

A Hardening of Views:

Proslavery v.
Free Labor Ideologies

Main question for the day

- Why did whites feel strongly enough about the expansion of slavery to take up arms?
 - Most Northerners not interested in ending slavery
 - Most Southerners did not own slaves
- And yet on both sides, the armies were composed primarily of *volunteers*
 - Above 80% on both sides
 - Granted, “volunteer” is a very tricky concept, given the pressure and incentives men faced
 - Still, most fought at least in part because they believed in the cause

Explanations

- Must look beyond the question of self-interest, narrowly defined
- Must instead focus on dominant ideologies that took root during the antebellum years – 30-40 years leading up to the war
 - Northern states
 - Rise of free labor ideology
 - Emergence of abolitionism
 - Southern states
 - Emergence of an aggressive defense of slavery as a “positive good”

Northern views on race

- Around 10% of northerners held abolitionist views
- Racism was pervasive and getting *worse*
 - New “scientific” racism developed in 1820s
- Effects of industrialization and immigration
- Black laws and state constitutions
 - Restricted rights blacks previously enjoyed
 - Some newly admitted states prohibited backs from entering
- Incredible hostility/violence directed at abolitionists
 - William Lloyd Garrison nearly lynched
- Even many of those who hated slavery believed the Constitution protected it
 - Could only prevent its expansion (Lincoln)

NY anti-abolitionist handbill, 1837

OUTRAGE.

Fellow Citizens,

AN

ABOLITIONIST,

of the most revolting character is among you, exciting the feelings of the North against the South. A seditious Lecture is to be delivered

THIS EVENING,

at 7 o'clock, at the Presbyterian Church in Cannon-street.

You are requested to attend and unite in putting down and silencing by peaceable means this tool of evil and fanaticism.

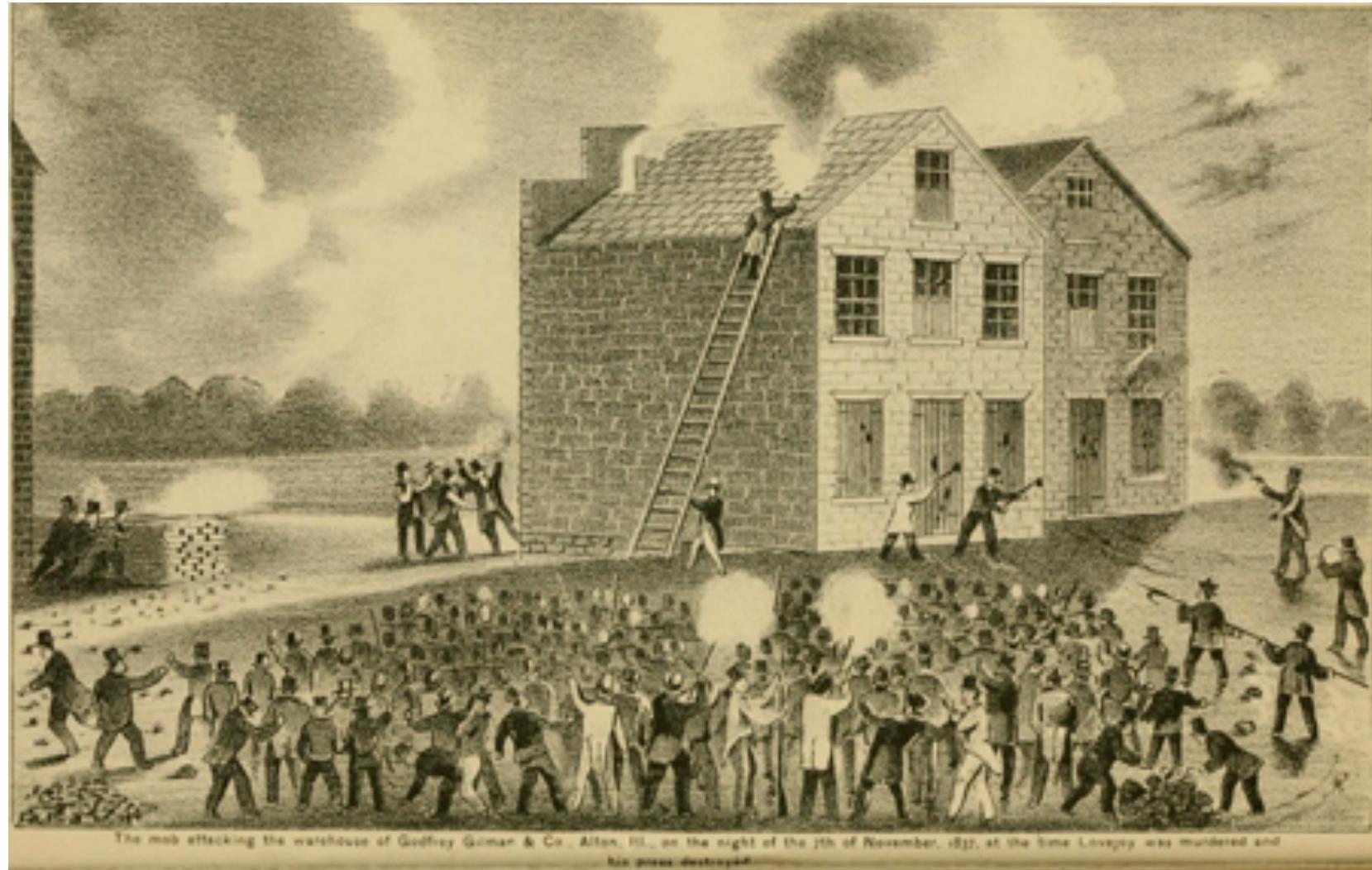
Let the rights of the States guaranteed by the Constitution be protected.

Feb. 27, 1837. The Union forever!

Elijah Lovejoy (1802-37)

- Presbyterian minister, abolitionist, printer
- Moved to Missouri, began publishing a religious newspaper and speaking out against slavery
- Mob destroyed his press, so he moved across the Mississippi River to Alton, IL
 - But mobs destroyed his press there, too
- Received a new printing press in November 1837
 - Lovejoy and some 20 armed men were defending the press at a warehouse until it could be installed
- Mob set warehouse on fire; Lovejoy shot and killed

Mob attacking warehouse storing Elijah J. Lovejoy's printing press



The mob attacking the warehouse of Godfrey Gilman & Co., Alton, Ill., on the night of the 7th of November, 1837, at the time Lovejoy was murdered and his press destroyed.

Lovejoy as an abolitionist martyr



During Lovejoy's memorial service, John Brown vowed to end slavery. Was already helping slaves escape on the underground railroad, but Lovejoy's murder further radicalized him.

Jan. 1838: Lincoln, a 28-year-old IL representative living in Springfield (just 70 miles from Alton) gave a speech condemning "*the increasing disregard for law which pervades the country.*"

Southern States

- Only about 1/3rd of white *households* enslaved people
 - Very misleading to stress that just 6% of *individuals* owned slaves (statistic often cited)
- States with highest percentage of slaves were the first to secede
- Those from slaveholding families were somewhat overrepresented in the Confederate Army
- Still, most Confederate soldiers did *not* own slaves
 - Probably around 60%

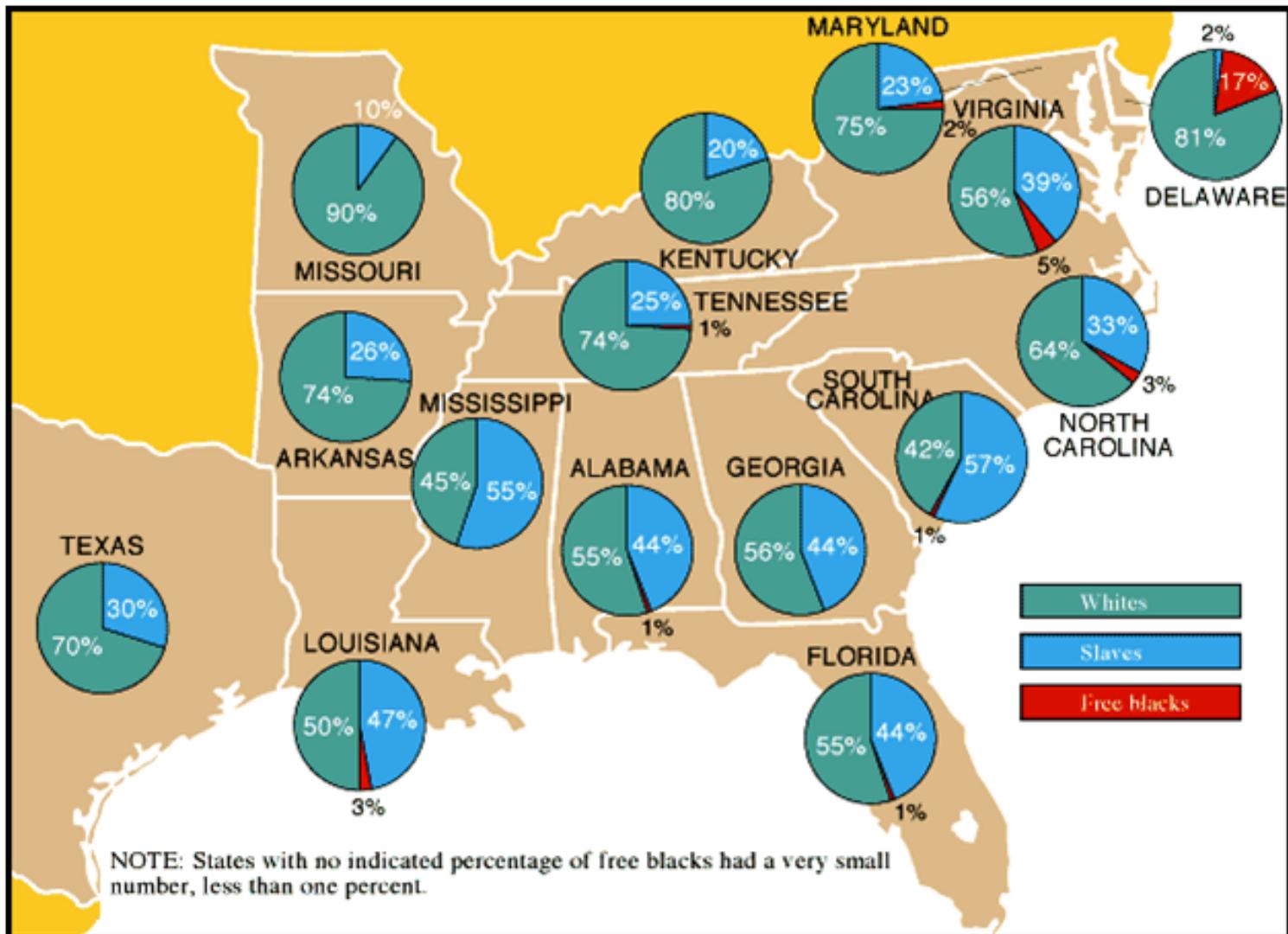
Where the enslaved lived

- Total number in the Lower South: 2,300,000
 - Slaves constituted 47% of total population
- Total number in the Upper South: 1,200,000
 - Slaves constituted 29% of total population
- Total number in the Border States: 430,000
 - 13% of total population
- Strong correlation between a state's inclination to secede and the percentage of slaves in its population

Stats on slave ownership/secession

- Lower South (SC, MS, FL, AL, GA, LA, TX) – states that seceded first
 - 36.7% of white families owned slaves
- Middle South (VA, AK, NC, TN) – states that seceded only after Lincoln called up troops after the firing on Fort Sumter
 - 25.3% of white families owned slaves
- Border States (DE, MD, KY, MO) – slave states that never joined the Confederacy
 - 15.9% of white families owned slaves

Southern population, 1860



What connected yeoman to planters?

- Economic dependency (of a very personal nature)
 - “Borrowed” their slaves
 - Brought cotton to big plantations to be ginned; etc.
- Economic interest
 - They also wanted free trade, a low tariff
- Ambition
 - Owning many slaves equated with high social status; many yeoman hoped to become planters themselves
- Democratic political culture/voting and militia service (slave patrols)
 - Connected all white men
- Fear of slave revolts and race “mixing”
- Shared culture
 - Attended same churches, etc.

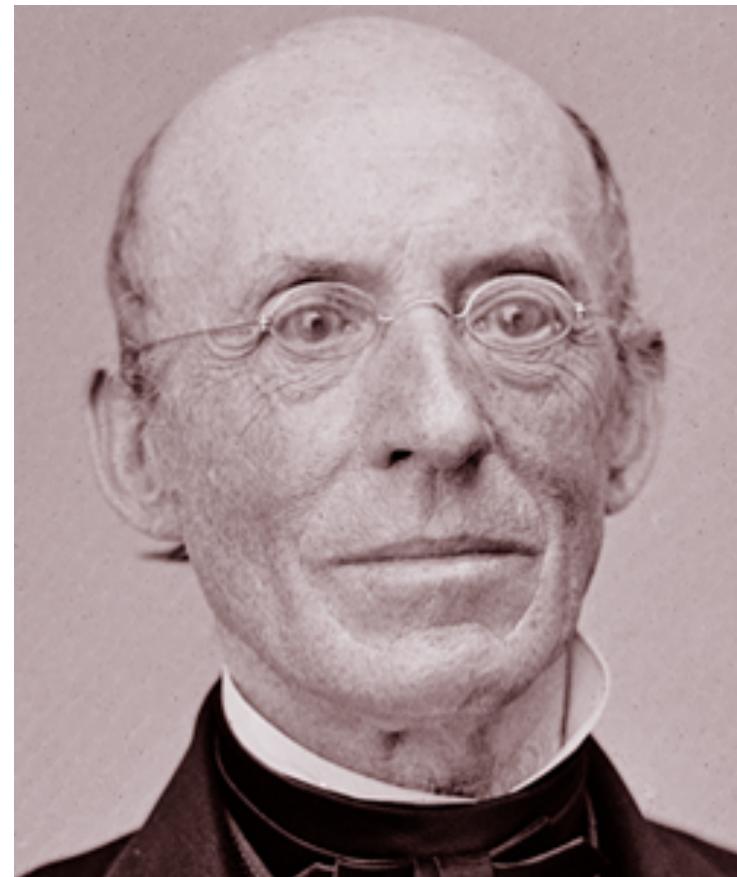
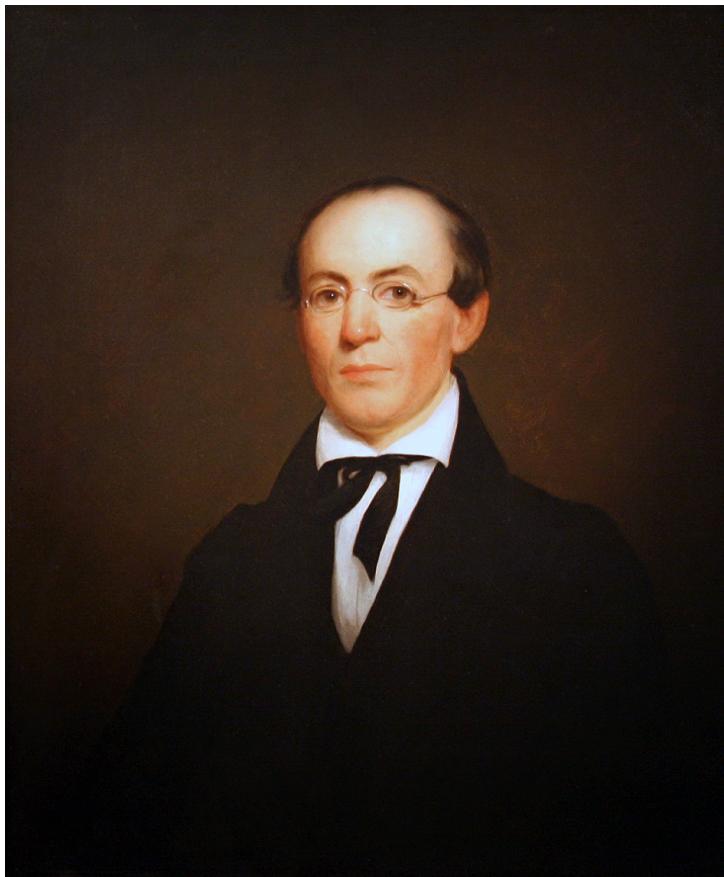
Rising fear of slave rebellions

- Nat Turner's Rebellion in VA (1831)
 - Largest slave revolt in US; led by a literate lay preacher who acknowledged his master had been kind to him
- Horrified not only to slave owners, but all whites who feared black vengeance/social disorder
- Resulted in strengthening of slave codes
 - More restrictions on slave movement, owning weapons, congregating, etc.
 - Militarization of the South
 - All white men in the community called upon to participate

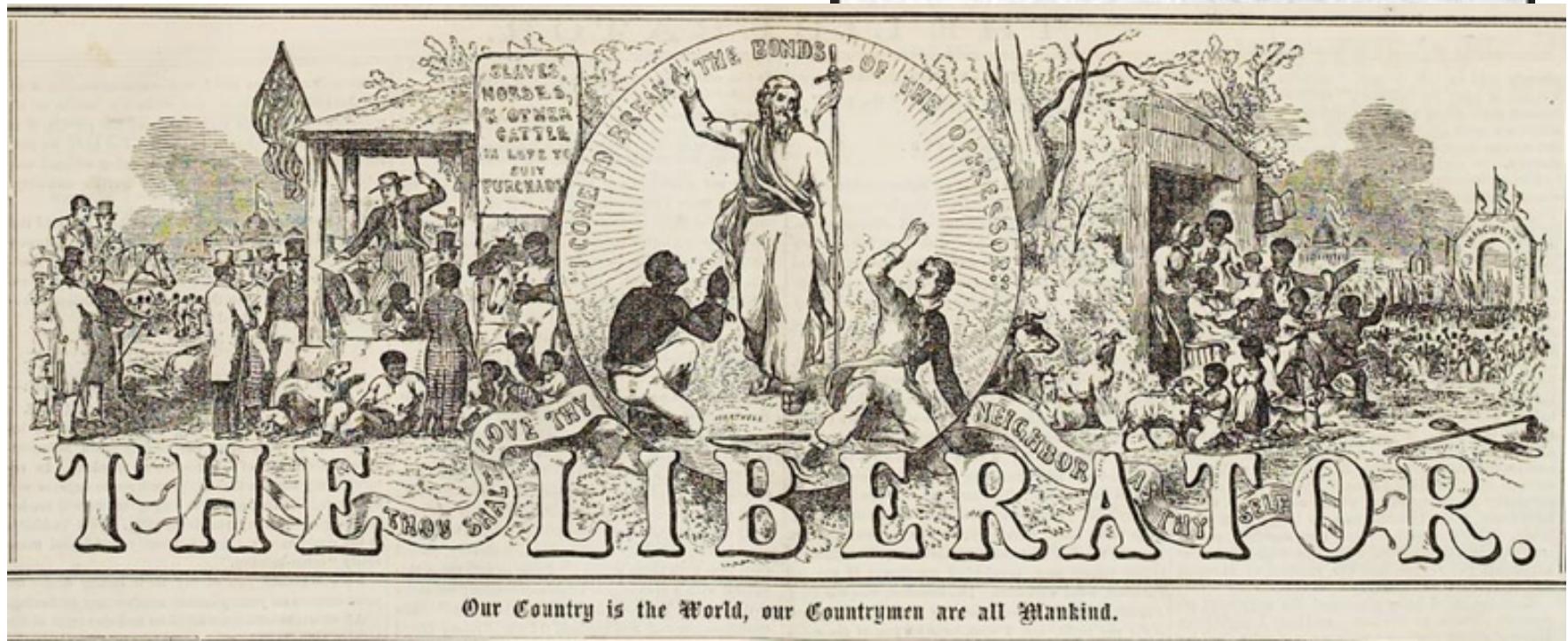
Abolitionism

- 1831: Same year as Nat Turner's Rebellion, William Lloyd Garrison begins publishing *The Liberator*
 - More radical than prior white-led movements
 - Emphasized the immorality of slavery: focus on the fate of the slave, not just the republic
 - Tone of moral indignation/righteousness that southerners abhorred
- 1833: Convention in Philadelphia (primary source reading)

William Lloyd Garrison



Masthead, 1830s and 1860s



American Anti-Slavery Convention

- Embraces pacifism and moral suasion
 - Frederick Douglass eventually breaks with Garrison over this
- No difference, in principle, between the African slave trade and American slavery
- Slaves should be freed immediately, with no compensation to owners
 - If anyone deserves compensation, it's the slaves
- African Americans should not be segregated or prevented from social/economic advancement through discrimination
- Colonization schemes immoral and absurd

Abolitionist movement takes off

- Flooding the South with abolitionist literature
 - Southerners protest that the US Post Office being used to disseminate “subversive” literature
- Petitions sent to Congress
 - Southerners impose the “gag rule”
- Gag rule
 - Succeeds in preventing Congress from considering anti-slavery petitions between 1836-44

Sen. John C. Calhoun (SC)

- Slavery as “a positive good speech” (1837)
- Delivered as a defense of the gag rule:
“abolition and Union cannot coexist”
 - *If we concede an inch, concession would follow concession–compromise would follow compromise, until our ranks would be so broken that effectual resistance would be impossible... Consent to receive these insulting petitions, and the next demand will be that they be referred to a committee in order that they may be deliberated and acted upon.*

Calhoun, cont.

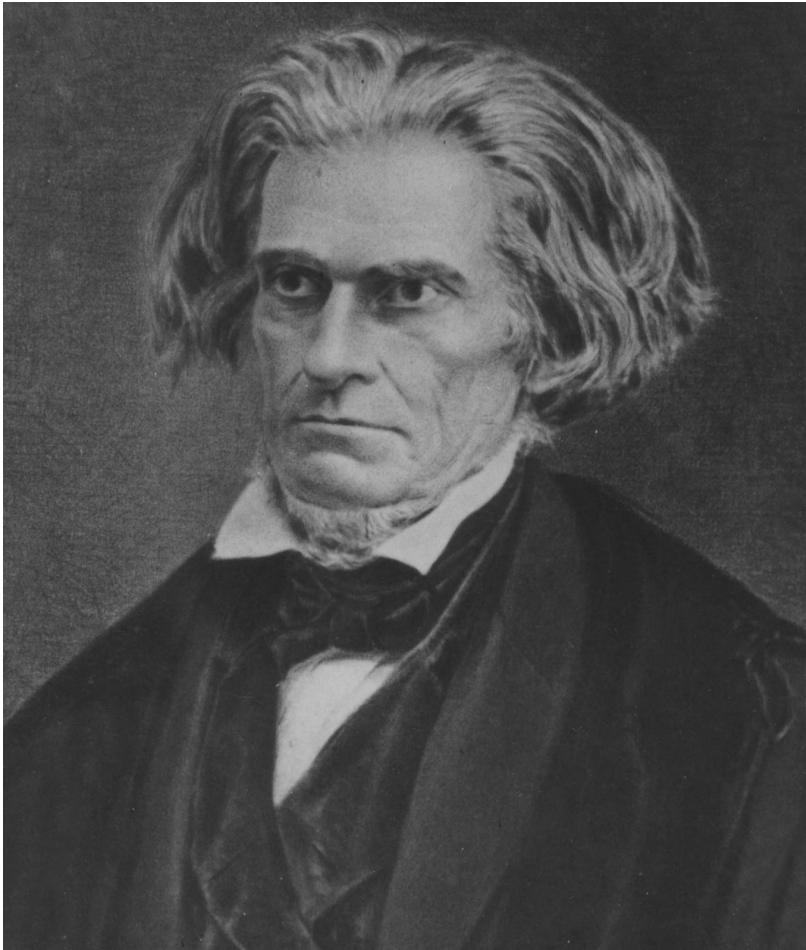
- “We of the South will not, **cannot**, surrender our institutions.”
 - *To maintain the existing relations between the two races, inhabiting that section of the Union, is indispensable to the peace and happiness of both. It cannot be subverted without drenching the country in blood, and extirpating one or the other of the races. Be it good or bad, [slavery] has grown up with our society and institutions, and is so interwoven with them that to destroy it would be to destroy us as a people.*
- And besides, he argues, slavery is good
 - Has uplifted African race
 - Rooted in racial difference decreed by nature
 - In all societies, one portion of the community lives on the labor of another

Calhoun's political journey

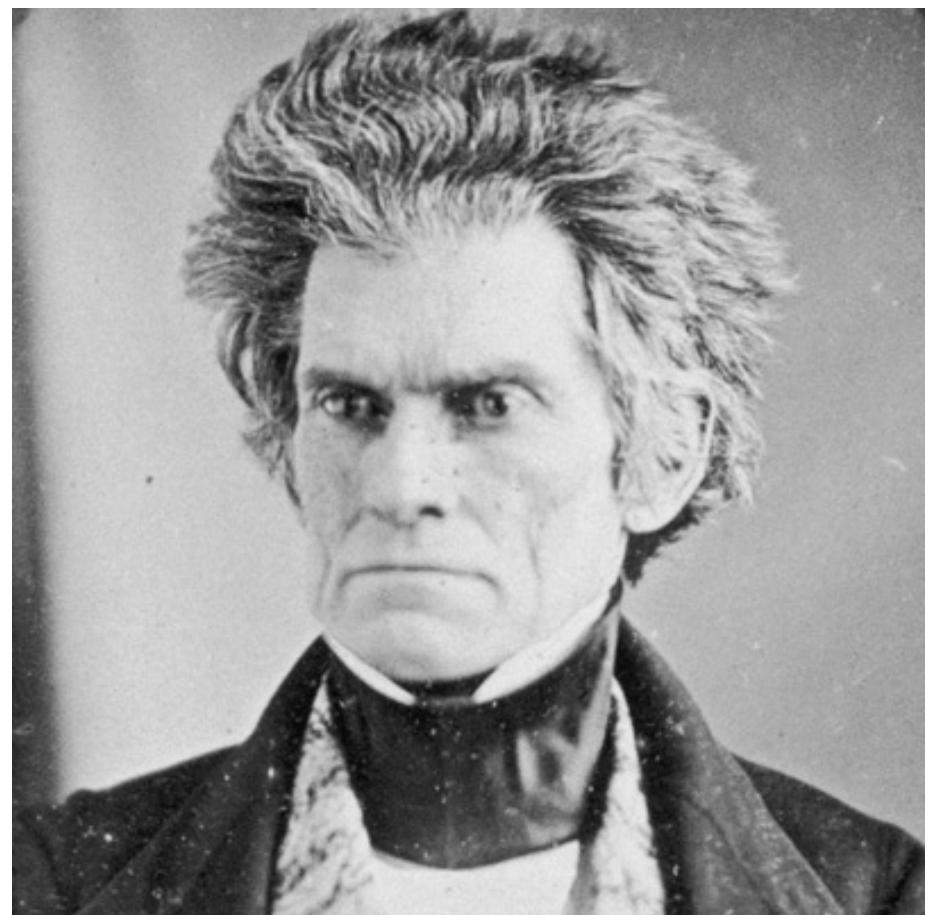
- John C. Calhoun's trajectory mirrored that of the nation
- Started out as a nationalist
 - Believed in strong central government; supported protective tariffs
- Gradually came to see the South's interests as radically different from the North's
 - Grew obsessed with growing population difference between the regions
- Switched to supporting of states' rights and free trade
- Developed a doctrine of nullification
 - States could reject federal laws
- 1832: South Carolina issued Ordinance of Nullification
 - New tariff law drawn up; SC ultimately backed down

Calhoun on the tariff, 1830

"I consider the Tariff, but as the occasion, rather than the real cause of the present unhappy state of things. The truth can no longer be disguised, that the present domestic institutions of the Southern States [i.e. slavery] and the constant direction which that and her soil and climate have given to her industry, has placed them in regard to taxation and appropriation in opposite relation to the majority of the Union."

A black and white portrait engraving of John C. Calhoun. He is shown from the chest up, wearing a dark, three-piece suit with a white shirt and a dark bow tie. His hair is long and wavy, styled in a manner typical of the early 19th century. He has a serious expression and is looking slightly to his left.

John C. Calhoun



Discuss

- How should we understand the fundamental differences that created a huge rift in American society and politics, beginning around 1830? Were these differences fundamentally economic or social/cultural?
- How does our contemporary moment compare? What are the differences and similarities?

Proslavery arguments

- Defense of slavery dated back to colonial times, but grew much more forceful in the 1830s
- Some appealed to the new so-called scientific studies that legitimized racism
- Others evoked religious explanations
 - Christ never spoke out against slavery
 - Old Testament patriarchs practiced slavery
 - Southerners emphasized original sin and the need for social restraints
 - Disputed perfectionist religious doctrines sweeping the North

Proslavery arguments, cont.

- Directly challenged the notion of “all men are created equal”
 - Claimed advanced societies always relied on a class of laborers to do the dirty work (“mudsill theory”)
- Slavery humane compared to the plight of Northern industrial workers
 - Workers discarded if sick or old
 - This argument was a powerful one
- Provided greater social stability
 - Compared the supposedly tranquil South to labor unrest in Northern cities

Free Labor Ideology

- Northerners believed in the superiority of free labor
 - Broad definition of “labor”
 - No fixed classes
 - Possibility for social advancement
 - Goal of economic independence
 - Expansion of free labor as solution to class divisions
- Western land/migration as safety valve
- American exceptionalism
- Problem: Southern legislators blocked proposals for a Homestead Act to give away free land
 - Calls for “Free Soil” – “free soilism”

Lincoln on labor

1847: “*And, inasmuch [as] most good things are produced by labour, it follows that [all] such things of right belong to those whose labour has produced them. But it has so happened in all ages of the world, that some have laboured, and others have, without labour, enjoyed a large proportion of the fruits. This is wrong, and should not continue. To [secure] to each labourer the whole product of his labour, or as nearly as possible, is a most worthy object of any good government.*”

Lincoln on labor, cont.

September 1859: “*The prudent, penniless beginner in the world, labors for wages awhile, saves a surplus with which to buy tools or land, for himself; then labors on his own account another while, and at length hires another new beginner to help him. This, say its advocates, is free labor—the just and generous, and prosperous system, which opens the way for all—gives hope to all, and energy, and progress, and improvement of condition to all.*”

Northern critique of South

- Southern economy inefficient and stagnant
- Class structure a fixed hierarchy
 - Society dominated by an aristocracy of slaveholders
 - Antithesis an economically fluid, socially mobile, democratic society
- Majority of Northerners came to believe the slave system affected *all* workers
 - Degraded the dignity of labor

Issue of Westward Expansion

- In the end, it all came down to what would happen with new territories
- White northerners felt that the expansion of slavery would worsen the plight of workers
 - Free whites wouldn't migrate West; labor surplus would build in the East
- But white southerners felt that forbidding the expansion of slavery threatened *their* interests
 - And insulted their honor
- Neither side wanted to lose representation in Congress

Republican Party Handbill (1856)

REPUBLICAN BULLETIN, No. 9.

THE ISSUE.

WHITE SLAVERY.

THE EXTENSION OF SLAVERY IS THE QUESTION NOT ONLY OVER FREE SOIL, BUT OVER FREE MEN. DO YOU DOUBT IT? READ THE WORDS OF THE HIGHEST AUTHORITIES IN THE SOUTH.

The *Richmond (Va.) Enquirer*, the oldest Democratic paper in the Old Dominion, a most able supporter of Buchanan for the Presidency, and of the Cincinnati Platform, speaks thus on this question. We take its own forcible words.

"Until recently, the defense of Slavery has labored under great difficulty, because its apologists, (for they were mere apologists,) took half way ground. They confined the defense of slavery to mere negro slavery; thereby giving up the slavery principle, admitting other forms of slavery to be wrong."

"The South maintains that SLAVERY IS RIGHT, NATURAL, AND NECESSARY, AND DOES NOT DEPEND UPON DIFFERENCE OF COMPLEXION. THE LAWS OF THE SLAVE STATES JUSTIFY THE HOLDING OF WHITE MEN IN BONDAGE."

Another leading press of the Democratic party, and a worthy organ of Mr. Buchanan, published in South Carolina, sustains the views we have quoted from the *Enquirer*. It uses this plain, straightforward language on the subject:

"Slavery is the natural and social condition of the laboring man, whether white or black. The great evil of Northern free society is, that it is burdened with a SERVILE CLASS OF MECHANICS AND LABORERS, UNFIT FOR SELF-GOVERNMENT, and yet clothed with the attributes and powers of citizens. Master and slave is a relation in society as necessary as that of parent and child; and the Northern States will yet have to introduce it. Their theory of a free government is a delusion."

But there is still broader ground on the subject of society, taken by the *Richmond Enquirer*. It says, in a recent number:

"Repeatedly have we asked the North, 'Has not the experiment of universal liberty FAILED? Are not the evils of FREE SOCIETY INSUFFICIENT? And do not most thinking men among you propose to subvert and reconstruct it?' Still no answer. This gloomy silence is another conclusive proof, added to many other conclusive evidences we have furnished, THAT FREE SOCIETY, IN THE LONG RUN, IS AN IMPRACTICABLE FORM OF SOCIETY."

Another paper, published in Virginia, the *South Side Democrat*, a journal distinguished for its faithful support of Mr. Buchanan, says:

"The expansion of slavery is a question not only of FREE SOIL but of FREE MEN. Do you doubt it? Read the words of the highest authorities in the south . . .

- 'SLAVERY IS RIGHT, NATURAL AND NECESSARY AND DOES NOT DEPEND UPON INSTANCES OF COMPLEXION. THE LAWS OF THE SLAVE STATES JUSTIFY THE HOLDING OF WHITE MEN IN BONDAGE.'

- 'Slavery is the natural condition of the laboring man, whether white or black. The great evil of Northern free society is that it is burdened with a servile class of mechanics and laborers unfit for self-government and yet clothed with the attributes and powers of citizens.'"

Why people went to war

- Most white Northerners came to believe the expansion of slavery *did* threaten their interests by
 - Corrupting their democratic republic
 - Foreclosing possibilities for social advancement
 - Degrading the value of manual labor
- Most white Southerners came to believe that the North's attempts to limit slavery was a presumptuous attack on their rights and culture