SECTION 4

Slavery and Secession

MAIN IDEA

A series of controversial events heightened the sectional conflict that brought the nation to the brink of war.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Secession created deep divisions in American society that persist to the present time.

Terms & Names

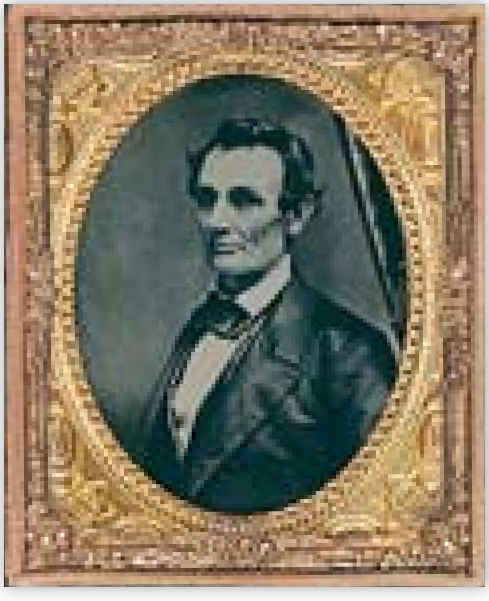
- Dred Scott
- Roger B. Taney
- Abraham Lincoln
- Freeport Doctrine
- Harpers Ferry
- Confederacy
- Jefferson Davis

On June 16, 1858, the Republican Party of Illinois nominated its state chairman, Abraham Lincoln, to run for the U.S. Senate against Democratic incumbent Stephen A. Douglas. That night Lincoln launched his campaign with a ringing address to the convention. It included a biblical quotation.

A Personal Voice ABRAHAM LINCOLN

"'A house divided against itself cannot stand.' I believe this government cannot endure permanently half *slave* and half *free*. I do not expect the Union to be *dissolved*—I do not expect the house to fall—but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become *all* one thing or all the other. Either the *opponents* of slavery will arrest the further spread of it . . . or its *advocates* will push it forward, till it shall become alike lawful in *all* the States, *old* as well as *new*, *North* as well as *South*."

—1858 speech



▲ This photograph shows Lincoln in about 1858, before the Civil War took its toll.

Lincoln was correct in that the United States could not survive for long with such a deep gulf between the North and the South—but was he right that the Union would not dissolve? With a weak president in James Buchanan and new legal questions over slavery, the United States faced the future with apprehension. Some suspected that events would lead like a trail of powder to a final explosion.

Slavery Dominates Politics

For strong leaders, slavery was a difficult issue. But it presented even more of a challenge for the indecisive President Buchanan, whose administration was plagued by slavery-related controversies. The first one arose on March 6, 1857.

DRED SCOTT DECISION In 1856 an important legal question came before the Supreme Court. The case concerned **Dred Scott,** a slave from Missouri. Scott's owner had taken him north of the Missouri Compromise line in 1834. For four years they had lived in free territory in Illinois and Wisconsin. Later they returned to Missouri, where Scott's owner died. Scott then began a lawsuit to gain his freedom. He claimed that he had become a free person by living in free territory for several years.

On March 6, 1857, Supreme Court Chief Justice **Roger B. Taney** handed down the decision. (See *Dred Scott* v. *Sandford,* page 332.) The Court ruled that slaves did not have the rights of citizens. Furthermore, said the court, Dred Scott had no claim to freedom, because he had been living in Missouri, a slave state, when he began his suit. Finally, the Court ruled that the Missouri Compromise was unconstitutional. Congress could not forbid slavery in any part of the territories. Doing so would interfere with slaveholders' right to own property, a right protected by the Fifth Amendment.

▲ Dred Scott's lawsuit dragged on for years, and set off even more controversy over slavery.

MAIN IDEA

Analyzing Effects

A What was the significance of the *Dred Scott* decision?

Sectional passions exploded immediately. Southerners cheered the Court's decision. Northerners were stunned. By striking down the Missouri Compromise, the Supreme Court had cleared the way for the extension of slavery. Opponents of slavery now pinned their hopes on the Republican Party. If the Republicans became strong enough, they could still keep slavery in check. A

THE LECOMPTON CONSTITUTION In fall 1857, the proslavery government at Lecompton, Kansas, wrote a constitution and applied for admission to the Union. Free-Soilers—who by this time outnumbered proslavery settlers in Kansas by nearly ten to one—rejected the proposed constitution because it protected the rights of slaveholders. The legislature called for a referendum in which the people could vote on the proslavery constitution. They voted against it.

At this point President Buchanan made a poor decision: he endorsed the proslavery Lecompton constitution. He owed his presidency to Southern support and believed that since Kansas contained only about 200 slaves, the Free-Soilers were overreacting.

MAIN IDEA

Analyzing Motives

B Why did Buchanan support the Lecompton constitution?

Buchanan's endorsement provoked the wrath of Illinois Democrat Stephen A. Douglas, who did not care "whether [slavery] is voted down or voted up." What he cared about was popular sovereignty. Backed by an antislavery coalition of Republicans and Northern Democrats, Douglas persuaded Congress to authorize another referendum on the constitution. In summer 1858, voters rejected the constitution once again. Northerners hailed Douglas as a hero, Southerners scorned him as a traitor, and the two wings of the Democratic Party moved still farther apart. B

Lincoln-Douglas Debates

That summer witnessed the start of one of Illinois's greatest political contests: the 1858 race for the U.S. Senate between Democratic incumbent Douglas and Republican challenger **Abraham Lincoln.** To many outsiders, it must have seemed like an uneven match. Douglas was a two-term senator with an outstanding record and a large campaign chest. Who was Lincoln?

A self-educated man with a dry wit, Lincoln was known locally as a successful lawyer and politician. Elected as a Whig to one term in Congress in 1846, he broke with his party after the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854 and became a Republican two years later.

LINCOLN CHALLENGES DOUGLAS As the senatorial campaign progressed, the Republican Party decided that Lincoln needed to counteract the "Little Giant's" well-known name and extensive financial resources. As a result, Lincoln challenged Douglas to a series of seven open-air debates to be held throughout Illinois on the issue of slavery in the territories. Douglas accepted the challenge, and the stage was set for some of the most celebrated debates in U.S. history.

Lincoln and Douglas had very different speaking styles. Douglas exuded self-confidence, pacing back and forth on the stage and dramatically using his fists to pound home his points. Lincoln, on the other hand, delivered his comments solemnly, using direct and plain language.

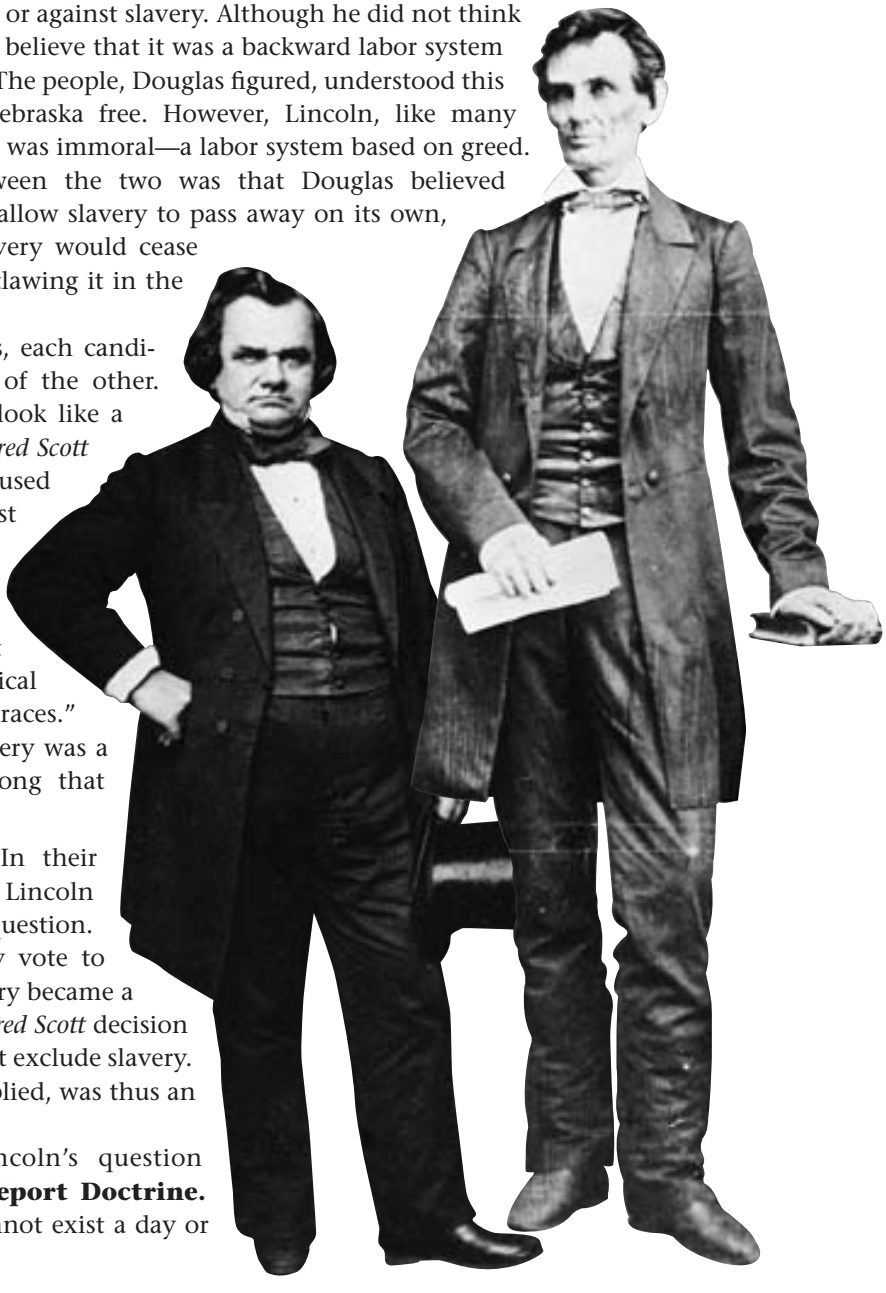
POSITIONS AND ARGUMENTS The two men's positions were simple and consistent. Douglas believed deeply in popular sovereignty, in allowing the residents of a territory to vote for or against slavery. Although he did not think that slavery was immoral, he did believe that it was a backward labor system unsuitable to prairie agriculture. The people, Douglas figured, understood this and would vote Kansas and Nebraska free. However, Lincoln, like many Free-Soilers, believed that slavery was immoral—a labor system based on greed.

The crucial difference between the two was that Douglas believed that popular sovereignty would allow slavery to pass away on its own, while Lincoln doubted that slavery would cease to spread without legislation outlawing it in the territories.

In the course of the debates, each candidate tried to distort the views of the other. Lincoln tried to make Douglas look like a defender of slavery and of the *Dred Scott* decision. In turn, Douglas accused Lincoln of being an abolitionist and an advocate of racial equality. Lincoln responded by saying, "I am not, nor ever have been, in favor of bringing about in any way the social and political equality of the white and black races." He did, however, insist that slavery was a moral, social, and political wrong that should not be allowed to spread.

THE FREEPORT DOCTRINE In their second debate, held at Freeport, Lincoln asked his opponent a crucial question. Could the settlers of a territory vote to exclude slavery before the territory became a state? Everyone knew that the *Dred Scott* decision said no—that territories could not exclude slavery. Popular sovereignty, Lincoln implied, was thus an empty phrase.

Douglas's response to Lincoln's question became later known as the **Freeport Doctrine.** Douglas contended, "Slavery cannot exist a day or



The Lincoln-Douglas debates created quite a spectacle, partly due to the opponents' difference in height.

an hour anywhere, unless it is supported by local police regulations." If the people of a territory were Free-Soilers, he explained, then all they had to do was elect representatives who would not enforce slave property laws. In other words, regardless of theory or the Supreme Court's ruling, people could get around the *Dred Scott* decision.

MAIN IDEA

Comparing C Explain the similarities and differences between Lincoln's position on slavery and that of Douglas.

Douglas won the Senate seat, but his response had worsened the split between the Northern and Southern wings of the Democratic Party. As for Lincoln, his attacks on the "vast moral evil" of slavery drew national attention, and some Republicans began thinking of him as an excellent candidate for the presidency in 1860. C

Passions Ignite

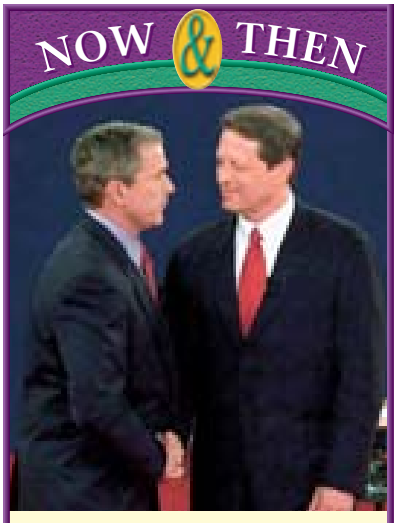
If 1858 was a year of talk, then 1859 turned out to be a year of action. Most Americans probably would have welcomed a respite from the issue of slavery. Instead, "God's angry man," John Brown, reemerged on the scene and ended all hopes of a compromise over slavery between the North and the South.

HARPERS FERRY While politicians debated the slavery issue, John Brown was studying the slave uprisings that had occurred in ancient Rome and on the French island of Haiti. He believed that the time was ripe for similar uprisings in the United States. Brown secretly obtained financial backing from several prominent Northern abolitionists. On the night of October 16, 1859, he led a band of 21 men, black and white, into **Harpers Ferry,** Virginia (now West Virginia). His aim was to seize the federal arsenal there, distribute the captured arms to slaves in the area, and start a general slave uprising.

Sixty of the town's prominent citizens were held hostage by Brown who hoped that their slaves would then join the insurrection. No slaves came forward. Instead, local troops killed eight of Brown's men. Then a detachment of U.S. Marines, commanded by Colonel Robert E. Lee, raced to Harpers Ferry, stormed the engine house where Brown and his men had barricaded themselves, killed two more of the raiders, and captured Brown. Brown was then turned over to Virginia to be tried for treason.

Historians have long debated Brown's actions. There is no doubt that he hated slavery with all his heart. However, why did he fail to tell slaves in the area about his plans beforehand? Why didn't he provide his men with enough food to last for even one day? In any case, Brown certainly hoped that his actions would arouse Northern fury and start a war for abolition.

JOHN BROWN'S HANGING On December 2, 1859, Brown was hanged for high treason in the presence of federal troops and a crowd of curious observers. Public reaction was immediate and intense. Although Lincoln and Douglas condemned Brown as a murderer, many other Northerners expressed admiration for him and for his cause. Bells tolled at the news of his execution, guns fired salutes, and huge crowds gathered to hear fiery speakers denounce the South. Some Northerners began to call Brown a martyr for the sacred cause of freedom.



POLITICAL DEBATES

In the mid-19th century, people flocked to public grandstands, where the politcal candidates debated the issues of the day.

When Lincoln debated Douglas, thousands of people came to listen. Each debate lasted for three hours, and listeners stood the entire time, interrupting the speakers with cheers and an occasional heckle. When the debate ended, spectators adjourned to tables of barbecued meat and ice cream. Torchlit parades ended the day.

The first televised presidential debate, in 1960, featured candidates Kennedy and Nixon. Since then, presidential candidates, including Bush and Gore (above), have made televised debating a cornerstone of presidential campaigning.

History Through Art

JOHN BROWN GOING TO HIS HANGING (1942)

This scene, painted by the African-American artist Horace Pippin in 1942, shows John Brown being transported by wagon to his execution. The artist has focused our attention on the cruelty of Brown's fate.

The abolitionist is shown tied with the rope that will be used to hang him, and sitting on the coffin that will receive his body after death. Brown's dark shape is silhouetted by the large white building behind him, a structure that combines the features of both courthouse and prison.

SKILLBUILDER

Interpreting Visual Sources

1. Why do you think the African-American woman in the right-hand corner is looking away from the scene?
2. How has the artist expressed the hopelessness of the situation?

SEE SKILLBUILDER HANDBOOK, PAGE R23.

The response was equally extreme in the South, where outraged mobs assaulted whites who were suspected of holding antislavery views. Harpers Ferry terrified Southern slaveholders, who were convinced the North was plotting slave uprisings everywhere. Even longtime supporters of the Union called for secession. As one former Unionist explained, "I am willing to take the chances of . . . disunion, sooner than submit any longer to Northern insolence and Northern outrage." D

MAIN IDEA

Analyzing Effects

D Why did Harpers Ferry increase tensions between the North and the South?

Lincoln Is Elected President

Despite the tide of hostility that now flowed between North and South, the Republican Party eagerly awaited its presidential convention in May 1860. When the convention began, almost everyone believed that the party's candidate would be Senator William H. Seward of New York. However, events took a dramatic turn.

THE REPUBLICAN CONVENTION The convention took place in Chicago, which had quickly transformed itself into a convention city with more than 50 hotels and an 18,000-square-foot wooden meeting center named the Wigwam. Republicans flooded into the frontier city in such crowds that despite the preparations, many ended up sleeping on pool tables in the hotels.

The convention opened to a surging crowd of delegates, newsmen, and spectators. The 4,500-person delegate floor overflowed within minutes. To gain seating in the galleries, which were reserved for gentlemen who had come with ladies, determined single men even offered schoolgirls a quarter for their company. The first day of the convention was passed in forming committees, listening to prayers, and gossiping about politics. As events came to a close, campaign managers for the candidates retreated to their headquarters and began bargaining for delegates' votes, some working late into the night.

SEWARD AND LINCOLN Senator William H. Seward appeared to have everything one needed in order to be a successful presidential candidate: the credential of having led anti-slavery forces in Congress, the financial support of New York political organizations—and a desire to be the center of attention. In fact, Seward himself had little doubt that he would be nominated. Well before the voting took place, Seward drafted his senatorial resignation speech, which he planned to deliver when his nomination became official.

▲ **Because Lincoln was virtually unknown in the East, his first name was written incorrectly as "Abram" on this 1860 election flag.**

Seward's well-known name and his reputation may have worked against him, however. Abraham Lincoln's being relatively unknown probably won him the nomination. Unlike Seward, Lincoln had not had much chance to offend his fellow Republicans. The delegates rejected Seward and his talk of an "irrepressible conflict" between North and South. On the third ballot, they nominated Lincoln, who seemed more moderate in his views. Although Lincoln pledged to halt the further spread of slavery "as with a chain of steel," he also tried to reassure Southerners that a Republican administration would not "directly, or indirectly, interfere with their slaves, or with them, about their slaves." His reassurances fell on deaf ears. In Southern eyes, he was a "black Republican," whose election would be "the greatest evil that has ever befallen this country."

MAIN IDEA

Drawing Conclusions E How did slavery affect U.S. political parties in 1860?

THE ELECTION OF 1860 Three major candidates vied for office in addition to Lincoln. The Democratic Party split over the issue of slavery. Northern Democrats backed Stephen Douglas and his doctrine of popular sovereignty. Southern Democrats backed Vice-President John C. Breckinridge of Kentucky. Former Know-Nothings and Whigs from the South, along with some moderate Northerners, organized the Constitutional Union Party, which ignored the issue of slavery altogether. They nominated John Bell of Tennessee. E

Analyzing *Political Cartoons*

"A POLITICAL RACE"

This cartoon depicts the major candidates in the 1860 presidential election. Three of the candidates, Bell, Breckinridge, and Douglas, are in hot pursuit of the front runner—Republican Abraham Lincoln. It was a close race. Lincoln defeated Douglas in the North. Breckinridge carried most of the South. Because the North had a higher population than the South, Lincoln won the election.

SKILLBUILDER

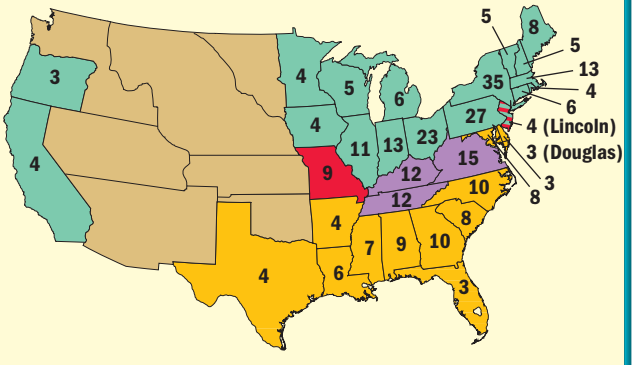
Analyzing Political Cartoons

1. Who, in the opinion of the artist, is the fittest man in the race?
2. How does this cartoon suggest the course of the election of 1860?

SEE SKILLBUILDER HANDBOOK, PAGE R24.

Election of 1860

Party	Candidate	Electoral votes	Popular votes
Republican	Abraham Lincoln	180	1,865,593
Southern Democratic	J.C. Breckinridge	72	848,356
Constitutional Union	John Bell	39	592,906
Northern Democratic	Stephen Douglas	12	1,382,713



GEOGRAPHY SKILLBUILDER
Region How did the election reflect the political divisions in the United States in 1860?

Lincoln emerged as the winner, but like Buchanan in the previous election, he received less than half the popular vote. In fact, although Lincoln defeated his combined opponents in the electoral vote by 180 to 123, he received no electoral votes from the South. Unlike Buchanan, Lincoln had sectional rather than national support, carrying every free state but not even appearing on the ballot in most of the slave states. The outlook for the Union was grim.

Southern Secession

Lincoln's victory convinced Southerners that they had lost their political voice in the national government. Fearful that Northern Republicans would submit the South to what noted Virginia agriculturist Edmund Ruffin called "the most complete subjection and political bondage," some Southern states decided to act. South Carolina led the way, seceding from the Union on December 20, 1860. Four days later, the news reached William Tecumseh Sherman, superintendent of the Louisiana State Seminary of Learning and Military Academy. In utter dismay, Sherman poured out his fears for the South.

A Personal Voice WILLIAM TECUMSEH SHERMAN

"This country will be drenched in blood. . . . [T]he people of the North. . . . are not going to let the country be destroyed without a mighty effort to save it. Besides, where are your men and appliances of war to contend against them? . . . You are rushing into war with one of the most powerful, ingeniously mechanical and determined people on earth—right at your doors. . . . Only in spirit and determination are you prepared for war. In all else you are totally unprepared."

—quoted in *None Died in Vain*

Even Sherman underestimated the depth and intensity of the South's commitment. For many Southern planters, the cry of "States' rights!" meant the complete independence of Southern states from federal government control. Most white Southerners also feared that an end to their entire way of life was at hand. Many were desperate for one last chance to preserve the slave labor system and saw secession as the only way. Mississippi followed South Carolina's lead and seceded on January 9, 1861. Florida seceded the next day. Within a few weeks, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas had also seceded. F

MAIN IDEA
Analyzing Effects
F How did Lincoln's election affect the South?

THE SHAPING OF THE CONFEDERACY On February 4, 1861, delegates from the secessionist states met in Montgomery, Alabama, where they formed the **Confederacy,** or Confederate States of America. The Confederate constitution closely resembled that of the United States. The most notable difference was that the Confederate constitution "protected and recognized" slavery in new

This 1864 playing card bears the portrait of Jefferson Davis, president of the Confederate States of America.

territories. The new constitution also stressed that each state was to be "sovereign and independent," a provision that would hamper efforts to unify the South.

On February 9, delegates to the Confederate constitutional convention unanimously elected former senator **Jefferson Davis** of Mississippi as president and Alexander Stephens of Georgia as vice-president. Davis had made his position clear, noting that to present a show of strength to the North, the South should "offer no doubtful or divided front." At his inauguration, Davis declared, "The time for compromise has now passed." His listeners responded by singing "Farewell to the Star-Spangled Banner" and "Dixie."

THE CALM BEFORE THE STORM As the nation awaited Lincoln's inauguration in March, its citizens were confused. What would happen now? Seven slave states had seceded and formed a new nation. Eight slave states remained within the Union. Would they secede also?

President Buchanan was uncertain. He announced that secession was illegal, but that it also would be illegal for him to do anything about it. He tied his own hands, but in truth there was not much that he could have done.

One problem was that Washington, D.C. was very much a Southern city. There were secessionists in Congress and in all of the departments of the federal government, as well as in the president's cabinet. Consequently, mass resignations took place. To some people it seemed as if the federal government were melting away. One key question remained in everyone's mind: Would the North allow the South to leave the Union without a fight?

HISTORICAL SPOTLIGHT

SECESSION AND THE BORDER STATES

Four slave states—Maryland, Kentucky, Missouri, and Delaware—were undecided about secession. Lincoln believed that these states would be essential to the success of the Union if war broke out. They had thriving industries and good access to important rail and water routes. Also, bordering North and South made the four states crucial to the movement of troops and supplies. Moreover, Maryland almost surrounded Washington, D.C., the seat of government.

As president, Lincoln faced a choice: free the slaves and make abolitionists happy, or ignore slavery for the moment to avoid alienating the border states. He chose the latter, but that did not prevent violent conflicts between secessionists and Unionists in Maryland, Kentucky, and Missouri. With militia intervention, and some political maneuvering, Lincoln kept the four border states in the Union.

SECTION 4 ASSESSMENT

1. TERMS & NAMES For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.

- Dred Scott
- Roger B. Taney
- Abraham Lincoln
- Freeport Doctrine
- Harpers Ferry
- Confederacy
- Jefferson Davis

MAIN IDEA

2. TAKING NOTES
List six major events described in this section and explain how each one sharpened the North-South conflict.

Event	Result
1. →	
2. →	
3. →	

CRITICAL THINKING

3. CONTRASTING
How did Lincoln and Douglas disagree about slavery? Which of their views were facts, and which were opinions?

4. EVALUATING
If you had been voting in the presidential election of 1860, for whom would you have voted, other than Abraham Lincoln? Explain your reasoning by using specific references to the chapter.

5. ANALYZING PRIMARY SOURCES
In *Dred Scott* v. *Sandford* of 1857, the Supreme Court found that:

> **"A free negro of the African race, whose ancestors were brought to this country and sold as slaves, is not a "citizen" within the meaning of the Constitution of the United States."**

How did the Supreme Court decision add to the tensions over slavery in the 1850s?