5

The Dispute over Slavery, Secession, and the Civil War

ALREADY THE NATION was reeling. On August 8, 1846, a young, impetuous, ruddy-complexioned freshman member of the House of Representatives by the name of David Wilmot, rose in the chamber and proposed a Proviso to an appropriations bill. The Wilmot Proviso took everyone by surprise. It stated "that, as an express and fundamental condition to the acquisition of any territory from the Republic of Mexico . . . neither slavery nor involuntary servitude shall ever exist in any part of said territory." Wilmot claimed that he did not oppose slavery where it already existed, as in Texas; but free territory, such as the territory received from Mexico, was totally different. "God forbid," he declared, "that we should be the means of planting this institution upon it."

All hell broke loose in the House. Southerners expected to take their slaves into a territory they had done so much to acquire. They raved and ranted in the heated debates over passage of the Wilmot Proviso, threatening secession. The House became one continuous riot of angry and frustrated men who frequently ended their outbursts with challenges to meet on the dueling ground.

Southerners tried to block passage of the Proviso, but it passed in the House by a vote of 80 to 64. In the Senate, however, where southerners had greater voting strength, they killed it. Session after session during the next several years the Proviso won passage in the House and

Remini 127-146

defeat in the Senate. "As if by magic," editorialized the *Boston Whig*, the Proviso "brought to a head the great question which is about to divide the American people." Still, the issue could not be left hanging indefinitely, especially after the Mexican War ended and the country received millions of acres in the Southwest that seemed ripe for the introduction of the "peculiar institution."

With a presidential election approaching, Polk decided to step down after one term as chief executive, and the Democrats nominated Lewis Cass of Michigan to replace him. Cass supported the doctrine of popular sovereignty, whereby local government, not the national government, should decide whether or not to allow slavery within its borders. As his running mate, William O. Butler was chosen.

Because of the growing controversy, a number of Democrats split off from the party, nominated Martin Van Buren for President, and endorsed the Wilmot Proviso. The Liberty Party, which supported abolition, joined these dissenters, and together the two groups met in Buffalo, where they formed the Free Soil Party in support of Van Buren and Charles Francis Adams, the son of John Quincy Adams, for Vice President. Their platform called for "free soil, free speech, free labor, and free men." The Whigs decided to try another general as their candidate and picked Zachary Taylor to head their ticket, along with Millard Fillmore.

In another extremely close election Taylor defeated Cass by winning 163 electoral votes to Cass's 127. The popular vote was 1,361,000 for Taylor; 1,222,000 for Cass; and 291,000 for Van Buren. The former President received no electoral votes, but he deprived Cass of enough popular votes to give New York, and with it the election, to Taylor. Had New York or Pennsylvania voted for Cass, he would have won the election.

Then, an event in California necessitated immediate congressional action concerning the territories acquired from Mexico. Shortly after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was signed, ending the war, workmen constructing a mill for John Sutter, a Swiss immigrant, discovered gold in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada in the Sacramento valley. Sutter tried to keep the discovery secret, but word of it quickly spread and a mad rush to the gold fields began. Thousands flooded into the region, crossing the plains by wagon, or sailing around Cape Horn at

the tip of South America, or fighting their way through the jungle of the Isthmus of Panama. These were the forty-niners, northerners for the most part, and their numbers swelled within a year so that the population of California skyrocketed from 6,000 to over 85,000. When delegates met in September 1849 to write a constitution, they excluded slavery. And they demanded admission into the Union as a state, not as a territory.

It was the intention of the new President, Zachary Taylor, to bring California and New Mexico into the Union quickly and if possible sidestep any fight in Congress. But the plan was hopeless. As soon as Congress convened in December 1849, the two sections of the country, North and South, began accusing each other of actions that they found intolerable and that, if pursued, would likely shatter the Union. In one exchange, Representative Robert Toombs of Georgia, "a stormy petrel . . . and always intolerant, dogmatic and extreme" shouted his protest. "I . . . avow before this House and country, and in the presence of the living God, that if by your legislation you seek to drive us from the territories of California and Mexico . . . thereby attempting to fix a national degradation upon the States of this Confederacy, *I am for disunion* and . . . I will devote all I am and all I have on earth to its consummation."

Northerners sneered. They had heard it all before, many times over. How often can you threaten to leave the Union, only to find an excuse to remain? But other southerners reiterated Toombs's threat. Alexander H. Stephens of Georgia jumped to his feet. "I tell this House that every word uttered by my colleague meets my hearty response. . . . I would rather that the southern country should perish . . . than submit for one instant to degradation."

At one point the quarreling in the House became so intense that it resulted in a melee. Members physically attacked one another. "Had a bomb exploded in the hall," reported the sergeant at arms, Nathan Sargent, "there could not have been greater excitement." It seemed as though the nation was headed toward dissolution unless some compromise could be found that would be satisfactory to both sides.

Fortunately, the "Great Compromiser" himself sat in the Senate, and on January 29, 1850, Henry Clay proposed a series of resolutions that he believed both the North and the South would find satisfactory.

These resolutions included the admission of California as a state without reference to slavery; the establishment of territorial governments for New Mexico and Utah based on popular sovereignty; settlement of the boundary of Texas and the assumption of Texas's debt on condition that Texas relinquish all claim to any part of New Mexico; passage of a more effective fugitive slave law; agreement to the "inexpediency" of abolishing slavery in the District of Columbia without the approval of the people living there and the "expedience" of abolishing the slave trade within the District; and the denial of congressional authority to interfere in the interstate slave trade.

During the debates Senator Daniel Webster delivered his famous 7th of March speech, in which he said: "I wish to speak today not as a Massachusetts man, not as a Northern man, but as an American. . . . I speak today for the preservation of the Union. Hear me for my cause." On the other hand, the dying John C. Calhoun (his speech had to be read by a colleague) blamed the North for all the nation's problems and demanded the restoration of southern rights through a constitutional amendment. "Disunion is the only alternative that is left us," he warned. Shortly thereafter, on March 31, 1850, he died. Clay appealed for mutual concessions, which, he said, were the only basis for compromise. Each side must give something and each must gain something. Neither can win or lose. Both must yield to the needs to the other.

This debate is arguably the most celebrated in American history. When it came time to vote, the eight proposals were offered as a single package, an Omnibus Bill, and as such it went down to defeat on July 31. A single package gave the senators no choice. It was approval for all eight resolutions or nothing. Fortunately, after the defeat, Senator Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois unraveled the Omnibus Bill and arranged to bring each one of the proposals up for a separate vote. He realized that the senators could not be expected to vote across the board in favor of the entire measure. By separating them he gave each senator the option of voting for one and against another. As it turned out there was a majority for every one of the proposals, and they passed the Senate in August and September 1850. The House of Representatives also approved, and the bill was signed by Millard Fillmore, who had succeeded to the presidency upon the sudden death of Zachary Taylor on July 9.

The Compromise of 1850 ranks among the greatest and most important legislative acts in the entire history of the United States. If nothing else, it postponed secession and civil war by ten years, a period that made possible the salvation of the Union. During those ten years the North underwent rapid industrialization that would enable it to pummel the South into submission; and the ten years also provided the time necessary to bring about the political rise of Abraham Lincoln, the sole figure most responsible for saving the Union.

THE IMPORTANT CHANGES occurring in the United States were augmented by a great new wave of immigrants. During the Jacksonian era the number of immigrants arriving in this country steadily increased from approximately 8,000 a year to 80,000. Then, between 1840 and 1860, that number climbed to 4.2 million—six times what it had been over the previous twenty years. England, Scotland, and Wales provided 500,000 people in the antebellum period, but far and away the largest number of immigrants came from Ireland. The widespread famine during 1845 and 1846, resulting from a disease that destroyed Ireland's potato crop—its chief food supply—caused the death of 1 million men, women, and children. Another 2 million abandoned their homeland and came to America between 1846 and 1860. Although for the most part they were farmers, they did not have the money to purchase land in the West, so most of them settled in the cities, especially Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and other port cities along the coast. They tended to cluster together for support and thus created the first American ghettos. They found employment as domestic help, factory workers, and construction laborers on the railroads and slowly advanced their status in society. They also turned to politics to protect their interests, and since they spoke English, they did not encounter the problems that other, non-English-speaking immigrants faced. In fact it did not take long for them to assume political leadership in the many cities where they settled.

Another national group to migrate to the United States at this time were the Germans. Following the revolution of 1848 thousands of political refugees fled Germany. Some of them were intellectuals, but most of these immigrants were peasants who had more money than the

Irish and therefore tended to move to the farming communities along the frontier or to western cities.

There were artisans and skilled craftsmen among these immigrants, and they helped advance the industrial development of this country. Once the United States recovered from the prolonged Panic of 1837, the rate of economic growth, especially in the manufacturing sector, accelerated rapidly. About 1.3 million skilled, semiskilled, and unskilled workers found jobs in industry. The opening of rich coal mines in Pennsylvania allowed companies to switch from wood-burning to coal-burning sources of heat. This was particularly true in the iron manufacturing industry. Steam power, applied to steamboats and railroads, also transformed transportation. The demand for railroad construction intensified in the 1850s, so that by the end of the decade 30,000 miles of track had been laid in the United States, and railroads such as the Erie, the New York Central, the Pennsylvania, and the Baltimore and Ohio connected cities in the Midwest, especially Chicago, to eastern cities. The machine-tool industry in America developed quite rapidly, and more and more products sold at home and abroad were the result of machine labor.

There was some manufacturing in the South, but nothing compared with what developed in the North. The South remained primarily an agricultural area, although it did have merchants, lawyers, and other professionals. The overwhelming number of southerners were farmers, raising cotton, tobacco, hemp, sugar, and rice, depending on their location. Of the 8 million southern whites in 1860, only a third owned slaves. The rest worked small farms themselves, with members of their family. Most of those who did own slaves had only a few, perhaps one or two. The idea of the South as a vast collection of huge plantations manned by hundreds of slaves, where the master lived in a large colonnaded mansion and the slaves resided in small shacks behind the big house, is totally false. There were few such plantations, although some did exist in each state. These plantations usually consisted of about 1,000 acres, with fifty slaves, and their owners constituted the upper class of society in the South. Andrew Jackson, for example, owned 150 slaves at one time, but that was quite extraordinary. On these particularly large 1,000-acre farms—Jackson always called his property "the farm"—the owner would normally hire an overseer to supervise the

work of the slaves. Overseers were usually poor whites who would administer the workforce by dividing the slaves into smaller units directed by trusted and able blacks called drivers. "Mammies" were the domestic equivalent of drivers and had charge of maintaining the big house where the owner and his family lived. Smaller plantations of from 300 to 500 acres were worked by maybe ten or twelve slaves. Yet although most southerners owned no slaves at all, it was the slave culture that defined life from Virginia to Texas. The "peculiar institution" of slavery informed the legal, political, and economic framework of society throughout the South in the antebellum period.

Slaves were considered property, chattel. They could be bought and sold at the pleasure of the master. Indeed, slave families could be broken up: wives separated from husbands, children taken from parents. In sum, the slave had no rights. Although it was a crime in most southern states to kill a slave, still, when such a killing occurred, the perpetrator invariably escaped punishment. Slaves could not go to court, or bring charges or testify against whites. They depended almost totally on the goodwill and decency of their owner. Naturally, the relationship between slave and master varied from place to place. It was complex and has been described by many historians as paternalistic, with both master and slave having responsibilities.

Despite this cruel and oppressive system, black men and women did manage to carve out a space in which they could maintain a degree of dignity. Some even learned to read and write. Many were craftsmen who built the mansions that housed their owners. Family and religion became the center of black culture. Frequently adopting Evangelical Protestantism as their religion, the slaves combined it with remnants of their west African heritage that energized, enlivened, and humanized their religious services.

The harshness of slavery varied according to location and type of plantation operation. It was undoubtedly harsher in the deep South than along the border states of Maryland, Kentucky, and Tennessee. There were five basic types of plantations, and they varied in size, organization, and operation. The first type, the cotton plantation, employed about two-thirds of the slaves from North Carolina to Texas. Long-fiber cotton had been grown on the southern Atlantic coast, but with the invention of the cotton gin in 1793 it was possible to profitably

grow short-fiber cotton farther west. After the War of 1812 the cultivation of cotton spread into Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Texas, so that by the 1850s southerners could boast that "cotton is king." The second type of plantation involved the cultivation of tobacco. It began in eastern Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina and then spread in the nineteenth century to Kentucky, Tennessee, and Missouri. The third type was the rice plantations, which were located in the swampy coastal areas of North and South Carolina, in Georgia, and along the banks of the Mississippi River in southern Louisiana. These rice plantations required large capital investments and were relatively few. The fourth type, the sugar plantations, existed almost exclusively in Louisiana. These plantations not only grew sugarcane but refined it into basic sugar, thus combining manufacturing with agriculture. Like the rice plantations, they required a large outlay of capital. For example, the smallest sugar plantation had an investment of $40,000. The fifth type was the hemp plantation, which was limited to Kentucky and parts of Missouri. It was the smallest operation that required slaves and therefore the smallest in number.

Make no mistake, slavery was the most basic and most financially rewarding economic operation in the United States prior to the Civil War. And although it was profitable for individuals, it did not encourage the creation of the infrastructure of an industrial economy as was happening in the North. But since individual southerners were profiting from the slave system, they were not about to see it abolished, even if perpetuating it meant dissolving the Union.

As SLAVERY CONTINUED to expand westward with the acquisition of Texas, the demand for its abolition also intensified. Indeed, at one time there had even been antislavery societies in the South, and many of these supported the American Colonization Society, which succeeded in founding a colony of free blacks in Liberia in the 1820s. But with the religious fervor of the Second Great Awakening, the abolitionists of the Jacksonian age breathed a hatred for the peculiar institution that was far more intense than anything earlier. Many of them were evangelists who could recognize sin from great distances, and to them, slavery was sin writ large. One zealot, William Lloyd Garrison,

published a newspaper called *The Liberator* in which he even denounced the Constitution of the United States. It was, he wrote, "a covenant with death and an agreement with hell."

In 1852, Harriet Beecher Stowe published a novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, graphically depicting the cruelties of the slave system. It begged "the Christian and humane people of the North" to block the implementation of the Fugitive Slave Act, which had been passed as part of the Compromise of 1850 and authorized federal marshals to return runaway slaves to their masters. Stowe's book sold widely and had a tremendous impact on the thinking of Americans about the institution of slavery. Some, like Abraham Lincoln, declared that it helped start the Civil War.

Runaway slaves had always been a problem for southerners, especially when the Underground Railroad system was set up. This consisted of "stations" (usually private homes or barns) along which "conductors" could help slaves escape to freedom. Harriet Tubman, a runaway herself, escorted several hundred slaves to safety. It was estimated that by the 1850s the Underground Railroad helped 1,000 or more runaways a year escape their servitude.

THE COMPROMISE OF 1850 brought about a period of relative political calm, but it did not last long. It was shattered in December 1853, when a bill was introduced to organize the territory of Nebraska without mentioning slavery, since Nebraska was north of 36°30' as established by the Missouri Compromise. A great deal of politicking took place in the passage of the measure, and because many of the leading figures in the discussion favored popular sovereignty for the region, it was finally decided to split the territory in two and establish Nebraska to the north and Kansas to the south. In addition, the Missouri Compromise was declared "inoperative." Another reason for organizing this territory was the desire of northern congressmen to facilitate the building of a railroad through the northern tier of states and territories that would eventually reach the Pacific Ocean. Building a railroad across organized territory with a governmental apparatus in place was far better than building one across unorganized territory. More particularly, a number of congressmen had invested heavily in real estate in the

surrounding states and were anxious to protect their investment. In addition, the bill extinguished Indian titles to the land, which also helped win approval for the entire measure.

But the Kansas-Nebraska Bill set off a titanic battle in Congress. Still, after the screaming and fighting ended in late May 1854, it became law through the healthy application of the "whip & spur" by the party leadership, especially by Stephen A. Douglas in the Senate and Alexander H. Stephens in the House. Douglas claimed full responsibility. "I passed the Kansas-Nebraska Act," he later bragged. "I had the authority and power of a dictator throughout the whole controversy in both houses. The speeches were nothing. It was the marshaling and directing of men, and guarding from attacks, and with a ceaseless vigilance preventing surprise." But Stephens helped. "If I had not been here the Bill would never have been got through. I took the reins in my hand and drove with whip & spur until we got the 'wagon out of the mud.'"

To make the measure more acceptable to southerners, it specifically repealed the Missouri Compromise and established two territories: Kansas to the west of slaveholding Missouri, and Nebraska to the west of the free states Minnesota and Iowa. The many southerners who voted for it clearly intended that Kansas would become slave (they would see to that) and Nebraska free. But the legislation was a fatal mistake. It annihilated the peace brought by the Compromise of 1850 and sent the country spinning toward disunion.

It also refashioned the party system. For one thing, sectional loyalty had replaced party loyalty. With the slow decline of the Whig Party, southerners were steadily drifting into the Democratic Party. Northerners too. Furthermore, on February 24, 1854, a number of Free-Soilers, northern Whigs, and antislavery Democrats met in Ripon, Wisconsin, and recommended the formation of a new party, which they called the Republican Party. Months later, after passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, a meeting was held in Jackson, Michigan, on July 6 that formally adopted the new name and demanded the repeal of the Kansas-Nebraska Act along with that of the Fugitive Slave Act.

Another party to appear in the middle of the 1850s was the Know-Nothing or American Party. It developed as a result of the large number of Irish and German immigrants who entered the country. By

1860 there were about 4 million immigrants, and native-born Americans suddenly became conscious, and resentful, of this large number of foreigners in their midst. In addition, many of these aliens were Roman Catholic. So the new party evolved into an anti-immigrant, anti-Catholic, and antislavery party whose members responded with "I know nothing" when asked about the purposes and policies of their organization.

Thus, in the election of 1854, according to Senator Douglas, the anti-Nebraska movement became "a crucible" into which Know-Nothings "poured Abolitionism . . . and what was left of Northern Whiggism, and then the Protestant feeling against the Catholic, and the native feeling against the foreigner." And they won a great many seats in Congress, as did the newly organized Republican Party. Of the forty-three northern Democrats who voted for the Kansas-Nebraska Act, only seven won reelection. So successful were the Know-Nothings that some predicted they would win the presidency in 1856. "How can anyone who abhors the suppression of negroes be in favor of degrading classes of white people?" remarked Abraham Lincoln. "As a nation, we began by declaring that '*all men are created equal.*' . . . When the Know Nothings get control, it will read, 'All men are created equal' except negroes, *and foreigners, and catholics*." But the Know-Nothing Party was short-lived. Internal divisions over slavery and the Kansas-Nebraska Act led to its demise by 1860.

Meanwhile in Kansas, violence erupted between free men and slaveholders that degenerated into a local civil war known as Bleeding Kansas. An investigation of the situation in that territory reported that in its present condition Kansas could not conduct a free election without a new census, impartial judges, and the presence of U.S. troops at every polling station. And the bloodshed in Kansas was reflected in Congress when, on May 19, 1856, Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts gave a speech in the upper house titled "The Crime against Kansas," in which he accused "hirelings picked from the drunken spew and vomit of an uneasy civilization" of invading Kansas in an attempt to impose a proslavery legislature upon the citizens by force and violence. He singled out the senior senator from South Carolina, Andrew Pickens Butler, as the personification of that "uneasy civilization" and verbally

assaulted him in a personal attack that was one of the most abusive speeches ever delivered in Congress.

Retaliation came swiftly. On May 22, 1856, Representative Preston S. Brooks, a nephew of Senator Butler, strode into the nearly empty Senate chamber, where he found Sumner sitting at his desk franking copies of his "Crime Against Kansas" speech. "Mr. Sumner," barked Brooks in a threatening voice, "I have read your speech twice over carefully. It is a libel on South Carolina and Mr. Butler, who is a relative of mine." And with that, he raised a large, heavy gutta-percha cane and struck Sumner repeatedly over the head. The badly mauled senator tried to escape. He was sitting close to his desk, so he tried to push back his chair, but the desk was firmly screwed to the floor and the rug underneath made it impossible to move the chair. So Sumner simply rose with a mighty heave, using all his strength, and in the process ripped the desk from its moorings as he toppled to the floor. "Bully" Brooks, as he came to be called, continued raining blows about Sumner's head and shoulders until the cane broke in two. "Every lick went where I intended," Brooks later boasted. "I wore my cane out completely but saved the Head which is gold."

Brooks resigned from the House, but his constituents reelected him overwhelmingly. To them he was a hero. Five months later he died of a liver disease at the age of thirty-seven. Sumner survived the attack and after his recovery had this to say about Brooks: "Poor fellow, he was the unconscious agent of a malign power."

DURING THIS PERIOD of crisis, when the nation desperately needed a strong, wise leader at the head of the government, one of the worst Presidents in the nation's history was elected. James Buchanan, the Democratic candidate, won election in 1856 over the Republican, John C. Frémont, and the Know-Nothing candidate, Millard Fillmore. Buchanan received 174 electoral votes to Frémont's 114 and Fillmore's 8. It was a remarkable showing for the young Republican Party, and had Pennsylvania and either Illinois or Indiana voted for him, Frémont would have been elected.

Straight off, Buchanan demonstrated his stupidity in his inaugural address, by announcing that the Supreme Court was about to hand

down a decision which would settle the problem of slavery. The question immediately arose as to how he knew beforehand what the court would decide. In point of fact he was not mistaken, but he foolishly thought that his announcement of it would calm fears and quiet strife. Two days later Chief Justice Roger B. Taney delivered the Dred Scott decision, which declared the Missouri Compromise unconstitutional because the Fifth Amendment to the Constitution stated that no one could be deprived of their property without due process of law. Taney also denied that Dred Scott, a slave suing for his freedom by virtue of his residence in a free state and free territory, was a citizen. As a slave, Scott was not entitled to sue in a federal court. The decision solved nothing, as Buchanan had predicted in his inaugural, and the reputation of the court plunged to its lowest level in its history.

Meanwhile, a rigged convention held in Lecompton, Kansas, wrote a constitution that protected slavery and prevented the electorate from outlawing the institution. Voters were given the choice of approving slavery or forbidding its *further* introduction into the territory. Either way Kansas would become a slave state.

Despite this obvious ploy to prevent a fair vote on the Lecompton constitution, President Buchanan asked Congress to admit Kansas as a state under that constitution. And this action set off a brouhaha in both houses of Congress. In the House it was a wild free-for-all with fifty or more members wrestling and punching one another. This outburst was the largest such melee in the entire history of that body. During the fracas, John F. "Bowie-Knife" Potter of Wisconsin reached for the hair of William Barksdale of Mississippi and tore off his toupee. "I've scalped him," cried the startled Potter, and everyone burst into laughter.

A compromise bill was finally reached by which voters in Kansas could accept or reject the Lecompton constitution. On August 2, 1858, the electorate defeated the constitution. Kansas remained a territory until after the secession of southerners in 1860–1861. It was admitted as a free state on January 29, 1861.

IN 1857 SOUTHERNERS were further outraged by the publication of a book by Hinton R. Helper, *The Impending Crisis of the South, and*

How to Meet It. He argued from statistics that many southern whites were impoverished by slavery and that the institution was detrimental to their economic welfare. What increased southern anger was the fact that Helper was a southerner himself, from North Carolina. But the book itself provided the kind of ammunition that abolitionists used to attack slavery in both the northern and the southern sections of the country.

The Lincoln-Douglas debates in the summer of 1858 also infuriated southerners in that Lincoln asked Douglas to reconcile the doctrine of popular sovereignty with the Dred Scott decision. Douglas replied that slavery could not "exist a day or an hour anywhere, unless it was supported by local police regulations." Since he was the leading candidate of the Democratic Party for the presidency in 1860, that remark lost him the South at the nominating convention. Southerners said they could not support a candidate who held this view. However, the debates did elevate Lincoln to national attention.

Then in mid-October 1859, at Harpers Ferry, John Brown led a raid that he hoped would ignite a slave insurrection. He seized the federal arsenal there, and after two days of fighting he was captured, tried for treason against the state of Virginia, and hanged on December 2. Brown became a martyr to northern abolitionists but a frightening figure of madness run amok to southerners. Throughout the South there was a feeling that this kind of horror would be repeated because of the propaganda of abolitionists and the political diatribes of Republicans.

In Congress the madness surfaced in the fistfights that broke out on the floor and the bitter words of recrimination that the members continually hurled at one another. "We will never submit to the inauguration of a Black Republican as President," stormed a Democrat from Georgia. "I speak the sentiment of every Democrat on this floor from the State of Georgia." And this remark was repeated when the Democrats held their nominating convention in Charleston on April 23. Northern delegates were unwilling to satisfy the demand of the South that slavery be allowed in the territories, whereupon members from the eight southern states walked out of the convention. The party split, and northern Democrats held their convention in Baltimore on June 18 and nominated Douglas and Herschel V. Johnson of Georgia for President

and Vice President. Southern Democrats also held their convention in Baltimore, on June 28, and nominated John Breckinridge of Kentucky and Joseph Lane of Oregon.

The Republicans met in Chicago on May 16. Senator William H. Seward had been the leading candidate for the presidency until he gave a speech in Rochester, New York, on October 25, 1858, in which he said: "It is an irrepressible conflict between opposing and enduring forces, and it means that the United States must and will, sooner or later, become either entirely a slaveholding nation or entirely a free-labor nation." That "irrepressible conflict" speech frightened a great many Republicans, and he lost their support. Lincoln, on the other hand, gave a more conciliatory but carefully worded speech at Cooper Union in New York City, known as the "House Divided" speech, in which he avoided any suggestion of conflict but did appeal for sectional understanding. On the third ballot the Republican convention named Lincoln for President and Hannibal Hamlin for Vice President. Remnants of the Whig and Know-Nothing parties formed the Constitutional Union Party in Baltimore and chose John Bell of Tennessee and Edward Everett of Massachusetts as their nominees.

Crippled by the split in its ranks, the Democratic Party went down to defeat. Lincoln won eighteen free states for 180 electoral votes, a clear majority. Breckinridge carried eleven slave states for a total of 72 electoral votes. Bell captured three border states for 39 votes. Douglas won only one state (Missouri) and scattered votes from a second (New Jersey) for a total of 12 electoral votes. In the popular contest Lincoln garnered 1,865,593 votes; Douglas 1,382,713; Breckinridge 848,356; and Bell 592,906.

Many southerners had sworn that they would never remain in a Union with a "Black Republican" President. So as soon as the results of this election became known nationally, the South Carolina legislature summoned a state convention to consider a course of action. The convention met on December 20, 1860, and formally dissolved South Carolina's ties to the other states "comprising the United States of America." This action was soon followed in the rest of the lower South: Mississippi seceded on January 9, 1861; Florida on January 10; Alabama on January 11; Georgia on January 19; Louisiana on January 26; and Texas on February 1. These states held a convention in Montgomery, Alabama,

on February 8, and their representatives adopted a constitution closely resembling the U.S. Constitution. The document established the Confederate States of America and recognized the independence and sovereignty of each state. Naturally, it protected the "peculiar institution." The following day the members elected Jefferson Davis as provisional President of the Confederacy, and Alexander H. Stephens as Vice President.

There were attempts to forestall this horrendous break. A peace convention made up of members from northern, southern, and border states met behind closed doors in Washington on February 4, 1861, with John Tyler, the former chief executive, presiding. But the participants failed to find an agreement acceptable to both sides. On February 28, another effort failed to turn back secession when Congress considered a joint resolution to amend the Constitution and guarantee slavery in the states where it already existed. But some sixty-five Republicans, led by Thaddeus Stevens of Pennsylvania, opposed it. Still the amendment passed the House (133 to 65) and the Senate (24 to 12), but the states did not ratify it.

In his inaugural address on March 4, 1861, President Lincoln tried to reassure southerners that their rights, especially their right to hold slaves, would be protected: "I have no purpose directly or indirectly to interfere with the institution of slavery in the States where it exists." And he endorsed President Jackson's claim that the Union was indivisible, that no state had the right to separate itself from the others. "Physically speaking," he declared, "we cannot separate." No state, acting on its own, "can lawfully get out of the Union." Like Jackson, he also reminded citizens that he was under oath to enforce the laws, and that duty required him to maintain federal property throughout the United States. His decision to provision Fort Sumter in the Charleston harbor, therefore, prompted the Confederates, under the command of General Pierre G. T. Beauregard, to attack the fort, which surrendered on April 12 after more than a day of constant bombardment. And by this military action, the Civil War began.

Once the fighting started, Lincoln summoned 75,000 volunteers to defend the Union, and he called Congress into special session to begin on July 4. As commander in chief he felt he had the authority to expand

the military, authorize the purchase of armaments, and suspend the writ of habeas corpus wherever necessary. He also directed the states to increase the size of their militias so they could best serve the interests of the nation. When Congress convened, he told the members that he had done nothing they could not legislatively approve. By the summer of 1861 the Union had 186,000 men under arms. Jefferson Davis also summoned southerners to defend their homeland and within a few months some 112,000 recruits responded to his call.

Once armed conflict erupted, the upper South seceded: Virginia on April 17, Arkansas on May 6, Tennessee on May 7, and North Carolina on May 20. Four other slave states—Delaware, Maryland, Kentucky, and Missouri—remained loyal to the Union, despite strong sentiment for the Confederacy in certain sections of these states. On the other hand, the western half of Virginia remained loyal to the United States, and seceded from the state and was admitted into the Union as West Virginia on June 19, 1863.

When Virginia seceded, the capital of the Confederacy was moved from Atlanta to Richmond, and in no time rebel troops appeared across the Potomac within sight of Washington. Hurriedly, troops were rushed to the Union capital and were housed in the halls and chambers of the House and Senate. Once Congress met for its special session on July 4, the soldiers were bivouacked in other parts of the city.

Under the strong leadership of Thaddeus Stevens, chairman of the Ways and Means Committee, the House within five days approved legislation that permitted the secretary of the treasury to borrow $250 million over the next twelve months. By the time Congress adjourned on August 6 it had passed sixty-six bills, all but four of which dealt with the war. In a little over a month it set a record for productivity, mainly because of vigorous leadership and a determination by a majority of its members to cope with a crisis of staggering proportions. This record of achievement continued for the next several years.

In the belief that the Confederate capital at Richmond could be captured with a sudden and unexpected blow, pressure from politicians and the press prompted Lincoln to overrule Winfield Scott, the commanding general, who argued that the troops in Washington needed

additional training before going into battle. Accordingly, Lincoln ordered General Irwin McDowell, with a force of 30,000 troops, to advance and attack Confederate forces under General Beauregard at a place called Manassas Junction, a little town on Bull Run, or creek, about thirty-five miles southwest of Washington. On July 21 the two forces met, and at first the battle went well for the Union. But Confederate reinforcements, under General Joseph E. Johnston, arrived from the Shenandoah Valley and routed the Union forces, who panicked and fled back to Washington. During the engagement General Thomas J. Jackson earned the nickname "Stonewall" because of his heroic stand during the battle. Lincoln now realized the wisdom of General Scott's insistence on further training for the Union troops. McDowell was replaced by General George B. McClellan, who had won several skirmishes in western Virginia and who became general in chief upon the retirement of General Scott.

A crisis with Great Britain was narrowly avoided when an American warship stopped the British steamer *Trent* and removed James M. Mason and John Slidell, two Confederate commissioners bound for England. Secretary of State Seward ordered the men released, thus preventing the crisis. He declared that the American warship acted improperly in not bringing the *Trent* and the two commissioners to port for adjudication by an admiralty court.

The Union suffered another military defeat on October 21, at Ball's Bluff near Washington, which stiffened demands by the more radical Republicans for an increased prosecution of the war and the abolition of slavery. Led by senators Benjamin Wade of Ohio and Zachariah Chandler of Michigan, and Representative Thaddeus Stevens, they called for the creation of a Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War, presumably as a response to Lincoln's assumption of authority in conducting it. The joint committee was approved on December 9, 1861, immediately after Congress convened for its regular session. It was given broad investigatory powers to summon persons to testify and demand papers to document the progress of the war. The committee included three senators—Chandler; Wade; and Andrew Johnson, a Democratic Unionist from Tennessee—and four representatives: George W. Julian of Indiana, Daniel W. Gooch of Massachusetts, John Covode of Pennsylvania, and Moses Odell, a Democrat from

New York. Wade chaired the committee, which was dominated by Radical Republicans. None of these men knew much about conducting the war, but all shared distrust, if not disdain, for the military. They sought any opportunity to embarrass or humiliate top-ranking generals.

And they abused their authority. They investigated the War Department for allegations of fraud and incompetence, and delved into the problem of government security, including rumors that the President's wife, Mary Todd Lincoln, was a Confederate spy. Worse, they harassed the President about his reluctance to proceed with immediate emancipation of the slaves and his failure to find the necessary person or persons to bring the conflict to a speedy and successful conclusion. The committee was, said one, "a mischievous organization, which assumed dictatorial powers." It summoned generals to testify and then asked them inane questions, such as, "What do you know about war?" A number of obsequious and incompetent generals "scolded and carped and criticized, and caviled, told half truths and solid lies, and the August and astute Committee listened with open ears." Such testimony was just the sort of thing the members wanted to hear—anything that belittled the military. In the course of its benighted history, it issued eight volumes of reports on a succession of military defeats. It also provided documentation that severely damaged the reputations of a number of unfavored generals, particularly General McClellan, whom the members loathed for failing to move his army and provide victories in the field.

The committee met with Lincoln and his cabinet on January 6, 1862, and, with malicious intent, reported that "neither the President nor his advisers seemed to have any definite information respecting the management of the war, or the failure of our forces to make any forward movement."

Since the cost of the war quickly mounted to $2 million a day, Congress passed a bill on February 6, 1862, authorizing the issuance of "greenbacks" or paper money as legal tender. It was the first paper currency ever issued by the national government. Two months later, on April 16, Congress outlawed slavery in the District of Columbia, with compensation to those who would free their slaves, thereby initiating the first step in legislating the end of slavery. Republicans shouted their

approval when the bill passed. "A few of the radical members," sneered one critic, "indulged in excessive and quite undignified manifestations of this delight, hurrahing in the corridors [of Congress], and seizing every negro they met and overwhelming them with congratulations." Lincoln regarded the action as a ploy to force him to take a stand on the issue. Despite his reluctance, he signed the bill, and it became law. Later Congress also abolished slavery in the territories, without compensation.

Of enormous importance to the steady expansion of the population in the west, Congress passed the Homestead Act on May 20, 1862, which provided 160 acres of public land to any person who would reside on it and farm it for five years. Within two years some 25,000 settlers staked claims to over 3 million acres of land. Similarly, the Morrill Land Grant College Act, passed on June 17, 1862, provided 30,000 acres of land to each member of Congress to finance the establishment of public agricultural and mechanical institutions within the states and territories.

One of the most important actions taken by Congress was the passage of the Internal Revenue Act of 1862, which taxed a wide range of items, few of which survived the war. But the Bureau of Internal Revenue created by this measure did become a permanent fixture of the federal government. And passage of the Pacific Railroad Act provided land and funds for the building of what would become a transcontinental railroad from Omaha, Nebraska, to Sacramento, California.

ALTHOUGH THE GOVERNMENT achieved a number of legislative successes, there was nothing but defeat on the military front. General McClellan, who was relieved of supreme command, except for the Army of the Potomac, was ordered to begin an advance on Richmond, and he took a route along the peninsula between the James and York rivers rather than lead a frontal attack from Washington that would relieve the pressure on the nation's capital. This peninsula campaign came to an abrupt end in the early summer of 1862, with the Seven Days battle, in which nearly 20,000 men on both sides were killed or wounded. Major General Henry W. Halleck was put in command of the Union army. And a significant battle occurred on March 8, 1862,