

Chapter 20: Causes of the Civil War 2

1. Kansas-Nebraska Act

Republicans

Senator Stephen A. Douglas wanted to build a **transcontinental railroad** to help the United States expand westward. In 1854, he got the Kansas-Nebraska Act passed that divided the Louisiana Purchase into two **territories**. Once done, work could begin on planning out a railroad route from the East to California.

Immediately, people argued over whether slavery should be allowed in either of these territories. Abolitionists, anti-slavery Democrats and Whigs, and Free-Soilers came together and formed the Republican Party. They opposed slavery in the territories and additional slave states in the West.

Bleeding Kansas

The territorial governor of Kansas held elections to form a new government in 1855. People poured into Kansas from free and slave states hoping to elect a government favorable to their side. Although abolitionists outnumbered **proslavery** forces, corruption at the polls caused a proslavery government to form. So, abolitionists formed their own government in Lawrence.

With two governments in the territory of Kansas, violence broke out with over 200 people dying. Newspapers referred to the civil war as Bleeding Kansas. The federal government split on which Kansas government to support. On the floor of the Senate, southern Representative Preston Brooks caned Senator Charles Sumner for blaming the South for the violence in Kansas.

Abolitionist John Brown arrived in Kansas in 1855. A religious **fanatic** who believed that slavery could only be abolished through violence, he took a small raiding party into the proslavery town of Pottawatomie Creek. There, on May 25, 1856, Brown and his band killed five proslavery men with swords. After, Brown fled the territory and headed north where abolitionists hid him from authorities. Brown spent his time planning his next attack.

2. Dred Scott

Court Case

Dred Scott was a slave bought around 1833 in the slave state of Missouri by army surgeon Dr. John Emerson. When the army transferred Emerson to the free state of Illinois, he took Scott with him. In 1836, Scott went with Emerson to Wisconsin Territory—free territory. Finally, by 1840 Scott had returned to Missouri.

In 1846, Scott sued for his freedom arguing that living in a free state and free territory made him a free man. The case went through the Missouri court system and finally reached the Supreme Court in 1857. Chief Justice Roger B. Taney hoped to end the debate over slavery in the territories. The Supreme Court ruled as follows:

1. Since Scott was a slave and not a U.S. citizen, he could not sue for his freedom.
2. Since Scott returned to Missouri—a slave state—he was still a slave.
3. The 5th Amendment prevented Congress from taking away property without “**due process**.” Since a slave was property, Congress could not make laws taking away slaves in the

territories. Since the Missouri Compromise banned slavery in Louisiana Territory, it was unconstitutional. Therefore, slavery could exist in all United States territories.

The North was outraged. To calm the North, Senator Stephen A. Douglas issued the Freeport Doctrine that stated anti-slavery territories could choose not to enforce slave codes. In this way, slavery might not take hold. However, the South threatened secession if the North failed to enforce slave laws in the territories.

3. Lincoln vs. Douglas

Debates for the Senate

In 1858, Stephen A. Douglas and Abraham Lincoln had seven debates. Both men were running for the United States Senate in Illinois. Historians believe these debates were the most important in American political history.

Douglas was a well known person for the Democratic Party and running for a third term to the U.S. Senate. Lincoln was running for Douglas's seat for the Republican Party. Since Douglas was famous, the campaign attracted national attention.

Most of the debates centered on the spread of slavery into the territories. Douglas tried not to take a side on the issue while Lincoln made it clear that he opposed the expansion of slavery. Although Lincoln eventually lost the election, he became famous as a result of the debates. Some people wanted him to run for president in 1860. Douglas's reelection caused anger among many Southerners. Eventually, the Democratic Party broke in two over the issue of slavery.

4. Harper's Ferry

John Brown Attacks

On October 16, 1859, John Brown and 22 men entered the southern town of Harper's Ferry and captured the federal arsenal of weapons. They intended to hand out weapons to local slaves and start a slave rebellion. They would go from plantation to plantation growing an army to march on the South and end slavery.

Unfortunately for Brown, the hoped for support from local enslaved people never showed up, but the local militia and U.S. marines did. After a firefight, most of Brown's followers were killed or captured. Brown was put on trial for treason and murder. On December 2, 1859, Virginia hanged John Brown.

Brown's raid raised tensions between the North and South and made any compromises on any issue nearly impossible.

5. Secession

Civil War

The nation had fragmented over the slavery issue. In the election of 1860, the Republican Abraham Lincoln won. Although Lincoln promised not to interfere with slavery where it existed, he stated he would not let it spread either.

For the South, they saw their grip on national power eroding. On December 20, 1860, South Carolina became the first of eleven states to secede and form the Confederate States of America. On April 12, 1861, Confederate forces attacked Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor. These first shots ignited the American Civil War.