

Why did the  
compromise fall in  
1860?



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During the beginning of the nineteenth century, the relationship between North and South deteriorated over the issue of territorial expansion. In 1850, the issue of slavery was slowly dividing the North and South sections of the United States; both factions were of similar origins and had a myriad of common bonds. Frantic efforts at compromise were launched such as the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 and The Missouri Compromise of 1820.

However, the sectional rift only increased with the Brooks-Sumner incident and any chances of compromise were terminated with the Supreme Court decision of the Dred Scott case in 1859. The two powerful parties of the Second American Party System, the Democrats and the Whigs, were dumbfounded and could not find a solution to the slave question, which ultimately lead to their destruction. From their remains rose two new political parties, the Republican Party and a southern party devoted to the defense of slavery. Their battle in the election of 1860 would decide the future and fate of the United States. By 1860 all attempts at compromise had failed, and within a year the nation was in the midst of a bloody Civil War that would cost over 600, 000 American lives and divided many families in the process.

The types of economies that developed in the three regions of the United States in the first half of the nineteenth century had a powerful impact on political goals and decisions. The South grew important cash crops such as cotton, tobacco, sugar, and rice. The North was far more industrialized than the South or even the West, having shifted from mercantile capitalism. At the same time the West shifted from subsistence farming to commercial agriculture and produced more foodstuffs, such as corn and wheat, than the other two regions. The North came to rely more and more on western

foodstuffs and in return, westerners became consumers of northern industrial and commercial products. By the 1850s the North and West were economically joined, and the North's economy was rapidly evolving into a modern-day industrial and commercial system. In the South, cash crops such as rice and tobacco were grown extensively. Yet no commodity was more important to the South than cotton. One southern political leader was so certain that the rest of the nation depended on the South's cotton production that he declared, "Cotton is King!" Cotton was one of the most important commodities in the world in the nineteenth century; many factories in the Northern states as well as European countries such as Great Britain and France needed cotton for their important and prosperous textile industries. Yet this was all done on the backs of abused slaves who worked tirelessly night and day to pick the cotton of their master's plantations. In the early 1800s Northerners were content to allow slavery to reside in Southern states. Only when Southern leaders sought to expand slavery did many Northerners become concerned.

The Missouri Compromise of 1820 was an attempt to maintain the balance in the Senate between slave and Free states. Senator Henry Clay, known as the Great Compromiser, worked out a compromise in which Maine would enter the Union as a free state while Missouri would be admitted into the Union as the northernmost slave state. As a result of the compromise, slavery was then prohibited north of the 36°30' parallel making a clear distinction between the northern and southern states. This boundary would then later be challenged by events such as the Dred Scott case, yet it marvelously managed to avert war for forty years, and thus set it aside for a later

generation to fight, but the damage to American nationalism helped to erode the so-called Era of Good Feelings in which the popular James Monroe presided as president.

During 1828, Congress passed a tariff that protected Northern industries but had the unwanted consequence of driving up domestic prices. This, while beneficial to the growing industry in the North, greatly crippled the South who suffered as their economy largely depended on the import and export of domestic goods. As a result, this new bill outraged Southerners who began calling it the Tariff of Abominations. South Carolina spearheaded Southern concerns by citing the doctrine of nullification, which allowed individual states to nullify proclamations of the federal government that would be found to be unconstitutional or inhibit the state's rights. The issue of nullification was taken up in the Senate in the famous Webster-Hayne debate in which Daniel Webster of Massachusetts, the Senate's leading orator, responded by challenging the South's apparent willingness to subvert the Union for regional economic gain. In doing so, he broadened the debate beyond land, tariffs, and slavery to a consideration of the very nature of the federal republic. In 1832 Congress modified the tariff of 1828 by retaining high duties on some goods, but lowering others to rates held before the treaty. A South Carolina convention, under the leadership of current vice-president John Calhoun, later that year adopted an Ordinance of Nullification, voiding the tariffs of 1828 and 1832 in the state. The claim was that because the South tended to export food and import manufactured goods these tariffs were abusive and unfair; this new Ordinance supported free trade and generally opposed protective tariffs. The South Carolina state legislature

funded a volunteer army and threatened secession if the federal government tried to force the state to comply with the tariffs. President Jackson, though an advocate of state's rights, responded forcefully and threatened to invade South Carolina if its leaders refused to participate in the collection of tariff duties. To the "ambitious malcontents" in South Carolina, he proclaimed emphatically, "the laws of the United States must be executed. . . . The Union will be preserved and treason and rebellion promptly put down." Jackson's proclamation stimulated an outburst of patriotism all over the country, isolating South Carolina from the rest of the Union. President Andrew Jackson asked Congress to grant him the authority to use military force to collect tax revenues and to subdue South Carolina. Congress complied by passing the Force Bill of 1833; the bill gave the President the authority to close ports or harbors at his will. This in turn would require opponents to the tariff to travel a distance to carry out any threats or insurrection against federal facilities. Hostile acts against government facilities or personnel would then be considered pre-meditated and blatant. Fortunately, however, the president never had to resort to military action. The crisis was averted when Congress passed a bill that reduced the productive tariff the following year. These events were dubbed the Nullification Crisis and the Compromise of 1833. Though war was averted, South Carolina now became the hotbed of southern dissent.

The crisis of 1850 may never have occurred if a more common resource was discovered in California. But since gold was so rare, and therefore very valuable, California's population skyrocketed. By 1850 over 100,000 hoping-to-strike-it-rich settlers, also known as forty-niners, flocked to California in

hopes of attaining vast wealth in the gold that was said to be so abundant there. Without waiting for federal approval, the inhabitants of California called a convention, framed a constitution that prohibited slavery, and applied to Congress for admission as a state without first becoming a territory, this was made possible due to the vast influx of people who had emigrated there from the east of the United States as well as those who had immigrated from other countries. California had become very populous. The questions of whether California should be admitted as a free state and slavery should be allowed in New Mexico and Utah, two other territories asking to be allowed into the Union at the time, generated a great deal of controversy both within Congress and throughout the nation. President Taylor supported California's admission. Though the slaveholding president supported the proposal, other slaveholders throughout the country did not follow suit. Many southerners quickly threatened that they would secede from the Union if California was admitted as a free state. The "Great Compromiser" Henry Clay then once again stepped into the fray and proposed a compromise to this problem; this would be known as the Compromise of 1850. The compromise itself was more a series of bills than an actual compromise, these bills included among other things, that California would enter the Union as a free state; a more stringent Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 was guaranteed to be rigidly enforced. The law itself was already present, but it was rarely followed due to it being so poorly enforced as well as fierce opposition from Northerners who refused to hand in runaway slaves to the ever unpopular slave hunters; a settlement of the boundary between Texas and New Mexico; an indemnity to be paid to Texas for the relinquishment of its claims to a large portion of New Mexico; the

slave trade would be banned in Washington D. C. (District of Columbia) though the ownership of slaves would not be abolished in the capital. This idea arose mainly because in this time period many European nations, with which the United States of America did business with, had already abolished slavery throughout their country, and it would leave an unfavorable impression on a foreign diplomat to see slaves which were no longer allowed in their own country, still present in another with whom they were considering associating themselves with ; the Mexican Cession, or the land taken from Mexico as a result of America's victory in the Mexican-American War, would be divided into two new territories, New Mexico and Utah. Both territories would determine the status of slavery in their areas by popular sovereignty. Popular sovereignty was a system that would determine whether the state or territory would be free or would allow slavery by means of holding local elections in said state or territory, Democrats would advocate popular sovereignty during the election of 1860. The compromise was made official with the signing of President Millard Fillmore. This passage by Congress delayed the onset of the Civil War for more than eleven years.

The “ Bleeding Kansas” period came about due to the Kansas-Nebraska Act. Democrat and Illinois Senator Stephen Douglas introduced the Kansas-Nebraska Act to further the construction of a Transcontinental Railroad to Chicago despite being warned by Frederick Douglass that the bill was “ an open invitation to a fierce and bitter strife”. For the Bill to pass he needed the votes of southern Democrats, who were unwilling to support him unless the new Territories needed to accomplish it were open to slavery. Douglas thought that by proposing that the status of slavery in the new territories be

governed by the principle of popular sovereignty, he would satisfy both pro and anti slavery factions. However, his bill in effect, repealed the Missouri Compromise of 1820, which barred slavery north of latitude 36<sup>o</sup> 30'. This brought as consequence that the Southern Whigs voted with southern Democrats in favor of the measure, and the northern Whigs rejected it, creating an irreconcilable split that left Whigs unable to field a presidential candidate in 1856. In the congressional elections of 1854, the southern Democrats became the dominant voice both in congress and within the party due to the split with the northern Democrats. The " Cotton Whigs", who had economic ties with southern slave owners, were convinced that the bill would encourage antislavery feelings in the north. They urged southern politicians to vote against the bill, but were utterly ignored. This convinced them that compromise with the South was impossible and the nation watched horrified as the residents of Kansas slaughtered each other in pursuit of sectional goals that increasingly seemed to represent the divisions of the country. Since popular sovereignty would decide Kansas's fate, it seemed that the majority of Kansas' antislavery farmers would align Kansas with the Free states. Proslavery sympathizers in neighboring Missouri were not about to stand by while their neighbor cast its lot with the free states on account of its land being fertile and perfect for growing and farming cotton, the " white gold" of the South. Soon, " border ruffians" crossed into Kansas with the intention of making it a slave state. Border ruffians terrorized Kansas and intimidated others to vote proslavery with vicious threats and cast fraud ballots during elections to help elect their candidates into office. In response, Northern opponents of slavery like the New England Emigrant Society began sending supporters to Kansas. Fighting soon erupted as advocates of slavery



created a government in Lecompton, Kansas and their opponents established an antislavery government in Topeka. Shortly thereafter, proslavery forces massacred citizens of the antislavery town of Lawrence. In retaliation, a violent abolitionist named John Brown organized his own massacre of five suspected proslavery advocates at Pottawatomie Creek in 1856. The Democratic President Pierce's decision to remain aloof from the events in Kansas further damaged what was left of his party's cohesion. In the ensuing months it seemed as if Kansas would enter as a free state, but a new problem arose; enter President James Buchanan. The newly elected President Buchanan accepted the proslavery Lecompton Constitution, which would admit Kansas as a slave state. Certain democrats then agreed to unite with the young Republican Party in 1858 to oppose the Lecompton Constitution, their efforts were not in vain and Kansas was ultimately accepted into the Union as a free state.

The election of 1856 attracted one of the highest voter turnouts in American history. Ordinary citizens were sharing the politician's concerns about the growing sectional rifts in the nation. The northern turnout also showed that the threat posed by expansion of slavery was greater than that posed by new immigrants. In 1856 the people of the United States heard about the looting and burning in Kansas, about John Brown's massacre at Pottawatomie, and about the Sumner-Brooks incident on the senate floor, ostensibly causing the unprecedented voter's outpour. In the latter incident, Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts suffered permanent injuries from an attack by Congressman Preston Brooks of South Carolina. Using abusive and accusatory language in his "The Crime Against Kansas" speech, Sumner

had singled out for ridicule Senator Andrew Butler of South Carolina. Sumner's rude and personal attack suggested that the senator was drooling. South Carolina, Sumner cried, had sent to the Senate "a Don Quixote who had chosen a mistress who, though polluted in the sight of the world, is chaste in his sight- I mean the harlot, Slavery." Talk of sexual connection between white Southerners and slaves was always explosive. Senator Butler's nephew, Preston Brooks, did not bother to challenge Sumner to a duel. Brooks said that the Yankee would never "give satisfaction" and would therefore refuse or flee from the challenge. Instead, Brooks strode into the Senate chamber and, finding the Massachusetts lawmaker alone, brutally beat Sumner with his cane, nearly ending his life. In Brooks's mind, he was simply avenging an intolerable affront to his uncle's honor. Each man found his action perfectly justifiable and the action of the other outrageous. So far had the behavioral codes of the North and the South diverged, and their attitudes were mirrored by their respective sections. The nation lay as divided as the senators.

President-elect James Buchanan's support for a pro-southern decision by the Supreme Court further aggravated sectional differences. In *Dred Scott vs. Sandford*, a southern-dominated Supreme attempted, in vain, to solve the political controversy over slavery. Scott, a slave, had been taken by his owner to Illinois, a Free State, and Wisconsin Territory north of the Missouri Compromise line. During that time, Scott married another slave and had a daughter who was born in free territory, then returned to Missouri, a slave state. Once in Missouri Scott sued for his freedom and that of his wife and daughter on the grounds that residence in free lands had made them free.

Chief Justice Roger B. Taney declared the Missouri Compromise unconstitutional asserting that the federal government had no right to interfere with the free movement of property throughout the territories. Taney dismissed the Dred Scott case on the grounds that only citizens could bring suits before federal courts and that black people were not citizens. The five southern members of the Supreme Court concurred with the decision along with one Northerner, Robert Grier. President-elect Buchanan had pressured Justice Grier into supporting the majority. Clearly as a sectional decision, Southerners expressed satisfaction and support for the Court, Northerners disagreed. They found themselves questioning the power of the Supreme Court to establish the “law of the land”. The racist attitude of the Supreme Court was a bitter blow to the free blacks in the North. The South was overjoyed with the Court’s ruling. The North was outraged; Northern Democrats like Senator Steven Douglas of Illinois found it increasingly difficult to reconcile their support of popular sovereignty in the Dred Scott decision. Under Douglas’s definition of popular sovereignty, it was always the white majority that would make decisions about black men’s freedom. Lincoln responded to this definition by stating that for a man to rule another man without his consent was tyranny. Lincoln succeeded in pressing Douglas on the issue of slavery in the territories after Chief Justice Taney’s Dred Scott decision. Lincoln used this opportunity to attack Douglas’s popular sovereignty idea. For how could the people of a territory vote against slavery, if Chief Justice Taney said that every American had a right to carry his property with him? In response, Douglas introduced his Freeport Doctrine. The doctrine was dubbed after the Illinois town where Lincoln and Douglas had met for one of their debates. The doctrine said slavery could not

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exist without “ friendly legislation” to support it. Anti-slavery voters could simply refuse to pass such laws and slavery would effectively be kept out of the territory. Douglas concluded then that popular sovereignty was entirely consistent with Chief Justice Taney’s ruling. However, the Freeport Doctrine alienated many Southern Democrats. Douglas had actually stated the essence of the doctrine previous to the debate at Freeport, but its prominent public assertion at Freeport contributed, along with other political disputes, to antagonizing those in the Southern United States who were demanding ever-increasing protections for slavery, and who subsequently insisted on the repudiation of the Freeport Doctrine in order to block Douglas’ presidential bid in 1860.

Containing slavery became important to Northerners, who believed that as slavery expanded, Northern industrial capitalism would become limited. To fight this fear a new political party emerged in the 1850s, the Republicans, whose political goals were “ free labor, free soil, free men.” The industrial capitalists, owners of the North’s factories and workshops had the most to gain by containing the spread of slavery and expanding capitalism. For example, as capitalism expanded, they hoped to expand the labor pool, by supporting a loose immigration policy, which in turn would drive down the wages that they would have to pay for workers. Just as the planters dominated the South, the industrial capitalists profoundly influenced the North’s political, economic and cultural system. In addition, their political and economic objectives often clashed with those of the South’s planter class. In the South, militant political leaders, referred to as fire-eaters due to their adamant nature to raise controversial disputes, especially with their northern

counterparts. These “ fire-eaters” chafed at the notion of containing slavery, let alone abolishing it entirely, naturally bringing about disputes between the two. These clashes were mostly due to slavery as the industrial capitalists wanted to expand the white labor pool and southern plantation owners wanted to keep their slave force. Though compromises such as the Missouri Compromise, the Kansas-Nebraska Act, and the myriad of bills proposed by Henry Clay in the Compromise of 1850, it helped to divert attention from the topic and to try and appease both sides, but conflict was inevitable. As discussed earlier, both the North and the South consisted of entirely different ideals and culture by the nineteenth century. These divisions were brought to light in both the violence of the Brooks-Sumner incident and the racist decision of the South-dominated Supreme Court during the Dred Scott case. By the time Abraham Lincoln, the sixteen president of the United States of America, took office the southern had already seceded from the Union. There was no longer room for compromise, Lincoln was given two options; to allow the Union to crumble or fight to preserve it.

They thought themselves to be to economically powerful, politically influential, and the North and the rest of Europe too dependent on their “ White Gold” for slavery to be abolished. They were wrong.