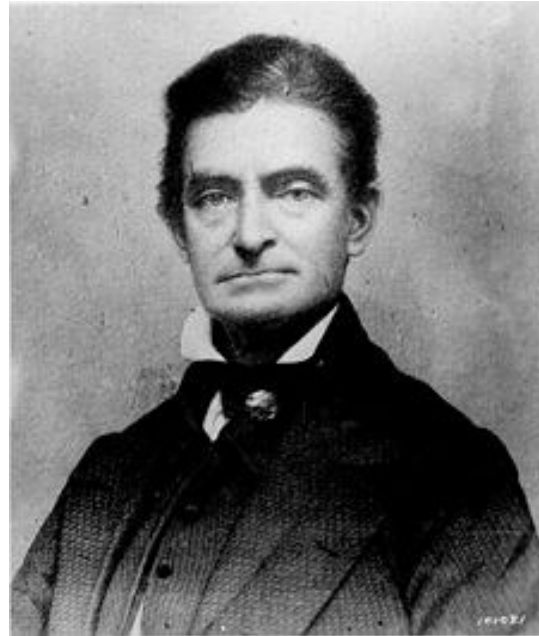


# *St Aiden's Homeschool*



*Footsteps on the Road to Learning*



*Biography*  
*John Brown*  
*With Note Pages*



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Donnette E Davis

**John Brown** (May 9, 1800 December 2, 1859) was an American abolitionist who advocated and practiced armed insurrection as a means to end all slavery. He led the Pottawatomie Massacre in 1856 in Bleeding Kansas and made his name in the unsuccessful raid at Harpers Ferry in 1859.

President Abraham Lincoln said he was a "misguided fanatic" and Brown has been called "the most controversial of all 19th-century Americans." His attempt in 1859 to start a liberation movement among enslaved African Americans in Harpers Ferry, Virginia electrified the nation. He was tried for treason against the state of Virginia, the murder of five proslavery Southerners, and inciting a slave insurrection and was subsequently hanged. Southerners alleged that his rebellion was the tip of the abolitionist iceberg and represented the wishes of the Republican Party. Historians agree that the Harpers Ferry raid in 1859 escalated tensions that a year later led to secession and the American Civil War.

Brown first gained attention when he led small groups of volunteers during the Bleeding Kansas crisis. Unlike most other Northerners, who still advocated peaceful resistance to the pro-slavery faction, Brown demanded violent action in response to Southern aggression. Dissatisfied with the pacifism encouraged by the organized abolitionist movement, he reportedly said "These men are all talk. What we need's action - action!" During the Kansas campaign he and his supporters killed five pro-slavery southerners in what became known as the Pottawatomie Massacre in May 1856, in response to the raid of the "free soil" city of Lawrence. In 1859 he led a raid on the federal armory at Harpers Ferry, Virginia (in modern-day West Virginia). During the raid, he seized the armory; seven people (including a free black) were killed, and ten or more were injured. He intended to arm slaves with weapons from the arsenal, but the attack failed. Within 36 hours, Brown's men had fled or been killed or captured by local farmers, militiamen, and U.S. Marines led by Robert E. Lee. Brown's subsequent capture by federal forces, his trial for treason to the state of Virginia, and his execution by hanging in Charles Town, Virginia were an important part of the origins of the American Civil War, which followed sixteen months later.

When Brown was hanged after his attempt to start a slave rebellion in 1859, church bells rang, minute guns were fired, large memorial meetings took place throughout the North, and famous writers such as Emerson and Thoreau joined many Northerners in praising Brown.

Historians agree John Brown played a major role in starting the Civil War. His role and actions prior to the Civil War, as an abolitionist, and the tactics he chose still make him a controversial figure today. He's sometimes memorialized as a heroic martyr and a visionary and sometimes vilified as a madman and a terrorist. While some writers, such as Bruce Olds, describe him as a monomaniacal zealot, others, such as Stephen B. Oates, regard him as "one of the most perceptive human beings of his generation." David S. Reynolds hails the man who "killed slavery, sparked the civil war, and seeded civil rights" and Richard Owen Boyer emphasizes that Brown was "an American who gave his life that millions of other Americans might be free." For Ken Chowder he's "at certain times, a great man", but also "the father of American terrorism."

Brown's nicknames were Osawatomie Brown, Old Man Brown, Captain Brown and Old Brown of Kansas. His aliases were Nelson Hawkins, Shubel Morgan, and Isaac Smith.

Later the song "John Brown's Body" (the original title of the "Battle Hymn of the Republic") became a Union marching song during the Civil War.

## **Early years**

John Brown was born May 9, 1800, in Torrington, Connecticut. He was the fourth of the eight children of Owen Brown (February 16, 1771 May 8, 1856) and Ruth Mills (January 25, 1772 December 9, 1808) and grandson of Capt. John Brown (1728–1776).

In 1805, the family moved to Hudson, Ohio, where Owen Brown opened a tannery. Brown's father became a supporter of the Oberlin Institute (original name of Oberlin College) in its early stage, although he was ultimately critical of the school's "Perfectionist" leanings, especially renowned in the preaching and teaching of Charles Finney and Asa Mahan. Recent suggestions that the Browns were heavily influenced by dissenting Presbyterians and other forms of neo-Calvinism at this period are incorrect. Although Brown withdrew his membership from the Congregational church in the 1840s and never officially joined another church, both he and his father Owen were fairly conventional, conservative evangelical Calvinists throughout their lives. Brown's conservative personal religion's fairly well documented in the papers of the Rev Clarence Gee, a Brown family expert, now held in the Hudson [Ohio] Library and Historical Society.

As a child, Brown lived briefly in Ohio with Jesse R. Grant, father of future general and U.S. President Ulysses S. Grant.

At the age of 16, John Brown left his family and went to Plainfield, Massachusetts, where he enrolled in a preparatory program. Shortly afterward, he transferred to the Morris Academy in Litchfield, Connecticut. He hoped to become a Congregationalist minister, but money ran out and he suffered from eye inflammations, which forced him to give up the academy and return to Ohio. In Hudson, he worked briefly at his father's tannery before opening a successful tannery of his own outside of town with his adopted brother.

In 1820, Brown married Dianthe Lusk. Their first child, John Jr, was born 13 months later. In 1825, Brown and his family moved to New Richmond, Pennsylvania, where he bought 200 acres (81 hectares) of land. He cleared an eighth of it and built a cabin, a barn, and a tannery. Within a year the tannery employed 15 men. Brown also made money raising cattle and surveying. He helped to establish a post office and a school. During this period, Brown operated an interstate business involving cattle and leather production along with a kinsman, Seth Thompson, from eastern Ohio.

In 1831, one of his sons died. Brown fell ill, and his businesses began to suffer, which left him in terrible debt. In the summer of 1832, shortly after the death of a newborn son, his wife Dianthe died. On June 14, 1833, Brown married 16-year-old Mary Ann Day (April 15, 1817—May 1, 1884), originally of Meadville, Pennsylvania. They eventually had 13 children, in addition to the seven children from his previous marriage.

In 1836, Brown moved his family to Franklin Mills, Ohio (now known as Kent). There he borrowed money to buy land in the area, building and operating a tannery along the Cuyahoga River in partnership with Zenas Kent. (External Link [🔗](#)) He suffered great

financial losses in the economic crisis of 1839, which struck the western states more severely than had the Panic of 1837. Following the heavy borrowing trends of Ohio, many businessmen like Brown trusted too heavily in credit and state bonds and paid dearly for it. In one episode of property loss, Brown was even jailed when he attempted to retain ownership of a farm by occupying it against the claims of the new owner. Like other determined men of his time and background, he tried many different business efforts in an attempt to get out of debt. Along with tanning hides and cattle trading, he also undertook horse and sheep breeding, the last of which was to become a notable aspect of his pre-public vocation.

In 1837, in response to the murder of Elijah P. Lovejoy, Brown publicly vowed: "Here, before God, in the presence of these witnesses, from this time, I consecrate my life to the destruction of slavery!" Brown was declared bankrupt by a federal court on September 28, 1842. In 1843, four of his children died of dysentery. As Louis DeCaro Jr shows in his biographical sketch (2007), from the mid-1840s Brown had built a reputation as an expert in fine sheep and wool, and entered into a partnership with Simon Perkins Jr of Akron, Ohio, whose flocks and farms were managed by Brown and sons. Brown eventually moved into a home with his family across the street from the Perkins' Mansion located on Perkins Hill. Both homes still remain and are owned and operated by the Summit County Historical Society. As Brown's associations grew among sheep farmers of the region, his expertise was often discussed in agricultural journals even as he widened the scope of his travels in conjunction with sheep and wool concerns (which often brought him into contact with other fervent anti-slavery people as well). In 1846, Brown and Perkins set up a wool commission operation in Springfield, Mass., to represent the interests of wool growers against the dominant interests of New England's manufacturers. Brown naively trusted the manufacturers at first, but soon came to realize they were determined to maintain control of price setting and feared the empowerment of the farmers. To make matters worse, the sheep farmers were largely unorganized and unwilling to improve the quality and production of their wools for market. As shown in the *Ohio Cultivator*, Brown and other wool growers had already complained about this problem as something that hurt U.S. wools abroad. Brown made a last-ditch effort to overcome the manufacturers by seeking an alliance with European-based manufacturers, but was ultimately disappointed to learn that they also wanted to buy American wools cheaply. Brown traveled to England to seek a higher price. The trip was a disaster as he incurred a loss of \$40,000 (over \$980,000 in today's dollars), of which Col. Perkins bore the lion's share.

The Perkins and Brown commission operation closed in 1849; subsequent lawsuits tied up the partners for several more years, though popular narrators have exaggerated the unfortunate demise of the firm with respect to Brown's life and decisions. Perkins absorbed much of the loss, and their partnership continued for several more years, Brown nearly breaking even by 1854. The men remained friends after ending their partnership amicably. Brown was a man of great talent and judgement in farming and sheep raising, but he wasn't a business administrator. The Perkins and Brown years not only reveal Brown as a man with a widely appreciated specialization (long since forgotten), but reflect his perennial zeal for the underdog which drove him to struggle on behalf of the economically vulnerable farmers of Ohio, Pennsylvania, and western Virginia a decade before his guerrilla activities in Kansas.

### **Homestead in New York**

In 1848, Brown heard of Gerrit Smith's Adirondack land grants to poor black men, and decided to move his family among the new settlers. He bought land near North Elba, New York (near Lake Placid), for \$1 an acre, although he spent little time there. After he was executed, his wife took his body there for burial. Since 1895, the farm has been owned by New York state. The John Brown Farm and Gravesite's now a National Historic Landmark.

### **Actions in Kansas**

In 1855, Brown learned from his adult sons in the Kansas territory that pro-slavery forces there were militant and that their families were completely unprepared to face attack. Determined to protect his family and oppose the advances of pro-slavery supporters, Brown left for Kansas, enlisting a son-in-law and making several stops just to collect funds and weapons. As reported by the New York *Tribune*, Brown stopped en route to participate in an anti-slavery convention that took place in June 1855 in Albany, New York. Despite the controversy that ensued on the convention floor regarding the support of violent efforts on behalf of the free state cause, several individuals provided Brown some solicited financial support. As he went westward, however, Brown found more militant support in his home state of Ohio, particularly in the strongly anti-slavery Western Reserve section where he'd been reared.

### **Pottawatomie**

Brown and the free state settlers were optimistic that they could bring Kansas into the union as a slavery-free state. But in late 1855 and early 1856 it was increasingly clear to Brown that pro-slavery forces were willing to violate the rule of law in order to force Kansas to become a slave state. Brown believed that terrorism, fraud, and eventually deadly attacks became the obvious agenda of the pro-slavery supporters, then known as "Border Ruffians." After the winter snows thawed in 1856, the pro-slavery activists began a campaign to seize Kansas on their own terms. Brown was particularly affected by the Sacking of Lawrence in May 1856, in which a sheriff-led posse destroyed newspaper offices and a hotel. Only one man was killed, and it was a Border Ruffian. Preston Brooks's caning of anti-slavery Senator Charles Sumner also fueled Brown's anger. These violent acts were accompanied by celebrations in the pro-slavery press, with writers such as Benjamin Franklin Stringfellow of the *Squatter Sovereign* proclaiming that pro-slavery forces "are determined to repel this Northern invasion, and make Kansas a Slave State; though our rivers should be covered with the blood of their victims, and the carcasses of the Abolitionists should be so numerous in the territory as to breed disease and sickness, we won't be deterred from our purpose" (quoted in Reynolds, p. 162). Brown was outraged by both the violence of the pro-slavery forces, and also by what he saw as a weak and cowardly response by the antislavery partisans and the Free State settlers, who he described as "cowards, or worse" (Reynolds pp. 163–164).

Biographer Louis A. DeCaro Jr. further shows that Brown's beloved father, Owen, had died on May 8, 1856 and correspondence indicates that John Brown and his family received word of his death around the same time. The emotional darkness of the hour was intensified by the real concerns that Brown had for the welfare of his sons and the free state settlers in their vicinity, especially since the sacking of Lawrence seems to have signaled an all-out campaign of violence by pro-slavery forces. Brown conducted surveillance on encamped "ruffians" in his vicinity and learned that his family was

marked for attack, and furthermore was given reliable information as to pro-slavery neighbors who'd aligned and supported these forces. The pro-slavery men didn't necessarily own any slaves, although the Doyles (three of the victims) were slave hunters prior to settling in Kansas. According to Salmon Brown, when the Doyles were seized, Mahala Doyle acknowledged that her husband's "devilment" had brought down this attack to their doorstep further signifying that the Browns' attack was probably grounded in real concern for their own survival.

Sometime after 10:00 pm May 24, 1856, it's suspected they took five pro-slavery settlers James Doyle, William Doyle, Drury Doyle, Allen Wilkinson, and William Sherman from their cabins on Pottawatomie Creek and hacked them to death with broadswords. Brown later claimed he didn't participate in the killings, however he did say he approved of them. Although neither of Brown's boys were present at the attack, they were beaten by other pro-slavery men of Pottawatomie.

### **Palmyra and Osawatomie**

A force of Missourians, led by Captain Henry Pate, captured John Jr. and Jason, and destroyed the Brown family homestead, and later participated in the Sack of Lawrence. On June 2, John Brown, nine of his followers, and twenty local men successfully defended a Free State settlement at Palmyra, Kansas against an attack by Pate. (See *Battle of Black Jack*.) Pate and twenty-two of his men were taken prisoner (Reynolds pp. 180–181, 186). After capture, they were taken to Brown's camp, and received all the food that Brown could find. Brown forced Pate to sign a treaty, exchanging the freedom of Pate and his men for the promised release of Brown's two captured sons. Brown released Pate to Colonel Edwin Sumner, but was furious to discover that the release of his sons was delayed until September.

In August, a company of over three hundred Missourians under the command of Major General John W. Reid crossed into Kansas and headed towards Osawatomie, Kansas, intending to destroy the Free State settlements there, and then march on Topeka and Lawrence.

On the morning of August 30, 1856, they shot and killed Brown's son Frederick and his neighbor David Garrison on the outskirts of Pottawatomie. Brown, outnumbered more than seven to one, arranged his 38 men behind natural defenses along the road. Firing from cover, they managed to kill at least 20 of Reid's men and wounded 40 more. Reid regrouped, ordering his men to dismount and charge into the woods. Brown's small group scattered and fled across the Marais des Cygnes River. One of Brown's men was killed during the retreat and four were captured. While Brown and his surviving men hid in the woods nearby, the Missourians plundered and burned Osawatomie. Despite being defeated, Brown's bravery and military shrewdness in the face of overwhelming odds brought him national attention and made him a hero to many Northern abolitionists, who gave him the nickname "Osawatomie Brown". This incident was dramatized in the play *Osawatomie Brown*.

On September 7, Brown entered Lawrence to meet with Free State leaders and help fortify against a feared assault. At least 2,700 pro-slavery Missourians were once again invading Kansas. On September 14 they skirmished near Lawrence. Brown prepared for battle, but serious violence was averted when the new governor of Kansas, John W. Geary, ordered the warring parties to disarm and disband, and offered clemency to former fighters on both sides. Brown, taking advantage of the fragile peace, left Kansas with three of his sons to raise money from supporters in the north.

## Later years

### Gathering forces

By November 1856, Brown had returned to the East to solicit more funds. He spent the next two years traveling New England raising funds. Amos Adams Lawrence, a prominent Boston merchant, contributed a large amount of capital. Franklin Benjamin Sanborn, secretary for the Massachusetts State Kansas Committee, introduced Brown to several influential abolitionists in the Boston area in January 1857. They included William Lloyd Garrison, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Theodore Parker and George Luther Stearns, and Samuel Gridley Howe. A group of six wealthy abolitionists Sanborn, Higginson, Parker, Stearns, Howe, and Gerrit Smith agreed to offer Brown financial support for his antislavery activities; they'd eventually provide most of the financial backing for the raid on Harpers Ferry, and would come to be known as the Secret Six and the Committee of Six. Brown often requested help from them with "no questions asked" and it remains unclear of how much of Brown's scheme the Secret Six were aware.

On January 7, 1858, the Massachusetts Committee pledged to 200 Sharps Rifles and ammunition, which was being stored at Tabor, Iowa. In March, Brown contracted Charles Blair of Collinsville, Connecticut for 1,000 pikes. In the following months, Brown continued to raise funds, visiting Worcester, Springfield, New Haven, Syracuse and Boston. In Boston he met Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson. He received many pledges but little cash. In March, while in New York City, he was introduced to Hugh Forbes, an English mercenary, who'd experience as a military tactician gained while fighting with Giuseppe Garibaldi in Italy in 1848. Brown hired him to be the drillmaster for his men and to write their tactical handbook. They agreed to meet in Tabor that summer.

Using the alias Nelson Hawkins, Brown traveled through the Northeast and then went to visit his family in Hudson, Ohio. On August 7, he arrived in Tabor. Forbes arrived two days later. Over several weeks, the two men put together a "Well-Matured Plan" for fighting slavery in the South. The men quarreled over many of the details. In November, their troops left for Kansas. Forbes hadn't received his salary and was still feuding with Brown, so he returned to the East instead of venturing into Kansas. He'd soon threaten to expose the plot to the government.

Because the October elections saw a free-state victory, Kansas was quiet. Brown made his men return to Iowa, where he fed them tidbits of his Virginia scheme. In January 1858, Brown left his men in Springdale, Iowa, and set off to visit Frederick Douglass in Rochester, New York. There he discussed his plans with Douglass, and reconsidered Forbes' criticisms. Brown wrote a Provisional Constitution that'd create a government for a new state in the region of his invasion. Brown then traveled to Peterboro, New York and Boston to discuss matters with the Secret Six. In letters to them, he indicated that, along with recruits, he'd go into the South equipped with weapons to do "Kansas work".

Brown and twelve of his followers, including his son Owen, traveled to Chatham, Ontario where he convened on May 8 a Constitutional Convention. The convention was put together with the help of Dr. Martin Delany. One-third of Chatham's 6,000 residents were fugitive slaves, and it was here that Brown was introduced to Harriet Tubman. The convention assembled 34 blacks and 12 whites to adopt Brown's Provisional Constitution. According to Delany, during the convention, Brown illuminated his plans to make Kansas rather than Canada the end of the Underground Railroad. This

would be the Subterranean Pass Way. He never mentioned or hinted at the idea of Harpers Ferry. But Delany's reflections aren't entirely trustworthy. By 1858, Brown was no longer looking toward Kansas and was entirely focused on Virginia. Other testimony from the Chatham meeting suggests Brown did speak of going South. Brown had long used the terminology of the Subterranean Pass Way from the late 1840s, so it's possible that Delany conflated Brown's statements over the years. Regardless, Brown was elected commander-in-chief and he named John Henrie Kagi as Secretary of War. Richard Realf was named Secretary of State. Elder Monroe, a black minister, was to act as president until another was chosen. A.M. Chapman was the acting vice president; Delany, the corresponding secretary. Either during this time or shortly after, the Declaration of the Slave Population of the U.S.A. was written.

Although nearly all of the delegates signed the Constitution, very few delegates volunteered to join Brown's forces, although it'll never be clear how many Canadian expatriates actually intended to join Brown because of a subsequent "security leak" that threw off plans for the raid, creating a hiatus in which Brown lost contact with many of the Canadian leaders. This crisis occurred when Hugh Forbes, Brown's mercenary, tried to expose the plans to Massachusetts Senator Henry Wilson and others. The Secret Six feared their names would be made public. Howe and Higginson wanted no delays in Brown's progress, while Parker, Stearns, Smith and Sanborn insisted on postponement. Stearn and Smith were the major sources of funds, and their words carried more weight.

To throw Forbes off the trail and to invalidate his assertions, Brown returned to Kansas in June, and he remained in that vicinity for six months. There he joined forces with James Montgomery, who was leading raids into Missouri. On December 20, Brown led his own raid, in which he liberated eleven slaves, took captive two white men, and stole horses and wagons. On January 20, 1859, he embarked on a lengthy journey to take the eleven liberated slaves to Detroit and then on a ferry to Canada.

Over the course of the next few months he traveled again through Ohio, New York, Connecticut and Massachusetts to draw up more support for the cause. On May 9, he delivered a lecture in Concord, Massachusetts. In attendance were Bronson Alcott, Rockwell Hoar, Emerson and Thoreau. Brown also reconnoitered with the Secret Six. In June he paid his last visit to his family in North Elba, before he departed for Harpers Ferry.

## Raid

Brown arrived in Harpers Ferry on July 3, 1859. A few days later, under the name Isaac Smith, he rented a farmhouse in nearby Maryland. He awaited the arrival of his recruits. They never materialized in the numbers he expected. In late August he met with Douglass in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, where he revealed the Harpers Ferry plan. Douglass expressed severe reservations, rebuffing Brown's pleas to join the mission. Douglass had actually known about Brown's plans from early in 1859 and had made a number of efforts to discourage blacks from enlisting.

In late September, the 950 pikes arrived from Charles Blair. Kagi's draft plan called for a brigade of 4,500 men, but Brown had only 21 men (16 white and 5 black: three free blacks, one freed slave, and a fugitive slave). They ranged in age from 21 to 49. Twelve of them had been with Brown in Kansas raids.

On October 16, 1859, Brown (leaving three men behind as a rear guard) led 19 men in an attack on the Harpers Ferry Armory. He'd received 200 Beecher's Bibles -- breechloading .52 caliber Sharps carbines -- and pikes from northern abolitionist

societies in preparation for the raid. The armory was a large complex of buildings that contained 100,000 muskets and rifles, which Brown planned to seize and use to arm local slaves. They'd then head south, drawing off more and more slaves from plantations, and fighting only in self-defense. As Frederick Douglass and Brown's family testified, his strategy was essentially to deplete Virginia of its slaves, causing the institution to collapse in one county after another, until the movement spread into the South, essentially wreaking havoc on the economic viability of the pro-slavery states. Thus, while violence was essential to self-defense and advancement of the movement, Brown's hope was to limit and minimize bloodshed, not ignite a slave insurrection as many have charged. From the Southern point of view, of course, any effort to arm the enslaved was perceived as a definitive threat.

Initially, the raid went well, and they met no resistance entering the town. They cut the telegraph wires and easily captured the armory, which was being defended by a single watchman. They next rounded up hostages from nearby farms, including Colonel Lewis Washington, great-grandnephew of George Washington. They also spread the news to the local slaves that their liberation was at hand. Things started to go wrong when an eastbound Baltimore & Ohio train approached the town. The train's baggage master tried to warn the passengers. Brown's men yelled for him to halt and then opened fire. The baggage master, Hayward Shepherd, became the first casualty of John Brown's war against slavery. Ironically, Shepherd was a free black man. Two of the hostages' slaves also died in the raid. For some reason, after the shooting of Shepherd, Brown allowed the train to continue on its way. News of the raid reached Washington by late morning.

In the meantime, local farmers, shopkeepers, and militia pinned down the raiders in the armory by firing from the heights behind the town. Some of the local men were shot by Brown's men. At noon, a company of militia seized the bridge, blocking the only escape route. Brown then moved his prisoners and remaining raiders into the engine house, a small brick building at the entrance to the armory. He'd the doors and windows barred and loopholes were cut through the brick walls. The surrounding forces barraged the engine house, and the men inside fired back with occasional fury. Brown sent his son Watson and another supporter out under a white flag, but the angry crowd shot them. Intermittent shooting then broke out, and Brown's son Oliver was wounded. His son begged his father to kill him and end his suffering, but Brown said "If you must die, die like a man." A few minutes later he was dead. The exchanges lasted throughout the day. By the morning of October 18 the engine house, later known as John Brown's Fort, was surrounded by a company of U.S. Marines under the command of Colonel Robert E. Lee of the United States Army. A young Army lieutenant, J.E.B. Stuart, approached under a white flag and told the raiders that their lives would be spared if they surrendered. Brown refused, saying, "No, I prefer to die here." Stuart then gave a signal. The Marines used sledge hammers and a make-shift battering-ram to break down the engine room door. Lieutenant Israel Greene cornered Brown and struck him several times, wounding his head. In three minutes Brown and the survivors were captives. Altogether Brown's men killed four people, and wounded nine. Ten of Brown's men were killed (including his sons Watson and Oliver). Five of Brown's men escaped (including his son Owen), and seven were captured along with Brown. Among the killed raiders were John Henry Kagi; Lewis Sheridan Leary and Dangerfield Newby; those hanged besides Brown were John Anthony Copeland, Jr. and Shields Green

John Brown raiders (External Link [🔗](#)):

**Killed**

John		Henry		Kagi
col2	=	Lewis	Sheridan	Leary
William		H.		Leeman
Dangerfield				Newby
col3	=		Stewart	Taylor
Dauphin				Thompson
William				Thompson
}}				

**Hanged in 1859 following the raid**

<b>Hanged</b>	<b>in</b>	<b>1860</b>	Albert	Hazlett
Aaron D. Stevens				

<b>Died</b>	<b>during</b>	<b>US</b>	<b>Civil</b>	<b>War</b>	Barclay	Coppock
Charles Plummer Tidd						

<b>Survived</b>	Osborn	Perry	Anderson
Owen			Brown
Francis Jackson Meriam			

**Imprisonment and trial**

Brown and the others captured were held in the office of the armory. On October 18, 1859, Virginia Governor Henry A. Wise, Virginia Senator James M. Mason, and Representative Clement Vallandigham of Ohio arrived in Harpers Ferry. Mason led the three-hour questioning session of Brown.

Although the attack had taken place on Federal property, Wise ordered that Brown and his men would be tried in Virginia (perhaps to avert Northern political pressure on the Federal government, or in the unlikely event of a presidential pardon). The trial began October 27, after a doctor pronounced Brown fit for trial. Brown was charged with murdering four whites and a black, with conspiring with slaves to rebel, and with treason against Virginia. A series of lawyers were assigned to Brown, who included Lawson Botts, Thomas C. Green, Samuel Chilton, a lawyer from Washington D.C., and George Hoyt, but it was Hiram Griswold, a lawyer from Cleveland, Ohio who concluded the defense on October 31. In his closing statement, Griswold argued that Brown couldn't be guilty of treason against a state to which he owed no loyalty, that Brown hadn't killed anyone himself, and that the failure of the raid indicated that Brown hadn't conspired with slaves. Andrew Hunter, the local district attorney, presented the closing arguments for the prosecution.

On November 2, after a week-long trial and 45 minutes of deliberation, the Charles Town jury found Brown guilty on all three counts. Brown was sentenced to be hanged in public on December 2. In response to the sentence, Ralph Waldo Emerson remarked that "[JohnBrown] will make the gallows glorious like the Cross." Cadets from the Virginia Military Institute under the leadership of General Francis H. Smith and Major Thomas J. Jackson (who'd earn the nickname "Stonewall" less than two years later) were called into service as a security detail in the event Brown's supporters attempted a rescue. During his month in jail, Brown was allowed to send and receive correspondence. He refused to be rescued by Silas Soule, a friend from Kansas who'd somehow infiltrated

the prison. Brown said that he was ready to die as a martyr, and Silas left him to be executed. More importantly, many of Brown's letters exuded high tones of spirituality and conviction and, when picked up by the northern press, won increasing numbers of supporters in the North as they simultaneously infuriated many in the South. On December 1, his wife joined him for his last meal. She was denied permission to stay for the night, prompting Brown to lose his composure for the only time through the ordeal.

### **Victor Hugo's reaction**

Victor Hugo, from exile on Guernsey, tried to obtain pardon for John Brown: he sent an open letter that was published by the press on both sides of the Atlantic (cf. *Actes et paroles*). This text, written at Hauteville-House on December 2, 1859, warned of a possible civil war:




### **Death and aftermath**

On the morning of December 2, Brown read his Bible and wrote a final letter to his wife, which included his will. At 11:00 he was escorted through a crowd of 2,000 soldiers. Among them were future Confederate general Stonewall Jackson and John Wilkes Booth, who borrowed a militia uniform to gain admission to the execution.

Brown was accompanied by the sheriff and his assistants, but no minister since he'd consistently rejected the ministrations of pro-slavery clergy. Since the region was in the grips of virtual hysteria, most northerners, including journalists, were run out, and it's unlikely any anti-slavery clergyman would've been safe, even if one were to have sought to visit Brown. Likely drawing strength from correspondence from northern clergy, he elected to receive no religious services in the jail or at the scaffold. He was hanged at 11:15 a.m. and pronounced dead at 11:50 a.m., and his body was placed in a wooden coffin with the noose still around his neck.

On the day of his death he wrote "I, John Brown, am now quite certain that the crimes of this guilty land will never be purged away but with blood. I'd, as I now think, vainly flattered myself that without very much bloodshed it might be done."

In 1864, his wife Mary Ann and some of Brown's remaining children moved to Red Bluff, California. At some point during their westward journey, Southern militants heard of their presence on the trail and sought to attack them, but the Browns were able to evade them.

John Brown's buried on the John Brown Farm in North Elba, New York, on the outskirts of Lake Placid. The farm and grave are located near Old Military Road. Also buried near Brown are his sons Oliver Brown  and Watson Brown . The tombstone  of Captain John Brown .

### **Senate investigation**

On December 14, 1859, the U.S. Senate appointed a bipartisan committee to investigate the Harpers Ferry raid and to determine whether any citizens contributed arms, ammunition or money. The Democrats attempted to implicate the Republicans in the raid; the Republicans tried to disassociate themselves from Brown and his acts.

The Senate committee heard testimony from 32 witnesses, including Liam Dodson, one of the surviving abolitionists. The report, authored by chairman James M. Mason, a pro-slavery politician from Virginia, was published in June, 1860. It found no direct evidence of a conspiracy, but implied that the raid was a result of Republican doctrines. The two committee Republicans published a minority report, but were apparently more concerned about denying Northern culpability than clarifying the nature of Brown's efforts. Certainly the 1860 Republican Presidential candidate, Abraham Lincoln of Illinois, echoed his party's view when he called Brown a delusional fanatic who was justly hanged.

### **Aftermath of the raid**

The raid on Harpers Ferry's generally thought to have done much to set the nation on a course toward civil war. Southern slaveowners, hearing initial reports that hundreds of abolitionists were involved, were relieved the effort was so small. Yet they feared other abolitionists would emulate Brown and attempt to lead slave rebellions. Therefore the South reorganized the decrepit militia system. These militias, well-established by 1861, became a ready-made Confederate army, making the South better prepared for war.

Southern Democrats charged that Brown's raid was an inevitable consequence of the Republican Party's political platform, which they associated with Abolitionism. In light of the upcoming elections in November 1860, the Republican political and editorial response to John Brown tried to distance themselves as much as possible from Brown, condemning the raid and dismissing Brown as an insane fanatic. As one historian explains, Brown was successful in polarizing politics: However, he defended Brown's character from detractors in the Northern and Southern press, and argued that those who supported the principles of the American Revolution couldn't consistently oppose Brown's raid. (Garrison reiterated the point, adding that "whenever commenced, I can't but wish success to all slave insurrections", in a speech in Boston on the day Brown was hanged). On December 22, 1859, John Greenleaf Whittier published a poem praising him, "Brown of Ossawatimie".

After the Civil War, Black leader Frederick Douglass wrote, "Did John Brown fail? John Brown began the war that ended American slavery and made this a free Republic. His zeal in the cause of freedom was infinitely superior to mine. Mine was as the taper light; his was as the burning sun. I could live for the slave; John Brown could die for him."

### **Posthumous view of Brown's character**

As the U.S. distanced itself from the cause of slavery and "bayonet rule" in the South, the historical view of Brown declined in a manner parallel with the demise of Reconstruction. In the 1880s, Brown's detractors some of them contemporaries

embarrassed by their fervent abolitionism began to produce virulent exposés, particularly emphasizing the Pottawatomie killings of 1856. Other intellectuals found Brown to be a forerunner of some strains of anarchism, much as contemporary scholars have frequently compared him with contemporary terrorists.

Although Oswald Garrison Villard's 1910 biography of Brown was thought to be friendly, Villard being the grandson of abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison, he also added fuel to the anti-Brown fire by criticizing him as a murderer de facto. Villard himself was a pacifist and admired Brown in many respects, but his interpretation of the facts provided a paradigm for later anti-Brown writers. By the mid-20th century, some scholars were fairly convinced that John Brown was a fanatic and killer, while some African Americans sustained a positive view of the man. Even as late as the mid 20th century, some Southerners used his name as a substitute for profanity and used the eponym as a curse.

Recent biographers accounts vary, although several works that've been published on Brown since the opening of the 21st century have marked a significant shift away from the hostility of writers on Brown. Toledo (2002), Peterson (2002), DeCaro (2002, 2007), Reynolds (2005), and Carton (2006) are critically appreciative of Brown's history, far from the opinions of earlier writers. A division of opinion's evident in two recent works of historical fiction: Bruce Olds's 1995 "Raising Holy Hell", which portrays Brown as a religious zealot tortured by delusions of godly violence; and the more unapologetically sympathetic fictional portrayal of Brown found in Russell Banks's 1998 "Cloudsplitter". The shift to an appreciative perspective on Brown moves many white historians toward the view long held by black scholars such as W. E. B. DuBois, Benjamin Quarles, and Lerone Bennett Jr. Writing in the 1970s, Albert Fried, a biographer and historiographer of Brown, concluded that historians who portrayed Brown as a dysfunctional figure are "really informing me of their predilections, their judgment of the historical event, their identification with the moderates and opposition to the 'extremists.'" Unfortunately it's this less studied, highly interpretive view of Brown that's prevailed in academic writing as well as in journalism; as biographer Louis DeCaro Jr. has recently written, "there's no consensus of fairness with respect to Brown in either the academy or the media." The current trend among some writers to portray Brown as another Timothy Mc Veigh or Osama bin Laden may still reflect the same bias that Fried discussed a generation ago. DeCaro likewise complains of writers taking "unstudied liberties" and concludes that in the 20th century alone, "poisonous portrayals [of Brown were] so prevalent as virtually to have formed one long screed of hyperbole and sarcasm in the name of historical narrative."

- Biographer Richard Owen Boyer has called him "an American who gave his life that millions of other Americans might be free";
- Biographer Stephen B. Oates has described him as "maligned as a demented dreamer... (but) in fact one of the most perceptive human beings of his generation";
- Biographer David S. Reynolds gives Brown credit for starting the civil war and "killing slavery", and cautions others against identifying Brown with terrorism. Reynolds sees him as the inspiration for the Civil Rights Movement a century later, arguing "it's misleading to identify Brown with modern terrorists."

- Historian and Brown researcher Paul Finkelman calls him "simply part of a very violent world" and states that Brown "is a bad tactician, a bad strategist, he's a bad planner, he's not a very good general-but he's not crazy"
- Biographer Louis A. DeCaro Jr., who's debunked many historical allegations about Brown's early life and public career, concludes that although he "was hardly the only abolitionist to equate slavery with sin, his struggle against slavery was far more personal and religious than it was for many abolitionists, just as his respect and affection for black people was far more personal and religious than it was for most enemies of slavery."
- Historian and Brown documentary scholar Louis Ruchames wrote: "Brown's action was one of great idealism and placed him in the company of the great liberators of mankind.";
- Biographer Otto Scott introduces his work on Brown by writing: "In the late 1850s a new type of political assassin appeared in the United States. He didn't murder the mighty--but the obscure. . . . his purposes were the same as those of his classic predecessors: to force the nation into a new political pattern by creating terror."
- Criminologist James N. Gilbert writes: "Brown's deeds conform to contemporary definitions of terrorism, and his psychological predispositions are consistent with the terrorist model."
- Novelist Bruce Olds calls him "fanatical, ... monomaniacal, ... a zealot, and ... psychologically unbalanced"; and finally
- Journalist Ken Chowder states he's "stubborn ... egoistical, self-righteous, and sometimes deceitful; yet ... at certain times, a great man"; Chowder argues that Brown has been adopted by both left and right wing, and his actions "spun" to fit the world view of the spinner at various times in American history. "
- According to his autobiography, when he was asked if white people could join his black nationalist Organization of Afro-American Unity, Malcolm X replied "maybe John Brown".
- There was also the John Brown Revolutionary League organized in 1969 in Houston, Texas and worked along The People's Party II and MAYO as the Rainbow Coalition. Radical young groups from black, white and Chicano backgrounds working to better their communities. Both the People's Party II and John Brown Revolutionary League participated in an armed stand off against abusive Houston police on July 26, 1970. Carl Hampton, Chairman of the People's Party II (later Black Panther Party) was killed in the battle. Bartee Haile, leader of the JBRL was also wounded. 400 mostly black supporters were arrested moments after the battle ended.

### Screen portrayals

The two most noted screen portrayals of Brown have both been given by actor Raymond Massey. The 1940 film *Santa Fe Trail*, starring Errol Flynn and Olivia de Havilland, depicted Brown completely unsympathetically as an out-and-out villainous madman, and Massey added to that impression by playing him with a constant, wild-eyed stare. The film gave the impression that it didn't oppose African-American slavery, even to the point of having a black "mammy" character say, after an especially fierce battle, "Mr. Brown done promised us freedom, but... if this is freedom, I don't want no part of it".

Massey portrayed Brown again in the little-known, low-budget *Seven Angry Men*, in which he wasn't only unquestionably the main character, but was depicted and acted in a much more restrained, sympathetic way.

Raymond Massey would also portray Brown on the Broadway stage, one of three characters he played in the acclaimed 1953 dramatic reading of Stephen Vincent Benet's epic poem *John Brown's Body*. Tyrone Power and Judith Anderson also starred in the production. In Book I of his epic poem, Benet called him a stone, "to batter into bits an actual wall and change the actual scheme of things."

Brown was also portrayed on film by John Cromwell in the 1940 *Abe Lincoln in Illinois* ([External Link](#)). Cromwell was the director of the film and wasn't credited in the role. Somewhat ironically, Lincoln was played by Raymond Massey, who also played Brown in the other films and productions cited in this article.

Singer Johnny Cash portrayed John Brown in Book I, Episode Five of the 1985 TV miniseries *North and South*. He's revered by character Virgilia Hazard (Kirstie Alley). During the Harpers Ferry episode, he exchanges brief words with character Orry Main (Patrick Swayze) and appears noble in his aims, but unrealistic.







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