The Missouri Compromise

How was the United States in 1820 divided between slave states and free states?

- In the early 1800s the population of the United States was rapidly growing and moving westward. Between 1816 and 1819 the country added four new states: Indiana, Mississippi, Illinois, and Alabama.

- In 1819 the Union was evenly divided between slave states and free states. 11 southern states and 11 northern. The North had a greater population than the South and so had more representatives in the House, where representation is based on the number of people in a state. However, because every state sends two representatives to the Senate, the North and South had equal representation there. No law could be passed without a vote in the Senate, so as long as the number of northern and southern senators was equal, each side could block any drastic laws supported by the other.

- In the South, slavery had spread westward into the new states of Mississippi and Alabama. By 1820 many northerners wanted to prohibit slavery from moving farther west into the Louisiana Purchase (though slavery had existed there before the United States purchased the territory).

What was the problem with Missouri's entering the Union as a slave state?

When Missouri applied to enter the Union as a slave state in 1819, there was an uproar in Congress. One more slave state would upset the balance of representation between slave and free states in the Senate. Senator Rufus King of New York argued that because Congress had limited slavery in the Northwest Territories in 1787, it could do the same in Missouri. Senator William Pinckney replied that the situations were different because Missouri would become an independent state and not a territory. The states are all equal, he said, so Congress has no authority to limit the rights of a particular state. Senators from the South also argued that the Fifth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution guaranteed slaveholders the right to take their property, including slaves, into territories and that no one could be deprived of their property without due process of law. After much debate, Congress decided to find a way to allow Missouri to enter the Union as a slave state without giving southerners the edge in the Senate. For more information on the Fifth Amendment, see the Constitution Handbook in your textbook.

What was the Missouri Compromise, and why was it important?

While Congress was debating the question of Missouri's statehood, Maine requested to join the Union as a free state. This enabled Henry Clay of Kentucky to lead Congress in creating the Missouri Compromise in 1820. This agreement preserved the balance in the Senate by admitting Maine into the Union as a free state and Missouri as a slave state. To prevent future disagreements, the compromise also prohibited slavery in the rest of the Louisiana Purchase.
north of 36°30' north latitude. For more information, see the Jefferson on Missouri Source Reading on the Exploring America's Past CD-ROM.

**REVIEW QUESTIONS**

**Directions:** Write T for a true statement and F for a false one. 

1. In 1819 the Union was made up of more slave states than free states.  
2. Representation in the House is based on population, though each state sends two representatives to the Senate.  
3. The free states of the North had more representatives in the House of Representatives.  
4. Some of the states admitted to the Union between 1816 and 1819 were slave states.  
5. The slave states and free states would have continued to have the same number of senators if Missouri were allowed to enter the Union as a slave state in 1819.  
6. A northern senator argued that because slavery had been limited in the Northwest Territory in 1787, Congress could limit slavery in Missouri as well.  
7. The Fifth Amendment to the Constitution states that no person can be deprived of property without due process of law.  
8. Maine requested to join the Union as a slave state.  
9. Henry Clay led Congress in creating the Missouri Compromise.  
10. The Missouri Compromise limited slavery south of 36°30' north latitude in the Louisiana Purchase.