

A.P. U.S. HISTORY NOTES

Chapter 19: "Renewing the Sectional Struggle"

~ 1848 – 1854 ~

- I. The Popular Sovereignty Panacea
 1. The **Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo** ended the **Mexican-American War**, but it started a whole new debate about the extension of slavery, with Northerners rallying around the **Wilmot Proviso**; however, the Southerners shot it down.
 2. Before, the two national parties, the **Democrats** and the **Whigs** had strong support from all over the nation; now, that was in jeopardy.
 3. In 1848, Polk, due to tremendous overworking and chronic diarrhea, did not seek a second term, and the Democrats nominated **General Lewis Cass**, a veteran of the **War of 1812**, a senator and diplomat of wide experience and considerable ability, and the originator of **popular sovereignty**, the idea that issues should be decided upon by the people (specifically, it applied to slavery, stating that the people in the territories should decide to legalize it or not.
 - i. It was good because it was a compromise between the extremes of the North and the South, and it stuck with the idea of self-determination, but it could spread slavery.
- II. Political Triumphs for General Taylor
 1. The Whigs nominated **General Zachary Taylor**, the hero of Buena Vista, a man with no political experience, but a popular man, and they avoided all picky issues in his campaign.
 2. Disgusted antislavery Northerners organized the **Free Soil Party**, a party committed against the extension of slavery in the territories and one that also advocated federal aid for internal improvements and urged free government homesteads for settlers.
 - i. This party appealed to people angry over the half-acquisition of Oregon, people who didn't like Blacks in the new territory, as well as "conscience Whigs" who condemned slavery on moral grounds.
 - ii. The Free Soilers nominated Martin Van Buren
 3. Neither major party talked about the slavery issue, but Taylor won narrowly.
- III. "Californy Gold"
 1. In 1848, gold was discovered in **California**, and thousands of men flooded into the state, thus blowing the lid off of the slavery issue.
 2. Most people didn't "strike it rich," but there were many lawless men and women.
 3. As a result, California (privately encouraged by the president) drafted a constitution and then applied for statehood, thus bypassing the usual territorial stage and avoiding becoming a slave state.
- IV. Sectional Balance and the Underground Railroad.
 1. In 1850, the South was very well off, with a Southerner as president (Taylor), a majority in the cabinet and on the Supreme Court, and equality in the Senate; plus, its 15 states could veto any proposed amendment that would outlaw slavery, yet it was worried.
 2. The balance of 15 free states and 15 slave states was in danger with the admission of free California (which would indeed destroy the equilibrium forever) and other states might follow California as free states.
 3. The South was also agitated about Texas' claims on disputed territory and the prospect of no slavery in Washington D.C., thus putting a piece of non-slavery land right in the middle of slave-holding Virginia and Maryland.
 4. Finally the **Underground Railroad**, a secret organization that took runaway states north to Canada, was taking more and more slaves from the South.
 - i. **Harriet Tubman** freed more than 300 slaves during 19 trips to the South.

5. The South was also demanded a stricter fugitive slave law.
- V. Twilight of the Senatorial Giants
1. In 1850, Congress was confronted with catastrophe in 1850, with California demanding admission as a free state.
 2. Thus, the three giants met together for the last time to engineer a compromise.
 - i. **Henry Clay**, now 73 years old, urged concession from both the North and the South (the North for a fugitive slave law, the South for others) and was seconded by **Stephen Douglas**, the “Little Giant” and a fine senator.
 - ii. **John C. Calhoun**, dying of tuberculosis, pleaded for slavery to be left alone, for the return of runaway slaves, the restoration of the rights of the South as a minority, and the return for political balance.
 - iii. **Daniel Webster** proclaimed that the new land could not hold slaves anyway, since it couldn’t cultivate cotton, etc... and his **Seventh of March** speech helped the North into compromise.
 3. As a result of the popular speech, though, Webster was also proclaimed a traitor to the North, since he had called for the ignorance of the slavery subject.
- VI. Deadlock and Danger on Capitol Hill
1. A new group of politicians, the **Young Guard**, seemed more interested in purifying the Union rather than patching it up.
 2. **William H. Seward**, a young senator from New York, was flatly against concession and hated slavery, but he didn’t seem to realize that the Union was built on compromise, and he said that Christian legislators must adhere to a “higher law” and not allow slavery to exist; this might have cost him the 1860 presidential election.
 3. President Taylor also appeared to have fallen under the influence of the “higher law,” vetoing every compromise sent to him by Congress.
- VII. Breaking the Congressional Logjam
1. Then, in 1850, Zachary Taylor suddenly died of an acute intestinal disorder, and portly **Millard Fillmore** took over the reigns.
 - i. Impressed by arguments of conciliation, he signed a series of agreements that came to be known as the **Compromise of 1850**.
 - ii. Clay, Webster, and Douglas orated on behalf of the compromise for the North, but the South hated it; fortunately, they finally accepted it after much debate.
- VIII. Balancing the Compromise Scales
1. The North got the better deal in the Compromise of 1850:
 - i. California was admitted as a free state, permanently tipping the balance.
 - ii. The Utah and New Mexico Territories could decide, with popular sovereignty, over slavery.
 - iii. Texas lost its disputed territory to New Mexico and (now) Oklahoma but was paid \$10 million.
 - iv. The District of Columbia could not have slave trade, but slavery was still legal.
 - v. A new **Fugitive Slave Law of 1850** was drastic, and it stated that (1) fleeing slaves couldn’t testify on their own behalf, (2) the federal commissioner who handled the case got \$5 if the slave was free and \$10 if not, and (3) people who were ordered to help catch slaves had to do so, even if they didn’t want to.
 2. Inflamed Northerners pledged not to follow the new law, and the Underground Railroad stepped up its timetable.

3. It turns out that the new Fugitive Slave Law was a blunder on behalf of the South, since it inflamed both sides, but a civil war didn't occur, and this was better for the North, since with each moment, it was growing ahead of the South in population and wealth—in crops, factories, foundries, ships, and railroads.
- IX. Defeat and Doom for the Whigs
1. In 1852, the Democrats, unable to agree, finally nominated dark horse **Franklin Pierce**, a man who was unknown and enemyless.
 2. The Whigs nominated “Old Fuss and Feathers” **Winfield Scott**, the old veteran of the War of 1812 and the Mexican-American War.
 3. Both parties boasted about the Compromise of 1850, though the Democrats did more.
 4. The Whigs were hopelessly split, and thus, Pierce won in a landslide; the death of the Whigs ended the *national* political arguments and gave rise to *sectional* political alignments.
- X. President Pierce the Expansionist
1. Pierce tried to be another Polk, and he impressed followers by reciting his inaugural address from memory, but his cabinet was filled with Southerners like **Jefferson Davis** and he was prepared to be a Southerner's tool
 2. In July of 1856, a brazen American adventurer, **William Walker**, grabbed control in Nicaragua and proclaimed himself president, then legalized slavery, but a coalition of Latin American states overthrew him.
 3. Over on the Pacific, America was ready to open up Asia, and it opened up Japan when **Commodore Matthew C. Perry** steamed into the harbor of Tokyo in 1854.
- XI. Coveted Cuba: Pearl of the Antilles
1. America wanted Cuba, but Spain wouldn't sell it to the U.S. at any price, so after two bad attempts to take Cuba failed and after Spain captured the American steamer *Black Warrior* on a technicality, three U.S. foreign ministers met in Ostend, Belgium and drew up the **Ostend Manifesto** which stated that the U.S. was to offer \$120 million to Spain for Cuba, and if it refused and Spain's ownership of Cuba continued to endanger the U.S., then America would be justified in seizing the island.
 2. Northerners were outraged once this “secret” document was leaked, and the South could not get Cuba (and obtain another slave state).
 3. Also, since the North wanted Canada and the South did not, the North failed in obtaining Canada (sectional interests cancelled each other out).
- XII. Pacific Railroad Promoters and the Gadsden Purchase
1. Though the U.S. owned California and Oregon, getting was very difficult, since the sea routes were too long and the wagon route over land was dangerous, so the only real feasible solution lay in a transcontinental railroad.
 2. The Southerners wanted a route through the South, but best one would go through Mexico, so Secretary of War Jefferson Davis arranged to have **James Gadsden** appointed minister to Mexico.
 - i. Finding Santa Anna in power again, he bought the **Gadsden Purchase** for \$10 million, and despite clamor about the “rip-off,” Congress passed the sale.
 3. The South now appeared to have control of the location of the transcontinental railroad, but the North said that if organization of territories was the problem, then Nebraska should be organized.
- XIII. Douglas's Kansas-Nebraska Scheme

1. To do this, Senator Stephen Douglas proposed (now called) the **Kansas-Nebraska Act**, which would let slavery in Kansas and Nebraska be decided upon by popular sovereignty.
 - i. The problem was that the Missouri Compromise had banned this, so the act would have to repeal it.
 - ii. Southerners had not thought of Kansas as a possible slave state, and thus backed the bill, but Northerners rallied against it.
 - iii. Nevertheless, Douglass rammed the bill through Congress, and it was passed.

XIV. Congress Legislates a Civil War

1. The Kansas-Nebraska Act directly wrecked the Compromise of 1820 and indirectly wrecked the Compromise of 1850.
2. Northerners no longer enforced the Fugitive Slave Law at all, and Southerners were still angry.
3. The Democratic Party was hopelessly split into two, and after 1856, it would not have a president elected for 28 years.