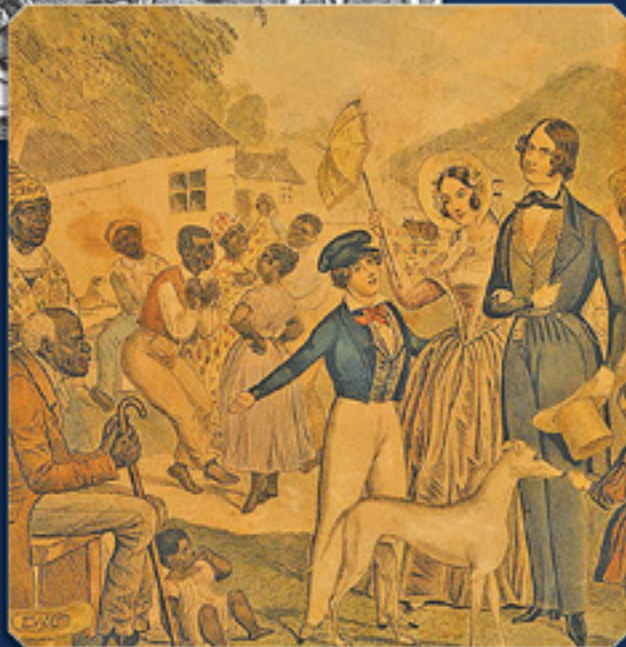


DOCUMENTS

Interpreting Alternative Viewpoints
in Primary Source Documents

Calhoun vs. the Abolitionists

John C. Calhoun mounted a powerful defense of slavery. Did the abolitionists counter his ideas effectively enough?



Debating the
DOCUMENTS

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*John C. Calhoun mounted a powerful defense of slavery.
Did the abolitionists counter his ideas effectively enough?*

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Teacher Introduction

★ Using Primary Sources

Primary sources are called “primary” because they are first-hand records of a past era or historical event. They are the raw materials, or the evidence, on which historians base their “secondary” accounts of the past.

A rapidly growing number of history teachers today are using primary sources. Why? Perhaps it's because primary sources give students a better sense of what history is and what historians do. Such sources also help students see the past from a variety of viewpoints. Moreover, primary sources make history vivid and bring it to life.

However, primary sources are not easy to use. They can be confusing. They can be biased. They rarely all agree. Primary sources must be interpreted and set in context. To do this, students need historical background knowledge. *Debating the Documents* helps students handle such challenges by giving them a useful framework for analyzing sources that conflict with one another.



*“Multiple,
conflicting
perspectives are
among the truths
of history.
No single
objective or
universal account
could ever put an
end to this endless
creative dialogue
within and
between the past
and the present.”*

From the 2011 Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct of the Council of the American Historical Association.

INTRODUCTION

★ *The Debating the Documents Series*

Each *Debating the Documents* booklet includes the same sequence of reproducible worksheets. If students use several booklets over time, they will get regular practice at interpreting and comparing conflicting sources. In this way, they can learn the skills and habits needed to get the most out of primary sources.

Each *Debating the Documents* Booklet Includes

- **Suggestions for the Student and an Introductory Essay.** The student gets instructions and a one-page essay providing background on the booklet's topic. A time line on the topic is also included.
- **Two Groups of Contrasting Primary Source Documents.** In most of the booklets, students get one pair of visual sources and one pair of written sources. In some cases, more than two are provided for each. Background is provided on each source. *Within each group, the sources clash in a very clear way.* (The sources are not always exact opposites, but they do always differ in some obvious way.)
- **Three Worksheets for Each Document Group.** Students use the first two worksheets to take notes on the sources. The third worksheet asks which source the student thinks would be most useful to a historian.
- **One DBQ.** On page 20, a document-based question (DBQ) asks students to write an effective essay using all of the booklet's primary sources.

★ *How to Use This Booklet*

1. Have students read “Suggestions for the Student” and the Introductory Essay.

Give them copies of pages 5–7. Ask them to read the instructions and then read the introductory essay on the topic. The time line gives them additional information on that topic. This reading could be done in class or as a homework assignment.

2. Have students do the worksheets.

Make copies of the worksheets and the pages with the sources. Ask students to study the background information on each source and the source itself. Then have them take notes on the sources using the worksheets. If students have access to a computer, have them review the primary sources digitally.

3. “Debate the documents” as a class.

Have students use their worksheet notes to debate the primary source documents as a class. Urge students to follow these ground rules:

- Use your worksheets as a guide for the discussion or debate.
- Try to reach agreement about the main ideas and the significance of each primary source document.
- Look for points of agreement as well as disagreement between the primary sources.
- Listen closely to all points of view about each primary source.
- Focus on the usefulness of each source to the historian, not merely on whether you agree or disagree with that source’s point of view.

4. Have students do the final DBQ.

A DBQ is an essay question about a set of primary source documents. To answer the DBQ, students write essays using evidence from the sources and their own background knowledge of the historical era. (See the next page for a DBQ scoring guide to use in evaluating these essays.)

The DBQ assignment on page 20 includes guidelines for writing a DBQ essay. Here are some additional points to make with students about preparing to write this kind of essay.

The DBQ for this Booklet (see page 20):

“Calhoun’s powerful defense of slavery was hard for abolitionists to fully dismiss or argue against.” Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why?

- Analyze the question carefully.
- Use your background knowledge to set sources in their historical context.
- Question and interpret sources actively. Do not accept them at face value.
- Use sources meaningfully to support your essay’s thesis.
- Pay attention to the overall organization of your essay.

INTRODUCTION

★ *Complete DBQ Scoring Guide*

Use this guide in evaluating the DBQ for this booklet. Use this scoring guide with students who are already familiar with using primary sources and writing DBQ essays.

Excellent Essay

- Offers a clear answer or thesis explicitly addressing all aspects of the essay question.
- Does a careful job of interpreting many or most of the documents and relating them clearly to the thesis and the DBQ. Deals with conflicting documents effectively.
- Uses details and examples effectively to support the thesis and other main ideas. Explains the significance of those details and examples well.
- Uses background knowledge and the documents in a balanced way.
- Is well written; clear transitions make the essay easy to follow from point to point. Only a few minor writing errors or errors of fact.

Good Essay

- Offers a reasonable thesis addressing the essential points of the essay question.
- Adequately interprets at least some of the documents and relates them to the thesis and the DBQ.
- Usually relates details and examples meaningfully to the thesis or other main ideas.
- Includes some relevant background knowledge.
- May have some writing errors or errors of fact, as long as these do not invalidate the essay's overall argument or point of view.

Fair Essay

- Offers at least a partly developed thesis addressing the essay question.
- Adequately interprets at least a few of the documents.
- Relates only a few of the details and examples to the thesis or other main ideas.
- Includes some background knowledge.
- Has several writing errors or errors of fact that make it harder to understand the essay's overall argument or point of view.

Poor Essay

- Offers no clear thesis or answer addressing the DBQ.
- Uses few documents effectively other than referring to them in "laundry list" style, with no meaningful relationship to a thesis or any main point.
- Uses details and examples unrelated to the thesis or other main ideas. Does not explain the significance of these details and examples.
- Is not clearly written, with some major writing errors or errors of fact.

Suggestions to the Student

★ *Using Primary Sources*

A primary source is any record of evidence from the past. Many things are primary sources: letters, diary entries, official documents, photos, cartoons, wills, maps, charts, etc. They are called “primary” because they are first-hand records of a past event or time period. This *Debating the Documents* lesson is based on two groups of primary source documents. Within each group, the sources conflict with one another. That is, they express different or even opposed points of view. You need to decide which source is more reliable, more useful, or more typical of the time period. This is what historians do all the time. Usually, you will be able to learn something about the past from each source, even when the sources clash with one another in dramatic ways.

★ *How to Use This Booklet*

1. Read the one-page introductory essay.

This gives you background information that will help you analyze the primary source documents and do the exercises for this *Debating the Documents* lesson. The time line gives you additional information you will find helpful.



2. Study the primary source documents for this lesson.

For this lesson, you get two groups of sources. The sources within each group conflict with one another. Some of these sources are visuals, others are written sources. With visual sources, pay attention not only to the image’s “content” (its subject matter) but also to its artistic style, shading, composition, camera angle, symbols, and other features that add to the image’s meaning. With written sources, notice the writing style, bias, even what the source leaves out or does not talk about. Think about each source’s author, that author’s reasons for writing, and the likely audience for the source. These considerations give you clues as to the source’s historical value.

3. Use the worksheets to analyze each group of primary source documents.

For each group of sources, you get three worksheets. Use the “Study the Document” worksheets to take notes on each source. Use the “Comparing the Documents” worksheet to decide which of the sources would be most useful to a historian.

4. As a class, debate the documents.

Use your worksheet notes to help you take part in this debate.

5. Do the final DBQ.

“DBQ” means “document-based question.” A DBQ is a question along with several primary source documents. To answer the DBQ, write an essay using evidence from the documents and your own background history knowledge.

Calhoun and the Abolitionists

The Debate over Slavery

Can you imagine anyone in America today actually defending the idea of slavery? Most people today would be appalled at the idea of owning another human being as a piece of property. The very thought of it would be sickening. Slavery seems so cruel and unjust to us now that it is hard to believe intelligent and well-meaning people ever believed in it. And yet they did.

In fact, not only did people believe in slavery, they argued openly and proudly in defense of it. “Amazing,” you might say, “how could they be such fools?” Yet here is a question for you: As a student of history, is it enough simply to condemn such views? Can you really understand an upsetting idea from the past if all you do is react to it in disgust?

Keep in mind that in the mid-1800s, before the Civil War, some of the South’s most intelligent and forceful thinkers defended black slavery. That is, they defended the buying and selling of African Americans to work on their farms and plantations. They saw slavery as a positive good for society. They developed well-reasoned, careful arguments for these views. They even used words like “equality,” “justice,” and “liberty” to defend human bondage in the South. Moreover, they challenged the North to defend its system of free labor on the same grounds. That is, they said both blacks and whites in the South were better off than the poor in the factories and cities of the North.

Does this defense of slavery seem surprising? Well, the past is often surprising. People in past times usually faced different conditions, thought differently, and used words differently. To understand these people better, you first need to try to see things as they saw them. If you don’t, you may be making a mistake historians call “presentism.” You make this mistake when you assume that people in the past thought and

acted just as people do in the present. The past is never that simple. You certainly may condemn the defense of slavery. But first, try to understand it. If nothing else, this will make the past more real to you. In the end, it may even help you better understand your own views about slavery.

Northerners, of course, were busy before the Civil War developing their own ideas about slavery. Some actually agreed with the Southern defense of slavery. Others opposed slavery because they feared both it and blacks together as threats to the North’s way of life. Yet the most forceful attacks on slavery were those of the abolitionists and others opposed to slavery on moral grounds. Their arguments will probably seem more reasonable to you. However, even these may not be as close to your own way of thinking as you might expect. Here, too, you should try to avoid presentism and understand the abolitionists and their own ways of thinking about freedom, equality, and human bondage.

In this booklet, the visual primary sources present Southern and Northern views of slavery and its political impact (pages 8–9). The written sources (pages 14–15) pit one of slavery’s strongest defenders, John C. Calhoun, against one of its strongest opponents, William Lloyd Garrison. As the Northern anti-slavery challenge to the South grew, Southerners actually became more forceful in defending slavery as a “positive good.” Known as the “cast-iron man,” Calhoun was a strong-willed, intelligent defender of slavery throughout a long political career lasting from 1810 to 1850. Garrison was perhaps the leading abolitionist of this time. His powerful attack on the evils of slavery offers a vastly different view from Calhoun’s. Together, the ideas of these men will help you see how the great divide over slavery could split the nation in two.

Calhoun & Abolitionism Time Line

1782

- • • On March 18, John C. Calhoun is born in South Carolina.

1787

- • • The Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade is founded in England. In America, Congress (under the Articles of Confederation) adopts the Northwest Ordinance. It provides for the creation of new states in the Northwest Territory and also bars slavery from that territory.

1808

- • • The Constitution's twenty-year ban on laws against the slave trade runs out. Congress outlaws the importation of slaves.

1810

- • • Calhoun is elected to Congress for the first time.

1820

- • • In the Compromise of 1820, Maine is admitted as a free state, Missouri as a slave state, and slavery is banned in the northern part of the Louisiana Purchase.

1824

- • • Calhoun is elected vice-president of the United States, under John Q. Adams. In 1828, he will also be vice president under Andrew Jackson.

1831

- • • In January, William Lloyd Garrison begins publishing *The Liberator*. In August, Nat Turner leads a slave uprising in Virginia. More than 50 whites and about 100 slaves are killed. Calhoun breaks with Jackson over the tariff and resigns from the vice-presidency.

1832

- • • The South Carolina legislature elects Calhoun to the Senate.

1833

- • • Calhoun defends his state's right to nullify federal tariffs. This "Nullification Crisis" clearly implies that the South will also seek to nullify attempts to restrict or end slavery. Increasingly, Calhoun will become the proslavery South's greatest champion. England outlaws slavery in all British colonies and in England itself. The American Anti-Slavery Society is formed.

1836

- • • Congress passes the "Gag Rule" prohibiting the reading of anti-slavery petitions in Congress.

1837

- • • In a famous Senate speech, Calhoun defends slavery as a "positive good." A mob murders abolitionist Elijah Lovejoy on November 7.

1840

- • • The Liberty Party, established by abolitionists, runs a candidate in the presidential election.

1844

- • • The Gag Rule is lifted in the U.S. Congress.

1847

- • • William Lloyd Garrison and Frederick Douglass take part in a speaking tour in Ohio.

1848

- • • Frederick Douglass begins editing his newspaper *The North Star*.

1850

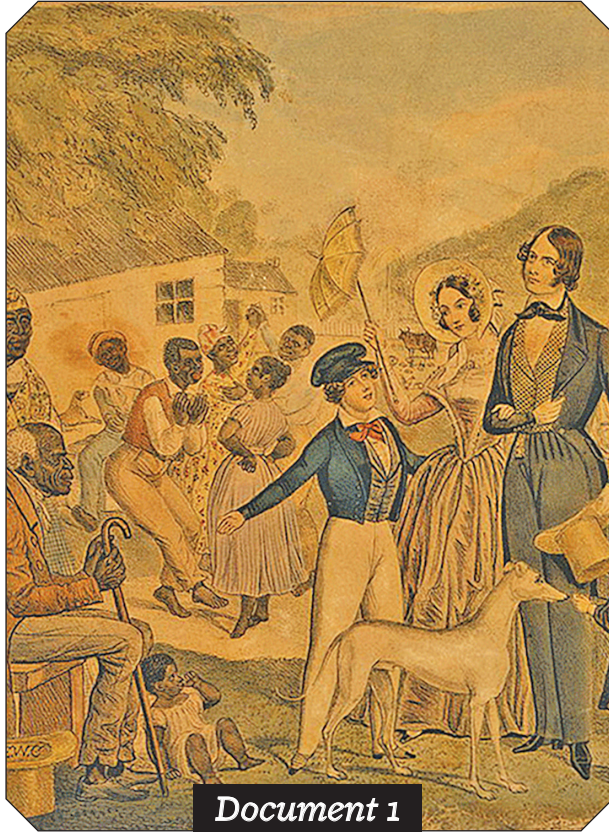
- • • On March 4, another Senator reads Calhoun's last speech to the Senate. In it, he opposes the Compromise of 1850's limits on slavery expansion. Calhoun dies on March 31. As part of the Compromise of 1850, Congress passes the Fugitive Slave Act, which requires the return of runaway slaves seeking sanctuary in the North. This outrages Northern opinion.

1852

- • • After being serialized in a newspaper, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe is published as a book. It sells a million copies over the next 18 months.

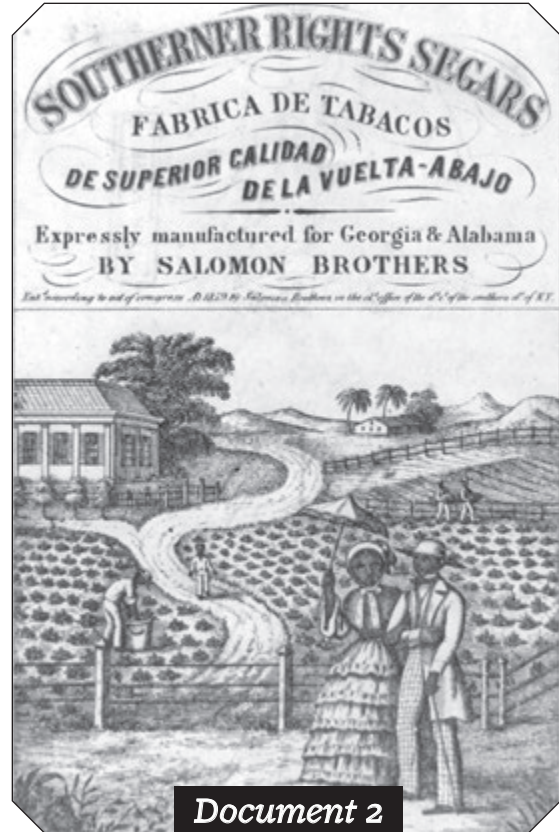
DOCUMENTS 1 & 2

Visual Primary Source Documents 1 & 2



Document 1

Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZC4-5950.



Document 2

Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZC4-12488

Information on Documents 1 & 2

Document 1, on the left, offers a view of slavery by E. W. Clay, a northern artist. This illustration was published in New York in 1841. In it, slaves dance and look over at their slave owner and his family. In the illustration's caption, the old slave says, "God Bless you massa! You feed and clothe us. When we are sick you nurse us, and when too old to work, you provide for us!" The master vows, "These poor creatures are a sacred legacy from my ancestors and while a dollar is left me, nothing shall be spared to increase their comfort and happiness."

Document 2, on the right, is a view of slave life in the American South. It is from an 1859 printed label for cigars "expressly manufactured for Georgia and Alabama." The New York firm Salomon Brothers created this label with Southern consumers in mind at a momentous time in U.S. history, just before the Civil War. The illustration shows a tobacco plantation with a manor house and a field in which black slaves harvest tobacco. In the foreground a black couple are out for a stroll.