

CHAPTER TWELVE: SLAVERY AND SECTIONALISM: THE POLITICAL CRISIS OF 1848–1861

READING AND STUDY GUIDE

- I. The Slavery Question in the Territories
 - A. The Gold Rush
 - B. Organizing California and New Mexico
 - C. The Compromise of 1850
 - D. Sectionalism on the Rise
- II. Political Realignment
 - A. Young America
 - B. The Kansas-Nebraska Act
 - C. Republicans and Know-Nothings
 - D. Ballots and Blood
 - E. Deepening Controversy
- III. Two Societies
 - A. The Industrial North
 - B. Cotton Is Supreme
 - C. The Other South
 - D. Divergent Visions
- IV. A House Divided
 - A. The Lincoln-Douglas Debates
 - B. John Brown's Raid
 - C. The Election of 1860
 - D. Secession

The seizure of vast tracts of land from Mexico in 1848 ushered in a period of intense conflict between the North and the South over the question of whether to permit slavery in the territories west of the Mississippi. At the root of these tensions were the starkly different paths of economic and social development being pursued in the two regions. The South prospered in the 1840s and 1850s by expanding its agrarian, slave labor economy; the North, by becoming more urban, industrial, commercial, and multicultural. In the process, the two regions developed divergent visions of the ideal society: the South celebrated the virtues of slavery, states' rights, and white supremacy, while the North touted the benefits of free labor, upward mobility, and equal opportunity. One of the first and most bitter controversies of the period emerged with the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850, a law requiring Northerners to assist Southerners in the apprehension of escaped slaves. It produced almost immediately a series of sensational incidents where abolitionists tried, with some success, to thwart the law and spirit escaped slaves to freedom.

This controversy set the tone for a decade that was to be rocked by a series of political, legal, and economic disputes that ultimately led back to the slavery question. By the mid-1850s,

each region increasingly came to see the other's system as a threat. Northerners became convinced that Southerners wanted to spread slavery to the West and even to the North, while Southerners believed Northerners sought to destroy slavery and the Southern way of life. When Republican Abraham Lincoln won the presidency in 1860, Southerners declared the Union dissolved, setting in motion events that led to a far more bloody conflict, the Civil War.

Learning Objectives

After a careful examination of Chapter 12, students should be able to do the following:

1. Outline the four proposals that shaped the national debate on slavery by 1846.
2. Explain the provisions of the Wilmot Proviso and why it failed to gain Congressional approval in 1846. Explain the significance of the Proviso even though it was a political failure.
3. Name the major candidates in the presidential election of 1848 and explain their positions on the sectional issues facing the nation.
4. Discuss the emergence of the Free Soil Party in 1848 and why the party is often connected to the origins of the modern Republican Party.
5. Summarize the significance of the California Gold Rush and the territory's impending admission to the union.
6. Outline the four major provisions of the Compromise of 1850 and explain why the Fugitive Slave Act would deepen sectionalism in the United States.
7. Briefly discuss the reactions of northern urban African American communities to the Fugitive Slave Act.
8. Discuss the family and religious background of Harriet Beecher Stowe and explain how her views on slavery reflected that background.
9. Explain the northern and southern reactions to Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and comment on the novel's impact on sectionalism.
10. Briefly discuss the candidates, issues, and results of the presidential election of 1852.
11. Identify and explain the sectional impact of the two major foreign policy fiascos during the Franklin Pierce administration.
12. Explain Stephen Douglas's motivation for wanting to create a Nebraska Territory in 1854.

13. Outline the provisions of the Kansas-Nebraska Act and explain their impact on sectionalism.
14. Define the term “Bleeding Kansas” and identify two incidents that occurred in Kansas after 1854 that earned the territory this nickname.
15. Explain what transpired in the United States Senate during the Brooks-Sumner incident.
16. Explain the impact of early nineteenth-century immigration on the emergence of the Know-Nothing party and point out the connection between the Know-Nothings and the emerging Republican Party.
17. Briefly identify the major candidates and issues of the presidential election of 1856. Explain how the results of the election reflected sectionalism’s impact on the national political party system.
18. Explain the Supreme Court ruling in the Dred Scott case and the impact of that decision on the nation’s efforts to reach a compromise regarding the slavery issue.
19. Explain the circumstances that led to the drafting of the Lecompton Constitution.
20. Explain how the Democratic response to the Panic of 1857 deepened sectional antagonism in the nation.
21. Discuss the historical significance of the Lincoln-Douglas debates in terms of refining the national debate on slavery and in terms of defining the distinctions between the Democratic and Republican parties.
22. Discuss the essential differences that divided the North and South by 1860.
23. Explain the southern reaction to John Brown’s raid and why this event is often considered a turning point in the southern road to secession.
24. Identify the major candidates and issues of the presidential election of 1860. Connect the results of this election to the secession of the Lower South.
25. Briefly discuss the responses of the federal government and the Republican Party to the secession of the Lower South. Explain why compromise efforts like the Crittenden Plan were unsuccessful.
26. Analyze Lincoln’s position on secession, especially as reflected in the series of decisions that culminated in the firing on Fort Sumter.

Key Terms & Definitions:

Compromise of 1850 An attempt by Congress to resolve the slavery question by making concessions to both the North and South, including admission of California and a new Fugitive Slave Act. (348)

Fugitive Slave Act A component of the Compromise of 1850 that increased the federal government's obligation to capture and return escaped slaves to their owners. (348)

Underground Railroad A network of safe houses and secret hiding places along routes leading to the North and into Canada (where slavery was prohibited) that helped several thousand slaves gain their freedom between 1830 and 1860. (349)

Young America The movement within the Democratic Party that embraced Manifest Destiny and promoted territorial expansion, increased international trade, and the spread of American ideals of democracy and free enterprise abroad. (352)

Kansas-Nebraska Act An 1854 act designed to resolve the controversy over whether slavery would be permitted in the Western territories. It repealed the ban on slavery north of 36° 30' (the Missouri Compromise) and created two separate territories, Kansas west of Missouri and Nebraska west of Iowa. (354)

Know-Nothings The nickname for the constituents of the nativist, or anti-immigrant, American Party who called for legislation restricting office holding to native-born citizens and raising the period of naturalization for citizenship from five to twenty-one years. (356)

Bleeding Kansas A phrase used to describe the wave of vigilante reprisals and counterreprisals by proslavery and antislavery forces in Kansas in 1856. (358)

Black Republican A racist pejorative that Democrats used to suggest that Republicans were dangerous radicals who favored abolition and racial equality. (359)

Dred Scott v. Sandford The highly controversial 1857 Supreme Court decision that rejected the claim of the slave Dred Scott, who argued that time spent with his owner in regions that barred slavery had made him a free man. It also declared that Congress lacked the right to regulate slavery in the territories. (360)

free labor A procapitalist Northern philosophy that presented an idealized vision of the industrial North, celebrating the virtues of individualism, independence, entrepreneurship, and upward mobility. (364)

Lincoln-Douglas debates A series of high-profile debates in Illinois in 1858 between Senate candidates Stephen A. Douglas and Abraham Lincoln that focused primarily on the slavery controversy. (366)

John Brown's raid A failed assault led by the radical abolitionist on the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia, on October 16, 1859, intending to seize the guns and ammunition and then touch off a wave of slave rebellions. (366)

Crittenden Compromise An unsuccessful proposal by Kentucky senator John J. Crittenden to resolve the secession crisis in the spring of 1861 with constitutional amendments to protect slavery. (369)

Study Questions:

How did the seizure of Western Land after the Mexican War fuel a growing controversy over slavery? (342)

What was the fate of most fortune seekers who headed west to mine for gold? (344)

How did the Gold Rush affect the native Americans of California? (345)

Why did Southerners react so negatively to President Taylor's plan? (346)

What did Seward mean by a "higher law?" (347)

How did Congressional vote on the Compromise of 1850 reveal growing sectionalism? (348)

Why did Southerners demand a Fugitive Slave Act? (349)

What made Uncle Tom's Cabin such an influential piece of antislavery literature? (350)

What caused the furor over the Fugitive Slave Act to eventually subside? (351)

What ideals inspired Young America's vision of westward expansion? (352)

Why did many Southerners support efforts to annex Cuba and seize other Caribbean and Latin American countries? (353)

Why did most Northerners oppose the repeal of the Missouri Compromise line of 36 30'? (354)

What events led to the formation of the Republican Party? (355)

What anti-immigrant laws did the American Party propose? (356)

What caused the sharp rise in anti-immigrant sentiment in the 1850s? (357)

How did events in Kansas expose the flaw in the policy of popular sovereignty? (358)

How did events in Kansas benefit the Republican Party? (359)

How did the Supreme Court use the Dred Scott case to expand and protect the rights of slaveholders? (360)

Why did Congress reject the Lecompton Constitution? (361)

How did new technology transform American agriculture? (362)

What did Southerners mean by the phrase “Cotton is King”? (363)

Why did Southern whites who owned no slaves support slavery? (364)

How did the Panic of 1857 strengthen the Southern argument for secession? (365)

How did the Lincoln-Douglas debates harm Douglas’s presidential ambitions? (366)

Why did many Northerners consider John Brown a martyr? (367)

What was unique about Lincoln’s victory in the election of 1860? (368)

What prevented a compromise in the spring of 1861? (369)

Why did Lincoln attempt to resupply Fort Sumter? (370)

How did the slavery issue factor into Mississippi’s decision to secede? (371)