

A.P. U.S. HISTORY NOTES

Chapter 20: "Drifting Toward Disunion"

~ 1854 – 1861 ~

- I. Stowe and Helper: Literary Incendiaries
 1. In 1852, **Harriet Beecher Stow** published *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, a popular book that awakened the passions of the North toward the evils of slavery.
 2. The book sold millions of copies, and overseas, British people were charmed by it.
 - i. The book helped Britain stay out of the Civil War because its people, who had read the book and had now denounced slavery, wouldn't allow intervention on behalf of the South.
 3. Another book, *The Impending Crisis of the South*, was written by **Hinton R. Helper**, a non-aristocratic white North Carolinian who tried to prove, by an array of stats, that the non-slaveholding Southern whites were really the ones most hurt by slavery.
 - i. Published in the North, this book and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* were both banned in the South but widely read in the North.
- II. The North-South Contest for Kansas
 1. Northerners began to pour into Kansas, and Southerners were outraged, since they had supported the **Compromise of 1850** under the impression that Kansas would become slave.
 2. Thus, on election day in 1855, hordes of Southerners from Missouri flooded the polls and elected Kansas to be a slave state; free soilers unable to stomach this set up their own government in Topeka.
 - i. Thus, confused Kansans had to choose between two governments: one illegal (in Topeka) and the other fraudulent (in Shawnee).
 3. In 1856, a group of proslavery raiders shot up and burned part of Lawrence, thus starting violence.
- III. Kansas in Convulsion
 1. **John Brown**, a crazy man (literally), led a band of followers to Pottawatomie Creek in May of 1856 and hacked to death five presumable proslaveryites.
 - i. This brutal violence surprised even the most ardent abolitionists and brought swift retaliation from proslaveryites.
 2. By 1857, Kansas had enough people to apply for statehood, and those for slavery devised the **Lecompton Constitution**, which provided that the people were only allowed to vote for the constitution "with slavery" or "without slavery."
 - i. If the constitution was passed "without slavery," then those slaveholders already in the state would still be protected.
 - ii. Angry free soilers boycotted the polls and Kansas approved the constitution with slavery.
 3. In Washington, **James Buchanan** had succeeded Franklin Pierce, but like the former prez, Buchanan was more towards the South, and firmly supported the Lecompton Constitution.
 4. Senator **Stephen Douglas**, refusing to have this fraudulency, threw away his Southern support when he fought for a fair election, and the result was the Lecompton Constitution voted on *as a whole*.
 5. Thus, the Democratic Party was hopelessly divided, ending the last remaining national party for years to come (the **Whigs** were dead and the **Republicans** were sectional).
- IV. "Bully" Brooks and His Bludgeon
 1. "Bleeding Kansas" was an issue that spilled into Congress: **Senator Charles Sumner** was a vocal antislaveryite, and his blistering speeches condemned all slavery supporters.
 2. Congressman **Preston S. Brooks** decided that since he couldn't challenge Sumner to a duel, he'd beat the senator with a cane like a dog, which is just what he did until his cane broke; nearby senators did nothing but watched, and Brooks was cheered on by the South.
 3. However, the incident touched off fireworks, as Sumner's "The Crime Against Kansas" speech was reprinted by the thousands, and it put Brooks and the South in the wrong.
- V. "Old Buck" versus "The Pathfinder"

1. In 1856, the Democrats had chosen James Buchanan, someone untainted by the Kansas-Nebraska Act and a person with lots of political experience, to be their nomination for presidency against Republican **John C. Fremont**, a fighter in the Mexican-American War.
 2. Another party, the **American Party**, also called the “Know-Nothing Party” because of its secrecy, was organized by “nativists,” old-stock Protestants, who nominated Millard Fillmore.
 - i. These people were anti-Catholic and anti-foreign and also included old Whigs.
 3. The campaign was full of mudslinging, which allegations of scandal and conspiracy.
 4. Fremont was hurt by the rumor that he was a Roman-Catholic.
- VI. The Electoral Fruits of 1856
1. Buchanan won because there were doubts about Fremont’s honesty, capacity, and sound judgment.
 2. Perhaps it was better that Buchanan won, since Fremont was not as strong as Lincoln, and in 1856, many people were still apathetic about slavery, and the South could have seceded more easily.
- VII. The Dred Scot Bombshell
1. On March 6, 1857, the Dred Scot decision was handed down by the Supreme Court.
 - i. **Dred Scot** had been a slave whose master had taken him north into free territory, where he had lived for many years. After his master’s death, he sued for his freedom from his new master, claiming that he had been in free territory. The Missouri Supreme Court agreed, freeing him, but his new master appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court, which overruled the decision.
 2. Chief Justice **Taney** said that no slave could be a citizen of the U.S. in his justification
 3. The case inflamed millions of abolitionists against slavery and even though who didn’t care against it.
 - i. In effect, he ruled that the Missouri Compromise had been unconstitutional: Congress had no right to ban slavery from the territories.
 4. Northerners complained; Southerners were inflamed by northern defiance, and more tension built.
- VIII. The Financial Crash of 1857
1. Psychologically, the **Panic of 1857** was the worst of the 19th century, though it really wasn’t as bad as the **Panic of 1837**.
 2. The panic was caused by inflation and overgrowth of grain and nowhere to export it.
 3. The North was especially hard hit, but the South rode it out with flying colors, seemingly proving that cotton was king and raising their egos.
 4. Also, in 1860, Congress passed a homestead act that would provide 160 acres of land at a cheap price for those who were less fortunate, but it was vetoed by Buchanan.
 - i. This plan, though, was opposed by the northeast, which had long been unfriendly to extension of land and had feared that it would drain its population even more, and the south, which knew that it would provide an easy way for more free soilers to fill the territories.
 5. The panic also brought calls for a higher tariff rate, which had been lowered to about 20% only months before.
- IX. An Illinois Rail-Splitter Emerges
1. In 1858, Senator Stephen Douglas’ term was about to expire, and against him was Republican **Abraham Lincoln**, an ugly fellow who had risen up the political ladder slowly but was a good lawyer and a pretty decent debater.
- X. The Great Debate: Lincoln versus Douglas
1. Lincoln rashly challenged Douglas, the nation’s most devastating debater, to a series of seven debates, which the senator accepted, and despite expectations of failure, Lincoln held his own.
 2. The most famous debate came at Freeport, Illinois, where Lincoln brought this scenario: if the people had a territory voted slavery down, would they be right, despite the Supreme Court saying that they could not do so?
 - i. Douglas replied with his “**Freeport Doctrine**,” which said that no matter how the Supreme Court ruled, slavery would stay down if the people voted it down; the people had the power.
 3. Douglas won, but more people voted for Abe, so he won the moral victory.
- XI. John Brown: Murderer or Martyr?
1. John Brown now had a plan to invade the South, seize its arms, call up on the slaves to rise up and revolt, and take over the South and free it of slaves, but in his raid of Harper’s Ferry, Virginia, the slaves didn’t revolt, and he was captured and convicted of treason and sentenced to death.
 2. Brown, though insane, was not stupid, and he portrayed himself as a martyr against slavery, and when he was hung, he instantly became a martyr for abolitionists; northerners rallied around his memory.

3. The South was happy, but abolitionists were infuriated by his execution (they conveniently forgot about his violent past)
- XII. The Disruption of the Democrats
1. After failing to nominate a candidate in Charleston, South Carolina, the Democrats split into North and South, and at Baltimore, the Northern Democrats nominated Stephen Douglas for president while the Southern Democrats chose **John C. Breckinridge**.
 2. Meanwhile, the “Know-Nothings” chose **John Bell** of Tennessee.
- XIII. A Rail-Splitter Splits the Union
1. The Republicans, sensing victory against their split opponents, nominating Abraham Lincoln, not William Seward.
 2. Their platform had an appeal to every important non-southern group: for free soilers it proposed non-extension of slavery; for northern manufacturers, a protective tariff; for the immigrants, no abridgement of rights; for the West, internal improvements at federal expense; and for the farmers, free homesteads.
 3. Southerners threatened that Lincoln's election would result in Southern secession.
 4. Lincoln wasn't an outright abolitionist, since as late as February 1865, he had still favored cash compensation for free slaves.
 5. Abe Lincoln won despite not even being on the ballot in the South.
- XIV. The Electoral Upheaval of 1860
1. Lincoln won with only 40% of the popular vote, and had the Democratic Party been more organized and energetic, they might have won.
 2. The Republicans did not control the House or the Senate, and the South still had a five to four majority in the Supreme Court, but the South still decided to secede.
- XV. The Secessionist Exodus
1. **South Carolina** had threatened to secede if Lincoln was elected president, and now it went good on its word, seceding in December of 1860.
 - i. **Alabama, Mississippi, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas** followed in the next six weeks.
 2. The seven seceders met in Montgomery, Alabama in February of 1861 and created the **Confederate States of America**, and they chose Jefferson Davis as president.
 3. President Buchanan did nothing to force the confederacy back into the Union, partly because the Union troops were needed in the West and because the North was still apathetic toward secession; they felt that it was better that the South had seceded.
- XVI. The Collapse of Compromise
1. In an attempt at compromise (again), **James Henry Crittenden** of Kentucky proposed the **Crittenden amendments**, which would ban slavery north of the 36°30' line and would leave the issue in territories south of the line up to the people; also, existing slavery south of the line would be protected.
 2. Lincoln opposed the compromise, which might have worked, because his party had preached against the extension of slavery, and he had to stick to principle.
 3. It also seems that Buchanan couldn't have saved the Union no matter what he could have done.
- XVII. Farewell to Union
1. The seceding states did so because they feared that their rights as a slaveholding minority were being threatened, and were alarmed at the growing power of the Republicans, plus, they believed that they would be unopposed despite what the Northerners claimed.
 2. The South also hoped to develop its own banking and shipping, and to prosper.
 3. Besides, in 1776, the 13 colonies had seceded from Britain and had won; now the South could do the same thing.