

Compromises to Save the Union

Review each compromise.

Great Compromise, 1787-9

The Articles of Confederation, under which America operated from 1781-1787, provided that each state would be represented by one vote in Congress. When changes were being discussed for how states should be represented during the creation of a new Constitution, two plans were pushed forward. The Virginia Plan provided for representation to be based on the population of each state. On the other hand, the New Jersey Plan wanted equal representation for every state. The Great Compromise, also called the Connecticut Compromise, combined both plans. It was decided that there would be two chambers in Congress: the Senate and the House of Representatives. The Senate would be based on equal representation and the House would be based on population.

Three-Fifths Compromise, 1787-9

Once it was decided that representation in the House of Representatives as to be based on population, delegates from Northern and Southern states had a difference of opinion on how slaves should be counted. Delegates for the Northern states where the economy did not rely heavily on slavery, felt that slaves should not be counted towards representation. This would provide the South with a greater number of representatives. On the other hand, Southern states fought for slaves to be counted in terms of representation. The compromise between the two became known as the three-fifths compromise because every five slaves would be counted as three individuals in terms of representation.

Commerce Compromise, 1787-9

Northern interests wanted the government to be able to impose tariffs on goods in order to protect against foreign competition. However, the Southern states feared that tariffs on their goods would hurt the trade upon which they heavily relied. The compromise was for imports to be only allowed on imports from foreign countries and not exports from the US.

Slave Trade Compromise, 1787-9

Those who opposed slavery in the northern states wanted to bring an end to the importation and sale of slaves. On the other hand, southern states felt that slavery was vital to their economy and did not want the government interfering in the slave trade. In the end, the North agreed to wait until 1808 before Congress would be able to ban the slave trade in the US. Importation ended in 1809, but by that time slavery was on the rise thanks to Eli Whitney's 1793 innovation: cotton gin, leading to expansion of plantation agriculture (King Cotton) across the Deep South.

Election of the President, 1787-9

The Articles of Confederation did not provide for a Chief Executive of the United States. Therefore, when delegates decided that a president was necessary, there was a disagreement over how he or she should be elected to office. While some delegates felt that the president should be popularly elected, others feared that the electorate would not be informed enough to make a wide decision. They came up with other alternatives such as going through each state's Senate to elect the president. In the end, the two sides compromised with the creation of the Electoral College. Thus, the citizens vote for electors who then vote for the president.

Compromise of 1790

Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson, concerned his financial plan would fail and the young nation would fall apart as conflict intensified between Jeffersonian and Hamiltonian thought, hammered out the compromise which brought the Assumption Act (public credit; assumption of state debt) and the Residence Act (building the capital city in Southern territory of Virginia and Maryland. The compromise was a victory for Hamilton's financial plan which included a tariff and a national bank, but the political conflict over such issues would continue to divide the nation for generations.

Missouri Compromise 1820-PASSED

Missouri would be admitted to the Union as a slave state. Maine would be admitted at the same time as a free state in order to maintain the balance between free and slave states. Slavery was declared illegal north of the 36°30' parallel west of Missouri. This compromised settled the dispute over slavery in the Louisiana Territory and maintained balanced representation with equal number of slave and free states.

The Nullification Crisis and Compromise Tariff of 1833-PASSED

John C. Calhoun & his 1828 Exposition and Protest... proposed South Carolina (and other states hurt the by Tariff of 1828 –Tariff of Abominations) were not obligated by the U.S. Constitution to follow the law. South Carolina threatened to secede from the Union in its 1832 Nullification Ordinance. President Jackson responded with a threat to send troops (Force Act), but the Compromise Tariff of 1833 kept things together.

The Wilmot Proviso 1846 (and 1847 and 1848) – FAILED TO PASS

This proviso passed the House but failed in the Senate twice (once in 1846 and once in 1847). If it had passed the Senate, it is very likely President Polk would have vetoed it. Had it passed, it would have banned slavery in any territory acquired from Mexico in the Mexican-American War. In 1848, an attempt to make it part of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo also failed. Sectional conflict over slavery in the Southwest continued up to the Compromise of 1850.

Benton Compromise of 1845 – FAILED TO PASS

This compromise aimed to soften political conflict between North and South over the annexation of Texas. The compromise passed the House and Senate but President Tyler and his successor President Polk ignored it – making it null and void - as Texas was brought in as a state and not as a territory. The original compromise would have divided Texas into a slave state (eastern portion) and a western territory that could eventually become a free state.

The Compromise of 1850-PASSED

After the Mexican-American War, the United States gained territory in the West, and the slavery issue ignited again over the question of whether slavery would be allowed to exist in the new states and territories. The Compromise of 1850 was a series of bills in Congress which sought to settle the issue, and it did postpone the Civil War by a decade. But the compromise, which contained five major provisions, was destined to be a temporary solution. Settled Texas border, ended slave trade in D.C., California entered as free state, and stronger fugitive slave law passed.

The Kansas-Nebraska Act-PASSED

The last major compromise that sought to hold the Union together, and it proved to be the most controversial. Engineered by Stephen A. Douglas the legislation inflamed conflict rather than quelling it. It called for popular sovereignty to replace the Missouri Compromise Line for the Kansas and Nebraska Territories. It was assumed by many that these two territories would come in as one slave and one free state. Newspaper editor, Horace Greeley, coined the term "Bleeding Kansas." to describe the outbreaks of violence in the territory and also in the Senate chamber (Brooks-Summer).

Crittenden Compromise, 1860 FAILED TO PASS

This was one final attempt to prevent war as South Carolina seceded following the election of Abraham Lincoln in 1860. Senator John Crittenden of Kentucky proposed this compromise which would have restored the 36°30' line established by the Missouri Compromise. This was futile since *Dred Scot vs. Sandford* in 1857 had declared the Missouri Compromise unconstitutional. This compromise sought to ease Southern angst by guaranteeing the continuation of slavery where it already existed, supported fugitive slave laws while also compensating slave-owners for runaway slaves, and pledged to enforce the laws prohibiting the African slave trade. It was defeated in both the House and Senate.