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Final Paper

A More Perfect Union: The Origins and Development of the U.S. Constitution

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In the novel, *Slave Nation How Slavery United the Colonies & Sparked the American Revolution*, by Alfred W. Blumrosen & Ruth G. Blumrosen, the authors discussed the important role slavery played in the making of our nation. Slavery played a role in the decision to declare independence from Great Britain and the decision to unite thirteen states into one country. The authors' premise is that slavery was a main cause for the American Revolution. "It is ironic that but for the desire of Virginians to retain and perpetuate slavery, the clarion call to liberty that is the Declaration might never have been heard". (P.139)

The authors do a convincing job of informing the reader about the many situations in which slavery played a major role in the decision making of the leaders of the thirteen colonies. Slavery was so important to the South that they were unwilling to have the institution of slavery be endangered. With Great Britain's decision in the Somerset case to free Somerset, the South became concerned. "Thus the refusal of Parliament to consider whether to legalize slavery in Britain during Somerset's trial, implying a lack of sympathy toward the slave owners, may have been as upsetting to the southern colonies as the Somerset decision itself." (P. 36)

The Somerset trial invoked fear in many Southerners. "The Declaratory Act of 1766, claiming parliamentary power over "all cases whatsoever" in the colonies, in conjunction with the Somerset decision, was an assertion on parliamentary power to destroy the southern economy and the social conditions built upon slavery." (P. 110)

Southerners were nervous that Parliament could make the decision to abolish slavery in the colonies.

The Somerset case made the South concerned with Great Britain's rule over them. The decision made many unsure of the future. Some believed Great Britain would do nothing about slavery, while others believed it was in jeopardy. Although the South recognized the ruling of the Somerset case they were uncertain and apprehensive about what it meant to the future of slavery. "The importance of Somerset in the American colonies was the impression that the decision created in the minds of the colonist planter-lawyer-politicians in the late 1772, who could only read the words, not the future." (P.35)

The South depended on their slaves. It allowed them to build a strong economy and live a certain lifestyle. Slavery gave the South the ability to have a powerful voice. With Great Britain beginning to exercise increasing control over the colonies, Southerners continued to have growing concerns about the institution of slavery and its longevity. "After Somerset, slavery and the colonial life it supported existed at the will of an apparently unfriendly Parliament." (P.37)

With more unrest growing and more colonies leaning towards declaring independence from Great Britain, the colonies were beginning to work together. The colonies began to unite in a shared belief that independence from Great Britain was an absolute necessity. The South, although not occupied like Boston, was uneasy with Great Britain's increasing control. "The events which unfold after the call for colonial committees of correspondence demonstrate the intensity of the southern commitment to both independence and slavery. These developments evolved toward a joining of the

northern and southern interests around concepts of “liberty and property.” Because slavery was subsumed within the concept of property, the South did not need to make a public demand for colonial support of slavery.” (P. 71)

The North was resistant to pass judgment on the South for the institution of slavery because the North needed the South to be able to gain independence from Great Britain. “In 1774, with Boston occupied by the British, the bargaining power of the South as compared to the North was overwhelming. Had Adams, or any northerner, raised the issue of the legitimacy of slavery, the South could simply have walked away from Philadelphia and allowed Massachusetts to sink under the weight of the British forces then in possession.” (P.96)

With the decision to declare independence and fight the American Revolution the states had new concerns. How would they govern themselves? Would they have a strong or weak central government? Inescapably, what would they do about slavery? “Adams’s statement to Jefferson is evidence that the most influential colonies-Massachusetts, Virginia, and the slave colonies-agreed to protect colonial slavery when the first met in 1774. Protecting slavery was such an important issue that it was resolved in favor of the South early in the first session of the Continental Congress.” (P.89) The South and the North wanted to create a union, but both had their needs that they wanted met.

Adams’ commitment to creating a union did not allow him to have a strong anti-slavery voice. Although it appeared he did not care for slavery he was not about to voice that concern. He knew to create the union he needed to allow the south to make the decisions about slavery. “Adams made clear in later life that he had deferred to the southern on the issue of slavery:” I have constantly said in former times to the southern

gentlemen, I cannot comprehend this object. I must leave it to you. I will vote for forcing no measure against your judgments.” (P. 88) Many believed Adams had a conversation at an early time about slavery and told the Southern leaders he would not interfere with their desire to keep slavery legal.

Slavery continued to be involved in conflict. As the states tried to form a new type of government to unite the States under a new constitution, the issue with slavery continued to be a problem. The South wanted to keep slavery and the North did not. A larger concern was what to do with the growing nation, have them be slave states or free states. Both sides had to compromise to allow the union to be created. “Restricting the land ordinance to the northwest meant that slavery continued to be lawful south of the Ohio. This change in another indication that the decision to protect slavery north of the Ohio had emerged to address the crisis at the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia.” (P.205) Slavery would be apart of the United States of America or there would not be a United States of America.

The South was willing to allow the passage of the Northwest Ordinance because they were able to have slave states south of the Ohio. The South did think it was useful to have slaves in the northern parts of the new territory. “Other reasons have been given for the willingness of the South to give up on slavery in the northwest. In the winter climates, slavery was not viewed as cost effective as in the South.” (P. 216) The south was able to make the concession because they did not believe slavery would be a benefit, they believed it would cost too much money to own and maintain slaves in that region.

In my opinion the authors did a great job giving examples of the importance of slavery in the creation of our country. Although it maybe an ugly part of

our nation's history, it gives rise to the question if slavery did not exist would our nation. "It is ironic that but for the desire of Virginians to retain and perpetuate slavery, the clarion call to liberty that is the Declaration might never have been heard". (P.139)

Pedology

With the information I learned through reading this book I would have different assignments for different students. The strengths and weakness of the skills my students possess are quite a range. Some students are more verbal and great presenters, while others have strong writing skills. Some of my students are very concrete and making visuals are a good learning tool for them.

For my students who enjoy presenting I would have them research and prepare for a debate about the of role slavery played in the establishment of our nation. The students would debate whether they believed it played a large or small role in the making of our nation. For my strong writers I would have them write a play about a day in history when the leaders of the states were debating slavery. For other students I would have them research, design and illustrate a time line about the laws passed about slavery from the colonial times though the abolishment of slavery.

The book was extremely thought provoking. I would use excerpts from the book itself and lead the students in a class discussion about the content of the excerpt. I would then challenge my students to find a different opinion then the authors about the topic discussed.

Bibliography

Blumrosen, Alfred W. and Ruth G. Blumrosen. *Slave Nation How Slavery United the Colonies & Sparked the American Revolution*. Illinois: Sourcebooks, 2005.

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