

# LINCOLN LORE

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## LINCOLN, FILLMORE AND THE COMPROMISE OF 1850

### LINCOLN'S POLITICAL REJUVINATION—NO. 2

Ex-President Millard Fillmore paid a visit to Springfield, Ill. in June 1854. Lincoln was asked to introduce the distinguished guest "to the large concourse of citizens" but the introductory words have not been preserved. It will be recalled that Fillmore was the 1848 Whig vice-presidential candidate upon the Zachary Taylor ticket which Lincoln had supported so enthusiastically. Upon the death of Taylor, Fillmore had succeeded him as the chief executive.

Lincoln must have recalled upon Fillmore's visit that it was his signature which made the "Compromise of 1850" valid. (Not to be confused with the "Missouri Compromise" of 1820.) There was a general feeling that if he had vetoed the measure war could not possibly have been averted. Here again the now aged Henry Clay in retirement at his home in Lexington was urged by both parties to return to Washington and use his influence in bringing about an agreement between the northern and southern sympathizers. At the time Clay left Kentucky for Washington, Lincoln was in Lexington visiting with his wife's relatives and undoubtedly witnessed Clay's departure.

The services rendered by Clay on this occasion paralleled in many respects the brilliant leadership which had brought about the Missouri Compromise thirty years before. However, in the final analysis it was the signature of Fillmore on the important measure that kept the Union together through a major crisis over sectional interests.

Most certainly Lincoln read the speech made by Henry Clay in the Senate chambers on February 5, 1850 which dealt with the above compromise resolutions. It appeared in pamphlet form and was widely circulated. In Clay's final outburst of eloquence at the close of the speech he exclaimed:

"But, I must take the occasion to say that, in my opinion, there is no right on the part of one or more of the States to secede from the Union. War and the dissolution of the Union are identical and inseparable. There can be no dissolution of the Union, except by consent or by war. No one can expect, in the existing state of things, that that consent would be given, and war is the only alternative by which a dissolution could be accomplished. And, Mr. President, if consent were given—if possibly we were to separate by mutual agreement and by a given line, in less than sixty days after such an agreement had been executed, war would break out between the free and slaveholding portions of this Union—between the two independent portions into which it would be erected in virtue of the act of separation."

"But how are you going to separate them? In my humble opinion, Mr. President, we should begin at least with three confederacies—the confederacy of the North, the confederacy of the Atlantic southern States, (the slaveholding States,) and the confederacy of the valley of the Mississippi. My life upon it, sir, that vast population that has already concentrated, and will concentrate, upon the headwaters and tributaries of the Mississippi, will never consent that the mouth of that river shall be held subject to the power of any foreign State whatever. Such I believe would be the consequences of a dissolution of the Union. But other confederacies would spring up, from time to time, as dissatisfaction and discontent were disseminated over the country. There would be the confederacy of the lakes—perhaps the confederacy of New England and of the middle States. . . .

"I said that I thought that there was no right on the part of one or more of the States to secede from this Union. I think that the Constitution of the thirteen States was made, not merely for the generation which then existed, but for posterity, undefined, unlimited, permanent, and perpetual—for their posterity, and for every subsequent State which might come into the Union, binding themselves by that indissoluble bond. It is to remain for that posterity now and forever. . . .

"Mr. President, I have said what I solemnly believe—that the dissolution of the Union and war are identical and inseparable; that they are convertible terms."

A few weeks after Fillmore's visit to Springfield, Lincoln gave an address in which he covered the ground historically between the Missouri Compromise and the Compromise of 1850. His presentation in part follows:

"By the treaty of Peace with Mexico in 1848 we acquired California, and in two years she applied for admission as a State. She came with a constitution prohibiting slavery, but there was a sufficient majority in the Senate to prevent her entering free. Then the question of boundary between Texas and New Mexico arose, and added to the agitation. The old fugitive slave law was then found to be inefficient. And finally, the famous Georgia Pen, in Washington, where negroes were bought and sold within sight of the National Capitol, began to grow offensive in the nostrils of all good men, Southerners as well as Northerners. All these subjects got into the Omnibus Bill, which was intended as a compromise between the North and the South, and the measures in which, although defeated in the aggregate, were all passed separately. The measures which the North gained by the passage of the Adjustment of 1850 were, the admission of California with a free Constitution and the discontinuance of the Georgia Pen; and those which the South gained were, the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law and the territorial bills of Utah and New Mexico, and the settlement of the Texas boundary. The North gained two measures and the South three. Such was the Compromise of 1850—a measure for the benefit of the South as well as of the North, and acquiesced in by the Whig and Democratic parties of the country.

"Now what was there in the Compromise Measures of '50 that repudiated the Missouri Compromise? The North secured that portion of the Louisiana purchase north of 36.30 to freedom, by giving the South what they demanded as an equivalent therefor, namely, Missouri. We got it fairly and honestly, by paying for it: then what reason was there in endeavoring to make the stipulation upon which we purchased it apply as a principle to other and all future territories? The Missouri Compromise was a contract made between the North and the South, by which the former got all the Louisiana purchase north, and the latter all south, of the line of 36.30 *within that territory*. There was no show of sense in endeavoring to make this bargain apply to any future territory acquired by the United States."

To state in more formal terms the results of the Compromise of 1850 affirmed by Fillmore, the objectives realized were:

1. California came into the Union as a free state.
2. The boundary between New Mexico and Texas was settled.
3. Governments were organized for the territories of New Mexico and Utah.
4. The slave trade was abolished in the District of Columbia.
5. A revised Fugitive Slave Law provided for the recovery of fugitives from labor.