

THE CAUSES OF THE CIVIL WAR:

A NEWSPAPER ANALYSIS

by

DIANNE M. BRAGG

WM. DAVID SLOAN, COMMITTEE CHAIR

GEORGE RABLE

MEG LAMME

KARLA K. GOWER

CHRIS ROBERTS

A DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the College of Communication and Information Sciences
in the Graduate School of
The University of Alabama

TUSCALOOSA, ALABAMA

2013

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines antebellum newspaper content in an attempt to add to the historical understanding of the causes of the Civil War. Numerous historians have studied the Civil War and its causes, but this study will use only newspapers to examine what they can show about the causes that eventually led the country to war. Newspapers have long chronicled events in American history, and they offer valuable information about the issues and concerns of their communities. This study begins with an overview of the newspaper coverage of the tariff and territorial issues that began to divide the country in the early decades of the 1800s. The study then moves from the Wilmot Proviso in 1846 to Lincoln's election in 1860, a period in which sectionalism and disunion increasingly appeared on newspaper pages and the lines of disagreement between the North and the South hardened. The primary sources used in this study were a diverse sampling of articles from newspapers around the country and includes representation from both southern and northern newspapers. Studying these antebellum newspapers offers insight into the political, social, and economic concerns of the day, which can give an indication of how the sectional differences in these areas became so divisive. This study shows what issues became such insurmountable problems for the nation that Americans finally reached a point where it seemed the only solution was going to war.

DEDICATION

For Jessie Fowler

You are an inspiration.

Thank you for your graciousness, hospitality, love, and pie.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am deeply indebted to the members of my dissertation committee: Wm. David Sloan, George Rable, Margot Lamme, Karla Gower, and Chris Roberts. They have supported and encouraged me every step of the way. I remain in awe of their vast knowledge and expertise, and I can only hope to live up to the example they have set for me. I also hope Dr. Sloan has been able to recover from my affinity for commas.

I owe special thanks to the University of Alabama Department of Journalism. The faculty and staff of that department, especially Jennifer Greer, have been beside me every step of the way and for their optimism, encouragement, and patience, I will always be grateful.

To so many people in the College of Communication and Information Sciences, I want to express my gratitude. To Dean Loy Singleton, who always had an open door, thank you for your patience, understanding, and support. To Diane Shaddix, who always had answers for my questions and ensured that everything went smoothly in the process of completing this project. A special thanks goes to Jennings Bryant who welcomed me to Alabama, made me feel at home, and set an example for so many students who have walked these halls. And, to so many other people here who make this place a wonderful, caring place to work, thank you.

I am also grateful for the University of Alabama Graduate School's support, in particular Dean David Francko and Associate Dean John Schmitt. I will never forget how your encouragement, professionalism, and guidance were there for me when I needed it most.

A special thanks goes to my own personal cheerleading squad: Ann Bourne, Crechale Stevens, Alexa Chilcutt, and Cecilia Hammond. You always had faith, love, and hope, and I can never repay you for all you have done for me, especially during some dark days. To so many other friends who loved and supported me through this, thank you.

I also want to thank my friends and former colleagues at the University of Memphis, who first set me on this path, especially Dan Lattimore and Elinor Grusin, who gave me a chance and helped me believe in myself. And, to Bill Brody who first told me I should pursue my doctorate. It was also at Memphis that I met Dana Rosengard, who made me laugh and saw me through on the third floor of Meeman. You all hold such a special place in my heart. I owe the University of Memphis so much for opening doors for me that I never would have dreamed possible.

For my family and friends in so many places, thank you for sharing your lives with me. Each of you has brought something special to my life, and you have been a constant source of inspiration and support. For my neighbors in Glendale Gardens, thank you for welcoming me into your lives and your homes and for showing me what it really means to be part of a community. Your courage and unfailing optimism in the face of disaster will forever remain a guidepost for me. I especially want to thank Elizabeth Brannon and Beverly Smith for the coffee, conversation, prayers, and love. So many mornings you made it possible for me to face the new day, and your constant encouragement will always be an example for me.

I also want to thank my three sons, Joshua, Caleb, and Jake. Each of you has brought something special to my life, and I cannot imagine what I would have done without you. I love you and am so proud of each one of you. And, for my husband, Rick, who came into my life and made me believe anything was possible. There are not enough words to say how much I love you and how grateful I am to have ever found you.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

“Why Do We Go to War?” the headline in North Carolina’s *Fayetteville Observer* asked its readers in May 1861, just a few weeks after the bombardment of Fort Sumter. Questions about disunion and the threat of war had dominated America’s public discourse for quite some time, but South Carolina’s secession in December 1860, followed by Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas, had led to an even greater sense of urgency about the country’s future and the very real possibility of war.¹ The question now was how had the United States become a country so divided that dissolution was at hand?

Almost from the moment General Robert E. Lee surrendered his troops at Appomattox, historians have studied the question of what brought about the American Civil War. Although

¹ Charles B. Dew, *Apostles of Disunion: Southern Commissioners and the Causes of the Civil War* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001); John W. Burgess, “Secession,” in *The Civil War and the Constitution, 1859-1865* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1901), 74-137. For more on South Carolina and its antebellum history, see: Drew Gilpin Faust, *James Henry Hammond and the Old South: A Design for Mastery* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1985); Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Bruce Collins, *The Origins of America’s Civil War* (New York: Homes & Meier Publishers, Inc., 1981), 46-47, 100, 122-123, 143-145; William W. Freehling, *The Road to Disunion*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); “A Declaration of the Causes which Induced the Secession of South Carolina,” in *The Rebellion Record: A Diary of American Events, with Documents, Narratives, Illustrative Incidents, Poetry, Etc.*, ed. Frank Moore (New York: D. Van Nostrand, 1867), 3-4; and Erika Pribanic-Smith, “Sowing the Seeds of Disunion: South Carolina’s Partisan Newspapers and the Nullification Crisis, 1828-1833” (PhD diss., University of Alabama, 2010). In ProQuest Dissertations and Theses at The University of Alabama, <http://search.proquest.com/pqdtlocal1006262/docview/757699097/13747BA4C54435FCA10/1?accountid=14472>.

they have arrived at a variety of answers, questions still remain. Through an examination of antebellum newspaper content, this dissertation will attempt to add to the historical understanding of the causes of the Civil War.

In April 1861, Americans understood that the Confederate firing on Fort Sumter and President Abraham Lincoln's subsequent decision to call up troops meant that the divided nation had finally come to war. The state of Virginia wasted no time in joining her seceding sisters in revolt, but several southern states, in spite of their abiding sympathies for the secessionists, still had questions about coming into the Confederate fold. Even Virginians were not even of one accord, resulting in the formation of a new state, West Virginia, and its secession from the Confederate states.

It was in this environment that on May 9, 1861, the *Fayetteville (NC) Observer*, reprinted "Why Do We Go to War?" from one of Virginia's leading newspapers, the *Richmond (VA) Whig*. The column began with a series of thirteen questions and answers in response to its headline, including these:

1. "Is it because a sectional party triumphed in the late Presidential election?"
2. "Is it because of the vituperation and abuse which have been heaped upon the South, by Northern men?"
3. "Is it because millions of Southern property have been carried off by Northern operators over 'underground railroads'?"
4. "Is it because we *hate* the North, and desire to wreak our vengeance, and *glut* our malice upon them?"

A resounding response of "No, it is not *that!*" followed each of these questions. After dismissing this long list of possible provocations, the article concluded that the conflict was a result of the

North's attempts to hold dominion over the South, much the same as England had done to the colonies in the period leading up to the American Revolution.

The Revolutionary War, the article asserted, was fought over "*certain inalienable rights*," and the "Revolutionary Sires" considered these rights "worth the most costly sacrifice of blood and treasure." The rights the article listed concerned the government's responsibility to secure "*life, liberty and property*" for its subjects, to "derive its power from the *consent of the governed*" and that if the government failed to do so, it "*ought to be* altered or abolished by the people." Under the current state of affairs, in the South's view, it was President Lincoln's efforts to take those rights away from the South that now left it no recourse other than secession, which meant war. In fact, the article asserted that the southern states actually had more reason to rebel against the Union than did the colonies against England. The southern states had tried to maintain their position, power, and representation in the United States government but to no avail. Virginia had, in good faith, attempted to "save the nation from civil strife," but the "vulgar, swaggering, blackguard, who occupies the Presidential chair, regards not the rights or liberties of others," the *Observer* article declared, "if he can only *make his mark* upon the page of history. Cursed be the man who owes his greatness to his country's ruin."² Southern resistance grew out of adherence to the South's interpretation of the values and principles of the nation's founding fathers. The South believed that Lincoln and the North had drifted away from the Constitution and had allowed the federal government to overstep its bounds, especially in its efforts to limit,

² Hanover, "A VOICE TO VIRGINIA! WHY DO WE GO to WAR?" *Fayetteville (NC) Observer*, May 9, 1861.

or even abolish, slavery. The South believed it was being forced to secede and form a new nation that would be true to the Constitution's precepts.³

Although the *Observer* article's position was widely shared, President Lincoln and his actions would never be the entire answer for most historians. Even if it could be agreed upon that the cannon fire at Fort Sumter was the Civil War's opening volley, historians have continued to grapple over which of the many contentious divisions between North and South actually brought the United States to this devastating juncture in history more than 150 years ago. Over the ensuing decades, varied historical theories have fallen in and out of favor, with themes such as economic conditions, slavery, tariffs, state sovereignty, and cultural divisions usually included on the long, ever-changing list.⁴ It is not difficult for even the casual reader of Civil War histories to discern that, during the decades leading up to the conflict, political tensions between the North and the South escalated on many fronts.⁵

³ Emory M. Thomas, *The Confederacy as a Revolutionary Experience* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: University of South Carolina Press, 1971).

⁴ David M. Potter, "The Literature on the Background of the Civil War," in *The South and the Sectional Conflict* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1968), 87-176.

⁵ For further study of the possible causes of the Civil War, see Edward L. Ayers, *What Caused the Civil War? Reflections on the South and Southern History* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005); Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Causes of the Civil War* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1974); David M. Potter, *The Impending Crisis, 1848-1861*, ed. Don E. Fehrenbacher, *The New American Nation Series* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1976); Gabor S. Boritt, ed., *Why the Civil War Came* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Edwin C. Rozwenc, ed., *The Causes of the American Civil War* (Boston: D. C. Heath and Company, 1961); Paul Calore, *The Causes of the Civil War: The Political Cultural, Economic and Territorial Disputes Between North and South* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2008); Kenneth M. Stampp, *And the War Came* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1950); Avery O. Craven, *Civil War in the Making, 1815-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1959); Bruce Collins, *The Origins of America's Civil War* (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, Inc., 1981); J. Mills Thornton III, *Politics and Power in a Slave Society: Alabama, 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978); David S. Heidler, *Pulling the Temple Down: The Fire-Eaters and the Destruction of the Union* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1994); and Stephen E. Maizlish and John J. Kushma, eds., *Essays on American Antebellum Politics, 1840-1860* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1982).

Among these rising tensions, historians have generally agreed that many of the two regions' differences had some foundation in northern industrialization, which resulted in significant changes in northern society and culture. These changes seemed to exacerbate the widening chasm between the North and the South, as the North's industrial advancements produced an underlying and complicated divergence between its modern vision for the future and the South's determination to cling to its agrarian, slave-holding traditions of the past. Historian Susan-Mary Grant underscored this when she wrote, "northerners managed, by the 1850s, to create a sectional ideology that portrayed the South as a world apart not just from the North but also from the nation."⁶ As the North's economy changed in the first half of the nineteenth century, southerners believed that the nation's economic policies had served to benefit the North at the expense of the South.⁷ The South believed the country's tariff policies favored northern industrialism and negatively affected southerners and their agricultural economy. Along with that, the South took offense at the North's opposition to slavery, especially when it concerned slavery in new territories. The South viewed the North's desire to control the spread of slavery as an attempt to wrest political and economic power from southerners and put them at a disadvantage to the North.

From the Wilmot Proviso in 1846 to Lincoln's election in 1860, the animosity between the regions rose dangerously. As the country expanded, the differences began to seem insurmountable. Slavery, which had long been an underlying agitation, became the most

⁶ Susan-Mary Grant, "A World Apart: The Romance and Reality of the South," in *North Over South: Northern Nationalism and America Identity in the Antebellum Era* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2000), 38.

⁷ Michael O' Brien, *Rethinking the South: Essays in Intellectual History* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 112-128.

prominent source of disagreement.⁸ Politicians, along with religious and economic leaders in both regions, emphasized the regions' differences to their constituents and strengthened the ever-deepening divide.⁹ In their attempts to study these intertwining issues, historians have examined varied sources, but whatever their point of reference, the question of how these issues coalesced into a war with such great consequences is still troubling today.¹⁰

There are many avenues an historian may follow to explore the underlying currents that might have led to the Civil War, and American newspapers have always been a valuable source for historical study. This dissertation will examine a variety of newspapers to examine how newspapers explained the events leading up to the Civil War to their readers. By reviewing the arguments and ideas that appeared in various northern and southern newspapers from the tariff and territorial debates leading up to the Wilmot Proviso in 1846 to Lincoln's election in 1860, it is possible to surmise what publishers, editors, and readers considered to be of enough importance to appear in print. Even items that might seem insignificant at first glance often shed light on the issues and events foremost in the minds of editors and readers.

Antebellum editors and publishers believed in the important role that newspapers played in recording history as it occurred. In 1860, Benjamin Franklin Taylor, who would work as a newspaper correspondent during the war, finished a small book in which he discussed the ability

⁸ For some discussion of these differences, see Edward Pessen, "How Different from Each Other Were the Antebellum North and South?" *American Historical Review* 85, no. 5 (December 1980): 1119-1149, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1853242> (accessed June 6, 2012); and Thomas B. Alexander, Stanley L. Engerman, Forrest McDonald, Grady McWhiney, and Edward Pessen, "Antebellum North and South in Comparative Perspective: A Discussion," *American Historical Review* 85, no. 5 (December 1980): 1150-1166, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1853243> (accessed June 6, 2012).

⁹ Maizlish and Kushma, *Essays*, 3-13.

¹⁰ Eric Foner, "The Causes of the American Civil War: Recent Interpretations and New Directions," *Civil War History* 20, no. 3 (September 1974): 197-214.

of newspapers to stop time by recording it for posterity. In his book, Taylor wrote:

I do not wonder that the impression of the first type, upon the printed page, was crimson. It was but the flushing of a new Morning, that has dawned upon the intellectual world. Oh! in that black, unseemly engine, lies the world's great strength, and Time's most formidable foe.¹¹

In retrospect, knowing that the United States was poised for such a bloody business, Taylor's words now sound ominous. America's newspapers, which had cut their teeth on the American Revolution, would soon be in the business of recording events that would tear the country apart.

Of equal importance to the role of newspapers during the war, though, is their role during the antebellum years. Because of the propensity of American newspapers to chronicle both the momentous and the seemingly mundane, they are uniquely able to offer a reasonable depiction of what issues figured most prominently in Americans' minds during those turbulent years.

Antebellum newspapers, in both the North and the South, were the most widely used form of public communication and news distribution, especially with the advent of new technology such as the steam engine, railroads, and the telegraph that enabled even faster dispersion of the news.¹² This dissertation's examination of the newspapers of this period offers an opportunity to determine some of the Civil War's causal themes, at least from the viewpoint of those who published and read newspapers.

¹¹ Benjamin Franklin Taylor, *January and June* (New York: Oakley and Mason, 1868), 223. The book was first copyrighted for Taylor by D. B. Cooke and Co. in Illinois in 1860.

¹² Donald Lewis Shaw, "At The Crossroads: Change and Continuity in American Press News 1820-1860," *Journalism History* 8, no. 2 (Summer 1981): 41-50. Shaw writes that nearly eight percent of the stories that appeared in newspapers from 1847-1860 were from the telegraph.

LITERATURE REVIEW

For the purposes of this study, it is necessary to be familiar with the scholarly explanations Civil War historians have offered on the complicated question of what might have caused the war. In an attempt to narrow the possible explanations, historians must take care not to overlook the many variables at work politically, economically, and socially during the antebellum period. In his comprehensive work, *The Impending Crisis, 1848-1861*, David Potter encouraged historians to be aware of the various factors that emerged in this difficult period and what effect these factors had on one another. Potter warned scholars to remember that a “neat historical order is only a convenient fiction, and sometimes a deceptive one, and that diverse events constantly impinge upon and modify one another.”¹³ In a similar vein, Edwin Rozwenc cautioned against bias based on region or class, as such prejudicial feelings would result in a narrow interpretation. “Historians, whatever their regional and social loyalties,” Rozwenc wrote, “are compelled to identify and to characterize more fully the causal variables which they must take account of in their explanations of the causes of the American Civil War.”¹⁴ Likewise, Thomas Pressley cautioned historians to avoid the danger of becoming apologists for their own personal backgrounds and influences, an objectivity that is often difficult.¹⁵ Each of these historians understood the necessity of making a conscious effort to avoid such common pitfalls. Only by doing so can an historian attempt to gain a fuller understanding of why the northern and

¹³ Potter, *The Impending Crisis*, 177.

¹⁴ Edwin C. Rozwenc, “The Present Crisis in the Historical Explanation of the Causes of the American Civil War,” in *The Causes of the American Civil War*, ed. Edwin C. Rozwenc, (Boston: D.C. Heath and Company, 1961), 227.

¹⁵ Thomas J. Pressley, *Americans Interpret Their Civil War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1954), 321.

southern states came to consider themselves so vastly different from one another, even to the point of going to war.¹⁶

When evaluating the reasons usually offered for the coming of the Civil War, the most cited cause of the growing division between the North and the South is slavery, and rightly so.¹⁷ Even from colonial times, the North's geography and its small rural farms had never fostered as great a dependence on slavery as in the South. In fact, in several states, such as Tennessee, people were often divided on the issue of slavery because of the differing geographical regions within the state's borders.¹⁸ The fertile land and warm climate in much of the South led to the rise of large plantations, beginning with crops such as tobacco in the Carolinas and moving on to cotton in Alabama and the Mississippi delta, and sugar in Louisiana. These large plantations controlled much of the most valuable land and afforded a small minority of white landowners the majority of the South's wealth. The rest of the South's white population owned few slaves or none at all. It is estimated that upwards of three-quarters of the population of white southerners

¹⁶ Edward Pessen, "How Different from Each Other Were the Antebellum North and South?" *American Historical Review* 85, no. 5 (December 1980): 1119-1149, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1853242> (accessed June 6, 2013).

¹⁷ For a collection of important essays and speeches on slavery, see Edwin C. Rozwenc, ed., *Slavery as a Cause of the Civil War* (Boston: D. C. Heath and Company, 1963). For further study, also see Eugene D. Genovese, *The Slaveholders' Dilemma: Freedom and Progress in Southern Conservative Thought, 1820-1860* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1992); Paul Calore, "Slavery and Its Impact on Sectionalism (1619 to 1830)," in *The Causes of the Civil War: The Political, Cultural, Economic and Territorial Disputes Between North and South* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2008); Avery O. Craven, "The Peculiar Institution," in *The Repressible Conflict, 1830-1861* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1939), 31-62; and James Oakes, *The Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveholders* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982).

¹⁸ For discussions of slavery and unionism in Tennessee, see Ezekial Birdseye and Durwood Dunn, *An Abolitionist in the Appalachian South: Ezekial Birdseye on Slavery, Capitalism, and Separate Statehood in East Tennessee, 1841-1846* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997), and Daniel W. Crofts, *Reluctant Confederates: Upper South Unionists in the Secession Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989).

did not own a single slave.¹⁹ Even so, many of these non-slaveholding whites believed they had a vested interest in slavery. Kenneth Stampf wrote about these white southerners, who were often poor or, at best, owners of small farms. For them, the peculiar institution “provided less tangible things: a means of controlling the social and economic competition of Negroes,” Stampf wrote, “concrete evidence of membership in a superior caste, and a chance perhaps to rise into the planter class.”²⁰ These motivations, encouraged by their wealthy, slave-holding neighbors, would prove to be powerful, even to the point of encouraging poor white southerners to go to battle for the institution of slavery, even though they did not own even a single slave.

Although the North remained primarily rural during the antebellum period, the increased industrial direction of its cities had led to a steady decline in its already small slave population in the region.²¹ This difference meant that many northerners had a favorable response to calls for abolishing slavery. However, the abolitionists’ campaign to end slavery did not stop in the northern states, but spread throughout the country. Avery Craven wrote that extreme abolitionists such as William Lloyd Garrison were able to integrate their attitudes into the mainstream

¹⁹ It is commonly cited that approximately twenty-five percent of the southern population owned slaves. Using statistics from the 1850 census and the *Historical Statistics of the United States Millennial Edition Online*, there were 347,525 slaveholders in the eleven states that eventually seceded and formed the Confederate States of America. The total adult white male population (over 15 years of age) in 1850 was approximately 1,225,368. That would be 28 percent. This does not include adult white females, since a small percentage would have owned slaves independently. J.D.B. DeBow, *U.S. Census, 1850: Statistical View of the United States... Compendium of the seventh Census* (Washington, DC: A.O.P. Nicholson, Public Printer, 1854), “Table Bb196-208. Slaveholders, by size of slaveholdings: 1790-1860,” in *Historical Statistics of the United States Millennial Edition Online*, ed. Richard Sutch and Susan B. Carter, <http://hsus.cambridge.org/HSUSWeb/toc/layoutChange.do?swidth=2560&id=Bb167-195&tableType=t> (accessed June 7, 2013).

²⁰ Kenneth M. Stampf, “The Peculiar Institution,” in *Slavery as a Cause of the Civil War*, ed. Edwin C. Rozwenc (Boston: D. C. Heath and Company, 1963), 79-88. See also Clement Eaton, *The Growth of Southern Civilization: 1790-1860* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1961); Kees Gispens, ed., *What Made the South Different: Essays and Comments* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1990); and Francis Butler Simkins, *The South: Old and New: A History, 1820-1947* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1947).

²¹ As early as 1777, Vermont had abolished slavery, followed by Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Connecticut, Rhode Island, and New York, all before 1800. Some of the states adopted “gradual abolition,” which meant the process took place over a period of years, as late as 1847 in Pennsylvania.

northern consciousness and encourage a general attitude of disgust toward the South. “The moral weaknesses of slaveholding would form a vital part of the understanding of a whole section,” Craven wrote.²² Merton Dillon wrote that abolitionists had pronounced slavery to be a sin, not simply a bad economic policy. In the South, Dillon said the abolitionists saw that “a proud and powerful section of the country flourished in wickedness.”²³ This attitude quickly led to vitriolic political debates between northerners and southerners. The South, which counted slavery as one of its bedrock institutions, was not ready or willing to abandon its ancestral practices. The ramifications of the South’s aggressive defense of slavery became increasingly apparent in the political realm, and the region struggled to retain its prominent position in national politics, while at the same time maintaining its own historical identity amidst growing hostility. It was a difficult balancing act, as historian Eric Foner noted. “Thus the South came face to face with a conflict between its loyalty to the nation and loyalty to the South—that is, to slavery,” Foner wrote, “which more than anything else, made the South distinct.”²⁴ This fissure would only widen as each region tried to force the other to modify its stance on this explosive issue.

For some historians such as James Ford Rhodes, the institution of slavery was the sole foundation for the entire conflict, although he did not absolve the North of guilt in the process. Potter wrote that Rhodes “held the nation rather than the South responsible for slavery, and if he

²² Avery O. Craven, “Coming of the War Between the States: An Interpretation,” in *An Historian and the Civil War* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1964), 36-37.

²³ Merton Dillon, “The Failure of the American Abolitionists,” in *Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 25, no. 2 (May 1959): 159-177. Also see Jane H. Pease and William H. Pease, “Confrontation and Abolition in the 1850s,” in *Journal of American History*, 58, no. 4 (March 1972): 923-937 and James Oakes, “The Convenient Sin,” in *The Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveholders* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982), 96-122.

²⁴ Eric Foner, *Politics and Ideology in the Age of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 53.

blamed the South for secession, he blamed the North for Reconstruction.”²⁵ Rhodes wrote that the North believed “that slavery was an evil and that its existence at the South was a blot on the national honor.”²⁶ J. Mills Thornton said that slavery was not just a southern issue any more than Indian removal was just a western issue. Instead, the South became emblematic of the nation as a whole.²⁷ But, as Bruce Collins wrote, southerners were strongly united in their defense of slavery. “Slavery,” Collins wrote, “united Southerners and created a sectional consciousness as nothing else could have done.”²⁸

Along with slavery, the principle of honor played no small role in southern society. It influenced southern values in education, family, religion, and civic duty. Bertram Wyatt-Brown’s work clearly shows that there was much more to the concept of southern honor than the occasional duel, although duels certainly did occur in the antebellum South.²⁹ Wyatt-Brown maintained that southern honor was based on a primeval code that influenced not only how southern whites viewed themselves, but also what they thought of the world around them. “The concept of honor,” he wrote, “was designed to give structure to life and meaning to valor, hierarchy, and family protection.”³⁰ The idea that the North could ever deign to believe it had

²⁵ David M. Potter, “The Literature on the Background of the Civil War,” in *The South and the Sectional Conflict* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1968), 90.

²⁶ James Ford Rhodes, *Lectures on the American Civil War* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1913), 14.

²⁷ J. Mills Thornton, “Comments, Laura Edwards Keynote: How Legal History Can Help Us Redefine the Contours of Southern History” (Lecture, 23rd Annual Southern Intellectual History Circle Conference, The University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, AL, February 25, 2011).

²⁸ Bruce Collins, *The Origins of the Civil War* (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, Inc., 1981), 52.

²⁹ “The City,” *Daily Picayune* (New Orleans, LA), Sept. 17, 1858. This story was typical in that a quarrel of “a private nature” resulted in a duel with Mississippi rifles. Three shots were fired, with neither party being hit, and one participant being removed when it was decided that “the satisfaction he had given sufficient.”

³⁰ Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 60.

more claim on honor than the South, and that the North considered itself to be morally superior to the southern states, galled southern sensibilities. To white southerners, those were fighting words, and they were not about to let northerners lecture them about honor. In response, southerners were quick to challenge the idea that northerners were in any way overly concerned with the morality of slavery and the treatment of slaves.³¹

From the southern perspective, the treatment of industrial laborers in northern cities was far inferior to the paternalistic care southern slaves received in the South. Susan-Mary Grant agreed that some of the staunchest northern supporters of abolition had little, if any, concern for the plight of slaves or free blacks. “The northern critique of slavery all too often evolved out of a deeply racist concern for the continued well-being of American white society,” Grant wrote. “In other words, concern for the slave was not necessarily the motivating factor behind northern attacks on slavery.”³² Southerners vehemently declared that they were far more involved in their slaves’ well-being and gladly provided them with food, housing, medical care, and clothing. They chafed at northerners’ moral condemnation of the South’s societal structure. “Slavery as a moral issue,” historian Frank Owsley wrote, “has too long been the red herring dragged across the trail.”³³

Southerners asserted that northern industrialists were themselves amoral in the way they mistreated their workers, which forced them to live and work in abject poverty. Southerners emphatically contrasted this charge of northern exploitation of free workers to the South’s vision

³¹ C. Vann Woodward, *The Burden of Southern History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993), 72. Woodward notes that although the war did become an emancipating crusade, “Lincoln never wanted to turn the war into a moral crusade.”

³² Grant, *North Over South*, 124.

³³ Frank Lawrence Owsley, “The Irrepressible Conflict,” in *I’ll Take My Stand; the South and the Agrarian Tradition by Twelve Southerners* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1930), 69.

of slavery as one of mutual benefit and concern between master and slave.³⁴ Historian Eugene Genovese wrote:

One after another, southern educators and theorists charged that the bourgeoisie, driven by greed and a temperament worthy of infidels, had thrown the masses into an economic jungle and left them to an animal existence of privation, brutal exploitation, outright starvation, and hopelessness.³⁵

Grant asserted that for many northerners the real issue was not concern over the morality of slavery as much as it was one of power. Grant and others have stated that northerners had come to fear the political power of southern plantation slaveholders and believed abolishing slavery was one way to derail the southerners' political and economic positions. Southerners, though, were clearly aware of the high political stakes.³⁶

Similarly, southern politicians clearly believed their political strength at the federal level was being threatened, and they would do whatever was necessary to maintain their position.³⁷ One of their foremost concerns with abolishing slavery was that it would take away a great portion of the South's economic wealth, as slaves were not cheap to purchase and they were

³⁴ There are numerous diaries and narratives that reveal this attitude among slaveowners. As such, after the War ended, slaveowners were often surprised when their slaves chose to leave their former places of servitude. For examples, see Drew Gilpin Faust, *James Henry Hammond and the Old South: A Design for Mastery* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982); Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); and Willie Lee Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction: The Port Royal Experiment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976).

³⁵ Genovese, *The Slaveholders' Dilemma*, 6.

³⁶ Alfred H. Conrad and John R. Meyer, "The Economics of Slavery in the Ante Bellum South," *Journal of Political Economy* 66, no. 2 (April 1958): 95-130, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1827270> (accessed March 6, 2013). Grant, *North Over South*, 62.

³⁷ Reuben Davis, "Relentless Avarice...has chained...the Agricultural States to the Northern States," in *Slavery as a Cause of the Civil War*, ed. Edwin C. Rozwenc (Boston: D. C. Heath and Company, 1963), 12-19.

considered valuable property.³⁸ The loss of economic power in the southern states could only result in a loss of political power, both in the United States and abroad. William Gienapp wrote that the North and the South began to view each other as threats to each other's "social, political, and economic interests." As such, he noted that each region was trying to place itself in a position of dominance, and the Civil War must ultimately be explained politically. "The outbreak of war in April 1861 represented the complete breakdown of the American political system," Gienapp wrote. "As such, the Civil War constituted the greatest single failure of American democracy."³⁹

It is important to clarify that positing slavery as more of a political and economic struggle than a moral one, does not diminish its importance as one of the most divisive issues. It simply calls into question the purported reasons why abolitionism became such a popular political cause in the North, when there is evidence to support the idea that few northerners truly pictured a society where freed slaves would be on an equal footing with whites. As Potter noted, the heart of the debate was more a question of what form a "Negro's" inferior status would take rather than one of any possible equality with whites. "For the Negro in America," Potter wrote, "chattel servitude was sectional but caste inferiority was still national, and thus the slavery issue also failed to present a complete contrast."⁴⁰ It became quite clear, especially after the Civil War,

³⁸ For an in-depth study of the slave trade and the value of slaves, see Michael Tadman's *Speculators and Slaves: Masters, Traders, and Slaves in the Old South* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989).

³⁹ William E. Gienapp, "The Political System and the Coming of the Civil War," in *Why the Civil War Came*, ed. Gabor S. Boritt (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 82-83. Also see William E. Gienapp, "'Politics Seem To Enter into Everything': Political Culture in the North, 1840-1860," in *Essays on American Antebellum Politics, 1840-1860*, eds. Stephen E. Maizlish and John J. Kushma (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1982), 14-69. Stephen B. Oates, *The Approaching Fury: Voices of the Storm: 1820-1861* (New York: Harper Collins, 1997).

⁴⁰ David Potter, "The Historian's Use of Nationalism and Vice-Versa," in *The South and the Sectional Conflict* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1968), 75.

that a racially integrated society is not what either region ever had in mind. Antebellum southerners considered attacks on slavery to be blatant attacks on their way of life, which they considered better than anything the North had to offer.⁴¹

In contrasting the two sections, southerners often held up their society as one that encouraged a more civilized and personally fulfilling life. “The South liked to think of itself as having a warmly human civilization,” historian Allan Nevins wrote, “while that of the North was bookish and mechanical.” As a result, Nevins said the perception was that “Southerners read for personal enjoyment and cultivation; Northerners read to invent or write.”⁴² The South was quite content to be framed by its rural conservatism, which was dominated by class and race. In contrast, the North was increasingly defined, at least by many southerners, as industrial and urban, in spite of the fact that much of it remained rural during this time. These marked differences in how each region was viewed, by itself and each other, led to an increasing sectionalism that made the two regions’ cultures appear incompatible.

Historically, before 1840, much of America’s culture in areas such as art, science, and theatre maintained a nationalistic tone. The United States’ early years were built on unifying and expanding the new country. Elizabeth Varon wrote that when Americans used the word “Union” in referring to their country, it encompassed “the geographic, linguistic, cultural, and historical

⁴¹ Numerous works delve into the southern perspective on slavery. A few are W. J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1941); William J. Cooper, *The South and the Politics of Slavery, 1828-1856* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978); Ulrich B. Phillips, *Life and Labor in the Old South* (Boston: Little, Brown, & Co., 1929); Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972).

⁴²Allan Nevins, *Ordeal of the Union, Vol. II, A House Dividing: 1852-1857* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1947), 539.

bonds that held America's citizenry together."⁴³ This sense of unity, though, slowly began to diminish during the antebellum period, as sectionalism became more pronounced in all areas of life, including newspapers. There was a marked change in perspective as nationalism took on a new, regional meaning. Foner acknowledged as much when he wrote that "the preceding decades had witnessed an escalation of distrust—an erosion of the reciprocal currents of good will so essential for national harmony."⁴⁴ Potter wrote that some of this erosion occurred as a result of the nation's growth, which threatened to undermine the precarious equilibrium of power between the two sections. As long as slavery remained an intact southern institution, the North had no interest in working with the South politically or economically. As the South began to lose its powerful voice in the federal government, it became more difficult for southerners to interpret federal actions in a way that also supported southern regionalism. Potter wrote that the South lost any "power of coordinating national with sectional objectives and thus of maintaining the image of the federal government as the guardian of the essential interests of values of Southern society."⁴⁵

As the national political environment gained more of a sectional focus, newspaper coverage shows how prominent northern and southern political figures rallied around their regions. "Boston and Charleston were now preoccupied with sectional stereotypes and antipathies," Foner wrote.⁴⁶ Carl Osthaus wrote that the southern press became obsessed with

⁴³ Elizabeth R. Varon, *Disunion! The Coming of the American Civil War, 1789-1859* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 4.

⁴⁴ Foner, *Politics and Ideology*, 53.

⁴⁵ Potter, "The Historian's Use of Nationalism and Vice Versa," in *The South and the Sectional Conflict* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1968), 82. For study of Confederate nationalism, see Drew Gilpin Faust, *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism, Ideology and Identity in the Civil War South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1988).

⁴⁶ Foner, *Politics and Ideology*, 53.

sectional politics and soon became a powerful voice of protest against any threats to the South's racial stratification and the rights of southern states. "If Northerners dominated the schools, pulpits, literature, and commerce, southerners lamented, then the press must speak for the South," Osthaus wrote, "combatting Northern arrogance and redressing the grievances of a wronged people."⁴⁷ Partisan presses took strong, uncompromising stands that made the divisions seem even more intractable. Political issues that previously might have been negotiable were now unmanageable.

Westward expansion did nothing to ease the tensions. Territorial expansion broadened the country's horizons and, at the same time, highlighted sectional divisions. The country comprised "two distinct cultures, Northern and Southern, each shading off toward the West in newer and not dissimilar forms," Nevins wrote, "but nevertheless on the whole sharply differentiated, had come into existence."⁴⁸ The erosion in national harmony as a result of the nation's efforts to expand its boundaries was especially apparent in Missouri in 1820. The political debate over the admission of new states and territories inevitably brought with it the question of whether slavery would be allowed in these new acquisitions. Expansion became a struggle over maintaining existing rights in new lands, and lines were drawn primarily along the divisions of abolition versus slavery. Southerners would not entertain the notion of admitting a state where, if slavery was not allowed, they might be unable to travel or settle there with their slaves. Southerners considered slaves to be their personal property, and they would not relinquish their right to take their property wherever they chose to go. In a strange turn of events for the country, rather than

⁴⁷ Carl R. Osthaus, *Partisans of the Southern Press: Editorial Spokesmen of the Nineteenth Century* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1994), xiii.

⁴⁸ Nevins, *Ordeal*, 537.

fostering an exciting time of national pride, Collins wrote, “westward expansion turned sectional rivalries into a perilous and significant contest over fundamental rights.”⁴⁹

After Texas was annexed and admitted to the Union in 1845 as a slave state, the subsequent Mexican War only served to aggravate these rivalries. In an effort to allay northern concerns over the expansion of slavery into new territories, Pennsylvania Senator David Wilmot attached a proviso to an appropriation bill that would exclude slavery from any of the territory the United States might acquire from Mexico. As Wilmot and others who supported the Proviso must have expected, Southerners quickly united to fight against it. Although the Wilmot Proviso passed the House, it stalled in the Senate and was ultimately abandoned. But as Collins noted, the damage was done. The South viewed Wilmot’s Proviso as an attack on the South, and southern politicians became wary of any northern legislative proposals. Wilmot’s actions made 1846 a year in which the political tenor in the country took a marked turn for the worse. As Collins wrote, it “remained a bone of political and constitutional contention for nearly 15 years.”⁵⁰

The early 1850s saw the South clinging to political power, and its leaders understood their precarious position. The North and the South each believed that their future depended on maintaining political control. “A majority of the residents of each section feared the other,” Gienapp noted, “and well before the fighting started the sectional conflict represented a struggle for control of the nation’s future.”⁵¹ Northern and southern politicians, who in other times would

⁴⁹ Bruce Collins, “Territorial Expansion, 1844-1848,” in *The Origins of America’s Civil War* (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, Inc., 1981), 67.

⁵⁰ Collins, *Origins*, 79.

⁵¹ William E. Gienapp, “The Crisis of American Democracy: The Political System and the Coming of the Civil War,” in *Why the Civil War Came*, ed. Gabor S. Boritt (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 84.

have been dedicated to the Union, now were more focused on their regions. “Politicians were willing to make certain concessions for national unity and success,” Gienapp wrote, “but they were understandably unwilling to sacrifice their own bases of power for such ends.”⁵² Joel Silbey noted that these sectional concerns shifted the American political scene from one of national party divisions, to one that was primarily focused on concerns such as immigration, westward expansion, and the ever-present issue of slavery. “As a new political synthesis developed, based on cultural issues, economic frustrations, and slavery extension,” Silbey wrote, “the basic nature of American political life shifted significantly.”⁵³ By the end of the 1850s, these political divisions manifested themselves in an increased call by southern states to secede from the Union.

Seceding from the Union was a political idea that culminated from frustration in and out of the political realm. “Secession, a specific political act,” Silbey wrote, “cannot be separated from the political world of the time with its everyday concerns, routines, norms, and conflicts.”⁵⁴ John C. Calhoun would have us remember that secession was not a new idea, but at this particular juncture in the country’s political history it appeared to be a more dire threat than ever before. The impact of secession was never in doubt, as antebellum newspapers began to use the term “Disunion” to describe what appeared to be on the horizon. It was a word that caused alarm, and it increasingly appeared in the headlines of both northern and southern newspapers. Varon

⁵² William E. Gienapp, “‘Politics Seem to Enter into Everything’: Political Culture in the North, 1840-1860,” in *Essays on American Antebellum Politics, 1840-1860*, eds. Stephen E. Maizlish and John J. Kushma (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1982), 51.

⁵³ Joel H. Silbey, *The Transformation of the American Politics, 1840-1860* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1967), 32.

⁵⁴ Joel H. Silbey, “The Surge of Republican Power: Partisan Antipathy, American Social Conflict, and the Coming of the Civil War,” in *Essays on American Antebellum Politics, 1840-1860*, eds. Stephen E. Maizlish and John J. Kushma, (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1982), 205.

noted that “disunion” had powerful connotations and conjured up visions of America as a failed idea, something neither side wanted to concede.⁵⁵

But ideas about what constituted the Union had diverged. The South insisted that the North had moved away from the founding fathers’ vision for America and that the South was the true standard bearer for the Union. The North, of course, refuted any such claims. Craven wrote that coexistence had become almost impossible because each region held firm to the belief that “it represented the true American expression as envisaged by the founding fathers and embodied in the Constitution.”⁵⁶

And so, in 1860, southerners reeled from the election of President Abraham Lincoln, and the rhetoric of secession seemed a reality. The conflicts of the previous years had finally managed to drown out any voices of calm or reason that may have remained, and, as the newspapers proclaimed, disunion was at hand. “Conservatives and moderate men, who probably constituted a majority in both sections,” Craven wrote, “lost ground and numbers as irritations accumulated and at last tumbled a whole people into a war few wanted and no one could prevent.”⁵⁷ Although it is doubtful that moderates actually were the majority in most states, any chance they might have had to stay the hand of war was most certainly gone by this time.

Along with an understanding of the scholarly work focused on the causes of the Civil War, this study also requires an examination of what was occurring in the newspaper industry

⁵⁵ Varon, *Disunion!*, 5. Varon’s study focuses on the concept of disunion, and what that concept meant to northerners and southerners. Varon does not equate disunion with secession, but considers secession to simply be “a specific mechanism whereby states could leave the Union, and it reflected complex constitutional theories on the boundaries of state and federal power.”

⁵⁶ Craven, *Civil War in the Making*, 103.

⁵⁷ Avery O. Craven, *An Historian and the Civil War* (Chicago: Phoenix Books, 1967), 113. Craven is one of a group of historians who follow the premise that the differences between the North and South were not great enough to make the war necessary.

during the antebellum period. Although several noted journalism historians have studied the press and the Civil War, they have not examined newspaper reports and tried to explain the coming of the war.⁵⁸ Frederic Hudson, who began his newspaper career in 1835 working for James Gordon Bennett at the *New York Herald*, saw the changes first hand. He and Bennett are remembered for their dedication to the *Herald's* comprehensive coverage of the Civil War, and they are often recognized for their increased use of correspondents to ensure that war news was rapidly disseminated to their readers. After his retirement in 1866, Hudson devoted his time to writing *Journalism in the United States, from 1690 to 1872*. In this work he noted the myriad changes that had occurred during the years prior to the Civil War. “With the extension of railroads, the introduction of ocean steamers, the spread of express lines, and the inauguration of the magnetic telegraph,” Hudson wrote, “the competition of journalists to keep in step with these new forces in the field became lively, comprehensive, and costly.”⁵⁹ Each of the advancements Hudson recorded greatly affected what events newspapers were able to report on their pages and how quickly their newspaper copy could be distributed throughout the nation.

⁵⁸ For further study of journalism history, some sources are: Williard Grosvenor Bleyer, *Main Currents in the History of American Journalism* (Cambridge, MA: Riverside Press, 1927); Frederic Hudson, *Journalism in the United States, from 1690-1872* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1873); Frank Luther Mott, *American Journalism, A History of Newspapers in the United States through 250 Years, 1690 to 1940* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1950); George Henry Payne, *History of Journalism in the United States* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1920); Wm. David Sloan ed., *The Media in America, A History*, 8th ed. (Northport, AL: Vision Press, 2011); John Tebbel, *The Compact History of the American Newspaper* (New York: Hawthorn Books, Inc., 1963); Julie Hedgepeth Williams, *The Significance of the Printed Word in Early America: Colonists Thoughts on the Role of the Press* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999); and Bonnie Brennen and Hanno Hardt, eds., *American Journalism History Reader: Critical and Primary Texts* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

⁵⁹ Hudson, *Journalism*, 609. Hudson’s assertion is borne out by the fact that there were no telegraph lines in 1840 and 50,000 miles of telegraph lines in 1860. Railroad lines increased from 2,818 to 30,626 during the same period. Data found in Allan Pred, *Urban Growth and City-Systems in the United States, 1840-1860* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), 176, Table A.1.

Along with the industry's physical changes, the early to mid-1800s also saw the rise of several powerful and influential newspaper editors.⁶⁰ Susan Thompson wrote about these editors who made their names publishing the sensationalist penny papers that appeared in the early 1800s. These newspapers were widely read and are often considered the first form of mass media. Their editors became prominent public figures who wielded extraordinary political power.⁶¹ Newspaper critics did not consider the advent of these powerful editors to be a change for the better, and in 1859 former newspaper editor Lambert Wilmer criticized the trend. Wilmer said the press had "power and authority to which it has no just pretensions," and "its usurpation of such power and authority is a daring infringement on the rights and liberties of the American people."⁶² William Huntzicker wrote that these editors' influence contributed to the inevitability of the Civil War, which he referred to as the "Editor's Civil War."⁶³ During this time, editors and their newspapers became synonymous. Osthaus wrote that southern editors "became a paladin of Southern virtue and a critic of Northern culture."⁶⁴ As the country moved toward war, the widespread influence of American newspapers and their editors was undeniable.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ See Bernell E. Tripp, "The Antebellum Press, 1820-1861," in *The Media in America, A History*, 8th ed., ed. Wm. David Sloan (Northport, AL: Vision Press, 2011), 141-158.

⁶¹ Susan Thompson, *The Penny Press: The Origins of the Modern News Media, 1833-1861* (Northport, AL: Vision Press, 2004).

⁶² Lambert A. Wilmer, *Our Press Gang; or, A Complete Exposition of the Corruptions and Crimes of the American Newspapers* (Philadelphia: J. T. Lloyd, 1859), 51. Frank Luther Mott notes on page 311 of his book *American Journalism* that Wilmer's book of press criticisms was "a curious and sometimes instructive compilation of strictures on the press."

⁶³ William E. Huntzicker, *The Popular Press, 1833-1865* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999), 115. Also see Donald E. Reynolds, *Editors Make War: Southern Newspapers in the Secession Crisis* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press (1970).

⁶⁴ Osthaus, *Partisans*, xiii.

⁶⁵ David B. Sachsman, S. Kittrell Rushing, and Debra Reddin van Tuyll, eds., "Setting the Agenda for Secession and War," in *The Civil War and the Press* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2000). David B.

The antebellum period also witnessed a growing African-American and abolitionist press. Numerous journalism historians have delved into the appearance of these alternative newspapers before and during the Civil War.⁶⁶ The abolitionist press arose out of frustration over the lack of coverage and support for its cause, and abolitionist groups began their own newspapers.⁶⁷ The publication of abolitionist papers quickly resulted in an increase in the suppression and censorship of newspapers, as well as greater restrictions on what could be sent through the mail in the South. Such restrictions were part of the South's strategy "to prevent the printing, circulation and reading of abolition materials."⁶⁸

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

From the early colonists' first pamphlets, books, almanacs, newspapers, and other ephemera, America's printers have provided invaluable written accounts of the country's history.⁶⁹ Among these important publications, newspapers have had an especially enduring and prominent role. Beginning with the *Boston News Letter*, first published by John Campbell in

Sachsman, S. Kittrell Rushing, and Debra Reddin van Tuyll, eds., *Words at War: the Civil War and American Journalism* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2008).

⁶⁶ Several excellent histories of the black press during this period are: Martin E. Dann, ed., *The Black Press, 1827-1890: the Quest for National Identity* (New York: G. P. Putnam Sons, 1971); Frankie Hutton, *The Early Black Press in America, 1827-1860* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1993); Matthew Peeples, "Creating Political Authority: The Role of the Antebellum *Black Press* in the Political Mobilization and Empowerment of African Americans," *Journalism History* 34, no. 2 (Summer 2008): 76-87; Garland I. Penn, *The Afro-American Press and Its Editors* (Springfield, MA: Willey & Co., 1891); Bernell Tripp, *Origins of the Black Press, New York, 1827-1847* (Northport, AL: Vision Press, 1992); Roland E. Wolseley, *The Black Press, U.S.A.* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1990); Frederick G. Detweiler, *The Negro Press in the United States* (College Park, MD: McGrath Publishing Co., 1968).

⁶⁷ Ford Risley, *Abolition and the Press: The Moral Struggle Against Slavery* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2008). Risley thoroughly chronicles the rise of abolitionist newspapers during the 1820s and 1830s.

⁶⁸ Hazel Dicken-Garcia and Giovanna Dell'Orto, *Hated Ideas and the American Civil War Press* (Spokane, WA: Marquette Books LLC, 2008), 7.

⁶⁹ Isaiah Thomas, *The History of Printing in America*, 2nd ed. (New York: Weathervane Books, 1970), 85.

1704, newspapers have kept a record of daily life in America, cutting across its various regions and diverse perspectives.⁷⁰ It is of no little consequence that the growth and advancement of the newspaper industry has coincided with America's development as a nation.

Historians have produced a seemingly endless number of works on the Civil War, and northern and southern newspapers are quoted in many of them.⁷¹ No works, however, have emphasized newspaper content as a means of investigating the causes of the American Civil War.⁷² The purpose of this study is to examine a variety of northern and southern newspapers from the 1840s to 1860 in an attempt to determine what the content of those newspapers might reveal about the underlying causes of the Civil War. The study's time period is chosen so that it will begin with some of the tariff and territorial issues leading up to the Wilmot Proviso in 1846 and will end with Lincoln's election in 1860. During these years, the United States was set on a course that seemed unthinkable to many Americans. It was an era of tumultuous political, social, economic, and geographic transition for the country, recorded in the newspapers of the day.

⁷⁰ Tebbel, *Compact History*.

⁷¹ Some important studies on the press during the Civil War are: J. Cutler Andrews, *The North Reports the Civil War* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1955); J. Cutler Andrews, *The South Reports the Civil War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970); George C. Rable, *News from Fredericksburg* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2000); William E. Huntzicker, *The Popular Press, 1833-1865* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999); Brayton Harris, *Blue & Gray in Black & White: Newspapers in the Civil War* (Washington DC: Brassey's, 1999); Ford Risley, "The Confederate Press Association: Cooperative News Reporting of the War," *Civil War History* 47, no. 3 (2001): 222-239; Richard H. Abbott, "Civil War Origins of the Southern Republican Press," *Civil War History* 43, no. 1 (1997): 38-58.

⁷² Some works are: David B. Sachsman, S. Kittrell Rushing, and Debra Reddin van Tuyl, eds., *The Civil War and the Press* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 2000); David B. Sachsman, S. Kittrell Rushing, and Roy Morris, Jr., eds., *Words at War: The Civil War and American Journalism* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2008); Lorman A. Ratner and Dwight L. Teeter, Jr., *Fanatics and Fire-eaters: Newspapers and the Coming of the Civil War* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003).

METHODOLOGY

Examining the content of newspapers published during this time frame should provide a glimpse of what Americans in the antebellum era considered most important. The period's newspaper pages tell the story of a generation whose way of life was being dramatically altered by myriad unforeseen events. Indubitably, by the Civil War's onset, America's newspapers had secure positions as the preeminent chroniclers of American life, and it is not surprising that Civil War historians have often gleaned articles from their pages to help describe and explain the events that occurred during the war.

Because this study will attempt to answer the question of what caused the Civil War through an examination of newspaper content, it is important to note how other scholars have used printed material to study other periods in American history. Probably the single most influential work in this area is Bernard Bailyn's book, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, which won the Pulitzer Prize for history in 1968. Bailyn used colonial printers' pamphlets to delineate the colonists' ideological positions that would ultimately lead to the Revolution.⁷³ His work serves as a model for determining how such works can represent the ideals and concerns of their readers, especially in light of an impending war. Bailyn, along with other historians, reasoned that during periods of duress in America's history, the role and influence of the press were often at their most profound. The relationship between American newspapers and the debates throughout the country prior to the Civil War bear out this theory.⁷⁴

⁷³ Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967).

⁷⁴ For further study of press freedom and First Amendment theory, see David Copeland, *The Ideas of a Free Press: The Enlightenment and Its Unruly Legacy* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2006); Jeffery A. Smith, *War and Press Freedom: The Problem of Prerogative Power* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999);

To help examine the causes of the Civil War, as suggested by the content found in the newspapers, this study will be organized chronologically, beginning with newspaper coverage of the tariff and territorial issues leading to the Wilmot Proviso in 1846. By this time, the country was engaged in debate over America's westward expansion, and the Missouri Compromise had failed to stave off the political dissension. Expansion was a flashpoint for argument, and the following years had formidable consequences for the country's divisions. The timeline will end with Lincoln's election in 1860 when secession and war became inevitable. The study will conclude with a summary of the causes of the Civil War as suggested by the newspaper content.

A diverse sampling of articles from ninety newspapers from various states in the country provided the primary sources for this study. The newspapers varied in size, circulation, and location, with most of them being regional publications. They primarily hail from the northern and southern states, although a few western publications are cited. The newspapers used in this dissertation do not include African-American or abolitionist newspapers, since they have a specific and narrow editorial focus. However, articles from such newspapers sometimes appeared in other mainstream publications, so occasionally they are cited. Whenever an article from one publication was cited in another, every attempt was made to secure the original reference. This includes newspaper reports on congressional sessions, of which the original transcription can be found in the *Congressional Globe*. Additionally, over a period of years newspapers sometimes were published under variations of the same title, in which case the title used in the newspaper databases is the one cited in the reference.

and Matthew D. Bunker, *Critiquing Free Speech: First Amendment Theory and the Challenge of Interdisciplinarity* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2001).

The content from the newspapers included in this study are news articles and editorials. Editors printed articles in their publications specifically because they accurately reflected the concerns, values, and culture of a particular newspaper's readers.⁷⁵ The editorials expressed the editors' and publishers' viewpoints and give an indication of what the readers' would have read about the various topics that were addressed. Newspapers also frequently published letters or commentary on other newspapers' positions on an issue. Reading the newspapers of this era offers some insight into the concerns and perspectives of the communities they served. This work examines antebellum newspapers in an attempt to understand what issues arose during this period that created such a hardened sectional divide that Americans found themselves unable to overcome it. By examining antebellum newspapers and what they have to show about the origins of the Civil War, we can gain a greater understanding of the circumstances surrounding this tumultuous time in American history.

⁷⁵ Donald Shaw, "Some Notes on Methodology: Change and Continuity in American Press News 1820-1860," *Journalism History* 8, no. 2 (Summer 1981): 51-53, 76.

CHAPTER II

TARIFFS AND TERRITORIES: 1816 to 1846

As the United States entered a period of tremendous growth in the 1800s, newspapers covered the debates over increasing tariffs and expanding territories. Although these two issues would divide the country along geographical lines, newspaper articles show that the early arguments often garnered varied opinions among both northern and southern legislators. Newspaper coverage indicates that many of these politicians were motivated by their struggle to retain political power. Despite the opportunities opening up for the United States, the country's expansion and federal economic influences were becoming flashpoints that would serve to deepen an already increasing regional divide that would help forge the way to war.

After the War of 1812, the United States found itself facing difficult economic times. To encourage the country's manufacturing interests and provide increased revenue, a new tariff was proposed to Congress. The ensuing debate over the Tariff of 1816 created public interest in how much the tariff duties would affect the price of goods and whether it would encourage the states' economies. As the North was embarking on a more industrial path, the region's politicians were mostly in favor of a tariff on manufactured goods, especially as American industries found themselves competing with British manufacturers. Southern states had a more mixed reaction, as a tariff on the export of many of its raw agricultural products, such as cotton, would make them

more expensive for other countries to purchase and use for manufacturing their goods. Also, the South's agricultural-based economy meant that southerners had to buy the manufactured products they needed from either the North or other countries. Under the new tariff duties, these goods would be more expensive for southerners to purchase.

While the politicians argued over the merits of the Tariff of 1816, which newspaper articles often referred to as the Tariff of Duties, newspapers carried detailed lists of various goods and how the proposed tariff would affect their cost.¹ Newspapers such as the *Maryland Gazette and Political Intelligencer* ran articles that contained the “substance of the new Tariff of duties.”² Rather than publish the entire list of duties, newspapers often chose to publish articles that only contained information on the specific duties that would be of interest to their readers. These articles usually had a regional emphasis and reflected a newspaper's local economy. One such example would be the *City Gazette And Commercial Daily Advertiser* of Charleston, South Carolina, which chose to print only a small article that detailed the proposed duty on cotton, which would be of great interest to its readers.³ For the most part, newspapers carried frequent coverage of the tariff debate in Congress, some of which included criticism of tariffs as a whole, along with concerns over specific duties. Rhode Island's *Providence Gazette* predicted that there would be protests over the tariff and wondered if it had any real possibility for passage. “Some

¹ “The New Tariff,” *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC), Feb. 14, 1816. This article noted the paper's intention to print the new “Tariff of Duties on Imports,” as prepared by Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Dallas. Along with other newspapers, the *Intelligencer* printed the Tariff Bill in full in its Feb. 20 and 21 issues.

² “New Tariff,” *Maryland Gazette and Political Intelligencer* (Annapolis), Feb. 29, 1816. This article listed the duties that would be charged on individual items and categories under the proposed new tariff, including “*Thirty-three and a third percent.*—Cotton manufactures of all descriptions, of which cotton is the material or chief value.” Only wood and paper products had a higher duty, with a charge of thirty-five per cent. Other papers that carried these lists of duties include the following: *Supporter* (Chillicothe, OH), March 12, 1816; *Commercial Advertiser* (New York, NY), Feb. 19, 1816; *Poulson's American Daily Advertiser* (Philadelphia, PA), Feb. 21, 1816; *Baltimore (MD) Patriot & Evening Advertiser*, Feb. 22, 1816; *Alexandria (VA) Herald*, Feb. 23, 1816; and *Raleigh Register, and North-Carolina Gazette*, March 1, 1816.

³ “Commercial,” *City Gazette And Commercial Daily Advertiser* (Charleston, SC), Feb. 28, 1816.

labored speeches will be made,” the article stated, “upon the general principle of giving extravagant encouragement to the manufactures of cotton wool, and sheep’s wool, and what will be the final determinations is yet doubtful.”⁴

Newspaper articles on the tariff debate indicate that southern congressional representatives’ general disapproval of the Tariff of 1816 stemmed from their belief that it favored the North’s burgeoning manufacturing interests and penalized the South’s agricultural economy. Georgia Representative John Forsyth was a frequent critic of the disparity that many southerners saw in the way in which the tariff would be administered, and northern newspapers published his remarks. One Virginia newspaper reported that Forsyth, who was prolific in proposing amendments to the bill, had contended that the high tariff duties were merely a “boon to manufacturers.”⁵ A South Carolina newspaper, the *Telescope*, was one of several papers that carried reports of Representative Forsyth’s motion to amend the tariff bill to “reduce the duty on cottons to 20 per cent.”⁶ Forsyth’s motion was discussed, but failed by a vote of 69 to 65.⁷ Forsyth “protested also with warmth against the injustice of taxing the south to support the manufactures of the east,” the *Albany (NY) Advertiser* reported; “and yet denying to the south any security for their manufactures in return.”⁸

⁴ “New-York, April 2. *From our Correspondent*. Washington, March 20,” *Providence (RI) Gazette and Country Journal*, April 6, 1816.

⁵ “Congress,” *Alexandria (VA) Gazette, Commercial and Political*, April 5, 1816. Forsyth was often quoted in numerous newspapers including the *Georgia Journal* (Milledgeville); *Albany (NY) Advertiser*; and the *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC).

⁶ Newspapers used the words “cottons” and “woolens” in reference to cotton and wool manufactured items.

⁷ “Congress. House of Representatives. Tuesday, April, 2,” *Telescope* (Columbia, SC), April 16, 1816.

⁸ “Congress. House of Representatives. Saturday, March 23. The Tariff,” *Albany (NY) Advertiser*, April 3, 1816.

While the South maintained that it was being unjustly affected by the proposed tariff, newspaper coverage indicated there was also some northern criticism of the tariff. New York newspaper editorials covered northern concern over whether the imposition of a tariff at this time would be good for the economy or if it might damage profitable import and export businesses, especially along the Atlantic seaboard. One newspaper bluntly took issue with the proposed tariff bill and pointedly criticized the financial acumen of Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Dallas. “Mr. Dallas may understand how to make out the items of a bill of cost,” New York’s *Commercial Advertiser* declared, “but we must really suppose him ignorant of the details of the trade, when he proposes such a measure as this.”⁹ The arguments newspapers covered on the tariff’s economic ramifications are indicative of ongoing political concerns over how best to organize and regulate the country’s financial systems.

The congressional tariff debate also raised questions over the increasing involvement of federal legislation in the free market. Specifically, southerners believed the tariff was an example of how the federal government’s marketplace influence had more of a negative impact on the South than the North. “Amendments and reductions of the rates of duty have been made,” the *Georgia Journal* reported, “but the rates, particularly on cottons and woolens, remain very high, and will fall heavily on the southern states.”¹⁰ This contention that the tariffs unfairly hurt southerners would continue to appear in newspapers in the coming years, along with an escalation of political and economic tensions between the North and the South. An 1819 *Daily National Intelligencer* article noted a growing coalescence of opinion on this point among the southern states. In a vote for a reduction in the cotton tariff rate, “of all the members from the

⁹ “New Tariff,” *Commercial Advertiser* (New York, NY), March 2, 1816.

¹⁰ “From Our Correspondent,” *Georgia Journal* (Milledgeville), April 24, 1816.

five southern states, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia,” the paper noted, “only five voted against the reduction of the duty on cotton goods to twenty-five percent.”¹¹ Despite the complaints, the Tariff of 1816 eventually received fairly broad bi-partisan support. But southern concern over the federal government’s power over the states would continue to increase in the years to come, and after the Tariff of 1816’s final passage on April 27, the southern states would never again fully support such tariffs.¹²

During and after the Tariff of 1816 debate, newspapers also covered the impending admittance of Indiana and Mississippi as the newest states in the Union. As bills for the two states’ admittance were discussed, senators and representatives often added cumbersome amendments and attachments to them. Newspapers carried articles that complained about how lengthy discussions over these amendment proposals often bogged down the legislative process, a problem that would continue to plague the country’s plans for expansion.¹³ “After adopting various amendments and rejecting others,” the *Commercial Advertiser* (NY) stated, “the discussion of which consumed considerable time, the bill was got through.”¹⁴ Despite the political hijinks, newspapers show that expanding the number of states in the Union created a feeling of expectation and excitement throughout the country. One article that appeared in

¹¹ “Address of the Philadelphia Society for the Promotion of National Industry, to the Citizens of the United States,” *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC), May 26, 1819.

¹² See Eugene C. Lewis, *A History of the American Tariff, 1789-1860* (Chicago: C.H. Kerr and Co., 1896); Edward Stanwood, *American Tariff Controversies in the Nineteenth Century* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1903); and William G. Carleton, “Tariffs and the Rise of Sectionalism,” *Current History* 42, no. 250 (1962): 333-338.

¹³ “Congress. In Senate—March 29. New States,” *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington DC), March 30, 1816.

¹⁴ “House of Representatives. *Thursday, March 28. New States*,” *Commercial Advertiser* (New York, NY), April 1, 1816. This article reported on the passage of two bills enabling the people of Indiana and Mississippi to each begin the process of forming a constitution and state government to move toward admittance to the union as states. This report appeared in various other newspapers including the *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC), March 29, 1816.

several newspapers struck an optimistic, albeit somewhat cautious, tone about the country's future.

When Indiana and Maine are admitted into the Union, it will be composed of TWENTY states. If, as is probable the Mississippi territory should be divided into two, and each admitted as a state, combined for "the common defence, and general welfare." –What a sublime spectacle will our country present to the world, if our Union can be preserved! And preserved, we trust, it will be.¹⁵

Despite the excitement newspapers reported, territorial expansion brought with it some new concerns. Newspapers published articles that pondered the political ramifications of increasing the number of states and the impact the additions would have on the current legislative balance. Newspapers noted that the two bills allowing Indiana and Mississippi to organize their own governments, as a prelude to statehood, would most certainly affect the country both politically and economically. "You will see by this how rapidly the strength and influence of our councils are increasing in the South and West," the *Providence (RI) Gazette* noted, "and of course diminishing in the North."¹⁶ These changes were also reflected in the press, as one article commented on the appearance and disappearance of newspapers in the different regions. "Within a week we have received four new Newspapers from the lately uncultivated regions of the West and North—an important evidence of the progress of settlement and of social habits," a New York newspaper reported. "Papers daily multiply in the West, and expire almost as numerously in the Atlantic states for want of sustenance."¹⁷ Those states, particularly in New

¹⁵ "The Union," *Independent Chronicle* (Boston, MA), August 1, 1816; *New-Hampshire Patriot & State Gazette* (Concord), August 6, 1816; and the *Western American* (Williamsburg, OH), August 31, 1816.

¹⁶"New-York, April 2. *From our Correspondent*. Washington, March 20," *Providence (RI) Gazette and Country Journal*, April 6, 1816.

¹⁷ *National Advocate* (New York, NY) Dec. 16, 1816; also see *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC), Dec. 13, 1816.

England, that had formed the bedrock of the United States government were acutely aware that territorial and state expansion, as appealing as it might be for the country, would result in a dilution of their power. As New England's manufacturing industries were expanding, it was important for the region to have an influence on political decisions that would affect its economy. The South had the same concerns over maintaining a strong congressional voice for their agricultural interests.

Among newspaper articles concerned with the balance of power, there were also articles that carried early rumblings of the increasing sectional strife over slavery. One *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC) article stated that the country's expansion would finally bring about some answers on questions of slavery, particularly its economic and social impact. "An experiment is making in the West," the article declared, "which will shed light upon a much agitated question in Political Economy; how far domestic slavery retards or accelerates the advancement of a nation to wealth?" The *Intelligencer* article noted that the Ohio River had become a line of demarcation, with states above it forbidding slavery and states below it permitting the practice. That demarcation, the *Intelligencer* asserted, would "assist in showing the effects of servitude upon the character and manners of a people." The article predicted that the practice of slavery would mean that one region "shall have more industry, in the other more enterprize: in the one more economy, in the other more liberality. It is thus that the manners of a people are affected by it [sic] laws."¹⁸ There was also speculation that immigration to the new states and territories might be based on whether slavery was allowed. The *Intelligencer* article brought up important questions that were being raised about slavery as the country was expanding, but it did not appear to have a definitive bias for either the North or the South.

¹⁸ "Slavery," *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC), Sept. 16, 1816; and *Telescope* (Columbia, SC), Sept. 24, 1816.

Along with questions over political power and the differences emerging between the slave and non-slaveholding states, there was interest in the country's changing demographics. The *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC) published an article that covered the general rise in the United States' population. This article noted how state expansion had affected population numbers, and predicted greater increases in the coming decade. The article also commented on what these increases might mean for the Union. "If the people of the United States silence the voice of local prejudices and passions," the *Intelligencer* declared, "if they preserve this *free* government, bequeathed to us by the virtues of our fathers; and guard the *Union*...who will dare to calculate the prosperity of this western region?"¹⁹ Other newspapers particularly noted changes in the slave versus free white population in different regions of the country.²⁰ As the northern states gradually abolished slavery, and as the United States continued its westward expansion, there was an increase in both slave exportations and planter migration to lands farther to the south and west.²¹ The movement of the slave population was predicated on the individual states' agricultural industries, as cotton and sugar plantations had the greatest

¹⁹ "Population of the United States," *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC), Oct. 3, 1816.

²⁰ For census numbers see United States Bureau of Census, *Census for 1820* (Washington, DC, 1821); United States Bureau of Census, *The Seventh Census of the United States: 1850* (Washington, DC, 1853), <http://congressional.proquest.com/congressional/result/congressional/pqpdocumentview?accountid=14472&groupid=96209&pgId=d9c7fdb1-750a-49ed-b36f-ec4cfa45a147>. Total state and slave populations can also be accessed using the University of Virginia Library Historical Census Browser, <http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu/index.html>. This site allows the user to select specific years and categories to form specific tables. Also, the following website has an interactive map showing the southern state slave population in 1860. The map is from the Census of 1860 and is divided into counties. The map indicates what percentage of the total population in each county were slaves. The counties are shaded with the darkest counties having the largest percentage of slaves in the total county population, http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2010/12/10/opinion/20101210_Disunion_SlaveryMap.html?_r=0.

²¹ Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, 2-21 and 245-247. Tadman's research shows that by the early 1800s Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, North Carolina, and the District of Columbia were already net exporters of slaves. By the 1850s they had been joined by South Carolina, Kentucky, Georgia, and Tennessee. The dominating slave importation states from 1820 to 1860 were Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, Florida, and Texas. Tadman also determined that the majority of slave exportations were from domestic slave trading, as much as 69.3 percent in the 1820s. Planter migration in that period only accounted for approximately 2.91 percent of the exportations. Tadman draws similar conclusions for the 1850s.

reliance on slave labor. One newspaper, the *Maryland Gazette and Political Intelligencer* in Annapolis, questioned a previously published article that claimed the free white population was gaining on the slave population throughout the country. The paper noted that some new statistics spoke otherwise about some states. “But examine the relative increase in some of the slave states,” the article reported, “and it will be found that the balance of gain is against the whites.”²² *The Globe* (Washington, DC) published an article that also noted racial changes in the population. “It is a curious and instructive fact,” the paper noted, “that while the colored population in the slave States increases with astonishing rapidity, in the free States it increases scarcely at all.”²³ The northern states were specifically interested in the increase in the free black population. During this time numerous articles began to appear in both northern and southern newspapers that considered the idea of colonization for free blacks, preferably in a location outside of the United States.

One New York newspaper, the *National Advocate*, carried an editorial on colonization and gave its reasons for supporting such a program. The article stated:

We are perfectly of accord, that the colonization of the free blacks is a measure fraught with much good, and may be the means of preventing much evil to posterity; for every man who looks forward to the increase of this part of our population, and who considers the natural prejudice which colour creates, and the opposition it presents as regards amalgamation by intermarriage, must, consequently, consider what will be the result of this increase in fifty or a hundred years.

The article went on to agree with common suggestions that free blacks should be allowed to form colonies in their land of their origin, with Sierra Leone often considered to be an excellent

²² *Maryland Gazette and Political Intelligencer* (Annapolis), Sept. 18, 1822.

²³ *Globe* (Washington, DC), Nov. 30, 1835.

choice.²⁴ Other newspaper articles followed in this same vein, highlighting a concern over the increasing black population, free or slave. It seems clear from these newspaper articles that the North was not keen on integrating free blacks into their society. These articles lend support to eventual charges from the South that although northerners might oppose slavery, they had no intention of welcoming free blacks into their communities. Over the next few decades, newspapers would continue coverage of the increase in the country's population, especially as it pertained to differences between the free and slave states.²⁵

As 1816 came to a close, newspapers reported that Indiana had been admitted to the Union on December 11. Indiana was admitted "in conformity with the principles of the articles of compact between the original states, the *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC) noted, "and the people and states in the territory northwest of the river Ohio."²⁶ In another article, the *Intelligencer* claimed that those who "owed service" to citizens in other states would not be allowed refuge in Indiana, but this was simply reported in the text of a speech and not highlighted in an editorial.²⁷ The fact that newspapers did not make an issue of Indiana's free

²⁴ "Colonization of Free Blacks," *National Advocate* (New York, NY), Dec. 30, 1816. Also see "The Meeting of the Colonization of Free Blacks," *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC), Dec. 24, 1816; "Colonization of Free Blacks," *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC), Oct. 14, 1817; "Colonization of the Free Blacks," *Raleigh Register, and North Carolina Gazette*, Oct. 24, 1817; and "Colonization of Free Blacks," *Illinois Emigrant* (Shawnee-town), Feb. 6, 1819.

²⁵ For some examples see "Progress of Population in the Slave States and in the Free States. No. 11," *Boston (MA) Courier*, Aug. 18, 1842; "Progress of Population in the Slave States and in the Free States. No. 12," *Boston (MA) Courier*, Aug. 25, 1842; and "The Slave Population of the United States. The Past and the Future of this Country," *Pennsylvania Inquirer and National Gazette* (Philadelphia, PA), May 17, 1843.

²⁶ "Laws of the United States (By Authority) Resolution for admitting the State of Indiana into the Union," *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC), Dec. 16, 1816. The last paragraph of this resolution noted that the "state of Indiana shall be one, and is hereby declared to be one of the U.S. of America, and admitted into the union on an equal footing with the original states in all respects whatever." It was approved on Dec. 11, 1816, by James Madison.

²⁷ "Indiana. Governor Jenning's Speech to the Legislature," *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC), Nov. 25, 1816.

status would indicate that at this point the balance of power between the free and slave states had not yet become an openly volatile issue for state admission. One year later, newspapers carried reports on Mississippi's admission to the Union, on December 10, 1817.²⁸ Once again, newspapers did not specifically spell out that Mississippi entered as a slave state, thus maintaining the equal balance of slave to free states in the United States. That balance was maintained when Illinois joined the roster of free states in 1818, with Alabama following closely behind as a slave state in 1819, giving each side eleven states for a total of twenty-two. But by 1820, there was an onslaught of newspaper coverage of the contentious debate over the admittance of Maine and Missouri, which eventually resulted in the Compromise of 1820. The key issue was that if Maine and Missouri were to enter as free states, the balance of power would then shift to the northern free states, a fact that caused great consternation for the southern slave states.

Newspapers noted that the U.S. Senate began its January 1820 session with a raucous start, as the discussion over Maine's admittance as a state suddenly turned into a debate over admitting Missouri with or without an exclusion of slavery. Newspapers quickly reported on the issue and noted the high interest in the debate. "The appearance of the Senate Chamber attested the importance of the question actually depending," the *Daily National Intelligencer* noted. "Never were the galleries and lobbies more crowded. The Debate of course will be reported."²⁹ The *Baltimore Patriot & Mercantile Advertiser* (MD) reported that the "Missouri Question," as it came to be called, was the focus of so much attention that it was unlikely that any other business

²⁸ "Acts of Congress. By Authority. *Resolution for the admission of the State of Mississippi into the Union*," *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC), Dec. 12, 1817. The article included: "That the state of Mississippi shall be...admitted into the Union...December 10, 1817—Approved, JAMES MONROE."

²⁹ "Washington. Friday, January 14," *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC), Jan. 14, 1820. Also seen in the *Louisville (KY) Public Advertiser*, Jan. 29, 1820.

in Congress would be addressed.³⁰ Newspapers across the country reported the seemingly endless proposed amendments, speeches, and votes, although there appears to have been more coverage in northern newspapers. One prominent topic was the debate to join the two states' admittance together in one bill, which is what eventually occurred. Some northern newspapers reported objections to that measure, but also held out hope that it might result in slavery being excluded from both states. "We shall all be disappointed," New York's *Northern Whig* declared, "if, when the question is taken in this shape, there is not a united vote from all the Senators who live in states where slavery does not exist."³¹ Another proposition was made to try to keep separate the bills for the two states' admittance and allow each of them to be discussed individually. That proposal ultimately failed, and in the end the two states' admittance remained together in one bill.³² One Maine newspaper, the *Eastern Argus*, published an article in which it expressed its regret that the two states would have to remain on the same bill, but it also instructed the Maine delegates to move forward on the issue of statehood even if slavery were allowed in Missouri. "We say unequivocally," the *Argus* declared, "that it is the duty of our delegates to see that Maine is admitted as a member of the Union before the fourth of March. The people expect it, and will, we believe, take no excuse for the neglect." The *Argus* then attempted to assure the southern states that Maine residents had not instigated the current debate.

The *Argus* declared:

³⁰ "Washington, Jan. 14," *Baltimore (MD) Patriot & Mercantile Advertiser*, Jan. 15, 1820.

³¹ "Slavery," *Northern Whig* (Hudson, NY), Jan. 25, 1820; "Slavery," *New-York Daily Advertiser* (New York), Jan. 17, 1820; *Salem (MA) Gazette*, Jan. 21, 1820; and "Resolutions on Slavery," *Poulson's American Daily Advertiser* (Philadelphia, PA), Jan. 22, 1820.

³² "Congressional Proceedings. Friday, January 14. IN SENATE," *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC), Jan. 15, 1820.

One word more. If our brethren of the South feel some degree of irritation on account of the clamor that has been raised in the Eastern states during the last summer, it ought to be remembered that this clamor was not raised in Maine, nor has it been encouraged here. An attempt was made by a few busy meddling persons to call meetings in different parts of the State, but they have been uniformly discouraged.³³

To the consternation of Maine's newspapers, the statehood debate had definitely taken on a sectional tone focused on the expansion of slavery, which they feared would hinder Maine's quest to become a state.

Rhode Island's *Providence Patriot, Columbian Phenix* newspaper gave an indication of the regional division when it printed a Senate vote on a motion to separate the admittance bills for Maine and Missouri. The article reported the votes from each state and used a star to denote slaveholding states and a dagger to denote non-slaveholding states.³⁴ An *Eastern Argus* (ME) article argued against the assertion that those who did not favor a slavery restriction for Missouri were therefore "favorers of slavery." Although the *Argus* directly addressed the issue of slavery and defined it as a "moral and political evil," its judgment was qualified. The *Argus* stated that any ideas that promoted immediate freedom for slaves would be met with resistance "No man in his senses thinks of emancipation," the paper declared. "All agree that it would be ruinous both to the master and slave." The article also pointed out that allowing slavery in Missouri only meant the transfer of slaves within the United States from one state or territory to another, not bringing in new slaves from other countries. Therefore, the *Argus* argued that the question of slavery in Missouri should not be a stumbling block for Maine's statehood, as it only applied to

³³ "Washington, 3rd Jan. 1820," *Eastern Argus* (Portland, ME), Jan. 11, 1820.

³⁴ "Maine And Missouri," *Providence (RI) Patriot, Columbian Phenix*, Jan. 26, 1820.

slaves already in the United States.³⁵ The *Argus* was willing to take a stand against slavery, unless, of course, it interfered with Maine's effort for statehood.

Other newspapers framed the slavery issue as a question of congressional authority over the states. Rhode Island's *Providence Patriot, Columbian Phenix* did so as follows:

There are many good and wise men, sincerely opposed to negro slavery, who doubt the constitutional power of Congress to restrict the States on this subject, and there are others, equally conscientious, who positively deny to Congress the authority, which other good and wise men contend they possess.³⁶

Other newspapers called into question Congress's authority to dictate the terms of a state's constitution in reference to property. The *Louisville (KY) Public Advertiser* stated that by proposing the slavery restriction for Missouri, Congress was taking a stand that would divest Missouri's citizens of their rightfully owned property. The paper concluded that "it would be truly mortifying to a people constitutionally entitled to the privilege of managing their own local affairs to be informed by Congress, that they *must* relinquish a considerable portion of their wealth and make *a concession never before exacted...*"³⁷ Control over property, particularly slaves, would become a key component of political debate in the coming years.

Newspapers soon reported that the Senate had voted that Congress did not have the right to restrict slavery in Missouri as a condition of its admittance. As a sign of the importance of this question, every member of the Senate, save one, was present for the vote.³⁸ Prior to the vote,

³⁵ "The Missouri Question," *Eastern Argus* (Portland, ME), Feb. 29, 1820.

³⁶ "Maine and Missouri," *Providence Patriot, Columbian Phenix* (RI), Jan. 22, 1820.

³⁷ "Missouri Question," *Louisville Public Advertiser*, Feb. 2, 1820.

³⁸ "The Missouri Question," *Daily National Intelligencer*, Feb. 2, 1820. Also see *Providence (RI) Patriot, Columbian Phenix*, Feb. 9, 1820; *Baltimore (MD) Patriot & Mercantile Advertiser*, Feb. 3, 1820;

newspapers reported on the speeches given throughout the debate. The *New-York Spectator* said:

On Monday, Mr. Barbour, of Virginia, spoke more than three hours, in the Senate, against the proposed restriction; . . . in the House of Representatives, Mr. Smyth, of Virginia, consumed five hours, in finishing the speech which he had commenced on Friday. If each member of the House is to utter a Speech of this intolerable length, the question of extending and rivetting [sp] the shackles of oppression and Slavery will probably be decided on or about the day of the next Anniversary of the Rights and Liberties of our Country.³⁹

The Senate's amendment to strike the slavery restriction then went to the House of Representatives, and newspapers soon reported on the continued debate in that legislative body. Finally, though, the political maneuverings ended and several newspapers ran articles that carried the headline "The Question Settled."⁴⁰ Maine would be admitted and then Missouri would follow without a slavery restriction, but slavery would be prohibited in all other parts of the Louisiana territory north of the 36° 30' north parallel.

Newspapers such as the *New-Hampshire Patriot and State Gazette* were pleased with the outcome of what came to be known as the Missouri Compromise. "The whole affair, however, is now happily settled, and we only advert to it as preliminary to a few observations on the late session of Congress," the *Gazette* declared. "During that congress, also, two stars, Maine and Missouri (one east, the other west,) have been added to our glorious constellation; and, in admitting one of them, has been decided, happily decided, the most dangerous question that has ever arisen in the republic."⁴¹ In Virginia, the *Alexandria Gazette* congratulated everyone that the

³⁹ "Debate on the Missouri Question," *New-York Spectator* (New York, NY), Feb. 4, 1820.

⁴⁰ "The Question Settled," *Savannah (GA) Republican*, March 11, 1820; Also see the following: *Supporter* (Chillicothe, OH), March 15, 1820; *Halycon and Tombeckbe Public Advertiser* (St. Stephens, AL), April 3, 1820; and *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC), March 3, 1820.

⁴¹ "Miscellany. From the National Intelligencer," *New-Hampshire Patriot and State Gazette* (Concord), March 26, 1821.

question was settled, and that it now only needed the signature of the president. “The few days past have been a trying time in Congress,” the paper stated, “but the trial is past, and we look now for harmony and conciliation on all sides.”⁴² Harmony and conciliation, however, were not at hand everywhere.

Newspapers such as Missouri’s *St. Louis Enquirer* were quick to report their unhappiness with the Compromise. As Maine’s admission to statehood approached, an *Enquirer* article railed against what it called the “designs of the north” to lead the way toward greater power over the country west of the Mississippi. The article asserted that the issue of slavery was simply being used by northern states to gain control of the new territories. “New York is making *rapid strides* towards that power which is to give law to the Union,” the *Enquirer* declared, “and control over the great country west of the Mississippi, is no small part of her plan.”⁴³ In South Carolina, the *Camden Gazette* presciently noted that the slavery issue would arise again in future debates over states and territories. “If they do, the question now depending in respect to Missouri will then recur,” the paper predicted, “and it will be time enough then to settle it, sufficient for the day is the evil thereof.”⁴⁴ These newspapers show how the Missouri Compromise would be the focus of debate for years to come, as would many other legislative actions on slavery and the territories.

News of Maine’s admittance as a state on March 15 was published in papers across the country.⁴⁵ The *St. Louis Enquirer* noted that in spite of its charges against the North, it did not

⁴² “By last Evening’s Mail. Washington, March 3. The Question Settled,” *Alexandria (VA) Gazette*, March 4, 1820.

⁴³ “Missouri Question,” *St. Louis (MO) Enquirer*, March 4, 1820.

⁴⁴ “Washington, Feb. 28,” *Camden (SC) Gazette*, March 9, 1820.

⁴⁵ See *Supporter* (Chillicothe, OH), March 15, 1820; *Louisville (KY) Public Advertiser*, March 22, 1820; *Scioto Gazette and Fredonian Chronicle* (Chillicothe, OH), March 23, 1820; *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC), March 24, 1820; and the *Raleigh Register, and North-Carolina Gazette* (NC), March 24, 1820.

carry a grudge against Maine. The paper touted the mutual dependence of the states and the future economic benefits the new states would soon provide. The article did note the contentious argument surrounding the two states' admittance, but stated that it was gratifying for the people of Missouri to see the "conduct of the people of Maine, who entirely refused, during the late northern excitement, to hold any meetings for dictating a constitution to the Missouri people."⁴⁶

Missourians might not have been so gratified had they read an article from the *Eastern Argus* printed in the *Daily National Intelligencer*. The *Argus* made it clear that Maine's primary objective was statehood and that the region had strategically set aside its feelings concerning the expansion of slavery, but only for the moment. "However earnest we may feel to prevent southern planters from emigrating with their slaves to Missouri," the *Argus* asked, "was it politic to hazard every thing for the purpose of gaining perhaps nothing?" The article added that the compromise that was finally reached would help prevent a firmer establishment of slavery beyond the current limits.⁴⁷ As these newspapers implied, even if the compromise had stayed the arguments, it was only for a short while.

On May 30, 1820, Connecticut Governor Oliver Wolcott gave a speech before the General Assembly of Connecticut, and several newspapers carried the text. Wolcott's remarks were prompted by the debate over Missouri and Virginia's formal declaration that Congress had no right to prohibit slavery as a condition of a new state being admitted into the Union. In his remarks, Wolcott stated the following:

⁴⁶ "Maine and Missouri," *St. Louis (MO) Enquirer*, April 8, 1820.

⁴⁷ "From the Eastern Argus of the 14th Inst.," *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC), March 24, 1820.

Congress is fully authorized to inhibit the further diffusion of slavery, and ... to permit it to be established in the territories or districts which have been or may hereafter be acquired, would in effect operate as an indefinite suspension if not a perpetual exclusion of the rights which appertain to the free agriculturalists of the United States.⁴⁸

As might be expected, Wolcott's remarks did not go unnoticed by Virginians, and newspapers reported that the *Richmond (VA) Enquirer's* editor responded quickly to Wolcott's words. "We do not, (says this editor) think it very respectful to the *Legislature* of a sister state, for the *Governor* of another state to submit a long and laborious protest against their proceedings," the *Enquirer* said.⁴⁹

At the same time, the *Daily National Intelligencer* carried an article taken from the *Missourian* that pointed out the fruitlessness of the slavery debate and hoped that the recent political turmoil would "inculcate among our United States a more forbearing and forgiving spirit." It stressed the hope that the "vessel of state has outlived the storm, and never may the angry waves of party, again dash against her sides with so much fury."⁵⁰ Other newspapers were decidedly more cautious about the future course of such debate. "[I]f ever our Union be dismembered," the *New-Bedford (MA) Mercury* stated prophetically, the two leading causes of that catastrophe will be, expansion of territory and slavery."⁵¹ The next conflict on the country's horizon would come in the form of another tariff and its effect on regional economics.

⁴⁸ "National Politics. Governor Wolcott's Speech," *National Gazette and Literary Register* (Philadelphia, PA), May 13, 1820.

⁴⁹ "Missouri," *Commercial Advertiser* (New York, NY), May 23, 1820.

⁵⁰ "Missouri Resolution," *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC), May 23, 1821.

⁵¹ "Free Government," *New-Bedford (MA) Mercury*, December 24, 1824.

The ever-increasing divisions that had begun to separate the North and the South became more apparent as newspapers covered the Tariff of 1828. This Tariff, sometimes called the Tariff of Abominations, was a protectionist tariff that increased the duties on foreign goods. The South did not produce many of the goods included in the tariff and it would be costly for southerners. So, not surprisingly, the tariff solidified southerners' anger toward what they considered to be the federal government's continued meddling in their business affairs.⁵² The tariff also met some resistance in the North, and newspapers reported that some New England states supported the South's position against the new duties. The *Salem (MA) Gazette* worried that the new tariff duties would adversely affect those whose livelihood depended upon the shipping and importing businesses that thrived along the coast. "The Tariff law is a monster that must be destroyed, or it will destroy the Union," the *Gazette* stated. "It is oppression to the South; it is unjust to a majority of the North; it is ruining the merchant and the shipping interest: it is indeed, an act of 'abominations.'"⁵³ Even such strong language from northern newspapers would not be enough to stop the tariff's passage, and Congress gave its final approval for the tariff on May 19, 1828. After its passage, northern newspapers often reported that many of the tariff's opponents' concerns had been alleviated. "In the shape in which the bill has been returned from the Senate, (says the National Journal)," the *Delaware Weekly Advertiser and Farmer's Journal* stated, "many of the objections which originally existed against its passage have been removed." In a sentence that might have been directed toward the South, the paper added that "the measure has assumed a character which will make it much more agreeable to those interests which mostly

⁵² "Mr. Webster's Speech on the Tariff," *Portsmouth (NH) Journal of Literature and Politics*, May 31, 1828. See Robert V. Remini, "Martin Van Buren and the Tariff of Abominations," *American Historical Review* 63, no. 4 (July 1958): 903-917.

⁵³ "Communication," *Salem (MA) Gazette*, June 20, 1828.

needed the protecting arm of the Government.”⁵⁴ The arguments were beginning to turn on which region contributed the most to the Union and had the most favorable impact on its economic well being. Northern newspapers often noted that one importance of the tariff was that it was needed for the furtherance of manufacturing in the United States, which would improve the county’s economic outlook. The *New Hampshire Statesman and Concord Register*, which had been critical of some of the tariff’s original provisions, noted that the act’s final revision “should afford additional protection to the manufacturing interests of the country.” The paper then went on to make a rather optimistic claim about future relations between the regions:

The North and the South are mutually dependent on a frequent and free interchange of the products and commodities of their respective sections of country—and by the encouragement and extension of manufactories, will become more and more so. The chain of their union will thus happily be brightened, and rendered more firm and durable.⁵⁵

Numerous southern newspapers reported on the region’s overwhelmingly negative reaction to the tariff. The tariff’s protective duties meant that it would be more expensive for foreign countries to sell their goods in the United States. As a result, countries such as Britain would have financial difficulties that would affect their ability to purchase the South’s crops, such as cotton. Southerners feared that countries that purchased southern crops would simply buy them elsewhere. The end result was that the South would be hit especially hard, as it would pay higher prices for manufactured goods while at the same time experience difficulty in selling its staple crops. An example of the hostile feelings toward the tariff can be found in Georgia’s *Macon Weekly Telegraph*, which covered an anti-tariff meeting in Houston County. The

⁵⁴ *Delaware Weekly Advertiser and Farmer’s Journal* (Wilmington), May 22, 1828.

⁵⁵ “The Tariff Bill,” *New-Hampshire Statesman and Concord Register*, May 31, 1828.

language was unequivocal, its tone one that would be duplicated in newspapers for many years to come. The paper declared:

But the evil stops not yet. Besides the destruction of our commerce, the law of which we complain has a tendency to weaken the bond of our union, and to alienate one portion of our beloved country from another. In fact so fruitful is it of evils that we may almost exclaim, "With what evil is it not fraught?" –The Constitution is trampled upon! One portion of our country made to cower before the other! and an universal dissatisfaction and distrust pervading the republic from Maine to Georgia? Of what sin, moral or political are we guilty when we raise our voices against a law so unjust, unequal, and oppressive?⁵⁶

Newspapers often restated the southern states' belief that such tariffs favored industrial economies over agrarian interests, and, by extension, created an economic advantage for the northern states. It was a conviction that only served to bolster the South's argument that the North and its politicians had every intention of crippling the South economically, thereby diminishing its political power. As these debates continued, newspaper articles occasionally noted slavery's impact on the South and its agrarian practices. In response to the South's position, the *New-Hampshire Sentinel* printed a letter that rejected southern complaints against tariffs and northern policies. The writer claimed to have resided for a time in the South and scoffed at the region's assertions that "their brethren at the north are growing rich at their expense." The writer said the "people of the South are fast coming to ruin" and stated:

[T]hey can justly blame none but themselves and their fathers. It is well known to most of your readers that the people of the South are almost exclusively planters, and thus for various reasons the agricultural interest must be paramount to every other, but with their miserable management, and manner of cultivating their lands, they are probably not so well acquainted. It is here, in connexion [sic] with the System of Slavery, the primary and moving cause, that we are to look, for the grand secret, the source of all the misery complained of.

⁵⁶ "Houston Anti-Tariff Meeting," *Macon (GA) Weekly Telegraph*, Sept. 22, 1828.

The writer went on to note, though, that although northerners deplored slavery, they had come to regard it as an evil “they can neither remedy or avert.”⁵⁷

In the increasingly antagonistic sectional debate, South Carolina soon began to lead the way under the direction of its prominent and vocal politician John C. Calhoun, who would run for vice-president on the Jackson presidential ticket. Calhoun had rightly earned his reputation as a persuasive and powerful speaker, and his words garnered a great deal of attention in newspapers throughout the nation. As the presidential election loomed, his positions were often debated extensively. “There are many objections against him—his loose principles about the constructive powers of Congress—his hostility to the tariff,” said one New York newspaper.⁵⁸ Clearly, Calhoun was not alone in his harsh opinion of the tariffs, but most of the other southern states were hesitant to consider some of Calhoun’s more strident steps such as nullification, accompanied by hints of secession. One other state, though, did appear to be eager to join in the fray. Georgia, which had previously nullified several federal laws and treaties that were concerned with the Cherokee nation, without any penalty, began to rival some of South Carolina’s rhetoric. The full text of Georgia Governor John Forsyth’s Address to the Legislature was printed in the *Macon Telegraph* on November 9, 1828, and it included his thoughts on the Tariff:

⁵⁷ Y.Z., “For the N.H. Sentinel,” *New-Hampshire Sentinel* (Keene), June 13, 1828.

⁵⁸“From the N.Y. American. Mr. Calhoun,” *Watch-Tower* (Cooperstown, NY), May 12, 1828. For further background see Anne Ward Marcher, “Myths and Consequences: Calhoun and Some Nashville Agrarians,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 59, no. 2 (Spring 1960): 251-264. Marcher examined the writings of Allen Tate and Andrew Nelson Lytle, members of a group known as the Vanderbilt Agrarians, to show that their work had continuing influence on the image of John C. Calhoun as a southern politician who believed in the merits of a feudalistic system in American society.

I have the very irksome task to perform, of remarking upon an act passed at the last Congress—the Tariff of 1828—an act which has filled the whole Southern country with resentment and dismay. The wishes, the remonstrances of the people and their Legislatures in the Southern States have been disregarded, the interests of a whole section of the Union recklessly sacrificed for the benefit of a class of persons recently sprung up among us, to whom grant after grant of special favors has been improvidently made since the close of the last war.⁵⁹

Doubtless, Forsyth spoke for many southerners who believed their interests were being ignored while the North's burgeoning industrial sector was receiving preferential treatment.⁶⁰

These economic concerns would come front and center as newspapers began to cover the upcoming presidential election. Opinion in newspaper articles ran the gamut from staunch support to derision of the Jackson and Calhoun ticket. One New York newspaper article derisively referred to the Democratic ticket as Farmer Jackson and Farmer Calhoun and ridiculed the Democratic nominees. "Farmer Calhoun's plantation in South Carolina, yields him cotton and corn," the *Utica (NY) Sentinel* stated. "It is supposed Farmer Jackson has not as many slaves as Farmer Calhoun, but Farmer Jackson has more land."⁶¹ The *New Orleans Argus* supported Jackson and Calhoun, but carried a letter signed by "A Pennsylvanian" in order to make southerners aware of the North's stance on the election and northerners' reactions to the repeated threats of nullification and secession. "We must not permit the slaveholding State," the article declared, "to presume that we fear their threat of a dissolution of the Union."⁶² In contrast, southern newspapers offered glowing tributes to the ticket, such as the *Richmond (VA) Enquirer*

⁵⁹ "Governor's Message," *Macon (GA) Telegraph*, November 9, 1828. Also published as *Macon Weekly Telegraph*.

⁶⁰ See John George Van Deusen, *Economic Bases of Disunion in South Carolina* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1928).

⁶¹ "Farmer Jackson & Farmer Calhoun," *Utica (NY) Sentinel*, Aug. 23, 1828.

⁶² A Pennsylvanian, "From the Democratic Press. Pennsylvania," *New Orleans (LA) Argus*, Sept. 5, 1828.

that referred to Calhoun as “a distinguished and meritorious public servant, a republican in principle and practice.”⁶³

With more than fifty-six percent of the popular vote, Jackson and Calhoun were elected in 1828, and many southerners felt certain the tariff would be repealed, or at least modified. Jackson, however, failed to fulfill the South’s wishes. Newspapers covered the heated battle that followed as Calhoun and the southern states were furious at the President’s inaction. “Speaking of the tone held by some warm blooded folks in the South,” a Baltimore, Maryland, newspaper declared, “in regard to nullification and the tariff, the *New England Review* says: ‘such men (as the nullifiers) are not to be reasoned with.’”⁶⁴ Jackson ultimately offered his last-minute Tariff of 1832 to appease Calhoun and his southern cohorts, but it did little, if anything, to quell the dispute. In an article titled “The Tariff,” the *Richmond (VA) Enquirer* commented on the recurring tariff proposals. “Our readers are doubtless similarly affected with ourselves,” the paper stated, “at the never ending recurrence of the above ill-omened title. It is indeed the APPLE OF DISCORD.”⁶⁵

In response to Jackson’s attempt to compromise, South Carolina stood firm and passed its Nullification Ordinance in November 1832, nullifying both the Tariff of 1828 and the Tariff of 1832. Northern newspapers railed against South Carolina’s actions, and a strongly-worded *Boston (MA) Post* editorial in support of Andrew Jackson’s reelection in 1832 summed up many of their sentiments. *The Pittsfield (MA) Sun* published the editorial, which included the following:

⁶³ “Republican State Convention,” *Richmond (VA) Enquirer*, Oct. 21, 1828.

⁶⁴ “A Fight,” *Baltimore (MD) Patriot & Mercantile Advertiser*, June 11, 1830.

⁶⁵ “The Tariff,” *Richmond (VA) Enquirer*, July 3, 1832.

If Nullification succeeds, the American System will be broken in pieces—the manufactures which depend on the tariff for life will cease to exist—rebellion will stalk abroad in the land—and a dissolution of the Union, which has always been the wish of the leading men in opposition to the North, is likely to follow....The only safety for the country and its institutions—for the union and our freedom—for the industry and commerce of the country, is in the re-election of ANDREW JACKSON.⁶⁶

The Nullification Crisis, as it came to be called, continued even as an angry Jackson issued his defiant “Proclamation to the People of South Carolina Regarding Nullification.”⁶⁷ Calhoun’s relationship with Jackson became so acrimonious that the vice-president submitted his resignation on December 28, 1832, which enabled him to take a seat in the United States Senate, a fact that many northern newspapers found incongruous. “The Hon. J. C. Calhoun has taken his seat in the Senate, and has sworn to *support* the Constitution of the United States,” the *Salem* (MA) *Gazette* reported. “What will men *not* swear to, to get into office?”⁶⁸ Even though a compromise was eventually worked out in 1833, with the help of Kentucky Senator Henry Clay,

⁶⁶ “Nullification,” *Pittsfield* (MA) *Sun*, Nov. 8, 1832. For further study of the Nullification Crisis in South Carolina, see Erika Pribanic-Smith, “Sowing the Seeds of Disunion: South Carolina’s Partisan Newspapers and the Nullification Crisis, 1828—1833” (PhD diss., The University of Alabama, 2010). In Proquest Dissertations & Theses @ University of Alabama, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/757699097?accountid=14472>; Joshua Cain, “‘We will Strike at the Head and Demolish the Monster’: The Impact of Joel R. Poinsett’s Correspondence on President Andrew Jackson during the Nullification Crisis, 1832-1833,” *Proceedings of The South Carolina Historical Association* (May 2011): 13-26. *America: History and Life with Full Text*, EBSCOhost; Richard E. Ellis, *The Union at Risk: Jacksonian Democracy, States’ Rights, and the Nullification Crisis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); William W. Freehling, *Prelude to Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); and Donald J. Ratcliffe, “The Nullification Crisis, Southern Discontents, and the American Political Process,” *American Nineteenth Century History* 1, no. 2 (Summer 2000): 1-30.

⁶⁷ “Proclamation by Andrew Jackson, President of the United States,” *Eastern Argus* (Portland, ME), Dec. 18, 1832; Also in numerous other papers such as *Vermont Gazette* (Bennington), Dec. 18, 1832; *Fayetteville* (NC) *Observer* (published as *Carolina Observer*), Dec. 18, 1832; *Pittsfield* (MA) *Sun*, Dec. 20, 1832; and *Macon* (GA) *Weekly Telegraph* (published as *Georgia Telegraph*), Dec. 26, 1832. The proclamation was published in full in Harrisburg, PA, by Singerly & Myers, 1864.

⁶⁸ *Salem* (MA) *Gazette*, Jan. 11, 1833. While still vice-president, Calhoun had campaigned for, and won, an election for the South Carolina U.S. Senate seat being vacated by Robert Hayne, who had won the South Carolina Governor’s election. Calhoun resigned the vice-presidency on December 28, 1832, and assumed the Senate seat the very next day.

it was an uneasy truce. “The success of this measure proved to be equal to its boldness,” stated a letter to the *Richmond (VA) Enquirer*.⁶⁹ South Carolina’s Nullification Crisis may have been resolved, but the issues that had been raised during the crisis would affect the political landscape for years to come.⁷⁰

Considering the turmoil during this period, it is not surprising that the Jacksonian era is often credited with laying the groundwork for much of the political dissension that would continue to escalate over the ensuing decades. Opposition to the Jacksonian Democrats’ philosophy resulted in the Whig Party’s appearance on the national political stage. Whigs quickly defined themselves as advocates for a government that gave more power to Congress than to the executive branch, and they also supported a protectionist agenda, which included stronger tariffs. Their positions were often referred to as “Whiggery” in newspaper articles of the day.⁷¹ The Whigs would continue to gain prominence, and in 1842 they were successful in the

⁶⁹“For the Enquirer,” *Richmond (VA) Enquirer*, April 23, 1833. Although Clay’s compromise was accepted, there was still debate over its merit. Clay was lauded in the North for his political acumen and statesmanship, and, encouraged by President Jackson, Congress passed the Force Bill and the Compromise Tariff. South Carolina responded by repealing the Nullification Ordinance, while simultaneously nullifying the Force Bill, simply as a matter of principle. For further study, see Merrill D. Peterson, *Olive Branch and Sword: The Compromise of 1833* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982).

⁷⁰ For further study of the the tariffs and the Nullification Crisis, see David Schroeder, “Nullification in South Carolina: A Revisitation” (PhD diss., The University of Alabama, 1999). In Proquest Dissertations & Theses @ University of Alabama, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/304519626?accountid=14472>. Schroeder asserts that the Nullifiers’ position was primarily based on opposition to the protective tariff, and not on the issue of slavery, as some historians have stated. Also, see J. P. Ochenkowski, “The Origins of Nullification in South Carolina,” *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 83, no. 2 (1982): 121-153. For a narrower view focused on Charleston, see Jane H. Pease and William H. Pease, “The Economics and Politics of Charleston’s Nullification Crisis,” *The Journal of Southern History* 47, no. 3 (Aug. 1981): 335-362. For the effect of Federalism, see George C. Rogers, Jr., “South Carolina Federalists and the Origins of the Nullification Movement,” *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 101, no. 1 (Jan. 2000): 53-67. A broader view of the political effect of the crisis can be examined in Donald J. Ratcliffe, “The Nullification Crisis, Southern Discontents, and the American Political Process,” in *American Nineteenth Century History* 1, no. 2 (Summer 2000): 1-30.

⁷¹ Lawrence Frederick Kohl, *The Politics of Individualism: Parties and the American Character in the Jacksonian Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989). Kohl studied newspapers of the period to examine the increasing divide between the Democrats and those who supported the Whig party’s ideology.

adoption of the Tariff of 1842, also known as the Black Tariff. In essence, the Black Tariff doubled tariff rates, with the end result being a decline in both imports and exports. The Whigs were not without opposition, though, and often clashed with the Locofocos, a faction of the Democratic Party whose members were strong proponents of free trade. During this period, Locofocos could be found in both the northern and southern states. In 1844, the Whigs' political fortunes worsened when Democrat James K. Polk defeated Whig candidate Henry Clay for the presidency.

Shortly after his election, Polk began to push for the Walker Tariff, which would substantially lower rates, much to the consternation of the Whigs and others who agreed with a more protectionist agenda. The tariff was named after Robert J. Walker, a former U.S. Senator from Mississippi, who was now Polk's Secretary of the Treasury. Northern newspapers, especially Whig partisan papers, quickly registered their disapproval. Articles such as "Sir Robert Walker's Mongrel Tariff Bill," which was published in the Whig paper the *Boston* (MA) *Daily Atlas*, appeared with frequency.⁷² The *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC), which also leaned toward the Whig party during this period, pronounced the tariff to be "more unjust to the manufacturers than could have been expected by the most ultra free-traders."⁷³ Once again there was a national debate over a tariff, but this time it was those who supported northern manufacturers who were the most displeased with the proposed tariff and its economic effects.

The *Morning News* in Connecticut, which supported the Whigs and the Black Tariff, accused those who favored the Walker Tariff of holding opinions on the tariffs, based on their

⁷² "Sir Robert Walker's Mongrel Tariff Bill," *Boston* (MA) *Daily Atlas*, March 10, 1846. Also see "Mr. Walker's Revenge Tariff," *Milwaukee* (WI) *Sentinel and Gazette*, March 13, 1846.

⁷³ *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC), March 12, 1846.

own special interests. The paper published the following:

J.M. Wadsworth, a Locofoco candidate for Congress in Mr. Slidell's District in Louisiana, gives his creed on the Tariff in a very laconic form, thus—'*I am opposed to the Tariff, but I am NOT opposed to the Duty on Sugar.*' This is worth whole columns of Virginia abstractions, which are only meant to *sugar over* what is here so frankly avowed.⁷⁴

The Locofocos, in line with their free trade agenda, were mostly in favor of the Walker Tariff's lower rates. Against the Whigs' strident opposition, President Polk signed the Walker Tariff into law in 1846. Despite Whig claims to the contrary, the Walker Tariff's lower rates did increase trade, which thereby increased revenue above the previous years under the Black Tariff. The Walker Tariff would remain in effect, with some modifications, until the adoption of the Morrill Tariff in 1861, which reinstated higher tariff rates at the beginning of the Civil War.

Throughout the early decades of the 1800s, newspaper coverage of the ongoing debates over tariffs and the expansion of the United States reflected the social, economic, and political climate in the country. Newspaper articles indicate that at the core of these debates was the struggle for political and economic power, and that the division was becoming increasingly regional, pitting the North against the South. Southerners believed the tariffs prior to the Walker Tariff were aimed at damaging their agrarian economy in favor of northern manufacturing, and newspaper reports of northern criticism of the Walker Tariff as being anti-manufacturing would appear to support the South's position. The South also began to be on the defensive as the admittance of new states had brought the issue of slavery into the discussion. On into the 1840s, though, that topic still remained more of a political and economic argument, rather than a moral one. Newspapers show that the country had become acutely aware of the precarious political

⁷⁴ "Anti-Tariff Creed of the South," *Morning News* (New London, CT), January 8, 1846.

power that hung in the balance of free and slave states, and as the nation's boundaries moved toward Texas and California that balance would continue to be threatened.

CHAPTER III

TERRITORIAL EXPANSION AND THE SLAVERY QUESTION

The United States' territorial expansion continued its frantic pace in the 1840s. The lure of new lands, the desire to spread Christianity, and the prospect of new wealth, had already led thousands of Americans to cross over the country's boundaries to the south and the west. Settlers brought their possessions with them, and for southern planters that meant bringing along their slaves. The contentious question of whether to allow slavery in these territories and future states arose with greater frequency and urgency. The legislative debate exploded in 1846 when a little-known U.S. Representative from Pennsylvania, Democrat David Wilmot, made a proposal that reverberated throughout the country and ensured that territorial and new state debates would henceforth divide the North and South along slavery expansion lines.

After winning the presidential election in 1845, James K. Polk quickly found the "Oregon Question" waiting to be answered. The United States, urged on by Democratic Party leadership, had been working since at least 1843 to establish an Oregon boundary with Britain that would extend the U.S. farther north than the border established in the Treaty of 1818.⁷⁵ In December

⁷⁵ Examples of some of the newspaper articles are as follows: "The Oregon Question," *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC), March 21, 1843; "Washington, January 9," *Weekly Raleigh Register, and North Carolina Gazette*, Jan. 12, 1844; *Fayetteville (NC) Observer*, Jan. 17, 1844; "The Oregon Negotiation," *Augusta*

1845, John O’Sullivan, a columnist with the *New York Morning News*, wrote an article in which he gave his opinion that it was the United States’ God-given destiny to expand into the far reaches of North America. Sullivan’s idea of Manifest Destiny was widely reported in newspapers and it rapidly became a principal foundation for the United States’ plans for territorial expansion.⁷⁶ The *New Hampshire Sentinel* was one of several newspapers that published articles that advocated Sullivan’s vision for the country’s future. The *Sentinel* was similar to many and stated:

The New York Morning News asks no better title to Oregon, up to 54, 40, than the “right of our manifest *destiny*, to overspread and to *possess the whole of the continent*, which Providence has given for the development of the great experiment of liberty and federative self-government intrusted to us.” Possibly other nations may object to such an anti-rent, *brigand* principle—i.e. if they *an’t* [sic] *afraid*.⁷⁷

Early on, the negotiations over the Oregon boundary became tense between Britain and the Polk administration as Democratic Congressional leaders put pressure on the President to insist on the 54° 40’ parallel north as the boundary line. This line was farther north than Britain had previously considered being willing to cede, but Polk and Congress forged ahead with the difficult and tense negotiations.

Americans were concerned that the boundary argument with Britain had the potential to lead to a military conflict at the same time the United States was entering into a war with Mexico over Texas, and newspapers printed several lengthy congressional speeches on the expansion

(GA) *Chronicle*, May 21, 1845; and “From the Washington Union. Oregon. The Debate in Parliament,” *New-Hampshire Patriot* (Concord), May 29, 1845, also published as *New-Hampshire Patriot and State Gazette*.

⁷⁶ Steven E. Woodworth, *Manifest Destinies: America’s Westward Expansion and the Road to the Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010).

⁷⁷ “Unnatural Murder!” *New Hampshire Sentinel* (Keene), Jan. 7, 1846.

issue. The *Augusta (GA) Chronicle* carried one by Georgia Representative Robert Toombs. In his speech, Toombs made reference to Terminus, the Roman god of boundaries, as follows:

Our American god Terminus is somewhat different from the Roman. He has legs; yes, sir, and long ones, too; and he is likely to give us a good deal of trouble. Like the spirit of Democracy, he is progressive and aggressive. He seems to claim under the new and boundless title of “manifest destiny.” He follows the pioneer and the hunter, and his tracts all point outward; he never retreats. Wherever he has a pretension of claim, he holds his title to be “clear and unquestionable.” Let us fix his location quickly and firmly, or this war of opinion, this war of systems, to which gentlemen have referred, may come upon us before we are ready for it.⁷⁸

Newspapers also reported that the political discussion over adding new territory to the United States had raised serious questions over the expansion of slavery.

Although Oregon’s climate was such that cotton and other southern crops would have difficulty thriving in the region, southern states were still concerned about the political implications of admitting a state without slavery. Newspapers reported that northern states were angered that they had worked with the southern states on obtaining Texas land in the belief that the South would not make trouble in Oregon. Now, though, it appeared the South had reneged on that understanding. Massachusetts’ *Berkshire County Whig* said the South had “log-rolled” for Oregon only to gain the North’s support for the acquisition of Texas, and then had backed off supporting the Oregon territory without slavery. “The South has no interest in acquiring or retaining Northern territory,” the paper stated, “where slavery is converted into freedom by the transforming influence of the climate and the soil.”⁷⁹ The *Augusta (GA) Chronicle* carried an

⁷⁸ “Speech of Mr. Toombs, of Georgia, on the Oregon Question. Delivered in the House of Representatives, January 12, 1846,” *Augusta (GA) Chronicle*, Feb. 19, 1846.

⁷⁹ “Pittsfield. Thursday, January 22, 1846,” *Berkshire County Whig* (Pittsfield, MA), Jan. 22, 1846. Also see “Recklessness of Assertion,” *New-Hampshire Patriot* (Concord, NH), also published as *New-Hampshire Patriot and State Gazette*, Feb. 26, 1846.

article that complained about the North's accusations and, to show southerners what northerners were saying, the article included an *Ohio Sentinel* quotation.⁸⁰ "The slaveholding South deserve to be lashed around the world with a whip of scorpions," the *Sentinel* quotation stated. "They care not a fig for Oregon, since they recently acquired additional slave territory at the South, and will in a moment kiss the paw of the British lion!" The *Chronicle* article then concluded, "Such are the sentiments of the Northern 'allies'"⁸¹

As words flew, even the London press weighed in on the argument, especially since there were U.S. threats of war with England over the Oregon boundary. The *New Hampshire Sentinel* reprinted a poem with the byline "London Punch" and noted that the author had the privilege of abusing "everybody, at home as well as abroad." The poem, *Washington War-Cry*, which was written as though from an American's point of view, was a pointed criticism of American expansion and southern slaveholders' influence. The poem's text included the following:

Raise high the shout of warfare, E'en now proud England cowers,
As Washington upon her head, Scorn and saliva showers. . . .
The favored race of freedom, Are not men to flinch
For the spread of sacred slavery, And the blessed law of Lynch.
IT [sic] is not in down-trod England, As in this happy land,
Where each man wops his niggers, And none may hold his hand; . . .
Democracy wants elbow-room, To put its branches forth;
Our South is cramped by Mexico, By Canada our North.
Spread, pioneers of progress. Your sway from shore to shore,
With unanswerable arguments, And mounted rifle-corps. . .
With bowie knives and bullets, We'll enforce the rights of man; . . .
The South shall send her slave-holders, To bid the world be free!⁸²

⁸⁰ There were several *Sentinel* newspapers in Ohio in 1846.

⁸¹ "Those 'Northern Allies,'" *Augusta (GA) Chronicle*, April 20, 1846.

⁸² "The Orchestra," *New Hampshire Sentinel* (Concord), April 15, 1846.

Despite the antagonistic tone in the press and the political realm, President Polk and Secretary of State James Buchanan were eventually able to work out a compromise with Britain, and the Oregon territory boundary was set at the 49° parallel north. Debate on the expansion of slavery was another matter, though, and the issue was far from resolved. The *Berkshire County Whig* (MA) published a *Boston Whig* editorial that chided Polk for allowing talk of war with Great Britain and acknowledged, “Polk and his party were very likely to have war with Mexico.” The article then went on to address the current and future state of the regional slavery debate. The *Whig* article stated:

Since the admission of Missouri, (as a State into the Union,)—remarks the Norfolk American—slavery has begun to be considered as the chief corner stone of the Republic at the South, and at the North men are found who are above being abolitionists. These rival absurdities will hereafter explode in the light of a superior civilization, or amid the strife and tumult of bloody anarchy. The man who says that he sincerely adopts the principles of the declaration of Independence, and is not an abolitionist—is a liar.⁸³

It was into this political environment that Representative David Wilmot introduced what would come to be known as the Wilmot Proviso.

Prior to 1846, Wilmot probably would have been described simply as a successful Pennsylvania lawyer and orator. In 1844, he entered the world of national politics when he won a seat representing Pennsylvania’s 12th District in the House of Representatives. He was not well known outside of his home state, but that would soon change.⁸⁴ Wilmot entered the House just as

⁸³ “The Boston Whig says—,” *Berkshire County Whig* (Pittsfield, MA), April 9, 1846.

⁸⁴ “Pennsylvania Election,” *New York Herald*, Oct. 12, 1844. The *Herald* listed Wilmot as a Democrat, but a Philadelphia newspaper, *North American and Daily Advertiser*, listed him as a “Locos” candidate in an article on the election on Oct. 8, 1844. Various newspapers listed him under one or the other of these two categories. “LIST OF MEMBERS OF THE SENATE AND HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE UNITED STATES. TWENTY-NINTH CONGRESS—FIRST SESSION,” *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC) Dec. 2, 1845. This *Intelligencer* listed all of the members but did not designate party affiliation. For more on Wilmot, see Charles Buxton Going, *David Wilmot, Free-Soiler: a Biography of the Great Advocate of the Wilmot Proviso* (Gloucester,

Polk began his presidency, and the newspapers were filled with coverage of territorial expansion, the annexation of Texas, war with Mexico, and the Walker Tariff, which was a revision of the Black Tariff's duties. North Carolina's *Fayetteville Observer* accused the Polk administration of wanting to lower the Black Tariff rates only to appease England in the negotiations over the Oregon territory dispute. The *Observer* declared:

What will England require in this bargain as a sufficient compensation for giving up her claim to Oregon? What is the darling, cherished object of her heart in this matter? *The breaking down of the American Tariff, that gives active business to the American people of all classes and callings, and fills the American Treasury with the means of paying all our obligations and keeping our credit honored!*—This is what England desires!⁸⁵

Newspapers covered Representative Wilmot's speech to the House of Representatives in the fall of 1846, when he chose to weigh in on the debate. In the speech, Wilmot stated his agreement with the Polk administration's assertion that the Walker Tariff's reduction in duties would increase trade and thereby increase revenues.⁸⁶ Prior to making this speech, though, Wilmot had already made a name for himself in the papers.

In August 1846, in the midst of the ongoing debates, Representative Wilmot proposed an amendment to an appropriations bill that would provide President Polk with money to begin negotiations with Mexico. This bill would quickly become known as the "Two Million Bill," as that was the amount of money Polk was requesting for approval.⁸⁷ It was to this bill that Wilmot

MA: P. Smith, 1966). As a junior member of the House, Wilmot had a reputation of being dutiful, and one of his first assignments was serving on a committee that would establish the Smithsonian Institute.

⁸⁵ "Mr. Walker's Tariff Report. Correspondence of the Baltimore Patriot," *Fayetteville (NC) Observer*, Feb. 21, 1846.

⁸⁶ "The Farmers and a Home Market. [From the speech of the Hon. David Wilmot of Pa. in the House of Representative, on the Tariff.]," *Pittsfield (MA) Sun*, Oct. 15, 1846.

⁸⁷ "United States and Mexico. Proceedings of the Senate," *Augusta (GA) Chronicle*, Aug. 18, 1846. This article, and others like it, contained the text of a message sent by President Polk to the United States Senate.

attached an amendment, thus creating a stir that would not subside for years to come. On Saturday, August 8, 1846, Wilmot submitted his amendment to the modified appropriations bill, as presented by Representative James J. McKay of North Carolina. Wilmot's amendment, which became known as the Wilmot Proviso, soon made the Pennsylvania representative a household name. Numerous newspapers carried the Proviso, which read as follows:

Provided. That as an express and fundamental condition to the acquisition of any territory from the Republic of Mexico by the United States, by virtue of any treaty which may be negotiated between them, and to the use of, by the Executive, of the monies herein appropriated, neither slavery nor involuntary servitude shall ever exist in any part of said territory, except for crime, whereof the party shall first be duly convicted.⁸⁸

With these words, David Wilmot plunged the House into the argument over whether any new territories added to the United States would be allowed to have slavery.

In the months following the Proviso's submission, newspapers often discussed the amendment's origins. The *Scioto Gazette* (OH) said it "had been prepared before dinner in concert between a number of Northern Whigs and Democrats." The article said it was first decided that Mr. Jenkins of New York would submit the document, but when those in attendance found that Wilmot approved of it, "it was at once decided that he was the very man." The paper noted that the "secret was pretty well kept considering how many were let into it" and it "took a great many members by surprise, and not the least at the quarter from which it came.—Most of

⁸⁸ "The Two Million Bill," *Daily Chronicle & Sentinel* (Augusta, GA), August 24, 1846. The Wilmot Proviso can be found in the *Cong. Globe*, 29th Cong., 1st sess., Aug. 12, 1846, 1217, <http://www.heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.congrec/conglob0019&collection=congrec&index=congrec/conglob&id=1265> (accessed March 15, 2013).

the Whigs who voted for the bill, voted for it only for the sake of the amendment it contained.”⁸⁹

One year later, at a Democratic Party State Convention in Herkimer, New York, Wilmot recounted the events that led to the Proviso’s drafting and his presentation of it. He said several men worked together to agree upon the “form and terms” of the amendment. Among them, Wilmot said he recalled “Mr. Rathbun, Mr. King, and Mr. Grover of New York, Mr. Brinckerhoff of Ohio, Mr. Hamlin of Maine and Judge Thompson and myself of Pennsylvania.” More importantly, though, Wilmot took the opportunity to try to explain the timing, as questions had been raised as to why he presented the Proviso when he did. Wilmot said:

It is made a ground of complaint by some that the Proviso was introduced out of season. By others that its design was to embarrass the administration—that it had its origin in a political intrigue for a Presidential candidate in 1848. I have been taught that the best time to do a right thing, was the first time you had an opportunity.⁹⁰

Whether this was Wilmot’s true motivation, or, as some newspapers suggested, he was chosen to present it to help his reelection bid, the Wilmot Proviso ensured that the expansion of slavery would become an unavoidable political issue. If Wilmot’s intention had been to make a name for himself on the national stage, he had succeeded.⁹¹

Wilmot and his cohorts most certainly understood the potential firestorm that would follow the proviso’s submission. The appropriations bill had been discussed, but not voted on,

⁸⁹ “The Wilmot Proviso,” *Scioto Gazette* (Chillicothe, OH), Sept. 16, 1846. The Whig party, which had come into being in the 1830s to oppose Andrew Jackson, would find it difficult to unite on such a proposal. The party comprised both slaveowners and Free-Labor supporters.

⁹⁰ “HERKIMER CONVENTION. The Voice of New York! Proceedings of the Herkimer Mass Convention of Oct. 26, 1847,” *Albany (NY) Atlas Extra*, Nov. 1847. There is no day printed on the *Extra*, just the month of November, but the convention was held on Oct. 26, 1847. Newspapers would cover continued discussion over who was responsible for the amendment, such as the *Mississippi Free Trader* (Natchez), Nov. 4, 1846.

⁹¹ Richard R. Stenberg, “The Motivation of the Wilmot Proviso,” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 18, no. 4 (March 1932): 535-541.

when Wilmot asked to speak. Historians have discussed at length why this relative newcomer to the House would have been recognized and allowed time on the floor, but Wilmot's voting record thus far had favored the Polk administration, and his motives must not have been suspect.⁹² After Wilmot presented his proposal, Representative James Dobbin of North Carolina immediately challenged the amendment and said "the gentleman from Pennsylvania [Mr. WILMOT] was not in order, the subject of slavery having no connexion [sic] with the bill."⁹³ Dobbin was overruled, and after some discussion the House of Representatives passed the amendment, without a roll call, with a final vote of 83 to 64.⁹⁴ The House then voted on the amended bill; and, after some procedural votes, the vote was taken, and the bill was passed with a vote of 87 to 64.⁹⁵

The Proviso would not, however, receive approval from the Senate, which would not meet until Monday, August 10. That was to be the last day of the legislative session, and the senators decided to adjourn on a point of order rather than have to take a vote on the matter. This political maneuvering was derisively reported in numerous newspapers, including the *New-Hampshire Patriot and State Gazette*, which contained the following scathing account of the legislative proceedings:

⁹² Eric Foner, "The Wilmot Proviso Revisited," *The Journal of American History*, 56, no. 2 (September 1969): 276, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1908123> (accessed June 10, 2012), and Potter, *Crisis*, 20-23.

⁹³ *Cong. Globe*, 29th Cong., 1st sess., Aug. 12, 1846, 1217.

⁹⁴ *Cong. Globe*, 29th Cong., 1st sess., Aug. 12, 1846, 1217. "The question recurring on the original amendment of Mr. WILMOT, tellers were asked and ordered; and, the question being taken, it was decided in the affirmative—ayes 83, noes 64."

⁹⁵ *Cong. Globe*, 29 Cong., 1st sess., Aug. 12, 1846, 1218, http://www.heinonline.org/HOL/Page?men_tab=srchresults&handle=hein.congrec/conglob0019&size=2&collection=congreg&set_as_cursor=1266&id=1266 (accessed June 10, 2013).

The only way to defeat the measure was by talking against time until the hour of adjournment had arrived. Where was the man, who, for the first time since the formation of our government, could descend to such contemptible meanness to prevent the passage of a measure—one too, which might determine the question of peace or war?

The senator with whom the paper took particular umbrage for the delay was John Davis of Massachusetts. “In a word,” the paper stated, “he preferred war—unrelenting, bloody war—to peace.”⁹⁶

Newspaper coverage of the Proviso quickly led to arguments and accusations over who supported slavery. Newspapers even questioned other publications’ motives, as in the case of two New Hampshire newspapers. *The New-Hampshire Patriot and State Gazette* said the *New Hampshire Sentinel* had questioned the *Patriot*’s position on slavery. In a lengthy article, the *Patriot* railed against the “pro-slavery” charges and accused the *Sentinel* of falsely reporting that all New Hampshire representatives had voted against the amendment. The *Patriot* stated that if the Whig party and its papers were sincere on the slavery question, they would not “resort to falsehood against political opponents, nor would they approve of conduct so *dastardly, mean and contemptible* as was that of John Davis—*trucking to the south*.” The article added that although the Whig party might not advocate slavery, it advocated measures that would “place the free laborer in a state of as abject servitude” as slaves. These sustained measures were “calculated to make slavery perpetual,” the *Patriot* insisted, “by making slave labor profitable to the slaveholder.”⁹⁷ The *Sentinel* responded that the *Patriot*, “under Mr. Nobody-knows-who’s direction,

⁹⁶ “Who are the advocates of Peace?” *New-Hampshire Patriot and State Gazette* (Concord), Sept. 3, 1846. This article accused Davis of being more intent on fighting the administration than supporting his country.

⁹⁷ “We should like to see the cue of the Patriots,’ [upon slavery.]—*New Hampshire Sentinel*,” *New-Hampshire Patriot and State Gazette* (Concord), Sept. 10, 1846. The article concluded by asking, “Is Mr. Prentiss satisfied with the ‘cue’ of the Patriot, or with the false and hypocritical position of his own party and *press* upon the subject of slavery?”

has taken its ‘cue,’ to charge as base slanderers all who ever doubted the anti-slavery propensities of the leaders of the Democracy.” It is worth noting that the *Sentinel* admitted to changing its position on slavery. The paper declared:

We approved of the gag rule, and have with one accord called the anti-slavery men the “nigger party,” by way of contempt and ridicule; and have defended the slave-holders, showing that their slaves were better off than most people dreamed of; but “principles never change,” and we now go against slavery precisely as Pennsylvania supported the Tariff....⁹⁸

Clearly, the Proviso debate had forced newspapers to define their position on slavery and to explain their coverage of votes on the amendment.

Although the Wilmot Proviso did not pass the Senate, it was immediately seen as a point of division between the North and the South, especially considering that the final vote on the amended bill split the Democratic Party. At this vote, the final tally broke down along northern and southern lines, with 52 northern Democrats voting for the bill and all 50 of the southern Democrats voting against it, joined by four northerners.⁹⁹ This schism in the Democratic Party would take its toll in the years to follow. The Senate’s vote, however, would not be the end of the discussion. David Wilmot and the Proviso would continue to be the subjects of legislative debate and newspaper coverage for years to come.

The Proviso’s submission and the attention it brought Wilmot meant his previous voting record was soon a topic of discussion across the country. Wilmot was “the gentleman who stood

⁹⁸ *New-Hampshire Sentinel* (Keene), Sept. 23, 1846. The Gag Rule had been in effect from 1836 to 1844 and tabled any slavery petitions to prevent them from being heard. Former President John Quincy Adams, who went on to serve as a Massachusetts representative, had led a long fight to repeal the Gag Rule, and South Carolina Senator John C. Calhoun had led the opposition against Adams’s efforts. After many political battles, the Gag Rule was finally rescinded on December 3, 1844, on the basis that it interfered with the constitutional right to petition the government for a redress of grievances as guaranteed by the First Amendment.

⁹⁹ Foner, “The Wilmot Proviso Revisited.”

out alone against all the other members from Pennsylvania, Whigs and Democrats, and voted for the tariff bill,” reported Georgia’s *Daily Chronicle & Sentinel*, which also noted that Wilmot “was eulogized to the skies by the Washington Union.” The *Daily Chronicle & Sentinel* supported peace with Mexico but would not support the appropriations bill, primarily because of the proviso. “Besides,” the paper snidely stated, “we are glad that it did not succeed, because of the proviso of that ‘able,’ ‘independent,’ ‘patriotic,’ Democrat, Mr. Wilmot.”¹⁰⁰ As the October 1846 election approached, Wilmot found himself facing opposition within his own party. According to some newspapers, some of the support for Wilmot’s opponent was more of a backlash against Wilmot’s support of the Walker Tariff of 1846 than his proviso submission. In an article carrying the headline “Rebellion in Wilmot’s District,” *The Boston (MA) Daily Atlas* predicted that Wilmot was “destined to be defeated, in which event Pennsylvania will present an undivided front in favor of the tariff of ’42, and opposed to the tariff of ’46.”¹⁰¹ Some newspapers joined in charges that Wilmot’s only motivation for proposing the proviso was to temper criticism of his tariff position, thereby aiding his reelection. “The resolution against the extension of slavery was very probably proposed by Mr. Wilmot,” *The Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC), concluded, “in order to mitigate the popular censure which he feared, doubtless, for his vote on the Tariff.” The same article cited a group of Pennsylvania Democrats who had written a resolution commending Wilmot for his “advocacy of a moderation of tariff burdens, and his motion to preclude slavery from the territory to be acquired in California.”¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰“The Two Million Bill,” *Daily Chronicle & Sentinel* (Augusta, GA), Aug. 24, 1846.

¹⁰¹ “Rebellion in Wilmot’s District,” *Boston (MA) Daily Atlas*, Oct. 12, 1846.

¹⁰² “Mr. Wilmot and Slavery,” *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC) Oct. 17, 1846.

One effect of the entire Wilmot Proviso debate was that it highlighted the inconsistent political landscape of the time, as alliances were often formed and broken during this period. Much of this political turmoil reflected the growing regional debate over slavery in the territories. There was also division within the regions, as evidenced by opposing newspaper opinions. Two Jackson, Mississippi, newspapers attacked each other over whether their stand against anti-slavery forces was strong enough. *The Southron* had criticized *The Mississippian* for not rebuking Wilmot and others for trying to stop the extension of slavery into the territories. *The Mississippian*, which was the Democratic Party's organ in that state, published an editorial to confirm its stand against Wilmot and others involved in prohibiting slavery. However, the *Mississippian* made a distinction between the proviso and abolitionism. The paper declared:

IF the fell spirit that seeks to overthrow the Constitution, that slavery may be abolished; which encourages stealing of negroes and exciting slaves to insurrection—if all this was reduced to the further extension of slavery in new and unformed States, eschewing any and every interference with the institution where it exists, we should never hear of such a thing as abolition. There is no man so blind, so beighted [sic] in Boetian [sic] ignorance, as not to see the difference between abolitionism and opposition to the further extention [sic] of slavery, to operate in the *future*.

The *Augusta (GA) Chronicle*, which had Whig political leanings during this time, chastised the “Democratic press of the South” for trying to convince southerners that although northern Whigs opposed the South on the slavery issue, northern Democrats did not. The paper reprinted several speeches by various Democrats and said the “truth of the whole matter is, all parties at the North are opposed to slavery,” and all those in their ranks, more or less, would “experiment upon the Union, even at the hazard of its destruction.”¹⁰³ In reference to Wilmot's reelection bid, one newspaper said it would “refer to the whole matter as another commentary on the text that the

¹⁰³ “Parties—Abolitionism,” *Augusta (GA) Chronicle*, Nov. 17, 1846. This article was one of the few that cited specific racial concerns such as the integration of schools. The article said it was “going pretty far, in all conscience, putting the sons and daughters of the whites in the same school room upon equal terms with the sons and daughters of the blacks!”

Northern Democrats are the ‘peculiar allies of the South.’”¹⁰⁴ In spite of the opposition, Wilmot’s presentation of the proviso probably did help him and he was able to win reelection. Several newspapers across the country took note of his success and the political implications.

In Ohio, the *Scioto Gazette* said Wilmot was one of the few “Locofocos” reelected to Congress from Pennsylvania. The paper also noted that Wilmot “was the introducer of the famous ‘Wilmot Proviso,’ and its strength saved himself from the general fate of his associates.”¹⁰⁵ *The New-Hampshire Patriot and State Gazette* carried an article with a Pennsylvania dateline that acknowledged Whig victories in the election. The Whigs’ success prompted the newspaper, which obviously did not support the Whigs, to conclude, “we have been most effectually ‘licked.’” The newspaper did find some consolation, though, in Wilmot’s return to office. “Wilmot, the only democrat who voted for the tariff of 1846, has been re-elected,” the paper reported. “This is good news, and almost reconciles us to the ‘licking.’”¹⁰⁶ Not all publications, though, were happy with Wilmot’s win. *The Cleveland Herald* stated, “We regret to see that Mr. Wilmot, the only Free Trade member of Congress from Pennsylvania who voted for the Tariff of 1846, has been re-elected even by a very small majority.” The *Weekly Raleigh Register and North Carolina Gazette* carried an article signed “Philadelphia Inquirer” that concurred with the *Herald* on Wilmot’s defection from Pennsylvania’s stand. “There is not a single free-trade district in the State, if we except Wilmot’s,” the article said.¹⁰⁷ The *Herald* also

¹⁰⁴ “Mr. Wilmot and Slavery,” *Daily Chronicle & Sentinel* (Augusta, GA), Oct. 21, 1846.

¹⁰⁵ *Scioto Gazette* (Chillicothe, OH), Nov. 4, 1846. The Locofocos were a Democratic Party faction that was in decline by this point. They were considered an extremist group, with their peak in power occurring in 1840 with President Martin Van Buren’s election. It would not have been considered a compliment at this time to be referred to as a “Locofoco.”

¹⁰⁶ “Election News. Pennsylvania,” *New-Hampshire Patriot and State Gazette* (Concord), Oct. 22, 1846.

¹⁰⁷ *Weekly Raleigh Register, and North Carolina Gazette*, Oct. 30, 1846.

noted that Wilmot's "district is composed of Locofoco counties, and the U.S. Gazette says his success is probably due to his California resolutions."¹⁰⁸ Newspapers also recognized that Wilmot's reelection would bring increased agitation between northern and southern politicians. Ohio's *Scioto Gazette* maintained that Wilmot's "return must be a source of bitterness to the southern Locofocos," and it amounted to "another expression of Northern sentiment and a further rebuke of southern dictation."¹⁰⁹

After the election, the Wilmot Proviso continued to be a point of contention, not least because it had brought the question of slavery within the territories front and center. The Gag Rule, which lasted from 1836 until 1844, had managed to quash discussions of slavery on the floor of Congress for eight years, but even after the rule's rescinding the slavery question did not immediately garner a great deal of official attention in Congress. Much of the political discussion before 1846 remained focused on the many issues looming before the country, such as the tariffs, the Oregon territory, and, soon after, Texas and the War with Mexico. During this time, as Wilmot and his political cohorts prepared and presented the Proviso, California had also increasingly become a part of the territorial debate. One newspaper, the *Californian* in Monterey, claimed to be the first newspaper published in the territory and immediately became a strong advocate for the region. In its opening editorial, published on August 15, 1846, it ticked off a long list of what it would support in the growing territory. Several of the issues of importance to the people living in California were severance from Mexico, freedom of speech and the press, public education, encouragement of immigration and protection from Indians. The paper noted its political agenda for the territory's future as the following:

¹⁰⁸ "Mr. Wilmot," *Cleveland (OH) Herald*, Oct. 23, 1846.

¹⁰⁹ *Scioto Gazette* (Chillicothe, OH) Nov. 4, 1846.

We shall advocate a territorial relation of California to the United States, til the number of her inhabitants is such that she can be admitted a member of that glorious confederacy. We shall support the present measures of the commander in chief of the American squadron on our coast, so far as they conduce to the public tranquility, the organization of a free representative government and our alliance with the United States.¹¹⁰

Although the California article supported freedom and immigration, it contained no specific mention of slavery. A *Scioto Gazette* (OH) article noted that the South had supported California's addition to the Union until the Wilmot Proviso recommended its admission as a free territory, at which point southern opposition rose. "The object of the South, in going for the acquisition of California, is clear enough.—They looked simply to sectional advancement through slavery," the *Gazette* maintained.¹¹¹ Although any prospect of new territories usually elicited some discussion on slavery, newspaper coverage indicates that it was Wilmot's amendment that made slavery a focal point of territorial expansion and slavery.¹¹²

In the midst of the controversy surrounding the Proviso, President Polk continued his efforts to solidify support for the war with Mexico and obtain funding for treaty negotiations. Polk's campaign for the Mexican War faced opposition in both the North and the South, and the

¹¹⁰ "Prospectus," *Californian* (Monterey), Aug. 15, 1846.

¹¹¹ "The Wilmot Proviso," *Scioto Gazette* (Chillicothe, OH), Oct. 28, 1846.

¹¹² An indication of the change in focus can be found in the *Congressional Globe* records. In the *Cong. Globe*, 29th Cong., 1st sess., there is an entry for "Slave trade, concerning" and an entry for the abolition of "Slavery in the District of Columbia." There are no remarks by any representatives in either of these entries. In the "Index to the Appendix of the *Cong. Globe*, 29th Cong., 1st sess., there is an entry for "Slavery" that states: "Remarks concerning. (See *Connecticut resolutions—Giddings—Culver—Fugitive Slaves.*)" An entry for "Slaves" likewise reads: "See *Fugitive Slaves.*" On page III of the "Index to the Appendix," the "Connecticut Resolutions concerning slavery and the admission of Texas into the Union" and the "Fugitive Slaves" entries only list one remark each. In contrast, 65 members of the House of Representatives are listed as having spoken on the bill to reduce the Tariff. It would be in the Second Session of the 29th Congress, which went from December 10, 1846, to March 4, 1847, that the discussion would move from primarily tariffs to slavery. In the Index to the Appendix of the *Cong. Globe*, 29th Cong., 2nd Sess., there is an entry for the Wilmot Proviso with a notation to "See *Slavery Question.*" Beside that entry, the index states that it concerns "remarks in the House of Representatives, concerning the, as presented by the proposition for interdicting slavery in new territory acquired by the United States." The topic now contained the names of 26 representatives who spoke on the subject of slavery, including Wilmot.

Wilmot Proviso created even more difficulty for the president and his agenda. Polk was criticized in the press for his efforts to explain why the Mexican War was necessary. *The Cleveland (OH) Herald* said in December 1846 that “we did not know how much Mexico had wronged and abused us until we read the speech of Mr. Lawyer Polk.”¹¹³ The vitriol in press editorials continued as newspapers criticized one another for their political stands on Mexico. Once again, the *New-Hampshire Patriot and State Gazette* minced no words in its criticism of a sister state paper, the *New Hampshire Sentinel*. “The old federal N. H. *Sentinel* probably cannot tell the truth: at any rate, we have never known it to do so in political matters,” the *Gazette* stated. “All our readers probably recollect its *great lie* that all of our members of congress voted against the Wilmot proviso. It now has a greater one, in justification of its Mexican allies.” The *Gazette* accused the *Sentinel* of glossing over disagreements with Mexico and asserting that there were amicable resolutions to its disagreements with the United States. “To place its own country in the wrong and to excuse the treacherous conduct of Mexico,” the *Gazette* concluded, “the sentinel publishes known falsehoods! This is federal patriotism.”¹¹⁴ This newspaper coverage shows the differences of opinion on the country’s path to expansion through war with Mexico. By adding the slavery question to the mix, Wilmot had made Polk’s task even more difficult.

The ringing-in of 1847 brought no abatement to the tensions, as politicians and newspapers continued to debate the Wilmot Proviso and territorial expansion. Newspapers immediately began highlighting the importance of upcoming elections. The *New Hampshire Sentinel* reported that a *New York Post* correspondent predicted the \$2 million appropriations bill would not pass if insistence on attaching the Proviso amendment continued. Although the House

¹¹³ *Cleveland (OH) Herald*, Dec. 15, 1846.

¹¹⁴ *New-Hampshire Patriot and State Gazette* (Concord), Dec. 17, 1846.

had passed the Proviso in the previous session, the *Sentinel* noted the instability of the amendment's political support and predicted defections in future votes. Increasingly, newspapers like the *Sentinel* were framing the territorial debate as a slavery issue in which representatives must decide whether to align themselves with the free states of the North or the slave states of the South. The *Sentinel* said New Hampshire must decide in the upcoming elections to respond as a free state. "Let the voters look at this matter in its true light," it declared, "and ask themselves if they are prepared to sustain men who are ready to vote with the South upon this question."¹¹⁵ The territorial issues were now inextricably linked with slavery and, according to newspaper coverage, that argument had clearly become a sectional one.

The new congressional session was barely underway when, on January 4, 1847, New York Representative Preston King, who was often identified as a Locofoco, sought to introduce a bill that would give President Polk \$30,000 to use for beginning negotiations with Mexico, along with the previously requested \$2 million with which to obtain a peace treaty. The sticking point, though, was Section 2 of the bill, which included the Proviso's condition that "there shall be neither slavery nor involuntary servitude in any territory which shall hereafter be acquired by or annexed to the United States, otherwise than in the punishment of crimes whereof the party shall have been duly convicted."¹¹⁶ In his speech, King called for a vote on the bill to prohibit slavery in any newly acquired territories, regardless of the Missouri Compromise. New York's *Hudson River Chronicle* reported that King said the only way people in a new territory would truly be able to determine their own fate would be for them to start with a clean slate, and if it began free it was more likely to remain that way. "Exclude slavery from all territory not within the limits of

¹¹⁵ *New Hampshire Sentinel* (Keene), Jan. 6, 1847.

¹¹⁶ "Speech of Preston King. Monday, January 4. In the House of Representatives," *Hudson River Chronicle* (Sing-Sing, NY), Jan. 19, 1847.

a State,” King said, “and I am willing the Territory shall determine for itself, when it becomes a State, what shall be its character.”¹¹⁷ King believed that if slavery were allowed to take hold in a new territory, it would be difficult to end the practice, as there would be economic incentives to allow it to remain. King’s speech appeared in numerous newspapers, and the *Farmers’ Cabinet* (NH) reported that it “produced a profound sensation on all sides of the House, the members crowding even into the area in front of the Speaker’s chair, during its delivery.”¹¹⁸

After King’s speech and the subsequent debate, the motion to allow the introduction of the bill failed by one vote, and the *Sentinel* said that if it were not for the “Proviso,” the motion would have passed by “a large majority.” The paper also reported on an “administration paper” and its response to the vote. “*The Union*,” the article said, “groans over the result, and considers this vote as a sign of the renewal of the ‘Missouri question,’ which will ‘shiver the Democratic party to pieces.’”¹¹⁹ Other newspapers appeared to be weary of the Proviso debate and were more concerned that Congress would make every effort to ensure there was funding available to adequately support the army and continue the war. “It seems to us,” the *Barre* (MA) *Gazette* said, “that Congress had better make some effort to sustain the army now there than to waste time over such a fruitless matter as this.”¹²⁰

Press support for the war, though, was far from universal, especially with the issue of slavery in the territories gaining so much attention. An article in Philadelphia’s *North American*

¹¹⁷ Ibid. This speech can also be found in Preston King, *The Wilmot Proviso: Bill and Explanation of Preston King of New York in the House of Representatives of the U.S., January 4 & 5, 1847* (Washington, DC: Blair and Rives, 1847).

¹¹⁸ “Washington, Jan. 5, 1847,” *Farmers’ Cabinet* (Amherst, NH), Jan. 14, 1847.

¹¹⁹ “Disturbing Question,” *New-Hampshire Sentinel* (Keene), Jan. 13, 1847.

¹²⁰ “The Wilmot Proviso,” *Barre* (MA) *Gazette*, Jan. 15, 1847. Discussion of support for the army by committee was also reported in “House,” *New-Hampshire Patriot and State Gazette* (Concord), Jan. 14, 1847.

newspaper was indicative of concerns over the Proviso and slavery. The paper carried portions of a *Washington Union* article that warned that the North might “underrate the feelings of their Southern brethren on this delicate and dangerous question,” and that “the South regards this question as one in which not only her prosperity, but the safety of her people may be concerned.”¹²¹ The issue of safety sometimes arose in newspapers as southern states expressed concern over what would happen if slaves were freed, especially in regions where the slave population outnumbered the free population. The *North American* (PA), though, railed at the idea that northern states should acquiesce to the South for any reason. The newspaper accused war supporters of only being interested in extending slavery through territorial expansion. “The North,” the article stated, “will enter into no crusade for the spread of slavery.” The paper declared unequivocally that the Union could do without any additional territory, especially if those new territories would “widen the shadow spread by the eclipse of human freedom.” Noting the increased regional divisions in the nation, the *North American* (PA) said it “is with reluctance that we use the words North and South in treating of national questions.” The newspaper then castigated the South and its politicians for drawing the lines of division and forcing its agenda onto the rest of the country. The paper stated that the South had driven President Polk “pell mell, over every Northern, every national interest, into his present position.” The next few lines ratcheted up the rhetoric by stating that southerners “have now the terrible fulfillment of their every wish. How do they like it? They are beggars for everything.” The article concluded that the southern aim of extending slave territory was a failure and the country should move on to successfully ending the Mexican War.¹²²

¹²¹ “The Wilmot Proviso,” *North American* (Philadelphia, PA), Jan. 18, 1847.

¹²² “The Wilmot Proviso,” *North American* (Philadelphia, PA), Jan. 18, 1847.

As the northern outcry over slavery in the territories increased, the southern press paid close attention. The *Augusta (GA) Chronicle* said that one northern newspaper, the *Albany (NY) Argus*, was considered to be a leading political organ and an ally of the “Southern Democracy.” The *Chronicle* reported, though, that even the *Argus* acknowledged that “there will be little diversity of opinion in the non-slaveholding States on the proposition to exclude slavery from all territory to be acquired in the progress of the war with Mexico.” The *Chronicle* said that such opinion “indeed, is the language of the Northern press, without distinction of party.”¹²³ The *New-Hampshire Sentinel* repeated some excerpts of Preston King’s speech and gave accounts of some of the debate, including protests by Representative Edmund Dargen of Alabama and Representative James Seddon of Virginia. Both men seemed to agree that the war should continue, but Seddon pointed out that the South should have some say because half of the officers fighting in the war were southerners.¹²⁴ The *Chronicle* argued that the competing political parties in the South should join forces and form a united southern front. “There is but one course which the South should take, Democrats and Whigs,” the paper said, “and it is to defeat these selfish dissimulators from whom the mask has been torn, and refuse admission to any new acquisition of Territory.”¹²⁵ The *Chronicle* understood that if the South were divided politically, it would lose its influence in Congress. A loss of political power would result in an inability to affect the future course of the country, especially if it concerned slavery. Certainly at this point, newspapers show that the South had decided that no new territory was a better option than any new territory without slavery.

¹²³ “The Natural Allies,” *Augusta (GA) Chronicle*, Jan. 19, 1847.

¹²⁴ “Extracts from the Speech of Hon. Preston King of New York,” *New-Hampshire Sentinel* (Keene), Jan. 20, 1847.

¹²⁵ “Northern Democracy and Slavery,” *Augusta (GA) Chronicle*, Feb. 2, 1847.

In February 1847, President Polk put in a request for a bill that would appropriate \$3 million to use in making a treaty agreement with Mexico, but the House postponed voting on the bill. Prior to the postponement, Preston King asked for time to amend the bill with the Proviso, but his request was voted down. A *New-Hampshire Sentinel* article charged that the amendment failed so the Senate could pass the bill, with a pro-slavery majority, and force those in the House who supported the Proviso to vote against the bill.¹²⁶ Shortly thereafter, South Carolina Senator John C. Calhoun used his oratorical skills to turn the focus onto the property rights of southerners. The debate over slavery in the territories brought to light a critical distinction about the way in which southerners viewed their slaves. The South considered slaves to be property and the fear was that if new territories and states did not allow slavery, southerners would be prevented from entering those regions with their slaves. Southerners considered such a restriction to be a violation of their property rights and a violation of the Constitution. Calhoun predicted that the Proviso's passage would have "the most fearful consequences to the *Union*." He had several resolutions he wanted taken up for discussion in Congress. One such resolution read as follows:

...any law which would deprive the citizens of any State from emigrating with their property into any territory of the United States, would be in derogation of this perfect equality, and in violation of the Constitution, and tend to subvert the Union.

At Calhoun's request, his resolutions were printed, and he lobbied for the Senate to vote upon them, because it was "high time for the South to know where they stood." A *Morning News* (CT) article reported that the Senate did not take up the resolutions. Senator Thomas H. Benton of Missouri said "he could not consent to neglect the business of the country for such a sting of

¹²⁶ "White Slaves of the North," *New-Hampshire Sentinel* (Keene), Feb. 17, 1847.

abstractions.” Benton’s comment must have caught Calhoun by surprise, as the newspaper reported that he had expected Benton’s support. The newspaper, however, added that “(Mr. Benton) wished it to be understood that he had never permitted the business of the nation to suffer by throwing a firebrand into Congress.”¹²⁷

Newspapers, however, did not follow Benton’s example and printed articles that discussed the positions of all involved. The *North American* (PA) reported on an article in the *Richmond* (VA) *Whig* that warned of the South’s stance. “Whenever the South shall be called upon to ACT,” the article declared, “it will present an undivided, stern, inflexible front to its fanatical assailants.”¹²⁸ The *North American* (PA) article also made a questionable assertion about those who favored the Wilmot Proviso. The article said those who supported the Proviso were not against the admission of future slave states to the Union, but they simply opposed the “acquisition of territory, now free, for the purpose of planting slavery upon it.”¹²⁹ The article made an important distinction. Proviso supporters understood that if a territory were to prohibit slavery, then any new states that might organize in that territory would be unlikely to allow slavery. Both sides understood that changing the slavery status of existing states was not feasible, so the battle was focused on the territories in an attempt to determine the slavery question for future states. Like the *Richmond* (VA) *Whig*, the *Mississippi Free Trader* began to employ the word “fanatic” and said that the “northern fanatics are again at their work of agitation.” The paper predicted “every northern man who votes with the South will be a democrat, while every

¹²⁷ “XXIXth Congress—Second Session, ‘*From the Tribune’s Telegraphic Report*,’ Washington, Feb. 19,” *Morning News* (New London, CT), Feb. 26, 1847.

¹²⁸ “Mr. Calhoun and the Wilmot Proviso,” *North American* (Philadelphia, PA), Feb. 23, 1847.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

northern whig who votes will vote against us.”¹³⁰ When the vote was finally held on Polk’s \$3 million appropriations bill, with the Proviso amendment included, it did pass the House, but the Senate then voted it down. The bill’s failure further angered those who were not only in favor of the Proviso but also wanted to see an end to the war. The *New-Hampshire Patriot and State Gazette* blamed northern senators who did not support the bill and said “with all their pretended anxiety for peace, and all their pretended zeal to prevent the extension of slavery, *the federal Senators from New England defeated the bill.*”¹³¹

In the meantime, Calhoun’s resolutions encouraged some states to move quickly and not wait to see if Congress would enact the Proviso. In March, the *Cleveland (OH) Herald* reported that the House of Delegates of Virginia had unanimously passed its own series of resolutions condemning the Wilmot Proviso, clearly using Calhoun’s resolutions as a template. The Virginia delegates had declared “void, *in prospectus*, any act which may be passed by the Federal Government having for its object the imposition of any restriction” on the governments of newly acquired territories and declared it “the right of any citizen to emigrate to any territory with, and hold there any property recognized lawfully his.” The *Herald* also said that the resolutions denounced the Wilmot Proviso “as a violation of the Constitution of the United States” and clearly stated that the slavery question belonged “exclusively to the State Governments.” The delegates then directed the Virginia governor to send their resolutions to the “Executives of every State in the Union.”¹³²

¹³⁰ *Mississippi Free Trader* “(Natchez), Feb. 24, 1847.

¹³¹ “The Peace Bill and Wilmot Proviso,” *New-Hampshire Patriot and State Gazette* (Concord), Feb. 25, 1847.

¹³² “Wilmot’s Proviso at the South,” *Cleveland (OH) Herald*, March 3, 1847.

Throughout the spring of 1847, newspapers provided continual coverage of the political debates and regularly printed speeches about the Wilmot Proviso, Calhoun's Resolutions, and the Mexican War, and these articles often included additional commentary. The *Mississippi Free Trader* carried articles listing who voted "Yea" or "Nay" on various proposals that either included or excluded the Wilmot Proviso.¹³³ Several newspapers reported on frustration that Congress seemed unable to make any decisions on issues of importance. On March 3, the *Daily Picayune* (LA) printed a typical congressional report. "Congress adjourned at three minutes before 1 o'clock the morning of the 4th," the paper reported, "not, however, having taken any decisive action upon any subject of general interest after 11 o'clock."¹³⁴ The *Ohio Observer* carried an editorial on two speeches, both of which opposed expanding slavery into the new territories. This paper included commentary, and its opinion was clear as it noted that the speeches' authors, Hon. D. R. Tilden and Hon. J. Brinkerhoff, both "take the same high ground on the question of the further extension of slavery, and maintain it with unanswerable arguments."¹³⁵ The *Weekly Flag & Advertiser* of Alabama carried an article on reaction to a speech Senator Calhoun gave in Charleston. In the article, the *Advertiser* made its position on southern rights clear. "Nothing can be gained by pursuing a course which would destroy the power of the democracy," the paper declared. "Let us hope that all will be well; but let it be understood, beyond doubt or controversy, that Southern rights must not be infringed on!"¹³⁶

¹³³ "The following are the votes in the U.S. Senate," *Mississippi Free Trader and Natchez Gazette* (Natchez), March 16, 1847.

¹³⁴ "Congressional," *Daily Picayune* (New Orleans, LA), March 13, 1847. Articles such as this can found in most newspapers. Many of those published at distance from Washington would have a similar time delay on reporting.

¹³⁵ *Ohio Observer* (Hudson), March 10, 1847.

¹³⁶ "A Sketch of Mr. Calhoun's speech at Charleston has appeared in the 'News' of that city," *Weekly Flag & Advertiser* (Montgomery, AL), March 26, 1847.

Newspaper coverage of Congress was extensive in the North and South, and newspaper readers in both regions would have been aware of the political relationship developing between expansion and slavery during this time.

Newspapers also show that more of these congressional speeches began to zero in on slavery and take an abolitionist tone. The *Cleveland (OH) Herald* reported on a speech Ohio Representative Joshua Giddings gave on the Wilmot Proviso. Giddings asserted that those who opposed the Proviso were only supporting the Mexican War in order to increase the country's slave-holding territory and, thus, the power of the slave states. Giddings' speech also addressed those who thought the Proviso would split the country. Giddings said he "would rather see this Union rent into a thousand fragments than have my country disgraced," the *Herald* reported, "and its moral purity sacrificed, by the prosecution of a war for the extension of human bondage."¹³⁷ Senator Thomas Hart Benton also began to weigh in on the issue and voice his concern. The *Scioto (OH) Gazette* covered a speech Benton gave in St. Louis. In the long speech, Benton spoke on almost every topic imaginable related to the Proviso, territorial expansion, and the slavery question. He commented at length on Calhoun's resolutions and criticized the extreme positions held by those with opposing views. The *Gazette* reported Benton's words as follows:

The Abolition creed is, that the admission of slavery in any part of the Union is a violation of the Constitution, and a dissolution of the Union; the new resolutions declare that the prohibition of slavery in any territory of the Union is a violation of the Constitution and of the rights of the States, and a subversion of the Union! So true it is, that extremes meet and that all fanaticism, for or against any dogma, terminates at the same point of intolerance and defiance.

¹³⁷ "Speech of Mr. Giddings, on The Wilmot Proviso, *Evening Herald*," *Cleveland (OH) Herald*, May 18, 1847.

The *Gazette* concluded the article by complimenting the Missouri senator. The paper said Benton sometimes spoke along party lines but “when the subject was too large or too small for party,” he chose the “character of a patriot who felt for his country and of a man who felt for his fellow man.”¹³⁸

Soon, almost every newspaper article related to the legislative battles included references to slavery. A *New York Tribune* item challenged the idea that Texas’s annexation would weaken slavery in the northern slave states as slaves would be moved farther south. “It is the *Slave-Trade* which keeps alive Slavery in the more Northerly Slave States,” the article stated. “But for that, it would die out, being unprofitable.”¹³⁹ A *Mississippi Free Trader* editorial stated that it opposed any legislation concerned with slavery in the territories. The paper made it clear that it agreed with Calhoun’s resolutions but denied that Congress had any authority over the states on the issue of slavery. The article asked, “Is it pretended that an act of congress can change the constitution of the United States, or interfere with the rights of the people of a state to hold slaves or not as they deem fit?” The article warned that the “only effect of either the northern or southern movement will be to estrange the feelings of the different portions of the Union, and minister to the ambition of a few men to the great jeopardy of the peace and safety of the whole.”¹⁴⁰ The *Tri-Weekly Flag & Advertiser* in Montgomery, Alabama, carried a *N.Y. Globe* article that also contended that Congress did not have such authority over the states. The article stated:

¹³⁸ “Mr. Benton’s Speech,” *Scioto Gazette* (Chillicothe, OH), June 2, 1847.

¹³⁹ *Cleveland (OH) Herald*, March 11, 1847.

¹⁴⁰ “Wilmot’s Proviso—Calhoun’s Resolutions,” *Mississippi Free Trader* (Natchez), March 17, 1847. The article indicated it was reprinted from the *New Orleans Atlas*.

The relation of master and slave is a matter exclusively belonging to the people of each State, within its own boundary, and any attempt by the government or people of any other State, or by the General Government, to interfere with or disturb it, would violate the spirit of that compromise which lies at the basis of the Federal Compact.

The article went on to clarify the “hope to maintain the Union of the States, by abstaining from all interference with the laws, domestic policy, and peculiar interests of every other State.”¹⁴¹

The *Tri-Weekly Flag & Advertiser* had a sense of foreboding when it covered deliberations in both the House and the Senate, and in another article the paper declared:

These proceedings are ominous of gathering evils to the South; and they will soon be here, unless our citizens, with a spirit of firm determination, meet them in the manner the crisis demands. There should be no temporising—no more compromises—no more concessions.¹⁴²

As might be expected, the Wilmot Proviso continued to be an integral element in the debates leading to the upcoming elections, as newspapers informed readers of how their representatives had voted on the Proviso. The Vermont gubernatorial election is a good example, as voting records became a political issue during the campaign. Paul Dillingham, Jr., had served four years as a congressional representative for Vermont’s Fourth District, and the Vermont Democratic Party had nominated him as its candidate for Governor. Vermont’s *Semi-Weekly Eagle* listed the names of representatives who had voted for the Proviso. The paper also detailed Dillingham’s decision to abstain from voting on the amendment, a decision that it roundly criticized as follows:

¹⁴¹ “From the N.Y. Globe. Slavery—The Wilmot Proviso, and the Compromises of the Constitution,” *Tri-Weekly Flag & Advertiser* (Montgomery, AL), Aug. 10, 1847.

¹⁴² “The Wilmot Proviso,” *Tri-Weekly Flag & Advertiser* (Montgomery, AL), March 16, 1847.

But where on this “*main question*” do we discover the vote of PAUL DILLINGHAM, Jr., of Vermont? Gentle reader, NOWHERE!! Sitting in his dishonored place in the House of Representatives, and having cast a vote *not five minutes previously* in a manner to defeat the Wilmot Proviso, he permits his name to be called and closes his mouth in ignominious silence. For the first, and we trust the last time, Vermont has a Representative in the National Councils who DARES not face his responsibilities.”

The *Eagle* noted that Dillingham knew “Vermont loathes slavery and everything tending to support and uphold it.”¹⁴³ The point was well made, and Dillingham was not elected governor, at least not at that time.¹⁴⁴

The fall of 1847 saw increased attention focused on who would be nominated to run for president in 1848, and slavery and the Wilmot Proviso were prominently featured in articles on the election. Senator Benton, always a powerful political voice, wrote a letter, published in various newspapers, in which he stated that he would not be a candidate for president. He urged the Democratic Party, and the South in general, to choose an electable presidential candidate from the North. The *Georgia Telegraph* published an editorial on Benton’s letter and made it clear that “Col. Benton will find that most Southern men are very willing that he should speak for himself in this matter, but not so willing that he should speak for all others.” The editorial added that it was not the South’s choice that slavery had been brought into question, but that the North had allowed that to happen, particularly by bringing up the “Wilmot’s anti-slavery proviso.” The paper noted that it was not unequivocally opposed to a northern presidential

¹⁴³ *Semi-Weekly Eagle* (Brattleboro, VT), Aug. 27, 1847.

¹⁴⁴ “Dillingham, Paul, Jr.,” *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=D000346> (accessed July 20, 2012). After the end of the Civil War, Dillingham did become Vermont’s 29th governor, serving a two-year term from 1865-1867. He did so, though, as a Republican rather than a Democrat

candidate, but that for “a Wilmot proviso man, for the Presidency, the South will not, dare not vote.”¹⁴⁵

American newspaper readers were interested in how the United States’ political process was perceived abroad, so newspapers often carried articles from French and British publications. The *Semi-Weekly Eagle* (VT) carried an article from a Paris publication, *Journal des Debats*, which the *New-York Evening Post* had first translated and published. The article addressed the current debates over the Wilmot Proviso, the Mexican War, and the slavery question. It listed a breakdown of the states’ voting records on slavery and cited Senator Calhoun as the South’s primary spokesperson. It stated that Calhoun believed the current political controversies were a conspiracy against the South and the Constitution, but the *Journal* offered its prediction on the issue’s resolution. The “most calm and liberal minded must come to the conclusion that at some day the slave states will be so completely hemmed in by the free states,” the *Journal* stated, “that they shall be induced to cleanse themselves from the leprosy of slavery which consumes them.”¹⁴⁶ The article cited Dr. William Henry Channing, whom the paper described as “one of the most eloquent men that North America has produced,” and was clear in its import:

...it will be as impossible to arrest the decline which has commenced in slavery, as to stop the waters of the Ohio in their course to the ocean. It is an affair of time which may be longer or shorter. Before ten or twenty years North America will be the only civilized country in which slavery will exist. Can it be possible that she wishes to preserve such a privilege?¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ “From the Tallahassee Journal. The South and the Presidency—Col. Benton,” *Macon (GA) Weekly Telegraph*, June 29, 1847.

¹⁴⁶ “A French View of Our Domestic Affairs,” *Semi-Weekly Eagle* (Brattleboro, VT), Aug. 10, 1847.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

As the election year approached and political parties began to have conventions, divisions within the parties remained a topic of concern. Southern newspapers expressed anger at sections of the parties that supported the Proviso, such as the Whig Party. The *Mississippian* asserted that none of the Whig newspapers, in particular the *Intelligencer*, were advocating the rights of southern states. In contrast, the *Mississippian* seemed confident that northern and southern Democrats would soon come together in a national convention, at which time they would “stand together on the ample platform of the Constitution.”¹⁴⁸ Some newspapers, however, reported that fractures within the Democratic Party were being used as an excuse for the South to threaten to hold a separate southern convention and thereby force the North to submit out of fears over secession and “dismemberment of the Union.”¹⁴⁹ The *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC) carried an article stating that it had not previously introduced the Wilmot Proviso question on its pages, but the paper was now publishing a letter to the editor from a Whig supporter. The letter writer feared the party’s move to make the Wilmot Proviso a test question for the next presidential election would ensure their defeat. The writer said the Proviso would “not prevent any State from establishing slavery *after its admission into the Union*,” so it was of no practical value. The *Intelligencer* agreed and said: “There are principles involved in the Mexican War vastly more important than the question of whether the existing slave population of the United States ought to be confined within this or that degree of latitude.”¹⁵⁰ This letter ignored southern concerns that a territory that prohibited slavery would be unlikely to ever allow it. Milwaukee’s

¹⁴⁸ “Facts for the People—The Wilmot Proviso,” *Mississippian* (Jackson) Sept. 17, 1847.

¹⁴⁹ “The Wilmot Proviso in New York,” *North American and United States Gazette* (Philadelphia, PA), Oct. 26, 1847.

¹⁵⁰ “To the Editors. The Wilmot Proviso—the Whig Party—and the next Presidential Election,” *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC), Sept. 7, 1847. This article was reprinted in the *Weekly Raleigh Register, and North Carolina Gazette* on Sept. 15, 1847.

Daily Sentinel and Gazette republished a *New York Tribune* item that admonished a *Globe* article concerning the Whigs' position against acquiring Mexican territory.¹⁵¹ The *Tribune* article stated that the *Globe* was in favor of the addition of Mexican territory and against the Wilmot Proviso. The *Tribune* asked if the *Globe* was trying to “gloss over the extension of slave-coffles, woman-auctions, whips and branding-irons over a region which has purged itself free of them?”¹⁵² These newspaper articles clearly show that the political schisms were becoming even more focused on the territorial expansion of slavery, as the Wilmot Proviso still garnered attention.

Some newspapers tried to deflect attention and asked politicians to draft an amendment more appealing than the Proviso. A *Scioto Gazette* (OH) editorial cited its agreement with an *Ohio State Journal* editorial that urged the “friends of the country to compare notes, and to resolve upon a measure even better calculated to ward off the evils of Disunion than was the Wilmot Proviso.” The article sought “a determined opposition to extending the Territorial Possessions of the Union by Conquest.” In essence, these newspapers took the position that it was better to leave the Mexican territory alone, especially at the cost of war, rather than face the possibility of division over the extension of slavery into acquired land. That idea, though, would only be a stopgap measure since the country was on the brink of acquiring more land. The *Morning News* in Connecticut accused proviso supporters of attempting to disrupt the Democrats. The paper took a jab at the “little locofocos” for “harping upon the Wilmot Proviso as a “firebrand thrown by the federalists into the democratic camp to produce distraction in the

¹⁵¹ It is unclear which *Globe* newspaper the *Daily Sentinel and Gazette* is referring to in this article, but it may be the newspaper published in Columbia, MO, in 1847. This newspaper was followed by the *Columbia Globe*, which appears to have been published in Columbia, MO, from 1847 to 1848.

¹⁵² *Daily Sentinel and Gazette* (Milwaukee, WI), Aug. 13, 1847.

party.”¹⁵³ The *Boston (MA) Daily Atlas* lashed out at legislators who had supported the Wilmot Proviso to get elected the previous year, but who had now changed their votes in order to ensure their party’s victory in the presidential election. The *Atlas* said the “papers and wire-pullers are busily preparing the party to assume the ground marked out by the leaders in Washington and the South, to ‘compromise’ the slavery question.” In its lengthy criticism, the *Atlas* had a long list of targets, including James Buchanan, the *Boston (MA) Post*, the Democrats, the Loco Foco Convention, the Whigs, the Maine and New Hampshire party papers, and the *Plymouth (MA) Rock*, which it said had “commenced likewise waddling off from the side of Freedom, to where its natural instincts and the demands of the party lead it.”¹⁵⁴ With all of the varied criticism and the ever-changing positions on topics such as the proviso, much of the information in many of these articles could be confusing for readers. So many of these newspapers included dated material from other newspapers along with current political reports and editorials. Newspaper readers would have to pay close attention to dates and to the sources of articles to gain a clear understanding of where various political parties and politicians stood on the issues.

As the election neared, newspapers extensively covered the Proviso’s effect on the political conventions. The *New-Hampshire Sentinel* published a letter that had appeared in the *Albany (NY) Evening Journal* and gave an account of the New York Democratic State Convention. The letter described a chaotic convention, with the final straw being a vote that failed to support the Proviso. “Never before has such a scene been presented in this state,” the letter concluded. “Never one more disgraceful or ridiculous. Never one more unworthy of the

¹⁵³ *Morning News* (New London, CT), Sept. 7, 1847.

¹⁵⁴ *Boston (MA) Daily Atlas*, Sept. 10, 1847.

representatives of a large portion of the people of the state.”¹⁵⁵ The letter indicated that the New York Democratic Party’s decision not to support a measure like the proviso would cause great consternation among New Yorkers, many of whom would be aligned against southern political interests. Philadelphia’s *North American and United States Gazette* reported on a meeting of the “rebels of the New York would-be democracy.” The paper cited the *Washington Union* in stating that there was “serious disunion and disaffection in the ranks of the New York democracy.” The conflict had arisen over the northern faction’s desire to incorporate the Wilmot Proviso in its creed. The article raised concerns again that there would be a “Southern Convention,” with ultimatums that if “the North persist in the Wilmot Proviso, then the South will break up the confederacy.”¹⁵⁶ For those wanting more specifics, the *Albany Atlas* published an “Extra” edition that contained the proceedings of the Democratic State Convention in Syracuse held in October and included a speech by David Wilmot.¹⁵⁷ Even without passage, the Wilmot Proviso was wreaking havoc with the Democratic Party and was successfully splitting it along sectional lines.

South Carolina, of course, remained at the forefront of any Wilmot Proviso debates. The *Greenville (SC) Mountaineer* reported that meetings on the Proviso were held at courthouses across the state in towns such as Greenville, Pickens, and Laurensville in October and November of 1847.¹⁵⁸ In the meetings, the resolutions the Virginia Legislature had proposed often were

¹⁵⁵ “The Democratic State Convention of the New York,” *New-Hampshire Sentinel* (Keene), Oct. 14, 1847. Reprinted from the *Albany (NY) Evening Journal*.

¹⁵⁶ “The Wilmot-Proviso War in New York,” *North American and United States Gazette* (Philadelphia, PA), Oct. 21, 1847.

¹⁵⁷ “Herkimer Convention. The Voice of New York!” *Albany (NY) Atlas, Extra*, Nov. 1847. There is no day printed on the *Extra*, just the month of November, but the convention was held on Oct. 26, 1847.

¹⁵⁸ “Anti-Wilmot Proviso Meeting,” *Greenville (SC) Mountaineer*, Oct. 29, 1847; “Anti-Wilmot Proviso Meeting in Pickens,” *Greenville (SC) Mountaineer*, Nov. 5, 1847; and “Wilmot Proviso Meeting. Pickens C.H.,” *Greenville (SC) Mountaineer*, Nov. 26, 1847.

adopted. One notable exception, however, was the resolution recognizing the Missouri Compromise, but for very different reasons than what Preston King gave in his speech. A *New Hampshire Statesman* article noted that South Carolina had decided "...the south should tender no compromise but the constitution." The article said that at one meeting "northern people generally, and all opponents of the spread of slavery come in for a portion of their denunciations."¹⁵⁹ The *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC) carried a *Greenville* (SC) *Mountaineer* article on one of the meetings. The article contained remarks by General W. Thompson, who lamented that southern blood was spilled in Mexico when the proviso would have the effect of keeping southerners out of the territory. Thompson said:

If any thing could add to the insult and outrage of the assertion of the principle of the Wilmot Proviso, it is the fact that it is now to be applied to territory conquered by the common sacrifices and sufferings of the whole country. What portion of the country has poured forth its blood and treasure more freely in this war than the South?¹⁶⁰

Thompson stated an attitude that was prevalent in the South, and often reported in its newspapers, that southerners had made far more sacrifices for the Union than their northern counterparts, and proposals like the Wilmot Proviso were unfair to the South.

As 1848 arrived, coverage of conventions and elections continued. Connecticut held state elections in the spring, which resulted in some Whig victories. The *Morning News* (CT) said that the election was a "triumph of principle over party" and hoped it would influence the upcoming presidential election. The paper also noted that the "New-York Globe, a Wilmot Proviso Locofoco paper," had written that Connecticut's Whig victories were a result of the "abandonment of the free territory principle on the part of a portion of the Democracy." *The*

¹⁵⁹ "South Carolina and the Wilmot Proviso," *New Hampshire Statesman* (Concord), Oct. 22, 1847.

¹⁶⁰ "Remarks of Gen. W. Thompson," *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC), Oct. 21, 1847.

Morning News bluntly replied that it did not know what the New London Locofoco Committee would think of that assessment, but “one of them we know to be so warm a friend of the slave, as to denounce all those who favor the abolition of slavery, as ‘niggers.’”¹⁶¹

In the presidential race, General Lewis Cass, a war hero and Democratic statesman, had thrown his name into the ring for the Democratic Party presidential nomination. A number of newspapers published a letter Cass wrote to A.O.P. Nicholson of Nashville, Tennessee. In the letter, which was known as the Nicholson letter, Cass explained why he had changed his position from supporting the Wilmot Proviso to opposing it. The *New York Herald* was one newspaper that carried the letter in full, and one of its final sentences illustrated how confusion over the issue had been compounded, probably to the benefit of all the politicians. Cass wrote:

The Wilmot proviso seeks to take from its legitimate tribunal a question of domestic policy.... Leave to the people, who will be affected by this question, to adjust it upon their own responsibility, and in their own manner, and we shall render another tribute to the original principles of our government and furnish another guaranty for its permanence and prosperity.¹⁶²

States rights as opposed to federal law became a rallying point for many politicians such as Cass. As the presidential election neared, the Democratic Party continued to work to pull its warring factions together, while newspapers continued to report the regional differences. The *Raleigh Register*, and *North Carolina Gazette* applauded the *Wilmington (DE) Journal* for printing a rebuttal to a letter the *New York Evening Post* published. The *Post* letter had asserted that there were “immense numbers” in the South who would have no problem with passage of the Wilmot

¹⁶¹ “Free Territory,” *Morning News* (New London, CT), April 10, 1848.

¹⁶² “The Views of General Cass on the Wilmot Proviso and the War,” *New York Herald*, Jan. 3, 1848. This article was carried in other newspapers, such as the *Mississippi Free Trader and Natchez Gazette*, Jan. 18, 1848; *Greenville (SC) Mountaineer*, June 23, 1848; and *Floridian* (Tallahassee), June 10, 1848.

Proviso. The *Register* published the following *Journal* reply:

No man who knows anything of the South, will undertake to say that there is even a minute fraction of her people who would not regard the enactment of the Wilmot Proviso as the grossest outrage which could well be committed upon her rights and her feelings. Should the North attempt to force upon us this odious spawn of Abolitionism, the Evening Post will soon see whether or not we are united upon this question.¹⁶³

The *Raleigh Register* also added its own retort to the *Journal's* response to the *Post's* letter. A “feeling of unutterable loathing and disgust naturally arises,” it declared, “when an imputation of so base and delicate a character is made against any man of the South.”¹⁶⁴ For many southerners, there were few criticisms as harsh as being considered a supporter of the Wilmot Proviso.

When the Democratic Party finally met to nominate its candidate, tensions were high. B.F. Hallett of Massachusetts later gave a detailed speech on the process to a Democratic Mass Meeting in Syracuse on July 22, 1848. The *Pittsfield (MA) Sun* printed the full text of his speech, which detailed the negotiations and the votes that took place. Hallett noted that the Democratic Party had refused to allow the Proviso to become a “cornerstone” test for the presidency, an idea put forth by politicians such as William Lowndes Yancey, who had been an Alabama U.S. Representative from 1844 to 1846. “The convention,” Hallett said, “excluded from their resolutions and sanction, the extreme test of the South proposed by Mr. Yancey, of Alabama, and that of the barnburners of the North.” Hallett stated that if both extremes had been carried out, they “would *meet* in a dissolution of the Union.”¹⁶⁵ Lewis Cass won the nomination, but the Proviso would continue to cause him problems in newspaper coverage of his campaign. The

¹⁶³ “The Wilmot Proviso at the South,” *Raleigh Register, and North Carolina Gazette*, May 10, 1848.

¹⁶⁴ “The Wilmot Proviso at the South,” *Raleigh Register, and North Carolina Gazette*, May 10, 1848.

¹⁶⁵ “Political. Speech of Hon. B.F. Hallett, of Massachusetts,” *Pittsfield (MA) Sun*, Sept. 28, 1848.

Vermont Patriot and State Gazette cited the *South Carolina Telegraph* as quoting a speech by Parson Hudson Brownlow stating that Cass was in favor of the Wilmot Proviso. The same article reported that other northern newspapers were reporting that Cass opposed the Proviso.¹⁶⁶ Throughout the 1848 campaign, newspapers would continue to offer questions, statements, and rebuttals on candidates' true positions concerning the Wilmot Proviso. Even as his own presidency wound down, Polk also faced such questions, especially with the signing of the Oregon bill.¹⁶⁷

The 1848 Whig presidential candidate, General Zachary Taylor, was a Louisiana slaveholder and would face similar scrutiny of his position on the Proviso. The *Vermont Patriot* published a letter that it said outlined the position Taylor took when addressing members of the Mississippi legislature. In the letter, Taylor was reported to have said that he thought there should be a compromise on the Proviso boundary but the "South should never agree to the provisions of the Wilmot Proviso—the citizens should be left free on that subject." The *Patriot* also carried an endorsement of Cass, in which it asserted that Democrats would not be happy with Taylor because the "friend of the slave has nothing to hope for if Gen. Taylor is elected; their fetters will be drawn the tighter."¹⁶⁸ The *Weekly Raleigh Register, and North Carolina Gazette* announced its support for Taylor, quoting an article from the *Fayetteville (NC) Observer* that "Gen. Taylor will do everything in his power to protect the rights and interests of the

¹⁶⁶ *Vermont Patriot and State Gazette*, (Montpelier), July 20, 1848. Similar articles questioned both Zachary Taylor's and Lewis Cass's positions on the Wilmot Proviso. Two examples are the *Floridian* (Tallahassee), July 8, 1848, and the *Boston (MA) Daily Atlas*, July 20, 1848.

¹⁶⁷ *Fayetteville (NC) Observer*, Sept. 26, 1848.

¹⁶⁸ "Gen. Taylor on the Wilmot Proviso and the War," *Vermont Patriot and State Gazette* (Montpelier), Aug. 3, 1848.

South.”¹⁶⁹ These two endorsements, one stating that Taylor would not support slaveholders and one stating he would, are an indication of the division between northern and southern Democrats. Taylor won the presidential election, but southerners were surprised when his administration maintained a more moderate position on slavery than they ever would have expected.

The South did not take kindly to Taylor’s moderate stance, and newspapers reported on the region’s criticism of the new president, especially when it seemed he might support the Wilmot Proviso. A North Carolina newspaper printed a story from the *Jackson (MS) Southron* that questioned the sincerity of some Mississippians who expressed approval of President Taylor’s intent to support the Wilmot Proviso. The article questioned the patriotism of these men and their “Southern attachments.”¹⁷⁰ Parson Brownlow, a prominent, vocal Tennessee newspaper editor, published a letter in response to a South Carolina circular that was “rallying the South against the Wilmot Proviso.”¹⁷¹ He declared that if the object of this movement was to dissolve the Union, “I throw it back upon you with feelings of indignation and contempt.” Brownlow described himself as a “Southern man with Southern principles” who would always be true to the South unless it chose to be led by “John Cataline Calhoun, whom Gen. Jackson sought to hang for treason and rebellion, during his Presidential reign.”¹⁷² Concern over dissolution of the Union became a recurring political cry in newspapers during Taylor’s administration.

¹⁶⁹ *Weekly Raleigh Register, and North Carolina Gazette*, Sept. 13, 1848.

¹⁷⁰ *Weekly Raleigh Register, and North Carolina Gazette*, February 27, 1850.

¹⁷¹ Brownlow’s positions were hard to predict as he purported to be both pro-Union and pro-slavery, until he was ousted from Tennessee by the Confederates and became an abolitionist speaker in the North. For more on Brownlow, see Stephen V. Ash, ed., *Secessionists and Other Scoundrels, Selections from Parson Brownlow’s Book* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999).

¹⁷² *Milwaukee (WI) Sentinel and Gazette*, Feb. 10, 1849.

During this time, the divisions made it increasingly difficult to follow various political party positions. Southern newspapers began to accuse one another of taking particular positions on slavery, the Proviso, and dissolution. In one example, the *Augusta (GA) Chronicle* accused some Georgia newspapers, such as the *Savannah Georgian*, *Constitutionalist*, and *Macon Telegraph*, of trying to either “dissolve the Union, or to surrender the institution of Slavery into the hands of the abolitionists.” The *Chronicle* said these newspapers had told northern abolitionists that “Georgia was divided; that the Whigs were not sound on the slavery question, and that Gen. Taylor, a large slaveholder and bound by every tie of interest to the South, was against the South and with them on the slavery question.”¹⁷³ South Carolina’s *Greenville Mountaineer* also criticized southern newspapers that portrayed any division on slavery among Georgia Whigs. The *Mountaineer* said one paper publishes “every argument, fact or circumstance that can make favor of the Free Soilers.”¹⁷⁴ Newspapers also reported that the post-election bitterness and confusion held true in the North, too. In an article on support for the proviso, the *Boston (MA) Daily Atlas* gave an idea of how complex the political environment had become. The *Atlas* stated that a Locofoco speech made at the Baltimore Democratic Convention had asserted that “northern Whigs were all abolitionists, and that southern Whigs were also, and that northern Democrats were truer friends of slavery than southern Whigs, and that the most deadly enemies to slavery were these same southern Whigs, &c.”¹⁷⁵

As 1850 neared, David Wilmot’s 1846 Proviso remained a divisive and contentious issue as politicians continued in their attempts to bring it up for a vote. Newspapers show that even

¹⁷³ “From the Southern Recorder,” *Augusta (GA) Chronicle*, March 1, 1849.

¹⁷⁴ “From the Augusta Constitutionalist,” *Greenville (SC) Mountaineer*, Aug. 3, 1849.

¹⁷⁵ *Boston (MA) Daily Atlas*, August 6, 1849.

when the proviso was not being considered in the halls of Congress, its mere mention stirred up intense partisan animosity. Newspaper coverage shows that the proviso threw open the doors for hostile debate over the expansion of slavery into new territories and states and divided the country's political parties, primarily along regional lines. Although it never became law, the political rhetoric and talk of disunion that accompanied the Wilmot Proviso successfully pushed the country further into a controversy its leaders were obviously ill-equipped to handle.

CHAPTER IV

1850: COMPROMISE OR CALAMITY

In 1850, newspapers closely followed President Zachary Taylor's new administration as it faced the challenges of working with Congress to establish a Texas and New Mexico boundary, admit California as a new state, and address slavery in all of these lands in a way that would be acceptable to the North and the South. Newspapers show that addressing these issues required a long, arduous, and contentious negotiation process, one that would be marked by deaths, deals, and potential duels, before the Compromise of 1850 would finally be passed in September. Although the Compromise may have bought the Union some time, it came at a price. Newspaper reports from that year depicted a growing sense of mistrust among legislators accompanied by visible rancor that would plague the North and the South in the years to come and push the country closer to civil war.¹

After the heated debates over the Wilmot Proviso and its proposed restrictions on slavery in the territories, southerners mostly welcomed General Zachary Taylor's ascension to the

¹ David M. Potter, "The Armistice of 1850," in *The Impending Crisis: 1848-1861* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1976), 90-120. In this chapter, Potter examined various historians' interpretations of the Compromise and its consequences. He did not consider it to be an actual compromise, where the participants adjusted their positions and came up with resolutions with which they could agree. Instead, Potter noted that what resulted was more of a truce, rather than a lasting peace, and he therefore refers to it as an "Armistice." Even so, Potter acknowledged that the Compromise bought time that allowed the North to expand its industrial base, which would greatly affect the eventual outcome of the Civil War.

presidency in March 1849. Taylor was a slaveowner from Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and the predominant belief was that he would be sympathetic to the South. Very quickly, though, he disappointed southerners by proving his devotion to the Union, a feeling most likely engendered during his years of service in the U.S. Army. Newspapers reported that he appeared somewhat favorable to the Wilmot Proviso and was determined to move decisively on territorial issues. To do so, he proposed that California and New Mexico be admitted as states, with their constitutions already in place, which could include whether slavery would be allowed. Allowing such a move meant that both would almost certainly be admitted as free states, as that was the most likely course the regions' voters would choose in such a process. Southern slaveholders responded angrily to this proposition. They wanted to ensure they would be able to take their slaves into any new states and territories, and they also wanted to maintain the precarious political balance between the free and slave states. An impasse between Taylor and Congress ensued, although a few southern Unionists attempted to tamp down the South's anger.

In April 1849, in response to southern protests, Massachusetts Senator Daniel Webster offered an amendment in support of Taylor's position, including the possible use of force against the South. The *Augusta (GA) Chronicle*, a Whig paper at the time, printed Webster's amendment and criticized those opposing the president on slavery grounds. The article stated:

To those familiar with the efforts of the Southern agitators to convert the Slavery question into a political one, and then array the country into two great sectional antagonistic parties with the hope of making a little political capital, their various turnings and inconsistencies are not matters of astonishment. Their object is to make political capital at whatever sacrifice to the country and its institutions—they care little for either—they are out of power and they want to get in.²

² "Mr. Webster's Amendment," *Augusta (GA) Chronicle*, April 14, 1849. For more on the *Augusta Chronicle's* history see Earl L. Bell and Kenneth C. Crabbe, *The Augusta Chronicle, Indomitable Voice of Dixie, 1785-1960* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1960).

Georgia Governor George Towns weighed in strongly on the debate with a letter that numerous papers carried. In the letter, he asserted that Congress did not have the right to legislate on slavery in the territories, the Wilmot Proviso was unconstitutional, and the Constitution guaranteed slaveowners the right to take their property with them “wherever the Constitution goes.”³ The disagreement in Georgia was representative of the arguments occurring across the country. Georgia newspapers with opposing opinions sniped at each other over the governor’s position. It “is the duty of public journalists to present facts to the people,” the *Macon (GA) Weekly Telegraph* admonished, “and deal fairly and candidly with all questions, but particularly with questions of such vital and momentous concern as that of slavery.” The *Telegraph* then criticized another newspaper for its coverage. “We find the *Journal & Messenger* still disposed to indulge its propensity for unfairness and mystification,” the *Telegraph* stated. “The *Messenger*’s charge that the Democracy of Georgia is divided in regard to the constitutionality of the Wilmot Proviso is the merest quibbling, and unworthy of any public journal which aspires to discuss fairly and intelligently any public question.”⁴ Despite the *Telegraph*’s editorializing, at this point Georgia was divided over the best way to respond to the question of slavery in the new states and territories, as was the rest of the country.

The question of California’s admission and whether it would be a free state now attracted as much attention as Texas and the territories acquired from Mexico, and the rhetoric accelerated. In New Hampshire, the *Farmers’ Cabinet* said the California Convention had “non-plussed the Calhounists” with its decision to try to gain admission to the Union as a free

³ “Milledgeville, Aug. 25th, 1849,” *Macon (GA) Weekly Telegraph*, Sept. 11, 1849. Also published as *Georgia Telegraph*. The letter was a response to a letter sent to Towns asking his opinion on the subjects listed.

⁴ “The *Messenger* and Southern Rights,” *Macon (GA) Weekly Telegraph*, Oct. 23, 1849. These debates were often ongoing, as in the *Telegraph*’s article “The *Messenger* and Southern Rights. Again,” Oct. 30, 1849. The *Journal & Messenger* referred to in this article is probably from Cincinnati, Ohio, but it is not clearly identified.

state. “They vainly hoped and designed *better* things for California,” the *Cabinet* maintained, “even the rich blessing of slavery itself.” The paper acknowledged rumors that there might be some compromises in the works. “But of such trades we have had enough,” the article said, “and they will be offered and urged in vain. Free territory, and *nothing else*, is the position of the North and West.” The *Cabinet* also said some southerners had made it perfectly clear what their reaction would be if they failed to stop California from entering the Union as a free state. “But should they fail, and California come in with all her free colors flying—what then?” the *Cabinet* asked. “Why then look out for a magnificent *strike* on the part of South Carolina and her slave-ridden confederates.”⁵ The negotiations were becoming increasingly difficult with such hardened positions on both sides and so much at stake.

Southern politicians’ stance against California’s right to decide its own status concerning slavery put them in an awkward position. As much as southerners wanted California to enter the Union as a slave state, going against what the people of California wanted for themselves flew directly in the face of the South’s argument that the southern states had a right to determine their own course on the slavery issue. This contradiction was not lost on the press, and several newspapers, including the *New Hampshire Patriot and State Gazette*, were quick to point out the problems inherent in any southern state’s decision to oppose Californians’ right to make their own decision on whether to allow slavery. One article on this topic appeared in the *Boston Post* and began with the following excerpt:

⁵ “Where Are They?” *Farmers’ Cabinet* (Amherst, NH), Nov. 29, 1849.

It is rumored that certain members of Congress will oppose the admission of California as a State into the Union *because she refuses to tolerate slavery!* If there be any so mad they will destroy themselves, for such a course would be in direct contravention of the sovereignty of the States, and of the rights guaranteed to them by the constitution. It would establish a precedent for interference with state rights which would remove the security upon which the slave-holding States rely for their safety upon the slave question, and would be denounced by every friend of the Union and supporter of the Constitution.

The *Gazette* then added that the “Post speaks truly well; the course of these men is suicidal in the extreme, and their conduct in this matter will do them more real injury than the Wilmot Proviso would ever cause.”⁶ New Orleans’ *Daily Picayune* printed an editorial explaining its opinion that the South must allow California to decide its own fate. The editorial succinctly listed the four choices available to Congress to decide the question: apply the Wilmot Proviso and exclude slavery; establish slavery in new territories; leave the subject to the people; or adopt a compromise line to divide the territories between free and slave states. The *Picayune* questioned how “can we now ask Congress to go behind the verdict of the Californians themselves, for the purpose of exercising a power which we have ever so strenuously denied?” If the South took that position, the *Picayune* noted, then it would yield up the very thing for which it had so long contended, “...the absolute and exclusive right of the communities interested to settle their domestic affairs for themselves.”⁷ It would be one of the vexing questions that would inaugurate the new session of Congress that would begin in December 1849.

The 31st Congress’s first session began with intense public and press scrutiny. Georgia’s *Daily Chronicle and Sentinel* carried a letter to the editor that accurately predicted the session’s atmosphere. “The approaching session of Congress bids fair to be one of the most exciting that

⁶ *New Hampshire Patriot and State Gazette* (Concord), Nov. 12, 1849.

⁷ “The California Question,” *Daily Picayune* (New Orleans, LA), Dec. 12, 1849.

has taken place during the existence of the Confederation,” the article declared. “The slavery question will again shake to its very centre the Union of these States.” The letter’s author also stated that if the session were to pass any unconstitutional legislation, such as the Wilmot Proviso, then it would be the South’s “*imperative* duty to resist it, even to the sundering of the ties that bind us as a confederated Republic.”⁸ Slavery in the territories was taking on such importance that talk of disunion now appeared in the press more and more frequently.

Along with slavery in the territories, abolishing slavery in the District of Columbia was another point of disagreement. The *Mississippi Free Trader* reprinted two letters from the *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC) that addressed the South’s response to slavery restrictions in the District of Columbia and the new territories, one from Senator Henry S. Foote of Mississippi and the other from Representative Thomas L. Clingman of North Carolina. Foote wrote that, if such measures were adopted, “the *Union* itself will be put in serious jeopardy by the movements thus menaced, as I hold it to be certain that no State of the South will patiently acquiesce in either of the aggressions alluded to.” Clingman stated that if “the Government should adopt the policy of excluding slaveholders, as such, from all the territory of the United States, it would in substance and effect *cease to be the Government of the United States.*”⁹ Two of the South’s leading politicians could not have made their positions more clear, and the citizens they represented were falling in step with them.

Behind the scenes, though, there had been movement to draft proposals that might be agreeable to both sides. Just as Congress began to grapple with its agenda, on January 29, 1850,

⁸ “From the Chronicle and Sentinel. Washington City, Dec. 1st. 1849. Mr. Editor,” *Augusta* (GA) *Chronicle*, Dec. 11, 1849. Also published as the *Daily Chronicle & Sentinel*.

⁹ “The North and the South and the Slavery Question,” *Mississippi Free Trader* (Natchez). Dec. 12, 1849; and, “Speech of Mr. Clingman, of North Carolina, on the Wilmot Proviso, Slavery, & c.,” *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC), Feb. 1, 1850.

Kentucky Senator Henry Clay offered the first version of his “Resolutions,” which he hoped would help resolve some of the controversy. These resolutions would eventually form the foundation for the Compromise of 1850, but not before a long and protracted fight.¹⁰ Clay’s resolutions quickly caused a stir, and newspapers began to report on politicians’ positions on the various resolutions.¹¹ The *Raleigh (NC) Register* generally praised the resolutions, although it acknowledged opposition to various parts of Clay’s plan in the North and the South. The paper also noted that Clay had given his assurance that he was willing to compromise on his resolutions. He is not “wedded to his own particular plan of compromise—highly objectionable to the South, as we deem it, in several important particulars,” the *Register* stated, “but that it is simply designed as an entering wedge to further attempts at pacification, and that he will support any measure at all likely to restore harmony and quiet to our distracted Country.”¹² Clay appeared to be sincere in trying to use his resolutions as a starting point for compromise, but he would soon discover that common ground would be elusive.¹³

¹⁰Clay’s resolutions were carried in numerous newspapers, including “Political, Etc. Mr. Clay’s Compromise Resolutions,” *Semi-Weekly Eagle* (Brattleboro, VT), Feb. 4, 1850; “Mr. Clay’s Compromise Resolutions,” *Macon (GA) Weekly Telegraph*, Feb. 5, 1850; “Political. Slavery—Mr. Clay’s Compromise,” *Vermont Watchman and State Journal* (Montpelier), Feb. 7, 1850; The original text found in “Clay’s Resolutions, ‘The Slavery Question,’” *Cong. Globe*, 31st Cong., 1st sess., 1850, 244-245, <http://www.heinonline.org.libdata.lib.ua.edu/HOL/Page?collection=congreg&handle=hein.congreg/conglob0026&type=Text&id=330>. See the first page of Senator Henry Clay’s handwritten resolutions, National Archives and Records Administration, Records of the U.S. Senate, http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/treasures_of_congress/Images/page_11/36a.html. See the first page of the printed version: http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/treasures_of_congress/Images/page_11/36b.html.

¹¹“Territorial and Slavery Compromise,” *Daily Picayune* (New Orleans, LA), Feb. 1, 1850. “Mr. Clay’s Compromise,” *Farmers’ Cabinet* (Amherst, NH), Feb. 7, 1850. “Mr. Clay’s Compromise,” *Pittsfield (MA) Sun*, Feb. 7, 1850. The *Sun* article listed the resolutions and then gave a detailed account of some of the Senate debate between Clay and others, such as Senators Davis, Downs, Rusk, and Foote.

¹²“The Skies Brighter,” *Raleigh (NC) Register*, Feb. 16, 1850.

¹³Mark Joseph Stegmaier, *Texas, New Mexico, and the Compromise of 1850: Boundary Dispute & Sectional Crisis* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1996).

Compromise would not come easily for either side, and some politicians found themselves criticized if they appeared to be working with the opposition.¹⁴ One Mississippi newspaper chided some of its state's politicians for being more loyal to the Whig party than to the South. The article reported that the *Jackson (MS) Southron* had exposed "the insincerity of some of those 'peculiar friends of the South' in Mississippi." Apparently, a group of Whigs had "rejoiced" upon hearing news that General Taylor, as the president was often called, supposedly would sign the Wilmot Proviso. This same group was silent when later told that Taylor probably would not sign it. "The patriotism of such men, and their 'Southern attachments,' will scarcely do for the South to 'tie' to," the paper said. "Had the South been as *near* to the hearts of these men as *their party*, would they not have felt more disposed to weep than to laugh at the first assertion?"¹⁵ During the negotiations, newspapers noted that regional loyalty often seemed far more important than loyalty to a particular political party. It also appeared that some southern politicians' positions were becoming more entrenched, despite Clay's efforts. In February, U.S. Representative Henry Hilliard of Alabama gave a speech that addressed concerns over the territories and California's possible exclusion of slavery, in particular the right of slaveholders to take their property with them into the new state. The *Daily Alabama Journal* published the speech and a portion of it declared:

For one, sir, I am for offering battle at once. I am for staking every thing upon a single field. We shall never be in better condition for contesting it than we are now; and if we are hereafter to struggle for a foothold in Deseret and New Mexico, I prefer to struggle for ascendency in California too, that we may bear our institutions with us to the Pacific coast.¹⁶

¹⁴ *Bangor (ME) Daily Whig & Courier*, Feb. 25, 1850. This article noted the "fierce opposition of Southern Senators to anything like compromise."

¹⁵ *Weekly Raleigh Register, and North Carolina Gazette*, Feb. 27, 1850.

¹⁶ "Speech of Mr. Hilliard of Ala.," *Daily Alabama Journal* (Montgomery), Feb. 28, 1850.

With such strong talk about southern loyalty and expanding slavery to the Pacific, Clay and his associates must have wondered if any compromise were possible.

Throughout this tense time, southern newspapers criticized President Taylor and his “do-nothing” policy and wondered if Clay could work with northern and southern men to bring about some good.¹⁷ Amidst all the talk, President Taylor’s patience with Congress was wearing thin and the tone of the debate was growing harsher. Some newspapers reported that Taylor had threatened to use force against the South if any spoke of disunion. The *Macon (GA) Weekly Telegraph* carried an article stating that “Gen. Taylor would, if necessary, *preserve the Union at the point of the sword*” and that to stop any attempted dissolution Taylor “*would use the military and navy of the United States to put down the agitators.*”¹⁸ The *Mississippi Free Trader* was blunt in its assessment of how the South would respond to such threats. “If Taylor crosses our frontier,” the paper warned, “he will never return over it.” If Taylor were to call for northern volunteers to fight against the South, the *Trader* declared that the South would be able to raise regiments of men, many of whom did not even own slaves, to fight for the Constitution. Let “Taylor make the first hostile demonstration against [sic] the south, and for enemies at home the road to eternity will be a short one,” the *Trader* declared. “*We dig no earth for traitors but their graves.*”¹⁹ Taylor was not smoothing the way for compromise, as he was opposed to Clay’s resolutions, and he was aggravating the political tensions Clay so needed to soothe.

¹⁷ “The Great Questions—The Only Questions—and a few words about them—The First Legislative Struggle,” *Macon (GA) Weekly Telegraph*, Feb. 18, 1850.

¹⁸ “*From the Raleigh Standard. Hear it, Southern Men!*” *Macon (GA) Weekly Telegraph*, March 19, 1850.

¹⁹ “From the La Fayette Statesman. The President and the South,” *Mississippi Free Trader* (Natchez), March 27, 1850.

During the animosity, some newspapers did note a few hopeful signs. As March began, the *Raleigh Register* reported that Mississippi Senator Henry Foote had introduced a Senate resolution to form a committee of thirteen members to address the “agitating question of the day.” The committee would include members from six free states and from six slave states, and a thirteenth member that the committee would choose. It was “pretty well understood in Washington,” the *Register* stated, “that the thirteenth man would be Daniel Webster, and that that Senator is in favor of extending the Missouri compromise line to the Pacific.”²⁰ The same issue of the *Register* and other newspapers also reported on a “Great Union Meeting” in New York City that more than 10,000 people had attended. Everyone who addressed the meeting “spoke warmly in favor of compromising the question of slavery,” the *Register* reported, “and were eloquent in speaking of the perpetuity of the Union.” The paper cited Major General Winfield Scott as one example of a man who had put the Union first. “He stood there neither a pro slavery man nor an abolitionist—neither a Whig nor a Democrat,” the *Register* declared, “but as a firm, unwavering friend of the union of the States, which he trusted in God would never be destroyed.”²¹

There were some small signs in favor of compromise that also appeared in other newspapers. The *Hinds County Gazette* in Mississippi said it agreed with the *Richmond (VA) Times* on a possibility for compromise, if the North would only be fair to the South. “The South ought not to acquiesce in the application of California for admission,” the *Gazette* insisted, “until the North has consented to an equitable compromise on the slavery question.”²² Newspapers also

²⁰ “An Important Movement,” *Raleigh (NC) Register*, March 2, 1850.

²¹ “Great Union Meeting,” *Raleigh (NC) Register*, March 2, 1850. Gen. Winfield Scott was a decorated U.S. Army veteran who would make an unsuccessful bid for the presidency as a Whig in 1852.

²² *Hinds County Gazette* (Raymond, MS), March 8, 1850.

noted that South Carolina Senator John C. Calhoun, who was now reported to be gravely ill with tuberculosis, was working on a new speech that he planned to present to Congress on the issue. At the same time, newspapers noted that it was widely known that Daniel Webster was working with Henry Clay on a final version of Clay's initial Compromise Resolutions that would be presented to Congress. The *Raleigh (NC) Register* reported that Webster would "take high constitutional ground, and will lead the North forward with terms from which the South will not desire to break away." Webster, though, was anxiously waiting to see what Calhoun would say in his speech.²³

On March 4, 1850, Calhoun arrived to present his speech to the Senate. But, as newspapers across the country noted, the great South Carolina orator of southern rights was too ill to read his own words.²⁴ Instead, he selected Virginia Senator James Mason to deliver the speech to Congress, while Calhoun watched. The speech, of which newspapers carried portions or summaries, was considered extreme by most any measure. In essence, Calhoun stated that either the North must agree to the South's terms, most specifically on issues tied to slavery, or disunion would be at hand. He suggested a possible constitutional amendment to protect the South's rights, although he later appeared to waver on that point. In particular, he used census data to support his claim that the balance between the North and the South had been destroyed "not by time, but by the interference of the government." The *Pittsfield (MA) Sun* stated that Calhoun had laid out three ways the government had undermined the South as follows:

²³ "The Washington Correspondent of the 'New York Herald,'" *Raleigh (NC) Register*, March 2, 1850.

²⁴ "Speech of Mr. Calhoun, of South Carolina. On the Slavery Question," *Macon (GA) Weekly Telegraph*, March 19, 1850. Also published as the *Georgia Telegraph*. Various versions of the speech appeared in most newspapers. A few carried what was said to be the full version, while others noted that they were carrying condensed versions.

The first charge is, that the South has been excluded from all interest in the territories common to the Union. The second is, that the adoption of a system of revenue and disbursements onerous to the South, has been forced upon the country, taking away an undue proportion of the proceeds of the South, and impressing upon her unequal taxation for the benefit of the North. The third charge is, that a system of political measures has been cherished that has changed the original character of the federal compact.²⁵

Calhoun's speech then expounded on his charges that prohibiting slavery in the territories violated southerners' rights, that the tariffs favored the North and hindered the South, and that the federal government was violating the Constitution. Each of these complaints had a direct link to slavery, an institution in whose defense Calhoun was never found lacking, but in this speech the Senator had unleashed a torrent of criticism.

Several southern newspapers indicated Calhoun might have gone too far this time. New Orleans' *Daily Picayune* noted the speech's "tone of deep despondency as to the fate of the Union—its stern repudiation of all compromises, and its exaction of further securities than those provided by the existing constitution, as a condition for adhering to the Union." The *Picayune* article added, though, that if Calhoun made it a direct issue of union or disunion, "...we would scruple to say at once that he will not, in our opinion, carry with him any considerable number of the people of the South."²⁶ Two days later another *Picayune* article on the speech's reception noted that it "sufficiently shows that the ultraism of his views finds few supporters in the South. His own colleagues deserted him." The article added that "Senators who have been considered as extreme and almost impracticable in maintaining the highest tone in support of Southern demands on the slavery question, rose, one after the other, to disclaim for themselves an approval

²⁵ "The Slavery Question in the Senate," *Pittsfield (MA) Sun*, March 14, 1850.

²⁶ "Mr. Calhoun's Speech," *Daily Picayune* (New Orleans, LA), March 7, 1850.

of his positions.”²⁷ The *Savannah (GA) Daily Republican* agreed and printed the following:

Our readers have had time to digest Mr. Calhoun’s late speech.—It is characterized by the compactness and logical adroitness peculiar to himself. It purports to give a history of the gradual destruction of the political equilibrium between the North and the South, an account of the progress of the Slavery agitation, and a detail of the causes of disunion, as they have successively arisen. His style is arrogant and dictatorial. He assumes for himself the sole and absolute guardianship of the rights and interests of the South, and boldly, as if by authority of the whole people, prescribes the ultimata [sic] of the Slaveholding States.

The *Republican* article continued in that vein and drew a bead on one particular statement Calhoun made in the speech. “Indeed, he says the South ‘has no compromise to offer but the Constitution.’ This sounds very well, but what does it amount to?” the *Republican* asked. ‘No Compromise to offer but the Constitution!’ What does this mean? or does it mean any thing?”²⁸ Without question, many southern newspapers felt Calhoun had overstepped with his words. They seemed to indicate that most Southerners, although firm in their convictions on slavery, believed a compromise was within their grasp, and Calhoun’s defiant attitude toward compromise of any type flew in the face of that belief. There were, however, many southern newspapers that were either supportive of Calhoun’s words or at least more reticent in their criticism.

The southern newspapers that supported Calhoun often focused on his defense of the South. Not surprisingly, South Carolina’s *Greenville Mountaineer* was one such newspaper. It carried an article that did not actually deal with the substance of the speech, but focused on Calhoun’s presence and the response the speech received that day. No “man in that dense throng—whether friend or foe,” the *Mountaineer* declared, “—could fail to feel the magic

²⁷ “Mr. Calhoun’s Speech,” *Daily Picayune* (New Orleans, LA), March 9, 1850.

²⁸ “Mr. Calhoun’s Speech,” *Savannah (GA) Daily Republican*, March 12, 1850.

influence that genius and lofty purpose threw, like a halo, round the head of this great statesman....” The paper described the positive reaction to the speech from members of the Senate, except for some like New Hampshire’s John P. Hale and New York’s William Seward, “who looked like culprits undergoing castigation.”²⁹ A later *Mountaineer* article said the speech was “worthy of the fame of Mr. Calhoun,” and that it was “a cool, calm, dispassionate, argumentative and logical production.”³⁰ The *Daily Alabama Journal* was another paper that praised Calhoun’s speech. The *Journal* published the following:

The speech of Mr. Calhoun, in the Senate on the 4th inst., is justly characterized as one of the ablest ever delivered in that body. His detail of the abolition aggressions on the South, is masterly and impressive, and cannot be met or confuted; every word, to use a cant phrase, weighs a pound.³¹

The *Mississippi Free Trader* carried a telegraphic report from the *St. Louis (MO) Reveille* that was greatly condensed from the original speech. The report touched on the barest of the speech’s essentials but made a point of including Calhoun’s history of the North’s aggression toward the South and the disparity in power that he said had grown out of government influence. Along with the praise, however, many southern newspapers had to mention Calhoun’s illness in order to explain why he could not deliver his own speech.

The *Greenville (SC) Mountaineer* noted Calhoun’s health and described his appearance. “Wasted and worn from recent sickness, severe thought, and intense anxiety for the issue of this great struggle,” the *Mountaineer* stated. “—the lines of his strong countenance were more deeply marked than usual....” Although some newspapers only acknowledged the renowned orator’s

²⁹ “Editorial Correspondence of the Telegraph,” *Greenville (SC) Mountaineer*, March 22, 1850.

³⁰ “Mr. Calhoun’s Speech,” *Greenville (SC) Mountaineer*, March 29, 1850.

³¹ “Mr. Calhoun’s Speech,” *Daily Alabama Journal* (Montgomery), March 12, 1850.

inability to read his own speech, the *Mountaineer* presented a dire picture of Calhoun's health. "This is but a meager skeleton of Mr. Calhoun's health," the article stated. "His health is such that he can scarcely recover; his lungs are diseased, and he has had a severe attack of influenza."³² Calhoun's illness, though, was not enough to stop northern newspapers from offering up their criticism of the speech and its extreme tone.

One northern newspaper, the *Barre (MA) Patriot*, did not hold back in an article titled "Mr. Calhoun's Ultimatum." It noted Calhoun's inability to stand up and speak and then said:

Surely the scene must have been sufficiently impressive. On the borders of the grave, with the shadow of death resting upon him, the great Nullifier must needs present himself in that focus of thought and action—for what? To renounce the errors of a life time?—to lay on the altar of Liberty one offering, ere he passed away?—to do for Liberty once, that which he had done for Slavery many times? No, but to take up a still bolder and more advanced position in behalf of his favorite heresy.

The article pointed out the differences between Calhoun and Henry Clay, a southerner described as a man who had grown more intolerant of slavery with age, while Calhoun was still bound by his devotion to the practice of slavery. "Chains are not on Mr. Calhoun's slaves alone, they are on himself also," the *Patriot* declared. "So completely is he in bondage, that he has become a free and most willing slave to the Spirit of Slavery." Several newspapers carried this same abstract of the speech, which was notable in its brevity as it condensed the lengthy text to a mere paragraph. The article described how Calhoun rose from his seat, thanked the Senators for allowing him the opportunity to speak, and then asked Mr. Mason to read his remarks. The article included the following from his speech:

³² "Telegraphic Despatches [sic] for the St. Louis Reveille. Louisville, March 5, 4 p.m.," *Mississippi Free Trader* (Natchez), March 20, 1850.

The loss of equilibrium between the two sections, the North and South, was the primary cause of Southern discontent, and if the question was not settled, disunion would follow. Northern aggressions were reviewed—the North was forcing the South to secede. To arrive at disunion would require time, but it must come, unless the question was fairly and speedily settled.³³

Several newspapers, such as the *Farmers' (NH) Cabinet*, noted that the speech lasted most of two hours “and will fill six columns in the Washington papers. It was listened to with marked attention.”³⁴ One newspaper, the *Pittsfield (MA) Sun*, also carried a condensed version but it admonished readers that the speech “should be read by every citizen—it is the most important speech, so far as its effects are to be considered, that has ever been delivered in the Senate of the United States.”³⁵ The *New Hampshire Patriot and State Gazette* printed an abstract of the speech along with a scathing editorial terming it “a manifesto of disunion” and adding that Calhoun had shown “his true colors to the people of the North.” The speech should “open the eyes of the patriotic men of the South,” the *Gazette* declared, “and show them that to follow him is to precipitate themselves into an abyss of calamity and ruin from which every sane man of them will shrink in horror.”³⁶ The Senate debate following the speech did show that some southerner leaders were not inclined to follow Calhoun’s directives.

On March 5, newspapers reported that events took an unexpected turn in the Senate. The *Alabama Daily Journal* noted that the Senate debates featured several southern senators who did not hold with some of Calhoun’s positions. “Mr. Foote, of Mississippi, and other Southern

³³ “Mr. Calhoun’s Ultimatum,” *Barre (MA) Patriot*, March 15, 1850.

³⁴ “Affairs at Washington,” *Farmers’ Cabinet* (Amherst, NH), March 7, 1850; “Monday, March 4,” *Barre (MA) Patriot*, March 8, 1850; and “XXXIst Congress....First Session,” *Semi-Weekly Eagle* (Brattleboro, VT), March 7, 1850.

³⁵ “The Slavery Question in the Senate,” *Pittsfield (MA) Sun*, March 14, 1850.

³⁶ “Mr. Calhoun’s Speech,” *New Hampshire Patriot and State Gazette* (Concord), March 14, 1850.

Senators,” the *Journal* reported, “took ground again[st] the extreme ultraism of Mr. Calhoun, in requiring an organic change of the Constitution.”³⁷ Senator Foote had taken the floor and asked for some clarification on whether Calhoun intended to say that only a constitutional amendment would satisfy the South. Several newspapers provided accounts of the heated exchange that occurred between the two men. Foote wanted to move forward his proposal for a committee of thirteen senators to consider the questions facing the two regions. Foote said he differed with Calhoun on various points, especially the idea of adding an amendment to the Constitution, which he did not believe would remedy the “evil.” Calhoun rose and asked if “the gentleman accused him of disunion?” Foote responded that he “would neither give nor take brow-beating.” Calhoun stated, again, that under the current situation “the South cannot remain in the Union.” Foote retorted that he “would remain in the Union, and without an amendment of the Constitution.”³⁸ Calhoun insisted that “the South could not remain in the Union if no additional guarantees were given. Does not the Senator agree with me?” Foote concluded by saying that he believed “we can remain happily and honorably in the Union, under a compromise, such as we can make in ten days. I do not believe that an amendment of the constitution is necessary.”³⁹ The *Mississippi Free Trader*, a newspaper from Foote’s home state, carried an article that contained only one sentence on the exchange between the two men. It simply stated that a “long discussion took place between Mr. Foote and Mr. Calhoun, relative to the latter’s speech yesterday.”⁴⁰ The battle of words between two such prominent southern politicians, one representing Mississippi

³⁷ “Mr. Calhoun’s Speech,” *Daily Alabama Journal* (Montgomery), March 12, 1850.

³⁸ “XXXIst Congress...First Session,” *Semi-Weekly Eagle* (Brattleboro, VT), March 7, 1850; “Congressional. Tuesday, March 5. Senate,” *New Hampshire Patriot and State Gazette* (Concord), March 14, 1850.

³⁹ “Mr. Calhoun’s Speech,” *Daily Alabama Journal* (Montgomery), March 12, 1850.

⁴⁰ “Washington, March 5, 5 p.m. Senate,” *Mississippi Free Trader* (Natchez), March 20, 1850.

and the other South Carolina, indicated a schism was developing among the southern contingency when it came to compromise. From its failure to adequately cover such an important rift, it would appear that the *Free Trader* did not want to publicize such disagreements.

Northern newspapers, though, took quick notice of the division, and the *New Hampshire Patriot and State Gazette* noted that Calhoun's "colloquy" with Foote meant that not all southerners agreed with Calhoun. The paper saw this division as a hopeful sign for compromise and for the Union. "The people of the South still look with horror upon disunion," the *Gazette* stated. "They still look upon a disunionist as a traitor."⁴¹ The *Barre (MA) Patriot* reported that Foote did not follow Calhoun's lead, although Foote himself was known as having been "sufficiently ultra for 'Southern rights.'" It concluded that "the vaulting spirit of slavery hath this time 'oe'r-leaped itself and fallen on th' other side'" and that the speech, "able as it is, will stand, not as an instrument of power, but as a monument of boldness."⁴²

Needless to say, Foote's refutation of Calhoun's speech did not sit well with all southerners. It was reported that Foote soon found himself in a confrontation with Arkansas Senator Solon Borland, a man known for his quick temper. Pennsylvania's *North American and United States Gazette* carried an article that said Foote and Borland had a "personal collision" near the vicinity of the *Daily National Intelligencer*. Borland "charged Mr. Foote with a desertion of Mr. Calhoun and the cause of the South," and Foote "retorted that Borland was a mere tender to Mr. Calhoun." After more words, Borland struck Foote in the face, followed up with more blows, and "injured him considerably." Foote was then carried into the *Intelligencer's* office. Friends of the two men, the *Gazette* reported, were "negotiating for an adjustment.

⁴¹ "Mr. Calhoun's Speech," *New Hampshire Patriot and State Gazette* (Concord), March 14, 1850.

⁴² "Mr. Calhoun's Ultimatum," *Barre (MA) Patriot*, March 15, 1850.

Secundam legem honoris.”⁴³ A “feud is rapidly developing between the Southern men,” the article noted, “the issues being Calhoun and disunion, or Union and moderation.”⁴⁴ If the South was not united, there was a chance that compromise might be achieved, and it was at this moment that Daniel Webster would speak.

On March 7, 1850, Senator Webster gave his much-anticipated speech, which came to be known as the “Seventh of March” speech. The *Daily Picayune* published a telegraphic report that was complimentary of Webster and his speech, which it said had lasted three hours. Webster was “exceedingly moderate,” the *Picayune* reported, and “was desirous to bring the two great sections together on terms of a liberal compromise.” The basic tenets of his compromise, as laid out by the *Picayune*, were to honor the compact made at Texas’s annexation and admission of California and New Mexico as non-slaveholding territories. He also favored strict enforcement of the fugitive slave law and said he “rebukes the abolition agitation, and profoundly regrets the Wilmot proviso.” Webster concluded by asserting “that none of the States of the Union had a right to secede from the confederacy.” Calhoun had listened to the speech attentively and seemed to agree with most of it, with the exception of Webster’s assertion that states did not have the right to secede.⁴⁵ The *Pittsfield (MA) Sun* gave an account of the speech, in which Webster “considered the grievances of the north and south.” In an overview of the history of slavery in the country, he said the “immense extension of slave territory was one of the most remarkable political transactions on record.” Webster’s speech also criticized the press for its role in the current political strife. “Again, the press was too violent and reproachful,” the *Sun* reported.

⁴³ “Secundam legem honoris” can be loosely translated as “according to the law of honor.”

⁴⁴ “A Personal Rencontre,” *North American and United States Gazette* (Philadelphia, PA), March 16, 1850.

⁴⁵ “Telegraphed to the New Orleans Picayune. Congressional,” *Daily Picayune* (New Orleans, LA), March 12, 1850.

“North and south Congressional speeches were the same; their virulence had corrupted the vernacular of the country.” Webster also took issue with abolitionists and said “abolition societies had produced more evil than good.” Finally, Webster honed in on the heart of the division. “The greater the complaints of the north,” he said, “the greater was the disposition of the south to extend rather than restrict slavery, as contemplated by the fathers of the Republic.”⁴⁶ Webster understood that the more the North pressed the South on slavery, the more the South would push back against what it viewed as a restriction of its rights primarily based on political power and economic influences.

After Webster’s speech, several newspapers appeared hopeful that Webster’s speech would have a positive effect and that Congress might be able to find a compromise. The *Daily Alabama Journal* carried reports from two Washington, D.C., newspapers, the *Intelligencer* and the *Union*. Webster’s latest speech “added fresh laurels to the fame of the great orator,” the *Intelligencer* said, “and gave fresh proofs of his truly national and patriotic spirit.” The *Journal* article carried a quote from the *Union* newspaper, which often opposed Webster, which said that it thought “his whole speech was very able, and the last part of it was marked with intrepidity, frankness and liberality.” The article expressed high hopes that Webster’s compromise proposal might be able to save the Union.⁴⁷

Some northern newspapers, though, were not quite so taken with Webster’s proposals. Vermont’s *Semi-Weekly Eagle* noted that it would not publish the speech in its entirety because of its length and then took a jab at Webster’s delivery. “The speech, as a whole, is not characterized by that degree of massive eloquence which distinguishes many of the author’s

⁴⁶ “The Slavery Question in the Senate,” *Pittsfield (MA) Sun*, March 14, 1850. Also see “Mr. Webster’s Speech,” *Pittsfield (MA) Sun*, March 21, 1850.

⁴⁷ “The Washington Union on Mr. Webster’s Speech,” *Daily Alabama Journal* (Montgomery), March 15, 1850.

previous productions,” the *Eagle* declared. “There is apparently no effort at oratorical display, though here and there a sentence rises to a point of grandeur truly *Websterian*.” The article particularly took issue with Webster’s positions on Texas and the Fugitive Slave Bill. “While we acknowledge the force of his reasoning, and the truth of many of his positions, so disagreeable to Northern men,” the *Eagle* stated, “we yet think he has gone further in his concessions to the South, with an honest desire to settle finally this vexatious question, than the circumstances of the case required.”⁴⁸ Another northern newspaper, New Hampshire’s *Farmers’ Cabinet*, carried a small article that focused on one question Webster had posed in his speech: “What will become of the flag?” The newspaper responded caustically:

We offer the following compromise, which would seem natural and equitable. The South to take the *stripes*, the North the *stars*. Each then would have a most appropriate and expressive emblem. The *eagle*, an emblem of unlimited freedom, and cruel rapacity, may, with much adaptedness, surmount them both.⁴⁹

These newspaper reports show that although northerners appeared eager for compromise, slavery was becoming the one issue on which they did not want to cede any ground. As the same could be said for the South, it seems clear from these newspapers that an agreeable compromise on slavery would be difficult to obtain. Overall, though, Webster’s speech appeared to be well received in both the North and the South and to open the door for compromise. It was even reported that Calhoun congratulated Webster on his speech and said he thought it was “calculated to save the Union.”⁵⁰ In the days after Webster spoke, Senator Foote successfully renewed his motion for a committee of thirteen to help draft a compromise. A vote on the floor

⁴⁸ “Mr. Webster’s Speech,” *Semi-Weekly Eagle* (Brattleboro, VT), March 14, 1850.

⁴⁹ “What will become of the Flag,” *Farmers’ Cabinet* (Amherst, NH), March 14, 1850.

⁵⁰ “The Slavery Question in the Senate,” *Pittsfield (MA) Sun*, March 14, 1850.

to raise a committee of thirteen “to settle the slavery question was carried—yeas 24, nays 22.”⁵¹
The close vote was an indication that division over a possible compromise was still wide.

Webster’s speech and the approval of Foote’s committee did not calm the extremists’ concerns. Although discussion on the speeches and possible areas of compromise continued, newspapers reported on the extreme positions that remained. Just four days after Webster spoke,, New York Senator William H. Seward gave a speech that presented an anti-slavery viewpoint and was opposed to any compromise on the issue. The speech did receive some press coverage but not to the extent of Calhoun’s and Webster’s. “If Seward’s doctrines were to be endorsed by the people at large,” a *New Hampshire Patriot and State Gazette* editorial stated, “there would be an end to not only of the Union but of every rational form of government for either section.”⁵² President Taylor had asked Seward to speak in favor of Taylor’s plan for the Texas boundaries and the plan to admit California and New Mexico as states with their own constitutions. Instead of helping Taylor, Seward’s strong antislavery statements damaged Taylor even further in the South. The *Mississippi Free Trader* ran articles that criticized Taylor’s record of antagonistic remarks and was critical of southerners who were not true enough to the South. It stated:

If there be, in our midst, men who encourage the fanatics, and urge Gen. Taylor to invade us with those Cossack hordes, they will not live to witness his triumfal [sic] march over blighted fields, ruined cities and ravaged households. Every step that he takes shall be over the smoking dwelling and the dead body of a traitor to the south. If ruin and death are to visit us, upon them shall they first fall. We will treat them as spies. They shall be driven from our territory, or gibbeted for vultures to feed on. Before the southern people perish, they will take ample vengeance on those who betray them.⁵³

⁵¹ “Congressional. Tuesday, March 5. Senate,” *New Hampshire Patriot and State Gazette* (Concord), March 14, 1850.

⁵² “Washington Correspondence,” *New Hampshire Patriot and State Gazette* (Concord), March 28, 1850.

⁵³ “The President and the South,” *Mississippi Free Trader* (Natchez), March 27, 1850.

The rhetoric in the *Trader's* article was exactly the type of political antagonism that Webster had decried in his speech.

During this time the South would lose one of its strongest legislative voices, a fact that would affect the dynamics of compromise and debate. After John C. Calhoun had been unable to read his own speech on March 4, newspapers regularly carried reports on his health, and it appeared that he was near death. Newspapers printed articles that offered small anecdotes about Calhoun and his long tenure in public life. One Boston paper recounted a story involving a Connecticut judge under whom Calhoun had studied law. The judge said that if he ever had a court case “where life depended on persuading a jury that pumpkins were the natural fruit of apple trees he knew no man whom he should employ with so much confidence as John C. Calhoun.”⁵⁴ Not long after, it was reported that on March 31, 1850, Calhoun had died, and southern newspapers quickly began to extoll the virtues of the man and his career. “But he has fallen—in the thickest of the fight—and upon the field where he has won so many trophies,” the *Daily South Carolinian* said. “His voice is forever hushed in the quiet of death and the wail of a nation’s sorrow follows swiftly after the warning tones of the patriot and statesman.”⁵⁵ “He who but yesterday stood in the Senate chamber without a peer,” the *Macon (GA) Weekly Telegraph* stated,—like Saul a head and shoulders taller than any of his brethren, and watching with eagle eye the vast interests of the great Republic, has passed forever from our midst.” Many southern newspapers noted how Calhoun’s death would affect the South on the national political stage. “The death of Mr. Calhoun is a calamity to the nation,” the *Telegraph* declared. “His loss to the

⁵⁴ “John C. Calhoun,” *Boston (MA) Investigator*, March 20, 1850.

⁵⁵ “Death of Mr. Calhoun,” *Daily South Carolinian* (Columbia), April 1, 1850.

South at this crisis particularly, is irreparable.”⁵⁶ The *Daily Picayune* published a lengthy announcement of Calhoun’s death and promised to publish a full biography as soon as it was available. “There is not time now to write an analysis of his intellectual and political character, if we were competent to the task,” the *Picayune* stated. “The historian and the political philosopher will find therein materials for many instructive chapters in their analysis of the events and the mind of this age.”⁵⁷ Although some papers outside the South published only short notices of Calhoun’s death, others set aside their previous differences with the Senator and published praise for his service.⁵⁸ The *Daily Ohio Statesman* said his death would “throw a pall of gloom” over the whole country and his name would always arouse “proud recollections and lofty associations of human greatness and individual power.” The *Statesman* also added:

Though his political opinions have not always met the approbation of the whole American people, none who have known him through the history of public men and public affairs, have ever withheld from him their highest admiration—and all have, from his earliest manhood, cherished a just pride in his transcendent intellect and tremendous force of character.⁵⁹

The *Daily National Intelligencer* out of Washington, D.C., gave the particulars of Calhoun’s death and declared that “few of our public men, since those of the revolutionary era, have filled a larger space in the public eye; few have acted a more important part on the stage of American politics....”⁶⁰ Calhoun had been a prominent political voice, and his support of nullification had

⁵⁶ “Death of John C. Calhoun,” *Macon (GA) Weekly Telegraph*, April 2, 1850.

⁵⁷ “Death of John C. Calhoun,” *Daily Picayune* (New Orleans, LA), April 1, 1850.

⁵⁸ “A Great Man Has Fallen: Death of John C. Calhoun!” *Scioto Gazette* (Chillicothe, OH), April 1, 1850; “Telegraphic,” *Bangor (ME) Daily Whig & Courier*, April 2, 1850. Both of these were brief announcements of Calhoun’s death.

⁵⁹ “Death of John C. Calhoun,” *Daily Ohio Statesman* (Columbus), April 1, 1850.

⁶⁰ “Death of Mr. Calhoun,” *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC), April 1, 1850.

given him a reputation as a stalwart supporter of the South. Despite the glowing remembrances newspapers published after his death, Calhoun's dogmatic political legacy would long continue to trouble the country.

Calhoun's death at this time, however, did allow the possibility for compromise to gain some traction. His last speech had brought to light some fissures among southern politicians, and now chances seemed better for those seeking compromise. Even so, as March ended and April began, the compromise resolutions continued to be debated with much argument and a great deal of political posturing. Newspapers reported that some northern politicians continued to call for a vote on the Wilmot Proviso, in spite of how unwelcome they knew it was in the South. Bringing up the proviso, which would never pass, only served to anger the South and hamper any hopes of compromise. As a result, the animosity between some of the politicians involved in the debates continued to grow.

It was during this period that a long-standing feud between Missouri Senator Thomas Hart Benton and Mississippi Senator Henry Foote reached violent proportions. Their dispute was a clear indication of growing regional divisions within the Senate, particularly within political parties, and received extensive newspaper coverage in both the North and the South. The tensions between the two senators had begun to escalate almost as soon as the 1850 session of Congress began, before Clay, Calhoun, or Webster had given their speeches. Newspapers reported that on Wednesday, January 16, 1850, Benton gave a speech in which he introduced a bill concerning the boundaries of Texas and the payment of \$15 million to Texas, monies intended to help pay off its Mexican debt. After Benton spoke, Senator Foote made a speech on the same subject, during which he accused Benton of "stealing his thunder." Foote then began to speak on the topic of slavery and criticized Benton as not being loyal to the South for not

addressing the issue in his bill. Benton put on his hat and left the chamber, at which point Foote said Benton “was making the same sort of flight that the negroes of Missouri made across the river.”⁶¹

At this point, newspapers simply made light of the exchange between the two men. A North Carolina paper suggested that Benton probably was offended by Foote’s poor use of Latin. The paper said Benton could not stand Foote’s misuse of the language, although Benton had a reputation for having a skin so thick that it “might put the rhinoceros to blush (if that quadraped could blush).”⁶² In an article with the headline “The Senate’s Jester,” Foote, too, found himself the focus of such humor. “Senator Foote is unquestionably the greatest curiosity in the body to which, by some strange freak of fortune, he happens to belong,” Vermont’s *Semi-Weekly Eagle* stated. “Not that he is altogether so destitute of brains as some people think.” The article included a sarcastic description of Foote and ended by stating that senators often left their seats rather than listen to him. Foote, though, needed no hearers, the *Eagle* stated, because the reporters never failed to see that “the nation is informed of what senators have some times to [sic] little patience to hear.”⁶³ The *Savannah (GA) Daily Republican* reported that there was question as to whether Benton left because of his “contempt for Foote” or if Foote’s keen and vehement sarcasm caused Benton to “take to his heels.” In either case, the *Republican* cared not

⁶¹ “Thirty-First Congress,” *Pittsfield (MA) Sun*, Jan. 24, 1850; “Foote upon Benton,” *Fayetteville (NC) Observer*, Jan. 22, 1850; “Benton and Foote,” *Raleigh (NC) Register*, Jan. 26, 1850.

⁶² “Foote and Benton,” *Raleigh (NC) Register*, Feb. 16, 1850; and, “Foote and Benton,” *Weekly Raleigh Register*, and *North Carolina Gazette*, Feb. 20, 1850.

⁶³ “The Senate’s Jester,” *Semi-Weekly Eagle* (Brattleboro, VT), Feb. 21, 1850. The article said of Foote: “The fluent and funny Mississippian is of very moderate side [sic], both as regards his personal latitude and longitude. He wears a wig. His face is somewhat long, somewhat thin, and of a good natured expression. He is really an amicable soul, quite incapable of malice, and will never do anything dreadful, whatever he may say. And there is no answering his sayings. Such a tongue as he has, such superhuman flipency [sic], such an untiring faculty of utterance, never before fell to the lot of mortal man or woman either.”

for the reason, but simply that Benton had taken leave of the Senate. “If he would stay out,” the paper declared, “as he is likely to do after next session, the country will be well satisfied.”⁶⁴

The *Farmers’ Cabinet* in New Hampshire took the incident more seriously and used it to voice concerns about the behavior in the Senate and also to make a prediction about where it might lead. The paper stated:

The scene was painful, but then there is an old score between Mr. Benton and Mr. Foote, which, sooner or later, may end in blood, and I am pained to say, the exasperation of Senators will not end here. Similar quarrels are hatched between other Senators, which may end in confusion and terror. I verily believe many Senators and members go armed, in the full expectation of witnessing a bloody government. The excitement is beyond anything that peaceable people can imagine.⁶⁵

The *Cabinet* was correct, and the antagonism did not end with that incident. On March 26, several newspapers reported the two men had once again waged a battle of words in the Senate, with Benton referring to Foote as “cowardly” and Foote referring to Benton as a “blackguard.”⁶⁶ The chamber erupted and had to be called to order, and Benton was infuriated over Foote’s comment. “Is language to be used here, which could not be used in an oyster-cellar, grocery, or tavern?” Benton asked.⁶⁷ Vermont’s *Semi-Weekly Eagle* criticized both senators’ behavior. “Both parties here began to cool down, and order was soon restored,” the paper stated. “But are not the proceedings positively disgraceful? They are worthy only [of] drunken bullies in an underground grog shop, where three-cent liquor is dispensed in unlimited doses.”

⁶⁴ *Savannah (GA) Daily Republican*, Feb. 11, 1850.

⁶⁵ “Washington, Jan. 17th,” *Farmers’ Cabinet* (Amherst, NH), Jan. 24, 1850.

⁶⁶ A nineteenth century word used to describe a person of ill repute who is reviled.

⁶⁷ “Benton and Foote,” *Boston (MA) Courier*, April 1, 1850; “The Benton and Foote Difficulty,” *Natchez (MS) Semi-Weekly Courier*, April 5, 1850.

When newspapers did take sides in the dispute, most followed along regional lines. The same issue of the *Eagle* carried a small article on the escalation in tensions that included a jab at Foote. “It is feared that the quarrel between Senators Benton and Foote will end in a duel,” the paper said. “The Louisville Journal says that Mr. Foote has fought some twenty or thirty duels, – that he has frequently been hit himself, but never was so fortunate as so [sic] hit his opponent.”⁶⁸ A similar article in the *Milwaukee (WI) Sentinel and Gazette* recounted the story of one of Foote’s duels. Foote’s opponent, S. S. Prentiss, had noticed some boys watching from the trees and ordered them to come down. “Foote is going to fire,” Prentiss said, “and no one knows where he’ll hit!”⁶⁹ The *Daily Ohio Statesman* chastised both men for their behavior, although the paper appeared to place more of the blame on Foote and “the aspirations of different Presidential candidates.”⁷⁰ Mississippi newspapers, not surprisingly, came to Foote’s defense, and did so vehemently. “We say go it, Foote!” the *Mississippi Free Trader and Natchez Gazette* declared. “Our chivalrous Senator is never better employed than when he is stripping the lion’s skin from the senatorial asses, who almost brayed their country into disunion and the dissolution of the great family compact of states.” The paper condemned Benton and noted that Foote would be “welcomed home with public dinners and every demonstration of civic approbation for his course, both towards Seward and Benton.”⁷¹

The press coverage did nothing to quell the senators’ bickering, and another incident was soon at hand. By April, the two men were obviously at a breaking point. As with many

⁶⁸ *Semi-Weekly Eagle* (Brattleboro, VT), April 1, 1850.

⁶⁹ “Senator Benton and Foote,” *Milwaukee (WI) Sentinel and Gazette*, April 10, 1850.

⁷⁰ “Senators Benton and Foote,” *Daily Ohio Statesman* (Columbus), April 6, 1850.

⁷¹ “Gen. Foote and Col. Benton,” *Mississippi Free Trader and Natchez Gazette* (Natchez), April 10, 1850.

legislators, they seemed more intent on antagonizing one another than finding any real agreement or compromise. Newspapers such as the *Daily Alabama Journal* reported that on April 17 Benton said in a speech on California that the “South cried wolf, when there was no danger.” Foote rose in response and began to disparage Benton, at which point Benton moved toward Foote “in a hostile manner.”⁷² Foote moved to the front of the chamber, in front of the chair, and pulled out a pistol, at which point Benton, who was unarmed, called for the Senate to take notice. Foote quickly said he was only acting in self-defense, as Benton might have had a weapon. Benton said Foote’s excuse was a “lying and cowardly pretext for assassinating him—for it was known that he never carried arms.”⁷³ Several times during their verbal exchange, newspapers reported, the Senate broke out with loud exclamations and had to be called to order. “The Senate was palsied and panic struck” the *Daily Alabama Journal* reported. “Investigation into the matter appears ridiculous, but a committee of seven was ordered to inquire into it.”⁷⁴

Not surprisingly, Benton’s comment that the “South was crying wolf” appeared in several southern newspapers, accompanied by a vigorous defense of Foote’s anger at Benton.⁷⁵ “We are glad our Senator has, at length, found means to touch the raw through the thick hide of the Missouri bear,” the *Mississippi Free Trader* declared. “However much we regret the show of fire

⁷²“Disturbances in the U.S. Senate. (Telegraphed for the Charleston Courier.) Washington, April 17,” *Daily Alabama Journal* (Montgomery), April 22, 1850.

⁷³ “Congressional. Senate. Washington, April 17, 1850,” *Daily Picayune* (New Orleans, LA), April 24, 1850.

⁷⁴“Disturbances in the U.S. Senate. (Telegraphed for the Charleston Courier.) Washington, April 17,” *Daily Alabama Journal* (Montgomery), April 22, 1850. Other accounts: “From Washington. A Fearful Scene in the Senate,” *Daily Ohio Statesman* (Columbus), April 22, 1850; “Foote and Benton,” *Daily Morning News* (Savannah, GA), April 22, 1850; “The Senate Disgraced!” *Semi-Weekly Eagle* (Brattleboro, VT), April 22, 1850; and, “Benton and Foote,” *Weekly Raleigh Register, and North Carolina Gazette*, April 24, 1850.

⁷⁵ Telegraphic Intelligence. Disgraceful Scene in the Senate,” *Macon (GA) Weekly Telegraph*, April 23, 1850. “Disturbances in the U.S. Senate. (Telegraphed for the Charleston Courier),” *Daily Alabama Journal* (Montgomery), April 22, 1850; and “Congressional. Senate,” *Daily Picayune* (New Orleans, LA), April 24, 1850.

arms in the Senate Chamber, we fully justify Gen. Foote in taking out a pistol in self defense.”⁷⁶ Another *Free Trader* article noted that Foote had nobly “deported himself, and vindicated the rights of the South in the exciting debate growing out of the great question now agitating the Union.”⁷⁷ Another Mississippi newspaper, the *Hinds County Gazette*, acknowledged that it was to be expected that the northern press would be “very severe on Gen. Foote,” but the paper found it more regretful that some of the southern papers were critical of him. With the admonition that “circumstances alter cases,” the *Gazette* asserted that “it is determined that an individual *may*, even in the pulpit, discharge a pistol at a *mad dog* that threatens the safety of any member of the congregation, without committing a breach of propriety.” “The old Hyena from Missouri,” the paper added, “is accountable to the country for this affair. Gen. F. did only what we, or any other citizen of Hinds county, would do under similar circumstances.”⁷⁸ Georgia’s *Daily Morning News* stated that it was gratified to see some northern papers “unanimously exonerate [sic] Mr. Foote from blame” in the altercation. “With an impartiality honorable to the press,” the *News* stated, “the blame is laid where it rightfully belongs, upon the shoulder of that compound of arrogance and egotism, Thomas Hart Benton.”⁷⁹ The *Mississippian* published a short, humorous *New York Sunday Times* item on the incident. “Folks think Col. Benton quite melo-dra-matic in bearing [sic] his naked bosom,” the paper declared, “and calling upon Foote to fire the moment he saw the pistol safely locked up in a desk. It was electric!”⁸⁰ The *Greenville (NC) Mountaineer*

⁷⁶ “Gen. Foote and Benton, in the Senate,” *Mississippi Free Trader* (Natchez), April 24, 1850.

⁷⁷ “Benton and Foote,” *Mississippi Free Trader* (Natchez), May 1, 1850.

⁷⁸ *Hinds County Gazette* (Raymond, MS), May 10, 1850.

⁷⁹ “Benton and Foote,” *Daily Morning News* (Savannah, GA), April 24, 1850.

⁸⁰ *Mississippian* (Jackson), May 17, 1850.

defended Foote, but also criticized both men for the long-standing feud that disgraced the country and encouraged them to fight it out elsewhere in the future.⁸¹

Senator Benton certainly had some defenders, too, but they were mainly northern newspapers. The *New Hampshire Patriot & State Gazette* said Foote had long attempted to make California's admission as a state contingent on agreement with the South's position on slavery. "Against this log-rolling scheme Mr. Benton had battled with wonderful ability, energy, tact and perseverance," the *Gazette* stated, and accused Foote of deliberately provoking Benton. "He evidently desired and sought an excuse for shooting Benton," the *Gazette* declared. "He intended to provoke Benton to attack him in order that he might shoot him."⁸² The *New Hampshire Statesman* printed an article from the *Hartford (CT) Courant* that blamed both men to some degree, but it claimed that Benton had borne Foote "for a long time in silence" and that Mr. Foote had meditated and prepared to accomplish murder.⁸³

Several newspapers, northern and southern, condemned the actions of both men, although sometimes the papers had political reasons for such a stand. "The newspaper press shows signs of dividing into parties," New Orleans' *Daily Picayune* asserted, "on the subject of the late disgraceful scene in the U.S. Senate."⁸⁴ Another *Picayune* article noted that the incident "shocks all our ideas of the decorum of the senatorial character" and it was hoped that the Senate would "act with decision, and without fear or favor."⁸⁵ The *Weekly Raleigh (NC) Register* stated that

⁸¹ "Messrs. Foote and Benton," *Greenville (NC) Mountaineer*, April 26, 1850.

⁸² "Benton and Foote," *New Hampshire Patriot & State Gazette* (Concord), April 25, 1850.

⁸³ "The Hartford Courant," *New Hampshire Statesman* (Concord), May 3, 1850.

⁸⁴ "The U.S. Senate—Benton and Foote," *Daily Picayune* (New Orleans, LA), April 30, 1850.

⁸⁵ "Benton and Foote," *Daily Picayune* (New Orleans, LA), April 20, 1850.

every “true American citizen will feel that he has received a personal reproach in the fact that the dignity of the Senate has been so grossly outraged.” The paper then proceeded, in an obvious partisan tone, to endorse the *Richmond (VA) Whig’s* sentiment that the Senate should expel both of the men and that the events were the result of Andrew Jackson’s presidency and the “down-hill march of Locofocoism.”⁸⁶ The *Natchez (MS) Semi-Weekly Courier* said that if “Senators are allowed to draw pistols and seek pugilistic encounters upon the floor of the Senate, we may soon look for the contagion to spread even to the Supreme Court Room....” Although it would not condemn either man on the basis of telegraphic reports, the *Courier* stated that one or both of them deserved expulsion, as the “dignity of the Senate, and the honor of the country, demand that a stern example should be set.”⁸⁷ The *Placer Times* of California gave the same account of the incident that appeared in several newspapers but without comment on who might be at fault.⁸⁸ Several newspapers printed a letter Benton sent on April 18 to Philip Fendall, the United States Attorney for the District of Columbia. In it, Benton wrote that he thought it “a proper subject for a court of justice, and wish it to be brought before the Criminal Court of this District.” Benton included a copy of the *National Intelligencer* (DC), which detailed an account of the incident.⁸⁹ Some newspapers published a *Boston (MA) Post* report that said Foote had been advised to “carry arms for self protection, not only by members of the Senate, but by

⁸⁶ “Foote and Benton,” *Weekly Raleigh Register, and North Carolina Gazette* (Raleigh, NC), April 24, 1850.

⁸⁷ “The Benton and Foote Difficulty,” *Natchez (MS) Semi-Weekly Courier*, April 28, 1850.

⁸⁸ “Passage Between Foote and Benton,” *Placer Times* (Sacramento City, CA), May 13, 1850.

⁸⁹ “Foote and Benton,” *Scioto Gazette* (Chillicothe, OH), April 23, 1850; “Benton and Foote,” *Milwaukee (WI) Sentinel and Gazette*, April 27, 1850; “Col. Benton, Foote and the Grand Jury,” *Daily Ohio Statesman* (Columbus), April 29, 1850.

members of the Cabinet.”⁹⁰ The insinuation was that Foote feared an attack from Benton over their quarrels.

Newspapers reported that the committee formed to investigate the incident finally met in May, and it began by taking testimony from witnesses, including members of the press and the boy who was said to have sold Foote the gun.⁹¹ In June, several senators were called to testify, including Benton, who accused Foote of “an attempted assassination.”⁹² It was reported in late June that the District of Columbia Grand Jury had decided to ignore Benton’s charges, but the Senate committee was continuing its investigation at Benton’s urging, although “without progressing an inch.”⁹³ The *Raleigh (NC) Register* reported that the Grand Jury had ignored “the bill against Foote for bringing his revolver to bear against the barn-door belly of old bully Bullion.”⁹⁴ On July 1, the *Bangor (ME) Daily Whig & Courier* published a report from the Senate’s activities on June 27, including the fact that the Benton and Foote Committee had finished its investigation. The *Courier* gave a dismal synopsis of the political climate:

This has been an intensely anxious day in the Senate. Mr. Clay expected the vote on the Compromise bill, but he was compelled to give it up. The friends of the Omnibus bill are gloomy at the prospect. Old Zach is ready to answer the call made in relation to New Mexico. The Cabinet are delighted with the news from Sante Fe. The Benton and Foote Committee closed their labors to-day with a scene between Foote and Col. Fremont. It is apprehended by some persons that the controversy between Foote and Davis is not ended. Confusion and distrust is the order of the day.⁹⁵

⁹⁰ “Benton and Foote,” *Daily Ohio Statesman* (Columbus), May 1, 1850.

⁹¹ “Benton and Foote,” *Fayetteville (NC) Observer*, May 14, 1850.

⁹² “Washington, June 19,” *Fayetteville (NC) Observer*, June 25, 1850.

⁹³ “Benton and Foote,” *Daily Morning News* (Savannah, GA), June 28, 1850. This article was critical of Benton and described him as “stout” and Foote as “feeble in health.”

⁹⁴ “Benton vs. Foote,” *Raleigh (NC) Register*, June 29, 1850.

⁹⁵ “The Compromise Scheme—The Benton and Foote Affair—Rumored Removals, & c.,” *Bangor (ME) Daily Whig & Courier*, July 1, 1850.

In August, newspapers carried summaries of the final report, which said the entire incident was “discreditable to the Senate.” The report found fault with both men, and with the Senate for not following its own rules for debate, but the committee did not recommend any disciplinary action. “They think the strong condemnation of the personalities,” newspapers reported, “the attempted assault, and the practice of carrying arms, sufficient to prove a warning in future.”⁹⁶

The *Cleveland (OH) Herald*, among others, believed “the committee have been a long time in reaching such an impotent, whitewashing conclusion.”⁹⁷ The attention to the feud and the animosity it engendered was a distraction in the compromise debates, which had continued to drag on for several months.⁹⁸ More than that, though, the feud between Benton and Foote is an example of the intense feeling that permeated the Senate deliberations. It seemed almost impossible that any type of compromise legislation would pass in an atmosphere so tainted by acrimonious partisanship.

By the time the committee’s report came out, another unexpected event had occurred. President Zachary Taylor had taken ill and died on July 9, creating even more political uncertainty. In the months leading up to his death, Taylor had dug in his heels on several of the compromise points and his insistence on admitting New Mexico as a new state. The boundary Taylor wanted would include land on the eastern side of Texas, which it had no intention of losing. The *Fayetteville (NC) Observer* reported that there were accusations that Taylor had

⁹⁶ “The Benton and Foote Difficulty,” *North American and State Gazette* (Philadelphia, PA), Aug. 3, 1850. Also see “The Benton and Foote Difficulty,” *Boston (MA) Daily Atlas*, Aug. 15, 1850, and “Foote and Benton,” *New Hampshire Patriot and State Gazette* (Concord), Aug. 22, 1850.

⁹⁷ “The Foote and Benton Quarrel,” *Cleveland (OH) Herald*, Aug. 5, 1850.

⁹⁸ “XXXIst Congress....First Session,” *Semi-Weekly Eagle* (Brattleboro, VT), May 30, 1850.

“prompted the New Mexicans to demand admission into the Union.”⁹⁹ Senator Foote proposed a resolution to investigate Taylor’s instructions concerning New Mexico and said the “proceedings were shameful and would bring on civil war.”¹⁰⁰ Southerners, who remembered Taylor’s harsh words and Seward’s antislavery speech, still smarted over what they perceived as Taylor’s betrayal.¹⁰¹ The southern states held a convention in Nashville, Tennessee, to discuss their strategy pending the compromise vote in the Senate, but it only resulted in a wait and see approach.¹⁰² Henry Clay’s committee of thirteen had been meeting since April and had finally agreed upon a comprehensive bill. It was similar in some respects to the one Senator Foote had proposed earlier and was sometimes referred to as the Omnibus Bill, since it incorporated so many provisions, including the admission of California. The Senate had been debating the bill since it was proposed, but Taylor did not support it and had threatened to veto it if it passed. By the end of June, it must have seemed as though everyone had something to say and the speeches would never cease. In the midst of it all, the *Mississippi Free Trader* noted the oratorical skills of two young House members from Alabama, Frank Bowden and Sampson Harris:

California has done some good therefore. She has caused to be dug up some orators. We may see, yet, Eloquence flowing, like golden waves of the Sacramento, from this subject; albeit there has been much mud and dirt dug up with the lumps of oratorical gold we have discovered. We all have to get a Southern Gold Washing Machine; to drain all this Northern mud from our golden stream of Eloquence!¹⁰³

⁹⁹ *Fayetteville (NC) Observer*, July 9, 1850.

¹⁰⁰ “XXXIst Congress...First Session,” *Semi-Weekly Eagle* (Brattleboro, VT), July 1, 1850.

¹⁰¹ “The President’s Plan,” *New Hampshire Patriot and State Gazette* (Concord), July 4, 1850.

¹⁰² “Nashville Convention—Address, & c.,” *Macon (GA) Weekly Telegraph*, July 9, 1850. This article noted that the convention would meet again after Congress had adjourned to “prescribe a suitable remedy for the South.”

¹⁰³ “From Our Special Washington Correspondent. Washington, June 13, 1850,” *Mississippi Free Trader* (Natchez), July 3, 1850.

In July, the Senate debate still appeared to be at a standstill, with serious political divisions that seemed insurmountable. An article in the *Mississippi Free Trader* observed:

This plan of the President's and the Compromise Bill has divided the whig forces completely; and it would just be as difficult to get the, [sic] Missouri Compromise line adopted in the existing territorial dispute, as to get a whig Compromise line drawn between the territory of that party now in dispute and divided between Zach Taylor and Hal Clay.¹⁰⁴

In the middle of this hot summer of debate came July 4 and the annual patriotic celebration in Washington, D.C. Taylor attended the festivities and soon became seriously ill, possibly with food poisoning from the intense heat that day.¹⁰⁵ By July 9, Taylor was dead.¹⁰⁶ Very quickly, the *Daily National Intelligencer* carried copies of the official correspondence concerning Millard Fillmore's resignation from the chair of the Senate, his ascension to the presidency, and the beginning of arrangements for Taylor's funeral.¹⁰⁷ Taylor's death changed the political landscape, and several editorials noted that Taylor's demise came at "such a critical

¹⁰⁴ "From Our Special Washington Correspondent. Washington, June 13, 1850," *Mississippi Free Trader* (Natchez), July 3, 1850. The lag time between article datelines and their actual publication should be noted. Without question, there must have been some reader confusion as to where things actually stood, as newspapers often contained articles from various dates.

¹⁰⁵ "Latest Streak by Lightning. Illness of President Taylor," *Daily Ohio Statesman* (Columbus), July 9, 1850; "Telegraphic News. Illness of President Taylor," *Augusta (GA) Chronicle*, July 11, 1850; "Dangerous Illness of President Taylor," *Farmers' Cabinet* (Amherst, NH), July 11, 1850; "Serious Illness of the President," *Pittsfield (MA) Sun*, July 11, 1850; "Dangerous Illness of President Taylor," *Cleveland (OH) Herald*, July 9, 1850. Several newspapers referred to his illness as "bilious Cholera," and some noted that there had been other deaths in the area from similar illnesses. Most papers around the country carried news of Taylor's illness on or after the date he had already died, as it happened so quickly. Many newspapers carried timelines of first reports of his illness and then his death.

¹⁰⁶ "Death of President Taylor," *Bangor (ME) Daily Whig & Courier*, July 11, 1850. Upon his death, it was reported that his last words were "I am not afraid to die: I have done my duty: My only regret is in leaving those dear to me."

¹⁰⁷ "Official," *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC), July 11, 1850.

period, a period of sectional controversy and almost sectional strife.”¹⁰⁸ The *Augusta (GA) Chronicle* reported that the Senate was debating a resolution to censure the president just when word of his illness was received.¹⁰⁹

Millard Fillmore took the oath of office on July 10, and newspapers quickly focused on his possible role in a compromise.¹¹⁰ “Cannot President Fillmore save this Union,” The *Daily Ohio Statesman* asked, “just as well as President Taylor?”¹¹¹ Newspapers reported that Taylor’s entire Cabinet had tendered their resignations but would stay on until President Fillmore made his choices.¹¹² Newspapers also noted that Taylor’s death might “have a favorable effect upon the Compromise, many members North and South feeling the necessity of some conclusion for the sake of the Union and peace.”¹¹³ Northern Whigs had been against the compromise, because of Taylor’s opposition to it, but the *Daily Ohio Statesman* reported that they now might feel more inclined to lend their support. The *Statesman* also published a *Louisville Journal* correspondent’s comment on Taylor’s death. “His death will probably produce important political changes,” the article stated, “almost certainly a removal of the present Cabinet, and, very possibly, the passage of the Compromise Bill.”¹¹⁴ Northern newspapers also reported that

¹⁰⁸ “Death of the President,” *North American and United States Gazette* (Philadelphia, PA), July 10, 1850. “The Funeral of the Late President,” *Daily Ohio Statesman* (Columbus), July 15, 1850; “Congressional Proceedings. Eulogy of Mr. Webster,” *Farmers’ Cabinet* (Amherst, NH), July 18, 1850.

¹⁰⁹ “Telegraphic News. Illness of President Taylor,” *Augusta (GA) Chronicle*, July 11, 1850.

¹¹⁰ “Mr. Fillmore Taking Office,” *Daily Picayune* (New Orleans, LA), July 14, 1850.

¹¹¹ *Daily Ohio Statesman* (Columbus), July 15, 1850.

¹¹² “Resignation of the Cabinet,” *Daily Picayune* (New Orleans, LA), July 14, 1850.

¹¹³ “Washington, July 12,” *Bangor (ME) Daily Whig & Courier*, July 15, 1850.

¹¹⁴ “Mr. Fillmore---The Slavery Question---The Cabinet,” *Daily Ohio Statesman* (Columbus), July 20, 1850.

Fillmore would not give a Cabinet position to anyone from a southern state that had sent representatives to the Nashville Convention.¹¹⁵

No sooner had Taylor been buried than the Senate continued in its work. Louisiana Senator Solomon Downs gave a eulogy stating that Taylor had wanted unity foremost. In a nod to some of the divisions Taylor had created, Senator Webster said that if Taylor's death might "be used to soften the animosities, to allay party criminations, and restore fellowship and good feeling among the various sections of the Union," then it might not have "been purchased at too high a price."¹¹⁶ Newspapers reported some movement among Whigs to abandon the party divisions that had arisen under Taylor and to unite behind Fillmore.¹¹⁷ It was reported that on July 15 Clay went forward with his plans and once again brought up the Omnibus Bill. Afterward, it appeared it might be business as usual as Seward tried to amend the bill by adding the Wilmot Proviso, and Benton spoke on possible Texas boundaries.¹¹⁸ Newspapers kept a close eye on the Senate proceedings, and on July 17 Webster spoke again about there being no need for the Wilmot Proviso, as most agreed that slavery would not prosper in the new territories.¹¹⁹ The *Bangor (ME) Daily Whig & Courier* reported that Webster said he believed the South to be as patriotic as the North and that the "great body of people entertain moderate views, and were devoted to the Union." Webster said he was determined "to act as an American for the good of

¹¹⁵ "Washington. 24th," *Cleveland (OH) Herald*, July 25, 1850.

¹¹⁶ "Address of Senator Downs," and "Address of Sen. Webster," *Vermont Watchman and State Journal* (Montpelier), July 18, 1850.

¹¹⁷ "Duty of the Whigs," *New Hampshire Statesman* (Concord), July 26, 1850.

¹¹⁸ "Latest Streak by Lightning. Congressional," *Daily Ohio Statesman* (Columbus), July 16, 1850.

¹¹⁹ This argument was being made to appease the North for not including the Wilmot Proviso, or some other type of slavery restriction for the territories, in any compromise that was reached. The logic was that the geography and the agriculture of the territories would not be conducive to supporting a slave economy, so fighting with the South over the issue was a needless distraction.

the whole country, be the consequences to himself what they might.”¹²⁰ Newspapers reported that numerous other senators spoke that day, including Senators Clay, Foote, and Hunter. The next day, July 18, after several more senators spoke, Senator John Hale of New Hampshire said the speeches had “led him to hope for what he had never expected before, that some good was to grow out of seven months’ discussion.”¹²¹ Newspapers reported a sense of hopefulness that the change in administrations would ease the country’s tensions, especially as Fillmore selected a new cabinet, which was immediately confirmed.¹²²

Within days it was reported that Fillmore had told a Texas delegation he would not pursue Taylor’s course in reference to Texas and its boundary with New Mexico. It seemed apparent that Fillmore did not want to do anything that would “annoy Texas, or would bring on a collision between Texas and New Mexico.”¹²³ In short order, obstacles to the compromise were vanishing. Fillmore’s choice of Daniel Webster for Secretary of State had been well received, especially because of his seeming ability to calm the slavery argument.¹²⁴ However, his voice in the Senate would have to be replaced, which was especially important in light of Fillmore’s hopes for compromise. There remained some southern concerns over what direction Fillmore’s administration might take in the coming days, especially as it concerned the Omnibus Bill. The *Mississippi Free Trader* said Fillmore and some new cabinet members had previously been

¹²⁰ “Political. Mr. Webster’s Speech on the Compromise Bill,” *Bangor (ME) Daily Whig & Courier*, July 25, 1850.

¹²¹ “Thirty-First Congress,” *Pittsfield (MA) Sun*, July 25, 1850.

¹²² “President Fillmore,” *Hudson River Chronicle* (Sing-Sing, NY), July 23, 1850; *Daily Alabama Journal* (Montgomery), July 22, 1850; “The New Cabinet,” *Hudson River Chronicle* (Sing-Sing, NY), July 23, 1850; “President Fillmore’s Cabinet,” *Pittsfield (MA) Sun*, July 25, 1850; “The New Cabinet,” *Semi-Weekly Eagle* (Brattleboro, VT), July 25, 1850. Also see Potter, “Crisis,” 110. Potter noted that Fillmore was the only vice-presidential successor to completely replace his predecessor’s entire cabinet.

¹²³ “President Fillmore’s Texas Views,” *Daily Alabama Journal* (Montgomery), July 29, 1850.

¹²⁴ *Bangor (ME) Daily Whig & Courier*, July 24, 1850.

identified as abolitionists. But the paper seemed to be looking for confirmation that Fillmore and his cabinet might hold “pro-slavery principles” and reported their views as “various and contradictory.” The paper hoped the “mystery” would be explained within a few days.¹²⁵

In spite of some initial optimism over possible passage of the Omnibus Bill, the mood quickly changed, and several newspapers reported that Clay would not be able to muster enough votes. “There seems to be less chance now,” the *Milwaukee (WI) Sentinel and Gazette* stated, “than before the recent changes at Washington, for its passage through the Senate.”¹²⁶ Clay’s frustration was tangible as he continued to argue at length for the bill’s passage.¹²⁷ The *Boston (MA) Daily Atlas* reported that on July 22 “Mr. Clay spoke three hours and a half today, and made what every body says is a great speech.” The paper, though, also added that there “was nothing very new or striking about it.”¹²⁸ Over the course of the final days of debate, newspapers reported on a string of amendments. In a failed attempt to ease the bill toward passage, Maryland Senator James Pearce initiated a proposal that, in essence, gutted the bill by removing the provisions for New Mexico, Texas, and California. On July 31 the only provision left, the Utah territory, was approved, which meant the Omnibus Bill had finally met with defeat.¹²⁹ Some

¹²⁵ “The Reformed Abolitionist,” *Mississippi Free Trader* (Natchez), July 31, 1850.

¹²⁶ “Chances of the Omnibus Bill,” *Milwaukee (WI) Daily Sentinel and Gazette*, July 23, 1850.

¹²⁷ “Editorial Correspondence of The Atlas,” *Boston (MA) Daily Atlas*, July 25, 1850; “Congressional,” *Scioto Gazette* (Chillicothe, OH), July 27, 1850; *Cleveland (OH) Herald*, July 29, 1850. A short item in the *Herald* was meant to be humorous and included the following: “In the course of his luminous argument in reference to the Omnibus Bill, Mr. Clay, addressing the ultras, cried out with a voice of a stentor (Greek herald): —What do you want?”

¹²⁸ “Editorial Correspondence of The Atlas,” *Boston (MA) Daily Atlas*, July 26, 1850. The speech was also covered in other articles including “By Magnetic Telegraph,” *North American and United States Gazette* (Philadelphia, PA), July 26, 1850.

¹²⁹ “Latest Streak by Lightning. Congressional. Washington, July 31, ’50,” *Daily Ohio Statesman* (Columbus), Aug. 1, 1850; “Latest Streak by Lightning. Congressional. Very Important from Washington, Aug. 1, 1850,” *Daily Ohio Statesman* (Columbus), Aug. 2, 1850; “The Omnibus Upset—Its Contents Spilled and Scattered!” *Semi-Weekly Eagle* (Brattleboro, VT), Aug. 5, 1850. Newspapers reported on the votes and negotiations

newspapers saw the result as a posthumous victory for President Taylor. “After eight months of useless agitation and unnatural excitement,” the *Cleveland (OH) Herald* said, “the Senate has now started from the point which Gen. Taylor recommended at the meeting of Congress.”¹³⁰

Some newspapers reported happiness over the defeat because the bill had supposedly favored the slave states. The *Bangor (ME) Daily Whig & Courier* carried an article from the *Boston (MA) Journal* celebrating the bill’s defeat, as it “is sufficient to say that it was a compromise of freedom to slavery.”¹³¹ In a reference to the fact that only the Utah territory had remained in the Omnibus, the *Farmers’ Cabinet* said the bill had finally arrived with “a freight of live Mormons from Salt Lake.” The article then alluded to the last-minute changes and stated that “Mr. Clay and the rest of ‘the team’ have concluded that such long vehicles are not adapted to such crooked roads.”¹³² Other newspapers expressed regret that the bill had failed. “The coalition of New England and Northern men, and of run mad Nullifiers and Disunionists,” the *Daily Ohio Statesman* declared, “which defeated this measure of conciliation, and Pearce, was utterly shameful and disgraceful.”¹³³ But Fillmore had other plans, and the fight was not yet over.

August would prove to be full of surprises, as Illinois Senator Stephen Douglas quickly stepped into the debate. Douglas believed that with the Fillmore administration’s help, the various compromise resolutions, which could not be passed together as the Omnibus Bill, could be passed as separate bills. He proved to be correct, and a flurry of activity in the Senate and the

in detail. Pearce acknowledged that his proposal had led to the bill’s defeat, but denied that the outcome had been his intention. For a summary of the events see Potter, “The Armistice of 1850,” in *Crisis*, 107-108.

¹³⁰ “The Defeat of the Omnibus Bill. Washington, July 31,” *Cleveland (OH) Herald*, Aug. 5, 1850.

¹³¹ *Bangor (ME) Daily Whig & Courier*, Aug. 5, 1850; also, “The ‘Omnibus’ Bill,” *Milwaukee (WI) Daily Sentinel and Gazette*, Aug. 5, 1850.

¹³² “The Compromise Bill,” *Farmers’ Cabinet* (Amherst, NH), Aug. 8, 1850.

¹³³ “The Defeat of the Compromise or Omnibus Bill,” *Daily Ohio Statesman* (Columbus), Aug. 6, 1850.

House resulted in passage of the resolutions, with some minor alterations, in August and September. As the Senate passed the separate bills and they moved to the House, a writer for the *Daily Picayune* in New Orleans said that it “is this spirit of concession and mutual forbearing which makes me hope for the best. There is a majority for each bill, as it came down from the Senate, in the House of Representatives.”¹³⁴

Numerous newspaper articles reported on the various bills as they came through, with most appearing satisfied with the final results. However, there was often mention of the slavery issue as it related to the District of Columbia and, more importantly, the Fugitive Slave Bill and how it might still cause discord. Slavery in the District of Columbia was temporarily solved by allowing it to continue for the time being while prohibiting further slave trade in the area. However, the Fugitive Slave Bill strengthened the existing law and would force northerners to turn in fugitive slaves or face penalties. New Orleans’ *Daily Picayune* reported in early September that all of the bills had “passed through Congress, have been signed by the President, and are fully laws of the land.” But the paper listed the tenets of the new Fugitive Slave Law and noted that the laws would still be denounced “in quarters which have not yet cooled down enough to acquiesce in the expressed will of the people.”¹³⁵ The *Daily National Intelligencer* carried an article expressing satisfaction with the California bill and how it was the Senate’s second great step “in four days towards the settlement of the unhappy controversies that have so long been distracting the country and suspending all regular legislation.” The article did note that the bills would cause grief for “those who are ready to sacrifice every thing to the interests of

¹³⁴ “Letter from Washington. Special Correspondence of the Picayune,” *Daily Picayune* (New Orleans, LA), Sept. 3, 1850.

¹³⁵ “The Last of the Bills—Their Reception,” *Daily Picayune* (New Orleans, LA), Sept. 21, 1850.

slavery.”¹³⁶ The *Augusta (GA) Chronicle* carried an article that said Congress had followed a path that lay between the “two extremes of opinion in the North and the South.” However it noted an *Albany (NY) Journal* article was critical of northerners who supported some of the measures that appeared favorable to the South. The *Journal* cryptically stated: “Northern throats are hoarse with rejoicings at the victory obtained by Slavery over Freedom.” The *Chronicle* article also carried a *Charleston (SC) Mercury* report that offered a glimpse of some of the negative southern response. The *Mercury* declared:

They have fired cannons in Washington, and displayed lights as for a great victory. Well, it is a victory over law and the constitution—a victory over justice and all sound statesmanship—over the minority, who stood up for principles, without which a nation becomes a mere horde of anarchists—a victory of the Executive over Congress, and of the spirit of abolition over all the Departments of the Government. The burning of powder may not stop with Washington City.¹³⁷

In a strongly worded article, the *Mississippi Free Trader* pointed out that although the Fugitive Slave Bill had passed, it only did so with southern votes, along with only two or three northern men voting for it, which meant it was not a compromise. “The North are pledged to nothing,” the *Free Trader* charged. “The free-soilers and moderate Northern men and the Southern submissionists are all bent on a system of measure which excludes the South from our territories.”¹³⁸ The complaint that Congress was intent on excluding the South was to be

¹³⁶ *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC), Aug. 17, 1850.

¹³⁷ “The Two Extremes,” *Augusta (GA) Chronicle*, Sept. 20, 1850.

¹³⁸ *Mississippi Free Trader* (Natchez), Sept. 25, 1850.

reiterated in newspapers throughout the South.¹³⁹ Of all the bills that finally passed, it would be the Fugitive Slave Law that would come to have the most significance in the decade to come.

Although the final outcome for Henry Clay's original resolutions was important, the bills that were finally passed only proved to be a stopgap measure. Newspaper coverage of the political debate over each provision gave an indication of how positions in both the North and the South were hardening. Newspaper reports on the altercation between Senators Benton and Foote were concerned that politicians were losing their ability to civilly traverse the political landscape. Newspapers continued to show how the debate over territories and economics, with slavery as a constant undercurrent, had always turned on political power. After the compromise, though, newspapers indicate that neither the South nor the North was really satisfied, and each side believed the other had gained too much ground, especially where slavery was concerned. From September 1850 and on, slavery would take to the forefront in newspapers' political coverage as discourse continued to spiral out of control. Newspapers would soon show how the South's fight to hold on to its position by insisting on enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Law would have unintended consequences. Newspaper articles also would begin to report more frequently on northern abolitionists' actions as they gained more northern support for their moral position on slavery. Newspapers show how it would quickly become apparent that the Compromise of 1850 had failed to solve the most vexing question of all.

¹³⁹ "The Burke Meeting," *Augusta (GA) Chronicle*, Oct. 4, 1850, and "For the Journal," *Daily Alabama Journal* (Montgomery), Oct. 11, 1850.

CHAPTER V

THE FUGITIVE SLAVE ACT: THE GREAT DIVIDE

Despite the best intentions of Fillmore, Clay, Webster, and Seward, the Compromise of 1850 contained at least one fatal flaw: the Fugitive Slave Law.¹ Instead of bringing the country together, as the Compromise supporters had hoped, newspaper coverage shows that the Fugitive Slave Law's inclusion quickly became a flashpoint between the North and the South, one that would eventually contribute to the outbreak of war.² In an attempt to assuage some of its anger over the other Compromise measures, the South aggressively called for the law's strict enforcement, even as the North stridently argued for its repeal.

In essence, the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 was an expansion of a clause already present in the U.S. Constitution.³ What the law did was strengthen federal enforcement of the clause and

¹ The Fugitive Slave Law is also referred to in publications as the "Fugitive Slave Act" and the "Fugitive Slave Bill." For consistency, this dissertation uses the term "Bill" prior to its passage, and "Law" after its passage, as that is the most frequent newspaper usage.

² Although the South was angry over the Compromise's exclusion of the slave trade from the District of Columbia, that anger was somewhat muted since the practice of slavery in the District was allowed to continue. Also, the South was satisfied because of the Fugitive Slave Law's passage.

³ The text of the Constitution's Fugitive Slave Law clause appears in Article IV, Section 2, Clause 3, of the U.S. Constitution and reads: "No Person held to Service or Labour in one State, under the Laws thereof, escaping into another, shall, in Consequence of any Law or Regulation therein, be discharged from such Service or Labour, but shall be delivered up on Claim of the Party to whom such Service or Labour may be due." This clause would later be superseded by the Thirteenth Amendment, http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution_transcript.html. *Prigg v. Pennsylvania*, 41 U.S. 539 (1842) affirmed this clause over a Pennsylvania statute that

require citizens to aid federal officials in returning fugitive slaves to their owners. The law's "provisions seem to meet with general approval," a *Daily Alabama Journal* article stated.⁴ An *Augusta (GA) Chronicle* article noted that "the provisions of the bill are quite stringent." The *Chronicle* article also called attention to the requirement that the law be executed at the "hands of commissioners appointed under the authority of the United States."⁵ Northerners, however, were infuriated that they could be legally required to assist in returning those accused of being fugitive slaves to their owners. Anyone who violated the law's provisions could be charged, fined, and jailed for not cooperating fully with the law. In addition, northerners were also incensed by the provision that any accused fugitive slaves would not be allowed a jury trial or even be allowed to speak in their own defense. Not allowing these safeguards meant the law's ramifications extended far beyond fugitive slaves, as many freed slaves who were living in the North now feared they would be captured and returned to slavery. Even those who had been born into freedom were at risk, as they would not be allowed to challenge their arrest or attempt to prove their free status.⁶

Prior to the law's passage, some newspaper articles showed that the South considered it a primary point of contention that the Constitution's existing fugitive clause was rarely enforced, especially in the North. In one example, the *Fayetteville (NC) Observer* carried an article critical

prohibited extraditing Negroes to other states for the purpose of slavery. The Oyez Project at IIT Chicago-Kent College of Law, http://www.oyez.org/cases/1792-1850/1842/1842_0 (accessed April 26, 2013).

⁴ "The Fugitive Slave Bill," *Daily Alabama Journal* (Montgomery), Sept. 2, 1850.

⁵ "Fugitive Slave Bill," *Augusta (GA) Chronicle*, Sept. 9, 1850. This same article appeared in the *Savannah (GA) Republican*, Sept. 1, 1850. This paper was also published as the *Savannah Daily Republican*.

⁶ Newspapers of this period use the words "Negro" and "black." Therefore, this dissertation will sometimes employ these words.

of a Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, judge who had acquitted a runaway slave of a horse-stealing charge because the slave had stolen the horse in order to run away. The *Observer* article stated:

We cannot believe that judicial authority has anywhere been clothed with so much knavery, or, if not knavery, so much stupidity. As an abstract sentiment for the “higher law” moralists, who trample all human laws and constitutions under their feet, certain men hold that the end sanctifies the means, and that, in order to steal himself, a man may steal anything else to make his own person secure.⁷

The article reminded readers that the Constitution already demanded that any fugitive slaves who were found must be returned to their owners, and citizens who refused to comply could be punished. The *Macon (GA) Weekly Telegraph* also carried an article that mentioned the incident in Harrisburg and said it was proof that northerners would not respect any law that enforced the South’s constitutional rights, including the proposed Fugitive Slave Bill. “The evils which this bill are intended to correct,” the *Telegraph* declared, “are in our judgment, in the present state of feeling in the Northern States, irremediable by law.”⁸

In an example of how northern and southern newspaper reports on the same event would often differ in details and facts, the *Vermont Chronicle* carried another version of this same fugitive slave case. Its version asserted that the horse-stealing charge was simply a ruse to get the three men in custody. “Three negroes have been arrested at Harrisburg, Penn., on charge of horse-stealing in Va.,” the *Chronicle* stated, “and it is supposed that the charge of stealing is a subterfuge to get the blacks back into slavery.” The article then gave a description of a riot that occurred after the judge dropped the horse-stealing charges, and it was noted that the Virginia slaveowners had attempted to seize the freed men. A group of whites and free blacks tried to stop the slaveowners, the *Chronicle* reported, at which point violence ensued and several arrests were

⁷ “Horse Stealing and Runaway Slaves,” *Fayetteville (NC) Observer*, Sept. 3, 1850.

⁸ “Congress,” *Macon (GA) Weekly Telegraph*, Sept. 3, 1850.

made. In the aftermath of the incident, the court acknowledged that the Virginians had the legal right to seize their slaves but condemned the violent measures the slaveowners had used in the incident. “But there was great and unwarrantable violence used,” the *Chronicle* stated, “such as would by no means be allowed to official persons in Pennsylvania in the execution of process; and the State could not allow persons reclaiming fugitives, in any violence which would be punishable in its own officers.”⁹ Newspaper articles such as these show the tension that already existed between the North and the South when it came to the return of fugitive slaves. It was incomprehensible to northerners who were opposed to slavery that they could be forced to participate in returning fugitives to slavery. To southerners, it was simply a matter of returning property to its rightful owners. As the *Macon (GA) Weekly Telegraph* had stated, it was unlikely that the Fugitive Slave Law would reduce those tensions, since northerners had already proved they would not willingly abide by any such law.

During the time Congress spent debating the Fugitive Slave Bill in September 1850, various newspapers carried differing opinions and observations on the proposed legislation. Southern newspapers frequently expressed doubt that the bill’s passage would result in any substantial changes. “The evils which this bill are intended to correct,” the *Macon (GA) Weekly Telegraph* maintained, “are in our judgment, in the present state of feeling in the Northern States, irremediable by law.” Another paragraph in this same article asserted that the southern press did not approve of the bill because it was simply a ploy to placate the border states. The *Telegraph* declared:

⁹ “Runaway Slaves,” *Vermont Chronicle* (Bellows Falls), Sept. 3, 1850.

The Southern Press says, that the political objective of the Fugitive Slave Bill, is to seduce the border states of Virginia, Maryland and Kentucky from the cause of the South. We have no doubt of it. We trust however, that it will be as abortive in that respect, as it is shallow and transparent in its design.¹⁰

This *Telegraph* paragraph addressed the fear that the Fugitive Slave Bill was simply being proposed to appease some southern states for political reasons and that the Fillmore administration had no serious intention of enforcing it. Northerners would have been aware of how southerners felt about the bill, as a version of this same paragraph also appeared in the *Milwaukee (WI) Sentinel and Gazette* a day after the *Telegraph* article. The *Sentinel* article added that the “papers appear unanimous in asserting that no law can be effectual to recover runaway slaves.”¹¹

In Washington, D.C., the *Daily National Intelligencer* published a New York newspaper article that took a different position on what the law would mean. The article stated that if the bill passed, the South would no longer have an excuse “for agitation or for railing” toward the North. “We have always urged that the North should act magnanimously in settling this whole dispute,” the article insisted, “and we think that now there is an obligation upon the free States so to act.”¹² The article appeared to encourage northerners to abide by the law, but magnanimous was not a word southern newspapers would have used in reference to the North. In fact, the *Augusta (GA) Chronicle* was one newspaper that carried an article questioning “the sincerity of the zeal of the North for the welfare of the slaves.” It was a common belief in the South that if it were still

¹⁰ “Congress,” *Macon (GA) Weekly Telegraph*, Sept. 3, 1850.

¹¹ “The Fugitive Slave Bill and the South,” *Milwaukee (WI) Sentinel and Gazette*, Sept. 4, 1850. The article appeared in the *Sentinel* with a Baltimore dateline.

¹² “Says the New York Commercial Advertiser,” *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC), Sept. 12, 1850.

possible for the North to make money in the international slave trade, the political climate surrounding slavery would be different. “It is well established,” the *Chronicle* stated, “that so long as the slave trade was tolerated, the most successful slave stealers were from New England.”¹³

The House and Senate finally approved the Fugitive Slave Bill on September 12, 1850.¹⁴ The *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC) published an article from Tennessee’s *True Whig* newspaper that seemed optimistic about future cooperation among most northerners and southerners after the bill’s passage. “Good men will rejoice—the patriot’s heart will once more be made glad—factionists and fanatics only will give voice to sentiments of sedition and revolution,” the article declared.¹⁵ In light of newspaper coverage of the bill, the article’s optimism seems misplaced. The northern newspaper response was immediate, and an article in the *Boston (MA) Daily Atlas* summarized many other northern newspapers’ dismay at the bill’s passage. The article declared:

The ‘Fugitive Slave Bill,’ a measure deservedly offensive and odious to a vast majority of the people of the free States, has been passed by the House of Representatives, and will become law, if it receives the signature of the President. Words are almost inadequate to express our mortification and disappointment at this result. In a House in which the representatives of the free northern States have a large majority, a measure which plainly tramples in the dust some of their most sacred rights, a measure which sets at naught the right guaranteed to every northern citizen, of trial by jury, and the right of habeas corpus, has been passed.

¹³ “Judge Berrien—A Strange Development,” *Augusta (GA) Chronicle*, Sept. 5, 1850.

¹⁴ “Latest Streak by Lightning. Congressional,” *Daily Ohio Statesman* (Columbus), Sept. 13, 1850. This paper carried a straightforward account of those who spoke in the debate and the vote. Variations and summaries of this account were carried in numerous newspapers.

¹⁵ “What Tennessee Thinks of It,” *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC), Sept. 18, 1850.

The *Atlas* predicted that the law would fail at encouraging any type of conciliation among the states and that it would instead create more cause for agitation between the North and the South. “It is a measure so utterly in defiance of public opinion,” the paper insisted, “that even its advocates can hardly expect it to be enforced.”¹⁶ The *Atlas* was correct that after President Fillmore signed the bill into law, its supporters would soon find that enforcement would be impossibly difficult.

Southern newspapers also quickly addressed the Fugitive Slave Law’s enforcement, or the lack thereof. They expressed regret that, in their opinion, the bulk of the Compromise Bill had given so much to the North. These newspapers fully believed the Fugitive Slave Law was a concession to the South that the federal government would never enforce. It did appear that the Fugitive Slave Law’s passage placated some southern newspapers at first, but other newspapers felt the South had been duped and quickly denounced those who had supported the compromise. The *Daily Morning News* (GA) published an article that pointedly criticized southern publications that had expressed any satisfaction with the Compromise Bill’s outcome, in particular the Fugitive Slave Law’s passage. The article stated:

We would ask those editors who tell us that the South has achieved all she had a right to ask, and who instance the fugitive Slave Bill as one of the great concessions made by the North, what do they expect from the operation of that bill in a community such as Western New York, where Slave stealing is heroism, and where the negro abductor is honored by a presentation of plate from women. The Fugitive Slave Bill is a mockery and an insult to the people of the South, and those Southern editors who are glorifying over its enactment *chiefly by Southern votes*, and pointing to it as a concession from the North, which ought to compensate our people for all we have surrendered, must have a very poor estimate of the perceptive faculties of their readers.¹⁷

¹⁶ *Boston Daily* (MA) *Atlas*, Sept. 14, 1850.

¹⁷ “The Fugitive Slave Bill and the Bill to Abolish the Slave Trade in the District of Columbia,” *Daily Morning News* (Savannah, GA), Sept. 20, 1850.

Even if the Fugitive Slave Law were enforced, it would not end the strife between the North and the South. Natchez's *Mississippi Free Trader* was firm on this point, listing several reasons why the Compromise would not work. The *Free Trader* article declared:

All the bright pictures of peace and harmony and brotherly love, and our glorious Union, of a reconciled and contented people, with which we have been deluded for months past, have already vanished into thin air. The closing scenes of the United States Congress, even after the passage of the omnibus bills, have been more violent, more embittered, and more pregnant with future strife and contention than any other period of Congressional history. We have not even a truce.¹⁸

Newspaper reports on division over the Compromise and the Fugitive Slave Law's enforcement indicate that the *Free Trader's* assessment was probably accurate.

In October, the *Mississippi Free Trader* carried a long article that touched on many concerns that had been mentioned individually in other newspapers. The article contended that it would not be secession that would lead the Union to war. If disunion occurred, the article asserted, it would be because the Compromise Bill's passage meant the South had submitted to the North. The article also accurately noted that votes on the Compromise Bill's various components were often divided by region. In particular, the *Free Trader* pointed to the fact that a majority of the northern senators voted against the Fugitive Slave Bill, which meant there was a "determination in the people of the North to defeat its operation." The *Macon (GA) Weekly Telegraph* also took notice of the Senate votes on the bill. "A very apt commentary on the probability of enforcing this or any other law of the kind at present, is afforded by the yeas and nays on the passage of the Bill through the Senate," the *Telegraph* stated, "where it will be seen that but two solitary Senators from the free-soil States voted for the Bill, the others either voting

¹⁸ "Secession or Submission," *Mississippi Free Trader* (Natchez), Oct. 9, 1850. Historians such as David Potter agree that the Compromise of 1850 was anything but a compromise. In *The Impending Crisis* Potter refers to the bill as the "Armistice of 1850," because it was not really a compromise in the true sense of the word.

against the Bill or dodging.”¹⁹ The *Free Trader* did suggest that the Compromise might result in a short period of peace, but that it would not last. “It is true, that with the entire vote of the South and a fractional vote of the North, we may for a time, on some matters of minor importance, make some stand for our constitutional rights,” the article predicted, “but it is evident that even this poor reliance is merely temporary, and will gradually fail us at the North....”²⁰

The *Macon (GA) Weekly Telegraph* agreed that the law would fail at its purpose in the North. The newspaper printed an article that referred to a *New York Tribune* piece about the Fugitive Slave Law. The *Telegraph* article asserted that the *Tribune* and “its political Abolition friends ‘acquiesce’ for the present, in the ‘peace measures,’” but they were counting on the law’s repeal at some point. The *Telegraph* article reprinted the following from the *Tribune*:

The *Tribune* says: ‘It is the truth that the Fugitive slave law is obnoxious here, whenever it is attempted to be enforced, ... if the South were to really hunt up and arrest even half the fugitives now living in the free States, not twenty members would be chosen from all the free States, not positively pledged to vote for that law’s repeal. So long as it is rarely enforced, its existence may be endured, and no longer.’²¹

What seemed to gall the southern press most was that northern lawmakers thought the South would be satisfied with a law most northerners had not even the slightest intention of enforcing.

Southern newspapers expressed concerned over more than just whether northerners would adhere to the Fugitive Slave Law. President Fillmore had given his support to the bill and had quickly signed it. In spite of Fillmore’s expressed support, southern newspapers’ concerns

¹⁹ “The Fugitive Slave Bill,” *Macon (GA) Weekly Telegraph*, Sept. 10, 1850. There are numerous accounts that senators from both sides stayed out of the chamber and lingered in the hallways when provisions of the Compromise Bill with which they did not agree were being voted upon on the floor.

²⁰ “Secession or Submission,” *Mississippi Free Trader (Natchez)*, Oct. 9, 1850.

²¹ “The Reason Why,” *Macon (GA) Weekly Telegraph*, Jan. 7, 1851.

extended to whether the president and his administration were serious about ensuring that the federal government enforced the Fugitive Slave Law. The *Mississippi Free Trader* carried an article expressing considerable doubt on that score. The article insisted that the most important aspect of enforcing the law was not that fugitive slaves would finally be returned to their owners. Instead, the *Free Trader* insisted it was more important to prove the federal government's sincerity in carrying out the only element of the Compromise Bill that the paper believed favored the South. The article also expressed concern that the law's violators would not be punished. "We complain not for the paltry loss of a few negroes," the article stated, "but that the Federal Executive will not see the laws faithfully executed and the culprits brought to the block."²² A few southern newspapers, though, expressed optimism over Fillmore's support of the law. The *Augusta (GA) Chronicle* carried an article that affirmed Fillmore's intention to enforce the law at all costs. The article announced receipt of a letter from Fillmore to Dr. Robert Collins of Macon, Georgia. The article stated that Fillmore wrote in his letter that he intended to execute the law "to the letter" and that, if it was necessary, "all forces at his disposal shall be used for that purpose."²³

Southerners insistence that the federal government strictly enforce a law in states that were opposed to it was a political reversal for the South. In a strange turn of events, the Fugitive Slave Law had accomplished one unlikely feat. Its passage put the South on the side of federal government and its enforcement of a federal law, while at the same time it forced the North to place its support behind states' rights in opposition to the law. What remained to be seen was whether Fillmore would actually use his executive power to enforce the Fugitive Slave Law.

²² Veritas, "Correspondence of the Mississippi Free Trader, Jackson, Dec. 23d, 1850. Dear Elwood," *Mississippi Free Trader* (Natchez), Jan. 1, 1851.

²³ "Letter from the President," *Augusta (GA) Chronicle*, Nov. 15, 1850.

In the months after the Fugitive Slave Law's passage, newspapers continued to cover public debates over the law. Often, newspaper articles reported on politicians who had been involved in passing the Compromise Bill measures, as these politicians spoke at public meetings and events across the country. In New York, one such meeting included Senators Lewis Cass (MI), Daniel Dickinson (NY), and Thomas Cobb (GA). The *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC), carried several of the speeches, including one by George Wood, Esq., who called for enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Law and addressed talk of emancipation. Wood asserted that the immediate release of slaves had been proven to be unwise in other countries' experiences.²⁴ It appears that the *Intelligencer* carried most of Wood's speech, in which he hoped that the Compromise Bill's passage would bring an end to "agitations and distractions which floated through the country." That had not been the case, though, and the article reported that Wood acknowledged the reality. "We have seen the agitations renewed," Wood said; "and when it terminated in the halls of Congress it was transferred to the community at large, and the agitation began again with fresh vigor at both North and South." Wood's speech strongly favored the South's position in the debate over slavery. The article carried this statement from the speech:

What have been the movements of the disunionists at the North? They have attacked the men at the South with every species of bitterness and reproach—taxing them with being man-stealers and tyrants. Will the men of the South submit to this? If they did they would be unworthy descendants of the great men who fought the battles of the revolution; and every man will say no, they ought not. But, under the idea of this "higher law," that slavery ought to be put down at once, men are ready to trample on the law and the constitution of the country.²⁵

²⁴ Although the article only used "Esq." to identify Wood, it is likely that he is George Tyler Wood, a former Texas state senator and governor.

²⁵ "Reception at New York of Messrs. Cass, Dickinson, and Cobb, By the Union Committee of Safety," *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC), Dec. 2, 1850. The "higher law" that Wood refers to is most likely a

Trampling on the Constitution was a common charge made against northern politicians. Disunion was a charge each region regularly made toward the other. All of the speeches recorded in this *Intelligencer* article considered enforcement of the Compromise Bill in its entirety, including the Fugitive Slave Law, as necessary for support of the Constitution and the Union.

Newspapers often reported on debates over whether the Fugitive Slave Law's failure or success would result in greater agitation. This concern caused some southern newspapers that supported the Union to criticize southern politicians who seemed eager to see the Fugitive Slave Law fail. Newspapers sometimes referred to these politicians as "ultras" who sincerely believed that only secession could end the sectional crisis. There were newspapers reports that such politicians harbored hopes that challenges to the law would create such anger in the South that the result would be disunion. After one Senate vote on a petition to repeal the law, the *Natchez* (MS) *Courier* accused two senators of attempting this strategy. The two southern senators, Andrew Pickens Butler of South Carolina and David Levy Yulee of Florida, had refused to vote on the grounds that they would not vote on any question raised about the law.²⁶ The *Courier*, though, attributed an ulterior motive to the senators' actions. "They would doubtless be glad to see it repealed," the *Courier* asserted, "because they know full well that its fall would be the sure precursor of that of the Union. Can such men be called the friends of the South? Luckily their votes are not needed."²⁷ Likewise, the *Augusta* (GA) *Chronicle* carried an article about a seeming agreement "between the disunion prints of the South and the abolition presses of the

reference to New York Senator William Seward's famous speech in which he declared, among other things, that the new territories were governed by a "higher law" than the Constitution and that slavery was doomed.

²⁶ In 1856, Senator Andrew Butler (SC) would be the focus of a verbal attack in Charles Sumner's famous anti-slavery speech in the Senate. Butler, who was not present at the time the speech was given, was a relative of Preston Brooks. In an infamous altercation, Brooks, also a South Carolina congressman, beat Sumner with a cane two days later on the Senate floor in retaliation for Sumner's speech.

²⁷ *Natchez* (MS) *Courier*, Jan. 28, 1851.

North.” The article cited examples in which the southern press had directly quoted abolitionist newspaper articles and expressed agreement with abolitionist suggestions for a vote to repeal the Fugitive Slave Law. The article stated that many in the southern press desired the law’s repeal because it would increase support for secession. “It is true they are using different means for the accomplishment of their purposes,” the *Chronicle* declared, “but the end will be the same—disunion, civil war and intestine [sic] strife and the final overthrow of Republicanism in the New World.”²⁸ Extreme abolitionists had taken a position that disunion was better than remaining in a Union with slavery, and southern extremists would rather leave the Union than abandon slavery. Clearly, those who were on opposite sides of the slavery issue often found common cause in calling for the Fugitive Slave Law’s repeal.

In spite of their opinion that it would not be enforced, southerners generally did not want to see the law repealed. Throughout 1851 and beyond, southern newspapers carried an increasing number of articles concerned with the possibility that the Fugitive Slave Law actually would be repealed, as northern state legislatures began lobbying for such action. The *Macon (GA) Weekly Telegraph* published an article stating that legislatures in New York, Pennsylvania, and Massachusetts were preparing to draft bills that would ask for the law’s repeal. The article declared:

While Southern Submission papers are piping songs, of peace, and Singing a lullaby to the South, to the tune of cessation of agitation at the North—papers in that Section, more sagacious, if not more honest, are showing that the flame of agitation there is kept steadily burning.²⁹

²⁸ “Strange Sympathy,” *Augusta (GA) Chronicle*, Jan. 29, 1851.

²⁹ “The Truce Broken,” *Macon (GA) Weekly Telegraph*, Feb. 4, 1851.

The *Savannah (GA) Daily Republican* seemed to think the talk of repeal was simply a political ploy. The paper carried an article noting that there had been an attempt in the House to repeal the Fugitive Slave Law but it had been “indignantly voted down.” The article stated that agitators trying to convince southerners that the law would not be enforced would be dismayed at failures to repeal it, and they would threaten that Congress would repeal the law when it reconvened. The *Republican* article took specific aim at politicians who engaged in talk of repeal and described them as “trading politicians” and “soldiers of fortune who are ready to attack any man or principle, so they are well paid.” The article concluded that “those who have watched the course of events, at the South, (and doubtless the same will hold true with the abolition press at the North) cannot be at a loss to apply these truths.”³⁰ Talk of repeal, though, would not go away, and southern newspapers continued to cover it.

It is likely that the repeal efforts the *Republican* was referring to were those of Ohio Representative Joshua Reed Giddings and his son-in-law, Indiana Representative George W. Julian.³¹ Both men held to staunchly anti-slavery views, and both of them made attempts to derail the Fugitive Slave Law. Their repeal efforts are indicative of many such measures that newspapers would cover. The *Natchez (MS) Courier* carried an article on Julian’s failed motion to bring forth a bill to repeal the law, but the article focused more on criticism of the *Vicksburg (MS) Sentinel* for stating that “it smelt a rat.” The motion had been defeated with a vote of 68 to 119, and the *Sentinel* had insisted that if the entire House of Representatives had voted the law could have been repealed. The *Courier* article took issue with the *Sentinel’s* statement and

³⁰ “Congressional,” *Savannah (GA) Daily Republican*, Jan. 9, 1851.

³¹ Both Giddings and Julian were members of the Free Soil Party. In the upcoming 1852 presidential election, Julian would be chosen as the Free Soil Party’s nominee for vice-president, winning that slot over his father-in-law, Giddings.

examined the regional make-up of the vote. The *Courier* article stated that twenty-four southern men and twenty-two northern men had missed the vote that defeated the motion. The article said the southern absentees would have voted to defeat the repeal effort and most of the northern absentees would have voted for the motion. With everyone voting, there would be approximately 90 votes for the motion to repeal and 143 opposed. From these numbers, the *Courier* concluded that the fugitive slave law was quite safe. “The further the matter is investigated the more certain does it appear that the law will stand, and with it those two fabrics against which free-soilers and secessionists are alike warring,” the article declared, “viz: the Constitution as it is, and the Union as it is.”³² The *Courier* article shows how repealing the Fugitive Slave Law had become a political tactic in both sections. Repeal motions continued the same type of regional agitation the Compromise Bill’s supporters had hoped would begin to abate.

While repeal efforts may have made strange bedfellows of abolitionists and secessionists, the issue of states rights versus federal law had also taken a new turn. The *Macon (GA) Weekly Telegraph* carried an account of Giddings’ and Julian’s failed efforts for the law’s repeal. This article, though, emphasized the Fugitive Slave Law’s importance to the southern states and said it was the only part of the Compromise Bill that “pretended justice to the South.” The article suggested how northern and southern states could best work together to save the Union. “There is only one way to bind the States in bonds of friendship, and that is, by every section minding its own business and adhering to the Constitution of the country, and acting honestly,” the *Telegraph* declared. “All else is gas and soap bubbles.”³³ This statement paradoxically encouraged the North and South each to mind its own business but at the same time it expected

³² *Natchez (MS) Courier*, Jan. 24, 1851.

³³ “The Fugitive Slave Law—The Second Act—Free-Soil Action—Postage, Etc.,” *Macon (GA) Weekly Telegraph*, Jan. 9, 1851.

them to help enforce the Fugitive Slave Law. The Fugitive Slave Law's enforcement required northern citizens' and officials' active cooperation.

The *New Hampshire Statesman* reprinted a *New York Tribune* article that also addressed the dilemma of states rights versus federal law, but from a different approach. The article cited a discrepancy between the fugitive slave law clause in Article IV, section 2, of the Constitution and the first clause that appears in the same section. The first clause in Section 2 reads as follows: "The Citizens of each State shall be entitled to all Privileges and Immunities of Citizens in the several States."³⁴ The article asserted that the fugitive slave clause, which is the third clause, had been enforced while the first clause had been defied. In support of this argument, the article used strong language to describe the treatment of northerners in the South:

White freemen from the North are subjected to imprisonment, indignities and outrage in South Carolina and other rabid lower law States on vague suspicion that they are Abolitionists and punished with whipping and banishment because of the finding of a newspaper in their trunks containing some article unfavorable to Slavery. Colored citizens of Massachusetts or Rhode Island, whose rights before the law of their own State are equal to those of any other citizens, are regularly dragged from the vessels in which they are serving as seamen or stewards, on the arrival of said vessels at Charleston, S.C., or other Southern ports, thrown into prison, there confined till their vessel is made ready to sail, and then compelled to pay heavily for the cost and charges of such arrest and detention, under penalty of being sold into perpetual Slavery.

The article concluded by asking for federal enforcement of the first clause of Section IV. "The Federal Government was not created only nor mainly to uphold Slavery;" the article stated, "it was intended primarily to subvert the cause of Freedom."³⁵ As can be seen, newspaper accounts

³⁴ U.S. Constitution, Article IV, Section 2. http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution_transcript.html.

³⁵ "From the New York Tribune. Constitutional Rights—North and South," *New Hampshire Statesman* (Concord), Feb. 28, 1851.

made it clear that northern and southern states often favored fidelity to federal law only so far as it suited their own particular political purposes.

Newspaper articles often took aim at particular states that were considered to be especially antagonistic toward enforcing the law or actively agitating for its repeal. A *Mississippi Free Trader* article singled out Massachusetts for scathing criticism. “Massachusetts meanly and criminally resists the execution of a law enacted in pursuance to an express grant of the compact of Union and stigmatizes Southern patriots as traitors,” the article stated, “whilst she herself is guilty of the treason.”³⁶ In its reporting on congressional activities, the *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC) often noted senators who brought petitions against both the Fugitive Slave Law and the District of Columbia slave trade compromise. The edict to abolish the slave trade in Washington, D.C., while leaving the practice of slavery intact, did not sit well with either the North or the South. One *Intelligencer* article reported that senators from New Hampshire and Rhode Island had presented petitions signed by their respective states’ citizens asking for the Fugitive Slave Law to be repealed and for slavery to be completely abolished in the District of Columbia.³⁷ The *Mississippian and State Gazette* carried an article that listed petitions senators and representatives from numerous towns in Massachusetts, Maine, Ohio, New York, and Pennsylvania had brought forth.³⁸ These motions and petitions for repeal, which occurred with regularity, kept the argument alive in the newspapers.

³⁶ Veritas, “Correspondence of the Mississippi Free Trader, Jackson, Dec. 23d, 1850. Dear Elwood,” *Mississippi Free Trader* (Natchez), Jan. 1, 1851.

³⁷ “Congress. Tuesday, February 25, 1851. In Senate,” *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC), Feb. 26, 1851.

³⁸ “Petitions for the Repeal of the Fugitive Slave Law,” *Mississippian and State Gazette* (Jackson), March 14, 1851.

Even as southerners called for adherence to the federal Fugitive Slave Law, states' rights associations continued to form in the South. Newspaper articles indicate that these associations grew out of the South's continued assertion that the Compromise favored the North, and both northern and southern newspapers carried news of the states' rights associations. The *Bangor (ME) Daily Whig & Courier* carried an article on a South Carolina meeting at which several resolutions affirming allegiance to the southern states were adopted. The article included some of the comments one speaker, Dr. D. M. Mason, made in a speech at the meeting. "It only remained for the people of the South to decide whether they were worthy of the rich inheritance of liberty and equality transmitted by their ancestors," Mason said, "or by abject submission entitled to sink beneath the contempt of their enemies."³⁹

Submission to the North was a common theme in newspaper reports on these meetings. The *Mississippi Free Trader* announced an upcoming meeting for "true friends of the South" who would be interested in organizing a "Southern States' Right party." The *Free Trader's* office was the location for the meeting, and the article announced: "No Submissionist is expected to attend."⁴⁰ The *Mississippian and State Gazette* published a Southern Rights Association of the University of Virginia address to the "Young Men of the South." The lengthy article detailed what it referred to as a "meager outline of some of the principal concessions of the South in behalf of the Union," including slavery, economy, war heroes, territories, and the Compromise Bill. The address predicted that the North would trample the provisions of the Compromise, in particular the Fugitive Slave Law. The article declared:

³⁹ *Bangor (ME) Daily Whig & Courier*, Nov. 1, 1850.

⁴⁰ *Mississippi Free Trader* (Natchez), Nov. 20, 1850.

If it be true that “we have no way of judging of the future, but by the past,” we may safely assert that the North will not be slow to insist on fresh sacrifices and further concessions. Already, the Fugitive Slave Bill, the only one of the series of measures that constituted what has been ironically styled “the Compromise,” which bore even the semblance of being favorable to the South, has been decried at the North, and its repeal loudly demanded from the pulpit, by the press, and in their legislative assemblies.⁴¹

Another *Mississippian and State Gazette* article warned southerners that some of the states’ rights groups were actually “submissionists” and might not stand strong with the South. The article stated that such groups feared they were losing influence and were now trying to prove they were advocates for southern rights. “To carry out this object they are practising [sic] the gross hypocrisy of calling themselves the Southern Rights party,” the article stated. “The people can’t be gulled by such barefaced deception and dishonesty.”⁴²

In May 1851, the *Daily Morning News* (GA) reported that South Carolina had held a convention in favor of states’ rights in Charleston. The paper reported that 431 delegates registered for the convention and that the *Charleston (SC) Mercury* reported that the convention president’s calls for resistance were “greeted with bursts of applause that seemed to spring warmly from the hearts of the whole assembly.”⁴³ The *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC) carried a short article on the same convention. The article began by stating that it was publishing “something more than ordinarily worthy of notice” from the convention report and carried Col A. P. Hayne’s comments on the topic of slaves as property. “He regarded the slave question as one of property,” the article stated, “and believed that, if the non-slaveholding States

⁴¹ “Address. Of the Southern Rights Association of the University of Virginia, to the Young Men of the South,” *Mississippian and State Gazette* (Jackson), Feb. 14, 1851.

⁴² *Mississippian and State Gazette* (Jackson), April 11, 1851.

⁴³ “The Southern Rights Convention of South Carolina,” *Daily Morning News* (Savannah, GA), May 7, 1851.

would not permit negroes or their descendants of mixed blood to reside in, pass through, or even visit them, and the slave States forbade emancipation, the Union might be saved.”⁴⁴ Of course, the North would never agree to such prohibitions, but Hayne’s extreme suggestions held within them a core truth about slavery and the Fugitive Slave Law controversy. The South viewed slaves as property, duly bought and paid for, and insisted on the right to protect its property, the right to take it into other states, and the right to have it returned, if lost or stolen. For the most part, northerners no longer held slaves, which is one of the reasons they viewed the idea of slaves as property in a different light. These two divergent views on slaves as property could not be reconciled under the terms of the Fugitive Slave Law, which insisted on the return of slave property to its owners.⁴⁵

There was another result of the South’s concern over the law’s enforcement and the threat of its repeal. Many southern state legislatures passed resolutions addressing what would happen if the federal government did not follow through with the law’s enforcement or went so far as to attempt repeal. The *Fayetteville (NC) Observer* carried a *Richmond (VA) Times* article that noted Maryland’s official stand on the Fugitive Slave Law. The article stated that the Maryland State Convention had adopted resolutions that agreed to the conditions of the Compromise, as long as the Fugitive Slave Law was enforced. The article also said Maryland would consider the law’s repeal or lack of enforcement to be a violation of the state’s rights. “In either event there would be a failure to comply with the solemn obligations which give to the Constitution its chief value and binding force,” the article continued, “and which could not be violated or deliberately evaded without leading to a dissolution of the Union.” In a reference to South Carolina’s

⁴⁴ *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC), May 15, 1851.

⁴⁵ For more information on the slave trade and slaves as property, see Michael Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves: Masters, Traders, and Slaves in the Old South* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989).

frequent threats to secede, the article concluded by noting that Maryland's words were "strong language for a 'border state,' and should teach South Carolinians that their true policy is to wait for a true issue and not rashly to raise a false one."⁴⁶ Just as northern legislatures were drafting resolutions to repeal the law, newspapers show that southern legislatures were making it clear that the law had to stand and be enforced.

The southern states' legislative actions did not go unnoticed, and northern newspapers often reported on these southern state resolutions. The *Milwaukee (WI) Daily Sentinel and Gazette* reported that the Florida legislature had resolved that the Union could only continue if the Fugitive Slave Law was enforced without modification or repeal. If that were not the case, the article said, Florida authorities would organize conventions to allow the people to take action. The article noted that the Florida Legislature believed the Compromise had required the South to acquiesce to the North on several points and without the Fugitive Slave Law it would have all been for naught. "That in spite of all the injustices of the past we will adhere to the Union if the Northern States cease from further aggression on our peculiar rights," the legislature resolved, "and observe other obligations of the Federal compact."⁴⁷ The *Vermont Chronicle*, reported that other state legislatures, especially those in the western "free states," were passing "resolves" in favor of the Compromise Bill and its measures. The article also noted, though, that these same legislatures were passing "severely restrictive laws against free blacks."⁴⁸

Newspapers also carried some accounts of southerners' attempts to recover fugitive slaves from the North. The *Augusta (GA) Chronicle* carried a lengthy statement by John Knight

⁴⁶ *Fayetteville (NC) Observer*, Dec. 24, 1850. Reprinted from the *Richmond (VA) Times*.

⁴⁷ *Milwaukee (WI) Daily Sentinel and Gazette*, Jan. 22, 1851.

⁴⁸ *Vermont Chronicle* (Bellows Falls), Feb. 18, 1851.

concerning events surrounding his attempt to help another man, Willis H. Hughes, recover two accused fugitive slaves, William and Ellen Craft, in Boston. The two men were at one point arrested for slander for calling Ellen Craft a slave but were later released. Knight's statement gave an account of mobs consisting of whites, Negroes, men, women, Christians, and abolitionists hounding the two men at their hotel. In the end, Knight had to leave the city before the matter was resolved, but he insisted in his statement that many of the Boston businessmen he met were in favor of enforcing the Fugitive Slave Law. "It is true, the abolitionists and negroes are very numerous, and apparently have things very much in their own way at present," Knight stated. "The business men, and men of property, with whom I conversed generally, took but little interest in the matter; but said that the law ought to be executd [sic]—that they wished to get rid of the negroes, and that if it came to a trial of strength, the negroes and abolitionists would be put down."⁴⁹ This assertion that Boston businessmen were in favor of the law contradicted newspaper articles that reported on protests in the Boston area.⁵⁰ Although it is possible that businessmen, "men of property," privately held no qualms over the law, most newspapers indicated that the majority of Boston's citizens publicly denounced the law.

A few months later, the *Mississippian and State Gazette* reported on another failed attempt to retrieve a fugitive slave from Boston and return him to the South. The *Gazette* critically noted that none of the city's officials would take responsibility for holding the slave for his master, and the slave had not been found. The *Gazette* devoted much of a full page to commentary on this incident, and some of it was criticism of President Fillmore for not following

⁴⁹ "The Boston Slave Case," *Augusta (GA) Chronicle*, Nov. 15, 1850.

⁵⁰ Some examples: *Richmond (VA) Whig*, Nov. 12, 1850; "Correspondence of the Mississippi Free Trader," *Mississippi Free Trader (Natchez)*, Jan. 1, 1851; and "Fugitive Slave Excitement," *New Hampshire Statesman* (Concord), Nov. 1, 1850.

through on his promise to use the military to enforce the law and ensure that fugitive slaves were apprehended. The *Gazette* also expressed outrage over the formation of a Boston association whose sole purpose was to fight for the Fugitive Slave Law's annulment. Fillmore's inaction, the fugitive slave's escape, and Boston's blatant attempts to subvert the law were more than the *Gazette* could stand. "This shows what public sentiment is, in the great Emporium of New England," the article declared. "We would like to know how much good the 'prosecutions' Mr. Fillmore talks so grandiloquently about, will do among such a people."⁵¹ The *New Hampshire Statesman* countered with a report from the *New Bedford (MA) Mercury* that attempted to explain New England's actions in testing the law. The article referred to reports that the South had threatened to withdraw trade from the Union because of northern opposition to the Fugitive Slave Law. The article stated:

The people of New England do not resist the lawful execution of the law; they try to test its constitutionality by means of the legal tribunals, and they ask that it be modified and made to conform to their views of the constitution. It is for doing this that the south proscribes New England, and will probably do its utmost to injure the free States generally.

The article also examined how stopping trade with northern states would have far worse economic consequences for the southern states than it would for the North.⁵² Newspaper accounts of actual returns of slaves were infrequent, but newspapers reported northern protests when returns did occur.⁵³ The *Boston (MA) Daily Atlas* had extensive coverage of the return of

⁵¹ "Another Outrage Upon the South! The Fugitive Slave Law again Violated!!" *Mississippian and State Gazette* (Jackson), Feb. 28, 1851.

⁵² *New Hampshire Statesman* (Concord), May 9, 1851.

⁵³ Many historians agree that the Fugitive Slave Law was never fully enforced. Stanley Campbell examined this issue in his work, *The Slave Catchers: Enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Law, 1850-1860* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1970). Campbell provides a table indicating that from 1850 to 1860

accused fugitive slave Anthony Burns from Boston to Virginia. There were numerous reports of protests and violence over Burns arrest, and one federal marshal was killed.⁵⁴ The *Daily Morning News* (GA) reported on arrests made for the marshal's murder and Burns' trial.⁵⁵ President Pierce authorized federal troops to assist in the case, a move that angered Bostonians and northern abolitionists. The judge ordered that Burns be returned to his master, and the *Daily South Carolinian* recounted the scene when Burns was taken to the boat for Virginia. It stated:

This decision has occasioned great excitement and most intense feeling. Many stores are closed, and the buildings hung in mourning. The United States flag, displayed at various points, is clothed in black. The avenue leading to Court Square is densely thronged with the highly excited populace. The militia soldiery [sic] are everywhere saluted with hisses. The fugitive will be taken down state street, to Central wharf, about 2 o'clock, guarded by 100 or 150 United States troops, with a 9-pounder, loaded with grape-shot. A large force of police is on the wharf, where an immense crowd is assembling. The bells are tolling in the neighboring villages. The Mayor has placed the city at the disposal of the military authorities.⁵⁶

Southern newspapers reported on northern outrage over the case, which confirmed their belief that northerners would subvert the Fugitive Slave Law whenever possible. One *Daily Morning News* article printed a caustic response to a protest. "We expect next to hear that the abolitionists have resolved to go in black and be 'niggers' outright," the paper declared. "If their skins were as

approximately 300 slaves were returned, although only half were through judicial proceedings. As David Potter notes in *The Impending Crisis*, p. 119, that total would amount to "two slaves per year per slave state."

⁵⁴ Burns was a fugitive slave who had escaped to Boston and found employment there. In May, 1854, Burns' master came from Virginia, apprehended Burns in Boston, and claimed him under the Fugitive Slave Law. Abolitionists led a riot to free Burns, but they were unsuccessful, and several people were arrested and at least one reported dead. A Massachusetts judge ordered Burns to return to Virginia with his master, and federal troops escorted him to the ship that would take him away. The next year, a Boston minister purchased Burns and returned him to Boston as a free man.

⁵⁵ "The Boston Slave Case," *Daily Morning News* (Savannah, GA), June 3, 1854.

⁵⁶ "By Telegraph for Carolinian. Boston Slave Case. Boston, June 2, 1854," *Daily South Carolinian* (Columbia), June 3, 1854.

black as their hearts, the desired metamorphose would be easily accomplished.”⁵⁷ Pierce was hesitant to call out federal troops after the Burns incident, and it was likely that he and southern politicians wondered if enforcing the Fugitive Slave Law was better in theory than in practice.

Negroes in the North, either free or fugitive, had mixed responses to the law, but there were reports that many fled to Canada rather than face being taken to the South.⁵⁸ The law’s directives meant even free blacks had no recourse to prove their freedom in a court of law. “If the Fugitive slave law has not been the instrument of bringing South many of the runaway slaves, it has had the effect of ridding the North of them,” the *Mississippian and State Gazette* reported. “They have fled in great numbers to Canada.” The article detailed various northern church reports on the loss of communicants as a result of the law. One “colored Baptist Church” reported losing all but two of its 114 members, with the pastor being the first to flee. Doctrinal differences apparently had an effect on some churches’ course of action. The article stated:

The Methodist Church, in the same place, has also lost a considerable number of its members from the same cause. There is said to be among these more disposition to make a stand and to evade or resist the law than among their Baptist brethren. Somebody had advised them to arm themselves and defend their liberty. The Baptist pastor, however, told his people that he found in the Gospel examples which justified running away, but no examples which warranted fighting.⁵⁹

Estimates vary, but there is no doubt that Negroes living in states bordering the South migrated to states farther north and often into Canada.

⁵⁷ “What Will Become of the Country Now?” *Daily Morning News* (Savannah, GA), June 10, 1854.

⁵⁸ Renford Reese examined this migration and the underground railroad in his article “Canada: The Promised Land for U.S. Slaves,” *Western Journal of Black Studies* Vol. 35, no. 3 (Summer 2011): 208-217.

⁵⁹ *Mississippian and State Gazette* (Jackson), Feb. 21, 1851.

Some northern newspapers reported that northerners were resigned to the fact that the Fugitive Slave Law would not be repealed or even modified. The *Daily Scioto (OH) Gazette* carried a *New York Tribune* article to that effect. “There is nowhere a great party demanding it. Public sentiment regards it with comparative indifference,” the article stated. “There is no such overwhelming popular movements in favor of repealing or changing the law as there was at the North in 1848 or ’49 against the extension of slavery.”⁶⁰ In response to the *Tribune’s* article, the *New Hampshire Statesman* attempted to explain the North’s seeming acquiescence to the law. The article acknowledged the gains northern politicians had made in much of the Compromise and that many of these men sought “respite from the harassing effects of further and unavailing controversy.” For many, the Compromise seemed the only way the Union could be preserved, and the country’s major political parties wanted to be “delivered from the mischievous effects of slavery agitation.” The *Statesman* also asserted that the public had been under intense pressure from the debate and now desired some repose. Prolonging the controversy would only result in “mischief.”⁶¹

A *Fayetteville (NC) Observer* article noted that, except for the two extremes, most people had accepted the Compromise. As for President Fillmore, it was clear that both sides found fault in his response to the law. The article noted that some denounced Fillmore for “fidelity to slavery,” while others accused him of being “false to the Compromise.”⁶² Even the *Daily Alabama Journal* carried an editorial stating that at this juncture most of the northern states were willing to abide by the law. The writer accused abolitionists and disunionists of being “ultras”

⁶⁰ *Daily Scioto Gazette* (Chillicothe, OH), July 22, 1851.

⁶¹ *New Hampshire Statesman* (Concord), Aug. 2, 1851.

⁶² “From the Republic. Democratic Denunciation of the Administration for its “Fidelity to Slavery”—Democratic Pledge to Agitate the Repeal of the Fugitive Slave Law,” *Fayetteville (NC) Observer*, Aug. 26, 1851.

who were determined to destroy both the Union and slavery. “I rejoice that the good and wise of both parties, North and South, have united for the preservation of the Constitution and the Union,” the *Journal* article said. Such articles appear to have been intended to convince readers that the controversy over the Fugitive Slave Law had subsided.

A few months later, though, a strongly worded article appeared in the *Mississippi Free Trader* that accused the South of succumbing to the North with a “smoking timorous spirit.” The article said the South’s silence over its right to slaves worth “twelve hundred millions of dollars worth of property” had led the North to openly “send out emissaries to kidnap our slaves or to circulate incendiary publications among them, inciting them to murder, rebellion [sic] and flight.” A reference to a New York anti-Fugitive Slave Law meeting recounted applause for the words of “the infamous blabber-lipped negro, Fred. Douglass.” The article insisted that the South could no longer be silent in the face of the North’s “moral, religious, social and educational” efforts. The article declared:

But the era of open resistance has dawned upon us. We now openly and fearlessly justify negro slavery as right and just in the sight of heaven, agreeable to the dictates and awards of divine providence, and as salutary a dispensation to the enslaved race in consideration of their natural and moral inferiority, as to the dominant race who are called upon by God himself to protect, feed, clothe and employ those who cannot take and have never taken, so good care of themselves, as the slave owners have done for them.

The article declared that any in the South who might disagree “that slavery is far better for the negro race than emancipation” should move to the North, because there would be more than enough people left to defend the South.⁶³ This article stated a clear stand in support of slavery without linking it to territorial expansion, economic necessity, or property rights. Instead, the

⁶³ “The Spirit of the North. Violence upon the South openly Advocated and Applauded—The Final Issue Made,” *Mississippi Free Trader* (Natchez), Feb. 2, 1851.

Free Trader called Negro slavery a God-given right, even a command for the “dominant” race to care for the “enslaved race.” At least for this newspaper, slavery alone was now the crux of the South’s argument with the North.

For several years, the Fugitive Slave Law would continue to be a pivotal piece of legislation. In April 1852, several newspapers published a letter Secretary of State Daniel Webster had sent in response to a Virginia politician concerning his views on the Compromise Bill and the Fugitive Slave Act. Webster acknowledged that of all the measures in the Compromise, the Fugitive Slave Law had caused the greatest dissatisfaction. But Webster added that he believed the law to be “entirely constitutional and highly proper, and absolutely essential to the peace of the country.” He said he did not believe any further agitation would make progress and both sides should adhere to the Constitution and not interfere with those things the states should control. His optimism for the future remained. “My belief is,” Webster said, “that when the passions of men subside, and reason, and true patriotism are allowed to have the entire sway, both North and South will come to a proper state upon these questions.”⁶⁴ Newspaper accounts of these public debates, speeches, and letters appear to indicate, however, that the “passions of men” over this issue were unlikely to subside any time soon. “The fugitive slave law is now the compromise,” the *Mississippi Free Trader* stated, “and when men talk about abiding by the Compromise, they refer to the support of the fugitive slave law.”⁶⁵

In the presidential election of 1852, the *Missouri Courier* succinctly summarized the issue for many voters. “The question is,” the *Courier* article stated, “shall we elect a President who may sign a bill to repeal the Fugitive Slave Law.” The Whig Party had failed to nominate its

⁶⁴ “The Following is the reply of Hon. Daniel Webster,” *Cleveland (OH) Herald*, April 15, 1852.

⁶⁵ “The State-Rights Democracy and the Compromise,” *Mississippi Free Trader* (Natchez), March 17, 1852.

incumbent, Millard Fillmore, and instead nominated General Winfield Scott for president and William Graham for vice-president. The Democrats nominated Franklin Pierce for president and William King for vice-president. The common belief was that Pierce would veto any attempts to repeal the Fugitive Slave Law, as he consistently expressed his support for the Compromise. Pierce's support was clearly noted in the *Courier's* article, which referred to him as being of the "school of Jackson Democrats who do not hesitate to use the veto."⁶⁶ Pierce's pledge to veto any repeal and the fact that his vice-presidential nominee, William R. King, was from Alabama, helped Pierce secure the southern vote in November. He managed to sweep the electoral vote, 254 to 42.⁶⁷ But even though he carried the North, the popular vote in the northern states was much closer than the electoral vote would suggest. Pierce did not win the popular vote in Connecticut, Delaware, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Ohio, Tennessee, and Vermont. In many other northern states, he barely broke 50 percent.⁶⁸ Although Pierce's election did mean the Fugitive Slave Law would remain in place, newspaper accounts show the issue was by no means settled.⁶⁹

In February 1854, several newspapers reported that Ohio Senator Salmon P. Chase had presented petitions asking for the Fugitive Slave Law's repeal.⁷⁰ This time, though, the calls for repeal had become part of the debate over the Kansas-Nebraska Act, which would allow voters in those territories to determine for themselves if they would allow slavery and, in effect, repeal

⁶⁶ *Missouri Courier* (Hannibal), Oct. 7, 1852.

⁶⁷ U.S. Electoral College, <http://www.archives.gov/federal-register/electoral-college/scores.html#1852>.

⁶⁸ "The American Presidency Project," <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/showelection.php?year=1852>.

⁶⁹ "Congress," *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC), Feb. 2, 1853; "Telegraphic Dispatches," *Boston (MA) Daily Atlas*, Feb. 1, 1853;

⁷⁰ Some examples are "Telegraphic Dispatches," *Boston (MA) Daily Atlas*, Feb. 28, 1854; "XXXIIIrd Congress. Washington, Feb. 27. Senate," *Bangor (ME) Daily Whig & Courier*, March 2, 1854; and "33d Congress, 1st Session," *Vermont Patriot & State Gazette* (Montpelier), March 3, 1854;

the Missouri Compromise. After that Act was signed into law in May, the calls for repealing the Fugitive Slave Law became even stronger. The *North American and United States Gazette* reported that several New England states were considering petitions to repeal the Fugitive Slave Law “in consequence of the passage of the Nebraska bill.”⁷¹ The *Ohio Observer* carried several articles concerning slavery and protests over the Kansas-Nebraska Act. “If the Missouri Compromise can be repealed,” the paper stated, “so, *a fortiori* the repealing act can be repealed. The Fugitive Slave law can be repealed.”⁷² In July 1854, Massachusetts Senator Charles Sumner began advocating for the introduction of a bill to repeal the Fugitive Slave Law. In his efforts, he did not mince words. The *Fayetteville (NC) Observer* published his statements from a Senate debate on the issue in June 1854. The article began with Sumner reiterating a question posed by Tennessee Senator James C. Jones:

“Can any one suppose that, if the fugitive slave act be repealed, this Union can exist?” To which I reply at once, that if the Union be in any way dependent on an act—I cannot call it a law—so revolting in every regard as that to which he refers, then it ought not to exist.⁷³

The Senate denied Sumner’s petition for repeal, but as newspaper articles show, that would not stop him from continuing to present others.⁷⁴

⁷¹ “Repeal of the Fugitive Slave Law,” *North American and United States Gazette* (Philadelphia, PA), June 19, 1854. This article also appeared in *Hinds County (Raymond, MS) Gazette*, July 12, 1854.

⁷² “Things That Can Be Done,” *Ohio Observer* (Hudson), June 28, 1854. The Latin legal phrase “*a fortiori*” means “with even stronger reason.” It is used to state that if one thing is true then certainly a second thing is even more certainly true.

⁷³ “Debate in the Senate,” *Fayetteville (NC) Observer*, July 3, 1854.

⁷⁴ The following are some examples: *Bangor (ME) Daily Whig & Courier*, Aug. 4, 1854; *Daily Morning News* (Savannah, GA), July 22, 1854; and *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC), Oct. 30, 1854.

It would be ten years before the Fugitive Slave Law was finally repealed, and it would take the Thirteenth Amendment, ratified on December 6, 1865, to modify Article IV, Section 2, of the Constitution.⁷⁵ On the surface, it would appear that the Fugitive Slave Law staved off disunion for a time, but newspapers reported that the law's enforcement created intense anger in the North. The publicity engendered whenever the law was enforced resulted in increased northern sympathy for slaves and anger toward the South. Southern newspapers covered the northern response to fugitive slave arrests, and it would have been clear to southerners that the law's enforcement was turning the tide of northern opinion even more against them. In the end, the law was rarely enforced, as southerners began to support it more on political principle. In an 1854 article on the Kansas-Nebraska debates, the *Bangor (ME) Daily Whig & Courier* acknowledged the Fugitive Slave Law's influence on the Union and its politics. In the North the ballot box "will teach politicians that this is not the era of slavery," the *Courier* stated, "and that the people will not rest quietly under whatever load slavery may impose." The article's concluding statement should have been a tocsin for the country. "The fugitive slave law was the last feather weight they could bear," the *Courier* declared, "and adding to that is to create a revolt, at whatever cost."⁷⁶

⁷⁵The Library of Congress, Primary Documents. <http://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/ourdocs/13thamendment.html>.

⁷⁶*Bangor (ME) Daily Whig & Courier* (Maine), March 18, 1854.

CHAPTER VI

THE ABOLITIONIST AGITATION: JOHN BROWN AND UNCLE TOM'S CABIN

Had the Wilmot Proviso become a law, or had slavery been abolished in the District of Columbia, nothing short of a special interposition of Divine Providence could have prevented the secession of most, if not all, of the slaveholding states of the union. I am far from saying that either or both of these causes would have justified so dreadful a result; but the South have been goaded into madness by long continued assaults of Northern fanatics and Abolitionists.

James Buchanan
March 12, 1850¹

As the 1850s progressed, newspapers recorded how the abolitionist movement expanded its influence and how the anti-slavery argument turned violent in Kansas. The release of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1852 was a boon for the abolitionists, but newspaper articles clearly show that the Kansas-Nebraska Act's passage in 1854 was the primary factor that fueled the expansion of antislavery politics. The Kansas-Nebraska Act reignited the slavery debate with a passion that did not abate, leading to what many newspapers presciently referred to as Bloody Kansas's Civil War. It was a terrible time for the nation as newspapers increasingly emphasized the hardening of positions on both sides that would ultimately lead the country to war.

¹ "Wheatland, near Lancaster, March 12, 1850. My Dear Sir," *Daily Cleveland (OH) Herald*, July 9, 1856.

Periodically during the 1800s, newspapers recorded how the abolitionist movement came to the fore and then faded away just as quickly. Although the cause had many devotees, abolitionists were often considered extremists in both the northern and the southern press, a characterization that plagued their efforts to influence the political landscape.² In January 1846, the *New-Hampshire Patriot and State Gazette* published an article offering its perspective on the history of abolitionism and how it “served triumphantly to illustrate the wisdom of giving fanaticism and error full vent of expression.” The lengthy article gave an overview of the advent of “political abolitionism” and noted how the movement never exerted much influence at the ballot box, as in its most recent failure to stave off slavery in the battle over Texas’s admission to statehood. Although the article referred to the “evils of slavery,” the *Patriot’s* clear message was that political abolitionists should be regarded as enemies of the Union. The article declared:

They have failed and are destined to fail, because, to reach the point they pretend to have in view, requires a march over the ruins of institutions, which the Americans believe to be the safe guard of their rights and liberties, the strength of the union and the hope of freedom in the western world. The way they go, leads through violated oaths, broken constitutions, faith contemned, honor outraged and sacred compromises trampled upon. The more there is of discussion and examination, the more firmly convinced will the great majority of the people of the free States become that they are no more responsible for the internal evils of the slave States, than they are for the evils that exist in any foreign nation. They believe that the Union is eminently beneficial to all the States. Beyond the objects specified in the articles of the union, they feel that they have no right, and are not required by any moral obligation, to go politically. Every new day has demonstrated the blessings of the Union, and never was it stronger than at this moment.³

² Ezekial Birdseye and Durwood Dunn, *An Abolitionist in the Appalachian South*, 3-25. Through Birdseye’s example, this book gives an overview of some of the arguments surrounding political abolitionists. The book contains letters Birdseye wrote to Gerrit Smith, a prominent abolitionist.

³ “Abolitionism—its weakness,” *New-Hampshire Patriot and State Gazette* (Concord), Jan. 1, 1846.

Despite the *Patriot's* hopefulness over the Union's strength, in the 1850s abolitionists would make increasing political and social gains that would ultimately endanger the Union.⁴

For most of the first half of the nineteenth century, northern and southern newspapers had viewed abolitionists with a wary eye. The abolitionist argument was obviously most troublesome for southerners, but even in the North there was debate over the constitutional issues surrounding slavery and the gradual or immediate emancipation of slaves. The topic affected churches, albeit especially those in the South, as worshippers struggled over how to reconcile the moral and political ramifications of the issue.⁵ As the abolitionist movement gained strength in the 1850s, mainstream northern and southern newspapers carried more articles on abolitionists and their efforts to affect the current political state.⁶ Abolitionism led southerners to conclude that the North favored aggressive action toward the South. There was increased concern on both sides that abolitionists were out to stymie any peaceful resolution of the slavery question.⁷ There was fear that the abolitionists' single-minded resolve was creating a volatile climate that might destroy the Union.

⁴ Grant, "One and Inseparable? The North, the South, and the Nation," in *North Over South*, 61-80. Grant writes that "by the 1850s, much of the moderate sentiment in the North as a whole had given way to a far more hostile approach; consequently, a more negative image of the South began to dominate the northern mind," 79.

⁵ See Anne C. Loveland, "Slavery," in *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order, 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), 186-218. Loveland addresses many of the difficulties evangelical ministers faced when confronting the morality of slavery. Whatever their position, many took issue with the abolitionists, particularly in southern evangelical churches. On p. 193, Loveland writes: "Southern evangelicals reacted to the abolitionist campaign in much the same way that their fellow southerners did. They condemned abolitionist efforts as interference in a matter that was the exclusive concern of the South. They contended that emancipation would be ruinous for both blacks and whites. They predicted that if abolitionists persisted in their efforts, the result would be dissolution of the Union." For further study of the role of religious faith prior to and during the Civil War, see George C. Rable, *God's Almost Chosen Peoples: A Religious History of the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

⁶ Risley, "The Mainstream Press Joins the Struggle," in *Abolition and the Press*, 127-154.

⁷ Genovese, "The Struggle for a Way Out," in *The Slaveholders' Dilemma*, 46-75. Genovese notes that many clerical and secular writers believed that the abolitionist agitation was impeding any progress for emancipation. Another difficulty was the fact that southerners viewed emancipation in very different terms than northerners and did not equate freedom with social and material progress for blacks.

Newspapers frequently reported on the increasing fear that abolitionists' political activities might lead to disunion. Newspapers described abolitionists as "fanatics" and sometimes as "ultras," a term usually reserved for southern extremists.⁸ The *Weekly Herald* (New York) criticized political parties for catering to extremists in each section. "Both the national parties at Washington, on several occasions during the present winter," the *Herald* maintained, "endeavored to harmonize, on the spoils principles, secessionists and free soilers—Southern ultras and Northern ultras—on the same Presidential platform, merely for the sake of the spoils."⁹ In the South, the *Natchez (MS) Courier* criticized both extremes, although it reserved its harshest language for the abolitionists:

A strong effort is making, says the Montgomery (Ala.) Journal, by the ultras in all sections of the Union to break in fragments our happy and mighty Republic, the noblest work of man. The motives of the ultras in the two sections are different, but their object is the same—disunion. The abolition fanatics desire disunion, that they may be at liberty to carry out their wild and wicked work of ruin and desolation on the South. The Southern ultras desire it from the singular idea that they could maintain its institutions better out of the Union than in it, and perhaps from other reasons. Though their motives are different, their object is the same, and to a great extent their reasoning.¹⁰

The article also included two quotes, one from an abolitionist publication and one from the *Charleston Mercury*, both of which predicted that the only course for the nation was disunion. Another southern newspaper, the *Hinds County Gazette* (MS) also printed concern over the Union's future in the face of the two extremes. "The Union of our fathers is in danger of

⁸ For further study of the abolitionists see Merton Dillon, "The Failure of the American Abolitionists," *Journal of Southern History* 25, no. 2 (May 1959), 159-177, and Jane H. Pease and William H. Pease, "Confrontation and Abolition in the 1850s," *Journal of American History* 58, no. 4 (March 1972), 923-937.

⁹ "The Great Whig Movements at Washington. Whig Caucus," *Weekly Herald* (New York), April 17, 1852. As the name suggests, the *Weekly Herald* was a weekly version of the *New York Herald* owned by James Gordon Bennett.

¹⁰ "The Argument of the Disunionist," *Natchez (MS) Courier*, March 21, 1851.

destruction,” the paper warned; “violent hands have been laid upon it by Northern factionists and fanatics, and Southern ultras and disunionists—the danger is appalling.”¹¹ At this point, it appeared that both northern and southern newspapers shared a common concern over extremists and their political influence.

Newspapers closely watched for the election of dogmatic abolitionists to political positions. In July 1851, as the United States was on the eve of its 75th Independence Day celebration, the *Raleigh* (NC) *Register* printed an article praising the Massachusetts Democratic State Central Committee for taking a stand of “non-interference with the rights of the South.” The *Register* had a specific reason for publishing this article. The Democratic Central Committee took action in response to a group of Massachusetts Free Soilers and Democratic legislators who had formed a coalition that resulted in famed abolitionist Charles Sumner’s election to the U.S. Senate.¹² The *Register* article encouraged northern Whigs and Democrats to break their alliances with the abolitionist movement and its supporters. “If they would act with firmness in this matter,” the *Register* insisted, “parties would resume their old platforms upon national issues, and sectional questions and disputes, the causes of so much mischief, would die away.”¹³ The *Register* believed it was in the South’s interest to move the political debate away from sectional issues, of which slavery was first and foremost. Establishing a connection between abolitionists

¹¹ “The Speaking at Cooper Well,” *Hinds County Gazette* (Raymond, MS), May 22, 1851.

¹² The Free Soil Party’s name accurately describes its agenda. In essence, Free Soilers were opposed to any expansion of slavery. They were criticized, though, for their political alliances, as can be seen in articles such as “The Progress of the Free Soil Party in Political Morals,” *Boston* (MA) *Daily Atlas*, Oct. 17, 1851. This article criticized the Free Soil Party for abandoning its commitment not to make political unions simply for the purpose of gaining an office. “They have openly, deliberately, repeatedly and shamelessly, violated their strongest pledges,” the *Atlas* said, “and yet have the hardihood to talk about Consistency!!!” For further study of the Free Soilers, see Frederick J. Blue, *The Free Soilers; Third Party Politics, 1848-54* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973), and Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: the Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

¹³ *Raleigh* (NC) *Register*, July 2, 1851.

and sectionalism would help the South in its efforts to portray the abolitionists as agitators willing to sacrifice the Union for their cause. Southern newspapers understood that framing the issue in this way might weaken abolitionists in the northern states.

In December 1851, the *Raleigh Register* carried an article that covered a recent Senate debate during which anti-slavery New Hampshire Senator John P. Hale criticized the Supreme Court.¹⁴ In his speech, given in response to a resolution submitted by Mississippi Senator Henry S. Foote, Hale referred to the U.S. Supreme Court as the “Citadel of Slavery.” The *Register* pounced on Hale’s statement as a criticism of the Supreme Court and the Constitution. “We have been looking for some time,” the *Register* said, “to see the weapons of the Abolitionists, and some other factions, turned against the Supreme Court—a Court, which, we think, is the Citadel of Constitutional Liberty, and the sheet anchor of the Republic.”¹⁵ In portraying abolitionists as anti-Unionists, the article declared loyalty to the federal government and its institutions. Such loyalty would appeal to northerners, but at this juncture it also appealed to southerners who wanted to see the Compromise of 1850 and the Fugitive Slave Law upheld.

Southern newspapers vigilantly watched northern threats to repeal the Fugitive Slave Law, as well as continued attempts to pass the Wilmot Proviso. Abolitionists were having success using the Fugitive Slave Law to further their cause, and the Wilmot Proviso was always guaranteed to garner attention. The *Daily Alabama Journal* said the South would resist any “unconstitutional aggression—the repeal or disregard of the fugitive slave bill—the revival of the

¹⁴ Hale would go on to be the Free Soil Party’s candidate for president in the 1852 election, where he would obtain 4.9 percent of the vote. For further information on Hale, see Richard H. Sewell, *John P. Hale and the Politics of Abolition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965).

¹⁵ *Raleigh (NC) Register*, Dec. 31, 1851.

proviso, or any new aggression.”¹⁶ The *Mississippian and State Gazette* accused abolitionists of supporting these and other northern “agitations” toward the South. It warned:

Bank, Tariff, and Internal Improvement questions will yet be agitated by the North, because she loves the union for the chances which it affords her of growing rich upon the fruit of Southern toil, by means of special legislation, but Northern councils will be swayed, more than ever, by the wild spirit of Abolitionism which has seized the minds of the masses.¹⁷

Southerners often complained that the North only supported the Union so it could take advantage of the South’s economy. This article also indicated concern that abolitionists might be gaining more political influence in the North.

Certainly, abolitionist leaders were becoming better known, although there was still negative publicity attached to their cause. Some newspaper articles had begun using prominent abolitionist leaders’ last names when referring to abolitionists in general, knowing that their readers would understand the reference. In one article, the *Pensacola (FL) Gazette* referred to Boston abolitionists as “the Garrisons and Phillipses, and other miserable fanatics.”¹⁸

Newspapers sometimes published critical articles aimed directly at prominent abolitionists’ and their actions. One New York newspaper, the *Weekly Herald*, carried an article that criticized prominent abolitionist Gerrit Smith.¹⁹ The article referred to abolitionism as a “clique” and claimed that even black voters in the north were not supporting the abolitionist party. It should be noted that this northern newspaper, whose owner was James Gordon Bennett, used derogatory

¹⁶ “The Latest Phase,” *Daily Alabama Journal* (Montgomery), Oct. 23, 1850.

¹⁷ “The Wilmot Proviso again threatened—Agitation for the repeal of the Fugitive Slave Law still increasing—Another warning to the South,” *Mississippian and State Gazette* (Jackson), Aug. 22, 1851.

¹⁸ “Another Fugitive Slave Case in Boston,” *Pensacola (FL) Gazette*, April 19, 1851.

¹⁹ For further study on Smith, see Laurence M. Vance, “A Radical Nineteenth-Century Libertarian,” *Independent Review* 13, no. 3 (Winter 2009): 431-439.

terms such as “wooly heads” and other racial vernacular in reference to blacks. The article declared:

Now, if Mr. Smith were not in his ideas blacker than the blacks themselves, he might draw a moral from this fact, which might be of some service to him. The negroes know better than he does, whether the carrying into practice of the doctrines which he professes would be of service to the Southern slaves or not, and by only fifty of them voting for his party, if party it can be called, they show they know better what is to the interest of their “brethern in bondage,” than he, with all his whiteness, does.²⁰

In light of abolitionist calls for freedom, southern newspapers frequently carried articles that questioned whether slaves were really interested in the abolitionist cause and emancipation, or if slaves might actually prefer their current position in the South.

It was common for abolitionist campaigns to publicize slavery’s horrors. To contradict those claims and to bolster the idea that slaves were content, southern newspapers ran stories that featured former slaves who were unhappy after gaining their freedom and living in the North. The *Augusta (GA) Chronicle* printed such an article about a slaveowner who permitted “his negro woman” to visit relatives in Ohio. Somehow, the relatives prevented her from returning and, inexplicably, had “run her off to Canada.” The woman then wrote to her master and asked for him to come and get her because she was unhappy. The woman’s husband then followed her to Canada and wrote to the master that the woman had been left there to starve.²¹ “They both express a warm desire to return home,” the article said. “In their new found land of freedom they have to work harder and fare worse than in slave Kentucky.”²² In the same vein, the *Macon (GA)*

²⁰ “Gerrit Smith’s Manifesto to the Wooly Heads,” *Weekly Herald* (New York, NY), Dec. 28, 1850.

²¹ The husband may have followed her at his master’s request, but the facts are unclear.

²² “Nuts for Abolitionists to Crack,” *Augusta (GA) Chronicle*, Jan. 5, 1854.

Weekly Telegraph carried an article that described relations between masters and slaves in rather bucolic terms:

In spite of the efforts of abolitionists to estrange the white and black races by misrepresentations of both, the most kindly relations still exists [sic] between them. The negro has a natural feeling of loyalty to his master and of pride in the prosperity of the family, and the master, in his turn, reposes confidence in, and cherishes affection for his well beloved slaves.

This *Telegraph* article concluded that the South's social structure meant that blacks were not "regarded with that loathing and contempt," which the article asserted was how the North viewed them. The article maintained that the North's free society resulted in negroes being "kept at a distance, and a reciprocal feeling of dislike is the natural result."²³ The article implied that the only way for the two races to coexist was if there were a hierarchical social structure in place.

But, southern newspapers sometimes were forced to address reports of brutal slave treatment in the South. When the northern press published accusations of slave mistreatment, southern newspapers often responded. Usually southern newspapers would offer explanations for such stories, which often included questions about the facts the northern newspapers presented. One such story made the rounds in early 1854. In this particular case, it was reported that a lynch mob burned a negro alive after he was found guilty of having "the impudence to raise his hand against a white man." It was reported that the negro had been captured and then tied to a tree. The mob sentenced him to death, after which he was allowed to pray and drink some water. Then, the wood underneath the negro man was set afire. The incident reportedly took place near Union Point, Mississippi, and a large number of slaves, perhaps numbering as many as 4,000, were brought from neighboring plantations to watch the execution as a warning. The *Mississippi*

²³ "Emancipation, &c.," *Macon (GA) Weekly Telegraph*, Nov. 18, 1856.

Free Trader printed several letters that had been sent to the paper asking about the story's veracity.

In answering the queries, the *Free Trader* offered a different version of events and gave a graphic account of two slaves who had "become a terror." The paper reported that the two slaves had murdered two white men and abducted two white women, one negro woman, and a child. In rescuing the victims, armed pursuers were able to capture one of the men, while the other managed to escape. One of the women, whose name was reported as Mrs. Todd, testified that she had seen the two negroes murder her husband. The paper noted that the other women were too distressed to talk, but Mrs. Todd was able to tell the story of what had happened to them. "It was enough to make men weep tears of blood," the *Free Trader* stated, "a series of crimes black enough to be execrated by devils. The people assembled did not need long to deliberate." So, according to the article, the negro man was tied up to be burned, with Mrs. Todd lighting the fire. In its article, "Abolition Falsehood," the *Free Trader* criticized northern newspapers for printing abolitionist versions of the story, which the *Free Trader* repudiated as false. The article declared:

This story, the same in its statement of alleged facts, but varying in language and coloring, as may occur to the imagination of each abolition writer who seizes upon it for the purpose of inflaming the Northern mind, is now going the rounds of the entire Northern press. We, therefore, have made diligent inquiry in regard to it and shall give the facts, so far as we have learned them, as accurately as possible, that the base calumny may be exposed and denounced, and its authors branded with the infamy they deserve.²⁴

It is impossible to know which versions of such stories are true. Most likely, readers accepted the version that most closely fit with their own politics, and these disparate versions only served to deepen an increasing divide. In spite of the publication of stories that supported the southern

²⁴ "Abolition Falsehood," *Mississippi Free Trader* (Natchez), Feb. 28, 1854.

view of slavery, the institution was about to face a formidable new challenge from a serial printed in an abolitionist publication.

When it came to publicizing ill treatment of slaves, Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* surpassed all other abolitionist efforts. Stowe's fictional account of slavery in the South was first published in weekly installments in an anti-slavery newspaper, the *National Era*, from June 1851 through April 1852. The newspaper serial proved to be very popular, and Stowe's story was published as a book in March 1852.²⁵ The book was a publishing phenomenon, with estimates of sales upward of 300,000 in its first year, and its popularity quickly became a newspaper story in itself. One article that appeared in numerous publications noted that probably "no literary work ever published has had such remarkable success as this."²⁶ Many newspapers reported sales in the United States and in England, where some newspapers said it sold as many as 400,000 copies.²⁷ The *Vermont Chronicle* carried an article that began with the book's latest sales reports and then commented on its popularity. "It is read where it is most needed," the *Chronicle* claimed. "Men in public life read it—slaveholders read it—those who have been indifferent to the subject of slavery read it—the defenders of the Fugitive-Slave Law in all its dangerous and odious features, read it."²⁸ *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was sold to such an extent that the *Fayetteville (NC) Observer* had to acknowledge its sales in the South. "The book is having an extensive run," the *Observer* reported, "and we notice that a large portion of the sales is made at

²⁵ Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin, or, Life among the lowly* (Boston: John P. Jewett & Company, 1852).

²⁶ "Uncle Tom's Cabin," *Cleveland (OH) Herald*, Nov. 4, 1852; "Uncle Tom's Cabin," *North American and United States Gazette* (Philadelphia, PA), Nov. 2, 1852; "Uncle Tom's Cabin," *Daily Scioto Gazette* (Chillicothe, OH), Nov. 9, 1852.

²⁷ Reports on the book's sales include "Uncle Tom's Cabin," *Vermont Chronicle* (Bellows Falls), Dec. 7, 1852; *New Hampshire Statesman* (Concord), May 22, 1852

²⁸ "Uncle Tom's Cabin," *Vermont Chronicle* (Bellows Falls), June 8, 1852.

the South.” In the same article, though, the *Observer* made it a point to note that the book was “a work of fiction,” in which Stowe “depicted in highly exaggerated colors, the evils and horrors of slavery.”²⁹ To the delight of abolitionists, it would be difficult to overstate *Uncle Tom’s Cabin’s* success, a fact that neither northern nor southern newspapers could ignore.³⁰

The newspaper articles on *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* began to appear in March 1852, just after the two-volume book’s release. Many papers carried bookstore advertisements for the work, but even those articles offered some perspective on the book’s content. The *Cleveland (OH) Herald* carried one such announcement stating that anyone who desired “a powerfully written tale, and one with a very decided anti-slavery tendency—exhibiting unusual descriptive powers, and a fine conception of what has occurred ‘down below,’ had better disgorge the necessary dollar and fifty cents and obtain one.”³¹ Another announcement in the *Bangor (ME) Daily Whig & Courier* praised the author for her “graceful pen” and predicted that the book would have immense circulation. “These volumes cannot fail to interest the reader in relation of the simple and touching incidents in the life of slaves,” the *Whig & Courier* said, “and will at the same time teach potentially the many evils of the system, and make many young hearts to swell at its atrocities.”³² Very quickly, though, editorials on Stowe’s book appeared in newspapers, and, as

²⁹ “The Desecration of Talent,” *Fayetteville (NC) Observer*, June 8, 1852.

³⁰ Some northern newspapers used the book’s popularity as a point of humor. On July 31, 1852, the *New Hampshire Statesman* (Concord) carried the following: “A friend writing from the South says that a copy of Uncle Tom’s Cabin which he possesses is one of the best Catholics,—it keeps *Lent* all the time.” On Sept. 10, 1852, the *Barre (MA) Patriot* said Harriet Beecher Stowe “has been engaged to write a tale on the effect of the Maine Liquor Law.”

³¹ “Smith, Knight & Co. have received a supply of “Uncle Tom’s Cabin,” *Cleveland (OH) Herald*, April 15, 1852.

³² “Uncle Tom’s Cabin: or Life Among the Lowly. By Harriet Beecher Stowe. 2 Vols. Boston: John P. Jewett, 1852,” *Bangor (ME) Daily Whig & Courier*, March 30, 1852.

might be expected, northern and southern publications had vastly different reactions. Few southern newspapers carried any such advertisements for the book.

In the North, some newspapers attempted to portray the book as being fair to the South and said that it presented both the good and the bad of the slavery system. *The Ohio Observer* ran such an editorial in May 1852. Even though the piece began with hopes that Stowe's work would "arouse the sluggish nation to shake off the curse, and abate the wrongs," it then tried to assuage southern slaveholders' concerns about the story. It stated:

It takes no extreme views. It does not seek to seize upon the most horrible atrocities, and brand the whole system as worse than it is. It is fair, generous, and calm, and candid. A slaveholder might read it without anger, but not easily without a secret abhorrence of the system which he himself upholds.³³

The *Vermont Chronicle* expressed concern over some of the book's generalizations on slavery and noted that the "treatment of slaves varies infinitely with the character and circumstances of slave-holders." The *Chronicle* also acknowledged that southerners were like any other people who might be living under such circumstances. "So much power over others," the *Chronicle* surmised, "with so little enforced responsibility, as the system of slavery supposes, is a dangerous possession."³⁴ Such reviews indicate that some northern newspapers, although critical of slavery, attempted to soften the book's reception in the South.

A few northern newspapers expressed serious concern over the book and complained that its publication would only serve to heighten sectional tensions. Even in Boston, where the abolitionist movement had such a stronghold, such worries appeared. The *Boston (MA) Investigator* carried an article that reprinted criticism of the book from the *London Times*. The

³³ "Uncle Tom's Cabin," *Ohio Observer* (Hudson), May 5, 1852.

³⁴ "Uncle Tom's Cabin," *Vermont Chronicle* (Bellows Falls), March 15, 1853.

article asserted that the book would not change the opinions of those who favored slavery. In fact, the article feared that Stowe's work could actually offend southerners to the point that they would become even more entrenched in their point of view. The article warned:

The object of this book is to abolish slavery. Its effect will be to render slavery more difficult than ever of abolishment. Its very popularity constitutes its greatest difficulty. It will keep ill-blood at boiling point, and irritate instead of pacifying those whose proceedings Mrs. Stowe is anxious to influence on behalf of humanity—Uncle Tom's Cabin was not required to convince the haters of slavery of the abomination of the "institution;" of all books, it is the least calculated to weigh with those whose prejudices in favor of slavery have yet to be overcome, and whose interests are involved in the perpetuation of the system.

This same *Investigator* article raised concerns that Stowe favored the immediate emancipation of slaves, as many abolitionists demanded, and warned that Americans probably were not ready for that step. "We do not believe that the blacks in America are prepared for sudden emancipation," the article stated, "and if they are, we are certain that the whites are wholly incapable of appreciating the blessing."³⁵ Another northern newspaper, the *Milwaukee (WI) Daily Sentinel*, published a report on the book's immense popularity and sales. The *Sentinel*, though, also praised the book's fidelity to southern slaves' true lives. The article made a broad statement that even southern newspapers had frankly testified to the work's truthfulness, albeit reluctantly.³⁶ That claim was far from accurate, as most southern newspapers denounced the book unsparingly.

As criticism in southern newspapers appeared, there was a recurring theme that Stowe, like other abolitionists, was keen on criticizing the southern social structure, while ignoring northern ills. Southern newspapers frequently responded to abolitionist criticism of slavery with

³⁵ "From the London Times. 'Uncle Tom's Cabin'—Slavery," *Boston (MA) Investigator*, Oct. 13, 1852.

³⁶ "City Matters. Uncle Tom's Cabin or Life among the Lowly," *Milwaukee (WI) Daily Sentinel*, June 2, 1852.

examples of the North's labor and poverty problems, and their response to Stowe was no different. A *Daily Alabama Journal* article is one such example. The article, titled "The Other Side," was an acerbic review of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. It reported that a southern writer was going to write a response to Stowe's book, *Uncle Tom's Cabin as it is*, and then added what the new book should cover:

Somebody would better write a history of Uncle Tag Rag and Bob-Tail's Cabin at the North, illustrating it with women fishing out driftwood [sic] from the ice of the river for fires; children eating with hogs out of the offal barrels; emaciated corpses of fathers and mothers unshrouded, but ready for the grave, with starvation written on their sunken brows; young women, reduced by necessity to crime, leading a life of shame and vice, and giving birth to diseased and suffering children, whose little ray of life quickly expires amid the noxious atmosphere of sin and woe by which they are surrounded.

The *Journal* article accused Stowe of ignoring the plight of the less fortunate who surrounded her in the North in order to bemoan the fate of southern slaves, who were "stout, fat, healthy negroes and negresses."³⁷ The *Fayetteville (NC) Observer* carried an article that asked for a "competent pen" to write a story that would truthfully depict life in the North. The article cited a New York newspaper's statistics that sixty-one percent of the city's deaths in 1850 were children under the age of ten. The *Observer* gave its reasons for New York's high child mortality rate, including poor living conditions, lack of medical care, and mothers who were forced to work and care for children alone.³⁸ Another *Fayetteville (NC) Observer* article cited a book, *The Cabin*

³⁷ "The Other Side," *Daily Alabama Journal* (Montgomery), June 2, 1852. This article was reprinted from the *Richmond (VA) Republican*. The book mentioned in this article was published with a very lengthy title: William L.G. Smith, *Life at the South, or, "Uncle Tom's Cabin" As It Is: Being Narratives, Scenes, and Incidents in the Real "Life of the Lowly* (Buffalo, NY: Geo. H. Derby and Co., 1852). <http://utc.iath.virginia.edu/proslav/smith hp.html> (accessed May 26, 2013). There were also reports of other possible books, as in an announcement in the *Daily Morning News* (Savannah, GA), Jan. 31, 1853. It stated that "Mrs. Carolla H. Criswell, a lady whom the *New York Herald* terms a 'star of some magnitude in the literary world,' is about furnishing a 'Sequel to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*,' which will shortly be ready for publication.

³⁸ "Pictures for the Author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*," *Fayetteville (NC) Observer*, Dec. 21, 1852.

and the Parlor; or, Slaves and Masters, that was published to counter Stowe's work. The *Observer* printed an excerpt, "'Negro Quarters' in New York," that described horrific living conditions and chastised northerners for ignoring the negroes' plight in the city.³⁹ The *Mississippi Free Trader* referred to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as a "foul libel on the South" and expressed hope that a future edition of the work might have an appendix showing the "degradation of humanity as it exists in a portion of New York City."⁴⁰ Some northern newspapers reprinted these articles so northerners probably had a good idea of how the book was received in the South.

Two Ohio newspapers published a New Orleans *Crescent* article that noted how Mrs. Stowe was "the native of a country where domestic servitude is unknown at present" but had been accepted there "but a generation back." Along with the article's assertion of northern hypocrisy, its reference to the North as another country was an indication of the growing chasm between the two regions. The *Crescent* article charged that northerners may have abolished slavery, but they still used human labor that was "so cheap and so profitable." In a reference to Stowe, the *Crescent* article said *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was "the literary production of a temporary nothing."⁴¹

Southern newspaper criticism of the book was sometimes directed not just at its content but also at Stowe personally. A *Mississippi Free Trader* editorial specifically focused on her gender. The newspaper considered it inappropriate for a woman to have written such a work and

³⁹ "A Reply to Uncle Tom's Cabin," *Fayetteville (NC) Observer*, Nov. 16, 1852.

⁴⁰ "Life in New York," *Mississippi Free Trader* (Natchez), Dec. 29, 1852.

⁴¹ "The New Orleans *Crescent*," *Daily Cleveland (OH) Herald*, Feb. 3, 1854. The article also appeared in *The Daily Scioto Gazette*, (Chillicothe, OH), Feb. 7, 1854.

asserted that a southern woman would never have considered doing such a thing. The *Free Trader* declared:

It is difficult to conceive how a woman of the least refinement or purity of mind could so completely unfrock herself as to indulge in the obscene reflections with which this book is everywhere replete. Every Southern plantation is represented as a harem, and every female slave as a victim of her masters [sic] lusts. What Southern women can be found who could consent to write such a book as this about Nothern [sic] people, though there are certainly abundant materials for the task. Say what you will about the social system of the South, it never was the parent of such monstrosities, such men-women, such moral hermaphrodites, as this.⁴²

Southerners had long that contended that northern society was inferior to the South's, certainly in areas of culture and women's roles.⁴³ In spite of the South's self-imposed rules for women, though, such criticism did not extend to southern women who put their pens to paper defending slavery.⁴⁴ In fact, not long after *Uncle Tom's Cabin* appeared, at least one southern female author was highly praised for writing a book in defense of the South.

Newspapers reported on several books written in response to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, all with an eye to supporting the South's position. One of them, *Aunt Phillis's Cabin; or, Southern Life As It Is*, enjoyed some success. The book's author, Mary Eastman, had been raised on a Virginia plantation, and her book directly countered many of Stowe's depictions of the South and

⁴² "Uncle Tom's Cabin," *Mississippi Free Trader* (Natchez), Oct. 20, 1852.

⁴³ For additional reading on women's roles in the South, see Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*. 1988); Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*; Bertram Wyatt-Brown, "Women in a Man's World: Role and Self-Image," in *Southern Honor*, 226-253.

⁴⁴ Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, "Social Order and the Female Self: The Conservatism of Southern Women in Comparative Perspective," in *What Made the South Different?* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1990), 49-62. Fox-Genovese wrote about several southern women who defended the South in print, including Caroline Lee Hentz, Julia Gardiner Tyler, Mrs. Henry Schoolcraft, and Augusta Jane Evans.

slavery.⁴⁵ Although Eastman's book did not attain the popularity of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, it did receive some press attention. However, many newspaper reviews of *Aunt Phillis's Cabin* contained more lines vilifying Stowe than reviewing Eastman's book. A *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC) article cited *Aunt Phillis's Cabin's* frequent criticism of abolitionists as extremists and argued that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was written to "suit the morbid tastes of extremists in thinking on the most exciting and dangerous of topics, rather than honestly to present a picture of things as they really exist."⁴⁶

For all of *Uncle Tom's Cabin's* popularity, some newspapers continually expressed concern over Stowe's handling of the subject. Some southern newspapers took Stowe to task for the wide brush she used in painting her picture of the South. Others criticized particular points they believed were in direct contrast to the reality of life in the South. One point of contention was Tom's depiction as "faultless" or "angelic," as opposed to the slave masters' repulsive behavior. "It is not one individual alone against whom Mrs. Stowe has borne false witness," the *Daily Alabama Journal* declared; "she has slandered hundreds of thousands of her countrymen." The *Journal* noted southern laws that would counter some of the main charges in Stowe's book, including separating slave families, the cruel treatment of slaves, and the lack of religious instruction for slaves.⁴⁷ Of course, it must be noted that the *Journal's* lengthy article presumed that southern slaveholders always followed such laws. The *Missouri Courier* carried an article stating that it regretted to see other Missouri newspapers recommending *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to

⁴⁵ Mrs. Mary H. Eastman, *Aunt Phillis's Cabin; or, Southern Life As It Is* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo & Co., 1852), Project Gutenberg: <http://archive.org/details/auntphilliscabi16741gut> (accessed May 24, 2013).

⁴⁶ "New Books," *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC), Aug. 27, 1852.

⁴⁷ "The Courier & Enquirer thus notices Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe's fiction," *Daily Alabama Journal* (Montgomery), Oct. 23, 1852.

their readers. Then, like the *Alabama Daily Journal*, the *Courier* attempted to refute some of the book's premises. The *Courier* questioned the section where an eight or nine-year-old child, Eliza, was sold in Louisiana. The *Courier* noted that the Louisiana statute book would not have allowed such a sale to proceed.⁴⁸ "Every person is expressly prohibited from selling, from their mothers," the *Courier* insisted, "the children who shall not have attained the full age of ten years."⁴⁹ The *Courier* did not seem to grasp that selling children of any age might have been an issue abolitionists could use to advance their cause in the North. Southern newspaper reports on slave sales, particularly those of children gave the North increased justification for their fight to stop the spread of slavery into new territories, which in turn only made the South more insistent on defending its rights and increased calls for disunion.⁵⁰

In 1853, Stowe published a follow-up volume, *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The work was clearly an abolitionist venture to bolster the believability of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The book was Stowe's obvious attempt to answer her critics, but it received mixed reviews. The *Bangor (ME) Daily Whig & Courier* did not praise the new book's style but did state that it contained a "mountain of materials" to back its claims. The *Whig & Courier* hoped the book would be able to "press the moral sin of slavery with still increased force upon the hearts and consciences of

⁴⁸ For a detailed analysis of the slave trade, see Michael Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*. In Part Two of his book, Tadman specifically addresses the separation of families. The slave trade tables in the appendix are a valuable resource.

⁴⁹ "Uncle Tom's Cabin," *Missouri Courier* (Hannibal), Nov. 4, 1852.

⁵⁰ Southern newspapers routinely reported the sale of young children. One typical example was an article that appeared on July 7, 1856, in the *Fayetteville (NC) Observer*. The article, "High Price for Negroes," lists the sale of six negroes. Only the slaves' first names are listed; so it is not possible to establish familial relationships. However, one man purchased two women, aged 35 and 23, along with an 11-year-old boy, Tom. It is possible that one of the women was Tom's mother, but the sales were not listed together. There was, however, one six-year-old boy, Peter, who was sold, alone, to N. Martin, for the "knocked down" price of \$460. Martin bought no other slaves.

christians North and South.”⁵¹ In response to the book, several southern newspapers printed an article that referred to *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* as simply an abolitionist party pamphlet that was able to amuse the “readers of romance.” Then, the article gave a review of *A Key to Uncle Tom’s Cabin* that was visceral in its condemnation:

Now the Key is quite a different thing. The book is a dull mass of anti-slavery essays, homilies, diatribes and what not raked together from newspapers. The whole cargo of the ship is dead weight, enough to sink even the reputation of the author of Uncle Tom. One must desperately be in love with the garbage of Abolition newspapers to read a dozen consecutive pages of this book; and the man whose patience can hold out to the end of it, can get through anything.⁵²

Other southern newspaper critics used this publication to continue berating Stowe for basing her work on overly broad generalizations. A common theme was that any book could use such a technique to come to false conclusions about any social institution, and many articles mentioned marriage as one example. These articles suggested that if a book were to portray as universal the actions of a “brutal husband” against a “gentle wife,” it would be an imitation of Stowe.⁵³

Amidst all the criticisms of Stowe’s work, the *Cleveland (OH) Daily Herald* carried two disturbing articles that were indicative of other slavery stories that appeared in northern newspapers. One article was published in November 1852 and told the story of a young mother who was being apprehended as a runaway slave. She ran away and threw her child upon the ground before returning to the slave catchers. A man who had been standing nearby picked up the child, and the slave catchers demanded that he give the child to them. But the mother denied

⁵¹ “A Key to Uncle Tom’s Cabin,” *Bangor (ME) Daily Whig & Courier*, April 19, 1853.

⁵² “A Key to Uncle Tom’s Cabin, &c., &c., by Harriet Beecher Stowe. Boston: John P. Jewett & Co.,” *Fayetteville (NC) Observer*, May 5, 1853. Also found in the *Pensacola (FL) Gazette*, May 7, 1853.

⁵³ “The New York Courier & Enquirer,” *Missouri Courier* (Hannibal), June 23, 1853.

the child was hers, and the man refused to give it up. The paper said the mother knew that to “own her offspring was to doom it to slavery, to disown and desert it, she hoped, was to allow the dearest treasure of her heart to grow up, breathing the air of freedom.”⁵⁴ In 1854, the *Herald* printed an even more disturbing story that reportedly came from a Mississippi man’s letter. The story concerned a master who had fathered a child with a young female slave. Later, when the master married, his new wife realized her husband was the slave child’s father, and she began to abuse it regularly. The child’s mother finally came to the point where she believed her child would be better off dead, and she killed it with an axe.⁵⁵ The article also attacked critics of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* with a vengeance. “Every day gives the lie to their assertions,” the article stated, “and every hour affords proof that the damning curse of human bondage is a huge leviathan, dragging in its train crime, misery, and despair.” The problem with these stories, as with many others like them, is that there is no verification. The stories may or may not be true, and a reader’s own opinions would likely color the stories’ reception.

If newspaper reaction to *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* is any indication, it appears that those who warned of the possibility that the book could do more damage than good might have been correct. Abolitionists were able to use the book successfully as a weapon, and southern newspapers reacted angrily to Stowe’s depiction of slavery and the South. “This book of Mrs. Stowe’s,” the *Fayetteville (NC) Observer* said, “is, we think, doing more to produce bad feeling between North and South, than anything else within our knowledge. It is hard to tell where its

⁵⁴ “An Incident for Another ‘Uncle Tom’s Cabin,’” *Cleveland (OH) Daily Herald*, Nov. 1, 1852. The location for this incident would have been Sandusky, Ohio, as the story was reprinted in the *Herald* from the *Sandusky (OH) Mirror*.

⁵⁵ “‘Uncle Tom’s Cabin’ is a Fiction,” *Cleveland (OH) Daily Herald*, Nov. 27, 1854.

evil effects will stop—perhaps not short of disunion and civil war.”⁵⁶ These words would hold true as the abolitionists used the momentum from Stowe’s book take their cause to the territories.

In 1854, the abolitionist movement gained another inroad into the political mainstream with the debate over the organization of the Nebraska and Kansas territories. The Kansas-Nebraska Act, which President Franklin Pierce signed into law on May 30, 1854, organized these territories on the basis of popular sovereignty, essentially repealed the Missouri Compromise, and upheld the Fugitive Slave Law part of the Compromise of 1850. Northern newspapers reported that northerners were incensed over the possible extension of slavery above the Missouri Compromise’s 36° 30’ line, and abolitionists wasted no time in channeling that anger. Southerners, though, were concerned, too, since the act would allow for the citizens of Kansas and Nebraska to hold elections to decide their state’s position on slavery.

Newspapers were filled with reaction from across the country to the Kansas-Nebraska Act’s passage. The *Farmers’ Cabinet* in New Hampshire published a report on the Michigan Senate’s response to the act. Michigan senators decided to pass resolutions showing their disapproval. The *Cabinet’s* article asserted that Michigan believed admitting Kansas and Nebraska without restricting slavery was also a violation of other previous agreements, such as the Compromise of 1850. Thus, Michigan would now take the position that the Kansas-Nebraska Act’s passage removed “all obligations on the part of the North to sustain those Compromises [sic] which the South think so necessary to secure the extension and perpetuation of their domestic institution.”⁵⁷ Quite clearly, Michigan had decided that if the Missouri Compromise did

⁵⁶ “Uncle Tom’s Cabin,” *Fayetteville (NC) Observer*, Nov. 23, 1852.

⁵⁷ “Michigan,” *Farmers’ Cabinet* (Amherst, NH), Feb. 8, 1855.

not stand, then the North could ignore resolutions from any other compromises. In particular, that meant ignoring the Fugitive Slave Law, which northerners abhorred.

One argument the abolitionists made was that it was unconstitutional to pass an act that would repeal the Missouri Compromise. To bolster their position, abolitionists and Free Soil party members, who were also opposed to slavery and its western expansion, began campaigns to uphold the Missouri Compromise. Missourians, not surprisingly, quickly became involved in the debate. The *Missouri Courier* published an article that supported the Kansas-Nebraska Act and criticized abolitionists, northern Free Soilers, and Whigs for fighting against the legislation. It also criticized Whig papers in the South for emphatically avoiding “slave agitation” and, therefore, not commenting on the current political debate, which had slavery as its focus. The *Courier* said the Whig press hoped to “impress the Abolition hordes with the belief that they can trample the Constitution and ride rough-shod over the South, who will not resist their encroachments for fear of agitating the subject of slavery.”⁵⁸ The Kansas-Nebraska Act created a political stew that would keep Kansas in a state of confusion and violence for years to come.

One long-lasting political result of the Kansas-Nebraska Act was the creation of the Republican Party, based on an anti-slavery platform that appealed to Free Soilers and some former Whigs. The *Pittsfield (MA) Sun*, which was decidedly anti-abolitionist, carried a *Boston Post* article that covered a September 1854 convention for those interested in a new political party. The article stated that the convention was nothing more than a Free Soil convention and critiqued some of the convention’s speeches. Prominent Massachusetts politician Amasa Walker was one speaker, and the paper carried a synopsis of his speech. The article reported:

⁵⁸ “The Great Question,” *Missouri Courier* (Hannibal), March 9, 1854.

He had a treple [sic] antithesis, and philosophically straightened out politics in this shape: on one side were to be ranged, in firm phalanx, Rum, Romanism and Slavery, while the other side were to fight for Temperance, Protestantism and Freedom! Here is a new plank in the abolition platform,--made of "know-nothing" wood.⁵⁹

Newspaper articles indicate that political chaos reigned as the Whigs fell apart and the new Republican Party was being born.

At the same time that the Republican Party was forming, there was also the brief appearance of the "Know-Nothing" or "American Party." The party was primarily based on an anti-immigrant and anti-Catholic platform, with little agreement over the slavery issue. New Orleans' *Daily Picayune* carried an article in July 1855 that illustrated the party's dysfunction. The *Picayune* said the Connecticut American Party had voted to adopt an abolitionist platform. The platform demanded the repeal of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, along with the return of the Missouri Compromise line. The Connecticut party said it would only accept Kansas and Nebraska as free states and was for "the exclusion of the relation of human bondage from the national territories." In contrast, the American Party's Georgia faction had adopted the pro-slavery declarations from the Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, faction's platform, the *Picayune* stated, and also adhered to an anti-Catholic test. In an interesting twist on a political debate that had at its core the issue of slavery, the *Picayune* said it "had hoped that Louisiana might be supported by every Southern State in discarding this element of bigotry from the American Party."⁶⁰ Many Whigs who joined the American party had little interest in nativism or anti-Catholicism but saw the party as a counterweight to the Democrats.

⁵⁹ "From the *Boston Post*, Sept. 8, The Freesoil Convention," *Pittsfield (MA) Sun*, Sept. 14, 1854.

⁶⁰ "Political," *Daily Picayune* (New Orleans, LA), July 10, 1855.

In the South, an *Augusta (GA) Chronicle* article reported on a “Missouri Pro-Slavery Convention,” held in St. Louis on July 18, 1855. The convention platform noted that Missourians who owned slaves were concerned that Kansas might be overrun with abolitionists who were hoping to influence the state’s decision on slavery. The fear was that abolitionist settlers might spill over into Missouri, the article said, and create problems for slaveholders, especially those who lived on the border. There were reports of “monied associations” planning to colonize Kansas, according to the *Chronicle*, for the purpose of keeping out slavery. Missouri slave holders made it clear that if abolitionist settlers emigrated from the North to Kansas, they were prepared to fight. “While disclaiming any intention to interfere with actual settlers,” the *Chronicle* maintained, “they will protect themselves and property, as the eighteen border counties of Missouri contain 50,000 slaves, which will be valueless if Kansas becomes the abode of abolition fanatics.”⁶¹ Again, as in other slavery debates, the issue was one of slaves as property. The concern focused on the economic impact on Missouri slaveholders if the abolitionists gained a strong foothold in Kansas. Slaveholders feared abolitionists would then attempt to influence the political environment and work to abolish slavery, an action that would deprive slaveholders of their investment. Countering any such abolitionist efforts with a pro-slavery campaign became a priority for Missouri slave-owners.

Another pro-slavery meeting held in Westport, Missouri, was attended by many of the same pro-slavery leaders who had attended the St. Louis convention. The *Barre (MA) Patriot* carried an article that said the convention’s actions were treasonous. The *Patriot* covered the speech of Gen. Benjamin Stringfellow, one of the convention’s organizers. Stringfellow, whom the article referred to as an “arch-agitator, the unsealed phial of wrath,” took a strong stand

⁶¹ “Missouri Pre-Slavery Convention,” *Augusta (GA) Chronicle*, July 22, 1855. The same or similar articles covering this convention also appeared in northern newspapers such as *Pittsfield (MA) Sun*, Feb. 9, 1854.

against any northerners who might be intent on moving to Kansas for abolitionist purposes. The newspaper reported Stringfellow's words as follows:

Men who come here from the Northern States professing to stand on the principles of the Kansas [sic] Nebraska Bill, were asking to make the territory a den of thieves and a harbor of abolitionism. The idea of a national democratic party in Kansas, he said was ridiculous. Every national democrat is an abolitionist in disguise—such an [sic] one might not steal a negro himself, but would pat those on the back who do—nine out of ten men in the world are abolitionists.

The article's author, who had attended the meeting, described the Missouri region as one of "violent sentiment and action" and declared that Stringfellow's goal was "nothing more nor less than bloodshed and final disunion."⁶² Clearly, newspapers gave men like Stringfellow a platform for their ideas and the coverage did much to keep the political rhetoric at a fever pitch.

In Boston, a city that remained a hotbed of abolitionism, the *Boston Daily Atlas* played down the seriousness of the abolitionists' threats and turned its editorial pen on Missourians for overreacting and threatening violence. The article stated the paper's opinion as follows:

Here and there in New England a confessed "lunatic" makes a speech, and the consequence is that thousands of Missourians, with no other madness to plead, except whiskey madness, invade a neighboring territory, and having commenced the good work by perjuring themselves, proceed to disembowel printing offices, lynch editors, threaten emigrants, take possession of the polls at the point of the bowie-knife, and force upon Kansas a sham Legislature!⁶³

Other newspapers asserted that it was the abolitionists who were working to force their will upon Kansas. The *Pittsfield (MA) Sun* reprinted an article from the *Peoria (IL) Press* that expressed outrage over the threat of violence in Kansas but laid most of the blame on the abolitionists.

⁶² "Reception of Dawson's Nomination in Kansas—Characteristic Speech from Stringfellow—Prospects of Civil War," *Barre (MA) Patriot*, Aug. 17, 1855.

⁶³ *Boston (MA) Daily Atlas*, April 25, 1855.

“Failing to defeat the passage of the law,” the article said, “the abolitionists in Massachusetts and elsewhere, urged on by the inflammatory appeal of their clerical and political leaders, determined upon a fanatical crusade to redeem the Territories from what they term the ‘curse of slavery.’” The article accurately noted that the abolitionist emigrants had headed to Kansas because it had become “the land where the ‘battle of freedom’ was to be fought.”⁶⁴

Some newspapers, though, reported that even abolitionists’ aggressive efforts would not be able to sway those who had no desire to renew the slavery agitation. The *Pittsfield (MA) Sun* printed an article containing the *Concord (NH) Patriot* editor’s opinion that the Whig and abolition papers had united in an effort to exacerbate the slavery issue. Most people would have nothing to gain by such controversies, the editor wrote, and would choose to ignore “the selfish schemes of trading politicians, who seek to get up another abolition mania in the hope of thereby getting into office.”⁶⁵ Newspapers clearly indicated, though, that Kansas was a battleground between the two opposing factions. According to some newspaper reports, Nebraska would be spared because its government had quickly passed legislation to ensure that only “bona fide settlers and citizens of Nebraska” would be allowed to vote on whether the state would have slavery.⁶⁶ Kansas’s government remained in flux, though, with arguments over who was actually in charge. Of course, Nebraska’s agricultural landscape was not one that would easily support slavery anyway; so the slavery argument there was really a moot point. In Kansas, however,

⁶⁴ “From the Chicago Times. Parties in Kansas.—*Massachusetts and Missouri Emigrants*,” *Pittsfield (MA) Sun*, Sept. 27, 1855.

⁶⁵ “Senator Douglas’s Speech,” *Pittsfield (MA) Sun*, July 26, 1855.

⁶⁶ “From the Chicago Times. Parties in Kansas.—*Massachusetts and Missouri Emigrants*,” *Pittsfield (MA) Sun*, Sept. 27, 1855.

agriculture would be more hospitable to slavery; but, more importantly, the state's proximity to Missouri made it a battleground.

Although many northern newspapers continued to increase their support of the abolitionists' views, there was still some criticism of abolitionist newspapers. The *Vermont Patriot & State Gazette* took abolitionist papers to task for their bias against President Pierce and for not publishing his speech on the situation in Kansas and Missouri. The *Gazette* stated:

The Watchman is the only abolition paper in Vermont that has printed the President's Kansas message; but every one of them occupy their space with the most wicked falsification of its views, and foolish denials of facts. No man in any party in the free States sustains the "border ruffians," as the southern meddlers with Kansas affairs are called—yet these reckless papers declare that the President sustains them; why, then, don't they publish the message?⁶⁷

Pierce did offer federal support to calm the Kansas territory, but it was often too little and too late. Pierce's failure in Kansas opened him up for criticism from both free-state and pro-slavery supporters.

The lack of clear political leadership led to an environment that ultimately resulted in an attack on Lawrence, Kansas. Northern immigrants had successfully made Lawrence a free-state stronghold in Kansas. In May 1856, a territorial grand jury issued indictments against three free-state leaders in Lawrence, along with two Lawrence newspapers and a hotel that was thought to be a free-state fortress. All of the charges were linked to free state efforts to organize and train military forces. On May 21, a lack of cooperation from the town's citizens thwarted a federal marshal's attempt to make arrests in Lawrence. The marshal had recruited pro-slavery volunteers

⁶⁷ *Vermont Patriot & State Gazette* (Montpelier), Feb. 8, 1856. The newspaper the *Gazette* referred to was most likely the *Vermont Watchman and State Journal* (Montpelier).

from Missouri to assist him, a fact that did not help him in his effort to arrest free-state men.⁶⁸ Georgia's *Daily Morning News* came at the story from a pro-slavery perspective. "The conduct of the abolitionists," the paper declared, "has been such to arouse the law and order men to some definite action. The people of Lawrence have resolutely refused to give up those against whom there are warrants out for crimes of any sort." It was impossible to get testimony from any pro-slavery men in Lawrence, the article added, because "it was dangerous for any pro-slavery man to remain there over night."⁶⁹ The marshal dismissed the volunteers with him, but soon they had reorganized and headed back to Lawrence on the afternoon of May 21, under the guidance of Sheriff Samuel Jones, who had also failed in a previous attempt to make arrests in Lawrence. Jones, though, had been shot a few days afterward, and this time he and the pro-slavery men would not go quietly.⁷⁰

Several newspapers offered an abolitionist and free-state perspective on events. The *Daily Cleveland (OH) Herald* reported that John Speer, the editor and proprietor of the *Kansas Tribune*, and another man from Lawrence had visited the *Herald's* offices.⁷¹ The two men had fled Lawrence to avoid arrest for "treason" and "resisting the officers." They said the "bogus" sheriff and marshal had arrest warrants for all the "leading Free-State men in the Territory." As a result, the people of Lawrence were now at the mercy of an "enormous posse of ruffians who are now encamped around the city," and the people had no leadership. "The ruffians have come from

⁶⁸ Potter, "Two Wars in Kansas," in *Impending Crisis*, 207-209.

⁶⁹ "Kansas Affairs," *Daily Morning News* (Savannah, GA), May 23, 1856.

⁷⁰ Potter, "Two Wars in Kansas," *Crisis*.

⁷¹ John Speer and his brother, Joseph, began the daily and weekly versions of the *Kansas Tribune*, a free-state paper, in Lawrence in 1855. The paper later moved to Topeka, KS. For further information on Speer see <http://www.kshs.org/archives/40506>, and for further information on the Kansas newspapers of the period see <http://www.kshs.org/p/kansas-territorial-newspapers/13875>.

Missouri,” the *Tribune* editor told the paper, “and they *are not* and *have not been* inhabitants of the Territory!”⁷² A Massachusetts newspaper, the *Lowell Daily Citizen and News*, stated that a “dark cloud hangs over the noble settlers in this territory.” United States territorial officials had engaged “southern emigrants” to form a militia, the *News* declared, and were “endeavoring to provoke Lawrence to some act that might serve as a pretext for the destruction of that place and the shooting of its inhabitants. We must be prepared any day to hear of a horrible massacre of the inhabitants of that city,” The paper warned, “unless the iniquity of our government is overruled by Providence.”⁷³ The *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, D.C.) said that the “reign of terror was complete in the Territory. Two cannon had crossed the river at Chison, destined for Lawrence.” The paper also reported on a failed attack directed toward a Lawrence newspaper editor. “Mr. Brown, Editor of the Herald of Freedom,” the *Intelligencer* article said, “writes that a mob had entered his hotel at Kansas city and dragged off a man supposed to be himself, but having discovered their mistake returned and demanded him.”⁷⁴ Newspaper reports on the Lawrence attack soon appeared, although the first ones often were inaccurate.

On May 26, the *New York Herald* printed the following sensational headline: “IMPORTANT FROM KANSAS. THE TOWN OF LAWRENCE DESTROYED. INTENSE EXCITEMENT IN THE TERRITORY. ARE WE TO HAVE CIVIL WAR?” The article came from the *Herald’s* Leecompton, Kansas, correspondent and included numerous statements on the pro-slavery forces and their actions in Kansas. “The Kansas war is again in full blast,” the *Herald* declared; “the excitement is at its height—the pro slavery forces are coming in from

⁷² “Just from Kansas,” *Daily Cleveland (OH) Herald*, May 23, 1856.

⁷³ “Kansas,” *Lowell (MA) Daily Citizen and News*, May 23, 1856.

⁷⁴ “The Civil War in Kansas,” *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC), May 22, 1856.

every quarter.”⁷⁵ The *Daily Scioto Gazette* (OH) published an article, purported to be from an eyewitness in Lawrence, that detailed several murders, along with horse-stealing and pillaging.⁷⁶ The *Bangor* (ME) *Daily Whig & Courier* also reported that several Lawrence citizens were murdered.⁷⁷ Eventually, though, the truth, which was still quite sensational, began to come through. Later newspaper reports put together the following account. The Missouri men reentered Lawrence with the sheriff. They proceeded to loot the town, reportedly stealing valuables and whiskey, and then fired cannons at the hotel. The cannons were not very effective, so they eventually burned the hotel and at least one other building and destroyed the printing presses at Lawrence’s two newspaper offices. What they did not do was murder anyone in Lawrence, as many early newspaper accounts reported. The *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC) carried an article that was critical of the attack but contained more accurate information, including the fact that the only person killed was a member of the “posse” that attacked the town, and his death was an accident. The *Intelligencer* article gave a chronology of the attack and went into great detail.⁷⁸ As the truth came out, there were admonitions for the public to take care in what they believed and to pay attention to the political motives behind some of the stories. “Most of the horrible stories about Kansas constantly manufactured by the Black Republicans,” the *Pittsfield* (MA) *Sun* asserted, “are understood by the public generally as being gross impositions upon the community, and designed for political effect.” Stories about murder and outrages in Kansas,” the paper added, should be viewed with caution. “Very little

⁷⁵ “Important from Kansas,” *New York Herald*, May 26, 1856.

⁷⁶ “The Mob at Lawrence. Particulars by an Eye Witness,” *Daily Scioto Gazette* (Chillicothe, OH), May 31, 1856.

⁷⁷ *Bangor* (ME) *Daily Whig & Courier*, June 4, 1856.

⁷⁸ “The Outrages in Kansas,” *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC), May 31, 1856.

confidence is to be placed in any thing the Kansas agitators say in regard to that Territory,” the *Sun* warned.⁷⁹

Overall, northern newspapers expressed anger about what had happened in Lawrence, even if no Free-State men had been murdered.⁸⁰ Some said that the events in Kansas were a blow against freedom and a victory for southerners. There was anger that the federal government had played a role in the Lawrence attack and that federal officials had joined forces with the Missouri “ruffians.” “To please and appease the Carolinians,” the *Farmer’s* (NH) *Cabinet* complained, “Lawrence is sacked and burnt by U.S. officials, or those acting under them, and her free presses sunk in the depths of the Missouri, simply because they were free!”⁸¹ Evidence seemed to be mounting that Pierce’s administration was too supportive of the Missouri ruffians. The Kansas debacle, when paired with Pierce’s plans for Cuba in the Ostend Manifesto, would prove to be the undoing of his administration.⁸² Without question, there was a political backlash over the federal government’s handling of affairs in Kansas.

Many newspapers on both sides criticized Pierce and his administration for the escalation of violence in Kansas. A *Milwaukee* (WI) *Daily Sentinel* article took Pierce to task for using the pretense of allowing the practice of democracy to decide the slavery issue in Kansas. The article declared:

⁷⁹ “The Lies About Kansas,” *Pittsfield* (MA) *Sun*, June 19, 1856.

⁸⁰ Free-State men, like abolitionists, were opposed to slavery, but more for economic reasons rather than moral ones.

⁸¹ “To What Are We Coming?” *Farmers’ Cabinet* (Amherst, NH), June 5, 1856.

⁸² The Ostend Manifesto was a document released in 1854 that detailed the Pierce administration’s behind-the-scenes efforts to obtain Cuba, most likely as a slave state. The manifesto infuriated northerners and abolitionists and hurt the Democratic Party. It would be part of the reason why the Democrats would not nominate Pierce for another term as president. For further study see Jay Sexton, “Toward a Synthesis of Foreign Relations in the Civil War Era, 1848-77,” *American Nineteenth Century History* 5, no. 3 (Fall 2004): 50-73.

The difficulties which seem to press upon this administration are all of its own sowing—it has sowed the wind, and is now reaping the whirlwind. Murder and ruffianism at the Capital—murder and ruffianism in Kansas—free speech, free thought forbidden—Slavery and its most exacting behests everywhere supreme, intolerant, insolent—and all this in the name of Democracy!⁸³

The *Bangor (ME) Daily Whig & Courier* blamed Pierce for the Lawrence attack and said the administration had lied about events there in the hope that most free-state people would “believe it was done by the fault of the Emigrant Aid Society.”⁸⁴ In the South, the *Macon (GA) Weekly Telegraph* printed a long article detailing the U.S. military’s futile and insufficient efforts to quell the violence in Kansas. The South tried to support Pierce; so the article stated that it did not fully blame the president or his administration for the situation but thought that federal officials had not carried out their duties. However, the *Telegraph* did express indignation that the U.S. army was initially sent to Kansas under Col. Edwin V. Sumner’s command, and the paper accused Sumner of protecting those truly responsible for any bloodshed in Kansas. The article clearly blamed the abolitionists and declared:

Peace will never be restored until the Abolitionists are ‘paid in their own coin’—one *good* whipping will settle the whole controversy, and it will never be done unless the citizens *are let alone*. When nothing will do a man, or set of men but a fight, there is no recourse but to accommodate them.⁸⁵

Kansas had successfully brought slavery front and center for the 1856 presidential election. The *Telegraph* published an article that indicated just how crucial the slavery issue would be for the South. The article was extremely critical of Millard Fillmore, who would be the

⁸³ “From Our New York Correspondent. New York, May 28th,” *Milwaukee (WI) Daily Sentinel*, June 3, 1856.

⁸⁴ *Bangor (ME) Daily Whig & Courier*, May 23, 1856.

⁸⁵ “The U.S. Army in Kansas,” *Macon (GA) Weekly Telegraph*, Sept. 23, 1856.

Know-Nothing Party candidate, and asserted that he was the least deserving of southerners' support. "According to his own admissions he drank in a prejudice to slavery with his mother's milk," the *Telegraph* stated. "The whole history of his life proves his bitter hostility to the South and her institutions."⁸⁶

Amidst all the turmoil, another incident in Kansas took place, one that received attention in newspapers, but the coverage was not as prominent as might be expected. On the evening of May 24, just days after the sacking of Lawrence, an abolitionist named John Brown, along with some of his cohorts, raided several cabins belonging to pro-slavery settlers in the Osawatimie area along the Pottawatomie Creek. On that fateful night and into the early morning hours of May 25, Brown's gang committed five atrocious murders. In the first incident, the gang dragged John Doyle and his two eldest sons out of their cabin, leaving Doyle's wife and his youngest son inside. Once outside, the gang shot Doyle and killed his two sons with broadswords. They then hacked and mutilated the bodies, all within earshot of Doyle's wife and youngest son. The gang then attacked the cabin of Allen Wilkinson, a member of the territorial legislature. The gang hacked Wilkinson to death while his wife pleaded for his life. Brown's murderous rampage continued on to the cabin of James Harris, where they hacked to death William Sherman, a guest, and mutilated his body. Brown and his men seemed very specific about their targets, and there were some newspaper reports that the victims were going to testify against Brown in relation to various abolitionist activities in Kansas.

Whatever the reason, the attacks were horrific; and although there is newspaper coverage, most of it appeared in the midst of other news from Kansas. Most of the articles mistakenly

⁸⁶ "Three Acts in the Life of Millard Fillmore. By His Acts Shall He Be Judged," *Macon (GA) Weekly Telegraph*, Sept. 30, 1856.

reported that eight men were killed, rather than five. The *New York Herald* carried a few short articles noting that “eight pro-slavery men were killed by a company of abolitionists on Pottawatomie creek.” One of the articles referred to the murders as a massacre.⁸⁷ On June 3, the *Herald* reported on the murders briefly as part of a long article with the headline, “Exciting News from Kansas.” This report mentioned the graphic nature of the crimes and the fact that horses belonging to the victims were stolen, but the information was buried far down in the article. Other newspapers, both northern and southern, carried articles similar in content, size and placement.⁸⁸ The *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC) mentioned the murders in only one sentence in an article that said help was needed for pro-slavery settlers in the territory in light of the Pottawatomie creek murders.⁸⁹ The *North American and United States Gazette* (Philadelphia, PA) carried a small article, taken from the *Westport (MO) Border Times*, with the headline “*War! War! Eight Pro-slavery Men Murdered by the Abolitionists in Franklin County, K. T.—Let Slip the Dogs of War!*” However, the article and its headline were placed several paragraphs beneath a bold headline, “The Kansas Troubles.” Also, a few paragraphs later the same paper carried a *New York Tribune* telegraph that mistakenly confused the Osawatomie murders with a completely different case. “The reported cold blooded murder of eight pro-Slavery men of Ossowatamie [sic] is altogether an exaggerated affair,” the paper said. “Five pro-

⁸⁷ “Kansas Affairs. Eight Pro-Slavery Men Killed—All Quiet at Lawrence, Lecompton and Franklin,” *New York Herald*, June 4, 1856; “From Kansas,” *New York Herald*, June 5, 1856; and “Kansas City, Mo.,” *New York Herald*, June 8, 1856.

⁸⁸ “Exciting News from Kansas,” *New York Herald*, June 3, 1856. Other newspapers carried articles similar in content, size and placement. Some were “Intelligence from Kansas,” *Boston (MA) Investigator*, June 11, 1856; “Exciting Rumors from Kansas,” *Charleston (SC) Courier, Tri-Weekly*, June 10, 1856; and, “From the Carolina Times. From Kansas,” *Charleston (SC) Mercury*, June 11, 1856.

⁸⁹ “Missourians Preparing for a Foray,” *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC), June 9, 1856.

Slavery men had got a Free State man, tied a rope around his neck and were about to swing him off, when a party of his friends came up and shot his persecutors dead.”⁹⁰

There were a small number of articles that gave more attention to the incident. The *Semi-Weekly Mississippian* carried two articles on June 13 that relayed the brutal details and sought revenge for the deaths. “For every Southern man thus butchered,” the article said, “a decade of these poltroons should bite the dust.”⁹¹ The *Charleston (SC) Mercury* published an article criticizing the murderers for committing their crimes at night. “The Abolitionists are again under arms,” the *Mercury* said. “So soon as the militia dispersed, they began to murder in the dark. There is no open fight in them.” The *Mercury* warned that such incidents would lead to war.⁹² On June 8, the *New York Herald* published a lengthy article with graphic descriptions. “We are in the midst of a terrible state of things,” the article said. “A warfare which would disgrace the brutal Indian is now being waged by the free State party in Kansas” The article’s author noted that it would be hard for people to believe the “horrors which I have to communicate.”⁹³

Indeed, the brutal rampage was too hard for some to believe. It was especially difficult as newspapers continued to print erroneous information. On June 11, the *Milwaukee (WI) Daily Sentinel* carried the following headline: “A REIGN OF TERROR IN KANSAS. A GUERILLA PARTY SURPRISED. FIVE MEN KILLED AT OSSAWATOMIE!!” At first glance, it would appear that the article was about the John Brown massacre. But the first line was a hint of what

⁹⁰ “The Kansas Troubles. From the Westport Border Times. *War! War! Eight Pro-slavery Men Murdered by the Abolitionists in Franklin County, K. T.—Let Slip the Dogs of War!*” *North American and United States Gazette* (Philadelphia, PA), June 6, 1856.

⁹¹ “Still Later from Kansas.—Eight men Brutally Murdered by Abolitionists,” *Semi-Weekly Mississippian* (Jackson), June 13, 1856. Poltroons are defined as cowards who lack courage and fortitude.

⁹² “Exciting News from Kansas,” *Charleston Mercury*, June 16, 1856.

⁹³ “The Outrage and Murder Committed by the Free State Men Upon the Pro-Slavery Inhabitants,” *New York Herald*, June 8, 1856.

was to come. “There is a Reign of Terror in Kansas,” the paper declared. “The prospects of Freedom are gloomy. The Northern squatters are yielding to despair. Their only hope is in Northern resolution.” The second section of the long article carried a subhead, “FIVE MEN KILLED.” The article acknowledged reports that five pro-slavery men were killed at Ossawatimie and their bodies mutilated. “Of course, the Free State party, as a party—every Northern man and every southern man with Northern principles—in the Territory,” the paper said, “is accused by the organs of the ruffians with this imaginary and revolting atrocity.” The article then stated that the facts refuted “the Missouri version” of the affair and gave an account that confused the details of two separate incidents. The *Sentinel*, in essence, reported that a group of “unnamed” men shot the pro-slavery men as they were preparing to lynch a free-state man. The man who was saved from being lynched said the unidentified shooters disappeared into the woods. The *Sentinel* article expressed concern that the deaths of the pro-slavery men would be used as an excuse for arresting leading northern men in the area.⁹⁴

Some newspapers carried reports of arrests that were made in the case. The *Boston (MA) Daily Advertiser* ran a small piece noting that some men responsible for the murder of some pro-slavery men had been arrested and that their leader had been identified as John Brown.⁹⁵ The *Charleston (SC) Mercury* carried a few lines on July 4 noting that all of the men except three had been released, “as nothing could be found against them.”⁹⁶ One of the men who remained in

⁹⁴ “A Reign of Terror in Kansas. A Guerilla Party Surprised. Five Men Killed at Ossawatimie!!” *Milwaukee (WI) Daily Sentinel*, June 11, 1856.

⁹⁵ “From Kansas [sic],” *Boston (MA) Daily Advertiser*, June 6, 1856. The same article appeared in the following: *Bangor (ME) Daily Whig & Courier*, June 6, 1856; *New York Herald* (New York), June 6, 1856; *Weekly Herald* (New York), June 7, 1856; and *Boston (MA) Daily Atlas*, June 6, 1856.

⁹⁶ “Letter From Kansas,” *Charleston (SC) Mercury*, July 4, 1856.

custody was John Brown, Jr., although he was not present during the murders.⁹⁷ It can only be surmised why these murders did not receive as much newspaper attention as the attack on Lawrence or other such incidents in Kansas. Of the newspapers that did report on the incident, their articles often contained false or inaccurate information, which most certainly was part of the problem. “The reports are indeed conflicting and contradictory as to specific facts,” New Orleans’ *Daily Picayune* stated, “vague in consequence of or remoteness from the scene of conflict and colored by the medium through which they are brought.”⁹⁸ It could be that confusion over what really happened left editors and readers unsure as to the truth. Some newspapers and their readers probably did believe that the incident was exaggerated for the purpose of exciting more anger against the free-state men. And it is also possible that, just as the *New York Herald* writer said, the incident was so horrific that it was simply too hard to believe.

Newspaper coverage shows that the entire country was transfixed by events in Kansas as it had, indeed, become a battleground. The rush of emigrants from the North to settle the territory and influence its future created chaos. Armed altercations, or just the threat of them, between free-state and pro-slavery men became regular occurrences. Across the country, newspapers reported on Lecompton, Leavenworth, Topeka, and Lawrence. It was in this environment that newspapers began to use terms like “Bloody” and “Civil War” when writing the news from Kansas. Although the *New York Herald* is often given credit for the gruesome moniker “Bloody Kansas,” it was not alone in using such terminology. The *Ripley (OH) Bee* carried the following headline on October 13, 1855: “Exciting News from Kansas—The Cut Throats Commencing Their Bloody Work—Southern Hordes Pouring In—Gov. Shannon Taking Sides with the

⁹⁷ Woodward, “John Brown’s Private War,” in *Burden of Southern History*, 41-68.

⁹⁸ “Kansas Troubles Thickening,” *Daily Picayune* (New Orleans, LA), June 18, 1856.

Ruffians.” The *Herald* and other newspapers used headlines such as “The Bloody Code of Kansas,” “Bloody Work in Kansas Close at Hand,” “Bloody News in Kansas,” and “Another Bloody Chapter in the History of Kansas.”⁹⁹ It was during the same period that newspaper articles began to refer to the strife in Kansas as a “civil war,” a sobriquet that began to be used repeatedly in headlines and articles. “Civil War with all its horrors, now rages in Kansas Territory,” the *Macon (GA) Weekly Telegraph* declared in June 1856.¹⁰⁰

Although at first it looked as if the South had won victories with the Fugitive Slave Act and the Kansas-Nebraska Act, the aftermath would prove otherwise. The antislavery forces managed to use northern anger over the legislation and turn the events of the early to mid-1850s to their advantage. *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, the Kansas-Nebraska Act, and then the subsequent violence in Kansas all worked in their favor. In cases such as the sacking of Lawrence, free-state settlers in Kansas received favorable press, while the Missouri ruffians were seen as violent aggressors. Inexplicably, abolitionist John Brown’s murderous attack did not garner enough accurate attention in either the northern or the southern press to aid the pro-slavery settlers’ cause. As the abolitionist movement gained both political strength and popularity, the political rhetoric became more heated. The abolitionists managed to get the press attention they wanted, and the South could see the impact. As should have been expected, though, the South would not easily be moved, and the abolitionists had most assuredly pushed the country closer to civil war. One northern newspaper, the *New-Hampshire Patriot and State Gazette*, published an article that carried a clear warning:

⁹⁹ Some newspapers that printed such headlines were *Boston (MA) Daily Atlas*, June 7, 1856; *New York Herald*, Aug. 28, 1856; *Fayetteville (NC) Observer*, Sept. 4, 1856; *Milwaukee (WI) Daily Sentinel*, Sept. 6, 1856; *Bangor (ME) Daily Whig & Courier*, Oct. 8, 1856; and *New York Herald*, Feb. 27, 1857, along with many others.

¹⁰⁰ *Macon (GA) Weekly Telegraph*, June 17, 1856. This same sentence appeared in northern publications, such as the *North American and United States Gazette* (Philadelphia, PA), June 6, 1856.

To force the south by political combination and political action to alter their internal policy, and to abolish an institution interwoven in all their relations as men and citizens, politically and pecuniarily, is to wade through turpitude black enough to curse any cause. To interfere politically with any of the internal affairs of the southern States, is an impertinence that no high-spirited people will tolerate. Wrong marks every step of political abolition.¹⁰¹

In an article on the Kansas territory, a southern newspaper, the *Charleston (SC) Mercury*, made an observation that could also be applied to the nation. “It is hard to say what all this will lead to,” the *Mercury* said. “I think that one party or the other will have to be driven from the Territory; they cannot live together.”¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ “Abolitionism—its weakness,” *New-Hampshire Patriot and State Gazette* (Concord), Jan. 1, 1846.

¹⁰² “From Kansas,” *Charleston (SC) Mercury*, June 11, 1856.

CHAPTER VII

DISUNION: THE ROAD TO LINCOLN'S ELECTION, 1856 to 1860

True conservatism, at the present time, consists in repelling the encroachments of the slave power, and maintaining the just rights of the free States. This must be done to maintain the Union, and to render the Union worth maintaining. This the free States can do, and do peacefully, lawfully, constitutionally and justly. They need no weapon but the ballot box....

But in truth there can be no section of the country mad enough to desire a dissolution. The South threaten merely to extend their power. If the march of slavery be not now stopped, it will soon be too late. If resistance be not now made, it may forever hereafter be in vain.

*The Boston Daily Atlas*¹

From 1856 to 1860, newspapers reported on a series of events beginning with Preston Brooks' attack on Charles Sumner that hardened sectional political positions. James Buchanan's election as president in 1856 appeared at first to be another victory for the Democratic Party, as did the Dred Scott decision. But the ongoing debate over Kansas and Stephen Douglas' win in the Illinois Senate election badly splintered the Democrats, and the outlook for the party in 1860 was grim. With John Brown's attack on Harper's Ferry in 1859, there seemed to be no turning back, and newspapers reported on what the South would do if Abraham Lincoln won the

¹ *Boston (MA) Daily Atlas*, October 29, 1855.

presidential election. As expected, the Republicans were victorious, and the South felt its political power slipping away and its peculiar institution imperiled.

When Massachusetts Senator Charles Sumner took to the Senate floor on May 19, 1856, to deliver a speech to his colleagues, his anti-slavery views were already well known. Since coming to the Senate in 1851, Sumner had often been critical of the South and slavery and had not endeared himself to the southern delegation. In June 1854, Georgia's *Daily Morning News* had carried an ominous item. "Considerable feeling exists here among the Northern members in consequence of an article in the Star of this evening," the *News* stated, "which is construed to bear an intimation of personal violence to Mr. Sumner and other anti-Nebraska members of Congress." The *News* printed a portion of the article in question that referenced the difficulty southern slaveowners were having enforcing the fugitive slave law in the North. It stated:

If Southern gentlemen are to be threatened and assaulted while legally seeking to obtain a possession of property, for the use of which they have a constitutional guarantee; if legal measures can only be sought for and established at the bayonet's point, certain men now in our midst will have to evince a little more circumspection than they ever evinced, in their walk, talk and acts.²

In September 1854, Massachusetts newspapers had covered a Free Soil Convention where Sumner had spoken strongly against "the two great outrages of the season to wit: the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska bill, and the rendition of Anthony Burns."³ The *Pittsfield (MA) Sun* described Sumner as follows:

² "Excitement in Washington," *Daily Morning News* (Savannah, GA), June 3, 1854.

³ "The Fugitive Slave Case. Burns Returned to Slavery," *Boston (MA) Daily Atlas*, June 3, 1854. When Sumner gave his speech at the Free Soil Convention in September 1854, Massachusetts was still in an uproar over the Anthony Burns case.

As he was always a Wilmot provisoist, and an ultra one, it is not strange that he spoke against the former; and as he, even in the senate, openly denied any obligation to support the constitution, as to the return of fugitive slaves, it is not strange that he denounced the latter. We suppose none will deny that this republican is a freesoiler! His speech was received with applause by the audience. It is due to this politician to say, that whatever opinion might have existed as to his tameness in his first congressional term, it exists no longer.⁴

Sumner's opposition to slavery had only increased over the years, and when he rose to begin his latest attack, which would famously become known as the "Crime Against Kansas" speech, it would surpass anything he had ever deigned to say before.

A few accounts of Sumner's remarks quickly showed up in newspapers' regular summaries of events in Congress. Sumner began by reviewing some of the history of Kansas, the *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC) said, in a speech that was "remarkable for lucidity of statement and beauty of diction." Sumner decried recent events in Kansas and stated what he believed to be the foundation of it all. "That crime was the forcible infliction of slavery on a reluctant people," the paper reported, "accomplished at the risk of intestine war and at the bidding of what he termed the 'slave power of the Republic.'" Sumner's attack continued and pointedly charged Illinois Senator Stephen Douglas and South Carolina Senator Andrew Butler, co-authors of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, for their complicity in allowing Kansas to be "overrun and subjugated by the pro-slavery propagandists of Missouri."⁵ Along with other newspapers, the *Boston* (MA) *Daily Atlas* article carried part of the speech but the *Atlas* included the following criticism of Douglas and Butler:

⁴ "The Freesoil Convention," *Pittsfield* (MA) *Sun*, Sept. 14, 1854.

⁵ "Congress—Yesterday," *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC), May 20, 1846.

As the Senator from South Carolina is the Don Quixote, the Senator from Illinois [Mr. Douglas] is the squire of Slavery, its very Sancho Panza, ready to do all its humiliating offices. This Senator, in his labored address, vindicating his labored report—piling one mass of elaborate error upon another mass—constrained himself, as you will remember, to unfamiliar decencies of speech.⁶

Although the speech was filled with many other similarly inflammatory accusations, one of the most well remembered paragraphs appeared in the *Charleston (SC) Mercury* on May 26. It read:

The Senator from South Carolina has read many books of chivalry, and believes himself a chivalrous knight, with sentiments of honor and courage. Of course, he has chosen a mistress, to whom he has made his vows, and who, though ugly to others, is always lovely to him; though polluted in the sight of the world, is chaste in his sight—I mean the harlot Slavery. For her, his tongue is always profuse in words.⁷

Although the *Mercury's* purpose in printing this passage was critical and inflammatory, some northern newspapers praised Sumner's speech and his mastery of language, a fact that several southern newspapers noticed. One southern newspaper snidely reported that a *New York Tribune* correspondent was "in raptures over the speech of Mr. Sumner." Likewise, the *Macon (GA)*

Weekly Telegraph reprinted the following praise from a *Tribune* article:

Senator Sumner's Kansas speech is the most masterly, striking and scathing production of the session. The galleries were crowded with intellect, beauty and fashion, and the ante-rooms were also thronged. His excoriation of Douglas was scornfully withering and scorching. He was animated and glowing throughout, hurling defiance among the opposition, and bravely denouncing the Kansas swindle from first to last. Some passages quite electrified the Chamber, and gave a new conception of the man. Finer effect has rarely been produced.⁸

⁶ "Mr. Sumner's Speech. The Crime Against Kansas," *Boston (MA) Daily Atlas*, May 23, 1856.

⁷ "Senator Sumner's Speech," *Charleston (SC) Mercury*, May 26, 1856. Original text found in "Kansas Affairs. Speech of Hon. C. Sumner, of Massachusetts, In the Senate, May 19, 1856," *Cong. Globe*, 34th Cong., 1st sess., appendix, 530, http://www.heinonline.org/HOL/Page?men_tab=srchresults&handle=hein.congrec/conglob0049&size=2&collection=congrec&set_as_cursor=&id=542 (accessed June 15, 2013).

⁸ "Senator Sumner's Speech," *Macon (GA) Weekly Telegraph*, May 27, 1856. This article is also found in *Daily Cleveland (OH) Herald*, May 21, 1856.

Over the next day or so, several newspapers reported that the speech was so filled with vitriol that several senators immediately rebuked it for violating senate decorum.⁹ South Carolina's *Charleston Mercury* initially published only a few lines, noting that Senators Cass, Mason, and Douglas had "denounced Mr. Sumner's speech in severe terms, and characterised [sic] it as being destitute of the truth."¹⁰ Several northern newspapers such as the *Vermont Patriot & State Gazette* reported Michigan Senator Lewis Cass's denunciation of the speech. "Mr. Cass said he had listened to Mr. Sumner's speech with equal regret and surprise," the paper reported. "It was the most un-American and unpatriotic speech he had ever heard on this floor. He hoped he might never hear such a speech again, here or elsewhere."¹¹ The *Boston (MA) Daily Atlas* also printed some of the critics' reactions to Sumner's speech. "Messrs. Cass, Douglas and Mason assailed him with the fury of ban-dogs," the paper stated. "Mr. Sumner answered them with vigor, firmness and spirit, and all three retired rather the worse for the contest."¹² The *Vermont Patriot & State Gazette* gave a more detailed report of the verbal sparring between Douglas and Sumner. "That speech was written and committed to memory," Douglas said, "practised [sic] before a glass, a negro boy holding a candle and watching the gestures." Douglas's remarks infuriated Sumner, who responded in kind. "The poisome [sic], nameless

⁹ "Kansas Affairs," *Cong. Globe*, 34th Cong., 1 sess., appendix, 529-547, http://www.heinonline.org/HOL/Page?men_tab=srchresults&handle=hein.congrec/conglob0049&size=2&collection=congrec&set_as_cursor=541&id=541 (accessed June 15, 2013). The text of Sumner's speech spreads over fifteen pages of the *Congressional Globe* followed by three pages of comments.

¹⁰ "Telegraphic Intelligence," *Charleston (SC) Mercury*, May 22, 1856.

¹¹ 34th Congress—1st Session. Senate, Washington, May 20," *Vermont Patriot & State Gazette* (Montpelier), May 23, 1856. Original text found in "Mr. Cass," *Cong. Globe*, 34th Cong., 1 sess., appendix, 544, http://www.heinonline.org/HOL/Page?men_tab=srchresults&handle=hein.congrec/conglob0049&size=2&collection=congrec&set_as_cursor=&id=556 (accessed May 24, 2013).

¹² *Boston (MA) Daily Atlas*, May 22, 1856.

animal,” Sumner said, “whose nature it is to discharge venom, is not a proper model for a senator.” Senator James Mason of Virginia, whom Sumner had also verbally assailed, responded, too. “Mr. Mason was understood to say—” the Vermont paper said, “The senator is certainly *non compus mentis*.—(Laughter.) Here the war of words ended.”¹³ But this was not to be the end of the affair.

Newspapers did not print Sumner’s speech in its entirety, probably due to its length. The speech was so long that it lasted on into the next day’s session. In general, considering the speech’s length and nature, newspapers normally might have published more of its content in subsequent issues. But the sacking of Lawrence, Kansas, occurred on May 21, and then, on May 22, a most unexpected turn of events quickly captured newspapers’ attention.

When Sumner’s speech singled out Andrew Butler for criticism, the South Carolina senator was not in the chamber to respond. As it turned out, though, he did not need to be present. South Carolina Representative Preston Brooks, took it upon himself to defend his relation’s honor.¹⁴ On May 22, Brooks strode into the Senate Chamber and after a few words about libel upon his state and kin, he proceeded to beat Sumner about the head with a gutta-percha cane.¹⁵ As Sumner, who had been seated at his desk, tried to escape, Brooks hit him again and again, even after the cane had broken, until Sumner, bleeding, lay unconscious on the floor. Newspaper coverage of the attack spread quickly and fanned sectional tensions.

¹³ 34th Congress—1st Session,” *Vermont Patriot & State Gazette* (Montpelier), May 23, 1856. The phrase “*non compus mentis*” means “not of sound mind.”

¹⁴ Many sources say that Brooks was a relative of Butler’s. Some say he was a cousin; others say he was a nephew.

¹⁵ The cane’s name came from the gutta-percha tree. The tree, found in Southeast Asia, yielded sap that, when boiled, became similar to plastic. Gutta-percha canes were cheaper than ebony canes and had become very popular in the 1850s.

The morning after the attack, Georgia's *Daily Morning News* carried a telegraphic report with the headline, "Mr. Sumner assaulted in the Senate Chamber." The short article, which was fairly accurate, read as follows:

Washington, May 22.—Mr. Brooks of South Carolina assaulted Mr. Sumner of Massachusetts in the Senate Chamber to-day while the latter was seated at his desk writing. Mr. Sumner received a stunning blow over the head with a heavy cane, cutting and contusing him badly. Mr. Brooks repeated the blows frequently. Mr. Keitt attempted to prevent interference. Mr. Crittenden, who was present pronounces the affair a shameful outrage. The provocation for the attack was given by Senator Sumner in his speech in the Senate against Senator Butler. [Sumner in his speech denounced Senator Butler in a most gross and insulting manner. Mr. Brooks is a relative of Senator Butler.]¹⁶

On May 23, the *Boston (MA) Daily Atlas* also published an article on the incident. It carried the headline "Dastardly Assault on Senator Sumner" and reported that a "most brutal assault has just been made upon Senator Sumner by Brooks, of South Carolina." Sumner was bleeding badly, the article stated, and "is now in a state of partial stupor."¹⁷ As with most articles on the attack, the *Atlas* noted that Sumner was seated in the Senate chamber, which was not in session, and was taken by surprise.¹⁸ The *Daily Scioto Gazette* (OH) said the *New York Mirror* believed the assault would assure Sumner's reelection to the Senate, which it did. "Personal and political differences are swallowed up," the *Gazette* declared, "in the overwhelming feeling that Massachusetts has been grossly outraged in the person of her Representative."¹⁹

¹⁶ "By Magnetic Telegraph. *Mr. Sumner assaulted in the Senate Chamber,*" *Daily Morning News* (Savannah, GA), May 23, 1856. Keitt was a U.S. Representative from South Carolina along with Brooks. It was reported that Keitt pulled a gun to stop anyone from helping Sen. Brooks.

¹⁷ "Dastardly Assault on Senator Sumner," *Boston (MA) Daily Atlas*, May 23, 1856.

¹⁸ Some articles referred to Senator Butler, who was 59, as aged or elderly. At the time of the attack, Brooks was 36 and Sumner was 45.

¹⁹ "How It Promises," *Daily Scioto Gazette* (OH), May 31, 1856.

James Gordon Bennett's *New York Herald* carried a blatantly sensational article headlined: "An Authentic Account of the Fracas—Colonel Brooks Held to Bail to Answer—Indignation of the Nigger Worshippers—Movement to Expel Brooks From the House, Etc." Despite the headline, the article began with a defense of its report on the attack. The *Herald* probably did so because of its reputation for being pro-South and anti-abolition. "The following will be found to be a strictly correct and impartial account of the attack on Mr. Sumner, in the Senate chamber, to-day," the *Herald* stated. "Colonel Preston S. Brooks, of South Carolina, took exception to the following language used by Senator Sumner in his speech on Tuesday last." Then the article published portions of Sumner's speech followed by an account of the attack, during which the *Herald* gave as favorable a view of Brooks as possible.²⁰ The *Charleston (SC) Mercury* followed suit and published the *Herald's* account on May 26, 1856, but with the headline "Messrs. Brooks and Sumner."²¹

Following the attack, the House attempted to expel Brooks, and although the resolution passed with a vote of 121 to 95, it did not receive the required two-thirds majority.²² Instead, the House took action to censure Keitt and Brooks, but they resigned in protest, only to be returned to their seats in the next election.²³ In the South, both men received favorable press attention, with Brooks being especially praised. North Carolina's *Weekly Raleigh Register* printed a short

²⁰ "An Authentic Account of the Fracas—Colonel Brooks Held to Bail to Answer—Indignation of the Nigger Worshippers—Movement to Expel Brooks From the House, Etc. Washington, May 22," *New York Herald*, May 23, 1856. Frederic Hudson would have been managing editor of the *Herald* at this time. Hudson went on to become an historian and write *Journalism in the United States, From 1690 to 1872* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1873).

²¹ "Messrs. Brooks and Sumner," *Charleston (SC) Mercury*, May 26, 1856.

²² *Cong. Globe*, 34th Cong., 1 sess., July 14, 1856, 1628, http://www.heinonline.org/HOL/Page?men_tab=srchresults&handle=hein.congrec/conglob0047&size=2&collection=congrec&set_as_cursor=488&id=488 (accessed June 15, 2013).

²³ Nevins, *Ordeal of the Union*, 443-448.

article noting that several Charleston gentlemen had given Brooks a new cane to show their appreciation for what he had done. The article said the governor of South Carolina (James Hopkins Adams) was leading an effort to raise money to present “Mr. Brooks with a ‘silver pitcher and goblet.’” The most striking line, though, was the assertion that the slaves in Charleston were going to present their own token of regard to Brooks, “who has made the first practical issue for their preservation and protection in their rights and enjoyments as the happiest laborers on the face of the globe.” The article implied that slaves wanted slavery to continue because they benefited from the institution, another stance southern slaveholders often took to defend the practice.²⁴

A *Weekly Raleigh (NC) Register* article on June 4 took note of the North’s opinion of Brooks’ actions. “The Northern papers are all condemning and denouncing Mr. Brooks,” the paper stated, “for his assault on Senator Sumner, in the severest terms.” The Senate should not forget, the article added, that Brooks was motivated by “foul language, abuse, taunts, and opprobrious epithets,” and the affair should be cause for the Senate to prevent such kinds of debates. “One evil leads necessarily to another,” the paper declared. “The Senate must preserve its own dignity, in order to command the respect of the public.”²⁵

In turn, northern newspapers took note of the South’s admiration for Brooks and responded accordingly. That fall, Philadelphia’s *North American and United States Gazette* reported that the Columbia *South Carolinian* had published an article on a dinner given in Brooks’ honor. The *Gazette* reported on some of the speeches from the dinner, including the following about Brooks:

²⁴ *Weekly Raleigh (NC) Register*, June 4, 1856.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

Brooks made one of his usual violent speeches—full of disunion and egotism. Senator Toombs of Georgia, also spoke for two hours in favor of Southern sectionalism and disunion, and said that he approved most heartily of Brooks’ assault on Sumner—that he “saw it done, and saw it well done.”²⁶

Similarly, in November, a Massachusetts newspaper called for a comparison of a speech Sumner had given at a reception to one Brooks made to some of his constituents. “Mark in the one the accomplished scholar, the liberal, highminded statesman, the generous patriot, the Christian gentleman,” the paper stated. “Mark the coarse brutality of the other, the egotism, the insolence, the contempt of authority, of order, and the open demand for the dissolution of the Union.”²⁷

Newspaper response to Brooks’ attack on Sumner shows how divided the North and South had become and is an indication of each region’s contempt for the other and its politicians.

Northerners were horrified that such an attack had taken place in the Senate, and northern newspapers tended to gloss over Sumner’s speech. In the South, Sumner, who was already considered an enemy of slavery, was vilified for his speech while Brooks was praised for protecting the honor of Butler, South Carolina, and the entire South. But, even as Brooks was being hailed as a hero, a dilemma arose for southerners. By attacking Sumner without warning, Brooks had violated some of the South’s honor code. At the same time, though, southerners felt Brooks was justified because Sumner was not worthy of being asked to a duel.²⁸ The North’s use

²⁶ “A Complimentary Dinner,” *North American and United States Gazette* (Philadelphia, PA), Oct. 10, 1856.

²⁷ *Lowell (MA) Daily Citizen and News*, Nov. 7, 1856.

²⁸ Ken Deitreich, “‘Ever Able, Manly, Just and Heroic’: Preston Smith Brooks and the Myth of Southern Manhood,” *Proceedings of The South Carolina Historical Association* (May 2011): 27-38, <http://libdata.lib.ua.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=31h&AN=62831142&site=eds-live&scope=site> (accessed May 9, 2013).

of the incident to attack southerner honor and chivalry aroused even more anger.²⁹ One article, “Congressional Courtesy,” appeared in an Ohio newspaper and noted the South’s predicament. Massachusetts Senator Henry Wilson, the article reported, had said in the Senate that “his colleague, Charles Sumner, had been stricken down by a murderous, brutal and cowardly assault.” Wilson’s remarks, the article said, “called out Senator Butler, of the chivalrous State of South Carolina.” A verbatim telegraphic report of Butler’s two responses, the paper reported, was as follows: “Speech First. ‘You’re a Liar!’ Speech Second. ‘I call on the Senate to witness that I have always been courteous in debate!’”³⁰

The widely varying tone of newspaper coverage on the character and actions of the politicians involved in this incident attests to how intense the rancor had become between the North and the South. The incident raised awareness that some sort of reckoning between the two regions was at hand. A Vermont paper plaintively said:

Never have our hopes of the prosperity of the Union been so shaken as by the events of the last few weeks. We have long hoped with trembling, but hope is fast yeilding [sic] to despair—and we are ready to say that if it can only be preserved by subserviency to Slavery, and continued, constant yeilding [sic] to Southern dictation and injustice, better far, by a mutual agreement, dissolve the copartnership, and let the South alone bear the evil and its responsibilities. In view of the crisis of our nation, with Jefferson, we tremble to remember that God is just, and only hope in view of his great forbearance and compassion. May Heaven avert the harm that threatens us!³¹

The aftermath of the incident left in its wake much indignation throughout the country. It would take Sumner more than three years to recover enough, physically and mentally, to return to the Senate, and his constituents considered his empty Senate chair to be a reminder of what had

²⁹ David H. Donald, *Charles Sumner and the Coming of the Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961).

³⁰ “Congressional Courtesy,” *Daily Scioto Gazette* (OH), May 31, 1856.

³¹ “To What Are We Coming?” *Farmers’ Cabinet* (Amherst, MA), June 5, 1856.

occurred. Brooks returned to the House, but his tenure, like his life, was short. He died on January 27, 1857, of croup and failed to see the final outcome of a saga in which his actions played a crucial role. On the eve of the Civil War, a North Carolina newspaper mentioned Brooks and his claim to infamy:

It may be doubted if the country will for many years feel the last of the evils resulting from the attack of Brooks on Sumner in the Senate Chamber. But for that attack...the country might never have arrived at that deplorable state of enmity that now exists. We have no doubt, also, that Lincoln's election is directly traceable to that assault, for it alone made half a million of Republicans—so a friend at the North assured us last summer.³²

The presidential election of 1856 would give some idea of how Brooks' action and the rise of the Republican Party would change America's political power structure. As November 1856 approached, it became clear the country's fractured nature would be a deciding factor in the election. The Democrats had come to despise President Franklin Pierce, and he failed to receive the party's nomination for a second term. As the Democratic Convention in Cincinnati, Ohio, neared, newspapers reported on the various names being considered for nomination. "The acrimony which this feeling has in part engendered," the *Macon (GA) Weekly Telegraph* reported, "between the 'friends' of Messrs. Douglas, Buchanan, and Pierce is already, among the 'knowing ones,' considered a fatal bar to the nomination of either of the three."³³ James Buchanan, though, did secure the nomination, and although the Democrats appeared confident, the *Telegraph* alluded to some concerns. "Political relations are so loose and unsettled now," the paper stated, "that the only ground of absolute confidence is actual success."³⁴ The Democratic ticket did win the election, but newspapers were quick to note how the votes for Buchanan and

³² "Brooks and Sumner," *Fayetteville (NC) Observer*, Dec. 10, 1860.

³³ "A Party in Peril," *Macon (GA) Weekly Telegraph*, May 13, 1856.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

the Republican candidate, John C. Frémont, were divided along regional lines with Frémont carrying the northernmost states and none in the South. Although Buchanan received 58.8 percent of the electoral votes, he only won 45.3 percent of the popular vote, while Frémont claimed 33.1 percent and Fillmore, the Whig-American candidate, obtained 21.5 percent. The votes indicated that if Fillmore, who only carried Maryland in the election, had not run, Frémont might very well have won Illinois, Indiana, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania.³⁵ Newspapers noted that the Republican Party's loss, in many ways, had the air of victory about it, while Buchanan's win was shrouded in division.

Newspapers offered various explanations, and the *Weekly Herald* (NY) said Buchanan won "by the divisions of the opposition forces and a series of accidents." The paper then warned:

Now the work among the various managers, cliques and coteries of the democracy, North and South, for the first seats at the table begins. Mr. Buchanan will soon discover what Mr. Jefferson Davis and his controlling secession faction expect and demand; he will perceive, on the returns of the election, however, that some steps of conciliation in behalf of the North are indispensable to the continued existence of the democratic party. Inevitably he must disappoint the North or the South.³⁶

The *Charleston (SC) Mercury* asserted that if the election had been held just a few months before, when northern sentiment against Preston Brooks was at its height, Frémont might have won. Also, Brooks' actions against Sumner, the paper stated, had caused northerners to unite against the Democrats, even though the paper reaffirmed its position that Brooks was in the right. "The merited caning of Sumner by Brooks," the *Mercury* stated, "was perverted into a powerful

³⁵ John Wooley and Gerhard Peters, "Election of 1856," *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/showelection.php?year=1856> (accessed June 2013).

³⁶ "Election of Mr. Buchanan and a Democratic Congress—Shoals and Breakers Ahead," *Weekly Herald* (NY), Nov. 8, 1856.

lever to act upon the northern fanatical mind. All seemed lost. Know Nothingism subsided into a mere ripple upon the wave of Black Republicanism.”³⁷ Recognizing that the election easily could have gone the other way, most southern newspapers somberly assessed the Democrats’ victory.

As the results were coming in, the *Charleston (SC) Mercury* stated:

We make no particular comments upon this result until we get full returns of the election; but what seems beyond dispute is, that the Northern people, in this Presidential election, have declared themselves a distinct people, with principles and purposes essentially and permanently at war with our safety and equality in the Union. But we reserve this matter for future discussion.³⁸

Although Buchanan’s election was a victory, the results gave southern newspapers pause as they were forced to acknowledge that any momentum in the South’s favor seemed to be dissipating and the future looked bleak.

Northern newspapers kept their readers apprised of some of the South’s concerns after the election. The *New York Herald* published a *Charleston (SC) Mercury* article on southerners’ belief that the election proved that the country was now divided and sectional issues carried the day. Southerners expressed indignation as they believed they had put forth the only truly qualified candidate in the election, a northerner, and the North had instead supported a less qualified candidate. The *Mercury* headline, “What Will Mr. Buchanan Do?” became a frequent query in the South as the region contemplated what the lack of northern support for Buchanan would mean. The *Mercury* article stated:

³⁷ “The True Cause of the Victory,” *Charleston (SC) Mercury*, Nov. 18, 1856.

³⁸ “The Presidential Election,” *Charleston (SC) Mercury*, Nov. 10, 1856.

The hope of peace, of good understanding, has all passed away. Henceforth we are necessarily two peoples—the North and the South. The democratic party have presented to the country a Northern man, no way identified with peculiar Southern interests; a man who could raise against himself no prejudices on the part of the North; and yet it has depended upon the almost unanimous vote of the South whether this man, great in talents, famous by a long life of noble statesmanship, irreproachable in morals and manners, should be elected to the Presidency over an adventurer, without experience in politics, with a doubtful reputation even as an explorer, and a still more doubtful one as a man, whose sole qualifications as a candidate was that he was willing to embody the sentiment of the hostility of the North to the South. What conclusion can we draw from this result except that we are on the verge of revolution or destruction? For ourselves, we prefer the former.³⁹

The *Boston (MA) Daily Atlas* asked the same question about Buchanan’s agenda for the future but framed it in light of Franklin Pierce’s support of slavery and his disappointing term as president. “We owe all the agitation which has shaken the country to the inexplicable fatuity of Franklin Pierce,” the *Atlas* stated, “who has thought slavery and dreamed slavery ever since he took an oath only to break it! Will Mr. Buchanan be mindful of aught else?”⁴⁰ The *Bangor (ME) Daily Whig & Courier* reprinted a *New Orleans Delta* article acknowledging that Buchanan’s election ensured that the Democrats would have “possession of the government” for eight consecutive years and would be “open to all the disadvantages of being in power.” More importantly, though, the *Delta* took note of the Republicans’ first run at the presidency. “Mr. Fillmore is laid on the shelf,” the *Delta* stated. “Fremont has served the purpose of laying a broad foundation for a party, the essential character of which is to be aggressive, and its object to control the country and subject the South to the despotism of a sectional majority.”⁴¹ Such

³⁹ “A Loud Blast from South Carolina. First Results of Mr. Buchanan’s Election. A New Constitution demanded, or a Southern Confederacy. What Will Mr. Buchanan Do? [From the Charleston Mercury] Mr. Rhett’s Letter to Gov. Adams,” *New York Herald*, Nov. 11, 1856.

⁴⁰ “What Will Mr. Buchanan Do?” *Boston (MA) Daily Atlas*, Nov. 11, 1856.

⁴¹ “From the New Orleans Delta, Nov. 11th,” *Bangor (ME) Daily Whig & Courier*, Nov. 26, 1856.

newspaper comments indicate the South now looked with great concern toward its political future, in particular what would happen in the next presidential election.

The votes had barely been tabulated when northern and southern presses began speculating about the 1860 contest. The *Charleston Mercury* printed a *New Orleans Delta* article that stated that even though the election was over, the issues it had raised were not settled. “These are yet in the womb of the future,” the article predicted, “and what the next four years may bring forth, we must wait to see, hoping for the best while we should be forearmed against she [sic] worst.” The end of the article posed a question that the *Delta* said needed be answered: “Whether this Union shall be Northern and Sectional, (to use a seeming contradiction in terms), or Southern and National?”⁴²

Northern newspapers also clearly understood that the 1856 election had laid the groundwork for the 1860 presidential contest. The *Milwaukee (WI) Daily Sentinel* reported on the Republican Party’s showing in the election and its prospects for the future:

Be sure that there is work to be done four years hence by the great party, which, with an imperfect organization and but two years existence, has almost won a victory—to which the contest just past is but the pastime of children. Close up the ranks again, then, and stand ready for the day of need.⁴³

The *Weekly Herald* (NY) said it was not surprised to learn that Democrats did not consider Buchanan’s election to be a true victory. “The heavy vote for Fremont—the enthusiasm of his friends—,” the paper said, “the deliberately expressed determination of the Northern people, evidenced by the popular vote, to overthrow the present democratic party—have caused a deep

⁴² “The Presidential Election in 1860—The Policy of the South,” *Charleston (SC) Mercury*, Nov. 17, 1856.

⁴³ “What is Expected of Democracy,” *Milwaukee (WI) Daily Sentinel*, Nov. 27, 1856.

and powerful impression throughout the South.”⁴⁴ The *New Hampshire Statesman* noted that although Buchanan had won, “it is very clear that the candidate of the Republican Party has made a capital run.” The paper then looked forward to the next four years and predicted:

Agitation of the Slavery Question, perhaps a War for conquests in behalf of the Slave System, will in all probability engross the public mind for the four succeeding years. Already the ablest of the Southern presses are advocating the revival of the Slave Trade and complete extension of black servitude over the entire country.⁴⁵

Such articles would only help to ensure that slavery would increasingly become the center of debate. Suggestions that the South would only be satisfied with the revival of the international slave trade and the extension of slavery across the entire country would only serve to exacerbate northern anxiety.

The *Daily Cleveland (OH) Herald* carried an article from the *Richmond (VA) Enquirer* showing why slavery should continue. The *Herald* printed the article to show its readers the depth of southern devotion to slavery. The article, “Slavery The Strongest Bond of Union,” was divided into several sub-paragraphs with headings such as “Without Slavery We Should All Sink Down Together,” “Slavery Gives Character To Civilization,” and “Slavery Is Conservative And Elevating.” A closing paragraph, apparently from the *New York Courier*, commented on the *Enquirer* article. “We have no comment to make on the above,” the closing paragraph declared, “except to say that those are the political principles which have elected James Buchanan to the office of President of the United States.” The article concluded by asking if it was upon these principles that the Republic was founded. “The North, with like voice,” the article asserted, “has

⁴⁴ “Affairs in Washington. Our Washington Correspondence. Washington, Nov. 25, 1856,” *Weekly Herald* (NY), Nov. 29, 1856.

⁴⁵ “The Presidential Election,” *New Hampshire Statesman* (Concord), Nov. 8, 1849.

just answered ‘No,’ and will continue thus to answer, until that answer is heard and heeded.”⁴⁶

Southerners, though, were just as emphatic about their answer, as an article in the *Charleston (SC) Mercury* clearly showed. The article included the following:

Let the South persevere in this new policy. Let her ask nothing (as she never has) but what she is entitled to under the Constitution, and resist all infringements upon her rights, and all will be well. Let the North see and know that the South is united in the defence of what she is entitled to, and the North will respect her rights. The way to maintain the Union is for the North to be taught that she must attend to her own business, and let that of the South alone. That is all the latter asks. And that she will have.⁴⁷

The country’s political environment had reached an abysmal point after the Brooks and Sumner incident and Buchanan’s election, a situation that would only worsen just two days after the March 4, 1857, inauguration.

On March 6, 1857, the Supreme Court finally released its decision in the *Dred Scott v. John F. A. Sandford* case.⁴⁸ Dred Scott was a slave who had sued for his freedom on the basis of his travels through free states with his master, John Emerson, now deceased. When Emerson had died in 1843, he left Scott, along with Scott’s wife and daughter, to his widow. Scott originally filed his suit in a St. Louis County Circuit Court, and, in 1850, he had won and was given his freedom. Emerson’s widow appealed the decision, thus setting off a long series of cases that would ultimately land at the Supreme Court’s door.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ “Gems of Democracy,” *Daily Cleveland (OH) Herald*, Nov. 14, 1856. The article began by saying the slavery text was from the *Richmond (VA) Enquirer*, but the *N.Y. Courier* was cited after the concluding commentary. It is possible the entire article, including the introduction to the *Enquirer* text and the final paragraph, were all republished from the *Courier*. In any event, the opening and closing paragraphs gave a northern perspective on the *Richmond (VA) Enquirer* text.

⁴⁷ “The True Cause of Victory,” *Charleston (SC) Mercury*, Nov. 18, 1856.

⁴⁸ *Scott v. Sandford*, 60 U.S. 393 (1856), <http://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/60/393/case.html> (accessed June 9, 2013). The Supreme Court decision misspells Sanford’s name as “Sandford.”

⁴⁹ Potter, *Crisis*, 267-296.

By the time the case reached the Supreme Court, the suit had gone through several courts and now named John Sanford, the widow's brother. Behind the scenes, Buchanan had urged the Court to quickly make a decision, in the hopes that it would quell political pressure for action on the slavery issue.⁵⁰ Newspapers show, however, that Buchanan's reasoning was flawed, and the Court's action in ruling against Dred Scott only served to make matters worse. In its decision, the Court ruled that Scott was not a U.S. citizen and, therefore, could not sue for his freedom. In essence, he was still a slave. The Court went further, though, and also ruled that Congress did not have power over slavery in the national territories, which rendered the Missouri Compromise of 1820 unconstitutional. Although the Kansas-Nebraska Act had already been the Missouri Compromise's undoing, newspapers reported that northerners were furious, especially since five southern justices made up the majority of the Court at that time.

Newspapers quickly began printing explanations of the ruling. A *Barre (MA) Gazette* article declared that the case was "the most important of any ever given by this highest Judicial tribunal of the country." The article gave a brief history of the case and the Court's ruling that Scott was still a slave. Then, the article noted that five of the justices were from slaveholding states and they had all agreed on the second part of the decision that the federal government had violated the Fifth Amendment's due process clause with the Missouri Compromise. "These all concur in the opinion," the *Gazette* said, "that slavery is a national institution, and to be protected by the general government, not only in the States, but in all the territories; that any legislation interfering in the right of persons to hold slaves in Kansas [sic], Minnesota or any other national

⁵⁰ Potter, *Crisis* 274-275. Buchanan began correspondence with the Court in a letter to Justice Catron in February. Catron suggested Buchanan contact Justice Grier about the case, which he did.

territory is unconstitutional and void.”⁵¹ The *Daily Cleveland (OH) Herald* published an article condemning the timing of the decision, coming on the heels of the presidential election. “The postponement of this decision from the term just previous to the Presidential election,” the *Herald* stated, “when it should have been disposed of, until after the result of that struggle, shows a method in the madness of slavery.”⁵²

In Louisiana, the *Times-Picayune* noted that “Black Republicans” were upset because they did not really understand the decision. “It is a heavy blow to Black Republicanism and its allies,” the paper stated, “the force of which they are attempting to break, in some slight degree, by raising a clamor against the judgment of the court for what it does not contain.” The Court’s decision meant the federal government had no jurisdiction over a state’s internal regulation, the paper added, and therefore the uproar was unnecessary.⁵³ Northern and southern states would now be able to control their own destinies without federal interference, according to the newspaper.

The *Macon (GA) Weekly Telegraph* made no attempt to contain its joy over the decision nullifying the Missouri Compromise line and declared that it would be the end of the Free Soil Party. This decision and Buchanan’s election, the *Telegraph* asserted, had vindicated Democratic Party principles. “The legal and popular verdicts being thus perfectly in accordance,” the *Telegraph* maintained, “those who were deceived or mistaken on the subject will now, we hope,

⁵¹ “The Decision in the Dred Scott Case,” *Barre (MA) Gazette*, March 13, 1857. Also see “History of the Dred Scott Case,” *Macon (GA) Weekly Telegraph*, March 31, 1857.

⁵² “The Nationality of Slavery—What the Dred Scott Decision Amounts to,” *Daily Cleveland (OH) Herald*, March 23, 1857.

⁵³ “Citizenship,” *Daily Picayune* (New Orleans, LA), March 21, 1857.

set an example of obedience to the laws and constitution of their country.”⁵⁴ In another article, “Black Republican Ravings,” the *Telegraph* noted that the *New York Tribune* had dismissed the decision as having “so much moral weight of those congregated in any Washington bar room.” The “ravings of the Black Republican press,” the *Telegraph* said, showed that Republicans were willing to commit treason if anything should “touch their abolitionism.” Eventually, cooler heads would prevail, the article predicted, and the decision would be accepted.⁵⁵

Newspapers, however, show that not only did cooler heads not prevail but the North responded to the decision with a vengeance. With Buchanan’s inauguration and the Dred Scott decision, the *Milwaukee (WI) Daily Sentinel* proclaimed, “Slavery is inaugurated as the child and ward of the Constitution of this Republic.” With its decision, the paper stated, the Supreme Court had “dishonored itself and the age and our free institutions.” The *Sentinel* expressed its hope that the states would ignore the Court’s decision. “It is impossible,” the *Sentinel* maintained, “that these Obiter Dicta—these words by the way, and the monstrous, insulting deductions from these words—should be recognized by the State Courts or State Governments.”⁵⁶

Newspapers reported that northerners were mobilizing against the decision. The *Barre (MA) Gazette* noted that the New York legislature had drafted the “Dred Scott Resolutions” and affirmed that New York would not allow slavery within its borders. The Supreme Court’s decision, the *Gazette* maintained, had “impaired the confidence and respect of the people of the

⁵⁴ “The Dred Scott Case Decided by the Supreme Court of the United States. The Missouri Compromise Unconstitutional.—Negroes not Citizens. Washington March 6, 1857,” *Macon (GA) Weekly Telegraph*, March 17, 1857.

⁵⁵ “Black Republican Ravings,” *Macon (GA) Weekly Telegraph*, March 17, 1857.

⁵⁶ “From Our New York Correspondent. New York, March 11, ’57,” *Milwaukee (WI) Daily Sentinel*, March 16, 1857.

States.”⁵⁷ The *Boston (MA) Daily Atlas* reported that the decision caused the state of Connecticut finally to take a stand. “Connecticut wheels into line with her sister New England States,” the paper stated, “in her protest against slavery propagation, filibustering, the Dred Scott decision, Buchanan’s administration, and the principles and projects of the democratic party.”⁵⁸ A *New York Herald* article predicted the Dred Scott decision would reopen agitation “of a more virulent and intensely sectional character, than anything of the kind which has ever been inflicted upon the country.” The article gave the details of the Dred Scott decision and then reported what the North would do in response:

But the Northern mind, to a very great extent, has become fixed in its ideas of the constitution concerning slavery; and fresh from the hot controversy of the late campaign, it is not in the mood for acquiescence to these decisions of the Supreme Court. Agitation must necessarily follow—a broad and continuous sectional agitation. It has already commenced.⁵⁹

Newspaper reports must have made it very clear to the South that the North’s anger over the Dred Scott decision was more than simply the ravings of “Black Republicans.”

In response, some southern newspapers questioned the depth of the North’s commitment to black freedom and equality. The *Macon (GA) Weekly Telegraph* published a story it said originated in the *New York News*, in which a young mulatto had “paid his devoir” to a white girl and “was favored in his suit.” Afterward, some young men stalked and beat him “until his tender passion was quite subdued.” The *Telegraph*, of course, agreed with the men’s actions but wondered why the northerners were so upset. “Why will people who make such a fuss about the

⁵⁷ “New York and the Dred Scott Case,” *Barre (MA) Gazette*, May 1, 1857.

⁵⁸ *Boston (MA) Daily Atlas*, April 10, 1857.

⁵⁹ “The Dred Scott Decisions—The New Slavery Agitation,” *New York Herald*, March 14, 1857.

Dred Scott decision,” the paper asked, “and contend so strenuously for the social, intellectual and political equality of the negro, balk at their own doctrines the moment Sambo takes them at their word?”⁶⁰

Newspapers reflected the national impact of the Dred Scott decision. The Court’s ruling in the case was not a decision about a single state or territory; it was a decision that cut across any such regional boundaries. Southerners once again declared themselves a champion of the Union and supporters of the law. But the victory would ring hollow for the Buchanan administration and the South. Newspapers revealed northern outrage at the decision and opposition to slavery grew even stronger.

While the Dred Scott decision continued to reverberate, Buchanan had to face the crisis in Kansas, a region that had already derailed one president. Newspapers continued to report on events in the territory, in particular the debate over the Lecompton and Topeka constitutions, but not as extensively as they had covered the earlier violence in the territory. The free-state men supported the Topeka Constitution, which was first proposed in 1855. The Lecompton Constitution was pro-slavery and was first proposed in 1857. In dealing with Kansas, Buchanan chose to support the Lecompton Constitution, a decision that would later haunt him. The Democrats were divided over Stephen A. Douglas’s break with Buchanan’s position on this issue. The Lecompton Constitution was hotly debated, and the *Kansas Weekly Herald* printed a letter to the editor that summed up the situation quite well: “Two things are certain in connexion [sic] with the Lecompton Constitution. “If Kansas is not admitted under it, the South will

⁶⁰ “A Cure for Love,” *Macon (GA) Weekly Telegraph*, May 12, 1857.

dissolve the Union. If she is admitted with it Kansas will in all probability be drenched with blood.”⁶¹

Southern newspapers strongly supported the Lecompton Constitution and paid close attention to the debate. The *Charleston (SC) Mercury* carried an article republished from the Philadelphia *Pennsylvanian* that reported that Pennsylvania’s Democratic presses supported Buchanan’s position. The majority of the Pennsylvania Democratic newspapers “sustain the views of the Kansas question presented by Mr. Buchanan,” the article asserted, “and disapprove of the hasty and uncalled for demonstration of Senator Douglas and the few Democrats who have followed his lead.”⁶²

Northerners who opposed the Lecompton Constitution looked askance on Buchanan’s efforts to have it passed. In Massachusetts, the *Lowell Daily Citizen and News* noted that Buchanan’s cabinet was divided along sectional lines and expressed indignation that some of the northern cabinet members might join with southerners on the vote. “It will be seen that the division is ‘geographical,’ so much deplored by the Democracy of the North,” the article stated. “Of course that will not do, and so one of the Northern men will go over to the South as usual to remedy it.”⁶³ In another issue, the same newspaper printed a scathing criticism of Buchanan’s position on the Lecompton Constitution and questioned his supposed southern loyalties. The paper stated:

⁶¹ “For the Kansas Herald. February 28, 1858. Mr. Editor,” *Kansas Weekly Herald* (Leavenworth City, Kansas Territory), March 13, 1858.

⁶² *Charleston (SC) Mercury*, Jan. 4, 1858.

⁶³ *Lowell (MA) Daily Citizen and News*, Jan. 21, 1858. The comment that a northern man “will go over to the South” was probably a reference to the North’s continued disgust with the Dred Scott decision, which was made possible because Justices Nelson and Grier from Pennsylvania joined the five southern justices in the decision.

Mr. Buchanan's Lecompton message is a pitiable affair. The poor old man is evidently frightened out of his wits by the hot-heads of the South, with their bugaboo about disunion. He fears, if the Lecompton Constitution is rejected by Congress, a movement will be inaugurated at the South that will engulf [sic] the 'kountry.' He would avoid the terrible catastrophe by trying to persuade or bully the North into accepting the Constitution.... This is the whole gist of President Buchanan's message. He is afraid. The South have bullied and threatened him till he does not know of any other method of getting out of the scrape. If he had one tithe of the pluck that animated Jackson, he would send those fire-eaters dancing with a flea in their ear. But he hasn't. He is a piece of putty in their hands.⁶⁴

After realizing the Lecompton Constitution faced an uphill battle, the *Ripley (OH) Bee* reported that Buchanan had sent a long letter to Virginia Governor Henry Wise "deploring the evil which this Lecompton business had brought upon the Administration." Buchanan asked for Wise's advice and beseeched him to "help save the Administration and the Democratic party."⁶⁵ After the Lecompton Constitution's final defeat in August 1858, the Democratic Party began dividing and Buchanan's presidency was going the way of Fillmore's. Democrats were now faced with more than just opposition from the North. They were also forced to confront their own party's disarray, and southern Democrats were beginning to feel even more isolated. The Democrats' fissure would become clear as Stephen Douglas faced off with Abraham Lincoln for an Illinois Senate seat.

The national press paid close attention to the Lincoln and Douglas contest, since it would have ramifications for the Democratic Party at large. Initially, newspapers reported that Douglas, a seasoned orator, did not want to participate in public debates with Lincoln. One report from the *Milwaukee (WI) Daily Sentinel* read as follows:

⁶⁴ "Mr. Buchanan's Lecompton Message," *Lowell (MA) Daily Citizen and News*, Feb. 4, 1858.

⁶⁵ *Ripley (OH) Bee*, April 17, 1858.

No one is more at home on the stump than Douglas, and we are a little surprised that he did not eagerly take up the gauntlet thrown by his competitor. If the Little Giant has a match on the stump it is Lincoln, and his knowledge of this fact had probably something to do with his refusal to accept the challenge. Mr. Lincoln, it is evident, has no fear to meet his rival before the people....⁶⁶

Douglas did, however, agree, and the candidates engaged in debates that gave Lincoln an opportunity to clarify his antislavery position, thus opening the way for him to run for the 1860 Republican presidential nomination. As newspaper coverage shows, the debates were wildly popular. The *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC) reported on the excitement in Illinois:

The Illinois papers come to us filled with reports of the Douglas and Lincoln debates. The audiences are of the largest kind—ten, fifteen, and even twenty thousand people gathering together to witness the sparring, if they cannot hear it, between the Judge and his antagonist. The last great debate came off on Wednesday at Quincy, and so vast was the collection of people that the town was overflowing, the hotels crowded, and many private houses completely filled with strangers. At Camp Point...in front of the station-house a splendid bonfire was flaming, and hundreds of torches were carried in the streets. Every house in the town was illuminated, presenting altogether one of the finest spectacles witnessed during the campaign.⁶⁷

The *Ripley* (OH) *Bee* reported that 12,000 people had attended one debate and 15,000 had attended another. The paper also made an election prediction. “The fight goes bravely on, in Illinois—the Little Giant finds his full match in Lincoln,” the *Bee* stated. “The latter, with the help of the Administration, will, in our opinion, win the battle.”⁶⁸ The immense interest in the debates was probably twofold. At this point it was clear that Douglas was fighting for leadership of the Democratic Party, which the Senate win would give him. Lincoln’s strong performance in

⁶⁶ “Lincoln and Douglas,” *Milwaukee* (WI) *Daily Sentinel*, July 29, 1858.

⁶⁷ “Political Intelligence,” *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC), Oct. 23, 1858.

⁶⁸ “The Douglas Fight,” *Ripley* (OH) *Bee*, Sept. 4, 1858.

the debates, though, was a sign of the new Republican Party's growing strength, and most newspaper readers would have understood its importance for the 1860 election.

Northern newspapers followed the contest with interest, but southern newspapers were more vocal in their comments. Southern newspapers felt forced to endorse Douglas, who had angered the South over his criticism of the Lecompton Constitution and the Buchanan administration, over Lincoln, whom they considered to be an abolitionist. One Alabama newspaper carried an editorial that captured the South's dilemma and condemned Douglas for his recent political stands. "We still think that Judge Douglas' course in the premises utterly indefensible—," the article stated, "that it was a plain and glaring violation of his own Kansas-Nebraska bill." Douglas had "never indulged in any of those denunciations of the South and her 'peculiar institution,'" the article pointed out, "that are so characteristic of the black-hearted Abolitionists [sic] that opposes him."⁶⁹ The *Mississippian* predicted Douglas would win but was direct in its criticism of him:

After Lincoln receives his drubbing, we want him to return the compliment and larrup Douglas. And then by way of making honors easy and ridding the country entirely of a pair of depraved, blustering, mischievous, low-down demagogues, we would have them make a Kilkenny cat fight of it and eat each other up. We have no choice to express between them; because it is like choosing between Punch and the Devil.⁷⁰

Despite Douglas's failure to toe the southern Democrats line, he remained a far better choice for most southerners than an outright abolitionist.

When the votes were cast on November 2, 1858, Douglas was the victor in Illinois, while Republicans had a good showing in many other states. For Buchanan, the outcome was a strong

⁶⁹ "Judge Douglas," *Daily Confederation* (Montgomery, AL), Aug. 30, 1858.

⁷⁰ "Douglas," *Mississippian* (Jackson), Sept. 14, 1858. Published as the *Semi-Weekly Mississippian*.

rebuke. The President and his supporters had hoped Douglas would lose the election, which would divest him of much of his political clout. The *Ripley (OH) Bee* reported on election returns in several states and noted that in New Jersey the Buchanan opposition had won the entire slate. “The Opposition have also carried the Legislature which secures a United States Senator,” the paper reported. “So goes Lecompton among the Jersey [sic] Blues.” The paper noted similar results in New York. “The Empire State has spoken,” the *Bee* declared. “Buchanan and Lecompton are most signally defeated.”⁷¹ The *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC) carried articles from numerous newspapers, which included the following from the *Boston Daily Advertiser*: “That the victory of Senator Douglas in Illinois is a more poignant rebuke to the President than the success of the Republicans would have been cannot be denied.”⁷² Even the *Daily Evening Bulletin* in San Francisco took note. “The long agony is over,” the *Bulletin* declared. “Mr. Buchanan’s administration has received a rebuke, the like of which has seldom been experienced by the most unpopular since the formation of the Union.”⁷³ The election, though, was not only important to Buchanan; it held great import for the Democratic Party at large.

Newspapers reported that Douglas’s win fairly assured him of the Democratic presidential nomination for 1860. The *Daily Missouri Republican* carried commentary from the *New York Times* that noted the ramifications of Douglas’s win. “The effect of this victory upon the Democratic party, cannot fail to be decisive,” the paper maintained. “Mr. Douglass [sic] will

⁷¹ “Election News,” *Ripley (OH) Bee*, Nov. 6, 1858.

⁷² “Spirit of the Press. The Late Elections. From the Boston Daily Advertiser of Nov. 6,” *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC), Nov. 9, 1858.

⁷³ “Letter from New Orleans. [From Our Own Correspondent.] How the Elections in the North and West are Viewed at the South,” *Daily Evening Bulletin* (San Francisco, CA), Dec. 2, 1858.

be more powerful at Washington than the President, with all his patronage. He will have the whole Democratic party of the North, and the conservative portion of that party at the South, at his back.”⁷⁴ An article republished from the *Washington Union* stated the situation clearly as follows:

If the Democratic party has triumphed in Illinois it has been at its own expense, in consideration of joining in the Black-Republican clamor against the ‘Lecompton fraud and swindle.’ It is a triumph barren and ignominious; it is a triumph over which the Black-Republicans have reason to exult, and do exult more than the good and true democracy.⁷⁵

San Francisco’s *Daily Evening Bulletin* carried an article with the headline “The South Shelved for the Next Presidency—Douglas the Man!” The article was clear about what impact the newspaper thought Douglas’s election would have on the future presidential race. “This victory, to my mind,” the *Bulletin* declared, “kills all chance that any man from the Southwest and South might have had for the Presidential nomination.” The article singled out presidential hopeful Senator Albert G. Brown of Mississippi, who had been a governor of that state. The article said that Brown “will no doubt throw up his hands in despair, and confine himself to his kingdom of Mississippi for the future.”⁷⁶ Northern newspapers thought Douglas’s win would be a wake-up call for the Democratic Party to rethink its positions in order to find a way to become unified and have a chance in the 1860 election. The *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC) published the following:

⁷⁴ “Judge Douglas’ Triumph,” *Daily Missouri Republican* (St. Louis), Nov. 8, 1858.

⁷⁵ “Spirit of the Press. The Late Elections. From The Washington Union of November 5,” *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC), Nov. 9, 1858.

⁷⁶ “Letter from New Orleans. [From Our Own Correspondent.] The South Shelved for the Next Presidency—Douglas the Man,” *Daily Evening Bulletin* (San Francisco, CA), Dec. 2, 1858.

The Democratic party is always wise enough to learn a new lesson whenever its old doctrines are worn out. The south must understand perfectly well by the recent results in Pennsylvania and Illinois that its only hope of preventing an overwhelming victory by the Republicans in 1860 lies in adopting the Douglas creed. Some of the Southern leaders of the party have already hastened to do this. Many of the Northern members of the party are ready to do it as soon as they find they can safely speak out their sentiments.⁷⁷

Southern Democrats, though, were not so quick to abandon their positions, and newspapers would continue to cover the fallout from Douglas's win. A Vermont newspaper noted the strange position in which the Democrats, especially in the South, found themselves. The paper stated:

The republicans of the North and the fire-eaters of the South, have finally got upon common ground. They both oppose popular sovereignty—both deny the power of the people of a territory to determine the slavery question for themselves—both contend that Congress alone possesses this power. The Northern republicans say Congress should use it to *prohibit* slavery, while their allies, the fire-eaters, say Congress should use it to *establish* slavery. In the mean time, the people of the territories are settling the question for themselves, and the great National Democratic party will sustain them in so doing.—
N. H. Democrat.

The division between the North and the South had now manifested itself in a divided Democratic Party as the country moved toward one of its most important elections.⁷⁸

Before 1860 could arrive, though, an incident in October 1859 captured the attention of newspapers throughout the country as it pitted an abolitionist against both the South and the federal government. On October 16, 1859, abolitionist John Brown, the same man responsible for the Osawatomie murders in May 1856, gathered a group of his followers and stormed the

⁷⁷ "Spirit of the Press. The Late Elections. From the Boston Daily Advertiser of Nov. 6," *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC), Nov. 9, 1858.

⁷⁸ *Vermont Patriot* (Montpelier), April 30, 1859.

federal arsenal in Harpers Ferry, Virginia.⁷⁹ It was a foolhardy move on Brown's part, and the uprising was quickly put down and the perpetrators apprehended. But the sheer boldness of it astounded everyone in the nation, North and South, and newspapers quickly jumped into the resulting fray.

Early newspaper accounts of Harpers Ferry, such as the one that appeared in the *Charleston (SC) Mercury* on October 19, focused on the sequence of events. Like many other such articles, this one referred to the incident as an "Insurrection" and identified John Brown as "Ossawatomie Brown."⁸⁰ The *Fayetteville (NC) Observer* reported that the mail had brought "accounts of an outbreak at Harper's Ferry, Va., accompanied with stories of an abolition and negro insurrection, loss of lives, &c."⁸¹ Newspapers printed daily accounts of information as they received it, some being more accurate and timely than others.⁸² On October 22, the *Columbus (GA) Daily Enquirer* published a detailed account of what authorities had learned from Brown, who had been wounded before being captured. The *Enquirer* also gave a list of everyone who had been killed or wounded in the attack.⁸³ Newspapers reported great interest in the names of Brown's men who had been involved in the uprising, and the names of citizens and soldiers whom Brown's men had either killed or wounded. Stories abounded of conspiracies and insurrections, and many articles identified the men with Brown as white, free black, or slave.

⁷⁹ The correct spelling is "Harpers," but most of the newspaper articles spell it as "Harper's." The correct spelling of the massacre location is "Osawatomie." Newspaper articles usually spelled it "Ossawatomie," but some spelled it "Ossawattomie."

⁸⁰ "Latest by Telegraph. Wednesday, October 19, 1859. The Harper's Ferry Insurrection," *Charleston (SC) Mercury*, Oct. 19, 1859.

⁸¹ "Startling News from Virginia," *Fayetteville (NC) Observer*, Oct. 24, 1859.

⁸² "The Harper's Ferry Riot. The Riot Quelled. Full Particulars," *Boston (MA) Daily Advertiser*, Oct. 19, 1859;

⁸³ "Still Later from Harper's Ferry—Jurisdiction of the Prisoners Settled—List of Killed and Wounded Rebels," *Columbus (GA) Daily Enquirer*, Oct. 22, 1859.

Southern newspapers had not forgotten that the raid's leader was the same John Brown who had led the Kansas attacks that resulted in the brutal murders of five pro-slavery men near the Osawatomie area. The South used this opportunity to remind the North that Brown had been allowed to escape any punishment for those murders. The *Columbus (GA) Daily Enquirer* republished an article that recounted a history of John Brown's activity and the Osawatomie murders, with great attention to the gruesome details of the attacks and the fact that Brown had remained free. "No man in Kansas has pretended to deny that old John Brown led that murderous foray, which massacred those men," the paper admonished. "The truth of history requires this statement. If Brown was a monomaniac, it dates back to his first visit to Kansas."⁸⁴ The *Charleston (SC) Courier* also gave an account of the murders that came from a Mrs. Doyle, whose testimony identified Brown as the leader of the men who had murdered her husband and two of her sons. The *Courier* reported that "Black Republicans" had made a hero of Brown; he and his band "had not been held up to the execration of the world by the press of the North, simply because the damning responsibility would recoil upon their own heads."⁸⁵ Reports indicated there was no question in anyone's mind that Brown was behind the murders at Osawatomie, and it galled the South that he had been allowed to remain free and continue with his abolitionist agitations. Southern newspapers had some success in making this point as even northern newspapers referred to Brown in their Harpers Ferry articles as "Osawatomie Brown." Southerners were able to place the blame for Harpers Ferry on northerners who had allowed

⁸⁴ "Strong Kansas Testimony Against Brown. [From the Lawrence (Kansas) Herald of Freedom, Oct. 29," *Columbus (GA) Daily Enquirer*, Nov. 10, 1859.

⁸⁵ "More About the Murder of Doyle and his Sons in Kansas by John Brown," *Charleston (SC) Courier, Tri-Weekly*, Dec. 22, 1859.

Brown to continue with his abolitionist activities even though it was known that he was guilty of the heinous Osawatomie massacre.

The *Macon (GA) Weekly Telegraph* carried an article that described one of Brown's abolitionist meetings held in Cleveland, Ohio. At the meeting, the article said, Brown bragged of stealing negroes to take to Canada, stealing horses, and shooting slaveholders.⁸⁶ His words were met with strong approval, the article reported, just as they had been at all such meetings Brown held in the North. Such approval, the *Telegraph* declared, "gave Brown the confidence that his party would sustain him in whatever he might do against the men of the South, and thus emboldened, the miserable wretch, by servile insurrections, sought to overthrow the government and bring himself to its head."⁸⁷ Such articles reminded southerners that Brown could carry out his crimes only because of support from the abolitionists and the Republicans.

Newspapers also warned southerners that Brown's actions at Harpers Ferry could prompt other insurrections and attacks on the South.⁸⁸ The *Pittsfield (MA) Sun* carried a *Richmond (VA) Enquirer* article that expressed the fears of many southerners as follows:

The aid of the *Federal Government* was near Harper's Ferry, and was *in hands faithful to the Constitution*; but another year may place that aid in the hands of our assailants, and the 'higher law' of an 'irrepressible conflict' urge on and strengthen the hands that murder our families and pillage our property. Is there no remedy? Shall the South, divided by useless conflicts about federal politics, fall as single victims to marauding bands of Northern fanatics? Before a question of such vital importance let party politics sink, and the grave fact of safety to life and property rise above all other subjects.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Many newspaper articles on Brown's attack at Osawatomie paid a great deal of attention to the fact that Brown had stolen horses from the victims and others. Horse stealing was a property crime that both northerners and southerners considered to be a serious offense. Southerners also viewed slave stealing as a serious property crime.

⁸⁷ "Ossawatomie Brown," *Macon (GA) Weekly Telegraph*, Nov. 1, 1859.

⁸⁸ "Insurrection at Harper's Ferry. From the Baltimore American of Yesterday," *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC), Oct. 19, 1859;

⁸⁹ "The Insurrection," *Pittsfield (MA) Sun*, Nov. 3, 1859.

It should be noted that the article's mention of those "faithful to the Constitution" was probably a reference to Lieutenant Colonel Robert E. Lee and Lieutenant J. E. B. Stuart, who were sent to command the federal forces around Harpers Ferry after the attack. These two southern military men were highly respected, and having them in command would have assured southerners that justice would be done.⁹⁰ New Orleans' *Daily Picayune* allayed fears when it said the rumor of an "insurrection was naturally very strong among slaveholders, but it was speedily calmed when the abortive effort was seen in its utter impotence."⁹¹

The *New York Herald* also countered such fears by insisting slaves had no interest in insurrections. "When we compare the condition of the free negro at the North," the *Herald* declared, "with that of the slave at the South, we cannot be surprised that Cuffy should prefer to remain in slavery."⁹² Southern slavery was "patriarchal," the article stated, and this social structure resulted in close bonds between masters and slaves, a relationship that existed nowhere else between the two races. The article concluded:

It would be well for the fanatics who wish to dissolve this great social tie in Southern society, through the shedding of blood or the cheat of Northern freedom for the negro, to learn a lesson from the refusal of the slaves in and around Harper's Ferry to accept the boon held out to them through the abolition invasion of old John Brown of Ossawatomie.⁹³

⁹⁰ Potter, *Crisis*, 370.

⁹¹ "Brown's Foray," *Daily Picayune* (New Orleans, LA), Nov. 8, 1859.

⁹² "Cuffy" was another derogatory term used for negro slaves.

⁹³ "The Abolition Invasion of Harper's Ferry—A Lesson from the Slaves," *New York Herald*, Oct. 27, 1859.

A *Richmond* (VA) *Enquirer* article warned that the North had more to fear from insurrections by their own laborers than the South did from its slaves. The *Enquirer*'s reasoning was in contrast with the *Herald*'s description of slave contentment. "There can be no insurrection at the South," the *Enquirer* declared, "because the whites are more numerous than the blacks, and because living on detached farms, under the supervision of masters and overseers, they [i.e. slaves] have no opportunity of concerted action."⁹⁴ Northerners, though, did believe southern slaveholders lived in constant fear of slave insurrections, as this fit with the abolitionists' conviction that slaves wanted freedom. The *Farmers' Cabinet* (NH) noted that "Gov. Wise and his friends of the Old Dominion" were terrified, and with good reason. "It is not this John Brown they fear so much," the *Cabinet* stated, "as it is the Old John Brown in every man's conscience."⁹⁵ Newspapers carried few reports of slave insurrections during this time or in previous years. Slave insurrections did sometimes occur, but they were not common.⁹⁶ Even so, fears of them often showed up in newspaper articles.⁹⁷

In the coverage of Harpers Ferry, some northern newspapers attempted to explain, if not defend, Brown's actions. The *New York Herald* painted Brown as a man who had gone insane, rather than a calculated abolitionist. The insurrection, according to the *Herald*, was part of a

⁹⁴ "Slave Insurrection. The Richmond Enquirer, of the 22d," *Kansas Herald of Freedom* (Wakarusa), Nov. 22, 1856. The *Kansas Herald of Freedom* was a free-state newspaper.

⁹⁵ *Farmers' Cabinet* (Amherst, NH), Nov. 23, 1859.

⁹⁶ Stanley L. Engerman, Richard Sutch, and Gavin Wright, eds., "Major Slave Revolts and Uprisings, by Location and Type: 1663-1853," *Historical Statistics of the United States*, <http://hsus.cambridge.org/HSUSWeb/toc/showChapter.do?id=Bb>.

⁹⁷ Some newspaper articles on rumors and fears of uprisings are "Contemplated Slave Insurrection," *Vermont Chronicle* (Bellows Falls), June 21, 1853; "Worse than Nigger Rising," *New York Herald*, Jan. 12, 1857; "The Terror in Nigger-dom," *Daily Cleveland* (OH) *Herald*, Dec. 19, 1856; "Slave Troubles," *Richmond* (VA) *Whig*, Dec. 9, 1856; "The Slave Insurrection at the South," *Barre* (MA) *Gazette*, Dec. 12, 1856; and "Terror in the South of a Slave Insurrection, Letter by a South Carolina Lady to a Friend in New York," *Daily Evening Bulletin* (San Francisco, CA), Dec. 31, 1860.

conspiracy of “that notorious Kansas free State abolition madman known as Ossawatimie Brown” and was carried out by “an insane Kansas abolitionist and his deluded followers, whites and blacks.”⁹⁸ The *Vermont Chronicle* acknowledged Brown’s involvement in the insurrection but then gave an account of his first visits to Kansas to protect his sons, who were abolitionist emigrants from the North. One son had died after being arrested for his anti-slavery views and another son had been shot, the *Chronicle* stated, and his sons’ deaths motivated Brown’s hatred of the “pro-slavery party.”⁹⁹ “The pro-slavery men abuse Old Brown,” a *Farmers’ Cabinet* (NH) article proclaimed, “and howl for his execution.”¹⁰⁰ One New Hampshire newspaper noted a *Boston (MA) Atlas & Bee* article that had referred to Brown as “an upright Christian hero” and painted a sympathetic picture of him.¹⁰¹ “They dared and died for what they felt to be the right, though in a manner which seems to us fatally wrong,” the *New York Tribune* proclaimed. “Let their epitaphs remain unwritten until the not distant day when no slave shall clank his chains in the shades of Monticello or by the graves of Mount Vernon.” The *New York Courier* defended Brown and said he was “a man half crazed and made utterly desperate by the murders of his sons by the border ruffians of Kansas.” The *New York Herald* accurately predicted the insurrection would create more hostility toward the North and endanger the Union. “Not many days, we apprehend,” the *Herald* predicted, “will elapse before the consequences upon the Southern mind of this desperate experiment of abolition treason in Virginia will be recognized in the North as

⁹⁸ “The Virginia Abolition Insurrection—Its Causes and Probable Consequences,” *New York Herald*, Oct. 19, 1859.

⁹⁹ “Harper’s Ferry Insurrection,” *Vermont Chronicle* (Bellows Falls), Oct. 25, 1859.

¹⁰⁰ “More Treason,” *Farmers’ Cabinet* (Amherst, NH), Nov. 30, 1859.

¹⁰¹ *Dover (NH) Gazette & Strafford Advertiser*, Oct. 29, 1859.

pregnant with danger to the Union.”¹⁰² It would appear that Northern newspapers had no concern over the effect their articles defending Brown would have on southerners.

With so much newspaper space devoted to the raid, when Brown’s trial commenced it garnered a great deal of press attention, with many newspapers publishing accounts of each day’s proceedings. Brown willingly gave a statement and did not deny his actions. He was quickly found guilty and sentenced to hang.¹⁰³ His execution and funeral also received extensive coverage.¹⁰⁴ The *Pittsfield* (MA) *Sun* reported a noticeable military presence. “Everything was conducted under the strictest military discipline,” the paper said, “as if the town were in a state of siege.”¹⁰⁵ Wendell Phillips offered a eulogy that several newspapers reprinted. Phillips praised Brown and said his “work is done; you have proven that a slave State is Only Fear in the mesh of Despotism.” Brown’s martyrdom, Phillips said, would “change a million hearts.”¹⁰⁶ The *Daily Cleveland* (OH) *Herald* praised Brown for the way he died. “Old Brown died game,” the paper said. “Brown came out of the jail smiling, and mounted the scaffold with a firm step, and stood there like a statue until the drop fell.”¹⁰⁷ Although some southerners admired Brown’s courage in

¹⁰² “Comments of the Northern Press on the Virginia Insurrection,” *Augusta* (GA) *Chronicle*, Oct. 23, 1859.

¹⁰³ A few of the articles on Brown’s trial and conviction are “The Trial of the Insurgents—Brown’s Statement,” *Pittsfield* (MA) *Sun*, Oct. 27, 1859; “The Harper’s Ferry Outbreak. The Third Day of Proceedings,” *New York Herald*, Oct. 29, 1859. “The Harper’s Ferry Outbreak. The Fourth Day’s Proceedings,” *New York Herald*, Oct. 30, 1859; “The Outbreak at Harper’s Ferry. The Verdict of the Jury,” *New York Herald*, Nov. 1, 1859; “The Harper’s Ferry Insurgents. The Trial of John Brown—His Conviction of Treason, Conspiracy, and Murder, Etc.,” *Charleston* (SC) *Mercury*, Nov. 4, 1859.

¹⁰⁴ Just a few of the many examples are “Execution of John Brown,” *Vermont Chronicle* (Bellows Falls), Dec. 6, 1859; “Execution of John Brown,” *Weekly Raleigh* (NC) *Register*, Dec. 7, 1859; “The Execution of John Brown,” *Boston* (MA) *Investigator*, Dec. 7, 1859; “Execution of John Brown. His Last Hours,” *Ripley* (OH) *Bee*, Dec. 10, 1859; “Execution of John Brown,” *New Hampshire Statesman* (Concord), Dec. 10, 1859. “Our Artist and Special Correspondent Making Their Last Visit to John Brown, in His Cell at Charlestown, Previous to His Execution,” *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper* (New York, NY), Dec. 10, 1859.

¹⁰⁵ “The Execution of John Brown. Harper’s Ferry, Dec. 2,” *Pittsfield* (MA) *Sun*, Dec. 8, 1859.

¹⁰⁶ “The Burial of John Brown,” *New York Herald*, Dec. 12, 1859.

¹⁰⁷ “John Brown’s Execution,” *Daily Cleveland* (OH) *Herald*, Dec. 3, 1859.

attacking the arsenal, articles such as these only served to create more anger in the South, especially as other abolitionists were implicated in Brown's attack.

Newspapers reported that prominent abolitionists such as Joshua Giddings and John P. Hale were accused of being Brown's accomplices and financial supporters, although Giddings and Hale issued a card denying any such involvement.¹⁰⁸ Newspapers also reported that the well-known abolitionist Gerritt Smith was under suspicion, especially when it was discovered he had given money to Brown.¹⁰⁹ The *New York Herald* pointedly blamed Brown's abolitionist supporters for the Harpers Ferry incident. "They—not the crazy fanatic John Brown—are the real culprits," the *Herald* insisted, "and it is they, not he, who, if justice were fairly meted out, would have to grace the gallows."¹¹⁰ Newspapers reported more arrests were going to be made in the case. An *Augusta (GA) Chronicle* headline indicated the tone of the coverage. It read, "The Harper's Ferry Insurrection—Arrest of a Suspected Follower of Ossawatimie Brown—Great Excitement."¹¹¹ Several northern newspapers, though, not only defended those accused of conspiracy, but also chided Virginia for making too much of Brown and his men. "Old Virginia will venture to hang crazy John Brown," the *Farmers' Cabinet* (NH) said, "but to undertake to hang such men as Seward, Greeley, and John P. Hale would be little too big a job...."¹¹² A committee was called to investigate charges of conspiracy, but its report did not find anything of

¹⁰⁸ *Pittsfield (MA) Sun*, Nov. 3, 1859.

¹⁰⁹ *Farmers' Cabinet* (Amherst, NH), Nov. 2, 1859.

¹¹⁰ "More Disclosures from Harper's Ferry—Two Years' Secret History of Abolitionism," *New York Herald*, Nov. 10, 1859.

¹¹¹ "The Harper's Ferry Insurrection—Arrest of a Suspected Follower of Ossawatimie Brown—Great Excitement," *Augusta (GA) Chronicle*, Nov. 12, 1859.

¹¹² "The Harper's Ferry Affair," *Farmers' Cabinet* (Amherst, NH), Nov. 9, 1859.

substance, although some of the men named had given financial support to Brown. The *Farmers' Cabinet* (NH) ridiculed the committee's proceedings and said the "mountain hath labored and brought forth a mouse."¹¹³

In the aftermath, John Brown's raid may not have been successful, but it newspaper accounts confirmed for the South that the abolitionists were willing to use violence to achieve their goals, even if it meant attacking a federal government building. As such, coverage of Brown's attack gave southerners a foothold in the argument they maintained that they were following the Constitution, they were abiding by the laws, and they were the ones being victimized by northern aggressors. Harper's Ferry would remain a landmark event for the country for many years and would continue to attract press attention. After Brown's execution the country moved toward the election of 1860, an election whose outcome appeared to have been decided long before it actually occurred.

It had become clear to the South, especially after Douglas's 1858 Senate win in Illinois, that the Democratic Party would be split in the election and the Republicans would make good on the gains they had made in 1856 and 1858. Several southern states began to make plans for what they would do if their fears proved true. Northern newspapers reported the unrest in the South, and in November 1859 the *Farmers' Cabinet* (NH) published some resolutions the Mississippi Democratic Party had passed concerning what actions it would take if a "Black Republican" were elected as president. "Mississippi will regard it as a declaration of hostility," the paper declared, "and will hold herself in readiness to cooperate with her sister States of the

¹¹³ *Farmers' Cabinet* (Amherst, NH), June 20, 1860.

South, in whatever measures they may deem necessary for the maintenance of their rights as co-equal members of the confederacy.”¹¹⁴

Southerners believed Lincoln’s election would give them no choice but to leave the Union. The *New York Herald* published a lengthy letter from U.S. Representative Laurence Keitt of South Carolina in which he proclaimed that if Lincoln won the election, disunion would be necessary. The letter included the following passage:

Thus it will be seen that a whole world lies between the North and the South, both upon the question of slavery and the character of the government. We have seen, too, that the Northern majority will use the power of the Union to destroy slavery. I have no hope of a review of the federal constitution, and its amendment, so as to secure the safety of the South. What then? I say frankly, that, in my judgment, disunion is the only remedy left to us against the dangers which menace our very existence.¹¹⁵

The *Charleston (SC) Courier Tri-Weekly* covered meetings in South Carolina that clearly outlined South Carolina’s intentions. In one meeting, a letter was read that summarized South Carolina’s feelings about Lincoln and the future. “We must cut ourselves loose from the hostile sectional domination his election would establish,” the letter read, “or it will involve us in inextricable ruin.”¹¹⁶ The *Augusta (GA) Chronicle* also weighed in on future prospects. “We do seriously fear that the Republican party will elect Lincoln to the Presidency,” the *Chronicle* stated, “and we fear the success of that party only because it would tend to still more embitter the sections against each other, to estrange the hearts of the people and to prepare the road to

¹¹⁴ “More Treason,” *Farmers’ Cabinet* (Amherst, NH), Nov. 30, 1859.

¹¹⁵ “Southern Sentiment on Lincoln’s Election. Letter from Mr. Keitt, of South Carolina. Disunion Proclaimed as a Necessity to the South,” *New York Herald*, Oct. 3, 1860. Keitt was the U.S. Representative who aided Preston Brooks in his assault on Charles Sumner by preventing anyone from stepping in to help Sumner.

¹¹⁶ “Public Meeting at Mount Pleasant, *To the Electors of Christ Church Parish*,” *Charleston (SC) Courier Tri-Weekly*, Sept. 29, 1860.

revolution.”¹¹⁷ The pessimistic outlook for a southern future with a Lincoln presidency ran through most southern newspapers.

For their part, northern newspapers disparaged the ongoing southern threat of disunion. The *Milwaukee (WI) Daily Sentinel* published a Kentucky newspaper article that carried such sentiment. The article stated:

Every four years these Southern Quixotes swell up with bad whiskey and worse logic, and tell so and so, that they—the Quioxites—will secede. Let them secede and be—blessed.—We are tired of their Gasconade, their terrific threats, and of their bloody prophecies. They were never calculated for any higher destiny than that of frightening old women and young children. They have been revived and repeated until—to use an expressive vulgarism—they are played out. Their bombast is absolutely sickening.¹¹⁸

Several newspapers wrote about the chaos of the Democratic convention and pondered the outcome of the party’s division. One Massachusetts newspaper reported:

The stampede of the fire eaters from the Charleston convention marks an epoch in the history of the democratic party. If the secessionists hold out, Douglas will get the compliment of a nomination, perhaps to day [sic]. He will have the advantage of being the regular nominee of his party, but this will hardly compensate for the loss of six or eight states.¹¹⁹

As the Democrats split into northern and southern factions and the Constitutional Union Party siphoned off a few southern Democrats, a *Louisville (KY) Journal* item chided those who had divided the party. “Yancey, and the other Brecken-rigid fire-eaters,” the article said, “seem to

¹¹⁷ “The Prospect Just Now,” *Augusta (GA) Chronicle*, May 26, 1860.

¹¹⁸ “Kentucky and the Fire-Eaters,” *Milwaukee (WI) Daily Sentinel*, Oct. 31, 1860.

¹¹⁹ *Lowell (MA) Daily Citizen and News*, May 1, 1860.

place no confidence in Shakespeare's remark that it is 'better to bear those ills we have than fly to others that we know not of.'"¹²⁰

A few southern holdouts, though, refused to believe the Democrats would lose. The *Pittsfield (MA) Sun* published an article that had appeared in the *Virginia Leader*. The article chastised those who did not have faith in the Democrats. The article made a prediction as follows:

This calm review of the history of the democratic successes and reverses during the last 25 years ought to be sufficient to satisfy the most despondent of the probability of a democratic triumph in the next presidential election.—There are clouds upon the horizon, but they are not nearly so dark and threatening as those which hovered over the party in '34, '40 or '55. They are but morning mists in the comparison.¹²¹

In November 1860, though, the *Leader's* predictions would not hold true. The election results were not a surprise to most. The Democrats were split as Stephen Douglas carried 29.5 percent of the popular vote but won only Missouri and its nine electoral votes, along with three of New Jersey's electoral votes. The Southern Democratic candidate, John C. Breckinridge, carried only 18.1 percent of the vote, but he won the lion's share of the South and 72 electoral votes. The Constitutional Union candidate, John Bell, won Tennessee, Virginia, and Kentucky, for 12.6 percent of the popular vote and 39 electoral votes. Lincoln won the election with only 39.9 percent of the popular vote but claimed 180 electoral votes.¹²² The electoral map of 1860 shows a clear line of demarcation between the southern slaveholding states and the North, with Tennessee, Virginia, and Kentucky in the middle going for Bell.

¹²⁰ "The Louisville Journal says," *Weekly Mountaineer* (Dalles, OR), Oct. 19, 1860.

¹²¹ "The Future Judged by the Past," *Pittsfield (MA) Sun*, Nov. 10, 1859.

¹²² John Woolley and Gerhard Peters, "Election of 1860," *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/showelection.php?year=1860>.

Newspapers, of course, carried extensive coverage of the election and its results. Northern newspapers printed numerous articles on the South's reaction to Lincoln's election. The *Dover (NH) Gazette* carried an article that contained articles republished from several southern newspapers. One noted that "news of Lincoln's election was received with stern indignation."¹²³ The *Milwaukee (WI) Daily Sentinel* proclaimed Lincoln had been elected president despite the work of extremists in the South. "The principle of intimidation," the paper declared, "so persistently and wickedly brought to bear on this election by Southern extremists and their allies the Northern Democratic panic-makers, has signally failed." Then, later on in the same article, the *Sentinel* appeared to extend an olive branch to the South:

Stretching out our hands to the South over this victory, we have no word of taunt to utter for the threats of disunion which were raised for our defeat. Let those threats be buried in oblivion; for through the long vista of this success we see a reign of peace from Slavery agitation, established simply by that circumscribing of Slavery within its local bounds, and that firm defence of the integrity of National Freedom.¹²⁴

The *Sentinel's* hopes for peace, though, were ill placed. The South did not believe the North would leave slavery alone within the southern slave states, and southerners were not willing to relinquish their right to slavery in the new states and territories. But southerners were by no means united on a course of action. As the election had neared, many southerners had made it clear what action they would take if Lincoln were elected. An article in the *Macon (GA) Weekly Telegraph* printed an article from the *Atlanta Confederacy* that carried the headline "What will the South do if Abraham Lincoln is Elected President?" The article stated:

¹²³ "Proceedings at the South. The Fire Eaters Full of Fight," *Dover (NH) Gazette*, Nov. 10, 1860.

¹²⁴ "The Result of the Election," *Milwaukee (WI) Daily Sentinel*, Nov. 10, 1860.

We answer this interrogatory by simply stating that the South will never permit Abraham Lincoln to be inaugurated President of the United States. This is a settled and sealed fact. It is the determination of all parties of the South. And let the consequences be what they may—whether the Potomac is crimsoned in human gore, and Pennsylvania Avenue is paved ten fathoms in depth with mangled bodies, or whether the last vestige of liberty is swept from the face of the American continent, the South, the loyal South—the Constitutional South, will never submit to such humiliation and degradation as the inauguration of Abraham Lincoln.¹²⁵

Although some southern newspapers in states such as Virginia and North Carolina asked their readers to wait and see what would unfold, others made it clear that Lincoln’s election signaled a new era. The *Augusta (GA) Chronicle* carried an article from the *Savannah (GA) Republican* titled “Spirit of the Georgia Press,” which included the following:

The presidential election is now decided beyond peradventure or a doubt. The election of Abraham Lincoln, the candidate of the Republican party of the North, to preside over and direct the destinies of this great confederacy, presents an aspect of affairs hitherto unknown to our people. It inaugurates a new era in our history, and dated the commencement of a new policy with our government. It goes farther: think or hope as we may, it brings us face to face with revolution. The dissatisfaction is deep and universal in one whole section of the Union, whose inhabitants feel that they have been trampled upon, and that every consideration of international comity and fraternal regard has been despised and set aside.¹²⁶

Many northern newspapers fully expected the South to act on its threats to secede from the Union if Lincoln were elected, and some even challenged the South on their pages. The *Richmond (VA) Whig* reprinted an article from the *New York Times* that expressed the sentiments of many northerners. It declared:

¹²⁵ “From the Atlanta Confederacy. What will the South do if Abraham Lincoln is Elected President?” *Macon (GA) Weekly Telegraph*, Aug. 10, 1860.

¹²⁶ “Spirit of the Georgia Press. From the Savannah Republican, 14th. Our Federal Relations—What Should be Done,” *Augusta (GA) Chronicle*, Nov. 15, 1860.

We are not surprised—nor in the least alarmed—at the symptoms of resentment and the movements towards secession which greet the news of Lincoln’s election in the Southern States. We have never supposed that the South would sit down quietly and submit at once to Republican ascendancy in the Federal Government. The stake for which they have been playing is too high. They are too deeply committed to permit any such retreat. They would incur the scorn and contempt of their own people if they were thus to quail before the spectre they have provoked. They are compelled to go ahead—if only to prove that they were not hypocrites and knaves in their threats.¹²⁷

Newspapers were quite clear that for many southern states an impasse between the North and the South had probably been reached, one that had been in the making for decades. Southern politicians now would have to choose what course to take, and for many there seemed to be no choice. The national division had finally become so great that it could not be overcome by compromise, accommodation, or delay, but instead would most likely lead the country to disunion and, in all likelihood, to war.

¹²⁷ “From the N.Y. Times, Aug. 9,” *Richmond (VA) Whig*, Nov. 13, 1860.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

The 1860 election returns were more than the South could bear. For southerners, the election of Abraham Lincoln as the United States' sixteenth president was an irrefutable condemnation of their way of life. For decades, American newspapers had reported on the country's growing sectional divide. In those final years, though, newspaper coverage shows how all the political debates over economic interests, political power, territorial expansion, and slavery had failed to stave off disunion. Newspapers documented how the North had increasingly resisted the South's demands to continue its practice of slavery and expand it to new territories and states. Newspapers show how during this time the Union had been continually undermined by sectionalism until it was, literally, being torn apart.

This examination of the causes of the Civil War, as seen in newspaper content, presents a picture of the issues that led the country to secession and to war. Some historians have emphasized particular causes as being primarily responsible for the insurmountable division the country ultimately faced. All of these causes played a role in bringing about the sectionalism that replaced the nationalism the American Revolution had created. As the 1800s progressed, the North's changing economy with its rising manufacturing industries placed it at odds with the South's unchanging agricultural economy. Newspapers show how this difference affected the

ability of the country's political leaders to govern using an economic policy that benefited both regions. For the South, it appeared that northern interests were being favored, and, thus, southerners believed they were being penalized financially. This tension also manifested itself in other ways. In order to protect its economic interests, the South needed to maintain its political leverage at the federal level, and newspapers show that southerners feared the country's territorial expansion would place it at a disadvantage if the new territories excluded slavery. Newspapers noted how the states became identified as being either free or slave, and how those designations carried political connotations.

Also, as the North distanced itself from slavery, there was an increase in northern anti-slavery sentiment, which ultimately gave way to more aggressive abolitionism. The South perceived the attack on slavery as an attack on its very way of life, economically, socially, and culturally. Southerners resisted northern condemnations and struggled to stem the tide of northern political influence at the federal level. The division between the North and the South in the political realm became such a crisis that negotiations and compromises failed time and again, as seen in the Compromise of 1850 and the Fugitive Slave Law. The 1850s saw the political environment spiral downward, and the heated debates began to focus on slavery as being the common thread throughout it all. Newspapers show that a perfect storm of events came together in the antebellum period and the country's leaders were either unable or unwilling to find a way to close the growing chasm that had divided the country so deeply. In the end, newspapers show how each region stood its ground, immovable and intractable, despite the looming possibility that the nation would be divided by war.

In the antebellum years, American newspapers continued to do what they had done since colonial times. As events and crises occurred in the nation, newspapers kept an account of what

Americans found important and what they thought about the struggles they faced. Empowered by the First Amendment, America's newspapers reported on the fledgling country as it went down a path that would ultimately stretch its boundaries across the continent.¹ In the process, though, these newspapers also recorded how the United States had gradually separated into two distinct and separate regions—socially, culturally, politically, and economically. American newspapers of this period, although rather small in size, usually contained extensive coverage of current political issues. Newspapers often had only four pages, two of which were often solely devoted to advertising. On the two remaining pages, many newspapers dedicated much of their space to accounts of legislative activities, often with information taken directly from the *Congressional Globe*. Because of their comprehensive coverage, newspapers during these tumultuous years offer important insights about what led this young nation to a sectional divide that would bring about the onset of war.

The tariff debates in Washington were one of the early components of the division that newspapers diligently covered. The tariffs levied in the early decades of the 1800s angered southerners, many of whom believed the nation's economic policies were beginning to penalize their agricultural interests and their dependence on goods manufactured elsewhere. The North had embarked on a manufacturing boom that had revolutionized its economy, and it looked to Washington for legislation that would favor its industries, both at home and abroad. Northern and southern newspapers carried substantial coverage of the political disagreements over economic legislation, and newspaper readers in both regions would have been keenly aware of the key players and their arguments. As William Gienapp and other historians have written,

¹ Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*. Leonard Levy, *Emergence of a Free Press* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Thomas I. Emerson, *Toward a General Theory of the First Amendment* (New York: Random House, 1966).

maintaining a powerful presence in Congress became increasingly important as each region tried to ensure that the government's policies did not hinder their economic interests. Newspapers also show that these economic differences played a role in aggravating the social and cultural differences between the two regions that would lead to war.

Historian Allan Nevins wrote about the changes in northern society that had occurred as a result of its industrial advancements and how these changes brought greater attention to the two regions' disparate cultures. Although the north remained rural in many areas, its urban growth and industrial advances made it strikingly different from the South, which still had a societal structure based on class and race. Certainly, slavery was a distinct part of this difference, and newspaper coverage of Uncle Tom's Cabin and the anti-slavery movement shows how northerners began to disparage southern society. Newspapers also show how the South aggressively responded to such charges in defense of not only slavery but also the culture and social structure of the region.

Elizabeth Varon wrote of how America's culture had been one based on unity until this time, but during the antebellum years that began to dissipate. Newspapers show how the southern states began to think of themselves as separate from the North and talk of disunion began to appear in print. Newspapers clearly show how any sense of common cause was replaced by sectional loyalties, first in the South and then in the North. As each region began to view itself as the true heirs of the founding fathers' vision for the United States, it appeared less and less likely that the regions could remain as one. Newspapers support Eric Foner's observation that national harmony was being replaced by distrust between the regions. In this same context, newspapers show how these economic and cultural concerns were strongly linked with political sectionalism.

Over time, the United States' northern and southern regions had achieved a kind of political balance of power, although some would suggest that the balance actually tilted to the South. Northern newspapers viewed with disdain the South's complaints that it was in any way being penalized politically. One northern newspaper article summed up northern views:

“The rights of the South must be protected,” say pretty much all of our Southern exchanges pretty much every time we look in them. Well what are the rights of the South, and how have they been violated? Bearing in mind the great superiority of the North in population, commerce, representation, manufactures and in all that has contributed to the growth and prosperity of the country, and how much more it has paid for the support of the government, notice below the number of officers from the organization of the government.

To support its assertion, this article listed important government positions such as president, vice-president, Supreme Court justices, and cabinet secretaries and noted whether the office holders, past and present, were northerners or southerners. The list affirmed the South's political advantage up to that point, and the 1854 editorial stated that it was time for a change.² In that context, newspapers show that the South was seriously worried that the nation's expansion threatened to do just that, and debates over the territories escalated.

The concern, as newspapers noted, was that the political balance might shift as a result of whether these new territories and states would allow slavery within their borders and how that would affect the ratio of free to slave state representatives in the halls of Congress. It seemed as if the nation had limitless opportunities for expansion, from Texas to California to Utah, but newspaper coverage indicated that such expansion would stretch America's political and social systems past their breaking points. If northern politicians could ensure that the new territories and states were free, these new regions were more likely to align politically with the North.

² *Bangor (ME) Daily Whig & Courier*, Oct. 18, 1854. Republished from the *Lowell (MA) Journal*.

Southern newspapers reported on fears that the argument to exclude slavery from new territories and states was really about excluding southerners. As historian Bruce Collins wrote, the rivalries between the two sections over westward expansion resulted in a contest over constitutional rights. As a result, newspapers show that much of the fight over political power in the territories also became a struggle over slaveowners' rights. The Wilmot Proviso brought much of that struggle to light, and Collins noted how the proviso would remain a contentious piece of legislation for years to come, even though it was never passed. Joel Silbey wrote that these sectional concerns significantly changed American politics, and newspaper coverage bears out that fact.

As the increased sectionalism took its toll, Gienapp wrote that "the coming of the Civil War must be explained ultimately in political terms." For Gienapp, America's political system had broken down by 1861, and the "Civil War constituted the greatest single failure of American Democracy."³ Newspapers recorded the political breakdowns as they occurred, often with greater frequency and intensity as the 1800s progressed. Although it was routine to read newspaper accounts of lengthy passionate discourse in Congress, these arguments now increased in vitriol and violence.

Newspapers thoroughly covered one example in the heated dispute that escalated between Senator Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri and Senator Henry S. Foote of Mississippi in 1850. Newspaper accounts show that Foote's decision to pull a gun on Benton on the floor of the Senate was roundly denounced, but Benton's behavior was also considered appalling. Each man had some partisan support in newspapers, but the general report was that both men had behaved badly. Civil discourse seemed to sink to its lowest when, in 1856, Preston Brooks took his cane

³ Gienapp, "The Crisis of American Democracy," 82.

to Charles Sumner in the Senate in a bloody assault. More important than the actual attack, though, was how newspapers reported the regional reaction to it. Southern presses staunchly sided with Brooks for his defense of the honor of a fellow southerner. The Northern press was outraged by southern newspaper praise for Brooks and cited the South's admiration for him as an example of southern society's degradation, which the North attributed to slavery and the slave power. Although initial newspaper reports noted that Sumner's speech was particularly vitriolic and that other senators had taken issue with his words, Brooks' violent response silenced Sumner's newspaper critics and helped to cast him as an innocent victim. Northern newspapers republished southern newspaper articles, which showed northern newspaper readers the extent of southern admiration for Brooks. The South's attempts to justify Brooks' actions were met with northern howls of disapproval and even the South flinched a bit as Brooks' behavior allowed northern newspapers to call into question the southern code of honor. These newspaper accounts of the escalation in verbal and physical altercations in the halls of government reflected sectional political loyalties that had deepened with each passing year. Long before they bloodied battlefields, northerners and southerners bloodied each other in the halls of Congress, and newspaper pages ran with reports that heightened emotions and reflected a lack of constructive political discourse at a crucial time.

The breakdown in America's political system during this period was one that historian David Donald described as the result of an "excess of democracy." For Donald and other revisionist Civil War historians, none of the pre-war crises that occurred in the United States could have, on their own, been solely responsible for the war. Newspaper coverage does show that the war was a culmination of many crises, most of which the country's leaders mishandled. American society, according to Donald, was not organized in a way to handle each of these

crises as they occurred, and, ultimately, there was a failure of political governance. Newspaper articles during this time are a record of politicians' ineptness in handling the crises that arose and how the country's elected leaders all too often resorted to short-term solutions, political compromises that clearly would not stand the test of time. Over and over, newspapers covered how politicians took action that they touted would save the Union. Newspapers, though, often noted that the legislative decisions would not prevent a crisis at a later date.

During these critical years, newspaper accounts show that Congress was often filled with powerful voices such as John C. Calhoun, Daniel Webster, Henry Clay, and Stephen Douglas, but the executive branch was sorely lacking in strong leadership, especially in the 1850s with Presidents Fillmore, Pierce, and Buchanan. Newspaper coverage gives credence to the theory that the political failings of America's leaders in the antebellum years played a pivotal role in leading the country to war. Additionally, as historian Michael Holt wrote, the North and the South had become so divided that American politics became increasingly sectionalized, and the two regions were unable to successfully participate in the political party system.⁴

Newspaper coverage of the violence in the Kansas territory helped show how the country's political failures made it difficult to find a suitable resolution for the region and caused a civil war that would have ramifications for the entire nation. Southerners thought the Kansas-Nebraska Act would favor their insistence on the right to take slave property into new territories. Northern newspapers, though, often portrayed the violence in Kansas as the fault of southerner slaveholders and such coverage put southerners on the defensive. Although northern newspapers often reported that abolitionist settlers were troublemakers, southern slaveholders took the brunt of the blame. While southerners were considered "ruffians," abolitionists seemed to get a pass

⁴ Michael F. Holt, *The Political Crisis of the 1850s* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978).

form the press, just as John Brown did for the Osawatomie murders. Newspaper coverage of Kansas and the use of terms like “bloody” and “civil war” served only to make such violence familiar to readers. If such passion was possible in Kansas, readers may have wondered, then why not in the rest of the country? Newspaper coverage revealed entrenched ideologies that increasingly left little room for compromise. The way in which each region viewed slavery and the property rights of slaveowners affected every other issue in the conflict and became the core justification for both sides’ positions.

As historian James Rhodes wrote, northerners viewed slavery as a moral evil in the South that needed to be stopped because the practice tarnished the entire country. Historian J. Mills Thornton III has noted that, indeed, slavery cannot be viewed as just a southern issue but as a national one. As such, each region felt as though it had the right to criticize the other. Susan-Mary Grant noted, though, that northern concern for slaves during the antebellum years did not extend to free blacks, an issue that southern newspapers published about with increasing frequency. Although northern abolitionists used moral and religious imperatives to advance their cause, southerners recognized that the North’s initial concern over slavery expansion was primarily economic and political, rather than moral.⁵ For the South, its social structure based on a system of slave labor made it radically different, in fact superior, from a society with a free labor system. Southerners considered the North’s free labor system to be flawed, partly because of its lack of care and concern for the livelihood of its free laborers. Allan Nevins is one of several historians who had written about this difference. He wrote:

⁵ Charles E. Beard, “The Approach of the Irrepressible Conflict,” in *The Causes of the American Civil War*, 2nd ed., ed. Edwin C. Rozwenc (Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath and Company, 1972), 71.

Differences in thought, taste, and ideals gravely accentuated the misunderstandings caused by the basic economic and social differences; the differences between a free labor system and a slave labor system, between a semi-industrialized economy of high productiveness and an agrarian economy of low productiveness. An atmosphere was created in which emotions grew feverish; in which every episode became a crisis, every jar a shock.⁶

Additionally, the abolition of slavery meant that southerners would face the loss of a tremendous financial investment, slave property, that was the underpinning for its entire social and economic system.

Newspapers reported on how the idea of people as property created clashes between northerners and southerners. For southerners, although slaves were people, they were primarily property that was cared for and considered valuable. Historian Laura Edwards wrote that the South believed that this system was in the slaves' best interests and that there was legal justification for considering people as property. As such, southerners often touted laws that dictated that slaveowners did not have absolute authority over their slaves and that there were rules for slaves' protection. Slavery allowed for a social order that southerners considered ideal. "Even as property, people remained connected to the peace precisely because their personalities made them central to the preservation of social order," Edwards wrote. "Within the peace, it was possible to be both a person and property at the same time without contradiction."⁷ Legal victories, from the Fugitive Slave Law to the Dred Scott decision, gave credence to the South's slaveowners and their property rights crusade.

⁶ Allan Nevins, "The Ordeal of the Union," in *The Causes of the American Civil War*, 2nd ed., ed. Edwin C. Rozwenc (Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath and Company, 1972), 231.

⁷ Laura F. Edwards, "Possession and the Personality of Property: The Material Basis of Authority," in *The People and Their Peace: Legal Culture and the Transformation of Inequality in the Post-Revolutionary South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 166.

The South was adamant about its right to slaves as property, but any time southerners tried to uphold that right, they often found that critical newspaper coverage created even greater opposition in the North. Newspaper reports clearly show that the northern backlash on legislative decisions ultimately hurt the South's position. In fact, it seemed as though every Southern advance in the political and legal arena during the antebellum period eventually proved futile. Newspaper coverage of the Fugitive Slave Law in the Compromise of 1850 helped make the law another hollow victory for the South. The negative northern newspaper coverage of attempts to recover fugitive slaves from places such as Boston created a firestorm of northern antislavery anger and successfully mobilized northern abolitionists. The successful return of fugitive slave Anthony Burns to Virginia came at great political cost for the South. It damaged President Buchanan's political reputation for his use of federal troops to carry out Burns' return, and it allowed abolitionists to gain more sympathetic coverage from the mainstream northern press. Certainly, the extensive newspaper coverage surrounding such forced returns of fugitive slaves had a direct bearing on the fugitive slave law's low enforcement rate. The South found that the law placed it in even more of a negative light and aided the abolitionists in their cause. It quickly became apparent that the cost of enforcing the fugitive slave law was not worth the newspaper scrutiny that accompanied it. To the South's dismay, newspaper coverage, in effect, nullified the fugitive slave law and made its enforcement difficult.

In the final years leading up to the war, newspaper accounts show that slavery became the embodiment of all the other sectional disagreements. Arguments over territorial expansion narrowed down to whether slavery would be allowed, and how that would impact southerners in property rights and politics. Economic policies were viewed in light of how they would affect the South's slave-based agrarian interests as opposed to the North's industrial economy. Cultural

differences were narrowed down to a society based on a slave system as opposed to one based on free labor, although neither side could claim true dedication to the advancement of a free black population. Politically, the debates and struggles for power within the political parties and in Congress became more sectional in the antebellum years. Hardened political positions on slavery divided the country and tore apart its political parties. Judicial and legislative actions, such as the Dred Scott decision and the Fugitive Slave Law, created even more division as the country seemed unable to hold on to any common ground for agreement.

For many Americans, their attempts to understand the events that were occurring across the country during the antebellum years were made possible because of changes in the newspaper industry. Advances in technology now allowed newspapers to report quickly on events that had the potential to take on national significance. Print helped create the context for war, concluded historian Edward Ayers, who accurately noted that it was not a coincidence that sectional disagreements rapidly grew alongside the telegraph, railroads, and newspapers in the 1840s and 1850s. Ayers wrote:

Without the papers, many events we now see as decisive would have passed without wide consequence. With the papers, events large and small stirred American people every day. The press nurtured anticipation and grievance. Americans of the 1850s grew newly self-conscious, deeply aware of who they were and who others said they were. The “North” and the “South” took shape in words before they were unified by armies and shared sacrifice.⁸

The very advances that made the North seem so different from the South were the same ones that enabled each region to read more about the other side’s opinions on the divisive issues of the day. These newspapers offer a report of what the issues were that would lead the country to such

⁸ Ayers, *What Caused the Civil War?* 140.

a disastrous point in its history. It was these newspapers that quickly reported on the 1860 election with a sense of foreboding for the country's future.

As the *Richmond (VA) Whig* and other southern newspapers reported, Lincoln's election in November 1860 was the final blow for the South.

To sum up the whole to a conclusion, we may reasonably regard it as settled, so far as Republican views and intentions can settle it, that the people of the South are living in sin and crime, that the federal Government should outlaw the domestic institutions of one-half the States of the Union, and on all occasions where it is called on to legislate with regard to them, it should so legislate as will most effectually destroy them. The question whether or not the institution of slavery should be let alone and its existence or non-existence, everywhere, left to the laws of climate and production and the wishes of the people, has been decided against us.⁹

Historian Avery Craven wrote that at this point the conflicts and crises had hardened the two regions to a point that there seemed no solution other than secession and war. Newspaper reports show that neither region seemed to see a way to alter the nation's course toward disunion. In much the same way that the early American press had covered how the colonies came together for revolution, antebellum northern and southern newspapers reported on how the country had divided into two sections that unified around their own particular causes to the point that they ultimately unleashed forces for war and disunion.

⁹ "Progress of Events," *Richmond (VA) Whig*, Nov. 30, 1860.

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