**Chapter 14**

**The Impending Crisis**

**Learning Outcomes**

* 1. Describe the arguments that took place over whether slavery should be allowed to expand into the new territories, and explain how the Compromise of 1850 was supposed to settle the issue.

**Objectives**

1. Analyze the prevalence of racism in both the South and the North.

2. Discuss the concept of popular sovereignty as proposed in the Wilmot Proviso.

3. Describe the election of 1848 and discuss the emergence of the Free Soil Party.

4. Explain the national issues that led to the Compromise of 1850, discuss the specific elements of the compromise, and explain how it finally became a law.

5. Discuss the connection between the attempt to buy Cuba and the Slave Conspiracy.

* 1. Explain how the Kansas-Nebraska Act affected the territories of Kansas and Nebraska, and describe the events that made “Bleeding Kansas” an accurate description for the region.

**Objectives**

1. Show how the issue of slavery led to violent confrontations in the Kansas Territory during the early 1850s.

2. Explain the events that took place in Kansas during the 1850s that made “Bleeding Kansas” an appropriate moniker.

3. Discuss the election of 1856 and relate how the emergent Republican Party became such a threat to the southern states.

* 1. Discuss the events that propelled the United States into a civil war in 1861.

**Objectives**

1. Explain the premise behind the Dred Scott court case, the ruling by the Supreme Court, and the reason why abolitionists were so upset by the decision.

2. Describe the actions of John Brown at Harper’s Ferry in Virginia, and explain what his intentions were as well as how the events there contributed to a sense of unease among southerners.

3. Discuss the election of 1860 and the results, and assess the significance of that outcome to the secessionist movement.

* 1. Explain why and how the southern states seceded from the Union, discuss President Lincoln’s reaction, and describe the earliest physical conflict between the two sides.

**Objectives**

1. Describe how the secession of the first southern states from the Union took place, and assess how united the southern states appeared during the months before Lincoln’s inauguration.

2. Describe Lincoln’s conciliatory actions and those by others prior to his inauguration to try to avert a civil war.

3. Explain the conditions at Fort Sumter and the decisions taken there that led to a civil war.

**Chapter Summary**

The new territories acquired by the United States during the 1840s complicated matters, but no discussion became more intense than that concerning slavery and its possible expansion. Southern Democrats pushed for the spread of slavery in the newly acquired lands. Northern Democrats opposed this effort, not due to consideration for the African Americans but rather to make the new territories available for white farmers. Many of them left to form the upstart Free Soil Party, a challenge to the Whigs. The latter issue forced a series of diplomatic maneuvers known as the Compromise of 1850 when the problem of where slavery was going to be legal arose with the admission of California, which threatened the North–South balance. The Compromise attempted to appease the concerns of both sides but only served to delay the conflict briefly. One section promised greater assistance from the North to capture fugitive slaves; state governments fought to thwart what they began to see as a southern slave conspiracy. The attempted purchase of Cuba, which was advocated by plantation owners, reinforced this fear.

The debate over slavery next manifested in the territories of Kansas and Nebraska; when this debate was resolved, the political landscape of the nation changed. The Kansas-Nebraska Act dictated that the residents of the territories themselves would decide whether or not to permit slavery upon statehood. As a result, the Whig Party disintegrated and was replaced by the Know-Nothing Party. The Know-Nothing Party was mostly devoted to anti-immigration and anti-Catholic issues and more importantly for the future, the Republican Party, which was anti-slavery and pro-internal developments. With the downfall of the Know-Nothings by the end of the 1850s (whose supporters mostly went to the Republican Party), the nation was divided, generally, between the Republicans in the North and the Democrats in the South. Allowing popular sovereignty in Kansas led to an influx of both northerners and southerners into the territory. Both sides committed atrocities; the pro-slavery faction was more blatantly corrupt in their attempts to hijack the election. Eventually, the anti-slavery majority got Kansas admitted as a free state. The tensions caused by bloodshed from both sides led to the caning of abolitionist Charles Sumner on the Senate floor. The 1856 election showed an increase in the North–South political divide and the growing power of the Republican Party.

Three specific events helped catapult the nation into a civil war. The *Dred Scott* decision by the Supreme Court that slaves were property anywhere in the U.S. enraged northerners. In turn, southerners expressed outrage after the botched but polarizing John Brown raid and execution.

The implosion of national party politics and the sense of isolation in the North and the South came to a head in the election of 1860. The Democrats could not agree on a candidate who would satisfy the party’s northern and southern members. They somewhat remarkably decided to adjourn the convention and reassemble in Baltimore in July. In the second Democratic convention, Douglas was nominated, but the southern delegates disagreed with the nomination and walked out. This move confirmed the long-standing divide within the party, and the Democratic Party officially split into northern and southern wings.

Meanwhile, the Republicans nominated Abraham Lincoln, who was an attractive candidate for two reasons. First, Lincoln had become known as a moderate on the slavery question. Second, Lincoln was from Illinois, a state the Republicans had failed to carry in 1856. The Constitutional Union Party nominated John Bell of Tennessee as their presidential candidate. The 1860 presidential election was the final event as Lincoln, basically only a section candidate, won the election without a single southern state.

Although Lincoln had actually affirmed the rights of the states in his campaign speeches, the South saw his opposition to the spread of slavery in the West as a serious threat. The Deep South reached its limits with the election. South Carolina took the lead. It did not want to be part of a nation in which it had no control. Over the next six weeks, several other southern states—Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas—followed suit. Americans had considered secession in the past. South Carolina waters became the location of the opening battle of the Civil War as Confederate forces attacked a Union attempt to resupply Fort Sumter.

**Chapter Outline**

I. Arguments over Slavery in the New Territories

A. The Democrats on Slavery in the West

1. Racist, But Antislavery, Northern Democrats

B. The Wilmot Proviso and the “Free Soil” Movement

1. The Presidential Election of 1848

2. The Free Soil Party

C. The Compromise of 1850

1. California as the Problem

2. The Compromise

3. The Controversy

4. Becoming Law

D. Western Destiny Deferred

1. Buying Cuba?

2. The Slave Conspiracy

II. The Kansas-Nebraska Act and the New Political Parties

A. Slavery in Kansas and Nebraska?

1. The Kansas-Nebraska Act

B. The Death of the Second Two-Party System

1. The Know-Nothing Party

2. The Republican Party

3. Two Parties from Two Regions

C. “Bleeding Kansas”

1. Popular Sovereignty

2. The Stolen Election

3. The Bleeding

4. Kansas’s Constitution

5. Free Soilers Strike Back

6. Outcomes

D. “Bleeding Sumner”

1. The Caning of Sumner

E. The Election of 1856

1. The Republicans

2. The Slave Power Conspiracy

3. The Election

4. Results

III. Three Events that Catapulted the Nation into War

A. The Dred Scott Controversy

1. Dred Scott

2. Slavery as Law of the Land

B. John Brown’s Raid

1. Results

C. The Election of 1860

1. The Democrats

2. The Republicans

3. The Final Sectional Division

4. Results

IV. Secession and Civil War

A. The Deep South Secedes

1. Lower South versus Upper South

B. Conciliatory Efforts

1. Crittenden Compromise

2. Lincoln’s Middle Course

C. Fort Sumter

V. Looking Ahead…

**Suggested Lecture Topics**

1. Racism in America: A Southern Problem Only?

2. The Kansas and Nebraska Territories Cause a Ruckus

3. Justice Roger B. Taney and the Mangled *Dred Scott* Decision

4. An Analysis of the Presidential Election of 1860

5. “Bleeding Kansas”—What’s In a Name?

6. An Overview of Secessionist Sentiment throughout the South

7. A Convenient Demise: Was Zachary Taylor Poisoned? Should He Have Been?

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| **The Reasons Why…** |
| (14-4). There were at least four major reasons why slavery plunged the nation into civil war in 1861:  a. Economics  b. Westward expansion  c. Political breakdown  d. An enraged populace  Break students into teams of four. Using each of the four reasons, give the teams a limited amount of time and have the groups write down terms that relate to the given reason to slavery or the coming civil war. For example, for (a) economics: plantations, labor, slave, free soil, etc. The team that has the most pertinent terms after the four rounds wins. |

**Research Topics—Projects and Papers**

Students might choose to do a project to be presented in class or write a more traditional research paper, or the instructors could decide which they prefer to have them do. Below are a few topics that are relevant to this chapter. Instructors may, of course, choose to develop their own topics.

1. Hold a mock debate between students representing the views of Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas in the 1858 Illinois senatorial election: Have the rest of the class analyze their performances. One student should present a brief description of Lincoln and his style of delivery and another should do the same for Stephen Douglas. Instructors can decide whether these descriptions should be presented before or after the debate.

2. Gather a collection of photos of John Brown: Place them in chronological order, either in a notebook or on a poster board. Describe the changes that one sees while viewing Brown over a period of years, and especially up to the day of his execution.

3. Plot the locations of major events in the Kansas Territory: Enlarge a map of Kansas in the 1840s. Add the names of towns and physical features, if necessary. In the order of their occurrence, place numbers on the map and on a separate paper, describe what happened at that particular place.

4. The Caning of Senator Sumner: Locate the famous drawing of Brooks’s attack on Sumner in the Senate. Track down contemporary news accounts of the event and follow-up on Senator Sumner. What happened to him after he was released from the hospital? Did he ever return to the Senate? If so, when?

**Additional www Resources**

“Bleeding Kansas,” Fort Scott National Historic Site. National Park Service.

<http://www.nps.gov/fosc/historyculture/bleeding.htm>

Wheeler, Samuel P. “The Crime Against Kansas,” Lincoln Studies.

<http://lincolnstudies.blogspot.in/2008/05/crime-against-kansas.html>

“The Attack on Fort Sumter,” Civil War Home website.

<http://www.civilwarhome.com/ftsumter.htm>

**Primary Source Discussions**

**Assignment Name: Read Calhoun’s Speech**

*Introduction:* John C. Calhoun knew that he was hearing his final speech read to the U.S. Senate on March 4, 1850, and he knew that the subject was too important for him to not try one last time to persuade those who opposed his views. On this site you will find a photocopy of his speech as recorded in the Congressional Globe. As such, the print is not that easy to read, so you would do well to enlarge the page somewhat (125 percent is suggested). Pay particular attention to the first few paragraphs (Calhoun’s speech begins about halfway down the first column) and the section on page 455 which begins with the phrase “It belongs now… .”

[Read Calhoun’s Speech](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=llcg&fileName=022/llcg022.db&recNum=538) and then take a brief quiz to check your understanding.

*Reflection Questions:*

1. What does Calhoun state as the “great and primary cause” of the Union’s being in danger of dissolution? Should America’s political leaders have realized from the beginning that this situation would arise? Should they have addressed the situation any differently? Could they have?

2. What do you make of Calhoun’s arguments that California could not be admitted as a state simply *because* it was not *already* a state unto itself, as required by the Constitution? To what part of the Constitution was he referring? Does his argument make sense?

**Assignment Name: Read a Contemporary Account of the “sacking of Kansas”**

*Introduction:* In July 1856, Col. John W. Geary of Pennsylvania was appointed governor of the Kansas Territory. This chapter is part of a work written by John H. Gihon, the governor’s private secretary. Gihon’s preface states that he has omitted incidents that he could not corroborate through official documents and interviews; he also acknowledges that he arrived in Kansas as a supporter of the cause of slavery, but that he has come to see the error of his ways.

[Read a Contemporary Account of the “sacking of Lawrence”](http://www.kancoll.org/books/gihon/g_chap13.htm) and then take a brief quiz to check your understanding.

*Reflection Questions:*

1. According to Gihon, what series of events took place in Douglas County, Kansas Territory, that precipitated the unsettling events in Lawrence, Kansas? What charge was leveled against residents of Lawrence?

2. After reading Gihon’s commentary on the Lawrence incident, would you consider him an impartial researcher? Why or why not?

3. How serious do you consider the actions of the posse that was sent to Lawrence? What about the actions of the residents of Lawrence? How would *you* have described what happened?

**Assignment Name: Read the section on slavery from the Lecompton Constitution**

Introduction: The Kansas Territory was the scene of numerous violent actions and illegal activities during the years when free-soil and proslavery groups fought for control. During that time, more than one election was held, and more than one constitution authored. This is a section from the proslavery Lecompton Constitution that was ultimately rejected by the residents of Kansas.

[Read the section on slavery from the Lecompton Constitution](http://www.lecomptonkansas.com/lecompton-constitution/) (scroll down to “Lecompton Constitution (Excerpt of the 8 Page Document)”) and then take a brief quiz to check your understanding.

URL: http://www.lecomptonkansas.com/lecompton-constitution/

*Reflection Questions:*

1. According to Article VII, Section 1, of the Lecompton Constitution, what was the status of slaves? What argument was used to support this claim? Was the argument just one? Why or why not?

2. Why do you specifically think the authors of the Lecompton Constitution laid out so specifically the “powers” of slave owners within the Kansas Territory?