# Crisis of the Union

### The Compromise of 1850

What had worked before for the slavery issues was compromise (remember Missouri?). Again walked Henry Clay, the "Great Compromiser," and also Democrat **Stephen Douglass.**They both cobbled together a plan to soothe the tensions brought by all this new, Mexican land.

The Compromise of 1850 had all sorts of parts that threw bones to different regions. For the north, they abolished the slave trade—but not slavery—in Washington, D.C. For the South, they pushed for a stronger **fugitive slave law.**As for the west, they created new territories but allowed **popular sovereignty**to decide whether they would be slave or free.

This worked for a while, especially because no new territories would be admitted until 1858. The big problem was that "popular sovereignty," which soundednice and democratic, was actually incredibly vague and problematic. The place that would prove how totally unworkable this idea was, was Kansas.

### Bleeding Kansas

Kansas was another territory that still hasn't resolved their slavery issue yet. Douglass decided that, like the Mexican territories, it should also decide through popular sovereignty. The **Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854**was passed, but the big problem with it was that it totally mooted the **Missouri Compromise.**According to thatdocument, the 36˚30' line was supposed to determine slavery, not people's choices.

The North was enraged. Anti-slavery feeling was spreading like wildfire there, especially thanks to the vehemently anti-slavery book by Harriet Beecher Stowe, **Uncle Tom's Cabin.**That was like the Harry Potterof its time—an instant best seller that everyoneread. In rebellion to the Act, Northerners passed **personal liberty laws**that weakened the Fugitive Slave Act because it gave the slaves the right to a trial.

And, more importantly, the Act led to the creation of a whole new party, the **Republicans.**It's important to remember that they weren't actually abolitionists—they were anti-slavery in the territories.It was an extension of the Free Soil party's ideas, but more popular because it also addressed a variety of other issues.

The danger with the Republican Party was that it gained a lot of supporters in the North and West—but nonein the South. How could it, it was totally against Southerner's main ideas. When the Republicans became the major party in Congress, the beautiful balance was finally tipped. Southerners saw this as the beginning of the end. With Republicans in power, slavery was doomed.

Kansas became the battleground for everyone's tensions. **Border Ruffians**were Southerners who attacked anti-slavery settlements and governments and tried to intimidate people to champion the pro-slavery cause. **John Brown**led a militant group of anti-slavery Northerners to do exactly the same thing to the pro-slavery settlers. Governments were created and dissolved, settlements burned, and people murdered.

### Dred Scott v. Sanford

In general, things weren't going well for the South. Gold-filled California went anti-slavery, Kansas proved popular sovereignty a bloody mess, and the Republicans were gaining power. One thing did happen that pleased many Southerners, however: the decision of **Dred Scott v. Sanford.**

The particulars of this case (a slave who sued for his freedom when his master took him to a free territory) aren't as important as the outcome. First, the Supreme Court declared that slaves were not citizens, so had no constitutional rights and couldn't sue in court. Secondly, and most importantly, it suddenly declared that the federal government had no right to regulate slaver in the territories.

As a result, the **Northwest Ordinance of 1787**andthe **Missouri Compromise**were totally moot. However,**Kansas Nebraska Act**and **Wilmot Proviso**also were, too. Northerners started becoming dangerously angry, claiming that the **Slave Power**had a tyrannical hold on the government, and were conspiring against liberty.

Then things started heating up. **Abraham Lincoln**and **Stephen Douglass**both ran for a Senate seat, and the famous **Lincoln-Douglass Debates**both stated elegant pro-slavery and anti-slavery arguments, andshowed the nation just how politically split it was.

That was nothing, though, in comparison to what had gone down between Senators Sumner and Booth. During a Senate session, A Senator **Charles Sumner**started vehemently denouncing the Kansas Nebraska Act and the whole South. Then, he accused Senator **Preston Booth** of having a slave lover.Booth was so mad he leapt out of his chair, ran down to Sumner, and started beating him viciously over the head with a cane. Anti-slavery activists were enraged—but pro-slavery people were so pleased that many of them actually sent more canes to Booth in the mail to show their support.

The violence wasn't only in government. In 1859, **John Brown,**who had led the anti-slavery group's attacks in Kansas, raided **Harper's Ferry,**arming slaves and trying to lead a slave revolt. In the North, he was a hero and a martyr. In the South, he was the devil incarnate—and proof to many that a union with the North was impossible, when it let loose demons like Brown to destroy them.

The final straw was the election of Abraham Lincoln in 1860. Why then, and not after all the violence? Because the election of an anti-slavery president, along with a predominantly anti-slavery Congress, spelled total doom for the slave cause. Lincoln didn't sayhe would end slavery—actually, he tried to assure the South that they were safe—but they didn't believe him. All the previous events had added in their minds to a conspiracy against them.

In 1860, right before Lincoln was inaugurated, South Carolina declared **secession.**Soon, other southern states joined and became the **Confederacy,**choosing **Jefferson Davis**as their leader. Lincoln decided not to fight until the South made a move, but he didn't need to wait long: in 1861 Confederate forces attacked northern troops stationed at **Fort Sumter,**and the Civil War had begun.

## Sample Questions

1. The ideology of the "cult of domesticity" popularized all of the following views EXCEPT

A) women were expected to educate their children about "republican" virtues  
B) women were not supposed to have work outside the home  
C) women were expected to educate their children on "republican" virtues  
D) women were the moral and spiritual leaders of the home  
E) only men were allowed to participate in the world of politics

The correct answer is (A).

In the antebellum period, the "cult of domesticity" (which, let's be honest, sounds a little creepy) was a romantic idea about womanhood. As the more spiritual and moral sex, women were supposed to create little heavens out of their homes. Men, coming home from rough days in the evil vortex of work and politics, could finally relax at home. It's true that women were supposed to educate their children on morality, too—but (A) is actually a better definition of "Republican Motherhood."

2. The terms of the Compromise of 1850 were weakened by

A) the conflicts in "Bleeding Kansas"  
B) the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act  
C) the Dred Scottcase  
D) the admission of Texas as a slave state  
E) the North's passage of personal liberty laws

The correct answer is (E).

The compromise decided 1.) popular sovereignty would determine slavery 2.) on a stronger fugitive slave law 3.) that the slave trade would be outlawed in Washington, D.C. Which of the answer options was most threatening? "Bleeding Kansas" comes in second place, because it sure didn't make popular sovereignty look like a good idea. However, it didn't weakenit in the same way the North's personal liberty laws wakened the Fugitive Slave Act. After all, that was their whole purpose.