ESSENTIAL CIVIL WAR CURRICULUM

The Compromise of 1850

By **John C. Waugh**

In early December 1849, more than a decade before the Civil War, the new Thirty-First Congress was about to convene in Washington. As its members filed into their respective chambers and took their seats, it was the best of times in the country—and the worst of times.

Prosperity was everywhere. In the decade just ending the population of the United States had surged by nearly 36 percent, from a little over 17 million to over 23 million. In the three-quarters of a century since independence the young nation had become a major player in world commerce, riding on the taut sails and sleek hulls of its clipper ships, the swiftest large sailing vessels that ever put keel to water. The age of steam had dawned, promising ever more world prominence and prosperity. To accommodate that revolutionary new transportation marvel, the railroad, some 9,000 miles of iron lines had been stitched down across the country. It was a figure that would double in the next five years, triple within the next ten. The telegraph, another miracle of 19th century technology, was new-born but already linking Washington to most of the major cities in the country. Fortunes were being made, and thousands seeking to make their own were rushing to the newly discovered gold fields of California.[1] We were a strapping young nation on the make.

But there wasn't a congressman or a senator who filed into his seat on December 3, 1849, under the copper-clad capitol dome in Washington, who didn't despair for the future of the Union.

There was a terrible crisis darkening the prosperity. And it sprang from the prosperity itself. The hugely successful war with Mexico, recently ended, had added more than a million square miles of new territory to the United States, ratcheting up the size of the country by almost 68 percent and expanding it all the way to the Pacific.

And it had brought big trouble, as huge acquisitions of land tended to do in those times. It had raised again the question of whether slavery was to be allowed in those new territories won from Mexico, renewing a bitter sectional standoff that was again

[1] The information in this paragraph is distilled from Elbert B. Smith, *The Presidencies of Zachary Taylor and Millard Fillmore* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1988), 4-5.

imperiling the Union. Slaveholders in the South were insisting on their right to take their slave property anywhere in the new territories. An increasingly abolitionist-driven North was insisting, just as urgently, that slavery must not be permitted to spread beyond the states where it already existed.

Hearts and minds were hardening daily. Southerners were threatening—ominously threatening—to secede from the Union unless their rights were protected. Seeing a North bent on destroying their way of life, Southerners were calling their Northern counterparts "fanatical assailants of our peculiar institutions," threatening "our dearest interest."[2]

One worried observer spoke of "the great comet of dissolution that has been blazing upon us for so long, coming nearer and nearer."[3] Congressman Henry Washington Hilliard of Alabama wrote, "Never did a thunder-cloud exhibit an angrier aspect; it touched every part of the horizon, and threatened the destruction of the Union."[4] Senator Henry Stuart Foote of Mississippi, often given to hyperbole, was nevertheless stating fact when he said that "red lightening is already gleaming in our faces and the thunder is rolling above our heads."[5] Henry Clay, the great Kentucky senator, spoke of "furnaces" of disunion, "in full blast in generating heat, and passion, and intemperance, and diffusing them throughout the whole extent of this broad Land."[6] Missouri Senator Thomas Hart Benton spoke of "the cry of danger" in the country.[7]

For some of these men old enough to remember, this was an all too vivid case of deja vu. It had all happened before, albeit to a less intense and dangerous degree, thirty years before, in 1820, following another great land acquisition, the Louisiana Purchase. The issue of whether slavery was to be permitted in that new territory was at the core of the trouble then. The South threatened secession over the issue then. And here it was again at mid-century, with a new land acquisition again at the core of the trouble and Southerners threatening disunion again.

The issue had been dealt with and compromised and the turmoil stilled in 1820 after the territory of Missouri, part of the Louisiana Purchase, applied for statehood as a slave state. The architects of the Missouri Compromise then drew a line at 36° 30´, allowing slavery in the Louisiana Purchase territory below the line but prohibiting it—Missouri excepted—in all the territory above it.

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[2] Robert P. Brooks, ed., "Howell Cobb Papers," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 5 (June 1921), 41.
[3] James S. Pike, *First Blows of the Civil War: The Ten Years of Preliminary Conflict in the United States from 1850 to 1860* (New York: American News Company, 1879), 19.
[4] Henry W. Hilliard, *Politics and Pen Pictures at Home and Abroad* (New York: Putnam's, 1892), 216.
[5] Cong. Globe, 31st Cong., 1st Sess. 403 (1850).
[6] Ibid., Appendix 116.
[7] Thomas Hart Benton, *Thirty Years' View: of a History of the working of the American Government for Thirty Years, from 1820 to 1850*, 1st reprint ed.(New York: D. Appleton, 1856), 2:132.

That hard-won compromise had kept peace between the sections and held the Union together in tenuous balance for three decades. But now, in 1850, with this new infusion of land from the Mexican War, disunion was again threatening, and for the same reasons. This time compromise would be even more difficult, for tempers were ever more frayed, positions ever more hardened. As the Congress convened, its members knew that if they couldn't strike another compromise in 1850 as they had in 1820, disunion and civil war would likely follow.

There was a pressing attendant problem. Just as deep and just as divisive was the Southern fear that as many as seventeen new territories might be carved out of all that new land and turned into Free states, permanently obliterating the already shaky political equilibrium in the country between the North and the South. And Southerners saw political equilibrium as their only shield against Northern dominance and aggression. If that political balance was eroded any further, they saw themselves entirely at the mercy of the antislavery North.

If there was to be any kind of compromise to disarm this sputtering political bomb and save the Union at this critical time, five problems had to be addressed.

• First, there was the problem of California. Overrun by the thousands flocking to its gold fields, California desperately needed a government and statehood—and in a hurry. It wanted admission into the Union immediately—as a free state.

• Second, what to do about with the rest of the land wrested from Mexico—the New Mexico and Utah territories. They were not yet as statehood-ready as California. But how were they to be treated when their time came?

• Third, there was the problem of Texas. Since statehood in 1845, Texans had claimed four counties of New Mexico territory east of the Rio Grande as their own. They were now theatening force, if necessary, to get it, and New Mexico was not willing to give it up. If there was a lit fuse that might detonate a civil war overnight, this Texas-New Mexico boundary dispute was it.

• Fourth, what to do about slavery and the slave trade in the District of Columbia. Both existed in the national capital "under the very eyes of Congress itself."[8] The North wanted them both ended. Southerners saw their end as a mortal blow to slavery in their region and sufficient cause for secession.

• Finally there was the fugitive slave problem. A law mandating the return to their masters of slaves attempting to escape to freedom to the North was on the books. Southern slave owners demanded it be tightened, honored, and enforced. Northerners were breaking it at every turn, running the Underground Railroad, abetting slave escapes at every opportunity.

[8] Cong. Globe, 31st Cong., 1st Sess. 250 (1850).

There was the intense spark of dissolution in these five burning fuses. And nobody worried more about them more than Henry Clay of Kentucky.

Clay had been in the public eye for four decades, as a congressman, diplomat, secretary of state, U. S. senator, and five times unsuccessful candidate for president. Though unable to get elected to the nation's highest office, he was a national icon. Together with Daniel Webster of Massachusetts and John Caldwell Calhoun of South Carolina, all still in the Senate in the twilight of brilliant careers, Clay was considered one of the three greatest senators of the first half of the nineteenth century—arguably the greatest.

There was no more beloved man in the country than this slender, eloquent, lionized Kentucky Whig. He was so lionized that he couldn't travel in the country in the normal fashion, but as one contemporary observed, he could "only make progresses. When he left his home the public seized him and bore him along over the land, the committee of one state passing him on to the committee of another, and the hurrahs of one town dying away as those of the next caught his ear."[9] Someone said of him that he "can get more men to run after him to hear him speak and fewer to vote for him than any man in America."[10]

Clay had retired from the Senate, he believed for good, and returned home to Kentucky in 1842. But as the crisis over slavery in the territories reemerged and deepened, the Kentucky legislature, perhaps sensing that the great man was needed once again on the national stage, voted unanimously to send him back to the Senate for this new Thirty-first Congress.

Clay had a mind for the middle ground. No man had done more to bank the fires of disunion in the past thirty years than he had. As a congressman his handprints had been all over the Missouri Compromise in 1820. He had essentially stilled the troubled waters again in the early 1830s when South Carolina had nullified a federal tariff law and the country seemed again about to hit the wall of sectional separation and civil war. He had been acclaimed in the country since then as the Great Compromiser, the Great Pacificator.

One congressman said of him, "His genius was the most transparent when soaring in the realms of peace."[11] He said of himself, "I go for honorable compromse whenever it can be made." Saying, "I know no South, no North, no East, no West to which I owe any

[9] James Parton, *Famous Americans of Recent Times* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1867), 4.
[10] Holmes Alexander, *The Famous Five* (New York: Bookmailer, 1958), 11.
[11] John Wentworth, *Congressional Reminiscences: Adams, Benton, Clay, Calhoun, Clay and Webster: An Address Before the Chicago Historical Society With Notes and an Appendix by Chicago's First Congressman* (Chicago: Fergus, 1882), 33.

allegiance," he had been for thirty years trying to compromise this distracting issue of slavery that threatened to rend the Union.[12]

Clay brought a compelling talent to this affinity for national healing--parliamentary finesse powered by a hypnotic personality, matched by an absolutely mesmeric speaking voice. An admirer wrote: "No orator's voice superior to his in quality, in compass and in management, has ever, we venture to say, been raised upon this continent. It touched every note in the whole gamut of human susceptibilities; it was sweet, and soft, and lulling as a mother's to her babe. It could be made to float into the chambers of the air, as gently as descending snow-flakes on the sea; and again it shook the Senate, stormy, brain-shaking, filling the air with its absolute thunders."[13]

Clay was now nearly seventy-three years old, tired and unwell. And he hoped in this return to the Senate in late 1849 that he would not be thrust into a leading role in this crisis. He wished only to be "a calm and quiet looker on, rarely speaking and when I do endeavoring to throw oil on the troubled waters."[14]

It was, of course, a forlorn hope. The times and the issue desperately cried for compromise, and the Great Compromiser was back in his seat. Everybody was looking to him in the crisis. Clay soon saw that, and realized that he must step into the center of the storm—once again.

By late January 1850, he had shaped the five disputed issues into a compromise package and was ready to introduce it.

It would admit California as a free state.

All other territories won from Mexico would be organized without any restrictions as to slavery.

Texas was to relinquish its claim to New Mexico territory and in return the federal government would assume the state's public debt amassed prior to its annexation in 1845.

Slavery would continue to exist in the District of Columbia—but not the slave trade.

And the Fugitive Slave Law would be tightened.[15]

[12] *American National Biography*, s.v. "Clay, Henry"; Cong. Globe, 31st Cong., 1st Sess. 368 (1850).
[13] Edward G. Parker, *The Golden Age of American Oratory* (Boston: Niles & Hall, 1857), 38.
[14] Henry Clay, *The Papers of Henry Clay*, eds. Melba Porter Hay and Carol Reardon (Lexington: University Press of Kentrucky, 1991), 10:604.
[15] Clay's resolutions and accompanying remarks are in Cong. Globe, 31st Cong., 1st Sess. 244-49 (1850).

That was Clay's package of bills. All debate that followed would cue on his handiwork. And the drama would play out on the Senate floor. The deeply divided House, which had just agonized through a frustrating month and sixty-three votes to pick a speaker, would basically slip into a standby role. Debate would rage in the House, particularly over the California issue. But the meaningful drama in the next eight months, until the House had to concur or not concur on a compromise scheme, would play in the old and hallowed Senate chamber.

It wasn't going to be an easy sell. Clay's compromise fell immediately under heavy cannonading from radical senators North and South. Northerners opposed it because they believed it gave away too much; Southerners opposed it because it didn't give away enough.

Uncompromising opposition was coming from a third powerful direction as well. President Zachary Taylor, the hero-general of the Mexican War elected president in 1848, had his own idea of how to resolve the crisis. His plan called for the immediate admission of California and action to admit the other territories as soon as feasible. It addressed none of the three other pressing problems. With his plan Taylor had hoped to take the issue out of Congress and calm the slavery tempest. A stubborn, hard-headed man, he vigorously opposed Clay's scheme of compromise in favor of his own.

Leading the Southern discontent was Calhoun, the paladin of the South, who had been articulating Southern outrage for two decades. He was dying; his once striking figure was now spectral, gaunt, and gray, ravaged by tuberculosis. But on March 4, he made his way to the Senate chamber propped between two other Southern senators and looking, one observer wrote, "like a fugitive from a grave."[16] He was too weak to read his speech himself, so Senator James Mason of Virginia read it as Calhoun slumped in his seat before him and listened, his cape drawn about him, his sunken dark eyes on fire.

His message bristled with opposition to Clay's compromise. He held concession or compromise to be fatal to Southern interests. In his speech he lashed out angrily, making demands no Northerner could accept—the right of slaveholders to carry their slaves without limit into any new territory, rigorous enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Law, an end to the agitation of the slave question, and restoration of the lost equilibrium and political parity between the sections.[17]

It would be the last card he would ever play on the South's behalf. In the night, on the last day of March 1850, Calhoun died. His farewell, the fall of a giant, saddened friend and foe alike. But his farewell speech only further polarized the sectional debate.

[16] Nathan Sargent, *Public Men and Events from the Commencement of Mr. Monroe's Administration, in 1817, to the Close of Mr. Fillmore's Administration, in 1853* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1874), 2:363.
[17] Calhoun's speech is in Cong. Globe, 31st Cong., 1st Sess. 451-55 (1850).

The situation cried for a powerful voice of moderation. And Clay knew of only one man, other than himself, who possessed such a voice. Clay, Calhoun, and Daniel Webster, a triad of senators widely viewed in the country as "The Great Triumvirate,"[18] had dominated American politics for nearly half a century. Everybody knew where Clay stood. Everybody knew where Calhoun stood. Both had been heard from on the compromise. But Webster, the third great senator of the triumvirate, had not yet spoken.

When Clay was shaping his compromise package, he knew it would stand slim chance unless he could rally Webster behind it. The two, both Whigs, both long-time rivals aspiring to the presidency, had not been on speaking terms for a decade. But Clay knew that Webster shared his abiding love of the Union and that no man had such persuasive power in the Senate and in the country. He must have Webster on his side.

Ordering his carriage on a bitter cold and rainy January night Clay, sick and weary, drove unannounced to Webster's residence and knocked on the door. A surprised Webster received him cordially and for an hour the two great men talked. But Webster would not commit himself to Clay's scheme until he had studied the measures more closely.

Webster seemed sympathetic. He was finding that the agitation over slavery in the territories was "mischievous, and creates heart burnings."[19] But nobody was quite certain how he would come down on the compromise package. Massachusetts was a seedbed of abolitionism, and his abolitionist constituency assumed he would be against it, as they were. And when he announced he would speak on the issue in the Senate on March 7, Southerners and Northerners alike braced themselves.

Webster, like Clay and like Calhoun, was absolutely unique. He was not a tall man. But powerfully built with an enormous head housing an oversized brain, he appeared a giant. His looks alone inspired awe. One writer called him "a small cathedral."[20] Another wrote, "he must be an impostor, for no man can be so great as he looked."[21] Webster's eyes were big, deep, bottomless pools, cavernous and hypnotic, black as pitch—"living coals," Thomas Carlyle, the English writer, described them—"sleeping furnaces, " "needing only to be blown."[22] Webster's eyes were likened by another to "great burning lamps set deep in the mouths of caves."[23]

[18] Merrill D. Peterson, *The Great Triumvirate: Webster, Clay, and Calhoun* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 5.
[19] Daniel Webster, *The Papers of Daniel Webster*, eds. Charles M. Wiltse and Michael J. Birkner, (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College/University Press of New England, 1986), 7:5.
[20] Alexander, *Famous Five*, 53.
[21] Parker, *Golden Age*, 49-50.
[22] Benjamin Perley Poore, *Perley's Reminiscences of Sixty Years in the National Metropolis*(Philadelphia: Hubbard Brothers, 1886), 1:288; Peterson, *Great Triumvirate*, 223.
[23] Oliver Dyer, *Great Senators of the United States Forty Years Ago*, (1848 and 1849)(New York: R. Bonner's, 1889), 252.

Matching those otherworldly eyes was an otherworldly voice—deep, melodious, theatrical, operatic, mesmeric. One contemporary described it as "a voice of great power and depth—a voice full of magnetism, a voice such as is heard only once in a lifetime."[24] When he was aroused, one writer wrote, his speech was akin to heavy cannonading—"Vesuvius. . . in full blast. . . . No Gothic language has ever been pounded into more compact cannon-ball sentences."[25]

The sight of Webster taking the floor was one of the most riveting in American politics. One observer wrote: "the getting up of Daniel Webster was not a mere act; it was a process. . . . The beholder saw the most wonderful head that his vision ever rested on rising slowly in the air; he saw a lion-like countenance, with great, deep set, luminous eyes, gazing at him with solemn majesty; in short, he saw the godlike Daniel getting on his feet, and his heart thrilled at the thought of what might be coming."[26]

Webster got to his feet on March 7 and what came was one of the most stirring defenses of the Union ever delivered on the floor of the U. S. Senate. "Mr. President," Webster began, "I wish to speak to-day, not as a Massachusetts man, nor as a Northern man, but as an American." He said: "I speak to-day for the preservation of the Union. 'Hear me for my cause.' I speak to-day, out of a solicitous and anxious heart, for the restoration to the country of that quiet and that harmony which make the blessings of this Union so rich and so dear to us all."[27]

He came down hard for Clay's compromise. Although he opposed the spread of slavery in the territories, he would do nothing to wound the feelings of the South to the endangerment of the Union. He assailed the spectre of secession. "I would rather hear of natural blasts and mildews, war, pestilence, and famine,' he said, "than to hear gentlemen talk of secession." Instead of "dwelling in those caverns of darkness, instead of groping with those ideas so full of all that is horrid and horrible, let us come out into the light of day; let us enjoy the fresh air of liberty and union."[28]

Webster's 7th of March speech stirred a storm. His abolitionist constituents and supporters were appalled, calling him a traitor. But friends of compromise believed his dramatic speech might have tipped the scale against disunion. The speech did not, however, stem the torrent of rhetoric on both sides.

As the tempest reached new fury, a succession of young Senate Turks, North and South, entered the fray—William Henry Seward of New York, giving no quarter to the slaveholding South; Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois, championing compromise; Salmon

[24] Howard Carroll, *Twelve Americans: Their Lives and Times*, 1971 reprint (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1883), 7.
[25] Parker, *Golden Age*, 93, 113.
[26] Dyer, *Great Senators*, 288-89.
[27] Cong. Globe, 31st Cong., 1st Sess. 476 (1850).
[28] Ibid., 483. The full text of Webster's speech is on pages 476-83.

Portland Chase of Ohio, the implacable enemy of the fugitive slave law; Jefferson Davis of Mississippi, the inheritor of Calhoun's mantle.

The other Mississippi Senator Henry S. Foote, never a man without an idea or the mouth to state it, had a plan to get the compromise on a fast track. He would package Clay's five points into a single bundle and call it an "omnibus bill," after the omnibus, a new form of urban transport unusual in its time for carrying passengers indiscriminately from all social classes and both sexes. Ladies finally got to ride with the men.

An omnibus wasn't Clay's original idea of how to get his compromise passed. Although he had viewed it a scheme of compromise and harmony, he had intended to take one bill at a time to the floor and get them passed individually. But Foote had a gadfly persistence that could wear down granite. And day after day he plugged for his omnibus approach, enraging many and exhausting the resistance of nearly all, including Clay.

So the compromise was bundled into an omnibus.

In its new dress, however, It didn't change any minds. Extreme Southerners and Northerners who opposed compromise continued to rake it daily and to send in a blizzard of amendments to kill it in part or in whole. A physically exhausted Clay stood resolutely day after day through the blazing hot summer defending the package, Horatio at the bridge, striving to keep it alive, seeing it as the only hope to avert disunion and civil war.

For the next three months the debate raged. Seventy times Clay was on his weary feet fighting for compromise. On May 21 he took off his gloves for a barefisted swing at its opponent in the White House. In a furious speech on the floor he attacked Zachary Taylor. Clay held up five fingers. "Here," he shouted, counting them off a finger at a time, "are five wounds—one, two, three, four, five—bleeding and threatening the well being, if not the existence of the body politic. What is the plan of the President? Is it to heal all these wounds? No such thing. It is only to heal one of the five, and to leave the other four to bleed more profusely than ever, by the sole admission of California, even if it should produce death itself."[29]

Clay pleaded in vain for the president to relent and unite with those who favored the omnibus compromise. But only death could move Zachary Taylor. And, indeed, death finally did. On July 4, the President attended an Independence Day commemoration on the mall. He sat for three hours on a torrid day in partial sun, listening to a patriotic speech by Henry Foote—a form of torture that could kill anybody. Not feeling well to begin with, the President returned to the White House and gorged on iced milk and cherries. Soon after he was seized by a violent attack of cholera morbus—acute

[29] Ibid., Appendix, 615.

gastroenteritis—with its attendant cramps, indigestion, diarrhea, and vomiting. Typhoid fever set in on top of this misery and on July 9, Taylor died.

Vice President Millard Fillmore of New York, who favored the compromise, became president. This by no means, however, guaranteed the passage of Clay's omnibus. Indeed, the compromise plan would soon follow Zachary Taylor to a sudden death and a lifeless grave. The end of the omnibus came quickly on the last day of July in a bewildering, fast-moving blizzard of amendments that even Clay could not stem. In a heartbeat California statehood, the New Mexico territories bill, the Texas-New Mexico boundary bill—everything—was yanked from the omnibus. It was left, when the attack subsided, with only a law to establish a territorial government for Utah.

The Omnibus was left a wrecked and empty shell. Its enemies, North and South, exulted. Senator Benton, of Missouri, its bitterest opponent, crowed, "Their vehicle is gone, all but one plank. . . . The omnibus is overturned, and all the passengers spilled out but one. We have but Utah left—all gone but Utah!"[30]

The eccentric New York editor, Horace Greeley, wrote, "And so the omnibus is smashed—wheels, axles and body—nothing left but a single plank termed Utah. I even saw the gallant driver abandoning the wreck between six and seven this evening, after having done all that man could do to. . . avert the disaster."[31]

Indeed, the gallant driver, Clay, was finished. Old, sick, jaded, and disgusted, he left Washington for the healing waters of the Atlantic at Newport, Rhode Island, to try to recover from his health-draining but final failed effort at compromise. He believed the compromise was killed by "one of the most extraordinary co-operations of Ultras, from the North and South, which was ever witnessed in a deliberative body."[32]

Though the omnibus was dead, compromise wasn't. Stephen A. Douglas, the thirty-six-year-old Democratic freshman senator from Illinois, stepped into the breech. As chairman of the Senate committee on the territories, Douglas had authored virtually all of the parts of the omnibus bill. Clay had merely taken his bills and packaged them.

Douglas had never favored the omnibus approach. All along he wanted to introduce the measures one bill at a time. He had reluctantly supported the omnibus because, for a time, it was the only available vehicle. Now it was wrecked and he believed he could raise its parts from the wreckage and pass them individually, pulling in a combination of separate blocs in favor of each measure separately.

He began re-introducing the elements of Clay's scheme one bill at a time. Even as the omnibus had moved toward catastrophe, he had been preparing the ground for such

[30] Ibid., Appendix, 1484.
[31] Quoted in Holman Hamilton, *Prologue to Conflict: The Crisis and Compromise of 1850* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1964), 111.
[32] Clay, *Papers*, 10:793-94.

an effort, both in the Senate and in the House. The House was as schism-rent North and South as the Senate was. But Douglas had carefully plowed the ground there. As the bills individually passed and came over from the Senate, his allies and a core of other compromise-minded men in the House united to ram them through. And on September 20, President Fillmore signed the final measure. The compromise became law.

The country celebrated. Senators and congressmen got drunk. The Union seemed saved—at least for the present. Many, however, looked at the compromise and believed that it was but an armistice that could not forever paper over the slavery issue. For nobody was entirely satisfied. The California bill was clearly a compromise to pacify the North, the New Mexico territory bill and the Fugitive Slave Law were concessions to the South. The Texas-New Mexico boundary bill and the bill to end the slave trade but not slavery in the District of Columbia were standoffs. It was clear that the tightened Fugitive Slave Law faced a hard future. Abolitionists would still violate it.

But the Congress had done all it could do. On the last day of September it adjourned, precisely at noon. It had been wrestling with the crisis for ten months—302 days—days blackened by acrimony and driven by raging sectional differences--the longest congressional session in the history of the young country to that time.

Civil War would not come then, after all. It would be delayed for a decade. In the middle of the1850s a Kansas-Nebraska Act was passed, which, among other things, undid part of the 1850 compromise. It abolished the old dividing line that had long contained slavery, permitting it now everywhere, leaving each territory North and South, to either accept or reject it.

The North exploded in anger. And by 1861 compromise would become impossible and the Civil War, which all of the bitter fighting on the Senate floor in the hot summer of 1850 had intended to avert, would finally, tragically, come.

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