

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

The decisions such as the publishing of Uncle Tom's Cabin, the Kansas-Nebraska Act, and speeches and movements from abolitionists in the 1850s were the most significant factors in driving the country to Civil War.

To begin with, Harriet Beecher Stowe's publication of her anti-slavery novel Uncle Tom's Cabin pushed the nation apart. The book sold 300,000 copies in the first year of its release in the United States, however, it sold 1.5 million copies in Great Britain in that same time period. When Stowe visited Great Britain in 1853, she was presented with a petition signed by 563,000 British women urging the States to abolish slavery. From these facts, it can be inferred that Britain's support was divided in the States, supporting the North's anti-slavery beliefs and having less sympathy for the South's pro-slavery ideals. On a national scale, the reviews of the book were not all positive, and not all similar. While moderates and Northerners praised the novel, some abolitionists argued that the 'harsh realities' presented in the book should have been more forceful. The South, on the other hand, believed that this view of slavery was one-sided and unrealistic, and in response to the book's publication, released at least 29 'Anti-Tom' (pro-slavery) novels and promptly banned Uncle Tom's Cabin in their states. The division of ideals concerning Stowe's work and of slavery in general presents that the gap between the North and South was progressively widened, and tensions may increase as a result. The North's reaction to the book was immensely positive, and just as the South published books in retaliation, many Northerners were inspired to write using Stowe's style. Many more anti-slavery books were published after 1852, but none were nearly as successful as Uncle Tom's Cabin. The North was also more forthcoming with their beliefs after the book became widespread, as in 1854, two years after its publication, 50,000 Northerners gathered in Boston to stop slavecatchers from attempting to capture the enslaved man Anthony Burns. These facts help to demonstrate how Northern abolitionism was strengthened by the publication of this book. All in all, the popularity of the novel and its demonstration of passionate anti-slavery ideals caused the United States to become further separated from itself. The North and South had very different reactions to the book, which emphasized their inability to tolerate the other's perspective concerning slavery. This disagreement was a successful precursor to the aggravation that triggered the Civil War.

Furthermore, the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 was the first major instance of violence over slavery between the North and South, pushing the country closer than ever to war. The act was introduced by Stephen Douglas, an Illinois Democrat, while the dough-faced Democrat

Franklin Pierce was in office. Because the author of the law was a Democrat, Pierce instructed all Democrats to vote in favor of the bill, while the Whigs, in contrast, could not decide which way to vote. They ended up voting sectionally. These facts show that the bill was passed, considering $\frac{3}{4}$ of the country must have voted for it, and the division of the Whigs effectively destroyed that political party. The act was written in order to organize the territories of Kansas and Nebraska as well as introduce transcontinental railroads, but it subsequently repealed the Missouri Compromise and parts of the Compromise of 1850. The states, which were above the Missouri Compromise line, would determine whether they were free or slave states via popular sovereignty. It can be assumed that because of these reasons, both Northerners and Southerners were influenced to go West in an attempt to sway the vote so they could add more states that supported their views to the country. Towns in these territories were then separated by views on slavery and would go back and forth attacking one another. This was eventually called "Bleeding Kansas." There were less than 200 deaths from these fights, but a lot of property damage. These facts are significant because while the attacks in Kansas were not extremely deadly, they proved we would pick up arms and fight each other over slavery. The Kansas-Nebraska Act aided in dividing the North and South because it fueled their disagreements by breaking the Compromises. The resulting fights between the North and South were a product of controversial lawmaking and an already extremely tense and divided country. Our will to fight one another was the most clear initial sign of Civil War.

Finally, abolitionists were a large part of what motivated us to fight each other. The voices of abolitionists ranged from enslaved people to Congressmen. Daniel Webster was a very passionate abolitionist and Senator from Massachusetts. On March 7th, 1850, he gave a surprisingly neutral speech to the Senate that urged for the Compromise of 1850 to be passed. This speech was in response to John C. Calhoun's pro-Southern, anti-compromise speech three days prior. The fact that such a strong political figure who dedicated his life to his anti-slavery ideals would present an almost unbiased speech wishing for compromise goes to show how unsteady the country already was, and compromise was necessary to preserve the union and keep peace between the North and South. Another abolitionist Senator, Charles Sumner, presented a speech in 1856 entitled "The Crime Against Kansas," discussing Bleeding Kansas. Unlike Webster's speech, Sumner was very bold, and directly attacked the authors of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, Stephen Douglas and Andrew Butler. A few days after he presented the speech, Preston Brooks, a House Representative and cousin to Butler, beat Sumner over the head with a cane on the Senate floor because of what he said. This display of violence in Congress further proves that violence between the North and South was becoming inevitable, and the Civil War was just beyond the horizon, as tensions between the states were greater than ever and nearly unable to be resolved. Lastly, abolitionist Frederick Douglass was a prominent figure in the years just before the start of the Civil War. He was a formerly enslaved man who became an author, public speaker, and advocate of the abolitionist movement. In 1858, he and John Brown planned to raid a US military arsenal in order to gather the support of more enslaved people in Maryland and Virginia, which resulted in the hanging of Brown. This aggression from both free people and slaves represents how, close to the Civil War, people in the United States were becoming divided solely by slaves and Northern abolitionists versus slave holders and pro-slavery advocates. The progression of violence and hatred leading up to the Civil War and the work of abolitionists shows how tight tensions were, and how it was widely felt that speaking out and physically acting against issues on the opposite

side of the debate was increasingly necessary. What came from the speeches and attacks led by abolitionists was a huge cause for violence for the years prior to and the start of the Civil War.

In conclusion, the decisions made by both Congress and the people in the decade before the Civil War had large influence on the eventual separation of the North and South. The division of ideals and inability to come to an agreement brought about fighting between states. War was virtually inevitable by the 1850s, as each new declaration was a new aggression to either – or potentially both – sides of the debate.