Compromise Of 1850 Essay, Research Paper

The Compromise of 1850

The Compromise of 1850 was a series of acts passed in 1850, by which the United States Congress hoped to settle the strife between the opponents of slavery in the North and slave owners in the South. There is much speculation about how our country would be without this Compromise. The Compromise is a major stepping stone in United States history because of its many forces and provisions.

The Compromise of 1850 was an attempt at solving North-South tensions over the extension of slavery, specifically into newly annexed Texas and territory gained by the U.S. in the Mexican War. Northerners were in favor of the Compromise, claiming that it would be an opportunity to stop slavery and reduce southern influence. On the other hand, Southerners were ultimately against it, arguing that their political power would be threatened because the admission of California would tip the equilibrium of the normal 15 free/15 slave states. Most importantly, the Compromise was a chance for America to expand its territories, no matter what kind of states. Meanwhile, the Wilmot Proviso, an amendment for a bill relating to the Mexican War, had supporters from the North that hoped to exclude slavery from the north and decline the South’s political power. President Zachary Taylor favored bypassing all the hoopla that comes with politics and proposed to admit California and New Mexico directly as states. This would mean that possibly two more free states would be in the Union, which upset the Southerners. In the end, President Taylor died while in office of a stomach ailment and was replaced in office by his Vice-President, Millard Fillmore. Fillmore was a quiet man who quickly let it be known that he supported the Compromise one hundred percent.

Daniel Webster, Henry Clay, and Stephen A. Douglas led in winning the passage of the Compromise laws. Clay sponsored compromise measures, largely originating with Stephen A. Douglas, in the Senate, and Douglas made the bright idea of separating the Compromise into components and holding a vote on each, which in turn added to the victory of the Compromise. John C. Calhoun led Southern opposition to the laws. Daniel Webster enhanced the acceptance of the Compromise by giving a powerful persuasive speech supporting the Compromise. These men were the main reasons the Compromise was accepted.

There were many provisions of the Compromise, more than just admitting a state to the Union. One hot topic was the issue of popular sovereignty, which meant that the residents decided issues pertaining to them. Many people agreed that the government should allow the residents of New Mexico and Utah to decide themselves if they wanted to be a free state or a slave state. Another important stipulation was the issue of the Fugitive Slave Act, urged by Clay, that stated that slave owners had the right to seize and return slaves who had fled to free territory. However many people deemed this act useless, arguing that many slaveholders would not bear the expense of a runaway slave. Of course the most controversial and most important topic of the Compromise of 1850 was whether to allow California into the Union as a free state, a slave state, or let it be decided by popular sovereignty. These provisions were broken down into separate votes, which allowed a majority for the Compromise, and President Fillmore signed it to law in 1850.

The Compromise of 1850 was not merely a debate over North and South, but more importantly over expansion and slavery. The Compromise tested the strength of our nation and showed that no matter what the circumstances, a goal can be achieved by the common man, as long as there is persistence and desire.