The **Baltimore Sun**, Runaway Slave Advertisements (1844)

**The End of the Second Party System, 1850–1858**

While many Americans celebrated the Compromise of 1850 as a "final settlement" of all outstanding sectional issues, its central provisions served only to keep those issues visible. The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, in response to a common problem among the slave states (Document 13-7), made it federal policy not simply to allow slavery in the states where it existed, but to extend the reach of the institution into the heart of the North itself. Anti-slavery militants increasingly turned to direct action both to free slaves and to protect fugitives from slave catchers and federal marshals (Document 13-9). Northerners saw the Fugitive Slave Act as demonstrating the lengths to which the "Slave Power" would go in attacking the liberties even of Americans in the "free states"; white southerners saw northern resistance as evidence that free-state residents refused to accept their constitutional obligations (Document 13-8).

Meanwhile, in 1854 the issue of whether to allow the expansion of slavery in the western territories reasserted itself with the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, which repealed the Missouri Compromise and allowed settlers in the newly organized territories of Kansas and Nebraska to determine the future of slavery there. Alarmed at what they viewed as a fresh triumph of the "Slave Power," a resurgent anti-slavery movement launched a new political party, the Republican Party, of unprecedentedly broad appeal. As Kansas degenerated into civil war between proslavery and antislavery factions,atrocity stories provided grist for sectional propagandists on both sides, while violence spread to the floor of the U.S. Senate itself (Document 13-10). The Supreme Court finally sought to resolve the issues in its 1857 *Dred Scott decision* (Document 13-11). However, its declaration that Congress had no constitutional right to bar slavery from the territories outraged Republicans and raised northern fears that the Court would ultimately declare slavery a *national* institution. To many northerners, it was becoming increasingly evident that the federal government had to be purged of all "Slave Power" influences—and the vehicle for doing so would be the Republican Party.

**13-7 Runaway Slave Advertisements (1844)**

The **Baltimore Sun**

Resistance to slavery took many forms. The most obvious but least frequent and arguably least effective were violent rebellions such as Nat Turner's famous insurrection of 1831 in Virginia. Given the numerically dominant and well-armed population of whites in the South, the opportunities for organized rebellion were extremely limited and the chances of success even less. More often, slaves probably engaged in simple acts of disobedience that disrupted plantation routines. "Let a hundred men show him [a slave] how to hoe or drive a wheelbarrow," one visitor noted, and "he'll still take the one by the bottom and the other by the wheel." Historians have used the label "silent sabotage" to describe these and similar instances of "misunderstanding" or "carelessness" that apparently enabled slaves to resist the conditions of their servitude without provoking retaliation by their masters. Of course, these acts of resistance are the most difficult for historians to assess because they were by definition covert. On the other hand, running away was both an act of resistance with a reasonably good chance of success relative to armed rebellion, and overt enough to force masters openly to acknowledge its occurrence. Along with planters' journals and diaries, one of the best sources for studying the incidence and nature of this phenomenon are newspaper advertisements. In the late antebellum period, approximately one thousand slaves ran away every year, and this estimate does not include the far greater numbers of temporary "truant" who ventured off to visit family members on neighboring plantations, for example, and returned voluntarily after a brief absence. The following sample of advertisements appeared in the *Baltimore Sun* in 1844, but the location and the year are not particularly significant. Similar advertisements may be found in newspapers throughout the South in any given year prior to the Civil War.
FIFTY DOLLARS REWARD - Ranaway from the subscriber, on the 10th inst., a MAN named Celus, calls himself Celus Dorsey, about 23 years old, slender made, about 5 feet, 7 or 8 inches high, dark complexion, rather thick lips; he has a large scar on one of his hands from a burn. It is probable he is lurking about Baltimore. I will give the above reward if taken out of the State, and $30 is taken in the State, and secured so I get him again.

SAML C. HUNT, 10 miles from Baltimore, on Baltimore and Susquehanna Railroad

RAN AWAY - from the subscriber, on the 9th of May, my Negro JIM WARD. He is 5 feet 5 inches high, between 17 and 18 years of age, not very black, with a down look, full suit of hair, quite entangled. Had on when he left, a drab jacket, black pants, check shirt and black hat. I will pay $10 if taken in the city, or $20 out of it, and all charges paid.

L. READ