

# The Civil War and Reconstruction 1850-1861: A House Divided

---

## Section 1: Setting the stage – Thinking about the coming of the Civil War

### 1.0: Introduction

- ❖ The origins (one could start at colonial times!) – but here mostly from about mid-19<sup>th</sup> century with some relevant pre-history.
- ❖ The Civil War itself as a critical turning point
  - the conduct of the war
  - the impact on American life
  - the abolition of slavery & the emancipation of 4 million slaves
  - & the consequences of that for the North and South
  - then Reconstruction – the time after the war – the struggle for what the new united nation would look like & the legacy of slavery and abolition.
  - Highlighting the relevancy to contemporary American life
    - definition of freedom of equality
    - relationship between force & consent in implementing social change
    - rights of individual vs. government in matters of security
    - intersection of principle and compromise in government
    - what is citizenship - & who should have it
    - what is racial equality & how best is it got to
    - terrorism as a tool of intimidation and war - & how should governments react
    - & the changing role of the historian & the impact of histories told.

### 1.1: The Market Revolution and Democracy

- ❖ Things that happened in the decades prior to (and impacted) the 1850s
  - the market revolution
    - banking, currency, protective vs. free trade, role of government in economic (and societal e.g. infrastructure, education) improvements – Democratic party against & Whig party pro
    - the territorial expansion – westward, new territories
    - the technological revolution – canal, steamboat, telegraph, railroad
  - the rise of political democracy
    - suffrage based on white, male suffrage
    - Two party system – Democratic & Whig
    - the effect of political democracy on society & culture
    - as a unifying factor

## 1.2: Abolitionism

- ❖ North and South are not monoliths – they have inner divisions – but generally speaking they begin to track a different path
  - in the North (1820-60), the market revolution stimulates economic development, and a rethinking of the principles of economics and labor – more urban based, industrial, technological - agricultural work decreases replaced by new forms of labor
  - in the South the status quo is reinforced esp. in terms of agriculture and the accompanying slavery (farm work remains constant)
- ❖ Slavery as a contradiction to the very idea of America – e.g. wording of the Declaration of Independence, Constitution (Th. Jefferson as slave owner)
- ❖ The most powerful slave system of the modern world vs. one of the largest mass movements i.e. the abolitionists
- ❖ The abolitionists are a small group but they utilize the tools from the new market revolution to articulate and disseminate their message.
  - steam powered press allowing mass production of pamphlets etc.
  - reduced travel time allowing people to go “on the road” and spread their abolitionist message
- ❖ And that message is:
  - slavery is a fundamental violation of American values
  - that should be abolished immediately
  - and African-Americans given full equal rights as citizens
- ❖ They also call upon public sentiment i.e. they harness the speech tools of political democracy outside of the formal political electoral and institutional system, and call upon people to empathize with the plight of the slave – that is, they attempt to turn the experience of slavery from the abstract to something more tangible.
- ❖ The agitation works, and politics must respond - by about 1850 abolitionism has taken over the political agenda.
- ❖ The Founding Fathers created a country talking about liberty but grounded in slavery - the Abolitionists put forward the principals of rights irrespective of race or color or national origin, and that were in the end to redefine the federal law in the Reconstruction period.

## 1.3: The Civil War and the Public

- ❖ The Civil War, its players and issues, causes and consequences, still pervade today.
  - 60,000 volumes written
  - publications of various sorts
  - documentaries
  - musicals, plays, films, TV
  - merchandising, mementos
  - monuments, reenactments, museums, exhibitions – often controversy
  - names, mascots – also leading to controversy
  - as metaphor (e.g. Rand Paul “ ...Obamacare is like slavery” What!!!)

#### 1.4: The Politics of History

- ❖ The evolution of historical interpretations
- ❖ The differing points of view of historians and the political impact in the present of an accepted historical narrative
- ❖ The Civil War narrative today as fundamentally different with the founding narrative of unified nationhood
- ❖ “All history is contemporary history” – meaning the questions historians ask are given by the society they live in e.g. civil rights and feminism in the 60s meant a reappraisal of race and gender inequalities historically, and for instance the creation of new academic fields of study and specializations within the history departments of universities.
- ❖ People instinctively turn to the past to explain the present, and ask new questions based on new experiences and the accumulation of knowledge
- ❖ Oscar Wilde – “The only obligation we have to history is to rewrite it”. Each generation writes history in accordance with the debates and concerns of the time.
- ❖ Ernest Renan – “...the act of forgetting, I might almost say, historical error plays a significant role in the creation of a nation and therefore advances in the field of history are often a threat to the the nation...” i.e. nations are built on mythologies (and historians often come along and call those mythologies into question or dismantle them completely)
- ❖ The Civil War then is an epoch in American history where the public perceptions, reinforced by society and government, and scholarly inquiry are wide apart and often contradictory
- ❖ Specifically today, historians have established the unquestionable centrality of slavery to American history and particularly in respect to the Civil War, BUT in the public domain, slavery remains a peripheral issue e.g. the absence of museums, there are monuments to Confederate leaders but none to the black political leaders of the Reconstruction period.

#### 1.5: Remembering the Civil War

- ❖ In 1865 Lincoln stated slavery was the cause of the Civil War, and that was accepted to be so – by everyone. Public opinion today (accumulated over a century or so) would suggest other things: tariffs, state rights, for example. These and other issues indeed played a role, but it must be restated, the fact remains: slavery was the central cause of the Civil War.
- ❖ The narrative surrounding the Civil War is exemplary of how long discredited (by historians) views (racist views even in this instance) retain (or regain) their potency in popular consciousness.

## Section 2: American Slavery

### 2.0: Introduction

In this section, we look at the broader history of slavery in the Western Hemisphere; and especially how this impacted upon the development of the institution in America, from the colonial era through to the post-revolutionary period up to the mid. 19<sup>th</sup> century.

We consider how slavery as an institution differed in the United States to elsewhere, why it survived in America even while it was being abandoned elsewhere, how it was affected by the American Revolution and the founding Constitution. And, we track the expansion and significance of slavery leading up to the secession crisis – in 1860, there were more slaves than ever before and the slave system was an integral part of the political and economic framework of not just the Southern states, but also the economies of the North and in Europe.

### 2A: The Origins of Slavery

#### 2.1: The History of Slavery

- ❖ The reduction of people to property
  - bought and sold
  - essentially no rights
  - “socially dead”
  - NOT to be confused with inequalities or injustices
- ❖ Existed since the beginning of civilization
  - in Ancient Roman & Greek empires
  - through to the middle ages
  - into the renaissance and enlightenment
  - and in modern times
  - accepted as part of the social hierarchy
  - notion of freedom as an inherent right is a relatively new concept in human history
- ❖ Without slavery the development of the New World would have been impossible
  - Modern capitalism – financing of the Industrial revolution
  - Settlement – from the approx. 1500-1800 12.5 million people who crossed the Atlantic, 10 million were slaves!
  - The slave trade was a gigantic part of world commerce in the 17<sup>th</sup> & 18<sup>th</sup> centuries

## 2.2: New World Slavery

- ❖ Slavery in the western hemisphere developed quite differently to how it had in other places and times. Historically,
  - slavery had operated as a small unit
  - prisoners, debtors, captives
  - within household, property, etc.
  - for limited time
  - not a part of the economic order
  - freedom could be obtained
  - very often little or no overt “racial” difference existed between the “slave” and his “keeper”
- ❖ In the Americas and the Caribbean slavery differed in two fundamental ways
  - for the first time we can speak of racial slavery, that is, race became an inherent factor in differentiating between the “owner” and slave – this is important because the implication follows that should a slave be freed he or she would still be defined by the mapping of race onto slavery and vice-versa; thereby cementing an alien status
  - and secondly, this was plantation slavery – large scale, with the imperatives of economics and market place
- ❖ This latter meant that the slaves outnumbered the free people (including owners, overseers, etc.) - discipline was required to control labor force
- ❖ Why not the native populations?
  - Hard to enslave people in their own territory – their numbers, their familiarity of the land - know how to defend themselves, hide, escape, resist.
  - Also, many of the Native Americans lacked resistance to European diseases and were dying in large numbers – Africans who had had greater contact with Europeans did not have this problem to such an extent
- ❖ By the 16<sup>th</sup> century “the color of slaves changed from white to black” and slaves en masse began to be treated as impersonal items of commerce rather than individuals.
- ❖ An inner slave trade had existed in Africa, but with the arrival of the Europeans this increased significantly and become trans-Atlantic as New World interests expanded.

## 2.3: Slavery in the British Empire

- ❖ “Slave society” as opposed to a “society with slaves” – Caribbean, Brazil & the southern states of America
  - slavery is the foundation of the economic order
  - & the social order
  - slaves make up the majority of the population – it follows that the policing is brutal & paths to freedom rare
  - the existence of a racist ideology to justify the enslavement
- ❖ Major commodity of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century was sugar
  - the first mass produced & marketed commodity (previously trade revolved around luxury items)

- Atlantic trade constituted then not only of sugar but also the slaves required on the plantations (to maximize profits)
- for the British during this period northern colonies like New York or Pennsylvania were mostly important only in terms of being from where food and supplies could be shipped from so that the island land could be maximized for the (profit making, slave driven) plantations.

## 2.4: Slavery in Colonial Virginia

- ❖ First slaves in Virginia at the beginning of 17<sup>th</sup> century
  - originally more like indentured servants (for limited time)
  - included also white “criminals” from Britain
  - short life span because of harsh conditions, disease, etc. (limited term was therefore a more economically viable option).
- ❖ By the 18<sup>th</sup> century a slave society is evolving
  - indentured service had given way to life time slavery
    - life expectancy had increased & therefore slavery became a more economic option
    - slaves were now entirely black & traded from out of Africa or the Caribbean
  - plantations depend on labor & voluntary workers were rare
  - free farmers from Europe were more interested in the land granted to them in Pennsylvania for instance
- ❖ By mid-18<sup>th</sup> century half the population of Virginia are slaves
  - plantations have vastly expanded and diversified to tobacco.
  - more and more slaves are required
  - also civil (roads, docks, building) & domestic (household)
  - slavery is codified in law

## 2B: Slavery and the Republic

### 2.5: Slavery in the Eighteenth Century

- ❖ A self-reproducing slave population
  - that is, birth rate exceeds death rate
  - & this irrespective of cruel conditions
  - relatively temperate climate - outside of tropical disease zone
- ❖ A closing of the cultural gap
  - during the high time of the slave trade (1730-1770) only about 400,000 slaves were brought to America
  - by 1860 the vast majority of black population is at least two generations removed from Africa
  - there culture has become a merger of the two continents – African-American.
- ❖ The law, the slave code, is now entrenched
  - & the code is enforced through extreme violence
- ❖ Slavery was also prevalent in the northern colonies
  - docks, construction, servants, farms

- in New York City in 1750 for example 15% of the population were slaves
- not however the foundation of the economies as in the southern states
- ❖ Slavery and the slave trade were the key aspect of the Atlantic economy
  - profits flowed back to the Crown, government, merchants in Great Britain
  - this capital finances the coming industrial revolution

## 2.6: Slavery, Freedom & the American Revolution

- ❖ The Revolution causes two crises
  - first, the ideological contradiction between liberty and slavery
    - a nation created in 1776 along the tenants of liberty **but** with half a million slaves!
  - & secondly, the north begins to move away from slavery and introduces laws of emancipation
    - gradually, drawn out over a long time different states at different times
    - mostly provides for freedom under certain conditions for the children of slaves
    - but over time a line is effectively drawn through the United States – north and south, between non-slave states and slave states
    - & the British offers freedom to American slaves – many leaving with them; to Britain or Sierra Leone
    - this causes a “disruption”
- ❖ But **only** a disruption – there had been 500,000 slaves in 1776 and in 1790 there were about 700,000!

## 2.7: Slavery and the Constitution

- ❖ Slavery is **embedded** in the Constitution (though not in word – circumlocutions like “persons held to labor”!) until the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment is ratified after the Civil War and in which slavery is (and in word!) irrevocably abolished.
- ❖ Three clauses important to the Constitution were:
  - The three fifths clause came out of a compromise (in respect to people being property (slaves) & how then to be accounted for in the populous), and allows for the “free” to be counted as one and “others” with a fraction of when determining representation – the House then is based upon the “free” population and 3/5ths of the “others”.
  - A clause forbidding Congress abolishing the slave trade from Africa for twenty years.
    - During this period (until 1808) South Carolina brought in about 100,000 new slaves.
    - Congress then abolishes the slave trade (some illegal continuation).
  - Fugitive Slave Clause
    - basically says: “persons held held to labor in one state & escaping to another must be returned”
    - ambiguity in not allocating responsibility – State (& which), Fed., the owner?
    - creates “extra-territoriality” – this means, for example, slavery may be abolished in New York but it is required to respect the law of a slave state like Georgia and return any fugitive slave

- Further, the Fifth Amendment to the Constitution says that "No person can be deprived of life, liberty or property without due process of law." This means that the Federal Government would be liable to compensation to the slavery states should they attempt to seize their "property", i.e. free those held in slavery.
- ❖ The contradiction between liberty and slavery is reconciled by asserting the inherent inferiority of slaves.
  - For the first time "race" becomes the primary criteria for understanding the attributes of "mankind"
  - Black people are deemed incapable of asserting their natural rights – they lack rationality, they lack the qualities to enable them to live in freedom and liberty as the Constitution promises – it follows that the Constitution does not apply to them!
- ❖ By the 19<sup>th</sup> century race ideology has usurped class and property ownership as the determining factor in respect to voting rights (women's rights is another story!)
  - one by one states that allowed free black men to vote in the decades after the revolutionary war rescind those rights
  - all the new States entering the Union (with the exception of Maine) allow the vote only to white men

## 2.8: The Cotton Kingdom

- ❖ After the revolution many thought slavery would die out - tobacco begins to take a toll on soil & slavery begins to wain
- ❖ **But**, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century due to the industrial revolution in England, cotton becomes the primary crop & slavery is rejuvenated.
  - The mechanization of spinning & weaving increases the demand for cotton
  - The invention of the cotton gin machine that eases the removal of the seeds from the boll making the mass production and marketing easier
  - Internal slave trade supersedes that out of Africa - slaves are traded in ever greater numbers from Virginia into the cotton growing southern states
- ❖ Cotton becomes the key commodity of world trade – "Cotton is King!" – the South has a monopoly – in 1850 three quarters of the world's cotton comes from the southern states of the US.
- ❖ Not just the South, the whole nation is thriving on the profits of cotton – half the value of the entire exports of the US – capital derived from cotton builds roads, railways, industry
- ❖ The international trade is controlled out of New York – merchants, insurance (incl. the lives of slaves), ship building, port, shipping
- ❖ The north was complicit therefore in the continuation of slavery – Abraham Lincoln (2<sup>nd</sup> Inaugural address) refers in fact to **American** slavery
- ❖ In 1860 the approximately 4 million slaves were worth \$3 billion
  - more than the combined value of railroads, factories & banks in the US
- ❖ Some other points on slavery
  - irregularly distributed – confined to the plantation belt – the mountainous areas of West Virginia, Tennessee, parts of Georgia and N. Carolina are mostly inhabited by poor white subsistence farmers



- in the lower south slavery is thriving, in some of the upper south, Delaware and Maryland for instance, slavery is disintegrating rapidly. Even in Virginia slavery is no longer growing.
  - There is now a free black population in the south of about 280,000 – mostly poor farmers or wage laborers in the upper south & in the deep south, (e.g. New Orleans or Charleston) there is a relatively prosperous, propertied, educated population.
  - Most southern white families did not own slaves – about one-third did.
  - Most slave owners were not plantation owners – there were far more farm owners who had just a few slaves
  - However the plantation culture set the tone for southern society – slaves were the source of wealth, status and influence.
  - Planters dominated politics, either directly or indirectly, and policies of the governments of the southern states were geared towards perpetuating their wealth and power.
- ❖ Slavery in 1850 is entrenched, politically protected, expanding (into the deep South, not so in upper states). On the eve of the Civil War there are more slaves in the western hemisphere than ever before, and the Old South is the largest, most powerful slave society of the modern world.

## Section 3: Historians and the Coming of the Civil War

### 3.0: Introduction

Section 3 examines “historiography”; the history of history so to speak. History as the presentation of “facts” should always take into consideration precisely which “facts” are being presented (and those which are not) and in what context (and in which not) – and that these choices are in fact made based on the interpretation(s), predispositions, of the historian.

Historical interpretations about the Civil War have changed significantly over the years, and it is important to realize that this has happened in the context of the era in which particular historians have lived – in other words, any interpretation of the past can not help but be affected by the times in which a historian is socialized. And then, what affect any interpretation may have on our own times and society.

Considered then in this section is how historians thinking about the causes of the war, its duration and consequences, and whether it was “worth” it in monetary & human cost, has changed over time.

### 3A: Interpreting the War

#### 3.1: What is Historiography

- ❖ The history of history – changing interpretations over time & dependent on that time
- ❖ In terms of the Civil War, simplistically said, there are two broad interpretations
  - an irrepressible conflict (William Seward) – that is, the differences between North and South were so fundamental that they could only be resolved through war (e.g. positions on slavery, states’ rights)
  - a blundering outcome – the failure of political leadership to resolve disagreements and tensions, i.e. nothing is inevitable
- ❖ Both beg the question of inevitability. Easily said in retrospect!
- ❖ Three major factors at the end of the war to be considered
  - the cost of war in human life and resources
  - the preservation of the Union
  - the end of slavery
- ❖ The weight placed on each of those by any historian will effect how the Civil War is judged
- ❖ But historical knowledge is also created by greater society – museums, monuments, literature, media (what is chosen to be remembered and what is forgotten)
- ❖ Then there is the post-modernist idea that ponders: what is truth anyway? It’s all relative, positional! Who’s to judge?!

### 3.2: The Nationalist Historians

- ❖ First generation historians were by and large participants – their views were heavily biased dependent on whether they themselves were of the North or South, justification of their own behavior – “union” or anti-slavery in the North, “state” rights in the South.
- ❖ Following (1890s, early 20<sup>th</sup> century) were those influenced by the nationalism of the time – the so-called **nationalist historians**; sectional reconciliation (amongst white populous) in light of the Spanish-American War & a common enemy, the taking away of the rights granted to black people during Reconstruction. The historical writing reflected this trend to heal divisions.
- ❖ Fault came to be apportioned, both sides were gallant & with due cause, the term “civil” war came into use, a cult developed around Lincoln and Lee – personalities that could be admired from both sides. The Confederacy (& the war) became romanticized.
- ❖ Simplified (& in the opinion of these historians): The North was right about slavery having to be abolished but wrong about Reconstruction.

### 3.3: The Second American Revolution

- ❖ In the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there follows reinterpretations from the so-called **progressive historians**
- ❖ The progressive era is a time of
  - bitter class conflict
  - violent labor strife
  - the first social welfare legislation
  - concerns about political corruption
- ❖ In this period came the rise of an economic interpretation of history
  - political ideas & ideologies seen as a mask for economic self-interest
- ❖ The Civil War therefore interpreted as a revolutionary war between the industrial class (of the North) and the agrarian (of the South)
  - the North wanted high tariffs to ward off competition from Britain, infrastructure development & a Homestead Act (to facilitate the opening up of westward markets)
  - the South wanted free trade for their agricultural products
- ❖ Charles Beard calls the Civil War the Second Revolution – again, slavery was an issue in the Civil War only in terms of its place (as an economic consideration) in the real conflict, and that was between the industrial North and the agricultural South
- ❖ For these historians slavery was peripheral & an issue used by politicians to galvanize support – what really mattered was respective economic self-interest.

### 3.4: The Needless War

- ❖ In the 1930s and 40s there is a new interpretive school – **the Revisionists**.
  - Building upon the progressives
  - Sharing the growing anti-war mood, especially in the wake of the catastrophe of World War 1
  - Seeing war to be overly glorified
- ❖ These historians saw the Civil War narrative as being too bound by its heroic rhetoric and reinterpreted it as an unnecessary conflict – that the union could have been preserved, slavery ended (it had reached its limit of expansion), without war.
- ❖ The blame lay with politicians and, even more, with agitators especially abolitionists in the North who enflamed emotions.
- ❖ Differences were over emotionalized, rhetoric inflammatory, leaders were indecisive and self-interested, public opinion was in fact against war.
- ❖ A **blundering** generation stumbled into a **needless** war.

### 3B: How We View the War Today

#### 3.5: Post-World War II Historians

- ❖ In the wake of WWII (a “good” war against fascism) there was a new moral impetus in the slavery discussion – slavery an evil that was worth fighting a Civil War over.
- ❖ The beginnings of the modern civil rights meant the Civil War was looked at again with a different perspective
- ❖ Liberalism links itself to the civil rights movement
- ❖ The Abolitionists are seen now as precursors to this movement
- ❖ In the 60s and 70s there is a bit of a reversion for two reasons:
  - disillusionment with the Civil Rights movement and politics because racism has not been conquered, and
  - new scholarship showed that the North was not as morally united against slavery as the popular narrative suggested
- ❖ The rise of Libertarianism that saw the Civil War to have tramped upon individual liberty and created a nation state (which includes taxation!) that is counter to true liberty.
- ❖ For the Libertarian it follows that the defense of State rights and local autonomy often leads to a defense of slavery and racism

#### 3.6: Ideology and the Coming of War

- ❖ In the 1960s the irrepressible war thesis gains new impetus through the concept of conflicting ideologies.
  - the Civil War as a conflict between two societies – North and South - based on two fundamentally different labor systems – free and enslaved - which spawned two rival sectional ideologies.

- ❖ In the 70s and 80s historians and historical study turns away from large events and personality and focuses on the cultural and social.
  - localization
  - ordinary people, common issues
  - tendency to support the blundering idea whereby “national” politics tends to lead “ordinary” people in directions that are unintended and unwanted.

### **3.7: Civil War Interpretation Today**

- ❖ Both the “irrepressible” and the “blundering” are still championed
- ❖ Contentions as to the period to be studied – how “long”, beginning & ending when
- ❖ An added element – slave resistance, i.e. what the tension between master and slave did to encourage a defensive attitude in the South and support for abolitionism in the North
- ❖ The pacifist approach to the War – and the fact that an alternative version of how slavery may have been abolished is absent
- ❖ A stance that places slavery at the center of the conflict, accepts War to be anarchy and murder, but that in the end good – here, the emancipation of peoples - may come from it – DuBois’ point of view for instance.

## Section 4: Territorial Expansion and Sectional Conflict

### 4.0: Introduction

Beginning our exploration in the 1840s, we consider how the question of the moral rectitude of slavery, long a divisive subject, became inextricably entwined in the nation's territorial expansion – especially, the political debate that arose in respect to the vast areas of land in the South-West brought into the United States after the Mexican American War, and whether slavery should be allowed to expand into these new territories.

Further, we look at the anomaly that the issue of slavery arose, and with vehemence, where it did not exist, rather than where it did, and why it was that political leaders seemed unable to come up with an acceptable compromise. The divisions were so set, that by 1854 the political system was on the verge of breaking down.

### 4A: The Politics of Slavery

#### 4.1: The Mexican War and the Expansion of Slavery

- ❖ Mid 1840s - the question of westward expansionism arose
  - the Mexican American War of 1846-48 led to the acquisition of vast new territories – Texas, California, Arizona, etc.
- ❖ The Wilmot Proviso 1846 – slavery would not be allowed in any territory acquired from Mexico
- ❖ The North saw this an opportunity for the Union to have control over the States (generally and constitutionally speaking State rights had the upper hand) in not allowing slave expansion and the South saw the perpetuation of non-slavery from territoriality into Statehood.
- ❖ What became know as Free Soil was in fact racist in that whilst it was “anti-slavery” it in no way envisaged the equality of black people in society – the appeal was purely to white, northern self-interest.

#### 4.2: The Politics of Slavery

- ❖ Up to the 1840s Congress had the power to regulate the territories – see the Missouri Compromise
- ❖ Then other points of view took the ascendancy
  - John Calhoun (Senator from North Carolina) who posited that the territories are the common property of all the states therefore anyone must be able to move themselves & their property without hindrance – it follows that Congress could not then forbid slavery
  - This notion was extend in the 1850s such that the South demanded that not only could slavery not be barred but in fact had to be protected.
  - Popular sovereignty became an opposing argument whereby the position on slavery was regulated locally – in the territories themselves
- ❖ “**Popular Sovereignty**” had wide appeal

- in that it took the issue out of national politics
- becomes the official position of the Democratic Party.
- ❖ Political parties at the time
  - Democratic Party
  - Whigs
- ❖ Both have strong North & South factions – they are national parties, both have an interest (to keep the peace in their respective parties) to keep slavery off the table
- ❖ In the South – both Whig & Democrat are pro-slavery
- ❖ In the North – slavery as a subject is avoided – Whigs there with a tendency to be a little more anti-slaver
  - but growing number of anti-slavery political groups
  - also a small Liberty Party with an abolitionist agenda
- ❖ Not happy with the nominations of Zachary Taylor for the Whigs and Lewis Cass for the Democrats, anti-slavery politicians in the North, from across the parties, came together to form the Free Soil Party nominating (former President) Martin Van Buren calling for the non-extension of slavery and also the Homestead provision for free land – so free of slavery and free of charge!!
- ❖ Free Soil Party – three points
  - established and respected politicians
  - begins the link of anti-slavery with economic self-interest
  - say nothing about the rights of free blacks – they sever political anti-slavery from racial egalitarianism
- ❖ Irrespective of the lack of moral imperative, the creation of this party and the growing questioning of slavery in the Northern electorates show that abolitionist agitation is having an effect.
- ❖ In the South on the other hand electoral success was more than ever dependent on pro-slavery positions (southern Democrats voted for the slave-owner & Whig Taylor rather than the northern Democrat Cass) – reinforced a growing feeling amongst northern Democrats that their southern brethren could not be trusted.

#### **4.3: The Political Crisis of 1850**

- ❖ Zachary Taylor (Whig) wins the 1848 election, but turns out to be not as sympathetic to some of the South's agenda.
  - as a sugar plantation owner he is pro-tariff (to protect against cheaper imports from Cuba and Caribbean) – cotton, tobacco plantation owners are not so and are opposed to federal market intervention.
  - as a military man, he bridled against the rising talk of nullification and secession (in 1849; should slavery be banned in the territories).
  - comes to rely on the political advice of Sen. William Seward, a northern Whig and anti-slavery
  - his singular vision is turned towards California; failing to recognize the urgency of the political issues pertaining to slavery
- ❖ California – goldrush 1848/49 brought a huge growth in population qualifying it for Statehood – to which many Southerners were opposed as it would help tip the balance in favor of free-states.
- ❖ From this arose issues concerning

- what this would mean for the other territories acquired from Mexico, e.g. Colorado, Nevada
- a new fugitive slave law. The Supreme Court had upheld in 1842 the idea of a “common law of recaption” whereby any slave owner could, of his own volition, go interstate and retake his “property” **but** States could neither assist nor intervene, rather this onus fell under Federal jurisdiction. Consequently, the northern States began passing “personal liberty laws” which forbade the intervention of law enforcement in the rendition of fugitive slaves. The South is now demanding that the Federal government tend to the recapture of fugitive slaves and, further, to override the States’ liberty laws.

#### **4.4: The Compromise of 1850**

- ❖ Henry Clay:
  - Senator from Kentucky, in office for fifty years, “The Great Compromiser” – the Missouri compromise, the nullification compromise, now the 1850 compromise
- ❖ The 1850 Compromise put forward by Clay
  - Admit California as a free state
  - Popular sovereignty for the rest of the Mexican Cession – no Federal intervention, no Wilmot Proviso; the remaining territories decide the status of slavery.
  - Debt relief for Texas
  - Abolition of the slave trade but not slavery itself in Washington DC
  - A fugitive slave law to satisfy the South
- ❖ Brilliantly debated - & ultimately broken up by Illinois senator, Stephen A. Douglas, such that it found majorities for each of its parts.

#### **4B: The Disruption of the Political System**

##### **4.5: The Fugitive Slave Question**

- ❖ The new draconian measures of the Fugitive Slave Law quickly became a matter of contention, especially in the North.
- ❖ Totally counter to the South’s assertion relating to “State rights” in that this law
  - in fact violates States’ rights
  - is the strongest assertion of Federal rights over those of States and local authorities
- ❖ Here are some of the aspects relating to the law:
  - Fed. government would appoint commissioners to oversee the process of rendition
  - fugitives had no right to defense, or to testify of their own behalf
  - local authorities could not intervene
  - merely a process of claim and identification
  - the law imposed heavy fines on anyone who sought to assist fugitives, or even to defy an order to help in their capture
  - Ex post facto – that is, even people who had escaped and lived for years in the North could be sought out



- And even free blacks became caught up in the system – sometimes through misidentification and for other scurrilous reasons
- ❖ Most of the fugitives in the North came from the Upper South – Virginia, Maryland etc.
- ❖ Important is the **extraterritoriality** of this law. For example, whilst slavery had been banned in New York state in 1827 they still had to respect and act upon the law of, say, Maryland.
- ❖ Canada therefore quickly became a haven for fugitives.
- ❖ Became more and more a major public issue – in some places, like Pennsylvania and Massachusetts, free blacks disrupted hearings and assisted fugitives to get to Canada, others organized help through various means.

#### 4.6: Stephen A. Douglas and Popular Sovereignty

- ❖ By the time of the 1852 elections, the (1850) compromise at first appeared to have settled slavery as a national issue
  - Both the Whigs & Democrats supported it
  - The Democrat Franklin Pierce was elected in a landslide
  - The Free Soil Party received little support
- ❖ Douglas was the most important political figure of the 1850s
  - Born in Vermont, he moved to Illinois
  - but didn't consider himself a northerner, rather a Western sectionalist
  - A strong believer in local self-government and Western expansion
  - as a Manifest destiny – not just West, also Canada, Cuba.
  - Described as reckless, optimistic, impulsive
  - With his piloting through of the 1850 compromise bills could be seen as the last of the compromise politicians – those who sought unity
  - Became associated with the notion of “popular sovereignty”
- ❖ The doctrine of “Popular Sovereignty”
  - Basically, allow the people of the territories to decide for themselves their future destiny in terms of allowing, or not, slavery.
  - It would ensure that the issue is taken from the national platform, and could therefore not cause disharmony in the Democratic Party.
- ❖ Douglas saw slavery in purely political terms, ignoring the moral issue. He was opposed to anti-slavery agitation, he was racist, he saw slavery as a local Southern institution that should be of no concern to the North. And says accordingly:
  - Moral issues are not political issues
  - Politics is about compromise, morals can not be compromised.
  - The basis of national politics in a diverse society must be “respect for difference”
- ❖ He was also against the temperance movement and stopping the delivery of mail on a Sunday (pleaded for by many religious people) for similar reasons - equating individual autonomy with the local autonomy (of popular sovereignty).
- ❖ Lincoln counters all this by asking how it can be that all the rights associated with local self governance can stand above the rights of a black person

#### 4.7: The Kansas-Nebraska Act

- ❖ Kansas and Nebraska territories are part of the Missouri Compromise
- ❖ A part of that compromise since 1820 is that slavery is prohibited in both
- ❖ In 1854 Douglas introduces a bill to create territorial governance there (initially called just the Nebraska Bill)
- ❖ Southerners call for an explicit repeal of the Missouri Compromise (which forbade slavery) in the bill, & were eventually seceded to.
- ❖ Denounced by many Northerners who rightly see it as opening the way to the possibility of the expansion of slavery (as per the notion of popular sovereignty).
- ❖ – incl. a manifesto by Salmon Chase & others calling the bill “a criminal betrayal ... to spread slavery in all the territories” and calling upon Northerners to abandon their hitherto political allegiances and form a new party.
- ❖ Also, ordinary Northerners were agitated by this development – as this was a part of the country they saw as a place of potential settlement and prosperity (without the stigma of slavery)
- ❖ The bill passes – easily in the Senate but by only 113 to 100 in the House. Of those 100 43 are northern Democrats and 45 northern Whigs and the remainder Free Soilers – and this will be the basis of the new Republican coalition.
- ❖ The roots of the Republican Party are being sown
  - within a couple of years the Whigs will disappear to be replaced by this new Party
  - this will be the last time the major two party system will change until this day
- ❖ The final bill was actually called the Kansas-Nebraska Act and that led to an implicit understanding that Nebraska is north & free and Kansas, south & slave. The latter notion was absolutely rejected by the North; for this was an area that had been set aside for free labor. Conflict was preprogrammed.
- ❖ Bleeding Kansas – a bloody civil war was the the outcome.
- ❖ The irony – so-called “popular sovereignty”, as typified by this territorial Act, was supposed to take slavery out of the national political arena and confine it to a locality. But here the magnitude of the violence, the issue at hand that very well had consequences beyond the region, rebounded back on the national stage.
- ❖ In the fall elections of 1854 the Democrats suffer a total disaster in the North, candidates opposed to Kansas-Nebraska swept up seats.
- ❖ A new political alignment begins – not immediately, not all at once - for the first time of parties along sectional lines – the Republican Party in the North and the Democratic South. The era of unity politicians is at an end, the new generation will be defined by their stance on slavery.

## Section 5: Immigration and Nativism

### 5.0: Introduction

This section digresses from an explicit consideration of the sectional conflicts that grew during the 1850s, and looks instead at the politics of immigration and the ensuing brand of radical nationalism that was evolving at the same time, and how this nativism can be interpreted in terms of the divide over slavery.

The 1850s were a time of massive migration - from Ireland, from Germany, and other European countries; bringing with it social tensions, questions of citizenship and a further disruption to an already fragile political system.

### 5A: A Nation of Immigrants

#### 5.1: Hindsight and the Historian

- ❖ An advantage of studying this question now, is a matter of hindsight. We know what happened!
- ❖ This period can be looked at as the road to the Civil War, but this is a pathway invented so to speak by historians and it easy to lose sight of those things that don't seem to be necessarily a part of the narrative or trajectory (towards war).
- ❖ And so it is with the rampant anti-immigrant sentiments, that is, nativism, that also arose in this decade.

#### 5.2: Who is an American?

- ❖ Narrative of a nation of immigrants – for those seeking freedom, opportunity (see Th. Paine “Common Sense”, 1776)
- ❖ However there have been virulent outbreaks of xenophobia:
  - 1790s leading to the 1798 Alien Act which restricts and expels migrants
  - 1850s (to be discussed here)
  - World War 1 period and immediately after leading to a new immigration law in 1924
  - and at this time is a very controversial and volatile topic
- ❖ One could consider two types of definition of citizenship
  - 1. Ethnic (which may include religious) – and one of descent, i.e. one retains one's identity beyond the borders of a country (e.g. German “volk”)
  - 2. Civic nationalism – which says that a commitment to the ideals of a nation is what is important, not one's descent.
- ❖ The United States could be considered a mixture of both but with more emphasis on the latter, on top of which there is the privilege of birthright citizenship (i.e. anyone born on US soil is automatically a US citizen.)
- ❖ Prior to the Civil War only white people could immigrate and become citizens.
- ❖ In 1870 black people could become citizens, and people from Asia only in the 1940s and 1950s.
- ❖ The nativism of the 1850s came about for three reasons
  - the unprecedented flood of new immigrants in the 1840s

- the hostility towards Catholic immigrants (e.g. German and particularly the Irish) – the Catholic Church seen as a threat to the State
- the breakdown of the political system and the ensuing vacuum into which “nativism” could fit.

### 5.3: Immigration before the Civil War

- ❖ Between 1815 and 1915 30 million people immigrated from Europe to America, others came from China and from Latin America
- ❖ In 1840s and 50s there were more than 2 million immigrants – many of them Irish, also British, German, Scandinavian.
- ❖ Most went North – consequently the population grows rapidly in the northern States. Those that went South went predominately to the cities on the periphery, like New Orleans, St. Louis, Baltimore
- ❖ Main port of entry was New York, and here many stayed. In 1860 NYC had 300,000 Irish and German born residents.
- ❖ Many went West – to Wisconsin for instance. Cities like Chicago, Cincinnati, Milwaukee had very large immigrant populations.
- ❖ Some of the disrupting factors in Europe leading to this migratory wave:
  - a rapidly rising population
  - industrial and factory advances (mechanization) led to the displacement of labor in trade and handcrafts
  - the agricultural revolution and land consolidation was pushing small farmers into the cities as factory workers, or into emigration.
  - political turmoil – leading to political refugees, particularly Germans, especially as a result of the failed 1848 revolutions – many were radical.
- ❖ But the largest group, the Irish, came during the potato famine beginning in the mid-1840s. They were mostly peasant farmers who suffered (irrespective of the famine) under Anglo-Irish landowners – small plots, high rents, a marginal existence. The famine caused a breakdown in the food supply and in the winter of 1847-48 one million people died of starvation. (Population at the time 8 million – 1 million died and over the next two years 2 million left the country!)
- ❖ Many of the Germans moved West – they had some money, skills, they could farm – they became socially mobile. The Irish mostly stayed put in the cities – they were destitute, unskilled – the proletariat in other words – they took jobs as laborers, many could not speak English (Gaelic!)

### 5.4: Immigrants in America

- ❖ Initially the new immigrants didn't assimilate much – abided by their own culture, language, etc., lived in their own neighborhoods
- ❖ Associated with migration comes problems like poverty, crime, crowded slums, poor sanitary conditions
- ❖ Immigrants are most often arrested and most often recipient of public support schemes
- ❖ There is a growing social stratification as immigrants compete with native-born workers for jobs
- ❖ There is little upward mobility over the first couple of new generations
- ❖ But they are able to save money

- ❖ All in all the new immigrants are seen as causing urban problems and being disruptive to society

### 5.5: Politics, Whiteness, Religion

- ❖ Concurrent to the transformation brought by immigration to the urban areas is the rise of powerful political machines in the cities
  - particularly the Democratic Party begin to mobilize immigrant communities and a major new voting block is beginning to be formed (e.g. Tammany Hall)
  - the political machines take over a social and welfare role within the communities (in exchange for their vote!)
  - at that time voters did not have to be a citizen - only to have claimed their intention to become one
- ❖ The Catholic Church becomes a growing presence
  - it becomes more and more dominated by the Irish
  - previously it had been mostly English and French who weren't provocative and tried to be accommodating of the Protestant majority
  - Important figure – Archbishop John Hughes – under whom the Catholic Church becomes more ambitious, militant, expansionist. He also solidifies the church hierarchy, makes it more disciplined, seeks public aid, fought for parochial schools
  - William Seward (Gov. NY from 1838-42) tried to mitigate the nativist elements within his Whig party (essentially an anti-immigrant party) – being of the opinion that the immigrant vote was vital and in fact supported Hughes in his efforts to get public money for new Schools

### 5.6: Nativism

- ❖ Cultural and class convictions rooted in the native born American Protestant population
  - economic competition – labor, wage decline
  - a rejection of cultural heterogeneity
  - rampant and deep-seated anti-Catholicism
    - the Pope as an anti-Christ
    - strictly hierarchical, undemocratic
- ❖ So, to summarize the nativist view of things:
  - immigrants create class problems
  - are reluctant to assimilate
  - are to blame for rising crime, pauperism
  - participate in the corruption of the political process

### 5.7: Political Nativism

- ❖ Temperance movement was one of the first manifestation of the Nativist movement – immigrant communities had a tendency to revel in contrast to the sobriety of the native Protestant society.
  - an attempt to impose the Protestant middle-class ethic on the immigrants
  - in 1851 Maine was the first State to pass a prohibition law; followed by some other New England states and then westward.

- some (& not just immigrants) saw this as an intrusion on their individual liberties – became a divisive political issue.
- ❖ 1850s saw the coming of the Know-Nothing Party
  - originally called The Order of the Star Spangled Banner
  - secret, ritualistic 1. members had to be Protestant & 2. must vote only for Protestant native-born Americans
  - in 1855 a third pledge was added – 3. devotion to the Union, opposed to sectional division
  - name came from the secret nature of the Party, such that should one be questioned upon it one was to respond: “I know nothing” !!
- ❖ Know-Nothing demands:
  - the exclusion of persons of foreign birth from public office
  - increase the naturalization period from 5 years to 21 years
  - “resistance to the aggressions of the Catholic Church” (whatever that might mean!)
- ❖ The 1854 elections in the wake of the Kansas-Nebraska Bill were disastrous for the Democratic Party not just because of the anti-slavery issue but also the rise of this nativist party.
  - Protestants leaving the Democrats for the Know-Nothings
  - A united front against the Democrats who passed the Kansas-Nebraska Bill, were pro-immigrant, anti-prohibition laws
- ❖ In the east the Know-Nothings ran as a single party, in the west they organized with fusion movements that might include Free Soilers, Whigs. Their success was based on the pairing (and contradiction!) of freedom (anti-slavery) and American-born privilege (nativism).

### **5.8: Know-Nothings in Power**

- ❖ The greatest success in Massachusetts – swept the election board in 1854
- ❖ Most of those who opposed slavery shifted to the Know-Nothings
  - they thought nativist sentiments compatible with their anti-slavery beliefs. Why?
    - the Catholic Church was opposed to the abolitionist movement
    - also had opposed the Free Soilers
    - and was generally against all the Protestant reform initiatives of the time
  - in essence then they shared a deep anti-Catholic view point
- ❖ Much of the legislature was made up of first time politicians – ministers of the church, skilled tradesmen
- ❖ Began deporting Irish workers – there was no national immigration law & States basically ran their own immigration process – 1840-70 Mass. deported 15,000 immigrants
- ❖ Their legislative concerns were diverse and only sometimes directly related to immigrant issues -
  - anti-slavery legislation
  - personal liberty law – protecting rights of fugitive slaves
  - sent a radical anti-slavery politician to the Senate
  - racially integrated the public schools of Boston 1855 (Note: in 1849 Charles Sumner had fought – and lost - a case in the Mass. Supreme Court challenging racially segregated schools on the basis of “separate can never be equal” anticipated Brown vs. Board of Ed. 1954!)

- a commission to investigate the nunneries in Massachusetts – finding such things did not exist, investigated priest seminaries instead.
- uplift the skilled native worker (to counter the adverse effects of immigration)
- a homestead exemption law such that a home could not be seized to pay off debts
- they repealed imprisonment for debt
- first State to introduce legislation to regulate railroad rates
- they passed a temperance law
- compulsory vaccination (against smallpox) – opposed by the Catholic Church
- ❖ So in the end the Massachusetts government was reflective of the Protestant population that felt threatened by mass immigration
- ❖ Also it is illustrative of Nativism as an alternative political impulse to that of the rising sectional discord – something upon which North and South could unite (against the aliens at the door! that is, immigrants)
- ❖ Many of those who joined the Know-Nothings were conservative Whigs (now almost history) who considered the new Republican Party too radical and were looking for a moderate unifying agenda to quell the sectional tensions.
- ❖ For a time the Party was popular in the upper South where there were indeed immigrants – e.g. Maryland, Virginia, Missouri. Furthermore, these States were the borderlands between “freedom” and “slavery” and likely to be particularly affected by sectional tensions. Most who supported the Know-Nothings here were also former Whigs who didn’t want to join the Democrats.
- ❖ Their attempt to create a new political center though ultimately goes the same way as the Whigs before them – destroyed by the irreconcilable differences on the slavery issue.
- ❖ No consensus could ever be found between the anti-slavery North Know-Nothings and the pro-slavery Southerners.
- ❖ The party rises and falls fast and the Nativist voting base, particularly in the North, is absorbed into the Republican Party
- ❖ Nativism does not decline until the Civil War – and Irish and Germans fighting together with the native-born for the Union gives impetus for another shift in the evolution of American society.

## Section 6: Rise of the Republican Party

### 6.0: Introduction

In the mid-1850s, and for the last time in history to date, one of the two major parties – the Whig Party – disappeared, to be replaced by the Republican Party. In this section, we examine its sectional emergence in the North (in contrast to its contemporary southern base), and will consider the party’s opposition to the westward expansion of slavery – not just in terms of their opposition to slavery for its own sake, but in terms of their affirmation of the superiority of “free labor”.

### 6A: The Northern Economy

#### 6.1: The Railroad, North and South

- ❖ Economic fluctuations – depressions or so-called “panics” – were fairly regular during the 19<sup>th</sup> century; every 20 years or so. From the end of a depression period in about 1843 until 1857 there had been about 15 years of substantial economic growth and transformation, especially in the North.
  - this would affect the new political alignments
  - the completion of transportation networks played a key role in the development of the market revolution that defined this period
- ❖ The railroad became the main means of transportation – of goods & people
  - by 1852 there was 10,000 miles of track
  - by 1860 there was 30,000! That is, the mileage had been tripled in a decade. The United States had more railroad than all the rest of the world put together.
  - it made national markets viable, it created new cities like Chicago
    - cities, like Baltimore, St. Louis became communication hubs, places without rivers or canals could now be accessed.
  - Vast areas of the interior can be opened to agricultural markets
    - which creates a shift from subsistence farming to commercial farming
  - New opportunities arise for iron, coal industry
  - Also, real estate speculation – e. g. rise in land values with new railroad projections and new settlements are encouraged
- ❖ Agricultural change is the most important aspect
  - in the North-west wheat and corn production (mostly for a domestic market, as opposed to the export market of cotton) sky rockets
  - the eastern urban centers are consuming the farm products produced westwards – a reciprocal relationship is evolving
  - many eastern farmers must specialize on perishable products – e. g. dairy – and commercial farmers have trouble competing with the farmers further west (many move westward)
  - In the South – beyond the export market for cotton, the market is less integrated and developed – small still mostly subsistence farming. Also an enormous slave population cut off from market goods, and a plantation elite sustained by a luxury market of sorts.



- Also, whilst the South has railroads to, they, like everything else, are subordinate to, and reinforces, the big cotton interests – there is no integrated network like the one being developed in the North – east and west.

## 6.2 Lincoln's America

- ❖ By the 1850s farm produce from the North West is going eastwards not to the South
  - e.g. in the 1840s 96 % of goods from Cincinnati went down the Ohio and Miss. rivers, in 1860 only 16% the rest going by rail to cities in the East.
  - it follows there is no longer an alliance based on agricultural interests between the old North West and the South
  - & it is the new interest-based alliance between the North West and the North East that forms the basis for the Republican Party
- ❖ At the same time in the East there is an expansion of industry and factory production
  - but predominately manufacturing was small scale – situated in shops, for instance, and with a max. of about ten employees.
- ❖ And there a more changes taking place:
  - the telegraph - invented in 1844, in 1860 there was approx. 50,000 miles of wire
  - ocean going steamships – cutting the time of trans-Atlantic crossings
- ❖ Still there remains artisan workshops using skilled workers and without machinery
- ❖ So the Civil War was not an industrial vs. agricultural issue – it was much more nuanced
  - what was important was the wide dispersion of mechanical skill in the North – important for the future economic development and an asset in the Civil War
  - anti-slavery proponents would argue that slavery suppresses labor skill - by devaluing it.
- ❖ Summing up, this so-called Lincoln's America was characterized by
  - a growing wage-earning class in the cities
  - and the ideal of economic independence – small farms, shops, factories – being realized

## 6.3: The Free Labor Ideologie

- ❖ The Republican Party is representative of this small scale capitalism that has developed in the North – not a totally new idea, with roots in the ideals of the Revolutionary period.
- ❖ “Anti-slavery” is not just about the obvious literal negative but also an affirmation of this Northern form of social organization
- ❖ Republicans call themselves ***the party of free labor*** and argue its superiority such that
  - it offers the possibility of social advancement – an opportunity for people to work their way up in life
  - to attain economic independence – to own land, property, businesses
  - free labor is economically efficient (see Adam Smith – the worker has incentive to labor because he benefits from his labor)
  - wage labor as a stepping stone only to true economic independence

## 6.4: The Limits of Free Labor

- ❖ The Republicans espousal of free labor and the dignity of labor does not run as far as worker's rights and working conditions
- ❖ "Go West!" says Horace Greeley from the New York Tribune – and many of the dissatisfied did; seeking better opportunities
- ❖ Black people in the North are not being spoken to (!) – free Blacks are suffering serious social and economic discrimination – are stuck in low paid unskilled jobs with little chance of upward social mobility
- ❖ Nor are women being addressed – they do sometimes work for wages – as domestics, in crafts, small manufacturers – but free labor does not concern them because they of course (!) can not aspire to economic independence.
- ❖ The Panic of 1857 led again to the homestead idea of going west - his homestead agitation tries to deal with the contradiction of a permanent wage-earning working class in a society built on the ideal of upward mobility
- ❖ Importantly, in terms of slavery expansion westward
  - such would inhibit the migration westward of free labor
  - two different economies can be seen to be in competition (for the West)
  - should slavery expand in to the westward territories – Kansas, Nebraska, etc. – that would cut off the chance for workers from the East to seek their economic opportunities elsewhere. It follows, many would remain in the eastern cities – the population growth would remain unchecked, class divisions would increase, opportunities for advancement decrease.

## 6B: The Republican Party

### 6.5: Republicans and the South

- ❖ From a northern perspective much about the South seems opposite to the system they are pursuing
  - they are not progressive
  - they do not have a vibrant market system
  - they are aristocratic (as opposed to democratic North)
  - there is high illiteracy
  - they have an oppressed class of poor whites with little chance of advancement
  - they depend on a system of slavery
- ❖ This may be somewhat embellished, but what is true is that an immersive market system does not exist in the South - and beyond the plantation system the economy is stagnant.
- ❖ It should be emphasized that the northern, i.e. Republican Party, opposition to the slavery of the South is only a moral (race) issue up to a point. The contention is more the economical one – i.e. see above: free vs. slave labor – and "free" in the North is good for white people because it means the potential of upward mobility. The same is presumed to be possible also in the South – an economic system that can help raise white people out of impoverishment.
- ❖ So the Republican Party prescription for the South comes down to transferring their system – small towns, manufacturing, farms instead of plantations

- ❖ Important is also that at this time the Federal Government is essentially dominated by southern politicians and during the 1850s an agenda is pursued in the interest of southern plantation owners. The North is increasingly irritated that their political influence does not represent their dynamic economic expansion.

## 6.6: The Radical Republicans

- ❖ The new Republican Party is factionalized
  - between conservatives and not so
  - between former Whigs and former Democrats
- ❖ The most well known faction are the Radicals, but there is little agreement on how to classify them. Some defining characteristics thrown around are
  - agents of the northern business class – only using the slavery issue to further their agenda to extend their power into the South
  - humanitarians and moralists; the predecessors of the Civil Rights movement
  - membership was even contentious with the exception of Thaddeus Stevens and Charles Sumner and some others
  - beyond a belief in free labor, there was no uniting economic theory
- ❖ Common to the Radicals were political careers defined by the slavery issue
  - and their fight against slavery predated the Republican Party
  - political abolitionists if you will
    - they ran for office, held office – in Congress, as Governors
    - forced the slavery issue on to the agenda in the 1840s
    - and in the 1850s believed opposition to slavery to be the overriding aim of the Republican Party & rejected any modification
- ❖ They mostly came from the Upper North
  - i.e. New England, upstate New York, northern Ohio, northern Illinois, northern Michigan
  - these areas – roughly New England & the belt of westward migration - were called “burned-over” districts
    - religious and reform enthusiasms – evangelical revivals, utopian communities, temperance movement, abolitionist movement
  - Stronghold of political radicalism, Puritan excesses
  - An area of rapid growth and prosperity – transportation, economically
- ❖ Morally committed to the abolition of slavery – not just its expansion – but they have to try to work within the political system
  - One radical idea is “Freedom National”
    - confining slavery to the states where it exists
    - but severing Federal governmental connection
    - slavery to be abolished in every place under Federal authority – DC for instance, forts, ports
    - their idea was that a “cordon of freedom” would totally cut off expansion and then one could concentrate on pursuing an anti-slavery agenda in the Upper South - states like Maryland and Virginia where slavery was already stagnating
    - such notions made the South very nervous

- ❖ So the Radicals are committed to keeping anti-slavery issue the top priority and therefore oppose any nativism or anti-immigrant sentiments that may divert from their cause.

### **6.7: The Election of 1856**

- ❖ At the National Convention in 1856 John C. Fremont is nominated for President
- ❖ The platform is all about slavery
- ❖ James Buchanan of Pennsylvania is the Democratic candidate and the Know-Nothings ran with ex-President Millard Fillmore
- ❖ The new Republican Party gets a third of the popular vote and 40% of the electoral vote
  - they didn't however get all the northern vote – losing out in the Lower North e.g. Pennsylvania, Indiana
  - the Lower North is more conservative, many are southern born, border on slave states
  - to increase their chances of winning in 1860 it is clear the Republicans have to attract the Fillmore vote of the Lower North and Upper South, mostly former Whigs who do not want to vote Democrat but find that the Republican Party is exacerbating sectional divisions.

### **6.8: The Republican Coalition**

- ❖ Republican vote for Fremont came not just from former Whigs, about 20% were northern formerly Democrat voters opposed to the Kansas-Nebraska bill and southern Democratic Party control
- ❖ New alignment of political parties – Whigs are gone, Republican & to a lesser degree Know-Nothings are on the rise, the Democrats have lost much of their northern electorate
- ❖ For the Republicans, this means they have to focus on what will keep all the factions together - & this is the cessation of the westward expansion of slavery
- ❖ Former Democrats have a hardline Jacksonian stance, conservative former Whigs seek compromise
- ❖ But the largest faction are the moderates – John Sherman, Abraham Lincoln – not radicals, but are firm that the Party must coalesce behind the a non-expansion platform.
- ❖ They seek to displace the Know-Nothings in the North & then to divest the party of any nativist tendencies and attract the immigrant vote of the North-West.
- ❖ By 1860 free-labor has triumphed in the North as the dominant ideal, and the South saw their society as becoming more threatened.

## Section 7: The Buchanan Administration

### 7.0: Introduction

This section explores some of the key developments following the election of 1856 and the ensuing presidency of James Buchanan, and how the sectional divisions laid bare in that election are further exacerbated. Firstly, we look at the Dred Scott decision of the Supreme Court and then the civil war of Kansas that was to become known as “bleeding Kansas”, and Buchanan’s effort to convince Congress to admit Kansas to the Union under a pro-slavery constitution against the will of the majority of settlers.

Northerners begin to coalesce around the Republican Party and Southerners become even more radical in their pro-slavery stance. Compromise is beginning to look almost impossible.

### 7A: The Dred Scott Case and the American Nation

#### 7.1: James Buchanan

- ❖ Some characteristics of the man
  - only bachelor President
  - only President from Pennsylvania
  - considered by some (historians) to be one of the worst Presidents
- ❖ This is the period of the final dissolution of the political system and the nation hitherto
- ❖ There is much here to satisfy the “blundering” generation theory
- ❖ Politically, Buchanan is a product of his time, representative of his time
  - born in the Washington era
  - he was a Federalist, a Jacksonian
  - served in all political capacities in the Pennsylvanian legislature
  - Secretary of State under Polk, Ambassador to Europe
  - in other words he rose through the ranks to the 1856 Democratic nomination
- ❖ And standing on a platform characterized by
  - popular sovereignty – i.e. letting territories be self-determinate
  - & commitment to the Kansas-Nebraska Bill
- ❖ Buchanan succeeded in carrying the South and the lower North & hence the presidency – but the sectional divisions had been exposed & the party landscape changing radically
- ❖ So success was dependent on a unified Democratic Party - & this quickly also began to disintegrate
- ❖ Buchanan believed the entire slave issue should be kept out of politics (!) – he saw himself as a pacifier
- ❖ but he was without the character attributes to pursue his agenda – he lacked resolve, allowed himself to be bullied and quickly fell under the influence of the powerful Southern voices in his cabinet – Howell Cobb, for instance, as Treasury Sec., himself a large slave owner

## 7.2: The Dred Scott Case

- ❖ In short: Dred Scott was the slave of a Dr. Emerson in Missouri, in the 1830s Emerson took Scott with him to Illinois, where slavery was prohibited (State Law), and then to Wisconsin Territory where slavery (under the Missouri Compromise, therefore Federal Law) was also prohibited, and then later back to Missouri. When Emerson died the ownership of Scott was passed to his daughter, and as a minor she was represented by the executor of the estate, the lawyer, John Sanford. Hence, “Dred Scott v. Sanford”, when in 1846 Scott sues the estate in the Missouri court for his freedom on the grounds that residence in a free state had made him free – the so-called ‘freedom principle’. The lower court agreed, but the Missouri Supreme Court reversed the decision in 1852, wanting to stem the tide of abolitionist sentiment and nullify the precedent. The widow Emerson had remarried an anti-slavery Reverend Chaffee from Massachusetts and because the matter now became one involving another state, the appeal ends up going to the US Supreme Court.
- ❖ It is argued at the end of 1856. The Court is as divided as the nation – there are four from the North and four from the South & the Chief Justice Roger Taney is from Maryland (borderland!)
- ❖ Taney had been a slave owner, but had emancipated his slaves, but he also believed in colonization and that freed slaves should be sent to Liberia and was opposed to any significant free black population in the United States.
- ❖ Therefore he was not a pro-slavery zealot, but nor was he an abolitionist nor a Republican

## 7.3: Dred Scott and Black Citizenship

- ❖ There were three cases before the courts:
  - Was there a case at all, that is, was Dred Scott an American citizen
  - Was he free, that is, did residence on free soil make him free
  - Did Congress (that is Federal Government) have the right to ban slavery as per the Missouri Compromise
- ❖ Taney took the position that the Court had the opportunity to make judgement on the slavery and sectional conflict
- ❖ Taney & the four Southern judges quickly decided that they would call for the Missouri Compromise to be declared unconstitutional - it had already been repealed but such a determination would mean that Congress could never prohibit slavery – but Taney realized a vote that came down 5 – 4 sectionally would not look legitimate

- ❖ Taney encouraged Buchanan to encourage the Pennsylvania Justice Greer to vote with the majority
- ❖ There is not just one decision – technical, opinionated – the first and most famous is that relating to citizenship & which comes mostly at the initiative of Taney
  - 1. No, the Constitution is only for white people – “the black man has no rights which the white man is bound to respect” – citizenship was vaguely defined – Taney agreed that States could make black people citizens but that didn’t mean they had to be recognized by the nation – the Comity Clause (i.e. other states have to recognize citizens of other states) does not apply to black people – Taney emphasizes this to be an interpretation of the Founders’ intent not a matter of his or anyone else’s prejudice – “*original intent*”
    - The Dred Scott decision makes necessary the Fourteenth Amendment after the Civil War to establish the terms of citizenship (especially of black Americans)
    - This *original intent* seems contrary to the fact that at the time the Constitution was ratified African-American men could vote in most states, and had elected delegates to the convention to ratify.

#### 7.4: Dred Scott, the Territories, and National Politics

- ❖ The second point concerning freedom earned through residence on free soil
  - 2. No, said six Justices (5 southerners plus Greer)
    - because he sued in Missouri (not Illinois) Missouri law applied
    - and in Missouri he is not free because Congress lacked the power to prohibit slavery there – the Missouri Compromise is unconstitutional therefore prohibition in that territory was null and void
    - Taney adopts the reasoning of the southern political leaders who contended that the territories belonged to all the states and so Congress could not adjudicate
    - Further, he argues with the Fifth Amendment whereby arguing that Congress can not prohibit slavery because it violates the aforesaid – that is, “... no person may be deprived of life, liberty or property without due process of law”, and where a slave is considered property. (One may of course question how the first bit – life, liberty – was just sort of ignored! Did anybody question this?)
    - (A reverse of the “freedom principle” – slavery exists only in States where it has been established) Slavery exists as the natural condition under the Constitution until a State prohibits it.
  - A consequence of this is that, the Supreme Court has effectively made the platform of the Republican Party – the abolition of slavery – unconstitutional
  - Further, the notion of “popular sovereignty” in the territories can no longer function – effectively the court is saying: slavery should exist there – and who then has the authority to ban it? Congress or the territorial administration appointed by them obviously not.

- ❖ The aftermath of the decision
  - Irrespective, Rev. Chaffee freed Mr. and Mrs. Scott and their daughters – the Scotts lived for only a couple of years but their children did at least have a free life.
  - instead of the sectional peace hoped for by Buchanan the antagonism between the North and South increased – it confirmed the North’s contention that Congress and now the Supreme Court were dominated by Southern interests
  - a disastrous decline in the prestige of the Supreme Court – during the following years and the Civil War they were not called upon adjudication – they had (in the eyes of the North) lost all moral authority

### **7.5: Bleeding Kansas**

- ❖ In 1854 after the passing of the Kansas-Nebraska bill Kansas sunk into a an ongoing strife between pro-slavery and anti-slavery – the former often coming across the border from Missouri to influence the politics e.g. voting in Kansas (?) in favor of pro-slavery candidates, civil agitation
- ❖ Free settlers outnumbered pro-slavery, but the latter dominated the political agenda. They, for instance, did not recognize the authority of territorial governor appointed by the President, they set up there own legislature, introduced the death penalty for anyone who helped fugitive slaves.
- ❖ By 1856 a civil war had developed – hence “Bleeding Kansas”
- ❖ The idea of “popular sovereignty” was discredited – the idea of allowing the territories to adjudicate matters for themselves had, in respect to Kansas, deteriorated into chaos and violence.
- ❖ Even the Buchanan appointed governor, Robert John Walker from Mississippi could not assert authority – he immediately recognized the pro-slavery forces to be outnumbered by northern free settlers and suggested instead that they concentrate instead on sharpening the Democratic Party profile and give up on the slavery question.
- ❖ The rogue legislature called a convention (in Leecompton) to author a constitution for Kansas and petitioning for Statehood – the referendum that followed offered the choice between
  - a constitution allowing in the future for slavery and its protection, and the prohibition of free black people in the new state, or
  - one saying there would be no expansion of slavery, but current slavery would be protected, and free blacks prohibited
- ❖ So the constitution could not be voted against, and there were many other pro-slavery features.
- ❖ A dispute arises between the Illinois senator, Stephen A. Douglas and Buchanan. Douglas refusing to accept the referendum and Buchanan demanding that Kansas be admitted to the Union.



## 7.6: The Lecompton Controversy and the Election of 1858

- ❖ In 1858 the administration decides to push the Lecompton constitution through congress, that is
  - to admit Kansas as a slave state
  - on the basis of a constitution accepted by a referendum in which the majority (as free state people) did not participate – that is, an illegitimate referendum run by an illegitimate body.
- ❖ Northern Democrats are in a dilemma – many are up for reelection
  - including Douglas – who rebels against the bill, and in doing so also against Southern Democrats dominance of Congress – and this improves his standing in his home state of Illinois
  - a good half of the Northern Democrats side with Douglas
  - strange alliances form between these Northern Democrats and Republicans and also border state politicians who think the administrations push for slavery in Kansas is a dead end (which given the low ratio of pro- to anti-slavery demographic it is)
- ❖ The bill passes the Senate, but not the House
  - alternatives are put forward, there are fist fights, the political system (and culture) is in turmoil
  - finally a (more than tricky) compromise was worked out involving Kansas voting upon a huge federal land grant, and as a footnote that being dependent upon acceptance of the Lecompton constitution
  - this was voted down by the people of Kansas by a huge margin – reflecting the majority of free residents – that was the end of the issue in terms of slavery in Kansas but there were other consequences
    - in the 1858 congressional elections, conservative swing voters, disgusted at the whole affair flipped to the Republican Party candidates – the Filmore vote (from 1856) up for grabs in the 1860 Presidential election was tangible
    - Buchanan and the administration sought revenge against Douglas (actually supporting Lincoln in the election) – instead of uniting, the Democratic Party fell into disarray

## 7.7: The Panic of 1857 and the Rise of Southern Radicalism

- ❖ After years of prosperity, in the fall of 1857 there was a serious economic downturn (the Panic of 1857) caused by instability due to the Crimean War – less demand for goods, interruption to the trade routes - the United States as an emerging economy was subject to world market irritations
- ❖ Unemployment, bankruptcies ensued
- ❖ There was a new demand for a Homestead Act to alleviate the consequences and encourage Westward settling – supported by both northern Republicans and Democrats and of course opposed by the South who didn't want more free farmers on the move West

- ❖ The South was not impacted by the depression – the world demand for cotton remained high, the price of cotton (and of slaves) does not collapse
- ❖ The famous contention “Cotton is king” is made – who controls cotton is in command. And that is the (deep) South and the plantation owners.
- ❖ This would be the beginning of an even greater Southern radicalism – some of the ideas being floated included:
  - the emergence of a Southern nationalism built as a slave empire
  - actively working against the union and in favor secession
  - in the wake of Lecompton they mistrust previous allies – like the Democrats in the upper South and North
  - they mistrust the institutions – Congress and Supreme Court
  - they fantasize about leading an empire based on slavery outside of the Union – with places like Cuba, Haiti, Mexico, Caribbean, Nicaragua
  - contemplate reopening the international slave trade
- ❖ Legitimacy was given to the seriousness of the matter at hand in 1860 when Jefferson Davis introduces in the Senate a series of resolutions demanding
  - a slave code guaranteeing slavery in all the territories of the United States – a direct repudiation of the Republican Party position and (Douglas’s) popular sovereignty.
- ❖ This reinforces the Northern fears about slave power and its aspirations
- ❖ The Republican Party needs a candidate who can unite and importantly carry the lower North to victory in the 1860 elections.

## Section 8: The Emergence of Lincoln

### 8.0: Introduction

In this section we focus on the gradual emergence of Abraham Lincoln as a prominent figure in 1850s pre-Civil War politics, and specifically in terms of his views and aspiration relating to the key issues dominating that decade – slavery, race and labor.

### 8A: Understanding Lincoln

#### 8.1: Lincoln: Myth and Legend

- ❖ Abraham Lincoln is portrayed as the quintessential American. Biographies, books, media, movies, etc., have a Lincoln for all political persuasions
  - the moralist committed to anti-slavery – William Herndon biography
  - the ambitious politician
  - a racist to some degree like most of his day
  - changeable – growing in his views and ideas

#### 8.2: Lincoln's Early Career

- ❖ Early biography:
  - he was indeed born in log cabin in Kentucky
  - when he was very young his family moved across the Ohio river into southern Indiana – a free state but very few black people
  - moved to Illinois when he was twenty one & worked as a lawyer but already his ambitions lay in politics – Henry Clay was his idol
  - he embraced the market revolution underway during his life – moving beyond subsistence farming, the railroad, towns, manufacturing
  - it follows that he joins the Whig Party which supported economic growth and diversification and government interventions and subsidies to that end
  - however, the Whigs always lost in Illinois! And this is contrary to the “ambition” Lincoln narrative: if he had wanted purely to get ahead in Illinois he would have been a Democrat
  - said little about slavery with the exception of in 1837, and in voting against an anti-abolitionist resolution, explained his position thus: that slavery is based both on injustice (moral) and bad policy (economic), but he further makes plain that he believes abolitionism makes the matter worse. So, he is a moderate operating within the political system of the time - Illinois does not have an abolitionist movement so he is not appealing to a constituency – but he going against the grain and exhibiting political courage.

- after leaving the state legislature he remained committed to Whig politics – as an organizer and unifier
- he served one term from 1847-49 in Congress – was unpopular because he opposed the Mexican war which was strongly supported in Illinois
- After Zachary Taylor was elected President in 1848 he lobbied for an appointment but turned down the governorship in Oregon – didn't want to return to the frontier!
- To all intents and purposes by 1850 Lincoln's political career is all but over and he returns to his job as a lawyer
- But the political shake up in the wake of the Kansas-Nebraska Act refocuses the political argument – away from purely economic matters to slavery and labor issues - reopening opportunities for Lincoln (and others)
- Lincoln becomes the principal spokesman in Illinois for those opposed to the Act and to the westward expansion of slavery – he doesn't join the Republican Party though until 1855 (it didn't really exist in Illinois)

### **8.3: Lincoln and Free labor**

- ❖ Lincoln's rise had nothing to do with legislative successes – he was not in office from 1849 until he was elected president - but came instead through his oratory skills.
- ❖ His speeches in the 1850s epitomize the new Republican Party and their social agenda
- ❖ He reads a lot, he listens to, the southern pro-slavery arguments (incl. that the slave is better off than the free laborer) and answers them (the free laborer is not fixed in place rather always has the chance of social mobility)
- ❖ He carefully spins his own image – illustrative of his own humble beginnings and making best use of his opportunities
- ❖ Touches upon all the reasons to oppose slavery – moral, religious, political, etc. but most importantly he describes it
  - as a form of "theft" – a theft of labor (and without consent) – everyone must have the right to "the fruits of their labor" – this a slave does not
  - he insists that a black man (or woman) has the equal right to improve their condition through labor

### **8.4: Lincoln and Slavery**

- ❖ In terms of the moral dimension, Lincoln insists he always opposed slavery – however, there is not much written evidence to this effect – he didn't write many letters, confide in others, keep a diary.
- ❖ Some sources suggest that, in terms of the plight of slaves: he saw, he pitied – and mostly kept his mouth shut! However distasteful, he was of the opinion the law must be abided by, and at that time it was lawful and decked by the Constitution.
- ❖ Lincoln is a nationalist – he believes in democracy, American exceptionalism – the effectivity of his argument (in the eyes of ordinary people) relies on the use of these ideas to formulate his opposition to slavery (& not on deep religious or moral arguments)
- ❖ In his rhetoric he makes the case that the expansion of slavery (and slavery itself) is an impediment to the great republican project of the American nation, as contrary to the ideal of liberty on which the nation is built.

- ❖ The dilemma is: how does one solve the slavery issue and at the same time keep the union in tact and further democratic ideals.
- ❖ In 1855 he is in a political quandary – the Whigs no longer exist, he can not be a Know-nothing (should they gain control he says: “all men are created equal except negros” would be extended to “all men are created equal except negros, foreigners and Catholics”!)
- ❖ Lincoln is not an abolitionist (he believes in the Constitution) but more than just being opposed to the expansion of slavery he now talks of the “ultimate extinction of slavery”
- ❖ So, Lincoln formulates his argument to incorporate
  - some of the moral fervor of the abolitionists
  - with a respect for the law and the nation that is appealing to more conservative northern voters
- ❖ He is the perfect middle ground for the Republican Party, and reflects the lowest common denominator of sentiment in the North in the 1850s

## **8B: Lincoln’s Rise to Prominence**

### **8.5: Lincoln and Race**

- ❖ In terms of race, Lincoln’s makes contradictory statements like
  - making a plea to discard quibbling’s about race and inferiority on one hand
  - and on the other saying he wasn’t looking to bring about social and political equality amongst the white and black races
- ❖ Also, at least from 1852-1862 Lincoln was an advocate of what was called colonization, that is, that the black population should be encouraged to leave the United States
- ❖ Lincoln basically believes in Henry Clay’s slavery emancipation plan - based on the consent of slave owners and the pursuant abolition of slavery in the states:
  - gradual emancipation of slaves - over many years
  - monetary compensation to the slave owners (for their property loss)
  - and a colonization process (neither the South or North would want to be inundated with free blacks)
- ❖ Is this racist? Probably – it sees America as a white society, and black people as an alien presence - but it is based on Lincoln’s contention that the African Americans have been unjustly deprived of their freedom, transported from their home lands & should be freed and repatriated to those lands.
- ❖ Also, he believes America to be deeply racist and a black person would never be able to achieve equality and enjoy the benefits of those rights in America.
- ❖ At this time Lincoln believes, like many, in a gradation of rights – black people have natural rights, but not civil rights (e.g. to own property, go to court) or political (e.g. to vote) or the same societal rights (e.g. relating to marriage)

## 8.6: A House Divided

- ❖ Just as Lincoln is ideologically speaking strategically placed, so is he geographically – Illinois is important
  - The Republicans need this “doubtful” state in 1860
  - Stephen A. Douglas is there – the great figure of the 50s’ - their debates become famous & Lincoln’s stature rises accordingly
  - He is from central Illinois – the north is becoming more anti-slavery, the south is pro-South, many are from or have kinship in the South, Democrats, racist
- ❖ In terms of the Republican Party, he takes a position between the more radical and the more conservative – he’s acceptable to both persuasions
- ❖ In 1855 he gets close to being elected to the Senate as an anti-slavery Whig (election by the legislature, not a popular vote) but when he sees he hasn’t the numbers encourages the Whigs to throw their support behind the anti-slavery Democrat Lyman Trumbull. Two important aspects can be taken from this:
  - firstly, that old party allegiances are breaking down and new coalitions are forming
  - and secondly, Lincoln’s magnanimity on this places him position to be the Republican candidate for Douglas’s senate seat in 1858
- ❖ He immediately starts campaigning – travels the state - supports the Republican Fremont for the presidency in 1856 – has a counter speech for every speech made by Douglas
- ❖ In 1858 some agitated for an acceptance of Douglas – now seen as an anti-southern, anti-Buchanan Democrat, but at the convention of 1858 Lincoln gives his “House Divided” speech making clear his belief that the Union’s survival was at stake.

## 8.7: The Great Debates

- ❖ Format – over many hours – one speaks, the other responds, etc. – thousands attended – untruths were told, for instance, Lincoln says Douglas in cahoots with Buchanan (obviously false) and Douglas says Lincoln wants to flood the state with negroes (also obviously false)
- ❖ They debate their different positions on slavery in the territories
- ❖ They debate the moral issue – Lincoln says Douglas does not have a moral position because he doesn’t recognize black people as human beings
- ❖ Lincoln is not elected – Republicans do get more votes (because of recent migrations into northern Illinois) but the legislature is portioned on the basis of old census figures, so the numbers favor the Democrats.
- ❖ But now Lincoln becoming a more national figure.
- ❖ In 1860 Lincoln gives his Cooper Union address in New York to introduce himself to the Eastern political leaders – this speech focuses on connecting the Union with the words and intentions of the Founding fathers, and the moral dilemma of how to reconcile a nation divided on the slavery issue.
- ❖ The speech is successful and Lincoln is launched as a potential presidential candidate.

## Section 9: The Gathering Storm

### 9.0: Introduction

Firstly, in this section we discuss John Brown, one of the most controversial figures of the 1850s – what were his ideas and motives, especially in respect to his 1859 raid on the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry - and what was (and is) his legacy. Secondly, we investigate the lead up to the election of 1860 – the campaigns and the candidates, and the aftermath - the decimation of the Democratic Party, Lincoln’s victory and a nation on the eve of war.

### 9A. Understanding John Brown

#### 9.1: John Brown and the Crisis of Abolitionism

- ❖ In the late 1850s - irrespective of the rise of the Republicans - many (abolitionists) are in despair about the lack of progress in anti-slavery initiatives and in the acceptance of their arguments based on “moral persuasion”
  - the South still dominates the Congress and federal government
  - the Dred-Scott decision
  - the Buchanan administration
  - there were 2 million more slaves in 1860 than in 1830
- ❖ Many abolitionists began to accept that “moral persuasion” (as it was called) could only be part of their tactic
  - a greater willingness to violence – acceptance of and/or participatory
  - making more use of the political system
  - resurrection of the Garrison idea of the North seceding – disunion movement
  - black abolitionists even considered the idea of black emigration (of their own volition) – by 1860 even Frederick Douglass was seeing this as a viable option
- ❖ John Brown recognized all these trends but he was the only one to translate the new mood into action. John Brown is an abolitionist who chose violence to further his cause.

#### 9.2: Brown Before Harpers Ferry

- ❖ John Brown was born in Torrington, Connecticut, in 1800 – his family moved to Ohio when he was a baby
- ❖ He grew up to be religious like most abolitionists, but unlike many who came out of the new testimonial evangelical “Second Great Awakening” of the early 1800s – optimistic, belief in a personal Savior - his was one more based on the teachings of the Old Testament, that is, more to do with a divine mission, a vengeful God. He was more attune to black abolitionists, that is, all means were acceptable in the fight against slavery, and was not interested in the endless factional disputes that plagued other abolitionists.

- ❖ He didn't benefit from the market revolutions around him – economically speaking he was not successful, and was always in debt; he had two wives and twenty children - that he treated harshly, to say the least(!)
- ❖ From 1840 he dedicated his life to the fight against slavery.
- ❖ Confides in Frederik Douglass of his plan for a fortress in the Appalachians from which forays would be made into plantation territories, agitating and freeing slaves – his idea being that such activities would cause a destabilization of the culture of slavery and the decrease in value of slave property. Sort of guerilla warfare.
- ❖ He helped publish radical black abolitionist literature.
- ❖ In 1851 he gets involved in the fight against the fugitive slave law.

### **9.3: From Kansas to Harpers Ferry**

- ❖ In 1855 John Brown becomes involved in the Kansas civil war
- ❖ After the sack of Lawrence in 1856, a haven of anti-slavery sentiment, by pro-slavery forces, Brown and his sons went to Potawatomi and murdered five pro-slavery settlers
- ❖ Irrespective of his status as an outlaw from justice he travels freely back to the East – in Boston in 1857 he meets with a prominent group that become known as the Secret Six who finance his anti-slavery endeavors – he meets with fugitive slaves in Canada – he speaks freely about his intentions
- ❖ In 1859 he tries to coerce Douglass into participating in his attack on a federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry in Virginia – Douglass declines
- ❖ October 16<sup>th</sup> 1859 – Brown and 21 men (5 African-Americans) leave his farm in Maryland and cross over into Harpers Ferry in Virginia (now West Virginia) – they take the arsenal and hold up there until the militia and federal troops (under command of Robert E. Lee) take back control – five escape, ten killed, seven captured – incl. Brown (all later executed.)
- ❖ Debatable whether Brown's raid was badly planned, executed; what his intentions were; whether he succeeded in galvanizing public opinion; at his trial he represented himself as a liberator

### **9.4: Was He Insane?**

- ❖ Governor Wise of Virginia was contemplating running as the Democratic candidate for the presidency and did not want to undermine his support in the South, so against pleas for Brown not to be executed – from those recognizing the dangers of martyrdom– he does not commute the sentence.
- ❖ His execution makes him more famous, and secures his place in history.
- ❖ Again, debatable. There is no evidence of this, beyond his anti-slavery obsession and his lawyers did try to use it as a defense at his trial – a plea which Brown refused to make.



## 9B. The Divided Nation

### 9.5: The Impact of Harpers Ferry

- ❖ Whilst some Northerners and Republicans disavowed themselves of John Brown (incl. Lincoln) others saw him as a martyr for the anti-slavery cause – there is in fact a huge ground swell of popular sentiment in the North after his execution
- ❖ African-Americans idolized him.
- ❖ In the South on the other hand, John Brown's actions and his pursuant martyrdom in the public arena reinforced the popular belief that the North was intent only in destroying their way of life – the newspapers in the South are full of rumors of plots and slave insurrections.
- ❖ So, it is the dramatic and violent events of Brown's raid and the aftermath that galvanize public sentiments; both ways – North and South. To that end one can very well see it as perhaps the first blow of the Civil War.
- ❖ John Brown made visible all the irrepressible tensions that existed between North and South, the fractious nature of the Union and whether only forceful actions could eradicate slavery, deter secession and save the Union.

### 9.6: The Nomination of Lincoln

- ❖ In 1860 **Republican** prospects look pretty good
  - they had major victories in 1858
  - the economy is not doing well, so the Homestead Act looks good, moderate tariffs (iron in Penn.)
  - but they know they have to concentrate on the lower North – Pennsylvania, Indiana, Indiana, New Jersey
  - William Seward was the most favored nominee
    - but many former Democrats and Know-Nothings were opposed to him
  - Also Salmon Chase (Gov. Ohio), Edward Bates (Missouri) – conservative
  - And then there was **Abraham Lincoln**
    - not offensive to any faction particularly
    - acceptable to the Know-Nothings and the Germans
  - Convention in Chicago (that is, Illinois; that is, home advantage Lincoln!)
  - The undecided States, opposed to Seward, quickly decide upon Lincoln - & he is nominated on the third ballot
- ❖ The Republican platform included
  - economic issues like the Homestead Act & free land in the West, moderate tariffs, Pacific railroad, but most importantly
  - what is called "Plank Eight"
    - stating the normal condition of the territories is freedom – that is more than just being opposed to expansion & the opposite of Dred Scott
  - there is also a strong plank against any form of nativism

## 9.7: The Election of 1860

- ❖ In 1859 the **Democrats** are in turmoil
  - the Deep South had put forward the so-called Alabama platform guaranteeing slavery in all the territories – as per Dred Scott
  - a great number of leaders in the Deep South are threatening secession should the Republicans win
  - further, they are opposed to **Stephen A. Douglas** as the Democratic nominee
  - the convention was in Charleston, South Carolina – whilst Douglas has the majority, the nominee required two-thirds of the delegates.
  - the platform – which incl. popular sovereignty - required only a majority and so that passed, whereupon the Southern block walked out of the convention
  - so the Convention was unable to nominate anyone and was adjourned for six weeks
  - then they meet again in Baltimore – pro-Douglas delegates from the South are seated, anti-Douglas southerners again walk out
  - in the end – Douglas is nominated and the radicals nominate **John C. Breckinridge** of Kentucky. The Democrats have two candidates.
- ❖ The last great bond of the Union has effectively collapsed – “ [the Dem. Party] has not one single principle common... to North and South”
- ❖ Then there is a new party the **Constitutional Union Party** which wants to establish a middle ground – they basically represent the Upper South and are opposed to secession. They nominate **John Bell** of Tennessee with a one sentence platform: “We stand for the Constitution and the Laws”
- ❖ Douglas goes out and campaigns – something not done during that time – and in places where he had not so much support, like, New England – but also in the deep South where he warns that should there be movement towards disunion, the Democratic North will stand with the Republicans.
- ❖ Lincoln won with 40% of the national vote – 60% of the northern vote and every state in the North – but the other 60% is split.
- ❖ Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia vote for Bell so the South is not absolutely united – Douglas wins Missouri, comes second in the popular vote & wins votes in both North and South
- ❖ The Democrats do win back control of Congress – so many southerners say the Republicans can’t do much in Congress, let’s wait and see what Lincoln does; they call for caution
- ❖ **BUT** the powerful cadre in the lower South who have been calling for secession for years see their chance and won’t be deterred.

## Section 10: The Secession Crisis

### 10.0: Introduction

In the immediate months following Abraham Lincoln's 1860 election win, seven states seceded, and the Union of the Founding Fathers was no more. This section addresses the secession crisis, exploring whether the dissolution could have been avoided through compromise; why Lincoln rejected compromise; what the motives were of the seceding states – just slavery and state's rights, or more; and how it all ended in war.

### 10A. The Secession Crisis

#### 10.1: The Idea of Secession

- ❖ A history existed, dating back to foundation, of secessionist or nullification (that is, a state's right to nullify federal laws) ideas
- ❖ The balance between federal and state jurisdiction has always been (and remains) contentious.
- ❖ Nullification is in some ways an attempt to preserve the union and inhibit secessionist ideas taking root
- ❖ The Constitution did not anticipate or provide for secession.
- ❖ The secession argument can be encapsulated thus:
  - The Southern states maintain that the Union through the Constitution is a contract whereby states cede a certain amount of jurisdiction but that the state retain the ultimate sovereignty – and may exercise their right to terminate that contract.
  - The counter argument, as articulated by Lincoln, is that the Nation predates the Constitution, and the people are sovereign, and they – not the States - created the Constitution – and the nation can not be dissolved on constitutional grounds.
- ❖ In the preceding decades, the South, and especially in respect to issues concerning slavery, often parried with the threat of secession.
- ❖ In 1860-61 it was not clear that the alternative to a hard, no compromise stance was in fact war.

#### 10.2: What is a nation?

- ❖ Many Southerners were against secession – they would rather wait and see what actions Lincoln would take in regards to slavery, and see whether the Republicans would be content with just halting expansion but leaving the South as was.
- ❖ The pro-secessionists had begun agitating for an independent South in the 1850s – a glorious future based on their own society and culture, free of the constraints of the North and their rejection of slavery, slave labor as superior to free labor, expansion into the Caribbean
- ❖ The argument that slavery was necessary to maintain white supremacy is not valid – other countries (and even the Northern states) have rejected slavery but still maintain a system of white dominance and the unequal status of black people.

- ❖ What is true is that slavery had become the central component of the Southern society in all respects: economy, work, discourse, family, etc. – that is, a “way of life” was seen to be in danger and in need of protection
- ❖ Anti-secessionists contended that the inevitable war would destabilize the system of slavery & therefore their “way of life”.
- ❖ Was the South a nation before the civil war?
  - it shared with the North – language, religion, heritage, political and judicial institutions – so what made it different?
  - the historian, David Potter, called the essence of nationhood “a community of interest” – i.e. shared interests around which a society coalesces – and that are protected institutionally;
  - and the South saw these being continually undermined and under threat from the rest of the Union

### **10.3: The Road to Secession**

- ❖ One argument is that disunity of the Southern states helped propel secession
  - the lower South was distrustful of the upper South – their near to the North, their commitment to slavery
- ❖ The lower South was becoming increasingly worried by the prospect of slave uprisings – 60% of the population of South Carolina for instance were enslaved - & the consequences
- ❖ and South Carolina is first – “The South Carolina Declaration of Secession” – a long list of grievances – and exemplifies the state of affairs
  - fugitive slaves and the North’s impeding of their return
  - anti-slavery sentiment in Washington
  - the heterogeneity of the union has been compromised by the election results
  - the census shows the North to be growing rapidly and the South stagnating - therefore a permanent minority – the North politically and systemically do not need the South!

### **10.4: Secession of the Lower South**

- ❖ In 1860 South Carolina didn’t have a presidential election – the legislature chose the electors – very authoritarian political system controlled by slave owners -the only state w here the majority of white families owned slaves
- ❖ They secede then send commissioners into other Southern states to make their case – and in other states many who espoused and organized secession were graduates of South Carolina College
- ❖ Other states soon followed – with intense debate, and sometimes not – Mississippi, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Texas ...
- ❖ By February 1861 seven slave states had seceded, but eight slave states remain in the Union
- ❖ So at the time of Lincoln’s inauguration the South is still not united. What differentiates them? The cotton states and their attention southward. And the oligarchic power of the planters in these states who were able to push through their agenda.

## 10B. The War Begins

### 10.5: Buchanan and the Crisis

- ❖ And in Washington
  - Buchanan is still President – and being pressured by Southerners in his cabinet to recognize secession - pro-secession members of his cabinet resign
  - Ironically Buchanan does not concede, and defends the Union – insists that the election of one man is not sufficient reason for breaking up the Union
  - he says he can not send in troops to prevent secession, because he can only do so at the request of States.
- ❖ Whilst some said: “let them go!” most Republicans and northern Democrats were adamantly opposed to secession
- ❖ Compromise suggestions were floated – business leaders sought compromise; sent representation southwards and lobbied the Republicans, likewise the Douglas Democrats, committees were instituted in Congress to pound out compromise proposal
- ❖ The Deep South had no interest – compromise only found support amongst the upper South – and the impetus lay here on preventing other states from seceding.
- ❖ The most serious proposal came from Senator Crittenden of Kentucky; who basically sought a constitutional amendment that would resurrect the Missouri compromise, whereby territories south of the Missouri line would become a slave area. However, that included also any new territories and the Republicans opposed this on the grounds it would encourage southward (i.e. Caribbean, Central America) expansion by the Southern states.
- ❖ Crittenden rightly warns the alternative to a compromise is civil war - and this will inevitably lead to the abolition of slavery.

### 10.6: Lincoln and Secession

- ❖ Historians think that Crittenden could have passed Congress – but Lincoln killed it. Why?
  - it would have meant the end of the Republican Party – they had won the election on a platform of ending the expansion of slavery
  - Lincoln was convinced that the crisis could not be solved by compromise – a compromise would only ever be a temporary solution
  - he was convinced that the South would use a compromise along the lines of Crittenden to pursue southward expansion (e.g. seek acquisition of Cuba or Mexico)
  - give in once and the South will continually threaten with secession
- ❖ In the shadow of Lincoln’s pending presidency, the southern secessionist States are taking federal property – forts, the mint in New Orleans. (And, in Charleston, Fort Sumter is being blocked off from supplies by the confederates.)
- ❖ From the new year 1861 through to his inauguration Lincoln travels by train to Washington (giving speeches along the way – calling for peace, pleading the interests of the Union, & standing steadfast against those who seek to destroy it). He is inaugurated on 4<sup>th</sup> March, and in his first inaugural address
  - denies the right of states to secede
  - commits to upholding federal authority (but moderates his tone in respect to forcefully retaking property seized by the confederate states)

- he states civil war to be in the hands of the dissatisfied, and thereby acknowledging its possibility

### 10.7: And the War Came

- ❖ In the early days of the administration, Seward, as Secretary of State, negotiates with Virginia about staying in the Union. Further, he puts forward an idea to instigate a war with Spain (over Cuba), to divert from the secessionist problematic – firmly rejected by Lincoln who tightens his grip on control.
- ❖ The Confederacy has inaugurated its own government – with Jefferson Davis of Mississippi as president.
- ❖ By April, Fort Sumter had almost run out of supplies. Lincoln gives the Confederacy the choice of either willingly allowing supplies (food, etc.) through or the federal government would do so by force.
- ❖ But the Confederacy says that is not acceptable & starts bombarding Sumter on April 12<sup>th</sup> – two days later the fort surrenders. The federal ships later can do nothing but evacuate the soldiers.
- ❖ So starts the Civil War, and what is said of Lincoln
  - one version (Ramsdell, southerner) – Lincoln for political reasons maneuvered the South into firing the first shot
  - another (Potter) – Lincoln took the least war-like position possible; the Confederacy did not have to respond aggressively
  - another (Stampp) – Lincoln hoped for peace, but was willing to accept war
- ❖ It follows, a historian’s interpretation is dependent upon where one’s sympathies lie.
- ❖ Lincoln immediately declares a state of insurrection in the South – calls for 75000 volunteers (the Union had an army of only 18000).
- ❖ Four more states secede – Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, Arkansas – and with call to arms. Some said Davis attacked Sumter to force Virginia into the Confederacy. Now 11 of the 15 slave states are in the Confederacy.
- ❖ The greater part of the South is therefore united. Now the unifying factor is more than just cotton - the common factor is now slavery.
- ❖ In terms of historical perspective;
  - irrepressible vs. blundering is probably not the right dichotomy, rather
  - contingency (individuals, events) vs. structure (social, interpretation)
  - and this latter should be balanced – (from Marx) *men make history but not in circumstances of their own choosing*

Again, follow this link for the edX course “The Civil War and Reconstruction – 1850-1861: A House Divided” - <https://www.edx.org/course/cwr-1850-1861-a-house-divided>