



History 201

Lectures 8

The Antebellum North and South

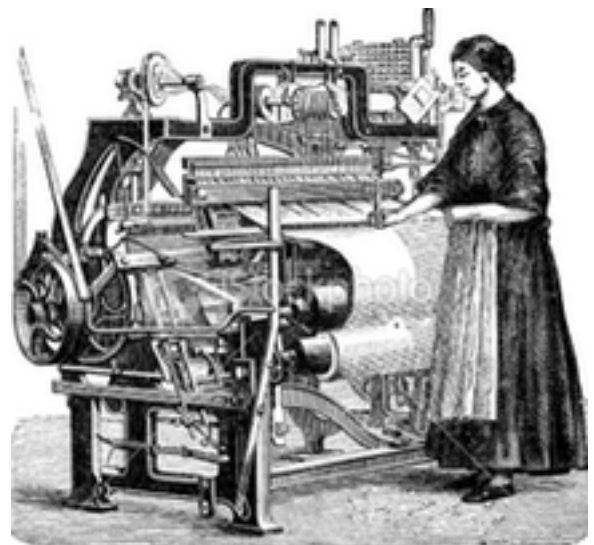
The North, and especially the Northeast, saw the continuous growth of industry from just after the turn of the 19th century until the beginning of the 20th. The industrial revolution was a revolution in production and manufacturing which began in Europe in the mid-1700s with the improvement and development of power driven machines. As the industrial revolution gained momentum, more and more of the world's goods were produced in factories instead of in peoples' homes.

The energy for the first factories was provided by water, specifically, through the use of the water wheel. Although water had been used in America to drive some types of machinery (mill wheels, lumber saws), its real economic potential was not exploited in America until the arrival of Samuel Slater. Slater was a skilled English mechanic who had come to America at the age of 21. In England he had worked in a cotton mill. Because of this he knew a great deal about the textile industry. The British government had tried to keep the mechanics of their textile industry a secret. They had forbidden the sale of textile machinery overseas, and had kept skilled textile workers from leaving England. But, in 1789, Slater was able to get out and come to America.

Shortly after arriving in the U.S., he met a capitalist named Moses Brown. Brown funded Slater. Slater reproduced the textile machines that he had worked on in England from memory. Slater became the father of the American factory system.

By the 1830's the U.S. had already felt the influence of the changes that were brought about by the industrial revolution. America had seen the growth of communication, transportation and manufacturing. It was developing into a great modern nation.

The census of 1850 revealed remarkable growth in the population. It also revealed change in its sectional



The Five Points in Manhattan in 1830. This intersection gained international notoriety as a densely populated, disease-ridden, crime-infested slum that existed for over 70 years.



distribution. In 1790, the population of the U.S. was about 3,900,000; in 1830 there were 12,800,000; in 1850 the population had grown to over 23 million. In 1790 nearly 90% of all Americans lived east of the Alleghenies. By 1850 this percentage had decreased to 55%.

Immigration growth in the U.S. by 1850 was primarily due to the rapid reproduction of native stock. Between 1820 and 1830 less than 500,000 foreigners came to America. Over the next 20 years five times that many came to the U.S. most of them were from Great Britain, Ireland and the German States. By 1850, nearly 12% of the population was foreign born. The United States had become a haven for those who fled poor working conditions in Britain, from famine in Ireland, and from political unrest in Europe.

At the close of the American Revolution, only 5 cities in the U.S. had more than 8,000 inhabitants. By 1850 there were 141 cities with near that population. These urban centers were already struggling with all of the problems of urbanization, such as sanitation, public health, fires, and "urban" crime. Many native-born Americans blamed these problems on foreign immigrants. In 1850 the nativists formed the Order of the Star Spangled Banner an anti-immigration society. Within a few years this organization developed into the powerful American, or Know-nothing Party.



Negative stereotype of Irish immigrants in the U.S., 1855.

From the day in 1790 when Slater completed the first cotton mill in the U.S., the growth of industry was rapid. By 1850, the annual output of U.S. mills and factories had reached over \$51 billion. By 1850, for the first time in our history, industry had surpassed agriculture as the most important economic sector. Improvements in technology gradually made greater industrialization possible. Next I would like to look at some of these improvements in technology.

☛ Francis Lowell and Paul Moody perfected the power loom (1814).

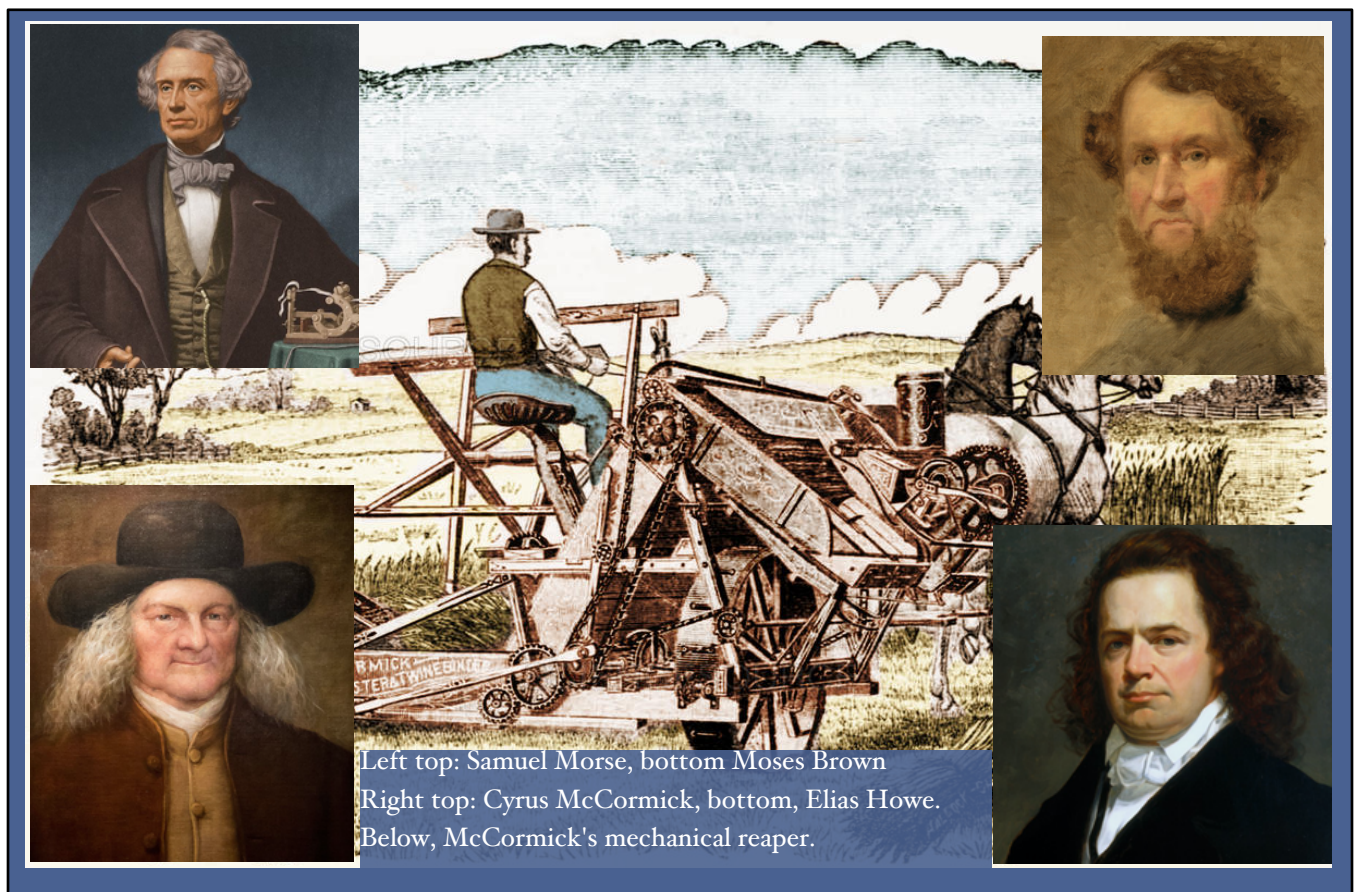
- ☛ Frederick Geissenhainer smelted iron ore using a new anthracite coal process. (1833)
- ☛ Elias Howe invented the sewing machine (1846).
- ☛ Oliver Evans converted the low-pressure steam engine invented by James Watt into a more effective high-pressure engine (1803). By the 1850s, New England factories had begun to use steam power.
- ☛ The invention of the electrical telegraph was of great significance. Samuel F. B. Morse succeeded in making the telegraph a practical means of communication in 1837. The first significant telegraph line was completed in 1843. By 1860 more than 50,000 miles of telegraph lines were in use in the U.S.
- ☛ Eli Whitney hit upon the idea of building machines with interchangeable parts. In 1798 Whitney wrote the Secretary of the Treasury requesting a contract to make rifles for the military. He used machines to make the parts. Two years later, in front of several skeptical officials, Whitney unpacked a box containing the parts for 10 rifles. At Whitney's request each official selected one part from each pile of identical parts. And Whitney assembled a rifle. The process was repeated until 10 guns were assembled.

As mentioned above the early 19th century saw a national trend in interest in agricultural improvements. The first three decades of the 19th century saw the introduction of new and better methods of farming. Among the most important were the introduction of better fertilizers, crop rotation methods and scientific stock breeding. New machines were also introduced which led to improvements in agriculture. As we have already seen, one of these, the cotton gin increased southern demand for slaves, and so also brought about social and political change as well. Several inventions are worthy of note here:

Cyrus McCormick invented a mechanical reaper in 1834.

John Deere introduced the steel plow in 1839.

Eli Whitney introduced the cotton gin in 1793. From the point of view of the historian, this simple machine may be among the most revolutionary inventions in since the invention of the wheel or the stirrup. It was the cotton gin that made the production of cotton across most of the South possible.



Left top: Samuel Morse, bottom Moses Brown
 Right top: Cyrus McCormick, bottom, Elias Howe.
 Below, McCormick's mechanical reaper.



The Southern states in the 1840's covered a large area. The cotton south stretched from southern Maryland to Florida, from the Atlantic Ocean to the Ohio and Mississippi rivers. It also included Louisiana, Arkansas and Texas.

Since the southern economy depended on agriculture. Industries and towns were slower to grow than in the North. There were a few large important cities in the South. The most important were the seaports of Charleston, South Carolina and New Orleans, Louisiana. These and a few other cities were the homes of industries and trade. But the most important single economic element of the South in the 1840's was the production of cotton.

At the turn of the 19th century the South produced a large variety of agricultural goods. Among the most important were indigo, rice, tobacco, sugar cane, and cotton. Prices on many of these goods had begun to decline, leading southern planters to rethink slavery and virtually exclusive agricultural production. In fact, by the beginning of the War of 1812, southern agriculturalists and planters had begun to argue that slavery was a dying source of labor. Quite a few members of the planter class, among them John C. Calhoun, wrote articles in which they argued that the South should begin to develop industry, and should emancipate their slaves to work in factories as well as fields.

The Growth of the Cotton Economy—in the late 1700s British inventors developed power-driven machinery for spinning cotton thread and weaving cloth. Before long, textile mills were in operation both in Britain and in the New England and Middle Atlantic States. The rise in production of cotton cloth created a rise in demand for cotton fiber. But, there was a problem.

The boll of the cotton plant (where the fiber comes from) is a tangle of fiber and seeds. There are two kinds of cotton that grow in the United States. Sea-island, or long-staple cotton grows on the plain along the Atlantic coasts of the Carolinas and Virginia. Upland cotton (short staple) will grow just about anywhere in the South where the humidity is not too high. It is fairly easy to separate the seeds from the fiber of sea-island cotton. The shorter fibers of upland



cotton, however, are very difficult to separate by hand. The seeds cling to upland cotton so tightly that a skilled worker could only recover about one pound of cotton a day. Because of this, it was only profitable to grow cotton in those areas of the South where sea-island cotton would grow.

In 1793, Eli Whitney was visiting a friend on a cotton plantation. Whitney's friend was explaining the production of cotton fiber to him. He mentioned that more cotton could be produced if only there were a way to separate the seeds more efficiently. Whitney designed the first cotton gin in order to solve the problem. The cotton gin is a mechanical device that separates the seeds from the cotton fiber quickly and efficiently. The gin doesn't care what kind of cotton it is. It can do just as good a job on upland cotton as it can on sea-island cotton. Whitney's machine operated on steam power could separate more than 1,000 pounds of cotton a day.

As a result of the increasing demand for cotton, more and more southern farmers began to grow cotton as their cash crop. Bales of cotton were shipped from southern ports to Britain and New England in greater and greater quantity. American production of cotton grew from 4,000 bales in 1790 to 732,000 bales in 1830. By 1860, the South produced over 4 million bales of cotton a year. From 1800 to 1860, the southern economy became increasingly dependent on cotton production and export. Stimulated by increasing demand, textile mills paid higher and higher prices for cotton. By 1830, it could be said that, in the South, cotton was king.

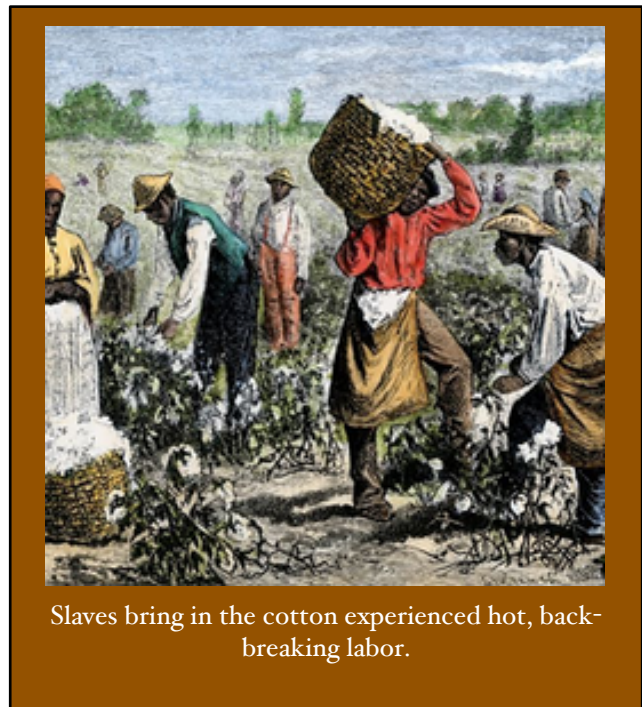
Cotton is a labor-intensive crop. A great deal of labor is needed to plant and harvest it. The South did not have a large free work force like the northern states. Slavery offered a large inexpensive work force in the production of cotton. As more and more farmers switched over to cotton production the Southern economy became more and more dependent on slavery. At about the same time that the demand for slaves rose in the South, the British interrupted the African slave trade by

blockading West African ports. In 1808, the United States banned the importation of new slaves. This blockade and ban made it more difficult for slave ships to get to the slave ports in Cuba and Haiti. Slave importation to the South dropped to a trickle. The price of an able field slave went from about \$5,300 in 1820 to as high as \$53,000 by 1855. By 1860 there were about 4 million slaves in the South out of a total population of 12 million.



By the 1820s, there was a nationwide push led by agriculturists in the North and South to improve the efficiency, production and profitability of agricultural activity. Southerners were just as excited about the potential for improved production as northerners. Southern planters experimented with various kinds of slave labor systems trying to produce more efficient systems of cotton and sugar production. Magazines like *DeBow's Review* (New Orleans) and the *Southern Cultivator*

(Augusta, Georgia) featured articles that recommended new systems of production of southern crops from rice to cotton. The traditional



Slaves bring in the cotton experienced hot, back-breaking labor.

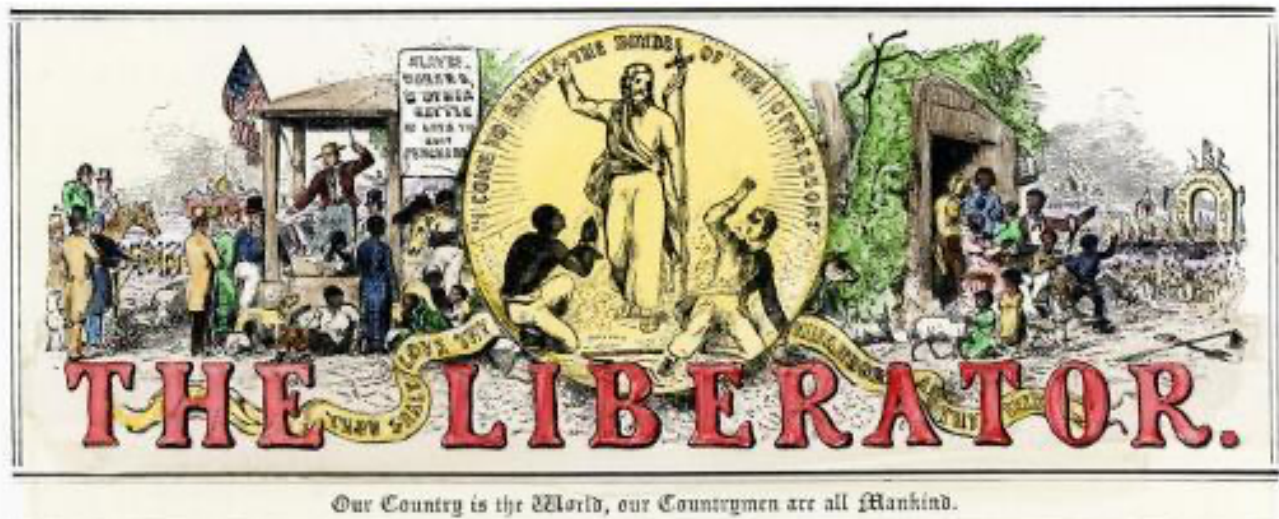
system of slave use was called the “gang system.” The gang system required continuous work at the same pace throughout the day. It was brutal, tiring and inefficient. The gang systems forced the slaves to work until the owner said they were finished and allowed them almost no freedom. The most popular new system was called the “task” system. Under this system, each slave is assigned a specific task to complete for the day. After that task was finished, the slave was then free to do as he or she wished with the remaining time. The task system was more efficient and provided slaves with more time to rest, increasing productivity. Some planters, among them Jefferson Davis and his brother, improved working and living conditions, employed the task system and added incentives for successful production. The worst working environment for slaves was on the cotton plantation. Work was continuous all year around and protests based on slowing down work made little difference because there was little urgency to pick it. So, slaves who slowed down their work would face punishment, and the cotton would still be there tomorrow. Life was somewhat easier for enslaved people on sugar plantations. Outside of the planting and harvesting seasons, both accomplished within a few days, there was for large numbers of slaves to do. Sugar had to be harvested quickly, so slaves were often rewarded for their work to get them to finish the job quickly. Additionally, many sugar planters were Catholic, and often even Creole, and generally somewhat kinder to their slaves than the Anglo-American cotton planters.



Left: Cartoon that lambasts Sugar planters.

Below: A gang harvesting sugar cane.





The Abolition Movement

The most vigorous of all reform movements to take place in the early 19th century was the movement to abolish slavery. No other single movement ever did as much to arouse controversy or to divide the Union. Today we will look at both the abolitionist movement and the southern reaction to abolition.

A few Americans in the colonial period objected to slavery. The Quakers were the most vocal and active anti-slavery group. The colonization movement began in Pennsylvania to collect money in order to purchase slaves in the South and return them to Africa. The movement was doomed by two factors, [1] the cost, and [2] the fact that most slaves preferred to remain in America.

By the 1790s, several anti-slavery societies existed both in the United States and in Great Britain. Many northerners and some southerners had grown to believe that slavery was morally wrong. Even some slave owners (for example, Thomas Jefferson) felt that slavery was an evil, but most of them agreed that it was a necessary one. The problem was that slavery offered an alternative for free labor which did not exist in the South.

By about 1800, many southerners had come to believe that slavery was both wrong and no longer profitable. The price of tobacco had dwindled somewhat, the land needed to rest after years of tobacco growing; the price of obtaining and caring for slaves had grown enormously. Some of these southern slave owners wanted to free their slaves, but were hesitant. They feared that, once freed, they would be unable to care for themselves in a difficult and often hostile society. They also feared that, once freed, they might be re-enslaved by unscrupulous slave dealers. The attitude against slavery largely vanished in the South with the spread of cotton agriculture after the introduction of Mr. Whitney's cotton gin. It appears that economic reality and practicality had won out in the South against scruples about the morality of owning other human beings.

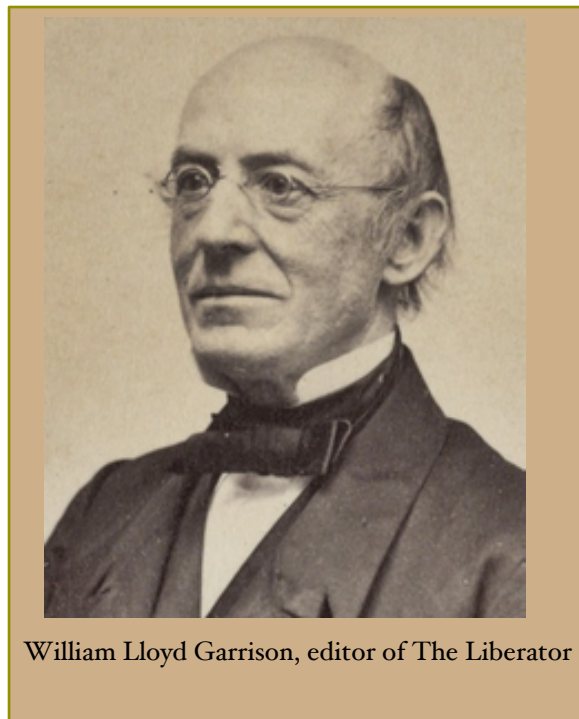
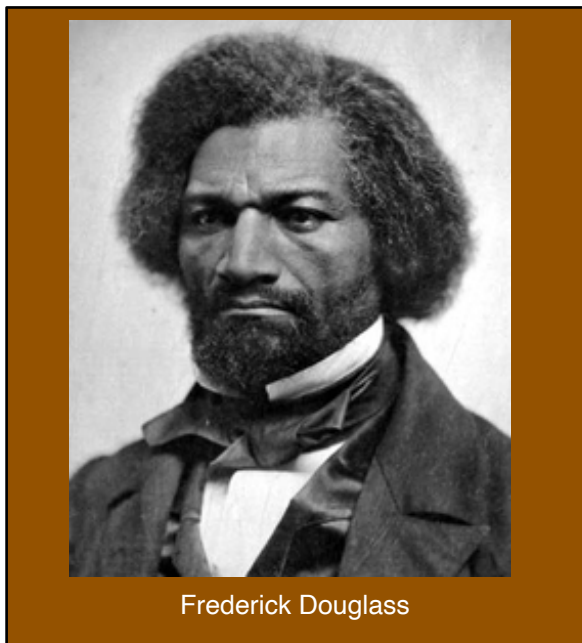
While the spread of cotton agriculture grew in the South, the Abolition movement grew in the North. In 1817, the American Colonization Society was founded. This society wanted to buy slaves, set them free and settle them in colonies in Africa. Again there were two problems [1] too many slaves, not enough money; [2] most Americans slaves were not used to the hardships of life in West Africa. Two colonies were actually founded. The British Society founded the Sierra Leone colony. The American society founded Liberia. In many cases the freed slaves were simply dropped off on the African coasts with clothes, supplies and building materials. They were occasionally attacked by African tribes who took all of their supplies and sold them back into slavery.

In the 1820s Benjamin Lundy, a Baltimore Quaker, published the *Genius of Universal Emancipation*. Lundy was a moderate in his approach to the issue of slavery. He hoped to bring about the gradual emancipation of all slaves by appealing to people's moral instincts.

In the 1830s more militant abolitionist movements began to appear. William Lloyd Garrison's newspaper, *The Liberator*, called for the immediate emancipation and enfranchisement of the slave population. Garrison felt that slavery contradicted the Bible and the Declaration of Independence. Garrison, and other radical Abolitionists had the effect of bringing a growing number of people into the abolitionist movement. At the same time militant abolition angered many pro-slavery Americans in both the South and North.

Another spokesman for the abolitionist movement was Frederick Douglass. Douglass was, himself an escaped slave. He was a most impressive spokesman. He was very intelligent, self-educated, and a gifted public speaker. Douglass condemned slavery and demanded immediate abolition and enfranchisement.

In the late 1830s the abolition movement was split into two factions. The radical abolitionists like Garrison and Douglass alienated more moderate members of the movement. Garrison had complicated the slavery issue by insisting that women be granted immediate full civil rights as well. Garrison also denounced the federal government and churches for compromising on the issue of slavery. Other abolitionists deplored Garrison's militant views. They wanted to bring about gradual abolition through the political arena. They felt that political action and patience would make possible



the end of slavery without causing damage to the social fabric of the nation, or possibly even causing the destruction of the Union.

In 1840 the Liberty Party was founded. The party was a moderate abolitionist group. The Liberty Party nominated James G. Birney, an ex-slave owner from Alabama for president. Birney received 7,000 votes. In 1844 he ran again and received 62,000 votes out of a total of 2.5 million. The problem was that the Liberty Party had only one issue in their platform. In the early 1840s, abolition was not a popular enough issue to get Birney elected.

Some supporters of the abolitionist movement took more direct action by helping runaway slaves. These activities were the origin of the Underground Railroad. Slaves who learned about the Railroad could escape and find shelter in both the North and South. They would be able to flee to freedom across the Ohio River or the Mason-Dixon line into Pennsylvania or Ohio. Fleeing north did not bring slaves their freedom, however. According to the Fugitive Slave Law of 1793, owners of runaway slaves could recover their property merely by appearing before a magistrate and declaring that the captured slave belonged to them. In order to be completely free, an escaped slave had to get all the way to Canada. Several individuals who became important in the abolition movement had escaped from

slavery. The most important were Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman. At great personal risk, Tubman made several trips into the South to bring escaped slaves out to freedom. She has come to be referred to as the “Moses of the abolition movement.”

The perils of slavery and escape from slavery were portrayed by Harriet Beecher Stowe, a northern white woman, in a book published in 1852, entitled *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. In the book, Stowe gave a rather stilted view of the southern slave system. The tone of the book was a moralistic one. Her narrative was very compelling. It portrayed the inhumanity of the slave system in the South. The book was applauded in the North, and praised by abolitionists. In fact *Uncle Tom's Cabin* became one of the most popular books in previous history. In the South the book was bitterly denounced as presenting a false picture of the slave system. Southerners pointed out that the inhuman master in the book did not give a fair picture of southern slave owners. Southerners were especially upset because the book encouraged the support of the Underground Railroad. Northern resistance of the abolitionist movement grew also. Abolitionist preachers in the North were sometimes forced to quit by their congregations. Mobs attacked Garrison on several occasions. Prudence Crandall turned her boarding school in Connecticut

into a teacher training school for black women. The community poisoned her well and tried to burn her house. Many northern wage earners opposed the abolition movement. They feared that they would have to compete against black workers if they were freed. Most northern trade unions opposed abolition. Finally, some people, both northern and southern feared that the abolition movement would force the South to secede. This would destroy the Union.

Southerners reacted to the abolition movement in various ways. Many southerners who had been in support of gradual abolition changed their minds when, in 1831, Nat Turner, a slave, led a revolt in Virginia in which some sixty whites were killed.

Several southern writers produced books that argued that slavery was good for everybody involved. John C. Calhoun insisted that slavery was a “positive good.” He compared the slave system in the South to the wage slavery and conditions of the worker in the North. The slaves, he said, were better off. They were fed, clothed, and protected by their owner. When slaves became too old to work they were cared for by the master. Northern workers, he said, worked in conditions which no southern master would force on his slaves. When northern workers got too old to work they were dismissed. To some extent, Calhoun was right. This does not make



slavery morally right, good, or humane, of course, but it certainly makes the northern labor system of the 1800s very wrong.

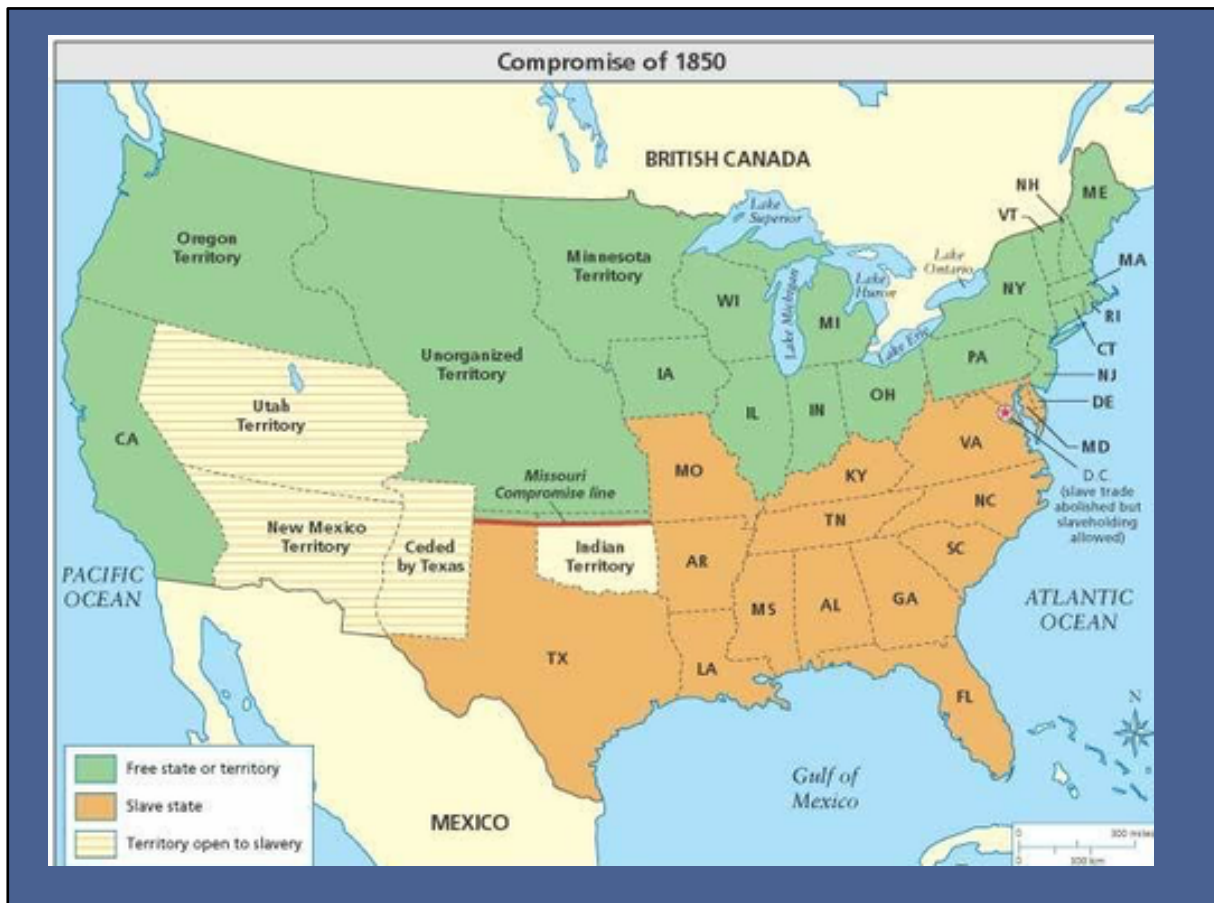
Other arguments for slavery included historical biblical and sociological; and racial rationalizations.

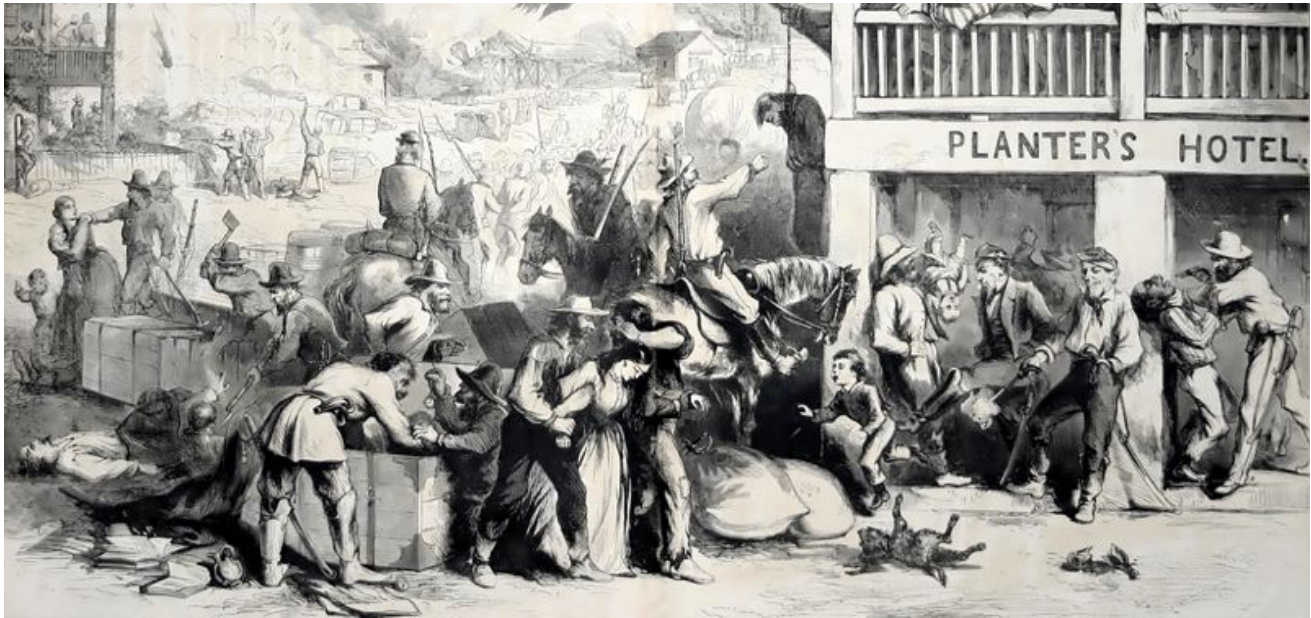
Calhoun and southern educator, Thomas Roderick Dew, made a historical argument for slavery. They stated that slavery had existed in all of the great ancient civilizations. The Hebrews, the Romans and the Greeks had slavery. Many of the great accomplishments of the Ancient World, they noted, were made possible by slavery.

Southerners provided biblical arguments in favor of slavery as well. They noted that both the Hebrews and early Christians had slaves. If they had them, southerners argued, then it must be compatible with Christian values. If slavery was sinful in the eyes of God, then surely the Bible would have condemned slavery.

Probably the most influential southern advocate of a sociological/racial argument in favor of slavery was George Fitzhugh, a Virginia lawyer, who wrote two influential books on the subject of slavery in the 1850s. Fitzhugh said that southerners were justified in owning slaves. This was because blacks, he argued, were racially inferior to whites. According to Fitzhugh, blacks were savages who were introduced to culture and Christianity by the experience of slavery. In addition to his social/racial arguments Fitzhugh used extensive documentation to show that southern slaves lived considerably better and longer than northern industrial workers.

The issue of abolition was to rage between the North and the South until it was finally ended brutally by the Civil War. All the while that abolitionists and pro-slavery advocates wrangled over the South's "peculiar institution," the political nation tried desperately to come to some compromise over it as well. To complicate matters, the question of slavery overlapped American expansion West. Northerners increasingly believed that the new western territories should be reserved for free labor, while southerners, just as eager to move West, argued that they should be able to bring their slave property with them.





Divisions Over Slavery

The most alarming feature of the slavery controversy was the division that it caused between the North and the South over the question of slavery in the new territories of the United States.

The Tallmadge Amendment — from as early as 1817 the question of whether there should be slavery in the new territories had sparked debate in Congress and in the streets of America. The issue came to a head over the admission of Missouri to the Union. When the Missouri territory applied for statehood in 1818, Congress was split between northern and southern interests over whether Missouri should be a slave or free state. James Tallmadge of New York proposed that Missouri be admitted under the following conditions:

- ☛ that further admission of slaves into Missouri be prohibited;
- ☛ that all children born to slave parents would be freed at the age of 25.

The Tallmadge amendment passed in the House, but failed in the Senate. In the Senate the Amendment was found unsatisfactory to every interest. Southerners were fighting to allow southern slave owners to take their property into the new territories; northern representatives were against allowing slavery in those new territories at all.

The Missouri Compromise — The Missouri question was settled in 1820 by a compromise. The Missouri Compromise stated that:

- ☛ Missouri should be admitted as a slave state;
- ☛ Maine should be admitted at the same time as a free state;
- ☛ Slavery should be prohibited in all of the Louisiana Purchase territory north of latitude 36°30' except for Missouri itself. The 36°30' latitude was chosen because it was assumed that early frosts north of that latitude would make cotton agriculture impossible.

At the heart of the Missouri Compromise was the assumption that there should be a balance



between free and slave states in the United States. Thus, Missouri and Maine were admitted in 1820-21, Arkansas and Michigan in 1837, Florida and Iowa in 1845-46, and Texas and Wisconsin in 1845-48. In each case Congress attempted to maintain a balance between slave and free states. But this uneasy balance was to fail as a result of the acquisition of the Mexican Cession and California. At the time of the California Gold Rush the Free Soil Party and many abolitionists were trying to make the opposition to slavery in new states and territories the major political issue of the 1850s.

The Wilmot Proviso — In 1846 David Wilmot, a northern anti-slavery Democrat, introduced a resolution to the effect that slavery should be forever barred in any territory acquired from Mexico. The Wilmot Proviso triggered a bitter struggle in Congress. It passed in the House, but was defeated in the Senate.

When California drafted a constitution and applied for statehood as a free state, southerners threatened to leave the Union. Leader from both the North and South proposed various solutions to the slavery question in the new western territories. Southerners wanted to see the Missouri Compromise line extend to the Pacific. Other congressmen felt that the question of slavery should be left to the people of each territory. Some more conservative congressmen (both northern and southern) felt that since slaves were property, the federal government was obligated to protect the property rights of any American slaveholders no matter where they took their slaves.

The Compromise of 1850 — In January of 1850, Henry Clay introduced in the Senate a series of resolutions. Five of them finally became the basis for the settlement known as the Compromise of 1850. The provisions were:

- California. Would be admitted as a free state;
- The slave trade (but not slavery) was to be prohibited in the District of Columbia;
- Congress would enact a more effective fugitive slave law;
- The public debt which Texas had acquired before 1845 would be assumed by the United States;
- Texas would give up its claims to

territory in New Mexico and Utah;

- Territorial governments would be established in New Mexico and Utah. Each of these territories might determine for themselves whether they wanted to be free or slave states.

Extremists on both sides opposed the Compromise. Proslavery congressmen like John Calhoun and anti-slavery leaders like William Seward of New York and Salmon Chase of Ohio, condemned the compromise. But, on the whole, the Compromise was supported. Both northern and southern politicians insisted that the Compromise of 1850 provided a final, equitable settlement of the problem. They were wrong!

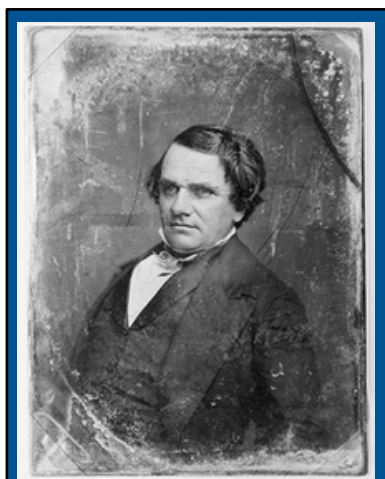
The best efforts of cautious political leaders and conservative businessmen could not preserve the uneasy truce created by the Compromise of 1850. Several factors led to the disruption of the Compromise in the later 1850s.

The Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 angered anti-slavery groups in the North. The law permitted federal and local officials to compel citizens to aid in the apprehension of fugitive slaves. Abolitionist groups in the North held mass meetings against the law, and vowed that it would not be observed or enforced.

Southern interests continued to try to secure additional slave territories. In 1848, President James K. Polk tried to purchase Cuba from Spain. If purchased it would have become a slave territory. Pro-slavery interests expanded into Oklahoma, Kansas and other territories in hope of making them slave states in the future.

The most fateful factor in the undoing of the compromise of 1850 and the Missouri Compromise

was the Kansas/Nebraska act (1854). Stephen Douglas, Senator from Illinois, was very interested in having a railroad extend from the East, either New York or Philadelphia, through his home city of Chicago to the West, reaching eventually to California. However, many southerners wanted a transcontinental railroad that would go through New Orleans and extend to southern California. Douglas decided to make a compromise with the southern senators. In exchange for having the railroad go through Chicago, he would introduce the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854. At first



Stephen Douglas

he proposed one new territory of Nebraska, then he proposed splitting it into two territories, Kansas and Nebraska. Douglas announced that popular sovereignty would decide whether there would be slavery in Kansas or not.

Douglas, who had no moral convictions against slavery, believed that the most democratic method of determining whether a state should be slave or free was to let the people of the state or territory decide. This idea was called popular sovereignty. Douglas proposed that the people of the Kansas territory should be allowed to determine for themselves whether Kansas would become a slave or free state when it entered the Union.

The Douglas bill caused a firestorm of opposition because it allowed slavery north of the line agreed upon in the Missouri Compromise, effectively repealing it. Even before the bill passed, a new grass-roots opposition party was being organized in most northern states, the Republican Party. Northern Democrats, southerners, and President Franklin Pierce supported the bill. Douglas used brilliant parliamentary maneuvers to get the bill passed on May 30, 1854. It was signed into law by Pierce; he was a “doughface,” a northerner whose political support came mostly from the South. In effect, there were now three political positions in American politics, represented by Northern Democrats (led by Douglas), the Northern Republicans, and the Southern Democrats. In 1860, they would each run a candidate for President of the United States.

The act divided the region into the Kansas Territory (south of the 40th parallel) and the Nebraska Territory (north of the 40th parallel). The most controversial provision was the stipulation that each territory would separately decide whether to allow slavery within its borders. This provision repealed the Missouri Compromise of 1820, which had prohibited slavery in any new states to be created north of latitude 36°30' since Kansas and Nebraska would be north of that line and could now choose to allow slavery.

The political results of the Kansas-Nebraska Act were far reaching and to some extent catastrophic for the political system as it existed before the act was passed.



“Beecher's Bible”

Here are some of the results of its passage.

Northern Whigs (Conscience Whigs) repudiated the Kansas-Nebraska Act and the pro-slavery faction of the Whig party, the southern, so-called “Cotton Whigs,” supported it, creating a rift between northern and southern Whigs, essentially destroying the Whig Party.

Many northern Democrats left their party in protest over the bill. Some of them joined the Conscience Whigs and the Free Soil Party. As the two major political parties broke up, a third party, the American, or Know-nothing Party enjoyed a very brief period of success. The Know- Nothings ignored the slavery issue completely. They called for the exclusion of new foreign immigrants.

The most significant political development of the Kansas/Nebraska Act and its passage was the formation of a completely new political party, the Republican Party. Republicans were recruited from the ranks of Free Soilers, northern anti-slavery Whigs and northern anti-slavery Democrats (Barn Burners). The party opposed the extension of slavery in any new territories of the United States.

The principle of popular sovereignty, which Douglas had written into the Kansas-Nebraska Bill, was put to the test in the Kansas territory. Anti-slavery and pro-slavery interests began to send forces to Kansas to support the various sides with both warm bodies and bullets. Many pro-slavery Missouri residents (Border Ruffians) rode across the border into Kansas, well armed and prepared to support their pro-slavery principles with both “bullets and ballots.”

Several anti-slavery organizations in the North, most notably the New England Emigrant Aid Company, organized and funded several thousand settlers to move to Kansas and vote to make it a free state. These organizations helped to establish Free-State settlements in Topeka, Manhattan, and Lawrence. Abolitionist preacher, Henry Ward Beecher collected funds to arm like-minded settlers with Sharps rifles, leading the precision rifles to become known as “Beecher's Bibles.” By the summer of 1855, approximately 1,200 New Englanders had made the journey to the new territory, armed and ready to fight.

The pro-slavery Kansans elected a majority of the territorial legislature in 1855, and established a government in Shawnee Mission. In response to the pro-slavery majority legislature, the Free Soil

supporters held a convention at Topeka and framed a separate constitution that banned slavery in the territory. On May 21, 1856, a group of Border Ruffians entered the Free-State stronghold of Lawrence and burned much of the town. These acts in turn inspired John Brown to lead a group of men on an attack on a proslavery settlement at Pottawatomie Creek. The group, which included four of Brown's sons, dragged five pro-slavery men from their homes and hacked them to death with broadswords.

In 1856, the official territorial capital was moved to Lecompton, a town only 12 miles from Lawrence. In April 1856, a three-man congressional investigating committee arrived in Lecompton to look into the troubles. The majority report of the committee found the elections to be improperly influenced by Border Ruffians. The President failed to follow its recommendations, however, and continued to recognize the pro-slavery legislature as the legitimate government of Kansas. In fact, on July 4, 1856, President Benjamin Franklin Pierce sent federal troops to break up an attempted meeting of the shadow government in Topeka.

In August, 1856, thousands of proslavery Southerners formed into armies and marched into Kansas. That same month, Brown and several of his followers engaged 300 proslavery soldiers in the "Battle of Osawatomie." The hostilities raged for another two months until Brown departed the Kansas Territory, and a new territorial governor, John W. Geary, took office and managed to prevail upon both sides for peace. A fragile peace followed, broken only by intermittent violent outbreaks, for two more years. The last major outbreak of violence was touched off by the Marais des Cygnes Massacre in 1858, in which Border Ruffians killed five Free-State men.

The Kansas-Nebraska Act split the nation and pointed it toward civil war. The act itself virtually nullified the Missouri Compromise of 1820 and the Compromise of 1850. The turmoil over the Act split both the Democratic and Whig parties and gave rise to the Republican party that soon controlled most of the Northern states. By 1856, the Union was divided, the national political parties that had provided cohesion to a nation prone to fracture were broken, and little remained to keep the peace.



Clash between proslavery and antislavery groups in Fort Scott, Kansas Territory, 1850s.