

Chapter 18: Renewing the Sectional Struggle (1848—1854)

The Popular Sovereignty Panacea

- political parties were a vital bond for the Union
 - each party had support from both the North and the South
 - politicians did not want to split into sectional groupings and wanted to ignore the slavery debate
 - could uncover at any time due to northern abolitionists and southern "fire-eaters"
- Polk chose to only go for one term, so Democrats had to find a new politician to rally behind
 - turned to General Lewis Cass, veteran of the War of 1812
 - Cass was the father of **popular sovereignty**
 - the people of that state should determine status of slavery, not the law or some line on the ground
 - politicians liked it because it was a compromise
 - but it could spread slavery

Political Triumphs for General Taylor

- the Whigs nominated General Zachary Taylor, "Hero of Buena Vista"
 - had never run for office or even voted
 - Clay should have won, but he made too many enemies and people didn't like him enough anymore
- the Whigs "pussyfooted" in their platform
- Taylor owned slaves and was a sugar plantation owner in Louisiana
- antislavery men in the North who didn't like Cass or Taylor decided to form the **Free Soil party**
 - openly talked about being against slavery and came out for Wilmot Proviso
 - wanted federal aid, internal improvements
 - attracted people who didn't really like Polk, northerners who didn't like black people and didn't want to share new land, Whigs who were influenced by the abolitionist movement
 - "Free soil, free speech, free labor, and free men"
 - condemned slavery not because they thought it was wrong, but because they thought it destroyed chances for free white workers to be self-employed
 - costly labor would be forced to compete with slave labor
 - foreshadowed Republican party which would come later
- with slavery shoved under the rug, politicians opened fire on insulting each other's personalities
- Taylor won with his wartime popularity, 163:127 ECV

- Van Buren from the Free-Soil party still polled about 300,000 ballots and diverted enough attention from Cass in New York to give the election to Taylor

"Californy Gold"

- Taylor became president and did not fit in
- gold was suddenly discovered on the American River near Sutter's Mill, California in early 1848
 - adventurers poured into California looking for gold
 - a few "struck it rich" but many found barely enough gold to sell and would have been better off staying at home instead of travelling with the "gold fever"
- most profits were made by those who charged miners outrageous amounts to do laundry and other personal stuff
 - some clothing even sent to the Hawaiian Islands to be washed
- the **California gold rush** attracted thousands of people to California
 - lawless men, virtueless women
 - outburst of crime; robbery, claim jumping, murder only discouraged by rough vigilante justice
- President Taylor privately encouraged Californians to draft their own constitution which excluded slavery
 - went to apply to Congress

Sectional Balance and the Underground Railroad

- the South had control of the President, majority in the cabinet and on the Supreme Court, outnumbered in the House but at least equal in the Senate
 - fifteen slave states could easily veto legislation or block Northern attempts
- 15 slave and 15 free states, but California would disrupt that
 - slave territory was running short
 - people were already angry that New Mexico and Utah were free states even though the South had fought for that land more than the North did
- Texas had claimed a big part of east of the Rio Grande which was about half of New Mexico
 - government wanted to detach that part while Texans were threatening to storm Santa Fe
- Southerners agitated at the idea of freeing the District of Columbia between Maryland and Virginia
 - upset that many slaves were lost to the **Underground Railroad**
 - stations passing through anti-slavery homes that ferried runaway slaves to the North and Canada
 - Harriet Tubman was a runaway slave from Maryland that went back to the South 19 more times and rescued over 300 slaves
 - demanded a stricter slave code by 1850s
 - the South was losing about 1000 slaves per year out of a total of 4 million slaves

- more blacks purchased their freedom than ever escaped, but the mental weight of having slaves escape was taking a toll on their masters
- *"Although the loss of property is felt, the loss of honor is felt still more."*

Twilight of the Senatorial Giants

- California wanted to be admitted
 - southerners threatening to secede, arranging a meeting in Tennessee to discuss withdrawing from the Union following 1849
- Clay, Calhoun, and Webster appeared together for the last time to urge the North and South to make amends and for the North to have a better fugitive-slave law
 - Calhoun had an idea for the North and South to both elect one President and work together
 - Webster's **Seventh of March speech** of 1850 helped the North compromise with the South
 - abolitionists who supported Webster labelled him as a traitor
 - Webster didn't like slavery, but thought disunion was worse

Deadlock and Danger on Capitol Hill

- Young Guard of the North were not interested in patching up the Union and wanted to get rid of slavery
 - William H. Seward was the spokesman and did not want to compromise
 - argued that Christians must follow God's moral law and that slavery was following an even "higher law" than the Constitution which made people not like Seward
- President Taylor was ready to send troops to Texas if the North started marching there

Breaking the Congressional Logjam

- President Taylor died suddenly in 1850
 - Vice President Millard Fillmore stepped up and signed the **Compromise of 1850** which conceded some stuff to both the North and South
 - North got California as a free state, Texas territory to be New Mexico, and abolition of slave trade in District of Columbia
 - South got New Mexico and Utah to be open to popular sovereignty, Texas to receive \$10 million for compensation for loss territory, and more stringent fugitive-slave law
- the North gradually accepted the compromise but the South hated it
 - converged multiple times to condemn the North and the compromise, but by then the rest of the South had gradually accepted it
 - second Era of Good Feelings dawned as both sides settled in peace and accepted the verdict on slavery

Balancing the Compromise States

- North won out in the compromise
 - California as a free state permanently tipped the scales against the South
 - New Mexico and Utah were popular sovereignty, but chose to be free
 - \$10 million to Texas wasn't even that much
 - **Fugitive Slave Law** or "the Bloodhound Bill" brought up a torrent of opposition in the North
 - slaves couldn't testify and were denied trial, created dangerous precedents for white Americans
 - federal commissioner would receive \$5 if the slave were freed and \$10 if the slave was returned, which was a bribe
 - abolitionists could be forced to be slave-catchers if they were found out to be aiding runaways
- the new slave code was so bad that even moderates who didn't care very much started to be strictly against it
 - Underground Railroad stepped up and rescued slaves from their pursuers
 - Massachusetts made it a penal offense to enforce the slave thing
- Southerners were really salty that the North would not follow the slave code
- the North was forging ahead in population and wealth
 - in 1850 northern moderates were unwilling to start a war against the South

Defeat and Doom for the Whigs

- Democrats elected Franklin Pierce in 1852
 - revived territory expansionist in Polk and accepted the entirety of the Compromise of 1850
- Whigs could have nominated Fillmore or Webster, but they went for Winfield Scott instead
 - his personality was repelling to the people
- campaign was just an attack on each other's personalities
- Whig party was too split
 - Pierce won 254:42 ECV
 - within a few years the Whig party would no longer exist
 - both Webster and Clay, members of the Whig party, died during the 1852 campaign

Expansionist Stirrings South of the Border

- Mexican War victory combined with gold discovered in California reignited the Manifest Destiny spirit
- British were starting to enter Central America and seizing the port of San Juan del Norte
 - America and Colombia negotiated to maintain neutrality if America got to have free access to the waterway

- **Clayton-Bulwer Treaty** determined no fighting between America and Britain over any isthmian waterway
- Southern "slavocrats" wanted more slave territory
 - American adventurer William Walker tried to take control of Nicaragua repeatedly
 - installed himself as President of Nicaragua in 1856 and tried to legalize slavery
 - Central American alliances formed and overthrew him and he died to a Honduran firing squad
- tried to take Cuba by sending a few hundred armed men and were defeated both times
 - angry Southern mob sacked Spain's consulate in New Orleans
 - Spanish officials seized American steamer *Black Warrior* in 1854 and President Pierce was about to start a war
 - American ministers in Spain, France, and England prepared for the acquisition of Cuba meeting in Ostend, Belgium eventually known as the **Ostend Manifesto**
 - offered \$120 million for Cuba, which if Spain refused, America would throw hands
 - Northerners said no, they hated it
 - Pierce administration dropped its scheme

The Allure of Asia

- California and Oregon territory made the US a Pacific power and they wanted to get close with Asia for trade
 - Britain just humbled Asia in the **Opium War** and gained access to five ports forcibly, as well as Hong Kong
 - President Tyler dispatched Caleb Cushing to negotiate with China
 - Chinese diplomats signed **Treaty of Wanghia** allowing US to trade like every other country
 - many flooded into treaty ports to convert the Chinese
- success in China prompted an attempt towards Japan
 - Japan said no and went into isolationism for two centuries
- 1852 President Fillmore sent warships to Japan commanded by Commodore Matthew C. Perry
 - requested free trade and friendly relations, promising to return the following year for the Japanese reply
 - returned February 1854 with more gifts and soldiers
 - Japan signed the **Treaty of Kanagawa** which provided proper treatment of shipwrecked sailors, American coaling rights in Japan, and consular relations

Pacific Railroad Promoters and the Gadsen Purchase

- transportation problems remained a legacy of the Mexican War
 - there was no way to get the Oregon or California
 - camels were proposed but they did not work

- North and South wanted to build a railroad, but debated where the railroad would be
- Secretary of War Jefferson Davis sent James Gadsden to negotiate for more land and bought the **Gadsden Purchase** for \$10 million
 - allowed the South to claim the railroad through already claimed territory
 - Northerners wanted to organize Nebraska in response but southerners in Congress didn't like that idea

Douglas's Kansas-Nebraska Scheme

- Illinois senator Stephen A. Douglas went forth with a plan to organize Nebraska
 - split into two sections, Kansas and Nebraska both to be settled by popular sovereignty
 - completely contradicted Missouri Compromise of 1820 which said there was no slavery above 30 degree 30' line
 - President Pierce threw himself behind the bill as did many southerners unaware of the Missouri Compromise
 - northerners didn't want to pass it but Douglas debated his way through Congress with the support of many southerners
- Douglas acted impulsively and recklessly
 - many northerners hated him but he gained popularity in the South and in the Democratic party for his allegiance to popular sovereignty

Congress Legislates a Civil War

- the **Kansas-Nebraska Act** propelled the Union towards Civil War
 - resulted in the Republican party notably in Wisconsin and Michigan as protests against slavery
 - included Whigs, Democrats, Free Soilers, Know-Nothings, and other enemies of Kansas-Nebraska
- purely sectional political party
 - Republican party would not be allowed south of the Mason-Dixon line