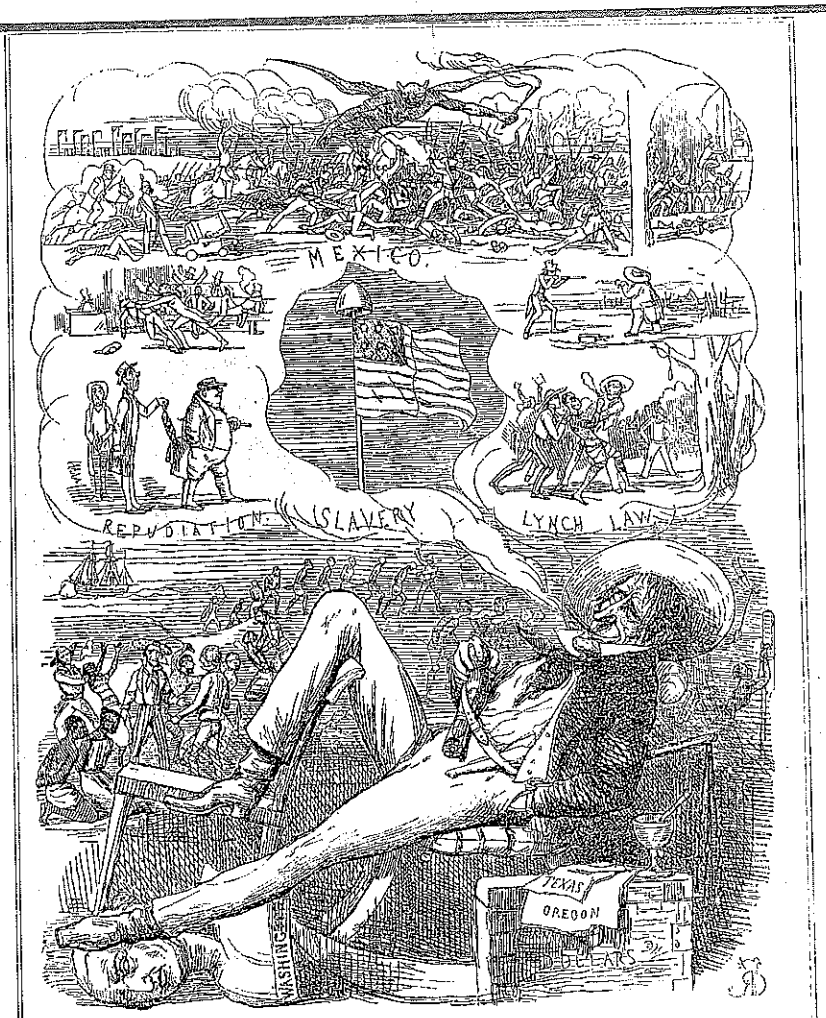
9

The Spread of Slavery and the Crisis of Southern Society

1836–1848



THE LAND OF LIBERTY.

RECOMMENDED TO THE CONSIDERATION OF "BROTHER JONATHAN."

In the 1830s, Charleston, South Carolina, was home to many wealthy whites who owned slaves. In one such slave-owning family, the wife was a deeply religious woman. She regularly assembled her children for family prayer and was known in the community for her charity and her work among the poor. Yet the young African American woman who worked for her as a seamstress and maid experienced little of this kindness. Perhaps it was because she was a mulatto (raising fears in her mistress that the master was sexually exploiting slave women), or perhaps it was because the young woman maintained an independent spirit despite having been enslaved for all of her eighteen years. She ran away several times and, when captured, was sent to the Charleston workhouse to be whipped. When the brutal whippings, which left finger-deep scars along her back, did not deter the woman's desire for freedom, her owners placed a heavy iron collar around her neck. Three prongs projected from it to hold the collar tight. Her owners also yanked out her front tooth to make it easier for them to describe her in case she ran again. The supposedly charitable mistress watched the seamstress work, with her deeply lacerated back, her mutilated mouth, and her bowed neck, but could never be sure that she had shackled the young African American's heart and soul as well as her body.

Although the seamstress may have persisted in her resistance to bondage longer than most slaves did and labored under closer scrutiny within an urban household, she was certainly not alone in challenging planters' authority. A black field hand from South Carolina, looking back on his days in bondage, claimed that when slaves gazed on southern soil, they saw "land that is rich with the sweat of our faces and the blood of our back." When planters noted the richness of that same land, they focused on the

Actions Speak Louder Than Words

"The Land of Liberty" was the ironic title of this cartoon published in an 1847 edition of the British satirical weekly *Punch*. *Punch* (1847) — American Social History Project.

wealth it produced for them. As the number of African Americans held in slavery grew, this irrepressible conflict between slaves and masters generated repeated crises in plantation society during the 1830s and 1840s. The resulting upheavals affected not only masters and slaves, but a range of other residents as well. Some were nonslaveholding white farmers who envied the profits made on plantations as they supported their own families on marginal land without the benefit of bound labor. Others were landless whites, who struggled to sustain body, soul, and family as they moved from place to place and from job to job. They competed with free blacks for jobs, housing, and the patronage of well-to-do whites but also shared their disparagement of wealthy whites. These groups vied with each other for respect, authority, and some degree of independence throughout the early nineteenth century.

The conflicts that were generated by southerners' competing economic, social, and political visions escalated in the years between the establishment of Texas as an independent republic in 1836 and the end of the U.S. war against Mexico in 1848. The planters' two goals—to consolidate power and to expand the lands under their control—often worked at cross-purposes, because the extension of slavery raised new conflicts and controversies both within and outside the South. During these years, planters became ever more dependent on slave labor. As one South Carolina plantation owner bluntly explained, "Slavery with us is no abstraction but a great and vital fact. Without it our every comfort would be taken from us. Our wives, our children made unhappy . . . all, all lost and our people ruined forever." In the 1840s, however, the consequences of extending slave labor into new western territories became clearer as expansion promoted regional, racial, and class conflicts that shattered party alignments and presaged the Civil War. During this decade, planters were driven to defend the institution of slavery more aggressively. Yet their proslavery arguments only heightened northern fears that human bondage threatened free labor and defied moral logic.

Planters, who had long been masters of their domain, found themselves facing challenges from both inside and outside the South. In the years preceding the final confrontations over slavery—from roughly 1836 to 1848—African Americans and poorer whites forced planters to recognize limits on their authority. Although the planters certainly retained their power, they had to make concessions, especially to nonslaveholding whites, to ensure continued control.

The Master's Precarious Domain

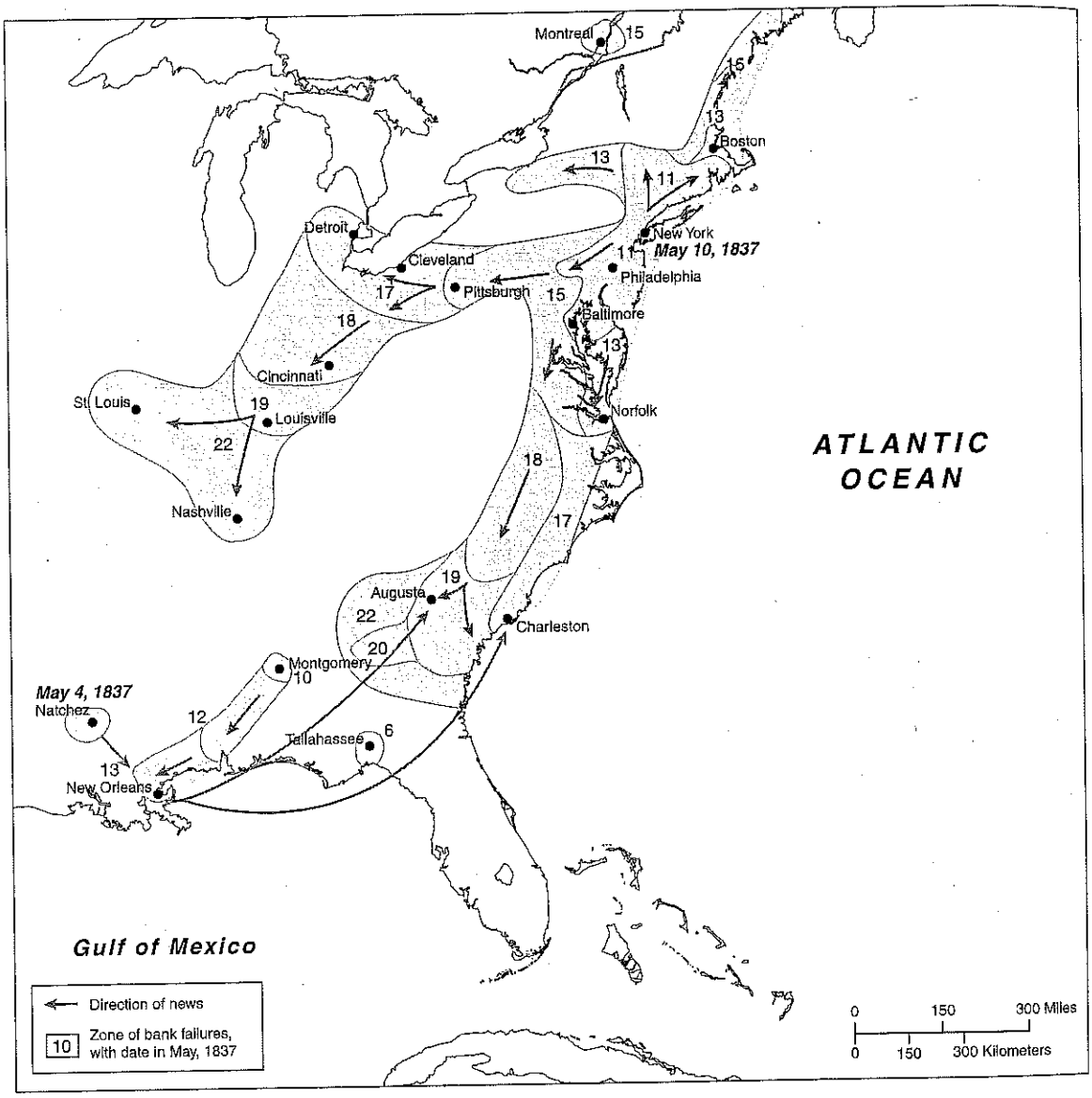
Throughout the 1830s and 1840s, planters successfully fended off challenges to their personal, political, and economic authority from southerners who received fewer benefits from a slave-based economy. Enslaved and free

blacks, American Indians, and nonslaveholding whites resisted the spread of the "peculiar institution," as slavery was euphemistically called. Even some plantation mistresses criticized (if only in their private diaries) the effects of slavery on their families. White plantation employees, too, found fault with the planters who hired them. In response, slave owners were forced to develop new strategies to maintain their control and consolidate their authority in the household, the community, and the region.

The Consolidation of Planters' Power For many southern planters, Texas came to symbolize their ability to expand slavery and consolidate their power. Slave owners such as Moses Austin began settling the fertile lands in eastern Texas in the 1820s, when Texas was one of the outlying provinces of the Republic of Mexico. With only about 2,000 Spanish-speaking residents, or *tejanos*, and a much larger number of Comanche Indians in the region, the Mexican government initially encouraged American settlement. Then, in 1829, the Republic of Mexico outlawed slavery, but thousands of Americans continued to bring enslaved blacks into Texas. By the early 1830s, a new government in Mexico, led by General Antonio López de Santa Anna, sought to stem the tide of U.S. migrants by imposing greater control over Texas. When U.S. migrants and planters failed to recognize Santa Anna's authority, he sought to drive the Americans out.

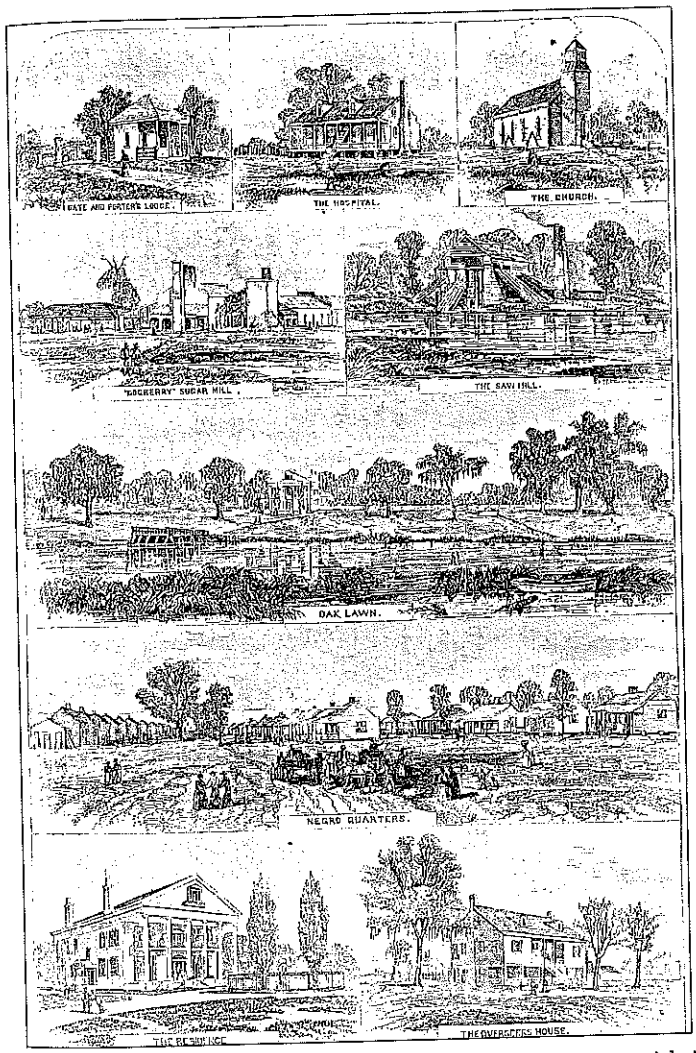
Skirmishes between Mexican troops and U.S. settlers began in 1835, and by March 2, 1836, Americans led by Moses Austin's son Stephen declared independence from Mexico. Four days later, 4,000 Mexican troops attacked the Alamo, an abandoned mission near San Antonio. When the 187 Americans who were defending the outpost, including Davy Crockett, refused to surrender, they were killed by Mexican soldiers. Soon afterward, more than 300 American rebels were killed at Goliad even after they had agreed to surrender. By April, however, the tide had turned as eager volunteers from the United States joined their countrymen already in Texas to defend American interests. Commanded by Sam Houston, U.S. forces routed the Mexican army at the battle of San Jacinto on April 21 and captured Santa Anna himself. As a result, Santa Anna signed a treaty in May 1836 granting independence to the Republic of Texas. Although conflicts continued for more than a decade between Mexicans and Texans and between Texans and Comanches, southern slave owners viewed the triumph of U.S. forces in Texas as a victory for slavery.

The heady economic dreams that followed Texas independence from Mexico in 1836 were delayed, but not destroyed, by the onset of depression the following year. The Panic of 1837 destroyed the fortunes of plantation owners across the South as prices fell by almost half between 1837 and 1843 (Map 9.1). Yet those who survived the crash were rewarded when British and U.S. banks began extending credit on more favorable terms in the early



MAP 9.1 Anatomy of a Panic: Bank Suspensions in May 1837

Although New York City served as the financial center of the United States, the Panic of 1837 began in the South. Bank failures in Natchez, Mississippi, and Tallahassee, Florida, produced the first alarms on May 4 and 6, 1837. By May 22, northeastern financial centers as well as key western and southern cities were engulfed in the Panic.



A "Model" Plantation

This pictorial survey of Oak Lawn, a large Louisiana sugar plantation on the Bayou Teche, includes a view of its slave quarters, consisting of forty-two cabins. C. E. H. Bonwill, *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, February 6, 1864 — American Social History Project.

1840s. By that time, the failure of farms and businesses had lessened competition, and the demand for many goods, including cotton, once again rose. In fact, pent-up demand ensured a steady market for both agricultural and manufactured items for the next several years.

Like some northern merchants and speculators, the most successful southern gentlemen took advantage of the devastation the panic wreaked on more vulnerable neighbors to expand their holdings. The percentage of white families who owned large plantations shrank, but their power was growing along with their desire to make their wealth and status more visible. As cotton prices rose, these affluent planters began to replace their rough and unpretentious farmhouses with newer, more ostentatious mansions. Across the South, but especially in Alabama, Louisiana, and the Mississippi Delta — the areas along the Gulf Coast into which slavery was expanding — the new plantation houses were decorated with expensive, often imported, furnishings and filled with fine wines, fancy clothes, numerous guests, and a domestic labor force large enough to care for the new amenities.

This new aristocracy with its opulent lifestyle was typified in Mississippi by the Natchez "nabobs," a group composed of the region's forty wealthiest families, who had begun to buy up land in the 1820s. During the Panic of 1837, members of this elite circle added both slaves and acreage at depression era prices and then took advantage of rising cotton prices in the mid-1840s to complete their climb to the top. Nabob Stephen Duncan, for instance, was a Pennsylvania-born physician who had moved to Mississippi in 1808. In the early 1830s, he was a successful planter and banker with close ties to the Whig Party and the American Colonization Society. Two decades later, Duncan owned six cotton plantations and two sugar cane plantations spread across three counties in two states, along with more than 1,000 slaves, 23 of whom labored as domestic servants at Auburn, his Natchez mansion.

Duncan and his fellow nabobs threw elaborate parties and balls, traveled extensively, bred and raced horses, and planted English-style boxed gardens. William Johnson, a free black barber in Natchez, detailed the comings and goings of local aristocrats in his diary. In 1840, in the midst of the depression, Johnson commented on the marriage of nabob Louis Bingaman, Duncan's brother-in-law, to a New York socialite. "The N.P. [newspaper] speaks of the wedding Dress Costing $2000. And of the marriage Contract or Settlement $100,000—Not bad to take," he concluded.

Marriage played a critical role in the economic strategies of southern planters. Stephen Duncan's wealth, for instance, was built not only on his medical practice, shrewd land speculation, and effective slave management practices, but also on two well-placed marriages (after the death of his socially prominent first wife, he married into another wealthy family). For men, a good marriage required obtaining both a large financial settlement and a wife who understood her place. Planter society celebrated strongly patriarchal families. The father supervised the plantation's production of the staple crop and the financial transactions that were directly linked to it, including the purchase and sale of slaves. His wife was assigned the domestic sphere and was denied access to most aspects of public life. "The proper place for a woman is at home," declared the *Southern Quarterly Review*. "One of her highest privileges [is] to be politically merged in the existence of her husband."

But a wealthy southerner's business dealings often took him away from home, requiring his wife to assume many duties in running the plantation. This created enormous strains. Catherine Hammond, wife of prominent South Carolina planter and politician James Henry Hammond, found herself in charge of affairs at Silver Bluff plantation during her husband's frequent travels. Catherine had inherited Silver Bluff at age eleven, when her father died. Six years later, in 1831, Hammond, a dashing young lawyer of twenty-three, married the shy teenage heiress despite her family's misgivings. In the summer of 1840, Catherine was pregnant for the seventh time in nine years. Yet she was suddenly forced to preside over the plantation when James decided that he needed "to go somewhere" to recover from the strain of his ongoing campaign for the governorship.

James spent the next six weeks in New York City, purchasing silver, linens, and furniture for a newly constructed residence in Columbia, while Catherine endured the hot and humid weather at Silver Bluff, overseeing the crops and slaves and entertaining a full house of family members and guests. Hammond returned to the plantation in September, just three days before Catherine gave birth. Women such as Catherine Hammond, although enjoying all the benefits of wealth and position that planter society had to offer, led lives that were restricted by the masculine authority that prevailed in the planter class.

The Price of Blood
Thomas Satterwhite Noble's painting reflected on the ways in which property overwhelmed any ties of affection in the plantation "family." His 1868 picture portrayed the sale of a plantation master's mulatto son to a slave trader. 1868, oil, 39 1/4 × 49 1/2 inches — The Morris Museum of Art, Augusta, Georgia.

Southern society's dependence on slaves strengthened traditional beliefs in the sanctity of social order and the strict subordination of the members of one (supposedly inferior) social group to those of another (supposedly superior). Planters viewed their children, wives, poorer neighbors, white employees, and slaves as being, to one degree or another, inferior to themselves in social standing and personal rights. The master's power over his slaves was merely an extension of his power over his wife and children. "Do you say that the slave is held to involuntary service?" one spokesman asked rhetorically, before offering his justification. "So is the wife. Her relation to her husband, in the immense majority of cases, is made for her, not by her." This linking of slavery with white family relations did not prevent the forcible breakup of slave families or keep planters from enslaving or selling children whom they conceived with female slaves. It did, however, reinforce the patriarch's supremacy within his own home and emphasize still more than in the North the wife's subordinate position.

Household Discord and Challenges from Below Although planters asserted their authority over their families, tensions often lurked just beneath the surface. First and foremost, the planter's sexual access to female slaves strained marital bonds and undermined the mistress's self-respect and moral authority on the plantation. A proper lady would, of course, try to ignore evidence of sexual indiscretion. Mary Boykin Chesnut, in an

oft-quoted passage from her diary, observed that "the Mulattoes one sees in every family exactly resemble the white children—and every lady tells you who is the father of all the Mulatto children in everybody's household, but those in her own she seems to think drop from the clouds or pretends so to think."

Sometimes the evidence was so overwhelming that it could not be ignored. Catherine Hammond left her husband over his sexual relationship with the slave Louisa but only after having overlooked earlier liaisons with Louisa's mother and with four of Catherine's own nieces. The absence of testimony from Louisa, her mother, or the nieces about the agonies they experienced as a result of this abuse makes it impossible to understand the full horror of the man's actions. However, his flagrant infidelity, which eventually forced Catherine to leave him to save her own reputation, illuminates the dark underside of domestic relations that was often concealed to preserve the family honor. That Catherine eventually reconciled with her husband suggests the limited options available to even the best-positioned southern women. Moreover, that Catherine apparently did nothing to stop the sexual exploitation of slave women or her own nieces also indicates the ease with which plantation mistresses became accomplices in the abusive system.

Prevailing attitudes not only minimized the private "indiscretions" of masters, they also denied the master's wife most public credit for the plantation's upkeep. Yet the wife's domestic sphere could be huge. She supervised a broad range of essential tasks not only in her family's living quarters (often known as the Big House), but also in the separate kitchen, dairy, smokehouse, and storehouse. Managing the household budget and negotiating with local merchants might also fall within her sphere. If the husband was deceased or temporarily absent, she usually administered the plantation alone or with the aid of an overseer. But chattel slavery discredited menial labor, associating those who performed it with the slave's lowly status. Unlike industrious northern businessmen, planters generally prided themselves on being men of leisure and culture, freed from hard work and financial concerns. The popular image of the plantation mistress reflected those values, rendering her the very embodiment of grace, gentility, and refinement. Strict adherence to these ideals placed the plantation mistress in the contradictory position of having to appear to be a delicate woman of leisure while performing hard work on a daily basis.

Plantation mistresses, like northern women, were encouraged to find solace in religion, but they discovered fewer opportunities there for self-expression and social initiative. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, southern women, at least in more densely settled areas, had formed prayer, missionary, and benevolent associations. A scattering of temperance societies flourished in southern cities beginning in the 1820s.

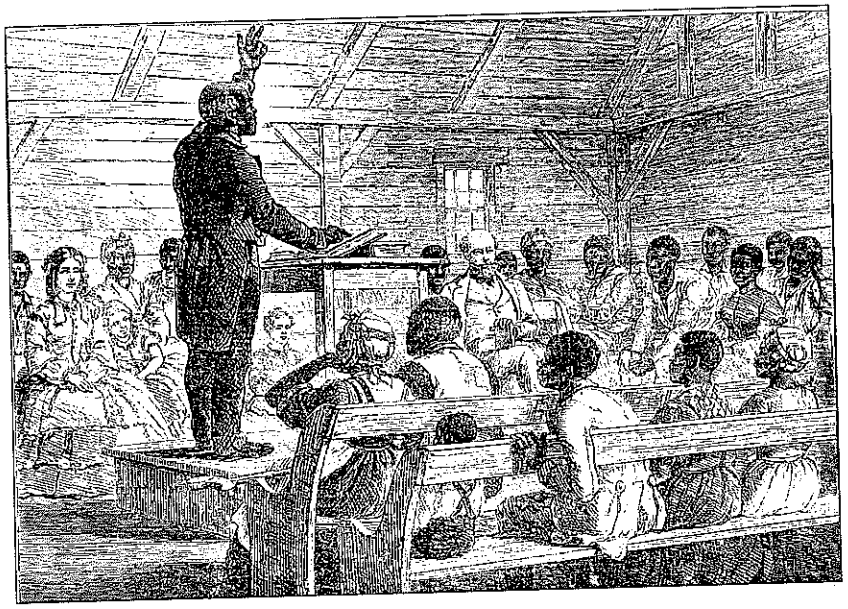
Soon, however, northern women's increasing visibility in antislavery agitation, much of it linked to religious awakenings, triggered a backlash in the South that curbed women's participation there in voluntary associations, whether church-based or secular. While such restrictions severely limited women's ability to launch collective and public protests against the abuses linked to male domination, they may have nurtured a more intimate form of guerrilla warfare in southern households when wives believed that their planter husbands had overstepped the boundaries of patriarchal authority.

Other individuals on the plantation also challenged planters' ideal of total control. Overseers were the most important paid laborers on most large plantations—and often the most problematic. They were expected to keep slaves working to their utmost capacity, keep them healthy and relatively content, and expend a minimum of funds on their care. Owners were demanding, but so too were the slaves, who recognized overseers as a potentially weak link in the chain of command and withheld their labor power from them or protested to owners against especially brutal overseers.

Many planters hired a new overseer every year, hoping to find one with the perfect mix of agricultural expertise, personal authority, and managerial integrity. In the diaries and letters of planters, problems with overseers loomed large: they were too harsh or too lenient; they were more interested in sexual exploitation than agricultural production; they were unhappy with their wages or housing or chances for becoming a planter themselves; they had gained too much control in the absence of the owner; they were out of control. This catalogue of complaints penned by slave owners certainly must have had its counterpart among discontented overseers, although few had the leisure time or the education to leave a written record. Occupying a difficult middle ground between black laborers and their white owners, overseers provided a constant reminder that planters' authority was limited in numerous ways.

The Ties That Bind?: Religion and Slavery Planters used various means to reinforce their control over family members, subordinates, and slaves. Religion offered one vehicle for creating bonds among diverse groups in southern society. Evangelical Protestantism had inspired opposition to slavery among some poor whites and fueled resistance by free blacks and slaves in the early 1800s. By the 1830s, however, slaveholding elites had gained more power within evangelical churches, and church leaders generally welcomed the approval and sponsorship of the planters and all the benefits their wealth and influence brought to the church.

Planters tried to use religion to bind slaves more tightly to the southern system, and owners increasingly controlled their slaves' attendance at church. During his years as a slave, Frederick Douglass was frustrated by the "many good, religious colored people who were under the delusion that



Family Worship in a Plantation in South Carolina

An engraving from a British illustrated weekly depicted the scene in a "rude chapel" of a Port Royal, South Carolina, plantation, where the master and mistress were "engaged in Divine worship, surrounded by [their] slaves, in a state of almost patriarchal simplicity." Frank Vizetelly, *Illustrated London News*, December 5, 1863 — American Social History Project.

God required them to submit to slavery and to wear their chains in meekness and humility."

Other blacks, however, resisted this message of servility. Robert Ryland, a white pastor in Virginia, began preaching in Richmond's First African Baptist Church in the 1840s. A defender of slavery, he claimed, as one free black man recalled, "that God had given all this continent to the white man, and that it was our duty to submit." Yet groups of African Americans lingered after Ryland's services to listen to blacks preach. Ryland himself admitted that one of these black preachers "was heard with far more interest than I was." Another witness noticed that at these informal services the "most active were those who had slept during [Ryland's] sermon."

In a few cities, independent black churches thrived. Membership in Baltimore's African Methodist Episcopal conference more than doubled between 1836 and 1856, and other southern cities experienced a similar upsurge in religious enthusiasm. In rural districts, however, separate black churches were rare, and slaves were forced to convene secret "night meetings," which continued despite being prohibited. Moreover, slaves might pick up dangerous ideas even from preachers who were sanctioned by whites. Many white southerners worried that prayers, songs, and sermons intended for their ears (and so filled with references to human freedom and universal brotherhood) might be "misinterpreted" by slaves and free blacks. Given the different meanings of salvation to blacks and whites, Christian appeals to blacks and the development of uniquely African American forms of Christianity remained sources of conflict for decades.

"Shout and Pray All Night": Slave Religion in Secret

Interviewed in 1937, former slave Charles Grandy recalled the difference between religious services supervised by whites and those that slaves conducted in secrecy.

In the church the white folks was on one side an' the colored on the other. The preacher was a white man. He preached in a way like, 'Obey your master an' missus' an' tell us don't steal from your master an' missus.' 'Course we knowed it was wrong to steal, but the niggers had to steal to get somethin' to eat. I know I did. . . .

Whites in our section used to have a service for us slaves every fourth Sunday, but it wasn't enough for them who wanted to talk with Jesus. Used to go across the fields nights to a old tobacco barn on the side of a hill. . . . Had a old pot hid there to catch the sound. Sometimes would stick your head down in the pot if you got to shout awful loud. I remember ole Sister Millie Jeffries. Would stick her head in the pot and shout and pray all night while the others was bustin' to take their turn. Sometimes the slaves would have to pull her head out of the pot so's the others could shout.

Charles L. Perdue, Thomas E. Barden, and Robert K. Phillips, eds., *Weevils in the Wheat: Interviews with Virginia Ex-Slaves* (University Press of Virginia, 1976), 116, 119.

Growing concerns over slavery among northern Christians also tested the alliance between southern evangelicals and planters. In the mid-1840s, northern Methodists and Baptists tried to convince their southern counterparts to oppose slavery on Christian grounds. The struggle intensified when slavery extended into new territories, which heightened northern opposition to the institution and prompted many northern churches finally to take a stand on issues they had long tried to ignore.

When southern congregations resisted northern entreaties, the national organizations of these denominations split. The most important schisms occurred among Methodists in 1844 and the Baptists in 1845 as both churches split along regional lines. Southern whites, particularly planters, found the antislavery stand of northern ministers treasonous. While planters overemphasized the abolitionist beliefs of mainstream northern ministers, the division between northern and southern churches no doubt reinforced the belief among slaves that southern white preachers did not have the final say on the Bible's meaning.

Native and African American Resistance on the Frontier As white men and women debated the proper role of the church in free and slave societies, many southern blacks continued to find solace in religion. Slaves who

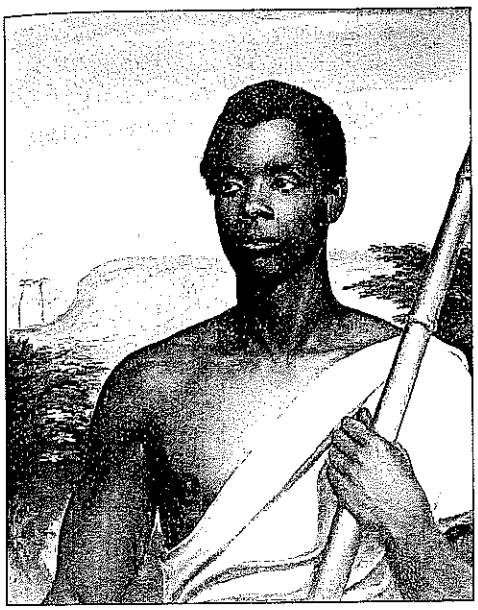
excelled at preaching, singing, and playing instruments provided role models for those with whom they shared their bondage and inspired some to resist their enslavement. Yet after Nat Turner's rebellion in 1831, open revolts were extremely rare. Moreover, the rapid settlement of whites in new areas of the South in the 1830s and 1840s deprived potential black insurrectionists of a safe refuge where they might escape capture. African Americans in the South therefore continued to depend on the forms of resistance developed earlier—feigning illness, destroying tools, injuring livestock, petty theft, arson, and running away—to survive within the confines of bondage (see Chapter 6).

Escape
This icon, or symbol, appeared on notices about fugitive slaves in the classified section of the Mobile, Alabama, *Commercial Register* in the 1830s. Richard Brough, *Commercial Register*, June 16, 1832 — Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

Some Africans sought to escape the brutalities of slavery by rising up against their captors while being transported to the Americas. The United States had outlawed the international slave trade in 1808, but other nations still participated in the trade between Africa and the West Indies. In July 1839, captive West Africans under the leadership of Joseph Cinqué revolted and took control of the Spanish slave ship *Amistad*. They ordered the owners to return them to Africa, but after a meandering course through the Atlantic Ocean, they were waylaid by a U.S. Navy brig. The Africans were charged with the murder of the *Amistad*'s captain and jailed in New Haven, Connecticut. Abolitionists came to their support, however, and former president John Quincy Adams represented them in court. After a long legal battle, the U.S. Supreme Court freed the "mutineers" in 1841. They returned to Africa the following year.

For blacks who were already enslaved in the United States, frontier regions remained one of the few areas where open revolt against bondage was still possible. During the 1830s, one of the most successful and sustained battles against the white majority took place in Florida, which had long served as a haven for runaway slaves (known as maroons). Here, the swampy terrain provided protection for isolated groups of fugitives, the rich lands provided food and shelter, and the Seminole Indian nation provided allies.

Although some Seminoles held African Americans as slaves, Seminole society was not rigidly racist. Here, bondage resembled the traditional slavery of Africa more than it did the commercially oriented institution fashioned by European settlers and their descendants. Slaves often lived on small farms with their own families and enjoyed many of the rights and liberties of full members of the tribe. Many married into the tribe, creating a mixed-race culture that drew on African, American, and Seminole traditions.



Joseph Cinqué

One of the most famous anti-slavery visual documents was a painting commissioned by the influential black abolitionist Robert Purvis to champion the cause of the *Amistad* captives. While awaiting the U.S. Supreme Court decision, Purvis hired the New Haven painter and abolitionist Nathaniel Jocelyn to celebrate the *Amistad* revolt's leader. Dressed in a toga and grasping a staff, which linked Joseph Cinqué to classical republicanism and religious prophecy, the portrait showed a man who boldly contradicted contemporary notions of African savagery and also challenged the standard abolitionist symbol, the supplicant slave. The *Amistad* defense committee disseminated prints of this painting across the country, and the portrait inspired at least one other act of resistance: the successful 1841 takeover of the *Creole*, a slave ship bound for New Orleans. 1839, oil on canvas, 30 1/4 × 25 1/2 inches — New Haven Colony Historical Society. Gift of Dr. Charles B. Purvis, 1898.

The Seminoles and the maroons who lived among them fought two wars against the United States. The First Seminole War broke out in 1812 when U.S. marines invaded Florida, hoping to wrest control of the region from Spain. The Seminoles and maroons repelled the invaders, the black fugitives resisting most fiercely. Andrew Jackson again led U.S. troops against Spanish and Seminole settlements in Florida in 1818, and Spain ceded Florida to the United States the next year. A decade later, the U.S. government sought to remove Seminoles from the region. Between 1832 and 1835, most of the Seminole nation was resettled in Oklahoma and other western territories. A minority, however, refused to leave. Under the direction of a militant and charismatic leader named Osceola, they fought a successful seven-year guerrilla action against the U.S. Army.

The Second Seminole War, which began in 1835, was expected to last only a few months. Instead, it lasted years and cost the lives of some 1,600 U.S. troops as well as $30 million to $40 million. It erupted partly because of federal efforts to drive all southeastern Indian tribes beyond the Mississippi, but slave traders, slave owners, and would-be slave owners who hoped to get their hands on fugitive slaves also supported the war. Osceola counted many maroons and mixed-race warriors among his supporters. According to a contemporary account, "The negroes, from the commencement of the Florida war, have, for their numbers, been the most formidable foe, more bloodthirsty, active, and revengeful than the Indian." Even more alarming to whites was the fact that hundreds of slaves escaped from nearby white-owned plantations and joined the Seminole ranks. American General Thomas Sidney Jessup wrote in late 1836, "This, you may be assured, is a negro, not an Indian war."

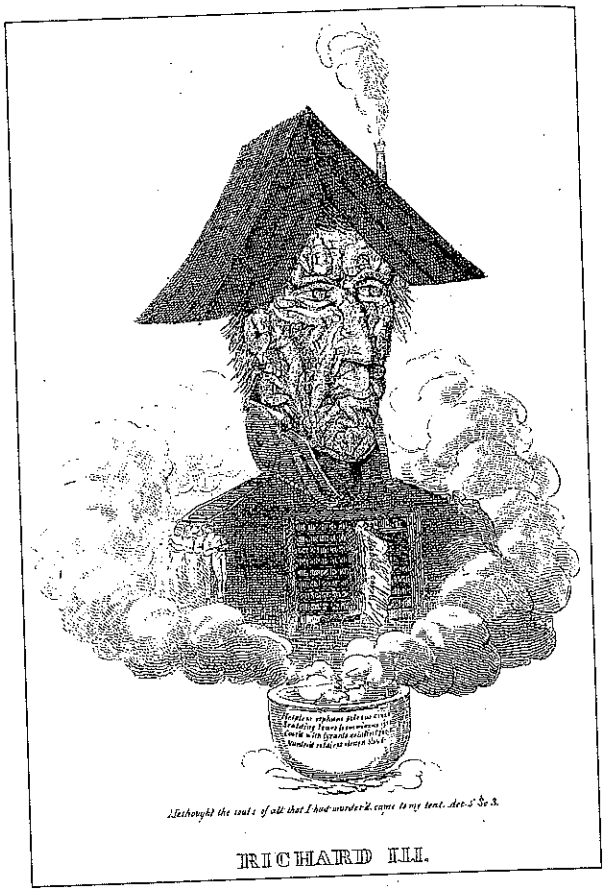
Finally stalemated, General Jessup hoped to separate the mixed-race fighters from the full-blooded Seminoles. He offered to send those with African American blood to the Indian (Oklahoma) Territory while allowing the Seminoles to remain in southern Florida. "Separating the negroes from the Indians," he wrote in 1838, would "weaken the latter more than they would be weakened by the loss of the same number of their own people." Other white military feared that black warriors, having tasted comparative freedom and proven themselves in battle, would prove more dangerous than ever if reenslaved. "Ten resolute negroes," warned one officer, "with a knowledge of the country, are sufficient to desolate the frontier, from one extent to the other."

Ultimately, the Second Seminole War ended in a U.S. victory but only after Osceola was lured into the U.S. Army camp by false promises of a

treaty. The Army took him captive, devastating the exhausted Seminole and maroon forces. Even then, however, the victors were forced to allow the fugitive slaves among the Seminoles to accompany the Indians westward rather than being returned to their former white owners.

The fierce resistance by the former slaves and the Seminole warriors speaks eloquently of the courage, determination, and military capacity that existed among blacks and Indians in this area of the South, where a strong alliance between them was possible. Unfortunately for slaves, such allies were extremely rare. Even other Indian groups, such as the Cherokee, practiced a form of slavery from the 1830s on that was closer to that of whites than of Seminoles.

In the Indian Territory of Oklahoma, where the Five Civilized Tribes were resettled in the 1830s, slaves held by Cherokee, Creek, Chickasaw, and Choctaw masters fled to the Seminoles, just as those owned by Georgia whites had done decades before. Others fled north to find freedom. The slave Henry Bibb, for instance, escaped to Michigan and published his story, *The Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb*, which was widely read among northerners. Mexico, too, though a great distance from most plantations, offered a safe haven much like that provided by Florida in the early nineteenth century. In 1842, two dozen slaves in the Cherokee settlement attempted a mass escape, fleeing southward in hopes of reaching Mexico. Slaves among the Creeks joined the group, which later liberated eight more blacks held by Choctaw slave catchers. Eventually, however, Cherokee militiamen overtook the fugitives, only two of whom escaped.



Richard III

Andrew Jackson's role in the First Seminole War was resurrected in this anti-Democrat cartoon published during the 1828 presidential campaign. Whig caricaturist David Claypool Johnston fashioned the Democratic candidate's head and shoulders out of a military tent, cannons, swords, and the bodies of dead Indians. The cartoon was captioned with a line from Shakespeare's play about the treacherous, despotic king of England: "Methought the souls of all that I had murder'd came to my tent." David Claypool Johnston, 1828, engraving with stipple, 6 1/8 × 4 3/8 inches — American Antiquarian Society.

Free Blacks Threaten Planters' Control Free blacks as well as slaves threatened planters' authority. In fact, by the 1830s, free blacks were often seen as a more serious threat to white supremacy than were rebellious slaves. The mere existence of free blacks in the South challenged any simple connection between race and enslavement.

Fearing the influence that free blacks exerted on slaves, the Virginia General Assembly in 1837 reaffirmed an 1806 statute that allowed county courts to determine whether free blacks would be allowed to remain in residence permanently. To stay in Virginia, the petitioner had to demonstrate

Seminoles

George Catlin's 1838 sketch showed 7 of the 250 Seminoles imprisoned at Fort Moultrie, Charleston, South Carolina. They were captured with Seminole leader Osceola near St. Augustine, Florida, after U.S. troops violated a truce agreement. George Catlin, *Seminolee*, 1838, pencil drawing — New-York Historical Society.

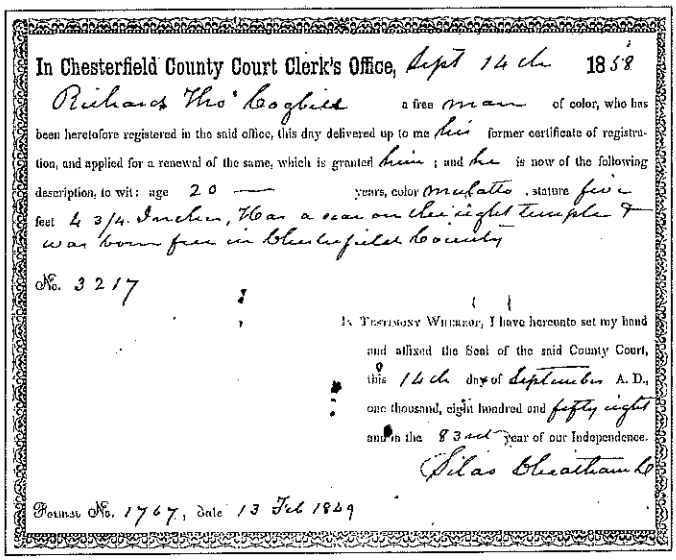
that he or she was "of good character, peaceable, orderly and industrious, and not addicted to drunkenness, gaming or other vice." African American men had a more difficult time than women persuading courts to let them remain in the state as free persons. It was hard for them to be industrious without being viewed as competitors with white workingmen, and they were more likely to be considered disorderly by their mere presence in the population.

Free black women posed less of a threat because their most marketable skills were in areas—laundry, domestic work, petty trades, and sewing—that were largely reserved for their sex and race. Harriet Cook, a washerwoman in Leesburg, Virginia, worked for twelve years after her 1838 emancipation to build an impressive and supportive clientele among that city's white residents. When she petitioned to gain permanent residence status, leading citizens swore that "It would be a serious inconvenience to a number of the citizens of Leesburg to be deprived of her services as a washerwoman and in other capacities in which in consequence of her gentility, trustworthiness, and skill, she is exceedingly useful." Her petition was granted.

The larger numbers of women who were emancipated, the job opportunities afforded them in cities, and the greater leniency of courts and

A Free Man of Color

A form issued by a Virginia county court in 1858 to Richard Cogbill certified his claim to be a free-born African American. Mary O'H. Williamson Collection, Prints and Photographs Department, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University.



In Chesterfield County Court Clerk's Office, Sept 14th 1858

Richard Thos Cogbill a free man of color, who has been heretofore registered in the said office, this day delivered up to me his former certificate of registration, and applied for a renewal of the same, which is granted him; and he is now of the following description, to wit: age 20 — years, color Mulatto, stature five feet 4 3/4 Inches, Has a scar on the right temple — was born free in Chesterfield County

No. 3217

In Testimony Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and affixed the Seal of the said County Court, this 14th day of September A. D., one thousand, eight hundred and fifty eight and in the 83rd year of our Independence.

Silas Bleathan C

Permit No. 1767, Date 13 Feb 1849

legislatures in granting them permanent residency resulted in a skewed sex ratio in the South's urban areas. As a result, free black women often had to support themselves and their families and to fend off economic and sexual exploitation by whites without the assistance of husbands, fathers, or brothers. Nonetheless, they were able to build and sustain communities in many southern cities.

The number of free blacks in the South remained small throughout the mid-nineteenth century, and most of them lived in towns and cities rather than plantation areas. Yet their presence still created considerable anxiety among whites. By 1840, the state of Mississippi had passed laws expressly prohibiting free blacks from testifying against whites, serving in the militia, voting, or holding office. A year later, a group of Natchez whites called a meeting at City Hall to consider "imposing a fine on the owners of slaves who permit them to go at large and hire their time; and also . . . requiring free persons of color to remove from [Mississippi] and to prevent their emigration into the state."

Like planters, nonslaveholding whites often opposed the presence of free blacks in the South. They tended to see free black workers as unwanted competition for jobs. In the North, immigrants from Ireland, Germany, and elsewhere reshaped the labor force and created tensions among whites as well as between whites and blacks. With smaller cities and less industry, the South attracted far fewer immigrants, leaving free blacks as the major source of economic competition. Still, a minority of southern whites believed that exemplary free blacks should be allowed to reside in southern communities, and some supported the petitions of free blacks who sought to remain in the region. Most of the whites who supported the presence of free blacks lived in small towns and rural areas of the upper South. Many belonged to small religious denominations, such as German Moravians and Quakers. In Loudoun County, Virginia, for instance, some three dozen citizens, mostly Quakers and Germans, argued in 1843 that "every man [sic], not convicted of a crime, has a natural right, to reside in the community where he was born." Although such sentiments were expressed more and more rarely after 1840, they did not entirely disappear.

In cities, however, where white workers competed directly with free black laborers, tensions between the two groups often ran high. There, many whites wanted to ensure that restrictive laws were enforced. Throughout the 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s, southern white workers strove to force blacks, slave and free, out of their neighborhoods and out of their occupations. Frederick Douglass remembered a white ship's carpenter named Thomas Lanman who had murdered two slaves. Regularly boasting of the crime, Lanman added that "when others would do as much as he had done, they would be rid of the d——d niggers." Douglass himself experienced this attitude more directly in 1836. When he was hired out by his owner as a

"So Cheapened the White Man's Labor": Conflict Between Black and White Workers

Far from viewing black workers as allies, most southern white workers saw them as competitors and hoped to exclude them from their trades. In this 1838 open letter to a local newspaper, a white Georgia artisan complains about whites hiring cheaper slave tradesmen over white men struggling for economic survival. He also lays out his case for the superiority of white tradesmen and their role in maintaining the slave system.

Gentlemen:

. . . I am aware that most of you have [such a] strong antipathy to encouraging the masonry and carpentry trades of your poor white brothers, that your predilections for giving employment in your line of business to ebony workers have either so cheapened the white man's labor, or expatriated hence with but a few solitary exceptions, all the white masons and carpenters of this town.

The white man is the only real, legal, moral, and civil proprietor of this country and state. . . . By white men alone was this continent discovered; by the prowess of white men alone (though not always properly or humanely exercised), were the fierce and active Indians driven occidentally: and if swarms and hordes of infuriated red men pour down from the Northwest, like the wintry blast thereof, the white men alone, aye, those to whom you decline to give money for bread and clothes, for their famishing families . . . would bare their breasts to the keen and whizzing shafts of the savage crusaders—defending negroes too in the bargain, for if left to themselves without our aid, the Indians would or can sweep the negroes hence, "as dewdrops are shaken from the lion's mane."

The right, then, gentlemen, you will no doubt candidly admit, of the white man to employment in preference to negroes, who must defer to us since they live well enough on plantations, cannot be considered impeachable by contractors. . . . As masters of the polls in a majority, carrying all before them, I am surprised the poor do not elect faithful members to the Legislature, who will make it penal to prefer negro mechanic labor to white men's. . . .

Yours respectfully,
J. J. Flournoy

Athens (Georgia) *Southern Banner*, January 13, 1838.

caulker in a Baltimore shipyard, white workers severely beat Douglass. Such scare tactics occasionally achieved limited results. Douglass's master pulled him out of the shipyard just as the white workers wanted.

White workers largely depended on legislation to remove free blacks from the region and from the labor force. Some politicians expressed sympathy for demands to limit certain occupations to whites only. But to write such provisions into law and enforce them would have limited the freedom of the planters to make use of the blacks they held in bondage in whatever

way they saw fit. No southern legislature was prepared to do that. Angered by such legislative failures but unwilling to champion emancipation, white workers generally blamed their woes on the helpless black population.

New Frontiers and New Challenges for Southern Slavery

Many southern whites hoped that the opening of western lands to white settlement would ease conflicts created by differences of wealth. The availability of lands once occupied by American Indians or controlled by Mexico provided a temporary safety valve, especially for white yeomen who hoped to join the plantation elite. There were other western areas, most notably the Appalachian foothills and highlands that ran from northwestern Virginia through Georgia, where slavery would never be profitable. These regions offered nonslaveholding whites the chance to carve out a living with only tenuous ties to the economic, political, and social system that was built on slave labor.

Yet as white southerners pushed farther west, the planter elite faced new challenges. Both slaveholders and nonslaveholders in frontier areas demanded political representation and legislation that threatened the authority of planters back east. At the same time, the spread of plantations westward expanded the internal slave trade and fueled growing criticisms from northern abolitionists. In response, slave owners developed an elaborate proslavery ideology to justify their "peculiar institution." Some wealthy southerners, anxious about the difficulties of sustaining a slave society, sought to diversify the South's economy. However, this, too, was viewed as a threat to planters' political and economic power. Thus, the expansion of slavery westward provided opportunities but also presented new problems.

Southern Whites Move Westward and Demand Rights The vast majority of southern white workers and farmers betrayed no sympathy for slaves. Most of those who lived on the margins of the rich plantation lands were closely tied to external cotton markets and large planters. Their counterparts who settled in the foothills and highlands, however, relied on diversified farming and benefited little from policies that enhanced the power of the big slave owners. Yet most wanted simply to be left to their own devices, and many still believed that slavery was the best way to maintain proper order in a society populated by both whites and blacks. Meanwhile, white workers in the state's urban areas, particularly those along the coast, benefited from the slave-produced cotton boom because it improved the general business climate.

Throughout the 1840s, the South continued to expand in both population and areas settled. In the mid-1840s, a rise in cotton prices increased the optimism and the profits of small farmers, rural merchants, and large

planters alike. Between 1840 and 1860, the South's total population grew by half (from seven million to eleven million). In the wake of the removal of the Cherokee and other Indian nations during the 1830s, whites flooded into former Indian lands, and the railroad soon followed. The cotton kingdom, which in 1845 already extended from the Carolinas southwestward to Texas and from Tennessee down to Florida, now pushed into new areas. Frontier settlements in western Missouri and Arkansas, which contained but a tiny number of settlers in 1840, experienced the most rapid growth (Table 9.1).

Life on the frontier was difficult, and for whites who had become used to living in more settled eastern regions, the move westward often required substantial adjustments. Small farmers had to carve fields out of forests without the aid of slaves, and well-to-do planters were forced to subject their families to the ruder life on the cotton frontier. Having moved from North Carolina to Alabama with her slaveholder husband, May Drake expressed her discontent in letters to her family: "To a female who has once been blest with every comfort, and even every luxury, blest with the society of a large and respectable circle of relations and friends . . . to such people Mississippi and Alabama are but a dreary waste." Another wrote, "The farmers in this country [Alabama] live in a miserable manner. They think only of making money, and their houses are hardly fit to live in." Although some planters, like the Natchez nabobs, tried to bring luxury and refinement to the frontier, many relocating white families found themselves struggling to rebuild homes, communities, and social networks.

Yet even in these new territories where everyone faced some hardships, settlers of moderate means developed resentments against wealthy planters. For instance, the *Mississippi Free Trader*, published in Natchez, editorialized

TABLE 9.1 Geographic and Economic Mobility of Poor Household Heads in North Carolina and Mississippi, 1840–1860

Poor whites moved frequently in search of better opportunities. As the southern frontier pushed westward, so did poor whites, and at least some acquired land in these frontier areas. Nonetheless, the vast majority remained landless, whether they stayed in one place or resettled farther west. This chart illustrates the geographic mobility and the difficulties in obtaining land for poor whites in Davidson County in central North Carolina from 1840 to 1860 and in the newly opened settlements of Pontotoc County and Tishomingo County in northeast Mississippi from 1850 to 1860. Charles C. Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South: Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi* (1994).

	Davidson Co. 1840–1850*	Davidson Co. 1850–1860*	Pontotoc Co. 1850–1860*	Tishomingo Co. 1850–1860*
Left the county†	86 (48%)	116 (64%)	143 (80%)	134 (75%)
Stayed in the same county and acquired land	51 (28%)	18 (11%)	20 (11%)	22 (12%)
Stayed in the same county and remained landless	44 (24%)	47 (26%)	15 (8%)	22 (12%)
Total number of household heads	181	181	178	178

*Source: Tax Lists, 1840, Davidson County Records, NCDAH; 1840 Federal Census for Davidson County, Schedule 1; 1850 and 1860 Federal Censuses for Davidson County, Schedules I and IV. 1850 and 1860 Federal Censuses for Pontotoc and Tishomingo counties, Schedules I and IV. A determination of household heads for Davidson County in 1840 was made by matching people from Tax Lists with the household heads listed on the 1840 Federal Census.

†Includes individuals who died during the period.

"They Had Given Me the Best They Had": A Traveler Describes the Rural South

This account was written by a traveler in the interior areas of Georgia in 1849, who prevailed upon local families for hospitality. His description conveys one family's poverty; later in the same account, he describes the household of an alcoholic, illiterate owner of forty slaves in even less flattering terms.

Being anxious to see how the poorest class of people lived in the interior, at night I stopped at the door-way of a very small and rudely-constructed hut, and inquired if I could 'get stay' for the night. At first I was refused; but upon representing myself a stranger in the country, and fearing to go farther, as there were 'forks in the road' and 'creeks to cross' before reaching another house, they finally consented to my staying.

The cabin contained but one room, with no windows; the chimney, built of mud and stones, was, as is usual in the South, outside the house. The furniture of the house was scanty in the extreme; a roughly-constructed frame, on which was laid a corn-shuck mattress, a pine table, and a few shuck-bottomed 'cha'rs.'

I had not been long in this place, before preparations for supper commenced. An iron vessel . . . was brought and set over the fire; in this dish was roasted some coffee; afterward, in the same dish, a 'corn cake' was baked, and still again some rank old ham was fried, and the corn-cake laid in the ashes to have it 'piping hot.' This constituted our supper. . . . A pet deer stalked in through the open door-way, and helped himself from the table without molestation.

Bed-time coming, one by one the family retired to the corner, and all lay together on the cornshucks. . . . Morning came, and . . . I asked the hostess for a wash, and the vessel which had served for roasting, baking and frying the evening previous was now brought; and . . . I washed myself in the dish out of which twelve hours before I had eaten a hearty supper. I paid them well, and thanked them kindly, for they had given me the best they had.

"Interior Georgia Life and Scenery by a Southern Traveler," *Knickerbocker Magazine,* August 1849, 113–118; reprinted in William E. Gienapp, ed., *The Civil War and Reconstruction: A Documentary Collection* (W. W. Norton, 2001), 17–18.

in April 1842 on the relative value of small farmers and larger planters to the city's economy. The small farmers, it noted,

> would crowd our streets with fresh and healthy supplies of home productions, and the proceeds would be expended here among our merchants, grocers, and artisans. The large planters . . . for the most part, sell their cotton in Liverpool; buy their wines in London or Havre; their negro clothing in Boston; their plantation imple-

ments and supplies in Cincinnati; and their groceries and fancy articles in New Orleans.

Conflicts among southern whites centered on several issues, including political representation, taxation, debt, and common rights to land and waterways. Planters, for instance, successfully supported legislation that put a ceiling on the taxation of slaves. This meant fewer state funds available for projects—such as roads, railroads, and canals—that might benefit the citizens at large. Nonslaveholding whites had a difficult time changing such laws because many southern states continued to use property qualifications to restrict voting rights and holding office. In the seaboard states, the eastern counties where large planters held sway were accorded much greater representation than were the western counties, which initially had been sparsely settled. As those western counties became more populated, the planter-dominated legislatures failed to reapportion representation.

In addition, the property limits on voting lessened the electoral leverage of small farmers and working-class whites throughout each state. In North Carolina, which had some of the most restrictive requirements in the South into the 1850s, only adult white males who owned at least fifty acres could cast a ballot in the state senate election. This requirement disenfranchised about one-half of the state's potential voters. To run for the state senate, a man had to own at least three hundred acres, and election to the state's House of Commons required a one-hundred-acre holding. The governor was required to own land worth $2,000 and was not chosen by popular election until after 1850.

Not all southern states imposed such severe restrictions on political participation. Mississippi, for instance, eliminated property qualifications for office much earlier than elsewhere in the South. Still, the vast majority of those who held office were planters, slave owners, or prosperous nonslaveholding yeomen. This was in part because party leaders were prominent and privileged men, such as the Natchez nabobs, and they set the agenda as well as the election slates for local, county, and state elections. In addition, elections were public events, presided over by local planters or merchants. The secret ballot was not yet utilized, ensuring that most nonslaveholding whites, who depended on their economic superiors for credit, employment, or other forms of assistance, would support the planter candidate.

Yet nonslaveholding whites did not simply defer to the planter elite. Despite their limited electoral power, they made demands on legislators and through the courts. During the 1840s and 1850s, property qualifications for voting were eliminated in nearly all the southern states, and the number and proportion of representatives from western regions in state legislatures were increased. Like their counterparts in the early nineteenth century, less

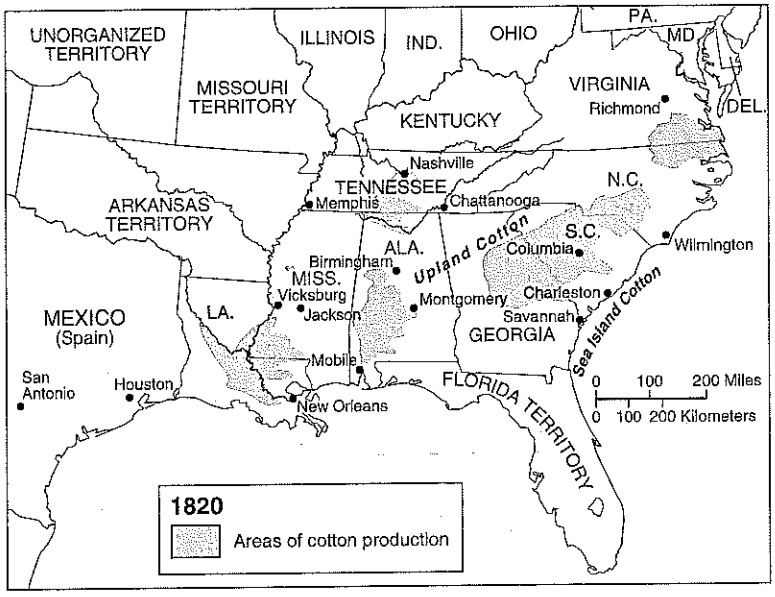
well-to-do whites continued to protest the confiscation of property for debts, the construction of dams that interfered with fishing rights, and the fencing of supposedly communal lands by individual farmers and planters. Sometimes the protests were orderly affairs, involving petitions to legislatures and claims made at court. At other times, near riots erupted as mobs of dispossessed or indebted whites railed against their treatment at the hands of wealthier neighbors or high-handed judges.

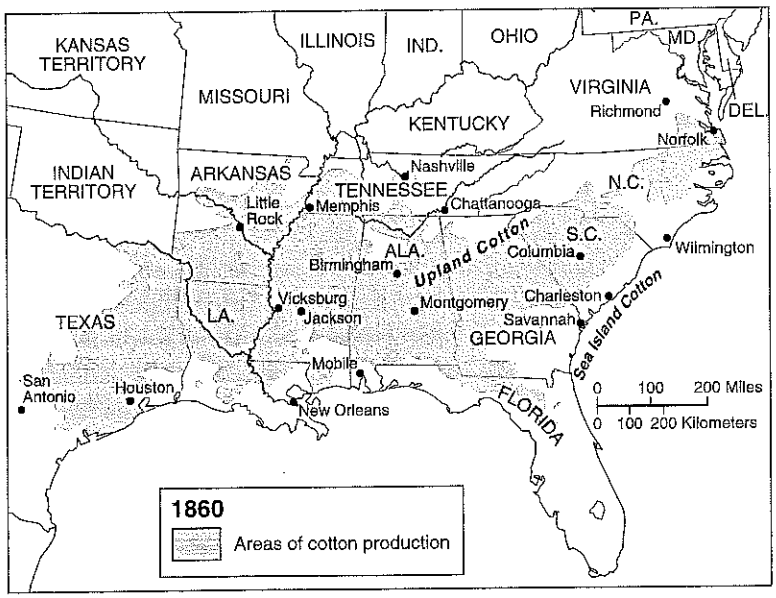
There were, however, significant barriers to sustaining opposition to planter policies among nonslaveholding whites. First, many poor and working-class whites were as deeply racist as their elite counterparts. When planters claimed that challenges to their authority would increase the chances of slave uprisings or an expansion of free black rights, most southern whites toned down their grievances. Just as important, nonslaveholding whites were themselves a varied group. Yeomen farmers who owned land and made a good living joined planters in confiscating the goods of indebted landless whites. Even those at the very bottom of white society did not always feel that they had a common cause. Some couples lived as man and wife without benefit of marriage and found their only allies among petty criminals, free blacks, and other marginal groups. These were ostracized by their more respectable counterparts who, although landless, maintained steady work habits, stable families, and a proper distance from blacks and criminals.

Probably numbering some 30 to 50 percent of all whites in the South in the mid-nineteenth century, landless whites comprised a large and diverse population at the bottom of the white social hierarchy. It was these very differences among the South's nonslaveholding residents that limited their ability and desire to forge a meaningful opposition to planter control. Yet various groups outside the planter class continued to assert their own rights and interests, thereby complicating the lives of planters who hoped to achieve absolute authority over their inferiors, white as well as black.

The Ravages of the Internal Slave Trade Until about 1850, as slavery expanded southward and westward, declining profits characterized older areas of cultivation, such as Virginia, Maryland, and North Carolina. The resulting losses were offset in part by monies made on the internal slave trade. Planters in the Upper South could reap a significant return on early investments by selling the best field hands and most fertile mothers among their slaves to planters in South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, and lands west (Map 9.2). But without new slaves coming into the Upper South, the prospects for future income were limited, and the ability to leave one's heirs a planter lifestyle was subverted.

The internal slave trade was one of the cruelest aspects of a harsh system. Although slaves had always been subject to sale, the possibility of being





MAP 9.2 The Spread of Cotton, 1820–1860
In 1820, cotton production was centered in the eastern seaboard states. Its spread to the South and West in the 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s ensured that the internal slave trade would also expand throughout this period. The sale of slaves from the Upper South to the Lower South provided profits for slave owners in both regions but resulted in painful separations for African American families and harsher working conditions for those African Americans who were sold into the Deep South.

sold to a plantation hundreds of miles from one's family increased dramatically in the 1840s with the extension of slavery into Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Arkansas, and Texas. Because the slaves who were in greatest demand were between the ages of twenty and fifty years, a high percentage of those sold left spouses and children behind. As slavery's heartland moved southwestward, the forced migration of hundreds of thousands of African Americans caused the massive destruction of families. Fannie

"My Master Has Sold Albert to a Trader": Family Separation in Slavery

Maria and Richard Perkins were owned by different masters, one in Charlottesville and the other in Staunton, Virginia. In 1852, a frantic Maria wrote to Richard about the sale of their children and the possibility of being sold herself. Most slaves did not know how to read and write, and this letter, in Mrs. Perkins's own handwriting, is unusual.

Charlottesville, Oct. 8th, 1852

Dear Husband

I write you a letter to let you know my distress. My master has sold Albert to a trader on Monday court day and myself and [our] other child is for sale also and I want [to] . . . hear from you very soon before next court [day] if you can. . . . I don't want you to wait till Christmas. I want you to tell Dr. Hamelton and your master if either will buy me they can attend to it now and then I can go afterwards. I don't want a trader to get me. They asked me if I had got any person to buy me and I told them no. They took me to the courthouse too [but] they never put me up [for sale]. A man [by] the name of Brady bought Albert and [he] is gone. I don't know where. They say he lives in Scottesville. My things is in several places some is in Staunton and if I should be sold I don't know what will become of them. I don't expect to meet with the luck to get that way till I am quite heartsick. Nothing more.

I am and ever will be your kind wife,

Maria Perkins.

Ulrich B. Phillips, ed., *Life and Labor in the Old South* (1929).

Berry, a former Virginia slave who was interviewed in 1937, recalled a day when

> There was a great crying and carrying on among the slaves who had been sold. Two or three of them gals had young babies they were taking with them. . . . As soon as they got on the train this ol' new master had the train stopped and made them poor gal mothers take babies off and laid them precious things on the ground and left them to live or die.

At other times, it was the mothers who were left behind and the children who were sold away. Whether adults or children, slaves sold into the Deep South faced even hotter and less hospitable climates, more demanding work schedules, and harsher punishments than those they had experienced in the Upper South.

The internal slave trade also created problems for whites who resided in what had once been profitable plantation regions. The sale of slaves to other regions increased owners' fears that slaves would retaliate against slaveholders and their families and sometimes ensured that those left behind would be more recalcitrant and resistant than ever. In certain areas of Virginia and

"I Will Come Back"
Having purchased his freedom, an Alabama ex-slave named Peter Still bade farewell to his enslaved wife, Vina. Still's self-purchased manumission in 1850 — an opportunity few masters offered their slaves — had no effect on his wife, who was owned by a different individual. Kate E. R. Pickard, *The Kidnapped and the Ransomed, Being the Personal Recollection of Peter Still and His Wife "Vina," After Forty Years of Slavery* (1856) — American Social History Project.

Maryland, the sale of large numbers of slaves increased the relative proportion of free blacks in the population. This development raised further anxieties about free blacks' influence on those left in bondage and their competition for jobs with poor whites, more of whom were now forced to seek work in urban areas. Some whites in the Upper South wondered whether slavery's advantages still outweighed its costs.

The Proslavery Movement During the 1830s and 1840s, revolts and escapes by slaves, the growth of the free black community, demands by nonslaveholding whites, and conflicts with overseers and wives all challenged the power of planters. The British abolition of West Indian slavery in 1833, the Panic of 1837, and the emancipation of slaves in the French West Indies in 1848 intensified slave owners' concerns over the future of the South's increasingly peculiar institution. Attacks from northern opponents — a growing abolitionist movement, the defection of the Grimké sisters and fugitive slaves, the condemnation of church leaders, and massive petition campaigns — heightened slave owners' concerns as well.

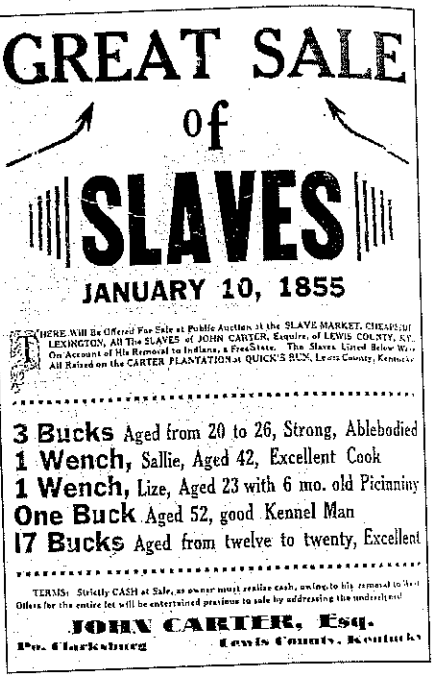
The defenders of slavery did not retreat, however. Believing that expansion into western lands presaged a new day for planters, they developed an aggressive defense of their way of life and further restricted possibilities for change. Previously referred to apologetically as a necessary but temporary evil, black bondage was now described as the natural order of things. In the words of South Carolina Senator John C. Calhoun, slavery was "a positive good," an institution that was beneficial to planters, slaves, and all other social groups.

Calhoun held up slave labor as in all respects superior to wage labor. The sharpening of social conflicts in the North, he claimed, testified to the superiority of outright bondage. "There is and has always been, in an advanced stage of wealth and civilization," Calhoun told the U.S. Senate, "a conflict between labor and capital. The condition of society in the South exempts us from the disorders and dangers resulting from this conflict." This fact, he asserted, demonstrates "how vastly more favorable our condition of society is to that of other sections for free and stable institutions." According to Calhoun and like-minded planters, the food, shelter, and clothing provided to slaves were superior to those available to free laborers of the North, and planters did not cut loose their slaves when sick or aged.

Thomas Dew, a young professor at the College of William and Mary in Virginia, crafted the first significant proslavery document. His *Review of the Debates in the Virginia Legislature of 1831 and 1832* offered an argument

on behalf of slavery in the guise of commentaries on the legislature's debates. Drawing on historical examples from ancient civilizations and on biblical justifications from the Old and New Testaments, Dew claimed that slavery was best both for the South and for the slaves. Planters, in this scenario, were both the instruments of God and the upholders of classical traditions and values. Indeed, biblical support for slavery may have been the most widely cited rationale for maintaining the institution, because scripture offered the most effective response to northern abolitionists and ministers who claimed to have right and righteousness on their side.

South Carolina Governor George Duffie was one of many politicians who embraced biblical justifications for slavery. Speaking before his state legislature in 1835, he clearly distinguished between the character and rights of whites and of blacks, justifying slavery only for those of African ancestry. Blacks, he proclaimed, were "destined by providence" for bondage. They were "in all respects, physical, moral, and political, inferior to millions of the human race" and therefore "unfit for self-government of any kind."



GREAT SALE
of
SLAVES
JANUARY 10, 1855

THERE Will Be Offered For Sale at Public Auction at the SLAVE MARKET, CHEAPSIDE LEXINGTON, All The SLAVES of JOHN CARTER, Esquire, of LEWIS COUNTY, KY. On Account of His Removal to Indiana, a Free State. The Slaves Listed Below Were All Raised on the CARTER PLANTATION at QUICK'S RUN, Lewis County, Kentucky

3 Bucks Aged from 20 to 26, Strong, Ablebodied
1 Wench, Sallie, Aged 42, Excellent Cook
1 Wench, Lize, Aged 23 with 6 mo. old Picininny
One Buck Aged 52, good Kennel Man
17 Bucks Aged from twelve to twenty, Excellent

TERMS: Strictly CASH at Sale, as owner must realize cash, owing to his removal to West. Offers for the entire lot will be entertained previous to sale by addressing the undersigned

JOHN CARTER, Esq.
Po. Clarksburg Lewis County, Kentucky

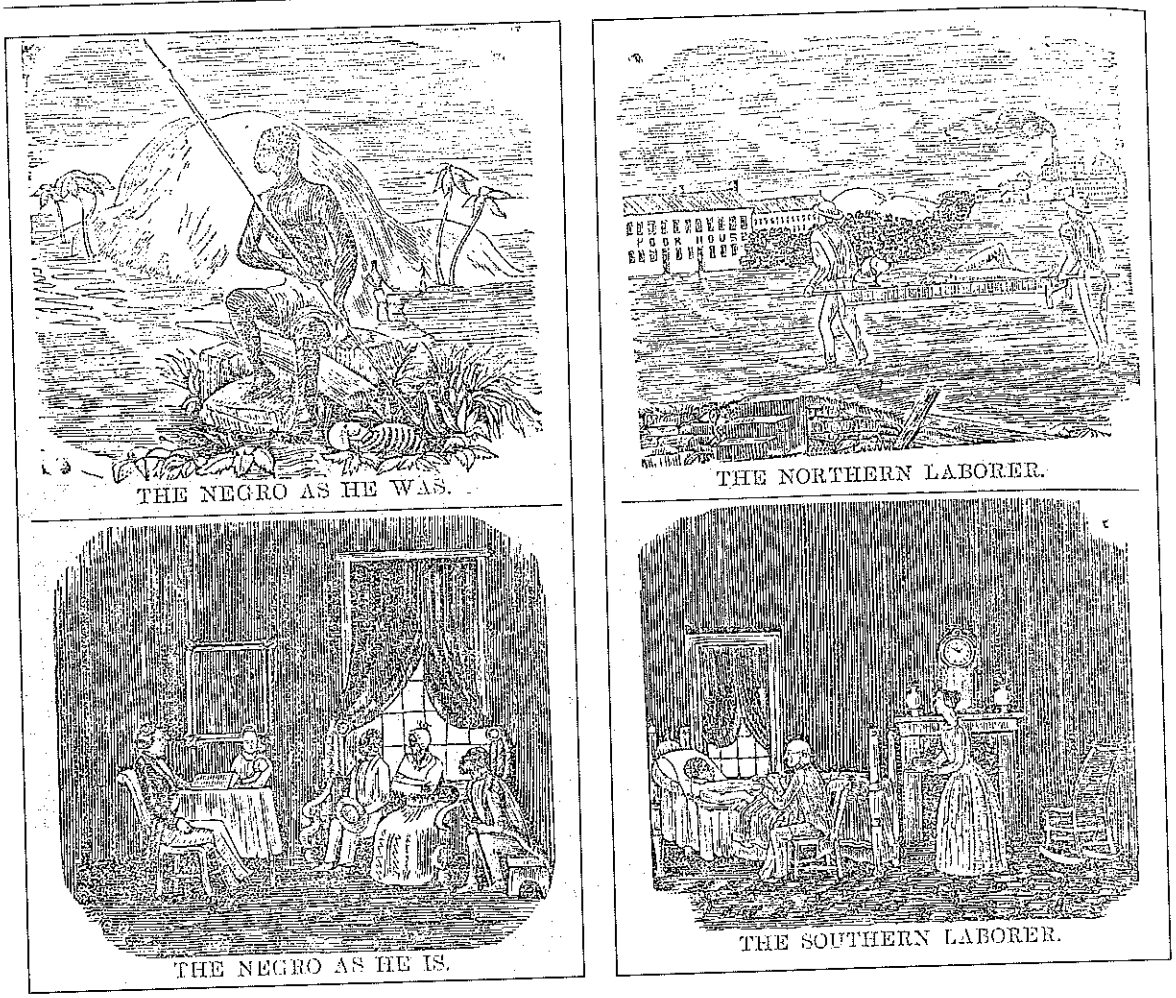
Slaves for Sale

The 23 slaves to be sold belonged to a Kentucky planter, John Carter, who decided to "liquidate his assets" before moving to the free state of Indiana. *Picaninny* was a derogatory term commonly used by whites to refer to a black child. John Winston Coleman, *Slavery Times in Kentucky* (1940).

During the next twenty-five years, proslavery politicians, professors, physicians, and publicists dutifully elaborated the racist argument, offering a stream of scientific as well as religious evidence in slavery's defense. The culmination of these arguments appeared in the 1850s in two books written by Virginian George Fitzhugh. In *Sociology for the South* and *Cannibals All,* Fitzhugh claimed that the reckless individualism fostered by "free labor" in the North was far more exploitative than was the paternal guardianship that characterized slavery. In his view, African Americans were a childlike race that required lifetime care and control.

Such racist doctrine was scientific nonsense, but it served three important purposes for the slave owners. First, it justified the bondage of African Americans by ruling out all arguments based on universal human rights. Second, it undermined the status and claims of free blacks. Third, it accomplished both of these objectives without explicitly threatening the rights of poor southern whites, whose support (or at least toleration) the slaveholders required.

The development of the proslavery argument both reflected and reinforced an increasingly rigid southern political and social structure at precisely the moment when reform and innovation were most necessary. The expansion of plantations into new geographical areas turned labor abundance into labor scarcity for many planters and exacerbated their financial dependence on single-crop, export-driven agriculture. As the Panic of 1837 had shown, dependence on a single crop and on foreign



The Benefits of Slavery
Two pages from a proslavery tract published around 1860 presented the contrasting fates of unfree and free labor: while fortunate slaves were civilized and, in old age, cared for by benevolent masters, the northern wageworker faced only exhaustion and destitution. From the private collection of Larry E. Tise.

markets made white southerners vulnerable to economic developments over which they had little control. The spread of slavery also intensified challenges from northerners who opposed the system on moral, political, and economic grounds; from slaves whose family and community networks were shattered by the internal slave trade; and from southern whites who feared competition from blacks or resented the tyranny of planters.

Resistance to Industrialization and the Limits of Economic Diversification Although few planters questioned the institution of slavery itself, some began considering the advantages of economic diversification in the South. But during the mid-1840s, despite serious fluctuations in the prices paid for cotton, tobacco, and rice, the profitability of plantation agriculture allowed those who supported the status quo to gain the upper hand. Advo-

Free Negroes in the North

Apologists for slavery often constructed a grotesque picture of free blacks in the North. According to this etching published during the Civil War, without the supervision of benevolent masters, northern African Americans descended into violence and degradation. V. Blada (A. J. Volck), *Sketches from the Civil War in North America, 1861, '62, '63* (1863) — Print Collection, Miriam and Ira Wallach Division of Art, Prints, and Photographs, New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

cates of diversification found it difficult to gain adherents when both agricultural production and the demand for plantation crops were on the increase. With the wealthiest residents of the South investing larger and larger sums in land and slaves, nonstaple food crops remained marginal to the region's economy.

Some investors, particularly in the cities and towns of the Southeast, did begin to diversify by investing in industry. In the 1840s, William Gregg's textile factory in Graniteville, South Carolina, and Joseph Reid Anderson's Tredegar Iron Works in Richmond, Virginia, were among the most profitable southern industrial ventures. Whereas the textile labor force was composed primarily of poor white women and children, the iron industry recruited African Americans, enslaved and free, in large numbers. Although these employment patterns demonstrated the capacity of women and blacks for industrial labor, they limited the potential for industrial growth. Only the poorest white women could work for wages without damaging their family's reputation; the increased employment of free blacks raised anxieties among skilled white men; and slaves were generally more valuable in agriculture than in industry. Factories, then, could flourish only on the periphery of plantation society.

Although industrialization was marginal to the southern economy, some planters still saw it as a threat to the institution of slavery. Any work off the plantation brought a slave into close contact with free laborers and with new ideas about life and liberty. That exposure encouraged and assisted attempts to escape slavery. Frederick Douglass's experiences provide a good example. Hostile southern white workers had once forced Douglass to return to his plantation from the docks of Baltimore. Later, however, he found himself hired out on the docks again in friendlier surroundings. There, according to Douglass, two Irish longshoremen "expressed the deepest sympathy for me, and the most dedicated hatred of slavery. They went so far as to tell me that I ought to run away and go to the North, that I should find friends there, and that I should then be as free as anybody." Douglass "remembered their words and their advice" and, a few years later, escaped to the North by passing as a free black sailor, an impersonation that was aided by his experience in the shipyard and the assistance of real free blacks. Other slaves simply took advantage of the relative anonymity that large cities provided and disappeared into the South's urban free black population.

Old Virginia Labor-saving Machine

A cartoon in an 1857 edition of the northern *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* satirized the planting techniques espoused by "Squire Broadacre," a Virginia farmer. With access to slave labor, many southern planters resisted technical innovations, mechanical and otherwise, that would improve agricultural output. "A Winter in the South," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* (September 1857) — American Social History Project.

It was urban life more than industrial labor that led to Douglass's escape. In fact, in some areas, such as Richmond and Lynchburg, Virginia, slaves worked in factories without any weakening of the system of bondage. Moreover, industrial slavery was one way to breathe new life into the southern economy without challenging the basic racial and labor relations of the region. Still, many planters assumed that industry and urbanization were synonymous and that both threatened the southern way of life.

For the cities' detractors, slave flight was by no means the only problem. The greater freedom (especially freedom of movement) that generally accompanied urban employment tended to erode the slave owners' power and ability to demand unquestioned deference from blacks. "The ties which bound together the master and the slave," the New Orleans *Daily Picayune* complained, were being "gradually severed" in that city, as slave workers "become intemperate, disorderly, and lose the respect which the servant should entertain for the master." The behavior of free blacks, fugitives, and resistant slaves in cities was considered "contagious upon those who do not possess these dangerous privileges."

Most slave owners, then, feared and despised the possibility of increased industrialization and the growth of cities in the South. "We have no cities. We don't want them," exclaimed one white Alabaman, who no doubt expressed the feelings of many of his neighbors. "We want no manufactures; we desire no trading, no mechanical or manufacturing classes. As long as we have our rice, our sugar, our tobacco, and our cotton, we can command wealth to purchase all we want."

Above all, slave owners worried that free wage earners and their employers would seek first to limit the use of slave labor and eventually collide with the whole slave-labor system. The small circle of southern leaders who advocated economic development and diversification agreed. One of their leading spokesmen, Senator George Mason of Virginia, complained that "slavery discourages arts and manufactures. The poor despise labor

when performed by slaves." To distinguish white from black urban workers, white artisans demanded preferential hiring and voting rights based on their race, justifying planters' fears that industrialization and urbanization were the beginning of a slippery slope that would disrupt their traditional power and privilege.

Even more frightening to slave owners, however, was the idea that white and black workers might make common cause, a situation that was more likely to occur in the few cities with high rates of immigration from Europe. In Baltimore, New Orleans, Charleston, and Richmond, for example, the urban working-class population increasingly included immigrants, who seemed to have little loyalty to or even respect for the region's deeply rooted system of chattel slavery. A Richmond newspaper assured its white subscribers that a major advantage of slave labor was its tendency to exclude "a populace made up of the dregs of Europe." But some African Americans viewed those "dregs" as potential allies and tried to assist them. For instance, in 1847, the members of Richmond's First African American Baptist Church sent $40 to Ireland to help victims of the famine. Later, they donated smaller sums to assist the Irish poor in Richmond. The *Charleston Standard* no doubt spoke for many slave owners when it branded foreign-born workers as "a curse rather than a blessing to our peculiar institution."

The South might have sustained a plantation system based on slavery and staple-crop agriculture and, simultaneously, developed an extensive industrial base by encouraging immigrants to settle in the region. In fact, many southerners who advocated economic diversification insisted that commerce and manufacturing would complement, not threaten, agriculture. James D. B. DeBow, who was inspired by the Memphis commercial convention of 1845, established a journal, the *Commercial Review of the South and the West*, that proclaimed in print, "Commerce is King." DeBow was also an ardent proslavery advocate who believed that only by creating southern commercial and industrial enterprises could the region maintain its existing traditions and institutions. This approach was rendered impossible, however, by planters' fears of foreign workers and their refusal to recognize manufacturing or wage labor as more than unworthy stepchildren in the southern economy. Indeed, planters tended to regard free labor as subversive and actively disruptive of the benefits of bound labor.

By the time DeBow's *Review* gained a significant readership at midcentury, the opportunity to reshape the South's economic structure had passed. Although complaints about planters' dependency on northern capital and commerce persisted, when it came to practical action, most planters chose to invest in land and slaves. By the late 1840s, as prices and profits for cotton, rice, sugar, and tobacco rose, ventures that would extend the geographical boundaries of plantation slavery generated more interest than those that would diversify the economy.

Extending the Empire for Slavery

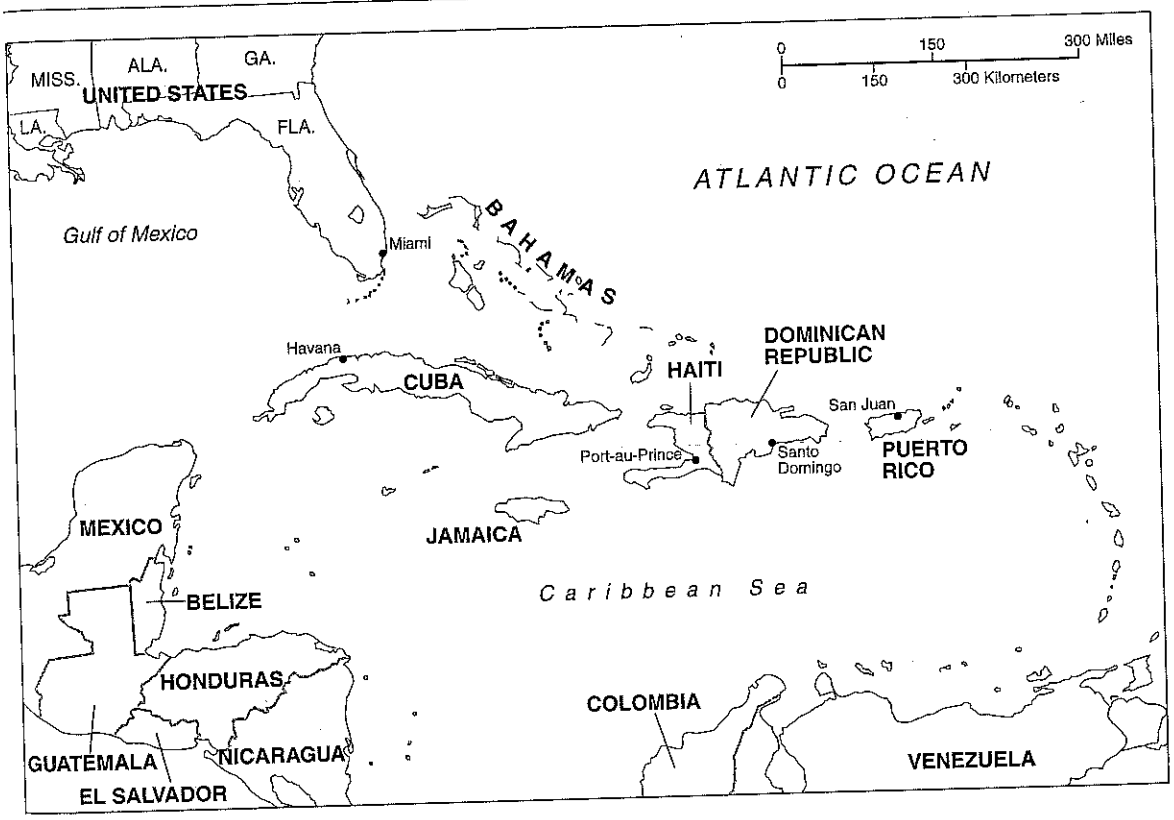
Southern whites had long dreamed of extending their dominion into tropical climates. Congressmen and presidents cast greedy glances at Cuba and Central America throughout the early and mid-nineteenth century. In New Orleans, the large number of French, free blacks, and slaves who arrived from Sainte-Domingue (present-day Haiti) after the revolution there in the 1790s gave the city a Caribbean flair that made planters in the area think of the possibilities of exploiting the West Indies. Proslavery adventurers actually mounted invasions of Mexico, Cuba, and Nicaragua in this period. And the successful settlement and "emancipation" of Texas in the 1830s revitalized dreams of a slave empire that stretched into Mexico and the Caribbean (Map 9.3).

Yet opening new lands to slavery created perils as well as opportunities. Territories acquired by the United States in the 1830s and 1840s inspired increasingly heated debates over the boundaries of slave society. When war erupted with Mexico in 1846, the criticisms from abolitionists intensified. In its aftermath, Whigs and Democrats were faced with difficult choices as some Americans who were adamantly opposed to the extension of slavery began to take a stand in the partisan political arena.

The Lure of New Territories to the South and West After Texas, Cuba was perhaps the most appealing prospect for annexation. In 1823, Secretary of State John Quincy Adams claimed, "There are laws of political as well as physical gravitation, and if an apple, severed by a tempest from its native tree, cannot choose but fall to the ground, Cuba, forcibly disjoined from its own unnatural connection with Spain, and incapable of self-support, can gravitate only towards the North American Union." In 1848, President James K. Polk tried unsuccessfully to help this "natural" gravitation along by offering Spain $100 million for the island. Similar offers, supported by circles of Cubans who were dissatisfied with Spanish rule, were made several more times over the next decade, although without success.

Southern planters also investigated economic possibilities in California during the 1840s. To encourage larger numbers of U.S. residents to settle the region, Anglo-American immigrants to the West Coast described the rich lands of the Sacramento and San Joaquin valleys and the docile population of Indian workers. Initially, these pioneers cared little about the origins of the new settlers, as long as the United States gained control of the region from Mexico. But planters, such as Richard Fulton of Missouri, wanted to know, "Is California a slave state and could our citizens bring their slaves with them?"

Those who were already established in the area tried to reassure potential southern émigrés. Rancher John Marsh, who had gained significant



MAP 9.3 The Lure of Caribbean Territories

After the United States acquired the Louisiana Territory and Florida, wealthy white Southerners began looking for new areas in which to expand their plantation economy. Some set their sights on the Caribbean. Easily accessible from Florida and with a long history of slave-produced sugar, rum, tobacco, and coffee, Cuba seemed particularly attractive. Even Sainte-Domingue (Haiti), the site of a successful slave rebellion led by Toussaint L'Ouverture in 1791, was considered a possibility for future development of the plantation system. Although plans to add Caribbean islands to the United States did not progress much in the mid-nineteenth century, Cuba and Puerto Rico were the first areas to come under U.S. control when the United States engaged in its first imperial adventures in the 1890s. Louis A. Pérez, Jr., *Cuba and the U.S.: Ties of Singular Intimacy* (1994).

experience in Indian affairs, admitted that Mexico did have laws against slavery, but he assured prospective migrants that the native peoples were willing workers. He even claimed that they submitted to "flagellation with more humility than negroes." Pierson B. Reading, a former New Orleans cotton broker who resettled in California, wrote to a friend back home in 1844, "The Indians of California make as obedient and humble slaves as the negroes in the south," and "for a mere trifle, you can secure their services for life." Although the indigenous peoples proved more resistant than these descriptions suggest, southern whites, encouraged by increased demand

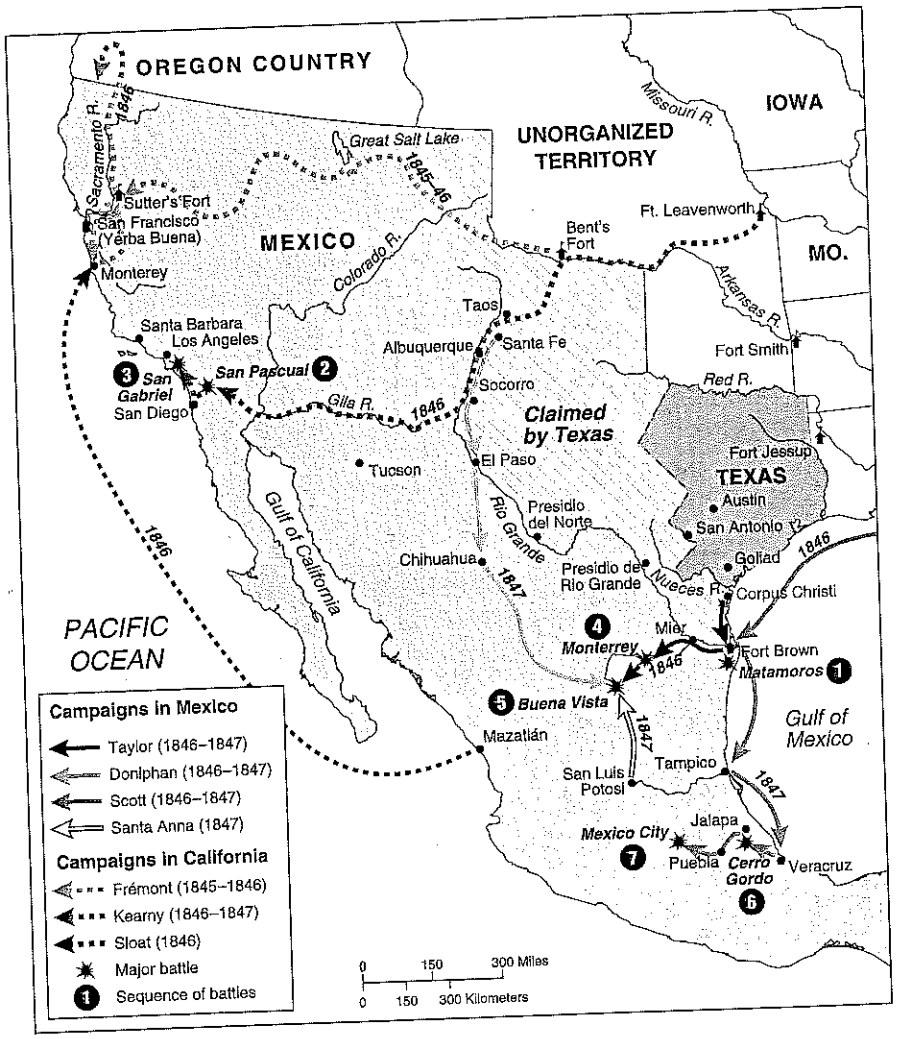
for agricultural products, eagerly envisioned plantations stretching from the Atlantic to the Pacific, worked by dark-skinned slaves.

The dreams of westward expansion had fueled political conflicts within and between the North and the South since the 1810s (see Chapter 8). The Lone Star Republic of Texas generated intensive debates in the 1830s and 1840s. It had sought U.S. statehood from the moment it achieved independence in 1836, but northern hostility to admitting this immense slaveholding territory into the Union had postponed action for several years. In 1844, however, the Democratic Party platform tied support for Texas statehood to the demand—popular among northern farmers—for the annexation of all of Oregon (a region that was claimed by both England and the United States). Farmers from the Old Northwest had been eyeing Oregon's Willamette Valley for years. By 1843, thousands of wagons were already following the Oregon Trail west from Missouri. Southern planters and politicians began to believe that the North's appetite for new lands might at last provide the basis for Texas statehood. The election the following year turned on the issue of admitting Texas and annexing Oregon.

As was noted earlier, the Democrats chose James K. Polk as their party standard-bearer, overlooking both President Tyler, who was considered ineffective, and Martin Van Buren, who was less enthusiastic about the admission of Texas. Andrew Jackson was a great fan of Polk who, like Jackson, was a Tennessee Democrat with a vision of America as an expansive nation. The Whigs nominated Henry Clay, but the party was divided over the wisdom of westward growth. Southern Whigs were particularly angered at Clay's failure to support the admission of Texas, whereas northern Whigs were annoyed that Clay even considered taking such a stand.

Polk's election was viewed as a mandate for expansion. The new administration did not annex all of Oregon, however. Instead, it agreed with Britain to define the forty-ninth parallel as the northern boundary of the United States, simply extending the eastern border with Canada westward. But even before this boundary dispute was settled, the U.S. Congress approved the annexation of Texas in December 1845.

The War with Mexico President Polk had even grander plans for expansion. During his one term in office, he oversaw the acquisition of more territory by the United States than any other president. His predecessor, President John Tyler, completed the annexation of Texas, but Polk presided over the settlement of the disputed Oregon Territory and then turned his attention to wresting more land from Mexico. Knowing that this plan would necessitate war, Polk sent U.S. troops across the Nueces River in Texas in January 1846 and into territory claimed by Mexico (Map 9.4). News that Mexican troops had crossed the Rio Grande River in April and attacked American soldiers then led Polk to demand war with Mexico. Whigs, however, thought that Polk had provoked the conflict, and a majority voted

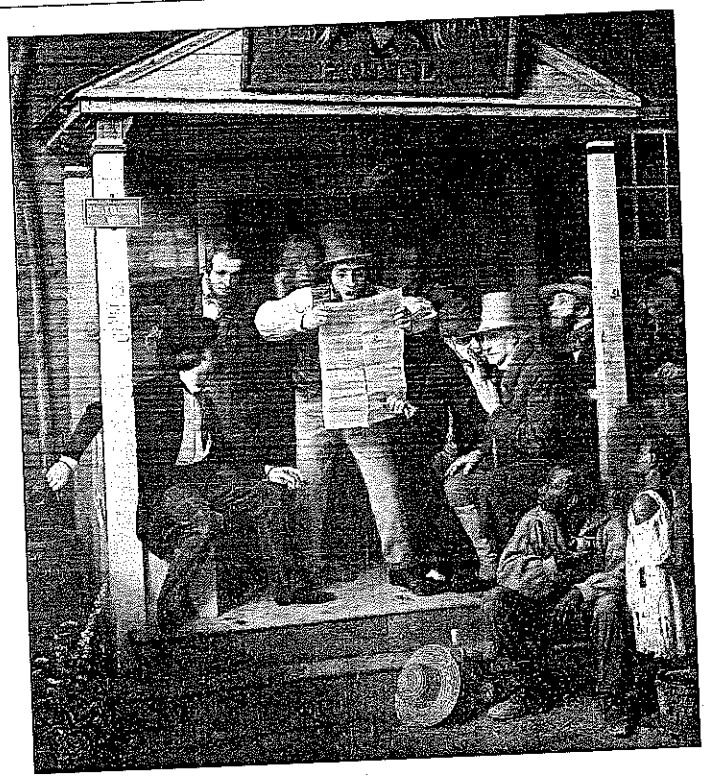


MAP 9.4 The U.S. War Against Mexico, 1846–1848

During the war with Mexico, U.S. troops seized the northern sections of Mexico, and John C. Frémont led an uprising of U.S. settlers in present-day California. At the same time, under the leadership of generals Winfield Scott and Zachary Taylor, the U.S. Army repulsed Mexican troops led by General Santa Anna. Defeated on all fronts, Mexico surrendered vast territories to the United States, comprising all or parts of present-day Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, Utah, Nevada, and Wyoming. California became an independent republic but was soon annexed by the United States as well.

against the declaration of war. The newly elected Whig representative from Illinois, Abraham Lincoln, even demanded evidence about the precise spot where Mexicans had supposedly shed American blood.

Still, the Democratic majority carried the day. "As war exists," the president then told Congress, "we are called upon by every consideration of duty and patriotism to vindicate with decision the honor, the rights, and the



War News from Mexico
In Richard Caton Woodville's 1848 painting, guests at the "American Hotel" (who represented a cross-section of the nation's white citizenry) demonstratively reacted to news about the Mexican War. Their almost comical behavior was in marked contrast to the subdued response of the black man and child in the picture's foreground. 1848, oil on canvas, 27 × 24 3/4 inches — National Academy of Design.

interests of our country." Many, probably most, Americans, North and South, agreed. Another Illinois representative, for instance, Democrat Stephen A. Douglas, was a fervent champion of westward expansion. He helped to boost the war spirit in Congress and branded critics such as Lincoln "traitors."

Despite the arid lands that made up most of northern Mexico, many slaveholders eagerly looked forward to creating new slave states from these hoped-for territories. "Every battle fought in Mexico," cheered the Charleston, South Carolina, *Courier*, "and every dollar spent there, but insures the acquisition of territory which must widen the field of Southern enterprise and power in the future. And the final result will be to readjust the power of the [Southern] confederacy, so as to give us control over the operation of government in all time to come."

For proslavery forces, the chance to acquire additional lands in the Southwest offered numerous benefits. The spread of slavery would aid planters in the Upper South by creating an even greater demand and higher price for their excess slaves. Small farmers who owned no slaves (a group that would constitute three-fourths of southern white families by 1860)

"We Are Engaged in a War of Conquest": Opposition to the War Against Mexico

These excerpts from a lecture by Charles C. Shackford, a Unitarian Universalist minister in Lynn, Massachusetts, criticize the premises and results of the U.S. war against Mexico and the lack of vocal opposition to it by northern citizens and politicians.

We are engaged in a war of conquest. All the resources of our nation for to-day and many days to come, are applied to inflict the horrors of war upon a neighboring people. We are recorded in the book of history, as the murderers of thousands whose only crime was living upon their native soil. . . . Truly is this matter the question of to-day; and the question not of politicians merely, but of every individual who has heart, or thought, or conscience. . . .

With the cancer of slavery feeding upon our system, this war was inevitable. . . . The North, with a fatal spirit of acquiescence, has submitted to one encroachment after another upon the spirit of freedom; and now, floated upon the surface, it is borne along to share the retribution. There remains but one way of escape. Slavery, that hydra, which but gains in strength from every act of feeble opposition and tame submission, must be slain. . . . At every new victory of the accursed system, some feeble cry is raised, 'that this encroaching evil must be opposed henceforth,' and then all is still. . . . A war in [our country's] defence, however iniquitous, a measure however wrong, has but to be entered upon, and then they pronounce it right to aid in its completion. . . .

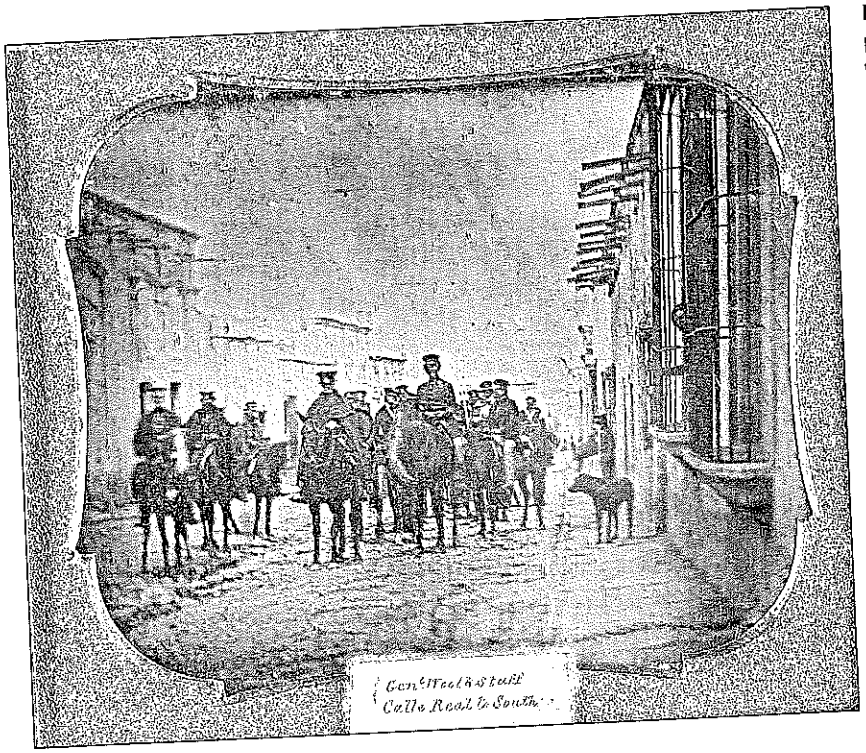
Glorious government! which can spend millions . . . to subdue a weak, divided, miserable country, while a deaf ear is turned to a whole people of noble-hearted workmen dying for bread. . . . No money for charity, none for justice, none for the payment of claims long due our citizens, none for internal commerce, for science, for the promotion of the means of human comfort; all must be taken to pay the hirelings in this war of slavery! Such is the glory that encircles our nation's brow!

Charles C. Shackford, *Citizen's Appeal in Regard to the War with Mexico. A Lecture* (Andrews & Prentiss, 1848).

could hope for a better chance on the new western lands, thereby alleviating the pressures on the planter class to respond to their needs by redistributing existing wealth. Finally, the rapid growth of a nonslaveholding and increasingly antislavery North endangered the political autonomy of the slaveholding South. Geographical expansion would help to ensure that planters had increased representation in the Senate through the admission of new slave states. This would prevent the North from using the federal government to block the interests of slaveholders.

In some parts of the country, however, the enthusiasm of slaveholders for war and their vision of a slave confederacy inspired vigorous opposition. Despite the passage of a resolution supporting the president's declaration of war, a majority in the House of Representatives also voted in favor of a Whig proposal that declared that the war had been "unnecessarily and unconstitutionally begun by the President of the United States." And while a prowar demonstration on May 20, 1846, occupied one part of New York's City Hall Park, George Henry Evans and John Commerford addressed an antiwar rally in another. Having "great reason to believe" that the Mexican War was the work of Texans and their business allies, the rally organizers urged "the Commander in Chief of the army to withdraw his forces, now on the Rio Grande, to some undisputed land belonging to the United States." And if war proved finally unavoidable, then the American sponsors of prowar meetings and messages "ought to be the first to volunteer, and the first to leave for the seat of war."

Opposition to the war was strong among northern farmers as well as some businessmen. The Massachusetts state legislature denounced the war and its "triple object of extending slavery, of strengthening the 'Slave Power,' and of obtaining control of the Free States" by gaining a slave-state majority in the Senate. The Cleveland *Plain Dealer* carried a speech by an Ohio



Dimly Viewed

Popular fervor for the Mexican War was fanned by visual reporting that promoted patriotic and nationalistic sentiments. Printmakers strove to satisfy the public's desire for news from the front. In the field, daguerreotypists struggled with a cumbersome and fragile new technology, trying to capture the world's first photographs of war. In this rare outdoor scene, Brigadier General John E. Wool and his mounted troops paused for a photographer in Saltillo's Calle Real, halting in the middle of the road to accommodate the long time required to expose a photographic plate. Daguerreotype, c. 1847 — Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

Uncle Sam's Taylorifics
A beardless Uncle Sam sliced and booted Mexico across the Rio Grande in this bellicose 1846 lithograph cartoon. Henry R. Robinson (after a drawing by Edward W. Clay), 1846, lithograph — New-York Historical Society.

Democrat who argued that the administration's willingness to compromise with Britain on the Oregon boundary while going to war with Mexico over the Texas boundary demonstrated that "the administration is Southern! Southern! Southern! . . . Since the South have [sic] fixed boundaries for free territory, let the North fix boundaries for slave territories." And Connecticut Congressman Gideon Welles probably spoke for a majority of his constituents when he declared, we must "satisfy the northern people . . . that we are not to extend the institution of slavery as a result of this war."

Abolitionists helped to foment and then reinforce northern fears that the war was a planter conspiracy to ensure southern control over the nation. During the 1830s, nearly every acquisition of territory in the South inspired abolitionist outcries against the extension of slavery. Announcement of the outbreak of war with Mexico was received at the 1846 meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society by means of the new magnetic telegraph. Abby Kelley, an abolitionist who had not planned to speak at the New York gathering, impulsively rose in indignation to express her opposition to the war. "Our fathers were successful in the Revolution, because they were engaged in a holy cause, and had right on their side. But in this case we have not. This nation is doomed," she proclaimed. She prayed for defeat but envisioned instead a U.S. victory followed by the day of reckoning, when southern slaves would join forces with western Indians, "who are only waiting to plant their tomahawks in the white man's skull."

As abolitionists engaged in acts of civil disobedience to protest the war, pacifists sometimes joined them. A young Henry David Thoreau refused to pay his taxes in protest against the war and was jailed in July 1846. The brief imprisonment inspired his classic essay "Resistance to Civil Government" (republished in 1866 under the title "Civil Disobedience"). Other antislavery advocates, however, followed Abby Kelley in taking a more belligerent pro-Mexico stance. Abolitionists across the country signed antiwar pledges and advocated military victory for Mexico. William Lloyd Garrison spoke for many abolitionists when he declared,

> I desire to see human life at all times held sacred; but in a struggle like this, so horribly unjust and offensive on our part, so purely of self-defence against lawless invaders on the part of the Mexicans, I feel as a matter of justice, to desire the overwhelming defeat of the American troops, and the success of the injured Mexicans.

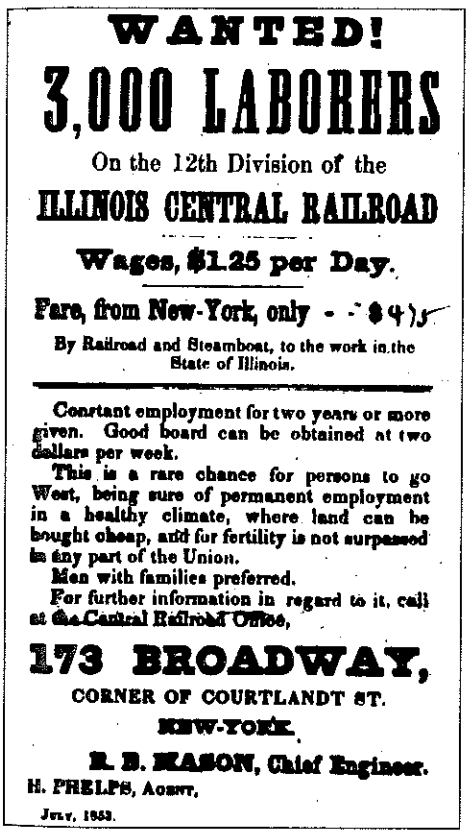
The abolitionist campaign bolstered opposition to the war among some Americans, but popular enthusiasm was inspired by the rapid advancement of U.S. troops into Mexico.

Although the war lasted eighteen months, U.S. troops dominated the fighting. General Zachary Taylor captured northeastern Mexico, including Monterrey, in September 1846. Colonel Stephen Kearney captured Santa Fe that same fall and then joined the ongoing battle in California, where Mexican forces were quickly defeated. When Mexico refused to surrender, Polk sent General Winfield Scott to march troops north from Veracruz, on Mexico's Gulf Coast. Scott's army seized Mexico City in September 1847, forcing the Mexican government to negotiate the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo soon thereafter.

The success of the U.S. Army ensured the dismemberment of Mexico. In March 1848, the Senate approved the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, granting the United States control over the provinces of California and New Mexico and moving the Texas-Mexican border southward from the Nueces River to the Rio Grande. The United States thus acquired vast new lands that offered seemingly limitless opportunities for economic advancement. But who would benefit most from these opportunities: southern planters, small farmers, or northern laborers? This question moved center stage in the nation's political debates.

Manifest Destiny and the Conflict over Slavery in the New Territories

Most white Americans, and certainly most Whigs, were not opposed to expansion. They might oppose expansion by force of arms or in the interest of slave owners, but even antiwar northerners generally agreed that the conquest of western lands benefited the nation. Journalist John L. O'Sullivan rallied support for westward expansion; in 1845, he claimed that



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July, 1853.

Go West, Young Man!
This Illinois Central Railroad advertisement, probably directed to immigrants, was posted in New York City in 1853. American Museum of Immigration, National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior.

it was Americans' "manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions." Although O'Sullivan's New York colleague Horace Greeley cautioned that a "nation cannot simultaneously devote its energies to the absorption of others' territories and the improvement of its own," settlers in the disputed western territories were enthusiastic about expansion and relatively unconcerned about contradictions between American principles and practice.

In California, John C. Frémont, who worked with the U.S. Army's topographical corps there, was happy to oblige when Polk indicated that the U.S. naval fleet in the Pacific would support a settler uprising along the West Coast. In 1846, Frémont helped to organize a rebellion among U.S. citizens living in California, and the "Bear Republic" soon declared its independence from Mexico. Frémont was certain that annexation would soon follow, counting on his father-in-law, Senator Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri, to carry the banner of California statehood in Congress.

With war underway and further expansion seeming inevitable, politicians turned their attention to the fate of slavery in the territories that were now sure to be acquired. Congressman David Wilmot, a Pennsylvania Democrat, opened the debate almost immediately. In 1846, at Wilmot's initiative, the House of Representatives voted to prohibit slavery in any territory that was acquired through the war with Mexico. Although defeated in the Senate, the Wilmot Proviso had received the endorsement of all but one northern state legislature by 1849.

Wilmot never considered his proposal a move "designed especially for the benefit of the black race." Nevertheless, it won fervent support among people in the free states who opposed slavery. This sentiment was strongest in New England, where clergymen, followers of Garrison, Liberty Party adherents, and free blacks were among the numerous contingents of anti-slavery advocates by the late 1840s. In 1846, a convention of working people protested the fact that "there are at the present time three millions of our brethren and sisters groaning in chains on the Southern plantations." Delegates to the convention declared their refusal to do anything "to keep three millions of our brethren and sisters in bondage" and called on other labor groups "to speak out in thunder tones" to secure for "all others those rights and privileges for which we are contending for ourselves."

But the majority of working people in the North were more cautious about abolishing slavery throughout the nation. Some no doubt recognized

"I Plead the Cause of White Freemen": Representative Wilmot's Proviso

In 1847, Representative David Wilmot of Pennsylvania proposed a legislative amendment (which came to be known as the Wilmot Proviso) that would ban slavery from any territory acquired as a result of the war with Mexico. In this speech to his fellow members of the House, Wilmot makes clear that he cares only for the prospects of free white workers and not at all for enslaved African Americans.

I make no war upon the South nor upon slavery in the South. I have no squeamish sensitiveness upon the subject of slavery, nor morbid sympathy for the slave. I plead the cause of the rights of white freemen. I would preserve for free white labor a fair country, a rich inheritance, where the sons of toil, of my own race and own color, can live without the disgrace which association with negro slavery brings upon free labor. I stand for the inviolability of free territory. It shall remain free, so far as my voice or vote can aid in the preservation of its character.

. . . O, for the honor of the North—for the fair fame of our green hills and valleys, be firm in this crisis—be true to your country and your race. The white laborer of the North claims your service; he demands that you stand firm to his interests and his rights; that you preserve the future homes of his children, on the distant shores of the Pacific, from the degradation and dishonor of negro servitude. Where the negro slave labors, the free white man cannot labor by his side without sharing in his degradation and disgrace.

Congressional Globe, 29th Congress, 2d sess., 1847, Appendix, 317. Reprinted in William E. Gienapp, ed., *The Civil War and Reconstruction: A Documentary Collection* (W. W. Norton, 2001), 17–18.

the economic contradictions highlighted in the Richmond, Virginia, *Enquirer*'s attack on working-class abolitionists. Referring to shoemakers in Lynn, Massachusetts, an editorial noted that they are "a people working all day on brogan shoes for the negroes at the South" but "who go to Abolition prayer meetings at night." Others feared that concerns over abolition were taking attention away from the needs of free white workers. George Henry Evans, once an outspoken enemy of slavery, became convinced that the fight for the emancipation of blacks must be postponed until the war against the exploitation of wage labor was won.

Still, if most northerners were wary about the effects of abolishing slavery, they also hotly opposed its extension beyond what then constituted the borders of the South. Northern farmers wanted western lands held free for settlement as homesteads, not as slave plantations. Many urban workers and small producers also hoped eventually to populate the West's towns and cities or have them kept free for their children and grandchildren. Immigrants, too, saw the West as a land of opportunity, and many eastern residents hoped that immigrants would settle there and thus alleviate competition for industrial and commercial employment in the East. Finally,

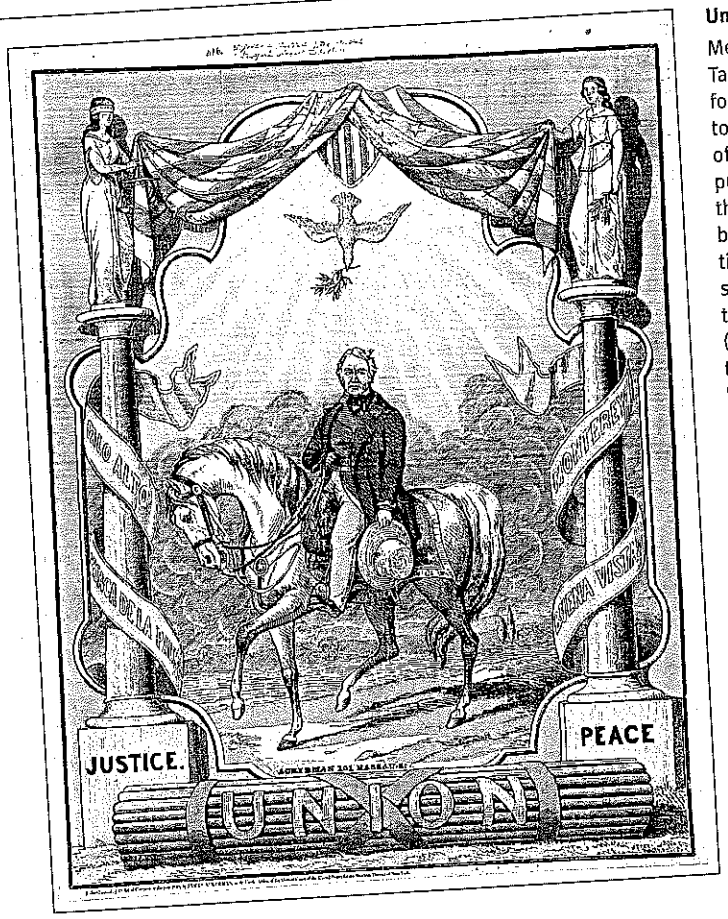
free blacks in the North were appalled at the thought that slavery would spread beyond its present borders. They rightly feared that their own liberties would be jeopardized by such an expansion.

None of these groups wanted to live among slaves and slave owners or to compete with slave labor. They believed that slavery had imposed multiple indignities, political restrictions, depressed wages, and harsh conditions on free workers in the South, and at the same time, it had encouraged industrial stagnation. To all these people, slavery signified the death of everything they cherished or aspired to: personal independence, mutual respect, political equality, the right to enjoy the fruits of their own labor. In attacks on their employers, Lynn shoemakers, Lowell mill operatives, and many other workers compared factory owners with slave owners and proclaimed the degrading conditions of their own labor by calling themselves "wage slaves." By accusing their employers of treating them like blacks, they hoped to horrify other white Americans and thereby gain their support.

With so negative a view of slavery, northern workers, farmers, merchants, and manufacturers could hardly relish having the institution gain new vigor by spreading farther west. Only a minority of them were abolitionists; most simply wanted slavery to remain restricted to the South. The vast majority of northern whites, including a number of abolitionists, believed that blacks were innately inferior and therefore supported state laws that limited the economic, social, and political rights of free African Americans. They envisioned the western territories as a place where free white men could gain access to cheap and abundant land. Even though far more free whites were now wage laborers than independent farmers or artisans, they were proud that they could sell their labor as free persons. Although in the midst of strikes and protests, they might wield the rhetoric of wage slavery, most would have agreed with the abolitionist who distinguished between slaves and free workers by saying, "Does he not own himself?" Moreover, whatever their circumstances at that point, many northern workers still hoped one day to own their own home, land, or business, a hope that the image of wide-open spaces and new opportunities in the West kept alive.

This antipathy to slavery, and in many cases to African Americans, explains why the Wilmot Proviso was so appealing to northern whites. In addition, free-soil clubs, which opposed the spread of slavery, sprang up quickly in cities and towns throughout the Northeast and upper Midwest at the start of the war with Mexico. By joining these clubs, workers, farmers, and shopkeepers—native-born and immigrant alike—announced that they would not tolerate chattel slavery in the territories acquired from Mexico.

Territorial Expansion and Political Turmoil The dispute over the spread of slavery became more and more important in American politics as the war



Union on the Battle Field

Mexican War hero Zachary Taylor rode popular enthusiasm for American conquest to victory in the presidential election of 1848. In this earliest-known presidential campaign poster, the names of Taylor's victorious battles wind down columns entitled Justice and Peace, while a sunlit dove of peace descends toward the unlabeled candidate (Taylor's fame making the mention of his name superfluous). Borrowing the style of large, colorful circus posters, this campaign poster promoted the election as another grand-scale public spectacle of the time. Thomas W. Strong, *Union*, woodcut printed in colors on paper, 1848 — Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

with Mexico ended. This issue would remain central for the next decade and a half, splintering the two main political parties, the Whigs and Democrats. Even before 1848, abolitionists had run for political office under the auspices of the Liberty Party. But when former president Martin Van Buren bolted from Democratic ranks to become the candidate of the new Free-Soil Party in 1848, the tension mounted. Although not an abolitionist, Van Buren ran on a platform that coupled opposition to the westward spread of slavery with support for "the free grant [of land] to actual settlers."

In 1848, the Free-Soil Party was not strong enough to oust the Whigs or Democrats from national power, in part because it inspired fierce opposition in the North and the South. William Lloyd Garrison and many other radical abolitionists dismissed the Free-Soilers for supporting "whitemanism" (that is, keeping the West open to white men only). Most of the northern economic elite also denounced the Free-Soil Party. Although in most cases, they morally opposed slavery, they opposed even more strongly the

organized antislavery movement. Their reasons were many: A mass campaign against slavery would dangerously polarize the nation. It would infuriate slave owners, whom the northern elite counted on as business and political partners. It would undermine the two major political parties and threaten the federal union itself. For instance, Whig leader and financier Philip Hone denounced Free-Soilers as "firebrands" who were ready to tear down the edifice of government to erect "altars for the worship of their own idols." And southern slaveholders were adamant in their opposition. As a result, Free-Soil candidate Van Buren lost his bid for a second chance as president, and Zachary Taylor, the Whig candidate, was elected.

Conclusion: Western Expansion and the Path to War

Despite this defeat, the issues that the Free-Soil Party had raised did not die. Instead, debates over land and labor grew more heated after 1848. Between 1845 and 1848, the United States had acquired 1.2 million square miles of territory. The victory over Mexico transferred California and the vast New Mexico territory to the United States and ensured that the Rio Grande would be recognized as the Texas border. Nearly 80,000 Spanish-speaking people, mostly of mixed Mexican-Indian descent, lived in the annexed areas. These people would perform much of the low-paid labor that was needed to make agriculture, ranching, mining, and industry profitable in the region. In addition, there were other racial and ethnic groups already settled in the western territories: Indians who had long inhabited the West, slaves taken there by their owners, immigrants and free blacks migrating westward to gain land and a better chance for an independent livelihood, and Chinese arriving in increasing numbers to work on railroads and in mining camps. These various groups increased the labor force, the competition for land, and the difficulties of resolving questions about the nation's social, racial, economic, and political order.

In 1848, however, Anglo-Americans focused more on their victory over Mexico than on the problems it spawned. Such vast territorial expansion in such a short time exhilarated many Americans. Didn't the war demonstrate the country's growing military prowess and finally seal its "manifest destiny" to dominate the continent from sea to sea? Certainly, southern planters felt confident that expansion had given new life to the system of plantation slavery.

During the 1830s and 1840s, southern planters had expanded their reach westward, removed most American Indians to Oklahoma Territory, developed an elaborate proslavery ideology, and consolidated their political and economic power in the region. Yet they could not rest easy. The acquisition of new territory and the expansion of a brutal internal slave trade inspired

resistance among enslaved women and men, outcries from free blacks and fugitive slaves, and growing criticisms of slavery from nonslaveholding southern whites and northern abolitionists. Tensions emerged even within the two major political parties over the best means for handling the increasingly volatile issues raised by slavery's spread westward. Indeed, winning the war against Mexico greatly sharpened the internal conflict in the United States. The debate over what to do with the new land—specifically, whether to permit slavery there—aroused emotions that ultimately exploded in the Civil War.

The Years in Review

1812

- The First Seminole War occurs, in which U.S. Marines invade Florida to recapture runaway slaves and meet resistance from black fugitives and Seminole Indians.

1832

- The majority of Seminole Indians leave Florida.
- College of William and Mary professor Thomas Dew crafts an influential proslavery document, which claims that slavery is best both for the South and for the slaves.

1833

- The British government abolishes the slave trade in the West Indies.

1835

- The Second Seminole War occurs, in which fugitive slaves (known as maroons) join Seminole Indians in their fight against the United States. The peace agreement in 1842 forces the Seminoles to leave Florida but allows maroons to accompany them to Oklahoma rather than returning to their masters.

1836

- The Republic of Texas declares its independence from Mexico; outnumbered Texans lose at the Battle of the Alamo and are all killed, but Texans defeat Mexicans six weeks later at the Battle of San Jacinto, crying "Remember the Alamo!"

1837

- The Panic of 1837 lasts five years and devastates the nation.
- The Virginia General Assembly reaffirms the 1806 statute that allows individual counties to determine whether free blacks could remain in residence.
- The First Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women meets in Philadelphia.