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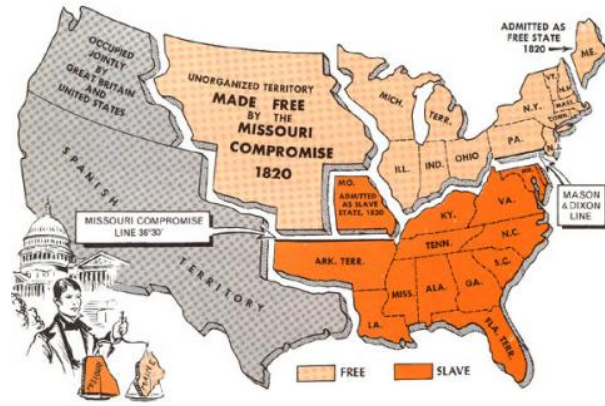
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When people in Missouri wanted to become part of the United States, in 1820, they wanted to enter the Union as a "slave state." Were that to happen, it would have tipped the balance between "free" and "slave" states in favor of "slave states." To avoid that imbalance, a compromise was reached. Missouri could be a "slave" state, but a part of Massachusetts would then have to be carved-out, creating another "free" state known as Maine.

When Robert and Zerelda James left Kentucky for their new home, Missouri was America's westernmost state. People who lived there had differing attitudes about slavery. Indeed, the issue of slavery played a significant role when Missouri applied for statehood in November of 1818.

At the time, there were twenty-two states. Eleven were "free" states, where slavery was not allowed, and eleven were "slave" states, where slavery was permitted. Missouri wanted to join the Union as a slave state, thus disrupting the delicate balance between "slave" and "free."

The lack of balance made a significant difference in Congress and in the federal laws which its members passed. Only two Senators are elected from each state.

If there were more "slave" states than "free" states, the South would have had a built-in Senate majority. If there were more "free" states than "slave" states, the North would have been advantaged. Allowing Missouri to enter the Union was thus a very hot topic of debate within the federal government.

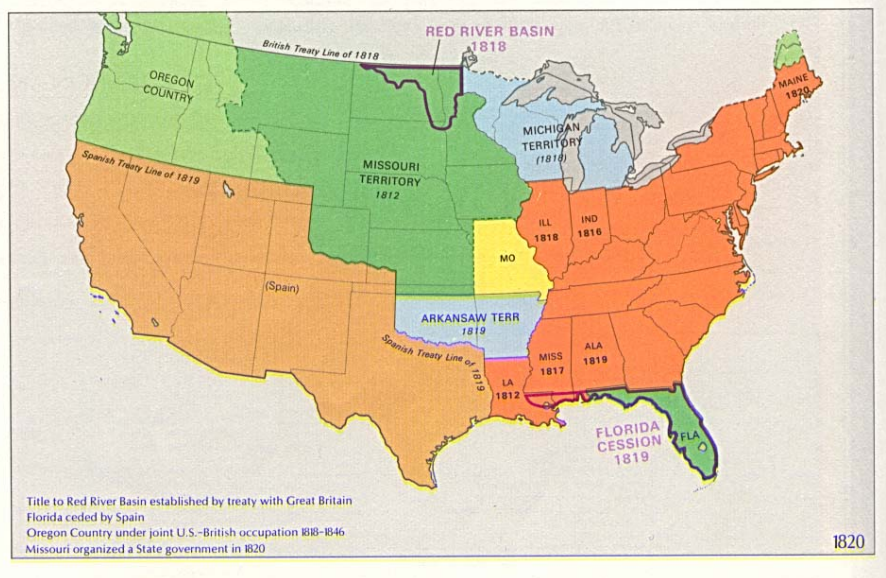
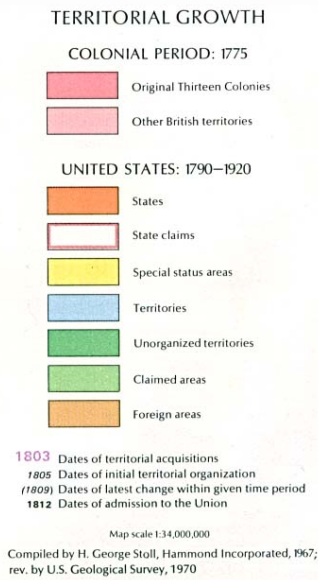
On the first of March, 1820, the House of Representatives passed a bill admitting Missouri to the Union - but as a free state. One representative, Mr. Randolph, observed that imposing such a restriction - against the wishes of Missourians - was "unconstitutional and unjust."

A possible compromise, to resolve this apparent impasse, was to carve-out the northern part of Massachusetts, thereby creating Maine - a new "free" state. The Senate had already addressed this issue the prior month.

To complicate matters further, Congress knew the "slave" versus "free" state debate would not end with Missouri. Other territories, once owned by France but sold to the United States in the Louisiana Purchase, would create the same issue when its residents applied for statehood.

Senators therefore drafted an amendment to their Missouri-Maine bill, mandating that all territory "which lies north of thirty-six degrees and thirty minutes north latitude" would not allow slavery.

However ... "thirty-six degrees and thirty minutes north latitude" is another way of describing Missouri's southern boundary. To allow Missourians to enter the Union the way they wished - as a slave state - the Senate amendment had to create a special status for Missouri.



A conference committee of House members (Missouri must be “free”) and Senators (Missouri can be “slave”) thrashed-out the issue. House members agreed to recommend the Senate compromise.

On the 2nd of March, 1820, the House voted (90 to 87) to allow Missouri to be a slave state and agreed (134 to 42) to prohibit slavery in the Louisiana Territory north of the 36° 30' latitude line. President Monroe signed the bill into law on the 6th of March, 1820.

With Maine and Missouri newly admitted, America had twelve “free” and twelve “slave” states. But the Missouri Compromise (as the deal came to be called) did not please everyone. When former president Thomas Jefferson heard about it, he was aghast. Extremely worried that slavery in Missouri, among other things, would lead to civil war in the land, he wrote:

*...this momentous question, like a fire bell in the night, awakened and filled me with terror. I considered it at once as the knell of the Union. it is hushed indeed for the moment. but this is a reprieve only, not a final sentence. . .we have the wolf by the ear, and we can neither hold him, nor safely let him go. justice is in one scale, and self-preservation in the other.* (Jefferson to John Holmes, 22 April 1820.)

For the next thirty-four years, states were admitted into the Union two by two - free and slave.

The Missouri Compromise held for thirty-four years, until the Kansas-Nebraska Act (of 1854) repealed it.

Then, in 1857, the Supreme Court decided the *Dred Scott case*, holding that Congress could not prohibit slavery in any of the country’s territories. Indeed, according to the high court, slaves were not even citizens and had no standing to sue in federal courts.

War, as Jefferson and others had predicted, was just around the corner. Before it was over, the state of Missouri - where compromise no longer ruled and the James family lived - would be in shambles.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/THE-MISSOURI-COMPROMISE-Jesse-James>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/THE-MISSOURI-COMPROMISE-Jesse-James>

## Media Stream



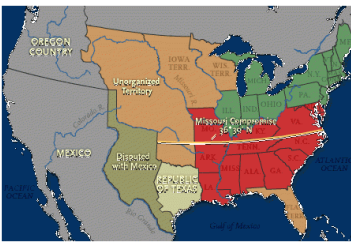
### Map - "Special Status" of Missouri as "Slave State"

Image, Library of Congress.

USGS (U.S. Geological Survey) map depicting territorial growth by 1820 (the year of the Missouri Compromise).

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Map-Special-Status-of-Missouri-as-Slave-State->

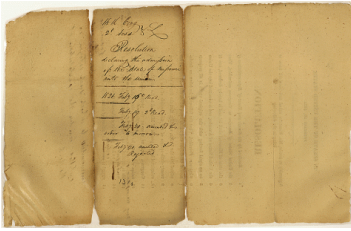


### Missouri Compromise Line - 36 Degrees, 30 Minutes

Image online, courtesy the reocities.com website.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Missouri-Compromise-Line-36-Degrees-30-Minutes>



### Original Resolution - Missouri Becomes a State

U.S. National Archives, digital image 26-0052a.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Original-Resolution-Missouri-Becomes-a-State>



### Kansas-Nebraska Act - Map Depicting Impact

Map by William Reynolds.

*Reynolds's Political Map of the United States...*

New York: Wm. C. Reynolds, 1856.

Online, courtesy Library of Congress

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Kansas-Nebraska-Act-Map-Depicting-Impact>