom and free students to learn for themselves why each state seceded. Getting secession right, in turn, sets the stage for getting the Civil War right, and Reconstruction, and then the Nadir. Students are capable of participating in an honest discussion of these topics. It’s time to let them.

Additional Resources Online

“Declaration of the Immediate Causes Which Induce and Justify Secession of South Carolina from the Federal Union”:

<http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/csa_scarsec.asp>

<http://www.teachingushistory.org/pdfs/DeclarationofImmediateCauses_000.pdf>

(original handwritten copy)

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. 1861, 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 defense, 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 entrusted 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 3rd of 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 1 - 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 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, the common agent, was then 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 the 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 definite 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 fulfill 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 greater 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 compose 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 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 when nine of them agreed the compact was to take effect among those concurring; and the General Government, as 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 the Constitution was framed are declared by itself to be “to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, 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 open establishment among them of societies, whose avowed object is to disturb the peace and to eloghe 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 beliefs and safety.
On the 4th day 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 sanction of 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.

Adopted December 24, 1860
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