

Harpers Ferry / Resources

List of resources with excerpts:

1. Frederick Douglass' letter to editor in defense of accusations he supported Brown.

"The taking of Harpers Ferry was a measure never encouraged by my word or my vote, at any time or place...My field of labor for the abolition of slavery has not extended to an attack upon the United States arsenal...I am ever ready to write, speak, publish, organize, combine and even to conspire against Slavery, when there is a reasonable hope for success...It can never be wrong for the imbruted and whip-scarred slaves, or their friends, to hunt, harass and even strike down the traffickers in human flesh...Entertaining this sentiment, I may be asked, why I did not join John Brown-- the noble old hero whose one right hand has shaken the foundation of the American Union, and whose ghost will haunt the bed-chambers of all the born and unborn slaveholders of Virginia through all their generations, filling them with alarm and consternation! My answer to this has already been given, at least, impliedly given: 'The tools to those that can use them.' Let every man work for the abolition of Slavery in his own way. I would help all, and hinder none. My position in regard to the Harper's Ferry insurrection may be easily inferred from these remarks."

*"Letter from Frederick Douglass," *The Liberator*, November 11, 1859, 29, 45. Accessed via Proquest.

2. From Colored Citizens of Chicago to John Brown

"We certainly have great reasons, as well as intense desires, to assure you that we deeply sympathize with you and your beloved family. Not only do we sympathize in tears and prayers with you and them, but we will do so in a more tangible form by contributing material aid...How could we be so ungrateful as to do less for one who has suffered, bled and now ready to die for the cause?"

*"H.O.W & others, Chicago, November 17, [1859]" James Redpath, *Echoes of Harper's Ferry* (Boston, 1860), 391

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3. “From a Woman of the Race He Died For” to John Brown

“Although the hands of Slavery throw a barrier between you and me...Virginia has no bolts or bars through which I dread to send you my sympathy...You have rocked the bloody Bastile [sic]; and I hope that from your sad fate great good may arise to the cause of freedom...”

*“Kendalville, Indiana, November 17, [1859]” James Redpath, *Echoes of Harper’s Ferry* (Boston, 1860), 418.

4. “From the Colored Women of Brooklyn” to John Brown

“We truly appreciate your most noble and humane effort and recognize in you a Saviour commissioned to redeem us, the American people, from the great National Sin of Slavery.”

*James Redpath, *Echoes of Harper’s Ferry* (Boston, 1860).

5. Transcendentalist writer Henry David Thoreau’s plea for Captain John Brown

“I wish I could say that Brown was the representative of the North. He was a superior man. He did not value his bodily life in comparison with ideal things. He did not recognize unjust human laws, but resisted them as he was bid. For once we are lifted out of the trivialness and dust of politics into the region of truth and manhood. No man in America has ever stood up so persistently and effectively for the dignity of human nature, knowing himself for a man, and the equal of any and all governments. In that sense he was the most American of us all. He needed no babbling lawyer, making false issues, to defend him. He was more than a match for all the judges that American voters, or office-holders of whatever grade, can create. He could not have been tried by a jury of his peers, because his peers did not exist. When a man stands up serenely against the condemnation and vengeance of mankind, rising above them literally by a whole body...the spectacle is a

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sublime one...and we become criminal in comparison. Do yourselves the honor to recognize him.”

*Henry David Thoreau “A Plea for Captain John Brown,” read to the citizens of Concord, Mass., Sunday Evening, October 30, 1859. Full text available at http://www.transcendentalists.com/thoreau_plea_john_brown.htm

6. Cape Cod Anti-Slavery Resolution

“Resolved, That resistance to tyrants is obedience to God; therefore it is the right and duty of the slaves to resist their masters (by such means as each deems right and proper) and it is the right and duty of the people of the North to incite them to such resistance, and to aid them by such means as they shall think just and expedient, to free themselves from the power that crushes them.”

**The Liberator*, Nov 25, 1859; 29, 47, accessed via Proquest

7. Speech of Virginia Governor Henry A. Wise in Richmond, VA

“His [Brown’s] expectation was to be joined immediately by hundreds and thousands of whites and blacks; and his purpose was to turn the arms of the United States, which he had captured, on the slaveholders of Maryland and Virginia. In this consisted his disappointment and failure. No negroes rose up to seize the arms he had captured. The negroes he had captured...ran back with trepidation to their masters... the faithful slaves refused to take up arms against their masters.”

**National Era* Nov. 3, 1859; Vol. XIII, No 670. Accessed via Proquest

8. Clarke Journal, published near Harper’s Ferry

“We [the South] now have the advantage...We have now the advantage by their [Northern abolitionists] being in the fault, and we being the wronged, aggrieved

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party...Slavery...is a kind, humane institution, in all its workings, and right...The Northern States are forbidding the free negroes coming there; we cannot have them here; and it shows that the only relation in which the white man is willing to live with them is Slavery...We now have an opportunity, while the world have this case in their eye, to demonstrate our superior excellence of character and disarm them of their opposition to Slavery.”

**National Era*, Nov. 24, 1859, Vol XIII, No. 673. Accessed via Proquest

9. General News -- The Reign of Terror

“The Rockville (Md.) Journal says that a man was arrested near the Great Falls, in that county, on Wednesday last, for the expression of a feeling of sympathy with the late rebellion at Harper’s Ferry. He is now in the county jail.”

**The Independent*, Dec. 1, 1859; 11, 574. Accessed via Proquest

10. Letter of Mrs. L. Maria Child to Capt. Brown

“Believing in peace principles, I cannot sympathize with the method you chose to advance the cause of freedom. But I honor your generous intentions— I admire your courage, moral and physical...Thousands of hearts are throbbing with sympathy as warm as mine...May you be strengthened by the conviction that no honest man ever sheds blood for freedom in vain, however much he may be mistaken in his efforts.”

**The Liberator*, Nov. 11, 1859; 29; 45 Accessed via Proquest

11. Vermont Chronicle editorial

“The affair at Harper’s Ferry is enough, of itself, to prove that Slavery is a wrong, and a source of weakness and danger; that it can never be the part of the Christian or the patriot to defend or prolong its existence...For our

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Northern readers it is not necessary, but for Southern eyes we take the precaution of saying that, whatever may be our judgment and feeling in regard to Slavery, and whatever sympathy may be felt for the deluded sufferer, none here justify Brown's undertaking."

**National Era*, Nov 17, 1859, Vol. XIII, no. 672, accessed via Proquest

12. New York Times reports of state of panic among Virginia slaveholders

"The panic has seized all classes of the people...some think that hordes of Northerners are on their way to invade the State...If five or six negroes are seen talking together, they are speedily magnified by rumor into a hundred, armed with pitchforks and scythe blades..."

**New York Times*, Nov. 24, 1859, pg. 1 Accessed via Proquest

13. John G. Whittier in the Amesbury Villager

"Everything now indicates that at the next Presidential election the Republican Party will be successful...While it will repress all interference with Slavery in the States where it exists, it will at the same time forbid its further extension, and secure the free States and Territories from its aggressions"

**New York Times*, Nov. 24, 1859, pg. 1 Accessed via Proquest

14. Washington [Arkansas] Telegraph

"It is a gratifying fact that this treasonable attack has met with no sympathy scarcely at the North. The press there, with scarcely an exception, of all parties and shades of opinion, denounce it in unmeasured terms. This is indeed a gratifying fact. It proves that the great body of the people of that section, however erratic and wayward at times, are still held bound to us by the ties of friendly and fraternal feeling."

**Chicago Press and Tribune*, Nov. 11, 1859 Accessed via Proquest

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15. John Brown's Last Prophecy from jail

"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."

*John Brown's last letter, written on the day he was hanged, Charlestown, Va, 2nd, December, 1859. From Oswald Garrison Villard, *John Brown: a Biography*.
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/brown/filmmore/reference/primary/index.html>