CHAPTER 12

Slavery and Sectionalism

The Political Crisis of 1848–1861

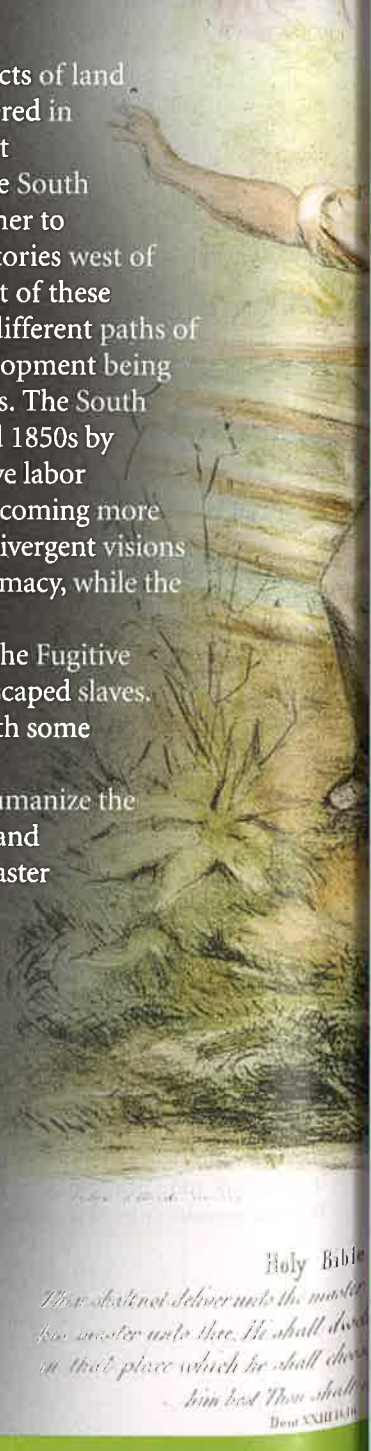
> "It is an irrepressible conflict between opposing and enduring forces, and it means that the United States must and will, sooner or later, become either entirely a slaveholding nation, or entirely a free-labor nation."
>
> WILLIAM SEWARD, 1858

The seizure of vast tracts of land from Mexico in 1848 ushered in a period of intense conflict between the North and the South over the question of whether to permit slavery in the territories west of the Mississippi. At the root of these tensions were the starkly different paths of economic and social development being pursued in the two regions. The South prospered in the 1840s and 1850s by expanding its agrarian, slave labor economy; the North, by becoming more urban, industrial, commercial, and multicultural. In the process, the two regions developed divergent visions of the ideal society: The South celebrated the virtues of slavery, states' rights, and white supremacy, while the North touted the benefits of free labor, upward mobility, and equal opportunity.

One of the first and most bitter controversies of the period emerged with the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850, a law requiring Northerners to assist Southerners in the apprehension of escaped slaves. It produced almost immediately a series of sensational incidents where abolitionists tried, with some success, to thwart the law and spirit escaped slaves to freedom.

Drawn by an abolitionist in the midst of this controversy, this dramatic image seeks to humanize the plight of escaped slaves while at the same time dramatizing the inhumanity of slave catchers and slaveholders. The inclusion of quotations from the Bible ("Thou shalt not deliver unto the master his servant which has escaped from his master unto thee ...") and the Declaration of Independence ("We hold that all men are created equal ...") highlights the fundamental claim of abolitionists that slavery violated both Judeo-Christian morality and republican principles. Southern slaveholders, of course, rejected these claims and asserted their inalienable right to property in all things, including slaves.

This controversy set the tone for a decade that was to be rocked by a series of political, legal, and economic disputes that ultimately led back to the slavery question. By the mid-1850s, each region increasingly came to see the other's system as a threat. Northerners became convinced that Southerners wanted to spread slavery to the West and even to the North, while Southerners believed Northerners sought to destroy slavery and the Southern way of life. When Republican Abraham Lincoln won the presidency in 1860, Southerners declared the Union dissolved, setting in motion events that led to a far more bloody conflict, the Civil War.

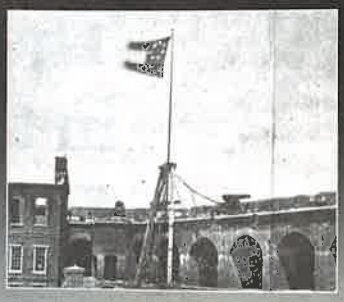


How did the seizure of Western land after the Mexican War fuel a growing controversy over slavery?

The Slavery Question in the Territories p. 344

Political Realignment p. 352

Two Societies p. 362



A House Divided p. 366

Effects of the Fugitive-Slave-Law.

Declaration of independence.

We hold that all men are created equal, that they are endowed their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among th are life liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

The Slavery Question in the Territories

The election of 1848 revealed an emerging sectional divide between the North and South over the issue of slavery. The dispute centered on whether slavery would be allowed in the new territories. Given the small population of white settlers in the West, many politicians hoped that any decision on creating territories and admitting new states would not arise for years. But the discovery of gold in California in 1848 brought tens of thousands of fortune seekers. By late 1849 they constituted a population sufficient to apply for statehood. After much acrimony Congress eventually passed the Compromise of 1850, a set of measures that quieted but did not resolve the fundamental disagreement over the future of slavery in America.

The Gold Rush

Although members of both parties in Congress sought to avoid the contentious issue of slavery and the territories, the discovery of gold in California soon forced them to confront it. In December 1848, following four months of rumors, more than 300 ounces of pure gold arrived in Washington, D.C., sent by the new territorial government of California. The news touched off the Gold Rush: a migration of thousands of gold seekers in 1849 from farms and workshops in the East to northern California on news of the gold strike near San Francisco. California's population exploded as a result, rising from just 14,000 at the start of 1849 to more than 100,000 by year's end. By 1852 it reached 220,000.

> "I have no pile yet, but you can bet your life I will never come home until I have something more than when I started."
>
> A Gold Rush migrant on his way to California

Eighty percent of the new arrivals were American-born (including free African Americans), with the rest coming from Mexico, South America, Europe, and Asia. The great majority of arrivals were single white men in their twenties and thirties. They came to California not to settle but rather to strike it rich and return home.

This fortune-seeking spirit of the migrants led to the creation of a rough and raucous society. Mining camps and boomtowns sprang up almost overnight only to be abandoned the moment the gold disappeared or word arrived of a fresh strike elsewhere. Most mining towns lacked any formal government, including sheriffs and judges, leading to high rates of crime and violence.

By 1852 most of the gold that could be easily extracted was gone and with it individual earnings as high as twenty dollars per day in 1849 (compared to less than two dollars per day back east). With much gold remaining embedded in rock deep beneath the earth's surface, mining shifted from independent miners to corporations possessing the capital to pay for the expensive technology required to extract the hard-to-reach gold. Most of the men who remained in mining after 1852 did so as wage laborers. Among them were many thousands of prospectors who had sold their farms and shops in the East in a fruitless quest for easy wealth.

While many panned for gold, thousands of migrants worked in enterprises that supported the mining industry such as hotels, restaurants, banks, saloons, and laundries. They realized that the surest way to riches lay in selling supplies such as pickaxes, shovels, rope, tents, and clothing at outrageous prices to eager miners. Many women earned high wages working in cooking, cleaning, and health care jobs, but many were forced into prostitution to survive, a practice that flourished in the male-dominated society of California. By one estimate, one out of every five women in California in 1850 worked as a prostitute.

Another group that found its dreams of riches thwarted were the Chinese, forty-five thousand of

What was the fate of most fortune seekers who headed west to mine for gold?

whom arrived in California by 1854. White miners, motivated by racism and greed, used violence and intimidation to confine the Chinese to the least desirable mining areas. The drawing shown here (**12.1**) depicts the segregated world of these Chinese miners. No whites appear in the scene, which shows the Chinese engaged in several activities, primarily mining. In 1852 the state legislature imposed a heavy tax on the Chinese, prompting many to turn from mining to farming, fishing, and operating restaurants and laundries. But increased immigration and job competition with whites in the coming decades would lead to escalating anti-Chinese sentiment and violence in California (see Chapter 16).

Much worse was the fate of the California Indians. The diseases brought by migrants killed tens of thousands, while ruthless bands of miners killed thousands more or drove them off their lands. Of the 150,000 Native Americans who lived in California in 1848, on the eve of the Gold Rush, only 30,000 remained by 1870. Meanwhile, countless *Californios*—Mexicans living in California—lost title to their lands through legal obstacles that the new American government imposed.

The Gold Rush sparked Western development and accelerated the creation of a coast-to-coast American nation. But the immediate consequence of the Gold Rush was not economic or social; it was political. The arrival of tens of thousands of people in 1849 suddenly made California eligible to organize a territorial government as a prelude to statehood. Looming over any discussion of California statehood, however, was the divisive issue of slavery.

Organizing California and New Mexico

Even before the discovery of gold forced national leaders to consider California statehood, the question of the Western territories and the status of slavery there took center stage in Congress. Tempers flared in the House when Northern representatives unsuccessfully attempted to approve a motion upholding the Wilmot Proviso in the Western territories, draft a bill to organize California as a free territory, and pass a bill ending the slave trade in the District of Columbia.

The tension eventually subsided as congressmen decided to wait for president-elect Zachary Taylor to take office and reveal his opinions on the question of slavery and the Western territories. Within weeks of his inauguration in March 1849, Taylor made it clear that while he was a Southerner who did not oppose slavery, he would put national unity above regional loyalty. Instead of creating territorial governments for California and New Mexico that would leave authority over the slavery issue with Congress, he proposed that they be made states immediately and thus have the freedom to decide the slavery question according to popular will. This would remove the

12.1 Racism in the Gold Fields of California Chinese gold-seekers were often confined to segregated encampments and less desirable mining sites.

How did the Gold Rush affect the native Americans of California?

contentious issue from Congress where it sparked bitter debate and increasing sectionalism.

Residents of New Mexico and California responded enthusiastically to Taylor's invitation. By the fall of 1849, California had approved a state constitution prohibiting slavery and applied to Congress for admission as a free state. They also adopted a seal (**12.2**) to symbolize their vision of their state and its future. In the foreground sits Minerva, the goddess of wisdom, while behind her a miner prospects for gold. (The motto, Eureka, is Greek for "I have found it.") Sheaves of wheat at her feet and ships (symbolic of commerce) sailing on the nearby waters indicate their expectations for robust economic growth. Months later, New Mexico's residents also applied for admission.

> "The people of the North need have no apprehension of the further extension of slavery."
>
> President ZACHARY TAYLOR
> at Mercer, Pennsylvania, July 1849

Taylor's actions touched off a firestorm of protest in the South. State legislatures signed petitions of protest and forwarded them to Washington, while mass meetings across the region denounced Taylor and his Northern supporters. Hard-line defenders of slavery, often called "fire-eaters," then convened a Southern rights convention in Nashville, Tennessee, in June 1850 "to devise and adopt some mode of resistance to Northern aggression."

What angered Southerners most was the threat Taylor's plan posed to the balance of power in Congress. Because of the North's greater population, it sent more representatives to the House. But with the balance of slave and free states standing at fifteen each, Southerners enjoyed equal representation in the Senate, allowing them to block any legislation deemed threatening to slavery or Southern interests (the so-called Southern veto). Admitting California and New Mexico as free states would tip the balance in favor of the North. Under such conditions it would only be a matter of time, warned Southern defenders, before a Congress dominated by Northerners moved to abolish slavery altogether. "For the first time," warned Senator Jefferson Davis of Mississippi, "we are about permanently to destroy the balance of power between the sections."

12.2 The Great Seal of California The inclusion of thirty-one stars indicated the hope that California would be admitted as the thirty-first state.

The Compromise of 1850

As he had done in the Missouri Compromise in 1820 and the Nullification Crisis of 1832–1833, Henry Clay of Kentucky proposed a compromise. His plan admitted California as a free state and organized New Mexico into two territories where the people would eventually vote to decide whether to permit slavery, a principle known as popular sovereignty. It also settled the border dispute between New Mexico and Texas, arranged for the federal government to assume Texas's debt, banned the slave trade in Washington, D.C., and established a stronger federal fugitive slave law.

The speeches inspired by the debate over Clay's bill, among the most famous in the history of Congress, revealed an intensifying clash of visions over the issue of the future of slavery in America. On March 4 John C. Calhoun, near death and too sick to stand, had a colleague read his speech expressing the views of proslavery Southern hard-liners. He demanded that the North stop attacking slavery, uphold the South's rights in the territories (especially the right to own slaves), and enforce the fugitive slave laws.

Three days later the renowned Massachusetts Senator Daniel Webster delivered his famous "Seventh of March Address," an impassioned plea

Why did Southerners react so negatively to President Taylor's plan?

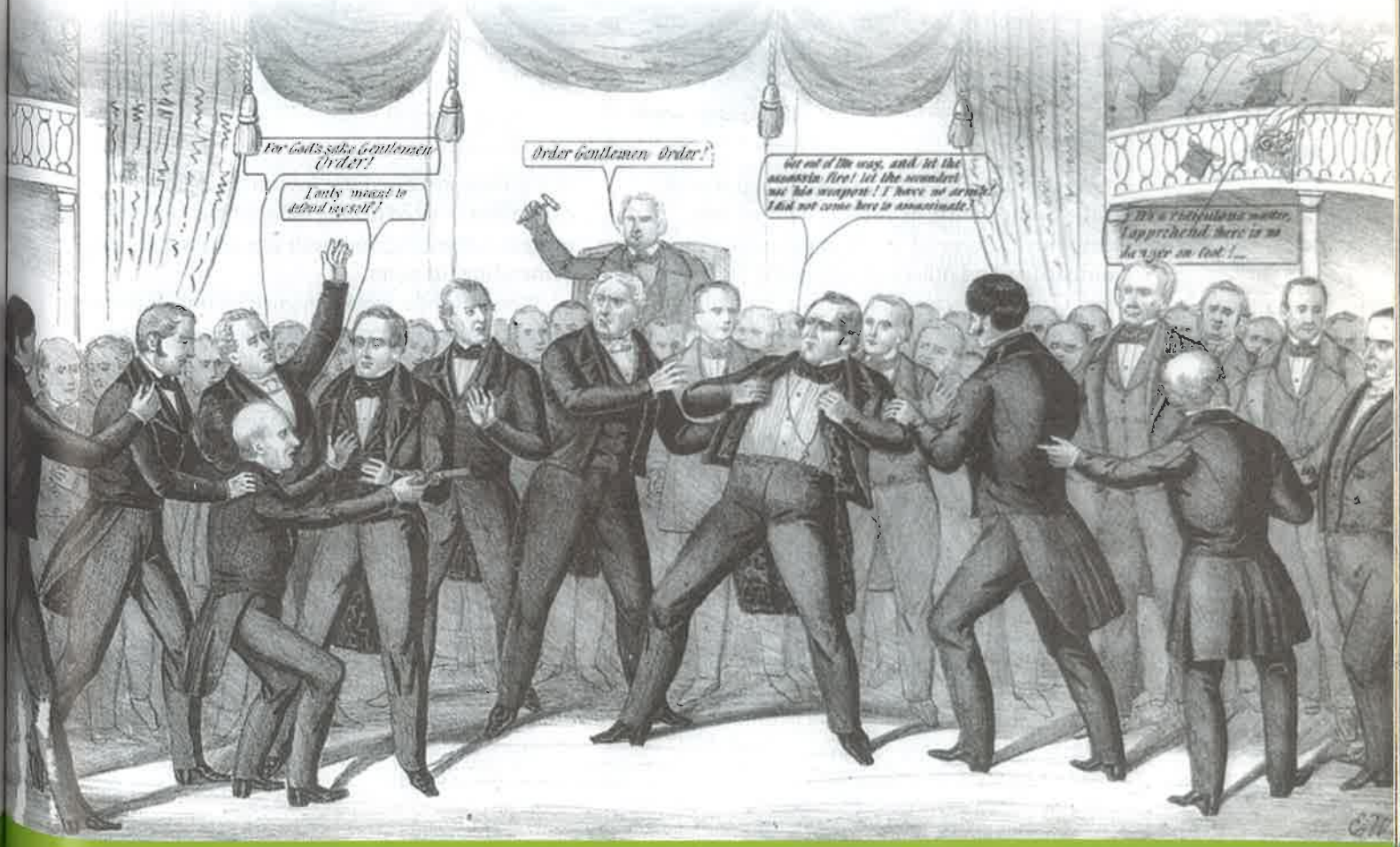
for moderation and compromise, warning that both proslavery and antislavery extremism threatened to destroy the Union. William Seward of New York then rose to voice the views of staunch antislavery Northerners. Rejecting the Southern argument that the Constitution guaranteed the right to extend slavery into the territories, Seward invoked the authority of "a higher law than the Constitution," the law of God under which all people deserved to live in freedom. Congress, he argued, should instead be debating how to eliminate slavery peacefully and gradually.

Debate over Clay's compromise raged for months. The hostility spawned by the differences of opinion over slavery and the Western territories is captured in this 1850 political cartoon, *Scene in Uncle Sam's Senate* (**12.3**). The tone of the cartoon is satirical, but it depicts a real incident in which Mississippi Senator Henry S. Foote pulled a pistol on Missouri Senator Thomas Hart Benton (shown holding his coat open and daring his opponent to shoot). In the end the Senate finally voted it down in July.

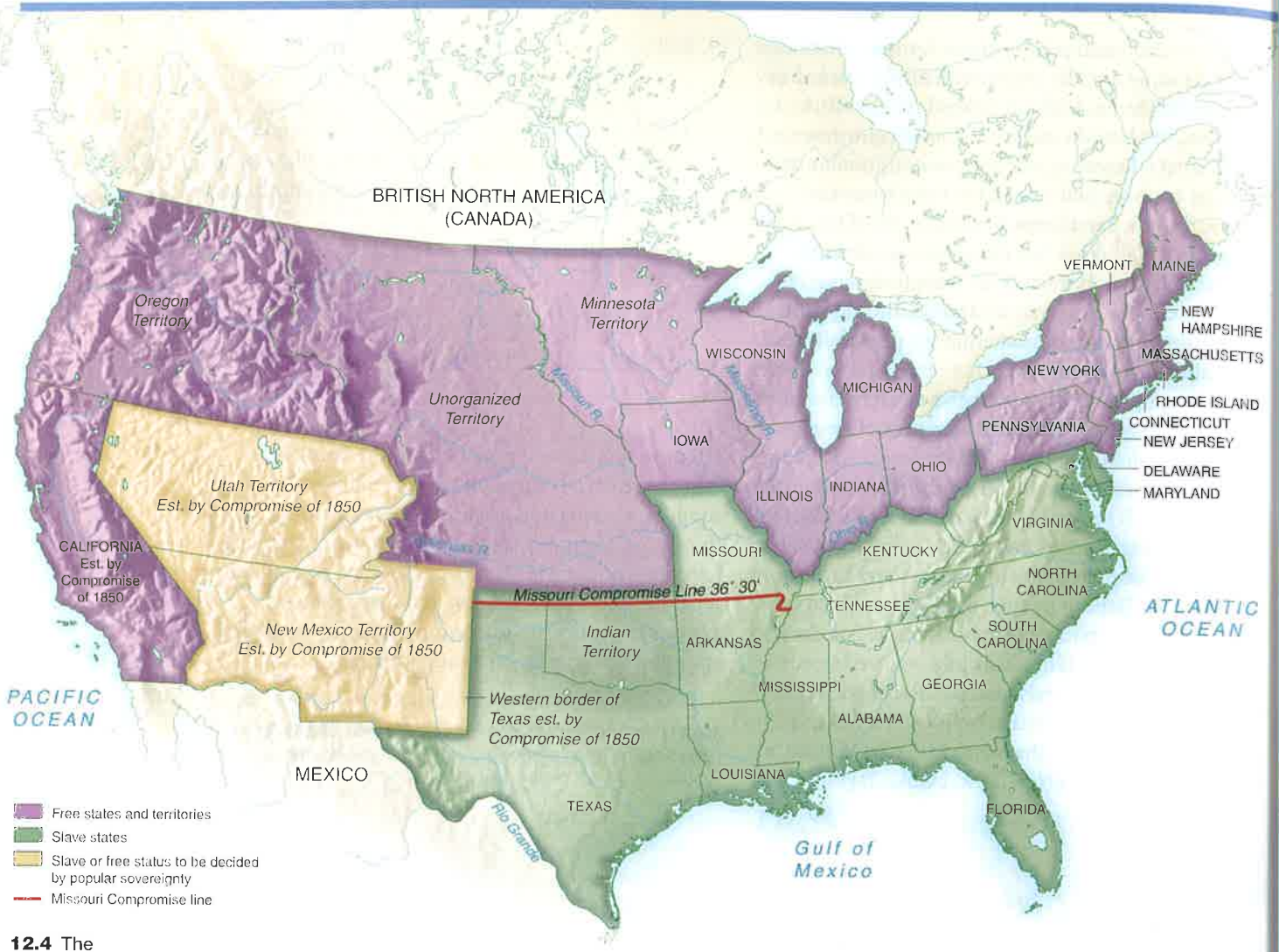
Then the unexpected occurred. President Taylor died of severe gastroenteritis on July 9, 1850, and was succeeded by Vice President Millard Fillmore, a moderate Whig from New York. Unlike Taylor, Fillmore was more sympathetic to the South and eager to reach a compromise. With Fillmore's support, a young and ambitious senator from Illinois, Stephen A. Douglas, revived the movement for compromise. He broke up Clay's massive bill into separate pieces of legislation and then, without appeals to patriotism or sectionalism, he assembled enough votes to pass each individually.

> "The South asks for justice, simple justice, and less she ought not to take. ... Nothing else can, with any certainty, finally and for ever settle the question at issue, terminate agitation, and save the Union."
>
> JOHN C. CALHOUN, March 4, 1850

12.3 Tempers Flare During the Debate over Clay's Omnibus Bill
Reflecting the rising animosity over the status of slavery in the new Western territories, fighting breaks out on the floor of the Senate.



What did Seward mean by a "higher law?"



12.4 The Compromise of 1850
The Compromise attempted to quell the political storm that arose over the slavery question by making concessions to both sides. Free-Soilers gained the admission of California as a free state, while supporters of slavery won a delay in deciding the slavery question in the New Mexico and Utah territories. The Compromise also settled the dispute regarding the western border of Texas, established a Fugitive Slave Act, and abolished the slave trade in Washington, D.C.

As the map illustrates (**12.4**), Douglas's bill, or the **Compromise of 1850**, contained five components, some of which appealed to proslavery Southerners and others to antislavery Northerners. First, California was admitted as a free state. To offset this concession to the opponents of slavery, a second bill created the New Mexico and Utah territories and left the question of slavery to be decided by popular sovereignty when each territory applied for statehood. Left unexplained was the status of slavery in the years leading to statehood. Third, Texas was required to cede disputed territory on its western border to New Mexico (pleasing opponents of slavery by reducing the slave state's size) in exchange for the federal government assuming the $10 million debt Texas had incurred as a republic (pleasing Southerners who held most of the debt). A fourth provision granted abolitionists a partial victory by banning the slave trade—but not slavery—in Washington, D.C. Finally, Congress enacted a strong **Fugitive Slave Act** that greatly increased the federal government's commitment to returning escaped slaves to their owners, something Southern fire-eaters had been demanding for years.

When the bills were all signed by mid-September, joyful crowds gathered in the nation's capital to serenade Congress with song and cheers of "The Union is saved."

But a close examination of the votes on the compromise's bills reveals a weakening of party loyalties and a growing tendency toward voting along sectional lines. Most Northern Whigs, for example, supported the admission of California as a free state and opposed the Fugitive Slave Act. Most Southern Whigs voted in the opposite manner. Only 20 percent of Congress—generally moderates made up of Northern Democrats and Southern Whigs—voted for all five bills. As many antislavery Northerners and Southern hardliners correctly predicted, the question of slavery, whether in the territories or elsewhere, would surface again.

How did the Congressional vote on the Compromise of 1850 reveal growing sectionalism?

Sectionalism on the Rise

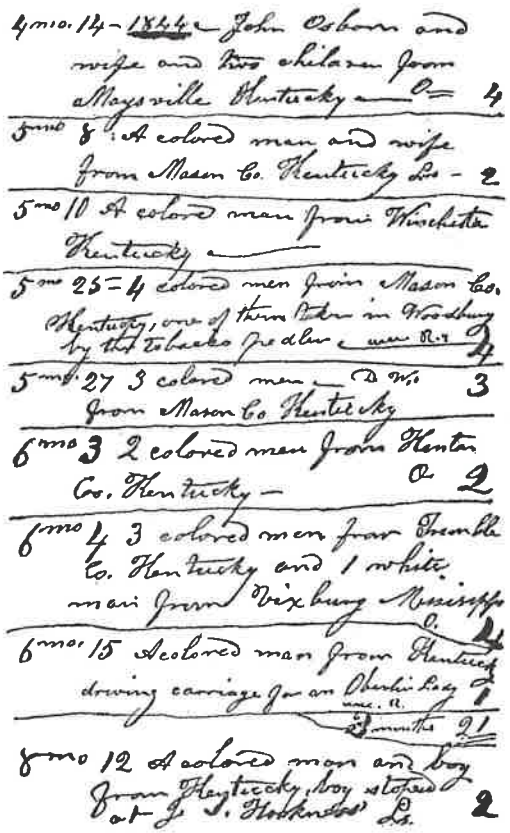
One element in the Compromise of 1850—the Fugitive Slave Act—sparked a national controversy that intensified the sectionalism, or hostility between North and South over the slavery question. The act created a force of federal commissioners who possessed broad powers to pursue and return suspected escaped slaves to their owners. It also permitted federal marshals to deputize private citizens to assist in capturing fugitive slaves. Those who refused to help were subject to fines and imprisonment. Once apprehended, an accused fugitive had no right to a jury trial. His or her fate was instead decided by a federal commissioner who stood to earn a fee of ten dollars if he returned the accused to slavery and only five if he released him or her.

Fugitive slaves escaping to the North did not become a major political issue until the 1830s. In that decade the growing abolitionist movement began to encourage and facilitate slave escapes along what came to be known metaphorically as the **Underground Railroad.** It was a network of safe houses and other secret hiding places along a series of routes leading to the North and into Canada where British law prohibited slavery. The existence of such a network is revealed in this page from the 1844 diary of Daniel Osborn, a Quaker living in Alum Creek, Ohio (**12.5**). Between April and September of that year—warm months ideal for travel—Osborn recorded assisting forty-seven escapees. His home

> "The slaves call her Moses."
> THOMAS WENTWORTH HIGGINSON, describing Harriet Tubman, 1859

was situated approximately halfway between the borders of northern Kentucky (where all but three of the fugitives came from) and Canada. Many of his Quaker neighbors also harbored fugitives.

Angry slaveholders and eager abolitionists spread fantastic stories of thousands of slaves being spirited north annually, but the Underground Railroad probably succeeded in bringing no more than several thousand slaves to freedom between 1830 and 1860. Its most famous "conductor" was Harriet Tubman, an escaped slave who made nineteen trips to the South to lead scores of slaves,


4 mo. 14 – 1844 – John Osborn and wife and two children from Maysville Kentucky — 4
5 mo 8 A colored man and wife from Mason Co. Kentucky &c. — 2
5 mo 10 A colored man from Winchester Kentucky —
5 mo 25 = 4 colored men from Mason Co. Kentucky, one of them taken in Woodbury by the Tobacco Peddler — 4
5 mo 27 3 colored men — 3
from Mason Co Kentucky
6 mo 3 2 colored men from Hunter Co. Kentucky — 2
6 mo 4 3 colored men from Franklin Co. Kentucky and 1 white man from Vicksburg Mississippi — 4
6 mo 15 A colored man from Kentucky driving carriage for an Oberlin Lady — 1
3 months 21
8 mo 12 A colored man and boy from Kentucky, boy stolen at J. S. Hobkirk's — 2

12.5 Abolitionists Assist Escaped Slaves along the Underground Railroad
This page from the diary of Daniel Osborn, a Quaker living in Alum Creek, Ohio, records the assistance he offered escaped slaves heading for Canada in the spring of 1844.

including many of her relatives, to freedom. Osborn's diary occasionally revealed a similar pattern on a smaller scale. In one eight-day period in August 1844, he recorded that an African American man passed through Alum Creek on his way back to Kentucky where he gathered his wife, child, and sister-in-law and returned safely. He was followed by a woman who came from Canada and successfully brought four of her children and one grandchild to freedom. Most fugitives escaped to the North through less formal arrangements and a combination of perseverance, ingenuity, and luck.

Although the number of escaped slaves remained relatively small, averaging one thousand per year out of a total slave population that approached four million by 1860, Southern slaveholders grew increasingly angry over the unwillingness of Northerners to assist in the return of their "property." Especially galling were the "personal liberty laws" passed by nine Northern states between 1842 and 1850, which prohibited the use of state officials or facilities like courts and jails for the capture and return of escaped slaves.

With these precedents in mind, Southerners made clear in the weeks following the Compromise of 1850 that they expected Northerners to uphold

Why did Southerners demand a Fugitive Slave Act?

the Fugitive Slave Act. "It is the deliberate opinion of this Convention," resolved a gathering of Georgia fire-eaters, "that upon the faithful execution of the *Fugitive Slave Law* ... depends the preservation of our much beloved Union." Southern insistence on a new fugitive slave law was full of contradiction. Even though Southern rights advocates consistently celebrated the sanctity of states' rights, they condemned Northern states for enacting "personal liberty laws." States' rights doctrine also opposed any increase of federal power, especially when slavery was concerned, yet Southerners willingly made an exception when it came to using federal authority to capture their escaped slaves.

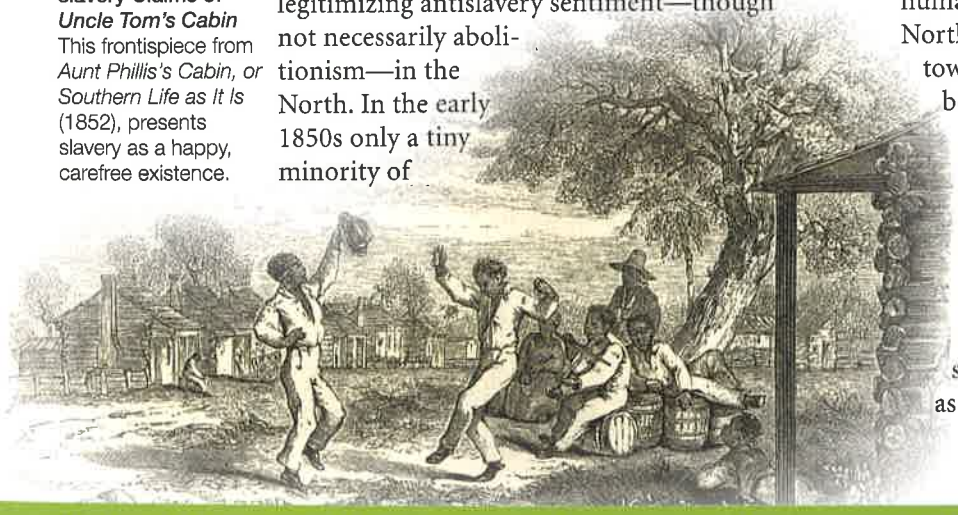
Abolitionists denounced the new fugitive slave law as "a hateful statute of kidnappers." They soon formed vigilance committees throughout the North and vowed, in the words of one Illinois newspaper, "to trample the law in the dust." Opportunities for resistance soon arose, for unlike the abstract questions raised by Wilmot Proviso and popular sovereignty, the Fugitive Slave Act created a succession of concrete human dramas in dozens of Northern communities (see *Choices and Consequences: Resisting the Fugitive Slave Act*).

Some early and memorable incidents occurred in Boston, the unofficial headquarters of the abolitionist movement. In October 1850, just weeks after the law's enactment, two slave catchers arrived in Boston in pursuit of William and Ellen Craft, who had escaped from Georgia two years earlier. The city's vigilance committee swung into action, hiding the Crafts and posting handbills throughout the city, denouncing the "kidnappers." After five days of sustained harassment and physical threats, the slave catchers left the city. Taking no chances, the Crafts boarded a ship for England.

The controversy over the Fugitive Slave Act played a significant role in popularizing and legitimizing antislavery sentiment—though not necessarily abolitionism—in the North. In the early 1850s only a tiny minority of Northerners were abolitionists. Indeed, many held deeply hostile views of blacks and rejected the idea of racial equality. Other Northerners opposed slavery, but were not willing to jeopardize the national peace achieved by the Compromise of 1850 by supporting abolitionist vigilantism. Nonetheless, the controversial events generated by the Fugitive Slave Act forced Northerners to confront the reality of an institution that had long seemed distant and abstract. The vivid images of Southern agents seizing free people in a community of free citizens and returning them to a life of bondage shocked even the most conservative Northerners. As one conservative Whig wrote after seeing the fugitive Anthony Burns returned to slavery from Boston in 1854, "When it was all over, and I was alone in my office, I put my face in my hands and wept." While these and subsequent events in the 1850s did not convert masses of Northerners to abolitionism, they did move many to see slavery as an evil that at the very least ought to be confined to its present boundaries in order to hasten its eventual demise.

Many Northerners also gradually took a more hostile attitude toward slavery as the result of reading antislavery literature. While the growing number of firsthand accounts of slavery by escaped slaves proved very popular, by far the most widely read and influential book was a work of fiction. First published in installments in an abolitionist newspaper, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* appeared as a novel in 1852. Its author, Harriet Beecher Stowe, came from a prominent abolitionist family. Within a year her novel sold 300,000 copies, making it the best-selling book of the era. Soon thousands of theatrical versions of the story were being performed in cities across the North. Speeches, diaries, letters, and other evidence indicate that Stowe's account of the brutality of slavery and the humanity of the enslaved moved millions of Northerners to take an increasingly hostile view toward slavery, even if they did not necessarily believe in racial equality.

The reaction to the book in the South was very different. Southerners denounced the author as a "wretch in petticoats" and banned the book. They also published several dozen proslavery novels with similar titles. This image (**12.6**) from *Aunt Phillis's Cabin] or Southern Life as It Is* (1852), portrays slaves dancing, suggesting they enjoy free time and are happy as slaves.



12.6 Southerners Refute the Anti-slavery Claims of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* This frontispiece from *Aunt Phillis's Cabin, or Southern Life as It Is* (1852), presents slavery as a happy, carefree existence.

What made *Uncle Tom's Cabin* such an influential piece of antislavery literature?

Choices and Consequences

RESISTING THE FUGITIVE SLAVE ACT

In February 1851 Boston's abolitionists faced a new challenge when federal authorities captured an escaped slave named Shadrach Minkins. As a federal judge ordered a hearing to determine Minkins's status to be held three days later, a large crowd of some two hundred white and black abolitionists gathered outside. Intimidating slave catchers and helping the Crafts avoid arrest had constituted *resistance* to the Fugitive Slave Act, but with Minkins in federal custody the situation raised the question of whether abolitionists were willing to *break* the law to uphold their values.

Choices

1. Drawing upon the civil disobedience tradition (see Chapter 11), declare the Fugitive Slave Act immoral and organize an extralegal effort to free Minkins.
2. Respect the laws regarding fugitive slaves, but wage a legal fight through the courts to prevent the extradition of Minkins and other alleged fugitive slaves.
3. Respect the laws regarding fugitive slaves and accept the likely transportation of Minkins back to slavery, but organize a more effective effort to spirit fugitive slaves out of the country (like the Crafts).

Decision

Convinced that the hearing would result in Minkins's return to slavery, a group of twenty African American men opted for choice 1 and burst into the courtroom, overpowered the guards, and took Minkins to Montreal, Canada. The incident thrilled abolitionists, including Theodore Parker who wrote later, "I think it is the most noble deed done in Boston since the destruction of the tea in 1773." Southerners and conservative Northerners like President Fillmore denounced the mob as lawless.

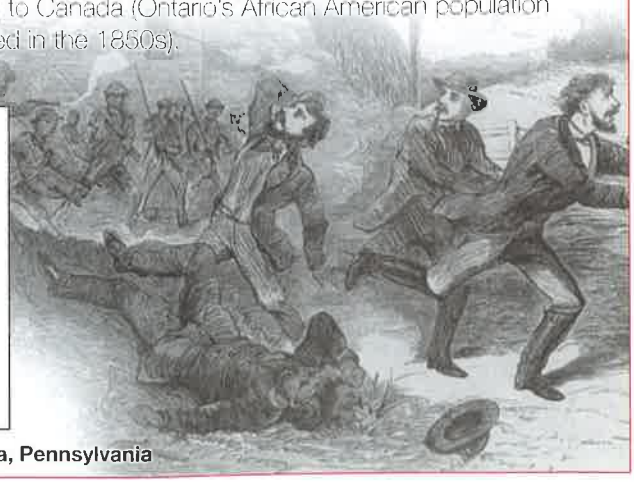
Consequences

When federal authorities apprehended another escaped slave, Thomas Sims, in Boston two months later, Fillmore sent 250 soldiers to guard the courthouse and escort the captive to a ship bound for Georgia. Nonetheless, similar incidents of extralegal actions by abolitionists occurred elsewhere. In Christiana, Pennsylvania, in October 1851, for example, two dozen armed African American men killed a slaveholder from nearby Maryland in pursuit of two escaped slaves. These events outraged Southerners, especially pro-secessionist fire-eaters. South Carolina, Mississippi, and Georgia held conventions to denounce abolitionism and consider secession. The furor soon quieted down as the number of slave captures decreased sharply, largely the result of thousands of free blacks and escaped slaves fleeing to Canada (Ontario's African American population doubled in the 1850s).

Continuing Controversies

When are acts of civil disobedience and violence to further the cause of justice legitimate?

In the 1850s abolitionists deemed slavery such an outrageous violation of American freedom that acts of resistance—even violence—were justified. This question would reemerge and generate heated debate in every subsequent era in American history, including movements for suffrage in the 1910s and civil rights in the 1960s.



African Americans drive off the slave catchers in Christiana, Pennsylvania

What caused the furor over the Fugitive Slave Act to eventually subside?

Political Realignment

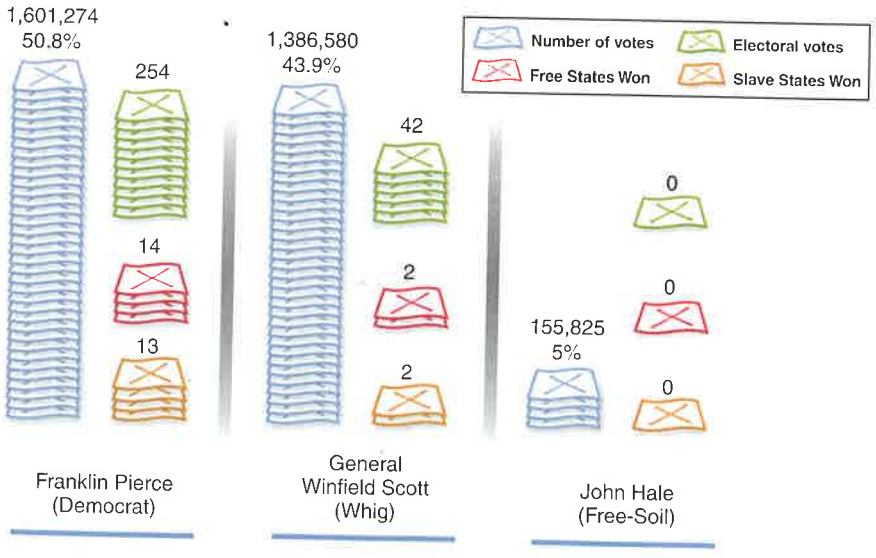
Furor over the Fugitive Slave Act subsided after 1851, and American politics experienced a period of relative calm. Some felt a rising optimism over the prospect of territorial expansion into the Caribbean and Latin America. At the same time, unprecedented levels of immigration spawned a powerful antiforeigner political movement that enjoyed widespread support until eclipsed by the reemergence of the slavery issue. Sectional animosity surged in 1854 as Congress debated whether to allow slavery in the Kansas and Nebraska territories. The resulting Kansas-Nebraska Act prompted the collapse of the Whig Party and in 1856–1857, a violent and protracted conflict between pro- and antislavery forces, known as "Bleeding Kansas."

Young America

By late 1852 a prosperous economy and fear of disunion undermined the appeal of extremists in both sections. Prosperity also helped calm the passions aroused by the Compromise of 1850 and the enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Act. In the presidential election that year, both parties nominated moderate candidates (Democrat Franklin Pierce and Whig General Winfield Scott) and put forth similar platforms pledged to uphold the Compromise of 1850. Pierce won handily, but the most telling aspect of the election was the woeful performance of the Whig Party in the South (**12.7**). Scott, allied with the antislavery wing of his party, won only Kentucky and Tennessee. The Whig Party was falling apart and soon would be gone.

Pierce's appeal lay not in his personality (he was rather dull), but in his credentials as a Northerner with Southern sympathies. He was also a member of a brash movement within the Democratic Party called **Young America**. Enthusiastic about the notion of Manifest Destiny (see Chapter 11), supporters of Young America promoted a nationalist vision of territorial expansion, increased international trade, and the spread of American ideals of democracy and free enterprise abroad. America, they argued, possessed the right, even obligation, to continue its expansion, especially into Latin America and the Caribbean. The Young America program enjoyed broad appeal in both sections of the country and a spirit that found expression in Democratic newspaper editorials, Fourth of July speeches, advertising imagery, and paintings. Among the paintings, Emmanuel Leutze's *Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way* depicts a group of pioneers peering out over a vast expanse of Western territory (**12.8**). Native Americans are nowhere to be seen, suggesting that the land is ripe

> "We have a destiny to perform, a 'manifest destiny' over all Mexico, over South America, over the West Indies."
>
> *DeBow's Review*, 1850



12.7 The Election of 1852
Scott's poor performance in the South (winning only two states) indicated that the Whig Party was fast disintegrating over the slavery issue.

What ideals inspired Young America's vision of westward expansion?

for the taking. By including babies and children, Leutze indicates that generations of future Americans will benefit from the land's bounty. A radiant sunset implies God's blessing is upon the enterprise.

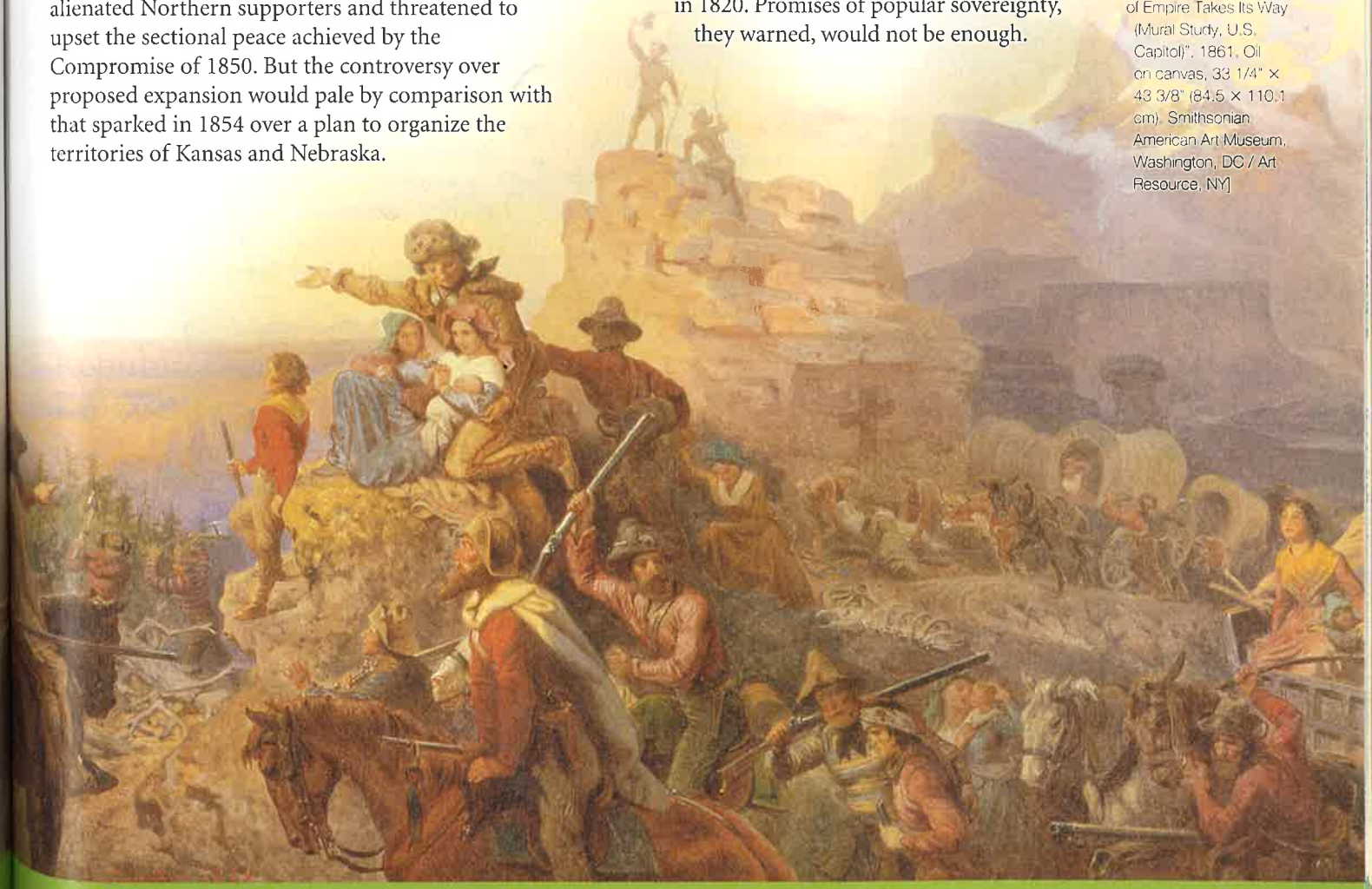
As president, Pierce proved an ardent proponent of expansion, which he believed would strengthen the Democratic Party and unite the nation. Yet his efforts at expansion had nearly the opposite effect. When Pierce entertained proposals to annex Hawaii and purchase Alaska, Southerners in Congress stymied the plans because the treaties would have outlawed slavery. Conversely, Northern representatives denounced Pierce's attempt in 1854 to acquire Cuba—with its plantation economy and 300,000 slaves—from Spain. Northerners likewise took a dim view of the invasions of Latin American and Caribbean countries led by small armies of expansion-minded adventurers known as "filibusters" (an English corruption of the Dutch word for pirate). These operations delighted Southern slave owners, however, who viewed these lands as ideal, in the words of Mississippi senator Albert G. Brown, "for the planting and spreading of slavery."

Pierce's support for proslavery expansionism alienated Northern supporters and threatened to upset the sectional peace achieved by the Compromise of 1850. But the controversy over proposed expansion would pale by comparison with that sparked in 1854 over a plan to organize the territories of Kansas and Nebraska.

The Kansas-Nebraska Act

Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois, another leading Young America figure, saw the future development of the United States in the rapid organization of territories and eventually states in the land west of Iowa and Missouri (essentially the northern half of the Louisiana Purchase). He was not alone. Farmers were eager to settle in the region's fertile Kansas and Platte River Valleys, while promoters of a transcontinental railroad hoped to run a northern route through it. Neither settlement nor railroad construction could occur, however, before the federal government negotiated land treaties with Indians and organized the area as a territory.

Douglas faced strong opposition from Southern congressmen who feared the new territories would eventually become two free states. They also had their sights set on a southern route for the transcontinental railroad, from New Orleans through the recently organized New Mexico territory to San Francisco. They told Douglas they would support his plan only if it included a repeal of the ban on slavery north of 36° 30′ that had been a part of the Missouri Compromise in 1820. Promises of popular sovereignty, they warned, would not be enough.



12.8 An Enthusiastic Vision of Westward Expansion This 1861 painting, *Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way*, by Emmanuel Leutze, vividly expresses the expansionist spirit of the Young America movement. [*Source:* Emanuel Gottlieb Leutz (1816–1868), "Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way (Mural Study, U.S. Capitol)", 1861, Oil on canvas, 33 1/4" × 43 3/8" (84.5 × 110.1 cm), Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC / Art Resource, NY]

Why did many Southerners support efforts to annex Cuba and seize other Caribbean and Latin American countries?

Fully aware that it would "raise a hell of a storm," but hopeful it would boost his presidential ambitions for 1856, Douglas introduced his **Kansas-Nebraska Act** as a solution to the issues arising over these Western territories. In addition to repealing the ban on slavery north of 36° 30′, the act called for splitting the area into two separate territories, Kansas west of Missouri and Nebraska west of Iowa (**12.9**). He intended this last provision to placate both North and South by allowing the eventual establishment of Kansas as a slave state (since its soil and climate were similar to neighboring Missouri) and Nebraska as a free state.

The Kansas-Nebraska Act touched off a national debate more intense than that of 1850. Most Northerners, both Whigs and Democrats, considered the 36° 30′ line an untouchable agreement that had ensured national peace for more than thirty years. While moderates had been willing in 1850 to allow slavery (via popular sovereignty) into Western territory lying south of the line, they now balked at the prospect of doing so in land north of it. Free-Soilers and abolitionists denounced the bill as "a gross violation of a sacred pledge" and conclusive evidence that the South, now increasingly referred to as the "Slave Power," was bent on spreading the curse of slavery wherever possible. They organized hundreds of "anti-Nebraska" rallies across the North and encouraged speeches, sermons, and petitions to Congress. "Despite corruption, bribery, and treachery," asserted one typical resolution, "Nebraska, the heart of our continent, shall forever remain free."

Undeterred by such opposition, Douglas prevailed, and his bill passed in May 1854. But it was a costly victory that seriously weakened his

12.9 The Kansas-Nebraska Act
The goal of Stephen A. Douglas in gaining passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act was to open the Great Plains to settlement and facilitate the construction of a transcontinental railroad (ideally running through his home state of Illinois). His repeal of the Missouri Compromise Line and the ensuing vigilante conflict in Kansas reignited the slavery controversy.

Why did most Northerners oppose the repeal of the Missouri Compromise line of 36° 30′?

Democratic Party and hampered his presidential hopes by associating him with controversy. The impact on the Whigs was even worse, shattering the party along sectional lines. Every Northern Whig in the House and Senate voted against the measure, while most Southern Whigs joined the Democrats in support. More seriously, the death of the Whig Party in the South indicated that the bitter fight over Nebraska had permanently ended the long-standing spirit of accommodation between the sections. Many Northerners resolved to make no more concessions to the Slave Power, while a growing number of Southerners resolved to preserve their rights from attacks by abolitionists.

This intensifying polarization between North and South is depicted in these two sculptures of "Freedom" by noted sculptor Thomas Crawford (**12.10**). Crawford was commissioned in 1854 to create a statue of a monumental figure representing liberty to top the Capitol building in Washington, D.C. One year later he submitted a proposed model for the sculpture to Secretary of War Jefferson Davis, who was overseeing the renovation of the Capitol building. Davis approved of the overall scheme—a large classically robed woman holding a sword and shield—but one detail infuriated the vociferous defender of slavery from Mississippi. Crawford had given "Freedom" a cap that Davis recognized as the one worn by freed slaves in ancient Rome. Sensing an abolitionist plot (Crawford was a friend of leading abolitionist Senator Charles Sumner), Davis threatened to cancel the commission. Crawford quickly reworked the design, replacing the cap with a helmet surrounded by stars and topped by a bald eagle.

Republicans and Know-Nothings

The political impact of the Kansas-Nebraska controversy became clear in the fall 1854 elections. Free-Soilers, ex-Whigs, and antislavery Democrats in the North formed dozens of local parties under names like the Anti-Nebraska or the People's Party. The most popular name, and the one under which they would eventually unite, was Republican. Despite their varied names, the parties shared an overriding commitment to opposing further concessions to Southern slave interests.

As this loose collection of antislavery groups coalesced into the Republican Party, the Democratic Party was transformed. In the midterm elections of 1854, Northern Democrats lost control of the House of Representatives and all but two free-state legislatures. Many of the defeated Democrats lost because they had voted for the Kansas-Nebraska Act. But in the South the Democratic Party actually grew stronger with the addition of proslavery Whigs. From that point the party came under growing Southern, proslavery control.

The nascent Republican Party was not the only movement seeking to succeed the defunct Whig Party. While many Northerners harbored growing concern about the Slave Power, large numbers perceived a greater threat to their way of life: mass immigration. The flow of immigrants into the United States, rising steadily since the 1820s, became

12.10 Slavery and the Republican Image
Crawford's design for a sculpture to top the Capitol's dome included a hat worn by freed slaves in ancient Rome (above). Bowing to pro-slavery objections, Crawford redesigned "Freedom's" hat as a helmet surrounded by stars and topped by a bald eagle.

What events led to the formation of the Republican Party?

a tidal wave in the mid-1840s. Industrialization, population growth, and crop failure in Europe led hundreds of thousands of Irish, German, and other western Europeans to seek new lives in America, where industrial jobs and cheap land abounded. Between 1845 and 1855 three million immigrants arrived, often settling in Northern cities.

This surge in immigration caused anti-immigrant sentiment, or nativism—native-born

> "The ill-clad and destitute Irishman is repulsive to our habits and our tastes."
>
> *The Christian Examiner* (N.Y.), 1848

Americans' belief in their superiority to the foreign born—to rise sharply. As *Images as History: The "Foreign Menace"* shows, Americans were upset not merely by the number of immigrants arriving, but also by their perceived character. While most immigrants in previous decades had been Protestants from Britain—many of them with money and skills—a large majority of immigrants in the 1840s and 1850s were poor unskilled Catholics from Germany and Ireland. Anti-Catholicism, with roots in American history going back to the nation's earliest European founders, surged into near hysteria. Some of the best-selling books in the antebellum period were works of anti-Catholic literature that charged Catholicism, with its emphasis on clerical authority and loyalty to the pope in Rome, was incompatible with democracy. Nativists also feared that immigrants took American jobs, drank too much alcohol, refused to assimilate, and increased poverty, disease, and crime.

Anti-immigrant sentiment reached a fever pitch in 1854 with the emergence of the American Party. Its core constituents were members of secret anti-immigrant societies founded in cities in the late 1840s. Because secrecy required them to answer "I know nothing" when asked about their organization, they earned the name "**Know-Nothings.**" Their political platform condemned both political parties as hopelessly corrupt and called for legislation restricting office holding to native-born citizens, barring the use of public funds for parochial schools, and raising the period of naturalization for citizenship from five to twenty-one years.

With the Whig Party in decline and the Democrats closely associated with the immigrant vote, Know-Nothings achieved stunning success in the 1854 elections, winning control of the state governments in Delaware, Pennsylvania, and Massachusetts. Nationally, about seventy-five Know-Nothing congressmen were sent to Washington. Elections one year later in 1855 saw the party win Maryland and Kentucky, place scores of nativist candidates in office in New York and California, and post impressive tallies in Tennessee, Virginia, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana.

In the aftermath of the elections of 1854, the big question was which of these two new political forces—antislavery Republicans or anti-immigrant Know Nothings—would replace the defunct Whig Party. But the American Party disintegrated almost as quickly as it arose, splitting like the Whig Party along sectional lines over the issue of slavery. Most of its members eventually joined the Republican Party. While many former members retained their dislike of foreigners, they grew increasingly concerned about what they perceived as a greater threat to the nation's well-being: the growing aggression of the Slave Power. This threat seemed most menacing in the newly created territory of Kansas.

Ballots and Blood

Even as opponents of slavery denounced Douglas's plan to allow popular sovereignty to decide the status of slavery in the territories, they devised a plan to ensure the results went their way. "We will engage in competition for the virgin soil of Kansas," William Seward warned his Southern colleagues in Congress just before passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, "and God give victory to the side which is stronger in numbers as in right." Wealthy New England abolitionists established the Emigrant Aid Company and financed the migration of more than two thousand antislavery settlers to Kansas. Thousands more went on their own.

Proslavery interests, however, proved equal to the task. To offset the soaring numbers of Northern settlers in Kansas, they organized bands of proslavery "border ruffians" to cross into Kansas from Missouri. While some came as settlers, most came as illegal voters determined to see Kansas enter the Union as a slave state. In the spring of 1855, proslavery men from Missouri cast nearly five thousand illegal votes that elected a proslavery territorial government,

What anti-immigrant laws did the American Party propose?

Images as History

THE "FOREIGN MENACE"

From the colonial period up to the present, Americans have held conflicted visions about immigration. On the one hand Americans proudly view their country as a "nation of immigrants" that has incorporated millions of newcomers while fashioning an ethos of tolerance. On the other, periods of virulent anti-immigrant sentiment have punctuated American history. In the 1840s and 1850s, groups of nativists—native-born Americans who believed themselves superior to the foreign born—mobilized to oppose immigration. While they failed to stop the mass influx of foreigners, their movement revealed a vision of immigration as a serious threat to the well-being of the republic.

The cartoon below reflects the belief that immigrants represented a threat to American democracy. The drawing beneath it expresses the fear that Catholic immigrants were part of a conspiracy to claim America for the Pope. What attitudes and actions might these kinds of images have inspired among native-born Americans?

By clothing the Irishman and German in whiskey and beer barrels, the artist reflects the widely held view that immigrants drank too much alcohol.

The brawl at the polling site suggests that immigrants threaten democracy because they use violence rather than persuasion to win elections.

The theft of the ballot box reveals the nativist fear of the rising political power of immigrants in the 1850s.

Immigrants as a Threat to Democracy, c. 1850

Borrowed from the Great Seal of the United States this eagle emphasizes the importance of public schools to American democracy.

Placing the Bible under the Pope's foot played upon the belief that Catholic priests and bishops prohibited people from reading the Bible on their own, something Protestants believed essential to Salvation.

Declaring Catholicism un-American, the artist presents the pope as the antithesis of republican authority, a royal figure seated upon a throne.

Alleging a papal plot to overthrow America, the pope points to the public school while a priest in the schoolyard organizes an attack.

***Popery Undermining Free Schools, and Other American Institutions*, 1855**

What caused the sharp rise in anti-immigrant sentiment in the 1850s?

which then gathered in the town of Lecompton, where they voted to legalize slavery.

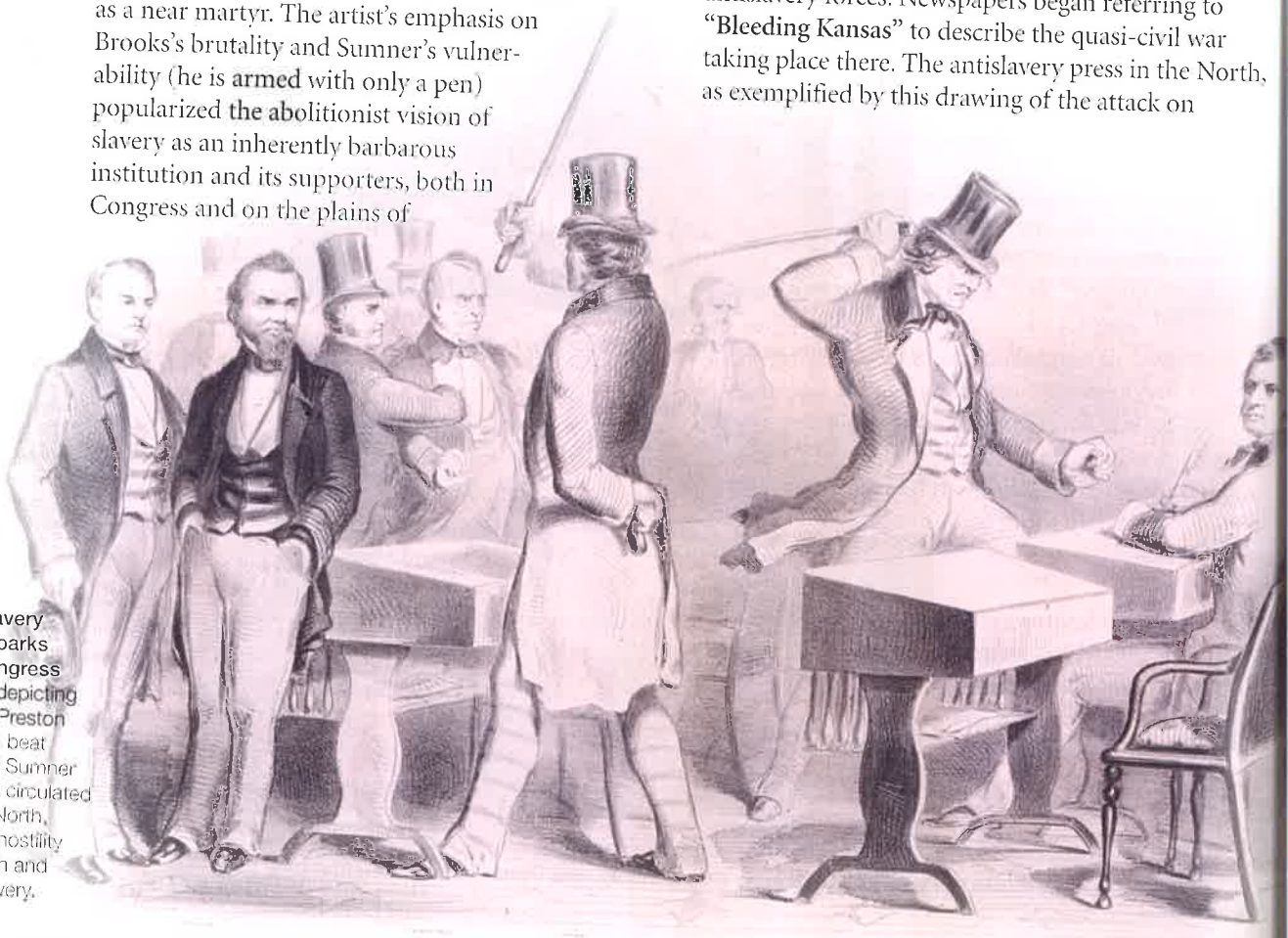
Antislavery settlers rejected the legitimacy of this "bogus legislature." In the fall of 1855, they drew up a free-state constitution, held elections that resulted in an antislavery legislature and governor located in the town of Lawrence, and asked Congress to admit the territory as a free state. Kansas now had two governments, each bitterly opposed to the other.

Kansas quickly became a divisive issue in Congress. While the Senate (controlled by Democrats) voted to recognize the proslavery government of Lecompton, the House (controlled by Republicans) recognized the free-state government in Lawrence. On May 20, 1856, Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts, a rising figure in the abolitionist movement, delivered a speech titled the "Crime Against Kansas," a harsh denunciation of Southern efforts to force slavery into the territory. Days later, South Carolina Congressman Preston Brooks attacked Sumner with a cane in the Senate chamber for his affront to Southern honor. Sumner nearly died from his injuries and never fully recovered his health.

As the image suggests (**12.11**), the antislavery cause in the North hailed Sumner as a near martyr. The artist's emphasis on Brooks's brutality and Sumner's vulnerability (he is armed with only a pen) popularized the abolitionist vision of slavery as an inherently barbarous institution and its supporters, both in Congress and on the plains of Kansas, as violent criminals who did not respect democracy or free speech. In contrast Brooks became a hero in the South for defending Southern rights and dignity. Hundreds mailed him notes of congratulations, while a few even sent canes as a symbol of their support, inscribed with phrases like "Hit Him Again."

Only days after Sumner's speech, a heavily armed band of proslavery vigilantes attacked Lawrence, Kansas, home to the antislavery territorial government. The posse sacked the town, setting fire to the main hotel and destroying its two newspaper presses. An opposing force of antislavery settlers arrived too late to prevent the devastation. Among them was John Brown, a zealous abolitionist who believed himself God's chosen instrument for eradicating slavery, which he ardently believed was a sin. Three days later he led a group of abolitionist avengers in a counterassault at Pottawatomie Creek, Kansas. Falling upon a settlement of proslavery families, the abolitionists pulled five men from their beds and hacked them to pieces with swords.

The violence touched off a wave of vigilante reprisals and counterreprisals by proslavery and antislavery forces. Newspapers began referring to "**Bleeding Kansas**" to describe the quasi-civil war taking place there. The antislavery press in the North, as exemplified by this drawing of the attack on



12.11 The Slavery Controversy Sparks Violence in Congress This lithograph depicting Representative Preston Brooks about to beat Senator Charles Sumner with a cane was circulated throughout the North, where it stoked hostility toward the South and defenders of slavery.

How did events in Kansas expose the flaw in the policy of popular sovereignty?

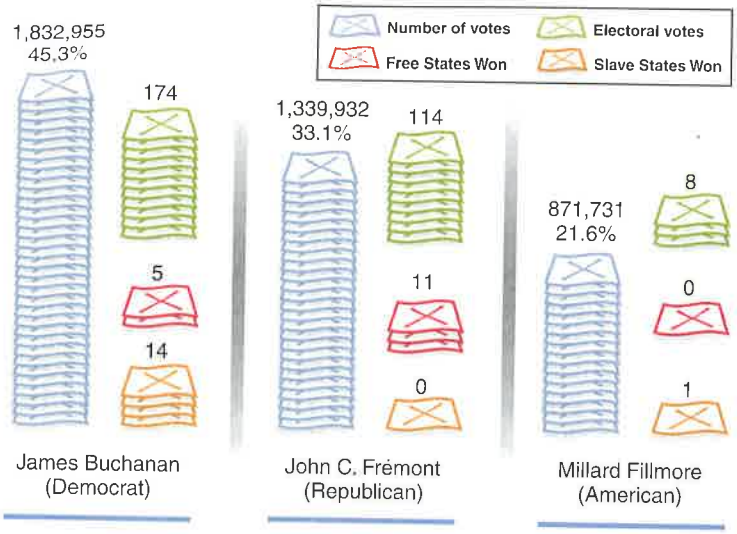
Lawrence (**12.12**), inflamed abolitionist passions. Note how the artist depicts the "border ruffians," as they were called by opponents of slavery, as the clear aggressors in the clash. These images, along with editorials, sermons, and speeches, inspired some Northerners to send money and guns to aid the Free-Soil cause, or to join groups of Free-Soil settlers heading for Kansas to thwart proslavery efforts. By the time President Pierce sent a new governor and thirteen hundred troops to Kansas in the fall of 1856, two hundred people lay dead, including one of John Brown's sons. The decades-long bitter debate over the status of slavery had disintegrated into armed conflict.

The highly charged events of 1854–1856 proved beneficial to the young Republican Party. Thousands of Free-Soil, Whig, and Democratic voters joined its ranks, making it the largest party in the North. Yet it was also a purely sectional party with no support in the South. Democrats had the advantage of being the only true national party, with strength in both sections.

For the presidential election of 1856, Republicans nominated the famed Western explorer John C. Frémont and waged a campaign likened to an evangelical crusade. Groups calling themselves "Wide Awakes" staged torchlight processions in towns and cities across the North, touting "Free Soil, Free Speech, Free Men, Frémont!" Democrats chose James Buchanan of Pennsylvania, who, like Winfield Scott and Lewis Cass, presidential candidates in elections before him, was a Northerner with pro-South credentials. The centerpiece of Buchanan's campaign was to play on the racism of many Northern voters by branding his opponents "**Black Republicans**," a racist pejorative that Democrats used to suggest that Republicans who opposed the extension of slavery into the Western territories were dangerous radicals who favored abolition and racial equality. The fast-fading American Party nominated ex-Whig and former president Millard Fillmore.

12.12 Bleeding Kansas
Determined to make Kansas a slave state, proslavery vigilantes attacked the antislavery stronghold of Lawrence, Kansas.

How did events in Kansas benefit the Republican Party?



12.13 The Election of 1856 The Republican Party, founded only two years earlier, earned the second-highest vote tally, but its support came almost exclusively from the North.

The three-way contest played out as two distinct sectional elections. As shown in the chart (**12.13**), Buchanan won easily in the South, though Fillmore polled an impressive 44 percent of the vote in the region. In the North the Republican Frémont outpolled Buchanan, but the latter's combined national total won him the overall election.

Deepening Controversy

Buchanan barely had time to settle into the White House in March 1857 when the slavery issue once again seized center stage with a controversial Supreme Court decision. Dred Scott had spent years living in different parts of the country as the slave of army surgeon John Emerson. When he returned to the slave state of Missouri, Scott sued for his freedom, arguing that his years in the free state of Illinois and the Wisconsin Territory (where the Missouri Compromise barred slavery) had made him a free man. The courts in Missouri rejected his suit, but Scott enlisted the help of abolitionist lawyers and appealed to the Supreme Court.

Dominated by proslavery Southerners, including Chief Justice Roger B. Taney, the court ruled in ***Dred Scott v. Sandford*** that slaves were property not people, and as such had no right to sue. Recognizing an opportunity to defend Southern rights and undermine the efforts of abolitionists, the justices also declared that Congress lacked the right to regulate slavery in the territories. In other words, the Court established as the law of the land the extreme Southern position that the right to property in slaves was inviolable and untouchable by any level of American government.

Opponents of slavery denounced the Court's decision as "a wicked and false judgment" and a "willful perversion" of the law. They seized on the decision as an example of the corruption of government by a Slave Power intent not merely on protecting slavery but on spreading it into every corner of the nation, including free states. Already in control of the White House and disproportionately influential in Congress, they argued, slaveholders now controlled the judiciary. Heightening their sympathy for Scott were antislavery publications, such as the widely-read *Frank Leslie's Weekly,* which showed him as a dignified man with a loving family (**12.14**). Some abolitionists declared the ruling "not binding in law and conscience," but most seemed to recognize that the only way to reverse the decision was with new justices named to the Court. That would happen only if the Republicans could win the White House in 1860.

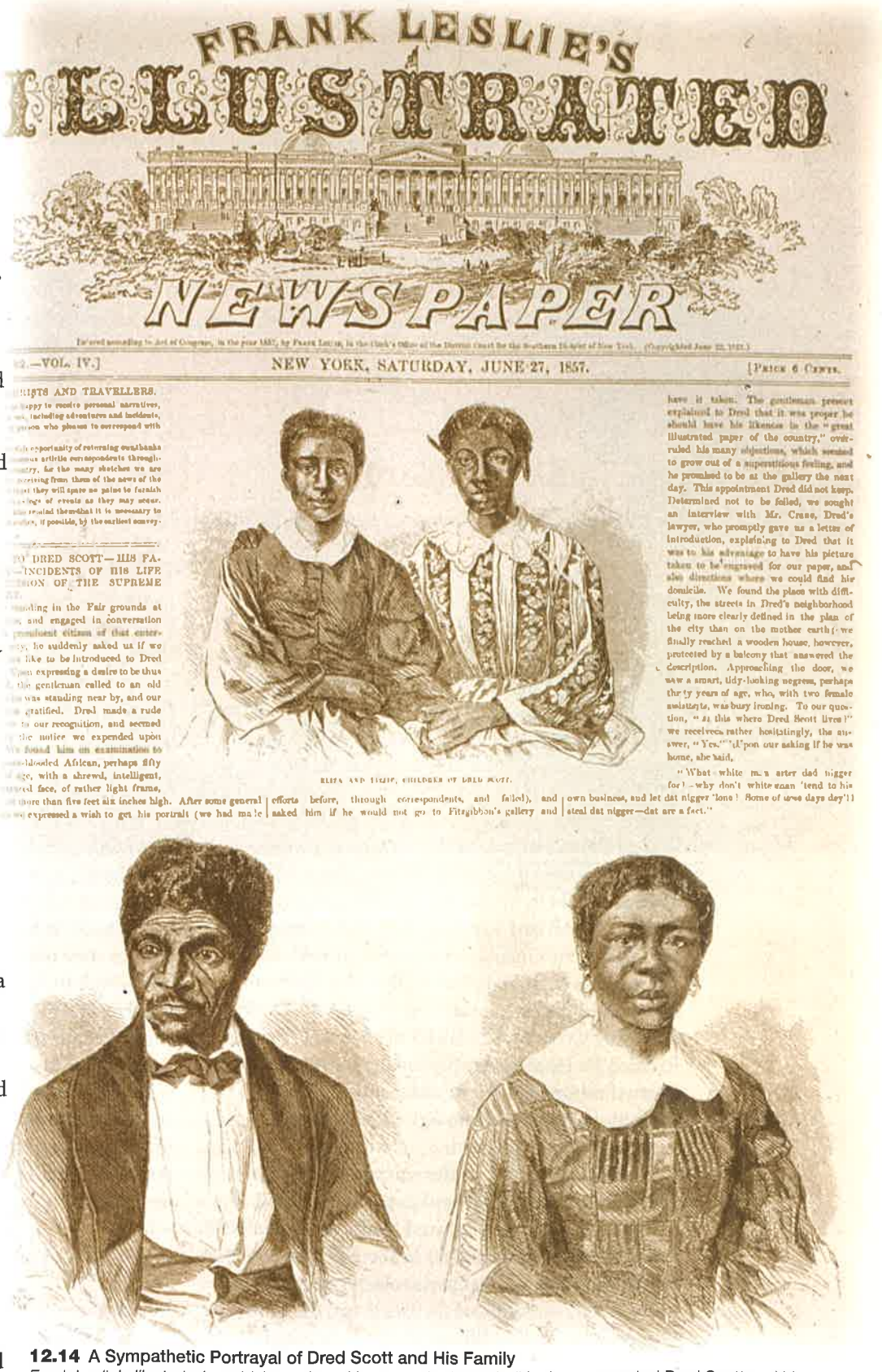
As both North and South considered the meaning of the *Dred Scott* decision, Kansas again became the focus of growing sectional animosity. The introduction of federal troops in 1856 had temporarily ended the spiral of vigilante violence. Tensions reached the breaking point in June 1857

> "They [African Americans] had no rights which the white man was bound to respect."
>
> Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, ROGER B. TANEY, majority of the opinion in the *Dred Scott* case

How did the Supreme Court use the Dred Scott case to expand and protect the rights of slaveholders?

when proslavery Kansans (who controlled the territorial legislature) held a convention in Lecompton and drafted a proslavery state constitution as a preliminary step to applying to Congress for statehood. When these proslavery men put the Lecompton Constitution before the people of Kansas in a referendum, antislavery residents, deeming both the legislature and the convention illegitimate, boycotted it. Because the antislavery residents had excluded themselves from the approval process, the constitution won approval easily and was forwarded to Congress. To complicate matters, however, in the fall the antislavery party won control of the territorial legislature and immediately authorized a second referendum on the proslavery constitution. This time proslavery residents boycotted, and the antislavery party rejected the constitution by more than two-thirds ofthe voters.

The scene shifted to Washington. President Buchanan gave in under intense pressure from Southerners in his cabinet and in Congress, who threatened secession if the proslavery Lecompton Constitution was not accepted and Kansas admitted as a slave state. Douglas came out against Lecompton because it was unpopular in his home state of Illinois, and it mocked his vaunted principle of popular sovereignty (even as it exposed its weakness). Months of rancorous debate ensued. A brawl broke out in the House, and some members of Congress began to come to the chamber armed. The Senate approved the Lecompton Constitution, but the House narrowly rejected it. Kansas would remain a territory indefinitely.


FRANK LESLIE'S
ILLUSTRATED
NEWSPAPER

VOL. IV.] NEW YORK, SATURDAY, JUNE 27, 1857. [PRICE 6 CENTS.

HTS AND TRAVELLERS.

DRED SCOTT—HIS FA-
INCIDENTS OF HIS LIFE
ION OF THE SUPREME

ELIZA AND LIZIE, CHILDREN OF DRED SCOTT.

have it taken. The gentleman present explained to Dred that it was proper he should have his likeness in the "great illustrated paper of the country," overruled his many objections, which seemed to grow out of a superstitious feeling, and he promised to be at the gallery the next day. This appointment Dred did not keep. Determined not to be foiled, we sought an interview with Mr. Crane, Dred's lawyer, who promptly gave us a letter of introduction, explaining to Dred that it was to his advantage to have his picture taken to be engraved for our paper, and also directions where we could find his domicile. We found the place with difficulty, the streets in Dred's neighborhood being more clearly defined in the plan of the city than on the mother earth; we finally reached a wooden house, however, protected by a balcony that answered the description. Approaching the door, we saw a smart, tidy-looking negress, perhaps thirty years of age, who, with two female assistants, was busy ironing. To our question, "Is this where Dred Scott lives?" we received a rather hesitatingly, the answer, "Yes." Upon our asking if he was home, she said,

"What white man arter dad nigger for?—why don't white man 'tend to his own business, and let dat nigger 'lone? Some of these days dey'll steal dat nigger—dat are a fact."

12.14 A Sympathetic Portrayal of Dred Scott and His Family
Frank Leslie's Illustrated, a widely read weekly sympathetic to abolitionism, presented Dred Scott and his family on its cover to emphasize his humanity after a Supreme Court decision that declared him nothing more than property.

Why did Congress reject the Lecompton Constitution?

Two Societies

From an economic standpoint the decade of the 1850s brought stronger bonds of interdependence between North and South. Northern textile manufacturers depended on a steady supply of Southern cotton, while Southerners relied on Northern manufactured goods, credit, and shipping. Yet overshadowing the increased economic integration of North and South was their splitting into two distinct societies. Northeastern and Old Northwest states industrialized at a stunning pace, symbolized by the spread in these regions of the railroad and factory. In much of the South, by contrast, economic growth arose from an ever-expanding system of staple crop production, notably cotton, that depended on the labor of four million slaves. Along with these divergent economies, North and South developed distinct philosophies that defined their vision of the proper social order.

The Industrial North

The North's industrial economy boomed in the 1840s and 1850s, driven by a growing pool of cheap labor swelled by mass immigration and innovations in technology (notably steam power). Manufacturing output soared, and by 1860 the total value of all goods produced in the North reached $1.5 billion (compared to $483 million for the entire nation in 1840). The dynamic and innovative character of the Northern industrial economy was displayed for all the world to see in 1853 at the Crystal Palace Exhibition in New York City (**12.15**). Modeled on a similar exhibition in London in 1851, the "Exhibition of the Industry of the World," as it was officially known, featured more than four thousand exhibits, a majority of them American. Even the building itself, a monumental cast-iron and glass building, reflected the latest trends in architecture, design, and construction materials. Inside, the more than one million visitors saw the latest in modern technology, including Cyrus McCormick's mechanical reaper, Richard M. Hoe's rotary printing press, and Elisha Otis's elevator. Significantly, the only Southern exhibitions of new technology were improved versions of the cotton gin.

Equally important to the emerging industrial economy was the building of a massive railroad network. Total trackage soared from more than 9,000 miles in 1850 to over 30,000 in 1860. Because most of this track lay west of Pennsylvania, it served to bind more closely the states of the Northeast with those in the Midwest, such as Illinois. Trade increasingly moved east to west along railroads and canals rather than north to south along rivers as in earlier decades, accentuating the growing sectional divide.

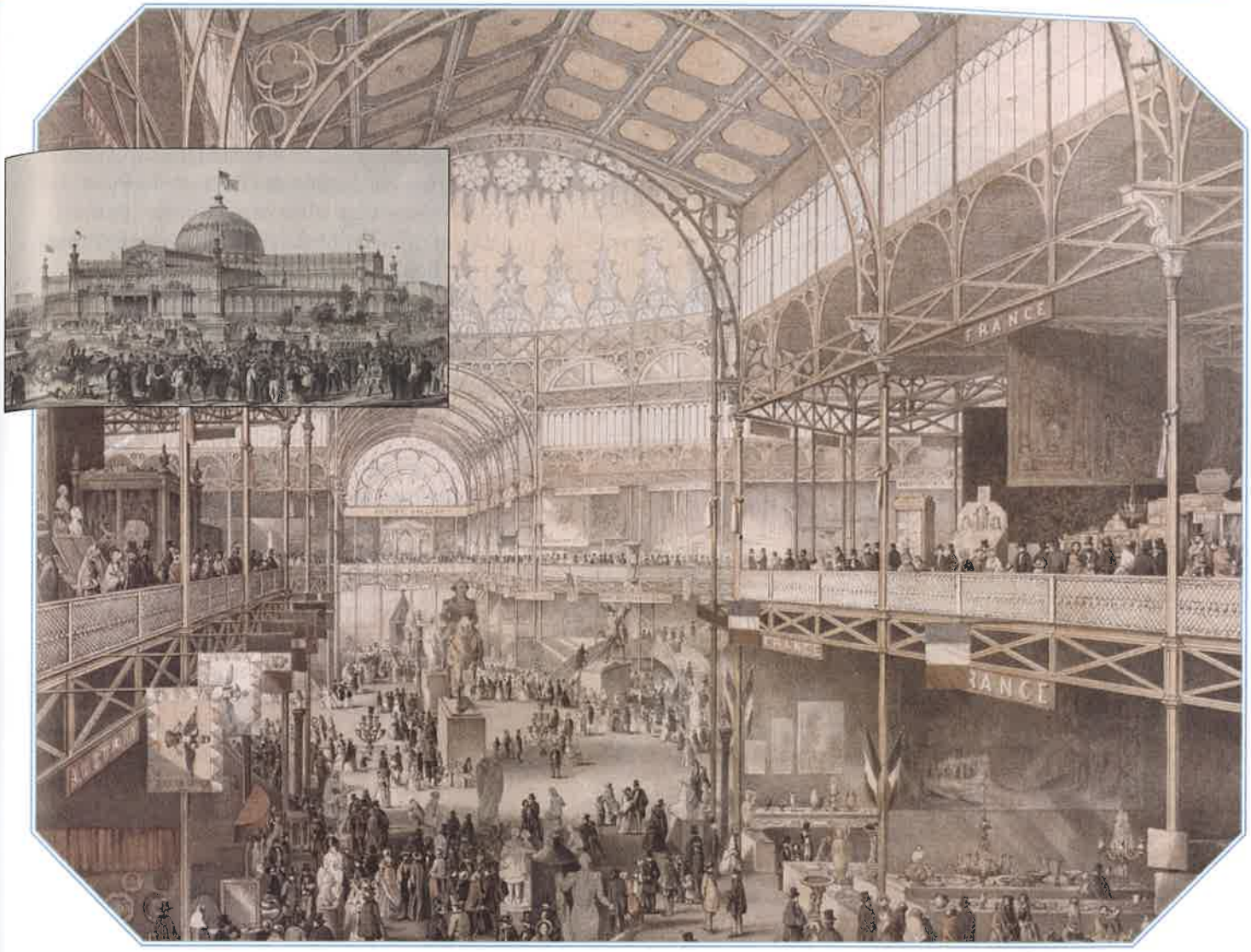
The growth of the railroads, along with the invention of the mechanical reaper by Cyrus McCormick and the steel plow by John Deere, revolutionized Northern and Western agriculture—still the foundation of the national economy. These new technologies allowed farmers to plow and harvest great expanses of land. The technology also allowed farmers to sell their produce in markets hundreds of miles away and to turn from raising a mixture of animal, fruit, vegetable, and grain products to specializing in single crops such as wheat, corn, or oats. Rising prices and growing demand from abroad for American grain added to this trend.

Industrialization brought rising wages and opportunity to most Northerners, but also new levels of poverty—especially among unskilled and immigrant workers who formed a growing class of urban poor. Wages in many industrializing sectors, such as shoe making and textiles, were too low for one earner to support a family. To increase their family's income, growing numbers of women and children entered factories or performed "outwork" in their homes, often for sixty or seventy hours per week. Many workers became unemployed for long stretches of time, especially in winter, and the number of poor families living in the squalid tenement districts of cities like New York and Boston began to rise.

Cotton Is Supreme

Industry also flourished in the upper South, especially in Maryland, Delaware, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Missouri. But it paled in comparison to industrialization in the North and constituted only a fraction of the overall Southern

How did new technology transform American agriculture?



12.15 The Crystal Palace Celebrates Northern Industry
Hundreds of thousands of visitors flocked to New York City in 1853 to view the "Exhibition of the Industry of the World." The main building itself, made of cast-iron and glass, was an expression of the latest industrial materials and design.

economy. Production of cash crops such as tobacco, sugar, and rice soared, as did prices. Nothing, however, outperformed the South's main staple crop, cotton. Production jumped from 1.35 million bales in 1840 to 4.8 million bales by 1860. Southern cotton by this time accounted for three-fifths of American exports and three-quarters of the world supply of cotton. As one Southern nationalist put it, "Cotton is King."

Most Southern cotton was shipped to Northern factories, indicating a growing economic integration between the two regional economies. But the relationship was by no means equal and Southerners increasingly resented their economic dependence on the North. "We purchase all our luxuries and necessities from the North," lamented a Southern newspaper editor in 1851. "Our slaves are clothed with Northern manufactured goods and work with Northern hoes, ploughs, and other implements. ... The slaveholder dresses in Northern goods. ... In Northern vessels his products are carried to market ... and on Northern-made paper, with a Northern pen, with Northern ink, he resolves and re-resolves in regard to his rights." A vociferous advocate of Southern economic diversification, James D. B. DeBow started a magazine with the motto "Commerce is King" and held commercial conventions throughout the South.

What did Southerners mean by the phrase "Cotton is King"?

By 1860 DeBow and other proponents of greater Southern economic independence could point to substantial progress. Southern railroad mileage had increased fourfold to 9,000 miles, and the number of factories reached eighteen thousand, most in the upper South The only problem for the South was that the economy of the North grew even faster. Even as the South increased its textile manufacture by 44 percent in the 1850s, its share of manufacturing nationwide declined by 2 percent. Indeed, in 1860 the city of Lowell, Massachusetts, operated more textile spindles than all the Southern states combined. The South remained an agricultural society. So long as staple crops brought high prices, no more than a handful of Southerners seemed willing to pursue industrialization.

The Other South

As important as slavery was to the Southern economy and culture, fewer than one-third of Southerners owned slaves. Even fewer owned more than twenty, and as the price of slaves rose in the 1850s the number of slaveholding families decreased. Most white Southerners were modest yeomen farmers who worked small patches of rough backcountry land, often barely at subsistence levels. With no access to capital and few educational opportunities (20 percent of Southern whites were illiterate), few small farmers expected to enter the planter class. In most areas they exerted only limited political power.

> "There is no such thing as a freeman being fixed for life in the condition of a hired laborer. The *free* labor system opens the way for all."
> ABRAHAM LINCOLN, 1860

Why then did poor Southern whites support a slave society in which they had so little influence and apparently so little stake? Some did so because members of their extended family owned slaves or because they themselves aspired to own slaves, a sign of wealth and status. Others embraced a long-standing Southern doctrine that white freedom depended on slavery. Because slaves performed hard, menial labor, slavery established a floor in the Southern economy below which even the poorest whites could not descend. Above all, poor Southerners supported slavery because they accepted the essential tenets of white supremacy, in particular the notion that blacks were inferior to whites and destined to live under their dominance.

Divergent Visions

Southern society not only preached the superiority of whites over blacks, but also the superiority of slave labor over wage labor in the North. The most prominent defender of slavery was George Fitzhugh. In several books and pamphlets published in the 1850s, he argued that all great societies in history practiced slavery and that the Southern version was remarkably humane because masters felt obliged to feed, clothe, and shelter their slaves. "The negro slaves of the South," he wrote, "are the happiest, and, in some sense, the freest people in the world." Moreover, argued Fitzhugh and others, such as the artist who drew this image that idealized slavery (**12.16**), slavery rescued Africans from the so-called barbarism of Africa and exposed them to "civilization" and Christianity. Pointing to the North's urban slums swelled with poor industrial workers, Fitzhugh ridiculed the Northern contention that wage labor was morally superior to slavery. Northern factory workers, he asserted, were little more than "wage slaves." Their condition was worse than that of the black slave because factory owners owed them nothing but the lowest possible wage. "Capital exercises a more perfect compulsion over free laborers than human masters over slaves," wrote Fitzhugh, "for free laborers must at all times work or starve, and slaves are supported whether they work or not."

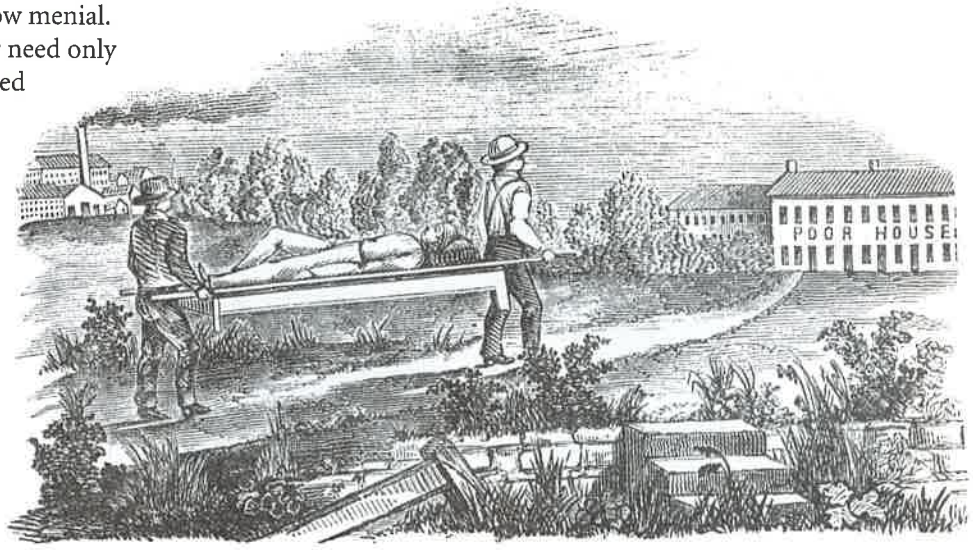
Republicans had an answer for the likes of Fitzhugh: a **free labor** philosophy that celebrated the virtues of individualism, independence, entrepreneurship, and upward mobility. As Fitzhugh did for the slave South, they offered an idealized vision of the industrial North that conveniently ignored the hopeless plight of many poverty-stricken city dwellers. "In the constitution of human nature," wrote New York *Tribune* editor Horace Greeley, "the desire of bettering one's condition is the mainspring of effort." In contrast to the South, which reserved hard labor for slaves, argued Greeley, in the North all

Why did Southern whites who owned no slaves support slavery?

work was noble and moral, no matter how menial. Better still, for the ambitious, wage labor need only be temporary. If a man labored hard, saved his money, avoided drink, and sought opportunity, went the free labor philosophy, he would soon possess his own farm or small business.

A slave-based society, then, for these Republicans, was the antithesis of this dynamic society of democratic opportunity. "Enslave a man," wrote Greeley, "and you destroy his ambition, his enterprise, his capacity." In the view of Northern abolitionists, slavery also stifled the capacity of the majority of poor and middling whites, protecting the privileges of the aristocratic few and leaving the rest with little opportunity for success. Northern writers like Frederick Law Olmsted argued that slavery led to a culture of laziness, luxury, and ignorance as opposed to the capitalist virtues of hard work, thrift, and restraint.

This ideological war of words grew more intense when a financial panic on Wall Street sent the economy plunging into a deep recession in late 1857, bringing unemployment and hard times to the industrial Northeast and agrarian West. But because the Southern economy was so geared toward the export of cotton, it experienced little of the Panic of 1857. Southern nationalists pointed to this as evidence that "cotton is supreme" in comparison to Northern industry. Some Southerners also argued that it proved the South could prosper on its own should the Union ever dissolve.



ATTENTION PAID A POOR SICK WHITE MAN.

ATTENTION PAID A POOR SICK NEGRO.

12.16 Proslavery Propaganda: Slavery and Free Labor Contrasted
This 1852 woodcut captures the argument of George Fitzhugh and other proslavery propagandists, claiming that masters care for their slaves even when sick and unable to work, while cold-hearted Northern factory owners simply dump their sick or injured workers at the poor house.

The development of these divergent philosophies in the 1850s played a major role in creating a climate of extreme mistrust between North and South. Given the moral and social dimension of the proslavery argument, Southerners perceived Northern criticism of slavery and attempts to prevent its spread as attacks on their "way of life." Likewise, Southern celebration of slavery and criticism of capitalist free labor convinced many Northerners that the Slave Power intended to spread slavery everywhere, including into the industrial North. The successful efforts by Southerners in Congress to defeat proposals for higher tariffs to protect Northern industry, land grants to promote a transcontinental railroad, and a homestead act to give 160 acres of public land to Western settlers accentuated hard feelings in the North. A leading ideologue of the Republican Party, William Seward, delivered a speech in 1858 predicting "an irrepressible conflict" between the two societies.

How did the Panic of 1857 strengthen the Southern argument for secession?

A House Divided

By the late 1850s slavery dominated national politics. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the congressional elections of 1858, especially in the state of Illinois where Senator Stephen A. Douglas engaged in a series of famous debates, mostly on the slavery issue, with a little known Republican challenger named Abraham Lincoln. Increasingly, Southerners became convinced that Northerners wanted not simply to exclude slavery from the Western territories but to destroy it completely. John Brown's abolitionist raid on Harpers Ferry in late 1859 only added to this perception. The subsequent election the following year of Abraham Lincoln, whose Republican Party Southern hard-liners believed was committed to abolition, sparked a secession movement that soon brought the nation to the brink of Civil War.

The Lincoln-Douglas Debates

In 1858 national attention turned to Illinois, where Stephen A. Douglas, a leading figure in the Democratic Party and certain 1860 presidential candidate, was running for reelection to the Senate. Many Americans were eager to see which direction he would take on the slavery issue. Opposing him was Abraham Lincoln, a former Illinois state representative and congressman. No abolitionist, Lincoln nevertheless believed slavery was immoral and hoped to prevent its spread to the Western territories. "A house divided cannot stand," warned Lincoln in his speech accepting the Republican nomination to run for senator. "I believe this Government cannot endure permanently half-slave and half-free."

The overwhelming underdog in the contest, Lincoln boldly challenged Douglas to a series of seven debates across the state of Illinois. The ensuing **Lincoln-Douglas debates** focused the fate of slavery, the legal and social status of African Americans, and the viability of popular sovereignty in the wake of the *Dred Scott* decision. Douglas portrayed Lincoln as a radical abolitionist and "Black Republican" whose policies would destroy the Union, elevate blacks to social and legal equality with whites, and promote interracial marriage. Lincoln denied these charges but made clear that a black man was "entitled to all the natural rights enumerated in the Declaration of Independence, the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Lincoln also castigated Douglas for his professed moral indifference toward slavery. "If slavery is not wrong," Lincoln asserted, "nothing is wrong."

Douglas won reelection to the Senate, but Lincoln had forced him to make statements that appeared both indifferent to slavery and willing to let residents in the Western territories ban it, thereby antagonizing both Southern fire-eaters and Northern free soilers. His opponents would use these words against him in the coming presidential campaign in 1860. More important, the debates made Lincoln a national figure and a rising star within the Republican Party.

John Brown's Raid

In 1857, just months after staging the Pottawatomie Creek massacre in Kansas, abolitionist John Brown began plotting an invasion of the South that he hoped would lead to a widespread slave revolt and the end of slavery. A deeply religious man raised from an early age to hate slavery, Brown believed God had called upon him to destroy slavery.

His sense of mission is revealed in this daguerreotype (**12.17**) taken in 1847. In it Brown reenacts a scene from a decade earlier when he stood up in a crowded church, raised his right hand, and pledged to commit his life to abolition. Brown's passion for the cause inspired many supporters and by the summer of 1859, with secret assistance from a number of prominent abolitionists, he had gathered a force of seventeen whites (including three of his sons) and five blacks and moved to a farm in Maryland.

John Brown's raid began at eight o'clock on the evening of October 16. Leading his raiders across the Potomac River to Harpers Ferry, Virginia, Brown quickly took control of the town and seized its federal arsenal full of guns and ammunition. They planned to fan out across the South, arming slaves as they went and touching off a wave of rebellion. But they were quickly cornered, and on October 18 U.S. Marines

How did the Lincoln-Douglas debates harm Douglas's presidential ambitions?

under the command of Colonel Robert E. Lee stormed their stronghold. The soldiers killed ten of Brown's men, including two of his sons, and took Brown and six others prisoner.

Six weeks later a Virginia jury found Brown and his men guilty of treason and sentenced them to hang. When given the opportunity to speak, Brown declared that he had acted in accordance with the Bible's call to fight for justice, a just cause for which he was prepared to die. On the day of his execution, Brown wrote one last note that proved eerily prophetic of the coming Civil War. "I, John Brown, am now quite certain that the crimes of this guilty land will never be purged away but with blood."

If in life Brown had failed to overthrow slavery, in death he furthered the abolitionist cause by becoming an instant martyr to many in the North. On the day of his execution, bells tolled in hundreds of towns from Boston to Chicago. At rallies and church services, Brown was lionized as a righteous instrument of God. Abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison, a life-long pacifist, told an audience in Boston, "I am prepared to say 'success to every slave insurrection at the South and in every slave county.'"

Not all Northerners were so enthusiastic, however; opponents of slavery like Lincoln and Greeley criticized Brown's use of violence to achieve his ends. Still there was no denying, observed one Northerner, that the "death of no man in America has ever produced so profound a sensation."

Sensation struck in the South as well, but it was one of fear and outrage. Brown's audacious act convinced many Southerners that Northern abolitionists would continue to conspire to instigate future slave uprisings in order to destroy Southern society. Increasingly they talked of dissolving their union with the North to protect their property and way of life. Robert Toombs of Georgia voiced the most pressing concern of Southerners: "Never permit this Federal government to pass into the traitorous hands of the black Republican party."

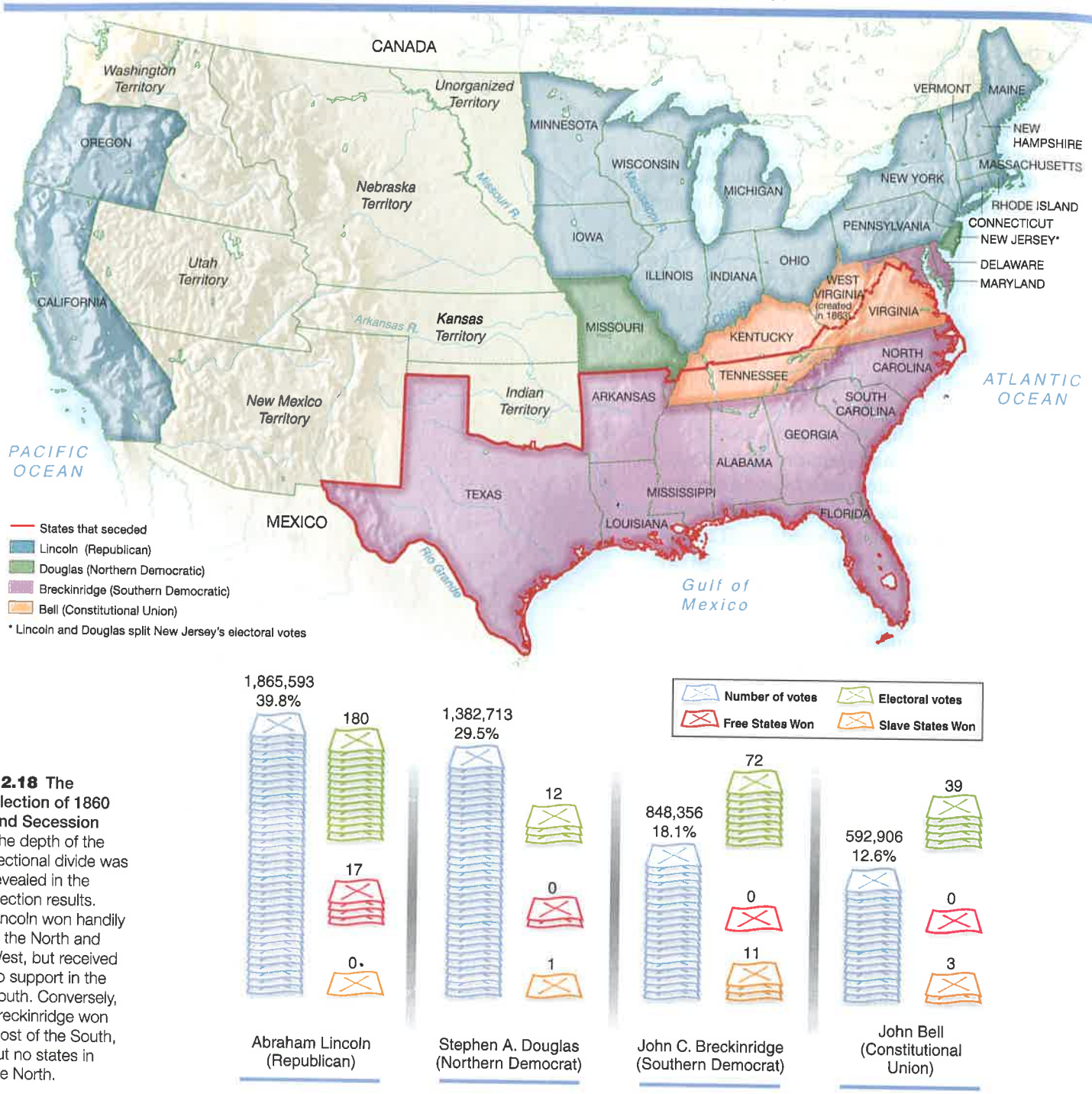
12.17 John Brown Vows to Destroy Slavery
In 1847 John Brown stood for this daguerreotype taken by African American photographer Augustus Washington, posing in a reenactment of a pledge he made to destroy slavery ten years earlier at an abolitionist meeting.

The Election of 1860

Throughout the course of the 1850s, the Democratic Party had managed to withstand the strains of sectional discord that demolished the Whigs and created a Republican Party with virtually no support in the South. But when the Democrats met in April 1860 in Charleston, South Carolina, to nominate a presidential candidate, disagreements between Northern and Southern delegates caused the convention to disband, unable to agree upon a nominee. The sectional split became official when a Baltimore convention of mostly Northern Democrats nominated Illinois senator Stephen A. Douglas, a man Southerners had become convinced would not protect slavery. A week later a convention of Southern Democrats also met in Baltimore and nominated John C. Breckinridge, Buchanan's vice president and a staunch proslavery man from Kentucky. To complicate matters further, former Southern Whigs and Know-Nothings formed the Constitutional Union Party and nominated John Bell, a pro-Union slaveholder of moderate views.

The Republicans hoped the split among the Democrats and the emergence of the Constitutional Union Party enhanced their chances for victory. Deeming Seward too controversial on the slavery

Why did many Northerners consider John Brown a martyr?



12.18 The Election of 1860 and Secession The depth of the sectional divide was revealed in the election results. Lincoln won handily in the North and West, but received no support in the South. Conversely, Breckinridge won most of the South, but no states in the North.

issue, Republicans selected Abraham Lincoln, a man with few political enemies and an established reputation as a moderate. He won the nomination on the third ballot. The party then adopted a platform touting Republican ideals of free labor, support for a homestead act, and a moderate approach to the slavery question that merely opposed its extension westward.

The national mood grew apprehensive as election day approached. The contest featured candidates who appealed to specific sections rather than to the national electorate. The result of the sectionalism, many observers feared, would be the very thing political leaders had struggled to prevent during the 1850s: disunion.

Lincoln won the four-way election with just under 40 percent of the popular vote. He swept all the states in the North, plus California and Oregon, while Douglas, who won only Missouri, finished second with 29 percent of the popular vote (**12.18**).

What was unique about Lincoln's victory in the election of 1860?

Breckinridge won all the Deep South states but polled just 18 percent of the popular vote. Bell of the Constitutional Union Party finished fourth with 13 percent. For the first time in the nation's history, a purely regional party, the Republicans, had won the White House. It was precisely the scenario Southern extremists had threatened would lead to dissolution of the Union.

> "That the South can afford to live under a Government, the majority of whose citizens ... regard John Brown as a martyr and a Christian hero, rather than a murderer ... is a preposterous idea."
>
> *Baltimore Sun*, November 28, 1859

Secession

Southern fire-eaters, having warned Southerners that the election of a "Black Republican" would lead to the end of slavery and the destruction of their society, wasted no time in calling for secession. Secessionist rallies broke out across the South. On December 20, 1860, a South Carolina convention unanimously passed a resolution declaring that the "union now subsisting between South Carolina and the other States ... is hereby dissolved." In less than two months, six more states—Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas—also seceded (12.18). One by one their representatives in Washington delivered speeches, resigned, and headed home.

Six of the seceded states sent delegates to Montgomery, Alabama, in early February where they organized a government similar to the one they had just left. The major exception, of course, was that its constitution declared slavery legal and protected everywhere in the new nation. They called their new nation the Confederate States of America and elected Jefferson Davis of Mississippi as its first president and Alexander Stephens of Georgia as vice president. They also created a Confederate Seal (**12.19**) that featured George Washington—not only the foremost Founding Father, but also a Virginian and a slave owner—at the center and established his birthday, February 22, as the official birth of the Confederacy. These choices reflected the Confederates' goal to legitimize secession by comparing it to the thirteen colonies breaking away from England during the American Revolution.

Even as the new Confederate government took shape, President James Buchanan, a weak and timid leader with Southern sympathies, did little to avert the crisis, claiming that he lacked constitutional authority to do anything. Moderates mobilized to see if they could, as in previous sectional crises in 1820, 1833, 1850, and 1854, devise a compromise acceptable to both sections. Senator John J. Crittenden of Kentucky put forth the leading proposal. The **Crittenden Compromise**, proposed several constitutional amendments to protect slavery, including one extending the old Missouri Compromise line of 36° 30′ to the Pacific, permitting slavery south of it, prohibiting it to the north. But while president-elect Lincoln expressed a willingness to compromise—including supporting a constitutional amendment protecting slavery where it existed in the South—he made it clear that he could not support the Crittenden Compromise. "On the territorial question," he said in reference to the Republican opposition to extending slavery into the West, "I am inflexible." With that the proposal died.

Newly elected Confederate president Jefferson Davis likewise professed an aversion to conflict, but rejected any prospect of compromise. For the Confederate States of America, the decision to secede was permanent. The citizens of the Confederacy, he argued, asked simply to be left alone.

The impasse left moderates in despair, but Lincoln placed his faith in pro-Union sentiment in the South. He believed that for all their bluster, Southern fire-eaters would eventually pull back from the brink of disunion and civil war as they had so many times before. After all, eight slave states in the upper South still remained within the Union. His inaugural address (see *Competing Visions: Secession or Union?*) emphasized the theme of reconciliation while also declaring the Union indivisible and secession illegal.

Lincoln also asserted his intent to "hold, occupy, and possess" all federal property in the seceded states. Although

12.19 The Confederate Seal: Linking Secession with the Spirit of 1776
By placing George Washington at the center of the Confederate Seal, Southerners sought to legitimize secession by comparing it to the decision of the thirteen colonies to break away from England in 1776.

What prevented a compromise in the spring of 1861?

the seceding states had seized nearly all federal property within their borders, two harbor forts remained in federal control, Fort Pickens in Pensacola, Florida, and Fort Sumter in Charleston, South Carolina.

> "The tea has been thrown overboard; the revolution of 1860 has been initiated."
>
> Charleston (S.C.) *Mercury*, reacting to Lincoln's election

With food and other necessities running low at Fort Sumter, Lincoln informed the South Carolina government of his intention to send a ship with non-military supplies. Confederate General P. G. T. Beauregard decided to force the issue before the ship arrived and ordered Major Robert Anderson, in command of the fort, to surrender. When Anderson refused, Confederate leaders began an artillery assault in the early morning hours of April 12, and by afternoon the next day the Union garrison surrendered. Southerners exulted in their quick victory, and immediately raised the Confederate flag over the ruins as a symbol of their triumph and sovereignty as an independent nation (**12.20**). On April 15 Lincoln declared the lower South to be in a state of "insurrection" and called for seventy-five thousand men to enlist for the purposed of putting down the rebellion. The Civil War had begun.

12.20 The Confederate Flag Flying in Triumph over Fort Sumter Taken the morning following the Fort's surrender, this photograph of Fort Sumter with a Confederate flag snapping defiantly in the breeze neatly captured the exuberance of the Southern victory and grim reality of the Union defeat.

Why did Lincoln attempt to resupply Fort Sumter?

Conclusion

Despite sharing certain aspects of a common heritage, language, and political tradition, as well as increasingly integrated economies, contentious issues in the 1850s, especially slavery, drove North and South apart. Cultural, social, political, economic, and psychological factors contributed to the growing rift, yet all of them, in one way or another, related to the institution of slavery. So too did the controversial events of the decade, from fugitive slave captures to Supreme Court decisions to presidential elections. Half the nation defined itself in terms of slavery, the other half in terms of its absence.

By 1860, the rhetorical references to nation, the Constitution, and Manifest Destiny that once unified the sections carried little weight. Indeed, North and South embraced separate and distinct visions of their destinies. "We are not one people. We are two peoples," argued Horace Greeley. "We are a people for Freedom and a people for Slavery. Between the two, conflict is inevitable." In 1861 these two peoples plunged into war, one in order to gain its independence, the other to deny it and preserve the Union. Neither was prepared for the consequences that war would bring.

Competing Visions

SECESSION OR UNION?

Mississippi's declaration of secession and Abraham Lincoln's inaugural address from March 1861, present opposing views on secession. Observe how both parties invoke the Constitution and other American traditions to justify their positions. What evidence do the secessionists cite to support their claim that the mere election of Lincoln justified secession? How does Lincoln reject the idea of secession and seek to place the burden of responsibility for any hostilities on the seceded states?

Patterned on the Declaration of Independence, Mississippi's declaration of secession sets forth a list of alleged attacks on slavery and states rights by the North.

Our position is thoroughly identified with... slavery—the greatest material interest of the world. Its labor supplies the product which constitutes... the largest and most important portions of commerce of the earth. ... These products have become necessities of the world, and a blow at slavery is a blow at commerce and civilization. ...

The hostility to this institution commenced before the adoption of the Constitution ...

It has grown until it denies the right of property in slaves, and refuses protection to that right on the high seas, in the Territories, and wherever the government of the United States had jurisdiction.

It refuses the admission of new slave States into the Union, and seeks to extinguish it by confining it within its present limits, denying the power of expansion. ...

It has nullified the Fugitive Slave Law in almost every free State in the Union ...

It advocates negro equality, socially and politically, and promotes insurrection and incendiarism in our midst.

It has enlisted its press, its pulpit and its schools against us, until the whole popular mind of the North is excited and inflamed with prejudice. ...

It has recently obtained control of the Government, by the prosecution of its... schemes, and destroyed the last expectation of living together in friendship. ...

Utter subjugation awaits us in the Union, if we should consent longer to remain in it. It is not a matter of choice, but of necessity. We must either submit to degradation, and to the loss of property worth four billions of money, or we must secede from the Union framed by our fathers, to secure this as well as every other species of property. For far less cause than this, our fathers separated from the Crown of England.

Our decision is made. We follow their footsteps. We embrace the alternative of separation ...

The flag of Mississippi, adopted after the state's secession in January 1861.

Lincoln used his inaugural address in March 1861 to respond directly to the assertions contained in the declarations of Mississippi and other seceded states. He attempted to reassure Southerners that his administration was not hostile to their interests, while rejecting their justification for secession.

Fellow citizens of the United States:

... I hold that, in contemplation of universal law and of the Constitution, the Union of these States is perpetual. Perpetuity is implied, if not expressed, in the fundamental law of all national governments. It is safe to assert that no government proper ever had a provision in its organic law for its own termination. ...

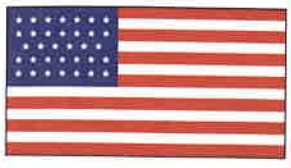
It follows from these views that no State upon its own mere motion can lawfully get out of the Union; that Resolves and Ordinances to that effect are legally void; and that acts of violence, within any State or States, against the authority of the United States, are insurrectionary or revolutionary, according to circumstances.

I therefore consider that, in view of the Constitution and the laws, the Union is unbroken; and to the extent of my ability I shall take care, as the Constitution itself expressly enjoins upon me, that the laws of the Union be faithfully executed in all the States. ...

In doing this there needs to be no bloodshed or violence; and there shall be none, unless it be forced upon the national authority.

In YOUR hands, my dissatisfied fellow-countrymen, and not in MINE, is the momentous issue of civil war. The government will not assail YOU. You can have no conflict without being yourselves the aggressors. YOU have no oath registered in heaven to destroy the government, while I shall have the most solemn one to "preserve, protect, and defend it."

I am loathe to close. We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. ...



The flag of the United States, updated in January 1861 to include a thirty-fourth star for the new state of Kansas.

How did the slavery issue factor into Mississippi's decision to secede?

CHAPTER REVIEW

1848

Gold discovered in California.
Population boom leads California to apply for statehood, renewing debate over whether slavery would be permitted in the Western territories.

1850–1852

Congress passes the Compromise of 1850.
By offering concessions to both supporters and opponents of slavery, it temporarily calmed sectional tensions.

Fugitive slave Shadrach Minkins is freed by abolitionists.
Similar incidents stoke abolitionist sentiment in the North and anger among Southerners.

Harriet Beecher Stowe publishes *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.
Best-selling antislavery novel converts many Northerners to the abolitionist cause.

1854

Congress passes the Kansas-Nebraska Act.
Allows Kansas and Nebraska to decide the slavery question by popular sovereignty.

Whig Party collapses.
Replaced by the Republican Party.

Know-Nothing movement reaches high point.
Nativist candidates elected throughout Northeast and Midwest, but movement soon fades.

Review Questions

1. Why did slavery emerge as a national political issue in the late 1840s?
2. What led to the rise of the Republican Party? How did the party define its position on the slavery question?
3. What were the sources of nativism that prompted the rise of the Know-Nothings? Why did the American Party fade in significance in the late 1850s?
4. Why was popular sovereignty such an attractive policy for politicians eager to resolve the slavery question in the territories? Why did it fail to accomplish this goal?
5. What led increasing numbers of Northerners to become convinced that Southern slaveholding interests had gained control of the national government?
6. What role did economic development play in the rise of sectional tension?
7. Why did Southern fire-eaters interpret the election of Abraham Lincoln as cause for secession?

1855–1856

Armed conflict between proslavery and antislavery forces in the Kansas territory.
The bloodshed lasts into 1857 and discredits the principle of popular sovereignty.

Senator Sumner assaulted for his "Crimes Against Kansas" speech.
Increases sectional animosity as Southerners hail Brooks as a hero and Northerners denounce him as a violent villain.

1857–1859

The U.S. Supreme Court decides the *Dred Scott* case.
Court rules that slaves are property, not people or citizens, and that the Missouri Compromise prohibition on slavery above 36° 30′ is unconstitutional.

John Brown's failed raid on Harper's Ferry, Virginia.
The South vilifies Brown as an abolitionist fanatic; the North hails him as a martyr.

1860

Abraham Lincoln is elected president.
Lincoln wins despite receiving no support in the South, revealing the deepening sectional rift over slavery.

South Carolina secedes from the Union.
Six more slave states follow suit and unite as the Confederate States of America.

1861

South Carolinians fire upon the Union-held Fort Sumter.
First shots of the Civil War prompt the Lincoln administration to issue a call for seventy-five thousand military volunteers. Four more Southern states secede.

Key Terms

Compromise of 1850 An attempt by Congress to resolve the slavery question by making concessions to both the North and South, including admission of California and a new Fugitive Slave Act. **348**

Fugitive Slave Act A component of the Compromise of 1850 that increased the federal government's obligation to capture and return escaped slaves to their owners. **348**

Underground Railroad A network of safe houses and secret hiding places along routes leading to the North and into Canada (where slavery was prohibited) that helped several thousand slaves gain their freedom between 1830 and 1860. **349**

Young America The movement within the Democratic Party that embraced Manifest Destiny and promoted territorial expansion, increased international trade, and the spread of American ideals of democracy and free enterprise abroad. **352**

Kansas-Nebraska Act An 1854 act designed to resolve the controversy over whether slavery would be permitted in the Western territories. It repealed the ban on slavery north of 36° 30′ (the Missouri Compromise) and created two separate territories, Kansas west of Missouri and Nebraska west of Iowa. **354**

Know-Nothings The nickname for the constituents of the nativist, or anti-immigrant, American Party who called for legislation restricting office holding to native-born citizens and raising the period of naturalization for citizenship from five to twenty-one years. **356**

Bleeding Kansas A phrase used to describe the wave of vigilante reprisals and counterreprisals by proslavery and antislavery forces in Kansas in 1856. **358**

Black Republican A racist pejorative that Democrats used to suggest that Republicans were dangerous radicals who favored abolition and racial equality. **359**

Dred Scott v. Sandford The highly controversial 1857 Supreme Court decision that rejected the claim of the slave Dred Scott, who argued that time spent with his owner in regions that barred slavery had made him a free man. It also declared that Congress lacked the right to regulate slavery in the territories. **360**

free labor A procapitalist Northern philosophy that presented an idealized vision of the industrial North, celebrating the virtues of individualism, independence, entrepreneurship, and upward mobility. **364**

Lincoln-Douglas debates A series of high-profile debates in Illinois in 1858 between Senate candidates Stephen A. Douglas and Abraham Lincoln that focused primarily on the slavery controversy. **366**

John Brown's raid A failed assault led by the radical abolitionist on the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia, on October 16, 1859, intending to seize the guns and ammunition and then touch off a wave of slave rebellions. **366**

Crittenden Compromise An unsuccessful proposal by Kentucky senator John J. Crittenden to resolve the secession crisis in the spring of 1861 with constitutional amendments to protect slavery. **369**