

## The Secession Crisis

### I. Slavery and Sectional Conflict

#### • The Compromise of 1850

- 1849, Pres. Zachary Taylor urges California to apply for admission as a free state
- Southerners reject plan, fearing North would further dominate federal government and would set a bad precedent against further expansion of slavery
- Henry Clay (Ky.) offers a compromise bill--three major points
  - California admitted as a free state
  - Strengthened the Fugitive Slave Law
  - New Mexico and Utah territories left open to popular sovereignty
- Reaction to the compromise of 1850
  - The opponents of slavery used the fugitive slave act as a rallying cry against the cruelty of slavery
  - Southerners became more militant in defense of their society
  - Both sides solidified their belief system – compromise became more difficult to imagine
  - Democrat Franklin Pierce was elected in 1852 in hopes that he could mend the country
  - The Whig party collapses as southern and northern members cannot agree on slavery and tariff issues
  - Southerners assert the sovereignty of individual states, northerners claim the nation is indivisible

#### • Enforcement of Fugitive Slave Act (1850)

- Act made easier for slave-owners to catch and return fugitive slaves from northern states
- Many in North appalled by fact that activities of slave catchers on northern soil was legalized, brought fact home that slavery was a national problem

#### • Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

- Convinced many Northerners of the evil of slavery
- Hard time getting book published
- Popularity of book--300,000 copies sold in the first year, over 1.5 million worldwide by following year

#### • Pro-slavery responses

- Pseudoscientific data -- phrenology (size of the brain), origins of races, physical inferiority of blacks (especially in colder climes)
- Blacks were intellectually inferior--slavery helped protect them and aided them in rising above their origins
- Religious arguments

#### • The Kansas-Nebraska Act (1854)

- Douglas introduces bill to establish the Nebraska territory--this was needed before transcontinental RR could be built
- The Kansas-Nebraska bill exposed the flaw of popular sovereignty
  - Northerners and southerners disagreed violently over what popular sovereignty meant
  - Could slaves be brought in until the issue was decided?
  - Who would decide the issue of slavery?
  - When would the issue be decided? As a territory or as a state?
- repealed the Missouri Compromise--now superseded by Compromise of 1850
- split Kansas and Nebraska into two territories
- Reaction to the Act
  - Southerners pleased with act, outraged with northern reaction

- Northern abolitionists charged the Act was sinister plot by the Slave Power to turn Kansas into a "dreary region of despotism, inhabited by masters and slaves"
- **The end of the Whig party, rise of Republican party**
  - Kansas-Nebraska Act split the Whig party into northern and southern wings that could no longer cooperate
  - The Democratic party suffered, but survived the crisis even though northern support fell drastically
  - Anger over the Act led antislavery Whigs and Democrats, along with Free-Soilers to form the Republican party
  - Republican party appealed to northerners who wanted economic development in the West and antislavery groups
  - Motto of the party was "Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men"
  - In 1856, Republican party candidate, John C. Fremont won eleven of the 16 free states in presidential election
- **"Bleeding Kansas"**
  - Territorial elections of 1855
    - thousands of proslavery Missourians invaded the polls and ran up large (but unlawful) victories for proslavery legislators
    - legislature created proslavery constitution
  - Free-soilers tried to set up an alternate constitution (1856)
    - Proslavery posse sent to arrest free-soilers sacked the town of Lawrence
    - John Brown murders five proslavery settlers on Pottawottamie Creek
  - Armed guerrillas roam the territories--over 200 people die in 1856
- **Fighting in Congress**
  - Sumner attacks the "crime against Kansas" in 1856 (The Harlot South Carolina)
  - Sumner's speech assails Sen. Andrew Butler of SC
  - Preston Brooks, Butler's nephew and Congressman from SC, canes Sumner
- **Lecompton Constitution--1857**
  - New election in 1857--free-soilers boycott
  - Proslavery forces wrote Lecompton constitution permitting slavery
  - New elections held → Lecompton constitution defeated easily
  - President Buchanan tried to force constitution through Congress, but lost
  - Stephen Douglas, leading northern Democrat, supported the antislavery majority
- **The Dred Scott decision (1857)**
  - Scott, a Missouri slave sues for his freedom
    - Suit based on fact his former owner had taken him for several years into Illinois, a free state and Wisconsin territory
    - Scott initially wins suit, but decision overturned
  - Issues
    - Was a black person a citizen and eligible to sue?
    - Had residence in free state made Scott free?
    - Could Congress prohibit slavery in a territory?
  - Roger Taney, chief justice, answers no for the court
  - Reactions to decision (combined with response to Lecompton constitution)
    - cries of slave power conspiracy--could slavery be extended to free states
    - impact on Republican party
    - Lincoln warns that slaveholders close to making slavery a national institution
- **Lincoln-Douglas debates (1858)**
  - Lincoln
    - Republican candidate for U.S. senator in Illinois

- had practiced law, served one term as congressman in Whig Party, but joined Republican party in 1856
  - Lincoln argues against slavery
  - opens with "House Divided" speech--"this government cannot endure permanently half slave and half free"
  - points out gulf between his free-soil position and Douglas' popular sovereignty
- Douglas argues for popular sovereignty
  - says free-soil position an "invitation to secession"
  - alienates both northerners (who don't like popular sovereignty) and southerners (who don't like fact Douglas doesn't defend southerners' right to slaves)
- Douglas wins election, but Lincoln wins attention throughout the North
- **John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry (1859)**
  - Brown plans attack on Harper's Ferry
    - federal arsenal
    - hoped to get slaves in Virginia and Maryland to rebel
    - Brown secretly gains financial support from six wealthy northern abolitionists ("Secret Six")
  - Attacks Harper's Ferry in October 1859
    - Only 18 or so blacks and whites joined him
    - Attack captures arsenal in town, but receives no support
    - Col. R.E. Lee and detachment of marines capture Brown and his supporters
  - Brown tried for treason and executed
  - Northern support for Brown
    - Garrison, Emerson, Longfellow
    - Hawthorne and Melville condemn attack
  - Southern reaction to the attack and northern support → confirms their fears

## II. The Election of 1860 and Its Aftermath

- **The split of the Democratic party**
  - Northern Democrats push for popular sovereignty in territories--led by Douglas
  - Democrats from 8 slave states walk out after Douglas forces succeed
  - Southern delegates hold separate convention in Baltimore
  - select John C. Breckenridge (Buchanan's V.P.) for president
  - efforts at compromise fail
  - No political party represents people from across the nation
- **Republicans select Lincoln**
- John Bell, became candidate of new Union Party, strong only in Upper South
- **Election results:**
  - Douglas, Bell, and Breckenridge combine for more popular votes than Lincoln
  - Lincoln sweeps the North, gains majority of electoral votes
- **Crittenden Compromise**
  - Proposed by John Crittenden of Kentucky as an amendment to U.S. Constitution
  - Extend Missouri Compromise line to California
  - Southerners would agree to this if Republicans would
  - Republicans refused after several months of debate

### III. Secession

- **South Carolina secedes**
  - Convention called immediately after Lincoln's election
  - SC seceded on Dec. 20 → hopes other southern states follow its lead
- Lower South states secede
  - Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas all secede by Feb. 1, 1861 (6 week period)
  - Secessionists did not gain unanimous support in most states
  - Unionists
    - Conditional--wanted to wait and see what Lincoln did
    - Unconditional--remain with Union no matter what Lincoln does (rare in the Deep South)
- **Why secession?**
  - Reasons for secession
    - States' Rights
    - Slavery
    - Agrarianism
    - Aristocracy
    - Habits of mind / "values" -- individualism, personalism, romanticism
- **Confederate government formed**
  - Delegates of seceding states meet in Montgomery
    - Confederate constitution based on U.S. Constitution with a few exceptions
      - right to own slaves protected
      - President elected to one 6 year term
      - line-item veto
  - Jefferson Davis elected provisional President
  - Alexander Stephens (V.P.) proclaims that cornerstone of new government is preservation of slavery and keeping blacks in their proper place
- **Lincoln's response**
  - President-elect Lincoln argues no compromise with slaveholders
  - faced with dilemma of how to keep nation together without going to war
- **President Buchanan does not respond**--hampered by fact that much of his cabinet pro-secession
- Upper South's response
  - Upper South divided over secession--mainly along east/west lines (VA, NC, Tenn., MD)
  - Most Upper South unionists were conditional--wait and see
  - Secession votes in Feb. 1861 fail in VA, NC, TN
  - No secession vote taken in KY, MD, MO, or Del.

### IV. The Civil War Begins

- Struggle over control of forts and arsenals
  - Many southern politicians claim there will be no war
  - To be safe, states seize federal arsenals and forts
- Charleston and Fort Sumter -- become focal point in March 1861
- Firing on Fort Sumter
- Lincoln's call for troops from all non-seceding states
  - Lincoln responds to attack with call for 75,000 soldiers to police civil unrest in South
- Upper South's response
  - Four states in Upper South (VA, NC, Tenn, and Ark) respond by seceding
  - Kentucky, Maryland, Missouri, and Delaware all remain in Union