

“The Free Sons of the North” versus

What Makes a Man in Bleeding Kansas?

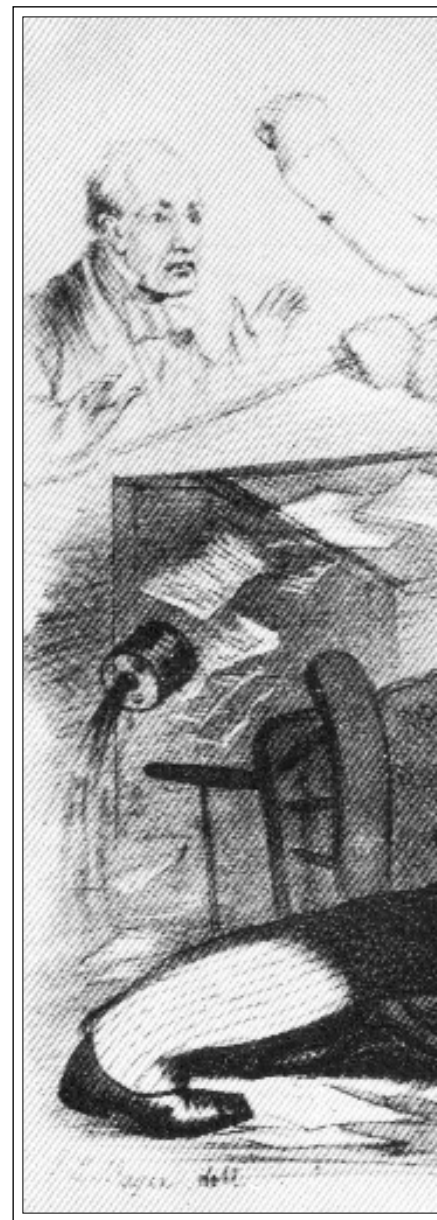
by Kristen Tegtmeier Oertel

On May 26, 1856, the pages of the *New York Daily Tribune* overflowed with news about “The War in Kansas,” and the headlines warned of “Freedom” being “Bloodily Subdued.” That week the sectional conflict had risen to a feverish pitch when a proslavery posse led by Sheriff Samuel Jones attacked the antislavery stronghold of Lawrence, Kansas, destroying the Free State Hotel and two antislavery newspapers, looting property, and wounding pride. Events in Washington, D.C., only exacerbated the increasing tensions between North and South when on May 19–20 Massachusetts Senator Charles Sumner gave a speech entitled “The Crime Against Kansas,” in which he admonished Southerners, particularly South Carolinians, for their behavior in territorial Kansas. South Carolina representative Preston Brooks refused to allow Sumner to libel his Southern brethren and on May 22 defended South Carolina’s honor by brutally caning Senator Sumner.¹ The *Tribune*’s reporters painted literary pictures of Sumner’s bruised body and the charred remains of the Free State Hotel in Lawrence for nearly a month after the incidents occurred. Bleeding Kansas and “Bleeding Sumner” galvanized much of the North around the antislavery cause, and together these two events gained acute attention from newspapers throughout the country.

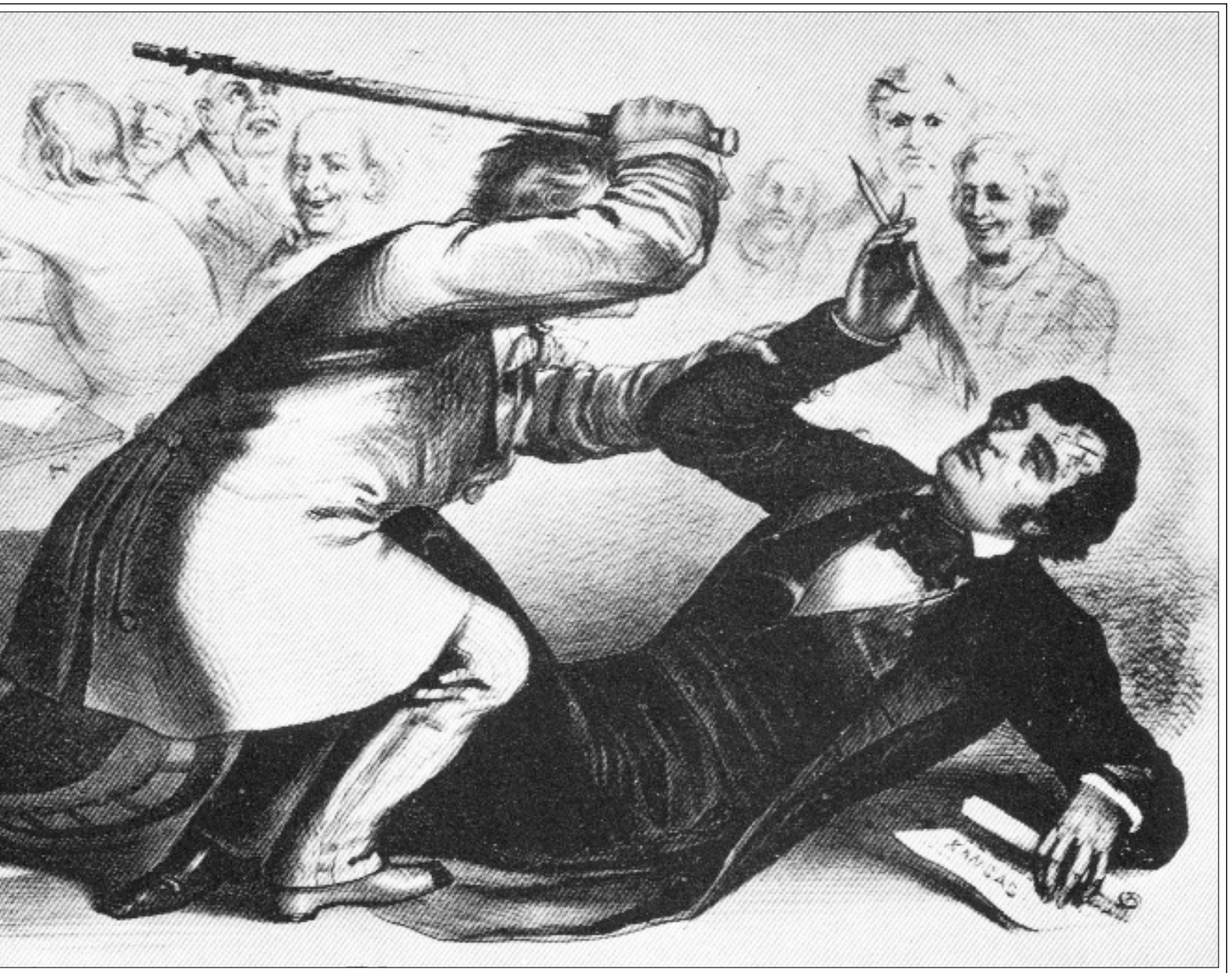
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1. For a brief account of Brooks’s attack on Sumner, see James McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 149–53.



“The Myrmidons of Border-Ruffianism”



Following his speech “The Crime Against Kansas,” Massachusetts senator Charles Sumner is brutally caned by South Carolina representative Preston Brooks.

One report of the “sack of Lawrence” argued that the “free sons of the North” confronted the “myrmidons of Border-Ruffianism” in a bloody battle over the extension of slavery into Kansas Territory.² Northerners charged that the Missouri Border Ruffians who attacked Lawrence acted “like wolves,” hunting down their enemies in lawless, animal-like mobs. Southerners countered these incendiary reports with charges that Northern men simply lacked the manly courage and military skill necessary to defend themselves and their families.³ Southern men exceeded the proper boundaries of manhood by violently defying any code of civilized law, while Northern men barely mustered the strength to protect themselves, let alone their property. In the context of fighting about slavery and free labor, Northerners and Southerners also argued about what kind of men they were.

Thus, the political and physical conflict over slavery’s extension also spawned a rhetorical battle over the meanings of manhood. Several scholars have constructed models of manliness in the nineteenth century that can be applied to Northern men in Kansas. The “Masculine Achiever” and the “Christian Gentleman” both championed a man’s ability to control his behavior, his environment, and maintain power over others. The “achiever” focused on man’s domination of the marketplace and his external environment, while the “gentleman” disciplined his internal drives, like sex and violence. The masculine achiever guarded his ideals and his property, through violent means if necessary, while the Christian gentleman kept that violence in check and justified its occasional usage with religious morality.⁴

2. New York Daily Tribune, May 26, 1856. A myrmidon is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as “An unscrupulously faithful follower or hireling; a hired ruffian; a base attendant.”

3. New York Daily Tribune, May 23, 1856; Independence (Mo.) Western Dispatch; quotation in New York Daily Tribune, June 2, 1856.

4. Anthony Rotundo, “Learning about Manhood: Gender Ideals and the Middle-class Family in Nineteenth-Century America,” in *Manliness and Morality: Middle-Class Masculinity in Britain and America, 1800–1940*, ed. J. A. Mangan and James Walvin (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1987), 35–51, shows that the masculine achiever, an individualist, “encouraged accomplishment, autonomy and aggression—all in the service of an intense competition for success in the market-place.” The Christian gentleman, on the other hand, emerged as “an evangelical response to the competitive impulse that was turned loose” by capitalism and its masculine achievers (p. 37). See also Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: BasicBooks, 1993); Clyde Griffin and Mark Carnes, eds., *Meanings for Manhood: Constructions of Masculinity in Victorian America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: Free Press, 1996); Mangan and Walvin, *Manliness and Moral-*

These characterizations of manhood are distinctly Northern and middle-class, and while they may describe the ideals of the majority of free-state men, they fall short in delineating Southern manhood. Many Southern men may have ascribed to these models, but white men’s behavior in the South was influenced first and foremost by the code of Southern honor. Defined by historian Bertram Wyatt-Brown as “a masculine ideal—aggressive, possibly rash, jealous of the family name, and protective of its women,” Southern honor supported strict notions of the patriarchal family.⁵ The code of Southern honor dictated rigid gender rules for both men and women and sustained a racial hierarchy that relegated enslaved and free black Americans to perpetual inferiority. Concepts of Southern honor thus shaped ideas about gender, race, and social status, as these interwoven ideologies together governed social relations in the South.

These ideal types of Northern and Southern manhood, however, rarely coincided with lived experience, especially in frontier Kansas where sectional violence and lawlessness punctuated settlers’ daily lives.⁶ A group of free-state

ty. Margaret Marsh is one of the few scholars who explicitly considers domesticity’s relationship to manhood in her article, “Suburban Men and Masculine Domesticity,” *American Quarterly* 40 (June 1988): 165–86.

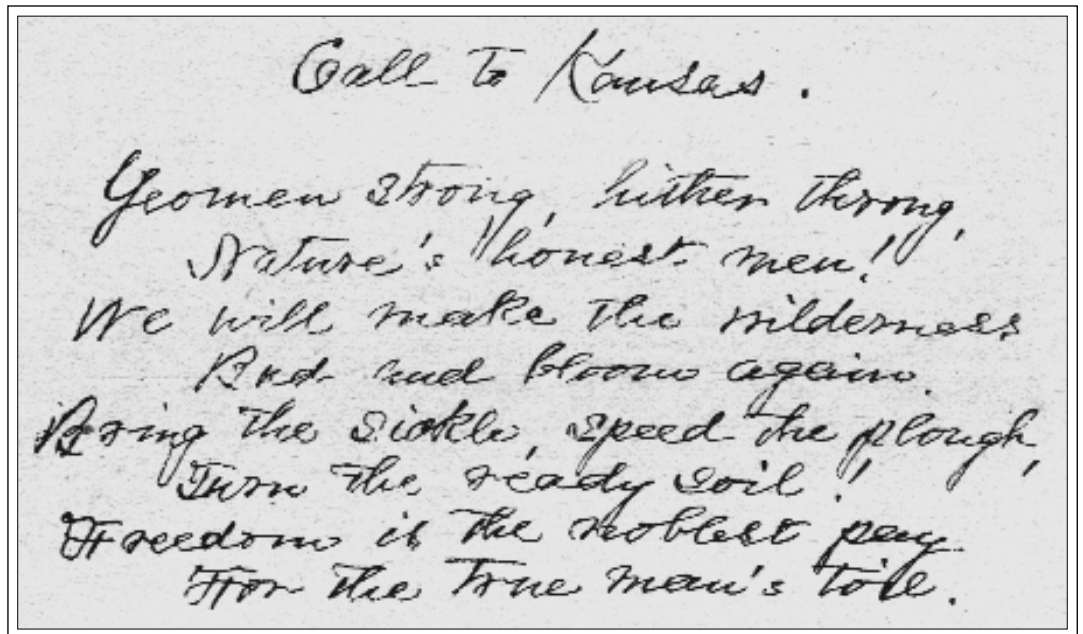
5. Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *The House of Percy: Honor, Melancholy and Imagination in a Southern Family* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982); Wyatt-Brown, “The Abolitionist Controversy,” in *Men, Women, and Issues in American History*, ed. Howard H. Quint and Milton Cantor (Homewood, Ill.: Dorsey Press, 1975); Kenneth Greenberg, *Honor and Slavery* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); David G. Pugh, *Sons of Liberty: The Masculine Mind in Nineteenth-Century America* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1983), 3–44.

6. Richard Slotkin is one scholar who examines the relationship between frontier lawlessness and violence in his books; see Slotkin, *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600–1860* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1973); Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800–1860* (New York: HarperCollins, 1985), 3–48. On manhood and gender in the American West, see Gunther Peck, *Reinventing Free Labor: Padrone and Immigrant Workers in the North American West, 1880–1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), especially 117–57; Susan L. Johnson, *Roaring Camp: The Social World of the California Gold Rush* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2000); Johnson, “A Memory Sweet to Soldiers’: The Significance of Gender in the History of the American West,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 24 (November 1993): 495–517; Elizabeth Jameson, *All that Glitters: Class, Conflict, and Community in Cripple Creek* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998); Katherine Morrissey, “Engendering the West,” in *Under an Open Sky: Rethinking America’s Western Past*, ed. William Cronon, George Miles, and Jay Gitlin (New York: W. W. Norton, 1992); John Mack Faragher, *Women and Men on the Overland Trail* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979); Faragher, *Sugar Creek: Life on the Illinois Prairie* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986); Kristen Tegtmeier, “‘The Ladies of Lawrence are Arming!’: The Gendered Nature of Sectional Violence in Early Kansas,” in *Antislavery Violence: Sectional, Racial and Cultural Conflict in Antebellum America*, ed. John R. McKivigan and Stanley Harrold (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999): 215–35.

men summed up the situation best by declaring: "We, the citizens of Kansas Territory, find ourselves in a condition of confusion and defenselessness so great, that open outrage and midday murders are becoming the rule, and quiet and security the exception. And . . . the law . . . has never yet been extended to our Territory — thus leaving us with no fixed or definite rules of action, or source of redress." Within the context of these protracted sectional and environmental tensions, settlers in Kansas debated and reshaped what masculinity meant and engaged their Northern and eastern counterparts in this process of redefinition.

In the course of interpreting their manhood, proslavery and antislavery men battled over what brand of manliness would best serve the territory of Kansas and the nation itself. The Southern version, one that endorsed violence and aggression, eventually triumphed over the Northern definition that championed self-restraint and moral fortitude. The language of gender in Kansas articulated the tensions between the North and South, and seen through this lens, one can illustrate how the gendered meanings of sectional conflict helped foreshadow the nation's movement toward the violence of civil war.

In 1855 Lucy Larcom wrote the "Call to Kansas," a poem that commemorated the westward movement to Kansas, and she won a fifty-dollar prize from the New England Emigrant Aid Company for her literary effort. Larcom began by calling forth "Yeomen strong" to "hither throng!" and settle the West in freedom's name. She wrote:



In her 1855 poem "Call to Kansas," Lucy Larcom described a "true man" as one who sought freedom and liberty in return for hard work, not monetary or political gain.

Bring the sickle, speed the plough,
Turn the ready soil!
Freedom is the noblest pay
For the true man's toil.⁸

A "true man," according to Larcom, sought freedom and liberty in return for hard work, not monetary gain or political prowess. Thus, the New England Emigrant Aid Company, while in practice a money-making enterprise, remained in theory and rhetoric a vehicle for "true men" and their families to establish a society based on the principles of antislavery and free labor.⁹ True New England men pursued justice, civilization, and moral truth, regardless of whether wealth and power rewarded them for their endeavors.

8. Lucy Larcom, "Call to Kansas," in D. W. Wilder, *The Annals of Kansas, 1541–1885* (Topeka: Kansas Publishing House, 1886), 57.

9. Gunja SenGupta, *For God and Mammon: Evangelicals and Entrepreneurs, Masters and Slaves in Territorial Kansas, 1854–1860* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996); Nicole Etcheson, "'Labouring for the Freedom of this Territory': Free State Kansas Women in the 1850s," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 21 (Summer 1998): 68–87.

7. Cited in the sworn testimony of Charles Robinson, Report of the Special Committee Appointed to Investigate the Troubles in Kansas; with the views of the minority of said committee, 34th Cong., 1st sess., 1856, H. Rept., 1069.



According to some proslavery men, lawlessness reigned supreme during Kansas territorial elections that were plagued by illegal voting. (Above) Missouri ruffians cross over into Kansas to cast their bogus votes.

Defending truth and justice required bravery, and Larcom continued by marking the courage these men must possess to survive the trials in Kansas:

Brothers brave, stem the wave!
 Firm the prairies tread!
 Up the dark Missouri flood
 Be your canvas spread.¹⁰

Larcom called on Northerners to “stem the wave” of slavery and prevent its extension west, noting that as they moved westward they would have to tread through “the dark Missouri” river, whose banks were peopled with black slaves. As they traversed the prairies, Northern men spread a presumably white “canvas” that covered Missouri’s blackness, transforming it into a place where “Father . . . there your sons, brave and good, shall to freemen grow.” Thus, proper Northern men not only created a society in the West that embraced free labor but one blanketed

10. Larcom, “Call to Kansas.”

by whiteness. Such a tall order required bravery and a commitment to free labor ideology, values to which Northern manhood increasingly aspired in the mid-nineteenth century.¹¹

Sara T. D. Robinson, wife of the future Kansas governor, argued that in addition to brave and civilized male settlers, Kansas needed men who lived by Christian principles. She lobbied for a refined Northern manhood, modeled after a family friend who just happened to be a minister: “We need such manliness among us, in this new, unsettled state of things; such men, with unwearied [sic] confidence in God, and the humanity of men; with whom the love for a distressed brother is more than one’s faith in creeds, and whose faith is strong.”¹² Kansas needed men who resolved conflict nonviolently if possible and who respected and lived to serve God. Robinson pleaded with the heavenly powers to dispatch such men to Kansas: “God give us Men! . . . Tall men, sun-crowned, who live above the fog in public duty and in private thinking.”¹³

In accordance with certain Christian teachings, the ideal Northern man valued nonviolence and held pacifism in high regard, especially when backed by principles of justice and liberty. After a proslavery mob destroyed the press of the Parkville, Missouri, antislavery newspaper, *The Luminary*, Samuel Pomeroy encouraged the editor, George Parks, to

11. On the formation of free labor ideology and its proliferation at mid-century, see Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970); Jonathan A. Glickstein, *Concepts of Free Labor in Antebellum America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991); Robert J. Steinfeld, *The Invention of Free Labor: The Employment Relation in English and American Law and Culture, 1350–1870* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991). On the whiteness of free labor ideology, see David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London: Verso, 1991); Alexander Saxton, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic: Class Politics and Mass Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (London: Verso, 1990).

12. Sara T. L. [sic] Robinson, *Kansas: Its Interior and Exterior Life* (Boston: Crosby, Nichols and Co., 1856), 60.

13. *Ibid.*, iii-iv.

“Be of Good cheer. . . . He whose cause is just is doubly armed—we are here for you. . . . Few in numbers but of strong faith and unconquerable courage! Strong in our adherence to principles strong in the Omnipotence of the right!” Pomeroy assured Clark that although he was caught unarmed militarily and could not prevent the destruction of his property, he was “doubly armed” with a noble cause. “Heart, soul and purse”—not guns—supplied the ammunition for this battle, which Northern men waged with “unconquerable courage” and “the Omnipotence of the right!”¹⁴

Sara Robinson noted the Northerners’ pendants for pacifism and implied that Southerners, Border Ruffians in particular, failed to abide by such morals. She wrote, “The people of Missouri call all eastern and Northern men cowards, and are evidently disappointed at the calm determination of the people of Lawrence to protect themselves from mob violence. They do not understand how a people can be brave, yet quiet.”¹⁵ From Robinson’s subjective viewpoint, she postured Northern manhood and antislavery activism as “brave, yet quiet” and placed negative, excessively violent connotations on the proslavery men’s actions.¹⁶

Even some Missourians regarded the quiet, pacifist nature of many free-state men as admirable. A newspaper correspondent for the self-proclaimed politically neutral Missouri Democrat met a free-state man whom he described as “quiet, gentlemanly and intelligent.” The same reporter argued against using violence to make Kansas free, claiming that, “One good man with a wife and family—one good Free-State bona fide settler—is worth more to Freedom than a dozen rifles.”¹⁷ Thus, restraint from violence and cultivating free labor families ensured freedom’s survival more than physically compelling its installment.¹⁸

14. Samuel C. Pomeroy to George S. Parks, April 24, 1855, Correspondence, Samuel Clarke Pomeroy Collection, Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society.

15. Robinson, *Kansas: Its Interior and Exterior Life*, 13.

16. In reality, many Northern men were just as violent as Southern men, as the popularity of “Beecher’s Bibles” demonstrates. However, many Northerners remained committed to the ideal of nonviolence even if the reality only sometimes matched this ideal.

17. Missouri Democrat (Fayette), October 29, 1856.

18. The importance of settling the frontier with free-soil families is fully explored by Michael Pierson, “‘Free Hearts and Free Homes’: Representations of Family in the American Antislavery Movement” (Ph.D. diss., State University of New York at Binghamton, 1993), especially 48–55.

Although Northerners frequently touted nonviolence, free-state men also recognized the necessity of violence when forced to defend themselves, their families, and their principles. Kansas emigration promoters advertised for a particular type of man, a “moral hero” who refrained from reactionary violence, yet bravely persisted in the fight for freedom. Writing to James Blood, member of the State Central Committee of Kansas (an emigrant aid society), George W. Hunt and Charles Stearns defined what they meant by “true men”:

The class of men we most need are moral heroes, and not merely fighting bravadoes. We do not wish our war, to be conducted on the principles of Border Ruffianism—those of fiendish rage and savage cruelty. We therefore wish for men of principle and of course, for men of courage for moral heroes are never physical cowards.¹⁹

True men, unlike Border Ruffians, used violence only when absolutely necessary and fought according to a commonly accepted code of war. Samuel Walker wrote an editorial in the Missouri Democrat that claimed free-state men “never acted but in self-defense,” and maintained that “we banded together for this purpose [because] of the organized bands on the other side.”²⁰

A willingness to resort to violence in self-defense or in pursuit of justice composed a central component of proper Northern manhood. Amos Lawrence, namesake of the famous antislavery town, wrote to his uncle, Giles Richards, and assured him of the free-state settlers’ laudable goals and their appropriate conduct in war. He claimed, “Those shining pacificators Sharpe’s Rifles . . . in hands of good and true ‘Free State’ men have wonderfully cooled the ardor of the border Missourians. Our people will act on the defensive only.”²¹ The record does not always support Lawrence’s “defensive only” claim, but he carefully postured Northern manhood in a way that fit the innocent ideal.

19. George W. Hunt and Charles Stearns to James Blood, September 29, 1856, Correspondence, box 281, James Blood Collection, 1854–1861, Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society.

20. Missouri Democrat, October 25, 1856.

21. Amos Lawrence to Giles Richards, December 10, 1855, Correspondence, Amos Adams Lawrence Collection, Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society.

Southerners who moved to Kansas also defended their mission with moral ardor and claimed that their violence was motivated only by the desire to protect themselves and their property, which often included their slaves. A correspondent for the Missouri Republican reported that the emigration parties to Kansas were “composed of honorable men” who were “not in the habit of pledging eternal friendship to robbers and murderers.” One man, writing for a proslavery paper, claimed that the “Sack of Lawrence” was “done with order and according to law,” and praised the “Law-and-Order men” of Kansas and Missouri.²² Proslavery manhood valued respect for the law, and stood willing to prosecute anyone who disobeyed the Southern version of “law and order.”

In fact, the proslavery men in Kansas called themselves the “Law and Order Party,” and according to their rhetoric, lawfulness reigned supreme during the various territorial elections that Northerners argued were plagued by illegal voting and ballot box stuffing.²³ One Kansas settler with Southern sympathies reported to Congress that “The people of Missouri acted upon the principle of self-defense” when they crossed the border in March 1855 to vote into power a proslavery territorial legislature. He argued that any violence they might have employed in the process of voting was necessary “to counteract the unusual and extraordinary movements which were being made at the north.” He blamed the Northern emigrant aid companies for the strife in the territory, not the Border Ruffians, noting that “the people of Missouri . . . were alarmed and very greatly excited at the unusual movements at the north and east, which they considered would engender civil war.”²⁴

Thus, Southern men, like Northern ones, affirmed their manhood by engaging in activities and advancing ideals that touted the use of violence for self-defense. Consequently, the Border Ruffian maintained a harmless, honorable reputation as a proper Southern man. One Missouri Congressman, Mordecai Oliver, bolstered pride in his proslavery constituents and described the Border Ruffians

as “men of wealth, intelligence, and high moral worth.” Oliver defended the ruffians against congressional attacks, arguing that they epitomized the best of the “Old Dominion” and the new West: “behold the wide-spread fields, churches of every denomination, numerous school-houses, the high state of civilization and refinement; and then talk about the people of Missouri being ‘border ruffians!’” He persisted in this laudable description by emphasizing the ruffians’ gallantry and patriotism, noting in particular that they possessed the “nerve to maintain” their rights.²⁵ Perhaps Oliver implied that the use of violence to defend Missourians’ rights was part and parcel of a Border Ruffian’s honor and manhood.

Similar to Oliver’s depiction, an editorial in the *Richmond (Virginia) Enquirer* portrayed the Border Ruffian as a simple farmer who defended Southern rights with valor. The *Enquirer* argued: “The ‘border ruffian,’ the farmer of the far South and West, is the noblest type of mankind. In his person is revived all the chivalry and generosity of the knights of the Middle Ages. He is the pioneer of a high and honorable civilization.” Countering much less favorable interpretations of the Border Ruffian, this report compared him to the ancient Greeks and Romans who established the pinnacle of civilized society. It was no accident that the Greeks and Romans also practiced slavery; the Border Ruffian merely perpetuated the legacy initiated by these ancient slave societies:

He is planting a master race . . . on a new soil; not buying up white men at the shambles, to remove them from slavery to capital in Boston, to make them, in a few generations, slaves to capital in Kansas . . . Free men of the North! . . . Go there [to Kansas]. But invite Southerners with their slaves . . . then the African will be menial, which suits his nature, and you however poor, a privileged and honored class.²⁶

The Border Ruffian’s identity relied in part upon the existence of the “menial” African, who performed labor unsuited for privileged white men, thus enabling white Southerners to achieve “independence,” whether as

22. Missouri Republican (St. Louis), October 16, 1856; Constitutionalist (Doniphan), May 23, 1856.

23. Robinson, *Kansas: Its Interior and Exterior Life*, 256, mocked the name of the Law and Order Party, arguing the following: “Such is law and order in Kansas, whose governor, drunken and debauched, insults women in their own dwellings, with language too profane for insertion here, and heads gangs for searching settlers’ homes.”

24. Matthew R. Walker to Mr. Anderson, May 22, 1856, Report of the Special Committee Appointed to Investigate the Troubles in Kansas, 1899.

25. Speech of Hon. Mordecai Oliver of Missouri, March 7, 1856, Appendix to Congressional Globe, 34th Cong., 1st sess., 1856, 169. Congressman Oliver was the minority member on the three-member Howard Committee, which compiled the Report of the Special Committee Appointed to Investigate the Troubles in Kansas. The majority was William A. Howard, chair (Republican, Michigan) and John Sherman (Republican, Ohio).

26. *Richmond (Va.) Enquirer*, reprinted in *National Anti-Slavery Standard* (New York), April 26, 1856.

yeomen or planters. The reporter noted the white farmer's freedom from enslavement to capital, yet denied his inherent dependence upon the labor of black men and women. The story closed with the assertion that if Northerners joined Southerners and permitted slaves to settle in the territory, "To be a citizen of Kansas, will then be an honour and a distinction, as once it was to be a citizen of Rome."²⁷

Given this apparent link between Southern masculinity and slavery, one can understand the necessity of slavery's expansion westward for the South and especially for Missourians.²⁸ If Southern honor epitomized "power, honor, and respect, for which riches and a body of menials were essential," then the possibility of achieving the pinnacle of economic success without slavery seemed daunting. Slaves not only performed the necessary labor required in making a large profit, but owning slaves also served as a status symbol that marked one's economic and social prestige. A man ruled over his castle and his dependents, and the more he ruled, the more power he possessed. By arguing against the right to own slaves, free-staters threatened the very foundations of Southern honor and Southern manhood.²⁹ Although not all Southerners owned slaves, the threat that antislavery activism posed to even nonslaveholders persisted because slavery was integral to maintaining the larger system of white patriarchy that dominated the South's social and eco-



Southerners often praised the "border ruffian" as a noble pioneer, perpetuating an honorable and privileged class of white men dominating the menial African slave.

economic relations. Because one's gender identity was closely tied to one's racial identity, the battle between proslavery and antislavery forces also was articulated as a battle between Northern and Southern manhood.³⁰

The most extreme rhetorical attacks on Southern and Northern manhood came from their respective enemies. Free-state women evaluated Southern manhood according to an accepted gender code that was based in part on notions of the Christian gentleman, and they expected Southern men to display chivalry and exemplify Southern honor.³¹ In her journal-like book *Kansas: Its Interior and Exterior Life*, Sara Robinson reflected upon her ideas about Northern and Southern manhood, and Southerners

27. *Ibid.*

28. Bertram Wyatt-Brown was not the first to suggest that the code of Southern honor and hence Southern manhood was linked to slavery and racism, but he has explored the relationship most extensively in his work. He argued in *Southern Honor*, 16, that "white man's honor and black man's slavery became in the public mind of the South practically indistinguishable." While Wyatt-Brown acknowledged that a concept of honor existed before slavery became racialized, slavery's growth and expansion in the South coexisted with Southern honor's entrenchment in Southern society. Kenneth Greenberg, *Honor and Slavery*, (xiii), has gone further than Wyatt-Brown by arguing that "since Southern gentlemen defined a slave as a person without honor, all issues of honor relate to slavery."

29. Greenberg, *Honor and Slavery*, 17.

30. Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and The Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

31. For one study that examines the gendered expectations between men and women in the South, see Brenda Stevenson, *Life in Black and White: Family and Community in the Slave South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 37–62.



Following the 1856 sack of Lawrence, depicted in this sketch, free-state women questioned their safety against Southern men, whom they viewed as savage, violent “dogs of war.”

repeatedly came up short of her ideal. She experienced firsthand the sack of Lawrence, and several proslavery men pillaged her homestead. They raided her closets and drawers, set her bed on fire, and destroyed letters and daguerreotypes that had been locked inside a trunk. Robinson castigated one of the perpetrators and questioned the viability of Southern honor: “This man, so busily prying into bureau drawers and private correspondence, was one of the principal men in the ‘law-and-order party.’ O, southern honor! How her gloss has become dim, when her chief men, the self-constituted champions of southern institutions, attempt to gain their ends by stealing private correspondence, and pillaging a lady’s drawers!”³² Robinson wondered what kind of man would resort to such means to accomplish even more deplorable ends. Proslavery manhood stood under constant moral assault from women such as Robinson, and much of the free-state propaganda claimed that Southern chivalry was mere hypocrisy.

Hannah Ropes, another pioneer freestater, joined Robinson in noting the lack of chivalry displayed by Southern men, especially Missourians. She wondered, “How we, at the North, have always believed implicitly in the chivalry of the South. . . . It is not until we arrive in Kansas . . .

that the truth really dawns upon us. Mother, there is no indignity to be mentioned which has not been heaped upon us.” Ropes castigated the Missourians repeatedly, citing examples that proved Southern chivalry waned in Kansas. She argued that the ruffians, “shoot at defenceless [sic] people with as much cool indifference as they would at partridges or prairie chickens,” and she feared that not “a single cabin [was] safe from outrage anywhere.”³³ Indeed, many women felt vulnerable without the guarantee of chivalry to protect them from Southern aggression.

Preston Brooks’s brutal caning of Charles Sumner in May 1856 left many Northern women afraid that Southern chivalry was indeed dead. One “true-hearted woman” sat next to a nicely dressed young man during a train ride, and they struck up a conversation about the events in Congress that week. The stranger stated that he had no sympathy for Sumner. The woman promptly replied:

Sir, it seems to me that you are an advocate of ruffianly violence against unsuspecting and defenceless [sic] men for the utterance of their opinions upon a great public question; and as I have no assurance that you will not put your theory in practice upon myself, if I venture to express my sentiments . . . I do not feel it safe to sit so near you.³⁴

In theory, Southern chivalry assured women of a certain amount of respect and protection from Southern men (and it did provide many women with that protection). After Bleeding Kansas and “Bleeding Sumner,” however, some Northern women wondered if chivalry would continue to shield them from harm. In its report of the caning, the *New York Tribune* argued, “No meaner exhibition of Southern cowardice—generally miscalled Southern chivalry—was ever witnessed.”³⁵

Some freestaters not only questioned the validity of Southern chivalry, but they also placed proslavery men on the boundary between man and animal. They often equated Missourians with animals and accorded them savage-like

33. Hannah Ropes, *Six Months in Kansas, by a Lady* (Boston: J. P. Jewett and Co., 1856), 151, 208–9.

34. *New York Daily Tribune*, June 21, 1856.

35. *Ibid.*, May 23, 1856.

32. Robinson, *Kansas: Its Interior and Exterior Life*, 248.

qualities. Hannah Ropes described them as, “a horseback people; always off somewhere; drink a great deal of whiskey, and are quite reckless of human life. . . . They ride fine horses, and are strong, vigorous-looking animals themselves.” She concluded her evaluation of the Border Ruffians by arguing that “the west portion of Missouri is mostly inhabited with a partially civilized race, fifty years behind you in all manner of improvements.”³⁶

Julia Louisa Lovejoy, a free-state woman originally from New Hampshire, used language that was particularly illustrative of this process of constructing the Missouri Border Ruffian as the violent, savage “other.” Lovejoy commented on their violent habits and emphasized the moral, civilized response of her Northern, middle-class brethren:

The Free State men, are shot down by pro-slavery villains, as beasts of prey . . . the dogs of war, are let loose. . . . All is commotion. Murder, unwhipt by Justice, stalks abroad, at noon-day. . . . This is an awful crisis, and unless heaven interpose, we shall be swept away, by an overwhelming army, led on by the whiskey-demon, to deeds of the blackest hue!³⁷

Lovejoy implied that murder, “whipt” by justice, antislavery justice, was perhaps less reprehensible than proslavery murder. Proslavery settlers, influenced by the “whiskey-demon,” committed “deeds of the blackest hue.” Were these deeds in reference to carnal transgressions such as rape? Or was Lovejoy implying that if the freestaters lost their struggle, Kansas would fall to slavery and thus be forced to engage in a sin of the “blackest hue?” In either case, Lovejoy castigated the proslavery men for their apparent efforts to convert the free soil of Kansas into a Southern plantation, where she believed the sin of slavery encouraged proslavery men to rape and pillage without restriction.

36. Ropes, *Six Months in Kansas*, 111. The first quotation and the language she employs suggests that Ropes exhibited a certain kind of attraction for these “brawny” Southern men. While Northern manhood may have been more refined and proper, it also may have lost a sense of sexual virility. Ropes’s opinions not only reflected her belief in the inherent savageness of western, “uncivilized” men but undoubtedly related to her class values as well. Ropes’s upper-middle-class roots shaped her opinions about the Missourians, and her derogatory statements resonated with a condescending attitude toward lower-class people in general. Thus, it is not surprising that the men who received Ropes’s most acute derision most likely resided on the lowest rung of the economic ladder.

37. Julia Louisa Lovejoy diary, July 8, 1855, and August 20, 1855, Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society.

In the end, Northerners criticized Southern manhood primarily for its connection to slavery. One Northern woman implied that any man who committed the sin of slaveholding, whether in theory or in practice, lacked manliness. She argued, “Every man at the South . . . who had any manhood left, would desert their shameful and ignominious cause and enlist under the banner of freedom and justice.” This woman encouraged Southern men to salvage their manhood by embracing the antislavery cause.³⁸

Southerners vehemently resisted any attempts to attract men to the abolitionist cause, and they retaliated against these rhetorical attacks on their manhood by questioning the manliness of Northern men. While describing a congressman who considered accepting the “Crittenden Compromise” (a bill that would have prohibited slavery in Kansas but permitted its extension below 36°30’, the old Missouri Compromise line), one proslavery newspaper referred to the “coqueting and coyness on the part of the attractive Mr. Giddings and sundry other belles . . . at the advances of Mr. Crittenden.” The story continued by criticizing Crittenden’s supporters, referring to them as “duennas,” or ladies in waiting. The reporter implied that men who supported the free-soil movement in Kansas mimicked feminine behavior, and he nullified their manhood because of their willingness to compromise on the slavery question.³⁹

Congressman William R. Smith of Alabama characterized free-state men as cowardly, treasonous, and sly, while he defended the bold actions of proslavery men during the Kansas territorial elections. On the floor of the House, Smith argued that “there have been outrages in Kansas, deliberate and designed, which are without parallel.” He clarified which actions he found most appalling, citing those that are “committed in the dark by the quiet but deadly maneuvering of those ingenious peace men who, with a puritanical devotion to human liberty, utter speeches which are slobbered all over with treason.”⁴⁰ “Peace men,” men who surreptitiously advanced their agendas in Kansas, fared much worse in Smith’s opinion than did the

38. “Testimony of a Woman,” *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, June 21, 1856 (emphasis in original).

39. *Washington (D.C.) Union*, March 31, 1858.

40. Speech of Hon. W. R. Smith, March 10, 1856, Appendix to *Congressional Globe*, 34th Cong., 1st sess., 1856, 158.

Border Ruffians, because “there is more devil in a sneak than in a bully.” Smith lauded the Border Ruffians for their aggressive, violent defense of proslavery ideals and insinuated that the Northerners lacked the gumption to assert their free-soilism openly, thus resorting to less daring and more covert modes of expression. Perhaps Smith implied that Northerners were less manly because they failed to follow the Southern gendered etiquette of resolving conflicts via the duel. If a true Southern man had a problem with another man, he did not sneak around and surreptitiously assault his enemy, but rather he called him to a duel and confronted him with confidence.

One Southern newspaper agreed with the sentiments expressed by Smith, claiming that some Northern men not only lacked manly self-assertion but were wholly out of their league when it came to the stuff of war. The *Journal of Commerce* reported: “When Eastern clergymen undertake to play bowieknife and pistol with ‘Border Ruffians,’ they are pretty sure to get worsted. Their strength lies in the arts of peace and the principles of religion. Had they stuck to these . . . the pride and passions of the South and Southwest would not have been roused.”⁴¹ If these eastern clergymen had adhered to their proper brand of manhood and not invaded the Southern male domain of “bowie knives and pistols,” then the South might have allowed their coexistence on the Kansas frontier. But in fact, Northerners eventually engaged Southerners on the same playing field, challenging them to an actual and metaphorical duel, a battle between North and South.

Considering how important the duel was to Southern concepts of masculinity, any implications of Northerners’ inability to handle firearms or their reluctance to use violence certainly indicates a criticism of Northern manhood.⁴² Some Southerners repeatedly critiqued freestaters’ poor marksmanship and their unwillingness to use guns to re-

solve social or political conflicts. Congressman Mordecai Oliver noted the freestaters’ apprehensions about using force in the territorial conflicts. Speaking about the men who formed one of the emigrant aid companies sent to Kansas in 1855, the Missouri congressman argued, “I take it that no men who would allow themselves to be herded upon steamboats, and shipped to the place of destination for a particular purpose, under the control and management of an association of men, would have any particular desire to indulge in the exercises incident to physical strife with deadly weapons.”⁴³ Oliver portrayed the members of the emigrant party passively, comparing them to cattle (or slaves?) who were forced to Kansas to pursue a goal not of their own making. As drones, controlled and managed by other men who imposed their own ideas upon the emigrants, these male settlers shied away from taking up arms to defend free-state ideals.

Another Southern commentator criticized Northern men for their reluctance to use guns and their inability to use them effectively. He conceded that Northern men outperformed Southern men in some tasks, but marksmanship was certainly not one of them. The *Missourian* claimed, “[Northern gentleman] do excel us in the manufacture of wooden clocks and such like enterprise . . . but history has not shown, not even in the history of Kansas, that they are our masters in the polite art of rifle-shooting, either in skill or willingness with the weapon.” The Missouri man euphemized gun violence as a “polite art” and proudly asserted his Southern and western brethren’s prowess in rifle shooting and their willingness to use gun violence to defend their ideals. Northern men, he argued, “may find that they have mistaken their vocation if they expect to conquer Southern and Western men in the open field.” He attacked Puritan men, in particular, and asked, “Would it not be better to cross the Puritans with a race of men who will use weapons when they are put into their hands?”⁴⁴

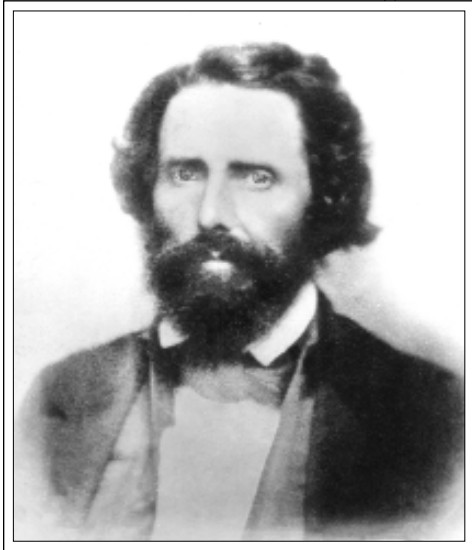
It appears that Southerners reserved their most trenchant critiques of Northern manhood for New Englanders and the men associated with the northeastern-based emigrant aid companies. The editors of *Leavenworth’s Kansas Weekly Herald* repeatedly depicted New Englanders as less

41. *Journal of Commerce* (Kansas City, Mo.), reprinted in *New York Daily Tribune*, May 28, 1856.

42. If the duel exemplified the epitome of Southern honor, as Kenneth Greenberg defines it, then proslavery men must have endorsed the duel as a method of boldly illustrating the honor that resided within each Southern man. Greenberg argues that the concept of the duel is not limited to armed conflict or threats of such conflict; lower-class men used fist-fights as a method of dueling and defending honor. Thus, Border Ruffians, the majority of whom lived a middle- and lower-class existence, might have expressed their honor and manhood by presenting a rough, warlike appearance. To their fellow Southerners, arguing and fighting with other men proved that proslavery settlers maintained their honor in Kansas. See Greenberg, *Honor and Slavery*, xii.

43. Speech of Hon. Mordecai Oliver, March 7, 1856.

44. *Western Dispatch* (Mo.), May 23, 1856, reprinted in *New York Daily Tribune*, June 2, 1856.



than manly, even as freaks of nature. In one article, the author described a gathering of the Lawrence "Emigrant Aid" men and demoted their manhood to the level of prehistoric man:

It is more amusing than instructive, to observe the little knots of sharp-eyed, thin-nosed, poaked-stemmed bi-peds, that are constantly gathering like spawn in a frogs pond; and to listen to their verbal essays about Abolition, Maine Law, Bloomer, Spiritual Manifestations, Mesmerism, or whatever their fanaticism directs their attention to for the time being.⁴⁵

In this quotation, Northern fanaticism, ranging in focus from abolitionism to mesmerism, stands out in stark contrast to Southerners' practical, ordered traditions such as slavery and patriarchy. In fact, the South's "benevolent pa-

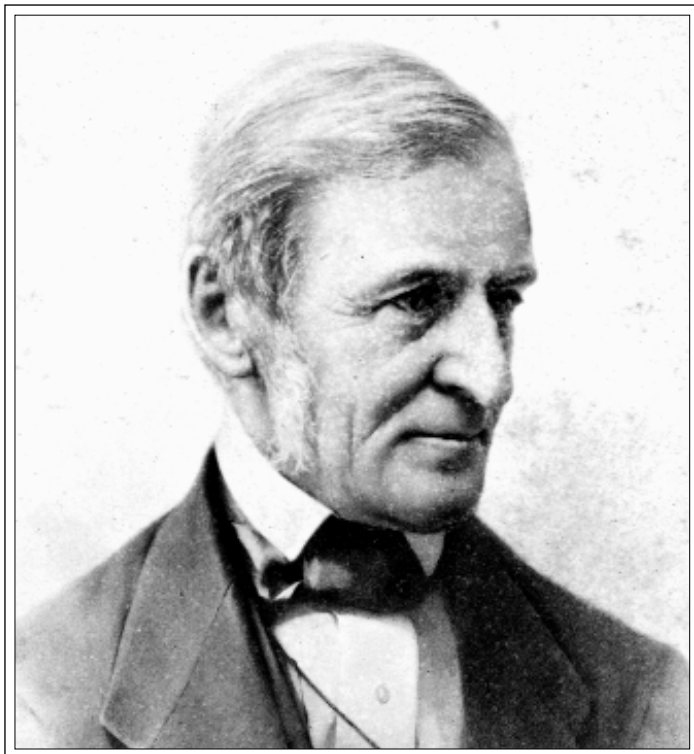
Some Northerners lauded the aggressive acts of freestater Colonel James Montgomery and his jayhawker troops, who resorted to violent tactics "in pursuit of antislavery justice."

ternalism" served civilization's needs more effectively than "free" labor, for under its aegis white male "slaves" were forced to work as mindless cogs in the North's factories.⁴⁶

Like the free-state settlers, the proslavery editors of the *Herald* constructed their own identities as civilized, refined settlers and even criticized fellow proslavery settlers when they tarnished such an image: "We are astonished that the intelligent Editor of the [Squatter] "Sovereign" should have

45. *Kansas Weekly Herald* (Leavenworth), March 9, 1855. The "Aid" folks this settler observed undoubtedly were members of the New England Emigrant Aid Company.

46. The most enduring proponent of this proslavery defense was George Fitzhugh, who argued in favor of Southern "domestic slavery" and against the slavery of Northern "Free Society." See Fitzhugh, *Sociology for the South or the Failure of Free Society* (Richmond, Va.: A. Morris, 1854); Fitzhugh, *Cannibals All! Or Slaves without Masters* (Richmond, Va.: A. Morris, 1857).



Prominent individuals such as Ralph Waldo Emerson (above) heartily endorsed John Brown's military plans for Kansas. According to Emerson, Brown was neither savage nor unmanly, but rather a moral hero.

made use of the low and debasing word D—d in speaking in defense of Mr. Donaldson's rights. . . . We most cordially endorse the sentiments of the Squatter Sovereign; but we deprecate the profanity of its language." The Herald editors "cordially endorsed" the opinions of the Squatter Sovereign, yet they censured their comrades' use of "vulgar language."⁴⁷ As the Herald of Freedom and the Squatter Sovereign quibbled over the proper behavior exhibited by true Southern men, their Northern counterparts wondered whether free-state men had any manhood left at all.

47. Kansas Weekly Herald, April 20, 1855. The Squatter Sovereign was published in Atchison, another proslavery community, while the Herald was published in Leavenworth. The language employed by the Herald and Squatter Sovereign may indicate class and educational differences between certain groups of proslavery settlers. The editors of the Herald tried to project an educated, thus wealthier image of themselves and their paper; however, data regarding the class background of each of the papers' readerships in Leavenworth and Atchison have not been uncovered.

Freestaters and Northerners debated and criticized their fellow brethren in Kansas about what kind of masculinity they displayed. A few Northerners were not surprised by either the repeated attacks on Lawrence or Senator Sumner's beating, and some implied that the North lacked the nerve and manly courage to prevent such Southern outrages. A May 24, 1856, editorial in the New York Daily Tribune quipped that, "the North has always lacked manly self-assertion. . . . So long as our truly civilized and refined communities succumb to the rule of the barbarian elements in our political system, we must be judged by the character and conduct of our accepted masters." One Tribune reporter argued, "Let them [Ruffians] seize and imprison, ravage and destroy; if the American People do not rise to the rescue of the Free State men of Kansas, they will deserve to be execrated to the last syllable of time."⁴⁸

Another reporter related Sumner's beating to the violence in Kansas and connected these incidents to the North's inability to control its own affairs. The report claimed, "If, indeed, we go on quietly to submit to such outrages, we deserve to have our noses flattened, our skins blacked, and to be placed at work under task-masters; for we have lost the noblest attributes of freemen, and we are virtually slaves."⁴⁹ Other reports articulated the theme of virtual slavery by claiming that freestaters and Northern politicians had become the subjects of a "slave oligarchy" that forced innocent citizens to submit to tyranny.

Free-state manhood faltered in Kansas, leaving many men humiliated by the Northern settlers' inability to protect and defend the free-soil cause and the families who populated the area. One editorial in the Tribune bullied Kansans into violently defending their state from the extension of slavery by citing a Southern source that criticized Northern inaction. Reprinting a story from the Lexington (Missouri) Express, the paper cited a Missourian's opinion of Kansas male honor: "As a Southern man, loyal to the State I live in, I would say that [a] Northern man must be base and destitute of all honourable feeling who believes in acquiescing in such a measure [as the repeal of the Missouri Compromise]."⁵⁰ Even some Southerners could see why the North must respond to the outrages committed by the South, and the Tribune aimed to use this

48. New York Daily Tribune, May 24, 1856; *ibid.*, May 22, 1856.

49. *Ibid.*, May 23, 1856.

50. Lexington (Mo.) Express, reprinted in the New York Daily Tribune, May 30, 1856.

kind of persuasion and intimidation to rally Northerners to support freedom in Kansas with arms as well as words.

Although many Northern abolitionists continued to eschew violence, one man repeatedly stood out in forceful opposition to nonresistance. John Brown organized and led an attack on proslavery settlers who lived near Pottawatomie Creek, brutally killing and physically disfiguring five men on the night of May 24, 1856. Claiming vengeance for the sack of Lawrence and other attacks on free-state settlers, Brown and his men (among whom were four of his sons) systematically rounded up and executed some of the men they believed responsible for the proslavery depredations in Kansas. Although Brown denied being present at the Pottawatomie Creek murders, several witnesses identified Brown and his sons as the chief executors of the bloody deeds.⁵¹

The extreme brutality of the Pottawatomie Creek murders and the national response to that massacre illustrates several aspects of the conflicted discourse over manhood at mid century. Most freestaters and Northerners condemned the attack, arguing that Brown exceeded the proper boundaries of antislavery manhood and activism in murdering and especially in mutilating his victims. Herald of Freedom editor George W. Brown (no relation to John Brown) subsequently criticized Brown's antislavery methods, claiming that "his policy was one of blood, which the best minds labored to counteract."⁵² Although cloaked in claims of divine justice, most Christian abolitionists were reluctant to embrace Brown's violent methods.⁵³

51. Many abolitionists who argued against violence during the initial settlement of Kansas gradually changed their course and supported military action after peaceful negotiations proved ineffective in combating proslavery forces. See Kristen Tegtmeier, "The Ladies of Lawrence are Arming!" 215. In addition to John Brown, James H. Lane often stood ready to respond with violence when engaged in conflicts with proslavery men. See W. E. B. DuBois, *John Brown, A Biography* (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1997), 83–85. After the sack of Lawrence, Brown was "indignant that there had been no resistance; . . . [he] denounced the members of the committee and leading free state men as cowards, or worse," and said that "something must be done to show these barbarians that we too have rights!" See DuBois, *John Brown*, 74. Affidavits of Mahala Doyle, James Harris, Louisa Jane Wilkinson, and Morton Bourn in Report from the Special Committee on Kansas, 34th Cong., 1st sess., 1193–1200, to confirm Brown's involvement in the crimes. Only James Redpath, Brown's friend and biographer, denied that Brown committed the Pottawatomie murders. See James Malin, *John Brown and the Legend of Fifty Six* (New York: Haskell House, 1971).

52. George W. Brown, *The Rescue of Kansas from Slavery with False Claims Corrected* (Rockford, Ill.: 1902), 150–51.

53. Most Christian "nonresistant abolitionists" were committed to nonviolence, but even Garrison, the most popular nonresistant, was moved by Brown's actions to consider violent action as a legitimate re-

Southerners, of course, were outraged by Brown's actions, which turned out to be a prologue to his 1859 raid on Harpers Ferry. While the South attempted to undermine Brown's significance by labeling him a butcher and a traitor, the murder of five proslavery men by a white abolitionist undoubtedly struck fear into the hearts of all Southerners. One popular song, "Old Man Brown, a Song for Every Southern Man," warned in its chorus that, "Old Osawatomie Brown . . . [will] run the niggers away."⁵⁴ From some planters' perspectives, "The South was under siege," and Brown's actions in Kansas and at Harpers Ferry confirmed their worst fears about abolitionism. Soon after the raid, Edmund Ruffin, a fire-eating Virginian, claimed that Northern abolitionists "designed to slaughter sleeping Southern men and their awakened wives and children."⁵⁵

In contrast to the majority of opinions about Brown, a few Northerners, most prominently men such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and women such as Lydia Maria Child, lauded Brown's behavior in Kansas and supported a "by any means necessary" retaliation to proslavery aggression and expansion. In December 1861 Child confided to Colonel James Montgomery that he and Brown had been two of the only men who truly understood the weight and import of halting slavery's expansion. She eloquently expressed her enthusiasm and support for Montgomery and his "jayhawker" troops (then stationed in Kansas), whom many knew to resist enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Law. She wrote, "Your name is peculiarly endeared to me by the accounts I have often had of you from my beloved relatives. . . . They sympathize with all that is good and true; and since John Brown's spirit ascended to Him who gave it, I think no man has more of their respect than your

sponse to proslavery aggression. See Lewis Perry, *Radical Abolitionism: Anarchy and the Government of God in Antislavery Thought* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973), 57, 259.

54. Peter Wallenstein, "Incendiaries All: Southern Politics and the Harper's Ferry Raid," in *His Soul Goes Marching On: Responses to John Brown and the Harpers Ferry Raid*, ed. Paul Finkelman (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995), 158. *Liberty* (Mo.) Tribune, May 30, 1856; see also D. R. Atchison, letter to the editor, *Boonville* (Mo.) Observer, August 23, 1856.

55. See Wallenstein, "Incendiaries All," 149. See also James McPherson, *Ordeal by Fire: Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2001), 128–29. While Ruffin's quotation may seem at odds with earlier Southern accounts of Northerners' unwillingness to use violence, I believe the two forms of verbal attacks lead to the same conclusion: Southerners feared Northern abolitionists and demeaned their capabilities as men to discount and deflect this fear. Perhaps the shift in language in relation to Brown indicates a desire to "rally the troops" and acknowledge the very real threat that abolitionists such as Brown posed to Southern slavery.

honored self." Child praised Montgomery's stalwart tactics, likening them to Brown's, and encouraged further resistance to the Fugitive Slave Law, even if such resistance meant boldly defying the U.S. government. She went on to support the violence of civil war by arguing, "better this fierce ordeal, than the drowsy degeneracy preceding this war."⁵⁶ According to Child, manly aggression and violence in pursuit of antislavery justice deserved a great deal more respect than the "drowsy degeneracy" and pacifism that characterized the majority of activism before the war.

Like Child, Emerson valued Brown's vigilance and portrayed him as a martyr to liberty. When Emerson heard Brown speak in March 1857 he wrote, "one of [Brown's] good points was, the folly of the peace party in Kansas." Soon after this meeting, Emerson and thirty other Bostonians heartily endorsed Brown's military plans for Kansas and formed a committee to financially support and advise Brown. For Emerson and the Kansas Committee, Brown was neither savage nor unmanly, but rather a moral hero who deserved the utmost respect and praise.⁵⁷

Inherent in the support and criticism of Brown lies a judgment about his manhood which, because of his notoriety at mid century, exemplifies two conflicting meanings of manhood before the Civil War—one that sanctioned violence and one that advocated self-restraint. Stephen S. Foster, a self-proclaimed nonresistant, praised Brown's methods and said, "I think John Brown has shown himself a man, in comparison with the Non-Resistants!"⁵⁸ Similarly, Emerson emphatically endorsed Brown's tactics and encouraged other Northern men to take up arms against slavery. He wrote, "I am glad to see that the terror at disunion and anarchy is disappearing. Massachusetts, in its heroic day, had no government—was an anarchy. . . . Every man throughout the country was armed with knife and revolver and it was known that instant justice would be administered to each offence." For Foster and Emerson, manhood, indeed humanity itself, carried with it the oblig-

ation to pursue moral truth and justice, which in this case meant literally combating slavery.⁵⁹

Emerson's sentiments regarding the necessity of war rang true with an increasing number of Northerners as the events in Kansas and around the country proved to many that violence was the only effective response to Southern aggression. One newsman reported from St. Louis that the means to peace between the proslavery and free-state forces was war: "Little can be done here by men of moderate opinion. . . . There can be no peace until you rise up and in a mighty exercise of power, put an end to the fell spirit of slavery propagandism."⁶⁰ Much of this push toward violence implied that Northerners needed to reconfigure their definition of true manhood to incorporate violence—preemptive and revolutionary violence, not merely violence in self-defense. After the sack of Lawrence, the *Cleveland Herald* announced, "Let it be distinctly understood, then, that men!—Men!! . . . are needed and must come, or Kansas is lost!" The North had not sent the "right kind of men" to Kansas, and they now needed to dispatch the men and "the means to use and carry on all the arts of peace."⁶¹

The most infamous tools used by free-state men to carry on the war in Kansas were Sharps rifles or "Beecher's Bibles." By 1856 many in New England became convinced that settlers must employ violent means to accomplish the free-state goals, and sympathizers in the East sent numerous shipments of Sharps rifles to Kansas in late 1855 and 1856. According to one of Henry Ward Beecher's biographers, Beecher believed that, "Since the conscience of the southerner was destroyed by slavery, the Bible was of little use and only force could make him uphold the laws."⁶² Accordingly, Beecher and his parishioners raised enough money to send more than fifty Sharps rifles to Kansas "for defense of the state." Beecher received much criticism for his endorsement of violence in Kansas, but he continued to "wave the torch of bleeding Kansas" and argued that to attack slavery in Kansas was to perform the "most Godlike work of religion."⁶³

56. Lydia Maria Child to James Montgomery, December 26, 1861, Correspondence, James Montgomery Collection, Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society.

57. Joel Porte, ed., *Emerson and His Journals* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1982), 474. Emerson wrote in early 1858, "All the children born in the last three years or 8 years should be charged with love of liberty, for their parents have been filled with Kansas & antislavery." See *ibid.*, 481.

58. *Practical Christian*, November 26, 1859, cited in Perry, *Radical Abolitionists*, 259.

59. See "From Moral Sense to Universal Man," in David Robinson, *Apostle of Culture: Emerson as Preacher and Lecturer* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), 50–55.

60. *New York Daily Tribune*, May 20, 1856.

61. *Cleveland (Ohio) Herald*, reprinted in *New York Daily Tribune*, May 26, 1856; *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, June 21, 1856.

62. Clifford E. Clark, *Henry Ward Beecher: Spokesman for a Middle-Class America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978), 123; see also "The Connecticut Kansas Colony," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 12 (Spring 1956): 1–7.

63. Clark, *Henry Ward Beecher*, 125.

Eventually the North heard many cries for war and some even embraced its arrival. One of the most vocal advocates for war had originally harbored a staunch commitment to pacifism and nonresistance, only to be converted to violence while living in Kansas. Charles Stearns, the Kansas correspondent for the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, refused to consider a military response to border ruffianism until he experienced the spoils of war firsthand:

When I came to Kansas, little did I dream of ever becoming a soldier. . . . Not until the war had existed for ten days did I arm myself, and then only in consequence of becoming convinced that we had not human beings to contend with. I always believed it was right to kill a tiger, and our invaders are nothing but tigers. . . . I made up my mind that our invaders were wild beasts and it was my duty to aid in killing them off.⁶⁴


Stearns constructed the Border Ruffians as wild animals, arguing they were not even human and were most certainly not proper Southern gentlemen. Stearns justified using not only violence against these “wild beasts” but also argued that the Border Ruffians deserved nothing less than total destruction at the hands of proper Northern men like Stearns.

Thus, as Southern men lost their humanity and assumed animal-like qualities in Northern eyes, the “free sons of the North” somewhat ironically met the challenge of the “myrmidons of border ruffianism” in a battle to the death. Rather than lobby for a manhood that restrained itself in the face of provocation, freestaters began to find the utility in cultivating an ideal of manliness that stood ready and willing to strike the first blow. Even before the bloody days of May 1856, Garrison’s *Liberator* argued, “The alarming situation of the Kansas settlers is urged as demonstrating the worthlessness of the principles of peace; because . . . returning good for evil, the martyr-spirit, [is] derided as folly and madness against ‘border ruffianism.’”⁶⁵ Free-state



Henry Ward Beecher (above) and other free-state sympathizers in the East sent shipments of Sharps rifles to Kansas “for defense of the state.” Beecher was much criticized for his support of violence in Kansas.

men would be mad to think that a refined, proper manhood could combat the savagery of Border Ruffianism. What became proper, instead, was the kind of manhood they had once criticized in their enemies—one that took an eye for an eye without first asking permission.

Thus, seen through a gendered lens, the sack of Lawrence was a virtual prelude to Fort Sumter. The Border Ruffians and freestaters provoked each other verbally and rhetorically until they finally confronted each other on Southern terms—on the battlefield. The South and the North would seek to prove the superiority of their respective societies in part through asserting the prominence of their manhoods. In the process they engaged in a grand duel that led hundreds of thousands of men on both sides to their deaths. 

64. *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, January 5, 1856.

65. *Liberator* (Boston), reprinted in *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, April 12, 1856; see also *Liberty* (Missouri) *Tribune*, May 30, 1856; D. R. Atchison, letter to the editor.