

The Antebellum Times Classifieds

Seeking Historical Detectives

to discover

WHO WAS JOHN BROWN?

Only qualified candidates should apply.

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K-12

ANTI-SLAVERY MASS MEETING!

Agreeably to a call, signed by about 50 persons, and published in the Lawrence Republican, a Mass Meeting of the friends of Freedom will be held at Miller's Hall, at 2 o'clock P. M., on Friday, Dec. 2d the day on which

CAPT. JOHN BROWN IS TO BE EXECUTED,

To testify against the iniquitous **SLAVE POWER** that rules this Nation, and take steps to

Organize the Anti-Slavery Sentiment

of the community. Arrangements have been made with prominent speakers to be present and address the meeting.

PER ORDER OF COMMITTEE OF ARRANGEMENTS.

Lawrence, Nov. 26, 1859.



“John Brown is a man who remains one of the **most controversial figures in American history**. He dedicated his life to the abolition of slavery; for him, **any means** used to achieve this goal were justified. He was prepared to kill or be killed in this effort, a decisive break with the nonviolent resistance embraced by most abolitionists at that time.

He has been called a **saint**, a **fanatic**, and a **cold-blooded murderer**. The controversy over his memory, his motives, about the true nature of the man, continues to stir passionate debate. It is said that **John Brown was the spark that started the Civil War.**”

Use your detective skills to determine once and for all,

WHO WAS JOHN BROWN?

The Kansas-Nebraska Act, 1854

“The Law that ripped America in two...”

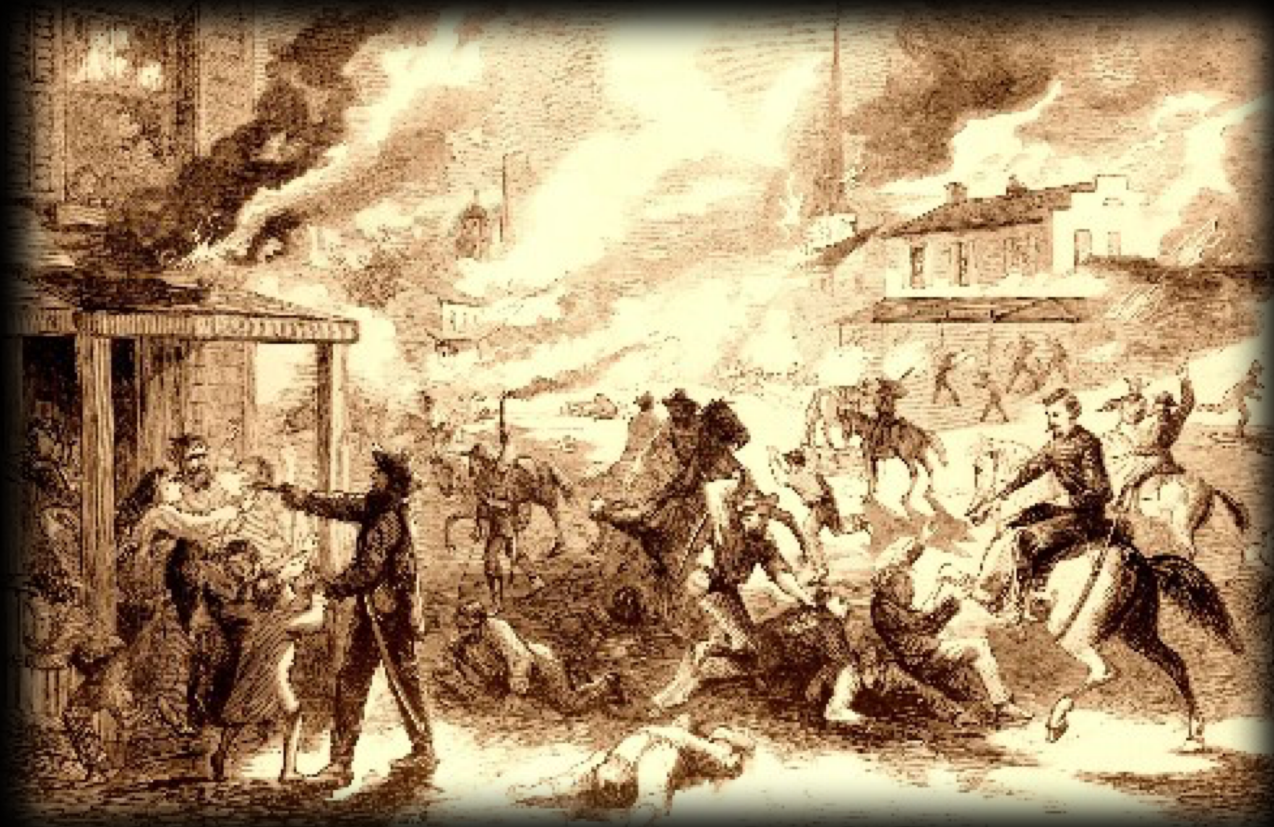
- Passed by the U.S. Congress on May 30, 1854. It allowed people in the territories of Kansas and Nebraska to decide for themselves whether or not to allow slavery within their borders.
- Repealed the Missouri Compromise of 1820 (which had prohibited slavery north of latitude 36°30′.)
- The Act infuriated many in the North; in the pro-slavery South it was strongly supported.
- After the Act was passed, pro-slavery and anti-slavery supporters rushed to settle Kansas to affect the outcome of the first election held there after the law went into effect. Pro-slavery settlers carried the election but were charged with fraud by anti-slavery settlers, and the results were not accepted by them.
- The anti-slavery settlers held another election, however pro-slavery settlers refused to vote. This resulted in the establishment of two opposing legislatures within the Kansas territory.

Discuss with your detective partner:

How do you think John Brown would have felt about the Kansas Nebraska Act?

Given what you know so far, how might he have responded? What actions may he have taken?

**Statement by James Townsley
(of Lane, Kansas)
describing the
Pottawatomie Raid of 1856**



“Bleeding Kansas”

- The question of whether Kansas would enter the Union as a free state or slave state lead to extreme violence.
- Free soil and proslavery forces poured into Kansas, and the territory erupted in violence between 1854-1858.
- On March 30th, 1855, a horde of 5000 heavily armed Missourians -- known as "Border Ruffians" -- rode into the territory. They seized the polling places and voted in their own legislature.
- Severe penalties were leveled against anyone who spoke or wrote against slaveholding; those who assisted fugitives would be put to death or sentenced to ten years hard labor.
- In April, 1856 in **Lawrence, Kansas** (established in 1854 by antislavery settlers), Sheriff Samuel Jones was shot and driven out of town while trying to arrest free-state settlers.
- In response, the Sheriff returned on May 21, 1856 with a posse of 750-800 Southerners to disarm the citizens, wreck the town's antislavery presses, and destroyed the Free State Hotel (which was believed to be an antislavery fort.)

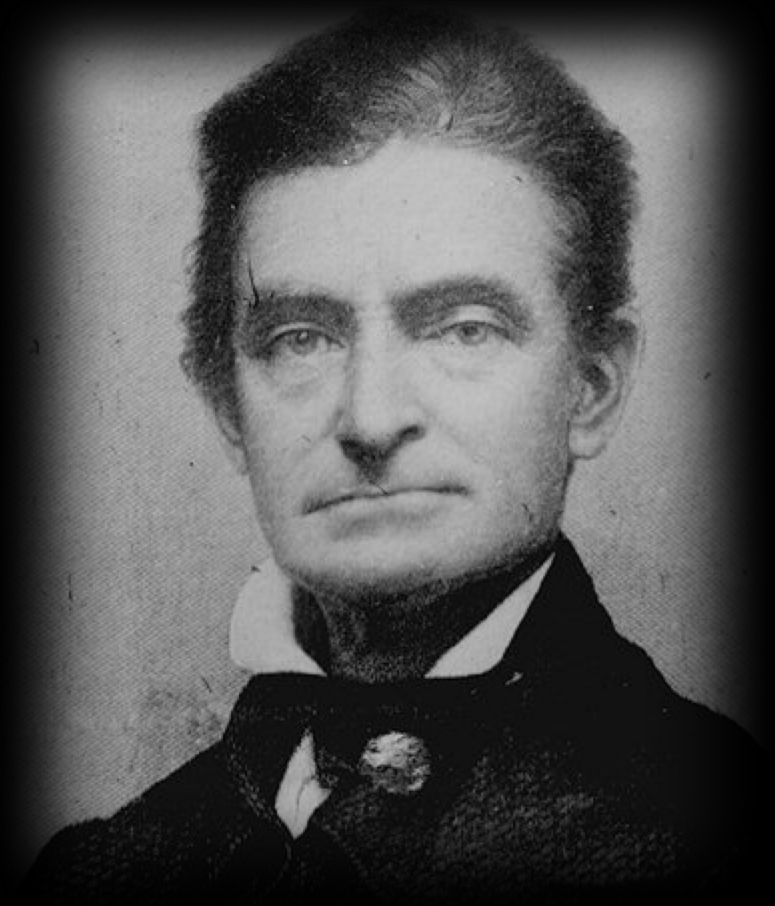
“Bleeding Kansas”

- John Brown was 55 years old when the Kansas Nebraska Act was passed, an old man by the standards of his day. He seemed worn down, broken by a difficult life.
- But a letter from his abolitionist sons who were in Kansas changed his mind. The free-soilers needed arms "more than bread," his son John Jr. wrote. "Now we want you to get for us these arms."
- The next day John Brown packed a wagon and headed west, gathering weapons along the way. "I'm going to Kansas," he declared, "to make it a Free state." Upon his arrival, Brown quickly brought order to his sons' homestead- named "Brown's Station."
- Of the five sons, John Jr. was most like his father. A blunt talking abolitionist, he was the captain of the **Pottawatomie Rifles**, a small group of free-state men living near the creek from which they took their name. They frequently exchanged threats of violence with their proslavery neighbors, but maintained an uneasy truce.
- Throughout the winter, the Brown men heard stories of Southern aggression: a battalion of 400 armed Southerners were marching into the territory, a free-state man was hacked to death, his body tossed onto his doorstep, President Pierce, a Southern sympathizer, warned that organized resistance on the part of free-state Kansans would be regarded as treasonable insurrection.

“Bleeding Kansas”

- For the Browns, another proslave invasion seemed imminent. When word came on May 21st that hundreds of Border Ruffians had marched on Lawrence, Kansas John Jr.'s **Pottawatomie Rifles** quickly assembled.
- En route to Lawrence they learned that the Ruffians had sacked the town, burned the Free-State Hotel, and not one abolitionist had dared to fire a gun. Brown was furious at this cowardly response.
- Within hours they received another disturbing report -- abolitionist Senator Charles Sumner had been brutally attacked on the United States Senate floor by a southern Congressman.
- "Something must be done to show these barbarians that we, too, have rights," Brown declared.
- He took a small group of men under his command and told them to prepare for a "secret mission." John Jr. tried to keep his father in camp, cautioning him to commit no rash acts. But the old man stuck a revolver in his belt and led his men away.
- They marched toward Pottawatomie Creek, to the homes of proslavery sympathizers. In the end, John Brown the Pottawatomie Rifles had killed seven settlers
- Known as the **Pottawatomie Massacre**, this was one of the many bloody episodes in Kansas preceding the American Civil War, which came to be nicknamed “Bleeding Kansas.”

John Brown's Provisional Constitution



Brown on Trial for Treason & Murder

- On October 16, 1859, John Brown led 18 men to seize the federal arsenal in Harper's Ferry, Virginia.
- Having planned this attack for months in advance, Brown allegedly believed this would be the beginning of a rebellion of slaves against their masters. He planned to use the weapons seized from the arsenal to arm the slaves in order to assist them in their uprising.
- The US Marines and armed citizens however struck back, demanding that Brown surrender. He refused and the Marines attacked, wounding Brown and capturing him.
- Upon his capture, when asked of his intentions, Brown reported, "We came to free the slaves, and only that."
- Brown was tried for treason and murder. He was found guilty and hung.

Solve the Mystery

Who Was John Brown?

- Review all of the evidence you have examined and write a 3-5 sentence statement explaining who John Brown truly was, in your expert detective opinion. Was he a hero? A villain? Was he someone who was wrongfully executed or did he receive just punishment? Solve the historical mystery once and for all.
- Be prepared to present and defend your “detective’s report” to the rest of the class.