THE POLITICS OF SLAVERY
The Political Parties
Feared by the 1787 Constitutional Convention but a part of political life in any government.
Antebellum Americans respected and relied on the party system to solve national and local problems in their ongoing experience of republican government.
The antebellum period showed the limits of political solutions to solving some economic competitive problems.
US Manifest Destiny would become an almost fatal...
1795-1825

The Federalists and the Jeffersonian Republican Democrats

The Federalists
Washington, John Adams, Alexander Hamilton

Pro Great Britain, Infrastructure and manufacturing development, increased trade, aristocratic/strong centralized government, economic growth via a planned economy prime value, non entanglement with foreign powers

Mixed on slavery - against it in theory but for it in practice (Washington was a slave owner)

Anti - French Revolution

Constitution a contract among the people that was amendable and non revocable by its terms
The Jeffersonian Republican Democrats
Pro French Revolution, agrarian lifestyle, increased trade, more democratic/weak central government, strong state government, freedom and equality prime values
Constitution a contract among the several states that was amendable and revocable outside its terms
Anti-British
Slavery - up to individual states and people
Federalists broke up after being too anti War of 1812 due to impact of war on New England trade.

Federalists called a Secession Convention in 1814 about the War.

Consolidated Democratic Party from 1825 to 1832 but still above views were held by same party members.

Election of “King” Andrew Jackson in 1828 incited move to a second national party, the Whig party.

National Parties also promoted by Martin Van Buren of New York to draw attention away from slavery as a national issue to economic development as a national issue – fear of sectionalism.
Whigs believed in:
High tariffs to protect American industry
The Bank of the United States to ‘regulate’ the economy
Liberty carried the responsibility of self and societal improvement
Expansion of US into the western territories should be preceded by development of the east
Law and Order
Generally, kinda of, anti-slavery
Not abolitionists but more pro colonialization

Pro Western land sales with proceeds going to Federal government for internal improvements

Pro public education for better citizens and economic development

Whigs were both Southerners and Northerners as were remaining Democrats
Prominent Whigs

Henry Clay (1777-1852) – Virginia born, Kentucky resident, slave owner, the “Great Compromiser”
US Senator, Secretary of State, Presidential candidate, hated and loved by many, admired by A. Lincoln

Daniel Webster (1782-1852) – Massachusetts and New Hampshire senator and secretary of state under Harrison, Tyler and Fillmore
Author of the Senate’s Second Webster-Hayne speech against nullification
John Quincy Adams, William Seward, Abraham Lincoln
Prominent Democrats
Andrew Jackson, Martin Van Buren, John C. Calhoun when the mood hit him
Democrats believed in local control for political and slave purposes
Southern Democrats were ever watchful of the implications of the exercise of Federal authority and power in non Slave issues for the possibility of extension
The Antebellum Political Crises
Missouri Statehood and Compromise
Nullification Crisis
The Abolition Act of 1833
The Gag Rule
The admission of Texas to the Union
The Mexican American War
The Compromise of 1850
The Kansas Nebraska Act of 1854
The Dred Scott decision of 1857
The election of Abraham Lincoln in 1860
Missouri Statehood and Compromise of 1819-1821

Question - would Missouri be admitted to the Union as a slave state or a free state?

Question arose after the introduction of the James Talmadge (D-NY) amendment prohibiting slavery in the Louisiana Purchase acquisition.

Why spread of Slavery important to the South:

- Need for contiguous slave states to discourage run-aways
- Need for new unexhausted land
- Need to dilute the density of slaves to reduce danger of rebellion
- Need to preserve Congressional balance with new states
- Assertion of property rights
- View of what American continent would look like
Henry Clay engineered the Missouri Compromise to admit Missouri as the only slave state north of the 36°30' north longitude line and admit Maine as a free state. The South began fearing more the power of the Federal government to limit or legislate away slavery though.
Nullification Crisis of 1828-1833

Question – Must a state abide by a federal law if it does not want to?

South Carolina under economic strain from US economic downturn in 1820s

Many South Carolina politicians blamed the change in fortunes on the national tariff policy that developed after the War of 1812 to promote American manufacturing over its European production competition.
The controversial and highly protective Tariff of 1828 (known to its detractors as the "Tariff of Abominations") was enacted into law during the presidency of John Quincy Adams. The tariff was opposed in the South and parts of New England.
The tariff's opponents expected that the election of Jackson as President would result in the tariff being significantly reduced.

When the Jackson administration failed to take any actions to address their concerns, the most radical faction in the state began to advocate that the state itself declare the tariff null and void within South Carolina.
In Washington, an open split on the issue occurred between Jackson and Vice President John C. Calhoun, a native South Carolinian and the most effective proponent of the constitutional theory of state nullification, legal theory that if a state believed a federal law unconstitutional, it could declare the law null and void in the state.

Based on a state based approval view of the Constitution.
Jackson signed into law the Tariff of 1832. This compromise tariff received the support of most northerners and half of the southerners in Congress.
The reductions were too little for South Carolina and on November 24, 1832, a state convention adopted the **Ordinance of Nullification**, which declared that the Tariffs of 1828 and 1832 were unconstitutional and unenforceable in South Carolina after February 1, 1833.

South Carolina initiated military preparations to resist anticipated federal enforcement.
However, on March 1, 1833, Congress passed both the Force Bill—authorizing the President to use military forces against South Carolina—and a new negotiated tariff, the Compromise Tariff of 1833, which was satisfactory to South Carolina.
The South Carolina convention reconvened and repealed its Nullification Ordinance on March 15, 1833, but three days later nullified the Force Bill as a symbolic gesture to maintain its principles.
The Abolition Act of 1833

British legislation eliminating slavery worldwide, including in the Western Caribbean

About 2 million Afro American slaves freed over about 6 years and compensation paid to owners

Worked up Southern slave interests due to

Bad example for federal government

British government hostile to slavery and its perceived conspiracy against the economic strength of the South

North American slaves have a place to flee to
So many freed slaves near US southern border

Reduces US slave expansion possibilities into British controlled and Spanish controlled islands

Gives the South a new view of foreign relations with a commerce and naval power adverse to
The Gag Rule (1836) and Mail Censorship

Prohibited House of Representatives’ debate on slavery petitions

Irritated Northern Representatives and citizens as a denial of Constitutional right of petition

At about the same time Abolitionist societies were mailing pamphlets to Southern addresses that Southern leaders stopped via compliant post masters
The admission of Texas to the Union

Texas was a slave country since 1836 after its war with, and secession from, unstable Mexico.

Mexico had abolished slavery in 1822 and the Texas territory had been a magnet for those US people seeking their fortune and respite from US law.

Texas was seen from its beginning settlement as a slave expansion opportunity.

Texas President Sam Houston makes it known he is in negotiations with Great Britain to form a trade relationship bordering on colonial status, scaring the US government to act to admit Texas.
John Tyler (1841-1845) unsuccessfully attempted to have the Senate admit Mexico as a state but met Northern resistance due to Texas’ slave status.

Tyler after Polk’s election in November 1844 manages a resolution through both houses to have Texas admitted to the Union without a 2/3 vote of the Senate breeding Northern resentment.
The Mexican American War (1846-1848)

Democrat President James Polk was determined to extend the United States to the Pacific coast to control California and increase trade to Asia. He also wished to drive Britain out of the Oregon Territory (present day Washington state, Oregon state and part of Idaho and Montana).

In 1845 Mexico claimed sovereignty over present day New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, Colorado, Nevada and southern California – What to do?

Polk sends an envoy to Mexico to negotiate a purchase of this land but is not surprised when refused.
Polk then sends General Zachary Taylor (a Whig known by Polk) with several thousand men to Mexico - Texas border.

Polk easily persuades Congress to declare war on Mexico after an alleged unprovoked attack on Taylor.

The North reacts with an uproar, seeing the declaration as a contrivance to take Mexico’s northern land for use by the slave states. Polk denies this as his motive.
David Wilmot, a Pennsylvania freshman Congressman, proposes an addition to a spending bill to acquire Oregon and any states admitted to the Union from Mexico would be free states; known as the Wilmot Proviso.

The Wilmot Proviso is rejected several times over the next few years with a majority of Southerners voting against it with some Northern Democrats but it does flesh out Southern intentions.
The Compromise of 1850

Attempt to achieve a political consensus on the slave status of the Mexico acquired territory

Initially managed by Senator Henry Clay but finished by Senator Stephen Douglas of Illinois

Resulted in
admission of California as a free state
the strengthening of the Fugitive Slave Law
popular sovereignty in Utah and New Mexico concerning the question of slavery
the abolition of the slave trade in D.C.

the federal assumption of Texas's debt

Some Southern slaveholders unhappy with the compromise and called a Secession Convention in Nashville without results
The Kansas Nebraska Act of 1854

Authored and managed by Stephen Douglas to address the admission of the Kansas and Nebraska territories.

To Douglas, the Act was a compromise to bring Southern and Northern legislators together to approve federal support for a Transcontinental Railroad.

Act left up to the territory by popular vote to allow or prohibit slavery.

Douglas did not believe slavery would be voted in by Kansas or Nebraska due to agricultural conditions did not permit profitable cotton farming.

South though interested in mining in the West with slaves and the principle of the thing.
However, Northern politicians and population felt effective overturn of the Missouri Compromise showed their lack of control and a betrayal of a “sacred line”.

Bleeding Kansas proved out the hostility and the failure of the Act.

The Act arose Abraham Lincoln from his political retirement.
The Dred Scott decision of 1857
US Supreme Court 7-2 decision
written by Roger Taney holding
that:
African Americans could not be
citizens and
that Congress did not have
authority to legislate on
slavery issues
Taney hoped that the decision
would settle all national
disputes about slavery
However, the decision "was greeted with unmitigated wrath from every segment of the United States except the slave holding states."

Many disregarded the decision as non-binding dicta, as the Court admitted it did not have jurisdiction to settle the action brought by Scott as to whether he was free after living for several years in non-slave states before his master took him back to Missouri.
The election of Abraham Lincoln in November 1860