

ROAD TO SECESSION

With the “Missouri Compromise”, Congress thought they had settled the question of slavery in the United States. A month after the passage of the law, the former President, Thomas Jefferson wrote to a friend that the “Missouri question...like a fire bell in the night, awakened and filled me with terror. I considered it at once as the knell of the Union. It is hushed indeed for the moment. But this is a reprieve only, not a final sentence.”

Though the Missouri Compromise managed to keep the peace for the moment, it failed to resolve the question of slavery and its place in the future of the country. Southern states who opposed the Missouri Compromise did so because it set a precedent for Congress to make laws concerning slavery, while Northern states were against the law because it meant slavery could be expanded into new territory.

Over the course of the next forty years significant events would occur to deepen the divide between the two sections of the country. The balance of power in the House and the Senate was at the core of the problem.

The use of protective tariffs to finance the country brought conflict between the industrial North and the agricultural South.

(1)The Abolition movement had taken hold in the 1830's, Anti - slavery societies were formed in the Northern states which brought a new focus on the slavery issue. Although divided between themselves on how to accomplish their goals, the focus placed on slavery changed the perspectives of the moral acceptability of slavery between Northern and Southern whites. The divide between the people of the two sections of the country would continue to widen over the next thirty years.

((1) Excerpt from the National Park Service, “No claim to original U.S. Government works.”)