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speeding down the track, without an engineer or brakes. The new territories acquired from Mexico had vastly increased the size of the nation, but debate over their status-and more importantly the status of slavery within them-paralyzed the nation. Southerners gained access to the territories and a draconian fugitive slave law in the Compromise of 1850, but this only exacerbated sectional tensions. Virtually all northerners, even those who supported the law because they believed that it would preserve the union, despised being