Compromise Of 1850 Essay, Research Paper

?Drifting Toward Disunion?

The Compromise of 1850

The annexation of Texas to the United States and the gain of new territory by the Treaty of Guadeloupe Hidalgo aggravated the hostility between the North and South. The controversial issue of slavery in the new territories arose again along with many other political differences that needed to be resolved. In the midst of fear that the southern states might withdraw from the Union altogether, Senator Henry Clay of Kentucky created a series of five legislative enactments. These enactments, known as the Compromise of 1850, answer the question of whether slavery was to be sanctioned or prohibited in the newly acquired regions. The first two measures included the admission of California as a free state and abolition of slave trade in the District of Columbia. The third bill was the Fugitive Slave Laws of 1850, which provided for the return of runaway slaves to their masters. The terms of the fourth measure said that Utah and New Mexico become free to settlement by both slaveholders and abolitionists, superceding the Missouri Compromise of 1820. Finally, the fifth measure stated that Texas, a slave state, be awarded ten million dollars, further strengthening the south.

William Henry Seward, among many others, including President Taylor, believed that the Union was not threatened. In addition, as a strong abolitionist Seward despised the very idea of the strict fugitive slave law and eagerly protested the proposed political equilibrium. First, the fugitive law denies to the black citizen all the safeguards of personal liberty, to render less frequent the escape of the bondman. Next, the organization of Utah and New Mexico into slave states in order to appease the South into staying with the Union is unconstitutional. This impracticable measure ?converts the Government from a national democracy, operating by a constitutional majority of votes, into a Federal alliance, in which the minority shall have a veto against the majority.?

Finally, these laws are quite unnecessary because the Union was not threatened.

Despite his many speeches and unwavering opposition towards the Compromise of 1850, the U.S. Congress passed the laws during August and September 1850. Many people, in the north and south, hailed the compromise as a final solution to the question of slavery in territories. However, the never dying issue reemerged in 1854 with the Kansas-Nebraska Act. Finally, the gradual intensification of the hostility between free and slave states because of the compromise measures resulted in the brutal Civil War.