

Section B: American Option

The Origins of the Civil War, 1846–1861

Daniel Webster's Seventh of March Speech, 1850

- 2** Read the sources and then answer **both** parts of the question.

Source A

In the excited times in which we live, there is found to exist a state of bitterness between the North and the South. There are lists of grievances produced by each; and those grievances, real or supposed, alienate the minds of one portion of the country from the other. I shall bestow a little attention on these various grievances. I begin with the complaints of the South. I will refer to one which has in my opinion just foundation: and that is there has been found in the North, among individuals and among legislators, a disinclination to perform their constitutional duties in regard to the return of persons bound to service who have escaped into the free states. In that respect, the South, in my judgement is right and the North is wrong.

I put it to all the sober and sound minds of the North as a question of morals and a question of conscience. What right have they, in their legislative capacity, or any other capacity, to endeavour to get round this Constitution, or to embarrass the free exercise of the rights secured in the Constitution to the persons whose slaves escape them? None at *all*, none at *all*.

*From the Seventh of March speech to the US Senate given by Daniel Webster,
Senator for Massachusetts, 1850.*

Source B

Mr Webster's speech seems to us to have for its object not at all the great question of right and wrong now open before our people but the mere quieting of the country. He treats the North and South as a father might treat two quarrelsome boys by dividing the dispute between them.

The doctrine of equilibrium – plainly stated by Mr Calhoun, obviously meant by Mr Webster – is simply shocking and utterly inadmissible. The great Northern statesman, after defending the Constitution with his unrivalled powers, has at length sacrificed himself to it. He seems not to know how deep a hold the anti-slavery movement has on the conscience of the great mass of the New England and the Western people. No genius, no eloquence, no public position, no past services can make his views tolerable to the calm reflection of the Free States.

From 'The Liberator', 29 March 1850.

Source C

About eight hundred men, most of them citizens of Boston, have addressed to Daniel Webster a letter expressing their approval of his late, notorious speech in the Senate. The leading signers belong to the class expressively termed the 'Cottonocracy', of whom it is said that if they were ever to reach heaven, they would no doubt seek to dam up the waters of the river of life to drive their spinning machines. Webster has been for years not the Representative of Massachusetts but the tool of these 'cotton lords', the Trinity of whose worship is the golden eagle, the silver dollar and the copper cent, these three being, according to their faith, 'one Money, and entitled to the supreme adoration of their stunted souls'.

From 'The Anti-Slavery Bugle', New Lisbon, Ohio, 20 April 1850.

Source D

Four years ago tonight, on one of those high critical moments in history when great issues are determined, when the powers of right and wrong are mustered for conflict, Mr Webster most unexpectedly threw his whole weight on the side of slavery and caused by his personal and official authority the passage of the Fugitive Slave Bill. People were expecting a totally different course from Mr Webster. The old fugitive law was fast becoming a dead letter. The new Bill made it operative, required me to hunt slaves. The way in which the country was dragged to consent to this, and the disastrous defection of the men of letters, of some preachers of religion, was the darkest passage in our history.

*From a lecture on the Fugitive Slave Law read by a prominent abolitionist at the Tabernacle,
New York City, 7 March 1854.*

Answer **both** parts of the question with reference to the sources.

- (a) To what extent do Sources B and C agree on the reaction of the North to Daniel Webster's Seventh of March speech? [15]
- (b) 'A disaster for the abolitionists.' How far do these sources support this assertion about the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850? [25]