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1 Slavery and the American Republic

In the first decade of the nineteenth century, when the American Union was still in its infancy and the blood sacrifice of the revolutionary war patriots still a fresh memory, Kentucky was frontier country. Every spring brought thousands of migrants westward, along turnpikes, trails and roads through mountain passes, or on flatboats on the Ohio River. Land could be bought from the government for two dollars an acre, but many settlers "squatted," at least at first. Braving epidemics of cholera and typhoid, they cleared trees and undergrowth, walked miles to fetch freshwater, ploughed the soil and built simple one-room cabins, and only if they could scratch a living did they try to buy the title to their plot. A few pioneers, migrating from Virginia or perhaps the Carolinas, brought with them their black slaves. It was here, only eight months apart, that Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson Davis were born.

The future president of the Confederacy and the sixteenth president of the Union both had fathers who struggled as farmers, and both were poor, although Samuel Davis owned not only the land he farmed, but also a few slaves. Lincoln was reputedly named for his grandfather who had been shot by Indians, Davis, in honor of President Thomas Jefferson. After only a few years, the Davises and the Lincolns moved on in search of better land, one family south into Louisiana and then Mississippi, the other north into Indiana. Davis became a West Point—educated soldier—and the owner of slaves. After spending his boyhood in Indiana, Lincoln became a lawyer on the Illinois prairie, making his way in what he called the "race of life" in a lily-white state where slavery was illegal but black people were barred from entering. For all that one grew up in a society where there were slaves and the other where there were none, and despite the fact that they became active in opposing political parties, Lincoln and Davis shared not only the same native state but also basic values and assumptions about their nation and its world-historical significance. What they had in common tells us as much about the coming of the Civil War as do the differences between them. Lincoln and Davis shared the nationalism of their age. As young men, both spoke of the value of free institutions, and expressed their faith in progress. Both were drawn into politics by their concern with economic development in an age of bewildering technological and social change. It is true that in innumerable large and small ways, Lincoln and Davis, like millions of other Americans, did not always mean the same things when they spoke of their American identity. But in the final analysis, the story of how Lincoln and Davis ended up as opposing leaders in one of the most savage wars in modern history is not the story of two men from different cultures coming into irrepressible conflict but that of how the issue of slavery came to overshadow what they shared.

NATIONALISM, DEMOCRACY AND REPUBLICANISM

Hindsight is the stock in trade of the historian, but it is a tool which has to be used with great caution. The knowledge that, in 1861, North and South went to war has tended to color the way in which historians have viewed the first half of the nineteenth century. Even the term scholars give to this period, "the antebellum era," defines it in terms of what came next. This is especially true of discussions of state-building and nationalism in the early republic. Not surprisingly, perhaps, given the collapse of the Union in the 1860s, historians have dwelt on the de-centralized and limited government, the strength of regional and local identities, and the centrifugal forces built into American institutions.

It is certainly true that secession was often mooted and long predicted. Never before had a republican form of government been tried on so extensive a scale—Washington called the new United States the "grand experiment." If Americans of the generation of the founding fathers had looked into a crystal ball and seen fratricidal warfare, they would have been dismayed but not entirely surprised. It was a risk inherent in a polity founded on the principle of de-centralization. After all, if there was one political impulse that united the colonists in the struggle against the British government, it was a dread of concentrated power. For Revolutionary-era Americans, the best government was assumed to be the most minimal that good order and freedom required. Liberty and power, argued the founding fathers of the American republic, were opposing forces that it was the purpose of constitutions to balance.

Getting the balance right was the aim of enlightened statesmanship. On the one hand, excessive liberty could undermine the sanctity of property, as the Jacobinical excesses of the French Revolution were to illustrate; on the other, the tendency of all government was to encroach on the liberty of the people. Classical republicanism had relied on civic virtue to counterbalance the tendency toward corruption and tyranny, although experience showed that it could do so for only so long. With Gibbon's example of the Roman Republic resonant in the mind of every educated man, the result was a rather pessimistic, cyclical view of the rise and fall of freedom. For many Americans in the revolutionary era, Great Britain had exemplified this trend. Once the freest constitution on earth, it had—in the view of the colonials—become stagnant, complacent, decadent and corrupt under the Hanoverians. What would prevent the new American republic succumbing eventually to the same fate? In the early decades of the nineteenth century, post-revolutionary France was held up by conservative Americans as an even more frightening example of the fate that could befall republican experiments. In his first extant public lecture, delivered to the Young Men's Lyceum of Springfield, Illinois, in 1838, Abraham Lincoln argued that the danger to the American republic lay only from within. "All the armies of Europe, Asia and Africa combined, with all the treasure of the earth (our own excepted) in their military chest, with a Buonaparte for a commander, could not by force take a drink from the Ohio, or make a track on the Blue Ridge, in a trial of a thousand years," Lincoln proclaimed. "If destruction be our lot, we must ourselves be its author and finisher. As a nation of freemen, we must live through all time, or die by suicide."[1]

The instability—or to give it a more positive term, "dynamism"—of American society in the first half of the nineteenth century is its defining feature. In the years between the birth of Lincoln and Davis and the firing of the first shots of the Civil War, the population of the United States grew from under six million to over forty million. In the same period, the United States was transformed from a cluster of Atlantic ex-colonies still heavily dependant on trade with the former colonial power into a largely self-sufficient exporter of agricultural and industrial products which already, by the 1850s, was in some respects exceeding British productivity rates. The "American System" of manufactures, whereby component parts of articles like clocks, guns, boots and clothing were produced at standard sizes so that they were interchangeable, enabled mass production of goods. By 1860, the United States boasted vastly more railroad mileage than any other country in the world. This did not mean that the United States had fully industrialized. By the time of the Civil War, less than a quarter of the working population was engaged in industrial activity of any kind. The vast majority still worked the land, and almost all American politicians assumed that industrial and commercial activity would only ever be supplementary to agriculture. Nevertheless, the basis for future industrial expansion was firmly in place in the northeast by the time of the Civil War. By 1860 New York City had become a teeming, bawdy, multi-ethnic city of over a million people. Immigration from Europe accounted for some of this growth. In the immediate antebellum decades, the most visible immigrants were Irish Catholics. Wherever there was industrial activity there were immigrants—not only in the urban metropolises of New York, Philadelphia and Boston but also in the mining areas of Pennsylvania and wherever railroads were being built. The presence of an alien Catholic population seemed threatening in a Protestant nation that thought of itself as having a divinely ordained place in human history. Moreover, this new urban proletariat seemed a harbinger of Old World class conflict. But though poor Irish immigrants worried wealthy established elites, they also provided the labor that was essential for industrial development. Eighteenth-century republicans had assumed that responsible citizens had to be self-reliant farmers or artisans, the owners of productive property. As immigration stepped up a pace in the 1850s, the proportion of Americans who were wage earners increased dramatically; a threat, or so it seemed to some, to the republican spirit of the nation.

The sense of boundless and uncontrolled growth was most visible in the territorial expansion of the nation and the gradual westward migration of the population. In 1804, President Thomas Jefferson had exploited the preoccupation of European powers with fighting each other in the Napoleonic wars to negotiate what has been called the "greatest real estate deal in history," the purchase of the vast Louisiana territory, which at a stroke doubled the size of the American republic. In the 1820s, hopeful southern farmers struck by "Alabama fever" moved west to plant cotton, a crop that seemingly guaranteed ever-greater profits. At the same time, new canals, improved roads, and eventually railroads began to connect farmers in New England and the "West" (the area now known as the Midwest) to growing urban markets in the eastern cities. In recent years, historians have followed Charles Sellers in grouping the multiple technological, economic and social changes of the early nineteenth century under the heading "the Market Revolution."[2]

The spread of capitalist relations altered the way in which localities and regions interacted with one another, as independent regional economies were integrated into a truly national market. The South became largely devoted to, and defined by, its output of staple crops, the Northeast by its greater industrial growth, and the West by its production of food.

As print became cheaper and more widely disseminated, early-nineteenth-century Americans became ever more closely interconnected by common reading habits. A shared sense of themselves as a distinctive nation and a characteristic Victorian faith in progress and destiny was inculcated by such literary hits as Mason Locke Weems's life of Washington, which, like millions of other Americans, the young Lincoln and Davis both devoured. Weems's *Washington* was a patriotic morality tale for children in which readers learned that Washington "could not tell a lie" and were encouraged to emulate his selfless virtues in order to preserve the blessings of free government. Tellingly, Abraham Lincoln used his very first public address, when he was a candidate for the Illinois state legislature in 1832, to make an argument for the importance of public education on the grounds that everyone should be "enabled to read the histories of his own and other countries, by which he may duly appreciate the value of our free institutions."[3] Such sentiments could be found everywhere in the antebellum era. Americans were not shy about trumpeting the genius of their republic, as countless foreign visitors attested. In comparison to Europe, Americans of the early nineteenth century may have had an absurdly brief national history, but they more than made the most of what they had. The founding fathers, and especially Washington, were revered as demigods, and tales told of their Christian and republican virtue.

The fact that the federal government was small by European standards was a source of pride for Americans; it certainly did not in itself diminish the loyalty that Americans felt toward it. In fact, the locally constituted nature of nineteenth-century government gave American nationality an anchor in the real lives of its citizens. To a truly remarkable degree, Americans felt ownership of their government because their government meant their community, leaders they knew, had voted for, could speak or write to, heckle and jostle if they wished. The Post Office was the federal institution that most antebellum citizens were most likely to encounter in their daily lives. The US Post Office, often with the stars and stripes flying from the roof, was a proud, tangible and highly useful indication of the beneficent power of republican government. Antebellum citizens might also encounter the federal government if they wanted to buy land in the West at bargain-basement prices. In the 1850s, the amount of land sold in the west by the federal government was equivalent to the acerage of the entire state of New York.

Religion was an important component of national identity. In the first decades of the nineteenth century, an evangelical Protestant movement known as the “Second Great Awakening” took hold, especially in the West. Charismatic Methodist preachers carried an Arminian message of personal salvation to farmers who had often previously been exposed only to the threats of hellfire and a religion of chastisement. The growing strength of evangelical Protestantism was fueled by a number of factors, among them the laissez-faire attitude of government toward the regulation of religion which created a free market among competing religious groups and the psychological needs of a society undergoing tremendous change. Evangelicalism also thrived because it re-configured secular republican values to suit the more individualistic demands of an expanding capitalist society. The values of hard work, self-discipline and personal salvation were fused into an American creed that was simultaneously religious and nationalistic.

Race was also a common foundation of American nationhood that transcended class, gender and region. Antebellum Americans boasted of their free institutions, their common inheritance from the Revolution and of the blessings of liberty, but this “civic” component to their national identity was limited by racial (and also gendered) assumptions about who was eligible to enjoy the benefits of American freedom. Black people accounted for 15 percent of the population by the time of the Civil War, but only a minority of them—around 450,000—were free, concentrated in the Upper South with a smattering in northern cities. Almost without thinking about it, the vast majority of white Americans assumed that theirs was, and would remain, a white man’s republic. They believed that one of the things that set the United States apart from the other republics of the New World was the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race over the “mongrel” peoples of Mexico and South America. The 1790 naturalization law excluded only two groups of people from the possibility of US citizenship—aristocrats who refused to renounce their title, and nonwhite people. Both groups were assumed not to have the capacity for self-government necessary for republican citizenship. Catholic Irish and other non-Anglo immigrants were legally entitled to citizenship, but for much of the nineteenth century they existed in a shifting middle ground between "whiteness" and something else.

National identity—like other forms of identity, including race—is malleable and historically contingent. Antebellum American nationalism usually reinforced, rather than undermined local, state and regional identities. "The South" certainly conceived of itself as a separate entity long before the Civil War, and slavery was evidently crucial to that process of self-definition. In truth, there were many Souths, not one. The Appalachian region which straddled western North Carolina, northeastern Alabama, east Tennessee and western Virginia was a distinctive geographical region, as was the swampy coastal region of the Florida panhandle, or the Mississippi River Valley, or the plains of Texas. The upcountry and mountainous parts of the South had a very distinctive culture and social structure—a land with comparatively few slaves, less productive land, and fiercely independent and self-sufficient farmers who regarded with suspicion and even hostility the more hierarchical lowland and piedmont regions of their states where the slave-owning planter class built their elegant mansions. Even so, the legal status of slavery, and a shared suspicion of the Yankee North, gave this region a sense of commonality, and from that developed ever more elaborate ideas about a distinctive southern "civilization."

In retrospect it is easy to identify the ways in which the antebellum political system made war possible. De-centralized government interwove free institutions into the fabric of local communities, making an abstract entity like the nation not only tangible, but also subject to multiple local and regional interpretations. In constitutional terms, the power of state governments created an inbuilt source of potential opposition to the federal government. But in the final analysis, Americans did not go to war between 1861 and 1865 because they lacked national institutions or a fervent sense of nationhood. Instead, it was the corrosive impact of the slavery issue which led to secession and Civil War. It was slavery, for example, that split apart the churches in the late 1840s, creating a schism in national bodies that anticipated the larger split to come. In the end it was Northern and Southern identities—rather than ethnic conflict, or competition between the frontier West and the urbanizing East, or the tensions between nonslaveholding whites and the rich planters in the South—that turned out be the subnational line of division that mattered. And although many factors were involved in the articulation of sectional identities in the decades preceding war, all were subsidiary to the one compelling problem of slavery.

THE SLAVERY ISSUE

For centuries after the fall of the Roman Empire, slavery in Europe had been a matter of degrees. In place of a clear-cut division between the free and the unfree, complicated and mutable layers of power and obligation connected kings, lords, freemen and peasants. As the European colonization of the Americas began in earnest in the seventeenth century, chattel slavery—the doctrine that men, women and children could be owned, bought and sold just like any other type of property—was reinvented in its modern form. Unlike slavery in the Roman world, it was race-based. In theory, and almost invariably in practice, only people of sub-Saharan African descent could be enslaved. Black slavery was a hard-headed answer to a very practical problem: for western Europeans in the early modern age, the challenge of the New World was largely a problem of labor supply. An Eden of immeasurable vastness and tantalizing natural wealth was there to be exploited, but as the germs from European settlers spread, the native population appeared to be in rapid terminal decline. Neither immigration from the Old World, the indentured servitude of poor European immigrants, nor the impressments—by threats or by promises—of the local population offered a sufficient labor supply to provide a large enough return for investors. The solution was found in the use of African slaves.

In the eighteenth century it was Britain that harnessed slavery most effectively to the engine of its commercial economy. The wealth "piled by the bond-man's two-hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil," to use Abraham Lincoln's phrase, was mainly used to supply addictive drugs.[4] Economic growth was fueled by the dependence of increasing numbers of Europeans—but especially the British—on coffee, tobacco, and, above all, sugar. Later, cotton cultivation in the new world provided the raw material for the textile mills that symbolized and catalyzed the fundamental shift in the organization of work and the scale of production that we know as the Industrial Revolution. Yet the culture that grew fat on the use of slave labor contained within it the seeds of its own destruction. Abolitionism developed hand in hand with the humanist doctrines of the enlightenment but most powerfully with the evangelical Protestantism and the sentimental, Romantic Tory sensibility of men like William Wilberforce or Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

The stirrings of the first great assault on slavery coincided almost exactly with the American Revolution. In 1770 about 460,000 slaves were held in the North American colonies, concentrated in Virginia and South Carolina. The British antislavery movement that developed in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century made the growth of antislavery feeling in the newly independent United States unremarkable. In New England and the mid-Atlantic states, where slaves were few, and of limited economic importance, newly independent legislatures enacted emancipation laws with relatively little fuss. In the South, where slavery was concentrated, immediate emancipation was debated but came up against implacable opposition from planters who feared economic ruin if they were deprived of their forced labor, and from many other people who worried that a large population of free blacks would be an incendiary force. Yet even in the South, the idea that slavery was an outmoded and unfortunate institution had some purchase. Slaveowners' anxieties about the security of their institution were stoked by the apparent willingness of the British to use slave insurrections as a weapon against the rebellious colonists in the Revolutionary war. The Royal Governor of Virginia, Lord Dunmore, became notorious for his proclamation offering to free any slave who would take up arms on behalf of the king. When the British were defeated, thousands of American slaves fled to the Bahamas or Canada. An even more nightmarish vision of the violent overthrow of slavery was the revolt in St Domingo (present-day Haiti) led by Toussaint L'Ouverture during the 1790s, which retained a powerful grip on the imaginations of white southerners for decades to come. In 1800, an abortive slave uprising in Virginia led by the black preacher Gabriel Prosser confirmed southerners' worst fears that the doctrine of bloody revolution against oppression was about to be used against them.

The Virginian Thomas Jefferson embodied the slaveowners' dilemma. Jefferson was the author of the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 which prohibited slavery from the large swathes of US territory not yet incorporated as states. He also established the mechanism for admitting new states on the basis of equality with the original thirteen after a territory had acquired a sufficiently large population, a constitutional principle that was to shape the course of American history in profound ways. The Northwest Ordinance was an expression of the generally held view of the founding generation that slavery was an institution that was to be tolerated, but which was held to be ultimately incompatible with free institutions. Later generations of northerners exaggerated only a little, when, like Lincoln, they expressed confidence that the founders, while tolerating slavery where it currently existed but prohibiting its spread into new, as yet unsettled territories, had placed it "where the public mind shall rest in the belief that it is in course of ultimate extinction."[5] Certainly, Jefferson at times made clear his own pious hope that public opinion would eventually turn against slavery. In his 1783 "Notes on the State of Virginia" he wrote that "there must doubtless be an unhappy influence on the manners of our people produced by the existence of slavery among us." In 1808, President Jefferson encouraged Congress to follow the example set by the British parliament and ban the Atlantic slave trade. After he left the White House, Jefferson continued to write about his fears that slavery corroded the white man's republic. In the midst of the War of 1812—the so-called "second war of independence" in which the British had once again threatened to use slaves against their enemies—he expressed his conviction that "the hour of emancipation is advancing, in the march of time." The manner of its coming, though, was yet to be decided:

> It will come; and whether brought on by the generous energy of our own minds; or by the bloody process of St. Domingo, excited and conducted by the power of our present enemy, if once stationed permanently within our Country, and offering asylum & arms to the oppressed, is a leaf of our history not yet turned over.[6]

Contrary to the hopes of some and the fears of others, slavery did not die without the lifeline of new legal imports from Africa. On the contrary, it flourished. Prices rose, and, unlike in male-dominated Latin American slave communities, the slave population expanded naturally at the same healthy rate as the white population. Slavery, Jefferson ruefully concluded in 1820, was not only a highly dangerous but an intrinsically insoluble dilemma: "We have the wolf by the ears, and we can neither hold him, nor safely let him go."[7]

Up until the late 1820s, political antislavery movements in the United States had been relatively genteel. Southerners could engage in discussions about emancipation because no one important in public life was suggesting anything so radical as forcible, immediate abolition. Searching for a way to cut the Gordian knot of Jefferson's dilemma, some southern slaveowners found an individual solution in the widespread practice of providing for the manumission of their slaves in their wills. George Washington's will, for example, declared that his slave property would be free after the death of his surviving wife Martha. One can imagine the nervousness this must have caused the widowed Mrs Washington as she dealt on a daily basis with men and women each of whom had a very personal stake in hastening her end. By deferring emancipation until after the slaveowner's death, this practice was a manifestation on a personal level of the response of southern white society as a whole: to wish the problem away, and in effect to bequeath it to succeeding generations. For most antislavery Americans—northerners as well as southerners—between the Revolution and into the Civil War, the best solution to the problem of the wolf held by the ears was to expel the wolf. Colonization of black slaves either in Africa or in some other tropical place outside the territory of the United States was widely seen as the only sensible solution to the problem. The American Colonization Society, or the American Society for the Colonization of Free People of Color, to give it its full title, was founded in 1816 to promote the idea of emancipation conditional on removal. Arguing that freed black people would always be impoverished and unequal if they remained in the United States, the society raised funds to found Liberia, a colony for freed American slaves on the west coast of Africa. Only a tiny numbers of free blacks ever went to Liberia, and the fact that this pathetic scheme was taken seriously by so many intelligent men in antebellum America is an extraordinary testament to the power of self-delusion where matters of race and status are involved. It had the support of numerous leading politicians as well as the young Illinois state legislator Abraham Lincoln. The ideas the society espoused retained a powerful grip on the imagination of some northern politicians well into the Civil War.

The early 1830s were a watershed in the history of modern slavery. In 1833, after a long struggle, abolitionists finally succeeded in passing an emancipation measure through the parliament at Westminster. Henceforth successive British governments took the moral high ground over slavery, just as the Royal Navy had done over the slave trade in the preceding two decades. The South was becoming isolated. The abolitionist movement that developed in the northern states in the early 1830s had markedly different aims and assumptions from those of the Colonization Society. Calling for immediate, rather than gradual emancipation, the new abolitionists introduced a tone of moral outrage into public discourse. Whereas colonization supporters, some of whom owned slaves themselves, tended to see masters as well-meaning and benevolent, abolitionists saw them as sinners. While colonization supporters for the most part saw the slavery question in practical, pragmatic terms, abolitionists saw it as a violation either of the religious idea that all men had a spark of divinity, or of the enlightenment idea that all men were created equal, or both. The first shot in this new high-stakes battle over the right and wrong of slavery in the nation which contained the world's most powerful slaveowners, was fired by David Walker, a free black born in North Carolina and now living in Boston. In 1829, Walker published *An Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World*, which called on black people to unite in opposition to slavery, by force if necessary. But he also challenged white antislavery moderates by bluntly stating that "America is as much our country as it is yours." For Walker, as for many subsequent radicals, Jefferson's apparently unequivocal statement of the "unalienable truth" that "all men are created equal" was both inspirational and sickeningly hypocritical. "See your Declaration Americans!!!!" he thundered. "Do you understand your own language? . . . I ask you candidly, was your suffering under Great Britain, one hundredth part as cruel and tyrannical as you have rendered ours under you?"

As he must have expected, Walker's pamphlet made him a marked man. Several southern states placed a price on his head. In 1830, he died in mysterious circumstances. A year later, however, the first edition of *The Liberator*, the newspaper of William Lloyd Garrison's new abolitionist society, was published in Boston. This was to be the leading voice of the abolitionist movement. Garrison promised to be as "harsh as truth and as uncompromising as justice." He was proud not to "think, or speak, or write with moderation." He delivered on that promise, condemning slaveowners as "an adulterous and perverse generation, a brood of vipers" and reveling in the notoriety that followed. "I will not equivocate", he declared, "I will not retreat a single inch—and I will be heard." Garrison vociferously argued that freed slaves must become a part of American society. Abolitionists spread their message using the latest technology. Steam presses pounded out millions of pamphlets, newspapers and broadsides. Antislavery lecturers traveled the country by rail, speaking in public meetings and using the organizational tactics as well as the rhetorical style of evangelical revivalists. This was an age when, as foreign observers often commented, Americans were enthusiastically joining voluntary organizations. The American Anti-Slavery Society was created in 1833 to campaign for immediate abolition. By the end of the decade, 100,000 northerners had joined this and similar groups. That was a terrifying number to slaveowners who had never before been subjected to such vitriolic attacks, but it was a tiny proportion of northern whites.

To the vast majority of northern whites, immediate abolitionism was dangerously extremist. Violent antiabolition mobs attacked prominent abolitionists, destroyed presses that printed abolitionist literature and disrupted antislavery meetings. Accusing abolitionist speakers of inciting black men to rape white women, antiabolitionists revealed that to many northerners, abolitionism was a serious threat to the racial and social order. In the 1830s, local communities across the northern states used violence and intimidation to try to silence antislavery activism. When, in 1833, a Quaker teacher, Prudence Crandell, tried to open a boarding school for black children in Canterbury, Connecticut, incensed locals responded by terrorizing the children and poisoning the school well. The state legislature promptly passed a law banning schools for black children. The most notorious incident was the murder of Reverend Elijah P. Lovejoy, the editor of an abolitionist newspaper in Alton, Illinois, in 1836. By attacking the Constitution as a sordid "covenant with death," Garrison placed himself outside the boundaries of mainstream politics. His language was deliberately extreme, but the point he was making was an important one. The debate about slavery was indeed constrained by the Constitution: unless slave states voluntarily chose to pass laws of emancipation, there was no possibility of immediately abolishing slavery in any constitutional way. Instead of celebrating July 4, black abolitionists provocatively celebrated August 1, the date of emancipation in the British West Indies. Ties to the British antislavery movement heightened fears that abolitionists were being controlled by foreign agitators.

Along with its humanitarian appeal to natural justice, the *Liberator* made at least one argument that echoed the "Jeffersonian" antislavery arguments of the Revolutionary period. That was the idea that slavery poisoned white man's democracy. For all his concern for universal equal rights, Garrison also pointed to the corrosive effect of slavery on all those who were complicit in it, and in particular on the illegitimate power of slaveowners. Abolitionists laid the foundations of the concept of the "Slave Power"—the idea that there was an oligarchic, anti-democratic, unrepublican class of slave owners who had perverted southern politics and were trying to control the nation as a whole. It was this line of argument that was eventually to carry antislavery ideas from the periphery to the mainstream of northern politics. Although only a minority of northerners ever signed up to all the tenets of immediate abolitionism, the effect of abolitionism far outweighed their relatively small numbers. By provoking a defensive reaction among slaveowners, abolitionists exposed different views about whether owning slaves was compatible in the long run with the dynamic small-scale capitalist society that nineteenth-century America was becoming. As Frederick Douglass, a charismatic former slave said in 1847, "I am delighted to see any efforts to prop up the system on the part of slaveholders. It serves to bring up the subject before the people and hasten the day of deliverance."[8]

The last occasion before the Civil War when real debate over the future of slavery could take place anywhere in the South other than in the northernmost 'border' slave states was the year 1831. In that year, the Virginia legislature defeated a proposal to abolish slavery in the state. The governor who proposed this radical move was no less a figure than Thomas Jefferson's grandson. The advocates of Virginia abolition like the proponents of abolition in Pennsylvania and New York thirty years earlier were happy for slaveowners to sell their slaves "down the river" to the Deep South. Like many "antislavery" people who followed them, their self-interested wish was that the entire "Negro question" would simply disappear. Their opponents, though, were aghast at the thought that Virginia could even consider removing almost her entire labor force at a stroke. And the state did not have the financial resources to adequately compensate masters for the loss of their property. The property-owning classes united to defeat the measure. The emancipation measure received enthusiastic backing from the western counties of Virginia where the slave population was small or nonexistent, but was defeated by the eastern slaveholding counties, which were overrepresented in the legislature. The price of emancipation seemed greater than the price of building up the defenses of slavery ever higher.

The Virginia emancipation debate was prompted in part by the most famous slave rebellion in US history. It was led by Nat Turner, a slave preacher from Southampton County, Virginia, who believed that God was calling him to lead a rebellion. Telling his followers of visions in which black and white angels fought in the sky until the heavens ran red with blood, Turner gathered a small band of supporters, and on August 22, 1831, he attacked farms, indiscriminately killing about sixty white people, many of whom were women and children. The militia was called out and Turner's band captured and sentenced to death. As he was led to the scaffold, Turner was said to have cried out, "was not Christ crucified?" On one level, Turner's example revealed the futility of direct violent confrontation between slaves and a white majority who were united and heavily armed—unlike in the Caribbean, where blacks were heavily in the majority and the chances of a successful uprising consequently greater. In the American South only an external force could tip the balance of power away from the slaveowners. Even so, the psychological impact of Turner's rebellion on white society was profound. Like the ghost of Toussaint L'Ouverture, the leader of the successful Haitian slave rebellion, Turner challenged the illusion that slaves were content with their bondage.

Nat Turner and William Garrison prompted a pro-slavery backlash. After their appearance, the space for discussing antislavery ideas in the South closed down. For the first time, southerners began to argue that slavery was not just a necessary evil but a positive good. After about 1830, slavery was no longer a problem that could be discussed openly in half the nation. Slaveowners' fears were ultimately a product of the weakness of their institution. A system that depended on the brutal exercise of physical force could not bear critical scrutiny. Slaveowners responded by tightening slave codes and increasing the level of visible violence meted out to the enslaved population. Lynching increased. New laws were passed across the South making it a criminal offense for a white person to teach a slave to read or write. The voluntary manumission of slaves was prohibited. No longer could southern gentlemen ease their consciences as Washington had done by freeing their slaves in their wills. All this was designed to prevent subversive ideas spreading among the slave population. Fearing that abolitionist ideas would be spread by northern free blacks, South Carolina passed a law which meant that black sailors on northern ships that docked in Charleston harbor overnight would be imprisoned until their vessel was ready to sail. At the same time as slaveowners tightened the security around their peculiar institution at home, they sought to stifle subversive ideas at their source. Southern congressmen succeeded in introducing "gag rules" lasting from 1836 to 1844 preventing Congress from debating emancipation petitions.

What most observers in the eighteenth century had assumed was an institution of limited economic value was transformed by technological advances which made the large-scale production of cotton possible and by the soaring demand for raw cotton from Britain and the northeastern United States. Slave prices were based on demand and on confidence in the system. By these measures slavery was flourishing at the time of the Civil War. Between the Revolution and 1860 the slave population had increased by a factor of ten to nearly four and a half million. The center of gravity of the slave economy had shifted south and west from

Virginia. By the time of the Civil War, it was concentrated in the lower south states of South Carolina, the hotbed of secessionist “fire-eaters”; Georgia, originally founded as a free colony but now with an expanding slave population; Florida, barely populated in the swampy south, but with thriving cotton growing areas in the panhandle; Louisiana and Mississippi, the new heartland of the big cotton and sugar plantations; and, to the west, the slave frontier in Texas. Slavery was also firmly established in the upper south states of Virginia, Tennessee, Arkansas and North Carolina, although in each of those states there was an upland area of small-scale white farmers with few slaves and only a tenuous connection to the market economy. Such areas were to be fertile ground for southern Unionism during the war. In the 15 states of the Union where it was legal to hold human property, slaves accounted for 32 percent of the total population by 1860. In the 11 states that seceded to form the Confederacy, the ratio was even higher: five and a half million whites lived alongside three and a half million blacks, almost all of whom were slaves. To foreign travelers slavery was the most obvious defining feature of the South. Northerners who went south were also struck by the large plantations with what appeared to be a feudal social structure. Only 3 percent of southern families owned plantations, defined as holdings with over 20 slaves, but this small elite owned more than half of all the slaves in the United States. Especially in these large plantations, slavery—southerners evasively called it their “peculiar institution”—was domesticated and mythologized by analogy with the patriarchal family.

Slavery by its very nature was an economic as well as a human institution. Mythologizers of the “lost cause” in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries would later fit slavery into the paradigm of the “white man’s burden,” arguing that slaveowners willingly perpetuated an economically inefficient labor system in order to maintain social stability and racial harmony. From a very different perspective, Marxist historians like Eugene Genovese and John Ashworth have also come to the conclusion that the slave South was not fully capitalist since brutal coercion and neofeudal ties of mutual obligation rather than wage labor formed the basis of social relations.[9] The problem here is one of definition. If the “cash nexus” is the arbiter of whether a society is considered capitalist, then the antebellum South clearly fails the test. But large-scale slaveowners were fully integrated into the international market economy, and, despite their rhetoric, they acted like good capitalists when they made decisions about buying and selling land

and slaves. Their aim was to maximize returns on their investment, and slavery was a matter of huge-scale investment. Despite the paternalist myth, profit was the bottom line.

The southern defense of slavery was certainly motivated by unquestioned assumptions of racial superiority (which were shared by most northerners) and by a certainty that only slavery could maintain racial order, but it was also a hardheaded defense of a mammoth financial investment. Antislavery campaigners rarely seemed to recognize the brute economic forces that sustained and stimulated the defense of slavery. The wealth per head of the southern white population on the eve of the Civil War, if one includes wealth held in the form of slave property, was, according to the economic historian James Huston, far in excess of that in the northern states.[10] One measure of the impact of the Civil War on the economic and political geography of the United States is that on the basis of wealth per white household Mississippi was the richest state in the Union in 1860; ever since the Civil War it has been one of the poorest. Unlike other moral issues which enter politics, abolitionism threatened millions of dollars of investments. In many ways, including a strict financial reckoning, southerners had much more at stake than northerners. The increasing economic value of slavery augmented the deep-seated attachment of the vast majority of white southerners to an institution that they thought underpinned the status of poor whites, provided the only conceivable means of maintaining economic output and guaranteed the stability of their social order.

THE POWER OF SLAVEOWNERS

The American Civil War arose from a fatal irony: slavery was a highly vulnerable institution but slaveowners were politically powerful. Like stand-up comedians or operatic prima donnas—but with far more serious consequences—the defining characteristic of the southern slaveowner in the three decades preceding the Civil War was a combination of insecurity combined with an inflated sense of their own importance. Only in the republic that was dedicated in its founding document to the principle that “all men are created equal,” and which was a synonym for the great experiment in democratic government, did slaveholders resort not to delaying tactics but to a full-scale defense of their right to keep slaves, indeed to the argument that slavery was both divinely ordained and modern. Defying what in retrospect appears to be the irresistible trend of the nineteenth century, slaveowners in the southern United States confidently set out to do what their British West Indian counterparts would not have dreamed of doing: founding a slave-based republic in the second half of the nineteenth century. The "cornerstone" of the Confederate States of America, according to its Vice President Alexander H. Stephens, was laid "upon the great truth that the Negro is not equal to the white man; that slavery, subordination to the superior race, is his natural and moral condition."[11] Southern slaveowners wielded much greater political power than their counterparts in Latin America, or the British, French or Spanish Empires, yet could not escape the paranoia that was the fate of slaveholders in a world in which slavery was contested. The increasing assertiveness of slaveowners who demanded more and more evidence that the free states were willing to recognize the legitimacy of slavery was the principal driver of sectional conflict. Slavery required not just the absence of opposition but positive support in order for it to survive. Slaveowners were caught in a vicious cycle whereby as more and more people loudly denounced slavery they needed ever-greater reassurance. Not only their honor and self esteem, their sense of social order and their conception of right and justice, but also an immense amount of capital was at stake in their fight to preserve their world. Slavery involved such fundamental issues of honor, identity, security and economic interest that it drove otherwise loyal Americans to secede from the Union; and only secession could have prompted Civil War.

Abraham Lincoln's confidence that the founders had placed slavery "on the course of ultimate extinction" suggests that the republicanism of the revolution with its egalitarian and democratic impulses must have been inimical to slavery. But the reality was more complex. If the resort to mass violence was demonstrably a catastrophic failure of the democratic process, by the same token it can also be argued that the democratic republic created circumstances in which war could happen, even which—given the economic imperatives of the age and the cultural framework through which nineteenth-century Americans viewed the world—made war likely.

The interrelationship between republicanism and slavery had a long pedigree. Dr Samuel Johnson, the author of the first English dictionary and one of a breed of Tory antislavery Englishmen, famously and dryly asked of the revolutionary American colonists, "Why is it that we hear the loudest yelps for freedom from the drivers of Negroes?" What he imagined to be evidence of hypocrisy was in fact easily explained: the colonists were in revolt about many issues but at the core of the conflict was the issue of property rights. Colonial leaders denied that parliament in London had the authority to tax (i.e. to deprive a person of some of his property) without due consent. Since for so many revolutionary leaders property included slave property it followed that they were equally exercised about any interference, from government or from other private citizens, with their absolute right to hold and dispose of that particular form of property as well. Indeed it was for that reason that the Declaration of Independence included—in several long paragraphs that have been eclipsed by the familiar ringing opening phrases—a long list of specific grievances against the King, including against his alleged attempts to stir up "servile insurrection."

Some historians have labeled the antebellum South a *herrenvolk* democracy, invoking a parallel with the Boers in South Africa, in which a doctrine of equality for white men is predicated on the existence of a servile race. Much as they may have resented having to do it, even the grandest southern slaveowning "aristocrat" had to court the votes of poor whites if he aspired to political office. And although blacks were not so visible in the North, the concept of *herrenvolk* democracy could be applied more broadly to the antebellum republic. This was a republic in which the gradations of freedom and unfreedom which continued to characterize European society were collapsed into a much sharper distinction between white Protestant men—among whom there was indeed a remarkable degree of political and economic equality—and the rest. Far from being polar opposites, slavery and freedom were mutually dependent in antebellum America. The culture of equal rights for white men implicitly—and at times explicitly—sanctioned and explained the continuation of slavery. It is revealing in this context that slavery continued to be a concept much used by antebellum politicians—just as it had been for the revolutionary generation—to describe perceived slights. Another answer to Dr Johnson's presumed paradox was that it was precisely because the "drivers of Negroes" knew perfectly well what slavery meant that they "yelped" for freedom and continually saw the struggle for power through the dichotomy of slavery and freedom.

If American national ideology was a double-edged sword which could be used to defend as well as attack slavery, antislavery politics was also blunted by nineteenth-century Americans' shared racial ideology. In the United States (and also, earlier, in the British West Indian colonies) the African slave population had maintained a healthy rate of natural increase. A gender and age balance in the slave population meant that the black community was self-sustaining. In much of the rest of the new world, imported slaves were almost entirely men, and inevitably racial intermingling with the Creole community took place on a much larger scale. To a much greater extent than was ever true in Latin America, Anglo Americans saw themselves as a community set apart by God for some divine purpose and they had much less interaction with native peoples and more rigid systems of racial separation between themselves and their African slaves. Historians are becoming increasingly aware of the comparative fluidity of racial identities in the eighteenth century, but the intensified pro-slavery stance of southern slaveowners in the three decades before the Civil War reflected a wider shift within European society toward a markedly more rigid and hierarchical conception of race.[12]

In theory, the presence of a large class of nonslaveholding whites should have been a major threat to the slave system. A large literature has developed over the last 20 years or so exploring the class tensions within white southern society.[13] But real as these divisions were, the critical fact was that the vast majority of nonslaveholding southern whites, unlike increasing numbers of white northerners, accepted the legitimacy of property in slaves. The bottom line was that antebellum southern elites were wealthy only so long as their right to slave property was recognized. So long as everyone accepted slaves as property, class tensions could be managed. So long as nonslaveholders aspired to become slaveowners, or at least did not challenge the right of their richer neighbors to invest their money in human beings, the internal stability of southern white society could be maintained. For increasing numbers of northerners, slavery epitomized opposing values. Ordinary white southerners saw no contradiction in signing up to the same proscription for a fair society as their northern cousins. North and South were both free labor societies for whites. Most Americans in both sections shared an optimistic and egalitarian outlook on life. Whatever their starting point in life, northerners and southerners shared the common aspiration of property ownership, and they believed that they lived in an open, free society where hard work was rewarded. The difference was that most southerners were comfortable with the idea that black people were just another type of property. So where many northerners understandably saw slavery as reminiscent of medieval serfdom, an alien, unrepublican transplant on free American soil, white southerners simply saw another type of property. "You speak of African slavery as if it were the slavery of the Anglo-Saxon or Celt," protested James Henry Hammond to an

English antislavery editor, "But it is not." White southerners affected bewilderment at the line of attack from northerners. "What is there in the character of that property [slavery] which excludes it from the general benefit of the principles applied to all other property?" asked Jefferson Davis in the senate in 1850. He meant it as a rhetorical question, but of course to his opponents the answer was screamingly obvious: "because they're human beings!"

The most basic factor that gave US slaveholders the ability to buck the trend of nineteenth-century antislavery reform was the federal structure of the American Constitution combined with the fact that slavery was geographically concentrated. The idea that groups have been powerfully committed to the principle of "states' rights" has been invoked as an explanation for many things in American history, especially the Civil War. There is no doubt that many people genuinely believed in local autonomy, a principle that flowed naturally enough from the antigovernment rhetoric of the revolution. But "states' rights" should not be reified into an independent force, certainly not one with the power to cause a war. Northerners were as apt to claim states' rights principles as southerners when it suited them—as it did in the 1850s when they passed "personal liberty laws" that were deliberately designed to undermine the federal fugitive slave legislation. Antebellum southerners were in important respects far more keen on an activist federal government than northerners. By pushing through more stringent fugitive slave laws and even, by the late 1850s, demanding federal protection for slavery in all US territories under the control of Congress, they were in effect calling for a huge expansion of the federal government's responsibilities. Yet federalism was still the basic political fact that made secession politically possible and states' rights offered a convenient vocabulary with which to cloak the revolutionary aims of southern leaders. Federalism also gave southerners a platform in the Senate—in which states were represented equally without regard to the size of their populations—much greater than their strength in the census would indicate.

The Federal Constitution of 1787 recognized the legitimacy of slave property even without using the word "slavery." The federal fugitive slave clause by which the authorities in the free states would be bound to return runaway slaves to their masters in the slave states was a nonnegotiable precondition without which the slave states would not have agreed to the Constitution; slavery, after all, was only as secure as its borders. Even more reassuring to slaveowners was the "three-fifths clause" in the Constitution which apportioned representation in

Congress and in the vitally important presidential Electoral College on the basis of the free *population* (emphatically not three-fifths of *voters*) “plus three-fifths of all other persons, excluding Indians not taxed.” In other words, slaveowners—astonishing as it seems in retrospect—were allowed to have it both ways. Slaves should be treated as *property* if they absconded and claimed freedom, but as *persons*—or at least as three-fifths of a person—from the point of view of representation. This critical clause gave slaveowners an undue political influence at the national level which endured even in the face of the relative decline of the white southern population. On several occasions the South got its way in a presidential election or in a close vote in the House of Representatives only because of the three-fifths clause.

The basic advantage of the Constitution for slaveowners was that it provided protection to a minority—and as southerners were only too aware, they were becoming an ever-smaller minority, in terms of population, economic output and number of states. The founders fully recognized the philosophical and practical problems posed by slavery but in the interests of national harmony they dodged the question, passing it down to their descendents. Rather than providing a means of resolving differences, the institutional edifice they created polarized northerners and southerners. The Constitution protected slavery and precluded a national response to the problem, and the privileges it gave to southerners were increasingly resented by northerners. Only when their privileged position in the Union was apparently threatened by a northern antislavery majority did southerners give up on the Union.

But the Constitution, useful as it was, was in itself an insufficient means of protecting southern rights. There were too many circumstances in which the South could be outvoted in the House, and even in the Senate. The presidential Electoral College, although weighted to the South by the three-fifths clause and by the overrepresentation of small states, nevertheless responded to the population increases in the North. Furthermore, as we have already seen, the slave interest, for all their states’ rights rhetoric, had a vital interest in controlling the national government since only that way could they ensure the protection of their property and the social order that was bound up in it. John C. Calhoun, the leading South Carolinian spokesman for southern rights, proposed that the Constitution be rewritten to give the slave states a formal, permanent veto over anything the North wanted to do. His solution to the shrinking minority status of the South, in other words, was to institutionalize its power irrespective of relative population size.

A more viable political survival strategy for the minority South was to build alliances in the North. This is why the party system became so important. One strategy for slaveowners might have been to make common cause with northern conservatives. Some did this through the agency of the Whig party, which tended to promote economic development in the context of social order. Southern conservatives were attracted by the Whigs' determination to maintain sectional harmony and social order. The evangelical revival created a cultural politics which could unite people in all sections on issues like defense of the Sabbath and the promotion of temperance. Unfortunately for southern Whigs, however, the northerners who worried for the moral health of society were often also those who were most disturbed by slavery. The most promising strategy for protecting southern rights within the Union, therefore, lay in the world's first mass political party—"the Democracy"—which coalesced in the late 1820s and early 1830s in support of President Andrew Jackson. The Democratic Party allied southerners with farmers and urban laborers in the North, tying them together with a shared political vocabulary, campaign songs and slogans. Jackson was the great egalitarian leveler of antebellum America. This reputation propelled him into the rough, whiskey-soaked world of frontier democratic politics and to two terms as president from 1829 to 1837. In complete contrast to his silk-stockinged predecessor John Quincy Adams, Jackson embodied the idea that the people ruled. His log-cabin-to-White-House biography led him from a childhood skirmishing with British soldiers, to fame as the victor of the battle of New Orleans against the British in the War of 1812 and a subsequent career as a fearless Indian killer, to a respectable existence as the owner of a plantation outside Nashville which known as the Hermitage and—naturally enough—the ownership of a hundred or so slaves. The Jacksonian Democratic Party was held together by a commitment to white racial solidarity and—to a greater extent than any other mass movement in American history—to equality of outcome as well as of opportunity. Their vision was an evolution of the Jeffersonian dream of an agrarian republic, an "empire of liberty" in which every white man would have the opportunity to own productive property. The enemy of this smallholders', white man's republic was concentrations of wealth, exemplified by bankers and speculators, who, according to Jacksonian rhetoric, made their money from the sweat of other men's labor. The free labor ideology that was used by Republicans in the late 1850s to condemn slavery gained its power from this rich Jacksonian tradition.

To some Jacksonians it was obvious that slavery violated these ideals, not so much because slaves themselves were being denied the fruits of their labor, but because slaveowners formed exactly the kind of privileged class who undermined the egalitarianism of the republic.

The overwhelming majority of Democrats remained hostile to antislavery politics. One of the weak points of recent scholarship on the coming of the war has been that it ignores the fierce resistance by a huge number of loyal northern Democrats to an antislavery interpretation of the nation. The founders had forged a pragmatic compromise that tolerated slavery. On the eve of the Civil War, large numbers of northerners were more than just tolerant; they accepted black enslavement as a permanent condition. Irish immigrants and southern-born migrants to the North were two groups especially susceptible to this complacent view of slavery, and, disproportionately represented in the northern Democratic Party, these groups formed a buffer against the growing antislavery culture that was gripping many other elements of antebellum northern society. As late as 1858, when Jefferson Davis visited New England for health reasons, his warm reception there convinced him that there were still many northern Democrats committed to protecting the South within the Union.

THE CRISIS OVER THE EXTENSION OF SLAVERY

The great fear of the South in the antebellum period was a united North. The South could not have exercised political power at a national level without the support of northern Democrats at critical junctures. The cause that unified northern and southern Democrats was western expansion. A nationwide depression in the 1840s made the promise of boundless, free land especially appealing. Cheap farms in the west would compensate the indebted farmers of states like Illinois, Ohio and Pennsylvania, who had suffered most from the economic downturn. It promised to unite northern and southern Democrats on a common platform. Yet, inevitably, expansionism undermined the effort to keep slavery out of national politics. Democrats unwittingly let the genie of antislavery politics out of the bottle by creating a new context in which the underlying tensions between slave and free societies could be fought out. In these circumstances, northern Democrats were compelled to support the South, in the tradition of tolerating slavery, and convinced that any other approach would drive southern states out of the Union.

Throughout the 1840s, white Americans moved west. Searching for new opportunities and beguiled by stories of the fertile valleys of Oregon, pioneers made the perilous trek across the Great Plains through Indian country and across the Rocky mountains beyond the boundaries of the United States. Until 1846 Oregon was jointly administered by the United States and Britain, but international boundaries were of little concern to settlers. The westward migration rekindled the old idea that it was the “manifest destiny” of the United States to spread across the continent. From the outset, expansion and conquest had been wired into the DNA of the nation. In the middle decades of the nineteenth century this process sped up. John O’Sullivan, the Democratic publicist who is credited with coining the phrase “manifest destiny,” made three basic points in support of territorial expansion: first, population growth required it; second, the United States was, in Jefferson’s phrase, an “Empire of Liberty” whose expansion equated with the growth of freedom in the world; and, finally, it was God’s will. The first of these arguments—population expansion—was closely related to the other two because most antebellum Americans, especially Democrats in both North and South, believed that American freedom was only possible because of the unique abundance of the new world. Unlike in Europe, landless eastern country dwellers or unemployed urban workers could escape their condition by going west. Although historians have shown that the very poorest section of eastern society were unlikely to travel west (because one needed a certain amount of capital to do so), this “safety valve” theory was an inspiring idea that structured Americans’ image of their own society for the rest of the nineteenth century and beyond. In testimony to Congress in 1846, William Gilpin, a Quaker, set out the case for expansion as a righteous crusade:

> The untransacted destiny of the American field is to subdue the continent—to rush over the vast field to the Pacific Ocean . . . to set the principle of self-government at work . . . to establish a new order in human affairs—to set free the enslaved . . . to change darkness into light—to stir up the sleep of a hundred centuries . . . to confirm the destiny of the human race—to carry the career of mankind to its culminating point—to cause stagnant people to be reborn—to perfect science—to emblazon history with the conquest of peace—to shed a new and resplendent glory upon mankind . . . to dissolve the spell of tyranny and exalt charity. . . . Divine task! immortal mission! Let us tread fast and

> joyfully the open trail before us. Let every American heart open wide for patriotism to glow undimmed, and confide with religious faith in the sublime and prodigious destiny of his well-loved country![14]

Needless to say, manifest destiny was an explicitly racial idea. "Race," declared John O'Sullivan, "is the key to the history of nations" and the rise and fall of empires. The superiority of the "Anglo-Saxon race" justified the expansion of Anglo-America at the expense of "lesser" peoples, whether they were Native Americans or Hispanics. Ideas about race hardened in this period, as pseudoscientific theories of racial difference appeared to provide an explanation as well as a justification for the domination of one people over another. The "Anglo-Saxon" race was a nineteenth-century coinage that brought to the fore the racial basis of American political culture. The Anglo-Saxons were a "liberty-loving" people. They were defined by their Protestantism, by their independence, their rejection of tyranny, whether in the form of aristocrats or the Catholic Church. The racial arguments in favor of expansion united most southerners and northerners. They justified the expropriation of Indian lands, and the waging of war against a "mongrel" Catholic "race" like the Mexicans. The great value of the West was that in the imagination of most Americans, it was still a virgin land. The Indians were destined to die out naturally, and the Hispanic population, small in numbers and easily overwhelmed by Anglo settlers, could be ignored. But the same racial logic limited the "natural limits" of the United States: for example, even so passionate a defender of slavery as John C. Calhoun opposed the annexation of the whole of Mexico on the grounds that so many Catholic "mongrels" could not be assimilated.

Southerners did not always take slaves with them when they traveled west, but many did, and many others were inspired by the thought of being able to acquire cheap and fertile land with enough capital left over to buy or hire a slave or two to work it. The profits to be made from cotton cultivation pushed entrepreneurial southern farmers ever further westward in search of new lands. When they reached the western border of the United States, in Louisiana, some kept on going—into the Mexican border province of Texas. Slavery was technically illegal in the republic of Mexico, but the writ of Mexico City did not extend to a troublesome province being rapidly settled by Anglos. When in 1836 a group of American settlers led by Stephen Austin and Sam Houston led a rebellion against the Mexican government and established an independent slaveholding republic, it was not a great surprise. No sooner had the independence of Texas been proclaimed than southerners were plotting to annex it to the United States.

In the early 1840s, the question of Texas annexation divided Americans. This was one of the first of a series of issues during the 20 years leading up to the Civil War in which the Democratic Party became the vehicle for expressing southern slaveowners' interests. The election of 1844 pitted Democrat James K. Polk, a vigorous supporter of Texas annexation, against the Whig standard bearer Henry Clay who opposed it. Polk was a little-known former Tennessee governor and slaveholder who received the nomination only because the favorite, former President Martin Van Buren of New York had publicly opposed annexation in order to avoid stirring up controversy over slavery. Frustratingly for the Whigs, Polk's narrow victory, one of the closest in any presidential election in American history, was probably due to James G. Birney, the candidate of the antislavery Liberty Party who took votes away from Clay in crucial northern states, especially New York. Both Clay and Polk were slaveowners, and the parties they represented had strength in both sections, but the choice between them was fateful for the nation. Had Clay become president in March 1845, it is unlikely that there would have been war with Mexico. Clay and most of his fellow Whigs worried that acquiring new territories with alien, Catholic populations would undermine republican values and distract attention from the need for economic development. Polk was an instinctive expansionist. Everyone knew that annexing Texas would provoke war with Mexico, and for many of Polk's southern supporters, that was the whole point. Texas was only to be the beginning. Calhoun and Jefferson Davis, now a Mississippi senator, were among those for whom expansion into the southwest was essential for the protection of slavery. Several new slave states could be created, helping to maintain southern power in the senate and the presidential Electoral College. Many southerners argued that the opening up of new cotton fields in the southwest would create more social mobility within southern white society. A few other slavery defenders in both North and South adopted a slightly different approach, arguing that more land open to slavery would spread slavery more thinly, making it a less dangerous and in some senses less visible institution.

The prospect of the annexation of Mexican territory was at least as appealing to many northerners. The motivation for nonslaveholders can be summed up in one seductive word: California. The abundance and fertility of California was mythical, and the temptation to oust the creaking authority of Mexico overwhelming. Not long after assuming office, Polk dispatched an emissary to Mexico offering to purchase California but the Mexican government refused to negotiate. Polk ordered US troops into the vast region between the Nueces River and the Rio Grande (now the western half of the state of Texas), land claimed by both nations. When fighting broke out, Polk claimed that blood had been shed on American soil and called for a declaration of war. War was supported by a majority of Americans, but it also stimulated passionate opposition. The fig leaf of self-defense was utterly unconvincing: in reality this was a straightforward war of aggression. Abraham Lincoln, then a one-term representative from Illinois, made a name for himself by introducing a series of resolutions in the House designed to expose the way in which the country had been misled into war by calling on the president to name the spot on American soil where Mexicans had allegedly attacked. Lincoln, like many other Whigs, was horrified by a war that seemed to undermine the republican experiment and threaten "Caesarism." Abolitionists were even more aghast. Garrison attacked the "cowardly pro-slavery war" as a naked bid for power by the Slave Power.

The Mexican War was probably the most successful war of imperial expansion in modern history. In the summer of 1846, a band of American insurrectionists proclaimed California as liberated from Mexican control and declared John C. Frémont, a dashing western explorer and adventurer, the de facto governor. In February 1847, General Zachary Taylor of Louisiana, a Whig and a slaveowner, defeated the Mexican forces under the control of Santa Anna in the battle of Buena Vista. In September, American forces commanded by General Winfield Scott occupied the Mexican capital city. Jefferson Davis served in the war with distinction alongside other West Point–trained officers whose names would later become famous, including George B. McClellan, Joseph Hooker, James Longstreet, Henry Halleck, George G. Meade, Joseph E. Johnston, Ulysses S. Grant, and Robert E. Lee. (William Tecumseh Sherman was also a junior officer, but missed the fighting, largely because he was sent to California by sea via Cape Horn.)

The fruits of the war were ratified in the Treaty of Guadaloupe Hidalgo. Mexico ceded a half a million square miles, or a third of its territorial area. All of present-day California, New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, Utah and half of present-day Texas came into the Union under the treaty together with a non-Anglo population of about 75,000 Spanish-speaking Mexicans and over 150,000 Indians. In compensation the Americans paid 15 million dollars, a bargain which looked even more one-sided when, only a year later, gold was discovered in the Sierra Nevada Mountains in California. This was the treaty which established the familiar territorial shape of the United States. The only subsequent territorial gains in North America were a small strip of additional land purchased from Mexico in 1853 (the "Gadsden purchase") and Alaska, purchased from Russia in 1867 and for long afterwards not considered to be of any economic importance.

Victory in the Mexican War was not especially costly in military terms (some 13,000 American soldiers died, mostly from disease), but it set in train events that in the space of just 12 years were to rend the Union apart. The issue it created was whether to allow slavery into this vast new territory. Before the Mexican cession, there was no possibility of any extension of slavery. The last time that the Union had faced the issue of whether to extend slavery into newly acquired territories—after the Louisiana Purchase—a settlement had been reached with the Missouri Compromise of 1820, which created a permanent dividing line between slave and free territory. By the late 1840s, the southern portion of the Louisiana Purchase territory had already been organized into the states of Louisiana, Alabama and Mississippi. The remaining unorganized territory—in present-day Kansas, Nebraska, Wyoming and the Dakotas—was north of the compromise line and would therefore eventually have to come into the Union as free states. Due largely to high rates of immigration into the northeastern cities from Europe, the population of the free states was increasing more rapidly than that of the South, so the slave states were already becoming an ever-smaller minority in the House of Representatives. In the Senate, where the states were equally represented irrespective of population size, the South retained much greater strength, but even here the parity of the early years of the republic was threatened unless new slave state territory could be found. Hence the importance of the Mexican cession to southerners.

Whigs who had opposed the war in the first place had long predicted the confrontation over slavery that would result. Before the war, the party had agreed on a policy of "no territory" in order to keep the northern and southern wings of the party together. Congressman Waddy Thompson, a rare South Carolina Whig, made the case to his fellow southerners that annexation of a vast new territory would benefit northern free laborers more than it would benefit slaveowners because of the practical problems and capital costs of setting up a slave system. His northern colleagues made the same case against territorial expansion for opposite reasons: that new lands would give a new lease of life to slavery and increase the political power of slaveowners within the Union. But it was not a Whig but a northern Democrat, David Wilmot of Pennsylvania, who introduced the resolution that polarized sectional opinion. The "Wilmot Proviso" moved that slavery be banned in any territory gained from Mexico. Under Mexican law, slavery was outlawed. Wilmot argued that he simply wanted to maintain the status quo. Wilmot may have been the man who placed slavery at the heart of national politics, but he was no Garrison. He was motivated, he explained, not by any "squeamish sensitiveness upon the subject of slavery, nor morbid sympathy with the slave." Instead his concern was that if slavery were legal the opportunities for free white laborers to settle and prosper in the new territories would be reduced. His aim, he declared, was to "preserve for free white labor a fair country, a rich inheritance, where the sons of toil, of my own race and own color, can live without the disgrace which association with negro slavery brings upon free labor."[15] With complete plausibility, Wilmot insisted that he was indifferent to slavery where it already existed. In any case, by the late 1840s, slavery was legal only in states, not in territories, and Congress had no constitutional authority to interfere with slavery in a state. Territories were a different matter; no one up until now had disputed the right of Congress to settle the issue one way or another in areas that had not yet been granted full statehood.

The Wilmot Proviso was a grenade lobbed into the delicate balance of the national two-party system. The potential for sectional breakdown was immediately apparent. Northern congressmen voted 83—12 in favor of the Proviso, and southerners 67—2 against. Party lines mattered not at all in the face of an issue that raised in stark form the fundamental question of the status of slavery as either an institution "on the course of ultimate extinction" or one that was fully accepted as legitimate. The Proviso passed the House on three occasions, but each time it was blocked in the Senate, where the South still had the votes to wield a veto. The Wilmot Proviso polarized opinion on both sides. Most northern newspapers enthusiastically backed it, in the South, there was near-universal condemnation. In the senate John C. Calhoun argued that since the territories were the common property of all the states and were merely held in trust by Congress, southerners had an equal claim to the land and could not be discriminated against by being told that they could not take their peculiar species of property there.

Why did southerners push to extend slavery? One reason was rooted in the vulnerability of slavery to being challenged. Even while proslavery defenders in the Indian summer of American slavery asserted that slaves were happy with their lot, their words were belied by the concerted efforts of slaveowners to shore up their legal rights and the security cordon around their ever-vulnerable institution. The more northerners attacked the legitimacy of slavery, the more southerners demanded assurances that it would be respected. From the point of view of southern political leaders, the issue was one of equal rights within the Union. All they wanted, they repeated tirelessly, was for their right to take property into the territories to be respected. The Georgia Whig Alexander H. Stephens insisted that the territorial issue was important not so much because he expected slavery to expand into all the areas under discussion, but because it involved the important principle of "constitutional right and equality . . . A people who would maintain their rights must look to principles much more than to practical results. . . . If the slightest encroachments of power are permitted or submitted to in the Territories they may reach the states ultimately."[16] A second, related, motivation was the fear that southerners were losing ground in national politics and that more free states would forever prevent southerners from wielding effective national power. Since slaveowners needed to control the federal government in order to protect slavery, this was a frightening prospect. Calhoun's protégé, the South Carolina planter James Henry Hammond, warned that adoption of the Wilmot Proviso would ensure ten new free states west of the Mississippi, and was frank about the implications: "Long before the North gets this vast accession of strength she will ride over us rough shod, proclaim freedom to our slaves and reduce us to the condition of Haiti . . . If we do not act now, we deliberately consign our children, not our posterity, but our children, to the flames."

Just as Whigs had predicted, the slavery extension issue was inseparable from the deeper issue of the future of slavery. If southerners felt that their honor was at stake, northerners were increasingly concerned that slavery expansion was threatening the nation as they understood it. For many northerners, the question of the expansion of slavery into the territories was not an abstract issue, but a question of individual opportunity. A Kentucky-born Whig, Richard Oglesby, made this point effectively:

> I came myself from a slave state. Poor white girls washed there all day long over a hot and steaming tub, and under a blazing sun, for

> ten cents a day. And why was this? Simply because a negro wench, equally strong, could be hired for that price. In Kentucky I was a laboring man. I hired out for six dollars a month. Why couldn't I get more? Because a negro man, of equal physical strength, could be hired for $75 per year. He could be fed on coarser food than I, and would be submissive . . . Do you want such an institution in your territories?[17]

The migration of free laborers into the western territories would enable the United States to escape from the classic Malthusian dilemma: the population could expand, and wages would remain high and the possibility of economic advancement through hard work would remain undiminished. In the battle over the Wilmot Proviso, northern newspapers began to portray the South as an alien power, a cuckoo in the nest. Horace Greeley's popular *New York Tribune* argued that for years "a spirit has been rampant in our public affairs, styling itself 'the South,' and demanding that the whole nation should fall down and worship whatever graven images it chooses to set up."[18] Increasing numbers of northerners—not just abolitionists—believed that if the new territories were allowed to become a "vast slave empire", the character of the nation would be changed forever and the "right to rise" for the honest white workingman would be sacrificed in the interest of a slaveholding class. No matter that most of the new territory was almost certainly unsuitable for cotton cultivation. Perhaps only southern California offered the right climactic conditions for slavery expansion on a serious scale. The fight over slavery in the territories was not, as one historian once claimed, a fight over an "imaginary negro in an impossible place."[19] Each side saw the question not only as a point of deep principle, but also as an issue of great practical political significance. Ominously, Horace Greeley's irritation at the presumption of power-hungry southerners captured a broader public mood in the North. Increasingly, northerners began to define the American republic exclusively in terms of the virtues of northern free labor society and in opposition to the South.

One group of northern antislavery politicians saw an opportunity in the crisis over slavery extension. For several years, antislavery reformers like Salmon P. Chase of Ohio, a former Democrat, and the Whiggish Bostonian lawyer Charles Sumner, had wanted to cut loose from the compromises intrinsic to the two national parties and create a new "fusion" movement that would unite in one party those who opposed the extension of slavery. With what in retrospect appear to be unrealistically high hopes of breaking the mold of the two-party system, delegates gathered in Buffalo, New York, in August 1848 to found the Free Soil Party. The nominee was none other than former Democratic President Martin Van Buren of New York, who brought with him a faction of northern Democrats (known as "Barnburners") who supported the Wilmot Proviso. Evangelical Protestant Whigs also participated in large numbers. Despite the relative conservatism of the Free Soil platform, some abolitionists, including Frederick Douglass, gave a cautious endorsement to this new departure.

If the national two-party system was to be preserved, and the sectional chasm that Wilmot had opened to be bridged, a new approach was needed, one which adroitly circumvented the Wilmot Proviso without endorsing Calhoun-style slave expansionism. A number of politicians in both parties alighted on the idea of resolving the impasse by passing the buck. Rather than take a decision then and there on the status of slavery in the new territories, Congress would devolve the matter to the territories themselves. This scheme had its origins in the desperate attempts by both political parties to find a way of bridging the sectional chasm that Wilmot had opened up. Lewis Cass, a Michigan Democrat who was his party's candidate in the 1848 presidential election, demonstrated a masterful rhetorical flourish when he called this solution "popular sovereignty," a term which seemed to identify the devolution of the decision about slavery to the territories with the unassailable democratic principles of the republic and the Jacksonian tradition of westward expansion and popular self-government.

Much to almost everyone's surprise, Cass was narrowly defeated in the 1848 election by the Whigs' nominee General Zachary Taylor, the Mexican War hero and a Louisiana slave holder who reveled in the nickname "Old Rough and Ready." Essentially, the Whigs had decided that the only way to avoid further loss of support was to find an attractive candidate and leave the squabbling about policy until after the election. The Free Soil Party polled far more votes than the more radical Liberty Party had in 1844, but arguably had less impact on the final result since they took votes in roughly equal numbers from Democrats and Whigs. The Free Soil Party may have failed, but it was a movement of huge significance for the relationship between the slavery issue and the party system. What Free Soilers had realized was that the free states now had a sufficiently large population that if they could be united, they would produce sufficient Electoral College votes to elect a president even if the South voted as a block for someone else. For the first time in the short history of the American republic, a political party was making a serious bid for national power by appealing to only one section.

COMPROMISE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

The conflict over slavery extension dominated national politics for two years. The political momentum for compromise was especially strong in the South. To the despair of southern radicals like Calhoun who wanted to create a united southern block, a majority of southern Democratic congressmen remained convinced that only the national Democratic Party could protect southern interests. The loyalty of southern Whigs like Alexander H. Stephens of Georgia to their party was shored up by the presence of a Whig slaveholder in the White House. Although some radical southern politicians threatened secession and even discussed privately plans for the war that might follow, a southern convention that met in Nashville, Tennessee, in June 1850 rejected secession out of hand and reaffirmed the commitment of the South to the Union. John C. Calhoun died in 1850 a frustrated man. Before he did so, the grand old man of Whiggery, Henry Clay of Kentucky, strode onto the national stage to offer a set of compromise proposals. Appealing to patriotism and pragmatism, he urged northerners to recognize that since the Mexican cession was unsuitable for plantation agriculture, their insistence on the Wilmot Proviso was needlessly provocative. “Act as lovers of liberty,” he told the antislavery forces, “and lovers, above all, of this Union.”[20]

Eventually, a series of measures, collectively known as the Compromise of 1850, were passed by both houses of Congress. Iced milk and pickled cucumbers may have played a role in this legislative breakthrough since President Taylor’s Independence Day snack in the broiling heat is alleged to have been the cause of his sudden death from gastroenteritis. The slaveowner president had been pushing his own alternative scheme and his sudden demise opened the way for the up and coming young Democratic senator from Illinois, Stephen A. Douglas, to steer the measures through the Senate. California, deluged with gold-diggers, was fast-tracked into admission as a free state without having to formally pass through territorial status. In a victory for antislavery campaigners, the slave trade was abolished in the District of Columbia, the tiny administrative area containing the national capital carved out of swampy land on the banks of the Potomac River and administered directly by a congressional committee. But these advances for the antislavery cause were counterbalanced by a stringent new Fugitive Slave Act, which provided for a massive extension of federal authority, making it a crime to hide a runaway slave from the authorities. The veteran Massachusetts Whig senator Daniel Webster, who had close ties to the antislavery community in Boston, reluctantly supported the new Fugitive Slave Act in the interests of national harmony, and for the remaining two years of his life he suffered the obloquy of his constituents who saw him as a traitor. On the critical issue of the status of slavery in the non-Californian part of the Mexican cession, Congress endorsed the “popular sovereignty” solution. There was a critical ambiguity to popular sovereignty over the precise point at which a territory was allowed to ban slavery, which enabled it to be supported by southern Whigs like Alexander Stephens as well as moderate northerners like the new president, New Yorker Millard Fillmore. If a territory could delay a ban until it applied for statehood, slaveowners would have at least a theoretical chance of populating the territory and determining the outcome in their favor. This, at least, was the argument that southern supporters of the Compromise measures used to their constituents.

As many historians have pointed out, a closer look at the way in which congressmen voted revealed that this was no true compromise. Douglas’ main contribution to the passage of the measures was to break up Clay’s omnibus bill into its individual components and to construct separate coalitions to support each one. Southerners broke party lines to vote against any restriction on slavery, and a substantial number of northern Democrats joined northern Whigs in opposing them. Only a minority of congressmen—mostly southern Whigs, some northern Democrats and minority of conservative northern Whigs—formed a genuine compromise block, supporting all the measures. In retrospect we know that the resolution of the slavery question hammered out with such effort in 1850 did not last. But at the time it was widely hailed for its statesmanlike resolution of a seemingly intractable problem. The Compromise removed the sting of slavery from national politics, at least for a short time. Southern radicals and northern Free Soilers had been marginalized.

In 1854 Ulysses S. Grant had resigned from the army after distinguished service in the Mexican War with the permanent rank of captain, only to try his hand and fail successively as a farmer, debt collector, engineer and clerk. Much later, in his memoirs, he (or his ghost writer, rumored to be Mark Twain) offered a perceptive retrospective analysis of the causes of the sectional crisis. “Slavery was an institution that required unusual guarantees for its security wherever it existed,” he observed. Since the people of the free states were in the majority, and since they “would naturally have but little sympathy” with demands upon them for the protection of the peculiar institution, “the people of the South were dependent upon keeping control of the general government to secure the perpetuation of” slavery. It was this determination to, in effect, nationalize slavery which the North could not permit. “Prior to the time of these encroachments,” Grant wrote, “the great majority of the people of the North had no particular quarrel with slavery, so long as they were not forced to have it themselves. But they were not willing to play the role of police for the South in the protection of this particular institution.”[21]

It was this last point—the requirement to be active agents in the protection of slavery not merely acquiesce from the sidelines—that began to erode the sense of the northern public that the Compromise of 1850 was a fair and viable settlement of the slavery problem. One of the purposes of the Fugitive Slave Act in the eyes of its southern supporters was to test the North’s commitment to respect southern whites. Runaway slaves undoubtedly posed an economic problem for individual slaveowners, but overall the numbers involved were too small to seriously threaten an institution with over three and a half million slaves. The new Fugitive Slave Law mattered as a symbol of the political power of slaveowners—a political power that was vital for the protection of slavery in the long run. “Respect and enforce the Fugitive Slave Law as it stands,” one pro-slavery editor warned the North. “If not, WE WILL LEAVE YOU!”[22] And southern Unionists also set great store by the attitude of the North to the Act. Henry Clay complained of obstruction to the act that “except for the whiskey rebellion, there has been no instance in which there was so violent and forcible obstruction to the laws of the United States.”[23]

By demanding that free men be shackled and returned to slavery against the wishes of the local community, the Fugitive Slave Act made the formerly abstract issue of the corrosive impact of slavery on republican government frighteningly concrete. In the years after the passage of the Act, a number of high-profile cases of runaway slaves—or allegedly runaway slaves—being returned to bondage electrified the North. The most famous was the case of Anthony Burns, a black man who had been living as a free man in Boston for several decades. In 1854, when, after a protracted legal battle, Massachusetts state authorities refused to arrest him, the agents of the slaveowner, determined to press the case on a point of principle, demanded, under the terms of the Fugitive Slave Act, that the federal government intervene. An estimated 50,000 Bostonians shouting “shame!” and “kidnappers!” watched in horror and outrage as the manacled Burns was marched by federal troops to the wharfside to be taken back South into slavery. Buildings were draped in funereal crepe; church bells tolled. Even conservative Bostonians were aroused by the appalling scene. “When it was all over, and I was left alone in my office,” wrote one old Whig, “I put my hands in my face and wept. I could do nothing less.”[24]

Such emotionally charged scenes generated a greater consciousness of the human horror of slavery on the part of northerners, just as they bound together the image of the degraded and humiliated slave with the degradation of the republic and the humiliation of the free white people of Massachusetts who had had to stand by impotently watching tyranny in action. A large section of northern society, perhaps even a small majority, came to see not only the Fugitive Slave Act, but the institution it supported and the politics it created, as a moral outrage. “The Fugitive Slave Bill has especially been of positive service to the anti-slavery movement,” argued Frederick Douglass. “It at once dramatized the “horrible character of slavery toward the slave,” exposed “the arrogant and over-bearing spirit of the slave States toward the free States” and aroused a “spirit of manly resistance” among northern blacks.”[25] For many Americans, the images of grief and outrage that surrounded the Anthony Burns case must have reminded them of the emotions stirred up by the publishing sensation of the decade, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, by Harriet Beecher Stowe, which first appeared in book form in 1852 (it had been serialized the previous year as in the anti-slavery journal *The National Era*). *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* played on the anxieties of middle-class Victorian America about the continued existence of slavery. Stowe, a member of a distinguished family of abolitionists and Congregationalist ministers (her brother, Henry Ward Beecher, was the most famous preacher of his age), saw slavery as an affront to civilized values, an anomaly in a society that believed in scientific, technological and social progress, and which valued hard work, thrift, self-control and individual responsibility.

Stowe captured a growing northern sensibility that slavery was something truly horrible. A large number of northerners, influenced by a powerful evangelical subculture, saw their republic as a righteous crusade against sin. In the autumn of 1854, Caroline Seabury, a young New England woman, journeyed South to take up a position as a teacher at an expensive girls' school in Columbus, Mississippi. Initially unconcerned about slavery—her first impressions of blacks were that they were a "happy, careless, thoughtless race"—she was profoundly upset when she witnessed a slave hiring, in which slaves who were surplus to requirement on a plantation were hired out for a year to the highest bidder. When a woman whose slave husband had been recently killed by their master realized that she was to be separated from her children, Seabury said, I "could not keep back my own tears, though they were unobserved by others."[26] But Seabury could not take refuge in the notion that such abuses were a problem only for the South. The Fugitive Slave law had destroyed once and for all the fiction that slavery was a purely sectional institution. Slavery was a national sin. The most hateful villain in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the tyrannical slave driver Simon Legree, is a displaced Yankee while one of the most sympathetic characters is the Harriet Shelby, the deeply religious plantation mistress.

The sentiments and sentimentality revealed by the immense popularity of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* were, in effect, a challenge to the nationalism of men like Henry Clay and Daniel Webster. The two Whig patriarchs represented a grand tradition of compromise that went back to the founding fathers. They believed that capitalist development combined with an earnest nationalism should trump sectionalism and slavery. In 1852, within a few months of one another, both men died. With them, James H. Hammond noted wryly in his diary, died "the last links of the chain of the Union."[27] Within two years, events were to make that remark seem prophetic.

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