



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

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15.2 THE END OF THE SECOND PARTY SYSTEM

SECTIONAL CONFLICT	The COMPROMISE OF 1850 BEGAN TO COME APART almost as soon as it was passed. Southerners had accepted the package but demanded that Northerners strictly adhere to its components and especially to the fugitive slave law. This issue, very problematic in the North, contributed to reopening the controversy over slavery.
Fugitive Slave Act	Northerners did not like fugitive slave laws; they had responded to a 1793 federal law by passing "personal liberty laws" to give fugitives some protection. The FUGITIVE SLAVE ACT, which REQUIRED ALL CITIZENS TO ASSIST IN THE APPREHENSION OF RUNAWAY SLAVES, provoked northern outrage because it demanded that citizens assist officials in capturing fugitives. Southerners regarded northern obstruction as a betrayal not only of the Compromise of 1850 but of the Constitution as well. Meanwhile, the enforcement of this unpopular law served to radicalize many Northerners against slavery, especially in New England.
Uncle Tom's Cabin	In 1851, Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel <i>UNCLE TOM'S CABIN</i> was published. Stowe's account was the single most POWERFUL ATTACK ON SLAVERY ever written. With 300,000 copies sold in its first year, it became America's first literary blockbuster and exerted an extraordinary influence on public opinion. In her book, Stowe succeeded in personalizing the abstract horrors of slavery with characters like Eliza, the slave mother fighting to keep her son from being sold away, and Simon Legree, the wicked overseer. The novel AWAKENED MILLIONS OF NORTHERNERS TO THE EVILS OF SLAVERY, while SOUTHERNERS DENOUNCED THE BOOK AS BEING FULL OF GROSS DISTORTIONS AND FABRICATIONS. Perhaps more important, the book confirmed for increasing numbers of Southerners their suspicion that they had few northern supporters.
Election of 1852: Democrats Won (Pierce from NH, So. Sympathies)	In 1852, the DEMOCRATS chose FRANKLIN PIERCE, a NEW HAMPSHIRE POLITICIAN WITH SOUTHERN SYMPATHIES, as their presidential candidate, while the WHIGS turned to GENERAL WINFIELD SCOTT, MILITARY HERO OF THE MEXICAN WAR. Still, the sectional question inevitably intruded on the election, and Whig divisions over slavery helped produce a DEMOCRATIC LANDSLIDE.
Transcontinental Railroad: Gadsden Purchase	Pierce sought to divert attention from the slavery issue by concentrating on foreign expansion, but his efforts to extend the nation's domain by purchasing Cuba inevitably became entangled with the sectional crisis. Although Pierce's Cuba initiative failed, he was successful in purchasing from Mexico 45,000 SQUARE MILES OF TERRITORY IN PRESENT-DAY ARIZONA AND NEW MEXICO, a transaction known as THE GADSDEN PURCHASE. The purchase was the result of the American desire to build a Pacific railroad, an issue that became entangled with slavery.
The Kansas-Nebraska Act	As a senator from Illinois and a booster of western economic development, Stephen Douglas naturally wanted the transcontinental railroad for his city and region. He thus introduced a bill in 1854 to organize a new territory, known as Nebraska, west of Iowa and Missouri. To win southern votes, Douglas inserted a provision that the status of slavery would be determined by "POPULAR SOVEREIGNTY" and the REPEAL OF THE ANTISLAVERY PROVISION OF THE MISSOURI COMPROMISE. In its final form, the measure was known as the KANSAS-NEBRASKA ACT, and after much debate it became law in May 1854, with the unanimous support of southern Whigs and Democrats. About half of all Northern Democrats refused to support it, however

<p>REALIGNMENT OF THE PARTY SYSTEM</p>	<p>The Kansas-Nebraska Act had the fateful effect of realigning the nation's political parties along geographic lines. The NEW PARTY SYSTEM that emerged in the 1850S WOULD MIRROR THE DIVISIONS BETWEEN THE NORTH AND SOUTH.</p>
<p><u>The Old Parties:</u> Whigs and Democrats</p>	<p>The Whigs' weak showing in the election of 1852 made clear that they were no longer a strong national party. Their decline and collapse left the Democrats as the country's only national party. Since most of the northern Democrats who supported Douglas's Kansas-Nebraska bill were not reelected the following year, after 1854, the Democrats became by default a southern-dominated party. The COLLAPSE OF THE WHIGS and the ALIENATION OF NORTHERN DEMOCRATS from their party meant that many Americans remained politically adrift. It was unclear who would attract these drifters.</p>
<p><u>The New Parties:</u> Know-Nothings and Republicans</p>	<p>In the vacuum left by the collapse of the Whigs, a number of different parties emerged. One of the most powerful and successful was the American Party (also called the KNOW-NOTHINGS), which was viciously OPPOSED TO IMMIGRANTS AND CATHOLICS. The Know-Nothings enjoyed a series of successes in 1854 and 1855, particularly in Massachusetts. Of greater future significance was the rise of the REPUBLICAN PARTY, which attracted a variety of disaffected elements across the political spectrum, all OPPOSED TO THE EXTENSION OF SLAVERY IN THE TERRITORIES. The Republicans also became the political voice of the FREE-LABOR IDEOLOGY, arguing that the slave power of the South degraded work and whites alike and was driving to extend its oppressive system by undermining the Constitution.</p>
<p><u>Election of 1856:</u> Democrats Won (Buchanan from PA, Popular Sovereignty)</p>	<p>The REPUBLICAN PARTY PLATFORM revealed the strictly SECTIONAL nature of the new organization, as it called for congressional PROHIBITION OF SLAVERY IN ALL TERRITORIES. Their nominee was JOHN C. FRÉMONT; the DEMOCRATS nominated JAMES BUCHANAN; and the KNOW-NOTHINGS turned to former President MILLARD FILLMORE as their standard-bearer. During the campaign, BUCHANAN TOUTED POPULAR SOVEREIGNTY as the key to the slavery issue and labeled the Republicans as antislavery extremists. The rhetoric worked, and Buchanan won a narrow victory, beating Frémont in the electoral college by 174 to 114. Despite losing, the Republican Party demonstrated that SECTIONALISM HAD CREATED A NEW PARTY SYSTEM, one that could prove dangerous for the Republic.</p>
<p>DISCUSSION QUESTIONS</p>	<p>Considering the sectional conflict already in place over the Fugitive Slave Act and <i>Uncle Tom's Cabin</i>, how you explain that a Democrat was elected to the presidency in 1852?</p> <p>When the Kansas-Nebraska Act added fuel to the fire, the Democrats still won the presidential election of 1856. How do you explain this? Why didn't the new Republican party win?</p>