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Period 3

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

One decision that pushed us towards the Civil War was violating the Missouri Compromise. The Missouri Compromise drew a line at 36 degrees 30 minutes (the bottom of Missouri). It was also agreed upon that everything above the line would become free states and everything below the line would become slave states. This illustrates how there is an agreed upon method on how states are to be admitted. If Congress were to allow any new state to violate these 30-year-old terms, the balance of free to slave states would be thrown off, and whichever side had less states would become infuriated. One bill in the Compromise of 1850 allowed for California to join the Union as a free state. California spans most of the pacific coast, so it was above and below the line. This depicts how the line was violated by having a free state in what was supposed to be slave state territory. Another bill in that compromise allowed for popular sovereignty to decide whether or not new territories would allow slavery. The territory gained from the Mexican American War also spanned above and below the line. This illustrates how northerners and southerners can now switch states that were previously off limits to them to their preferred view. When reviewing all the evidence, it can be seen that violating the Missouri Compromise upset citizens across the nation, which further divided us and pushed us towards the Civil War.

Another decision that pushed us towards the Civil War was passing the Compromise of 1850. In January 1850 Henry Clay proposed a compromise to make both the North and South happy about what to do with the newly acquired territory from the Mexican American War. This compromise was hotly debated for roughly 8 months. This illustrates how northern and southern congressmen are practically incapable of coming to an agreement, even if both sides will receive some benefits. Eventually Stephen Douglas separated the compromise into 5 separate bills. Now northerners and southerners could simply vote for the proposals they liked, yet northerners accused Congress of giving into threats of secession. This demonstrates how even when both sides are given options that they like, one side is always unhappy that the other side gets any sort of advantage. An assessment of the situation shows that the arguments sparked by the compromise divided Congress, and the nation, further, instead of working towards amends and agreements. John C. Calhoun gave a speech to the Senate during the debate over the compromise. He said that the only way to become peaceful again was to have the North concede to the South's requests, which inflamed passions on both sides. This depicts how even regular speeches in Congress increased tension and further divided the two sides. Overall, the decision to pass the Compromise of 1850 pushed us closer to the Civil War by igniting intense debate between Northerners and Southerners, which increased political tension and caused even greater division.

One final decision in the 1850s that pushed us towards the Civil War was the Fugitive Slave Act. One bill in the Compromise of 1850 strengthened the Fugitive Slave Act. As a response, 9 northern states passed personal liberty laws, which made enforcing the law harder. This demonstrates how the North and South are so divided that northerners are willing to pass their own laws in order for southerners to have less power. Part of the strengthening stated that

officials who didn't arrest runaway slaves would get a \$1000 fine. Another part stated that citizens who helped runaways would get a \$1000 fine or 6 months in jail. This depicts how northerners can now face serious consequences if they don't adhere to this law. This would greatly upset Northerners because they are opposed to this law and want nothing to do with something that is supported by southerners. When calculating the importance of the Fugitive Slave Act, it was invaluable to pushing us towards the Civil War by creating another slave-related issue that caused intense debate between the North and South. All in all, the decision to have the Fugitive Slave Act be more strongly enforced divided the nation in half, which helped push us towards the Civil War.