

SECTIONAL STRIFE 1850-1851

After the Mexican War the controversy of slavery in the territories affected almost every issue in American politics. One provocative event after another aggravated relations until secession of the South led to the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861.

SOUTHERN AGRICULTURE AFTER 1800

The outstanding change in American agriculture was the rapid expansion in cotton cultivation. When Eli Whitney invented the cotton gin (1793), he broke the bottleneck in the conversion of cotton to textiles and thereby opened up an ever growing demand for cotton fiber. The gin made economically feasible the cultivation of upland, short staple cotton. The gin could quickly cut the tightly clinging fibers from seeds of the upland cotton. Cotton cultivation was freed from its confinement to the coastal, sea-island climate where the loose-seeded, long staple variety grew.

By 1811 cotton production had increased forty times over the production of 1791. With the conclusion of the War of 1812 cotton production spread more rapidly than ever over new areas of the deep South as high prices for the staple encouraged extensive use of slave labor. Small farmers also produced cotton in areas not suitable for large plantation fields. "King Cotton" came to dominate the whole life and economy of the South. This cash crop brought great profits to producers and served to draw settlers into the virgin lands farther out on the frontier. Since the cotton exhausted the fertility of the soil rapidly, fresh land was always in demand.

Sugar cane cultivation on large slave plantations in southern Louisiana increased and came to supply a large part of the country's need for sugar. Tobacco production continued in Virginia and Maryland and expanded into Kentucky and Tennessee on slave plantations. Rice production on plantations cultivated by slave labor prospered in South Carolina and Georgia. Southern farms, even large plantations, tried to produce enough foodstuffs for self-sufficiency. Corn acreage was as large as any cash crop and more widespread geographically, but it was consumed on the farm and plantation.

The social effects of slavery also had a great impact on the southerner. Slavery created a social caste system between the slave owners and the rest of the white farmers. Because of the profits slave owners created, they dominated the government offices. This created for the poorer non-slaveowning farmer the idea that all they had to do to make it in the South was to own slaves. This hurt the motivation to work hard to make money. Also, a contempt for manual labor was created, because only slaves should work hard with their hands. This conspired to keep the economy of the South from growing and taking advantage of the Industrial Revolution.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE RAILROADS

By far the most significant development in transportation was the building of the railroads beginning in the 1830s. The advantages of rail transportation over other forms was in the greater speed and freedom from confinement of routes and waterways. The eastern seaboard cities built railroads to draw inland commerce to themselves. Most were built with private financing, often subsidized by local and state aid.

Numerous technological improvements were made. Wooden rails were replaced with iron and coal replaced wood as a fuel. As the necessary connections were made, the Northwest became more closely linked to the East; this common economic interests lead to the building of factories and would lead the Northwest to be drawn together with the Northeast during the Civil War.

THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

The Industrial Revolution, or development of large scale manufacturing, was delayed in America because 1) the superior quality of imported manufactures; 2) the lack a adequate, low-cost labor; 3) and the greater attraction of shipping, trade and land speculation for investment capital.

The first large factories were built by textile manufacturers using water power in the Northeast. Samuel Slater introduced cotton spinning from England in 1791. Eli Whitney's development of the

principle of interchangeable parts helped make mass production possible. The construction of the first telegraph line in 1844 by Samuel Morse brought rapid communication, an aid to business organization. Improved transportation enabled manufacturers to supply national markets from factories in the Northeast or the upper Midwest. The heavy immigration of the 1840s and 1850s furnished many of the workers for these factories. Because of this, the Northern leaders felt slavery was harmful to industry because it created an atmosphere of less than hard work. The powerful and prospering new industrialists grew impatient with Southern control of the national politics (the Senate) that prevented favorable legislation for business interests (tariffs and federal funding from something like the Bank of the United States).

The North also saw an increase in immigration, especially from Germans escaping Europe because of war who were anti-slavery in their beliefs. These people refused to settle in the South and be forced to compete with forced labor.

THE COMPROMISE OF 1850

The acquisition of the Southwest in the Mexican War raised the question of the status of slavery in the territories. In the election of 1846 the Wilmot Proviso argued against the expansion of slavery into the new lands acquired from Mexico. Although it never passed in the Senate, it was frequently used by the abolitionists as an argument against slavery each time the question was presented to the country. The South felt it could not survive without slavery and always viewed the Proviso as a threat to its existence.

SLAVERY IN THE TERRITORIES

There were three views on the legality of slave-holding in the new territories acquired from Mexico and in the Louisiana Purchase.

- 1) Southern view as stated by John Calhoun maintained that Congress has no right to exclude slavery from the territories. To exclude slavery would amount to the exclusion of slave owners and would deny their rights to take their property, the slaves, into territories that belonged to the whole nation, a violation of the due process clause of the fifth amendment. The South hoped to offset the free states of Oregon and Minnesota which would soon be applying for statehood.
- 2) The North held that Congress had the legal right to legislate such provisions as it saw fit for the government, of the territories including the right to legislate upon the status of slavery, the necessary and proper clause of the Constitution.
- 3) The moderates, mostly Northern Democrats, favored "popular sovereignty" as suggested first by Lewis Cass of Michigan in the Presidential Election of 1848 and which held that the residents of a territory should decide that status of slavery. Some held this view as a means of compromise, others simply believed in local determination of such questions as a matter of democracy.
- 4) Another view favored dividing the territory by the extension of the Missouri Compromise line of 36°30' to the Pacific.

THE CALIFORNIA GOLD RUSH

The discovery of gold not far from Sacramento in 1848 brought a sudden large inrush of "forty-niners" to California the next year. The military government proved inadequate for the needs of a population of 100,000. California drafted a constitution in 1849 and applied for statehood as a free state. Again, as with Missouri's application for statehood, the South was alarmed by the prospect of being outvoted in the Senate by free state senators. A year later, 1850, New Mexico and Utah applied for admission as free states. Extremists in the South favored immediate secession.

Apart from the slavery controversy, the phenomenal mass migration from all over the world to California greatly accelerated the settlement of the whole Far West. The increase in the amount of gold available for specie poured into channels of commerce and stimulated worldwide prosperity during the 1850s. The South did not take advantage of the increase in gold, while the North used the gold to greatly improve its industries, railroads and population, especially with the increased demand for American goods because of the Crimean War in Europe.

DEBATE AND ENACTMENT OF THE COMPROMISE PROPOSALS

Henry Clay and several other old Whig stalwarts presented legislation to settle not only the future of Mexican Cession, but several other sectional issues as well. This legislation was offered in a so-called Omnibus Bill to be accepted or rejected as a package. It included the following: 1) California was admitted as a free state; 2) New Mexico and Utah were to be organized into territories with no reference to slavery; 3) Texas's public debt was assumed in return for acceptance of a more restrictive boundary than she claimed; 4) the slave trade (but not slavery) was banned in the District of Columbia; 5) a more stringent fugitive slave law.

Moderates led by Clay appealed to Congress to settle issues and stop the dangerous squabbling over slavery. Daniel Webster sacrificed his political career in the North to support Clay's compromise in his famous "Seventh of March" speech. Webster argued that nature had banned slavery from the arid West, and he condemned the abolitionists for creating strife. Farmers and businessmen over the country, enjoying prosperity again with increase in the availability of gold and money regulations, did not wish to disturb it with further dispute over slavery. President Taylor, not a good politician, refused to work with either side to achieve compromise, but Taylor suddenly died of food poisoning in July 1850. Vice President Millard Fillmore, who favored compromise, now became President. Stephen A. Douglas, a Democratic Senator from Illinois, took over management of the bill from the ailing Clay and separated it into five separate bills, the passage of which he secured by September.

CONSEQUENCES OF THE COMPROMISE

After the compromise measures were adopted by Congress the South stopped its threats of secession and relative quiet over the whole nation followed. The compromise supporters insisted the slavery question had been permanently settled. Most of the provisions of the compromise represented victories for the anti-slavery cause, but the North refused to accept the Fugitive Slave Law which represented the only clear-cut victory for the South. The North wanted jury trials for runaway slaves. Mass meetings resolved not to obey the law. State legislatures passed "personal liberty laws" prohibiting the use of local jails for holding runaways and otherwise blocked enforcement. The South accused the North of violating their part of the compromise. A larger consequence was the postponement of Southern secession until the North had used the economic prosperity of the most of the decade to become strong enough to prevent the disintegration of the Union.

THE ELECTION OF 1852

Results of this election seemed to reflect a national feeling for moderation. The Democratic dark horse candidate Franklin Pierce of New Hampshire, who received the nomination because Fillmore did not seek the nomination, won an overwhelming victory over the Whig nominee. The Whigs again nominated an old war hero from the Mexican War, General Winfield Scott. However, because of the growing section of anti-slavery people in the party, southern Whigs began to leave the party. This split caused the Whigs to lose the election. The Free Soil Party entered a candidate but made a poorer showing than in 1848. The election ominously foreshadowed the end of national parties with strong support from all sections of the Union.

EXPANSIONISM OF THE PIERCE ADMINISTRATION

Pro-Southern Democrats controlled the Pierce administration, the Democratic Party, and Congress. Pierce was a mediocre President who had no profound understanding of how critical were the quarrels between the sections. The administration tried to distract attention from the slavery issue by trying to use the popularity of foreign expansion. However, this backfired on the administration.

THE OSTEND MANIFESTO

An overly aggressive bit of Southern diplomacy tried to acquire Cuba from Spain. Southerners took advantage of Cuban dissatisfaction with Spanish misrule. Narciso Lopez led filibustering

expeditions from American ports between 1849 and 1850 and others threatened to do so. In 1854 a crisis arose when the Spanish seized the *Black Warrior*, an American ship, for violation of customs regulations.

In 1854 Pierce decided to take advantage of both difficulties within Spain and of France and Britain's involvement in the Crimean War to take action regarding Cuba. The American ministers to England, France and Spain were directed to meet at Ostend, Belgium, to plan concerted action to aid the American Minister Pierre Soule in Madrid. They drew up the Ostend Manifesto pointing out the importance of Cuba to the United States (because of slave issues). The statement declared that Spain ought to sell Cuba to the United States. If Spain refused then the United States would be justified in seizing it by force. The Manifesto was a trial balloon that disclosed so much opposition to the anti-slavery North and the anti-slavery European nations that Pierce disavowed it. It showed, however, how far the South was willing to go to strengthen the slave interests of the country by trying to annex one or more new states.

THE KANSAS-NEBRASKA ACT

Mutual animosity between the sections survived the Compromise of 1850 in spite of the prosperity and the insistence of moderates that the slavery issue had been settled. The personal liberty laws and abolition propaganda antagonized the South. Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) appealed to the emotions of the masses in the North and ended the indifference by arousing them against slavery as a moral evil. However, many in the North were still unwilling to free the slaves, because of the then increased competition for jobs. Soon, however, slavery appears in the national spotlight.

THE KANSAS-NEBRASKA ACT

This Act: 1) established two new territories, Kansas and Nebraska; 2) it specifically repealed the Missouri Compromise which prohibited slavery in the territories of the United States north of 36°30'; and 3) provided that the inhabitants of the territories should decide the status of slavery themselves (the principle of popular sovereignty). Such an act was obviously favorable to the South who controlled both houses of Congress, which had a strong influence over the weak President Pierce.

The motives behind its passage were: 1) the desire on the part of Stephen Douglas, who introduced the bill, to open the way for the construction of a transcontinental railroad through the center of the United States from Chicago (Douglas had a financial stake in his father's Chicago railroad business). By organizing a territorial government, the Indians could be removed by the army, otherwise the railroad would pass through a southern route. 2) Douglas himself, ambitious to win the Democratic nomination for President, saw an opportunity to win Southern support – it was expected Kansas would become a slave state – without making a stance on slavery that would lose northern support. Douglas had no personal stand on slavery, but was surprised at the stormy reaction in North after the bill was passed.

EFFECT ON POLITICAL PARTIES

With the assistance of the powerful Democratic bloc, the Kansas-Nebraska Act easily passed and was signed by President Pierce. There was an immediate and strong grass roots reaction against it in the North, especially the Northwest, a reaction that effectively wiped out the second party system of Whigs and Democrats. Northern Whigs went into either the new Republican Party or the anti-immigrant Known-Nothings, the Southerners went into the Democratic Party, and the Whig Party itself vanished. Anti-Nebraska Northern Democrats also joined the Republican Party, which added opposition to slavery extension to other northern issues, (tariff, railroad, etc) in a sectional appeal for supporters.

THE STRUGGLE TO WIN KANSAS

The Kansas-Nebraska Act caused civil war in Kansas. Northerners organized to win Kansas as a free state, but Missourians organized to make Kansas a slave state. New England founded the New England Emigrant Aid Society to populate Kansas with anti-slavery voters to offset the normal tendency for Kansas to be settled by pro-slave migrants from the bordering state of Missouri. From the nearby Northern states came to Kansas because of the availability of good farmland, not to support any cause. Anti-slave settlers easily outnumbered pro-slavery settlers. However, Missourians organized secret

societies to send fraudulent voters into Kansas to win elections to make Kansas a slave state. In this way they elected a pro-slave territorial delegate to Congress and in 1855 chose a pro-slave legislature.

Next, the anti-slavery forces met at Topeka in October 1855, and drafted a constitution for the state prohibiting slavery. Pro-slave men refused to vote and the free state government was installed at Lawrence. In May 1856, a pro-slavery mob of "border ruffians" from Missouri burned Lawrence. John Brown, the extreme abolitionist, retaliated by murdering five pro-slavery men in the "Pottawatomie Massacre." Subsequently about 200 persons were killed in the battles that ensued in "Bleeding Kansas."

The pro-slavery and anti-slavery forces in Congress could not decide on how to admit Kansas into the Union. The South favored Kansas as a slave state, while the North favored Kansas as a free state. This will not be settled until 1861 after the Southern members had withdrawn from Congress.

THE ASSAULT ON SENATOR SUMNER

During the debates over the events in Kansas, Senator Charles Sumner, a sharp-tongued abolitionist orator from Massachusetts, denounced Senator Butler of South Carolina in polished but insulting language in a long speech on "The Crime Against Kansas." Butler's neighbor, and nephew, Representative Preston Brooks, also of South Carolina, avenged the remarks by beating Sumner over the head and shoulders with a cane. Southerners endorsed this act of gross violence by presenting a number of canes to Brooks and reelecting him after he was forced to resign in the face of Northern protests. The North took up the quarrel by mass producing Sumner's speech.

THE ELECTION OF 1856

The Democrats, still united, nominated James Buchanan of Pennsylvania on a platform of popular sovereignty and compromise between the sections. Buchanan had forty years experience in politics, but mainly in foreign affairs. The domestic crisis demanded someone who could handle the problems, which Buchanan was unable to do. The new Republican Party nominated Benton's son-in-law, John C. Fremont of Mexican War fame. However, his firm stance against the spread of slavery was too extreme for this election, which caused many moderates to vote for Buchanan, who won in a landslide.

EVENTS LEADING TO SECESSION

Several events during the Buchanan administration convinced the South they could no longer, as an ever-increasing minority, protect their economic interests, especially slavery. Secession seemed to be the only solution.

THE DREAD SCOTT CASE, 1857

This decision, legalizing slavery in all territories, was a great Southern victory but was uncertain since the North seemed determined to reverse it.

Dred Scott, a slave, sued for his freedom on the ground that his residence in the free territory north of the Missouri Compromise line and in the free state of Illinois had made him free. Scott was abetted by abolitionists who managed to get his case into the United States Supreme Court as a test case. The Court, headed by Chief Justice Taney from Maryland, dismissed the case for want of jurisdiction, because Scott was not a citizen but still a slave without the right to sue. In order to clarify its position on jurisdiction, the Court handed down an *obiter dictum*, or gratuitous opinion, to settle the disputed slavery question in the territories. The Court declared that as a slave Dred Scott was property, that the Fifth Amendment prohibited Congress from depriving any person of property without due process of law, and that property of any kind could be taken into the territories. Therefore, the Court ruled that the Missouri Compromise line had always been unconstitutional.

The South was delighted with the victory since slavery was now allowed in all territories of the United States, which would make it easier for more states to be adopted into the Union as slave states. The Republicans denounced it as partisan since seven justices in the Court were Southern Democrats. Republicans denounced the *obiter dictum* as having no legal justification. Republicans declared they would reverse the decision, once they gained control of the national government, by "packing" the Court. Their unwillingness to accept a decision of the highest court in the land alarmed the South.

THE PANIC OF 1857

A sharp depression struck the country in 1857. It was caused mainly by the slowing of demand for American goods on the world market because of the end of the Crimean War. However, recovery set in quickly when large quantities of grain and cotton were shipped to Europe to offset the destruction of farmland there because of the war. This allowed the South to recover much quicker than the North. Also, because of the subsistence nature of most Southern farms, many in the South were not effected by the panic. To the South this proved the superiority of the South's economy over the industrial North's economy. To prevent this from happening again, the North began to vote strongly Republican as the party began to adopt policies that would be beneficial to the North. In the election of 1858, the Republicans gained control of the House of Representatives.

THE LINCOLN-DOUGLAS DEBATES (1858)

The Republicans also made a strong showing in the Senatorial races. Stephen Douglas, the Democratic Senator from Illinois, was challenged by a young, Republican Springfield lawyer, Abraham Lincoln, for reelection. It was one of the first opportunities to test the strength of the new Republican Party. Lincoln challenged "the Little Giant" to a series of debates that centered on the slavery question. At Freeport, Lincoln sought to embarrass Douglas by asking if the people of a territory could, after the Dred Scott decision, lawfully exclude slavery from a territory. Douglas was trapped into siding with the North or the South. In his "Freeport Doctrine," he stated the people of a territory could keep slavery out by not passing local police regulations necessary for its existence. Douglas won the election. However, his answer did not satisfy the South and helped to widen the growing split between Northern and Southern Democrats. Since the debates popularized Lincoln all over the North, they helped him win the Republican presidential nomination in 1860.

JOHN BROWN'S RAID (1859)

The man responsible for the Pottawatomie Massacre secured financial contributions from Northerners to carry out a plan to free the slaves by inciting a slave insurrection. Brown, in order to secure a supply of arms, captured the federal arsenal at Harper's Ferry. As the alarm spread, forces gathered to take Brown and his men. The insurrectionists took refuge in a railroad roundhouse but were forced to surrender after ten of them were killed. A Virginia court tried Brown for treason; he was hanged with six of his followers. The South was horrified by the threat of a North sponsored slave revolt and blamed the "Black (also Nigger) Republicans" for it. After the execution the North made Brown a martyr.

THE ELECTION OF 1860

The Democrats met at Charleston, South Carolina. There the extremists demanded the Party adopt a platform asking Congress to guarantee slave property in the territories. The Northerners under Douglas defeated and adopted the Douglas policy of popular sovereignty. Southerners bolted the convention. The Northerners adjourned and met again at Baltimore to choose Douglas. Southern Democrats reassembled and chose John C. Breckinridge of Kentucky and endorsed the Dred Scott decision.

The Republicans met in Chicago. Lincoln, the moderate candidate was chosen in preference to William Seward, an older politician but an extremist. They adopted a platform to appeal to various voter groups. They promised to 1) exclude slavery from the territories, 2) adopt a protective tariff, 3) enact a free homestead law, and 4) support railroad building with federal aid.

The Constitutional Union Party, emphasizing the preservation of the Union by compromise over slavery, named John Bell of Tennessee.

Lincoln won every state in the North except New Jersey (he split with Douglas). He gained only a minority of the popular vote. Breckinridge won the states of the lower South. Both sections voted for extremist candidates. The South had warned during the campaign that Lincoln's election would be the signal for secession, which they now undertook.