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### Why were the decisions made in the 1850s pushing us towards the Civil War?

The Kansas-Nebraska Act was passed by Congress in 1854. This act left the issue of slavery up to popular sovereignty in the territories - passing the torch of decision making to the voters - and repealed the Compromise of 1820, and thus the 36-30 line became obsolete. This means that the way of deciding the issue that had been used for 34 years was gone, which lead to both Northerners and Southerners flooding into the territories in order to sway the regions into their favor. This highlights how some may have been so firm in their beliefs that they were willing to pack up their life and move just so that they could have a potential state in their political favor. The Kansas-Nebraska Act, along with movement west, would lead to physical violence. One case was the caning of Charles Sumner. In 1857, Representative Charles Sumner made a speech in which he poked fun at those who support slavery. This speech led to him being attacked with a walking cane while in the literal House of Representatives. This illuminates that tensions between Northerners and Southerners were so high at this point that the politicians could be compelled to acts of physical violence. And because some American citizens look to Congress for guidance, they may have been under the impression that slavery was worth fighting over, which may have further led to tension and violence among the public. Speaking of, there have actually been a few small conflicts. The two major ones are Bleeding Kansas and Harper's Ferry. In Bleeding Kansas (1856-58), pro-slavery citizens took to sacking anti-slavery towns, resulting in the deaths of 175 people. In Harper's Ferry (1859), John Brown attempted to raid a store of government arms, with the idea that he would hand to guns to slaves for them to rebel against their masters. The fighting resulted in 16 dead. This demonstrates that in America, people were already fighting over the issue of slavery, as these events feature a battle of sorts initiated by both sides. One could even say that John Brown was trying to start a civil war of his own, so the real war could not have been far off. It wasn't.

Something else to touch on the political atmosphere of America at the time. In 1854, the Whig party was divided over slavery and ended up imploding on itself. From the ashes of the Whigs, the Republican party came to be. The Republicans were mostly anti-slavery, and primarily opposed the Democratic party. This showcases the intense divide not only between North and South, but also between Democrat and Republican. This likely only led to further political tension, especially given the presence of politicians referred to as "dough-faced," which means that they are Northerners that act like Southerners with weak ideas. One such politician was Stephen Douglas, who was a key factor in the destruction of Whigs. This goes to show that politicians often had alliances to their home regions, as those who did not quite literally caused parties to fall apart. In addition, the Supreme Court case involving Dred Scott was decided in 1857, with a 7-2 decision saying that he was not and could never be a free man, going so far as to state that no African American could ever be a citizen. At the time, however, there were over 400,000 free African Americans living in the United States. A few years prior, from 1852-53, the

novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe is published and sells millions of copies. This spark of a book opened the people's eyes to the horrors of slavery, turning the 10% of abolitionists in the North into a higher number. This combination of events likely caused public unrest, especially in the North. In addition, the current president was James Buchanan, a pro-slavery Democrat, who may have been able to stack the Court so that Scott could not win. This causes political imbalance and discourse amongst the general public.