

# The History and the Literature: *The Good Lord Bird*

**Diane and Stan Henderson**  
**OLLI at the University of Cincinnati**  
**May 24, 2024**

**For a PDF of these slides, please email**  
**[dianehenderson@gmail.com](mailto:dianehenderson@gmail.com)**

## The History

## Overview

- Mexican Session and Compromise of 1850
- “Messses”: Living in Washington
- Kansas-Nebraska and Popular Sovereignty
- Breakdown of Discourse and Bloody Kansas
- Dred Scott: Worst. Decision. Ever.
- Lincoln-Douglas Debates
- John Brown and Harper’s Ferry
- Lincoln’s Coopers Union Speech
- “In your hands, my dissatisfied fellow countrymen....”



**James K. Polk**, 11<sup>th</sup> President  
Official White House Portrait  
by George P. A. Healy

America’s workaholic president, he literally worked himself to death, lasting only three months after he left office.

His passion was **Manifest Destiny**, to see the United States span the North American continent. To accomplish that, he **fabricated grounds for the Mexican-American War** with the intention of taking as much territory as he could. The **Mexican Cession** at the end of the war was **525,000 square miles**, for which the US paid \$15 million. Polk was furious that his peace commissioner didn’t get more of Mexico.

He had an ulterior motive for so much land: the **extension of slavery into new territory** to protect southern power in the federal government.

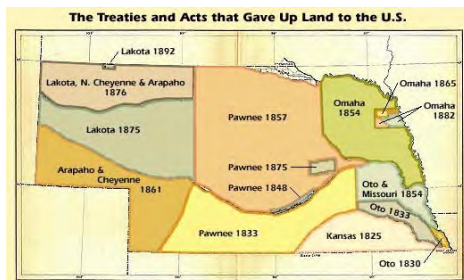
The Mexican War created a **bicoastal nation with a hole in its middle**, and that green space in the middle (below) was **essentially Indian Country**. The Indian Removal Act of the 1830s had pushed the remaining indigenous peoples out of the already settled eastern areas and promised them control of the unorganized territory. **Crossing this “American Desert” was risky**. Going across Central American or by water around Cape Horn even more so. Then...



**GOLD DISCOVERED!**

America **needed the Indians gone** and a **transcontinental railroad!** And, while we’re at it, how about **some more slave states?**

## The Inconvenient Indigenous



The map shows **when tribes ceded land** to the US. Note the biggest cessions are **in the 1850s**. The 1861 cession by the Arapaho and Cheyenne was to **accommodate the Transcontinental Railroad**.

## Extent of United States Railroads and Junctions, 1855



## Dreaming of a Transcontinental RR

**Stephen Douglas**, Congressman from Illinois, had introduced transcontinental railroad legislation in 1844, favoring **Chicago** as the starting point. He also **owned interest** in a company that could build a **northern route** starting in Duluth. Southerners favored a southern route, which the Gadsden Purchase facilitated



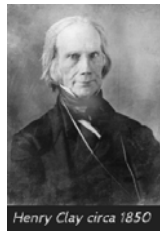
**Zachary Taylor**, 12<sup>th</sup> President  
Official White House Portrait  
by Joseph H. Bush

War hero—and slave holder—Taylor had the responsibility of **sorting out the Mexican Cession challenge**. He wanted to bring in California and Utah as states with their population deciding on slavery and organize territories for the remaining areas, again with slavery decided locally, not in Congress. The **South rebelled** at the possibility of **two new free states**; the **North was outraged** at the prospect of more slave states. Taylor was impatient with both sides, and other actors began to search for a compromise. He **died in the midst of debate**.

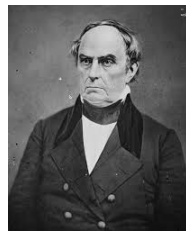
## The Great Triumvirate



**John C. Calhoun, SC**  
Slavery as a "positive good"



**Henry Clay, KY**  
The Great Compromiser



**Daniel Webster, MA**  
Liberty and Union


## The Final Compromise

- The **Compromise of 1850**, initiated by Henry Clay, was a package of bills to solve **issues regarding slavery arising in the Mexican Cession**
- The bills settled Texas border issues, organized New Mexico and Utah territories with their voters deciding the slavery question, and admitted California as a free state; the **legislation was silent on the fact that Utah Territory would have been free under the Missouri Compromise**
- The **Fugitive Slave law** was significantly strengthened and became a major issue with abolitionists




**Millard Fillmore**, 13<sup>th</sup> President  
Official White House Portrait  
By George P. A. Healy


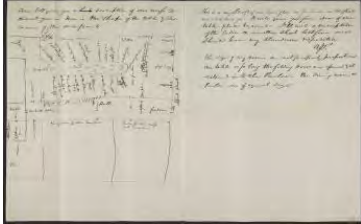
**Fillmore** supported the Compromise of 1850, and in doing so, returned the presidency to the **tradition of conciliation of the South**—including a particularly noxious (to the North) Fugitive Slave Law. Fillmore said later, "I am and ever have been opposed to slavery and nothing but a conviction of Constitutional obligation could have induced me to give my sanction to a law for the reduction of fugitive slaves." The law calmed the South but inflamed the North.




Understanding ante-bellum policy requires understanding how people lived in Washington. Few families accompanied members of Congress, so senators and representatives lived in boarding houses, one of the earliest business ventures in the capital. Carroll Row (r), one of the first, housed multiple "messes", as they were called. The Library of Congress replaced the Row.




Abraham Lincoln (right) stayed at Mrs. Sprigg's when he served in Congress. Mary and their two sons came with him initially, but Mary didn't get along well with some boarders and Lincoln sent her home. He wrote after she had left that "all with whom you were on decided good terms—send their love to you—The others say nothing."

Rep. Parker Amasa (left) in letter home showed seating arrangements at table in his boarding house, mentioned future presidents Fillmore and Buchanan as messmates.



Map of Capitol Hill area where most Congressmen lived in the 1800s




Row houses in Capitol Hill today characteristic of those in the 19th Century

The men who "messed" together had similar interests that were amplified by proximity. From these combinations, we see five types of friendship illustrated in the Congressional messes of the mid-19th century:

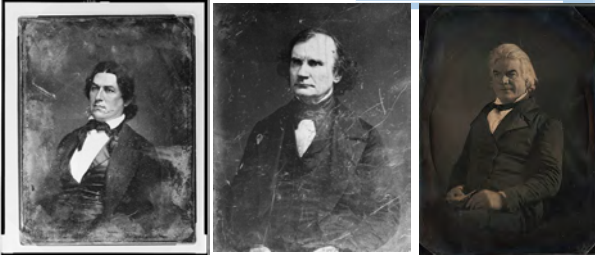
- Institutional
- Alliance
- Mentor/protégé
- Social
- Pure

The first two are political; the last two are personal; mentor/protégé combines the two.

One Congressional Mess would shape a bill that would become the final step towards Civil War and make a man named John Brown's role in history possible.



Waterston House built in 1802



**Robert M. T. Hunter, VA** Chair of Finance    **James Mason, VA** Chair of Foreign Affairs    **Andrew Pickens Butler SC** Chair of Judiciary

These three Southern patricians, proteges of John C. Calhoun, formed a mess based on institutional, alliance, and mentor-protégé types of friendship. Their relaxation at Mason's nearby Winchester, VA, home likely enhanced the social friendship as well. They represented the elite of the South (Mason was actually royalty, the grandson of the Founding Father George Mason). They were to become a part of the iconic "Mess" of the ante-bellum period, the **F Street Mess**.  
Malavasic

Hunter, Mason, and Pickens were **joined in their mess** by Atchison. He came from a **significantly different background**—not the old money of the patrician South. He was a Westerner from modest means. However, he had made his way into the **highest circles of power** as President Pro-tempore of the Senate. And with the untimely death of Vice President William Rufus DeVane King in 1853, he became **second in line to the Presidency** of the United States.

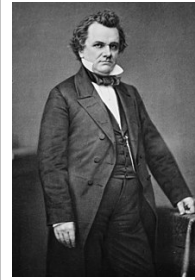
When Atchison moved into 361 F Street, he already had an affinity with his mates in terms of the **Senate and party (institutional and alliance)**, connections amplified by the power positions the Mess cumulatively held. When he found himself in a **bitter battle for reelection**, he needed to do what was right for him. The **other three came to his aid**.

That meant the **repeal of the Missouri Compromise** and the **manipulation of the President** of the United States and another king of the Senate.

Malavasic



**David Rice Atchison, MO**  
Senate President Pro-Tem



**Stephen A. Douglas, IL**  
Chair, Territories

The last unorganized piece of the Louisiana Purchase was the hole in the American Donut: Nebraska. As settlers streamed onto Indian land and the clamor for a transcontinental railroad grew, the **House of Representatives moved to organize**. However, the **Missouri Compromise forbids slavery in this last tract of the Purchase**.

The bill moved to the **Senate Committee on Territories**, chaired by Illinois Senator transcontinental rail advocate Stephen A. Douglas. The **F Street Mess's Atchison** says he would rather have Nebraska "sink in hell" than see it in the hands of "Free Soilers."

Douglas advocated for the **popular sovereignty** approach of the Utah and New Mexico territories in the Compromise of 1850, which allowed the territories to make their own choice on slavery, but **neither "affirming nor repealing" the Missouri Compromise**.

Even though Douglas saw his bill as establishing "certain great principles" (i.e., popular sovereignty) to **move** the prickly issue of slavery out of Congress and put in **into the hands of the people**, he was losing control. He appreciated the power of the F Street Mess as well **recognized that his leadership role in the Senate and his presidential ambitions were on the line** (as this cartoon attests). Douglas was "a **ferocious fighter**, the fiercest, most ruthless, and most unscrupulous that Congress had perhaps ever known," but he was **no match for the** parliamentary maneuvering and combined power of the **F Street Mess**.



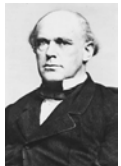
**Caption: Little Stephen A. trying to climb into a very high chair**

Douglas now wrote an **explicit repeal of the Compromise** into the bill. President **Pierce agreed** but wanted the **repeal to come from the Supreme Court**, not Congress. The **F Street Mess refused**.

This set up the need for a **Sunday meeting with Pierce**, fanatically resistant to business on the Sabbath (driven by his wife). The senators enlisted Jefferson Davis to get the President to agree to meet. With "cold formality" **Pierce** received Douglas and the F Street Mess and **agreed to the repeal coming from Congress**. At Douglas's insistence he provided a **written assertion that the Compromise of 1850 had negated the Missouri Compromise**.



**Franklin Pierce**  
14<sup>th</sup> President  
Official White House Portrait  
by George P. A. Healy



**Salmon P. Chase, PA**



**Sam Houston, TX**



**Thomas Hart Benton, MO**

The bill is **re-introduced to create two territories, Kansas and Nebraska**. Opponents led by Chase say it will be a "**region of despotism, inhabited by masters and slaves**." Houston argued, "Maintain the Missouri Compromise!...**Stir not up agitation!**" And **Benton**, the nemesis of F Street Mess's Atchison rails, "We are told [the bill] is to **keep the question of slavery out of Congress!** Great God! It was out of Congress... unless Congress dragged it in by breaking down the sacred laws which settled it! [i.e., the Missouri Compromise]!"

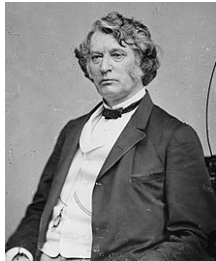
**Pierce signals patronage depends on how Democrats vote; the bill passes.**

## Aftermath



This 1854 cartoon expresses the **outrage the Kansas-Nebraska Act ignited in the North, especially among the abolitionist movement**. Here, Democrats James Buchanan and Lewis Cass hold the Free Soiler down by his hair, while Franklin Pierce tugs at his beard, and Stephen Douglas shoves a Black man representing slavery down his throat.

### "A Breakdown of Reasoned Discourse"



**Sen. Charles Sumner**  
Republican, Massachusetts

In 1856, **Sumner, a radical abolitionist**, delivered a two-day fire-and-brimstone Senate speech titled "The Crime Against Kansas." He attacked pro-slavery advocates in Kansas as "hirelings, picked from the drunken spew and vomit of an uneasy civilization." [meaning the South]

He also **attacked** South Carolina Senator **Andrew Pickens Butler**, calling him an imbecile that "**has chosen a mistress. I mean the harlot, slavery.**" Senator Stephen Douglas leaned over to a colleague and said, "**That damn fool will get himself killed by some other damn fool.**"

That "**other damn fool**" turned out to be South Carolina Congressman **Preston Brooks**, a Butler cousin, who found Sumner at his desk on the Senate floor.

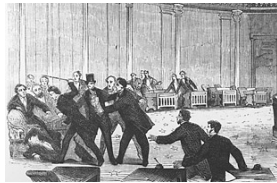
"You've libeled my state and slandered my white-haired old relative... and I've come to punish you for it." He then **proceeded to beat Sumner senseless**, shattering a gold-tipped cane before other senators could pull him off.

**Sumner suffered traumatic brain injury** that kept him from his Senate duties for two years, but the Massachusetts legislature left him in office.

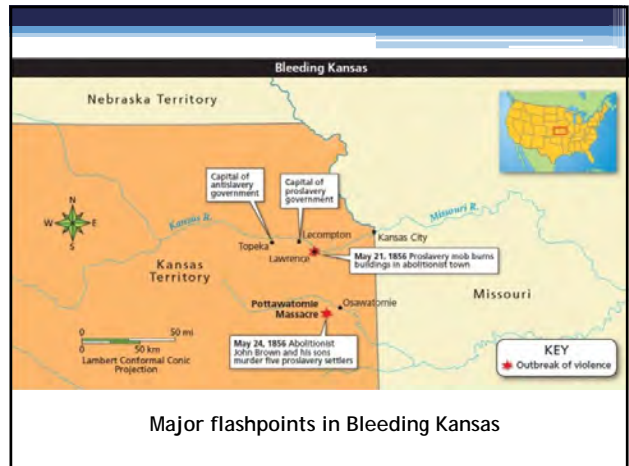
**Brooks** was fined \$300 but received no jail time. A vote to expel him from the house failed; he **resigned and was promptly re-elected** by his constituents. Replacement canes flooded in from across the South.



**Preston Brooks**  
Democrat, South Carolina



Contemporary illustrations of Brooks's assault. Above, left, Sumner tries to rise from his chair. Above, right, he falls to the floor. Right, other senators pull Brooks off.



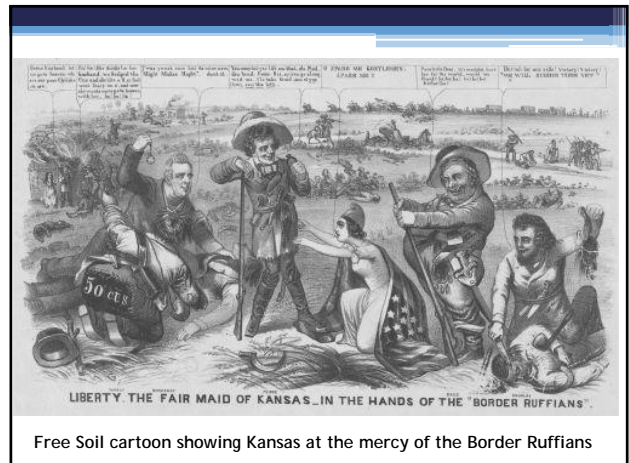
Major flashpoints in Bleeding Kansas



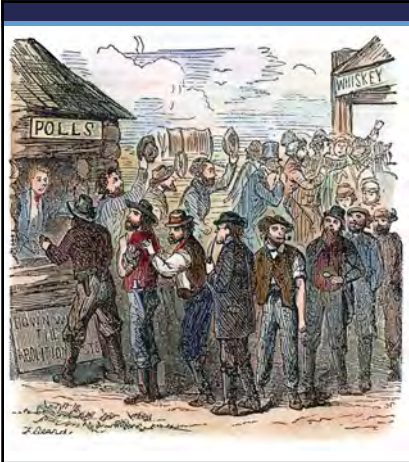
Left, Missourians, nearly all pro-slavery, flooded across the border into Kansas Territory to ensure it became a slave state. They were called **Border Ruffians** and **initially had a numerical advantage** because of their proximity to the new territory.



Right, **Free Soilers** were settlers from the East, **more likely to be abolitionist** and determined to make Kansas a free state.



Free Soil cartoon showing Kansas at the mercy of the Border Ruffians




**Early voting in Kansas Territory** was pro-slavery because **Missourians came across the border to vote but were not Kansas residents**. Free Soil residents boycotted the voting, but the **illegal votes had elected pro-slavery legislators** that would draw up a slavery friendly constitution.




Left, **first territorial capitol in Ft. Riley**. Proslavery legislators met there for **only five days**, primarily to **eject the 8 (of 39 total) Free Soil legislators**, before moving to Lecompton.




Right, **Constitution Hall in Lecompton**, where Kansas's first (pro-slavery) constitution was drafted. **Free Soilers refused to participate and voted it down**. President Buchanan still accepted it but called for another vote. **It failed again**. In 1858, Free Soilers gained control and moved the capital to Lawrence.



**First Hotel in Lawrence**




**1856 sack of Lawrence by pro-slavery forces.**




Three days after the sack of Lawrence, a disgusted John Brown with four of his sons kidnapped and hacked to death **five pro-slavery men** at Pottawatomie. It was the **first time pro-slavery advocates used violence** and signaled a broadening of "Bleeding Kansas."

**John Brown lived here**




John Brown followed his five sons to Kansas. He built this cabin for his brother-in-law.




**"Bloody Kansas" would continue**, even after statehood in 1861. In 1863, **Quantrill's raiders burned Lawrence again and massacred 182 men and boys in front of their wives and mothers.**

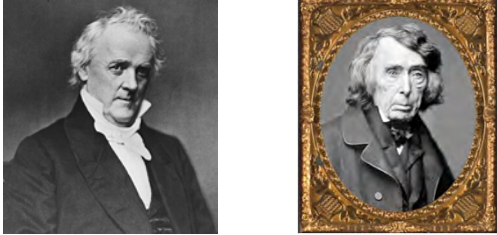
**Dred Scott v. Sandford: The Supreme Court's Shame**



**Dred Scott**

Scott was an enslaved person in Missouri, whose **white owner took into territory where slavery was illegal**. When his owner took him back to Missouri, **Scott sued, claiming he had been freed by being in a non-slave state.**

The Supreme Court in 1857 ruled against Scott. Chief Justice **Roger Taney**, writing for the majority, said that the **Framers never intended for Blacks to be included under the word 'citizens'** in the Constitution or to have any citizenship rights. Further, he ruled, the **Missouri Compromise had been unconstitutional** because it restricted slave owners **property rights (to hold slaves).**



**James Buchanan**  
15<sup>th</sup> President

**Roger B. Taney**  
5<sup>th</sup> Chief Justice

Buchanan met with Taney on the day of his inauguration and endorsed the decision to be issued two days later. In his inaugural Buchanan said slavery was "happily a matter of but little practical importance" about to be settled "speedily and finally" by the Court, which would essentially legalize slavery nationally. It was an egregious breach of the separation of powers.



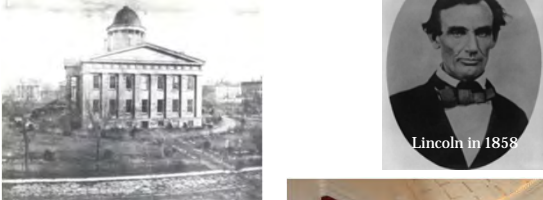
**Scott, Taney Family**

**Removal of Taney Statue**


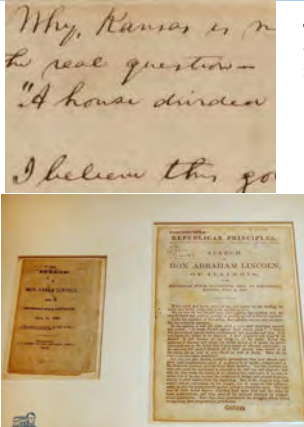
The *Dred Scott* decision is considered the **worst in Supreme Court history**, on the basis of overt racism, judicial activism, poor legal reasoning, and the role it played in the start of the Civil War. It aimed to create a constitutional right to own slaves anywhere in the country while permanently disenfranchising all people of African descent. Charles Evans Hughes, the 11<sup>th</sup> Chief Justice, called it the Court's "greatest self-inflicted wound."

In 2017, descendants of the Scott and Taney came together for a **reconciliation of apology and forgiveness**. Also in 2017, the **Taney statue** on the State House grounds in Annapolis, MD, **was removed**.

### A House Divided



In 1858, Abraham Lincoln accepts the Illinois Republican nomination for the US Senate with his "House Divided" speech in the State Capitol (above and right).

The speech was covered nationally in the *NY Tribune* on page 3 and was made into a campaign pamphlet

**REPUBLICAN PRINCIPLES.**  
SPEECH OF HON. ABRAHAM LINCOLN,  
OF ILLINOIS.  
At the Republican State Convention, June 16, 1858.

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 in the late the 47th year, since a policy was initiated, with the avowed object and avowed promise of getting 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 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. Either the opponents of slavery will arrest the further spread of it, and place it where the public mind shall rest in the belief that it is in course of ultimate extinction; or its advocates will push it forward till it shall become alike lawful in all the States, old as well as new—North as well as South. Have we no tendency to the latter condition?

Let every man enjoy liberty to the utter condition!

Let every one who thinks, carefully consider, so that your almost complete legal compulsion—pieces of machinery as it is, speak—compensation, of the National

### The Lincoln-Douglas Debates

In 1858, state legislatures chose US senators, so Lincoln and the incumbent, Stephen A. Douglas, are **really campaigning for who will win the legislature**. Lincoln had been shadowing Douglas statewide, but now formally challenges him to a **series of debates in seven of Illinois's nine congressional districts**. Douglas agrees and chooses the format.



Lincoln and Douglas will alternate in each debate with a one-hour opening with a 1-and-a-half-hour response and a 30-minute rebuttal.

**Ottawa: Shaky Start for Lincoln**


Douglas goes first in Ottawa and catches Lincoln off-guard with aggressive, race-baiting attack. A shaky Lincoln says he doesn't believe in racial equality.



**Freeport: the "Freeport Question"**


In Freeport, Lincoln hits back with the "Freeport Question" that forces Douglas to assert that new states can prohibit slavery, a statement that will fracture the Democratic Party convention in 1860.






**Jonesboro: Douglas ties Lincoln to Abolitionism**

In Jonesboro, Douglas charges Lincoln has “the black flag of abolitionism.” Lincoln asserts the Founders expected slavery’s “ultimate extinction.”




**Charleston: Lincoln denies possibility of racial equality**


In Charleston, Douglas claims Lincoln is friend of Frederick Douglass (they had never met). Lincoln says, “I am not, nor ever have been, in favor of bringing about in any way the social and political equality of the white and Black races.”




**Robert Marshall Root painting of Charleston Debate**



In Galesburg, Lincoln starts to hit his stride. In response to Douglas's charge that he is inconsistent, Lincoln attacks Douglas for being illogical in granting new states the right to legalize slavery: **Logic does not support a right to commit a wrong.**




Old Main at Knox College in Galesburg is the **only physical Lincoln-Douglas debate site still in existence**. It had just been completed in 1856. The tablets commemorate the event outside the main doors.



**Quincy: Black Republican**


In Quincy, Douglas calls Lincoln a “Black Republican.” Lincoln mocks the claim “that I want a Negro wife.”



**Alton: Conspiracy**

In Alton, Douglas asserts white superiority over Blacks and supports state sovereignty in making slavery legal. Lincoln suggests the Dred Scott decision is part of a conspiracy to make slavery legal nationally. The Alton debate was the only one that Mary Lincoln attended (along with their teenage son Robert).


Even though the Democrats won the November election and sent Douglas back to the Senate, **in public opinion, Lincoln had won the debates**. The national exposure positioned him to make a run for the presidential nomination in 1860.



Lincoln would defeat Douglas (and two others) in the 1860 presidential election, but Douglas would support Lincoln as the Civil War started, even, famously, holding his hat while Lincoln gave his inaugural address. He said there could be “no neutrals, only patriots and traitors.” Douglas died in 1861, telling his sons “to obey the laws and support the Constitution of the United States.”


In 2019, the statue of the “Little Giant” on the Capitol grounds in Springfield (above) was removed because of Douglas's racist views and his 20% ownership in his family's 200-slave plantation in Mississippi. Lincoln's remains.

### The Faces of John Brown




**A. Washington, 1847**  
African-American

First likeness, very unusual with hand raised; flag is standard of “Subterranean Pass Way”, the militant alternative to the Underground Railroad that Brown sought to establish.



**Ole P. H. Balling, 1872**

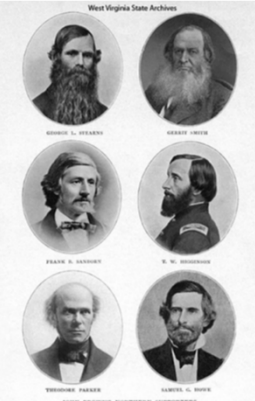
“Let America know and ponder on this: there is something more frightening than Cain killing Abel, and that is Washington killing Spartacus.” Victor Hugo




Published 10 days after execution

### The Secret Six


These six Boston area abolitionists secretly funded Brown. They argued against his plans, but in the end, “he left us only the alternatives of betrayal, desertion, or support. We chose the last.” They helped Brown as individuals, not as co-conspirators.



Investigations after the raid began to implicate these men. Three fled to Canada; one had himself committed to an asylum. Federal marshals tried to arrest Sanborn, but 150 townspeople rushed to his defense, leading friend Louisa May Alcott to write, “Sanborn was nearly kidnapped. Great ferment in town.”




In the summer of 1859, Brown was renting this house in Chambersburg, PA, **planning his raid on Harper's Ferry**. He convinced Frederick Douglass to meet him there. Over the course of two days, **Douglass tried to dissuade him**, while Brown tried to entice Douglass to join him. **"When I strike the bees will...swarm, and I shall want you to help them."**




After the Harper's Ferry raid, **Douglass was implicated** by papers found in Brown's possession. He **fled via Underground Railroad** routes to Canada and to England for a period of exile.

**Brown-Douglass Meeting**  
by Jacob Lawrence




**Kennedy Farm: Staging for Raid**

Brown's plans assumed **enslaved people would rise up** when his men seized the Armory. But **Brown had fanatical fervor with little strategic planning** to support it. As many had warned him, **no slaves rushed to join** the insurrection.






**Harper's Ferry**




**The Engine House**


Scenes inside the Engine House, exchanging fire with the Marines, including Brown standing over his two dead sons, Watson and Oliver (lower right).


Marines, under the command of Col. Robert E. Lee, above right, prepare to storm the Engine House.



Inside the Engine House, **only eight of the original raiders remain**. This view, a colored version of a *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* drawing, is just before the Marines break in. Hostages are at the left.




**A much later, stylized illustration of the storming of the Engine House. Lt. Israel Green beats the kneeling Brown with his sword.**



THE PRISON, GRAND-JURORS' COURT HOUSE, CHARLESTOWN, WEST VIRGINIA  
(The Prison is the background.)

In 1859, Harper's Ferry was in Virginia; the western portion would break away during the Civil War to become West Virginia. Brown was taken to Charlestown, now Charleston, West Virginia, for trial and execution.




Brown was severely injured during the raid (r).

For most of his trial, he was carried back and forth from prison to the courthouse on a cot. Above left, with armed escort, he is carried from the prison to court.

Above: Brown on the courtroom floor.

Right, he makes a statement before sentencing: "men consented to his death and then went home and taught their children to honor his memory."



"to have interfered as I have done—in behalf of His despised poor, was not wrong but right...had I so interfered in behalf of the rich, the powerful, the intelligent, the so-called great,...and suffered and sacrificed what I have in this interference, it would have been all right; and every man in this court would have deemed it an act worthy of reward rather than punishment."




**The Hanging of John Brown**

**Last Moments of John Brown**  
by Thomas Hovenden

**John Brown's Grave**

Reaction to the raid and Brown's death varied widely. **Some churches** in the North **tolled bells** at his execution. To many **in the South, he was a devil.** During the Civil War, **Union soldiers would march to "John Brown's Body."** He is "a-moulderin' in his grave," but his "soul is marching on." (Later to be "The Battle Hymn of the Republic")



*"He could not have been tried by a jury of his peers, because his peers did not exist."*  
Henry David Thoreau

*"John Brown began the war that ended American slavery and made this a free Republic. His zeal in the cause of freedom was infinitely superior to mine...I could live for the slave; John Brown could die for him."*  
Frederick Douglas

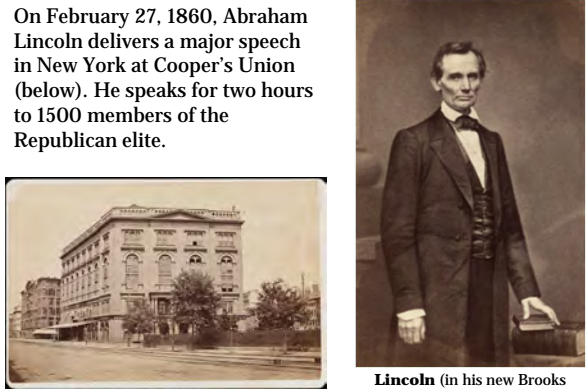
*"John Brown's death was not an end; it was a beginning. It fired sparks that even today smolder on the American scene."*  
Newsweek, October 19, 1959

### And 165 Years Later...

*"Terrorism is violence that avoids combat, is used against the defenseless (often civilians), and is intended to shock and horrify, with the aim of bringing about social change. . . . Brown's Pottawatomie murders may qualify as terrorism on these counts. It might be argued that excessive force . . . challenged real social injustice: . . . the twin horrors of chattel slavery and Southern violence."* David S. Reynolds

*"Was John Brown a midnight terrorist or a revolutionary hero? [He]'s a very troubling legacy. Nobody should prettify him and nobody should utterly dismiss him. . . . I think John Brown is our template in American history. . . . John Brown forces us to face the almost natural ambivalences about his acts. He is disturbing and inspiring. . . . He in some ways worked for the highest ideals — human freedom and the idea of equality — but he also used the most ruthless deeds. . . ."* David W. Blight

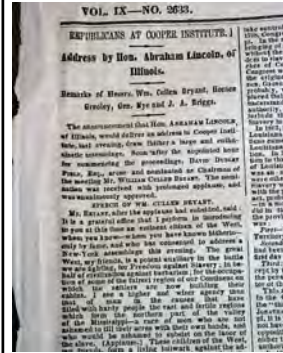
On February 27, 1860, Abraham Lincoln delivers a major speech in New York at Cooper's Union (below). He speaks for two hours to 1500 members of the Republican elite.



**Lincoln** (in his new Brooks Bros. suit for the speech)



"When Lincoln rose to speak, I was greatly disappointed. He was tall, tall—oh, how tall! And so angular and awkward that I had, for an instant, a feeling of pity for so ungainly a man." However, as Lincoln continued to speak, "his face lighted up as with an inward fire; the whole man was transfigured. I forgot his clothes, his personal appearance, and his individual peculiarities. Presently, forgetting myself, I was on my feet like the rest yelling ... cheering this wonderful man."



The speech is featured on the front page of the *New York Times*

"No man ever before made such an impression on his first appeal to a New York audience." *New York Tribune*

"He skewered Stephen Douglas, deftly made the case that the *Dred Scott* decision was constitutionally and historically ungrounded, and forcefully articulated the Republican party's moral opposition to slavery." Holzer

"He had arrived at Cooper Union a politician with more defeats than victories, but he departed politically reborn." Holzer

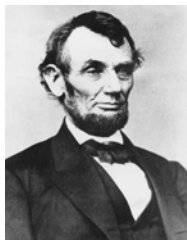
### Increasingly Desperate Compromise

- For nearly 85 years America had been sustained by compromise. It began with the Constitution itself, including the Fugitive Slave Clause, houses of Congress with equal and proportional representation, the 3/5 clause.
- Then came a deal to put the capitol on the Potomac in exchange for support of the government's assumption of state debt, the Missouri Compromise, the Compromise of 1833, the Compromise of 1850.

### Compromise to Conciliation to War

- The compromises, including those around slavery, that made the Constitution possible in 1787 gave way to a policy of conciliation and accommodation after 1820 that moved slavery ever closer to national institutionalization
- That, in turn, would energize the anti-slavery movement into a new political party that captured the presidency in 1860. The stain of slavery, enshrined in compromise, would be washed away in the blood of civil war

**Abraham Lincoln**, 16<sup>th</sup> President. His election marked the end of the reign of southern domination and northern conciliation practiced by Jackson's successors for 25 years.



During that time, the anti-slavery movement had formed a new party and determined that "the tug" must come now.

"In your hands, my dissatisfied fellow-countrymen, and not in mine, is the momentous issue of civil war."

Lincoln's First Inaugural Address

### Sources

- <https://www.americanheritage.com/eyewitness-describes-hanging-john-brown>
- D. W. Blight. *Frederick Douglass: Prophet of Freedom*. 2018. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- <https://boundarystones.weta.org/2021/11/25/dinner-and-debates-boardinghouses-district>
- [https://www.cjr.org/the\\_kicker/and\\_thats\\_the\\_way\\_it\\_was\\_febru\\_12.php](https://www.cjr.org/the_kicker/and_thats_the_way_it_was_febru_12.php)
- E. De Togni. <https://www.battlefields.org/learn/articles/abolitionists-john-brown>

## Sources

- Harold Holzer. Lincoln at Cooper Union: The Speech that Made Abraham Lincoln President. 2004. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- D. O. Linder. <https://www.famous-trials.com/johnbrown/620-home>
- A. E. Malavasic. The F Street Mess: How Southern Senators Rewrote the Kansas-Nebraska Act. 2017. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.
- Earman, Cynthia Diane. "Boardinghouses, Parties and the Creation of a Political Society: Washington City, 1800-1830" (1992). LSU Historical Dissertations and Theses. 8222. [https://repository.lsu.edu/gradschool\\_disstheses/8222](https://repository.lsu.edu/gradschool_disstheses/8222)
- Dennis Frye. <https://www.battlefields.org/learn/articles/john-browns-smoldering-spark>

## The History and the Literature Novels

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. <i>City of Thieves</i> , David Benioff                          | 13. <i>The Curse of Pietro Houdini</i> , Derek B Miller   |
| 2. <i>All the Light We Cannot See</i> , Anthony Doerr              | 14. <i>The Things They Carried</i> , Tim O'Brien          |
| 3. <i>The Night Watchman</i> , Louise Erdrich                      | 15. <i>Hamnet</i> , Maggie O'Farrell                      |
| 4. <i>The Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet</i> , Jamie Ford | 16. <i>Lincoln in the Bardo</i> , George Saunders         |
| 5. <i>Varina</i> , Charles Frazier                                 | 17. <i>The Summer Before the War</i> , Helen Simonson     |
| 6. <i>Lessons in Chemistry</i> , Bonnie Jo Garmus                  | 18. <i>A Gentleman in Moscow</i> , Amor Towles            |
| 7. <i>Matrix: A Novel</i> , Lauren Groff                           | 19. <i>The Lincoln Highway</i> , Amor Towles              |
| 8. <i>The Women</i> , Kristen Hannah                               | 20. <i>All the King's Men</i> , Robert Penn Warren        |
| 9. <i>The Invention of Wings</i> , Sue Monk Kidd                   | 21. <i>The Underground Railroad</i> , Colson Whitehead    |
| 10. <i>This Tender Land</i> , William Kent Kreuger                 | 22. <i>How Much of These Hills Is Gold</i> , C. Pam Zhang |
| 11. <i>The Great Believers</i> , Rebecca Makkai                    |   |
| 12. <i>The Good Lord Bird</i> , James McBride                      |   |

Red — novels we won't repeat    Purple — upcoming

## ...and the Literature

### *The Good Lord Bird* James McBride

For a PDF of these slides, please email  
[dianedhenderson@gmail.com](mailto:dianedhenderson@gmail.com)



## Some of the Current Covers



## About McBride

- Born 1957 in Riverside, California, the 8th of 12 children
- Graduated from Oberlin College in 1979
- Received degree from Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism in 1980
- Staff writer for *The Boston Globe*, *People Magazine*, and *The Washington Post*
- Work has appeared in *Essence*, *Rolling Stone*, *New York Times*, and *National Geographic*
- 2015 National Humanities Medal "for humanizing the complexities of discussing race in America"
- Currently Writer-in-Residence at New York University



**Slide 70**

---

**DH2** Diane Henderson, 4/23/2024

## His Books

- *The Color of Water: A Black Man's Tribute to His White Mother*, 1995 \*
- *Miracle at St. Anna's*, 2002 \*\*\*
- *Song Yet Sung*, 2008 \*\*
- *The Good Lord Bird*, 2013 \*\*\*
- *Kill 'Em and Leave: Searching for James Brown and the American Soul* \*
- *Five-Carat Soul*, 2017 \*\*
- *Deacon King Kong*, 2020
- *The Heaven and Earth Grocery Store*, 2023

\* nonfiction

\*\*short stories

\*\*\*made into a movie

## His Film Career

- *Miracle at St. Anna* adapted for a movie directed by Spike Lee, released in 2008
- Co-wrote and co-produced *Red Hook Summer* with Spike Lee in 2012



### 7 Episode Showtime Series

- Won Emmy for Main Title Design
- Ethan Hawke as Brown
- Joshua Calem Johnson as Onion




Current Paperback Cover

## Also a Noted Musician and Composer



## A Member of Rock Bottom Reminders



## Recognition for *The Good Lord Bird*

- National Book Award for Fiction, 2024

### Judge's Citation:

"McBride's novel takes a pivotal, troubled sequence in American history—John Brown's abolitionist campaign—and retells it in a voice as comic and original as any we have heard since Mark Twain. The narrator is one Henry Shackelford, aka Onion, an escaped teenaged slave who accompanies Brown while disguised as a girl. Fondly portraying Brown as a well-meaning but unhinged zealot, *The Good Lord Bird* is daringly irreverent, but also wise, funny, and affecting."

- 2014 Andrew Carnegie Medal for Excellence in Fiction

## How We Got to This Novel

- I read the novel and it stayed with me
- [A] magnificent...brilliant romp of a novel about [John] Brown...McBride sanctifies by humanizing. ...In [McBride's] hands, John Brown is a wild and crazy old man—and more a hero than ever before
  - Baz Dreisinger, *New York Times*
- *The Good Lord Bird* takes the iconic events of Brown's crusade and puts them in a different light, both cruder and more nuanced than the standard story, with unfaltering pace and writing that is finely lyrical even when the characters' voices are vulgar.
  - Jane Steen, [historicalnovelsociety.org](http://historicalnovelsociety.org)

## And It Is Historical Fiction

- Defined as a genre of literature, film, etc., comprising narratives that **take place in the past** and are characterized chiefly by an **imaginative reconstruction of historical events and people**.
- Transports readers to another time and place, **requiring a balance of research and creativity**, and while it often includes real people and events, the genre **offers a fiction writer many opportunities to tell a wholly unique story**.

## Key Elements of Historical Fiction

- Setting
- Plot
- Characters
- Dialogue
- Conflicts
- Written contemporarily about events that happened 50+ years ago

## Ivory-Billed Woodpecker...

### THE Good Lord Bird



## Red-Bellied Woodpecker...







*The Last Moments of John Brown*  
late 19th-century painting  
Thomas Hovenden



**JOHN BROWN SONG.**

John Brown has been a martyr to the cause  
 of the oppressed, and his name is  
 as dear to the hearts of the  
 brave as ever.

Chorus:  
 When John Brown, martyr of the world,  
 Shall come to his trial,  
 We will be there to testify  
 With courage and with pride,  
 And our voices will be raised  
 For the rights of the oppressed,  
 And for the land of the free,  
 Where all men shall be equal,  
 And where the weak shall be  
 As strong as the free.

When John Brown, martyr of the world,  
 Shall come to his trial,  
 We will be there to testify  
 With courage and with pride,  
 And our voices will be raised  
 For the rights of the oppressed,  
 And for the land of the free,  
 Where all men shall be equal,  
 And where the weak shall be  
 As strong as the free.

When John Brown, martyr of the world,  
 Shall come to his trial,  
 We will be there to testify  
 With courage and with pride,  
 And our voices will be raised  
 For the rights of the oppressed,  
 And for the land of the free,  
 Where all men shall be equal,  
 And where the weak shall be  
 As strong as the free.

Original Lyric Sheet



A Song for the  
 Times,  
 or John Brown.  
 No. 4.  
 H. De Marsan,  
 Publisher