

This measure soon made way for the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, when Congress decreed that the new territories of Kansas and Nebraska could also determine the legality of slavery on their own, through a popular vote. Moderate Northern congressmen like Stephen A. Douglas, the Democratic senator from Illinois, forged these concessions in the Kansas-Nebraska Act because they wanted to build a transcontinental railroad through Kansas and Nebraska. Besides, what could possibly be wrong with referring the issue to a popular vote?

As it turns out, plenty. The “slavery debates” in Kansas often featured guns, knives, ropes, pitchforks, and fire. From 1854 to 1858, about 10,000 pro- and anti-slavery partisans battled fiercely to control the fate of “Bleeding Kansas.” It wasn’t long before high-profile officials got involved. David Rice Atchison, a Democratic senator from Missouri, led the pro-slavery invasion in 1855. Meanwhile John Brown—a devout Christian and anti-slavery fanatic—rode from Ohio to Kansas with his seven sons, recruiting radical anti-slavery fighters along the way. In May of 1856, Brown’s militia murdered five unarmed pro-slavery settlers near Pottawatomie Creek in Franklin County, Kansas. Over four years Bleeding Kansas claimed about 200 lives.

We are determined to repel this Northern invasion, and make Kansas a Slave State; though our rivers should be covered with the blood of their victims, and the carcasses of the Abolitionists should be so numerous in the territory as to breed disease and sickness, we will not be deterred from our purpose.

—Benjamin F. Stringfellow,  
in the newspaper *Squatter Sovereign*, 1855

Bleeding Kansas eventually entered the Union as a free state—but this was only the beginning. On October 16, 1859, John Brown charged back into the national limelight in spectacularly crazy fashion with an implausible plan to start a slave rebellion in Virginia. With 22 followers, Brown staged a daring (and suicidal) raid on the federal armory at Harper’s Ferry, now located in West Virginia, to obtain weapons for a rebel slave army that he really, really hoped would materialize to fight with him. It didn’t. Unfortunately for Brown, the only crowds that surfaced were local militias, along with some spectators. The militias sur-

rounded the arsenal and cut off all escape routes, and after a two-day siege, Marines led by U.S. Army Colonel Robert E. Lee assaulted the arsenal and killed 10 of Brown's followers. Five rebels escaped, but Brown was captured alive along with six of his followers. Over the next few months, all seven were convicted of treason and hanged.

## ABRAHAM LINCOLN IN 90 SECONDS

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Born in a log cabin in central Kentucky on February 12, 1809, Abraham Lincoln was a son of the early American frontier. In 1816 the family moved to neighboring Indiana, in part because Lincoln's father, Thomas, disapproved of slavery. In typical frontier fashion, his family relocated again to Illinois in 1830, where Lincoln got a job carrying goods on raft-like "flatboats" on local tributaries of the Mississippi River. Lincoln had less than two years of formal schooling but managed to teach himself about a wide range of subjects, and by 1837 he was practicing law in Springfield, Illinois.

Although he didn't hunt or fish, Lincoln was an accomplished outdoorsman, whose height and strength made him a formidable wrestler. This came in handy in his early political career: during his first, unsuccessful candidacy for the Illinois General Assembly in 1832, one of Lincoln's supporters was being harassed by a heckler at a rally—so Lincoln picked up the man by his collar and the back of his pants and literally threw him out of the meeting.

Lincoln didn't win that election, but he did get elected to the Assembly in 1834. In 1837 he stated his opposition to slavery for the first time, publicly voicing a long-held private belief. His first stint in national politics, as a congressman from Illinois, wasn't all that promising: an old-school Whig, he alienated his constituents by arguing that the Mexican War of 1848 was unconstitutional, and he didn't run for reelection.

Meanwhile his first love, Ann Rutledge, died of typhoid fever in 1835; following a rocky courtship and at least one canceled wedding, in 1841 Lincoln married Mary Todd, the daughter of a wealthy Kentucky slave owner. After giving up his seat in Congress, Lincoln focused on his legal practice (even arguing a case before the U.S. Supreme Court) and raising a family. But in 1854 he finally came out of political retirement to oppose the Kansas-Nebraska Act, which would extend slavery to new states.

That year he helped orchestrate an alliance with remnants of the Whig Party, dissenting Democrats, and various "Free Soil" groups to form the Republican Party. In 1858 Lincoln lost his bid for the Senate seat held by Illinois Democrat Stephen