

1850s: Decade of Controversy

I. Economic Prosperity of 1850s

A. Railroad building expanded tremendously

1. Mileage increased from 9000 to 36,600 miles in 1860
2. Most expansion concentrated in Northeast section of nation
3. First federal land grants (6 sections of land for each mile of track) set pattern of government assistance
4. By 1860 Northeast and Northwest sections linked by lines. Southern railroads formed a distinct unit with few links to northern rail lines.

B. Northern industrial growth

1. Market expansion for northeast manufacturers
 - a) Railroads for domestic markets
 - b) Clipper ships and steamships opened European markets. Faster and cheaper than sailing vessels
2. California gold rush added capital (\$50 million in gold shipped east yearly)
3. Expansion of labor supply
 - a) Northeastern farmers unable to compete with western goods sent more workers to cities
 - b) Immigrants from Ireland and Germany as a result of famines and unrest in Europe

C. Spread of Southern plantation system. Slavery seen as indispensable for South's prosperity.

1. Expansion of cotton production
 - a) Price rose from 6 cents/lb. in 1845 to 14 cents/lb. in 1857
 - b) U.S. produced 7/8 of world cotton supply by 1860
2. Expansion of tobacco market (200 million lbs. in 1850 to 430 million lbs. in 1860).

D. Western agriculture expanded as a result of railroad growth and opening of European markets. Results:

1. Westerners became aware of world hostility to slavery
2. Westerners became convinced of importance of Northeast to their prosperity rather than the South which purchased a much smaller share of their produce

II. Persistence of the Slavery Controversy

A. Compromise of 1850 angered extremists on both sides

1. Admission of California as a free state
2. Remaining western territories organized with no restriction on slavery
3. End of all slave trade in the District of Columbia

4. Strict federal fugitive slave law
5. Assumption of Texas' debt by the national government

B. Southerners expressed interest in new potential slave regions

1. Cuba. U.S. sought to purchase Cuba from Spain. Ostend Manifesto stated U.S. "right" to seize Cuba if Spain refused to sell it.
2. Nicaragua. William Walker led a group of Tennessee volunteers who seized nation and ruled it for two years (1854-1856)
3. Mexico. Gadsden Purchase in SW Arizona territory in 1853 for \$10 million for possible railroad route.

C. Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin (1852) convinced many northerners of the evil of slavery

III. Kansas-Nebraska Act (1854)

A. Stephen Douglas proposed that

- 1) Kansas and Nebraska territories be divided into two sections
- 2) Missouri Compromise be repealed, with settlers in each territory choosing whether or not they wanted slavery (popular sovereignty)

B. Effects of the Kansas-Nebraska Act

- 1) Party realignments
 - a) Whig Party collapsed
 - b) Know-Nothing Party (anti-immigrant, anti-Catholic) emerged
 - c) Republican Party, organized in support of keeping slavery out of the territories, gained strength in northwestern states
- 2) Bleeding Kansas violence as pro- and anti-slavery forces rushed in to Kansas territory.

IV. Dred Scott Case (1857)

A. Chief Justice Taney ruled that Scott (Dred Scott v. Sanford) could not sue for his freedom

1. Missouri Compromise was unconstitutional (Congress had no right to restrict slavery from territories)
2. Constitution and citizenship did not apply to blacks

B. Northerners feared that slave power might extend further, perhaps including German and Irish immigrants

V. Illinois Senate Election of 1858

A. Stephen Douglas and Abraham Lincoln debated throughout the state, focusing on slavery and its expansion

1. Freeport Doctrine (Douglas): people could keep slavery out by refusing to enact black codes and other laws necessary for its survival
2. Lincoln: "A house divided against itself cannot stand." Slavery should not be extended into territories

B. Lincoln loses election, but gains national prominence for his arguments

VI. John Brown's Raid—1859

A. Brown and his followers planned a slave insurrection to begin in western Virginia.

B. Seized federal arsenal at Harper's Ferry, but was quickly captured, tried, and hanged.

C. Impact of Brown

1. Northern abolitionists (Emerson and Thoreau) viewed him as a martyr, taking action against the evil of slavery
2. Southerners generally viewed Brown as a madman, symbolizing the fanatical hatred of the North
3. Moderates (Lincoln) condemned Brown's action, while admiring his commitment to countering slavery

VII. Election of 1860

A. Democrats split into northern and southern factions and nominated two candidates (Douglas and Breckenridge)

B. Former Whigs nominated Bell in an attempt to preserve Union with Constitutional Union Party. Strong only in Virginia and upper South

C. Republicans nominated Lincoln as a moderate compromise candidate.

D. Results:

- 1) Bell wins three states (Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee)
- 2) Breckenridge carried the South
- 3) Lincoln carried the Northern states and won the electoral vote, though earning less than 40% of all votes cast
- 4) On December 20, 1860, South Carolina seceded from the Union