

The Middle Period (c.1820-c.1914)

Just as European history has its “Middle Ages” between the Roman Empire and modern Europe, America has what historians have called a “Middle Period” between its founding and its modern era. By this period, the questions of unity and independence were settled. The big challenge became how to get rid of slavery. The period begins with the failed attempts by the founders to contain slavery. This failure led to the Civil War to resolve the conflict between “North” and “South” over this issue once and for all. Following the “Reconstruction” of the Union, America began to emerge as a powerful country in the world, and to change into a democracy.

I. The Problem of Slavery

A. Slavery and the Separation of Powers

1. When the Founding Fathers created the United States they believed that a government must protect individual rights.
2. Sadly, the compromise to unify the northern and southern states when they created the government allowed slavery to continue.
3. As more and more people came to desire the end of slavery, they found that it would be very difficult to do it, because to legally end slavery in the United States would require an amendment (an addition) to the Constitution.
4. Because the power to make laws was divided between the House of Representatives and Senate, each one would have to agree to get rid of slavery.
5. What especially mattered was that only 7/13 states wanted to end slavery, and to get an amendment to the Constitution, 2/3 of the states would have to agree. (7/13 is less than 2/3.)

B. The Growth of the Union up to 1820

1. Following the creation of the original government of the thirteen colonies, new states began to be added to the Union.
2. Each time a free state would be added, a slave state would be added also. This kept a balance between them in the Senate.
3. By 1820 there were 22 states in all – 11 where slavery was illegal, 11 where it was legal.

C. The Missouri Compromise (1820)

1. The question of whether slavery would be allowed in the Louisiana Territory had never been answered. Now a part of that territory, Missouri, applied for admission to the Union as a slave state.
2. Those who wanted to stop slavery wanted to stop it from joining the Union as a slave state, but supporters of slavery argued that the Federal government did not have this power. Slavery was a matter for states to decide.
3. Since Missouri could not join without the support of the North, a compromise was agreed upon.
 - a) Missouri would be allowed to join as a slave state.
 - b) A new free state, Maine, would be broken off from Massachusetts.
 - c) *All remaining territory from the Louisiana Territory west and north of Missouri would be off limits to slavery. This was by far most of the territory, and seemed like it might be a step towards abolishing slavery.*