

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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John Brown's religious beliefs motivated his violent abolitionist crusade. His parents inculcated their Calvinist Christian beliefs into young Brown, including their abolitionist views of slavery. Brown grew from a skeptical spiritual seeker as a child to a young Christian adult who was a determined, but peaceful abolitionist. As Brown grew into a full adult, his Old Testament inspired sense of Christian justice decreed that he declare war on slavery. He took his abolitionist crusade to Kansas Territory where he was instrumental in fomenting violent conflict between pro-and-anti-slavery forces, helping to make Kansas Territory earn the sobriquet "Bleeding Kansas." Brown was willing to risk his life for slavery in "Bleeding Kansas," but had not yet accepted the role of martyr for the abolitionist cause.

Brown left Kansas when the Free State forces prevailed in Kansas Territory, and prepared for his raid on Harpers Ferry, and began to accept the role of martyr for the abolitionist cause. When his raid on Harpers Ferry failed, his faith grew exponentially, and he fully embraced the role of martyr for the abolitionist cause, and went to his death

He was correct, for his Christian abolitionist crusade exacerbated ideological tensions between the North and South, lighting the fuse for the conflagration of the Civil War, and ending slavery, making his abolitionist crusade a success.

Brown's Christian beliefs were outside of the mainstream of antebellum Christianity, and this work does not defend the orthodoxy of Brown's religious beliefs. However, John Brown's religious beliefs motivated his violent abolitionist crusade. Brown's actions demonstrate the powerful effect of religion on the flow of American History.

**JOHN BROWN, RELIGION AND VIOLENCE:  
MOTIVATION IN AMERICAN HISTORY**

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**A Thesis**

**Presented to**

**The Department of Social Sciences**

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**Master of Arts**

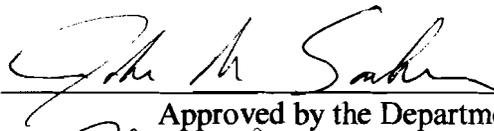
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**by**

**Grayden Royce Atwater**

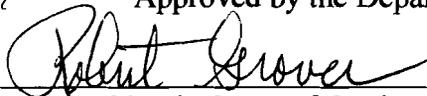
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Approved by the Department Chair



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## Introduction

John Brown's interpretation of Calvinist Christianity motivated his violent abolitionist crusade. His faith instructed him that slavery was a sin, and that he was an agent of God on earth to eradicate slavery from the United States. Brown believed that unrepentant slaveholders and their allies were so morally bankrupt that they were the enemies of God. His faith decreed that it was his divinely inspired duty to use violence to combat the slave power. Brown was not a bloodthirsty killer, for he did not harm women, children, or repentant slaveholders and their allies. However, he did not hesitate to fight and kill proslavery advocates who stood firmly for slavery.

John Brown was a complex man who affected the flow of American history in many different ways. The focus of this work is on John Brown's religious motivation for his abolitionist crusade. Brown's religious beliefs were outside of the mainstream of antebellum Christianity, and it is not the purpose of this work to defend the doctrinal orthodoxy of his religious beliefs. However, his religious motivation for his abolitionist crusade offers insight into the mind and soul of a man motivated by ideology to commit acts of violence, demonstrating the power of ideological beliefs to motivate human action and change the course of American history.

This work is not the first to explore Brown's religious beliefs as motivating factor for his violent abolitionist crusade. James Redpath wrote *The Public Life of Capt. John Brown: With an Autobiography of his Childhood and Youth* in 1860, which was the first biography of Brown. Redpath was the first voice in a choir of Brown apologists who argued that Brown was motivated by his Christian faith to fight slavery. He was followed by Richard D. Webb, who collected Brown's writings in his 1861 work, *The Life and*

*Letters of Captain John Brown: Who was Executed at Charlestown, Virginia, Dec. 2, 1859 for an Armed Attack upon American Slavery* in 1861, and the same year Osborne P. Anderson, one of Brown's African-American raiders at Harpers Ferry, produced *A Voice from Harper's Ferry*, both of these works presenting Brown as a Christian Crusader. F.B. Sanborn wrote a glowing tribute to Brown as an abolitionist saint in *The Life and Letters of John Brown: Liberator of Kansas and Martyr of Virginia* in 1891, and William Elsey Connelly continued to sing the praises of Brown as a Christian martyr in his 1900 work, *John Brown*. All of these writers presented Brown as a paragon of righteousness, a holy warrior against the evil of slavery. This work agrees with their arguments that Brown was motivated to fight slavery by his religious beliefs. However, this book argues that Brown was not a saint, but a flawed man who tenaciously believed in his private interpretation of Christian theology that dictated that slavery was an evil that could only be stamped out by violent means.<sup>1</sup>

Throughout the 1890s, and into the nascent twentieth century, Americans wanted to put the Civil War behind them, and bind the nation back together. Brown's racial egalitarianism was a problem, for both northern and southern whites held deeply racist views of African-Americans. In addition, Brown's strong stand against the south stood in defiance of the political and social effort to repair the rent in American society wrought by the Civil War. Therefore, from the late 1890's to the 1970's historians mainly wrote works defaming Brown, arguing that he was primarily motivated by greed, and psychosis

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<sup>1</sup> James Redpath, *The Public Life of John Brown* (Boston: Thayer and Eldridge, 1860); Richard D. Webb, ed. *The Life and Letters of Captain John Brown: Who was executed at Charlestown, Virginia, December 2, 1859 for an Armed Attack on American Slavery; with some Notices from his Confederates* (London: Smith Elder and Company, 1861); Osborne P. Anderson, *A Voice From Harpers Ferry*, (Boston: By the Author, 1861, Reprint, New York: Books for Library Press, 1972) (page references are to the reprint edition); F.B. Sanborn, ed. *The Life and Letters of John Brown: Liberator of Kansas and Martyr of Virginia* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1891); William Elsey Connelly, *John Brown*, Volumes 1 and 2 (Topeka: Crane and Company Publishers, 1900).

to fight against slavery. This generation of historians asserted that religion and abolitionism being a minor motivation or a smokescreen for his base motives for his violence.

Charles Robinson, the Kansas Agent for the New England Emigrant Aid Society, and a Free State leader during the Bleeding Kansas period who opposed Brown's violent strategy, wrote *The Kansas Conflict* in 1898, criticizing Brown as an impediment to the Free State cause. His widow, Sarah Tappan Robinson, funded Hill Peebles Wilson 1913 work, *John Brown, Soldier of Fortune: A Critique*, which branded Brown a morally and spiritually bankrupt thief and a murderer who used the struggle over slavery as an excuse to commit crimes. Oswald Garrison Villard, in his 1910 work, *John Brown: A Biography 1800-1859*, did not display Wilson's vitriol towards Brown, but he condemned Brown for his violent campaign against slavery. Furthermore, Villard portrayed him as a slightly insane religious fanatic who, despite himself, inspired the North to fight against slavery, and the South to defend their "peculiar institution." Robert Penn Warren in his 1929 work, *John Brown, the Making of a Martyr*, presents Brown as a mentally ill, abolitionist fanatic who was made into a Christian martyr by abolitionist spin doctors.<sup>2</sup>

Brown's detractors are a valuable balance to the panegyric writers who make him into a saint, but they go too far in their attacks on Brown and his contribution to American history. This work acknowledges Brown's human flaws, but unlike the writers of works aiming at debunking the "Brown Legend," the purpose of this book is to look at

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<sup>2</sup> Charles Robinson, *The Kansas Conflict* (Lawrence: Lawrence Journal Publishing Company, 1898, Reprint, Freeport Books: Books for Library Press) ( page references are to the reprint edition).; Hill Peebles Wilson, *John Brown, Soldier of Fortune; a Critique* (Boston: The Cornhill Company, 1913); Oswald Garrison Villard, *John Brown: A Biography 1800-1859*. (Garden City: Doubleday, Doran and Company, Inc., 1929). Same work, later printing; Robert Penn Warren , *John Brown: The Making of a Martyr* (Payson and Clarke, Ltd., 1929, reprint, Nashville: J.S. Sanders and Company, 1993). All references are to the reprint edition.

Brown as a human being, a man with flaws and moral weaknesses, but not completely lacking in positive qualities. One of those positive qualities was his belief in the equality of African-Americans, and his earnest Christian beliefs that motivated him to work on their behalf.

African-Americans demonstrated strong affinity for John Brown, and W.E.B. DuBois, in his 1909 work, *John Brown* uses Brown as a paragon of a civil rights advocate. His work was aimed at African-Americans to spur them to fight for their rights as Americans in the face of pervasive racism and discrimination. Dubois holds up Brown's spirituality and his Christian fealty to the abolitionist cause throughout his work, which is a paean to Brown, but has more intellectual and philosophical depth than previous panegyrics to Brown. Benjamin Quarles, in *Allies for Freedom*, published in 1974, studied the veracity of African-American veneration of Brown, and establishes the Christian origin of his abolitionist beliefs and crusade. This work concurs with Dubois' and Quarles' conclusions about Brown's belief in racial equality, and the Christian motivation of his abolitionist crusade.<sup>3</sup>

The rise of the civil rights movement in the 1960s made Brown's racial egalitarianism a positive in historian's eyes, and a spate of balanced and positive works about Brown began to appear in the canon of historical literature during the 1970's. Stephen Oates wrote a balanced account that took all aspects of the influences on Brown's ideology and actions into account in his 1970 work, *To Purge this Land with Blood: A Biography of John Brown*. He presents a flawed, man who was motivated to fight against slavery by a complex mix of social and religious motivations that combined

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<sup>3</sup> W.E.B. Dubois, *John Brown* (Philadelphia: George W. Jacobs and Company, 1909, reprint, New York, International Publishers, 1962). All references are to the reprint edition ; Benjamin Quarles, *Allies for Freedom: Blacks and John Brown* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974).

to produce a determined foe against slavery. Richard O. Boyer offers a similar interpretation of Brown, offering a broad social history of Brown to support his argument. This work differs from the dominant trend of 1970's Brown historiography in that concentrates on Brown's primary motivation, his religious beliefs, while maintaining the 1970's historiographical trend to depict Brown as a fallible human being with positive qualities.<sup>4</sup>

From the 1980's to 2005, works about Brown and his impact on American history have maintained the historiographical trends began in the 1970's. Nicole Etcheson, in *Bleeding Kansas: Contested Liberty in the Civil War Era*, published in 2002, gives a balanced view of Brown's effect on the conflict, concluding that Brown's violence was borne of his abolitionist beliefs. Louis DeCaro Junior, writing "*Fire from the Midst of You*" a *Religious History of John Brown* during the same year, offers a positive analysis of Browns religious beliefs, but does not concentrate on Brown's religion as a motivation embark on his violent abolitionist crusade as this work does. David S. Reynolds, in *John Brown, Abolitionist: The Man who Killed Slavery, Sparked the Civil War, and Seeded Civil Rights*, Published in 2005, offers a positive view of Brown, following Oates' in merging many different factors in the make up of Brown's motivations.<sup>5</sup>

However, there are those who still hold to the negative pre 1970's view of Brown, as Patrick Brophy's *Bushwhackers of the Border: The Civil War Period in Western Missouri*, second edition, 2000, presents Brown as a terrorist and a thief. This view is not

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<sup>4</sup> Stephen Oates, *To Purge this Land With Blood: A Biography of John Brown* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970; Richard O. Boyer, *The Legend of John Brown: A Biography and a History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970).

<sup>5</sup> Nicole Etcheson, *Bleeding Kansas: Contested Liberty in the Civil War Era* (Lawrence: The University Press of Kansas, 2004); Louis A. Decaro Junior, "*Fire from the Midst of You*" *A Religious History of John Brown* (New York: New York University Press, 2002); David S. Reynolds, *John Brown, Abolitionist: The Man who Killed Slavery, Sparked the Civil War, and Seeded Civil Rights* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

entirely incorrect, for Brown felt that any unrepentant slaveholder or their allies were fair game for violence and raiding. This work takes Brophy's view into account and seeks to honestly portray Brown as a man of faith who believed that violence was the only means of combating slavery.<sup>6</sup>

After an intense study of the historiography concerning John Brown and his religious beliefs, This work takes the following tack. Chapter one studies the beginnings of Brown's spiritual development from a child who was a skeptical seeker to an adult who was deeply devout Christian who believed he was God's agent on earth to fight slavery by violent means. His parents taught him to regard slavery as a sin as he grew up in Hudson, Ohio as a part of their efforts to inculcate their Calvinist Christian beliefs into young John. Brown matured into a devout Christian young adult with a strong, yet peaceful desire to end slavery. However, as Brown grew into a full adult, he came to believe that violence was the only means to eradicate slavery from the United States, and at age 37, Brown declared war on slavery.

Chapter two demonstrates how Brown put his beliefs into action in the ideological struggle between pro-and-anti-slavery forces over the status of slavery in Kansas Territory. Brown fought vigorously against proslavery forces in Kansas until the Free State forces gained ascendancy, and he had no war to fight. Brown went to Kansas territory willing to risk his life for his abolitionist cause, but was not yet taking the role of martyr, for his faith was still strong that he could fight and destroy slavery in the United States.

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<sup>6</sup> Patrick Brophy, *Bushwackers of the Border: The Civil War Period in Western Missouri* (Nevada: Vernon County Historical Society, Revision, 2000).

Chapter three contains a narrative of Brown's preparation for his final raid on Harper's Ferry. Brown's faith in the righteousness of his cause increased during this period, and he began to accept the role of martyr for the abolitionist cause. Brown was preparing to strike his final blow against slavery by raiding the Federal Arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia and bleeding off slaves from the South until slavery was economically unfeasible, forcing Southerners to abandon their "peculiar institution."

Chapter four tells of the crescendo of Brown's abolitionist crusade, which was not his raid on Harpers Ferry, which was a military failure. Brown could not reveal his plans to raid Harpers Ferry to any area slaves for fear of detection, and when the raid finally commenced, and he was free to recruit slaves to his cause, he only gathered fourteen slaves to his banner. Brown's raid failed because he waited too long for slaves to flock to his banner, and did not retreat from Harper's Ferry until he was surrounded by Virginia and Maryland militia units. Brown waited too long because he had faith in the divine righteousness of his mission, and believed that hundreds, if not thousands of slaves would join him to fight slavery.

However, Brown succeeded in his abolitionist crusade, for he took on the mantle of a martyr at his trial in Charlestown, Virginia. His faith increased exponentially as he faced death on the gallows, and his fealty to his Christian abolitionist cause inspired Northerners to adulate him as a hero and a Christ-like martyr for the abolitionist cause. The North's positive reaction to Brown's war against slavery convinced the South that the North was their enemy, and lit the ideological conflagration of the Civil War, which ended slavery in the United States , making Brown's crusade against slavery an ultimate success.

## Chapter One

### The Genesis of a Christian Crusader

John Brown was born on May 9, 1800, in Torrington, Connecticut into a devout Christian family and was reared in the doctrine and tenets of the Congregationalist Church. Abolitionism was a strong component of the teachings of Brown's spiritual inculcation by his parents and church. He absorbed and retained abolitionism into his belief system as a child, and as he matured into an adult, he became a committed abolitionist whose crusade against slavery evolved from peaceful to violent.

Brown's father Owen was born at West Simsbury, Connecticut on February 16, 1771. John Brown's grandfather, John, was a captain in the Connecticut militia during the Revolutionary War. Brown's grandfather died of dysentery in New York in 1775. Owen's mother, Hannah, was left to raise eleven children on her own, and due to the fact that most men were away from home fighting the British, she took on the role of deputy husband, providing pecuniary, emotional, and spiritual support for her family. Wartime privation made this a difficult task, but she was a hard working and thrifty mother who lovingly cared for her family despite wartime food shortages and a lack of basic necessities.<sup>1</sup>

Owen's abolitionist beliefs came to fore at an early age when he befriended a slave named Sam, who had been assigned by a neighbor to help the Brown family operate their farm in the absence of Owen's father in 1776. Owen developed a deep emotional bond with Sam, and when Sam died of pleurisy, Owen was deeply grieved. Sam's death

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<sup>1</sup> Owen Brown Autobiography, 1849 in F.B. Sanborn, ed. *The Life and Letters of John Brown Liberator of Kansas, and Martyr of Virginia* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1891), 4. West Simsbury is now known as Canton, Connecticut.

made a deep impression on Owen, and as the first funeral the five year old had attended, instilled in him a caring and accepting attitude towards African-Americans.<sup>2</sup>

Utilizing family and church, Hannah Brown inculcated religious beliefs into young Owen. When Owen was five years old, Hannah sent him to live with his grandfather for intermittent periods of time, and his grandfather taught him the fundamental doctrines and practices of the Congregationalist Church. Owen's religious training continued when he went to live with his sister, Asubah, and his brother-in-law Michael Barber in 1779, at intervals, and his sister taught him more of the fundamentals of the Christian faith. When Owen was eleven years old, the Brown family's religious faith was deepened by a revival led by the Reverend Edmund Mills that swept through Canton. Owen's mother and older sisters, along with his older brother John, made formal declarations of their Christian faith at this time. Owen did not firmly embrace the Christian faith in concert with his family, but his faith grew during this revival. The Brown family engaged in regular devotionals, and sang sacred music at church functions and meetings from this time forward, steeping young Owen in a strong Christian faith.<sup>3</sup>

Owen's spiritual development was spurred on when his mother sent him to live with the Reverend Jeremiah Hallock at various intervals in 1784. Owen returned to the spiritual tutelage of Reverend Hallock when he was nineteen, and received further instruction in the Christian faith. Part of this instruction included abolitionist philosophy, which Owen learned from spiritual discussions concerning slavery between Reverend Jeremiah Hallock and Reverend Samuel Hopkins, during which Reverend Hopkins

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>3</sup> Owen Brown to Marian Brown Hand, 1848-1849, Letter edited by Clarence S. Gee, 1960. (West Virginia State Archives) [Data base online]; available from <http://www.wvculture.org/history/archivesindex.aspx> . Accessed on August 30, 2005.

denounced slavery as a sin. Reverend Hallock had equally strong abolitionist views, and had sent Reverend Hopkins abolitionist sermons by Reverend Jonathan Edwards, a contemporary of the two ministers. Owen's study of the pamphlet, along with his previous experiences helped to cement his abolitionist beliefs.<sup>4</sup>

Owen married Ruth Mills, the daughter of Reverend Gideon Mills, in March of 1793. Reverend Mills gave the young couple Christian counsel to strengthen their Christian faith and marriage. Ruth influenced Owen to conform to Christian conduct in a manner consistent with the role of women at the time as homemakers and role models for Christian behavior. Owen and Ruth became adoptive parents, and Ruth gave birth to her first child, Salmon, on June 29, 1794. Ruth's Christian conduct aided the Brown family's fortunes when her tenure as a teacher in Norfolk, Connecticut created positive contacts for Owen, which cleared the way for Owen to move his family to move to that city and set up a tannery in 1796. Despite trials such as Salmon's death and business failures, life there was mostly pleasant for the Brown's, including the birth of a daughter, Anna on July 5, 1798. Spiritually, Owen and Ruth made a profession of their Christian faith at Norfolk in 1798, again signaling the importance of Christianity in their lives.<sup>5</sup>

Owen's Christian commitment to abolitionism was further strengthened by an incident concerning a Reverend Thomson, a pro-slavery Virginia Presbyterian minister in Norfolk in 1798. The minister had moved to the Norfolk area to escape the British during the Revolutionary War and had left his slaves on his Connecticut property to maintain the farm. Reverend Thomson returned in 1798 to take his slaves back to Virginia, but found that they were unwilling to return, and one of the slaves hid amongst the local free

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<sup>4</sup> Jules Abels, *Man on Fire: John Brown and the Cause of Liberty* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1971), 8; Owen Brown, 1850, in Sanborn, 11.

<sup>5</sup> Owen Brown to Marian Hand, 1848-1849 ed. by Gee.

African-Americans. Some of the African-Americans were members of Owen Brown's Congregationalist Church, which marked his church as one friendly to African-Americans.<sup>6</sup>

Reverend Thomson was a substitute minister for the Congregationalist and Presbyterian Churches for the Norfolk area, and when he came to preach at Owen's Congregationalist Church, Owen and a group of the members of the church opposed his presence in the pulpit due to his pro-slavery beliefs. In addition, they confronted him about his plans to take the wife and child of the escaped slave back to Virginia. Owen and his abolitionist cohorts opposed his plans due to the fact that the slaves had lived in Connecticut, and the legislature had made Connecticut a free state in 1784, and that the minister was committing a sin in dividing a married couple against their will. Reverend Thomson countered with the argument that he had married them, and he did not advise the wife to be obedient to her husband. Furthermore, Reverend Thomson cited the state's rights argument that he had purchased the slaves in Virginia and the purchase was subject to the laws of Virginia and not Connecticut, and he had the right to take his slaves back to Virginia.<sup>7</sup>

Owen Brown and his abolitionist church members prevented Reverend Thomson from taking his slaves back to Virginia, and this incident was important in Owen Brown's evolution towards becoming an active participant in the abolitionist movement. Owen translated his beliefs into action, and he became a believer in acting on his abolitionist convictions. Owen's Christian beliefs were an integral part of this evolution, as the anti-

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<sup>6</sup> Owen Brown, 1850, in Sanborn, 11.

<sup>7</sup> Owen Brown, 1850 in Sanborn, 11; John Hope Franklin and Alfred A. Moss, Jr, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African Americans*, Eighth edition (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2000), 93.

slavery beliefs of northern Congregationalists were an important influence on his development from a theoretical to an active abolitionist.<sup>8</sup>

Owen moved his family to Torrington, Connecticut, in 1799, and on May 9, 1800, Ruth gave birth to John Brown. Ruth's influence on John's moral and spiritual development was important and profound. Ruth inculcated absolute fealty to Christian morality in John at an early age. When John was a four year old, he stole three shiny brass pins that belonged to a girl living in the Brown's Torrington home. Ruth found out about John's transgression, and gave him an entire day to reflect upon his sin, and then gave him a thorough spanking for his wrongdoing. This incident stayed with John the rest of his life, an indication of the strong influence of his mother on his moral and spiritual development.<sup>9</sup>

Owen traveled to Hudson, Ohio, in 1804 and found that the Connecticut settlers who had ventured there to settle lived in peace with each other and held Christian beliefs in concert with his own. Owen moved his family to Hudson the following year, with the purpose of making a new start and to support the preservation and propagation of his Christian faith. The arduous trek from Torrington to Hudson began the process of teaching John independence and hardiness in the wild that would help him later in his abolitionist crusade.<sup>10</sup>

Owen's earlier experience with African-Americans had divested him of racial prejudice, and when he encountered Native Americans he viewed and treated them as equals, an attitude that he passed on to John. Owen's egalitarian attitude towards people

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>9</sup> John Brown to Henry L. Stearns, 15 July 1857, in Oswald Garrison Villard, *John Brown: A Biography 1800-1859* (Garden City: Doubleday, Doran and Company, Inc. 1929), 1.

<sup>10</sup> Owen Brown to Marian Hand Brown, 1848-1849 Gee, ed.; John Brown to Henry L. Stearns, 15 July 1857, in Villard, 1.

of other races and belief systems was unique for the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and helped to fuel John Brown's abolitionist convictions at an early age. John observed and retained Owen's belief in the equality of all humanity under God's divine rule, and made it a permanent part of his ideological base.<sup>11</sup>

Owen taught John the Calvinist theological principle that God chastises his children to keep them on the straight and narrow path. John learned this lesson as a child, when at six years old; he lost a yellow marble that one of his Native American friends had given him as a gift. Five months after losing his precious marble, he had caught and tamed a squirrel he named "Bob Tail," and when lost his beloved pet it made a deep impression on him. While it may seem trite that the loss of small items such as a marble and a pet would be termed adversity, John had few worldly possessions at the time. John's lifelong acceptance of this theological principle helped to keep his faith strong despite the trials and travails that were to come later in his life. His faith was the foundation of his abolitionist crusade, and when had to make sacrifices, his belief that God was on his side despite his problems gave him strength to fight to end slavery.<sup>12</sup>

John was not perfect as a child, and pursuant to the Calvinist conviction that human beings are sinful and disobedient beings; he admitted that at times, he fibbed to avoid punishment. He was guilt ridden about this, and had reformed from this habit in adult life. However, he did so to avoid the quick wrath of Owen and Ruth, who spanked first and asked questions later when they saw what they perceived as sinfulness in their children. Brown felt that if they had taken the contrite nature of his admission of sin as

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<sup>11</sup> Owen Brown to Marian Hand Brown, 1848-1849 Gee ed. ; John Brown to Henry L. Stearns, 14 July 1857, in Villard, 2.; Gerald Sorin, *Abolitionism: A New Perspective* ( New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972) 60.

<sup>12</sup> William F. Keesecker, ed. *A Calvin Treasury*, second edition (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 25; John Brown to Henry L. Stearns, 15 July 1857, in Villard, 2.

evidence of his genuine repentant nature, and had not been so quick to resort to corporal punishment, he would not have resorted to white lies to avoid the sting of a branch on his britches as a child.<sup>13</sup>

Owen and Ruth's strict discipline was in line with the Calvinist view that corporal punishment was necessary to instill Godliness into children. Owen Brown was a deeply devout Calvinist Congregationalist, and demonstrated his fealty to this concept of Calvinist theology at the first hint of miscreant behavior to a degree greater than most parents of the era demonstrated. John adhered to Owen's philosophy with his own children and with others outside of his own family who violated his interpretation of Christian morality. Owen's view of Christian discipline became an integral part of John's motivation to fight pro-slavery advocates later on in life, making this an important component of his Christian beliefs.<sup>14</sup>

Visits to the woodshed did not completely dominate young John's life. He spent a great time outdoors, so much so that in his early years his education was sporadic. John preferred to work at Owen's tannery and farm, and seek adventure in the wilderness other than to sit and learn penmanship and mathematics in a schoolroom. Owen, despite his tendency to be a strict disciplinarian, was permissive in this area, and allowed young John to skip school, sending him out to drive cattle or do other jobs.<sup>15</sup>

On December 9, 1808, his mother, Ruth died. John grieved for years, indicating the deep emotional attachment that he had for his mother, and her strong influence on his moral and spiritual development. When Owen married Sally Root on November 8, 1809,

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<sup>13</sup> Keesecker, 164; John Brown to Henry L. Stearns, 15 July 1857, in Villard, 3.

<sup>14</sup> Keesecker, ed. 36.

<sup>15</sup> John Brown to Henry L. Stearns, 15 July 1857 in Villard, 3.

John respected her as a Christian stepmother, but he did not develop the deep emotional ties with her that he did with his biological mother.<sup>16</sup>

John became interested in intellectual pursuits at the age of ten, when a friend convinced him to read history books and offered him access to a library. His formal education had been scanty, but he found that he enjoyed reading, and pursuant to his Calvinist Christian desire to live a clean, moral life, sought intellectual activity because it kept him from bad company, and on the straight and narrow path. John's studies had a strong effect on this spiritual and moral state, giving him knowledge of the works of Christian writers and keeping him from engaging in activities such as playing cards and dancing that were forbidden in his home.<sup>17</sup>

During the war of 1812, at the age of twelve, John Brown observed military life and found it repugnant, and for the rest of his life resisted efforts to draw him into military service. John paid fines and procured a deferment from military service until he was beyond draft age into the militia. John had not yet become the violent abolitionist crusader that was willing to fight against slavery with the sword.<sup>18</sup>

During the War of 1812, one of the formative incidents that created an intense hatred of slavery in John occurred in Ohio when he was delivering cattle for his father to American troops at Detroit. John stopped at the home of a slaveholder and met a slave who was his own age. Due to the influence of Owen's racial egalitarianism, John and the slave got along well. John noticed that the slaveholder treated John with respect, praising his wit and maturity for being able to drive cattle to the troops about one hundred miles

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<sup>16</sup> Owen Brown to Marian Brown Hand, 1848-1849 Gee, ed.; John Brown to Henry L. Stearns in Villard, 3, 4.

<sup>17</sup> John Brown to Henry L. Stearns, 15 July 1857, in Villard, 4-5.

<sup>18</sup> Barrie Stavis, *John Brown: The Sword and the Word* (South Brunswick: A.S. Barnes and Company, 1970), 16.

away from home alone. However, the slaveholder mistreated the young slave, beating him with shovels and other objects, and forcing him to wear inadequate clothing for the weather, along with giving substandard housing. John was horrified at this ugly reality of slavery, and the incident strengthened his Christian abolitionist beliefs, as he was driven to despair at the spiritual and moral effect of slavery on African-Americans. He vowed after this to work to abolish slavery for the rest of his life.<sup>19</sup>

Owen had reared John in an intensely religious home, and John had absorbed much of what his father and mother had taught him. However, John had not yet evolved into the firm Christian that was willing to fight and die for his Christian beliefs and abolitionism. When John was sixteen, he took another step towards becoming a Christian abolitionist crusader when he made a formal declaration of his faith, and though he never accepted all of the prevalent Christian theological beliefs of his day, Brown developed a deep faith that remained firm throughout his abolitionist crusade. He had studied the Bible before, while his faith was at an earlier stage of development, but when he made his public profession of religion, he began an intense study of the Bible that yielded a detailed knowledge and stronger belief in the veracity of the Holy Writ. John's confession of faith was a strong step towards becoming an active Christian abolitionist.<sup>20</sup>

John's faith was so strong that he pursued the pastorate the year of his public declaration of his faith. He attended a college preparatory school operated by the Reverend Moses Hallock in Plainfield, Massachusetts. John planned to enter Amherst College, but he developed an eye inflammation that ended his academic career before he

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<sup>19</sup> Boyer, Richard O. *The Legend of John Brown: A Biography and a History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973), 196-199.

<sup>20</sup> W.E. Burghardt Dubois, *John Brown* (originally published, 1909, Reprint, New York: International Publishers, 1962), 24-25 (page references are to the reprint edition).

could enter the college. John returned to Hudson to work in his father's tannery as a foreman, and worked to purge himself of all moral taint, a battle he, like his father, fought constantly.<sup>21</sup>

John was an ambitious young man who worked hard to succeed, and brooked no opposition to his goals. This quality garnered respect from older adults, and resentment from others who felt he was a controlling supervisor. John admitted this fault, and ruminated over his sin of pride and excessive ambition. Brown's ambition did not dissipate the veracity of his Christian faith. His faith permeated every part of his life. He insisted that everyone who worked for him take part in family devotions and attend church on Sunday. Brown was wont to pray, praying even over snacks before eating.<sup>22</sup>

Though John was driven to succeed, he still found that he needed a soul mate. He was the foreman of his father's tannery, and his duties became so numerous and time consuming that he needed to hire a housekeeper. John hired Mrs. Amos Lusk, a widow who had a quiet, amiable daughter named Dianthe. John fell in love with Dianthe, and they were married on June 21, 1820. Lusk was a hard working Christian woman whose gentle character and behavior worked to strengthen and reinforce Brown's Christian faith. Lusk bore Brown seven children, and he worked to inculcate his children with his religious beliefs. He fretted constantly over the state of their spirituality, constantly urging them to adhere to the doctrines and tenets of their Christian faith. He imitated his parents' disciplinary methods in an effort to teach his children his interpretation of

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<sup>21</sup> Villard, 17; John Brown to Henry L. Stearns, 15 July 1857, in Villard, 6; Owen Brown to Marian Brown Hand, 1848-1849, Gee, ed. John Brown's eye inflammation is a logical explanation for his "insane" appearance in some photographs.

<sup>22</sup> James Foreman to James Redpath, 28 December 1859, in *A John Brown Reader: The Story of John Brown in His Own Words in the Words of Those Who Knew Him and in the Poetry and Prose of the Literary Heritage*. ed. Louis Ruchames (New York: Abelard-Schuman, 1959), 163.

Christian morality. As a young parent, Brown administered corporal punishment with puritanical zeal seeking to instill Christian morality by strict discipline. Brown's discipline softened as he grew older, and he later regretted his early draconian methods.<sup>23</sup>

However, for the most part, Brown was a tender, loving husband and parent. He cared deeply for his family, and frequently demonstrated great love for them. Brown diligently cared for his wife and children when they were ill, sitting by their bedsides and patiently providing home medical care with kindness and love. In addition, he was frequently affectionate with his children, demonstrating the internal dichotomy between his nature as an Old Testament prophet and a New Testament saint.<sup>24</sup>

Brown's role of patriarch of his family was part of his Christian faith, and he extended his desire to enforce his interpretation of Christian morality onto others outside of his family. Brown's zeal for enforcing Calvinist Christian principles was an integral part of his spirituality. In 1824 he owned his own tannery in Hudson, Ohio, and when an employee stole a calf skin, he was outraged. After a stern lecture on Christian morality, instead of firing the employee, Brown kept him on, and told him that if he left his employment he would have him arrested. Brown's punishment was to instruct the employee's co-workers not to speak to him. Brown's stern Old Testament strategy reformed the employee, who adopted Brown's strict Christian morality.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Gee, Clarence S. "Children and Grand Children of Owen Brown" 10 30 1957, (West Virginia State Archives) [database online]; available from <http://www.wvculture.org/history/archivesindex.aspx>. Accessed on August 31, 2005. All future references to this document were accessed on August 31, 2005; Robert Penn Warren, *John Brown: The Making of a Martyr* (Payson and Clarke LTD, 1929, reprint Nashville: J.S. Sanders and Company, 1993), 22-24; Ruth Brown Thompson, in Sanborn, 38.

<sup>24</sup> Ruth Brown Thompson in Sanborn, 38.

<sup>25</sup> James Foreman to James Redpath, 28 December 1859, in Louis Rucahmes ed, *A John Brown Reader: The Story of John Brown in His Own Words In the Words of Those Who Knew Him and in the Poetry and Prose of the Literary Heritage*. (New York: Abelard-Schuman, 1959), 163, 164.

Brown's efforts to ensure that everyone around him conformed to Christian behavior were not limited to his family and employees. During the fall of 1824, Brown was rushing to the doctor to seek help for Dianthe, when he observed two men stealing apples from an orchard. He put his zeal for his Christian beliefs ahead of his wife's health and welfare, and stopped the men from stealing the apples. Brown forced them to make amends for their trespass against his sense of Christian morality. Once the wrong was made right, Brown went on to fetch the doctor for his sick wife.<sup>26</sup>

In May of 1826, Brown moved his family to Randolph Township in Pennsylvania, where Brown's crusade to purify society's morals went into action against a cattle thief in 1829. A man stole a cow sixteen miles away from where Brown lived. When he found out that the cow's owner had dismissed theft charges due to the thief's poverty, Brown's sense of Christian justice was offended, and he went to court and demanded that the thief be imprisoned. The cattle rustler was jailed, but Brown, demonstrating the complexity and conflict between his nature as an avenging Old Testament prophet and a gentle New Testament servant, insured that the thief's family was provided for while the man served his prison term.<sup>27</sup>

Brown's wife, Dianthe, died from a combination of heart disease and complications from childbirth on August 10, 1831. The death of both Dianthe and her newborn child were a source of great anguish for Brown, but it did not weaken his faith in God. Brown believed that he was under God's divine power and guidance, and thus her death was part of God's plan for his life.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> James Foreman to James Redpath, 28 December 1859, in Ruchames, 164.

<sup>27</sup> James Foreman to James Redpath 28 December 1859, in Ruchames, 164

<sup>28</sup> Stephen B. Oates, *To Purge this Land with Blood: A Biography of John Brown* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), 25.

Near this time, while Brown was living at Randolph Township, his Calvinist theology was challenged by a Methodist minister, who questioned the Calvinist belief in predestination. The minister was witty and sharp, and did not allow Brown time or space to interject with his own views on Christianity. Brown did not take this kindly, and forcefully challenged the Methodist minister to a debate. Brown utilized his extensive knowledge of the Bible and the *Westminster Catechism* to defend his Calvinistic Christianity with such intellectual acuity and fervor that the Methodist minister retired from the debate early, yielding the platform to Brown.<sup>29</sup>

Brown's abolitionism was still evolving, and in the 1830's he worked to end slavery via peaceful means. Brown proposed to bring a free African-American child into his home and rear him as his own offspring, which demonstrates Brown's unusual egalitarianism towards African-Americans in antebellum America. He considered trying to convince a Christian slaveholder to free a slave to his care, and if it failed, buy a young slave and rear him or her in the Brown family. He further planned to open a school for African-American children in New Randolph Township. Brown believed that the presence of an educated African-American would have a devastating effect on slavery. Brown could never bring any of these plans to fruition, but his sincerity was genuine and indicative of his zeal for the abolition of slavery.<sup>30</sup>

Brown was not alone in his abolitionist beliefs in the 1830's. Abolitionists became forceful in their efforts to extinguish slavery in the United States during this decade, growing out of a seedbed of abolitionist efforts conducted by early abolitionists such as Elihu Embree and Benjamin Lundy. Early abolitionists proposed gradual

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<sup>29</sup> Louis A. DeCaro, Jr. *"Fire from the Midst of You" A Religious Life of John Brown* (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 90.

<sup>30</sup> John Brown to Frederick Brown, 21 November 1834, In Sanborn, 41.

abolitionism and colonizing freed slaves in Africa, but as the 1830's progressed, "immediatists" who believed that slavery should be completely abolished immediately, and not gradually, became vocal in the abolitionist crusade. Brown was a member of the "immediatist" chorus at this time in his life, though not the extremist that he would later become.<sup>31</sup>

Religious fervor marked the abolitionist movement, with abolitionist clergy thundering forth from their pulpits against slavery. Christian abolitionists abounded in the anti-slavery movement, and many of them shared John Brown's Presbyterian and Congregationalist church ties. Religion offered a power source that energized the abolitionist movement, for it raised the abolitionist crusade to a spiritual level, which tapped deeply personal aspects of the soul, which made the abolitionist movement a Christian duty. Brown felt this duty deeply, for his Christian faith was the main component of his belief system.<sup>32</sup>

While Brown was dedicated to the abolitionist cause, he also was cognizant of his duties to his family, and sought to remarry. On June 14, 1833, Brown married Mary Day, the daughter of Charles Day, a local blacksmith. Brown handed the shy young woman of sixteen a letter containing a marriage proposal. He followed her down to a spring on Brown's property the next day and verbally asked her for her hand in marriage. She agreed to marry him, and on June 14, 1833, she became his wife. Mary Day was a strong,

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<sup>31</sup> George Brown Tindall, *America: A Narrative History* Vol 1, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1984), 560-568; Sorin, 38-43.

<sup>32</sup> Sorin, 44-55.

loving wife who worked hard and reared Brown's children by his previous wife, along with bearing and raising seven of her own.<sup>33</sup>

During the 1830's Brown's commitment to his Calvinist Christian beliefs deepened, and while residing in New Richmond, Township Pennsylvania, he created a school where he worked to evangelize the community. He led Christian services in his barn, and in a school house he built. Brown worked to procure ministers, but led services in the absence of clergy.<sup>34</sup>

Brown's pursuit of Calvinist Christian righteousness led him to eschew the use of tobacco and hard liquor. His sense of righteousness was fused with his abolitionist beliefs, and he aided fugitive slaves in their escape to freedom while living in New Richmond. He had developed the belief that ending slavery was worth risking failure and death during this time in his life, a belief that propelled him to act on his abolitionist convictions.<sup>35</sup>

Brown was a failure in his father's trade of tanning, and also as a surveyor, lumber dealer, postmaster, shepherd, wool dealer, horse breeder, and trainer, cattleman, and farmer. He failed in business for two reasons, one being the fact that he relied too much on credit to fund his business ventures. When returns on his investments did not garner enough income to cover his debts, the businesses failed. However, the more in-depth reason was that he was so committed to his Christian faith and his abolitionist crusade that all other enterprises were secondary in importance. His rigid adherence to his

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<sup>33</sup> Villard, 24, 25; Clarence S. Gee, *Genealogy of John Brown and his Children*, 30 October 1957, (West Virginia State Archives) [database online]; available from <http://www.culture.org/history/archivesindex.aspx>. All future references to this document were accessed on August 31, 2005.

<sup>34</sup> Decaro, 84-86.

<sup>35</sup> George B. Delameter (undated letter), in Ruchame, 170-171.

religious beliefs and his fervor for his abolitionist crusade dominated his mind and actions almost to the exclusion of his business ventures. Brown was deeply committed to the abolitionist cause, but he was not yet a violent abolitionist crusader. Dramatic events soon transpired that helped to turn him into an anti-slavery warrior.<sup>36</sup>

On November 7, 1837, a pro-slavery mob in Alton, Illinois killed abolitionist minister Elijah P. Lovejoy and destroyed his printing press. Lovejoy was a prominent abolitionist, and his murder exacerbated abolitionist zeal to fight slavery. The murder of Lovejoy spurred the evolution of Brown's abolitionist beliefs from firm to extreme. Abolitionist Christians held memorial services all across the North and during a service at Hudson, Ohio, John Brown rose and reputedly said "Here before God, in the presence of these witnesses, from this time, I consecrate my life to the destruction of slavery."<sup>37</sup>

Brown was serious about his abolitionist beliefs and the equality of African Americans and whites. During services at the Congregational Church in Franklin, Ohio, that same year, he noticed that African-Americans were seated at the back of the church, segregated from whites. Brown took umbrage at this discrimination, and at the next service stood up and stated his opposition to racism. Following his speech, he went to the back of the church, and led the African-Americans to his family pew and sat them amongst the white members of the congregation. Brown's family moved to the African-American section in the back of the church. Brown's action caused uproar in the church, and the next day deacons visited Brown to reprove him for his action. However, Brown

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<sup>36</sup> Sanborn, 54; John Brown Jr. to F.B. Sanborn, (Undated Letter) in Sanborn, 87-88; (Find twenty year letter)

<sup>37</sup> David S. Reynolds, *John Brown, Abolitionist: The Man Who Killed Slavery, Sparked the Civil War, and Seeded Civil Rights* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 2005), 63 ; Edward Brown in J. Newton Brown, "Lovejoy's Influence on John Brown" *The Magazine of History* Vol 23, September-October 1916, 97-102, in Ruchame, 181.

did not back down, and sent the deacons away after a strong statement of his belief in the equality of all persons before God. One year later, after the Browns had moved from Franklin to Hudson, Ohio, the church sent him a letter stating that the family had been expelled from the membership due to their year's absence, but more likely, Brown's belief in racial equality was the underlying cause for his family's expulsion.<sup>38</sup>

Brown's association with organized religion was sparse following this incident, for he could not reconcile the hypocrisy of a church that preached freedom for African-Americans and yet refused to accord them social and spiritual equality. Brown's faith in his Christian beliefs did not waver, but becomes stronger. His religious beliefs became more bonded with his abolitionist crusade, and less with organized religion.<sup>39</sup>

Brown's evolution from a peaceful abolitionist to a violent abolitionist crusader was evident when he gathered his family in the kitchen in their home Akron, Ohio in 1837, and asked his family if they would commit to fight slavery by violent means. Brown's shift in tactics to end slavery had been a long and slow process, but he had reached a point where he did not believe that peaceful means would ever end it. He asked his wife, Mary, sons John Junior, Jason and Owen to swear an oath to fight slavery by violent means and all present agreed. Brown's transformation into an abolitionist warrior was almost complete.<sup>40</sup>

Ten years later, in 1847, Frederick Douglass, a freed slave who was a prominent African-American abolitionist, visited Brown's home in Springfield, Massachusetts. Brown had moved his family to operate a wool cooperative in that July, and was living in a working class neighborhood. Douglass was impressed with Brown's honesty and

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<sup>38</sup> John Brown Jr. to F.B. Sanborn (undated Letter), in Sanborn, 52, 53.

<sup>39</sup> Oates, 43, 44.

<sup>40</sup> John Brown Junior to F.B. Sanborn, December, 1890, in Villard, 46.

genuine dedication to abolitionism. Brown's evolution from a peaceful abolitionist crusader was complete, and in their conversation he proposed to enlist Douglass in his plan to abolish slavery in the United States. Brown's strategy was to take twenty-five men into the Allegheny Mountains in Pennsylvania and Maryland, and end slavery by helping thousands of slaves escape to the North. Brown proposed recruiting the bravest of these men to fight off slaveholders who resisted his forces' efforts, and send the rest of them to Canada. Brown believed that this would have a weakening effect on slavery in the South, thus creating a domino effect that would eventually end slavery in the United States.<sup>41</sup>

Douglass pointed out that Brown might die in this effort; Brown stated that "he had no better use for his life than to lay it down for the cause of the slave." Douglass had not yet given up on finding a peaceful means of abolishing slavery, and instead proposed that slaveholders might be morally persuaded to end it. Demonstrating his abandonment of peaceful persuasion, Brown replied that "he knew their proud hearts and that they would never be induced to give up their slaves unless they felt a big stick about their heads." Douglass left the Brown home fully convinced of the veracity of Brown's abolitionist convictions, and of his determination to fight to end slavery.<sup>42</sup>

Brown did not immediately take up arms against slavery, but he did take action to help fugitive and former slaves. In 1848, Gerrit Smith, a wealthy abolitionist, set aside 120,000 acres of land in the Adirondack Mountains of New York for free African-Americans to settle on and become financially independent. In addition, Smith wanted the African-Americans to earn the \$250 dollar property value qualification for voting in

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<sup>41</sup> Frederick Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, (1893, Reprint in *Frederick Douglass, Autobiographies* (New York: Library Classics of the United States, Inc), 718,719.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, 719.

the state. Brown entered into agreement with Smith to aid the African-Americans with farming and general advice on daily matters of life. Brown moved his family to North Elba, New York, in 1848, and settled them on a 244 acre farm that he bought from Smith for one dollar an acre.<sup>43</sup>

From 1848 to 1850 Brown alternated between his efforts to settle his family at North Elba and help African-American settlers in their new homes in Adirondack Mountains and settling his business affairs concerning a wool cooperative in Springfield, Massachusetts. While he was at Springfield, Congress passed the fugitive slave law as part of the compromise of 1850, which mandated that slaveholders could retrieve escaped slaves anywhere in the United States with impunity. Furthermore, it established commissioners who could request aid from citizens who were bound by law to help retrieve escaped slaves. The law set abolitionists across the North ablaze with moral indignation and John Brown aflame with the desire to put his pledge to fight slavery into action. Brown organized the United States League of Gileadites, an organization dedicated to enabling free African-Americans and fugitive slaves to defend themselves against attempts by slave holders to return them to captivity. Brown attended the Zion Methodist Church in Springfield, a racially integrated abolitionist church, and his genuine racial egalitarianism and respect for African-Americans gave him the ability to inspire African-Americans to allow him to lead them. Brown advocated violent resistance to any effort by slaveholders to return any freed or fugitive slave, an indication that he had changed from a nonviolent abolitionist to a violent anti-slavery warrior.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Abels, 29-32.

<sup>44</sup> Henry H. Simms, *A Decade of Sectional Controversy: 1851-1861*(Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1942), 51-57.

Brown returned to North Elba to find that the African-American settlers were not prospering due to a combination of their unfamiliarity with the cold climate, and the area's rocky soil which stubbornly refused to yield crops. In addition, white settlers in the area refused to help them economically, and businessmen in the cheated them constantly. Brown interceded on behalf of the African-American settlers when they were mistreated by white residents and provided supplies for them. However, in the end, Gerrit Smith's and John Brown's efforts to settle African-Americans in the Adirondacks failed. Brown had to find another theater of operations to fight his battle against slavery, and soon national events provided him with a new battlefield in the Kansas Territory.

## Chapter Two

### The Christian Crusader in Kansas

John Brown's upbringing in his Calvinist faith inculcated him with a belief that it was his duty to embark on his abolitionist crusade. He believed that slavery was a malevolent stain in America's moral fabric and that slaveholders would not free their slaves unless they were forced to by violent duress. Therefore, when the status of slavery in Kansas Territory was in question, Brown joined Free State forces to insure that Kansas Territory would enter the Union as a Free State.

The fight over slavery in Kansas Territory was the result of long simmering debate over the status of slavery in western territories that came to a violent boil in Kansas Territory in 1854. John Brown's penchant for moving to find greener pastures was not unusual for his era. Americans were constantly on the move, and when slaveholders moved west, they came into conflict with free soil advocates who did not want slavery to extend into new territories. Slaveholders, on the other hand, felt that slavery was protected by the U.S. Constitution and that they had the right to take their property anywhere they desired.<sup>1</sup>

Cultural differences also divided North and South. The North had developed a dynamic industrial socioeconomic base, while the south had remained a tradition-bound agricultural section. The northern economy was based on the dignity and value of free labor, while southerners built their labor system on slavery, believing that slaves performed the menial labor in society, while whites served in skilled and professional

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<sup>1</sup> Warren, Robert Penn, *John Brown: The Making of a Martyr* (Payson and Clarke, Ltd, 1929, reprint, Nashville: J.S. Sanders and Company, 1993), 91 (all references are to the reprint edition); Frederick Jackson Turner, *The United States 1830-1850: The Nation and its Sections*. (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1935), 14-15.

occupations. northern and southern philosophies clashed constantly, creating a strained political and social atmosphere that guaranteed conflict between the sections.<sup>2</sup>

Congress had kept the issue of slavery in the territories to a low boil by passing compromise measures that temporarily placated advocates of both sides of the slavery issue. The Missouri Compromise of 1820 was precipitated by Missouri's desire to be admitted as a slave state. This would have thrown the balance of free versus slave states in favor of slave states, which created sectional political conflict. To placate both sides on the issue, Missouri was admitted as a slave state, while Maine was admitted to the Union as a free state. In additional effort to settle northern jitters about the expansion of slavery into new territories, the Missouri Compromise stated that slavery would not be allowed north of 36° 30".<sup>3</sup>

The Mexican-American War unsettled the balance of power when in 1848, via the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hildago, the United States gained parts of what are now the states of New Mexico, Nevada, Arizona, Utah, California, and Colorado. Southerners demanded the right to take their slaves into the newly opened territories. Northerners objected, and brouhaha was on in congress. Henry Clay worked to bring together the compromise of 1850, which brought California into the Union as a free state, but allowed the citizens of New Mexico and Utah Territories to decide by a vote whether they would allow slavery. This was termed "Popular Sovereignty," a concept that would be one of the primary causes of the "Bleeding Kansas" era of American History.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Susan-Mary Grant, *North over South: Northern Nationalism and American Identity in the Antebellum Era* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2000), 153-159.

<sup>3</sup> Don E. Fehrenbacher, *The South and Three Sectional Crises* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), 15.

<sup>4</sup> Nicole Etcheson, *Bleeding Kansas: Contested Liberty in the Civil War Era* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 12.

The compromise of 1850 also included the Fugitive Slave act, which caused an uproar amongst John Brown and other abolitionists. It dictated that slaveholders could retrieve fugitive slaves from any state in the Union and that local law enforcement and citizens were compelled by law to aid them in their efforts. In addition, whites who refused to cooperate with the commissioners who sought the fugitive slaves, or interfered with their efforts faced fines and imprisonment. African Americans were denied the right to a trial or testify in their own defense. While the Fugitive Slave Act was galling to Northerners, many accepted the Compromise of 1850 overall, and the balance between North and South was preserved.<sup>5</sup>

The Kansas Nebraska Act of 1854 forced the issue of the expansion of slavery into the territories onto the national stage once again. Stephen Douglas, a senator from Illinois wrote the bill into law, which stated that, the citizens of Kansas and Nebraska Territories, and in extension all new territories, could utilize popular sovereignty to decide the status of slavery in their territories and states. The Kansas Nebraska Act explicitly nullified the Missouri Compromise's proscription of slavery north of 36° 30'.<sup>6</sup>

Northerners reacted negatively to the Kansas Nebraska Act because it opened territory heretofore closed to slavery, and they feared the South would gain ascendancy in the social, economic, and political realms of these territories. Free State advocates organized emigration aid societies, one of the largest and most important being the New England Emigrant Aid Society, headed by Eli Thayer. Thayer's strategy was to form a company that provided the means for Free State settlers to emigrate to Kansas Territory, for Nebraska Territory was bordered by the Free State of Iowa, so its entry into the Union

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<sup>5</sup> Micheal F. Holt, *The Political Crisis of the 1850s* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1978), 86,87.

<sup>6</sup> Etcheson,, 14-15.

as a free state was a forgone conclusion. Kansas was bordered by the slave state of Missouri, and therefore had a greater chance of becoming a slave state if anti-slavery forces did not act quickly. Free State settlers were to vote for Kansas Territory to enter the Union as a free state, and pay back the New England Emigrant Aid Society for the cost of their passage, when they were able to, in return for the society's aid in procuring the means of their emigration to Kansas Territory.<sup>7</sup>

Thayer's strategy called for New England Free State Settlers to be shock troops in the war against slavery in Kansas by settling in advance of Free State settlers from the Northern Midwest, establishing a beachhead in defiance of pro-slavery advocates who would try to make Kansas a slave state. Thayer believed that victory in Kansas would inflict a dramatic political setback on proslavery advocates that would reverberate into the demise of slavery in the United States. Thayer's plan found an enthusiastic audience in the North, and Free Soilers and abolitionists, encouraged by the northern anti-slavery elite, soon were preparing to move to Kansas Territory in large numbers. The New England Emigrant Aid Society established Lawrence, Kansas on August 1, 1854. The Free State advocates followed this event by establishing other Free State communities, including Osawatimie, which was founded either in December, 1854, or early January 1855. John Brown would make the Osawatimie area his home, and his violent abolitionist crusade would put Osawatimie in the center of the maelstrom of Bleeding Kansas.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Thomas Goodrich, *War to the Knife: Bleeding Kansas, 1854-1861* (Mechanicsburg: Stackpole Books, 1998), 9,10.

<sup>8</sup> Goodrich, 10; Samuel A. Johnson, *The Battle Cry of Freedom: The New England Aid Society in the Kansas Crusade* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1954), 53.

Southern pro-slavery advocates viewed Thayer's and other similar emigration societies as an attack on their political and economic health and development and as an insult to southern culture. Pro-slavery advocates expected Kansas Territory to become a slave state, and Nebraska Territory to become a free state, preserving the balance of power between free and slave states in congress. When northerners began to settle Kansas in an effort to make it a slave state, conflict between pro-and-anti-slavery forces increased exponentially, for southerners were adamant Kansas would enter the Union as a slave state, and they were willing to fight politically and to use violence to ensure this result.<sup>9</sup>

Thayer and other anti-slavery advocates had taken care to arm their forces, but proslavery forces engaged in massive legal and voting fraud to insure that the territorial government was strongly pro-slavery. Pro-slavery advocates passed draconian pro-slavery laws that anti-slavery advocates simply refused to accept the validity of, and instead set up their own shadow government. Free State intransigence spurred the pro-slavery government and extralegal forces from Missouri labeled "Border Ruffians" to commit acts of violence against Free Staters in the name of "law and order." The courts routinely looked the other way when pro-slavery advocates committed atrocities against Free Staters. Free Staters began to fight back, and a guerilla war began between the pro-and-anti-slavery forces in Kansas Territory. Into this tinderbox rode a lit match named John Brown.<sup>10</sup>

In May 1855, Brown's sons preceded him to Kansas. John, Jason, Owen, Frederick, and Salmon Brown settled in the Osawatimie area. Brown's sons came to

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<sup>9</sup> Jules Abels, *Man on Fire: John Brown and the Cause of Liberty* (New York: The MacMillian Company, 1971), 43, 44.

<sup>10</sup> Abels, 45, 46; William Elsey Connelly, *John Brown*, Vol 1 (Topeka: Crane and Company, 1900), 40-49.

make a new start and to work to ensure that Kansas entered the Union as a free state. The Brown clan found Kansas soil to be rich and ideal for good crops. Kansas was a perfect place for the Browns to start over. However, the main ideological reason that they came to Kansas was to ensure that Kansas entered the Union as a free state.<sup>11</sup>

Brown came to Kansas with the pure intention of fighting proslavery forces in Kansas Territory. Brown's father, Owen, who was in his eighties, wrote the Reverend Samuel Adair upon John Brown's departure for Kansas Territory "He thinks to start for Kansas next week, he has something of a warlike spiret [sic] I think as necessary for defence I hope nothing more." Brown's zeal for violence against slavery forces in Kansas not only worried his father, but also Adair, who was concerned about Brown's propensity for violence against slaveholders. Brown came to Kansas in October, 1855, with "a lot of revolvers, rifles, and muskets" that had been donated by anti-slavery advocates to fight proslavery forces in Kansas. Adair concurred with Owen's analysis of John's desire to engage in violence against slavery, writing that "he has much of the war spirit, I hope he will not, however go beyond strict self defense or defense of suffrage." Brown went far beyond the demands of self defense or defense of suffrage, for he did not come to Kansas with a wagonload of farm tools, but with a wagonload of weapons. He came to Kansas not to farm, but to fight.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Hill Peebles Wilson, *John Brown Soldier of Fortune: A Critique* (Boston: The Cornhill Company, 1913), 73.

<sup>12</sup> The Reverend Samuel Adair was John Brown's brother-in-law; he was married to Florilla Brown Adair, John Brown's half-sister. She was the daughter of Sally Root Brown, Owen Brown's second wife. The Adair's were abolitionists who found the first Congregationalist Church in Osawatimie, Kansas in 1855 (Clarence S. Gee, "Owen Brown Family Genealogy" 1955-1961 (West Virginia State Archives) [database online] available from <http://www.wvculture.org/history/archivesindex.aspx>. Accessed on September 7, 2005; Owen Brown to Samuel Lyle Adair, 8 August 1855 (Kansas State Historical Society) [database online] Available from <http://www.territorialkansas.org>. Accessed on September 7, 2005; Samuel Lyle Adair to Reverend S.S. Jocelyn, 15 October 1855 (Kansas State Historical Society) [database online] available from <http://territorialkansasonline.org> .

First, However, Brown had to take care of his family, who had fallen on hard times since they had emigrated to Kansas Territory in the spring of 1855. Brown's sons and their wives were ill. Their illness was exacerbated because they had not built any permanent homes but instead were living in tents and makeshift shelters. John Brown and his children had sixty cents after gathering all of their funds together. To add to their misery, they had to battle prairie fires.<sup>13</sup>

Even while he observed that his family was suffering, Brown had his mind on fighting slaveholders in Kansas. He believed that proslavery advocates were losing ground, and Free State forces were winning the battle over the status of slavery in Kansas Territory. Despite his family's suffering, he urged his wife to have "hope in God" and "endeavor" earnestly to secure admission where there will be no more bitter separations." Brown had come to Kansas with his strong Christian faith, which remained intact despite his family's suffering.<sup>14</sup>

John Brown first went into battle against slavery during the Wakarusa War, which was a conflict that erupted due to a claim dispute between proslavery advocate Franklin Coleman and Free Stater Charles Dow. Coleman shot Dow, and fled to the protection of Sam Jones, the proslavery sheriff of Douglas County, Kansas. Jones and the proslavery government of Kansas Territory refused to prosecute Coleman, and this action fomented active guerilla warfare in Kansas Territory. During the unrest, Jones arrested Jacob Branson, a Free State settler, for threatening revenge for Dow's murder. Free State forces from the Free State bastion of Lawrence freed Branson while Jones was

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Accessed on September 7, 2005.

<sup>13</sup> John Brown to Dear Wife [Mary Brown] and Children everyone, 13 October 1855, (Kansas State Historical Society) [database online] available from <http://www.territorialkansasonline.org> . Accessed on September 7, 2005.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 14.

transporting his prisoner to Lecompton, the proslavery capital of Kansas at the time. The proslavery government of Kansas used this as an excuse to besiege Lawrence with 1500 proslavery fighters, and John Brown armed himself, along with other men from the Osawatimie area, and went to the defense of Lawrence.<sup>15</sup>

Brown went to Lawrence to fight proslavery advocates, and when Charles, Robinson, the Kansas representative of the New England Emigrant Aid Society, negotiated a peaceful solution to the Wakarusa war, Brown was appalled. Brown stood and decried the agreement with such fervor that Robinson's men forcibly dragged him off the speaker's stand.<sup>16</sup>

Proslavery forces were not happy with the results either. They felt they had been sold out by Wilson Shannon, and they did not lose their zeal to destroy Lawrence and drive out all Free State Settlers in Kansas Territory. The Wakarusa War did not end hostilities between pro-and-anti slavery forces, but kept them at a boil, scalding any chances for an early end to the conflict.<sup>17</sup>

Soon after the Wakarusa War, Brown offered a sarcastic analysis of Robinson's strategy when he wrote "I will only say at this time that the territory is now intirely [sic] in the power of the Free State Men; & not withstanding this result has been secured by means of some bravery, & tact; with a good deal of trickery on one side; & of cowardice, folly on the other, yet so it is." Brown disapproved of any peaceful resolution to the

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<sup>15</sup> Alice Nichols, *Bleeding Kansas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), 49-59.

<sup>16</sup> Salmon Brown to William E. Connelly, 28 May 1913 (West Virginia State Archives) [database online] available from <http://www://wvculture.org/history/archivesindex.aspx>. Accessed on September 12, 2005. All future references to this source were accessed on this date.

<sup>17</sup> Etchison, 87-88.

conflict, and the Wakarusa War failed to offer him the war against slavery he had sought.<sup>18</sup>

Brown's desire to fight did not abate during the cold winter of 1855-1856, nor did his religious faith. Despite the fact that he missed his family, he continued to stand by his Christian faith as the core of his moral resolve to end slavery. Brown's zeal to end slavery grew as spring came, for he asserted that "For one I have no desire (all things considered) to have the Slave power cease from its acts of aggression. "Their foot shall slide in due time." Brown was spoiling for a fight in Kansas Territory, and he had a "bring it on" attitude towards proslavery forces. Events soon transpired giving Brown an opportunity to try to aggravate the conflict between pro-and-antislavery forces in Kansas to open warfare.<sup>19</sup>

In the spring of 1856, Proslavery Judge Sterling Cato was holding court in the Osawatomie area, pledging to arrest Free Staters. The outspoken and aggressive John Brown and his clan were high on Cato's list. Free State advocates had a meeting, and decided to send a warning to Cato's court to cease and desist from any efforts to enforce proslavery law. John Brown and sons John Brown Junior and Salmon went down to Cato's Court, and delivered the message. Judge Sterling Cato ignored it and issued warrants for the arrest of John Brown and all of his sons, and all of the members of the Free State shadow government in the Osawatomie area.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> John Brown to Orson Day, Esquire, 14 December 1855 (Kansas State Historical Society) [database online] available from <http://www.territorialkansasonline.org>. Accessed on September 12, 2005.

<sup>19</sup> John Brown to Dear Wife [Mary Brown] and Children everyone, 1 February 1856 (Kansas State Historical Society) [database online] available from <http://www.territorialkansasonline.org>. Accessed on September 12, 2005; John Brown to Dear Wife [Mary Brown] and Children everyone, 7 April 1856 (Kansas State Historical Society) [database online] available from <http://territorialkansasonline.org>.

<sup>20</sup> Salmon Brown to William Elsey Connelly, 28 May 1913.

Brown was determined to stir up trouble, and after a scouting mission in a proslavery guerilla camp, where he learned that proslavery fighters intended to attack and kill him and his sons, along with other Free State settlers, he decided to be proactive in his fight against proslavery advocates in the Osawatomie area. To provoke a fight, he sent his son, Salmon and his son-in-law Henry Thompson unarmed, to Judge Cato's court. Brown told them to loiter around the court to test the Cato's and the proslavery government's resolve. Cato did not arrest Salmon and Henry, and they returned home. It is not clear whether Brown wanted the arrests to occur, but Brown's action revealed his deep faith in God, for he trusted God's providence to the point that he was willing to accept God's will if his son and son-in-law had been arrested or physically harmed. Salmon Brown, however did not share his father's deep religious faith, and was not comfortable with being dangled as bait to force a fight between pro-and-anti-slavery forces. Reflecting on the incident years later, Salmon stated that "I thought he trusted a little too much in Providence."<sup>21</sup>

Brown found the excuse to fight proslavery forces he sought when Samuel Jones exacted his revenge on Lawrence for thwarting Jones' desire to fight Free Staters. Jones was trying to arrest Free State leaders in Lawrence in the spring of 1856, and when a Free Stater shot him in the back while he was camping, he had his excuse to attack Lawrence. Jones blamed all of the Free Staters in Lawrence and after gaining the blessing of Governor Wilson Shannon and President Franklin Pierce, Jones rode into Lawrence with Federal Marshal T.J. Donelson, and Missouri Senator David Atchison, along with eight hundred proslavery militia soldiers to serve arrest warrants against Free State activists. Unlike the Wakarusa War, Charles Robinson was not present to offer any political

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<sup>21</sup> Salmon Brown to William Else Connelly, 28 May 1913.

trickery to win the day, for he recognized that he and other Free State leaders could not negotiate their way out of this mess, plus Robinson did not want to directly fight the federal government. Robinson and other Free State leaders had fled Lawrence in advance of Sheriff Jones party, leaving the town defenseless against the proslavery onslaught. After Marshal Donleson made some arrests, he freed the posse from its federal duty, and over to the authority of Sheriff Jones. Despite Atchison's entreaties to abstain from looting and burning, Jones was not to be denied his revenge, and he ordered the sacking of Lawrence.<sup>22</sup>

When John Brown heard of Lawrence's plight, he saddled up to ride to the beleaguered Free State city with nearly two hundred men. After a forced march, they rode up to the top of the hills south of Lawrence and saw Lawrence in flames. Brown realized that he was too late, but it provided a justification for his next move, an attack on the proslavery guerillas serving as the enforcement arm of Judge Cato's court.<sup>23</sup>

Brown and his force rode back to Ottawa Jones' homestead, which was between Ottawa and Lawrence, and camped on May 22. While cooking breakfast, and discussing the proslavery threat to Free State settlers in the Osawatomie area, Brown asserted that "Now something *must* be done. We have got to defend our families and our neighbors as best we can. Something *is going to be done now*. We must show by actual work that there are two sides to this thing and that they cannot go on with impunity." The avenging Old Testament warrior had seen evil claim victory unopposed by the forces of light, and his sense of Christian justice had been assaulted. Brown was ready to visit righteous retribution on proslavery forces in the Osawatomie area. When James Townsley objected

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<sup>22</sup> Nichols, 105-109.

<sup>23</sup> Salmon Brown to William E. Connelly, 28 May 1913.

to the morality of killing proslavery settlers, Brown replied “I have no choice, it has been ordained by Almighty God, ordained from eternity, that I should make an example of these men.”<sup>24</sup>

Brown’s strategy was to drive Judge Cato’s court and other proslavery men who accompanied them out of the Osawatomie area by killing officers of the court and spreading terror throughout the proslavery community. Brown hoped to cause proslavery advocates to either cease harassing Free State settlers or to flee. He sought to accomplish this goal by staging a surprise attack on May 24, 1856.<sup>25</sup>

Brown selected four of his sons, Owen, Frederick, Salmon, and Oliver, and his son-in-law, Henry Thompson, and Free State advocates Theodore Weiner and James Townsley for the mission. Brown’s force attacked at night, for cover, and used broadswords to keep their actions stealthy. The inhabitants of the first cabin they approached greeted them with the sound of gunmetal being rammed through a chink in the walls of the cabin, and due to the fact that they did not want gunfire alerting the neighborhood to their attack, they moved on to the Doyle cabin. At the Doyle cabin, they forcibly extracted James Doyle and his sons William and Drury, who were taken outside of their home over the cries and protestations of Mahala Doyle and killed them with broadswords. Allen Wilkinson was the next victim, his ill wife begging for his life so that he could take care of her, but to no avail. Wilkinson soon fell to the ground, cut and hacked to death. William Sherman died of sword blows to the head, and Brown’s grisly

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<sup>24</sup> (Footnote Ottawa Jones); James Townsley in the *Lawrence Daily Journal*, 10 December 1879 in Louis Ruchames, ed. *The Story of John Brown in his own words In the Words of those who knew him and in the Poetry and Prose of the Literary Heritage* (London: Abelard-Schumann, 1959), 198; Jason Brown 13 December 1908, in Oswald Garrison Villard, *John Brown A Biography 1800-1859* ( Garden City: Doubleday, Doran and Company, Inc. 1929), 151. Nichols, 113.

<sup>25</sup> Salmon Brown to Frank B. Sanborn, 17 November 1911 (West Virginia State Archives) [database online] available from <http://www.wvculture.org/history/archivesindex.aspx>. Accessed on September 12, 2005. All future references this source were accessed on this date.

mission was finished. However, in a final flourish, John Brown shot the deceased Doyle in the forehead as Brown and his Free State force left the scene.<sup>26</sup>

Brown's attack on proslavery advocates on the Pottawatomie provoked a new wave of guerilla warfare. Charles Robinson and his Free State faction had quieted the guerilla to a mild degree by utilizing peaceful pursuits. Brown, however, had other ideas, and wanted to start a war to end slavery, and felt that political maneuvers would not accomplish this goal. The Pottawatomie Massacre gave him his renewed war.<sup>27</sup>

Brown and his men were condemned by both free and slave state activists for the Pottawatomie Massacre, and Brown had to go into hiding in the wilds of Kansas Territory. Brown's faith in the spiritual veracity of his abolitionist crusade had not been shaken by the negative response to the Pottawatomie raid, for when James Redpath, a Free State fighter and reporter visited his camp, Redpath found that he was a peace with himself. Brown still led his troops in prayer and worship, and often sought solitude for prayer. Upon returning from his prayer sessions, Brown indicated to his men that he had been given visions from God that directed his actions. Furthermore, one of Brown's men told him that he did not "love warfare, but peace" and was only acting in obedience to the will of the Lord, and fighting God's battles for his children's sake."<sup>28</sup>

Brown later related to two of his allies, E.A. Coleman and his wife, the depth of his involvement in the Pottawatomie Massacre. When Coleman asked him if he killed the five proslavery advocates, he replied, "I did not; but I do not pretend to say that they were not killed by my order; and in doing so I believe that I was doing God's service."

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<sup>26</sup> Villard, 158; Nichols, 113-115; Salmon Brown to Frank B. Sanborn, 17 November 1911.

<sup>27</sup> Charles Robinson, *The Kansas Conflict* (Lawrence: Lawrence Journal Publishing Co, 1898, reprint, Freeport Books for Libraries Press, 1972), 265 (page citations are to reprint edition).

<sup>28</sup> Robinson, 275; James Redpath, *The Public Life of Captain John Brown* (Boston, 1860), 112,114, in Villard, 200,201.

Coleman's wife then asked "Then, captain do you think that God uses you as an instrument in his hands to kill men?" Brown replied "I think he has used me as an instrument to kill men; and if I live, I think he will use me as an instrument to kill a good many more!"<sup>29</sup>

After Pottawatomie, proslavery advocates began scouring eastern Kansas to find and fight John Brown and his men. Proslavery guerilla Henry Clay Pate, leading around fifty men, captured Brown's sons John Junior and Jason. Though neither had any part in the Pottawatomie Massacre, Pate turned Brown's sons over to federal troops and continued hunting for John Brown and the rest of his force. Pate's quarry quickly pursued Pate himself, both to engage his proslavery enemy and to free his captured sons. On Saturday, May 31, 1856, Pate camped near Black Jack Creek near present day Baldwin City. The next day, Pate's men rode into nearby Palmyra, and attacked and looted the Free State hamlet.<sup>30</sup>

Pate's raid on Palmyra cause the local Free State guerillas to mobilize, and on Monday Morning, June 2, 1856 they met with Brown and his nine men, and offered Brown command of Free State forces in the attack on Pate and his proslavery militia. Brown's nine, and Captain Samuel T. Shore's twenty men attacked Pate's fifty four men. Brown ordered Shore's twenty men to go into a ravine that flanked Pate's position on the left, and Brown charged up the ravine that flanked Pate's men to the right, thereby catching Pate's men in a murderous crossfire. Brown then went to the right, but Shore, with more bravado than brains, approached the ravine by marching out into the open

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<sup>29</sup> E.A. Coleman in W.E.B. Dubois, *John Brown*, ed. David Roediger ( Philadelphia: G.W. Jacobs, 1909, reprint New York: The Modern Library, 2001), 91 (all references are to the reprint edition)

<sup>30</sup> William Phillips, *The Conquest of Kansas* (Boston: Phillips, Sampson and Company, 1856, reprint Freeport: Books for Libraries Press, 1971), 51.

within range of Pate's rifles. Pate's men then flanked in the ravine to the left, and Shore's force was effectively neutralized, and he and most of his men retreated. Shore and two of his men joined Brown in the ravine to the right of Pate's position. Brown was now vastly outnumbered, but his faith in God and his determination to successfully prosecute his abolitionist crusade carried him, and after his son, Frederick rode a horse across the battlefield and gave the impression that Brown had more men than he did by waving a flag and pretending to rally Free State reinforcements, Pate surrendered to Brown's small force, with Brown taking twenty eight prisoners, Pate included.<sup>31</sup>

Brown's victory at the Battle of Black Jack successfully rehabilitated him in the eyes of many Free State settlers, for he had stood up against the proslavery foe and won. The battle also demonstrates Brown's strong faith that he believed that he was an avenging agent of God, and that not even being vastly outnumbered, and being outgunned deterred him from fighting slavery. The common belief is that God marches with the larger battalions, but Brown believed that God working through one man could defeat any force, no matter what the size.

Colonel Edwin Sumner, under order from Governor Wilson Shannon to disperse all organized guerilla groups, intercepted Brown, and ordered him to free his prisoners and disperse. Brown's belief in God's providence was strengthened not only by his victory, but by his narrow escape from capture and hanging when United States Marshal Fain, who was riding with Sumner's soldiers, failed to arrest him. Incidents such as this built John Brown's faith in God, and fed his will to fight slavery in the name of the Lord.

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<sup>31</sup> Phillips, 336-341.

<sup>32</sup> Nichols, 123.

Sumner also entered the camp of a proslavery band led by General J.W.

Whitfield, and ordered them to disband and return to Missouri. Whitfield's guerillas did not contest Sumner's authority and promised to disband. However, they continued to attack Free State forces, and on June 7, 1856, they attacked and looted Osawatomie to take revenge on Brown for the Pottawatomie Massacre. John Brown had placed his mark upon Osawatomie, and because of his presence and actions, the Free State town attracted visitors, pleasant, and unpleasant.<sup>33</sup>

Brown hid out in his camp at the Ottawa Jones homestead allowing his wounded troops to heal while the guerilla war he had worked to create stormed around him. On July 2, 1856, Brown rode to Lawrence, and from there, to Topeka to assist Free State forces in defending the Free State legislature from proslavery attack. The federally recognized proslavery government in Lecompton had called upon President Pierce to help them disband the shadow Free State government. Governor Wilson Shannon put Colonel Sumner, who earlier had dispersed Brown's guerillas after the Battle of Black Jack, in command of the unpleasant mission. On July 4, 1856, Sumner dispersed the Free State Legislature with such diplomacy that the disbanded legislators cheered him as he led his troops out of Topeka.<sup>34</sup>

John Brown and his guerilla fighters waited near Topeka to rush to the defense of the Free State Legislature, even to attack federal troops if necessary to defend the Free State cause. Brown did not have to fight the United States Army, but the fact that he was willing to attack Federal troops is demonstrative of his fealty to his crusade to end slavery. Brown's primary loyalty was to God, not the Federal Government, and if the

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<sup>33</sup> Phillips, 363-376.

<sup>34</sup> Villard, 217-220.

government defended slavery, he was willing to fight the United States Army. His belief that God's law transcended man's law drove him to commit acts that violated Federal and Territorial laws, for he believed he was God's arm of justice, and if human law violated his vision of God's commandments, he obeyed God's word first, and violated humanity's.<sup>35</sup>

Following a trip to the Nebraska border to deliver his wounded from the Battle of Black Jack to safety, John Brown returned to Kansas with his son, Frederick. Brown's sons, Owen, Oliver, and Salmon felt that they had done their bit for the Free State cause in Kansas Territory and left the conflict ridden territory. Thus, on August 7, 1856, Brown turned back towards his battle with slavery on the plains of Kansas.<sup>36</sup>

Brown returned to Lawrence on August 11, and through letters and intermediary contacts proposed to attempt a rescue mission to free his son John Brown, Junior, from a proslavery prison camp, but John Brown, Junior dissuaded his father from the attempt in fear for both of their lives. Brown heard of proslavery raids in the Osawatomie area and rode to defend the Free State town. Brown commenced raiding proslavery advocates' homesteads and driving off proslavery settlers along Sugar Creek in Linn and Bourbon Counties. Ironically, the leader of the proslavery force he attacked was also named John E. Brown. Following this raid, he returned to the Osawatomie area, and camped one mile northeast of the town at the site where the Osawatomie State Hospital now stands.<sup>37</sup>

Raiding proslavery settlers' homes and driving them off does not smack of Christian behavior, but Brown felt according to Frederick Douglass, that "slavery was a state of war, and the slave had a right to anything necessary to his freedom." Brown used

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<sup>35</sup> Villard, 221.

<sup>36</sup> Villard, 223,224.

<sup>37</sup> Villard, 236-238.

the livestock and good he took in raids in his abolitionist crusade, and thus felt that he was not committing an immoral act by “liberating” proslavery property to provide sustenance for his war against slavery. It must also be remembered that proslavery raiders engaged in the same practices with the same logic as John Brown, only reversed. Thus, no side was innocent of looting and burning during the struggle over the status of slavery in Kansas Territory.<sup>38</sup>

Wilson Shannon resigned as governor of the Territory of Kansas on August 18, 1856, and Lieutenant Governor Daniel Woodson, a proslavery advocate took his place. Woodson reacted to the news that Jim Lane, a Free State guerilla, had led Free State settlers in to Kansas Territory from the North, and chafing from the news of continuing guerilla war in the Territory, was going to settle the problem once and for all. Woodson called up the “Kansas Militia,” curiously staffed by Missouri proslavery advocates, to bring proslavery peace to Kansas Territory once and for all, and one of his fervent desires was to capture John Brown.<sup>39</sup>

Former Missouri Senator David Atchison led 1,150 proslavery militia men into Kansas to stamp out the Free State forces in Kansas Territory. On August 29, while camping at Bull Creek north of Osawatomie, Atchison learned that John Brown was in Osawatomie, and sent two hundred and fifty men under the command of John W. Reid to attack him. John Brown expected the attack, but the canny Reid circled the town and attacked from the west. The surprise was complete, for John Brown’s son, Frederick thought that the advance scouts of Reid’s force were Free Staters from Lawrence, and

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<sup>38</sup> Frederick Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass: Written by Himself* (1893, reprint, in *Frederick Douglass: Autobiographies* (New York: The Library of America, 1994), 718. (All References are to the Reprint edition.)

<sup>39</sup> Stephen Oates, *To Purge this Land with Blood: A Biography of John Brown* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), 168.

was shot dead by one of the scouts. In addition, David Garrison was killed after he spotted the proslavery guerillas and attempted to hide. The Reverend Samuel Adair, upon deducing that Osawatomie was in immediate danger, sent his son Charles into Osawatomie to warn John Brown and the citizens of the threatened Free State Community. Brown led his forces across the river to Osawatomie to organize its defenses. Brown first saw to it that the women and children were safe, and then set out to battle.<sup>40</sup>

Brown led 42-45 men into battle against Reid's 250 proslavery fighters, and engaged the proslavery forces about half a mile west of Osawatomie. Brown took up positions in the timber along the Marais Des Cygnes River and when he observed their superior numbers, concluded that he could only put up a symbolic fight, to draw the proslavery force away from Osawatomie and save the Free State community from a second sacking. When the proslavery force came into rifle range, Brown's forces opened fire, creating disorder in the proslavery ranks for fifteen or twenty minutes. However, Reid's force rallied, and brought artillery to bear on their positions, but Brown's men slipped away one by one. Brown was one of the last to retreat, even though he had been hit in the back by grapeshot the proslavery forces were raining down on his forces. Only when Brown saw that he had only six or seven men left did he retreat, wading across the river to safety.<sup>41</sup>

Reid's forces rode into Osawatomie and looted and burned the town, not pursuing Brown's forces as Brown had wished. When Brown reached safety across the river he

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<sup>40</sup> Villard, 240; Luke Parsons, "Speech on the Battle of Osawatomie," 30 August 1913 (West Virginia State Archives) [database online] available from <http://www.wvculture.org/history/archivesindex.aspx>. Accessed on September 13, 2005; John Brown, 7 September 1856, in Wilson; Oates, 169.

<sup>41</sup> John Brown in Wilson, 166,167; Oates, 169-170.

saw Osawatomie burning, and turned to his son Jason, and said, “God sees it, I have only a short time to live—only one death to die, and I will die fighting for this cause. There will be no more peace in this land until slavery is done for. I will give them something else to do than extend slave territory. I will carry this war into Africa.” The battle of Osawatomie had taken his son and five of his Free State guerillas, along with wounding five proslavery militia men, but John Brown’s abolitionist crusade would take more lives. However hard John Brown fought against slavery in Kansas Territory, his final campaign against slavery was to shake the very foundations of the American republic.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Parsons, 30 October 1913; John Reid, 31 August 1856 in Alfred Theodore Andreas, *History of Kansas* (Chicago: A.T. Andreas, 1883 reprint, Atchison: Atchison Historical Society, 1976), 145-146.

## Chapter Three

### The Christian Crusader Prepares for Battle

After the Battle of Osawatomie, Brown turned his primary attention to preparing for his raid on Harpers Ferry. He worked to recruit men and gain the funding for the supplies he needed from the ranks of abolitionists, with varying degrees of success. His faith in God and his mission did not wane, and though some abolitionists were lukewarm in their response to his fundraising efforts, he found firm supporters who backed his mission, proving to him that God was on his side.

Following the Battle of Osawatomie, Brown went and viewed his son Frederick's body. He was too overcome with emotion to stay for the burial, and instead took Frederick's cap and rode away before the funeral took place. Brown camped first at the Hauser Farmstead, two and a half miles from Osawatomie, and then moved on to Ottawa Jones' farmstead, which proslavery guerillas had raided and burned on August 31. He, along with his son, Jason, and Free State fighter Luke Parsons, rested and recuperated until he rode to Lawrence on September 7, 1856. Despite losing his son, Frederick, and seeing Osawatomie raided and burned, Brown's faith was intact, for he wrote to his wife Mary that "Hitherto the Lord both helped me not withstanding my afflictions."<sup>1</sup>

Free State settlers still had faith in Brown, for when he arrived in Lawrence he was greeted as a conquering hero. The Free State forces needed a hero, for proslavery Governor Woodson had called out 2,700 proslavery militia men under the command of David Atchison to subdue Free State forces in Kansas Territory. This included the

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<sup>1</sup> Oswald Garrison Villard, *John Brown A Biography: 1800-1859* (Garden City: Doubleday, Doran and Company, Inc., 1929), 254; Stephen Oates, *To Purge this Land with Blood: A Biography of John Brown* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), 171; John Brown to Dear Wife [Mary Brown] and Children everyone, 7 September 1856 (Kansas State Historical Society) [database online] Available from <http://www.territorialkansasonline.org> . Accessed on September 13, 2005.

proslavery guerillas that had fought in the Battle of Osawatomie under the command of John W. Reid. Lawrence was again threatened, and this time, John Brown was offered command its Free State forces. Brown declined the offer, choosing instead to act in the role of an advisor.<sup>2</sup>

Governor Woodson was replaced by Governor John W. Geary, who impartially governed Kansas Territory, and ended the guerilla war once and for all. Geary's effective leadership cooled the conflict down to the point that John Brown no longer had a war to fight in Kansas, and in early 1856, he left Kansas Territory for the east.<sup>3</sup>

Brown's faith that God was on his side was still strong, for on October 11, 1856, he wrote to his wife from Tabor, Iowa that "I am through Infinite grace, once more in a Free State." Brown needed a new base to operate from, and he had many supporters in Tabor, and abolitionist community settled primarily by emigrants from Oberlin, Ohio, a center of abolitionist activity. Brown established his new base of operations in Tabor, and started working to assemble his forces and gather funding and supplies for the grand finale of his abolitionist crusade. Brown engaged in fundraising for his abolitionist crusade during the rest of 1856 and the balance of 1857, while keeping watch on the political and ideological developments in Kansas.<sup>4</sup>

Brown was not convinced that Governor Geary's peace in Kansas would last. Brown established a base camp for his guerilla force outside of Kansas Territory. His plan was to have a guerilla force in stasis, and when Geary's peace fell apart in Kansas

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<sup>2</sup> Jules Abels, *Man on Fire: John Brown and the Cause of Liberty* (New York: The MacMillian Company, 1971), 104 -105.

<sup>3</sup> John H. Gihon, *Geary and Kansas* (Philadelphia: C.C. Rhodes, 1857), 129; Oates, 176,177.

<sup>4</sup> John Brown to Dear Wife [Mary Day Brown] and Children, 11 October 1856, (West Virginia State Archives) [database online] available from <http://www.wvculture.org/history/archivesindex.aspx>. Villard, 267, 268.

Territory, he could reassemble his fighters, and move back into Kansas to resume his abolitionist crusade. At his base in Tabor, he stored his supplies, arms and ammunition in the home of Reverend John Todd, an abolitionist minister. After establishing his base, he headed east to begin fundraising for his abolitionist crusade.<sup>5</sup>

During Brown's fundraising tour, he met with mixed success as he found that the majority of the abolitionists that he spoke to did not share his intense dedication to the abolitionist cause. This frustrated him, and he fumed to Theodore Parker that "he [Brown] cannot [sic] secure (amidst all the wealth, luxury, and extravagance of this ('Heaven exalted people' :)) even the necessary supplies for a common Soldier 'how are the Mighty fallen?'" Brown's difficulties did not affect his faith in his mission to end slavery, nor did it lessen his conviction that he was on a mission from God. Brown wrote John Brown, Junior on April 15, 1857, following a winter of fundraising that "I have had a good deal of discouragement; and have often felt quite depressed: but hitherto God hath helped me."<sup>6</sup>

Brown did not use a religious appeal to glean money, choosing to emphasize the suffering of Free State settlers to move his audience. Brown was a deeply devout Christian, but he was tolerant of others' religious faiths. His men included Jews, Agnostics, Spiritualists, and Quakers. Brown was practical enough to edit his speeches and appeals for a broad audience, not just those who shared his religious beliefs. Brown

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<sup>5</sup> Villard, 267-270.

<sup>6</sup> John Brown to Theodore Parker, Copy sent to Mary Stearns, April, 1857 (West Virginia State Archives) [database online] available from <http://www.wvculture.org/history/archivesindex.aspx>; John Brown to Dear Son [John Brown, Junior], 15 April 1857 (West Virginia State Archives) [database online] available from <http://www.wvculture.org/history/archivesindex.aspx>.

was willing to work with people of other faiths to end slavery, though he maintained his strong Christian faith.<sup>7</sup>

Brown reserved his religious statements for his family in private letters. Brown's faith was being tested, but it was still strong. His personal letters to his family reveal that he was willing to pay any price to fight slavery. Brown wrote to his wife, Mary, on June 17, 1857 that "would give anything to know that I would give anything to know that I shall be permitted to see you all again in this life. But God's will be done." Brown's half-brother Jeremiah related that that Brown's dedication to his abolitionist crusade increased during his battles in Kansas. When Brown inherited property from his father, he did not use the proceeds from the land to provide for his family but spent the entire amount on his mission to end slavery. John Brown stated to his half-brother that he was "satisfied that he was a chosen instrument in the hands of God to wage war against slavery." Brown was willing to sacrifice everything for his firm belief in the spiritual and moral veracity of his war against slavery.<sup>8</sup>

Brown and his sons had left the battlefields of Kansas Territory satisfied they had done their part for the Free State forces. Brown revealed in actions regarding his sons, that though he backed violent action against slavery, he was not bloodthirsty. Brown did not force his sons to fight alongside him. When his sons decided to leave Kansas, he did not condemn them. Brown believed that violence was the only means to end slavery. However, Brown did not fight and kill with glee. Brown stated that "while I may *perhaps*

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<sup>7</sup> Truman Nelson, *The Old Man: John Brown at Harpers Ferry* (New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1973), 66-92; Villard, 391-401.

<sup>8</sup> John Brown to Dear Wife [Mary Brown] and Children everyone, 17 July 1857 (Kansas State Historical Society) [database online] available from <http://www.territorialkansasonline.org> ; Jeremiah Brown testimony to the United States Senate, 1859, in Richard Webb, ed. *The Life and Letters of Captain John Brown: Who was Executed at Charlestown, Virginia, December 2, 1859, for an Armed Attack upon American Slavery* (London: Smith, Elder and Company, 1861), 80-81.

feel no more love of the business than they do; still I think there may be *possibly* in their day that which is more to be dreaded: if such things *do not now exist*.”<sup>9</sup>

Brown was ready for war, but the summer of 1857 brought peace to Kansas Territory via the efforts of Governor Geary and his successor, Robert J. Walker. Walker continued Geary’s policy of even handed government. Political and social conflicts between pro-and-anti-slavery forces still occurred, but the open guerilla warfare ended. In addition, Free State settlers were winning the battle of numbers against proslavery settlers, giving the Free State forces the upper hand. Brown was an abolitionist warrior without a war. Brown stated in August, 1857 that “Should no disturbance occur: we may possibly think back to work eastward, cannot determine yet.” Brown wanted a field of battle against slavery, and if he could not find one ready made, he was willing to create his own violent conflict over slavery.<sup>10</sup>

Brown was determined to create a conflict over slavery that would work to end slavery, and during a fundraising trip he met Hugh Forbes, a European revolutionary who had formal military training, and was anti-slavery. Brown enlisted his help and confided his strategy to end slavery to Forbes. Brown had also started assembling arms, ammunition, and supplies either for use in Kansas or in his larger plan to attack slavery in Virginia. Brown felt that if slaves had the chance to arm themselves and fight slaveholders, they would fight for their freedom. He proposed to raid the Federal Arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia, collect arms and ammunition and provide a rallying point for slaves to flock to their freedom. Brown planned to establish guerilla bases in the

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<sup>9</sup> John Brown to Dear Wife [Mary Brown], 31 March 1857, in Louis Ruchames, ed. *A John Brown Reader: The Story of John Brown in His Own Words and in the words of those Who Knew Him And In the Poetry and Prose of the Literary Heritage* (New York: Abelard-Schuman , 1959), 103.

<sup>10</sup> Alice Nichols, *Bleeding Kansas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), 190-199.

Allegheny Mountains and a series of communities for the freed slaves who joined him. Brown then planned to send raiding parties deeper and deeper into the South to induce slaves to leave their masters, thus making slavery economically and socially untenable, thereby ending slavery in the United States.<sup>11</sup>

Brown returned to his base camp at Tabor, Iowa on August 7, 1857, and retrieved the arms and ammunition that he had stored in Reverend Todd's basement and started planning his final raid. Brown's forces at this time consisted only of his son Owen. When Hugh Forbes found that he had traveled from the east to train and serve in an army of three, he was profoundly discouraged. In addition, Brown did not have the money he had promised to pay Forbes for his military services. Brown had asked Forbes to write an extensive military manual for his troops, and Forbes wanted to get paid for his efforts. Forbes left Tabor on November 2, 1857, and later became a major monkey wrench in Brown's plans to fight slavery in Virginia.<sup>12</sup>

Brown returned to Kansas on the same day Forbes left for the east. Brown roved about and gathered supplies and funds, but finding no guerilla war, he contented himself with recruiting troops. He recruited John E. Cook, Richard Realf, Luke F. Parsons, and met a future biographer, R.J. Hinton. In addition, he brought Aaron D. Stevens, Charles W. Moffet, Charles P. Tidd , Richard Richardson, William H. Leeman, and John H. Kagi into his abolitionist crusade. With a small cadre of troops gathered, he began to plan for his eastern campaign.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Villard, 286,287; Truman Nelson, *The Old Man: John Brown at Harpers Ferry* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1973), 49-54.

<sup>12</sup> Villard, 298, 299.

<sup>13</sup> Villard, 308, 309.

Brown returned to his camp at Tabor, Iowa in November, 1857 and revealed his plan to attack slavery in Virginia. His announcement created considerable alarm and concern amongst his followers, but Brown's strong faith in God and his belief that his abolitionist crusade was borne of Heaven, helped to convince his doubting men, and the mission moved forward. On December 4, 1857, he moved his base camp from Tabor to Springdale, Iowa, arriving there on December 29.<sup>14</sup>

Brown established his base at Springdale, leaving his troops there to prepare for his Virginia campaign, and went back east to engage in more fundraising efforts. Brown went to visit Frederick Douglass, in Rochester, New York, on January 28, 1858, and told him the details of his plan to raid Harpers Ferry. Douglass warned him against the plan, but Brown was not to be deterred from his mission. While at Douglass's home, he wrote a "Provisional Constitution" for the communities of freed slaves he proposed to create.<sup>15</sup>

Brown incorporated his deep Christian faith into his provisional constitution. He decreed that "schools and churches established, as soon as may be, for the purpose of religious and other instruction; and the first day of the week regarded as a day of rest and religious instruction and improvement." Brown's state was to be a Christian stronghold, and he proscribed "Profane Swearing, filthy conversation, indecent behavior, or indecent exposure of person, or intoxication, or quarreling, shall not be allowed or tolerated, neither unlawful intercourse of the sexes." Brown wove his religious beliefs into the fabric of his Christian state, and demanded that everyone conform to his moral standards.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Villard, 310, 311.

<sup>15</sup> Oates, 223, 224.

<sup>16</sup> John Brown Provisional Constitution, in Wilson, 428, 429.

Brown's provisional constitution differed from the United States Constitution in that it would effectively establish a theocracy. The United States Constitution, in the first amendment, which states that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion." Brown's provisional constitution reflects a clear conflict between his vision of society, and the founding fathers. To Brown, Christianity and the Bible reigned as the supreme guide to all matters in life, and man's law was of secondary importance. Thus, he could fight anyone who stood for slavery, even the United States Government, if necessary.<sup>17</sup>

Brown spent most of the winter and spring of 1858 fundraising. Most importantly, on February 22, he met with his primary group of supporters, known as the "Secret Six," at Peterboro, New York. Brown revealed his plans to them, along with his provisional constitution. Like Douglass, they tried to convince him of the inadvisability of his plan, but Brown's commitment wore them down. Gerrit Smith, after trying to dissuade his Brown from his Harpers Ferry plan for two days, summed up the feelings of the Secret Six "You see how it is; our dear friend has made up his mind to this course, and cannot be turned from it. We cannot give him up to die alone; we must support him." Brown's Christian zeal and strong devotion for his abolitionist cause won them over, for they realized that Brown was going to proceed despite any advice against his plan.<sup>18</sup>

Brown continued his fundraising and recruiting efforts throughout the winter and spring of 1858, despite the efforts of Hugh Forbes to derail his plans. Forbes had not been paid for his services as an advisor to Brown's troops, and when he failed to gain financial

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<sup>17</sup> "The Bill of Rights" [database online] available from <http://usinfo.state.gov/usa/infousa/facts/funddocs/billeng.htm>.

<sup>18</sup> Franklin Benjamin Sanborn, ed. *The Life and Letters of John Brown: Liberator of Kansas and Martyr of Virginia* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1891), 438, 439.

satisfaction from Brown's supporters, he went to Washington, D.C., and reported Brown's plans to Massachusetts Senator Henry Wilson and New York Senator William H. Seward. This did not deter Brown in his efforts, but it concerned his supporters, who told him to hold off on his attack on Virginia until the threat from Forbes could be neutralized. Brown's supporters suggested that he commence operations in Kansas Territory to discredit Forbes' efforts to expose Brown's plans in Virginia.<sup>19</sup>

While the Secret Six were engaged in damage control back east, Brown went to Chatham, Canada to formally ratify the provisional constitution he had written at Frederick Douglass's home. On May 8, 1858, he held a constitutional convention for the government of the egalitarian nation that he planned on forming in the Alleghenies. Brown wanted to formalize his new government and recruit new guerillas for his cause. None of Brown's primary supporters attended his constitutional convention but that did not deter him from his course. Both African-Americans and whites who attended raised the same objections everyone else had, but Brown dismissed their concerns. He had faith in God to sustain him and bring him victory. Despite their concerns, they signed the document, a further testimony to Brown's persuasive nature and leadership ability.<sup>20</sup>

After leaving Chatham, Brown visited his home in North Elba, and per the request of the Secret Six, returned to Lawrence, Kansas on June 27, 1858. Free State forces had prevailed in Kansas Territory in the federally recognized Territorial government, and Brown needed military action to discredit Forbes' whistle blowing. Brown found that while Free State forces had completely pacified northern Kansas, there was a spark of conflict in southeastern Kansas that he could possibly fan into a roaring fire. Brown's

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<sup>19</sup> Villard, 316, 317; Sanborn, 458-464.

<sup>20</sup> Oate, 243-247.

abolitionist war benefited from an attack on Free State settlers that was similar to the Pottawatomie Massacre. Charles A. Hamilton had set out to kill around sixty Free State settlers and guerillas, and James Montgomery found out about Hamilton's plans and engaged in preemptive strike, forcing Hamilton and his force to leave Kansas Territory. Hamilton wanted revenge, and on May 19, 1858, he and a group of proslavery guerillas killed five Free State settlers and wounded four, with one Free Stater saving his life by feigning death. Hamilton and his men rode back into Missouri, this proslavery action being named "The Marais Des Cygnes Massacre," which gave John Brown and opening to fight a new guerilla war in Kansas Territory. Free State fighters formed together to search out, and capture or kill Hamilton and his guerillas, among them James Montgomery, who ranged about Western Missouri searching for Hamilton and his men with little success.<sup>21</sup>

Montgomery found that many citizens, both pro-and-anti-slavery were weary of the guerilla war that had boiled and simmered repeatedly in southeast Kansas since 1856. Settlers on both sides of the issue sought to have peace restored by offering an olive branch to both sides of the issue, offering to arrest any pro-or-anti-slavery guerillas who committed depredations against either side. Thus, James Montgomery found himself a wanted man due to his actions as a Free State guerilla.<sup>22</sup>

Montgomery sought allies, and he found a willing one in John Brown. Brown wanted to fight slavery, and Montgomery was offering him the opportunity to strike at proslavery advocates again. Brown took the alias of Shubel Morgan to shield his identity,

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<sup>21</sup> Oates, 247-248; Nicole Etcheson, *Bleeding Kansas: Contested Liberty in the Civil War Era* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 197; Nichols, 35; G Murlen Welch, *Border Warfare in Southeastern Kansas: 1856-1859* (Pleasanton: Linn County Publishers, 1977), 96-111.

<sup>22</sup> Welch, 114-(Look it up)

and on July 1, 1858 established a base camp at the homestead of Eli Snyder, who had fought Hamilton before the Marais Des Cygnes Massacre, and one half mile from the Missouri state border. Brown called his men to join him there, and thus began a dress rehearsal for his raid on Harpers Ferry.<sup>23</sup>

Brown wrote up a set of regulations for his guerilla troops, and his deep Christian beliefs are evident when he wrote, “a gentlemanly and respectful deportment shall at all times and places shall be maintained towards all persons; and profane or indecent language shall be avoided in all cases.” He followed this regulation with a ban on “intoxicating drinks.” Brown stood by his strict morals even in the heat of guerilla war, thereby demonstrating his fealty to his Christian beliefs.<sup>24</sup>

Brown was willing to fight any force that he considered proslavery, and when he perceived that fighting federal forces at Fox’s ford was a battle against slavery, he did not hesitate to battle federal troops. Both sides of the fight garnered wounded soldiers from the skirmish. Brown later hid out in the home of Augustus Wattles, and while there literally lay out on the floor above Wattles as he visited with Captain Farnsworth, a federal cavalryman who boasted that he was going to capture John Brown. Neither Farnsworth, nor any other federal officer captured Brown until his raid at Harpers Ferry. Brown was committed to his abolitionist crusade to the point that he was willing to fight anyone who dared to oppose him, for Brown adhered to the values and beliefs of his Christian faith, not man made laws that condoned slavery.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Villard, 353.

<sup>24</sup> 41 John Brown, “Articles of Agreement for Shubel Morgan’s Company,” 12 July 1858 (Kansas State Historical Society) [database online] available from <http://www.territorialkansasonline.org> . Accessed on

<sup>25</sup> William Elsey Connelly, *John Brown Vol 2* (Topeka: Crane and Company, 1900), 216-217.

Brown fought his abolitionist crusade to end slavery, not for personal revenge. In August, 1858, he was on a guerilla mission into Missouri when he entered Pattonsville, the home of the Reverend Martin White, who had killed his son Frederick at the Battle of Osawatomie. Eli Snyder noticed that White was within their view and lethal grasp, and brought it to Brown's attention. Snyder offered to "go down and have a talk with him." Brown refused to allow Snyder, or any of his men harm White. Brown later wrote, "People mistake my objects. I would not hurt one hair of his [White's] head. I would not go one inch to take his life. I do not harbor the feelings of revenge. *I act from principle.* My aim is to restore human rights."<sup>26</sup>

Brown spent most the fall of 1858 fundraising in Kansas Territory and participating in various guerilla attacks on proslavery forces. On December 19, 1858, an opportunity to both free slaves, and practice for his Virginia campaign presented itself when a Vernon County, Missouri slave named Jim Daniels came to George Gill, and told Gill that his owner was going to sell him down south to Texas. Gill took Daniels to Brown, and he enthusiastically agreed to help him. Brown led his troops into Vernon County, and divided his men into two groups, taking command of one, and giving command of the other to Aaron Stephens. Brown raided the farm of H.G. Hicklin, and freed Daniels and his family, and a slave named Sam, and Stephens raided the farm of David Cruise and freed a pregnant slave woman, becoming involved in a gunfight that ended with Stephens killing slaveholder David Cruise.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Captain Eli Snyder to James H. Holmes, 1894, in Villard, 357; James Hanway to R.J.Hinton, 5 December 1859, Villard, 358.

<sup>27</sup> Villard, 359-367; David S. Reynolds, *John Brown Abolitionist: The Man who Killed Slavery, Sparked the Civil War, and Seeded Civil Rights* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 278; Welch, 191-192.

Brown took the slaves to various hiding places in present day Linn, Miami, and Anderson Counties directly after the raid. Conservative proslavery men were appalled at his raid, for they feared a renewal of armed conflict, which they deemed unwise and unnecessary, for the settlers were war weary. Brown found himself reproved by even committed Free State settlers, and this convinced him that Kansas Territory was no longer a viable battleground for his war against slavery.<sup>28</sup>

Brown felt the sting of this attack upon his crusade, and wrote a letter in defense of his raid into Missouri in which he compared his actions to proslavery actions. Brown pointed out that Charles Hamilton had killed and wounded five Free State settlers for revenge, and the Missouri state government had done little or nothing to apprehend Hamilton and his men. Brown compared his raid to Hamilton's, implying that his raid was morally justified, stating that "Eleven people are forcibly restored to their natural and inalienable rights, with but one man killed, & all 'Hell is stirred from beneath.'" Brown believed he was morally justified to use force to free slaves, and that mainline criticism of his raid were hypocritical.<sup>29</sup>

Brown's trek to Canada was interrupted by an attempt to capture him and his freed slaves at Holton. Brown's presence was news in the area, and proslavery forces gathered eighty men under the command of A.P. Wood to capture him. Brown procured twenty six Free State guerillas to oppose the proslavery fighters. At Fullers Ford, the proslavery activists lined up for what they thought was going to be an easy and glorious capture of John Brown and his fugitive slaves. However, Brown was not cowed. He formed his men up, and simply rode straight into the proslavery fighters with such

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<sup>28</sup> Welch, 191-194.

<sup>29</sup> John Brown to Gents [Old Brown's Parallels], 3 January 1859 (Kansas State Historical Society) [database online] available from <http://www.territorialkansasonline.org>. Accessed on September 13, 2005.

determination and will that the proslavery advocates rode off with firing a shot, and thus, this skirmish is called "The Battle of the Spurs."<sup>30</sup>

Brown took the slaves on a precarious path to deliver them to freedom in Canada. He was alternatively welcomed and spurned throughout Iowa, Illinois, and Michigan. Brown finally led the slaves he freed in Missouri to safety at Windsor, Canada on March 12, 1859. Brown immediately began fundraising for his abolitionist crusade, and conferred with the Secret Six. Brown arrived in Cleveland, Ohio, and on March 15, held a lecture, addressing his violent acts at the Pottawatomie Massacre, by stating in *The Leader* that "he had never killed anybody, although on some occasions he had *shown his young men with him*, how some things might be done as well as others, and they had done the business." Brown further stated in *The Leader* that he "had never driven out proslavery men from the territory, but if the occasion demanded it, he would drive them into the ground like fence-stakes where they would remain permanent settlers." Brown did not disclaim his violence during the guerilla war in Kansas Territory, but gloried in it, for it was in accord with his belief that violent conflict was the only way to abolish slavery in the United States.<sup>31</sup>

Brown also addressed the stealing of proslavery property during the guerilla war in Kansas Territory during his lecture in Cleveland. *The Plain Dealer* reported that Brown stated that "the Border Ruffians had created the war and that they should defray the expenses of the war." he further stated that "He had regarded the enemy's arms,

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<sup>30</sup> Abels, 224-225.

<sup>31</sup> Oates, 266-273; *Leader*, in Villard, 393.

horses, etc. as legitimate booty.” Brown acted on what he believed was right, with no apologies, and advocated war against slaveholders on all fronts.<sup>32</sup>

On March 25, Brown spoke at a Congregationalist church at Jefferson, Ohio at the invitation of abolitionist Ohio Congressman Joshua Giddings. Giddings stated that Brown “Gave us clearly to understand that he held to all the doctrines of the Christian religion as they were enunciated by the Saviour.” Gerrit Smith, after visiting with Brown at his Peterboro, New York home on April 11, noted “If I were asked to point out—I will say it in his presence—to point out the man in all this world I think most truly is a Christian, I would point out John Brown. Smith, a Member of the Secret Six, also saw Brown’s Christian zeal up close, and found it to be genuine, as did Joshua Giddings. Bronson Alcott, a prominent Boston intellectual and abolitionist, attested to the veracity of Brown’s Christian faith, following a speech by Brown at Concord, Massachusetts on May 8, “Our people heard him with favor. He impressed me as a person of surpassing sense, courage, and religious earnestness.” Brown’s deep faith made an impression on his supporters, who saw his firm commitment to act on his religious beliefs.<sup>33</sup>

Brown had a deep faith in God. He believed he was a soldier of God, and possessed a strong will to succeed due his faith in his mission. Supporters like Gerrit Smith were drawn in by the sincerity of Brown’s faith. Smith and others had tested his faith by questioning his Virginia Plan, and Brown did not waver. Brown’s deep faith was genuine, and prominent intellectuals and abolitionists like Joshua Giddings, and Bronson Alcott were convinced of his faith.

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<sup>32</sup> *The Plain Dealer*, March, 1859.

<sup>33</sup> *The Plain Dealer*, March, 1859, in Villard, 392; Joshua Giddings, in Villard, 394 ; Gerrit Smith in Villard, 395; Bronson Alcott in Villard, 398.

After June 3, Brown's fundraising activities abated as he began to plan in earnest for his raid on Harpers Ferry. Brown brought his men together and worked to gather supplies for his raid, and after a last visit to his home in North Elba, New York, he left his Adirondack farm for the last time on June 16, 1859. Brown headed south, prepared to take his abolitionist crusade into Virginia.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Villard, 401.

## Chapter Four

### The Christian Crusaders Final Battle

John Brown left his home at North Elba to fight the final battle of his abolitionist crusade at Harpers Ferry, where his strategy was to raid the federal armory, and then wait for slaves to flock to his banner. Then they would retreat with his men and the newly liberated and empowered slaves to the Allegheny Mountains. Brown planned to organize a religious egalitarian society in the Alleghenys where freed slaves could live as equals with white Americans. Militarily, he planned to establish bases throughout the Allegheny's and send guerilla groups into Virginia, and progressively further into the south, making slaveholders release their slaves. Brown felt that this would force northern anti-slavery advocates to abolish slavery, and force both northerners and southerners to accept African-Americans as social a political equals.

Brown lost his final military battle, but he won his final spiritual and moral battle in a Charleston, Virginia courtroom. Brown stood by his Christian faith and was firm in his resolve that his Christian abolitionist crusade was just during his trial. His unswerving faith inspired the North, making Brown a martyr for the abolitionist cause. This convinced the South that the North was an aggressive enemy of slavery. Though John Brown was hanged on December 2, 1859, his abolitionist crusade was effective, for it helped to spark the Civil War, which ended slavery.

Brown arrived in the Harpers Ferry area on July 3, 1859. He led a scouting mission of the area aided by two of his sons, Owen and Oliver, and Jeremiah Anderson. With help from John E. Cook, whom Brown had sent several months earlier to live in, and spy on Harpers Ferry; they found the ideal base of operations. Taking the name of

Issac Smith, Brown rented a farmhouse and small cabin that was owned by the heirs of a deceased farmer named Doctor Booth Kennedy. The Kennedy farm was five miles from Harpers Ferry, and the house was large enough to accommodate his troops, with the cabin offering storage and more living quarters.<sup>1</sup>

Brown had to conceal his mission from his proslavery neighbors, so he hid his men during the day. Brown's guerillas baked in the attic while trying to stay motionless and quiet. Brown gave his base a domestic look by installing his fifteen-year old daughter, Annie, and his son Oliver's seventeen-year old wife, Martha, in the farmhouse as the women of the home. Annie and Martha provided cover for the raiders, visiting with friendly and curious southern neighbors, who in timeless rural fashion, wanted to know everything about all aspects of the "Smith" family's business. Annie knew of Brown's plans, and was loyal and supportive of her father's efforts. Annie and Martha had a difficult job, for Brown was gathering men and supplies for his raid on Harpers Ferry, which made for unusual comings and goings at the Kennedy farmhouse Annie and Martha deflected prying eyes and questions well, helping to make the Kennedy farmhouse a safe haven for Brown's raiders.<sup>2</sup>

Brown strove to indoctrinate his eighteen men with his Christian faith and abolitionist ideology. Osborne Anderson, one of Brown's African-American recruits, reported that "Every morning when the noble old man was at home, he called the family around, read from his Bible, and offered to God the most touching supplications for all

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<sup>1</sup> F.B. Sanborn, ed. *The Life and Letters of John Brown: Liberator of Kansas and Martyr of Virginia* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1891), 527; Oswald Garrison Villard, *John Brown: A Biography 1800-1859*, (Garden City: Doubleday, Doran and Company, Inc., 1929), 404.

<sup>2</sup> Annie Brown Adams to William V. Alexander, 5 June 1906, (West Virginia State Archives) [database online] available from <http://wvculture.org/history/archivesindex.aspx> . Accessed on September 19, 2005.

flesh; and especially pathetic were his petitions for the oppressed. I never heard John Brown pray that he did not make a strong appeal for the deliverance of the slave.”<sup>3</sup>

Brown worked to teach his men about his Christian faith by engaging them in spirited debate. He reasoned strongly with his men, but allowed them to have their own opinions, even when they disagreed with his own views. Osborne Anderson observed “He often remarked that it was gratifying to see young men grapple with moral and other important questions, and express themselves independently; it was evidence of self sustaining power.” Brown drew his power from his faith, and he worked to pass that faith on to his men.<sup>4</sup>

On August 16 and 17, 1859, Brown met with Frederick Douglass in a rock quarry outside of Chambersburg, Pennsylvania. Brown sought to convince Douglass to join him in his final battle, but Douglass argued that Brown’s mission was too dangerous, and would fail. Douglass pointed out that Brown’s plan would be “fatal to running off slaves (as was the original plan), and fatal to all engaged in doing so.” Douglass further argued that “attacking the federal government would array the whole country against us.” Brown was firm in his conviction that his plan would work, and Douglass reported that “He did not at all object to rousing the nation; it seemed to him that was just what the nation needed.” Despite Douglass’s strong arguments against his plan, Brown’s belief that his strategy and tactics would work stayed firm. Though Brown left the quarry without Douglass at his side, he gained a recruit in Shields Green, who had accompanied

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<sup>3</sup> Osborne P. Anderson *A Voice from Harpers Ferry: A Narrative of Events at Harpers Ferry* (Boston: Printed for the Author, 1861, reprint Freeport Books for Library Press, 1972), 24 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

<sup>4</sup> Anderson, 25.

Douglass to the meeting. When asked if he wanted to go fight beside Brown, Green quietly answered “I b’lve I’ll go wid de ole man.”<sup>5</sup>

Owen Brown’s efforts to guide Green back to the Kennedy farm were fraught with danger, and precipitated a leadership challenge to John Brown. A slave patrol saw Owen with Green, and took chase, and the two made it back to the Kennedy farm with great peril. The dangerous trek created doubts in Owen’s mind about the feasibility of Brown’s plan, and others in Brown’s guerilla force shared Owen’s concerns. When Brown was confronted with his men’s concerns, he did not strong arm them, but stated his case and allowed them the choice of rejecting his leadership, or following him and his strategy. Brown’s deep faith and teaching paid off, for his defense of his plan was strong enough that after deliberations, his men stayed the course and continued to follow him.<sup>6</sup>

Throughout the fall of 1859, Brown gathered supplies and worked to recruit men for his final battle against slavery. On September 29, he sent Annie and Martha back to North Elba, for the time was drawing nigh for his attack on slavery in Virginia. Following the departure of the feminine sentinels of the Kennedy Farm, preparations began in earnest for the raid on Harpers Ferry, and on Sunday, October 16, 1859 Brown gave the order “Men, get on your arms: we will proceed to the Ferry.” John Brown commenced his final battle in is abolitionist crusade with only nineteen men and the faith that he would succeed.<sup>7</sup>

Brown rode into Harpers Ferry, which is located on a peninsula between two mountains at the confluence of the Potomac and Shenandoah Rivers, with the Loudon

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<sup>5</sup> Frederick Douglass, *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass: Written By Himself* (1893, in *Frederick Douglass: Autobiographies* (New York: Library Classics of The United States, Inc. , 1994) , 758-760.

<sup>6</sup> Truman Nelson, *The Old Man: John Brown at Harpers Ferry* (New York: Holt, Rienhart and Winston, 1973), 60-65.

<sup>7</sup> Villard, 420.

Heights on the Shenandoah River and the Maryland Heights on the Potomac River. The peninsula slopes up from the confluence of the two rivers to the top of a hill, the Bolivar Heights, on which the town is built. The Federal Arsenal and the Armory was located at the base of the peninsula, right on the bank of the Potomac River. Two bridges allowed access to Harpers Ferry, a bridge over the Shenandoah, and a covered bridge that spanned the Potomac that carried railroad, foot, and horse and wagon traffic. Militarily, it was as Frederick Douglass put it, “that all his [Brown’s] arguments, and all his descriptions of the place, convinced me he was going into a perfect steel trap, and that once in it, he would never get out alive, that he would be surrounded at once, and escape would be impossible.” Brown’s great faith in the spiritual veracity of his quest to end slavery, however, convinced him that he would succeed, though, as he entered Harpers Ferry, at 10:00 pm on Sunday, October 16.<sup>8</sup>

Brown took possession of the federal arsenal without firing a shot, for security was light, and no one considered an armed attack on the arsenal to be even a remote threat. He dispatched guards to the bridges that entered the town, and scattered his men throughout the arsenal complex, making the arsenal fire engine house his field headquarters. He had entered town at 10:00 pm, and by midnight, he was in control of the United States Arsenal at Harpers Ferry. No one but a few hostages, who were unfortunate enough to be on duty on the two bridges and at the arsenal at the wrong time, knew what had happened.<sup>9</sup>

Had Brown been a brigand who merely sought to acquire arms for his gang, he would have quietly loaded up wagons and rode out of town to do damage elsewhere.

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<sup>8</sup> Villard, 428, 429; Douglass, 759.

<sup>9</sup> Keller, 33-42.

Brown, however, was not fighting for profit, and while capturing the arsenal, he announced to Daniel Whelan, the sentry at the arsenal gate that “I came here from Kansas and this is a slave state. I want to free all of these Negroes in the state. I have possession now of the United States Arsenal, and if the citizens interfere with me I must only burn the town and have blood.” Brown raided Harpers Ferry on a Christian crusade to end slavery in the United States, and he was willing to fight and even to kill to achieve his goal.<sup>10</sup>

Brown sent men to the surrounding area to collect both hostages and recruits. He did gather up a few slaves, but only about fourteen. Then, he sat and waited for the flood tide of slaves to come and join his crusade against slavery. While he was waiting, disaster struck. At midnight, John Brown’s son, Watson, in an attempt to stop a bridge watchman named Patrick Higgins from crossing the Potomac shouted “Halt!” Higgins, not understanding the meaning of the word, continued to walk towards Watson, and actually balled his fist up and struck him. Watson answered this assault by shooting Higgins in the head, inflicting a flesh wound in his scalp. At 1:25 am, a Baltimore and Ohio Train approached the Potomac Bridge, and it was met by the bleeding Higgins, who related the events that led up to his wound. The engineer and the baggage master went out to investigate, and they ended up dodging bullets. Shepherd Hayward, the free African-American baggage master for the train depot, went to investigate. When either Watson or Stewart Taylor saw a form in the dark, upon getting no answer after challenging Hayward, who did not understand what “Halt” meant either, shot him dead. Tragically,

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<sup>10</sup> Keller, 39.

the first casualty inflicted by Brown's troops in their war against slavery in Virginia was as Free African-American.<sup>11</sup>

Logic dictates that Brown would have immediately realized that the town was aware of his presence, and skedaddled out of Harpers Ferry with a satisfying load of rifles and ammunition, and the chance to fight another day. However, Brown had faith that the power behind his Christian Crusade was from God. Furthermore, he believed that reinforcements would be flocking to him soon, for he had left his son, Owen, and other men at the Kennedy Farm to get ready to arm the hundreds of slaves whom he firmly believed would join his cause. Providence, however, did not decree that his violent war against slavery would succeed, for the longer he waited for the masses of slaves to join him, the larger the number of southern militia men grew around the Arsenal. Brown had allowed the train to go through, and the conductor had alerted state and national military forces to Harpers Ferry's plight. By Monday night, Brown was caught in the steel trap that Frederick Douglass had warned him about, for he was surrounded and isolated in the fire engine house.<sup>12</sup>

President James Buchanan detailed the Federal response to Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry to Lieutenant Colonel Robert E. Lee, commanding ninety marines. Early in the morning, on Tuesday, October 18, after Brown refused to surrender, the Marines charged the engine house, and Brown's final military battle was over. Brown and his

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<sup>11</sup> Keller, 42-44.

<sup>12</sup> Jules Abels, *Man on Fire: John Brown and the Cause of Liberty* (New York: The MacMillian Company, 1971), 283-289.

force were overpowered by a forceful attack on the fire engine house, and the Christian crusader's violent campaign to end slavery came to an end.<sup>13</sup>

Brown's military battle was a failure, but his abolitionist crusade was to find its zenith during the weeks following the military debacle at Harpers Ferry. National reaction was negative at first, but Brown's fealty to his beliefs, and his cool deportation despite the fact that he was wounded and in the hands of his enemies changed the nation's perception of the raid. In the office of the paymaster at Harpers Ferry, Brown was questioned by government and court officers, and while refusing to reveal whom his supporters were, spoke of his motivation to fight slavery. Brown deflected questions about his supporters by stating that "No man sent me here; it was my own prompting and that of my Maker, or that of the Devil, --whichever you please to ascribe it to. I acknowledge no master in human form." Brown did not name any man as his guide, but instead specified God, and then, acknowledging the reality that southerners would not believe his religious motive was real, added a reference to the devil in a sarcastic slap at proslavery activists.<sup>14</sup>

When Senator James M. Mason inquired about Brown's justification for his raid on Harpers Ferry, he replied "I think, my friend, you are guilty of a great wrong against God and humanity,--I say without wishing to be offensive, -- and it would be perfectly right for anyone to interfere with you so far as to free those you willfully and wickedly hold in bondage. I do not say this insultingly." Mason was stymied, and answered "I understand that." Brown did not mince words when he stated his moral justification for

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<sup>13</sup> W.E.B. DuBois, *John Brown* (Philadelphia: George W. Jacobs and Company, 1909, reprint, New York: International Publishers, 1962), 332-334.

<sup>14</sup> Villard, 471- 476.; John Brown et al October, 1859, in Franklin Benjamin Sanborn, *The Life and Letters of John Brown: Liberator of Kansas and Martyr of Virginia* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1891), 562-563.

his crusade against slavery. However, he displayed tact and diplomacy that revealed a man with a strong intellect in dealing with his capture and trial. Thus, in his defeat, he began to win over his critics in the North, and frighten his enemies in the South by his effective defense of his motives.<sup>15</sup>

Brown's firm belief that he was morally justified by his Christian faith was further revealed by his statement to Mason that "I think I did right, and that others will do right, who interfere with you at any time and at all times. I hold that Golden Rule, 'Do unto others and ye would that others should do unto you,' applies to all who would help others to gain their liberty."

Brown had no qualms about using violence to attack slavery, and firmly believed that he was acting in accordance with God's word. Lieutenant J.E.B. Stuart, however was not convinced of the Christian veracity of Brown's beliefs and asked him "But don't you believe in the Bible?" Brown firmly stated "Certainly I do." to the skeptical Stuart. When Stuart questioned Brown's faith once more, stating "The wages of sin is death" Brown's instant and firm retort was "I would not have made such a remark to you if you had been a prisoner, and wounded in my hands." Ironically, Stuart, who would later fight for the Confederacy, was second in command of Federal forces at Harpers Ferry. Brown had a firm faith in God, and he took extreme umbrage at an impertinent slaveholder questioning the veracity of his Christian faith.<sup>16</sup>

Later that day at Harpers Ferry, Brown further clarified his Christian motives when he answered a bystander's question, "Do you consider this a religious movement?" Brown's answer was immediate and left no room for doubt as to the motives for his

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<sup>15</sup> John Brown, "Interview with Mason, et al," October, 1859, in Sanborn, 564.

<sup>16</sup> John Brown, "Interview with Mason et al," October, 1859, Sanborn, 564.

Christian abolitionist crusade when he answered “It is, in my opinion, the greatest service man can render to God.” Brown drove this point home when, in answer to the question “Do you consider yourself an instrument in the hands of Providence?” he answered “I do.” The same bystander pressed the issue, and asked again on what principle Brown justified his acts. Brown’s answer confirmed that he acted upon principle and not revenge or personal gain when he stated “Upon the Golden Rule. 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.”<sup>17</sup>

Governor Andrew Wise cautioned Brown to be more concerned about his impending death than the abolition of slavery during an exchange later on October 19, 1859. Wise, due to Brown’s wounds and his impending date with the gallows, advised Brown that “It is better you should turn your attention to your eternal future than be dealing in denunciations which can only injure you.” Brown, shot back, “The difference between your tenure and mine is trifling, and I therefore tell you to be prepared. You all have a heavy responsibility, and it behooves you to prepare more than it does me.” Brown was sure of his Christian faith, and of his heavenly destination. He saw his abolitionist crusade as a mission from God, and did not fear the Almighty’s final judgment.<sup>18</sup>

Governor Wise was sufficiently impressed with Brown’s deportment in the face of adversity that when Brown was accused of being insane, he disagreed, stating that “They are mistaken who take Brown to be a madman. He is a bundle of the best nerves I ever saw.” Wise further testified to Brown’s faith, while not endorsing it. As a southern

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<sup>17</sup> John Brown, Interview with Mason, et al October 19, 1859, Sanborn, 564,565.

<sup>18</sup> John Brown to Virginia Governor Andrew Wise, Interview with Mason et al, October 19, 1859, in Sanborn, 571.

politician he did not display approbation for Brown, but testified to Brown's fealty to his beliefs. "He is a fanatic, vain and garrulous, but firm, truthful, and intelligent. He professes to be a Christian in communion with the Congregationalist Church in the North, and openly preaches his purpose of universal emancipation." Brown's unwavering faith in the righteousness of his cause made a deep impression on Wise.<sup>19</sup>

Brown and four of his men were taken to Charlestown, Virginia, to stand trial. Brown was charged with treason against the state of Virginia, conspiracy to induce slaves to rebel, and murder. Throughout his trial, Brown continued to draw on his religious beliefs as the source of his motivation, and he was ready to give his life for his cause. He argued in court that if he was not going to receive a fair trial that he wanted to be executed without "the mockery of a trial." Brown stated at his arraignment that "I am ready for my fate." Brown knew that the gallows awaited him, and he was willing to die for his beliefs.<sup>20</sup>

The Northern press immediately argued that Brown was being denied a fair trial and tried too quickly by the state of Virginia. The grand jury found evidence that supported the charges of treason to the Commonwealth of Virginia, conspiring with slaves to commit treason, and murder. Brown was brought to trial in the land of his enemies, with his enemies on the jury, so it was a forgone conclusion that he would be found guilty, despite a show of a trial. Brown's lawyers staged the best defense for him possible, but it was clear that he would be found guilty. Brown stayed calm and

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<sup>19</sup> Andrew A. Wise, 1859, in Sanborn, 571,572.

<sup>20</sup> Abels, 322; John Brown, Trial Transcripts, October 25, 1859, in Richard D. Webb, ed. *The Life and Letters of Captain John Brown: Who was Executed at Charlestown, Virginia, December 18, 1859, for an Armed Attack Upon American Slavery*, (London: Smith, Elder and Company, 1861), 190.

coolheaded in spite of the hostility that surrounded him, and turned the trial into a stage for his abolitionist crusade.<sup>21</sup>

Brown fought his final battle during his trial with his strongest force, his faith in God and the conviction that he was God's agent on earth to end slavery. Brown revealed his strong faith in letters to his family and supporters during his imprisonment and trial. In a letter to his family on October 31, 1859, Brown, stated "I feel quite cheerful in the assurance that God reigns; & will overrule all for his glory and the best possible good. I feel no conciouness [sic] of guilt in the matter: nor even mortification [sic] on account of my imprisonment, & irons." Brown believed that his abolitionist crusade was God's will, and that he was morally justified when he committed violence to end slavery.<sup>22</sup>

Brown was in a Charlestown jail, knowing that he was facing death, and still his faith remained strong enough that he wrote to his family "I also commend you all to him 'whose mercy endureth for forever': to the God of my fathers 'whose I am; & whom I serve.' 'He will never leave you nor forsake you' unless you forsake him.' Brown still believed that God had not forsaken him despite his precarious position, and felt that his faith in God was an example worthy for his family to emulate. From jail, he advised his family to "Be sure to remember & to follow my advice & my example too: it has been consistant [sic] with the holy religion of Jesus Christ in which I remain a most firm, and humble believer." Brown wanted his family to work to abolish slavery despite the cost. He advised his family to "never forget the poor nor think anything you bestow on them to be lost, to you even though they may be black as Ebedmelch the Ethiopian eunuch who

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<sup>21</sup> Keller, 178-183.

<sup>22</sup> John Brown to Mary Ann Brown, 31 October 1859 (West Virginia State Archives) [database online], available from <http://www.wvculture.org/history/archivesindex.aspx>. Accessed on September 20, 2005. All future references to this source were accessed on this date.

cared for Jeremiah in the pit of the dungeon; or as black as the one to whom Phillip preached Christ.”<sup>23</sup>

On November 2, after a quick trial, Brown was found guilty of all charges and sentenced to hang on December 2, 1859. In his final statement during his trial, Brown stated that “This court, acknowledges, as I suppose, the validity of the law of God. I see a book kissed here which I suppose is the Bible, or at least the New Testament. That teaches me further to “remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them.” I endeavored to act up that instruction.” Brown plainly stated that he was motivated to fight slavery by his religious beliefs, and implied that he doubted the spiritual veracity of any person or group’s Christian beliefs who were proslavery.<sup>24</sup>

Despite a sentence of death, Brown’s faith remained firm. Brown stated in a letter to his wife, Mary Ann Brown on November 8, that “I am besides quite cheerful having (as I trust) the peace of God which passeth all understanding to ‘rule in my heart’ and the testimony of good conscience that I have not lived altogether in vain. Brown had no doubt that his abolitionist crusade had been justified by his pure Christian motives, and was at peace with himself and his God, and did not fear death. Brown also believed that his death would help the abolitionist cause. Brown stated that “I can trust God with both the time and manner of my death; believing as I now do that for me at this time to seal my testimony (for God & humanity) with my blood, will do vastly more toward advancing the cause I have Earnestly Endeavored to promote, than all I have done in my

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<sup>23</sup> John Brown to Mary Ann Brown 31 October 1859.

<sup>24</sup> John Brown, November 2, 1859, in Nelson, 232,233.

life before.” Brown was quickly taking the role of martyr, and was doing so with peace in his heart.<sup>25</sup>

Indeed, Brown’s sense of righteous sacrifice was strengthened by his efforts to face his impending death as much like Jesus Christ and the martyred saints as possible. Brown wrote to his wife Mary to “Remember dear wife and children all, that Jesus of Nazareth suffered a most Excruciating death on the cross as a felon-under the most aggravating circumstances. Think also of the prophets, and the apostles and Christians of former days, went through greater tribulations than you or I: and try and be reconciled.” Brown was not comparing himself to Christ, but was trying imitate his savior when he faced his last hours of life, and encouraged his family to face his death in the same spirit.<sup>26</sup>

Brown continued to proclaim that his abolitionist crusade was born of his religious beliefs in a letter to one of Brown’s supporters, George Adams, on November 15. Brown stated that “I do certainly feel that through divine grace I have endeavoured to be ‘faithful in a very few things’: mingling with those much of imperfection.” Brown did not claim to be morally perfect, but he did believe that his war against slavery was spiritually ordained. Brown also worked to demonstrate his fealty to his cause to win others to his cause, by striving to be an example of Christian forbearance to in the face of death. He wrote, “I cannot feel that God will suffer even poorest service we may any of us render him or his cause to be lost; or in vain. I do feel ‘dear Brother’ that I am wonderfully ‘strengthened from on high.’ May I use that strength in ‘showing his strength

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<sup>25</sup> John Brown to Mary Ann Brown, 8 November 1859 (West Virginia State Archives) [database online] available from <http://www.wvculture.org/history/archivesindex.aspx>. Accessed on September 20, 2005. All other references to this source were accessed on the same date.

<sup>26</sup> John Brown to Mary Ann Brown, 8 November 1859.

unto this generation, & his power to every one that is to come.” Brown was taking the role of abolitionist martyr seriously, for he was committed to ending slavery. He believed that dying a brave and saintly death was one of the most effective means of successfully prosecuting his goal of ending slavery by dying.<sup>27</sup>

Brown’s efforts were succeeding. Brown was fast becoming a martyr in the eyes of the North. Sermons railing against the South, and canonizing him boomed out from northern pulpits. Newspapers editorialized in his favor, and pamphlets and books supporting Brown were widely distributed in the North. African-Americans may not have flocked to Brown’s banner in the South but in the North, they extolled Brown as a hero, lionizing him as a Christian man who was willing to die for their freedom. Charles H. Langston, an Oberlin, Ohio African-American abolitionist wrote that Brown “To undo the heavy burdens and to let the oppressed go free” African-American Women in Brooklyn, New York offered to help Mary Brown financially. The church group wrote her stating that they met to “supplicate our common Father in behalf of one they felt had offered up his life, and the lives of those dearer than his own to obtain for their oppressed race their “God given rights.”<sup>28</sup>

Southerners saw Brown’s raid as the embodiment of northern aggression against their culture and civil rights. He was vilified by southerners, who denounced him as a enemy of their section. Brown was seen as the front man for a widespread conspiracy in the North to subjugate the South and its culture. The fires of secession began to roar, and

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<sup>27</sup> John Brown to George Adams, 15 November 1859 (West Virginia State Archives) [database online] available from <http://www.wvculture.org/history/archives/index.aspx>. Accessed on September 20, 2005.

<sup>28</sup> Barrie Stavis, *John Brown: The Sword and the Word* (New York: A.S. Barnes and Company, 1970), 167-169; Benjamin Quarles, *Allies For Freedom: Blacks and John Brown* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 111-119; Charles H. Langston, in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, November 18, 1859 in Benjamin Quarles, ed. *Blacks on John Brown* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972), 12; Ladies of New York, Brooklyn, and Williamsburgh, in *The Weekly Anglo-African*, December 17, 1859, in Quarles, *Blacks on John Brown*, 16.

with Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry was working to divide further the nation and make a strong contribution to the causes of the conflagration of the Civil War.<sup>29</sup>

As his execution date approached Brown continued to write letters that declared his motives. He celebrated his impending death as a victory for his Christian abolitionist beliefs, for he believed that in his death, he would help to end slavery. Brown stated in a letter to his children on November 22, that "I am even 'joyfull [sic] in all my tribulations,' ever since my confinement; and I humbly trust that 'I know in whom I have trusted.' A calm peace ( perhaps) like which your own Dear Mother felt in view of her last changed seems to fill my [being] by day & by night.'" Speaking of the effect of his death, he wrote "As I trust my life has not been entirely thrown away; so I also humbly trust that my death shall not be in Vain. God can make it to be of a thousand times more valuable to his own cause than all of the miserable service (at best) that I have rendered during my life." Brown had been willing to fight for his beliefs, now he was willing to die for them.<sup>30</sup>

Brown's commitment to the ending of slavery is evident when he eschewed the spiritual counsel of proslavery ministers stating in a November 23 letter to abolitionist Minister Reverend McFarland, he states "These ministers who profess to be Christian, and hold slaves or advocate slavery, I cannot abide them. My knees will not bend in prayer with them, while their hands are stained with the blood of souls." Brown was unbending in his opposition to slavery and racism, and he considered all proslavery advocates to be so morally polluted and spiritually bankrupt that he would not pray with them. Instead, he wanted his last spiritual counselors to be "poor little dirty, ragged

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<sup>29</sup> Villard, 472-476.

<sup>30</sup> John Brown to Dear Children, November 22, 1859 (West Virginia State Archives) [database online] available from <http://www.wvculture.org/history/archivesindex.aspx>. Accessed on September 21, 2005.

bareheaded and bare footed Slave boys & girls; led by some old gray headed, Slave Mother.”<sup>31</sup>

When Brown’s supporters conspired to free him from jail and save his life, Brown refused their efforts. Brown stated that “I doubt if I ought to encourage any effort to save my life. I may be wrong, but I think that my great object will be nearer its accomplishment by my death than by my life.” Brown was right, for when he was hanged in Charlestown, West Virginia on December 2, 1859, he became a martyr for the abolitionist cause, and irretrievably enflamed the conflict between the North and the South over slavery. Brown’s last written words were prophetic, “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.” Brown’s actions helped to precipitate the Civil War which ended slavery, making his Christian crusade to abolish slavery a success.<sup>32</sup>

John Brown was motivated by his Christian faith to work to abolish slavery by violent means, providing an excellent example of the power of ideology a motivating factor in the evolution of human history. Religion is one of the most powerful components of ideology, and Brown is an excellent model to study to observe the power of religion as a force in changing history. Religious belief is subjective, and it is not the purpose of this work to defend or defame the morality of Brown’s actions. It is the purpose of this work to state that Brown’s violent abolitionist crusade was motivated by his interpretation of the Christian faith.

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<sup>31</sup> John Brown to Reverend McFarland, 23 November 1859 in Sanborn, 598,599; John Brown to Mary E. Stearns, 29 November 1859 (West Virginia State Archives) [database online] available from <http://www.wvculture.org/history/archivesindex.aspx> . Accessed on September 21, 2005.

<sup>32</sup> John Brown to jail guards , November,1859, 623; , 2 December 1859, 620, both in Sanborn.

What is holy to one individual is profane to another. Stating that Brown was motivated by his religious beliefs to act does not imply approval of his actions. Many of Brown's enemies testified to the veracity of his faith and his zeal in his abolitionist crusade, though they did not adhere to his beliefs and methods. Brown was not any more violent than Charles Hamilton, a proslavery fighter who killed five, and wounded four Free State men in the Marais Des Cygnes Massacre on May 19, 1858, and believed that he was fighting for southern rights, motivated by proslavery ideology. Both men believed that they were morally justified in killing the enemies of their respective causes, as did all who fought in the guerilla war that gave territorial Kansas the sobriquet "Bleeding Kansas."

Brown's religious beliefs were inculcated into him as a child, and he was a questioning believer as a child and a youth. His parents and family taught him his faith, with abolitionism being a strong part of their indoctrination of young John. In addition, Brown grew up in Hudson, Ohio, an anti-slavery community, which helped to reinforce his parents' efforts to teach him that slavery was a sin, and needed to be eradicated from American culture.

When Brown witnessed a slave being mistreated at age twelve, it confirmed his nascent belief that slavery was a malevolent stain in America's moral fabric, and he dedicated his life to battling slavery by peaceful means. From his teens to age thirty seven, he assisted slaves along the Underground Railroad and proposed to his half-brother to open a school for African-Americans or to adopt an African-American child into his family to work to end slavery. Until to his late thirties, Brown shared the beliefs

of most Abolitionists of his time, the belief that political action and moral persuasion could bring slavery to an end in the United States.

However, a struggle between the Old Testament prophet and the New Testament saint was raging in Brown's soul and intellect. The Old Testament prophet demanded that he was God's agent on earth to work out God's will and fight slaveholders by any means necessary, even violence. The New Testament saint in Brown was morally outraged by slavery, but was gentle in its approach, seeking a nonviolent solution to the problem. As Brown grew into an adult, the Old Testament prophet began to gain ascendancy over the New Testament saint, and Brown became God's warrior against slavery by the time he was thirty seven.

The event that tipped his ideological balance towards violent resistance to slavery was the death of abolitionist Elijah Lovejoy by a proslavery mob in Alton, Illinois, in 1837. Brown had slowly become convinced that the slaveholders could only be defeated by force, and the death of Lovejoy convinced him that open war against slavery was the only means of abolishing slavery. The Old Testament told him of the Israelites using violence to fight their enemies, and Brown came to the conclusion that it was within the bounds of Biblical morality to fight and kill slaveholders in the name of God.

The Fugitive Slave act of 1850 offered Brown his first chance to fight slavery outright when he organized African-Americans in Springfield, Massachusetts, into a armed force called the United States League of Gileadites, an organization created to violently resist the efforts of slaveholders to capture fugitive slaves and return them to their owners. Brown advocated setting off bombs in courtrooms to distract the court officials and afford a chance to free a fugitive slave during their hearings. Brown was

ready and willing to fight for his beliefs, and the power of his religious convictions was fully engaged in war against slavery.<sup>33</sup>

The fight over the status of slavery in Kansas Territory offered Brown an ideal battleground for his abolitionist crusade. In October of 1855, he went to Kansas, and worked to keep the guerilla war that occurred off and on between pro-and-anti-slavery forces from 1855 to 1858 at a constant boil. Brown ranged about Kansas Territory, fighting proslavery advocates with religious fervor, for he desired to keep the fires of the ideological war between pro-and –anti-slavery forces blazing hot, hoping they would spread nationally. When anti-slavery forces prevailed in Kansas Territory, and even his allies rejected his attempts to fight there, he left Kansas to spread his war against slavery to the rest of the nation.

Brown took his war against slavery to Virginia, believing that if he offered slaves the opportunity to fight for their freedom, they would flock to his banner. However, his need for secrecy before his raid on Harpers Ferry hampered his efforts to attract slaves to his cause. When he started his raid, and began to recruit slaves for his revolution, he only attracted fourteen. Brown’s faith in the divine sponsorship of his mission prevented him from retreating from Harpers Ferry in time to effect a viable escape. Brown waited too long for his army of slaves to join him, for he believed that God would ensure the success of his mission. He was captured, and his military mission failed.

Brown’s faith increased exponentially despite his failure, for where the Old Testament prophet had failed to end slavery, the gentle New Testament saint was to win

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<sup>33</sup> John Brown, “Words of Advice: Branch of the United States League of Gileadites,” 15 January 1851. in Louis Ruchames, ed. *A John Brown Reader: The Story of John Brown in His own Words In the Words of Those Who Knew Him an in the Poetry and Prose of the Literary Heritage* ( New York: Abelard-Schuman, 1959), 77.

the North over to his cause, convince the South that the North was their enemy, and help spark the Civil War. Brown faced his death with such firm faith in the veracity of his religious convictions that he became a martyr in the eyes of the North and an example of northern aggression to the South. The effect of these reactions was to light the fuse for the final explosion of ideological conflict that caused the Civil War.

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