THE suppression of the African slave trade is one of the most significant achievements of the American people. President Abraham Lincoln's administration, however, often receives full credit for those measures which finally terminated the barbaric commerce. Although the new Republican government did much in this respect, it is mistaken to suppose that effective action against the slave trade began with Lincoln's inauguration. In fact, the five years of Lincoln's Presidency were no more vital to the suppression of the illegal trade than were the preceding four years. The slave trade legislation promulgated during the Buchanan regime continued and substantially fortified a movement which had its inception in the first decade of the nineteenth century.

On March 2, 1807, President Thomas Jefferson signed the "Act to prohibit the importation of slaves into any port or place within the jurisdiction of the United States" after January 1, 1808.1 With this law on the books, many hoped that "the hideous sufferings undergone by these poor creatures in their transit across the Atlantic had at last drawn down the reprobation of humanity" upon the traders.2 But since Congress provided no special machinery to enforce it, the act proved difficult to implement. The Treasury Department, as well as the Navy, State, War, and Interior Departments, all took their turns as policing agencies.2

After 1808, Congress passed numerous amendments and supplements to the law, including the significant act of May 15, 1820, which declared slave traders tantamount to pirates, subject to the

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1 U. S. Statutes at Large, II, 426.
SUPPRESSION OF THE SLAVE TRADE

legal fate of that group: hanging. Moreover, the United States concluded international treaties in 1824 and 1842 with the hope of finally exterminating the trade, but to little avail. Despite the noble intentions of these enactments and notwithstanding tremendous international scorn, the slave trade persisted on an illegal basis.

Naval officers, diplomatic correspondents, and other eyewitnesses testified to the continuing traffic. Apathetic federal and local officials ignored the law, although a weak United States naval patrol did manage to apprehend a few violators from time to time.

During this period, New York City became the “greatest slave-trading mart in the world.” The New York Journal of Commerce observed that few of its readers were “aware of the extent to which this infernal traffic is carried on . . . in close alliance with our legitimate trade; and that down-town merchants of wealth and respectability are extensively engaged in buying and selling African Negroes, and have been . . . for an indefinite number of years.” J. D. B. DeBow interviewed a ship captain convicted as a slaver in 1854, but subsequently pardoned owing to “the doubt as to his being an American citizen.” From a prison cell in New Orleans, this notorious individual asserted that New York “is the chief port in the world for the slave trade.” More explicitly, he exclaimed that “neither in Cuba or in the Brazils is it carried on so extensively. Ships that convey slaves to the West Indies and South America are fitted out from the United States. Now and then one sails from Philadelphia; more from Baltimore; but

4 U. S., Statutes at Large, III, 600.
5 The best evidence available is furnished in the numerous diplomatic dispatches between British and American officials in the British Sessional Papers.
6 One periodical of the times even suggests that the government “did not exert itself in good faith to carry out . . . the legislation of Congress in regard to the matter. If a vessel was captured, her owners were permitted to bond her, and thus continue her in the trade; and if any man was convicted of this form of piracy, the executive always interposed between him and the penalty of his crime.” Moreover, “the laws of Congress . . . had become a dead letter, and the suspicion was well grounded that certain officials of the Federal Government had actually connived at their violation.” From “The Slave-Trade in New York,” Continental Monthly, XI (January, 1862), 87.
7 The Times (London), October 18, 1846.
most of all from New York. This is our headquarters!” When asked whether he and his fellow slavers feared the British fleet, the arrogant sailor responded negatively. “We run up the American flag,” he explained, “and if they come on board we have to do is to show our American papers, and they have no right to search us. So they growl and grumble and go off again.”

The extent of clandestine trade progressively increased in the antebellum decade, especially during the Buchanan administration. The New York Evening Post published a list of “eighty-five vessels fitted out from New York, from February, 1859, to July, 1860,” for the slave trade.11 The New York Times lamented that at no other time “has the traffic been as actively and successfully prosecuted as at the present.”12 In an earlier article, the Times reported that “the whole slave coast of Africa is... lined with slavers, who are generally from New York, cleared from the Custom House, bringing all the appliances of the trade with them, and maneuvering about on the coast, under various pretences and disguises of legal traffic.”13 Even the British government was becoming painfully aware and concerned with the increase in “the prostitution of the American flag on the West Coast of Africa for the purpose of slave-dealing.”14 The “imperfection in the United States’ laws, which cannot fail to affect the efficient action of American cruisers for the suppression of the slave trade,” especially annoyed the British.15 These factors, as well as an increased agitation for the re-opening of the slave trade, coupled with the fact that “the South had been more or less familiar with violations of the laws since 1808,” resulted in such a remarkable increase of the illegal commerce between 1850 and 1860, that “the movement may almost be termed a reopening of the slave trade.”16

The recurrent demands of powerfully organized minorities (especially in South Carolina and Louisiana) for the disestablish-

11 New York Evening Post, January 14, 1861.
13 Ibid., March 2, 1860.
14 Earl of Malmesbury to Lord Napier (December 15, 1858), British Sessional Papers, 1859, XXXIV [2469]. Hereafter cited as B. S. P.
15 Lord John Russell to Lord Lyons (April 13, 1860), B. S. P., 1861, LXIV [2823-1].
ment of governmental controls and restrictions on the slave trade proved an important factor in accounting for this increased activity. The South sought to compensate for its numerical inferiority and its need to compete with the steady influx of free laborers into the North. Concurrently, “a sudden increase in the world market for tropical products made such plantation areas acutely conscious of the inadequacy of their labor supply.” These considerations partly explain the concern of Southern planters for a relaxed national slave trade policy.

Southern clamor for re-opening the trade had its foundation set as early as 1836, when, in an address before the Senate, John C. Calhoun expressed deepest regret that the trade had ever been branded as piracy. This sentiment grew in rapid proportions until in the summer of 1858 the South Carolina State Senate declared the slave trade laws unconstitutional, null and void, and the senators “roundly applauded the assertion that the slave trade was as innocent and legitimate as any other.” Finally, the Vicksburg Commercial Convention of 1859 adopted a resolution requesting the repeal of all laws that stood in the way of re-opening the trade. Moreover, agitation for legalizing the trade was not confined entirely to Southern radicals. On the eve of the election of 1860, for example, the New York Times exposed Moses F. Odell, a Democratic candidate for Congress from the Second District of New York City (Brooklyn), as being a staunch advocate of such a policy. In this atmosphere of divergent interests and national unrest the seeds for the extinction of the slave trade were being sown.

Initially, James Buchanan’s administration continued the established policy of apathy in regard to the numerous infractions of the slave trade laws. By mid-1858, however, the frequent, even flagrant, violations of the laws prompted Buchanan to act. He put

18 Register of Debates in Congress, 24 Cong. 1 Sess., XII, 209.
Interior Secretary Jacob Thompson in charge of enfor
ing all slave trade legislation, and obviously intended to take a more pe-
sonal hand in the execution of the laws himself. This concentr.
ation of duties on the Department of the Interior has often been
credited to Lincoln, because in his first annual message to Congress
he declared that he had confided "the execution of the laws for the
suppression of the African slave trade . . . to the Department
of the Interior." It appears that the President's reference to a
reorganization of the enforcement apparatus was merely a political
maneuver designed to illustrate a change in climate in keeping
with the Republican image. The truth of the matter is that Lin-
coln only formalized an established fact by a public declaration,
and that the Department of the Interior under Caleb B. Smith
did little more (and probably even less) to enforce the slave
trade laws than did Jacob Thompson.

From an analysis of the records of the Department of the
Interior in relation to the suppression of the slave trade, it ap-
pears that Caleb Smith's sole function in regard to the enforce-
ment of the slave trade laws was financial in nature—controlling
the disbursement of Congressional appropriations to the various
other governmental agencies (e.g., Navy and Treasury) concerned
with slave trade matters. On the other hand, Jacob Thompson's
functions were much more comprehensive in scope. Not only did
Thompson handle the financial program, but he also supervised
the resettlement of liberated Africans in Liberia. Additionally,
Secretary Thompson played an active role in the investigation
of alleged slave trading activities as well as adopting preventative
measures in regard to illegal slave imports. Accordingly, he sent
an agent provocateur, Benjamin F. Slocumb, into the South to
discover and undermine slave importing activities. Although
Slocumb's success in infiltrating slave importing groups was
minimal, his mere presence in the South testifies in part to the
administration's determination to extirpate the slave trade.

22 Records of the Department of the Interior relating to the African Slave
Trade and Negro Colonization, 1858-72: Letters Received from the Presi-
dent, the Executive Departments, and Congress; Register of Letters Sent;
and Miscellaneous Letters Received (Washington: National Archives
Microfilm Publications), passim.
23 Ibid.; and Senate Exec. Doc. 1, 36 Cong. 2 Sess., I, 41-44.
24 See, for example, Thompson to Slocumb (conference), September 14,
1859), Records of the Department of the Interior . . . 1858-72, Letters Sent:
By the spring of 1859 Buchanan’s government succeeded in bringing about major innovations in the war against the slave trade. The first of these dramatic changes took the form of an appropriation by Congress “to carry out the Act of March 3, 1819, and subsequent acts, and to pay expenses already incurred.” Specifically, appropriations for the enforcement of the slave trade laws had been fantastically small. The two appropriations which preceded the 1859 bill totaled less than $20,000 combined. On March 3, 1859, under the scrutiny of a watchful Buchanan, the 35th Congress appropriated $75,000 for the suppression of the illicit traffic. Specifically, $45,000 was for the sustenance of the American fleet stationed off the coast of Africa near Porto Praia, while the remaining $30,000 was allocated “for the support, maintenance, and education of the Echo Africans.” The latter provision created a barrage of Congressional criticism and indignation directed point-blank at the White House. Apparently, Buchanan personally entered into a contract with the American Colonization Society on September 7, 1858, with the humane purpose of transporting the Africans who had been captured on the slaver Echo back to Liberia and “to furnish them, during the period of one year thereafter, with comfortable shelter, clothing, and provisions, and to cause them to be instructed in the arts of civilized life... at the rate of $150 for each individual.” Consummated without Congressional approval, the President’s transaction nearly caused the defeat of the entire appropriation. Although the debate on whether Buchanan had exceeded Presidential prerogative was long and torrid, the bill finally passed by a substantial margin and became law on March 3.

Aside from this financial stimulus, Buchanan sought to increase and perfect the naval enforcement apparatus. Before 1859 the number of vessels deployed by the Department of the Navy to

Hatch to Thompson (November 21, 1859), Slocumb to Thompson (November 21, 1859), and Hatch to Thompson (November 23, 1859), Records, Miscellaneous Letters Received.
54U. S. Statutes at Large, XI, 404.
55 Ibid., pp. 90, 227.
56 Ibid., p. 404.
57 Congressional Globe, 35 Cong. 2 Sess., II, 1053.
59 For the debate see Congressional Globe, 35 Cong. 2 Sess., II, 1052, 1076, 1387, 1144, 1175, 1431, 1553, 1570.
suppress the slave trade never amounted to more than six. Six ships, moreover, was an exception to the rule, occurring only between August, 1849 and May, 1851. Generally, the African fleet consisted of only four vessels, three of which were usually second or third-class sloops, while the flagship itself was never less than a first-class sloop or a frigate. At various instances, however, the number of ships would even dip below four. In the period between June, 1857 and May, 1859, for example, the African squadron consisted of only three vessels: Cumberland, Dale, and St. Louis. Moreover, before 1859 an auxiliary squadron to patrol the waters surrounding Cuba for slavers who happened to evade the clutches of the African fleet was non-existent. It is no wonder, therefore, that few slavers were captured before 1859.

Disturbed by the ineffectiveness of the naval situation, the Buchanan administration soon came to grips with the problem and effected a series of far-reaching innovations designed to suppress the illegal traffic. On June 12, 1858, Congress had appropriated $1,350,000 for the purchase of five steamers for employment in the punitive expedition against the Paraguayans. Later added to the African fleet and subsequently bolstered by the inclusion of several heavily armed warships, these vessels enhanced and substantially strengthened America's watch-dog force in the Atlantic.

On July 6, 1859, Captain William Inman replaced Flag Officer Thomas A. Conover as commander of the African fleet. In his rather lengthy communique to the new commander, Secretary of the Navy Isaac Toucey, strongly emphasizing the fact that the United States was "sincerely desirous wholly to suppress the traffic in slaves," assigned the following vessels to the African squadron: Constellation (flagship and first-class sloop), Portsmouth (first-class sloop), San Jacinto (first-class sloop), Vincennes (second-class sloop), Mohican (second-class sloop), Mariou (third-class sloop), Mystic (third-class steamer), and Sumpter (third-class steamer). Not only was the African squadron strengthened by the inclusion of these eight vessels (116 guns);

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32 Senate Exec. Doc. 4, 36 Cong. 2 Sess., IV, 14-16.
33 Ibid., pp. 4-28.
34 Ibid., pp. 23-25.
35 Congressional Globe, 35 Cong. 1 Sess., 568.
36 Toucey to Inman (July 6, 1859), House Exec. Doc., 36 Cong. 2 Sess., IV, 574-578.
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its effectiveness was further enhanced by the simultaneous switching of the squadron's home base from Porto Praia to Sao Paulo de Loando, much closer to the heaviest concentration of slave trade activity. Additionally, Buchanan cleverly placed four American steamers off the Cuban coast to watch for slavers that had escaped the detection of the African fleet. These were the Mohawk, I'yandotte, Crusader, and Water Witch. Then, on November 2, 1859, the steam cutter Harriet Lane was assigned to patrol "the coast of the United States on the Atlantic from the northern boundary of Georgia to the southern boundary of Florida . . . to more effectually frustrate attempts to violate the laws prohibiting the slave trade." Treasury Secretary Howell Cobb's instructions to Captain Faunce of the Harriet Lane are indicative of the unusually strong approach the Buchanan administration had adopted:

In order to arrest attempts to violate the laws . . . I need not impress upon you the necessity of the utmost vigilance and circumspection; and when you have reasonable grounds to believe that vessels so arriving or departing, or found within our waters, or hovering on the coast, are engaging in violating the laws prohibiting the slave trade, it will be your duty promptly to arrest and bring them into port that the parties and property concerned may be dealt with according to law.

Confident that his naval program would achieve positive results and "reassured" by Thompson and Slocumb that slave importing into the United States was being kept at a minimum, President Buchanan reported to Congress on December 19, 1859:

All lawful means at my command have been employed, and shall continue to be employed, to execute the laws against the African slave trade. After a most careful and rigorous examination of our coasts, and a thorough investigation of the subject, we have not been able to discover that any slaves have been imported into the

\[\text{\textsuperscript{27}}\text{Senate Exec. Doc., 36 Cong. 1 Sess., II, 1138-1139.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{28}}\text{Toucey to Craven (September 23, 1859), Toucey to Stanley (September 24, 1859), Toucey to Maffitt (September 26, 1859), and Toucey to Sartori (November 10, 1859), House Exec. Doc. 7, 36 Cong. 2 Sess., 603-606 and Senate Exec. Doc. 4, 36 Cong. 2 Sess., IV, 26-28.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{29}}\text{Cobb (Secretary of the Treasury) to Faunce (November 2, 1859), House Exec. Doc. 7, 36 Cong. 2 Sess., pp. 642-643.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{30}}\text{Ibid., p. 642.}\]
United States except the cargo by the *Wanderer*, numbering between three and four hundred. Those engaged in this unlawful enterprise have been rigorously prosecuted, but not with as much success as their crimes have deserved.\footnote{Buchanan, *Works*, X, 342.}

The positive results of Buchanan’s vigorous campaign against the evils of the slave trade soon became apparent. Official government records show that prior to the Buchanan administration the number of vessels arrested for violating the slave trade legislation were relatively few. This becomes especially clear when the decade 1850-1860 is examined. In 1850 three slavers were arrested.\footnote{Advance (1852), R. P. Brown (1853), H. N. Gambrill (1853), Glamorgan (1854), Jasper (1854), G. H. Townsend (1854), Falmouth (1856), C. F. A. Cole (1856), William Lewis (1856), and Panchita (1856).} The years 1852, 1853, 1854, and 1856 yielded a total of only ten captured ships, while 1851 and 1855 were numerically void of any reported arrests.\footnote{“Virginian, Alice Rogers, Wildfire, Falmouth, William, Cora, Bogota, Thomas, Triton, W. R. Kebby, Erie, Storm King, Joven Antonio, Cora, Bonito, W. L. Cogswell, Tocca, and Mary J. Kimball.”} But beginning in 1857 a modest increase in the number of slavers apprehended can be observed. From 1857 to 1859 a total of twenty-four slavers were captured, doubling the total for the preceding seven years.\footnote{House Exec. Doc. 104, 35 Cong. 2 Sess., p. 32; House Exec. Doc. 7, 36 Cong. 2 Sess., pp. 105-106, 516-517, 547, 627-638; House Exec. Doc. 2, 36 Cong. 2 Sess., pp. 263-275; Senate Exec. Doc. 53, 37 Cong. 2 Sess., p. 2; Senate Exec. Doc. 2, 35 Cong. 2 Sess., pp. 190-199; Senate Exec. Doc. 3, 36 Cong. 1 Sess., p. 204; and Senate Exec. Doc. 1, 37 Cong. 1 Sess., pp. 97-98. There does not exist a complete official list of slavers captured throughout the years. The only official attempt (*House Exec. Doc. 7*, 35 Cong. 2 Sess., pp. 625-631) is, unfortunately, incomplete.} Then, in 1860, Buchanan’s efforts were amply rewarded. In that year, the naval squadrons made a total of eighteen arrests.\footnote{Buchanan, *Works*, X. 342.} Of these, twelve were prosecuted before the law.\footnote{J. P. Glover (1857), William Clark (1857), Lewis McLaren (1857), Panchita (1857), Flora (1857), W. G. Lewis (1857), J. W. Reed (1858), Huntress (1858), Lyra (1858), Putnam (1858), Brothers (1858), Mystie (1858), Valley (1858), Wanderer (1858), Julia Dean (1858), Angelita (1858), Rebecca (1859), Orion (1859), Ardennes (1859), Atlantic (1859), Emily (1859), J. P. Hooper (1859), Cygnêt (1859), and Delicia (1859).} Moreover, statistics on the number of vessels arrested and bonded in the Southern District of New York between 1852-1860 provide even a clearer indication of the positive effects resulting from the government’s desire to eradicate the slave trade. From May, 1852, to June, 1859, only four slavers had
been apprehended. But from June, 1859, to December, 1860, a total of sixteen ships were arrested.47 The most sensational and significant case resulting from the mass arrest of 1860 is that of Nathaniel Gordon, captain of the slave ship Erie. Indicted in October, 1860, and convicted on November 30, 1861, in the United States District Court for Southern New York of “forcibly detaining and confining negroes on board that vessel, with intent to make them slaves,” Gordon was declared a pirate and condemned to death.48 Owing mainly to the unprecedented mode of punishment prescribed, Lincoln felt compelled to grant a stay of execution from February 7, 1862, until February 21.49 The President faced tremendous pressure to pardon Gordon or at least to lessen his punishment. Never before had the penalty of death been extended to an offender of the slave trade laws. Understandably, many individuals found difficulty in comprehending Gordon’s fate. An advocate of this viewpoint, Gilbert Dean, wrote a stirring letter of protest to the Chief Executive. His eleventh-hour appeal read as follows:

Your Administration has been signalized by the outbreak of a conspiracy to destroy the Government. Traitors have been taken with arms in their hands. Added to this has been the crime of piracy, of which some have been convicted. None have been executed; instead of that the loyal nation has greeted with unanimous approval the declaration of amnesty and forgiveness. While the prison doors are opening to convicted pirates and acknowledged traitors, the gallows is being erected for Gordon. And why? Is the moral crime of which he is guilty greater than those you are releasing?50

Despite this and similar appeals, the President’s determination did not waver. On February 21, therefore, “the execution of this unhappy man at last took place under the most shocking circumstances, the prisoner having attempted to commit suicide by the taking of poison.”51 An alert prison guard and the availability of

47 Senate Exec. Doc. 53, 37 Cong. 2 Sess., V, 2.
48 Lord Lyons to Earl Russell (December 2, 1861), B. S. P., 1862, LXI [2959].
51 Consul Archibald to Earl Russell (February 24, 1862), B. S. P., 1863, LXXI [3160].
a stomach pump, however, foiled Gordon's attempt to cheat the gallows. In addition, he was far from being sober when finally led to the scaffold: "so powerful had been the effect of the poison that, in order to keep him alive till the necessary moment, they had been obliged to give him whiskey enough to make an ordinary man drunk three times over."\(^{52}\)

Notwithstanding the revolting nature of this death scene, the execution of Gordon had profound effects and did much to accomplish the purpose for which it was intended. The British consul in New York appropriately declared:

> The conviction of this notorious offender, and the no less important conviction which will be thereby impressed upon the minds of all similar offenders, that juries can now be relied on to pronounce a verdict of guilty in cases in which the evidence will sustain such verdicts, will have a wholesome influence in suppressing, or, at least, in greatly diminishing the enterprise in the equipment of slave-trading expeditions. . . .\(^{53}\)

Lincoln himself recognized that there were interests at stake "too mighty to allow him to turn back the mighty power of justice which this unfortunate man had put in motion against himself."\(^{54}\)

At this point, however, it should be emphasized that although Gordon was convicted and executed during the Lincoln administration, his arrest, indictment, and the instigation of prosecution against him occurred during Buchanan's last year in office.

Nearing the conclusion of his term, on December 3, 1860, President Buchanan confidently reported to Congress that "since the date of my last annual message not a single slave has been imported into the United States in violation of the laws prohibiting the African slave trade."\(^{55}\) Although his statement should not be interpreted as meaning that a virtual cessation of slave trade activities had miraculously occurred (slavers still were being fitted out and the attempts to bring slaves to America did not end), the President did bequeath to his successors an illegal activity which had been more than visibly shaken by his vigorous pro-

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\(^{52}\) New York Times, February 22, 1862.
\(^{53}\) Consul Archbald to Earl Russell (October 31, 1862), B. S. P., 1863, LXXI [3160].
\(^{54}\) New York Times, February 22, 1862.
The initial steps had been taken. They would see their fruition in the extension of reform measures under Lincoln, culminating in the Thirteenth Amendment, which itself eliminated the motive for any continuation of the illicit trade.

Even more significant than the actual measures adopted by the Buchanan administration for the suppression of the slave trade are the motives from which such action originated. In the first place, several external factors confronted the President. The most obvious of these was the general humanitarian nature of the American people. Generally speaking, public opinion, especially in the North, strongly opposed both slavery and the slave trade. The prevailing resentment was fanned by numerous denunciatory articles in newspapers and periodicals. The following passage clearly demonstrates the humanitarian scorn of the general public:

Human blood is crying out from the holds of hundreds of slave ships, in the name of our common humanity, to come to the rescue, to send the power to stop it, and the means and ability to enforce that power, to the African coast; and with an iron hand, to strangle the demonical traffickers in human souls.56

European sentiment, especially in England, echoed this anti-slave-trade fervor. The British were, in a sense, the moral leaders of the world against the slave trade. After abolishing the trade herself in 1807, England became the determined leader of a world movement to suppress the trade internationally. About the middle of the century, the United States began to respond to the moral wrath flowing across the Atlantic from the British Isles. International scorn, coupled with domestic resentment and concern, therefore, motivated Buchanan’s concerted measures between 1858 and 1861.

But what of Buchanan himself? What personal factors prompted him to oppose the slave trade? This question becomes especially significant in view of his alleged pro-Southern and pro-slavery interests and leanings. Basically, the President’s interpretation of the institution of slavery, like that of many of his contemporaries, was complex. Being a legalist and a constitutionalist, Buchanan adhered to the doctrine of states’ rights. Accordingly, he admitted

that slavery was constitutionally the prerogative of the several states. Morally, however, Buchanan detested the institution of slavery. He believed slavery "to be a great . . . moral evil," and thanked God that his lot "has been cast in a State where it does not exist." On the question of the slave trade, however, the President adopted a clear-cut policy of opposition in conformity with his dual philosophy of legalism and humanitarianism. The slave trade (unlike slavery itself) was contrary to established law, as well as being "a disgrace to the civilization of the nineteenth century." In this respect, he acted in accordance with his philosophy and vehemently denounced the infernal traffic.

Buchanan was, therefore, motivated primarily by humanitarian and moralistic beliefs. Other motives for his actions, however, do exist. One historian, for example, has suggested that the President's policy might well have been bound up intricately with the split in Democratic ranks between pro-Buchanan and pro-Douglas wings. In other words, his position "was in part influenced by his wish to counteract Douglas, and to recapture the confidence of northern moderates by being, on this point, more anti-slave than Douglas." A more reasonable explanation, however, lies in the realm of partisan politics and, in turn, political expediency. Perhaps the Democrats reasoned that by getting the jump on the Republicans (who had recently assumed a strong anti-slavery platform) in regard to the suppression of the slave trade, their chances in the forthcoming election might be heightened. Republican propaganda had painted an unsavory picture of the alleged pro-slavery attitude of the Buchanan administration, asserting that the Democrats were incapable of effectively enforcing the slave trade laws. Illustrative of this attitude is a pamphlet published by the Republican Association of Washington in 1859 which declared:

He must be charitable and confiding indeed, who believes that administrations at Washington, controlled by the Gulf states, will ever do anything effective towards shutting up the African slave trade. Not such aid, nor such defenders, do the times demand. If our laws are to be

Buchanan, Works, I, 202-203.
Ibid., VII, 406.
Letter from Philip Shriver Klein, Department of History, Pennsylvania State University, May 12, 1964 (in the author's files). Professor Klein is Buchanan's latest and most definitive biographer.
executed, there must be different executive agents. What is wanted, in short, to put down this infamous traffic, is a Republican President, and that would suffice to accomplish the object.\(^6^0\)

A political challenge of this caliber could not go unheeded. It posed a grave threat to the future of the Democratic party and required instant action. It was partially in response to this threat that the Buchanan administration increased the naval apparatus, sent the detective Slocumb into the South, and generally adopted a stronger and more straightforward attitude in regard to the slave trade. Whatever the motivation, however, the crux of the matter is that the government under Buchanan’s direction accomplished much more than is generally assumed in regard to the slave trade, and that the Lincoln administration, coming to power in March, 1861, found it in a genuinely harassed condition.