

# *The Newspaper Reporter and the Kansas Imbroglia*

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Scholars, as well as businessmen and politicians, have long recognized the tremendous influence of the newspaper press in the making of American public policies. As early as 1835 its mushrooming power had struck the eye of Alexis de Tocqueville, who told his European audience that when a number of journals united on one course, their pressure was "irresistible," and the strength of "the periodical press" was "only second to that of the people."<sup>1</sup> By 1850 the snorting Hoe rotary press was rolling out papers in thousands, and Moses Beach's New York *Sun* had given the "penny sheet" a vigorous start. The number of dailies climbed from 138 in 1840 to 254 at mid-century, 372 in 1860, and 542 a decade later, with a reported circulation of over two and one half million,<sup>2</sup> and a leader like the racy (but excellent) New York *Herald* claiming a daily sale of 77,000 copies on banner days in the sixties.<sup>3</sup> Such success warmed the hearts of razor-tongued, ambitious editors of the stripe of Samuel Bowles, who exuberantly foresaw the journal of the future as " 'the high priest of History, the vitalizer of Society, . . . the earth's high censor, . . . and the circulating life blood of the whole human mind' ";<sup>4</sup> or the elder Bennett, who dramatically asked why a newspaper might not become " 'the greatest organ of social life, . . . take the lead . . . in the great movements of human thought, and of human civilization,' " and even " 'send more souls

<sup>1</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, tr. by Henry Reeve, ed. by Henry S. Commager (New York, 1947), 107.

<sup>2</sup> Frederic Hudson, *Journalism in the United States, from 1690 to 1872* (New York, 1873), 770-72.

<sup>3</sup> Frank L. Mott, *American Journalism; A History of Newspapers in the United States Through 250 Years, 1690 to 1940* (New York, 1941), 303.

<sup>4</sup> Willard G. Bleyer, *Main Currents in the History of American Journalism* (Boston, 1927), 257.

to Heaven, and save more from Hell, than all the churches or chapels in New York—besides making money at the same time.’”<sup>5</sup> The same circulation figures, however, depressed such foes as the author of a bilious *Exposition of the Corruptions and Crimes of the American Newspapers*, which charged editors with deliberate efforts to “mislead the judgment of the public,”<sup>6</sup> and flung at them the opinions of contemporaries who found the press “the **GREATEST POWER IN THE STATE**,” placing “every other power, to a greater or lesser extent, in subjection to its laws,” and exercising “for good or evil” a huge influence on the popular mind, both “in itself and as the channel through which most other influences act.”<sup>7</sup> An approving nod might have come from visitors like Charles Dickens, to whom the vile works of a press with “its evil eye in every house, and its black hand in every appointment in the state” were “plainly visible,”<sup>8</sup> and William H. Russell (covering the outbreak of the Civil War for the London *Times*) who said that in cities the size of New York men spoke of the heads of “notorious” sheets “much as people in Italian cities of past time might have talked of the most infamous bravo or the chief of some band of assassins.”<sup>9</sup>

Such fiery rhetoric on both sides showed sharp awareness of what the booming circulation totals meant. The number of newspaper readers was growing daily vaster. The thirst for news of the exciting events of the fifties and then of the war, plus the coming of empire builders in newsprint — James Gordon Bennett, Horace Greeley, Joseph Medill, Charles A. Dana, and later Edward W. Scripps, Joseph Pulitzer, and William R. Hearst—who joined a shrewd sense of popular taste to a daring use of new technologies, all combined to make the daily journal the gospel of all classes. Though each class and section, indeed, might have its own Authorized Version, every American was coming to depend on those few fragile pages for his understanding of the bewildering political, social, and economic developments which were complicating his life more and

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 191.

<sup>6</sup> Lambert A. Wilmer, *Our Press Gang; or, A Complete Exposition of the Corruptions and Crimes of the American Newspapers* (Philadelphia, 1859), 51.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 64-65.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Mott, *American Journalism*, 310-11.

<sup>9</sup> William H. Russell, *My Diary North and South*, 2 vols. (London, 1863), I, 147-48.

more each year. The newspaper, with its millions of readers who found in its columns the only contact with an outside world growing ever more important to them, and yet harder to understand, grew into a mighty agent in the shaping of public attitudes. Its great thumb could so mold the mind of the believing, arguing, and voting American that it was a social force undreamed of in the older republic.

With the press rising to such sudden eminence (once held by the pulpit) in steering public opinion, the role of the news gatherer took on a new significance, and the romantic figure of the special correspondent appeared in view. Until the forties the source of all but local news had been the weeks-old clippings of "Our Latest Mails." A deft man with scissors and gluepot was a whole press service in himself, but the stale tidings which he pasted into dense columns could never hope to be as exciting as the pitch-and-brimstone editorials which the news provoked. But with the coming of the telegraph and the swift express, a few farsighted eastern papers started to post special reporters at points that gave promise of yielding news. Presently these inquisitive figures began to clamber aboard incoming steamers to press arrivals from Europe feverishly for late news; to buttonhole lawmakers and lobbyists in halls and streets of state and territorial capitals; to lounge in the galleries of party conventions; and to stumble, booted and bearded, through the mud and alkali dust of frontier mining camps or army posts. Wherever drama or conflict were to be found, they were on hand, with open notebook and persuasive pencil. Through their letters the growing numbers of newspaper readers began to witness those events and personalities on which they formed their often volatile but hugely significant judgments. As the light in which facts were presented could bend those judgments in differing directions, the correspondent, thanks to the trinity of multiple press, lightning communication, and swelling readership, became a powerful as well as a colorful force in making up the enthusiastic American mind on a variety of crucial issues. Nor was he slow to appreciate and use his newly found strength. In the frankly partisan era of pre-Civil War journalism, reporters covering politically meaningful stories were loud and eloquent in their bias, proud of their alchemists' power to transmute the base metal of events-as-they-were into the fine gold of party advantage, and cheerfully ready to

“dramatize” happenings for the convenience of the editors. In the war itself bearded and usually unterrified generals, as well as the administration, treated correspondents with nervous respect, always mindful of their ability to make or break public confidence in war policies and leaders. In Reconstruction the reports from “Secessia” of men like Whitelaw Reid, Thomas Knox, Sidney Andrews, and John T. Trowbridge helped to build the half vengeful and half reforming climate of opinion toward the South which nourished Radical policies. In time the attitude-manipulating “special” became a confidant of presidents, golf partner of princes, lion of salons, and even the hero of novels.<sup>10</sup>

For all his importance, however, historians have generally ignored the correspondent, though they have often enough used his accounts, unaltered, as sources—despite the decision of a careful student, Lucy Salmon, that “The line that divides the special correspondent from the propagandist is at times invisible.”<sup>11</sup> When dealing with the part played by newspapers in political history, they have sometimes acted as if nothing ever appeared in them save editorials and old mail, a notion which grows leaner in truth (for major journals, at least) every year after 1850. Pockets of information on the reporters themselves are so few and scattered that a student is at a world of pains to pan a few nuggets of fact. Nonetheless, this paper attempts to inquire into what manner of men the leading northern papers sent to cover the fifties’ most explosive news story—the Kansas struggle in 1856. Here was a sequence of dramatic events, taking place in the midst of an inexorably increasing tension. In their troubled minds men were juggling the prospects of peace or war. Their notions of national progress, human and political rights, the worth and permanence of the Union and the Constitution, and the character of their sectional neighbors were all being melted and recast in a fierce blaze of argument. On their understanding of such institutions as slavery, such men as Preston Brooks and Salmon P. Chase, and such happenings as the race to settle Kansas would depend those attitudes which political leaders would lean on for support in ensuing struggles. The Kansas correspondents, then, occupied a truly critical role. Given their aims and

<sup>10</sup> For interesting comment on the reporters in Reconstruction, see Paul H. Buck, *The Road to Reunion, 1865-1900* (Boston, 1937), 16-20.

<sup>11</sup> Lucy M. Salmon, *The Newspaper and the Historian* (New York, 1923), 193.

origins, it was inevitable that they should do what they did—namely, make a gigantic contribution to the excitement and suspicion which grew ominously darker as the Union stumbled closer each month to collapse.

By 1856 turbulent and thunderous name-calling was already doing much to quench any glimmering possibility of a rational solution to sectional issues. Statesmen and editors were commonly using the language of a barroom on prize-fight night to discuss the most delicate constitutional and social problems, violence was naturally following distortion, and noses were bloodied and skulls thumped from border towns to the floors of Congress. When, amid this tumult, Kansas was opened to settlement, an ordinary frontier process became fatally involved in the long range clash of North and South, and what was even more dangerous, in an approaching presidential election—a time when most Americans traditionally behave with magnificent insanity, and are ready to believe virtually anything about their opponents. As emigrants poured westward by rail, steam, and horse, reporters were sent hastening after them to describe, for the impatient East, a mighty contest between freedom and slavery scheduled to take place beyond the Mississippi.

James Redpath, corresponding variously for the *St. Louis Democrat*, *Chicago Tribune*, and *New York Tribune*, was twenty-one when he reached Kansas in 1855. He had come to Michigan from England as a boy, learned printing, plunged headlong into the anti-slavery current, and won Horace Greeley's notice with articles in a Detroit paper when only twenty.<sup>12</sup> In Kansas he served as reporter for the first Free State convention in 1855,<sup>13</sup> and was on hand at a second, months later, to rally the faltering behind a demand on Washington for repeal of the Fugitive Slave law and emancipation in the District of Columbia.<sup>14</sup> He speedily became an intimate of Charles Robinson, Free State leader, who thought him an "indomitable friend of the oppressed of all colors and all climes,"<sup>15</sup> and in the summer's guerrilla fighting he was a "Major" of Free State

<sup>12</sup> Charles F. Horner, *The Life of James Redpath and the Development of the Modern Lyceum* (New York, 1926), 17.

<sup>13</sup> Daniel W. Wilder, *The Annals of Kansas* (Topeka, 1886), 84-85.

<sup>14</sup> *New York Tribune*, January 29, 1856.

<sup>15</sup> Charles Robinson, *The Kansas Conflict* (New York, 1892), 182.

forces. Here he met and became an unquestioning supporter of John Brown, and next year (growing more passionate in his letters each month) he was temporarily an adjutant to James H. Lane.<sup>16</sup> Three years later he unabashedly confessed his private and premature declaration of war, saying: "I believed that a civil war between the North and South would ultimate in [slave] insurrection, and that the Kansas troubles would probably create a military conflict of the sections. Hence I . . . went to Kansas; and endeavored, personally and by my pen, to precipitate a revolution."<sup>17</sup>

Bellwether of Greeley's flock in Kansas was William A. Phillips. His was a vastly important position, for the yeasty *Weekly Tribune*, composed of items culled from the "moral and educational" daily sheet, shook the opinion of the whole North with its broadsides. It had the fantastic circulation of some 170,000 in the free states, and in some rural households was said to share a place with the Bible as a sole source of truth and reading matter.<sup>18</sup> A Scotch Presbyterian born, Phillips had come to the United States at fourteen, and tried both law and editing in southern Illinois before moving to Kansas. At once he became an intimate of Robinson and a Free State stalwart,<sup>19</sup> and the *Tribune* proudly asserted that he was in Kansas "not only to write well, but also . . . to fight well," when necessary.<sup>20</sup> He got time to gather his hasty letters into a volume, *The Conquest of Kansas, by Missouri and Her Allies*, dedicated to proving that "federal troops . . . [held] in their iron grasp the Kansas that Missouri and slavery conquered."<sup>21</sup> "A marvel of rapid book-making," sneered a skeptical contemporary,<sup>22</sup> but the book at once became a Free State gospel, and Phillips not only a lion in Lawrence, but in postwar years a congressman from Kansas.

The pen name "Worcester" over a Kansas letter in the *New York Tribune* signified the work of Thomas Wentworth Higginson.

<sup>16</sup> Horner, *James Redpath*, 96.

<sup>17</sup> James Redpath, *The Roving Editor; or, Talks with the Slaves in the Southern States* (New York, 1859), 300. The italics are the writer's.

<sup>18</sup> Jeter A. Isely, *Horace Greeley and the Republican Party, 1853-1861* (Princeton, 1947), Appendix B, 338.

<sup>19</sup> "Memorial Proceedings on Col. William A. Phillips," *Kansas State Historical Society Transactions*, V, 1889-1896 (Topeka, 1896), 100-13.

<sup>20</sup> *New York Tribune*, January 26, 1856.

<sup>21</sup> William A. Phillips, *The Conquest of Kansas, by Missouri and Her Allies* (Boston, 1856), 414.

<sup>22</sup> Noble L. Prentis, *Kansas Miscellanies* (2nd ed., Topeka, 1889), 95.

This young Bostonian graduate of Harvard Divinity School had prepared himself for frontier journalism by teaching school and preaching in Massachusetts. But a New England pulpit was a dangerous place then; God was sending down curious instructions for the improvement of society, and presently Higginson was helping to lead a mob against the Boston jail, to free Anthony Burns. Soon he was in Kansas for the Emigrant Aid Society, being at least once associated with Redpath in conducting 135 rifle-bearing agents of the Higher Law into Topeka.<sup>23</sup> In September, 1856, he confided, with great journalistic impartiality, to his notebook: "Only just at this moment things look discouragingly safe, and the men are beginning to fear marching in without a decent excuse for firing anything at anybody."<sup>24</sup>

The *Boston Traveller*, *Chicago Tribune*, and *New York Post* (which knew him as "Kent") were served by Richard Hinton. A recent emigrant from London, Hinton was soon in the Free State swim, connected with both their convention and legislature in 1857.<sup>25</sup> An old settler later recalled irritably that Hinton had never failed to mention his origin in "Hold Hingland" on introduction, and had, incidentally, "sent his sensational letters to the press of the eastern states, denying facts and voicing falsehoods in relation to the Pottawatomie affair."<sup>26</sup> Forty years later the correspondent himself stated that he, Phillips, Redpath, William Hutchinson, Samuel F. Tappan, James M. Winchell, and John H. Kagi — all reporters — were "earnest supporters" of John Brown, and that he and Redpath, in fact, "openly announced . . . adherence to the task of fighting slavery with every weapon obtainable."<sup>27</sup>

Sensitive, scholarly young men, sincere to death in their beliefs, were Richard Realf and John Kagi. Realf was English-born, and an already published poet at twenty-two, in 1856. In Kansas he divided his time between writing for several eastern papers, running in Free State emigrants, and serving with Jim Lane's irregulars. Then he fell under John Brown's fatal spell. At the secret meeting

<sup>23</sup> Wilder, *Annals of Kansas*, 139.

<sup>24</sup> Mary Thacher Higginson (ed.), *Letters and Journals of Thomas Wentworth Higginson, 1846-1906* (Boston, 1921), 140-41.

<sup>25</sup> Wilder, *Annals of Kansas*, 165, 171.

<sup>26</sup> Eli Moore, Jr., "The Naming of Osawatomie, and Some Experiences with John Brown," *Kansas State Historical Society Collections*, XII, 1911-1912 (Topeka, 1912), 345.

<sup>27</sup> Richard J. Hinton, *John Brown and His Men* (New York, 1894), 40-42.

of Brown's band in Canada, in May, 1858, he was chosen secretary of state in the curious government which the old man was mentally framing for the freedmen's republic, but fate saved him by making him unavailable for the final raid.<sup>28</sup> Not so lucky was Kagi (made secretary of war in the same strange meeting), who covered Kansas for the Washington *National Era* and the aging but combative William Cullen Bryant's New York *Post*. He came of a long established Virginia family, settled in Ohio. At twenty he had taught school, been a shorthand reporter, and dabbled with the law. At twenty-one he was a Kansas reporter and a roughly dressed trooper on the side of Lane and Brown. At twenty-four he lay dead in the streets of Harpers Ferry, his courage and talent of no further use to anyone.<sup>29</sup>

Though only a four-year-old infant, the New York *Times* was not caught lagging in the scramble for Kansas news. One of its reporters, Samuel F. Tappan, described himself as a Massachusetts abolitionist (and "mechanic" by profession) in the records of the Topeka Convention of 1856. Later he was tried for a part in the rescue of the Free State man, Jacob Branson, from his Missouri captors, which had touched off the sputtering little "Wakarusa War."<sup>30</sup> James M. Winchell had himself inscribed on the rolls of the Wyandotte Convention of 1859 as a "farmer" born in New York, but in 1856 he was a *Times* correspondent, and so was William Hutchinson, a Vermont-born emigrant to the beleaguered territory, aged thirty-two in that critical year.<sup>31</sup> Both men evidently stood high in the regard of Lawrence, for when the burnt offerings grew lean in November, 1856, the Kansas State Central Committee charged the two with fund-raising, and dispatched Winchell to pass the hat among the friends of freedom in New York and other eastern cities.<sup>32</sup>

Whatever the sincerity and intellect of this group of reporters

<sup>28</sup> Rossiter Johnson, "Richard Realf," *Lippincott's Magazine* (Philadelphia), XXIII (March, 1879), 293-300; James Redpath, *The Public Life of Capt. John Brown* (Boston, 1860), 231.

<sup>29</sup> Thomas Featherstonhaugh, "John Brown's Men: The Lives of Those Killed at Harper's Ferry," *Southern History Association Publications* (Washington), III (October, 1899), 288-89.

<sup>30</sup> Wilder, *Annals of Kansas*, 85, 164.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 261, 281; Richard J. Hinton, "Pens That Made Kansas Free," *Kansas State Historical Society Collections*, VI, 1897-1900 (Topeka, 1900), 371-82.

<sup>32</sup> Wilder, *Annals of Kansas*, 142-43.



for major journals (and small town editors relied on the gossipy letters of home-town emigrants for firsthand news), they were not well qualified to cover Kansas. The frontier was a place of short tempers and disputed claims, little respect for law, and a perfect passion for exaggeration. Only hard boiled western veterans, familiar with all the quirks of the frontier mind, and with the arts of political bombast and sleight-of-hand already superbly developed in the young republic, could have truly understood affairs. New York and New England abolitionist schoolteachers, lawyers, and editors could only offer one-sided zeal where understanding was needed — a tragic substitution, though perhaps the only one possible in the atmosphere of the day. At any rate, the complex net of economic and social conflicts was hardly to be cut through by militant crusaders of any persuasion.

Certainly some editors, eyeing the approaching elections, were content to have it so. Greeley wrote his managing editor: "We cannot admit Kansas as a State; we can only make issues . . . Do not let your folks write more savagely than I do. I am fiery enough." <sup>33</sup> The president of the Kansas State Central Committee begged everyone in the territory who could wield a pen to bombard newspaper offices with atrocity tales.<sup>34</sup> In 1859 George W. Brown, an original Free State martyr, scored Realf, Kagi, Phillips, and Hinton by name as dangerous ultras,<sup>35</sup> and a recent student of Greeley's party connections thinks the bewhiskered reformer could hardly have chosen worse correspondents for Kansas.<sup>36</sup> Even the orthodox James Ford Rhodes admits, of *Tribune* reporters, that "While they were diligent, able, and interesting newspaper writers, they were strong partisans, ready to believe the most atrocious outrages related of the border ruffians, and apt to suppress facts that told against their own party."<sup>37</sup> For confirmation of this masterly understatement, one must turn to the reporters' colorful accounts of Kansas affairs in the pages of the Republican papers themselves.

Chicago *Tribune* readers, with the usual lively western interest

<sup>33</sup> Quoted in James C. Malin, *John Brown and the Legend of Fifty-Six* (Philadelphia, 1942), 89.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 221.

<sup>35</sup> Lawrence *Herald of Freedom*, October 29, 1859, quoted *ibid.*, 257-58.

<sup>36</sup> Isely, *Horace Greeley and the Republican Party*, 131.

<sup>37</sup> James Ford Rhodes, *History of the United States from the Compromise of 1850*, 9 vols. (New York, 1900-1928), II, 218.

in new horizons, were treated to mail from Kansas territory as early as March, 1855. The first poll for a territorial legislature had gone thumpingly to the proslavery men, aided by herds of migratory Missourians, and the Chicago paper, spluttering at this outrage, warned — long before Lawrence and Topeka were household words in Worcester and Naugatuck — that in time “an army of New England boys” would stand on that disputed sod, “ready to defend it with their blood.” If the North, fighting for “Freedom, Truth and Righteousness against Despotism,” became really worked up, the Yankee blood which had fallen in '76 would “not disgrace its source.” Chicagoans, probably relieved to learn that someone else’s blood was going to water Kansas, soon were told that the Missourians were guilty of “ruffianly violence, . . . threats, brutalities, stabbings, shootings and gougings.” Free State men’s property was wrecked, “their wives terrified and insulted, and they driven away or butchered in cold blood!” in testimony whereof a settler named Cole McCrea told of being shot at and beaten with a plank, at a meeting controlled by proslavery forces, until his collarbone broke.<sup>38</sup> Obviously, tempers were being stretched long before Kansas began to bleed in earnest, and a few pens were already prepared to gild “atrocities” in ferocious hues. The Kansas mailbag for 1855, however, dwelt less often on political wars than on the glowing prospects of tent-and-shanty towns, and the lush soil, mineral treasures, and (unblushingly) the balmy climate of the state-to-be. The problem of the Free State promoters was to keep a lurid light on the scene without at once discouraging all but a handful of those thirsty for martyrdom from coming out, and this took journalistic balancing feats of high degree.

A dashing tale was plucked out of the “Wakarusa War” of December, 1855, when a St. Louis *Democrat* reporter told how a pair of Lawrence ladies had ridden through the “siege lines” set up around the town by the proslavery forces, visited a Free State home, and returned unchallenged, with petticoats hung with powder bags and stockings bulging with percussion caps.<sup>39</sup> A siege was palpably the stuff of romance, and the newspaper public had vicariously and safely enjoyed Sevastopol for a year. But before Lawrence could have its Light Brigade, a temporary truce and a grim winter

<sup>38</sup> Chicago *Tribune*, April 17, May 4, 5, 16, June 16, 1855.

<sup>39</sup> St. Louis *Democrat*, quoted *ibid.*, January 4, 1856.

ended the "war." Excitement rose anew, however, with early thaws. One newsman reported the tarring of a Free State resident, and asked a supply of Sharp's rifles by the significant date of "the 'ides of March' next," and another revealed, at peril of life, that a secret Border League had "sworn that Kansas *shall be a slave State*," and only swift action could keep the question from "being settled in blood." Mounted ruffians already were foraging through homes, robbing arms and "other things," according to a New York reporter.<sup>40</sup> A dispatch to Chicago, headed "Important from the Seat of War!" pictured the gallant few of Lawrence as sleeping on their arms, under hourly threat of destruction. This provoked the editors to thunder that the spirit of Bunker Hill would "resist the aggressions of the Slave-Power" as in olden times, and to warn that "a CIVIL WAR for the extension of Slavery and the subjugation of a free people" was on the horizon.<sup>41</sup>

Now stories poured in pell-mell. At Topeka a settler saw a "horde of pirates, robbers and fanatics from Missouri," brought to the territory for "purposes of murder and theft" and "protected and backed by all the strength of the Federal authorities." Franklin Pierce, with Stephen A. Douglas and Wilson Shannon, was cast as a principal villain in the journalistic drama of the rape of Kansas. From Lawrence, Redpath sent in the letter of the Reverend Pardee Butler, recently tarred and feathered at Atchison for holding what the Missourians presumably considered dangerous thoughts. "If I can picture to myself," wrote Butler, with a pardonable shudder of retrospect, "the look of a Cuban bloodhound, just ready . . . to seize a panting slave in a Florida swamp, then I imagine we have . . . the expression worn by these emigrant representatives of the . . . South Carolina chivalry when they first scented — in their own imagination — the blood of a live 'Abolitionist.'" Redpath himself disclosed that the armed ruffians robbing merchants' wagons were mainly stragglers from the band which Major Jefferson Buford had hopefully sent forth from Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina, equipped with Bibles, to secure the blessings of slavery for Kansas. Besides the inevitable bowie knives and revolvers, they now possessed government rifles, he charged, for Shannon had mustered them all in as militia — "probably by *President Jeff. Davis*'

<sup>40</sup> New York *Tribune*, January 14, 24, February 6, 1856.

<sup>41</sup> Chicago *Tribune*, February 15, 18, 19, 1856.

orders.”<sup>42</sup> Greeley’s readers learned that ruffians who had murdered Reese P. Brown in January with knives and hatchets, had spat tobacco juice into his dying eyes.<sup>43</sup> The Cleveland *Herald’s* Kansas eyewitness said that travelers were arrested and searched, letters opened, homes looted, and food stolen by the Missourians.<sup>44</sup> He also noted that Free State emigrants were shivering in poverty, while their foes reveled in gilded ease, “supported by Southern capital and guaranteed against want,”<sup>45</sup> and the St. Louis *Intelligencer’s* correspondent depicted armed men rushing headlong into the territory, bent on the destruction of Lawrence, but added a truthful and completely ignored warning: “*The ultras on both sides are dangerous men.*”<sup>46</sup>

As spring wore on the New York *Tribune* forged to the lead in Kansas coverage, for Greeley knew how valuable the Kansas issue was to the gaudy candidacy of John C. Frémont. Stories from the territory soon crowded all other news into unappetizing locations among the patent medicine ads, and a current joke told of the elderly lady who vainly tried to identify a back number which she wished to buy by declaring triumphantly: “I think it had something about *Kansas* in it!”

The famed “sack of Lawrence,” in May, gave the reporters’ tales a hitherto lacking scope and grandeur. Whatever really happened is still obscure, but in substance a posse swollen with irregular militia and armed with a “bogus” court writ entered the town, hurled the presses of the two Free State papers into the river, and set fire to the empty Free State hotel (which they said was being used for an arsenal) after vainly pecking at its walls with small cannon. Liquor flowed, some shops and homes were broken into, and Robinson’s home robbed and burned. However, the only two casualties were both accidental and both proslavery. Of course nothing could excuse such barefaced outlawry, but the eager press rushed to whip up a blaze out of a relatively small fire. It was made to appear that the “ravagers” of Lawrence left Genghis Khan looking like a new minister, nervously conducting his first church sociable, and “Lawrence” became to many northern minds the same kind of bat-

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, April 10, May 15, 22, 1856.

<sup>43</sup> New York *Tribune*, May 26, 1856.

<sup>44</sup> Quoted in New York *Herald*, May 27, 1856.

<sup>45</sup> Quoted in New York *Tribune*, May 26, 1856.

<sup>46</sup> Quoted *ibid.* The italics are the writer’s.

tle cry and trigger for explosive emotions that "Harpers Ferry" would be to some Southerners.

One *Tribune* man wrote that he galloped out of the doomed city, "his midnight pathway . . . lighted by a pyramid of fire . . . while every few moments the booming of the cannon told that the varied work of destruction was going on." Men were "firing at the houses with their artillery and freely entering and ransacking," while citizens were "disarmed, robbed, plundered and shot down, under the color of law." Another scribe drew a heart-rending picture of "the women and children of Lawrence," reduced that night to sleeping "either beneath the friendly sheltering trees along the banks of the Kansas, or huddled . . . in small houses or cabins on the outskirts of town," while the ruffians lay sprawled drunkenly in Lawrence's streets. The Missourians had fired "by platoons" at the hotel's windows, careless of "the women and children fleeing in every direction, the Sheriff having refused any time to remove them . . . to a place of safety." For fifteen miles around the flames reddened the sky; there was "no doubt but that the town is in ashes and many of its inhabitants butchered." One pious correspondent could hardly believe "that God's beautiful earth contained such savages," while another discovered a case of rape and told Franklin Pierce that "the wail of . . . one helpless and abused woman" had gone up to Heaven against him. The indomitable Redpath counted two rapes and two hundred stolen horses — perhaps a more serious matter on the plains frontier.<sup>47</sup>

The most amazing stories to come out of the Kansas troubles, however, were the several versions of the alleged speeches by the onetime Missouri Senator, David Atchison, urging the proslavery warriors into the breach. One *Tribune* version ran, in part:

Boys, this day I am a Kickapoo Ranger, by G——! This day we have entered Lawrence . . . and not one d——d Abolitionist has dared to fire a gun. . . . And now, boys, we will go in . . . and test the strength of that d——d Free State Hotel, and learn the Emigrant Aid Society that Kansas shall be ours. Boys, ladies should be . . . respected by all gentlemen; but by G——! when a woman takes on herself the garb of a soldier, by carrying . . . a Sharp's rifle, then she is no longer a woman, and by G——, treat her for what you find her, and trample her under foot as you would

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, May 30, 1856; *St. Louis Democrat*, quoted *ibid.*; *New York Tribune*, June 2, 5, 1856; *Chicago Tribune*, quoted *ibid.*, June 9, 1856.

a snake. . . . If a man or woman dare to stand before you, blow them to h—— with a chunk of cold lead!<sup>48</sup>

A letter purporting to be from a resident, James F. Legate, who said that drunken yells had interfered with his hearing, credited Atchison with saying:

Boys, the Emigrant Aid hotel with her port holes, must this day be tested, and *it* blown to hell. The damned Abolition presses must go into the Kaw River, and there soak out some of their *darky* love. If the men or women undertake to stop us, we'll hang them *by God!* A *lady* is entitled to the protection of every gentleman, but when a woman takes upon herself the garb of manhood, she is no more worthy of your protection than a savage brute.<sup>49</sup>

Redpath's version, as usual, was more colorful than the others:

Faint not as you approach the city of Lawrence; but, remembering your mission, act with true Southern heroism, and at the word, spring like your bloodhounds at home, upon that damned Abolition hole. . . . Yes, Ruffians! draw your daggers and bowie-knives, and warm them in the heart's blood of all those damned dogs that dare defend that dammed [*sic*] breathing hole of hell. . . .

Boys! do the Marshal's full bidding. . . . and for it you shall be amply paid as United States' troops, besides having an opportunity of benefiting your wardrobes from the private dwellings of those infernal nigger-stealers. . . .

Are you determined? Will every one of you swear to bathe your steel in the black blood of some of those black sons of B——s?

Yes, I know you will; the South has always proved itself ready for honorable fight, and you who are noble sons of noble sires, I know will never fail; but will burn, sack and destroy until every vestige of these Northern Abolitionists is wiped out!<sup>50</sup>

It is hard to believe that a man of Atchison's position would have permitted himself such a frenzied cocktail of profanity and bad grammar, and the similarity of the stories carries a faint suggestion that the reporters checked them with each other for improvements before mailing. Atchison denied the speech many years later,<sup>51</sup> while even Phillips declared that all the versions were "more or less incorrect"<sup>52</sup> and Hugh Young, also of the *Tribune*, admitted, with

<sup>48</sup> New York *Tribune*, June 5, 1856.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, June 19, 1856.

<sup>50</sup> Chicago *Tribune*, July 15, 1856.

<sup>51</sup> Quoted in James C. Malin, "The Proslavery Background of the Kansas Struggle," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* (Cedar Rapids), X (December, 1923), 304.

<sup>52</sup> Phillips, *Conquest of Kansas*, 295-96.

rare candor, that he couldn't get close enough to hear Atchison. The loudly Free State St. Louis *Democrat*, too, said that the Missouri leader was reported to have advised moderation.<sup>53</sup>

The proslavery papers carried versions probably as untruthful, but less stimulating. "No violence was done to any person in the town," said an Independence journal, while another "Ruffian" reporter, fresh from the "notorious abolition hole," swore that everything had been done "with order and according to law" save for the regrettable burning of the Robinson house. The St. Louis *Republican* somehow declared with a straight face that the "coolness of the citizen-soldiers" was due to the total absence of liquor in the ranks, as did the significantly named Lecompton *Union*. The Westport, Missouri, correspondent of the New York *Herald*, then holding a dignified neutrality between "Border Ruffians" and "nigger worshippers," opined that the abolitionists had "kindled the fire," and had no complaint "now that they [had] scorched their hands."<sup>54</sup>

Whoever had kindled the fire, the fat was now in it and sizzling fiercely. Redpath's facile pen outlined a "Reign of Terror," with plows idle in the furrow while farmers stood sentry or hurried on midnight alarms. He even made the Pottawatomie massacre a proslavery outrage, asserting that Allen Wilkinson, William Sherman, and the Doyles were shot in the act of stringing up a Free State man. Phillips palpitatingly told his public that he was "proscribed and hunted like a wild beast," hiding in thickets from armed ruffians, all because of his fearless exposures. Others wrote of rings being rudely snatched from Free State womenfolk, men being bound and left on the prairie to die of thirst, farmers being robbed of their cattle, dragged from their homes and pulled up on tiptoe at ropes' ends until they offered to leave Kansas. Free State prisoners from the Osawatomie guerrilla fight were allegedly marched twenty-five miles afoot, in a blazing sun, loaded with chains and deprived of water. Armed ruffians turned back Kansas-bound steamboats on the Missouri, showing (the writer of the account said) that the North was truly "*subjugated and subdued.*" Even

<sup>53</sup> New York *Tribune*, June 2, 1856; St. Louis *Democrat*, quoted *ibid.*, May 30, 1856.

<sup>54</sup> Independence (Mo.) *Western Dispatch*, quoted in New York *Tribune*, June 2, 1856; Doniphan *Kansas Constitutionalist*, quoted *ibid.*; St. Louis *Republican*, quoted *ibid.*, June 4, 1856; Lecompton *Union*, quoted *ibid.*, June 7, 1856; New York *Herald*, June 2, 1856.

the *Herald* deserted the administration, and decided that squatter rule in Kansas meant "organized ruffianism, whiskey, spoliation, robbery, murder, fire and sword."<sup>55</sup>

Intensity mounted suspiciously as election day drew near. The same paper which stated that every Free State man within twenty miles of Lawrence had lost at least one horse in July, also told of three ruffians who had critically injured an emigrant by stamping on his belly with their boots, and carried tidings of "thefts, robberies, murder, and . . . outrages" yet in store. A Fort Riley settler wrote that reading his Chicago *Tribune* amid proslavery neighbors seemed to him like reading the Scriptures in secret during the reign of Bloody Mary. Such an analogy would thrill a truculently Protestant public, and the Irish were already hopelessly Democratic and could be safely offended.<sup>56</sup>

The "Ruffians" were charged with trying to hire drunken Indians as allies, and slitting a Free State man's throat after cutting him down with ten bullets. A German farmer, said one story, was shot dead in the streets of Leavenworth and scalped by a "Ruffian" who kept the trophy on exhibit in a sheet of newspaper — from the proslavery St. Louis *Republican*, of course. (Another reporter said the scalp was paraded up and down Leavenworth's main street on a pole.) Someone said that a shot was deliberately fired down Frederick Brown's throat as he lay dead after the guerrilla fight at Osawatomie, and a gory variant declared he was "mangled by having a gun thrust into his mouth" in his death agonies, while other "Ruffians" pinned a prisoner to the ground with bayonets and shot his head to pieces. The wife and daughter of a Leavenworth man were caught alone by Missourians and subjected to "foul indignities," and a young Indiana woman was seized late at night, while returning from what delicacy styled "one of the out-buildings in the rear of the house," ravished and left for dead — a clear rebuke to those men who believed "that negro slavery elevates the character of the whites."<sup>57</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Chicago *Tribune*, quoted in New York *Tribune*, June 12, 1856; New York *Tribune*, June 13, 14, 16, July 7, 1856; Worcester (Mass.) *Spy*, quoted *ibid.*, July 9, 1856; New York *Herald*, July 3, 1856.

<sup>56</sup> Chicago *Tribune*, August 4, 16, 18, 1856.

<sup>57</sup> New York *Tribune*, August 21, 29, September 8, 1856; Chicago *Tribune*, September 5, 1856; St. Louis *Democrat*, quoted *ibid.*, September 8, 1856; Rochester (N. Y.) *Democrat*, quoted in New York *Tribune*, September 15, 1856; St. Louis *Democrat*, quoted *ibid.*, August 30, 1856; New York *Tribune*, quoted in Chicago *Tribune*, September 9, 1856.



Proslavery sheets tried their hands at this brimstone journalism, but they were well outmatched in resources, and their backers, having much less to gain politically by disturbances, took the part of "law and order" men, and preferred to show Kansas as a pleasant land, agitated only by fanatics and what they called "freedom shriekers." "Ruffian" correspondents pretended to find Lawrence welcoming a congressional investigating committee with drunken and fanatic shouts, or goading Sheriff Samuel J. Jones into free fights. They wrote of proslavery families being robbed and driven from their homes at bayonet point by "Abolitionists," with "neither age, or sex . . . exempt from the merciless savages." They goaded northern pride with gibes at the "vast hordes of emigrant paupers from the East and North" overrunning Kansas. But they could not approach their enemies in the sheer volume of this picturesque type of reporting; the fact was that local journals found it strategic to ignore the troubles, and major southern papers were evidently less interested in Kansas than we have been led to believe.<sup>58</sup>

All these charges were serious enough in an America not yet taught to be skeptical of atrocity stories, and more or less at home with genuine atrocities. But almost deadlier was the propaganda which painted the "Ruffians" as lacking in those moral virtues without which men of the fifties felt naked in the chill blast of churchly disapproval. Americans were entirely familiar with vice in all its pleasant forms, but lacked the reassuring gospel of psychiatry to tell them that vice was the result of uncontrollable inner forces. All debauchery was willful sin, a desperately grave matter in an age which believed firmly in the divine origin and responsibility of man. To show Southerners as habitual tosspots, gamesters, and swearers, then, was not to confer on them the semiendearment which such a portrait might now imply, but to stigmatize them critically. Then, too, in the North religion and conscience had been linked with self-improvement and progress, which manifested themselves in education and industry. Ignorance and backwardness were not quaint oddities in a man or section; they evidenced a collapse of conscience, a failure to till the Lord's vineyard, for which damnation was a rather lenient sentence. Jeering newspaper

<sup>58</sup> St. Louis *Republican*, quoted in *Washington National Intelligencer*, May 1, 1856, and *New York Tribune*, May 2, 1856; Westport (Mo.) *Border Times*, quoted in *New York Tribune*, June 5, 1856; Leavenworth *Journal*, quoted *ibid.*, August 25, 1856; Kickapoo *Pioneer*, quoted *ibid.*, August 15, 1856.

thrusts at southern indolence and alcoholism were often funny, but in some respects more swollen with the lethal seeds of war than any blood-and-thunder rhetoric. Viewed in this light they became a major part of the Kansas propaganda.

Correspondents told subscribers that the Missourians were "hard-featured and whiskey-flavored, unkept, unshaved," and unwashed. They were forever "drinking, gambling, . . . blaspheming," an "obscene, depraved, brutish . . . race of beings," talking mainly of "killing Abolitionists in Kansas," and as "ignorant and unpolished as their 'acts' demonstrated they were unprincipled and violent." Benjamin F. Stringfellow, one of their leaders, had supposedly said that "working-women had been whores from the time of Abraham and would be to the end of the world," a statement which must have had prodigious effect in northern kitchens and shops. Governor Shannon, like other federal officials, was "drunk at every opportunity," ranging from "three sheets in the wind" to "so drunk that he could not have told a Sharp's rifle from a blunderbuss." His wife, it was said, had made many remarks "contrasting the Pro-Slavery folks with the 'Massachusetts paupers,' much to the disparagement of the latter." By late 1856 Greeley was even absolving "the drunken rabble of Missouri" from responsibility for the state of things. The responsibility, of course, lay with the administration, the Senate, the Democratic party.<sup>59</sup>

"An incalculable amount of whiskey" welcomed Buford's men to Missouri, where an older member of the group sadly buttonholed a Chicago reporter to confide that his son had lost a fortune at cards on the outward trip, and was now, like the other young bravos, wheedling the disgusted Missourians for whiskey money. Redpath journeyed up the Missouri with a boatload of "scions of the first families of South Carolina, Alabama [and] Louisiana," all "educated to despise labor," who stayed continually drunk and amused themselves by firing pistols in the air and drawing bowie knives on each other. In the territory they were quickly marked as a "lazy, loafing, cursing and whisky-swilling class of men," contemptuous of work and depending on contributions from the misguided South for support. They did "nothing but drink and gamble," and lived

<sup>59</sup> Chicago *Tribune*, January 5, March 25, 1856; New York *Times*, February 25, 1856; New York *Tribune*, March 21, June 12, 13, July 30, September 16, 1856.

“an indolent camp life, than which nothing [was] more . . . abominably filthy.”<sup>60</sup>

In 1857 a Chicago *Tribune* man predicted that St. Louis would soon be a free soil city, as it was jammed with southern emigrants, looking for “a place where it is not disreputable to *labor*.” The hinterlands were still uncivilized; on river landings crowds of “dirty, unwashed, unshaven and unshorn scamps” leered at steamboat passengers, while in the towns the “poor, blear-eyed, ignorant crew” of “groggery hangers-on” were reduced to “relating their thefts, arsons and murders” and waiting deliveries of fresh whisky before attempting new exploits in Kansas. This reporter outlined the stock “Border Ruffian” with a vigor grandly surpassing anything appearing elsewhere:

They are a queer-looking set, slightly resembling human beings, but more closely allied, in general appearance, to wild beasts. An old rickety straw hat, ragged shirt, buttonless corduroys with a leather belt and a coarse pair of mud-covered boots constitute a ‘full dress.’ They never shave or comb their hair, and their chief occupation is loafing round whiskey shops, squirting tobacco juice and whittling with a dull jack-knife. They drink whiskey for a living, and sleep on dry goods boxes — are all ‘national democrats,’ and delight in robbing hen roosts. . . . They generally carry a huge bowie-knife and a greasy pack of cards, and . . . frequently spend the night . . . in some convenient mud-hole. Their conversation is interspersed with original oaths, and generally ends in a free fight. They are ‘down on’ schools, churches and printing offices, and revel in ignorance and filth. After visiting them one cannot but feel the truth of the doctrine of total depravity. . . .<sup>61</sup>

Familiar as we are with the nonjournalistic pursuits of the correspondents, can we deny that many of these stories were intentionally written to play on every moral and religious prejudice of eminently moral and religious minds? Kansas had to bleed in order that no right-thinking reader could miss seeing a dark plot of the Slave Power to capture America’s cherished West for itself. The danger of these unlabeled political handbills, which made of every Missourian a murderous hillbilly, lay in the fact that no pains whatsoever were taken to mark the so-called “Ruffians” off from the mass of nonslaveholding southern whites. It was suggested that every Southerner who did not own and beat slaves was the drunken

<sup>60</sup> Chicago *Democratic Press*, quoted in *New York Tribune*, May 10, 1856; *Chicago Tribune*, May 16, 1856; *New York Tribune*, June 13, August 6, 16, 1856.

<sup>61</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, March 25, April 13, 14, 20, 1857.

tool of someone who did — just as, for some Dixieland journals, every Yankee kept a set of false scales and a picture of John Brown on his mantelpiece. Newspapers on both sides joined in the foolish game of bartering off precious pride and confidence in the Union, bit by bit, for temporary election advantages. Countrymen were no longer neighbors with whom one traded garden tools and had arguments in the first week of November; they were enemies of everything worth living for. In such an atmosphere, created in part by the work of the Kansas correspondents, things could go but one way, and it little mattered what immediate event set off the charge.

As for the truth of Kansas, it would be a hardy venture to seek it overnight when scholars such as James C. Malin and Frank H. Hodder have given lifetimes to intense scrutiny of the economic origins of the fighting. But there is just enough evidence to show that the reporters' versions — often now the official versions — which pit a corps of the blessed against the hordes of unrighteousness, leave many gaps unfilled.

The books on Kansas published in 1856 generally uphold the Free State cause, but were mainly written by contestants, not spectators. Mrs. Sara Robinson's account, ringing with screams, echoes of round Missouri oaths and pistol shots is, after all, the work of the Free State "governor's" lady, and generally repeats the newspaper charges in a more shrill tone.<sup>62</sup> Correspondent Phillips' *Conquest of Kansas* is one long polemic. A heavy weapon for the Free State side was *The Englishman in Kansas*, by Thomas H. Gladstone, correspondent of the sober *London Times*. Gladstone, supposedly neutral to begin with, accepted the Free State position with such huge enthusiasm that he not only laid every outbreak of trouble at the door of the "drunken, bellowing, bloodthirsty" Missourians, but at peril of his immortal soul recommended the Robinson and Phillips books as unpolluted sources of fact.<sup>63</sup> Yet the uproarious American West had shaken more than one case of Fleet Street decorum, and Gladstone probably did feel more at home with the New Englanders of Lawrence than among the booted, hairy, and tobacco-fragrant Missouri rivermen straight

<sup>62</sup> Sara T. L. Robinson, *Kansas; Its Exterior and Interior Life* (Boston, 1856).

<sup>63</sup> Thomas H. Gladstone, *The Englishman in Kansas: or, Squatter Life and Border Warfare* (New York, 1857), xlvii, 41, 64, 228-29.

from Huck Finn's world. Mrs. Hannah A. Ropes's *Six Months in Kansas*, carrying only to April, 1856, seems realistic in that it speaks much more of the normal hazards and toils of frontier life — undoctored fevers, funerals, seemingly endless childraising — than of violence at the polling booths.<sup>64</sup>

Yet even in 1856 there was skepticism, as there might well have been, considering that after all, according to so unruffianly a student as James Ford Rhodes, only two hundred were killed before December, 1856 — a record which some cow and mining towns of a decade later might have considered comparatively effeminate. Theodore Parker knew “‘of no transaction in human history . . . covered up with such abundant lying.’”<sup>65</sup> G. Douglas Brewerton was sent to Kansas in 1855 by the New York *Herald* with a terse warning from the managing editor that the war in Kansas was all “‘a move to make political capital for Whitfield or Reeder at Washington,” a “humbug, of the most unmitigated kind.” His own conclusion, in a book of badly strained (but rare) humor, was that Kansas had been duped by “‘too many *windy* battles . . . by interested *talkers* upon *either* side,” whose main interest lay in the loaves and fishes of office.<sup>66</sup> Bennett shared the conviction, with many Democratic editors, that “‘the Kansas imbroglio” was “‘the active business capital of the nigger worshippers for the Presidential campaign,” and that they had, perforce, to “‘inflare and keep up an overwhelming sectional excitement.”<sup>67</sup> The Whig New York *Express* must have spoken for many when it charged Greeley's *Tribune* with the blame “‘*For the blood which has been shed in Kansas . . . and for all that is bitter and ferocious in the modern school of politics.*”<sup>68</sup>

Many Kansans, too, were apparently unhappy in the knowledge that the East thought they spent most of their time calling upon each other with hatchets. One settler told the congressional investigating committee (which could only reach a split verdict) that he knew “‘of no one being treated unkindly who minds his own

<sup>64</sup> Mrs. Hannah A. Ropes, *Six Months in Kansas. By a Lady* (Boston, 1856).

<sup>65</sup> Quoted in Leverett W. Spring, *Kansas, The Prelude to the War for the Union* (Boston, 1890), v-vi.

<sup>66</sup> G. Douglas Brewerton, *The War in Kansas. A Rough Trip to the Border, Among New Homes and a Strange People* (New York, 1856), 17, 395-96.

<sup>67</sup> New York *Herald*, April 29, 1856.

<sup>68</sup> Quoted in Albert J. Beveridge, *Abraham Lincoln, 1809-1858*, 2 vols. (Boston, 1928), II, 407.

business,'” and another disgustedly declared that had it not been “‘for land and town lot speculations, there would have been no trouble in Kansas.’”<sup>69</sup> Recently published letters, in which settlers unconscious of divine mission or a reading public poured out their private impressions of Kansas, are of great aid. A South Carolina schoolteacher despaired at the “lies told about the affairs of Kansas,” and the gullibility of his home town paper which was dutifully copying these “erroneous statements.”<sup>70</sup> Thomas Wells came out from Rhode Island to battle the Slave Power, but was soon obliged to warn his family not to “think too much of the newspaper accts of what the pro-slavery people are going to do in Kansas,” for they were “frequently exag[g]erated . . . and . . . *inaccurate*,” though sometimes not stating the case “as bad as the truth would allow.”<sup>71</sup> On the other hand, New Yorker John Everett told his brother Robert that the latter’s information on political matters was “as correct as mine, particularly if you read the N. Y. Tribune.”<sup>72</sup> Yet all three showed their greatest concern to be with pioneer problems — efforts at furniture making, fears that flour would give out before roads were thawed, and strange new remedies for sore udders and croup. They took less thought of the political morrow than the lawyers and editors at Lawrence, and saw trouble only when it left a powder stain on their sills, or turned up as precious news, to be savored on long, lonely evenings. Even the fearsome army of the Slave Power which “sacked” Lawrence is shown, if we may credit a recently republished diary, to have been composed at least partly of farmers’ sons behaving typically in an era when firearms and liquor were common, and excitement and a chance to skip chores for a week were rare. Written in the vein of the *Private History of a Campaign That Failed*, this all-too-uncommonly humorous account suggests that the “troops” spent more time dodging stray shots from each others’ guns and quarreling with officers than in lynching “abolitionists.” The company included, among others, “four Doctors, a sprinkling of Lawyers, some

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 336, 319. See also *Report of the Special Committee Appointed to Investigate the Troubles in Kansas; with the Views of the Minority of Said Committee* (Washington, 1856). This document is *House Report No. 200, 34 Cong., 1 Sess.*

<sup>70</sup> Axalla J. Hoole, “A Southerner’s Viewpoint of the Kansas Situation, 1856-1857,” *Kansas Historical Quarterly* (Topeka), III (February, 1934), 59.

<sup>71</sup> Thomas C. Wells, “Letters of a Kansas Pioneer, 1855-1860,” *ibid.*, V (May, August, 1935), 176, 282.

<sup>72</sup> “Letters of John and Sarah Everett,” *ibid.*, VIII (February, 1939), 13.

business men and mechanics." The departure for Lawrence was marred by the appearance of "a young urchin, who kept continually gyrating his fingers at the end of his nose," and the attempts at drill were "painful," generally ending in dismissal "amongst the acclamations of the company." A shortage of trained cooks led to the issuing of bread "of the consistency of a brick and something of the color of a quadroon." Even the famous whisky left something to be desired. On May 20 the men received a ration of it in tin pannikins, but a fly could "with little danger ford from one side to the other of said pannikin." Yet the diarist was aware that such vignettes of camp life would not appear in the eastern press, for on May 16 they captured "a live Yankee," and he observed:

Yankee displays a great amount of coolness, and evidently takes notes for a leader for the [New York] *Tribune*. After mature deliberation we agree to let him slide, treating him with all the courtesy imaginable. He retires thanking us for our humanity, but will write for old Greeley's paper, I presume, at the first opportunity an account of the *barbarous treatment of a Free State man by the Pro-slavery party*.<sup>73</sup>

Such smoke indicates at least a small fire. Partisan reporting can never be truthful reporting, and as history teaches nothing when presented as a simple struggle between good and bad, it would seem worth-while to cover the ground of Kansas once more. Certainly the unfolding of the story in terms of torture, murder, and fire, by men with hearts and pens wholly dedicated to the triumph of abolition principles, helped measurably to cut the ground from under moderates, foster irreconcilable attitudes, and keep political sore spots festering. There is no suggestion here that one side had a corner on intransigence, or that the proslavery men were less flamboyant than their enemies in the war of words. A nation as romantic, impulsive, and dogmatic as young America could not, perhaps, express itself on issues so deeply rooted in the soul in any nonviolent way. Nevertheless, no long range proposal of racial and economic adjustment, demanding patience and concession from all parties, could spring out of soil made barren by hate propaganda. The Kansas reporters helped to make the sectional issue, in many minds, one of absolute rights and wrongs, and whether or not disunion could eventually have been prevented, the release of

<sup>73</sup> "Notes on the Pro-Slavery March on Lawrence," *ibid.*, XI (February, 1942), 45-64.

such explosive forces in men's brains boded ill for any hope of compromise. Modern journalists may well consider that great influence carries great responsibility before staking the fate of western civilization on the outcome of one diplomatic crisis. Nothing is easier than to stand on one's moral superiority and invoke sacred symbols in every quarrel, ignoring the sordid clash of material interests; but such a course can lead to tragic developments and leave the press, among many other agencies, with a heavily freighted conscience.