

Chapter 167 – The 1848 Campaign For The White House



Dates:
Summer – Fall 1848

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Date: Fall 1847 To Summer 1848

Six Political Conventions Precede The 1848 Race



The White House In Washington, D.C.

By mid-August 1848, a total of six different political conventions have been held to select candidates to succeed Polk.

Conventions Held For The 1848 Race

Dates	Party	Nominee
Sept. 10-11, 1847	Native American	Zachary Taylor
October 20	Liberty Party (1st)	John Hale
May 22, 1848	Democrats	Lewis Cass
June 2	Liberty Party (alt.)	Gerritt Smith
June 7	Whigs	Zachary Taylor
Aug 9-10	Free Soil	Martin Van Buren

Each gathering is marked by internal bickering and residual uncertainty about both the nominees and the platforms that emerge.

Some of this simply reflects personal animus and old scores to be settled, common within the political arena.

But for the first time since the 1820 Missouri Compromise, there is a sense within the two major parties that the bonds of Union are about to be severely tested -- over the issue of whether or not slavery will be allowed in the new Mexican War territories.

At the two extremes are the growing number of Southerners insisting the answer be “yes” and the combination of Wilmot-men and Abolitionists insisting it be “no.” In between are Unionists, forever seeking another compromise.

Dissenting Views Across The Political Spectrum In 1848

Divisions Within The Democrats	Seeking	Key Proponents
* Southern Fire-Eaters	Iron clad guarantees on the expansion of slavery	Calhoun, Yancey, Davis, Hunter, Mason, Atchison
* Van Buren Loyalists	Revenge against the South for stealing the 1844 nomination	John Van Buren, Dix, Wright, Niles, Butler
* Wilmot Democrats	A flat-out ban slavery in all new western territories	Wilmot wing and King wing
Divisions Within The Whigs		
* Conscience Whigs	An alternative to the Southern slave-holder, Taylor	Sumner, Wilson, Charles Francis Adams
Issues Transcending Both Parties		
* Devoted Unionists	Political compromises designed to save the Union	Crittenden, Bell, Clayton, Johnson, Toombs, Cobb, Stephens
* Abolitionists	Immediate emancipation and assimilation of all slaves	Chase, Smith, Garrison, Conscience Whigs
* Anti-Immigrationists	A ban on immigration and passage of anti-Catholic codes	Levin, Dearborn

Date: 1848

African-Americans Remain Helpless Pawns Amidst The Political Controversy



Remote from these political intrigues of 1848 are 3 million African-Americans who know one thing for certain – be they slave or freed, only a very small minority of the white population want anything whatsoever to do with them.

This remains true despite growing membership of whites in the anti-slavery movement, and the progress being made by some free blacks within their own enclaves.

Those Who Remain Enslaved At The Time Ch167-2

Those facts do not, however, signal willingness on the part of whites to alter their stereotypical beliefs that all blacks are inferior by nature, and that slaves in particular likely to be dangerous if allowed to wander freely.

Even within the Northern Anti-Slavery movements, only a small minority of radical Abolitionists support assimilation of blacks into white society -- while the majority would be happy to see any freedmen remain in the South or return to Africa.

Thus the new banner being raised by the Free Soil Party is, in the main, about preserving the new western lands for white settlers, not about welcoming emancipated blacks.

This fact will soon be confirmed in the state constitution of California when it applies for admission to the Union.

Date: August To November 1848

Both Major Party Campaigns Try To Deal With The Slavery Issues

Going into the race, both of the major party candidates recognize that slavery in the west is an explosive political issue best tip-toed around during the campaign.

The Whigs, however, have an easier time dodging the issue than do the Democrats.

Thus Zachary Taylor is able to run simply as “Old Rough and Ready,” the heroic military general who, at age sixty-one, has defeated a much larger Mexican army by bravery and grit – to finally realize America’s Manifest Destiny.

The fact that he is a plantation owner and lifelong slave holder is already well known, and will probably gain him more Southern votes than are lost to the small band of fervent Abolitionists.

On the other hand, Cass is forced to contend more directly with the slavery issue. This is due to the schism within the Democrats provoked by the Wilmot Proviso, and the emergence of the Free Soil Party, in part comprising the Barnburners, and headed by former icon, Martin Van Buren.

But Cass believes his “pop sov” compromise – “let the voters decide” -- will succeed with both his internal political factions and the American people at large. If only he can convince Southerners that the votes will favor slavery and Northerners that it will oppose it.

This is no small task, and it is frustrated in the North by Van Buren and the Free Soil Party campaign.

The ex-President wants his political revenge, and he goes on the offensive arguing that slavery violates “the principles of the Revolution,” and that Congress does indeed have the right to prohibit its spread, if it so chooses. This stance infuriates the Southern Democrats. John Calhoun denounces Matty as an “unscrupulous and vindictive demagogue,” while Polk calls him “the most fallen man.”

In the end, the “Little Magician’s” residual popularity will deny Cass the presidency, achieve revenge against the “Polk men,” and make the Free Soilers into America’s first credible third party.