Name _____ Date _____

Road to the Civil War: Timeline from the Missouri Compromise to Fort Sumter

Directions: Read the short passage and study the timeline from 1820 to 1861. Then answer each question.

The Road to the Civil War

Why the Union Broke Apart

Historians agree that slavery was the main cause of the Civil War. Above all, Americans fought over whether slavery would spread into the West. As the nation gained new land in the West, Northerners and Southerners clashed again and again over that question. In 1820, Congress drew a line across the Louisiana Purchase. Slavery was banned north of the line, except in Missouri.

That line held until 1854. Then a new law let settlers in Kansas and Nebraska vote on slavery for themselves. Supporters and opponents of slavery rushed into Kansas, and fighting broke out there. Opponents of the law formed the Republican Party to keep slavery from spreading. Three years later, the Supreme Court ruled that Black Americans could not be citizens. It also ruled that Congress could not ban slavery in the territories.

In November 1860, Abraham Lincoln, a Republican who opposed the spread of slavery, was elected president. Many Southern leaders believed his victory threatened slavery. South Carolina left the Union the next month, and other states soon followed. Leaders who backed secession argued that a state had the right to leave the Union. Several of these states wrote statements explaining why they were leaving. In them, the states named the protection of slavery as their chief reason. In April 1861, Confederate forces fired on Fort Sumter, and the war began.

Timeline: The road to the Civil War, 1820 to 1861

Date	Event
March 1820	Missouri Compromise: Missouri may join the Union as a slave state and Maine as a free state. Slavery is banned in the rest of the Louisiana Purchase north of Missouri's southern border.
May 1846	The United States goes to war with Mexico.
February 1848	A treaty ends the war with Mexico. The United States gains California and most of the Southwest.
September 1850	Compromise of 1850: California joins the Union as a free state, and a stronger Fugitive Slave Act helps enslavers recapture people who escaped to free states.
March 1852	*Uncle Tom's Cabin*, a novel that shows the cruelty of slavery, comes out as a book. It sells 300,000 copies in the United States in its first year.

Date	Event
May 1854	The Kansas-Nebraska Act lets settlers in Kansas and Nebraska vote on slavery, ending the Missouri Compromise line.
July 1854	Opponents of the Kansas-Nebraska Act form the Republican Party to stop the spread of slavery.
May 1856	A proslavery mob attacks the antislavery town of Lawrence, Kansas, burning a hotel and wrecking newspaper offices.
March 1857	In the Dred Scott decision, the Supreme Court rules that Black Americans cannot be citizens and that Congress cannot ban slavery in the territories.
August to October 1858	Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas hold seven debates about slavery during their race for a U.S. Senate seat from Illinois.
October 1859	John Brown leads a raid on the federal armory at Harpers Ferry, Virginia, hoping to start an uprising of enslaved people. He is captured and later executed.
November 1860	Abraham Lincoln, a Republican, is elected president.
December 1860	South Carolina secedes, or leaves the Union.
January to February 1861	Six more Southern states secede. In February, seceded states form the Confederate States of America.
April 1861	Confederate forces fire on Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor, South Carolina. The Civil War begins.

1. What does the passage say historians agree was the main cause of the Civil War?

A. A quarrel with Britain over sailors taken from American ships

B. Taxes that Parliament placed on tea and paper

C. Slavery, and above all whether it would spread into the West

D. A fight over whether to keep a national bank

2. According to the passage, what happened soon after the 1854 law let settlers in Kansas and Nebraska vote on slavery?

A. California joined the Union as a free state.

B. Maine joined the Union as a free state.

C. Congress drew a line across the Louisiana Purchase to limit slavery.

D. Supporters and opponents of slavery rushed into Kansas.

3. Three events from the 1850s are listed below. Using the timeline, label each one First, Second or Third in the order it happened.

Write the letter of the matching answer on each line.

1. _____ Lincoln and Douglas hold seven debates in Illinois
2. _____ *Uncle Tom's Cabin* comes out as a book
3. _____ The Supreme Court decides the Dred Scott case

A. Second

B. First

C. Third

4. Use the timeline to fill in the state name each sentence needs.

Word bank
California • Missouri • Virginia • South Carolina • Kansas

In 1850, _____ joined the Union as a free state. In December 1860, _____ became the first state to secede.

5. Why did opponents of the Kansas-Nebraska Act form the Republican Party, according to the passage and the timeline?

A. To bring back the war with Mexico and win more land

B. To help Southern states leave the Union

C. To keep slavery from spreading into the territories

D. To support the Supreme Court's Dred Scott decision

6. Which two timeline events show the fight over slavery turning violent before the war began?

☐ A. March 1852: *Uncle Tom's Cabin* comes out as a book.

☐ B. November 1860: Lincoln is elected president.

☐ C. October 1859: John Brown leads a raid on the armory at Harpers Ferry.

☐ D. May 1856: A proslavery mob attacks Lawrence, Kansas.

☐ E. August to October 1858: Lincoln and Douglas hold seven debates.

7. The passage says that after South Carolina left the Union, "other states soon followed." When does the timeline show those states leaving?

A. January to February 1861

B. October 1859

C. March 1857

D. November 1860

8. Leaders who backed secession argued that a state had the right to leave the Union. According to the passage, what did several seceding states name as their chief reason for leaving?

A. To stop the spread of factories

B. To protect slavery

C. To end the Fugitive Slave Act

D. To protest the war with Mexico