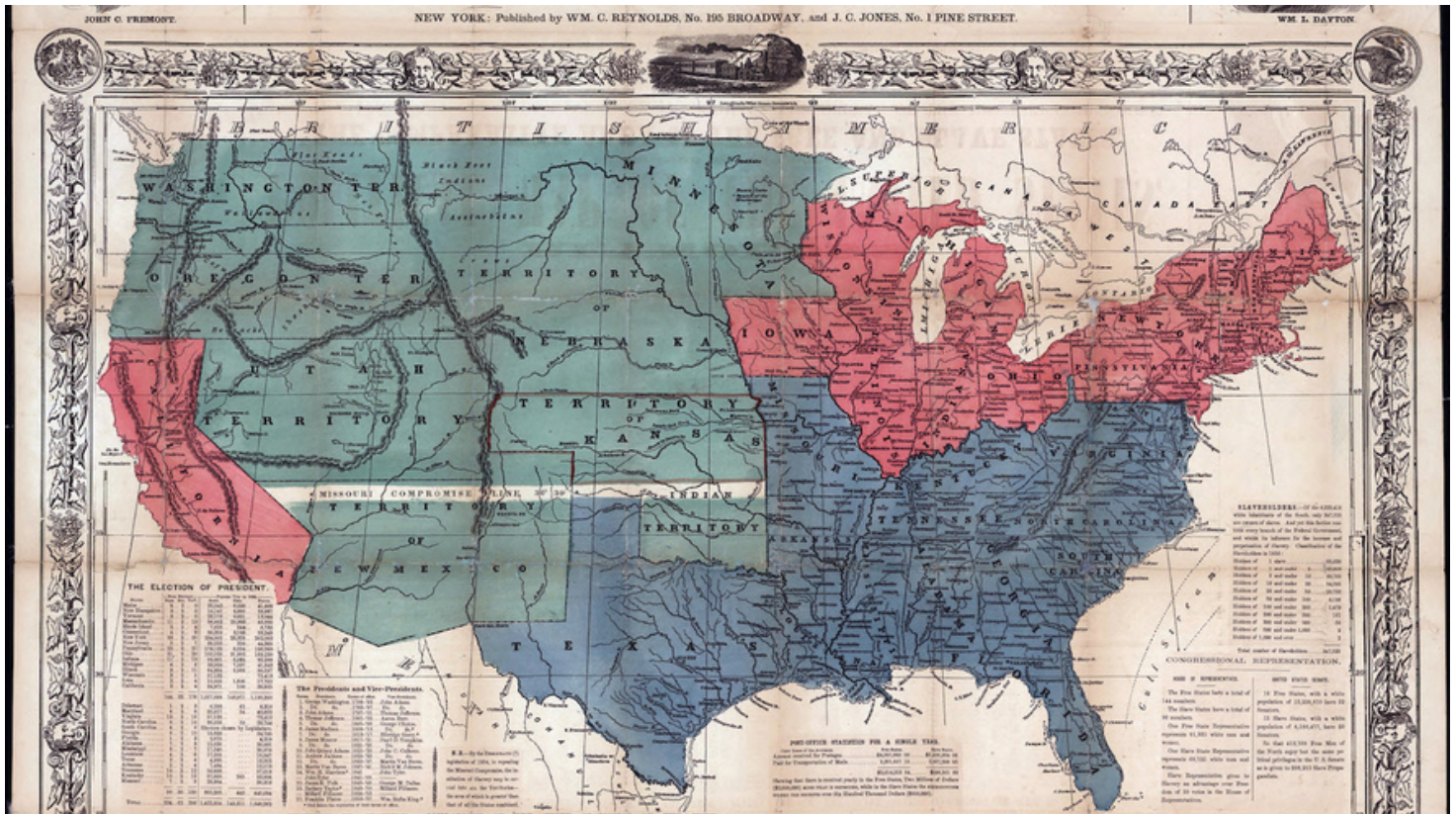


The Missouri Compromise and Slavery in the Western U.S.

By UShistory.org, adapted by Newsela staff on 05.12.17

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Printed on map: "Designed to exhibit the comparative area of the free and slave states and the territory open to slavery or freedom by the repeal of the Missouri compromise. With a comparison of the principal statistics of the free and slave states, from the census of 1850." Free states are in red, slave states are in dark blue, and the territories that could be slave or free if the Missouri compromise was ended are in gray-blue.

In the 1800s, new states wanted to join the U.S. The question was whether they should allow slavery.

Slave owners were moving huge numbers of slaves to the Western territories. Slavery had become a major debate. In the U.S. Constitution, the Founding Fathers tried to balance the power of slave and free states. They sacrificed the rights of African-Americans to keep Southern states happy. Slavery became a big question once again in 1819. Missouri was a territory, and now it was asking to join the United States as a slave state.

Free and slave states were equal

In 1819, the nation had 11 free and 11 slave states. Each state got two senators who made laws in Congress. This meant that slave states and free states had an equal number of senators. If Missouri

became a slave state, it could give slave states more power. Congressman James Tallmadge from New York suggested that slavery should be outlawed in Missouri. The debate in Congress was bitter. The defenders of slavery said any new state should get to decide whether or not to allow slavery. They said that if Congress made the decision, then the new states would have fewer rights than the original ones.

Congress came up with a solution called the Missouri Compromise. It had two parts. First, Missouri would join the U.S. as a slave state. Maine would also become a state, but it would be a free state. Second, slavery would be outlawed from all new states north of Missouri. Congress drew a line across the country starting at the southern border of Missouri. People on both sides knew the Missouri Compromise had many problems. Still, it lasted for over 30 years, until 1854, when lawmakers made a new law called the Kansas-Nebraska Act. It said that new states north of the boundary could choose slavery.

Jefferson feared for the country

The Missouri crisis showed that America had a major problem. This problem would later explode into a civil war. Thomas Jefferson said the Missouri crisis, "like a fire-bell in the night, awakened and filled me with terror," as Jefferson thought it would destroy the country.

African-Americans were against slavery in the West, and slave communities were very aware of the debate happening in Congress. Denmark Vesey was a free black minister living in Charleston, South Carolina. He quoted the Bible and lawmakers to condemn slavery in his church. Vesey helped organize a slave uprising in 1822. They planned to capture Charleston long enough for its black population to escape to the country of Haiti. They were caught just days before the rebellion was supposed to start. Thirty-five organizers were killed, including Vesey, and his church was destroyed.

North and South more divided

In the North, anti-slavery feelings were building, and in the South, African-Americans were rebelling. Slaveholders were scared. One white Charleston resident complained that his slaves thought the Missouri debate would give slaves their freedom. African-Americans knew they would not gain their freedom from it. But they also knew that the North and South were growing even more divided. The battle over slavery in Western states led to more slave rebellions. The largest was Nat Turner's Virginia Slave Revolt in 1831.

Quiz

- 1 What was the author's purpose in writing this article?
- (A) The author wrote this article to persuade readers that the Missouri Compromise did not work.
 - (B) The author wrote this article to explain how the debate about slavery created a lot of conflict in the development of the United States.
 - (C) The author wrote this article to describe different opinions politicians had about whether slavery should be allowed in the United States or not.
 - (D) The author wrote this article to tell about the events that led to slave rebellions during the 1800s.
- 2 According to the article, what did Northern and Southern lawmakers AGREE about?
- (A) whether new states should be able to choose to have slavery
 - (B) whether the Missouri Compromise had problems
 - (C) whether new states would have the same rights as original ones
 - (D) whether slavery should be outlawed in Missouri
- 3 How is the introduction [paragraphs 1-2] related to the final section "North and South more divided"?
- (A) Both emphasize that slavery was a cause of conflict between the North and South.
 - (B) Both describe the effects of slavery on people living in the North and South.
 - (C) Both compare reactions to the Missouri Compromise in Northern and Southern states.
 - (D) Both show solutions to the Missouri debate proposed by Northern and Southern states.
- 4 Fill in the blank in the sentence below.
- Overall, the article is organized around _____
- (A) a person and a place.
 - (B) a person and a law.
 - (C) a time and a place.
 - (D) a time and a law.