

**Events Leading to the Beginning of the Civil War –
A Summary of Sectional Conflicts, 1850 - 1861**

COMPROMISE OF 1850

1. California was admitted to the United States as a free state.
 - The South wanted to divide California into two states, one slave and one free. However, as a result of the Compromise of 1850, California (and the gold discovered there in 1849) was admitted to the Union as a free state. This made 16 free states and 15 slave states in the United States.
2. Popular sovereignty (voting) in the Utah and New Mexico Territories.
 - In the rest of the Mexican Cession (land acquired after the Mexican War) the people in these areas would be allowed to vote on whether to allow slavery in their territories. Before this, Congress had always made that decision. This allowed the possibility of slavery in these territories.
3. Slave trade was abolished in Washington, D.C.
 - People could no longer openly buy and sell slaves in the nation's capital. Slavery was still legal there, but slave auctions were now illegal.
4. Fugitive Slave Law passed by Congress
 - A strong national (federal) law was passed to help return runaway slaves to their masters. Even people in free states were supposed to help capture and return fugitive (runaway) slaves or face prison and large fines. When a suspected runaway was caught and taken to court to determine their identify, the judge (at the hearing) received a double fee for finding in favor of the master. The Fugitive Slave Law was one response to the growing success of the Underground Railroad, used by Harriet Tubman to aid hundreds of runaways.

UNCLE TOM'S CABIN (1852)

- A Northern abolitionist, Harriet Beecher Stowe, wrote a very persuasive novel to describe the evils of slavery. This book, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, told of the suffering of brave and kind slaves at the hands of cruel and horrible overseers and masters. This novel became a best seller in the North and was presented in play form at many theaters. The book was banned in the South, but successfully persuaded many Northerners to join the abolitionists and oppose the Fugitive Slave Law. In its history, this book sold more copies than any other book in America besides the Bible.

KANSAS-NEBRASKA ACT (1854)

- This law organized the new territories of Kansas and Nebraska according to the idea of popular sovereignty (voting) to let people in those territories decide for themselves whether to have slavery in their territories or not. The new law went against a previous law that banned slavery north of Missouri in new territories of the Louisiana Purchase. Both the pro-slavery and anti-slavery supporters moved into Kansas and "cheated" during the election. The fighting and killing that occurred gave the area the nickname of "Bleeding Kansas" and was a mini-civil war in that state. Neither side really won.

REPUBLICAN PARTY ORGANIZED (1856)

- Partly as a response to "Bleeding Kansas", a new political party was formed. They participated in their first national election in 1856, and were defeated. Abolitionists and anti-slavery Northerners formed the Republican Party for the specific purpose of keeping slavery from spreading to any new territories. By winning state and national elections, they hoped to gain enough political power to make the spread of slavery illegal. Many Southerners misinterpreted the goals of the party to mean abolishing all slavery in the United States.

DRED SCOTT CASE (1857)

- A slave, Dred Scott, sued his master for freedom because he had been taken to live in a free territory (Wisconsin). The Supreme Court of the United States (under the leadership of Chief Justice Roger B. Taney) ruled that living in a free territory did not make Dred Scott a free man. The High Court further stated that Dred Scott, in fact, did not even have the right to sue in the U.S. Courts, and that he was the “property” of his owner with no civil rights. Furthermore, this decision went on to say that even Free Blacks were not citizens of the United States, no matter where they lived or how long they had been free. This decision also declared unconstitutional the law that had banned slavery in some United States territories. The Court ruled that since slaves were property and the Fifth Amendment to the Constitution protected the right to own property, Congress could not keep slave owners from taking their “property” anywhere in the United States they wanted to go. The Supreme Court said that only states, not the federal government, could make laws about slavery. This case was a blow for abolitionists and put power behind the states’ rights arguments.

JOHN BROWN’S RAID ON THE ARSENAL AT HARPER’S FERRY, VIRGINIA (1859)

- A violent abolitionist (one who believed that it was OK to kill slave owners and cause slave uprisings against their masters) named John Brown led a raid against the United States arsenal (place where guns are kept) at Harper’s Ferry, Virginia. His plan was to capture the guns and distribute them to slaves in the surrounding countryside. These slaves would then be armed and could rise up in a rebellion against their masters, kill them and declare themselves free. The United States Army, under the command of Colonel Robert E. Lee, ended the raid by surrounding the arsenal and killing or capturing the raiders. John Brown was captured (although many of the other raiders were killed), was put on trial for treason against the United States, was found guilty, and was hanged.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN WAS ELECTED PRESIDENT OF THE U.S. (November, 1860)

- A Republican candidate, Abraham Lincoln, was elected the 16th President of the United States. He defeated two Democrats (who canceled each other’s votes out). Although he campaigned on the Republican Platform of keeping slavery from *spreading*, many Southerners thought Lincoln was an *abolitionist*.

SECESSION AND FORMATION OF THE CONFEDERATE STATES OF AMERICA

- In December of 1860, immediately after Lincoln’s election, South Carolina became the first Southern state to secede (withdraw) from the United States of America. They were followed in December 1860 and early in 1861 by six other Southern states: Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Florida, Louisiana, and Texas. These seven states formed the Confederate States of America. They based their decision on the principles of *states’ rights* arguing that they had the free right to leave the Union because they had freely joined the Union. One of the first things the new government of the CSA did was to confiscate all U.S. government property (post offices, government buildings, tax offices, military bases) in the South and demand loyalty to the Confederacy. These states also believed that when Abraham Lincoln officially became President on *March 20, 1861, he would begin to abolish slavery in the South. (*note: now the U.S. inaugurates the President on January 20th but in 1861 it was March 20th)

NORTH VS. SOUTH, 1850 – 1861

Before people get involved in an all out war, there is usually a series of events that make them angry. As each side gets more and more angry, there is less chance for a peaceful solution. This is a list of events that occurred between 1850 and 1861 in the United States. The sequence of these events resulted in the outbreak of the Civil War in our country between the North and the South.

For each event below, review the event (using the handout *Event Leading to War*) and tell whether it makes the North or the South most angry. Explain why that section of the country would be angered by that event. The first event, the Compromise of 1850, had several parts to which the two sides would respond differently.

Event	Who got mad?	Why?
1. The Compromise of 1850: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • California was admitted as a free state. • People in the Mexican Cession could decide for themselves whether to allow slavery or not • The slave trade was abolished in Washington, DC • Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Law 		
2. <i>Uncle Tom's Cabin</i> was published in 1852.		
3. Kansas-Nebraska Act (1854)		
4. Republican Party is formed in 1854-56		

Event	Who got mad?	Why?
5. Supreme Court decision on the Dred Scott case (1857)		
6. John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry, VA (1859)		
7. Election of Abraham Lincoln as President of the U.S. (November, 1860)		
8. South Carolina and other southern states secede (December 1860 – early 1861)		
9. The Confederate States of America are formed (1861)		
10. Civil War begins with the shots fired at Fort Sumter, S.C. by Confederate troops on April 12, 1861.		

