

Congress and the Crisis of the 1850s: A Perspective from the History of Congress, 1801-1877

The Crisis of the 1850s

In the years leading up to the Civil War, the United States was deeply divided over the issue of slavery. This division was reflected in Congress, where debates over slavery and its expansion into new territories dominated the political landscape. The Crisis of the 1850s refers to a series of events that pushed the nation to the brink of civil war. These events included the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, the Dred Scott decision, and John Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry. Congress played a central role in these events, and its actions helped to shape the course of the Civil War.

The Kansas-Nebraska Act

The Kansas-Nebraska Act was passed in 1854 and repealed the Missouri Compromise of 1820. The Missouri Compromise had prohibited slavery in the Louisiana Territory north of the 36°30' parallel. The Kansas-Nebraska Act allowed the people of Kansas and Nebraska to decide for themselves whether or not to allow slavery in their territories. This legislation was highly controversial and led to widespread violence in Kansas, which became known as "Bleeding Kansas."

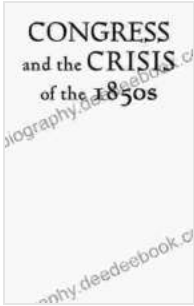
Congress and the Crisis of the 1850s (Perspective Hist of Congress 1801-1877) by Keel Hunt

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The Dred Scott Decision

The Dred Scott decision was issued by the Supreme Court in 1857. The case involved a slave named Dred Scott who had sued for his freedom on the grounds that he had lived in free territory. The Supreme Court ruled against Scott, holding that he was not a citizen of the United States and could not sue in federal court. The Court also ruled that the Missouri Compromise was unconstitutional. This decision further inflamed tensions between the North and the South.

John Brown's Raid on Harpers Ferry

In 1859, abolitionist John Brown led a raid on Harpers Ferry, Virginia. Brown's goal was to seize the federal arsenal and incite a slave rebellion. The raid was unsuccessful, and Brown was captured and executed. Brown's raid was a major turning point in the crisis of the 1850s and helped to push the nation closer to civil war.

The Outbreak of the Civil War

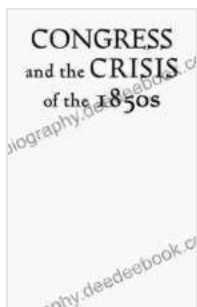
The election of Abraham Lincoln in 1860 led to the secession of seven Southern states from the Union. In 1861, Confederate forces fired on Fort Sumter in South Carolina, and the Civil War began. The Civil War was a

bloody and protracted conflict that resulted in the deaths of over 600,000 Americans. The war ended in 1865 with the surrender of the Confederate army.

The Legacy of the Crisis of the 1850s

The Crisis of the 1850s was a pivotal period in American history. The events of this period led to the Civil War, which ended slavery and transformed the United States. The legacy of the Crisis of the 1850s is still felt today in the debates over race and equality in America.

The Crisis of the 1850s was a complex and tumultuous period in American history. Congress played a central role in these events, and its actions helped to shape the course of the Civil War. The legacy of the Crisis of the 1850s is still felt today, and its lessons continue to inform our understanding of race and equality in America.



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