

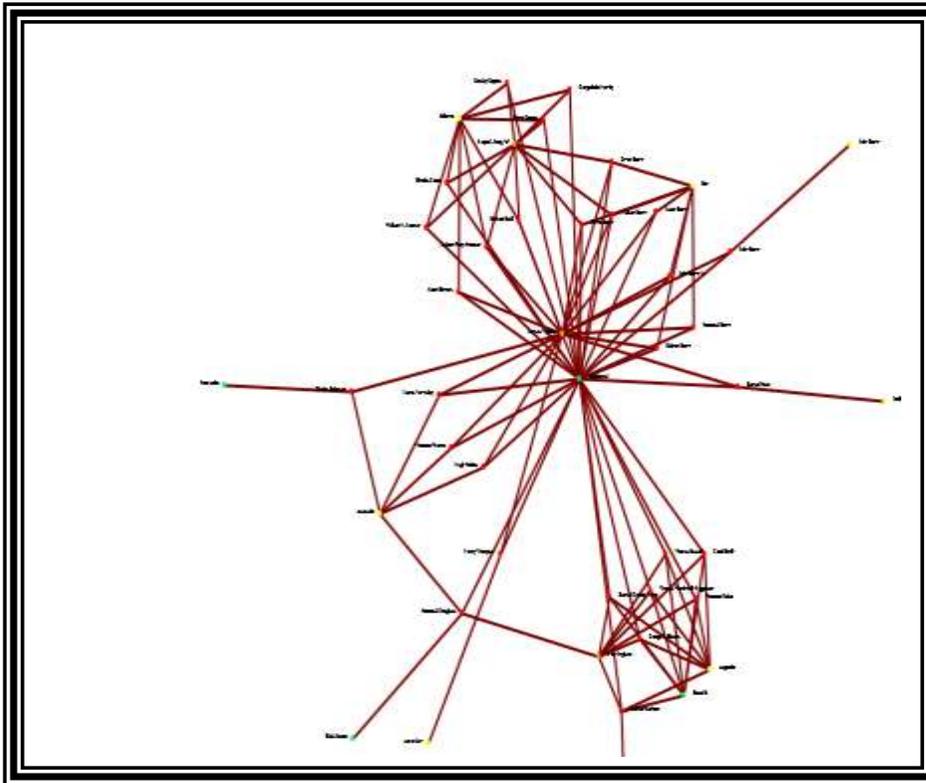
John Brown of Kansas: A Network Analysis of Influence and Centrality

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The history of pre-Civil War Kansas is marked by the “Bleeding Kansas” period that existed between 1854 and 1858. During that time an uneasy alliance existed between Free State advocates who fought to keep slavery from competing with free labor in Kansas, abolitionists who feared the entry of a new slave state into the union after the failure of the Missouri Compromise, and men who like Brown who saw slavery as an anathema to be fought by any means necessary. Brown’s anti-slavery efforts culminated in the pivotal abolitionist raid by Brown and his band on Harper’s Ferry, in what was then Virginia in 1859. The myths that surrounded Brown during his lifetime and after his execution cloud the influence he exercised on followers and associates of similar political beliefs. His social networks offer a fascinating field for historians to explore in assessing his influence in Kansas and among abolitionist communities of the eastern United States.

Constructing a preliminary network for Brown and his known associates constituted a test case for my studies in the formation of Civil War era social networks. I am particularly interested in learning the degree of inter-related political and social connections between Underground Railroad conductors and Civil War Union officers in the western theatre. The network I chose to develop is a very limited one based on thirty individuals identified by a survey of secondary sources and my dissertation research into the 79th United States Colored Troops. The resulting network, although not by any means complete, offers some insight into how John Brown’s influence spanned the United States.

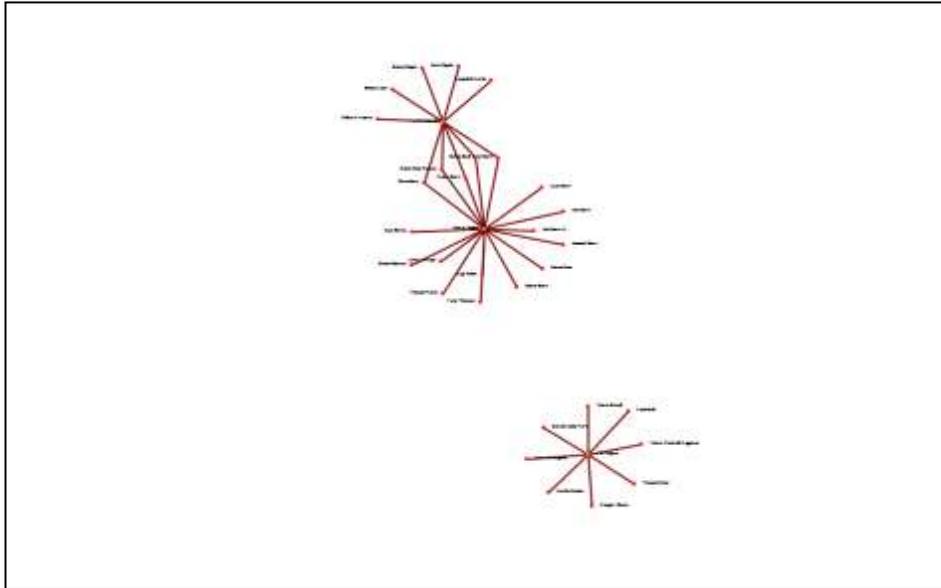
The network has not been weighted for the degree of assumed influence on family and friends, rather, all individuals have been assessed in terms of their political affiliation and geographical location. The results display several nodes that test the hypothesis that John Brown was deeply connected to a number of individuals of several socio-economic levels, race and political influence. The second network that I constructed related to John Brown’s time in Kansas relates to the officers of the 79th United States Colored Troops, a group largely affiliated with abolitionism and Underground Railroad activities. Some individuals have been included due to pre-war relationships and activities that reveal sympathy with abolitionism, although verified only through oral history or anecdotes. Many personal connections have been obscured by the passage of time, but seldom do people of widely contrasting interests resist incursions by individuals outside of the core group. Therefore I assumed that individuals identified by potential actions in support of the Underground Railroad were abolitionists and at least peripherally associated with John Brown.



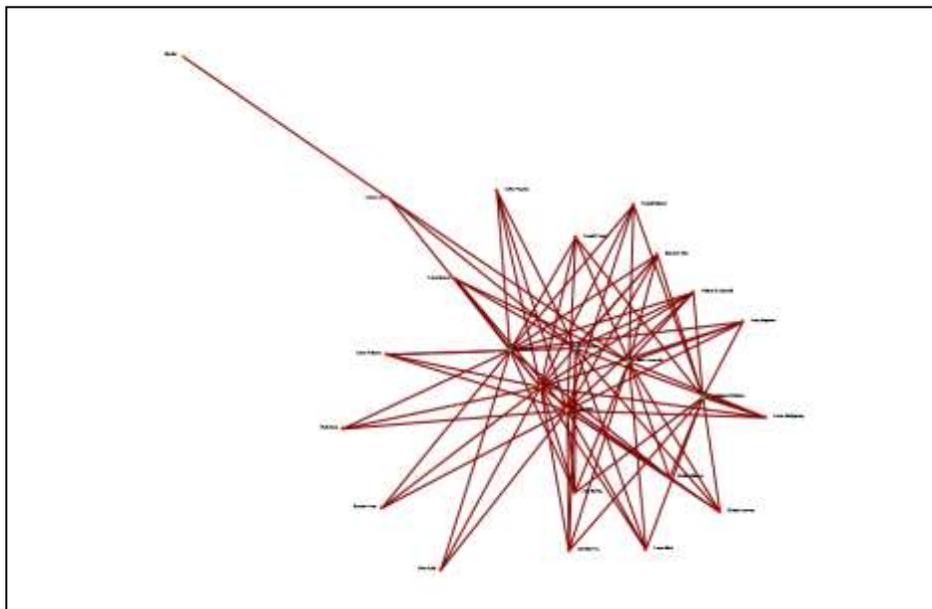
John Brown Network 1: All Affiliations

John Brown's networks were defined as three organizations: family members to include in-laws; abolitionists; and supporters such as the abolitionist group known as the "Secret Six." The resulting networks, with John Brown at the center display a 0.26 centrality with abolitionists and a standard deviation of 0.362. Measures of action-level have a 0.143 centrality and GINI coefficient of 0.371. Brown is the central node for all groups, but what is interesting to note is that Brown's links to core and peripheral groups is sustained over great distances in an era when he communicated via letter, courier, and face-to-face communication. Sustaining such links depended on regular correspondence and shared interests that were reinforced over a decade of action in Kansas and the eastern abolitionist enclaves. His Harper's Ferry followers united both groups into a single network that was extinguished when the followers were killed at Harper's Ferry or later executed following capture.

Network diagram 2 demonstrates the impact of Brown's social network when he and his Harper's Ferry followers were killed or executed. However, his death did not sunder abolitionist activity in the east or Kansas. In fact, Brown's death brought together previously discrete networks in the 79th United States colored Troops when the Civil War began. Network diagram 3 is a dense network with multiple connections and



John Brown Network 2: Organizational Affiliations (Harper's Ferry at top)



John Brown Network 3: Underground Railroad and John Brown's Kansas Legacy

key nodes centered around abolitionist and Underground Railroad associations. These relationships will be explored further, but network science is offering some new ways for historians to analyze data and develop quantifiable measures to determine the influence of individuals within those networks.