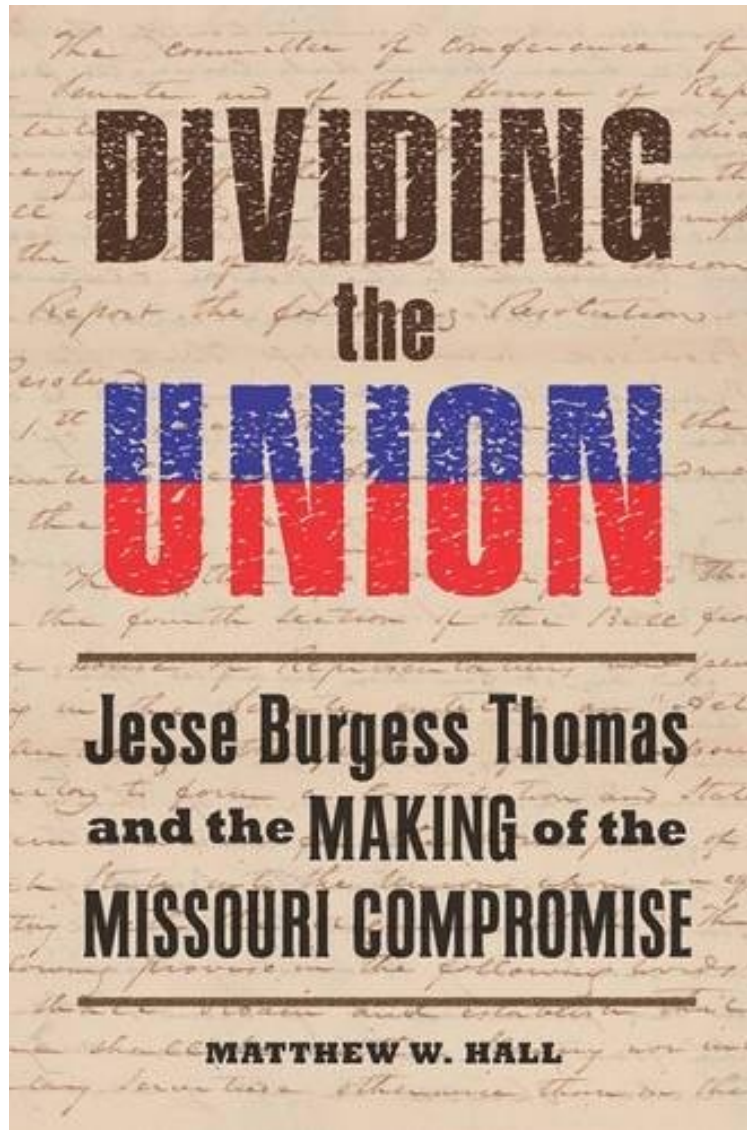


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# Dividing the Union: Jesse Burgess Thomas and the Making of the Missouri Compromise

Matthew W. Hall

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**Matthew W. Hall : Dividing the Union: Jesse Burgess Thomas and the Making of the Missouri Compromise** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Dividing the Union: Jesse Burgess Thomas and the Making of the Missouri Compromise:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. A wonderful and authentic historyBy Derrell SweemDividing the Union goes into great detail about the twists and turns which led to the approval of the Missouri Compromise by

Congress. Along the way the book also enlightens the reader about the complexities of our nation's expansion into the wilderness of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois and Missouri and how those territories developed and became states. The book shines a light on slavery, the problems of which were not confined to the South; on our inescapable conflicts with Indians; and on the establishment of law and order in the new territories. It also details the little known political shenanigans by which our Congress works, making the reader realize that crafting legislation has never been easy and in many ways was even more difficult and challenging in the past than it is today. The author utilizes the life of a little known politician of the day to argue that compromise requires a set of political skills and a certain political temperament. The book is based on exhaustive research of the time period and is an invaluable resource for serious historians; at the same time, it is written with such clarity that it can be enjoyed by the average reader. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. A Gem of History By lakelover Matt Hall's *Dividing the Union* is a thoroughly researched and sensitively written account of Jesse Burgess Thomas and his pivotal role in making the Missouri Compromise. Hall provides a quiet, thoughtful analysis supported by facts with an emphasis on the people and their changing relations with one another as well as the politics of a fledgling nation as it comes to terms with the divisive issues of slavery and western expansion. His style is fresh and succinct with a human touch while he provides fact-based insights into the significance of events at their time and over time. *Dividing the Union* holds particular appeal for readers with a serious interest in American history during the formative early 19th Century. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Slavery wasn't only a Southern practice... By Customer Fascinating politics and social history of the widespread divided views on the extension of slavery in the first third of the 19th century. Shows how compromise can happen! Very well researched...

In 1820 the Missouri controversy erupted over the issue of slavery in the newly acquired lands of the Louisiana Purchase. It fell to Jesse Burgess Thomas (1777–1853), a junior U.S. senator from the new state of Illinois, to handle the delicate negotiations that led to the Missouri Compromise. Thomas's maturity, good judgment, and restraint helped pull the country back from the brink of disunion and created a compromise that held for thirty-four years. In *Dividing the Union*, Matthew W. Hall examines the legal issues underlying the controversy and the legislative history of the Missouri Compromise while focusing on the aspects of Thomas's life and character that gave him such influence. The first in-depth biography of Thomas, Hall's work demonstrates how the legislative battle over the Compromise reflected the underlying nuances of the larger struggle over slavery. The text of the Missouri Compromise originated from the Northwest Ordinance. Article VI of the Ordinance purported to prohibit slavery in the Northwest Territory, but paradoxically, a provision that assured property rights in another article was used to protect slavery. People in some parts of the Northwest sought to circumvent Article VI by formulating indenture laws and various state constitutional provisions addressing slavery. Pro- and antislavery activists eventually developed quite different interpretations of the relevant language in these documents, making negotiations over slavery in the new territory extremely complicated. As Hall demonstrates, Thomas was perfectly situated geographically, politically, and ideologically to navigate the Missouri controversy. He was the first speaker of the Indiana Territorial General Assembly, one of the first territorial judges in the Illinois Territory, and the president of the Illinois State Constitutional Convention in 1818. Because the drive for statehood in Illinois was strong, the convention managed to skirt the divisive issue of slavery, due in large part to Thomas's efforts. That he was never required to clearly articulate his own views on slavery allowed Thomas to maintain a degree of neutrality, and his varied political career gave him the experience necessary to craft a compromise. Thomas's final version of the Compromise included shrewdly worded ambiguities that supported opposing interests in the matter of slavery. These ambiguities secured the passage of the Compromise and its endurance until the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854. By weaving Thomas's life story into the history of the Missouri Compromise, Hall offers new insight into both a pivotal piece of legislation and an important, previously overlooked figure in nineteenth-century American politics.

"In this persuasive volume, Matthew Hall provides not only a vivid, suspenseful narrative describing the passage of the Missouri Compromise (a close call indeed) but also the fullest account we have of the enigmatic legislator who performed heroic service to the nation in that troubled hour."—Michael Burlingame, Chancellor Naomi B. Lynn Distinguished Chair in Lincoln Studies, University of Illinois Springfield "Hall's well-researched, sensitive biography of Thomas provides a meticulous reconstruction of how the Compromise was formulated and the various motives of its advocates, illuminating the political history of pre-Civil War America."—Daniel Walker Howe, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815–1848* "Dividing the Union should be required reading for modern lawmakers. In an era that was even more politically divisive than our own, Jesse Thomas did his utmost—through tact, shrewdness, and lawyerly deftness—to forge a lasting and nation-saving compromise. With clarity and discernment, Hall vividly reveals the contributions of an enigmatic and overlooked but intriguing and significant statesman."—Evan Thomas, author of *Being Nixon*