

# **The Republican Party's Version of American History: Galvanising the Northern Public against Southern Slavery**

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**Abstract:** *The 1850s in the United States were a time of intense social and political division. The sectional crisis between the free labour economy of the Northern states' and the Southern states' entrenched social system of slavery were igniting tensions across the Nation. In the midst of this turmoil, a Northern political party standing on a platform of anti-slavery emerged in 1854. This new Republican Party would in the space of six years go from being a regional party in places like Illinois to claiming the Presidential office under the leadership of Abraham Lincoln in 1860. How did the Republicans gain so much public support in the Northern states in so short a time? One technique was the use of rhetorical language through which Republicans espoused their interpretation of the true meaning of America's history since the Founding Fathers and the Declaration of Independence. With the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the American Civil War, it is a good time to reinvestigate how Republican leaders such as Abraham Lincoln, William H. Seward, Salmon P. Chase and Charles Sumner were able to convey their Party's message and persuade the vast population of the North to favour an anti-slavery stance. In particular, this paper discusses just how these prominent Republicans interpreted America's history and used it as a weapon to justify calls for containing slavery within the Southern states where it existed at the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861.*