Reasons for Secession

Read state declarations to identify the issue behind secession.

8.C.12.1.C "Explain slavery as the central factor for the secession of southern states by examining passages from state secession declarations."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline a phrase from each state's declaration that names slavery. Circle the complaint or fear linked to it so you can trace each state's reason for secession.

What the Declarations Said

1. In December 1860, South Carolina became the first state to secede. Its declaration did not simply say that states should make their own decisions. It complained of "an increasing hostility on the part of the non-slaveholding States to the institution of slavery." The declaration also accused northern states of failing to return people who had escaped slavery, as federal law then required. South Carolina's leaders claimed that other states had broken their agreement with the South. The dispute they named concerned the protection of slavery, not an unnamed right to govern.

2. Mississippi followed in January 1861. Its declaration stated, "Our position is thoroughly identified with the institution of slavery," and described enslaved labor as vital to the state's wealth. It warned that opposition to slavery threatened the crops and trade on which many white Mississippians relied. This was an argument about the economy, but the declaration made clear what held that economy together: the forced labor of enslaved people. By naming slavery directly, Mississippi's leaders showed that protecting it was their chief reason for leaving the Union.

3. Georgia's January 1861 declaration opened with complaints against northern states "with reference to the subject of African slavery." It also attacked the election of Abraham Lincoln, whose Republican Party opposed the spread of slavery into western territories. Georgia's leaders feared losing political power to people who would restrict that spread. They did not claim that Lincoln had already abolished slavery in Georgia. Reading these declarations together reveals a pattern: disputes about law, money, and elections led back to the same central issue, whether slavery would remain protected and expand.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. What complaint did South Carolina make about northern states? How did that complaint connect to slavery?

2. How does Mississippi's statement about its "position" help explain its economic argument for secession?

3. Why did Georgia's leaders connect Lincoln's election to their complaint about slavery?

4. South Carolina discussed law, while Mississippi discussed the economy. What central issue connected their arguments?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

A museum visitor says, "These states seceded only because they wanted states' rights, not because of slavery." Write a 65 to 85 word reply. Quote two different state declarations from the passage, explain what their leaders wanted to protect, and end by explaining why "states' rights" alone is incomplete.

ANSWER KEY

Reasons for Secession

GRADE 8 · 8.C.12.1.C

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline a phrase from each state's declaration that names slavery. Circle the complaint or fear linked to it so you can trace each state's reason for secession. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What complaint did South Carolina make about northern states? How did that complaint connect to slavery?	**South Carolina complained that northern states were hostile to slavery and failed to return people who had escaped it. Its stated dispute concerned protecting slavery.**
2	How does Mississippi's statement about its "position" help explain its economic argument for secession?	**Mississippi said its position was closely tied to slavery. Its leaders viewed enslaved labor as vital to the crops and trade that produced the state's wealth.**
3	Why did Georgia's leaders connect Lincoln's election to their complaint about slavery?	**Lincoln's party opposed the spread of slavery into western territories, and Georgia's leaders feared losing power to people who would restrict that spread.**
4	South Carolina discussed law, while Mississippi discussed the economy. What central issue connected their arguments?	**Both arguments centered on protecting slavery. South Carolina objected to resistance to laws concerning escaped enslaved people, while Mississippi defended an economy built on enslaved labor.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The claim about states' rights leaves out what these leaders wanted to defend. South Carolina's declaration cited "an increasing hostility on the part of the non-slaveholding States to the institution of slavery." Its leaders objected to northern opposition to slavery. Mississippi said, "Our position is thoroughly identified with the institution of slavery," connecting secession to an economy built on forced labor. Both declarations name slavery, so calling their cause only states' rights hides the central issue they described.

Accept accurate explanations supported by the quoted declarations, including responses using Georgia instead of South Carolina or Mississippi. The reply should distinguish a general claim about state power from the specific institution the declarations sought to protect.