A Line Reopened

Why northern critics opposed the Kansas-Nebraska Act

8.C.11.2.B "Examine why the North opposed the possibility that northern territories such as Kansas and Nebraska might adopt slavery, which had been prevented by the Missouri Compromise."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline the earlier rule for slavery in Kansas and Nebraska, and circle the change made in 1854. Number three different reasons northerners opposed that change.

What Changed in Kansas and Nebraska?

1. In 1854, a farmer considering a move to Kansas might ask a sharp question: Would slavery be allowed there? The Missouri Compromise of 1820 had barred slavery in the Louisiana Purchase lands north of latitude 36°30′, except for Missouri. Both Kansas and Nebraska lay north of that line, so the rule had kept slavery out of those areas. The Kansas-Nebraska Act changed the rule. It let settlers in each territory vote on whether to allow slavery, a policy called popular sovereignty. To many northerners, this reopened a question Congress had settled decades earlier.

2. Some northerners opposed slavery because they believed it was morally wrong to own human beings. Others focused on work and land. They wanted territories open to farmers and wage earners who did not own enslaved people. They feared that slaveholders, who could force enslaved people to work without wages, would gain control of the best land and make it harder for free workers to build a life there. These reasons differed, but both groups saw the new law as a threat to the kind of communities they hoped would grow in Kansas and Nebraska.

3. Northern critics also worried about power in Washington. If slavery spread into new territories, those places might later enter the Union as slave states. That could give slaveholding interests more votes in Congress and more influence over national laws. The change to the Missouri Compromise angered northerners who had trusted its boundary to limit slavery's expansion, even if they did not call for ending slavery where it already existed. Opposition did not mean every northerner agreed about racial equality. It meant many saw the Kansas-Nebraska Act as a danger to an existing limit on slavery.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why did some northerners see the Kansas-Nebraska Act as undoing an earlier agreement?

2. Why did some northerners oppose the act on moral grounds?

3. Why did farmers and wage earners worry about slavery spreading to these territories?

4. Why did the possibility of new slave states worry northern critics about Congress?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a four-sentence letter to a northern newspaper in 1854 opposing the Kansas-Nebraska Act. Explain the earlier rule, give two different reasons for opposing the change, and predict one possible result if slavery spreads.

ANSWER KEY

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GRADE 8 · 8.C.11.2.B

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline the earlier rule for slavery in Kansas and Nebraska, and circle the change made in 1854. Number three different reasons northerners opposed that change. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why did some northerners see the Kansas-Nebraska Act as undoing an earlier agreement?	**The Missouri Compromise had barred slavery in those lands, but the new act let settlers vote to allow it.**
2	Why did some northerners oppose the act on moral grounds?	**They believed it was wrong to own human beings and opposed allowing slavery to spread.**
3	Why did farmers and wage earners worry about slavery spreading to these territories?	**They feared slaveholders would control the best land and make it harder for people seeking farms or paid work to build a life there.**
4	Why did the possibility of new slave states worry northern critics about Congress?	**New slave states could give slaveholding interests more votes in Congress and more influence over national laws.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

To the editor, the Missouri Compromise barred slavery in the lands that became Kansas and Nebraska, but the new act puts that limit at risk. Allowing slavery there would mean allowing more people to be owned and forced to work. Farmers seeking land might also struggle if slaveholders took control of the best places to farm. If these territories become slave states, slaveholding politicians could gain more votes in Congress.

Accept responses that distinguish the earlier ban from the new vote and explain opposition using evidence from the passage. Students may choose moral, work and land, or political concerns for their letters.