I. California Problem

II. Civili War Seems Imminent

III. Compromise of 1850

**Fugitive Slave Act of 1850:** Part of [Henry Clay](https://www.biography.com/people/henry-clay-9250385)’s famed Compromise of 1850—a group of bills that helped quiet early calls for Southern secession—this new law forcibly compelled citizens to assist in the capture of runaway slaves. It also denied slaves the right to a jury trial and increased the penalty for interfering with the rendition process to $1,000 and six months in jail. In order to ensure the statute was enforced, the 1850 law also placed control of individual cases in the hands of federal commissioners. These agents were paid more for returning a suspected slave than for freeing them, leading many to argue the law was biased in favor of Southern slaveholders.

**Why was the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act enacted?**The reason the 1850 law was enacted was as a concession to the Southern slave states as part of the [Compromise of 1850](http://www.american-historama.org/1850-1860-secession-era/compromise-of-1850.htm) which sought to obtain agreement between the Southern states and the Northern Free States as to the status of territories acquired during the [Mexican-American War](http://www.american-historama.org/1841-1850-westward-expansion/mexican-american-war.htm) (1846–1848).

● Thousands of slaves had escaped from slavery in the [Slave States](http://www.american-historama.org/1829-1841-jacksonian-era/underground-railroad-map.htm) of the South to the Free States in the North  
● The [Abolishment  Movement](http://www.american-historama.org/1829-1841-jacksonian-era/abolitionist-movement.htm) was established in 1830 and the number of its supporters was growing  
● The [Underground Railroad](http://www.american-historama.org/1829-1841-jacksonian-era/underground-railroad.htm) was established in1832 to help fugitive slaves and many slaves escaped to Canada

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**What were the effects of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act?**The effects of the 1850 Act were:

● The Fugitive Slave Act was strengthened  
● Penalties for helping slaves were increased to $1000 and six months in jail  
● It penalized United States officials who did not arrest an alleged runaway slaves  
● Runaway slaves were not entitled to a jury trial  
● Runaway slaves were not allowed to testify on their own behalf

**Make a prediction:**

1. What parts will Northerners hate/Southerners like?
2. How do you think Northerners will react to this new law?

**Document Analysis**

1. What is the document about?

2. How would Northerners feel about this? Southerners? Explain in 1 sentence.

**Jigsaw**

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| **Personal Liberty Laws** | **Underground Railroad** | **Uncle Tom’s Cabin** |
| 1. Explain how it resisted the Fugitive Slave Act in in your own words.  2. Why would Northerners Love, but Southerners hate it? | 1. Explain how it resisted the Fugitive Slave Act in in your own words.  2. Why would Northerners Love, but Southerners hate it? | 1. Explain how it resisted the Fugitive Slave Act in in your own words.  2. Why would Northerners Love, but Southerners hate it? |

**Personal Liberty Laws**

Federal laws of 1793 and 1850 allowed for the arrest and removal of alleged fugitive slaves with only minimal evidence presented by the master or master's agent claiming a person as a fugitive. Many northern states adopted various laws, generally known as "personal liberty laws, " that were designed to prevent the kidnapping of free blacks as well as to provide a fair process for the return of actual fugitives. The kidnapping of a number of free black children in Philadelphia, some of whom were never returned to their families, led to the passage of Pennsylvania's 1826 law. Most of the early state laws required clearer evidence that the person arrested was actually a fugitive slave. The laws also gave alleged fugitives greater procedural rights. Pennsylvania's law of 1826, for example, required that any one removing a black from the state as a fugitive slave first obtain a certificate of removal from a state judge, [justice of the peace](https://www.encyclopedia.com/social-sciences-and-law/political-science-and-government/political-science-terms-and-concepts-38), or alderman. Other laws, like Vermont's act of 1840, specifically guaranteed that an alleged fugitive be given a jury trial. While these laws provided protection for free blacks and procedural rights for actual fugitives, they also contained language and provisions that allowed claimants to turn to the states for enforcement of the fugitive slave law. Under these laws, for example, state officials could issue arrest warrants for fugitives and incarcerate them during a trial to determine their status.

In *Prigg v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (1842), Justice [Joseph Story](https://www.encyclopedia.com/people/history/us-history-biographies/joseph-story) of the U.S. Supreme Court found unconstitutional any state laws that slowed down the removal process or in any way interfered with the return of fugitive slaves.

Following this decision, some northern states adopted new personal liberty laws, withdrawing all of their support for the enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Laws. Under these laws, state officers were prohibited from helping to enforce the law, and state facilities, such as jails, were closed to slave catchers.

Partially in response to these new personal liberty laws, Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850. This law created a mechanism for national enforcement, including, if necessary, the use of U.S. marshals, state militias, and federal troops to return fugitive slaves to their masters. At least nine states responded to this law with new personal liberty laws, closing state facilities to slave catchers and denying any state or local support for the return of fugitive slaves. These laws helped undermine the effectiveness of the new law.

**Underground Railroad**

The Underground Railroad, a vast network of people who helped fugitive slaves escape to the North and to Canada, was not run by any single organization or person. Rather, it consisted of many individuals -- many whites but predominently black -- who knew only of the local efforts to aid fugitives and not of the overall operation. Still, it effectively moved hundreds of slaves northward each year -- according to one estimate, the South lost 100,000 slaves between 1810 and 1850.

The escape network was not literally underground nor a railroad. It was figuratively "underground" in the sense of being an [underground resistance](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Underground_resistance). It was known as a "railroad" by way of the movement of large numbers of individuals. The Underground Railroad consisted of meeting points, secret routes, transportation, and [safe houses](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Safe_house), and assistance provided by abolitionist sympathizers. Individuals were often organized in small, independent groups; this helped to maintain secrecy because individuals knew some connecting "stations" along the route but knew few details of their immediate area. Escaped slaves would move north along the route from one way station to the next. "Conductors" on the railroad came from various backgrounds and included free-born blacks, white abolitionists, former slaves (either escaped or [manumitted](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manumission)), and [Native Americans](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Native_Americans_in_the_United_States). Churches also often played a role, especially the [Religious Society of Friends](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religious_Society_of_Friends) (Quakers), [Congregationalists](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Congregational_church), [Wesleyans](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wesleyan_Church), and [Reformed Presbyterians](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reformed_Presbyterian_Church_of_North_America) as well as certain sects of [mainstream denominations](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mainline_Protestant) such as branches of the [Methodist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Methodism) church and American [Baptists](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baptists).  
  
For the slave, running away to the North was anything but easy. The first step was to escape from the slaveholder. For many slaves, this meant relying on his or her own resources. Sometimes a "conductor," posing as a slave, would enter a plantation and then guide the runaways northward. The fugitives would move at night. They would generally travel between 10 and 20 miles to the next station, where they would rest and eat, hiding in barns and other out-of-the-way places. While they waited, a message would be sent to the next station to alert its stationmaster.   
  
Although the fugitives sometimes traveled on boat or train, they usually traveled on foot or by wagon. Routes were often purposely indirect to confuse pursuers. The journey was often considered particularly difficult and dangerous for women or children, yet many still participated. In fact, one of the most famous and successful abductors, [Harriet Tubman](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harriet_Tubman), was a woman.

The risk was not limited solely to actual runaway slaves, but also to their helpers. Because strong, healthy blacks in their prime working and reproductive years were seen and treated as highly valuable commodities, it was not unusual for free blacks—both [freedmen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freedman#United_States) (former slaves) and those who had never been slaves—to be kidnapped and sold into slavery. "Certificates of freedom"—signed, [notarized](http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/notarize) statements attesting to the free status of individual blacks—could easily be destroyed and thus afforded their holders little protection. Under the terms of the [Fugitive Slave Act of 1850](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fugitive_Slave_Act_of_1850), when suspected fugitives were seized and brought to a special [magistrate](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magistrate) known as a commissioner, they had no right to a jury trial and could not testify in their own behalf. Technically, they were guilty of no crime. The marshal or private slave-catcher needed only to swear an oath to for the return of the “property.”

The Underground Railroad helped tens of thousands of slaves escape slavery over its lifetime. This escape was the Railroad’s and the conductor’s ultimate goals. Many people think that the Underground Railroad’s main goal was to end or abolish slavery, but that is not true. The Underground Railroad was created with the goal in mind of simply helping slaves who desired freedom, escape. The abolition movement was a separate entity.

**Uncle Tom’s Cabin**

Northern views of slavery hardened after the publication of Harriet Beecher Stowe's sentimental novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, in which she wrote about the injustice of the institution in reaction to the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. The daughter of the noted preacher Lyman Beecher and sister of Reverend Henry Ward Beecher, Stowe first serialized *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in an abolitionist magazine in 1851. The story appeared as a book the following year. The novel dramatically portrays the terror of the slave Eliza as she runs across ice floes on the Ohio River, clutching her tiny baby, and the nobility of Uncle Tom as he is whipped to death by Simon Legree. The book makes it clear that the concept of slavery is inherently evil; although Tom had been owned by a “kindly master” before he was sold to Legree, it was the institution itself that led to families being torn apart.

Stowe's novel was an immediate success, selling two million copies by the end of 1852 and waking a mass audience to the harshness of slavery. The impact of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is difficult to overestimate. According to Stowe's son, when President Lincoln met Mrs. Stowe at a White House affair, he is alleged to have remarked, “So this is the little lady who started the Civil War.” The story is probably apocryphal, but it makes the point that northern views on slavery indeed changed after the publication of her novel

*Uncle Tom's Cabin* outraged people in the [American South](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_South).[[26]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uncle_Tom%27s_Cabin#cite_note-pbs-4p2958-26) The novel was also roundly criticized by slavery supporters.

Acclaimed Southern novelist [William Gilmore Simms](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Gilmore_Simms) declared the work utterly false,[[55]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uncle_Tom%27s_Cabin#cite_note-55) while others called the novel criminal and slanderous.[[56]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uncle_Tom%27s_Cabin#cite_note-Brophy-56)Reactions ranged from a bookseller in [Mobile, Alabama](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mobile,_Alabama), being forced to leave town for selling the novel[[26]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uncle_Tom%27s_Cabin#cite_note-pbs-4p2958-26) to threatening letters sent to Stowe (including a package containing a slave's severed ear).[[26]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uncle_Tom%27s_Cabin#cite_note-pbs-4p2958-26) Many Southern writers, like Simms, soon wrote their own books in opposition to Stowe's novel.[[57]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uncle_Tom%27s_Cabin#cite_note-57)

Some critics highlighted Stowe's paucity of life-experience relating to Southern life, saying that it led her to create inaccurate descriptions of the region. For instance, she had never been to a Southern plantation. However, Stowe always said she based the characters of her book on stories she was told by runaway slaves in Cincinnati. It is reported that "She observed firsthand several incidents which galvanized her to write [the] famous anti-slavery novel. Scenes she observed on the Ohio River, including seeing a husband and wife being sold apart, as well as newspaper and magazine accounts and interviews, contributed material to the emerging plot."[[58]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uncle_Tom%27s_Cabin#cite_note-58)