

Slavery and sectional attitudes, 1820-1860 essay sample

[Sociology](#), [Slavery](#)



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By the mid 1830s many Americans were now having mixed feelings about slavery. In fact the nation was even threatened to separate over the whole issue. Perhaps it was one of the main reasons that the United States has fought the civil war. Basically the majority of the people living in the north were against slavery, and the white southerners were proslavery.

The north saw slavery as an evil. They said that it was immoral; that in a nation such as the United States, where principles of equality and freedom come from, slavery is wrong and shouldn't exist. In addition, the north argued that the nation shouldn't depend on only the crops produced by slaves. It should engage in other systems of commerce.

In October of 1854, Abraham Lincoln made a speech about slavery at Peoria, Illinois. He said that slavery violates many principles of the United States' politics. How can slavery exist in such a nation where freedom and equality exist? In this speech he warned all Americans that if they continue to exploit the slaves for profit then the nation may fall and even white man's freedom could be jeopardized.

In 1857, Hinton Helper has published a book called "The Impending Crisis". In this book he stresses on the economic effects of slavery. He argues that the United States has grown so accustomed to slavery that it has forgotten other systems of commerce. He says that the nation cannot depend on only slavery and the staple crops. He suggests that the U. S. should start to seek other means of obtaining wealth. He says, "We must begin to feed on a more substantial diet than that of proslavery politics.... Before us there is vast work to be accomplished... It is not less a work than that of infusing the

spirit of liberty into all our systems of commerce, agriculture, manufactures, government, literature, and religion." He concludes by saying that "oligarchal despotism must be overthrown; slavery must be abolished."

Perhaps the one of the most influential pieces of literature against slavery was a book called "Uncle Tom's Cabin" which was published in 1852. This book helped convince many Americans that not only was slavery wrong but it also reviled many negative aspects of a slave's life. This book was widely sold. In fact, 135,000 sets and 270,000 volumes were sold to thousands of Americans and other people all over the world, convincing many people that slavery is wrong and immoral.

Contrast to the northern majority, white southerners viewed slavery as a positive good. They said that overall the slaves of the south, were treated much better than the workers in the factories in the north. They argued that the production of staple crops depends on the slaves. Lastly, the slaves did not only work on the plantations but also provided other services such as nursing the children of the whites.

When Governor George McDuffie addressed the South Carolina legislature in 1835, he said that in many aspects the lives of slaves were actually better than those of some of the workers in the north. He said that the factories in the north had conditions that were even worse than those of slavery. He also discusses how many people starve in the public poorhouses in the north. He concludes by saying that the slaves never have to experience anything like this.

In 1837, William Harper wrote a Memoir on Slavery. In this memoir he questions that if the abolitionists are successful then what is going to happen to the plantations of the south? He answers this question by saying that slaves are crucial to the production of the staple crops such as cotton. If slavery was to be ended than surely the production of cotton would be ended and with it the economy would plummet.

Another positive aspect of slavery was that not only were the slaves responsible for the crops but some were even given the task of nursing the children of the whites. This was paradoxical because the masters would not allow the slaves to own property or exercise civil rights, yet they entrusted their own children into the hands of the slaves. Many slaves served as a surrogate mother for the offspring of the planter class.

As it can be seen both the north and the south had good arguments. The north said that slavery was wrong and evil. The south said that it was necessary for the country's economy. However in the end history reveals that it was wrong and immoral. The nation is even forced to divide over this issue and fight one of the bloodiest wars which was called the Civil War.