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8.68 Explain the motivations behind passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act 1854, including the rise of the Republican Party, “Bleeding Kansas”, the Sumner Brooks incident, and the John Brown raid on Harper’s Ferry. (H,P)

Mr. Zoller explains the Kansas-Nebraska Act and "Bleeding Kansas."
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RdodEnENnUU

The Kansas-Nebraska Act

(Pictured Above: Stephen Douglas, the sponsor of the Kansas-Nebraska Act as well as the most vocal supporter of popular sovereignty, was known as the "Little Giant" because of his small stature.)

The KANSAS-NEBRASKA ACT OF 1854 may have been the single most significant event leading to the Civil War. By the early 1850s settlers and entrepreneurs wanted to move into the area now known as Nebraska. However, until the area was organized as a territory, settlers would not move there because they could not legally hold a claim on the land. The southern states’ representatives in Congress were in no hurry to permit a Nebraska territory because the land lay north of the 36°30’ parallel — where slavery had been outlawed by the Missouri Compromise of 1820. Just
when things between the north and south were in an uneasy balance, Kansas and Nebraska opened fresh wounds. The person behind the Kansas-Nebraska Act was Senator Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois.

( Pictured Above: The Kansas-Nebraska Act began a chain of events in the Kansas Territory that foreshadowed the Civil War.)

He said he wanted to see Nebraska made into a territory and, to win southern support, proposed a southern state inclined to support slavery. It was Kansas. Underlying it all was his desire to build a transcontinental railroad to go through Chicago. The Kansas-Nebraska Act allowed each territory to decide the issue of slavery on the basis of popular sovereignty. Kansas with slavery would violate the Missouri Compromise, which had kept the Union from falling apart for the last thirty-four years. The long-standing compromise would have to be repealed. Opposition was intense, but ultimately the bill passed in May of 1854. Territory north of the sacred 36°30’ line was now open to popular sovereignty. The North was outraged.

( Pictured Above: The Kansas-Nebraska act made it possible for the Kansas and Nebraska territories (shown in orange) to open to slavery. The Missouri Compromise had prevented this from happening since 1820.)

The political effects of Douglas’ bill were enormous. Passage of the bill irrevocably split the Whig Party, one of the two major political parties in the country at the time. Every northern Whig had opposed the bill; almost every southern Whig voted for it. With the emotional issue of slavery involved, there was no way a common ground could be found. Most of the southern Whigs soon were swept into the Democratic Party. Northern Whigs reorganized themselves with other non-slavery interests to become the Republican Party, the party of Abraham Lincoln. This left the Democratic Party as the sole remaining institution that crossed sectional lines. Animosity between the North and South was again on the rise. The North felt that if the Compromise of 1820 was ignored, the Compromise of 1850 could be ignored as well. Violations of the hated Fugitive Slave Law increased. Trouble was indeed back with a vengeance.

"Educreations" - The Rise of the Republican Party


and..

The Union in Peril


FIGURE 1.3
Canefight! Preston Brooks and Charles Sumner

(Pictured Above: United States Senate Preston Brooks beats Charles Sumner with a cane.)

Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts was an avowed Abolitionist and leader of the Republican Party. After the sack of Lawrence, on May 21, 1856, he gave a bitter speech in the Senate called "THE CRIME AGAINST KANSAS." He blasted the "murderous robbers from Missouri," calling them "hirelings, picked from the drunken spew and vomit of an uneasy civilization." Part of this oratory was a bitter, personal tirade against South Carolina’s Senator Andrew Butler. Sumner declared Butler an imbecile and said, "Senator Butler has chosen a mistress. I mean the harlot, slavery." During the speech, Stephen Douglas leaned over to a colleague and said, "that... fool will get himself killed by some other ... fool." The speech went on for two days.

Representative Preston Brooks of South Carolina thought Sumner went too far. Southerners in the nineteenth century were raised to live by an unwritten code of honor. Defending the reputation of one’s family was at the top of the list. A distant cousin of Senator Butler, Brooks decided to teach Charles Sumner a lesson he would not soon forget. Two days after the end of Sumner’s speech, Brooks entered the Senate chamber where Sumner was working at his desk. He flatly told Sumner, "You’ve libeled my state and slandered my white-haired old relative, Senator Butler, and I’ve come to punish you for it." Brooks proceeded to strike Sumner over the head repeatedly with a gold-tipped cane. The cane shattered as Brooks rained blow after blow on the hapless Sumner, but Brooks could not be stopped. Only after being physically restrained by others did Brooks end the pummeling.

(Pictured Above: United States Capital Charles Sumner spent years recovering from the attack.)

Northerners were incensed. The House voted to expel Brooks, but it could not amass the votes to do so. Brooks was levied a $300 fine for the assault. He resigned and returned home to South Carolina, seeking the approval of his actions there. South Carolina held events in his honor and re-elected him to his House seat. Replacement canes were sent to Brooks from all over the south. This response outraged northern moderates even more than the caning itself.

As for poor Charles Sumner, the physical and psychological injuries from the caning kept him away from the Senate for most of the next several years. The voters of Massachusetts also re-elected him and let his seat sit vacant during his absence as a reminder of southern brutality. The violence from Kansas had spilled over into the national legislature.
From www.bing.com, watch “This Day in History” - from the Freedom Trail.

John Brown’s 1859 Harpers Ferry Raid

The following lesson is taken from http://investigatinghistory.ashp.cuny.edu/m5.html
Bill Friedheim Borough of Manhattan Community College, CUNY

Was “the time for compromise gone?” Was this the blow that “began the war that ended slavery?”

**Overview**

John Brown was a driven man, an abolitionist who was relentless in his opposition to slavery. Ultimately, he justified violence as a means to realize what he considered the most noble of goals – the destruction of slavery.

Like his Calvinist father before him, Brown considered slavery a moral blight. But unlike many other white abolitionists, Brown mixed easily with African Americans, prompting Frederick Douglass, the most famous 19th century black abolitionist, to write that:

_Though a white gentleman, he is in sympathy a black man and as deeply interested in our cause as though his own soul had been pierced by the iron of slavery._

In 1849, John Brown settled his family in the black community of North Elba in the New York Adirondacks.

Six years later, Brown moved to the new territory of Kansas, which soon became a major pre-Civil War battleground. A year earlier, the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 undid the Missouri Compromise, which in 1820 had prohibited slavery north of the latitude of 36/30 (the southern border of Missouri). Even though the two territories lay north of the Missouri Compromise line, the Kansas-Nebraska Act allowed both jurisdictions to vote on whether they would enter the union as slave or free states. Upon passage of the act, organized groups of slaveholders and abolitionists, including the Browns, poured into the new Kansas territory. An undeclared guerilla war erupted which became known as “Bloody Kansas.” Both sides perpetrated acts of intimidation, murder and arson, which soon escalated out of control.

On May 24, 1856, Brown led a party of militant abolitionists who slaughtered five pro-slavery settlers in Potawatomie Creek. Brown claimed that he did not participate in the actual killings, but unapologetically approved them as just justified payback for a pro-slavery assault on Lawrence, Kansas. For this act and for his defense of the “free soil” town of Osawatomie, Kansas, Brown became nationally renowned to abolitionists and infamous to slaveholders. Soon after, a New York stage play, “Osawatomie Brown” heralded his feats.

Subsequently, Brown, with funding from prominent abolitionists, raised a small paramilitary force. In January 1858, raiders under Brown’s leadership liberated twelve slaves in Missouri, delivering them to freedom in Canada.

On the night of October 16, 1859, Brown, now 59 years old, staged his final and most daring raid, an assault on the federal armory in Harpers Ferry, Virginia (now West Virginia), which housed an arsenal of more than 100,000 rifles and muskets. Calling his raiding force, the “Provisional Army,” Brown’s group of 22 men included three of Brown’s sons, a fugitive slave and four free blacks. Brown’s goal was to seize the arsenal, distribute the guns and muskets, mobilize anti-slavery forces, incite slave insurrections and organize raids against slaveholders across the South.

Brown and his men initially took control of the armory, but within 36 hours, U.S. Marines under the leadership of future Confederate generals, Robert E. Lee and J.E.B. Stuart, stormed the facility, killed several of Brown’s band and captured Brown and the remaining raiders.

Brown was taken to nearby Charles Town, Virginia (now West Virginia) where he was charged on three counts: trea-
son, murder and conspiracy to lead a slave rebellion. After a seven-day trial and forty-five minutes of deliberation, a jury found him guilty on all counts. The court sentenced Brown to death.

On December 2, 1859, Brown wrote:

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

Later, that day, Brown was hung. By March 1860, six of his compatriots, having been tried and found guilty, followed Brown to the gallows.

In life and even death, John Brown’s image loomed large, particularly in the nineteen months between the October 1859 Harpers Ferry raid and the outbreak of Civil War at Fort Sumter in April 1861. The debate about the immediate and long-term meaning of the Harpers Ferry raid and Brown’s legacy was loud, messy and intemperate. On the day of Brown’s execution, church bells tolled in several northern cities and many abolitionists hailed Brown as a martyr (although some questioned his violent means). In the North, partisans (and newspaper editorialists) of the Democratic and Republican* parties railed at one another, each accusing the other of promoting a culture of violence. Across the South, newspaper editorials vilified Brown, his raiders and his supporters, but disagreed about the consequences of Harpers Ferry raid for the future of the South and slavery. The language used to characterize Brown in newspapers – North and South, Democrat and Republican, abolitionist and pro-slavery – was rarely neutral or even-tempered. Depending upon the viewpoint, editorials used the partisan vocabulary of “saint,” “crusader,” “martyr,” “madman,” “devil,” “lunatic,” and “murderer.”

Decades later, Brown continued to evoke deep passion. Almost 22 years after the event, Frederick Douglass memorialized John Brown’s raid at Harpers Ferry, proclaiming:

If John Brown did not end the war that ended slavery, he did at least begin the war that ended slavery…. Until this blow was struck, the prospect for freedom was dim, shadowy and uncertain. The irrepressible conflict was one of words, votes and compromises.

When John Brown stretched forth his arm the sky was cleared. The time for compromises was gone – the armed hosts of freedom stood face to face over the chasm of a broken Union – and the clash of arms was at hand. The South staked all upon getting possession of the Federal Government, and failing to do that, drew the sword of rebellion and thus made her own, and not Brown’s, the lost cause of the century.

Is Douglass right about the legacy of Brown’s raid? Was “the time for compromise gone?” Was this the blow that “began the war that ended slavery?”

In the activity that follows, you will consider these and other questions. Taking a leap in space and time, you will debate the moral and political implications of Brown’s raid in the voice of historical characters, circa 1859-1860.

For additional overviews and perspectives:

- **John Brown, 1800-1859** (Territorial Kansas Online at the University of Kansas)
- **John Brown’s Holy War** (The American Experience/PBS)
- **John Brown’s Raid** (Shotgun’s Home of the American Civil War, a site constructed by an amateur Civil War and Confederate history buff)

*Republican politicians, including Abraham Lincoln, made a point of publicly distancing themselves from Brown’s Harper’s Ferry Raid and tactics. In his famous Cooper Union speech on February 27, 1860, Lincoln asserted:

You charge that we stir up insurrections among your slaves. We deny it: and what is your proof? Harper’s Ferry! John Brown!! John Brown was no Republican; and you have failed to implicate a single Republican in his Harper’s Ferry enterprise.

But no matter how much Republicans protested any link with Brown, it did not stop Democratic Party invective and claims that the Republican Party was responsible for Harper’s Ferry.*