

Events Leading to the Civil War Worksheet

Western Expansion

After President Thomas Jefferson acquired the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, the United States doubled in size. This purchase gave the United States control of the vast lands west of the Mississippi. As Americans pushed west, the issue of slavery came to the forefront. Would the new territories of the United States be slave or free?

Missouri Compromise

The first confrontation over slavery in the West occurred in 1819. Missouri applied for admission to the Union as a slave state. The admission of Missouri would upset the balance of power in the Senate where at the time there were 11 free states and 11 slave states. Senator Henry Clay proposed a compromise. In 1820, he suggested that Missouri enter as a slave state and Maine as a free state to keep the balance of power. Congress also drew an imaginary line across the Louisiana Purchase at 36 degrees 30 minutes north latitude. North of the line would be free states (with the exception of Missouri), and south of the line would be slave states.

Compromise of 1850

In 1850, California applied for admission as a free state. Once again, the balance of power in the Senate was threatened. The South did not want to give the North a majority in the Senate. They also feared that more free states would be carved from the Mexican cession. Once again, Clay, the "Great Compromiser," pleaded for compromise. John C. Calhoun, a senator of South Carolina stated the South would not compromise. He demanded that slavery be allowed in the western territories and that there be a tough fugitive-slave law. Daniel Webster of Maine offered a solution to keep the Union together. The Compromise of 1850 had four parts: 1) California entered as a free state. 2) The rest of the Mexican cession was divided into New Mexico and Utah. In each state, voters would decide the issue of slavery. 3) Slave trade was ended in Washington D.C. 4) A strict new fugitive-slave law was passed.

Fugitive Slave Law

The Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 was very controversial. It required that all citizens were obligated to return runaway slaves. People who helped slaves escape would be jailed and fined. The law enraged Northerners because it made them feel a part of the slave system. Persons involved with the Underground Railroad worked to subvert the law.

Uncle Tom's Cabin

In 1852, Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. This novel told of the story of Uncle Tom, an enslaved African American, and his cruel master, Simon Legree. In the novel, Stowe wrote of the evils and cruelty of slavery. While it is argued whether the book was a true portrayal of slavery, the novel still had an enormous influence. The book sold more than 300,000 copies, was published in many languages, and was made into a play. It also helped change the way many Northerners felt about slavery. Slavery was now not only a political problem but a moral problem.