The War Before the War

Discussion Questions

1. What could the North and the South have done to avoid the Civil War and why didn’t they do it?
2. How did Franklin justify continuing to have slaves when he previously said “A slave, … is a human creature stolen, taken by force, bought of another or of himself with money. and being so taken or bought, is compelled to serve the taker or purchaser during pleasure or in life. He may be sold again. … He is bound to obey.
3. What do you think of George Washington’s having slaves and buying new ones directly from slave ships to avoid the commission?
4. When was the “era of good feelings?” Who called them that and why?
5. The author of the book states that there were many reasons for the unraveling of slavery in the United States but one in particular exposed the United States as a lie. This was the fact that enslaved black people, against long odds repeatedly risked their lives to flea their masters in the south in search of freedom in the north. Fugitive slaves exposed the contradiction between the myth that slavery was a benign institution and a reality that a nation punitively based on the principal of human equality was actually a prison house in which millions of Americans had no rights at all. What do you think about this statement and why?
6. Article IV section 2 clause 3 of the constitution is known as the Fugitive Slave clause . Do you think the founding fathers were trying to address the situation of slavery or put a band-aid on it and Why?
7. What was the compromise of 1850? What did it do and what did it cause?
8. In Ohio, a black minister who had escaped slavery 20 years earlier remarked that Satan could now rent out hell and move to the United States where he could feel more at home. What does this mean?
9. “The gap between Emerson’s righteous fury and Lincoln’s reluctant acquiescence comes the driving question of this book.” How could anyone loathe slavery and countenance such an odious law, in Lincoln’s case, a man who built his political career on opposing it and eventually lead the war that would destroy it?
10. When a particular historical error recurs in one form or another, people must decide whether to submit to an unjust law or resist it? Have there been times when this has occurred in our lifetime?
11. Was the Civil War for union or a war against slavery or some mixture of the Two?
12. The novelist James Mcbride said that “The web of slavery is sticky business and at the end of the day ain’t nobody clear of it. What do you think he meant by this?
13. Where in a slave is the line between humanity and property begin and end?
14. F. Scot Fitzgerald says“The ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function” Now days it is referred to as compartmentalization. How did the north and the south founding fathers utilize this technique? Is compartmentalization still use today in our society? If so, how?