

Missouri Crisis and Compromise

This lecture provides a brief review of the economics and politics of slavery and in so doing brings together ideas and events that you have read about previously. How many times have you read about slavery in the law? You read about the legislation in 17th-century colonial Virginia that began to define slavery as race-based and then how Thomas Jefferson wrote into the 1787 Northwest Ordinance that slavery would be prohibited in the territory north of Ohio in the Old Northwest. When you read the Constitution, you found a few indirect references to slavery but no mention of the word "slave" or "slavery." The three-fifths rule counted slaves as three-fifths of a person in a state's population (Art. I, Sec. 2). The Constitution also stipulated that Congress could not end the slave trade until 1808 at the earliest (Art. I, Sec. 9) and that runaway slaves would be returned to their owners (Art. IV, Sec. 2).

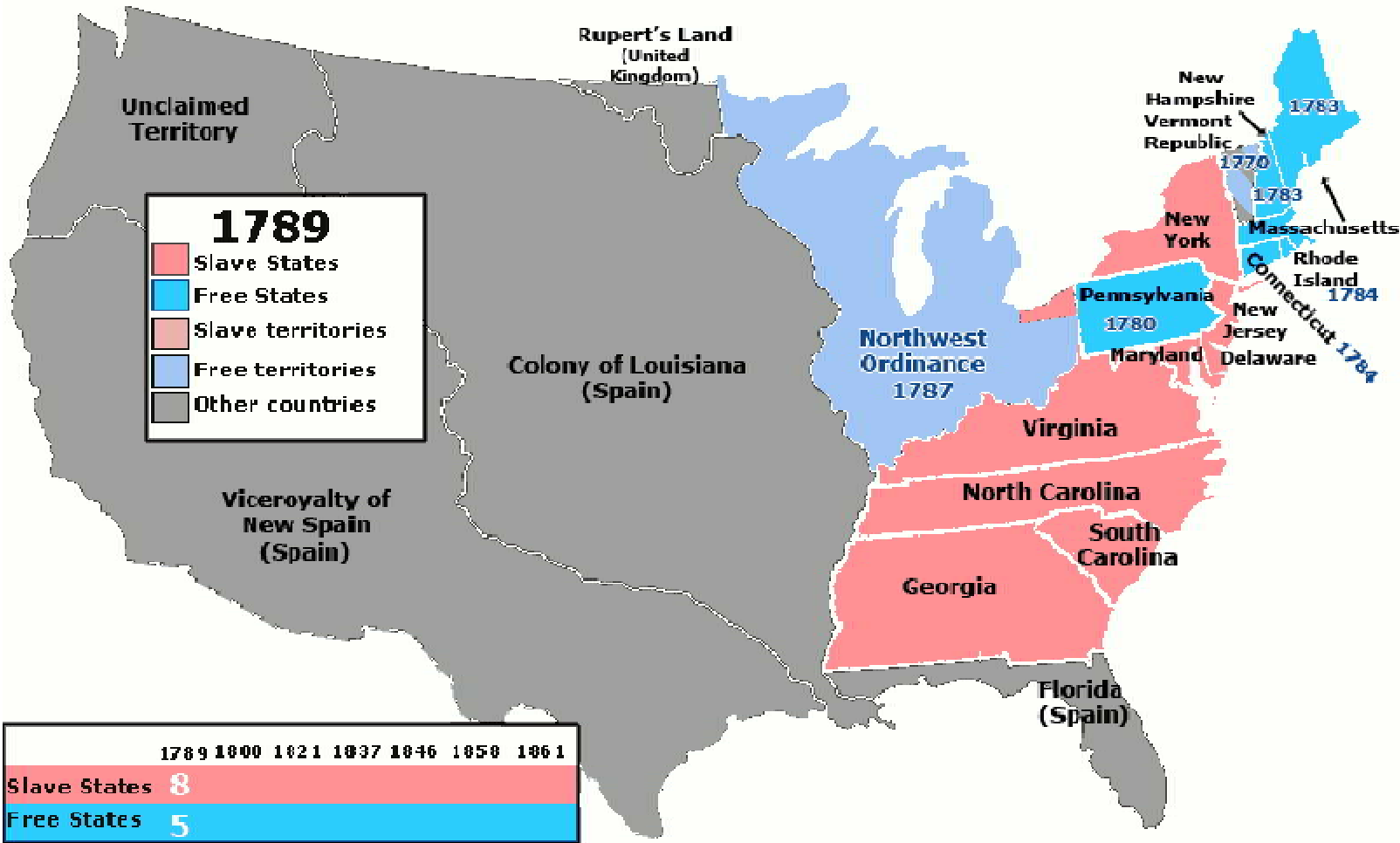
Congress ended the slave trade in 1808, but you also learned that slave colonies in the Chesapeake were unique in the Western Hemisphere because natural increase (births) in the slave population was a greater factor in growth than slaves shipped from Africa. Although the international trade ended in 1808, the domestic slave trade prospered.

By the 1780s, though, slavery was on the decline (in fact Jefferson believed that it would eventually disappear) until the invention of the **cotton gin** in 1793 revolutionized cotton agriculture by allowing short-staple cotton to be grown profitably throughout the South. The cotton gin represented a technological innovation that transformed American society in the Industrial Revolution.

By 1820 **short-staple cotton** eclipsed all other crops and by 1850 55 percent of all slaves worked in cotton and cotton composed more than 50 percent of the value of all American exports. Cotton's economic power inspired Senator James Henry Hammond of South Carolina to boast in 1858: "**Cotton is King.**"

Look at this map to watch the proportion of free and slave states up to the Civil War, which begins in 1861.





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While short-staple cotton revitalized southern slavery, in the North by 1804 every state had provided for abolition or gradual emancipation of slaves. East of the Mississippi, the Ohio River and the Mason-Dixon line divided North from South and eventually slave from free. But in 1819 Missouri applied for statehood and opened the debate on the expansion of slavery, a debate that foreshadowed what would lead to the Civil War. Furious congressional wrangling resulted in the **Missouri Compromise** in 1820. Under its provisions, Maine entered the Union as a free state and Missouri as a slave state, thus preserving the balance in the U.S. Senate between slave and free states. Given what you now know about the expansion of slavery in the South due to cotton cultivation, do you understand why the Missouri Compromise resolved only momentarily the increasingly sectional division between those who opposed slave labor and those who depended on it? In the next course (**History 147**), we will see soon how temporary the Missouri Compromise was.



Take a look at this map. If you click on a state or territory, you see population numbers including the number of Blacks.

www.teachingamericanhistory.org/neh/interactives/sectionalism/lesson1/

Think again about the **Nullification Crisis** during the Jackson Administration. Was it about slavery? No, it was not, but it highlighted the idea that a state could secede if the federal government interfered in its special interests. In 1832 South Carolina claimed the tariff violated its interests but in the years leading to the Civil War slavery would be the special interest that southern states demanded be protected from federal interference.

The **Missouri Crisis** and subsequent Compromise made clear how divisive an issue slavery could be in Congress. In the 1830s abolitionists sponsored nearly 700,000 petitions to abolish slavery and end the slave trade in the District of Columbia. Congress rejected them all and finally at the behest of southerners and with President Jackson's approval, Congress passed a "**gag rule**" in 1836 that prohibited any discussion of the antislavery petitions.

As you can see from the above discussion, the nation was on a collision course that no "gag rule" could prevent. In **History 147**, we will follow closely that course that leads to the most destructive conflict in American history the Civil War.

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