

# 1) The North, the South, and Slavery in America

## Advanced



When Texas joined the United States in 1845, one major challenge facing the nation was the growing and intensifying debates over slavery.

Southern states had excellent soil and long growing seasons. This made their economies perfect for plantation agriculture, which required a large labor force doing the intensive work of growing cash crops like cotton. In contrast, the climate and geography of northern states were less suitable for large-scale plantation agriculture.

One result of these significant regional differences was that plantation agriculture using enslaved labor had been growing significantly in the South for nearly 200 years. Meanwhile, the economy of the North was built around small-scale farming, but had also developed around trade and manufacturing. By the early 1800s, slavery had been abolished in the North.

The economic differences between the North and the South caused each region to have very different views on what was politically and economically best for the nation. Politicians from the North and the South each worked to gain a majority in the U.S. Congress so they could have the political power to do what was best for their own region.

As the United States expanded west, arguments between the North and the South over slavery intensified. If new western territories joined as free states, the North would gain more power in the government. If they joined as slave states, the South would gain more power. As new western states like Texas joined the Union, arguments between the North and the South over the expansion of slavery intensified significantly, causing growing regional conflicts and even, at times, violence.

# 2) The U.S. – Mexico War 1846 – 1848

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When the United States annexed Texas in 1845, the U.S. government agreed to uphold Texas' claims that its southern border with Mexico was the Rio Grande. The Mexican government disputed this claim, however, stating that the border was actually about 150 miles north at the Nueces River. American President James K. Polk sent the U.S. army under General Zachary Taylor into the disputed territory north of the Rio Grande in 1846.

Then on April 25, 1846, Mexican troops launched an attack on Taylor's army across the Rio Grande. President Polk asked Congress for a declaration of war against Mexico for "spilling American blood on American soil," and the U.S.-Mexico War

had begun. When the U.S. army entered Mexico City in September 1847, the Mexican government was forced to surrender.

The U.S.-Mexico War ended with the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, which required Mexico to cede to the United States all Mexican territory west of Texas to the Pacific Ocean. The Mexican Cession included the modern-day states of California, Utah, Nevada, Arizona, and parts of New Mexico, Colorado, and Wyoming. The acquisition of the territories of the Mexican Cession triggered intense debates between Northern and Southern politicians in the U.S. Congress over whether this new land should enter the Union as slave states or free states.

### 3) The Gold Rush & the Compromise of 1850

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New territories like those within the Mexican Cession could apply for statehood once they gained a population of 60,000 free people. Population growth of that size would have typically taken a long time in the 19<sup>th</sup> century; however, in 1848 gold was discovered in California. During the next few years, 300,000 people flooded into the California territory, each hoping to strike it rich. With this rapid population increase, California quickly became eligible for statehood.

Once again, debates flared up in the United States congress over whether California would enter the Union as a slave state or free state. A Kentucky Senator named Henry Clay passed the Compromise of 1850, hoping to satisfy the North by allowing California to enter the Union as a free state, while attempting to satisfy the South

by passing the Fugitive Slave Act, which required runaway slaves to be returned to their enslavers, even if they had escaped to a free state.

Additionally, the Compromise of 1850 allowed the territories of Utah and New Mexico to decide the issue of slavery themselves by vote when each territory applied for statehood. The Compromise of 1850 also adjusted the border between New Mexico and Texas, reducing the size of Texas to its contemporary borders.

While the Compromise of 1850 attempted to take measures to address the growing arguments between the North and the South over slavery, it did not solve the problem. The issue of the expansion of slavery continued to pose a serious challenge to the United States.

### 4) The Kansas-Nebraska Act 1854

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In 1820, the U.S. Congress passed a law called the Missouri Compromise, which allowed Missouri to join the Union as a slave state, but prohibited slavery north of the 36°30' line in the rest of Louisiana Territory. This satisfied many Northerners because it limited the expansion of slavery, however, it angered many Southerners who believed the federal government did not have the right to limit the expansion of slavery.

Then in 1854, almost ten years after Texas' annexation, the United States Congress passed a law called the Kansas-Nebraska Act. This act basically undid the Missouri Compromise, stating that the issue of slavery in these areas would be decided by popular sovereignty. In other words, the people could vote on whether they wanted to

allow slavery in their states or not. Many who supported the expansion of slavery were satisfied with this law because it meant that slavery could spread into more new states. Opponents of the expansion of slavery were deeply dissatisfied with this law, however, because it did not follow the law already established by the Missouri Compromise more than thirty years earlier which had limited slavery only to southern regions.

Violent conflicts broke out in Kansas in 1854 as Northerners and Southerners flooded the state to try to influence the vote over slavery. An abolitionist named John Brown and his sons even killed five pro-slavery supporters during the violence that took place as a result of the Kansas-Nebraska Act.

## 5) Conflicts Over Slavery Continued to Grow

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While Texas' population and economy grew and developed as a new state in the Union, problems continued to intensify throughout the country around the issue of slavery. In 1854, Northerners formed the Republican Party to oppose the expansion of slavery in the United States, though it only received support from the anti-slavery northern states.

Then, in 1857, the United States Supreme Court made an official ruling in a case about an enslaved man named Dred Scott. Scott argued that he should be considered a free man, because his master had brought him into a free territory. The Supreme Court, however, ruled that Scott was not a free man because enslaved people were not legally citizens of the U.S., and as such, they had no rights under the constitution. Furthermore, the Supreme Court declared that the federal government had no legal

right to prohibit the expansion of slavery into American territories. This ruling angered abolitionists and other opponents of the expansion of slavery in the United States.

A few years later in 1859, John Brown, the abolitionist who had killed five pro-slavery supporters in Kansas in 1854, attempted to raid the federal arsenal called Harper's Ferry in Virginia. His goal was to steal federal weapons in order to arm enslaved people so they could rebel against their masters. His attempt failed, and he was captured and executed, though his actions highlighted the steadily increasing tension between pro-slavery and anti-slavery parts of the country. Additionally, his actions stoked the deep fears of Southern slave holders that the large, enslaved populations of their states might rebel against them.

## 6) The Election of 1860

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The United States had become so divided over slavery that it became the defining issue of the presidential election of 1860. Most Southerners would only vote for a candidate who supported the expansion of slavery, while most Northerners wanted an anti-slavery candidate.

The Republican Party, which had been founded only six years earlier, nominated a man named Abraham Lincoln. Lincoln opposed the spread of slavery into the western territories. For this reason, nearly all Southerners did not want him to be president. South Carolina even declared it would secede if Lincoln was elected. Most Texans also

opposed Lincoln, throwing their support behind a pro-slavery candidate named John C. Breckenridge.

Tensions were high and the country was on edge throughout 1860 leading to the election. Pro-slavery vigilantes in north Texas killed dozens of people they claimed were abolitionists trying to incite a slave rebellion. When the election results showed that Abraham Lincoln had won the presidency by a very small margin, South Carolina seceded from the Union. People throughout the country waited to see what the rest of the south, including Texas, would do next.