



# The Causes of the Civil War

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Part 2 of 2



# The Fugitive Slave Law and the Rise of the Know-Nothing Party

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- Northern states enacted “personal liberty laws that prohibited state officials from assisting in the return of runaways and extended the right of trial by jury to the fugitives. Southerners regarded these attempts to obstruct the return of runaways as a violation of the Constitution and federal law.
- A massive wave of immigrants from Europe arrived in America from 1846-1855. Opponents of immigration capitalized on the fears of working-class Americans and resentment against their growing political power to create the Know-Nothing Party. Lincoln denounced them as hypocritical– once they had been immigrants, too, and now they were unwilling to grant the new immigrants the same freedoms that they now enjoyed.

# The Kansas-Nebraska Act and the Revival of the Slavery Issue

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- It nullified the Missouri Compromise, so that slavery could exist north of the earlier boundary line and then allowed the settlers of the new territories to decide the question of whether they would be slave or free by voting on the issue, or popular sovereignty.
- Northern Democrats and Free-Soilers combined to form the Republican Party in opposition to the Kansas-Nebraska Act. The two factions in the new party were those who wanted the complete abolition of slavery and for African-Americans to receive full civil rights– including the right to vote, while the other faction favored colonization as a workable solution to slavery. Both factions were united in their desire to stop slavery from spreading into the new Western territories.

# Bleeding Kansas and Bleeding Sumner

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- Since the future of the territories was to be decided by a vote. Both sides– New Englanders and free-soilers and Southerners from Missouri decided to settle the territory and both established territorial governments. When President Franklin Pierce urged Congress to recognize the pro slavery territorial government, Kansas descended into a civil war. Preston Brooks caned Charles Sumner for disparaging remarks that he had made about his uncle, Senator Andrew Butler of South Carolina during a speech in which he had also condemned the pro slavery government in Kansas.
- In South, Brooks was hailed as a hero despite resigning his seat after being censured in Congress and re-elected to his seat. In the North, Sumner was seen as a martyr for the cause of freedom and abolitionism. Brown gruesomely murdered pro slavery men and boys and his actions widened the civil war in Kansas.

# The Election of 1856 and the Dred Scott Decision

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- The voting broke down on sectional lines, plus, the two parties tried to demonize one another over the issue of slavery and its expansion. However, if the Republicans had just carried two more states they would have won the election and the Presidency.
- The court ruled that a slave was not a citizen, so therefore he could not sue for his freedom, that the Missouri Compromise was unconstitutional, and that Congress did not have the ability to restrict the expansion of slavery. In effect, what the ruling stated was that to end slavery would require amending the Constitution. The reaction to the decision was that there was a slave power conspiracy at work to legalize slavery throughout the country. Indeed, the Dred-Scott Decision, basically stated that slavery could exist anywhere.

# The Gathering Storm and the Lincoln-Douglas Debates

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- Seward believed that the conflict had deep roots and was inevitable. Most Northerners were convinced that one side of the nation was dedicated to freedom and one was opposed to it. They felt that Southerners were dominated by an aggressive slave power which had seized control of the federal government and imperiled the liberties of free people.
- Lincoln painted Douglas as someone who wanted to make slavery lawful throughout the country. In turn, Douglas painted Lincoln as a radical stating that he wanted a civil war, the emancipation of the slaves and to provide equality between the races. The election ended with a loss for Lincoln, though at the time, no voter could directly vote for either candidate as state legislatures voted for US Senators at the time, but it gave Lincoln a national platform for his message and that of his party which would propel him to the presidency in 1860.