

Lesson 1 Conflicts and Compromises

Lesson Summary

The **Missouri Compromise** of 1820 preserved the balance between free and slave states. This compromise had banned slavery in that part of the Louisiana Purchase north of latitude 36°30' N. However, its provisions did not apply to the huge territory gained from Mexico in 1848. Would slavery be permitted in this new territory?

Northerners wanted to stop slavery from spreading and feared that if it did spread, the South would gain too much power. Representative David Wilmot of Pennsylvania proposed that Congress ban slavery in all southwestern lands that might become states. This Wilmot Proviso passed in the House, but not the Senate.

Senator Lewis Cass of Michigan proposed **popular sovereignty**, meaning that people in each new territory applying for statehood should decide for themselves whether to allow slavery. Senator John C. Calhoun of South Carolina demanded that slavery be allowed everywhere in the western territories. Calhoun and other Southerners feared that if free states gained a majority in the Senate, slave states could no longer block antislavery proposals.

Antislavery Whigs and Democrats also took a strong stand. They wanted to ban slavery in all territory gained in the Mexican-American War—making it “free soil.” In 1848 they created their own party, called the Free-Soil Party, and nominated former President Martin Van Buren for President.

In 1849, California applied for admission as the 31st state. California’s entry into the Union would upset the balance of free and slave states. Southern leaders threatened to **secede**, or withdraw, from the Union if California was admitted as a free state. Senator Daniel Webster of Massachusetts argued that states did not have the right to secede. If slave states seceded, the nation could plunge into a **civil war**. Over many months, Senator Henry Clay of Kentucky made over 70 speeches favoring compromise. Eventually, Congress approved a set of measures favored by Clay that became known as the **Compromise of 1850**.

To please the North, California was admitted as a free state, and the slave trade was banned in the nation’s capital. To please the South, popular sovereignty would be used to decide whether slavery would be allowed in the rest of the Mexican Cession.

Southerners also got a tough law to prevent people from escaping slavery. The **Fugitive Slave Act** of 1850 allowed government officials to arrest any person accused of trying to escape slavery. Suspects had no right to defend themselves in a trial; all that was needed to deprive

Name _____ Class _____

Date _____

someone of his or her freedom was the word of one white person. In addition, Northerners were required to help capture anyone accused of escaping.

Harriet Beecher Stowe was a Northerner committed to fighting slavery. In 1852, she published *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, a book about a kind slave who is abused by a cruel master. The book shocked thousands of northerners who were previously unconcerned about slavery.