Avenging Angel?

John Brown, the Harpers Ferry Raid and the "Irrepressible" Conflict

A Unit of Study for Grades 9–12

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Acknowledgments

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Introduction

Approach and Rationale

Avenging Angel? John Brown, the Harpers Ferry Raid and the "Irrepressible" Conflict is one of over 60 National Center for History in the Schools teaching units that are the fruits of collaborations between history professors and experienced teachers of both United States and World History. The units represent specific dramatic episodes in history from which you and your students can pause to delve into the deeper meanings of these selected landmark events and explore their wider context in the great historical narrative.

By studying a crucial episode in history, the student becomes aware that choices had to be made by real human beings, that those decisions were the result of specific factors, and that they set in motion a series of historical consequences. We have selected dramatic moments that best bring alive that decision-making process. We hope that through this approach, your students will realize that history in an ongoing, open-ended process, and that the decisions they make today create the conditions of tomorrow's history.

Our teaching units are based on primary sources, government documents, artifacts, magazines, newspapers, films, private correspondence, literature, contemporary photographs, and paintings from the period under study. What we hope to achieve using primary source documents in these lessons is to remove the distance that students feel from historical events and to connect them more intimately with the past. In this way we hope to recreate for your students a sense of "being there," a sense of seeing history through the eyes of the very people who were making decisions. This will help your students develop historical empathy, to realize that history is not an impersonal process divorced from real people like themselves. At the same time, by analyzing primary sources, students will actually practice the historian's craft, discovering for themselves how to analyze evidence, establish a valid interpretation and construct a coherent narrative in which all the relevant factors play a part.

Content and Organization

Within this unit, you will find: Teaching Background Materials, including Unit Overview, Unit Context, Correlation to the National Standards for History Unit, Objectives, Introduction to *Avenging Angel? John Brown, the Harpers Ferry Raid and the "Irrepressible" Conflict*, A Dramatic Moment; and Lesson Plans with Student Resources. This unit, as we have said above, focuses on certain key moments in time and should be used as a supplement to your customary course materials. Although these lessons are recommended for use by secondary students, they can be adapted for other grade levels.

The Teacher Background section should provide you with a good overview of the entire unit and with the historical information and context necessary to link the specific Dramatic Moment to the larger historical narrative. You may consult it for your own use, and you may choose to share it with students if they are of a sufficient grade level to understand the materials.

The Lesson Plans include a variety of ideas and approaches for the teacher which can be elaborated upon or cut as you see the need. These lesson plans contain student resources which accompany each lesson. The resources consist of primary source documents, any handouts or student background materials, and a bibliography.

In our series of teaching units, each collection can be taught in several ways. You can teach all of the lessons offered on any given topic, or you can select and adapt the ones that best support your particular course needs. We have not attempted to be comprehensive or prescriptive in our offerings, but rather to give you an array of enticing possibilities for in-depth study, at varying grade levels. We hope that you will find the lesson plans exciting and stimulating for your classes. We also hope that your students will never again see history as a boring sweep of inevitable facts and meaningless dates but rather as an endless treasure of real life stories and an exercise in analysis and reconstruction.

TEACHER BACKGROUND MATERIALS

I. UNIT OVERVIEW

John Brown remains a fascinating enigma in American history, and his abolitionist activities, culminating in the Harpers Ferry raid, continue to occupy a central place in the literature dealing with the coming of the Civil War. Brown's willingness to use force to achieve his antislavery goals continues both to fascinate and repel readers. A strict Calvinist in faith who fathered twenty children, Brown was an unsuccessful businessman, whose activities often traversed the boundary of ethical behavior and moral propriety. By age fifty-five, Brown remained an obscure, unsuccessful, and rather ordinary figure, with little to distinguish him from scores of his fellow Americans at the time.

His bold activities in the Kansas civil war—"bleeding Kansas"—changed all that, and made him a hero to many northern abolitionists, both white and black, who were convinced that moral suasion had merely played into the hands of the "slavocracy." A radical abolitionist, Brown's assertiveness, coolness under fire, fearlessness, and willingness to resort to force to achieve his objectives commended him to northern abolitionists who believed only force could stem the tide of the slave power.

Although Brown's raid at Harpers Ferry proved inept and was quickly suppressed by local militia forces and federal troops commanded by Robert E. Lee, his remarkable final days between his capture on October 19, 1859 and execution on December 2, 1859, made him a legend in the North, and a devil incarnate in the South. In a commemorative speech in 1881, Frederick Douglass stated: "If John Brown did not end the war that ended slavery, he did at least begin the war that ended slavery." Brown's revolutionary actions at Harpers Ferry and subsequent articulation of his antislavery views accelerated the "irrepressible conflict" between North and South and set the nation on its course toward civil war. Brown recognized that his actions would result in armed conflict between North and South and believed such a course to be the only way to eradicate the evil of slavery. As he wrote in his last message before his execution, "I, John Brown am now quite *certain* that the crimes of this *guilty land*: *will* never be purged away; but with Blood. I had *as I now think: vainly* flattered myself that without *very much* bloodshed; it might be done."

II. UNIT CONTEXT

This unit deals with the continuing struggle between proslavery and antislavery proponents in the years exacerbating sectional discord and culminating in secession of the Southern states and Civil War. The lessons would most appropriately be taught as a prelude to the Civil War and a culmination of the heightened sectional conflict resulting from passage of the Fugitive Slave Law (1850), the Kansas-Nebraska Act (1854), "Bleeding Kansas" (1855-56), and the Dred Scott decision (1857). The unit provides a

variety of perspectives on John Brown's Harpers Ferry Raid and the ensuing historical interpretation of his character and purpose.

III. Correlation to the National History Standards

This unit correlates to **Era 5**, **Standard 1** of the *National History Standards*, Basic Edition (National Center for History in the Schools, 1996). It provides students an understanding of how the increasing sectional polarization between North and South and the heated acrimony over the slavery issue accelerated extremists on both sides to adopt policies and actions to advance their values and beliefs. In addition, it poses the more fundamental question concerning under what circumstances an individual's moral beliefs and religious values, take precedence over the rule of law and political compromise characteristic of democratic societies.

IV. Unit Objectives

Students will:

1. Analyze John Brown's motives and beliefs for the decision to invade Harpers Ferry and seize the federal arsenal.

2. Explore how John Brown's raid at Harpers Ferry exacerbated sectional tensions and contributed to the coming of the Civil War.

3. Analyze John Brown's statements following his capture at Harpers Ferry and evaluate their historical accuracy by comparing his account to the historical record.

4. Interpret textual, photographic, and graphic images in their historical context.

5. Evaluate how the paintings and illustrations of John Brown have influenced the interpretation of his actions and determine whether they portray him as a martyr or devil.

V. Lesson Plans

Lesson One: John Brown: The Visionary

Lesson Two: John Brown: The Fanatic

Lesson Three: John Brown: The Image

Lesson Four: The Historical John Brown

VI. Historical Introduction to *Avenging Angel? John Brown, the Harpers Ferry Raid and the "Irrepressible" Conflict*

"How did a singularly unsuccessful fifty-nine-year-old, Connecticut-born tanner turned surveyor, sheep-raiser, and land speculator, who twice married and sired twenty children, become one of history's most successful martyrs?" asks Lacey Baldwin Smith.[1] To his supporters and sympathizers, John Brown was a Christian martyr who sacrificed his life for the emancipation of African Americans. To his opponents, Brown symbolized a deranged fanatic willing to inaugurate a bloody servile insurrection to advance his bloodthirsty design. To many of his contemporaries John Brown was a hardheaded, cold-hearted, inner-directed fanatic who balanced a rigid adherence to Old Testament values with a more flexible quest for affluence. Throughout his adult life Brown exhibited a dismal lack of business acumen and a tortured sense of God's terrible wrath and divine justice. A failure at every business venture he tried, Brown was frequently in debt and had difficulty providing sustenance for his growing family. A risk-taker, he repeatedly involved himself in schemes to secure a more solid financial footing, but time and circumstances negated his efforts. Over twenty years, he experienced repeated business failures. Contrary to the daily piety he exhibited in reading and studying the Bible, praying for forgiveness and enlightenment, and shepherding his family, Brown played fast and loose with the ethics of commercial and business exchange. Business associates provide eloquent testimony to Brown's lack of judgment, stubbornness, and propensity for failure.

John Brown was born in Torrington, Connecticut on May 9, 1800, the son of Owen and Ruth Mills Brown. A simple, hard-working and God-fearing family, the Browns instilled strong religious and antislavery values in John and his siblings. At age five, John and his family moved to Hudson, Ohio, twenty-five miles south of Cleveland. The Western Reserve was a hotbed of abolitionism, and Owen Brown became a leading citizen of the community and a benefactor of Oberlin College.

At age eight, John Brown experienced a devastating loss in the death of his mother and neither accepted nor developed an emotional attachment to his stepmother. It is likely that Brown's mother, like his maternal grandmother earlier, died insane. An indifferent student with little formal education and training, Brown left school early to work in his father's tannery. During the War of 1812, he supplied beef to American military forces, at times rounding up steers and driving them a hundred miles to army encampments along Lake Erie. His experiences during the war with undisciplined militiamen, prone to profanity-laced conversation and other un-Christianlike conduct, forever soured Brown on the fighting strength or efficiency of military forces. It was during the war that Brown experienced an incident that shaped his antislavery proclivities. A young black slave around the same age as Brown was beaten with an iron shovel

[1] Lacey Baldwin Smith, "John Brown: 'Let Them Hang Me' " in Smith, *Fools, Martyrs, Traitors: The Story of Martyrdom in the Western World* (New York: Knopf, 1997), p. 229.

by his master. Brown was appalled by the brutality of the event and the realization of the utter helplessness of the young slave.

Brown briefly studied for the ministry in Massachusetts and Connecticut, but a shortage of funds and an eye infection terminated his preparation. At age twenty he married Dianthe Lusk, a plain but pious young lady, and opened a tanning business in eastern Ohio. Over the next thirty-five years, Brown failed at over twenty businesses in Ohio, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts and New York, while engaged as a tanner, surveyor, cattle and sheep raiser, land speculator, wool merchant, postmaster and farmer. Throughout his adult life Brown struggled endlessly to feed and provide for his growing family, but experienced great hardship and want as a result of his repeated business failures. His first wife and three-day-old son died in 1832. Brown had fathered seven children in twelve years, but two of his sons had died. He married sixteen-year-old Mary Ann Day less than a year later and fathered thirteen additional children. An epidemic of dysentery swept through his household in September 1843, taking the lives of four of his children in succession. In all, nine of his twenty children died before reaching adulthood. Despite the personal tragedy he experienced, Brown remained steadfast in his religious convictions and antislavery views. There is much testimony throughout his life of his hostility to slavery and kindness and assistance to African Americans. In Ohio and Pennsylvania he assisted the "Underground Railroad" in spiriting escaped slaves to freedom and for a time even contemplated opening a school for blacks. As early as 1847 he outlined the substance of his plan to Frederick Douglass to launch a revolutionary insurrection to eradicate slavery in the South. But the time was not yet propitious to strike and Brown was subsequently involved in a series of lawsuits, litigation, and court appearances from 1851 to 1854.

Brown's first foray at striking a blow against slavery came in Kansas in 1856. The Fugitive Slave Law, part of the Compromise of 1850, had antagonized many Northerners because it made them potential accomplices to the recovery of escaped slaves. In 1851 he founded the League of Gileadites in Springfield, Massachusetts, organizing whites, free blacks, and escaped slaves to resist enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Law "with the sword." The Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 and its revocation of the Missouri Compromise line alienated Northerners further and created a major conflict in the new territory of Kansas, opened to settlers of both slaveholders and free-soilers under the provision of popular sovereignty. Five of Brown's sons had journeyed to Kansas in order to establish homesteads in the new territory and were soon caught up in the "free state" cause. Resisting efforts of "border ruffians" from Missouri to intimidate free-state settlers and secure control of the territory for the extension of slavery, the Browns joined the free state militia and summoned their father to assist them. John Brown journeyed to Kansas with his son Oliver and son-in-law Henry Thompson and a wagonload of arms, munitions, and supplies. Brown soon gained notoriety as a leader of a military company able and willing to wage war on slaveholders and their allies. The resulting civil war in Kansas was resplendent with atrocities on both sides, earning the territory the name of "Bleeding Kansas."

May 1856 proved the climax. On May 19 and 20 Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts delivered a vitriolic speech in the United States Senate entitled "The Crime Against Kansas." Sumner called for the immediate admission of Kansas to the Union as a free state and denounced in very personal terms Senators Stephen Douglas of Illinois (chief supporter and sponsor of the Kansas-Nebraska Act), Andrew Pierce Butler of South Carolina, and James Mason of Virginia. On May 21, an army of proslavery men rode into Lawrence, Kansas, destroyed the offices of two newspapers and threw their presses into the river, burned down the hotel and the house of the free state "governor," and pillaged the stores. The following day, May 22, Senator Butler's cousin, Representative Preston Brooks of South Carolina, found Sumner alone at his desk in the Senate chamber writing letters. Brooks attacked Sumner hitting him repeatedly over the head with a cane until restrained by several men coming to the Massachusetts senator's aid. Sumner did not return to the Senate for three years. Reading about these events in Kansas, John Brown "went crazy." On the evening of May 24-25, he led a party including four other men and two of his sons along the Pottawatomie Creek. Seizing five proslavery men from their cabins, Brown's army murdered them in cold blood with broadswords. The so-called Pottawatomie Massacre contributed to full-scale war in Kansas, with over 200 deaths in the remainder of 1856 alone. One of Brown's sons, Frederick, was murdered and two others, John, Jr. and Jason, suffered horribly. Brown, however, remained unscathed, and hid his involvement in the Pottawatomie killings from his northern supporters. He triumphantly returned to the East in order to raise money and arms for the war against slavery.

Brown preached to abolitionist audiences throughout the Northeast arguing that no amount of moral suasion could end slavery. Stressing the sanctity of the Bible and the Declaration of Independence, he told Ralph Waldo Emerson "better that a whole generation of men, women and children should pass away by a violent death than that a word of either should be violated in this country."[2] In the autumn of 1857, Brown began recruiting his army for the Harpers Ferry Raid. Without disclosing the actual details of his plan, Brown let it be known that he intended to resist the aggression of the slave power and would begin his revolution in Virginia. In May 1858, Brown called a constitutional convention and summoned his followers to meet in Chatham, Ontario, Canada. Thirty-four blacks attended the convention and under Brown's direction unani-

[2] Stephen B. Oates, *To Purge This Land With Blood: A Biography of John Brown* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), p. 197.

mously adopted a "Provisional Constitution and Ordinances for the People of the United States." The document was to serve as the provisional constitution of the United States as a new government was established. Brown was elected "Commander in Chief" of the provisional army and other officers were sworn in. At the conclusion of the convention, Brown returned to New England to raise funds for his campaign, and sent one of his followers, John E. Cook, to Harpers Ferry to reconnoiter and provide information to him.

Brown was well-known to a large coterie of prominent Northern abolitionists, both white and black, including Frederick Douglass, Martin Delany, Harriet Tubman, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, William Lloyd Garrison, Julia Ward Howe, and Harriet Beecher Stowe. His chief financial supporters were a secret group of six men, Samuel Gridley Howe, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Theodore Parker, Franklin B. Sanborn, Gerrit Smith, and George Luther Stearns. Theodore Parker, a leading Unitarian minister, was the grandson of Captain John Parker who commanded the minutemen at Lexington in 1775.

Brown arrived in the area of Harpers Ferry in early July 1859. He rented the Kennedy Farm, about five miles from Harpers Ferry on the Maryland side, posing as a farmer named "Isaac Smith." Over the next several weeks men and supplies arrived at the farmhouse, via Chambersburg, Pennsylvania. On the night of October 16, 1859, Brown gave the signal to his twenty-one followers, and launched the raid on the Federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia.

Dramatic Moment

On November 2, 1859, jurors took but forty-five minutes to find John Brown guilty of treason. The clerk of the Court asked Brown if he had anything to say before sentence was pronounced. Brown stood and in a deeply moving address to the Court, declared:

> I have, may it please the Court, a few words to say. In the first place, I deny everything but what I have all along admitted—a design on my part to free the slaves. I certainly intended to have made a clean thing of that matter, as I did last winter when I went into Missouri and there took slaves without the snapping of a gun on either side, and landed them safe in Canada. That was all I intended. I never did intend murder, or treason, or the destruction of property, or to incite slaves to rebel.
>
> I have another objection. Had I interfered in the manner which I admit has been fairly proved—had I interfered in behalf of the rich and powerful, or any of their friends, it would have been all right. Every man in this room would have deemed it an act worthy of reward rather than of punishment. I say I am yet too young to understand that God is any respecter of persons. I believe that to have interfered as I have done, in behalf of His despised poor, was not wrong, but right.
>
> This Court acknowledges, as I suppose, the validity of the Law of God. I see a book kissed, which I suppose to be the Bible, which teaches me that all things whatsoever I would that men should do to me I should do even so unto them. It teaches me also to remember them in bonds as bound with them. I have endeavored to act up to these instructions.
>
> Now if it is deemed necessary that I should forfeit my life and mingle my blood with the blood of my children and with the blood of millions in this slave country whose rights are disregarded, I say, let it be done!
>
> Let me say one word further. I feel entirely satisfied with the treatment I have received on my trial. Considering all the circumstances, it has been more generous than I expected. I admire the candor and truthfulness of the witnesses. But I feel no consciousness of guilt! Now I have done.

Judge Richard Parker then declared:

> John Brown, the evidence has shown, and the jury has found, that there is no reasonable doubt as to your guilt under the indictment. Therefore, the since the jury has adjudged you guilty, the sentence of the Law is that you shall be hanged by the neck until you be dead, and that the execution of this judgment be made and done in public on Friday, the second of December next. And may God have mercy on your soul.

Source: Julia Davis, *The Anvil: The Trial of John Brown* (New York City, NY: Harper & Row, 1963), pp. 70–71.

LESSON ONE
JOHN BROWN: THE VISIONARY

A. OBJECTIVES

- Explain the reasons for John Brown's raid.
- Analyze the justification for his actions and their impact.
- Analyze the relationship between John Brown and Frederick Douglass.

B. LESSON ACTIVITIES

(1) Have students read the letter from Annie Brown Adams to Garibaldi Ross (**Document 1A**) and complete the Written Document Analysis Worksheet (**Student Handout 1**).

(2) Conduct a Reader's Theater on "John Brown and the Harpers Ferry Raid" (**Document 1B**). Choose 18 students to play each of the parts of the narrative. The students should sit in the front of the room while they are reading their parts. As the students listen to the enactment, they should be directed to jot down the point of view of each of the characters in the dialogue using **Student Handout 2** (Notetaking Form).

After the presentation use the questions at the end of the Reader's Theater (page)as a guide for class discussion.

(3) Students should study the pictorial documents on Harpers Ferry:

- The Maps of Harpers Ferry (**Document 1C**)
- The 1859 View of Lower Harpers Ferry (**Document 1D**)
- The Interior of the Engine House (**Document 1E**)

The students then can be asked to reconstruct the raid bringing together the information from the Reader's Theater (**Document 1B**), the maps (**Document 1C**), and the pictorial documents (**Documents 1D** and **1E**).

Class discussion questions:

- Why did John Brown choose Harpers Ferry as the place to begin his revolution?
- How should the choice be evaluated? Foolish? Wise? Other? Why?

(4) Have students read "The Last Meeting between Frederick Douglass and John Brown" (**Document 1F**). Answer the questions with a partner using the "Pair and Share" Technique. This involves students answering the questions separately, sharing their answers with a partner, and having the answers agreed with, disagreed with and/or modified until one answer has been developed between the pairs.

"Pair and Share" discussion questions:

1. Why did Douglass refuse to join John Brown in the Harpers Ferry raid?

2. According to Douglass, how did Brown's men initially react to his declared intention to seize the Federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry?

3. According to Douglass, how had Brown altered his original plan for going into Virginia?

4. How did Brown justify his decision to seize the Federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry? Why did Douglass oppose the plan?

5. How did Brown intend to insure his escape from Harpers Ferry?

Review the pairs' answers and then have the class discuss:

- Was Frederick Douglass justified in not participating in Harpers Ferry? Why or Why not?

(5) Final Discussion: Using the information from the pictures, the Reader's Theater and the "Last Meeting Between Frederick Douglass and John Brown," ask students to discuss:

Was the Raid on Harpers Ferry Necessary? Why or Why Not?

Ask Students to complete the Discussion Form (**Student Handout 3**) at the conclusion of the discussion.

ANNIE BROWN ADAMS TO GARIBALDI ROSS, DECEMBER 15, 1887

All members of the Brown family did not share John Brown's ardor for his campaign in Virginia. His wife, three of his six sons, and his son-in-law did not join Brown at Harpers Ferry. The three sons who accompanied him, Owen, Oliver, and Watson, were in fact dismayed when they realized that their father intended to seize the federal arsenal and armory at Harpers Ferry. Annie Brown Adams' letter provides evidence that not all members of the family favored the enterprise. Jason and Salmon Brown refused to support the plan while John Brown, Jr. remained in Ohio rasing money and supplies for his father. Salmon later declared: "I did not want to go to Harpers Ferry very much. I said to the boys before they left: 'You know father. You know he will dally till he is trapped.'" [See, also, Stephen B. Oates, *To Purge this Land with Blood: A Biography of John Brown* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), p. 272.]

Annie Brown Adams to Garibaldi Ross, December 15, 1887:

My father and two brothers, Owen and Oliver, John Henry Kagi and Jerry G. Anderson went down to Harpers Ferry some time in June to prepare for and get a place that would be quiet and secluded where they could receive their freight and men. They rented Kennedy Farm situated about five miles north of Harpers Ferry as that seemed in all respects perfectly adapted to their purpose . . . . It was far enough from neighbors to seclude us, in a quiet woodsy place, less than a half mile from the foot of the Blue Ridge Mountains in Maryland, about two miles from Antietam and six miles from Sharpsburg—afterwards noted battlegrounds during the War. . . .

After my father had selected his place, he found out . . . that he would be obliged to have some woman to help him, to stand between him and the curiosity of outsiders. . . .So he sent Oliver back to North Elba after Mother and I. Never dreaming that Mother would not go. Oliver's girl wife, Martha and I went back with him. Martha was sixteen and I was fifteen years old then. . . .

I will first describe John Brown, not the one the world knew, but my father as I knew him. He was very strict in his ideas of discipline. We all knew from our earliest infancy that we *must* obey him. . . .

We commenced housekeeping at Kennedy Farm sometime in July . . . . Our family at that time consisted of six persons. . . .Then followed the rest—one, two three and four at a time. These last arrivals all came secretly by way of Chambersburg, Father, and some of the rest going there with a light covered wagon, in which they rode or else walked a part of the way. They would hide in the woods and come in to the house before daylight in the morning or else after dark at night. They all lived upstairs over the dining room, coming down at their meals, and at any time that there were strangers or visitors about. . . .

Source: David Brion Davis and Steven Mintz, eds., *The Boisterous Sea of Liberty: A Documentary History of America from Discovery through the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 474-475.

Questions for discussion of **Document 1A**:

1. Why did Annie and Martha Brown agree to join John Brown at the Kennedy Farm in the summer of 1859?

2. Why did Brown decide to rent the Kennedy Farm?

3. What role did Chambersburg, Pennsylvania play in the enterprise?

READERS' THEATER:
JOHN BROWN & THE HARPERS FERRY RAID

The following Reader's Theater exercise tells the story of the Harpers Ferry Raid from John Brown's perspective. The actual words assigned the characters were spoken or written by the historical figures represented in the excerpts, although some of the words were written or spoken after the events described. In particular, the reader should compare Brown's perspective with those of other witnesses to the events at Harpers Ferry, such as the following accounts offered by Robert E. Lee and in Senator James Mason's majority report to the United States Senate in 1860.

Jefferson Davis: The Black Republicans were trying to push us to the brink. They were a sectional party incorporating the lunatic abolitionists and were implacable enemies of the South— a sectional party which was now plotting our ruin. They were determined to encircle us with free territories and free states in a heinous effort to strangle us into submission. They were determined to turn the North against us and precipitate a war of sections so that they could free the Negroes and put them on top of whites in the South.

In June, 1858, on the very day Congress adjourned, Lincoln, the Black Republican candidate for Douglas's Senate seat, gave a violent abolitionist speech before a convention of Republican zealots. Lincoln declared that this country could not remain half slave and half free, and called for a war of extermination against the South and its domestic institutions.

Abraham Lincoln: "A house divided against itself cannot stand. I believe this government cannot endure, permanently half *slave* and half *free.* I do not expect the Union to be *dissolved*—I do not expect the House to *fall*—but I *do* expect it will cease to be divided. Either the *opponents* of slavery will arrest the further spread of it, and place it where the public mind shall rest in the belief that it is in course of ultimate extinction; or its *advocates* will push it forward, till it shall become alike lawful in *all* the States, *old* as well as *new—North* as well as *South."*

John Brown: It's too late to settle the slave question through politics, conventions, or any other peaceful means. It was late winter [1858] and I was pacing back and forth in Gerrit Smith's mansion in Peterboro, New York. "There's no recourse left to the black man," I said, "but in God and a massive slave uprising in which the blood of slaveholders will be spilled. This is a terrible thing, but slavery is a terrible wrong, the same as murder, and the unrepentant southerners deserve to be violently punished for their sins."

Jefferson Davis: You ask, why did we argue the right to take slaves into Kansas and the other western territories? Was that not a barren, theoretical right? I believed that

slave labor could be adapted to the gold and silver mines and the cattle ranches of the Southwest—the Spaniards had employed Indian slaves in such enterprises in their conquest of Mexico. I was all for buying Cuba and annexing Mexico and other tropical regions where our slave-based agriculture could thrive; manufacturing had an equal right to go there, too, of course. The point is, we needed to extend slavery because of the war that was being made against our institutions; because of the want of security which resulted from the action of our bitter foes in the northern states.

John Brown: God has raised me to deliver the slaves from Egypt. It's *His* will that I invade Virginia, the queen of the slave states, and provoke a massive slave rebellion with a guerrilla army I'm now raising. From Virginia we'll sweep southward through the southern mountains in a whirlwind of bullets and bayonets, pikes, and axes. The balance of the slave states will nearly conquer themselves, there being such a large number of Negroes in them. To prevent anarchy, I intend to establish a provisional government in the territory we conquer. I've drafted a constitution for such a government. It provides for a commander-in-chief of the army, a president, vice-president, a supreme court, and a one-house Congress.

Franklin Sanborn: It's an amazing proposition! But I've got to admit I have some doubts. The plot is . . . sounds . . . well, rather fantastic. Desperate in character, inadequately planned. And what will the result be for certain?

John Brown: Even if the insurrection fails, it will cause such convulsions that the North and the South cannot remain together in the Union. Southerners will see a northern conspiracy behind it, just as they did behind Nat Turner's slave revolt, and will demand retribution. I believe that even a failed insurrection will cause such a violent quake that the entire temple will come crashing down, and slavery with it. I should then have effected a mighty conquest, like the last victory of Samson. Only through insurrection and war can this slave-cursed Republic be restored to the principles of the Declaration of Independence. I for one am ready to die to bring it about.

Franklin Sanborn: Noble sentiments, Captain Brown, but . . .

John Brown: [interrupting Sanborn] If *God* be for us, who can be against us? I'll carry on without you if you've got no faith in me.

Franklin Sanborn: You leave us only the alternatives of betrayal, desertion, or support. [At this point Sanborn and Gerrit Smith go for a walk in the snowy hills to talk Brown's proposition over. After returning, the conversation with Brown continues:]

Gerrit Smith: We cannot give you up to die alone. We *will* support you. I'll raise all the money I can for you, and Frank here will lay the case before your friends in Massachusetts—Reverend [Theodore] Parker, Dr. [Samuel Gridley] Howe, George Stearns, and Reverend Thomas Wentworth Higginson. I can see no other way.

John Brown: Young Sanborn communicated the enterprise to my Massachusetts friends; and in March I met with all five of them in a Boston hotel: Higginson, the tall, stiff-backed, belligerent clergyman from Worcester; Parker, the coughing, blood-and-thunder Unitarian who'd sided with me in my argument with [William Lloyd] Garrison; Stearns, the long-bearded merchant who always wore a soft hat and liked to give money to benevolent causes; Sanborn, the ardent smooth-faced young schoolteacher and secretary of the Massachusetts Kansas Committee; and Dr. Howe, the colorful man of causes who'd fought in the Greek Revolution against Turkey. I repeated what I'd told Sanborn and Smith: that I was an instrument in God's hands to invade the South and destroy its wicked institution by the sword. If the insurrection can hold its ground for a few days, the whole country from the Potomac to Savannah will be ablaze.

Thomas Wentworth Higginson: I have long advocated disunion to get rid of the slavery curse and have predicted that a revolution is coming.

Theodore Parker: Your plan, Captain Brown, accords with my belief and support of violent resistance to the Slave Power.

Samuel Gridley Howe: I, too, have long called for some move of actual force against the slave power.

John Brown: Only a sectional Armageddon will destroy slavery. Even if the insurrection attempt fails, it will shake this country to its foundations, divide North and South beyond hope of compromise, and bring on war, gentleman, a maelstrom of violence in which slavery itself will perish. To atone for the crime of slavery, this entire generation of men, women, and children may well be swept away.

Theodore Parker: Yes, yes, you're quite right. Only civil war can settle this matter. I've said so for years.

[The others nodded in agreement]

John Brown: Ah, these brave reformers *liked* the idea of the United States passing through the ordeal of civil war, of an unrepentant South in flames, in order that the slavery curse might be removed at last. With Gerrit Smith, they formed a Secret Committee of Six to raise $1,000 for the "experiment" and to serve as my "advisers." I wanted their *money*; not their advice—I took advice from nobody. I then traveled across the East talking to black leaders, trying to drum up support. I met my black friend, Rev. Jermain W. Loguen, in Syracuse. He had escaped slavery in Tennessee. Loguen took me to St. Catherines, Canada, a haven for escaped slaves, where I sought out Harriet Tubman. She was called "Black Moses" because she'd stolen into the land of Egypt eight times and delivered sixty slaves to freedom. Higginson said there was a $12,000 reward for her in Maryland, and claimed "she will probably be burned alive if she is caught." Tall and powerfully built, she was the most of a man naturally I ever met. She had sharp, brilliant eyes and a deep voice, and carried scars on her neck, head, and back from her own days under the lash in Maryland.

Harriet Tubman: There's a war comin', Mr. Brown. They can say peace all they like, but I know it's goin' to be war.

John Brown: Then you'll like what I've come to tell you. [I then confided my plan in full. She promised to do "missionary work" for me among the thousand fugitives in St. Catherines, and then join me in the South when I gave the signal. I then issued a call for black leaders to meet me in secret convention at Chatham, Canada, about forty miles above Detroit, where I would complete my preparations. Then I would strike.

Narrator: Brown's secret convention took place in the spring of 1858 in the engine house of a black fire-fighting company. Brown and twelve recruits showed up, as did 36 Negro delegates. Neither Frederick Douglass nor Jermain Loguen appeared and Brown was very disappointed. The free-born Martin Delany, an editor and abolitionist orator who had studied medicine at Harvard, and worked with Douglass on the *North Star* showed up. Delany now championed colonization for American Negroes, on the grounds that America was too Negrophobic for blacks to live there in the freedom they deserved.

Martin Delany: Captain Brown, would you state your objectives?

John Brown: For 20 or 30 years it has been my greatest and principal object to liberate the slaves. Gradually a plan formed in my mind for mountain warfare in the South. To prepare myself, I studied the Spartacus gladiator revolt against the Romans, Touusaint Louverture's slave war on Santo Domingo in the seventeen nineties, and Nat Turner's revolt in Virginia. I consider Nat Turner a great American hero, greater than George Washington. As I studied these uprisings, a plan of action emerged spontaneously in my mind. I went to Kansas to gain a footing for the furtherance of this matter, and from then on I've devoted my whole being, mental, moral, and physical, all that I have and am to the extinction of slavery. I'm convinced that southern slaves are ripe for rebellion. At the first sign of a leader, they'll immediately rise all over the southern states. Gentlemen, I am that leader. My company—twelve of them are standing beside me now—will invade Virginia, in the region of the Blue Ridge mountains, and march into Tennessee and northern Alabama, where the slaves will swarm to us. We'll then wage war upon the plantations on the plains west and east of the mountains, which will serve as the base of operations.

Black Delegate: But what if troops are brought against you?

John Brown: A small force trained in guerrilla warfare can easily defend those Thermopylae ravines against southern militia and the U.S. Army. I expect thousands of free Negroes in the northern states to join me once the invasion begins.

Narrator: Brown then read the constitution that would create a new provisional government once the slaves were freed to the convention. He would serve as commander in chief, with John Henry Kagi, his most trusted recruit, as secretary of war. The pre-

amble of his constitution declared *war* against slavery because slavery was a perpetual *state of war* against black people. After considerable debate over the constitution, Delany and the other delegates approved and signed it unanimously. Some of the blacks then joined Brown in singing, *Go down Moses, way down in Egypt land. Tell ole Pharoah, to let my people go.*

John Brown: Yes, Lord God, yes. I am your destroyer, I am your sword of vengeance. I will make the whole land desolate and waste to the cities until not an inhabitant is left. But just as I was ready to move, God in His inscrutable wisdom placed thorns in my path. Loguen reported that Negroes who would go to war did not have the money "to get there with." I was also nailed down for want of funds—so far the Six had sent me only about $600, and the money had melted away in expenses. Meanwhile, Hugh Forbes, the flighty drillmaster I'd enlisted for my flock of sheep, defected, went to Washington, and told what he knew about the conspiracy to several Republican politicians. The Secret Six were scandalized.

Samuel Gridley Howe: Senators Henry Wilson, John Hale, and William Seward, and God knows how many more, have heard about the plot.

John Brown: Of the Six, only the fighting Higginson wanted to go ahead. In a perfect panic, the other five voted to send me back to Kansas until things cooled off. They offered me an additional $2,000 or $3,000 as an inducement. Complaining bitterly about their cowardice, I stored my "tools" in a secret hideaway in Ohio and returned to the territory under a new alias, "Shubel Morgan."

Over the winter I struck a blow for God and freedom that resounded across the land: my little army invaded Missouri and liberated eleven slaves and several horses from two enemy homesteads, nearly provoking another civil war along the Kansas-Missouri border. We escorted the blacks to the Canadian border and freedom, then hurried down to Cleveland where I auctioned the horses off. In a fund-raising lecture attended by reporters, I described the success of the slave-running expedition and pointed out, proudly, that the President had put a price of $250 on my head. I retaliated by putting a price of $2.50 on the *rotten* head of Buchanan. In the spring of 1859 I journeyed back to Boston and warned the Secret Six that it was time for war, there would be no more postponements.

Frederick Douglass: I met with Brown at his urging at an old stone quarry in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, where he revealed his plan to attack the Harpers Ferry arsenal.

Narrator: Harpers Ferry was a mountain town in northern Virginia where the Potomac and Shenandoah rivers meet. Brown had sent an advance agent, John E. Cook, into town several months earlier to gather information. Meanwhile, after meeting with the Secret Six in Boston and attending to additional business, Brown had rented an old two-story farmhouse about seven miles away from Harpers Ferry on the Maryland

side of the Potomac. He gave his name as "Smith" and told neighbors he was a cattle buyer from New York. Several recruits came with Brown, and others trickled in over the summer, including three of his sons, Oliver, Owen and Watson.

John Brown: I will attack the arsenal and confiscate all the government weapons, take hostages, and then strike south across the mountains.

Frederick Douglass: If you attack Federal property it'll array the whole country against you. Old friend, listen to me. You're going into a perfect steel-trap. Once in you'll never get out alive. How can you rest on a reed so weak and broken? Virginia will blow you and your hostages sky-high.

John Brown: God is my guard and shield. I trust all to *Him – He* alone will determine the outcome. Come with me, Douglass. I'll defend you with my life. I want you for a special purpose. When I strike, the bees will swarm, and I need you to help hive them.

Frederick Douglass: No, I will not go with you this time. The plan cannot work. You will raise the whole country against you by attacking federal property.

Narrator: Though Douglass refused to join Brown, his associate Shields Green decided to join Brown's army. Several other recruits joined up in the next several weeks. On Sunday, October 16, 1859, Brown gathered up his small army of 16 whites and five Negroes. He explained: "We have only one life to live, and once to die; and if we lose our lives it'll do more for the cause than our lives would be worth in any other way." He stored his constitution, several well-marked maps of the South, and letters that incriminated the Secret Six, Frederick Douglass, Martin Delany, and several prominent Republicans in a carpetbag, which he left in a trunk inside the farmhouse, where it could be easily found. He later declared: "I was the stone God cast into the black pool of slavery, and I wanted the ripples to spread over as much of the North as possible, forcing everybody to take sides."

John Brown: "Men," I said, "get on your arms; we'll proceed to the Ferry." Leaving my son Owen and two others as a rear guard, I climbed into a wagon loaded with guns and pikes and led the men two by two into a damp moonless night. When the town lights came into view, I motioned to two raiders to fall out and cut the telegraph lines. Then I flung my little army across the bridge that led to Harpers Ferry, deploying several to guard the Potomac and Shenandoah bridges. Except for a few fugitives strolling the streets, the town was quiet. My men crept through the shadows of Potomac Street, and took the watchman at the government works by surprise. In the glare of torches, I told him: "I'm here in the name of Jehovah. I came from Kansas and intend to free all the Negroes in this state. If the citizens interfere with me I must burn the town and have blood."

Narrator: Brown's men quickly seized the government buildings and confiscated the weapons inside them. His son Owen, meanwhile, had moved the pikes to the schoolhouse near the Potomac where the slaves were to report, after hearing of his raid.

Cook, his advance agent, had assured Brown the slaves would come forward by the hundreds once word of the invasion spread. Around midnight, a detachment of raiders brought three white hostages into the armory yard, plus twelve liberated male slaves and several confiscated weapons. One hostage was Colonel Lewis Washington, a grand-grandnephew of George Washington.

John Brown: I wanted you particularly for the moral effect it would give our cause having a man of your name as a prisoner. I armed the slaves with pikes and told them to guard the prisoners. Among the weapons was a magnificent sword given to George Washington by Frederick the Great. I strapped it on, thinking it a fitting symbol for the war that had begun this night.

Narrator: Sometime that night, the Baltimore & Ohio train steamed into town from the west. Brown's sentinels at the bridges, opened fire on the train. Fearing the shooting would arouse the town, Brown sent one of the blacks to tell his men to let the train go. But several sentinels questioned Brown's decision fearing the alarm would be spread once the train reached the next town and the telegraph would alert the entire countryside.

John Brown: Shortly after telling my sentinels to stand firm, a church bell started tolling somewhere in the town. They were spreading the alarm! The bell tolled on and on—*insurrection. Insurrection* – tolling into the dawn. I scanned the overcast Heavens, whispering: "Lord, what do I do?" No word yet from Owen. We had to wait for him and the slaves—they could be as many as 1,500. Then, if it is God's will we will vacate the town.

Narrator: Shortly after 8:00 a.m. some of the armory employees arrived for work, heedless of the tolling bell. They were taken prisoner and placed with the other hostages in the fire engine house. Gunfire soon erupted in the streets as militia troops began arriving.

John Henry Kagi: [By messenger] Captain Brown, you must order an evacuation while we can still fight our way to safety across the bridge. . .

John Brown: [By messenger] Tell Kagi and the others to stand firm. It was my settled policy not to do anything when I did not know what to do. A good course was sure to be safe in the hands of Jehovah. Bullets were now flying all around us, and more armed men were pouring across the bridge leading to Maryland. In all the gunfire, my son Oliver and another sentinel made it back to the armory, but several others had been killed. The speed with which the countryside had mobilized took me by surprise. . .

Osborn Anderson [a raider]: "What are we going to do, Captain? They got us surrounded. Can't fight our way out now."

John Brown: Can't wait for Owen and the slaves, I thought. Must negotiate for a cease fire, offer to release the hostages if the militia will let us go free. I sent a raider, Will Thompson, out under a truce flag, but the scoundrels seized him and took him off at gunpoint. Ordering the remaining raiders to take cover in the little fire-engine house, I sent my son, Watson, and Aaron Stevens under a second white flag. But the mob gunned them both down. *Those miserable swine.* Watson managed to crawl back to the engine house, where he doubled up in agony at my feet. "Be brave, be a man," I told him. . . .

Narrator: By late afternoon crowds of drunken men milled about in the streets firing indiscriminately and screaming obscenities at Brown and his men. They threatened to commit vile atrocities on the blacks with Brown. One of Brown's men killed the mayor of the town. In retaliation, several townspeople dragged Will Thompson kicking and screaming toward the Potomac, where they quickly dispatched him. Additional reinforcements arrived throughout the remainder of the day and into the evening.

John Brown: Inside the engine house it was pitch dark and painfully cold as I took stock. Only four uninjured raiders were left, and eleven prisoners. Most of the liberated blacks had disappeared. One raider lay on the floor, dead. My son Oliver had also been shot, and he and Watson lay side by side, both choking and crying in pain. Exhausted from the fighting and lack of sleep, I paced back and forth, trying to think what to do, Washington's sword swinging at my side. Oliver kept begging me to put him out of his agony and shoot him. I turned on him. "If you must die, die like a man." Then I spun around to face the prisoners. "Gentlemen, if you knew of my past history you would not blame me for being here. I went to Kansas a peaceable man, and the proslavery people hunted me down like a wolf. I lost one of my sons [Frederick] there." I stood trembling, then called to Oliver. There was no answer. "I guess he's dead," I said, and started pacing again.

Narrator: Federal troops under Colonel Robert E. Lee and Lieutenant J.E.B. Stuart had arrived during the night. As dawn spread, they deployed in the street, the first column armed with sledgehammers, the second with bayonets ready to assault the engine house. Stuart approached under a flag of truce.

J.E.B. Stuart: [Speaking to Brown] "I bear a note from Colonel Robert E. Lee."

Narrator: He then reads the contents of the note stating the armory and its works were surrounded on all sides, that it was impossible for Brown and his men to escape, and demanding their immediate surrender.

John Brown: I reject the terms. I want reassurances that my men and my hostages can leave." Stuart refused to alter the terms. Suddenly, he jumped back from the door and waved his hat three times, and the storming party rushed forward. I slammed the door and we opened fire on them through the gun holes and cracks in the building, but it was no use. The troops battered down one of the doors with a heavy ladder and

swarmed inside. Colonel Washington pointed at me and said: "This is Osawatomie." A sword-wielding officer leaped forward and struck me with such a savage thrust of his weapon that it lifted me almost off the floor. Then he beat me with the hilt of his sword until I slipped into blackness.

When I came to, I could not believe I was alive. I was lying on the grass outside the engine house, cut and bleeding badly about the upper part of my body, but there was no wound in my stomach where the blade had struck. The officer who had tried to kill me was cursing his bad luck. "The blade must have hit his belt buckle. In my haste to leave the barracks I took the dress sword instead of my battle sword." Colonel Lee bent over to look at my wounds and then called for a physician.

Narrator: Brown was placed under heavy guard while a lynch mob screamed for his head. Later that afternoon, Gov. Henry Wise of Virginia, several officers, U.S. congressmen and reporters interrogated Brown for three hours.

Interrogator: How can you justify your acts?

John Brown: I pity the poor in bondage that have none to help them. That is why I am here; not to gratify any personal animosity, revenge, or vindictive spirit. It's my sympathy with the oppressed and the wronged, that are as good as you and as precious in the sight of God. I wish to say, furthermore, that you had better—all you people of the South—prepare yourselves for a settlement of that question that must come up for settlement sooner than you're prepared for it. You may dispose of me very easily; I'm nearly disposed of now; but this question is still to be settled—this Negro question I mean—the end of that is not yet.

Narrator: Brown was placed on trial for treason against the state of Virginia and tried in nearby Charles Town, where he was sentenced to hang. Several of his friends tried to save his life by petitioning the governor to declare him insane and commit him to an asylum. But Brown rejected the ploy with contempt.

Avis [Brown's jailer]: The authorities found your carpetbag of papers at the Kennedy farmhouse. Most of your immediate backers have fled the country. You've caused a hell of a ruckus. The town is full of troops. The entire state is on alert. They say you're an agent of the Black Republican Party—the vanguard of a mighty abolitionist army being assembled in the North to destroy us. They say the irrepressible conflict is at hand, and we should fight it out to the bitter end.

John Brown: I could have wept for joy. The apocalypse must *surely* be coming—I could see it in my mind: *a nation in flames,* with Jehovah thundering his wrath over all. The signs all pointed to His approaching fury. I could hear great commotion outside—the clank of soldiers in the streets, and fearful cries on the wind. Night after night haystacks and barns blazed beyond my barred window, lighting up the Heavens with a flickering glare. Mr. Avis said they blamed the fires on northern agents and distracted slaves. But I knew it was the work of Jehovah.

It's now December 2nd—the day of my hanging, the day the gallows become my cross. I'm approaching those gallows while sitting on my coffin in the bed of a military wagon. Thank you, Father, for allowing an old man like me such mighty and soul-satisfying rewards. I'm ready to join thee now in Paradise. Hanging me won't save them from God's wrath! I warned them, I warned the entire country: I, John Brown, am now quite certain that the crimes of this guilty land will *never* be purged away, but with blood.

Source: Adapted from Stephen B. Oates, *The Approaching Fury: Voices of the Storm, 1820-1861* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), pp. 224-235 and 282-290.

Questions for discussion:

1. How do Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson Davis differ on the slavery issue?

2. What does Lincoln mean when he says: "A House Divided against itself cannot stand? How would John Brown respond to Lincoln's "House Divided" speech?

3. Why did John Brown decide to invade Harpers Ferry? How does he justify his plan?

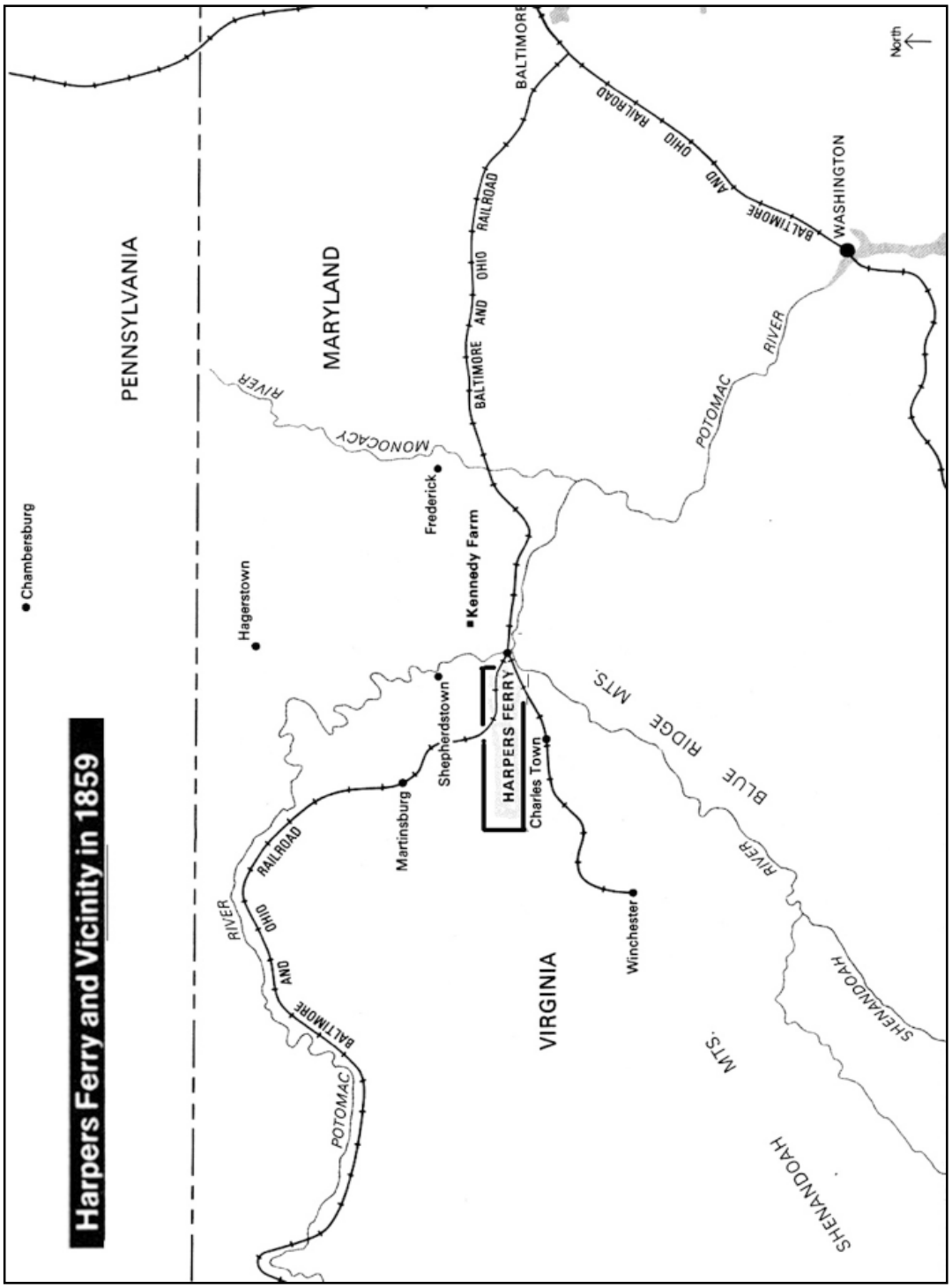
4. Why did Brown temporarily abandon the Harpers Ferry raid and return to Kansas following the Chatham Convention? How did African Americans respond to Brown's decision to invade Harpers Ferry?

5. Why did Brown temporarily abandon the Harpers Ferry raid and return to Kansas following the Chatham Convention?

6. Why did Brown refuse to abandon Harpers Ferry before militia forces and Federal troops arrived?

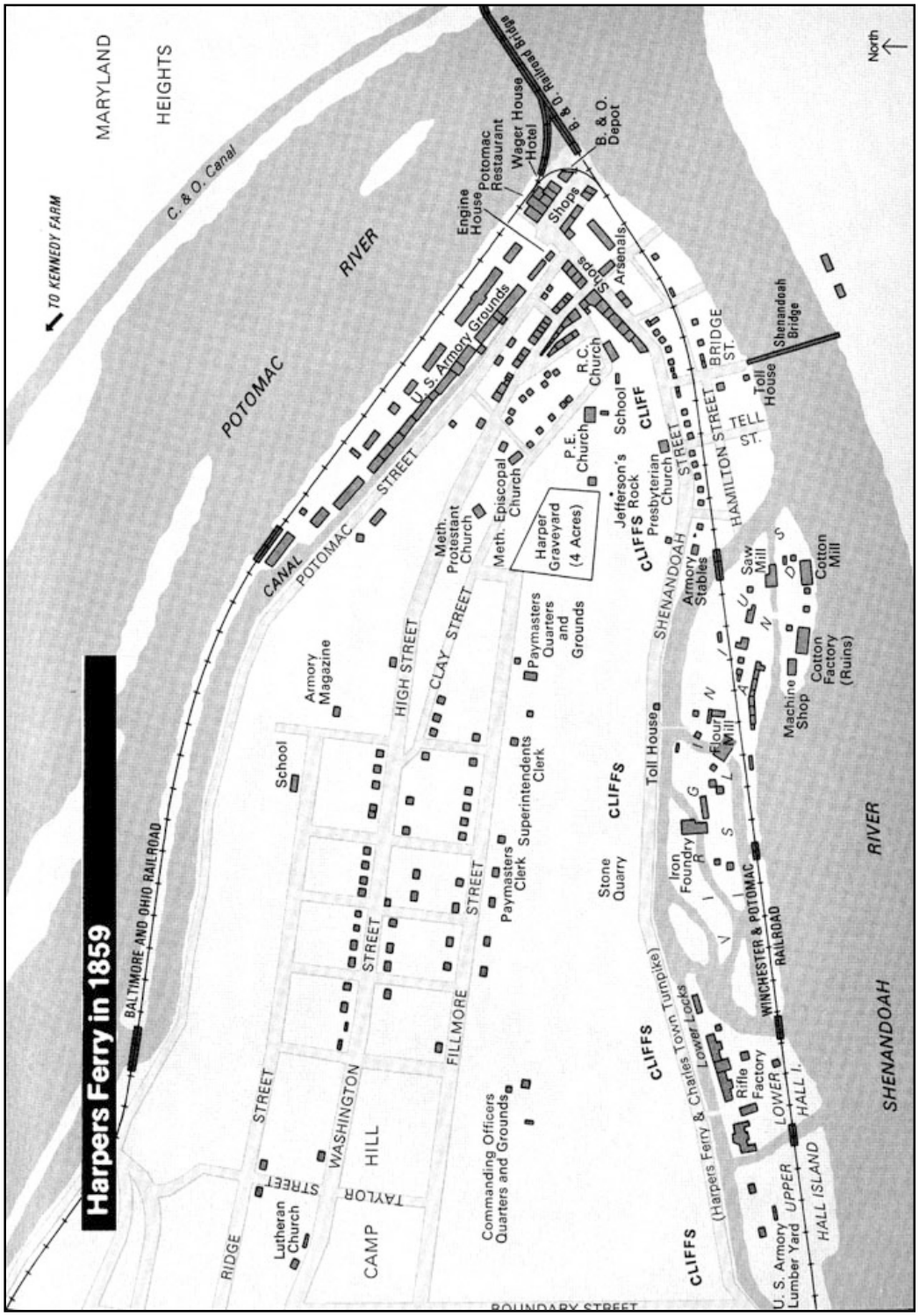
7. In the next to the last paragraph above, what does the sentence about haystacks and barns burning nightly refer to? What additional evidence can you cite to indicate that Brown's raid was more widely supported than Virginia authorities indicated? [See Gov. Wise's Proclamation, **Document 2A**.]

MAP OF HARPERS FERRY, #1



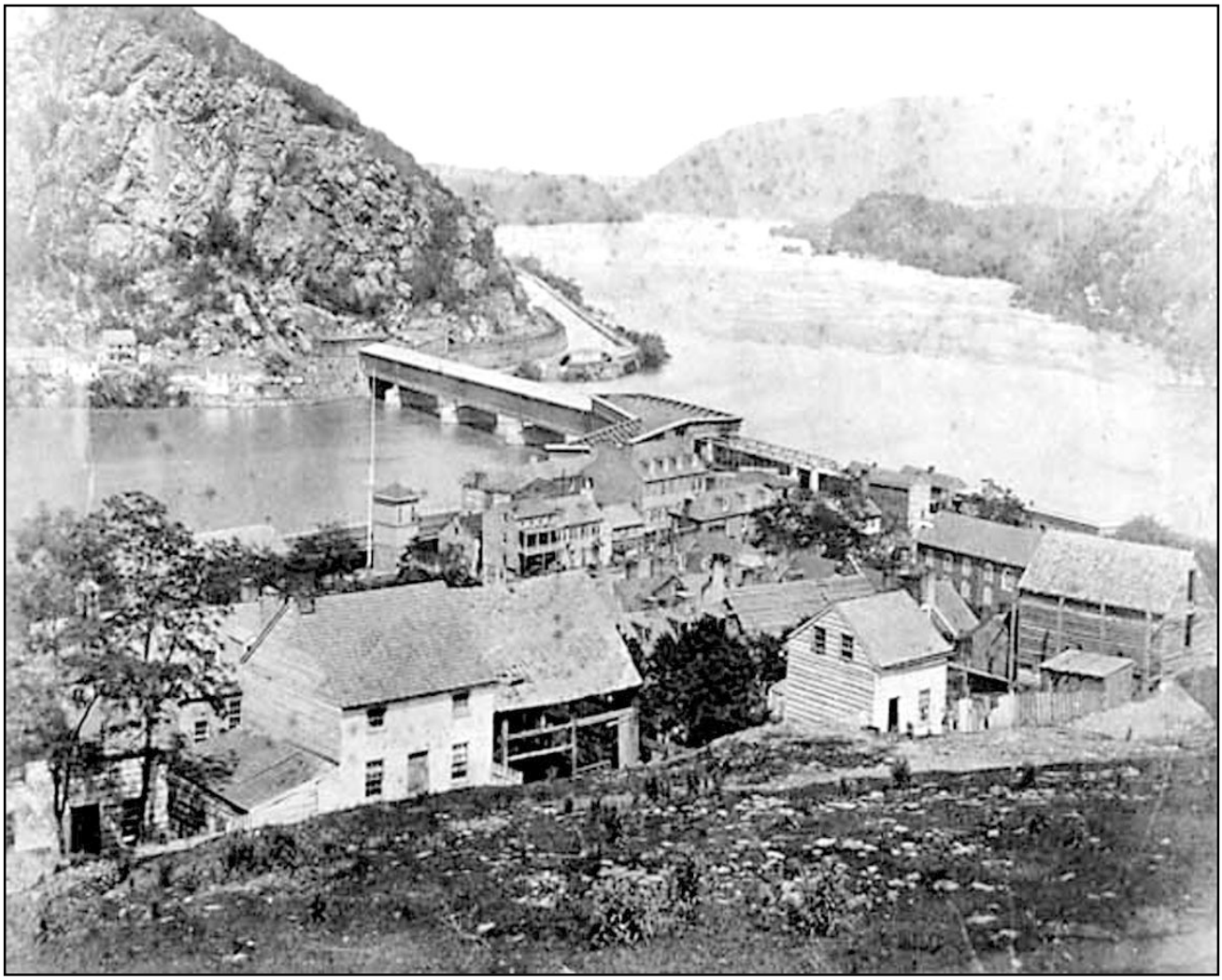
Source: Adapted from *Harpers Ferry and the Story of John Brown; Study Guide* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, 1991), pp. 24-25.

Map of Harpers Ferry, #2



Source: Adapted from *Harpers Ferry and the Story of John Brown; Study Guide* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, 1991), pp. 24-25.

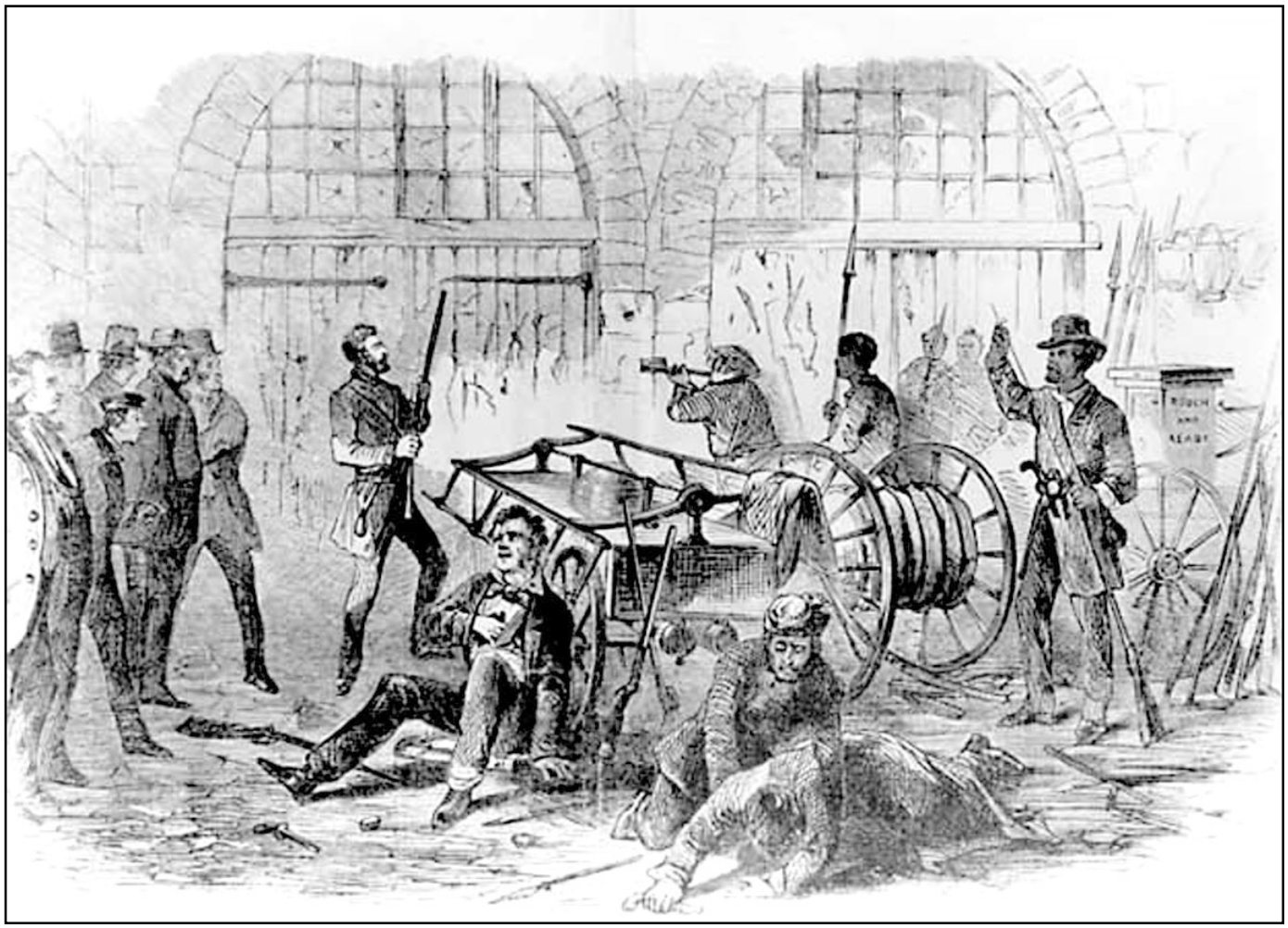
LOWER TOWN HARPERS FERRY



National Park Association

1859 view of Lower Town Harpers Ferry and the covered Baltimore and Ohio Railroad Viaduct. The Point was a bustling commercial district at the time. This is one of the earliest known photographs of Harpers Ferry.

HARPERS FERRY INSURRECTION



National Park Association

Harpers Ferry Insurrection – Interior of the Engine-House, Just Before the Gate is Broken Down By the Storming Party – Col. Washington and His Associates As Captives, Held by Brown As Hostages. The date was October 18, 1859.

LAST MEETING BETWEEN FREDERICK DOUGLASS AND JOHN BROWN

John Brown had first discussed his plan for invading Virginia with Frederick Douglass in 1847. In August 1859, the two met for the last time at a stone quarry in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, where Brown pleaded with his old friend to join him in the Harpers Ferry Raid. Douglass, however, was reluctant to join the enterprise and rejected his friend's pleas.

While at my house, John Brown made the acquaintance [of a] Negro man who called himself by different names-sometimes "Emperor," at other times, "Shields Green." He was a fugitive slave, who had made his escape from Charleston, South Carolina; a State from which a slave found it no easy matter to run away. But Shields Green was not one to shrink from hardships or dangers. He was a man of few words, and his speech was singularly broken; but his courage and self-respect made him quite a dignified character. John Brown saw at once what "stuff" Green "was made of," and confided to him his plans and purposes. Green easily believed in Brown, and promised to go with him whenever he should be ready to move.

About three weeks before the raid on Harpers Ferry, John Brown wrote to me, informing me that a beginning in his work would soon be made, and that before going forward he wanted to see me, and appointed an old stone-quarry near Chambersburg, Penn., as our place of meeting. Mr. Kagi, his secretary would be there, and they wished me to bring any money I could command, and Shields Green along with me. In the same letter he said that his "mining tools" and stores were then at Chambersburg, and that he would be there to remove them.

I obeyed the old man's summons. Taking Shields, we passed through New York City, where we called upon Rev. James Glocester and his wife, and told them where and for what we were going, and that our old friend needed money. Mrs. Glocester gave me ten dollars, and asked me to hand the same to John Brown, with her best wishes.

When I reached Chambersburg, a good deal of surprise was expressed (for I was instantly recognized) that I should come there unannounced, and I was pressed to make a speech to them, with which invitation I readily complied. Meanwhile, I called upon Mr. Henry Watson, a simple-minded and warm-hearted man, to whom Capt. Brown had imparted the secret of my visit, to show me the road to the appointed rendezvous. Watson was very busy in his barber's shop, but he dropped all and put me on the right track. I approached the old quarry very cautiously, for John Brown was generally well armed, and regarded strangers with suspicion. He was then under the ban of the government, and heavy rewards were offered for his arrest, for offenses said to have been committed in Kansas. He was passing under the name of John Smith.

As I came near, he regarded me rather suspiciously, but soon recognized me, and received me cordially. He had in his hand when I met him a fishing-tackle, with which he had apparently been fishing in a stream hard [near] by; but I saw no fish, and did not sup-

pose that he cared much for his "fisherman's luck." The fishing was simply a disguise, and was certainly a good one. He looked every way like a man of the neighborhood, and as much at home as any of the farmers around there. His hat was old and storm-beaten, and his clothing was about the color of the stone quarry itself—his then present dwelling place.

His face wore an anxious expression, and he was much worn by thought and exposure. I felt that I was on a dangerous mission, and was as little desirous of discovery as himself, though no reward had been offered for me.

We—Mr. Kagi, Captain Brown, Shields Green, and myself— sat down among the rocks and talked over the enterprise which was about to be undertaken. The taking of Harpers Ferry, of which Captain Brown had merely hinted before, was now declared as his settled purpose, and he wanted to know what I thought of it. I at once opposed the measure with all the arguments at my command. To me such a measure would be fatal to running off slaves (as was the original plan), and fatal to all engaged in doing so. It would be an attack upon the Federal government, and would array the whole country against us.

Captain Brown did most of the talking on the other side of the question. He did not at all object to rousing the nation; it seemed to him that something startling was just what the nation needed. He had completely renounced his old plan, and thought that the capture of Harpers Ferry would serve as notice to the slaves that their friends had come, and as a trumpet to rally them to his standard. He described the place as to its means of defense, and how impossible it would be to dislodge him if once in possession.

Of course I was no match for him in such matters, but I told him, and these were my words, that all his arguments, and all his descriptions of the place, convinced me that he was going into a perfect steel-trap, and that once in he would never get out alive; that he would be surrounded at once and escape would be impossible. He was not to be shaken by anything I could say, but treated my views respectfully, replying that even if surrounded he would find means for cutting his way out; but that would not be forced upon him; he should, at the start, have a number of the best citizens of the neighborhood as his prisoners and that holding them as hostages he should be able, if worse came to worse, to dictate terms of egress from the town.

I looked at him with some astonishment, that he could rest upon a reed so weak and broken, and told him that Virginia would blow him and his hostages sky-high, rather than that he should hold Harpers Ferry an hour. Our talk was long and earnest; we spent the most of Saturday and a part of Sunday in this debate—Brown for Harpers Ferry, and I against it; he for striking a blow which should instantly rouse the country, and I for the policy of gradually and unaccountably drawing off the slaves to the mountains, as at first suggested and proposed by him.

When I found that he had fully made up his mind and could not be dissuaded, I turned to Shields Green and told him he heard what Captain Brown had said; his old plan was

changed, and that I should return home, and if he wished to go with me he could do so. Captain Brown urged us both to go with him, but I could not do so, and could but feel that he was about to rivet the fetters more firmly than ever on the limbs of the enslaved.

In parting he put his arms around me in a manner more than friendly, and said: "Come with me, Douglass; I will defend you with my life. I want you for a special purpose. When I strike, the bees will begin to swarm, and I shall want you to help hive them." But my discretion or my cowardice made me proof against the dear old man's eloquence—perhaps it was something of both which determined my course. When about to leave I asked Green what he had decided to do, and was surprised by his coolly saying, in his broken way, "I b'leve I'll go wid de ole man."

Here we separated; they to go to Harpers Ferry, I to Rochester. There has been some difference of opinion as to the propriety of my course in thus leaving my friend. Some have thought that I ought to have gone with him; but I have no reproaches for myself at this point, and since I have been assailed only by colored men who kept even farther from this brave and heroic man than I did, I shall not trouble myself much about their criticisms. They compliment me in assuming that I should perform greater deeds than themselves.

Such then was my connection with John Brown, and it may be asked, if this is all, why I should have objected to being sent to Virginia to be tried for the offense charged. The explanation is not difficult. I knew that if my enemies could not prove me guilty of the offense of being with John Brown, they could prove that I was Frederick Douglass; they could prove that I was in correspondence and conspiracy with Brown against slavery; they could prove that I brought Shields Green, one of the bravest of his soldiers, all the way from Rochester to him at Chambersburg; they could prove that I brought money to aid him, and in what was then the state of the public mind I could not hope to make a jury of Virginia believe I did not go the whole length he went, or that I was not one of his supporters; and I knew that all Virginia, were I once in her clutches, would say "Let him be hanged."

Before I had left Canada for England, Jeremiah_Anderson, one of Brown's men, who was present and took part in the raid, but escaped by the mountains, joined me, and he told me that he and Shields Green were sent out on special duty as soon as the capture of the arsenal, etc., was effected. Their business was to bring in the slaves from the surrounding country, and hence they were on the outside when Brown was surrounded. I said, to him, "Why then did not Shields come with you?" "Well," he said, "I told him to come; that we could do nothing more, but he simply said he must go down to de ole man."

Anderson further told me that Captain Brown was careful to keep his plans from his men, and that there was much opposition among them when they found what were

the precise movements determined upon; but they were an oath-bound company, and like good soldiers were agreed to follow their captain wherever he might lead.

Source: *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (1881, reprint New York: Pathway Press, 1941), 350-54.

Questions for Discussion:

1. Why did Douglass refuse to join John Brown in the Harpers Ferry raid?

2. According to Douglass, how did Brown's men initially react to his declared intention to seize the Federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry?

3. According to Douglass, how had Brown altered his original plan for going into Virginia?

4. How did Brown justify his decision to seize the Federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry? Why did Douglass oppose the plan?

5. How did Brown intend to insure his escape from Harpers Ferry?

Document Analysis Worksheet

1. Type of Document: (check one)
   - _____ Journal
   - _____ Letter
   - _____ Speech
   - _____ Telegram
   - _____ Other (specify type) _____
   - _____ Legislative Resolution
   - _____ Newspaper Editorial
   - _____ Congressional Record
   - _____ Memorandum

2. Date of the Document: _____

3. Author (or creator) of the document:

_____

4. For what audience was the document written?

_____

5. Document information:
   A. List important pieces of information presented in the document.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

   B. Why was the document written?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Adapted from the Written Document Analysis Worksheet designed and developed by the Education Staff, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC 20408

Notetaking Worksheet

Character	Point of view
Frederick Douglass	
Jefferson Davis	
Abraham Lincoln	
John Brown	
Franklin Sanborn	
Gerritt Smith	
Thomas Wentworth Higginson	
Harriet Tubman	
Martin Delaney	
Samuel Gridley Howe	
Avis (Brown's Jailer)	
Theodore Parker	

DISCUSSION FORM

Refutation

Defense

Conclusion

LESSON TWO
JOHN BROWN: THE FANATIC

A. OBJECTIVES

- To explain the meaning of John Brown's death and analyze its effect on northern and southern viewpoints and the advent of civil war.

- To identify the author or source of historical documents and assess their credibility.

- To draw inferences from pictorial depiction of events surrounding John Brown's trial and execution and evaluate their representation as fact or propaganda.

B. LESSON ACTIVITIES

(1) Begin the lesson by having students analyze "Gov. Wise's Proclamation" (**Document 2A**) in relationship to the pictures of "The Trial of John Brown" (**Document 2B**) and "The Execution of John Brown" (**Document 2C**). The following questions should be the basis of the analysis:

- To what extent does Governor Wise's proclamation provide evidence that there may have been more support for John Brown than the Virginia authorities admitted?
- What evidence does the introductory paragraph (beginning with the word "Curiously") provide that there may have been more support for John Brown than the Virginia authorities admitted?
- How does the picture portray John Brown at his trial? Is he a threat at the trial? at the execution? Why or why not?
- Does the picture "The Execution of John Brown" coincide with the fear of the Proclamation? Why or why not?
- Jefferson Davis, Robert E. Lee, and Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson were at the execution of John Brown. What is the connection between their presence and Governor Wise's Proclamation? Explain.

(2) Divide the class into groups of six to nine students and using a modified jigsaw activity designate two to three students within each group to read the following documents:

- Mason Senate Committee Report (**Document 2D**)
- Robert E. Lee's Report on the Harpers Ferry Raid (**Document 2E**)
- Correspondence between Lydia Maria Child and Governor Wise and Mrs. Mason of Virginia (**Document 2F**)

Each specialty group should answer the questions at the conclusion of their assigned document. Reassembling into the larger group, students within each sub-group lead the discussion of their assigned document. The class should reconvene as a whole and discuss the following:

- Was John Brown's raid an invasion of the South? Why or why not?

(3) Read the timeline (**Student Handout 4**). Ask the students to identify the key events in American history during this period. Then ask them to relate the key events to John Brown's personal life. How are they connected?

(4) Direct the students to Frederick Douglass's 1881 Storer College speech about John Brown ("Frederick Douglass on John Brown," **Document 2G**). How does he view him after the raid? Why? Is Douglass's attitude different now than it was before Harpers Ferry? Why or why not? Why is Douglass exalting Brown now? Explain.

Concluding Discussion Question:

Is John Brown's raid an isolated act of a fanatic? Or, is it part of a calculated effort to stir up conflict? Support your point of view.

GOV. WISE'S PROCLAMATION

The following document is from the Jefferson County Courthouse in Charlestown, West Virginia (originally Charles Town, Virginia), where Brown was tried in 1859. It was published and distributed prior to Brown's execution on December 2, 1859.

The Jefferson County Courthouse tour guide state " . . . Curiously, throughout the trial, there were many barn burnings in Jefferson County. And, curiously, the members of the jury were the principle [sic] victims. The threats of the abolitionist were felt as obvious and real enough!" Against this backdrop the following "broadside" was posted widely in the county.

PROCLAMATION!

IN pursuance of instructions from the Governor of Virginia, notice is hereby given to all whom it may concern,

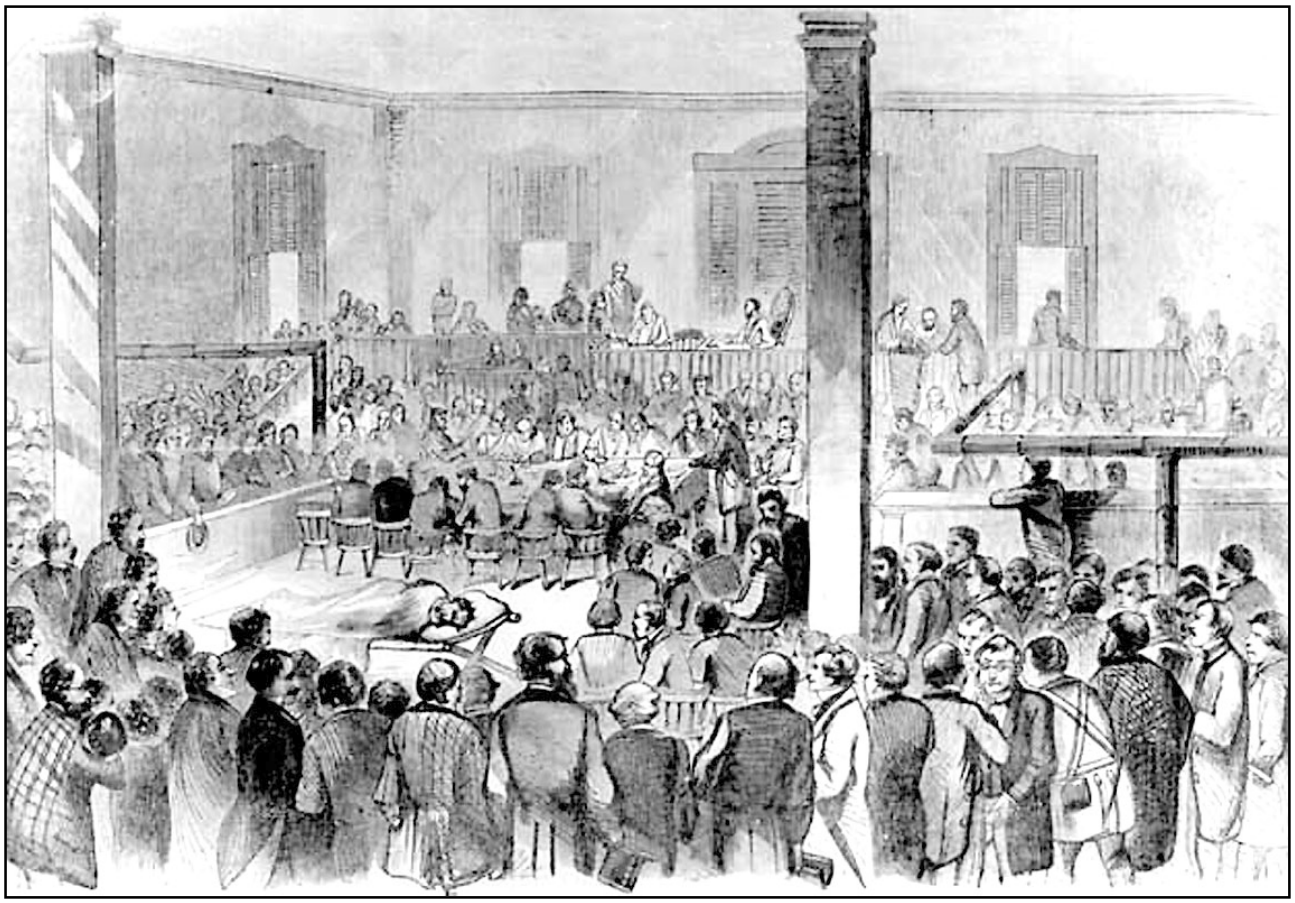
That, as heretofore, particularly from now until after Friday next the 2nd of December, **STRANGERS** found within the County of Jefferson, and Counties adjacent, having no known and proper business here, and who cannot give a satisfactory account of themselves, will be at once arrested.

That on and for a proper period before that day, strangers and especially parties, approaching under the pretext of being at the execution of John Brown, whether by Railroad or otherwise, will be met by the Military and turned back or arrested without regard to the amount of force, that may be required to effect this, and during the said period and especially on the 2nd of December, the citizens of Jefferson and the surrounding country are ***EMPHATICALLY*** warned to remain at their homes armed and guard their own property.

Information received from reliable sources, clearly indicates that by so doing they will best consult their own interests.

No WOMEN or **CHILDREN** will be allowed to come near **the** place of execution.

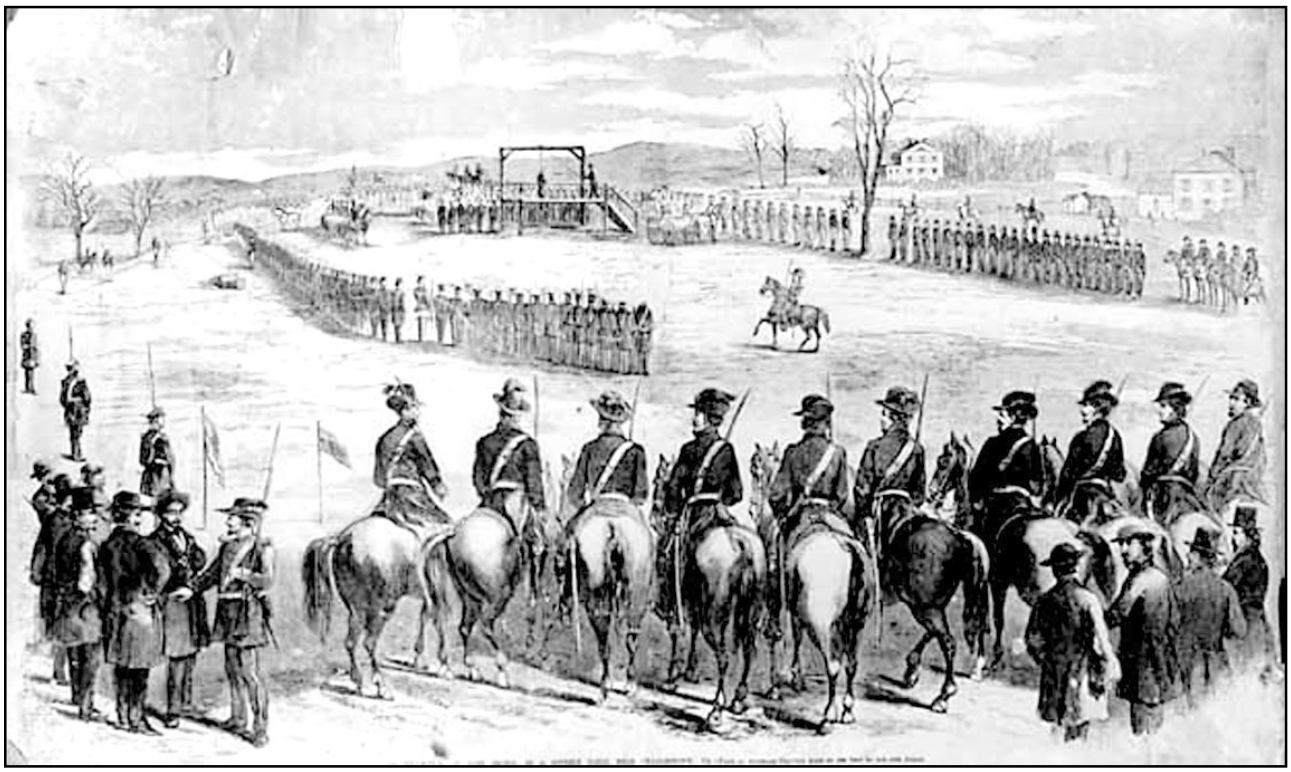
THE TRIAL OF JOHN BROWN (SKETCH)



National Park Association

"The Trial of John Brown, at Charlestown, Virginia, for Treason and Murder." Sketched by Porte Crayon (David Strother). A stricken John Brown is depicted in the center of the courtroom.

THE EXECUTION OF JOHN BROWN (SKETCH)



National Park Association

"The execution of John Brown, in a stubble field near Charlestown, Va." The execution took place on December 2, 1859.

ROBERT E. LEE ON THE HARPERS FERRY RAID

The following excerpt is from Colonel Robert E. Lee's report to the Adjutant General on the Harpers Ferry Raid.

HEADQUARTERS HARPERS FERRY, October 19, 1859

COLONEL: I have the honor to report, for the information of the Secretary of War, that on arriving here on the night of the 17th instant, in obedience to Special Orders No. 194 of that date from your office, I learn that a party of insurgents, about 11 p. m. on the 16th, had seized the watchmen stationed at the armory, arsenal, rifle factory, and bridge across the Potomac, and taken possession of those points. They then dispatched six men, under one of their party, called Captain Aaron C. Stevens, to arrest the principal citizens in the neighborhood and incite the negroes to join in the insurrection. The party took Colonel L. W. Washington from his bed about l ½ a. m. on the 17th, and brought him, with four of his servants, to this place. Mr. J. H. Allstadt and six of his servants were in the same manner seized about 3 a. m., and arms placed in the hands of the negroes. Upon their return here, John E. Cook, one of the party sent to Mr. Washington's, was dispatched to Maryland, with Mr. Washington's wagon, two of his servants, and three of Mr. Allstadt's, for arms and ammunition, &c. As day advanced, and the citizens of Harpers Ferry commenced their usual avocations, they were separately captured, to the number of forty, as well as I could learn, and confined in one room of the fire-engine house of the armory, which seems early to have been selected as a point of defense. About 11 a. m. the volunteer companies from Virginia began to arrive. These companies . . . forced the insurgents to abandon their positions at the bridge and in the village, and to withdraw within the armory inclosure, where they fortified themselves in the fire-engine house, and carried ten of their prisoners for the purpose of insuring their safety and facilitating their escape, whom they termed hostages . . . After sunset more troops arrived. . . . Later in the evening the companies from Baltimore . . . and a detachment of marines, commanded by Lieutenant I[srael] Green accompanied by Major Russell, of that corps, reached Sandy Hook, about one and a half mile east of Harpers Ferry. At this point I came up with these last-named troops, and leaving General Edgerton and his command on the Maryland side of the river for the night, caused the marines to proceed to Harpers Ferry, and placed them within the armory grounds to prevent the possibility of the escape of the insurgents. Having taken measures to halt, in Baltimore, the artillery companies ordered from Fort Monroe, I made preparations to attack the insurgents at daylight. But for the fear of sacrificing the lives of some of the gentlemen held by them as prisoners in a midnight assault, I should have ordered the attack at once.

Their safety was the subject of painful consideration, and to prevent, if possible, jeopardizing their lives, I determined to summon the insurgents to surrender. As soon after daylight as the arrangements were made Lieutenant J. E. B. Stewart [Stuart], 1st cavalry, who had accompanied me from Washington as staff officer, was dispatched, under a flag, with a written summons . . . Knowing the character of the leader of the insurgents, I did not expect it would be accepted. I had therefore directed that the volunteer troops, under their respective commanders, should be paraded on the lines assigned them outside the

armory, and had prepared a storming party of twelve marines, under their commander, Lieutenant [Israel] Green, and had placed them close to the engine-house, and secure from its fire. Three marines were furnished with sledge-hammers to break in the doors, and the men were instructed how to distinguish our citizens from the insurgents; to attack with the bayonet, and not to injure the blacks detained in custody unless they resisted. Lieutenant Stewart [Stuart] was also directed not to receive from the insurgents any counter propositions. If they accepted the terms offered, they must immediately deliver up their arms and release their prisoners. If they did not, he must, on leaving the engine-house, give me the signal. My object was, with a view of saving our citizens, to have as short an interval as possible between the summons and attack. The summons, as I had anticipated, was rejected. At the concerted signal the storming party moved quickly to the door and commenced the attack. The fire-engines within the house had been placed by the besieged close to the doors. The doors were fastened by ropes, the spring of which prevented their being broken by the blows of the hammers. The men were therefore ordered to drop the hammers, and, with a portion of the reserve, to use as a battering-ram a heavy ladder, with which they dashed in a part of the door and gave admittance to the storming party. The fire of the insurgents up to this time had been harmless. At the threshold one marine fell mortally wounded. The rest, led by Lieutenant Green and Major Russell, quickly ended the contest. The insurgents that resisted were bayoneted. Their leader, John Brown, was cut down by the sword of Lieutenant Green, and our citizens were protected by both officers and men. The whole was over in a few minutes.

After our citizens were liberated and the wounded cared for, Lieutenant Colonel S. S. Mills, of the 53d Maryland regiment, with the Baltimore Independent Greys, Lieutenant B. F. Simpson commanding, was sent on the Maryland side of the river to search for John E. Cook, and to bring in the arms, &c., belonging to the insurgent party, which were said to be deposited in a school-house two and a half miles distant. Subsequently, Lieutenant J. E. B. Stewart [Stuart], with a party of marines, was dispatched to the Kennedy farm, situated in Maryland, about four and a half miles from Harpers Ferry, which had been rented by John Brown, and used as the depot for his men and munitions. Colonel Mills saw nothing of Cook, but found the boxes of arms, (Sharp's carbines and belt revolvers,) and recovered Mr. Washington's wagon and horses. Lieutenant Stewart [Stuart] found also at the Kennedy farm a number of sword pikes, blankets, shoes, tents, and all the necessaries for a campaign. These articles have been deposited in the government storehouse at the armory.

From the information derived from the papers found upon the persons and among the baggage of the insurgents, and the statement of those now in custody, it appears that the party consisted of nineteen men—fourteen white and five black. That they were headed by John Brown, of some notoriety in Kansas, who in June last located himself in Maryland, at the Kennedy farm, where he has been engaged in preparing to capture the United States works at Harpers Ferry. He avows that his object was the liberation of the slaves of Virginia, and of the whole South; and acknowledges that he has been disappointed in his expectations of aid from the black as well as white population, both in the Southern and Northern States. The blacks whom he forced from their homes in this neighborhood, as far as I could learn, gave him no voluntary assistance. The servants of

Messrs. Washington and Allstadt, retained at the armory, took no part in the conflict, and those carried to Maryland returned to their homes as soon as released. The result proves that the plan was the attempt of a fanatic or madman, which could only end in failure; and its temporary success was owing to the panic and confusion he succeeded in creating by magnifying his numbers. I append a list of the insurgents, . . . Cook is the only man known to have escaped. The other survivors of the expedition, viz: John Brown, A. C. Stevens, Edwin Coppic, and Green Shields, (alias S. Emperor,) I have delivered into the hands of the marshal of the western district of Virginia and the sheriff of Jefferson county. They were escorted to Charlestown by a detachment of marines, under Lieutenant Green. About nine o'clock this evening I received a report from Mr. Moore from Pleasant Valley, Maryland, that a body of men had, about sunset, descended from the mountains, attacked the house of Mr. Gennett, and from the cries of murder and the screams of the women and children, he believed the residents of the valley were being massacred. The alarm and excitement was increased by the arrival of families from Sandy Hook, fleeing for safety. The report was, however, so improbable that I could give no credence to it; yet I thought it possible that some atrocity might have been committed, and I started with twenty-five marines, under Lieutenant Green, accompanied by Lieutenant Stewart [Stuart] for the scene of the alleged outrage, about four and a half miles distant. I was happy to find it a false alarm. The inhabitants of Pleasant Valley were quiet and unharmed, and Mr. Gennett and his family safe and asleep.

I will now, in obedience to your dispatch of this date, direct the detachment of marines to return to the navy-yard at Washington in the train that passes here at 1 ¼ a. m. to-night, and will myself take advantage of the same train to report to you in person at the War Department. I must also ask to express my thanks to Lieutenant Stewart [Stuart], Major Russell, and Lieutenant Green, for the aid they afforded me, and my entire commendation of the conduct of the detachment of marines, who were at all times ready and prompt in the execution of any duty.

The promptness with which the volunteer troops repaired to the scene of disturbance, and the alacrity they displayed to suppress the gross outrage against law and order, I know will elicit your hearty approbation. Equal zeal was shown by the president and officers of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad Company in their transportation of the troops, and in their readiness to furnish the facilities of their well ordered road.

A list of the killed and wounded, as far as came to my knowledge, is herewith annexed . . . and I inclose a copy of the "Provisional Constitution and ordinances for the people of the United States," of which there were a large number prepared for issue by the insurgents.

I am, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

R. E. LEE, Colonel Commanding.
Colonel S[amuel]. Cooper,

Adjutant General U. S. Army, Washington City, D. C.

Source: United States Congress. Senate. 36th Cong., 1st Sess., Select Committee on the Harpers Ferry Invasion. Report of the Select Committee of the Senate. Appendix. Washington, D.C., 1860, pp. 40–45.

Questions for discussion:

1. What was Brown's purpose in invading Harpers Ferry according to Lee?

2. How does Lee characterize slaves in the area around Harpers Ferry?

3. According to Lee, how did Brown respond to the lack of support among whites and blacks in the area?

4. How does Lee's account of the Harpers Ferry raid differ from Brown's? How are the two accounts similar?

MASON SENATE COMMITTEE REPORT
MAJORITY REPORT SUBMITTED BY SENATOR JAMES MASON (VA)

June 15, 1860

The following excerpt is from Senator James Mason's majority report to the United States Senate on June 15, 1860 on the Harpers Ferry Raid. Southern senators were convinced Brown's actions were widely supported in the North and endorsed by leading members of the Republican party. Northern Republicans, while opposed to the further spread of slavery argued vehemently that Brown had acted alone.

The Select Committee of the Senate appointed to inquire into the late invasion and seizure of the public property at Harpers Ferry, beg leave to submit their report:

On the 14th of December, 1859, the resolutions annexed were adopted by the Senate of the United States:

Resolved, That a committee be appointed to inquire into the facts attending the late invasion and seizure of the armory and arsenal of the United States at Harpers Ferry, in Virginia, by a band of armed men, and report—

Whether the same was attended by armed resistance to the authorities and public force of the United States, and by the murder of any of the citizens of Virginia, or of any troops sent there to protect the public property;

Whether such invasion and seizure was made under color of any organization intended to subvert the government of any of the States of the Union; what was 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;

What was the character and extent of the military equipment in the hands or under the control of said armed band; and where and how and when the same was obtained and transported to the place so invaded.

That said committee report whether any and what legislation may, in their opinion, be necessary on the part of the United States for the future preservation of the peace of the country, or for the safety of the public property; and that said committee have power to send for persons and papers.

In conducting this inquiry the committee examined a number of witnesses, who were summoned before them from different States of the Union. . . .

The committee find, from the testimony, that this so-called invasion originated with a man named John Brown, who conducted it in person. It appears that Brown had been for some previous years involved in the late difficulties in the Territory of Kansas. He went there at an early day after the settlement of that Territory began, and either took with him or was joined by several sons, and, perhaps, sons-in-law, and, as shown by the proofs, was extensively connected with many of the lawless military expeditions belonging to the history of those times. . . .

[To] bring about servile insurrection in the slave States. . . it appears that, in the winter of 1857-58, he collected a number of young men in the Territory of Kansas, most of whom afterwards appeared with him at Harpers Ferry, and placed them under military instruction at a place called Springdale, in the State of Iowa, their instructor being . . . [Hugh Forbes] who, it was said, had some military training. These men were maintained by Brown; and in the spring of 1858 he took them with him to the town of Chatham, in Canada, where he claimed to have summoned a convention for the purpose of organizing a provisional government, as preliminary to the descent upon some one of the slave States. The proceedings of this convention, with the form of the provisional government adopted there, were taken amongst the papers found with Brown's effects after his capture, and were before the committee, and will be found in the appendix to this report. So far as the committee have been able to learn from the testimony, the convention was composed chiefly of negroes who were residents in and about this town of Chatham, in Canada. The only white persons present were Brown and those who accompanied him. The presiding officer of the convention was a negro, and a preacher. At the close of the convention Brown returned with the party he had taken there back to Ohio, and permitted most of them to disperse, upon the agreement that they would be at his command whenever called for. Two of them, however, to wit: John E. Cook, afterwards executed in Virginia, and Richard Realf were sent on the following missions: Cook was sent to Harpers Ferry, in Virginia, with directions to remain there and thereabout subject to the future call of his chief. Realf was sent to the city of New York, as shown by his testimony, for the following purposes: it would seem from the testimony that a man named Hugh Forbes, an Englishman, who, it was said, had the reputation of military experience in some of the revolutions in Southern Europe, had been engaged by Brown to take charge of his military school in Iowa. Differences, however, arising between them, Forbes, who had gone to the West with that view, abandoned the project and returned to New York. Whilst the convention was sitting at Chatham, Brown received information which led him to believe that Forbes had betrayed his counsels, and Realf was dispatched to New York with instructions, if practicable, to get possession of such correspondence with Brown as might prove the facts of his intended descent upon some one of the slave States should his plans be divulged—a mission which, for the reasons stated in the testimony of Realf, altogether failed.

In conducting the inquiry, the committee deemed it a matter of importance to have the testimony of Forbes. It appeared, however, that not long after the explosion at Harpers Ferry, Frobes left the country, and the committee were not able to procure his attendance before them.

As to the attack at Harpers Ferry, the committee find that Brown first appeared in that neighborhood early in July, 1859. He came there under the assumed name of Isaac Smith, attended by two of his sons and a son-in-law. He gave out in the neighborhood that he was a farmer from New York, who desired to rent or purchase land in that vicinity, with a view to agricultural pursuits, and soon afterwards rented a small farm on the Maryland side of the river, and some four or five miles from Harpers Ferry, having on it convenient houses, and began farming operations in a very small way. He had little or no intercourse with the people of the country; and when questioned through the curiosity of his neighbors, stated further that he was accustomed to mining operations, and expected to find deposits of metal in the adjacent mountains. He lived in an obscure manner, and attracted but little attention, and certainly no suspicion whatever as to his ulterior objects. Whilst there, he kept some two or three of his party, under assumed names, at Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, who there received, and from time to time forwarded to him, the arms of different kinds of which he was subsequently found in possession. Cook, one of his men spoken of above, it appears, had resided at Harpers Ferry and its neighborhood for some twelve months before Brown appeared, pursuing various occupations. He left the Ferry a few days before the attack was made, and joined Brown at his country place. The whole number assembled with Brown at the time of the invasion were twenty-one men, making with himself in all twenty-two.

On Sunday night, the 16th of October, 1859, between 11 and 12 o'clock at night, Brown, attended by probably eighteen of his company, crossed the bridge connecting the village of Harpers Ferry with the Maryland shore, and, on reaching the Virginia side, proceeded immediately to take possession of the buildings of the armory and arsenal of the United States. These men were armed, each, with a Sharp's rifled carbine, and with revolving pistols. The inhabitants of the village asleep, the presence of this party was not known until they appeared and demanded admittance at the gate leading to the public works, which was locked. The watchman in charge states that on his refusal to admit them, the gate was opened by violence and the party entered, made him prisoner, and established themselves immediately in a strong brick building used as an engine-house, with a room for the watchman adjoining it. They brought with them a wagon, with one horse, containing arms and some prepared torches.

The invasion thus silently commenced, was as silently conducted, none of the inhabitants having been aroused. Armed parties were then stationed at corners of the streets. Their next movement was to take possession, by detached parties of three or four, of the arsenal of the United States, where the public arms were chiefly deposited, a building not far from the engine-house; and by another party, of the workshops and other buildings of the armory, about half a mile off, on the Shenandoah river, called 'Hall's rifle works.' These dispositions made, an armed party was sent into the adjoining country, with a view to the seizure of two or three of the principal inhabitants, with such of their slaves as might be found, and to bring them to Harpers Ferry (in the language of Brown) as 'hostages'; Cook, who had become well acquainted with the country around Harpers Ferry, acting as their guide. They thus seized Colonel Lewis W. Washington, with several of his slaves, (negro men), at his residence, some five or six miles distant;

and in like manner a gentleman named Allstadt, who lived near the road leading from Colonel Washington's to the Ferry, two or three miles distant from the latter, with some five or six of his slaves, (also negro men.) They brought off also from Colonel Washington's such arms as they found in his house, with a wagon and four horses, for subsequent use, as will be shown. This party with their prisoners arrived at the Ferry a little before day, and the latter were carried at once to the room adjoining the engine-house, where they were kept in custody.

Having thus far apparently perfected his plans, a party was sent, taking Washington's wagon and horses, and five or six of the captured slaves, into Maryland to bring the arms deposited at Brown's house there to a point nearer the Ferry and more accessible. On their way, they seized a gentleman named Byrne, who lived in Maryland, three or four miles from Harpers Ferry, and whom they afterwards sent to the Ferry and placed amongst the other prisoners at the engine-house. It is shown that their design was to have taken at the same time as many of the slaves of Byrne as might be found, but in this they did not succeed. During Monday, a large portion of the arms, consisting of carbines, pistols, in boxes, and pikes, were brought off in the wagon and deposited in a school-house about a mile from the village of Harpers Ferry, on the Maryland side. The first alarm that was given, indicating the presence of the hostile party, appears to have been on the arrival there of the mail train of cars on the Baltimore and Ohio railroad, on its way from Wheeling to Baltimore, and which arrived at Harpers Ferry at its usual hour, about half past one o'clock in the morning. On the arrival of Brown's party, he had stationed two men, well armed, on the bridge, with directions to permit none to pass. This bridge is a viaduct for the railroad to cross the river, having connected with it a bridge for ordinary travel. When the train arrived, it was arrested by this guard, and very soon afterwards a negro named Hayward [Shepherd], a free man who lived at Harpers Ferry and was in the service of the railroad company as a porter, was shot by this guard and died in a few hours. His statement was, as shown in the testimony of John D. Starry, one of the witnesses, 'that he had been out on the railroad bridge, looking after a watchman who was missing, and he had been ordered to halt by some men who were there; and instead of doing that, he turned to go back to the office, and as he turned they shot him in the back.' The alarm, however, did not extend to the inhabitants of the town, the scene of operations, so far, being near the river, at points occupied by the railroad structures and the public works; the principal part of the town being somewhat remote from that quarter. The train of cars, after being detained some hours, was permitted to proceed on its way to Baltimore.

When daylight came, as the inhabitants left their houses, consisting chiefly of workmen and others employed in the public works, on their way to their usual occupations, and unconscious of what had occurred during the night, they were seized in the streets by Brown's men and carried as prisoners to the engine-house, until, with those previously there, they amounted to some thirty or forty in number. Pikes were put in the hands of such of the slaves as they had taken, and they were kept under the eyes of their captors, as sentinels, near the buildings they occupied. But their movements being conducted at night, it was not until the morning was well advanced that the presence and character of the party was generally known in the village.

The nearest towns to Harpers Ferry were Charlestown, distant some ten miles, and Martinsburg, about 20. As soon as information could reach these points, the citizens assembled, hurriedly enrolled themselves into military bands, and with such arms as they could find, proceeded to the Ferry. Before their arrival, however, it would seem that some four or five of the marauders, who were stationed at 'Hall's rifle works,' were driven out by the citizens of the village, and either killed or captured. In the course of the day, an attack was made on the engine and watch-house by those of the armed citizens of the adjoining country who had thus hurriedly arrived, and the prisoners in the watch-house, adjoining the engine-house, were liberated. The attacking parties were fired on by the marauders in the engine-house, and some were severely wounded. It should have been stated that during the night Brown selected ten of those whom he considered the principal men of his prisoners, and carried them into the engine-house, where they were detained. The rest thus left in the watch-house were those who were liberated during the attack spoken of. The engine-house is a strong building, and was occupied by Brown, with seven or eight of his men.

During the day it appears that all of Brown's party, who were not with him in the engine-house, were either killed or captured, except those who were on the Maryland side engaged in removing the arms, as above stated. Before, however, they were thus captured or destroyed, they shot and killed two persons, citizens of Virginia, in the streets. One of them, a man named Boerley, who lived in the village, was killed by a rifle shot near his own house. He had taken no part in any of the attacks , and does not appear even to have been armed. The other, Mr. George W. Turner, was a gentleman who lived in the country some ten miles distant, and who, it appears, had gone to the village soon after information that his neighbor, Mr. Washington, had been seized in his house and carried off during the night. It would seem that, for his safety, he had taken a gun offered to him by some one in the village, and was proceeding along the street unattended, with it in his hand, when he also was killed by a rifle ball.

The party immediately under Brown remained barricaded in the engine-house during the whole of that day [Monday]. They had confined with them ten most respectable and valuable citizens, kept, as stated by Brown, in the nature of 'hostages,' for the security of his own party, he assuming that a regard for the safety of the 'hostages' would deter their friends and neighbors from attempting their rescue by force.

During the day an irregular fire was kept up against the engine-house by the people who assembled, and which was returned by the party within through loop-holes made in the wall, or through the doorway, partially opened.

In this manner two of Brown's party were killed at the doorway; and in the afternoon a gentleman of the village, Mr. Beckham, was killed by a shot from the engine-house. It was clearly shown that he was entirely unarmed, and had exposed his person only for an instant on the railroad bridge opposite to the house.

To conclude this narrative, it appears that as soon as intelligence could be conveyed to Washington of the state of things at Harpers Ferry, the marines on duty at the navy-yard were ordered to the scene of action, under the command of Colonel Robert E. Lee, of the army.

The official report of Colonel Lee . . . will show in what manner the affair was ended by the capture of Brown and his remaining party, and the rescue in safety of those he detained as prisoners.

Colonel Lee . . . found it necessary to carry the house by storm, the party within refusing to surrender except on terms properly held inadmissible. In this affair one marine was killed, and another slightly wounded.

Such, it is believed, are the facts attending this great outrage; and the committee find in response to so much of the resolutions of the Senate, that the armory and other public works of the United States were in the possession and under the control of this hostile party more than thirty hours; that besides the resistance offered by them to the military force of Virginia, they resisted by force the lawful authority of the United States sent there to dispossess them, killing one and wounding another of the troops of the United States, and as shown that, before they were thus overpowered, they killed in the streets three of the citizens of Virginia who were alone and not even in military array, beside the negro who was killed by them on their first arrival.

It does not appear that any of the public property was stolen or carried away, although a large sum of money was in the paymaster's office near to the engine-house, and doubtless would have been seized had they known where it was. There was nothing to protect it but the ordinary safety of an iron door. . . .

It clearly appeared that the scheme of Brown was [to] take with him comparatively but few men, but those had been carefully trained by military instruction previously, and were to act as officers. For his military force he relied, very clearly, on inciting insurrection amongst the slaves, who he supposed would flock to him as soon as it became known that he had entered the State and had been able to retain his position—an expectation to no extent realized, though it was owing alone to the loyalty and well-affected disposition of the slaves that he did not succeed in inciting a servile war, with its necessary attendants of rapine and murder of all sexes, ages, and conditions. It is very certain from the proofs before the committee, that not one of the captured slaves, although arms were placed in their hands, attempted to use them; but on the contrary, as soon as their safety would admit, in the absence of their captors, their arms were thrown away and they hastened back to their homes.

It is shown that Brown brought with him for this expedition arms sufficient to have placed an effective weapon in the hands of not less than 1,500 men; besides which, had he succeeded in obtaining the aid he looked to from the slaves, he had entirely under his control all the arms of the United States deposited in the arsenal at Harpers Ferry. After his capture, beside the arms he brought in the wagon to the Ferry, there were

found on the Maryland side, where he had left them, 200 Sharp's rifled carbines, and 200 revolver pistols, packed in the boxes of the manufacturers, with 900 or 1,000 pikes, carefully and strongly made, the blade of steel being securely riveted to a handle about five feet in length; many thousand percussion caps in boxes, and ample stores of fixed ammunition, besides a large supply of powder in kegs, and a chest that contained hospital and other military stores, beside a quantity of extra clothing for troops.

For an answer to the inquiry, how far 'any citizens of the United States, not present, were implicated therein or accessory thereto by contribution of money, arms, munitions, or otherwise,' the committee deem it best to refer to the evidence which accompanies this report. It does not appear that such contributions were made with actual knowledge of the use for which they were designed by Brown, although it does appear that money was freely contributed by those styling themselves friends of this man Brown, and friends alike of what they styled 'the cause of freedom,' (of which they claimed him to be an especial apostle,) without inquiry, as to the way in which the money would be used by him to advance such pretended cause. The evidence fully shows that he had the pikes manufactured in Connecticut especially for this expedition, and certainly they would appear to have been the most formidable weapon which could have been placed in the unskillful hands for which they were intended. . . . They were sent directly from Connecticut to Brown, under his assumed name of Isaac Smith, first to Chambersburg, in Pennsylvania, there received by some of Brown's men, who were placed there also under assumed names, and by whom they were transported to his abode near Harpers Ferry.

The history of the rifles and pistols is most interesting to this inquiry. It appears from the evidence that, in 1856, these 200 Sharp's carbines had been forwarded by an association in Massachusetts called the '*Massachusetts State Kansas Committee,*' at first to Chicago, on their way to Kansas. At Chicago they were placed under the control of another association, called the '*National Kansas Aid Committee.*' There being some difficulty, from the disordered condition of the country at that time, in getting them to Kansas, they were sent by this last named association to Iowa, where they remained. In January, 1857, it seems there was a meeting of this National Kansas Committee in the city of New York. That committee was constituted of one member from most of the non-slaveholding States. At that meeting John Brown appeared, and made application to have these arms placed in his possession. It would seem that he wanted them, as he expressed it, 'for purposes of defense of Kansas'; but as the troubles there were nearly ended, such pretension seems to have been discredited by those to whom it was addressed. . . .

> [The *National Kansas Aid Committee* refused to release the arms to Brown and returned them instead to the *Massachusetts State Kansas Committee.* George L. Stearns, the head of the committee, in turn, released them to Brown in January 1857. Stearns also gave Brown money to purchase 200 revolver pistols from the Massachusetts Arms Company. The weapons were stored at Tabor, Iowa under Brown's direction and subsequently shipped to Ohio and thence on to Chambersburg.]

The history of the large armament collected by Brown at Harpers Ferry is . . . clearly traced. The rifled carbines, manufactured in Connecticut, intended . . . to be originally used in intestine strife in Kansas, and sent there for that purpose, were voluntarily, by the Massachusetts Kansas Committee, through its chairman [Stearns], placed in the hands of Brown, with vague and inexplicit instructions as to their use, about the time when it would appear that he finally conceived the purpose of exciting servile war in some of the slaveholding States. They were allowed to remain in his possession, notwithstanding his failure or refusal to give them up after that committee and its chairman had been warned of his purpose to put them to some use not warranted by those who owned them. The revolver pistols, as shown by the testimony of Stearns . . . was a volunteer gift from him to Brown, at about the same time the carbines were handed over to him, and whether thus beyond his control or not, were not recalled from his possession. The expedition, so atrocious in its character, would have been arrested, had even ordinary care been taken on the part of the Massachusetts committee to ascertain whether Brown was truthful in his professions. Even the modest inquiry made of him by the National Kansas committee, as stated by their secretary, [H.B.] Hurd, resulted in such equivocation and evasion on his part as led them peremptorily to refuse these arms to him, as their act.

The testimony shows that after his treasonable proceedings at Chatham he went back to New England, traveled through its several villages, collecting money, which was freely contributed under the auspices both of Dr. [Samuel Gridley] Howe and Mr. Chairman Stearns and others, with a knowledge that he retained the large supply of arms of which they had failed to dispossess him.

Upon the whole testimony, there can be no doubt that Brown's plan was to commence a servile war on the borders of Virginia, which he expected to extend, and which he believed his means and resources were sufficient to extend through that State and throughout the entire South. Upon being questioned, soon after his capture, by the Governor of Virginia, as to his plans, he rather indignantly repelled the idea that it was to be limited to collecting and protecting the slaves until they could be sent out of the State as fugitives. On the contrary, he vehemently insisted that his purpose was to retain them on the soil, to put arms in their hands, with which he came provided for the purpose, and to use them as his soldiery.

This man (Brown) was uniformly spoken of, by those who seemed best to have known him, as of remarkable reticence in his habits, or, as they expressed it, 'secretive.' It does not appear that he intrusted even his immediate followers with his plans, fully, even after they were ripe for execution. Nor have the committee been enabled clearly to trace knowledge of them to any. The only exception would seem to be in the instance of the anonymous letter received by the Secretary of War in the summer preceding the attack, referred to in his testimony. The Secretary shows that he could get no clue to the writer; nor were the committee enabled in any way to trace him. Considering that the letter was anonymous, as well as vague and apparently incoherent in its statements, it was not at all remarkable, in the opinion of the committee, that it did not arrest the attention of the officer to whom it was addressed.

The point chosen for the attack seems to have been selected from the two-fold inducement of the security afforded the invaders by a mountain country, and the large deposit of arms in the arsenal of the United States there situated. It resulted in the murder of three most respectable citizens of the State of Virginia without cause, and in the like murder of an unoffending free negro. Of the military force brought against them, one marine was killed and one wounded; whilst eight of the militia and other forces of the neighborhood were wounded, with more or less severity, in the several assaults made by them.

Of the list of 'insurgents' given in Colonel Lee's report, (fourteen whites and five negroes,) Brown, Stevens, and Coppic, of the whites, with Shields Green and Copeland, of the negroes, captured at the storming of the engine-house, were subsequently executed in Virginia, after judicial trial; as were also John E. Cook and Albert Hazlett, who at first escaped, but were captured in Pennsylvania and delivered up for trial to the authorities of Virginia—making in all seven thus executed. It does not seem to have been very clearly ascertained how many of the party escaped. Brown stated that his party consisted of twenty-two in number. Seven were executed, ten were killed at the Ferry; thus leaving five to be accounted for. Four of these five, it is believed, were left on the Maryland side in charge of the arms when Brown crossed the river, and who could not afterwards join him; leaving but one, who, as it would appear, is the only survivor of the party who accompanied Brown across the bridge, and whose escape is not accounted for. . . .

The invasion . . . by Brown and his followers at Harpers Ferry . . . was simply the act of lawless ruffians, under the sanction of no public or political authority—distinguishable only from ordinary felonies by the ulterior ends in contemplation by them, and by the fact that the money to maintain the expedition, and the large armament they brought with them, had been contributed and furnished by the citizens of other States of the Union, under circumstances that must continue to jeopard (sic) the safety and peace of the Southern States, and against which Congress has no power to legislate. . . .

Before closing their report, the committee deem it proper to state that four persons summoned as witnesses, to wit: John Brown, Jr., of Ohio, James Redpath, of Massachusetts, Frank B. Sanborn, of Massachusetts, and Thaddeus Hyatt, of New York, failing or refusing to appear before the committee, warrants were issued by order of the Senate for their arrest. Of these, Thaddeus Hyatt only was arrested; and on his appearance before the Senate, still refusing obedience to the summons of the committee, he was by order of the Senate committed to the jail of the District of Columbia. In regard to the others, it appeared by the return of the marshal of the northern district of Ohio, as deputy of the Sergeant-at-Arms, that John Brown, Jr., at first evaded the process of the Senate, and afterwards, with a number of other persons, armed themselves to prevent his arrest. The marshal further reported in his return that Brown could not be arrested unless he was authorized in like manner to employ force. Sanborn was arrested by a deputy of the Sergeant-at-Arms, and afterwards released from custody by the judges

of the supreme court of Massachusetts on *habeas corpus*. Redpath, by leaving his State, or otherwise concealing himself, successfully evaded the process of the Senate.

And the committee ask to be discharged from the further consideration of the subject.

J. M. MASON,
Chairman.
JEFF'N DAVIS.
G.N. FITCH.

Source: The excerpt is from United States Congress. Senate. 36th Cong., 1st Sess., Select Committee on the Harpers Ferry Invasion. Report of the Select Committee of the Senate. Washington, D.C., 1860, pp. 1–10 and 16–19.

Questions for discussion:

1. Why did the Senate establish the special Select Committee to investigate the Harpers Ferry Raid?

2. According to Senator Mason, how did slaves in the Harpers Ferry area respond to Brown's raid?

3. In what ways does Senator Mason's report differ from previous accounts of John Brown and Robert E. Lee? In what ways are all three reports similar?

CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN LYDIA MARIA CHILD AND GOV. WISE AND MRS. MASON OF VIRGINIA

Lydia Maria Child was a Garrisonian abolitionist who supported moral suasion in contesting slavery. She was the author of a number of children's books, self-help books, and several novels. Though she opposed John Brown's resort to violence, she applauded his noble purpose. The following excerpts are from her correspondence with Governor Henry Wise of Virginia, John Brown, and Margaretta Mason, the wife of Senator James Mason of Virginia. Child's correspondence was published in 1860 and sold over 300,000 copies.

LYDIA MARIA CHILD TO GOV. HENRY WISE.
Wayland, Mass., *Oct. 26th, 1859*.

Governor Wise: I have heard that you were a man of chivalrous sentiments . . . .Relying upon these indications of honor and justice in your character, I venture to ask a favor of you. Enclosed is a letter to Captain John Brown. Will you have the kindness, after reading it yourself, to transmit it to the prisoner?

I and all my large circle of abolition acquaintances were taken by surprise when news came of Capt. Brown's recent attempt; nor do I know of a single person who would have approved the event, had they been apprised of his intention. But I and thousands of others feel a natural impulse of sympathy for the brave and suffering man. Perhaps God, who sees the inmost of our souls, perceives some such sentiment in your heart also. He needs a mother or sister to dress his wounds, and speak soothingly to him. Will you allow me to perform that mission of humanity? If you will, may God bless you for the generous deed!

I have been for years an uncompromising Abolitionist, and I should scorn to deny it or apologize. For it as much as John Brown himself would do. Believing in peace principles, I deeply regret the step that the old veteran has taken, while I honor his humanity towards those who became his prisoners. But because it is my habit to be as open as the daylight, I will also say, that if I believed our religion justified men in fighting for freedom, I should consider the enslaved every where as best entitled to that right. Such an avowal is a simple, frank expression of my sense of natural justice.

But I should despise myself utterly if any circumstances could tempt me to seek to advance these opinions in any way, directly or indirectly, after your permission to visit Virginia has been obtained on the plea of sisterly sympathy with a brave and suffering man. I give you my word of honor, which was never broken, that I would use such permission solely and simply for the purpose of nursing your prisoner, and for no other purpose whatsoever.

Yours, respectfully,
L. MARIA CHILD

REPLY OF GOV. WISE

Richmond, Va., *Oct. 29th, 1859.*

Madam: yours of the 26th was received by me yesterday, and at my earliest leisure I respectfully reply to it, that I will forward the letter for John Brown, a prisoner under our laws, arraigned at the bar of the Circuit Court for the country [sic] of Jefferson, at Charlestown, Va., for the crimes of murder, robbery and treason, which you ask me to transmit to him. I will comply with your request in the only way which seems to me proper, by enclosing it to the Commonwealth's attorney, with the request that he will ask the permission of the Court to hand it to the prisoner. Brown, the prisoner, is now in the hands of the judiciary, not of the executive, of this Commonwealth.

You ask me, further, to allow you to perform the mission "of mother or sister, to dress his wounds, and speak soothingly to him." By this, of course, you mean to be allowed to visit him in his cell, and to minister to him in the offices of humanity. Why should you not be so allowed, Madam? Virginia and Massachusetts are involved in no civil war, and the Constitution which unites them in one confederacy guarantees to you the privileges and immunities of a citizen of the United States in the State of Virginia. That Constitution I am sworn to support, and am, therefore, bound to protect your privileges and immunities as a citizen of Massachusetts coming into Virginia for any lawful and peaceful purpose.

Coming, as you propose, to minister to the captive in prison, you'll be met, doubtless, by all our people, not only in a chivalrous, but in the Christian spirit. You had the right to visit Charlestown, Va., Madam; and your mission being merciful and humane, will not only allowed [sic], but respected if not welcomed. A few unenlightened and inconsiderate persons, fanatical in their modes of thought and action, to maintain justice and right, might molest you, or be disposed to do so; and this might suggest the imprudence of risking any experiment upon the peace of a society very much excited by the crimes with whose chief author you seem to sympathize so much. But still, I repeat, your motives and avowed purpose are lawful and peaceful, and I will, as far as I am concerned, do my duty in protecting your rights in our limits. Virginia and her authorities would be weak indeed —weak in point of folly, and weak in point of power— if her State faith and constitutional obligations cannot be redeemed in her own limits to the letter of morality as well as of law; and if her chivalry cannot courteously receive a lady's visit to a prison, every arm which guards Brown from rescue on the one hand, and from Lynch law on the other, will be ready to guard your person in Virginia.

I could not permit an insult even to woman in her walk of charity among us, though it to be to [sic] one who whetted knives of butchery for our mothers, sisters, daughters and babes. We have no sympathy with your sentiments of sympathy with Brown, and are surprised that you were "taken by surprise when news came of Capt. Brown [sic] recent attempt." His attempt was a natural consequence of your sympathy, and the errors of that sympathy ought to make you doubt its virtue from the effect on his

conduct. But it is not of this I should speak. When you arrive at Charlestown, if you go there, it will be for the Court and its officers, the Commonwealth's attorney, sheriff and jailer, to say whether you may see and wait. On the prisoner. But whether you are thus permitted or not, (and you will be, if my advice can prevail) you may rest assured that he will be humanely, lawfully and mercifully dealt by in prison and on trial.

Respectfully,
HENRY A. WISE

MRS. CHILD TO GOV. WISE

In your civil but very diplomatic reply to my letter, you inform me that I have a constitutional right to visit Virginia, for peaceful purposes, in common with every citizen of the United States. I was perfectly well aware that such was the *theory* of constitutional obligation in the Slave States; but I was also aware of what you omit to mention, viz.; that the Constitution has, in reality, been completely and systematically nullified, whenever it suited the convenience or the policy of the Slave Power. Your constitutional obligation, for which you profess so much respect, has never proved any protection to citizens of the Free States, who happened to have a black, brown, or yellow complexion; nor to any white citizen whom you even suspected of entertaining opinions opposite to your own, on a question of vast importance to the temporal welfare and moral example of our common country. This total disregard of constitutional obligation has been manifested not merely by the Lynch Law, mobs in the Slave States, but by the deliberate action of magistrates and legislators. . . . Slavery is . . . an infringement of all law, and adheres to no law, save for its own purposes of oppression.

You accuse Captain John Brown of whetting knives of butchery for the mothers, sisters, daughters and babes of Virginia; and you inform me of the well-known fact that he is "arraigned for the crimes of murder, robbery and treason." I will not here stop to explain why I believe that old hero to be no criminal, but a martyr to righteous principles which he sought to advance by methods sanctioned by his own religious views, though not by mine. Allowing that Capt. Brown did attempt a scheme in which murder, robbery and treason were to his own consciousness, involved, I do not see how Gov. Wise can consistently arraign him for crimes he has himself commended. *You* have threatened to trample on the Constitution, and break the Union, if a majority of the legal voters in these Confederated States dared to elect a President unfavorable to the extension of Slavery. Is not such a declaration proof of premeditated treason? . . .

In your letter, you suggest that such a scheme as Captain Brown's is the natural result of the opinions with which I sympathize. Even if I thought this to be a correct statement, though I should deeply regret it, I could not draw the conclusion that humanity ought to be stifled, and truth struck dumb, for fear that long-successful despotism might be endangered by their utterance. But the fact is, you mistake the source of that strange outbreak. No abolition arguments or denunciations, however earnestly, loudly,

or harshly proclaimed, would have produced that result. It was the legitimate consequence of the continual and constantly increasing aggressions of the Slave Power. The Slave States, in their desperate efforts to sustain a bad and dangerous institution, have encroached more and more upon the liberties of the Free States. Our inherent love of law and order, and our superstitious attachment to the Union, you have mistaken for cowardice; and rarely have you let slip any opportunity to add insult to aggression.

The manifested opposition to Slavery began with the lectures and pamphlets of a few disinterested men and women, who based their movements upon purely moral and religious grounds; but their expostulations were met with a storm of rage, with tar and feathers, brickbats, demolished houses, and other applications of Lynch Law. When the dust of the conflict began to subside a little, their numbers were found to be greatly increased by the efforts to exterminate them. They had become an influence in the State too important to be overlooked by shrewd calculators. Political economists began to look at the subject from a lower point of view. They used their abilities to demonstrate that slavery was a wasteful system, and that the Free States were taxed, to an enormous extent, to sustain an institution which, at heart, two-thirds of them abhorred. The forty millions, or more, of dollars, expended in hunting fugitive slaves in Florida, under the name of the Seminole War, were adduced, as one item in proof, to which many more were added. At last, politicians were compelled to take some action on the subject. It soon became known to all the people that the Slave States had always managed to hold in their hands the political power of the Union, and that while they constituted only one-third of the white population of these States, they held more than two-thirds of all the lucrative, and once honorable offices; an indignity to which none but a subjugated people have ever submitted. The knowledge also became generally diffused, that while the Southern States *owned* their Democracy at home, and voted for them, they also systematically *bribed* the nominally Democratic party, at the North, with the offices adroitly kept at their disposal.

Through these, and other instrumentalities, the sentiments of the original Garrisonian Abolitionist became very widely extended, in forms more or less diluted. But by far the most efficient co-labors we have ever had have been the Slave States themselves. By denying us the sacred Right to Petition, they roused the free spirit of the North, as it never could have been roused by the trumpet of Garrison, or the soul -animating bugle of Phillips. They bought the great slave, Daniel, and according to their established usage, paid him no wages for his labor. By his cooperation, they forced the Fugitive Slave Law upon us, in violation of all our humane instincts and all our principles of justice. And what did they procure for the Abolitionist by that despotic process? A deeper and wider detestation of Slavery throughout the Free States, and the publication of Uncle Tom's Cabin, an eloquent outburst of moral indignation, whose echoes wakened the world to look upon their shame.

By filibustering and fraud, they dismembered Mexico, and having thus obtained the soil of Texas, they tried to introduce it as a Slave State into the Union. Failing to affect their purpose by constitutional means, they accomplished it by a most open and pal-

pable violation of the Constitution, and by obtaining the votes of Senators on the false pretenses. (The following Senators, Mr. Niles of Connecticut, Mr. Dix, of New York, and Mr. Tappan, of Ohio, published statements that their votes had been obtained by false representations; and they declared that the case was same with Mr. Heywood, of North Carolina.)

Soon afterward, a Southern Slave Administration [under President James K. Polk] ceded to the powerful monarchy of Great Britain several hundred thousands of square miles [Oregon Territory], that must have been made into Free States, to which that same Administration had declared that the United States had "an unquestionable right;" and then they turned upon the weak Republic of Mexico, and, in order to make more Slave States, wrested from her twice as many hundred thousands of square miles, to which we had not a shadow of right.

Notwithstanding all these extra efforts, they saw symptoms that the political power so long held with a firm grasp was in danger of slipping from their hands, by reason of the extension of Abolition sentiments, and the greater prosperity of Free States. Emboldened by continual success in aggression, they made use of the pretence [sic] of "Squatter Sovereignty" to break the league into which they had formerly cajoled the servile representatives of our blinded people, by which all the territory of the United States south of 36 deg [sic]; 30′ was guaranteed to Slavery, and all north of it to Freedom. Thus Kansas became this battle-ground of the antagonistic elements in our Government. Ruffians hired by the Slave Power were sent thither temporarily, to do the voting and drive from the polls the legal voters, who were often murdered in the process. Names, copied from the directories of cities in other States, were returned by thousands as legal voters in Kansas, in order to establish a Constitution abhorred by the people. This was their exemplification of Squatter Sovereignty. A Massachusetts Senator [Charles Sumner], distinguished for candor, courtesy, and stainless integrity, was half murdered by slaveholders, merely for having the manliness to state these facts to the assembled Congress of the nation. Peaceful emigrants from the North, who went to Kansas for no other purpose than to till the soil, erect mills, and establish manufactories, schools, and churches, were robbed, outraged, and murdered. For many months, a war more ferocious than the warfare of wild Indians was carried on against a people almost unresisting, because they relied upon the Central Government for aid. And all this while, the power of the United States, wielded by the Slave Oligarchy, was on the side of the aggressors. They literally tied the stones, and let loose the mad dogs. This was the state of things when the hero of Osawatomie and his brave sons went to the rescue. It was he who first turned the tide of Border-Ruffian triumph, by showing them that blows were to be taken as well as given.

You may believe it or it or not, Gov. Wise, but it is certainly the truth that, because slaveholders so recklessly sowed the wind in Kansas, they reaped a whirlwind at Harpers Ferry.

The people of the North had a very strong attachment to the Union; but, by your desperate measures, you have weakened it beyond all power of restoration. They are not

your enemies, as you suppose, but they cannot consent to be your tools for any ignoble task you may choose to propose. . . . Not by such as these must you judge the free, enlightened yeomanry of New England. A majority of them would rejoice to have the Slave States fulfill their off-repeated threat of withdrawal from the Union. It has ceased to be a bugbear, for we begin to despair of being able, by any other process, to give the world the example of a real republic. The moral sense of these States is outraged by being accomplices in sustaining an institution vicious in all its aspects; and it is now generally understood that we purchase our disgrace at great pecuniary expense. If you would only make the offer of a separation in serious earnest, you would hear the hearty response of millions, "Go, gentlemen, and

> 'Stand not upon the order of your going,
> But go at once!'

Yours, with all due respect,
L. Maria Child.

Mrs. Child to John Brown
Wayland, Mass. Oct. 26, 1859.

Dear Capt. Brown: Though personally unknown to you, you will recognize in my name an earnest friend of Kansas, when circumstances made that territory the battle-ground between the antagonistic principles of slavery and freedom, which politicians so vainly strive to reconcile in the government of the United States.

Believing in peace principles, I cannot sympathize with the method you chose to advance the cause of freedom. But I honor your generous intentions—I admire your courage, moral and physical. I reverence you for the humanity which tempered your zeal. I sympathize with you in your cruel bereavement, your sufferings, and your wrongs. In brief, I love you and bless you.

Thousands of hearts are throbbing with sympathy as warm as mine. I think of you night and day, bleeding in prison, surrounded by hostile faces, sustained only by trust in God and your own heart. I long to nurse you—to speak to you sisterly words of sympathy and consolation. I have asked permission of Governor Wise to do so. If the request is not granted, I cherish the hope that these few words may at least reach your hands, and afford you some little solace May you be strengthened by the conviction that no honest man ever sheds blood for freedom in vain, however much he may be mistaken in his efforts. May God sustain you, and carry you through whatsoever of may be in store for you!

Yours, with heartfelt respect, sympathy and affection,
L. Maria Child.

REPLY OF JOHN BROWN, NOVEMBER 4, 1859
Mrs. L. Maria Child:

My Dear Friend — Such you prove to be, though a stranger — your most kind letter has reached me, with the kind offer to come here and take care of me. Allow me to express my gratitude for your great sympathy, and at the same time to propose to you a different course, together with my reasons for wishing it. I should certainly be greatly pleased to become personally acquainted with one so gifted and so kind, but I cannot avoid seeing some objections to it, under present circumstances. First, I am in charge of a most humane gentleman, who, with his family, has rendered me every possible attention I have desired, or that could be of the least advantage; and I am so recovered of my wounds as no longer to require nursing. Then, again, it would subject you to great personal inconvenience and heavy expense, without doing me any good. Allow me to name to you another channel through which you may reach me with your sympathies much more effectually. I have at home a wife and three young daughters, the youngest but little over five years old, the oldest nearly sixteen. I have also two daughters-in-law, whose husbands have both fallen near me here. There is also another widow, Mrs. Thompson, whose husband fell here. Whether she is a mother or not, I cannot say. All these, my wife included, live in North Elba, Essex county [sic], New York. I have a middle-aged son, who has been, in some degree, a cripple from his childhood, who would have as much as he could well do to earn a living. He was a most dreadful sufferer in Kansas, and lost all he had laid up. He has not enough to clothe himself for the winter comfortably. I have no living son, or son-in-law, who did not suffer terribly in Kansas.

Now, dear friend, would you not as soon contribute fifty cents now, and a like sum yearly, for the relief of those very poor and deeply afflicted persons, to enable them to supply themselves and their children with bread and very plain clothing, and to enable the children to receive a common English education? Will you also devote your own energies to induce others to join you in giving a like amount, or any other amount, to constitute a little fund for the purpose named?

I cannot see how you coming here can do me the least good; and I am quite certain you can do immense good where you are. I am quite cheerful under all my afflicting circumstances and prospects; having, as I humbly trust, "the peace of God which passeth all understanding" to rule in my heart. You may make such use of this as you see it fit. God Almighty bless and reward you a thousand fold!

Yours in sincerity and truth,
.JOHN BROWN

LETTER OF MRS. [MARGARETTA] MASON.
Alto, King George's Co., Va., Nov. 11th, 1859.

Do you read your Bible, Mrs. Child? If you do, read there, "Woe unto you, hypocrites," and take to yourself with two-fold damnation that terrible sentence; for, rest assured, in the day of judgment it shall be more tolerable for those thus scathed by the awful denunciation of the Son of God, than for you. *You* would sooth with sisterly and motherly care the hoary-headed murderer of Harpers Ferry! A man whose aim and intention was to incite the horrors of a servile war—to condemn women of your own race, ere death closed their eyes on their sufferings from violence and outrage, to see their husbands and fathers murdered, their children butchered, the ground strewed with the brains of their babes. The antecedents of Brown's band proved them to have been the offscourings of the earth; and what would have been our fate had they found as many sympathizers in Virginia as they seem to have in Massachusetts?

Now, compare yourself with those your "sympathy" would devote to such ruthless ruin, and say, on that "word of honor, which never has been broken," would *you* stand by the bedside of an old negro, dying of a hopeless disease, to alleviate his sufferings as far as human aid could? Have *you* ever watched the last, lingering illness of a consumptive, to soothe, as far as in you lay, the inevitable fate? Do *you* soften the pangs of maternity in those around you by all the care and comfort you can give? Do *you* grieve with those near you, even though the sorrows resulted from their own misconduct? Did *you* ever sit up until the "wee hours" to complete a dress for a motherless child, that she might appear on Christmas day in a new one, along with her more fortunate companions? We do these and more for our servants, and why? Because we endeavor *to do our duty in that state of life it has please God to place us.* In his revealed word we read our duties to them—theirs to us are there also—"Not only to the good and gentle, but to the forward."—(Peter 2:18.) Go thou and do likewise, and keep away from Charlestown. If the stories read in the public prints be true, of the sufferings of the poor of the North, you need not go far for objects of charity. Thou hypocrite! Take first the beam out of thine own eye, then shalt thou see clearly to pull the motel out of thy neighbor's." But if, indeed, you do lack objects of sympathy near you, go to Jefferson county (sic), to the family of George Turner, a noble, true-hearted man, whose devotion to his friend (Col. Washington) causing him to risk his life, was shot down like a dog. Or to that of old Beckham, whose grief at the murder of his negro subordinate made him needlessly expose himself to the aim of the assassin Brown. And when you can equal in deeds of love and charity to those *around* you, what is shown by nine-tenths of the Virginia plantations, then by your "sympathy" whet the knives for our throats, and kindle the torch that fires our homes. *You* reverence Brown for his clemency to his prisoners! Prisoners! and how taken? Unsuspecting workmen, going to their daily duties; unarmed gentlemen, taken from their beds at the dead hour of the night, by six men doubly and trebly armed. Suppose he had hurt a hair of their heads, do you suppose one of the band of desperadoes would have left the engine-house alive? And did he not know that his treatment of them was only hope of life then, or of

clemency afterward? Of course he did. The United States troops could not have prevented him from being torn limb from limb.

I will add, in conclusion, no Southerner ought, after your letter to Governor Wise and to Brown, to read a line of your composition, or to touch a magazine which bears your name in its list of contributors; and in this we hope for the "sympathy," at least of those at the North who deserve the name of woman.

—M.J.C. Mason.

REPLY OF MRS. CHILD.
Wayland, Mass., Dec. 17th, 1859.

Prolonged absence from home has prevented my answering your letter so soon as I intended. I have no disposition to retort upon you the "two-fold damnation" to which you consign me. On the contrary, I sincerely wish you well, both in this world and the next. If the anathema proved a safety valve to your own boiling spirit, it did some good for you, while it fell harmless upon me. Fortunately for all of us, the Heavenly Father rules His universe by laws, which the passions or the prejudices of mortals have no power to change.

As for John Brown, his reputation may be safely trusted to the impartial pen of History; and his motives will be righteously judged by Him who knoweth the secrets of all hearts. Men, however great they may be, are of small consequence in comparison with principles; and the principle for which John Brown died is the question issue between us.

You refer me to the Bible, from which you quote the favorite text of slaveholders: —

> "Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the forward." –Peter, 2:18.

Abolitionists also have favorite texts, to some of which I will call your attention:

[She then proceeds to list 17 verses from the Bible and their citations.]

If the appropriateness of these texts is not apparent, I will try to make it so, by evidence drawn entirely from Southern sources. The Abolitionists are not such an ignorant set of fanatics as you suppose. They *know* whereof they affirm. They are familiar with the laws of the Slave States, which are alone sufficient to inspire abhorrence in any humane heart or reflecting mind not perverted by the prejudices of education and custom. I might fill many letters with significant extracts from your statute-books; but I have space only to glance at a few, which indicate the *leading* features of the system you cherish so tenaciously.

The universal rule of the slave State is, that "The child follows the condition of its mother." This is an index to many things. Marriages between white and colored people are forbidden by law; yet a very large number of the slaves are brown or yellow. When Lafayette visited this country in his old age, he said he was very much struck by the great change in the colored population of Virginia; that in the time of the Revolution, nearly all the household slaves were black, but when he returned to America, he found very few of them black. The advertisements in Southern newspapers often describe runaway slaves that "pass themselves for white men." Sometimes they are described as having straight, light hair, blue eyes, and clear complexion." This could not be, unless their fathers, grandfathers, and great-grandfathers had been white men. But as their *mothers* were slaves, the law pronounces *them* slaves, subject to be sold on the auction-block whenever the necessities of convenience of their masters or mistresses required it. The sale of one's own children, brother, or sisters, has an ugly aspect to those who are unaccustomed to it; and, obviously, it cannot have a good moral influence, that law and custom should render licentiousness a *profitable* vice.

Throughout the Slave States, the testimony of no colored person, bond or free, can be received against a white man. You have some laws, which, on the face of them, which seem to restrain inhuman men for murdering all mutilating slaves; but they are rendered nearly null by the law I have cited. Any drunken master, overseer, or patrol, may go into the negro cabins, and commit what outrages he pleases, with perfect impunity, if no white person is present who chooses to witness against him. North Carolina and Georgia leave a large loophole for escape, even if white persons present, when murder is committed. A law to punish persons for "maliciously killing a slave" has this remarkable qualification: "Always provided that this act shall not extend to any dying of moderate correction." We at the North find it difficult to understand how *moderate* punishment can cause *death*. I have read several of your law books attentively, and I find no cases of punishment for the murder of a slave, except by fines paid to the *owner*, to indemnify him for the loss of his *property*: the same as if his horse or cow had been killed . . . .

Your laws uniformly declare that "slave shall be deemed a chattel personal in the hands of his master, to all intents, constrictions, and purposes whatsoever." This, of course, involves the right to sell his children, as if they were pigs; also, to take his wife from him "for any intent or purpose whatsoever." Your laws also make it death for him to resist a white man, however brutally he may be treated, or however much his family may be outraged before his eyes. If he attempts to run away, your laws allow any man to shoot him.

By your laws, all a slave's earnings belong to his master. He can neither receive donations or transmit property. If his master allows him some hours to work for himself, and by great energy and perseverance he earns enough to buy his own bones and sinews, his master may make him pay two or three times over, and he has no redress. Three such cases have come within my knowledge. Even a written promise from his master has no legal value because slave can make no contracts.

Your laws also systematically aim at keeping the minds of the colored people in the most abject state of ignorance. If white people attempt to teach them to read or write, they are punished by imprisonment or fines; if they attempt to teach each other, they are punished with from twenty to thirty-nine lashes each. It cannot be said that the anti-slavery agitation produced such laws, for they date much further back; many of them when we were Provinces. They are the *necessities* of the system, which, being itself an outrage upon human nature, can be sustained only by perpetual outrages. . . .

Looking at the system of slavery in the light of all this evidence, do you candidly think we deserve "two-fold damnation" for detesting it? Can you not believe that we may hate the system, and yet be truly your friends? I make allowance for the excited state of your mind, and for the prejudices induced by education. I do not care to change your opinion of me; but I so wish you could be persuaded to examine this subject dispassionately, for the sake of the prosperity of Virginia, and the welfare of unborn generations, both white and colored. For thirty years, Abolitionists have been trying to reason with slaveholders, through the press, and in the halls of Congress. Their efforts, though directed to the *masters only*, have been met with violence and abuse almost equal to that poured on [the] head of John Brown. Yet surely we, as a portion of the Union, involved in the expense, the degeneracy, the danger, and the disgrace, of the iniquitous and fatal system, have a *right* to speak about it, and a right to be *heard* also. At the North, we willingly publish proslavery arguments, and ask only of fair field and no favor for the other side. But you will not even allow your own citizens a chance to examine this important subject. Your letter to me is published in Northern papers, as well as Southern; my reply will not be allowed to appear in any Southern paper. The despotic measures you take to silence investigation, and shut out the light from your own white population, prove how little reliance you have on the strength of your cause. In this enlightened age, all despotisms *ought* to come to an end by the agency of moral and rational means. But if they resist such agencies, it is in the order of Providence that they must come to an end by violence. History is full of such lessons. . . .

To the personal questions you ask me, I will reply in the name of all the women of New England. It would be extremely difficult to find any woman in our villages who does *not* sew for the poor, and watch with the sick, whenever occasion requires. We pay our domestic[s] generous wages, with which they can purchase as many Christmas gown[s] as they please; a process far better for their characters, as well as our own, than to receive their clothing as a charity, after being deprived of just payment for their labor. I have never known an instance where the "pangs of maternity" did not meet with requisite assistance; and here at the North, after we have helped the mothers, *we do not sell the babies*.

I readily believe what you state concerning the kindness of many Virginia matrons. It is creditable to their hearts: but after all, the best that can be done in that way is a poor equivalent for the perpetual wrong done to the slaves, and the terrible liabilities to which they are always subject. Kind masters and mistresses, you are merely lucky accidents.

If any one *chooses* to be a brutal despot, your laws and customs give him complete power to do so. And the lot of those slaves who have the kindest masters is exceedingly precarious. In case of death, or pecuniary difficulties, or marriages in the family, they may at any time be suddenly transferred from protection and indulgence to personal degradation, or extreme severity; and if they should try to escape from such sufferings, any body is authorized to shoot them down like dogs.

With regard to your declaration that "no Southerners ought henceforth to read a line of my composition," I reply that I have great satisfaction in the consciousness of having nothing to loose [sic] in that quarter. Twenty -seven years ago, I published a book called "An Appeal in behalf of that class of Americans called Africans." It influenced the minds of several young men, afterward conspicuous in public life, through whose agency the cause was better served than it could have been by me. From that time to this, I have labored too earnestly for the slave to be agreeable to slaveholders. Literary popularity was never a paramount object with me, even in my youth; and, now that I am old, I am utterly indifferent to it. But, if I cared for the exclusion you threaten I should at least have the consolation of being exiled with honorable company. Dr. Channing's writings, mild and candid as they are, breathe what you would call arrant treason. William C. Bryant, in his capacity of editor, is openly on our side. The inspired muse of Whittier has incessantly sounded the trumpet for moral warfare with your iniquitous institution; and his stirring tones have been answered, more or less loudly, by Pierpont, Lowell, and Longfellow. Emerson, the Plato of America, leaves the scholastic seclusion he love[s] so well, and disliking noise with all his poetic soul, bravely takes his stand among the trumpeters. George W. Curtis, the brilliant wealth of his talent on the altar of Freedom, [sic] and makes common cause with rough-shod reformers.

The genius of Mrs. Stowe carried the outworks of your institution at one dash, and left the citadel open to besiegers, who are pouring in amain [sic]. In the church, on the ultra-liberal side, it is assailed by the powerful battering-ram of Theodore Parker's eloquence. On the orthodox side is set a huge fire, kindled by the burning words of Dr. Cheever. Between them is Henry Ward Beecher, sending a shower of keen arrows into your entrenchments; and with him ride a troop of sharp-shooters from all sects. If you turn to literature of England or France, you will find your institution treated with as little favor. The fact is, the whole civilized world proclaims Slavery an outlaw, and the best intellect of the age is active in hunting it down.

L. Maria Child.

Source: ANTI-SLAVERY TRACTS. No. 1. *New Series.* Correspondence between Lydia Maria Child and Gov. Wise and Mrs. Mason, of Virginia (New York: American Antislavery Society, 1860). Library of Congress, Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Daniel A.P. Murray Collection, 1818-1907.

Questions for discussion:

1. How does Lydia Maria Child characterize John Brown's raid in her first letter to Gov. Wise?

2. Why did Child desire to come to Virginia to visit Brown? How does her viewpoint demonstrate northern support for Brown's actions?

3. How does Gov. Wise respond to Child's request to visit Brown? Why does he claim he has to pass her request on to the prosecutor, whom he appointed?

4. How does Child respond to Gov. Wise's letter? How does she characterize the slave states in her second letter to Wise?

5. How does Child's exchange with John Brown illustrate the perception of Brown in northern abolitionist circles? How does Brown respond to Child's message?

6. How does Margaretta Mason's letter characterize Child and northern supporters of John Brown?

7. How does Child respond to Mrs. Mason's letter?

TIMELINE

1800	Born in Torrington, Connecticut, May 9.
1805	Brown family moves to Ohio.
1819	Attends schools in Massachusetts and Connecticut.
1819-1825	Works as a tanner in Ohio.
1820	The Missouri Compromise prevents a political crisis between North and South on the issue of slavery.
1821	Marries Dianthe Lusk, June 21.
1829	Abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison calls for the immediate emancipation of slaves.
1831	Nat Turner leads a slave insurrection in Virginia.
1832	Dianthe Lusk Brown dies on August 10.
1833	Marries Mary Ann Day on July 11.
1835-1840	Speculates in land near Hudson, Ohio.
1837	Suffers heavy financial losses in the Panic of 1837. Abolitionist editor Elijah Lovejoy is murdered by a mob. Brown vows to dedicate his life to the destruction of slavery.
1841	Begins sheep farming.
1842	Applies for bankruptcy.
1843	Four of his children die of dysentery in one month.
1847	Reveals to Frederick Douglass his plan to free the slaves.
1849	Travels to Europe to sell wool. Moves to a farm in North Elba, New York.
1850	A new Fugitive Slave Law denies protection to slaves who have escaped to the North.
1851	Founds the Black Abolitionist "League of Gileadites" to resist the Fugitive Slave Law by force.
1851-1854	Brown's wool business fails.
1852	Harriet Beecher Stowe publishes *Uncle Tom's Cabin.*
1854	The Kansas-Nebraska Act enrages abolitionists by opening the western territories to slavery. Five of Brown's sons move to Kansas.
1855	Attends convention of abolitionists at Syracuse, New York. Joins sons in Kansas. Helps defend Lawrence, Kansas, against proslavery forces.
1856	In retaliation for the "Sack of Lawrence," murders five proslavery settlers along Pottawatomie Creek in Kansas. Leads a guerrilla band as "Bleeding Kansas" explodes in violence.
1857	Gains support from abolitionists in Boston, New York, and throughout New England. Orders 1,000 pikes. Establishes a military headquarters in Tabor, Iowa.
	In the Dred Scott decision, the U.S. Supreme Court declares that slaves are property and that Congress cannot deprive slave owners of that property.
1858	Attends the Chatham Convention in Canada and receives support for a "Provisional Constitution" of the United States to govern the nation freed from slavery. Leads a raid into Missouri and frees 11 slaves.
1859	The U.S. Supreme Court upholds the Fugitive Slave Act.
	Arrives in Harpers Ferry, Virginia, on July 3. Begins raid on Harpers Ferry armory and arsenal on October 16. Captured in the armory fire engine house on October 18.
	Tried in Charles Town, Virginia, October 27-30. Executed at Charles Town, December 2. Buried at the Brown farm in North Elba, New York, December 8.

Source: *Harpers Ferry and the Story of John Brown: Study Guide* (Washington, D.C.: Division Of Publications, National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1991), pp. 20-21.

TIMELINE ANALYSIS WORKSHEET

(1) List the key events in American history during this time period.

(2) What are the key events in John Brown's life during this time period?

(3) Why was the Kansas-Nebraska Act considered a key event? How did it affect slavery in the territories? Why did so many Northerners oppose it?

(4) How did the Dred Scott decision affect slavery in the territories? What impact did the Dred Scott decision have on the "moral suasion" argument advanced by Northern abolitionists like William Lloyd Garrison?

(5) John Brown agreed with William Lloyd Garrison who said, "I have to be on fire because I have mountains of ice around me to melt." Did John Brown believe the Dred Scott decision made his raid at Harpers Ferry necessary? Do you agree? Why or why not?

(6) Did the Kansas-Nebraska Act, the Dred Scott decision, and John Brown's raid make the Civil War inevitable? Why or why not? Explain your answer.

FREDERICK DOUGLASS ON JOHN BROWN

The following excerpt is from an address by Frederick Douglass at the fourteenth anniversary of Storer College, Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, May 30, 1881.

Not to fan the flame of sectional animosity now happily in the process of rapid and I hope permanent extinction; not to revive and keep alive a sense of shame and remorse for a great national crime, which has brought own punishment, in loss of treasure, tears and blood; not to recount the long list of wrongs, inflicted on my race during more than two hundred years of merciless bondage; nor yet to draw, from the labyrinths of far-off centuries, incidents and achievements wherewith to rouse your passions, and enkindle your enthusiasm, but to pay a just debt long due, to vindicate in some degree a great historical character, of our own time and country, one with whom I was myself well acquainted, and whose friendship and confidence it was my good fortune to share, and to give you such recollections, impressions and facts, as I can, of a grand, brave and good old man, and especially to promote a better understanding of the raid upon Harpers Ferry of which he was the chief, is the object of this address.

In all the thirty years' conflict with slavery, if we except the late tremendous war, there is no subject which in its interest and importance will be remembered longer, or will form a more thrilling chapter in American history than this strange, wild, bloody and mournful drama. The story of it is still fresh in the minds of many who now hear me, but for the sake of those who may have forgotten its details, and in order to have our subject in its entire range more fully and clearly before us at the outset, I will briefly state the facts in that extraordinary transaction. . . .

The bloody harvest of Harpers Ferry was ripened by the heat and moisture of merciless bondage of more than two hundred years. That startling cry of alarm on the bank of the Potomac was but the answering back of the avenging angel to the midnight invasions of Christian slave-traders on the sleeping hamlets of Africa. The history of the African slave-trade furnishes many illustrations far more cruel and bloody. . . .

I wish however to say just here that there was no foundation whatever for the charge that I in any wise urged or instigated John Brown to his dangerous work. I rejoice that it is my good fortune to have seen, not only the end of slavery, but to see the day when the whole truth can be told about this matter without prejudice to either the living or the dead. I shall however allow myself little prominence in these disclosures. Your interests, like mine, are in the all-commanding figure of the story, and to him I consecrate the hour. His zeal in the cause of my race was far greater than mine . . . I could live for the slave, but he could die for him. The crown of martyrdom is high, far beyond the reach of ordinary mortals, and yet happily no special greatness or superior moral excellence is necessary to discern and in some measure appreciate a truly great soul. Cold, calculating and unspiritual as most of us are, we are not wholly insensible to real greatness; and when we are brought in contact with a man of commanding mold,

towering high and alone above the millions, free from all conventional fetters, true to his own moral convictions, a "law unto himself," ready to suffer misconstruction, ignoring torture and death for what he believes to be right, we are compelled to do him homage. . . .

Though more than twenty years have rolled between us and the Harpers Ferry raid, though since then the armies of the nation have found it necessary to do on a large scale what John Brown attempted to do on small one, and the great captain who fought his way through slavery has filled with honor the Presidential chair, we yet stand too near the days of slavery, and the life and times of John Brown, to see clearly the true martyr and hero that he was and rightly to estimate the value of the man and his works. Like the great and good of all ages . . . this our noblest American hero must wait the polishing wheels of after-coming centuries to make his glory more manifest, and his worth more generally acknowledged. . . .

Despite the hold which slavery had at time on the country, despite the popular prejudice against the Negro, despite the shock which the first alarm occasioned, almost from the first John Brown received a large measure of sympathy and appreciation. New England recognized in him the spirit which brought the pilgrims to Plymouth rock and hailed him as a martyr and saint. True he had broken the law, true he had struck for a despised people, true he had crept upon his foe stealthily, like a wolf upon the fold, and had dealt his blow in the dark whilst his enemy slept, but with all this and more to disturb the moral sense, men discerned in him the greatest and best qualities known to human nature, and pronounced him "good." Many consented to his death, and then went home and taught their children to sing his praise as one whose "soul is marching on" through the realms of endless bliss. . . .

With eighteen men this man shook the whole social fabric of Virginia. With eighteen men he overpowered a town of nearly three thousand souls. With these eighteen men he held that large community firmly in his grasp for thirty long hours. With these eighteen men he rallied in a single night fifty slaves to his standard, and made prisoners of an equal number of the slave-holding class. With these eighteen men he defied the power and bravery of a dozen of the best militia companies that Virginia could send against him. Now, when slavery struck, as it certainly did strike, at the life of the country, it was not the fault of John Brown that our rulers did not at first know how to deal with it. He had already shown us the weak side of the rebellion, had shown us where to strike and how. It was not from lack of native courage that Virginia submitted for thirty long hours and at last was relieved only by Federal troops; but because the attack was made on the side of her conscience and thus armed her against herself. . . . When John Brown proclaimed emancipation to the slaves of Maryland and Virginia he added to his war power the force of a moral earthquake. Virginia felt all her strong-ribbed mountains to shake under the heavy tread of armed insurgents. Of his army of nineteen her conscience made an army of nineteen hundred.

Another feature of the times, worthy of notice, was the effect of this blow upon the country at large. At the first moment we were stunned and bewildered. Slavery had so benumbed the moral sense of the nation, that it never suspected the possibility of an explosion like this, and it was difficult for Captain Brown to get himself taken for what he really was. Few could seem to comprehend that freedom to the slaves was his only object. . . . In the view of some, it assumed tremendous proportions. To such it was nothing less than a wide-sweeping rebellion to overthrow the existing government, and construct another upon its ruins, with Brown for its President and Commander-in-Chief, the proof of this was found in the old man's carpet-bag in the shape of a constitution for a new Republic, an instrument which in reality had been executed to govern the conduct of his men in the mountains. Smaller and meaner natures saw in it nothing higher than a purpose to plunder. To them John Brown and his men were a gang of desperate robbers, who had learned by some means that government had sent a large sum of money to Harpers Ferry to pay off the workmen in its employ there, and they had gone thence to fill their pockets from this money. The fact is, that outside of a few friends, scattered in different parts of the country, and the slave-holders of Virginia, few persons understood the significance of the hour. That a man might do something very audacious and desperate for money, power or fame, was to the general apprehension quite possible; but, in face of plainly-written law, in face of constitutional guarantees protecting each State against domestic violence, in face of a nation of forty million of people, that nineteen men could invade a great State to liberate a despised and hated race, was to the average intellect and conscience, too monstrous for belief. In this respect the vision of Virginia was clearer than that of the nation. Conscious of her guilt and therefore full of suspicion, sleeping on pistols for pillows, startled at every unusual sound, constantly fearing and expecting a repetition of the Nat Turner insurrection, she at once understood the meaning, if not the magnitude of the affair. It was this understanding which caused her to raise the lusty and imploring cry to the Federal government for help, and it was not till he who struck the blow had fully explained his motives and object, that the incredulous nation in any wise comprehended the true spirit of the raid, or of its commander. Fortunate for his memory, fortunate for the brave men associated with him, fortunate for the truth of history, John Brown survived the saber gashes, bayonet wounds and bullet holes, and was able, though covered with blood, to tell his own story and make his own defense. . . . His manly courage and self-forgetful nobleness were not lost upon the crowd about him, nor upon the country. They drew applause from his bitterest enemies. Said Henry A. Wise, "He is the gamest man I ever met." "He was kind and humane to his prisoners," said Col. Lewis Washington.

To the outward eye of men, John Brown was a criminal, but to their inward eye he was a just man and true. His deeds might be disowned, but the spirit which made those deeds possible was worthy highest honor. It has been often asked, why did not Virginia spare the life of this man? why did she not avail herself of this grand opportunity to add to her other glory that of a lofty magnanimity? Had they spared the good old man's life—had they said to him, "you see we have you in our power, and could easily take your life, but we have no desire to hurt you in any way; you have committed a

terrible crime against society; you have invaded us at midnight and attacked a sleeping community, but we recognize you as a fanatic, and in some sense instigated by others; and on this ground and others, we release you. Go about your business, and tell those who sent you that we can afford to be magnanimous to our enemies." I say, had Virginia held some such language as this to John Brown, she would have inflicted a heavy blow on the whole Northern abolition movement, one which only the omnipotence of truth and the force of truth could have overcome. . . . His death was a foregone conclusion, and his trial was simply one of form. . . .

Just here was the true glory of John Brown's mission. It was not for his own freedom that he was thus ready to lay down his life, for with Paul he could say, "I was born free." No chain had bound his ankle, no yoke had galled his neck. History has no better illustration of pure, disinterested benevolence. It was not Caucasian for Caucasian—white man for white man; not rich man for rich man, but Caucasian for Ethiopian—white man for black man—rich man for poor man—the man admitted and respected, for the man despised and rejected. "I want you to understand, gentlemen," he said to his persecutors, "that I respect the rights of the poorest and weakest of the colored people, oppressed by the slave system, as I do those of the most wealthy and powerful." In this we have the key to the whole life and career of the man. . . . The situation was thrilling. An old man in the center of an excited and angry crowd, far away from home, in an enemy's country—with no friend near—overpowered, defeated, wounded, bleeding—covered with reproaches—his brave companions nearly all dead—his two faithful sons stark and cold by his side—reading his death—warrant in his fast—oozing blood and increasing weakness as in the faces of all around him—yet calm, collected, brave, with a heart for any fate—using his supposed dying moments to explain his course and vindicate his cause: such a subject would have been at once an inspiration and a power for one of the grandest historical pictures ever painted.

With John Brown, as with every other man fit to die for a cause, the hour of his physical weakness was the hour of his moral strength—the hour of his defeat was the hour of his triumph—the moment of his capture was the crowning victory of his life. With the Alleghany [sic] mountains for his pulpit, the country for his church and the whole civilized world for his audience, he was a thousand times more effective as a preacher than as a warrior, and the consciousness of this fact was the secret of his amazing complacency. Might with the sword of steel, he was mightier with the sword of the truth, and with this sword he literally swept the horizon. He was more than a match for all the Wises, Masons, Vallandinghams and Washingtons, who could rise against him. They could kill him, but they could not answer him. . . .

Apart from this mission there was nothing very remarkable about him. He was a wool-dealer, and a good judge of wool, as a wool-dealer ought to be. In all visible respects he was a man like unto other men. No outward sign of Kansas or Harpers Ferry was about him. As I knew him, he was an even-tempered man, neither morose, malicious nor misanthropic, but kind, amiable, courteous, and gentle in his intercourse with men. His words were few, well chosen and forcible. He was a good business man, and a

good husband and father: a man apparently in every way calculated to make a smooth and pleasant path for himself through the world. He loved society, he loved little children, he liked music, and was fond of animals. To no one was the world more beautiful or life more sweet. How then as I have said shall we explain his apparent indifference to life? I can find but one answer, and that is, his intense hatred to oppression. I have talked with many men, but I remember none, who seemed so deeply excited upon the subject of slavery as he. He would walk the room in agitation at mention of the word. He saw the evil through no mist or haze, but in a light of infinite brightness, which left no line of its ten thousand horrors out of sight. Law, religion, learning, were interposed in its behalf in vain. His law in regard to it was that which Lord Brougham described, as "the law above all the enactments of human codes, the same in all time, the same throughout the world—the law unchangeable and eternal-the law written by the finger of God on the human heart-that law by which property in man is, and ever must remain, a wild and guilty phantasy. . . ."

It must be admitted that Brown assumed tremendous responsibility in making war upon the peaceful people of Harpers Ferry, but it must be remembered also that in his eye a slave-holding community could not be peaceable, but was, in the nature of the case, in one incessant state of war. To him such a community was not more sacred than a band of robbers: it was the right of any one to assault it by day or night. He saw no hope that slavery would ever be abolished by moral or political means: "he knew," he said, "the proud and hard hearts of the slave-holders, and that they never would consent to give up their slaves, till they felt a big stick about their heads."

It was five years before this event at Harpers Ferry, while the conflict between freedom and slavery was waxing hotter and hotter with every hour, that the blundering statesmanship of the National Government repealed the Missouri compromise, and thus launched the territory of Kansas as a prize to be battled for between the North and South. The remarkable part taken in this contest by Brown has been already referred to, and it doubtless helped to prepare him for the final tragedy, and though it did not by means originate the plan, it confirmed him in it and hastened its execution.

During his four years' service in Kansas it was my good fortune to see him often. On his trips to and from the territory he sometimes stopped several days at my house, and at one time several weeks. It was on this last occasion that liberty had been victorious in Kansas, and he felt that he must hereafter devote himself to what he considered his larger work. It was the theme of all his conversation, filling his nights with dreams and his days with visions. An incident of his boyhood may explain, in some measure, the intense abhorrence he felt to slavery. He had for some reason been sent into the States of Kentucky, where he made the acquaintance of a slave boy, about his own age, of whom he became very fond. For some petty offense this boy was one day subjected to a brutal beating. The blows were dealt with an iron shovel and fell fast and furiously upon his slender body. Born in a free State and unaccustomed to such revolted at the shocking spectacle and at that early age he swore eternal hatred to slavery. After years never obliterated the impression, and he found in this early experience an argument against contempt for small things. . . .

Most of us can remember some event or incident which has at some time come to us, and made itself a permanent part of our lives. Such an incident came to me in the year 1847. 1 had then the honor of spending a day and night under the roof of a man, whose character and conversation made a very deep impression on my mind and heart . . . . Clad in plain American woolen, shod in boots of cowhide leather, and wearing a cravat of the same substantial material, under six feet high, less than one hundred and fifty lbs. in weight, aged about fifty, he presented a figure straight and symmetrical as a mountain pine. His bearing was singularly impressive. His head was not large, but compact and high. His hair was coarse, strong, slightly gray and closely trimmed and grew close to his forehead. His face was smoothly shaved and revealed a strong square mouth, supported by a broad and prominent chin. His eyes were clear and grew, and in conversation they alternated with tears and fire. When on the street, he moved with a long springing, race-horse step, absorbed by his own reflections, neither seeking nor shunning observation. Such was the man whose name I heard uttered in whispers—such was the house in which he lived—such were family and household management—and such was Captain John Brown.

He said to me at this meeting, that he had invited me to his house for the especial purpose of laying before me his plan for the speedy emancipation of my race. He seemed to apprehend opposition on my part as he opened the subject and touched my vanity by saying, that he had observed my course at home and abroad, and wanted my cooperation. He said he had been for the last thirty years looking for colored men to whom he could safely reveal his secret, and had almost despaired, at times, of finding such, but that now he was encouraged for he saw heads rising up in all directions, to whom he thought he could with safety impart his plan. As this plan then lay in his mind it was very simple, and had much to commend it. It did not, as was supposed by many, contemplate a general rising among the slaves, and a general slaughter of the slave masters (an insurrection he thought would only defeat the object), but it did contemplate the creating of an armed force which should act in the very heart of the South. He was not averse to the shedding of blood, and thought the practice of carrying arms would be a good one for the colored people to adopt, as it would give them a sense of manhood. No people he said could have self-respect or be respected who would not fight for their freedom. He called my attention to a large map of the U. States, and pointed out to me the far-reaching Alleghanies [sic], stretching away from the borders of New York into the Southern States. "These mountains," he said, "are the basis of my plan. God has given the strength of these hills to freedom; they were placed here to aid the emancipation of your race; they are full of natural forts, where one man for defense would be equal to a hundred for attack; they are also full of good hiding places where a large number of men could be concealed and baffle and elude pursuit for a long time. I know these mountains well and could take a body of men into them and keep them there in spite of all the efforts of Virginia to dislodge me, and drive me out. I would take at first about twenty-five picked men and begin on a small scale, supply them arms and ammunition, post them in squads of fives on a line of gathering recruits from the surrounding farms, seeking and selecting the most restless and daring." He saw that in this part of the work the utmost care must be used to guard against

treachery and disclosure; only the most conscientious and skillful should be sent on this perilous duty. With care and enterprise he thought he could soon gather a force of one hundred hardy men, men who would be content to lead the free and adventurous life to which he proposed to train them. When once properly drilled and each had found the place for which he was best suited, they would begin work in earnest; they would run off the slaves in large numbers, retain the strong and brave ones in the mountains, and send the weak and timid ones to the North by the underground Railroad; his operations would be enlarged with increasing numbers and would not be confined to one locality. Slave-holders should in some cases be approached at midnight and told to give up their slaves and to let them have their best horses to ride away upon. Slavery was a state of war, he said, to which the slaves were unwilling parties and consequently they had a right to anything necessary to their peace and freedom. He would shed no blood and would avoid a fight except in self-defense, when he would of course do his best. He believed this movement would weaken slavery in two ways-first by making slave property insecure, it would become undesirable; and secondly it would keep the anti-slavery agitation alive and public attention fixed upon it, and thus lead to the adoption of measures to abolish the evil altogether. He held that there was need of something startling to prevent the agitation of the question from dying out; that slavery had come near being abolished in Virginia by the Nat. Turner insurrection, and he thought his method would speedily put an end to it, both in Maryland and Virginia. The trouble was to get the right men to start with and money enough to equip them. He had adopted the simple and economical mode of living to which I have referred with a view to save money for this purpose. This was said in no boastful tone, for he felt that he had delayed already too long and had no room to boast either his zeal or his self-denial.

From 8 o'clock in the evening till 3 in the morning, Capt. Brown and I sat face to face, he arguing in favor of his plan, and I finding all the objections I could against it. Now mark! this meeting of ours was full twelve years before the strike at Harpers Ferry. He had been watching and waiting all that time for suitable heads to rise or "pop up" as he said among the sable millions in whom he could confide; hence forty years had passed between his thought and his act. Forty years, though not a long time in the life of a nation, is a long time in the life of a man; and here forty long years, this man was struggling with this one idea; like Moses he was forty years in the wilderness. Youth, manhood, middle age had come and gone; two marriages had been consummated, twenty children had called him father; and through all the storms and vicissitudes of busy life, this one thought, like the angel in the burning bush, had confronted him with its blazing light, bidding him on to his work. Like Moses he had made excuses, and as with Moses his excuses were overruled. Nothing should postpone further what was to him his only apology for existence. He often said to me, though life was sweet to him, he would willingly lay it down for the freedom of my people; and on one occasion he added, that he had already lived about as long as most men, since he had slept less, and if he should now lay down his life the loss would not be great, for in fact he knew no better use for it. . . .

Thus far, I have spoken exclusively of Capt. Brown. Let me say a word or two of his brave and devoted men, and first of Shields Green. He was a fugitive slave from Charleston, South Carolina, and had attested his love of liberty by escaping from slavery and making his way through many dangers to Rochester, where he had lived in my family, and where he met the man with whom he went to the scaffold. I said to him, as I was about to leave, "Now Shields, you have heard our discussion. If in view of it, you do not wish to stay, you have but to say so, and you can go back with me." He answered, "I b'l'eve I'll go wid de old man;" and go with him he did, into the fight, and to the gallows, and bore himself as grandly as any of the number. At the moment when Capt. Brown was surrounded, and all chance of escape was cut off, Green was in the mountains and could have made his escape as Osborne Anderson did, but when asked to do so, he made the same answer he did at Chambersburg, "I b'l'eve I'll go down wid de ole man." When in prison at Charlestown, and he was not allowed to see his old friend, his fidelity to him was in no wise weakened, and no complaint against Brown could be extorted from him by those who talked with him.

If a monument should be erected to the memory of John Brown, as there ought to be, the form and name of Shields Green should have a conspicuous place upon it. It is a remarkable fact, that in this small company of men, but one showed any sign of weakness or regret for what he did or attempted to do. Poor Cook broke down and sought to save his life by representing that he had been deceived, and allured by false promises. But Stephens, Hazlett and Green went to their doom like the heroes they were, without a murmur, without a regret, believing alike in their captain and their cause.

For the disastrous termination of this invasion, several causes have been assigned. It has been said that Capt. Brown found it necessary to strike before he was ready; that men had promised to join him from the North who failed to arrive; that the cowardly negroes did not rally to his support as he expected, but the true cause as stated by himself, contradicts all these theories, and from his statement there is no appeal. Among the questions put to him by Mr. Vallandingham after his capture were the following: "Did you expect a general uprising of the slaves in case of your success?" To this he answered, "No, sir, nor did I wish it. I expected to gather strength from time to time and then to set them free." "Did you expect to hold possession here until then?" Answer, "Well, probably I had quite a different idea. I do not know as I ought to reveal my plans. I am here wounded and a prisoner because I foolishly permitted myself to be so. You overstate your strength when you suppose I could have been taken if I had not allowed it. I was too tardy after commencing the open attack in delaying my movements through Monday night and up to the time of the arrival of government troops. It was all because of my desire to spare the feelings of my prisoners and their families."

But the question is, Did John Brown fail? He certainly did fail to get out of Harpers Ferry before being beaten down by United States soldiers; he did fail to save his own life, and to lead a liberating army into the mountains of Virginia. But he did not go to Harpers Ferry to save his life. The true question is, Did John Brown draw his sword against slavery and thereby lose his life in vain? and to this I answer ten thousand

times, No! No man fails, or can fail who so grandly gives himself and all he has to a righteous cause. . . . Did John Brown fail? Ask Henry A. Wise in whose house less than two years after, a school for the emancipated slaves was taught. Did John Brown fail? Ask James M. Mason, the author of the inhuman fugitive slave bill, who was cooped up in Fort Warren, as a traitor less than two years from the time that he stood over the prostrate body of John Brown. Did John Brown fail? Ask Clement C. Vallandingham, one other of the inquisitorial party; for he too went down in the tremendous whirlpool created by the powerful hand of this bold invader. If John Brown did not end the war that ended slavery, he did at least begin the war that ended slavery. If we look over the dates, places and men, for which this honor is claimed, we shall find that not Carolina, but Virginia—not Fort Sumpter [sic], but Harpers Ferry and the arsenal—not Col. Anderson, but John Brown, began the war that ended American slavery and made this a free Republic. Until this blow was struck, the prospect for freedom was dim, shadowy and uncertain. The irrepressible conflict was one of words, votes and compromises. When John Brown stretched forth his arm the sky was cleared. The time for compromises was gone—the armed hosts of freedom stood face to face over the chasm of a broken Union—and the clash of arms was at hand. The South staked all upon getting possession of the Federal Government, and failing to do that, drew the sword of rebellion and thus made her own, and not Brown's, the lost cause of the century.

Source: *John Brown: An Address by Frederick Douglass, Harpers Ferry, West Virginia* (African American Perspectives: Pamphlets from the Daniel A. P. Murray Collection, 1818-1907).

LESSON THREE
JOHN BROWN: THE IMAGE

A. OBJECTIVES

- To analyze the purpose and effect of the visual images of John Brown.
- To evaluate works of art and visual images as historical documents.

B. LESSON ACTIVITIES

(1) Place students in cooperative learning groups and distribute the set of the visual images of John Brown (**Documents 3A–3D**): John Brown without Beard; John Brown with Beard, May 1859; The Last Moments of John Brown by Thomas Hovenden; and, John Brown Mural by John Stewart Curry. Ask students to complete the Art Analysis Worksheets (**Student Handout 6**).

(2) Reconvene the class and review the answers to the worksheet. Each group should report its answers.

(3) After reviewing the answers to the worksheet have the students read the following excerpt reported by an "Eyewitness to the Hanging of John Brown," *American Heritage,* February 1955:

> Old Brown. . . was fifty-nine years old. He wore the same shabby black suit he had worn at Harpers Ferry and at his trial, the black contrasting vividly with the white shirt and socks and his incongruous red slippers. His frame was tall but gaunt now almost to emaciation . . . .His unflinching gray eyes . . . were serious . . .he showed no fear. His demeanor was characterized by an unexpected serenity.
>
> Now they were there. A group of soldiers surrounded the wagon and the scaffold. They allowed no one to come between them and the prisoner. Pickets were posted at various points, and the crowd was held back at bayonet point nearly a quarter of a mile from the gallows. . . . The elaborate security precautions were not necessary. The crowd was quite orderly. They had not come to rescue John Brown. They had come to see him die. . . .The earth immediately about the scaffold was bare. The prisoner . . .turned and ascended the steps to the gallows. . . He shook hands with sheriff James Campbell and jailer John Avis. . . .

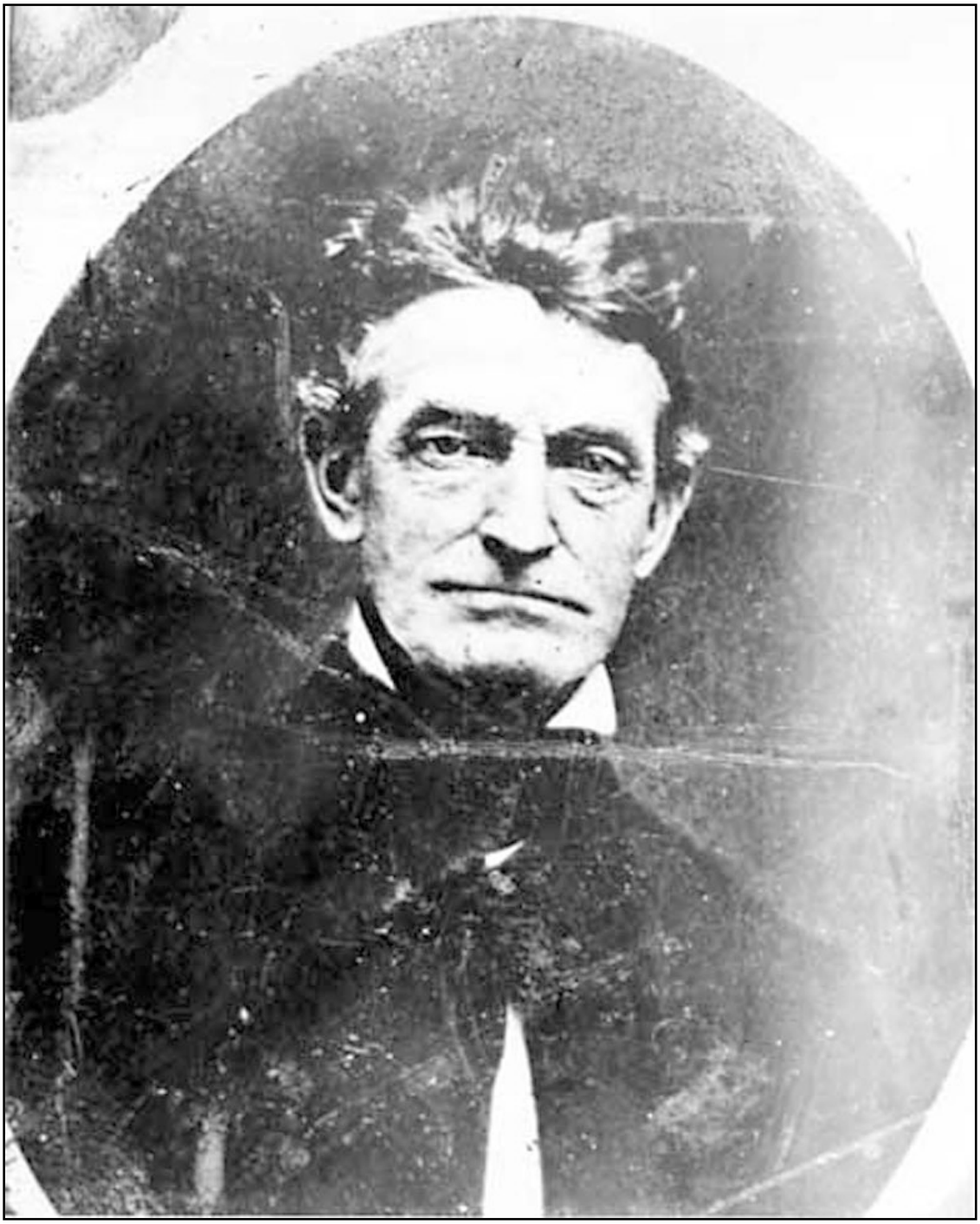
Discussion questions:

- How does the above account compare with the Hovenden painting of John Brown? Was the painting inaccurate? Why or why not? What was the reason for the painting? Can the painting be used as an historical document? Why or why not?

- How does each of the visuals appeal to emotions? Explain.

- Which of the visual images do you feel best portrays John Brown? Why? Is Brown best considered a freedom fighter—a human sacrifice for the freedom of fellow humans? Or, is he best viewed as a fanatical murderer? Why?

PHOTO OF JOHN BROWN WITHOUT BEARD



National Park Association

Photo portrait of John Brown without his beard, taken prior to the raid on Harpers Ferry.

PHOTO OF JOHN BROWN WITH BEARD

National Park Association

Portrait of John Brown, from the Bowman Gallery, Ottawa, Illinois.

THOMAS HOVENDEN PAINTING: THE LAST MOMENTS OF JOHN BROWN

National Park Association

Copy of an 1884 oil painting showing John Brown leaving the Charlestown jail on his way to be hanged on December 2, 1859. The image of Brown kissing an African-American child, depicted by artist Thomas Hovenden, never occurred.

JOHN STEWART CURRY PAINTING: THE TRAGIC PRELUDE MURAL

National Archives (NWDNS-79-CWC-3F(10))

Copy of a mural by John Stewart Curry in the State Capitol in Topeka, Kansas, circa 1937–42.

ART ANALYSIS WORKSHEET

Document 3A—John Brown without a Beard

1. Which part of John Brown's face do you focus on when looking at the picture? Why?

2. What clues does the visual give you about John Brown's character? Explain.

Document 3B—John Brown with a Beard, May 1859

1. How does the beard alter John Brown's features and appearance?

2. Why do you suppose John Brown grew a beard before the raid? Explain your answer.

Document 3C—The Last Moments of John Brown, by Thomas Hovenden

1. Study the people in the painting. Who is the focus of the painting? How do you know?

2. Describe the relationship of the people in the painting to the central figure.

3. Describe the expression of the central figure. Describe the reaction of the people around him.

4. What is the main idea that the painter is trying to convey? How do you know?

Document 3D—John Brown Mural by John Stewart Curry

1. Who are the people in the painting? Describe their relationship to John Brown.

2. How would you describe the size of John Brown in relationship to the others in the painting? Why do you suppose Curry painted it that way?

3. How would you describe the look on John Brown's face? Explain.

4. What is the painter's view of John Brown? How do you know?

LESSON FOUR
THE HISTORICAL JOHN BROWN

A. OBJECTIVES

- Analyze the effect of John Brown's Raid on northern and southern opinions.
- Evaluate the impact of John Brown's Raid on subsequent events.
- Evaluate John Brown's place in American history.

B. LESSON ACTIVITIES

(1) Conduct a Reader's Theater on "The Aftermath of Harpers Ferry" (**Document 4A**). Fourteen students should be assigned to read the remarks of each of the characters in the narrative. The students should sit in the front of the room while they are reading their parts. As the students listen to the enactment, they should be use "Notetaking Form" **Student Handout 7** to jot down the point of view of each of the characters in the dialogue. At the conclusion of the reading, use the following questions to guide a class discussion:

(2) Divide the class into cooperative learning groups of four students, two of the students representing Northerners, the other two representing Southerners. Assign "John Brown: The Great Emancipator" (**Document 4B**) for them to read. After reading the piece, the students should engage in a Point/Counterpoint discussion with the Northerners supporting Sanborn's argument and the Southerners opposing his argument. For closure, ask each group to report its major findings to the class.

(3) Distribute the three photographs—"National League of Colored Women in front of John Brown's Fort, 1896" (**Document 4C**), "Niagara Movement Leaders at Harpers Ferry, 1906" (**Document 4D**), and "Delegates to the Second Niagara Conference, 1906" (**Document 4E**) and ask the students to complete a Photograph Analysis Worksheet (**Student Handout 8**) for each. After completing the worksheets, conduct a general class discussion on the following questions:

- Why did African American leaders make pilgrimages to Harpers Ferry to pay their respects to John Brown? Were their actions in this regard different from whites? Why or why not?
- Should John Brown best be viewed as a "martyr to the cause of freedom," or a "terrorist?" Explain.
- Why does John Brown remain a controversial figure in our history?

READERS' THEATER:
THE AFTERMATH OF HARPERS FERRY

The following Reader's Theater provides an account of how Northerners and Southerners reacted to John Brown's Raid on Harpers Ferry and shows how the raid fanned the flames of sectional discord and propelled the nation toward Civil War, exactly what John Brown had predicted. In your reading, note in particular the major differences between Northern and Southern viewpoints on events and analyze how and why such differences remained so tractable.

Frederick Douglass: I was lecturing in Philadelphia when I learned that Brown had been captured at Harpers Ferry and that letters found in his possession implicated me, Gerrit Smith, Frank Sanborn, Samuel Gridley Howe, Martin Delany, and several others. I was stunned: the old man had actually gone through with it. I had hoped against hope that he would not attack that Federal arsenal and get himself trapped and killed. But he would not listen to me, and now his rash act imperiled all of us who were his friends. When the New York *Herald* reported that a hundred southerners had offered rewards for my head and those of Smith, Giddings, and "other abolitionists and Republicans," I hurried home to Rochester in alarm. There I heard that the New York governor would turn me over to the Virginia authorities when they moved to extradite me. I fled to Canada and then took ship to England.

Harpers Ferry filled me with a tempest of mixed emotions. John Brown was my friend, the bravest man I ever met, and he had sacrificed his life for us. A part of me wanted to be with my friend, to march to the gallows by his side. But what good would I do to the abolitionist cause at the end of a hangman's noose? *Words* were my weapons in the war against slavery, and I could best wield them by steering *clear* of the hangman's rope. . . . I had always been more distinguished for running than for fighting, I said in a letter to the *Rochester Democrat and American*, referring to my flight from slavery in Maryland. Tried by the Harpers Ferry insurrection test, I admitted, I was most miserably deficient in courage. But I thought the attack on the United States arsenal was reckless and wild, and my field of labor for the abolition of slavery did not extend to such an operation.

Brown's attack on Harpers Ferry may have been rash, but his idea of destroying slavery by violence was right. I was astounded to learn that Garrison had come around to our view as well.

Jefferson Davis: I was certain that a conspiracy lay behind the Harpers Ferry invasion which extended across the entire North and implicated leading Republicans. I believed that it reached into England, too; that money was contributed there as well as in the North; that the English drillmaster [Hugh Forbes] who had defected from Brown was a military leader sent from England to participate, first, in the Kansas trouble, and then in the raid upon Virginia. The Harpers Ferry attack made us realize the extent to

which the South was a lonely slaveholding outpost, surrounded by abolitionist enemies and sitting atop a powder keg. When I reached Washington in early December 1859 I found my southern colleagues as furious and indignant about Harpers Ferry as I was. John Brown had just been hanged, but that hardly appeased us. In an ugly mood, a group of us called at the White House to confer with the President.

James Buchanan: Brown was lawless, fanatical, and mad, but he obviously did not act alone. When they captured him, he had two hundred pistols, two hundred Sharp's carbines, and almost a thousand pikes. There is much sympathy for him in the North. On the day of his execution, bells were tolled in many cities, cannon fired, and prayers offered up for him as if he were a martyr. Churches were draped in mourning! Ralph Waldo Emerson reportedly said he made the gallows as glorious as the cross.

James Mason [Virginia]: Mr. President, all Virginians are offended by the indecent expressions of sympathy for Brown in the North. The man committed violent crimes; innocent people were killed. His object was to provoke a *slave revolt*, rampant rapine and murder. Yankees who approve of such acts are inhuman.

Clement Clay [Alabama]: The Black Republicans are the real culprits behind the Harpers Ferry attack. Four years ago, I said that the natural and necessary result of the antislavery teachings of the Republican party was civil strife and bloodshed, and that it would occur if the party prevailed in the North. My prediction has proved prophetic.

Jefferson Davis: I made the same prophetic prediction.

Gallatin Brown [Mississippi]: The New York *Tribune* day after day holds up Brown as a martyr to "the sacred cause of liberty." I'll put it to the Black Republicans in Congress: why don't you rebuke your newspapers and your public speakers, who openly express sympathy with this criminal? Tell your editors, tell your [Horace] Greeleys and [William Henry] Sewards, that their course is treasonable.

James Buchanan: The Richmond newspapers report that Seward subscribed money to Brown, and was a conspirator. A notice in one paper offered $50,000 for Seward's head. God knows how many other Republicans in Congress are implicated.

Jefferson Davis: We intend to investigate Mr. Seward and all other Republican suspects. One thing is beyond question: Brown's invasion was the violent offspring of Republican dogma—of the party's "irrepressible conflict" and "house divided" doctrines and its platform. By advocating war on our domestic institutions, their leaders inspired that madman to attack us.

Alfred Iverson [Georgia]: I think their *leaders* plotted the attack. It's the intention of the Republicans as a party—its their settled design—to break down the institution of slavery by fair means or foul means; and if they cannot accomplish it in one way, they'll try it in another. Haven't y'all seen this?

Narrator: Iverson then showed his colleagues a recent Republican circular, which created a sensation in that crowded White House chamber. Signed by sixty-eight Republican congressmen, by Horace Greeley of the New York *Tribune*, and by other influential party members, the circular endorsed *The Impending Crisis* by Hinton R. Helper, a southerner.

Alfred Iverson: In his book, Helper proposes to destroy slavery by exciting the "poor whites" to revolution against the slaveholders. At the same time, he calculates on inciting the niggers in all the southern states to rise against their masters, burn their property, and cut their throats. The Black Republicans have recklessly distributed a hundred thousand copies of his incendiary tract across the free states. One of the endorsers is John Sherman of Ohio, the *very man* they intend to put forth as Speaker of the House. The party that can sanction such a man for such an office undoubtedly had a hand in Brown's mad act.

Jefferson Davis: Harpers Ferry is the first genuine act of civil war, of one section invading the other. This government cannot continue as a shield to permit one portion of the country to make war upon another. The Federal government must take steps to protect us in our constitutional rights of person and property, or face the consequences.

James Mason: Virginia has already taken steps to protect itself. The militia is on alert across the state; 50,000 guns have been distributed.

Narrator: Other voices quickly chimed in: "South Carolina is also on alert; "So is Mississippi"; "and Georgia"; "Alabama, too"; "and Tennessee"; "and North Carolina"; "and Texas."

Jefferson Davis: United, let us give the Republicans and the North an ultimatum. We will not tolerate invasion or outside provocation of any sort intended to excite our slaves. Mr. President, I trust, sir, that we have your support for a Senate investigation of Harpers Ferry?

James Buchanan: You do indeed. You should investigate Stephen A. Douglas and his supporters while you're at it. An Administration paper in Ohio reports that Brown's carpetbag contained a letter from Douglas. It seems that he contributed a thousand dollars to the old felon's cause.

Narrator: Buchanan fairly bristled with hatred for Douglas. He would have liked nothing better than "to crucify that drunken lout on the cross of Harpers Ferry."

Alfred Iverson: I can't believe he was involved. Douglas may be a lot of things, but he isn't crazy. He owns slaves and a plantation himself—in Mississippi. Why would he contribute money for a projected slave revolt? I acquit him and the northern Democracy of complicity in Brown's raid. Our quarrel with them is over the question of territorial rights.

Jefferson Davis: I agree with Iverson. The pressing matter right now is the Harpers Ferry invasion. We'll take care of Douglas after we get an investigation of the Black Republicans under way.

Narrator: As soon as Congress convened, Southern members demanded that the Senate set up an investigating committee to look into Harpers Ferry. It plunged the chamber into a furious ten-day debate. Republicans tried to sidetrack the proposed investigation by amendment and evasion. They denied any complicity in Brown's raid, but expressed sympathy for his "high ideals." Some Republicans even accused southerners of being the aggressors.

James Chestnut [South Carolina]: Sir, when did we ever try to subvert any of your institutions? It's you who have cast firebrands among us, you who have carried the war to our border; you who seek to shut us out from the common domain. You accuse us of agitation. Gentlemen, the responsibility is with you, not with us. I quote from a speech of Mr. Seward, the flag-bearer of your party, in the Senate chamber in March of 1858: "Free labor has at last apprehended its rights, its interests, its power, and its destiny, and is organizing itself to assume the government of the Republic. It will henceforth meet you boldly and resolutely here; it will meet you everywhere, in the territories or out of them, wherever you may go to extend slavery. It's driven you back in California and in Kansas; it will invade you soon"—Mark the language—*"It will invade you soon."* What a wonderful similarity of sentiment and purpose with the recent outbreak in Virginia!

Well, sir, the thing must stop! Call it treason , gentlemen, and make the best of it; but I tell you unless these things cease, we will sunder the Union, pull it to pieces, column, base, and tower, before we'll submit to be crushed.

Lyman Trumbull [Republican, Illinois]: The outbreak at Harpers Ferry has arisen *not* from the teachings and acts of the Republican party, or any of its leaders, or anybody in its ranks, but from the teachings of the party with which the Senator from South Carolina is himself associated. The *Democratic party*, by upholding the proslavery sacking of a Federal arsenal in Missouri, by sending Federal troops into Kansas to arrest and imprison free-state men on trumped-up charges of treason, set an example to our country which engendered the spirit that maddened Brown.

Narrator: Several Democrats cried out in protest, but Trumbull ignored them.

Lyman Trumbull: The North intends no encroachment upon the South. It's because of the misrepresentation of the objects and views of that party that the prejudices of the South have been excited against it—and chiefly by the misrepresentations which have been made by this so-called Democratic party in the North. They choose to call every person that doesn't unite with them an abolitionist. Sir, we are not abolitionists; we are *restrictionists.* I quote from our party platform: "Resolved: That with our republican fathers, we hold it to be a self-evident truth that all men are endowed with the inalien-

able right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Resolved: That we deny the authority of Congress, of a Territorial Legislature, or any individual or association of individuals, to give legal existence to slavery in any Territory. Resolved: That the Constitution confers upon Congress sovereign power over the Territories, and that it is both the right and the imperative duty of Congress to prohibit in the Territories those twin relics of barbarism, polygamy and slavery." That is what we believe. We don't advocate meddling with slavery where it already exists."

Clement Clay [Alabama]: When you teach your constituents that slavery is a crime against man and a sin in the eyes of Heaven, and has no guarantee in the Federal Constitution, how can you expect men to respect our rights or to refrain from acts of violence against us? The principles you profess, the sentiments you avow, the very platform read in our hearing, bind you to exert every means within your power to abolish slavery, not only with exclusive Federal jurisdiction, but within the states in which it exists. Your hatred for us and for our institutions is manifest in every word of your platform which was jeeringly read by the Senator from Illinois, in which you denounce slavery, in the same breadth with polygamy, as "barbaric," as a sin and a crime. Furthermore your platform declares that the Negra is entitled to liberty and equality with the white man in social and political rights. This is the root of the evil. This makes a chasm between the North and the South so deep and wide that it can never be filled up or bridged over. You show your hatred for us in other ways, too. For twenty-five years, our Negras have been stolen or robbed from us, either by individuals or by organized bands of predatory northern invaders.

Henry Wilson [Rep., Massachusetts]: Sir, we are indeed opposed to slavery. We believe slavery to be a wrong. We believe slavery to be an evil—moral, social, and physical. But we do not preach ill will or unkindness toward you or any portion of the people of our common country.

Clement Clay: Your party is solemnly pledged by your platform, and by the speeches of Senator Seward and other Republican leaders, to maintain and carry out in the administration of this government, when you get the power, measures which intend to revolutionize our society, to desolate our fields, to deluge our land in blood. *I tell you, sir, it's impossible for us to live under a government administered by your party.*

Benjamin Wade [Rep., Ohio]: We're compelled to listen by the hour to speeches filled with denunciations of our party, telling us that the Union is to be dissolved if the people elect as President an honorable man of our party, holding to principles precisely such as the old fathers of the government held. I say to you gentlemen of the other side, these are very harsh doctrines to preach in our ears. I tell you, when you talk so coolly about dissolving this Union, do you know the difficulties you'll have to wade through before that end can be consummated? Do you believe that you can rend all this asunder without a struggle? We're bound in the same ship; we're married forever, for better or for worse.

Jefferson Davis: That last remark made me gag. The Black Republicans were married to their precious *Negroes*, not to us! Wade's blather about the founding fathers added to my indignation. I was sick and tired of hearing it. The *Black Republicans* were not on the side of the framers. *We* were. *We* southern-rights Democrats were the ones who sought to preserve the government as our fathers formed it, and to maintain the sacred principles they established: the sovereignty of the states over their domestic institutions and the joint ownership of the territories. The real disunionists were those of the North who undertook to sap the foundations upon which the government stood, not those who sought to preserve them.

On December 15, the Senate voted to establish an investigating committee, with Mason as chairman and myself as chief inquisitor, to find if any "subversive organizations" —in other words, any Black Republicans—were involved in Brown's crimes. Meeting some forty times, we sifted through myriad reports and conducted interviews with Henry Wilson, Joshua Giddings, John A. Andrews of Massachusetts, and other Republicans; and with two of Brown's confessed backers, Howe and Stearns. But several of the Black Republicans continued to address the Senate to my consternation!

William Henry Seward [Rep., New York]: Brown's raid was an act of sedition and treason. The Republican party means no harm to the southerners. But the Republican party intends to save the territories by constitutional and lawful means, from being homes for slavery and polygamy.

Henry Wilson: The Republican party means to arrest the extension of slavery, and rescue the government from the Slave Power. We'll blot out slavery in the national capital. We'll surround the slave states with a cordon of free states. We'll then appeal to the hearts and consciences of men, and in a few years we'll give liberty to the millions in bondage."

Narrator]: Both houses were in a violent mood that winter. In the House, the Republicans had indeed put John Sherman forward as Speaker, which precipitated a fierce party struggle that deadlocked the House for two months before a coalition speaker [Howell Cobb of Georgia] could be chosen. The floor rang with furious harangues and threats from both sides of the aisle. Murder was in the air. Armed men prowled the lobbies, brandishing revolvers. Almost every member of Congress reportedly carried weapons. "The only men who don't have a revolver and a knife are those who have two revolvers," observed James Hammond of South Carolina.

Jefferson Davis: Given the tense state of affairs, our committee was forced to interrogate witnesses with extreme caution, lest we precipitate a war in Congress between Black Republicans and angry southerners. Finally, after months of work, I made the majority report to the Senate. In it, I denounced the Republicans for their reckless "higher law" doctrines and chastised the Massachusetts Kansas Committee for carelessly entrusting guns and money to Brown. But Brown was so secretive that no one, not even his immediate followers, appeared to have known fully of his plans. Nor, in the evidence brought

before us, could we find proof of direct Republican collusion with Brown. We concluded that Harpers Ferry was "simply the act of lawless ruffians under the sanction of no public or political authority, against which Congress has no power to legislate."

That was our official report. Privately, we of the South remained convinced that Brown was sustained by an extensive combination at the North and that he was inspired by Republican party doctrine if not by individual Republicans. The raid reinforced our conviction that the Republicans, if they won the upcoming presidential election, would themselves do violence against us and our domestic institutions. As a consequence, Harpers Ferry united the South as had no other previous event. We stood forth as one man and cried: "if a Black Republican is elected President, let the Union be dissolved."

Narrator: The presidential election year, 1860, dawned with the Democratic party—the last remaining national institution—hopelessly divided along sectional lines. Stephen Douglas, still supporting popular sovereignty was the choice of northern Democrats, but anathema to southern Democrats. Since northern Democrats held a majority, they could prevent the nomination of a southern Democrat, such as Jefferson Davis.

Stephen Douglas: I have no hesitation in expressing my firm and deliberate conviction that the Harpers Ferry crime was the natural, logical, inevitable result of the doctrines and teachings of the Republican party.

Gallatin Brown: The South will demand at Charleston a platform explicitly declaring that slave property is entitled in the territories to the same protection that is given to every other species of property, and failing to get it she'll bolt the convention.

Jefferson Davis: Brown and I both offered resolutions which, in effect, demanded a Federal slave code for the territories if the territorial legislatures refused to protect slave property. My resolutions, in addition, asserted that only when a territory became a state could its citizens reach a decision about slavery; that open and covert attacks against slavery, or any form of intermeddling with it, by one or more states, or combination of citizens, tended to destroy the Union; and that northern personal liberty laws, which were aimed at nullifying the fugitive slave law, were hostile in character, subversive of the Constitution, and revolutionary in effect.

These resolutions, supported by President Buchanan, were approved by a caucus of Senate Democrats over Douglas's bitter objections. A declaration of southern principles, they put the northern Democrats on notice: these were the requirements for a party platform acceptable to the South. We knew, of course, that Douglas would never embrace a platform calling for a Federal slave code in the territories. Our goal was to block his nomination and force the party to choose a pro-southern candidate—either Franklin Pierce, R.M.T. Hunter of Virginia, or John Breckinridge of Kentucky—on a southern-rights platform. We intended, in short, to continue ruling the Democratic party, or see it disintegrate. We would never submit to the rule of that grog-drinking demagogue from Illinois.

Stephen Douglas: I loathed Davis for trying to shape a party platform in the Senate. The platform was the job of a national convention, not a Senate caucus. But it would take more than a bunch of resolutions to stop me at Charleston. I had the most efficient and far-reaching political machine ever put together for a presidential contest.

Source: The reading is adapted from Stephen B. Oates, *The Approaching Fury: Voices of the Storm, 1820-1861* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), pp. 290-303.

Questions for discussion:

1. How did Frederick Douglass respond to news of Brown's capture at Harpers Ferry? How does he characterize the Harpers Ferry Raid?

2. How did southern senators respond to John Brown's raid? Who did they hold responsible for the raid?

3. What was President James Buchanan's response to John Brown's raid? How did he characterize the raid and who did he blame?

4. How did Northern Republicans respond to John Brown's raid? How did they counter Southern arguments concerning the raid?

5. In addition to "slavery," what other evil in the territories were northern Republicans opposed to at this time?

6. What resolutions did Jefferson Davis offer in the Senate with President Buchanan's support? How would northern Republicans respond to such resolutions?

7. Based on the positions expressed in the reading, was the Civil War "repressible" or "irrepressible?"

Notetaking Worksheet

Character	Point of view
Stephen Douglas	
Frederick Douglass	
Jefferson Davis	
James Buchanan	
James Mason	
Clement Clay	
Gallatin Brown	
Alfred Iverson	
James Chestnut	
Lyman Trumbull	
Henry Wilson	
Benjamin Wade	
William Henry Seward	

JOHN BROWN: THE GREAT EMANCIPATOR

By F. B. Sanborn

Franklin B. Sanborn was a member of the *Secret Six* that financed and supported John Brown's activities in Kansas and later at Harpers Ferry.

It is hard—nay, impossible—to carry the reader of these pages in 1883 back in memory to that period of our country's history when John Brown captured the town and arsenal at Harpers Ferry, or make real to ourselves the despotism which a few slaveholders then exercised over the rest of mankind in this country. Though a meager minority in their own South, they absolutely controlled there not only four millions of slaves, but six millions of white people, nominally free, while they directed the policy and the opinions of more than half the free people of the non-slaveholding States. They had dictated the nomination and secured the election of [James]Buchanan as President,—the most complete servant of the slave power who ever held that office; they had not only refused to terminate the slave-trade (as by treaty we were bound to assist in doing), but they had induced the importation of a few cargoes of slaves into Carolina and Georgia; they had broken down the Missouri Compromise of 1820 (imposed by themselves on the unwilling North), and had done their best to extend slavery over the new territories of the nation, and to legalize its existence in all the Free States. Through the mouth of Chief Justice [Roger B.] Taney, who simply uttered the decrees of the slaveholding oligarchy, they had made the Supreme Court declare that four million Americans, of African descent, had practically "no rights which a white man was bound to respect"; and they exerted themselves in every way to give due effect to that dictum. The Dred Scott decision was given by Taney in 1857, and it led at once to the execution of John Brown's long-cherished purpose of striking a blow at slavery in its own Virginian stronghold. That decision flashed into the minds of Northern men the conviction which John Quincy Adams had long before formulated and expressed—that "the preservation, propagation, and perpetuation of slavery was the vital and animating spirit of the national Government." It was this conviction that led to the election of Abraham Lincoln in 1860, as it had led John Brown and his small band of followers to form their conspiracy and begin their campaign in 1858-59.

While the unpaid labor of the slaves was believed by the slaveholders to be the real source of our national prosperity, it was the merit and the fate of John Brown first to see and act upon the sad knowledge that slavery and our national existence were incompatible. Thirty years before he died for the blacks in Virginia, he chose the side of the nation against slavery; and in less than ten years after his death the whole people followed in the path he had marked out—the straight and thorny road of emancipation by force.

It is in this broad way that the Harpers Ferry raid must be looked at,—not as a midnight foray of robbers and murderers. It was an act of war, and was accepted by the South as a sure omen that war was at hand. Brown told the slaveholders this in his famous conversation with [Senator James]Mason of Virginia and [Congressman Clement] Vallandigham of Ohio. "I claim to be here," he said, "carrying out a measure I believe to

be perfectly justifiable, and not to be acting the part of an incendiary or ruffian; on the contrary, I am here to aid those suffering under a great wrong. I wish to say, furthermore, that you had better—all you people of the South-prepare yourselves for a settlement of this question. It must come up for settlement sooner than you are prepared for it, and the sooner you commence that preparation the better for you. You may dispose of me very easily. I am nearly disposed of now. But this question is still to be settled; this negro question, I mean. The end of that is not yet." This was a veritable "Thus saith the Lord"—as his hearers and the whole world soon found out. But to such as then doubted the message of the prophet Brown condescended to verify his credentials in that wonderfully eloquent speech to the court that sentenced him to the gallows:

> This court acknowledges, as I suppose, the validity of the Law of God. I see a book kissed here which I suppose to be the Bible or, at least, the New Testament. That teaches me, 'that all things whatsoever I would that men should do unto me, I should do even so to them! It teaches me further, to 'remember them that are in bonds as bound with them! I endeavored to act up to that instruction. I say I am yet too young to understand that God is any respecter of persons. I believe that to have interfered as I have done-as I have always freely admitted I have done-in behalf of His despised poor, was not wrong but right.

There was John Brown's authority for the capture of Harpers Ferry,—the same which Ethan Allen alleged, with less reason, at Ticonderoga, where he commanded surrender "in the name of the great Jehovah." Brown "had gone to be a soldier in the army of the Lord" long before his death, and the song of the people marching to avenge that death were but the public proclamation of his commission from above. Since the details of that strange conversation with Mason of Virginia have faded from the popular memory, let me quote another passage in which Brown pursues the same line of reasoning he afterward held in court.

> SENATOR MASON: How do you justify your acts?
>
> CAPTAIN BROWN: I think, my friend, you are guilty of a great wrong against God and humanity—I say it without wishing to be offensive,—and it would be perfectly right for any one to interfere with you so far as to free those you willfully and wickedly hold in bondage. I do not say this insultingly.
>
> SENATOR MASON: I understand that.
>
> CAPTAIN BROWN: I think I did right, and that others will do right who interfere with you, at any time, and all times. I hold that the golden rule, "Do unto others as you would that others should do unto you," applies to all who would help others to gain their liberty.
>
> LIEUTENANT [J.E.B.] STUART: But you don't believe in the Bible?

> CAPTAIN BROWN: Certainly I do. I want you to understand, gentlemen, that I respect the rights of the poorest and weakest of the colored people, oppressed by the slave system, just as much as I do those of the most wealthy and powerful. That is the idea that has moved me, and that alone. We expected no reward except the satisfaction of endeavoring to do for those in distress—the greatly oppressed—as we would be done by. The cry of distress of the oppressed is my reason, and the only thing that prompted me to come here.

Brown's plan of action in Virginia was wholly his own, as he more than once declared; and it was not until he had long formed and matured it that he made it known (so far as an attack on slavery in Virginia was concerned) to the few friends who shared his confidence in that matter. I cannot say how numerous these were; but beyond his own family and the armed followers who accompanied him, I have never supposed that his Virginia plan was known to fifty persons. Even to those few it was not fully communicated, though they knew that he meant to fortify himself somewhere in the mountains of Virginia or Tennessee, and from that fastness, with his band of soldiers, sally out and liberate slaves by force. His plan to this extent was known, early in 1858, by Frederick Douglass, Gerrit Smith (at whose house and in whose presence I first heard Brown declare it), Theodore Parker, Dr. S. G. Howe, George L. Steams, T. W. Higginson, and myself, and we all raised money to aid Brown in carrying this plan forward.

I know this, because some of the money and nearly all the correspondence relating to the contributions passed through my hands in 1858-9. I talked more than once in those years with all the persons above named, concerning Brown's Virginia plans and had letters from all except Douglass in regard to it. Brown's general purpose of attacking slavery by force, in Missouri or elsewhere, was known in 1857—to R. W. Emerson, A. Bronson Alcott, Henry Thoreau, Wendell Phillips, Thomas Russell, John A. Andrew, and others of the anti-slavery men of Massachusetts, none of whom discountenanced it, while most of them, in my hearing, distinctly approved it, generally, however, as a last resort or a measure of retaliation for the outrages of the slaveholders and their allies. Had these gentlemen known of the Virginia plan, most of them would have strongly disapproved it as premature or impracticable. Such, also, it seemed at first, and generally afterward, to those of us who contributed money to aid Brown in it. I speak particularly of Gerrit Smith, Theodore Parker, George L. Steams, Dr. Howe, Col. Higginson, and myself. But we all felt, as Governor Andrew afterward said, that whatever the old worthy might plan or do, "John Brown himself was right," and upon that feeling we acted, in spite of doubts and many misgivings. The end has justified our instinctive sentiment; and it has more than justified, it has glorified Brown. I do not wonder that Virginians cannot all see this yet; but the world sees it. . . .

I knew John Brown well. He was often at my house and at the houses of my friends and I traveled with him for days. He was what all his speeches, letters, and actions avouch him—a simple, brave, heroic person incapable of anything selfish or base. The higher elements of his character are well seen in the portrait which accompanies these pages There were darker and sterner traits which fitted him for the grim work he had to do

and which are better shown in his bearded portraits, and in some which I possess, taken in the year 1857. But the face that here looks out upon us bespeaks that warm love for God's despised poor which was his deepest trait, and that noble disregard of everything but justice which distinguished his every action. But above and beyond these personal qualities he was what we may best term a historic character; that is, he had, like Cromwell and Spartacus, a certain predestined relation to the political crisis of his time, for which his character fitted him and which, had he striven against it, he could not avoid. Like Cromwell and all the great Calvinists, he was an unquestioning believer in God's fore-ordination and the divine guidance of human affairs; but he was free from the taint of guile that disfigured Cromwell's greatness. Of course, he could not rank with Cromwell or with many inferior men in leadership; but in this God-appointed, inflexible devotion to his object in life he was inferior to no man, and he rose in fame far above more gifted persons because of this very fixedness and simplicity of character. . .

Young men never knew, perhaps, and some old men have forgotten, that we once had statesmen (so called) who loudly declared that negro slavery was the basis not only of our national greatness, but of the white man's freedom. This groveling doctrine found favor in Virginia in John Brown's time, and it was his work, as much as any man's, to overthrow it. A hundred years ago one of the great Virginians, a statesman indeed by nature and by training, said:

> With what execration should that statesman be loaded who, permitting one-half the citizens to trample on the rights of the other, transforms those into despots and these into enemies? Can the liberties of a nation be deemed secure when we have removed their only firm basis-a conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties are the gift of God, that they are not to be violated without his wrath? Indeed, I tremble for my country (Virginia) when I reflect that God is just, that His justice cannot sleep forever; that, considering numbers, nature, and natural means only, a revolution of the wheel of fortune is among possible events; that it may become probable by supernatural interference. The Almighty has no attribute that can take sides with us in such a contest.

This was the language of Jefferson in his *Notes on Virginia*, written in 1783, and it was in the county of Jefferson that Brown made his foray in 1859. He harbored in the county of Washington, in Maryland, for three months. He descended upon Jefferson County in Virginia at the end of that time; and when the astonished successors of Washington and Jefferson saw him first, he held in his hand Washington's sword, and was enacting Jefferson's Declaration of Independence in favor of the slaves of Colonel Washington,—that the Scriptures might be fulfilled. And they were fulfilled to the utmost in the years of war and ruin that followed.

At the critical period of that civil war when its issue was still undecided save in the councils of heaven, at the close of the year 1862 Abraham Lincoln put forth his first edict of emancipation, and followed it up, January 1, 1863, with the final proclamation that

Franklin Benjamin Sanborn (1823–1908)
Dictionary of American Portraits (Toronto: Dover Publications, Inc., 1967), p. 542.

the slaves in the rebellious States were from that day free. John Brown had been in his woodland grave among the Adirondack Mountains but little more than three years when we saw this triumph of his hopes, this crown of his toil and martyrdom. His friends gathered to celebrate so happy an event at the house of one of the most faithful and active of his supporters in the Virginia campaign, George Steams, of Medford, in Massachusetts. It was one of the last of those meetings in which the old anti-slavery men and women came together with hearts united, and rejoiced together face to face. [William Lloyd] Garrison and [Wendell] Phillips were there, [Ralph Waldo] Emerson and [Bronson] Alcott (Thoreau had died eight months before), Dr. Howe and his poetic wife [Julia Ward Howe], Mrs. [Lydia] Child, Moncure Conway, Martin Conway of Kansas, and many others now dead or widely sundered. . . .

John Brown came to prominence in an age by no means grand or noble; but such was his own heroic character that he conferred importance on events in themselves trivial. His petty conflicts in Kansas and the details of his two days' campaign in Virginia will be remembered when a hundred battles of our civil war are forgotten. He was one of ten thousand, and, as Thoreau said, could not be tried by a jury of his peers, because his peers did not exist; yet so much was he in accord with what is best in the American character that he will stand in history for one type of our people, as Franklin and Lincoln do, but with a difference. He embodied the distinctive qualities of the Puritan, but with a strong tincture of the more humane sentiments of later times. No man could be more sincere in his faith toward God, more earnest in love for man; his belief in fore-ordination was absolute, his courage not less so. The emotion of fear seemed to be quite unknown to him, except in the form of diffidence,—if that were not rather a sort of pride. He was diffident of his power in speech or writing, yet who, of all his countrymen, has uttered more effective or immortal words?

Part of the service he rendered to his country was by this heroic impersonation of traits that all mankind recognize as noble. The cause of the poor slave had need of all the charm that romantic courage could give it; his defenders were treated with the contempt which attached to himself. They were looked upon with aversion by patriots; they were odious to trade, distasteful to fashion and learning, impious in the sight of the Church. At the single stroke of Brown, all this was changed; the cause that had been despised suddenly became hated, feared, and respected; and out of this new fear and hatred our national safety was born. Ten years more of disgraceful security, and the nation might have been lost; but the rash and frantic efforts of the South to defend its barbarous system brought on the revolution that has regenerated us politically. No doubt

the affair at Harpers Ferry hastened our political crisis by at least ten years,—and what fatal years they might have been but for John Brown! . . .

Source Note: This excerpt was written in 1883 as a comment on a Virginian's account of John Brown's Raid on Harpers Ferry and was originally published as a "Comment By A Radical Abolitionist," *The Century Magazine,* 26 (July 1883), 411–15, in response to Alexander R. Boteler's "Recollections of the John Brown Raid by a Virginian Who Witnessed the Fight," *Ibid.,* 399-411.

Questions for Discussion:

1. How does Sanborn characterize the state of the nation prior to John Brown's Harpers Ferry raid? How might Southerners disagree with Sanborn's view?

2. How does Sanborn characterize John Brown? Why does he feel this way?

NATIONAL LEAGUE OF COLORED WOMEN IN FRONT OF JOHN BROWN'S FORT, 1896

National Park Association

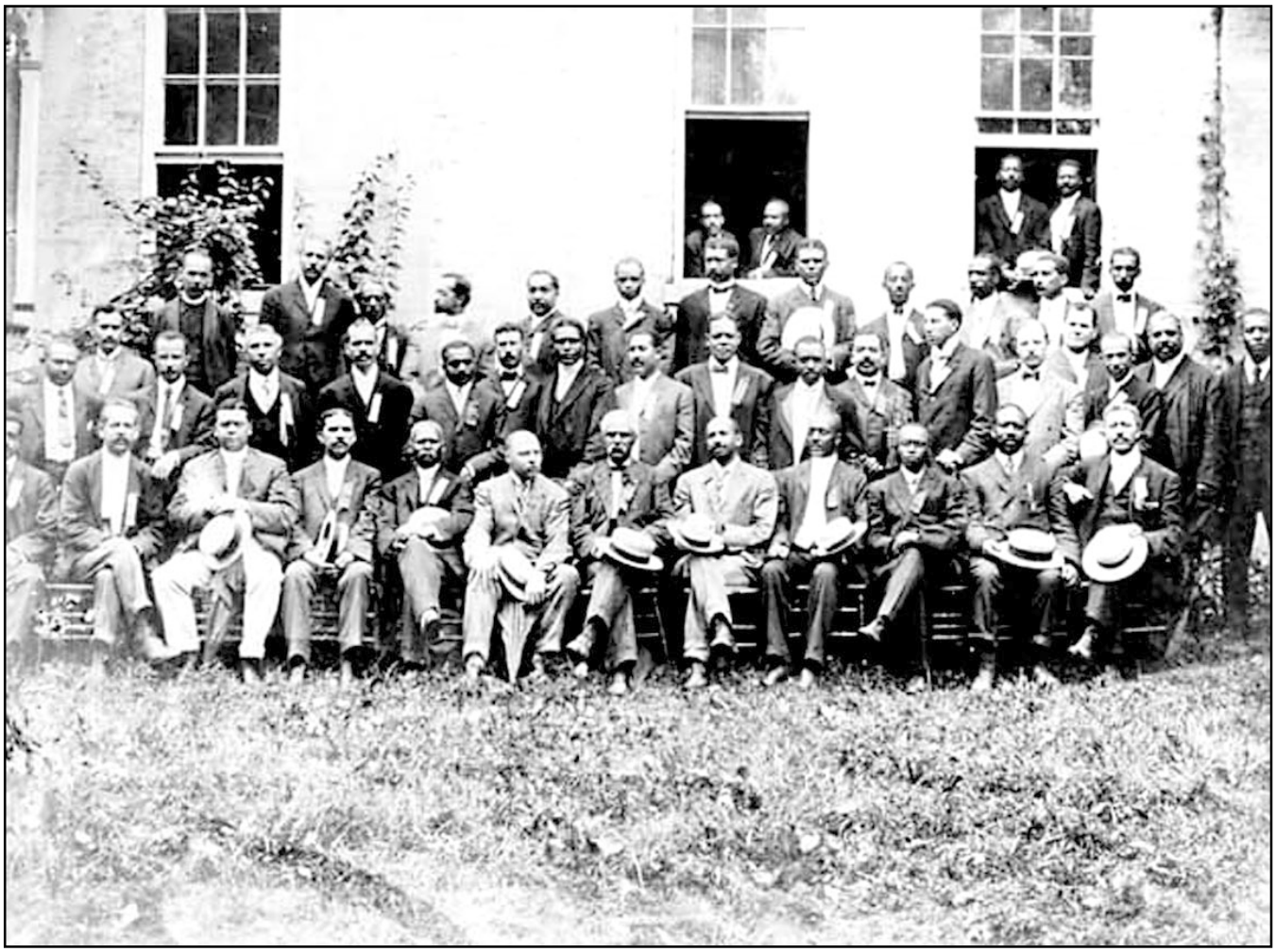
From 1895–1909, John Brown's Fort stood on the Alexander Murphy Farm on a bluff overlooking the Shenandoah River. In this photograph taken on Juoy 14, 1896, members of a pilgrim party from the National League of Colored Women pose in front of the fort.

NIAGARA MOVEMENT LEADERS AT HARPERS FERRY, 1906

National Park Association

Niagara Movement leaders W.E.B. DuBois (seated), and (left to right) J.F. Clifford, L.M. Hershaw, and F.H.M. Murray at Harpers Ferry on April 17, 1906. The Niagara Movement was an early civil rights organization and a precursor to the NAACP.

DELEGATES TO THE SECOND NIAGARA CONFERENCE, 1906



National Park Association

Delegates to the Second Niagara Conference pose in front of Anthony Hall on the Storer College campus in Harpers Ferry on April 17, 1906.

Photograph Analysis Worksheet

STEP 1. NAME OF PHOTOGRAPH_____

STEP 2: OBSERVATION

A. Study the photograph for 2 minutes. Form an overall impression of the photograph and then examine individual items. Next, divide the photograph into quadrants and study each section to see what new details become visible.

B. Use the chart below to describe the people, objects, and activities in the photograph.

People	Objects	Activities

STEP 3. INFERENCE

Based on what you have observed above, list three things you might infer from this photograph.

_____

_____

_____

_____

STEP 4: QUESTIONS

A. What questions does this photograph raise in your mind?

_____

_____

_____

B. Where could you find answers to them?

_____

_____

_____

Adapted from the Photograph Analysis Worksheet designed and developed by the Education Staff, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC 20408

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

The following suggested readings provide a more extensive coverage of the topics and events presented in the unit of study.

Abels, Jules. *Man on Fire: John Brown and the Cause of Liberty.* New York: 1971.

Remains a classic work on John Brown and a sympathetic overall narrative.

Banks, Russell. *Cloudsplitter: A Novel.* New York: HarperCollins, 1998.

Chosen by the *New York Times* as one of the eleven best books of the year, Banks's fictional account is told through the eyes of Owen Brown, third son of John Brown and one of only three men to escape capture or death in the raid. Owen's ambivalence toward his father is a featured characteristic of the story and reflects the continued fascination with the true nature of the historical John Brown. The book deals with Brown's entire life and, though it alters some events and chronology in the story, it is based on a thorough acquaintance with the historical record and presents a fascinating portrayal of John Brown's commanding presence, idealism, antislavery views and motivation.

Davis, Julia. *The Anvil: The Trial of John Brown*. Elmsford, NY: Harper & Row Publishers, 1963.

The Anvil is a two-act play largely based on the transcript of the Brown trial.

Drescher, Seymour. "Servile Insurrection and John Brown's Body in Europe," *Journal of American History,* 80 (September 1993), 499-524.

Drescher reviews the European response to John Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry noting the muted tone of that response. With the exception of Victor Hugo's sympathetic and supportive writings in defense of Brown, few well-known European literary figures were involved in the debate over Brown's actions.

Finkelman, Paul, ed. *His Soul Goes Marching On: Responses to John Brown and the Harpers Ferry Raid.* Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995.

An indispensable collection of articles dealing with John Brown and the Harpers Ferry Raid by writers including Seymour Drescher (reprinting *JAH* article cited above), Paul Finkelman, Charles Joyner, Robert McClone, Peter Wallerstein and Bertram Wyatt-Brown.

McClone, Robert E. "Rescripting a Troubled Past: John Brown's Family and the Harpers Ferry Conspiracy," *Journal of American History,* 75 (March 1989), 1179-1200.

McClone points out how surviving members of the Brown family dealt with the legacy of John Brown's raid and how the memory of earlier events were "resripted" over time. Family members divided over that legacy, some supporting Brown's idealism and antislavery views, others feeling ashamed over his violence and fanaticism.

National Park Service. *John Brown's Raid.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, 1974.

An excellent brief account of John Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry, with photographs of the raiders and participants. It also includes several well-defined maps of Harpers Ferry, including the Federal arsenal and Halls Rifle Works.

Oates, Stephen B. *To Purge This Land with Blood: A Biography of John Brown.* New York: Harper & Row, 1970.

Still the best single volume biography of John Brown; includes much information on the background and aftermath of the raid.

Oates, Stephen B. *The Approaching Fury: Voices of the Storm, 1820-1861.* New York: HarperCollins, 1997.

Provides a good background to the Harpers Ferry raid by incorporating the views of thirteen notable Americans of the period, including John Brown, James Buchanan, John C. Calhoun, Henry Clay, Jefferson Davis, Stephen Douglas, Frederick Douglass, George Fitzhugh, William Lloyd Garrison, and Abraham Lincoln. The viewpoints expressed are taken from the speeches, writings, and letters of the participants and although some are taken out of context, they provide a valuable view of the sectional issues dividing Americans in the period leading up to the Civil War.

Olds, Bruce. *Raising Holy Hell.* New York: Viking Penguin, 1996.

A novel that incorporates a variety of materials from newspapers, diaries, and historical accounts into the narrative. Olds views Brown as a bloodthirsty fanatic and zealot, but believes he was justified in using violence because slavery was an evil that could be ended no other way.

Quarles, Benjamin, ed. *Blacks on John Brown.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972.

John Brown was unique for his time in that he was a white man willing to sacrifice his life for the emancipation of African American slaves. Quarles's provides a variety of contemporary and modern examples of the depth of feeling and support displayed by African Americans toward John Brown.

Renehan, Edward J., Jr. *The Secret Six: The True Tale of the Men Who Conspired with John Brown.* Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1997.

The best study of the Secret Six — Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Samuel Gridley Howe, Theodore Parker, Francis Sanborn, Gerrit Smith, and George Stearns — and their support of Brown's antislavery activities in Kansas and Virginia. It is a well-written and informative account that includes a wealth of material on Brown and his northern supporters and clearly notes Brown's relation and friendship with many northern abolitionists.

Smith, Lacey Baldwin. "John Brown: 'Let Them Hang Me,'" in *Fools, Martryrs, Traitors: The Story of Martyrdom in the Western World,* edited by Lacey Baldwin Smith. New York: Knopf, 1997, pp. 229-261.

Smith presents a compelling argument of how John Brown became a "successful martyr," and presents a good overview of his life and career as an antislavery exponent.

Villard, Oswald Garrison. *John Brown, 1800-1859: A Biography Fifty Years After.* New York: Knopf, 1943 (reprint of 1910 edition).

Although superceded by more modern biographies, Villard's work contains some valuable first-hand accounts and appendices. Villard was the grandson of famed abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison.