The Union in Peril: Events Leading up to the Civil War

Four Main Causes of the Civil War

1. Slavery
2. Constitutional Disputes
3. Economic Differences
4. Political Blunders and Extremism
5. Conflict over Territory Status
   1. Wilmot Proviso: Would have excluded slavery from new territories gained from Mex.
      1. Would have upset balance of 15 slave/15 free created in compromise of 1820 (Missouri Compromise)
      2. Wilmot Proviso is defeated… stirs up sectional tensions
   2. Three “Views”
      1. Free Soil Party (1848)
         1. “Free soil, free labor, and free men”
         2. Northerners who opposed allowing slavery into new territories
         3. Also advocated free homesteads (public land grants to small farmers)
         4. Split from Whigs and Democrats
            1. “Conscience” whigs – outright opposed slavery
            2. Antislavery democrats “Barnburners” (defection hurt the democratic party)
      2. Southern Position
         1. Extend Missouri compromise 36,30 line to the pacific ocean to keep balance of free and slave states
      3. Popular Sovereignty Movement
         1. Created by Lewis Cass (Democrat)
         2. Allow popular vote among settlers of each new state to decide if slave or non-slave
         3. Moderates on both sides favored this
6. The Election of 1848
   1. Democrats: Lewis Cass vs. Whig: Zachary Taylor (General in Mex-Am war) vs. Free Soil: Martin Van Buren (former president)
   2. Zachary Taylor Wins
7. The Compromise of 1850:
   1. Gold rush of 1849 and dramatic increase in settlers caused need for law and order
   2. Henry Clay Compromise Proposal:
      1. Admit California into Union as Free State
      2. Divide remainder of Mexican Cession into two territories: New Mexico and Utah.
         1. Popular Sovereignty to decide on slavery issue
      3. Give disputed Texas land to New Mexico and Fed. Gov will assume $10 mil in debt
      4. Ban slave trade in DC, but still allow for whites to hold slaves there
      5. Adopt a new Fugitive Slave Law and enforce
   3. The “Great Triumvirate”:
      1. Henry Clay, Daniel Webster, and John C. Calhoun
      2. Webster: argued for compromise to save the union
      3. Calhoun: argued against compromise
   4. Stephen Douglas, gets different groups in congress to pass the compromise in “chunks”
   5. President Zachary Taylor dies in office, thus Millard Fillmore succeeds him
      1. Millard Fillmore signed the compromise provisions into law easily
8. Agitation over Slavery
   1. Fugitive Slave Law
      1. Purpose: track down runaway slaves who escaped to Northern States
      2. Escaped slaves were under federal jurisdiction
      3. Captured people who claimed to be free were denied the right to trial by jury
      4. Whites who aided escaped slaves were subject to harsh penalties
   2. Underground Railroad
      1. Fabled network of “conductors” and “stations”
         1. Loose network of N. free blacks, ex slaves, and some white abolitionists who helped escaped slaves reach the North or Canada
      2. Harriet Tubman: escaped slave herself, helped over 300 slaves escape over the course of 19 trips back south
   3. Books
      1. “Uncle Tom’s Cabin”
         1. Very influential book about the brutalities of slavery
         2. 1852, Harriet Beecher Stowe
            1. Lincoln to Stowe “so you’re the little woman who wrote the book that made this great war”
         3. Angers Northerners and Southerners alike
      2. “Impending Crisis of the South”
         1. Used statistics to prove that slavery actually weakened the southern economy
   4. Sectional Tensions
      1. Northerners: slavery immoral
      2. Southerners: north wanted to destroy the institution of slavery and the way of life based upon it.
9. National Parties in Crisis
   1. The Election of 1852
      1. Whigs: General Winfield Scott (supported American system initiatives, but no real mention of slavery issue) v. Democrats: Franklin Pierce (although a northerner, supported the fugitive slave law)
      2. Pierce wins, shows the weakening of the whigs
   2. The Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854
      1. Democrats controlled white house and congress
      2. Stephen Douglas (IL) devised a plan for creating a transcontinental railroad with a major stop in Chicago
         1. Since the Northern route was unfavorable to Southerners he devised a compromise where Nebraska territory would be split into two states, with each having the opportunity to decide based on popular sovereignty if they wanted to be free or slave
         2. Nebraska territory was N. of 36,30 line devised in Missouri Comp, thus this opens up slavery to Northern areas
10. Extremists and Violence
    1. “Bleeding Kansas” 1856
       1. Fighting breaks out among proslavery and antislavery groups in Kansas
          1. Missouri farmers set up homesteads in Kansas to create a pro-slavery government
          2. Northern abolitionists and free soilers set up the New England Emigrant Aid Company which helped to relocate abolitionist sympathizers in Kansas to create an anti-slavery government
    2. Sumner-Brooks incident
       1. Senator Charles Sumner verbally attacked the democratic administration
          1. Inc. personal charges against Andrew Butler
       2. Butler’s nephew, Preston Brooks defended his uncle (Butler) by whacking Charles Sumner with a cane on the head
          1. Southerners applauded Brooks’ actions
11. New Parties
    1. Know-Nothing Party (aka American Party):
       1. Formed from the Whigs on nativist beliefs and religious tensions
          1. Protestant Americans against immigrant Germans and Irish Catholics
    2. Republicans
       1. Created in reaction to the Kansas-Nebraska Act
       2. Composed of free-soilers and antislavery Whigs and Democrats
       3. Purpose: oppose the spread of slavery to new territories (not to end slavery though)
12. The Election of 1856
    1. Republican John C Fremont vs. Democrat James Buchanan
       1. Although Buchanan wins, election showed the future prospects for the republican party in National politics
          1. Fremont won 11 of 16 free states (showed it was possible to win the white house without winning any southern votes)
13. Constitutional Issues
    1. Lecompton Constitution
       1. Proslavery state constitution of Kansas submitted by the proslavery “southern” legislature (there were two legislatures at the time: one pro-slavery, one anti-slavery)
       2. Buchanan proposed to accept the constitution
       3. Congress didn’t accept it
    2. Dred Scott v. Sandford (1857)
       1. Proslavery decision
       2. Case: Dred Scott was held in slavery in Missouri and then taken to the free territory of Wisconsin where he lived for two years before returning to Missouri. He argued that his two year residence on free soil made him a free citizen. He sued for his freedom.
       3. Holding: Roger Taney court decided against him
          1. Framers of Constitution didn’t intend for African Americans to be citizens
          2. Congress had no power to deprive any person of property without due process of law (slaves = property)
          3. The Missouri Compromise was unconstitutional because it excluded slavery from Wisconsin and other N. territories
       4. Decision delighted Southern Democrats and infuriated N. Republicans
       5. In effect, S.C. declared that all parts of Western Territories were open to slavery
    3. Lincoln-Douglas Debates
       1. A then unknown Abraham Lincoln challenged Stephen Douglas for Republican nomination
          1. Lincoln: famous “house divided” speech: “This government cannot endure permanently half slave and half free”
             1. Attacked slavery on moral grounds
          2. Douglas: “Freeport” doctrine (based on speech in Freeport IL):
             1. Slavery could not exist in a community if the local citizens did not pass slave codes to maintain it – which alienated Southern Democrats
       2. Douglas wins nomination, but loses favor with Southern Democrats and Lincoln goes from unknown to well known
14. The Road to Secession
    1. The Rise of the Republicans
       1. Worried many southerners because:
          1. Republican anti-slavery plank
          2. Republican economic program which favored Northern Industrialists (higher tariffs = help Northerners, hurt cotton exporting south)
    2. John Brown and Harpers Ferry
       1. Radical abolitionist who tried to start a slave uprising in Virginia
       2. Oct. 1859
          1. Led small band of followers at the Federal arsenal to arm slaves and cause an uprising
          2. Robert E. Lee captures Brown and followers
       3. Northern moderates condemned Brown’s actions, but most Southerners saw this as proof of the North’s true intentions to overthrow the southern way of life
    3. The Election of 1860
       1. Democratic party split
          1. Democrats v. Southern Democrats
             1. Stephen Douglas gets the Democratic nomination on a platform of popular sovereignty and enforcement of fugitive slave law
             2. John Breckinridge of Kentucky is the nominee for Southern Democrats on a platform of unrestricted expansion of slavery and annexation of Cuba (as a slave state)
       2. Republicans
          1. Nominate Lincoln on a platform of exclusion of slavery from new territories, a protective tariff, free land to homesteaders, and a railroad to the Pacific
             1. Some southern states threaten to secede if Lincoln is elected
       3. The Constitutional Union Party
          1. A group of former whigs, know nothing, and moderate Democrats
             1. Nominated John Bell on a platform of strict constitutional enforcement and preserving the union
       4. The Election
          1. Lincoln carried all free states of the North (59% of electoral votes)
             1. Lincoln (Rep)

180 electoral, 1,866,000 pop

* + - * 1. Douglas (N. Democrat)

12 electoral, 1,375,000 pop

* + - * 1. Breckinridge (S. Democrat)

72 electoral, 848,000 pop

* + - * 1. Bell (Constitutional Union)

39 electoral, 591,000 pop

* + - 1. Lincoln won without winning a single southern state

1. Secession
   1. Despite a Democratic controlled Congress and Supreme Court, the election of Lincoln caused the secession of several states
      1. December 1860 – South Carolina secedes by special convention
      2. Over next six weeks – Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas
      3. February 1861 – reps meet in Montgomery Alabama to create the Confederate States of America
   2. Confederate States of America
      1. Constitution similar to the US Constitution
         1. Placed limits on government enforcement of tariffs and/or restrictions on slavery
            1. President: Jefferson Davis of Mississippi
            2. VP: Alexander Stephens of Georgia
      2. Single six year term for President
      3. President has line-item veto
      4. Prohibited foreign slave trade
   3. Crittenden Compromise
      1. Buchanan, the president prior to Lincoln, did nothing to prevent the secession of the states
      2. Senator John Crittenden proposed a constitutional amendment that would:
         1. Guarantee the right to hold slaves in all territories south of the 36,30 line
         2. Lincoln said he couldn’t accept the compromise bc it violated Republican position
      3. Southerners believed their plight similar to the Revolution of 1776 from the Tyranny of Northern rule
      4. Many southerners felt that Lincoln would follow in the footsteps of Buchanan and not fight either