

What issues were resolved by the compromise of 1850 who benefited more from its t...

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ID What issues were resolved by the Compromise of 1850? Who benefited more from its terms, the North or the South? Why? Slavery became the most significant point of division between the Northern States, and those in the South and the Compromise of 1850 was intended to resolve this issue, and thus also other potential sources of potential conflict between North and South.

In 1787, slavery was recognized in the Constitution (General History of the United States Supreme Court, 2011). Slavery was not regulated within States through Congress. Slavery was, then, accepted as a fact which existed within States, and the Federal Government restricted its involvement in the affairs of individual States.

By 1847, however, the Courts of the United States were declaring that the Constitution was ultimate, and that slavery was a political, not a legal issue (Jones v. Van Zandt, 1847: General History of the United States Supreme Court, 2011)). The Missouri Compromise - which declared that Congress could exclude slavery from Missouri Territory north of the 36-degree, 30-minute line - meant that the political, rather than the legal battle about slavery had started.

The Southern States, represented in the feelings of John Calhoun, felt as if they had been disadvantaged: "... the fact that the equilibrium between the two sections in the government as it stood when the Constitution was ratified and the government put in action has been destroyed." (Calhoun speech, 1850). He continued: the Southern States of the Union were extremely dissatisfied with conditions as they were and that this dissatisfaction had been growing since the question of slavery had arisen. The point had been

reached at which the Southern States could not remain in the Union with “honor and safety” (Calhoun speech, 1850) if things remained as they were. Slavery was, of course not the only source of the dissatisfaction: the imbalance of power between North and South was also unacceptable. According to Calhoun, the North exercised far more political power than the South. In addition, racial attitudes in the North and South differed so widely as to be irreconcilable. For these reasons, the South was left with few choices.

These States would have to agree to the abolition of slavery, or secede from the Union. Calhoun proposed that the North would have to hold the Union together by force and its superior numbers and wealth. The Northern States had more voting power, and Southern States had become increasingly geographically isolated from the rest of the Union. The Southern States with direct access to ports, for example, could afford to secede, in the hope that they would be able to continue unhindered to trade offshore. But slave States geographically closer to the Northern States or even reliant on Northern ports for foreign trade, and the Northern States on their borders could not as easily secede from the Union – the economic and social ties were strong.

Divisions within the Union were so strongly felt, and involved such fundamental social and economic issues that without concessions from either side the Civil War was indeed inevitable. In fact, the Compromise of 1850 had not resolved anything.

References

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