

## Winner of the Second Annual Pierpont Essay Contest - Hunter Midcap

Contestants must write a 300-500 word essay reacting to the following statement of Francis H. Pierpont:

*I need not remark to you, Gentlemen, how fatal the attempted dismemberment of the Union must prove to all our material interests. Secession and annexation to the South would cut off every outlet for our productions, \. We cannot get them to the Confederate states across the Alleghenies. The Ohio River and the country beyond it would be closed to our trade. With Maryland in the Union, our outlet to the East would be interrupted, while we could not carry our products across the Pennsylvania line by the Monongahela or other route. In time of war we would encounter a hostile force, and in time of peace, a custom house at every turn.*

Hunter Midcap's essay:

West Virginia did not always exist. In the year 1830, a convention was held in Wheeling, on some of the key issues faced in the state. It was very evident that the Western Virginians wanted to separate from the eastern Virginians. Both sides had several differences. The Allegheny mountains separated both regions, creating more farmlands and plantations in the east and small farms in the west. The Westerns also claimed that the Easterners used most of the state's taxes for the benefit of the East's farms. This, and several other issues, led to western Virginia seceding from Virginia in 1863. If western Virginia had not seceded from Virginia, western Virginians would have faced unfair representation in the economy, blocked passageways for trade, and an unequal distribution of taxes.

Western Virginia would have faced unfair representation in the government if they would have stayed with Virginia. Both regions were equal in white population, although the East had a larger amount of slaves (where each person was counted as 3/5 of a regular person). This was due to their large plantations. Also western Virginians had less counties. This meant that there would be less representation from western Virginia. Both of these factors contributed to an unfair representation in government and if the region would have stayed with Virginia, they would have had less say on issues facing the country.

Western Virginia would have faced blocked passageways for trade, if they had stayed with Virginia. Because Virginia was seceding from the Union (United States), they were going to be part of an agriculture economy, where cotton, tobacco, and sugarcane would be the top exports. Western Virginia was a more industrialized area, compared to the farming society of eastern Virginia. They would have had to switch their economy to farming, which would have jeopardized trade. Also western Virginia was trading to states such as Maryland, Ohio, and Pennsylvania, which were all part of the Union. If Western Virginia would have continued to trade with them during the war, then the trade routes and supplies would have been bombarded and disrupted by soldiers. These two factors would have resulted in blocked routes for trade, resulting in the overall isolation of western Virginia.

An unequal distribution of taxes would have been an issue western Virginia would have faced if they had stayed with Virginia. In the 1850 Convention, the second in Virginia, the issue was brought up about taxes. The westerners complained that they were unfairly distributed and given out in the state. They said that most taxes were given to the easterners so they could improve their farms. Also, they said that the other taxes were given to schools, which were located in the East. These two factors would have led to an unequal distribution of taxes, if western Virginia would not have separated from Virginia.

West Virginia offered fair representation, open trade, and equal taxes when it seceded from Virginia. Although most think slavery had a huge impact on the state's path to statehood, these issues were as important as slavery was at the moment. West Virginia has always been a mountainous state, compared to the farm based industry of Virginia, and "Mountaineers are Always Free."

#### Works Consulted

Wood, Vicki. *West Virginia: 150 Years of Statehood*, Clairmont Press, 2013.

West Virginia Public Broadcasting, *West Virginia: The Road to Statehood*", West Virginia & Regional History Center, West Virginia University Libraries, Broadcast of 18 October 2013, and West Virginia (47-51). 28 November 2016.