

Thirty-Second Congress

Dec. 1, 1851-Mar. 3, 1853

Administration of Millard Fillmore

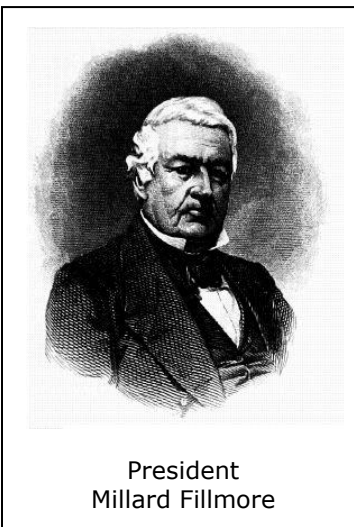
Historical Background.....	1
War or Peace?	2
Economic Trends and Conditions.....	3
Landmark U.S. Supreme Court Decisions.....	4
1851 Events.....	5
1852 Events.....	5
Major Acts.....	7

Historical Background

With the enactment of the Compromise of 1850, the 32nd Congress experienced a momentary pause in the slavery dispute. Both North and South hoped the debate was over, and Stephen A. Douglas told his Senate colleagues that the Compromise should be considered a “final settlement” of the slavery issue. It was time, he reasoned, to “cease agitating, stop debate, and drop the subject.” Many congressmen agreed. In the House, a resolution cementing the Compromise’s permanence and prohibiting further debate on the slavery question passed with a wide margin of 101-64. Support for the Compromise was even more pronounced in the Senate. When Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts attempted to repeal the Fugitive Slave Act in August 1852, only three other senators joined him.

However, despite Congress temporarily dropping the subject, the 1852 Presidential election became another forum for the sectionalism question. National sentiments continued to exert enough influence to cause sectionalists to support the national political party of their choice, however provisional that support was at the time. Democrat Franklin Pierce captured the presidency by endorsing the Compromise and pledging not to let slavery become a political issue ever again. Pierce won with 254 electoral votes; his Whig rival, General Winfield Scott, received 42 electoral votes. Meanwhile, Southerners who feared the potential of a new free state obstructed the organization of the Nebraska Territory.

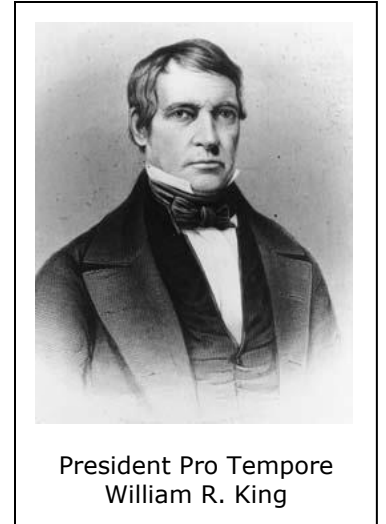
Democrats retained control of the national legislature following the 1850 elections. With the Compromise in place, therefore, the 32nd Congress turned its attention on railroad routes linking the East Coast to the Pacific and other issues concerning America’s continual push west. Questions of railroad subsidies and right-of-ways dominated debate, and in August 1852, Congress



House	Senate
Majority Party: Democrats (127 seats)	Majority Party: Democrats (36 seats)
Minority Party: Whigs (85 seats)	Minority Party: Whigs (22 seats)
Other Parties: Unionists (10 seats); Free Soilers (4 seats); Independent Democrats (3 seats); States Rights (3 seats); Independent Whig (1 seat)	Other Parties: Free Soiler (3 seats)
Speaker of the House: Linn Boyd	President Pro Tempore: William R. King; David R. Atchison

granted a one-hundred-foot right-of-way through public lands to all railroads that were chartered at the time or might be chartered within the next ten years. To further encourage railroad construction, railroads were given the right to use earth, stone, and timber from adjacent public lands in constructing roadbeds and were granted sites for construction depots, water stations, and workshops. In March 1853, legislation was passed authorizing the Secretary of War to make explorations and surveys for determining the most practical and economic route for a railroad between the Mississippi River and the Pacific Ocean.

Near the conclusion of the 32nd Congress, the Washington Territory was created from the Oregon Territory. President Millard Fillmore also signed an unusual piece of legislation authorizing William L. Sharkey, consul of the United States at Havana, to administer the oath of office to Vice President-elect William King, who was in Cuba attempting to recover from tuberculosis. King was sworn in on March 24, 1853. A few days later, he left Cuba for his plantation in Alabama, where he died on April 18.



Sources:

Dell, Christopher and Stephen W. Stathis. [Major Acts of Congress and Treaties Approved by the Senate, 1789-1980](#). Government Division (CRS), Sept. 1, 1982. 97th Congress, 2nd Session, 82-156 GOV. ProQuest Congressional, CRS-1982-GOV-0005

Douglas, Stephen A. ["The Compromise Measures."](#) *Congressional Globe Appendix*, 32nd Congress, 1st Session, (Dec. 23, 1851) Vol. 21, pp. 65-68. ProQuest Congressional. CG-1851-1223

Fillmore, Millard. [Message from the President of the United States to the two Houses of Congress, at the commencement of the first session of the Thirty-second Congress](#). Senate, Dec. 2, 1851. 32nd Congress, 1st Session, S.exdoc.1/1 (Pr13.1/1:851) ProQuest Congressional, 611 S.exdoc.1/1

Fillmore, Millard. [Message from the President of the United States to the two Houses of Congress, at the commencement of the second session of the Thirty-second Congress](#). Senate, Dec. 6, 1852. 32nd Congress, 2nd Session, S.exdoc.1/1 (Pr.13.1/1:852). ProQuest Congressional, 658 S.exdoc.1/1

["The Compromise Measures."](#) *Congressional Globe Appendix*. 32nd Congress, 1st Session, (Apr. 5, 1851) Vol. 21, Pt. 2, pp. 976-983. ProQuest Congressional. CG-1852-0405

War or Peace?

Disputes in Cuba

With the acquisition of the West being completed in the previous two Congresses, South America occupied the majority of the United States' attention during the 32nd Congress. In 1851, President Fillmore faced a diplomatic crisis when a "filibustering" expedition, led by Narciso López, from the United States invaded Cuba. In previous years, Narciso López had been campaigning in the American South for the U.S. 'liberation' of Cuba. On August 3rd approximately 400 armed U.S. citizens and foreigners embarked from New Orleans and invaded Cuba on August 12. The force attacked colonial Spanish troops on August 13, but were forced to retreat when they found themselves outnumbered. About 50 invaders were captured and

publicly executed on August 16. The leader of the insurrectionists, López, was executed on September 1. Some 150 prisoners were deported to Spain. An unknown number of them were U.S. citizens. The crisis threw into question the United States' principle of neutrality and the President's ability to "restrain the citizens...from entering into controversies between other powers."

British and French naval forces stationed themselves around Cuba to prevent any more incursions from the U.S. mainland, causing commercial intercourse to be disrupted between the U.S. and Cuba as well as other South American countries. To ease tensions, a tripartite convention was held between the U.S., Britain, and France. Meanwhile, Mexico, Nicaragua, Buenos Aires, and Chile found themselves in the grips of civil wars and colonial rebellion. The disruptions halted negotiations for an inter-oceanic and strained diplomatic relations, especially between the U.S. and Mexico - still tense following the Mexican-American War. Despite these tensions, the survey marking the border between the two countries carried on.

In the newly acquired western territories, tensions between the Native Americans and the ever growing population of white settlers began to flare as the Native peoples found their food and other resources stripped from the lands they occupied. Nearly 8,000 U.S. troops were deployed to protect settlers and American interests from attacks.

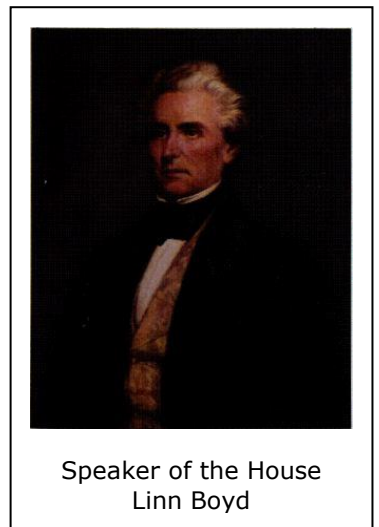
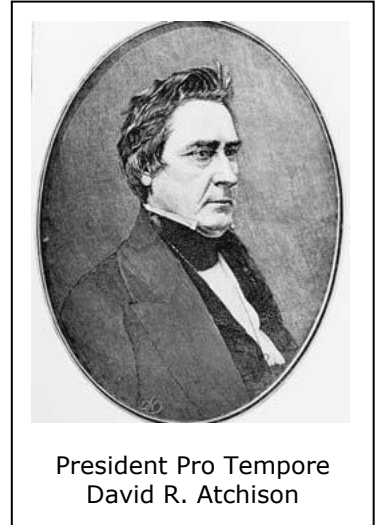
Sources:

Fillmore, Millard. [*Message from the President of the United States to the two Houses of Congress, at the commencement of the first session of the Thirty-second Congress*](#), Senate, Dec. 2, 1851. 32nd Congress, 1st Session, S.exdoc.1/1 (Pr13.1/1:851) ProQuest Congressional, 611 S.exdoc.1/1

Fillmore, Millard. [*Message from the President of the United States to the two Houses of Congress, at the commencement of the second session of the Thirty-second Congress*](#), Senate, Dec. 6, 1852. 32nd Congress, 2nd Session, S.exdoc.1/1 (Pr.13.1/1:852). ProQuest Congressional, 658 S.exdoc.1/1

Fillmore, Millard. [*Island of Cuba. Message from the President of the United States, in reference to the Island of Cuba*](#), Senate, July 13, 1852. 32nd Congress, 2nd Session, H.exdoc.121. ProQuest Congressional, 648 H.exdoc.121

Fillmore, Millard. [*Presidential message on proposed tripartite convention on Cuba*](#), Senate, Jan. 4, 1853. 32nd Congress, 2nd Session, S.exdoc.13. ProQuest Congressional, 660 S.exdoc.13



Economic Trends and Conditions

The 32nd Congress started on a good economic footing but had a number of challenges over the course of the next two years. Domestic exports saw an increase of \$43,646,322, but the increase was attributed to the high price of cotton in the previous year. By the beginning of the Congress, cotton prices had declined by almost half. Reductions in revenues from other domestic exports, such as breadstuffs, rice, and general provisions, also hit the government hard. President Fillmore criticized the current low-tariff policy, claiming "incontestably[sic] [...] the foreign demand for the products of the

American farmer has steadily declined” and calling for an upward revision on the rate of foreign goods.

To add to the government’s growing budgetary woes, under the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, which had ended the Mexican-American War, the U.S. was required to pay Mexico for the land ceded during the Mexican Cession of 1848 plus resulting citizen damages and claims. A sum of \$3,242,400 to Mexico and \$2,591,213 to citizens was to be paid for in 1851 alone. President Fillmore also warned that specie payments would drain the Treasury’s coin by an estimated \$58,607,308 in 1851 and called for Congress to pay off the public debt quickly to prevent economic crisis. He renewed his calls to Congress in his second State of the Union after Congress did little to ease the public debt and did nothing to revise the tariff.

Sources:

Corwin, Thomas. [*Finances. Report of the Secretary of the Treasury, on the state of the finances.*](#) Department of Treasury, Jan. 20, 1853. 32nd Congress, 2nd Session, H.exdoc.23/1 (T1.1:852). ProQuest Congressional, 676 H.exdoc.23/1

Fillmore, Millard. [*Message from the President of the United States to the two Houses of Congress, at the commencement of the first session of the Thirty-second Congress.*](#) Senate, Dec. 2, 1851. 32nd Congress, 1st Session, S.exdoc.1/1 (Pr13.1/1:851) ProQuest Congressional, 611 S.exdoc.1/1

Fillmore, Millard. [*Message from the President of the United States to the two Houses of Congress, at the commencement of the second session of the Thirty-second Congress.*](#) Senate, Dec. 6, 1852. 32nd Congress, 2nd Session, S.exdoc.1/1 (Pr.13.1/1:852). ProQuest Congressional, 658 S.exdoc.1/1

Guthrie, James. [*Finances report of the Secretary of the Treasury, on the state of the finances.*](#) Department of Treasury, Dec. 7, 1853. 33rd Congress, 1st Session, S.exdoc.2 (T1.1:853). ProQuest Congressional, 694 S.exdoc.2

Landmark U.S. Supreme Court Decisions

Strader v. Graham, held that slaves traveling through free states were not free because they were still slaves in the state they resided, and that those helping fugitive slaves escape would be liable for the monetary value of lost slaves, 51 U.S. 82 (1851)

Cooley v. Board of Wardens of the Port of Philadelphia, held that a Pennsylvania law requiring all ships entering or leaving Philadelphia to hire a local pilot did not violate the Commerce Clause of the Constitution, 53 U.S. 299 (1852)

Sources:

Costello, George A. and Johnny H. Killian. [*Constitution of the United States of America, Analysis and Interpretation.*](#) CRS, Library of Congress, Jan. 1, 1996. 103rd Congress, 1st Session, S. Doc. 103-6 (Y1.1/3:103-6). ProQuest Congressional, 14152 S.doc.6

1851 Events

- **Jan. 1:** *Taiping Rebellion* - [Hong Xiuquan proclaims his new dynasty, the Taiping Tianguo \("Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace"\)](#), beginning the bloody Taiping Rebellion
- **Feb. 18:** [In Boston, Mass., members of the anti-slavery Boston Vigilance Committee rescue fugitive slave Shadrach Minkins from a courtroom following his arrest by U.S. marshals](#)
- **May 1:** [The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations, otherwise known as The Great Exhibition, is opened by Queen Victoria in the Crystal Palace, Hyde Park, London and runs until October 18](#)
- **May – Aug.:** *Great Flood of 1851* - [Extensive flooding washes across the Midwestern United States; Des Moines, Iowa is virtually destroyed](#)
- **Aug. 12:** [Approx. 400 armed men, led by Narciso López, including U.S. citizens invade Spanish controlled Cuba, in a 'filibustering' expedition](#)
- **Aug. 13:** [The 'filibustering' expedition led by Narciso López attack colonial Spanish troops in Cuba but are forced to retreat when they find themselves outnumbered](#)
- **Aug. 16:** [Roughly 50 members of the 'filibustering' expedition are captured by Spanish troops in Cuba and executed](#)
- **Sept. 1:** [Leader of the 'filibustering' expedition to Cuba, Narciso López, is executed](#)
- **Sept. 18:** [The New York Times is founded](#)
- **October:** Reuters news service is founded
- **Nov. 14:** [Herman Melville's novel *Moby-Dick; or The Whale* is published in the U.S. by Harper & Brothers, New York, after being first published on October 18 in London by Richard Bentley, in 3 volumes as *The Whale*](#)
- **Dec. 2:** *French Coup of 1851*- [Louis Napoleon, president of France, dissolves the French National Assembly and declares a new constitution to extend his term](#)
- **Dec. 24:** [The Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., burns; the fire destroys two-thirds of the 6,487 volume collection acquired from former President Thomas Jefferson](#)
- **Dec. 31:** The 1851 Chilean Revolution ends after the rebel defeat at the Battle of Loncomilla

1852 Events

- **Mar. 20:** [Uncle Tom's Cabin by Harriet Beecher Stowe published in Boston](#)
- **Apr. 5:** The Second Anglo-Burmese War begins with the capture of the port of Martaban by the British
- **July 1:** [After dying of tuberculosis, U.S. Senator Henry Clay becomes the first to lay in state in the United States Capitol rotunda](#)
- **July 5:** Frederick Douglass delivered his famous speech "What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?" in Rochester, New York

- **Sept. 24:** French engineer Henri Giffard made the first airship trip from Paris to Trappes
- **Oct. 16:** After nearly five years imprisonment in France, former Algerian Emir Abdelkader El Djezairi was released by orders of then-president Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte
- **Oct. 31:** [General Joaquin Solares of Guatemala led an invasion of neighboring Honduras, beginning a war that lasted until February 13, 1856](#)
- **Nov. 2:** [Democrat Franklin Pierce of New Hampshire defeated Whig Winfield Scott of Virginia in the U.S. presidential election of 1852](#)
- **Dec. 2:** Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte becomes Napoleon III, Emperor of the Second French Empire

Sources:

Brodhead, Richard. [Memorials for expenses incurred by American contributors to Industrial Exhibition in London](#). Committee on Claims. Senate, Mar. 10, 1852. 32nd Congress, 1st Session. S.rp.114. ProQuest Congressional, 630 S.rp.114

Committee on the Judiciary. Senate. [Freedom of the Press](#). (Y4.J89/2:F87/5; Sep. 28-30, Oct. 12-14, 19-20, 1971; Feb. 1-2, 8, 16-17, 1972). ProQuest Congressional, HRG-1971-SJS-0004

Conrad, Charles Magill. [Report of the Secretary of War, communicating reports in reference to the inundations of the Mississippi River](#). Department of War, Jan. 20, 1852, 32nd Congress, 1st Session. S.exdoc.20. ProQuest Congressional, 614 S.exdoc.20

Fillmore, Millard. [List of papers, from the Department of State, accompanying the message of the President of the United States, at the opening of the Thirty-second Congress](#). Department of State, Dec. 2, 1851, 32nd Congress, 1st Session. S.exdoc.1/2 (S1.1:851). ProQuest Congressional, 611 S.exdoc.1/2

Fillmore, Millard. [Message from the President of the United States, communicating, in compliance with a resolution of the Senate, information in relation to the difficulties between the British authorities and San Salvador](#). GPO, Feb. 28, 1851, 31st Congress, 2nd Session. S.exdoc.43. ProQuest Congressional, 591 S.exdoc.43

Fillmore, Millard. [Proclamation for recapture of fugitive slave arrested in Boston, Massachusetts](#). GPO, Feb. 18, 1851, Presidential Proclamation No. 56. ProQuest Congressional, 1851-PR-56

House. ["Burning of the Library of Congress"](#) Congressional Globe, 32nd Congress, 1st Session (Dec. 26, 1851) Vol. 21, pp. 153-155. ProQuest Congressional, CG-1851-1226

Melville, Herman. [Moby Dick](#), Saddleback Publishing, 2005. ProQuest Ebook Central

Senate. ["Counting the Electoral Votes"](#) Congressional Globe, 32th Congress, 2nd Session (Feb. 9, 1853) Vol. 22, pp. 549. ProQuest Congressional, CG-1853-0209

Senate. ["Death of the Hon. Henry Clay"](#) Congressional Globe, 32nd Congress, 1st Session (June 30, 1852) Vol. 21, pp. 1631-1637. ProQuest Congressional, CG-1852-0630

Stowe, Harriet Beecher. [Uncle Tom's Cabin](#). Ed. Karen Fisher Younger. New York: Quayside Publishing Group, 2016. ProQuest Ebook Central.

Pierce, Franklin. [China. Message from the President of the United States, transmitting copies of correspondence between the State Department and the late Commissioner to China](#), July 19, 1854, H.exdoc.123. ProQuest Congressional Research Digital Collection, 734 H.exdoc.123

Pierce, Franklin. [Message from the President of the United States, communicating, \[...\] concerning the revolution in France of December, 1851](#). GPO, Mar. 22, 1853, 33rd Congress, Special Session. S.exdoc.7. ProQuest Congressional, 688 S.exdoc.7

Major Acts

Right of Way Granted to All Railroads. Granted a right of way through public lands to all railroads chartered by any of the states within the next ten years. Also granted necessary sites not less than ten miles apart for depots, watering places, and workshops along the line or lines of the railroads. Approved Aug. 4, 1852 ([10 Stat. 28, Chap. 80](#)).

Washington Territory Government Establishment. Established the Washington Territory out of that portion of the Oregon Territory lying north of the Columbia River and the 46th parallel east to the summit of the Rocky Mountains. Provided for a territorial government, which included a governor, secretary of the territory, and a legislative assembly (consisting of a Council and House of Representatives). Vested judicial power in a supreme court, district courts, probate courts, and justices of the peace. Approved Mar. 2, 1853 ([10 Stat. 172, Chap. 90](#)).

Army Appropriations Act of 1954 (Transcontinental Railroad Survey). Authorized the secretary of war “to employ such portion of the corps of topographical engineers, and such other persons as he may deem necessary, to make such explorations and surveys as he may deem advisable, to ascertain the most practical and economical route for a railroad from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean.” Appropriated \$150,000 to defray the expense of the explorations and surveys. Approved Mar. 3, 1853 ([10 Stat. 214, Chap. 98, Sec. 10](#)).

Sources:

Dell, Christopher and Stephen W. Stathis. [Major Acts of Congress and Treaties Approved by the Senate, 1789-1980](#). Government Division (CRS), Sept. 1, 1982. 97th Congress, 2nd Session, 82-156 GOV. ProQuest Congressional, CRS-1982-GOV-0005

Copyright©2018, ProQuest LLC. All rights reserved.