



# America's Great Debate: Henry Clay, Stephen A. Douglas, and the Compromise That Preserved the Union

*Fergus M. Bordewich*

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**The “stimulating, richly informed” (*The Wall Street Journal*) story behind the Compromise of 1850, which preserved the Union on the eve of the Civil War—“original in concept, stylish in execution...provides everything history readers want....The characters seem as vivid, human, and understandable as those who walk the halls of Congress today” (*The Washington Post*).**

The Mexican War introduced vast new territories into the United States, including California and the present-day Southwest. When California settlers petitioned for admission to the Union, Congress was presented with a seemingly intractable dilemma: with the Senate precariously balanced at fifteen free states and fifteen slave states, would California be free or slave? So began an unprecedented crisis in American government and the longest debate in Senate history.

Fergus Bordewich tells the epic story of the Compromise of 1850 with skill and vigor, bringing to life two generations of senators who dominated the great debate. Luminaries such as John Calhoun, Daniel Webster, and Henry Clay were nearing the end of their long careers, while rising stars such as Jefferson Davis, William Seward, and Stephen Douglas would shape the country's politics as slavery gradually fractured the nation.

The Compromise saved the Union from collapse, but it did so at a great cost. *America's Great Debate* takes us back to a time when political compromise was not only possible, but imperative for the survival of the nation.

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