

Volume 17

Number 020

**A House Divided: (33) Birth of the
Republican Party - I**

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: Because in part of constitutional requirements for the election of the President, successful large American political parties have to be coalitions, sometimes fractious coalitions, of interest and

ideology (for fuller discussion, see 17-016). Take, for instance, the Republicans. The modern Republican Party is a coalition of among other groups: southern whites (many formerly Democrats) skeptical of the progress of African American civil rights, older conservative evangelical Christians and Catholics disturbed by social and moral changes in modern American life, small government tax-averse libertarians, national defense hawks, and small and large business owners, financiers and managers. That is pretty complex, but no less complex than the original Republican coalition.

The Republicans swept up a

whole group of disaffected voters in the 1850s. While its main focus was opposition to the spread of slavery, there were other elements to this powerful coalition, almost exclusively found in the American north. It emerged in the wake of the 1854 Kansas-Nebraska Act authored by Illinois Democratic Senator Stephen Douglas. This Act repealed the Compromise of 1820 which prohibited slavery's spread north of a geographical line running along the southern border of Missouri extended out to the Pacific. It enshrined the doctrine of "squatter sovereignty," which basically said if a majority of voters who "squatted" or lived in a particular state wanted slavery, it

could exist there. The Whig Party promptly dissolved. Northern anti-slavery Whigs and Free Soil Democrats and others such members of the defunct anti-immigrant Know-Nothing Party began to look for a new political home. Slavery, however, was not the only issue for the Republicans. Next time: The Heart of a Republican.

In Richmond, Virginia, this is Dan Roberts.

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