

Quoted From the Boston African-American Historic site:
<http://www.nps.gov/boaf/fugitiveslavelaw.htm>

Background :

“After the Revolutionary War, Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Law of 1793, which gave legal support to masters seeking their fugitive slaves.

In response, states that had recently freed their slaves, like Massachusetts, established personal liberty laws to protect citizens from slave catchers.

Under these personal liberty laws, fugitives could testify before judges and *slave owners were prevented from seizing fugitives without a warrant for their arrest.*”

“The Compromise (of 1850) stated:

1) Slave trading was outlawed in the District of Columbia, yet slavery itself was to be decided upon by residents of both the district and the state of Maryland;

2) Congress had no power to interfere with the interstate slave trade;

3) California would be admitted to the Union as a free state;

4) New Mexico and Utah would decide on slavery through a vote of popular sovereignty; and

5) A federal fugitive slave law would be enacted, making it illegal for northerners to harbor, aid, or assist fugitive slaves.

This last, the fugitive slave law, was the most devastating for African Americans. It meant that, if caught, fugitive slaves were no longer brought before judicial officers for determination of their fate. Instead, they were brought before federal commissioners. Thus, the liberty of thousands of African Americans lay in the lap of a terribly biased administrative, rather than judicial, process.”

Click on the web address above for the complete text.