

THE HOUSE DIVIDED: THE POLITICAL CRISIS OF THE 1840S & 50S

HISTORY 1100.3

23-28-30 SEPT. 2007

I. The Story Thus Far . . .

♦**A. *North and South had been growing apart since Revolution, which had led to the abolition of slavery in the North, and (eventually) its tremendous growth in South.***

- 1. Economies increasingly based on manufacturing & food production in North, cotton & slavery in South.
- 2. Long-term pattern of the horizontal westward movement of regional cultures.
- 3. Regional stereotypes of arrogant, violent, self-indulgent southern slave lords and peaceful, puritanical middle-class working families had some truth to it, even as self-images.

♦**B. *What held the sections together so long?***

- 1. Shared political values and symbols: Revolution, Founding Fathers, republicanism, Constitution.
- 2. National political parties: Democrats and Whigs of 1830s and 1840s were more evenly matched in more parts of the country than any party set-up before or since.

As long as politicians in all major regions needed allies in other regions to win national elections, Union was strengthened and slavery could not be the major issue.

- 3. The Missouri Crisis (1819-21): With party system temporarily down, most Northern congressmen voted together to ban slavery from new state of MO.
- 4. Crisis was resolved by Missouri Compromise, creating a permanent line between slavery & freedom for all future states.

♦**C. *Sectional conflict & the Civil War were ultimately caused by slavery, but sadly it was not morality that drove slavery issue.***

- Radical abolitionism (“immediatism”) was extremely unpopular in the North.

II. Expansion & the Rise of the Sectional Conflict

♦A. *Anti-slavery only became major political force because of massive territorial expansion in the 1830s & 1840s.*

·1. Longstanding pattern of aggressive southern expansion got much worse.

–*Examples included Indian lands in southeast, then TX, FL, Ark., n,w. MO (Platte Purchase).*

–*The Mexican-American War, 1846-47: manufactured by a southern president (James K. Polk) on slim pretext, acquired vast new lands for slavery, nearly including all of Mexico.*

·2. Northern Democrats felt party was too dominated by South & slavery, brought in Wilmot Proviso, 1846: ban on slavery in the territory conquered from Mexico.

·3. Proviso failed but crystallized central issues:

–*Extension of slavery into new territories*

–*Power of Congress over slavery*

–*Whether slavery would continue to grow or be put back on road to eventual extinction*

·4. Staked out a form of anti-slavery politics that could be widely accepted in North: "Free Soil."

–*To Free Soilers, West was future of the country & future had to be free (and white).*

·5. Ex-pres. Van Buren ran as candidate of the Free Soil Party, 1848: lost but showed potential popularity of Free Soil position.

III. The Kansas-Nebraska Act

♦A. *Compromise of 1850 resolved Wilmot Proviso controversy but not larger issues*

·1. New Fugitive Slave Law forced northerners to help retrieve slaves.

·2. During "doughface" Pierce presidency, southerners pursued further expansion schemes in Latin America: filibustering.

♦B. *Political Miscalculation of the Century*

·1. Origins: Stephen Douglas, Chicago real estate, and the competition for the transcontinental railroad. Problems:

–*Northern half of Indian Territory in the way*

-Missouri – northern state with southern population was next door

·2. Repeal of the Missouri Compromise was the price for southern support of Douglas's bill to organize the territory along the Chicago railroad route.

·3. The Kansas-Nebraska Act: Two new territories organized under Douglas's pet solution: popular or "squatter" sovereignty.

-P.S. meant as non-coercive, democratic. Also opened northern territories to slavery.

♦C. 1854 elections wiped out Whigs, left Dem. party overwhelmingly southern.

IV. Culture War in Kansas, 1854-56

♦A. Sectional Imperialists Battle for Control of Kansas

·1. Popular sovereignty invited competition for the new lands, creating rare instance of sectional imperialists competing for the same land. Land as important as ideology.

·2. Yankee colonization organizations: The Massachusetts Emigrant Aid Company and others.

-Founded town of Lawrence; promotions included Whittier's "Kansas Emigrant's Song"

·3. Sen. David Atchison led "Border Ruffians" from Missouri into Kansas to steal elections & make sure territory was repressively pro-slavery against will of most settlers, July 1855.

-Northern press painted caricature of proslavery "Pukes" (poor whites from MO) as vicious sub-humans. Unfortunately this was only partly an exaggeration. [If time: Stabbing of Buffalo Bill's father.]

-Squatter Sovereign newspaper expressed violent attitudes of proslavery forces: coercion only for white men in their own households: "Death to all Yankees and traitors in Kansas."

Another saying: "scourge the county of abolitionism, free soilism, and every other damnable ism that exists"

.4. Pierce administration recognized the illegal proslavery territorial government.

–“Free State” forces refused to recognize proslavery government & maintained their own competing one.

♦B. *“Bleeding Kansas” and “Bleeding Sumner” brought competing northern & southern versions of manhood into focus.*

.1. Mounting northern shame & anger at being forced to submit to South & slavery, feelings of violation over happenings in Kansas & DC.

.2. Sen. Charles Sumner of Mass. gave "Crime Against Kansas" speech insulting the South and an SC senator, so SC Rep. Preston Brooks beat him, 19-20 & 22 May 1856.

–Sumner got brain damaged, Brooks became a hero. Many southerners felt northern men were weaklings without honor, while many northerners felt southerners regarded them as no more than slaves.

Henry Ward Beecher: "The symbol of the North is the pen; the symbol of the South is the bludgeon."

.3. The exaggerated "Sack of Lawrence," 21 May 1856: Judge Lecompte outlawed Free State officials, ordered destruction of Lawrence newspaper & hotel. No armed resistance offered.

.4. Some northern men began to conclude that South would only understand force.

–Captain John Brown's execution of proslavery settlers on Pottawatomie Creek, 24 May 1856, launching a summer of civil war in Kansas. [If time, clip from John Brown's Holy War] A northerner who fought back!

♦C. *New national party emerges during Kansas crisis: the Republicans (GOP), 1st major party with no southern support. Denounced as “Black Republicans,” racializing debate.*

I. The Westward Movement of Regional Cultures

II. Expansion of the United States

III. The “Bleeding Kansas” Issue

IV. John Brown In Kansas