



HENRY LOUIS GATES, JR.

with Tonya Bolden

DARK SKY RISING

**RECONSTRUCTION AND
THE DAWN OF JIM CROW**

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THE DAWN OF JIM CROW**

By Henry Louis Gates, Jr.
with Tonya Bolden

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Dr. Henry Louis Gates, Jr.

In your hands

you are holding my book *Dark Sky Rising: Reconstruction and the Dawn of Jim Crow*, my very first venture in writing for young readers.

The book and its topic are very special to me for several reasons. When I was growing up in Piedmont, West Virginia, our American history lessons were mainly focused on the Founding Fathers and other great figures in American history, such as Abraham Lincoln and Theodore and Franklin Roosevelt. My teachers didn't dig deeply into the reasons for slavery, or why racial segregation happened. Back then, history class was all about dates and names, but not much about black people or the historical causes and effects of slavery and racism.

This is one of the reasons I became a professor of African and African American Studies.

Fortunately, I come from a family that loved to read and loved to discuss current events. My parents always taught me that knowledge brings meaning to one's daily life, and therefore to one's future. In fact, my mother and father often told my brother, Paul, and me that "knowledge is power." And so, when the chance came to write about one of the most turbulent and intriguing times in the shaping of America, I was very eager to present this important aspect of history to young readers.

The Reconstruction era remains one of the most pivotal yet least understood chapters in American history. Beginning with the Civil War and its aftermath, the United States struggled to heal the sectional divide that slavery and secession had caused while living up to the promise of equal citizenship for all, including the four million formerly enslaved African Americans who had played a decisive role in saving the Union and fighting for their own liberation. During Reconstruction, the Constitution was transformed. African Americans built businesses and religious and educational institutions, advanced an energetic form of government, held elective offices from the local to the federal level, organized and voted,

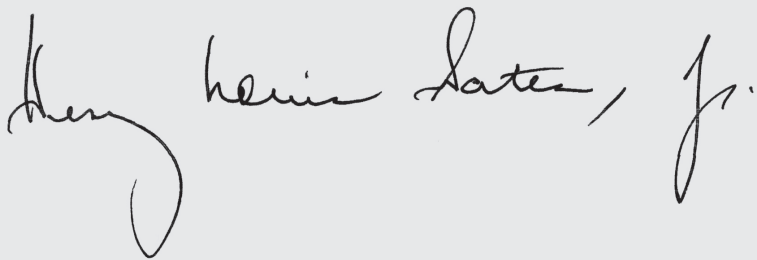
and revitalized democracy itself against the longest of odds—and a constant, violent backlash.

Writing deep into the Jim Crow era that followed, the preeminent and pioneering black intellectual W. E. B. Du Bois wrote in his history *Black Reconstruction* that, during those transformative years of hope, struggle, and eventual betrayal, “the slave went free; stood a brief moment in the sun; then moved back again toward slavery.”

I am fortunate to be collaborating with Tonya Bolden to bring the story of Reconstruction to students and families, who themselves are living through another period of urgency, consequence, and change. In cutting through the layers of false memories and other “lost causes,” we seek to arrive at the heart of what Du Bois tried to teach us about the Civil War and Reconstruction, and the dreadful period that followed during the so-called Redemption of the South and the rise of Jim Crow segregation—the set of laws that enshrined “separate but equal” as the law of the land—so that you, a new generation of readers, can feel closer to your history and be vigilant about the complicated memory of Reconstruction, Redemption, and race in our own time.

Our book covers the half century from the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment, which legally

abolished slavery following the Civil War, and its fiftieth anniversary during the height of Jim Crow segregation. Our focus has been on presenting real-life accounts of resiliency and courage, creativity and uplift. Hopefully, this book will encourage you to ask questions about the legacy of the Civil War, to think deeply about history, and to develop some of your own ideas that you'll share as a participant in America's democratic experiment today.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Henry Louis Gates, Jr." The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "H" and a distinct "Jr." at the end.

Dr. Henry Louis Gates, Jr.

Director of the Hutchins Center
for African & African American Research,
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Notable Awards & Citations

DR. HENRY LOUIS GATES, JR.

Emmy Award Winner for Outstanding
Historical Program—Long Form, for
The African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross

**PEABODY AWARD WINNER FOR *THE AFRICAN AMERICANS:*
*MANY RIVERS TO CROSS***

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ELECTED TO THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF ARTS AND LETTERS

Chosen as the National Endowment
for the Humanities Jefferson Lecturer

INDUCTED INTO THE SONS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

To Edward Austen Burke, Nathaniel Louis Gosdanian, and Ella Edith Parke Heinrich: May you live in a world in which racism is a historic memory.

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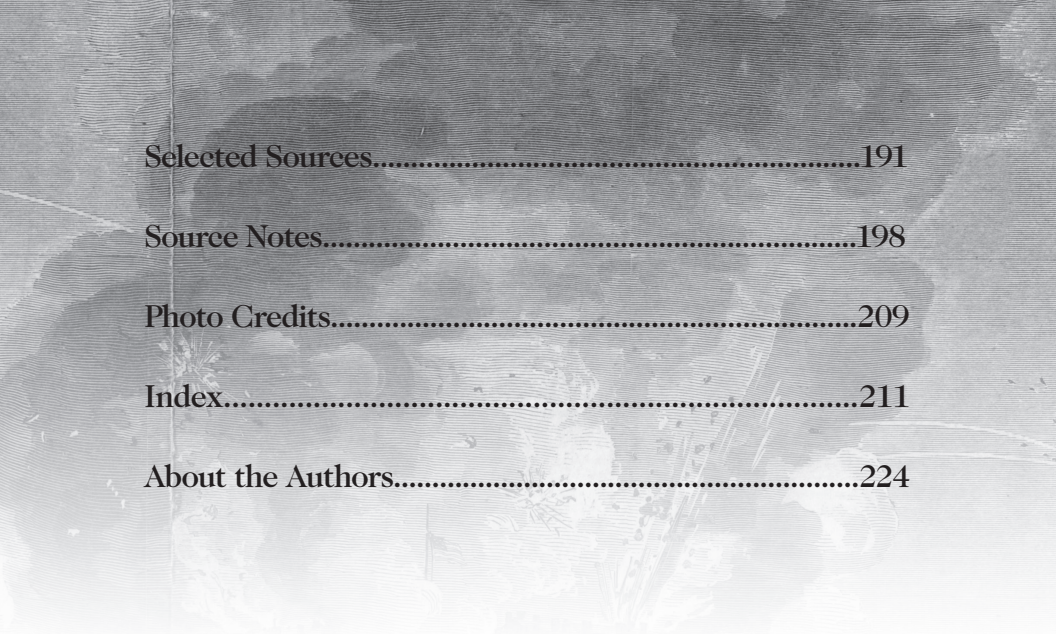
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1

Let Freedom
Ring!

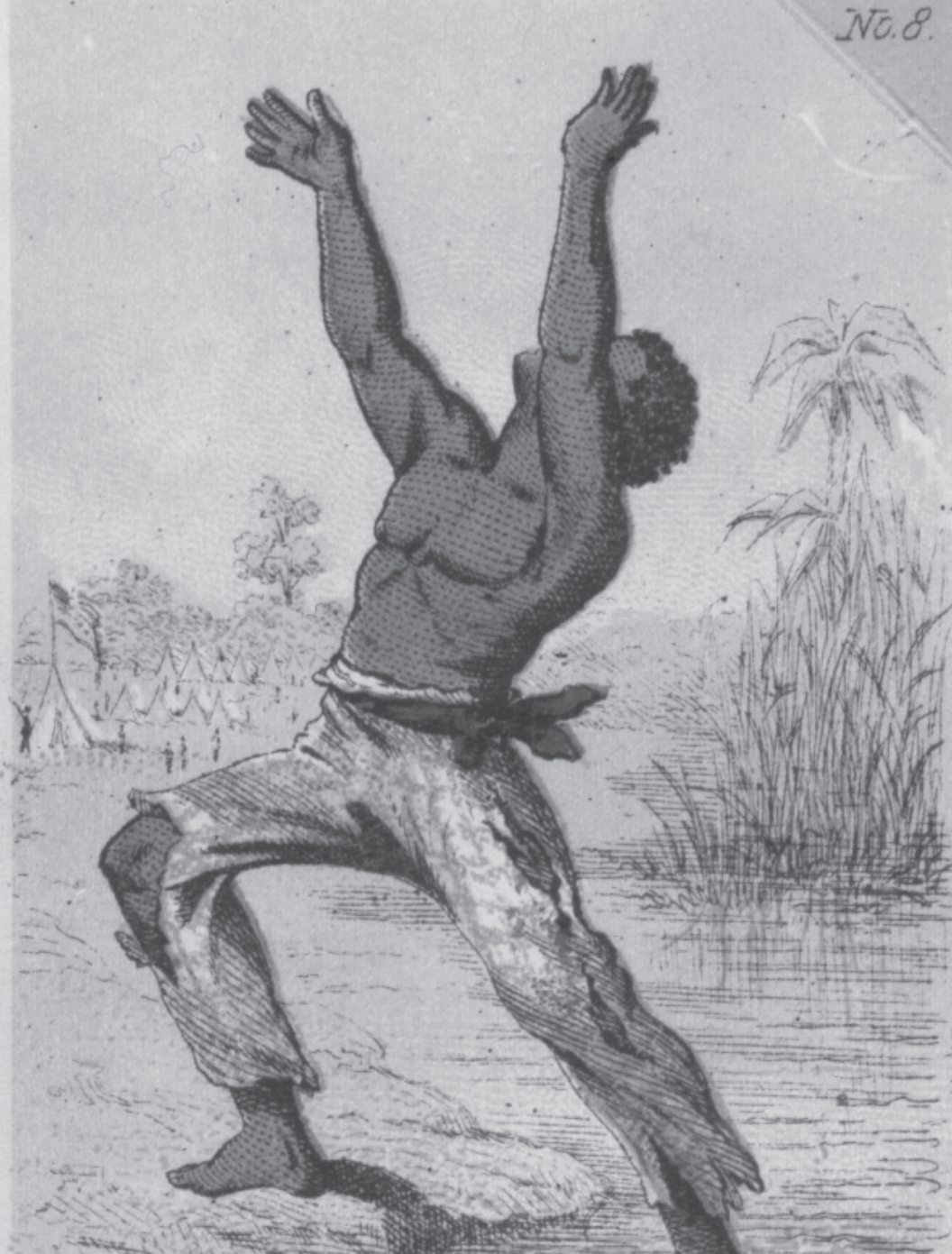
A sacred moment in a grove of live oaks draped in Spanish moss.

A song, impromptu, from the souls of black folk moved witnesses to tears.

*My country 'tis of thee,
Sweet land of liberty,
Of thee I sing . . .*

It began with an elderly man possessed of a strong, if gravelly, voice. Between one moment and the next, two women joined in. Soon more black voices were aloft singing of “rocks and rills,” of “woods and templed hills,” of freedom ringing out.

When white people lent their voices to the song, “I motioned them to silence,” remembered Colonel Thomas Wentworth Higginson, remarking upon his tearfulness that day. “I never saw anything so electric,”



REACHING AND REJOICING: News of President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, declaring freedom for people enslaved in Rebel-held territory, was cause for joyous celebration and for millions of black people to set their sights on a bright future.

he added, “it made all other words cheap; it seemed the choked voice of a race at last unloosed.”

This electric, majestic moment happened on Thursday, January 1, 1863, more than six hundred bloody days into the Civil War, America’s second revolution.

That grove of live oaks was next to Camp Saxton in Port Royal, South Carolina, which had been under Union occupation since late 1861. The gathering in the grove was a celebration of what the formidable Frederick Douglass called “the trump of jubilee”: President Abraham Lincoln’s grand Emancipation Proclamation. It declared people enslaved in Rebel-held territory *free*.

On the 1st of January, 1863, we held services for the purpose of listening to the reading of President Lincoln’s proclamation. . . . It was a glorious day for us all, and we enjoyed every minute of it.

—Susie King Taylor, *Reminiscences of My Life in Camp with the 33d United States Colored Troops Late 1st S. C. Volunteers* (1902)

It was shortly after the reading of Lincoln’s proclamation that the singing of “My Country ’Tis of Thee”

swept over the vast crowd of thousands, roughly seven hundred of whom were members of a proud black regiment under Colonel Higginson's command: the 1st South Carolina Volunteers.

*Land where my fathers died,
Land of the pilgrims' pride,
From ev'ry mountain side
Let freedom ring!*



COMMANDER AND ABOLITIONIST: Colonel Thomas Wentworth Higginson's abolitionist activities included involvement with the Underground Railroad.

Dr. Seth Rogers, the regiment's white chief surgeon, also witnessed that moment of soaring song. When he wrote to his wife, Hannah, of "the most eventful day" of his life, he said that the "spontaneous outburst of love and loyalty to a country that has heretofore so terribly wronged these blacks, was the birth of a new hope in the honesty of her intention."

"Just think of it!—the first day [black people] had ever had a country," Colonel Higginson later proclaimed, declaring that "the life of the whole day was in those unknown people's song."

After Higginson addressed the crowd in that grove of live oaks, he presented the color bearers, Sergeant Prince Rivers and Corporal Robert Sutton, with the flags they were to keep flying high and out of enemy hands in battle. Prince Rivers vowed that he would *die* before he surrendered his flag.

Prince Rivers, a five-foot-ten dark-skinned man with light eyes, had endured some forty years in slavery on Henry Middleton Stuart's plantation along the Coosaw River near Beaufort, South Carolina, not far from Port Royal. A house servant and coachman, Rivers learned to read and write while enslaved. He did so at great peril. Rivers risked a brutal whipping, being sold farther south, or other forms of punishment if found out.

In early 1862, Rivers pulled off the ultimate act of resistance. He swiped one of his owner's finest horses and escaped from Edgefield, South Carolina, where Stuart had moved because of the war. Skirting Confederate troops, brave Prince Rivers rode more than a hundred miles to Union lines near Port Royal.

A born leader, Prince Rivers was not only a color bearer in the 1st South Carolina Volunteers but also the regiment's provost sergeant, its law-and-order man. Said Colonel Higginson of Rivers: "There is not a white officer in this regiment who has more administrative ability, or more absolute authority over the men . . . and if there should ever be a black monarchy in South Carolina, he will be its king."

"Contraband" is what the Union called Prince Rivers and other enslaved people who walked, ran, rowed, galloped, and swam to Union lines. "Contraband of war": confiscated enemy property used to aid the rebellion, from vessels and weapons to people. The designation began with the Union's General Benjamin Franklin Butler, a rotund and rather pompous man who hailed from Massachusetts.

Back on the night of Thursday, May 23, 1861, a month after the war broke out, three enslaved men—Frank Baker, Shepard Mallory, and James

Townsend—escaped from Norfolk, Virginia, where they were forced to do construction work for the Confederacy at Sewell’s Point. Worse, they were soon to be carted off to North Carolina, separated from their families.

In a skiff and under cover of night, the three desperate men rowed across the waters of Hampton Roads to a fortress under Union control: the behemoth Fort Monroe, on the tip of the Virginia Peninsula. Baker, Mallory, and Townsend pleaded with General Benjamin Butler, the fort’s commander, for sanctuary.

When the three men’s owner, Confederate colonel Charles Mallory, got wind of their whereabouts, he dispatched an emissary, Major John Cary, to get his property back.

Since the start of the war, more often than not, when enslaved people sought asylum at a Union fort or camp, they were rebuffed—or worse, returned to their owners as required by the Constitution and the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act.

What would General Butler do?

He decided to keep the three men.

But wasn’t Butler obligated to abide by the law? Major Cary pressed.

“I am under no constitutional obligations to a

foreign country, which Virginia now claims to be,” replied Butler, a lawyer. He was keeping the men as “contraband of war.” Virginia had used them against the Union. Butler would use them on the Union’s behalf. Coincidentally, Virginia voters ratified their state’s ordinance of secession on the very day the three black men escaped captivity.

General Butler would only reconsider his position if Colonel Mallory pledged allegiance to the United States. That didn’t happen. Thus, Frank Baker, Shepard Mallory, and James Townsend were not hauled back into the hell of slavery. Instead, they became laborers at Fort Monroe.

Though I was a mere child during the preparation for the Civil War and during the war itself, I now recall the many late-at-night whispered discussions that I heard my mother and the other slaves on the plantation indulge in. These discussions showed that they understood the situation, and that they kept themselves informed of events by what was termed the “grape-vine” telegraph.

—Booker T. Washington, *Up from Slavery: An Autobiography*
(1901)



SEEKING PROTECTION: *(Above)* Children and adults hung their hopes on Fort Monroe.
(Below) People escaping slavery crossing the Rappahannock River in Virginia.



Word of General Benjamin Butler's stance spread fast. For black people in the area, Fort Monroe became "Freedom's Fortress." Within days of Butler's decision, nearly fifty had made a mad dash there. "Up to this time I have had come within my lines men and women with their children—entire families—each family belonging to the same owner," wrote Butler to a superior, General Winfield Scott, on May 27, 1861. Butler told Scott that he had decided to employ the able-bodied, "issuing proper food for the support of all, and charging against their services the expense of care and sustenance of the non-laborers."

African Americans were not only making tracks for Freedom's Fortress. "Within weeks" of Butler's decree, scholar Adam Goodheart tells us, enslaved people "were reported flocking to the Union lines just about anywhere there *were* Union lines."

In August 1861, the US Congress passed and President Lincoln signed the First Confiscation Act. It made General Butler's off-the-cuff decree law. By then, more than nine hundred black men and women, girls and boys, had made their way to Freedom's Fortress alone. One of those bold souls was Henry (Harry) Jarvis, an oysterman from Virginia's Eastern Shore.

Harry Jarvis was an imposing, impressive man. Over six feet tall and well built, he was said to have a “shapely head, a Roman nose, and the eye of a hawk” and “might have been a model for a Greek chisel—the young Hercules in bronze, or a gladiator ready for the imperial review.” In the spring of 1861, Jarvis, twenty-five or thereabouts, made up his mind to escape after his owner—the “meanest man” on the Eastern Shore—shot at him.

For days, Harry Jarvis lay low in the woods with a friend bringing him food and news. Jarvis waited for just the right moment to take his liberty. It would come on the day of his owner’s birthday bash, a time when the man and his friends would be boozing it up and carrying on into the wee hours—that was to be his freedom date.

Three weeks passed by the time Jarvis lit out in stolen goods: a canoe from a white man, a sail from a black man. After a stormy start, he was blessed with a steady breeze at his back. By morning, he was thirty-five miles away, across the James River and at Freedom’s Fortress.

Like other black men, Jarvis yearned to fight for the Union. When he told General Butler of this desire, the white man snapped that it was *not* “a black man’s war.” Jarvis shot back that it “*would* be a black man’s war before they got through.” (Though black men, such as

my fourth great grandfather John Redman, had fought for the nation's independence in the American Revolution, they were excluded from serving in the US Army in 1792. This wasn't the case with the navy.)

Instead of remaining at Fort Monroe, Jarvis joined the crew of a commercial vessel that would take him to Cuba; Haiti; and Liberia, West Africa.

Of course, back at Freedom's Fortress, Harry Jarvis's retort to General Butler was spot-on. For freedom was ringing out.

In August 1862, the Second Confiscation Act went into effect, rendering enslaved people who made it to Union lines "captives of war, [who would] be forever free of their servitude, and not again held as slaves." There was also a new militia act. It gave Lincoln the green light to employ blacks as laborers in the army for "ten dollars per month and one ration, three dollars of which monthly pay may be in clothing."

What's more, by the summer of 1862, slavery had been abolished in the District of Columbia and the western territories. The end of slavery in the capital came at a price that sickened abolitionists, though. The federal government was to pay owners up to \$300 per enslaved person.

The two confiscation acts along with the new militia act culminated in the Emancipation Proclamation.



THE WAR BEGINS: Confederate soldiers fire cannons from an artillery battery, bombarding Fort Sumter in Charleston, South Carolina, beginning on April 12, 1861.

This 1863 decree, which Lincoln called “a fit and necessary war measure” for putting down the rebellion, fired up more black people to escape captivity. It also propelled black men, in the North and South, freeborn and freed—boatsmen, field hands, artisans, mechanics, merchants—to join the Union’s armed forces, for Lincoln’s proclamation also said that black men could be soldiers.

As fate would have it, the first black Union regiment came from South Carolina, the first of the eleven Southern states to secede (December 20, 1860) and the state where the war began when, on April 12, 1861, Confederate cannons blasted the Union’s Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor.

More than a year later, in late summer 1862, the Union’s secretary of war, Edwin Stanton, an asthmatic and abrasive Ohioan with a beard, authorized the fiery-eyed yet gentle abolitionist General Rufus Saxton of Massachusetts, the Department of the South’s military governor stationed in South Carolina, to raise black troops there. A few months later, Colonel Higginson was on the scene to take command. Thus, the birth of the 1st South Carolina Volunteers—or rather its rebirth.

Back in early May 1862, Union general David Hunter, then the commander of the Department of

the South, declared people enslaved in Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina to be free. Hunter also began raising a black regiment in South Carolina. Prince Rivers was in that regiment. General Hunter had even taken Rivers on a recruiting mission to New York City, where some white people, livid over the sight of a black man in uniform, bombarded Rivers with stones and racial slurs.

Ten days after General Hunter issued his proclamation of liberation, Abraham Lincoln voided it.

At the time, the president was doing his utmost to keep the Border States from bolting. These were the slave states that had not joined the Confederacy: Delaware, Kentucky, Maryland, and Missouri. After Hunter's unauthorized actions, Lincoln tried to make a deal with representatives of the border states and Virginia's western counties, which had seceded from the "Old Dominion." He pleaded with them to agree to compensated gradual emancipation: payment for ending slavery at some point in the future. No, they said.

All along, Lincoln publicly proclaimed that the war was about the restoration of the Union, *not* ending slavery.

Then . . .

The winds of war, from the Union's failed Peninsula Campaign to take Richmond, Virginia, the second

capital of the Confederacy, in the spring and summer of 1862, to the Union's need for more boots on the ground, caused Lincoln to change course. On September 22, 1862, five days after the Union's victory in the Battle of Antietam—the war's bloodiest single day of combat—Lincoln issued the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation. In it, he gave the Confederacy one hundred days to cease hostilities. If it didn't, come January 1, 1863, he would release a final Emancipation Proclamation.

Lincoln kept his word, as the folks down in Port Royal learned when the New Year rolled around.

Decked out in blue jackets, scarlet pants, and broad-brimmed hats, Sergeant Prince Rivers and his comrades shouted "Hurrah!" throughout Camp Saxton on New Year's Day 1863. It was a day of surging jubilation, of freedom ringing out, of joy overflowing among liberty-loving people around the nation. In Port Royal, the day was capped with a grand barbecue!

The Road to War

The Civil War was a long time coming. Its causes include the following:

Compromise of 1850 (September 1850): This series of statutes was intended to defuse North-South tensions over the more than half-million square miles of land the United States gained for \$15 million at the end of the Mexican-American War (1846–1848). This land included all or parts of present-day Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming. In this compromise, among other things, California entered the Union as a free state, slave trading in the District of Columbia (but not slavery itself) was abolished, and there was a new Fugitive Slave Act that favored slaveholders. For one, federal marshals in the North were compelled to assist slave hunters. Anyone abetting a fugitive could be fined a thousand dollars and imprisoned for six months.

Kansas-Nebraska Act (May 30, 1854): This superseded part of the Missouri Compromise of 1820, which had admitted Maine into the Union as a free state and Missouri as a slave state, while banning slavery in the rest of the land acquired in the Louisiana Purchase (1803) above the parallel 36° 30'. This land included the territories of Kansas and Nebraska, where slavery would now be a matter of popular sovereignty, that is, left up to their white male settlers. This led to a violent clash between proslavery and antislavery activists, known as “Bleeding Kansas.” The issue remained unresolved until Kansas was admitted to the Union as a free state in January 1861.

Dred Scott Decision (March 6, 1857): Because their owner had them living on free soil for a while (in Wisconsin Territory for one), Dred Scott and his wife, Harriet, enslaved in St. Louis, Missouri, sued for their freedom and that of their two daughters. Dred Scott’s case went all the way to the US Supreme Court, where, in his opinion for the Court, Chief Justice Roger Taney concluded Scott had no right to

bring his suit, because, whether enslaved or free, blacks were not citizens of the United States.

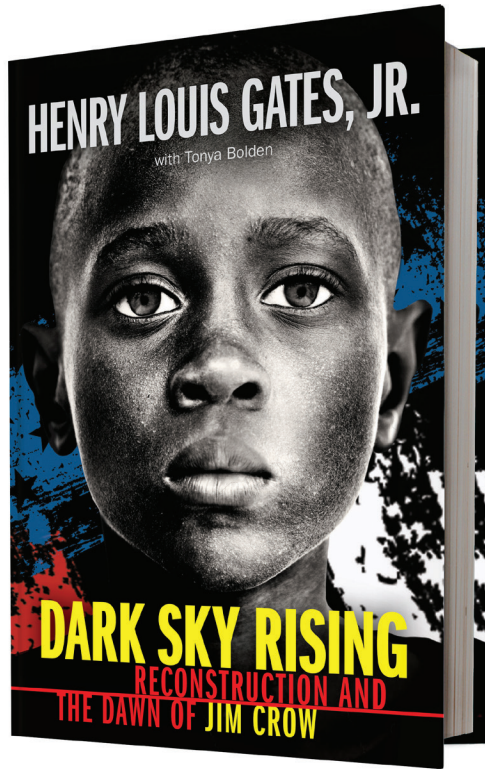
John Brown's Raid (*October 16, 1859*): White firebrand John Brown led a raid on the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia (now in West Virginia), with a small band of black and white men that included his sons. Brown's goal was to ignite an uprising among enslaved people in the area. The raid failed and John Brown was hanged. Thomas Wentworth Higginson was one of the raid's financial backers.

Lincoln's Election to the Presidency (*November 6, 1860*): In the run-up to the election of 1860, many white Southerners, most of them Democrats, vowed "Dis-Union!" if the Republican candidate, Abraham Lincoln of Illinois, won the presidency. While not an abolitionist (an advocate for the immediate end of slavery throughout the nation), Lincoln opposed the expansion of slavery into the western territories. He wasn't alone. "Free soil" was one of the principles of the nascent Republican Party, founded in 1854. Some white Americans were free soilers because they despised slavery, others because they loathed the idea of wealthy Southern planters gobbling up the land. They wanted the territories populated by white farmers who cultivated their own small farms.

South Carolina's Secession (*December 20, 1860*): At a convention in Charleston, the Palmetto State left the Union. It then urged others to join it "in forming a Confederacy of Slaveholding States." By the time Lincoln reached Washington, DC, for his inauguration (March 4, 1861), Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas had heeded South Carolina's call. A month earlier, in February 1861, a new republic had been born: the Confederate States of America.

Attack on Fort Sumter (*April 12, 1861*): Confederate cannons bombarded Union-held Fort Sumter in Charleston, South Carolina, until the fort's commander surrendered late the following day. President Lincoln promptly called for seventy-five thousand troops to crush the rebellion. Arkansas, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia joined the Confederacy that spring.

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