

The decision whether to allow slavery in new territories was a heated issue that divided the nation.

Political Conflict Over Slavery

SS.8.A.1.2, SS.8.A.1.7, SS.8.A.4.1, SS.8.A.4.2, SS.8.A.4.8, SS.8.A.4.11, SS.8.A.5.1, SS.8.A.5.2

What political compromises were made because of slavery?

The question of slavery had long fueled debate in the United States. Each time this debate flared, the nation's leaders struck some form of compromise.

For example, in 1820 the Missouri Compromise preserved the balance between slave and free states in the Senate. It also brought about a temporary stop in the debate over slavery.

New Territory Brings New Debates

In the 1840s, the debate over slavery in new territories erupted again. In 1844 the Democrats nominated James K. Polk of Tennessee for president and called for the annexation of Texas at the earliest possible time. After Polk's election, Texas was admitted to the Union in December 1845.

Texas's entry into the Union angered the Mexican government. Matters worsened when the two countries disputed the boundary between Texas and Mexico. At the same time, support was growing in the South for taking over California and New Mexico. President Polk tried to buy these territories from the Mexican government, but failed. All these issues helped lead to the Mexican War.

Differing Views

Soon after the war with Mexico began, Representative David Wilmot of Pennsylvania introduced the Wilmot Proviso. This proposal would ban slavery in any lands the United States might acquire from Mexico.

Southerners protested. They wanted the new territory to remain open to slavery. Senator John C. Calhoun of South Carolina offered another idea, saying that neither Congress nor any territorial government could ban slavery from a territory or **regulate** it.

Neither bill passed, but both caused heated debate. By the 1848 presidential election, the United States had taken California and New Mexico from Mexico but took no action on slavery in those territories.

In 1848 the Whigs picked General Zachary Taylor as their presidential candidate. The Democrats chose Senator Lewis Cass of Michigan. Both candidates ignored the slavery issue, which angered some voters.

Those who opposed slavery left their parties and formed the Free-Soil Party. Its slogan was "Free Soil, Free Speech, Free Labor, and Free Men." The party chose former president Martin Van Buren as its candidate. Taylor won, but the Free-Soil Party gained several seats in Congress.

A New Compromise

Concerned over growing abolitionism, Southerners wanted a strong national **fugitive** (FYOO • juh • tihv), or runaway, slave law. Such a law would require every state to return runaway slaves.

In 1849 California applied to become a state—without slavery. If California became a free state, however, slave states would be outvoted in the Senate. Even worse, antislavery groups wanted to ban slavery in Washington, D.C. Southerners talked about **seceding** (sih • SEED • ihng) from, or leaving, the Union.

In 1850 Senator Henry Clay of Kentucky suggested a compromise. California would be a free state, but other new territories would have no limits on slavery. In addition, the slave trade, but not slavery itself, would be illegal in Washington, D.C. Clay also pushed for a stronger fugitive slave law.

A heated debate took place in Congress. Senator Calhoun opposed Clay's plan. Senator Daniel Webster supported it. Then President Taylor, who was against Clay's plan, died unexpectedly. Vice President Millard Fillmore, who favored the plan, became president.

Senator Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois solved the problem. He divided Clay's plan into parts, each to be voted on separately. Fillmore had several Whigs abstain, or not vote, on the parts they opposed. In the end, Congress passed the Compromise of 1850.

The Fugitive Slave Act

Part of the Compromise of 1850 was the Fugitive Slave Act. Anyone who helped a fugitive could be fined or imprisoned. Some Northerners refused to obey the new law. In his 1849 essay "Civil Disobedience," Henry David Thoreau wrote that if the law "requires you to be the agent [cause] of injustice to another, then I say, break the law." Northern juries refused to convict people accused of breaking the new law. People gave money to buy freedom for enslaved people. Free African Americans and whites formed a network, or interconnected system, called the Underground Railroad to help runaways find their way to freedom. Democrat Franklin Pierce became president in 1853. He intended to enforce the Fugitive Slave Act.

Explaining Who formed the Free-Soil Party and why?

Florida CONNECTION

Florida Becomes a State

Like Texas, Florida became a state in 1845. President John Tyler signed Florida's statehood into law on March 3, the last day of his administration. William D. Moseley became the first governor and David Levy Yulee Florida's first U.S. Senator.

The Kansas-Nebraska Act

SS.8.A.1.2, SS.8.A.4.1, SS.8.A.4.2, SS.8.A.4.8, SS.8.A.5.1, SS.8.A.5.2, LA.8.1.6.1

What is the Kansas-Nebraska Act?

In 1854 Senator Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois introduced a bill to settle the issue of slavery in the territories. It organized the region west of Missouri and Iowa as the territories of Kansas and Nebraska. Both were north of 36°30' N latitude, the line that limited slavery. Before the law they would have been free, giving the free states more votes in the Senate and angering the South.

Douglas hoped to make his plan acceptable to both the North and South. He proposed repealing the Missouri Compromise and letting the voters in each territory vote on whether to allow slavery. He called his proposal "popular sovereignty."

This idea, which is central to the American system of government, means that the people are the source of all government power. Douglas's *popular sovereignty* came to mean a particular method for deciding the question of slavery in a place.

Northerners protested. The plan allowed slavery in areas that had been free for years. Southerners supported the bill. They expected Kansas to be settled mostly by slaveholders from Missouri. They would, of course, vote to keep slavery legal. With some support from Northern Democrats and the backing of President Pierce, the Kansas-Nebraska Act passed in 1854.

Conflict in Kansas

Supporters of both sides rushed to Kansas. Armed pro-slavery supporters known as **border ruffians** (BOHR • duhr RUH • fee • uhns) crossed the border from Missouri just to vote. When elections took place, only about 1,500 voters lived in Kansas, but more than 6,000 people voted. The pro-slavery group won.

Kansas established laws supporting slavery. Slavery opponents refused to accept the laws. They armed themselves, held their own elections, and adopted a constitution banning slavery. By January 1856, Kansas had two rival governments.

In May 1856, slavery supporters attacked the town of Lawrence, an antislavery stronghold. Antislavery forces retaliated. John Brown led an attack that killed five supporters of slavery. Newspapers wrote about "Bleeding Kansas" and "the Civil War in Kansas." A **civil war** is war between citizens of the same country. In October 1856, federal troops arrived to stop the bloodshed.

Identifying Cause and Effect What events led to "Bleeding Kansas"?

LESSON 1 REVIEW

Review Vocabulary

1. Explain the significance of the following terms.

a. fugitive b. secede

LA.8.1.6.1

2. Use the following terms in a short paragraph about Kansas in the 1850s.

a. border ruffians b. civil war

LA.8.1.6.1

Answer the Guiding Questions

3. **Describing** How did the Compromise of 1850 address the question of slavery?

SS.8.A.4.1, SS.8.A.4.2

4. Analyzing What was the Wilmot Proviso? Why was it so controversial?
SS.8.A.4.2, SS.8.A.4.8, SS.8.A.5.2

5. Explaining How did Stephen Douglas help win approval of the Compromise of 1850?
SS.8.A.4.8

6. Listing What were some ways that Northerners defied the Fugitive Slave Act?
SS.8.A.4.8, SS.8.A.5.1

7. NARRATIVE WRITING Write a dialogue between two people in Nebraska who are expressing their views on the issue of popular sovereignty. Have one person defend the policy and the other oppose it.
SS.8.A.4.2, SS.8.A.4.8