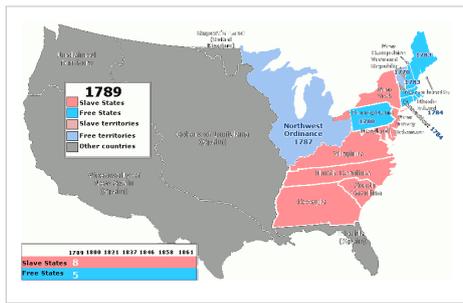


Bleeding Kansas

Bleeding Kansas, **Bloody Kansas** or the **Border War**, was a series of violent political confrontations involving anti-slavery Free-Staters and pro-slavery "Border Ruffian" elements, that took place in the Kansas Territory and the neighboring towns of Missouri between 1854 and 1861. At the heart of the conflict was the question of whether Kansas would enter the Union as a free state or slave state. As such, Bleeding Kansas was a proxy war between Northerners and Southerners over the issue of slavery in the United States. The term "Bleeding Kansas" was coined by Horace Greeley of the *New York Tribune*; the events it encompasses directly presaged the American Civil War.

Congress had long struggled to balance the interests of slaveholders and abolitionists. The events later known as Bleeding Kansas were set into motion by the Kansas–Nebraska Act of 1854, which nullified the Missouri Compromise and instead implemented the concept of popular sovereignty. An ostensibly democratic idea, popular sovereignty stated that the inhabitants of each territory or state should decide whether it would be a free or slave state; however, this resulted in immigration *en masse* to Kansas by activists from both sides. At one point, Kansas had two separate governments, each with its own constitution, although only one was federally recognized. On January 29, 1861, Kansas was admitted to the Union as a free state, less than three months before the Battle of Fort Sumter which began the Civil War.

Origins



The issue of slavery, deeply embedded in the culture of the Southern United States, had been divisive since the country's formation.

The Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 created the Kansas and Nebraska territories and opened the lands to settlement by American pioneers. The Act also established that the question of whether slavery would be allowed in the new states of Kansas and Nebraska would be decided by the inhabitants of the states – essentially repealing the Missouri Compromise. The concept of letting the settlers decide, now known as

"popular sovereignty," was an idea advocated by U.S. Senator Stephen A. Douglas, chairman of the Senate Committee on Territories. Popular sovereignty was an attempt to offer concessions to the Southern states by making possible the expansion of slavery into both western and northern territories. While this doctrine, also known in Kansas Territory as "squatter sovereignty," was not actually formulated by U.S. Senator Lewis Cass, he nevertheless earned the sobriquet "Father of Popular Sovereignty" by providing its ideological framework in a letter published in the *Washington Daily Union*, which later also secured for Cass the presidential nomination of the Democratic party.^[1]

Initially, it was assumed that few slave owners would attempt to settle in Kansas and make it a slave state, because it was thought to be too far north for profitable exploitation of slaves. However, the eastern portion of Kansas along the Missouri River was as suitable for slave-based agriculture as the nearby "black belt" of Missouri in which most of Missouri's slaves were held.

The settlement and the zone formation of the state government in Kansas became highly politicized beyond the borders of the territory. There were a number of reasons for this. Missouri, a slave state, was uniquely exposed to free states, with Illinois and Iowa bordering it on the east and north. Most parts of Missouri held very few slaves, and slave owners were a very small proportion of the state's population. If Kansas entered the Union as a free state, Missouri would have free soil on three sides. Since manumission, abolition activity, and escape were all more common in the border states, the existence of nearby free soil was a threat to Missouri slaveowners.

Also, in the Senate, each state is apportioned two senate seats. A rough balance had existed between free and slave states, but each addition of a state threatened to tip the balance, disrupting the status quo (see Slave Power).

to his Senate desk for three years as a result of his injuries to the head and neck area; he became regarded as an antislavery martyr.

These acts in turn inspired John Brown to lead a group of men in Kansas Territory on an attack at a proslavery settlement at Pottawatomie Creek. During the night of May 24, the group, which included four of Brown's sons, led five pro-slavery men from their homes and hacked them to death with broadswords. Brown's men let Jerome Glanville and James Harris return home to the cabin of Harris.

On June 2, 1856, John Brown took future Confederate Colonel Henry Clay Pate and 22 other pro-slavery soldiers prisoner at the Battle of Black Jack.

In 1856, the official territorial capital was moved to Lecompton, a town only 12 miles (19.3 km) from Lawrence. In April 1856, a three-man congressional investigating committee arrived in Lecompton to look into the troubles. The majority report of the committee found the elections to be improperly influenced by Border Ruffians. The President failed to follow its recommendations, however, and continued to recognize the pro-slavery legislature as the legitimate government of Kansas. In fact, on July 4, 1856, Pierce sent federal troops to break up an attempted meeting of the shadow government in Topeka.

In August, thousands of proslavery men formed into armies and marched into Kansas. That same month, Brown and several of his followers engaged 400 proslavery soldiers in the "Battle of Osawatimie." The hostilities raged for another two months until Brown departed the Kansas Territory, and a new territorial governor, John W. Geary, took office and managed to prevail upon both sides for peace. This was followed by a fragile peace broken by intermittent violent outbreaks for two more years. The last major outbreak of violence was touched off by the Marais des Cygnes massacre in 1858, where Border Ruffians killed five Free State men.

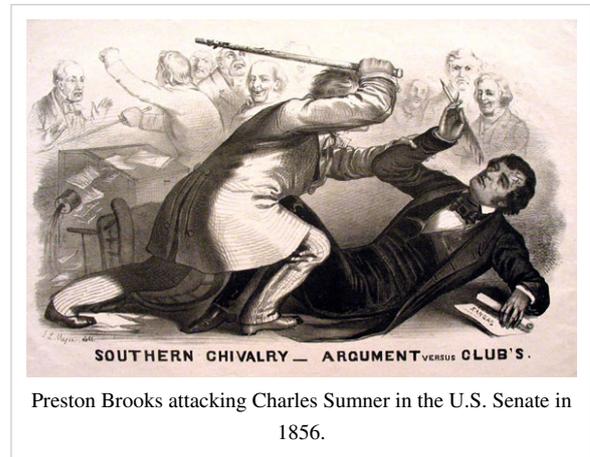
In all, approximately 56 people died in Bleeding Kansas by the time the violence completely abated in 1859.^[4] Following the commencement of the American Civil War in 1861, additional guerrilla violence erupted on the border between Kansas and Missouri.

Constitutional fight

An adjunct to the guerrilla warfare in Bleeding Kansas was the fight over the constitution that would govern the state of Kansas. Several constitutions were drafted, including the 1855 Topeka Constitution, which created the shadow Free-State government to resist the illegitimate government voted in by unregistered Missourian voters.

In 1857, a Kansas constitutional convention was convened, which drafted what has become known as the "Lecompton Constitution," a pro-slavery document. The abolitionist forces boycotted the ratification vote because it failed to offer them a means to vote against slavery. The Lecompton Constitution was accepted by President James Buchanan, who urged acceptance and statehood. Congress disagreed and ordered another election. In the second election the pro-slavery forces boycotted the process, allowing the anti-slavery forces to claim victory by defeating the document. In the end, the Lecompton Constitution died because it was not clear whether it represented the will of the majority.

In mid-1859, the Wyandotte Constitution was drafted; this document represented the prevailing abolitionist view. It was approved by the electorate by a 2-to-1 margin, and Kansas entered the Union as a free state pursuant to its terms on January 29, 1861.



Heritage Area

In 2006, legislation that enabled a new "Freedom's Frontier National Heritage Area" (FFNHA) was passed by Congress. The heritage area is tasked with describing the story behind the Missouri/Kansas border war, the story of settlement, and the enduring struggle for freedom in the region to the present. FFNHA comprises 41 counties, 29 of which are in eastern and east-central Kansas and 12 of which are in western Missouri.

Notes

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- [2] William Frank Zornow, *Kansas: a history of the Jayhawk State* (1957) p 72
- [3] James, Richardson. "A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents" (<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/11125/11125-8.txt>). Project Gutenberg. . Retrieved 2008-03-18.
- [4] Dale Watts, "How Bloody Was Bleeding Kansas? Political Killings in Kansas territory, 1854-1861," *Kansas History* (1995) 18#2 pp. 116-129. online (http://www.kshs.org/publicat/history/1995summer_watts.pdf)

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Bad Blood, the Border War that Triggered the Civil War (<http://www.kcpt.org/badblood/>) a documentary DVD (ISBN 0-9777261-42)

External links

- 1856 Congressional Report on the Troubles in Kansas (<http://www.hti.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=moa;idno=AFK4445.0001.001>)
- Documentary On Bleeding Kansas (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0469633/>)
- Kansas State Historical Society: A Look Back at Kansas Territory, 1854-1861 (<http://www.kshs.org/exhibits/territorial/territorial1.htm>)
- NEEAC. *History of the New-England Emigrant Aid Company*. Boston: John Wilson & Son, 1862. (<http://books.google.com/books?id=XxeyclkePjC&printsec=frontcover&dq=new+england+emigrant+aid+company#PPA1,M1>)
- PBS article on Bleeding Kansas. (<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4p2952.html>)
- Territorial Kansas Online: A Virtual Repository for Kansas Territorial History. (<http://www.territorialkansasonline.org/~imlskto/cgi-bin/index.php>)
- U-S-History.com. (<http://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h84.html>)
- Online Exhibit - Willing to Die for Freedom, Kansas Historical Society (<http://www.kshs.org/p/online-exhibits-willing-to-die-for-freedom-introduction/15398>)

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