

The Union in Peril**Section 1****The Divisive Politics of Slavery****Terms and Names**

Wilmot Proviso Bill that would ban slavery in the territories acquired after the War with Mexico

secession Decision by a state to leave the Union

Compromise of 1850 Series of measures that were intended to settle the disagreements between free states and slave states

popular sovereignty Idea that people living in a territory should make their own decisions, especially the decision to admit slavery

Stephen A. Douglas Senator from Illinois who worked to pass the Compromise of 1850

Millard Fillmore 13th president

Before You Read

In the last section, you read about American expansion to the West. In this section, you will see how the issue of slavery in the western territories caused conflict in the nation.

As You Read

Use a chart to take notes on the regional differences discussed in the section.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN NORTH AND SOUTH; SLAVERY IN THE TERRITORIES (Pages 304–306)**How did the North and South differ?**

By the early 1850s, the North and South had grown further apart. The North was industrial. It had 20,000 miles of railroad track, factories, and large cities. Many immigrants came to the North to find jobs in the factories. These immigrants opposed slavery. The South remained rural and agricultural. It had very little industry and few immigrants.

In 1846, Congress debated the **Wilmot Proviso**. This was a bill that would ban slavery in the new territories acquired from Mexico. Northerners favored the bill. They felt that more slave states would give the South too much power in Congress.

Southerners opposed the Proviso. They argued that they had a right to slaves in the new territories, because slaves were property—and property was protected by the Constitution. The Wilmot Proviso never passed.

In 1849, California asked to enter the Union as a free state. Southerners thought it should be a slave state since most of it lay south of the Missouri Compromise line. (This imaginary line running through the western territories was created in 1820. South of the line, slavery was legal; north of the line it was outlawed.)

President Zachary Taylor supported California's admission as a free state. Taylor believed that its climate and terrain were not suited to slavery. More importantly, Taylor felt that the South

Section 1, *continued*

would be better off leaving the slavery issue up to individual territories rather than Congress—and its many abolitionist members.

However, Taylor soon found that feelings in the South were more passionate than he expected. Southerners saw the move to block slavery in the territories as an attack on the southern way of life. They began to question whether the South should remain in the Union.

1. Why was the issue of slavery in the territories so important to the North and South?

THE SENATE DEBATES

(Pages 307–309)

What was the Compromise of 1850?

The 31st Congress opened in December 1849 in an atmosphere of distrust and bitterness. The question of statehood for California topped the agenda. So too did other disputes. Northerners demanded the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia. Southerners accused the North of failing to enforce the Fugitive Slave Act of 1793. As the tension mounted, some southern states threatened **secession**, or formal withdrawal from the union.

In Congress, Henry Clay of Kentucky presented the **Compromise of 1850**. To please the North, the compromise called for California to be admitted as a free state. To satisfy the South, the compromise called for a stricter fugitive slave law. This law required Northerners to return escaped slaves to their masters.

Other provisions of the compromise had elements that appealed to the North and

South. For example, Northerners were happy with a provision that gave **popular sovereignty** to the territories of New Mexico and Utah. This allowed the territories to decide for themselves whether to be a slave or free state. That provision appealed to Southerners as well.

Also, as part of the compromise, the federal government would pay Texas \$10 million to surrender its claim on New Mexico. This provision satisfied Northerners because, in effect, it limited slavery in Texas to its current borders. For Southerners, the money would help to offset Texas's expenses and debts from the war with Mexico.

Congress debated the Compromise of 1850 for months. The North, represented by Daniel Webster of Massachusetts, supported the plan. The South, represented by John C. Calhoun of South Carolina, opposed the compromise.

The compromise failed to pass. Senator **Stephen A. Douglas** of Illinois then took action. He was able to pass the compromise by submitting each part of the plan as a separate bill. The unexpected death of President Taylor aided Douglas's efforts. On July 9, 1850, Taylor fell ill and died. **Millard Fillmore** became president. Unlike Taylor, he supported the compromise. Finally, the Compromise of 1850 became law. However, it did not settle the issue of slavery for long.

2. What were the features of the Compromise of 1850?
