

**AP Tip**

Do not wait until you've read the documents to develop your own personal knowledge. Even before reading the documents take a few minutes to brainstorm information that you can recall about the topic. If time permits, organize this information so that you can construct the essay while incorporating the documents into the essay. When the document information is similar to what you have brainstormed, present that knowledge as it is expressed in the documents. Possibly the document material can be used to help you analyze other issues.

**STRUCTURE OF A FREE-RESPONSE ESSAY**

In writing a free-response essay, whether a DBQ or a general free-response essay, you need the following:

- a well-developed thesis that sums up your perspective
- an effective analysis and appropriate use of information
- a lucidly cogent essay that is well-structured and lucidly written

Below is one model for organizing your thoughts in preparation for writing the free-response and DBQ essays:

*Thesis (Opinion)*

*Supporting Arguments* (major reasons, to be developed in the body paragraphs, that defend or support your thesis)

*Structured Body Paragraphs*

- Topic Sentence
  - supports the thesis
  - introduces the topic of the paragraph
- Historical and Factual Information
  - facts
  - details
  - statistics
  - quotes
- Analysis
  - explains the separate parts of your arguments
  - explains the significance of the information you present as it relates to the thesis

**FRAMING THE DEBATE** To demonstrate an understanding of the complexity of the issue or question, you need to show that you are aware of both sides of the argument or perspective. This frames the debate for the reader. Thus in the introduction, you want to present the “other” view—the one you are *not* supporting. Make certain, however, that you do not develop the other perspective so fully that the reader is unclear about your thesis. Your objective is to convince the reader that you have a strong thesis and that it is well developed with historical information and analysis.

**OUTLINING** For each essay in Section II, the AP examination has built in time for you to develop an outline. Time spent on your outlines is important for a number of reasons:

- ❑ It prevents you from writing an essay that is unorganized because you begin writing whatever comes into your head at the moment.
- ❑ It helps you determine your perspective on the issue. If after completing an outline you realize that your information tends to support one view over the other, then this is the perspective you should develop.
- ❑ It provides you with a brief brainstorming opportunity before writing the essay.

Once you have outlined your essay, it is time to put pen to paper. Remember that examination readers are looking for a clear thesis backed up with specifics. Concentrate on setting out accurate information in straightforward, concise prose. You cannot mask vague information with elegant prose.

## A FREE-RESPONSE QUESTION AND THREE SAMPLE ESSAYS

Having established the ingredients of a free-response answer, let us now look at three essays—one excellent (grade: 9), one good (grade: 6), and one poor (grade: 3). Comments following each essay explain ways in which each essay succeeded or failed. All three essays respond to the following free-response question:

Question: Analyze the extent to which compromise was no longer possible between the North and South by the 1850s.

### SAMPLE ESSAY 1

By the time Abraham Lincoln was elected president in 1860, the time for compromise between the North and South had passed. Lincoln's election was the spark that ignited secession. Throughout the antebellum period political leaders had attempted to preserve the Union through compromise and by maintaining the political balance in the Senate. As early as the Constitutional Convention there were indications that the conflicting economies and cultures of the regions would ultimately have to be resolved, either through ongoing political compromise or through war. As late as 1858, just two years before secession, Lincoln had said "a house divided against itself cannot stand." The outbreak of the Civil War was the tragic resolution to the sectional differences and the inability to maintain two different economic, political, and cultural systems under one government.

Territorial expansion played a significant role in straining sectional relations because it involved the debate over the expansion or containment of slavery. In 1820 Congress seemed to have resolved this problem when it passed the Missouri Compromise, which prevented the expansion of slavery north of the 36° 30' line. For a time, Congress was able to balance representation in the Senate by admitting both a slave state and a free state into the Union. For example, Missouri, a slave state, was admitted at the same time as Maine, a free state.

Compromise could only address the symptoms of the problem; it could not resolve the basic economic, moral, and cultural differences, especially because the two regions had completely different economic systems dominated by opposing dominant social, economic, and political classes: the planter-slaveholder in the South and the industrial capitalist in the North. Economically, Northern manufacturers and the Northern economy required a protective tariff, internal improvements, and a national bank to facilitate commerce, whereas the South wanted low tariffs, state banks, and was opposed to internal improvements. The North's economy and culture rested on the wage-labor system, which was, of course, inconsistent with the South's slave economy and culture. Both sought to expand their systems for a variety of reasons: politically the North and South quarreled over the extension of slavery because the addition of a new slave state or free state meant greater political representation in Congress. This in turn meant that either region, if given the political advantage, could pass legislation that affected not only the future expansion of slavery, but other burning political issues as well, such as the tariff.

Furthermore, the North maintained that the Union had been established as a contract between the people of the United States. Southern political leaders responded that the Union was the result of a compact between the states, and that a state had the authority to nullify federal laws and even secede from the Union. These conflicting political theories made compromise even more difficult to achieve because the South claimed to have the authority to reject any federal law it deemed unconstitutional or a threat to states' rights.

Added to this was the role of Northern abolitionists and Southern defenders of slavery whose justifications for or against the peculiar institution added a moral element to the already significant differences. Thus by the time Congress passed the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854 and the Supreme Court handed down the Dred Scott decision in 1857, the possibility of maintaining the Union became increasingly tenuous.

Politically, by the 1850s the two major political parties represented, for the most part, different sections: the Democrats articulated the South's objectives, whereas the Republicans represented an adversarial view. Up until the election of Lincoln, the presidency was occupied either by a Southerner or a Northerner who tended to favor the South's position. Lincoln, a Republican and an advocate of the containment of slavery, represented to the South that the executive branch would now become an obstacle to the South's political objectives, and that its political and economic influence would therefore wane over time. Thus, by the 1850s, conditions for secession were already present, and the time for compromise had, for all intents and purposes, passed.

COMMENT This essay effectively outlines the divisions that prevailed between the North and South in the antebellum period. While it by no means completely addresses the issue, given the time constraint (35

minutes) it successfully indicates that while Lincoln's election was the event that finally shattered the Union, deep social, economic, and political divisions had already been festering for decades. The writer articulates the view that the Civil War was the result of irreconcilable differences that could no longer be resolved through compromise. Although listing the features of the *Dred Scott* case would certainly help, the writer successfully synthesizes selective historical content with effective analysis to support the thesis. Grade: 9 (Excellent)

## SAMPLE ESSAY 2

Although there were many disputes, differences, and events that made compromise in the decades before the 1850s very difficult, political leaders such as Clay and Calhoun were able to work out solutions that politically resolved the differences between North and South and therefore prevented secession and war. Unfortunately the nation's political leaders were not up to the task in the 1850s. As early as the Constitutional Convention the Framers developed solutions to sectional problems such as the Three-fifths Compromise and the Assumption Bill. In the early nineteenth century, with tensions high over the attempt to expand or limit the spread of slavery, congressional leaders were able to work out the Missouri Compromise, which defined where slavery could and could not expand. In 1850 the United States could have experienced civil war had not political leaders worked out the Compromise of 1850, which strengthened the Fugitive Slave Act in the South's favor but allowed California to enter as a free state. True, the Dred Scott decision effectively eliminated the Missouri Compromise, but political leaders such as Senator Stephen Douglas could not create compromises that would reduce tensions. Instead, they offered the controversial Kansas-Nebraska Act.

The idea of popular sovereignty made compromise almost impossible because Congress could no longer establish areas where slavery could expand and where it could not. Besides, the Kansas-Nebraska Act further enforced the Fugitive Slave Act, which angered Northerners immensely. The only thing holding the Union together at this point was the hope on the part of the South that it could in the future continue to expand slavery. Lincoln, who was opposed to the expansion of slavery, concerned the South so much that no one in 1860 could find any way to compromise. With Lincoln's election the South seceded. But it didn't have to come to that. The nation's political leaders had failed to do what their predecessors in Congress had been able to achieve: effective compromises.

△ COMMENT This essay has a clear thesis: the nation's political leaders in the 1850s were responsible for failing to reduce or resolve the sectional tensions through effective compromises that earlier political leaders had accomplished. The writer cites several important political compromises. The scope of this essay could be broader, however, in that the author does not incorporate the role of territorial expansion

into the discussion. Further, the discussion is limited in that no clear differences between the sections are established. Thus the essay focuses only on the controversy over the expansion of slavery and not on its economic and political consequences for the sections. It also depicts the Compromise of 1850 as a workable solution that had no subsequent repercussions. In fact the North was outraged by the Fugitive Slave component of the act. There is also a factual error: the Kansas-Nebraska Act did not strengthen the Fugitive Slave Act. An explanation of popular sovereignty would also add to the quality of this essay. Nevertheless, the writer exhibits a good understanding of the topic and uses information that sustains the thesis throughout the essay. Grade: 6 (Good)

### SAMPLE ESSAY 3

Compromise in the 1850s was impossible because the North and South no longer wanted to negotiate. They believed that only through war would their differences be settled. The Missouri Compromise was more effective than the Kansas-Nebraska Act. It prevented war, whereas the Kansas-Nebraska Act made war more possible. Popular sovereignty was not an effective solution either. Now slavery could spread anywhere and the North would be opposed to this. Lincoln was opposed to the spread of slavery, but he was not willing to break up the Union for it. Therefore a better solution to the problem could not be found. If Lincoln opposed the spread of slavery, what other option did the South have but to leave the Union? Also, the North and South viewed slavery differently. The North opposed it as inhumane; but the South claimed it was an institution that benefited both Southern whites and slaves. Had the Framers at the Constitutional Convention addressed the issue of slavery, future generations would not have to find solutions and compromises to this problem. But even if Congress did work out compromises, such as the Missouri Compromise, no one could determine what the Supreme Court would do, such as the Dred Scott case. Lincoln's election was not the cause of the war. True, he was a Northerner, but so were other presidents. Put simply, neither the North nor the South favored compromise by the 1850s because they could not resolve their political differences.

✎ COMMENT This essay is weak in a number of areas. While it has a thesis, it is rudimentary; the thesis is not developed in the essay effectively. The writer strings together generalizations that have little connection to one another. Important issues are not explained. For instance the writer contends that the Missouri Compromise was more effective than the Kansas-Nebraska Act but does not explain how or why the former prevented war. This essay lacks focus, analysis, and sufficient historical information to defend the thesis. Grade: 3 (Poor)

