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John Brown's Rebellion

In the leading years to the Civil War, the tension between the North and the South grew especially with “Dredd Scott Decision”. The U.S. Constitution protects the people's' right to private property, since slaves are classified as “property” then the owners of their property may move into the North. This takes the Northern slave laws and throws them out the window and outrages the North due to the fact that slavery can basically spread to where ever it sees fit under the U.S. Constitution. The South loved this idea due to the fact that this saves the slaves states especially after losing both Texas and California to the North and having the disadvantage in the House of Representatives. Popular Sovereignty was no longer eligible so slave states may now expand and save the “Southern Culture”. This however put many Northern politicians up in arms. Some chose to fight using politics, John Brown chose a different route.

An abolitionist is someone who supports the abolition or the end of slavery in the United States, these abolitionists express how slavery should end in many different ways. Protesting, promoting laws or bills to Congress, or taking physical action like John Brown.

Brown settled down as a businessman in Springfield, there he found his purpose to the community. He became a parishioner at the “Free Church”, the center for abolitionists in Springfield. Brown worked so hard that Springfield transformed into the major center of abolitionism, and one of the safest and most significant stops on the Underground Railroad (Wikimedia). Not only did Brown shelter runaway slaves, he also fought the men that were after the fugitives. When the United States passed the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850, Brown put together a militia to fight these bounty hunters and prevent the recapture of African Americans.

1855 in the state of Kansas is where John Brown’s name became national news. Brown traveled down with five of his sons. Brown contributed to the dream of ending slavery by force, he grew tired of praying and debating with people so decided to take matters into his own hands. Once Brown was in Kansas, “there, he became the leader of antislavery guerillas and fought a proslavery attack against the antislavery town of Lawrence. The following year, in retribution for another attack, Brown went to a proslavery town and brutally killed five of its settlers (PBS, John Brown). Brown led black and white men side by side and he did not see them as individual colors but rather as men that all wanting to be free. Once Brown saw his first win, he created a plan. This plan would have changed the course of the country and possibly could have prevented the Civil War from lasting as long as it did.

Brown's next target was Harpers Ferry located in West Virginia. "The plan was to raid on Harpers Ferry was intended to be the first stage in an elaborate plan to establish an independent stronghold of freed slaves in the mountains of Maryland and Virginia—an enterprise that had won moral and financial support from several prominent Bostonians" (Encyclopaedia Britannica). Brown wanted owned slaves to rise up against their owners and create a free state of freedmen in the pursuit to abolish slavery. The idea behind the movement was that the population of the south was roughly about 40% whites and 60% slaves, so the slaves would have the numbers and with the capture of Harpers fort they would have the force. "Choosing Harpers Ferry because of its arsenal and because of its location as a convenient gateway to the South, John Brown and his band of 16 whites and five blacks seized the armoury on the night of October 16" (Encyclopaedia Britannica). The attack in 1859 was to supply the small rebellion and the hope to stop trading routes of slaves in the south. The attack took about 2 days but then word of the southern countryside took action sending federal and state troops under the command of Robert E. Lee. Once Lee and his troops arrived, the battle lasted about 7 minutes and Brown lost half of his men and was badly wounded resulting in the surrender of the fort.

Brown was brought to Virginia and tried and convicted for treason, Before hearing his sentence, Brown was allowed make an address to the court,

“ . . . I believe to have interfered as I have done, . . . in behalf of His despised poor, was not wrong, but right. Now, if it be deemed necessary that I should forfeit my life for the furtherance of the ends of justice, and mingle my blood further with the blood of my children, and with the blood of millions in this slave country whose rights are disregarded by wicked,

cruel, and unjust enactments, I submit: so let it be done." (PBS John Brown) Brown was then hung on December 2, 1859.

Although Brown's plan of a free state for slaves and the control of Harpers Ferry may have failed the impact of the rebellion became national news and struck fear and hope into many. The attack scared many southerners due to the fact that the rebellion even happened and that Brown was never caught earlier during his attacks in Kansas. He also brought hope to slaves and many abolitionists in the North. The North used Brown as an example to anti slavery supporters and became a martyr in the pursuit of freedom of a cause that seemed impossible.

Works Cited:

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