

Chapter 149 - Four Cross Party Factions Emerge On The Slavery Issue

Time: February 1850

Abolish Slavery

As Clay weighs in with his Omnibus Bill, four distinct cross-party factions have developed around the issue of “what to do about slavery in the west.”

The first faction remains relatively small, the Abolitionists, a handful of outspoken and much maligned congressional leaders who have followed in the footsteps of John Quincy Adams after his death in 1848. Recent additions include Thad Stevens in the House and Salmon Chase in the Senate.

“Abolish Slavery” Leaders In Congress In 1850

Tenure	House	State	Party
1838-59	Joshua Giddings	Ohio	Whig/Rep
1849-53	Thad Stevens	Pa	Whig
	Senate		
1847-53	John P. Hale	NH	Free Soil
1849-55	Salmon Chase	Ohio	Free Soil

Contain Slavery

The second faction is the “Contain Slavery” men of the North, whose leaders accept slavery in the old South, while standing in opposition to expanding it into the new western lands. They are very much in the ascendency by 1850, bolstered by the “Free Soil” movement and Whig Senator Henry Seward’s influence with President Taylor.

“Contain Slavery” Leaders In Congress In 1850

Tenure	House	State	Party
1845-51	David Wilmot	Pa	Democrat
1849-53	Preston King	NY	Free Soil
	Senate		
1848-61	Hannibal Hamlin	Maine	Democrat
1849-61	Henry Seward	NY	Whig/Rep

Expand Slavery

Then come the “Expand Slavery” Southerners – also referred to as State’s Righters or Fire-Eaters – arguing that slavery is guaranteed in the Constitution and threatening secession should Washington interfere with their institution. They are Democrats, serving predominantly in the Senate, and accustomed to having influence over whoever is President.

“Expand Slavery” Leaders In Congress In 1850

Tenure	Senate	State	Party
1844-55	David Atchison	Mo	Democrat
1845-50	John Calhoun	SC	Democrat
1846-57	Andrew Butler	SC	Democrat
1847-51	Jefferson Davis	Miss	Democrat
1847-61	Robert Hunter	Va	Democrat
1847-61	James Mason	Virginia	Democrat
1850-52	Robert B. Rhett	SC	Democrat

Compromise To Save The Union

Finally, there are the “Unionist” hoping to find a middle ground on slavery that gains enough support to hold the nation together. In the House they have been led so far by the Georgia Whigs, who are now in flux. In the Senate they include the giants, Clay and Webster, and the rising star, Douglas. Their voice into the White House is carried by the Kentucky Governor, John J. Crittenden, who was Taylor’s campaign manager in the 1848 election.

“Unionist” Leaders In Congress In 1850

Tenure	House	State	Party
1842-50	Robert Winthrop	Mass	Whig
1843-51	Howell Cobb	Georgia	Democrat/CU52
1843-51	Robert Toombs	Georgia	Whig/CU52
1843-59	Alexander Stephens	Georgia	Whig/CU52/D55
1849-53	Edward Stanly	NC	Whig
	Senate		
1821-51	Thomas Hart Benton	Missouri	Democrat
1845-50	Daniel Webster	NH	Whig
1847-61	Stephen Douglas	IL	Democrat
1847-59	John Bell	Tenn	D/Amer/Con U
1847-52	Henry Foote	Miss	Democrat
1849-52	Henry Clay	Kentucky	Whig

Note: “CU” = The Constitutional Union Party; Amer = Know Nothings Party