

## Dates of Importance

Hardly anyone is able to remember the year, let alone the decade in which Congress enacted the Missouri Compromise. **It was 1820.** The compromise admitted Missouri to the Union as a slave state and Maine as a free one, but it also divided the rest of the land obtained from France by the Louisiana Purchase into slave and free territory at 36° 30' north latitude, Missouri's southern boundary. Although this legislation satisfied moderates for a generation, by mid-century the slavery issue was becoming ever more intense.

It was addressed again by the Compromise of 1850; the 1820 act itself was repealed by the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, which permitted the residents of those territories to decide the slavery question for themselves. Passed in the forlorn hope of maintaining peace, the new legislation instead triggered bloody civil war in Kansas Territory between proslavery and antislavery settlers.

The violence of the 1850s throws the hopeless compromises of that decade into high relief and makes us less aware of the earlier measure.

**1830**, the year Daniel Webster replied to South Carolina's senator Robert Hayne, who contended that the separate states were the ultimate source of sovereignty in the American political system. In Webster's speech on the floor of the Senate, he called the American flag "the gorgeous ensign of the republic" and concluded with the sentence: "Liberty *and* Union, now and forever, one and inseparable."

**1845**, when the term "manifest destiny" was coined by writer John L. O'Sullivan, reflecting the expansionist spirit of the era. It was, he wrote, "our *manifest* [read 'obvious'] *destiny* to overspread the continent."

**1857** The Dred Scott case, where a slave, Dred Scott, sued for his freedom on the ground that his master, an army surgeon, had taken him into Illinois and Wisconsin Territory, where slavery had been barred by Congress in the Missouri Compromise. The Supreme Court's majority decision ruled that the Missouri Compromise was unconstitutional because it violated the property rights protected by the Fifth Amendment, since it denied slave owners the right to take their property wherever they wanted to. In effect, this decision opened all the West to slavery, infuriating the North, and pushed the nation more precipitously toward civil war.

**1917**, the year that General Pershing is credited with saying "Lafayette, we are here", upon setting foot on French soil at the head of the first contingents of the American Expeditionary Forces. Actually, the statement was made by an aide, Charles E. Stanton.