

Crisis & Compromise

By 1816, the Territory of Missouri took the final steps towards statehood. Missouri petitioned to join the Union in 1818, but Congress ignored the request. U.S. legislators were reluctant to add another slave state to the Union. Missouri would tip the balance of power in favor of slave states, 12 slave to 11 free states.

Missouri's road to statehood was not a smooth one. The U.S. House of Representatives recommended an enabling bill for Missouri statehood in 1819. Representative James Tallmadge Jr. proposed an amendment to the bill calling for the gradual extinction of slavery in Missouri. Representative John Scott and others protested the amendment because other territories did not have restrictions placed on their statehood. Yet, the House passed the bill with the Tallmadge amendment. The Senate refused the bill sending it back to the House. Missouri's statehood became a controversial topic in both northern and southern states.

When Congress convened in December of 1819, both chambers introduced enabling bills for Missouri. Once again, the House passed its bill with the Tallmadge amendment and the Senate refused it. The crisis became messier when Massachusetts voted to allow its district of Maine to petition for statehood. Southerners held Maine's statehood hostage for the admission of Missouri without the Tallmadge amendment.

Speaker of the House Henry Clay and Senator Jesse Thomas forged and pushed through the Missouri Compromise, which allowed Maine to enter the Union as a free state and Missouri to enter any way it chose. Missouri's southern border became the dividing line between future slave and free states. The compromise ensured Missouri's statehood, but another crisis was waiting in the midst.



Businesses such as Bernard M. Lynch's "slave market" in St. Louis continued after statehood due to the Missouri Compromise, which allowed slavery in Missouri. Lynch's sales sent enslaved persons to western counties in Missouri or further down the Mississippi River expanding the practice in the state and feeding it in the South.

Images courtesy of the Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis. "Lynch's Slave Market, 104 Locust Street," circa 1852. (above); The National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institute. "Henry Clay" by John Neagle, (right).

