

## 21.6 The Compromise Satisfies No One

Clay and Webster hoped that the Compromise of 1850 would quiet the slavery controversy for years to come. In fact, it satisfied almost no one. Instead of quieting down, the debate grew louder each year.

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In this painting, a group of fugitive slaves are helped as they make their escape from bondage. The assistance northerners gave to escaped slaves caused hard feelings among southern slaveholders.

live like a slave, and if force is employed to reenslave me, I shall make preparations to meet the crisis as becomes a man.”

The Fugitive Slave Law also said that any person who helped a slave escape, or even refused to aid slave catchers, could be jailed. This provision, complained New England poet Ralph Waldo Emerson, made “slave catchers of us all.”

Opposition to the law was widespread in the North. When slave catchers came to Boston, they were hounded by crowds of angry citizens shouting, “Slave hunters—there go the slave hunters.” After a few days of this treatment, most slave catchers decided to leave.

Northerners’ refusal to support the law infuriated slaveholders. It also made enforcement of the law almost impossible. Of the tens of thousands of fugitives living in the North during the 1850s, only 299 were captured and returned to their owners.

**Uncle Tom’s Cabin** Nothing brought the horrors of slavery home to northerners more than *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, a novel by Harriet Beecher Stowe. The novel grew out of a horrifying vision Stowe experienced when she was sitting in church on a wintry Sunday morning in 1851. The vision began with a saintly slave known as Uncle Tom and his cruel master, Simon Legree. In a furious rage, Legree had the old slave whipped to death. Just before Uncle Tom’s soul slipped out of his bloodied body, he opened his eyes and whispered to Legree, “Ye poor miserable critter! Th’ ain’t no more ye can do. I forgive ye, with all my soul!”

### The Fugitive Slave Law

Both sides were unhappy with the Fugitive Slave Law, though for different reasons. Northerners did not want to enforce the law. Southerners felt the law did not do enough to ensure the return of their escaped property.

Under the Fugitive Slave Law, any person arrested as a runaway slave had almost no legal rights. Many runaways fled to Canada rather than risk being caught and sent back to their masters. Others decided to stand and fight. Reverend Jarmain Loguen, a former slave living in New York, said boldly, “I don’t respect this law—I don’t fear it—I won’t obey it...I will not

Racing home, Stowe scribbled down what she had seen. Her vision of Uncle Tom's death became part of a much longer story that was first published in installments in an abolitionist newspaper. In one issue, terrified readers held their breath as the beautiful slave Eliza chose to risk death rather than be sold away from her young son. Chased by slave hunters and their dogs, Eliza dashed to freedom across the ice-choked Ohio River, clutching her child in her arms. Later, Stowe's readers wept as they read her account of how Uncle Tom died at the hands of Simon Legree.

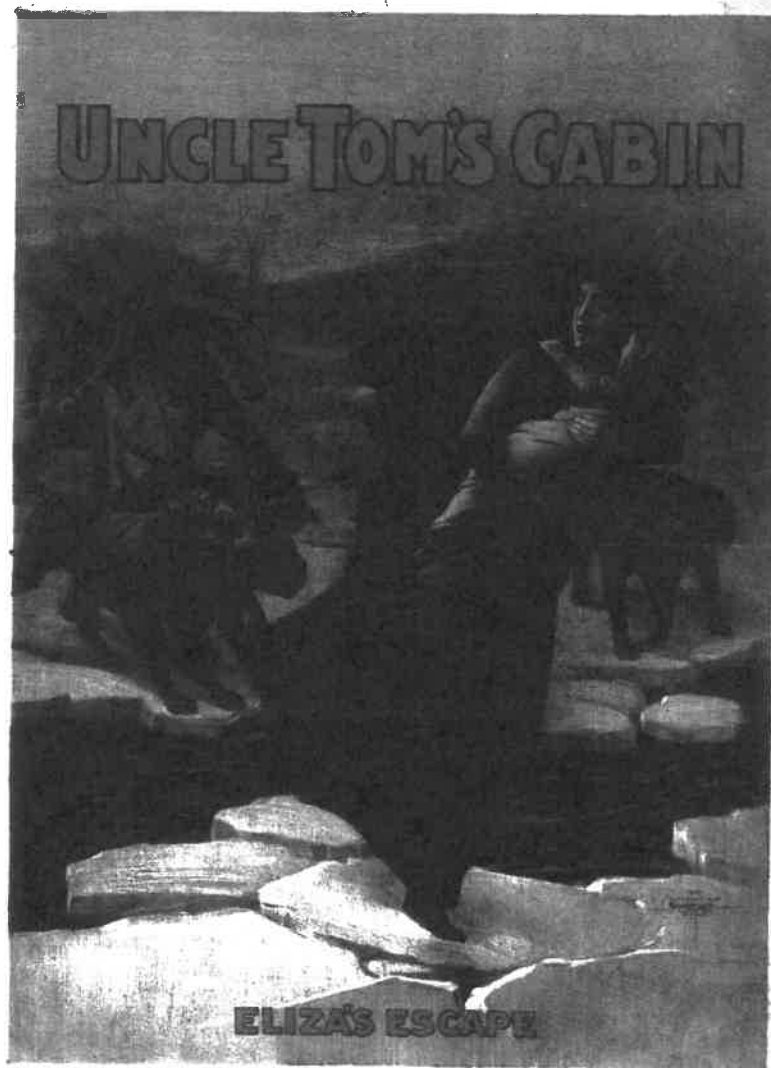
In 1852, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was published as a novel. Plays based on the book toured the country, thrilling audiences with Eliza's dramatic escape to freedom. No other work had ever aroused such powerful emotions about slavery. In the South, the novel and its author were scorned and cursed. In the North, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* turned millions of people against slavery.

### The Ostend Manifesto and the Kansas-Nebraska Act

Northerners who were horrified by slavery were roused to fury by two events in 1854: the publication of the so-called Ostend Manifesto, and the Kansas-Nebraska Act.

The document known as the Ostend Manifesto was a message sent to the secretary of state by three American diplomats who were meeting in Ostend, Belgium. President Franklin Pierce had been trying to purchase the island of Cuba from Spain, but Spain had refused the offer. The message from the diplomats urged the U.S. government to seize Cuba by force if Spain continued to refuse to sell the island. When the message leaked to the public, angry northerners charged that Pierce's government wanted to grab Cuba in order to add another slave state to the Union.

Early that same year, Senator Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois introduced a bill in Congress that aroused an even greater furor. Douglas wanted to get a railroad built to California, and he thought the project was more likely to happen if Congress organized the Great Plains into Nebraska Territory and opened the region to settlers. Because this territory lay north of the Missouri Compromise, Douglas's bill said nothing about slavery. But southerners in Congress agreed to support the bill only if Douglas made a



Perhaps no other novel in American history has had the political impact of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Upon meeting author Harriet Beecher Stowe, Abraham Lincoln said, "So you're the little woman who wrote the book that made this great war."

## The Kansas-Nebraska Act



The Kansas-Nebraska Act outraged northerners because it violated the Missouri Compromise.

Newspaper editor Horace Greeley charged in the *New York Tribune*:

*The pretense of Douglas & Co. that not even Kansas is to be made a slave state by his bill is a gag [joke]. Ask any Missourian what he thinks about it. The Kansas Territory...is bounded in its entire length by Missouri, with a whole tier of slave counties leaning against it. Won't be a slave state!...Gentlemen! Don't lie any more!*

**Bloodshed in Kansas** After the Kansas-Nebraska Act was passed, settlers poured into Kansas. Most were peaceful farmers looking for fertile soil. Some settlers, however, moved to Kansas either to support or to oppose slavery. In the South, towns took up collections to send their young men to Kansas. In the North, abolitionists raised money to send weapons to anti-slavery settlers. Before long, Kansas had two competing governments, one for slavery and one against it.

The struggle over slavery soon turned violent. On May 21, 1856, pro-slavery settlers and “border ruffians” from Missouri invaded Lawrence, Kansas, the home of the anti-slavery government. The invaders burned a hotel, looted several homes, and tossed the presses of two abolitionist newspapers into the Kaw River. As the invaders left Lawrence, one of them boasted, “Gentlemen, this is the happiest day of my life.”

The raid on Lawrence provoked a wave of outrage in the North. Money was quickly raised to replace the destroyed presses. And more “free-soilers,” as the anti-slavery settlers were called, prepared to move to Kansas.

Meanwhile, a fiery abolitionist named John Brown plotted his own revenge. Two days after the Lawrence raid, Brown and seven followers,

few changes—and those changes had far-reaching consequences.

Douglas’s final bill created two new territories, Kansas and Nebraska. It also scrapped the Missouri Compromise by leaving it up to the settlers themselves to vote on whether to permit slavery in the two territories. Douglas called this policy “popular sovereignty,” or rule by the people.

Douglas’s Kansas-Nebraska Act hit the North like a thunderbolt. Once again, northerners were haunted by nightmare visions of slavery marching across the plains. Douglas tried to calm their fears by saying that the climates of Kansas and Nebraska were not suited to slave labor. But when northerners studied maps, they were not so sure.

including four of Brown's sons and his son-in-law, invaded the pro-slavery town of Pottawatomie. There they dragged five men they suspected of supporting slavery from their homes and hacked them to death with swords.

**Violence in Congress** The violence in Kansas greatly disturbed Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts. To Sumner, it was proof of what he had long suspected—that Senator Stephen Douglas had plotted with southerners to make Kansas a slave state.

In 1856, Sumner voiced his suspicions in a passionate speech entitled "The Crime Against Kansas." Using harsh, shocking language, Sumner described the "crime against Kansas" as a violent assault on an innocent territory, "compelling it to the hateful embrace of slavery." He dismissed Douglas as "a noisome [offensive], squat, and nameless animal." Sumner also heaped abuse on many southerners, including the distinguished Senator Andrew P. Butler of South Carolina.

Just what Sumner hoped to accomplish was not clear. However, copies of his speech were quickly printed up for distribution in the North. After reading it, New England poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow congratulated Sumner on the "brave and noble speech you made, never to die out in the memories of men."

Certainly it was not about to die out in the memories of enraged southerners. Two days after the speech, Senator Butler's nephew, South Carolina representative Preston Brooks, attacked Sumner in the Senate, beating him with his cane until it broke in half. By the time other senators could pull Brooks away, Sumner had collapsed, unconscious and bloody.

Reactions to the attack on Sumner showed how badly divided the country had become. Many southerners applauded Brooks for defending the honor of his family and the South. From across the South, supporters sent Brooks new canes to replace the one he had broken on Sumner's head.

Pro-slavery men from Missouri on their way to Lawrence, the "Free Soil" capital of Kansas. These "border ruffians" used violence and threats to frighten anti-slavery citizens.



Most northerners viewed the beating as another example of southern brutality. In their eyes, Brooks was no better than the pro-slavery bullies who had attacked the good people of Lawrence. One Connecticut student was so upset that she wrote to Sumner about going to war. "I don't think it is of very much use to stay any longer in the high school," she wrote. "The boys would be better learning to hold muskets, and the girls to make bullets."

**The Dred Scott Case** In 1857, the slavery controversy shifted from the bloodied floor of Congress to the Supreme Court. The Court was about to decide a case concerning a Missouri slave named Dred Scott. Years earlier, Scott had traveled with his owner to Wisconsin, where slavery was banned by the Missouri Compromise. Upon his return to Missouri, Scott went to court to win his freedom. He argued that his stay in Wisconsin had made him a free man.

There were nine justices on the Supreme Court in 1857. Five of them, including Chief Justice Roger Taney, were from the South. Four were from the North. The justices had two key questions to decide. First, as a slave, was Dred Scott a citizen who had the right to bring a case before a federal court? Second, did his time in Wisconsin make him a free man?

Taney, however, hoped to use the *Scott* case to settle the slavery controversy once and for all. And so he asked the Court to consider two more questions: Did Congress have the power to make any laws at all concerning slavery in the territories? And, if so, was the Missouri Compromise a constitutional use of that power?

Preston Brooks savagely beats Charles Sumner on the U.S. Senate floor. It took Sumner three and a half years to recover from the beating.



## 21.7 The *Dred Scott* Decision

On March 6, 1857, Chief Justice Roger Taney prepared to deliver the most important decision of his career. Nearly 80 years old, the chief justice had long been opposed to slavery. As a young Maryland lawyer, he had publicly declared that “slavery is a blot upon our national character and every lover of freedom confidently hopes that it will be...wiped away.”

True to his words, Taney had gone on to free his own slaves. Many observers wondered whether he and his fellow justices would now free *Dred Scott* as well.

**Two Judicial Bombshells** The chief justice began by reviewing the facts of *Dred Scott*’s case. Then he dropped the first of two judicial bombshells. By a vote of five to four, the Court had decided that *Scott* could not sue for his freedom in a federal court because he was not a citizen. Nor, said Taney, could *Scott* become a citizen. No African American, whether slave or free, was an American citizen—or could ever become one.

Next, Taney dropped bombshell number two. The Court had also rejected *Scott*’s argument that his stay in Wisconsin had made him a free man. The reason was simple. The Missouri Compromise was unconstitutional.

Taney’s argument went something like this. Slaves are property. The Fifth Amendment to the Constitution says that property cannot be taken from people without due process of law—that is, a proper court hearing. Banning slavery in a territory, Taney reasoned, is the same as taking property away from slaveholders who would like to bring their slaves into that territory. And that is unconstitutional. Rather than banning slavery, Congress has a constitutional responsibility to protect the property rights of slaveholders in a territory.

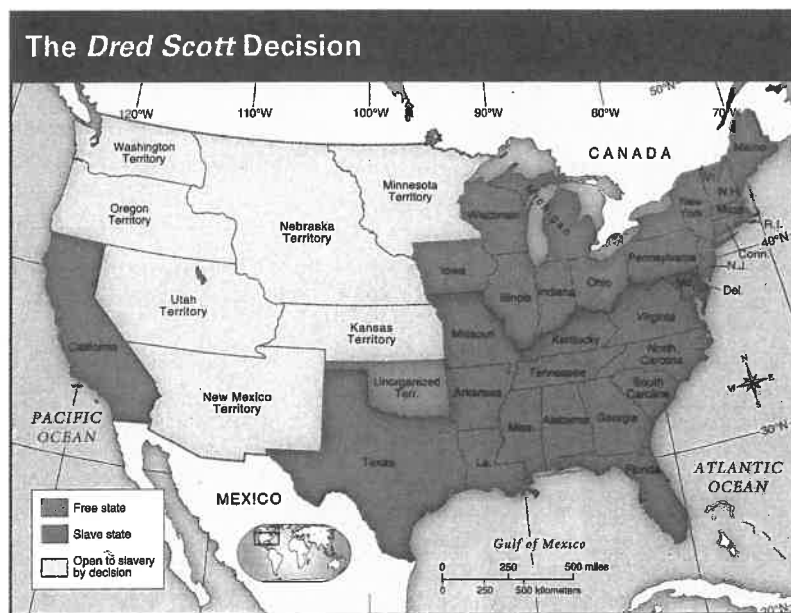
The *Dred Scott* decision delighted slaveholders. They hoped that, at long last, the issue of slavery in the territories had been settled—and in their favor.

Many northerners, however, were stunned and enraged by the Court’s ruling. The *New York Tribune* called the decision a “wicked and false judgment.” Another New York newspaper expressed outrage in its bold headlines:

**The Decision of the Supreme Court  
Is the Moral Assassination of a Race  
and Cannot Be Obeyed!**



*Dred Scott*’s struggle for freedom hastened the beginning of the Civil War and, in the end, led to freedom for all slaves.



As a result of the *Dred Scott* decision, slavery was allowed in all territories.

## 21.8 From Compromise to Crisis

During the controversy over the Kansas-Nebraska Act, anti-slavery activists formed a new political organization called the Republican Party. The Republicans were united by their beliefs that “no man can own another man...that slavery must be prohibited in the territories...that all new states must be free states...that the rights of our colored citizen...must be protected.”

In 1858, Republicans in Illinois nominated Abraham Lincoln to run for the Senate. In his speech accepting this honor, Lincoln pointed out that all attempts to reach compromise on the slavery issue had failed. Quoting from the Bible, he warned, “A house divided against itself cannot stand.” Lincoln went on: “I believe this government cannot endure, permanently half-slave and half-free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved—I do not expect the house to fall—but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing, or all the other.”

Abraham Lincoln addresses an audience during one of the famous Lincoln-Douglas debates. Stephen Douglas is directly behind Lincoln on the platform.



### The Lincoln-Douglas Debates

Lincoln's opponent in the Senate race was Senator Stephen Douglas. The Illinois senator saw no reason why the nation could not go on half-slave and half-free. When Lincoln challenged him to debate the slavery issue, Douglas agreed.

During the debates, Douglas argued that the *Dred Scott* decision had put the slavery issue to rest. Lincoln disagreed. In his eyes, slavery was a moral, not a legal, issue. He declared, “The real issue in this controversy...is the sentiment of one class [group] that looks upon the institution of slavery as a wrong, and of the other class that does not look upon it as a wrong.”

Lincoln lost the election. But the debates were widely reported, and they helped make him a national figure. His argument with Douglas also brought the moral issue of slavery into sharp focus. Compromise over slavery was becoming impossible.

**John Brown's Raid** While Lincoln fought to stop the spread of slavery through politics, John Brown adopted a more extreme approach. Rather than wait for Congress to act, Brown planned to seize the federal arsenal (a place

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where weapons and ammunition are stored) at Harpers Ferry, Virginia. He wanted to use the weapons to arm slaves for a rebellion that would destroy slavery forever.

It was an insane scheme. All of Brown's men were killed or captured during the raid on the arsenal. Brown himself was convicted of treason and sentenced to die. On the day of his hanging, he left a note that read, "I John Brown am now quite certain that the crimes of this guilty land will never be purged away but with blood."

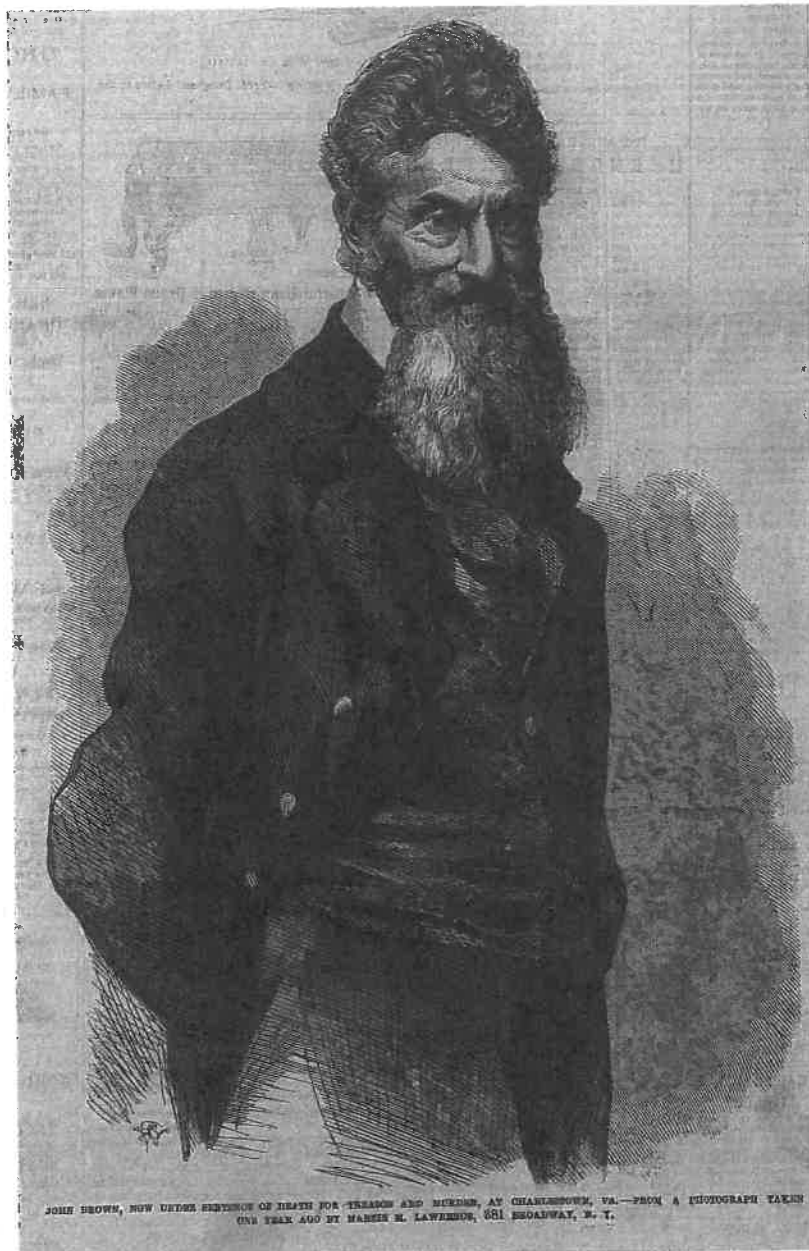
Such words filled white southerners with fear. If a slave rebellion did begin, it was their blood that would be spilled. The fact that many northerners viewed Brown as a hero, rather than a lunatic, also left white southerners uneasy.

**The Election of 1860** The 1860 presidential race showed just how divided the nation had become. While the Republicans were united behind Lincoln, the Democrats had split between northern and southern factions. Northern Democrats nominated Stephen Douglas. Southern Democrats supported John C. Breckinridge of Kentucky. The election became even more confusing when a group called the Constitutional Union Party nominated John Bell of Tennessee.

With his opposition divided three ways, Lincoln sailed to victory. But it was a strange sort of victory. Lincoln won with just 40 percent of the votes, all of them cast in the North. In ten southern states, he was not even on the ballot.

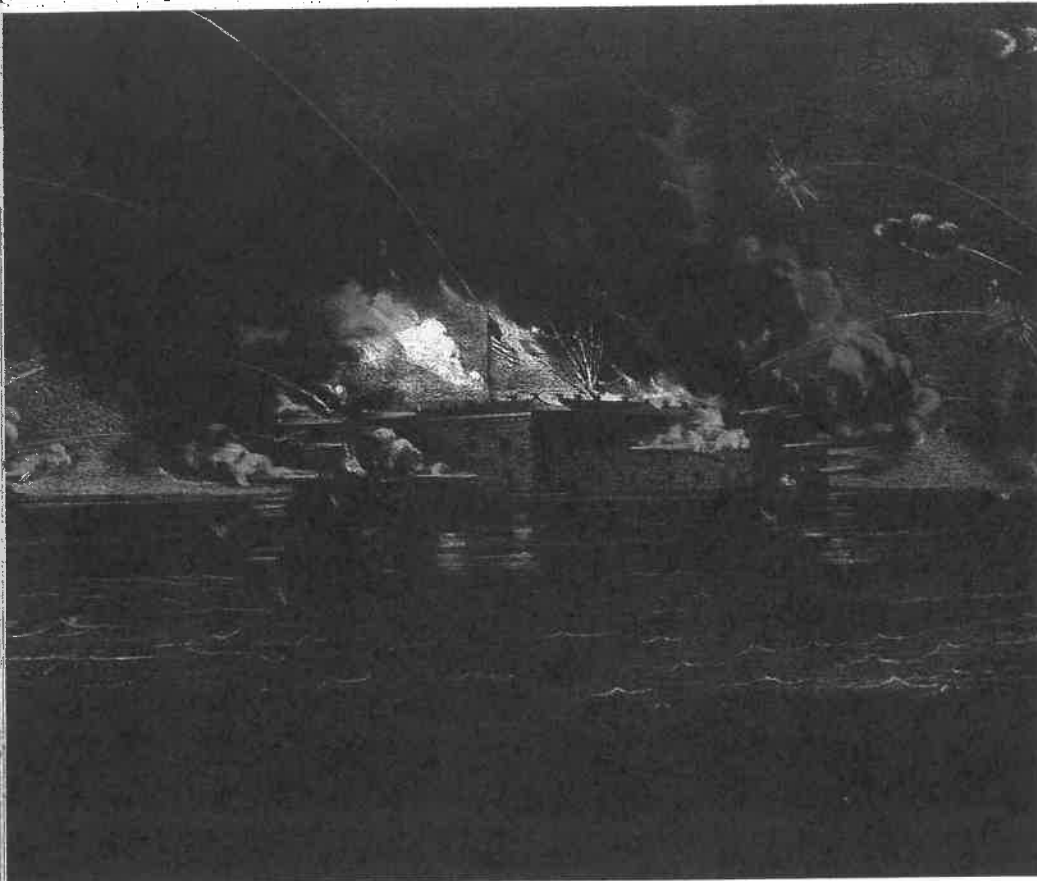
For white southerners, the election had an unmistakable message. The South was now a minority section. It no longer had the power to shape national events or policies. Sooner or later, southerners feared, Congress would try to abolish slavery. And that, wrote a South Carolina newspaper, would mean "the loss of liberty, property, home, country—everything that makes life worth living."

In the weeks following the election, talk of secession filled the air. Alarmed senators formed a committee to search for yet another compromise that might hold the nation together. They knew that finding one would not be easy. Still, they had to do something to stop the rush toward disunion and disaster.



John Brown was a hero to anti-slavery northerners and a villain to the slaveholding South.





The opening shots of the Civil War were fired at Fort Sumter on April 12, 1861. No one was killed in the 33-hour bombardment. It was a bloodless opening to the bloodiest war in American history.

Carolina, delegates attending a state convention voted that same day to leave the Union. The city went wild. Church bells rang. Huge crowds filled the streets, roaring their approval. A South Carolina newspaper boldly proclaimed, "THE UNION IS DISSOLVED!" Six more states soon followed South Carolina's lead.

**Civil War** On March 4, 1861, Lincoln became president of the not-so-United States. In his inaugural address, Lincoln stated his belief that secession was both wrong and unconstitutional. He then appealed to the rebellious states to return in peace. "In your hands, my dissatisfied fellow countrymen, and not in mine," he said, "is the momentous issue of civil war."

A month later, hotheads in Charleston, South Carolina, forced the issue. On April 12, they opened fire on Fort Sumter, a federal fort in Charleston Harbor. After 33 hours of heavy shelling, the defenders of the fort hauled down the Stars and Stripes and replaced it with the white flag of surrender.

The news that rebels had fired on the American flag unleashed a wave of patriotic fury in the North. All the doubts that people had about using force to save the Union vanished. A New York newspaper reported excitedly, "There is no more thought of bribing or coaxing the traitors who have dared to aim their cannon balls at the flag of the Union... Fort Sumter is temporarily lost, but the country is saved."

The time for compromise was over. The issues that had divided the nation for so many years would now be decided by war.

## 21.9 Secession

The Senate committee held its first meeting on December 20, 1860.

Just as the senators began their work, events in two distant cities dashed their hopes for a settlement.

In Springfield, Illinois, a reporter called on president-elect Abraham Lincoln. When asked whether he could support a compromise on slavery, Lincoln's answer was clear. He would not interfere with slavery in the South. And he would support enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Law. But Lincoln drew the line at letting slavery extend into the territories. On this question, he declared, "Let there be no compromise."

In Charleston, South