

CHAPTER 14

Slavery and America's Future: The Road to War, 1845–1861

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After you have studied Chapter 14 in your textbook and worked through this study guide chapter, you should be able to:

1. Discuss President Polk's expansionist objectives, and examine the manner in which these objectives were achieved.
2. Explain the dissension and fears that emerged as a result of the Mexican War, and discuss the political, social, and economic consequences of the war.
3. Examine the issues and personalities and explain the outcome of the 1848 presidential election.
4. Identify the sectional disputes that led to the Compromise of 1850, and cite the provisions of the Compromise.
5. Explain the reemergence of sectional tension between 1850 and 1854, dealing specifically with:
 - a. the Fugitive Slave Act.
 - b. *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.
 - c. the Underground Railroad.
 - d. the election of Franklin Pierce.
6. Examine the issues and personalities and explain the outcome of the 1852 presidential election.
7. Explain the introduction of and debate over the Kansas-Nebraska bill; cite the bill's provisions; and examine the consequences of its enactment into law.
8. Examine the realignment of political affiliations and political parties in the United States during the 1850s.
9. Explain the political, social, and economic philosophy of the Republican Party, the reasons for its appeal among northern voters, and the forces that led to the party's success in the 1860 election.
10. Examine the issues and personalities and explain the outcome of the 1856 presidential election.
11. Explain the Supreme Court's decision in *Dred Scott v. Sanford*, and examine the impact of the decision on the political parties and their leaders and on northern and southern public opinion.
12. Examine the issues and personalities and explain the outcome of the 1860 presidential election.
13. Discuss the failure of attempts at compromise after the 1860 election, and explain the success of the secession movement in seven southern states between December 1860 and March 1861.

THEMATIC GUIDE

Chapter 14 has as its theme the interplay of several forces that paved the road to war in the period between 1845 and 1861. Two of the forces, territorial expansion and slavery, might at first glance seem separate, but in fact the two became inseparably intertwined because of the addition of a third force—the perceptions (frames of reference) of the two antagonists, North and South, toward each other: “[The Republican Party] charged southerners with using the power of the federal government and planning to make slavery legal throughout the Union. Southern leaders defended slavery and charged the North with unconstitutional efforts to destroy it.” The application of such perceptions to the twin forces of territorial expansion and slavery provided the catalyst necessary to produce sectional polarization, disunion, and war.

The Mexican War heightened northern fear of a Slave Power. This fear, present in the North since passage of the gag rule in 1836, was caused by the belief that southern power and the expansion of slavery were jeopardizing the liberties of whites. Northerners began to see a Slave-Power conspiracy behind most of the events of the era, and, as a result, they became more and more antislavery in sentiment. The nature of northern fears and analysis of the Wilmot Proviso demonstrate that northern antislavery sentiment was racist and, in the sense that northerners wanted the territories for the expansion of their economic system (based on the free wage-labor system) as opposed to the slave-labor system of the South, self-serving in its orientation.

Furthermore, the Mexican War, through introduction of the Wilmot Proviso into the House of Representatives, heightened southern fear that a hostile North was attempting to undermine and eventually abolish the institution of slavery. Southerners began to see an antislavery conspiracy behind most of the events of the era, and since such a conspiracy seemed tied to the northern abolitionist movement, southerners began to defend slavery more vociferously and, through John C. Calhoun’s state-sovereignty theories, claimed slaveowners’ rights were constitutionally protected.

Acquisition of territory from Mexico caused slavery expansion to become the overriding issue in the presidential election of 1848. The Democrats and the Whigs began to fragment as a result of sectional antagonisms, and the presence of the Free-Soil Party was partially responsible for Zachary Taylor’s election as president. Between 1848 and 1850 several other issues emerged and caused further dissension. The most troublesome matter was the rights of settlers in the territories. The Compromise of 1850, rather than settling this and other issues, became a source of argument, which was further fueled by publication of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.

As southern leaders began to feel more and more threatened by the antislavery arguments coming from the North, they developed a variety of proslavery arguments designed to explain the necessity of expanding slavery and to counter the moral arguments against slavery. Furthermore, to prevent congressional action, the South continued to advance states’ rights constitutional theories.

The election of Franklin Pierce to the presidency and the domestic and foreign policy decisions of his administration had the effect of further feeding northern fear that the Slave Power had captured control of the national government. Northerners saw passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act and its repeal of the Missouri Compromise as a proslavery act inspired by the Slave Power. The shock waves from passage of this act brought the destruction of the Whig Party, the birth of the Republican and American Parties, and a complete realignment of the political system in the United States. In this realignment, the Republican Party, by appealing to groups interested in the economic development of the West and by expounding an ideology based on the dignity of labor, became the dominant party in the North. Concurrently, the Democratic Party, by arguing that slavery elevated the status of all whites, appealing to racism, and emphasizing the “rights” of southerners, became the party of the South. In addition, northerners linked Democrats with the Slave Power, while southerners linked Republicans with radical abolitionists.

6. popular sovereignty
7. the Free-Soil Party
8. the Compromise of 1850
9. the Fugitive Slave Act
10. *Uncle Tom's Cabin*
11. the Underground Railroad
12. personal-liberty laws
13. Stephen A. Douglas
14. the Kansas-Nebraska Act

15. the American (Know-Nothing) Party

16. “Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men”

17. Bleeding Kansas

18. John Brown

19. the Sumner-Brooks affair

20. James Buchanan

21. the *Dred Scott* case

22. the “Mormon War” in Utah

23. the Panic of 1857

Objective 2

3. The Wilmot Proviso stipulated that
 - a. slavery would be permitted in Utah and New Mexico but prohibited in California.
 - b. blacks would be colonized in the territory acquired from Mexico.
 - c. the civil and political rights of blacks would be guaranteed in the territory acquired from Mexico.
 - d. slavery would be prohibited in all territory acquired from Mexico.

Objective 3

4. Zachary Taylor's victory in the 1848 presidential election was, in large part, due to
 - a. the support he received from William Lloyd Garrison and the abolitionists.
 - b. the fragmentation of the political parties along sectional lines over the issue of slavery in the territories.
 - c. his decisive stand against the expansion of slavery into the territories.
 - d. President Polk's endorsement.

Objectives 4 and 5

5. One of the basic flaws in the Compromise of 1850 was the
 - a. failure to abolish the slave trade in the nation's capital.
 - b. admission of California as a slave state.
 - c. ambiguity that surrounded the idea of popular sovereignty.
 - d. extension of the Missouri Compromise line to the Pacific Ocean.

Objective 7

6. The Kansas-Nebraska Act
 - a. rejected the concept of popular sovereignty.
 - b. unified the Whig Party against the Slave Power.
 - c. was introduced as a proslavery measure.
 - d. repealed the Missouri Compromise.

Objective 9

7. Which of the following statements best expresses the beliefs of the Republican Party in the 1850s?
 - a. Acceptance of the dignity of labor is essential to the future progress of the United States.
 - b. The central government should remain limited in its power and should not intervene in the economic life of the states.
 - c. Slavery is morally wrong and should be abolished immediately.
 - d. All ethnic groups living in the United States should be afforded political, social, and economic equality.

Objective 8

8. Southern Democrats appealed to nonslaveholders in the South by
 - a. promising to make slaves available to all white southerners.
 - b. arguing that slavery made all white men equal.
 - c. supporting a homestead bill for the western territories.
 - d. supporting the use of federal funds for internal improvements in the South.

Objectives 7, 8, 9, and 10

9. Analysis of the presidential election of 1856 reveals that the
- Democratic Party had become a purely sectional party.
 - Republican Party was partially successful in gaining support in the South.
 - Republican Party had become the dominant party in the North.
 - voters preferred the candidate whose stand on the territorial questions was clear.

Objective 11

10. In the *Dred Scott* decision, the Court held that
- property rights were to be subordinated to individual rights.
 - it was impossible for a slave to be freed.
 - Congress could not prohibit slavery in the territories.
 - a slave moving into a free state became a free person.

Objectives 9 and 12

11. Which of the following best expresses the beliefs of Abraham Lincoln?
- The territories must be open to *all* people in the United States.
 - Slavery is morally wrong and must be abolished immediately.
 - The question of the expansion of slavery into the territories can best be decided through the use of popular sovereignty.
 - The Slave Power threatens to expand not only into the territories but into the free states as well.

Objective 11

12. In the aftermath of the *Dred Scott* decision, Stephen Douglas
- asserted that the decision did not have the force of law and was not to be obeyed.
 - angered southerners by standing by his principle of popular sovereignty.
 - admitted that the decision made it impossible to prevent the expansion of slavery into the territories.
 - began to work for a constitutional amendment that would outlaw slavery in the United States.

Objective 12

13. In the 1860 election, the supporters of John C. Breckinridge, the presidential nominee of the southern wing of the Democratic Party,
- stressed Breckinridge's support of the Union.
 - admitted that the Panic of 1857 demonstrated the economic weaknesses of a slave society.
 - called for military preparedness in the slave states.
 - called for repeal of the Kansas-Nebraska bill.

Objective 13

14. The Crittenden Compromise failed because
- the election of 1860 had so hardened sectional antagonisms that compromise was impossible.
 - extremists gained control of southern state legislatures and made it impossible for southern congressmen to accept a compromise.
 - northern leaders wanted the South to leave the Union.

- d. Lincoln refused to make concessions on the issue of the expansion of slavery into the territories.

Objectives 2, 5, 7, 8, 9, 12, and 13

15. Which of the following was the central or overriding issue that led to the breakup of the Union?
 - a. The meaning of the Constitution regarding slavery
 - b. The appeal of abolitionists to higher morality
 - c. The nature of slavery throughout human history
 - d. The question over the expansion of slavery in the territories

ESSAY QUESTIONS

Objectives 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 11, and 12

1. Explain what northerners meant when they referred to the Slave Power, and trace the northern fear of the Slave Power from the Mexican War through the 1860 presidential election.

Objectives 2 and 4

2. Explain the “state sovereignty” position advanced by John C. Calhoun to defend the expansion of slavery into the territories. What constitutional argument did Calhoun use to support his position?

Objectives 4 and 5

3. Examine the Fugitive Slave Law and its impact on relations between North and South.

Objectives 7 and 8

4. Cite the provisions of the Kansas-Nebraska bill and examine its far-reaching impact on American society.

Objective 12

5. Examine the issues and personalities in the 1860 presidential election, and explain the election’s outcome and its impact on American society.

Multiple-Choice Answers

1.
 - a. Correct. In his presidential campaign, one of Polk’s slogans was “Fifty-four Forty or Fight.” However, since war with Mexico seemed imminent, Polk was ultimately willing to accept the 49th parallel as Oregon’s northernmost boundary in order to avoid a two-front war with Great Britain and Mexico.
 - b. No. Polk gained widespread support in his presidential campaign through the use of the expansionist slogan “Fifty-four Forty or Fight.” Therefore, in light of Polk’s election, it was quite possible that a large segment of the American people would have supported a war with Great Britain over the Oregon Territory.
 - c. No. Public disclosures by the Senate did not cause President Polk to accept British offers concerning the Oregon boundary.

- d. No. Had the British accepted all of the American demands, there would have been no need for a negotiated settlement. By the settlement, the United States accepted the 49th parallel (rather than 54° 40') as Oregon's northernmost boundary and agreed to perpetual free navigation of the Columbia River by the Hudson's Bay Company.
2. c. Correct. It seemed to many northerners that the Mexican War was engineered by the Slave Power to acquire more slave territory. They also believed the Slave Power had placed free speech and civil liberties in jeopardy by passage of the gag rule in the House.
- a. No. Although the expression of concern by Whigs that President Polk had engineered the war with Mexico demonstrates a fear of presidential power, no such fear was expressed in relation to the gag rule.
- b. No. Those who opposed the Mexican War and the gag rule did not charge that "subversive foreign influence" was behind these acts.
- d. No. New Englanders were opposed to both the Mexican War and the gag rule.
3. d. Correct. In proposing the Wilmot Proviso, David Wilmot hoped to bar slavery from the Mexican cession territory and leave the area open to white opportunity only. The introduction of the proviso into the House transformed the debate over the Mexican War to a debate over the expansion of slavery.
- a. No. Although most supporters of the Wilmot Proviso did not believe that slavery was morally wrong and did not seek to abolish the institution in the slave states, neither did they advocate permitting slavery in the Utah and New Mexico territories.
- b. No. David Wilmot did not propose the colonization of blacks in the territory acquired from Mexico.
- c. No. David Wilmot, the author of the Wilmot Proviso, was not an abolitionist and neither believed in nor advocated equal rights for blacks in the Mexican cession territory.
4. b. Correct. In the presidential election of 1848, both the Whig and Democratic parties tried to avoid the issue of slavery in the territories, but this was the main issue in the minds of many people. This issue caused many southern Democrats to vote for the Whig presidential candidate because he was a slaveholder. It was also this issue that caused antislavery Whigs, former members of the Liberty Party, and some northern Democrats to organize the Free-Soil Party and run a presidential candidate in 1848. These facts support the idea that the slavery issue caused fragmentation of the political parties along sectional lines in 1848.
- a. No. William Lloyd Garrison did not believe that abolitionists should become involved in politics, and his stand on this issue caused a split in the abolitionist movement. In any event, Garrison could never have supported Taylor since Taylor was a slaveholder.
- c. No. Zachary Taylor, a slaveholder and the presidential nominee of the Whig Party in the 1848 election, attempted to avoid the issue of the expansion of slavery into the territories.
- d. No. Zachary Taylor was a Whig; James K. Polk was a Democrat. Polk did not endorse Taylor in the 1848 presidential election.
5. c. Correct. The statement concerning popular sovereignty was so vague that southerners explained it in one way while northerners explained it in another. Therefore, on this issue and the related issue of the expansion of slavery into the territories, the compromise settled nothing.
- a. No. Although the Compromise of 1850 did not abolish slavery in Washington, D.C., it did abolish the slave trade. However, neither the failure to abolish slavery in D.C. nor the abolition of the slave trade in D.C. was a basic flaw of the compromise.

- b. No. California was admitted as a free state, but that was not a basic flaw in the Compromise of 1850 either.
- d. No. The Missouri Compromise line applied only to the Louisiana Purchase Territory and was not extended to the Pacific Ocean.
6. d. Correct. By adopting the concept of popular sovereignty in Kansas and Nebraska and thus allowing the people residing there to decide whether the region would be free or slave, the Kansas-Nebraska Act repealed the Missouri Compromise.
- a. No. By indicating that the question of slavery in Kansas and Nebraska would be left to the people living there, the Kansas-Nebraska Act accepted the concept of popular sovereignty.
- b. No. The Kansas-Nebraska Act widened the division between the northern and southern wings of the Whig Party and led to the party's demise.
- c. No. Stephen Douglas believed that environmental and geographic conditions in Kansas and Nebraska would keep slavery out of the region. Because of this belief it cannot be said that he introduced the Kansas-Nebraska Act as a proslavery measure.
7. a. Correct. In its stand against the Slave Power and against the expansion of slavery into the territories, the Republican Party stood on the belief that the future of the nation rested on the dignity of labor and the availability of economic opportunity.
- b. No. The Republican Party's support of both internal improvements and a homestead bill indicates support for a strong and vigorous central government actively involved in the economic life of the state.
- c. No. Although Abraham Lincoln expressed the belief that slavery was morally wrong, the Republican Party did not take a stand against slavery for moral reasons. Furthermore, the party did not call for an immediate end to the institution of slavery.
- d. No. The Republican Party attempted to woo members of the anti-immigrant Know-Nothing Party into its ranks and did so by sponsoring legislation that would postpone extending the right to vote to naturalized citizens.
8. b. Correct. In courting the support of the nonslaveowning white majority in the South, southern Democrats argued that all white men enjoyed liberty and social equality in a slave society because of the enslavement of blacks.
- a. No. In their attempt to prevent conflict between the interests of the slaveowner and the nonslaveowner, southern Democrats did not promise to make slaves available to all white southerners.
- c. No. A homestead bill would give free land in the western territories to people who would use it. Southern Democrats' belief in a limited central government and their fear that a homestead bill would exclude slavery from the territories led them to oppose such a measure.
- d. No. Southern Democrats believed in a limited central government. As a result, they did not support federally sponsored internal improvements.
9. c. Correct. The Republican Party carried eleven of sixteen free states. This evidence indicates that the Republican Party had become the dominant party in the North. It also indicates that a massive polarization between North and South was under way.
- a. No. The Democratic candidate, James Buchanan, carried five of sixteen free states and all of the slave states except Maryland. Although most of Buchanan's support came from the South, the fact that he carried some free states indicates that the Democratic Party was not a purely sectional party.

- b. No. The Republican Party had virtually no support in the South and carried no slave state. Maryland, the only slave state not to support Buchanan, went for Millard Fillmore, the Know-Nothing candidate.
- d. No. James Buchanan, who won the presidential election of 1856, had been ambassador to Great Britain during the controversy over the Kansas-Nebraska Act, and his views on territorial questions were not clear.
10. c. Correct. The Court ruled the Missouri Compromise unconstitutional and in so doing ruled that Congress could in no way prohibit the movement of any kind of property, including slaves, into the territories.
- a. No. The Court did not rule that property rights were subordinate to individual rights.
- b. No. Although the Court ruled against Scott's contention that he was free as a result of having been taken into free territory, it did not rule that slaves could not be freed by their owners.
- d. No. The Court ruled against Dred Scott's contention that he was free because he had been taken into free territory.
11. d. Correct. Lincoln believed that the Slave Power was attempting to impose its will on the Union and carry slavery into the territories and into all the states. Therefore, he saw the Slave Power as a threat to democracy and the free-wage-labor system, and he saw slavery as a threat to all whites.
- a. No. Lincoln believed that the western territories should be open to free whites.
- b. No. Lincoln hoped to confine slavery to the South, where it would die a natural death. But he did not advocate the immediate abolition of slavery.
- c. No. Lincoln's belief that slavery should be barred from the territories indicates that he did not accept popular sovereignty as a way of dealing with the question of the expansion of slavery.
12. b. Correct. Despite the Supreme Court decision that Congress could not prohibit slavery in the territories, Douglas chose to oppose the imposition of the proslavery Lecompton Constitution on Kansas, arguing that the people of Kansas had rejected it by more than ten thousand votes in a referendum. In taking this stand, Douglas broke with the Buchanan administration and reaffirmed the doctrine of popular sovereignty. In addition, his stand angered southerners and greatly reduced his chances of winning the presidency.
- a. No. Douglas did not directly defy the Court's decision.
- c. No. Douglas believed that, in spite of the *Dred Scott* decision, there was still a way to prohibit slavery in the territories.
- d. No. Douglas did not work for passage of a constitutional amendment to outlaw slavery.
13. a. Correct. Some southern newspapers associated John C. Breckinridge, the presidential nominee of the southern wing of the Democratic Party, with secessionists. In response, Breckinridge delivered a speech in which he publicly disavowed secession.
- b. No. In the 1856 election, the Know-Nothing Party ran on an anti-Catholic, anti-immigrant platform. By 1860, members of this party had joined either the Republican Party or the Constitutional Union Party, but its anti-Catholic rhetoric was not a major factor in the 1860 presidential election.
- c. No. John C. Breckinridge, the presidential nominee of the southern wing of the Democratic Party, did not call for military preparedness in the slave states.

- d. No. In light of the fact that the Kansas-Nebraska Act repealed the Missouri Compromise, southerners generally supported it and supported the proslavery Lecompton Constitution in 1857. This was also true of John C. Breckinridge, James Buchanan's vice president and the 1860 nominee of the southern wing of the Democratic Party.
14. d. Correct. Lincoln had the political task of preserving the unity of the heterogeneous Republican Party. To accomplish that task he believed it necessary to reject the Crittenden Compromise. This rejection caused southern leaders to reject the compromise as well, and the peace effort collapsed.
- a. No. The results of the 1860 election indicated that most voters did not want extreme action and that compromise was still a possibility.
- b. No. Although there were southern extremists who did not want compromise, southern leaders in the Senate demonstrated their willingness to accept the Crittenden Compromise under certain conditions.
- c. No. The Union was very dear to northern leaders. They believed the South was bluffing when it threatened to secede and believed the pro-Union forces in the South would prevent secession.
15. d. Correct. Northerners and southerners were both intent on carrying their separate economic systems into the territories. White northerners believed that the expansion of a slave-based labor system into the territories would destroy economic opportunities for whites and that the concept of the degradation of labor, inspired by slavery in the South, would replace the concept of the dignity of labor, inspired by the free wage-labor system of the North. White southerners, for their part, believed that prevention of the expansion of slavery into the territories would eventually lead to the abolition of slavery and an end to the southern way of life. In each side's mind, the issue ultimately became too important to compromise. Therefore, the overriding or central issue that led to the breakup of the Union was the question concerning the expansion of slavery into the territories. See Chapter 14, specifically pages 252 and 253.
- a. No. Although southerners searched for and found constitutional arguments to support their property rights as slave owners, the meaning of the Constitution regarding slavery is not the central issue that led to the breakup of the Union. See Chapter 14, specifically pages 252 and 253.
- b. No. Clearly abolitionists used moral arguments against slavery and portrayed slavery as an evil that blighted American society. However, the religious and moral views of abolitionists, which were countered by proslavery arguments from the South, do not, in the end, explain the breakup of the Union. See Chapter 14, specifically pages 252 and 253.
- c. No. The nature of slavery throughout human history is not the central or overriding reason for the breakup of the Union. See Chapter 14, specifically pages 252 and 253.