

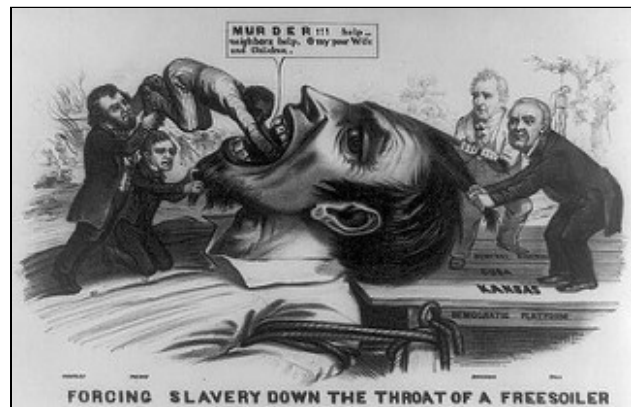
Name: _____ Class: _____

Bloody Kansas

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A series of events dividing pro-slavery southern states and anti-slavery northern states led up to the start of the Civil War in 1860. The Missouri Compromise of 1820 allowed slavery south of and prohibited slavery north of Missouri's southern border. The Compromise of 1850 settled four years of political confrontation between slave and free states with five new laws, including a stricter Fugitive Slave Law that legally required Northerners to return escaped slaves to their southern owners. And finally, the development of a transcontinental railroad would require the unorganized territory west of Missouri to become organized territories preparing for statehood. All of this occurred a few years before the South seceded, or left the Union, starting the Civil War. As you read, note who disagrees with whom and what the effects of these disagreements are.

- [1] For decades throughout the early 1800s, both northern and southern states had threatened secession and dissolution¹ of the Union over the question of where slavery was to be permitted. At issue was power. Both sides sought to limit the governing power of the other by maintaining a balance of membership in Congress. This meant ensuring that admission of a new state where slavery was outlawed was matched by a state permitting slavery. For example, when Missouri entered the Union as a slave state, the Missouri Compromise ensured that Maine entered the Union as a free state.



"Kansas Nebraska Act - "Forcing Slavery"" by Elycefeliz is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

New states were organized as self-governing territories before they could become states. They therefore developed a position on slavery well before being admitted to the Union. Southerners held that slavery must be permitted in all territories. Northerners held that slavery must not be extended into new territories. If slavery were not permitted in the territories, southern power in Congress would gradually erode.²

If either side was successful in gaining a distinct advantage over the other, many felt disunion and civil war would follow.

It was in Kansas in the 1850s that this conflict finally erupted in violence between the North and the South. The Kansas-Nebraska Act initiated the violence.

1. **Dissolution (noun):** the act of officially ending an agreement or organization
2. **Erode (verb):** to gradually destroy (something)

The Kansas-Nebraska Act

- [5] The Kansas-Nebraska Act may have been the single most significant event leading up to the Civil War. By the early 1850s, settlers and entrepreneurs³ wanted to move into the area now known as Nebraska. However, until the area was organized as a territory, settlers would not move there because they could not legally hold a claim on the land. The southern states' representatives in Congress were in no hurry to permit a Nebraska territory because the land lay north of the 36°30' parallel⁴ — where slavery had been outlawed by the Missouri Compromise of 1820.

The person behind the Kansas-Nebraska Act was Senator Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois. Douglas supported building a transcontinental railroad that would go through Chicago, Illinois. Since the railroad would also go through Nebraska, Nebraska would need to become a new territory. To win southern support, he proposed simultaneously creating a state many thought would be inclined to support slavery: Kansas.

The Kansas-Nebraska Act allowed each territory to decide the issue of slavery itself, a concept called “popular sovereignty.” Since Kansas was also north of the 36°30' parallel, if it allowed slavery it would violate the Missouri Compromise, which had kept the Union from falling apart for the last 34 years. The long-standing compromise would have to be repealed. Opposition was intense, but ultimately the bill passed in May of 1854. Territory north of the sacred 36°30' line was now open to popular sovereignty.

The political effects of Douglas' bill were enormous. Passage of the bill irrevocably split the Whig Party, a major political party originally dedicated to bolstering the power of the Congress over that of the President.⁵ Most of the southern pro-slavery Whigs were soon swept into the Democratic Party, which retained supporters in the North. Most northern Whigs reorganized themselves with abolitionists⁶ to become the Republican Party, the party of Abraham Lincoln.

Border Ruffians

The passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act would lead to a civil war between pro-slavery and anti-slavery settlers in Kansas.

- [10] Slavery was quite likely to be outlawed by popular sovereignty in Nebraska, where cotton didn't grow well. The situation in Kansas was entirely different, where the land was similar to that in Missouri, a slave state. Whether Kansas was to be slave or free would be decided at the polls.

Missouri counties that bordered Kansas were strongly pro-slavery and wanted their neighbor to be a slave state. In the fall of 1854, Senator David Atchison of Missouri led over 1,700 men from Missouri into Kansas to vote for a pro-slavery representative. These were the infamous⁷ “Border Ruffians,” who threatened to shoot, burn and hang those opposed to slavery.

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3. **Entrepreneur (noun):** a person who starts a business
 4. This boundary line run along and extends from the southern border of Missouri.
 5. The Whigs developed in the 1830s in opposition to President Andrew Jackson's administration, which strongly favored executive over legislative action. The Whigs were supportive of Thomas Jefferson's ideas of democracy, which they felt Jackson violated. The issue of slavery was what ultimately divided them and led to the end of the party in the 1850s.
 6. **Abolitionist (noun):** one who supports the official end of slavery
 7. **Infamous (adjective):** well-known for a negative quality or deed

Although their votes were later ruled fraudulent, their candidate was elected to Congress. When it came time to elect a territorial legislature the following March, almost 5,000 men came into the state from Missouri to cast illegal ballots. Although anti-slavery settlers made up the majority of the population in Kansas, they were outvoted. The result of the fraudulent election was a legislature with 36 pro-slavery delegates and three anti-slavery delegates.

As one of their first acts, this legislature passed a harsh slave code that threatened fines and imprisonment simply for expressing opinions against slavery. The death penalty would be administered to any individual found guilty of assisting slaves to revolt or escape. It also legalized the “border ruffian” vote by not requiring voters to be residents in Kansas prior to voting; the retroactive⁸ law protected the preceding elections.

Within a year, the population of anti-slavery residents in Kansas, which far outnumbered legal pro-slavery residents, revolted against the “Bogus Legislature” located in Shawnee Mission. They organized under the name “Free Soldiers,” drew up a free state constitution, and elected a separate governor and state legislature located in Topeka. The result was a state with two governments.

- [15] President Franklin Pierce refused to step in to resolve the election dispute resulting from the border ruffians. In the spring of 1856, Kansas’ Chief Justice Samuel Lecompte demanded that members of the anti-slavery “Free Soil” government in Kansas be indicted⁹ for treason.

Bloody Kansas

The anti-slavery government leaders and citizens had financial support from New England abolitionists on their side. Northerners shipped them boxes of Sharps rifles, named “Beecher’s Bibles” after anti-slavery preacher Henry Ward Beecher, who remarked that a rifle might be a more powerful moral agent on the Kansas plains than a Bible.

On May 21, 1856, the pro-slavery forces sprung into action. A posse¹⁰ of over 800 men from Kansas and Missouri rode to Kansas’ anti-slavery stronghold in Lawrence to arrest members of the free state government. The citizens of Lawrence decided not to resist, but the pro-slavery mob was not satisfied. They proceeded to destroy two newspaper offices, throwing the printing presses from the Free-Soil newspaper into the nearby river. They burned and looted homes and shops. As a final message to the abolitionists, they aimed their cannons at the Fire State Hotel and smashed it into oblivion.

The attack inflamed almost everyone. Republicans introduced bills to bring Kansas into the Union under the free state government, while Democrats introduced bills to bring in Kansas as a slave state. Neither party alone could get the votes necessary to win. Republican newspapers exploited the situation in Kansas to increase readership, galvanizing the northern states like nothing before. They said “The Sack of Lawrence” was a direct act of violent aggression by slave-owning southern “Fire Eaters.”

8. **Retroactive (adjective):** affective from a certain date in the past
9. **Indict (verb):** to formally decide that someone should be put on trial for a crime
10. **Posse (noun):** a group of people gathered by law enforcement to help search for a criminal

The Sack of Lawrence called for retaliation in the eyes of John Brown, a devout¹¹ white abolitionist. Brown found human bondage immoral, and he was furious that the people of Lawrence had chosen not to fight. He told his followers that they must “fight fire with fire,” and “strike terror in the hearts of the pro-slavery people.” In his eyes, the only just fate for those responsible for the border ruffian laws was death.

- [20] On the night of May 24, three days after the Lawrence affair, Brown set out with seven others calling themselves the Army of the North. They entered the pro-slavery town of Pottawatomie Creek armed with rifles, knives, and broadswords. Brown and his band stormed the houses of his enemies. One by one, they dragged out five helpless victims and hacked at their heads with broadswords. It was the South’s turn to be outraged. Destroying property was one thing, but no one had been killed in Lawrence. Brown had raised the stakes. He and his followers were doggedly hunted well into the summer. Now a fugitive,¹² Brown traveled north where abolitionists received him like a cult¹³ hero.

The sack of Lawrence and the massacre at Pottawatomie set off a brutal guerrilla war¹⁴ in Kansas. By the end of 1856, over 200 people would be murdered in cold blood. Property damage reached millions of dollars. Federal troops were sent by President Buchanan to put down the fighting, but they were too few and had little effect.

Kansas, whose official stance on slavery remained hotly contested until the war broke out,¹⁵ served as a small-scale prelude to the bloody catastrophe that engulfed the entire nation only five years later. Its violence seemed contagious, and within the week it spilled over into the national legislature as well.

After the sack of Lawrence, on May 21, 1856, Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts — an avowed¹⁶ abolitionist and leader of the Republican Party — gave a bitter speech in the Senate called “The Crime Against Kansas.” He blasted the “murderous robbers from Missouri,” calling them “hirelings, picked from the drunken spew and vomit of an uneasy civilization.” He verbally attacked South Carolina’s pro-slavery Senator Andrew Butler. Stephen Douglas leaned over to a colleague and said, “That damn fool will get himself killed by some other damn fool.” The speech went on for two days.

Representative Preston Brooks of South Carolina, distant cousin of Senator Butler, thought Sumner went too far. Two days after Sumner’s speech, Brooks entered the Senate chamber where Sumner was working at his desk and proceeded to strike the Northerner over the head repeatedly with a gold-tipped cane. The cane shattered as Brooks rained blow after blow on the hapless Sumner. Brooks only stopped when others physically restrained him.

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11. **Devout** (*adjective*): deeply religious
 12. **Fugitive** (*noun*): a person running to avoid capture
 13. **Cult** (*noun*): a small group of devoted supporters or fans
 14. “Guerilla war” tactics often include battles between small groups of armed forces. These forces also often use unconventional tactics that are not used in traditional warfare.
 15. Kansas was admitted to the Union in January of 1861 as a free state, and was a part of the Union during the Civil War.
 16. **Avow** (*verb*): to declare or state (something) in an open and public way

[25] Northerners were incensed.¹⁷ The House voted to expel Brooks, but it could not amass¹⁸ the votes to do so. Brooks was levied¹⁹ a \$300 fine, resigned, and returned home to South Carolina where people held events in his honor and reelected him to his House seat. This response outraged northern moderates even more than the caning itself. As for poor Charles Sumner, the physical and psychological injuries from the caning kept him away from the Senate for most of the next several years. Nevertheless, as he recovered at home and abroad, he was lauded as an abolitionist hero. The voters of Massachusetts continued to reelect him and let his seat sit vacant²⁰ as a reminder of southern brutality. The time for symbolism was closing, though, with blood already spilled and the Civil War looming just around the corner.

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17. **Incense** (*verb*): to arouse with extreme anger
 18. **Amass** (*verb*): to collect
 19. **Levy** (*verb*): to use legal authority to demand and collect (a fine)
 20. **Vacant** (*adjective*): empty or unoccupied

Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which TWO of the following best identify the central ideas of this text?
 - A. Senator Douglas made Kansas a slave state so that he could build a railroad that would benefit him and his state.
 - B. Popular sovereignty in the Kansas-Nebraska Act voided the premises of the Missouri Compromise, which helped to keep the Union together.
 - C. The Free Soil government's rebellion against Kansas' just government was responsible for a large loss of life.
 - D. Pro-slavery forces in Missouri encouraged much of the destruction and violence that gripped Kansas in 1856.
 - E. While the pro-slavery Kansans made up a majority of the voting population, the anti-slavery Kansans eventually grabbed control of the state.
 - F. John Brown's massacre inspired Representative Brooks to attack Senator Charles Sumner in the Senate Hall.

2. PART B: Which TWO phrases from the text best support the answers to Part A?
 - A. "Since the railroad would also go through Nebraska, Douglas had to make Nebraska a territory." (Paragraph 6)
 - B. "Since Kansas was also north of the 36°30' parallel, if it allowed slavery it would violate the Missouri Compromise, which had kept the Union from falling apart for the last 34 years." (Paragraph 7)
 - C. "These were the infamous "Border Ruffians," who threatened to shoot, burn and hang those opposed to slavery." (Paragraph 11)
 - D. "Within a year, the population of anti-slavery residents in Kansas, which far outnumbered legal pro-slavery residents, revolted against the 'Bogus Legislature' located in Shawnee Mission." (Paragraph 14)
 - E. "In the spring of 1856, Kansas' Chief Justice Samuel Leconte demanded that members of the anti-slavery "Free Soil" government in Kansas be indicted for treason." (Paragraph 15)
 - F. "Its violence seemed contagious, and within the week it spilled over into the national legislature as well." (Paragraph 22)

3. PART A: What does the word "hapless" mean as used in paragraph 24?
 - A. Pitiful
 - B. Angry
 - C. Unfortunate
 - D. Overconfident

4. PART B: Which phrase from the text best supports the answer to Part A?
- A. "an avowed abolitionist" (Paragraph 23)
 - B. "That damn fool" (Paragraph 23)
 - C. "Sumner went too far." (Paragraph 24)
 - D. "As for poor Charles Sumner," (Paragraph 25)
5. Which statement best describes the relationship between border ruffians and the guerilla warfare that broke out in Kansas?
- A. The border ruffians were the same people that initiated violent attacks and murders on their enemies.
 - B. By helping elect pro-slavery politicians in Kansas, the border ruffians prompted a battle for control of the state that would end in violence.
 - C. By physically threatening anti-slavery Kansans, the border ruffians prompted their targets to act violently to defend themselves against a supposed threat.
 - D. The border ruffians' slaughter of innocent civilians caused retaliatory violence, leading to all-out war in Kansas.
6. What effect does the conclusion of the text, focused on the attack of Charles Sumner, have on the development of the central ideas of the text?
