

# The Trial of the The Secret Six

A Fictitious Role Play of the Trial  
Of the Secret Six, The Men who conspired  
with John Brown

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Tahanto Regional High School

For  
Understanding the Civil War Through Primary Sources

9/22/2001

## **Lesson Plan**

**Class:** United States History; AP United States History

**Grades** 9-12

**Unit:** Renewing the Sectional Struggle, Prelude to War

**Topic:** The Trial of the Secret Six

### **Goals:**

1. The Students will develop a greater understanding of the intense division developing between the North and the South over the issue of slavery by being challenged to play the role of a particular individual during this time.
2. The students will be challenged to contemplate under what conditions is a crime justifiable.

### **Instructional Objectives:**

After this lesson, students will be able to:

1. Identify the role played by the Secret Six in the crimes of John Brown
2. Identify and understand the main arguments for and against the Fugitive Slave Act from the perspective of
  - A. Abolitionists
  - B. Moderate Republicans
  - C. Jeffersonian and Henry Clay's "necessary evil"
  - D. John C. Calhoun's Slavery- a positive good
3. Evaluate the facts of the case and judge whether the actions of the Secret Six were justified or whether they were guilty of treason
4. Students will develop a general idea of the procedures of a Senate committee hearing

### **Procedures**

1. Students will receive a role sheet for the trial. Roles are broken down as follows.
  - A. Witnesses of the crime in question
  - B. Political and character witnesses
  - C. Committee senators will act as tribunal interrogators There will be
    1. at least one prejudiced to favor the defense
    2. at least one prejudiced to favor the prosecution
    3. a more impartial chairperson (James Mason) who will run the session and not question the witnesses from a prejudiced point of view

Each role has a specific purpose either by presenting key evidence in the case or to present a key point of view regarding slavery in general and the fugitive slave act in particular.

2. Students will read their role and discuss a plan of attack with their "friendly senator" on the committee in order to best present the argument presented on that student's role sheet.
3. Students will prepare for their testimony.
4. Students will testify before the committee, fielding questions from both their "friendly" senator and their "unfriendly" senator, as well as the committee chair
5. Students will debate the issue on the floor of the Senate and vote on the guilt and or innocence of the Secret Six
6. Students will write an essay that compares and contrasts the various viewpoints given during the trial on the fugitive slave act

### **Materials**

1. Student Role Sheets
2. FCAs for witness performance

3. FCAs for Essay
4. Classroom arranged in Senate committee format
5. Placards for Senators during trial and debate
6. Gavel for Committee Chair and Senate President

**Evaluation**

1. Debate Grade
2. Essay
3. Test on the Unit

Participants

Defense

**Character**

**Student**

Harriet Beecher Stowe

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Anthony Burns

\_\_\_\_\_

Thomas Wentworth Higginson

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Theodore Parker

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Samuel Gridley Howe

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George L. Stearns

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Franklin B. Sanborn

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Gerrit Smith

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Mary Smith

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James Redpath

\_\_\_\_\_

Frank Preston Stearns (exaggerated Stories)

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**Prosecution**

**Character**

**Student**

Governor John Albion Andrew

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Frederick Douglass

\_\_\_\_\_

J.E.B. Stuart (Carpetbag found implicating S. Six)

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Lewis Washington (Hostage @ Harper's Ferry)

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Hugh Forbes

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Asa Butman

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William Lloyd Garrison

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Judge Edward Loring

\_\_\_\_\_

Mahala Doyle

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Richard Realf

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Charles Robinson

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George Fitzhugh

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**Senate Investigative Committee**

**Character**

**Student**

James Mason (Chair)

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Jefferson Davis

\_\_\_\_\_

Graham N. Fitch (Indiana)

\_\_\_\_\_

James R. Doolittle (Wisconsin)

\_\_\_\_\_

Jacob Collamer (Vermont)

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## Defense Witness: Mary Smith

Congratulations, you have been chosen to be the defense's "impact witness." Using the primary source documents provided for you in your folder, you and your "friendly senators" will devise an argument that disputes the notion that slavery is an issue that only impacts those who live in the South, and thus the people of the North should simply mind their own business. After reading the sources provided for you, you should be able to answer the following questions.

1. What happened to you while you were in the South?
2. How does your story demonstrate how the fugitive slave law infringes upon the rights of free blacks, even in the North?
3. Why are you opposed to the fugitive slave act?

## Defense Witness: Harriet Beecher Stowe

You are the author of the famous *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the book that sparked enormous controversy over slavery in general and the Fugitive Slave Act in particular. You are brought before this court to testify on behalf of the *Secret Six* as a fellow Northerner who feels horrified at the notion that a law was passed that required the North to return runaway slaves to their masters. As so eloquently depicted in your novel, slavery is a sin in the eyes of the Lord and the sooner it becomes part of America's past the better. You sympathize with your northern compatriots. You have no knowledge of their alleged conspiracy with John Brown, however you are brought before the court to explain why so many in the North were opposed to slavery in general and the fugitive Slave Act in particular.

Read pp. 112-129 in *The Approaching Fury*, by Stephen Oates. This will allow you to answer the following questions during your testimony.

1. Why are you opposed to slavery?
2. Why are you and so many other Northerners disgusted about the Fugitive Slave Law?
3. What was your novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, about?
4. How have many in the South responded to your book?
5. You are going to be challenged by the other side regarding the veracity of your novel. Isn't this simply a figment of your imagination? What evidence do you have that such events as depicted in your book actually occur in real life. Be sure to use examples cited in the reading.

## Defense Witness: Anthony Burns

You are Anthony Burns, one of the most famous fugitive slaves in American History. You had escaped the South in 1854, stowing away on an old Baltimore clipper, hiding in a place so small that for the 2 week voyage you were never able to stretch completely out. Upon arriving in Boston you obtained a job at the Mattapan Works in South Boston. You were captured as a fugitive slave later that year, in May, and your subsequent hearing and deportation sparked riots and demonstrations not seen in Boston since the Revolutionary War. It is during this time that you became associated with two of the defendants, Thomas Higginson and Theodore Parker. Read the attached selections from *Anthony Burns, The Defeat and Triumph of a Fugitive Slave*, and be prepared to testify before the committee

1. What happened to you hand? 109-121.
2. Tell the story of "Wings over Jordan." Why did this convince you that you were destined to escape? (109-121)
3. Discuss the efforts of Parker to assist you in your defense at the hearing. (P. 49-51)
4. Are you aware of Parker's efforts to rally Boston behind your cause? (p. 55-56) Isn't this an obvious example of attempting to undermine a federal law that was passed to maintain unity between North and South?
5. Describe what you witnessed outside your jail cell the night of May 26, 1854. (p. 79-80 and 91-92) Was Mr. Higginson a participant? What was he doing? As a result of this incident, what was the fate of one of the guards, a Mr. Batchelder?
6. Isn't it true that as part of your defense you claimed that you did not escape but simply fell asleep on the boat that carried you off to Boston? (p. 142) Did you expect them to believe this? What does this say about your character and of your credibility as a witness?
7. Is it true that US District Attorney Hallett refused to allow you to be bought by northern sympathizers? (P. 106)
8. What happened at your hearing? Were you released or sent back to the South?
9. Describe the scene of your deportation. (160-165)
10. Discuss how you were "made an example of" upon your arrival back in Virginia (165-168)
11. How did you eventually gain your freedom? (168-170)

You must prepare against the prosecution's attempts to depict your story as a prime example of two members of the Secret Six, Parker and Higginson, as dangerously violent abolitionists who were will to resort to violence to achieve their goals. You must somehow

## Defense Witness: Thomas Wentworth Higginson

### Photo Here (page 53)

You are a member of the so called “Secret Six.” Unlike many of your associates, you are proud of your association with John Brown and was looking forward to testifying before the committee so that you could set the record straight regarding your opinion of slavery, the Fugitive Slave Law, and the Crime Against Kansas.

**Important Family-** Born in 1823, you are a member of one of the most distinguished families in New England. On your mother’s side you find such distinguished names as the Storow family (Storow Drive) and John Wentworth, the first governor of New Hampshire. Your father’s side can claim Francis Higginson, who emigrated to Salem in 1629 and was the author of the famous *New England Plantation*, which was a best seller in England.

**Renaissance Man** You are an extremely gifted in many areas. You are extremely articulate and athletic, having the distinction of being both a popular Worcester minister and an amateur boxer! You entered Harvard at the age of 13 and upon graduating entered Harvard Divinity School. You truly are a man ahead of your times. You fought for the causes of both abolitionism and women’s suffrage.

**Disunion-** Like many abolitionists at the time, you believed that slavery was the great sin of the nation and therefore must be abolished. You quickly, however, moved to the radical fringe of the abolitionist movement by being a proponent of disunion. As you wrote in your journal in 1846,

*“I might have recorded on my birthday or New Year’s Day, my final self enrollment on the ranks of the American Non-Jurors or Disunion Abolitionists... and my determination not only to vote for any officer who must take an oath to support the U.S. Constitution but also to use whatever means may lie in my power to promote the Dissolution of the Union.”*

**Riot- The Anthony Burns Case** Read pages 64-70 in *The Secret Six*, by Edward Renehan, Jr. The Prosecution will attempt to portray you as rebellious agitator intent on destroying the Union. How can you defend your actions in Boston? Didn’t the Fugitive Slave law help keep the Union together?

**Fundraising** You will not deny that you have been involved with fundraising events through your church and through your association with the Secret Six to support John Brown. You are going the have to defend such support for a man who was engaged in such activities as Potawamie, his raids on Missouri, and of course Harper’s Ferry. Read pages 103-105 and page 115. How did our experiences in Kansas convince your that support of a man such as Brown was a good thing?

**The Harper’s Ferry Plan-** Plausible deniability and the Forbes problem Read p. 128-129 and 162-166 in *The Secret Six*. Why did the Secret Six postpone the Harper’s Ferry plan at the Revere House? What new arrangement was made with Brown in attempt to HIDE the Secret Six’s involvement? Why did you disagree with Brown that postponement was not a good thing? Clearly, this is evidence against you. However, as already stated, you will NOT back down from your support of Brown. However, keep in mind that you are also loyal to your friends. Devise a defense that demonstrates that Brown told you of this new arrangement, and that you were aware of the Forbes factor by a private letter from Forbes to you.

**Final Analysis-** Read page 273-274. In retrospect, what would you have done differently if you could do it all over again? Keep in mind that you are not looking to hide your feelings. Your testimony will likely indict you for treason, but you do not care. Slavery is an evil and you believe that in this case, the ends justify the means.



## Defense Witness: Theodore Parker

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You are a member of the notorious “Secret Six,” the alleged conspirators and financial backers of John Brown.

### Background

Like most of the Secret Six, you are from a family that has quite a New England pedigree. Your grandfather commanded the Minutemen on the Lexington Green who uttered the words “*Don’t fire unless fired upon, but if they want to have a war, let it begin here.*” You have always felt destined, or cursed (depending on your mood) by your family history to fight against injustice. When asked about your defiance of the Fugitive Slave Law, you were quoted as saying, “*You know I do not like fighting, but what could I do? I was born in the little town where the fight and the bloodshed of the Revolution began... My grandfather drew the first sword in the Revolution, my fathers fired the first shot, the blood which flowed there was kindred to this which courses in my veins today...*”

### Ideology

Like most abolitionists of this era, your estimate of “the negro” intellectually and morally, was low. This did not, however, sway you from your belief that slavery was “*the great national sin.*” Your chief argument against slavery was that it contradicted in your eyes one of the most sacred documents in the history of the world, the *Declaration of Independence*. All in America were to blame, for both men in the North and the South profited from it and the rest allowed it to go on. In your most famous sermon, you said, *As the “snake” of slavery came crawling northward in the guise of the fugitive slave law, so at the same time did avarice—“the foulest worm which Northern cities gender in their heat” --- go crawling south. With many a wiggling curl it wound along its way. At length they met and twisting their obscene embrace, the twain became one monster... there was no North, no South, they were one poison.*”

### Personality

You have been described as “pompous, annoying, and eminently good.” You are an extremely intense and strong willed man and pride yourself on valuing “truth over friendship, candor over decorum, and war over any peace that compromises liberty.” Ralph Waldo Emerson once said of you that you “never kept back the truth for fear to make an enemy.” Forever the idealists, you were denied many pulpits due to your unique takes on religion. But true to form, you would not compromise your version of the truth for convenience sake. (For further info on his religious doctrine see p. 41 in *The Secret Six*.”

### Your Testimony

You will be challenged in court to defend your actions in both the Anthony Burns case and the activities of John Brown. Read the following and prepare your defense.

1. Read p. 55-56 in *Anthony Burns*. How can you justify your actions. Clearly, Burns was the property of the slave owner in question. If Boston refused to hand him over, couldn’t this lead to a slippery slope down the path to civil war?
2. Read p. 66-67 in *the Secret Six*. What actions did you take in the riot that started in Faneuil Hall? Wasn’t this a conspiracy between you and Higginson to break Burns out of jail?

3. \*Read p. 50-51 in *The Secret Six*. You officiated over a wedding of the fugitive slaves Ellen and William Craft who were hiding from three slave catchers in Boston. Not only did you know this, you laid a sword next to the Bible, then gave the sword to the Bible, and instructed the groom to kill any *United States officer or slave-owner*." Later you flippantly declared, *with this sword I thee wed*."

\* Furthermore, discuss your Massachusetts Vigilance committees harassment of slave catchers.

4. At an Anti Slavery committee meeting in New York in 1856, Garrison introduced you to the crowd in this manner, "*I have the pleasure of introducing to you a very excellent fanatic, a very good infidel, and a first rate traitor, in the person of Theodore Parker of Boston*." What did he mean by this? Why did you not object? Did you find this label to be, in reality, an honor?

4. Read p. 146-147 in *The Secret Six*. Witnesses claim to have seen you along with other members of the Secret Six meeting with Brown in the American House Hotel on Hanover St. in Boston. Shortly after the American House Hotel meeting, you were actively engaged in fundraising for Brown, collecting \$100. What was discussed in the meeting? What was the purpose of the \$100? Did Brown tell you what his plans were?

5. Higginson received a letter from a Mr. Hugh Forbes. Shortly thereafter you were seen on the premises of the Revere House on Hanover St. again with the Secret Six and John Brown. What was this meeting about? Was it about the contents of the letter? Did this letter change your plans. (Read p 160-165 in the *Secret Six*.)

Obviously, you need to somehow claim that you were a financial backer of the freedom fighter, John Brown, but had no way of knowing his specific plans. Your best defense is to claim that your main interest in associating with Brown was to defend Kansas from falling into the hands of the Border Ruffians from Missouri, and that assisting Brown was the best way to achieve that end.

## Defense Witness: Frank Preston Stearns

You are one of the sons of the defendant, George L. Stearns. You remember John Brown visiting your household. You and your “friendly senators” must devise a defense for your father which revolves around the notion that the Secret Six was somehow duped into giving John Brown financial support to help the cause of free-soilers in Kansas. In doing so, you must read the following excerpts from *The Secret Six* and devise a game plan.

P. 113-114  
p. 22-23, 27. 62

Using his business practices and his propensity to misrepresent the past, you, along with your friendly senators, must devise a plan that somehow represents John Brown as an unscrupulous con man who tricked the Secret Six into funding his hare brained attempt to incite a slave revolt in the mountains of Virginia.

## Prosecution Witness: Mahala Doyle

Your husband was killed by the hand of the John Brown and his sons at Potawanamie Creek. You are appalled at the current groundswell of support for John Brown's actions at Harper's Ferry and in Kansas. It is your experience that John Brown is a ruthless killer, nothing more. Read p. 82 –83, 95 and 99 –100 in *The Secret Six* and p. 180 in the *Approaching Fury* answer the following questions to prepare for your testimony before the committee.

1. Why did you and your husband come to Kansas?
2. Isn't it true that the Doyles were slave hunters from Tennessee?
3. Why would Brown have something against you and your family?
4. Describe what happened to your family.

## Defense Witness: Dr. Samuel Gridley Howe

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You are one of the most fascinating members of the Secret Six. Your personal history is among the most diverse and heroic in American history.

- You invented the style of Braille known as Boston line lettering which was used to print our the New Testament
- You founded the first industrial school for the blind
- You started the first Braille circulatory library
- You became the first in the world to teach language to a blind-deaf-mute, Ms. Laura Bridgeman
- Graduated from Brown University in 1821 and Harvard Medical School in 1824
- You volunteered for the Greek fight for independence against the Turks
- You participated in an 1830 uprising against the restored Bourbon monarchy in France
- Arrested and thrown in a Berlin jail after attempting to deliver funds to Polish revolutionaries attempting to gain freedom from their Prussian rulers. (this experience would make you forever skittish around prisons!)

### Personality

You are tall, lean, and athletically built. Furthermore, you are brash and quickly bored. In addition, you are prone to quick judgements and rash, immediate action. You see a challenge in life as a personal adversary that must be. Strangely, despite your obvious patience with the blind and the mute, you are not so patient with the rest of the human race. You did not suffer fools very well and have difficulty with those who are not wise enough to see the errors of their ways. In short, you are a freedom loving man of action who, given a cause, would dive headlong into battle with any injustice. One injustice that must be vanquished, in your eyes, is slavery.

### Your Defense

You are a proud and bold member of the abolitionist movement, an admitted supporter of John Brown, but you deny any prior knowledge of Brown's plan to raid Harper's Ferry. Thus, you must somehow deny all allegations that connect YOU to the raid. Some facts to help you defend yourself in your testimony.

- In the real Mason Committee, Senator Mason asked you "What ends are to be attained by promoting... antislavery sentiment? What is the object in view?" "*The object, you said, was the promotion of freedom among men; the same object as the fathers of the Revolution.*"
- Read p. 244-246 in *The Secret Six*. You are going to have to explain to the court why you fled to Canada after Harper's Ferry.
- Read page 227-228. This will somehow help you help you in your plan of defense against the very implicating letters found strewn about the farmhouse that Brown was staying at in Virginia just before the Harper's Ferry attack.
- Read p. 146-147 in *The Secret Six*. Witnesses claim to have seen you along with other members of the Secret Six meeting with Brown in the American House Hotel on Hanover St. in Boston. What was this meeting about?
- Higginson received a letter from a Mr. Hugh Forbes. Shortly thereafter you were seen on the premises of the Revere House on Hanover St. again with the Secret Six and John Brown. What was this meeting about? Was it about the contents of the letter? Did this letter change your plans. (Read p 160-165 in the *Secret Six*.)

## Defense Witness: George L. Stearns

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You are perhaps the most even-tempered and reasonable of the Secret Six. You have been described by the others as a man who possessed the same fierce hatred of slavery but with a viewpoint tempered by pragmatism. For example, you convinced Higginson not to go through with a raid on the Court House to liberate a captured fugitive slave, Thomas Sims. You are a sickly, middle aged man who wears a long beard to protect your chest from the cold. At first glance you do not appear to be the “type” to be an abolitionists. You are a wealthy conservative businessman and made your fortune through a variety of shrewd innovations and investments.

### **Philanthropists**

Upon obtaining your wealth, you became involved in a wide variety of philanthropic endeavors, including Mass General Hospital, the Boston Orphans’ Asylum, and the Perkins Institute for the Blind. Furthermore, you gave countless contributions to the libraries, halfway houses, and public monuments.

### **Abolitionist**

As a member of the “in crowd” in Boston, you frequently entertained many important players in the abolition movement, including Wendell Phillips, Charles Sumner, Frederick Douglass, and Lewis Hayden. It was Hayden’s description of his harrowing escape from the woods and swamps of Kentucky that inspired you to join the abolitionist movement. You were quoted as saying, “*I would mortgage all I own to see the end of slavery. I would give every farthing to support any venture that promised success. For such a thing was the money coined, and for nothing less.*” Soon, your mansion in Medford, Massachusetts became a much-frequented station on the Underground Railroad.

### **Your Testimony**

- You are an admitted supporter of both abolitionism and John Brown. Read pages 110, 114, 118, 120, 126, and 130. How can you justify supporting Brown in Kansas. Don’t you know of the atrocities he committed there? (Perhaps you can talk to your son about a defense for this question)
- Read p. 146-147 in *The Secret Six*. Witnesses claim to have seen you along with other members of the Secret Six meeting with Brown in the American House Hotel on Hanover St. in Boston. What was this meeting about?
- Higginson received a letter from a Mr. Hugh Forbes. Shortly thereafter you were seen on the premises of the Revere House on Hanover St. again with the Secret Six and John Brown. What was this meeting about? Was it about the contents of the letter? Did this letter change your plans. (Read p 160-165 in the *Secret Six*.)
- You will definitely be challenged on your “retreat” to Canada upon Brown’s arrest at Harper’s Ferry. If you had no prior knowledge, why did you retreat?
- Can you explain the letters found by Jeb Stuart in the Brown’s rented farmhouse?
- For a general theme of your defense in this trial, read p 249-251. Basically you will deny having prior knowledge while at the same time supporting Brown’s action. Quite Shrewd!

## Prosecution Witness: Lt. J.E.B. (Jeb) Stuart

You arrived with Colonel Robert E. Lee the morning after John Brown's seizure of Harper's Ferry. Your testimony is important for two reasons, 1<sup>st</sup>, you are a witness to the devastation caused by the raid, and second, you were the one who found the carpetbag full of letters which implicated the Secret Six in John Brown's rented farmhouse near the armory. To prepare your testimony you must read p. 198-296 in *The Secret Six*, and be prepared to provide the following information.

- Describe the scene at Harper's Ferry upon your arrival
- Describe in detail the manner in which you captured the armory
- What did you find at Brown's farmhouse?

## Prosecution Witness: Governor Charles Robinson (Kansas)

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During the time of “Bleeding Kansas,” you were the Lawrence, Kansas agent for the New England Emigrant Aid Company, a committee whose primary purpose was to finance and recruit anti-slavery homesteaders into Kansas. Your chief financier was a man by the name of Amos Lawrence, a wealthy New England industrialist who is the namesake for both Lawrence, Massachusetts and Lawrence, Kansas. While in Kansas, you were involved in the center of violence between pro and anti-slavery forces. The purpose of your testimony is to develop a character study on John Brown. Your role is to explain your dealings with John Brown in Kansas. In order to do so, you must read p. 87-91 in *The Secret Six* and prepare your testimony around the following themes.

- Describe the situation at Lawrence. Why were you under siege?
- In your estimation, was there a peaceful solution? Why would it be a public relations mistake to engage your enemy with violence?
- When did John Brown arrive?
- Was John a good influence? Explain his actions during the siege.
- What was Brown’s plan for ending the siege? Why did you disagree?
- Clearly, the opposition will try to distance Brown from the *Secret Six*. Answer them honestly. Did Brown ever mention the Secret Six? Did he ever mention that his modus operandi was directed from somewhere else? Can YOU provide any evidence that Brown was associated with the Secret Six?



## Prosecution Witness: Lewis Washington

You were taken hostage by Brown's men and brought to Harper's Ferry. You are the 46-year old great-grand nephew of George Washington. For obvious reasons, Brown believed that you would be a valuable hostage in case his plan went awry. Your testimony has been requested by the committee pro-slavery side to paint a vivid picture of the violence and madness associated with the John Brown raid on Harper's Ferry. To be sure, you will not provide any direct evidence that links the Secret Six to the raid, but your testimony is invaluable in proving that if the Secret Six were proven involved, they clearly were accessories to an act of kidnapping, murder, and treason! In order to prepare for your role, you must read p. 195-204 in *The Secret Six*, and develop a testimony based upon the following themes.

- Why were you kidnapped?
- What did they take from your house?
- Describe as much detail as you can those horrible hours you were held captive at Harper's Ferry.
- How many died?
- Describe Brown's callousness toward his dying son, Oliver.
- Describe the rescue by Robert E. Lee and his men.
- Did you ever regain the sword that Frederick the Great gave to your great grand uncle?
- In your estimation, was this an act of treason committed by Brown?

## Prosecution Witness: Governor John Albion Andrews (MA)

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P. 207

You certainly are a strange choice to be a witness for the prosecution. You are clearly an avowed abolitionist who frequently attended black churches in Massachusetts and marveled at the fact that unlike many white churches, these churches contained 9 parts God and less than one part hypocrisy. You have been called before the committee for three reasons. First, before you became Governor, you were a famous lawyer, and when John Brown was arrested, several members of the Secret Six came to you for legal advice. Second, based upon your advice, several of your “clients” went to Canada! Read p 206-210 ,225-228, and 259 and develop a testimony using the following as a theme.

- If found guilty, can the Secret Six be found guilty of treason?
- Why at first did you believe that the Six could not be taken from Massachusetts?
- After changing your mind several times, what was your final conclusion regarding the possibility of arrest and trial. Reading the August 8, 1846 precedent, could the Six be taken legally to Virginia or Washington?
- What was your advice to your clients? Who went to Canada? Why did you advise them to go?
- The defense (to whom you are friendly) will try to paint a portrait that basically is of men who feared that if they are taken South they would risk serious injury at the hands of a southern mob. Could this have been the motivation of the Sanborn, Stearns, and Howe?
- Describe the real life attempt to take Sanborn to Washington. Why did he not go? What was your role in getting him off from this attempted arrest? Does this not implicate Sanborn?

## Defense Witness: Franklin Sanborn

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At 26 years old, you are the youngest member of the Secret Six. Despite your youth, you have already come to know tremendous tragedy. You fell in love with the beautiful but fragile Ariana Walker while attending Phillips Exeter Academy in New Hampshire. While you continued your education at Harvard, you heard that Ariana was dying of a rare neurological disease. You rushed to her deathbed, married her, and was forced to bury your young bride within days of your wedding. To the upper class in Boston, you were a tragic celebrity, walking about Boston with a black band on your stovepipe hat and making daily visits to the gravesite of your beloved Ariana.

After the death of Ariana, you graduated from Harvard and opened up your own college prep school in Boston known as the Sanborn School. Soon, your school became a much sought after school that attracted some students from “the best families.” The sons of Emerson, Hawthorne and Horace Mann all attended your school.

#### Personality

Henry Thoreau once stated that you were “quiet, steadfast, earnestness and ethical fortitude are of the type that calmly, so calmly, ignites and then throws bomb after bomb. In other words, as another friend put it, you were “...a revolutionary in a quite way.”

#### Your Defense

You are going to have to defend yourself before the committee on a host of issues. Read the following and prepare a defense.

- Read p. 101 and 110 in *The Secret Six*. After your first meeting with him, what was your impression of him? It is obvious through a speech you made that you were going to help Brown. In what ways were you planning to help Brown? \*(Hint: the contradiction between Brown’s version of The Battle of Black Jack and the truth can be used as a defense, see Franklin Preston Stearns)
- Read p. 146-147 in *The Secret Six*. Witnesses claim to have seen you along with other members of the Secret Six meeting with Brown in the American House Hotel on Hanover St. in Boston. What was this meeting about?
- Higginson received a letter from a Mr. Hugh Forbes. Shortly thereafter you were seen on the premises of the Revere House on Hanover St. again with the Secret Six and John Brown. What was this meeting about? Was it about the contents of the letter? Did this letter change your plans? (Read p. 160-165 in the *Secret Six*)
- Many letters were found in the Brown’s rented farmhouse outside Harper’s Ferry. Several of the letters were from you. It appears from these letters that you were the chief collector for Brown in New England. Exactly what was the purpose of these funds? Read p. 191-193 in *The Secret Six*.
- Read 207-210 and p. 240-241 It appears that after talking to Andrews, you left the country and went to Canada on TWO different occasions. If you were not guilty of any crimes, why did you leave?
- Read 257-259. Tell the story of the attempt to arrest you outside your home in Concord. Why did you resist? How did your SISTER save you? How did you eventually escape arrest entirely?

## Defense Witness: Gerrit Smith

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You are among the more well known of the Secret Six. In 1860, you ran for president on the ticket of the Radical Abolitionist party in 1860. Furthermore, you are probably the most wealthy of the Six. Born in 1799 near Syracuse, New York, you were the heir of real estate holdings in Virginia, Pennsylvania, and New York that totaled more than 1 million acres!

### Personality

At times you could be charming, optimistic, and outgoing, however there were other times that you could fall into fits of deep depression. Many things could set off your depression stages, including holidays such as Easter and Christmas, but it seems that the most usual cause was a severe fear of illness. An insufferable hypochondriac, any case of the sniffles could lead you toward a long bout of bitterness and sadness. Once you tried to commit suicide. After the attack at Harper's Ferry, you suffered an breakdown and spent some time in an asylum.

### Religious Conviction, Philanthropy, and Abolitionism

You took to heart the biblical passage that stated it was as easy for a rich man to get into heaven as it was to pass a camel through the eye of a needle. Thus, much of your time was given to charity to help widen the needle's eye. You gave hundreds of thousands of dollars to charities such as Polish and Greek refugees, Irish famine victims, schools for the deaf, libraries, and of course, Abolitionism.

- Read P. 17-19 and 24 in *The Secret Six* and the information pamphlet on Timbucto. What was the purpose of Timbucto? Was it a haven for fugitive slaves, in violation of the fugitive slave law? How did John Brown get involved?
- Read p. 122-123. Is it true that you knew Hugh Forbes? Is it also true that Forbes was going out West to fight for Brown? Did you give Forbes any money? Why?
- Read p. 146-147 in *The Secret Six*. Witnesses claim to have seen you along with other members of the Secret Six meeting with Brown in the American House Hotel on Hanover St. in Boston. What was this meeting about?
- Higginson received a letter from a Mr. Hugh Forbes. Shortly thereafter you were seen on the premises of the Revere House on Hanover St. again with the Secret Six and John Brown. What was this meeting about? Was it about the contents of the letter? Did this letter change your plans? (Read p 160-165 in the *Secret Six*)
- As late as August, 1859 witnesses claim that you were openly full of praise for John Brown. Edwin Morton, a guest at one of your parties, stated that announced loudly that "*If I were to point out... the man in all this world I think most truly a Christian, I would point to John Brown.*" Can you honestly say that at this late a date you were still financially supporting Brown and had no knowledge of his plans to attack Harper's Ferry?
- Throughout the years John Brown was at North Elba (Timbucto) he was in and out of debt, under suspicion of fraud, engaged in bloody violence in Kansas, and was in personal debt to you. Through it all, you continued your financial support. Why? Read p. 62-63, 114-127 to help formulate your response.
- In real life, released from the asylum just before you were judged too "unwell" to appear before the committee. Which is a good thing for the other 5, for even on your good days you were hotheaded, unstable, and unpredictable. In our fake trial, however, you will testify, and just as Smith did later on in life, you will categorically deny any prior knowledge of the Fugitive Slave Law.

## Prosecution Witness: Richard Realf

You are one of the “soldiers” recruited by John Brown for his mission against slavery. You were born in England, the son of a constable, a poet, and the former lover of Lady Noell Byron, the widow of Lord Byron. You moved to the United States in 1854 because your “instincts were democratic and republican, or, at least, anti-monarchical.” Soon, you became a radical abolitionist and joined John Brown in November 1867. You are a key witness in the case against the Secret Six, for you have knowledge of both Brown’s plan to attack Harper’s Ferry and his relationship with the Secret Six. Your testimony will have some trouble being accepted without doubt, however, for while in the company of John Brown you abandoned him and took off with some of his funds. Your veracity will surely come into question. Read p. 133-135, 154-155, 167-169, and 239 in *The Secret Six* and prepare your testimony based around the following themes.

- What was John Brown’s plan? (133-135)
- Discuss the construction of John Brown’s new “constitution” and “government.” Isn’t this, in a sense, a plan by Brown to overthrow the government and establish himself as at least temporary leader?
- What was to be your role in this new government? (154-155)
- You specifically requested from the Secret Six \$250. What was the purpose of this money? (Read p. 166-168 to answer these questions) You should deny that any of this took place. Try to decipher the last paragraph to see how Realf tries to exonerate himself from guilt for fundraising for Brown.
- Regardless of whether you were involved in the fundraising, you sold your story to several newspapers. Could you repeat for the court what was reported in the papers? Who was involved in the plot?
- To be sure, the other side will try to portray you as a liar and a cheat. They will try to use your betrayal of Brown, in both your fundraising activities in England and your sellout to the newspapers as a reason to question the validity of your testimony.

## Prosecution Witness: Frederick Douglass

You are among the most prominent members of the abolitionist movement and a frequent acquaintance of John Brown. Given your high profile in the movement to end slavery, it was inevitable that John Brown would come to you to seek support for his Harper's Ferry scheme. Read p. 136-139 and p. 189-190 in *The Secret Six* and prepare your testimony that revolves around the following themes.

- For what purpose did John Brown visit you on the evening of January 28, 1858?
- In your conversation with Brown, you were horrified at his nonchalance attitude toward what he had in store for Virginia. Explain.
- You are not opposed to armed revolt against slavery, are you?
- Why did you believe that Brown was overestimating the chance of the black slaves to join Brown's rebellion?
- You believed that the attack would be suicide. What was it about Harper Ferry's location in association with its surrounding terrain which make keeping the armory impossible? Feel free to use the chalkboard to diagram what you mean.
- John Brown disagreed, why?
- Poor planning notwithstanding, what, in your eyes, was John Brown's fundamental flaw that would prove to be his undoing?
- In August Brown made one final attempt to get you assistance and again you refused. Why did you feel that John Brown's actions might be a disaster not only for Brown, but also the abolition movement?

## Prosecution Witness: Hugh Forbes

You are a key witness against the Secret Six. If you can convince the committee that what you are saying is true, your testimony could put the Secret Six away for a long time. You will need to overcome, however, your own shady past which the opposition will try to exploit in order to undermine your testimony. You must read pages 123-124, 127-129, 139-140, 150-152, 156-165, and 164-166 in *The Secret Six*, and prepare your testimony around the following themes.

- You were born in Scotland, fought in the Italian revolution, and had a family in Paris. Why did you abandon your family and come to the United States?
- Why had you been fired at the Italian-language newspaper, *The European*? Did your drinking problem have anything to do with it?
- What “job” did Brown offer you? Why did you see this as a great opportunity?
- Soon you became disenchanted with Brown and his operation. Explain in as much detail as you can why you believed Brown’s whole operation was doomed.  
What was wrong with his “army”?  
His weaponry?  
His plan?  
Why did you believe that the slaves would not join him?
- Why were you in such desperate need of money?
- You also blamed his New England supporters who promised the financing. How had they “subverted your destiny?”
- Did you go to the government to inform them of Brown’s plan? What two prominent officials did you see? What was their reaction?
- It certainly is true, however, if you believed that Brown had a chance for success, you would have stayed with him, correct?
- Desperate for money, how did you attempt to get it from the Secret Six? Isn’t this blackmail?
- Do you have any evidence that proves that the Secret Six had direct knowledge of the plan to attack Harper’s Ferry?

## Prosecution Witness: Judge Edward Loring

You are Judge Edward Loring , the presiding judge over the Anthony Burns case. You are a witness of to the chaos that revolved around the trial as well as the activities of the Secret Six members Thomas Wentworth Higginson and Theodore Parker.

- Read p. 64-70 in *The Secret Six*, and p. 77-80 and 90-92 in *Anthony Burns*. Please tell the court to the best of your recollection the role Mr. Parker and Mr. Higginson played in the attempt to free Burns from jail.
- What happened to one of the guards, a Mr. Batchelder?
- In a speech on p. 104 in *Anthony Burns*, Mr. Parker blames you for the death of Batchelder. Why? How do you respond? Who really is to blame?
- Read p. 157-159. What was your ruling in the Burns case? What evidence supported your decision?
- Do you feel any guilt whatsoever in sending Burns back into slavery?
- Could you explain, if you could, why the fugitive slave law , as stated on p. 22 in *Anthony Burns* and p. 49 in *the Secret Six*, commissioners like yourself were paid \$10 for every instance in which a fugitive was sent back and only \$5 if the fugitive were set free? Wouldn't this taint your decision?
- As stated on p. 49, the fugitive slave law, what was the penalty for impeding the acquisition of a fugitive slave?
- To sum up, what crimes did Mr. Parker and Mr. Higginson commit during the trial of Anthony Burns?



## Prosecution Witness: George Fitzhugh

You have been brought before this committee to repudiate lies against the southern way of life in general and slavery in particular that have been uttered by some of the defense witnesses during these hearings. In particular, you denounce Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe as a liar and a hypocrite, spreading filthy falsehoods against slavery while at the same time looking the other way at a far more reprehensible system of wage slavery in the North. Your task is to read pages 129-139 in *The Approaching Fury* and develop a testimony that revolves around the following themes.

- Why are you repulsed by the fact that Stowe, a woman, was the author of such a criticism?
- How do you see the fact that Stowe's madness is a direct correlation to the North's "obnoxious doctrines of liberty and equality?"
- Why, in your estimation, has Free Society been "an abject failure?"
- What is your remedy for the evil that so inherent in Free Society?
- Compare the conditions of the worker in free society to that of the slave/
- In your eyes, Why is the Free black population the only problem that faces the South today? What is your solution?
- Could you please explain this quote to the court? (p. 135) "*We must combat the doctrines of natural liberty, human equality, and the social contract as taught by Locke and the Enlightenment, Jefferson and other misguided patriots ruined the splendid political edifice they erected by espousing dangerous abstractions- the crazy notions of liberty and equality they wrote onto the Declaration of Independence and the Virginia Bill of Rights. No wonder abolitionists love to quote the Declaration of Independence! Its precepts are wholly at war with slavery and equally at war with government, all subordination to order, all order. It is full of mendacity and error. Consider its verbose, newborn, false, and unmeaning preamble. Men are not born physically, morally, or intellectually equal. Some are large, strong, and healthy, others weak, small and sickly...The weak in mind or body require guidance, support, and protection; they must obey and work for those who protect and guide them- they have a natural right to guardians, committees, teachers, or masters. Nature has made them slaves; all that law and government can do is regulate, modify, and mitigate their slavery.*"
- You have stated (p.137) that "*The Negroes of the South are, in fact, the happiest, and some sense, the freest people in the world.*" Please explain.

## Committee Chairman: Senator James Mason (Va.)

You are the author of the fugitive slave law and therefore will be very sensitive to testimony that relates to this issue. As any Southerner, you regard the right to property, including slavery, as a right guaranteed in the Constitution. Furthermore, in your estimation, the fact that northerners are assisting the fugitive slaves is even more of an insult. *Although the loss of property is felt, you once said, the loss of honor is still felt more.*” (McPherson, 79) At least once before, during the election of 1856, you believed that slavery was an issue worth seceding the union to protect. You made it perfectly clear that if the Republican candidate, John C. Fremont was elected, that the South “*should not pause but proceed at once to immediate, absolute, and eternal separation.*” (McPherson, 158)

To prepare for the trial, you must read up on all the witnesses and prepare for them as you would if you were a prosecuting lawyer.

During the trial you will both ask the witnesses questions and maintain order in the courtroom.

The chief goal of your committee, and a key clause in your committee’s charter, is to determine if the invasion and seizure of the federal arsenal at Harper’s Ferry was made “*under color of any organizations intended to subvert the government of any of the States of the Union... the character and extent of such organization; and whether any citizens of the United States not present were implicated therein. Or accessory thereto, by contributions of money, arms, munitions, or otherwise.*”

## Committee Member: Senator Jefferson Davis (Mississippi)

You are the most anxious of all members of the committee to uncover and prosecute the Secret Six. You are positive that the incident at Harper's Ferry was the tip of the iceberg that if uncovered will reveal an intricate plot of northern abolitionists to wreak chaos in the slaveholding South. You have been made chief inquisitor during the hearings and you will definitely be setting out to prove that the Secret Six were guilty of a variety of charges, including violating the fugitive slave law and conspiracy to commit treason.

To prepare for the trial, you must read up on all the witnesses and prepare for them as you would if you were a prosecuting lawyer.

During the trial, you will act as the chief prosecuting lawyer. You may ask questions at any time during the proceedings.

The chief goal of your committee, and a key clause in your committee's charter, is to determine if the invasion and seizure of the federal arsenal at Harper's Ferry was made "*under color of any organizations intended to subvert the government of any of the States of the Union... the character and extent of such organization; and whether any citizens of the United States not present were implicated therein. Or accessory thereto, by contributions of money, arms, munitions, or otherwise.*"

## Committee Member: Senator Graham Fitch (Indiana)

You are the third member of the pro slavery majority on the committee. Your chief role is to support Jefferson Davis and James Mason by helping them prepare for the witnesses and to ask questions of the witnesses yourself.

To prepare for the trial, you must read up on all the witnesses and prepare for them as you would if you were a prosecuting lawyer.

During the trial, you will act as the chief prosecuting lawyer. You may ask questions at any time during the proceedings.

The chief goal of your committee, and a key clause in your committee's charter, is to determine if the invasion and seizure of the federal arsenal at Harper's Ferry was made "*under color of any organizations intended to subvert the government of any of the States of the Union... the character and extent of such organization; and whether any citizens of the United States not present were implicated therein. Or accessory thereto, by contributions of money, arms, munitions, or otherwise.*"

## Committee Member: Senator James R. Doolittle (Wisconsin)

You are one of the two anti-slavery members of the committee, which makes you outnumbered 3-2 on the committee. Although the truth is clearly the aim of any committee hearing, you are more likely to hear the witness biased against slavery and for the defense witnesses. Therefore, you will serve as sort of a “friendly” senator, helping each defendant as a defense lawyer would help out his or her client. Furthermore, you will intensely cross-examine prosecution witnesses. Your roles as committee member are as follows.

To prepare for the trial, you must read up on all the witnesses and prepare for them as you would if you were a defense lawyer.

During the trial, you will act as the chief defense lawyer. You may ask questions at any time during the proceedings.

The chief goal of your committee, and a key clause in your committee’s charter, is to determine if the invasion and seizure of the federal arsenal at Harper’s Ferry was made “*under color of any organizations intended to subvert the government of any of the States of the Union... the character and extent of such organization; and whether any citizens of the United States not present were implicated therein. Or accessory thereto, by contributions of money, arms, munitions, or otherwise.*”

## Committee Member: Senator Jacob Collamer (Vermont)

You are one of the two anti-slavery members of the committee, which makes you outnumbered 3-2 on the committee. Although the truth is clearly the aim of any committee hearing, you are more likely to hear the witness biased against slavery and for the defense witnesses. Therefore, you will serve as sort of a “friendly” senator, helping each defendant as a defense lawyer would help out his or her client. Furthermore, you will intensely cross-examine prosecution witnesses. Your roles as committee member are as follows.

To prepare for the trial, you must read up on all the witnesses and prepare for them as you would if you were a defense lawyer.

During the trial, you will act as the chief defense lawyer. You may ask questions at any time during the proceedings.

The chief goal of your committee, and a key clause in your committee’s charter, is to determine if the invasion and seizure of the federal arsenal at Harper’s Ferry was made “*under color of any organizations intended to subvert the government of any of the States of the Union... the character and extent of such organization; and whether any citizens of the United States not present were implicated therein. Or accessory thereto, by contributions of money, arms, munitions, or otherwise.*”

## Secret Six Follow Up What Really Happened to the Secret Six?

### **Stearns, Howe, and Smith's actions condemned, but not criminal convictions were issued**

None of the Secret Six were convicted of a criminal act. The majority report, authored by Mason himself, was very critical of Smith, Stearns, and Howe, strongly condemning their support for Brown and offering no restraint whatsoever on a man so dangerous as Brown. Although finding no specific conspiracy linking the Secret Six to Harper's Ferry, Mason did find evidence from Forbes testimony that the Six financially supported Brown and also knew of his large supply of arms "of which they had failed to dispossess him."

It has been theorized by James McPherson in *Battle Cry of Freedom* that perhaps Mason lost resolve to uncover the conspiracy. Stearns and Howe noted that the questioning at the hearing was "so unskillfully framed that they could, without literal falsehood," deny prior knowledge of Brown's plans to raid the federal arsenal.

### **Higginson and Sanborn never brought before Committee**

As brought up in the trial, Sanborn's sister, a hostile Concord mob, and John Albion Andrew rescued Sanborn from being brought before the committee.

Higginson was never called, however. McPherson theorized that Mason probably did not want to give the eloquent and fiery Higginson a forum to voice his antislavery rhetoric.

### **Parker dying of Tuberculosis during the hearing.**

Parker was too sick to be called to the committee hearing, and in fact died in July 1860, one month after the committee issued its report to the Senate.

### **Smith never testified, was in an asylum during the trial**

Smith was released from the asylum just before Christmas, 1859. He continued to deny any involvement with Brown and Harper's Ferry. He went so far as to sue the *Chicago Tribune* for libel for their allegations that Smith was involved in the Harper's Ferry raid. He lost!

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