

Name: _____ Date: _____

WORKSHEET

Chapter 10: Western Virginia in the New Nation - 1787-1850 Section 1: Virginia Revises Its Constitution

Virginia Constitutional Convention of 1850-51 (Page 1)

George Summers was born in Virginia and moved to the Kanawha Valley as an infant. In 1830, he was elected to the Virginia General Assembly representing Kanawha County. In 1840, he was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. He was a member of the Virginia Constitutional Convention of 1850.

Directions: Read the excerpts from his comments at the convention, then answer the questions that follow.

...It has been somewhat amusing to witness the array, which has been made on this floor, of the vast amount of property held in eastern Virginia and the enormous taxes which are borne by the people. At the same time we are taunted with our poverty. Certain counties of the West are pointed to, as paying less than the cost of their representation. The east is so abounding in riches that she cannot come into an equal co-partnership with us at all. I venture to say that western Virginia not only bears an equal burthen with eastern Virginia, but that in proportion to the value of our property, we pay more. We pay at the same rate on lands and other taxable property. We have the same subjects of taxation, which the east has. If our cattle, household furniture &c., are untaxed, the same property is untaxed in the east. But then, there is other property on this side of the mountain not taxed. Slaves under twelve years of age are not subjects of taxation. This class, by the computation of the gentleman from Richmond, (Mr. R. G. Scott) amounts in value in eastern Virginia to more than sixty millions of dollars. Admit that they are unproductive, you take very good care not to exclude from taxation, the forest and mountain lands of the west, however unproductive they may be....

You speak of the comparative poverty of eastern Virginia. Why, sir, her very geographical position is capital. A straight line across the North American continent from the Pacific to the Atlantic passes through her borders.... Virginia, in the munificence of her bounty, gave away the "Northwest Territory" to cement the union of these States, and to aid in defraying the expenses of our war of independence. Shall she not seek to participate, at least, in the benefit of commercial relations with the great Commonwealths which have been carved out and are now flourishing upon the soil which was once her very own?

Gentlemen speak of western schemes and western improvements, and of the eastern people being plundered of their money to construct works in the west. Mr. Chairman, I am a western man, but I am also a Virginian. I trust I have a proper appreciation of the interests and the honor of the whole State. I have no hesitation in believing that the central connection (James River-Kanawha) to which I have alluded, whenever made, will bring benefits to eastern Virginia five-fold more important and valuable than the west can ever derive from it. The eastern end of the line will be the commercial end, while ours will be the producing end....

The advocacy of the mixed basis has, so far, proceeded upon the ground, exclusively, that it is necessary to protect eastern Virginia from excessive taxation, and improper appropriation. We have answered to this, that the west is as much interested in the proper exercise of these powers, as is the east. In addition to this, we have offered to insert in the constitution, and all reasonable guaranties for the safety and quiet of our eastern brethren....

A good deal has been said in this discussion about slave property and the necessity for its protection. We have said to our eastern brethren that we cannot consent to put the reins of government in the hands of a minority of the people for the purpose of protecting slaves or any other species of property. We deny that slaves are entitled to be represented as persons or as property.

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**Virginia Constitutional Convention
of 1850-51 (Page 2)**

Directions: Continue reading the excerpts from George Summers’s comments at the convention, then answer the questions that follow.

Gentlemen, you are excitable upon this subject of slave property; you ought to be to a certain extent. It is all right that you should be vigilant. But you are sometimes a little too excitable, and you had better have some cool men, with mountain air fanning their temples, to help you when you go into these consultations down south. Sir, in the event of conflict and of war, we have been told here that the east would like very well to have your help. We will give you our help, but we must come in as equals and brethren – equals in the cabinet as well as in the field – equals in the power to declare the war as well as to wage it.

Gentlemen express surprise that the people of the west should consider themselves degraded by this inequality which is sought to be forced upon them.... When our people see that some five thousand eastern inhabitants can send a member to this body, and that it requires some nine thousand of themselves to do the same thing, it is not easy for them to perceive that you claim superiority, and that by consequence, theirs is a position of inferiority....

George Summers, Kanawha County

Source: Convention Supplement to the *Richmond Enquirer Whig, Examiner, Times, Republican and Republican Advocate*, March 1851.

1. Why does Summers say western Virginia pays more taxes than eastern Virginia? _____

2. What does he say about taxing nonproductive items? _____

3. What does he say about eastern money going to support transportation improvements in the west? _____

4. What is Summers’s opinion about counting slaves to determine representation in the Virginia legislature? _____

5. How many eastern voters equate to a delegate? How many western voters equate to a delegate? _____

