

## The Debate over Slavery

### The Big Idea

Antislavery literature and the annexation of new lands intensified the debate over slavery.

### Main Ideas

The addition of new land in the West renewed disputes over the expansion of slavery.

The Compromise of 1850 tried to solve the disputes over slavery.

The Fugitive Slave Act caused more controversy.

Abolitionists used antislavery literature to promote opposition.

### **Main Idea 1: The addition of new land in the West renewed disputes over the expansion of slavery.**

- Additional land gained after Mexican-American War caused bitter slavery dispute.
- Missouri Compromise of 1820 prohibited slavery north of latitude 36°30'.
- President Polk wanted to extend the line to the West Coast, dividing Mexican Cession into free and slavery parts.
- Some leaders wanted **popular sovereignty**, the idea that political power belongs to the people, to decide on whether to ban or allow slavery in their territory.

### **Regional Differences about Slavery**

#### **Growing Sectionalism**

- Some northerners wanted to ban slavery in all parts of the Mexican Cession.
- The **Wilmot Proviso**, prohibiting slavery there, was proposed but not enacted.
- **Sectionalism**, favoring the interests of one section or region over the interests of the entire country, was on the rise.
- Antislavery northerners formed a new party—the **Free-Soil Party**—to support the Wilmot Proviso.

#### **California Question**

- California applied to enter the Union.
- Southerners did not want California to be a free state because it would upset the balance of slave and free states.

### **Main Idea 2: The Compromise of 1850 tried to solve the disputes over slavery.**

- Senator Henry Clay offered **Compromise of 1850**.
  - California would enter the Union as a free state.
  - The rest of the Mexican Cession would be federal land. The slavery question would be decided by popular sovereignty.
  - Texas could give up land east of the upper Rio Grande. In return, the government would pay Texas's debt from when it was an independent republic.
  - Slave trade, but not slavery, would end in the nation's capital.
  - A more effective fugitive slave law would be passed.
- The compromise was enacted and settled most disputes between slave and free states.

### **Main Idea 3: The Fugitive Slave Act caused more controversy.**

#### **Fugitive Slave Act**

- Made it a crime to help runaway slaves and allowed officials to arrest runaway slaves in free areas
- Slaveholders could take suspected fugitives to U.S. commissioners, who decided their fate. Commissioners received more money for returning them to slaveholders.
- Accused fugitives could not testify on their own behalf.

#### Reaction to Act

- Enforcement of act immediate
- Thousands of northern African Americans fled to Canada in fear.
- Act upset northerners
- Anthony Burns was fugitive returned to slavery with federal help in 1854.
- Persuaded many to join abolitionist cause

#### **Main Idea 4:**

#### **Abolitionists used antislavery literature to promote opposition.**

- Northern abolitionists used stories of fugitive slaves to gain sympathy for their cause.
- Fiction also informed people about the evils of slavery.
- *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by **Harriet Beecher Stowe** was an influential antislavery novel published in 1852.
  - More than 2 million copies sold within a decade.
  - Still widely read as source about harsh realities of slavery.