**Missouri Compromise**

In the years leading up to the Missouri Compromise of 1820, tensions began to rise between pro-slavery and anti-slavery factions within the U.S. Congress and across the country. They reached a boiling point after Missouri’s 1819 request for admission to the Union as a slave state, which threatened to upset the delicate balance between slave states and free states. To keep the peace, Congress **orchestrated** a two-part compromise, granting Missouri’s request but also admitting Maine as a free state. It also passed an amendment that drew an imaginary line across the former Louisiana Territory, establishing a boundary between free and slave regions that remained the law of the land until it was **negated** by the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854.

The [Missouri](http://www.history.com/topics/us-states/missouri) Compromise was an effort by Congress to **defuse** the sectional and political rivalries triggered by the request of Missouri late in 1819 for admission as a state in which slavery would be permitted. At the time, the United States contained twenty-two states, evenly divided between slave and free. Admission of Missouri as a slave state would upset that balance; it would also set a **precedent** for congressional **acquiescence** in the expansion of slavery. Earlier in 1819, when Missouri was being organized as a territory, Representative James Tallmadge of [New York](http://www.history.com/topics/us-states/new-york) had proposed an amendment that would ultimately have ended slavery there; this effort was defeated, as was a similar effort by Representative John Taylor of New York regarding [Arkansas](http://www.history.com/topics/us-states/arkansas) Territory.

The extraordinarily bitter debate over Missouri’s application for admission ran from December 1819 to March 1820. Northerners, led by Senator Rufus King of New York, argued that Congress had the power to prohibit slavery in a new state. Southerners like Senator William Pinkney of Maryland held that new states had the same freedom of action as the original thirteen and were thus free to choose slavery if they wished. After the Senate and the House passed different bills and deadlock threatened, a compromise bill was worked out with the following provisions: (1) Missouri was admitted as a slave state and Maine (formerly part of Massachusetts) as free, and (2) except for Missouri, slavery was to be excluded from the Louisiana Purchase lands north of latitude 36°30′.

The Missouri Compromise was criticized by many southerners because it established the principle that Congress could make laws regarding slavery; northerners, on the other hand, **condemned** it for acquiescing in the expansion of slavery (though only south of the compromise line). Nevertheless, the act helped hold the Union together for more than thirty years. It was repealed by the [Kansas-](http://www.history.com/topics/kansas-nebraska-act)[Nebraska](http://www.history.com/topics/us-states/nebraska) Act of 1854, which established popular **sovereignty** (local choice) regarding slavery in [Kansas](http://www.history.com/topics/us-states/kansas) and Nebraska, though both were north of the compromise line. Three years later, the Supreme Court in the *Dred Scott* case declared the Missouri Compromise unconstitutional, on the ground that Congress was prohibited by the Fifth Amendment from depriving individuals of private property without due process of law.

**Vocab**

Orchestrated – arrange or direct the elements of a situation

Negated – to make ineffective

Defuse – reduce danger or tension

Precedent - an earlier event or action that is regarded as an example or guide to be considered in later similar circumstances

Acquiescence – to reluctantly accept something without protesting

Condemn – to express complete disapproval of something

Sovereignty – the authority of a state to govern itself or another state