

American history paper

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There is near consensus that the polarization of the United States, into South and North, which eventually lead to the American Civil War was caused by slavery (Hutchison, 2003). The argument that has taken currency on this issue is that the Southerners were fighting for the perpetuation of slavery while the Northerners had taken the moral high ground of ending it. However, the two respective stands taken by these two groups smacks of self-centeredness (Hutchison, 2003).

First, the Southern States were using the equality of all citizen in the United States as a scapegoat to support the continuation of slavery because their economic prosperity was dependent on slavery while their northern compatriots supported its abolition not because they did not benefit economically from it but because they never wanted the Southerners to share in those benefits emanating from slavery, that is why they used the excuse of criminalizing any expansion on slavery in the territories that had been acquired from Mexico while not including their territory (North) in that abolition.

Because of this discord between these two regions a number of compromises were brokered the most popular being the 1850 compromise. However, there reached a time when not even the 1850 compromise could hold on, that is when the union eventually broke asunder. Now that the 1850 compromise had failed to contain the South and the North territories from engaging in the debate on slavery, another solution had to be sort in order to reduce hostility between these two territories. This is how the Kansas-Nebraska bill came to being.

Therefore the Kansas-Nebraska bill can be looked on as another compromise brokered after the failure of a previous compromise (1850 compromise). Why the Kansas-Nebraska bill succeeded for some time where the 1850 compromise failed was because while it kind of tried to end slavery in the Southern as was being propagated by the Northerners the Kansas-Nebraska bill gave the Southerners a say in making that decision which they exercised by voting for the continuation of slavery in their territory which was against the wishes of the northerners (WikiAnswers, 2009).

By giving the Southerners the power to solely decide on this explosive matter of slavery, this bill declared the 1850 compromise null and void thereby watering down the advances that had been made by the 1850 compromise in ending slavery which even president Abraham Lincoln conceded was an evil enterprise. It should also be noted that the compromise of 1850 was reached by the representative of the Southern and Northern States while Kansas-Nebraska bill though passed by congress which is another representative assembly gave people from the respective regions the sovereign power to decide on the right to own slave.

Another important point to note about the two is that they were both premised on the need to bring peaceful coexistence between the two territories in a larger union although both only succeeded in further dividing them (Hutchison, 2003). It can also be argued that by giving the two territories the power to vote separately on this issue of slavery, the Kansas-Nebraska bill made any effort at unity futile. That is why the Southerners found no fault in the bill while the Northerners were extremely outraged by its content.

The 1850 compromise just like a number of compromises that had been struck prior to it had succeeded in maintaining a semblance of peaceful coexistence although there was inner rage which was building in each of the territories which is why eventually both territories decided enough is enough and maintenance of the status quo became untenable (Hutchison, 2003). First, the 1850 compromise was unable to address exhaustively the issue of slavery which was the explosive issue that was the subject of the discontentment from both sides.

This was because it created an environment of suspicion on both territories each not sure whether their demand had been met by the compromise. For instance, the Southerners after years of being treated as second class citizen by their Northern compatriot believed that the 1850 compromise was a perpetuation of that bigotry while the Northerners who all through had been used to dictating terms to their Southern compatriots did not see a reflection of that superiority in the 1850 compromise. The Kansas-Nebraska bill on the other hand might have made a mark in enhancing the equality of people from both territories.

However it neither anticipated nor addressed the resistance that the Northerners would have most definitely put against any effort towards equalizing them with the southern compatriots whom they had all through considered inferior when it came to the enjoyment of rights. Being a product of legislation from a representative assembly, the Kansas-Nebraska bill was a democratic instrument unlike the 1850 compromise that was just a product of the deliberation of a skewed representation forum which is probably why it was viewed by the Southerners with suspicion.

This bill also failed to the test of pragmatism in that it failed to appreciate the fact that the Southerner would obviously vote for slavery which was increasing being viewed as an infringement of the people's right (slaves), this is one of the reasons why it did not hold water for much longer despite the fact that it gave people from both territories a right to influence decisions at the national level.

References Hutchison, E. Craig, (2003). The civil war: Why? – Compare and Contrast. Retrieved 23 July 2010 from