

of the compromise also celebrated their achievement as saving the Union and forever resolving disputes over slavery.

There were grounds for such optimism. Passage of the Texas boundary bill with support from both Texas senators averted the feared clash at Santa Fe. Many Whig and Democratic newspapers around the country praised the compromise and the restoration of sectional peace. Businessmen in northeastern cities who had organized bipartisan Union meetings in the summer to show support for the compromise were especially pleased. Measuring public opinion precisely is impossible; nonetheless, substantial evidence suggests that a majority of Americans in both sections happily accepted the compromise as an end to sectional strife. By definition, however, majorities do not include everyone, and significant minorities in both sections loathed provisions of the compromise package.

Of most immediate danger, many Democrats from South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi considered California's admission as a free state and the reduction of Texas grounds for immediate secession. As soon as California became a state, Georgia's Democratic governor called for a state secession convention to meet in December, with delegates to be elected in November. Mississippi's Democratic governor, John A. Quitman, called his legislature into special session and persuaded it to schedule a secession convention in late 1851, with its delegates to be chosen in September of that year. Secessionists in Alabama and South Carolina awaited the outcome in Georgia and Mississippi before calling their own conventions.

With its convention scheduled a full year before Mississippi's was to meet, Georgia was the crucial state. There pro-compromise Whigs from the black belt, led by Stephens and Toombs, who had worked heroically in the House for compromise since February 1850, and pro-compromise up-country Democratic non-

California was admitted, 150-56. Utah succeeded much more narrowly, 97-85, and the seventeen northern Whigs who abstained could have killed it had they joined the majority of their colleagues in voting against it. Again the pressure from Fillmore and Webster had telling effect. Given the House's northern majority, the Fugitive Slave Act passed with surprising ease, 109-76, largely because of heavy northern abstentions. Two northern Whigs and twenty-nine northern Democrats were in the majority. Enactment of the District slave-trade measure 124-59 on September 17 completed the House's work.

Fillmore signed the measures as soon as they reached his desk, and he rejoiced that "the long agony is over." He referred both to the end of the longest, most grueling congressional session held since the adoption of the Constitution and to what he hoped was a permanent settlement of the conflict over slavery extension. In his annual messages of December 1850 and 1851, indeed, Fillmore explicitly called the compromise a "final settlement" of disagreements over slavery. Congressional proponents

slaveholders, led by Howell Cobb, the Democratic Speaker of the House who had helped facilitate passage of the compromise, formed a Union coalition against a Southern Rights coalition composed primarily of bitter slaveholding Democrats. At the December convention, pro-compromise Union men overwhelmingly outnumbered secessionists 240 to 43. That rout effectively delayed southern secession for ten years.

Nonetheless, the convention made clear in the so-called Georgia Platform that its acquiescence in the compromise was conditional, not absolute. It pledged that Georgia "would abide by it as a permanent adjustment of this sectional controversy" only if it was indeed permanent. Georgia would resist "to a disruption of every tie that binds her to the Union" any new effort in Congress to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia, to bar slavery from Utah and New Mexico, to prevent the admission of new slave states, or to alter or repeal the Fugitive Slave Act. "Upon the faithful execution of the *Fugitive Slave Law* by the proper authorities [that is, Fillmore's administration]," the Georgia Platform concluded, "depends the preservation of our much beloved Union."

The triumphant Union coalition also announced in December that it intended to make the realignment of political forces in Georgia during 1850 permanent by running Union candidates in the state and congressional elections of 1851 against the outnumbered Southern Rights forces. The Union Party easily elected the Democrat Cobb governor the following October, and the new Union majority in the state legislature sent Toombs to the Senate to replace John M. Berrien, one of the few southern Whigs to oppose the compromise in 1850.

Similar realignments occurred in Mississippi and Alabama in 1851. Non-slaveholding Democrats joined with slaveholding Whigs in new Union parties. Running on the Georgia Plat-

form, they routed Southern Rights parties composed primarily of anti-compromise slaveholding Democrats in congressional, gubernatorial, and state legislative elections. The compromise had been affirmed as acceptable to the South, however grudgingly, and secession had been stopped cold (as it was in South Carolina as well). The by-product of that achievement, however, was what turned out to be the permanent destruction of the two-party system of Whigs and Democrats in those three states. Democrats would recover by 1852; Whigs would not.

Elsewhere in Dixie's elections of 1850 and 1851, jousting over the compromise assumed the partisan lines that had emerged in Congress. Democratic candidates denounced the compromise as a sellout of Southern Rights; Whigs defended it as just to the South and necessary for the preservation of the Union. In almost every slave state, moreover, pro-compromise Whigs won the majority of offices at stake, usually because non-slaveholding Democrats who accepted the compromise refused to vote for Democratic candidates who continued to denounce it. Buoyed by those victories, Whigs across the South by the end of 1851 had started to demand that their party nominate Fillmore for President in 1852 so they could retain their advantage on the compromise issue. Indeed, to southern Whigs' delight, Fillmore used every power he possessed, including calling out troops, to enforce the Fugitive Slave Act in the North.

Popular and political reactions to the compromise in the North were the mirror image of those in the South. Whigs in the North suffered greater internal divisions over it than did Democrats. Northern Democrats defended the compromise as necessary to save the Union, whereas the majority of northern Whigs blasted the territorial bills for allowing slavery's possible extension. From Maine to Michigan, Whigs publicly and privately execrated Clay, Webster, and Fillmore for their roles in se-

curing the compromise. They considered its terms a betrayal of everything northern Whigs had stood for on the slavery issue since 1844. Unless northern Whigs repudiated the compromise, most Whig politicians believed, their voters would abandon them for the Free-Soil Party. "We must make war on this administration to save the Whig party from contempt and scorn," wrote one of Seward's New York allies. Ohio Whig Senator Ben Wade was more succinct: "God save us from Whig Vice Presidents."

The territorial provisions were bad enough, but the new Fugitive Slave Act most infuriated Northerners, and not just Whig politicians. While Southerners were making its enforcement the *sine qua non* for their remaining in the Union, Northerners were erupting in ever more organized rage over the terms of this new law. To facilitate the recapture of runaway slaves in the North, the law called for the appointment of new federal commissioners to sit in judgment of accused fugitives. It also provided that U.S. marshals should help slaveholders track the runaways down. Those alleged fugitives were denied the right to testify or to have juries decide their fate. In this star-chamber setting, commissioners were encouraged to discover runaways: for every black they returned to slavery, they received ten dollars; if they declared the accused to be free, they earned five dollars. Nor did the law apply only to instances of hot pursuit. Blacks who had lived as free men and women for years in northern communities might be accused and consigned to slavery. For white Northerners, the worst provision of the law allowed for them to be fined and imprisoned if they aided slaves in escaping or even if they refused to join posses called by marshals in pursuit of fugitives. The law forced white Northerners to become slave catchers themselves, to act at the beck and call of southern slaveholders. In short, they could be symbolically reduced to the status of slaves.

Enactment of the Fugitive Slave Act provoked Harriet Beecher Stowe to write her famous antislavery novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. First published in serialized form in a Free-Soil Party newspaper, it became a runaway best-seller when it appeared as a book in 1852. Some 300,000 copies sold within the first year. Between 1850 and the end of 1852, moreover, northern mobs in a few well-publicized episodes snatched captured fugitives from the authorities and sped them to freedom in Canada. Nonetheless, thorough research by historians reveals that in most instances the new law was peacefully enforced. However much Northerners might revile the law, the vast majority of them believed that it must be obeyed as long as it was the law of the land.

Still, the law was reviled, and most northern Whigs believed they would be slaughtered in the North's congressional and state elections of 1850 and 1851 unless they called for its immediate revision or repeal and were free to criticize other pro-southern parts of the compromise as a betrayal of Whig principles. Those northern Whigs faced opposition from northern Democrats, who proudly trumpeted their role in passing the compromise and blasted its Whig critics for recklessly endangering the Union. In every northern state, moreover, a minority of Whigs remained loyal to the new Fillmore administration, which insisted on the finality of the compromise. Those administration loyalists tenaciously fought against Whig platforms and candidates that refused to accept the compromise as the final word on slavery matters. "The present administration will not recognize one set of Whig principles for the North, and another for the South," Webster insisted as early as October 1, 1850.

The result during 1850 and 1851 was a series of increasingly bruising battles between pro-administration and anti-administration Whigs in the North's district and state party

conventions to choose the party's nominees and write its platforms. Anti-administration, anti-compromise Whigs usually won those intra-party battles, but then lost elections to pro-compromise Democratic candidates because pro-compromise Whigs refused to vote for them. In response to these setbacks, by the end of 1851 anti-compromise Whigs had become determined to prevent either Fillmore or Webster, who openly sought the office, from getting the party's presidential nomination. Instead, they attempted to secure it for General Winfield Scott, the particular favorite of Seward, Fillmore's archrival.

By the start of 1852, however, northern Whigs had decided to abandon their criticism of the Compromise of 1850. The results of the North's elections of 1850 and 1851, just like those in the South, clearly demonstrated that running against the compromise was a political loser. The majority of people in both sections accepted it. Therefore, both Whig and Democratic politicians decided to woo back their parties' pro-compromise elements who had defected or stayed home in 1850 and 1851. In 1852 both parties wrote national platforms pledged essentially to the finality of the compromise. Democrats, indeed, explicitly pledged that their party would never allow any further discussion of slavery in the halls of Congress.

Not all Whigs or Democrats accepted these endorsements of the compromise. Former Southern Rights Democrats were incensed, and die-hard Southern Rights Democrats actually ran their own presidential candidate that year. Conversely, Horace Greeley, who edited the most widely read Whig newspaper in the North, represented many northern Whigs when he wrote of his party's platform: "We defy it, execrate it, and spit upon it." Nonetheless, by the summer of 1852 the two major parties had officially reached a consensus about the finality of the compromise as a permanent settlement of the slavery extension issue.

That consensus, importantly, destroyed the ability of parties to run Janus-faced campaigns on slavery issues in the different sections.

