

A. Civil War Causes

1. Power Struggle Between Federal and State Governments

a) Missouri Compromise

- (i) The Missouri Compromise was an effort by Congress to defuse the sectional and political rivalries triggered by the request of Missouri late in 1819 for admission as a state in which slavery would be permitted.
- (ii) At the time, the United States contained twenty-two states, evenly divided between slave and free. Admission of Missouri as a slave state would upset that balance; it would also set a precedent for congressional acquiescence in the expansion of slavery.
- (iii) Earlier in 1819, when Missouri was being organized as a territory, Representative James Tallmadge of New York had proposed an amendment that would ultimately have ended slavery there; this effort was defeated, as was a similar effort by Representative John Taylor of New York regarding Arkansas Territory.
- (iv) The extraordinarily bitter debate over Missouri's application for admission ran from December 1819 to March 1820.
- (v) Northerners, led by Senator Rufus King of New York, argued that Congress had the power to prohibit slavery in a new state.
- (vi) Southerners like Senator William Pinkney of Maryland held that new states had the same freedom of action as the original thirteen and were thus free to choose slavery if they wished.
- (vii) After the Senate and the House passed different bills and deadlock threatened, a compromise bill was worked out with the following provisions:

- (viii) (1) Missouri was admitted as a slave state and Maine (formerly part of Massachusetts) as free, and (2) except for Missouri, slavery was to be excluded from the Louisiana Purchase lands north of latitude 36°30'.
- (ix) The Missouri Compromise was criticized by many southerners because it established the principle that Congress could make laws regarding slavery; northerners, on the other hand, condemned it for acquiescing in the expansion of slavery (though only south of the compromise line). Nevertheless, the act helped hold the Union together for more than thirty years.

b) Compromise of 1850

- (i) For four years Congress had bitterly and futilely debated the question of the expansion of slavery. Ever since David Wilmot had proposed that slavery be prohibited from any territory acquired from Mexico, opponents of slavery had argued that Congress possessed the power to regulate slavery in all of the territories. Ardent proslavery Southerners vigorously disagreed.
- (ii) Politicians had repeatedly but unsuccessfully tried to work out a compromise. One simple proposal had been to extend the Missouri Compromise line to the Pacific Ocean. Thus, slavery would have been forbidden north of 36°30' north latitude but permitted south of that line.
- (iii) This proposal attracted the support of moderate Southerners but generated little support outside the region. Another proposal, supported by two key Democratic senators, Lewis Cass of Michigan and Stephen Douglas of Illinois, was known as "popular sovereignty." It declared that the people actually living in a territory should decide whether or not to allow slavery.

- (iv) But neither suggestion offered a solution to the whole range of issues dividing the North and South. It was up to Henry Clay, who had just returned to Congress after a seven-year absence, to work out a formula that balanced competing sectional concerns.
- (v) For an hour, Clay outlined to Webster a complex plan to save the Union. A compromise could only be effective, he stated, if it addressed all the issues dividing North and South. He proposed that:
- (1) *California be admitted as a free state;*
 - (2) *there be no restriction on slavery in New Mexico and Utah;*
 - (3) *Texas relinquish its claim to land in New Mexico in exchange for federal assumption of Texas's unpaid debts;*
 - (4) *Congress enact a stringent and enforceable fugitive slave law; and*
 - (5) *the slave trade--but not slavery--be abolished in the District of Columbia.*
- (vi) A week later, Clay presented his proposal to the Senate. The aging statesman was known as the "Great Compromiser" for his efforts on behalf of the Missouri Compromise and the Compromise Tariff of 1832 (which resolved the nullification crisis). Once again, he appealed to Northerners and Southerners to place national patriotism ahead of sectional loyalties.
- (vii) Clay's proposal ignited an eight-month debate in Congress and led John C. Calhoun to threaten Southern secession. Daniel Webster, the North's most spellbinding orator, threw his support behind Clay's compromise.

- (viii) "Mr. President," he began, "I wish to speak today not as a Massachusetts man, nor as Northern man, but as an American ... I speak today for the preservation of the Union. Hear me for my cause." He concluded by warning his listeners that "there can be no such thing as a peaceable secession."
- (ix) Webster's speech provoked outrage from Northern opponents of compromise. Senator William H. Seward of New York called Webster a "traitor to the cause of freedom." But Webster's speech reassured moderate Southerners that powerful interests in the North were committed to compromise.
- (x) Still, opposition to compromise was fierce. Whig President Zachary Taylor argued that California, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, and Minnesota should all be admitted to statehood before the question of slavery was addressed, a proposal that would have given the North a ten-vote majority in the Senate.
- (xi) William H. Seward denounced the compromise as conceding too much to the South and declared that there was a "higher law" than the Constitution, a law that demanded an end to slavery.
- (xii) On the evening of July 9, 1850, President Taylor died of gastroenteritis, five days after taking part in a Fourth of July celebration dedicated to the building of the still unfinished Washington Monument. Taylor's successor was Millard Fillmore, a 50-year-old New Yorker, who was an ardent supporter of compromise.

- (xiii) In Congress, leadership in the fight for a compromise passed to Stephen Douglas, a Democratic senator from Illinois. Douglas abandoned Clay's strategy of gathering all issues dividing the sections into a single bill. Instead, he introduced Clay's proposals one at a time. In this way, he was able to gather support from varying coalitions of Whigs and Democrats and Northerners and Southerners on each issue.
- (xiv) The compromise proposals never succeeded in gathering solid congressional support. In the end, only 4 senators and 28 representatives voted for every one of the measures. Nevertheless, they all passed.
- (xv) As finally approved, the Compromise:
 - (1) *admitted California as a free state;*
 - (2) *allowed the territorial legislatures of New Mexico and Utah to settle the question of slavery in those areas;*
 - (3) *set up a stringent federal law for the return of runaway slaves;*
 - (4) *abolished the slave trade in the District of Columbia; and*
 - (5) *gave Texas \$10 million to abandon its claims to territory in New Mexico east of the Rio Grande.*
- (xvi) The compromise created the illusion that the territorial issue had been resolved once and for all. "There is rejoicing over the land," wrote one Northerner, "the bone of contention is removed; disunion, fanaticism, violence, insurrection is defeated." Sectional hostility had been defused; calm had returned. But, as one Southern editor correctly noted, it was "the calm of preparation, and not of peace."

c) Sectionalism in 1850's

- (i) Sectionalism is the placing of the needs of one section of the nation over the needs of the whole nation.
- (ii) The different sections at this time were the North and the South. Though the West was also a section, it did not practice sectionalism. Instead it was the other sections that fought to control the destiny of the west.
- (iii) The North was primarily industrial in nature. Business and industry played major roles. While the North was not known for its agricultural production it was the largest producer of grain. Life was faster and commerce was looked at with more importance.
- (iv) The South was primarily agricultural. The southern economy was primarily based upon the existence of large family farms known as plantations. The plantation economy relied on cheap labor in the form of slaves to produce tobacco and then cotton. The plantation lifestyle produced a slower more leisurely lifestyle. Farmers on the plantation did not do the work themselves. They were referred to as the "gentleman farmer."
- (v) First and foremost, the most important difference between the north and south was slavery. For the most part most northerners really didn't care about slavery in the beginning but as time went on, the existence of it as well as the extension of slavery into the western territories, became the central issue.
- (vi) The north and south each wanted power to pass laws that would benefit their section. This meant that the more states that became "free" or "slave" meant more votes, both in the House, Senate and Electoral College, for that section. The issue of representation is played out as we expanded westward and decisions had to be made about each state.

- (vii) The South resented all tariffs as they relied on British imports for more of their everyday goods. They also needed other nations to purchase cotton from their farms. As the north supported tariffs to protect their growing industries, the south became increasingly angered. This tension eventually led to the passage of what South Carolina called "the Tariff of Abominations." The south then argued they had the right of nullification which is the power of a state to declare a federal law null and void.
 - (viii) Lastly was the issue of States Rights. This issue is a direct outgrowth of the South's fear that the North would pass laws that would hurt its lifestyle. Some examples would be tariffs and laws to restrict or abolish slavery. The south again claimed they had the right of nullification and to choose their own lifestyle.
- d) Kansas – Nebraska Act and “Bleeding Kansas”
- (i) The Kansas-Nebraska Act (1854) destroyed the Whig Party, divided the Democratic Party, and created the Republican Party.
 - (ii) Ironically, the author of this legislation was Senator Stephen A. Douglas, who had pushed the Compromise of 1850 through Congress and who had sworn after its passage that he would never make a speech on the slavery question again.
 - (iii) As chairman of the Senate Committee on Territories, Douglas proposed that the area west of Iowa and Missouri--which had been set aside as a permanent Indian reservation--be opened to white settlement.
 - (iv) Southern members of Congress demanded that Douglas add a clause specifically repealing the Missouri Compromise, which would have barred slavery from the region. Instead, the status of slavery in the region would be decided by a vote of the region's settlers.

- (v) In its final form, Douglas's bill created two territories, Kansas and Nebraska, and declared that the Missouri Compromise was "inoperative and void." With solid support from Southern Whigs and Southern Democrats and the votes of half of the Northern Democratic members of Congress, the measure passed.
- (vi) Douglas's supporters pictured him as a proponent of western development and a sincere believer in popular sovereignty as a solution to the problem of slavery in the western territories.
- (vii) Douglas had long insisted that the democratic solution to the slavery issue was to allow the people who actually settled a territory to decide whether slavery would be permitted or forbidden. This was known as popular sovereignty
- (viii) Because the Kansas-Nebraska Act stated that the future status of slavery in the territories was to be decided by popular vote, both antislavery Northerners and proslavery Southerners competed to win the region for their section. Kansas became the arena of sectional conflict. For six years, proslavery and antislavery factions fought in Kansas as popular sovereignty degenerated into violence.
- (ix) Competition between proslavery and antislavery factions reached a climax on May 30, 1855, when Kansas held territorial elections. Although only 1,500 men were registered to vote, 6,000 ballots were cast, many of them by proslavery "border ruffians" from Missouri.
- (x) As a result, a proslavery legislature was elected, which passed laws stipulating that only proslavery men could hold office or serve on juries. One statute imposed five years imprisonment for anyone questioning the legality of slavery in Kansas.

- (xi) Free Soilers held their own "Free State" convention in Topeka in the fall of 1855, and drew up a constitution that prohibited slavery in Kansas, and also barred free blacks from the territory.
- (xii) Like the Free Soilers who settled California and Oregon, most Northerners in Kansas wanted the territory to be free and white. They submitted the Topeka Constitution to the territory's voters, who approved it by an overwhelming majority. The Topeka government then asked Congress to admit Kansas as a free state.
- (xiii) Kansas now had two legislatures--one pro-slavery, the other against. President Franklin Pierce threw his support behind the proslavery legislature and asked Congress to admit Kansas to the Union as a slave state.
- (xiv) On May 21, 1856, 800 proslavery men, many from Missouri, marched into Lawrence, Kansas, to arrest the leaders of the antislavery government.
- (xv) The posse burned the local hotel, looted a number of houses, destroyed two antislavery printing presses, and killed one man. One member of the posse declared: "Gentlemen, this is the happiest day of my life. I determined to make the fanatics bow before me in the dust and kiss the territorial laws. I have done it, by God."

2. Diverting Economies

a) High Tariffs

- (i) A critical economic issue that divided the North from the South was that of tariffs.
- (ii) Tariffs were taxes placed on imported goods, the money from which would go to the government.

- (iii) Throughout the antebellum period, whenever the federal government wanted to raise tariffs, Southern Congressmen generally opposed it and Northern Congressmen generally supported it.
- (iv) Southerners generally favored low tariffs because this kept the cost of imported goods low, which was important in the South's import-oriented economy.
- (v) Southern planters and farmers were concerned that high tariffs might make their European trading partners, primarily the British, raise prices on manufactured goods imported by the South in order to maintain a profit on trade.
- (vi) In the North, however, high tariffs were viewed favorably because such tariffs would make imported goods more expensive. That way, goods produced in the North would seem relatively cheap, and Americans would want to buy American goods instead of European items.
- (vii) Since tariffs would protect domestic industry from foreign competition, business interests and others influenced politicians to support high tariffs.
- (viii) Americans in the West were divided on the issue. In the Southwest, where cotton was a primary commodity, people generally promoted low tariffs. In the Northwest and parts of Kentucky, where hemp (used for baling cotton) was a big crop, people supported high tariffs.

b) Transcontinental Railroad

- (i) The First railroads did not compete with canals immediately for intersectional traffic. Railroad construction required immense amounts of labor and capital.
- (ii) As more and more railroads grew, they stimulated economic activity.

- (iii) Location of a railroad helped determine what agricultural land was used and how profitably it could be farmed. Land grant railroads stimulated agricultural expansion by selling farm sites at low rates on liberal terms.
 - (iv) Railroads spurred regional concentration of industry and investment banking.
 - (v) The economic integration of East and West stimulated nationalism and became a force for preserving the union.
 - (vi) Increased production and cheap transportation meant more income and an improved standard of living for western farmers.
 - (vii) Without railroads and the link they provided to eastern markets, the Midwest and new western territories may have not sided with the north against the South in the coming Civil War.
- c) “Fire – Eaters”
- (i) An outspoken group of Southern, proslavery extremists, were known as Fire-Eaters.
 - (ii) This group clearly and actively advocated secession from the Union and the formation of an independent confederacy as early as the 1840s.
 - (iii) The group included a number of well-known champions of Southern sovereignty, including South Carolina newspaper editor Robert Barnwell Rhett, Virginia planter Edmund Ruffin, and William Lowndes Yancey, a radical Democrat from Alabama.
 - (iv) Although Rhett, Ruffin, Yancey, and other Fire-Eaters were the chief spokesmen for confederacy, many moderate southerners who supported secession continued to distrust them and they seldom acquired responsible positions within the Confederate government.
- d) “Industrial Slavery”

- (i) Major point made by the south in defense of plantation slavery.
 - (ii) Believed that industrial slavery was worse than plantation slavery
 - (iii) Stated the belief that the extremely low wages and poverty level treatment of industrial workers and the poverty type conditions they were living in were no better off than the slaves of the south.
 - (iv) Southerners and proponents of slavery went on to state that it was worse due to that fact that industrial leaders did not support or provide for their workers beyond a pittance of a wage whereas they provided food, housing, and medical care for their slaves.
- e) Panic of 1857
- (i) Between the mid 1840s and 1850s, the United States experienced remarkable and speedy growth in manufacturing, agricultural production, population, railroad mileage, gold production, and sales of public land.
 - (ii) Such growth inevitably caused dislocations of actual wealth and perceived wealth, and a serious economic collapse followed.
 - (iii) The economic collapse in 1857 checked agricultural expansion and industrial growth in much of the nation.
 - (iv) This hurt the railroads and cut down on demand for manufactured goods leading to a deeper collapse. This led to increase in unemployment.
 - (v) The economic panic had its greatest impact on the north but little impact on the South.
 - (vi) As cotton prices remained high and protected the south from the effects of the economic collapse of 1857, growing resentment from the north toward the south was a major concern for the growing sectional conflict between the two.

f) King Cotton

- (i) King Cotton was a phrase frequently used by Southern politicians and authors prior to the American Civil War, indicating the economic and political importance of cotton production.
- (ii) After the invention of the cotton gin (1793), cotton surpassed tobacco as the dominant cash crop in the agricultural economy of the South, soon comprising more than half the total U.S. exports.
- (iii) The concept of “King Cotton” was first suggested in David Christy’s book *Cotton Is King* (1855).
- (iv) Convinced of the supremacy of its commodity at home and abroad, the South was confident of success if secession from the Union should lead to war.
- (v) On the floor of the U.S. Senate, Senator James H. Hammond declaimed (March 4, 1858): “You dare not make war upon cotton! No power on earth dares make war upon it. Cotton is king.”
- (vi) The South was wrong.
- (vii) Skillful diplomacy by the North, coupled with English abolitionist allegiances and Confederate military failure at crucial stages of the war, kept Britain from intervening. Rather than enter the war on the side of the slave states, Britain developed alternate sources of cotton cultivation elsewhere in the empire.
- (viii) To the detriment of the entire region, the South continued after the war to be a one-crop economy until the 20th century, when the New Deal and World War II encouraged diversification and industrialization.

3. Sectional Tensions

a) Dred Scott Episode

- (i) On March 6, 1857, in a small room in the Capitol basement, the Supreme Court ruled that Congress had no power to prohibit slavery in the territories.
- (ii) In 1846, a Missouri slave, Dred Scott, sued for his freedom. Scott argued that while he had been the slave of an army surgeon, he had lived for four years in Illinois, a free state, and Wisconsin, a free territory, and that his residence on free soil had erased his slave status.
- (iii) In 1850 a Missouri court gave Scott his freedom, but two years later, the Missouri Supreme Court reversed this decision and returned Scott to slavery. Scott then appealed to the federal courts and eventually the Supreme Court.
- (iv) March 1857, Chief Justice Roger B. Taney announced the Court's decision. By a 7-2 margin, the Court ruled that Dred Scott had no right to sue in federal court, that the Missouri Compromise was unconstitutional, and that Congress had no right to exclude slavery from the territories.
- (v) The chief justice made two sweeping rulings. The first was that Dred Scott had no right to sue in federal court because neither slaves nor free blacks were citizens of the United States. At the time the Constitution was adopted, the chief justice wrote, blacks had been "regarded as beings of an inferior order" with "no rights which the white man was bound to respect."
- (vi) Second, Taney declared that Congress had no right to exclude slavery from the federal territories since any law excluding slavery property from the territories was a violation of the Fifth Amendment prohibition against the seizure of property without due process of law. For the first time since *Marbury v. Madison* in 1803, the Court declared an act of Congress unconstitutional.

- (vii) Newspaper headlines summarized the Court's rulings:
 - (1) *SLAVERY ALONE NATIONAL--THE MISSOURI COMPROMISE UNCONSTITUTIONAL--NEGROES CANNOT BE CITIZENS--THE TRIUMPH OF SLAVERY COMPLETE.*
- (viii) In a single decision, the Court sought to resolve all the major constitutional questions raised by slavery.
- (ix) It declared that the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights were not intended to apply to black Americans.
- (x) It stated that the Republican Party platform--barring slavery from the western territories--was unconstitutional.
- (xi) And it ruled that Stephen Douglas's doctrine of "popular sovereignty"--which stated that territorial governments had the power to prohibit slavery--was also unconstitutional.
- (xii) Many Republicans-- Including Abraham Lincoln--regarded the decision as part of a slave power conspiracy to legalize slavery throughout the United States.
- (xiii) The Dred Scott decision was a major political miscalculation. In its ruling, the Supreme Court sought to solve the slavery controversy once and for all.
- (xiv) Instead the Court intensified sectional strife, undercut possible compromise solutions to the divisive issue of the expansion of slavery, and weakened the moral authority of the judiciary.

b) Lincoln – Douglas Debates

- (i) The critical issues dividing the nation--slavery versus free labor, popular sovereignty, and the legal and political status of black Americans -- were brought into sharp focus in a series of dramatic debates during the 1858 election campaign for U.S. senator from Illinois.

- (ii) The campaign pitted a little-known lawyer from Springfield named Abraham Lincoln against Senator Stephen A. Douglas, the front runner for the Democratic presidential nomination in 1860.
- (iii) A Whig in politics, Lincoln was elected in 1846 to the U.S. House of Representatives, but his stand against the Mexican War had made him too unpopular to win reelection.
- (iv) After the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854, Lincoln reentered politics, and in 1858 the Republican Party nominated him to run against Douglas for the Senate.
- (v) Lincoln proceeded to argue that Stephen Douglas's Kansas-Nebraska Act and the Supreme Court's Dred Scott decision were part of a conspiracy to make slavery lawful "in all the States, old as well as new--North as well as South."
- (vi) For four months Lincoln and Douglas crisscrossed Illinois, traveling nearly 10,000 miles and participating in seven face-to-face debates before crowds of up to 15,000.
- (vii) Douglas argued that slavery was a dying institution that had reached its natural limits and could not thrive where climate and soil were inhospitable. He asserted that the problem of slavery could best be resolved if it were treated as essentially a local problem.
- (viii) Lincoln, on the other hand, regarded slavery as a dynamic, expansionistic institution, hungry for new territory. He argued that if Northerners allowed slavery to spread unchecked, slave owners would make slavery a national institution and would reduce all laborers, white as well as black, to a state of virtual slavery.

- (ix) The debates reached a climax on a damp, chilly August 27. At Freeport, Illinois. Lincoln asked Douglas to reconcile the Supreme Court's Dred Scott decision, which denied Congress the power to exclude slavery from a territory, with popular sovereignty. Could the residents of a territory "in any lawful way" exclude slavery prior to statehood?
 - (x) Douglas replied by stating that the residents of a territory could exclude slavery by refusing to pass laws protecting slaveholders' property rights. "Slavery cannot exist a day or an hour anywhere," he declared, "unless it is supported by local police regulations."
 - (xi) Lincoln had maneuvered Douglas into a trap. Any way he answered, Douglas was certain to alienate Northern Free Soilers or proslavery Southerners. The Dred Scott decision had given slave owners the right to take their slavery into any western territories. Now Douglas said that territorial settlers could exclude slavery, despite what the Court had ruled. Douglas won reelection, but his cautious statements antagonized Southerners and Northern Free Soilers alike.
 - (xii) Although Lincoln failed to win a Senate seat, his battle with Stephen Douglas had catapulted him into the national spotlight and made him a serious presidential possibility in 1860. As Lincoln himself noted, his defeat was "a slip and not a fall."
- c) John Brown
- (i) Opponents of slavery hoped to use moral suasion and other peaceful means to eliminate slavery. But by the mid-1850s, the abolitionists' aversion to violence had begun to fade. On the night of October 16, 1859, violence came, and John Brown was its instrument.

- (ii) Brown's plan was to capture the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia and arm slaves from the surrounding countryside. His long-range goal was to drive southward into Tennessee and Alabama, raiding federal arsenals and inciting slave insurrections.
- (iii) John Brown led a raiding party of approximately 21 men toward Harpers Ferry, where they captured the lone night watchman and cut the town's telegraph lines. Encountering no resistance, Brown's raiders seized the federal arsenal, an armory, and a rifle works along with several million dollars' worth of arms and munitions.
- (iv) Brown then sent out several detachments to round up hostages and liberate slaves.
- (v) During the night, a church bell began to toll, warning neighboring farmers and militiamen from the surrounding countryside that a slave insurrection was under way. Within hours, militia companies from villages within a 30-mile radius of Harpers Ferry cut off Brown's escape routes and trapped Brown's men in the armory.
- (vi) Twice, Brown sent men carrying flags of truce to negotiate. On both occasions, drunken mobs, yelling "Kill them, kill them," gunned the men down.
- (vii) John Brown's assault against slavery lasted less than two days. Early Tuesday morning, October 18, U.S. Marines, commanded by Colonel Robert E. Lee and Lieutenant J.E.B. Stuart, arrived in Harpers Ferry.
- (viii) Later that morning, Colonel Lee's marines stormed the engine house and rammed down its doors. Five of Brown's party escaped, ten were killed, and seven, including Brown himself, were taken prisoner.
- (ix) A week later, John Brown was put on trial in a Virginia court, even though his attack had occurred on federal property.

- (x) During the six-day proceedings, Brown refused to plead insanity as a defense. He was found guilty of treason, conspiracy, and murder, and was sentenced to die on the gallows.
- (xi) Brown was allowed to make a five-minute speech and his words helped convince thousands of Northerners that he was a martyr to the cause of freedom.
- (xii) At Brown's execution, a Virginia officer cried out: "So perish all enemies of Virginia!"
- (xiii) Across the North, church bells tolled, flags flew at half-mast, and buildings were draped in black bunting.
- (xiv) The Northern reaction to John Brown's raid convinced many white Southerners that a majority of Northerners wished to free the slaves and incite a race war.
- (xv) Southern extremists, known as "fire-eaters," told large crowds that John Brown's attack on Harpers Ferry was "the first act in the grand tragedy of emancipation, and the subjugation of the South in bloody treason."