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The Blake Resolution of 1860 and the Politics of the Sectional Crisis in Congress

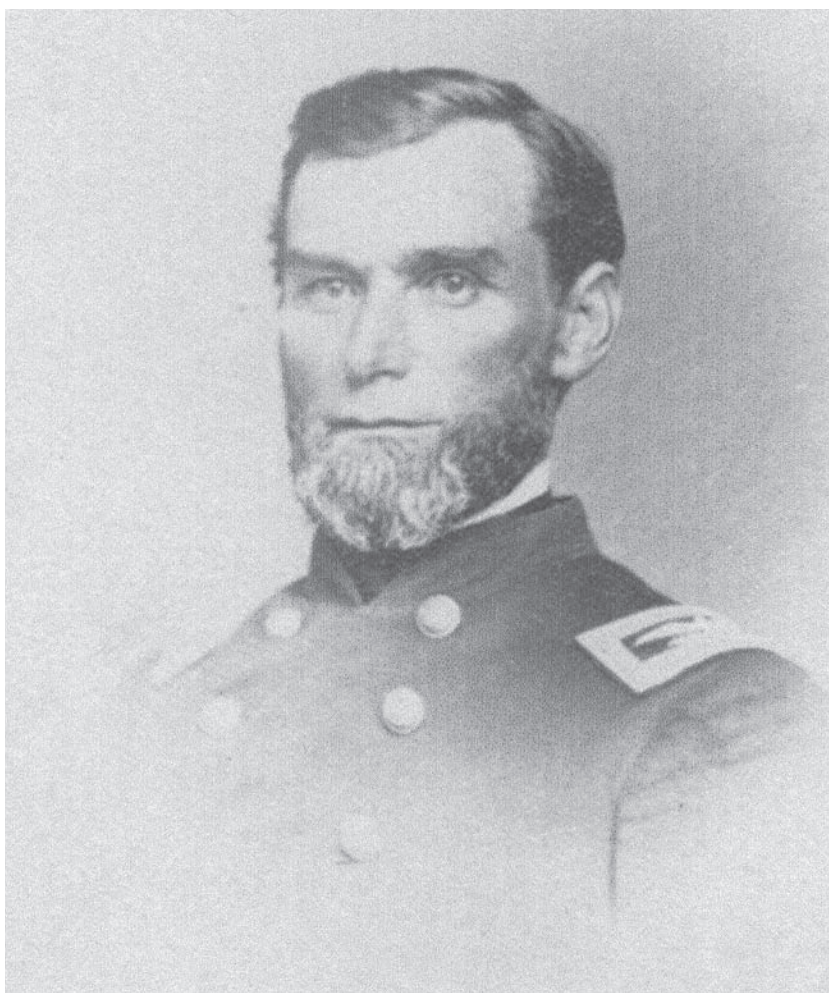
MARK J. STEGMAIER

On March 26, 1860, Republican congressman Harrison Blake of Ohio introduced a resolution into the U.S. House of Representatives, a resolution that resurrected in the minds of every House faction something from which Republicans had attempted to distance themselves in the run-up to the presidential election of 1860: the Democratic accusations of Republican complicity in John Brown's raid. What follows here is the first detailed account of Blake, his resolution, the extraordinary reaction to it, and its contribution to the escalating sectional crisis leading to the Civil War.

The first session of the 36th Congress began under the portentous cloud of John Brown's raid on the federal arsenal at Harper's Ferry, Virginia, in October 1859. John Brown and his small band had planned to use the arsenal's weapons to arm the slaves and foment a slave rebellion. U.S. forces had regained control of the arsenal after two days, and nearly all of Brown's men died. Courageous old Brown himself was captured, tried for his crimes, and sent to the gallows on December 2, 1859, only three days before the congressional session opened in Washington. John Brown may have failed to achieve his intended goal, but he had nonetheless succeeded in transferring the national political focus in the sectional crisis from the issue of slavery's potential expansion into faraway western territories to the more basic issue that had always lain just beneath the veil of the territorial issue: the fate of slavery

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Harrison Blake, 166th Regiment, Ohio National Guard, Fort Richardson, Virginia, July 15, 1864. Courtesy of Medina County Historical Society, Medina, Ohio.

in southern states themselves. Brown's attack paralyzed southern whites with fear that more such abolitionist raids across their borders would follow. Democrats and southerners were quick to accuse the Republicans of complicity in Brown's raid, at least indirectly, by having inspired Brown and his men with their antislavery ideology and agitation. Republican politicians desperately denied any connection, direct or indirect, to Brown's attack or purposes. The U.S. Senate occupied the early weeks of the session with debate on a resolution condemning the Brown raid, while the House of Representatives engaged in a grueling two-month struggle over the Speakership. The House finally elected moderate Republican William Pennington of New Jersey as Speaker of the House on February 1, 1860, allowing the House to organize itself and do business. Then, on March 26, after several weeks of relative calm

in House proceedings, Rep. Harrison Gray Otis Blake, or H. G. Blake, as he usually signed his name, Republican abolitionist from Medina and freshman congressman from Ohio's 14th Congressional District, shocked his party colleagues and the House of Representatives by introducing a resolution that many interpreted as proposing the abolition of slavery everywhere. Having parried for months their enemies' attempts to smear them with the brush of abolitionism or John Brown incendiarism, Republican congressmen suddenly found themselves faced with voting on the abolition issue. To anyone reading the congressional debates of that session, the Blake resolution and the struggle over it immediately stand out from the usual business in which the House engaged.¹

H. G. Blake had already enjoyed a fascinating and very active life in his forty years before coming to Congress in December 1859. Born in Vermont in 1819, Blake was orphaned in 1821 when both parents died after being stranded in a snowstorm. A family friend then raised him, moving young Blake with his family to New York and then, in 1830, to Guilford in Medina County, part of what had once been Connecticut's Western Reserve in northeastern Ohio. They were part of the surge of New Englanders departing from the declining agriculture of their states and heading west to the Ohio Country in the 1820s and 1830s, bringing with them their Congregational faith, Puritan work ethic, strong sense of community organization, and fervent commitment to the establishment of educational institutions. The New Englanders transformed the Western Reserve frontier into a prosperous land of farms, mills, and towns. Hardworking Harrison Blake epitomized the New England values as he grew up clearing land and doing farm work. Though he received little formal education, H. G. Blake displayed from an early age a Lincolnesque interest in reading practical books and a driving ambition to improve his lot in life. For a year he studied medicine under the tutelage of a doctor, but he gave that up and moved to the town of Medina in 1836, and

1. Among the works that cover the national situation following John Brown's raid and the early months of the 36th Congress, 1st session, see Roy F. Nichols, *The Disruption of American Democracy* (New York: Macmillan, 1948), 270-86; Allan Nevins, *The Emergence of Lincoln* (New York: Scribner's, 1950), 2:70-202; Robert W. Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1973), 716-44; Elbert B. Smith, *The Presidency of James Buchanan* (Lawrence: Univ. Press of Kansas, 1975), 92-105; David M. Potter, *The Impending Crisis, 1848-1861* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), 380-404, 478; and William W. Freehling, *The Road to Disunion*, vol. 2, *Secessionists Triumphant, 1854-1861* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2007), 246-68. Historian Eric Foner in his classic study of pre-Civil War Republican ideology gives a short account of the struggle over the resolution but does not mention Blake. Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1970), 214. See also Thomas B. Alexander, *Sectional Stress and Party Strength: A Study of Roll-Call Voting Patterns in the United States House of Representatives, 1836-1860* (Nashville: Vanderbilt Univ. Press, 1967), 106-7, 257, 259, 262. The Blake (1818-1876) in this article is not to be confused with the Harrison Gray Otis Blake (1816-1898) who was an associate of Emerson and Thoreau.

there he worked as a store clerk while he studied law under the supervision of a local judge. This bright, friendly, and honest young man soon became active as an attorney, store owner, banker, and politician. He supported William Henry Harrison for president in 1836 and again in 1840 and became an effective stump speaker noted for the intensity and earnestness of his convictions. Blake won election as a Whig to the Ohio House of Representatives for one-year terms in 1846 and 1847 and to the Ohio Senate in 1848 and 1849. He was elected president pro tempore of the Senate in 1849. When the Whig Party died out in the mid-1850s, Blake became an active partisan of the new Republican party. In 1859, after the sudden death of Congressman Cyrus Spink from a stroke, the Republicans of Ohio's 14th Congressional District (Lorain, Medina, Wayne, and Ashland counties) nominated Blake to replace Spink, and he easily won the special election at the end of October 1859 over his Democratic opponent, one N. Power.²

H. G. Blake represented in Congress what was popularly known as the "Oberlin District," since it included that famous abolition college and town. Blake himself was a long-time abolitionist, possibly influenced by his New England Congregationalist upbringing and the evangelical abolition reformers of the Second Great Awakening revivals in the 1830s. As a member of the Ohio legislature, he had vigorously fought to get rid of Ohio's infamous discriminatory Black Codes, and his voting record was solidly in favor of black rights and in favor of Ohio resolutions opposing any slavery extension into national territories. In the 1850s, even though it is unclear for how long, Blake took more direct and riskier action against slavery when he became an active "conductor" on the Underground Railroad. He and his wife, Betsey, had an attic room above the kitchen in their Medina home where he hid fugitive slaves on their way to the next "station" at Oberlin and then Canada. On his way to Washington, D.C., to assume his House seat, Blake even made an effort to visit fellow abolitionist John Brown before he was hung for his notorious raid on the federal arsenal at Harper's Ferry, but fellow train passenger and congressman Alexander R. Boteler of Virginia and others dissuaded him from making the attempt out of consideration for his own safety. A person with Blake's principles and determination on the slavery issue was unlikely to desert his ideals and remain forever silent once he took his seat in Congress.³

2. For some brief sketches of Blake's life, see Gloria Brown, "The Legacy of H. G. Blake: The Amazing Life of Medina's Most Distinguished Citizen," *Historic Medina: Journal of Medina Preservation* (Fall 2001): 4-24; *Medina County Gazette*, Apr. 21, 1876; *History of Medina County and Ohio* (Chicago: Baskin and Battey, Historical Publishers, 1881), 234-37; *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, Feb. 12, 1932; and 108th Congress, 2d sess., in *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, 1774-2005* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 2005), 665.

3. For a good introduction to the Western Reserve and its settlement in the early nineteenth century, see R. Douglas Hunt, *The Ohio Frontier: Crucible of the Old Northwest*,

March 26, 1860, began as an ordinary day in Congress. It was a Monday, and Mondays were “resolution” days in the House. On such days an air of levity usually pervaded the chamber. Members would introduce all sorts of bills, which would then be referred to committee without debate. They would then introduce a wide variety of resolutions, some of which might engender great laughter or involve some controversial issue. But members realized that, no matter what the resolution, even if it was merely introduced to impress the constituents back home (a resolution ordinarily referred to as “buncombe”),⁴ a single objection in the House would prevent further consideration of the proposal. As the clerk called the states for bills, and numerous ones were offered, H. G. Blake introduced one for House Clerk John Forney to read. Blake was described at the time by a Washington correspondent, almost certainly the well-known Democratic congressman from Columbus, Samuel S. (“Sunset”) Cox, as “mild mannered, sallow-complexioned, dark-haired, anxious-eyed[,] . . . amicable[,] . . . [a]ccommodating, quiet, unobtrusive, yet observant.” The freshman congressman had so far participated little in House proceedings, but that day he decided that he would at least take his stand and make his position as an antislavery Republican known.⁵

1720–1830 (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1996), 203–4, 230–31, 249–50, 267, 382–87. For the record of Blake’s votes in the Ohio legislature, the author is indebted to Tom Franzmann of the Univ. of Central Oklahoma, a Ph.D. candidate at Oklahoma State Univ. who has completed a database of antebellum voting in the Ohio legislature. See also Stephen Middleton, *The Black Laws: Race and the Legal Process in Early Ohio* (Athens: Ohio Univ. Press, 2005), 141. On Blake’s role in the Underground Railroad, see Brown, “Legacy of Blake,” 13–15; *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, Feb. 12, 1932; and *History of Medina County* (Medina, Ohio: Medina County Historical Society, 1948), 235–36. Blake provided a signed note to several fugitive slaves to give to two Oberlin professors at the next station. H. G. Blake to James Monroe and Henry E. Peck, Sept. 6, 1858, James Monroe Papers, Oberlin College Archives, Oberlin, Ohio; and Catherine M. Rokicky, *James Monroe: Oberlin’s Christian Statesman and Reformer, 1821–1898* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State Univ. Press, 2002), 45. On Blake’s attempt to visit Brown, see his own detailed accounts in Blake to Monroe, Dec. 1, 1859, Monroe Papers; Blake letter under the pseudonym “Jefferson” in *Medina Gazette*, Dec. 8, 1859; and Rokicky, *Monroe*, 50.

4. The term “buncombe,” often spelled “bunkum” or simply shortened to “bunk,” originated during the Missouri Compromise debates of 1820 as a term for something said or done in Congress primarily to impress one’s local constituency. On Feb. 25, 1820, Rep. Felix Walker, whose district included Buncombe County, North Carolina, delivered a speech on the Missouri question despite the earnest entreaties to desist by some of his colleagues. Walker informed his colleagues that he was speaking “for Buncombe,” and the term thereafter entered the American lexicon. Glover Moore, *The Missouri Controversy, 1819–1821* (Lexington: Univ. of Kentucky Press, 1953), 92; *Dictionary of American History*, rev. ed. (New York: Scribner’s, 1976), 1:83; and *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2d ed. (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1989), 2:654–55.

5. For some comments about “resolution day” in the House, see *The (N.Y.) Independent*, Apr. 5, 1860; *New York Evening Post*, Mar. 28, 1860; (Columbus) *Daily Ohio State Journal*, Mar. 29, 1860; (Columbus) *Daily Ohio Statesman*, Mar. 31, 1860; *Springfield (Mass.) Daily Republican*, Mar. 30, 1860; and *Washington (D.C.) Evening Star*, Mar. 27, 1860. The personal description of Blake is from the column that originally appeared in the *Daily Ohio Statesman* and is from a Washington correspondent using the pseudonym “Chanticleer,” who was almost certainly Rep. S. S. Cox (D-OH), co-owner of the *Statesman*. On Cox see David Lindsey,

Blake's first measure that day was a bill to repeal the stringent Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, which northerners had enforced sometimes reluctantly and in some cases not at all. People in northern states especially resented the provision in the law that could be used to forcibly deputize citizens of the free states and require them to help recapture escaped slaves from the South. Blake's bill, designated H.R. 487, amounted to a simple statement of a few lines repealing the obnoxious law. Besides his abolitionist abhorrence of the 1850 act, Blake was apparently also motivated to take his action as a response to the harsh treatment suffered by northerners traveling in the South since John Brown's raid. In late December, writing as "Jefferson" to the *Medina Gazette*, Blake had written of southerners threatening to hang antislavery men who dared venture into the South while simultaneously complaining that northern states violated the Constitution because, as Blake put it, "They will not compel their citizens to become slave catchers for the slave drivers of the South." In the same letter he described the Fugitive Slave Law as unconstitutional and "an outrage upon every principle of jurisprudence, and an insult to humanity." After the clerk read Blake's bill twice on March 26, William G. Whiteley, a Delaware Democrat, moved that the bill be referred to the Judiciary Committee, which then took no further action on it.⁶

If any of Blake's fellow Republicans were concerned about his bill creating any unpleasantness for them, they did not reveal it. After all, that type of measure from an antislavery representative of the Oberlin District could not be surprising, and anyway it was quickly disposed of. After several more bills on various subjects were introduced, Speaker Pennington then called the states for resolutions. Members again offered a variety, beginning with lengthy ones by Freeman Morse (R-ME) in favor of increased international measures to halt the African slave trade. They were referred to the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union. Other resolutions were agreed

"Sunset' Cox, Ohio's Champion of Compromise in the Secession Crisis of 1860-1861," *Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Quarterly* 62 (Oct. 1953): 348-67. The relevant House rules are given in Ashur C. Hinds, *Hinds' Precedents of the House of Representatives of the United States*, . . . (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1907-8), vol. 4, 91:3365; and the House rules as conveniently printed in the *Washington (D.C.) Daily Globe*, Dec. 7, 1859.

6. For the bill itself, see *Congressional Globe*, 36th Cong., 1st sess., 1356; *House Journal*, 36th Cong., 1st sess., 587; and "Original House Bills," H.R. 36A-B1, folder 19, Record Group 233, Records of the U.S. House of Representatives, National Archives (NA), Washington, D.C. That Whiteley moved the bill's reference to committee is in telegraphic dispatches: e.g., (Frankfort) *Tri-Weekly Kentucky Yeoman*, Mar. 29, 1860; and *Nashville Republican Banner*, Mar. 28, 1860. Blake's "Jefferson" letter discussing the southern mistreatment of northerners in the South while southerners also demanded that they strictly enforce the Fugitive Slave Law is in the *Medina Gazette*, Dec. 22, 1859. Blake's choice of the pseudonym "Jefferson" probably derived from his admiration of the principles in the Declaration of Independence and Jefferson's origination of the ban on slavery in the Northwest Territory. See Blake's June 12, 1860, antislavery speech in the House. *Congressional Globe*, 36th Cong., 1st sess., App. 417-19.

to, objected to, or referred to committee as they came up. None excited much debate in the relaxed atmosphere of resolution day. One curious resolution that caused some smiles and chuckling because of the blatant hypocrisy of the member offering it was a recommendation by ardent South Carolina fire-eater John McQueen for the purpose of “emancipating” the striking shoemakers of Lynn, Massachusetts, from the “tyranny” of their capitalist masters by repealing all duties on boots, shoes, leather, and other imported articles used in their business. It was a typical slaveholding dig at labor unrest and capital exploitation in northern industry. The resolution was quickly agreed to without debate. The train of resolutions continued. And then H. G. Blake showed that he was not quite done with his antislavery maneuvers, even if an objection were to kill the resolution he planned to offer.⁷

When his opportunity came, Blake submitted the following preamble and resolution for the clerk, John Forney, to read to the House:

Whereas,

The chattelizing of humanity and the holding of persons as property, is contrary to natural justice and the fundamental principles of our political system, and is notoriously a reproach to our country throughout the civilized world, and a serious hindrance to the progress of republican liberty among the nations of the earth:

Therefore,

Resolved, that the Committee on the Judiciary be and the same is hereby instructed to enquire into the expediency of reporting a bill giving freedom to every human being and interdicting slavery wherever Congress has the Constitutional power to legislate on the subject.⁸

Amid the usual noisiness of the House chamber and the lively chattering among the members, many heard the resolution one way, many another way, and some probably not at all. As Forney read the Blake resolution, he may have paused to catch his breath after the words “human being,” a pause that may have led to very different interpretations of the resolution’s meaning. If Blake had inserted a comma at that point, or if the clerk paused at that point, thus implying the existence of a comma there, then the meaning of the resolution would be dramatically different from what Blake actually submitted. As Congressman Blake drafted it, the preamble constituted an

7. *Congressional Globe*, 36th Cong., 1st sess., 1356–59. Some of the newspaper correspondents commented on the Morse and McQueen resolutions. *Boston Daily Journal*, Mar. 31, 1860; *Charleston Daily Courier*, Mar. 29, 1860; *Chicago Press and Tribune*, Mar. 30, 1860; *Daily Ohio State Journal*, Mar. 29, 1860; *The Independent*, Apr. 5, 1860; and *New York Evening Post*, Mar. 28, 1860.

8. “Simple Resolutions, Motions, and Orders,” H.R. 36A-B3, folder 1, RG 233, NA.

unabashed condemnation of slavery per se, but the resolution itself envisioned a possible bill to abolish slavery only in areas under proper federal jurisdiction. Even the more limited resolution went well beyond the Republican platform of 1856, which had simply proclaimed federal authority to prohibit slavery in national territories. Under Blake's resolution, that authority would be broadened to include the District of Columbia, federal forts or other installations, and other areas of federal jurisdiction. Republicans, though, disavowed any intention of interfering with slavery in the southern states because they did not see those areas as properly included under federal jurisdiction. However, a comma after "human being" would divide Blake's resolution into two proposals: the first to free every human being (i.e., complete abolition of slavery) and the second to abolish slavery where the federal government had the authority to do so. No matter how one heard the proposition read, it was awkwardly and vaguely phrased.⁹

Some Washington correspondents at the time reported in their newspaper columns that Blake had hastily drafted his resolution, that he offered it without consulting with his Republican colleagues, and that, since Blake thought it would be objected to, he proposed it simply as buncombe to impress his constituents. Although the *Chicago Press and Tribune* correspondent "Waldo" (probably Joseph Medill) thought Blake had drafted his resolution only as a response after hearing McQueen's resolution in reference to the Lynn shoemakers, it is more probable that Blake had arrived at the House that day with both his measures already prepared. The originals of both his bill to repeal the Fugitive Slave Law and his antislavery resolution are written very neatly, as if carefully prepared, even though Blake did insert some extra words in his resolution at some point. The correspondents were correct in asserting that Blake had not consulted his fellow Republicans about his plans, for they would have probably convinced him that presenting this resolution was politically unwise. As to the buncombe charge, it may or may not have some validity. Blake had to have expected that someone would object to the resolution. Even if the House had approved the reference to the Judiciary Committee called for in the resolution, the resolution would have gone to a committee chaired by Democrat John Hickman of Pennsylvania and been buried there. So Blake's resolution was impractical.¹⁰

9. Comment on the vagueness and awkwardness of the wording, especially the "human being" clause, is in Charles Francis Adams Diary, Mar. 26, 1860, *Microfilms of the Adams Papers* (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1954), roll 75; *Daily Ohio State Journal*, Mar. 29, 1860; *Daily Ohio Statesman*, Mar. 31, 1860; *The Independent*, Apr. 5, 1860; *New York Evening Post*, Mar. 28, 1860; and *Philadelphia North American and United States Gazette*, Mar. 28, 1860; and *Springfield (Mass.) Daily Republican*, Mar. 30, 1860. For the Republican platform of 1856, see George T. Kurian, ed., *The Encyclopedia of the Republican Party* (Armonk, N.Y.: Sharpe Reference, 1997), 2:441–42.

10. For the various comments on these matters by Washington correspondents, see *Chicago Press and Tribune*, Mar. 30, 1860; *Daily Ohio State Journal*, Mar. 29, 1860; *New Orleans*

Blake may indeed have been putting his views on record to impress the antislavery voters of his Oberlin District. But given how strongly and fervently he believed in the antislavery cause, it is more likely that he just wanted to make a statement of record with his bill and resolution to remind everyone in Congress that some Republicans were not going to discard their antislavery principles just because this was an election year and just because slavery was a topic many Republicans wanted to avoid in the months after John Brown's raid. Blake thought the meaning of his resolution was clear: a restatement of Republicans' long-held contention that the federal government did have authority to abolish slavery in areas under its jurisdiction and that it should do so. And he probably thought that the House might refer his resolution to committee without objection, just as they had done earlier with his bill to repeal the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law. Whether the resolution was objected to or not, the Oberlin District's representative was certainly not expecting to create any great controversy. After all, only the previous Tuesday, on March 20, the U.S. Senate had quickly and without debate disposed of a memorial offered by antislavery Republican senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts, and moved by him to be referred to their Judiciary Committee, a petition from abolitionist Samuel J. May and 400 other Bostonians urging repeal of the Fugitive Slave Law and the abolition of slavery wherever the federal government possessed jurisdiction. The memorial was much more detailed than Blake's resolution but encompassed the same goals as Blake's two measures of March 26. Sumner's motion to refer the memorial had been tabled on a roll call vote of 30–17 with every Republican vote registered against tabling. Congressman Blake probably anticipated that there would be no uproar in the House over his resolution, just as there had been none in the Senate less than a week before on Sumner's memorial.¹¹

As soon as the clerk had completed reading Blake's resolution, Representative William Smith of Virginia and several other southern Democrats voiced their objections. But the situation changed quickly as other southern Democrats yelled at them not to object. For the southern fire-eaters had suddenly sensed an opportunity to create mischief for the Republicans on the

Daily Crescent, Apr. 3, 1860; *New York Evening Post*, Mar. 28, 1860; *New York Daily Tribune*, Mar. 27, 1860; *Philadelphia North American and United States Gazette*, Mar. 28, 1860; and *Springfield Daily Republican*, Mar. 30, 1860. One American (Know-Nothing) correspondent, "Aegis," claimed that his fellow Republicans were aware of Blake's plan and "beleaguered" him before he introduced the resolution to suppress it in order to not force the Republicans to reveal their true policy but that Blake was made of "stuff too stern" for them and offered the resolution anyway. This claim appears more inspired by partisan interest than the facts in this case. See *New York Morning Express*, Mar. 29, 1860.

11. On Sumner's memorial, see *Congressional Globe*, 36th Cong., 1st sess., 1245; and *The (Boston) Liberator*, Mar. 30, 1860. However, the *Liberator* would take no notice of Blake's resolution.

slavery issue. The rabid disunionist Laurence M. Keitt of South Carolina, who had been itching for controversy ever since the end of the Speakership contest, began “running up and down the aisles, stroking his beard with the keen satisfaction of the difficulty which he scented.” Roger Pryor of Virginia, who had lately been sitting “mute as a church mouse, with his arms folded,” immediately perked up with “animation” and “excitement.” Otho Singleton of Mississippi, who had not had a chance for a long time to brag about his state’s ability to “whip all creation,” was on his feet using “his long legs with unwonted nimbleness.” The stern-faced James Pugh of Alabama seemed delighted to have the slavery question agitated once more, as did Muscoe Garnett of Virginia, who “woke up from his slumbers.” These agitators quickly started marshaling their southern congressional colleagues to allow the Blake resolution into the House proceedings.¹²

At the request of several members, the clerk read the Blake resolution again. Blake himself explained that, since the resolution was merely for reference to committee, he thought there would be no objection. He seemed confused by the sudden southern attention to his resolution, with some objecting and others pleading with them not to object. William Barksdale of Mississippi withdrew his objection. Speaker Pennington, amidst cries of “Don’t object,” announced that he heard no objection. But then Democrat Lawrence Branch of North Carolina objected to the preamble, until his fellow Democrats Thomas Hindman of Arkansas and Otho Singleton of Mississippi urged him not to object so that they could call for a roll call vote on the resolution and see how many Republicans would vote for it. Branch withdrew his objection, and Singleton immediately demanded the yeas and nays.¹³

While southern Democrats acted with alacrity, the Republicans were momentarily stunned. One reporter likened it to being struck by a “thunderbolt” and two others to having a “bomb-shell” explode among them.¹⁴ One consideration that certainly prevented Republicans from reacting quickly to Blake’s move was a desire not to embarrass a fellow Republican. And it would also have been awkward by nature for Republicans, all of whom were anti-slavery to some degree or another, to speak up in objection to an antislavery resolution. So initially the Republicans relied on the southern Democrats to object, but when those Democrats then withdrew their objections and

12. *Congressional Globe*, 36th Cong., 1st sess., 1359; and *Chicago Press and Tribune*, Mar. 30, 1860. The quotations in regard to the southern fire-eaters are from the correspondent “Waldo” in the *Press and Tribune*, probably Joseph Medill. On Medill as correspondent, see Donald A. Ritchie, *Press Gallery: Congress and the Washington Correspondents* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1991), 60.

13. *Congressional Globe*, 36th Cong., 1st sess., 1359.

14. *Cincinnati Daily Enquirer*, Mar. 30, 1860 (“thunderbolt”); and *Charleston (S.C.) Mercury*, Mar. 29, 1860, and *The Independent*, Apr. 5, 1860 (“bomb-shell”).

moved for a roll call vote, the Republicans suddenly were faced with recording their votes on the Blake resolution. Many of them were not sure exactly what the resolution proposed, no matter how many times the clerk might read it. The preamble sounded abolitionist, and the resolution itself struck many as so loosely worded that it could be open to an interpretation that the federal government claimed power to abolish slavery even in the states. The very well-defined memorial presented by Senator Sumner on March 20 had been open to no such interpretation. In this post-John Brown, pre-national convention period, the last thing most Republican members desired was to be forced to take a stand on a controversial resolution on slavery. The first Republican to try to block the resolution was Representative John Killinger of Pennsylvania; he objected to the resolution, only to have Branch of North Carolina inform him that his objection came too late, since the resolution had been received and the yeas and nays ordered. Other Democrats shouted, "It is too late!" and "Call the roll!" and "Let us vote!"¹⁵

John Forney, the clerk, began to call the roll amid this confusion. And above the noise came the quick response of "Aye" by the first name on the roll, another freshman Republican with Blake-like antislavery views, fifty-one-year-old Charles Francis Adams of Massachusetts. "My response was so prompt in the affirmative," Adams recorded in his diary entry for that day, "that it caught . . . [the Republicans] up before they could start a side-wind motion; hence the necessity of facing the fire." Adams seemed quite pleased with his role in forcing other Republicans to declare rather than hide their principles. As he wrote in his diary, "Verily, there is something in the magnitude of this question that make cowards of us all." In a similar vein a Democratic correspondent, probably Representative Samuel S. Cox of Ohio, likened the impact of Blake's resolution on the Republicans to the effect of the spear of the angel Ithuriel in John Milton's *Paradise Lost*; when the spear had touched Satan, Satan was forced to drop his animal disguise and reveal his true form. From a Democratic viewpoint, Blake's Ithuriel spear forced Republicans to drop their hypocritical disguise of being national and moderate and to reveal themselves as sectional and radically abolitionist. "Glory to Blake!" penned the gleeful Democrat.¹⁶

Some of the Republicans did not hear, or pretended not to hear, Adams's response, but Speaker Pennington and attentive southern Democrats did. Republican William Dunn of Indiana moved to table the resolution, only to have Democrats John Phelps of Missouri and Thomas Hindman of Arkansas interject that Adams had voted already. Speaker Pennington, a Republican,

15. *Congressional Globe*, 36th Cong., 1st sess., 1359.

16. C. F. Adams Diary, Mar. 26, 1860, *Adams Papers Microfilms*, roll 75; and *Daily Ohio Statesman*, Mar. 31, 1860. See note 5 above on Cox.

agreed with the Democrats, pointed out that the clerk had recorded Adams's "aye," and therefore ruled Dunn's motion out of order. Under Rule 42 of the House, once a roll call commenced, it could not be stopped. Killinger of Pennsylvania continued to press the point that he had objected to the resolution, until Speaker Pennington unceremoniously told him the objection had been made too late. Republican Edward Joy Morris of Pennsylvania and Democrat Daniel Sickles of New York requested that the resolution be read a third time, only to meet with a chorus of protests from southern Democrats. Moderate Republicans like Morris and northern Democrats like Sickles saw no value in agitating the slavery issue and realized that the southern Democrats were manipulating the Blake resolution for their own sectional purposes. The deafening tumult had stopped the call of the roll after Adams's response, and the Speaker declared that he could not hear a word. With Democrats continuing to shout "call the roll," Congressman Blake, realizing he had opened a Pandora's box with his resolution, expressed a desire to withdraw it. But the Democrats insisted that the roll call could not be halted now. At this point, John Cochrane of New York, another northern Democrat who saw all this as useless except to southern disunionists, requested that the House rule prohibiting members from gathering near the clerk's desk during a roll call vote (Rule 39) be enforced. There is no indication that members were around the clerk's desk or what they were doing there or how Speaker Pennington responded to Cochrane's request. It was at this desk that the journal clerk, John M. Barclay (appointed from Indiana), recorded the House proceedings and roll calls (basically everything but debate) in the official *House Journal*. After several more requests for another reading of the resolution, including one by Blake who said he believed members misunderstood his resolution, the speaker ordered the clerk to read Blake's resolution a third time. Next, Cochrane of New York and Republican leader John Sherman of Ohio pressed Speaker Pennington on whether the vote was merely on the resolution or on the preamble too. Pennington answered that this vote was on the resolution itself and that the preamble was not involved in this vote. Following these developments, the clerk resumed the roll call.¹⁷

17. See *Congressional Globe*, 36th Cong., 1st sess., 1360, for most of the proceedings, but the telegraphic dispatch sent out by reporters and carried in many newspapers contains some information missed by the *Globe* reporters. See, for example, *New York Times*, Mar. 27, 1860. One correspondent felt that Killinger's objection was in time and that the Speaker had ruled incorrectly. *Springfield Daily Republican*, Mar. 30, 1860. Blake's attempt to withdraw the resolution is in the telegraphic dispatch and in correspondents' letters in *Charleston Mercury*, Mar. 29, 1860; *New Orleans Daily Crescent*, Apr. 3, 1860; and *Daily Ohio State Journal*, Mar. 29, 1860. The attitude of Cochrane and some other northern Democrats who opposed having a vote is discussed by the correspondent in the *Chicago Press and Tribune*, Mar. 30, 1860. On Barclay as journal clerk, see *Register of Officers and Agents, Civil, Military, and Naval, in the Service of the United States, on the Thirtieth September, 1859*; . . . (Washington, D.C.:

Once all their delaying tactics had failed to stop the vote, Republican floor managers such as Galusha Grow of Pennsylvania and John Sherman of Ohio tried to figure out what to do. One thing was certain; they were very angry with the upstart Blake. As the *Columbus Statesman's* correspondent put it, "Some swore. [Rep. Samuel] Curtis [of Iowa] said he wouldn't vote. Old Thad Stevens [of Pennsylvania] said—'if the Fool Killer came along, there would be another vacancy besides Spink's, and mourning would make Oberlin blacker than ever.' Sherman was worried, for it smoked him to the suffocation point." At this stage there appeared to be only one legitimate way for Republicans to avoid voting: pairing off, or agreeing with someone definitely opposed to the resolution that neither would vote. The effect of this was to cancel each others' votes as well as keep both names out of the official record of the vote. This maneuver was not in the House rules but had become a long-standing tradition, often used in order to accommodate those members who had to be absent for several days or more due to illness or for other reasons. The *Columbus Statesmen's* correspondent, obviously delighted at the Republicans' dilemma, described the scene with humor:

But the backing and filling, and squirming and dodging and running—cannot be pencilled. Birds never sought in *pairs* in spring with more amative cooing and wooing. Republicans dallied their bills around American [Know-Nothing or Opposition] bills; and sweet disport went on, until the lovely pairs retired to—drink! Vigilant members on the Republican side were taken with sudden and extraordinary cholics. Measles and mumps broke out in the families of Republican members. Others . . . were harassed with laryngitis, bronchitis, and even quick consumption. Oh! it was terrible to respond under such pulmonary difficulties.¹⁸

Before the voting was over, some fifteen pairs had been announced. Sometimes members stated their assumption that they were paired or should be paired with a member who was absent. Only three of these were Republican-American pairs. Four Republican pairs were with northern Democrats, and five were with southern Democrats (although one of those Democrats, L. Q. C. Lamar of Mississippi, voted against the resolution despite his supposed pair with Republican James Moorhead of Pennsylvania). One pair consisted of

William A. Harris, 1859), 196, a copy of which is in the library of the National Archives; and *Congressional Directory for the First Session of the Thirty-Sixth Congress of the United States of America*, 1st regular ed. (Washington, D.C., 1860), 26, box Y6072, RG 287, Publications of the U.S. Government, NA.

18. *Daily Ohio Statesman*, Mar. 31, 1860.

a northern American and a southern American, and one Republican, John Verree of Pennsylvania, was announced as paired while the other member of the pair was left unnamed. For the record, some of these members declared how they would have voted if not paired off. Two Republicans—Israel Washburn Jr. of Maine and David Kilgore of Indiana—stayed in their seats but did not vote, drawing a threat of a censure resolution from Democrat Thomas Bocock of Virginia, since Rule 42 of the House required all members present to vote. Six members—no Republicans among them—arrived in the House after their names had been called, and each stated that he would have voted “nay.”¹⁹

At last the “pandemonium,” or “beer-garden scene,” as correspondents termed it, ended when the vote tally was announced as 60 for the resolution and 109 against it. The commotion over the Blake resolution had consumed a half hour of the House’s day. Of the 108 Republicans (not counting Speaker Pennington), 59, more than half, voted for the Blake resolution. They were joined by the one member of the Congress who still identified himself as a Whig, Luther Carter of New York. Glum-faced and reluctant, Curtis of Iowa and Sherman of Ohio had finally voted for the resolution. Stevens of Pennsylvania “dodged” by pairing off. Some Republicans probably just slipped away to committee rooms without bothering to pair off. Thomas Corwin of Ohio was campaigning for Republicans in Connecticut at the time, and Reuben Fenton of New York was absent due to illness. Among the Republicans voting for the resolution, most who stated their reason said that they were only voting for it because it was merely to refer a matter to committee. Some, like Adams, saw it as a matter of defending Republican principles, and others simply felt that it was less awkward and inconsistent for them to vote for Blake’s resolution than it would have been to oppose it or to “dodge” it.²⁰

The Democrats who voted, 21 northern and 60 southern, opposed the resolution, as did the Americans/Know-Nothings/Opposition members, 2 northern and 14 southern. Neither Democrats nor Americans could vote for what they construed to be an abolitionist resolution. They were joined by 12 Republicans who voted “nay,” including 6 from the Pennsylvania delegation.

19. *Congressional Globe*, 36th Cong., 1st sess., 1360–61.

20. *Ibid.*, 1359–61; and *House Journal*, 36th Cong., 1st sess., 594–595. For some reason, the *House Journal* only lists fifty-nine names of those voting for the resolution, but the missing Republican, George W. Palmer of New York, is listed in the *Congressional Globe*. See also C. F. Adams Diary, Mar. 26, 1860, *Adams Papers Microfilms*, roll 75; *Daily Ohio Statesman*, Mar. 31, 1860; *Charleston Mercury*, Mar. 29, 1860 (“beer-garden scene”); *Daily Ohio State Journal*, Mar. 29, 1860; *New York Morning Express*, Mar. 29, 1860; *New York Evening Post*, Mar. 28, 1860 (“Pandemonium”); *Springfield Daily Republican*, Mar. 30, 1860; and *Washington (D.C.) States and Union*, Mar. 28, 1860. The *New York Morning Express* and *States and Union* both particularly commented on the vote of Carter of New York.

The Republicans voting against the resolution did so because the wording of the resolution was too vague and open to an abolitionist interpretation, and its preamble was clearly abolitionist. Republican Ezra French of Maine voiced his particular dislike for the resolution clause “giving freedom to every human being,” since in his opinion this would include convicts and criminals in the penitentiaries. This theme was subsequently stated by Republican David Kilgore of Indiana in his attempt to explain why he refused to vote. This silly “convicts” rationale for opposing the resolution brought more paroxysms of laughter among the Democrats.²¹

The last stage of the farcical drama followed the announcement of the vote, when Thomas Bocock of Virginia carried through with his threat to move a resolution of censure against Kilgore of Indiana and Washburn Jr. of Maine for remaining in their seats and not voting. The correspondent of the *Columbus Statesman* wrote, “The crinkle of fun that pervaded the Democratic side, as Bocock moved to censure . . . , was ineffably happy!” Having belabored this matter for what it was worth in producing Democratic merit, after a few minutes Bocock withdrew his resolution of censure.²²

If H. G. Blake thought that the frustrations of his initial venture into House politics were over after the vote, he was wrong. New developments were afoot. What he did not know at the time was that the journal clerk, Mr. Barclay, had recorded the Blake resolution in the handwritten *House Journal* with a comma after “human being,” thus dividing the resolution into a first clause appearing to provide for abolition everywhere and a second clause providing for abolition only in places directly under federal government jurisdiction. Whether Barclay inserted the comma at that strategic point by mere accident or at the behest of congressmen (maybe southern Democrats?) gathered around the clerk’s desk is not clear. Blake’s handwritten version from which Barclay copied had no such comma. However the error occurred, once the resolution was recorded that way in the handwritten *House Journal*, it also appeared with the comma in the printed version. The *House Journal* version was then printed, with comma, in the debates in the *Washington Daily Globe* on March 27. Moreover, the telegraphic dispatch that went out from Washington and that reprinted the Blake resolution apparently quoted it from the handwritten *House Journal* and thus sent the most abolitionist version of Blake’s measure to newspapers all over the country.²³

21. *Congressional Globe*, 36th Cong., 1st sess., 1360, 1362; *Daily Ohio Statesman*, Mar. 31, 1860; and *Daily Ohio State Journal*, Mar. 29, 1860.

22. *Congressional Globe*, 36th Cong., 1st sess., 1361–62; *Daily Ohio State Journal*, Mar. 29, 1860; *Daily Ohio Statesman*, Mar. 31, 1860; *The Independent*, Apr. 5, 1860; and *New York Evening Post*, Mar. 28, 1860.

23. *House Journal*, 36th Cong., 1st sess., 594 (printed version) and Mar. 26, 1860 (handwritten version), 5th sheet, RG 233, NA; *Daily Globe*, Mar. 27, 1860; and *New York Times*, Mar. 27, 1860 (telegraphic dispatch sent to that and other papers). Blake did not write about all this in

Just when Blake himself discovered what had happened is not clear, but by the next day he was prepared to correct the record for his House colleagues. Blake waited to speak until nearly the close of the session on March 27. After debate on the army appropriation bill, Democrat Thomas Florence of Pennsylvania moved to adjourn. But Blake rose and wished to make a personal explanation. Florence courteously withdrew his adjournment motion. Blake then said:

I wish to call the attention of the House to a resolution which I had the honor to introduce yesterday, for the purpose of preventing misapprehension. I will read the resolution. [He read the resolution, but not the preamble.] There is a punctuation there—a comma—[after “human being”]. . . . I wish to say to the House that I put no comma there; that it was all one sentence. I know no person, I am acquainted with no man, who claims that we have any control over slavery in the States; and I certainly did not have it in my mind that we should interfere with it there at all, and I was careful to avoid the appearance of any such thing in my resolution. I simply desire now to call the attention of the House to the fact in reference to this punctuation.²⁴

Following Blake’s statement, Democrat Henry Burnett of Kentucky briefly pressed Republican David Kilgore of Indiana regarding the views he had expressed the day before about federal power to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia. Kilgore replied that he would soon report a bill for gradual emancipation in the District. Florence then renewed his move to adjourn, and at 4:45 P.M. the House did so.

However, when the regular *Congressional Globe* segment appeared in print a few days later, H. G. Blake’s explanation was nowhere to be found. It was published only in the *Daily Globe* but was excised from the *Congressional Globe* by the editors. The *Globe* editors also eliminated the first clause of Burnett’s subsequent query of Kilgore. The clause—“Now that we are upon personal explanations”—appears in the *Daily Globe* but not in the *Congressional Globe*. Once the editors decided to eliminate Blake’s speech, they had to also strike out the first part of Burnett’s statement, which was dependent on Blake’s. The *Globe* editors probably did not elide Blake’s explanation as

his “Jefferson” letter dated Apr. 4 to the *Medina Gazette*, but he typically did not write about his own actions, even his strongly antislavery House speech of June 12. *Medina Gazette*, Apr. 19 and June 21, 1860. House clerk John Forney also wrote nothing about the Blake resolution struggle in his Mar. 27 letter as “Occasional” to his newspaper. See *Philadelphia Press*, Mar. 28, 1860. On Forney as “Occasional,” see George F. Milton, *The Eve of Conflict: Stephen A. Douglas and the Needless War* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1934), 380.

24. *Daily Globe*, Mar. 28, 1860, 5.

a personal slight to Blake himself. While the *Daily Globe* of March 27 had printed the resolution with the controversial comma, the later edition, the *Congressional Globe*, printed the Blake resolution of March 26 without the comma. Having made this correction, the *Globe* editors probably saw no reason to publish Blake's explanation of March 27; the editorial deletion neatly covered up the *Globe's* previous error.²⁵

The resolution that the House had disposed of after a half hour showed that it still commanded some attention beyond the immediate discussion and vote of March 26. Six letters sent to H. G. Blake after the episode are preserved in a private collection in Medina, Ohio, and all but one of those displayed a positive reaction. The negative one was signed only "A Virginian" and came from someone in Fairfax County who sarcastically informed Blake that "your name is on every tongue in the land—and will be handed down to posterity—" and then, posing the rhetorical question, "Who, but some poor ignoramus, taking into consideration the *tranquil* state of our country—would have thought of offering such a diabolical resolution?" The other five letters were all written by strongly antislavery men. Two were from well-known Oberlin abolitionists, Reverend Edward H. Fairchild and lawyer Ralph Plumb, connected with the Oberlin-Wellington rescue of a fugitive slave in 1858; both praised Blake for his bill and resolution. Three other missives with glowing tributes to Blake came from John W. Bullock, a farmer from nearby Elyria; George E. Baker of Albany, New York, a close friend and biographer of Republican senator William H. Seward; and Dr. B. Woodward of Galesburg, Illinois.²⁶

The same basic reactions in these five letters found their way into supportive Republican and abolitionist commentary. The Columbus-based *Ohio State Journal's* Washington correspondent "Cyd." defended Blake's resolution as representative of Republican principles but stated also that the southern fire-eaters and their presses distorted it into a resolution designed

25. Ibid.; *Congressional Globe*, 36 Cong., 1st sess., 1394; *Daily Ohio State Journal*, Mar. 31, 1860; and *Medina Gazette*, Apr. 5, 1860. The *State Journal's* correspondent recorded Blake's explanation in his own column and, despite reservations, supported Blake's resolution. This correspondent wrote regular letters to the *Journal* signing his name "Cyd." Almost certainly he was Rep. Cydnor B. Tompkins of Ohio, one of the Republicans who voted for the Blake resolution.

26. The letters from "A Virginian," Mar. 28; George E. Baker, Mar. 31; R. Plumb, Apr. 2; B. Woodward, Apr. 11; John W. Bullock, Apr. 26; and Rev. E. H. Fairchild, Apr. 27, 1860, are all in the Blake Papers. On the Oberlin-Wellington rescue and some information on Plumb and Fairchild, see Nat Brandt, *The Town that Started the Civil War* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse Univ. Press, 1990). On George E. Baker, see Glyndon G. Van Deusen, *William Henry Seward* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1967), 174, 232, 274; and John M. Taylor, *William Henry Seward: Lincoln's Right Hand* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey's, 1991), 99, 121, 142, 172, 246, 266. Bullock is listed in "Population Schedules of the Eighth Census of the United States, 1860," microfilm M653, roll 1001, p. 5, and Woodward is listed in the same census, roll 195, p. 995, RG 29, Records of the Bureau of the Census, NA.

to interfere with slavery in the southern states. The *Journal* itself printed an editorial on April 3 calling the resolution a “bold and earnest expression of Republican principles” and particularly praised the preamble as “clear, concise, vigorous” in its wording. The editorial leveled harsh criticism at those Republican congressmen too weak and timid to vote for it. Blake’s hometown *Medina Gazette* did not offer its own editorial but reprinted the one from the *Ohio State Journal* and two others from Pennsylvania presses vigorously endorsing the Blake resolution. Another Republican newspaper in Blake’s district, the *Elyria Independent Democrat*, ran an editorial on April 11 calling every statement in the resolution true, “manifestly just and equitable” and an accurate expression of Republican faith in the government’s power to prohibit slavery wherever federal jurisdiction applied but not in the southern states themselves. The editorial said that Blake’s resolution had rattled the proslavery side of the House as “a boy’s cane would when thrust through a nest of black hornets.” The American Anti-Slavery Society’s *National Anti-Slavery Standard* in New York commented that Blake’s surprise move had indeed caused a stir in the House, “that Dead Sea of intrigue and compromise” where “tender-footed” Republicans wanted to stand well with their antislavery constituents but in many cases could not toe the mark in the face of Congress’s prevalent conservatism.²⁷

Most Republican newspaper editors, however, chose to ignore completely the Blake resolution in their editorials, printing nothing about it beyond the regular telegraphic accounts. These editors were embarrassed by the resolution, wanted to minimize its importance by taking little notice of it, and wished that Blake had never offered it in the first place. The *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* did print a critical editorial titled “Blake’s Blunder,” in which the paper accused Blake of using the resolution to distinguish himself among “mischief-makers” by proposing immediate abolition in vague language that left it unclear whether it applied to the states or not. The paper opined that no matter how others might interpret it, the South would always construe it “as a deliberate plan for the sudden and forcible abolition of slavery.” Some Republican newspapers in major eastern cities limited what commentary they printed on the Blake resolution to the decidedly negative opinions of their Washington correspondents. The *New York Tribune*’s correspondent sent a dispatch labeling Blake’s move “inexpedient” and with “no practical object.” The *Boston Journal*’s veteran correspondent “Perley” (Benjamin Perley Poore) likewise deemed the resolution of “no earthly benefit” to the Republicans and proclaimed that “[a] few more similar displays for ‘Buncombe’” would

27. *Daily Ohio State Journal*, Mar. 31 and Apr. 3, 1860; *Medina Gazette*, Apr. 12, 19, and 26, 1860; *Elyria (Ohio) Independent Democrat*, Apr. 11, 1860; and (New York) *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, Mar. 31, 1860.

materially and detrimentally affect the Republican campaign of 1860 by driving away the conservative Whigs and Americans of the northern states from the Republican ticket. Another longtime letter writer, James Harvey, writing as “Independent” to the *Philadelphia North American*, was even more damning, referring to Blake as a “little county court practitioner” aiming to achieve “individual notoriety” with “senseless agitation” over a “barren abstraction” that could only damage the Republicans.²⁸

While most Republican papers that chose to comment on the Blake resolution dismissed it as useless, mischievous buncombe, most northern Democratic and American or nativist papers pressed on their readers the theme that Blake’s resolution had forced the Republicans to expose their true abolitionist proclivities, despite some “magnificent dodging” by some Republican members of the House. Among Democratic correspondents, the *Columbus Ohio Statesman*’s “Chanticleer” on one hand seemed to admire Blake for his integrity and devotion to principles, despite the “misguided fanaticism of the Oberlin member,” while on the other hand he condemned the resolution and its preamble as possessing “the seeds of disunion, anarchy, hate, and murder.” The *Cincinnati Enquirer*’s “Cleveland” condemned the sixty Republicans who voted for Blake’s resolution as “enemies of the Constitution and the Union.” Democratic editorials in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* and the *Philadelphia Pennsylvanian* interpreted the resolution as supporting abolition of slavery everywhere. The *Pennsylvanian* declared that the resolution “tears aside the veil” from the “unholy purposes” of the Republicans in “a declaration of open warfare” on the South as violative of their rights “as any act of old John Brown.” The nativist *New York Express* likewise insisted in one editorial titled “By Their Fruits Ye Shall Know Them” that the resolution meant “INTERFERENCE WITH SLAVERY IN THE STATES” and in a second editorial that, after sixty Republicans had voted for a resolution to “wage war” on the slave states, that party could no longer disguise itself as conservative.²⁹

The longest and most detailed analysis of the resolution’s significance was provided in an editorial in the Democratic *New York Herald*, emphasizing at length that the Blake resolution perfectly reflected the radically abolitionist theories of Lysander Spooner in his 1845–46 book *The Unconsti-*

28. *Boston Daily Journal*, Mar. 31, 1860; *New York Daily Tribune*, Mar. 27, 1860; *Philadelphia Daily Evening Bulletin*, Mar. 27, 1860; and *Philadelphia North American and United States Gazette*, Mar. 28, 1860. On Benjamin Perley Poore, see Ritchie, *Press Gallery*, 73–78. On James E. Harvey, see Daniel W. Crofts, “James E. Harvey and the Secession Crisis,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 103 (Apr. 1979): 177–95.

29. *Cincinnati Daily Enquirer*, Mar. 30, 1860; *Cleveland Daily Plain Dealer*, Apr. 2, 1860; *Daily Ohio Statesman*, Mar. 31, 1860; *New York Morning Express*, Mar. 27 and 30, 1860; and *Morning Pennsylvanian*, Mar. 27, 1860.

tutionality of Slavery. Just as Spooner had argued that slavery was opposed to natural law, that natural law took precedence over the Constitution, and that therefore the Constitution could not shield slavery from efforts to abolish it, so did the *Herald* view the Blake resolution as “the entering wedge” of the Republicans to abolish slavery in the southern states and to destroy the South in a bloodbath reminiscent of the slave revolt on St. Domingue in the Caribbean in the 1790s. The Washington correspondent of the *New York Daily News* also briefly referred to the Blake resolution as the “first fruit” of Spooner’s book. All partisanship aside, the attitudes expressed by northern Democrats and Americans betrayed their core belief that the Republicans were at heart abolitionists whose measures, as encompassed in Blake’s resolution, would ultimately drive the South to secede from the Union and fight a civil war to preserve its way of life and its “peculiar institution.”³⁰

Among newspapers in the southern states and the District of Columbia, those of the Opposition or American party and those moderate Democratic presses clinging to faith that the South could peacefully coexist with the Republican-dominated North within the same union displayed the mildest reactions to the Blake resolution. Many of these newspapers took no notice of it beyond printing the regular telegraphic reports of congressional proceedings. Two Opposition newspapers that did print editorials on the subject, Georgia’s *Columbus Enquirer* and Louisiana’s *New Orleans Crescent*, argued that the resolution and the sixty votes for it represented the viewpoint of the radical wing of the Republicans; the *Enquirer* stressed the northern vote against the resolution as indicative of a more conservative sentiment in free states, while the *Crescent* argued that Blake offered the resolution only to satisfy the “morbid appetite” of his local constituency. Southern Democratic presses still supportive of Senator Stephen Douglas of Illinois for president provided only brief accounts or comments on Blake’s resolution.³¹

Southern states’ rights Democratic newspapers contained none of the reserve of the southern unionists. When they editorialized concerning the Blake resolution, they consistently and vehemently denounced it as evidence of Republican intent to use all federal power at their disposal to abolish slavery in the southern states whenever they did achieve power. The *Nashville Union and American*, the *Louisville Courier*, and the *Lexington Kentucky*

30. *New York Herald*, Mar. 29, 1860; and *New York Daily News*, Apr. 2, 1860. For some account of Spooner’s antislavery radicalism, see Lewis Perry, *Radical Abolitionism: Anarchy and the Government of God in Antislavery Thought* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1973), 194–208; and William W. Wiecek, *The Sources of Antislavery Constitutionalism in America, 1760–1848* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1977), 257–58, 260, 263.

31. *Daily Columbus (Ga.) Enquirer*, Apr. 2, 1860; *Daily Louisville Democrat*, Apr. 1, 1860; *New Orleans Daily Crescent*, Apr. 9, 1860; and *States and Union*, Mar. 28, 1860, in editorial reprinted in the *Dallas (Tex.) Herald*, Apr. 25, 1860.

Statesman all detected Republican aggression against slavery in the states in Blake's resolution. The *Savannah News* reprinted the *Pennsylvanian's* editorial about Republican intent to make war on the South. One of the strongest editorial condemnations of the Blake resolution appeared initially in the *Alexandria Virginia Sentinel* and was reprinted in the *Richmond Enquirer* and the *Wilmington (N.C.) Journal*. The Republican vote for Blake's resolution should disabuse southerners, the *Sentinel* declared, of any lingering notions that that party had abated its hatred of the South or that the Republicans would respect the Constitution as an obstacle to their abolition efforts once they gained power over the federal government. The *Baltimore Sun*, in another vigorously worded editorial, also urged on southerners "the extreme necessity of self-preservation," even to the dissolution of the Union and the horrors of civil war, given the Blake resolution's revelation of long-matured Republican plans for "the subjugation of the South in the abolition of slavery."³²

H. G. Blake himself must have been amazed at all the attention his resolution was receiving from newspapers around the country. The version of that resolution on which nearly all of the presses were rendering their judgments was not the one that Blake had actually written and introduced but the radically abolitionist variant with the comma after "human being." Only a few papers printed the resolution as Blake had written it. Even where the anti-Republican editorials recognized that the resolution only applied to areas under federal jurisdiction and not the slave states, those essays had nonetheless interpreted Blake's resolution, especially its preamble, as a sinister harbinger of things to come if and when the Republicans won national power. Blake did little to assuage this sense of southern dread about the Republicans when he delivered his first major speech in the House on June 12, more than two months after the resolution struggle and nearly a month following the nomination of Abraham Lincoln for president by the Republican convention at Chicago. Although Blake's speech was titled "Equality of Rights in the Territories," it contained much more than the standard Republican arguments on slavery extension. The speech was actually a lengthy explanation of his March 26 resolution, which he defended as having proposed "a very harmless inquiry," and he rejected Democratic charges that it was "incendiary." Blake admitted that even many Republicans who voted to refer it were more ready to apologize for it than to defend it. But the Ohio congressman felt there were no apologies to make, even for the abolitionist preamble that had been called "incendiary" and even "treasonable." From there Blake

32. *Baltimore Sun*, Mar. 29, 1860; *Lexington Kentucky Statesman*, Apr. 3, 1860; *Louisville Daily Courier*, Mar. 31, 1860; *Nashville Union and American*, Apr. 3, 1860; *Richmond Enquirer* (semiweekly edition), Mar. 30, 1860, and *Wilmington (N.C.) Daily Journal*, Apr. 4, 1860, both reprinting editorial from *Alexandria Virginia Sentinel*; and *Savannah Daily Morning News*, Mar. 31, 1860, reprinting editorial from *Philadelphia Pennsylvanian*, Mar. 27, 1860.

launched into an oratorical assault on slavery as opposed to natural rights and referred to Jefferson's egalitarian words in the Declaration of Independence. He condemned slavery as a great sin against God and agreed that Congress did possess the power to ban such a grievous moral wrong from the national territories. On a more practical level, he charged that permitting slavery to infest the territories only threatened to enhance southern power in Congress through the three-fifths clause of the Constitution. In addition, Blake asserted, slavery's presence in the territories would exclude free white labor and southern nonslaveholders from those areas. Slavery itself, he said, denied the humanity of blacks, hurt nonslaveholders in the South, kept the southern ruling class in power, repelled immigrants from settling in the slave states, and blighted progress generally. At both the beginning and the end of his speech, Blake praised Abraham Lincoln as the party's choice for president. Blake's address, however clear an explication of his resolution and his antislavery views, received no particular attention in the newspapers. It was just another of many one-hour speeches on various issues that congressmen were anxious to deliver during those last weeks before the session ended on June 28. Besides, nothing Blake said in his speech could begin to divert public attention away from Senator Charles Sumner's famous speech only eight days earlier in the other chamber: "The Barbarism of Slavery," a four-hour extravaganza of vituperation on the evils of the "peculiar institution."³³

References to the Blake resolution were not quite over with. In the second, "Secession Winter" session of the 36th Congress, following Lincoln's election as president in November 1860 and during which seven slave states would declare themselves seceded from the Union, the Blake resolution arose again in congressional debate. Blake himself probably did not realize what sensitive nerves he had struck with his resolution. In that second session numerous plans of compromise were offered by members of both houses to attempt to save the Union, or at least to retain as many slave states as possible in the Union until Lincoln was inaugurated as president on March 4. Thereafter the 37th Congress could deal with the problems. Much debate and many speeches took place in the two chambers of Congress as seven slave states passed ordinances of secession and formed the Confederacy. Many southerners had become convinced that with "Black Republican" Abraham Lincoln as president, the Republicans would undertake to abolish slavery even in the southern states, with all the attendant evils of race war and a bloodbath of unimaginable proportions. As evidence of Republicans' true purposes, one northern Democratic senator and several southern congressmen

33. See *Congressional Globe*, 36th Cong., 1st sess., App. 417-19, for Blake's speech. On Sumner's speech, see *ibid.*, 2590-603; and David Donald, *Charles Sumner and the Coming of the Civil War* (New York: Knopf, 1960), 352-63.

of the border slave states raised the Blake resolution and Republican votes for it in their indictment of Republican intentions.

The first to invoke the Blake resolution was Senator David Bigler of Pennsylvania, a strong Democratic supporter of President James Buchanan and an ardent proponent of compromise and concessions to the South. In his Senate speech of January 21, 1861, Bigler recited ten events beginning in 1854 that he believed had been the leading sources of slavery issue agitation. The first he listed was the Kansas-Nebraska Act itself, followed in chronological order by the birth of the Republican party; the struggle for “Bleeding Kansas”; the 1858 proposal for a slave state of Kansas under the Lecompton Constitution; Senator William Seward’s “irrepressible conflict” doctrine and Lincoln’s similar “House Divided” doctrine, both in 1858; John Brown’s raid; Republican endorsement of Hinton R. Helper’s *Impending Crisis*; “the vote of sixty Republican members of Congress for the Blake resolution”; Senator Sumner’s “The Barbarism of Slavery” speech; and northern election victories by Republicans and the victory of Lincoln as president. Blake’s resolution had made Bigler’s top-ten list of sectional crisis agitations.³⁴

A few days later in the House, on January 25, Democrat Henry Burnett of Kentucky, an avid defender of southern rights, brought up the Blake resolution and had it read again to the House as evidence of Republican plans in relation to slavery. H. G. Blake spoke up in defense of his resolution, calling it simply “a matter for inquiry” for reference to committee, and he asserted, in two short statements within a few minutes that the Republicans did not construe, nor could anyone else legitimately interpret, his resolution as authorizing interference with slavery in the southern states. On January 31 Burnett’s fellow Kentucky Democrat William E. Simms challenged radical Republican John Farnsworth of Illinois with the fact that he had voted for Blake’s resolution. Farnsworth admitted his vote for it, said that the resolution could be interpreted in various ways, and declared that he himself favored abolishing slavery in any area where it could be done under the U.S. Constitution. A bit later that same day, Democratic representative William Avery of Tennessee referred again to the Blake resolution as a contradiction to the assertions of Republican David Kilgore of Indiana and others that their party did not intend to abolish slavery in the states. A southern Opposition/American member from Tennessee, James M. Quarles, drew the same connection between Republican abolitionist intentions and the Blake resolution in his speech of February 1. The last references to the Blake resolution during the second session were made by Simms of Kentucky once more, when in his address of February 9 he elaborated on two separate oc-

34. *Congressional Globe*, 36th Cong., 2d sess., 490.

casions on the abolitionist implications of the Blake resolution and the Republicans who had voted for it.³⁵

Congressman Blake himself did not deliver a formal address in this session until February 19, only two weeks before the session's end and Lincoln's inauguration. Blake made no mention of his 1860 resolution. He instead concentrated on condemning southern secession, which he claimed the slave states opted for not from any Republican threat to slavery in their states but because those slave states had failed within the Union to force the North to nationalize slavery through new Constitutional guarantees. Blake declared that Republicans would never compromise their principles and would not amend the Constitution to give greater security for slavery; to do so would be "political suicide" for the party. Instead, the Ohio radical demanded that the South make concessions to the North, since slavery had caused the crisis that threatened to destroy the Union. In this regard, Blake made several suggestions, including an amendment to strike out the three-fifths clause of the Constitution. Blake opposed any compromise with southern secessionist rebels. By February, after seven states had severed their ties with the Union and had become traitors in Republican eyes, Blake's "no compromise" stand was shared by most Republicans in Congress.³⁶

Lincoln's inauguration also marked the beginning of H. G. Blake's second term in Congress, for he had been reelected in November 1860. The 37th Congress was also the first one during the Civil War, which began after the Confederates fired on and captured Fort Sumter in Charleston's harbor in April. Representative Blake became a stalwart supporter of the Union cause and Lincoln's administration. As Union troops were retreating in disarray back toward Washington after the First Battle of Bull Run, Congressman Blake strenuously exhorted them to stop retreating and was reportedly able to turn some of them back to face the Confederates. In Congress he acted with the radical Republican faction and delivered a speech on April 11, 1862, strongly supporting the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia. In that same session, as a member of the Committee on the Post Office and Post Roads, Blake originated the establishment of a postal money order system, which was finally enacted by Congress after Blake had relinquished his seat. During his second term, the Blakes' four-year-old son died. The Lincolns lost their young son about the same time. H. G. Blake and President Lincoln shared their grief and memories on long walks together. After Blake returned to Medina in 1863, he helped to organize several local companies of troops into a regiment of the Ohio National Guard, and Blake himself became colonel of it. The unit spent its service in 1864 on guard duty at forts in the Washington

35. *Ibid.*, App. 109, 119, 122, 141, 209, 211.

36. *Ibid.*, App. 223-25.

area. They saw no action against Confederate forces but suffered many deaths due to sickness in the camp. The regiment mustered out in September 1864. Once again, Blake resumed private life in Medina as businessman, banker, lawyer, newspaper editor, civic leader, and Republican activist. He died of pneumonia in April 1876 just before his fifty-seventh birthday.³⁷

As for the Blake resolution of 1860, it may have impressed Senator Bigler of Pennsylvania as one of the top-ten sources of agitation between 1854 and 1861, but very few since then have paid any attention to it. Nonetheless, it deserves to be remembered as an illustrative episode of the politics of the sectional crisis. First of all, the abolitionist preamble and the vaguely worded antislavery resolution demonstrated the continuing commitment of Republicans like H. G. Blake to their antislavery ideals—which scared the proslavery South. No matter how many times radical Republicans such as Blake or even more moderate Republicans might deny any intention of interfering with slavery where it already existed in southern states, southern leaders saw in measures such as this a dreadful future scenario of Republicans in power using that power to destroy slavery. Maybe the Republicans would only move against slavery in areas under federal jurisdiction at first, but southerners saw this as only a prelude to the ultimate Republican goal of abolition everywhere. The Blake resolution also illuminated the quandary in which the Republican party found itself in the months after John Brown's raid. Anxious to nominate and elect a Republican president in 1860 and fearful of being smeared by Democrats as having provoked Brown's raid by their agitation, Republican congressional leaders, even some of the radicals, did not want to do anything that might possibly begin turning public opinion against them in the North as being a group too radically antislavery to be trusted with political power. But the Democrats could derive only momentary joy from the disarray and lack of cohesion among Republicans as they grappled with Blake's unanticipated measure. Their confusion did not indicate any real split in Republican ranks in the House. They might feel that the resolution's wording was vague and that the proposal's timing could not have been worse, but one must remember that nearly all Republicans agreed with the sentiments of both Blake's preamble and the resolution as he had drafted it. The resolution did represent basic Republican thought on the evil of slavery and federal government power in relation to it. The perceptive Democratic correspondent of the *Columbus Statesman* understood that the Republican rift over the Blake resolution was only temporary; at the

37. *Congressional Globe*, 37th Cong., 2d sess., 950–51, and App. 91–93; *Medina County Gazette*, Apr. 21, 28 and May 5, 1876; *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, Feb. 12, 1932; *History of Medina County*, 313, 335; and Brown, "Legacy of Blake," 19, 23–24.

end of his rollicking account of the struggle, he predicted that the Republicans would not split but would reunite at their Chicago convention.³⁸

The House turmoil of March 26, 1860, is also instructive concerning the Democrats at that time. Laugh and joke all they might at the Republicans' befuddlement over the Blake resolution, and vote as they might in a unified bloc against it, the Democratic coalition was superficial and fragile. While the Republicans looked forward hopefully to their convention, the northern and southern wings of the Democrats awaited a divisive showdown on the slavery issue at their upcoming convention in Charleston. Southern Democratic radicals had been committed to secession since John Brown's raid and were anxious to use the Blake resolution to define the image of Republicans in the southern public mind as unmitigated abolitionists. Their determination may have involved some House fire-eaters in the legerdemain of getting a comma inserted after "human being" in the official report of Blake's resolution in order to make it appear more abolitionist than Blake intended. They really feared the Blake resolution; to them it was the Republican party's program, with or without the comma, but especially with it. Blake's proposal and the Republican party after John Brown's raid connoted to southern Democrats a future of abolition, race war, and the bloodbath of St. Domingue. To prevent this imagined future, these southern Democrats would resort to disrupting the Democratic party, destroying the Union, and fighting the Civil War. Blake in an April 4, 1860, letter described slavery as "the greatest of all the sum of all crimes"; to southern fire-eaters, Blake's resolution represented the sum of all their fears.³⁹

38. *Daily Ohio Statesman*, Mar. 31, 1860.

39. The Blake quotation is from his Apr. 4, 1860, "Jefferson" letter in the *Medina Gazette*, Apr. 19, 1860.