

Hudson Moll

Why were the decisions made in the 1850s pushing us towards a Civil War?

The first reason is that laws were used to make decisions. The constitution made it a law that fugitive slaves must be returned (1793); however, the North passed Liberty Laws in 1850 that stated man's liberty could not be taken away, even for slaves. This highlights the North's attempts to overrule laws supporting slavery by creating new laws. The Compromise of 1850 abolished the slave trade in Washington D.C. It also admitted California as a free state, even though part of it was under the 36, 30 line. This demonstrates that the North would attempt to win any battles, no matter how small, against slavery by slowly removing it and compromising. Along with the Compromise of 1850 came a new Fugitive Slave Act that was passed. In this act, anyone trying to impede or prevent slaves from being captured and returned, or aiding the slaves, could receive criminal punishment. This exposes how the South wanted to thwart any slave's attempt to gain freedom using legal force, and they would punish the North if they tried to help black people gain it. When assessing the legal battle ensuing in the 50s, it can be decided that an enraging legal battle was splitting the nation and would soon reach a tipping point where words could no longer resolve the issue, only actions, such as a Civil War.

The Supreme Court ruled that African Americans could never become a citizen of the US after Dred Scott tried to sue for his freedom. Officers were hired to catch slaves and could even receive bonuses; any free blacks became slaves because fugitives could not claim a trial by jury or represent themselves in a court of law. This emphasizes that the South believed not just slaves should not have freedom, but all black people. This enraged many Northerners and abolitionists, such as John Brown who was a Northerner abolitionist and was involved in the conflict of the Kansas-Nebraska act. In court, he gave a five-minute speech about his views to the world before he was hanged on December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1859. This demonstrates that Northerners were willing to die for the cause of freedom and spread their message. Harriet Beecher Stowe was a Southerner, but she was an influential, abolitionist writer. Her book, Uncle Tom's Cabin, sold over 300,000 copies in 1852. This proves there were abolitionists enraged by the decisions made all over the country, even in the South, and slavery became a popular topic that filled nearly every home across America. When weighing the decisions of Abolitionists made in response to decisions about slavery and freedom, it is evident that they were willing to stand up for those who couldn't, and they wanted to open the eyes of the country and the world. This foreshadows that abolitionists and Northerners were prepared to fight over these decisions in a Civil War.

The decision to pass the Kansas-Nebraska Act led to further violence and division of Congress and the country. Senator Chase claimed the Kansas-Nebraska Act was a "gross violation of a sacred pledge." Sumner was caned nearly to death after stating Kansas was being "raped" because of the Kansas-Nebraska Act. The tone and quotes from Congress meetings underline the tension rising over national decisions, even in a civil place, and they emphasize the division and importance of these decisions. This suggests the parties were so divided and enraged against each other that they could no longer peacefully solve the issue. Kansas' population went from around 1000 in 1854 to over 8000 in 1855, largely due to border ruffians coming from the bordering state of Missouri to illegally influence votes and decisions using violence, fear, and persuasion. Anti-slavery and pro-slavery constitutions were formed, and less than 200 people were killed over the decision of Kansas' state status. This exposes how Kansas was a similitude of the future Civil War, and the North and South had reached a point where they would shed blood to get their way. John Brown led 22 people, white and black, to overthrow a US

arsenal in Harpers Ferry. After a brief skirmish, General Lee's troops of the South killed eight of the rebels and injured John Brown. This demonstrates how the North opposed the South and slavery so much that they believed a rebellion would be the only proper solution. It also foreshadows the sides in the upcoming Civil War, one of which was led by General Lee. When gauging the examples of violence presented, the reader can understand that slavery is a wild fire that spread to the hearts of every citizen, and enraged them in a fury of madness against each other. Peace was no longer an option; only violence could resolve the division and reunite the nation. The decisions made in the 1850s were sparks in a violent fire that ravaged the nation.