

## Chapter 161 – The Whigs Choose Another General



**Dates:**  
June 7, 1848

**Sections:**

- The Whigs Have Their Own Opportunities And Challenges Going Into 1848
- The Whigs Meet In Philadelphia To Choose A Nominee
- Taylor Is Chosen On The Fourth Ballot
- Millard Fillmore Is The Nominee For Vice President

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Date: 1848

### The Whigs Have Their Own Opportunities And Challenges Going Into 1848

The Whigs are once again optimistic as they look ahead to the 1848 election, while still having internal policy issues on slavery needing resolution.

As a party, they have added 37 House seats to their side in 1846, giving them a slim 116-112 majority. Twenty of these pick-ups come from New York and Pennsylvania, where the Wilmot Proviso garners widespread public support.

But Wilmot's proposed ban is a two-edged sword, even for the Whigs, where 17 of their 19 Southern House members vote "no" on August 8, 1846, when it is attached to Polk's initial Appropriations Bill.

The strategic question for the Whigs is therefore how to leverage the popularity of the Wilmot ban in the North without alienating their membership in the South.

One advantage they have over the Democrats is that much of their party strength lies in the upper South rather than in the hard-core cotton belt. The Border states of Kentucky, Maryland and Delaware, together with Tennessee, account for 7 of their 21 senators, and 16 representatives. The old South states of North Carolina, Virginia, and Georgia add 3 more in the Senate and 16 in the House.

What these Whig-heavy states have in common is a less cotton/slave-centric economy, a long-standing commitment to the Union, and a conservative hesitancy toward any talk of secession.

The Southern Whigs also boast many established congressional leaders -- men like Senators John J. Crittenden of Kentucky, John Clayton of Delaware, Reverdy Johnson of Maryland, and John Bell of Tennessee -- who share personal reservations about slavery and do their best to moderate threats from the emerging Southern "Fire-Eaters."

In the House they are joined by the likes of the Virginians, John Minor Botts and William Preston, Daniel Barringer and George Badger of North Carolina, and two exceptional Georgia Whigs, Alexander Stephens and Robert Toombs, who will persevere through many ups and downs in search of compromises to protect the Union.

**Southern States Where Whigs Have Strengths In 1848**

<b>Border</b>	<b>House</b>	<b>Senate</b>	<b>“Influentials”</b>
Kentucky	6	2	JJ Crittenden, Charles Morehead
Maryland	4	2	Reverdy Johnson, James Pearce
Delaware	1	2	John Clayton
Southeast			
North Carolina	6	2	Daniel Barringer, George Badger
Georgia	4	1	Alex Stephens, Robert Toombs
Virginia	6	0	John Minor Botts, William Preston
Southwest			
Tennessee	5	1	John Bell
Alabama	2	0	
Louisiana	1	1	

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Date: June 7, 1848

**The Whigs Meet In Philadelphia To Choose A Nominee**



Thurlow Weed (1797-1872)

Two weeks after the Democrats nominate Lewis Cass, Philadelphia hosts its first national convention, as the Whigs pour into the “Chinese Museum” venue on Ninth Street, so-called for its historical display of eastern artifacts.

What’s on the mind of the delegates is finally electing a President who will put into practice the “American System” principles that Henry Clay laid out some twenty years ago.

They came close in 1840, until General Harrison, “Old Tippecanoe,” died one month after his inauguration, only to be replaced by the “turncoat” Tyler, at heart a thoroughgoing Virginia Democrat. Their disappointment is repeated in 1844, when Clay, making his third run, loses a tight race to Polk.

But circumstances in 1848 appear much more hopeful. Unity within the Democratic Party has been severely tested by the Wilmot controversy, and the sitting president, Polk, has given way to a less formidable foe in Cass. Victory should be in store, if the party can nominate the right candidate.

With Clay’s influence waning, the two leading strategists for the Whigs are Kentucky Senator John Crittenden, and journalist, Thurlow Weed, who controls party politics in New York. In 1830 Weed

launched the Anti-Mason Party to bring down Andrew Jackson, and his drive to unseat the Democrats remains undiminished. Together the two men will play the kingmaker role at the convention.

Crittenden himself is regarded by many as a possible candidate, but he dismisses the idea. Clay remains a favorite, but lacks momentum after prior defeats. Senator John Clayton sparks interest, but his tiny home state of Delaware works against him. A few back Supreme Court Justice John McLean of Ohio. Webster's decision to remain in Tyler's administration eliminates him.

This leaves two men in the spotlight – the recent war heroes, Generals Winfield Scott and Zachary Taylor.

The Democrats fear Scott more than Taylor, and Polk acts to diminish his reputation and deprive him of getting the nomination. He does so by initiating a “court of inquiry,” charging that Scott “compromised military operations” in Mexico by dealing directly with Santa Anna to end the war. Future war heroes such as Robert E. Lee and George McClellan decry Polk's cynical ploy and Scott is acquitted – but not before the Whig convention is over.

All eyes then turn to Zachary Taylor – still a very uncertain candidate in the months leading up to the convention.

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Date: June 7, 1848

### **Taylor Is Chosen On The Fourth Ballot**

Two questions have surrounded Taylor from the beginning: does he want to be President and is he really a Whig?

His own words, recorded soon after his February 1847 victory at Buena Vista, seem to rule out a run.

*On the subject of the presidency...under no circumstances have I any aspirations for the office, nor do I have the vanity to consider myself qualified.*

In fact, since departing Mexico in November 1847, Taylor has been happily retired at *Cypress Grove Plantation*, one of several he owns around Baton Rouge, Louisiana. He lives modestly in a small cottage, spending his days mixing easily with townspeople and overseeing the labor of his slaves, which number over one hundred.

When asked about politics, he claims that he is an Independent, not a Whig, and admits that he has never voted before in an election.

Despite these “limitations,” Thurlow Weed is certain that Taylor will win, if nominated. Like Harrison, he is a military hero, a southerner, a slave holder, and one who believes in the sanctity of the Union. Moreover he arrives on stage with no political baggage, no public positions on controversial issues like the Wilmot Proviso, nothing liable to offend one side or the other.

Still Weed recognizes that Taylor must publicly embrace the Whig Party prior to the Philadelphia convention.

He communicates this to Colonel William Bliss, a military aide to the General, who sends a contingent to Baton Rouge in late April 1848 to extract the needed pledge. It comes in the form of what could only be characterized as a tepid commitment:

*I reiterate what I have often said...I am a Whig but not an ultra Whig. If elected I would not be the president of a party (but) would endeavor to act independent of party domination and should feel bound to administer the Government untrammelled by party schemes.*

Along with a promise to insure a strong banking system, this is enough for Weed and Crittenden to proceed, and they rally a diverse band of supporters for Taylor. Included here are seven congressmen known as the “Young Indians,” including Abraham Lincoln and two Georgians, Robert Toombs and Alexander Stephens. Endorsements also appear from non-Whigs, the General’s son-in-law, Jefferson Davis, a Democrat, and the leader of the Nativist American Party, Lewis Levin. Even Scott writes glowingly about Taylor in a September 16 note to one D.F. Miller:

*I know General Taylor to be one of the best citizens in our land. In point of integrity he can have no superior. His firmness of purpose is equally remarkable, and I consider him a man of excellent sense and sound judgement. He has always been known as a republican in principles and manners....*

Crittenden serves as Taylor’s floor manager on June 7 and steers his way through a variety of de-railers: a motion to force the nominee to obey the party platform; a denunciation from a Massachusetts delegate that the General would “continue the rule of slavery for four more years;” and the demand by backers of other candidates to register their preferences in the early balloting.

In the end, Taylor leads from the first vote forward. Clay is shown the respect he deserves, before his support drifts to the two generals. On the fourth reckoning, Taylor goes over the top.

**Whig Nomination For President - 1848**

<b>Candidate</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
Taylor	111	118	133	171
Clay	97	86	74	32
Scott	43	49	54	63
Webster	22	22	17	14
Clayton	4	3	1	0
McLean	2	1	0	0

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Date: June 7, 1848

### **Millard Fillmore Is The Nominee For Vice President**

With Taylor heading the ticket, the Whigs turn to selecting a running mate.

They have learned from the John Tyler fiasco of 1840 that their choice needs to be certifiably Whiggish in regard to his political beliefs and history – a litmus test that is doubly true this time given uncertainties surrounding Taylor.

Out of fourteen names teed up at the convention, four are given serious consideration – two New Yorkers, ex-Governor William Seward and State Comptroller, Millard Fillmore; the textile tycoon from Massachusetts, Abbot Lawrence; and former Treasury Secretary under Harrison/Tyler, Thomas Ewing of Ohio.

Ewing is supremely qualified, but is eliminated by a dirty trick in the form of a false assertion on the floor that he wants his name withdrawn from consideration.

Thurlow Weed is forever firmly behind Seward, with both regarding Fillmore as a serious threat to their control over New York state politics. Seward also opposes much of what Fillmore has come to represent: lukewarm opposition to slavery, fierce anti-Catholic and anti-immigrant attacks, and a lack of curiosity, depth and decisiveness regarding national affairs.

At the same time, the energetic Seward has relatively little interest in serving as Vice-President and, along with Weed, throws his support behind Lawrence.

Lawrence, however, faces sharp divisions within his own Massachusetts delegation. Daniel Webster never forgives him for backing Clay for the 1840 nomination, while the anti-slavery “Conscience Whigs” regard him as far too aligned with Southern cotton interests, who supply his mills.

With Ewings out by deception and Seward by intent, the race comes down to Lawrence versus Fillmore.

Fillmore has climbed out of poverty as a youth to a successful legal career, four terms in the U.S. House, the founding of Buffalo University, and his current position as Comptroller of New York, overseeing accounting practices and financial reporting for state government. He is intent on returning to the national stage, and has campaigned over a year for the Vice-Presidency.

He is also well organized at the convention, and offers the delegates a Northerner who appears to be mildly against the spread of slavery, thus balancing Polk, the Southern slave owner.

The first ballot is tight, but Fillmore pulls away on the second and wins the position he is after – along with a destiny that will surpass his wildest ambition.

**Ballot Results For Vice-President**

<b>Candidate</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>
Fillmore	115	173
Lawrence	109	87
Others	51	

## Chapter 162 – Women Reformers Begin To Battle For Gender Equality



**Dates:**  
1820 –  
1840's

**Sections:**

- The Second Awakening Sparks Debate Over The Roles And Rights Of Women
- Educational Advances Expand The Horizons For Women
- Roll Call For The Women's Rights Movement
- Lucretia Mott Emerges As The Role Model For The Women's Movement
- Elizabeth Cady Stanton Becomes Chief Strategist For The Women's Movement
- Lucy Stone Adds Her Indomitable Will On Behalf Of Gender Equality
- Susan B. Anthony Brings Her Unique Organizational Talents To The Cause

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Date: 1820-1845

### The Second Awakening Sparks Debate Over The Roles And Rights Of Women

While the two major parties are focused on slavery and politics, a movement to reshape the roles and rights of women in society is quietly picking up momentum.

From Jamestown forward, women and men operate in different spheres, codified by Blackstone's English common law, biblical admonitions and social norms.

Men are born to rule, to be masters of their own households, to become the nation's ministers, lawyers, doctors and businessmen, to venture out into the affairs of state, participating in the militia, politics, and the civic arena.

Women's defined role is one of domesticity and subservience, first in relation to their fathers and then to their husbands.

Those who "fail" to marry become "spinsters," relegated to living at home with their likely-to-be disappointed parents.

As single women (*feme sole*), however, they do retain their personal "rights" to own property, run a business, retain wages, write and sign contracts, create a will and dispose of their own possessions.

Once married, women "surrender" these rights to their husbands under the English law of "coverture" – whereby her wishes are assumed to be "covered," or subjugated, under the will of her husband.

From then on, her charge lies in supporting her husband, first by producing heirs – ten lifetime pregnancies being common – and then by providing a well-run household. The duties here are non-stop and laborious. Laundry done with well water, cooking over an open fire, mending clothes, gardening,

milking cows, helping with crops, raising children, caring for sick family members, attending church and instilling proper moral values.

The effect is the near total exclusion of women from the civic arena. Speaking out in a public forum, especially with men present, becomes a “radical” act, and voting in elections is considered out of the question. As Thomas Jefferson put it...

*The ballot must be reserved for every man who fights and pays.*

The notion of separate spheres between the sexes is reinforced in popular publications of the day. A Southern journal sums it up as follows:

*His aspirations are for thrones and large dominions; she is queen of the household; her diadem is the social affections; her scepter, love.*

*Godey's Ladies Book* offers a “Code of Instructions For Ladies,” with a full litany of “nevers” – never contradict your husband, give advice unless asked, criticize his behavior, respond during arguments, censor his morals, and so forth.

Testimonials to the traditional hierarchy abound, this one from a contented wife in Georgia:

*True to my sex, I...love to feel my woman's weakness protected by man's superior strength.*

Few challenges to this hierarchy materialize during the Revolutionary era. The rare exceptions originate with women like the anti-British political pamphleteer, Mercy Otis Warren and Abigail Adams, the outspoken wife of the second U.S. President, who warns of a “Ladies rebellion.”

It is not, however, until the height of the Second Great Awakening phenomenon between 1820 and 1845 that America begins to seriously rethink “women's roles and rights” – along with other social reforms like temperance, slavery, debtor's prisons, poverty, and abuses of child labor and the physically handicapped.

The spirit here is every bit consistent with the nation's revolutionary instinct to challenge all orthodoxies associated with its European heritage.

Under the umbrella of “liberty and power to the individual,” Americans re-think the structure of their government, their churches, their financial institution, and their economy. How natural then to reconsider the structure within their own households – especially given its overtones of monarchy and serfdom!

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Date: 1830's Forward

### **Educational Advances Expand The Horizons For Women**

The women who initiate the debates on gender tend to benefit from parents who encourage their early intellectual curiosity and provide them with a formal education – often through tutors or attendance at one of the new “female seminaries” that spring up between 1820 and 1840, during the height of the Awakening.

These seminaries are the successors to earlier “dame schools” or “finishing schools,” where young girls are taught the four values required to lead a virtuous life: religious piety, submission to a husband’s will, sexual faithfulness, and home-making skills, including cooking, sewing, gardening and child care.

The founders of these new schools are intent on replacing this narrow “domesticity” curriculum with one that mirrors that being offered to males – world literature, languages, mathematics, and science. Since for-men-only colleges refuse to recognize the merits of these subjects for females, the “radicals” who start up these seminaries plow forward on their own – often under the more acceptable guise of training women to become better teachers.

Lurking within the halls of these new “female seminaries,” however, are educators like Mary Lyon of Mount Holyoke, and students like Lucy Stone, who are dedicated to using their schools to reshape the ambitions and opportunities for women in American society.

#### **Earliest Colleges Admitting Women In America**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Where</b>	<b>Curriculum</b>
1742	Bethlehem Female Seminary Moravian College	Germantown, Pa.	Link to Moravian Church, becomes a secondary school for girls 8-15, broad academic curriculum along moral guidance, vocational training, physical exercise, and social skills.
1772	Single Sister’s House Salem Female Academy	Winston-Salem, N.C.	Link to Moravian Church, similar to Bethlehem on structure, among the first to accept black students.
1792	Litchfield Academy	Litchfield, Connecticut	Founded by Sarah Pierce to provide “Republican Motherhood” vision of women as capable teachers of their own children. Pierce also authors her own history textbooks.
1796	Nine Partners School	So. Millbrook, New York	Quaker run co-ed school for ages 7-15 years. Both Lucretia and James Mott attended the school and later taught there.
1803	Bradford Academy Bradford Teachers Seminary	Bradford, Mass.	Three year college prep school which shifted to women only in 1836, with focus on preparing teachers. Cost of \$4-6 per semester.
1806	Byfield Female Seminary	Byfield, Mass	Run by Congregationalist minister, Joseph Emerson, attendees include Zilpah Grant and Mary Lyon.

1811	Boston Lyceum For Young Women	Boston, Mass	Founded by educator and journalist, John Park and attended by Margaret Fuller
1818	Elizabeth Female Academy	Washington, Miss.	Methodist Church connections, with emphasis on spirituality, James Audubon taught drawing in 1822, and Varina Davis was attendee.
1821	Troy Female Seminary Emma Willard School	Troy, New York	College prep boarding school founded by Emma Willard who, with Beecher and Lyon, created curriculum matching that taught to boys. Grads include Elizabeth Cady Stanton.
1823	Hartford Female Academy	Hartford, Connecticut	Founded by educator, Catharine Beecher, with emphasis on early childhood education.
1825	Science Hill School	Shelbyville, Ky	Founder is Julia Ann Hieronymous Tevis, with focus on teaching science to young women.
1827	Linden Wood School For Girls	St. Charles, Missouri	Presbyterian Church, founded by the teacher, Mary Easton, and her explorer husband, George Sibley. Full range of courses for college prep.
1828	Ipswich Female Seminary	Ipswich, Mass.	Founded by Zilpah Grant, colleague of Mary Lyon, focus on joy of learning vs. rote memorization.
1830	Charleston Female Seminary	Charleston, Mass.	Opened by Baptist ministers, then educator Martha Whiting, attendees include Mary Livermore
1833	Columbia Female Academy	Columbia, Missouri	Baptist link, first mistress was Lucy Wales, college prep.
1833	Friends Select School	Philadelphia, Pa.	Quaker run, Anna Dickinson attended.
1834	Wheaton Female Seminary	Norton, Mass	Founded by education pioneer, Mary Lyon, with "curriculum mirroring that offered to men." No church ties.
1837	St. Mary's Hall	Burlington, New Jersey	All-girls academic boarding school, founded by Episcopal Bishop, George Doane.
1837	Mount Holyoke Female Academy	South Hadley, Mass.	Educator Mary Lyon's finest legacy, emphasizes science and math, moral purpose, physical fitness, campus work to defray costs, affordable to all, major advances in educating teachers. Sister school to Andover Academy For Boys.
1839	Georgia Female College Wesleyan Female College	Macon, Georgia	Methodist Church links, first president was Rev. George Pierce, college level courses focused on the sciences.
1842	Quaboag Seminary	Warren, Mass	College prep for both sexes, Lucy Stone attends before going on to Oberlin.
1844	St. Mary's College	Notre Dame, Indiana	Sisters of the Holy Cross of France, Catholic college prep boarding school.

1848	Philadelphia School of Design for Women	Philadelphia, Pa.	Founded by Sarah Worthington King to prepare poor women with skills to enter trade, teaches wood carving, lithography and household design.
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Each of the four women who will lead the “Women’s Movement” attend one of these progressive schools -- Lucretia Mott (Nine Partners), Elizabeth Cady Stanton (Troy), Lucy Stone (Oberlin College), and Susan B. Anthony (Moulson’s Female Seminary).

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Date: 1776 Forward

**Roll Call For The Women’s Rights Movement**



Lydia Marie Child (1902-1880)



Mary Livermore (1820-1905)



Louisa May Alcott (1832-1888)

But early education is only one mark of those who will lead the Women’s Movement.

With few exceptions, they are all confirmed, and activist, abolitionists.

Several join Lloyd Garrison’s inner circle --Lucretia Mott becomes, in effect, his spiritual advisor; Sojourner Truth, the Grimke sisters, Abby Kelley and Maria Weston Chapman are traveling lecturers and agents; Margaret Fuller, Lydia Marie Child, Anna Dickinson and others contribute essays to his *Liberator* newspaper.

Religion typically plays a significant role in their upbringing. Several are Quakers, among them Mott, the Grimke’s, and Abby Kelley. Some belong to mainstream Protestant sects or break-aways, such as the Unitarians (Lucy Stone, Howe, Chapman, and Alcott) and the Universalists. Others, like Susan B.

Anthony, move from one sect to another, only to abandon all formal affiliation out of frustration with the failure of church officials to deal with the “degradations” suffered by blacks and women.

A few are so-called “Freethinkers” from early on, aware of the formal religious traditions, but inclined to rely on their own reason and instincts to move through life. The utopian socialist Fanny Wright and the precocious Lydia Marie Child belong here – as does the always unconventional Elizabeth Cady Stanton.

With very few exceptions, women in the movement marry – almost always to husbands who are supportive of their full equality. Most also become mothers, although as a group they are much less inclined toward very large families common at the time. Stanton is one exception, giving birth on eight separate occasions.

Even with only one or two children, they are left with the challenge of taking care of their families, while simultaneously devoting their remaining time to their causes and personal careers. These careers are fundamental to altering their spheres of influence, beyond home and church, and into arenas historically reserved for men.

Many begin in a safe zone by teaching or tutoring. From there, however, they break out in multiple directions.

Some establish and run their own academies: Sarah Pierce, Zilpah Grant, Mary Easton, Emma Willard, Mary Lyon, Catherine Beecher.

Others turn to writing, from fiction and poetry (Alcott, Child) to hard-hitting essays (Warren, Fuller, Stanton, Child, McClintock, Howe) to running newspapers (Mary Shad Cary, the Forten sisters, Fuller, Stanton, Anthony, and others).

Lucretia Mott and Antoinette Brown Blackwell are both ordained ministers, the former in the Quaker Church, the latter a Congregationalist. Mary Walker earns an MD degree and practices medicine, while others labor as nurses.

Many are responsible for founding and operating major reform organizations. Early on they include the Female Anti-Slavery Societies, in Philadelphia (Mott, the sisters Grimke and Forten) and in Boston (Maria Weston Chapman). When the American Anti-Slavery Society finally admits women – in 1839, six years after its founding – the roster includes Mott, the Grimkes, Kelley, Stanton, Stone, Anthony and others.

Later on, Stanton and Anthony found the National Woman Suffrage Association (1869), Stone and Brown the American Woman Suffrage Association (1869) and Francis Willard the Women’s Christian Temperance Union (1873).

Together these courageous leaders will fundamentally change the rights and roles of women during the second half of the nineteenth century.

**Some Of The Leading Figures In The Women's Movement During The 19<sup>th</sup> Century**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Dates</b>	<b>Their Education</b>	<b>Religion</b>	<b>Marry?</b>	<b>Abol?</b>
Mercy Otis Warren	1728-1814	Tutored by local minister	Puritan	Y- 5 children	
Abigail Adams	1744-1818	Home schooled by mother	Unitarian	Y- 6	
Sarah Pierce	1767-1852	NY school for teachers	Presby		
Emma Willard	1787-1870	Public school in Berlin, Conn.	Christian	Y-1	
Sarah Grimke	1792-1873	Private tutors on plantation	Quaker	Y-0	Y
Lucretia Coffin Mott	1793-1880	Nine Partners School	Quaker	Y-6	Y
Zilpah P. Grant	1794-1874	Byfield Female Seminary	Congreg.	Y-0	
Fanny Wright	1795-1852	Home school in UK by aunt	Freethinker	Y-1	Y
Mary Lyon	1797-1849	Byfield Female Seminary	Congreg.		
Sojourner Truth *	1797-1883	Enslaved, education banned	Methodist	Y-5	Y
Catharine Beecher	1800-1878	Litchfield Academy + self-taught	Presby		
Mary Easton Sibley	1800-1878	Women's boarding school in Ky.	Presby	Y-0	
Mary Ann McClintock	1800-1884	Westtown School	Quaker	Y-5	Y
Lydia Maria Child	1802-1880	Self-taught	Freethinker	Y-0	Y
Amy Post	1802-1889	Self-taught	Quaker	Y-4	Y
Angelina Grimke Weld	1805-1879	Private tutors on plantation	Quaker	Y-0	Y
William Lloyd Garrison	1805-1879				
Martha Coffin Wright	1806-1875	Quaker schools in Philadelphia	Quaker/left	Y-7	Y
Margaretta Forten *	1806-1875	Private black academy in Phil	AME		Y
Maria Weston Chapman	1806-1885	Schools in UK	Unitarian	Y-4	Y
Margaret Fuller	1810-1850	Father tutor, then Boston Lyceum	Transcend.	Y-1	Y
Harriet Forten Purvis *	1810-1875	Private black academy in Phil	AME	Y-8	Y

William Henry Channing	1810-1884				
Ernestine Potovsky Rose	1810-1892	Hebrew school in Poland	Judaism/left	Y-0	Y
Abby Kelley Foster	1811-1887	New England Friends School	Quaker	Y-1	Y
Wendell Phillips	1811-1884				
Jane Hunt	1812-1889	Home school	Quaker	Y-4	Y
Paulina Wright Davis	1813-1876	Public school in NY	Presby	Y-2	Y
Elizabeth Cady Stanton	1815-1902	Troy Female Seminary	Freethinker	Y-8	Y
Lucy Colman	1817-1906	Self-taught	Spiritualist	Y-1	Y
Lucy Stone	1818-1893	Oberlin College '50	Unitarian	Y-1	Y
Amelia Bloomer	1818-1894	New York public grade school	Episcopal		
Julia Ward Howe	1818-1910	Home schooled by tutors	Unitarian	Y-6	Y
Susan B. Anthony	1820-1906	Moulson's Female Seminary	Q/Uni/left		Y
Mary Livermore	1820-1905	Charleston Female Seminary	Universalist	Y-0	Y
Elizabeth Smith Miller	1822-1911	Philadelphia Friends School	Unknown		Y
Mary Ann Shadd Cary *	1823-1893	Quaker school in Pa.	AME/left	Y-2	Y
Edna Dow Cheney	1824-1905	Private girls schools	Transcend.	Y-2	Y
Antoinette Brown Blackwell	1825-1921	Oberlin College '47	Congreg.	Y-7	
Thomas Higginson	1828-1911				
Louisa May Alcott	1832-1888	Father + Transcendentalist tutors	Unitarian		Y
Dr. Mary Walker	1832-1919	Syracuse Medical College	Freethinker	Y-0/Divorce	Y
Victoria Woodhull	1838-1927	Public grade school in Ohio	Spiritualist	Y-2/Divorce	
Frances Willard	1839-1898	Northwestern Female College	Methodist		
Anna Dickinson	1842-1932	Friends Select School in Pa.	Quaker		Y

\* African-Americans Y=Yes, Blank=No

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Date: 1820 Forward

## Lucretia Mott Emerges As The Role Model For The Women's Movement



Lucretia Mott (1793-1880)

No single figure has greater impact on the women's movement than Lucretia Coffin Mott.

Her remarkable life begins in 1793 on the island of Nantucket, some thirty miles south of Cape Cod, Massachusetts. Her father is a seafarer, captain of a sailing vessel, trading in seal skins, voyaging as far away as South America and China. His often year-long absences place the burden of caring for the family -- which includes eight children -- and for a small supply store, directly into the hands of his wife. Later in life, Lucretia recalls the skills and independence evidenced by the women of the Island while their husbands were away.

*I remember how our mothers were employed, while our fathers were at sea. They were obliged to go to Boston... mingle with men, make their trades and with all of this, have very little help in the family, to which they must discharge their duties.*

In addition to witnessing and admiring her mother's self-confidence and initiative, she also grows up in a Quaker community that rejects hierarchical privilege, believes in co-education, encourage women to think for themselves, to speak up in mixed public forums, even to serve in the official church ministry.

In 1804 the Coffin family moves to Boston, with her father transitioning from the risky life at sea to more stable pursuits as a tradesman. At age thirteen, Lucretia begins her studies at the Nine Partners co-educational school in Poughkeepsie, NY. The venue is a Quaker Meeting House and the superintendent is one Adam Mott, who fosters a sense of duty among his students on behalf of abolition. Lucretia is moved by her reading about slavery and by those who speak against it like the Quaker preacher, Elias Hicks.

*My sympathy was early enlisted for the poor slave, by the class-books read in our schools, and the pictures of the slave-ship, as published by Clarkson. The ministry of Elias Hicks and others, on the subject of the unrequited labor of slaves, and their example in refusing the products of slave labor, all had their effect in awakening a strong feeling in their behalf.*

From Hicks, Lucretia is also persuaded that one's moral compass should be guided by "obedience to the light within" rather than conformity to often misguided institutional norms.

By fifteen, she is hired at Nine Partners as an assistant teacher, and learns a distressing lesson about such norms around the issue of wage difference between women and men.

*The unequal condition of women in society also early impressed my mind. Learning, while at school, that when they became teachers, women received but half as much as men for their services, the injustice of this was so apparent, that I early resolved to claim for my sex all that an impartial Creator had bestowed.*

One of Lucretia's fellow teachers is James Mott, son of the superintendent, and the man she marries in 1811, after her family moves to Philadelphia. Together they will become activists on behalf of abolition and gender equality over the next 57 years together, up to his death in 1867.

Putting an end to slavery tops Lucretia's list from the beginning. In 1815 she joins forces with another Quaker, Benjamin Lundy, in trying to convince the Friends General Assembly to publicly support abolition. In 1819 she sees slaves first-hand on a trip into Virginia.

*The sight of the poor slaves was indeed affecting: though...we were told their situation was rendered less deplorable, by kind treatment from their masters.*

While raising her children – eventually numbering six – she masters her Bible studies to the point where, in 1821, age twenty-eight, she is ordained as a Quaker minister. From there she is drawn into leading “a more public life:”

*At twenty-five years of age, surrounded with a little family and many cares, I felt called to a more public life of devotion to duty, and engaged in the ministry in our Society, receiving every encouragement from those in authority, until a separation among us...when my convictions led me to adhere to the sufficiency of the light within us, resting on truth as authority, rather than taking authority for truth.*

This puts her on-stage in front of large audiences for the first time. It instills the courage she will need to advocate in public for her causes, as well as providing a model for other women to participate in civil discourse.

In 1823 she and James initiate the Philadelphia Free Produce Society, a co-op dedicated to boycotting the use of all products derived from slave labor – from sugar to cotton to tobacco. Conforming to this ban proves challenging to the Mott's financial future, and it comes at a time of pressure from within the Quaker community to denounce their “Hicksite” convictions.

Lucretia simply moves forward amidst the upheavals, balancing her private and public responsibilities. This trait is repeatedly commented upon by other women...

*She is proof that it is possible for a woman to widen her sphere without deserting her home life.*

On January 1, 1831, the nascent abolitionist movement is transformed by William Lloyd Garrison, a new arrival, who publishes the first edition of his paper, *The Liberator*, announcing that...

*I shall strenuously contend for the immediate enfranchisement of our slave population.... I am in earnest — I will not equivocate — I will not excuse — I will not retreat a single inch — **AND I WILL BE HEARD.***

Garrison is quick to mobilize his forces, and in December 1833 some 62 delegates (21 Quakers) meet in Philadelphia to found the American Anti-Slavery Society, which, over the next five years will boast a quarter million members, eventually including the four main leaders of the Women's Rights movement, Mott, Stanton, Stone and Anthony.

At the opening convention, however, a vote is taken and women are denied membership!

Despite this affront, Lucretia is undismayed, and speaks out at the plenary session about the wording of the "pledge of faith." This meeting also marks the beginning what will be her lifelong association with Lloyd Garrison.

Along with Lydia Maria Child and Margaretta Forten, the African-American daughter of the black abolitionist, James Forten, Mott soon founds the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society. Its mission includes gathering petitions, collecting money for black schools, writing pamphlets and lecturing to public audiences. In 1835 the fiery southern white abolitionist Angelina Grimke joins Mott as an itinerant lecturer, further emboldening more women to speak their minds on a range of reform issues.

Along with their zeal comes not only verbal abuse but also physical risk. In 1838 a mob breaks up an anti-slavery meeting at the Pennsylvania Hall, then burns it to the ground and threatens the homes of local abolitionists, including Lucretia and James Mott. Such attacks are not unusual and the gentle "Mother Mott" will continue to face them.

In June 1840, at the first World Anti-Slavery Convention in London, the Women's Rights movement becomes a cause celebre. The meeting is called to applaud the English for freeing some 800,000 slaves since their emancipation act of 1833, and to encourage other nations, especially the U.S., to follow suit. A total of roughly 300 official delegates are present, including 50 from America. Seven women are invited, among them the now famous Mott and the baroness widow of the English poet, Lord Byron.

At the opening session, the question of seating the female delegates suddenly takes center stage, with a lively debate consuming most of the day. One irate U.S. delegate sums up the situation as follows....

*What a misnomer to call this a world convention of abolitionists when some of the oldest and most thorough going supporters are denied the right to be represented.*

But a final vote goes against the women by a 90% nay to 10% yea margin, and the females, including Lucretia Mott, are forced to observe the session away from the official floor. This well-publicized "degradation" will energize those a host of women intent on changing their status in society.

The 1840 London Convention is also remembered as the first encounter between the 47 year old icon, Mott, and one of her eventual protégés, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, the 24 year old newlywed accompanying her husband Henry Stanton, a US delegate. Elizabeth's reaction to Mott is one of awe:

*It seemed to me like meeting a being from some larger planet, to find a woman who dared question the opinions of Popes, Kings, Synods, Parliaments, with the same freedom that she would criticize an editorial in the London Times, recognizing no higher authority than the judgment of a pure-minded, educated woman.*

Mott is likewise impressed by Stanton's views on changing the standing of women and by her self-assurance. Over the next eight years, the two are in frequent touch, with the culmination being the landmark Seneca Falls Convention of 1848, and Stanton's famous Declaration of Sentiments on behalf of women.

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Date: 1830 Forward

### **Elizabeth Cady Stanton Becomes Chief Strategist For The Women's Movement**



Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902)

Stanton's family lineage is considerably more prestigious than others in the inner circle of the women's movement.

Her maternal roots trace back to Colonel James Livingston, whose service in the Revolutionary War is rewarded with a 3500 acre land grant in New York state. One of his daughters marries Peter Smith, a fabulously wealthy partner of John Jacob Astor, and father of the philanthropist reformer, Gerrit Smith. Another daughter, Margaret, weds Daniel Cady, a prosperous attorney, who serves a term in the U.S. House (1815-17), before eventually being named a justice on the New York Supreme Court.

"Judge Cady" and Margaret have eleven children, with Elizabeth, born in 1815, the eighth in line. She is raised in Johnstown, New York, amidst privileges that include horseback riding, chess lessons, access to her father's extensive library, and a formal education -- first in a local grammar school and then at Troy Female Seminary, Emma Willard's college prep boarding school which opens in 1821. She enrolls there in 1831, at age sixteen, and completes an academic curriculum, from math to science, classical languages, religion and composition.

Reflecting on her youth, she later admits to the pain of her father's "preference for boys," and her desire to win his affection by matching her brother's every accomplishments. Her formula is simple:

*I thought that the chief thing to be done in order to equal boys was to be learned and courageous. So I decided to study Greek and learn to manage a horse.*

After graduating from Troy, she connects with her well-to-do cousin, Gerritt Smith, eighteen years her senior, and his circle of friends, already engaged in temperance and abolitionist activities. Ironically Elizabeth has grown up with a slave in her own household, owned by her father until freed in 1827 under New York law.

One of Gerritt Smith's acquaintances is Henry Stanton, who begins his career as a journalist before enrolling in 1832 at Lane Theological Seminary, intending to become a Presbyterian minister. The school

is embroiled at the time with debates over slavery, and Stanton leaves before graduation to become a lecturer on behalf of abolition, and to help Smith found the Liberty Party in 1840.

Elizabeth is also drawn into the reform fervor of the 1830's and finds in Stanton a man who is a decade older, and already making his mark as a public speaker and writer on causes she favors. Despite her father's uncertainties about Henry's future prospects, the two are married in 1840, agreeing that "obey your husband" be omitted in the vows.

Six weeks after the wedding they are in London attending the World Anti-Slavery Convention, a pivotal moment where she meets Lucretia Mott and witnesses first-hand the refusal to seat female delegates, which she recalls as...

*A burning indignation that filled my soul.*

Garrison remembers her as "a fearless woman...who goes for woman's rights with all her soul."

One signal of her commitment lies in what she calls her "debut in public" in a speech on temperance. She recounts this in an 1841 letter to her friend, Eliza Neall, saying that one hundred men were present and that the "homeopathic doses of Women's Rights" she infuses brought tears to the eyes of her audience and herself. She also concludes that...

*The more I think on the present condition of women, the more am I oppressed with the reality of her degradation. The laws of our country, how unjust are they! our customs, how vicious! What God has made sinful, both in man and woman, custom has made sinful in woman alone.*

From this speaking triumph also comes a life-long lesson:

*The best protection any woman can have ... is courage.*

Eight years will elapse between the 1840 London Convention on slavery and the landmark 1848 Seneca Falls gathering on women's rights. Much of that time for Elizabeth is spent in Boston, raising her seven children (one dies at birth), and mingling with activists, like Garrison and Fred Douglass, and intellectuals, like Emerson and the Alcotts.

While the Mexican War and sectional tensions over slavery dominate public discourse, a small cadre of protesters form up on behalf of "the women's issues." In 1845 the Transcendentalist Margaret Fuller publishes her treatise on *Women In The Nineteenth Century*, laying out a litany of basic rights denied and directing a scathing attack against men who exhibit a "tone of feeling toward females as toward slaves."

A smattering of men also lobby for change. Judge Elisha Hurlbut condemns "coverture" as "the law of the male sex gathering unto themselves dominion and power at the sacrifice of the female." Wendell Phillips and Garrison add their support. The Unitarian minister, Samuel May, goes so far as to tell his congregation that justice demands equality for women, including an astonishing plea for their right to vote.

Elizabeth's outward protests remain fairly muted so far. She refuses to be called "Mrs. Stanton," and adopts a new form of less formal dress favored by liberated women.

But in her few spare moments away from housekeeping she dashes off a series of essays on women's roles and rights that prove forerunners to the legally cast declarations she will offer at the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848, which will change her destiny.

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Date: 1840 Forward

### Lucy Stone Adds Her Indomitable Will On Behalf Of Gender Equality



Lucy Stone (1818-1893)

A third pioneer in the women's movement is Lucy Stone.

As a child she lives under the shadow of the words her mother tells her she used to report her birth to her father: "Oh dear, I am sorry it is a girl."

The time is 1818, and Francis Stone is hoping for another son to help work his farm in western Massachusetts, not a girl, unlikely to even offset her own consumption with the light labor she can provide. Throughout her youth, her father rules his domain with an iron hand, while her mother is left to comply on all things.

*There was only one will in our family, and that was my fathers.*

The effect of this on Lucy is to steel herself against repeating this subservience in her own life. This leads to her vows to become as educated as a man, to always earn and keep her own wages, and above all to avoid the surrender of her basic rights through marriage.

She is also upset as a youth by events outside her own home. She hears that Congress refuses to accept anti-slavery petitions written by women. Ministers in her own Congregational Church condemn the abolitionist Sarah Grimke for "assuming the place of a man" by speaking out in public. She learns that a Connecticut anti-slavery meeting refuses to count the vote of the firebrand Abby Kelley, who proceeds to defiantly raise her hand anyway.

Her early education in a local school is limited, but still sufficient to land her a position in teaching at the age of sixteen. When she enquires about her wages, she is told that "women can afford to teach for one half, or even less, the salary which men would ask."

In 1838, Lucy reads newspaper excerpts of Sarah Grimke's *Letters On The Equality Of The Sexes*, aimed at demolishing biblical justifications for subjugating women and forcing them to operate in different spheres from men.

In 1839, her thirst for education finds her enrolling at Mount Holyoke, only to discover that open support for abolition and women's rights is frowned upon by school officials. She transfers to Quaboag Seminary, especially to learn enough Latin and Greek to pass college entrance exams. In 1843 she has accumulated

enough savings to apply to Oberlin College, which nine years earlier becomes the first university accepting women.

Lucy thrives at Oberlin, mastering its classical curriculum. She works part-time to pay her way, and convinces the administration to adjust her wages upward to equal her male counterparts. She protests faculty resistance to a visiting lecture by abolitionist Kelley, and sets up a clandestine female debating society, where she hones her own speaking skills. In 1847 she graduates with honors, but refuses to write a commencement address after learning that it must be read by a man.

Her Oberlin phase also leads to a lasting friendship with Antoinette Brown, later the first woman ordained to the ministry by the Congregational Church. The two are sisters-in-law six years later, after Lucy changes her mind and decides to marry Henry Blackwell. He is an Englishman by birth, who immigrates to America, becomes a successful hardware salesman, and falls in love with Lucy after hearing one of her lectures. The marriage is preceded by an extensive pre-nuptial agreement, vacating all of the “coverture” rules abhorrent to Lucy since her youth.

In 1848, Abby Kelley convinces her to become a Lecturing Agent for the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, which fully connects her to Lloyd Garrison’s supporters, including Lucretia Mott.

Lucy is now right where she belongs. Standing in front of a mixed and often openly hostile crowd. Sporting a short, almost masculine haircut and wearing a loose fitting jacket over “bloomer” trousers. Vigorously making the case for the cause of equality for women.

Over the coming decade her prowess and fearlessness as a public speaker will make her famous nationwide.

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### Sidebar: Oberlin College



Tappan Hall On The Campus Of Oberlin College

Lucy Stone’s Oberlin College begins in 1833 within the context of yet another of the era’s “utopian communities,” this one imagined by two young religious zealots seeking “moral perfection.”

One is Reverend John Shipherd, influenced by revivalist preacher, Charles Finney, and conducting his own evangelical meetings in 1832 in Elmyra, Ohio. The other is his friend from prep school, Philo

Stewart, serving as a missionary to the Choctaw tribes in the area. Both are troubled by the lack of religious dedication in the west, and decide to found a colony, whose “sole mission is to save souls and prepare the world for the coming millennium of Christ.”

With support from their Congregational church back east, they acquire 550 acres of land some thirty miles southeast of Cleveland, and christen their colony Oberlin, after a French educator they admire.

As with other utopian experiments, Oberlin suffers severe financial difficulties, until one of Shipherd's fundraising trips connects him with the philanthropist Lewis Tappan -- who has just learned that attempts to promote abolition at Lane Theological Seminary have run afoul of its conservative head, Lyman Beecher. This results in a walk-out from Lane of about 50 students and trustee, Asa Mahan.

Shipherd now works out a quid pro quo, whereby Tappan will donate \$10,000 and 8 professorships to Oberlin if the local college there guarantees that students do manual labor to pay operating expenses, and will agree to enroll both women and blacks, in addition to men.

Shipherd willingly accepts the deal on his own, and, in 1833, the Oberlin Collegiate Institute opens its doors, with Asa Mahan as its first president and a class largely composed of the Lane defectors.

By 1835, however, the community Trustees have still not lived up to the deal with Tappan. Their resistance demonstrates the disparagement toward females and blacks that prevails at the time -- even among this supposedly idealistic white enclave.

While admitting women has been approved, it comes with the caveat that their curriculum be confined to two departments -- "Female" and "Teachers" -- and not "Collegiate" and "Theological."

Enrolling blacks is another matter entirely, and the responses here are symbolic of the intense racial bias that dominates America's white society, South and North. Opponents argue that enrolling blacks at Oberlin would be madness, that internal church funding would disappear, and that...

*Hundreds of Negroes would be flooding in...and as soon as the darkies begin to come, the whites will begin to leave...and we will become a Negro school.*

At first, Shipherd tries to counter with moral persuasion, while tempering his plea with assurances that hands-off distance can still be maintained between whites and the inferior blacks.

*None of you will be compelled to receive them into your families, unless, like Christ, the love of your neighbor compels you to...as Christ ate with publicans and sinners... But this should be passed because it is a right principle and God will bless us in doing right...If we refuse to deliver our black brethren... I cannot hope that God will smile upon us.*

This too fails, and the Trustees opposition is strengthened by a student vote of 32-26 vote against admitting blacks. All that's left for Shipherd is threat, and on February 9, 1835, he tells the Trustees that the school will not only lose Tappan's crucial financial support, but that he will also leave the community unless they go along. By a margin of one last vote, cast by the abolitionist minister, John Keep, the motion to admit blacks carries.

From that moment on, Oberlin College will become a beacon of light shining across America on behalf of educating females and blacks -- even though actual progress proceeds in fits and starts.

Five years will pass before sixteen year old George Vashon becomes the first black enrolled. He is the son of Pennsylvania abolitionist, John Vashon, and goes on to graduate with honors in 1844, followed by a distinguished career as a lawyer, professor and reformer.

Progress happens faster for the Oberlin women. The curriculum for females is expanded to include the full range of “Collegiate” courses, with three women signing up for these in 1837, and two going on to be first in the nation to receive an AB degree, in 1841. Twenty-one years later, one Mary Patterson will be the first black woman awarded that degree, also from Oberlin.

Lucy Stone will enroll at Oberlin in 1843 and graduate in 1847. Her experiences there will reinforce many of the prejudices against women that are the norm in her day, including wage inequities and efforts to stifle her voice at campus debates and commencement. But, her time at Oberlin also proves transformative, as she begins her leadership in the Women’s Rights Movement. As she later observes:

*Whatever the reason, the idea was born that women could and should be educated. It lifted a mountain load from woman. It shattered the idea, everywhere pervasive as the atmosphere, that women were incapable of education, and would be less womanly, less desirable in every way, if they had it.*

And what of Shipherd and Stewart, the two men who fought so hard to create a utopian community and college in 1832 in the backwoods of Ohio? Sadly, Shipherd dies of malaria at age forty-two in Michigan, in the process of founding Olivet University, his “next Oberlin” in the west. Stewart lives on to seventy and continues to help fund Oberlin through profits from a patented stove he invents.

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Date: 1840 Forward

### **Susan B. Anthony Brings Her Unique Organizational Talents To The Cause**



Susan B. Anthony (1820-1906)

The fourth member of the early women’s movement is Susan Brownell Anthony.

She is born in 1820, which makes her five years younger than Elizabeth Cady Stanton and two years younger than Lucy Stone.

Her early life is spent on a modest farm situated in the far northwestern edge of Massachusetts. To supplement the family income, her father Daniel operates a small cotton mill, which employs local women, several of whom are housed on the farm. This exposes Susan from an early age to the hard labor demands placed on women, in their households and in factories.

Daniel is a “Hicksite Quaker,” like Lucretia Mott, who relies on his “inner light” rather than church authority to shape his beliefs. He is not only a freethinker but also a reformer, dedicated especially to temperance, abolition and equal education for women.

In 1826, Daniel and a wealthy friend form a partnership to operate a much larger cotton mill, and the family moves some forty miles north to a new home in Battenville, New York. Once settled in, he constructs a one room schoolhouse on his new property, and hires a teacher, Mary Perkins, to instruct his own children and those of his mill workers. Susan is an eager student and is ever ready to expand her educational horizons.

At age seventeen a chance arises and she is off to Deborah Moulson's Female Seminary, a Quaker boarding school in Philadelphia. The curriculum is ideal – math, science, literature, physiology – but she finds the environment stifling, with Moulson an overbearing religious zealot, perpetually criticizing her work along with her sunny disposition.

This bittersweet academic interlude ends abruptly when the aftershocks of Andrew Jackson's Bank Panic of 1835 crush her father's business and leave the entire family in poverty.

In 1838, she returns home, determined to help pay off the family debts.

To do so, she begins teaching in 1840 at Eunice Kenyon's Friends Seminary in New Rochelle, New York. While there, she becomes increasingly self-confident and brushes off several marriage proposals, to protect her independence. Her anti-slavery instincts are heightened in New Rochelle by the systematic humiliations she sees free blacks suffering at the hands of "supposedly Christian" whites. She also learns to her dismay that the wage she is being paid at the Seminary is only one-fourth of her male counterparts.

In 1845 she is back home again in a Quaker community near Rochester, on a farm which becomes a gathering place for activists, including the famous Unitarian minister, Samuel May, preaching in nearby Syracuse, and, over time, Frederick Douglass, who will become Susan's lifelong friend. Three "causes" are bubbling up for her – temperance, abolition, and the career and wage constraints placed on women by traditional social norms.

A year later, in 1846, she ventures out again on her own. This time for a position her uncle arranges as headmistress of the "Female" Department at Canajoharie Academy – where she teaches for three years and earns a reputation for intelligence and drive. While there, she joins the Daughters of Temperance, and also begins to break away from some of her strict Quaker heritage, evident in a more colorful choice of dresses and involvement with theater and dance.

The landmark Seneca Falls Convention on women's rights takes place on July 19-20, 1848, while she is still living and teaching at Canajoharie. But both of her parents and her younger sister, Mary, attend the Rochester Women's Rights Convention which follows on August 2, and sign the Declaration of Sentiments document, which defines the movement.

Susan returns to Rochester in 1849 when Canajoharie closes, and takes on responsibility for overseeing her parent's farm, while her father sets up a new insurance business. But she is soon drawn into applying the skills she has acquired on behalf of her causes – and, like Lucy Stone, goes forth as a traveling lecturer.

It is not until May 1851 that Amelia Bloomer introduces Anthony to Elizabeth Cady Stanton at a Lloyd Garrison event in Seneca Falls. This begins a partnership that defines the Women's Rights Movement over the next fifty years. The two are perfect complements – Stanton, the theoretician, Anthony, the get-it-done practitioner. It is Anthony who sums this up in an 1902 eulogy for her friend:

*She forged the thunderbolts and I fired them.*

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### Sidebar: The "Look" Of The Liberated Woman



Dr. Mary Walker Wearing Trousers!

While the women's movement enjoys near unanimity on its messages, settling on the "proper look" for its messengers stirs lots of controversy.

In one camp are those who insist that a change in appearance is required to signal a change in station. This leads them toward shorter haircuts and loose fitting trousers worn under waist or knee-length jackets, and away from the traditional whalebone corsets and hoop skirts -- some weighing up to twelve pounds -- most have worn since their teens.

Others feel that these changes will open them up to mockery "for trying to look like men" -- and that this in turn will detract attention from the arguments they wish to make.

The leading early proponent of the new look is Amelia Bloomer, a Seneca Falls journalist and advocate for female rights. She claims that women, not men, should determine the dress they prefer, and that the choice should be driven by what they find comfortable and healthy.

*The costume of women should be suited to her wants and necessities. It should conduce at once to her health, comfort, and usefulness; and, while it should not fail also to conduce to her personal adornment, it should make that end of secondary importance.*

Be they straight legged or puffed out in a Turkish design, the trousers are christened "bloomers" in honor of their sponsor – and the entire ensemble becomes "the Bloomer Costume."

The visual impact of the new look is dramatic. Gone is the static, ornamental, predictable impression of the hoop skirts; on comes a much heightened sense of motion, energy and substance. Women dressing for action, rather than women dressing for men.

The stage actress, Fanny Kemble, an abolitionist once married to the scurrilous slave owner, Pierce Meese Butler, causes an early stir by donning the "Turkish dress" at public events. Proponents of physical fitness for women discard their corsets. A group calling themselves the "Lowell Bloomer Institute" declare their intent to abandon...

*The whimsical and dictatorial French goddess Fashion (in favor of) the demands and proffers of Nature.*

The feminist Elizabeth Smith Miller introduces the new look to her cousin, Stanton, who appreciates the freedom of movement it provides, and begins to debut it at her lectures.

Another Stanton cousin, Gerritt Smith supports a Dress Reform Association along with Amelia Bloomer's efforts to promote the new designs to a mass market.

But, of course, the nay-sayers latch onto "the bloomer look" as one more reason to ridicule the radical women.

The accusations range from tasteless and unladylike to impersonating men and encouraging promiscuity. A variety of "Bloomer Polkas" add fodder to the put-downs.

In the end, most of the reformers, including Stanton, decide to reverse course. Paulina Wright Davis sums up the entire fashion matter as follows:

*If I put on this dress, it would cripple my movements in regard to our work at this time, and crucify me ere my hour had come.*

## Chapter 163 – The Seneca Falls Convention Coalesces The Women’s Rights Movement



**Dates:**  
July 18-20, 1848

- Sections:**
- The Female Declaration Of Independence At Seneca Falls
  - Day One Of The Seneca Falls Convention
  - The Demand For Voting Rights Stirs Controversy
  - Day Two At Seneca Falls
  - Publicity About The Convention Varies Widely
  - The Intrepid Female Agents Of Change

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Date: July 19-20, 1848

### The Female Declaration Of Independence At Seneca Falls



Eight years after Mott and Stanton experience the “seating humiliation” at the 1840 Anti-Slavery Convention in London, the topic of injustices against women comes up at a tea party they attend at Jane Mott’s house in Boston. The date is July 9, 1848, but Stanton recalls it decades later:

*I poured out, that day, the torrent of my long-accumulating discontent, with such vehemence and indignation that I stirred myself, as well as the rest of the party, to do and dare anything.*

What she decides to do mirrors the founding fathers, circa 1776 – hold her own continental congress and announce a Declaration of Independence from an authoritarian rule which governs her life without her consent.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902)

Immediately the wheels are set in motion for an event to be held on July 19-20 at the Wesleyan Methodist Chapel in Seneca Falls, New York, to...

*Discuss the social, civil and religious condition and rights of women.*

To boost attendance, word goes out that reform luminaries such as Mott, Sarah Grimke, Lydia Marie Child and Frederick Douglass will be present. Next comes an agenda for the session, with Day One reserved for women only and Day Two open to both sexes. The burden of writing and delivering the keynote addresses falls to Stanton. She is assisted by the Quaker reformer, Mary McClintock, and by her attorney husband, who searches for historical precedents to make her arguments.

They decide to document the case using the frameworks laid out by the founders against Britain – beginning with a list of “Sentiments” that capture their grievances and followed by “Resolves” describing the remedies they intend to pursue in response.

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Date: July 19, 1848

### **Day One Of The Seneca Falls Convention**

The first day of the convention opens with roughly two hundred women filling the chapel. Stanton and Mott begin with keynotes encouraging the attendees to listen with open minds to the ideas presented -- especially regarding the “depth of their degradation” at the moment -- and to make a personal commitment to changing the status quo.

Excitement builds when Stanton reads her “Declaration of Sentiments,” fashioned after the bill of particulars supporting the 1776 break with Britain. In this case, the rupture is cast as “one portion of the family of man...seeking a position different from that which they have hitherto occupied.”

*When, in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one portion of the family of man to assume among the people of the earth a position different from that which they have hitherto occupied, but one to which the laws of nature and of nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes that impel them to such a course.*

Then come the ringing assertions that “all men and women are created equal,” that they share the same “unalienable rights;” that in the face of an “absolute despotism” which violates these rights, it is proper to “throw off” the sources of oppression and “demand the equal station to which they are entitled.”

With this foundation established in the preamble, Stanton enumerates the “degradations” which justify the revolution she demands. These are captured in sixteen “repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward women” intended to “establish an absolute tyranny over her.”

1. *He has never permitted her to exercise her inalienable right to the elective franchise.*
2. *He has compelled her to submit to laws, in the formation of which she had no voice.*
3. *He has withheld from her rights which are given to the most ignorant and degraded men—both natives and foreigners.*
4. *Having deprived her of this first right of a citizen, the elective franchise, thereby leaving her without representation in the halls of legislation, he has oppressed her on all sides.*
5. *He has made her, if married, in the eye of the law, civilly dead.*<sup>4</sup>
6. *He has taken from her all right in property, even to the wages she earns.*<sup>5</sup>

7. *He has made her, morally, an irresponsible being, as she can commit many crimes with impunity, provided they be done in the presence of her husband. In the covenant of marriage, she is compelled to promise obedience to her husband, he becoming, to all intents and purposes, her master—the law giving him power to deprive her of her liberty, and to administer chastisement.*
8. *He has so framed the laws of divorce, as to what shall be the proper causes of divorce; in case of separation, to whom the guardianship of the children shall be given; as to be wholly regardless of the happiness of women—the law, in all cases, going upon the false supposition of the supremacy of man, and giving all power into his hands.*
9. *After depriving her of all rights as a married woman, if single and the owner of property, he has taxed her to support a government which recognizes her only when her property can be made profitable to it.*
10. *He has monopolized nearly all the profitable employments, and from those she is permitted to follow, she receives but a scanty remuneration.*
11. *He closes against her all the avenues to wealth and distinction, which he considers most honorable to himself. As a teacher of theology, medicine, or law, she is not known.*
12. *He has denied her the facilities for obtaining a thorough education—all colleges being closed against her.<sup>6</sup>*
13. *He allows her in Church as well as State, but a subordinate position, claiming Apostolic authority for her exclusion from the ministry, and, with some exceptions, from any public participation in the affairs of the Church.*
14. *He has created a false public sentiment, by giving to the world a different code of morals for men and women, by which moral delinquencies which exclude women from society, are not only tolerated but deemed of little account in man.*
15. *He has usurped the prerogative of Jehovah himself, claiming it as his right to assign for her a sphere of action, when that belongs to her conscience and her God.*
16. *He has endeavored, in every way that he could to destroy her confidence in her own powers, to lessen her self-respect, and to make her willing to lead a dependent and abject life.*

The call for redress, in the form of full citizenship, follows:

*Now, in view of this entire disfranchisement of one-half the people of this country, their social and religious degradation,—in view of the unjust laws above mentioned, and because women do feel themselves aggrieved, oppressed, and fraudulently deprived of their most sacred rights, we insist that they have immediate admission to all the rights and privileges which belong to them as citizens of these United States.*

Along with recognition of the likely resistance to be faced and a determination to press on.

*In entering upon the great work before us, we anticipate no small amount of misconception, misrepresentation, and ridicule; but we shall use every instrumentality within our power to affect our object. We shall employ agents, circulate tracts, petition the State and national Legislatures, and endeavor to enlist the pulpit and the press in our behalf. We hope this Convention will be followed by a series of Conventions, embracing every part of the country.*

Stanton closes with a call to end the “degradation of women” so that America can finally become the “great and virtuous nation” the founders intended.

*The world has never yet seen a truly great and virtuous nation, because in the degradation of women the very fountains of life are poisoned at their source.*

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Date: July 19, 1848

### **The Demand For Voting Rights Stirs Controversy**

After reading the “Sentiments” through from start to finish, Stanton opens up the floor to discuss them individually.

She finds near unanimous agreement in the hall, with one exception – the issue of women’s suffrage.

This is not a surprise to her.

Just four weeks earlier, her cousin Gerritt Smith is roundly criticized when the platform of his Liberty Party calls for universal suffrage.

She is also warned by those who help with the draft that the majority of women would prefer to focus on changes related to the social and religious arenas -- and to stay away from politics. This admonition reflects the generally accepted orthodoxy that men’s intellectual superiority equips them to engage in the civic arena, while women’s innate moral superiority is best focused on home and church.

Even Lucretia Mott tries to convince Stanton to back off from the “voting rights” call:

*Why Lizzie, thee will make us ridiculous.*

And her almost always supportive husband seconds the caution.

*You will turn the proceeding into a farce.*

But with Garrison-like certainty, she will have none of this -- as evidenced by her decision to launch her list of “degradations” with being deprived of her “inalienable right to the elective franchise,” and “submitting to laws” in which she has no voice.

When the Sentiments are read aloud on Day One, the only stumbling block to outright consensus centers on reservations about female suffrage – and Stanton decides to hold this topic over for further discussion.

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Date: July 19, 1848

### Eleven “Resolutions” Are Then Presented

Stanton’s Sentiments lay the predicate that women have been ill-treated when it comes to coverture, employment, wage equality, suing for divorce, education, admission to the ministry – even to the erosion of their self-confidence and self-respect. With all of these violations tracing to the “false supposition of the supremacy of man.”

In lawyerly fashion, she turns during the afternoon session on July 19 from the list of grievances to a list of proposed solutions. These are presented in the form of eleven “Resolutions:”

1. *Resolved, That such laws as conflict, in any way, with the true and substantial happiness of woman, are contrary to the great precept of nature, and of no validity; for this is "superior in obligation to any other.*
2. *Resolved, That all laws which prevent woman from occupying such a station in society as her conscience shall dictate, or which place her in a position inferior to that of man, are contrary to the great precept of nature, and therefore of no force or authority.*
3. *Resolved, That woman is man's equal—was intended to be so by the Creator, and the highest good of the race demands that she should be recognized as such.*
4. *Resolved, That the women of this country ought to be enlightened in regard to the laws under which they -live, that they may no longer publish their degradation, by declaring themselves satisfied with their present position, nor their ignorance, by asserting that they have all the rights they want.*
5. *Resolved, That inasmuch as man, while claiming for himself intellectual superiority, does accord to woman moral superiority, it is pre-eminently his duty to encourage her to speak, and teach, as she has an opportunity, in all religious assemblies.*
6. *Resolved, That the same amount of virtue, delicacy, and refinement of behavior, that is required of woman in the social state, should also be required of man, and the same transgressions should be visited with equal severity on both man and woman.*
7. *Resolved, That the objection of indelicacy and impropriety, which is so often brought against woman when she addresses a public audience, comes with a very ill grace from those who encourage, by their attendance, her appearance on the stage, in the concert, or in the feats of the circus.*
8. *Resolved, That woman has too long rested satisfied in the circumscribed limits which corrupt customs and a perverted application of the Scriptures have marked out for her, and that it is time she should move in the enlarged sphere which her great Creator has assigned her.*
9. *Resolved, That it is the duty of the women of this country to secure to themselves their sacred right to the elective franchise.*
10. *Resolved, That the equality of human rights results necessarily from the fact of the identity of the race in capabilities and responsibilities.*
11. *Resolved, therefore, That, being invested by the Creator with the same capabilities, and the same consciousness of responsibility for their exercise, it is demonstrably the right and duty of woman, equally with man, to promote every righteous cause, by every righteous means; and especially in regard to the great subjects of morals and religion, it is self-evidently her right to participate with her brother in teaching them, both in private and in public, by writing and by speaking, by any*

*instrumentalities proper to be used, and in any assemblies proper to be held; and this being a self-evident truth, growing out of the divinely implanted principles of human nature, any custom or authority adverse to it, whether modern or wearing the hoary sanction of antiquity, is to be regarded as self-evident falsehood, and at war with the interests of mankind.*

After further discussion of each Resolve, the convention adjourns for the day, with these assertions on the table:

- Women and men are created equal;
- Women deserve equal treatment under the law;
- The traditions of coverture must be abandoned;
- All other forms of female degradation must end;
- Their educational opportunities should be expanded;
- The voice of women should be heard in public;
- Their career options should extend beyond teaching and nursing;
- They should receive equal pay for equal work;
- They must be granted the “sacred right to vote.”

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Date: July 20, 1848

### **Day Two At Seneca Falls**

The audience on the second day grows, as men are invited to join in and speak up.

Their presence shifts some of the dynamics in the hall – one sign being that a man, James Mott, Lucretia’s husband, is asked to chair the meeting, given the “mixed” audience. Despite the revolutionary spirit in the air, traditional gender decorum still prevails at the moment.

The morning session is filled with various speeches, including a hopeful update about a “married women’s property act” currently being considered at a New York state constitutional convention. This reinforces the feeling that laws must be changed for the movement to ultimately succeed.

After lunch, Stanton re-reads the “Sentiments” and the “Resolves,” which leads to renewed debate about “female suffrage.” Ironically it is none other than the ex-slave Frederick Douglass who speaks up on the topic -- arguing that if he as a black man deserves the vote, then justice demands the same right for all women. His endorsement rallies enough support in the room to have the call for suffrage included in the final documents.

The closing session is again chaired by a man, Thomas McClintock, whose wife Mary has helped plan the event. Both speak to the audience. He provides a detailed review of the onerous laws of coverture currently on the books; she follows with a plea to lobby on behalf of their repeal.

With the July temperature hovering in the nineties, the convention heads into the homestretch.

Much awaited talks by the convention’s two most famous figures, Frederick Douglas and Lucretia Mott, lead into a call for attendees to step forward and sign the Sentiments and the Resolves.

As with the 1776 Declaration of Independence, the act of affirming a controversial document in writing is not taken lightly, and less than half of those present do so. Still one hundred sign on. The gender split is 68 women and 32 men; their ages range from 14 to 81 years old; 25 are Quakers; Douglass is the lone black; only one of the signers will live to 1920 when the Nineteen Amendment finally grants female suffrage.

The end of the convention brings a sigh of relief to Stanton, Motts and the other organizers, who are generally pleased with the outcomes.

What they cannot realize at the moment is how transformative their hastily assembled event will be in the long march ahead toward equality. It is not a stretch to speak of July 10-20 at Seneca Falls in the same breath as July 4 at Philadelphia. Both put a permanent stake in the ground on behalf of revolutionary change impacting the nation.

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Date: 1848

### Publicity About The Convention Varies Widely



Horace Greeley (1811-1872)

The Seneca Falls Convention does not go unnoticed in the popular press, first locally and then broadly. The reactions are about evenly split.

Some papers like the St. Louis *Daily Reveille* are content to simply acknowledge the event itself, without taking a stance one way or the other on the issues debated.

*The flag of independence has been hoisted for the second time on this side of the Atlantic, and a solemn league and covenant has just been entered into by a convention of women at Seneca Falls, New York.*

Others like *The Oneida Whig* go on the attack – while exhibiting in their rhetoric the exact brand of female “degradation” decried at the event.

*This bolt is the most shocking and unnatural incident ever recorded in the history of womanity. If our ladies will insist on voting and legislating, where, gentleman, will be our dinners and our elbows? Where our domestic firesides and the holes in our stockings?*

The Philadelphia *Public Ledger and Daily Transcript* is similarly clumsy in its ringing affirmation of “the ladies” who remain in their proper place, as wives and mothers, not crusaders.

*A woman is nobody. A wife is everything... and a mother is, next to God, all powerful....The ladies of Philadelphia, therefore, ...are resolved to maintain their rights as Wives, Belles, Virgins, and Mothers, and not as Women*

The Seneca County Courier finds the convention's assertions startling, and their resolutions radical:

*The meeting was novel in its character and the doctrines broached in it are startling to those who are wedded to the present usages and laws of society. The resolutions are of the kind called radical."*

Meanwhile, leave it to Horace Greeley, the 37 year old editor of *The New York Tribune*, to support that which so many of his colleagues consider radical. Greeley dabbles in various utopian movements, becomes an outspoken abolitionist, adopts a vegetarian diet -- and his staff includes Margaret Fuller, one of the earliest and most articulate advocates for female equality. Greeley's editorial applauds the revolutionary spirit and proposed reforms at Seneca Falls, albeit with some reservations about suffrage:

*When a sincere republican is asked to say in sober earnest what adequate reason he can give, for refusing the demand of women to an equal participation with men in political rights, he must answer, None at all...however unwise and mistaken the demand, it is but the assertion of a natural right, and such must be conceded.*

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Date: 1848 Forward

### The Intrepid Female Agents Of Change



Frances Willard (1839-1898)

And so time will pass.

Some thirty years after the Seneca Falls Convention, Stanton recalls the aftermath in particularly painful terms:

*So pronounced was the popular voice against us, in the parlor, press, and pulpit that most of the ladies who had attended the convention and signed the declaration, one by one, withdrew their names and influence and joined our persecutors. Our friends gave us the cold shoulder and felt themselves disgraced by the whole proceeding.*

For her and others, the battle for gender equality proves every bit as challenging and lengthy as black emancipation.

The sage Lucretia Mott foretells this early on, with a warning to her young colleagues:

*Thou wilt have hard work to prove the intellectual equality of women with men – facts being so against such an assumption in the present stage of women's development.*

For those in the front lines, the fight for the rights of women follows naturally from their efforts against slavery.

The plight of America's slaves and women is by no means equivalent! But both groups suffer many of the same indignities. Both share a sense of bondage, be it to a master or a husband. Both are systematically deprived of education and of basic legal rights and remedies. Both are often pushed beyond their physical limits, between constant pregnancies and daily labor. It is not by accident that Stanton chooses the word "degradations" to characterize the experience.

But above all else, what nineteenth century American women have in common with slaves is the stigma of being born as a lesser being – the stigma that leads Lucy Stone's mother to apologize to her father for delivering another girl.

Fighting back from this stigma requires courage. As Anthony says:

*Cautious, careful people always casting about to preserve their reputation and social standing can never bring about a reform*

The litmus test of leadership falls to those brave women who take to the lecture circuit – in front of an audience including men, often appalled at the sight of a short-haired woman, dressed in a jacket and trousers, speaking up and challenging the role they have been assigned in society, by the Bible, the common law, and tradition.

The traveling routine itself is a challenge: lining up venues, often finding either tiny or hostile audiences, flopping into rented rooms, and then moving on to the next site, especially, as Amelia Bloomer reports, in the dead of winter:

*My ardor in the cause of women chills at the thought of stage rides in temperatures of twenty-five below zero.*

Even that most tenacious lecturer, Lucy Stone, recalls the physical and mental toll of these tours:

*I am completely exhausted by long & hard field service, and my back is giving me so much pain, I am going home to rest.*

For those who dare, however, the moments of public speaking are quintessentially liberating.

And once the battle is joined at Seneca Falls, the women's rights movement picks up momentum. The lessons learned from the campaign against slavery are soon repeated – more organized conventions, the creation of "societies," petitions to congress, pamphlets and publicity.

Stanton's essays are a constant goad to all opponents, especially those in government. In February 1854, she makes the case to the New York state legislature:

*We demand full recognition of our rights as citizens of the Empire State. We are persons; native, free born citizens; property-holders, tax-payers. We support ourselves, and, in part, your schools, churches, poor-houses, prisons, army, navy, the whole machinery of government, and yet we have no voice in your councils. We have every qualification required by age constitution, necessary to the legal other, but the one of sex.*

In 1869 the National Women Suffrage Association starts up, with Stanton as president and Anthony alongside

That same year also finds the two of them editing and publishing their own newspaper, *The Revolution*, dedicated to the cause.

As with almost all reform groups, an internal schism occurs, in this case over the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Amendments, which guarantee the rights of blacks, including the vote for men. Stanton and Anthony are outraged by the absence of equal entitlements for women. As Stanton tells congressmen at the time:

*You now place the negro, so unjustly degraded by you, in a superior position to your own wives and mothers.*

Meanwhile Lucy Stone, along with Paulina Wright Davis and her clerical sister-in-law, Antoinette Brown, are unwilling to try to derail any advances for the former slaves, even if they are disappointed by the outcome. This leads them to found a separate group, the American Women Suffrage Association. Unlike the NWSA, it allows men to participate, and tends to favor the Republican Party.

The NWSA or Stanton-Anthony wing of the movement is also inclined to more confrontational tactics, especially "storming the polls" on election days. In 1872, Stanton herself votes, before being arrested, fined, and released.

These wounds heal by 1890, and the old warriors reunite under the merged banner, National American Women Suffrage Association, with Anthony serving as president. She is seventy years old at the time, with Stanton at seventy-five and Lucy Stone at seventy-two.

Their time on stage is almost up. Stone dies in 1893, Stanton in 1902, Anthony in 1906. So none live to see women granted the vote, either in America in 1920 or in the UK in 1928.

They will, however, remain eternally together, along with Lucretia Mott and others, on the rolls of those who liberated women from bondage, always, as Stanton said, by overcoming fear and speaking the truth.

*The moment we begin to fear the opinions of others and hesitate to tell the truth that is in us, and from motives of policy are silent when we should speak, the divine floods of light and life no longer flow into our souls*

A next generation of leaders will carry this tradition forward – and, fittingly, it includes both Harriot Stanton Blatch (1856-1940) and Alice Stone Blackwell (1857-1950), every inch their mother's daughters.

## Chapter 164 – Dissidents Abound After The Two Major Party Conventions



**Dates:**  
Fall/Winter 1848

- Sections:**
- The Southern Fire-Eaters
  - The Van Buren Loyalists
  - The Wilmot Democrats
  - The Conscience Whigs
  - The Devoted Southern Unionists
  - The Abolitionists And The Xenophobes

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Date: 1848

### The Southern Fire-Eaters

Despite efforts by the two major political parties to achieve unity in 1848, both conventions end with a host of angry delegates looking for alternative policies or candidates.

On the Democratic side, the Southern Fire-eaters are particularly dismayed by the results on May 22 in Baltimore.

In response to the devastating threat inherent in the Wilmot Proviso, they are left with a Northerner, Lewis Cass, heading the ticket, and “popular sovereignty” as their best hope for expanding slavery into the west.



John C. Calhoun (1782-1850)

This is not enough for the likes of William Yancey of Alabama, the Virginians, Robert Hunter and James Mason, Jefferson Davis of Mississippi, David Atchison of Missouri, and others who now join John C. Calhoun in the search to defend their wealth and way of life.

Together they begin to really dig in behind the “legal guarantees” they see in the 1787 Constitution, especially the right of citizens to transport their “property” (in slaves) to all new territories and existing states.

This assertion will become a central part of their expansion strategy for the west – to establish the presence of slaves on the land in advance of any attempts to ban their presence through legislative actions.

In addition to the economic threats, Southern Fire-eaters are galled by what they regard as increasing attacks on their personal integrity and values.

Constant goading by abolitionists like Garrison provoke sharp, often violent reactions, as do jibes in Congress from Anti-Slavery Society petitions and from provocateurs like Giddings of Ohio and Hale of New Hampshire, who openly refer to their region as the “Slavocracy.”

These attacks prompt the search for new rationales in defense of slavery.

Among these is the assertion that slaves in the South experience better treatment than white men and women working for wages across the North.

*The (Northern) laborer must work or starve. He is more of a slave than the Negro because he works longer and harder for less allowance than the slave and has no holiday, because the cares of life with him begin when its labors end. He has no liberty, and not a single right.*

Needless to say, this comparison is roundly rejected across the North, and the “free soil” movement is quick to respond, saying that it “dishonors” white men and the “dignity” of their labor.

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Date: 1848

### **The Van Buren Loyalists**



Martin Van Buren (1782-1862)

Other Democrats dissatisfied with the Cass-Butler ticket are the “Barnburners,” ready to bring down the party structure to have their own way.

Within this faction, the most outspoken are the Van Buren loyalists, including New Yorkers like Senator John Dix, Van Buren’s son, “Prince” John, and Governor Silas Wright, along with Senators John Niles of Connecticut, Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri, and the Massachusetts’s lawyer and political insider, Benjamin Butler.

These and others have still not forgotten the 1844 convention in Baltimore, supposedly destined to re-nominate ex-President Van Buren, who has devoted his entire life to building the Democratic machine.

Instead a carefully orchestrated anti-Van Buren campaign led by Southerners, including Andrew Jackson, and the ever ambitious Pennsylvanian, James Buchanan, eventually hands the nomination to the Tennessee slave-owner, James Polk.

This outcome is accompanied by fistfights on the floor and vows, especially by Van Buren’s son, that “scores would be settled” in due course.

The chance for retribution comes after the 1848 convention.

The personal animosities that prompt it are masked under a theme put forth by Dix and Niles – to the effect that the time has come for the free states to assume “that control in the affairs of the government to which they are entitled.”

The key weapon in this counter-attack is, of course, Martin Van Buren himself.

“The Little Magician” may be sixty-six year old, but he will soon jump back into the political arena as one last shot at the presidency comes his way.

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Date: 1848

### **The Wilmot Democrats**

The other wing of the “Barnburner” faction is driven more by their commitment to the Wilmot Proviso banning slavery in the land acquired from Mexico, than to personal revenge for Van Buren.

Among this group are the two men most associated with introducing the amendment in the first place: David Wilmot from Pennsylvania, and Preston King, his house colleague, from New York.

But their reasons for backing the ban differ sharply.

Wilmot’s stated objective is to keep the new land free of plantation slavery in order to provide the best possible setting for white settlers to realize the American Dream.

For King, the goal is different. Along with congressman Jacob Brinkerhoff of Ohio and Maine Senator Hannibal Hamlin, he regards the ban as an important step in ending the curse of slavery.

Ironically these two contrary streams of thought will soon flow together into the “free soil” movement.

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Date: 1848

## The Conscience Whigs



Charles Sumner (1811-1874)

On the Whig side, the nomination on June 7 of another Southern slave-holder, Zachary Taylor, is beyond the pale for many delegates, most notably a contingent from Massachusetts who will go on to play key roles in the emancipation movement.

Their most vocal member is the thirty-seven year old Boston lawyer, Charles Sumner, a literally towering presence at six feet four inches. He graduates from Harvard, mingles with the New England intelligentsia, and enlists in the anti-slavery crusade in 1845 alongside Horace Mann, both trying to end school segregation.

Sumner is joined in his criticism of the Mexican War and of Zachary Taylor by two other Massachusetts men whose political careers to date have been limited to their home state legislatures.

One is Henry Wilson, impoverished as a child and self-educated, who apprentices as a shoemaker in Natick, before launching his own successful business manufacturing “brogans,” and then drifting into politics as a Whig. Known as the “Natick Cobbler,” Wilson dedicates his life to the abolitionist cause after witnessing slave families being broken apart and sold off to traders on a visit to Washington

The third key member of what becomes known as the Massachusetts’ “Conscience Whigs” is Charles Francis Adams, the only surviving child of President John Quincy Adams, and one who follows in his footsteps – from Harvard to politics to eventual diplomatic service and a lifelong dedication to wiping out the moral stain of slavery.

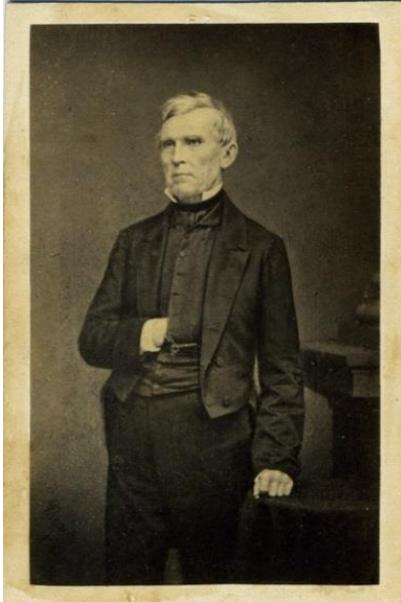
These “Conscience Whigs” are opposed in their home state by “Cotton Whigs,” conservatives aligned with Daniel Webster, among them ex-Governor Edward Everett, and Speaker of the U.S. House, Robert Winthrop. Together they fear that aggressive attacks on Southern slavery will threaten their local textile manufacturers and might lead on to the break-up of the Union.

But for the “Conscience Whigs,” even passive support for Taylor is out of the question, and like the Van Buren Democrats, they will soon be drawn toward the “free soil” movement.

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Date: 1848

### The Devoted Southern Unionists



John J. Crittenden (1787-1863)

The Whig conservatives of Massachusetts are not alone in fearing that the two party conventions have failed to address the sectional conflicts over slavery amplified by the Mexican War.

Despite decades of political infighting, both Democrats and Whigs have always come together around Andrew Jackson's famous 1830 toast/dictate during the Nullification crisis:

*Our Union – it must be preserved!*

Historically the burden to achieve this outcome has fallen on Henry Clay, the “Great Compromiser,” whose task has been to conjure up a sectional accommodation and then sell it to the hard core Northerner, Daniel Webster, and the Southerner, John C. Calhoun. By now, however, the stars of this “great triumphirate” are fading -- with Calhoun about to be dead in March 1850, Clay in June 1852 and Webster in October 1852.

Still the impulse to Union burns bright in 1848 – and again it is the border state Whigs who take the lead.

They are championed by sixty-one year old John J. Crittenden of Kentucky and three other senior Whig Senators, all fifty-two years old – John Bell of Tennessee, John Clayton of Delaware and Maryland's Reverdy Johnson.

Joining them are younger House Whigs from the old South – two influential Georgians, Robert Toombs (38) and Alexander Stephens (36), and the Virginian, John Minor Botts (46).

Their challenge lies in reaching out on behalf of the Union to other Southern Democrats, especially those drifting toward the hard line positions of the Fire-Eaters, in order to protect their economic interests.

One of their key allies across the aisle will be Howell Cobb, a rising force in Democratic politics. Cobb is a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of the University of Georgia, a lawyer and a slave-holder, who is elected to the House in 1843 at age twenty-eight on his way to becoming Speaker in 1849 and then serving as Treasury Secretary under James Buchanan. For the next decade, Cobb will work tirelessly with the border Whig contingent to avoid Southern secession – before finally giving up in frustration.

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Date: 1848

### **The Abolitionists And The Xenophobes**

During this period of political turmoil and restructuring, two other factions hover outside the gravitational pull of the Democratic and Whig parties in 1848.

One group, the Abolitionists, are devoted to freeing the slaves and assimilating them into American society -- although they too are now divided on how quickly and how best to make this happen.

The Garrison backers continue to reject political means in favor of grass roots activism, while the Liberty Party wing, now headed by Gerritt Smith and Salmon Chase, seek public office and new legislation.

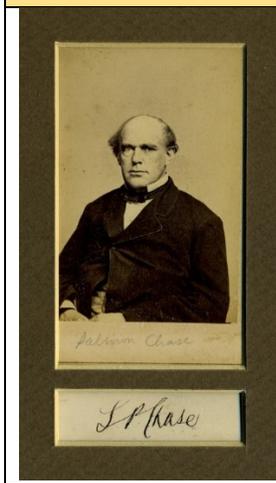
The other floating group, the xenophobic Native American Party, is predicated on protecting the interests of white Protestants born in the United States.

To accomplish this end, they hope to stem the growing tide of immigrants coming into America in the 1840's, while extending the naturalization timeline for recent arrivals. They also intend to place severe restrictions on all Roman Catholics already in the country, arguing that their loyalty is to the Pope and not to the Constitution.

Advocates within both camps hope to build a credible political party, but have had only narrow successes so far.

Their path to influence will demand that they attach themselves to a more mainstream movement in the end.

## Chapter 165 – Salmon Chase Organizes The “Free Soil Party” Which Nominates Van Buren



**Dates:**  
August 9-10, 1848

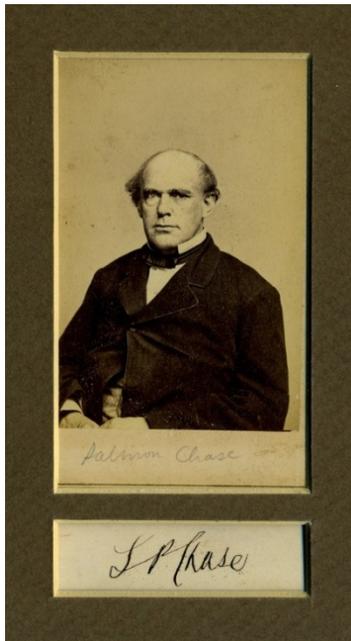
**Sections:**

- Salmon P. Chase Envisions A New Political Alliance
- The Free Soil Party Nominates Martin Van Buren

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Date: August 1846 – July 1847

### Salmon P. Chase Envisions A New Political Alliance



All the discord emanating from the 1848 nominating conventions is music to the ears of Salmon Chase, whose allegiance has belonged to the Liberty Party over the past seven years.

During that time, Chase has devoted his razor sharp legal mind to the challenge of abolishing slavery.

He concludes that while political action is required, the vast majority of Americans regard blacks as both inferior and menacing, have little interest in their freedom, and are adverse to the prospect of assimilating them into white society.

The weak voting record for the Liberty Party (only 2% in 1844) is proof that abolition is not a stand-alone issue capable of garnering widespread popular support – especially if the outcome is perceived to disrupt the Union.

Salmon P. Chase (1808-1873)

Instead, Chase concludes that those who hope to end slavery must attach themselves to a “larger idea,” one having broad national appeal.

He spots this opportunity in 1846, when a majority in the House vote in favor of the Wilmot Proviso.

For Chase, the Proviso signals widespread public support for a new Manifest Destiny vision of America to the west – one that offers a chance to start over and eliminate all prior barriers to “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” for white citizens.

Better yet for Chase the abolitionist, the key barrier in Wilmot’s sights is plantation slavery.

The House vote signals that plantation slavery must be banned in the Mexican Cession territories for free white men to realize the American Dream.

Such a ban will help the western settlers – sure to begin as farmers – succeed economically. It will eliminate the chance for wealthy plantation owners to outbid them for the best parcels of land, and, because of slave labor, to undercut the prices they can charge for their crops.

Moreover the Wilmot backers argue that the absence of all black slaves and their masters will have a profound positive effect on the quality of the white society that develops in the west.

For one thing, white settlers will be relieved of the perpetual fear associated with slave uprisings.

They will also avoid the decadent two-tiered social structure Northerners have come to associate with the South --with “one class of citizens accustomed to rule and the other to obey.”

Herein lies the “larger idea” that Chase has been after in his political quest. Ironically it offers a way to build broad opposition to slavery *not* by focusing on the suffering it causes the Africans, but rather on its negative impact on the hopes and prospects of the white population!

To convert these insights into action, however, will require a series of clever moves to bring all of the dissidents – from the Barnburners to the Conscience Whigs, the Abolitionist wings and the Wilmot supporters – together in one new national party.

Chase begins this task soon after the Wilmot vote by seeking consensus among those in the anti-slavery movement, men like Charles Sumner, Joshua Giddings, Preston King and Charles Francis Adams. From there he begins to reach out to the Van Buren Loyalists and those touting “free soil for free white labor.”

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Date: August 9, 1848

### **A Free Soil Party Platform Is Passed**

Chase's efforts bear fruit on August 9-10, 1848, when upwards of 20,000 supporters from 17 states pour into the city of Buffalo to give birth to The Free Soil Party.

The tenor of the August 9-10 convention is reminiscent of the revivalist meetings that swept America in the 1830's. It is held in the open air Tent In The Park, and features a series of charismatic speakers who attempt to resurrect the spirit of 1776 and enlist their audience in the crusade against the spread of plantation slavery.

The proceedings are widely reported, thanks to one Oliver Dyer, a 24 year old expert in shorthand, who provides a "phonographic record" of the events to newspapers across the country.

*By nine o'clock the concourse was immense. Every available seat and foothold on the ground was occupied. The Ohio delegation came into the tent with banners flying and were received with great cheering...and exhortations and expressions of determination to 'put the thing through, no giving up, no compromises, free soil and nothing else.'*

*Mr. Polk of Connecticut offers this sentiment: 'let men of the deepest principle, manifest the most profound condescension, and exercise the deepest humility today, and posterity will honor them for the deed.'*

Chase is assigned the task of preparing a platform centered on Wilmot's ban of slavery in the west – without offering "justifications" that could prove divisive. The result is a sixteen point platform which sets the Free Soil Party in stark contrast to the wishes of the Slave Power.

- 1. We do plant ourselves upon the national platform of freedom in opposition to the sectional platform of slavery.*
- 2. That slavery...depends upon state law which cannot be repealed or modified by the federal government.*
- 3. That the provisos of Jefferson...clearly show that it was the settled policy of the nation not to extend, nationalize or encourage, but to limit, localize and discourage slavery...and to this policy the government ought to return.*
- 4. That our fathers...denied to the federal government a constitutional power to deprive any person of life, liberty or property, without due legal process.*
- 5. That Congress has no more power to make a slave than to make a king; no more power to establish slavery than to establish a monarchy.*
- 6. That it is the duty of the federal government to relieve itself of all responsibility for the existence or continuance of slavery.*
- 7. That the only safe means of preventing the extension of slavery...is to prohibit its extension in all Territories by an act of Congress.*
- 8. That our calm but final answer to the slave power is no more slave states or slave territories. let the soil of our domain be kept free for the hardy pioneers of our land and the oppressed and banished of other lands seeking homes of comfort in the new world.*

9. *That the committee of eight bill in the Senate (proposing extension of the 36'30" MO line) was no compromise but an absolute surrender of non-slaveholders...by several senators... who voted in open violation of the will of their constituents. There must be no more compromises with slavery; if made they must be repealed.*
10. *That we demand freedom and established institutions for our brethren in Oregon now exposed to hardships by the reckless hostility of the slave power to the establishment of free government for free territories.*
- 11-15. *That we support...cheap postage, a retrenchment of federal patronage, river and harbor improvements as needed, the free grant to actual settlers of reasonable portions of public lands, the earliest practical payment of the national debt, a tariff of duties to defray the expenses of the federal government and pay annual installments against the debt and the interest thereon.*
16. *That we inscribe on our banner "Free Soil, Free Speech, Free Labor, And Free Men," and under it we will fight on and fight forever until a triumphant victory shall reward our exertions.*

The platform avoids the controversial themes associated with the abolitionists – moral condemnation of slave holders; immediate emancipation of all slaves even in the South; assimilation of the ex-slaves into white society.

It focuses not on freeing the slaves from their misery, but on freeing white men from the diminishing effects of living with slavery in their midst.

As Walt Whitman, convention delegate and editor of *The Brooklyn Eagle*, puts it:

*The workingmen of the North, East and West, in defense of their rights, and their honor, declare that their calling shall not be sunk to the miserable level of Negro slaves.*

The argument here is that the founders, including Jefferson, recognized that slavery threatens the dignity and supremacy of white America; they intended to limit, not expand it; and the time is now to carry out their wishes.

These sentiments fall short of what Chase and other abolitionists ideally hoped to achieve.

Upon reading the platform, Lloyd Garrison first calls it another example of “white-manism”-- but then, upon further reflection, says that it signals “the beginning of the end” for the slave power, and vows to drive the movement “to a higher ground.”

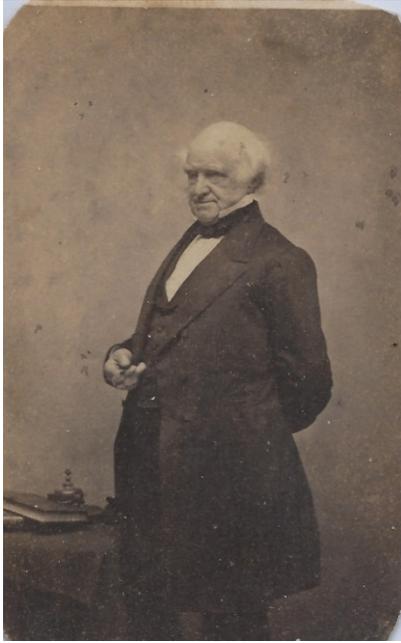
Chase, the astute politician, sees it the same way. It is a first step, giving average Americans a middle ground they seek between the Slave Power’s insistence on spreading slavery and the abolitionist’s demand for immediate emancipation.

The “Free Soil” formula is simple: pen the slaves up in the old South; let those who support the institution deal with the problems; and wait for the institution to wither away.

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Date: August 10, 1848

### The Free Soil Party Nominates Martin Van Buren



Martin Van Buren (1782-1862)

When the time comes for the convention to select a nominee both wings of the new party offer candidates.

The abolitionists rally around Senator John Hale of New Hampshire, who has earlier been chosen by The Liberty Party as its 1848 nominee. Along with Joshua Giddings of Ohio, Hale has led the drive in Congress against the Slave Power. He opposes the Texas Annexation and the Mexican War, and even stands along in opposing resolutions honoring Generals Taylor and Scott.

The final nod, however, goes to the Van Buren Loyalists and to those backing Wilmot on behalf of white settlers, not black slaves.

Their candidate is none other than Martin Van Buren himself, ready at sixty-six to reclaim his rightful place in the White House.

#### Free Soil Nomination Results

Candidates	Votes
Van Buren	244
Hale	183
Giddings	23
Charles F. Adams	13
Others	4
Total	467

The choice for Vice-President, by a unanimous vote, is Charles F. Adams, son of President JQ Adams and a noted Conscience Whig.

When the convention closes, the delegates exit Buffalo with great optimism.

They have a platform that offers western settlers a chance to prosper without the barriers of plantation slavery, and one that serves the end goals of the abolitionists. Their marching banner – “Free Soil, Free Speech, Free Labor and Free Men” – rings true to their intent, and comes across as tempered, non-radical, and likely to resonate broadly in the North and West.

And they have a well-known nationally respected figure in Martin Van Buren at the top of their ticket. This may or may not be enough to contend with the Democrats and the Whigs, but at least it represents a solid start in that direction.

## Chapter 166 – Reprise Of James Knox Polk’s Consequential Presidency



**Dates:**  
1845-1849

**Sections:**  
• Changes In The American Landscape During Polk’s Presidency

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Dates: March 4, 1845 – March 5, 1849

### Changes In The American Landscape During Polk’s Presidency

As time runs out on Polk’s presidency, his stamina is dwindling and, despite pleas from supporters, he is not about to try for a second term.

Few will miss his temperament which lacks the charisma, spontaneity and the out-going nature of his sponsor, Andrew Jackson. Instead his manner is typically described as guarded-to-aloof, and his work-style as nothing short of compulsive. What the two Tennessee men share, however, is the capacity to accomplish their agendas – to match talk with decisive action.

Polk actually completes many of the former President’s top priorities, especially territorial expansion.

While Jackson longed to acquire the western land owned by Mexico and possessed the warrior credentials to follow through, he backed off for fear of the disruption to national unity that might follow a war. Polk sees some risks here, but charges forward anyway, backed by the popular cry of “manifest destiny.”

In the end, his efforts in Texas, Oregon and the Mexican Cession tack on 41% of the nation’s total land, and even in the last months of office he is still trying to pry Cuba loose from the Spanish. Many criticize his “war of aggression,” but America reaches from sea to shining sea as he leaves office.

### Expansion Of America's Land Mass

Year	Land Gained	From	Via	Square Miles	% US
1784	13 colonies to Miss R	Britain	War	888,811	29%
1803	Louisiana Territory	France	Buy	827,192	27
1819	Florida	Spain	Buy	72,003	2
1845	Texas Territories	Mexico	Annex	390,144	13
1846	Oregon Territories	Britain	Buy	285,580	10
1848	Mexico Cession	Mexico	War	529,017	18
1853	Gadsden Purchase	Mexico	Buy	29,640	1
	Total (48 states)			3,022,387	100%

Polk's impact on the economy and the financial system is also sizable.

His move to a lower tariff not only enhances free trade and exports, but also signals the manufacturing sector's ability to now hold its own without "protection." The Independent Treasury ends Jackson's war on the Federal Banks and stabilizes the currency. Annual growth in GDP averages in double-digits, and the lucky strike discovery of gold in California will help propel future gains.

Despite all these advances, the downside of Polk's term is that the aftermath of the war intensifies the North-South impasse over the future of slavery.

As a plantation owner himself, Polk is well aware that the Southern economy rests on expanding slavery, and that the firebrands will demand it be allowed in the new Mexican territories. But he also remains confident that, if resistance occurs, his Democratic Party coalition will again work out whatever accommodations are needed.

In this, he is proven wrong.

The curse on his administration is the Wilmot Proviso, proposed by a fellow House Democrat, and calling for a flat ban on the spread of slavery into all new land acquired in the west. Polk is able to rely on the Senate to temporarily palliate this damage, but the unity which has driven his party to dominate federal politics begins to slip away on his watch – and it will not return.

The result is a dramatic restructuring of America's political parties that splits the Democrats, sees the advent of the Free Soil movement, and leads on to the dissolution of the Whigs and the eventual creation of the Republican Party and its victory in 1860.

Another defining characteristic of Polk's term is the blossoming of various social reform movements associated with the Second Great Awakening. Chief among them are much more organized resistance in the North to slavery and the early efforts by American women to achieve gender equality.

Taken together, events during Polk's single term are extremely consequential and will have profound effects on shaping the future course of American history.

As with many presidents, the challenges presented have been all-consuming, and he claims to be “exceedingly relieved” to leave office.

His departure begins with a farewell tour across the south where he is welcomed throughout by large and approving crowds. In New Orleans, however, he begins to suffer fatigue and diarrhea, and is forced to retire to his estate in Nashville, for the final three weeks of his life.

There he is gripped by cholera and his condition steadily deteriorates. On his deathbed he is given the Methodist baptism delayed during his childhood, before succumbing on June 15, 1849. He is only fifty-three years old at the time.



Sarah Childress Polk (1803-1891)

Polk’s wife, Sarah, will survive her husband by 42 years, living at *Polk Place*, faithfully attending her Presbyterian church, and dressing daily in black clothes to mourn his memory. While childless, she inherits his 53 slaves, with the stipulation they be freed upon her death.

When the Civil War breaks out, Sarah declares herself a “neutral.”

## Chapter 167 – The 1848 Campaign For The White House



**Dates:**  
Summer – Fall 1848

- Sections:**
- Six Political Conventions Precede The 1848 Race
  - African-Americans Remain Helpless Pawns Amidst The Political Controversy
  - Both Major Party Campaigns Try To Deal With The Slavery Issues

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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**

<b>Divisions Within The Democrats</b>	<b>Seeking</b>	<b>Key Proponents</b>
* 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
<b>Divisions Within The Whigs</b>		
* Conscience Whigs	An alternative to the Southern slave-holder, Taylor	Sumner, Wilson, Charles Francis Adams
<b>Issues Transcending Both Parties</b>		
* 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

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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.

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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.

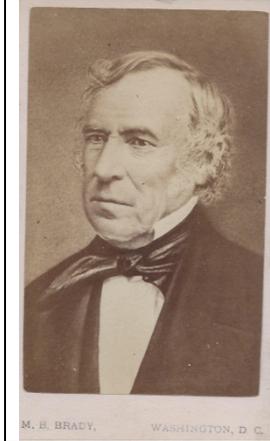
But Cass believes his “pop sov” compromise – “let the voters decide” -- will succeed with both his internal political factions and the American people at large. If only he can convince Southerners that the votes will favor slavery and Northerners that it will oppose it.

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.

## Chapter 168 – General Zachary Taylor Becomes America’s Twelfth President



**Dates:**  
November 7, 1848

**Sections:**

- A Second Whig Wins The White House
- Zachary Taylor: Personal Profile

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Date: November 7, 1848

### A Second Whig Wins The White House



Zachary Taylor (1784-1850)

For the first time all Americans cast their ballots for president on the same day, in this case Tuesday, November 7, 1848.

Whig General Zachary Taylor wins the election, garnering 47% of the popular vote and a fairly comfortable 163-127 margin in the Electoral College. He dominates in the North and more than holds his own in the Border States and the South, where many assume erroneously that his slave-owning status signals his support for future expansion.

As expected the Democrats suffer from their internal divisions. Cass sweeps the six Midwestern states (Ohio to Wisconsin and Iowa) and also wins in Virginia, South Carolina, Alabama, Mississippi, Missouri, Arkansas and Texas. But the Free Soilers, behind Van Buren, carve out 10% of the popular vote, signaling their power as a third party option.

The public once again repudiates the abolitionists and Gerritt Smith’s Liberty Party, in what turns out to be its final political campaign.

### Results Of the 1848 Presidential Election

	Party	Pop Vote	Elect Tot	South	Border	North	West
Taylor	Whig	1,361,393	163	43	23	97	0
Cass	Democrat	1,223,460	127	48	7	15	57
Van Buren	Free Soil	291,501	0				
G. Smith	Liberty	2,545	0				
Other		285	0				
		2,879,184	290	91	30	112	57

At the local level, Taylor records a crucial win of 36 electoral votes in New York over favorite son, Martin Van Buren -- who nevertheless manages to outpoll and derail Senator Cass in the state.

### Election Results In New York State (1848)

	Party	Pop Vote	%
Taylor	Whig	218,583	48%
Van Buren	Free Soil	120,497	26
Cass	Democrat	114,319	25
Smith	Liberty	2,545	1
Total		455,944	100%

A total of four states shift from the Democrats to Taylor and the Whigs in 1848, the two most crucial being New York and Pennsylvania.

### Party Power By State

South	1844	1848	Pick-Ups
Virginia	Democrat	Democrat	
North Carolina	Whig	Whig	
South Carolina	Democrat	Democrat	
Georgia	Democrat	Whig	Whig
Alabama	Democrat	Democrat	
Mississippi	Democrat	Democrat	
Louisiana	Democrat	Whig	Whig
Tennessee	Whig	Whig	
Arkansas	Democrat	Democrat	
Texas	---	Democrat	Democrat
Border			
Delaware	Whig	Whig	
Maryland	Whig	Whig	
Kentucky	Whig	Whig	
Missouri	Democrat	Democrat	
North			
New Hampshire	Democrat	Democrat	
Vermont	Whig	Whig	
Massachusetts	Whig	Whig	

Rhode Island	Whig	Whig	
Connecticut	Whig	Whig	
New York	Democrat	Whig	Whig
New Jersey	Whig	Whig	
Pennsylvania	Democrat	Whig	Whig
Ohio	Whig	Democrat	Democrat
Maine	Democrat	Democrat	
Indiana	Democrat	Democrat	
Illinois	Democrat	Democrat	
Iowa	Democrat	Democrat	
Michigan	Democrat	Democrat	
Wisconsin	---	Democrat	Democrat

Despite all of the Party turmoil preceding the election, the composition of both the House and the Senate is only marginally changed from 1846. The Democrats maintain a solid 35-25 lead over the Whigs in the upper chamber – although two transformative “Free Soil” senators are elected, Salmon P. Chase of Ohio, and John Hale of New Hampshire.

#### Senate Election Trends

House	1844	1846	1848	Change
Democrats	31	36	35	-1
Whigs	25	21	25	+4
Others		1		-1
Free Soil			2	+2
Vacant	0			

In the House, the Democrats pick up one seat to maintain a narrow majority.

#### House Election Trends

House	1844	1846	1848	Change
Democrats	143	112	113	+1
Whigs	78	116	108	- 8
Free Soil			9	+9
Others	6	6	1	-5

This victory in Congress shows that although the Wilmot controversy has shaken the Democrat’s solidarity, it has not yet caused an irreparable schism.

It does, however, signal that the path back to the White House will require a quid pro quo between Northern Democrats who aspire to the office -- like Stephen Douglas, Franklin Pierce and James Buchanan – and Southern Democrats who hope to extend slavery to the west.

Thus the idea of a “doughface” presidential candidate for future Democrat nominees is advanced – a man of the North, but one willing to reach accommodations with Southern wishes on slavery.

On the other side, political strategists like Thurlow Weed and Salmon Chase have been able to deny the Democrats their successor to Polk, no small accomplishment. But Zachary Taylor’s credentials as a Whig, in the mold of Henry Clay, are thin at best – and internal divisions over slavery are already intensifying.

If the Whigs are to dislodge the Democrats on a more permanent basis, it appears that some linkage to the Free Soil Movement will be required, possibly around opposition to expanding slavery.

But for now, it’s time for “Old Rough & Ready” to take his turn at the presidency.

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**Zachary Taylor: Personal Profile**

Zachary Taylor is the fourth American president whose fame rests heavily on his military achievements. Like Washington and Harrison, he is born on a Virginia plantation to a prominent family, with roots in his case tracing back to the Plymouth Colony. His father is Lt. Colonel Richard Taylor, who fights at Trenton and Monmouth and is with George Washington at Valley Forge.

In 1790 his family picks up and moves to the frontier in Kentucky, two years before its admission as a state. Taylor is six at that time and is raised, like Andrew Jackson, in a log cabin, while his father works his 8,000 acres worth of land, with the help of 23 slaves. His formal education is hit or miss, and he favors a rough physical life in the outdoors rather than intellectual pursuits in the classroom.

**Comparisons Between Taylor And The Three Previous Military Presidents**

<b>Presidents</b>	<b>Family Heritage</b>	<b>Education/Career</b>	<b>Landmark Battle</b>
Washington	Virginia plantation	Tutors/planter/military/politics	Yorktown (1781)
Jackson	Childhood poverty in SC	Self-educated/lawyer/planter/militia	New Orleans (1815)
Harrison	Virginia plantation	Tutors/medical school/militia/politics	Tippecanoe (1811)
Taylor	Virginia plantation	Self-educated/military/politics	Buena Vista (1847)

In 1808 his second cousin, James Madison, then Secretary of State, arranges a military omission for him as 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant in the army’s Seventh Infantry Regiment. He is posted to New Orleans, earns a promotion to Captain in two years, and marries his wife “Peggy,” who prays daily for his safety throughout her life. He is then off to the Indiana Territory in 1811, defending Ft. Knox and Ft. Harrison against Tecumseh and the Shawnees during the War of 1812. His successes here draw praise from General William Henry Harrison, the nation’s military and political leader in the Northwest territories.

When the war ends, Taylor resigns briefly to farm a 324 acre plantation just east of Louisville, Kentucky that his father has given him as a wedding present. He is now a slave owner, and will add many more “servants,” as he calls them, in the years to come.

His farming hiatus proves brief, and in 1816 he is back in the army, with the rank of Major. He spends two years at Fort Howard in the upper reaches of the Michigan (later Wisconsin) Territory at Green Bay, before being promoted to Lt. Colonel and assigned to duty in Louisiana.

From 1822 to 1824, he commands Fort Robertson in Baton Rouge, and while there acquires a second plantation, 300 acres along with more slaves, in Feliciana Parish. It will become his off duty home for the rest of his life.

After a stint as a recruiting officer, he is called to Washington, DC in 1826, before heading back west for tours at Fort Snelling and Fort Crawford, in what will become the Minnesota Territory. He is a full Colonel when he joins the fighting in the brief Blackhawk War of 1832.

Based on his own up and down experiences in the army, Taylor refuses in 1835 to approve the marriage of his daughter Sarah to a twenty-six year old 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant named Jefferson Davis. While the two lovers elope anyway, she dies three months after the marriage, leaving both Davis and Taylor in despair.

Taylor's military career takes another leap forward during the Second Seminole War in southern Florida. On Christmas day 1837 he wins the Battle of Lake Okeechobee, earning his nickname, "Old Rough & Ready," along with a promotion to Brigadier General in charge of all U.S. troops in Florida.

As his fame grows, so does his wealth. In 1840 he purchases his third plantation, *Cyprus Grove*, in Rodney, Mississippi, along with 81 more slaves, for \$95,000. He also begins to dabble around the edges of politics, in communication with Harrison, his old superior, about to be elected President.

After leaving Florida, he is stationed in Arkansas, with command over most American forces west of the Mississippi River. This places him along the frontier facing Texas, as tension builds with Mexico over the March 1845 annexation. On January 12, 1846 Polk orders him to advance west to the Rio Grande, and three months later the war with Mexico is under way.

The hard-charging Taylor now moves into the Mexican interior winning battle after battle despite being often outmanned by upwards of two to one margins. His crushing win at Monterrey on September 24, 1846 is followed by a strategically brilliant victory over Santa Anna at Buena Vista on February 23, 1847.

Buena Vista marks the end of Taylor's days as a combat officer and the beginning of his persona as a hero on the national stage and a potential candidate for the presidency. It is not a position he chases after – in fact, early on he is quick to dismiss the idea out of hand. But two Whigs in particular – the strategist, Thurlow Weed, and Senator John J. Crittenden – finally win him over.

Reservations aside, the Whigs nominate Taylor on the fourth ballot, and proceed to mail him a letter seeking his acceptance. When nearly a month passes without a response, the General, busy with both his command of the western armies and his plantation, finally comes upon the "lost notification" and signals his agreement.

At sixty-four years old, Taylor and his reluctant wife, prepare to leave home for what will be his final, and an abbreviated, tour of duty.

## Chapter 169 – The Slavery Debate Again Heats Up Before Taylor Is Sworn In

**Dates:**

December 1848  
to January 1849

**Sections:**

- Joshua Giddings Bill To Ban Slave Trading In The District Of Columbia Passes In The House
- Calhoun Tries To Unify Southern Support For Slavery
- Calhoun’s “Address To The Southern Delegates In Congress” Fails To Stir Rebellion

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December 18- 21, 1848

### Joshua Giddings Bill To Ban Slave Trading In The District Of Columbia Passes In The House



Even before Taylor is inaugurated, the slavery issue flares up again in Congress.

This time the instigator is not David Wilmot, but rather Joshua Giddings of Ohio, who, for a full decade, has stood alongside his mentor, John Quincy Adams, as lone crusaders on behalf of abolition.

Giddings grows up on a modest farm in Ashtabula, Ohio, in the northeast corner of the state known as the Western Reserve. This land, formerly owned by Connecticut, is dominated by New England emigrants, and Giddings soon absorbs their Puritan values. He is a strapping youth, 6’2” tall, athletic and brimming with self-confidence. He serves at age 16 in the War of 1812, then returns to work the farm and continue his self-education. He is a natural scholar and soon apprentices himself to Elisha Whittlesey of nearby Canfield to prepare for the bar, which he passes in 1821. His joint practice with fellow Ohioan, Benjamin Wade, leads to fame and fortune, prior to the crash of 1837, which nearly wipes away his wealth.

Joshua Giddings (1795-1864)

At that point, friends push him into politics and, in 1838; he is elected to the House, to succeed his teacher and friend, Whittlesey.

Soon both Giddings and Wade are drawn into their shared opposition to slavery, first through lectures delivered by Theodor Dwight Weld, the disciple of Reverend Charles Finney, and later through Giddings daughter, Lura Maria, a dedicated Garrisonian. Together the two law partners form an Anti-Slavery Society chapter, before Giddings heads off to Washington.

Once there, he keeps a diary, with 1838-39 entries bearing witness to the slave trade in DC, and to the frustrations he faces in trying to end it.

- *This day a coffle of about sixty slaves, male and female, passed through the streets of Washington, chained together on their way south. A being in the shape of a man was on horseback, with a large whip in his hand, with which he occasionally chastised those who, through fatigue or insolence, were tardy in their movements. This was done in daylight, in public view.*
- *I say that Northern men will not consent to the continuance of our national councils where their ears are assailed while coming to the Capitol by the voice of the auctioneer publicly proclaiming the sale of humans, of intelligent beings...I am asked now to contribute from the funds of the people thus abused to the improvements of this city...I protest against this. I shall be opposed to all appropriations in this District not necessary for the convenience of government. I take my stand here.*
- *It is amusing and astonishing to see the views entertained by most of the members on the subject of abolition. At the South, that is designed to create a general rebellion among the slaves, and have them cut their master's throats. At the North they have no definite idea of the meaning ...and appear afraid to come out and declare their sentiments.*
- *I have come to the honest conclusion that our northern friends are in fact afraid of these southern bullies....I think we have no northern man who dares boldly and fearlessly to declare his abhorrence of slavery and the slave trade. This kind of fear I have never experienced, nor shall I submit to it now. For that purpose I have drawn up a resolution calling for information as to the slave trade in the District of Columbia...Friends advise me not to present it on two accounts: first it will enrage the southern members; second it will injure me at home. But I have determined to risk both; for I would rather lose my election at home than to suffer the insolence of these Southerners.*

By 1848, after a decade of frustration in the House, Giddings senses a tide beginning to shift his way.

On December 18, 1848, he tests this by offering a stature to abolish slavery in the District – arguing that DC is federal land and thus not subject to Maryland's state law sanctioning the institution. But this bill is defeated by a 106-79 margin,

A subsequent option, initiated by Abraham Lincoln, seeks DC abolition in exchange for compensation for freed slaves, plus a guarantee to seize and return all run-aways. It is tabled without a vote.

Giddings, however, has a fallback position. On December 21, he proposes another bill, this time to at least ban slave trading in the District.

Its passage by a margin of 98-88 sounds another alarm for Southerners. If the House is willing to pass restrictions on slavery on “federally controlled” land in DC, might it not apply the same principle to the

new Mexican Cession “territories” out west? Might it even go so far as to prohibit slavery before the “territories” write their own constitutions and apply for statehood?

Senator John Calhoun of South Carolina seems to think so.

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Date: December 22, 1848

**Calhoun Tries To Unify Southern Support For Slavery**



John C. Calhoun (1782-1850)

Unlike many Southerners, sixty-six year old Senator John Calhoun is not lulled into complacency by Zachary Taylor’s planter credentials. He fears for the General’s political naiveté, and suspects that he will soon fall under the influence of Northern Whigs, especially anti-slavery New Yorkers such as Governor William Seward and party boss Thurlow Weed.

Calhoun’s strategy is to go on the offensive to protect the South, before it is too late.

His immediate fear in December 1848 is that a Northern-dominated Congress will move quickly to outlaw slavery across the entire Mexican Cession before Southern planters can gain a toehold in the region.

To try to forestall this “free soil” fait d’accompli, Calhoun convinces 69 of the 121 southern members of Congress to convene on December 22, 1848, for the purpose of constructing a unified sectional platform on the slavery issues.

He tells this caucus that unless the South acts swiftly and with one voice, both California and New Mexico will become “free states.” This, in turn, will tip the current 15:15 balance in the Senate in favor of the North, and open a path to end the expansion of slavery and thus crush the South’s economic future.

The caucus agrees to set up a “Committee of Fifteen” to further discuss the issues and draft a statement, which Calhoun will write himself.

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Date: January 1849

**Calhoun’s “Address To The Southern Delegates In Congress” Fails To Stir Rebellion**

The Committee statement is presented by Calhoun to a collection of 90 Southern congressmen and senators at a meeting held in the Senate chamber on January 15, 1849.

But instead of unity, the result is chaos.

Leading Southern Whigs such as Robert Toombs and Alexander Stephens of Georgia oppose its “threatening” tone. Others are so offended by the acrimonious debate it triggers that they exit the hall. Those who remain finally agree to meet again to debate Calhoun’s proposal versus a toned-down option.

On January 22 they reconvene, and Calhoun’s version is adopted. But it is a hollow victory. In the end, only 48 of the 121 southern members go on to actually sign the petition, with a mere two Whigs among them.

**Southern Politician’s Support For Calhoun’s Petition**

	<b>Sign On</b>	<b>Do Not Sign</b>	<b>Total</b>
Democrats	46	27	73
Whigs	2	46	48
Total	48	73	121

Despite this tepid support, Calhoun goes ahead and publishes his “Address of the Southern Delegates in Congress to Their Constituents.” His goal is clearly to scare the region into action.

Thus he argues that the North’s true intent is to raise all blacks to equality with whites, to hand them the vote, and to thereby abolish slavery.

*They intend to vest the free blacks and slaves with the right to vote on the question of emancipation in this District. But when once raised to an equality, they would become the fast political associates of the North, acting and voting with them on all questions, and by this political union between them, holding the white race at the South in complete subjection.*

Like Cassandra foretelling the fall of Troy, Calhoun goes on to warn that failure to act will destroy the Southern way of life and turn the land into:

*A permanent abode of disorder, anarchy, misery and wretchedness.*

Only by banding together can this fate be avoided.

*The first and indispensable step, without which nothing can be done, and with which everything may be, is to be united among yourselves, on this great and most vital question. Until then, the North will not believe that you are in earnest in opposition to their encroachments, and they will continue to follow, one after another, until the work of abolition is finished.*

If political opposition fails, Calhoun invokes the specter of war:

*Nothing (then) would remain for you but to stand up immovable in defense of rights involving your all – your property, prosperity, equality, liberty, and safety. As the assailed, you would stand justified by all laws, human and divine, in repelling a blow so dangerous, without looking to consequences, and to resort to all means necessary for that purpose.*

For the moment, however, this dire warning falls on deaf ears.

The Southern Whigs, having finally won the White House, have no interest in abandoning Taylor in favor of Calhoun. The Democrats simply assume that Taylor, the slaveholder, will protect their interests in the end.

Toombs regards the outcome as a triumph, and reports it to Taylor's main political confidante, the Whig Unionist, Senator John J. Crittenden of Kentucky:

*We have completely foiled Calhoun in his miserable attempt to form a southern party.*

## Chapter 170 – Taylor Names His Cabinet And Is Inaugurated



**Dates:**  
1849-1850

**Sections:**

- Taylor's Cabinet Picks Tend To Oppose Further Expansion Of Slavery
- The Inaugural Speech Calls For "Enlarged Patriotism" To Assuage Sectional Conflicts
- Overview Of Taylor's Term

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Date: January – February 1849

### **Taylor's Cabinet Picks Tend To Oppose Further Expansion Of Slavery**

As the various congressional factions spar over slavery in the District of Columbia, President Taylor assembles a cabinet comprising seven Whigs, all formerly lawyers.

His choice for Secretary of State is a sitting U.S. Senator from Delaware, John Clayton, a man he has never met before in person. But Clayton has long been considered presidential timber and enjoys support within the party during the 1847 nominating process. He opposes both the Texas Annexation and the Mexican War, but vigorously supports the troops once the fighting begins.

Neither of the military posts is filled with experienced service men, signaling Taylor's intent to focus on his duty as commander-in-chief.

The War Secretary, George W. Crawford, serves only briefly in the Georgia militia before being chosen as the state's Attorney General and Governor. His early record in politics includes a prolonged duel in which he kills a local congressman on a third exchange of gunfire. The Navy post goes to House member William "Ballard" Preston, a planter and slave owner who support abolition during his time in the Virginia state legislature.

For the Treasury, Taylor is said to favor Horace Binney, defender of the Second U.S. Bank against Jackson, but instead ends up with another Pennsylvanian, William Meredith. He is the son of a famous Philadelphia banker, and an unflinching proponent of protective tariffs to support American jobs.

Congressman Jacob Collamer of Vermont becomes a Postmaster General who, to his benefit, refuses to follow the tradition of immediately sacking all party-opposite employees within his realm.

The Attorney General position goes to the renowned Maryland trial lawyer, ex-slave owner, and sitting U.S. Senator, Reverdy Johnson. He becomes a strong supporter of Taylor and a particularly influential member of the cabinet.

Given the sudden and vast expansion westward, congress approves a new Department of the Interior, its mission being to manage the lands, natural resources, and Indian affairs in the new territories. The first to fill this slot is Thomas Ewing of Ohio, formerly a U.S. Senator and then, momentarily, Treasury Secretary under Harrison.

While four of his seven picks come from “slave” states, all members share Taylor’s opposition to expanding the institution into the west.

**Zachary Taylor’s Cabinet**

<b>Position</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Home State</b>
Secretary of State	John Clayton	Delaware
Secretary of Treasury	William Meredith	Pennsylvania
Secretary of War	George Crawford	Georgia
Attorney General	Reverdy Johnson	Maryland
Secretary of Navy	William Preston	Virginia
Postmaster General	Jacob Collamer	Vermont
Secretary of Interior	Thomas Ewing	Ohio

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Date: March 5, 1849

**The Inaugural Speech Calls For “Enlarged Patriotism” To Assuage Sectional Conflicts**



The Vision Of A Unified Nation

A crowd of some 20,000 gather at the East Portico to hear the new President deliver his inaugural address, an abbreviated and largely perfunctory effort of only 1090 words.

Taylor begins by expressing gratitude for his election and acknowledging the “fearful responsibilities” he will face.

*The confidence and respect shown by my countrymen in calling me to be the Chief Magistrate...have inspired me with feelings of the most profound gratitude; but when I reflect that the acceptance of the office..involves the weightiest obligations (and) by fearful responsibilities.*

He anticipates “able cooperation” from a divided congress (a Whig House and a Democrat Senate) and the judiciary, so that he can execute his duties “diligently, impartially, and for the best interests of the country.”

*Happily, however...I shall not be without able cooperation (from) the legislative and judicial branches of the Government ...whose talents, integrity, and purity of character will furnish ample guaranties for the faithful and honorable performance. With such aids and an honest purpose to do whatever is right, I hope to execute diligently, impartially, and for the best interests of the country the manifold duties devolved upon me.*

In enumerating his duties, Taylor promises to operate within the strict guidelines laid out for the Executive in the Constitution. His first priority will be to act as the military commander-in-chief. He will oversee all treaties, appoint ambassadors, update congress on emerging issues, and insure that all laws are faithfully executed.

*To command the Army and Navy of the United States; with the advice and consent of the Senate, to make treaties and to appoint ambassadors and other officers; to give to Congress information of the state of the Union and recommend such measures as he shall judge to be necessary; and to take care that the laws shall be faithfully executed....*

At this point his mind is clearly on the tensions surrounding slavery in the new territories – as he returns to the notion of serving “the whole country,” and not “any particular section or local interest.” His determination will be to maintain the “national existence” (i.e. the Union) by scrupulously following the Constitution.

*Chosen by the body of the people under the assurance that my Administration would be devoted to the welfare of the whole country, and not to the support of any particular section or merely local interest, I this day renew the declarations I have heretofore made and proclaim my fixed determination to maintain to the extent of my ability the Government in its original purity and to adopt as the basis of my public policy those great republican doctrines which constitute the strength of our national existence.*

He cycles back to an old favorite from his days at war, the need for a strong Regular Army as opposed to trying to fight effectively with amateur militiamen.

*In reference to the Army and Navy, lately employed with so much distinction on active service, care shall be taken to insure the highest condition of efficiency, and in furtherance of that object the military and naval schools, sustained by the liberality of Congress, shall receive the special attention of the Executive.*

Despite this focus on the army, Taylor says he will follow Washington’s dictate to avoid involving America in foreign conflicts, and will exhaust all diplomatic efforts to settle disputes before any resort to warfare.

*As American freemen we can not but sympathize in all efforts to extend the blessings of civil and political liberty, but at the same time we are warned by the admonitions of history and the voice of our own beloved Washington to abstain from entangling alliances with foreign nations.... It is to be hoped that no international question can now arise which a government confident in its own strength and resolved to protect its own just rights may not settle by wise negotiation; and it eminently becomes a government like our own, founded on the morality and intelligence of its*

*citizens and upheld by their affections, to exhaust every resort of honorable diplomacy before appealing to arms.*

He acknowledges his responsibility to appoint honest and capable government officials.

*The appointing power vested in the President imposes delicate and onerous duties. So far as it is possible to be informed, I shall make honesty, capacity, and fidelity indispensable prerequisites to the bestowal of office, and the absence of either of these qualities shall be deemed sufficient cause for removal.*

Finally he pledges to “protect the interests” of all three sectors of the economy (“agriculture, commerce, and manufactures”), to “extinguish the public debt,” to achieve “economy in all public expenditures,” and to rely on Congress to properly regulate...domestic policy.”

Consistent with his predecessors, Taylor invokes “Divine Providence” to sustain the “high state of prosperity” the nation has long experienced, while also calling on “enlarged patriotism” to “assuage the bitterness...marking differences of opinion” and strengthen the Republic.

*In conclusion I congratulate you, my fellow-citizens, upon the high state of prosperity to which the goodness of Divine Providence has conducted our common country. Let us invoke a continuance of the same protecting care which has led us from small beginnings to the eminence we this day occupy, and let us seek to deserve that continuance by prudence and moderation in our councils, by well-directed attempts to assuage the bitterness which too often marks unavoidable differences of opinion, by the promulgation and practice of just and liberal principles, and by an enlarged patriotism, which shall acknowledge no limits but those of our own widespread Republic.*

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## **Overview Of Taylor’s Term**

Zachary Taylor’s time in office will be brief – only sixteen months – but it will further set the stage for the national debate around slavery that dominates the next decade.

The South’s assumption that Taylor’s ownership of three plantations will translate into support for extending slavery into the new Mexican Cession territories is soon proven false. Like Andrew Jackson before him, the General’s highest calling lies with preserving the Union, and he is convinced that a flat-out prohibition on more slavery will put an end to further sectional hostilities. On this score he will be proven dead wrong.

When Taylor signals his wish to immediately admits California to the Union as a Free State, Southerners in Congress, including his own Whig associates, rise up to oppose him. Their apparent sense of betrayal is so intense that the aging patriarch of the party, Henry Clay, decides to step directly into the fray in search of a solution on slavery similar to his 1820 Missouri Compromise.

Along with the powerful Democrat, Stephen Douglas, Clay crafts what becomes known as the 1850 Omnibus Bill, which includes off-sets to the South for the admission of a Free California. Central here are promises to allow voters in the New Mexico and Utah Territories to choose their status (i.e. the Democrat’s “popular sovereignty” principle) and new rules requiring Northerners to enforce the Fugitive Slave Law.

Congressional debate over the Omnibus Bill in March 1850 produces memorable exchanges between aging lions such as John Calhoun and Daniel Webster and next generation leaders such as William Seward, who, like Taylor himself, opposes passage. Seward's "Higher Law" address goes so far as to argue the primacy of God's law over that in the U.S. Constitution, a fearful consideration for all slave-owners.

In response, Southern Fire-Eaters hold a convention in Nashville in June seeking a call for secession, but they are turned back by more moderate Unionist forces. Still further wrangling over the Omnibus Bill resumes.

In the middle of all this, Taylor is struck down by a severe case of gastroenteritis and dies after a six day battle to try to recover. He is the second President to succumb in office and the last ever elected under the Whig banner. His successor is a mere shadow of the decisive Taylor, his Vice President, Millard Fillmore.

### President Taylor's Term: Key Events

<b>1848</b>	
<b>Nov 7</b>	Taylor is elected President
<b>Dec 5</b>	Polk confirms discovery of gold in California
<b>Dec 21</b>	Abolitionist Giddings offers bill to ban slavery in DC
<b>Dec 22</b>	Calhoun convenes Southern conference. Sets up Committee of 15
<b>Year</b>	Multiple attempts by Polk to buy Cuba
	German revolution fails & many immigrate to U.S.
<b>1849</b>	
<b>January</b>	Amelia Bloomer publishes <i>The Lily</i> focused on women's movement
	Moderate Southerners defend Taylor, reject Calhoun's pleas
<b>June 15</b>	President Polk dies suddenly in Nashville
<b>July 27</b>	Memorial service in DC for ex-President Polk
<b>Feb 7</b>	Supreme Court denies Mass/NY attempt to tax incoming aliens
<b>Feb 12</b>	Temporary government set up in San Francisco
<b>Mar 5</b>	Taylor inaugurated
<b>Aug 11</b>	Taylor forbids any filibustering actions in Cuba
<b>August</b>	Taylor: "the North need have no apprehension of the further expansion of slavery"
<b>Sept 13</b>	Convention delegates sign a California Constitution declaring it a "Free State"
<b>Nov 13</b>	California Constitution ratified by voters: bans slavery & hopes for all-white population
<b>Dec 4</b>	Taylor calls for California statehood & says he will fight secession
<b>Dec 22</b>	A troubled Howell Cobb elected House Speaker after 3 week battle and 63 ballots
<b>Year</b>	The Pacific Railroad Co. is chartered, looking westward
	Regular shipping voyages from NY to Liverpool take 33 days
<b>1850</b>	
<b>Feb 5-6</b>	Clay proposes initial 1850 Compromise (Ca a free state; NM tbd; fugitive slave act)
<b>Feb 20</b>	Thad Stevens joins the attack on slavery in the House
<b>Feb 27</b>	Unionist Robert Toombs pleads with North to honor Southern rights
<b>Feb</b>	Hawthorne's <i>Scarlet Letter</i> is published
<b>Mar 4</b>	Calhoun's final speech warns of two nations split over slavery & southern secession
<b>Mar 7</b>	Webster speech calling on North to accept slavery to preserve the Union
<b>Mar 11</b>	Seward counters with "there is a higher law" speech opposing the Compromise
<b>April 17</b>	Senator Foote draws pistol on Senator Benton on floor during California debate
<b>April 19</b>	Clayton-Bulwer Treaty guarantees US & UK neutrality in Central America
<b>May 8</b>	Senate committee reports "Omnibus Bill" – one on territories, other on DC
<b>May</b>	Narciso Lopez filibustering expedition lands in Cuba & is later ousted
<b>Jun 3-12</b>	Nashville Convention rejects secession & calls for 36'30" line to coast
<b>July 9</b>	Taylor dies suddenly & Fillmore becomes president

The economy begins to tick up toward the end of Taylor's term in office, as the California gold rush gets underway.

**Key Economic Overview**

	<b>1848</b>	<b>1849</b>	<b>1850</b>
Total GDP (\$000)	\$2,427	2419	2581
% Change	1%	NC	7%
Per Capita GDP	\$111	108	111

## Chapter 171 – Taylor’s Comments On Expanding Slavery Shock The South



**Dates:**  
Summer 1849

**Sections:**

- Taylor Announces His Opposition To Extending Slavery During A Tour Of The Northeast

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Date: March to September 1849

### Taylor Announces His Opposition To Extending Slavery During A Tour Of The Northeast



Those Seen As “Servants” Not Slaves By Taylor

After the inauguration, Taylor and his family move into a White House marred by a leaky roof and the same suspicious water supply -- sourced from the polluted Potomac River, a mere 2500 feet from the front door – that may have killed Harrison.

Once there, he is quickly surrounded by the usual band of “favor-seekers,” literally camped out on the ground floor near his office, and awaiting the traditional five minute audience with the new executive.

This siege is followed by various ceremonial duties, including two back-to-back funeral services.

On July 17, Taylor delivers a eulogy address in memory of Dolley Madison, who dies in the capitol city at eighty-two. In his remarks the President coins the term “first lady” in referring to her. Only ten days later, a memorial is held in honor of ex-President Polk, who dies at age fifty-three in Nashville, less than four months after leaving office.

By mid-summer the General is restless and eager to leave his new post and venture beyond Washington. He decides to tour the Northeast, and sets out on August 9, 1849 for Baltimore, on his way to Pennsylvania and New York.

In Harrisburg he learns that “expansionists” who encouraged the war with Mexico are plotting further moves into foreign lands. Some wish to drive south through lower Mexico and into Central America. Others have their eyes on Cuba, a long-time acquisition target. To curtail a potential “filibustering” expedition against Cuba, Taylor orders Secretary of State Clayton to closely monitor the ports of New Orleans and New York.

Soon after issuing this order, the President is struck by ominous bouts of what appears to be cholera, with persistent diarrhea and vomiting that will eventually cut his trip short.

But he rallies sufficiently to travel to Pittsburg, where he praises tariffs that protect jobs. Heading further north into Mercer County, he meets with a group of free-soil advocates. In off-hand remarks he announces his opposition to any further expansion of slavery.

*The people of the North need have no apprehension of the further extension of slavery....If the congress sees fit to pass (the Wilmot proviso) I will not veto it.*

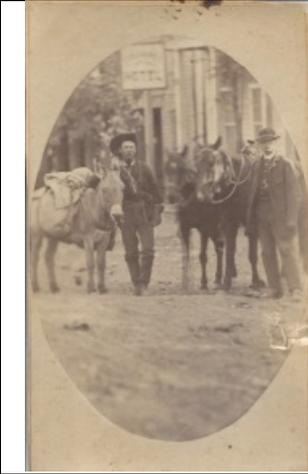
When this quote appears in the press it shocks the South!

Taylor does not intend to free the “servants” on his three plantations, nor to abolish slavery in the old South. But he is very aware of the growing volatility that surrounds the institution across the North, and the threat this poses to the Union. And, like General Jackson before him, the sanctity of the Union is first and foremost in his heart. By flat-out banning the spread of slavery, Taylor thinks he will end the divisive debate once and for all.

After heading back east across Pennsylvania, he again becomes violently ill, on August 24. He rests for several days then heads home to Washington after a final stop-over in Albany, New York

Once there he will face the mounting storm over his now public stance on slavery, and on statehood for California – two issues that dominate the remaining ten months of his presidency.

## Chapter 172 – The Issue Of Statehood For California Heats Up



**Dates:**  
January 1848  
to 1849

**Sections:**

- The Gold Rush Propels The Need For A California State Government
- The Rules For Admitting New States To The Union Are Well Established
- California Writes Its Constitution Calling For “Free State” Status
- A Proposal To Ban All Blacks Is Debated

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Date: January 1848 – June 1849

### The Gold Rush Propels The Need For A California State Government



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From his first day in office, Taylor is acutely aware of the need to organize a sustainable government for California in light of the new settlers flooding in to search for gold.

Word of the initial “find” gradually spreads after the January 24, 1848 discovery of nuggets in the trace water below John Sutter’s sawmill. In August 1848 easterners hear the news in the *New York Herald*, but it is President Polk’s announcement to Congress on December 5, 1848 that fully fuels the “Forty-Niner” stampede.

While the port of San Francisco is first to experience the transition from sleepy Spanish mission to overnight boom town, the entire state is affected by the gold rush. California’s total Caucasian population jumps from roughly 8,000 in 1840 to 120,000 in 1850 and 380,000 by 1860.

“Lived The Miners, Forty-Niners...

In the face of this influx, the duty of maintaining law and order continues to fall on a string of Military Governors on site since the Bear Flag rebellion and the end of the Mexican War in 1847. Their public safety challenges mount daily:

*It is clear to every man that San Francisco is partially in the hands of criminals, and that crime has reached a crisis when life and property are in imminent danger. There is no alternative left us but to lay aside our business and direct our whole energies as a people to seek out the abodes of these villains and execute summary vengeance upon them.*

President Polk tries several times to have California declared an official Territory during his final year in office, but Congress stalls for two reasons:

- Any move toward statehood will require a decision on whether or not to allow slavery there; and
- That decision will in turn upset the Union's current 15 Free vs. 15 Slave state balance.

So Taylor is left with this thorny issue, and in true military fashion decides to take it on as quickly as possible.

On April 3, 1849, just a month after his inauguration, he sends sitting Georgia congressman Thomas Butler King to San Francisco to explore the shift from military to civilian rule. King follows the Panama route and arrives there on June 4, to learn that activities are already under way to form a government. Spearheading this effort is General Bennett Riley, the Military Governor who fought under General Scott in the overland drive to take Mexico City.

The day before King arrives, Riley issues a call to elect representatives for a Constitutional Convention to be held on September 1, 1849 – a move that Taylor supports wholeheartedly.

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Date: 1849

### **The Rules For Admitting New States To The Union Are Well Established**

The process for admitting new states like California to the Union has worked smoothly over time, with seventeen new additions approved, the latest being Wisconsin, in May 1848.

The one exception to the rule goes back three decades to the Missouri application in 1820, where the Tallmadge Amendment, seeking to ban slavery in the state, causes a congressional crisis. It is resolved through Henry Clay's Missouri Compromise Bill which draws a "slave vs. free state" demarcation line at 36'30" across all of the Louisiana Purchase territories.

But this 1820 slavery line precedent does not apply to the new Mexican Cession Territories, and therefore any decision on California will require further congressional debate and agreement.

Aside from the "slavery question," the basic ground rules for adding new states are laid out in the Land Ordinance of 1784 and in the Admission to the Union Clause (Article IV, Section 3) of the 1787 Constitution.

The steps involved are first applied to the "Northwest Territory" lands west of the Appalachian Mountains won from Britain in the Revolutionary War, and go as follows:

1. All lands within a new Territory are placed in the “public domain” – i.e. they are owned by the government.
2. Congress surveys the land and decides how many new states will be created over time.
3. The path to statehood begins when a threshold number of citizens settle in the defined boundaries.
4. A representative group of residents convene a Territorial Convention to write a proposed state constitution.
5. The State Constitution is submitted to the population at large for an up or down vote.
6. If approved, the proposed state sends its Constitution and plans to the U.S. Congress to seek admission.
7. The Congress debates the admission and either accepts or rejects it.
8. Once admitted, new states are granted “equal footing” with prior states when it comes to rights and laws.

The threshold level on residents, initially set at 20,000 (and later raised to 60,000 and 93,000) is easily met by California in 1849.

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Date: August – October 1849

### **California Writes Its Constitution Calling For “Free State” Status**

The call by General Riley to hold a convention is met by enthusiasm among the settlers.

On August 1, 1849, a total of 48 delegates are chosen by secret ballot to attend the assembly. Half have lived in the state for an extended time, with twelve residing there for ten or more years and another twelve for at least three years. Their backgrounds are quite diverse, including fourteen lawyers, twelve ranchers, nine merchants, and four military men.

This group gathers on September 1 at Colton Hall in Monterrey, and works steadily over 43 days to write the initial constitution, which they sign on October 13.

The final document borrows heavily from the 1787 U.S. Constitution – with several notable exceptions:

For one, California takes the lead in defining its own Territorial boundaries, rather than waiting on Congress to complete this task. Their proposed plat also defines a total of 29 counties.

It offers an expanded Bill of Rights, listing twenty-one in total rather than the usual ten.

Among the additions are calls for a statewide system of public K-12 schools together with a University, all paid in part by local funds. Both single and married women are accorded the right to own and control their own property. A debt limit is established at \$300,000.

The Constitution also makes one other declaration that will cause a firestorm in the U.S. Congress – it officially announces its intent to enter as a “Free State.”

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Date: Fall 1849

### A Proposal To Ban All Blacks Is Debated



Mocking Image Of A Boy With A Pot On His Head

The debates over “Free State” status that occur among the California delegates in Monterrey display the intensity of the anti-black racism prevalent across white America at the time.

They are covered in depth by *The Californian*, a one-sheet newspaper that begins publishing in August 1846. It links the proposed ban on slavery to the wish for an all-white population:

*We entertain several reasons why slavery should not be introduced here:*

- *Negroes have equal rights to life, liberty, health and happiness with the whites.*
- *It is wrong for slavery to exist anywhere.*
- *We left the slave states because we didn't want to bring up our families in miserable conditions.*
- *There is no excuse for its introduction into this country, by virtue of climate or physical condition.*
- *We desire only a white population in California.*

This is the spirit of David Wilmot's Proviso writ large – with the “Free State” label now signaling “free of all black residents!”

This notion of an all-white society has surfaced across Northern states from Ohio through Indiana, Michigan, Illinois and Iowa. But it will not be written into a final constitution until 1859 when Oregon is accepted as the nation's 33<sup>rd</sup> state.

## Chapter 173 – Taylor Says He Will Support California Admission As Free State



**Dates:**  
November 13 –  
December 4, 1849

**Sections:**

- Taylor's Support For "Immediate Admission" Further Alarms The South

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Date: November 13 To December 4, 1849

### Taylor's Support For "Immediate Admission" Further Alarms The South



Visitors in western gold mine country

On November 13, 1849, one month after completing the final draft, the settlers ratify the California Constitution by a margin of 12,061 in favor vs. 811 opposed.

At the same time, they elect their first civilian governor, forty-two year old Peter Bernett, who migrates west from Missouri to Oregon in 1843. Bernett is drawn to San Francisco by the Sutter gold rush, sets up a law practice there, and wins his race over four other contenders, including John Sutter himself.

From this point on, the military gives way to civilian rule on a permanent basis.

The town of Pueblo de San Jose is chosen as the first state capitol, and elected congressmen begin meeting there on a regular basis to pass legislation.

All that's left now is for the U.S. Congress to approve the admission of California as a Free State.

On December 4, 1849, the day after the 31<sup>th</sup> Congress convenes for its opening session, Taylor's first and only annual message urges them to accept California's petition without delay:

*The people of that Territory...recently met for the purpose of forming a Constitution...and it is believed they will shortly apply for the admission into the Union as a sovereign State. Should such be the case...I recommend their application to the favorable consideration of Congress.*

This call by Taylor is met by shock among Southern politicians, Democrats and Whigs alike.

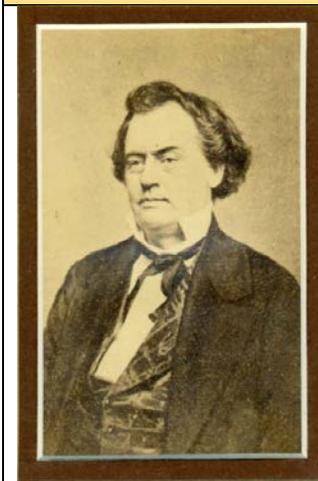
“Their President” – a slave-owning Southern man with three plantations – is coming out against expanding slavery in the west, and also upsetting the 15:15 state balance of power in the Senate in favor of a Free State majority!

He is also doing this without any apparent recognition of the gravity of these decisions on the Southern economy, and without staying neutral until a search for “compromises” can play out in Congress.

This sparks a sense of betrayal among Southerners, and a growing conviction that Taylor is now the pawn of the two anti-slavery New Yorkers -- Thurlow Weed and Governor Henry Seward– who led his presidential campaign.

The Georgia Whigs who have trusted and supported Taylor all along are among the most distressed.

## Chapter 174 – Moderate Southern Whigs Stage A Rebellion In The House



**Dates:**  
December 1849

- Sections:**
- The California Admission Threatens The South’s Veto Power In The Senate
  - Moderate Southern Whigs Defy Their Party During The Election Of A House Speaker

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Date: December 1849

### The California Admission Threatens The South’s Veto Power In The Senate

Taylor’s support for the California admission comes ten months after John C. Calhoun issues his “Address of the Southern Delegates in Congress to Their Constituents,” warning of a Northern take-over in Washington.

At the Executive level, victories by Harrison (1840) and Taylor (1848) show that the Democrats can no longer guarantee a President who is reliably pro-South and pro-slavery.

Within the House, “Slave State” membership has fallen below the 40% mark.

**Membership In The House Of Representatives**

Year	From Slave States	From Free State	Total	% Slave State
1800	65	77	142	46%
1810	81	105	186	44
1820	90	123	213	42
1830	100	142	242	41
1840	91	141	232	39
1850	90	143	233	38

And in the Senate, the simple admission of California would result in 16 Free States vs. 15 Slave State and reverse the prior pattern of any imbalances initially favoring the South. Thus free Maine follows slave Missouri in 1821, free Michigan follows Arkansas in 1837, free Iowa and Wisconsin join soon after Florida and Texas.

**Balance Of Free Vs. Slave States As Of 1849 When California Applies**

<b>South – Slave (11)</b>	<b>Border – Slave (4)</b>	<b>North – Free (9)</b>	<b>West – Free (6)</b>
1788 South Carolina	1787 Delaware	1787 Pennsylvania	1803 Ohio
1788 Georgia	1788 Maryland	1787 New Jersey	1816 Indiana
1788 Virginia	1792 Kentucky	1788 Connecticut	1818 Illinois
1789 North Carolina	1821 Missouri-23	1788 Massachusetts	1837 Michigan-26
1796 Tennessee		1788 New Hampshire	1846 Iowa-29
1812 Louisiana		1788 New York	1848 Wisconsin-30
1817 Mississippi		1790 Rhode Island	
1819 Alabama		1791 Vermont	
1836 Arkansas-25		1821 Maine -24	
1845 Florida-27			
1845 Texas-28			

Were California admitted as a Free State, it would be the first time for the South to “go first,” and in this case without any clear prospect of an off-setting Slave State to follow.

Beyond Washington, two other threats to Southern slavery are looming larger.

The first is the “Free Soil” movement, spawned by Wilmot, and standing in opposition to the presence of all blacks in the new territories.

Second is the American Anti-Slavery Society, now some 2,000 chapters and 150,000 members strong since its 1833 inception, and flooding the North and West with its traveling lecturers, pamphlets, newspapers, and petition drives.

Taken together, even the most moderate Southern members in Congress feel the need to resist this tide.

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December 1849

### Moderate Southern Whigs Defy Their Party During The Election Of A House Speaker



Robert Toombs (1810-1885)      Howell Cobb (1815-1868)

The leader of this new Southern resistance within the Whig Party is Robert Toombs of Georgia, who has long opposed Calhoun's inflammatory warnings, and, together with Alexander Stephens, has been a voice of moderation in the House.

Earlier in 1849, Toombs becomes aware of Taylor's comments about prohibiting slavery in the west, but chooses to downplay them as a momentary error soon to be corrected.

*General Taylor is in a new position, His duties and responsibilities are vast and complicated, and besides he is among strangers whose aims and objects are not known to him. Therefore, that he should commit mistakes, even grave errors, must be expected. But I have an abiding confidence that he is honest and sincere, and will repair them when seen.*

But Taylor's position on the admission of California pushes Toombs over the edge.

To dramatize his outrage, he decides to interfere in the election of the House Speaker. The incumbent is his fellow Whig, Robert Winthrop of Massachusetts, who stands a good chance of repeating given that the Democrats, now back in the majority, already face regional divisions.

Toombs begins by making his demands on slavery clear:

*Congress ought not to put any restrictions upon any state institutions in the territories and ought not to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia.*

In a fiery speech on December 1, 1848 he goes further, threatening Disunion if slavery is banned in the new territories "purchased by common blood."

*I have as much attachment to the Union of these States, under the Constitution of our fathers, as any freeman ought to have. I am ready to concede and sacrifice for it whatever a just and honorable man ought to sacrifice....I do not then hesitate to avow before this House and the country, and in the presence of the living God, that if by your legislation you seek to drive us from the Territories purchased by the common blood and treasure of the people, and to abolish slavery in the District, thereby attempting to fix a national degradation upon half the States of this confederacy, I am for Disunion, and if my physical courage be equal to the maintenance of my convictions of right and duty I will devote all I am and all I have on earth to its consummation.*

This speech signals an important sea change among Southern moderates.

Toombs in particular is noted for his genial manner and long-standing opposition to the inflammatory rhetoric of John C. Calhoun. He has also opposed Polk's initial advance to the Rio Grande and, like Stephens and Crittenden, enjoys a reputation as a fierce supporter of the Union.

But on this issue, Toombs exhibits the unbending determination that will later make him a founder of the Confederacy, its first Secretary of State, and later a field general in its army.

Ballot after ballot, his coalition blocks resolution, even for a host of compromise candidates – from Whig Edward Stanly to Democrats W.J. Brown and Linn Boyd.

Finally a frustrated bipartisan group proposes a change in the House rules whereby a Speaker could be elected with a plurality of the votes rather than a majority. On December 22, the 63<sup>rd</sup> ballot hands the Speakership to a Democrat, Howell Cobb, with a 46% plurality.

The choice is actually a victory for Toombs since Cobb is a close friend, a fellow Georgian, and a supporter of expanding slavery into the West.

**Ballots For Speaker Of The House: December 1849**

Candidates			#1	#30	#38	#47	#59	#60	#63
Howell Cobb	Georgia	Dem	103	5		1	2	95	102
Robert Winthrop	Mass	Whig	96	102	100	10	13	90	99
Linn Boyd	Ky	Dem		4	1	86	28	3	1
W.J. Brown	Indiana	Dem		2	109				
Emery Potter	Ohio	Dem		77		18	1	3	1
Edward Stanly	N.C.	Whig				66	75		
John McClernand	IL	Dem					50		
David Wilmot	PA	FS	8	6	6		7	9	8
All-Others			14	28	9	44	40	17	10
Total			221	224	225	225		217	221

The voting in the House does not go unnoticed by Henry Clay – an ex-Speaker himself and still patriarch of the Whig Party he founded two decades ago.

It convinces him that Southern moderate Whigs like Toombs and Stephens are on the verge of joining their more radical Democratic colleagues like Calhoun and Yancey in fighting for the expansion of slavery.

## Chapter 175 – Henry Clay And Stephen Douglas Collaborate On The “1850 Omnibus Bill”



**Dates:**  
January – February 1850

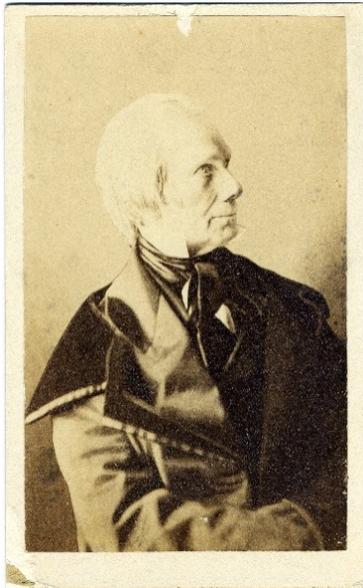
**Sections:**

- Clay Steps In Again To Search For Another Compromise
- The “1850 Omnibus Bill” Is Presented To Congress

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Date: January To February 1850

### Clay Steps In Again To Search For Another Compromise



Henry Clay (1777-1852)

Senator Henry Clay is 72 years old when this latest crisis materializes.

He has been in in various DC posts 43 years, since joining the Senate from Kentucky in 1806. His family life has been filled with tragedy. All six of his daughters have died young of various diseases, and one of his five sons – Henry Clay, Jr. – has been killed in 1847 at the Battle of Buena Vista, while serving under Taylor. What cruel irony to be called upon to “fix” the consequences of the Mexican War he opposed in congress and that cost him his namesake.

Still Clay is nothing if not a patriot, and he jumps right in.

As a master of legislative horse-trading, he knows that tensions over California entering as a Free State would be greatly reduced if the South could be guaranteed a new Slave State to be carved out of the New Mexico or Utah Territories.

The problem of course is that such “guarantees” are no longer a political option.

Prior votes on the Wilmot Proviso have shown that a majority in the House oppose any extension of slavery in the new West, and President Taylor, the titular head of Clay’s own Whig Party, has said he would support this prohibition.

This leaves the “Great Conciliator” with only one way out – embracing the Democrat’s bandwagon on Popular Sovereignty as a path that could conceivably lead to the admission of more Slave States, to offset California.

While hardly the “federal guarantees” wanted by the South, Clay joins Stephen Douglas in crafting a bi-partisan bill they hope will gain Congressional passage.

Two sticking points surface immediately. The first lies in deciding how much time should pass before a new Territory can apply for admission; the second, whether or not slaves will be permitted to arrive in advance of the application.

The South is very clear about its wishes on both counts.

It favors a long period of “Territorial” status, and one where slave owners are able to enter and settle down, well before a “pop sov” vote is taken. The Southern assumption being that “dislodging” slavery once it exists would be much more difficult than banning it in the first place.

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Date: February 5, 1850

### **The “1850 Omnibus Bill” Is Presented To Congress**

Working together the two powerful senators arrive at what is named the “Omnibus Bill,” promising the South that the future of slavery in the New Mexico and Utah Territories would be decided by “popular sovereignty” voting, and not by any blanket ban such as the Wilmot Proviso.

It also allows for settlers to immediately bring slaves into the Mexican Cession lands, while remaining intentionally vague as to the elapsed time between Territorial status and admission to statehood.

To further sweeten the pot for the South, it delivers on three more wishes that emerge in the early negotiations:

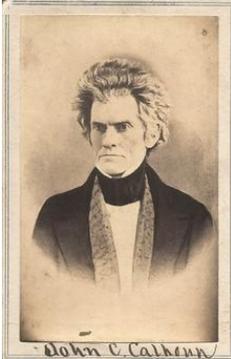
- Granting the slave state of Texas \$10 million to settle its boundary disputes with New Mexico.
- Explicitly recognizing that slave ownership (albeit not trading) will continue in DC.
- Announcing a new Fugitive Slave Law that will allow southern bounty hunters to enter northern states and forcibly remove all proven run-away slaves.

On February 5, 1850, Clay introduces his Omnibus Bill in the Senate.

What follows is a Congressional debate on slavery that rivals the 1820 Missouri Compromise in both importance and in soaring rhetoric.

It also marks the final curtain for the three long-term “giants” of the Senate – Calhoun, Webster and Clay – and the emergence of the new men who will dominate the floor for the next decade – Jeff Davis, Robert Toombs, Stephen Douglas, Henry Seward, and Charles Sumner.

## Chapter 176 – Antagonistic Congressional Debates Stymie Clay’s “Omnibus Bill”

	<b>Dates:</b> February – March 1850	<b>Sections:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Four Political Factions On Slavery Form Up In 1850</li> <li>• Freshman Congressman Thaddeus Stevens Opens The Attack On Clay’s Bill</li> <li>• Toombs Speaks For The Constitutional Unionists Across The South</li> <li>• Calhoun Weighs In For The Southern Fire-Eaters</li> <li>• Daniel Webster’s Embrace Of The Omnibus Bill Weakens His Support In New England</li> <li>• William Seward Emerges As A New Force In The Senate</li> <li>• Seward’s “Higher Law” Speech Derails Clay’s Bill</li> </ul>
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Date: February 1850

### Four Political Factions On Slavery Form Up In 1850

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

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

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

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

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

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**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Senate</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Party</b>
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

Finally, there are the “Unionist” seeking 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**

<b>Year</b>	<b>House</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Party</b>
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
	<b>Senate</b>		
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

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Date: February 20, 1850

### **Freshman Congressman Thaddeus Stevens Opens The Attack On Clay's Bill**



Thaddeus Stevens (1792-1868)

The attack on Clay's Bill by the Abolitionist forces is launched in the House on February 20, 1850 by Thaddeus Stevens of Pennsylvania.

The stern-faced Stevens arrives in Washington with a reputation as a crusader against institutions he regards as conveying unfair advantages to privileged classes over the common man. This leads to his first foray into politics in the 1830's as a leading member of the short-lived Anti-Masonic Party.

From there, he turns his fire against the Southern planter class and the practice of slavery.

His commitment to abolition develops gradually. As a young "letter of the law" attorney in 1821, he prevails on behalf of a slave-owner in recovering Charity Butler, a run-away, and her two young children. But the victory gnaws at his conscience, and shortly thereafter he buys the freedom of a slave he encounters in Maryland.

By 1835 he is speaking out in Gettysburg in favor of ending slavery and re-colonization. He attacks the 1836 "Gag rule" and urges congress to end both slave trading and ownership in DC. In an address at the May 1837 state constitutional convention he says:

*Domestic slavery in this country is the most disgraceful institution that the world has ever witnessed under any form of government in any age.....(If I) were the owner of every Southern slave, (I would) cast off the shackles from their limbs and witness the rapture...in (their) first dance of freedom.*

When his Anti-Masonic Party is dissolved in 1838, Stevens first joins Salmon Chase in the Liberty Party, before switching to the Whigs in 1844 and winning his congressional seat in 1848. In that same year he hires a freed black woman, Lydia Hamilton Smith, to be his housekeeper in the capitol and, according to some accounts, his mistress.

Stevens is famous throughout his career for biting oratory, and it is on full display when he rises on February 20 to oppose the 1850 Omnibus Bill. The target of his spleen in this case is one Richard Meade of Virginia, who has just supported the movement of slaves into the new western territories.

Stevens argues that such a move will produce the same economic and moral degradations in the west already evident across Virginia, where "breeding slaves" has become the standard way of life.

*It is now fit to be only the breeder, not the employer of slaves...Instead of searching for the best breed of cattle and horses to feed on her hills and valleys...the sons of his great state must devote their time to selecting and grooming the most lusty sires and the most fruitful wenches, to supply the slave barracoons of the South.*

Instead of an Omnibus Bill which perpetuates the evils of slavery, Stevens demands an option that abolishes the practice once and for all. He closes his speech with a final dose of spleen for those “Northern doughfaces” who surrender their moral authority to curry favor from Southern politicians and voters.

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Date: February 27, 1850

### **Toombs Speaks For The Constitutional Unionists Across The South**

Steven’s criticism is followed by that of another Whig, Robert Toombs, the dissident Georgian, who two months earlier foiled his party’s attempt to elect Winthrop as Speaker of the House.

His message captures the sense of betrayal felt by many Southern Unionists over the entire slavery debate. The 1787 Constitution sanctioned the practice, so how he asks can Northern men of honor turn their backs on the contract?

Toombs powerful February 27 critique begins by acknowledging that the North now enjoys a majority status in America that can be used to “destroy the political rights” of the South.

*Mr. Chairman: There is a general discontent among the people of fifteen states of the Union against this government...It is based upon a well-founded apprehension of a fixed purpose on the part of the non-slaveholding states of the Union to destroy their political rights.*

*The course of events, the increase of population in the Northern portion of the republic and the addition of new states, are about to give the non-slaveholding states a majority in both branches of Congress, and they have a large and increasing majority of the population of the Union.*

The only protection left for the minority South lies in “good faith” behaviors by the majority North.

*These causes have brought us to the point where we are to test the sufficiency of written constitutions to protect the rights of a minority against a majority of the people. Upon the determination of this question will depend the permanency of the government. Our security, under the Constitution, is based solely upon good faith.*

The Constitution does not allow the government to mandate slavery in the new territories, and the South is not demanding that. All it asks is to exercise its right to take its slaves into the new territory.

*We do not demand, as is constantly alleged on this floor and elsewhere, that you shall establish slavery in the territories. I have endeavored to show that you have no power to do so.*

*Slavery is a ‘fixed fact’ in your system.*

*We ask protection from all hostile impediments to the introduction and peaceful enjoyment of all our property in the territories. Whether these impediments arise from foreign laws or from any pretended domestic authority, we hold it to be your duty to remove them.*

Toombs argues that the proposed Omnibus Bill simply strengthens the Northern majority, while offering none of the important protections the South wants and deserves – and hence it cannot be supported.

*The bill now before us for the admission of California...settles nothing but the addition of another Non-slaveholding state to the Union, thus giving the predominating interest additional power to settle the territorial questions which it leaves unadjusted.*

*In this state of the question it cannot receive my support.*

In the beginning the South signed on for both the Union and the Constitution; the former cannot be sustained without adherence to the latter.

*We are now daily threatened with every form of extermination if we do not tamely acquiesce in whatever legislation the majority may choose to impose upon us.*

*Gentlemen may spare their threats...the sentiment of every true man of the South will be, we took the Union and the Constitution together and we will have both or we will have neither.*

*The cry of the Union is the masked battery from behind which the Constitution and the rights of the South are to be assailed*

Toombs declares that he has never cast a sectional vote in Congress and never will.

*I have never yet given a sectional vote in these halls. Whenever the state of public opinion in my own section...shall incapacitate me from supporting the true interests of the whole nation...I will surrender a trust which I can no longer hold with honor.*

*The first act of legislative hostility to slavery is the proper point for Southern resistance.*

The South came to the Union with its slavery and seeks the protection owed it by the North.

*You owe us protection (from interference). We had our institutions when you sought our alliance. We were content with them then, and we are content with them now. We have not sought to thrust them upon you. (So) why do you fear our equal competition with you in the territories?*

All being asked for is equal treatment of all settlers, then a free election to decide the slavery question.

*We ask only that our common government shall protect us both equally until the territories shall be ready to be admitted as states into the Union, then to leave their citizens free to adopt any domestic policy which in their judgment...may best promote their happiness. The demand is just, (but) I see no reasonable prospect that you will grant it.*

*The action of this House is demonstrating that we are in the midst of a legislative revolution, the object to trample under foot the Constitution...and to make the will of the majority the supreme law of the land.*

The duty of Southerners is to stand by the Constitution until it is proven powerless to protect – at which time it must abandon the Union and stand by its arms.

*In this emergency our duty is clear: it is to stand by the Constitution and the laws until demonstrated that the Constitution is powerless for our protection.*

*It will then not only be the right but the duty of the slaveholding states to seek new safeguards for their future security ...to prevent the application of the resources of the republic to the maintenance of the wrongful act.*

*I appeal in the language of a distinguished Georgian who yet lives to arouse the hearts of his countrymen to resist wrong: when arguments are exhausted, we will stand by our arms.*

Toombs's speech captures the key arguments of the Southern dissidents who will go on to form the Constitutional Union Party:

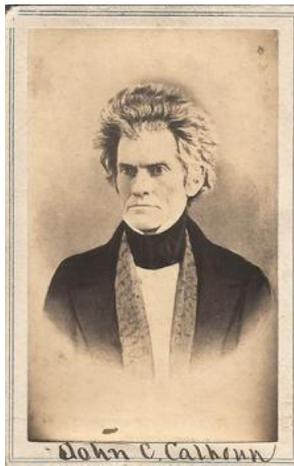
- The institution of slavery was sanctioned in the 1787 contract between the original thirteen states;
- The minority South is now at the mercy of the majority North to abide by the established rules;
- This will require compromises from the North over slavery in order to preserve the sacred Union.

But within this context, Toombs signals his faction's willingness to accept the "popular sovereignty" option as a fair way to decide on slavery in the west.

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Date: March 4, 1850

### **Calhoun Weighs In For The Southern Fire-Eaters**



John C. Calhoun (1782-1850)

For the Fire-Eaters of the South, Toombs' "solution" is both naïve and inadequate.

Their leading spokesman is John C. Calhoun of South Carolina, who is dying from tuberculosis when it is his turn to open debate on the Omnibus Bill in the Senate.

On March 4, 1850, only 27 days before he succumbs, Calhoun struggles into the chamber for the last time, in a final attempt to "ask for simple justice" for those in the South. He has served his nation over four decades since being elected to the House in 1811. His record includes eight years as Secretary of War under Monroe, seven years as Vice President under Adams and then Jackson, one year as Secretary of State under Tyler, and another seventeen years in congress representing South Carolina.

Despite all this, the one position he wants most, the presidency, has eluded him over questions about his party loyalties. At one moment he is tied to the Federalist Adams and then the Whig Clay. His credentials as a Democrat are tarnished when Jackson turns against him, and when he begins to call for Southern secession. In the end, all sides respect his towering intellect, but few trust his motives or appreciate his overbearing demeanor.

When recognized to speak on the Omnibus Bill, Calhoun is too weak to proceed, and asks his friend, James Mason of Virginia, to stand in for him.

The themes Mason announces are vintage Calhoun. As he sees it, Congress has been usurped by an anti-slavery fringe group that represents less than 5% of all people in the North, and is now forcing the South to choose between abolishing slavery and seceding from the Union.

The address begins ominously on the prospect of “disunion.”

*I have, Senators, believed from the first that the agitation of the subject of slavery would, if not prevented by some timely and effective measure, end in disunion.*

The rest plays out Calhoun’s well known theme that what began with regional “equilibrium” in 1787 has now shifted to Northern dominance and unfair treatment of the South. To prove his point, he says that the boundary prohibitions set on slavery will disqualify the South from access to three-quarters of the nation’s public land.

*The United States, since they declared their independence, have acquired 2,373,046 square miles of territory, from which the North will have excluded the South, if she should succeed in monopolizing the newly-acquired Territories, about three-fourths of the whole, leaving to the South but about one-fourth. Such is the first and great cause that has destroyed the equilibrium between the two sections in the government.*

In addition he claims that the South has always been deprived of its fair share of incoming federal revenue which has been driven largely through cash generated by its cotton export industry.

*The next is the system of revenue and disbursements which has been adopted by the government. It is well known that the government has derived its revenue mainly from duties on imports. The South, as the great exporting portion of the Union, has in reality paid vastly more than her due proportion of the revenue -- an immense amount of which in the long course of sixty years has been transferred from South to North. It is safe to say that it amounts to hundreds of millions of dollars -- adding greatly to the wealthy of the North, and increasing her population by attracting immigration from all quarters to that section.*

Calhoun says that these violations of the South’s “honor and safety” must end if the Union is to be saved – and that the path to “simple justice” lies in abiding by the promises made in the Constitution.

*How can the Union be saved? By adopting such measures as will satisfy the States belonging to the Southern section that they can remain in the Union consistently with their honor and their safety. The South asks for justice, simple justice, and less she ought not to take. She has no compromise to offer but the Constitution, and no concession or surrender to make. She has already surrendered so much that she has little left to surrender.*

Like Toombs, he says that the time has come to “cease the agitation of the slave question” and restore the original equality between the North and the South.

*The North has only to will it to accomplish it—to do justice by conceding to the South an equal right in the acquired territory, and to do her duty by causing the stipulations relative to fugitive slaves to be faithfully fulfilled--to cease the agitation of the slave question, and to provide for the insertion of a provision in the Constitution, by an amendment, which will restore to the South, in substance, the power she possessed of protecting herself before the equilibrium between the sections was destroyed by the action of this government.*

Finally he closes with words that move supporters and opponents alike -- his final reflection on a long life in public office.

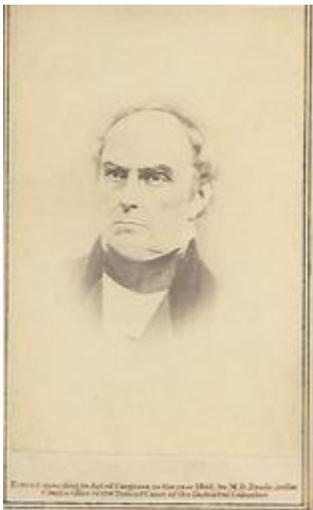
*Having faithfully done my duty to the best of my ability, both to the Union and my section, throughout this agitation, I shall have the consolation, let what will come, that I am free from all responsibility.*

After this farewell speech, Calhoun returns to the Old Brick Boarding House in DC, where he dies on March 31 at age 68 years. His body is returned to Charleston where parades and speeches at The Citadel and City Hall dominate the city for two days until his final burial at St. Phillips Episcopal Church.

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Date: March 7, 1850

### **Daniel Webster's Embrace Of The Omnibus Bill Weakens His Support In New England**



The next critical juncture in the debate belongs to Massachusetts Senator Daniel Webster, and his support for the Omnibus Bill proves shocking to his many supporters.

“Black Dan” is renowned as a hard drinker and fast liver, with a dominant personality, withering visage and litigator’s voice, and an unerring capacity to forever strike the right emotional chords in making his case.

His brilliant career as a constitutional lawyer has included many such cases, including over 200 appearances before the Supreme Court and a string of landmark victories. Most are antithetical to the South, involving institutions which it distrusts – big corporations and big banks -- or backing federal jurisdiction over states’ rights.

Daniel Webster (1782-1852)

- Dartmouth College v Woodward. Corporations do need not serve the public interest in order to enjoy the privileges granted in their charters.
- McCulloch v Maryland. States cannot impose taxes on federal entities, such as The U.S. Bank.
- Gibbons v Ogden. The federal government, not the states, has final power to regulate interstate commerce.
- Cohens v Virginia. Federal courts have the right to review all state decisions in criminal cases.

As a Federalist and then a Whig politician over four decades, Webster has also stood with the New England industrialists for a restrictive tariff and government spending on infrastructure, and against both the Texas annexation and the Mexican War.

When he rises to address the Senate on March 7, he seems an unlikely candidate to assuage Southern fears and to sell Clay’s compromise. But, instead of confrontation, his brief is nothing but conciliatory toward the South.

His opening declaration immediately mesmerizes the audience.

*I wish to speak today not as a Massachusetts man, nor as a Northern man, but as an American..... I speak for the preservation of the Union. Hear me for my cause.*

He decides to simply ignore Calhoun's attacks on federal taxing and spending policies.

*The honorable Senator from South Carolina (argues) that the North has prospered at the expense of the South in consequence of the manner of administering this government, in the collecting of its revenues, and so forth. These are disputed topics, and I have no inclination to enter into them.*

Instead he goes right to the issue of slavery, arguing that "men of good conscience" exist on both sides. While some see it as morally wrong, it's not banned in the New Testament, and, in general, the Southern tradition is to treat those in bondage with "care and kindness."

*The separation of that great religious community, the Methodist Episcopal Church... (shows that) upon the general nature and influence of slavery there exists a wide difference of opinion... Although not the subject of any injunction in the New Testament, (many feel) slavery is a wrong. The South, upon the other side, having been accustomed to this relation between two races all their lives (and) having been taught, in general, to treat the subjects of this bondage with care and kindness... do not see the unlawfulness of slavery.*

From there he lashes out against the Abolitionists, who have "produced nothing good" over twenty years, and whose "agitation and impatience" have retarded "the slow moral improvement of mankind."

*Then, Sir, there are the Abolition societies, (about) which I have very clear notions and opinions. I do not think them useful. I think their operations for the last twenty years have produced nothing good or valuable.*

*They created great agitation in the North against Southern slavery. Well, what was the result? Public opinion, which in Virginia had begun to be exhibited against slavery, and was opening out for the discussion, drew back and shut itself up in its castle.*

*They are apt to think that nothing is good but what is perfect, and that there are no compromises or modifications to be made in consideration of difference of opinion or in deference to other men's judgment.*

*There are impatient men; too impatient always to give heed to the admonition of St. Paul, that we are not to "do evil that good may come"; too impatient to wait for the slow progress of moral causes in the improvement of mankind...*

Not only are these radicals misguided, but also those Northerners who shirk their "constitutional duty" to return escaped slaves to their rightful owners. Here is Webster the full throated "property lawyer" in action.

*I will allude to (one) other complaints of the South, which has in my opinion just foundation; and that is, a disinclination among some individuals and among legislators in the North to perform fully their constitutional duties in regard to the return of persons bound to service who have escaped into the free States. In that respect, the South, in my judgment, is right, and the North is wrong.*

*I put it to all the sober and sound minds at the North as a question of morals and a question of conscience. What right have they, in their legislative capacity or any other capacity, to endeavor to get round this Constitution, or to embarrass the free exercise of the rights secured by the Constitution to the persons whose slaves escape from them? None at all; none at all.*

As he winds down, Webster's passion is elevated and, once again, he is every inch the Unionist, repeating his 1830 plea to embrace harmony and cast aside secession.

*Mr. President, I hear with distress and anguish the word "secession." I see as plainly as I see the sun in heaven what that disruption itself must produce; I see that it must produce war, and such a war as I will not describe.*

*Peaceable secession! There can be no such thing as peaceable secession. Peaceable secession is an utter impossibility.*

*What is to remain American? What am I to be? An American no longer? Am I to become a sectional man, a local man, a separatist, with no country in common with the gentlemen who sit around me here, or who fill the other house of Congress? Heaven forbid! Where is the flag of the republic to remain? Where is the eagle still to tower? Or is she to cower, and shrink, and fall to the ground?*

*Can anybody suppose that this population can be severed, by a line that divides them from the territory of a foreign and alien government, down somewhere, the Lord knows where, upon the lower banks of the Mississippi? What would become of Missouri? Will she join the arrondissement of the slave States? Shall the man from the Yellow Stone and the Platte be connected, in the new republic, with the man who lives on the southern extremity of the Cape of Florida?*

*Sir, I am ashamed to pursue this line of remark. I dislike it, I have an utter disgust for it. I would rather hear of natural blasts and mildews, war, pestilence, and famine, than to hear gentlemen talk of secession. To break up this great government! To dismember this glorious country! To astonish Europe with an act of folly such as Europe for two centuries has never beheld in any government or any people! No, Sir! no, Sir! There will be no secession! Gentlemen are not serious when they talk of secession...*

*And now, Mr. President, instead of speaking of secession, let us come out into the light of day. Never did there devolve on any generation of men higher trusts than now devolve upon us, for the preservation of this Constitution and the harmony and peace of all who are destined to live under it.*

In the end, Webster's March 7 speech comes down on the side of Clay and Crittenden – the old men of his generation -- who have lived through the birth of the nation and can't quite grasp the multifaceted and intractable differences that now divide the North and the South.

Critics claim that he has sold out to the South in the hope of winning a Whig presidential nomination in 1852.

Lloyd Garrison lashes out, accusing Webster of “bending his supple knee anew to the Slave Power.” Other abolitionists follow, most notably the poet, John Greenleaf Whittier, who pens the following:

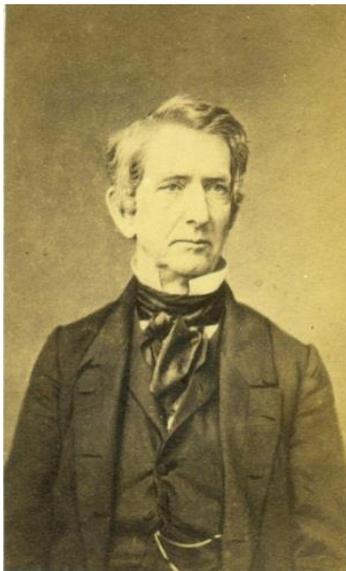
*Of all we loved and honored, nought save power remains.  
A fallen angel’s pride of thought, still strong in chains.  
All else is gone from those great eyes, the sould has fled,  
When faith is lost, when honor dies, the man is dead.*

While Webster breathes additional life into the Omnibus Bill, his support of the Fugitive Slave Act portion will cost him dearly, especially in Massachusetts, and, like Calhoun, he will forever be denied his nomination for the presidency.

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Date: March 11, 1850

### **William Seward Emerges As A New Force In The Senate**



William H. Seward (1801-1872)

With Webster’s support on the record, Clay is optimistic that his Omnibus Bill will be approved in the Senate.

His hopes, however, are shattered exactly four days later when another of his fellow Whigs, William Seward of New York, rises to make his maiden speech in Congress.

The diminutive Seward has led the proverbial “silver spoon in his mouth” life, from his birth into a wealthy NY family, through his first-in-class graduation from Union College and his marriage to Frances Miller, whose father brings him into a thriving law practice and sets the couple up on their lifelong estate in Auburn, NY.

He is first drawn into politics by Thurlow Weed, the newspaperman, joins the Anti-Masonic Party and wins a seat in the NY state senate in 1830. In 1838 he is elected Governor of NY and moves steadily upward to the U.S. Senate in 1848.

His aversion to slavery begins in his youth.

Seward’s father owns slaves, and he mixes with them on a daily basis as a youth. Bondage strikes him as unfair, and this belief is amplified dramatically in adulthood when he and Frances, vacationing in northern Virginia, encounter the realities of slave sales and corporal punishment. After this 1835 trip, Frances becomes an abolitionist, and Seward begins to speak publicly against slavery.

Still he is not yet a dedicated Abolitionist by 1850. Nor is he among the very small band of Assimilationists like Lloyd Garrison, William Birney, Lucretia Mott, John Brown and others who have lived among blacks and can see a day when they are fully integrated into the social fabric.

Instead, like Lincoln, Seward is simply convinced that slavery is morally evil, and is ready to block any actions to allow it to spread outside of the old South.

His opposition in this regard is especially important because he and his supporter Thurlow Weed both have the ear of President Zachary Taylor. The fact that all three want to see the Omnibus Bill defeated shows how fractured the Whigs are on the slavery issue, and how much Clay's control within the party has eroded over time.

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Date: March 11, 1850

### **Seward's "Higher Law" Speech Derails Clay's Bill**

Seward's speech before the Senate on March 11, 1850, is a stinging indictment of his fellow Whigs, Clay and Webster, and of the proposed Compromise.

He begins by acknowledging Calhoun, and countering his arguments on behalf of "equilibrium" between the states (i.e. half should be free; half slave). The Constitution says no such things, according to Seward.

*The honorable senator from South Carolina, argues that the Constitution was founded on the equilibrium (of states) and recognizes property in slaves.*

*The proposition of an established classification of states as slave states and free states, seems to me purely imaginary. This must be so, because, when the Constitution was adopted, twelve of the thirteen states were slave states, and so there was no equilibrium. ...*

He then turns to the "slaves are property" assertion and, like several founders back in 1787, hoists the South on contradictions inherent in the 3/5<sup>th</sup> clause. If slaves were truly property, like cattle or horses, they should count as zero in the census. In arguing for a 3/5ths count, surely the South was seeing them as inhabitants of the country, albeit lesser in value than the whites.

*I submit that the Constitution not merely does not affirm the "slave as property" principle, but, on the contrary, altogether excludes it.*

*The Constitution regards (slaves) as inhabitants, debased below the level of free inhabitants, but only by two-fifths. The remaining three-fifths leaves them still an inhabitant, a person, a living, breathing, moving, reasoning, immortal man.*

Seward then makes an assertion which immortalizes his speech – the belief that man is accountable to "a higher law than the Constitution," the law of the Creator, which dictates against slavery.

*But there is a higher law than the Constitution, which regulates our authority over the domain, and ... is bestowed upon us by the Creator of the universe. We are his stewards.*

*And now the simple, bold, and even awful question which presents itself to us is this... shall we establish human bondage, or permit it by our sufferance to be established? Sir, our forefathers would not have hesitated an hour. They found slavery existing here, and they left it only because they could not remove it. There is not only no free state which would now establish it, but there is no slave state, which, if it had had the free alternative as we now have, would have founded slavery.*

*I confess that the most alarming evidence of our degeneracy which has yet been given is found in the fact that we even debate such a question.*

*I cannot consent to introduce slavery into any part of this continent which is now exempt from what seems to me so great an evil. These are my reasons for declining to compromise the question relating to slavery as a condition of the admission of California.*

In turn, he encourages America to join other Christian nations like Britain and France in gradually abandoning slavery.

*Sir, there is no Christian nation, thus free to choose as we are, which would establish slavery. I speak on due consideration because Britain, France, and Mexico, have abolished slavery, and all other European states are preparing to abolish it as speedily as they can.*

Seward argues that his position on slavery places him in the moderate camp, unlike others who are threatening sectional harmony – those who demand an overnight end to slavery and those who wish to make it permanent.

*We hear on one side demands-- absurd, indeed, but yet unceasing--for an immediate and unconditional abolition of slavery--as if any power, except the people of the slave states, could abolish it, and as if they could be moved to abolish it by merely sounding the trumpet loudly and proclaiming emancipation.*

*On the other hand, our statesmen say that "slavery has always existed, and, for aught they know or can do, it always must exist. God permitted it, and he alone can indicate the way to remove it." As if the Supreme Creator... did not leave us in all human transactions, with due invocations of his Holy Spirit, to seek out his will and execute it for ourselves.*

*Here, then, is the point of my separation from both of these parties.*

*I feel assured that slavery must give way, and will give way... that emancipation is inevitable...*

*But I will adopt none but lawful, constitutional, and peaceful means, to secure even that end; and none such can I or will I forego.*

*No free state claims to extend its legislation into a slave state. None claims that Congress shall usurp power to abolish slavery in the slave states. None claims that any violent, unconstitutional, or unlawful measure shall be embraced.*

*But you reply that, nevertheless, you must have guaranties; and the first one is for the surrender of fugitives from labor. That guaranty you cannot have, as I have already shown, because you cannot roll back the tide of social progress. ...*

Finally, and naively, Seward dismisses the warnings from Calhoun and Webster that the slavery issue could lead on to disunion.

*There will be no disunion and no secession.*

*Let, then, those who distrust the Union make compromises to save it.*

*I shall not impeach their wisdom, as I certainly cannot their patriotism; but, indulging no such apprehensions myself, I shall vote for the admission of California directly, without conditions, without qualifications, and without compromise. ...*

In the end, Seward offers the South nothing at all in exchange for admitting California as a free state.

Even the notion of a “popular sovereignty” vote in favor of slavery is dismissed in Seward’s “higher law” formulation.

Which leaves Wilmot’s flat-out ban on slavery in the west as Seward’s only answer.

In effect, this speech on March 11 signals the death knell for the bill that Clay has put forward.

It’s now up to the various sides to search for a new solution.

## Chapter 177 – More Public Violence Marks The Growing Debate Over Slavery



**Dates:**  
April 17 to May 8, 1850

- Sections:**
- More Violence Breaks Out On The Floor Of The Senate
  - Mob Attacks American Anti-Slavery Society Convention In NYC

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Date: April 17, 1850

### More Violence Breaks Out On The Floor Of The Senate



Henry Foote (1804-1880)

With Clay and Douglas off searching for a new California bill, rhetorical violence on the floor of the Senate gives way to physical violence.

The spark occurs on April 17 after a speech by Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri who argues for immediate admission of California, without all the controversial off-sets proposed by Clay.

Benton's position reflects his shifting attitude toward slavery. This begins in 1835 when he emancipates one of his slaves, a woman named Sarah, in return for "14 years of loyal service." From there he progressively comes to question the impact of the institution on American society. As he says in 1849:

*If there was no slavery in Missouri today, I should oppose its coming in.*

For the men of the South, Benton's position mirrors the betrayal they see with President Taylor. Two confirmed slave holders turning their backs on the traditions and economic well-being of their region.

One man particularly upset by Benton is Henry Foote of Mississippi.

Foote is a relative newcomer to the Senate, but his reputation as a constant agitator is already well established. Over the years he has fought four formal duels, being wounded himself three times. His lesser battles will include fist fights with three colleagues, Senators Jefferson Davis of Mississippi, Simon Cameron of Pennsylvania and Solon Borland of Arkansas.

Ironically, Foote, like Benton, is a fierce Unionist. He regards every day of bickering over slavery on the floor as a threat to holding the nation together.

His limited patience with debating the issue runs out on April 17, when Benton balks at being ruled out of order by Vice President Millard Fillmore. Foote inserts himself into the dialogue, calling Benton out directly, absent the usual senatorial courtesy.

In turn, Benton rises abruptly, knocking over a tumbler on his desk and rushes toward Foote's seat as others try to block him. Foote retreats toward the well and goes for a long rifle barreled pistol he is carrying. He cocks it and points toward Benton. Others grab the gun from Foote, but Benton sees it, opens his coat to show that he is unarmed, then roars: "let the damned assassin shoot!"

After both men are restrained and pushed back to their desks, amidst shouts for order, Vice-President Fillmore adjourns the session before any further damage can be done.

This incident, however, demonstrates once again just how explosive divisions over slavery have become among the national politicians in Washington.

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Date: May 7-8, 1850

### **Mob Attacks American Anti-Slavery Society Convention In NYC**



James Gordon Bennett (1795-1872)

Three weeks after the Benton-Foote incident, another violent confrontation occurs in New York City, this one involving the public rather than the politicians.

The venue is the Broadway Tabernacle where the American Anti-Slavery Society is holding its annual convention. The event is well publicized in response to planned appearances by Frederick Douglass and Lloyd Garrison.

Among those displeased by this congregation of abolitionists is James Gordon Bennett, founder in 1838 of the *New York Herald*, which soon boasts the largest circulation in the nation. Bennett is known for his honest reporting and for a host of innovations, especially in the coverage of financial news and cultural events. His conservative leanings, however, make him suspicious of abolitionists, as threats to the Union and to the reputation of the city.

For several days in advance of the Society event, the *Herald's* editorials encourage the public to turn out to "frown down these mad people" and discourage their "dangerous assemblies."

One who takes this literally is a Tammany operative named Isaiah “Captain” Rynders, who sets out to disrupt the convention.

On May 7, 1850, Rynders climbs on stage during Garrison’s opening address and demands to be given equal time to rebut his comments about the church’s failure to speak out against slavery. After Garrison agrees for the sake of order, Rynders sends up one “Professor Grant” whose racist harangue asserts that all negroes are “brother to the monkey.”

When Frederick Douglass rises to differ with “Grant,” Rynders says that his talents are explained by the fact that his mother was white. Douglass counters with humor, referring to Rynders as his half-brother.

A humiliated Rynders returns to the church on the second day with a mob that continues to disrupt every speaker. Wendell Phillips talk is broken by chants of “Traitor, Traitor!” and Garrison is mocked as a religious fanatic. After members of the city police in the hall side with Rynders, the meeting is adjourned to prevent physical violence.

Bennett is satisfied with the outcome and the *Herald* reports:

*Thus closed anti-slavery free discussion in New York for 1850.*

Other coverage is more sympathetic to the event sponsors, not because of their views on slavery, but rather a shared sense that their civil liberties had been abused by the mob.

## Chapter 178 – The Clayton-Bulwer Treaty Avoids A U.S.- U.K. Confrontation In Central America



**Dates:**  
April 19, 1850

**Sections:**  
• Two International Powers Vie For Influence In Central America

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Date: April 19, 1850

### Two International Powers Vie For Influence In Central America

While Congress is debating statehood for California, individual and corporate entrepreneurs are eager to find a fast and affordable route to reaching the riches of its gold fields.

One path lies in a sea voyage from the East coast around the tip of South America at Cape Horn to San Francisco which can be completed in 25-30 days -- but the typical \$400 fare is prohibitive for most adventurers.

An option that has proven intriguing lies in connecting the Atlantic and Pacific oceans by constructing a continuous waterway across either Nicaragua or Panama. In both locations the oceans are separated by land masses that extend only 50-150 miles, with rivers and lakes facilitating linkage, were canals to be constructed.

Such an undertaking is first explored in 1825 by commercial and military interests seeking a short-cut to the Pacific. At that time, surveyors map out a potential route for a canal in Nicaragua, but it is subsequently set aside given the costs and complexities.

But the California gold rush resurrects interest in 1849 which extends beyond the United States to nations in Europe, most notably Great Britain, which continues to have land claims along the eastern coast of Honduras and Nicaragua, and to the west, at San Juan, a likely end point for a canal.

In order to avoid any future tensions between America and Britain over such a canal, Secretary of State John Clayton and British minister Sir Henry Bulwer negotiate a treaty guaranteeing that:



*Neither country will seek territorial dominion over Nicaragua or any other country in Central America; and any canal or other path across the isthmus will be open for equal use by both nations.*

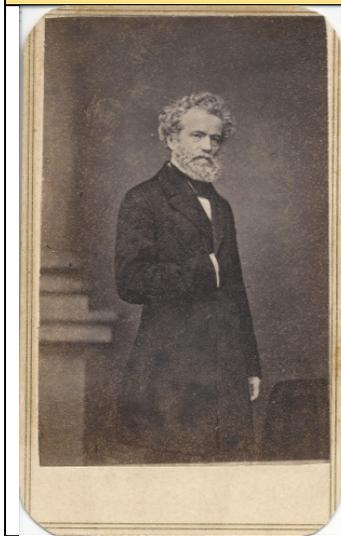
Map Showing Possible Sites For A Canal In Nicaragua

The Clayton-Bulwer Treaty is ratified by a 42-11 vote in the Senate on April 19, 1850. As such it becomes the one foreign policy achievement during Zachary Taylor's presidency.

Over time, however, it also generates criticism among hard-liners who argue that it weakens the total "hands-off" warning codified in the 1823 Monroe Doctrine.

(Note: plans for a Nicaragua Canal to rival the 1914 Panama Canal continue to the present day.)

## Chapter 179 – An Early Filibustering Expedition To Create A Caribbean Slave Empire Is Thwarted



**Dates:**  
1846 Forward

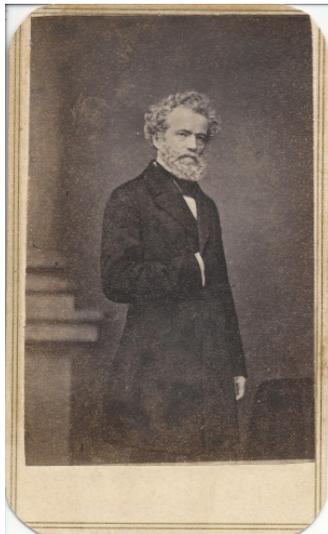
**Sections:**

- Targets Outside The U.S. For The Expansion Of Slavery
- Spain Thwarts Narciso Lopez Invasions Of Cuba

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Date: 1846 Forward

### Targets Outside The U.S. For The Expansion Of Slavery



John Quitman (1798-1858 )

If some Americans are interested in territory to the south to construct an Atlantic-Pacific canal, others view this land through the prism of expanding slavery.

They comprise a cadre of Southerners who envision a vast Caribbean Slave Empire extending from Mexico to Central America and across the Gulf to the West Indies.

Such an empire would be realized through a series of filibustering expeditions, led by America conquistadors drawn from the ranks of Mexican War military professionals.

Its strategic purpose lies in providing the South with new paths to economic growth should Northerners decide to curtail the expansion of slavery into New Mexico and California.

An early proponent of the filibustering movement is ex-General John Quitman.

A New Yorker by birth, Quitman migrates in 1821 to Natchez, a Mississippi River town that is briefly the state's capitol, as well as jumping off point for the "Natchez Trace," a prehistoric pathway leading 440 miles east to Nashville. Once there, his legal practices flourishes, he joins the militia, enters state politics, and purchases *Monmouth Plantation*, in sight of one of the nation's largest slave trading hubs.

When the Mexican War breaks out, Quitman earns national fame as Brigadier General serving under both Taylor and Scott and accepting the surrender of Chapultepec Castle. He is briefly the Military Governor of Mexico City and argues in favor of annexing the entire country.

After that, Quitman returns to Mississippi, where he builds his reputation as a Southern “Fire-Eater” and wins the 1850 election for state Governor.

Early in his term, Quitman is approached by a Venezuela born adventurer named Narciso Lopez who is seeking support for an invasion of Cuba.

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Date: May 1850 to August 1851

### **Spain Thwarts Narciso Lopez Invasions Of Cuba**

America’s wish to acquire Cuba traces back for decades.

Thomas Jefferson signals his interest in 1820, and John Quincy Adams approaches Spain’s ambassador about an acquisition off and on during his eight year tenure as Secretary of State, under Monroe.

In 1848, President Polk authorizes U.S. Ambassador Romulus Saunders to begin purchase negotiations for “up to \$100 million” – but Spain refuses to part with its lucrative sugarcane and coffee operations.

At this point, Narciso Lopez enters the picture with a proposal to Polk for taking Cuba by force.

Lopez is fifty years old at the time, with a prior record of having fought with Spain against Simon Bolivar’s crusade to liberate Latin America, and then, in 1843, alongside the Cubans in their early battles to escape the Spanish yoke.

Lopez flees to America in 1848 after his “Cuban Rose Mine” conspiracy is thwarted.

Once there he continues to seek support for his invasion plan. Polk has already turned him down, and Zachary Taylor follows suit in August 1849. He then shifts his attention to Southern military men, but is also rebuffed by Jefferson Davis and Robert E. Lee before Governor Quitman encourages him to proceed.

In May 1850, he assembles some 600 men – mostly veterans of the Mexican War – in New Orleans, and sets sail for Cuba. His force lands on the north coast at Cardenas, some 90 miles east of Havana. He captures the town, but finds little local support there and decides to turn back upon hearing that a large force of Spanish troops is approaching.

Upon his return to America, it is Quitman who pays the price for the invasion – being arrested for violating the 1817 Neutrality Act and forced to resign his Mississippi governorship in February 1851, before being acquitted in three separate trials that all end with hung juries.

Still Lopez is undeterred, and fifteen months later, in August 1851, he returns with a smaller force of 400 men and lands on the far western edge of the island, at Pinar del Rio. After failing again to rally the locals, he is captured this time by the Spanish. On September 1, 1851, he is strapped into a chair and garroted to death at the public square in Havana.

Fifty other Americans are shot at the same time, including “Colonel” William Crittenden, nephew of the then Attorney General, John J. Crittenden.

It remains uncertain whether Lopez intends to rule Cuba in his own name or have it annexed into the United States – but, either way, the tradition of slavery will remain in place.

The failure of the filibustering expedition of 1851 does not put an end to the wish among Southerners to wrest control over Cuba from Spain. It surfaces again in 1854 in the “Ostend Manifesto” prepared by members of the Pierce administration, which calls for the use of force, if need be, to occupy the island. When made public, however, the Manifesto is roundly opposed in the North, thus ending talk of aggressive action.

Still Cuba remains a critical trading partner with America in the decades ahead. By 1894, some 90% of Cuba’s exports go the United States, with only 6% shipped to Spain. In that same year, the journalist and poet, Jose Marti, initiates a revolution to drive out the Spaniards. America enters the war in May of 1898, landing at Guantanamo Bay. Spain soon surrenders and the December Treaty of Paris finally secures Cuban independence. In 1903 Cuba agrees to lease the naval base at Guantanamo Bay to the U.S. in perpetuity for an annual payment of \$2,000. Over a century later that arrangement remains in place.

## Chapter 180 – The Nashville Convention Fails To Support A Call For Secession



**Dates:**  
June 3-11, 1850

**Sections:**  
• One More Effort Fails To Align The Southern States

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Date: June 3-11, 1850

### One More Fire-Eater Effort Fails To Align The Southern States



“Merchant’s Day” In Downtown Nashville, Tennessee

John C. Calhoun’s final speech to the Senate, before his death on March 31, 1850, calls for the South to gather together to address the obvious threat he sees in the admission of California as a Free State.

His wish is fulfilled in early June, when a “Southern Convention” convenes at the McKendree Methodist Church in Nashville.

Attendance, however, is uneven and foreshadows the outcome. Only five of the fifteen total “slave states” send official representatives: Mississippi, South Carolina, Virginia, Georgia and Texas. Four others (Alabama, Arkansas, Florida and Tennessee) send “observers” – while the remaining six states (Delaware, Maryland, Kentucky, Missouri, North Carolina and Louisiana) stay home.

The agenda is devoted to yet another attempt by the firebrands to unify and rally the South against what they see as the rising tide of “Northern aggression.”

One sponsor is Governor John Quitman of Mississippi, who has just secretly backed the filibustering invasion of Narciso Lopez in Cuba. Quitman and his supporters hope that Nashville will lead to secession, which is the South’s “constitutional right.”

At the convention, the Fire-Eaters ring the alarms of Southern disaster on the horizon:

- The future economic prosperity of the South rests on the demand for, and prices of, their cotton and their slaves.
- The only way to secure this demand lies in extending slavery into the west.
- The North is now firmly committed to opposing this expansion.
- The only way to avoid looming economic disaster is to secede.

But again they are met by the Unionists who regard secession as too extreme – even traitorous – and want to keep pushing for compromise.

The meeting drags on over nine days, before it closes with 28 resolutions, among them assertions that slavery is sanctioned by the Constitution, that Clay’s Compromise Bill is to be resisted, and that the best alternative lies in extending the 36’30” Missouri Line to the Pacific.

These are all a far cry from the firebrand’s call for secession.

Instead they signal the majority wish across the South for a peaceful compromise.