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1 In the course of the final assault on the enginehouse of the Harper's Ferry Federal Arsenal in which John Brown had barricaded himself with the remaining members of his raiding party on the morning of October 8, 1859. Lieutenant Israel Green struck the old man with his sword before trying to run him through with a savage underthrust that raised him completely from the ground; the blade was deflected and bent double, but the assailant continued, beating his victim on the head with the hilt of his sword. John Daingerfield, one of the hostages, who was "not two feet from Brown at the time", supposed that the old man's skull was split and "did not know till some time later that Brown was not killed". As chance would have it, Lieutenant Green had left his battle sword in the barracks and was armed, at the time of the attack, with only a light dress sword - a detail that no doubt saved John Brown's life and rendered possible the prison coda that was to follow, altering in the process public perception of the meaning of the raid. For it is clear that there are two separate parts to the Harper's Ferry expedition; the first comes to a close when the United States Marines storm the enginehouse on October 18, the second ends in the apotheosis of John Brown, hung from the gallows on December 2. Between these two dates he calmly received a stream of newspapermen and visitors in his cell (Oates2 cites Coppoc's claim that no less than 800 people visited the jail in a two-day period) and kept up a voluminous correspondence with family, supporters, critics, and the simply curious. The Virginia authorities, by allowing uninterrupted access to the prisoner, and by postponing his execution so that he faced death alone, seemed perversely intent on facilitating martyrdom. His letters, writes Villard, "were a far - for them - more dangerous weapon than the Sharp's rifle they had taken from him at Harper's Ferry"; "No theatrical manager," remarked Thoreau, "could have arranged things so wisely to give effect to his behavior and words." Later historians such as Nevins,3 hostile to John Brown, will begrudge him his unerring instinct for finding and keeping the center of the stage, as if he should have had the common decency to keep
passion out of the cold and calculating business of real politics. But as to the nature of the
public conversion, there is no question. Immediately after the event the Northern press is
almost unanimous in condemning the invasion as misguided if not simply crazy. On the
day after Brown's capture Thoreau notes that he has "seen no hearty approbation for this
man in any abolition journal". On the day of the execution, however, church bells are
run through the North, prelude to a wave of idolatry that was to spread not only by
the written word (and song) but by images as well - from nine-color chromos of his life
sold by newspapers as a promotion gimmick to Victor Hugo's imaginative sketch of the
gallows scene.

The highly lyric effects achieved daring the reprieve which Lieutenant Green
unintentionally granted his victim inevitably color our perception of the hero, especially
as the "miraculous", "meteor-like" character of John Brown's intrusion into the ongoing
debate about slavery tends to rob him of historical density. History books reduce him to a
single act that strikes out of nowhere, and the Harper's Ferry raid is treated as an
outrage to the Civil War rather than as a product of the 1850's. Brown did indeed
consider himself as a man marked for a transcendent destiny, but his conception of his
role (and the manner in which the acting out of this role was rendered possible by others)
must be viewed in the light of pre-Harper's Ferry expectations as to the nature and
possibilities of heroism. Leaving aside for the moment the prison sequel - during which
Brown, instinctively grasping the new demands that public opinion was making on him,
shifts his stance from war leader to solitary martyr - let us see what sort of figure he cut
against the background of the 1850's. A number of recent historians (Michael Rogin,
George Forgie and Dwight Anderson among others) have argued convincingly that the
period prior to the Civil War was lived in the shadow of the Founding Fathers and that
however dramatic contemporary events appeared they were inevitably dwarfed by a past
incarnate in the towering figures of the Revolutionary pantheon. Anderson has traced the
widespread influence during this period of the cult of George Washington as codified in
Parson Weems's celebrated Life, and in particular the forming effect the image of
Washington exercised on Lincoln's career. Forgie pinpoints the 1850's as a decade in
which nostalgic filiopiety is intensified, stifling the nascent Young America movement
epitomized by Stephen Douglas and forcing the debate to return to exegeses of the
Founders' true intentions.

Accepting, for immediate purposes, the legitimacy of this analysis of the period, how does
John Brown fit into the temper of a time so concerned with the applicability of past
models? Contemporary portraits of Brown invariably single out the anachronistic quality
of his presence as a leading source of his charisma. The newspaperman James Redpath,
major architect of the John Brown legend, who had begun mythologizing Brown well
before the Harper's Ferry raid, introduces him as the "old Puritan type of Christian". Emerson is quick to claim him as an original settler "fifth in descent from Peter Brown
who came to Plymouth on the Mayflower in 1620", and Thoreau adds the Levolutionary
note, comparing him to "the best of those who stood on our bridge once, on Lexington
Common and on Bunker Hill". The qualifier "Old" that adheres so naturally to his name
simply reinforced the patriarchal element, as did the fact that Brown was constantly
surrounded - and seen as surrounded - by his sons, no fewer than three of whom were to
accompany him on the Harper's Ferry raid.

If, on the other hand, Brown himself slipped so easily into this role it is because the
circumstances of his life had so to speak prepared him for it. Brown's biographers have
amply informed us of the multiple failures that marked his pre-Harper's Ferry career - to the extent that some of them (Boyer for instance) are tempted to see in his militant abolitionism a compensatory activity. Perhaps. But we would stress rather the fact that the setbacks which John Brown experienced in the marketplace economy forced him to return to more traditional manual occupations that served to reinforce his image as holdover from a previous age. At certain periods of his life he exhibited the booster mentality of a thoroughbred Yankee entrepreneur. Take for instance his ventures in land acquisitions. Hard up for ready cash, John Brown invested borrowed funds in the Franklin Land Company counting on the coming construction of the Ohio and Pennsylvania Canal to bring about a dramatic rise in land prices. The sequel is a classic American unsuccess story: the canal company modified its route and the recession of 1837 created a credit pinch, with the result that by 1842 John Brown was forced to declare bankruptcy. His career as a speculator (he was even for a brief period a bank director!) was cut short. It is in great part this failure that will lead the Brown sons to stake out claims for Federal lands in Kansas, reverting to the role of frontier farmers in which they will be joined by their chastened father. Brown's subsequent foray into the wool business follows the same pattern: incensed by what he considered the unfair practices of wool purchasers he attempted to protect the farmers' interests by forming a cooperative company that would buy and hold available wool production, thus forcing the merchants to pay a reasonable price. The complexities of the market (and the erratic tariff policies of the Federal government) combined to do him in. A last-minute attempt to bypass middlemen and sell directly on the English market only compounded the financial disaster which ended in liquidation and acrimonious lawsuits. As a result John Brown retreated once again from the deceptive world of marketplace manipulation to a more traditional occupation - that of sheep and cattle breeder. However well-intentioned his try at stabilizing wool price may have been, in economic terms it represented an attempt to create a horizontal monopoly. Land speculation and monopoly building will fuel the post-Civil War economy: in these terms John Brown is a portent of the future, but a portent only since he proves spectacularly unfit for the world of the "moneylenders" and reverts to manual roles.

In yet another domain John Brown encountered defeat.

At the age of sixteen while living in the frontier town of Hudson, Ohio in the house of his father for whom he worked as foreman in the family tannery, Brown, despite his scant schooling, decided to prepare for the ministry, which meant going east to study Greek and Latin at Plainfield Academy in Massachusetts with the idea of going on subsequently to Amherst. There is no doubt as to the genuineness of his sense of vocation! there is no doubt either that in so doing he was conforming to the American pattern of social advancement. Some fifteen months later, however, he was on his way home again, ostensibly because of the inflamed condition of his eyes, in reality because he was ill-suited to the intellectual preparation that the ministry required. The humiliation must have been extreme - so extreme, as boyer points out, that he makes no mention of the incident in his autobiography. For another, such a downfall might have resulted in a rejection of religion! in John Brown's case it only drove him to reaffirm his faith, but in a nonintellectual, resolutely naïve manner. Had he acceded to the ministry Brown would doubtless have been influenced by the liberal interpretation of the Scriptures that was part of the Unitarian current so eloquently personified by Theodore Parker. As it was, he fell back on an extraordinarily literal interpretation - not only did he learn by heart entire pages of the Bible (which he quoted abundantly in his correspondence) but he read
his own actions in terms of Biblical figurae. He was a Moses whose mission it was to lead God’s people out of bondage in Egypt - a term which figures frequently in his correspondence as synonym for the South. (The fact that blacks also read the Bible in this spirit no doubt confirmed him in his ways). Brown habitually criticized the modern approach to the Gospel, witness his letter of 1853 to his oldest son: "I forgot to say that my younger sons (as is common in this 'progressive age') appear to be a little in advance of my older, and have thrown off the old shackles entirely: after THOROUGH AND CANDID investigation they have discovered the Bible to be ALL a fiction." Whatever else he might do John Brown was not one to throw off the old shackles in order to advance into his own age. Unlike other abolitionists (overwhelmingly liberal in religious terms) for whom the emancipation of the negroes was a progressive social issue, Brown had derived his abolitionism directly from the sacred text.

The anachronistic figure that Brown cut, however, far from alienating militant abolitionists, proved to be a decisive factor in the spell that he cast over them. Nevins and Woodward, both relying heavily on James Malin's anti-Brown work, John Brown and the Legend of '56, mistakenly treat the enthusiasm of Brown's Northern supporters as a nineteenth-century form of 'radical chic', a desperate middle-class search for the exotic. In a recent study Jeffery Rossbach argues that the 'objective' intention of Brown's supporters was - through the catalytic effect of the violence that they knew he was prepared to unleash - to eradicate slave docility and propel black men into the nineteenth century as full-fledged participants in the emerging industrial economy. Although his approach is at times tendentious Rossbach brings us much closer to the true nature of the relationship that bound Brown to the Secret Six, the band of intellectual reformers who financed his arms buying. To begin with. Brown appeared not as exotic but as a familiar figure cut from the same (social) cloth as they were. They, like John Brown, were descended from old New England families, and, with the sole exception of Gerrit Smith who had inherited a fortune in landholdings, they were born of families whose fortunes were in decline (George Stearns is the only one to make good as a businessman). John Brown represents for them a reminder of their origins-brought humanly closer by his evident insolvency. At the same time. Brown presented additional guarantees of reliability for these hesitant conspirators. He was a family man (abolitionism is closely linked to defense of the family as reading H.B. Stowe reminds us); moreover he retained (perhaps the only holdover from his illfated encounter with the business world), an accountant's turn of phrase that calmed whatever doubts may have assailed Sanborn, the chief bookkeeper of the group's funding enterprise. John Brown offered them a unique opportunity to reenter the world of the Fathers, to reestablish contact with the primal sources of national energy (it is in this sense that Brown is literally radical). James Redpath will supply the additional link when, in his portrait of John Brown, he evokes the latter's Indian prowess, a sure sign that a genuine American hero is in the making.

Undoubtedly as well - in the eyes of the Secret Six - John Brown, tough and unwielding, stood for the Act as against the Word - or rather words. Their support for him assuaged their misgivings as to the real hold that their ideas had on national consciousness and behavior. Brown's curt dismissal of politicians, his condemnation of all forms of compromise, his belief in the virtues of insurrection recalled an earlier age when - instead of talking about moral 'suasion' (as the contemporary term would have it) - men had acted on their beliefs. And this nostalgia was accompanied by a solid dose of the intellectual's antiintellectualism,
which is but another expression of their uncertainty as to their status in society. John Brown, as he appeared in front of his Concord audience, holding up for all to see the chain with which the Missouri ruffians had bound and dragged his son, reassured them that they were indeed in touch with the cruel realities of the world.

An integral part of Brown's public image was his reputation as a Kansas fighter. It was as Captain John Brown, the hero of the Battle of Black Jack, that he toured the East in 1857 and 1858 in quest of support for his Great Plan. Kansas, in the second half of the decade, was the theater not only of clashes between proslavery border ruffians and Free Soil immigrants; it was as well the seat of conflict between two conceptions of the antislavery cause. To Eli Thayer, the wealthy Worcester manufacturer and founder of the New England Emigrant Aid Society, antislavery was business antislavery; he had no quarrel with the slaveholders who remained south of the border. To Thomas Wentworth Higginson, later to figure as Brown's most loyal supporter among the Secret Six, it was a political and moral crusade, the last chance for the nation to make good on its initial promise of equality for all. To Higginson, who tried to raise an army for Kansas, and who held the rank of brigadier general in James Lane's troop, "a single day in Kansas makes the American Revolution more intelligible than all that Sparks and Hildreth can do". This militant minister makes it a point when preaching in Lawrence (Kansas) on a September Sunday of 1856 to choose as text for his sermon the very Biblical verses the Reverend John Martin had preached on his return from the Battle of Bunker Hill. When in January of 1857 Higginson finally met John Brown face to face it produced a shock of recognition.

I saw in Kansas the history of the past [...] And if I wanted a genuine warrior of the Revolution where could I find him better than in the old Vermonter, Captain John Brown, the defender of Osawatomie... Old Captain Brown, the Ethan Allen, the Israel Putnam of today?

An autobiography is the record of the manner in which an individual recomposes the events of his life in terms of the response he intends to elicit; the autobiography of an historical figure can reveal the attempt to situate and define a public image. In the case of John Brown, unfortunately, the autobiographical record is slim. The account of his Kansas adventures, which he began in the third person, is cut short after only a few pages; we are left with the celebrated autobiographical letter addressed to George Stearn's son Henry but in fact intended for George Stearns himself. Dated July 1857, this letter - which recounts Brown's early life up to the time of his marriage - is designed to build confidence in the writer as a man who can be trusted in a matter as perilous as a direct attack on Southern slavery. The most dramatic moment is the account of young John's encounter with a black boy. While staying "with a gentlemanly landlord once a United States Marshall," he meets a slave "near his own age very active, intelligent and good feeling" to whom he is under obligation "for numerous little acts of kindness". But whereas John is complimented on his smart behavior and quick speech, the black boy, his equal in every respect, is "hardly clothed", "poorly fed", and "beaten before his eyes with Iron Shovels or any other thing that came to hand". There is no way of knowing whether or not this incident actually took place; true or not, the scene is given as the origin of his abolitionist sentiments, "a circumstance that in the end led him [i.e. John Brown, the text is in the third person] to declare and swear: Eternal War with Slavery". Childhood experience here
provides the terrain for fundamental political decisions which are thus assimilated to reactions in a domestic (patriarchal) setting. In his autobiographical letter John Brown adheres to the pattern set down by Parson Weem's *Life of George Washington* (also written for young readers but aimed through them at their elders) whereby the stories of childhood (apocryphal or not) are seen as sure signs of future greatness.

The autobiography presents as well another curious aspect. While on one hand the author insists on his early ambition "to excel in doing anything he undertook to perform" and on the fact that he habitually expected to succeed in what he undertook, the account itself chronicles a series of losses which cast him in the role of victim. When he was six an Indian gave him a "Yellow Marble" which he lost "beyond recovery"; subsequently his pet squirrel wandered away or was killed leaving him "in mourning" for over a year; finally a ewe lamb, "perhaps" a gift from his father, sickened and died. These incidents - which John Brown sees fit to recall along with the loss of his mother at the age of eight, a loss that was "complete and permanent" in that he never "adopted in feeling" his stepmother - constitute what he refers to as "the school of adversity". Losses are interpreted as elements in a didactic process. Moreover the passage which describes the loss of the marble and the squirrel is followed immediately by the admission that, on occasion, he told lies; reversing the order of reading would suggest that the double loss is chastisement for uttering falsehoods. Could this not be further interpreted as an oblique reference to the punishment administered (in the form of financial ruin) when he abandons the Biblically sanctified profession of sheep and cattle breeder and ventures out into the false world of the moneylender? That such issues are not far from his mind is suggested by the fact that, in the course of a paragraph which discusses the right of minors to own animals, he adds that "older people have sometimes found difficulty with titles" (a reference to the dispute with Chamberlain over ownership of the Westland farm?). Be this as it may, in the context of the autobiography the misfortunes that he endures are treated as part of a plan, of a "much needed course of discipline" by which the "Heavenly Father sees it best to take all the little things out of his hands which he has ever placed in them". The only adversity recorded which is not considered as part of the Almighty's plan is that meted out to the black boy; only in so far as John Brown takes up the cause of the black boy (a boy of his own age and - according to the description given - of like abilities) is revolt legitimized. Here we can refer to another text written by Brown himself, this time in the first person, in which the 'author' - a black man - makes public confession of his errors. "Samho's Mistakes", intended for the negro journal *Ram's Horn*, presents the portrait of a conventional Sambo (given to laughter, poor times and ostentatious behavior) who repents of his ways. Inconspicuously Brown has included in the catalogue of Sambo's shortcomings certain traits that are far more characteristic of his own failings, namely obstinacy and dogmatism, creating thus a composite portrait which suggests in yet another way the extent to which Brown (unlike his contemporaries) has interiorized the image of the black man, experiencing the injustice done them as done to him, confirming the necessity of his/their revolt.

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But what form was revolt to take? Although John Brown as a young boy was disgusted (as he recounts in his autobiographical letter) by what he witnessed of military training, he was not a man to tolerate disorder. On frequent occasions in the course of his career he
adopted the stance of a lawgiver setting down in writing the code that was to bind the members of the group of which he was undisputed leader. The "Covenant and Bylaws of the Free-State Volunteers of Kansas" (1856) and the "Articles of Agreement of Shubel Morgan's Company" (1858) - both of which he drew up - go far beyond a mere set of working rules for frontier fighters. Brown elaborates, in both cases, a social contract as if he had felt called upon to establish the charter of a new state. The 1856 Covenant stipulates how officers are to be elected, creates a court of justice, regulates personal behavior (no "vulgar talk" or alcohol) and specifies how amendments can be adopted. And this is not the first text of this nature. Already in 1850, immediately after passage of the Fugitive Slave Law, Brown, who was then living in Massachusetts, had organized among the black population of Springfield a "Branch of the U.S. League of Gileadites" (no other branch existed or was to exist) for which he wrote an "Agreement" (signed by 44 blacks) and some stirring "Words of Advice". The Gileadites were to band together to rescue fugitive slaves from the law; but John Brown's text hints at something more far-reaching, for after remarking that "personal bravery" always "charms" the American people (and is thus more effective than the spectacle of "the sufferings of more than, three millions of our submissive colored population") he goes on to cite the example of "the Greeks struggling against the oppressive Turks, the Poles against the Russians, the Hungarians against Austria and Russia combined", as if he were prefacing a Declaration of Independence for the black nation. In a sense such a declaration was unnecessary; it would suffice simply to interpret the American declaration literally - in the same manner as Brown was accustomed to read the Scriptures.

But to John Brown no literal reading of the United States Constitution could make up for the obvious inadequacies of that document which afforded blacks no basis for protection. Thus - as a part of his preparation for Harper's Ferry - he sent out a call for a Provisional Constitutional Convention which was held under the auspices of the black nationalist Martin Delany in Chatham, Ontario in May of 1858. Brown delivered the keynote address and then submitted for approval his draft of the "Provisional Constitution and Ordinances of the People of the United States", which was adopted article by article (there were 48 of them in all) and signed by the assembled company after administration of an oath "not to divulge any of the secrets" of the convention. This extraordinary document merits fuller treatment. In some respects - for instance separation of powers - it is modelled on the United States Constitution, but in other respects it inclines toward a far more authoritarian regime (the Commander-in-chief of the army - who is not the President - is given broad authority) and some provisions (obligation to labor, prohibition of "unlawful intercourse between the sexes") appear frankly despotic. But it is not the contents that concern us here as much as the fact that Brown, burdened as he was by the material and financial organization of his expedition, should consider such a step a necessary prelude to action. Harper's Ferry was not to be a hit-and-run raid on slave country but the first act of the process of substitution of one system of government for another - in other words a revolution, another one, or rather a return to the true meaning of the first.

Turning now to the Harper's Ferry attack itself, how can one account for the ignominious failure of so grand a design? For failure it was: Brown's expeditionary war, launched on a Sunday evening is over and done with by Tuesday morning. Brown's tactics seen to have been uncertain, badly prepared, and based on miscalculation of both black and white reactions. Villard considers that Brown has hesitated so long between alternative strategies that at the time of the attack he was "without any clear and definite plan of..."
campaign”. Other historians (Nevins, Oates) point to the unsuitability of the terrain for guerilla warfare and the lack of any previous reconnoitering or logistic preparation. (Only W.E.B. Dubois approves of Brown as military commander, laying the blame on his men for tardy execution of his orders). It would appear indeed that Brown never arrived at a satisfactory synthesis of the three strategies that he had, at one time or another, envisaged: guerilla warfare, open insurrection, and slave stampedes. Yet however justified these critiques of Brown’s leadership may be, they do not provide an explanation of his conduct in the early hours of Monday morning. For at this moment, with several courses of action still open to him, John Brown - who certainly knew from his Kansas campaigns the danger, for a small force such as his, of losing the initiative - inexplicably vacillates, lingering in the armory when all about him called for a rapid move. On this point all accounts agree.

Shortly after taking possession of the armory and the rifle works on Sunday night, Brown had sent a detachment of six men to fetch Colonel Lewis Washington, great grand-nephew of George Washington, from his plantation five miles south of Harper’s Ferry: the party, which returned in the early hours of the morning, had specific instructions to bring back - in addition to the colonel - a pistol presented to George Washington by Lafayette and a sword supposedly given to him by Frederick the Great of Prussia, sword which was immediately appropriated by Brown himself. Washington's sword in hand, Washington's descendant on the premises, and a new Constitution in pamphlet form ready to be distributed: such symbols were signs the significance of which drowned out the desperate messages he received from his second-in-command, Kagi, calling for retreat to the mountains. Brown treated Colonel Washington more as a distinguished visitor than as a hostage, taking the trouble - and time - to send out to the local inn for breakfast, despite the fact that the alarm was by then spreading and the townsmen arming for the counterattack. But there was more to it than this. John Brown was well aware that Harper's Ferry (as well as all the other towns that had figured on his list of possible targets) was Federal ground. As long as he remained there his revolt was a nationwide revolution. Were he to leave Harper's Ferry he would he but a renegade by Virginia or Maryland law. His dealing in traditional symbols (Washington, the Constitution) was a form of fidelity to the heroic image in which he was cast: but it was as well the expression of a fundamental political fact of the moment. The anachronistic return to the past carried with it a modern message that Brown was one of the few to have grasped: slavery would not disappear unless the Federal government was forced to intervene. That intervention was all the more certain the longer he remained in the Harper's Perry arsenal, reason enough to hesitate before abandoning the enginehouse.

In the hours following his capture John Brown plays out his role to the full, stating that his intention was to arm the slaves and demanding that his constitution be read aloud in its entirety to the assembled company. He seems also to have invited discovery of incriminating evidence, having left in a carpet bag at the nearby Kennedy farm, letters implicating his Northern supporters and maps pinpointing the Southern counties in which the slave population was in the majority. But in the course of the trial and the imprisonment Brown shifts his stance. Abandoning the role of leader of a revolt he denies in his November 2 address to the court - probably his most telling speech in the light of the later legend - that he never intended "treason, or the destruction of property or to excite or incite slaves to rebellion, or to make insurrection" and he makes no mention either of his Northern supporters or of his plans for excursions further south.
The Harper's Ferry raid is no longer the first act in a revolution, but a solitary form of moral witness that requires failure to succeed. By depoliticizing his invasion John Brown gives up the role of Founding Father for that of sacrificial son...only to be resurrected two years later by the armies of the North.

NOTES

8. Revins - followed by C. Vann Woodward in "John Brown's Private War", The Burden of Southern History, rev. ed. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1968 - treats Brown as insane (Nevin's term is 'monomania'). Oates convincingly refutes this line of argument by showing how the affidavits on which Nevins and Woodward base their case, were drawn up when there was question among Brown supporters of trying to prevent the execution by a plea of insanity, and have been read out of context.
14. Malin in himself sounds at times like a Tom Wolfe minus the humour: "Is it merely a strange paradox, or is it a form of practical or even a necessary balancing of social forces, that such a national Legend, grounded in a doctrine of violence, should become to such a degree an escape mechanism for a class of society which would be most injured by its application?" (James C. Malin, John Brown and the Legend of '56. Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society. 1942, p. viii)
16. A remarkable example of contemporary verbal acrobacy is to be found in Joshua Bidding's testimony on the relevance of the "Higher Law" to the "condition of African slavery in this


19. The text of the letter is given in Redpath. pp. 24-35.

20. The article is cited in full by Villard, pp.659-61.


22. Villard gives both texts (pp. 661-64 and 666-67). "Shubel Morgan" is none other than John Brown himself, who also went under the name of Nelson Hawkins.


24. The text of the "Provisional Constitution" and the minutes of the Chatham meeting are given in U.S. Senate Committee Reports, vol. I, pp. 45-59.


27. Oates considers that Brown has "mysteriously delayed" (p.293): Boyer refers to his "fatal indecision" (p. 4): and Redpath concludes that "the delay was fatal to his plans". (p.251) Osborne P. Anderson, one of the members of the expedition writes in his account of the invasion that Brown appeared "somewhat puzzled". (A Voice from Harper's Ferry, Freeport (N. Y.): Books for Libraries Press, 1972, reprint of 1861 edition, p.36) Brown himself ascribes his delay to "my desire to spare the feelings of my prisoners and their families". (Redpath, p.282)


29. This point will emerge in the debate as to whether or not John Brown should have been tried in a State or Federal court, debate which the Virginia authorities foreclosed by their haste in bringing him to trial. Brown's defense counsel will plead that Brown was not a citizen of Virginia and that the events took place outside the court's jurisdiction - from which one can draw the conclusion that the only treason he could have been charged with was Federal treason. See The Life. Trial and Execution of Captain John Brown, New York: Da Capo Press. 1969, reprint of 1859 edition, "The Fifth Day", pp. 84-94.


31. "He was particularly inquired of... as to his intending to stampede slaves off, and he promptly and distinctly replied that that was not his purpose. He designed to put arms in their hands to defend themselves against their masters, and to maintain their position in Virginia and the South". (Testimony of Andrew Hunter, U.S. Senate Committee Reports, vol.11, p.62) John Brown does, however, in the course of the long Tuesday afternoon interview with Governor Mason, on occasion avoid admitting outright that he intended to set off a general uprising among the slaves, but the details that he provides are such as to leave no doubt in his hearers' minds. Hunter finds it "very singular" - as do others - "that he should enter into his plans immediately". (U.S. Senate Committee Reports, vol. II, p. 60)

32. That John Brown foresaw the possibility of failure appears highly likely to his biographers, for instance Oates: ".... even if his invasion failed (as he probably knew it would)". (p.310) Thus the fact that John Brown should have left incriminating evidence where it could so easily be
captured in tantamount to an attempt to implicate others in a nationwide revolt. Sure enough, the front page of The New York Times of October 22, 1859 broadcasts the news: "But the most valuable discovery was a trunk belonging to Capt. Brown, containing a great number of highly-important papers, documents, plans and letters from private individuals throughout the Union - all revealing the existence of an extensive and thoroughly-organized conspiracy, whose leaders were Capt. Brown and J.F. Cook...". There follow extracts from the correspondence.

The New York Times also publishes a "Vindication of the Invasion". This document, written in the past tense, Oates takes to be a vindication of the Harper's Ferry expedition, written by Brown "as though the raid had already failed and he was facing a jury and a divided nation beyond". (Oates, p.283) In our opinion - although we agree that Brown half expected to fail - Oates' reading is a misinterpretation; the document more probably refers to the Missouri slave raid and thus dates from the Kansas period (other Kansas papers were found in the same lot). Sanborn is also of the latter opinion (see Sanborn, p.489).

33. The shift did not go unnoticed. See Andrew Hunter's testimony (U.S. Senate Committee Reports, vol. II, p. 62) and Brown's letter in which he Tries to reconcile the two versions (ibid., pp. 67-68).

34. John Brown's speech to the Court, Nov. 2, 1859, The Life, Trial and Execution of Captain John Brown, p.94.

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