

# THE ROAD TO CIVIL WAR

STUDENT STUDY  
UNIT

# 3











THE FUGITIVE SLAVE LAW AND NORTHERN ABOLITIONISM, PAGES 1–7 | BLEEDING KANSAS, PAGES 8–15

**1850–1861** | With the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law in 1850, men, women, and children suspected of being runaways could be arrested and taken into custody—even in states where slavery was outlawed. Writings that described the capture of African Americans, coupled with news accounts and photographs that chronicled the injustice of the Fugitive Slave Law, fueled anger and action among Northerners. The controversy over slavery became even more intense as the growing nation gained new territory. Would new states permit slavery or outlaw it? The documents in the second half of this unit present a case study that illuminates how this question was answered in Kansas.

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## The Fugitive Slave Law and Northern Abolitionism

### DOCUMENTS YOU'LL BE USING

-  **3.1** Executive Committee of the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society
-  **3.2** Protesting the Return of Anthony Burns
-  **3.3** Fugitive Slave Anthony Burns
-  **3.4** Whipping Scars on a Former Slave
-  **3.5** Emily—Runaway Slave
-  **3.6** Caution!! Colored People of Boston...
-  **3.7** Lyrics from “Slavery Is a Hard Foe to Battle”
-  **3.8** A Man Kidnapped!
-  **3.9** Excerpt from *The Religious Duty of Obedience to Law: A Sermon*
-  **3.10** On the Promulgation of the Fugitive Slave Act

### Emily—Runaway Slave

**3.5** | Reward poster | 1853 | *The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 required citizens to assist in the recovery of runaways, even in “free states.” It denied a fugitive’s right to a jury trial and provided for the appointment of federal officials to enforce the law. This poster, advertising for the capture of such a runaway named Emily, was probably posted in both Kentucky, a “slave state,” and Ohio, a “free state.”*

# 100 DOLLARS REWARD!

**Runaway from the subscriber on the 27th of July, my Black Woman, named**

## EMILY,

**Seventeen years of age, well grown, black color, has a whining voice. She took with her one dark calico and one blue and white dress, a red corded gingham bonnet; a white striped shawl and slippers. I will pay the above reward if taken near the Ohio river on the Kentucky side, or THREE HUNDRED DOLLARS, if taken in the State of Ohio, and delivered to me near Lewisburg, Mason County, Ky.**  
**THO'S. H. WILLIAMS.**  
**August 4, 1853.**

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

# CAUTION!!



## COLORED PEOPLE

**OF BOSTON, ONE & ALL,**

You are hereby respectfully **CAUTIONED** and advised, to avoid conversing with the

**Watchmen and Police Officers of Boston,**

For since the recent **ORDER OF THE MAYOR & ALDERMEN**, they are empowered to act as

### **KIDNAPPERS**

**AND**

### **Slave Catchers,**

And they have already been actually employed in **KIDNAPPING, CATCHING, AND KEEPING SLAVES**. Therefore, if you value your **LIBERTY**, and the *Welfare of the Fugitives* among you, *Shun* them in every possible manner, as so many **HOUNDS** on the track of the most unfortunate of your race.

**Keep a Sharp Look Out for KIDNAPPERS, and have TOP EYE open.**

**APRIL 24, 1851.**

Caution!! Colored People of Boston...

3.6 | Broadside | 1851 | This broadside was posted in Boston in 1851, the year after the Fugitive Slave Law took effect.

## Lyrics from “Slavery Is a Hard Foe to Battle”

3.7 | Song lyrics | 1855 | This popular song, published in New York City in 1855, was written by Justin Hutchinson, an abolitionist from New Hampshire.

I looked to the South and I looked to the West,  
And I saw old Slavery a coming,  
With four Northern dough faces hitched up in front,  
Driving freedom to the other side of Jordan.  
Then take off coats and roll up sleeves,  
Slavery is a hard foe to battle.  
Then take off coats and roll up sleeves,  
O, Slavery is a hard foe to battle, I believe.

...If I was the Legislature of these United States,  
I'd settle this great question accordin';  
I'd let every Slave go free over land, and on the sea,  
And let them have a little hope this side of Jordan.  
Then rouse up the free, the sword unsheath,  
Slavery is a hard foe to battle!

The South have their school where the masters  
learn to rule,  
And they lord it o'er the free states accordin';  
But sure they'd better quit e'er they raise the yankee grit,  
And we tumble 'em over t'other side of Jordan.  
Then wake up the North, the sword unsheath,  
Slavery is a hard foe to battle!

But the day is drawing nigh that Slavery must die,  
And every one must do his part accordin';  
Then let us all unite to give every man his right,  
(and women too!)  
And we'll get our pay the other side of Jordan.  
Then wake up the North, the sword unsheath,  
Freedom is the best road to travel.



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CHORUS.

Then take off coats and roll up sleeves — O.

Slave-ry is a hard foe to bat-tle.

Then take off coats and roll up sleeves — O.

Slave-ry is a hard foe to bat-tle I be-lieve.

## A Man Kidnapped!

3.8 | Broadside | 1854 |

*Anthony Burns was enslaved in Virginia, where he became a preacher and learned to read and write. He escaped by ship to Boston in 1854. His owner, Charles Suttle, learned that Burns was in Boston and came north to recover him under the Fugitive Slave Law. Burns was arrested and held on the third floor of the federal courthouse. On May 26, white abolitionists staged a meeting and rally in Faneuil Hall, while a smaller group of mostly African Americans met at Tremont Temple. The two groups came together at the courthouse, where they tried unsuccessfully to free Burns. He was returned to Virginia on a federal ship. Within a year, his freedom was bought with \$1,300 raised by a black church. Burns returned to Boston.*

# A MAN KIDNAPPED!

A PUBLIC MEETING AT

## FANEUIL HALL!

WILL BE HELD

# THIS FRIDAY EVEN'G, May 26th, at 7 o'clock,

To secure justice for A MAN CLAIMED AS A SLAVE by a

# VIRGINIA KIDNAPPER!

And NOW IMPRISONED IN BOSTON COURT HOUSE, in  
defiance of the Laws of Massachusetts. Shall he be plunged into the Hell of  
Virginia Slavery by a Massachusetts Judge of Probate?

**BOSTON, May 26th, 1854.**

Excerpt from  
*The Religious Duty of  
Obedience to Law:*  
A Sermon by  
Ichabod S. Spencer

3.9 | Sermon | November 24, 1850 |

*Resistance to the Fugitive Slave Law was a hotly debated topic in northern states. This sermon, delivered in New York City in 1850, asks whether it is morally permissible to disobey the federal law.*

I am not justifying slavery. I am pleading obedience to the texts before me. Slavery may be wrong. Be it so; there is still a *righteous* method to get rid of it. But if slavery is wrong, that does not make violence and murder *right*.

I am not justifying the fugitive-slave Law. It may be wrong: it may be unwise and unconstitutional. I think that any wise and modest man would hesitate much to pronounce it unconstitutional, after its enactment by a body of men who aimed to abide by the constitution, and who studied the matter most intensely, with every opportunity for information and with minds trained for years in the depths of legal science. But, be it wrong—be it unwise and unconstitutional; there are civil courts to decide upon its constitutionality, and no man has any right to decide for himself that it is unconstitutional, and act upon that decision: if he had such a right, then every man would be his own Lawmaker, and public Constitution and Law would be nothing but a bugbear or a bubble! Be it wrong; there is a peaceful, prescribed way of amending both Law and Constitution,—and a wrong in the Law does not make false swearing by the juryman and murder by the fugitive *right!*

...The matter before us is a very serious matter. The wicked principles of which I have spoken, disguise it as you will, tend directly to anarchy, confusion, and civil war! The question *is not*, whether slavery is right, or the Fugitive Slave Law right. It

draws deeper. The question is, shall Law be put in force, and the government of the country stand; or shall Law be resisted, and the government of the country disobeyed, and the nation plunged into all the horrors of civil war? If Law cannot be executed, it is time to write the epitaph of your country! ■

FUGITIVE SLAVE LAW.

THE

Religious Duty

OF

OBEDIENCE TO LAW:

A

SERMON,

Preached in the Second Presbyterian Church

IN BROOKLYN, NOV. 24, 1850.

BY ICHABOD S. SPENCER, D D.

NEW YORK:  
PUBLISHED BY M. W. DODD,  
BRICK CHURCH CHAPEL, CITY HALL SQUARE,  
OPPOSITE THE CITY HALL.  
1850.

BOSTON, JUNE 17, 1854.

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REV. AND DEAR SIR :

On the promulgation of the Fugitive Slave Act, a new and large field for benevolence was opened in this city. The extent of misery caused by that act is so great and appalling, that we will not here trust ourselves fully to characterize it, presuming that the readiness of your Christian sympathy with the innocent sufferers, counting many hundreds in number, will appeal more strongly to your hearts than any words from us. We ask you, in the name of Humanity, to read this short Circular in your house of worship, on Sunday, with or without comment, according to the dictates of your feelings or sense of propriety, and having done this, to take up a contribution for this charity.

Men may, and do, honestly differ, as to the duty of Christian men, and good citizens in the trying position in which free Massachusetts is placed by this Law ; but we feel safe in assuming that there is no difference of opinion as to our duty in furnishing clothes and food, physicians and medicine, and professional counsel, to the poor, sick, frightened, and bereft men, women, and children, as well escaped slaves as free persons of color, who are hiding in garrets, and corners, and cellars, not yet claimed, but living in a state of mind bordering on distraction. These are very many, comprising the young, middle-aged, and old, of both sexes, actually, in many cases, incapacitated by fear and real danger, from coming to the light of day to earn a living for themselves and their families. We must not let them die. In view of these cases, we ask the contributions of the charitable, for the purpose of relieving the pressing necessities of these children of our common Father.

For some months past, there was but little alarm amongst our colored citizens ; but now another victim has been seized in our city and sent into hopeless bondage. He was a peaceable citizen, honest and industrious. He disturbed nobody. He was a member of a church in Boston ; he had been a Preacher in Virginia, and was an ordained Minister of the Baptist denomination. This wanton and cruel act frightens the poor fugitives who are yet tarrying with us ; they also must flee away from the graves of our fathers. For when a Christian minister is seized and forced off to be a Slave, what colored man is safe ?

We think it is not the will of the Heavenly Father that one of these little ones should perish. They come to us for aid. We ask you to help us, assured that the blessing of those that are ready to perish will fall on you, and He who does not forget the cup of cold water given to a fainting brother will openly reward your beneficence.

In 1851, we sent a similar circular to *each of the churches* in Massachusetts. *Eighty-seven* gave us their contributions, amounting to \$1,484.56. This sum has been applied, exclusively, for the benefit of Fugitive Slaves. Since the passage of the Fugitive Slave Bill, we have assisted two hundred and thirty of our fellow Christians to obtain freedom in another land. We cannot miraculously multiply our few loaves — you can do it with no miracle.

We deem it proper to state that the Vigilance Committee, which we represent, does not, nor ever has, countenanced or counselled a forcible resistance to the execution of the law ; and we wish to add that any society or person, desiring to limit the uses of their contribution, will please indicate it, and may rely on its being faithfully applied as they shall request. Donations may be addressed to FRANCIS JACKSON, 31 Hollis Street, the Treasurer, or to any one of the undersigned Committee of Finance.

Respectfully,

R. E. APTHORP,	ROBERT MORRIS, JR.
FRANCIS JACKSON,	ELLIS GRAY LORING,
SAMUEL G. HOWE,	H. I. BOWDITCH,
J. A. ANDREW,	S. E. SEWALL.

## On the Promulgation of the Fugitive Slave Act

3.10 | Letter | June 17, 1854 | This 1854 letter solicited contributions for a fund to benefit fugitive slaves in Massachusetts.

# The Fugitive Slave Law and Northern Abolitionism

## UNIT 3 Analyzing the Documents

TIME CLASSROOM  
REPRODUCIBLE

The questions below are designed to deepen your understanding of the images and texts concerning the Fugitive Slave Law and northern abolitionists' responses to it. Use items 3.1 through 3.10 as the basis for your answers.

1. How do the broadsides illustrate the provisions of the Fugitive Slave Law?

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2. How did Anthony Burns become a symbol? Why do you think his case attracted so much attention?

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3. Why did the Fugitive Slave Law lead to a growth in abolitionism in the North? What do the documents reveal about the background of the abolitionists? How did they use cases like that of Anthony Burns to promote their point of view?

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4. What justification did abolitionists offer for refusing to follow the provisions of the law? What counterargument did men like Ichabod Spencer put forth?

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