

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

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HISTORY 203 – Varying Viewpoints – Due Friday, Dec. 10<sup>th</sup>

Charles and Mary Beard, *The Rise of American Civilization (1927)*

A view of the Civil War as an economic and social revolution:

“At the bottom, the so-called Civil War...was a social war, ending in the unquestioned establishment of a new power in the government, making vast changes in the arrangement of class, in the accumulation and distribution of wealth, in the course of industrial development, and in the Constitution inherited from the Fathers...If the series or acts by which the bourgeois and peasants of France overthrew the king, nobility, and clergy is to be called the French Revolution, then accuracy compels us to characterize by the same term the social cataclysm in which the capitalists, laborers, and farmers of the North and West drove from power in the national government the planting aristocracy of the South...The so-called civil war was in reality a Second American Revolution, and in a strict sense, the First.””

David M. Potter, *The Impending Crisis, 1848-1861 (1976)*

A view of the 1850s as a time of irreconcilable conflict between North and South over the central issue of slavery:

“Thus slavery suddenly emerged as a transcendent sectional issue in its own right, and as a catalyst of all sectional antagonisms, political, economic, and cultural...The slavery question became the sectional question, the sectional question became the slavery question, and both became the territorial question...From the sultry August night in 1846 when Wilmot caught the chairman’s eye, the slavery question steadily widened the sectional rift until an April dawn in 1861 when the batteries along the Charleston waterfront opened fire on Fort Sumter...”

Michael Holt, *Forging a Majority: The Formation of the Republican Party in Pittsburgh, 1848-1860 (1969)*

A view of the 1850’s as a time when many issues besides slavery dominated national politics:

“Politics did not revolve around [slavery and the South] just as politics today does not revolve around communism, although most people dislike it. Instead social, ethnic, and religious considerations often determined who voted for whom between 1848 and 1861. Divisions between native-born Americans and immigrants, between Protestants and Catholics, rather than differences of opinion about the tariff or the morality of slavery, distinguished Whigs and Republicans from Democrats...Interpreting the rise of the Republican Party in the North solely in terms of hostility to slavery or economic issues is, therefore, too simplified.”

1. How does each of these views see the relationship between slavery and sectional feeling?
2. What does each of these views see as the relationship between slavery and other issues in the 1850s?
3. How would each of these historians interpret the decline of the Whigs and the rise of the Republicans in the 1850s?