

Chapter 15 A Divided Nation (1848–1860)

New land gained in the Mexican War led to increased tension over the issue of slavery. After Abraham Lincoln won the election of 1860, several southern states left the Union. As you study this chapter, consider why expansion might create conflict in a nation, how a Supreme Court decision might affect individuals' rights, and why a state might want to leave the Union.

Chapter 15

Section 1: The Debate over Slavery

In this section you will learn how the expansion of the United States led to a growing conflict over slavery. People disagreed strongly about whether to allow new territories to permit slavery. As you study this material, pay attention to the following terms:

Wilmot Proviso

sectionalism

popular sovereignty

Free-Soil Party

Compromise of 1850

Fugitive Slave Act

Uncle Tom's Cabin

You will also want to keep the following questions in mind as you review this material:

- What were the main conditions of the Compromise of 1850, and what reasons did people have for supporting or opposing it?
- Why was the Fugitive Slave Act controversial in the North?
- What was the impact of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*?

Chapter 15.1 Section Summary

After the Mexican War ended in 1847, the United States gained a vast territory called the Mexican Cession. Representative David Wilmot introduced a proposal called the **Wilmot Proviso**, which would forbid slavery in any part of the Mexican Cession. Most northerners supported the Wilmot Proviso, but southerners opposed it. The debate showed a growing **sectionalism**—a preference for one region’s interests over those of the country as a whole. Senator Lewis Cass of Michigan suggested resolving the dispute through **popular sovereignty**, which would allow each territory’s voters to decide whether to permit slavery.

In the presidential election of 1848, Senator Cass ran against war hero Zachary Taylor. Because neither candidate addressed keeping slavery out of the new territory, some antislavery northerners created a new political party—the **Free-Soil Party**. Although the Free-Soil Party won 10 percent of the vote, Zachary Taylor won the election.

When California applied for statehood, most Californians wanted to join as a free state. However, southerners believed that California’s admission would upset the balance of power between free and slave states. Senator Henry Clay proposed a compromise in which California would join as a free state, but voters would decide through

popular sovereignty whether to allow slavery in the rest of the Mexican Cession.

Senator John C. Calhoun thought that Clay's proposals would destroy the balance between North and South. Senator Daniel Webster, on the other hand, believed the proposals would preserve the Union. After Congress debated for months, it agreed to Clay's proposals, which became known as the **Compromise of 1850**.

One part of the Compromise of 1850, the **Fugitive Slave Act**, made it a crime to assist runaway slaves and allowed authorities to arrest them anywhere in the Union. Many northerners opposed the act because fugitive slaves could be shipped south without a trial by jury.

Abolitionists began using slaves' stories to further their cause. *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, a novel by Harriet Beecher Stowe published in 1852, showed the terrible conditions of slaves' lives. The book angered many southerners, but also brought new supporters to the antislavery cause.

Chapter 15

Section 2: Trouble in Kansas

In this section you will learn how the struggle over slavery grew worse, as northerners and southerners fought to settle their differences in Kansas. As you study this material, pay attention to the following terms:

Kansas-Nebraska Act

Pottawatomie Massacre

You will also want to keep the following questions in mind as you review this material:

- How did different sections of the country react to the Kansas-Nebraska Act?
- In what ways did people attempt to settle the conflict over slavery in Kansas?
- How did the North and the South react to the beating of Charles Sumner?

Chapter 15.2 Section Summary

In the election of 1852, the Whigs had nominated another war hero, Winfield Scott. The Democrats nominated Franklin Pierce, who won by a landslide. The Whigs' defeat was so crushing that some of them feared that the Whig Party itself had come to an end.

The slavery issue was revived once more when Representative Stephen Douglas made plans to build a railroad from Chicago to San Francisco. To do this, the remainder of the Louisiana Purchase would have to become federal territory. Southerners opposed this plan, because the Missouri Compromise required that this land be free territory, and eventually free states. Southern delegates told Douglas they would support his railroad plan only if the new territory could be open to slavery.

In 1854 Douglas introduced a bill in Congress that would divide the remaining Louisiana Purchase land into two territories, Kansas and Nebraska. Voters would decide the question of slavery there through popular sovereignty. Many northerners were angry because the bill violated the Missouri Compromise. However, most southerners supported the bill, and the **Kansas-Nebraska Act** became law.

Because popular sovereignty allowed voters to determine whether to allow slavery in Kansas, many antislavery and pro-slavery groups rushed to get people to move there. Most people came from nearby Missouri, a slave state. The new territorial legislature had a pro-slavery majority, and it passed strict pro-slavery laws. One law made it a crime punishable by death to assist a runaway slave. Antislavery Kansans boycotted this pro-slavery legislature and started a legislature of their own 30 miles away.

Soon violence broke out. A pro-slavery group rode into Lawrence, Kansas, burning and looting buildings. Abolitionist John Brown fought back, killing five pro-slavery men and burning their homes. This attack, held along the Pottawatomie Creek in eastern Kansas, became known as the **Pottawatomie Massacre**. Kansas fell into a state of civil war.

Violence broke out in Congress as well. Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts criticized slavery supporters and insulted South Carolina senator Andrew Pickens Butler. Another senator, Preston Brooks, beat Sumner unconscious with a cane. Dozens of southerners supported this action, sending Brooks new canes. Many northerners were angry and thought Brooks should be expelled from the Senate.

Chapter 15

Section 3: Political Divisions

In this section you will learn how divisions over slavery deepened and how political parties struggled to face the issue. As you study this material, pay attention to the following terms:

Republican Party

Dred Scott decision

Lincoln-Douglas debates

Freeport Doctrine

You will also want to keep the following questions in mind as you review this material:

- How did the Kansas-Nebraska Act affect U.S. political parties?
- Why did Dred Scott sue for his freedom, and how did the Supreme Court rule on his case?
- How did Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas differ in their views of slavery?

Chapter 15.3 Section Summary

The Kansas-Nebraska Act continued to cause divisions in U.S. politics. Most Democrats who had voted for the bill lost their seats in the House. The Whig Party fell apart, with northerners and southerners refusing to deal with one another. Around this time some political leaders formed the **Republican Party** formed, which was dedicated to preventing the spread of slavery.

The presidential election of 1856 showed just how much slavery had divided the country. The Know-Nothings fell apart over slavery as many northerners left the party to join the Republicans. The Democrats nominated James Buchanan, who had no associations with the divisive Kansas-Nebraska Act, while the Republicans chose explorer John C. Frémont. Buchanan won the election and soon faced a crisis over a Supreme Court case dealing with slavery.

In this case Dred Scott, a slave, was suing for his freedom. He had been the slave of Dr. John Emerson, who before his death had once taken Scott to live in free territory. Scott argued that because he had lived where slavery was illegal, he was no longer a slave.

In the 1857 *Dred Scott decision*, the Supreme Court ruled that African Americans were not citizens; therefore, Scott did not have the right to sue in federal court. The court also ruled that Scott's status

had to be determined by the laws of Missouri, which defined him as a slave. In addition, the Court ruled that Congress did not have the right to deprive people of their property. In effect, this ruling said that Congress had no right to ban slavery in any federal territory.

This decision stunned Republicans. Abraham Lincoln, who ran as a Republican for the U.S. Senate in 1858, engaged in seven debates with Democrat Stephen Douglas. During the **Lincoln-Douglas debates**, Lincoln said that slavery was wrong and should not be allowed to spread. He insisted that African Americans should have all the rights listed in the Declaration of Independence. Douglas argued that the Republicans wanted to make all states free, which he warned would lead to war.

Lincoln pointed out that Douglas's idea of popular sovereignty conflicted with the *Dred Scott* decision. If Congress could not ban slavery in a territory, then it seemed strange that voters could. Douglas responded with a statement that became known as the **Freeport Doctrine**. Douglas argued that it did not matter what the Supreme Court decided about slavery, because the people themselves had the right to decide whether to allow slavery.

Chapter 15

Section 4: Secession

In this section you will learn how tensions increased between the North and the South until several southern states finally left the Union. As you study this material, pay attention to the following terms:

John Brown's raid

Constitutional Union Party

secession

Confederate States of America

You will also want to keep the following questions in mind as you review this material:

- How did Americans react to John Brown's raid?
- What factors led to Lincoln's victory in the presidential election of 1860?
- Why did some southern states decide to leave the Union?

Chapter 15.4 Section Summary

In 1858 John Brown was still fighting for the abolitionist cause. He planned to attack the plantations, hoping to free slaves as he and his followers swept through the South. **John Brown's raid** began on October 16, 1859, as Brown and his men broke into a federal arsenal in Harpers Ferry, Virginia. They tried to get slaves to join their fight, but few did. Brown and many of his supporters were arrested and later hanged for treason.

Many people in the North praised Brown for fighting for slaves' rights. Others, including Abraham Lincoln, thought that violence was not the answer. Southern whites felt threatened, and some southern states began talking about leaving the Union.

In the election of 1860, four major candidates emerged. Northern Democrats nominated Stephen Douglas, and Southern Democrats nominated John C. Breckinridge. Some former Whigs started a new party, called the **Constitutional Union Party**, which recognized no political principles other than the U.S. Constitution. They nominated John Bell of Tennessee. The Republicans nominated Abraham Lincoln.

The presidential race showed how divided the country had become. The two southern candidates, Breckinridge and Bell, split the

electoral votes of the slave states, and Douglas won only Missouri's electoral votes. Lincoln won only 40 percent of the popular vote, but he won almost all of the electoral votes in the free states. Therefore, Lincoln won the election.

Many southern whites were afraid that Republicans would try to end slavery in the South. They thought that such an action would destroy their way of life. South Carolina's legislature met to discuss **secession**—the act of formally leaving the Union. In December 1860 South Carolina's legislature voted to secede from the Union.

Senator John J. Crittenden of Kentucky proposed a compromise on slavery that would satisfy the South, but President Lincoln would not hear of compromise. By February 1861, six more states had seceded. Delegates from these southern states gathered to form a new nation, the **Confederate States of America**, and they elected Jefferson Davis as their president.