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Chapter 18 - Renewing the Sectional Struggle

I. The Popular Sovereignty Panacea

1. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ended the Mexican-American War, but it started a whole new debate about the extension of slavery, with Northerners rallying around the Wilmot Proviso (which proposed that the Mexican Cession lands be free soil); however, the Southerners shot it down.
2. Before, the two national parties, the Democrats and the Whigs, had had strong support from all over the nation; now, that was in jeopardy.
3. In 1848, Polk, due to tremendous overworking and chronic diarrhea, did not seek a second term, and the Democrats nominated General Lewis Cass, a veteran of the War of 1812, a senator and diplomat of wide experience and considerable ability, and the originator of popular sovereignty, the idea that issues should be decided upon by the people (specifically, it applied to slavery, stating that the people in the territories should decide to legalize it or not).
 - It was good (and liked by politicians) because it was a compromise between the extremes of the North and the South, and it stuck with the idea of self-determination, but it could spread slavery.

II. Political Triumphs for General Taylor

1. The Whigs nominated General Zachary Taylor, the hero of Buena Vista in the Mexican War, a man with no political experience, but popular man, and they avoided all picky issues in his campaign.
2. Disgusted antislavery Northerners organized the Free Soil Party, a party committed against the extension of slavery in the territories and one that also advocated federal aid for internal improvements and urged free government homesteads for settlers.
 - This party appealed to people angry over the half-acquisition of Oregon, people who didn't like Blacks in the new territory, as well as "conscience Whigs" who condemned slavery on moral grounds.
 - The Free-Soilers nominated Martin Van Buren.
3. Neither major party talked about the slavery issue, but Taylor won narrowly.

III. "Californy Gold"

1. In 1848, gold was discovered in California, and thousands flooded into the state, thus blowing the lid off of the slavery issue.
2. Most people didn't "strike it rich," but there were many lawless men and women.
3. As a result, California (privately encouraged by the president) drafted a constitution and then applied for free statehood, thus bypassing the usual territorial stage and avoiding becoming a slave state.

IV. Sectional Balance and the Underground Railroad

1. In 1850, the South was very well off, with a Southerner as president (Taylor), a majority in the cabinet and on the Supreme Court, and equality in the Senate meaning that its 15 states could block any proposed amendment that would outlaw slavery. Still, the South was worried.
2. The balance of 15 free states and 15 slave states was in danger with the admission of free California (which would indeed destroy the equilibrium forever) and other states might follow California as free states.
3. The South was also agitated about Texas' claims on disputed territory and the prospect of no slavery in Washington D.C., thus putting a piece of non-slavery land right in the middle of slave-holding Virginia and Maryland.
4. Finally the Underground Railroad, a secret organization that took runaway states north to Canada, was taking more and more slaves from the South.
5. Harriet Tubman freed more than 300 slaves during 19 trips to the South.
6. The South was also demanded a stricter fugitive slave law.

V. Twilight of the Senatorial Giants

1. In 1850, the South was confronted with catastrophe, with California demanding admission as a free state.
 - Thus, the three giants met together for the last time to engineer a compromise.
2. Henry Clay, AKA "The Great Compromiser," now 73 years old, urged concession from both the North and the South (the North for a fugitive slave law, the South for others) and was seconded by Stephen Douglas, the "Little Giant" and fine senator.
3. Southern spokesman John C. Calhoun, dying of tuberculosis, pleaded for states' rights, for slavery to be left alone, for the return of runaway slaves, the restoration of the rights of the South as a minority, and the return for political balance.
4. Northerner Daniel Webster proclaimed that the new land could not hold slaves anyway, since it couldn't cultivate cotton, etc... and his Seventh of March speech helped move the North into compromise.
5. As a result of the popular speech, though, Webster was also proclaimed a traitor to the North, since he had called for ignoring the slavery subject.

VI. Deadlock and Danger on Capitol Hill

1. A new group of politicians, the “Young Guard,” seemed more interested in purifying the Union rather than patching it up.
2. William H. Seward, a young senator from New York, was flatly against concession and hated slavery, but he didn’t seem to realize that the Union was built on compromise, and he said that Christian legislators must adhere to a “higher law” and not allow slavery to exist; this might have cost him the 1860 presidential election.
3. President Taylor also appeared to have fallen under the influence of the “higher law,” vetoing every compromise sent to him by Congress.

VII. Breaking the Congressional Logjam

1. Then, in 1850, Zachary Taylor suddenly died of an acute intestinal disorder, and portly Millard Fillmore took over the reigns.
2. Impressed by arguments of conciliation, he signed a series of agreements that came to be known as the Compromise of 1850.
3. Clay, Webster, and Douglas orated on behalf of the compromise for the North, but the South hated it; fortunately, they finally accepted it after much debate.

VIII. Balancing the Compromise Scales

1. What the North got... (the North got the better deal in the Compromise of 1850)
 1. California was admitted as a free state, permanently tipping the balance.
 2. Texas lost its disputed territory to New Mexico and (now) Oklahoma.
 3. The District of Columbia could not have slave trade, but slavery was still legal. This was symbolic only. It was symbolic in that the nation’s capital “took a stance” against the trade. However, it was impractical because the trade only was illegal, not slavery and because a person could easily buy a slave in next-door Virginia.
2. What the South got...
 1. Popular sovereignty in the Mexican Cession lands. This was good for the South because prior to this, there was to be no new slave lands (the 36°30’ Missouri Compromise line had drawn that). On paper, this opened a lot of land to slavery, possibly. This was bad for the South because those lands were too dry to raise cotton anyway and therefore would never see slaves.
 2. Texas was paid \$10 million for the land lost to New Mexico.
 3. A new, tougher Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 was drastic, and it stated that (1) fleeing slaves couldn’t testify on their own behalf, (2) the federal commissioner who handled the case got \$5 if the slave was free and \$10 if not, and (3) people who were ordered to help catch slaves had to do so, even if they didn’t want to.
 - Angry Northerners pledged not to follow the new law, and the Underground Railroad stepped up its timetable.
 - It turns out that the new Fugitive Slave Law was a blunder on behalf of the South, since it inflamed both sides, but a civil war didn’t occur, and this was better for the North, since with each moment, it was growing ahead of the South in population and

wealth—in crops, factories, foundries, ships, and railroads.

IX. Defeat and Doom for the Whigs

1. In 1852, the Democrats, unable to agree, finally nominated dark horse Franklin Pierce, a man who was unknown and enemyless.
2. The Whigs nominated “Old Fuss and Feathers,” Winfield Scott, the old veteran of the War of 1812 and the Mexican-American War.
3. Both parties boasted about the Compromise of 1850, though the Democrats did more.
4. The Whigs were hopelessly split, and thus, Pierce won in a landslide; the death of the Whigs ended the national political arguments and gave rise to sectional political alignments.

X. Expansionist Stirrings South of the Border

1. Pierce tried to be another Polk, and he impressed followers by reciting his inaugural address from memory, but his cabinet was filled with Southerners like Jefferson Davis and he was prepared to be a Southerners’ tool.
2. In July of 1856, a brazen American adventurer, William Walker, grabbed control in Nicaragua and proclaimed himself president, then legalized slavery, but a coalition of Latin American states overthrew him. This threw some fuel on the “Slavocracy” theory (a conspiracy theory where the South was always seeking new slave land).
3. America also eyed Cuba with envy.
 - Although America wanted Cuba, Spain wouldn’t sell it to the U.S. at any price.
 - So after two attempts to take Cuba failed, and after Spain captured the American steamer Black Warrior on a technicality, three U.S. foreign ministers met in Ostend, Belgium and drew up the Ostend Manifesto which stated that the U.S. was to offer \$120 million to Spain for Cuba, and if it refused and Spain’s ownership of Cuba continued to endanger the U.S., then America would be justified in seizing the island (sell it or it’ll be taken).
4. Northerners were outraged once this “secret” document was leaked, and the South could not get Cuba (and obtain another slave state). Pierce was embarrassed and more fuel thrown on the Slavocracy theory.

XI. The Allure of Asia

1. Over on the Pacific, America was ready to open to Asia.
 - Caleb Cushing was sent to China on a goodwill mission.
2. The Chinese were welcoming since they wanted to counter the British.
3. U.S.—China trade began to flourish.
4. Missionaries also sought to save souls; they largely kindled resentment however.
5. Relations opened up Japan when Commodore Matthew C. Perry steamed into the harbor of Tokyo in 1854 and asked/coerced/forced them to open up their nation.
 - Perry’s Treaty of Kanagawa formerly opened Japan.
 - This broke Japan’s centuries-old tradition of isolation, and started them down a road of modernization and then imperialism and militarism.

XII. Pacific Railroad Promoters and the Gadsden Purchase

1. Though the U.S. owned California and Oregon, getting out there was very difficult, since the sea routes were too long and the wagon route overland was dangerous, so the only real feasible solution lay in a transcontinental railroad.
2. The Southerners wanted a route through the South, but the best one would go through Mexico, so Secretary of War Jefferson Davis arranged to have James Gadsden appointed minister to Mexico.
 - Two reasons this was the best route: (1) the land was organized meaning any Indian attacks could be repelled by the U.S. Army and (2) geography—the plan was to skirt south of the Rocky Mtns
 - Finding Santa Anna in power again, he bought the Gadsden Purchase for \$10 million, and despite clamor about the “rip-off,” Congress passed the sale.
3. A northern railroad would be less effective since it would cross over mountains and cross through Indian territory.
4. The South now appeared to have control of the location of the transcontinental railroad, but the North said that if the organization of territories was the problem, then Nebraska should be organized.

XIII. Douglas's Kansas-Nebraska Scheme

1. To do this, Senator Stephen Douglas proposed the Kansas-Nebraska Act, which would let slavery in Kansas and Nebraska be decided upon by popular sovereignty (a concession to the South in return for giving up the railroad).
2. The problem was that the Missouri Compromise had banned any slavery north of the 36°30' line, so the act would have to repeal it.
3. Southerners had never thought of Kansas as a possible slave state, and thus backed the bill, but Northerners rallied against it.
4. Nevertheless, Douglas rammed the bill through Congress, and it was passed, repealing the Missouri Compromise.

XIV. Congress Legislates a Civil War

1. The Kansas-Nebraska Act directly wrecked the Missouri Compromise of 1820 (by opening slavery up above the 36°30' line) and indirectly wrecked the Compromise of 1850 (when everyone thought the issue was settled and done).
2. Northerners no longer enforced the Fugitive Slave Law at all, and Southerners were still angry.
3. The Democratic Party was hopelessly split into two, and after 1856, it would not have a president elected for 28 years.

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