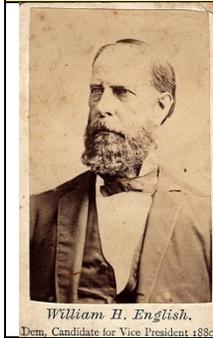


## Chapter 261 – The “English Bill” Tries To Save The Lecompton Constitution



**Dates:**  
April 21, 1858

**Sections:**

- The “English Bill” Is A Last Ditch Effort To Save The Lecompton Constitution
- Weary Congressmen Finally Pass The English Bill

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Date: April 21, 1858

### The “English Bill” Is A Last Ditch Effort To Save The Lecompton Constitution



William English (1822-1896)

The fireworks in Congress on admitting Kansas as a Slave State under the Lecompton Constitution continues through February and March 1859, and into April.

Southerners are unable to secure enough House votes to approve the measure; Republicans lack enough to block it for good.

Those caught in the middle are Northern Democrats seeking a way to honor their commitment to popular sovereignty to resolve the slavery issue without appearing to undermine Buchanan.

A possible way out finally emerges from discussions between congressmen William English of Indiana and Alexander Stephens of Georgia. It becomes known as the “English Bill,” featuring a plausible reason to re-submit the Lecompton Constitution to the voters in Kansas, together with a threat tailored to gain its passage.

The “need to re-submit” relates to an “exorbitant land grant request” in the prior admission document – with Kansas seeking 24 million acres from the public domain versus the 4 million acres typically offered.

Rejecting the 24 million acre land grant provides a plausible reason to hold a popsov vote to see if Kansans are still willing to file for admission under the lesser grant of 4 million acres.

Then comes the threat which might just enable a positive outcome for the Lecompton Constitution: if they reject the document as submitted, Congress promises to delay a vote on their admission until after an official Census puts their population above the designated threshold of 93,000 people.

The English Bill reaches the floor on April 21, 1859.

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Date: April 30, 1859

### Weary Congressmen Finally Pass The English Bill

While Republicans predictably oppose the English Bill, they are joined by Buchanan's Democratic foe, Stephen Douglas, who views the entire maneuver as corrupting the true spirit of a fair popsov vote.

But other Northern Democrats like English line up behind the Southern members to support its passage.

On April 30, 1859 they succeed with wins in both chambers.

#### Congressional Vote On The English Bill: April 30, 1859

	In The House	In The Senate
<b>Voting Aye</b>	112	31
<b>Voting Nay</b>	103	22

Buchanan immediately celebrates the passage, declaring in his usual Pollyannaish fashion that it will bring peace to Kansas and to the country, while restoring unity within the Democrat Party.

Others are nowhere near as sanguine, including the more astute Southern politicians who recall that Kansans rejected Lecompton in a fair vote by an overwhelming margin back on January 4, 1858.

Buchanan's Secretary of the Treasury, Georgia's Howell Cobb writes:

*I regard the vote as very doubtful. (Governor) Denver when here so considered it.*

The date for the public vote on the English Bill version of Lecompton is set for August 2, 1858.

## Chapter 262 – The Marais des Cygnes Massacre Again Stirs Up Hatred In Kansas



**Dates:**  
Spring-  
Summer 1858

**Sections:**

- Pro-Slavery Men Seek Revenge For A Free-Stater Attack
- Free-Staters Executed In Cold Blood
- The Violence Continues Despite Governor Denver’s Efforts To End It

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Date: April-May 1858

### Pro-Slavery Men Seek Revenge For A Free-Stater Attack



As the English Bill works its way through Congress, more blood is spilled in Kansas, again following the now familiar tit for tat pattern of aggression leading to revenge.

The sequence begins this time with Free State men lead by one James Montgomery, who moves to Kansas in 1856, only to have his farm burned down by raiders during his first summer there.

Within a year, Montgomery has formed his own “Self-Protective Company,” which engages in various acts of violence in the southern part of the state, while dodging patrols of U.S. troops seeking to achieve law and order.

The Massacre Occurs Where The Marias des Cygnes River Crosses the Missouri-Kansas Border

In April 1858, a skirmish known as the Battle of the Yellow Paint ends with one U.S. soldier dead and several other men wounded, including members of Montgomery’s band.

The response comes this time from Charles Hamilton, a Georgian by birth and also the victim of a raid on his Kansas property which drives him out of the state. By the spring of 1858 he is a prototypical Missouri ruffian, intent on insuring that Kansas becomes a Slave State.

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Date: May 19, 1858

### Free-Staters Executed In Cold Blood



An Armed Westerner On His Mule

On May 19, 1858, Hamilton gathers a posse of some 25 fighters to launch a “war of extermination” against all Free Staters he can find. They cross the border and arrive at the unincorporated town of Trading Post, Kansas, where they begin to accumulate prisoners, eventually ending with eleven in total.

The men are marched some five miles northeast of the town and ordered into a ravine alongside the Marais des Cygnes River.

Hamilton then orders his men to murder the defenseless prisoners.

When several balk, he reportedly “swears terribly” at them until they comply. Once all have fallen, several killers climb into the ravine to finish them off and to rob their pockets.

Surprisingly six of the victims survive to report on the massacre. Five of them have suffered wounds while a sixth has simply feigned being shot. One, a William Hairgrove, claims to overhearing Hamilton’s words to his men:

*We have got eleven of the damned Abolitionists biting the dust, and will return in a few days and seep the entire Valley.*

When the six report on the massacre, the embarrassed Pro-Slavers concoct a story, saying that after Hamilton released them, they found arms and opened fire on his troopers who merely shot back.

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Date: Summer 1858

### The Violence Continues Despite Governor Denver’s Efforts To End It

Now it is Montgomery’s turn to go on the offensive and the two clash again in southern Kansas with casualties on both sides before Hamilton flees across the border.

This fails to deter Montgomery, who follows him to West Point, Missouri, with some fifty soldiers and two cannon.

While a major battle is avoided, the threat level brings Governor Denver onto the scene, including a visit to the Marais des Cygnes site and meetings with leaders from both sides.

Denver does make some headway here, proposes stationing U.S. troops along the border, and gains at least tacit support for his plans from Charles Robinson, head of the Free State Party, and from Hamilton.

Time will also tell that the Montgomery-Hamilton battles mark the end of organized confrontations in Kansas prior to the Civil War.

But James Denver, only six months into his tenure by June 1857, is already feeling a sense of hopelessness about finding a lasting solution for Kansas.

On September 1, 1858 he submits his resignation as the fifth of six Governors of the Kansas Territory.

## Chapter 263 – John Brown’s Plan To Attack Harper Ferry Hits A Roadblock



**Dates:**  
April-May 1858

**Sections:**

- Brown Travels East To Advance His Virginia Plot
- An Angry Hugh Roberts Totally Derails Brown’s Momentum

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Date: January to April 1858

### Brown Travels East To Advance His Virginia Plot



A Freedman

The Kansas battles are far from Captain John Brown’s mind early in 1858. Instead he is focused on his plot to raid Harpers Ferry, which is proceeding much more slowly than anticipated.

The result being that Hugh Forbes, the ex-British soldier he has hired to mold his guerrilla force, remains stranded in Ashtabula, Ohio, with no recruits to train. In January 1858 Brown goes there by himself, only to find that Forbes has gone back east, and is sending notes to members of the Secret Six complaining about Brown and his failure to get paid the money he was promised.

Brown is spooked by the news and continues on east to control the damage. Along the way he stops for three weeks in February 1858 at Frederick Douglass’ home in Rochester. By this time the black icon has broken with his mentor, Lloyd Garrison and other pacifists in the abolitionist movement, and is convinced that violence alone will free the slaves.

Brown takes this time with Douglass to draft a lengthy Constitution describing principles of the new “post-slavery” government he hopes to establish. He calls the document a “Provisional Constitution and Ordnances for the People of the United States” which ends slavery and promises full citizenship and social and legal equality for...

*All persons of mature age, whether proscribed (censured), oppressed or enslaved.*

Given his view of himself as a patriot and a Union man, Brown rejects secession outright and simply calls for the country to live up to its stated belief that “all men are created equal.” Unlike even the vast majority

of his white abolitionist allies, he is actually convinced that blacks *are not inferior* to whites and that they can, and deserve to be, fully assimilated into the social fabric.

His attention now turns to reassuring his Secret Six supporters and gaining support for his Constitution.

He is in Boston in March 1858, seeking another \$1,000 in funding and endorsement of his framework for the Provisional Government. He receives a lukewarm response on both counts. All six agree to abolishing slavery, but full citizenship and assimilation are greeted with skepticism. He continues to outline his plans for the Virginia raids, without mentioning that the initial attack will be on U.S. property at the Harpers Ferry arsenal. The response is \$600 in additional money and a plea from all but Higginson to proceed cautiously.

On April 7, 1858 Brown is in St. Catherine's, Ontario, where he meets Harriet Tubman, is smitten by her courage and determination, and christens her a "General" in their shared crusade. He also encounters Douglass' friend, the black nationalist, Martin Delaney, who has moved his family to Chatham, Ontario in 1854. He is forty-six years old, and has led a remarkable life as a doctor, journalist, educator, fierce abolitionist, and proponent of a return to Africa. While skeptical of all white abolitionists, Delaney, like Douglass, readily embraces Captain John Brown.

While in Chatham, he also adds one recruit, Osborne Perry Anderson, a free black who attends Oberlin College before immigrating to Canada. Anderson will be one of the five blacks at Harpers Ferry and will write a first-hand account of the action after he escapes.

These positive contacts in Canada reenergize Brown, and heads back to Springdale, Iowa now to gather up his troops and move ahead with his Virginia action.

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Date: April to May 20, 1858

### **An Angry Hugh Roberts Totally Derails Brown's Momentum**

Brown reaches his Iowa quarters only to turn around almost immediately after hearing that Hugh Forbes campaign against him has intensified.

Forbes begins by sending an attack letter to Charles Sumner, but the Senator has forgotten Brown by the time he receives it. He then goes after Seward, pulling no punches towards Brown:

*He is very bad man who would not keep his word...a reckless man, an unreliable man, a vicious man.*

From there he shifts to various members of the Secret Six. His note to Dr. Samuel Howe stings not only Brown, but also his New England backers:

*The humanitarians and Brown are guilty of perfidy and barbarity, to which may be added stupidity...I am the natural protector of my children, nothing but death shall prevent my defending them against the barbarity of the New England speculators.*

He tells the journalist Horace Greeley that he has been "deceived, misled, swindled, beggared, his family turned into the streets to starve."

Most recipients of Forbes' ire dismiss him as unhinged – but not the members of the Secret Six. They are alarmed by the publicity, especially in Washington, and fearful of personal repercussions. With the exception of Higginson, they decide to tell Brown to postpone any action for the time being.

On May 20, 1858, they meet with Brown in Boston and deliver the news.

This “pause” in the action will last for 22 months, until the actual raid on October 17-18, 1859.

Brown returns to Iowa and disperses his recruits, several of whom will drop out for good. By the end of June, 1858, he will be back in Kansas, now wearing a full white beard and sporting a new alias, Mr. Shubel Morgan.

## Chapter 264 – Lincoln Accepts Senate Nomination With “House Divided” Speech



**Dates:**  
June-July 1858

- Sections:**
- Republicans Nominate Lincoln To Run Against Douglas In Illinois
  - The “House Divided” Speech Begins His Campaign Against Douglas
  - Lincoln’s Speech Proves Controversial
  - Lincoln Begins To Shadow Douglas On The Stump
  - A Series Of Seven Lincoln-Douglas Debates Are Scheduled

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Date: June 16, 1858

### Republicans Nominate Lincoln To Run Against Douglas In Illinois



Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865)

The summer of 1858 also finds a relative newcomer to the national political scene entering the debate over the crisis in Kansas. He is a 49 year old Illinois lawyer named Abraham Lincoln.

Lincoln’s home base for two decades has been the town of Springfield, population 3,000, after he moves there in 1837. He fits the classical American mold of the “self-made man,” rising up from a log cabin childhood, educating himself with help from his step-mother, and earning his living in a variety of everyday jobs before deciding to read for the bar. He is soon recognized as a highly skilled advocate, “riding the circuit” on behalf of his clients, winning high profile cases, and becoming a popular figure throughout his home state. In 1842 he weds Mary Todd, a Kentucky belle, also courted by Stephen Douglas. Together they will have four sons between 1843 and 1853.

Lincoln is drawn off and on into politics, first serving three terms in the Illinois General Assembly and then in the U.S. House in 1847-49, where he is a Henry Clay-style Whig and a critic of the Mexican War. But he then backs away, returns home and concentrates on building his law firm and the wealth he seeks to support his family.

He remains on the sidelines until the 1854 Kansas-Nebraska Bill and the repeal of the 1820 Missouri Compromise violate his conviction that slavery is immoral, and that it is his ethical duty to resist its spread to the west. With the backlash against the bill spreading in the North, and his Whig Party disbanded, he joins the new Republican Party.

In the Fall of 1854 he sets his sights on winning a U.S. Senate held by James Shields, a man against whom he almost fought a duel in 1842. He leads on the first six ballots cast by the state legislators, but

still falls short of the needed majority. He responds by releasing his delegates to the Anti-Nebraska Democrat, Lyman Trumbull, who is elected.

Despite this defeat, the sheer clarity and power of his arguments on the slavery issue lead Republicans to nominate him in 1858 to run against Senator Stephen Douglas, who is seeking a third term.

At 8pm on June 16, 1858, Lincoln delivers his acceptance speech in front of an audience of one thousand gathered in the Springfield Hall of Representatives.

The address is titled “A House Divided Against Itself Cannot Stand,” and its main message is both controversial and captivating.

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Date: June 16, 1858

### **The “House Divided” Speech Begins His Campaign Against Douglas**

Lincoln’s mastery as an orator is evident in the eight staccato sentences which open his acceptance address:

*Mr. President and Gentlemen of the Convention -- If we could first know where we are, and whither we are tending, we could then better judge what to do, and how to do it. We are now far into the fifth year, since a policy was initiated, with the avowed object, and confident promise, of putting an end to slavery agitation. Under the operation of that policy, that agitation has not only, not ceased, but has constantly augmented. In my opinion, it will not cease, until a crisis shall have been reached, and passed. "A house divided against itself cannot stand." I believe this government cannot endure, permanently half slave and half free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved -- I do not expect the house to fall -- but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing or all the other.*

In these lines Lincoln delivers a stark message to his audience -- the prolonged conflict in Kansas is symbolic of the fate that will befall America unless it can agree to either end slavery or to nationalize it.

He then argues that between the Kansas-Nebraska Bill, the *Dred Scott* decision and the Lecompton Constitution, the course has been set to legalize slavery in all states – even in Illinois. As he says, those who ignore this possibility...

*... Shall lie down pleasantly dreaming that the people of Missouri are on the verge of making their State free; and... shall awake to the reality, instead, that the Supreme Court has made Illinois a slave State.*

If indeed “that is whither we are tending,” what must be done to end this threat? The only answer, Lincoln says, is to prohibit the expansion of slavery into the territories by defeating those politicians who would oppose this outcome – chief among them being his opponent, Stephen Douglas.

*... Clearly, he is not now with us -- he does not pretend to be -- he does not promise to ever be.*

He ends this relatively brief address saying that if his fellow Republicans will unite behind his proposals on “what to do and how to do it,” victory will be theirs.

*The result is not doubtful. We shall not fail -- if we stand firm, we shall not fail. Wise councils may accelerate or mistakes delay it, but, sooner or later the victory is sure to come.*

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Date: Summer 1858

### **Lincoln’s Speech Proves Controversial**

While preparing his remarks, Lincoln asks his trusted law partner, William Herndon, about the wisdom of offering the “house divided” prediction. Herndon, a staunch anti-slavery advocate, sees some danger in the allusion:

*It is true, but is it wise or politic to say so?*

For many in the audience and in the national press, the response is one of alarm. Instead of reinforcing his image as a conservative Whig, the “house divided” line seems to imply that he expects, even favors, a war between the North and South to resolve the slavery dispute.

When accused of “radicalism,” Lincoln tries to deflect the criticism:

*I did not say I was in favor of anything...I made a prediction only – it may have been a foolish one perhaps.*

Time will tell, however, that Lincoln, the lawyer and politician, is never so inclined to loose observations.

If he is to have any chance of beating the renowned Stephen Douglas, he must first awaken the people of Illinois to the threat posed by the Democrat’s deeply flawed principle of “popular sovereignty.”

Its outcome has been five years of bloody warfare in Kansas, accompanied by violent rhetoric and threats of secession in Congress.

This pattern must end, says Lincoln, who now sets out to bring this message to the electorate.

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Date: June 26, 1858

### **Lincoln Begins To Shadow Douglas On The Stump**

As the lesser known candidate, and a clear underdog, Lincoln decides that his only chance of winning will lie in corralling Douglas into debating him head on. To force this outcome, he begins by following Douglas to various venues around the state and offering immediate rebuttals to his speeches.

On June 26 he is in Springfield following an earlier appearance by Douglas. His remarks begin by picking away at popular sovereignty -- first asking if the policy justifies the practice of polygamy in Utah, and

then reminding his audience of how easily it was violated on election days in Kansas by the pro-slavery forces

He segues to *Dred Scott*. Unlike Douglas who supports the decision, Lincoln calls it “erroneous,” the result of a stacked Southern court, divided on the details. He insists that it is not yet “settled law” and expresses his hope to see it over-ruled.

*That decision declares two propositions-first, that a negro cannot sue in the U.S. Courts; and secondly, that Congress cannot prohibit slavery in the Territories. It was made by a divided court-dividing differently on the different points... We believe, as much as Judge Douglas, (perhaps more) in obedience to, and respect for the judicial department of government But we think the Dred Scott decision is erroneous. We know the court that made it, has often over-ruled its own decisions, and we shall do what we can to have it to over-rule this.*

The notion that the founders intended to exclude negroes from having the “rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” is preposterous on the face of it.

*He finds the Republicans insisting that the Declaration of Independence includes ALL men, black as well as white; and forth-with he boldly denies that it includes negroes at all,*

Likewise Douglas’ foolish assertion that Republicans wish to “marry with negroes.”

*Now I protest against that counterfeit logic which concludes that, because I do not want a black woman for a slave I must necessarily want her for a wife.*

He closes here with what will become a familiar appeal to the basic good will and humanity of average Americans when it comes to standing against human bondage.

*The Republicans inculcate, with whatever of ability they can, that the negro is a man; that his bondage is cruelly wrong, and that the field of his oppression ought not to be enlarged. The Democrats deny his manhood; deny, or dwarf to insignificance, the wrong of his bondage; so far as possible, crush all sympathy for him, and cultivate and excite hatred and disgust against him; compliment themselves as Union-savers for doing so; and call the indefinite outspreading of his bondage “a sacred right of self-government.”*

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Date: July 1858

### **A Series Of Seven Lincoln-Douglas Debates Are Scheduled**

Supporters of Douglas mock Lincoln’s follower strategy claiming that it shows his inability to attract audiences on his own. Still he persists, and persistence finally pays off.

The two camps agree to hold a total of seven head-to-head debates, one each in the legislative districts of Illinois outside of Chicago and Springfield, where they have already been heard together.

Ground-rules for the events are worked out, along with the target dates, beginning on August 21 and continuing to October 15, 1858, only 18 days before the November 2 election.

## Chapter 265 –Slavery Supporters Suffer Another Loss When Kansas Voters Reject The “English Bill”



**Dates:**  
August 1858

- Sections:**
- The End Arrives For The Pro-Slavery Lecompton Constitution
  - The Kansas Defeat Is Costly To Buchanan, Douglas And The Democrat Party

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Date: August 2, 1858

### The End Arrives For The Pro-Slavery Lecompton Constitution



Among Those Hoping For Freedom

The Second of August 1858 marks a major turning point in the history of the Kansas Territory.

For almost four years the will of the territory’s residents on slavery has been dictated by a sequence of electoral frauds carried out by the Missouri Border Ruffians. These begin in November 1854 with polling to choose the first representative to Congress. They continue with the rigged election of the so-called “bogus legislature” in March 1855, which hands control over to its pro-slavery members to draft a state constitution.

The result of their work is the Lecompton document, written in December 1857 and sent to Congress for admission to the union. It designates Kansas as a Slave State.

Over the next five months, James Buchanan and his Southern supporters try every tactic they can think of to force members of the U.S. House to approve Lecompton. They do so even though it has never been voted upon by the public, a clear violation of the Democratic Party’s commitment to popular sovereignty.

When not only the Republicans, but also their own Senator Stephen Douglas, refuse to cave in, the Democrats attach the threatening “English Bill” to the body of the Lecompton Constitution, hoping that Kansans will support it rather than face an indefinite delay in achieving statehood and securing public domain acreage.

On August 2, 1858, residents of Kansas go to the polls to approve or reject the Lecompton Constitution.

The result is an overwhelming defeat for Buchanan and for the South.

**Public Vote On Lecompton: August 2, 1858**

	<b>Votes</b>
<b>For The Constitution + English Bill</b>	1,788
<b>Against The Constitution</b>	11,300

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Date: Summer 1858

**The Kansas Defeat Is Costly To Buchanan, Douglas And The Democrat Party**

By the time Governor James Denver resigns his post on September 1, 1858, James Buchanan’s presidency has suffered a string of setbacks from which it will never recover. Chief among these are his willingness to ignore obvious election fraud to pass the Lecompton Constitution for his southern backers; failure to stem the financial panic; his feckless pardon of the Mormon insurrectionists; and his repeated failures to listen to, and retain, his designated Governors in Kansas and to stabilize the open warfare there.

**Some Key Set-Backs In Buchanan’s First 18 Months In office**

<b>1857</b>	
<b>March 4</b>	Inauguration Day
<b>March 6</b>	The <i>Dred Scott</i> ruling encounters resistance
<b>March 20</b>	Governor Geary resigns
<b>July 15</b>	Governor Walker declares Kansas in rebellion
<b>August 24</b>	Ohio Bank collapse begins financial panic
<b>October 5</b>	Free State Party wins official Kansas legislature
<b>December 15</b>	Governor Walker resigns
<b>December 18</b>	Douglas defies Buchanan support for Lecompton
<b>1858</b>	
<b>April 6</b>	Controversial pardon given to the Mormons
<b>May 19</b>	Massacre at Marais des Cygnes
<b>August 2</b>	Kansas voters reject the English Bill
<b>September 1</b>	Denver submits his resignation

Buchanan’s defeats are also shared by the Democratic Party writ large.

The manipulations to pass the Lecompton Constitution make a mockery of the party’s long-standing commitment to popular sovereignty as the only fair way to resolve the future of slavery.

In turn they force Stephen Douglas to speak out against a Democratic President, and in so doing to further the internal divide between the Southern and Northern factions in the party.

With the English Bill now dead and Kansas in the Free State column, the South turns its attention to trying to convert the *Dred Scott* decision into a Congress-approved law guaranteeing slave owners the right to bring their “property” into any of the new Territories and settle down in advance of admission to statehood.

Northerners meanwhile turn their eyes toward the Illinois senate race and the debates between Douglas and his Republican adversary, Abraham Lincoln, which are sure to turn on the slavery issues.

## Chapter 266 – Lincoln – Douglas Debates Frame The National Divide Over Slavery



**Dates:**  
August 21–  
October 15, 1858

**Sections:**

- The Stage Is Set For The Debates
- The Opponents Settle On Their Strategies And Messages
- The First Debate In Ottawa Opens With Douglas As Aggressor
- Lincoln Corners Douglas On Popular Sovereignty In Freeport
- Douglas Forces Lincoln To Discuss His Racial Views At Jonesboro And Charleston
- Douglas Again Asserts The Supremacy Of White Men At Galesburg
- Lincoln Again Claims The Moral High Ground At Quincy
- The Debates Conclude At Alton

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Date: August 21 to October 15, 1858

### The Stage Is Set For The Debates



In an eight week period from August 21 to October 15, 1858, the spotlight on the national debate over slavery is focused on Illinois, where the upstart Republican, Abraham Lincoln, is running for the U.S. Senate seat against the incumbent Democrat, Stephen Douglas. Lincoln has tried once before, in 1855, and failed. Douglas has been elected twice and is seeking his third term.

After winning the nomination on June 16 and delivering his famous “house divided” acceptance speech, Lincoln begins chasing Douglas from one campaign stop to the next, following up his speeches with

Map Showing The Order And Sites Of The Seven Lincoln-Douglas Debates

rebuttals delivered to the same audiences. This irritates Douglas, and the two men finally agree to hold seven joint appearances across the state. Each will be divided into three segments: the first speaker to open for one hour; his opponent to respond for ninety minutes; then a closing half hour rebuttal for the initial speaker. The honor of going first will be rotated from one location to the next.

Given the nationwide interest in the debates, stenographers are present on stage to try to capture the words spoken so that newspapers can report on the news from each exchange. The actual live audiences vary by

city and by weather conditions, ranging from a low around 2,000 in Alton to over 10,000 in several other venues.

The typical debate takes place in the town square, beginning in the early afternoon hours. The speakers appear on a raised platform, with the crowds gathered around them, standing throughout the event, often straining to hear their messages. Those who record the experience remark on the marked contrasts between the speakers.

The difference in their heights and physical builds seems almost comical. Lincoln is 6'4" tall, rail thin, and gangly in his posture. Douglas is a foot shorter, hardly coming up to Lincoln's shoulder, with a thick frame and an oversized head held erect at all times. Lincoln is dressed in a plain black suit, while Douglas is decked out in a dark blue coat, light pants, a ruffled shirt, topped off by a broad-brimmed white felt hat.

When Lincoln opens his mouth to speak, the audience is greeted with a Kentucky twang, particularly high pitched until early nervous tension is overcome. He is also inclined to punctuate his main points with...

*One single gesture delivered with his right forefinger (that) seemed to be continuing to scratch away in front of (him).*

On the other hand, Douglas owns the deep baritone of a theater actor, booming out his message in rapid order and with unwavering self-assurance and clenched fist pointed skyward.

Both men are highly skilled and experienced lawyers, blessed with logical minds and the capacity to frame and deliver their arguments in cogent fashion. Lincoln is prone to injecting humor into his remarks, and to speaking in emotional terms about slavery. Douglas is all business, pounding home his points and refraining from even mentioning his feeling about those enslaved.

Each is backed by advisors, who help the candidates understand the challenges they face and plot their messages along the way. Lincoln envisions two audiences for his remarks: the live audience at each venue and the newspaper-reporters whose stories will broaden his reach. As such, he tends to vary his main points from one town to the next, building his case in cumulative fashion. On the other hand, Douglas seldom varies from his main script, relying on repetition and the power of his oratory alone to persuade the attendees in front of him.

Both men, however, are prone to wander into legal complexities and jargon that is lost upon their audiences.

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Date: August 21 to October 15, 1858

## The Opponents Settle On Their Strategies And Messages



A Typical Midwestern Town Square

The future of slavery is what draws the sizable turn-outs, and both candidates focus almost exclusively on this issue, choosing to ignore possible differences on the financial crisis, immigration policies or other matters.

Attitudes toward the institution itself vary across the 420 mile vertical axis where the debates are held, from Freeport, up north near Chicago, to Jonesboro, nestled south in “Little Egypt” between Kentucky and Missouri.

But one thing that doesn’t vary across Illinois is absolute opposition to allowing any more blacks – be they slaves or freedmen – to come into their communities. This conviction is based on long-entrenched negative stereotyping of all negroes. It is evident in state constitutions across the North, the most recent example being in Kansas, where the Topeka legislature adopts an “Exclusionary Clause” banning blacks from residence, cheek to jowl with their wish to be designated as a “Free State.”

While Lincoln exhibits much less racial prejudice than most Americans, his public policy pronouncements happen to fit well with this desire to “keep blacks out.”

If, as he says, the *Dred Scott* ruling opens the door to “nationalizing slavery,” including in Illinois, then at least his proposed federal ban is the best way to try to prevent that outcome.

Douglas is a crafty enough politician to see that his alternative to a ban – “let the people decide” – is nowhere near as definitive as Lincoln’s proposal. Thus his challenge in the debates will lie in attacking him from a different angle.

He does so by painting Lincoln, and all Black Republicans, as radical Abolitionists in disguise.

Thus while banning the spread of slavery, he implies that Lincoln will turn around and free all of the Southern slaves and allow them to settle anywhere they want, as freedmen. According to Douglas, Lincoln also regards negroes as equal to whites, intends to hand them the right to vote, even to encourage inter-marriage between the races. Worse yet, the result of all this will be the end of the Union and perhaps a civil war.

Lincoln vigorously denies the abolitionist tag and says that freeing Southern slaves is legally prohibited by the 1787 Northwest Ordinance. But he also argues that the nation’s founders wanted slavery to wither away, regarding human bondage as a moral stain, and inconsistent with the values announced in the Declaration of Independence.

Douglas will fire back, insisting that America was founded by and for the white race, and that emotional pleas about the morality of slavery should carry no weight in the debates. The central question, he says, is whether the future of slavery should be decided by votes cast by people living in the territories or by federal mandates from Lincoln and his abolitionist Republican allies.

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Date: August 21, 1858

### **The First Debate In Ottawa Opens With Douglas As Aggressor**

Douglas brings several advantages to the contest, and intends to exploit them all. He has been an Illinois Senator for eight years and the state is rightly proud of his reputation as a powerhouse on the national stage. His Democratic Party enjoys a majority in the state legislature – where the final votes will be cast – going into the Fall. He also feels that his years in the political arena make him a better debater than Lincoln.

The opening debate unfolds on August 21, 1858 at the town of Ottawa, in upstate Illinois, some 85 miles southwest of Chicago. A sizable crowd over 10,000 strong shows up at Lafayette park to hear the exchange, which begins around 2:30pm, with Douglas leading off. The Little Giant immediately goes on the offensive.

His goal is to peg Lincoln as an Abolitionist who will free all slaves and let them loose to invade the North and the new territories to the west. To prove this, he holds up what he claims is a radical “party platform” that Lincoln supposedly signed in Springfield calling for:

- *A total repeal of the Fugitive Slave Act*
- *Abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia*
- *Prohibiting interstate sales of slaves*
- *Prohibiting the presence of slaves in all new territories*
- *Refusal to admit any more Slaves States into the Union*
- *Refusal of any further acquisition of new territory*
- *Denying the right of new states to create a constitution of their own*

Within days this “Springfield platform” document will be debunked as the work of an obscure abolitionist meeting held in Aurora, Illinois, and nothing to do with Lincoln. This “error” by Douglas is evidently an honest one, but it is nevertheless an embarrassment for him.

For the moment in Ottawa, however, he demands that Lincoln respond by saying whether he agrees or disagrees with each of the assertions.

Lincoln is caught off guard by this tactic. He claims, properly but in awkward fashion, that he never heard of this “Springfield document” and refuses to answer the particulars. Instead he falls back on rehashing his 1854 Peoria speech, where he attacked Douglas for his Kansas-Nebraska Bill.

Once he regains his balance, Lincoln appeals to his mostly Northern audience to oppose the “monstrous injustice of slavery” which violates the “fundamental principles of civil liberty.”

*I hate it because of the monstrous injustice of slavery itself. I hate it because it deprives our republican example of its just influence in the world – enables the enemies of free institutions,*

*with plausibility, to taunt us as hypocrites --and especially because it forces so many really good men amongst ourselves into an open war with the very fundamental principles of civil liberty – criticizing the Declaration of Independence, and insisting that there is no right principle of action but self-interest.*

As usual throughout the debates, Douglas brushes the “morality appeal” aside as a red herring, an attempt by Lincoln to insert emotion into what should be decided by reason.

*I desire to address myself to your judgment...and not to your passions or your enthusiasm.*

Opinions vary as to who prevails at Ottawa, but Lincoln’s performance immediately advances his political stature both in Illinois – where until now he has been a little known “down-stater” – and at the national level. His advisors urge him to be even more aggressive going forward:

*Don’t act on the defensive at all...be bold, defiant and dogmatic...in other words, give him hell.*

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Date: August 27, 1858

### **Lincoln Corners Douglas On Popular Sovereignty In Freeport**

The two combatants meet again after a six-day hiatus, this time in upstate Freeport, a stronghold for Republicans in the 1856 presidential race. Most observers agree that Lincoln turns in a strong performance here.

He leaps directly into answering the seven questions Douglas posed in Ottawa.

- *I do not favor the unconditional repeal of the fugitive slave law.*
- *I do not stand pledged against territories which wanted slavery after they became states.*
- *I do not stand pledged against the admission of territories as slave states if it comes when they seek admission.*
- *I do not stand pledged today to abolishing slavery in the District of Columbia.*
- *I do not stand pledged to prohibit the interstate slave trade.*
- *I am not generally opposed to honest acquisition of new territories.*

But he says that, in accord with the wishes of the founders and of common humanity:

*I am pledged to a belief in the right and duty of Congress to prohibit slavery in all the United States Territories!*

He also takes the opportunity to chastise Douglas for using a mistaken document to frame his questions at Ottawa in the first place, saying it was...

*Most extraordinary (to) so far forget all the suggestions of justice to an adversary, or of prudence to himself, as to venture upon (his) assertion...which the slightest investigation would have shown him to be wholly false.*

With that out of the way, he turns the tables on Douglas with four interrogatories of his own.

- Would he favor acquiring more foreign land even if it included slaves?
- Would Douglas just admit Kansas before it has the 93,000 residents required by law?
- Could a territory exclude slavery by law before it becomes a state?
- Did he agree with the *Dred Scott* ruling that a state cannot exclude slavery?

The first question intends to show Douglas's personal commitment to slavery. Lincoln knows that Douglas owns slaves himself, and that he supports the acquisition of Cuba and more land in Mexico and Central America that would expand the reach of slavery – and he wants this on the record. The others are aimed at challenging the theory and practice of popular sovereignty, and driving a further wedge between Douglas and those Democrats who back the Buchanan administration.

The most telling question in this second debate, and probably across all seven, calls upon Douglas to square the Supreme Court dictates in *Dred Scott* with his policy of popular sovereignty. When the high court decrees that slave owners *must be allowed to take their property* to any state or territory they want, doesn't this overrule any votes cast expressing the wishes of local residents?

Douglas responds with what will become known as his "Freeport Doctrine:"

*It matters not what the Supreme Court may hereafter decide as to the abstract question whether slavery may or may not go into a territory under the Constitution, the people have to lawful means to introduce it or exclude it as they please, for the reason that slavery cannot exist a day or an hour anywhere, unless it is supported by local police regulations. Those police regulations can only be established by the local legislature, and if the people are opposed to slavery, they will elect representatives to that body who will by unfriendly legislation effectually prevent the introduction of it into their midst. If, on the contrary, they are for it, their legislation will favor its extension."*

Here is the classical argument made by supporters of state's rights (or sovereignty) ever since the 1803 *Marbury v Madison* finding that federal laws trump local laws. John Calhoun tries to resist the 1828 Federal Tariff increase by having South Carolina "nullify" the law. Lincoln now accuses Douglas of employing this same tactic on slavery.

While Lincoln can claim a victory among constitutional scholars for this challenge, it seems likely that bringing up the conflicts between *Dred Scott* and popular sovereignty hurts him in the Senate race. For sure it allows Douglas to claim that his policy remains a viable alternative for Illinois voters who wish to "keep blacks out" absent a federal ban.

Ironically the "Freeport Doctrine," which ends Douglas' prospects for becoming president as a Democrat, spurs speculation that he might eventually run as a Republican!

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Date: September 15–18, 1858

### Douglas Forces Lincoln To Discuss His Racial Views At Jonesboro And Charleston



A Typical Attack On Miscegenation, In This Case Leveled At Abolitionist Horace Greeley

Douglas uses the third and fourth debates to pressure Lincoln on his beliefs about the “all men are created equal” tenet, and whether it applies to the negro race.

On September 15, 1858 the two meet at the small town of Jonesboro, the southernmost stop on their circuit, and the most inclined to be pro-slavery. The crowd numbers only 1,500, and the speeches are largely a rehash of points made earlier. Lincoln jabs again at the seeming irrelevance of popular sovereignty after the federal ruling in *Dred Scott*. Douglas asserts that...

*The signers of the Declaration of Independence had no reference to the negro whatsoever when they declared all men to be created equal.*

Three days later, an enthusiastic assembly of 12,000 spectators show up at Charleston, along the border with Indiana, for the fourth exchange. As part of the preliminary fanfare, Douglas supporters mount a large banner showing a white man, a black woman and a mulatto child, titled “Negro Equality.”

Lincoln spots this display and recognizes its intent to label him as an abolitionist and a supporter of miscegenation. He decides to address these claims head on as the opening speaker. His comments are remarkably candid in revealing his lifelong struggle with what to do about slavery. He says that he has always regarded it as immoral and a violation of American values, but continues to be perplexed about finding a practical solution. He cannot imagine that the differences between the races, and the negative stereotypes of blacks, will ever support assimilation.

*There is a physical difference between the white and black races which I believe will forever forbid the two races living together on terms of social and political equality. And inasmuch as they cannot so live, while they do remain together, there must be the position of superior and inferior, and I as much as any man am in favor of having the superior position assigned to the white race.*

He then dismisses Douglas’ charges that he supports racial equality, and inter-marriage:

*I am not, nor ever have been, in favor of bringing about in any way the social and political equality of the black and white races....I am not, nor ever have been, in favor of making voters or jurors of negroes, nor of qualifying them to hold office, not to intermarry with white people...I do not understand that because I do not want a negro woman for a slave I must necessarily want her for a wife.*

Some of his supporters will later express shock at these remarks, which they regard as racial pandering.

*He forsook principle and planted himself on low prejudice...The Negro had no stauncher advocate than Lincoln...(but) now that same Lincoln declared that the Negro, created as a race inferior to White by the Lord Almighty, must remain in his condition.*

Lincoln is careful here, and elsewhere, to not blame the people of the South for the problem, to not refer to the entire region as the “Slave Power.” As a follower of Clay, he says he would favor re-colonization of all blacks, while acknowledging that the economy could not support that path. What’s left then is to follow the founder’s wishes, and at least refuse to let the practice expand.

Moving along, he spends the remainder of his opening comments on a new and questionable charge, saying that Douglas plotted to avoid a public vote on the Lecompton Constitution in Kansas.

*Now, the charge is, that there was a plot entered into to have a Constitution formed for Kansas, and put in force, without giving the people an opportunity to vote upon it, and that Mr. Douglas was in the plot.*

This attack originates with Douglas’ mortal enemy, Lyman Turnbull, the junior Senator from Illinois, recently converted from a Democrat to a Republican. The Little Giant dismisses the charge, saying that he has staked his entire political future on popular sovereignty. He also mocks Lincoln for bringing it up.

*Why, I ask, does not Mr. Lincoln make a speech of his own instead of taking up his time reading Trumbull’s speech?*

Douglas goes back on the offensive, with his contention that Lincoln and the Republicans are all abolitionists.

*No sooner was the sod grown green over the grave of the immortal Clay, no sooner was the rose planted on the tomb of the Godlike Webster, than many of the leaders of the Whig party, such as Seward, of New York and his followers, led off and attempted to abolitionize the Whig party, and transfer all your old Whigs bound hand and foot into the abolition camp.*

He also calls Lincoln’s patriotism into question over his reservations about the Mexican War.

*If Mr. Lincoln is a man of bad character, I leave you to find it out; if his votes in the past are not satisfactory, I leave others to ascertain the fact; if his course on the Mexican war was not in accordance with your notions of patriotism and fidelity to our own country as against a public enemy, I leave you to ascertain the fact.*

Finally, he accuses Lincoln of telling one audience that blacks are equal to whites, and then denying this for the next – depending on what he thinks they want to hear. Lincoln parries and the debate comes to an end.

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### **Sidebar: The Atmosphere At The Charleston Debate**

Saturday, September 18, 1858 would go down as the most exciting day in the history of Charleston, Illinois. It pitted “Honest Abe, the Tall Sucker” against “The Little Giant,” and corn farmers from nearby Muddy Point, Dog Town, Muddy Point, Pinhook, and Greasy Creek poured into town by horseback, wagons and trains, loaded down with food and cider.

Many folks are decked out in colorful costumes marked by campaign buttons and ribbons. Bands play and parades feature floats, often with elaborate praise for their favorites.

*Westward the Star of Empire Takes its Way, Our Girls link-on to Lincoln, Their Mothers were for Clay.*

The Douglas procession includes sixteen young couples on horseback carrying American flags and offering huzzas:

*The Government Made for White Men-Douglas for Life*

Both men encounter negative banners, one showing Douglas being clubbed to the ground by Lincoln, the other a “Negro Equality” sign that Lincoln addresses as he opens.

The speakers address the crowd from a raised platform, 18 feet by 30 feet, large enough to seat some sixty special guests, among them Mrs. Douglas in an elaborate lavender dress, but not Mrs. Lincoln, who does not attend. With such a large crowd. Lincoln begins by encouraging silence along the way.

*It will be very difficult for an audience so large as this to hear distinctly what a speaker says, and consequently it is important that as profound silence be preserved as possible.*

Despite the admonition, supporters are inclined to cheer loudly for their favorites, while opponents interrupt occasionally with their own catcalls and challenges.

The event carries on from 2:45pm to the conclusion around 5:15pm. At that time, both candidates retreat to their own headquarters for supper, further rallies and evening serenading. It is midnight when the town finally shuts down after its memorable day in history.

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Date: October 7, 1858

### Douglas Again Asserts The Supremacy Of White Men At Galesburg



Everyday White Citizens Of The Time

Almost three weeks elapse before the fifth encounter takes place in the town of Galesburg, before another very large crowd of some 15,000 attendees. The venue chosen is on the campus of Knox College, founded in 1837 by Presbyterian minister George Washington Gale, mentor of Reverend Charles Finney, head of the Oneida Institute and early leader in the anti-slavery movement.

The weather is chilly and Douglas arrives suffering from a case of bronchitis. Between his ill health and a decidedly anti-slavery audience, he turns in a lackluster performance. His opening repeats familiar themes. The white race is supreme and it has the right to operate the country in its own interest.

*This Government was made by our fathers on the white basis...made by white men for the benefit of the white men and then their posterity forever.*

Lincoln and the Republicans are slandering the founding fathers with their phony interpretation of “all men created equal” and their devious efforts to abolish slavery.

The charges levelled by Turnbull and Lincoln that he favored passage of the Lecompton constitution without a fair public vote are totally contrived.

*I hold to that great principle of self-government which asserts the right of every people to decide for themselves the nature and character of the domestic institutions and fundamental law under which they are to live.*

Lincoln senses the anti-slavery feelings of the crowd and says that a basic sense of humanity demands that “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” be guaranteed for all men. If Douglas is successful in his goal to “nationalize slavery,” America will be made the lesser for it.

Lincoln also responds to the attack made on his patriotism at Charleston regarding his votes on the Mexican War. He confirms that he did oppose “the origin and justice of the war,” but goes on to say...

*I never voted against the supplies for the army, and...whenever a dollar was asked...for the benefits of the soldiers, I gave all the votes that...Douglas did, and perhaps more.*

For good measure, he says that Douglas is set on acquiring even more land to foster the spread of slavery:

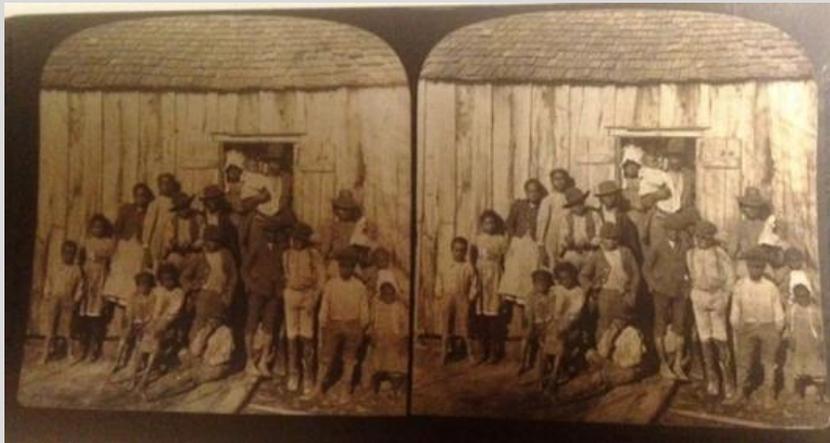
*A grab for the territory of poor Mexico, an invasion of the rich lands of South America, then the adjoining islands.*

Most observers feel that Galesburg has been a good day for Lincoln. He again more than holds his own against the Little Giant on a public stage; advances the notion that Douglas hopes to “nationalize slavery;” and questions his basic sense of morality on the issue.

*He is blowing out the moral lights around us.*

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#### Sidebar: Stephen Douglas As Slaveholder



Enslaved People Huddled Together Outside A Typical Cabin

The body of evidence supporting Douglas’ moral indifference to slavery is supported by his history as a plantation owner.

In March 1847 he nearly becomes an official slave holder when he marries Martha Martin, daughter of a North Carolina planter, who offers the couple a cotton plantation on the Pearl River in Mississippi, as a wedding present. At the time, he declines the offer, saying that, as a northerner, he lacked the knowledge to manage it properly. The rejection also seems influenced by fear of negative publicity, as he is about to make his first run for a seat in the U.S. Senate.

In 1848 his father-in-law dies and Douglas is named executor for the entire estate. In the will, Martha inherits the 2500 acre site along with some 140 slaves. The property is to remain in her name, while Douglas is to serve as manager and receive 20% of the annual income. This draws him into the operations for the first time, and he visits the land whenever political activities take him to the south. He also receives regular updates from the on-site overseer he hires, detailing crop results along with conditions of his slaves. One such excerpt goes as follows.

*The negroes are in fine helth, with children increasing very fast...and they are just as fat as you ever saw hogs...The negroes will steel hogs to sell to mean white folks...Nezer is yet in the woods (and) will always give us trouhable, he ran away almost for Nothing.*

When he becomes a serious candidate for the presidential nomination in 1852, the subject of his connections to the Mississippi plantations comes up, and he vows to liquidate his holding and reinvest the cash back in Illinois, but he never does so.

In 1853 Martha dies soon after giving birth, and ownership is transferred to Douglas' two sons. Crop losses to Pearl River flooding finally convince him to sell the first plantation and buy another. He partners with a Baton Rouge man in 1857 and lands a 2,000 acre parcel near Greenville, Mississippi, to be worked by his 142 slaves.

The plantation continues to provide him needed revenue, especially when his personal finances become precarious in the 1850's, and he retains control over it until typhoid fever claims him at age forty-eight on June 3, 1861.

Despite efforts to distance himself from the Mississippi plantations, political opponents cast him repeatedly as a slave-holder. He is accused of promoting the Kansas-Nebraska Bill to pump up the sales value of his slaves. His speculative purchases of land for the intercontinental railroad are said to be funded by his cotton profits. And, on the eve of the 1858 senatorial race, reports surface about mistreatment of the slaves in his care.

Douglas brushes aside all such criticism as irrelevant to his role in government.

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Date: October 13, 1858

### **Lincoln Again Claims The Moral High Ground At Quincy**

The sixth debate in the series is held at the bustling town of Quincy, incorporated in 1840, named in honor of President John Quincy Adams, and home to many recent German immigrants. Situated on the Mississippi River, it is already a popular stopping off port for both commercial traffic and steamboat passengers.

By the time Douglas arrives at Quincy, he is near exhaustion. During the total 100 days of the campaign, records show that he makes some 130 speeches and travels 5,227 miles, by trains, boats and carriages. Lincoln too is running from one stop to the next, logging 4,350 miles and giving 60 formal addresses in this same timeframe.

While Douglas, at age forty-nine, is recognized for his pugilistic personality and is five years younger than Lincoln, he is often prone to illnesses and is far less physically fit than "Honest Abe," now portrayed in posters with ax in hand as the vigorous "rail-splitter."

Unlike his teetotaler rival, Douglas is also a very heavy drinker. In fact, on October 13 he shows up at the Quincy event with a visibly "puffy face" and other signs of a hang-over from the previous night's activities.

With the parades and other preliminaries over, Washington Square is jam packed with 12,000 attendees, many of whom have been loyal Whigs in the past and are wondering about Lincoln's affiliation with the Republican Party.

The lead-off spot at Quincy belongs to Lincoln, and he immediately lays into Douglas for trying to divert attention away from the central issue in the contest:

*The difference between the men who think slavery is a wrong and those who do not think it wrong.*

There it is, plain and simple, says Lincoln.

The entire Democratic Party, including Douglas, believes that slavery is not wrong and are eager to see it take root across the nation. On the other hand, the Republicans hope to...

*Prevent its growing any larger and so deal with it that there may be some promise of an end to it.*

This is what the founders wanted, what the Whigs under Henry Clay wanted, and what he wants. Not the abolitionist agenda to free all the slaves immediately and turn them loose in white society. Instead a simple prohibition to stop the spread of a moral stain and puts an “end to this slavery agitation” that threatens the Union.

A wobbly Douglas tries to respond. He begins by denying that he ever called slavery a “positive good” and agreeing that it is a misfortune for those in bondage. But, he says, the price of trying to dismantle the institution would be to tear the Union apart for good.

The rest is anti-climactic. Douglas stumbles through his usual litany, accusing Lincoln of favoring abolition and full racial equality, while continuing to assert that the morality of slavery should have no bearing when it comes to settling on the right public policy. He also says that, once free, the slaves would be unable to survive on their own.

*The humane and Christian remedy he proposes for the great crime of slavery (will) extinguish the negro race.*

Lincoln counters that...

*His policy in regard to the institution of slavery contemplates that it shall last forever.*

After an appropriate round of applause both men head down to the landing and board the *City of Louisiana* steamer for the 115 mile ride south to Alton, Illinois, for their final encounter.

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Date: October 15, 1858

### **The Debates Conclude At Alton**

The seventh and final debate follows three days later in Alton, Illinois.

Ironically it is the 1837 murder here of abolitionist editor Elijah Lovejoy that spurs Lincoln to offer his first public address, and John Brown to swear his fateful church oath to “consecrate his life to ending slavery.”

Like Quincy, Alton is another boom town, offering both a port on the Mississippi and a terminal for two railroad lines heading west and east. Like St. Louis, 22 miles due south, it intends to be a crucial commercial hub.

On an overcast day, the turn-out is disappointing, with an estimated crowd of only 5,000 people. Lincoln's friend, the German ex-patriate, Gustave Koerner, notes that Douglas arrives again in bad shape.

*His face... was bloated, and his looks were haggard and his voice almost extinct... his words came like barks, and he frothed at the mouth when he became excited.*

Still he opens up with a frontal attack on Lincoln's "house divided" speech. First, he says, because it demeans the founding fathers for lacking the wisdom to create a nation that "can no longer endure." Second, because the predicted "all free or all slave" outcome would be accompanied by a civil war between the South and the North.

So, he wonders aloud, is Lincoln's policy to end slavery worth the price of such a war?

He turns to Lincoln and asks if he would really deny statehood to Kansas if the people there voted in favor of slavery – and, if so, does that not signal his opposition to the sacred principle of self-government?

Next comes the false charge made by Lincoln and Senator Trumbull, who happens to be in the audience, about the Lecompton Constitution. Douglas says that he would never have allowed Kansas to be admitted as a slave state without a public vote. In fact, he says he has even had the courage to battle his own President on behalf of popular sovereignty.

He ends, as usual, by insinuating that Lincoln is an abolitionist, who believes that the "all men are created equal" line means that negroes are equivalent to white men. Instead...

*The signers of the Declaration of Independence ... did not mean negroes, nor the savage Indians, nor the Fejee Islanders nor any other barbarous race.*

Now it is Lincoln's turn. He has been seated toward the rear of the state, taking it all in, not even bothering this time with rebuttal notes. When he rises, he begins by poking fun at Douglas for complaining further about his own president and party.

*He has now vastly improved upon the attack he made (in Quincy) upon the Administration.*

Raucous laughter accompanies this observation, reinforcing Lincoln's ability to use humor to undercut Douglas' lecturing style as a speaker.

By now he has also heard all of the accusations before: that he wants a civil war, intends to free all of the slaves, regards blacks as equal to whites, supports inter-marriage, opposes the rights of the people to self-government. His rejoinders come with ease. He asks how many men have fled to Illinois to escape competing with slave labor and appeals to this free soil faction saying that a slave free Kansas would be an...

*Outlet for free white people everywhere... in which Hans, Baptiste and Patrick and all other men from all the world, may find new homes and better their condition of life.*

But it remains the immorality of human bondage that animates his defense. He quotes his mentor, Henry Clay:

*If a state of nature existed and we were to lay the foundations of society, no man would be more strongly opposed than I should be to incorporating the institution of slavery among its elements.*

He asks how many in the audience feel that slavery is morally right, and repeats his usual framing:

*Those who deny freedom to others, deserve it not for themselves...and under a just God, cannot long retain it.*

*That is the issue that will continue in this country when these poor tongues of Judge Douglas and myself shall be silent. It is the eternal struggle between these principles that here stood face to face from the beginning of time and will ever continue to struggle. The one is the common right of humanity and the other the divine right of kings.*

Douglas closes with his familiar themes.

*I care more for the great principle of self-government, the right of the people to rule, than I do for all the negroes in Christendom.*

Then the specter of warfare should the voice of the people be drowned out by a tyrannical ban from Washington. If that happens...

*The result will be bloodshed of the unholy kind.*

With that, the final debate comes to an end – some two weeks before the election of the Illinois state legislators who will have the final say in the senatorial race.

## Chapter 267– Douglas Is Re-elected While Lincoln Becomes Famous



**Dates:**  
October 16 – November 1,  
1858

**Sections:**

- The Campaign Runs Right Up To The Final Day
- The Illinois Legislature Chooses Douglas Over Lincoln

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Date: October 16 to November 1, 1858

### **The Campaign Runs Right Up To The Final Day**

Both candidates continue to stump right up to election day.

President Buchanan does everything he can to see that the Little Giant is defeated, including the organization of a slate of anti-Douglas Democrats, known as “Danites.”

Lincoln is most concerned about how members of his old Whig Party react to his switch to the Republicans. Of special interest here is 71 year old Senator John J. Crittenden of Kentucky, like Lincoln a dedicated backer of Henry Clay. An endorsement from Crittenden would improve the odds of victory across the “old line Whig Belt” districts in central Illinois. But Crittenden is no fan of the Republican call to ban slavery in the territories, and he also views a Douglas victory as a slap in the face to Buchanan. Instead of support for Lincoln, a Crittenden letter gets published which heaps praise on Douglas:

*The people of Illinois little know how much they owe Douglas (who) had the courage and patriotism to take an elevated, just and independent position on the Lecompton question...calling not only for approbation but applause.*

On October 29, 1858 makes his final stop in Rock Island, Illinois, where he is greeted by campaign banners that sum up his major themes:

- Popular Sovereignty Now And Forever
- Down With Negro Equality
- The Country Was Made For White Men
- Old Abe Has Got On The Wrong Spot

One day later, Lincoln ends his long march with a much quieter event at home in Springfield, where he tells friends and supporters that the entire effort, marked by many “odious epithets” hurled his way, will have been worth it if he could restore the Missouri Compromise and stop the further spread of slavery.

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Date: November 2, 1858

### The Illinois Legislature Chooses Douglas Over Lincoln



Stephen Douglas (1813-1861)

Up until the Seventeenth Amendment in 1913, all U.S. Senators are chosen by their elected state legislators, rather than by the popular vote. Thus for Lincoln to displace Douglas in 1858, the Republicans must win a majority of the 100 seats up for grabs on November 2 in the Illinois state assembly.

Lincoln tracks the district by district returns throughout the day, and realizes by nightfall that the Democrats have held on to the legislature and, in turn, that he will lose to Douglas.

The final tally favors the Democrats by a margin of 54 to 46.

#### Illinois Legislature Election Of November 2, 1858

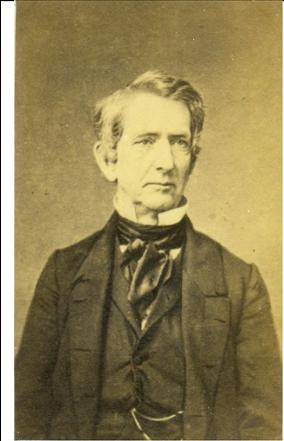
Party	Senate	House	Total
Democrats	14	40	54
Republicans	11	35	46

Lincoln is deeply disappointed by the loss, albeit not surprised by it.

The “Crittenden letter” backing Douglas has cost support across the “Whig Belt” counties, which the Democrats carry fourteen to five.

On top of that, Illinois voters also seem concerned that the Republican call to ban slavery in the west may be too radical a position, and one that will cause the South to leave the Union.

## Chapter 268 -- Henry Seward's "Irrepressible Conflict" Speech



**Dates:**  
October 25, 1858

**Sections:**

- The Mid-Term Elections Get Under Way
- Seward Issues A Warning
- The Address Alarms Many Of His Listeners

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Date: October 25, 1858

### The Mid-Term Elections Get Under Way

Throughout the Fall of 1858 another Republican, Henry Seward, is out stumping for his party's candidates in other mid-term elections – hoping they will support his candidacy for the presidential nomination in 1860.

Among many observers he is already considered a shoo-in for that honor.

The New Yorker has been a recognized force at the national level since being elected to the US Senate in 1850.

His time there begins with a remarkable maiden speech, delivered on May 11, 1850, amidst the contentious debates over the Compromise Bill put forward by Henry Clay and Stephen Douglas, and already commented on by the likes of John Calhoun and Daniel Webster.

In this speech he not only calls for an outright ban on slavery across all of the new western territories, but then justifies this on the basis of a “higher law” than the U.S. Constitution.

That “higher law,” being the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness granted to all men by their heavenly Father and held sacred by the founding fathers.

Seward's proposed ban immediately makes him the enemy of the South, while his rationale will forever strike many of his fellow Whigs as radical and dangerous.

But his proposed ban does become the basis for the Republican Party in the years to follow – even though many converts will sign on not to end black slavery on moral grounds, but to insure the supremacy of white men and the “dignity” of their free labor.

On October 25, 1858, Henry Seward is in Rochester, New York, speaking to potential voters, when he delivers what becomes another famous speech, where he posits an “irrepressible conflict” to come.

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Date: October 25, 1858

### Seward Issues A Warning



Henry Seward (1801-1872)

William Henry Seward is by no means a natural orator. He speaks softly; appears almost introspective; avoids the flamboyant gestures common among his more animated peers. His power instead emanates from the sheer clarity and logic of his arguments.

His address in Rochester quickly posits America as a theater with “two radically different political systems” vying for control:

*Our country is a theatre, which exhibits...two radically different political systems; the one resting on the basis of servile or slave labor, the other on voluntary labor of freemen.*

He says that the servile system is rooted in a belief that physical labor is “groveling and base” and asserts that its proponents would enslave white men as well as blacks, if they could!

*The laborers who are enslaved are all negroes ...but this is only accidental. The principle of the system is, that labor in every society, by whomsoever performed, is necessarily unintellectual, grovelling and base; and that the laborer, equally for his own good and for the welfare of the State, ought to be enslaved. The white laboring man, whether native or foreigner, is not enslaved, only because he cannot, as yet, be reduced to bondage.*

The slave system came to the states via the Portuguese and Spain and it leads inevitably to poverty and imbecility; free labor is the norm in the UK, Germany, Holland and Scandinavia and yields wealth, intelligence, freedom.

*This African slave system is one which, in its origin and in its growth, has been altogether foreign from the habits of the races which colonized these States, and established civilization here. It was introduced on this continent as an engine of conquest...by the Portuguese and the Spaniards, and was rapidly extended by them all over South America, Central America, Louisiana, and Mexico. Its legitimate fruits are seen in the poverty, imbecility, and anarchy which now pervade all Portuguese and Spanish America. The free-labor system is of German extraction, and it was established in our country by emigrants from Sweden, Holland, Germany, Great Britain, and Ireland. We justly ascribe to its influences the strength, wealth, greatness, intelligence, and freedom, which the whole American people now enjoy.*

The presence of slavery punishes not only blacks, but whites as well, limiting their access to land and resources, and also eroding the moral fiber of their communities.

*The slave system is not only intolerable, unjust, and inhuman, toward the laborer...but is scarcely less severe upon the freeman, to whom...it denies facilities for employment, and..because, as a general truth, (their) communities prosper and flourish, or droop and decline, in just the degree that they practise or neglect to practise the primary duties of justice and humanity. The free-labor system conforms to the divine law of equality, which is written in the hearts and consciences of man, and therefore is always and everywhere beneficent.*

Slavery breeds the threat of insurrection and leaves the population living in constant fear.

*The slave system is one of constant danger, distrust, suspicion, and watchfulness. It debases those whose toil alone can produce wealth and resources for defence, to the lowest degree of which human nature is capable, to guard against mutiny and insurrection, and thus wastes energies which otherwise might be employed in national development and aggrandizement. The free-labor system educates all alike, and by opening all the fields of industrial employment and all the departments of authority, to the unchecked and equal rivalry of all classes of men, at once secures universal contentment, and brings into the highest possible activity all the physical, moral, and social energies of the whole state.*

It promotes an aristocratic form of government, with all power residing among the masters.

*In states where the slave system prevails, the masters, directly or indirectly, secure all political power, and constitute a ruling aristocracy. In states where the free-labor system prevails, universal suffrage necessarily obtains, and the state inevitably becomes, sooner or later, a republic or democracy.*

With the exception of Russia, most major nations have abandoned slavery in favor of free labor.

*Russia yet maintains slavery, and is a despotism. Most of the other European states have abolished slavery, and adopted the system of free labor. It was the antagonistic political tendencies of the two systems which the first Napoleon was contemplating when he predicted that Europe would ultimately be either all Cossack or all republican. Never did human sagacity utter a more pregnant truth.*

That trend, he say, is because the two systems are simply incompatible. In America this becomes evident when a new state declares itself either Free or Slave.

*The two systems are incompatible. They never have permanently existed together in one country, and they never can...Indeed, so incompatible are the two systems, that every new State which is organized within our ever-extending domain makes its first political act a choice of the one and the exclusion of the other, even at the cost of civil war, if necessary.*

To cement the outcome, the Slave states went so far in the 1856 election as to keep anti-slavery candidates from even appearing on their ballots.

*The slave States, without law, at the last national election, successfully forbade, within their own limits, even the casting of votes for a candidate for President of the United States supposed to be favorable to the establishment of the free-labor system in new States.*

As the country's infrastructure develops, the two labor systems come together more often and more intensely.

*Hitherto, the two systems have existed in different States, but side by side within the American Union. (But)... the States into a higher and more perfect social unity or consolidation. Thus, these antagonistic systems are continually coming into closer contact, and collision results.*

The result, says Seward, is an “irrepressible conflict,” that must end with an America that is “entirely a slaveholding nation or a free-labor nation:”

*Shall I tell you what this collision means? They who think that it is accidental, unnecessary, the work of interested or fanatical agitators, and therefor ephemeral, mistake the case altogether. It is an irrepressible conflict between opposing and enduring forces, and it means that the United States must and will, sooner or later, become either entirely a slaveholding nation, or entirely a free-labor nation.*

*Either the cotton and rice fields of South Carolina and the sugar plantations of Louisiana will ultimately be tilled by free labor, and Charleston and New Orleans become marts of legitimate merchandise alone, or else the rye-fields and wheat-fields of Massachusetts and New York must again be surrendered by their farmers to slave culture and to the production of slaves, and Boston and New York becomes once more markets for trade in the bodies and souls of men.*

Importantly, the founding fathers understood the incompatibility of the two systems from the beginning, and, according to Seward, set up the amendment process to eventually abolish slavery in every state.

*The fathers knew that the two systems could not endure within the Union, and expected within a short period slavery would disappear forever. Moreover, in order that these modifications might not altogether defeat their grand design of a republic maintaining universal equality, they provided that two thirds of the States might amend the constitution.*

But the South will not surrender its slaves easily, and they are on the march to nationalize the institution.

*(It) has at length made a stand, not merely to retain its original defensive position, but to extend its sway throughout the whole Union. It is certain that the slaveholding class of American citizens indulge this high ambition, and that they derive encouragement for it from the rapid and effective political successes which they have already obtained.*

He then makes an extraordinary declaration, announcing that he would leave America were slavery to prevail.

*For one, I should not remain in the country to test the sad experiment. Having spent my manhood, though not my whole life, in a free State, no aristocracy of any kind, much less an aristocracy of slaveholders, shall ever make the laws of the land in which I shall be content to live. Having seen the society around me universally engaged in agriculture, manufactures, and trade, which were innocent and beneficent, I shall never be a denizen of a State where men and women are reared as cattle, and bought and sold as merchandise. When that evil day shall come, and all further effort at resistance shall be impossible, then, if there shall be no better hope for redemption than I can now foresee, I shall say with Franklin, while looking abroad over the whole earth for a new and more congenial home, "Where liberty dwells, there is my country."*

The Democrats has long been co-opted by the South and is the party of slavery. It must be defeated for America to prosper, and that is the challenge for the new Republican Party.

*At last, the Republican party has appeared. It avows, now, as the Republican party of 1800 did, in one word, its faith and its works, " Equal and exact justice to all men." Even when it first entered the field, only half organized, it struck a blow which only just failed to secure complete and triumphant victory.*

Seward closes with another charged line -- “a revolution has begun” – and the people are now ready to take back the nation from the Democrats, the “betrayers of the constitution.”

*I know, and you know, that a revolution has begun. I know, and all the world knows, that revolutions never go backward. Twenty senators and a hundred representatives proclaim boldly in Congress to-day sentiments and opinions and principles of freedom which hardly so many men, even in this free State, dared to utter in their own homes twenty years ago. While the government of the United States, under the conduct of the Democratic party, has been all that time surrendering one plain and castle after another to slavery, the people of the United States have been no less steadily and perseveringly gathering together the forces with which to recover back again all the fields and all the castles which have been lost, and to confound and overthrow, by one decisive blow, the betrayers of the constitution and freedom forever.*

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Date: October 1858 - Forward

### **The Address Alarms Many Of His Listeners**

As with Lincoln’s “house divided” metaphor from his June 1858 speech, Seward’s description of an “irreconcilable difference” between slave labor and free labor is intended to alarm his listeners.

These two men share the same intent: to warn Northerners that the Democrat’s goal is to nationalize slavery; that the Kansas-Nebraska Act, the *Dred Scott* decision and the Lecompton Constitution facilitate this outcome; and that the only way to prevent it lies in electing Republicans to govern the nation.

Both also share a deeply held conviction that slavery is morally indefensible, that it violates America’s core value of freedom, and that the founders had every intent of insuring that it withered away over time.

Both have concerns about their own warnings and predictions, two in particular: will a civil war be required to put an end to slavery, and what will happen to the millions of slaves once they are freed?

Neither wants a war and neither has a good answer regarding the fate of freed blacks in a white society that sees them as inferior and fears their revenge.

But in their minds, something must be done to prevent the sustained violence and governmental chaos witnessed in Kansas from repeating itself one territory at a time across the west. Thus their joint call for a flat out ban on any more expansion of slavery.

The exact rhetoric they employ to make these points does, however, differs in ways that will affect their chances of becoming president – with Lincoln coming across as more tempered and Seward viewed, especially in the press, as more of the “arch agitator.”

Some of Seward's reputation as a "radical" may trace to his tendency to express quite unconventional thoughts -- the notion of a "higher law" than the Constitution, of a "revolution" in progress, of slaves again for sale in New York and Boston, of his commitment to abandon his country should this happen.

While these images energize many to join the Republican cause and back his personal candidacy, they also seem to scare others away, to position him as one whose election would eliminate the possibility of compromise and restored unity.

## Chapter 269– Republican Party Wins Mid-Term House Elections



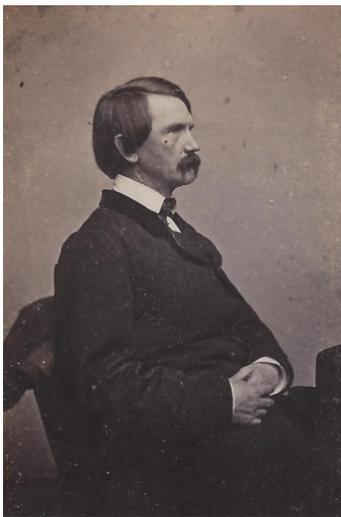
**Dates:**  
August 1859 – November 1859

**Sections:**  
• Republicans Gain Momentum

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Date: August 2, 1858 to November 8, 1859

### Republicans Gain Momentum



The actual mid-term election voting is strung out between August 2, 1858 and November 8, 1859 – a pattern that will persist until an 1872 bill that concentrates all polling on the Tuesday after the first Monday in November.

When the returns are all in, the Democrats have lost their majority in the House, surrendering 35 seats in total, with 19 going to a splinter group christened the Southern Opposition Party. Meanwhile the Republicans are the big winners, capturing 116 seats for a plurality position.

Francis Blair, Jr. (1821-1878)

#### Results Of 1858 Elections: The House

Party	# Seats	Gain/Loss
<b>Democrats</b>	98	--35
<b>Republicans</b>	116	+26
<b>Know Nothings</b>	5	--9
<b>So. Opposition</b>	19	+19
<b>Total</b>	238	

The largest statewide shift in popularity occurs in Buchanan's home state of Pennsylvania, where his Democrats lose ten races. Gains by the new Southern Opposition faction are concentrated in the mid-South, Tennessee, Kentucky and North Carolina.

**Biggest Shifts From 1856 Results In The House**

	<b>Gainers</b>	<b>Losers</b>
<b>Pennsylvania</b>	Republicans +10	Democrats --10
<b>Tennessee</b>	So. Opposition +7	Democrats - 4/ KN -3
<b>New York</b>	Republicans +5	Democrats -5
<b>Kentucky</b>	So. Opposition +5	Democrats -3/KN - 2
<b>North Carolina</b>	So. Opposition +4	Democrats -3/KN -1

The results by region reinforce the threat of a Union on the brink of dissolution.

In the slave states of the South, the Republicans win exactly one seat, that in Missouri's 1<sup>st</sup> District, won by Francis Preston Blair, Jr.

Conversely in the North, they pile up 115 wins against only 33 going to the Democrats. Should a portion of these Democratic victories give way in 1860, a new President, chosen entirely on electoral votes in the North, would be a possibility. In effect, a "Northern President."

**House Seats Won In The 1858 Election By State**

<b>Southeast</b>	<b>Tot Seats</b>	<b>Republican</b>	<b>Democrats</b>	<b>So. Opposition</b>	<b>Know Nothing</b>
Virginia	13	0	12 (-1)	1 (+1)	0
North Carolina	8	0	4 (-3)	4 (+4)	0 ((-1)
Georgia	8	0	6	2 (+2)	0 (-2)
South Carolina	6	0	6	0	0
Total	35	0 0	28	7	0
<b>Border</b>					
Kentucky	10	0	5 (-3)	5 (+5)	0 (-2)
Maryland	6	0	3	0	3
Missouri	7	1	5 (+1)	0	1 (-1)
Delaware	1	0	1	0	0
Total	24	1	14	5	4
<b>Southwest</b>					
Tennessee	10	0	3 (-4)	7 (+7)	0 (-3)
Alabama	7	0	7	0	0
Mississippi	5	0	5	0	0
Louisiana	4	0	3	0	1
Arkansas	2	0	2	0	0
Texas	2	0	2	0	0
Florida	1	0	1	0	0
Total	31	0	23	7	1
<b>Total South</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>5</b>

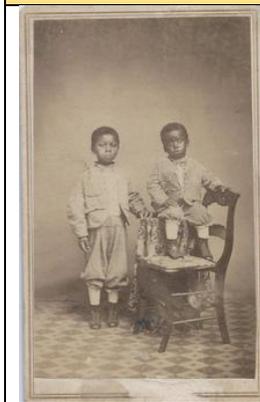
Northeast					
New York	33	26 (+5)	7 (-5)		
Pennsylvania	25	20 (+10)	5 (-10)		
Massachusetts	11	11	0		
Maine	6	6	0		
New Jersey	5	3 (+1)	2 (-1)		
Connecticut	4	4 (+2)	0 (-2)		
New Hampshire	3	3	0		
Rhode Island	2	2	0		
Vermont	3	3	0		
Total	92	78	14		
Northwest					
Ohio	21	15 (+2)	6 (-2)		
Indiana	11	7 (+2)	4 (-2)		
Illinois	9	4	5		
Michigan	4	4	0		
Total	45	30	15		
Far West					
Wisconsin	3	2 (-1)	1 (+1)		
California	2	0	2		
Iowa	2	2	0		
Minnesota	2	2 (+2)	0 (-2)		
Oregon	1	0	1		
Kansas	1	1 (+1)			
Total	11	7	4		
Total North	148	115	33	0	0
Total U.S.	238	116	98	19	5

In the Senate, with only one-third of the seats are in play, the trend is toward the Republicans, although the Democrats still maintain a fairly comfortable majority.

#### Results Of 1858 Elections: The Senate

Party	# Seats	Gain/Loss
Democrats	38	--4
Republicans	25	+5
Know Nothings	2	-2
<b>Total</b>	65	

## Chapter 270 – John Brown Frees Missouri Slaves And Takes Them To Safety



**Dates:**  
December 20, 1858

**Sections:**  
• Brown Returns To Action In Kansas

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Date: December 20, 1858

### Brown Returns To Action In Kansas



Two Youngsters

With his Virginia raid on hold after Hugh Forbes' public revelations, John Brown returns to Kansas in June 1858, roughly a month after the cold-blooded murder of eleven Free-Staters at the Marais des Cygnes River.

But his mind is now more on Virginia than Kansas, and besides that, he is also suffering from what he calls the "ague," fits of shivering and chills commonly associated with malaria. This fells him all the way to October 1858.

Still he finds enough stamina to organize a defensive unit he calls "Shubel Morgan's Company," which includes two recruits who will die with him at Harpers Ferry: Jerry Anderson and Albert Hazlett, both veterans of various battles in Kansas.

On December 20, 1858, he is back in action, leading a party of twenty men across the Missouri border and into Vernon County, on a mission to liberate slaves. He collects a total of eleven men, women and children, in raids on two farms and decides to personally lead them to safety and freedom.

Immediately after the incursion, the Governor of Missouri places a \$3,000 bounty on his head, and President Buchanan adds another \$250 on his own.

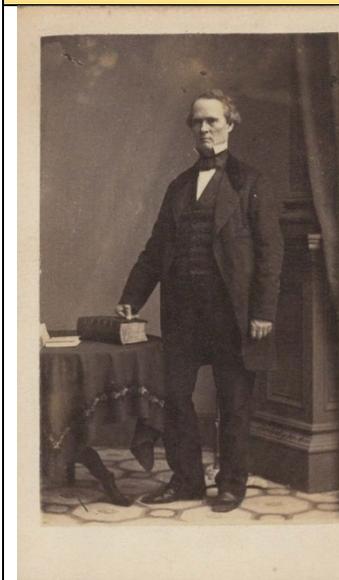
Brown is characteristically undeterred, and organizes an expedition to take the slaves North.

On February 20 the band has reached Grinnell, Iowa. They pass through Springdale on February 25 and West Liberty on March 9. From there they head northeast through Illinois and Michigan, finally reaching Detroit, where Brown puts them on a ferry to Windsor, Ontario and a new life in Canada.

The journey has lasted eighty-two days and has covered over 11,000 miles.

It stands as one more chapter, in this case a less violent one, in Osawatomie Brown's crusade to end slavery.

## Chapter 271– Oregon Moves Toward Applying For Statehood



**Dates:**  
August 1848 -  
September 1857

- Sections:**
- Congress Establishes The Oregon Territory
  - Joseph Lane Is A Leading Force In The Territory
  - The Constitution Convention Opens
  - Asahel Bush And The “Salem Clique” Dominate The Proceedings
  - The Delegates Vote To Permanently Cleanse Oregon Of All Negroes

\*\*\*\*\*

Date: August 14, 1848

### Congress Establishes The Oregon Territory



Map Of The “Oregon Country” Circa 1846

While plans are being hatched throughout the 1850’s to blow up the Union, the residents of the Oregon Territory are finally eager to join it.

Their journey has been in the making for over a half century, ever since Merriweather Lewis and William Clark explore the area in their 1805-6 expedition, and John Jacob Astor opens the trading post for his Pacific Fur Trading Company in 1811.

While battles between Astor and Britain’s Hudson Bay Company for dominance of the fur trade continue into the 1830’s, settlers from the east begin to straggle into the area, attracted by the promise of abundant farmland.

On July 5, 1843 they gather together to establish their first provisional government, under a document known as the “Organic Laws of Oregon.”

Soon thereafter the “Oregon Country” becomes the center of national attention in a threatening boundary dispute with Great Britain. It is sparked by the 1844 presidential campaign, where those backing James

Polk and “manifest destiny” rally behind the cry of “Fifty-four forty or fight.” Cooler heads prevail in the Oregon Treaty of 1846, negotiated by James Buchanan, and establishing the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel as US-Canadian border.

This begins serious discussions about statehood, and on August 14, 1848, Congress creates the Oregon Territory, stretching all the way from the 42<sup>nd</sup> to the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel, and President Polk appoints Joseph Lane as the first Territorial Governor.

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Date: March 3, 1849

### **Joseph Lane Is A Leading Force In The Territory**



Joseph Lane (1801-1881)

Lane will dominate the political scene in Oregon for much of the next twelve years -- as another of the larger-than-life men of action who emerge during America’s westward expansion.

Joseph Lane is born in North Carolina to a father who fought in the Revolutionary War. His youth is spent in Kentucky where he is self-taught. At fifteen he moves to Indiana, marries four year later, operates a successful flat-boat business on the Ohio River.

He reads the law on his own and enters politics at age twenty-two, before enlisting in the Mexican War. Like others his age, the war becomes his pathway to national recognition. He serves under Zachary Taylor, is wounded twice in combat and rises to the rank of Major General.

When Lane arrives in Oregon as the first Governor on March 3, 1849, the total population of the Territory is just under 9,000 people, and battles are frequent with the local Cayuse tribe. He resigns his office in 1850, but then becomes the delegate to the U.S. House from 1851 to 1857, when he is elected as the first of Oregon’s two U.S. Senators.

His aggressive pro-slavery stance leads to his nomination by break-away Southern Democrats as Vice-President alongside John Breckinridge in the 1860 race. His loss here and his support for secession ends his political career, although he lives on in Oregon until dying in 1881.

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Date: August 17, 1857

**The Constitution Convention Opens**



After the land north of the Columbia River becomes the Washington Territory in 1853, the Oregonian’s turn their attention toward statehood. Concerns over federal taxation and land prices have slowed the process, but on June 1, 1857, voters call for a Constitutional Convention by a margin of 7,209 yeas against 1,616 nays.

The convention opens on August 17, 1857 in the town of Salem.

Sixty delegates are chosen to attend. They range in age from 64 years to 25 years old, with a median around forty.

Map Of The Oregon Territory In 1857

**Age Of Delegates**

Years	#
60 or older	5
50-59	10
40-49	17
30-39	22
20-29	6

Half are farmers; another seventeen are lawyers; the rest have diverse occupations.

**Occupation Of Delegates**

	#
Farmers	30
Lawyers	17
Mechanics	3
Miners	3
Surveyors	2
Physicians	2
Editor	1
Printer	1

Their birthplaces are very diverse, and divided almost evenly between Free States and Slave States.

**Birth State Of Delegates**

<b>Free States</b>	
New York	7
Illinois	6
Massachusetts	4
Connecticut	4
Pennsylvania	4
Ohio	3
Others	4
Total	32
<b>Slave States</b>	
Missouri	7
Kentucky	6
Virginia	5
Tennessee	4
Others	4
Total	26
<b>Europe</b>	
	2

\*\*\*\*\*

Date: August- September 1857

**Asahel Bush And The “Salem Clique” Dominate The Proceedings**

The Democratic Party is dominant in Oregon in 1857, and its members account for just over 75% of the convention delegates. The rest are residual Whigs along with a one lone early Republicans, a lawyer named John McBride.

**Political Party Of Delegates**

	<b>#</b>
<b>Democratic</b>	46
<b>Anti-Democratic</b>	13
<b>Republican</b>	1

The framework for political debate is largely set by two newspaper publishers, who lock horns throughout the 1850’s.

One is Thomas Dryer, a New Yorker by birth, who comes to California during the gold rush, then moves north in 1850 to found the *Oregonian*. It is centered in the town of Portland, and dedicated to promoting the Whig agenda. Despite being a notorious alcoholic, Dryer is still able to wield a devastating pen against his political foes.

He is more than matched in this regard by Asahel Bush, originally from Massachusetts, who is recruited by Samuel Thurston -- Oregon’s first provisional representative in 1849 to the U.S House – to found a

paper backing his political career and helping to organize the Democratic Party. Bush's paper is the *Oregon Statesman*, which starts up in Salem in 1851.

Bush himself quickly becomes a leading mover and shaker in Territorial politics, Oregon's version of publishers like Francis Preston Blair in D.C., Thurlow Weed in Albany, and Horace Greeley in New York City.

Bush parlays his political connections into landing lucrative contracts as the Territorial Printer, charged with publishing all official government notifications. The widespread circulation of his paper, and his personal political acumen, soon attract upcoming Douglas Democrats to his side. Thomas Dryer christens this group the "Salem Clique," comprising a dozen or so men, who play a central role in shaping the Oregon Constitution and running the government itself.

#### A Profile Of Bush And Key Associates In The "Salem Clique"

	<b>Born</b>	<b>Home</b>	<b>Attend</b>	<b>History</b>
<b>Asahel Bush</b>	1824	Mass	No	Apprentice printer, passes bar in MA, in '51 founds <i>Oregon Statesman</i> , builds Democrat Party, head of Salem Clique, backs Stephen Douglas, defends slavery but is pro-Union, later a very successful banker
<b>Matthew Deady</b>	1824	MD	Yes	Apprentice blacksmith in Ohio, Oregon in '49, reads law, elected to legislature '50, President Pierce puts him on state Supreme Court '53-59, a fierce supporter of slavery
<b>Benjamin Harding</b>	1823	Pa	No	Illinois lawyer, to Oregon and into legislature '50, supports Joseph Lane, US Senate '62-65
<b>James Nesmith N</b>	1820	Me	No	Oregon in '43, law, but never practiced; wealth from gold rush, military captain in several territorial wars vs. tribes, fights alongside Lane; US Marshal '53-55; Supt of Indian Affairs ('57-59), opposes slavery, US Senate '61-67
<b>Delazon Smith</b>	1816	NY	Yes	Oberlin College but critical of its anti-slavery views, lawyer and newspaper editor, from Iowa to Oregon '52, edits <i>Oregon Democrat</i> , Speaker of legislature '55-56, U.S. Senator for 3 weeks in '59, eventually linked to Joseph Lane and Southern Democrats, dies suddenly '60
<b>Lafayette Grover</b>	1823	Me	Yes	Lawyer, Oregon '51, county clerk and prosecutor, Indian wars, Speaker in legislature, later Governor twice and US Senator
<b>Orville Pratt</b>	1819	NY	No	West Point, law, practice in Galena, IL, appointed to Oregon Supreme Court by Polk '48-52, uses positions and influence to advance his considerable fortune, to SF in '56 as lawyer

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Date: September 18, 1857

### **The Delegates Vote To Permanently Cleanse Oregon Of All Negroes**

The influence of the Salem Clique is apparent right away as delegates choose Matthew Deady to preside over the convention. Two other clique members, Delazon Smith and Lafayette Grover, serve as delegates, as does Thomas Dryer for the opposition.

All told, the event will run for a total of thirty-two days, and produce a constitution modeled on Indiana's 1851 document, with nine of the final eighteen articles copied word of word and many of the others altered only slightly.

The one topic that draws extensive discussion is the fate of black people within state borders.

Unlike Kansas, the issue of whether or not to allow slavery is never in doubt in Oregon – even though members of the Salem Clique all condone the practice, as does the powerful Joseph Lane.

The public has already signaled its overwhelming wish to become a Free State in the 1843 “Organic Laws,” not because of any moral reservations, but rather to support free white labor. On top of that, all agree that the climate in Oregon is not fit anyway for plantation crops like cotton or sugar.

So there is upfront consensus that no slaves will be permitted in the new state.

But then the question shifts to the fate of “free blacks” already in residence. This is addressed on June 18, 1844, in another statute known as “Peter Burnett’s Lash Law.” According to this law, “free blacks” are ordered to leave the territory, and any who refuse will be subject to a public whipping every six months...

*On his or her bare back not less than twenty, nor more than thirty ‘stripes’ to be inflicted by the constable of the proper county.*

The prime mover behind this extraordinary act, one Peter Burnett, is a rural Missouri man who immigrates to Oregon in 1843 and enters politics before leaving for the California gold rush in 1848. Once there he makes a fortune selling real estate, before being elected as the state’s first Governor in 1849. While in office he attempts to repeat his “lash law,” but without success.

Having already excluded both slaves and free black residents, all that remains to insure that Oregon becomes a pure white state is to ban the future immigration of any new free blacks – and that’s what the delegates decide to do.

The exact language appears in Article I, Section 35 of the constitution:

*No free negro, or mulatto, not residing in this State at the time of the adoption of this Constitution, shall come, reside, or be within this State, or hold any real estate, or make any contracts, or maintain any suit therein; and the Legislative Assembly shall provide by penal laws, for the removal, by public officers, of all such negroes, and mulattoes, and for their effectual exclusion from the State, and for the punishment of persons who shall bring them into the state, or employ, or harbor them.*

Before it is passed, an effort is made to also include “Chinamen” in the ban. The sponsor here is William Watkins, a medical doctor from Josephine County, who argues that they pose the same threat to white labor as the slaves”

*Chinamen...(are) practically slaves, they are bought and sold to one another, and to white men, as much as negroes were in the south. If Chinese emigration continued to come into (my) county...in five years no white man would inhabit it. White men could not compete with them.*

After a lively debate, Watkins finally withdraws his motion, and on September 18, 1857, the delegates are asked to vote on their constitution.

**Delegate Votes On Constitution**

	#
<b>Voting to accept</b>	35
<b>Voting to reject</b>	10
<b>Absent</b>	15

While this endorsement seems a bit lackluster, in the end, 52 of the 60 delegates go on to sign the final document.

## Chapter 272– Oregon Becomes The First State To Ban All Blacks In Its Constitution



**Dates:**  
February 14,  
1859

- Sections:**
- Public Support For The Constitution And Black Exclusion Is Overwhelming
  - Oregon’s Anti-Black Racism Mirrors The Beliefs Of Most White Americans In 1860
  - Congress Admits Its First “Whites-Only” State Into The Union

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Date: November 9, 1857

### Public Support For The Constitution And Black Exclusion Is Overwhelming

Criticism the Constitution comes predictably from Thomas Dryer and his *Oregonian*, with editorials attacking the outcome as the work of Bush and his henchmen:

*A half score of reckless office-hunting knaves in and about Salem, who have too long controlled the political rights of the people of Oregon.*

Oregonians seem to brush aside the attacks as more petty bickering between Dryer and Bush, the Portland crowd and the Salem crowd, the ex-Whigs and the Democrats.

Seven weeks after the convention they go to the polls and vote overwhelmingly to approve the Constitution.

Even more telling is the level of support they show for excluding free blacks from taking up residence in the state – a clause that gains 89% of the votes cast.

#### Oregon Public Voting On November 9, 1857

	<b>Aye</b>	<b>Nay</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>% Aye</b>
<b>Constitution Itself</b>	7,195	3,215	10,410	69%
<b>Prohibiting Slavery</b>	7,727	2,645	10,372	74
<b>Excluding Free Blacks</b>	8,640	1,081	9,721	89

Oregon is now set to enter the Union as a pure whites-only state.

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Date: 1859

### Oregon’s Anti-Black Racism Mirrors The Beliefs Of Most White Americans In 1860



Men like Abraham Lincoln recognize that this wish in Oregon to be “cleansed of all negroes” -- not just the slaves -- is a sentiment shared by the vast majority of whites in the North, and by many Southerners. It is why he believes that assimilation between the races is out of reach, and continues to favor re-colonization to Africa were it practical.

Expressions of this virulent anti-black racism in Oregon comes in a variety of ways. The Territorial Supreme Court Chief Justice, George Williams, puts it this way at the time of the convention:

*Negroes are naturally lazy.... [They] are an ignorant and degraded class of beings, and therefore they will vitiate to some extent those white men who are compelled to work or associate with them.*

To Be “Excluded” In Oregon

A more crudely expressed opinion comes earlier from one N. V. Holmes in an 1855 letter to the *Oregonian*:

*Niggers...should never be allowed to mingle with the whites. They would amalgamate and raise a most miserable race of human beings. If niggers are allowed to come among us and mingle with whites, it will cause a perfect state of pollution. Niggers always retrograde, until they get back to the state of barbarity from whence they originated... The Almighty has put his mark on them, and they are a different race of human beings. Let any gentleman read the history of a physician that has dissected a nigger and see what you will find: their very brain is tintured with black.*

Nothing in these beliefs is particularly new – and for six decades they have been converted into countless statutes and policing policies aimed at discouraging black from taking up residency within state boundaries.

These so-called “black codes” are passed by legislatures from Ohio to Oregon.

#### Statutes Discouraging Black Residency

Northern States	Years Approved
<b>Ohio</b>	1804, 1807
<b>Illinois</b>	1819, 1829, 1853
<b>Michigan</b>	1827
<b>Indiana</b>	1831, 1852
<b>Iowa</b>	1839
<b>Oregon</b>	1849, 1859
<b>Kansas</b>	1855

But Oregon is the first to actually write a ban on all blacks into their constitution.

And the ban there will prove to be very effective.

Results of the 1860 Census show that only 126 negroes or mulattoes appear on the state rolls, out of a total population of 52,456. One hundred year later, in 1960, less than 1% of all Oregonians are black.

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Date: February 14, 1859

### **Congress Admits Its First “Whites-Only” State Into The Union**

Oregon assumes that its admission to the Union will follow rapidly after the constitution is approved in November 1857 – and they proceed to elect their first slate of government officials.

Two familiar faces are picked for the U.S. Senate. One is Joe Lane, whose national credentials are already well established. The other is Delazon Smith, who soon falls under Lane’s spell and turns on his former colleagues in the “Salem Clique” to wrest control from Asahel Bush over the Democratic Party machine.

The choice for Governor is John Whitacre, another pro-slavery sympathizer, who moves from Indiana during the gold rush, and serves as a probate court judge before entering the Oregon legislature.

Together with congressman Lafayette Grover, these men lobby Congress for a speedy admission process.

But this is not to be.

In the Senate, southerners led by Jefferson Davis, object to any further disruptions to the balance of power, given that Oregon would become the 18th Free State against only 15 Slave States. This delay lasts until March, 1858, when proponents win by a 35-17 margin.

The bill to admit lingers in the House, including a six month long recess running from June 16 to December 6, 1858. By the time the second session opens, the Republicans are already on their way to winning a plurality in the chamber. A few raise concerns about the black exclusion clause, but most of the controversy is focused on the fact that Oregon’s current population, pegged at 42,862, falls well below the established 93,000 minimum threshold, debated in April during the English Bill controversy.

Finally, after a fifteen month delay, enough Republican hold-outs join the Democrats in passing the bill on a 114 to 103 vote.

<b>Votes To Admit Oregon</b>		
	<b>Aye</b>	<b>Nay</b>
<b>US Senate</b>	35	17
<b>US House</b>	114	103

When James Buchanan adds his signature on February 14, 1859, America welcomes its first “whites-only” state into the Union.

## Chapter 273 – An Ongoing Fugitive Slave Act Fight In Wisconsin Is Finally Resolved

**Dates:**

March 1854 –  
March 1860

**Sections:**

- A Mob Frees A Fugitive Slave Held In Wisconsin And The Instigator Is Arrested
- The Wisconsin Supreme Court Frees Booth And Declares The Fugitive Slave Act Unconstitutional
- The U.S. Supreme Court Overrules Wisconsin But Booth Eventually Gains His Freedom

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Date: March 10, 1854

### **A Mob Frees A Fugitive Slave Held In Wisconsin And The Instigator Is Arrested**

In 1859, after several years of stonewalling, the Supreme Court of Wisconsin finally turns over documents requested by the U.S. Supreme Court to rule on a contentious run-away slave case.

At issue is the fate of Sherman Booth, who plays a leading role on March 10, 1854, in the unlawful escape from custody of a fugitive slave named Joshua Glover.

Booth is a native of New York who, while studying at Yale University, is hired to teach English to slaves from the Spanish ship *Armistead* as they await a trial in Connecticut that will free them. He is so moved by this experience that he founds an abolitionist newspaper and helps to organize the state's Liberty Party before graduating in 1841. In 1848 he moves west to Racine, Wisconsin, and starts up the *Wisconsin Freedman* paper in nearby Milwaukee.

His editorial fight against slavery turns to action on March 10, 1854, when Joshua Glover, a run-away from Missouri, is arrested in a Racine barn by a U.S. Marshal and his master, one Bennami Garland. When Glover is jailed, Booth organizes a protest rally which eventually turns into a mob that frees him and begins his escape to freedom in Canada.

While Booth does not participate in the assault, he encourages it and then boldly announces in his paper that the "Fugitive Slave Act has been repealed in Wisconsin."

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Date: 1854-1855

### **The Wisconsin Supreme Court Frees Booth And Declares The Fugitive Slave Act Unconstitutional**

Booth is arrested and brazenly admits to his involvement.

When bail of \$2,000 is set by U.S. Commissioner Winfield Smith, his supporters raise the funds and, once free, he fires back at the government in a series of editorials and a call for a statewide anti-slavery convention to be held in the capital of Madison on July 21, 1854.

His lawyers then file a writ of habeas corpus with the Wisconsin Supreme Court to force a trial of his case. The result in *Abelman v Booth* is an acquittal and an opinion written by Associate Justice Abram D. Smith which labels the Fugitive Slave Law a “wicked and cruel Enactment” and declares it unconstitutional.

With that, the Booth case assumes national visibility, and a federal court issues an order to re-arrest him.

On July 19, 1854 the Wisconsin Supreme Court reaffirms his freedom, only to see him taken into custody two days later by federal marshals. A trial follows in a U.S. District Court, where the judge orders the jury to ignore all pleas about the “morality of the law” itself. He is convicted and jailed.

Booth again appeals to the Wisconsin Supreme Court, and on February 3, 1855, it again finds that the Fugitive Slave Act is unconstitutional and, in turn, releases him from jail

As soon as the U.S. Supreme Court hears that Wisconsin is ignoring a federal law passed by Congress, it demands to hear the case.

But the Wisconsin Supreme Court frustrates this demand by refusing to send the required case documents to Washington.

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Date: March 7, 1860

### **The U.S. Supreme Court Overrules Wisconsin But Booth Eventually Gains His Freedom**



The open resistance in Wisconsin continues over four years, into 1859.

In the interim, a separate court case in July 1855 results in Booth being required to pay \$1,000 to Joshua Glover’s master for the loss of his slave.

The rest of the story involves many twists and turns.

After finally receiving the needed documentation, and hearing the case against Booth, the U.S. Supreme Court reverses the prior ruling. The opinion, written by Chief Justice Roger Taney on March 7, 1860, says that a state court has no right to file for habeas corpus on behalf of a federal prisoner. Moreover, it has no authority to declare a law passed by Congress unconstitutional.

Hans Christian Heg (1829-1863)

Booth is soon back in custody – this time in a federal custom house jail in Milwaukee. To add to his woes, he is also accused of raping a fourteen year old girl, a charge that goes unproven but damages his reputation among some prior supporters.

But Sherman Booth remains undaunted. He addresses a “freedom rally” from his cell on July 4, 1860, and less than a month later, on August 1, a ninth attempt to free him by force succeeds. He flees to Waupun, Wisconsin, where he is welcomed ironically by the warden of the state penitentiary there, one Hans Christian Heg, who will later become a war hero, dying in action at the Battle of Chickamauga.

While Booth is re-captured on October 8, 1860, the federal will to punish him has dampened, and Buchanan finally agrees to free him for good. He returns to a career in journalism and lecturing against slavery. His final brush with the law happens in 1865 when he encourages a black man named Ezekiel Gillespie to vote – an act which prompts the Wisconsin Supreme Court to approve negro suffrage in the state.

## Chapter 274– John Brown Gets Ready For His Attack In Virginia



**Dates:**  
April – September  
1859

- Sections:**
- Brown’s Plan To Attack Virginia Is Revived After A Year-long Delay
  - John Brown Occupies His Base At The Kennedy Farm
  - Frederick Douglass Hears The Plan And Fears For The Outcome
  - The Raiders Reflect On Their Mission And Fate

\*\*\*\*\*

Date: April-May 9, 1859

### **Brown’s Plan To Attack Virginia Is Revived After A Year-long Delay**

After delivering the Missouri slaves he has liberated to the ferryboat to Canada in Detroit, John Brown swings east to revive his Virginia plan. It is now April 1859 and nearly a year has passed since the public disclosures by Hugh Forbes have spooked his Secret Six backers and forced him to send his original band of nine recruits on their ways.

He vows to pick up the pieces and travels east from Detroit, stopping off at Oberlin College before arriving in Cleveland on March 15, 1859 for a rally that turns out some 10,000 anti-slavery enthusiasts. He shares his latest exploits with the crowd, and leaves with two new black recruits – Lewis Leary, who will be killed in action, and his nephew, John Copeland, who will be tried and hanged.

He meets with abolitionist Governor Joshua Giddings and then arrives in Peterboro, New York, where he spends April 11-14 with Gerritt Smith, who is delighted by his rescue of the Missouri slaves. Smith donates another \$400 to the cause and heaps praise on Brown.

*If I were asked to point out the man in all this world I think most truly a Christian, I would point to John Brown.*

For the first time in two years he is also able to visit with his family in North Elba, lingering there for two weeks.

He swings down to Boston, receiving kudos from the Transcendentalists who continue to regard him as the self-reliant man of nature, willing to spring into action on behalf of a “higher law.” Bronson Alcott labels him:

*The manliest man I have ever seen.*

On May 9, 1859 he is back with the Secret Six, updating his progress and receiving more financial support. Dr. Samuel Howe is the only insider who criticizes his action in Missouri and is hesitant about the Virginia attacks.

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Date: June to July 3, 1859

### John Brown Occupies His Base At The Kennedy Farm



A Typical 19<sup>th</sup> Century American Farm Setting

The summer of 1859 finds a buoyant John Brown eager to seize the day in Virginia.

He turns his attention to assembling the arms he will need for the initial assault. On June 3, 1859 he is in Collinsville, Connecticut with one Charles Blair who is manufacturing what will be known as “John Brown’s Pikes.” These are fearsome weapons, featuring a stainless steel Bowie knife mounted at the tip of a six foot long spear. Brown has designed them for the slaves he expects to free, whom he feels will lack the proper training to use conventional guns. He gives Blair \$450 to finish up 950 pikes and ship them to his secret depot in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, 55 miles north of Harpers Ferry.

On June 11 John Brown makes his last visit to his home in North Elba. It lasts only five days, much of it devoted to discussions about the upcoming attack and Brown’s wish to have his sons accompany him to Virginia.

Three agree to go: Oliver at twenty and Watson at twenty-one will both suffer gut-shots in the battle and die slow and agonizing deaths, while Owen at thirty-four will fight and escape to safety, living for thirty more years. Thirty-eight year old John Jr. will oversee the shipment of some 198 Sharps rifles and 200 revolvers, but will be absent when the battle takes place.

Tough-minded Salmon at twenty-two, is convinced that the attack will fail, says that to his father, and refuses to sign on. Jason, a gentle soul at twenty-six, also bows out.

With their fates decided, the Browns head to the Kennedy Farm to meet up with the rest of the volunteers and begin training for their assault. The farm is on two acres of land roughly five miles north of Harpers Ferry. Brown has rented the property from heirs of the deceased Dr. Robert Kennedy under the alias of Isaac Smith. He pay \$35 on a lease running until March 1860, signaling his intent to be a long-term settler.

On July 3, 1859, Brown, his son, Oliver and Osborn Anderson move to the farm, along with Oliver’s pregnant wife, Martha and Brown’s daughter, Anne. Both women are sixteen years old, and their duty will be to handle the housekeeping chores and act as look-outs on the property, until just before the raid.

Some 105 days now remain until the bloodshed begins.

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Date: July-August 1859

### **Frederick Douglass Hears The Plan And Fears For The Outcome**

While Brown is elated that the day of reckoning is near, there are still many details left to prepare for the attack.

To celebrate the Fourth of July he drafts his own version of the Declaration of Independence which will later be found at the farm. It reaffirms his intentions for the new Provisional Government.

*To secure equal rights, privileges and justice for all... We will obtain these rights or die in the struggle to obtain them. We make war upon oppression.*

By the end of August, twenty of the twenty-one men who will fight at Harpers Ferry are present on the farm.

They will be crammed into tight quarters, as the farmhouse consists of only two rooms, and much of the barn space is given over to the eventual storage of weapons. But most are accustomed to living rough in the outdoors, and they settle in nicely.

Their daily routine consists of reading Hugh Forbes manual on guerrilla tactics, training with their weapons, debating religion and politics, singing songs and keeping up with the news via the *Baltimore Sun*, brought to them by John Cook, who has been living in town for over a year to scope out the operation.

On Sundays, John Brown attends the local Dunker Church. During the week, he is called upon by neighbors to act as veterinarian for their sick farm animals. Efforts to conceal their purpose are wanting all along, with the men sending details to their families back home and engaging in loose talk. Secretary of War John Floyd even receives an anonymous letter in August citing Brown's presence and intentions in Virginia, but discards it as implausible.

The one moment of real tension among the men occurs when, for the first time, many of them learn that the initial attack will be made on the U.S. Arsenal. Like many other Brown supporters – even including members of the Secret Six – the assumption is that the plantations in and around Harpers Ferry are the target, not federal property. Upon hearing to the contrary, "Captain" Charles Tidd and several other predict failure, but Brown eventually brings them around.

He hears a similar forecast from Frederick Douglass who visits the farm in mid-August. Brown tries very hard to persuade Douglass to join him:

*Come with me Douglass. I want you for a special purpose. When I strike, the bees (i.e. slaves) will begin to swarm, and I shall want you to help hive them.*

Brown is convinced that the slaves will spontaneously rise up to join his crusade, but fails to devise a system for getting the word out to the plantations, a critical oversight.

After listening to Brown's plan, Douglas declines the invitation to join in, and tells his old friend, "I believe you will die there."

While disappointed, the meeting does result in Brown's final recruit, twenty-three year old, Shields Green, a fugitive slave from Charleston, S.C., who has accompanied Douglass to the farm.

The presence of a white man ready to die for black men astonishes Green, who will go to Harpers Ferry, fight, be captured and subsequently hanged.

\*\*\*\*\*

Date; September 1859

### **The Raiders Reflect On Their Mission And Fate**

In early September the weapons supplied by the Massachusetts State Kansas Committee and the Secret Six arrive at the Kennedy farm. Included are 198 Sharps rifles and 200 Maynard revolvers, although the latter lack priming devices needed to make them functional.

They are followed at the end of the month by the supply of "John Brown's Pikes," which he intends to distribute to the men he frees. As he says with great assurance:

*Give a slave a pike and you make him a man.*

Fall is harvesting season across the South, when slaves are particularly over-worked and most prone to flight. Brown's feels it is the perfect time for his attacks to begin.

On September 29, 1859 he takes another step forward, ordering the two women to leave the farm and return home for safety. He gives a note to his daughter Anne, telling her to "save this letter to remember your father by."

Oliver Brown's pregnant wife Martha also says good-bye to her husband for the last time. Both will be dead within the next six weeks, he from a mortal wound in battle, she following an illness after also losing her newborn baby.

Thoughts of impending death also mark the correspondence of the other would-be soldiers. While Charles Tidd escapes in the end, his fears about the assault on the armory persist, and he writes his parents:

*This is perhaps the last letter you will ever receive from your son.*

Two men who will die during the battle assume the worst while trying to rationalize it in their own minds. Jerry Anderson writes...

*If my life is sacrificed, it can't be lost in a better cause.*

John Kagi says that if he dies, "the result will be worth the sacrifice."

As September ends, the men are just sixteen days away from discovering their individual fates.

## Chapter 275 – The Wyandotte Constitution Is Approved In Kansas



**Dates:**  
October 4, 1859

**Sections:**  
• Kansans Draft Their Final Constitution

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Date: October 4, 1859

### Kansans Draft Their Final Constitution



Not Wyandotte, But Another Small Town

As Captain John Brown prepares to attack Harpers Ferry, the people of the Kansas Territory are about to vote on the Wyandotte Constitution, the fourth and final document written to support their admission to the Union.

The document is crafted by the Free State forces and follows their failure to get their Leavenworth Constitution through the U.S. Senate in May 1858.

After that defeat, a proposal to try again is signed by Samuel Medary, the sixth Territorial Governor, in February 1859 and green-lighted by voters on March 29, 1859 by a margin of 5,306 to 1,425. The small town of Wyandotte, soon to be absorbed into Kansas City, is chosen as the venue, and on July 5, 1859 some 52 elected delegates – 17 Democrats and 35 Republicans -- begin their work.

The timing is paradoxical. Thus while the Wyandotte delegates are creating their Free State Constitution, President Buchanan is running a desperate campaign to have Kansans support the Pro-Slavery Lecompton document, modified by “threats” in the “English Bill.” The vote here is scheduled for August 2, 1859.

However, even those Democrats at Wyandotte are quite certain that the Lecompton bill will fail, as it does. Hence the debates at the convention are not around slavery, rather on other potential “black rights” cited in the Leavenworth Constitution that many now consider “too radical.”

One such issue is whether or not “free blacks” will be allowed to reside in Kansas. Voting on the Topeka document excluded them, but this ban is dropped in Leavenworth, and also at Wyandotte.

Leavenworth also called for a popular referendum on allowing black men to vote and on integrating public schools, but both of these possibilities are dismissed by the more conservative delegates at Wyandotte.

Another issue relates to “women’s rights,” first debated at Leavenworth. The Wyandotte Constitution includes two important departures from the traditional law of “coverture,” one allowing women to own property, the other giving them equal rights to guardianship over their children.

The final Constitution also defines the exact western boundary line for Kansas and calls for a popular vote to select a permanent capital (which turns out to be Topeka).

The convention comes to a close after twenty-four days, on July 29, 1859. Delegates approve the final document 32-17, although true to its entire territorial history, the vote is split along political lines.

**Delegate Votes On Wyandotte**

<b>By Party</b>	<b>Aye</b>	<b>Nay</b>
<b>Republicans</b>	32	0
<b>Democrats</b>	0	17
<b>Total</b>	32	17

A statewide public poll on the constitution follows ten weeks later on October 4, 1859, and is passes by a 2:1 margin.

**Popular Vote On Wyandotte**

	<b># Kansans</b>
<b>Approve</b>	10,421
<b>Reject</b>	5,530

After four bitter years of violence over the slavery issue, Kansas again applies to the U.S. Congress for admission as the 34<sup>th</sup> state in the Union.

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**Sidebar: The Four Kansas Constitutions And Its Final Admission As A State**

Over roughly a four year period from December 15, 1855 to October 4, 1859, the opposing forces in Kansas will write four different constitutions.

Three are drafted by those intent on having Kansas declared a Free State: the Topeka, Leavenworth and Wyandotte documents. Their content varies significantly regarding the treatment of blacks and women, but all agree on banning slavery in the state.

The fourth, and by far the most historically impactful, is the Lecompton Constitution, drafted by Pro-Slavery forces who slip into Kansas from Missouri and conduct fraudulent votes to have it submitted to Congress. After it is repeatedly rejected by Northern members of the U.S. House, and then by the people of Kansas in two fair votes, it is finally discarded. But not before it has deepened the national divide between people in the North and South, further splintered the Democratic Party coalition, and cost James Buchanan control over his presidency.

**History Of The Four Constitutions In Kansas**

Constitution Name	Authors	Public Voting	Date	Outcome In Congress
Topeka	Free-Staters	1,731 -- 46	Dec 15, 1855	Senate blocks 7/56
Lecompton	Pro-Slavers	6,134 – 569 163 –10,266	Dec 21, 1857 Jan 4, 1858	House blocks
Leavenworth	Free-Staters		May 18, 1858	Senate blocks
Lecompton/English Bill	Pro-Slavers	1,788 – 11,300	Aug 2, 1859	Efforts to pass end
Wyandotte	Free-Staters	10,421 – 5,530	Oct 4, 1859	Approved 1/28/61

Ironically the request to admit Kansas as a Free State under the Wyandotte document arrives in Congress in February 1860, just as the Union itself is breaking apart.

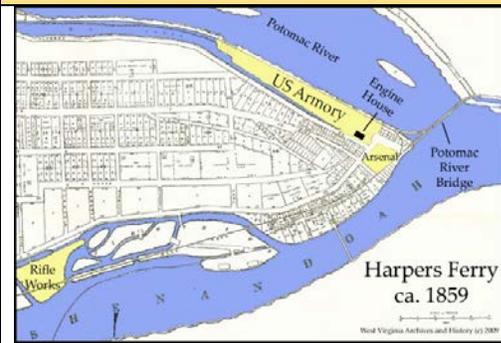
In April 1860, the Republican controlled House favors admission by a 134-73 vote, only to have final passage stalled again in the Senate, where the Democrats still enjoy an eleven seat majority.

This stalemate continues until the November 1860 election of Abraham Lincoln prompts eleven Southern states to secede. The first five of them – South Carolina, Mississippi, Florida, Alabama and Georgia – are already gone by mid-January 1861, when the Kansas admission bill again comes to Congress.

The withdrawal of members from the Southern states radically alters the make-up of both the US House and Senate and removes the historical barriers for Kansas. On January 21, 1861, the remaining senators vote 36-16 for admission. The House follows suit by a 119-42 margin on January 28.

On January 29, 1861, fate has it that President James Buchanan, who has risked and lost his presidency opposing the entry of Kansas as a Free State, signs the final bill of admittance.

## Chapter 276 – John Brown’s Forces Attack Harpers Ferry



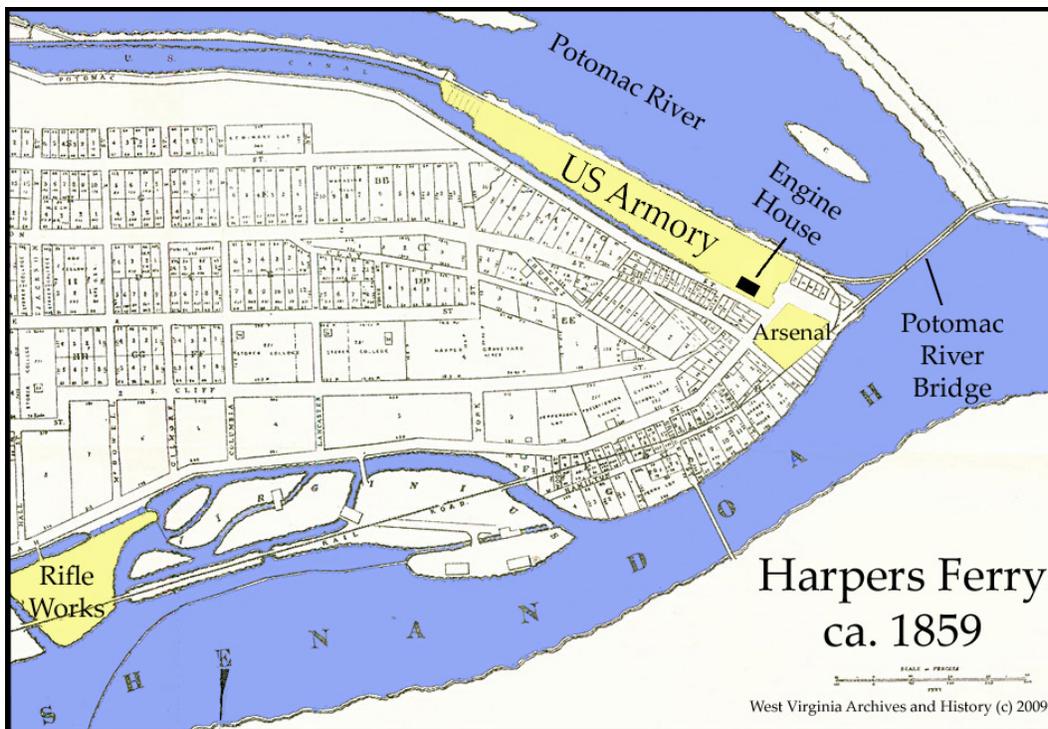
**Dates:**  
October 15  
–18, 1859

- Sections:**
- Final Assignments For The Raid Are Laid Out
  - After A Smooth Start Brown Apparently Changes His Plan
  - A Harried Commander Decides To Make His Stand In The Fire Engine House
  - The Violence Accelerates And Federal Troops Arrive On The Scene
  - Lee Storms The Fire Engine House And John Brown Is Captured Alive

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Date: Saturday, October 15, 1859

### Final Assignments For The Raid Are Laid Out



The Town Of Harpers Ferry, The Railroad Bridge Crossing The Potomac From MD, & The Shenandoah Bridge

The town of Harpers Ferry predates the American Revolution.

In 1761 the Virginia General Assembly gives Robert Harper the rights to run a ferry across the Potomac River from the Maryland Heights to the east, into the town which will ultimately bear his name. Thirty years later the federal government acquires land at the point to construct a second U.S. Arsenal to supplement its first at Springfield, Massachusetts. In 1824 a wooden bridge is constructed to span the

river, and in 1839, a single track railroad line is added by the B&O, making Harpers Ferry one of its central hubs. By 1859 the town is flourishing, with a population of some 2,500 citizens.

John Brown means to violate its serenity and security beginning Sunday evening, October 16.

In early October he has made one final departure from the Kennedy Farm, meeting with John Jr. and John Kagi in Philadelphia to put the finishing touches on his raid. While there, he picks up his final recruit, a fifth black man, Francis Merriam, who will successfully escape after the fight. Merriam will arrive at the last minute, bringing with him rifle primers and caps, along with a \$600 donation from Lewis Hayden, a run-away slave who has prospered as a merchant in Boston and played an instrumental role in the 1848 escape of Ellen and William Craft.

With Merriam on board, Brown has a total of twenty-two men in his Provisional Army, well short of the fifty he had hoped for, but enough, he believes, to achieve victory.

On October 15, 1859, he gathers the men together to announce that the Revolution would get under way the next day, Sunday, October 16.

It is the Sabbath, and the day begins with Brown reading from the scriptures and asking for God’s support for their righteous endeavor.

He turns symbolically to Osborne Perry Anderson, born a free black, to walk through the final assignments.

Three men – Owen Brown, Francis Merriam and Barclay Coppoc, will stay at the Kennedy Farm to begin.

The other nineteen will march in strung-out pairs to assemble near the Potomac River Bridge. Once there, each pair will have an assigned task:

**Brown’s Detailed Plan To Assault Harpers Ferry**

<b>Assigned Tasks</b>	<b>Who</b>
Cut the telegraph wires to the outside world	John Cook & Charles Tidd
Capture the guard at the railroad bridge over the Potomac	John Kagi & Aaron Stevens
Guard the railroad bridge as the action plays out	Watson Brown & Stewart Taylor
Capture the 2 <sup>nd</sup> bridge to town over the Shenandoah River	Oliver Brown & Will Thompson
Seize the Engine House where trains are stored	Jerry Anderson, Dauphin Thompson, Wm Leeman
Seize the U.S. Arsenal where 2,000 rifles are stored	Albert Hazlett & Edwin Coppoc
Seize Hall’s Rifle Works, largest gun mfr. In the South	John Copeland & John Kagi
Move to the countryside and begin freeing slaves	Aaron Stevens, Charles Tidd, John Cook, Shields Green, Perry Anderson, Lewis Leary
Stay back and guard the Kennedy Farm	Owen Brown, Francis Merriam, Barclay Coppoc

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Date: October 16 Evening To October 17 Mid-day

### **After A Smooth Start Brown Apparently Changes His Plan**

The operation begins like clockwork. By midnight Sunday, Brown is in control of both bridges into town, plus the key structures he is after, the Armory, U.S. Arsenal, the Fire Engine House, Hall's Rifle Works. His six outriders have captured Colonel Lewis Washington, the great grand-nephew of the former president, along with another planter and six slaves, and have brought them to the Armory building fronting the Potomac. All this without any casualties.

A simple retreat from there, back across the railroad bridge to the Kennedy Farm with his captured bounty, will mark the assault a success.

But then John Brown, the man of action, pauses, apparently shaken by the responses from the now liberated slaves in his presence. When he passes out his pikes and asks them to guard their four white prisoners, their response is fear not empowerment. One slave refuses to handle the pike, telling Brown "I don't know nuffin' bout handlin' dem tings." The others exhibit comparable alarm and puzzlement. Who is this white man in charge? Have they been taken to be sold down south? What form of savage retaliation will they face if their masters recapture them?

This unexpected response from the freed slaves evidently shocks Brown, and causes him to alter his entire plan. Instead of escaping into the hills, he will now make his stand against slavery at Harpers Ferry.

Soon enough his party begins to lose the advantages of surprise. At 1:30am an eastbound train is halted at the railroad bridge and an alarmed baggage porter named Shephard Hayward is mortally wounded by shots from Oliver Brown and Stewart Taylor. He is a free black man, and the first to die at the site.

As Monday, October 17, dawns, John Brown allows the train across the bridge, despite having earlier cut down the telegraph lines to conceal his presence. It arrives at Monocacy, Maryland and wires news to Baltimore that "150 abolitionists have taken Harpers Ferry, killed the porter Hayward and are freeing slaves." This report is ignored until 10:30am when the B&O line president wires the news to President Buchanan and Governor Henry Wise of Virginia. Wise orders two militia units, the Jefferson Guards and the Botts Greys to move east from Charles Town to the Ferry, seven miles away.

In the interim, the townspeople and local militias swarm toward the Armory where Brown is now holding some 30 hostages he has rounded up on the farms and in town. From beginning to end, he promises not to harm them, and he keeps his word.

But further violence is now inevitable, and the next death belongs to an Irish grocer in town named Thomas Boerly, shot by Dangerfield Newby, the freed slave who comes with Brown in hopes of freeing his wife and family held on a nearby plantation. But this rescue is not to be, as Newby is gunned down while running along the bridge to the shelter of the Armory. Newby will be the first of the eight raiders who will lose their lives in action of October 17. After his death, the angry crowd cuts off his ears and genitals, jabs sticks into his wounds, and feeds his remains to feral hogs. Variations on this level of savagery will also accompany the treatment of several other members of Brown's band who are captured or killed.

By mid-afternoon on Monday, the window of opportunity for Brown to flee from Harpers Ferry closes for good.

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Date: Early Afternoon October 17, 1859

### **A Harried Commander Decides To Make His Stand In The Fire Engine House**



“John Brown’s Fort” In The Fire Engine House At Harpers Ferry

In town at the Hall’s Rifle Works factory, Brown’s second-in-command, John Kagi finds himself trapped along with Lewis Leary and John Copeland. All three run for their lives out the back and down to the Shenandoah River, attempting to swim to safety. Kagi is quickly shot dead, while Copeland is dragged to the shore and jailed along with Leary, who is mortally wounded and will die on October 20.

As the afternoon wears on, more local militias and armed citizens surround Brown’s survivors inside the Armory. His options now are to surrender, fight, or negotiate his way out. He tries the latter, sending Will Thompson out under a white flag of truce. It is ignored and Thompson is taken into custody.

With desperation setting in, “Old Osawatomie” decides to consolidate most of his remaining forces at the best structure in sight, the town’s Fire Engine House, later famous as “John Brown’s Fort.” It is a one story brick structure comprising some 36 x 24 feet in space. Brown selects eleven of his highest profile hostages and moves them there, along with seven of his troopers: his sons, Owen and Watson; his son-in-law, Dauphin Thompson, his long-time Kansas sidekicks, Aaron Stevens and Jerry Anderson; the mild-mannered Quaker, Edwin Coppoc; and his final recruit, Fred Douglass’ friend and fugitive slave, Shields Green.

Jerry Anderson and Albert Hazlett will remain hiding in the Armory, which is unguarded when they find it and largely overlooked throughout the action.

Despite his first failed attempt at negotiating, Brown tries again, this time sending Aaron Stevens and his son, Watson, out under a truce flag. Both are immediately shot. Watson is struck in the bowels and crawls back inside the Fire Engine House, groaning in agony. Stevens is badly wounded and transported to the Armory as a prisoner. Seeing this, Will Leeman panics, and dashes out of the building and down to the Potomac River. He dives in and is wounded before trying to surrender. With his hands up, he is shot in the face. His body remains on a rock in the river, where it is used as target practice for the irate attackers.

About this same time, John Cook, reaches the east side of the Ferry bridge and climbs a tree to reconnoiter the status of conditions in the town. His day has been spent as an out-rider, rounding up the liberated slaves, and waiting back at the Kennedy Farm, along with Charles Tidd and three others, each with limited physical capacities, Owen Brown with a crippled arm from childhood, Barclay Coppoc, suffering from consumption, and the frail and easily rattled, Francis Merriam.

Cook sees the overwhelming militia and civilian forces gathered around the main buildings, then hears by word of mouth that Brown and seven other raiders have all been killed. With that, he turns back to the Kennedy Farm and tells the others that it would be “sheer madness” to try to cross the bridge. Together the five men pack their gear and escape into the mountains.

Four of the five will succeed, but not John Cook. After hiking 100 miles, the five men are near Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, when Cook ventures out for supplies on October 26, He is recognized, captured for the \$1,000 bounty on his head, and returned to Richmond where he is hanged on December 16, 1859.

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Date: Afternoon To Evening On October 17, 1859

### **The Violence Accelerates And Federal Troops Arrive On The Scene**

Around 3pm, the locals are further enraged when the popular Mayor of Harpers Ferry, Fontaine Beckham, is killed by a bullet fired by Edwin Coppoc from inside the Engine House. This loss, along with that of another prominent citizen, George Turner, prompts the mob to haul Will Thompson, captured earlier under a flag of truce, out of his cell at the Waters Hotel and march him to the railroad station. Once there he is tied to a post and shot to death, and his corpse is throw into the Potomac.

The next casualty is Brown’s youngest son, Oliver. He is firing out from the Engine House, when a shot catches him in his intestines. He is laid out next to his brother, Watson, suffering from the same excruciating wound. Oliver will die during the night of October 17-18; Watson will linger, succumbing on the 19<sup>th</sup>, after telling his captors: “I did my duty as I saw fit.” Stewart Taylor is also shot and dies after three hours inside the Engine House.

As darkness falls, the two raiders hidden in the overlooked Arsenal, manage to sneak down to the Potomac and cross over in a skiff. After trying, unsuccessfully, to connect with the other escapees from the Kennedy Farm, they head to Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, where Hazlett, like John Cook, is spotted, captured, returned to Virginia and hanged. Perry Anderson is more fortunate, eventually making it all the way to Canada. Of the five blacks in Brown’s party, Perry Anderson is the only one who manages to escape.

Meanwhile, in town, Captain Thomas Simms of the Frederick Militia enters the Engine House under a white flag and talks about possible surrender terms. But Brown insists on free passage for his men back across the river, in exchange for his eleven hostages, and Simms demurs.

It is 11PM on October 17 when 52 year old Brevet Colonel Robert E. Lee arrives on the scene accompanied by ninety U.S. Marines. Lee is a career military officer, having served in the Mexican War and as Superintendent of West Point from 1852-55. Given Brown's isolation and the mob scene he encounters, Lee decides to delay a move against the Engine House until the morning of the 18<sup>th</sup>.

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**Date: October 18, 1859**

### **Lee Storms The Fire Engine House And John Brown Is Captured Alive**



James Ewell Brown (Jeb) Stuart  
(1833-1864 kia)

Dawn on Tuesday, October 18, finds 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant Jeb Stuart under a white flag peering into the Engine House and, for the first time, recognizing that the assumed "Mr. Smith" who rented the Kennedy Farm is none other than the Kansas renegade "Osawatomie Brown." Their meeting is brief, Stuart demanding unconditional surrender, Brown still countering with safe passage in exchange for his captives.

When Stuart exits, he crouches behind the heavy door and raises his hat, signaling a twelve man unit under the command of 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Israel Green to rush the building, with battering rams and fixed bayonets at the ready.

Brown waits inside with his eleven hostages, including Lewis Washington, his dead son Owen and his dying son, Watson, the corpse of Stewart Taylor, along with four able bodied defenders: Edwin Coppoc, Jerry Anderson, Dauphin Thompson and Shields Green.

The assault is brief but bloody. The one marine casualty is Private Luke Quinn, born in Ireland and joining the corps in 1855. His death merely adds to the lust for revenge in the congested room.

Jerry Anderson and Dauphin Thompson are killed by bayonet thrusts, while Edwin Coppoc and Shields Green are taken alive.

It is Lt. Green who attacks John Brown, stabbing and slashing him repeated, but with an officer's sword rather than a more lethal cavalry saber. Thus instead of dying on the scene, Brown survives. He is bleeding badly when carried to the Armory and laid next to Aaron Stevens, captured earlier at the Rifle Works.

The fact that Brown lives on for an additional 45 days through his nationally covered questioning and trial, and his eventual execution on December 2, 1859 will alter the entire narrative that follows from his Harpers Ferry raid.

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### Sidebar: Fates Of The Twenty-Two Men At Harpers Ferry

Of the twenty-two men who participate in the raid, ten are killed in action:

- Five die outright: Newby, Kagi, Leeman, Jerry Anderson, Dauphin Thompson
- One is summarily executed: Will Thompson
- Four succumb to mortal wounds: Oliver and Watson Brown, Taylor and Leary

Five are captured at the scene:

- Three are unhurt in the fighting: Quaker Edwin Coppoc, John Copeland and Shields Green
- Two others, Brown and Aaron Stevens, surrender after being severely wounded

Two flee, but are caught near Chambersburg, Pennsylvania by bounty hunters:

- John Cook, who has lived in, and scouted, Harpers Ferry for a year before the raid
- Albert Hazlett who is able to slip out of the Arsenal

All seven of those taken into custody are tried, convicted and hanged.

Brown goes first and is convicted on October 31 and dies on December 2.

Four more follow shortly, with Edwin Coppoc found guilty on November 3; the two black men, Copeland and Green, on November 4; then Cook, despised for betraying his neighbors in town who call for him to be lynched. All will be hanged on December 16, Copeland and Green in the morning, Coppoc and Cook in the afternoon.

Trials for the other two, Aaron Stevens and Albert Hazlett, are delayed when the term of the current court expires. They will be convicted in February 1860 and executed on March 16.

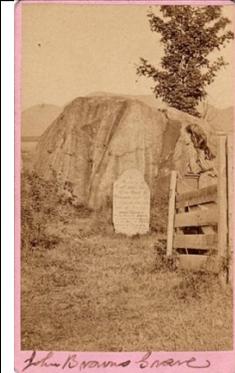
That leaves the five men who successfully escape. Three share similar fates, enlisting in the Union army and dying soon thereafter. Barclay Coppoc dies in a troop train accident in 1861 at age 22; Charles Tidd of disease in 1862 at 28; and Francis Merriam, also at 28, of disease in 1865.

Two live on. One is Osborn Perry Anderson, the only black who survives, and writes his own account of the incident before dying at 42 in 1872. The other is John Brown's third son, Owen, who has been at his side since the Pottawatomie massacre and will reach age 65 before his death in 1889.

<b>Killed Outright</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Profile</b>	<b>Dates</b>
Dangerfield Newby	24	B	Slave in Va, freed, at HF to free his family	KIA 10/17
John Kagi	24	W	Ohio, Kansas militia, 2 <sup>nd</sup> in command to JB	KIA 10/17
William Leeman	20	W	Maine, settles in Kansas	KIA 10/17

Will Thompson	25	W	NH, son-in-law to JB, brother of Dauphin	Executed 10/17
Jerry Anderson	26	W	Indiana, Kansas, Missouri raid with JB	KIA 10/18
Dauphin Thompson	21	W	NH, North Elba neighbor, in-law Watson B	KIA 10/18
Mortally Wounded				
Stewart Taylor	22	W	Canada, wagon maker	10/17, dies 10/17
Lewis Leary	24	B	NC, born a free black, Oberlin	10/17, dies 10/20
Oliver Brown	20	W		10/17, dies 10/18
Watson Brown	24	W		10/17, dies 10/19
Hanged Later				
John Brown	59	W		Hangs 12/2/59
John Cook	29	W	Conn, law, Kansas, lives in HF for year	Esc, hangs 12/16
John Copeland	25	B	NC, Oberlin, nephew of Lewis Leary	Jail, hangs 12/16
Edwin Coppoc	24	W	Ohio, Quaker, Kansas but not fighting	Jail, hangs 12/16
Shields Green	23	B	SC, run-away, friend of Fred Douglas	Jail, hangs 12/16
Albert Hazlett	22	W	Pa, with Montgomery in Kansas	Esc, hangs 3/16/60
Aaron Stevens	28	W	Conn, Mexican War, Kansas militia	W, hangs 3/16/60
Successful Escape				
Perry Anderson	29	B	Born a free black in Pa, attends Oberlin	From Armory
Owen Brown	24	W	JB's stalwart 3 <sup>rd</sup> son, longest survivor at 66	From Farm
Barclay Coppoc	20	W	Ohio, Quaker, meets JB Springdale, Ia	From Farm
Francis Merriam	21	W	Mass, in Kansas but not fighting	From Farm
Charles Tidd	25	W	Maine, Missouri raid with JB, fears failure	From Farm

## Chapter 277 – Respect For John Brown Grows From His Capture To His Execution



**Dates:**  
October 18 –  
December 7, 1859

**Sections:**

- The Captive's Bearing Surprises The Southerners
- Brown Is Tried And Sentenced To Death
- America Learns About Captain Brown While He Is In Prison
- The Execution Is Carried Out
- John Brown's Body Lies A Mouldering In His Grave

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Date: October 18, 1859

### The Captive's Bearing Surprises The Southerners



Clement Vallandigham  
(1820-1871)

John Brown's behavior and words between the time he is captured on October 18, 1859 and the time he is hanged on December 2 have much to do with changes in the way he is perceived by the public at large in the North.

Newspaper reporters pour into Harpers Ferry from along the east coast by the time he is taken. So too do various politicians, eager to pepper him with questions about the raid. A three hour grilling is completed while he is still prone in the Armory. Virginia congressman Alexander Botelier asks if Brown if he "expected to get assistance here from whites as well as blacks?"

*I did, and yes, I have been disappointed.*

Two other Virginians, Senator James Mason and Governor Henry Wise, are joined by the pro-Southern Ohio Governor Clement Vallandigham in a series of questions:

*Q: Who funded you?*

*A: I cannot implicate others.*

*Q. Mr. Brown, who sent you here?*

*A. It was my own prompting and that of my Maker.*

*Q. What about the loss of innocent lives?*

*A. If there was any killing of innocent people, it was without my knowledge.*

*Q. Did you consider this a religious service?  
A. It was the greatest service man can render to God.*

*Q. Do you consider yourself an instrument in the hands of God?  
A. I do.*

Brown ends this initial interrogation with the first of many words that will appear in newspaper and other written accounts over time:

*I wish to say, furthermore, that you had better – all you people of the South –prepare yourselves for a settlement of this question. You may dispose of me very easily...but not the negro question. The end of that is not yet.*

Those expecting to hear the rantings of a lunatic abolitionist are thrown by Brown’s demeanor and responses. When asked to characterize his prisoner, Governor Wise replies:

*They are themselves mistaken who take him to be a mad man. He is a man of clear head, of courage, fortitude and simple ingenuousness. He was humane to his prisoners...(also) vain and garrulous, but firm, truthful and intelligent.*

Vallandigham is also surprised by Brown:

*Captain John Brown is as brave and resolute a man as ever headed an insurrection....He is the farthest possible remove from an ordinary ruffian, fanatic or mad man. Certainly his was one of the best planned and best executed conspiracies that ever failed.*

While both men will soon regret these initial remarks, they do reflect a certain grudging admiration for Brown’s code of conduct, which seems in many ways to mirror the Southern ideal. He commits himself to fighting for his cause. His plan of attack is bold and meticulous and well executed, albeit to the chagrin of his opponents. He exhibits great personal courage during the battle, surrendering only after being severely wounded. He protects his hostages from harm. His responses when captured are forthright and his manner is that of a gentleman. He shuns excuses and awaits his fate with dignity.

He may be Osawatimie Brown of Kansas fame, but Governor Wise and other who now encounter him find that his bearing and words resonate with many of the courtly traditions of the South.

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Date: October 25 To November 2, 1859

### **Brown Is Tried And Sentenced To Death**

Brown’s demeanor, however, does nothing to delay the cry for swift retribution in the South. Together with the four others in custody, he is transferred to Charles Town, the seat of government for Jefferson County, located seven miles to the west of Harpers Ferry.

The intent of his captors is try Brown first, and then move on later to his associates. With that in mind, the wounded warrior is formally indicted on October 25, 1859, one week after the raid. The charges include treason against Virginia, inciting slaves to violence, and murder. In the interim, arrangement are made for a trial and lawyers are chosen to defend him. He responds with dismissiveness:

*If I am to have nothing but a mockery of a trial...I do not care anything about counsel. It is unnecessary to trouble any gentlemen with that duty.*

His wishes are ignored and the trial begins the following day in a courtroom packed with some 500 spectators, many smoking cigars, consuming roasted peanuts and contributing shouted curses as they deem appropriate.

Judge Richard Parker, a former US congressman, presides, and Brown is initially defended by two southern lawyers who encourage him to plead “hereditary insanity” to escape a death sentence. Brown brushes away this idea before two northern lawyers arrive for his defense. Judge Parker rejects their plea for a delay, and they plunge forward arguing that his mission was humanitarian in nature, the slaves did not riot, all hostages were treated with respect and were unharmed, and that the deaths were not premeditated but the result of combat.

Furthermore, since their client was not a citizen of Virginia, he could not be guilty of treason against the state.

Closing statements from both sides occur on October 31 and the jury is dismissed to deliberate. They do so for forty-five minutes before returning a verdict of guilty on all counts.

Sentencing occurs on November 2, before which Judge Parker offers Brown the chance to address the court, and he does so with words and demeanor that, once publicized, cause observers on both sides to re-think their beliefs about his sanity and his actions..

*I have, may it please the court, a few words to say...*

*I deny everything but what I have admitted all along...a design on my part to free the slaves...I never did intend murder, or treason, or the destruction of property, or to incite slaves to rebellion, or to make insurrection.*

*I believe that to have interfered as I have done...in behalf of His despised poor, I have done no wrong, but right.*

*Now if it is deemed necessary that I should forfeit my life for the furtherance of the ends of justice, and mingle my blood further with the millions in this slave country whose rights are disregarded by wicked, cruel and unjust enactments, I say, let it be done.*

Like Governor Wise, some Southerners who are present are moved by the dignity and eloquence of this address.

But words alone are hardly enough to dismiss the profound sense of community and sectional terror created by the raid – and Parker sentences Brown to death by hanging, one month hence.

Hearing the news, Lloyd Garrison’s *Liberator* tells its readers to...

*Let the day of his execution...be the occasion of such a public moral demonstration against the bloody and merciless slave system as the land has never witnessed.*

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Date: November 3 To December 1, 1859

### **America Learns About Captain Brown While He Is In Prison**

During the twenty-nine days which follows his sentencing, John Brown does nothing but enhance the impression he makes on his captors, and on the outside world.

A reporter who interviews him remarks on his Calvinist convictions:

*Captain Brown appears perfectly fearless in all respects. Says that he has no feeling about death on a scaffold and believes that every act, even all follies that lead to disaster, were decreed to happen ages before the world was made.*

His own correspondence reinforces his belief that freeing the slaves was his God-given destiny, and that goodness will come from his actions.

*I feel quite cheerful in the assurance that God reigns & will overrule all for His glory & the best possible good.*

He also reflects on the past, especially to his time in Kansas, and his role in the Pottawatomie Massacre. On this count, he seems to give himself the benefit of the doubt:

*I never shed blood of my fellow man except in self-defense or in promotion of a righteous cause.*

As the end draws near, he recognizes that his final contribution to his cause will come on the scaffold. He writes as much to his half-brother, Jeremiah:

*I am worth inconceivable more to hang that for any other purpose. ...I have fought the good fight and have finished my course.*

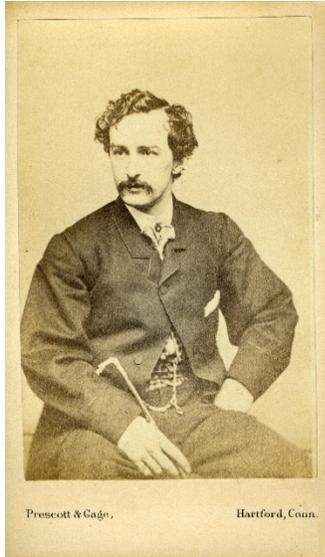
His concerns are for the future well-being of his family. He admonishes them to study the Bible and to abhor slavery. He pleads with his wife to stay home to avoid the emotional turmoil of his execution and to conserve their money. He asks that a handful of slaves accompany him to the gallows and that his body be burned along with his two dead sons, Watson and Oliver.

Mary Ann Brown, his wife of 26 years and mother of 13 of his 20 children, ignores his pleas and arrives on the day before he is executed. She spends four hours with him, but is convinced to not witness his death. His request that she be allowed to stay with him through the night is denied.

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Date: December 2, 1859

## The Execution Is Carried Out



John Wilkes Booth (1838-1865)

*I, John Brown, am now quite certain that the crimes of this guilty land will never be purged away, but with Blood. I had...vainly flattered myself that without very much bloodshed it might be done.*

Crowds gather to get a final glimpse of the prisoner, but few succeed, since a hyper cautious Governor Wise floods the town and the surrounding roads with troops to prevent any possibility of a last second rescue. Some 3,000 armed guards are present, comprising local militias and 264 federal troops, again under Robert E. Lee.

The execution site is also cordoned off from the public, except for a few who manage to slip through. Among them are John Wilkes Booth posing as a militia member, and the prominent fire-eater, Edmund Ruffin, who already intends to build his case for Southern secession around the Harpers Ferry incident.

The scaffold is freshly built for the occasion. The platform is 12' by 16' and six feet high, reached by twelve stairs. At the front is a crossbeam with a short noose hovering over a trap door. Brown arrives along with his coffin and an undertaker named Sadler who tells him:

*You're the gamest man I ever saw, Captain Brown.*

Brown replies:

*I was so trained up; it was one of the lessons of my mother; but it is hard to part from friends.*

He has refused the offer of a clergyman, so climbs the stairs and moves to the trapdoor on his own. Observers comment on his dignified manner and unwavering courage. His hat is removed, and a white linen hood is fitted over his face. His only request is that the sentence be carried out without ceremony and quickly. But he is forced to stand still for almost ten minutes as mounted troops are brought into place.

When the trap-door is sprung, his drop is only two feet, but fortunately it is enough to snap the spinal cord in his neck, and he dies quickly. After another thirty-five minutes his body is cut down and placed in his coffin.

Colonel Preston issues the final official word at the scene:

*So perish all such enemies of Virginia and of the Union and of the human race.*

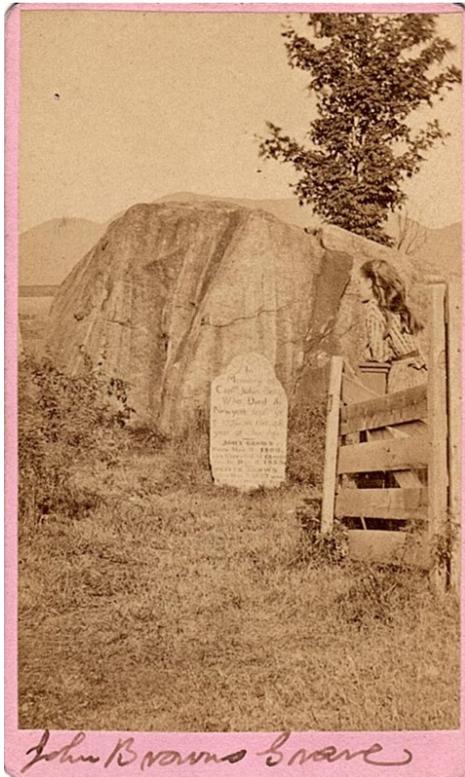
Wilkes Booth records a different coda in his diary:

*He was a brave Old Man.*

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Date: December 3-7, 1859

### John Brown's Body Lies A Mouldering In His Grave



An Early Visitor To John Brown's Grave

On December 3, Mary Ann Brown begins a five day journey with her husband's corpse, by train to Philadelphia and boat to New York, followed by a 25 mile trek overland to the farm in North Elba, NY.

She wishes to take her two dead sons along, but Brown's request has been denied. Watson's body is handed over to the Winchester Medical School for anatomical research, while Oliver's remains, along seven others are thrown into two crude pine boxes and buried alongside the Shenandoah River. (By 1899 the remains of the two sons, along with nine other raiders will be acquired and reburied next to Brown.)

A small and simple memorial service follow on December 7. His body is transferred to a new casket by his family, and it is left open while his neighbors and other friends file past.

He is then lowered into a nearby grave next to a huge bolder where he has carved his name in case he should die at Harpers Ferry. His headstone -- moved years before from Connecticut to the farm -- is that of his grandfather, Captain John Brown, who lost his life fighting in the American Revolution. Brown's name, along with those of Oliver and Watson, are added below the original inscription.

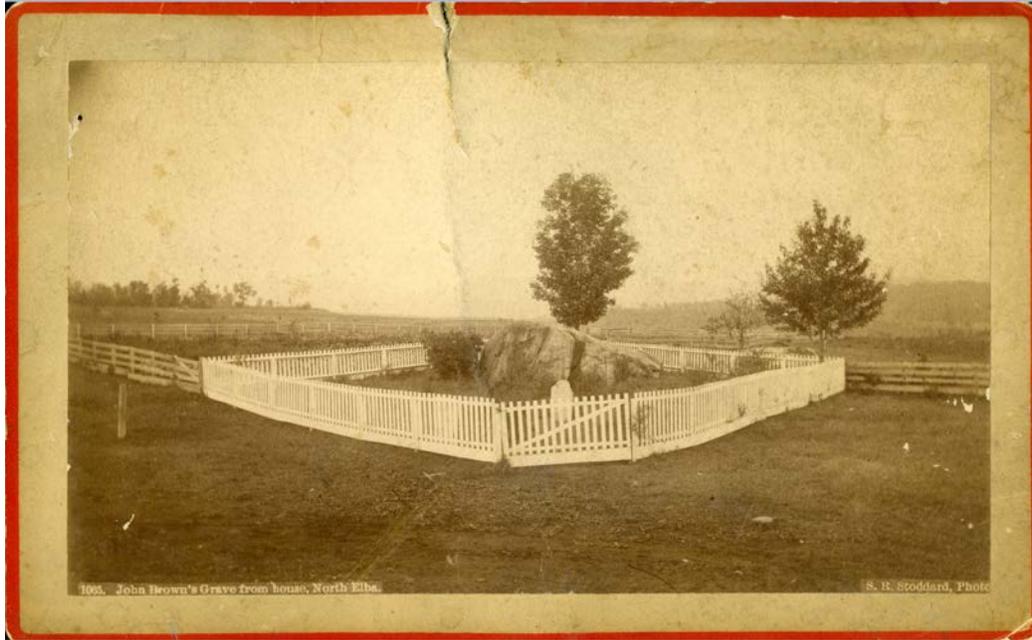
The ceremony itself is simple and brief. It is marked by the singing of his favorite inspirational hymn:

*Blow ye the trumpet, blow,  
The gladly solemn sound;  
Let all the nations know,  
To earth's remotest bound,  
The year of Jubilee has come.*

Final tributes are spoken by several attendees, including Wendell Phillips:

*Marvelous old man! He has abolished slavery in Virginia...History will date Virginia Emancipation from Harpers Ferry. His words, they are even stronger than his rifles. They crushed a State. They have changed the thoughts of millions, and will yet crush slavery.*

John Brown's story would seem to be over -- but it is hardly over.



John Brown's Gravesite In North Elba (Circa 1897)

## Chapter 278 – The South Responds To The Harpers Ferry Raid



**Dates:**  
October 1859 -  
Forward

**Sections:**

- Reprisals Take Place Across The South
- Edmund Ruffin Exploits Harpers Ferry In Demand For Secession
- Southerners Expect Northern Condemnation Of The Terrorist Attack

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Date: October 1859 Forward

### Reprisals Take Place Across The South

Shock waves reverberate across the South even after John Brown is in his grave.

The event itself is sui generis. It goes well beyond the 1831 rebellion by Nat Turner, in that the leader is a white man, not a black, and a Northerner to boot. As such it feels like a betrayal of the basic trust between the states and sections that allowed the Union to form in the first place.

In the South, Brown symbolizes that worst nightmare for a civilized society, a homegrown terrorist – and they respond to the fear he has triggered in predictable fashion. First they try to search out and punish the perpetrators, and then to tighten their local security to prevent future attacks.

As usual, the easiest target for punishment are the blacks in their presence -- and any whose prior behavior suggests a threat are subject to beatings, lynchings and even burning at the stake. The extent of the retributions here is unknown, but it likely matches or exceeds those following the Nat Turner uprising.

But this time the spotlight even extends to the 353,000 free blacks living across the South alongside its 3.9 million slaves. The state of Maryland asks whether it is time to put an end to “free negroism.” North Carolina follows up by passing legislation whereby all free blacks are given a choice between becoming “re-enslaved” or leaving the state. Mississippi and Arkansas eventually do the same.

Attention also falls on suspected “white collaborators.”

These include anyone thought to be harboring anti-slavery sentiments. As rumors spread, “Black Lists” materialize from town to town, along with local boycotts of any businesses run by “negro sympathizers.”

Attempts are also made to interdict publications and other materials from the North that are deemed to be critical of slavery. Horace Greeley's *New York Tribune* becomes a leading example, along with the *Springfield Republican* and *Harpers Weekly Magazine*.

The intent of these moves is well articulated by an editorial in the *Atlanta Confederacy*:

*We regard every man in our midst an enemy to the institutions of the South who does not boldly declare that he believes African slavery to be a social, moral, and political blessing. If not he should be requested to leave the country!*

Along with the above, efforts are made to strengthen the response time and effectiveness of local militias to deal with any future crises. The scenario that has played out at Harpers Ferry is an embarrassment for the South. The strategic targets – the bridge, the Arsenal and Armory, and the Rifle Works – fall without resistance. The local response to the raid is poorly led and uncoordinated, more of a mob scene than anything else. President Buchanan is slow to call out federal support, and more than a full day passes before Robert E. Lee and his marines show up.

All of this becomes a wake-up call for both the local, state and federal militia in the South. The result are growing enlistments and greater preparation in case force is required again in the future.

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Date: October 1859 Forward

### **Edmund Ruffin Exploits Harpers Ferry In Demand For Secession**



Edmund Ruffin (1794-1865)

While retribution and defensive measures are on the minds of most Southerners, a smaller contingent is eager to exploit Harpers Ferry to promote their own agenda – that being secession.

This notion of exiting the Union has a long history in America, especially in the state of South Carolina, where John Calhoun tries for decades to alert the region to the threats it faces from the North – especially as the balance of power in Congress slips away.

When Calhoun dies in 1850, leadership passes on to the next generation of proponents labeled the Fire-eaters. Included here are men like James Henry Hammond of South Carolina, William Yancey of Alabama, and Louis Wigfall of Texas.

But one man who stands out after Harpers Ferry is sixty-five year old Edmund Ruffin, born into the Virginia planter aristocracy and initially famous for his pioneering scientific work on preventing soil erosion, especially through crop rotation and by spreading “marlstone” (lime-rich mud) on his tobacco fields. He is also a member of the Southern intellectual class, along with men like William Simms, Beverly Tucker and James Hammond.

Like the others, Ruffin is a total believer in the “slavery as a positive good” camp, and carries this so far as to suggest that the US might expand into Africa in order to provide a path to Christian salvation for the natives.

Instead of a tragedy, he regards Harpers Ferry as a fortuitous alarm regarding abolitionist threats:

*Finally proof arrived out of the blue...Such a practical exercise of abolitionist principles is needed to stir the sluggish blood of the South.*

The *Enquirer* of Richmond shares his read on the importance of the event:

*The Harpers Ferry invasion has advanced the cause of disunion more than any other event that has happened since the formation of the nation.*

The villains, Ruffin claims, are not simply the twenty-two raiders, but the entire Northern population.

*Southerners at last has an identifiable, common foe, the great majority of the Northern people.*

The result of the raid will finally force the South to choose secession over submission.

*I wish for the Southern states to be forced to choose between secession and submission to abolitionist domination.*

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**Sidebar: Edmund Ruffin**

**Edmund Ruffin will have his way on Southern secession and pay the price for it.**

On April 12, 1861 he is at Cummings Point on the tip of Morris Island, just two miles southeast of Ft. Sumter, serving as a member of the Palmetto Guards. According to myth he is given the honor there of firing the first cannon shot of the war, and then becoming the first man to enter the fallen fort. Two of his sons serve in the CSA army, but, owing to his advanced age, his service during the conflict is limited to visiting and rallying troops in the field.

The final surrender at Appomattox finds Ruffin in despair. His wife is long gone and only two of his ten children remain alive. His plantations have been overrun and looted by Union troops, who also burn his precious books and collection of fossil shells.

On June 17, 1865, at his son’s *Redmoor* home, Ruffin goes to his room and writes a final entry in his diary, before wrapping a Confederate flag around his shoulders and killing himself with a shotgun. This act mirrors that of his godfather, Thomas Cocke, in 1840. His last recorded words signal his undying hatred for the Yankees:

*And now with my latest writing and utterance, and with what will [be] near to my latest breath, I here repeat, & would willingly proclaim, my unmitigated hatred to Yankee rule—to all political, social and business connections with Yankees, & to the perfidious, malignant, & vile Yankee race.*

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Date: October 1859 Forward

### **Southerners Expect Northern Condemnation Of The Terrorist Attack**

To dramatize his message, Ruffin is able to lay his hands on fifteen of “John Brown’s Pikes,” in addition to the one that he carries around personally in public. These pike are savage looking weapons, eight foot long spears, topped by a Bowie knife, to be wielded by the liberated slaves as pay-back to their masters.

Ruffin intends to make them as memorable as the cane Preston Brooks has used to thrash Charles Sumner into submission in the Senate in 1856. He does so by packaging each pike up in a special display case with an enclosed message:

*A sample of the favors designed for us by our Northern brethren.*

He then sends one to each of the sitting Governors in the slave states, with the exception of Delaware, where he sees no hope of provoking the response he wants. Instead the fifteenth pike goes to the state capitol in Charleston, where he is certain of a favorable reception.

This effort by Ruffin becomes one aspect of the Fire-eater’s secession campaign leading into the fast approaching presidential campaign of 1860.

Its goal is to convince Southerners that the raid was not the isolated work of a madman, but rather to connect the dots between John Brown and the Black Republican Party, with its abolitionist inspired intent to do away with the institution of slavery.

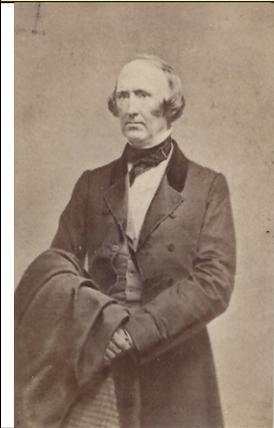
Ruffin even declares that he hopes for a Republican victory in 1860 since that will...

*Agitate and exasperate the already highly excited indignation of the South.*

To further drive home his call for immediate secession, he challenges his fellow Southerners to watch the reactions to the Harpers Ferry raid among their fellow citizens in the North.

Will they condemn it outright or somehow find ways to justify it? For many Southerners this question seems to become a litmus test related to the possibility of leaving the Union.

## Chapter 279 – The Northern Reaction To Harpers Ferry Shifts Over Time



**Dates:**  
October 1859 Forward

- Sections:**
- Initial Northern Opinions Are Critical Of John Brown
  - The Transcendentalists Rally Early Support For John Brown
  - Other Northerners Find A Measure Of Justice In The Harpers Ferry Action
  - Brown’s Execution Is Mourned In Many Northern Cities

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Date: October 1859

### Initial Northern Opinions Are Critical Of John Brown



Horace Greeley (1811-1872)

Contrary to Ruffin’s expectations, the immediate response to John Brown and Harpers Ferry in the North is much like that in the South.

Press coverage is almost uniformly opposed to the raid.

The *New York Evening Post* says that Brown was “driven to madness” by his actions in Kansas, and Harpers Ferry was the tragic result. The *Chicago Press and Tribune* writes that no one could “approve the (raider’s) means or justify their ends.” Even the abolitionist editor, Horace Greeley, initially calls it “the work of a mad man.”

The Northern politicians follow suit in condemning the act.

Two are immediately assumed to have been involved in some fashion. New York Senator Henry Seward legitimately denies any role in the plot. Ohio Governor Joshua Giddings, who has had frequent contact with Brown, responds deceptively, that “Brown never consulted me.”

Other well-known abolitionists concur. John Hale “deeply regrets” the raid; Salmon Chase sees it as “an insane attempt;” Ben Wade says “it is absurd to implicate the Republican Party in the acts of John Brown.”

Lincoln says that the raid is “wrong for two reasons...a violation of law and...futile as far as any effect it might have on the extinction of a great evil.”

Even Brown’s closest backers, members of the Secret Six, distance themselves after a large cache of their incriminating correspondence with him is uncovered at the Kennedy Farm. Gerritt Smith suffers a nervous breakdown and enters an insane asylum, while Parker remains in Italy and Stearns, Sanborn, and Howe flee to Canada, soon to be followed by Frederick Douglas.

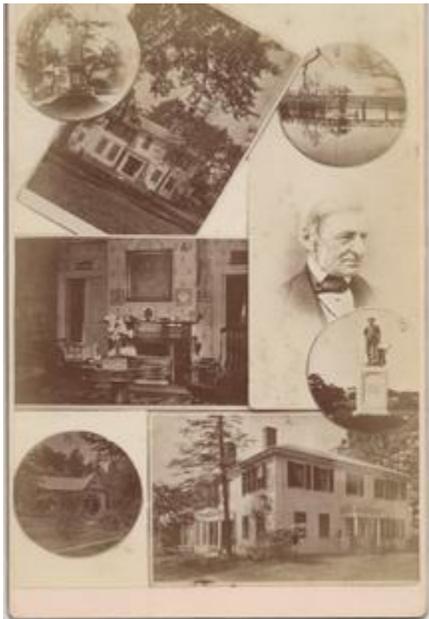
At first it seems that the Unitarian Minister, Thomas Higginson, Brown’s staunchest loyalist among the Secret Six, will be left standing alone in Boston to defend his attack on slavery.

But, soon enough other voices join in.

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Date: November 8, 1859

### **The Transcendentalists Rally Early Support For John Brown**



Ralph Waldo Emerson And His Surroundings

The first group to come to Brown’s defense are the New England Transcendentalists, who have been introduced to him by Theodore Parker during his January 1857 eastern journey in search of monetary support. At that time, he strikes them as an example of their ideal American, the morally upright and self-reliant man, living amidst nature’s bounty, making his way as a farmer. His purpose in opposing slavery is just and his determination admirable.

While not engaged in his Harpers Ferry plan, they are now wont to defend him against the Southern onslaught.

Their campaign is led by Ralph Waldo Emerson, America’s leading intellectual, whose mastery of the spoken and written word have defined the public’s notion of heroism for over two decades.

On November 8, 1859, twenty-four days before Brown is hanged in Virginia, Emerson delivers a lecture at the Music Hall in Boston that causes many Northerners to begin to imagine him in a different light.

Emerson’s topic is a familiar one, articulating the “qualities which conspicuously attract the wonder and reverence of mankind.” He lists and explores three: selflessness, practicality and courage. The third quality, “courage,” takes him to a prior conversation he has had with Brown.

*Captain John Brown, the hero of Kansas, said to me that “for a settler in a new country, one good, believing, strong-minded man is worth a hundred, nay, a thousand men without character, and that the right men will give a permanent direction to the fortunes of a state.”*

He goes on, referencing the reported exchanges between Virginia Governor Henry Wise and his captive:

*The true temper has genial influences. It makes a bond of union between enemies. Governor Wise of Virginia, in the record of his first interviews with his prisoner...distinguishes John Brown. As they confer, they understand each other swiftly; each respects the other. If opportunity allowed, they would prefer each other's society and desert their former companions*

John Brown is no madman, according to Emerson; instead a successor to “the best of those who stood at our bridge on Lexington Common” – ready to sacrifice himself in service to a higher law.

From there comes a line that will register alongside “the shot heard round the world.” It refers to Brown as...

*That new saint than whom none purer or more brave was ever led by love of men into conflict and death,—the new saint awaiting his martyrdom, and who, if he shall suffer, will make the gallows glorious like the cross.*

This comparison of Brown on the gallows to Christ on the cross will shower Emerson with opprobrium from his critics – but also cause others to find justification for his actions.

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Date: December 1859 Forward

### **Other Northerners Find A Measure Of Justice In The Harpers Ferry Action**

While most Northerners will reject the notion of sainthood for John Brown, a very sizable number will conclude that his actions were in many ways understandable, even heroic and long overdue.

This group comprises people who have become fed up with the South's efforts to “nationalize slavery,” to impose the presence of blacks on white citizens who want nothing to do with them.

Antagonism toward the South among this group has been building for decades.

For many, it is heightened by the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act, the presence of bounty hunters in local towns, and the intrusive demands that citizens help capture run-aways. It grows with the 1854 Kansas-Nebraska Bill, reneging on the 36'30" line of demarcation and opening up the Louisiana acreage to the wealthy Southern planters. Then comes the bullying tactics by the Missouri Ruffians in the 1856 Kansas elections, the caning of Charles Sumner, and the fumbling attempts by Buchanan to ram the pro-slavery Lecompton Constitution through congress, negating the will of the voters.

It is during this period that these Northerners comes to define the South as a whole as “The Slave Power.”

Their feeling is that if the South insists on continuing to have slaves, that is their problem – but they have no right to force it on the rest of the nation. To do so reflects a form of arrogance that needs to be slapped down once and for all.

In turn, the actions at Harpers Ferry represent the kind of bloody nose the South deserves – with John Brown as the necessary messenger.

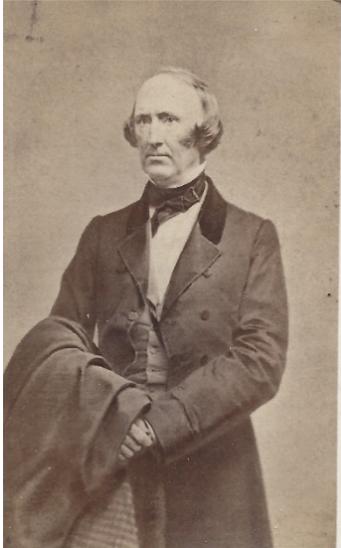
While they will never regard him as the Christ-like figure conjured up by Emerson, he will become another of the archetypal icons embedded in the American psyche:

*The right-minded vigilante, exercising frontier justice on his own,  
to strike out against the wrong-doers in the name of essential justice.*

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Date: December 2, 1859

### **Brown's Execution Is Mourned In Many Northern Cities**



Wendell Phillips (1811-1884)

As John Brown's execution date approaches, supporters frame a variety of plots for a last minute rescue -- but in addition to being impractical, he also signals his intent to die a martyr to his cause.

What's left then are various forms of protests, small and large.

At 11am on December 2, as he stands on the gallows, church bells are rung in towns and cities across the North and West in support of his suffering. Memorial events follow.

A large gathering at Tremont Hall in Boston listens to praise for him from Wendell Phillips and from William Lloyd Garrison, who finally acknowledges that insurrections may be needed to abolish slavery.

*I am prepared to say: success to every slave insurrection at the South and in every slave country.*

Cleveland's Melodeon Hall is decked out in black crepe for over a thousand mourners, under a banner claiming: JOHN BROWN, The HERO of 1859.

A speaker at an assembly in Rhode Island proclaims that...

*In his strong love for freedom, in his heroic spirit, in his fidelity to his convictions (we see) a noble spirit.*

Nowhere is reverence for John Brown greater than in the free black communities of the North. Special praise for him comes from Charles Henry Langston, born in Virginia to a white planter and his black common law wife, educated at Oberlin College, and a founder of the Ohio Anti-Slavery Society. Langston asks his audience "why should I honor the memory or mourn the death of any of the white people of this land?" He answers his own question, in praise of John Brown:

*A lover of mankind – not of any particular class or color, but of all men...He fully, really and actively believed in the equality and brotherhood of man...He alone has lived up to the Declaration of Independence...He admired Nat Turner as well as George Washington.*

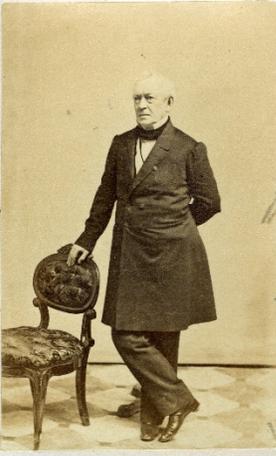
Other Northern remembrances of John Brown and Harpers Ferry are tinged with animosity toward the South.

In Connecticut, Virginia Governor John Wise is hanged in effigy.

Then in Boston, there is the English born journalist, James Redpath, who uses Harpers Ferry to continue his vitriolic attacks on the Slave Power. Redpath's reporting on Brown goes back to Kansas, where he interviews him soon after the Pottawatomie Massacre, and he will go on to publish a favorable biography of him in 1860. But for the moment he is happy to sing his praises as the warrior whose actions reveal the cowardice of the South.

*Never before, among modern nations, did seventeen men produce so terribly and universally a panic as Old Brown at Harpers Ferry....Everyone believed the South to be full of fighting pluck until Brown demonstrated that she was only a cowardly braggart after all.*

## Chapter 280 – President Buchanan And Other Northerners Push Back On The Pro-Brown Sentiment

	<p><b>Dates:</b> December 1859 Forward</p>	<p><b>Sections:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anti-Brown Rallies Are Held In The North</li> <li>• President Buchanan Delivers His State Of The Union Address To Congress</li> </ul>
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Date: December 1859

### Anti-Brown Rallies Are Held In The North



Edward Everett (1794-1865)

Southerners are angered by the shows of Yankee sympathy for Brown, but they are not alone in this regard.

They are joined by Northern conservatives who are fiercely dedicated to saving the Union and regard both Harpers Ferry and the Republican Party as threats to this outcome. Notable among this group are two Massachusetts men, the Whig, Edward Everett, an ex-Senator, Governor and Secretary of State, and the Democrat, Caleb Cushing, Attorney general under Franklin Pierce.

Everett lashes out against Emerson, his former student at Harvard, for blasphemy, and likens Brown’s plan as akin to the devastation caused by the 1791 black revolution in Santo Domingo. Cushing reminds listeners of the “merciless heart” exhibited by Brown at the Pottawatomie Massacre, and adds a dire prediction:

*This is the commencement of Civil War in the United States.*

A so-called “Anti-Brown rallies” draws almost 6,000 people to the Academy of Music Hall in New York City on December 19, 1859. It praises negro slavery as “decreed by nature” and labels those who support Brown as...

*Disgraces to a Christian age and country.*

Letters to this effect are read out to the crowd from Presidents Martin Van Buren, Millard Fillmore and Franklin Pierce, along with former candidate, General Winfield Scott.

A comparable event is held in Philadelphia, marked by large banners declaring:

*Down with all Traitors, Factionists and Disunionists!*

Soon enough these sentiments will translate into a new political entity known as the Constitutional Unionist Party.

It will comprise a diverse combination of Northerners and Border State Southerners, with roots in the Whig and Democrat parties, united around one paramount end – to save the Union.

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Date: December 19, 1859

### **President Buchanan Delivers His State Of The Union Address To Congress**

On the same day as the anti-Brown rally in NYC, James Buchanan delivers his third annual message to Congress. By this time his presidency has collapsed around him, even if he is not yet fully aware of the fact. It has been slain by one thing above all, his desire to appease his Southern friends and supporters on the protection of slavery, in order to achieve and try to retain his high office.

The address of December 19, 1859 is exceedingly long and rambling. The final two-thirds deals with foreign policy and with the nation's finances, including:

- The favorable relations achieved with China, Russia, France and most other nations
- Ongoing strains with Spain, especially over the ongoing attempt to purchase Cuba;
- Yet to be fully resolved treaties with Britain regarding central America.
- Threats from Mexico against US citizens and a proposal for military outposts in Sonora and Chihuahua.
- Support for a military force to enter Mexico should that prove necessary.
- The possible need for a show of naval force to insure safe passage in Panama and Nicaragua.
- Support for a transcontinental railroad, especially to facilitate the military defense of the west coast.
- Concern over a budget deficit of roughly \$6million for fiscal year 1859-60.
- A recommendation to raise tariffs to avoid future deficits.

But it is the front end of the text – dealing in detail with the issues of slavery – that is most telling. It reveals a President trying to convince himself that the issues are now resolved and that the threat of a civil war is over. Despite his best efforts to sound confident here, his words back and forth come across as hollow.

*Due to that Almighty Power...the general health of the country has been excellent...*

*We have been exposed to many threatening and alarming difficulties in our progress, but...the danger to our institutions has passed away.*

*I shall not refer in detail to the recent sad and bloody occurrences at Harpers Ferry. Still, it is proper to observe that these events...may break out in still more dangerous outrages and terminate at last in an open war by the North to abolish slavery in the South....*

*...For myself I entertain no such apprehension... Questions which in their day assumed a most threatening aspect have now nearly gone from the memory of men...Such, in my opinion, will prove to be the fate of the present sectional excitement should those who wisely seek to apply the remedy continue always to confine their efforts within the pale of the Constitution.*

Ever true to his Southern tilt, he says that the remedies must be accomplished...

*... Without serious danger to the personal safety of the people of fifteen members of the Confederacy.*

Having dismissed the threat, he returns to it again referencing Harpers Ferry.

*I firmly believe that the events at Harpers Ferry, by causing the people to pause and reflect upon the possible peril to their cherished institutions, will be the means under Providence of allaying the existing excitement and preventing further outbreaks of a similar character*

He is then on to continued praise for the *Dred Scott* decision, ending the legal debate on slavery.

*I cordially congratulate you upon the final settlement by the Supreme Court of the United States of the question of slavery in the Territories... protected there under the Federal Constitution.*

He does so while leaving room for those Democrats still attached to the role of popular sovereignty in the process of achieving statehood.

*When in the progress of events the inhabitants of any Territory shall have reached the number required to form a State, they will then proceed in a regular manner and in the exercise of the rights of popular sovereignty to form a constitution preparatory to admission into the Union.*

His discussion of slavery ends with a long monologue on the history of the institution in America and a paean to the blessings it has bestowed on the Africans.

*For a period of more than half a century (their) advancement in civilization has far surpassed that of any other portion of the African race. The light and the blessings of Christianity have been extended to them, and both their moral and physical condition has been greatly improved.*

*At present (the slave) is treated with kindness and humanity. He is well fed, well clothed, and not overworked. His condition is incomparably better than that of the coolies which modern nations of high civilization have employed as a substitute for African slaves. Both the philanthropy and the self-interest of the master have combined to produce this humane result.*

These perspectives by Buchanan on slavery could have been lifted from the pens of men like Thomas Dew and the Reverend James Thornwell in 1832, John C. Calhoun in 1837, James Hammond in 1845, George Simms in 1852 and a host of other “slavery as a positive good” advocates.