



# U. S. History: From the Colonial Period to 1877

Dr. Edrene S. McKay ■ (479) 855-6836 ■ Email: esmnet@cox-internet.com

## 15.1 THE COMPROMISE OF 1850

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <p><b>SLAVERY EXPANSION</b><br/><b>Divided Parties</b></p>   | <p>When it became clear that war with Mexico would result in new U.S. territories, politicians suggested a variety of plans for resolving the issue of whether those states would be slave or free. This TERRITORIAL ISSUE seriously divided the Whig and Democratic Parties.</p>  |
| <p><b><u>Wilmot's Proviso:</u></b><br/><b>Prohibit Slavery in the Territories</b></p>  | <p>In August 1846, while the Mexican War was still in progress, antislavery Democrat David WILMOT PROPOSED THAT CONGRESS PROHIBIT SLAVERY in any territory acquired from Mexico. MANY NORTHERN POLITICIANS AND VOTERS BACKED WILMOT'S PROVISIO because they opposed slavery as an institution, they did not want southern political power to increase, or they wanted to reserve western land for white settlers. SOUTHERNERS UNIVERSALLY DENOUNCED THE PROVISIO, arguing that Congress had no right to exclude slavery from a territory. Other congressional leaders supported a plan proposed by Senator Lewis Cass that became known as POPULAR SOVEREIGNTY, which would allow the people of each territory to decide the status of slavery there. Popular sovereignty had the advantage of being ambiguous: Northerners argued that the decision on slavery could be made when the first territorial legislature assembled, while Southerners declared that the status of slavery could be determined only when the territory drew up a constitution and applied for statehood.</p>  |
| <p><b><u>Popular Sovereignty:</u></b><br/><b>Let the People in the Territory Decide on the Issue of Slavery</b></p>  | <p>The 1848 PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN revealed SECTIONAL TENSIONS IN BOTH PARTIES, although both Democrats and Whigs tried to avoid the slavery question. When Polk declined to run again, the DEMOCRATS nominated LEWIS CASS and adopted a VAGUE PLATFORM. The WHIGS nominated General ZACHARY TAYLOR, a SLAVE OWNER from Louisiana and HERO OF THE MEXICAN WAR and adopted NO PLATFORM at all. Antislavery Whigs and Democrats, dissatisfied with the choice of candidates, formed the FREE-SOIL PARTY and nominated former president MARTIN VAN BUREN. The Free-Soil party did not win a single state, although they did make slavery the primary issue of the election. TAYLOR WON the electoral vote by 163 to 127, but the election showed that both parties had been shaken by the issue of slavery in the territories.</p>   |
| <p><b><u>Election of 1848:</u></b><br/><b>Sectional Tensions</b></p>   | <p>Once in office, Taylor surprised everyone by urging the immediate admission of California and New Mexico (whose largely antislavery settlers had begun writing free-state constitutions) to the Union as free states. The plan aroused intense opposition in the South because of the prospect that only free states would continue to emerge in the territories. To resolve the impasse, HENRY CLAY offered a series of resolutions involving compromise on all sides to restore sectional harmony, but the plan was vehemently opposed by John C. Calhoun, who declared that the plan favored the North over the South. Clay wanted the measures to pass as a single "OMNIBUS BILL," but the measure failed. Senator STEPHEN A. DOUGLAS of Illinois stepped in and was able to fashion a compromise in the form of a SERIES OF MEASURES that could be voted on separately. By mid-September 1850, Congress had enacted and the president had signed all the components of the COMPROMISE OF 1850: CALIFORNIA entered the Union as a FREE STATE; NEW MEXICO AND UTAH became territories where the question of slavery would be decided by POPULAR SOVEREIGNTY; Congress passed a STRICTER FUGITIVE SLAVE law but ENDED THE SLAVE TRADE IN THE CAPITAL; and TEXAS had its preannexation DEBTS ASSUMED in exchange for RELINQUISHING ITS NEW MEXICO CLAIMS. The Compromise of 1850 passed because its key measures were supported by moderates who could be allied with larger sectional blocks. The compromise was more an example of Douglas's parliamentary skill than an indication of conciliation on the issue of slavery by the dissenting parties. The compromise was a temporary cease-fire that did not resolve the larger issues.</p> |
| <p><b>Third Party</b><br/><b>(Free Soilers)</b></p>  | <p>Once in office, Taylor surprised everyone by urging the immediate admission of California and New Mexico (whose largely antislavery settlers had begun writing free-state constitutions) to the Union as free states. The plan aroused intense opposition in the South because of the prospect that only free states would continue to emerge in the territories. To resolve the impasse, HENRY CLAY offered a series of resolutions involving compromise on all sides to restore sectional harmony, but the plan was vehemently opposed by John C. Calhoun, who declared that the plan favored the North over the South. Clay wanted the measures to pass as a single "OMNIBUS BILL," but the measure failed. Senator STEPHEN A. DOUGLAS of Illinois stepped in and was able to fashion a compromise in the form of a SERIES OF MEASURES that could be voted on separately. By mid-September 1850, Congress had enacted and the president had signed all the components of the COMPROMISE OF 1850: CALIFORNIA entered the Union as a FREE STATE; NEW MEXICO AND UTAH became territories where the question of slavery would be decided by POPULAR SOVEREIGNTY; Congress passed a STRICTER FUGITIVE SLAVE law but ENDED THE SLAVE TRADE IN THE CAPITAL; and TEXAS had its preannexation DEBTS ASSUMED in exchange for RELINQUISHING ITS NEW MEXICO CLAIMS. The Compromise of 1850 passed because its key measures were supported by moderates who could be allied with larger sectional blocks. The compromise was more an example of Douglas's parliamentary skill than an indication of conciliation on the issue of slavery by the dissenting parties. The compromise was a temporary cease-fire that did not resolve the larger issues.</p> |
| <p><b>Whigs Won</b><br/><b>(Taylor a Slave Owner, War Hero)</b></p>  | <p>Once in office, Taylor surprised everyone by urging the immediate admission of California and New Mexico (whose largely antislavery settlers had begun writing free-state constitutions) to the Union as free states. The plan aroused intense opposition in the South because of the prospect that only free states would continue to emerge in the territories. To resolve the impasse, HENRY CLAY offered a series of resolutions involving compromise on all sides to restore sectional harmony, but the plan was vehemently opposed by John C. Calhoun, who declared that the plan favored the North over the South. Clay wanted the measures to pass as a single "OMNIBUS BILL," but the measure failed. Senator STEPHEN A. DOUGLAS of Illinois stepped in and was able to fashion a compromise in the form of a SERIES OF MEASURES that could be voted on separately. By mid-September 1850, Congress had enacted and the president had signed all the components of the COMPROMISE OF 1850: CALIFORNIA entered the Union as a FREE STATE; NEW MEXICO AND UTAH became territories where the question of slavery would be decided by POPULAR SOVEREIGNTY; Congress passed a STRICTER FUGITIVE SLAVE law but ENDED THE SLAVE TRADE IN THE CAPITAL; and TEXAS had its preannexation DEBTS ASSUMED in exchange for RELINQUISHING ITS NEW MEXICO CLAIMS. The Compromise of 1850 passed because its key measures were supported by moderates who could be allied with larger sectional blocks. The compromise was more an example of Douglas's parliamentary skill than an indication of conciliation on the issue of slavery by the dissenting parties. The compromise was a temporary cease-fire that did not resolve the larger issues.</p> |
| <p><b><u>Debate Over Slavery Expansion:</u></b><br/><b>Clay's Omnibus Bill v. Douglas' Series of Measures</b></p>  | <p>Once in office, Taylor surprised everyone by urging the immediate admission of California and New Mexico (whose largely antislavery settlers had begun writing free-state constitutions) to the Union as free states. The plan aroused intense opposition in the South because of the prospect that only free states would continue to emerge in the territories. To resolve the impasse, HENRY CLAY offered a series of resolutions involving compromise on all sides to restore sectional harmony, but the plan was vehemently opposed by John C. Calhoun, who declared that the plan favored the North over the South. Clay wanted the measures to pass as a single "OMNIBUS BILL," but the measure failed. Senator STEPHEN A. DOUGLAS of Illinois stepped in and was able to fashion a compromise in the form of a SERIES OF MEASURES that could be voted on separately. By mid-September 1850, Congress had enacted and the president had signed all the components of the COMPROMISE OF 1850: CALIFORNIA entered the Union as a FREE STATE; NEW MEXICO AND UTAH became territories where the question of slavery would be decided by POPULAR SOVEREIGNTY; Congress passed a STRICTER FUGITIVE SLAVE law but ENDED THE SLAVE TRADE IN THE CAPITAL; and TEXAS had its preannexation DEBTS ASSUMED in exchange for RELINQUISHING ITS NEW MEXICO CLAIMS. The Compromise of 1850 passed because its key measures were supported by moderates who could be allied with larger sectional blocks. The compromise was more an example of Douglas's parliamentary skill than an indication of conciliation on the issue of slavery by the dissenting parties. The compromise was a temporary cease-fire that did not resolve the larger issues.</p> |
| <p><b>COMPROMISE OF 1850</b><br/><b>California Free, NM &amp; Utah Decided by Popular Sov., Stricter Fugitive Slave Law, No Slave Trade in D.C., Texas Debt Assumed for Giving up NM</b></p> | <p>Once in office, Taylor surprised everyone by urging the immediate admission of California and New Mexico (whose largely antislavery settlers had begun writing free-state constitutions) to the Union as free states. The plan aroused intense opposition in the South because of the prospect that only free states would continue to emerge in the territories. To resolve the impasse, HENRY CLAY offered a series of resolutions involving compromise on all sides to restore sectional harmony, but the plan was vehemently opposed by John C. Calhoun, who declared that the plan favored the North over the South. Clay wanted the measures to pass as a single "OMNIBUS BILL," but the measure failed. Senator STEPHEN A. DOUGLAS of Illinois stepped in and was able to fashion a compromise in the form of a SERIES OF MEASURES that could be voted on separately. By mid-September 1850, Congress had enacted and the president had signed all the components of the COMPROMISE OF 1850: CALIFORNIA entered the Union as a FREE STATE; NEW MEXICO AND UTAH became territories where the question of slavery would be decided by POPULAR SOVEREIGNTY; Congress passed a STRICTER FUGITIVE SLAVE law but ENDED THE SLAVE TRADE IN THE CAPITAL; and TEXAS had its preannexation DEBTS ASSUMED in exchange for RELINQUISHING ITS NEW MEXICO CLAIMS. The Compromise of 1850 passed because its key measures were supported by moderates who could be allied with larger sectional blocks. The compromise was more an example of Douglas's parliamentary skill than an indication of conciliation on the issue of slavery by the dissenting parties. The compromise was a temporary cease-fire that did not resolve the larger issues.</p> |

|                                       |   |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| <p><b>DISCUSSION<br/>QUESTION</b></p> | <p><b>Most Americans hoped that the Compromise of 1850 would end debate over the issue of slavery. Why was it not a permanent settlement?</b></p> |
|---------------------------------------|---|