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**A House Divided: (32) – The
Collapse of the Whig Party - III**

Lead: One hundred and fifty years ago the Republic was facing its greatest crisis. This continuing series examines the American Civil War. It is *A House Divided*.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: By the end of the 1830s no significant subject in American political life could be discussed without reference to the enormous social, economic and moral issue of slavery. Americans

were losing control of their ability to have a rational conversation. No national discussion was possible without dragging in the way in which it would affect the progress, expansion, restriction, or destruction of slavery. Whether it was tariffs, internal improvements, foreign affairs, economics, public education western expansion, the Transcontinental Railroad, the War in Mexico, all were affected by this question. Most American's opinion on one issue was shaded by their opinion on The Issue.

Formed as an opposition party to the Democrats in the 1830s, the Whig Party was defunct within two decades. It fell apart because

of internal division over slavery. Northeastern Whig leaders such as Daniel Webster were business types who were not particularly concerned about slavery. Northern Whig voters, strongly affected by evangelical Christianity and Abolition, were very intense in their opposition to slavery. Southern Whigs were committed to all the traditional Whig positions of support for public education, internal improvements and Federal aid to business, but strongly supported slavery. Southern Whig leaders such as Zachary Taylor, John Tyler, Henry Clay and Alexander Stephens, all owned slaves.

With this split the Party could not long survive. The last Presidential election in which Whigs seriously contended was 1852. It revealed just how lame the party had become. At the convention in New York City, Northern Whigs supported a non-slave holding southerner, General Winfield Scott, hero of the Mexican War, which the Whigs had bitterly opposed in 1840s. Southern Whigs supported sitting President Millard Fillmore because of his vigorous enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Law passed in 1850. They were so divided that they could not even pass a party platform and only nominated Scott

on the 53rd ballot. He, in turn, was decisively defeated by Democrat Franklin Pierce. Ohio Whig congressman Lewis D. Campbell said of his party after the election, “We are slain. The party is dead-dead-dead.” Most Northern Whigs went into the new Republican Party. Most Southern Whigs gradually were absorbed into the Democrats.

If the Party was dead, Whig ideas lived on. Its advocacy of government support for business survived in Republican enthusiasm for high tariffs, internal improvements, the Transcontinental Railroad, higher

education, specifically land grant colleges, and the Northern Whig opposition to slavery. Both major parties came to see the value of Whig enthusiasm for free, universal public education. The party had lost its followers and reason for existence, but its values continue to influence American life into the 21st century.

In Richmond, Virginia, this is Dan Roberts.

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