Liberty Challenged in 19th Century America

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# **Introduction**

The golden land of America was not known to rest of the world until the exploration by Christopher Columbus. He was the voyager who discovered the American continent and soon, different European powers established their footprints in that land. Great Britain formed thirteen different colonies, but after a while America emerged as an independent nation in the world as a result of their revolutionary struggle in 1776. America aimed to emerge as a progressive nation, however, the old colonial trends and practices still dominated its political and social life. Slavery is one such notorious institution which remained a consistent part in American territory until 1865. Besides, this was widely practiced in southern colonies where white owners had large plantations. They needed more slaves for their economic wheel and this was the reason they wanted to legalize slavery in United States of America. This issue remained a consistent bone of contention between the North and South as several constitutional struggles illustrated it. As a matter of fact, slavery was the dividing line between the two parts of America. This deeply-entrenched slavery system was so significant that it took American nation to its first civil war after the failure of numerous legislative measures. Different tangible forces exacerbated the conflict, and this conflict between American union and the confederate forces eventually ended with the emancipation proclamation and civil rights amendments for Black Americans.

# **Discussion**

The 3/5 compromise was about political power. Slave owning states desired to count slaves, who could not vote, for the purposes of political representation of said state in the Congress. Non-slave owning states saw this as a ploy to control the nascent government. Following the 3/5 compromise, many in the slave states saw this as a win as it gave them greater representation in the Halls of Government than the non-slave states.

Following the compromise, those who opposed slavery only wanted to consider the free people of the population, while those in favor wanted to include slaves in the population count. This would provide for slaveholders to have many more seats in the House of Representatives and more representation in the Electoral College (Bestor 1964, 118). Many ratios were considered, such as three-fourths, one-half, and one-quarter.

The political power of slave states was greatly following the 3/5 compromise, for 3/5 compromise rendered the representations of slave states in the federal legislature. Southern states would account for 33 of the seats in House of Representatives after equal representation of free and slave states in the lower house – House of Representatives. However, the 3/5 compromise allowed slave states for contesting 47 seats in lower house i.e. House of Representatives.

The Missouri Compromise was that it set a pattern for the enlargement of the United States without upsetting the political balance between the slave-holding and "free" states. Missouri was settled by many slave-holders, and it sought admission as a state which would permit slavery.

The Missouri Compromise of 1820 promoted expansionist policies because it allowed slavery to exist in the western territories south of the line 36 degrees, 30 minutes, and north. If Missouri entered the United States as a slave state, the voting balance in the Senate would favor the slave states. This might have meant that laws favoring slavery would more likely be passed by Congress. Abolitionists in the North opposed any laws favoring slavery and favoring the extension of slavery into the western territories (Forbes 2009, 94).

The admission of Missouri into the union as a slave state would have altered the balance of slave and free states in the US Senate, which, many in the north found unacceptable. It was, in retrospect, an ugly "gentleman's agreement" that prevented the US from descending into a civil war which obviously didn't last very long. Regardless by making explicit new states, as they were admitted into the union, they would allow slavery (Forbes 2009, 118).

The Compromise of 1850 delayed the Civil War for a decade, giving the North valuable time to further industrialize and strengthen its ability to survive a protracted war, an advantage the South would not enjoy. And those 10 years would also see the emergence of Abraham Lincoln, the statesman who would restore the Union after it split apart.

The compromise of 1850 was the passage of tougher fugitive slave law. Obviously, this aggravated many northerners. The southerners steamed over California entering the Union as a free state. The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 was one of a number of legislative actions which did nothing to mitigate sectional tension but did instead heighten it. The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 made it unlawful to aid or abet runaway slaves - it mandated a reward for those returning runaway slaves.

North succeeded to bag California as 16th free state in the Union. However, the compromise of 1850 guaranteed south that there wouldn’t be any federal restriction imposed on slavery in Utah and New Mexico. Not only did the compromise of 1850 reversed the Missouri Compromise but the overall issue of slavery was left unsettled.

The United States Congress passed Kansas - Nebraska Act in the year 1854. The Kansas- Nebraska Act aimed at giving the opportunity to the people of Kansas and Nebraska to decide about the fate of slavery in their states. The Kansas Nebraska Act repealed the Missouri Compromise signed in 1820, which declined slavery from the north of America.

With the passage of the Kansas Nebraska Act, the old Missouri compromise was limited, which initially discouraged slavery toward the North side of America. The Kansas - Nebraska act was considered the turning point since it allowed the people of both states to freely express their will about retaining or eliminating slavery from their states.

Another effect of the act was the powers given to state about expressing their wills. It set the tradition for democratic practices throughout the states in America. People gradually started taking interest in the state affairs and with time started discouraging practices which largely went against the norms of human rights (Lawson 1997, 51).

The Dred Scott decision of 1857 ruled that a slave who is residing in a Free State or territory is by no means entitled to be regarded as a free man. The decision basically ruled that freedom is not decided with the change of location or territory rather it is attributed with the population one has been a part of since the birth.   
 Since the decision upheld that Dred was not an American citizen, therefore he was not allowed to file any suit against the citizens of America in any court or whatever the circumstances were. This decision reveals that slavery even took the least form of freedom, that is, to express a negative will against anyone from the slaves.

The slave population (the blacks) lost their political rights and enjoyed no opportunities among the civil society. They were regarded as material beings which can be used and disposed of too quickly. Such decisions by the American courts also provided opportunities to the White Americans to express their hate for the slave population in the ways they desired.

Slavery is incompatible with the United States political and economic system for the following reasons.

Slavery was counterproductive in the pursuit of happiness enshrined in the United States constitution. The American population with time started believing that happiness is hard to achieve in cases where any human is deprived of the basic facilities of life. As time went on, the people of America started adopting the presence of Blacks as more of the kind of normal beings (Lawson 1997, 69).

Americans believed that slavery was a blot on the American values of freedom and human rights. Americans who started moving from North to South or started travelling abroad used to believe that they (Americans) work against the human right values. As this sense of understanding started expanding, people started disowning slavery.

Another important reason for the downfall of slavery was increased industrialization. Since the slaves were not trained to be employed at industries and agrarian industry started diminishing, therefore the consumption of slaves started reducing. Also, as the time went on, the Blacks started taking part in schools and other institutions to bring themselves at par with other Americans, which finally left no justification for Blacks to be treated like slaves.

Several causes are credited for the start of the Civil War in America. The famous among them are as follows:

There was a consistent animosity between the North population and the South population. They started fighting over minor disputes which often led to grave situations. Sometimes, the situations became too horrific that state authorities had to intervene to soothe the situation.

The expansion of the ideological rift between Americans was also another reason for civil war. This ideological divide was so deep that people even used to avoid going into the population which they believed belonged to other ideology. This ideological rift was so deep that it was evident that it will, one day or another result in a war.

Lastly, the victory of Abraham Lincoln proved that in that time in America, there was the least tolerance for hate violence. The end of the civil war proved such notions and Abraham Lincoln started introducing reforms which aimed at creating justified opportunities for each American.

# **Conclusion**

American history is filled with incidences of massive human rights violations. The early Americans on one side fought for creating their own land but on other side they were involved in massive crimes against humanity. This paper has highlighted such incidences which remained the reason for conflict and were the reason for a severe divide among the Americans.

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