

How Would You Solve the Union's Problems?

Introduction:

Government is the power to make choices and the authority to carry them out. Politics are the process of identifying a problem, gathering information, considering advantages and disadvantages to several options for solving the problem, determining ways to evaluate your success, and finally choosing and carrying out the right course of action. In the years prior to the Civil War, American politicians were confronted with many problems. The nation's leaders were forced to try and solve these problems in order to keep the Union together.

Directions: Complete each of the sections below in order to solve the nation's problems.

Background Information: Compromise of 1850

For several years after the Missouri Compromise, both slave and free states entered the union without incident. However, with the discovery of gold in California in 1849 that uneasy calm would be broken. In 1849, over 80,000 people moved to California during the Gold Rush. With thousands of people moving to California during the Gold Rush, the area had become a lawless place. Those living in California needed a government to protect them from the crimes and the anarchy that was rampant in this gold rich land. Due to the lawlessness and the large number of people living there, the people of California asked Congress for statehood.

An important question was now raised in the Congress: "Should slavery be legal in the Mexican Secession?" If you recall, after the Mexican War, the United States had captured large chunks of land from Mexico including California. No one knew how the slavery question should be answered in this new territory. The people of California had voted to enter the union as a free state; however this would upset the balance of power in the Senate. After California asked for statehood, Congress began a legendary seven month debate to answer the slavery question in the western territories.

The debate featured an aging cast of political giants in Henry Clay, Daniel Webster, and John C. Calhoun. Each of these men had had long careers in government and each of them were nearing death. Calhoun, who was too sick to read his own speeches, suggested that if the states could not agree on a compromise than the north should let the south peacefully secede or leave the union to start their own country. "If you will not yield, than let the states agree to separate and part in peace. If you are unwilling we should part in peace, tell us so, and we shall know what to do!" Webster laughed at the idea that the states could part in peace. He pointed out that peaceable succession would not be possible. That attempts at succession would produce "such a war as he would not describe." Still another Senator name Seward further enraged the south when he called for the total abolition of slavery.

Part I: What do you know about the problem the Union faces?

1. In the form of a short response, describe the problem the nation faced over admission of California to the Union in 1850.

2. List at least **FIVE** facts or pieces of information you have gathered about the California problem from the reading above.

A.

B.

C.

D.

E.

Part II: How would you solve the Union's problems?

3. List **THREE** possible solutions to the California statehood dilemma below. Describe each of them in the form of a short response.

Solution #1:

Solution #2:

Solution #3:

4. List the "**Pros**" and "**Cons**" of each of your solutions above.

Solution #1		Solution #2		Solution #3	
<u>Pros</u>	<u>Cons</u>	<u>Pros</u>	<u>Cons</u>	<u>Pros</u>	<u>Cons</u>

5. In the form of a short response, decide which one of your solutions you think will best fix the Union's California problem. Be sure to clearly explain your answer.

Part III: How did the politicians in 1850 solve the California statehood problem?

As the debate reached a fever pitch, Henry Clay the "Great Compromiser" stepped in with a compromise he hoped would save the union. He wrote over 70 speeches explaining and promoting the deal, but like Calhoun, Clay was too sick to read them. His speeches were read by an up and coming Senator from Illinois Steven Douglas. Clay assured the north that "nature was on their side" and created a five part compromise he felt would make both the north and the south happy. In the compromise: 1. California would enter the union as a free state 2. The Mexican Session would be divided into territories. Each territory would use Popular Sovereignty to answer the slavery question (nature on their side) 3. the slave trade would be ended in Washington D.C. 4. the compromise would include a "Fugitive Slave Law" in which northerners would have to help southerners capture run away slaves and 5. the compromise settled the border dispute between Texas and New Mexico.

The Congress was forced to vote on each part of the compromise separately in order to ensure that all of them would pass. Some members of Congress did not approve of various parts of Clay's compromise. Many northerners were especially outraged by the Fugitive Slave Law. In the end the compromise was passed by the Congress, but still had to be signed into law by President Taylor. Taylor, who was not politically experienced, did not approve of the compromise. He felt that the vote the people of California had passed to be a free state should have been enough to decide the issue. He was also close with Seward who encouraged Taylor to push for more abolition. For those reasons, Taylor threatened to veto the compromise if it was put before him. After months of Clay's hard work, Taylor threatened to destroy it all with the stroke of a pen. Without the compromise the nation would have fallen apart.

As luck would have it, fate stepped in, and Taylor mysteriously died before he vetoed Clay's compromise. No one is certain what happened to him. Millard Fillmore, his Vice-President took over and signed the compromise into law. Clay's compromise had once again saved the nation from civil war in 1850. It would be the last time however that Clay, Calhoun, and Webster would play a role in the nation's rocky future. Shortly after 1850 all three would be dead and there would be no one left to bind the nation's deep divisions.

6. In the form of a short response, describe the compromise created that solved the California statehood issue.

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7. In the form of a short response, compare and contrast your solution to the Missouri statehood issue with Henry Clay's compromise.

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