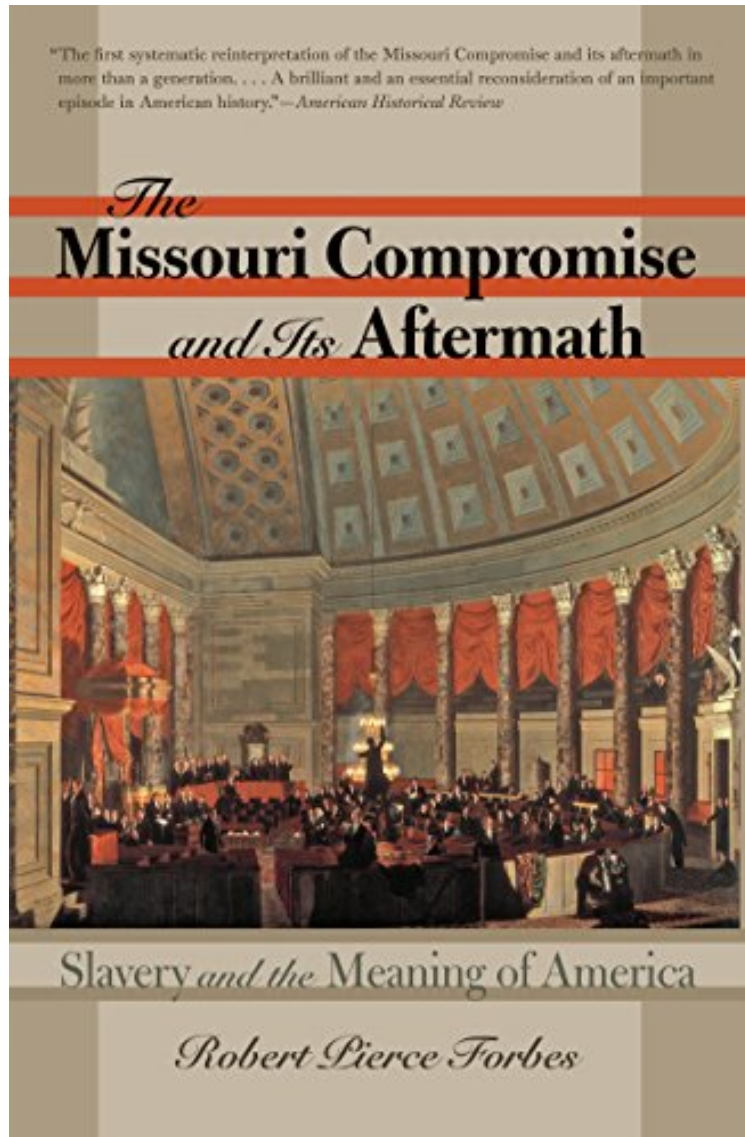


The Missouri Compromise and Its Aftermath: Slavery and the Meaning of America

Robert Pierce Forbes

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Robert Pierce Forbes : The Missouri Compromise and Its Aftermath: Slavery and the Meaning of America before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Missouri Compromise and Its Aftermath: Slavery and the Meaning of America:

14 of 14 people found the following review helpful. Once in a generation.By greg taylorRobert Pierce Forbes' book is

a masterwork in American history. His book reinterprets the Missouri Compromise as the watershed event in the first eighty or ninety years of this country's history. As I read him, Forbes is asserting that this country was created with a fundamental contradiction that was so deeply ingrained that our political institutions eventually failed in dealing with it. And then the war came. I am talking, of course, about the contradiction between the universal rights enshrined in our founding documents (and thus in our self-image) and the presence of slavery through out much of the land. We believed that we had created the universal republic and what we had really created was a white republic. We were able to live with the contradiction because most people believed that slavery had been imposed on us by Britain and that it would eventually die off. As time went on two paths began to emerge. The northern states moved slowly toward making slavery illegal (which was very different from making their free black inhabitants full citizens) and the southern states moved toward being (in various ways) slave-based economies. In Forbes' reading of the historical record, the debates that erupted around the Missouri compromise exposed just how deep those differences ran. The spark was the Tallmadge amendment which would have prevented any more slaves being brought into Missouri after statehood and would have emancipated any Missouri born slaves at age 25. Forbes' telling of the resulting debates and the behind the scenes maneuvering that led to the two compromises is masterful and insightful. He develops several themes in this discussion. One is that James Monroe was much more effective a President than has been realized. Forbes shows that Monroe was tireless and adroit in his efforts toward the compromises. Perhaps most admirably, Monroe seems to have simply not cared about credit. He simply wanted what he thought was good for the country to occur no matter who got the acclaim. Forbes also notes that the various arguments that were developed during the debates and the language that was used to soften the compromises were harbingers of some of the horrors to come. The language that Clay used to forge a Congressional acceptance of the provocative Missouri Constitution (particularly the clause that outlawed any free blacks from moving into the state) was to prove the foundation for the Dred Scott decision years later. That language framed the national thinking about free blacks in such a way as to deny any possibility of freedmen being citizens of many Northern states. That last sentence speaks to one of the most remarkable things about Forbes' book. He is clear that the North legalized many forms of racism. He also really tries to make some of the Southern reaction and/or thinking on racism and slavery understandable. For example, up until the British emancipation of their West Indian slaves in the 1830s, there had never been a peaceful emancipation on a societal level by slave owners. Slavery had always ended in rebellion up until that point in time. So prior to that emancipation, it is understandable that most slave owners assumed that emancipation without exportation of the freed blacks would lead to race war. Their most recent example was Haiti and they also had the slave rebellions of Denmark Vecsey and Nat Turner to support their beliefs. This also explains why the British abolition movement was such a provocation to them. The successful emancipation of the West Indies proved that their fears were not completely justified. Most simply could not accept this. Forbes' discussion ranges far beyond Missouri. He talks about the tariff debates, the internal improvement debates, the (complete and total outrage) of the South Carolinian Negro Seaman Act, the Nullification crisis, the annexation of Texas, the Dred Scott decision and Kansas, bloody Kansas. He discusses the enormous variety of Southern intellectual reaction to these various crisis, the unanimity of the Southern political reaction on the national stage and all the various ways that Northern politicians played the doughface. Forbes provides keen insights into the actions of Monroe, Clay, Webster, Calhoun, Van Buren, J.Q. Adams and Jackson. He provides readings of many of the influential writings of the times whether Robert Turnbull's *The Crisis* or Thomas Cooper's *Consolidation* or John Taylor of Caroline's *New Views on the Constitution* or David Walker's *Appeal...to the Colored Citizens of the World*. His history ends with the Dred Scott decision and with the compromise of 1850 wherein the Missouri Compromise was abrogated. Forbes discussion is well grounded in original sources and with a mastery of the scholarly literature. He has absorbed Thomas Hart Benton's *Thirty Years View*, J.Q. Adams' *Memoirs* (one of the essential diaries in American history) and Hermann von Holst's *The Constitutional and Political History of the United States* as well as the more recent literature. But it is really in his mastery of the Congressional record and in the letters of people like Van Buren and Monroe wherein Forbes has grounded his interpretations. Rarely, usually once or twice a generation, a historical work comes along which changes a field of inquiry, which sets new standards of research for those who labor in that field thereafter. We have seen such works, in my lifetime, from Bailyn, Woods, Foner and maybe McPherson. It is my belief that Forbes' book may be their equal. Time will tell. But why wait for history's judgment? I guarantee you that you will learn from this book, that it will give you much to think about, that it will make sense of much that confused you before and that it will bring you up against those twin issues in our national narrative that have warped so many events in that narrative- slavery and race. What freaking more do you want?

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Very Informative
By P. R. Smith
This book contains a lot of detail and I found it difficult to read. That said, it gives an in depth review of events surrounding the Missouri Compromise. I have been studying U.S. History from 1800-1860 on a personal quest to better understand it. If you want to understand this period and the part that slavery played in shaping this era, then it is essential to understand the Missouri Compromise. I found the play between the Northern and Southern members of Congress as the Compromise played out to be very fascinating. The South was adamant and unyielding in its defense of slavery and the North was, I felt, constantly yielding to preserve the Union. This book also points out how commercial interests between North and

South played a role in the compromise. I think we could easily had the Civil War any time between 1830-60, but for the art of compromise it was delayed. Also, it seems history keeps repeating itself. The major issues of today are nearly as contentious as they were in 1820. Thus, reading this book gave me perspective on the political challenges that we face today.³ of 3 people found the following review helpful. How the Civil War Became Inevitable By Leonard J. Wilson Sometime between 1776 and 1861 the unity of the United States, together with their shared interests and their willingness to consider other points of view, effectively ended. At some point, civil war became inevitable. Slavery was the issue, but how, when, and why did the states, their representatives in Washington, and the people themselves determine that their sectional views on slavery were more important than the Union? From prior readings, I had come to suspect that the Missouri Compromise in 1820 was the watershed in the fragmentation of the Union. Robert Pierce Forbes recent book, *The Missouri Compromise and its Aftermath*, seems to support my suspicion. Missouri was the first new state whose status as free or slave was not effectively predetermined by its prior status as territory (1) ceded by a free state (Vermont, Maine), (2) ceded by a slave state (Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi), (3) where slavery was forbidden under the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 (Ohio, Indiana, Illinois), or (4) where slavery was firmly rooted under prior French rule (Louisiana). Thus, the Missouri Statehood Bill was the first occasion for congressional debate on the free/slave status of a new state. That debate commenced when Rep. James Tallmadge (NY) introduced an amendment providing "that the further introduction of slavery ... be prohibited ... and that all children of slaves born within the state shall be free at the age of twenty-five." It was not at all clear that the Constitution empowered congress to impose conditions on applicants for statehood other than that their constitutions be consistent with the US Constitution. Therein lies the problem: The US Constitution (pre-13th Amendment) was not consistent with itself. Consider the following three provisions: * The US Constitution recognized the existence of slavery in two clauses: (1) A state's representation in congress was based on its population of free persons plus 3/5 of "all other" persons (i.e., slaves) and (2) Congress was prohibited from restricting the "migration or importation of persons" (i.e., the slave trade) prior to 1808. * Under Amendment V, a person could not be deprived of private property (presumably including slaves) without due process of law. * Under Article IV, the citizens of each state are entitled to all the privileges and immunities of citizens in the several states (presumably including the protection of property). From a purely legal viewpoint the US could not continue to function as a mixture of free and slave states. This is the logic that led to the Dred Scott decision which came perilously close to declaring slavery legal in all states. It took the 13th Amendment to remove this inconsistency from the Constitution, and it took the Civil War to make the 13th Amendment feasible. Missourians reacted to the Tallmadge Amendment by drafting a state constitution that prohibited emancipation and forbid free black persons from entering the state. The second of these provisions either violated the provision of Article IV cited above or declared that free blacks could not be citizens. This marked the recasting of the slavery issue from one focused primarily of status (free or slave) to one also focused on race. Prior to this time, some southern states (North Carolina and Tennessee) had allowed free blacks who met the property qualifications in effect at the time to vote, a clear indication that they were considered citizens. Henry Clay's Missouri Compromise (admit Missouri as a slave state but prohibit additional new slave states north of its southern border) held until the territory acquired in the Mexican War necessitated reopening the issue. However, the damage was done. Neither side, North or South, trusted in the good intentions or good faith of the other again. Increasingly, it became apparent that the western states and territories would soon hold the balance of power and, increasingly, they were becoming disenchanted with the South's intransigence on numerous issues, including South Carolina's nullification of the tariff and the South's rejection of Daniel Webster's olive branch when he proclaimed his devotion to "the Union as it is" rather than "as it should be". Perhaps from this point (1829) on, civil war became inevitable. Professor Forbes ends the book with a noteworthy observation: It is impossible to "tell the story of America, or understand its meaning, without acknowledging the fundamental contradiction of slavery that is at its center."

Robert Pierce Forbes goes behind the scenes of the crucial Missouri Compromise, the most important sectional crisis before the Civil War, to reveal the high-level deal-making, diplomacy, and deception that defused the crisis, including the central, unexpected role of President James Monroe. Although Missouri was allowed to join the union with slavery, the compromise in fact closed off nearly all remaining federal territories to slavery. When Congressman James Tallmadge of New York proposed barring slavery from the new state of Missouri, he sparked the most candid discussion of slavery ever held in Congress. The southern response quenched the surge of nationalism and confidence following the War of 1812 and inaugurated a new politics of racism and reaction. The South's rigidity on slavery made it an alluring electoral target for master political strategist Martin Van Buren, who emerged as the key architect of a new Democratic Party explicitly designed to mobilize southern unity and neutralize antislavery sentiment. Forbes's analysis reveals a surprising national consensus against slavery a generation before the Civil War, which was fractured by the controversy over Missouri.

Forbes's analysis of the Missouri Compromise . . . is the best history of that landmark political decision for several decades.--International History Forbes's account of the sectional conflict from the time of the Missouri crisis is well

written and thoroughly researched and will repay a reader's careful and thoughtful consideration.--Journal of American HistoryPart of a welcome rise in scholarly attention . . . that historians of the early Republic have until now been more inclined to acknowledge than to study. . . . Forbes has helped to call our attention squarely onto the Missouri crisis, and has offered a bracing interpretation of its course and significance.--H-Net[An] impressively researched book. . . . Sure to inform future discussions of the politics of slavery, and its timely message speaks to Americans today.--Missouri Historical [An] exemplary study. . . . A resolutely intelligent book, provocative in its thesis, broad in its reach, patient in its execution, and sober in its judgments.--Political Science QuarterlyA compelling case study of the centrality of slavery to early national America.--Journal of Southern HistoryThis is an important book that only begins to untangle the shifting political alliances, issues, and ideologies that sustained debates over slavery during the 1820s.--Journal of the Early Republic[Forbes's] ability to question the depths of a proslavery 'consensus' before 1819 is intriguing.--The Virginia Quarterly Lively and engaging . . . [Forbes] succeeds in rendering the debates the narrates vivid and dramatic.--Register of the Kentucky Historical Will certainly become a focus for debate for future generations of antebellum scholars.--Arkansas Historical QuarterlyCertain to become essential reading on the era of good feelings and the origins of the second-party system. . . . Extremely rich and complex. . . . Important and intriguing.--Journal of Interdisciplinary HistoryAn important book offering the first systematic reinterpretation of the Missouri Compromise and its aftermath in more than a generation. . . . A brilliant and an essential reconsideration of an important episode in American history. It is a work of thorough scholarship and penetrating insights.--American Historical The Missouri Compromise and Its Aftermath is a splendid work. Forbes's research is thorough and imaginative and reveals a full mastery of American political history. Without question, this book will become the standard source for any discussion of the Missouri debates, their origins, and their aftermath.--Ira Berlin, University of MarylandA profound study.--Daniel Walker Howe, in *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848*, winner of the Pulitzer Prize in HistoryAs no other historian has, Forbes demonstrates the full significance of the Missouri Controversy and Compromise by placing it at the center of a dramatic shift in regime and consciousness, away from the founders' vision of slavery as a moral evil and towards a Jacksonian perspective that predicated the survival of America on a refusal to discuss or confront the anomaly of slavery in a free society. The book represents a major contribution to the history of antebellum American political culture, with thought-provoking implications for political life today.--Iver Bernstein, Washington University in St. LouisFrom the Inside FlapRobert Pierce Forbes goes behind the scenes of the crucial Missouri Compromise, the most important sectional crisis before the Civil War, to reveal the high-level deal-making, diplomacy, and deception that defused the crisis, including the central, unexpected role of President James Monroe. Although Missouri was allowed to join the union with slavery, Forbes observes, the compromise in fact closed off nearly all remaining federal territory to slavery. Forbes's analysis reveals a surprising national consensus against slavery a generation before the Civil War, which was fractured by the controversy over Missouri.