

Chapter 18- Renewing the Sectional Struggle

1848-1854

A. The Popular Sovereignty Panacea

1. Each of the two great political parties was a vital bond of national unity, for each enjoyed powerful support in both North and South; to politicians, the wisest strategy seemed to be to sit on the lid of the slavery issue and ignore it; the cover bobbed up and down in response to the agitation of northern abolitionists and impassioned southern “fire-eaters”
2. Anxious Democrats were forced to seek a new stand-bearer in 1848; President Polk, broken in health by overwork, had pledged himself to a single term as president
 1. The Democratic National Convention at Baltimore turned to an aging leader, General Lewis Cass, a veteran of the War of 1812; although a senator and diplomat, he was sour-visaged and somewhat pompous—silent about issue of slavery in the territories
 2. Although the Democratic party was silent, Cass was not silent; his views on the extension of slavery were well known because he was the reputed father of “popular sovereignty”—doctrine that stated that the principles of the Constitution, should themselves determine the status of slavery in their separate state
3. Popular sovereignty had a persuasive appeal; the public liked it because it accorded with the democratic tradition of self-determination; politicians liked it because it seemed a comfortable compromise between the abolitionist bid for a ban on slavery in the territories and southern demands that Congress protect slavery in the territories
 1. Popular sovereignty tossed the slavery problem into the laps of the people in the various territories; advocates of the principle thus hoped to dissolve the most stubborn national issue of the day into a series of local issues (spread issue out)
 2. Popular sovereignty had one fatal defect: it might serve to spread the blight of slavery

B. Political Triumphs for General Taylor

1. The Whigs, meeting in Philadelphia, cashed in on the “Taylor fever”
 1. They nominated the honest Zachary Taylor, the “Hero of Buena Vista,” who had never held civil office or even voted for president; Henry Clay should logically have been nominated but Clay had made too many speeches—and too many enemies
 2. The Whigs eager to win at any cost, dodged troublesome issues and merely extolled homespun virtues of their candidate—the frontier fighter had not committed himself on the issue of slavery extension but he did own slaves on his sugar plantation
 3. Ardent antislavery men in the North, distrusting both Cass and Taylor, organized the Free Soil party—aroused by the conspiracy of silence in the Democratic and Whig

platforms, the Free-Soilers made no bones about their own stand—they came out for the Wilmot Proviso and against slavery in the territories

4. Going beyond other antislavery groups, they broadened appeal by advocating federal aid for internal improvements and by urging free government homesteads for settlers
2. The new party assembled a strange assortment of new fellows in the same political bed
 1. It attracted industrialists miffed at Polk's reduction of protective tariffs; it appealed to Democrats resentful of Polk's settling for a part of Oregon while insisting on all of Texas—a disparity that suggested a menacing southern dominance among Democrats
 2. It harbored many northerners who hatred was directed not so much at slavery as at blacks and who gagged at the prospect of sharing the newly acquired western territories with African Americans—it also contained a large element of "conscience Whigs," heavily influenced by the abolitionist crusade, who condemned slavery
 3. The Free-Soilers trotted out wizened former president Van Buren and marched into the fray, shouting, "Free soil, free speech, free labor, and free men"
 4. Free-Soilers condemned slavery not so much for enslaving blacks but for destroying the chances of free white workers to rise up from wage-earning dependence to the esteemed status of self-employment (only could be accomplished with free soil)
 5. As the first inclusive party organized around issue of slavery and confined to a single section, the Free Soil party foreshadowed the emergence of the Republican party
3. With the slavery issue officially shoved under the rug by the two major parties, the politicians on both sides opened fire on personalities; the amateurish Taylor had to be carefully watched, lest his pen puncture the reputation won by his sword
 1. His admirers puffed him up as a gallant knight and sloganized his remark, allegedly uttered during the Battle of Buena Vista, "General Taylor never surrenders"
 2. Taylor's wartime popularity pulled him though and Free-Soiler Van Buren diverted enough Democratic strength from Cass in New York to throw the election to Taylor

C. Californy Gold"

1. President Taylor was a military square peg in a political round hole; he would have been spared much turmoil if could have continued to sit on the lid; but the discovery of gold in California, early in the year of 1848, blew the cover off
 1. A horde of adventurers poured into the valleys of California singing "O Susannah!" and shouting "Gold! Gold! Gold!" began tearing at the yellow-graveled streams and hills; a fortunate few of the bearded miners "struck it rich" at the "diggings"
 2. But the luckless many probably would have been money well ahead if they had stayed at home unaffected by the "gold fever" which was often followed by more deadly

fevers—the most reliable profits were made by those who mined the miners, notably by charging outrageous rates for laundry and other personal services

2. The overnight inpouring of tens of thousands of people into the future Golden State completely overwhelmed the one-horse government of California—a distressingly high proportion of the newcomers were lawless men, accompanied by virtue-less women
3. An outburst of crime inevitably resulted from the presence of so many miscreants and outcasts; robbery, claim jumping, and murder were commonplace and such violence was only partly discouraged by rough vigilante justice (few hangings in San Francisco)
4. A majority of Californians, as decent and law-abiding citizens needing protection, grappled earnestly with the problem of erecting an adequate state government
 1. Privately encouraged by President Taylor, they drafted a constitution in 1849 that excluded slavery and then boldly applied to Congress for admission
 2. California would thus bypass the usual territorial stage, thwarting southern congressmen seeking to block free soil—southern politicians arose in opposition
5. Would California prove to be the golden straw that broke the back of the Union?

D. Sectional Balance and the Underground Railroad

1. The South of 1850 was relatively well-off; it then enjoyed more than its share of the nation's leadership and it had seated the war hero Zachary Taylor, from Louisiana
 1. It boasted a majority in the cabinet and on the Supreme Court; if outnumbered in the House, the South had equality in the Senate, where it could at least neutralize
 2. Its cotton fields were expanding and cotton prices were profitably high; few people believed that slavery was seriously threatened where it already existed below the Mason-Dixon line—fifteen slave states could veto any constitutional amendment
2. Yet the South was deeply worried, as it had been for several decades, by ever-tipping political balance; there were then fifteen slave states and fifteen free states; the admission of California would destroy the delicate equilibrium in the Senate, perhaps forever
 1. Potential slave territory under the American flag was running short, if it had not in fact disappeared; agitation had already developed in the territories of New Mexico and Utah for admission as non-slave states—the fate of California might well set a precedent for the rest of the Mexican Cession territory (purchased with Southerners)
 2. Texas claimed a huge area east of the Rio Grande and north to the forty-second parallel, embracing in part about half the territory of present-day New Mexico
 3. The federal government was proposing to detach this prize while Texans were threatening to descend upon Santa Fe and seize what they regarded as rightfully theirs

4. Many southerners were also angered by the nagging agitation in the North for the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia (prospect of free soil in between)
3. Even more disagreeable to the South was the loss of runaway slaves, many of whom were assisted north by the Underground Railroad—virtual freedom train consisted of an informal chain of “stations” through which scores of runaway slaves were spirited by conductors usually white and black abolitionists from the slave states to free-soil Canada
4. The most amazing of these “conductors” was an illiterate runaway slave from Maryland, fearless Harriet Tubman; during nineteen forays into the South, she rescued more than three hundred slaves and deservedly earn the title of “Moses”
5. By 1850 southerners were demanding a new and more stringent fugitive-slave law; the old one passed Congress in 1793 had proved inadequate to cope with runaways, especially since unfriendly state authorities failed to provide needed cooperation
 1. The abolitionists who ran the Underground Railroad did not gain personally from their lawlessness but to the slaveowners the loss was infuriating, whatever the motive
 2. Estimates indicate that the South in 1850 was losing perhaps 1,000 runaways a year out of its some 4 million slaves; in fact, more blacks probably gain their freedom by self-purchase or voluntary emancipation than ever escaped
 3. But the slavemasters rested their argument on the Constitution which protected slavery, and on the laws of Congress, who provided for slave-catching

E. Twilight of the Senatorial Giants

1. Southern fears were such that Congress was confronted with catastrophe in 1850
 1. Free-soil California was banging on the door for admission, and “fire-eaters” in the South were voicing ominous threats of secession; the crisis brought into the congressional forum the most distinguished assembled of statesmen since the Constitutional Convention of 1787—Clay, Calhoun, and Webster (last time together)
 2. Henry Clay played a crucial role; the “Great Pacificator” had come to the Senate from Kentucky to engineer his third great compromise—he was still eloquent and lively
 3. He proposed and defended a series of compromises; he was ably seconded by Senator Stephen Douglas of Illinois (“Little Grant”) whose role was more important
 4. Clay urged with all his persuasiveness that North and South both make concessions and that the North partially tided by enacting a more feasible fugitive-slave law
2. Senator John C. Calhoun, “Great Nullifier” championed South in his last formal speech
 1. Although approving the purpose of Clay’s proposed concessions, Calhoun rejected them as not providing adequate safeguards

2. His impassioned plea was to slave slavery alone, return runaway slaves, give the South its rights as a minority, and restore the political balance; he had an utterly unworkable scheme of electing two presidents, one from the North and the South
3. Calhoun died in 1850, before the debate was over; Calhoun had labored to preserve the Union and had taken his stand on the Constitution
3. Daniel Webster next took the Senate spotlight to uphold Clay's compromise measures in his last great speech; he urged all reasonable concessions to the South, including the FSL
 1. To legislate on the subject was an act of sacrilege for the Almighty God had already passed the Wilmot Proviso; the good Lord had decreed that a plantation economy and hence a slave economy could not profitably exist in the Mexican Cession territory (compromise, concession, and reasonableness were solutions)
 2. Webster's famed Seventh of March speech, 1850, was his finest; it helped turn the tide in the North toward compromise (strengthened Union sentiment)
 3. It was especially pleasing to the banking and commercial centers of the North, which stood to lose millions of dollars by secession; but abolitionists, who had assumed Webster was one of them, upbraided him as a traitor
 4. Webster had long regarded slavery as evil but disunion as worse, had, in fact, always despised the abolitionists and never joined their ranks

F. Deadlock and Danger on Capitol Hill

1. The stormy congressional debate of 1850 was not finished, for the Young Guard from the North were yet to have their say; this was a group of newer leaders who, unlike the aging Old Guard, had not grown up with the Union (interested in purging and purifying)
 1. William H. Seward, freshman senator from New York, was the able spokesman for many of the younger northern radicals; a strong antislaveryite, he came out clearly against concession (he did not realize that compromise brought Union together)
 2. Seward argued that Christian legislators must obey God's moral law as well as man's mundane law; he therefore appealed with reference to excluding slavery in the territories to an even higher law than the Constitution (cost him presidency)
2. As the great debate in congress ran its heated course, deadlock seemed certain; President Taylor who had allegedly fallen under the influence of men like "Higher Law" Seward, seemed bent on vetoing any compromise passed by Congress
 1. His military ire was aroused by the threats of Texas to seize Santa Fe; he appeared to be doggedly determined to "Jacksonize" dissenters, by leading an army against them
 2. If troops had begun to march, the South probably would have rallied to the defense of Texas, and the Civil War might have erupted in 1850, earlier than its actual date

G. Breaking the Congressional Logjam

1. At the height of the controversy in 1850, President Taylor unknowingly helped the cause of concession by dying suddenly, probably of an acute intestinal disorder
 1. Vice President Millard Fillmore, a conciliatory New York lawyer-politician took over
 2. As presiding officer of the Senate, he had been impressed with the arguments for conciliation, and he gladly signed the series of compromise measures that passed Congress after seven long months of stormy debate (balancing of interests)
 3. The struggle to get these measures accepted by the country was hardly less heated than in Congress; in the northern states, “Union savers” like Senators Clay, Webster, and Douglas orated on behalf of the compromise (acceptance crystallized in North)
 4. It was strengthened by a growing spirit of goodwill, which sprang partly from a feeling of relief and partly from an upsurge of prosperity enriched by California gold
2. The “fire-eaters” of the south were still violently opposed to concession; a movement in the South to boycott northern goods gained some headway, but in the end the southern Unionists, assisted by the warm glow of prosperity, prevailed
3. In mid-1850 an assemblage of southern extremists had met in Nashville, Tennessee and not only took a strong position in favor of slavery but condemned the compromise measures then being hammered out in Congress (meeting again after the bills passed, the convention proved to be a dud—southern opinion had accepted the verdict of Congress)
4. Like the calm after a storm, a second Era of Good Feelings dawned; disquieting talk of secession subsided and peace-loving people were determined that the compromises should be a “finality” and that the explosive issue of slavery should be buried

H. Balancing the Compromise Scales

1. The North clearly got the better deal in the Compromise of 1850
 1. California, as a free state, tipped the Senate balance permanently against the South
 2. The territories of New Mexico and Utah were open to slavery on the basis of popular sovereignty; but the iron law of nature had loaded the dice in favor of free soil
 3. The southerners urgently needed more slave territory to restore the “sacred balance” and if they could not carve new states out of the recent conquest from Mexico, where else might they get them? In the Caribbean was one answer
2. Even the apparent gains of the South rang hollow; disgruntled Texas was to be paid \$10 million toward discharging its indebtedness, but in the long run this was a modest sum
3. The immense area in dispute had been torn from the side of slaveholding Texas and was almost certain to be free—the South had halted the drive towards abolition in the District of Columbia, by permitting the outlawing of the slave trade in the federal district

4. Most alarming of all, the drastic new Fugitive Slave Law of 1850—"the Bloodhound Bill"—stirred up a storm of opposition in the North; the fleeing slaves could not testify in their own behalf and they were denied a jury trial; these harsh practices, some citizens feared, threatened to create dangerous precedents for white Americans
 1. The federal commissioner who handled the case of a fugitive would receive five dollars if the runaway were freed and ten dollars if not—resembling a bribe
 2. Freedom-loving northerners who aided the slave to escape were liable to heavy fines and jail sentences; they might even be ordered to join the slave-catchers
5. So savage was this "Man-Stealing Law" that it touched off an explosive chain reaction in the North; many shocked moderates were driven into swelling ranks of the antislaveryites
6. The Underground Railroad stepped up its timetable and infuriated northern mobs rescued slaves from their pursuers; Massachusetts, in a move toward nullification made it a penal offense for any state official to enforce the new federal statute
7. Other states passed "personal liberty laws," which denied local jails to federal officials and otherwise hampered enforcement; the abolitionists protested against the statute
8. The Fugitive Slave law was an appalling blunder on the part of the South
 1. No single irritant of the 1850s was more persistently galling to both sides, and none did more to awaken in the North a spirit of antagonism against the South
 2. The southerners in turn were embittered because the northerners would not in good faith execute the law—the one real and immediate southern "gain" from the Great Compromise; slave-catchers redoubled their efforts, with some success
 3. Should the shooting showdown have come in 1850—from the standpoint of the secessionists, ye; from the standpoint of the Unionists, no (time fighting for North)
 4. With every passing decade, this huge section was forging further ahead in population and wealth—in crops, factories, foundries, ships, and railroads
9. Delay also added immensely to the moral strength of the North—to its will to fight for the Union; in 1850 thousands of northern moderates were unwilling to pin the South; the inflammatory events of the 1850s did much to bolster the Yankee will to resist secession
10. This one feverish decade gave the North time to accumulate the material and moral strength that provided the margin of victory—Compromise of 1850 helped the Union win

I. Defeat and Doom for the Whigs

1. Meeting in Baltimore, the Democratic nominating convention of 1852 startled the nation; hopelessly deadlocked, it finally stampeded to the second "dark horse" candidate in American history, an unrenowned lawyer-politician, Franklin Pierce (from NH)

1. Pierce was a weak and indecisive figure; he served without real distinction in the Mexican War; he was known as the “Fainting General” (fondness of alcohol)
2. He was enemyless because he had been inconspicuous and as a prosouthern northerner, he was acceptable to the slavery wing of the Democratic party
3. His platform came out emphatically for the finality of the Compromise of 1850
2. The Whigs, also convening in Baltimore, missed a splendid opportunity to capitalize on their record in statecraft; able to boast of a praiseworthy achievement in the Compromise of 1850, they might have logically nominated President Fillmore or Senator Webster
3. But having won in the past only with military heroes, they turned to another, “Old Fuss and Feathers” Winfield Scott, perhaps the ablest American general of his generation
 1. Although he was a huge and impressive figure, his manner bordered on haughtiness
 2. His personality not only repelled the masses but eclipsed his genuinely statesmanlike achievements; the Whig platform praised the Compromise of 1850 as a lasting arrangement, though less enthusiastically than the Democrats
4. With slavery and sectionalism to some extent soft-pedaled, the campaign again degenerate into a dull and childish attack on personalities—Democrats ridiculed Scott’s pomposity and Whigs charged that Pierce was the hero of “many a well-fought bottle”
5. Luckily for Democrats, the Whig party was split; antislavery Northern Whigs swallowed Scott as their nominee but deplored his platform, which endorsed the hate Fugitive Slave Law; Southern Whigs, who doubted Scott’s loyalty to the Compromise of 1850 and especially the Fugitive Slave Law, accepted the platform but spat on the candidate
6. General Scott, victorious on the battlefield, met defeat at the ballot box; he was stabbed in the back by his fellow Whigs, notably in the South (Pierce won in a landslide)
7. The election of 1852 was fraught with frightening significance, though it may have seemed tame at the time; it marked the effective end of the disorganized Whig party
 1. The Whigs’ demise augured the eclipse of national parties and the worrisome rise of purely sectional political alignments; the Whigs were governed at times by the crassest opportunism, and they won only two presidential elections (both war heroes)
 2. They finally choked to death trying to swallow the distasteful Fugitive Slave Law
 3. Their great contribution was to help uphold the ideal of the Union through their electoral strength in the South and through the eloquence of leaders like Henry Clay and Daniel Webster—both contributed powerfully to preservation of a United States

J. President Pierce the Expansionist

1. At the outset the Pierce administration displayed vigor; his cabinet contained aggressive southerners, including as secretary of war one Jefferson Davis, future president of the Confederacy—people of Dixie were determined to acquire more slave territory
2. The intoxicating victories of the Mexican War stimulated the spirit of Manifest Destiny
 1. The conquest of a Pacific frontage, and discovery of gold on it, aroused lively interest in the transisthmian land routes of Central America, chiefly in Panama and Nicaragua
 2. Many Americans were looking even further ahead to potential canal routes and to the islands flanking them, notably Spain's Cuba (visions fired ambitions)
 3. They lusted for new territory after the Compromise of 1850 seemingly closed most of the lands of the Mexican Cession to the "peculiar institution"
3. Southerners took a special interest in Nicaragua; a brazen American adventurer, William Walker, tried repeatedly to grab control of this Central American country in the 1850s
 1. Backed by an armed force recruited largely in the South, he installed himself as president in July 1856 and promptly legalized slavery (offering Nicaragua)
 2. But a coalition of Central American nations formed an alliance to overthrow him; President Pierce withdrew diplomatic recognition and he died in 1860
4. Nicaragua was also of vital concern to Great Britain, the world's leading maritime and commercial power; fearing that the grasping Yankees would monopolize the trade arteries there, the British made haste to secure a solid foothold at Greytown (in Nicaragua)
5. This challenge to the Monroe Doctrine raised the ugly possibility of an armed clash
6. The crisis was surmounted in 1850 by the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty, which stipulated that neither America nor Britain would fortify or secure exclusive control over any future isthmian waterway—the agreement seemed necessary to halt the British
7. America had become a Pacific power with the acquisition of California and Oregon, both of which faced Asia—the prospects of a rich trade with the Far East now seemed possible
 1. Americans had already established contacts with China and shippers were urging Washington to push for commercial intercourse with Japan
 2. The mikado's empire had withdrawn into isolationism and had remained there for over two hundred years; the Japanese were so protective that they prohibited shipwrecked foreign sailors from leaving and refused to readmit Japan their own sailors who had been washed up on the West Coast of North America
 3. But by 1853, as events proved, Japan was ready to emerge from reclusion (Russia)
8. The Washington government dispatched a fleet of awesome, smoke-belching warships, commanded by Commodore Matthew C. Perry, brother of the hero of Battle of Lake Erie

9. By judicious display of force and tact, he persuaded the Japanese in 1854 to sign a memorable treaty; it provided for only a commercial foot in the door
10. But it was the beginning of an epochal relationship between the Land of the Rising Sun and the Western world; this achievement attracted little notice at the time (no slogan)

K. Coveted Cuba: Pearl of the Antilles

1. Sugar-rich Cuba, lying off the nation's southern doorstep was the prime objective of Manifest Destiny in the 1850s; supporting a large population of enslaved blacks, it was coveted by the South as the most desirable slave territory available (restore balance?)
2. Cuba was a kind of heirloom—the most important remnant of Spain's once-mighty New World empire; Polk, the expansionist, had taken steps to offer \$100 million for it, but the sensitive Spaniards had replied that they wouldn't sell it to the Americans at any price
 1. With purchase completely out of the question, seizure was apparently the only way to pluck the ripening fruit; private adventurers from the South now undertook to shake the tree of Manifest Destiny—1850-1851, two "filibustering" expeditions set out
 2. Each numbering several hundred armed men, they descended upon Cuba
 3. Both feeble efforts were repelled and latter ended in tragedy when the leader and fifty followers were summarily shot or strangled (many from best families of South)
 4. An angry mob of southerners sacked Spain's consulate in New Orleans
3. Spanish officials in Cuba rashly forced a showdown in 1854 when they seized an American steamer, *Black Warrior*, on a technicality; now was the time for President Pierce, dominated as he was by the South, to provoke a war with Spain and seize Cuba
4. The major powers of Europe (England, France, and Russia) were about to become bogged down in the Crimean War and hence were unable to aid Spain
5. A cloak-and-dagger episode followed; the secretary of state instructed the American ministers in Spain, England and France to prepare confidential recommendations for the acquisition of Cuba; meet at Ostend, Belgium, the three envoys drew up a top-secret dispatch, soon known as Ostend Manifesto (urged administration to offer \$120 million)
 1. If Spain refused, and if its continued ownership endangered American interests, the United States would "be justified in wresting" the island from the Spanish
 2. The secret Ostend Manifesto quickly leaked out and northern free-soilers, already angered by Fugitive Slave Law, rose in an outburst against the manifesto of brigands"
 3. Confronted with disruption, the Pierce administration was forced to drop its schemes
6. Clearly the slavery issue deadlocked territorial expansion in the 1850s; the North was developing a renewed appetite for Canada and the South coveted Cuba (Crimean War)

7. Neither section would permit the other to get the apple of its eye, so neither got either

L. Pacific Railroad Promoters and the Gadsden Purchase

1. Acute transportation problems were another legacy of the Mexican War; the newly acquired prizes of California and Oregon might just as well been remote islands
 1. The sea routes to and from the Isthmus of Panama were too long; covered wagon travel past bleaching animal bones was possible but slow and dangerous
 2. Feasible land transportation was imperative for the newly won possessions on the Pacific Coast might break away; camels were even proposed as the answer—they were imported from the Near East but Americans could not adjust to them
 3. A transcontinental railroad was clearly the only real solution to the problem
2. Railroad promoters, both North and South, had projected many drawing-board routes to the Pacific Coast but the estimated cost in all cases was so great that for many years there could obviously be only one line—should its terminus be in the North or the South?
3. The favored section would reap rich rewards in wealth, population, and influence; the South, losing the economic race to the North, was eager to extend a railroad through adjacent southwestern territory all the way to California
4. Another chunk of Mexico now seemed desirable, because the campaigns of the recent war had shown that the best railway route ran slightly south of the Mexican border
 1. Secretary of War Jefferson Davis, a Mississippian, arranged to have James Gadsden, a prominent South Carolina railroad man, appointed minister to Mexico
 2. Finding Santa Anna in power for the sixth and last time, and as usually in need of money, Gadsden made gratifying headway—he negotiated a treaty in 1853
 3. The Gadsden Purchase area was ceded to the US in 1853 for \$10 million
 4. The transaction aroused much criticism among northerners, who objected to paying a huge sum for a cactus-strewn desert nearly the size of Gadsden's South Carolina
5. The coveted railroad enabled the South to claim the coveted railroad with even great insistence; a southern track would be easier to build because the mountains were less high and because the route would not pass through unorganized territory (Texas and NM)
6. Any northern or central railroad would have to be thrust through the unorganized territory of Nebraska, where the buffalo and Indians roamed; northern railroad boosters quickly replied that if organized territory were the test, then Nebraska should be organized
7. Such a move was not premature, because thousands of land-hungry pioneers were already poised on the Nebraska border; but all schemes proposed in Congress for organizing the territory were greeted with apathy or hostility by many southerners

M. Douglas's Kansas-Nebraska Scheme

1. In 1854, Senator Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois delivered a counterstroke to offset the Gadsden thrust for southern expansion westward in the United States
 1. Little Giant” radiated the energy and breezy optimism of the self-made man; an ardent booster for the West, he longed to break the North-South deadlock over westward expansion and stretch a line of settlements across the continent
 2. A “steam engine in breeches,” Douglas threw himself behind a legislative scheme that would enlist the support of a reluctant South; the proposed Territory of Nebraska would be sliced into two territories, Kansas and Nebraska
 3. Their status regarding slavery would be settled by popular sovereignty—a democratic concept to which Douglas and his western constituents were deeply attached
 4. Kansas, west of slaveholding Missouri, would presumably choose to become a slave state but Nebraska, west of free-soil Iowa, would presumably become a free state
2. Douglas's Kansas-Nebraska scheme ran into a formidable political obstacle; the Missouri Compromise of 1820 had forbidden slavery in proposed Nebraska Territory, which lay north of the sacred 36 30' line and the only way to open the region would be to repeal it
3. This bold step Douglas was prepared to take, even at the risk of shattering the uneasy truce patched together by the Compromise of 1850
 1. Many southerners, who had not conceived of Kansas as slave soil, rose to the bait; here was the chance to gain one more slave state—President Pierce supported it
 2. But the Missouri Compromise, could not be brushed aside lightly; whatever Congress passes it can repeal, but by this time the North had come to regard the sectional pact as almost as sacred as the Constitution itself (Free-soilers members struck back)
 3. Free-soilers met their match in Douglas, who was the ablest rough-and-tumble debater of his generation; he rammed the bill through Congress, with strong support from many southerners—political passions were so heated that there was bloodshed
4. Douglas's motive in prodding anew the snarling dog of slavery have puzzled historians
 1. His foes accused him of angling for presidency in 1856; yet his admirers have argued plausibly in his defense that if he had not championed the bill, someone would have
 2. Douglas acted somewhat impulsively and recklessly; he declared repeatedly that he did not care whether it was voted up or down in the territories; what he failed to perceive was that hundreds of thousands of his fellow citizens in the North did feel deeply on this moral issue (repeal of Missouri Compromise a breach of faith)
5. Genuine leaders must foresee the possible effects of their moves; Douglas predicted a “hell of a storm,” but he grossly underestimated its proportions; though he had critics in

the North, he still enjoyed a high degree of popularity among his following in the Democratic party, especially in Illinois, a strong hold of popular sovereignty

N. Congress Legislates a Civil War

1. The Kansas-Nebraska Act was one of the most momentous measures ever to pass Congress; by one way of reckoning, it greased the slippery slope to Civil War
2. Antislavery northerners were angered by what they condemned as an act of bad faith; all future compromise with the South would be immeasurably more difficult (conflict)
3. The Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, preciously enforced in the North only halfheartedly was a dead letter; Kansas-Nebraska Act wrecked two compromises: that of 1820, which it repealed specifically and that of 1850, which northern opinion repealed indirectly
4. The growing legion of antislaveryites gained numerous recruits, who resented the grasping move by the "slavocracy" for Kansas (free-soilers tried to control Kansas)
5. The proud Democrats were shattered by the Kansas-Nebraska Act; they did elect a president in 1856 but he was the last they were to boost into the White House for 28 years
6. The most durable offspring of the Kansas-Nebraska blunder was the new Republican party; it sprang up spontaneously in the Middle West, notably in Wisconsin and Michigan, as a mighty moral protest against the gains of slavery (included Whigs)
 1. It soon included disgruntled Whigs, Democrats, Free-Soilers, Know-Nothings, and other foes of the Kansas-Nebraska Act; the hodgepodge party spread eastward with the swiftness of a prairie fire and with the zeal of a religious crusade
 2. At the beginning of 1854, it elected a Republican Speak of the House of Representatives within two years; never really a third-party movement, it erupted with such force as to become overnight the second major political party (sectional)
 3. The new Republican p[arty would not be allowed south of the Mason-Dixon line