PROSLAVERY SENTIMENT IN IOWA
1838-1861

*By Joel H. Silbey**

In the early period of Iowa's history there was widespread support among the people for the institution of Negro slavery. Actually, Iowa's ante-bellum history can be divided into three different eras. During the first period, lasting until about 1846, great support of slavery existed; in the second period, lasting until 1854, the state underwent a transition; in the final period Iowa took its place in the roster of antislavery states. This gradually changing opinion was due in the main to the makeup of the population within the state. Several streams of immigration flowed into Iowa, coming from different sections of the country at different times. As a result, the preponderant element in the state's population changed. Because of the intimate relationship between proslavery sentiment and the composition of the population, it is necessary to understand first how and by whom Iowa was settled.

In the early years of the nineteenth century, cotton planters pushed their way into the interior counties of the South in search of fresh lands. For this and other reasons, many of the small farmers of those counties could not compete with the great slaveholders and either sold out or abandoned their property. Thereupon they, too, set out in a quest for new lands. From the Carolinas, Virginia, and Maryland, they moved into Kentucky and Tennessee. They halted there for a time and then proceeded North and West via the Mississippi River system into the lands later to comprise Illinois, Wisconsin, and Iowa.[1]

In June, 1833, the area above the confluence of the Mississippi and Des Moines rivers, known as the Iowa District, was thrown open to settlement

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[1] Frederick Jackson Turner, *The United States, 1830-1850* (New York, 1935), 261-2; and *Rise of the New West, 1819-1829* (New York, 1906), 54-5, 77; Henry Clyde Hubbart, "'Pro-Southern' Influences in the Free West, 1840-1865," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 20:46 (June, 1933).

by the national government, and Southerners began entering in droves. The Iowa District, extensively publicized in the South by travelers and army officers who had been stationed there, was considered to be one of the finest domains for farming in the whole Mississippi Valley. Steamboats from the South unloaded their passengers at such a port as Keokuk, while many farmers from Missouri moved north into the newly opened district. Within three years the Iowa District received over 10,000 settlers.[2]

As a result of this influx, Iowa took on the characteristics of a Southern community. Although most of the early settlers from the South were small farmers, there were also some sons of wealthy Southern families who sought greater opportunities for economic advancement in Iowa. This group furnished much of the practical leadership during the early days. Southern-born members formed the largest bloc in the Iowa delegation to the first Wisconsin territorial legislature (while Iowa was a part of Wisconsin Territory), and they predominated in the first legislature of Iowa Territory.[3]

Most of the early settlers in Iowa were accustomed to the institution of slavery and were quite willing to accept it as properly belonging wherever they were. Some of the settlers even brought a few slaves with them. The exact number of these, however, is unknown.[4] Most of the slaves were used as household servants because of a scarcity of such workers. They were well distributed throughout the territory, some being located as far north as Dubuque.[5] Augustus Caesar Dodge and George Wallace Jones,

[2] Unfortunately it is impossible to know how many of these were Southern-born, as the census of 1840 does not list nativities. Cyrenus Cole, *A History of the People of Iowa* (Cedar Rapids, Iowa, 1921), 130; Julia Anne Browning, "The Frontier Settlements of the Early Thirties" (M. A. thesis, State University of Iowa, 1933), 55; Frank I. Herriott, "Whence Came the Pioneers of Iowa?" *Annals of Iowa* (third series), 7:373, 452-6 (April, July, 1906).

[3] Dubuque *Daily Miners' Express*, Nov. 19, 1853; Herbert Quick, *One Man's Life* (Indianapolis, 1925), 68; speech of A. C. Dodge, Feb. 24, 1853, *Congressional Globe*, 32 Cong., 2 sess., Appendix, 202-205; John D. Barnhart, "The Southern Element in the Leadership of the Old Northwest," *Journal of Southern History*, 1:186 (May, 1935); Herriott, "Whence Came the Pioneers?" 459.

[4] Turner, *United States, 1830-1850*, 210-17; Leola Nelson Bergmann, "The Negro in Iowa," Iowa Journal of History and Politics, 46:6 (January, 1948), says there were but a few slaves brought in, but William E. Dodd, "The Fight for the Northwest, 1860," *American Historical Review*, 16:775 (July, 1911), says there were thousands of slaves in Iowa. The true figure undoubtedly lies closer to the Bergmann estimate.

[5] James Wilson Grimes, "To the People of Iowa," in William Salter, *Life of James W. Grimes* . . . (New York, 1876), 47.

Iowa's first two United States Senators, both owned slaves in the early period. At one time Dodge asserted in the United States Senate that his father had taken slaves into Wisconsin in open violation of the Ordinance of 1787 and that he himself had been reared by a Negro "mammy."[6] Many less distinguished settlers moved into the extreme Southern portion of Iowa in the belief that they were going into the slave state of Missouri. They held slaves in complete ignorance of the fact that they were living in an area closed to slavery by the Missouri Compromise of 1820.[7] In any event, the census of 1840 shows that there were sixteen slaves in Iowa, six males and ten females. How many were present earlier is a matter of conjecture. But in 1840 there were 172 free Negroes in Iowa, and it is probable that most of these were slaves who had been freed.[8]

Immigration into Iowa continued at a rapid pace. The immigrants came from all over the Union now, from Pennsylvania, from Ohio, from New York, from New England, as well as from the South. Foreigners also began to arrive in profusion, so that by 1849 the population of Iowa had grown to 154,573.[9] The pattern of immigration had changed radically. Overland travel was now as practicable as river travel, and Easterners and foreigners were arriving in greater numbers than Southerners. Despite this, the Southern elements maintained their leadership of territorial affairs all through this period of rapid settlement. In the House of Representatives of the fourth territorial legislature, they held sixteen seats out of a total of twenty-six and in the two constitutional conventions of 1844 and 1846, Southerners formed the largest single bloc of delegates present.[10] But this state of affairs could not last. Railroads, land companies, and newspapers in the eastern United States advertised the attractions of the state's fertile prairies. As a result, Iowa became an "El Dorado" to economically hard-

[6] *Cong. Globe*, 33 Cong., 1 sess., Appendix, 381; Burlington *Daily Telegraph*, Feb. 22, 1854.

[7] David Sparks, "The Birth of the Republican Party in Iowa" (Ph. D. thesis, University of Chicago, 1952), 2.

[8] *Sixth Census . . . United States* (Washington, 1841), 468.

[9] Burlington *Iowa Territorial Gazette*, Aug. 11, 1838; Mar. 31, 1839; Davenport *Gazette*, May 5, 1842; Bloomington *Herald*, Nov. 11, 1843; Apr. 20, 1844; Sept. 18, 1847; *Iowa Historical and Comparative Census, 1836-1880* (Des Moines, 1883), 196-7.

[10] Iowa City *Capital Reporter*, Jan. 29, 1842; Benjamin F. Shambaugh (ed.), *Fragments of the Debates of the Iowa Constitutional Conventions of 1844 and 1846 . . .* (Iowa City, 1900), 405-410, 413-15.

pressed Easterners who filled up the approaches to the state with their wagons.[11]

These newer settlers, hating slavery and the South, were more than a match for the older settlers and soon overwhelmed them by sheer numbers. The new settlers took over the political control of the state through the Republican party in the mid-1850's and kept it. But for the first twenty years of Iowa's history, she was Southern in outlook and action and gave aid and comfort to the proponents of slavery in the United States. This proslavery sentiment had developed in the first days of Iowa's history and stayed until the Civil War.

Although many of the people of the Iowa District had been driven from their homes by the expansion of the slave-plantation system, it seemed that they were still, with few exceptions, in favor of slavery. To them, the institution was the only "natural and right" condition for Negroes, and as a consequence they defended slavery throughout the territorial period. In the year 1837 the *Wisconsin Territorial Gazette*, published at Burlington, Iowa, unleashed an attack on Elijah Lovejoy, the controversial abolitionist leader. The *Gazette* warned Lovejoy and his followers that their "impertinent interference" in matters of which they were profoundly ignorant was extremely dangerous to the future well-being of the United States. Furthermore, since there was a "sound spirit" in regard to abolition in both Illinois and Iowa, their efforts would be unrewarded there. To the *Gazette* this "sound spirit" was a hatred of abolitionism and an acceptance of the institution of slavery.[12]

There were two reasons for this proslavery attitude. The first was the fear of the economic competition that might come from free Negroes with the consequent lowering of white wages. This, in turn might lead to social equality for the Negroes and open the way for the amalgamation of the races, an abhorrent thought to those Iowans who had been reared in a land where Negroes were considered inferior and who sincerely believed

[11] Burlington *Iowa State Gazette*, Oct. 3, 1849; May 22, 1850; Oct. 1, 1853; Burlington *Hawk-Eye*, Apr. 12, Nov. 1, 1849; Iowa City *Republican*, Oct. 24, 31, 1849.

[12] Burlington *Wisconsin Territorial Gazette*, Oct. 5, 19, 1837. A preacher who was born in Ohio of Virginian parents said of himself and his contemporaries who pioneered with him in Iowa, "We hated an abolitionist as we hated a nigger." Quoted in Frank I. Herriott, "Iowa and the First Nomination of Abraham Lincoln," *Annals of Iowa* (third series), 8:199 (October, 1907).

that the colored man was of a lower order. Any equalizing of the status between the two races was not to be tolerated.[13]

The second reason why Iowans defended slavery was their alleged paternalistic concern for the Negro's own good. Emancipation of the Negroes, they claimed, only resulted in injury to both races, since freedmen were unable to care for themselves and were constantly in trouble. Jails and poor houses were filled with such freedmen, they claimed, and Negroes were better kept in slavery, where they at least were cared for.[14]

The dangers which Iowans saw in emancipation led them to demand that the political issue of slavery be dropped on local, state, and national levels. Constant agitation of the issue could weaken the bonds of union and leave the western states at the mercies of the two opposing sections. The activities of the abolitionists in the Northern states were thus sources of growing anxiety, and Iowa newspapers utilized every opportunity to assail the abolitionists and warn them against carrying their activities into Iowa. One editor declared, "we are entirely Southern in our feelings, and hold that every attempt to agitate the abolition of slavery that does not come from the slaveholders themselves is an unwarrantable interference in their domestic concerns, and should receive unqualified condemnation."[15] All in all, "abolitionist" became a term of derision and derogation used by both political parties, since the majority of Whigs hated the abolitionist as much as did the Democrats. So bitter was the feeling in this regard that for a long time most Iowans made no distinction between moderate antislavery and extreme abolitionism. Fearing the results of constant agitation of the slavery issue, they opposed even the mildest antislavery measures.

By 1838 a measure to grant Iowa territorial status was introduced into Congress, but was opposed by Senator John C. Calhoun of South Carolina, who declared that he would not "consent to the formation of a new Territory which in a few years would become a powerful abolition State." George W. Jones, then the delegate from Wisconsin Territory, assured Calhoun that Iowans hated abolitionism as much as any Southerner, but Calhoun replied, with prophetic insight, that when the people of New

[13] Iowa City *Capital Reporter*, quoted in Iowa City *Standard*, Oct. 10, 1844; Bergmann, "The Negro in Iowa," 6-7.

[14] Burlington *Wisconsin Territorial Gazette*, Oct. 5, 26, 1837.

[15] Burlington *Iowa Territorial Gazette*, June 29, 1839. See also Bloomington *Herald*, Nov. 10, 1843; Iowa City *Capital Reporter*, Oct. 19, 1844.

England, New York, and the Western Reserve began to enter Iowa it would become "the strongest abolition State in the Union." Calhoun's opposition was so strong that Jones finally had to resort to trickery to have the Iowa bill enacted while the South Carolina Senator was absent.[16]

Political life in the new Territory began almost at once with the Democratic party in control. This was due to the fact that the counties of southern Iowa, which were the first ones settled, were the main Democratic strongholds and contained twice as many people as the rest of the territory.[17] In the north, only Dubuque County showed the same Democratic consistency. The Whig party, for its part, was smaller and less active than the Democratic. It contained whatever antislavery sentiment existed during the territorial years and thus earned the title, "nigger party." The sincerity of the party's position was questioned by one editor who accused the Whigs of being interested only in the abolitionist vote centered in four counties in the southeastern corner of Iowa. These were settled partly by Quakers and Danes who not only established an underground railroad but also made Missouri slave catchers unwelcome.[18]

The Democratic party in Iowa asserted its hostility to antislavery sentment repeatedly in party conventions. In its 1840 convention it quoted with approval Martin Van Buren's statement that he was the "inflexible and uncompromising opponent of every attempt on the part of Congress to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia," and that he was determined "to resist the slightest interference with it in the states" where it existed.[19] Not content with that, the legislatures and the two constitutional conventions of the territorial period discussed ways and means of excluding free Negroes from Iowa. The result was a series of anti-Negro and pro-Southern enactments that gave Iowa the outward appearance of a Southern state. For example, the first Legislative Assembly of the Territory enacted a law declaring that after April 1, 1839, Negroes and mulattoes could not live within Iowa Territory unless they could show a certificate of actual freedom. If they had such a certificate they were to be placed under a bond of

[16] John C. Parish, *George Wallace Jones* (Iowa City, 1912), 127-30.

[17] *Iowa . . . Census, 1836-1880*, 196.

[18] Burlington *Iowa Territorial Gazette*, June 1, 1844; Sparks, "Birth of the Republican Party in Iowa," 33.

[19] David C. Mott, "Iowa Political Conventions and Platforms," *Annals of Iowa* (third series), 14:37-8 (July, 1923).

$500. If they could not post this sum, they were to be hired out by the county commissioners "for the best price in cash."[20] The high cost of this bond and the threat of virtual enslavement was tantamount to driving Negroes from the Territory.

The convention which met at Iowa City in 1844 to draw up a state constitution furnished the next occasion for a discussion of anti-Negro legislation. Several petitions were presented asking that the rights of citizens, including the right to vote, be granted to Negroes. These petitions were referred to a committee for study. This committee later reported against accepting the ideas embodied in the petitions because it feared dangerous agitation would result from the granting of such rights. Still later, Francis Gehon, a native of Tennessee, moved that the convention make sure that no petitions calling for Negro suffrage be entertained by a future state legislature. He said that the presenting of these petitions was an evil that should be kept out of Iowa, as such ideas were dangerous to the permanency of the Union.[21] The desire to end all agitation on the dangerous subject met with approval both in and out of the convention.[22]

Another resolution offered at the convention asked that a committee investigate the expediency of excluding all "persons of color" from the state. This was laid on the table in favor of another which directed the legislature to pass laws as soon as possible to prevent the settlement of Negroes and mulattoes within its jurisdiction. Comments were heard to the effect that free Negroes must be kept out of Iowa at all costs. The people were said to desire a policy that would permit Negroes in Iowa only as slaves, not as free men. An attempt to write this into the constitution as a provision compelling the legislature to exclude Negroes failed only because it was asserted that it might hinder Iowa's entry into the Union. The constitution as finally written contained certain restrictive provisions against Negroes that prevented them from voting, serving in the state legislature, or in the state militia. These provisions were continued in the Constitution of 1846 under which Iowa entered the Union.[23]

[20] Cole, *History of the People of Iowa*, 147.

[21] Shambaugh (ed.), *Fragments of the Debates*, 11, 26, 42, 123.

[22] Iowa City *Capital Reporter*, Oct. 19, 1844.

[23] Shambaugh (ed.), *Fragments of the Debates*, 33, 66, 155-6; Benjamin F. Shambaugh (ed.), *Documentary Material Relating to the History of Iowa* (3 vols., Iowa City, 1897-1901), 1:153, 155, 164, 194, 195, 204.

When the Constitution of 1844 was submitted to Congress for approval it became a pawn in the continuing struggle for advantage between North and South. In order to have more territory available for the creation of free states, Northern Congressmen cut Iowa's boundaries. The angered people of Iowa refused to accept this amendment.[24] Iowa's delegate to Congress, A. C. Dodge, returned to explain to his constituents what had happened. He fixed the blame for the situation squarely on Northern Congressmen who, he said, had a "fixed determination" to disregard Iowa's wishes on the boundary matter and to curtail them as the North saw fit. Southern Congressmen, he pointed out, had not voted against the boundaries desired by the Iowans, further proof, as far as he was concerned, that the interests of the people of Iowa were with the South.[25]

The interests that Dodge referred to were based upon common ideals and a common heritage. They were also based upon economic ties. Iowa depended largely upon the Mississippi River to get her produce to market. And as long as this was true, she was of necessity allied with the slave states that controlled the river.[26] This economic dependence certainly played its part in shaping political opinion in Iowa concerning the South and slavery. Many Iowa politicians became known as "doughfaces" — Northern men with Southern principles. Few of them, however, minded this derogatory epithet, for they realized how much their position in the Union depended on the South. Dodge emphasized this before Congress on several occasions.[27]

The South, too, realized that it had a potent ally in Iowa as well as in the other Northern states dependent upon the Mississippi River as their main highway to outside markets. In an effort to cement this alliance, a commercial convention was called to meet at Memphis, Tennessee, in late 1845. Eleven slave states were joined by delegates from Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, and Pennsylvania. The similarities of interests of the attending states

[24] The full story can be followed in *Niles' National Register*, Feb. 22, Apr. 5, 19, May 3, July 19, Aug. 23, Sept. 13, Nov. 29, 1845.

[25] William Salter, "Augustus C. Dodge," *Iowa Historical Record*, 3:403 (January, 1887); Iowa City *Capital Reporter*, Oct. 22, 1845.

[26] Bloomington *Herald*, June 3, 1842.

[27] See, for instance, his speech of Feb. 22, 1851, *Cong. Globe*, 31 Cong., 2 sess., Appendix, 310-11.

and the necessity for future unified planning were stressed.[28] But the Mississippi River was about to lose its position in the economic life of the West. Eastern railroads were pushing out from the Atlantic seaboard and bringing Eastern markets closer to Western produce. However, Iowa's delegates continued to look South as they pushed for a north-south railroad connecting Dubuque and Keokuk.[29]

Iowa became a state of the Union in 1846, when her boundary dispute was finally settled. Almost immediately she was plunged into national politics that would destroy her old ties and allow a group with different convictions to overthrow her old leaders. But during her eight-year territorial history a majority of her people clearly cast their lot with the South. They permitted slaves in their midst, excluded and restricted free Negroes, denounced abolitionists, and sought ways to improve communications with the South. Obviously Iowans were conscious of their Southern heritage, and to bolster this consciousness Iowa's representatives in Congress aided the South in speech and vote.

The national political scene from 1846 to 1854 was set against the backdrop of an increasingly tense sectional struggle over the issue of slavery expansion. North stood against South for control of the territories seized from Mexico. The attempts of one section or the other to assert authority over the new lands led to bitter controversy. The period began with the introduction of the Wilmot Proviso and ended with the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act. Between these two events the Free Soil election of 1848, the Compromise of 1850, and the Finality Campaign of 1852 stood out as milestones in the ever growing crisis over slavery expansion.

In these years, Iowa's politics reflected the national turmoil. Immediately upon gaining statehood, Iowa sent Shepherd Leffler, a native Virginian, and Serranus C. Hastings, a New Yorker by birth, to represent her in the lower house of Congress. Due to political maneuvering within the state, Iowa remained unrepresented in the Senate until late in 1848, when the state legislature at last elected George Wallace Jones and Augustus Caesar Dodge as Iowa's first United States Senators.[30]

Jones was born in Vincennes, Indiana, among slaveholding farmers who

[28] Herbert Wender, *Southern Commercial Conventions* (Baltimore, 1930), 53-69; *Niles' National Register*, Nov. 29, Dec. 6, 1845.

[29] Iowa City *Capital Reporter*, Aug. 25, 1847.

[30] *Ibid.*, Dec. 13, 1848.

were attempting to have slavery legalized there. Jones's father was one of the leaders of this movement and had brought his son up in the Southern milieu. The younger Jones attended Kentucky's Transylvania University, where he met many who were to influence his later actions. Such men as David Atchison and Jefferson Davis were friends of his college days, and Davis remained a close friend throughout Jones's life. Years afterward Jones was to tell James Buchanan that he held "no secrets from Mr. Davis." With such deep attachment to Southerners, Jones learned to hate abolitionism and glorify the South as much as any man born in that section, and so he admitted.[31]

Augustus Caesar Dodge was born in Ste. Genevieve, Missouri, and later moved to Galena, Illinois, and then to Burlington, Iowa, where he entered politics. Dodge, like Jones, absorbed much of Southern culture and many Southern views during his army service and his experience in Congress. It was said that he "carried with him much of southern manners."[32] He was an extremely popular political figure in his state and was naturally elected to the Senate.

Both Iowa Senators, then, had Southern backgrounds, were amenable to Southern influences, and might be expected to support the South against the North. Dodge and Jones began their senatorial careers when the Wilmot Proviso occupied the center of the national stage. In 1846 Representative David Wilmot of Pennsylvania had moved that, in the future, slavery should not be allowed to exist in any of the territory acquired from Mexico.[33] This Proviso destroyed Democratic hopes that slavery would never become an issue in national politics. Although the Iowa Democratic leaders endeavored to play down the Proviso, the Whigs insisted that it was a "test question between the slave and non-slave holding states, or rather between the friends of the Union and nullifiers."[34] Dodge and Jones were attacked for being against the Proviso and for holding "the extreme Southern position" on all questions. Congressman Leffler was also assailed for his anti-Proviso position. The Whigs accused the Iowa legislature of the "meanest kind of neutrality" for refusing to compel its con-

[31] Parish, *George Wallace Jones*, 65-6, 188, 202.

[32] Edward H. Stiles, *Recollections and Sketches of Notable Lawyers and Public Men of Early Iowa . . .* (Des Moines, 1916), 83.

[33] *Cong. Globe*, 29 Cong., 1 sess., 1217.

[34] Iowa City *Standard*, July 28, 1847.

gressional leaders to vote for the Proviso, thereby putting the state in the position of "cringing" to the South on the issue.[35]

The Democratic newspapers, in their turn, defended the delegation and denounced the Whig agitation. The Proviso was characterized as time-wasting and ridiculous and of no use except to stir up old antagonisms that were best forgotten. It was considered dangerous because it would destroy the balance between the North and South and was actually an appeal for bloodshed.[36]

All indications are that the majority of the people of Iowa regarded the Wilmot Proviso as an unnecessary and dangerous restriction and were willing to follow the lead of the Democratic party. There were some elements of dissent, but in this early period these elements still comprised a definite minority of the population. In no way did the legislature take any stand in favor of the Wilmot Proviso, and Iowa was the only free state not to do so. The original Southern settlers still controlled the state, and they followed the lead of the Democratic party on national issues. But at the same time there was the beginning of a subtle change in Iowa. Cognizant of the shifting population, the proslavery elements had gone on the defensive and sought to soothe both old and new elements in the state. The answer seemed to lie in playing down the issue of slavery completely. However, the force of circumstance was against this.

The 1848 presidential election gave birth to the Free Soil party, whose main tenet was the Wilmot Proviso. The party nominated Martin Van Buren and Charles Francis Adams as its candidates. Iowa Democrats saw in this movement a resurgence of abolitionism and characterized the candidates as the "free nigger" ticket intent on destroying the Democratic party.[37] Although the Free Soilers received only 1,100 votes in Iowa, they did bring the slavery issue into the open for all to see, and they established a newspaper at Mount Pleasant, *The Iowa Freeman*, that worked overtime to publicize their cause.[38] The result of this was that Iowans

[35] Burlington *Hawk-Eye*, Jan. 4, 25, Feb. 22, 1849; Feb. 7, 1850; Bloomington *Herald*, Feb. 20, 1849.

[36] Burlington *Iowa State Gazette*, June 13, 1849; Muscatine *Democratic Enquirer*, Feb. 10, 1849; Iowa City *Capital Reporter*, Mar. 17, 24, Dec. 29, 1847; Mar. 8, Aug. 9, 1848; Jan. 31, Feb. 21, 1849.

[37] Iowa City *Capital Reporter*, Aug. 9, 23, Sept. 6, Oct. 4, 11, 1848.

[38] Bloomington *Herald*, Dec. 2, 1848; Theodore Clarke Smith, *The Liberty and Free Soil Parties in the Northwest* (New York, 1897), 323.

could no longer ignore the slavery issue, a fact that became apparent with the crisis of 1850.

The Thirty-first Congress, which convened in December, 1849, was to be the battleground for the sectional struggle over the Mexican cession. Iowa newspapers took immediate interest in the contest. The Democratic press still wanted no agitation on the slavery issue, for this would merely produce irresponsible discussions on the value of the Union. The papers felt that the whole issue was "nonsense," since slavery could never flourish in California and New Mexico. On the other hand, the leading Whig newspapers in Iowa at once took a belligerent attitude toward the South for its opposition to the admission of California as a free state, and warned Northern Congressmen that no compromise was to be allowed on the issue.[39]

In Congress, Henry Clay brought forward a series of compromise measures in an effort to settle the outstanding problems connected with slavery. The measures provided for the entrance of California into the Union as a free state, the organization of the territories of Utah and New Mexico with no mention of slavery, the abolishment of slavery in the District of Columbia, and a law to recapture fugitive slaves.[40]

The Iowans in Congress were relieved by the introduction of Clay's compromise plan. As they declared, they could both work for the Union and repel abolitionism through the compromise. Dodge declared that the plan was the basis for restoring good feeling both in Congress and in the nation. His avowal was generally supported by both Whigs and Democrats in Iowa. One influential Whig newspaper declared that Dodge was right on the "abstract question of the Union" and should be followed. The citizens of Iowa, reported another, should overlook the little evil that may come from the bill and be satisfied with the settlement of these long-vexed questions.[41] From Democratic party conventions in the state came a series of resolutions favoring the compromise measures. At the same time, however, other resolutions condemning the compromise bills, especially the one regulating fugitive slaves, arrived in Washington. But these latter reso-

[39] Burlington *Iowa State Gazette*, June 9, 1849; Iowa City *Republican*, Dec. 5, 1849; May 15, 1850.

[40] *Cong. Globe*, 31 Cong., 1 sess., 244-7.

[41] Muscatine *Democratic Enquirer*, May 30, 1850; Burlington *Hawk-Eye*, Mar. 14, 1850.

lutions were in the minority. Most Iowans seemed willing to accept the compromise in order to end the three years of agitation on the subject of Negro slavery.[42]

Fortified by these endorsements, Dodge and Jones entered into the battle for the compromise measures wholeheartedly. They pointed out that Iowa supported the compromise, since only a few citizens condemned their course, and that Iowans were opposed to any "ism" which was calculated to "distract and divide the American Democracy." As proof of this, Jones mentioned that the Iowa legislature had refused to instruct him and his colleague to vote for the Wilmot Proviso, an act of "wisdom . . . and a high compliment" to them. The two Iowa Senators assailed extremists in both sections but reserved their bitterest attacks for the abolitionists and pro-Wilmot Proviso men, those "engines of demagogism" who attempted to subvert the sacred rights of Americans. They pledged that they would forever be opposed to the "fell spirit of abolitionism" which was really imbued with "the spirit of treason" and therefore it was right for the South to oppose it.[43]

Despite some adverse reactions from a segment of the Whig press to this type of comment, Senator Dodge continued in the same vein. He declared that he would do so even if the Northern press denounced him as proslavery, and he continued to snipe at Free Soilers, abolitionists, and the Wilmot Proviso whenever the opportunity presented itself.[44] When the various compromise measures were voted upon, Dodge and Jones consistently voted with the South. They were the only Northern Senators, except for Daniel Sturgeon of Pennsylvania, to vote for the engrossment of the Fugitive Slave Bill prior to final passage.[45]

By September, 1850, the various compromise measures had passed both houses and had become the law of the land. In Iowa the reaction was one of relief that the great struggle was over. A letter to the Iowa City *Republican* summed up the general feeling:

> Upon the whole, a great work has been accomplished, and, I do not regret that the matter is settled. . . . I trust the peace of the country is restored, and that the response for which the nation

[42] *Cong. Globe*, 31 Cong., 1 sess., 1389, Appendix, 1716; Burlington *Hawk-Eye*, June 13, 1850.

[43] *Cong. Globe*, 31 Cong., 1 sess., 1085-6, 1333, Appendix, 910, 1716.

[44] *Ibid.*, 31 Cong., 1 sess., 1085-6, 1146-8, 1452, Appendix, 1345.

[45] *Ibid.*, 31 Cong., 1 sess., 1239, 1481, 1555, 1660.

> pants may forever banish the idea of self-destruction; that dissolution, secession, revolution, and nullification, may be erased from the mind of man, or only remembered to be guarded against.[46]

The Fugitive Slave Act, however, soon became the subject of some adverse comment in Iowa, although there was an active defense of the act, too. One paper called it "the most important equitable and just of the whole seven forming the Compromise," and suggested that any who wished to defy the law would be better off emigrating to Liberia.[47] Official sanction was given to the law by two Iowa Governors when they requested obedience to federal laws by all citizens.[48] Even the Whig press upheld the Fugitive Slave Law. They declared that it was necessary for peace and that the South, feeling crushed by the overwhelming weight of the North, must be given every assurance that the people would obey the law and the Constitution. To buttress this, the Whigs pointed out that when Christ reigned on earth he had made no declaration against slavery. Indeed, he had told slaves to obey their masters.[49]

The Iowa legislature supported the Compromise by adopting a series of resolutions declaring that "all the controversy respecting the prohibition of slavery in the territories is forever laid to sleep." Therefore, it was the duty of all citizens to "conform to their requisitions and carry them out in good faith," no matter what the individual's feelings were toward specific sections of the laws. The Fugitive Slave Law, as part of the law of the land, must be obeyed. In stating their position, the legislators said they were not "apoligists for slavery . . . [but] merely the advocates of their country's integrity, and as a consequence of her largest and most effectual good."[50] This appeal to the citizens to conform to the laws is significant in that, of all the measures enacted, the only one in which the individual citizen had a choice whether to obey or not was the Fugitive Slave Law. The others were merely organic enactments.

[46] "Iowa" to the editor, Iowa City *Republican*, Sept. 25, 1850.

[47] Burlington *Iowa State Gazette*, Sept. 25, Nov. 13, 1850.

[48] See Gov. Ansel Briggs's Second Biennial Message, Dec. 3, 1850, and Gov. Stephen Hempstead's Inaugural Address, Dec. 4, 1850. Quoted in Benjamin F. Shambaugh (ed.), *Messages and Proclamations of the Governors of Iowa* (7 vols., Iowa City, 1903-1905), 1:409-410, 428.

[49] Iowa City *Republican*, Sept. 25, 1850; Burlington *Hawk-Eye*, Oct. 31, Nov. 14, 28, Dec. 5, 1850.

[50] *Iowa House Journal, 1850*, 186, 190; *Iowa Senate Journal, 1850*, 94-5.

Senator Jones presented the Iowa resolutions to the Senate as "speaking the true American sentiment upon the question of slavery." He said that he was gratified because they were an expression of approval of his own and his colleague's course during the previous session and reflected the true sentiment of the Democratic party in Iowa which had not succumbed to the "fanatical excitement" engendered by the Wilmot Proviso. He repeated that he and Dodge "were the only Senators from any of the free States who were not instructed to vote for the Wilmot Proviso, and its kindred abolition doctrines."[51] The resolutions were presented to the House of Representatives by Lincoln Clark, newly elected Democratic Congressman who had formerly served in the lower house of the Alabama legislature and in that state's judiciary. Arriving in Dubuque in 1848, he was among the last group of Southern emigrants to Iowa that wielded significant influence in the state's politics.[52]

In Congress all seemed serene. All controversial questions were compromised, and there seemed to be nothing of national interest to occupy its time. Nevertheless, in the Northern states a storm was brewing. Expressions of discontent over the Fugitive Slave Law became ominous. In Iowa, Missouri slaveowners crossed and recrossed the state seeking runaway Negroes. Many of the people of southern Iowa were quite content with this. But there were others who were not, and they resisted the slave catchers and aided the slaves whenever possible. Again, partisan newspapers defended or attacked the law in bitter terms.[53]

The renewed agitation penetrated to Washington, where Senator Dodge made a violent attack on those who were trying to undermine the law and reopen the question. It was the abolitionists who were trying to nullify the law, he charged. These men were insincere and lacking in integrity, for their sole concern was to free the Negroes and then to ignore them. The South, he felt, must be protected against the scheming of these men. That section had the right to enjoy its prosperity in security under the Constitution. "I am not the friend of the blacks," he emphasized, "as

[51] *Cong. Globe*, 32 Cong., 1 sess., 103.

[52] *Ibid.*, 692; *Biographical Directory of the American Congress, 1774-1927* (Washington, D. C., 1928), 816.

[53] O. A. Garretson, "Travelling on the Underground Railroad in Iowa," Iowa Journal of History and Politics, 22:418-20, 428 (July, 1924); Iowa City *Republican*, Dec. 13, 1851; Iowa City *Capital Reporter*, May 19, 1852.

against my own race and my own countrymen." He then took exception to some remarks Senator James M. Mason of Virginia had made about Northerners not keeping the peace, vigorously pointing out the stand of Iowa in support of the Fugitive Slave Law and the right of the South. Mason immediately arose and replied that he "certainly did not mean to include that State in my remarks in reference to public opinion in the free States generally. He has characterized that State properly. There is a sound state of public opinion there, and I trust it may long pertain to that State."[54]

A year later, on August 26, 1852, Dodge spoke once more in defense of his support of the Fugitive Slave Law. He acknowledged that the law was intended to benefit the slave states, but he justified his vote for it on the grounds that he was disinterested in the institution of slavery and wished only to end all fears on both sides. He concluded this portion of his speech with a declaration on Negro-white relations:

> Mr. President, the questions involved in this slavery agitation rise in importance far above the fugitive law, and to a great way beyond even the abolition of slavery in the States of the South — revolutionary and destructive of life and property as the latter would be. Behind these are those grave and momentous questions of equality, amalgamation, and superiority between the Caucasian and African races. The idea of equality and amalgamation of those two races in the United States of America is utopian in the extreme, and I think wicked and disgraceful. With the exception of a fanatical few, to state the question is to show its utter impracticability, and to draw upon its author the execration of all men of all parties, save the Abolition party. As long as the two races inhabit the same country, the white race will maintain its superiority over the black race. All history fully attests this fact, and whether it was so designated by the Great Creator of the Universe or not, the acknowledgement of that superiority is the only condition upon which these races can ever live together in peace.

Dodge concluded with another attack on the abolitionists and characterized them as "ambitious and designing demagogues" who were trying to introduce "black-skinned flatnosed, and wool-headed" Senators and Representatives into Congress. The result of this, said Dodge, would be the debasement of the white race and the end of the Union. He, for one, would

[54] *Cong. Globe*, 31 Cong., 2 sess., Appendix 310-11.

fight against such an eventuality. He then praised the Southerners for their "heroic" defense of their property against the "firebrands" who were bent upon imposing this "horrid state of society" upon the country.[55]

This whole speech was that of a "doughface" — a Northern man with Southern principles — a declaration against an "inferior" race, an argument for slavery. It was a clear reflection of the proslavery majority in Iowa that had sent Augustus Dodge to the United States Senate.

For the moment excitement occasioned by the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law died down, and both parties were content to leave well enough alone, although Dodge's speech proved offensive to a certain element in the Iowa Democratic party.[56] Large numbers of Germans were unhappy over the party's acceptance of the law, an unhappiness that foreboded trouble for the Democrats. As for the Whigs, they were warned that the country wanted peace and that they must proclaim their adherence to the Compromise acts if they wished to survive as a party.[57] The leaders of the Democratic party, for their part, were desirous of preventing any split in their ranks. They determined to ignore all issues that caused friction, and in order to do so they had championed the Compromise as the final settlement of the slavery question.

The result of the election of 1852 seemed to prove that the Democrats had been right. The national platform of the party had included a so-called "finality" resolution which the state organization echoed.[58] During the campaign the Iowa Democrats hammered away at the fact that they had compromised all dangerous issues, and they emerged with a sweeping victory at the polls and triumphantly re-elected George Wallace Jones to the Senate.[59] They had guessed correctly that the people of the state would back up their Compromise stand and their defense of the Fugitive Slave Law. Their aims seemed to be realized; slavery agitation had ended.

[55] *Ibid.*, 32 Cong., 1 sess., Appendix, 1118-19.

[56] Keokuk *Des Moines Valley Whig*, Aug. 12, 1852; David S. Sparks, "The Decline of the Democratic Party in Iowa, 1850-1860," Iowa Journal of History, 53:11 (January, 1955).

[57] Burlington *Hawk-Eye*, Feb. 13, 1851; New York *Daily Times*, Nov. 29, 1851.

[58] Kirk Porter, *National Party Platforms* (New York, 1924), 28-32, 36-7; Roy V. Sherman, "Political Party Platforms in Iowa" (M. A. thesis, State University of Iowa, 1926), 107.

[59] Dubuque *Daily Miners' Express*, Aug. 3, 1852; Iowa City *Republican*, Dec. 18, 1852.

But almost at once there was the beginning of some discontent in Iowa. Stimulated by the growing Northern immigration, antislavery sentiment became more vocal, and there was a reaction against the Iowa Congressmen's defense of slavery. The old settlers were perfectly content, but the new were not. Although the proslavery forces grew cautious, so as not to offend the new settlers unduly, a series of events across the Missouri River soon renewed the agitation on the slavery issue and galvanized the latent antislavery sentiment that had come to Iowa.

A number of people in Iowa were interested in the construction of a transcontinental railroad that would traverse their state. They hoped that if Congress approved such a project a land-grant act would result benefitting both themselves and the railroad. In order that such a bill be passed, the land west of Iowa must be organized and its Indian land titles cleared. Appeals were made to both major parties in the state to unite on the project and see it through to completion.[60] The matter was considered all the more urgent because Missourians who were trying to get a transcontinental railroad for their state secured the necessary "right of way" legislation from Congress in 1852.[61] Petitions had been presented to Congress from Iowa as early as 1848 requesting a similar act, but despite the efforts of Senators Dodge and Jones, Congress had ignored these.[62] The repeated rebuffs stimulated the desire to organize the territory across the Missouri River before the Missourians were too far advanced with their plans. Mass meetings were held throughout Iowa, pressing for the organization. As a result, Senator Dodge introduced a Nebraska territorial bill in late 1853, which emerged from Stephen A. Douglas' Committee on Territories as the Kansas-Nebraska Bill.[63]

The Kansas-Nebraska Bill contained a clause, section 21, which reopened the whole slavery controversy. This section repealed the Missouri Compromise and gave to the people of a territory themselves the right to

[60] Sparks, "Birth of the Republican Party," 59; Bloomington *Herald*, Dec. 2, 1848.

[61] Perley Orman Ray, *The Repeal of the Missouri Compromise* (Cleveland, 1909), 100-101; *Cong. Globe*, 32 Cong., 1 sess., Part III, iii.

[62] *Cong. Globe*, 30 Cong., 1 sess., 103, 380.

[63] The territory was split in two in response to a demand from the settlers of the area themselves. George Fort Milton, *The Eve of Conflict: Stephen A. Douglas and the Needless War* (Boston, 1934), 148. For some of the earlier developments, see Burlington *Iowa State Gazette*, Dec. 8, 1853; Jan. 11, 1854; Burlington *Daily Telegraph*, Jan. 14, 1854; *Cong. Globe*, 33 Cong., 1 sess., 44.

decide if they wanted slavery or not within their territory. Douglas believed this consistent with the principle enunciated in the Compromise legislation of 1850. Furthermore, the people of the territory involved had asked for the right to decide this for themselves.[64]

A storm was brewing here that was to influence Iowa profoundly. There was a great deal of criticism in the North against the repeal of the Missouri Compromise, and Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts moved to prevent it.[65] Iowans of both parties were chagrined. Despite all of their efforts to check it, there was renewed agitation on the slavery question.[66] Their two Senators and their Representatives came out in favor of the bill and of the principle of popular sovereignty, basing their support on the fact that section 21 was consistent with the principles of 1850, while all laws passed by Congress to regulate slavery extension were invalid. Dodge characterized any bill limiting slavery expansion as a "dangerous assumption of power" by Congress and one which it had no right to make. He urged that all those who had supported the principles of 1850 should do so again.[67]

The people of Iowa, however, showed no signs of following Dodge's advice. To them the fact that slavery agitation was being revived outweighed all other considerations. Whig newspapers claimed that two-thirds of Iowa's people were against the repeal of the Missouri Compromise and that the agitation being stirred up on the issue was dangerous to the preservation of the Union. This was the third time, they said, that North and South had fought for the territories. The people had been lucky in 1820 and 1850. To reopen "the wounds" could mean the end of such luck.[68]

The Whigs were not alone in their opposition. The Iowa Democratic party split wide open on the issue. Most of the rank and file members were opposed to the position expressed by their congressional leaders. Many proved willing to give up their traditional party membership in order to maintain peace on the slavery issue.[69] The Democratic leaders, seeking

[64] *Cong. Globe*, 33 Cong., 1 sess., 221, Appendix, 382; Milton, *Eve of Conflict*, 148.
[65] New York *Daily Times*, Jan. 20, 1854; *Cong. Globe*, 33 Cong., 1 sess., 186.
[66] Iowa City *Republican*, Feb. 22, 1854.
[67] *Cong. Globe*, 33 Cong., 1 sess., Appendix, 376-82.
[68] Iowa City *Republican*, Feb. 22, Mar. 15, 1854.
[69] *Ibid.*, June 21, 1854; Sparks, "Birth of the Republican Party," 72.

some way out of their predicament, decided to ignore the issue raised by the repeal of the Missouri Compromise and concentrate their efforts on the argument that the abolitionists were causing all of the agitation and trouble. Senator Dodge, to advance this plan, made a long speech attacking the abolitionists for what he charged was their obvious aim to gain political power at the expense of the territorial bill. He pointed out that the whole career of abolitionism was one of violence. This violence, he added, had destroyed Southern emancipation sentiment by its extremism, and thus the abolitionists had themselves delayed the emancipation of the Negro. They had also fought against the only humanitarian means of solving the problem: Negro colonization. It was the abolitionists who, with their constant pressure on the South, had forced the Southerners to take strong measures against the Negroes in their midst. If the abolitionists were really interested in the welfare of the Negro, they, too, would be for slavery expansion as this would disperse the Negroes over a wide area where the institution would ultimately die. Therefore, there was no reason for any "sickly sentimentality" over slavery.[70]

Senator Dodge was trying to win back the moderates of his own state with this partisan attack, but he was largely unsuccessful. Some of the Democratic press said that his cry of abolitionism was no longer valid because it was "false and idle, and stale," and no longer had the power "to drive men from what they deem to be the performance of duty."[71] Petitions against the bill poured into Washington from Iowa, further challenging the position of their Senators. This reaction in Iowa was about the same as in the rest of the Northwest, a reaction unexpected and frightening to many leaders in Washington. But the Pierce administration was behind the bill, and nothing could stop its momentum. On Friday, March 3, 1854, the Senate passed the Kansas-Nebraska Bill, 37 to 14, with Dodge and Jones voting in favor. The Southern Senators openly rejoiced as the bill passed.[72]

When the news reached the West, the Iowa City *Republican* sarcastically

[70] Dodge averred that Negroes belonged away from the United States, for if God had wanted the two races living together he would not have put them on separate continents originally. *Cong. Globe*, 33 Cong., 1 sess., Appendix, 377-82.

[71] Muscatine *Democratic Enquirer*, Mar. 1, 1854.

[72] *Cong. Globe*, 33 Cong., 1 sess., 532, 551, 773, 1040; Louis Pelzer, *Augustus Caesar Dodge* (Iowa City, 1908), 194.

congratulated the Senate on the triumph of "Doughface policy in the North," while another paper charged that Iowa's Senators had voted for the bill in order to promote their own political fortunes rather than Iowa's interests.[73] This criticism was not confined to Iowa alone. Horace Greeley's New York *Tribune* asked whether "Alabama and Florida [were] more devoted to the despotic ideas of American panslavism" than Iowa under the control of "cunning place hunters who juggle[d] and swindle[d] in the abused name of Democracy [and who were] . . . the enemies of guaranteed Freedom in the New Territories?"[74] John Greenleaf Whittier followed with a charge that Iowa was "another of the free slave states."

> From the hour of its admission to the present, its influence and its votes have been given in favor of slavery. Augustus Caesar Dodge's vote has always been as certain for any villainous scheme of slavery propagandism as those of Butler and Atchison. . . . Iowa is now, and has been from the outset . . . to all intents and purposes, a slave state.[75]

The same sort of reaction was repeated when the House of Representatives met to consider the bill. Bernhart Henn, Iowa's Democratic Representative, echoed the sentiments of Senator Dodge in defending the bill. He, too, attacked the abolitionists as the sole cause of all of the nation's grief. He felt that the Southerners in Congress were simply asserting a valid principle of constitutional law against the wild ravings of the abolitionists. When the bill came up, Henn voted for it and received a letter of commendation from Congressman W. B. W. Dent of Georgia for being "sound in the faith."[76]

There were a few commendations from within Iowa also. Ex-Governor Stephen Hempstead said that the act was one of the best ever passed. Resolutions favoring the delegation's vote were passed in the southern congressional district, and the leading Democratic newspaper applauded the "moral courage and zeal" of the Congressmen.[77] But all this was now the voice

[73] Iowa City *Republican*, Mar. 15, 1854; Keokuk *Des Moines Valley Whig*, Mar. 9, 1854.

[74] New York *Tribune*, Mar. 29, 1854; Iowa City *Republican*, July 5, 1854.

[75] Washington *National Era*, July 27, 1854.

[76] *Cong. Globe*, 33 Cong., 1 sess., Appendix, 885-8, 1254; Frank I. Herriott, "James W. Grimes versus the Southrons," *Annals of Iowa* (third series), 15:417n. (October, 1926).

[77] Iowa City *Republican*, July 12, 19, 1854; Iowa City *Capital Reporter*, May 31, 1854.

of a minority in a state that, to the outside world, had changed its viewpoint overnight. Iowa hated the act because it destroyed a mood which she had cultivated for eight years, a mood of moderation, peace, and evasion of dangerous issues. All of this was now gone. Horace Greeley was correct in declaring:

> The passage of the Nebraska Bill was a death blow to Northern quietism and complacency, mistakingly deeming themselves conservatism. To all who had fondly dreamed or blindly hoped that the Slavery question would somehow settle itself, it cried "sleep no more!" in thunder tones that would not die unheeded. Concession and complacency were plainly doomed to subserve none other than the most transient purposes. . . . Systematic determined resistance was now recognized as imperative duty.[78]

Concession and complacency were indeed dead. One editor reminded the people of Iowa that they could record their protest "against the consummation of this foul plot" in the gubernatorial election which was but three months away.[79] It now seemed clear that Jones and Dodge had gone too far in their proslavery stand and had sabotaged their party unwittingly.

At the beginning of 1854 the Whig party of Iowa was badly split and in a moribund condition. For a time it even seemed useless to hold a state convention. But with the growing opposition to the Kansas-Nebraska Act, Whig hopes brightened. If a man could be nominated for governor who could weld a new coalition made up of those elements opposed to the bill, the party might have a chance of victory. They found their candidate in James Wilson Grimes, a thirty-eight year-old native of New Hampshire. With him two Free Soilers were also nominated for state offices on the Whig ticket.[80] Some old-line Whigs denounced Grimes as an abolitionist and bolted the convention.[81] Grimes gave these up and sought to solidify his Free Soil and dissident Democratic support. To do this, he issued an "Address to the People of Iowa." Published on April 8, 1854, the "Address" won him definite Free Soil support. In it he concentrated on the Kansas-Nebraska Act and played upon the fears of many Iowans that the

[78] Horace Greeley, *Recollections of a Busy Life* (New York, 1868), 294.

[79] Iowa City *Republican*, May 24, 1854.

[80] David S. Sparks, "The Birth of the Republican Party in Iowa, 1854-1856," IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY, 54:3-4 (January, 1956); Herbert Fairall, *Manual of Iowa Politics* (Iowa City, 1884), 37.

[81] Dubuque *Daily Miners' Express*, May 13, 1854.

slavery struggle would be transferred to the state itself. He pointed out how many proslavery people were still in Iowa, that they would battle antislavery forces for control of the state. Probably referring to Alexander H. Stephens, he asserted that "a distinguished Representative from Georgia" had announced that Iowa would be a slave state within fifteen years.[82] In this way Grimes effectively played on Iowa's long-sustained apprehension of slavery strife and the economic competition of Negro slaves. He also declared that it was the Democratic party that had brought about this threat of slavery because of its subservience to the wishes of the South. In addition, Grimes inflamed and won over to his side the growing German elements within the state by quoting, out of context, a remark made by Senator Andrew Butler of South Carolina to the effect that the people of Iowa would rather have slaves among them than foreigners.[83]

The "Address" was widely circulated throughout the state by the Whig newspapers. The Democrats, caught off balance and thrown on the defensive, tried to repudiate the charges of Grimes, but despite denials from Stephens and Butler, Grimes repeated his charges in a campaign speech on July 5.[84] The denials never caught up with the original accusation, and the people of Iowa were left with the impression that the Kansas-Nebraska Act was what its opponents said it was: a Southern plot to extend slavery all about them and eventually to draw them into the slave system. The Nebraska issue became the sole theme of Grimes's campaign. His strategy worked, because for the first time in history Iowa elected a Whig governor, although by the very close margin of 2,000 votes.[85] The victory was largely a personal one for Grimes, since only one other state office went to a Whig. Grimes had successfully played up the one issue on which Democrats were most vulnerable: the resurrection of the slavery controversy and the ending of the "finality" pledge. He was never adequately answered by the overconfident Democratic leadership. Dodge and Jones stayed in Washington while their record was being attacked at home and never gave

[82] Quoted in Salter, *Grimes*, 47.

[83] Sparks, "Birth of the Republican Party in Iowa," Iowa Journal, 10; Salter, *Grimes*, 48; Milton, *Eve of Conflict*, 173, 173n., 174n.

[84] Dubuque *Daily Miners' Express*, June 13, 1854; Herriott, "Grimes versus the Southrons," 355-6n., 416-19.

[85] Sparks, "Birth of the Republican Party," Iowa Journal, 13; Fairall, *Manual of Iowa Politics*, 38.

their party the articulate leadership so badly needed.[86] Although there were other issues in the campaign, Grimes successfully obscured them with the one issue that could keep his coalition together. He was overjoyed at his victory, declaring that: "Our southern friends have regarded Iowa as their northern stronghold. I thank God it is conquered."[87]

Grimes realized that the excitement over the Kansas-Nebraska Bill could not last forever and that when it died he had to be ready with a positive program so that the Democrats would not be able to come back. He felt that his best hope was to weld his diverse group of Whigs, Free Soilers, and disaffected Democrats into a solid coalition centered on the issue of antislavery. He knew that he would be opposed at every step by the vestiges of the once powerful proslavery element. This group had grown proportionately smaller but was still articulate. And the congressional leaders were still of the old group. Grimes set his sights on Senators Dodge and Jones as his primary targets. The Whigs had won the state legislature in 1854, and Dodge, whose term was expiring, was replaced by Free Soiler James Harlan, a native of Illinois. Harlan demonstrated the basic difference between himself and his doughface predecessor when he told the United States Senate that Negroes were the equals of the white men because "they had arms, heads, noses, ears, legs, etc."[88]

Meanwhile, a call for a convention to organize the antislavery forces in Iowa was issued. This convention met in Iowa City in February, 1856, and organized the Republican party of Iowa. It is rather significant that most of the organizers and leaders of the new party were relative newcomers to the state.[89] The Democrats reacted violently to the organization of the Iowa Republicans. They declared that the Republicans were intent upon glorifying the Negro at the expense of the white man; that they would go to any extremes to harass and submerge the South; that they were following the tenets of "Seward niggerology."[90]

Despite continued Democratic attacks, the new party moved ahead al-

[86] Herriott, "Grimes versus the Southrons," 432; Milton, *Eve of Conflict*, 173.

[87] Quoted in Herriott, "Whence Came the Pioneers?" 371.

[88] Dan Elbert Clark, *History of Senatorial Elections in Iowa* (Iowa City, 1912), 59-87, 123; Keokuk *Des Moines Valley Whig*, Sept. 26, 1859.

[89] Muscatine *Journal*, quoted in John W. Gannaway, "The Development of Party Organization in Iowa," IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY AND POLITICS, 1:517 (October, 1903).

[90] Burlington *Iowa State Gazette*, Jan. 16, Feb. 26, Sept. 16, Oct. 28, 1856.

most at will. They won several elections to cement their hold and proceeded partially to relieve Negroes of the restrictions placed upon them. For example, they gave the Negro the right to give testimony in Iowa's courts. The underground railroad worked at full operation as Iowa judges ignored the Fugitive Slave Law. The antislavery men were in full control and their numbers were being augmented daily as more immigrants crossed the Mississippi into Iowa.[91] The movement to undo twenty years of past history was climaxed in a convention called in 1857 to replace the state constitution of 1846.

One of the issues that the convention spent a good deal of its time debating was whether or not to remove the word "white" from the constitutional provision on suffrage. Immediately, there was sharp reaction to the idea from Democrats and old-line Whigs. But one man, James Edwards, a native of Kentucky, rose and made an impassioned attack on the institution of slavery and excoriated those of his colleagues who would uphold the South's "peculiar institution."

> I am glad that I have an opportunity here of speaking upon this slavery question. Born in a slave state, and educated with all the prejudices of a slaveholder, I have been contending for twenty years with the institution of slavery. It was slavery that drove me from my native state. Then can it be expected that I should stand up here and become its defender? I left the state that gave me birth. . . . It was slavery that drove me away from her. . . .
>
> And yet we find men here, breathing the free air, and treading the broad prairies of the State of Iowa, who are apologists of this greatest of all curses — human slavery. . . .
>
> Who are those who stand up here and defend slavery? Is there any one here who advocates slavery? I tell gentlemen, that if they do not advocate slavery with their lips, in so many and direct terms, they exert an influence and power in regard to it that is the very backbone of the institution in the South.[92]

Iowa's proslavery legions were not used to such a direct and violent attack on their beliefs. Edwards reflected the new temper in a state where

[91] *Ibid.*, Dec. 18, 1856; Dubuque *Express and Herald*, Dec. 24, 1856; Benjamin F. Gue, *History of Iowa . . .* (4 vols., New York, 1903), 1:280-81; Bergmann, "The Negro in Iowa," 19; Louis Pelzer, "The Negro and Slavery in Early Iowa," IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY AND POLITICS, 2:481 (October, 1904); Dan Elbert Clark, *Samuel Jordan Kirkwood* (Iowa City, 1917), 97-8.

[92] *Debates of the Constitutional Convention of the State of Iowa . . . 1857* (2 vols., Davenport, 1857), 2:681, 683.

antislavery sentiment was now the dominant theme. But the triumph of antislavery thought was by no means complete. The people of Iowa had been imbued with their anti-Negro feelings too long. Although Iowans were in the process of changing their attitudes, it would not be until after the Civil War that negrophobia would disappear from the state.

At the convention of 1857 a Negro-exclusion resolution was introduced but laid on the table. Previously, the Negro-suffrage resolution had been referred to the committee on suffrage. Within a short time the committee reported back to the convention with a majority favoring striking the word "white" from the suffrage qualifications. A minority on the committee fought the majority report, however, declaring that Iowa would be submerged under a deluge of Negroes from every section of the Union. They declared that these Negroes would soon control the state and that the whites would find their position intolerable.[93] The convention finally decided not to change the suffrage clause in the constitution, but to submit the issue of Negro suffrage directly to the people when they voted on the new constitution. When the question came before the voters, they showed that, although they had come a long way from their proslavery past, they were still enmeshed in their traditional anti-Negro prejudices. Democratic newspapers resurrected old fears and played upon old hatreds. If the provision went through, they declared, the state would be abolitionized, and the Negro with take over and drive the white man into degradation. They repeatedly attacked those Republican delegates who had favored this provision.[94] The combination of propaganda and prejudice worked well. Negro suffrage was overwhelmingly defeated by a vote of 49,387 to 8,489.[95] The Negro disability provision stayed in the constitution, while some men who had voted for Negro suffrage were driven from political office, since many people believed them to be abolitionists.[96] Iowa was now strongly antislavery but not abolitionist.

[93] *Journal of the Constitutional Convention of the State of Iowa, 1857* (Muscatine, 1857), 119, 240, 243, 320-21.

[94] Burlington *Iowa State Gazette*, Nov. 1, 1856; June 23, 1857.

[95] Carl Erbe, "Constitutional Provisions for the Suffrage in Iowa," IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY AND POLITICS, 22:206 (April, 1924).

[96] Two years later L. L. Pease, a Republican candidate for state senator, was defeated because he had voted for Negro suffrage in 1857. J. W. Denison to C. C. Carpenter, Dec. (n. d), 1859, *Cyrus Clay Carpenter Papers* (State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City).

After the adoption of the Constitution of 1857, Iowa's politics again became tied in with national affairs. The Dred Scott decision of 1857 became a vital issue in the state, as Republicans denounced the Supreme Court and Democrats defended the decision.[97] The Dred Scott case, however, was not the issue that finally brought down the last vestiges of the once-proud Southern spirit in Iowa. Instead, this disintegration came about as a result of both the development of affairs in Kansas and the actions of the very personification of the old Iowa, George Wallace Jones. Jones was the only Iowa Democrat still in Congress; although his state had changed, he had not. Motivated by his early upbringing and his friends of a lifetime, he still spoke and voted with the South and against the wishes of his state.

From the beginning of its development as a territory, Kansas was doomed for trouble. Free-staters and slave-staters rushed into the land in a race to be the first to assert popular sovereignty. Clashes and chaos inevitably followed. In Iowa there was general indignation on both sides over developments in Kansas. The Republicans saw the Kansas struggle as a part of a Southern plot to perpetuate the institution of slavery by bloodshed. Governor Grimes threatened armed intervention to protect Iowa's citizens in Kansas. The Democratic press, on the other hand, assailed "the fanatical, wild, and revolutionary course being pursued by Northern fanatics," as stories were circulated telling of assaults on peaceful Southern immigrants by gangs of "nigger worshippers."[98]

Senator Jones, for his part, persisted in his proslavery attitude as he became one of the sponsors of the Lecompton Constitution drawn up by the proslavery forces in Kansas and presented to Congress in the hope that the territory would be admitted immediately as a slave state. This constitution was rooted in fraud, as it had been rammed through by the slave-state men without the free-state men voting on it. For this reason, one of the chief opponents of this bill was Senator Stephen A. Douglas, who saw a perversion of popular sovereignty in the Lecompton Constitution which had not been accepted by a majority of all of those eligible to vote for it. Douglas' opposition caused a Democratic party split as the Buchanan administration accepted and backed the Lecompton Constitution. The split

[97] Fairfield *Iowa Sentinel*, May 14, 1857.

[98] Shambaugh (ed.), *Messages and Proclamations*, 2:66; letter of Grimes to President Franklin Pierce, Aug. 28, 1856, quoted in Salter, *Grimes*, 85; Burlington *Iowa State Gazette*, Oct. 2, 6, 1855; June 1, Aug. 22, 1856.

went through the Democratic ranks right down the line to Iowa.[99] This was the opportunity that the Republicans had been waiting for. If they could cause a split between Jones and the state party on the issue they would easily be able to gather up the Senate seat for themselves while insuring against a resurgence of the Democrats.

On December 17, 1856, the Iowa General Assembly instructed Jones to vote for the admission of Kansas only as a free state.[100] A year later resolutions passed by the Assembly attacking the Lecompton Constitution were dispatched to Jones with instructions that he should present them to Congress. He did so, but at the same time he defended the Lecompton Constitution. He also said that he had no intention of obeying the previous instructions from the legislature, as he believed that the only way to solve the slavery question would be to admit Kansas as a slave state at the same time that Minnesota was admitted as a free state, in the tradition of previous moves of this nature. He thereupon proceeded to vote for the admission of Kansas under the Lecompton Constitution.[101]

The action split the Democratic party in Iowa. Many Democrats went with Douglas and came out against the Lecompton Constitution, while only a few remained with Jones.[102] The jubilant Republicans unleashed an immediate attack on Jones by asking if the people of Iowa wished to have as their Senator "that pro-slavery doughface." This question was constantly repeated in an effort to widen the split.[103] The Democrats, in order to defend themselves, resorted to antiquated tactics. They insisted that slavery should not be discussed or agitated. The Republicans ignored the advice,[104] and their tactics paid off when the Democrats repudiated Jones and came out in favor of the Douglas position. George W. Jones was not renominated by the Democrats for the Senate. The antislavery Chicago *Tribune* wrote his epitaph:

[99] Milton, *Eve of Conflict*, 255-94.

[100] Burlington *Iowa State Gazette*, Dec. 17, 1856.

[101] *Cong. Globe*, 35 Cong., 1 sess., 566; Parish, *George Wallace Jones*, 51.

[102] Burlington *Iowa State Gazette*, June 30, 1858; Louis Pelzer, "The History of Political Parties in Iowa from 1857 to 1860," IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY AND POLITICS, 7:188-9 (April, 1909).

[103] Des Moines *Weekly Citizen*, Feb. 10, 1858; "Letters of James W. Grimes," *Annals of Iowa* (third series), 22:494 (October, 1940).

[104] Davenport *Weekly Gazette*, Dubuque *Daily Times*, and Webster City *Hamilton Freeman*, quoted in Clark, *Senatorial Elections*, 106, 117-19; Burlington *Iowa State Gazette*, Sept. 8, 1857; Dodd, "Fight for the Northwest," 777.

> A light is extinguished in our sister State beyond the Mississippi, and gloom falls over the northwest. Jones is no more! Four days ago he shone with comet lustre in the galaxy of the unwashed; now, "sick almost to doomsday with eclipse." As Dodge — lost Pleiad — sailed from the space two years ago, so Jones wanders away to bear him company in the regions of the infinite Nowhere. *Par nobile* discomfited demagogues! . . . Dodge was the embodied genius of the doughface. — Jones never attained that dignity.[105]

After Jones's downfall came the crowning blow. As his replacement in the Senate the Republican-controlled Iowa legislature elected James Wilson Grimes.[106] This action ended an era in Iowa history. The reign of the "doughface" was over. Both within and without the state, Iowa presented a solid antislavery front. Grimes and Harlan in Washington and Samuel J. Kirkwood in the governor's chair gave Iowa a different political tone. The South no longer had a political ally.

Despite some efforts in the last two years before the Civil War to resurrect the issue of the Negro in Iowa, the Democrats were unable to stage any kind of comeback. The party's long flirtation with proslavery opinion in Iowa had cost it heavily in the end. By 1860 the party occupied comparatively the same position that the Whig party had occupied during Iowa's territorial years. Democrats were ineffectual in the main, and despite their assaults on the "nigger scented" Mr. Lincoln in 1860 the Republicans swept the state.[107] Iowa went into the Civil War Northern, Republican, and antislavery. And George W. Jones suffered the final humiliation of being jailed by order of Secretary of State William Seward, who claimed that he did it lest disloyal elements within the state rally behind Jones to aid the secessionists. As a result of this, the Democratic party as a whole was accused of treason by the Republicans and became moribund as thousands deserted it under the barrage of wartime Republican propaganda.[108]

[105] Quoted in Clark, *Senatorial Elections*, 106-107. See also Iowa City *Republican* Feb. 3, 1858.

[106] Cole, *History of the People of Iowa*, 313.

[107] Sioux City *Eagle*, June 12, 1858; Sioux City *Register*, Apr. 28, Sept. 15, Nov. 3, 1860; Burlington *Iowa State Gazette*, Mar. 24, 1859; Des Moines *Iowa State Journal*, Nov. 26, 1859; Kenneth F. Millsap, "The Election of 1860 in Iowa," Iowa Journal of History, 48:119 (April, 1950).

[108] Parish, *George Wallace Jones*, 60, 62-3; Robert Rutland, "The Copperheads of Iowa: A Re-Examination," Iowa Journal of History, 52:8-9, 29 (January, 1954).

The Southern dominance within the state could not iast. The area was on one of the main routes to the West; and with the increasing Eastern overland migration, Iowa soon filled up with people of a different background. Thousands of Northern antislavery settlers came to the prairies of Iowa and soon challenged the old settlers for control of the state. With the introduction of the Wilmot Proviso the slavery controversy came to the center of the American political stage. The two Iowa groups then contended actively for the right to speak for their state on the slavery issue. Despite the efforts of the Southerners to maintain Iowa as a friend of the South, the Northern forces found a great leader in James W. Grimes, who guided the political revolution that wrested the state away from Southern dominance.

Iowa was a contradictory entity during the ante-bellum period. She was located in the North and subjected to Northern influences, yet at the same time she had a strong attachment to the South that she refused to give up. She defended the South and slavery even though the expansion of the slave system was one of the reasons why many of her people left the South originally. Fortunately for their peace of mind, the Southerners in Iowa were able to justify their defense of slavery. Negroes were anathema to them, and if they had to defend slavery and resort to extremism to keep the Negro away from them, they would do it. As a result, Iowa's representatives in Congress were forthright promoters of the Southern point of view and as nearly pro-Southern as the Southern representatives themselves.

The proslavery group shaped Iowa during a great part of her early history, and tenaciously maintained itself until disrupted by the Civil War. So thoroughly was it then broken up that Iowa lost the last trace of her pro-Southern and proslavery attitudes and emerged finally as a Northern state with Northern principles.