

Oakland Unified School District

District Assessment

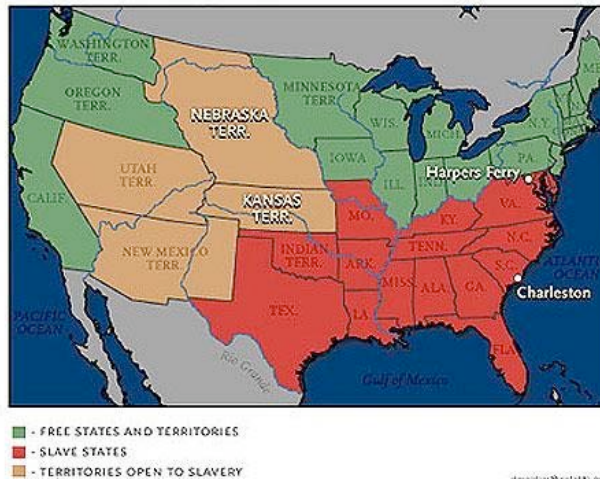
8th Grade U.S. History

Spring Semester, 2008 – 2009

Topic: “Is John Brown an American Hero?” (CV)



Pre-Civil War Free vs. Slave States



FEARFUL AND EXCITING INTELLIGENCE.

NEGRO INSURRECTION AT HARPER'S FERRY.

Extensive Negro Conspiracy in Virginia and Maryland.

Seizure of the United States Arsenal by the Insurrectionists.

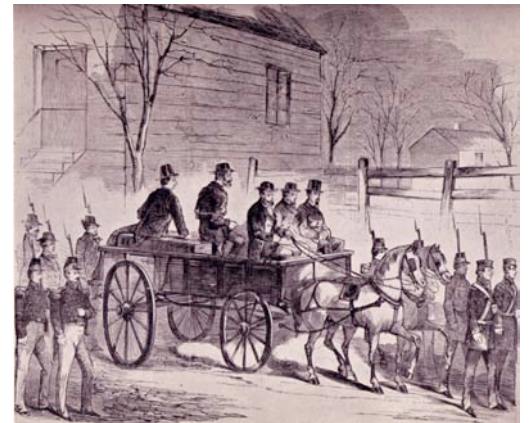
Arms Taken and Sent into the Interior.

The Bridge Fortified and Defended by Cannon.

Trains Fired into and Stopped--Several Persons Killed---Telegraph Wires Cut---Contributions Levied on the Citizens.

Troops Dispatched Against the Insurgents from Washington and Baltimore,

&c., &c., &c.



To Do:

Use what you learned in class and the following source documents to answer the question below.

Background:

On October 16, 1859, John Brown led 21 men (5 blacks and 16 whites) on a raid of the federal arsenal [place where weapons are kept] at Harpers Ferry, Virginia. He planned to take the weapons and use them to start a slave revolt. The plan did not work. Brown was wounded and quickly captured, and moved to Charlestown, Virginia, where he was tried and convicted of treason. John Brown was hanged on December 2, 1859.

- from *Africans in America*, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4p1550.html>

Question to answer:
Is John Brown an American hero?

Source #1 – Three years before the raid on Harpers Ferry – John Brown in Kansas

On May 21, 1856, 800 proslavery men, many from Missouri, marched into Lawrence, Kansas, to arrest the leaders of the antislavery government. They burned the local hotel, looted a number of houses, destroyed two antislavery printing presses, and killed one man. This became known as the “sack of Lawrence.”

(6) In response to this violence, John Brown, a Bible-quoting Calvinist who believed he had a personal duty to overthrow slavery, announced that the time had come “to fight fire with fire” and “strike terror in the hearts of proslavery men.” The next day Brown led a group of six men and dragged five proslavery men and boys from their beds at Pottawatomie Creek in Kansas. Brown’s men split open the proslavery men’s skulls with a sword and cut off their hands. The men said that Brown did not commit any of the actual murders himself, but he was their leader and made the decisions as to who should be killed and who was to be spared.

from

“Bleeding Kansas and Bleeding Sumner” the Gilder Lehrman Institute,
<http://www.gilderlehrman.org/teachers/module9/index.html>
& <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/CONTEXTS/Kansas/jbrown.html>

What did John Brown say about his raid on Harpers Ferry? (primary sources

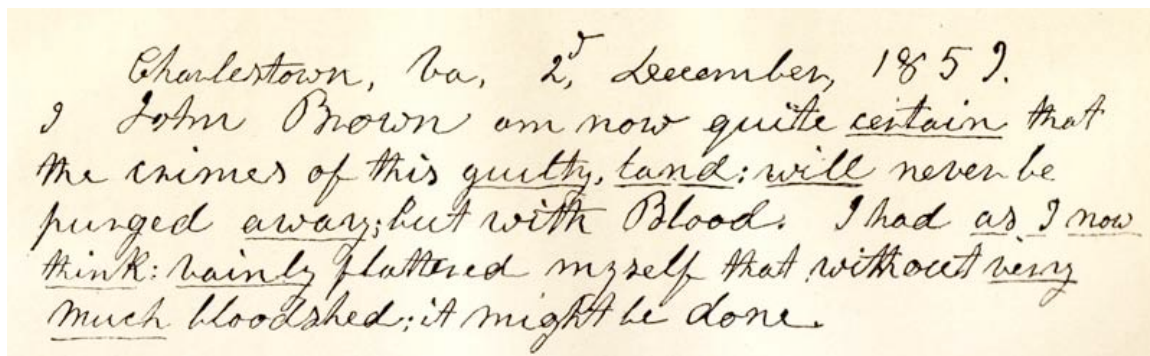
Source #2 - From address of John Brown to the Virginia Court at Charles Town, Virginia on November 2, 1859

The court acknowledges, as I suppose, the validity of the law of God. I see a book kissed here which I suppose to be the Bible, or at least the New Testament. That teaches me that all things that men should do to me, I should do even so to them. It teaches me further to "remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them." I endeavored to act up to that instruction. I say, I am too young to understand that God is any respecter of persons. I believe that to have interfered as I have done -- as I have always freely admitted I have done -- in behalf of His despised poor, was not wrong, but right. Now if it is deemed necessary that I should forfeit my life for the furtherance of the ends of justice, and mingle my blood further with the blood of my children and with the blood of millions in this slave country whose rights are disregarded by wicked, cruel, and unjust enactments. -- I submit; so let it be done!

Source #3 - John Brown's Last Prophecy, Charlestown, Va, 2nd, December, 1859

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.

(image of same passage John Brown's last letter, written on day he hanged. From "John Brown: a Biography," by Oswald Garrison Villard.)



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What was said about John Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry? (primary sources)

Source #4 – Abraham Lincoln on John Brown

“Old John Brown has been executed. We cannot object even though he agreed with us in thinking slavery is wrong. This cannot excuse violence, bloodshed, and treason.”

Source #5 – Frederick Douglass on John Brown

“Did John Brown fail? John Brown began the war that ended American slavery and made this a free Republic. His zeal in the cause of my race was far greater than mine. I could live for the slave, but he could die for him.”

Source #6 – Newspaper Editorial from Cincinnati, Ohio, *Enquirer* [Democratic]

We rejoice that old BROWN has been hung. He was not only a murderer of innocent persons, but he attempted one of the greatest crimes against society -- the stirring up of a servile [inferior] and civil war. He has paid the penalty for his crimes, and we hope his fate may be a warning to all who might have felt inclined to imitate his aggressive conduct. – December 3, 1859

Source #7 – A painting of Brown completed 25 years after Harpers Ferry



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

What Four Historians Say About John Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry (secondary sources)

Source #8 - from Margaret Washington, historian:

John Brown was most definitely a hero in the eyes of African Americans. He was a hero in the eyes of many people who were involved in the antislavery movement. Even the pacifists, who did not believe in violence, saw John Brown as a hero because he was willing to die for his convictions... Though they did not excuse what he did and would not have done it themselves they felt that slavery was so wrong that anything that was done to end it was justified. So he was a hero, and he was certainly a hero to African Americans because he paid a supreme price for their freedom...

Source #9 - from David M. Kennedy, historian:

John Brown's crackbrained [crazy] scheme was to invade the South secretly with a handful of followers, call upon the slaves to rise [rebel], give them with weapons, and establish a kind of free black state as place of safety... At Harpers Ferry, he seized the federal weapon storage in October 1859, during which several innocent people were killed, including a free black, and wounding ten or so more. But the slaves did not know of Brown's raid and failed to rebel...

- from David M. Kennedy, *The American Pageant*, Houghton Mifflin, 2002, p. 422-423

Source #10- from James Davidson and Mark Lytle, historians

Thirty-six hours after the first shot, John Brown's war on slavery had ended. By any calculation the raid had been a total failure. Not a single slave had risen to join Brown's army. Ten of the raiders lay dead or dying; the rest had been scattered or captured... Seven other people had been killed and nine more wounded during the raid.

Most historians would agree that Harpers Ferry raid was to the Civil War what the Boston Massacre had been to the American Revolution: an incendiary event. In an atmosphere of aroused passions, profound suspicions, and irreconcilable differences, Brown and his men put a match to the fuse. Once their deed had been done and blood shed, there seemed to be no drawing back for either North or South. The shouts of angry men overwhelmed the voices of compromise.

from -Davidson & West, *After the Fact: The Madness of John Brown*, Knopf, 1982, p. 148 - 149

Source #11 - from Deborah Dandridge, historian:

Not only did John Brown sacrifice his life to bring down the nation's nefarious [evil] system of chattel slavery, but unlike most white abolitionists, he devoted a great deal of his adult life to fostering the practice of racial equality. During the 1830s, he and his lived in a predominantly African American community where he earned a reputation for treating everyone as his peers [equals]. Moreover, he frequently demonstrated a strong intolerance for acts of racial discrimination, such as those he encountered when traveling with his African American colleagues. By the time he began to take up arms against the forces of chattel slavery in Kansas, John Brown had developed allies and friends among many African American leaders, of whom Frederick Douglass, his long-term friend, was the closest... -

From The Brown Quarterly, Volume 3, No. 3 (Winter 2000)

Day #5 – Writing Assignment Part VI – Writing Assignment

Based on the information you learned in class and the source documents you read, decide whether John Brown is an American hero.

Check the box that represents your judgment.

I **do not** think John Brown is an American hero.

I **think** that John Brown is an American hero.

Now that you have made your judgment, your task is to support this decision by writing an essay that responds to the following question:

“Is John Brown an American Hero?”

Write a multi-paragraph essay that answers this question. Your answer should support your opinion with

- information learned in class
- evidence from the primary and secondary sources you have read (include important quotations)
- explanations of how the evidence you have chosen supports your thesis (answer)
- your response (counterargument) to evidence that could be used to argue for a different answer.

Use the checklist below to make sure that your essay is well written and complete. Begin your essay below.

An excellent piece of historical writing contains the following:

- ___ A title that prepares the reader for the specific topic and content of the essay
- ___ A thoughtful, well-developed thesis that clearly identifies your argument.
- ___ An introduction that contains the thesis, and maps out (identifies) the major reasons used to support thesis.
- ___ Body paragraphs, each addressing one of your major reasons, which contain a topic sentence (body thesis) and supporting evidence, and links back to the argument you make in your introduction
- ___ Use of primary and secondary sources, connection between sources, and explanation of what sources mean
- ___ Counterargument - identification and response to different ideas about Brown and his raid
- ___ Fluid writing, precise language, and organization that move your argument forward
- ___ A powerful conclusion that summarizes arguments and adds significance

