

# **SLAVERY DIVIDES A NATION: A SERIES OF FAILED COMPROMISES**

## **MISSOURI COMPROMISE, 1820**

In 1819, there were 11 'Free States' (states without slaves) and 11 'Slave States' (states with slaves) in the Union; the Free and Slave states were equal. Free: IN, IL, OH, PA, NY, VT, NH, MA, RI, CT, & NJ. Slave: KY, VA, NC, SC, GA, AL, MS, TN, LA, DE, & MD.

This year, however, Missouri petitioned Congress to join the Union as a Slave State, which would give the Slave States and the South a majority for voting in the Senate. Immediately, crisis erupted, and the issue became a hotly debated issue in Congress. The North, or Free States, were concerned because Missouri was part of the Louisiana Purchase; if Missouri were admitted as a Slave State, then perhaps all future states formed from the Louisiana Purchase might also become Slave States by default. The South argued that since Missouri already had slaves, the government had no right to take them away. During this month's long debate, Maine also applied to join the Union as a Free State.

Finally, Senator Henry Clay developed a proposal. He suggested that the Union admit Missouri as a Slave State and Maine as a Free State. This plan kept the number of Free and Slave states equal (12 each). A final provision of the compromise involved drawing an imaginary line across the southern border of Missouri, stretching from the tip of Texas to Missouri's southeast corner, at 36°36' line of latitude. In the future, slavery would be permitted south of this line and banned north of this line. The only exception would be Missouri.

## **COMPROMISE OF 1850**

The Missouri Compromise applied only to the Louisiana Purchase lands. As Americans continued to expand westwards, the issue of slavery created further controversy. Many Americans who traveled to Texas brought their slaves with them, and in 1845, Texas was admitted as a Slave State. A few years later in 1850, Americans traveled westward to California in pursuit of gold, which was recently discovered there. As the population of California grew, the question arose as to whether California should join the Union as a Slave or Free state.

The South argued that slavery should be allowed in any territory. Furthermore, they demanded that runaway slaves be returned to them. They otherwise threatened to leave (secede) from the United States and form their own country. The North, of course, disagreed. Abolitionists wanted slavery banned throughout the country based on morals. Moderates or people who took a 'middle of the road' approach suggested that perhaps the Missouri Compromise line should be extended all the way to the Pacific Coast. The problem with that solution, however, is that the compromise line would run

straight through California, dividing it. Other moderates suggested popular sovereignty or voting in each new territory for the residents to decide for themselves whether they would allow slavery or not.

In 1850, Henry Clay saved the day again with another compromise. The Compromise of 1850 consisted of 5 main provisions:

1. California would be admitted as a Free State
2. The slave trade would be banned in Washington D.C.
3. A new Fugitive Slave Act would be enacted; hiding or helping a slave escape was punishable by a steep fine (\$1,000) and imprisonment!
4. The Mexican Cession (land) would be divided into New Mexico and Utah. Voters in each state would decide slavery by popular sovereignty!
5. The border dispute between Texas and New Mexico was settled

After the Compromise of 1850 was reached, neither side was very happy with the outcomes. Both sides had to give a little, and neither got exactly what they wanted. The strict Fugitive Slave Act enraged many Northerners and strengthened their cause to ban slavery nationwide.

### **THE KANSAS-NEBRASKA ACT, 1854**

In 1853, Senator Stephen Douglas introduced a bill to Congress regarding the Kansas Territory. He proposed creating two new territories from that land: Kansas and Nebraska. The bill stated that the residents of these territories would hold a vote to decide if they would become a Free or Slave state. Because these territories were part of the Louisiana Purchase land, this bill violated the Missouri Compromise of 1820. According to the previous compromise, both Kansas and Nebraska should become Free States.

Many people felt that allowing voting was a fair decision. Southern states felt confident that voting would favor slavery, especially since many southerners had moved to Missouri and brought their slaves. The president, Franklin Pierce, also supported the bill and helped to pass it through Congress.

Northerners were outraged when the bill was passed into law. They felt strongly that the Kansas Nebraska Act violated the Missouri Compromise of 1820. With the vote approaching, the crisis grew violent. Proslavery and antislavery forces sent settlers to Kansas to fight for control of the territory on voting day. Ultimately, Nebraska became a Free State without much problem, but there was bitter fighting and conflict in Kansas before it voted to become a Free State as well.