



SLAVERY, GEOGRAPHY, AND POLITICS – THE IMPACT OF A 19TH CENTURY POPULATION DENSITY MAP

Activity Items

This activity uses the following online resources:

- Mapping Slavery in the Nineteenth Century
www.census.gov/history/pdf/slavedensitymap.pdf?cssp=SERP
- “Visualizing Slavery,” a 2010 opinion piece in *The New York Times*, by Susan Schulten
opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/12/09/visualizing-slavery/?_r=2

Student Learning Objectives

- I will be able to analyze and interpret a historical map (showing the population density of enslaved people in the southern United States), an opinion piece, and a painting.
- I will be able to explain how decision-makers, such as President Abraham Lincoln, likely used the map during the Civil War.

NAME: _____ DATE: _____

1. Navigate to the URL for “Mapping Slavery in the Nineteenth Century,” and read the text below the map. Next, open an interactive version of this choropleth map by clicking the first link in the text. You can zoom in and out of the map using the slider at the bottom, or you can click and drag the map to move it around. What is the purpose of the “Scale of Shade” in the lower right corner? Use examples to support your answer.

2. What population density patterns do you see on the map, and how do those patterns correspond to or conflict with what you already know about slavery prior to and during the Civil War?

3. The statistical map, which uses 1860 Census data, was the first of its kind to be produced in the United States — by the U.S. Coast Survey in September 1861, shortly after the Confederacy was formed and the secession crisis became the main focus of Abraham Lincoln’s presidency.

What evidence is there that the makers of this map were Union supporters? Why might they have produced this map so soon after the Confederacy was formed?

4. What did the map let readers visualize about the South that they may not have been able to previously?
5. Go to the URL at the top of this activity to read “Visualizing Slavery,” a 2010 opinion piece in *The New York Times* by Susan Schulten, a history professor at the University of Denver. Schulten wrote that the population density map you examined in this activity “uniquely captured the complexity of the institution” of slavery. Explain in your own words what she meant by that statement.
6. Now examine the painting — “President Lincoln Reading the Emancipation Proclamation to His Cabinet,” by Francis Bicknell Carpenter — included in the piece online. By clicking to zoom in, you can see that Carpenter included the population density map in the lower right corner of the scene. What do you think attracted President Lincoln to this map? How did it reflect one of the central themes of his presidency?

