

3 Slavery Dominates Politics

MAIN IDEA

Disagreement over slavery led to the formation of the Republican Party and heightened sectional tensions.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

The Democrats and the Republicans are the major political parties of today.

TERMS & NAMES

Republican Party
John C. Frémont
James Buchanan
Dred Scott v. Sandford
Roger B. Taney
Abraham Lincoln
Harpers Ferry

ONE AMERICAN'S STORY

Joseph Warren, editor of the Detroit *Tribune*, wanted the antislavery parties of Michigan to join forces. In 1854, his newspaper pushed them to unite.

A VOICE FROM THE PAST

[A convention should be called] irrespective of the old party organizations, for the purpose of agreeing upon some plan of action that shall combine the whole anti-Nebraska, anti-slavery sentiment of the State, upon one ticket [set of candidates endorsed by a political party].

Detroit Tribune, quoted in *The Origins of the Republican Party*

By July, antislavery politicians from various parties, including the Whigs, Free-Soilers, and some Democrats, had settled their differences. On July 6, they met to form a new party “to concentrate the popular sentiment of this state against the aggression of the slave power.” In memory of Thomas Jefferson, they called themselves Republicans. In this section, you will learn why the Republican Party was formed and how it changed American politics in the 1850s.



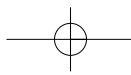
This medal shows an early motto of the Republican Party. It also makes clear the Republican connection to the antislavery position of the Free-Soil Party.

The Republican Party Forms

The creation of the Republican Party grew out of the problems caused by the Kansas–Nebraska Act of 1854. The law immediately caused a political crisis for the Whig Party. Southern Whigs had supported the bill for the same reason that Northern Whigs had opposed it: the bill proposed to open new territories to slavery. There was no room for compromise, so the party split.

The Southern Whigs were destroyed by the split. A few joined the Democratic Party. But most searched for leaders who supported slavery and the Union. The Northern Whigs, however, joined with other opponents of slavery and formed the **Republican Party**.

The Republicans quickly gained strength in the North. “Bleeding Kansas” was the key to the Republican rise. Many people blamed the violence on the Democrats. With the 1856 elections nearing, the



Republicans believed that they had an excellent opportunity to gain seats in Congress and win the presidency.

The Republicans needed a strong presidential candidate in 1856 to strengthen their young party. They nominated **John C. Frémont**. Young and handsome, Frémont was a national hero for his explorations in the West, which earned him the nickname the “Pathfinder.”

ReadingHistory

A. Summarizing

Why did the Republicans nominate Frémont for president in 1856?

Republicans liked Frémont for a couple of reasons. He had spoken in favor of admitting both California and Kansas as free states. Also, he had little political experience and did not have a controversial record to defend. Even so, the Republican position on slavery was so unpopular in the South that Frémont’s name did not appear on the ballot there.

The Election of 1856

The Democrats nominated **James Buchanan** to run for the presidency in 1856. As minister to Great Britain, he had been in England since 1853 and had spoken neither for nor against the Kansas–Nebraska Act.

Buchanan took advantage of his absence from the country. He said little about slavery and claimed that his goal was to maintain the Union. Buchanan appealed to Southerners, to many people in the upper South and the border states, and to Northerners who were afraid that Frémont’s election could tear the nation apart.

The American, or Know-Nothing, Party also nominated a presidential candidate in 1856. They chose Millard Fillmore, who had been president, following the death of Zachary Taylor, from 1850 until 1853. But the Know-Nothings were divided over slavery and had little strength.

The 1856 presidential election broke down into two separate races. In the North, it was Buchanan against Frémont. In the South, it was Buchanan against Fillmore. Buchanan won. He carried all the slave states except Maryland, where Fillmore claimed his only victory. Buchanan also won several Northern states.

Although he lost the election, Frémont won 11 Northern states. These results showed two things. First, the Republican Party was a major force in the North. Second, the nation was sharply split over slavery.

The Case of Dred Scott

The split in the country was made worse by the Supreme Court decision in the case of Dred Scott. Scott had been a slave in Missouri. His owner took him to live in territories where slavery was illegal. Then they returned to Missouri. After his owner’s death, Scott sued for his freedom. He argued that he was a free man because he had lived in territories where slavery was illegal. His case, *Dred Scott v. Sandford*, reached the Supreme Court in 1856.

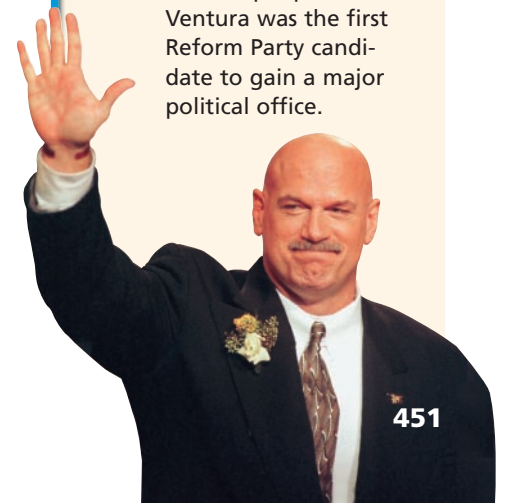
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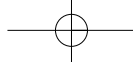
THIRD-PARTY CANDIDATES

American politics has usually been dominated by two parties. Most third-party candidates, such as the Republican Frémont in 1856, lose elections. In 1998, Minnesotans broke that pattern when they elected for governor Jesse Ventura of the Reform Party (below).

One reason for Ventura’s victory was his celebrity status. He had been a professional wrestler and the host of a popular radio show. His plain speaking appealed to many Minnesotans who felt the major parties were out of touch with the people.

Ventura was the first Reform Party candidate to gain a major political office.





Dred Scott (above) first sued for his freedom in 1846. The Supreme Court, led by Chief Justice Roger B. Taney (right), did not rule on the case until 1857.



In 1857, the Court ruled against Scott. Chief Justice **Roger B. Taney** [TAW•nee] delivered his opinion in the case. In it, he said that Dred Scott was not a U.S. citizen. As a result, he could not sue in U.S. courts. Taney also ruled that Scott was bound by Missouri's slave code because he lived in Missouri. As a result, Scott's time in free territory did not matter in his case.

In addition, Taney argued that Congress could not ban slavery in the territories. To do so would violate the slaveholders' property rights, protected by the Fifth Amendment. In effect, Taney declared legislation such as the Missouri Compromise unconstitutional.

Southerners cheered the Court's decision. Many Northerners were outraged and looked to the Republican Party to halt the growing power of Southern slaveholders.

ReadingHistory

B. Recognizing Effects How did Taney's opinion affect the Missouri Compromise?

Lincoln and Douglas Debate

After the *Dred Scott* decision, the Republicans charged that the Democrats wanted to legalize slavery not only in all U.S. territories but also in all the states. They used this charge to attack individual Democrats. Stephen A. Douglas, sponsor of the Kansas–Nebraska Act, was one of their main targets in 1858. That year, Illinois Republicans nominated **Abraham Lincoln** to challenge Douglas for his U.S. Senate seat. In his first campaign speech, Lincoln expressed the Northern fear that Southerners wanted to expand slavery to the entire nation. He set the stage for his argument by using a metaphor from the Bible.

A VOICE FROM THE PAST

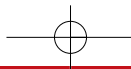
"A house divided against itself cannot stand." I believe this government cannot endure, permanently half slave and half free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved—I do not expect the house to fall—but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing, or all the other.

Abraham Lincoln, Springfield, Illinois, June 16, 1858

Later in the year, the two men held formal debates across Illinois. The Lincoln–Douglas debates are now seen as models of political debate. At the time, the debates allowed people to compare the short, stocky, well-dressed Douglas with the tall, thin, gawky Lincoln.

The two men squarely addressed the nation's most pressing issue: the expansion of slavery. For Lincoln, slavery was "a moral, a social and a political wrong." But he did not suggest abolishing slavery where it already existed. He argued only that slavery should not be expanded.

Douglas did not share Lincoln's belief that it was the national government's role to prevent the expansion of slavery. Instead, he argued



CITIZENSHIP TODAY

Debating Points of View

Debate has long been an important method of exploring public issues. The Lincoln-Douglas debates drew crowds from all over Illinois to hear Lincoln and Douglas discuss the issues of the day. Debates such as these can help people find out about candidates' views.

Today, the National Forensic League (NFL) sponsors Lincoln-Douglas Debates, competitions for high school students. Many judges, actors, news commentators, and talk show hosts began to develop their debating skills in such competitions.


High school students can benefit from learning to defend their positions in debates. One student explained what she learned from NFL debates. "I learned about how to think really fast and how to respond."

Jessica Bailey of Apple Valley High School in Minnesota won second place in the national Lincoln-Douglas Debates competition in 1998.



How Do You Debate an Issue?

1. Choose a debate opponent and an issue to debate. (One NFL topic for national competition was whether the federal government should establish an educational policy to increase academic achievement in secondary schools in the United States.)
2. Research the topic you chose.
3. Agree on a format for your debate—how many minutes for presentation, rebuttal, and closing.
4. Debate your opponent in front of the class.
5. Find out how many students in the audience agree with each side, then ask for their reasons.

 See Citizenship Handbook, page 269.

For more about debating . . .



that popular sovereignty was the best way to address the issue because it was the most democratic method to do so.

But popular sovereignty was a problem for Douglas. The Supreme Court decision in the *Dred Scott* case had made popular sovereignty unconstitutional. Why? It said that people could not vote to ban slavery, because doing so would take away slaveholders' property rights. In the debates, Lincoln asked Douglas if he thought people in a territory who were against slavery could legally prohibit it—despite the *Dred Scott* decision.

Douglas replied that it did not matter what the Supreme Court might decide about slavery because "the people have the lawful means to introduce it or exclude it as they please." Douglas won reelection. Lincoln, despite his loss, became a national figure and strengthened his standing in the Republican Party.

John Brown Attacks Harpers Ferry

In 1859, John Brown, who had murdered proslavery Kansans three years before, added to the sectional tensions. Brown had a plan. He wanted to inspire slaves to fight for their freedom. To do this, he planned to capture the weapons in the U.S. arsenal at **Harpers Ferry**, Virginia.

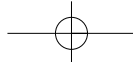
On October 16, 1859, Brown and 18 followers—13 whites and 5 blacks—captured the Harpers Ferry arsenal. They killed four people in the raid. Brown then sent out the word to rally and arm local slaves.

ReadingHistory

C. Making Inferences Why were popular sovereignty and the opinion in the *Dred Scott* case inconsistent?

Vocabulary

arsenal: stock of weapons



HISTORY
through **ART**

John Stewart Curry painted *The Tragic Prelude* between 1937 and 1942. He shows a wild-eyed John Brown standing on the bodies of Civil War soldiers.

What do you think Curry's views were on John Brown's role in U.S. history?

But no slaves joined the fight. The U.S. Marines attacked Brown at Harpers Ferry. Some of his men escaped. But Brown and six others were captured, and ten men were killed.

Brown was then tried for murder and treason. He was convicted and sentenced to hang. On the day he was hanged, abolitionists tolled bells and fired guns in salute. Southerners were enraged by Brown's actions

and horrified by Northern reactions to his death.

As the nation headed toward the election of 1860, the issue of slavery had raised sectional tensions to the breaking point. In the next section, you will read about the election of 1860 and its effect on the nation.

Section **3** Assessment

1. Terms & Names

Explain the significance of:

- Republican Party
- John C. Frémont
- James Buchanan
- *Dred Scott v. Sandford*
- Roger B. Taney
- Abraham Lincoln
- Harpers Ferry

2. Taking Notes

Use a chart like the one below to take notes on the major events discussed in this section.

Election of 1856	
<i>Dred Scott v. Sandford</i>	
Lincoln–Douglas debates	
Harpers Ferry	

3. Main Ideas

- What issues led to the creation of the Republican Party?
- What consequences did the *Dred Scott* decision have for free blacks?
- How did John Brown's attack on Harpers Ferry increase tensions between the North and the South?

4. Critical Thinking

Identifying Facts and Opinions

How did Lincoln and Douglas disagree about slavery? Which of their views were facts, and which were opinions?

THINK ABOUT

- Lincoln's speech at Springfield in 1858
- Douglas's support of popular sovereignty

ACTIVITY OPTIONS

MATH

GEOGRAPHY

Do research to find election returns from the 1856 presidential election. Make **graphs** or draw a **map** to illustrate the results.