Bleeding Kansas

Explanation of the Source: Stephen Douglas’ success in getting the Kansas-Nebraska bill through Congress doomed Kansas in the 1850s. It undid the sectional truce known as the Compromise of 1850, a truce Douglas himself played the key role in arranging. It greatly weakened his own wing of the Democratic party and thus his own base of support. It did even greater harm to the Whigs who virtually disappeared as a party in the November elections, their place taken by the Republicans. Its passage may well have made the Civil War inevitable. According to the Howard Committee, the special Congressional Committee, that was sent to observe the troubles in Kansas, this was what they found.

This first source below deals with an election on March 30, 1855. This election was for the territorial legislature which will dictate the future of the territory/state. There were, according the census just taken, 8,601 residents in Kansas, 2,905 of whom were eligible to vote. Missourians came to participate in the election and sway the vote.

“The evening before, and the morning of the day of the election, about one thousand men arrived at Lawrence, and camped in a ravine a short distance from the town, and near the place of voting. They came, in wagons (of which there were over one hundred) or on horseback, under the command of Colonel Samuel Young, of Boone county, Missouri, and Claiborne F. Jackson, of Missouri. They were armed with guns, rifles, pistols and bowie knives; and had tents, music and flags with them. They brought with them two pieces of artillery, loaded with musket balls.

When the voting commenced, . . . Colonel Young offered to vote. He refused to take the oath prescribed by the governor, but said he was a resident of the territory. He told Mr. Abbott, one of the judges, when asked if he intended to make Kansas his future home, that it was none of his business; if he were a resident then he should ask no more. After his vote was received, Colonel Young got upon the window sill and announced to the crowd that he had been permitted to vote, and they could all come up and vote. He told the judges that there was no use swearing the others, as they would all swear as he had. After the other judges had concluded to receive Colonel Young’s vote, Mr. Abbott resigned as judge of election, and Mr. Benjamin was elected in his place.

The polls were so much crowded till late in the evening that for a time they were obliged to get out by being hoisted up on the roof of the building, where the election was being held, and passing out over the house. Afterwards a passageway was made through the crowd by two lines of men being formed, through which voters could get to the polls. Colonel Young asked that the old men be allowed to go up first and vote, as they were tired with the traveling, and wanted to get back to camp. During the day the Missourians drove off the ground some of the citizens, Mr. Stearns, Mr. Bond and Mr. Willis. They threatened to shoot Mr. Bond, and made a rush after him, threatening him. As he ran from them, shots were fired at him as he jumped off the bank of the river and escaped.

Thus the committee find that in this, the first election in the territory, a very large majority of the votes were cast by citizens of the State of Missouri, in violation of the organic law of the territory.”
This second source below deals with the Southern perspective of the Kansas/Nebraska Bill. Many historians, have pointed out that the slavery issue reached a condition of intolerable tension and violence.

. . in an area where a majority of the inhabitants apparently did not care very much one way or the other about slavery." An "overwhelming proportion of the settlers were far more concerned about land titles" than anything else.

“When the Kansas bill passed the people of the South expected to take possession of the territory. They urged those on the border to "move right over," and take their slaves with them. They said "two thousand slaves settled in Kansas would make it a slave state." But the southern people did not have the "courage of their convictions." They did not dare take their slaves over. There never were but a handful of slaves in Kansas, and these were on the border where they could be easily withdrawn. But southern people determined to take possession of Kansas, and as soon as the bill was passed the men in the border counties of Missouri began to rush over, and stake off claims. In a few weeks the whole region was claimed under the pre-emption laws by persons residing in Missouri. They paid no attention to the terms of the law, but each man marked off the land he wanted, drove a stake down and wrote his name upon it, and went back home. This gave them no title and no claim because it did not comply with the law. But they agreed among themselves to shoot any man who interfered with them. When the real settlers came two months later they found many embarrassments. They might travel fifty miles and not see a human habitation or a human face, but if they attempted to claim a piece of unoccupied land, they found it already claimed by somebody in Missouri. This man had not complied with the law, and had secured no title, but then he had a revolver and a bowie knife, and in the unwritten code of the border these stood for law and right, and pretty much everything else.”

**The Conditions in Kansas**

**By: Edward Bridgman**

**Dates: May 25 to 27, 1856**

**Explanation of the Source:** When Kansas exploded into a state of Civil War, people from both sides wrote down the atrocities of the Pro-Slavery group and the Anti-Slavery Group. Below, is just one example of how Edward Bridgman expressed to his cousin, the terrible nature of war in Kansas.

Dear Cousin Sidney

May 25, 1856

I write now to let you know my present situation and a little about the affairs of Kansas....

In some small towns the men are called up nearly every night to hold themselves in readiness to meet the worst as scouting parties of Alabamians, Georgians, and Missourians are around continually, plundering clothes yards, horses and cattle, and everything they can lay hold of. A few miles from Lawrence a man was plowing. a party of Southerners came along and being hungry killed his best ox, ate what they wanted, took away some and left the rest. Such like occurrences are almost daily taking place. Last Thursday, news came from Lawrence that she was in the hands of the Ruffians, and that they had demolished the Free State Hotel, burned Robinson’s house, and destroyed the two printing presses. Almost immediately a company of 30 was raised. There was no
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reason why I could not go for one, so I borrowed a rifle and ammunition and joined them. The thought of engaging in battle is not a pleasing one, but the free state men are compelled to. Why should I not do [so] as well as others, I have nothing to hinder me and my life is no dearer to me than the lives of others are to them. At sundown we divided into 2 divisions and took turns in walking. It was really affecting to see husbands and wives bid each other good bye. -- not knowing as they would ever see each other again. yet the feeling and sympathies of the women are as much enlisted in the cause as the men. It is nothing uncommon to see them running bullets and making cartages. One woman yesterday told me that she had often been called up nights to make them....

Tuesday, 27.

Since I wrote the above the Osawatomie company has returned to O. as news came that we could do nothing immediately, so we returned back. On our way back we heard that 5 men had been killed by Free State men. the men were butchered -- ears cut off and the bodies thrown into the river[.]. the murdered men (Proslavery) had thrown out threats and insults, yet the act was barbarous and inhuman whoever committed by[.] we met the men going when we were going up and knew that they were on a secret expedition, yet didn't know what it was. Tomorrow something will be done to arrest them. There were 8 concerned in the act. perhaps they had good motives, some think they had, how that is I don’t know. The affairs took place 8 miles from Osawatomie. The War seems to have commenced in real earnest. horses are stolen on all sides whenever they can be taken....

Wednesday, 28.

Since yesterday I have learned that those men who committed those murders were a party of Browns. one of them was formerly in the wool business in Springfield, John Brown[.] his son, (Jn) has been taken today, tho he had no hand in the act, but was knowing to it, but when I write to Maria I will give further particulars[.] Osawatomie is in much fear and excitement[.] News came tonight that a co. of Georgains and Alibamians were coming to make this their headquarters. All work is nearly suspended, the women are in constant fear[.] It was really pleasing to witness the reception of our co., by the women after they came in to O. [It] was a little after dark. A long line of women and children stood by the roadside to greet us and joy was depicted on every countenance. hands were heartily shaken and congratulations offered[.] but I must close....

Yours truly, E”

Crimes against Kansas

By: Charles Sumner
Date: May 19, 1856.

Explanation of the Source: There were two wars for Kansas. The one on the ground was far less important than that for northern public opinion. The "sack" of Lawrence was a Northern triumph in this second war. An even greater defeat for the pro-slavery cause came a day later. The Senate at this time was debating the free soil constitution for Kansas adopted in the December 1855. There was no chance that the Senate would approve it. What was at stake; was northern opinion. Leading the opposition was South Carolina Democrat Andrew Butler. Massachusetts Republican Charles Sumner gave the major speech in favor of the Free State constitution. Below is speech given by Charles Sumner attacking Butler, a pro-slavery Senator.
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“The Senator from South Carolina has read many books of chivalry, and believes himself a chivalrous knight with sentiments of honor and courage. Of course he has chosen a mistress to whom he has made his vows, and who, though ugly to others, is always lovely to him; though polluted in the sight of the world, is chaste in his sight -- I mean the harlot, Slavery. For her, his tongue is always profuse in words. Let her be impeached in character, or any proposition made to shut her out from the extension of her wantonness, and no extravagance of manner or hardihood of assertion is then too great for this Senator.

The frenzy of Don Quixote, on behalf of his wenche Dulcinea del Toboso, is all surpassed. The asserted rights of Slavery, which shock equality of all kinds, are cloaked by a fantastic claim of equality. If the slave States cannot enjoy what, in mockery of the great fathers of the Republic, he misnames equality under the Constitution -- in other words, the full power in the National Territories to compel fellow men to toil, to separate husband and wife, and to sell little children at the auction block -- then, sir, the chivalric Senator will conduct the State of South Carolina out of the Union! Heroic knight! Exalted Senator! A Second Moses come for a second exodus!

With regret, I come again upon the Senator from South Carolina, [Mr. Butler] who, omnipresent in this debate, overflowed with rage at the simple suggestion that Kansas had applied for admission as a State; and, with incoherent phrases, discharged the loose expectorations of his speech, now upon her representative, and then upon her people. There was no extravagance of the ancient Parliamentary debate which he did not repeat; nor was there any possible deviation from truth which he did not make with so much of passion, I am glad to add, as to save him from the suspicion of intentional aberration. But the Senator touches nothing which he does not disfigure -- with error, sometimes of principle, sometimes of fact. He shows an incapacity of accuracy, whether in stating the Constitution or in stating the law, whether in the details of statistics or the diversions of scholarship. He cannot open, but out there flies a blunder.”

Sumner's speech angered many Southerners, none more than Congressman Preston Brooks, a relative of Butler's. The next day, May 22, the day after the "sack" of Lawrence, Brooks entered the Senate chamber looking for Sumner whom he found at his desk. The Senate was not in session and very few others were in the room. Brooks walked up to Sumner, raised his cane, and struck the Massachusetts Senator over the head with it repeatedly. He continued to strike even after the cane broke from the force of the blows. He continued to strike even after Sumner slumped to the floor. A Congressional colleague, Lawrence Keitt, stood guard to prevent anyone from coming to Sumner's rescue. Sumner did survive this attack.