TEXAS AND THE KANSAS-NEBRASKA ACT OF 1854

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the North Texas State University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF HISTORY

By

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Denton, Texas
December, 1974

This work demonstrates the importance of the Kansas-Nebraska Act in stirring sectional awareness and tension in Texas. It also analyzes the continuing impact of the measure on Texas politics and public opinion from 1854 until secession in 1861.

Texas newspapers of the 1850s were the principal source for this study, supplemented by historical journals and other works. Organized chronologically and topically, this study traces Texans' attitudes and opinions concerning the extension-of-slavery controversy from their showing little interest in the issue prior to 1854 to their demand for secession in 1861. Texans considered slavery inseparable from their prosperity and welfare. Their determination to preserve it caused them to become a part of the disastrous secession movement.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The people of Texas took comparatively little interest in the slavery controversy prior to the introduction of the Kansas-Nebraska bill in 1854. Although there was some concern for issues arising from the conflict between slave and free states, citizens of the Lone Star State paid far more attention to their own problems growing out of the days of the Revolution and the Republic. The debt of the Republic and the boundary dispute with New Mexico were the questions uppermost in the public mind. However, frequent Indian depredations along the frontier also constituted an important issue, and numerous lesser problems plagued the state. Hundreds of spurious land claims, involving millions of acres of land, demanded immediate attention. The absolute necessity for internal improvements became more evident every day. The organization of new counties, the extension of the civil authority of the state, and the implementing of governmental machinery required much attention. These
questions formed the basis of the party divisions and colored the complexion of political discussion until 1854.¹

Yet, Texas could not escape entirely the slavery controversy that agitated the other states in the Union before the introduction of the Kansas-Nebraska bill. Her representatives in Congress took part in the debate over the Wilmot Proviso in 1846 and the Compromise of 1850, and the position of the state government toward these issues concerning the extension of slavery was an unmistakable one. In a joint resolution, approved February 2, 1848, the Texas legislature requested that her senators and representatives in the United States Congress protest against the relinquishment of the conquered Mexican provinces and against any law that would prevent citizens of slaveholding states from immigrating into these territories with their slave property.² A similar resolution, approved March 18, 1848, declared also that the Wilmot Proviso violated the rights


of the states. Another resolution, following the introduction of the compromise measures of 1850, denounced the movement to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia as unconstitutional and declared that the territories were the common property of the several states and that Congress had no right to pass laws that would discriminate among the states. Nor did the Texas press remain entirely silent on the slavery issues of the times. Many of the newspapers began to show their interest in the controversy by reprinting editorials and speeches on the subject from leading Southern papers. When comments were made, they were usually in accord with Southern sentiment, but most of the papers appeared hesitant to take a firm stand on either side.

The legislature and the press of Texas paid some attention to sectional matters, but there is little to indicate that before 1854 the masses of people of the state were deeply concerned with the sectional controversy. This can be seen by the reaction of Texans toward the calling of the Nashville Convention in 1850. The purpose of the

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3 Ibid., pp. 132-34.
4 Ibid., pp. 531-32.
5 See for example Galveston Weekly News, 2 February 1848; Marshall Texas Republican, 20 December 1849; Austin Texas State Gazette 15 June 1850; Clarksville Northern Standard, 13 April 1850.
convention was to formulate some plan to unite the South against what many Southerners, particularly those from the Deep South, considered to be Northern encroachments upon their constitutional rights concerning the slavery issues then being debated before Congress. Texas, along with the other Southern states, was invited to send delegates to the convention which was to meet in early June, 1850, at Nashville, Tennessee. The Texas legislature passed an act on February 11, 1850, calling for a public election to be held on March 4 to select eight delegates, four from each congressional district, to attend the convention. After the delegates were elected, however, only one of the eight, ex-governor James Pinckney Henderson, actually attended the meeting. The other seven failed to go, apparently because so few votes were cast by the people of Texas favoring the sending of delegates to the convention. It should be pointed out that the three weeks from the time the legislature issued a call for the election until the date of the election did not allow ample time for the people to be well informed as to the purpose of the election. Still, there is no evidence that Texans would have been more in favor of the convention even if sufficient time had been allowed for the election.6

Thus, although some of the leaders of the state were fully aware of the situation, the greater part of the citizenry were not overly alarmed at the attitude of Congress toward the extension of slavery issue in 1850. They were much more concerned with the Texas boundary dispute with New Mexico and with the settling of the huge state debt than they were with the slavery controversy that was polarizing the rest of the United States at this time.

Less than four years later, however, when the Kansas-Nebraska bill came before Congress in 1854, circumstances had changed greatly in Texas. Whereas the attitude of most inhabitants had previously been one of complacency, public opinion in the state now moved rapidly toward one of open hostility with regard to Northern attempts to halt the expansion of slavery into the western territories. There were several reasons for this rapidly changing attitude of the Texans. The Compromise of 1850 settled the problems of the state concerning the western boundary dispute and the public debt and effectively removed these questions from public concern. Federal troops had been sent to the state to protect against Indian raids and most Texans were under the impression, for the time being, that the soldiers would adequately handle the Indian situation.  

7Richardson, Wallace, and Anderson, Texas, pp. 151-52.
of an internal nature faced the state, and these were mostly being worked out on a local level and often did not attract state-wide attention. The inhabitants of Texas were now able to focus greater attention on national affairs and politics.

The rapid increase in the population of the state after annexation also had an important influence on the radically changing attitude of Texas toward the slavery issues. When Texas entered the Union in 1846, she had slightly more than 100,000 whites and 32,000 Negro slaves living within her boundary.8 Before this time, the uncertainty as to the future of the country and the heavy tariff placed upon Texas cotton by the United States had prevented numerous immigrants from moving to the new country with its abundance of cheap, rich lands.9 But annexation to the United States and the subsequent war with Mexico and its successful termination removed these problems. Thousands of cotton growers and other immigrants then began to pour

8Abigail Curlee, "A Study of Texas Slave Plantations, 1822 to 1865," (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas, 1932), p. 325. These figures represent only a close approximation of the actual white and slave population in Texas in 1846. This source, as well as others, indicate that the white population in 1846 was somewhere between 100,000 and 102,000 while the slave population was somewhere between 31,000 and 33,000.

into the state until by 1854 the population had swelled to approximately 264,000 whites and 90,000 slaves—an increase during the eight years of at least 264 per cent for the white population and 290 per cent for that of the slave population. The vast majority of the immigrants were Southerners, many of whom were planters and farmers of moderate means. They had grown up in areas where slavery was taken as a matter of course, and they naturally brought their views regarding slavery with them to Texas. With the increase in planters and their slaves, cotton production also increased until slavery became, as with the other Southern states, the very foundation of Texas's economic system. From 1850 to 1854 alone, cotton production in the state increased from more than 58,000 bales to about 210,000 bales. During the same period, the value of slaves increased from $17,776,500 to $46,501,840 and that

10 Willard Richardson, ed., The Texas Almanac for 1857, with Statistics, Historical and Biographical Sketches, etc., Relating to Texas (Galveston: Galveston Weekly News Printing Office, 1856), p. 106; Curlee, "A Study of Texas Slave Plantations," p. 326. These figures should be construed as being only close approximations of the actual white and slave populations in 1854.


12 See Richardson, Wallace, and Anderson, Texas, p. 159 for the cotton production in 1850 and the Austin Texas State Times 13 May 1855, for the cotton production in 1854.
of the total taxable property from $51,814,615 to $126,981,617. Protection of property in slaves therefore became practically synonymous with economic security.

With the rapid growth of Texas as a state, the inevitable political factions began to form lines and inject issues into the general elections. During the days of the Republic, the voters of Texas were divided into factions consisting of those who were for and those who were against the policies of Sam Houston rather than into definite parties. Politics in the state consisted more of personalities than issues and men ran for governmental office at the request of their friends or for personal gratification. Later, the current of events which swept Texas into the Union had an important influence; and because the Democrats had encouraged annexation while the Whigs had opposed it, the former were able to profit by the popularity of annexation. The Democrats also backed the war with Mexico which most Texans ardently favored while the Whigs bitterly opposed the war. Furthermore, most of the immigrants to Texas were of the small farmer class and were Democrats.

13 Willard Richardson, The Texas Almanac for 1857, p. 106.

Thus by 1854 an overwhelming majority of the people of Texas were Democratic and regarded the interests of the state and of the South as identical with those of the party.\textsuperscript{15} The old pro-Houston and anti-Houston factions still existed but the political philosophies of each came more into line with national politics. The pro-Houston faction mainly adhered to the principles of the Union Democrats that became prominent in some of the other Southern states after 1850. This faction most often favored conciliation and compromise over the question of slavery whenever it threatened the disruption of the Union. Sam Houston was its leader and his popularity was the tie that bound them together.\textsuperscript{16} The anti-Houston faction became the Southern or state-rights party and corresponded more nearly to the ultra-Southern doctrines of the Calhoun Democrats. They were radically opposed to compromising in any way what they considered to be their constitutional rights. Their leaders consisted mainly of large planters and other prominent men who had recently immigrated to Texas from other Southern


states.\(^{17}\) Opposed to both of these Democratic factions were the Whigs. They were few in number by 1854 and usually aligned themselves in favor of the interests of the Whig national party whenever they could.

The great increase in Texas's population had still another important bearing on the changing attitude of Texans toward the slavery controversy. This was the rapid expansion of the number of newspapers published in Texas after annexation and their influence on the general public. As a Republic, only thirteen newspapers were being published within Texas's boundaries.\(^{18}\) The number of publications increased to twenty-one by 1848, and by 1854 there were over fifty newspapers being printed in Texas with a combined circulation sufficient to reach practically all whites in the state.\(^{19}\) The newspapers of 1854 were much more conscious of national affairs than they had been in previous years and practically every issue was replete with political news and sharp editorial comment on the public


issues of the hour, from the local to the national scene. Editorial writing in the backwoods was an art, and although some of the writing was irate and misinformed, most of it was clear and sound. It kept the citizens of Texas fully aware of events. The newspapers were often strongly partisan, and as the great majority were founded by editors who had recently immigrated to Texas from the Old South, most of the news and editorial comment was in accord with the popular views of the other Southern states at that time. 20

There were thus several factors which increased Texans interest in national affairs by 1854. The large influx of able men from the other Southern states, the great increase in slaves and their correspondingly favorable impact on the economy of the state, the settlement of many of Texas's major internal problems, the increase in partisan political

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20 Richardson, Wallace, and Anderson, Texas, p. 183. Richardson, using as sources the United States census for 1850 and 1860 and the Texas Almanac for the years 1857, 1858, and 1860, points out that more than 90 per cent of all white immigrants to Texas since 1846 were from the Old South. In addition, some editors of Texas newspapers frequently commented in editorials or such when new newspapers were started or when they changed editors. They also often commented on the political philosophy of the new papers or of the editors. Virtually all these new editors were from other Southern states. It should be pointed out that some of the newspapers in existence in Texas prior to 1846 had the same editor on through the 1850's and that some of these editors had immigrated to Texas from Northern states. However, they were few in number. For the story of a Northern-born editor, see Ernest Wallace, Charles DeMorse: Pioneer Editor and Statesman (Lubbock: Texas Tech Press, 1943).
activity, and the increase in the number of newspapers and editors with more interest in national affairs all contributed to greater awareness by Texans of national politics and sectional questions. Texas was now more closely tied to the other Southern states than ever before in her history. The great determining factor in the national politics of most Texans was that their state was bound to the South with economic, racial, and political ties and interests. Therefore, when Texans awakened to the seriousness of the North's opposition to slavery extension as a result of the Kansas-Nebraska controversy in 1854, the people of the state poured forth a steady stream of opinion concerning their views on the entire matter of slavery.

It should not be surprising that Texans in 1854 reacted vigorously to what they regarded as Northern opposition to and threats to Southern institutions. However, public opinion in Texas concerning the Kansas-Nebraska Act has received little attention in the past in relation to the sectional controversies of the 1850's. Most authors writing about this phase of Texas history have either ignored Texans intense feelings over the issues or else dismissed them as being of little consequence in the state's march to the Secession Convention in 1861. Only the vote against the bill by Sam Houston, one of Texas's United States senators, has been written about to any extent. As
yet, no comprehensive study has been made concerning the attitude and activities of the other public officials and of the people of Texas in regard to this measure.\textsuperscript{21}

The purpose of this study then is to examine the attitudes of leading public figures and public opinion in general in Texas through the critical period following the introduction of the Nebraska bill in January, 1854, until its passage as the Kansas-Nebraska Act on May 30, 1854, and on through the political repercussions which followed passage of the measure. It will demonstrate the importance of this act in stirring sectional awareness and tension and will analyze the attitudes expressed by Texans on the whole issue of slavery extension. Just what reasons, what hopes and fears, did they have in so vigorously supporting the

\textsuperscript{21}Wallace, Texas in Turmoil, pp. 29, 40-41; Richardson, Wallace, and Anderson, Texas, pp. 146, 183; Connor, Texas: A History, pp. 189-91; Louis J. Wortham, A History of Texas from Wilderness to Commonwealth, 5 vols. (Fort Worth: Wortham-Molyneaux Co., 1924), 4:250; John Henry Brown, History of Texas, from 1685 to 1892, 2 vols. (St. Louis, Mo.: Becktold and Co., 1893), 2:372-75. These works, and numerous other ones, either completely disregard Texas's role in the Kansas-Nebraska controversy or else only point out that Texas became interested in the slavery controversy as a result of the Kansas-Nebraska bill, without going into any detail as to the public's reaction to the measure. That so much has been written concerning Houston's vote on the bill can probably be attributed to his long political and military career in Texas, and also because of the great amount of public and personal records, letters and other documents which are available concerning his public life.
Kansas-Nebraska measure and denouncing the Northern opponents of the act? And finally, it will outline the continuing impact of the Kansas-Nebraska Act on Texas politics and public opinion from 1854 until the secession crisis of 1861.
CHAPTER II
THE EXTENSION OF SLAVERY CONTROVERSY

With the introduction and passage of the Kansas-Nebraska bill in 1854, sectional conflict stirred by slavery reached unprecedented levels of fury. No other piece of legislation from the beginning of congressional history to the outbreak of the Civil War produced as many immediate, sweeping, and ominous changes as this act. It completed the destruction of the Whig party and removed this conservative influence from American politics. At the same time, as many Southern Whigs became Democrats, it increased Southern influence in the Democratic party. It split the Northern Democrats asunder and drove many of them from the party. More important, it called into being the Republican party on the principle of no extension of slavery into the Western territories. And it led to a state of unceasing excitement, moved by a great passion, which threw the nation into turmoil and unleashed forces which no one was able to control.¹

The issue of slavery in the territories was not really a new grievance to the people of Texas or the other states and territories of the United States. Indeed, the issue was almost as old as the United States itself, for even before the framing of the Constitution, controversy over the extension of slavery into the Western territories of the United States had begun.

As a result of military victories during the Revolutionary War, the new United States government assumed responsibility for a great expanse of land northwest of the Ohio River. Efforts of the Confederation Congress to establish "temporary government of the western territory" led to a report in March, 1784, by a committee headed by Thomas Jefferson of Virginia. It contained a proviso to the effect that there should be "neither slavery nor involuntary servitude" in any part of the Western Territory after 1800. Brought to a vote, the matter failed by a single vote. A similar measure, introduced to Congress in 1785, failed to have any action taken upon it and was set aside until 1787.

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3 Ibid., pp. 119, 247.
4 Ibid., 28:239.
A new committee was appointed to draft an ordinance for the Western Territory on July 9, 1787. After only two days of meetings, a draft bill of the Northwest Ordinance, which laid the foundation for the admission of new states into the Union, was distilled from the earlier versions of 1784 and 1785. The draft was read to Congress and then read a second time on July 12. The following day saw the hasty climax of an issue that had been agitated for nearly a decade. To the five "articles of compact" comprising the ordinance, Congressman Nathan Dane of Massachusetts moved a sixth article banning slavery in the Northwest Territory. To quiet Southern alarm, he incorporated into his amendment a clause providing that slaves escaping into the territory might be reclaimed by their owners. The ordinance with this amendment was then brought to a vote and passed by the unanimous assent of the eight states present.

The Northwest Ordinance of 1787 which outlawed slavery in the Western Territory differed from the previous drafts of 1784 and 1785 in one major respect. The previous drafts had been directed at the entire western area of the United States, and had thus invited the sectional collision that

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5 Ibid., 32:313-20.

blocked them. The version of July, 1787, sidestepped that collision by confining itself to the territory northwest of the Ohio River. The region west of Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia was tacitly set aside for future consideration.\(^7\)

When the Northwest Ordinance became law in 1787, the federal government did not have undisputed title to any of the Western Territory. Before the Southern states would grant clear deeds of cession of its Western land claims, they wanted to be satisfied that Congress would exercise its governance in a fashion acceptable to prospective Southern settlers. By agreeing in 1787 to separate the Western Territory at the Ohio River, Northerners were virtually conceding defeat in the effort to apply this doctrine south of the river. This opened the way for Southern states to give up their Western claims with assurances that Congress would not try to abolish slavery there. North Carolina acted first, passing a new act of cession in 1789, this time specifically providing that Congress could make no laws emancipating slaves in the ceded territory. Congress quickly accepted this grant, including its qualification.\(^8\) In the same year, Virginia ceded all claims to

\(^7\) Burk A. Hinsdale, *The Old Northwest, with a View of the Thirteen Colonies as Constituted by the Royal Charters* (New York: Townsend MacCoun, 1888), pp. 272-79, 304-16.

land northwest of the Ohio River, and then consented to the
district of Kentucky being erected into an independent
state. To govern the territories thus committed to its
keeping, Congress passed the Southwest Ordinance, applying
the 1787 ordinance to "the territory of the United States
south of the river Ohio" but specifically omitting the
prohibition of slavery. South Carolina then ceded its
Western land claims and finally, in 1802, the last Southern
state, Georgia, gave up its land claims in the West. As in
the case of North Carolina and Virginia, these states sur-
rendered their Western land claims only after provisos were
inserted into the deeds of each cession providing that
Congress would pass no law prohibiting slavery in the ceded
territory.

Thus, by dividing the Western Territory at the Ohio
River, Congress in effect extended the Mason-Dixon Line to
the Mississippi River. It was with an eye to this under-
standing that Texans and other Southerners later argued
that Congress had no power to legislate on the subject of

9Oscar P. Austin, *Steps in the Expansion of Our Terri-
10Ibid., p. 95.
11Ibid., pp. 96-99; Greeley, *The American Conflict*,
pp. 49-50.
slavery, even though the Constitution appeared to give plenary powers over the territories.12

The extension of slavery controversy arose again in 1803 with the acquisition of the Louisiana Purchase from France. The treaty of purchase met with little opposition in either house and quickly became ratified. However, when a bill to provide temporary government for Louisiana originated in the Senate in December, 1803, debate broke out almost immediately over the question of slavery. Two amendments to the bill were presented to Congress by Federalist Senator James Hillhouse of Vermont. The first moved to outlaw the foreign slave trade into the territory. The second moved to exclude from Louisiana those slaves imported into the United States since 1798, the year the last of the original states, Georgia, outlawed foreign traffic in slaves. Both of these amendments were accepted with little opposition.13

At this point, the Senate had exercised only its powers over commerce. If these had been the only regulation of slavery in Louisiana, Southerners would not have been overly

concerned. But this was not all. On January 30, 1804, Hillhouse presented another motion to Congress which would have effectively prohibited slavery itself in Louisiana. This motion proposed to add a proviso to the ordinance for temporary government of Louisiana saying that no slave brought into the territory could be held in bondage for more than a year. The proposed amendment, like the sixth article of the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, included a clause guaranteeing the return of fugitive slaves.

The motion was momentous. A decision to exclude slavery from all territory west of the Mississippi River would have had the most far-reaching consequences, not only for the territory itself, but also for the balance of political forces within the Union. If the Federalists and their Northern Republican colleagues had succeeded in passing this motion, and had gotten President Thomas Jefferson to sign it, American history would have taken a different course.

But Congress made no such decision; the motion failed by a margin of six votes. Slavery therefore continued in

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14 Ibid., pp. 241-42.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid., p. 242.
Louisiana under American rule virtually as it had under Spanish and French rule before it.

The extension of slavery issue remained relatively quiet in the halls of Congress until February, 1819, when it again arose, provoking a controversy which raged throughout the nation for the next two years. At this time, Congress had under consideration a bill to enable the territory of Missouri to form a constitution and state government. Missouri had considerable slave property, and it was generally understood that, if left to her own devices, she would enter the Union as a slave state. However, there were those in Congress who had no intention of allowing this territory to become a state by her own devices. On February 13, 1819, New York Congressman James Tallmadge, Jr. proposed an amendment to the enabling act which would have provided for the gradual abolition of slavery in Missouri. The amendment passed the House but met defeat in the Senate, and all action on Missouri's statehood application became stalemated for the remainder of the session amid violent controversy.


But when Congress again met, in December of 1819, Maine had requested admission as a free state, and a way out of the impasse appeared. As there were eleven free and eleven slave states when Missouri requested admission to the Union, it could now be admitted along with Maine and the equilibrium maintained. A compromise bill allowing both territories to prepare for statehood was thus consented to and passed by Congress. In its final form, the bill provided in substance that Maine should enter the Union as a free state, that Missouri should be permitted to form a constitution and state government without restriction as to slavery, and that slavery should be "forever" prohibited in the unorganized portions of the Louisiana Purchase north of 36°30'.

On the basis of the March, 1820 enabling act, Missouri held a convention, drafted a constitution, and applied for admission to the Union. But this constitution empowered the Missouri legislature to exclude free Negroes and mulattoes from the state. When presented to Congress, another storm broke, for the sentiment in the free states was that such a provision contravened the second section of the sixth article of the Constitution which held that "The Citizens of each state shall be entitled to all

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19 Ibid., 16th Cong., 1st sess., 1820, 36:1576-87.
Privileges and Immunities of Citizens in the several States." And free Negroes and mulattoes undoubtedly possessed privileges of citizenship under the constitutions of free states.

This free Negro provision of Missouri's constitution caused the necessity for yet another compromise. Finally Henry Clay of Kentucky offered a resolution that Missouri should be admitted to the Union whenever she would give a satisfactory pledge that nothing in her constitution should be interpreted to abridge the privileges and immunities of citizens of the United States. This pledge Missouri soon gave, and became a state in 1821.

Aside from some extremists in both the North and the South, most Americans at this time were content to abide by the Missouri Compromise as it greatly lessened sectional tensions. But the provision of the compromise which called for an imaginary line to be drawn across portions of the Louisiana Purchase at 36°30', with slavery forbidden north of the line, came to be the focal point of much of the slavery controversies in later years. Like the other states of the Union, Texas would become caught up in the agitation, and this piece of legislation would play an important part in the stand taken by Texans concerning the

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21 Ibid.
22 Ibid., pp. 168-69.
extension of slavery in 1854 and thereafter until disunion.

Although little controversy over extending slavery into the territories occurred on a national basis during the next twenty-four years, from 1821 to 1845, the issue did not die. Instead, anti-slavery sentiment became more radical in the North while pro-slavery sentiment developed rapidly in the South. And the whole question of slavery extension became even more potentially explosive.

Prior to 1830, the program of Americans involved in the various anti-slavery movements continued to be mild and gradualistic. Then, during the 1830s, the movements entered a new period of growth and militancy. New organizations came into existence until by 1840 there were almost 2,000 national and local anti-slavery societies with a total of nearly 200,000 members. Thousands of other Northerners who did not belong to any of the anti-slavery societies also came to disapprove of slavery and its extension by reading abolitionist literature and newspapers. Abolitionists at first relied on moral persuasion to advance their cause. Later they turned more and more to political action, seeking to induce the Northern states and the federal government to aid the cause where possible. By interjecting questions of morality into political discussion from the 1830s through the 1850s, abolitionists helped to
raise politics to a new plane where compromise became virtually impossible. 23

Before the 1830s, most Southerners were not greatly concerned with the gradually rising tide of anti-slavery sentiment. But in 1831, an event occurred which had a profound effect upon the Southern population. This was the slave insurrection in Virginia, led by the Negro preacher Nat Turner, in which sixty-one white people, including women and children, were slain before Turner and his followers could be captured and put to death. 24 Fearful of a general slave uprising in the South, alarmed Southerners began strengthening their slave codes, controlling the movements of slaves, and prohibiting their being taught to read. 25 Southern leaders also proceeded to elaborate an intellectual defense of slavery and most state legislatures, together with Southern representatives


in Congress, began working fervently to suppress anti-slavery agitation which many Southerners blamed for the Turner insurrection.  

The actions of the Southerners caused many people who were not abolitionists to believe that civil liberties were endangered in the entire country, not just in the South, and that the slaveocracy represented an evil force detrimental to the well-being of the country as a whole. Thus the majority of Northerners, though not necessarily for love of the Negro, eventually came to sympathize in varying degrees with the anti-slavery movement and to espouse its cause. And with the increased growth and militancy of this movement, an even larger and more determined majority of Southerners, later including the Texans, rallied to the defense of their "peculiar institution."

While attention focused on the abolitionist and pro-slavery movements, the question of the extension of slavery never totally disappeared. It had only been smoldering under its constraints, awaiting a new issue to bring it once again to national prominence. Such an issue was initiated

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in 1836 with the creation of the Republic of Texas by a successful revolution against Mexico. This event began the long struggle for Texas's annexation to the United States, a struggle ended by her entry into the Union in January, 1846. Throughout the years of the Republic, Texans made several attempts to gain admission to the Union. But primarily because Texas, with its vast area, would become another slave state, these attempts were blocked by the Northern states until Congress finally circumvented the necessity of obtaining a two-thirds majority in the Senate by allowing annexation by joint resolution of both houses. The Mexican War, which then followed and which resulted in part from Texas's boundary dispute with Mexico and in part from American visions of "Manifest Destiny," then added additional territories to the Union. And with the acquisition of new territories, the whole question of slavery extension was reopened. It would dominate American politics until the Civil War.28

The immediate cause of the reopening of the controversy concerned the Wilmot Proviso. This measure came soon after hostilities with Mexico began. President James K.

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Polk requested $2,000,000 from Congress for the purpose of initiating peace negotiations and adjusting the boundaries between the United States and Mexico. To a bill to appropriate this sum, David Wilmot, a little-known Pennsylvania Democrat, offered an amendment on August 8, 1846, which specified that slavery should be prohibited for all time in any territories that might be acquired from Mexico. The bill with Wilmot's amendment passed the House after a bitter debate in which all efforts by Southerners to water it down were beaten. It failed, however, to pass the Senate. The next Congress revived the proviso in a multitude of guises, and it repeatedly gained the support of large majorities in the House, and just as repeatedly met rejection in the Senate.

With debate over the proviso still raging in Congress, an American army under General Winfield Scott entered and occupied Mexico City in mid-September, 1847. A few months later, in early February, 1848, representatives of the United States met with those of Mexico at the small village of Guadalupe Hidalgo and signed with them a treaty of peace.

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30 Going, David Wilmot, pp. 94, 98.

A little more than a month later, on March 10, the Senate ratified the treaty by a vote of 38 to 14 and the vast territories of California and New Mexico became a part of the United States.\(^{32}\)

With ratification of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo by the Senate, congressional debate over the Wilmot Proviso abated. But the basic question of whether or not slavery would be allowed to extend into the newly acquired territories remained unsettled. Many Northerners were bitter that their efforts to exclude slavery from the Mexican Cession had failed, and the collaboration of the Senate, in which the interests of slavery were vastly overrepresented, in defeating the proviso was a lesson deeply impressed upon them. On the other hand, many Southerners deeply resented that the new territories had not been opened to slavery. Furthermore, they were alarmed at the North's intention to halt the spread of slavery, for they regarded it as an attack on slavery itself. Wilmot's proviso settled nothing concerning the extension of slavery controversy. Instead it caused sectional feelings over the point contended for to greatly intensify.

That the extension of slavery issue had not been settled can be seen by events which occurred when the

\[^{32}\text{McLaughlin, Constitutional History of the United States, pp. 511-12.}\]
question of organizing the Mexican Cession territories arose. With the approach of the 1848 presidential election, no territorial government had been organized for California and New Mexico. Even the organization of Oregon, an area with a climate obviously unsuitable for slavery, had been held up by the controversy. Southern members of Congress, hoping to gain some advantage in the regions further south, blocked a territorial bill for Oregon until August, 1848, when a free-soil government was finally authorized. 33

During the election campaign, neither of the major parties wished to make either expansion or exclusion of slavery a major issue. To do so would have been a sure way of losing votes in one section or another. In campaigning, therefore, both the Whig nominee, Zachary Taylor of Louisiana, and the Democratic nominee, Lewis Cass of Michigan, tried to avoid definite and provocative reference to the slavery question. Taylor won the election, and when he assumed office in March, 1849, the problems concerned with organizing the territories won by the Mexican War were still unresolved. 34


But once in office, Taylor soon became pressed with the immediate need to establish a government for California, where the gold rush of 1848 had enormously multiplied the population. To Taylor, statehood seemed to be the solution to California's problem. He reasoned that California, and also New Mexico, should be encouraged to frame state constitutions and apply for admission to the Union. Nobody could deny their right to dispose of slavery as they wished, since all sides conceded that a territory, as it became a state, had control over its own institutions. In this manner conflict over slavery in the two areas would be solved. Taylor thus urged California and New Mexico to frame constitutions. Both readily consented, and, since both territories contained few slaveholders, they each adopted a constitution banning slavery and were soon clamoring for statehood.35

It quickly became apparent that Congress would not accept Taylor's plan for the admission of California and New Mexico. Not only had he completely disregarded pro-slavery sentiment in his actions, he had aroused jealousy and anger in Congress by failing to consult with them before acting. Then too, they recognized the president's failure to confront side issues which had emerged from the conflict

35Jones, Disrupted Decades, pp. 82-84.
over slavery in the territories. One such issue dealt with slavery in the District of Columbia. Anti-slavery Northerners demanded that the evil institution be abolished there, seeing human servitude in the capital as a national disgrace; Southerners angrily replied that slavery could not be denied in the capital without the consent of Maryland, which had originally donated the land, and that to do so would be an insult to the entire South. Another potent question involved the rendition of fugitive slaves. The Personal Liberty Laws of many Northern states, which forbade their courts and law officials to assist in the return of runaways, deeply galled the South, and they demanded a new and tough federal fugitive slave code. A third issue related to the boundary dispute between Texas and New Mexico. Texas claimed the portion of New Mexico east of the Rio Grande, including Santa Fe, although the national government had assigned this area to New Mexico. It seemed to many Texans that the United States was trying to steal part of their territory; they were also angry at the government's refusal to assume the Texas war debt which had been incurred during their struggle for independence from Mexico. Southerners supported the claim of Texas; and Northerners, that of New Mexico. Still another important issue concerned the impact of admitting two more free states to the Union. With its social system under
constant attack from the North, the southern states had developed a strong sense of insecurity. They were aware that the admission of the new territories would upset the Senate balance of fifteen free and fifteen slave states. To southern leaders, this balance was their only means of maintaining equality in Congress, for their strength in the House and in the electoral college had already declined. 36

In June, 1850, southern representatives from nine states met at Nashville, Tennessee. Their purpose was to consider what action should be taken if California entered the Union as a free state and if slavery should be prohibited in the territories. Although the convention expressed a willingness to compromise by extending the Missouri line of 1820 to the Pacific Ocean, it also threatened secession as the alternative to a satisfactory settlement. 37 In the North, excitement ran equally high, as state legislatures there passed resolutions demanding that slavery be barred from the territories while public meetings endorsed the Wilmot Proviso. Against this


background the Compromise of 1850 was worked out in the spring and summer of that year. Because of it, the threat of secession proved abortive.

In actuality, the Compromise of 1850 consisted of a series of five separate statutes. These reflected the recommendations of Henry Clay who had returned to the Senate after some years absence. Briefly stated, Clay proposed and Congress finally consented: To admit California as a free state; to provide territorial government for the rest of the acquisition from Mexico and to provide that the states to be formed therefrom might enter the Union with or without slavery, as their constitutions should prescribe; to draw the boundaries of Texas so as to exclude New Mexico, and in return to assume the debts of Texas; to prohibit the slave trade, but not slavery, in the District of Columbia; and finally to strengthen the Fugitive Slave Law. 38

Before the sectional controversies of the period 1846-1850, Southerners had rarely challenged the assumption that Congress had the right to prohibit slavery in the territories, just as few responsible Northern leaders had questioned the constitutional right of a state to control its domestic institutions. But as a result of the increasing

38 Hamilton, Prologue to Conflict, pp. 52-54, 161.
controversy resulting from the pro-slavery and anti-slavery agitation of the 1830s and 1840s, three virtually new views of the powers of Congress relating to slavery in the territories were presented to the public by 1850. Each of these in the turbulent years that followed gained a considerable number of adherents among concerned citizens generally as well as among constitutional lawyers. And it was upon these views that Texans would react to events and charter their course in the decisive years leading to secession.

The first of these new views to appear is most often called the free-soil doctrine. In its more specific form the doctrine was briefly this: That portion of the Fifth Amendment to the Constitution which says, "No person shall be . . . deprived of . . . liberty . . . without due process of law," prohibited and was intended to prohibit slavery in the territories, the District of Columbia, and all other places under the exclusive jurisdiction of the federal government. Congress, the executive department, and the courts were under a constitutional obligation to give effect to this provision. 39 A variant of the doctrine held that the prevailing view at the time of the making of the Constitution was that freedom, not slavery, was the natural

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and proper status of people of African descent, as well as white people. Therefore the framers of the Constitution must have intended to embody this idea of liberty in the Constitution. And therefore Congress had both the obligation and the power under the Constitution to exclude slavery from the territories and other places under the exclusive jurisdiction of the federal government.40

This free-soil doctrine became the official doctrine of the Liberty party in 1844 and of the Free-Soil party in 1848 and 1852.41 It was also taken up by many strongly anti-slavery people who liked the doctrine because it allowed them to feel that in opposing the spread of slavery into the territories they were not only acting on moral principles but also obeying a constitutional injunction as well.

The second virtually new view of the powers of Congress as to slavery in the territories presented in the 1840s was that which has most commonly been called the Calhoun doctrine or the doctrine of non-intervention. It was best

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40See for examples, speeches of Lewis D. Campbell of Ohio and Gerrit Smith of New York in the House of Representatives, February 17 and April 6, 1854, respectively. House, Congressional Globe, 33rd Cong., 1st sess., 1854, 31:244-47, 519-30.

41Porter and Johnson, National Party Platforms, pp. 4-8, 13-14, 18-20.
stated by John C. Calhoun of South Carolina in a set of Senate resolutions on February 19, 1847. According to Calhoun's doctrine, sovereignty was not divisible. The states were sovereign; the United States was not. The federal government was only the agent or trustee of the states in matters expressly delegated to it by the Constitution. The territories were the common property of the states, as co-owners, not of the United States as an entity. The government of the territories was necessarily left to the federal government, as the agent or trustee for the states. But in governing territories, the federal government had a constitutional obligation not to discriminate in any way among the various states or among their citizens. It must admit into the territories and protect there as property anything, slaves, for example, which a citizen of any state might choose to bring with him and of which he had been legally possessed in the state from which he had come. To do otherwise would be discrimination between states and between citizens of different states, and, therefore, unconstitutional. And if Congress could not prohibit slaveholders from bringing their slaves into the territories but must protect them there in their property rights, a territorial legislature could not exclude

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42 Senate, Congressional Globe, 29th Cong., 2d sess., 1847, 16:453-55.
slaves or deny protection to slave property, for a territorial legislature was but a creature of Congress and could not be authorized to do what its creator could not do. 43

Almost from its conception, the Calhoun doctrine gained the acceptance of almost the entire extreme state-rights, or Calhoun, wing of the Democratic party in the South. It never gained the acceptance of the Union, or Jacksonian, Democrats of the South or of the great majority of the Southern Whigs, who generally adhered to the principles of compromise concerning the slavery issues. But in the tempestuous years before the Civil War, the Calhoun wing gained ascendancy in the Democratic party in almost all the southern states. And as the Democratic party rather consistently carried the elections in most of these states, the Calhoun doctrine had spokesmen in Congress in numbers out of proportion to its subscribers among the people. 44

The third new view of the constitutional powers of Congress as to slavery in the territories was the popular sovereignty doctrine. It first became prominently advanced by Senator Lewis Cass of Michigan in a well-publicized

43 Ibid.

letter to A.O.P. Nicholson of Tennessee dated December 24, 1847.\textsuperscript{45} This doctrine was refined and elaborated upon by Cass, Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois, and others in the next several years. Very briefly, the doctrine stated that while from the very necessities of the case, Congress must have power to mark off new territories and provide and ensure them republican forms of government, as incipient states, it had no constitutional authority to regulate their internal policies in matters not put under federal jurisdiction by the Constitution. The regulation of these matters must be left to the people of the territories themselves acting through their elected representatives; and whether or not to permit slavery was one of these matters of local, internal concern.\textsuperscript{46}

Most proponents of this view never asserted that a territory had sovereignty in the sense that a state of the Union had. They also did not claim or believe that a district in the territory of the United States with a population consisting principally of squatters on the public domain should be allowed to have an elective legislature. They


did assert that a territory with an established and reasonably stable population must, under the Constitution, be allowed to have a very large measure of self-government.\(^\text{47}\)

This doctrine of popular sovereignty appealed most to those who did not have especially strong feelings about slavery. Such people liked to believe that in voting to leave the decision to territorial legislatures they were not compromising their principles or bowing to political expediency but simply obeying a requirement of the Constitution. Anti-slavery radicals of the North and pro-slavery radicals of the South alike opposed the doctrine as being wholly unacceptable to their aims.

Although the spirit of compromise ruled in the early 1850s, sectional tensions were just under the surface, and the key political issue remained the extension of slavery. It was not that the American people were so directly or narrowly concerned with the fate of the Western territories; rather the question of slavery there came to be, to many Northerners and Southerners, the political expression of a more fundamental disagreement over slavery itself. The territories provided a test of strength between the sections that closely related to deeper sectional differences. To Northern critics of slavery, the territories were the

\(^{47}\)McLaughlin, A Constitutional History of the United States, pp. 520-22.
first area of attack in a larger crusade against slavery in the South. To the Southerners, and to Texans who actively entered into these sectional controversies during the 1850s, the territories became the first line of defense for their "peculiar institutions" or, more significantly, for the Southern way of life itself.48

CHAPTER III

THE KANSAS-NEBRASKA BILL

After the organization of the Western Territory provided for in the Compromise of 1850, that part of the Louisiana Purchase lying between the Missouri River and the Continental Divide still remained unorganized. This area had been set aside as a permanent Indian frontier not many years before. But the acquisition of new lands on the Pacific in the 1840s meant that this Indian frontier lay in the center of the nation, across the lines of communication and transportation to the Pacific coast. With the rapid growth of population in California and the Oregon Territory, pressures to remove the Indian barrier and to organize the area into a territory mounted. At this same time, the project of a transcontinental railroad began to be much discussed, in Congress, in the newspapers, and elsewhere. Politicians and their constituents in Missouri, Illinois, and Iowa realized that unless some form of territorial government was established for what was then called the Nebraska country, the railroad linking the East with the West most likely would be built along a southern route, through Texas and the New Mexico Territory.
Several attempts had been made between 1845 and 1853 to organize the Nebraska country, but these had always failed in Congress, mainly because of existing treaties which gave the Indian tribes of that region title to nearly the whole area.\footnote{U.S., Congress, Senate, Congressional Globe, 29th Cong., 1st sess., 1846, 15:1217, 1218, 1220-21; George Fort Milton, The Eve of Conflict: Stephen A. Douglas and the Needless War (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1934), p. 107.} During the summer of 1853, however, this obstruction was largely removed when George Manypenny, Commissioner of Indian Affairs under the administration of President Franklin Pierce, negotiated treaties by which the Indians unconditionally ceded approximately 13,500,000 acres of land to the United States. Another 842,500 acres were given up on the condition that the government sell the land and give the proceeds to the Indians. Agreement was also reached whereby the Indian Office was to have reservations made for the Indians from other portions of the Nebraska country.\footnote{U.S., Department of Interior, Report on Indian Affairs: Annual Report, 1853, House Executive Document, no. 1, pt. 1: 243-481.}

With the Indian barrier removed and the people of neighboring states and even the Indians themselves much interested in the matter of territorial organization, Congress took up the question at the end of 1853. On
December 14, Senator Augustus C. Dodge of Iowa introduced a bill to organize a territorial government for the Nebraska country. The bill was read twice and then referred to the Committee on Territories, chaired by Senator Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois.  

In working with the bill introduced by Senator Dodge, Douglas faced a dilemma. The proposed Nebraska territory lay entirely to the north of the Missouri Compromise line of 1820; if organized it would have to be established as a free territory. Douglas realized that this action would invite another long and bitter congressional debate over the slavery extension issue, and possible defeat of the bill, for few Southerners were likely to vote for organization of the territory if it excluded slavery. And Douglas most definitely did not want the bill to be defeated. Defeat would be a crippling blow to his real estate and railroad interests in the Midwest and the Northwest. Most importantly, failure of the bill might be harmful to his plans to become president. Douglas wanted the Nebraska country organized so that settlers could enter and buy land, so that the transcontinental railroad could be built by a central route, and so that new Western states

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3 Senate, Congressional Globe, 33rd Cong., 1st sess., 1853, 28, pt. 1:44, 221.
could be admitted to the Union which might help him to the White House. 4

After considering the intricacies involved in Dodge's Nebraska bill for about three weeks, Douglas felt that he had found a way to win approval of the bill with a minimum of slavery controversy. He would follow the precedent of the Compromise of 1850 and allow the people of Nebraska to decide for themselves on slavery. Therefore, when Douglas introduced the Nebraska bill to the Senate on January 4, 1854, he included an amendment to Dodge's bill which stated: "And when admitted as a State or States, the said Territory, or any portion of the same, shall be received into the Union, with or without slavery, as their constitution may prescribe at the time of their admission." The wording of the amendment was identical with that of the Utah and New Mexico Territorial Acts of 1850. 5 An accompanying Territorial Committee report stated that the measures involved in the Compromise of 1850 were meant to have a much more


comprehensive and enduring effect than the simple adjustment of the problems resulting from the territory acquired during the Mexican War. They were designed to establish certain great principles, and the Committee on Territories deemed it a duty to incorporate in their territorial bill the principles and spirit of those measures. The committee also pointed out that the Nebraska country occupied practically the same position on the slavery question as did Utah and New Mexico when they underwent territorial organization.\(^6\)

The report further stated that the question of whether slavery was by law prohibited in the territories organized from the Mexican Cession had been left unsettled in 1850. It also pointed out that opinions now differed as to whether slavery was prohibited in the Nebraska country by valid law; the constitutionality of the eighth section of the Missouri Compromise which restricted slavery "forever" north of 36° 30' being questioned. The report concluded by saying that since Congress had taken no definite position on the issue of slavery in the territories in 1850, the committee would not be inconsistent in refusing now to take a stand as to the legality of the restrictive clause of the

\(^6\)U.S., Congress, Senate, Committee on the Territories, Report from the Committee on Territories, 33rd Cong., 1st sess., 1854, no. 15, p. 1.
Missouri Compromise. The question of whether or not slavery was to be excluded from Nebraska during its territorial phase was thus left uncertain.

The bill, in twenty sections, was read twice in the Senate and then printed for the first time in the Washington Sentinel on January 7, 1854. In this form it attracted little more attention than had the other bills for the organization of the Nebraska country. On January 10, however, it was published again in the same paper, but this time with twenty-one sections. The surprising twenty-first section, Douglas explained, had been omitted from the first printing by an oversight on the printer's part. Whether this explanation was true, or whether Douglas appended the additional section sometime between the first and the second printing, perhaps as a concession to Southerners, is impossible to say. The latter is most likely though for Douglas had declared in the January 4 report that the committee had abstained from taking any position regarding the legality of the Missouri Compromise. The new twenty-first section contradicted this portion of the report, for it stated:

7Ibid., p. 2.
First: That all questions pertaining to slavery in the Territories, and in the new States to be formed therefrom, are to be left to the decision of the people residing therein, through their appropriate representatives.

Second: That "all cases involving title to slaves" and "questions of personal freedom," are referred to the adjudication of the local tribunals, with the right of appeal to the Supreme Court of the United States.

Third: That the provisions of the Constitution and laws of the United States, in respect to fugitive slaves from service, are to be carried into faithful execution in all the "organized Territories" the same as in the States.9

In short, it enacted the principle of popular sovereignty. By implication, the Missouri Compromise of 1820 was no longer valid law.

With the inclusion of this section, Douglas expected swift passage of the bill. He believed the bill in this form would be acceptable to the state-rights Southerners while at the same time satisfying Northerners who would realize that geography and climate would exclude slavery from any new states which might be admitted from the Nebraska Territory.

But there was a flaw in the twenty-first section of the bill. This flaw was pointed out by Whig Senator Archibald Dixon of Kentucky, a lawyer-planter and owner

9Senate, Congressional Globe, 33rd Cong., 1st sess., 1854, 28, pt. 1:222.
of hundreds of slaves. As a strict constructionist of the Constitution, he believed that unless the Missouri Compromise was explicitly repealed, it would remain in force until the people in the Nebraska Territory acted to end it. No slaveholder could carry his slaves to the territory north of the line 36° 30' until the people living therein met, and through their representatives voted in the majority that slavery could exist there. This being so, Dixon felt that the decision would go against the South, for the laws up to the time of the election would exclude slaveholders while admitting free-soilers, abolitionists, and others opposed to slavery. The Nebraska bill as it stood was thus only a delusion to the South, and he felt obligated to right this wrong. Repeal by implication was not enough, it must be by expressed words.

On the afternoon of January 15, therefore, Dixon dictated to his wife an amendment for the outright repeal of the Missouri Compromise. The amendment, which he soon read in Congress, provided that "the citizens of the several States and Territories shall be at liberty to take and hold their slaves within any of the Territories of the United States, or of the States to be formed therefrom,

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10 Milton, The Eve of Conflict, p. 112.
11 Nevins, Ordeal of the Union, 2:95-96.
as if the said . . . [Missouri Compromise] had never been passed.\textsuperscript{12}

When Douglas heard the proposed amendment, he went immediately to Dixon and attempted to persuade him not to take this step. But Dixon emphatically refused and reiterated his argument for the flat, outright repeal of the Missouri Compromise. A few days later, Douglas invited Dixon to go for a buggy ride with him, and they again discussed the repeal amendment. Dixon eventually convinced Douglas of the necessity for the repeal and the latter agreed to incorporate the amendment in his bill although, as he said, "I know it will raise the hell of a storm."\textsuperscript{13}

To help combat this coming storm, Douglas realized that he must secure the backing of the president and his administration. On Sunday morning, January 22, he sought out Jefferson Davis of Mississippi, President Pierce's Secretary of War and most trusted advisor, to secure his approval of the repeal amendment and to enlist his aid in getting an appointment with the president. Although Davis knew Pierce never liked to conduct business on Sunday, he


\textsuperscript{13}Susan B. Dixon, \textit{A True History of the Missouri Compromise and its Repeal} (Cincinnati: Robert Clark Co., 1899), pp. 444-45.
went to him anyway, and got the appointment for that afternoon, as he knew Douglas wanted to bring the repeal before the Senate the next day.\textsuperscript{14}

David, Douglas, and a small group of congressmen who were interested in the measure then proceeded to the White House and met with Pierce. After a long discussion, the president finally agreed to put his support behind the bill.\textsuperscript{15} He probably did so because of the persuasion of Davis and because he did not want to risk offending Southerners whose support he would need in the forthcoming presidential election.

Thus a small group of men changed the political character of the bill. It was no longer simply a proposal of the Committee on Territories. With Pierce's support, it had become an administration measure, a test of strength in the Democratic party.

The following day, January 23, Douglas met with his committee and submitted the revised bill which they quickly approved. He then introduced the measure in its final form to the Senate that same day. This bill was different from his previous one in two important respects. First, it openly


\textsuperscript{15}Ibid.
repealed the Missouri Compromise on the ground that it "was superseded by the principles of the legislation of 1850, commonly called the compromise measure, and is declared inoperative."\textsuperscript{16} The second change proposed the division of the territory into two parts, calling the northern portion Nebraska and the southern portion Kansas. It was intended by this last change to prepare Kansas for settlement by the Missourians; while Nebraska, with its larger limits, was left to the slower process of Northern immigration.\textsuperscript{17} At the same time the \textit{Washington Union}, the leading Democratic organ, printed an editorial saying that the administration approved the Kansas-Nebraska bill and regarded it as "a test of Democratic orthodoxy."\textsuperscript{18}

The public in the North now realized that something startling was under way, and newspapers there began to spread the alarm that Douglas and the administration were attempting to open the territories to slavery and disturb the existing equilibrium. In Congress, leading abolitionists--Salmon P. Chase of Ohio, William H. Seward of New York, and Charles Sumner of Massachusetts--saw in Douglas's


\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.; Nevins, \textit{Ordeal of the Union}, 2:98.

\textsuperscript{18} \textit{Washington Union} as cited in Milton, \textit{The Eve of Conflict}, p. 119.
bill the chance to reawaken the anti-slavery passions of
the North, and perhaps to increase their own group's
strength in Congress. For these reasons, as well as their
own hostility toward slavery, they began drafting a docu-
ment entitled the "Appeal of the Independent Democrats in
Congress to the People of the United States." This docu-
ment, written by Sumner and signed by other free-soil
advocates in Congress, found its way into print on Jan-
uary 24, the day after the Kansas-Nebraska bill had been
introduced to the Senate.19

Written in a tone of righteous indignation, the
document made an impassioned plea to the people of the
North to oppose the passage of the bill by every possible
means of protest. According to the appeal, the enactment
of the bill would "open all the unorganized Territory of
the Union to the ingress of slavery." "We arraign this
bill," it stated, "as a gross violation of a sacred pledge;
as a criminal betrayal of precious rights; as part and
parcel of an atrocious plot..." The bill was a "mon-
strous" plot against humanity and democracy, "dangerous to
the interest of liberty throughout the world." "The

19Milton, The Eve of Conflict, pp. 117, 120; Nevins,
Ordeal of the Union, 2:111.
dearest interests of freedom and the Union," it declared, were in "imminent peril." 20

The appeal proved highly effective in arousing public sentiment, both for and against the bill. It was probably the most potent factor of them all, for the sectional conflict over slavery was now entering that stage where the realities of events had little relationship to the action they produced.

With the interest of much of the nation concentrated upon the Kansas-Nebraska bill, and with sectional passions beginning to rise, there followed one of the most bitter contests in the history of Congress. In the Senate the debate lasted from January 30, almost without interruption, until March 3. 21 It was seen from the start, however, that with the Democratic administration and most of the Southern Whigs to aid him, Douglas would secure passage of the bill in the Senate. But the debating strength of the minority was totally unexpected, and the country hung upon the speeches with unrelaxing tension. Led by Chase, who directed the attack against the bill in the Senate, and assisted by other Northern Democrats and Free-Soilers, the


21 Ibid., pp. 273-532. These pages in the Congressional Globe show that few other matters were discussed or debated to any extent other than the Kansas-Nebraska bill.
assailants of the bill continually denounced its measures. They tried to convince the senators that the compromise acts of 1850 were not intended to introduce any principle of territorial organization except that covered by them and that the bill was a violation of national faith.22

Leading Southern senators, including George Badger of North Carolina, Robert Toombs of Georgia, and Andrew Butler of South Carolina, replied with long speeches pointing out the merits of the bill. They insisted that the Missouri Compromise was a violation of Southern constitutional rights and that Northern congressmen had voided the compromise by refusing to extend the 36° 30' line on to the Pacific during the slavery debates of the 1840s. To them, the present bill would do no more than to remove over thirty years' injustice to the South and to place all sections of the Union on an equal footing in the territories.23 But the real difference in the Kansas-Nebraska bill rested with Douglas, who showed in this contest an ability in parliamentary combat unequaled by any of his opponents. His arguments, whether good or bad, were presented in such a manner as to appear plausible and reasonable. He continued to insist upon the universal

22 Ibid., pp. 133-532, passim.
applicability of the principle of non-intervention and repeatedly assailed the Missouri Compromise as in no sense a real compact. By continually attacking minor defects in his opponents' reasoning, he made it appear that they and not he were on the defensive before the country. 24

Yet, however much Douglas might attempt to restate his proposition in a form more attractive to the North, the issue was the naked one of opening to the introduction of slaves a territory from which they had previously been excluded. The anti-slavery advocates continually offered amendments designed to emphasize this fact, but their propositions were voted down without ceremony by the administration majority. 25 The only amendment of importance which passed the Senate was one limiting the right to acquire and hold land in the new territories to American citizens. 26 A proviso was also added declaring it to be "the true intent and meaning of this act not to legislate slavery into any territory or state, nor to exclude it therefrom; but to leave the people thereof perfectly free

24Ibid., pp. 325-38; Nevins, Ordeal of the Union, 2:142-43.
26Ibid., 28, pt. 2:1300.
to form and regulate their own domestic institutions in their own way."²⁷

In this form the measure was finally passed in the Senate, by a vote of 37 to 14, with fifty-one of the sixty-one senators present. Voting in favor of the bill were fourteen Northern Democrats, fourteen Southern Democrats, and nine Southern Whigs. Voting against it were four Northern Democrats, six Northern Whigs, two Free-Soilers, one Southern Whig, and one Southern Democrat. The two Southerners who opposed the bill were John Bell of Tennessee and Sam Houston of Texas.²⁸

Almost from the beginning, it had been certain that the Kansas-Nebraska bill would be adopted by the Senate. Success for the advocates was much more uncertain in the House, where the administration had less influence, and here the real battle for the repeal of the Missouri Compromise was fought.

As soon as the Senate bill was brought before the House on March 3, 1854, William Richardson of Illinois, Douglas's lieutenant, attempted to have the bill referred to the House Committee on Territories, of which Richardson

²⁷Ibid., 31:559.

was the chairman. However, this attempt failed by a vote of 110 to 95 and the bill was referred instead to the Committee of the Whole. With fifty other bills ahead of it, the measure seemed placed beyond the reach of the legislation; but it was generally recognized that it was not dead. For weeks, however, there was no action on the bill, and the country remained in suspense.

In the meantime, Douglas's premonitions that his bill, with the repeal of the Missouri Compromise, would "raise the hell of a storm" were justified. Members of Congress, the administration, and the people of the South were treated to an explosion of wrath and fury in the North which far surpassed any other agitation of the slavery issues. From outraged conservatives who saw their cherished compromise disturbed, to radical anti-slavery men who fiercely welcomed the bill as an unmasking of the treachery of the "slave-power" arose a tempest of protest. Editorials and public letters were followed by meetings, without distinction of party, to denounce the bill, at first singly in the large cities, then by dozens and then hundreds in nearly every county and town of the free states. Five Northern legislatures passed resolutions of protest. Ministers of practically all denominations preached sermons

against the iniquity of the bill, and from them and from thousands of others, petitions and remonstrances of every sort began to pour in upon Congress.30

In the South, the bill at first received scant applause. The general feeling was one of indifference, and the repeal of the Missouri Compromise under Douglas's leadership was regarded as a Northern affair. But when the rising anti-slavery excitement became evident, Southern newspapers and in turn most people in the South awakened to the importance and significance of the bill and rallied to uphold the principles embodied in the measure.31 Thus, within a few short weeks after Douglas's final bill had been introduced, the entire nation was caught up in the chaos.

In the face of this storm, Douglas refused to quit. Through March and April he and the administration applied themselves to building up a safe majority. They worked heartily to whip waverers into line; by the use of patronage and by administration threats that no Democrat who forsook his party at this crisis could hope for further favors, many deserters were returned to the fold.32

31 Ibid., pp. 468-70; Nevins, Ordeal of the Union, 2:146.
32 Nevins, Ordeal of the Union, 2:142; Milton, The Eve of Conflict, p. 142.
On May 8, accordingly, with a majority stiffened up by these means, Richardson, with Douglas at his elbow, forced the fighting. The original Kansas-Nebraska bill was too deeply buried to get to, but by laying aside eighteen other bills in succession, another Nebraska bill, introduced into the House earlier in the session, was reached. And to this one Richardson moved the Senate bill as a substitute. This maneuver succeeded by a vote of 109 to 88.\(^{33}\)

Then, on May 11, after the House had listened to more than eighty speeches on the bill, Richardson moved to cut off all further debate the following day. The opposition protested violently and began a filibuster. This filibustering went on for two days while feeling in the House ran continually higher, language grew harsher, and popular excitement grew more intense. Finally, late in the second night, when most representatives were angry and many inflamed by liquor, weapons were drawn and bloodshed on the floor was narrowly averted by the Speaker, who succeeded in securing an adjournment.\(^{34}\)

Then following several more days of bitterness and hostility, on another trial, Richardson obtained a vote to


\(^{34}\)Ibid., p. 1183.
close debate at noon, Saturday, May 20. 35 The opposition however, continued to fight on with dilatory motions and amendments until Alexander H. Stephens of Georgia managed to force a vote on the night of May 22. The bill passed by a narrow vote of 113 to 100. 36 Stephens wrote the next day that "Nebraska is through the house,--majority thir-teen--. . . . I took the reins in my hand, applied whip and spur, and brought the 'wagon' out at eleven o'clock P.M. Glory enough for one day." 37 The majority was composed of fifty-seven Southern and forty-four Northern Democrats, and twelve Southern Whigs. Voting against the bill were forty-two Democrats from the North and two from the South, together with forty-five Northern and seven Southern Whigs, and four Free-Soil Democrats. 38 Since the bill as passed left out the provision restricting landholding to citizens, it went back to the Senate, which concurred, after a brief debate, on May 25, by a vote of 35 to 13. 39

36 Ibid., p. 1254.
38 Rhodes, History of the United States, p. 489.
Pierce then signed the Kansas-Nebraska bill on May 30, 1854, and it became law.

On December 23, 1850, following the slavery agitation of 1848 through 1850, Stephen A. Douglas had made a speech in the Senate in which he declared: "I wish to state that I have determined never to make another speech on the slavery question. . . . I am heartily tired of the controversy. I will say therefore . . . let us cease agitating, stop the debate, and drop the subject." But now his bill tore open all the wounds of that period and reawakened all the bitterness and hostility of those years. It was the direct cause of a radical alteration of Northern political feeling, and set in motion events which led straight to the Civil War. Perhaps Charles Sumner saw these things when he said of the bill:

It . . . is at once the worst and the best on which Congress ever acted . . . it is the worst bill, inasmuch as it is a present victory of Slavery . . . it is the best bill on which Congress ever acted, for it annuls all past compromises with Slavery, and makes any future compromises impossible. Thus it puts Freedom and Slavery face to face, and bids them grapple.

Douglas had passed his bill, and as he had predicted, it raised "the hell of a storm" across the United States. But what reaction did this storm cause in Texas? How had

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40 Ibid., 31:174.
41 Ibid., p. 785.
Texans--both those leaders active in public affairs and those who reflected public opinion in general--reacted to the congressional struggle and to the bitter Northern opposition that continued even after passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act?
CHAPTER IV

THE REACTION OF TEXANS ACTIVE IN PUBLIC AFFAIRS TO THE KANSAS-NEBRASKA BILL

During the congressional struggle over the Kansas-Nebraska bill, Senator Sam Houston, the best known public figure in Texas, took an active part in opposition to the measure. In a speech before the Senate on February 15, 1854, Houston made the only protest against the bill by any Southern Democrat. In his speech, he reminded the Senate that the principles embodied in the bill were not new to him. He had met them before, in different forms to be sure, but always with the same purpose in view. He recalled the circumstances of his support of the Missouri Compromise in application to Oregon, and the denunciation that his "notorious opposition" had called forth, but affirmed that he was ready for another attack, if incurred in the performance of duty. He further reminded the Senate that the South had sustained his position that the 1820 compromise was a solemn compact between North and South. When Texas was admitted into the Union, the Missouri Compromise formed what might be termed a part of her constitution, and certainly, so far as Texas was concerned, the
compromise was sacred.\(^1\) So long as this was true he believed that Texas senators must be bound by it. Houston also contended that there was no necessity for the bill as it would cause the slavery agitation to be renewed and that he therefore had no alternative but "either to adhere to the principles which I had formerly avowed and acted upon . . . or to abandon them and vote for a contrary principle repealing the acts which I had formerly recognized."\(^2\)

It was Houston's belief that the Compromise of 1850 supplemented that of 1820, as a final settlement of the slavery question, and that the development of the United States was due to the harmony between the two sections that had been promoted by the compromise. He pointed out that the fifth plank of the Democratic platform of 1852 opposed the reopening of the slavery question. Foreseeing the possibility of a coming conflict between the two sections, he held that it was logical to expect that the South would, in time, lose control of the government. In that case the repeal of the Missouri Compromise would form a precedent that might be used by the North, when it gained control, to close Southern territory to slavery.\(^3\)

\(^2\)Ibid., p. 206.
\(^3\)Ibid.
As a friend to the Indians, Houston saw in the bill only injustice and dishonesty toward them. He pointed out that the Indians had been promised that upon their removal to lands west of the Mississippi River, the land they settled would be theirs in perpetuity. But if they ever wished to dispose of this land, the treaty provided that the lands could only be sold or ceded to the United States, "and the United States guarantees that said lands shall never be within the bounds of any State or Territory, nor subject to the laws thereof." He condemned the bill as a proposal to break the above treaty by incorporating the Indians of this region within a territorial government.

On March 3, 1854, two days before the Senate vote on the Kansas-Nebraska bill, Houston made another speech opposing the measure. He restated many of his previous objections and added that the South had not asked for the measure, nor would they gain anything if it were adopted. The South "may accept it from the Northern gentlemen who generously bestow it," he pointed out, "but if it were beneficial to the South, it would have been asked for." Houston further argued that the popular sovereignty principle had never been applied in any of the cases involving the territories and to do so now would only stir up

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4 Ibid., p. 203.
5 Ibid., p. 339.
needless agitation. A strong Unionist, he concluded his speech by saying, "... upon the decision which we make upon this question, must depend union or disunion."^6

Houston's attitude was to bring down the wrath of much of Texas upon him. Contrary to Houston, Senator Thomas J. Rusk of Texas, also a Democrat, voted in favor of the bill and thus secured favor with most Texans. Although Rusk never took an active part in any of the Senate debates over the bill, he nevertheless ardently believed in state-rights and believed with equal fervor that such rights should extend to the territories.^7 In a long letter to M. D. Ector, editor of a Henderson newspaper, dated June 17, 1857, Rusk stated his reasons for voting in favor of the Kansas-Nebraska bill:

I have never regretted my course in that matter, nor doubted for a moment that I was right. What determined my vote in favor of that bill, was the clause repealing the unjust restriction against the Southern states, contained in the act of Congress in 1820, usually called the Missouri Compromise.^8

Rusk said he had always regarded the Missouri Compromise as "palpably unconstitutional, and a usurpation by

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^6Ibid., p. 342.


^8The letter in its entirety is found in the San Augustine Eastern Texian, 11 July 1857. A brief portion of the letter is found in Clarke, Thomas J. Rusk, p. 191.
Congress, of powers which they do not possess, but which by the Constitution, they were expressly forbidden to exercise." He presumed that no one could be found who would claim power in Congress to abolish or interfere with the rights of property in slaves in a state. Congress then did not have the power to exclude the citizens of Texas, or any other slaveholding state, from going to any territory which was or which might become the property of all the states, nor to deny to them the protection of their property which the Constitution enjoined upon them. He pointed out that some people attempted to draw a distinction between property in slaves and other property, but that the Constitution made no such distinction. On the contrary, the Constitution expressly authorized slaves to be imported as property for twenty years after its adoption. It also included slaves as an element of representation, three-fifths of them being required to be taken into account in apportioning the representatives in Congress.⁹

According to Rusk, if the power was admitted in Congress to make any law forfeiting a particular species of property if it were carried into a territory, then the same construction would authorize Congress to disregard all other restrictions and prohibitions in the Constitution.

⁹San Augustine Eastern Texian, 11 July 1857.
This construction, in essence, would thus make Congress an absolute despotism as far as the territories were concerned. To Rusk, such would be too dangerous to the Union, and for this reason, Congress was restrained and limited in the territories as well as in the states by the Constitution. And since Congress did not have complete control over the territories, it should be left to the people therein to form and regulate their domestic institutions in their own way, subject only to the Constitution of the United States.¹⁰

Thus it was the repeal of the Missouri Compromise and Rusk's adherence to the popular sovereignty principle as embodied in the Kansas-Nebraska bill which persuaded him to vote for the measure. It should be noted, however, that when Rusk and other state-rightists in Texas spoke of popular sovereignty, they often applied an entirely different meaning to the term than did Cass, Douglas, and others. Texans such as Rusk were for popular sovereignty as stated in the Kansas-Nebraska bill, but, as will be explained later, the wording of the bill was such that it enabled them to interpret popular sovereignty to mean essentially the same thing as Calhoun's doctrine of non-intervention, and they used the term in this context. Rusk explained the meaning of popular sovereignty as follows:

¹⁰Ibid.
It draws no invidious distinction between citizens of different sections; it leaves everybody alike, free and unembarrassed, to unite the Territories the common property of all, and throws . . . around every man's life, liberty, and prosperity, the broad shield of the Constitution. Under its provisions, no man can rise in the Territories and say to his neighbor, 'I am holier than thou' . . . all from the least to greatest, stand upon an equality.\textsuperscript{11}

Texas's two representatives in Congress, Peter H. Bell and George W. Smyth, were both Democrats and both voted in favor of the Kansas-Nebraska bill.\textsuperscript{12} However, diligent search of congressional records and other works concerning the bill fail to indicate that either played an active role in the House struggle over the bill. Nor is there any explanation of why they voted as they did. It can only be assumed that, as public servants of a slave state, they believed the same as most other Southern representatives in regard to the Kansas-Nebraska bill and voted accordingly.\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{11}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{12}House, Congressional Globe, 33rd Cong., 1st sess., 1854, 28, pt. 2:1254.

\textsuperscript{13}Bell came to Texas from Virginia and fought at San Jacinto. He was elected governor of Texas in 1849 and again in 1851. A few months before the expiration of his second term in 1853 he resigned to fill the vacancy in the United States Congress caused by the death of David S. Kaufman. He remained in Congress from 1853 to 1857, at which time he moved to North Carolina. During the Civil War, he served in the Confederate army as colonel of a combat regiment. See Walter Prescott Webb et al., eds., The Handbook of Texas, 2 vols. (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1952), 1:141. Smyth came to Texas from Tennessee in 1830 and settled at Stephen F. Austin's colony.
As an overwhelming majority of the people of Texas were Democrats and regarded the interests of the state and of the South as identical with those of the party, it was inevitable that Houston's action in the Senate would be condemned while the action of Rusk would be praised. The Texas press led the attack against Houston. Later, when the importance of the bill became more evident, the newspapers were joined in their attack by many political leaders of the state as well as county and state Democratic conventions and the Texas legislature.

The Marshall Texas Republican, edited by Robert W. Laughery, an extreme state-rightist, led the press attack against Houston. Learning from a Virginia newspaper, the Richmond Enquirer, that Houston planned to vote against the Kansas-Nebraska bill, Laughery stated in an editorial on March 4, 1854, that he didn't know why Houston would vote this way. But he felt that "nothing can justify this treachery, nor can anything save the traitor from the deep damnation which such treason may merit." The editorial

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14 Marshall Texas Republican, 18 March 1854.
also denounced Houston as a friend of the free-soilers because he voted in 1848 against carrying the Missouri Compromise line to the Pacific and because of his vote for the Oregon territorial bill with the Wilmot Proviso attached to it.\(^{15}\)

By March 25, Laughery had grown concerned that other newspapers in the state might be avoiding the issue of Houston's vote. In an editorial that day, he commented that he had been waiting to hear what his contemporaries would say concerning Houston's vote on removing the slavery restriction hanging over Nebraska. "Strange to relate," he lamented, "they are all, from one end of the state to the other, with a solitary exception, as silent as the grave." The exception, according to Laughery, was the Texas State Gazette at Austin, which only said that it regretted General Houston having been found in the bad company of free-soilers and abolitionists by voting with them on the Nebraska matter.\(^{16}\) Perhaps in an effort to prod other papers into action, the Republican explained that the vote given by Houston was a free-soil vote and that he had arrayed himself against the South and against the administration. Laughery admitted that Houston might be opposed to the bill on grounds other than its

\(^{15}\)Ibid., 25 March 1854.

\(^{16}\)Ibid.
implications for slavery but in this instance he had been called upon to vote not for the bill, "but for the removal of an odium and unjust restriction which hung over the Nebraska territory, saying that slavery should not exist there." Instead, "he cast his vote and his influence with the abolitionists, for its continuance." Again shaming the other newspapers in Texas for not speaking out against Houston, the Republican concluded that "yet in a state more deeply interested in the institution of slavery than any other, such conduct is passed over in silence and without rebuke."17

Charles DeMorse, editor of the Clarksville Northern Standard and long-time friend of Houston, replied to the Republican: "We feel no ceaseless knawing at our vitals an ambition to pull somebody else down in order that we may become prominent as a destroyer, nor to set fire to any lofty edifice that we may be seen amid the blaze of the conflagration."18 In a later issue, DeMorse said he would put Houston's entire Senate speech before the people and let them judge his action for themselves. He personally felt that Houston had a right to speak and act as he did concerning the Nebraska bill but that he "did misrepresent

17 Ibid.
18 Clarksville Northern Standard, 22 April 1854.
his constituency and should have voted with his friends rather than stand on principle."\textsuperscript{19}

Not all newspapers in Texas were so generous in their treatment of Houston. The \textit{Austin Texas State Times} said that Houston had misrepresented the people of Texas in a manner which no other one of her eminent sons would have dared to do and that he should be held accountable on his merits.\textsuperscript{20} The \textit{Galveston Weekly News}, a bitter political enemy of Houston, said it hoped "Seward and Wade of Ohio and Houston of Texas, with all the fraternity who, we suppose agree with Wade that 'a free Negro is as good as a white man,' will choose their friends and associates among them . . . for he certainly can no longer expect the support of Texians."\textsuperscript{21} The \textit{La Grange Texas Monument} denounced Houston for being "cheek by jowl with such men as Giddings, Chase, Sumner, and others." It said he was not "acting out the Maxim of the son of Erin, who on a certain occasion pronounced a curse against the man, who refused to fight for the country he got his bread in."\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Ibid.}, 18 June 1854.
\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Austin Texas State Times}, 13 April 1854.
\textsuperscript{21} \textit{Galveston Weekly News} as cited in \textit{La Grange Texas Monument}, 17 May 1854.
\textsuperscript{22} \textit{La Grange Texas Monument}, 12 April 1854.
Yet another paper, the Galveston Times, illustrated Houston's position by anecdotes. In answer to the question: "Where did you come from?" the Negro replied: "Well 'fore God, Massa, I'clar I been away from Tennessee so long, I dun forgot whar I cum from." Houston, the Times felt, had forgotten that he had been sent to the Senate to represent the interests of a Southern state.23

Some papers criticized Houston's opposition to the Kansas-Nebraska bill because of its alleged injustice to the Indians in that territory. To the Leon Pioneer, the Indian matters were of secondary consideration "when compared with the great principle which the Nebraska bill asserted, and the establishment of which is so vital to the South."24 The Austin Texas State Times agreed, characterizing his Indian objections as "mere twaddle, and nothing more, and are unworthy of the man."25

Other newspapers in Texas opposed Houston's voting as he did, but thought he did so in order to get Northern support for nomination to the presidency in 1856 rather than because of his concern for the Indians and his opposition to the principles in the Nebraska bill. The

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23 Galveston Times as cited in Marshall Texas Republican, 10 June 1854.
24 Centerville Leon Pioneer, 19 April 1854.
25 Austin Texas State Times, 25 June 1854.
Houston Telegraph and Texas Register said that everyone thought Houston and Douglas were both only trying to gain support for the forthcoming election. "Whoever can see the difference between tweedle-de and tweedle-dum should abuse Houston and applaud Douglas," declared the Telegraph. "The fact is old Sam has beat the little giant at his own game, and today would get two votes North, for every one that the latter would get South, if their names were before a nominating convention for the Presidency."26 The Texas State Intelligencer, a Whig paper at Henderson, likewise thought both Houston and Douglas were using the Nebraska bill for political purposes and felt that Douglas's "trucking [sic] to the South is fully as objectionable as Houston's to the North."27 The Texas Monument at La Grange denounced Houston for "deserting his post as a Senator, to pander to the morbid appetites of abolitionists and 'political parsons' of the north, to secure their votes for the Presidency."28 The Richmond Texas Sun, in an editorial, agreed with the Columbia Planter and Democrat that Houston

26 Houston Telegraph and Texas Register as cited in Austin Texas State Gazette, 13 May 1854.
27 Henderson Texas State Intelligencer as cited in Marshall Texas Republican, 13 May 1854.
28 La Grange Texas Monument, 31 October 1854.
was only courting Northern support for the presidency and for this reason "the South will not forget Houston's vote."  

A few newspapers in Texas thought Houston acted correctly in opposing the Kansas-Nebraska bill. The Bastrop Texas Advertiser praised Houston's stand, saying "The South has no better champion . . . when championship is needed." The editor thought that the repeal of the Missouri Compromise could not possibly benefit the South since Nebraska furnished no inviting field for slave labor and therefore "the strife about it is the old war of abstractions." The Matagorda Colorado Tribune praised Houston for "the wisdom of his course on the Nebraska bill" as it was only a bid by Douglas for the presidency and did not come from the South. The San Antonio Herald agreed with Houston that the Missouri Compromise of 1820 was a hallowed compact between the North and the South and considered its repeal to be a breech of faith on the part of the South. The Marshall Meridian also supported the course of Houston upon the bill but did not state its reasons for doing so.

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29 Richmond Texas Sun, 20 February 1855.
30 Bastrop Texas Advertizer, 18 April 1854.
31 Matagorda Colorado Tribune, 5 April 1854.
32 San Antonio Herald, 12 June 1855.
33 Marshall Meridian as cited in Marshall Texas Republican, 13 May 1854.
Although a few newspapers defended Houston's actions, so much antagonism toward him developed in Texas that he hurried home from Washington to explain his vote on the Kansas-Nebraska bill to his constituents. He made speeches in several towns across the state in which he reiterated the arguments employed in the Senate debates to defend his position. The Cherokee Sentinel condemned his stump speeches as attempts "to gull the people into acquiescence or silence" and complained that "he has left the faithful Rusk in Congress to carry on alone."

Other newspapers continued their unrelenting attack upon Houston throughout the rest of 1854 and on through 1855 in an attempt to make his stand on the Kansas-Nebraska bill a reason for the Texas legislature not to return him to the Senate, even though his term did not expire until 1859. Old political enemies, pro-slavery advocates, and anti-Unionists also joined in the demand that Houston's career in the Senate should be ended. Williamson S. Oldham, an editor of the Texas State Gazette, and Louis T. Wigfall, a recent newcomer to Texas from South Carolina and a

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34 Houston Chronical as cited in Austin Texas State Gazette, 13 May 1854.

35 Cherokee Sentinel as cited in Austin Texas State Gazette, 27 May 1854.

radical state-rightist, spearheaded this campaign against Houston. As the momentum increased in 1855, other opponents of long standing, eager to get in one more blow against him, joined in the outcry. These included such well-known Texas politicians as Anson Jones, Maribea B. Lamar, David G. Burnet, James Pinckney Henderson, and Francis R. Lubbock. Some of them, such as Wigfall, Henderson, Lubbock, and Oldham trailed Houston, speaking in opposition wherever he spoke. 37

During his speeches in Texas in 1854 and 1855, Houston not only spoke out against the Kansas-Nebraska bill but also used the occasions to denounce the press and others opposed to him. He referred to the Galveston Weekly News as "that low, dirty sheet" and declared that its editor, Willard Richardson, was "too mean to steal." Houston accused John Marshall, chairman of the State Democratic Committee and another editor of the influential Texas State Gazette, as being a vegetarian, saying "he won't eat meat and one drop of his blood would freeze a frog. . . ." He claimed that Williamson S. Oldham embezzled money from a bank in Arkansas and then "he sunk those bank books in

the river and ran away to Texas." Of Wigfall, Houston asked the crowds, "Will you be dominated by that drunken blatherskite from South Carolina?" even though he knew that Wigfall had killed one man and wounded another over political differences in South Carolina. And of Lubbock, whom he had previously befriended, Houston sneered, "Frank Lubbock has every characteristic of a dog, but gratitude."

But however much Houston tried, he could not turn the tide of hostility against him. The press attacks on him kept the public attention focused on the Kansas-Nebraska bill and made them aware of its importance even before the development of widespread Northern opposition to the measure. Had Houston not voted as he did, it is doubtful that the press and the public would have shown as much interest in the bill as they did at this time, nor would they have had such strong opinions about it. Thus, as the North intensified their attack upon the Nebraska bill and Texas became more aware of the seriousness of this opposition, the Democratic party and the state legislature were already in no mood to react amicably. Rather, they rallied

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to defend the principles embodied within the measure with renewed vigor and condemned Houston's opposition to the bill even more.

As a result of Northern agitation concerning slavery in the territories, the Democratic State Convention, meeting at Huntsville in April of 1855, devoted its platform almost entirely to the national controversy over slavery extension. The platform called for strict adherence to the state-rights doctrine; maintained that Congress had no right to interfere in the affairs of sovereign states; condemned the attacks of the North upon the rights of the South and the integrity of the Constitution; and endorsed the principles of the Kansas-Nebraska Act.\(^4\)

In October and November of 1855, at least twenty-two counties held conventions in which they likewise adopted resolutions upholding the doctrine of state-rights and endorsing the Kansas-Nebraska bill. They also censured Houston for not favoring the measure, and many of the conventions recommended that the state legislature demand his resignation from the Senate.\(^4\) The Cass County convention declared that Houston had violated the confidence

\(^4\)Galveston Weekly News, 23 June 1855.

\(^4\)Austin Texas State Gazette, 20 October 1855. The counties were: Lavaca, Fannin, Liberty, Lamar, Leon, Comal, Travis, Shelby, Williamson, Burnett, Bastrop, Cass, Fayette, Hays, Smith, and DeWitt.
given him by his constituents, and ought to resign his seat so that a man who would become the exponent of their sentiments might be elected.42 The Hays County convention voiced the opinion that the many past services of Houston only added to his present shame and infamy because of his base and traitorous desertion of democracy and the just cause of the South.43 Even Houston's home county, Walker County, joined in the outcry. Resolutions were adopted at Huntsville to the effect that he had forfeited all claims to Democratic support, and that it was the duty of the legislature to pass resolutions instructing him to vacate his position as senator. The convention felt that "the integrity of the Democratic party, the interests of the South generally, and of Texas particularly, demand this action."44

Many of these conventions organized Democratic associations for the purpose of securing "permanent success of the national Democratic party, whose effort has always been to protect the national rights of the South from outrage." In addition, the organizations were formed to

42 Austin Texas State Gazette, 27 October 1855.
43 Ibid., 17 November 1855.
44 Ibid., 20 October 1855.
extend and strengthen Southern institutions, and "to protect Southern rights when threatened with violence."\textsuperscript{45}

The Sixth Texas Legislature, which convened in Austin on November 5, 1855, reflected the general state of excitement of the people concerning the agitation created by the Kansas-Nebraska controversy. It also voiced the sentiment of the county conventions resenting Houston's course against what the people considered their interests.

On November 13, a joint resolution was introduced by Congressman Jack Davis of Smith County, instructing the United States congressional representatives of Texas to vote against any repeal or modification of the Kansas-Nebraska bill. Congressman F. M. White of Port Lavaca then offered a substitute commending the course of Senator Rusk on the Kansas-Nebraska bill, while making no mention of Senator Houston. This brought forth much discussion and many declarations concerning the conduct of Houston, but no action was taken against him at this time.\textsuperscript{46} However, on the fifteenth, both houses met and unanimously chose Rusk, more than a year before his second term expired in the Senate, for another term of six years. This in itself was

\textsuperscript{45}Ibid., 1 December 1855.

evidence enough that the legislature of Texas appreciated his stand on the Kansas-Nebraska bill.\textsuperscript{47}

As Senator Houston was in Texas at the time this discussion in the state legislature was going on, Congressman Isaac Parker of Tarrant County introduced a resolution calling for the Speaker to invite Houston to speak before the House to justify his actions in the Senate. After about three hours of debate by the legislators on whether or not to allow Houston to speak, the resolution finally carried by a vote of 48 to 32. Congressman John W. Dancy and William Stedman gained enough support to adopt the resolution only after assuring other congressmen that the invitation to the former president of Texas was a mere matter of courtesy, "not to be construed as an endorsement of his Kansas-Nebraska vote."\textsuperscript{48}

On November 23, 1855, Houston delivered his address before the legislature at Austin wherein he explained his vote by saying that Texas, in accepting the resolutions of annexation, recognized the Missouri Compromise, and that he therefore considered himself bound to vote with the North in maintaining it.\textsuperscript{49} A short time later, on

\textsuperscript{47}Ibid., pp. 18-19.

\textsuperscript{48}Dallas Weekly Herald, 5 December 1855; Friend, Sam Houston: The Great Designer, p. 241.

\textsuperscript{49}Texas Legislature, House, Journal, 6th Leg., reg. sess., 23 November 1855, p. 62.
December 1, the legislature passed a resolution stating: "Be it resolved by the legislature of the State of Texas, that the legislature approves the course of Thomas J. Rusk in voting for the Kansas-Nebraska Act, and disapproves the course of Sam Houston, in voting against it." This resolution passed by a vote of 77 to 3. The Texas legislature thus effectively ended Houston's senatorial career, even though his term still had more than three years to run.

In the wake of the Texas legislative actions, the Democratic State Convention met again in Austin from the fifteenth to the eighteenth of January, 1856. As part of the platform adopted, they endorsed the Kansas-Nebraska Act as "a triumph of the Constitution over fanaticism and sectional madness." The platform also maintained the equality of the states and the rights of slavery to protection in the territories until such territory should be admitted as states into the Union. That the radical leaders were becoming intolerant to opposition to their ideas on the subject was shown in other action taken by the convention rather than in its platform. A resolution, offered by Williamson S. Oldham, and unanimously adopted, stated that:

50 Ibid., 1 December 1855, p. 85.
51 Austin Texas State Gazette, 7 January 1856.
This convention do most fully and cordially endorse and approve the votes of Senator Rusk and Representatives Geo. W. Smyth and Peter H. Bell upon the Kansas-Nebraska act, and that we do further most decidedly disapprove the vote of Senator Houston upon said act, as not in accordance with the Democracy of Texas. 52

Thus by early 1856, the mood of the Texas state legislature, the state Democratic conventions, and the county conventions was one of increasing anxiety over the controversies arising from the Kansas-Nebraska bill. The growing radicalism of many Northerners only served to intensify the feeling of the state's public leaders in regard to Douglas's measure and their opposition to the stand taken by Sam Houston. The continued press attacks against Senator Houston, the only public figure of importance in Texas who opposed the Kansas-Nebraska bill, played a very important part in drawing the attention of Texans to the bill and heightening the level of sectional awareness in the Lone Star State. The newspapers, however, had a larger and more important role in molding and reflecting public opinion toward developments in 1854-1856. This more general aspect of Texans' reaction to the Kansas-Nebraska bill must now be examined.

CHAPTER V

REACTION OF THE TEXAS PRESS TO THE KANSAS-NEBRASKA BILL

In the decade preceding Texas's secession from the Union, newspapers were the primary public communications medium. No greater force existed in the molding and reflecting of public opinion than that of the local press within the state. Other factors played their part in influencing the opinions of the citizens of Texas but none were as potent as the press. Politicians were an important source of information regarding local, state, and national issues, but they rarely made public speeches except during election years and on festive occasions. Prior to the slavery controversies growing out of the Kansas-Nebraska bill, the political speeches and commentaries dealt more with local issues; speeches concerning national events did not become widespread until the gubernatorial campaign of 1857.¹ There were also few institutions of higher learning, few libraries, and few books or magazines of a political nature in circulation in Texas in the

early and mid-1850s from which people could gain greater insight into state and national affairs.\(^2\) In many communities, literary societies sponsored lectures and debates on ponderous and wide-ranging subjects but they were often designed to appeal to women and children as well as to the men and were usually not of a political nature.\(^3\)

Although growing rapidly during the 1850s, Texas was still very much a frontier state, and this too aided in the great influence which newspapers had in the state during the decade prior to secession. In 1850 only five towns could boast a population of as much as one thousand, and even by 1860, there were but two towns--San Antonio and Galveston--which had reached a population of more than five thousand.\(^4\) Just thirty-two miles of railroad track had been completed within Texas by 1855 and the first telegraph line in the state, running from Houston to Galveston, did not begin operation until 1858.\(^5\) Rivers were navigable but a short distance from the coast, and a lack of internal


\(^3\)Ibid., p. 170.

\(^4\)Ibid., p. 164.

improvements often caused great difficulty in traveling from one place to another during the wet winter and spring seasons along nearly impassable roads and across unbridged streams. Indians still raided over large areas of Texas and numerous outlaw bands and desperadoes roamed the state, eager to waylay unsuspecting travelers. The long hours of hard work required on the farms and plantations further isolated the settlers much of the time. Because of these problems, trips to towns were infrequent and there were only occasional visitors at most of the rural homes. It was thus left to the press to be the principle disseminator of news, and the people of Texas anxiously sought newspapers in order to keep abreast of matters concerning the local, state, and national scene.

The 1850s were a period of much activity in the newspaper world of Texas. Many new newspapers came into existence, others either shut down their presses for good or relocated elsewhere, and still others made ownership or editorial changes which resulted in an important change in the political philosophy of the paper.

This period, particularly in the years after 1854, was prolific in themes of political controversy, both local

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and national, as sectional aggressiveness began to meet more determined resistance in both the North and the South, and animosity between the two sections increased rapidly. Attention was thus drawn to public affairs to an extent rarely equaled, and men arrayed themselves upon one or the other side with an aroused passion, and eagerly sought to keep abreast of current events, their causes, tendencies, and probable results. All this was rich fodder for the newspaper man, and he catered to it with zeal.

Antebellum editors had no access to the rapid news reports, news features, professional political commentaries, and special interest columns provided by present day wire services. In selecting news they were limited to sources used only sparingly today. Some news from outside the state came through New Orleans by way of exchange papers and letters brought to coastal towns such as Galveston by tri-weekly mail boats. Other news was brought into the state by travelers or in the form of correspondence and newspaper clippings from Texas politicians in Washington to various editors whose newspapers they considered to be politically advantageous to them.8

7 Richardson, Wallace, and Anderson, Texas, p. 176.
The preparation and presentation of news items did not conform to standards of today's journalism. Most writers displayed no tendency to make their efforts comprehensible to the least educated reader. Many of the editors used a more complex language structure and a larger vocabulary than those of today. They wrote with as much literary flair as with attention to factual detail; they made no pretense at being objective and liberally inserted personal comment. Mistakes of fact were not uncommon and bias was often rampant.9 Yet, more clearly and fully than any other source, these newspapers describe the way of life and the feelings of the people of that era.

Of all the papers started in Texas prior to statehood, only six of them lived through the era of annexation and into the 1850s.10 Thus the vast majority of the newspapers from the early 1850s onward were new ones; of the fifty-five non-religious or literary papers in existence in 1857, over 70 per cent were founded during or after 1853.11 Some of these new papers were established and edited by native

10Ibid., p. 384.
Texans, but most were put into operation by new settlers pouring into Texas from other states. And as more than 90 per cent of the new settlers were from other Southern states, it is only natural that a large proportion of the owners and editors were also Southerners and stressed the Southern viewpoint in their newspapers when referring to the slavery controversy.  

This was the era of the partisan press in Texas. During a major political campaign or controversy, propaganda received major emphasis, as some editors devoted up to 75 per cent or more of available reading space of each issue to molding public opinion. They printed speeches by politicians and others whose views on matters such as slavery

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coincided with their own and extracted from other papers editorials and information which reinforced their own position. At the same time, they heaped abuse upon those politicians and editors whose papers held views contradictory to their own by publishing excerpts of speeches and editorials, as well as rumors and hearsay, to show that they were "unsound" on certain issues, and printing liberal amounts of ridicule and satire that often amounted to character assassination. The volume and violence of this political propaganda varied from paper to paper. Such editors as Charles DeMorse of the Clarksville Northern Standard devoted little space to propaganda and exercised much restraint. Others, such as Robert W. Laughery of the Marshall Texas Republican, published vicious papers that were devoted almost exclusively to the controversies of the day. Newspapers were major weapons in the bitter sectional struggle of the 1850s, and nowhere was this more apparent than in the Southern frontier of Texas.

Some of the Texas newspapers of the mid-1850s, because of their location in populated areas or because of the forcefulness of their editors or a combination of both, were much more influential in shaping the opinions and actions of their readers than others. Still other papers, because of a lack of competition in their area of circulation, had the field to themselves. And as they were often the
principal contact with the outside world, they were able to control both the scope and the tone of news being disseminated to their readers. Thus the newspapers exerted an influence in Texas in the mid-1850s that has been the privilege of few newspapers to exert since. They wielded a powerful influence in shaping public policy and molding public opinion throughout Texas, and in turn they reflected popular views on controversial issues.

Until Stephen A. Douglas drafted the Nebraska bill in late 1853, the policy of compromise on the issue of slavery extension had been followed successfully since the adoption of the Missouri Compromise in 1820. The effect of this policy had been to keep the agitation against slavery within bounds. Other slavery incidents of an irritating nature, such as Northern resistance to the enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, had occurred from time to time but they had caused little national attention.¹³ Thus as the year 1853 drew to a close, slavery issues were relatively quiet and there appeared to be no dark clouds on the political horizon to disturb the peaceful condition then existing within the Union.

Therefore, when Texans first learned that a move was under way in Washington to organize the Nebraska country, they were largely unconcerned or indifferent toward the matter. The *Marshall Texas Republican* commented that "as there is nothing to be gained or lost in the controversy, we hold little interest in it."\(^{14}\) Another journal, the *Jefferson Herald*, could see no necessity for the introduction of Douglas's bill, and the *Indianola Bulletin*, after thanking Senator Thomas J. Rusk for copies of Congressional speeches on the bill, informed its readers that "the proceedings of Congress are quite void of interest."\(^{15}\) Still another paper, the influential *Austin Texas State Gazette*, initially opposed the measure, contending that the Compromise of 1850 had been a final adjustment to all matters on slavery and that the bill would once more revive the question of slavery agitation.\(^{16}\)

When the bill appeared in its final form, however, with two territories instead of one to be created, and with the Missouri Compromise specifically repealed, Texans became more interested and began showing support for it. Even so, they were cautious in their approval of the bill,

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\(^{14}\) *Marshall Texas Republican*, 4 February 1854.


\(^{16}\) *Austin Texas State Gazette*, 7 February 1854.
seeing only theoretical rights to be gained, and not even hinting that slavery might actually spread to the new territories. In the early stages of the development of the Kansas-Nebraska bill, Texans were not anxious that old wounds be reopened.

But as the debate in Congress in early 1854 reopened the whole subject of slavery and rekindled the dying fires of sectional controversy, vastly different views between the two sections concerning the method of controlling the spread of slavery by political compromises began to emerge. As the North intensified its opposition to the proposed repeal of the Missouri Compromise, Texas and the other Southern states intensified their defense of the principles embodied in the bill. Spokesmen from each section of the nation formulated elaborate justification for either approving or disapproving the measure, and both Northern and Southern newspapers, politicians, and agitators, backed by an excited public, continued to increase sectional antagonism until each party to the controversy became obsessed with the fear that its own preservation was at stake.

Primarily because of a lack of any well-organized political parties or other means of communicating with the

17 Marshall Texas Republican, 25 March 1854; Austin Texas State Gazette, 13 May 1854; Clarksville Northern Standard, 11 March 1854; Galveston Weekly Civilian and Gazette, 30 January 1854; Indianola Bulletin, 8 March 1854.
public, it was the state press which first alerted Texans to the gravity of the new wave of anti-slavery sentiment being aroused in the North. As the local presses continuously rehashed the entire extension of slavery controversy, pointing out the numerous attempts by Northerners to deprive the South of its rights by seeking to halt the spread of slavery, Texans became more and more convinced that they had become less than equal citizens because of the Missouri Compromise restrictions. They came to view this measure as the beginning of Northern encroachments upon Southern rights and determined that it had to be removed from the statute books before equality could be regained. Where anti-slavery Northerners saw the Kansas-Nebraska bill as a "slave-power" conspiracy to push slavery westward, most Texans saw only justice and equality for the South. Indeed, the vast majority of those in the state who approved the bill spoke first of its repeal of the 1820 measure, which they contended restored constitutional rights to the South and placed them on an equal footing with the North in the opportunity to take their property with them to the territories of the United States.

To Texans, the territories of the United States belonged as much to one state as to another. When such territories were thrown open for settlement, citizens from all portions of the nation should have equal privilege upon
the soil. Since the Constitution recognized and protected property in slaves, a slaveholder had as much right to enjoy the services of his slaves upon the soil of a territory as a man from a free state had to enjoy and be protected in the services of his species of property. And every attempt on the part of the federal government to prohibit any portion of the citizenry from settling in such territory with their property, of whatever description it might be, was in violation of the principles upon which the government was formed. 18

Texans felt that they had been unconstitutionally excluded from portions of the national domain and therefore approved the Kansas-Nebraska bill primarily because it would return to them rights which had been lost to the Missouri Compromise. As the Galveston Weekly News explained,

The Nebraska bill... is emphatically the great Southern measure of the day. It restores the Slave States to those constitutional rights of which they have been deprived for nearly a half century. It places them, where the constitution placed them, on a footing of equality with the free states, with respect to all the territory of the Union, which is the common property of all the states. 19

18 Centerville Leon Pioneer, 28 October 1854; San Augustine Red Lander, 12 August 1854; San Antonio Ledger, 1 March 1855; Marshall Texas Republican, 1 April 1854; Galveston Weekly News, 11 July 1854; Galveston Weekly Civilian and Gazette as cited in Marshall Texas Republican, 10 June 1854.

19 Galveston Weekly News, 7 November 1854.
Many other papers in the state held similar views, insisting that the bill did not propose to make any regulation on the subject of slavery except to remove unconstitutional restrictions already made, and to "place matters as they were at first."²⁰

These papers claimed it to be a falsification to charge the South with plighted faith in seeking a formal repeal of the Missouri Compromise as its letter and spirit had already been violated by the North. They contended that the South agreed to the 1820 compromise only to promote peace and harmony with the North, even though it enunciated no principle upon which the differences between the two sections were to be adjusted. Rather, it simply drew a geographical line of division, north of which slavery was positively prohibited, while south, it was left to wage a precarious and uncertain struggle for a foothold. This compromise was always distasteful to the South, but there were no attempts to disturb it on her part. On the contrary, when the United States gained extensive territory south of the 36° 30' line following the Mexican War, the Southern states, in accordance with the spirit of the 1820 compromise, contended

²⁰The quote is from the Shelbyville Reville as cited in Marshall Texas Republican, 10 June 1854. Other papers expressing the same view include the following: Washington Texas Ranger, and Lone Star, 2 March 1854; Centerville Leon Pioneer, 1 March 1854; Austin Texas State Gazette, 28 February 1854; Clarksville Northern Standard, 18 February, 25 March 1854.
for the extension of the line through the new territory to the Pacific. The North, wanting all of the land to be void of slavery, then found it necessary to repudiate the contract and declare it no longer binding.21

Most of the Texas press considered the repudiation of the Missouri Compromise by the North to have been formalized in 1850 when both sections agreed to a new principle for the regulation of slavery in the territories. The necessity for the new principle resulted when the North refused to extend the 1820 compromise line to the Pacific, and instead had attempted to gain passage of the Wilmot Proviso, by which slavery would have been prohibited both north and south of the line in the Mexican Cession. Then arose the fierce and protracted struggle which almost caused a disruption of the bonds that united the free to the slave states. To once again save the nation from disunion, the South agreed to form a new compact. They did so although they had been reluctant to make a new treaty with the North, whose selfish greed of political power had induced her indecently and shamelessly to violate the spirit of the old one. Still, the South agreed to the Compromise of 1850 which, according to many Texas editors, in organizing the territories of New Mexico and Utah, had

21 Austin Texas State Gazette, 7 February, 28 February 1854; Clarksville Northern Standard, 11 March, 25 March 1854; Marshall Texas Republican 25 February 1854.
recognized a new principle—that of popular sovereignty—with regard to the question of slavery in the territories. This principle resulted from the provision that when the two territories applied for statehood they were to be "received into the Union, with or without slavery, as their constitution may prescribe at the time of their admission."23

Both the North and the South agreed that the principle of popular sovereignty had been enacted by the compromise measures of 1850. But herein their agreement ended. Texas and the other Southern states claimed that the new principle applied to all territories belonging to the United States, and not just those comprising the Mexican acquisition, as the North contended. They thus looked upon the repeal of the Missouri Compromise by the Kansas-Nebraska Act to be the logical consequence of the enactment of 1850 since the geographical line of 1820 had been superceded by

22Austin Texas State Gazette, 7 February, 28 February 1854; Marshall Texas Republican 25 February 1854; Clarksville Northern Standard, 17 June 1854.

or was inconsistent with the new principle of popular sovereignty. 24

Until the Kansas-Nebraska bill became valid law in late May, 1854, Texans had mainly approved it on the grounds that it had removed from the statute books an odious and unconstitutional measure. They spoke little of the popular sovereignty principle, seeing it as a right for Southerners, but mostly a barren right. Most Texans had generally accepted the Northern Democrats view of the principle whereby the people of a territory should decide the slavery issue for themselves through their territorial legislatures. 25 They conceded that this would be an effective barrier against slavery in the Western territories since emigration from the free states would probably be greater than from the slave states, resulting in a majority of citizens who would be anti-slavery. These citizens would then instruct their territorial government to prohibit the institution. 26

24 Austin Texas State Gazette, 28 February 1854; Clarksville Northern Standard, 11 March, 17 June 1854; Indianola Bulletin, 8 March 1854; Centerville Leon Pioneer, 1 March 1854; Galveston Weekly Civilian and Gazette, 30 January 1854; Marshall Texas Republican, 25 February 1854.

25 Marshall Texas Republican, 4 February, 18 February 1854; Clarksville Northern Standard, 11 March 1854; Galveston Weekly Civilian and Gazette, 25 May 1854.

26 Matagorda Colorado Tribune as cited in Houston Telegraph and Register, 6 June 1854; San Antonio Herald, 12 June 1855, Clarksville Northern Standard, 18 February 1854.
But after the bill became law, and Northern agitation against it did not diminish as Texans had hoped, but rather continued to increase, they began moving more firmly into the state-rights camp of the Southern Democrats. In so doing, they came more and more to use a special, ultra-Southern interpretation of the popular sovereignty concept. Texans were soon contending that the principle of popular sovereignty, if interpreted in a constitutional manner, supported John C. Calhoun's theory of non-intervention which in fact meant federal protection of slavery in the territories. They based their contention on Douglas's phraseology of the clause in the Kansas-Nebraska bill which repealed the Missouri Compromise. It held that the 1820 compromise being inconsistent with the principles of non-intervention by Congress with slavery in the States and Territories, as recognized by the legislation of 1850, commonly called the Compromise Measures, is hereby declared inoperative and void; it being the true intent and meaning of this act not to legislate slavery into any Territory or State, nor to exclude it therefrom, but to leave the people thereof perfectly free to form and regulate their domestic institutions in their own way, subject only to the Constitution of the United States.27

Texans concluded that since all powers that were conceded in the bill could only be exercised "subject to the Constitution," it followed that "if squatter [popular] sovereignty

is not recognized and established by the Constitution, neither is it recognized and established by the Kansas-Nebraska bill.\textsuperscript{28} They claimed that popular sovereignty as Douglas interpreted it was not in the Constitution but that the non-intervention principle was recognized by that document. They argued that since the Constitution protected property, a citizen of any state could take his slaves into any territory. A territorial government had no right to prohibit slavery until it applied for admission as a state. At that time and only at that time could the status of slavery in a particular territory be settled. Before that time, if necessary, Congress must intervene to protect slavery. Thus congressional non-intervention was strictly limited; Congress must not intervene to prohibit slavery, but if a territory sought to do so, Congress must then intervene to prevent such a prohibition. As the Washington Texas Ranger, and Lone Star editorialized:

> The definition of non-intervention affirms the right or duty of Congress to legislate upon slavery in the territories in certain instances. If, for instance, there be any impediment, resulting from local law or municipal usage, which excluded slavery from a territory and thus shuts the South out from its occupancy, it becomes the duty of Congress to remove the obstacle and throw open the territory to the equal participation of all the states.\textsuperscript{29}

\textsuperscript{28}Galveston Weekly News, 5 June 1854.

\textsuperscript{29}Washington Texas Ranger, and Lone Star, 1 June 1854.
In this form, Texans approved "most heartily" the non-intervention principle which had been given positive enactment by the Kansas-Nebraska Act and considered its passage as a great victory for the South. They believed it would remove slavery controversies from the halls of Congress and away from dangerous agitation and leave the question to the people--the only true authority under the Constitution--to determine whether they should have slavery in their midst. 30

The greatest single objection by those who opposed the Kansas-Nebraska bill was that the slavocracy would use the measure as a means to push its institutions into the Western territories and perhaps other areas of the Northern Hemisphere as well. Northerners noted with anxiety that slavery had been permitted in the New Mexico and Utah territories. Now it was being proposed to open two more territories--Kansas and Nebraska--to slavery. In theory at least, the way had been opened for four additional slave states. To Northern anti-slavery people, the Kansas-

30 Marshall Texas Republican, 15 April 1854; San Antonio Ledger, 7 July 1855; Austin Texas State Gazette, 17 June 1854; Clarksville Northern Standard, 1 July 1854; Indianola Bulletin 10 May 1854; Centerville Leon Pioneer, 28 October 1854; San Augustine Red Lander, 22 July 1854; Austin Texas State Times, 25 June 1854, 5 May 1855. The 25 June issue of the State Times reported that nineteen out of every twenty Texans approved the slavery principles embodied in the Kansas-Nebraska bill.
Nebraska bill became the climax of Southern aggression, the latest proof of a gigantic "slave-power" conspiracy to take possession of the vast Western plains and shut out the Northern small farmer and free laborer.

Most of the Texas press simply ignored these allegations. For their part, they had become convinced that the North intended to deny them their rights whenever possible, and under pressure of Northern attacks, felt forced to protect their rights and claim the full measure of them under the Constitution, even though those rights might not add one slave state to the Union. The fact that many Texans were not as interested in the actual expansion of slavery as they were in the right of its citizens to do so if they desired is exemplified by the Marshall Texas Republican's view: "We are willing to admit that no portion of Nebraska may become slave territory. Still, if the question is left an open one, the South will have an honorable chance to enjoy a share of it, and if she is excluded constitutionally and fairly, she will have no cause for complaint." Other papers held similar views. The Shelbyville Reville urged the North to "let the question be left to the proper authorities to determine it, and the South will not complain, though not another foot of slave territory

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31 Marshall Texas Republican, 15 April 1854.
Another Texas newspaper, the Jefferson Herald, could see no practical value to be gained by opening the Nebraska Territory to slavery since "everyone knows that the soil, climate and productions of the country actually and virtually prohibit slavery there. . . ." Still, the Herald favored the Kansas-Nebraska Act since its allowing any type of property to be taken to that region was "a matter of justice to the South." 

This appeal to constitutional justice reflected the belief that, if one outpost of Southern rights was surrendered, the entire structure of slavery would be endangered. Though many Texans doubted whether slavery would ever spread to Kansas or Nebraska, they feared to yield a legal precedent which could later be used against them. Texas, along with the other Southern states, saw the attack on slavery in the territories as an attack on the entire system, believing that only after the North had halted expansion could they hope to destroy it in the South. Had Texans not demanded the right to carry slaves where they had little intention of taking them anyway, they would have opened the way for attack against slavery where it already

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32 Shelbyville Reville as cited in the Marshall Texas Republican, 10 June 1854.
stood. To admit that the institution should not be expanded would have been admitting that it was wrong and would have been taking the first steps toward its abolition. Texans therefore sought the right to take slaves into the territories as a basic defense for the protection of the system where it already existed.\(^{34}\)

Other Texans were not so interested in mere theoretical rights as with actual benefits to be gained by passage of the bill--such as the acquisition of additional territory for the purpose of increasing the political power of the South as well as to expand slavery for social and economic purposes. Many pro-slavery Texans refused to admit that slavery expansion had ended. On the contrary, they believed it likely that the United States would acquire, at some future date, possession of other lands appropriate for their institution, just as the Mexican Cession had recently been acquired. These Texans did not appear to be too interested in taking their slaves to Kansas or Nebraska or other areas already possessed by the Union. Rather, they looked mostly toward Mexico and Cuba, believing the climate and soil in

those countries to be more suitable to their needs. They felt that should these areas ever be acquired, the non-intervention principle embodied in the Kansas-Nebraska Act would prevent a Northern majority in Congress from hindering their settlement by the South. As the Marshall Texas Republican noted: "Every year adds to the numerical strength of the North; and should new territory be acquired, there may be no other means of keeping the Southern people from a common enjoyment of it except an interdiction by Congress." Also aware of their minority position, the Austin Texas State Gazette urged Texans not to rely upon the kindness and sympathy of the North, but instead strengthen the Southern area and rely upon the South's political power in Congress. Noting the decline of such

35 Only two newspapers which were surveyed for this study indicated any Texans were actually making plans to take their slaves to Kansas. There was never any mention at all of going to the Nebraska territory. Nor was there ever any mention of seeking to go to the arid and Indian infested regions of the Mexican cession with their valuable slaves. When there was mention in the newspapers of Texans going to Kansas, it was usually indicated they were going there for the purpose of defending that territory against anti-slavery forces; Texans appeared to be more interested in fighting than farming in Kansas. For sources relating to this note see the following: Galveston Weekly News, 11 July 1854; Austin Texas State Gazette, 29 July 1854; Brazoria Texas Planter, 20 September 1854; Austin Texas State Times, 28 April 1855; Shelbyville Reville, 9 May 1854.

36 Marshall Texas Republican, 15 April 1854.
power in both the House of Representatives and the Senate, the Gazette warned Texans that "either we must extend the area of the slave states, or we must be willing to see the entire control of the federal government fall into the hands of the North."\textsuperscript{37} The Gazette appeared to be most interested in Mexico, and felt that this country would quickly be colonized by Southerners should it ever become a part of the Union.\textsuperscript{38} Another Texas newspaper, the Columbia Democrat and Planter, also favored extending slavery into Mexico if the South could "get rid of much of the illiteracy so democracy can work and the peonage system modified so they [the peons] either rank as slaves or white people." This paper also urged the slave states to look to Cuba for expansion as well as "all the rest of the continent worth having."\textsuperscript{39}

Other papers likewise began showing an increasing interest in Cuba following the wide-spread publicity given the Kansas-Nebraska bill. The San Antonio Ledger admitted that Cuba had long been desired as "an addition to the slave power of the Southern states." This would give to the South control of the sugar markets of the world, and then the federal government, in framing reciprocal duties, could indicate such terms as would place the South "side by side

\textsuperscript{37}Austin Texas State Gazette, 9 September 1854.
\textsuperscript{38}Ibid., 21 October 1854.
\textsuperscript{39}Columbia Democrat and Planter, 9 October 1854.
of the grain grower and the pork raiser of the West."\textsuperscript{40} Another journal, the \textit{San Augustine Red Lander}, thought Cuba would be an ideal country to strengthen the Southern confederacy "as she is so adjacent to us."\textsuperscript{41} And the \textit{Marshall Texas Republican} feared that should Cuba not become a part of the United States, "the interests of the South particularly" would be in jeopardy.\textsuperscript{42} The \textit{Republican} also talked of the possibility of extending slavery to three islands in the Pacific and perhaps even into Canada.\textsuperscript{43}

Although the great majority of newspapers in Texas viewed the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska bill as a hallowed triumph for the slaveholding interests, there were others with a different interpretation, who cautioned against the building of false hopes upon it. Most of the opposition in Texas to the bill arose from the Whig papers, although some Democratic organs also resisted passage of

\textsuperscript{40}\textit{San Antonio Ledger}, 22 February 1855.
\textsuperscript{41}\textit{San Augustine Red Lander}, 29 July 1854.
\textsuperscript{42}\textit{Marshall Texas Republican}, 5 November, 10 December 1853, 17 June 1854.
\textsuperscript{43}\textit{Ibid.}, 3 December 1853.
the measure. These journals showed little unity in regard to their reasons for opposition, but most saw the bill as being more harmful than helpful to the South.

The Brenham Inquirer appears to have been the only paper in Texas which openly endorsed the Northern free-soilers position on the slavery issues growing out of the Kansas-Nebraska bill. The Inquirer, a conservative Whig paper, expressed its anti-slavery views by printing an article from Harper's Magazine and stating its admiration for "the tone and spirit" of the article. This article held slavery to be a local institution, confined by the Constitution to the states in which it existed, and all attempts to extend it beyond the line in which it had been hemmed in would be an outrage and a wrong done to the North. The Inquirer then stated that the Kansas-Nebraska bill had so inflamed "the Northern mind" that it might cause a dissolution of the Union, and that the Southern propagandists

44 There were considerably more Whigs in Texas through the early 1850s than has often been claimed. For a study of this party for the period 1848-1852 see Randolph Campbell, "The Whig Party of Texas in the Elections of 1848 and 1852," Southwestern Historical Quarterly 73(1969):17-34. These Whig's were still in evidence in the state until late 1854, at which time many of them joined the ranks of the American, or Know-Nothing, party.
and their Northern allies who originated and sustained 
the bill should be held accountable for their actions. 45

Other Whig papers were not so radical in their oppo-
sition to the measure, seeing it as being unnecessary and 
the cause of useless agitation. The Bastrop Texas Adver-
tiser argued that Nebraska and Kansas were not an inviting 
field for the introduction of slave labor, so the strife 
about the bill was "the old war of abstractions." Further, 
it was a needless measure to all intents and purposes, and 
mischievous both in its conception and its ultimate effect. 
The Advertiser also viewed the bill as being "preeminently 
unjust" to the Indians of the two territories. 46

Another vocal Whig paper, the Galveston Journal, 
opposed the Nebraska bill "as violative of the plighted 
faith of the nation" and as a useless agitation, "gotten 
up by a miserable, lilliputian, Northern political huck-
ster. . . ." The Journal blasted other Texas editors for

45 Brenham Inquirer as cited in the Marshall Texas 
Republican, 23 September 1854. The Republican characterized 
R.S. Hunt, the Inquirer editor, as "a Whig, and what is 
more, an anti-slavery Whig." See Texas Republican, 16 Sep-
tember, 1854.

46 Bastrop Texas Advertiser, 18 April 1854. The 
Advertiser was edited by William J. Cain, from Aberdeen, 
Mississippi. He advocated Whig and later American party 
principles and the Union cause. For more information on 
this paper, see F.E. Baillio, A History of the Texas Press 
Association, to which is also added A History of the Early 
Newspapers of Texas (Dallas: Southwestern Printing Co., 
what it considered to be their nearsightendess in the matter and their attempted monopoly of the patriotism of the country. As this paper saw it, the Whig party had settled the question of slavery for the country over and again, but "democracy could not let it rest . . . and for its consequences . . . democracy is responsible."  

Some members of the Whig press distrusted the source of the act. Expressing the belief that the bill was concocted by Douglas to advance his own individual political ambitions, the Houston Telegraph and Register did not desire the Nebraska territory opened to slavery. Its editors stated that: "We don't consider the boon worth a bawbee. On the contrary, we would regard it as a pretty sharp Yankee swoop wherein we gave something and got nothing." The Telegraph also feared that Kansas and Nebraska would eventually be admitted to the Union as free states. Then Arkansas and Texas, with free states bordering the Red River, would be in the same perilous situation as Kentucky and Missouri.  

Whether the Matagorda Colorado Tribune professed to Whiggery is not known, but it echoed the Telegraph on most

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47 Galveston Journal, 26 May, 9 June 1854. This paper appears to have been the principle organ for the Whig party in Texas.

48 Houston Telegraph and Register as cited in the Matagorda Colorado Tribune, 6 June 1854.
of its objections to the Kansas-Nebraska bill. Like the Telegraph, it saw the bill as a bid by Douglas to gain Southern support for the presidency. It likewise feared that if the Kansas and Nebraska territories were left open to slavery, they would "certainly be settled by abolitionists, and the South eventually would be surrounded by a cordon of vandal states." The Tribune also felt that the measure would not put an end to congressional interference and that the operation of the bill would undoubtedly bring the question back to the floor of Congress. It reasoned that by giving a territorial legislature power to regulate slavery, Congress would interfere through its instructions to the legislature. Thus the South would be giving up the principle of non-intervention for a mere "mess of pottage," and from being a measure for the extension of slavery the bill would "tend to its restriction and extinction, no doubt about it."\(^49\)

At least two papers considered to be Democratic organs also opposed the bill. Both of these newspapers were pro-Union in sentiment, but they disapproved the measure for different reasons. The San Antonio Herald agreed that it established the principle of non-intervention, but thought it left the South with a barren privilege. This paper

\(^49\)Matagorda Colorado Tribune, 5 April, 6 June 1854.
claimed that the South would gain nothing by opening the Kansas and Nebraska territories to slavery as the emigration from the free states would be greater than from the slave states because Northerners, without slaves, stock, or plantations could move more easily and quickly than the Southern slaveholder. Abolitionists could thus settle the territories and declare them free before the Southerners were ready to start. The Herald also noted that the repeal of the Missouri Compromise had led to an excitement of which the South had not seen the beginning of the end and that the principle of non-intervention would have to be sustained by force of arms.\textsuperscript{50} The other Democratic paper, the Marshall Meridian, denounced the bill as being only "a pioneer movement toward disunion and the separate Southern Confederacy idolized by Mr. Calhoun."\textsuperscript{51}

Aside from most Whig and some Union Democrat papers, the only other segment of Texans considered to have been in opposition to the slavery provisions of the Kansas-Nebraska bill were the Germans. The organized movement of these people into Texas began in 1843 under the leadership

\textsuperscript{50}San Antonio Herald, 12 June 1855. This paper so antagonized the citizens of San Antonio with its pro-Union stand that a mob burned it to the ground in 1860 and its editor, J.P. Newcomb, fled the state for his life. See Gray, "History of the Texas Press," p. 395.

\textsuperscript{51}Marshall Meridian as cited in Marshall Texas Republican 1 July 1854.
of Prince Solms of Braunfels, Germany and continued in increasing numbers until by 1850 they constituted about a fifth of the white population of the state. 52 During the early 1850s the influx of immigrants from Germany was augmented by political refugees who were forced to leave their native country because of their liberal ideal of democratic government and their advocacy of greater personal freedom. By 1854 Comal, Gillespie, and Medina counties were almost entirely composed of German citizens, and about three-fourths of the inhabitants of Victoria and Colorado counties were German. Several other counties, including Calhoun, Bastrop, Bexar, and Travis also had large numbers of Germans. The immigration to Texas from other portions of the United States during the decade of the 1850s was so great, however, that by 1860 the German citizens constituted but 3.4 per cent of the total white population. Yet the fact that these people were concentrated in a comparatively small area of the state made possible concerted action, and caused their influence

to be proportionately greater than it would otherwise have been.\textsuperscript{53}

From the earliest period of German colonization in Texas, few Germans were slaveholders.\textsuperscript{54} Since they came from Europe where slavery no longer existed, they could not overcome a natural aversion to the institution, but factors other than moral objections account for their having had only a limited number of slaves. They had the long established custom of agricultural pursuits being a family endeavor, with the entire family working the fields; they were totally unfamiliar with the system of slave labor; generally those who immigrated to Texas had little money and could not afford slaves. As the Germans came to Texas with the full knowledge of the existence of slavery, they had little to say about it upon arrival.\textsuperscript{55}

Some Germans did oppose slavery, however, and their position on the slavery issues caused trouble for the


\textsuperscript{54}Olmsted, A Journey Through Texas, footnote 1, p. 432. Olmsted states that a citizen of San Antonio, who, on account of business relations with the Germans was well informed on the matter, told him he knew of only twelve Germans who were slave proprietors in Texas.

\textsuperscript{55}Jordan, German Seed in Texas Soil, pp. 182-83.
entire German population. Most of the anti-slavery accusations made against Germans stemmed from a political meeting held in Vauxhall Garden, San Antonio on May 14 and 15, 1854, in connection with the second annual *Saengerfest*. Although the Germans did not mention the Kansas-Nebraska bill directly, it is likely that it was uppermost in their mind when they adopted the following resolution regarding slavery:

> Slavery is an evil, the abolition of which is a requirement of democratic principles; but as it affects only single states, we desire: That the federal government abstain from all interference in the question of slavery, but that, if a state resolves upon the abolition of the evil, such state may claim the assistance of the general government for the purpose of carrying out such resolve.

Only a small number of Germans were present at the convention, and they by no means voiced the sentiments of the majority in the state. But the possibility of a large

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58 *Austin Texas State Gazette*, 24 June 1854. In this issue, Alexander Rossy, a German citizen from New Braunfels, stated that the number present when the final vote was taken on the slavery resolution did not amount to thirty.
group in the state opposing slavery alarmed Texans, and they began condemning all Germans, forcing them to make plain their stand on the slavery issues. At this time, the Germans as a group were neutral on the slavery issue, but since they were a minority group and anti-foreign sentiment was strong in Texas, they realized the expediency of supporting the majority position and quickly chose the pro-slavery position.  

The protests against the San Antonio platform might have ended at this point if Dr. Adolf Douai, the editor of the San Antonio Zeitung, had not continued defending the San Antonio resolutions and agitating for abolition. The effect of this agitation was to make much of the Texas press believe that all Germans were abolitionists. The San Antonio Ledger, in announcing the resolutions of the convention, said: "Let any portion of our population undertake a crusade by means of secret associations or otherwise . . . and they will raise a storm of indignation from which they will be glad to escape by any means within their power."  

The Texas State Gazette attacked Douai, claiming he was either a free-soiler or an abolitionist, and that it would give him two alternatives, to either desist in advocating

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59 Ibid., 29 July 1854.
60 San Antonio Ledger, 22 June 1854.
the abolition of slavery or to "take up his march."61 Another Austin paper, the Texas State Times, also bitterly attacked the Zeitung and its editor. The Times stated it was surprised that San Antonio would put up with this paper and suggested "a masked battery" from Austin "go down river and forcibly remove the paper."62 Several other papers also spoke out in opposition to Douai and his views.63

As Germans began to realize the necessity of taking a pro-slavery stand, they too began a harsh attack of the paper. Numerous conventions were held denying that the Germans were responsible for the views presented by Dr. Douai in the San Antonio Zeitung. One convention, at Lockhart, passed a resolution stating: "We recommend to our German countrymen to discountenance and suppress attempts to disturb the institution of slavery, upon which is founded the prosperity and happiness of our Southern country. . . ."64

61 Austin Texas State Gazette, 12 May 1855.
62 Austin Texas State Times, 19 May 1855.
63 Biese, "Texas State Convention of Germans," footnote 25, p. 260. The other papers mentioned were the following: Galveston News, Goliad True American, La Grange Paper, the the Gonzales Inquirer.
The result of the attitude of the Texas press, and the attitude later taken by the Germans, was that most of those Germans who had patronized the Zeitung cancelled their subscriptions and refused to advertise in its columns. Dr. Douai was then forced to sell his paper and go to the North to live.65

From 1854 until the Civil War, Texas Germans defended slavery, partially because they really supported the institution and partially because they wished to prove their loyalty to the state and to the South. Germans were strong supporters of the Democratic party because the principles of this party were in harmony with the political ideals which they brought from Europe and because this party defended them against the Know-Nothings, who were anti-foreign in sentiment. As sectional animosity grew apace, Germans supported the state-rights philosophy as strongly as any other group in Texas, proving their loyalty to their state and their party.66

Within a few short months after the introduction of the Kansas-Nebraska bill into Congress, the national scene

65 Benjamin, The Germans in Texas, p. 117.

had begun to change dramatically, with Douglas's bill having the opposite effect of its intentions. Instead of quieting sectional conflict and unifying the Democratic party, it had reopened old wounds and put an end to the whole method of settling slavery controversies by compromise. It caused many Northern Democrats to leave the party; it provided the incentive for Southern congressmen, as their influence in the Democratic party increased, to lay aside traditional party divisions to form the basis of the Solid South. Most important of all, the bill supplied the occasion for the entrance of a new party that was completely sectional in composition and creed, and dedicated to preserving all the territories for freedom. 67

In Texas, the Kansas-Nebraska bill caused the people's thought to steadily progress in complete sympathy with the Southern movement to maintain Southern rights at all costs. This thought progressed from little interest concerning the extension of slavery controversy when the bill was first introduced to later voicing approval of the repeal of the Missouri Compromise on the grounds that it gave to them

equality with the North. Then, as Northern agitation against the measure increased, Texans reacted by claiming the full measure of their constitutional rights. In so doing, they began interpreting popular sovereignty as expressed in the Compromise of 1850 to actually mean non-intervention in the way Calhoun interpreted state-rights in the territories. Increasingly they turned to the state-rights Democrats for leadership in protecting their rights and as a means of uniting in opposition to the Republican party, which Texans believed to be dedicated to the total destruction of all slavery—not just slavery in the territories. In defending their principles, they became embroiled in all the sectional controversies which followed the Kansas-Nebraska Act, culminating in their decision to leave the Union.
CHAPTER VI

AFTERMATH AND CONCLUSIONS

The sentiment of Texas after 1854 lay predominantly with the state-rights Democrats because most people in the state believed this party could best protect their constitutional rights. In 1854, there were both Whigs and Democrats in Texas, but party organization did not crystallize until after passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act. Before this time, the party factions opposed to each other were of a personal rather than of a political nature; it was the man and not the party he represented which counted most. When the Whigs were disrupted in 1854, however, the Democrats were suddenly confronted by a rival party that threatened their dominance. Native-born American Protestants, opposed to the increasing political influence of foreigners and Catholics, formed the American, or Know-Nothing party. Secret at first, the party received its name from the answer "I know nothing," given by its members when asked questions concerning its objectives and principles. In Texas, the large number of Germans and Mexicans, most of whom were Catholic, inspired the growth of the party. Making its first appearance in the state
in 1854, the Know-Nothings won all its races for city offices in San Antonio and the next spring won additional city offices in Galveston.  

Encouraged by these victories, the party held a state convention at Washington-on-the-Brazos in June, 1855, and nominated a full slate of candidates for state offices. Their platform called for the preservation and perpetuation of the Constitution and the federal union; opposed the formation of sectional parties; and believed in a strict construction of the Constitution and the preservation of the rights of the states. The party therefore expressed Southern Unionists views, and opposed the more radical sentiments of the state-rights Democrats. A large number of its adherents were obtained from the disintegrating Whig party and from the pro-Union Democrats, including, for a time, Sam Houston.


In the state-wide elections of 1855, the Know-Nothings showed considerable strength, electing about twenty representatives and five senators to the state legislature. They failed in their bid for state offices, however, as their gubernatorial candidate, David C. Dickson of Montgomery County, was defeated by Elisha M. Pease by a vote of 17,968 to 26,336, and their other candidates were likewise defeated by a substantial margin. The Know-Nothings again attempted to gain control of state offices in the 1857 campaign, but they were crushed by the state-rights Democrats, and soon afterwards began to disband as an organization.5

Despite having some success, the Know-Nothings were never a serious threat to the Democratic philosophy in the state, and the elections of 1855 and 1857 made it evident that the only party in which the pro-slavery people of Texas had any faith was that of Southern Democrats. The most significant effect of this party upon Texas was to arouse the impassive Democrats into organizing a strong state-wide party, one whose purpose was to defend Southern rights, including the right of secession.

5Roberts, "The Political, Legislative, and Judicial History of Texas," p. 45.
Confronted with the early success of the Know-Nothings in 1855, as well as with continued Northern excitement over the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act and emergence of the Republican party, Texas Democrats rushed to more effectively organize. Less than a week after the Know-Nothing convention at Washington-on-the-Brazos, the Austin Texas State Gazette issued a call for Democratic leaders to meet in Austin. However, the meeting was sparsely attended, with only twelve counties being represented. This gathering nevertheless adopted a state platform which recognized the existence of the national controversy over slavery, and from this time on until Texas withdrew from the Union, the party's platforms were devoted almost exclusively to this all-prevailing question.6

Alarmed at the show of strength by the Know-Nothings within the state in 1855 and with a view to the upcoming presidential campaign, Texas Democrats called for another convention to be held in Austin in early 1856. This convention was well attended, with ninety of the ninety-one counties in the state being represented.7 The party adopted a declaration of principles which put it unequivocally on record for the doctrine of non-intervention, while

7Wallace, Texas in Turmoil, p. 42.
it repudiated the doctrine of popular sovereignty. In part, the declaration on the Kansas-Nebraska Act and non-intervention stated that

The Democracy of the state of Texas . . . insist upon the Old Democratic doctrines of states' rights, and a strict constriction of the Constitution, as cardinal principles of the Democratic faith; that the principle of non-intervention by the federal government is a doctrine of the Constitution, alike applicable to states and territories; and any attempt on the part of congress to prohibit slavery in any territory, or to restore the Missouri Compromise . . . would be a violation of this principle, and should be regarded as an attempt to trample on the Constitution and dissolve the Union, and should be resisted at every hazard and to the last extremity.8

The convention's declaration which repudiated Douglas's interpretation of the doctrine of popular sovereignty was essentially the same as had already been stated by the press in 1854: Neither the government of the United States, or the inhabitants of a territory, could prohibit or obstruct slavery in any territory until it applied for admission as a state. Until that time, citizens of all states had co-equal rights with their property upon any territorial soil.9

The Austin convention also instructed the Texas delegates to the Democratic National Convention not to support anyone

8Winkler, Platforms of Political Parties in Texas, p. 64.
9Ibid.; Austin Texas State Gazette, 26 January 1856.
who opposed the non-intervention interpretation of the Kansas-Nebraska Act. 10

This meeting enabled the Texas Democrats to unite in opposition to the Republican and Know-Nothing candidates for the 1856 presidential election. Texans showed little concern that the Know-Nothing candidate, Millard Fillmore, would win the presidency, especially since the national party had become split on the slavery issue. 11 However, they viewed the tremendous growth of the Republican party with alarm, and feared that they offered a serious threat to the Democrats on the national level.

The Republican party, growing out of the turmoil of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, consisted of several diverse groups which had united for the avowed purpose of halting the extension of slavery in the territories. 12 This new party showed an immediate strength that was sensational. Before the campaign of 1856, they had elected a strong minority to

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10 Galveston Weekly News, 26 January 1856.


the House of Representatives and had won control of several state governments in the North. They were well organized and faced the upcoming national elections with high confidence. Meeting in Philadelphia in June, 1856, the party's national nominating convention chose John C. Fremont of California as their presidential hopeful. For their platform, the Republicans stood against the repeal of the Missouri Compromise, opposed the extension of slavery, denounced Southern expansionism plans, and declared that the Constitution conferred upon Congress both the right and duty to prohibit slavery in the territories. As the party was sectional, it made no attempt to appeal to the South.

Texans were naturally appalled at the Republican platform. They were convinced that any successful attempts to stop the expansion of the slave area would be a prelude to its eventual abolition throughout the South with disastrous consequences, not only to their personal ambitions but to the whole structure of Southern society. Texans believed slavery to be an indispensable part of their social structure, a means of controlling the Negro race and establishing

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14 Randall and Donald, The Civil War and Reconstruction, pp. 103-104; Howe, Political History of Secession, p. 291.
social order, as well as for economic purposes. Thus to attack any part of slavery was to attack the Texan, his security, his way of life.

Newspapers, public officials, and the people of Texas in general responded to the Republican threat with aggressive hatred. They warned that a Republican victory would never be tolerated, and that secession and war would follow if Fremont should be elected. The Galveston Weekly News predicted that the South would never submit to the inauguration, much less the administration of Republicans--Black Republicans as they were called throughout the South--and that victory for this party would "be a death blow to the Union." Should war then result, the News believed "there is not a nation on earth that could conquer the South." Even papers which opposed secession, such as the San Antonio Herald, admitted that "Fremont's election would be the signal for immediate dissolution." Other papers began connecting the Black Republicans with abolitionist activities within the state. Allegations of a wide-spread, insidious abolitionist plot to incite the negroes to burn towns and

15 San Antonio Herald, 30 August 1856; Galveston Tri-Weekly News, 14 August 1856; Galveston Weekly News, 14 October 1856.

16 Galveston Weekly News, 14 October, 28 October 1856.

17 San Antonio Herald, 30 May 1856.
kill the citizens were reported in several newspapers. Although most of the plots described in the fall of 1856 were probably conjured up by the fertile imaginations of frightened men, increased restlessness and disturbances among some slaves did occur, terrifying the Texans. Their apprehensions of a slave insurrection seemed to be materializing.

Seeing the rebellious activities of the slaves as a prelude to what might happen if the Black Republicans elected their candidate to the presidency, Texas Democrats went to the polls united behind their national party nominee, James Buchanan of Pennsylvania. A lifelong political ally of the slave states, Buchanan was considered to be "as reliable as Mr. Calhoun himself." Perhaps a Virginia newspaper, the Richmond Examiner, best summed up Buchanan's popularity in the South when it noted: "He never gave a vote against the interests of slavery, and never uttered a

18 San Augustine Red Lander, 16 September 1856; Columbia Democrat and Planter, 2 October 1856; Galveston Tri-Weekly News, 9 September 1856; Bryan to Hayes, 1 January 1857, Ernest W. Winkler, ed., "The Bryan-Hayes Correspondence," Southwestern Historical Quarterly 25(1922):217-18. In this 1857 letter from Guy M. Bryan, Texas state senator, to Rutherford B. Hayes, future president of the United States, Bryan states that there had been "some eight or ten" attempts at insurrection in Texas during the 1856 campaign.

19 Howe, Political History of Secession, p. 295.
word which could pain the most sensitive Southern heart."\(^{20}\)

In the ensuing election, Buchanan carried Texas and all the slave states except Maryland, as well as five Northern states. Fremont won the other eleven Northern states and received a large minority vote in the five Northern states carried by Buchanan. The popular vote was 1,838,169 for Buchanan, 1,341,264 for Fremont, and 874,534 for Fillmore.\(^{21}\)

Texans viewed the election results with mixed emotions. They were, of course, elated at their candidate's election for they believed he would protect their interests, allowing them to remain in the Union. But the large popular vote received by Fremont caused them to realize the definite possibility of a Republican victory, with all its horrible consequences, in 1860. To the Texan, the 1,341,264 votes gained by "free soil, free speech, and Fremont" represented not mere votes; they represented abolitionists, vile and evil men who might say that slavery should not be extended, but mean that slavery should be abolished.\(^{22}\)


popular election, the possibilities became threatening realities.

Texas, as with the other Southern states, saw the executive branch as their last hope for equality in the Union. By controlling the presidency, the South felt it could repulse any abolitionist assault on slavery. But to lose control of the presidency would leave the South with no decisive powers. The Republicans might then seize control of the judiciary and a sufficient number of states to pass constitutional amendments and thus trample in the dust the Southerners' sacred guarantees of the Constitution. A threat to political supremacy was one thing; menace to the social order was quite another. The Republicans were both.

Texans wanted to remain in the Union in 1856, but only so long as it protected their constitutional rights. Their state-rights philosophy allowed them to believe that since the Union resulted from a voluntary compact between the states, the ultimate source of political power still rested with the individual states. They reasoned that if a sovereign Republic, as Texas had been, could by popular vote decide to join the Union, they could by popular vote decide to leave that union. The prospect of withdrawal from the Union was not so serious to Texans as it was to people of the older states since they had been only recently an
independent Republic, and as such, had developed intense pride and individualism. Their position in 1856 was clear; they would never remain in a Union controlled by abolitionists.

Sectionalism and strife on the social, political, and constitutional fronts characterized the years from the campaign of 1856 through the election of 1860 when the Republican victory came as a call for the birth of the Confederacy. Texans, alarmed at the closeness of the 1856 election, continued to solidify defense of their social order. Convinced that the Republicans would not hesitate to usurp the Constitution if necessary to achieve their aims, they came more and more to think that they would ultimately be forced to secede or yield their way of life.

Events taking place on the national scene did nothing to relieve their anxiety. "Bleeding Kansas" and the Northerners' contemptuous disregard for the Fugitive Slave Law only demonstrated what Texans had long feared was true: the North fully intended to rob them of their way of life.

Texans even received little solace from the Dred Scott decision, handed down by the United States Supreme

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Court in March of 1857. They naturally approved the ruling, but they paid scant attention to its effect when it was first announced, as they believed the Court had merely given additional legal sanction to the non-intervention principle already made law by the Kansas-Nebraska Act.

However, Republicans denounced the decision as a partisan plot by the Democrats to goad the North into accepting slavery in the territories and promptly refused to accept the judgement. Furthermore, they boldly announced that when they gained control of the government, they would reverse the ruling by packing the Supreme Court with new members.

With these developments, some Texas newspapers began to make editorial comment on the decision and Northern reaction toward it, but even so, the state press was remarkably quite on the issue. Those few which did comment simply pointed to the Northern outburst of wrath over the Dred Scott case as additional proof that the fanatical Republicans would never

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25 Austin Texas State Times, 29 March 1857.

hesitate to destroy the Constitution in order to have their way.27

Perhaps the main reason the Texas press gave so little notice to the Supreme Court decision concerning Dred Scott was because they were more concerned with state than national affairs in much of 1857. In this year, the gubernatorial election attracted more attention than ever before. For the first time, the state Democratic organization nominated all candidates for state offices. And, in order to unite and bind the Democrats together, a resolution was adopted pledging the delegates to support the nominees of the convention.28 Hardin R. Runnels and Francis R. Lubbock were nominated for governor and lieutenant governor by the convention. Runnels, a plantation owner from Bowie County, and Lubbock, a leading organizer of the state Democratic party, were both strong believers in state-rights, as were the other regular Democratic nominees for the state offices. Their platform, strongly adhering to Southern rights, demanded a congressional non-intervention policy for slavery


in the territories and also adopted the planks of their 1856 convention. 29

Opposing the state-rights, or regular Democrats, as they were called, were Sam Houston, the gubernatorial candidate, and Jessie Grimes of Grimes County, who sought the lieutenant governorship. Grimes had served in the Texas legislature during the days of the Republic and also as a state legislator. Since both were pro-Union in sentiment, and therefore unwelcome in the regular Democratic camp, they campaigned as independent Democrats and opposed the extreme state-rights views of the regular Democrats. 30

The campaign which ensued was bitterly fought. The regular Democrats styled the race "Houston versus Democracy" and both they and much of the press severely criticized Houston and his record as a Southern congressman. His whole career as United States senator was reviewed, and condemned. Houston's opponents accused him of voting against all bills in the interest of slavery; of supporting the Know-Nothing party; of blaming Texas settlers for Indian depredations along the frontier; of seeking the support of New England clergymen for the presidency; and of advocating submission

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to the Republicans should they gain control of the govern-
ment. 31 Aroused by this treatment, Houston responded
aggressively, labeling those who opposed him as secession-
ists while presenting himself as the champion of the Union.
He both ridiculed and insulted his state-rights opponents,
accusing them of numerous crimes and claiming they wanted
to control the state for personal gain. 32 But Houston's
efforts, and his support by the Union Democrats and the
remnants of the Whig and Know-Nothing parties were not
enough, for the regular Democrats won the election by nearly
ten thousand votes. 33 The other state-rights candidates
also won their races for the state offices, thus leaving
this wing of the Democratic party in firm control of Texas
politics in 1857. 34

Many Texans had not forgotten Houston's vote against
the Kansas-Nebraska Act. Then too, the near Republican

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31 Austin Texas State Gazette, 1 July 1857; Marshall
Texas Republican 23 May 1857.

32 Austin Texas State Gazette, 25 July 1857; Marquis
James, The Raven: A Biography of Sam Houston (New York:
Blue Ribbon Books, 1929), pp. 589-90; M.K. Wischhart, Sam
Houston, American Giant (Washington: Robert B. Luce,

33 Wortham, A History of Texas, 4:251. The actual vote
was 32,552 for Runnels and 23,628 for Houston.

34 T.R. Fehrenbach, Lone Star: A History of Texas and
the Texans (New York: Macmillan Co., 1968), p. 334; Wallace,
Texas in Turmoil, p. 45.
victory in 1856 and the threat which this party posed to Southern institutions caused many people of the state to be wary of putting a Unionist in office. They preferred to back the state-rights Democrats, whom they believed to be most capable of protecting their society.

Runnels took over the reins of governor on December 21, 1857. In his inaugural address to the Texas legislature on that day, he reviewed the whole history of the struggle over the extension of slavery, making it clear he would favor disunion if Southern rights continued to be abused by the abolitionists. He contended that

Year by year the South is becoming weaker, the North growing stronger. The equilibrium has been destroyed which afforded the only sure and permanent guarantee or protection against abolition innovation. . . . For the future to the North must be left the management and control of a question which involves union or disunion, peace or war. . . . There is now but one reasonable hope for preserving the Union and maintaining the rights of the states in it, and that is upon a rigid adherence to a strict construction of the federal constitution.\textsuperscript{35}

This declaration reflected the sentiment of the predominantly state-rights legislature and apparently of the people who had elected Runnels to office. From this time onward, secession as an alternative to state-rights came to be considered more and more.

\textsuperscript{35}\textit{Texas, Legislature, Senate, Journal, 7th Leg., reg. sess., 21 December 1857, p. 244.}
For a while after the 1857 election, Texans continued to listen to the threats and warnings of secession by their state leaders. But they eventually grew tired of the needless agitation of the slavery question and a conservative reaction set in during the latter part of 1858 and lasted through most of 1859.\textsuperscript{36} The great majority of Texans did not want to leave the Union unless it was absolutely necessary, for the Union had given them security and prosperity. They wished peace with the North and only asked that they be allowed the same rights under the Constitution which Northerners enjoyed. Granted, if these rights were denied, secession might be necessary, but Texans did not want to be the cause of any such action.

As part of the conservative mood prevalent in Texas in 1859, the voters of the state elected Sam Houston as their governor and rejected Runnels, who was seeking re-election. Many Texans voted against Runnels because of the regular Democratic platform which called for the reopening of the African slave trade, a move they thought would have disastrous consequences. Houston's plea for the preservation of the Union won him the solid vote of the pro-Unionists and the support of many moderates who

had become disenchanted with the extreme state-rights leaders. Then too, most of those who had been in Texas during the Republic voted for Houston for sentimental reasons. Another important factor in Houston's election, which had little to do with the conservative backlash, was that he won the overwhelming support of the Texans in the western area of the state by capitalizing on Runnel's failure to satisfactorily deal with Indian depredations along the frontier.37

Edward Clark, the former secretary of state under Governor Pease, won the election for lieutenant governor over Francis R. Lubbock, and several other independent Democrats who had entered the congressional races also rode into office on Houston's coattails.38 However, they failed to gain control of the state legislature, as evidenced by the action taken when it met in Auston on November 7, 1859. This legislature demonstrated without delay that it was not sympathetic with Houston's pro-Union views. In order to counter his election and the conservative backlash, the legislature promptly sent Louis T. Wigfall, state senator from Harrison County, to the United States Senate to fill the vacancy created by James Pinckney Henderson's death in

37Wallace, Texas in Turmoil, pp. 46-48. The vote in this election was 36,257 for Houston and 27,500 for Runnels.
38Ibid., pp. 47-48.
1858. Wigfall was perhaps the most radical of all the state-rights Democrats in Texas, and also the leading advocate for the reopening of the African slave trade. His being chosen to succeed Henderson has often been considered to be a reaction to John Brown's raid on the federal arsenal at Harper's Ferry, Virginia in mid-October, but apparently this was not the prime factor in the election of this ultra-Southerner to the Senate. 39

Although Brown's raid probably did not influence the sending of Wigfall to the Senate, it caused great alarm in Texas and throughout the Southern states. 40 Texans once again turned to the Southern extremists to lead their destiny.

As many anti-slavery groups in the North mourned Brown as a martyr and a saint, Southerners became convinced that the welfare of their section was unsafe in the Union. The one great fear that always secretly gnawed at the Southerner, the possibility of a general slave insurrection with all its horrors, now seemed to be becoming a reality.

39 For a study of the reasons for Wigfall's election to the United States Senate, see Billy D. Ledbetter, "The Election of Louis T. Wigfall to the United States Senate, 1859: A Reevaluation," pp. 241-54.

Many Southerners jumped to the conclusion that the Republicans were responsible for Brown's raid and saw it as a prelude to what would happen under a Republican administration. The whole effect was to dramatize anew the cause of Southern rights.

Events quickly followed which finalized Texas's decision to separate from the Union. In July, 1860, just before the presidential election of that year, several fires occurred almost simultaneously in Dallas, Denton, and Pilot Point. A Dallas farmer soon supplied evidence that the fires were part of a slave plot to begin an insurrection throughout the state and the people reacted with near hysteria. Vigilance committees sprang up in almost every community, many additional alleged slave plots were uncovered, and at least seventy-five--the true number is not known--slaves and whites suspected of being involved in the plots were hanged, burned, or shot. Practically all Texas newspapers carried stories of these slave plots and their often irrational, exaggerated, and vivid accounts of the abolitionist schemes were largely responsible for

41 Donald E. Reynolds, Editors Make War: Southern Newspapers in the Secession Crisis (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1970), pp. 97-117. This work covers only the years 1860-61 of the secession crisis. However, it is an excellent account of the role of Southern editors, including several of those from Texas, in the times immediately prior to the Civil War.
the panic which existed in the state from July through October, 1860. Many radical state-rights editors, in elaborating upon their own fearful reports of alleged incendiaryism and other slave plots, suggested to their thousands of readers that this was but the beginning of the horrors that Texans must suffer if they accepted a Republican as their president.42 Most Texans saw secession as their only alternative.

A scant month after the last of the Texas flames died down, the citizens of the state went to the polls, on November 6, 1860, and cast their lot against the hated Republicans. However, their efforts were of no avail, and Abraham Lincoln, the Republican candidate, won the presidency. But the Texas press and politicians had done their work well: Lincoln did not receive a single popular vote in the state.43

When news of the Republican victory reached Texas, the United States flag immediately came down in most places, and the Lone Star flag raised in its place. Texans then began to put their state-rights philosophy into actual practice. On February 1, 1861, the state held a convention and the delegates, by a vote of 166 to 8, decreed secession.

42 Ibid., pp. 97, 105, 116-17.
43 Randall and Donald, The Civil War and Reconstruction, p. 133.
A popular referendum was then held, with 46,129 of the state's citizens voting for secession while 14,697 were against it; Texans had voted to enter the Union, they now voted to leave it. The Secession Convention then officially canvassed the votes and announced that as of March 2, 1861, Texas had once more become a sovereign and independent nation.  

Texans loved the Union and never really wanted to leave it. In 1846, when Texas entered the Union, 94 per cent of her citizens had favored statehood. Yet, fifteen years later, 76 per cent of her citizens favored secession. Many developments during these fifteen years help to explain this drastic change in Texans' attitudes, but none had a greater impact than the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854. There had been no demand for a measure such as Douglas's by the people of Texas, and no proposal resembling it had been openly discussed by politicians or mentioned in party platforms or declarations. But once passed, Texans supported the bill because they felt that its repeal of the Missouri Compromise restored to them their rightful position of equality in the Union. They also supported the measure because they believed that the non-intervention

principle forced the abandonment of congressional restriction of slavery in the territories and opened the way for the people, the only true constitutional authority, to decide for themselves whether or not slavery should be allowed in the territory wherein they resided. Furthermore, their interpretation of the non-intervention principle progressed on to Calhoun's view that Congress had to protect slavery in a territory until it was granted statehood. This was a position which seemed aggressive although it probably was not. For even though most Texans did not think slavery would really spread to Nebraska or Kansas, they had to insist on their rights there in order to protect slavery where it already existed. However, a minority of Texans approved the Kansas-Nebraska Act because they actually wanted to expand slavery, and believed that the bill opened the way for them to do so, if not immediately and into territories already opened to slavery, then perhaps at some later date when other territories might be acquired.

Houston's opposition to the bill had little effect in determining Texans' attitudes toward it, but his vote against the measure was very important in drawing their attention to the entire extension of slavery controversy. Because of this attention given to Houston's vote, Texans were made much more aware of the extent of Northern
opposition which built up while the Kansas-Nebraska bill was being passed in early 1854. As Northern hostility toward the bill increased, most people of Texas increased their defense of the measure. Becoming convinced that the North had violated all past compromises with the South and that they would not stop agitating against slavery, Texans came to view the Kansas-Nebraska bill as a clarion call to be done with all compromises with such people. Instead, they began demanding their version of a strict interpretation of the Constitution as the only means of having equality with the North.

There were strong Unionist feelings in Texas, especially around Sam Houston, but the Kansas-Nebraska bill heightened sectionalism in the state. Then, with the rapid growth of the Republican party, Texans grew concerned for the protection of their institutions and began to move more firmly into the camp of the state-rights Democrats. As their fear of the Republicans increased, they grew more willing to listen to the voice of these extremists, while demanding the last inch of their constitutional rights.

Texans considered slavery to be inseparable from their prosperity and welfare, and that it had to be defended at all costs. Abolitionist plots and the election of Lincoln in 1860 was to them final proof of the determination of the Republicans to deny them their way of life, and the
necessity of secession. The Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 opened the way and provided much of the impetus for this whole chain of events from the mid-1850s onward as Texas moved toward disunion.
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