

Evaluate the strengths and limitations of this interpretation, making reference to other interpretations you have studied.

‘The slave states had rejected disunion, at least for the time being. Yet by no means had they wholeheartedly or unreservedly embraced the Compromise of 1850.’

*Richard Sewell ‘A House Divided: Sectionalism and Civil War 1848-1865.’ (1988)*

This interpretation by Richard Sewell deliberates the Southern views on the 1850 compromise; something which many Southerners weren’t fully ‘embrac[ing]’ due to the many concessions which they believed outweighed that of the North’s. Here, Sewell only reiterates the view of many other historians and Southerners of the time who were unable to exploit their view due to issues with travelling across the plains etc. When discussing the line ‘rejected disunion’, Sewell is referring to the vote which the states had to undertake in order to decide whether they would separate from America’s union where they could elect for themselves whether Southern states would be free or slave states: this was, however, rejected and the South remained apart of the union. However, it is evident that Sewell believes that this may change in the near future; suggesting that this decision is only ‘for the time being’ and that many are against this vote. He incorporates the Compromise into the rejection of the disunion as, essentially, it is based on the factors of the Compromise that the ‘rejection of disunion’ was decided.

The interpretation can be supported by historical evidence of the time; with many factors leaning towards this statement from Richard Sewell. As stated in the interpretation, Southerners had not ‘wholeheartedly or unreservedly embraced the Compromise’; particularly within Southern groups of fireeaters who radicalised any negative thoughts about the compromise with violence and threats (such as threatening succession due to the fugitive slaves not being returned to the South despite the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850). As well as those against the union, there are also those who merely didn’t get a chance to vote in the election (due to inaccessibility, for example) who’s voices weren’t heard, whom are also accounted for within the interpretation which alludes a lack of unity within the South as many were unable to express their views or otherwise were in disagreement. Therefore, the interpretation obtains strengths as it accounts for those against the union and for succession; labelling them as those who don’t ‘wholeheartedly’ or ‘unreservedly’ agree with the Compromise.

Despite this, there are also weaknesses to this interpretation due to the credibility of evidence provided. For example, there is only a mention of the Southern viewpoint which leaves us with nothing more than question marks as to the Northern or Unionist views on the decision not to leave the union (which was, in fact, a positive viewpoint as it destined