

Bleeding Kansas

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Crash! A bullet shatters a window just inches from where you are standing! A crowd of angry men are swarming around your home, waiting to take you captive. Can you imagine going through this? Well, many people did during Bleeding Kansas.

On December 14, 1853 a man named Augustus C. Dodge introduced a bill in the Senate. The bill stated that the government should organize Nebraska territory. The bill was sent to Stephen A. Douglas to be made a law. To get the votes he would need, Douglas had to please the Southerners, so Douglas decided to let the settlers choose whether or not they wanted to be a slave state. If the bill were made a law, it would repeal the Missouri Compromise, which said slavery could not go over the 36 degrees 30 minute line (above which slavery was prohibited and below where it was allowed). This bill would open the North to slavery if made a law. Douglas finally got President Pierce's approval of the bill and on May 30, 1854, it became a law.

The Northerners reacted immediately and came pouring into Kansas. When the South heard this, the Southerners came in by the thousands, all armed and ready. (When the ballots to decide whether Kansas would become a free or slave state were cast only 20 out of 600 people were legal residents.) The pro-slavery forces won that election.

Another election was held on March 30, 1855 to choose territorial legislature members. Missourians or Boarder Ruffians, as they were called, swarmed over into Kansas. Once again, the Southerners won the election.

The new state legislature made laws that the Northerners called the "Bogus Laws". These laws said that anyone who wrote or spoke against slaveholding, or assisted fugitives would be sentenced to ten years of hard labor or put to death. The outraged Northerners set up their own Free State legislature at Topeka. There were now two governments in Kansas, each outlawing the other.

One of the Southern leaders, David Atchison, encouraged the Missourians to defend their government "with bayonet and blood" and "to kill every abolitionist in the district" if necessary (*Africans in America: Judgement Day*).

Some of the Northerners were part of a movement called "Free Soil". The Free Soil movement demanded territory for white people. The Free Staters voted and outlawed black people from living in Kansas, whether they were slave or free.

Many people attacked others because they were for or against slavery. People were kidnapped, tarred and feathered, and killed. On May 21, 1856, a group of pro-slavery men burned the Free State Hotel in Fort Scott, ransacked homes, stores, and destroyed two printing presses. For revenge, John Brown and a group of men attacked Pottawatomie Creek.

The year eighteen fifty-eight was the most violent year of the time that had come to be known as Bleeding Kansas. In April, James Montgomery, the leader of the Free State forces, fought the U.S. troops in the Battle of Paint Creek. In May, Montgomery drove the pro-slavery forces out of Linn County. In revenge, eleven free staters were taken from their homes to a ravine and shot down. On June 5, Montgomery tried to burn the Western Hotel in Fort Scott but failed. The governor held a meeting on June 15 to try to settle the unrest, and it was quiet for five months. Montgomery struck again in December and rescued Benjamin Rice, a prisoner at Fort Scott. During the rescue, John Little resisted by firing shots at the free-staters from his store. He was shot and killed while looking out the window to see if his shots had found their mark. Little's fiancé sent Montgomery a letter reprimanding him for killing her loved one.

Many attempts were made to make Kansas a free state. Pro-slavery forces in the Senate strongly disapproved of the plan and stalled Kansas' admission into the Union. Finally, in 1861 free-staters excelled over the pro-slavers, and Kansas became a free

state. Bleeding Kansas had ended, but not before about 55 people were killed and many more had been harmed.

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