

Section B: American Option

The Origins of the Civil War, 1846–1861

The Compromise of 1850

- 2 Read the sources and then answer **both** parts of the question.

Source A

The agitation on the subject of slavery now raging throughout the land presents a most extraordinary spectacle. Congress, after a protracted session of nearly ten months, succeeded in passing a system of measures which are believed to be just to all parts of the republic and ought to be satisfactory to the people. The South has not triumphed over the North nor has the North achieved a victory over the South. Neither party has made humiliating concessions to the other.

And yet we find that the agitation has reopened in the two extremes of the Union with renewed vigour and increased violence. In the South, the measures of adjustment are denounced as a disgraceful surrender of Southern rights to Northern abolitionists. In the North, the same measures are denounced with equal violence as a total abandonment of the rights of freemen in order to conciliate slave power.

From a speech by Stephen Douglas, 23 October 1850.

Source B

When the so-called compromise measures passed both houses of Congress and received the approval of the President, there was some prospect of domestic tranquillity. These measures were, unquestionably, of Southern origin and so framed as to promote and encourage Southern interests. The South gained all its points in the game of legislation and left the North, if not a victim to superior tact and finesse, at least a dupe to systematised threat and bombast.

It was reasonable to expect that the South would be satisfied with the concessions and advantages of the compromise measures. The result is far different; they quarrel with their own men and their own propositions. They imagine a danger and they proceed to act with emergency. They will admit no discussion – they will concede nothing – but swagger on as they have done since the formation of our union. They have their way and are not content! If the similar fanaticism were encouraged in this section by argument and plaudit, we would never hear the end of Southern declamation and wordy resistance.

From the 'Lewisburg Chronicle', Lewisburg, Pennsylvania, 30 October 1850.

Source C

By the Compromise of 1850, the South, in some particulars, sacrificed its essential interests. It gave away the magnificent empire of California. It recognised the principle of Squatter Sovereignty. Above all, it consented to the abolition of the slave trade in the District of Columbia. What indemnity did the South receive for these important concessions? The Fugitive Slave Law and nothing more. The act was drawn with care and ability and is wanting in no provision essential to its satisfactory operation. In view of the adversary's strength, it was something to gain even so inadequate a compensation for all our sacrifices. Considering the extremity of our distress, the enactment of the Fugitive Slave Law was in some sort a triumph for the South.

From the 'Charleston Mercury', 25 May 1857.

Source D

Out of Congress the abolitionists were aroused almost to a pitch of frenzy by the passage of the Compromise measures and the Fugitive Slave Law. Addresses were immediately issued by thousands, which freely circulated in all Northern States, counselling resistance to the law under every circumstance. Conventions were held of whites and negroes, in which death was proclaimed to every slaveholder who attempted to carry out the infamous enactment. The tide of runaway slaves from the South, which had been flowing for so many years, swelled into a flood. Where one slave formerly made a successful escape, scores made good their flight now. New England became the goal of the fugitives and here they found friends without number, who furnished them with the means for extending their journey to the Canadian provinces.

From Felix de Fontaine, 'History of American Abolitionism', 1861.

Answer **both** parts of the question with reference to the sources.

- (a) To what extent do Sources B and C agree about the role of the South in the making of the 1850 Compromise? [15]
- (b) How far do these sources support the assertion that the 1850 Compromise was favourable to the North? [25]