

SECTIONALISM & SECESSION



DIRECTIONS: *Briefly describe each of the following moments, all of which had crucial impact during the confrontational decade of the 1850s. Be sure to explain how each event was foundationally important to the sectional discord that would transition into the Civil War. The first one has been completed for you.*

Compromise of 1850

Immediately into the 1850s, Congress lost four of its key members due to retirement—Henry Clay (Kentucky), Daniel Webster (Massachusetts), John C. Calhoun (South Carolina), and Thomas Hart Benton (Missouri). Their absence was strongly felt. At a time when intelligent, reasonable leadership was necessary to guide the nation, Congress instead began to act irresponsibly. In the last action of his outstanding political career, Clay (after securing support from Webster) presented Congress with several resolutions designed to settle every outstanding issue regarding slavery. Upon suggestion from a congressional colleague, all of Clay's measures were combined into one comprehensive "Omnibus Bill." Congress rejected it. However, newcomer Stephen Douglas (Illinois) reintroduced each of Clay's provisions individually. After several months of debate, the entire package passed. Clay went to his grave in 1852 believing that his last great political deal had saved the Union from secession. Unfortunately, the Compromise did not quiet sectional strife for long.

National leadership / State of politics during the 1850s

Uncle Tom's Cabin / Fugitive Slave Act / Underground Railroad

Kansas-Nebraska Act / “Bleeding Kansas”

Emergence of the Republican Party / Election of 1856

***Scott v. Sandford* (aka Dred Scott decision)**

John Brown’s Raid on Harpers Ferry

Election of 1860 / Southern secession / Formation of the Confederacy

1. The Compromise of 1850:
 - a. was completely ill-conceived
 - b. quieted sectional bickering until some southern states seceded in 1860
 - c. fell short of Henry Clay's hopes
 - d. was declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in 1855

2. According to the South, the institution of slavery and the act of secession were justified by the doctrine of:
 - a. manifest destiny
 - b. popular sovereignty
 - c. states' rights
 - d. due process

3. The Republican Party of the 1850s supported all of the following except:
 - a. abolition of slavery
 - b. readily available land to settlers headed westward
 - c. manufacturing, banking, and business interests
 - d. relatively high tariffs

4. The correct chronological order of the following events is:
 - a. Kansas-Nebraska Act → *Scott v. Sandford* → CSA formed → John Brown's raid
 - b. *Scott v. Sandford* → Kansas-Nebraska Act → John Brown's raid → CSA formed
 - c. John Brown's raid → CSA formed → Kansas-Nebraska Act → *Scott v. Sandford*
 - d. Kansas-Nebraska Act → *Scott v. Sandford* → John Brown's raid → CSA formed

5. Most of the successful escapes aboard the Underground Railroad came from:
 - a. the South's larger cities, such as Atlanta, Charleston, and New Orleans
 - b. plantation areas near the Mississippi River
 - c. the northernmost regions of the slave South
 - d. states along the Atlantic seaboard—Georgia, the Carolinas, and Virginia

6. Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas disagreed most about:
 - a. expansion of slavery to new territories and states
 - b. using force to abolish slavery throughout the United States
 - c. equality of the black and white races
 - d. immorality of slavery

7. According to the doctrine of popular sovereignty, the decision to allow slaves in new territories should be left to:
 - a. the President and Congress
 - b. eligible voters throughout the country
 - c. people in the territory
 - d. the governor of the territory

8. The Massachusetts senator who emerged as the leading supporter of Henry Clay's Compromise of 1850 was:
 - a. John Frémont
 - b. Daniel Webster
 - c. Thomas Hart Benton
 - d. David Wilmot

9. In general, the southern states encouraged free blacks to:
 - a. integrate into the white southern society
 - b. become educated and choose a profession
 - c. form communes in urban areas
 - d. emigrate from the region

10. During the 1850s, when the United States was in dire need of strong national leadership, it was simply not to be found. All of the following were contributing factors to this situation except:
 - a. after having provided many years of solid service in the Senate, Thomas Hart Benton, John C. Calhoun, Henry Clay, and Daniel Webster were all gone
 - b. Franklin Pierce and James Buchanan provided weak presidential guidance
 - c. the Supreme Court was dominated by southerners (such as Chief Justice Roger B. Taney) bent on using the Court to extend selfish regional desires
 - d. some members of Congress, such as Stephen Douglas of Illinois, Charles Sumner of Massachusetts, and Preston Brooks of South Carolina, constantly exhibited pettiness and partisanship adding to the deep sectional rift

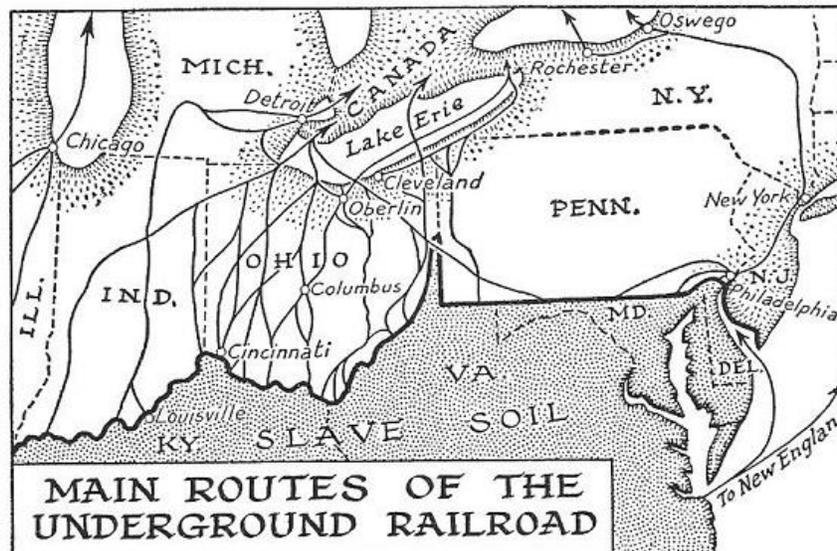
11. During the 1850s, the Whig Party split over the issue of:
 - a. expansion
 - b. immigration
 - c. taxation
 - d. slavery

The Cotton South. Changes in the South were less dramatic than in other regions during the mid-19th century. Cotton, still "king," marched westward into the fertile lands west of the Mississippi. Virginia was still a leading tobacco producer, but areas west of the Appalachians were raising more than half the nation's crop by the 1850s. Agricultural diversification was taking hold in the Upper South as corn and wheat were grown in increasing amounts. Edmund Ruffin introduced marl to counteract the acidity of worn-out tobacco fields. Cotton remained the major American export; however, manufacturing in the Northeast and the railroad became the mainsprings of economic growth.

The Economics of Slavery. The increased importance of cotton in the South strengthened the hold of slavery. The price of slaves, particularly in the Deep South, increased threefold between 1820 and 1850, with a prime field hand selling for up to \$1,800. The demand for slaves meant a booming slave-trade market. As slaves became more expensive, the percentage of the slaveowning population declined; by 1860 only one southern family in four owned slaves. The region's agriculture was characterized by a few large plantations and many small farms, but the trend of the 1850s was toward larger units. Small farmers were moderately prosperous, owning a few slaves and producing the South's staple crops. Well-managed plantations could yield an annual return of 10 percent, but slavery limited southern development by tying up capital in slaves that was needed for the creation of marketing and transportation systems.

The Sociology of Slavery. It is difficult to generalize about the living condition of slaves because so much depended on the individual master's behavior. Most owners provided adequately for them, but slaves had no rights. Even free blacks were limited by southern state laws. They were considered a bad example to slaves, making them envious, or worse, helping them escape.

Psychological Effects of Slavery. While slave revolts (suspected or real), such as Denmark Vesey's, indicated that some blacks could not bear slavery, most slaves appeared resigned to their fate. The system fostered black submissiveness and discouraged independent judgment and self-reliance. Slavery affected whites almost as severely as blacks. Poor southerners, associating working for others with servility, were discouraged from hiring out, and brutal tendencies were easily vented on slaves.



Manufacturing in the South. Some manufacturing developed in the South: small flour and lumber mills flourished and iron and coal were mined. William Gregg of South Carolina was an enlightened textile manufacturer who recognized the great potential of developing textile factories in the South, but he was unable to win many converts. As late as 1860 less than 15 percent of the goods manufactured in the United States came from the South.

The Northern Industrial Juggernaut. The North experienced a rapid expansion of industry. With a premium on ingenuity and resourcefulness, several American industries were by 1850 becoming mass-production facilities. Industrial growth was also stimulated by the discovery of new natural resources, expanded agricultural output, and a relaxation of earlier prejudices against corporations. American industrial growth created a great new demand for labor, but the beneficial aspects were mixed: skilled craftsmen and technicians earned good wages, while unskilled workers were hardly able to support a family.

Self-generated Expansion. Technological or inventive steps resulted in the need to create other advances in support of the first. For example, the cotton textile business stimulated the growth of machine-tool production, which stimulated metal works, which in turn stimulated mining and refining of iron.

A Nation of Immigrants. Immigration increased dramatically. Potato blight in Ireland and crop failures in Germany contributed to a great influx from these nations between 1842 and 1854. Many Germans and Scandinavians moved west to become farmers, while most Irish, lacking farming capital, settled in large eastern seaports. The Irish, although suffering themselves from social and economic discrimination, developed a strong prejudice against blacks. The impact of a growing urban industrial society resulted in the formation of slums in most eastern cities. Since the weekly salary of a factory hand seldom reached \$5, wives and children also labored in factories merely to survive. The lot of skilled workers improved somewhat by a shorter work day, mechanic's lien laws, and a Massachusetts court decision (*Commonwealth v. Hunt*, 1842) establishing the legality of labor unions. Unskilled workers were, however, worse off materially than most southern slaves. The majority of middle-class America was indifferent to the social conditions brought about through rapid industrialization and heavy immigration.

Foreign Commerce. Until the Civil War the nation remained primarily an exporter of raw materials and an importer of manufactured goods, usually importing more than it exported. Great Britain remained the constant factor in foreign trade, being both the best customer and leading supplier of the United States. The success of sailing packets speeded the tendency for New York to dominate the nation's commerce. New Bedford and other New England towns concentrated on whaling. New shipbuilding designs, such as Donald McKay's clipper ships, revolutionized international trade.

Steam Conquers the Atlantic. The heyday of the clippers was short-lived as technological advances mechanized ocean commerce. By the late 1840s steamships had captured most of the passenger traffic, mail contracts, and first-class freight. Atlantic crossings could be made in fewer than ten days. The American merchant marine fleet consisted mostly of wooden vessels, and government aid to shipping meant little in the decades before 1860. England began to excel in building iron ships which gave her a distinct advantage in transatlantic trade. The combination of competition, government subsidies, and technological advances drove shipping rates down.

Railroads and Canals. Perhaps the most dramatic changes occurred in the nation's internal commerce. As late as 1840 the bulk of western trade moved down the Mississippi to New Orleans in spite of the numerous canals connecting West to East. The 1840s and 1850s witnessed great progress in railroad construction that resulted in 30,636 miles of track in operation by 1860. Four companies opened transappalachian lines: the Erie, the Baltimore and Ohio, the New York Central, and the Pennsylvania.

Financing the Railroads. Private investors supplied three-quarters of the money invested in railroads before 1860, with local merchants, businessmen, and farmers becoming heavy investors by buying railroad stocks. However, many large financiers and foreign investors preferred owning bonds over stock. Most railroads were "mixed enterprises," drawing support from both private and public investments. Public aid included loans and tax incentives. Direct federal aid to railroads was usually blocked in Congress, but the government began awarding land grants to railroads in the 1850s.

Railroads and the Economy. The economic importance of railroad construction was profound. In agriculture, railroads determined just what land was utilized and how profitably it could be farmed. Land-grant railroads fostered agricultural expansion by offering settlers liberal terms on railroad owned lands. Although farm labor was scarce, the introduction of new tools and machines reduced manpower needs. John Deere's steel plow and Cyrus McCormick's reaper were important stimulants. Railroads also had a powerful impact on American cities, particularly intermediate centers such as Buffalo, Cincinnati, and Chicago. As with the textile industry, railroads stimulated other economic activity. Their growth spurred the iron industry and led to the decline of freight rates, which in turn meant boom times to farmers in the West.

Railroads and the Sectional Conflict. Linking East and West by railroads had fateful effects on politics. The social and economic integration of East and West stimulated nationalism and thus became a force for the preservation of the Union. The South lost its influence in the Northwest because it failed to create a southern railway system; southerners placed too much reliance on the Mississippi, and their leaders were no more interested in commerce than industry.

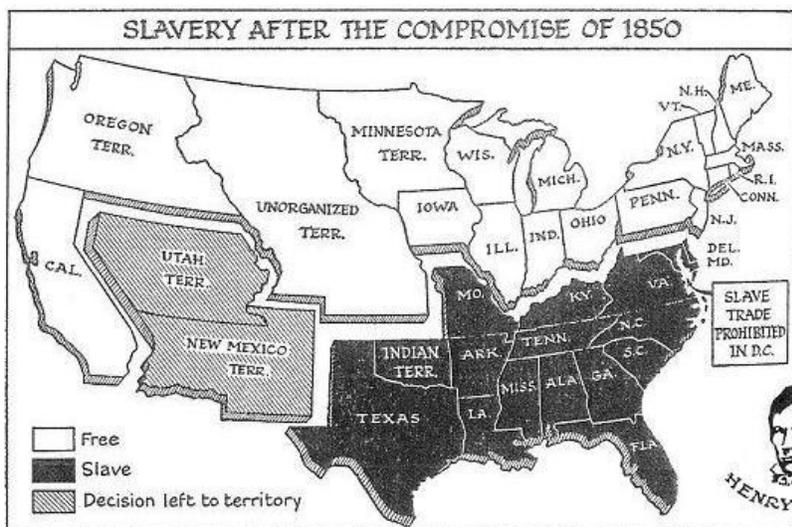


The Economy on the Eve of Civil War. The territorial gains from the Mexican War set the stage for the phenomenal economic growth that occurred in the United States between the mid-forties and the mid-fifties. Every economic indicator surged forward; it appeared that the "American System" had become a reality. Although the Panic of 1857 caused a recession, the basic vigor of the economy prevented a full depression.

The Compromise of 1850. The population boom in California resulting from the gold rush brought about the need for a territorial government. President Taylor, attempting to avoid a divisive sectional debate, advocated the immediate entry of California into the Union on the basis of popular sovereignty while New Mexico would be developed as another state. Southerners refused to accept his plan and some threatened secession. Henry Clay, his presidential ambitions dead, designed a grand compromise strategy for ending the slavery question.

Admit California as a free state; the rest of the Southwest would be organized without mention of slaves. Texas was to give up its western land claims and in return the United States would assume the Texas debt. Slave trade in the District of Columbia would be abolished and a new effective fugitive slave law would be enacted.

Clay's proposal led to one of the greatest debates in the history of Congress, as the old political giants joined the debate for the last time. Webster defended Clay's plan, while Calhoun favored a peaceful secession for the southern states. The death of President Taylor opened the way for enacting the compromise, and Stephen Douglas of Illinois brilliantly managed the congressional lobbying to gain its acceptance. While no one was completely satisfied, sober and conservative citizens were relieved, thinking the slavery problems had been resolved.



The Slave Power Comes North. The inclusion of the stronger Fugitive Slave Act as part of the Compromise of 1850 greatly exacerbated sectional tensions because southerners increased efforts to claim escaped slaves, while many northerners refused to cooperate with the law. Some states passed strong personal-liberty laws making enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Act next to impossible.

Uncle Tom's Cabin. Harriet Beecher Stowe responded to the Fugitive Slave Act by writing *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, an immediate best-seller. Southerners denounced the novel as distorting plantation life, while many northerners became more opposed to slavery after reading it.

The Little Giant. Stephen A. Douglas, senator from Illinois, was the Henry Clay of his generation. He based his politics on expansion and popular sovereignty. He was not proslavery but refused to admit the moral wrongs of slavery. In 1852, Douglas wanted the Democratic presidential nomination, but the party selected Franklin Pierce, who went on to defeat the Whig, Winfield Scott.

Kansas-Nebraska Act. Anxious to have Nebraska Territory organized to provide government for the area's settlers and to open the region to building a transcontinental railroad, Douglas introduced a bill to provide government for the area's settlers. Southerners objected to a northern transcontinental railroad route and initially opposed Douglas' plan. Seeking to win southern support, Douglas agreed to divide the Nebraska region into two territories, Kansas and Nebraska, and to repeal that part of the Missouri Compromise excluding slavery north of 36°30'. Popular sovereignty would decide the issue of slavery in the territories. In spite of widespread northern opposition, Douglas got enough support to have the bill passed. The nation had taken its greatest single step toward secession and civil war.



Party Realignment. Presumably the question of slavery in the territories had been settled, but the Kansas-Nebraska Act reopened it. Reaction in the North included the creation of two new political parties: the American, or "Know-Nothing," party which espoused an ultranational program based on opposition to immigrants and Catholics, and the Republican party, a sectional organization that demanded slavery be kept out of the territories.

Kansas became the focus of national attention as it prepared for statehood. In the early days the proslavery forces had the advantage. During the March 1855 territorial legislature election, about 5,000 "Border Ruffians" from Missouri entered Kansas and helped elect proslavery candidates. Antislavery settlers refused to recognize this regime and elected their own legislature. President Pierce sided with the proslavery element. Fighting broke out between these factions. One result was John Brown's murder of five proslavery men at Pottawatomie Creek.

Making a Senator a Martyr. Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts was a reformer whose vindictiveness earned him numerous enemies. In the spring of 1856 he made a Senate speech attacking the Kansas-Nebraska Act, Stephen Douglas, and Senator Andrew Butler of South Carolina. This led to Sumner being roundly beaten with a cane by Congressman Preston Brooks of South Carolina, a nephew of Butler. As a result, Sumner became a northern hero, while southerners applauded Brooks.

Buchanan Tries His Hand. The election of 1856 saw James Buchanan, a Democratic faithful, defeat John C. Frémont, the Republican candidate. Although Republicans doubted Buchanan's ability to withstand southern extremists, many thought he was the right man for the times.

The Court Tries Its Hand. In 1857, even before the Kansas issue was settled, the Supreme Court contributed to rising sectional tensions through its Dred Scott decision. In 1846, Scott, a slave who had accompanied his owner from Missouri to Illinois and the Wisconsin Territory, had sued for his freedom. The Supreme Court not only ruled that Scott could not sue because he was a black--thus not a citizen--but also that the Missouri Compromise, when it had been in effect, was unconstitutional. Popular sovereignty seemed destroyed, and northerners believed the Court had opened the door for slavery expansion.

The Lecompton Constitution. Buchanan appointed Robert J. Walker of Mississippi as territorial governor of Kansas. Walker opposed slavery expanding into the territories. The proslavery leaders in Kansas soon convened a rump constitutional convention at Lecompton, adopted a proslavery constitution, and obtained its passage in a crooked election. Governor Walker denounced the Lecompton Constitution, but Buchanan accepted the document as the basis for Kansas statehood. In an 1858 referendum, Kansas voters overwhelmingly rejected the proslavery constitution.

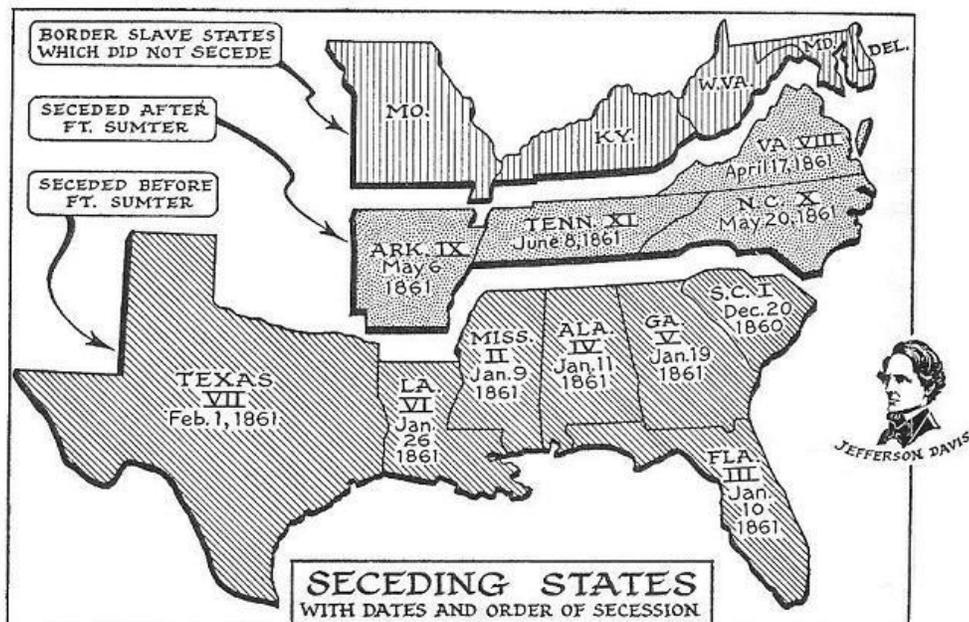
The Emergence of Lincoln. The senatorial election in Illinois in 1858 attracted national attention; Douglas was standing for reelection, opposed by the Republican Abraham Lincoln. Lincoln had a modest law practice and he had served the public in the Illinois legislature and as a one-term congressman (1846-1848). Lincoln was a complex personality, humorous and yet subject to periods of deep melancholy. The passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act awakened Lincoln to the problem of slavery in the territories, and he began to speak against it, thus attracting considerable public notice.

The Lincoln-Douglas Debates. In a series of seven debates, Lincoln and Douglas disputed the campaign issues. Douglas tried to picture Lincoln as an abolitionist, and Lincoln attempted to portray Douglas as proslavery and a defender of the Dred Scott decision. Nevertheless, they maintained a high intellectual level in their speeches. At Freeport, Illinois, Lincoln forced Douglas to admit that the Supreme Court's decree could not prevent settlers from excluding slavery from any territory because citizens could simply refuse to pass local police laws necessary for its enforcement. Douglas' "Freeport Doctrine" probably won him reelection, but it almost certainly cost him any chances for the presidency in 1860.

John Brown's Raid. In October 1859, John Brown made his second tragic contribution to sectional paranoia when he and 18 followers, white and black, attacked Harpers Ferry, Virginia. Federal forces captured Brown, and he was convicted and hanged. Southerners viewed Brown as a typical radical abolitionist, while in the North he became a martyr.

Election of 1860. It appeared in 1860 that Stephen Douglas was probably the last hope of avoiding a rupture between North and South, but at the Democratic convention in Charleston, South Carolina, southern delegates refused to back Douglas, bolted the convention, and no one was nominated. In June another convention held by northern Democrats nominated Douglas, while a southern wing selected John C. Breckinridge of Kentucky. The Republicans skillfully drafted a platform attractive to all classes throughout the North and West, and then, ignoring several frontrunners, nominated Abraham Lincoln. A fourth party, the Constitutional Unionist, chose John Bell of Tennessee. Lincoln received a million fewer votes than his combined opponents but won a clear victory in the electoral college.

The Secession Crisis. South Carolina, followed by all the states of the Lower South, seceded from the Union. Since the election of Lincoln did not present an immediate threat to slavery, why did the South secede? First, because northern economic domination seemed to threaten southern independence; and second, years of sectional strife had undermined the patriotic feelings of southerners. Buchanan proved totally inept in handling the crisis and Lincoln felt that secession was a bluff. The Crittenden Compromise proposed a constitutional amendment recognizing legal slavery south of 36°30', but Lincoln refused to consider any extension of slavery. Before Lincoln's inauguration, the nation wondered what action the new president would take on secession. Lincoln's inaugural address was conciliatory but firm. The South was warned, however, that secession was not merely illegal but impossible.



Fort Sumter: The First Shot. By the time Lincoln was inaugurated in March 1861 the Confederacy had already seized most United States property in the Deep South, and Lincoln had no intention of forcibly reclaiming it. However, Fort Sumter, in the harbor at Charleston, and Fort Pickens in Florida were still in federal hands. Lincoln decided to keep the forts and resupply them. The Confederates responded by attacking Fort Sumter on April 21, 1861, forcing its surrender. Lincoln immediately issued a call for 75,000 volunteers, and this action prompted Virginia, North Carolina, Arkansas, and Tennessee to secede. At that point, Lincoln clearly indicated that the war would be fought to preserve the Union, not to abolish slavery.