The Doughfaces Alternate

Franklin Pierce was a "doughface". He was called this because he was a Northerner, but he strongly sympathized with southern ideas and goals. He was usually seen as a kind and good man. He was also an utterly ineffective leader. He became president just at the wrong time. The problems contained in the Compromise of 1850 were becoming obvious. He would make those problems a thousand times worse.

The Compromise had certainly kept the peace. It had also raised the stakes. Before the Compromise of 1850, the Missouri Compromise had been the only way to decide what new states came in as free or slave. The Compromise of 1850 postponed the admittance of New Mexico as a state to prevent it from entering the Union as a Free State. It also reinforced the fugitive slave laws. But the Compromise had reopened a debate that was sure to lead to dramatic conflict. This conflict would center on what new lands would be admitted to the USA. One of the first of the new lands to become a point for debate was Cuba. There was a new proposal to buy or seize Cuba from Spain. The Northern States assumed this was a way to strengthen the slave states. The South saw Cuba as a necessary part of Manifest Destiny. In the end, the debate went nowhere.

Even after Cuba was off the table, the debate continued to rage. The release of the novel Uncle Tom's Cabin in 1852 had raised abolitionist awareness and anti-slavery sentiment in the North. The problem was mainly that the slave-holding interests were aware of a lessening of power. They worried that if states continued to join the Union as Free states, then slavery was doomed. It would probably be outlawed once enough Free-State Senators and Representatives were in Congress. To combat this, they believed two things were necessary: somehow, slave states needed to enter the Union, and the rights of slave-owners needed to be vigorously maintained. 1854 would give them several opportunities on both these fronts.

Outrage would flare in the North when Pierce enforced the Fugitive Slave Act. An escaped slave by the name of Anthony Burns was discovered and arrested while at a market in Boston. An outraged crowd of sympathizing citizens and principled abolitionists move to stop the arrest and trial. Federal officers acting under the Fugitive Slave Act forced back the crowds. President Pierce chose to use this as an opportunity to show his allegiance with the south. He ordered Federal Troops to Boston to enforce Burns' return. Despite the presence of troops lining the streets and protecting the courthouse, a mob of northerners burst into the court in an attempt to free Burns. A Deputy Federal Marshal was killed in the process. Despite all this, Burns was returned to his owner as the law required. Burns would be freed later and live the rest of his short life in the North.

The worse mistake would be the Kansas-Nebraska Act. This was an attempt to solve the problems caused by the Compromise of 1850. Southern slave interests were trying to overturn the original Missouri Compromise for an obvious and rational reason: slaves are needed for agriculture, and not for much else. When the original Missouri compromise guaranteeing slave states south of a dividing line was made, no one really realized how much of the southwest was desert or lands that were bad for farming. As it stood, the South had gained a vast stretch of land where slaves were not needed because of the environment. The South needed to keep the number of Slave States in the Senate above a minimum to keep slavery from being outlawed in Congress. The new territories in the Southwest would not accomplish this. The South needed for slavery to move north into the Great Plains. It was too bad that the Missouri Compromise specifically prohibited such an action.

The solution was the Kansas-Nebraska Act. This declared that the new territories of Kansas and Nebraska would be slave or free based on a vote of the *citizens*. Pro-slave Southerners hoped that enough slave-owners or sympathizers would move to the new territories give a majority vote in favor of slavery. The problem was that this effectively destroyed the Missouri Compromise *and* the Compromise of 1850. Now, it would come down to who could organize the best, and fight and scream the loudest. The result was Bleeding Kansas. Pro and anti-slave supporters moved to Kansas before the vote in order to drive out their opponents through terrorism and intimidation. Among these warriors was John brown. He was a fierce abolitionist who would have a major role in the start of the Civil War.

At the end of the violence, the vote showed Kansas would be a slave state. There was evidence that this was a result of pro-slave citizens of Missouri (a slave state) illegally crossing the border to vote. Despite the evidence of this illegal activity, Pierce chose to recognize the pro-slave government of Kansas as legitimate. When abolitionists created an alternative state government, Pierce said they were rebels. He sent the Army in to prevent them from meeting.

All this would in the end come to nothing more than a practice run for the Civil War. It had proven that each side was more than happy to use violence to win. The South had won. The State of Kansas would send two pro-slave Senators to Congress. This victory would be short lived. Pierce lost the next Presidential election. In the end, Pierce hadn’t worked out a solution that would bring peace. He had instead set the stage for war.

Unusually, Franklin Pierce was not defeated in the next election. Instead, he was removed by his own party. During the Democratic nomination process, James Buchanan beat out Pierce, and became the Democratic nominee. This was mostly because of Buchanan's good reputation. Buchanan had recently been out of the country. This meant people did not blame him for the Kansas-Nebraska Act. He was seen as a political outsider.

In the campaign that followed, Buchanan ran against the first Republican Presidential candidate. The Republicans were a regional party. They belonged to the North, Midwest, and some border states. The entire goal of the Republicans was to provide support for abolition. They thought slavery was bad for the country. The Republicans also wanted to limit the influence of the Southern Democrats. The 3/5 Compromise written into the Constitution to calculate representation continued to give the South considerable control in Congress. By now, the North was more populous. By most logic, the north should control Congress. Something had to change.

The Republicans had formed their party in 1854. They nominated the war hero John C.s Fremont to run against Buchanan. Fremont lost, but the elections of 1856 and 1858 saw the Republicans rise to dominance in the North. For now, though, they lost the battle for the White House, and the Democrats retained control of the Presidency.

To be fair to (arguably) our worst President ever, Buchanan did sort of step into bad situation. The country was divided. Not only was it arguing about the future of slavery, but now there was a new issue. Some Southerners were asking whether the federal government could even regulate slavery in territories that were not yet states. Buchanan was happy to avoid the issue. In any case, the Supreme Court was about to hear a case dealing with slavery in the Territories. Dred Scott was coming to Washington.

The Dred Scott case was a critical one. It is difficult to imagine the amount of interest that surrounded it. Dred Scott was a slave that had traveled with his master throughout several relocations. These included locations in Wisconsin and Illinois. Scott sued for his freedom. He claimed that in the course of his travels, his owners had brought him to Free States. He argued that by doing that, they had set him free. At first, a jury ruled in his favor in Missouri. They agreed he should be free. The case was then appealed. Several higher courts disagreed. There were many court cases from earlier that seemed to show Scott was right. He should be free. By 1857, the case had reached the Supreme Court.

The ruling in 1857 was shocking. The court ruled that African Americans *could not be citizens of the United States under the Constitution.* Further, it was ruled that the Federal government could not regulate slavery in the territories because slaves were property. Owners were protected from unreasonable search and seizure by the 5th amendment. This meant that the government could not seize property. Since slaves were property, and not citizens, slaves couldn’t be taken by the government and set free. This basically nullified the Missouri compromise. It also meant that the only governments that could regulate slavery were State governments. This legalized the idea of popular sovereignty based on votes. Whetehr slavery was allowed not depended only on the state. The decision also turned free African Americans across the country from citizens to mere residents. At this point, small crisis built upon small crisis. The country felt on the verge of disintegration...but Buchanan's greatest failing was yet to come.

The country was in the throes of the election of 1860. Now, Buchanan's flaws became obvious. A small-time former congressional representative and country lawyer by the name of Abraham Lincoln appeared. He had been nominated as the compromise candidate at the Republican Convention held in Chicago, Illinois. Lincoln was in a four way race. In a divided country, there were several candidates who represented the options available. Lincoln stood for ending the *expansion* of slavery as the Republican Candidate. Meanwhile the Democrats broke apart. The Southern branch of the party nominated Vice-President Stephen Breckenridge as their presidential candidate. The Northern Democrats chose to nominate the person who had organized of the Compromise of 1850 and the Kansas-Nebraska Act, Stephen Douglas. Yet another group broke off and nominated a man who declared himself neutral on slavery but for preserving the Union: John Bell.

The overall effect of all these Democratic candidates was to split the electoral vote in the South. Lincoln won the North as a solid group of states, and with it, the Presidency. This was a clear problem. The Southern States were finally prepared to do exactly what they had always threatened. They would secede from the Union to create their own Republic. Buchanan had been warned of this possibility by the commanding General of the Army. It would be necessary to take steps to protect Federal property contained in Southern states, such as armories and forts. Buchanan did nothing other than talk. In a speech to Congress, he announced that secession was illegal. He also said that the Federal government could not and would not use force to prevent secession. This pleased no one. By late December, Southern states beginning with South Carolina voted to secede. As they did so, Senators, Representatives and members of the Cabinet resigned to join their home states. Shortly, these states began seizing federal property. Throughout, Buchanan wavered, accomplishing nothing. He finally dismissed Southern sympathizers from his cabinet after it was too late, and began plans to use force to hold the Union together. At this point in his lame duck months, no one would listen to him. At the most critical time, he had talked when he should have acted. The task of preserving the Union would fall to his successor, the 16th President: Abe Lincoln.

1. Explain three factors that contributed to tensions about slavery during Franklin Pierce's presidency.

2. Describe the events that caused Bleeding Kansas.

3. Explain what the Dred Scott trial was about.

4. What was the result of the Dred Scott trial?

4. Describe what was going on with the Republicans and Democrats during the 1860 election.

5. What was the country like when Lincoln was about to take office?