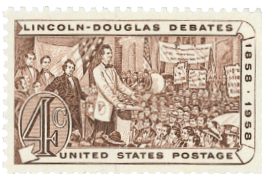


# This Day in History... May 30, 1854

## Kansas-Nebraska Act

On May 30, 1854, President Franklin Pierce signed the Kansas-Nebraska Act into law. The act had been created to settle tensions over slavery and open new lands for development, but instead only proved to create more division and move America closer to Civil War.

In the 1850s, Congress was deeply divided over the issue of slavery. This was particularly true over the fate of new US territories – there was a great struggle to see whether the practice of slavery would be allowed in the new territories or not. Earlier laws had been passed to address this. The Compromise of 1850 had, in part, left the issue of slavery up to the settlers of each territory (popular sovereignty). Additionally, the Missouri Compromise banned slavery in territories north of the 36°30' parallel.



*The act was largely written by Stephen A. Douglas (who later squared off against Abraham Lincoln in a series of 1858 debates).*

Stephen A. Douglas had been pushing for a transcontinental railroad since 1845. Part of his plan for the railroad involved organizing a formal Nebraska Territory. He submitted a proposal that passed in the House but was stalled in the Senate. Slavery wouldn't have been allowed because the territory would have been north of 36°30', but a group of senators refused to approve it if slavery wasn't allowed.

The bill was reintroduced in early 1854. The amended bill would divide the former Nebraska Territory into two new territories – Kansas and Nebraska. The act would also allow residents of Kansas and Nebraska

territories to decide for themselves whether to allow slavery within their borders. The act would also repeal the Missouri Compromise of 1820, which had banned slavery in most northwestern regions of the country.



*The act was signed into law by President Franklin Pierce.*

The bill passed the Senate on March 4 and the House on May 22. President Franklin Pierce then signed it into law on May 30, 1854, officially establishing the Kansas and Nebraska Territories.

The Kansas-Nebraska Act outraged many Northerners. They considered the Missouri Compromise to have been binding. Many in the pro-slavery South supported the new act. Rather than stem the tide of war, the Kansas-Nebraska Act led to immediate hostilities. As the vote on slavery approached, abolitionists and pro-slavery factions rushed to the territories to influence the outcome.

In the first election, Kansas residents voted to allow slavery within their territory. Antislavery settlers alleged the vote was marred by fraud (more votes were counted than there were legitimate voters) and rejected the results. They held a second election, one in which the pro-slavery faction refused to vote. Each group established their own legislature within the territory, operating in direct opposition to the other.



*Nebraska achieved statehood on March 1, 1867.*

Violence soon erupted between the pro-slavery Border Ruffians and the abolitionist Free-Staters. The death toll rose, leading to the phrase “Bleeding Kansas.” To support the pro-slavery settlers, President Franklin Pierce ordered Federal troops into the area to stop the violence and remove the abolitionist legislature. A third election was held. Pro-slavery supporters prevailed, and vote fraud was alleged once again.

As a result, Congress rejected the constitution adopted by the pro-slavery settlers and statehood was denied. Eventually, anti-slavery settlers in Kansas outnumbered pro-slavery residents, and statehood was granted shortly before the start of the Civil War. Kansas was admitted as a free state on January 29, 1861. Nebraska, whose residents chose to ban slavery, was admitted as a state in 1867.



*Issued for the 100th anniversary of the Kansas Territory.*



*Issued for the 100th anniversary of the Nebraska Territory.*



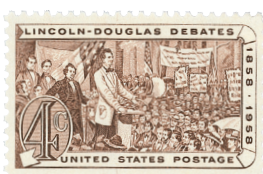
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