

ESSENTIAL CIVIL WAR CURRICULUM

The Brooks-Sumner Affair

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Resources

If you can read only one book

Author	<i>Title</i> . City: Publisher, Year.
Hoffer, Williamjames	<i>The Caning of Charles Sumner: Honor, Idealism, and the Origins of the Civil War</i> . Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010.

Books and Articles

Author	<i>Title</i> . City: Publisher, Year. "Title," in <i>Journal</i> ##, no. # (Date): #.
Benson, T. Lloyd	<i>The Caning of Senator Sumner</i> . Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2004.
David, James Corbett	"The Politics of Emasculation: The Caning of Charles Sumner and Elite Ideologies of Manhood in the Mid-Nineteenth-Century United States," in <i>Gender and History</i> 19 (August 2007): 324-45.
Deitreich, Kenneth	<i>The Short Life and Violent Times of Preston Smith Brooks: A Man of Mark</i> . Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2019.
Donald, David	<i>Charles Sumner and the Coming of the Civil War</i> . New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1960.
Freeman, Joanne B.	<i>The Field of Blood: Violence in Congress and the Road to Civil War</i> . New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018.

Gienapp, William	“The Crime Against Sumner: The Caning of Charles Sumner and the Rise of the Republican Party,” in <i>Civil War History</i> 25, no.3 (Sept. 1979): 218-45.
Pierson, Michael D.	“All Southern Society Is Assailed by the Foulest Charges’: Charles Sumner's 'The Crime against Kansas' and the Escalation of Republican Anti-Slavery Rhetoric,” in <i>New England Quarterly</i> 68 (December 1995): 531-57.
Puleo, Stephen	<i>The Caning: The Assault that Drove America to Civil War</i> . Yardley, PA: Westholme Publishing LLC, 2013.
Simpson, Brooks	“‘Hit Him Again’: The Caning of Charles Sumner,” in Finkelman, Paul and Donald Kennon, eds. <i>Congress and the Crisis of the 1850s</i> . Athens: Ohio University Press, 2012, 203-21.
Sinha, Manisha	“The Caning of Charles Sumner: Slavery, Race, and Ideology in the Age of the Civil War,” in <i>Journal of the Early Republic</i> 23, No. 2 (Summer 2003): 233-62.
White, Laura	“Was Charles Sumner Shamming, 1856-1859?” <i>The New England Quarterly</i> 33, no. 3 (Sept. 1960): 291-324.
Woods, Michael E.	“‘The Indignation of Freedom-Loving People’: The Caning of Charles Sumner and Emotion in Antebellum Politics,” in <i>Journal of Social History</i> 44, no. 3 (Spring 2011): 689-705.
_____.	“Tracing the 'Sacred Relicts': The Strange Career of Preston Brooks's Cane,” in <i>Civil War History</i> 63 (June 2017): 113-32.

Organizations

Organization Name	Description, Contact information including address, email
The South Carolina State Museum (Columbia, SC)	The museum has some rings made from fragments of the cane. Their website is: http://scmuseum.org/
The Old State House (Boston, MA)	The museum has a cane that is probably the one used by Brooks (although this is not

	entirely certain). Their website is: https://www.thefreedomtrail.org/trail-sites/old-state-house
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Web Resources

Other Sources

Name	Description, Contact information including address, email
Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA	Charles Sumner Correspondence https://hollisarchives.lib.harvard.edu/repositories/24/resources/1477
Lewis Round Wilson Special Collections Library at the University of South Carolina	Preston S. Brooks Letters, 1856 https://finding-aids.lib.unc.edu/01842/

Scholars

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Topic Précis

On May 19 and 20, 1856 Senator Charles Sumner delivered his “Crime against Kansas” speech in the U.S. Senate. Sumner opposed the 1854 Kansas-Nebraska Act and abhorred the resulting literal and figurative battleground that was Bleeding Kansas as it struggled with whether it would become a free or slave state. Sumner’s habit of using aggressive personal attacks against his opponents made him a hated man. And in his five-hour oration over two days, his “Crime against Kansas” speech, he was particularly scathing about his opponents. The speech covered four crimes, four apologies and four remedies. Among those he excoriated was Senator Andrew Butler of South Carolina. Representative Preston Brooks of South Carolina was a cousin of Butler’s. He overheard part of Sumner’s speech and read the transcript after it. Because of Butler’s age (and the fact that he was travelling after the speech was given) Brooks decided that it would be up to him to punish Sumner. The southern code of honor did not countenance a duel with an inferior (as Brooks

considered Sumner to be) so he settled on a plan to assault Sumner. On May 22 Brooks entered the Senate chamber as the session ended. He approached Sumner, accused him of libeling his state and slandering his relative and proceeded to beat Sumner unconscious. Brooks was tried in court for assault and fined \$300. Special committees in both the Senate and House were struck to investigate the affair, the Senate committee deciding it had no jurisdiction and the House committee issuing majority and minority reports. A vote in the House to expel Brooks failed. Brooks responded with a defiant speech and resigned, to be immediately reelected a few months later. Brooks died unexpectedly in January 1857 before he could resume his seat. Sumner, meanwhile, suffered a great deal from the beating and while re-elected was unable to return to the Senate until 1859. He was a radical Republican during the Civil War, active in Reconstruction after the war and served a total of 23 years in the Senate, dying in 1874 at the age of 63. The attack by Brooks on Sumner inflamed sectional passions. It was applauded in the South where increasing hostility of northerners towards slavery and southern culture was resented. In the North the attack confirmed negative views of the South and strengthened the new Republican party as the election of 1860 approached.
