Chapter 16 Lesson 2

Challenges to Slavery

ESSENTIAL QUESTION Why does conflict develop?

As feelings over slavery intensified, the chance for compromise disappeared.

Birth of the Republican Party

SS.8.A.1.2, SS.8.A.5.2, LA.8.1.6.3

How did a new political party affect the challenges to slavery?

After the Kansas-Nebraska Act, the Democratic Party began to divide along sectional lines. Northern Democrats left the party. Differing views over slavery also split the Whig Party.

The 1854 Congressional Elections

Antislavery Whigs and Democrats joined with Free-Soilers to form the Republican Party. One of the party's major goals was the banning of slavery in new territories. In 1854 the Republicans chose candidates to challenge the pro-slavery Whigs and Democrats in state and congressional elections.

The Republicans quickly showed strength in the North. In the election, they won control of the House of Representatives and several state governments. Unlike the Republicans, almost three-fourths of the Democratic candidates from free states lost in 1854.

In contrast, Republican candidates received almost no support in the South. At the same time, the Democrats, having lost members in the North, were becoming a largely Southern party. This division would be even more apparent in the presidential election of 1856.

The Presidential Election of 1856

The Whig Party, torn apart over slavery, did not offer a candidate in 1856. Republicans chose Californian John C. Frémont, a famed western explorer. The party platform called for free territories. Its campaign slogan was "Free soil, Free speech, and Frémont."

The Democratic Party nominated James Buchanan of Pennsylvania. He was a diplomat and former member of Congress. Buchanan tried to appeal to Southern whites. The Democratic Party endorsed the idea of popular sovereignty.

The American Party, or Know-Nothings, grew quickly between 1853 and 1856 by attacking immigrants. The party nominated former president Millard Fillmore as its candidate. Yet this party was also divided over the issue of the Kansas- Nebraska Act. When the Know-Nothings refused to call for a repeal of the act, many northern supporters left the party.

The vote in 1856 was divided along rigid sectional lines. Buchanan took all Southern states except Maryland. Frémont won 11 of the 16 free states but did not get any electoral votes from south of the Mason-Dixon Line. With 174 electoral votes compared to 114 for Frémont and 8 for Fillmore, Buchanan won.

Explaining Why did the Republican Party form?

Dred Scott v. Sandford

SS.8.A.1.2, SS.8.A.4.8, SS.8.A.5.2

Why was the Dred Scott case important?

Dred Scott was an enslaved African American bought by a doctor in Missouri, a slave state. In the 1830s, the doctor moved with Scott to Illinois, a free state, then to the Wisconsin Territory. The Northwest Ordinance of 1787 banned slavery there. Later the doctor returned with Scott to Missouri.

In 1846 antislavery lawyers helped Scott sue for his freedom. Scott claimed he should be free since he had lived in areas where slavery was illegal. Eleven years later, the case reached the Supreme Court. At issue was Scott's status, but the case also gave the Court a chance to rule on the question of slavery itself.

The Court Rules

Chief Justice Roger B. Taney (TAW • nee) wrote the Court's opinion: Dred Scott was still an enslaved person. As such, he was not a citizen and had no right to bring a lawsuit. Taney wrote that living on free soil did not make Scott free. A slave was property. The Fifth Amendment prohibited the taking of property without "due process."

Finally, Taney wrote that Congress had no power to ban slavery. The Missouri Compromise, that banned slavery north of 36°30' N latitude, was unconstitutional, and so was popular sovereignty. Not even voters could ban slavery because it would mean taking someone's property. In effect, Taney said that the Constitution protected slavery.

Reaction to the Decision

The Court's decision upheld what many white Southerners believed: Nothing could legally stop slavery. It ruled limiting the spread of slavery, the Republicans' main issue, unconstitutional.

Republicans and other antislavery groups were outraged. They called the decision "a wicked and false judgment" and "the greatest crime" ever committed in the nation's courts.

Explaining Why did the Dred Scott decision say voters could not ban slavery?

Lincoln and Douglas

SS.8.A.1.7, SS.8.A.4.8, SS.8.A.5.2, LA.8.1.6.1

How did Abraham Lincoln and Stephen A. Douglas play a role in the challenges to slavery?

The Illinois Senate race of 1858 was the center of national attention. The contest pitted the current senator, Democrat Stephen A. Douglas, against a rising star in the Republican Party named Abraham Lincoln.

People considered Douglas a possible candidate for president in the 1860 election. Lincoln, far less known outside of his state, challenged Douglas to a series of debates. Douglas reluctantly agreed.

The Lincoln-Douglas Debates

Lincoln and Douglas debated seven times. The face-offs took place in Illinois cities and villages during August, September, and October of 1858. Thousands of spectators came to the debates. Newspapers provided wide coverage. The main topic, or subject of discussion, was slavery.

During the debate at Freeport, Lincoln pressed Douglas about his views on popular sovereignty. Lincoln asked whether the people of a territory could legally exclude slavery before becoming a state.

Douglas replied that voters could exclude slavery by refusing to pass laws that protected the rights of slaveholders. Douglas’s response, which became known as the Freeport Doctrine, satisfied antislavery followers, but it cost Douglas support in the South.

Douglas claimed that Lincoln wanted African Americans to be fully equal to whites. Lincoln denied this. Still, Lincoln insisted that African Americans should enjoy rights and freedoms:

"But in the right to eat the bread . . . which his own hand earns, [an African American] is my equal and the equal of [Senator] Douglas, and the equal of every living man."

—Abraham Lincoln, August 21, 1858

The real issue, Lincoln said, was “between the men who think slavery a wrong and those who do not think it wrong. The Republican Party think it wrong.”

Following the debates, Douglas won a narrow victory in the election. Lincoln lost but did not come away empty-handed. He gained a national reputation as a man of clear thinking who could argue with force and persuasion.

John Brown and Harpers Ferry

After the 1858 election, Southerners felt threatened by Republicans. Then, an act of violence added to their fears.

On October 16, 1859, the abolitionist John Brown led a group on a raid on Harpers Ferry, Virginia. His target was a federal arsenal (AHRS • nuhl), a storage site for weapons. Brown hoped to arm enslaved African Americans and start a revolt against slaveholders. Abolitionists had paid for the raid.

"Now if . . . I should forfeit my life for the furtherance of the ends of justice and MINGLE MY BLOOD . . . with the blood of millions in this slave country whose rights are disregarded by wicked, cruel, and unjust enactments—I submit; so LET IT BE DONE."

—John Brown's statement to the Virginia Court

Local citizens and federal troops defeated Brown's raid. Tried and convicted of treason and murder, Brown received a death sentence. His hanging shook the North. Some antislavery Northerners rejected Brown's use of violence. Others saw him as a martyr (MAHR • tuhr)—a person who dies for a cause.

John Brown's death rallied abolitionists. When white Southerners learned of Brown's abolitionist ties, their fears of a great Northern conspiracy against them were confirmed. The nation was on the brink of disaster.

Identifying Why did John Brown raid the arsenal at Harpers Ferry?