

CAMBRIDGE

ENDORSED BY

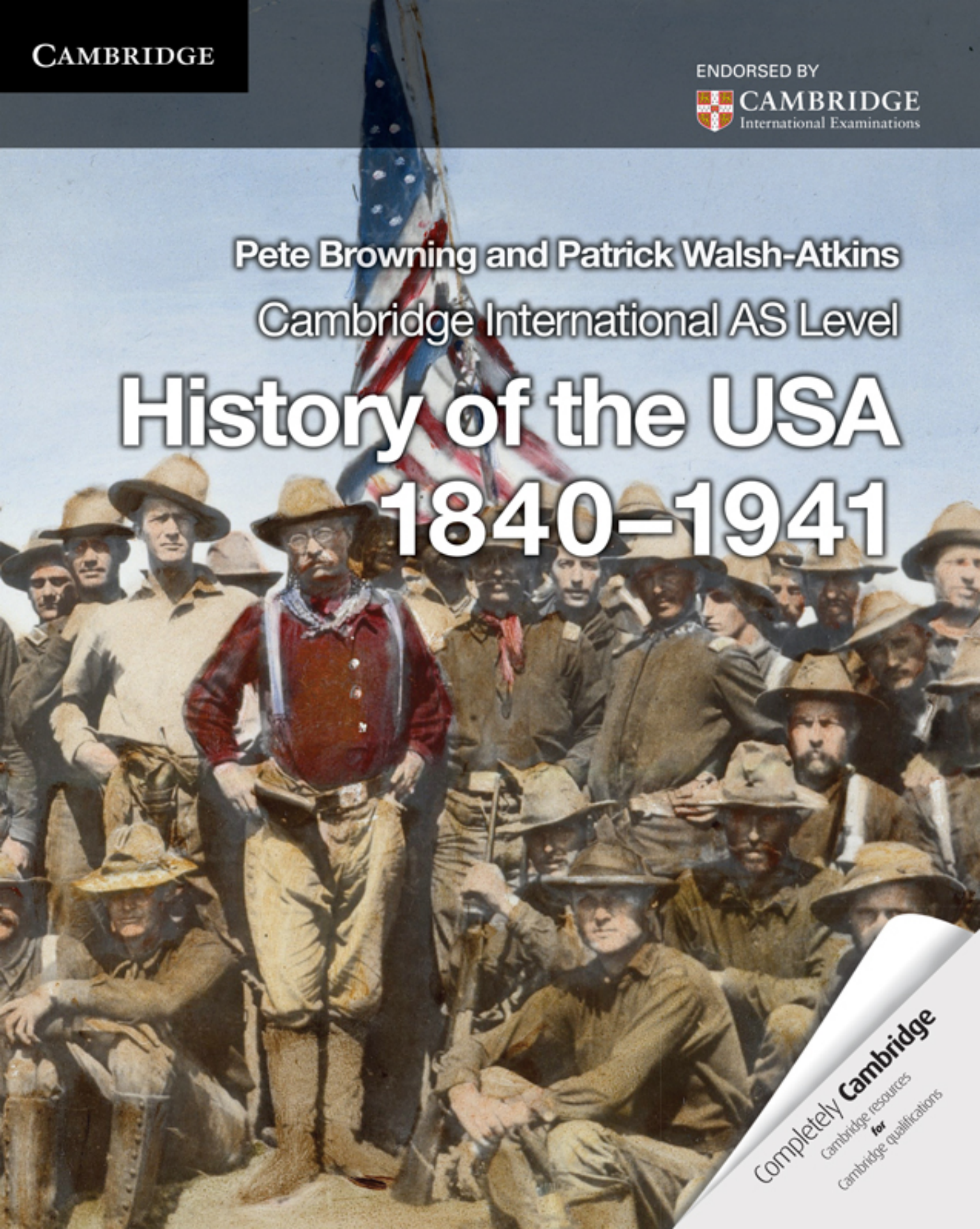


CAMBRIDGE
International Examinations

Pete Browning and Patrick Walsh-Atkins

Cambridge International AS Level

History of the USA 1840–1941



Completely **Cambridge**
Cambridge resources
for
Cambridge qualifications

Pete Browning and Patrick Walsh-Atkins
Series editor: Patrick Walsh-Atkins

Cambridge International AS Level

History of the USA

1840–1941



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107679603

© Cambridge University Press 2013

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2013

Printed in the United Kingdom by Latimer Trend

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-107-67960-3 Paperback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication, and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Contents

Introduction	4
1 The origins of the Civil War 1846–61	6
Sectional tensions in the United States	8
The outcomes of the war with Mexico	15
The Compromise of 1850 and its breakdown	19
The 1860 presidential election	26
The beginning of the Civil War in April 1861	31
2 The Civil War and Reconstruction 1861–77	38
Four years of civil war	40
The impact of the Civil War	47
The aims and outcomes of Reconstruction	54
How successful was Reconstruction?	61
3 The expansion of US power in the 19th and 20th centuries	66
Expansion in North America 1840s–90s	68
Central America and the Caribbean 1840–1930	76
The USA's relationship with Europe 1840–1930	85
US relations with China, Japan, the Philippines and the Pacific Islands	93
4 The Gilded Age and the Progressive Era 1870s–1920s	100
Industrial expansion in the 1870s and 1880s	102
The economic and social consequences of rapid industrialisation in the late 19th century	110
The aims of the Progressive Movement 1890s–1910s	115
The Progressive Movement – success or failure?	122
The presidency of Woodrow Wilson 1913–21	126
5 The Great Crash, the Great Depression and the New Deal 1929–41	135
The causes and impact of the Great Crash and the Great Depression	137
Strategies for domestic problems by Hoover and Roosevelt in the 1930s	141
Opposition to the New Deal	154
Roosevelt – a great American president?	160
6 Examination skills	164
What skills will be tested in examination, and how?	166
Knowledge and understanding questions	168
Analysis and evaluation questions	172
Source-based questions	180
Examination technique	192
Index	196
Acknowledgements	200



Introduction

Cambridge International AS Level History is a new series of three books that offer complete and thorough coverage of the Cambridge International AS Level History (syllabus code 9389). Each book is aimed at one of the AS History syllabuses issued by Cambridge International Examinations for first examination in 2014. These books may also prove useful for students following other A Level courses covering similar topics. Written in clear and accessible language, *Cambridge International AS Level History – History of the USA 1840–1941* enables students to gain the knowledge, understanding and skills to succeed in their AS Level course (and ultimately in further study and examination).

Syllabus and examination

Students wishing to take just the AS Level take two separate papers at the end of a one-year course. If they wish to take the full A Level there are two possible routes. The first is to take the two AS papers at the end of the first year and a further two A Level papers at the end of the following year. The second is to take the two AS papers as well as the two A Level papers at the end of a two-year course. For the full A Level, all four papers must be taken. The two AS papers are outlined below.

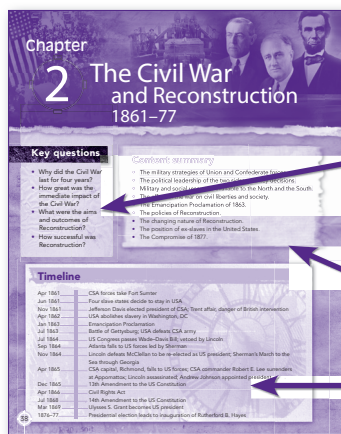
Paper 1 lasts for one hour and is based on *The Origins of the Civil War 1846–61*. The paper will contain at least three different sources, and candidates will have answer two questions on them. Students are not expected to have extensive historical knowledge to deal with these questions, but they are expected to be able to understand, evaluate and utilise the sources in their answers, and to have sound background knowledge of the period. In the first question (a) candidates are required to consider the sources and answer a question on one aspect of them. In the second question (b) candidates must use the sources and their own knowledge and understanding to address how far the sources support a given statement. Chapter 1 provides the appropriate level of historical knowledge to deal with Paper 1.

Paper 2 lasts for an hour and a half. This paper contains four questions, and candidates must answer two of them. Each question has two parts: part (a) requires a causal explanation; and part (b) requires consideration of significance and weighing of the relative importance of factors. A question on each of the four topics outlined in the Cambridge syllabus (for example, *The Great Crash, the Great Depression and the New Deal 1929–41*) will appear in every examination paper.

Examination skills

Chapter 6, which is entirely dedicated to helping students with examination skills and techniques, gives guidance on answering all the different types of exam questions in detail. Students should read the relevant section of the exam skills chapter *before* addressing practice questions, to remind themselves of the principles of answering each type of question. Remember that facts alone are not enough; they must be accompanied by a clear understanding of the question and must employ a range of skills such as focused writing, evaluation and analysis.

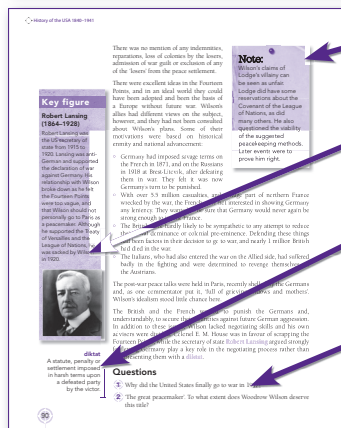
All chapters have a similar structure. The key features are as follows:



1 **Key questions** pose thought-provoking pointers to the key issues being dealt with in the chapter.

2 **Content summary** explains the essence of a chapter.

3 **Timeline** offers an overview of significant events of the period.

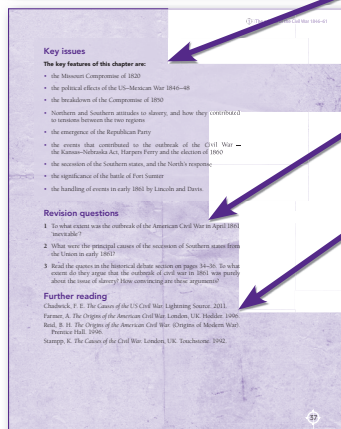


4 **Notes** highlight significant points from within the text.

5 **Key figures** offer a detailed profile of key personalities.

6 **Definitions** of key terms enhance students' understanding of the text.

7 **Questions** interspersed within the chapters help to consolidate learning.



8 **Key issues** outline the key aspects of the content that might be significant for exam preparation.

9 **Revision questions** help students assess their own understanding and skills.

10 **Further reading** provides a list of extra resources that will help with gaining a wider perspective of the topic.

Chapter

1

The origins of the Civil War 1846–61

Key questions

- How and why did the outcomes of the war with Mexico in 1846–48 add to sectional difficulties?
- Why did the Compromise of 1850 break down so quickly?
- Why did the Republicans win the 1860 presidential election?
- Why did the Civil War begin in April 1861?

Content summary

- The Missouri Compromise of 1820 and the Wilmot Proviso of 1846.
- The outcome of the US–Mexican War 1846–48 and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848.
- The Compromise of 1850 and the reasons for its breakdown.
- The Fugitive Slave Act and the Kansas–Nebraska Act.
- The political effect of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.
- The formation of the Republican Party and the Republican victory in the 1860 presidential election.
- The secession of the Southern states and the outbreak of war.
- The leadership of Lincoln and Jefferson.

Timeline

Jan 1820	Missouri Compromise
Dec 1845	Texas annexed by the USA
Apr 1846	War with Mexico begins
Jun 1846	USA settles dispute with Britain over Oregon
Feb 1848	Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ends US–Mexican War
Sep 1850	Compromise of 1850
May 1854	Kansas–Nebraska Act; Bleeding Kansas (to 1861)
1854–56	Formation of the Republican Party
Mar 1857	<i>Dred Scott</i> judgment
Oct 1859	Raid on Harpers Ferry
Nov 1860	Abraham Lincoln elected as president
Dec 1860	South Carolina secedes from the USA
Jan–Feb 1861	Six other states secede from the USA; the Confederacy established
Mar 1861	Lincoln inaugurated as president
Apr–May 1861	Four more states join the Confederacy

Introduction

The United States was formed in 1776–83 as the result of 13 colonies winning a revolutionary war against their British rulers. The USA was different to the monarchies and empires of the time, in that it was based on the revolutionary ideas of democratic government and liberty of the individual. Furthermore, the USA was the first nation with an official constitution – that is, a single document containing the rules by which the country was to be governed. By agreeing this constitution, the 13 states (then all located on what is now the east coast of the USA) achieved a careful compromise between their different interests. There were several points of tension between different regions of the United States, particularly between the Northern and Southern states, and these conflicts became greater over the next 70 years. Issues such as cultural and industrial differences between North and South, the ownership of slaves and the extent of state rights versus federal rights eventually led to a four-year civil war. Political attempts to resolve the conflict repeatedly failed, and more than 600,000 people died as a result of the war.

Figure 1.1 The signing of the US Constitution in 1787



Sectional tensions in the United States

In 1789, the USA consisted of 13 states based on the east coast of North America and stretching across to the Mississippi River. The rest of North America was governed – very loosely – by other European powers: Britain, Spain and Russia and, from 1800 to 1803, France. There were tensions between the new, revolutionary United States and the European powers. The colony of Louisiana, taken by France from Spain in 1800, was sold to the USA three years later for just \$15 million, or 3 cents per acre. The Louisiana Purchase, as it was called, more than doubled the size of the USA.

federal
If something is described as federal, it relates to the central government of a union of states.

The USA expanded westwards and gained new lands. Those lands had to be organised into **federal** territories before being allowed to become states. This westward expansion raised an issue that would trouble US development for the next 80 years – the issue of slavery.

The two main sections of the early USA became known as the North and the South. The 13 original states were split roughly half and half, with three main differences between the sections:

- slavery
- economic differences
- cultural differences.

Note:

The difference between federal territories and states was that although both territories and states were under federal government, states had much greater freedom from federal control.

Slavery and the Missouri Compromise

In 1860, slavery was legal in the South of the USA, but was illegal in the North. The US Constitution had allowed slavery, and it was a fundamental feature of the Southern economy and society. However, by the 1820s all Northern states had banned slavery.

	White	Black and mixed race	
		Free	Slave
North	18.42 million	0.23 million	–
South	6.29 million	0.26 million	3.95 million

Table 1.1 US population by racial groups in 1860 (1860 Census, page xii)

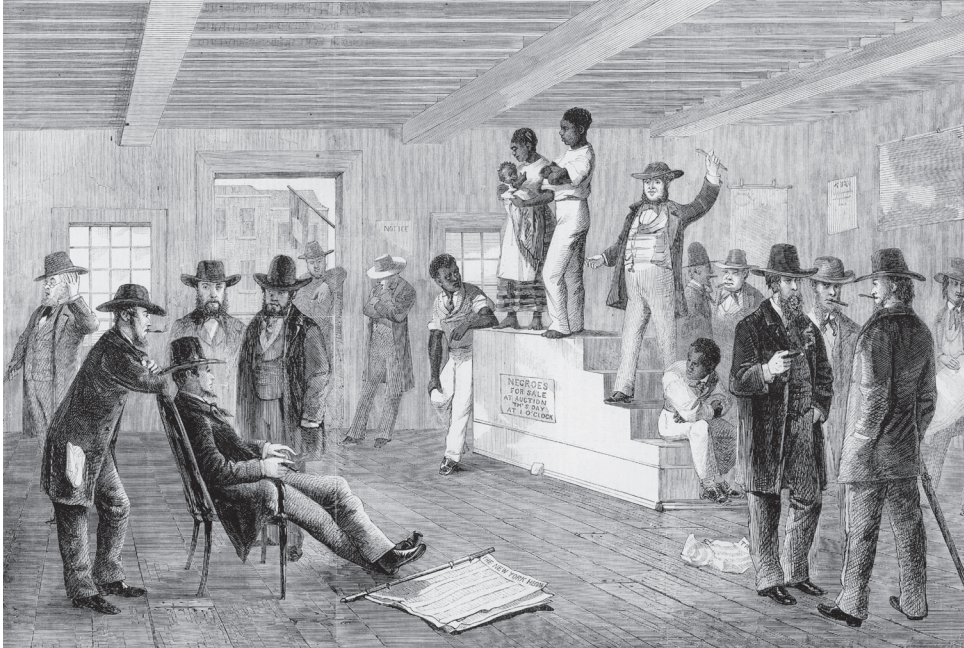


Figure 1.2 A slave auction in Virginia, 1861

More than one-third of the people in the South were slaves, and white Southerners found themselves having to try and justify slavery in various ways: economic, political and moral. As new states joined the USA, a key issue was whether they did or did not allow slavery – whether they were ‘slave’ states or ‘free’ states. The United States relied on a careful balance between these two. If that balance was disturbed, then the political stability of the nation was at risk. In 1820, plans to admit Missouri as a slave state caused problems because it upset the equal numbers of slave and free states. There were a growing number of Northerners who thought slavery was morally wrong and wanted to abolish it throughout the USA. These people were known as abolitionists.

Note:

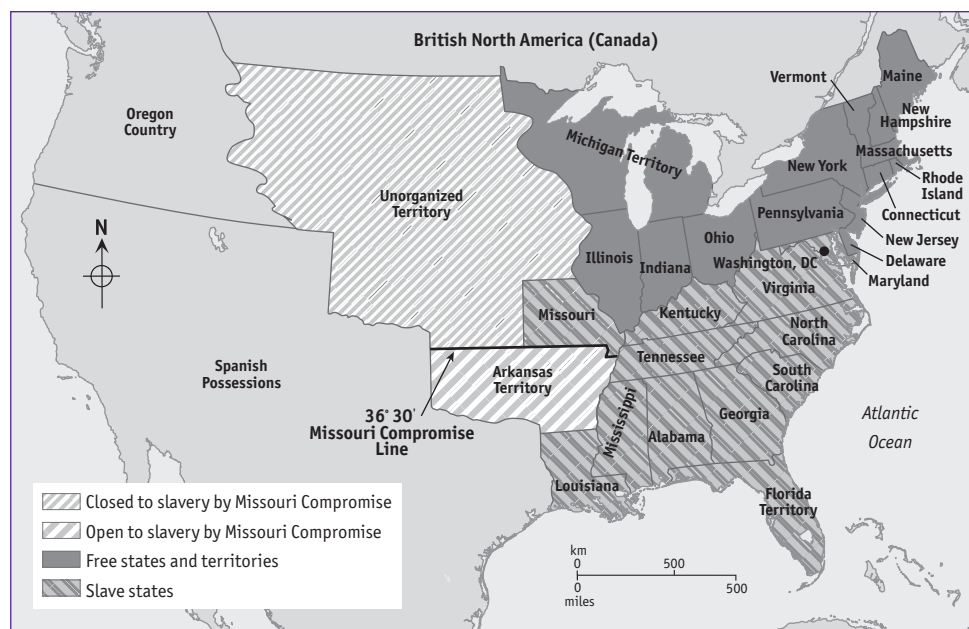
The abolitionists became an increasingly important political force from the 1830s onwards. They came from a wide variety of groups and classes. Some were liberal humanitarians and some had deeply religious reasons for opposing slavery. They received a lot of support in the popular press of the day. Some abolitionists were prepared to support direct action and joined the ‘Underground Railroad’ (see page 19), helping slaves to escape to the North.

An early compromise between North and South, known as the Missouri Compromise, was eventually agreed by **Congress** in 1820. Missouri could join the United States as a slave state if Maine, in the north-east, joined as a free state. A second feature of the Compromise proved to be of great importance in the following 40 years: Congress agreed that in the Louisiana Territory bought from France in 1803, there would be no slavery in lands north of latitude 36° 30’ that were still awaiting statehood. The only exception to this was the state of Missouri itself.

Congress

The legislative (law-making) branch of the US government is made up of elected members and divided into two chambers – the Senate and the House of Representatives. There must be a majority agreement in both houses in order for legislation to be passed.

Figure 1.3 A map of the 1820 Missouri Compromise, showing free and slave states



Economic differences

Economic and social differences between the North and South became more apparent over time, especially after the Northern states abolished slavery in the early 19th century. Population growth was one major difference between North and South. By 1860, the original 13 states of the USA had grown to 18 free states and 15 slave states. The North's population was 18.65 million, the South's 10.5 million. A higher standard of living was primarily responsible for the North's population growth, but another important factor was that the North was the destination for the majority of immigrants to the USA.

Another major difference between North and South was the growth of industry in the North. Increasing internal and foreign trade, helped by transport changes (canals, roads and river use), led to the growth of a range of industries such as engineering and textiles. With great support for business and enterprise from state governments, and the growth of a mobile society that respected wealth and business skills, a very different socio-economic system emerged in the North than existed in the South.

Note:

As production on the plantations was very labour-intensive, the plantation owners used slaves to grow and harvest the cotton and also to work in the mills to produce the raw cotton cloth. This free labour was essential to the plantation owners' profits.

Not everyone saw industrialisation as either desirable or inevitable. The South didn't welcome industrialisation, and largely retained its agrarian (farming-based) economy with much less industrial production – in 1860, only 8% of US factories were located in the South. A large part of the Southern workforce was involved in the production of cotton, with some tobacco and rice, and slaves were vital to the harvesting of those crops. Foreign competition had led to the lowering of cotton prices on the world market, and many of the larger farmers and slave owners were falling into debt. There was growing feeling in the South that its economic interests were being sacrificed in order to increase the profits of Northern industrialists.

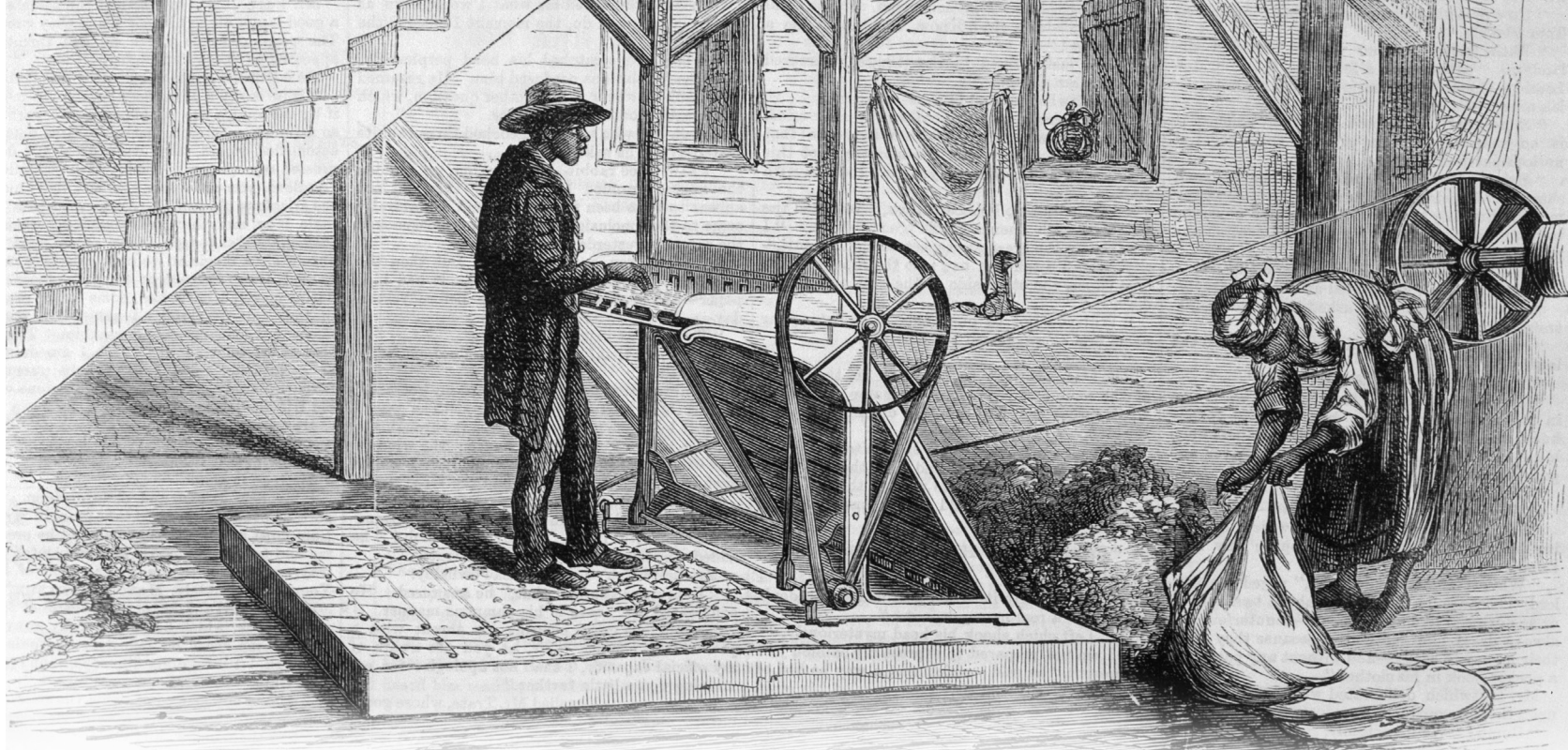


Figure 1.4 A cotton gin (machine for extracting cotton fibres from their seeds) in the Southern United States

By the 1850s, more than half of US exports consisted of raw cotton, largely sent to the Lancashire cotton mills in Britain. The economic interests of the South and North began to come into conflict. The South supported **free trade** in order to encourage greater trade with Britain. The North wanted **tariffs** to protect the new industries being formed in the Northern region against competition with Britain. Some historians argue that these economic differences were more important than slavery in causing the Civil War.

Cultural differences

North and South were divided not only socially and economically, but also culturally. Although Americans from the North and South came from the same European emigrants, by the middle of the 19th century different social values were emerging in the two regions. In particular, the importance of 'honour' was still central to Southern life, while it was disappearing from the North. Honour is a code of duties imposed by a social group on its members. If your honour was questioned, you had to defend it – to the death if necessary. Therefore violence was part of this 'honour' code, usually taking the form of duels. In the North, states began passing laws that suppressed duelling, and a formal legal code started to replace an informal social code.

Some historians argue that the cultural distinctiveness of the South was so great that it is possible to speak of an independent Southern nationalism, based on slavery, chivalry and a strong Christian faith. The North's own regional identity was based on free labour, liberty and a more puritanical Christianity.

free trade

This describes international trade that is left to run its course according to market forces rather than being manipulated through tariffs, quotas or other restrictions.

tariffs

Tariffs are taxes or duties paid on certain imported and exported goods. Tariffs mean that particular imported products or materials are more expensive to consumers. By selectively restricting foreign trade in this way, governments can encourage consumers to buy from alternate sources – often from inside the country itself.

From all quarters of South Carolina have come to my ears the echoes of the same voice; it may be feigned but it sounds in wonderful strength all over the country, 'nothing on earth shall ever induce us to submit to any union with the brutal, bigoted blackguards of the New England states, who neither comprehend nor regard the feelings of gentlemen! Man, woman and child, we'll die first.'

Imagine these and an infinite variety of similar sentiments uttered by courtly, well-educated men, who set great store on a nice observance of the usages of society and who are only moved to extreme bitterness and anger when they speak of the North and you will fail to conceive the intensity of the dislike of the South Carolinians for the free states. There is nothing in the dark caves of human passion so cruel and deadly as the hatred the South Carolinians profess for the Yankees.

From *Pictures of Southern Life* by British author William Howard Russell, 1861.

The North is prosperous and the South is not. The one increases and multiplies by a process which freedom and civilization constantly accelerates. The South goes far backward by a process which ignorance and slavery inaugurate. The wealth, the power, the intelligence, the religion and advanced civilization are with the first. The last is secondary and retrograde. It is the infirmity of semi-barbarous men to hate what they cannot imitate; hence the bitterness which marks the utterances and emphasizes the actions of the rebels. Dislike of what is above and beyond them is at the bottom of this.

From the *Chicago Tribune*, February 1861.

Political issues

Understanding the political tensions that began to develop in the 19th century requires an initial awareness of the US political system, which was founded on the 1787 Constitution:

- The USA is a republic, the head of state being an elected president.
- The USA is a federal state, with powers shared between the national government – known as the federal government – in Washington, DC, and the various states.

- The US system of government is based on a system of **checks and balances** to ensure that no one part of government becomes too powerful.
- The US government is built on the idea of the **separation of powers**. The elected national assembly, Congress (see page 9), makes the laws. The separately elected president is in office for four years, and recommends national policies. The Supreme Court decides whether the politicians' laws and policies are within the rules of the Constitution.
- Amending the Constitution is very difficult. To do so, two-thirds of both houses of Congress and three-quarters of the states have to agree.

Although the creators of the US Constitution had hoped to create a system of government that would prevent political parties ever being formed, this did not happen. National political parties began to emerge immediately after independence, and initially they proved to be important unifying factors in the United States. There were plenty of issues, such as expansion, on which people in both the North and the South could agree. Issues that might prove divisive, such as slavery, tended to be left to local politicians to deal with, rather than being raised at a national level. However, once slavery became a national issue, political parties became forces for disunity.

checks and balances

Each branch of government is able to veto (prevent) or amend acts or decisions made by other branches.

separation of powers

Separate branches of government are given separate powers that other branches have no control over (apart from overseeing fair practice with checks and balances).

Note:

By the 1840s, two political parties had emerged: the Democrats and the Whigs. Both were national parties that attracted support across the USA. In broad terms, the Democrats identified more with rural, agricultural America and were very suspicious of the federal government taking too much power from the states. The Whigs were more concerned with the growing industrial towns and cities. They wanted to use the powers of federal government to protect and develop a more integrated national economy.

Another issue that divided the North and South and further split the national parties was the nature and extent of the powers of the president and Congress. Many Southern states and Democrats from the South were anxious to prevent a president or Congress from harming their interests – particularly in the case of slavery. They wanted to ensure that a state could retain the right to legislate for itself and not be dictated to by a president or Congress in Washington, DC. Northern Democrats were less hostile to growth in the power of federal government, so 'states' rights' (the right of a state to decide its own destiny) became an issue that divided parties, as well as North and South.

Questions

- 1 What picture do Sources A, B and C below paint of Southern society?
- 2 What arguments do Sources B and C give for and against slavery?
- 3 Read through all three sources. Which source is more useful for a historian? Which is more reliable? Explain your answers.

Source A

Each bank [of the Ohio River] forms the frontier of a vast state: the one on the left is called Kentucky, the other [on the right] takes its name from the river itself. The two states differ in only one respect: Kentucky has accepted slaves but Ohio has rejected them.

On the left bank of the river, the population is sparse; occasionally a troop of slaves can be seen loitering in half-deserted fields; society seems to be asleep; man looks idle while nature looks active and alive.

On the right bank, a confused hum announces from a long way off the presence of industrial activity; the fields are covered by abundant harvests; elegant dwellings proclaim the taste and industry of the workers; in every direction there is evidence of comfort; men appear wealthy and content; they are at work.

Alexis de Tocqueville (a French writer), Democracy in America, 1835.

Source B

I appeal to facts. The black race of central Africa came to us in a low, degraded and savage condition. In the course of a few generations it has grown up under the fostering care of our institutions to its present comparatively civilized condition. This, with the rapid increase of numbers, is conclusive proof of the general happiness of the black race, in spite of all the exaggerated tales to the contrary.

In the meantime, the white race [in the South] has not degenerated. It has kept pace with its brethren in other parts of the Union where slavery does not exist. Have we not contributed our full share of talents and political wisdom in forming and sustaining this political system? Have we not constantly inclined more strongly to the side of liberty and been the first to resist the encroachments of power?

An extract from a speech to the US Senate by the senator for South Carolina, John Calhoun, 1837.

Source C

The question of slavery is undeniably, for this country at least, the great question of the age. On the right decision of it depend interests too vast to be fitly set forth in words. Here are three millions of slaves in a land calling itself free; three millions of human beings robbed of every right, and, by statute and custom, among a people self-styled Christian, held as brutes.

Knowledge is forbidden, and religious worship, if allowed, is clogged with fetters; the sanctity of marriage is denied; and home and family and all the sacred names of kindred, which form the dialect of domestic love, are made unmeaning words. The soul is crushed, that the body may be safely coined into dollars.

Charles Burleigh, 'Slavery and the North' (an abolitionist tract), 1855.

The outcomes of the war with Mexico

Up until the Mexican war, there were committed abolitionists, men who carried their hostility to slavery into all elections. They were noisy but not numerous ... Opposition was not a creed of either political party. In some sections, more anti-slavery men belonged to the Democratic Party and in others to the Whigs. But with the inauguration of the Mexican war, in fact with the annexation of Texas, the 'inevitable' conflict commenced.

Ulysses S. Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, 1885–86.

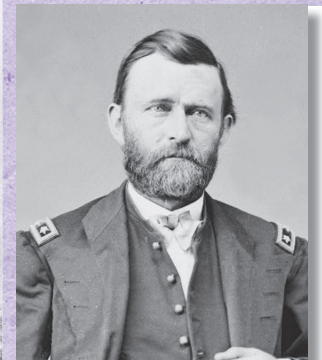
The extract above is from a book by **Ulysses S. Grant**, military leader of the Union (Northern) armies in 1864–65 and US president between 1869 and 1877. Grant's perception of when the Civil War commenced provides a useful starting point for explaining how events unfolded from the annexation of Texas in 1845 to the outbreak of the war 16 years later.

Figure 1.5 The attack over Chapultepec (1846) during the US–Mexican War

Key figure

Ulysses S. Grant (1822–85)

Grant was a career soldier who, despite a difficult start at his military academy, was an excellent horseman and a keen fighter. Not content with his responsibilities as a quartermaster in the US–Mexican War, he went to the frontlines to engage in combat. He had much success as a general during the Civil War, and went on to become US president in 1869.



The Wilmot Proviso and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo

Tensions between Mexico and the USA over Texas

Until it declared independence in 1836, Texas was part of Mexico. In the decades leading up to 1836, American settlers had moved to Texas, many of them with slaves. Slavery, however, was illegal in Mexico. The Mexican government tried to assert its authority and the settlers resisted, eventually declaring Texas's independence from Mexico. Some Texans wanted to join with the USA, others to keep complete independence. Eventually, in 1845, the United States offered to **annex** Texas. A year later, an agreement was reached and Texas became a state in the USA.

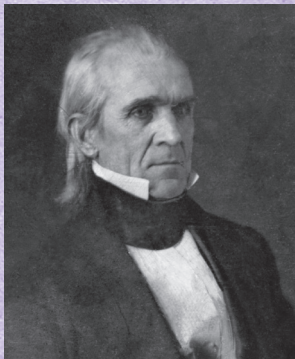
annex

Annexing a territory means incorporating it into an existing political entity such as a country, state or city.

Key figure

James Polk (1795–1849)

Polk was president of the USA from 1845 to 1849. He was a Democrat and a committed expansionist, and hoped to acquire much of Mexico, California and Oregon. He believed the USA should have a strong and assertive presidency. Polk died as a result of overwork after serving a single term in the White House.



Note:

Manifest destiny was the belief that the continued expansion of the United States across the North American continent was a pre-ordained, entirely positive development.

Mexico refused to accept the loss of Texas without a fight. Conflict between the USA and Mexico grew much more likely when **James Polk** became president in 1845. He was a keen expansionist, a strong believer in 'manifest destiny' and in his election campaign he had promised to annex Texas if elected.

Polk proved to be the major cause of the war with Mexico. He had offered to buy the two northernmost territories of Mexico for \$25 million, but the Mexicans turned him down. He then sent US troops beyond the Nueces River, the recognised border between Texas and Mexico, to the Rio Grande, 240 km (150 miles) further south, which the Mexicans did not accept as the border. Here, US troops provoked a clash with Mexican forces and war followed. Mexico was invaded and the capital taken by US troops, who remained there until a peace treaty was signed.

The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo

On 2 February 1848 at Guadalupe Hidalgo, close to Mexico City, the United States agreed a treaty that reflected the scale of the American victory. The USA gained two territories, Upper California and New Mexico, as well as establishing the Rio Grande as the new boundary between Texas and Mexico. In return for this huge territory gain, which reduced the size of Mexico by half, the USA paid Mexico \$15 million. The name of the region that thus became part of the USA was The Mexican Cession.

How the Cession was to be included in the USA posed major political problems. Much of it lay to the south of the dividing line between free and slave states laid down by the Missouri Compromise, now 25 years old and broadly accepted by North and South. Some Northerners felt that



Figure 1.6 A map showing *The Mexican Cession*, the territory gained by the USA in the *Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo*

the informal division of power between the two regions was tilting in the direction of the South, because it seemed likely that if new territories became states they would be slave states. The North began to talk of ‘Slave Power’, the excessive political power of slave owners in the South.

Another factor causing a split between North and South was the way in which the Constitution allocated members to the popularly elected part of Congress, the House of Representatives. This was decided based on the population of a state, with a certain number of people per representative. However, although slaves could not vote, they still counted as three-fifths of a ‘person’. With slaves only existing in the Southern states, this meant in practice that the South had 17 more members in the House of Representatives than the North felt it should have.

The Wilmot Proviso

The North attempted to limit what it perceived as the South’s growing power by introducing the Wilmot Proviso. In August 1846, a Democratic congressman, David Wilmot, from the Northern state of Pennsylvania, introduced an amendment to a congressional bill that would provide President Polk with \$2 million to assist in peace talks with Mexico. Many believed that the money would be used to buy territory from Mexico. Wilmot’s brief amendment simply stated that slavery was not to be permitted in any land gained from Mexico, whether it was purchased or won in war.

The Wilmot Proviso was debated on several occasions over the next year, but was never passed by Congress. Yet this failed amendment was of great historical significance. Leading modern historian Eric Foner wrote: ‘If any event in American history can be singled out as the beginning of a path which led almost inevitably to sectional controversy and civil war, it was the introduction of the Wilmot Proviso.’

The Wilmot Proviso’s rejection by Congress in 1846–47 was the first indication of politicians voting on sectional – that is, regional – lines. In the early 19th century, the USA’s two political parties were national parties, drawing support from both North and South around national issues. The political parties did not concern themselves with what they regarded as sectional issues, such as slavery. However, the Wilmot Proviso was a sign of things to come: the divisions it revealed grew to such an extent that the whole party system underwent a profound change.

Redistribution of seats in the House of Representatives

Although the three-fifths clause helped the South in the House of Representatives, the changing demography of the USA did not. Following each census, held every ten years, seats were redistributed between the various states.

Date	Total no. of seats	North		South	
		No. of seats	Percentage of seats	No. of seats	Percentage of seats
1827	213	123	57.7	90	42.3
1845	224	135	60.3	89	39.7
1861	237	147	62.0	90	38.0

Table 1.2 US House of Representatives: number and distribution of seats 1827–61

The table above shows the gradual decline in the proportion of Southern members of the House of Representatives. This, coupled with the increase in free states that each sent two senators to the Senate, led Southerners to fear that with a minority in Congress they would not be able to prevent the North from imposing its will on the South.

The Compromise of 1850 and its breakdown

The Wilmot Proviso, and its failed outcome, aroused anxieties in both the North and the South. This in turn raised other national issues concerning slavery, of which two proved particularly important:

- **The continuing slave trade in Washington, DC:** the US capital was not a state and therefore slavery in the district was a responsibility of the US federal government. Abolitionists wanted an end to this slave trade, while slave owners and traders believed that this would set a precedent for abolishing the slave trade between states.
- **The flight of fugitive slaves from slave states to free states:** slave owners had a constitutional right to regain escaped slaves if they were discovered. The Fugitive Slave Act of 1793 stated that federal officials had a duty to help return fugitive slaves, and that slave owners could receive compensation money from people who helped the slaves escape.

Note:

Washington, DC (the 'DC' stands for District of Columbia) is the capital of the USA but is officially not part of any state. It is administered directly by Congress.

By 1848, 12 Northern states had passed more than 40 personal liberty laws that aimed to counter the 1793 Fugitive Slave Act and to help fugitive slaves in their escape. In addition, since the early 19th century abolitionists had developed what became known as the 'Underground Railroad': a secret network of people who helped fugitives escape from the South and reach the North. Southern slave owners argued that their constitutional rights were being undermined by the North, and demanded a new Fugitive Slave Act.

Figure 1.7 A portrait of a slave named Anthony Burns, surrounded by illustrations of his escape from slavery, his trial and his return to slavery



Federal politicians faced a great challenge in settling all of the political issues related to slavery. Throughout 1850 there was a lot of complex bargaining, which in itself signified the growing difficulty of reaching agreement on this sensitive issue. An official compromise was eventually reached in September of that year, and it is simply known as the Compromise of 1850. This development was made easier by the death of President Zachary Taylor in July 1850. Taylor had proved not to be as enthusiastic a supporter of the South as the Southern states had hoped; he wanted to avoid any discussion on slavery. The appointment of Taylor's more flexible vice president, Millard Fillmore, in his place, led to an agreement over some of these issues.

Elements of the Compromise of 1850

The Compromise of 1850 was a set of agreements that consisted of four separate elements:

- California joined the USA as a free state, even though some of California was below the 1820 Missouri Compromise line (see page 9). The people of California wanted it to be a free state.
- New Mexico and Utah, the two remaining parts of The Mexican Cession, became US territories with no specified slave status. The people of the territories would decide later whether the territories would be free or slave.
- The slave trade was abolished in Washington, DC.
- A new Fugitive Slave Act was passed. It imposed criminal penalties on anyone interfering with a slave owner's rights to his slaves, and restricted the legal rights of fugitive slaves to a fair trial.

The Compromise of 1850 was an example of Congress working to resolve national tensions. All sides compromised, and although no one was entirely happy with the result, it did temporarily reduce the risk of civil war.

Implementing the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850

The new Fugitive Slave Act, passed in 1850, included the following key elements:

- Any federal marshal or other official who did not arrest a known fugitive slave was liable for a heavy fine. Officials who arrested a fugitive slave were entitled to a bonus.
- A slave owner's claim that a slave was a fugitive was sufficient cause for arrest.
- If arrested, fugitive slaves could not claim trial by jury nor legally represent themselves. This meant that many free African-Americans were actually arrested and became slaves, as they could not defend themselves.

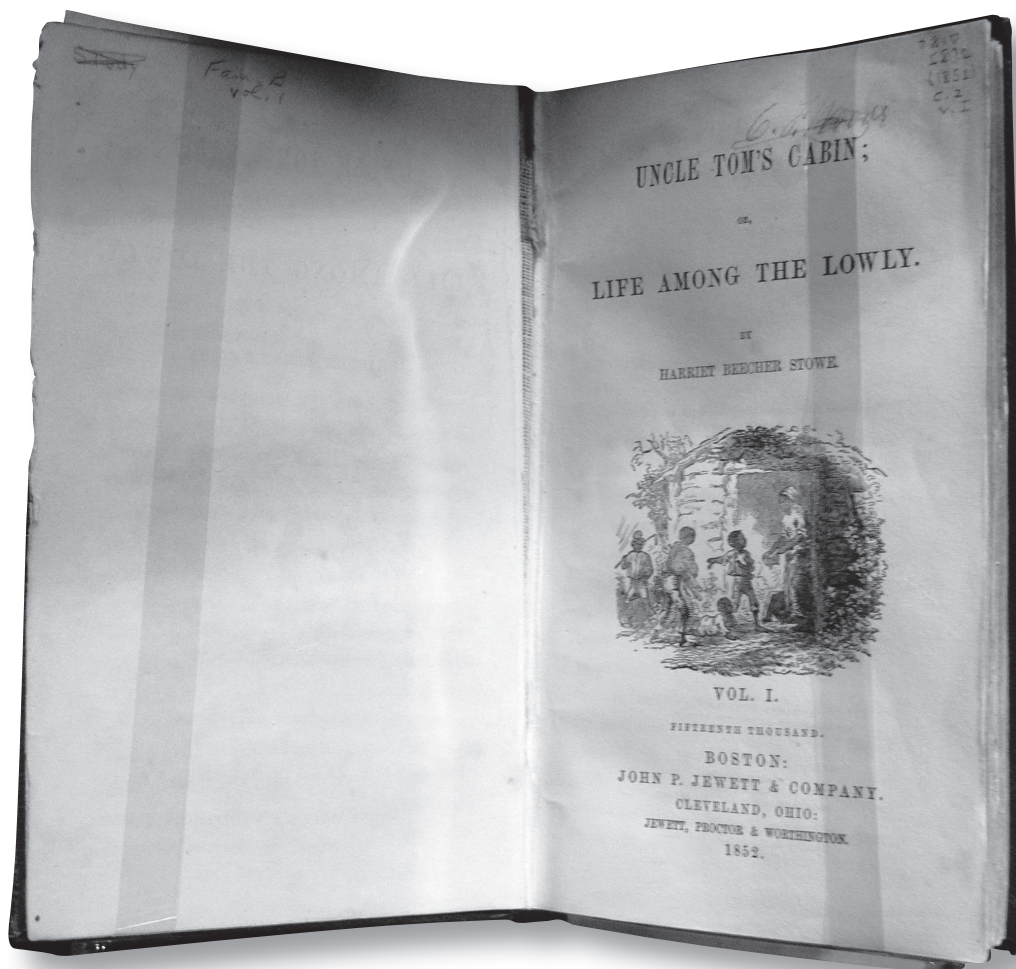
The South felt that it was making territorial concessions – none of the new states and territories were slave – in return for the North's support in upholding the Fugitive Slave provision of the Constitution.

However, if agreeing the Compromise of 1850 had proved hard work, implementing the Fugitive Slave Act was even harder. Abolitionists now had to decide whether to uphold or defy the law, and many prominent Northern abolitionists chose to publicly resist the Fugitive Slave Act.

Uncle Tom's Cabin

The publication of a novel called *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1852 compounded difficulties for the federal government. This anti-slavery book, written by **Harriet Beecher Stowe**, centred on the character of African-American slave 'Uncle Tom' and exposed the cruel realities of slavery.

Figure 1.8 A first edition of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, 1852



The book was an instant bestseller: 300,000 copies were sold in the first year, and it became the most successful novel of the 19th century. It was also turned into a play, and was therefore seen by many who did not read books. Its sentimental story had a great impact on public life in the USA, weakening the perceived case for slavery and fuelling the abolitionist cause. Southern authors wrote books, both factual and fictional, to try to counter the impact of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, but to no avail.

Key figure

Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811–96)

Stowe was a staunch abolitionist who wrote *Uncle Tom's Cabin* partly in response to what she saw as the injustices of the Fugitive Slave Act. She took up writing to help support her large family and was genuinely surprised at her national and international success, and at the impact her work had. When Lincoln met Stowe he said, 'So you are the little woman who wrote the book that started this great war?'



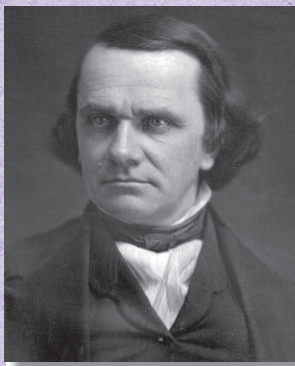
36° 30' line

This is a circle of latitude: an imaginary line running around the Earth, connecting all the places whose position is along that line.

Key figure

Stephen Douglas (1813–61)

Douglas was the Democratic Party nominee for president in 1860. Despite winning several debates against the Republican candidate Abraham Lincoln, Douglas lost out to him in the presidential elections. A supporter of the Union who was married to a slave owner, Douglas was an advocate of popular sovereignty in the states as a solution to all problems. He ended up being strongly disliked in both the North and the South.



It is difficult to appreciate the impact the book had at the time, not least because the novel's two-dimensional, stereotypical characterisation of African-American people has been heavily criticised in more recent times. 'Uncle Tom' has become a term of abuse used to describe a black person who is subservient to white people and their culture.

The Kansas–Nebraska Act of 1854

There was a widespread hope that the Compromise of 1850 had settled the territorial dimension of slavery in the USA for the foreseeable future. However, within a few years the issue of the slave/free status of new territories and states returned. The focus was now on the parts of the Louisiana Purchase of 1803 (see page 8) that were north of the **36° 30' line** accepted as the division between slave and free states.

In 1820, the Missouri Compromise had established Missouri as a slave state located west of the Mississippi and east of the Missouri River. According to that 1820 Compromise, Missouri was the only slave state or territory that could be established within the Louisiana Purchase north of the specified 36° 30' line.

In 1852, the remaining Purchase lands had still not been organised into territories. Leading Northern Democrat senator **Stephen Douglas** of Illinois, among others, decided it was time that these territories were created. Settlers wanted to move into the region and needed effective government to do so. In addition, territorial status would allow the building of a transcontinental railway across the central USA.

Douglas realised that he needed the support of Southern congressmen and senators to pass a bill to create these territories. His plan was that the people of the new territory, Nebraska, would be able to decide for themselves whether this would be a slave or a free state. In January 1854, Douglas persuaded a reluctant President Franklin Pierce, another Democrat, to support the bill. It would apply popular sovereignty to what would now be two territories: Nebraska, the northern of the two, to the west of the free state of Iowa; and Kansas, west of the slave state of Missouri.

The Kansas–Nebraska Bill caused a great political storm. Southern Democrats used it as a test of party loyalty for Northern Democrats. Many failed the test, and the Democratic Party was split. Much the same happened to the Whigs. The national party system of the past 30 years was broken by the power of sectional rivalry.

The Kansas–Nebraska Act effectively repealed the Missouri Compromise of 1820, as the states had the option of choosing to be slave states rather than their free status being assured by federal law due to their geographic position. This was supported in the South and heavily opposed in the North.



Figure 1.9 A map showing the outcome of the Kansas–Nebraska Act of 1854

‘Bleeding Kansas’

In 1854, according to one estimate, just 1400 people lived in Kansas (Native Americans were not counted). If the free/slave status of this new territory was to be decided by its people, as the Kansas–Nebraska Act stated, supporters of slavery and abolitionism both quickly realised it was important to fill Kansas with as many of their own sympathisers as possible.

People moved into the territory with great speed, and an accurate population count a year later listed 8501 people living in Kansas. In the rush to gain control, the South had a great advantage. On the eastern border of Kansas was Missouri, a slave state, with a population of nearly 600,000 whites and 87,000 slaves.

The first territorial election in Kansas was planned for the spring of 1855. Rumours spread that anti-slavery groups from the north-east were planning to send 20,000 supporters to dominate the election. Around 5000 men from Missouri, known as the ‘border ruffians’, were sent to ‘persuade’ voters to support Kansas becoming a slave territory.

The election resulted in a pro-slavery vote of 5427 and a free-state vote of 791. The pro-slave winners threw out the few anti-slavers who had been elected to the legislature, and put through a law that made it a hanging offence to help a slave escape.

Note:

The border ruffians were some 5000 men, many of them armed, who crossed from Missouri and controlled the Kansas election by methods such as intimidation and illegal ballot papers. They continued to cause havoc across Kansas over the next few years.

Those opposed to slavery then held their own illegal election, wrote their own constitution that banned slavery in the territory, and elected a new governor and legislature. The result was a local civil war between the two ‘governments’, in which over 200 people died. This was a warning of things to come: the struggle over slavery was becoming increasingly violent. Furthermore, the events of the early 1850s – the Compromise of 1850 and the Kansas–Nebraska Act – caused many in the North to realise it was time to form a new party.

The formation of the Republican Party

The 1850s saw a major reorganisation of US political parties. Slavery, traditionally a sectional issue, had started to significantly affect national politics. Northern Whigs, Northern Democrats and the Free Soil Party came together between 1854 and 1856, united by their support for abolitionism, and formed the Republican Party. The Free Soil Party had been formed in 1848 by those strongly opposed to slavery, although few Free Soilers wanted immediate abolition. The party’s full slogan was ‘Free Soil, Free Speech, Free Labour and Free Men’. It had little political impact. However, when the Free Soilers joined with many Northern Whigs and Democrats, first of all in states such as Wisconsin and then across the North, they became a much greater political force. What kept these groups together was opposition to government policies towards Kansas and a desire to prevent any expansion of slavery.

For the 1856 presidential election, these groups combined in the Republican Party to become the main challenger to the increasingly ‘Southern’ Democrats. The Republican presidential candidate was John Frémont (see page 71), a well-known and popular explorer from California who had minimal political experience. Opposing him was the Democrats’ candidate, James Buchanan, who strongly sympathised with Southern aspirations.

The North was a two-horse race between Buchanan and Frémont. Buchanan was victorious, winning five Northern states and 14 Southern states. Although Buchanan was the only candidate to win states in both North and South, his strength was clearly in the South. The electorate, and therefore the parties, were dividing along sectional lines. Mutual misunderstandings grew about the aims and intentions of both sides. There was much talk of **secession**, mainly in the South. The USA needed some calm and effective leadership in the next four years to avoid the eruption of conflict. Within three days of Buchanan’s inauguration, however, the next milestone on the road to civil war came into sight.

secession

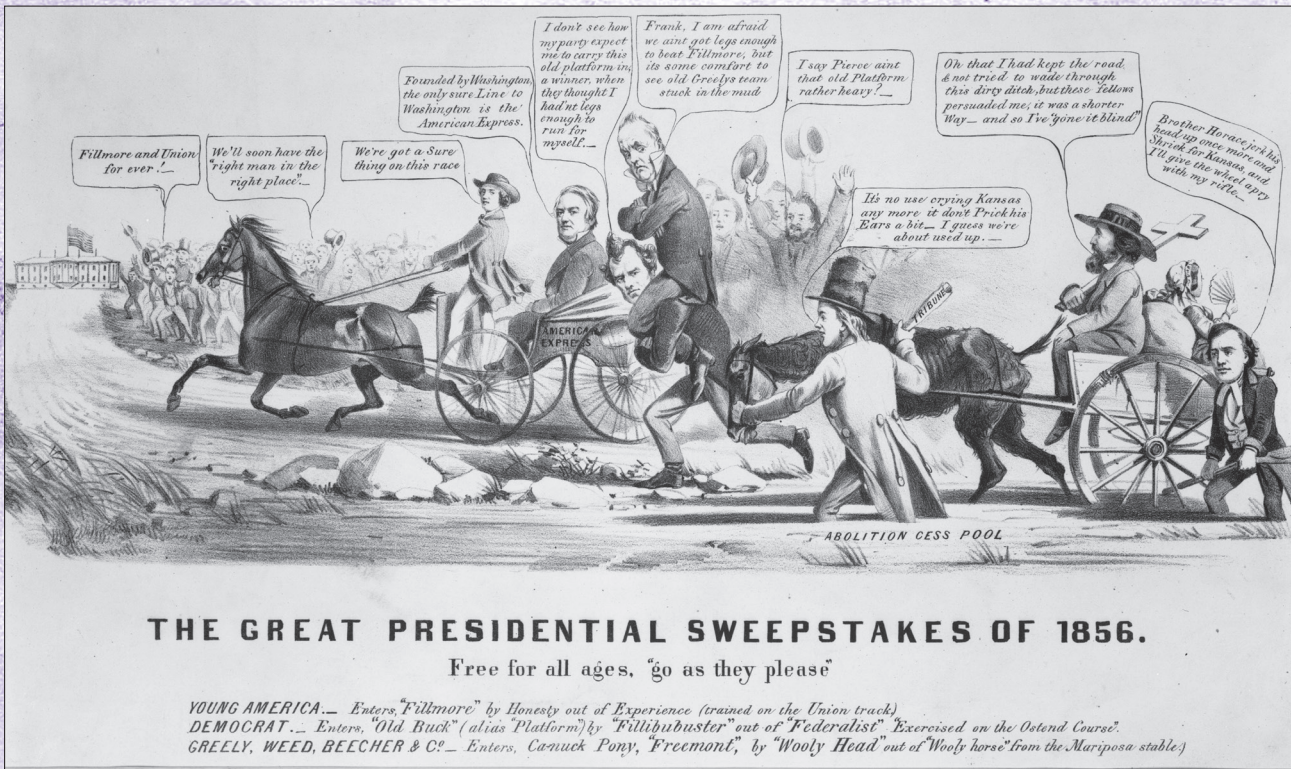
The act of withdrawing from an organisation, union or political entity. In the context of the USA, it typically refers to the withdrawal of a state from the United States.

Questions

- 1 To what extent did the Kansas–Nebraska Act reveal the inability of the US government to solve the problems caused by slavery?
- 2 How did the formation of the Republican Party increase the danger of civil war in the United States?

- ③ How would you define the North's position on slavery? Is the division of North = abolitionist and South = pro-slavery too simplistic?
- ④ Read the information below about the cartoon in Source A. What does the cartoon tell you about the nature of US politics during this troubled period?

Source A



The cartoon above, published some time before the 1856 presidential election, puts Millard Fillmore (see page 20) in the lead in the race for the White House. At the bottom of the page we are told that he is entered by Young America, bred by Honesty out of Experience (trained on the Union track). Next comes Buchanan, who is being carried by the current president, Franklin Pierce. Last comes Fremont [sic], entered by Horace Greeley (editor of the *New York Tribune*), Thurlow Weed and Henry Ward Beecher (Harriet Beecher Stowe's brother), all leading abolitionists. Frémont's carriage is being pulled by an old horse, which symbolises abolitionism. The horse is stuck in the cesspool of abolitionism. Frémont's jockey, carrying a cross that symbolises Catholicism, regrets his decision to go down the abolitionist route. Henry Ward Beecher tries to pull his carriage out of the pool by using a rifle as a lever.

The 1860 presidential election

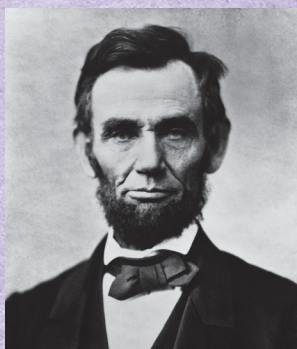
Supreme Court

The Supreme Court has ultimate authority over all legal decisions in the USA. It is the highest court in the country and consists of nine judges, all nominated by the president and approved by the Senate.

Key figure

Abraham Lincoln (1809–65)

Lincoln was born to a poor farming family. A largely self-taught lawyer, he went on to serve for one term as a Whig in the House of Representatives. In 1856, he helped form the Republican Party. Lincoln stood for the Senate in 1858. In 1860, he won the presidential election as a Republican with just 39% of the vote. He remained president until he was assassinated in April 1865.



The *Dred Scott* case

Two days after Buchanan was inaugurated as president in March 1857, the US **Supreme Court** announced its verdict in what was to become one of its most famous cases. Dred Scott was a slave who had lived in free territories as well as in a slave state. He went to court to gain US citizenship, and his case reached the highest court in the nation.

By the 1850s, it was generally accepted that the US Supreme Court had the right of judicial review. This means that it could review the policies of the president and the laws of Congress to decide if they were constitutional or not.

In March 1857, in the case of *Dred Scott v Sandford*, the Supreme Court made three rulings:

- Dred Scott had no right to be a US citizen.
- Dred Scott was bound by the laws of the slave state he had left, and not the free territories in which he had lived; the original slave owner's property rights had to be respected.
- Congress had no authority to limit slavery to certain parts of the USA, making the 1820 Missouri Compromise unconstitutional.

These judgments delighted the South and angered the North. The South thought that the *Dred Scott* decisions would help preserve slavery against increasing abolitionist pressure from the Northern-based Republican Party. The North saw the judgments as evidence of the Supreme Court's bias – five of the judges were from slave states. There was talk of a conspiracy between Southern Democrats in Congress, the presidency and the Supreme Court.

The Lincoln–Douglas debates

The judgment in *Dred Scott* raised the question of the place of slavery within the USA. What had been confined to the South for a generation could now expand across the USA, as the judgment affirmed that every state government in the country should be able to decide on slavery without federal government intervention. The national debate on the subject became personified by two politicians: Stephen Douglas and **Abraham Lincoln**, Democrat and Republican respectively.

Abraham Lincoln helped found the Republican Party in 1856, and aimed to be a US senator for Illinois in 1858. Stephen Douglas – known as the 'Little Giant' – was a leading Democrat and a member of the US Senate since 1843, who was up for re-election for Illinois. Douglas had been a leading proponent

of the popular sovereignty doctrine and proposed the controversial Kansas–Nebraska Act of 1854 (see page 22). Lincoln and Douglas took opposing views on slavery, a topic that they argued in a series of debates during the 1858 election campaign. Before the debates even began, however, Lincoln set out his position in what became known as the ‘House Divided’ speech.

‘A house divided against itself cannot stand.’ 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. Either the opponents of slavery will arrest the further spread of it ... or its advocates will push it forward till it shall become alike lawful in all the states, old as well as new, North as well as South.

Abraham Lincoln, June 1858. To read the entire speech, go to quod.lib.umich.edu/l/lincoln/lincoln2/1:508.1?rgn=div2;view=fulltext

Lincoln’s pessimistic analysis of the *Dred Scott* judgment argued that it was part of the Democratic strategy to expand slavery. Yet while the Republicans were united in their opposition to the Supreme Court ruling, the Democrats were divided. Some, mainly in the South, supported the judgment. Stephen Douglas found himself in a very difficult position. As the author of the Kansas–Nebraska Act, he was a keen advocate of popular sovereignty – the right of the people (although only a selected electorate) of a territory to choose whether to live in a free or slave state. Douglas could not reject *Dred Scott* and yet he could not fully support it because of its pro-slavery implications. The compromise he came up with during the debates with Lincoln was the Freeport Doctrine. This stated that the people of a state or territory should have the right to vote for its slave or free status, and that they should subsequently be able to refuse any legislation that went against this decision.

Douglas was put in another difficult position by developments in Kansas. The pro-slavery assembly in the territory had agreed on its constitution, the Lecompton Constitution. After a complex and very dubious series of elections and referendums to legitimise the constitution, it was submitted to the US Congress with a request for statehood. Needing to maintain his support among Southern Democrats, President Buchanan decided to support their request. Stephen Douglas, believing in popular sovereignty and trying to develop his support among Northern Democrats, had to oppose it. In December 1857, the two men had a face-to-face row in the White House. Relations were never repaired. The Democratic Party was now divided firmly into Northern and Southern Democrats. Some Northern Democrats had already left the party to join the Republicans.

The row over the Lecompton Constitution for Kansas had long-lasting consequences. The majority in the Senate refused to agree to Kansas's request for statehood and it served to divide North and South still further. In January 1861, Kansas did at last join the USA – as a free state.

Lincoln and Douglas had seven long debates in the summer of 1858, almost entirely focused on the issue of slavery. The debates gave huge publicity to the issue and helped Lincoln to become a national figure. Douglas won the election to the Senate, although Lincoln went on to win the presidential election against Douglas in 1860. In the time between these two elections, another event was to bring civil war closer for the USA.

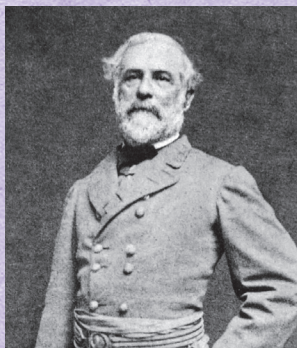
Note:

Only one Senate seat per state is up for re-election at a time. The election for the other Senate seat comes either two or four years later.

Key figure

Robert E. Lee (1807–70)

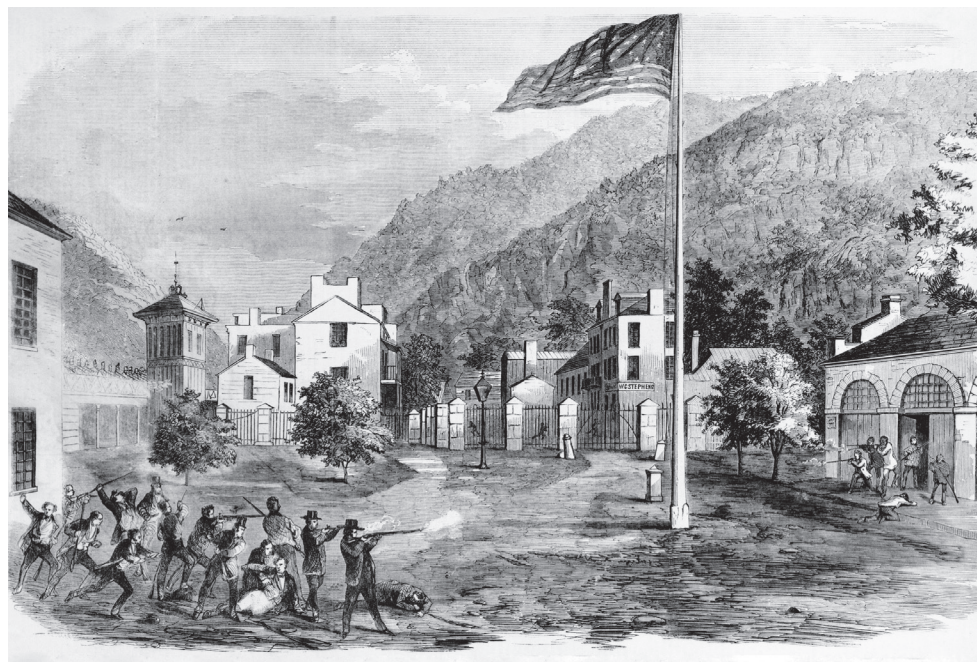
Lee was general of the Confederate army during the Civil War, and was Jefferson Davis's senior military advisor. He was an able general who hoped to bring victory to the South by destroying the North's army in battle. He came close to achieving this at the Battle of Gettysburg (see page 42), but the North's victory in this battle led to the South's defeat in the Civil War.



The raid on Harpers Ferry 1859

On 16 October 1859, a group of 22 men – 17 white and five black – attacked the US army's munitions depot in the town of Harpers Ferry, Virginia. Their leader was John Brown, who had been involved in fighting in the Kansas–Nebraska conflict. Brown was an abolitionist who often resorted to violence. He hoped that the seizure of weapons would encourage African-Americans in the area to rise in support. No uprising occurred. The local militia regained control of the town, killing eight of the rebels in the process. US troops, led by Colonel **Robert E. Lee**, quickly recaptured the fire-engine house in which the rebels made their last stand. Brown was caught alive but wounded. The surviving rebels were tried and punished. This disorganised, short-lived attempt to provoke rebellion became significant not for the events of the raid, but for the responses to it.

Figure 1.10 The raid on Harpers Ferry, with militia firing on the rebels from the railway bridge and trapping John Brown's group in the fire-engine house



John Brown's behaviour in the aftermath of the raid won him considerable public sympathy. In the last few weeks of his life, he showed great dignity and courage. In court, having been sentenced to death, he made a five-minute speech that people have compared to Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. Almost a century later, in 1950, the historian Allen Nevins wrote: 'In his last weeks John Brown rose to a height of moral grandeur which went far to redeeming his name from the terrible blots which he had placed upon it.' Brown was hanged on 2 December 1859.

The American people, especially in the North and West, displayed a strong emotional reaction to Brown's execution. In Lawrence, Kansas, the editor of the *Republican* wrote: 'The death of no man in America has ever produced so profound a sensation. A feeling of deep and sorrowful indignation seems to possess the masses.'

Victor Hugo, the French novelist, wrote an open letter on the day of Brown's hanging, pleading that he be spared. Henry Ward Beecher said that people should not pray for Brown's release: 'Let Virginia make him a martyr ... His soul was noble, his work miserable. But a cord and a gibbet would redeem all that and round up Brown's failure with heroic success.' Although many disagreed with Brown's actions, they also argued that slavery itself was wrong. He became a hero – a martyr to those opposed to slavery.

In the South, however, the raid on Harpers Ferry confirmed people's worst fears about the Northern abolitionist threat to slavery. Rumours and suspicions only added to these fears. Visitors to the South who were thought to be abolitionists risked being whipped, **tarred and feathered** or hanged. The contrasting responses of the North and South to the death of John Brown shows how divided the USA had become by the end of the 1850s. A presidential election was due in November 1860. Buchanan's presidency had widened sectional divisions; the president elected in 1860 could be decisive in deciding the future of the United States.

tarred and feathered

Being covered with boiling hot tar and then a large number of downy feathers, so that the tar burns the skin and sticks the feathers to the body.

The election of Abraham Lincoln

Lincoln was the surprise winner of the 1860 election, but he had also been an unexpected victor in the nomination process of the Republican Party. He was not even one of the leading candidates before the nomination process began, let alone the favourite. Most people seemed to be backing William Seward, from New York, a strongly anti-slavery candidate who was vastly experienced – he had been governor and then senator for New York since 1839.

The Republican convention (where a party decides on its presidential candidate) was held in Chicago, Illinois – a fact that almost certainly helped Lincoln. Coming from the Midwest, Lincoln came to be seen as more of a vote-winner in the borderline states such as Illinois and Ohio. New York and the East would vote Republican no matter who the candidate was. Lincoln was also known for his 1858 debates with Stephen Douglas, a leading Democratic candidate, in which he had been very effective. Lincoln won the Republican Party's nomination for presidential candidate.

platform
A 'platform' is what a political party or candidate promises to do if elected to office.

The Democratic Party had already held its convention – this time in Charleston, South Carolina, arguably the most pro-slavery state in the whole of the South – in April 1860. Stephen Douglas was the favourite to win. After no less than 57 ballots, however, he still had not gained the two-thirds majority needed to win the nomination. The convention agreed to meet in Baltimore in June. This time Douglas was elected, though many delegates from the South stayed away. They organised a separate convention, at which they chose their own candidate, John C. Breckinridge, the current vice president. The Democratic Party remained critically divided.

There was a fourth party in 1860, the Constitutional Party, formed by some ex-Whigs. John Bell, a wealthy slave owner from Tennessee, was its candidate. This party had no **platform**, only a commitment to 'recognise no political principle other than the Constitution ... the Union ... and the enforcement of law'. In practice, the party wanted to defend the interests of the South, but it wanted to do so without mentioning the issue of slavery.

The cartoon below, which shows three of the four political parties, makes the point that the Democratic Party was greatly weakened by the division between its Northern and Southern wings. In 1856, it was the one party that could claim to be national and to draw support from both sections, but by 1860 it had become as sectional as the Republican Party.

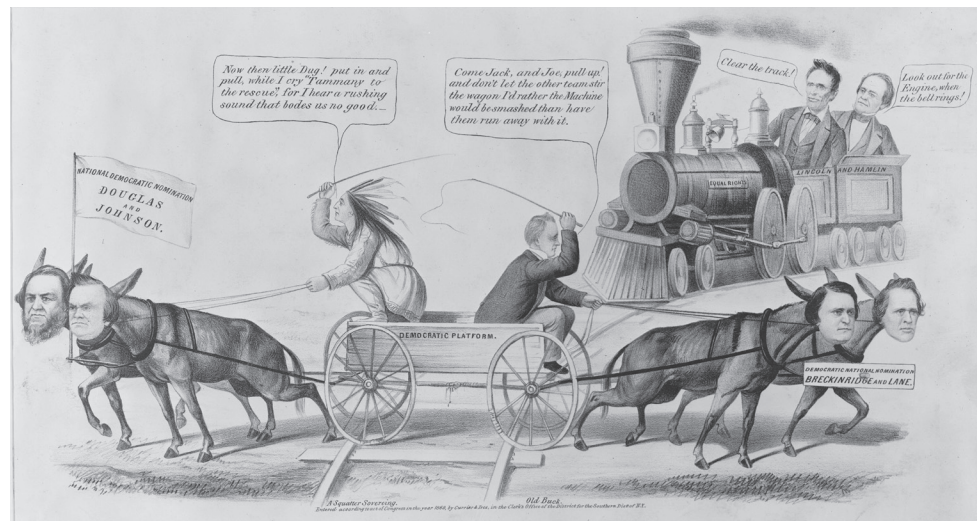


Figure 1.11 A political cartoon from 1860

As in 1856, the 1860 presidential election involved two sectional contests: Lincoln versus Douglas in the North, Breckinridge versus Bell in the South. Lincoln only gained 39% of the popular vote, but it proved enough to win. He earned few votes in the South, and thus became a president chosen by one section of the nation. Lincoln was known across the USA as a leading abolitionist, and the dedicated anti-abolitionists in the South believed he would certainly outlaw slavery when he took office. They decided to act immediately, rather than waiting five months for his inauguration to see what he would do. The last milestone on the path to civil war was in sight.

The beginning of the Civil War in April 1861

The secession of the South 1860–61

Lincoln's election in 1860 sent a worrying signal to the South. It was clear that the region's influence at a national level was waning. Many of the Southern states decided that the only option was to secede from the United States and rule themselves. However, the fact is that Lincoln's election did not necessarily pose a direct threat to the Southern way of life:

- Lincoln explicitly stated that he did not intend to act against the institution of slavery in the Southern states; in fact, the political limitations of his office meant that it was unlikely that he could abolish it, as the Republican Party did not have control of Congress or the Supreme Court.
- In early 1861, the 'South' did not present a unified political entity opposed to the 'North'; instead, the South had numerous different factions and interests, and internal state loyalties there were stronger than those to a theoretical 'Southern country'.

None of this stopped Southern secessionists from reacting strongly against Lincoln's election. South Carolina was the first state to act decisively. On 20 December 1860, a convention (special assembly) decided to dissolve the union between South Carolina and all the other states of the USA. Six other states followed by February 1861: Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana and Texas.

Figure 1.12 A map showing the secession of the Southern states



The people of Georgia having dissolved their political connection with the Government of the United States of America present to their confederates and the world the causes which have led to the separation. For the last ten years we have had numerous and serious causes of complaint against our non-slave-holding confederate States with reference to the subject of African slavery. They have endeavored to weaken our security, to disturb our domestic peace and tranquillity, and persistently refused to comply with their express constitutional obligations to us in reference to that property, and by the use of their power in the Federal Government have striven to deprive us of an equal enjoyment of the common Territories of the Republic. This hostile policy of our confederates has been pursued with every circumstance of aggravation which could arouse the passions and excite the hatred of our people, and has placed the two sections of the Union for many years past in the condition of virtual civil war. Our people, still attached to the Union from habit and national traditions, and averse to change, hoped that time, reason, and argument would bring, if not redress, at least exemption from further insults, injuries, and dangers.

The state of Georgia's declaration of secession, approved 29 January 1861.

state legislatures

Elected bodies of people that have the power to make, change or repeal state laws.

referendum

A public vote held on a specific issue.

The average vote on secession in the **state legislatures** resulted in 80% in favour. Texas was the only state that put its convention's decision to the people – it held a **referendum** in which secession was approved by 44,317 votes to 13,020. Another four states – Arkansas, Tennessee, North Carolina and Virginia – left the Union once the fighting started in the spring. Importantly, the four slave states closest to the North – Missouri, Kentucky, Maryland and Delaware – stayed in the Union. The fact that not all slave states had broken away from the USA was to prove significant. The northern half of Virginia, refusing to follow the rest of the state, broke away to form West Virginia.

I have no purpose, directly or indirectly, to interfere with the institution of slavery in the states where it exists. I believe I have no lawful right to do so, and I have no inclination to do so.

From President Lincoln's first inaugural address, March 1861.

On the occasion corresponding to these four years ago, all thoughts were anxiously directed to an impending civil war. All dreaded it – all sought to avert it. While the inaugural address was being delivered from this place, devoted altogether to saving the Union without war, insurgent agents were in the city seeking to destroy it without war – seeking to dissolve the Union, and divide effects, by negotiation. Both parties deprecated war; but one of them would make war rather than let the nation survive; and the other would accept war rather than let it perish. And the war came.

From President Lincoln's second inaugural address, March 1865.

Forming a confederacy

In February 1861, delegates from the rebel Southern states met in Montgomery, Alabama, to form a new union: the Confederate States of America. They established their own 'Southern' legislature, made up of politically or economically influential men, and they quickly got down to business:

- On 9 February, **Jefferson Davis** was appointed provisional president of the Confederacy.
- On 11 March 1861, a Constitution of the Confederate States was ratified, mirroring the US Constitution but protecting rights such as slavery.
- The Confederate states set about creating their own army.
- The Confederacy adopted its own flag, sharpening the South's sense of separate identity.

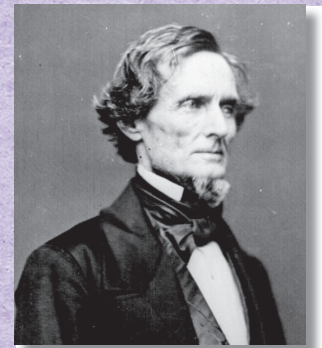
During this dramatic period, the president was still Buchanan, a Democrat who avoided hasty action. Lincoln was heading from Illinois to Washington, DC, to be inaugurated on 4 March 1861. As soon as he took office, Lincoln was faced with the problem of Fort Sumter, a federal fort in Charleston Harbor, South Carolina. The commander of the fort, Major Robert Anderson, was a former slave owner who nevertheless remained loyal to the Union. When the state of South Carolina seceded, local forces demanded that the US troops abandon their positions and surrender the fort. Fort Sumter thus became a flashpoint for conflict. Lincoln could not be seen to give up federal property to secessionists, but for the secessionists Fort Sumter now virtually amounted to a 'foreign' occupation in the midst of its territory. As the Sumter garrison found itself under siege, Lincoln and his advisors debated the right course of action.

After some delay, Lincoln decided that he would send an unarmed naval force to resupply Fort Sumter, as the garrison was running out of food. In response, on 9 April, Davis ordered that Sumter either surrender, or be taken by force. On 11 April the Charleston military commander, General Beauregard, issued Major Anderson with a demand for surrender. Anderson refused, and in response Confederate forces began to pound Sumter with artillery fire on the morning of 12 April. The outcome was inevitable. Anderson surrendered Fort Sumter the following day, and the outraged North was provoked into action. On 15 April, with hostilities now open, Lincoln issued a call to arms, asking for 75,000 men to defend the Union. Four days later, he announced a **naval blockade** of the Confederate states. Tens of thousands of men rushed to join both the Union and Confederate armies. The American Civil War had begun.

Key figure

Jefferson Davis (1808–89)

Davis was born in Kentucky and was a soldier and slave owner. He became a Democratic member of the House of Representatives and then the Senate, and also served as US secretary of war between 1853 and 1857. A senator again in 1857, he was chosen as president of the Confederate States of America in 1861. Davis retained this position throughout the Civil War, until the CSA's defeat in 1865. At the end of the war he was charged with treason and imprisoned, but he was later released without trial.



naval blockade

Preventing ships from entering or leaving a certain area.

Historical debate

The true causes of the American Civil War remain hotly debated to this day. There are two main schools of thought: the ‘irrepressibilists’ and the ‘blunderers’. The arguments of the irrepressibilists are summarised in William Seward’s 1858 speech (below), which describes the Civil War as an ‘irrepressible conflict’. The blunderers are those who believe that the Civil War was caused by a blundering generation of politicians who sleepwalked into war.

Shall I tell you what this collision between North and South means? They who think that it is accidental, unnecessary, the work of interested or fanatical agitators and therefore ephemeral, mistake the case altogether. 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 ...

It is the failure to apprehend this great truth that induces so many unsuccessful attempts at a final compromise between the slave and free states and it is the existence of this great fact that renders all pretended compromises, when made, vain and ephemeral.

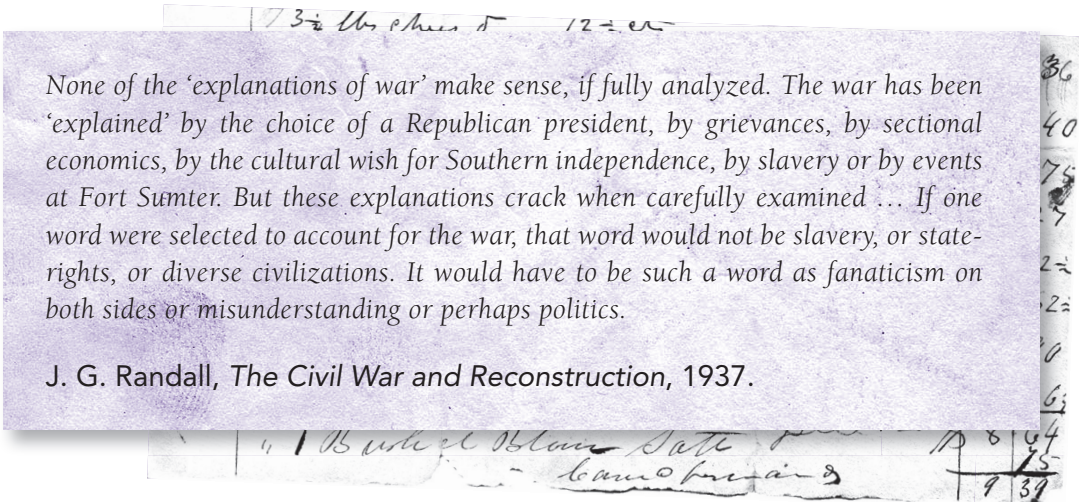
From a speech by William Seward made in October 1858.

The idea of a fundamental clash between enduring forces was further developed in the 20th century by Marxist historians. Marxists believed that the prime driving forces of history were economic and social, and that the ‘great men’ of history were less important than they seemed. Historians on the Progressive wing of US politics, who were not declared Marxists, thought much the same. The best known of this group – and the most influential American historian of his time – was Charles Beard. Writing with his wife, Mary, he labelled the Civil War as ‘the second American Revolution’. Louis Hacker, a fellow Progressive, later developed Beard’s ideas, writing in 1940 that ‘the American Civil War turned out to be a revolution indeed. But its striking achievement was the triumph of industrial capitalism.’ The withdrawal of Southern states from the USA allowed the Northern Republicans to establish an economy that suited the needs of Northern industry.

Note:

American Progressivism was a movement that advocated political, cultural and economic reform to encourage the development of an increasingly industrialised USA.

The leading ‘blunderer’ was J. G. Randall, a mid 20th-century historian.



None of the 'explanations of war' make sense, if fully analyzed. The war has been 'explained' by the choice of a Republican president, by grievances, by sectional economics, by the cultural wish for Southern independence, by slavery or by events at Fort Sumter. But these explanations crack when carefully examined ... If one word were selected to account for the war, that word would not be slavery, or state-rights, or diverse civilizations. It would have to be such a word as fanaticism on both sides or misunderstanding or perhaps politics.

J. G. Randall, *The Civil War and Reconstruction*, 1937.

According to the blundering generation theory, the war occurred because the politicians on both sides made mistakes. They did not intend a civil war but their actions incited one nonetheless.

The debate continues in varying forms some 70 years later. Some historians believe in the importance of fundamental social and economic causes of the war; other are convinced that it was an accidental war. The objectives of the North and South in the Civil War are perhaps clearer than the war's causes: the two sides and their leaders certainly stated what they were fighting for. Lincoln sought to preserve the United States of America. In his inaugural address on 4 March, he clearly stated his belief that 'no State upon its own mere motion can lawfully get out of the Union; that resolves and ordinances to that effect are legally void, and that acts of violence within any State or States against the authority of the United States are insurrectionary or revolutionary, according to circumstances'.

This is not to say that Lincoln was committed to war as a matter of course, as he also stated that 'there needs to be no bloodshed or violence, and there shall be none unless it be forced upon the national authority. The power confided to me will be used to hold, occupy, and possess the property and places belonging to the government and to collect the duties and imposts; but beyond what may be necessary for these objects, there will be no invasion, no using of force against or among the people anywhere'.

In late 1860 and early 1861, Buchanan and Lincoln exercised caution, keen not to inflame Southern opinion (particularly amongst the states of the upper South) by ill-advised military action. In February 1861, for example, a Peace Conference was held in Virginia, although the Confederacy did not send any delegates. The conference reinforced a message that the North was quite prepared not to interfere with the institution of slavery. Where Lincoln was very clear, however, was on the integrity of the Union and on his conviction that secession was both illegal and unjustifiable. This point is important – Lincoln was prepared to go to war to preserve the Union, not to abolish slavery. As for racial equality, only a few radical abolitionists gave it much thought.

Lincoln showed political skill during 1861. As we have seen, four slave states stayed with the North: Delaware, Kentucky, Maryland and Missouri. Known as the Border States, these states all adjoined Northern states and were the least committed to slavery. The relative lack of slaves in these states was one reason why they looked North rather than South. Lincoln's policies were another reason. In Missouri, Lincoln sacked his military commander, Frémont, when the latter gave Missourian slaves their freedom. This reassured the Border States that they could keep their slaves, and thus kept them on the Union's side. It also showed that Lincoln did really intend to maintain the Union rather than free the slaves.

The decision of the four Border States to stay in the Union would go on to have a significant effect on the outcome of the Civil War. Instead of the South having 13 states and the North 19, the balance in terms of political geography was very much in favour of the North. Maryland, in particular, made a big difference, as three of the four borders of Washington, DC, were in Maryland. Although there was a certain level of support for Lincoln and the North in the Border States, the only way that the new president could make sure that Maryland did not join the Confederacy in the spring of 1861 was by imposing **martial law** there. This meant Lincoln could take all the decisions in the state. The inclusion of these slave states in the North, however, also affected the politics of the USA. The four Border States, so crucial in the conduct of the war, carried great weight in policy debates. Within the USA, they counter-balanced the power of the abolitionists in the Northeast.

martial law

In emergency situations, leaders can sometimes impose martial law in designated areas. This means that the military authorities rule over the area in accordance with military law.

For Jefferson Davis, the prime objective was to preserve the Southern way of life, built around slavery – which meant secession. Davis also argued that secession was about a state's right to exercise self-determination as much as it was about the perceived threat to slavery. He stated this in his farewell speech to the Senate.

Secession belongs to a different class of remedies. It is to be justified upon the basis that the States are sovereign. There was a time when none denied it. I hope the time may come again, when a better comprehension of the theory of our Government, and the inalienable rights of the people of the States, will prevent any one from denying that each State is a sovereign, and thus may reclaim the grants which it has made to any agent whomsoever.

From the US Senate farewell speech by Jefferson Davis, 21 January 1861.

The implications of secession, however, were fully revealed at Fort Sumter. Davis saw this action as an affront to his new government, and believed that taking the fort was an opportunity to bring other slave states into the Confederacy. Therefore, in April 1861, the American people found themselves at war with each other. No one knew how long it would last or what changes would follow in its wake. As at the start of most wars, many (including Lincoln) expected it to be short. They were wrong.

Key issues

The key features of this chapter are:

- the Missouri Compromise of 1820
- the political effects of the US–Mexican War 1846–48
- the breakdown of the Compromise of 1850
- Northern and Southern attitudes to slavery, and how they contributed to tensions between the two regions
- the emergence of the Republican Party
- the events that contributed to the outbreak of the Civil War – the Kansas–Nebraska Act, Harpers Ferry and the election of 1860
- the secession of the Southern states, and the North’s response
- the significance of the battle of Fort Sumter
- the handling of events in early 1861 by Lincoln and Davis.

Revision questions

- 1 To what extent was the outbreak of the American Civil War in April 1861 ‘inevitable’?
- 2 What were the principal causes of the secession of Southern states from the Union in early 1861?
- 3 Read the quotes in the historical debate section on pages 34–36. To what extent do they argue that the outbreak of civil war in 1861 was purely about the issue of slavery? How convincing are these arguments?

Further reading

Chadwick, F. E. *The Causes of the US Civil War*. Lightning Source. 2011.
 Farmer, A. *The Origins of the American Civil War*. London, UK. Hodder. 1996.
 Reid, B. H. *The Origins of the American Civil War*. (Origins of Modern War). Prentice Hall. 1996.
 Stamp, K. *The Causes of the Civil War*. London, UK. Touchstone. 1992.