

# Slavery in America

Slavery in the Americas began just 25 years after Columbus made his first voyage in 1492. The Native Americans who welcomed the Spaniards when they arrived were killed or forced to work as slaves on plantations the Spanish established. African slaves were brought to Virginia in 1619. Although we generally think of slavery as being a southern practice, at the time of the Revolutionary War, there was slavery in every state. After the Revolutionary War, when the United States was being formed, most people understood that slavery was wrong and should be stopped. In fact, just 20 years after the U.S. Constitution was adopted, a law was passed making it illegal to import slaves from Africa. While this law was a step in the right direction, it did nothing to stop slavery. The country had enough slaves to do all of the work needed on the huge plantations. The owners of these plantations also had a steady supply of new slaves, because the children born of the slaves would also become slaves.

Although slavery was originally practiced in every state, it was mainly a regional issue. The northern states had many factories and relied on skilled workers. The white workers did not want to compete with slaves who would work for nothing. With slaves working for nothing, white workers would have trouble getting jobs and would not be paid very much. On the other hand, the South did not have many factories or workers. There were huge farms or plantations that relied on slaves to do most of the work.



### THE MISSOURI COMPROMISE

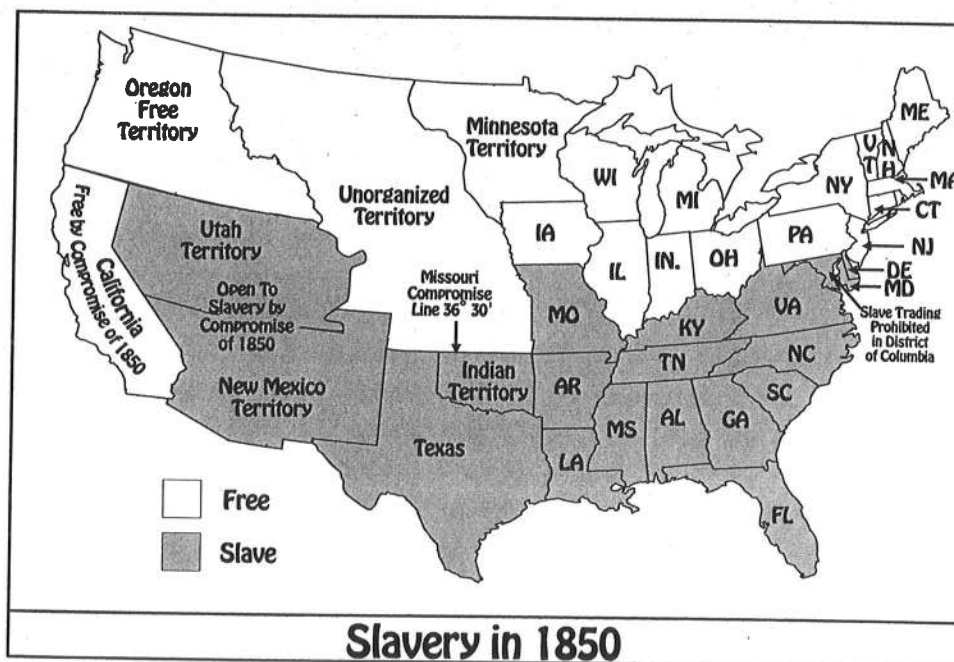
In 1819, the number of states with slaves was the same as the number of slaves that did not have slaves. There were 11 states that were called *free states* since there were no slaves, and there were 11 states that were called *slave states*. This was the year that Missouri wanted to be admitted as a state. The question was, should it be a free state or a slave state? This question became a hotly debated subject in Congress. The North was afraid that since Missouri was part of the Louisiana Purchase, that if it were admitted as a slave state, then all of the other states to be formed out of this territory would also be slave states. Southerners felt differently. They said that since many Southerners had already settled in Missouri and had slaves, the federal government had no right to take the slaves away from them. Finally, a compromise on the part of both sides was reached. It was called the Missouri Compromise of 1820. The compromise had the following provisions:

1. Slavery would be allowed in Missouri.
2. Slavery would be forbidden north of the line across the Louisiana Purchase that extended from the upper tip of Texas to the bottom of Missouri (the 36° 30' line of latitude).
3. Slavery would be permitted south of this line.

When Missouri was admitted as a slave state, Maine was admitted as a free state. So the balance between slave and free states remained the same.

### THE COMPROMISE OF 1850

In spite of the Missouri Compromise, disagreements concerning slavery continued. Americans continued their push westward. Some went to California and Texas. Many who went to Texas took their slaves with them. California and Texas were Spanish possessions, but Mexico became independent and claimed this area. However, those living in Texas did not want to be part of Mexico, they wanted to be independent, too. This led to a war, and 10 years after Texas became a Republic, it was admitted as a slave state, since it was south of the Missouri Compromise Line. A few years later in 1848, gold was discovered in California. The population of California grew very quickly and the question of whether California should be a slave state or a free state was raised once again.



The debate over slavery continued. The South wanted more of the area won from Mexico to be slave states. They threatened to leave the United States and form another United States of the South. The North, of course, disagreed. In 1850, Henry Clay devised a compromise plan to settle the issue. The plan was called a compromise because each side got some things it wanted. Among other things, the Compromise of 1850, as it came to be known, had four provisions:

1. California was to be admitted as a free state.
2. Slave trade—but not slavery—was to be prohibited in the District of Columbia.
3. The new land acquired from Mexico was to be organized into two territories—New Mexico and Utah—and Congress was not to decide if these territories should be slave or free. The people who settled these territories would decide for themselves when they asked to become a state. This was called **popular sovereignty**. The compromise was passed by Congress.
4. A new fugitive slave law was passed. Hiding or helping a slave escape was punishable by a fine and imprisonment.

### THE KANSAS-NEBRASKA ACT

In 1853, President Franklin Pierce promised that the Compromise of 1850 would be strictly enforced and that the slavery problem had been solved. In a matter of only a few weeks, however, that changed. Senator Stephen A. Douglas from Illinois introduced a bill to Congress to create two new territories from part of the Louisiana Purchase just west of Missouri and Iowa. The names of these two territories were to be Kansas and Nebraska. The bill also said that the people in these two new territories should be able to vote if they wanted slavery or not. This violated the Missouri Compromise of 1820, which said that any new state admitted that was west or north of Missouri had to be a free state. Douglas said that the Compromise of 1850, which included popular sovereignty, took the place of the Missouri Compromise. After a difficult fight in the Congress, the Kansas-Nebraska Act passed and became law. Nebraska became a free state without much problem, but there was bitter fighting and conflict in Kansas before it voted to be a free state.



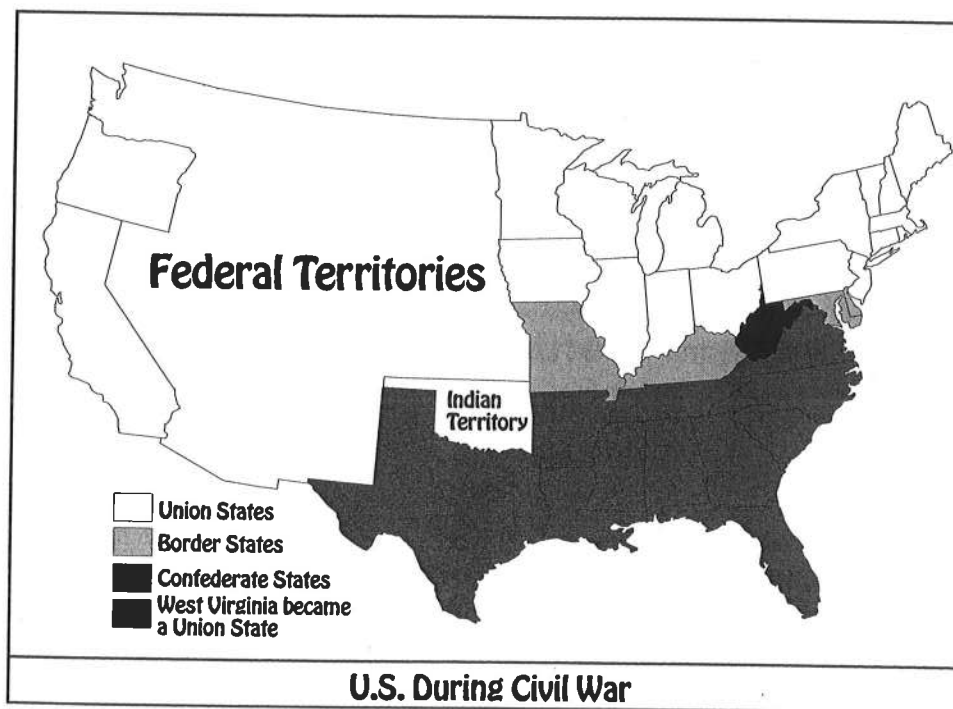
## Slavery Leads to War

Some people predicted that if Abraham Lincoln were elected president of the United States in 1860, the Southern states would secede from the Union. Many Northerners did not take these predictions seriously, but when Abraham Lincoln was elected, this is exactly what happened. The first state to leave the Union was South Carolina. Soon after South Carolina declared itself “an independent commonwealth,” six other cotton producing states—Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas—also seceded. In February, 1861, representatives of the states that had left the Union met in Montgomery, Alabama, and adopted a provisional constitution for the newly-formed group called the **Confederate States of America**. Jefferson Davis was elected president, and Alexander H. Stephens was elected vice president of the Confederacy. President Davis then appointed a Cabinet.

The Confederacy hoped the remaining eight slave states would secede and become part of the newly-organized Confederacy, but only four—Arkansas, Tennessee, North Carolina, and Virginia—separated themselves from the Union once the war began. The other four states—Delaware, Kentucky, Maryland, and Missouri—were called **border states**. The border states were slave states located on the border between the Confederate states and the free states in the Union.

Not everyone in the South wanted to secede. Texas Governor Sam Houston opposed succession. Even Alexander H. Stephens who was elected vice president of the Confederacy originally opposed succession. Forty counties in Virginia felt so strongly the Union should be preserved that they held their own constitutional convention after Virginia had seceded and decided to form a new state called West Virginia and become part of the Union.

Many believe that the War Between the States was fought to abolish slavery. This is not quite true. While the issue of slavery caused the Southern states to secede, which eventually led to war, the North did not go to war to abolish slavery. It fought to preserve the Union. By the same token, the South did not go to war to defend slavery. It was fighting for states’ rights. The South felt each state had the right to secede and to govern itself.



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## Slavery Quiz

Shown below are a number of sentences. Some are true and some are false. If the sentence is true, write the word "true" in front of the sentence. If the sentence is false, write a term that could replace the term written in bold type to make the sentence true.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. **Spanish** slaves were brought to Virginia in 1619.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. The South did not have many **factories**.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. At the time of the **Civil War**, there was slavery in every state.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Slavery in the Americas began just 25 years after **Balboa** made his first voyage in 1492.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. As a result of the Missouri Compromise, **Missouri** was admitted as a slave state.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. As a result of the Missouri Compromise, **Maine** was admitted as a free state.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Twenty years after the U.S. Constitution was adopted, a law was passed making it illegal to import slaves from **Asia**.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. The **Southern** states had many factories.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. In **1819**, the number of states with slaves was the same as the number of states that did not have slaves.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. The south had huge farms or **plantations**.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. Children born of the slaves would also become **slaves**.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. In 1848, gold was discovered in **Utah**.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. Some people predicted that if **Jefferson Davis** was elected president of the United States, the Southern states would secede.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 14. Stephen A. Douglas from Illinois introduced a bill in Congress to create two new territories—**Kansas** and Nebraska.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. The North was afraid if Missouri was admitted as a slave state, then all of the other states formed out of the **Gadsden** Purchase would also be slave states.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 16. In February 1861, representatives from states that had left the Union met in Montgomery, Alabama, and adopted a constitution for the **Consolidated** States of America.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 17. Texas became a **Republic** when it won its independence from Mexico.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 18. Texas was admitted as a slave state since it was south of the **Missouri** Compromise Line.

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- \_\_\_\_\_ 19. The first state to leave the **Confederacy** was South Carolina.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 20. Alexander H. Stephens was vice president of the **Confederacy**.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 21. According to the Missouri Compromise, slavery was forbidden north of the line across the Louisiana Purchase that extended from the upper tip of Texas to the bottom of **Texas**.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 22. According to the Compromise of 1850, **California** was to be admitted as a free state.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 23. According to the Compromise of 1850, slave trade—but not slavery—was to be prohibited in the **District of Columbia**.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 24. According to the Compromise of 1850, The new land acquired by the war with Mexico was to be organized into two territories—New Mexico and **Old Mexico**.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 25. According to the Compromise of 1850, the question of slavery in New Mexico and Utah was to be decided by the **governor**.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 26. The term called "**popular sovereignty**," refers to letting residents decide if a state should have slavery.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 27. As a result of the Compromise of 1850, a new **compromise** law was passed.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 28. Some people complained that the Compromise of 1850 violated the **Missouri** Compromise of 1820.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 29. Forty counties in Virginia felt so strongly the Union should be preserved that, after Virginia had seceded, they formed a new state called **West Virginia** and became part of the Union.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 30. There was bitter fighting and conflict in **Nebraska** before it voted to be a free state.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 31. **Northerners** felt they were fighting the Civil War to preserve the Union.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 32. The **South** felt they were fighting for states' rights.