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Esther Jaffee – A, Source-Based Essay

In light of the presented sources, it is evident that the arguments put forward in support of slavery were not, by the standards of the time, unreasonable. Sources C, D, and E make it evident that through a combination of economic factors and the pervasive inequality of the time, by the standards of the mid 1800s when the issue of slavery was contested hotly both in political circles and eventually on the battlefield of the Civil War, the arguments put forth by those in affirmation of slavery were not by any means unreasonable. However, sources A and B set forth a compelling argument in favor of the assertion 'the arguments put forward in defense of slavery were unreasonable, even by the standards of the time' as they maintain that the moral standards of the time were not universally in support of slavery at all. Ultimately, while A and B support the conclusion that arguments in defense of slavery were unreasonable by the standards of the time, sources C, D, and E present a more compelling argument in negation of the assertion.

Principally, in refutation of the assertion 'the arguments put forward in defense of slavery were unreasonable, even by the standards of the time' is the supportable argument that economic factors in the 1800s created an environment in which support of slavery was entirely reasonable. Source D's author is the Confederacy's president, who was elected for his moderate perspectives specifically, which would imply that his views on the justification of slavery would be more rational rather than emotional – as Jefferson Davis was never one of the 'fire-eaters' of the time. As such, his appeal to economic rationality rather than simply speaking to the concept of the superiority of the white race, as does Alexander H. Stephens in Source C, maintains a great deal of credibility. While both sources had comparable origins, as speeches delivered to justify slavery, Davis's speech originated from a more moderate source, and thus has more potential for objectivity. The information presented includes an assessment of the economic benefits of

slavery – which were substantial. He points to the growth of the enslaved population and the coincidence thereof with the expansion of the cotton industry, among others – as does Source E. While the modern historical analysis is vastly different as a source from Davis’s speech, it supports the same conclusion with even greater reliability. Source E, written with the superior consideration to both sides of the argument that comes with intervening centuries, nonetheless states directly that slavery was profitable, which lends credence to Source D’s assertion of the same conclusion. The economy was a vastly important factor in the reasonable nature of the defense of slavery, not only from the standpoint of those directly benefiting – that is, Southern planters, but from the standpoint of the United States’ government itself, which relied on tariffs to fund the largely Northern expansion of infrastructure. Source E points to ‘unfettered capitalism’ as a justification for slavery of the time, a claim which is largely supported by Source D’s prioritization of ‘three quarters of the exports of the whole United States’ over the value of human life. Therefore, based on the economic motivations of the time, it is clear based principally on sources D and E that the arguments put forth in defense of slavery were *not* unreasonable based on that standards of the 1800s.

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Furthermore, the assertion ‘the arguments put forth in defense of slavery were unreasonable, even by the standards of the time’ is also refuted by the deep-rooted inequality of the societal circumstances the assertion addresses. Racial inequality was a largely ingrained part of society, a statement which is supported by Source C, as it shows that a speech delivered publicly by an official representative of the Confederacy contained deeply racist themes that it thus proves were accepted in large part by the society of the time – highlighting the warped nature of the standards in place during the time at which the defense of slavery was taking place. While Jefferson Davis’s moderacy allowed him to be elected as the Confederacy’s leader,

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Alexander H. Stephens, who began his career as a moderate Whig but adopted the prevailing views of the day on slavery in order to advance politically, was less bound by the norms of moderacy in his speech presented as Source C. This does not make him a strongly reliable source with regards to the content of his speech in comparison with Source D, but it allows for assessment of the opinions of the time, given that Stephens' opinions historically were changed to reflect those of the public, as evidenced by his transition from Whig to vice president of the Confederacy. The information presented centers on the superiority of the white race to 'the negro' and points to both God and the newly drafted Constitution of the Confederacy as justifying these views, which is significant because it illustrates that support for slavery was not only motivated by a desire for economic success, but by a cultural certainty that slavery was justified by inherent racial differences. Source C conflicts with the speeches presented in Source A and Source B because while the speeches by William H. Seward and Frederick Douglass are presented similarly – appealing to the emotional and moral centers of the audience to which they address – Sources A and B use this emotional appeal to stand against slavery, while Source C's appeal to emotion affirms the justification of slavery. In terms of deciding the overall standards of the time, however, Source C is more valuable as it reflects the views of those in defense of slavery, which are those contested, and proves a positive – that these views were justified – through its own reflection on the 'standards of the time.' The assertion 'the arguments put forth in defense of slavery were unreasonable, even by the standards of the time' is therefore refuted by evidence that the prevailing standards of the time, in fact, were vastly racist and thus easily justified slavery to many – both those in power and the electorate.

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However, support is present for the assertion 'the arguments put forward in defense of slavery were unreasonable, even for the time' due to the presence of those who opposed slavery

based on moral standards. This is supported by Source A and Source B. Source A, Seward's speech to the US Senate, reflects the presence of moral opposition to slavery by an individual within the government. The fact that Source A was written by Seward is important in light of his formative impact on the Republican party – Seward was one of the principal members of the burgeoning political party, who largely shaped its views through his legendary oratorical skills and deeply-held influence on the course of the nation as both a member of Lincoln's cabinet and, eventually, the man who would, as Secretary of State, add Alaska to the United States' territories. An accomplished politician, the fact that Seward sees the 'common heritage of mankind' and references Christianity strongly throughout his speech is reflective of both Christian abolitionist motivation for the support of that cause, and, interestingly, compares directly to Source C's use of biblical themes – both are sources with an undercurrent of religious sentiment, but Seward uses the notion of equality under 'the Creator' to support an argument against slavery – and, given the fact that this use of Christianity to support abolitionism was prominent at the time, Seward's interpretation is more reliable. Source B also supports the presence of moral opposition to slavery, but in a different way. Frederick Douglass, in Source B, addresses a public audience, much as Alexander H Stevens does in Source C. While Sources A and D are both addresses to Congresses – the US Senate and the Confederate Congress, respectively – Sources B and D were both addresses given publicly, towards a common-man audience. The fact that Source B was delivered by Frederick Douglass is particularly significant as it makes his language and the impact of his words more powerful. Douglass was an influential abolitionist and prominent figure in the movement, who was self-taught in terms of literacy. He would have disagreed with Source D's assertion that the South educated the slaves, as he was forced to seek knowledge entirely for himself, and only able to utilize it fully once he had

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achieved freedom. The power of Douglass's speech, Source B, is unmistakable in comparison with Seward's speech in Source A – the blunt and personal approach to the issue of slavery underscores how deeply the institution of slavery conflicts with Douglass' beliefs and morality, as compared to Seward's more ideological objections. Source B highlights the guilt of the United States' people and their association to slavery, and makes it abundantly clear that he regards condoning slavery to be tantamount to supporting it. Source A's lofty and somewhat abstract address to the morality of slavery together with Source B's visceral and concrete approach to why slavery was unjustified both support the existence of moral objections to slavery present in American culture. As such, and largely due to the prominence of northern and abolitionist moral objections, it can be concluded that on some level, the standards of the time did not justify or make reasonable the arguments in defense of slavery – because the standards of the time were not universal, and not universally in favor of the support of slavery, as is affirmed largely by Source A and B.

In summation, the sources presented display a wide array of viewpoints from a wide array of origins. Source A and B support the assertion that 'the arguments put forth in defense of slavery were unreasonable, even by the standards of the time' while sources C, D, and E oppose this conclusion. As such, through a combination of both economic factors and the prevailing sentiment that regarded inequality and racial prejudice as commonplace, the presented sources in large part refute the statement that 'the arguments put forward in defense of slavery were unreasonable, even by the standards of the time.' However, a strong case is presented nonetheless that the moral standards of the time were not universally in support of slavery at all, which supports the conclusion. As an aggregate whole, assessment of the question reveals stronger support on behalf of the sources presented in *refutation* of the assertion.