

Chapter 14 Outline - Slavery and America's Future: The Road to War, 1845–1861

- I. Introduction

Territorial expansion brought the slavery question once again to the forefront. This volatile issue gave rise to a new political party, the Republicans, and moved the nation closer to war.

- II. The War with Mexico and Its Consequences

- A. Oregon

The Oregon Treaty of 1846 established the northernmost boundary of the Oregon Country at the 49th parallel.

- B. “Mr. Polk’s War”

After failing in his attempt to buy land to the Pacific from Mexico, Polk waited for war. After Mexican cavalry struck against an American cavalry unit on the north side of the Rio Grande, Polk drafted a war message to Congress. Congress voted in favor of a declaration of war on May 13, 1846.

- C. Foreign War and the Popular Imagination

There were public celebrations that accompanied the declaration of war. It was seen as a fulfillment of Anglo-Saxon-Christian destiny.

- D. Conquest

Due to steady progress on the part of American forces, and after a daring invasion at Vera Cruz that led to the capture of Mexico City, the United States was victorious.

- E. Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo

A treaty with Mexico gave the United States possession of California

and the New Mexico Territory and recognized the Rio Grande as the Texas border. The United States agreed to pay the claims of American citizens against Mexico and to give Mexico another \$15 million.

There was sharp regional division concerning the war, with Southwesterners largely supporting the war and New Englanders opposing it. Whigs charged that it was an “unnecessary war” and that Polk had “usurped the power of Congress.” Abolitionists and some antislavery Whigs saw the war as a plot to extend slavery.

- F. “Slave Power Conspiracy”

Many northerners opposed the Mexican War, insisting that its causes could be found in a slaveholding oligarchy who intended to ensure the institution of slavery.

- G. Wilmot Proviso

Congressman David Wilmot proposed a bill that outlawed slavery in territories gained from Mexico, but his proposal failed in the Senate.

Southerners used the Fifth Amendment to justify their right to take their slaves into the territories.

The Proviso subsequently became a rallying cry for abolitionists.

Although most white northerners were not abolitionists, they wanted the West free of slavery and of blacks. Most white northerners believed that slavery in the western territories would destroy the ideal of free labor.

- H. The Election of 1848 and Popular Sovereignty

Slavery in the territories emerged as the primary issue in the 1848 election. The Democrat Lewis Cass supported popular sovereignty, allowing Whig slaveholder Zachary Taylor to win the presidency with the southern vote.

- III. 1850: Compromise or Armistice?

- A. Debate Over Slavery in the Territories

California's request to enter the Union as a free state sparked the first major political conflict following the Mexican War. When Henry Clay's omnibus bill did not pass, Stephen Douglas introduced each measure separately. Douglas was able to gain a majority for each separate bill that made up the compromise, and the Compromise of 1850 became law.

- B. Compromise of 1850

By the Compromise of 1850, California entered the Union as a free state; Texas gave up its boundary claims; the New Mexico and Utah territories were organized on the basis of popular sovereignty; the fugitive slave law was strengthened; and the slave trade was abolished in Washington, D.C.

The two basic flaws in the Compromise of 1850 were: (1) popular sovereignty in all its vagueness had been written into the act, and (2) the Fugitive Slave Act.

- C. Fugitive Slave Act

An important facet of the compromise strengthened southerners' ability to capture escaped slaves. Abolitionists sharply protested this law. Protests and violent resistance to slave catchers occurred in many northern towns from 1850 to 1854.

- D. *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

Harriet Beecher Stowe's book enthralled northerners by painting a portrait of the suffering of slaves, a portrayal that appalled white southerners.

- E. The Underground Railroad

Southerners were especially disturbed by the Underground Railroad.

- F. Election of 1852 and the Collapse of Compromise

Franklin Pierce's victory gave southerners hope because he believed that each section's rights should be defended and because he supported the Fugitive Slave Act. Those same stands appalled many northerners. Pierce's foreign policy decisions caused a further rift between southerners and northerners.

- IV. Slavery Expansion and Collapse of the Party System

- A. The Kansas-Nebraska Act

This bill, proposed by Stephen A. Douglas, exposed the complexity of popular sovereignty. By throwing open to slavery Louisiana Purchase territory north of 36° 30', the bill in effect repealed the Missouri Compromise. Discord over the bill helped split the Whigs, and the party fell apart.

- B. Birth of the Republican Party

The Kansas-Nebraska Bill encouraged antislavery Whigs and Democrats, Free-Soilers, and other reformers to form the Republican Party, which grew rapidly in the North. In the 1854 Congressional elections, Republicans captured a majority of northern House seats.

- C. Know-Nothings

The American Party, called Know-Nothings, started as an anti-immigrant, anti-Catholic party that exploited fears of foreigners.

- D. Party Realignment and the Republicans' Appeal

The Republicans, Democrats, and Know-Nothings all sought to attract former Whigs. The Republicans appealed to those voters interested in internal improvements, federal land grants, higher tariffs, and the

economic development of the West.

- E. Republican Ideology

To broaden their ideology beyond antislavery, the Republicans trumpeted “Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men.”

- F. Southern Democrats

Southern Democrats attracted slaveholders from among the former Whigs. The party used racial fears to keep the political alliance between yeomen and planters intact.

- G. Bleeding Kansas

When the Kansas-Nebraska Act passed, thousands of proslavery and antislavery people poured into Kansas, leading to massive bloodshed in the territory.

Passions led to violence in the Senate in the form of the Sumner-Brooks affair (the caning of Senator Sumner).

- H. Election of 1856

With southern support, James Buchanan was elected president in 1856.

- V. Slavery and the Nation’s Future

- A. *Dred Scott* Case

In this case, the Supreme Court ruled that Dred Scott was not a citizen of the United States or of Missouri; that residence in free territory did not make Scott free; and that Congress had no power to bar slavery in the territories.

The decision seemed to confirm northern fear of an aggressive Slave

Power.

- B. Abraham Lincoln on the Slave Power

Lincoln stressed that slavery in the territories affected all citizens of the United States because, if left unchecked, slavery would soon grow into a nationwide institution.

- C. The Lecompton Constitution and Disharmony Among Democrats

Douglas's stand against the Lecompton Constitution infuriated southern Democrats.

- VI. Disunion

- A. John Brown's Raid on Harpers Ferry

Hoping to bring about a slave rebellion, Brown led a band of men in an attack on the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia. This act struck fear into the South.

- B. Election of 1860

Lincoln won this election on a sectional basis, with the southern votes split between Douglas, Breckenridge, and Bell. When Republicans refused to accept the Crittenden Compromise, southerners threatened secession.

- C. Secession and the Confederate States of America

On December 20, 1860, South Carolina seceded from the Union, a step that enticed other southern states to follow.

By February 1861, seven states had formed the Confederate States of America. Upon inauguration, Lincoln worked to uphold federal authority without war.

- D. Fort Sumter and Outbreak of War

At Fort Sumter in South Carolina, the Confederates could acquiesce to Lincoln's intent to supply the federal installation or they could attack the garrison. In April, Confederates bombarded the fort and forced its surrender.

- E. Causation

Without slavery there would have been no war. Republicans wanted to extend the North's free labor economy westward; slaveowners wanted to do the same with slavery. Neither northerners nor southerners would state that slavery (or abolition) was the cause, but the issue was continually at the center of sectional disagreements.