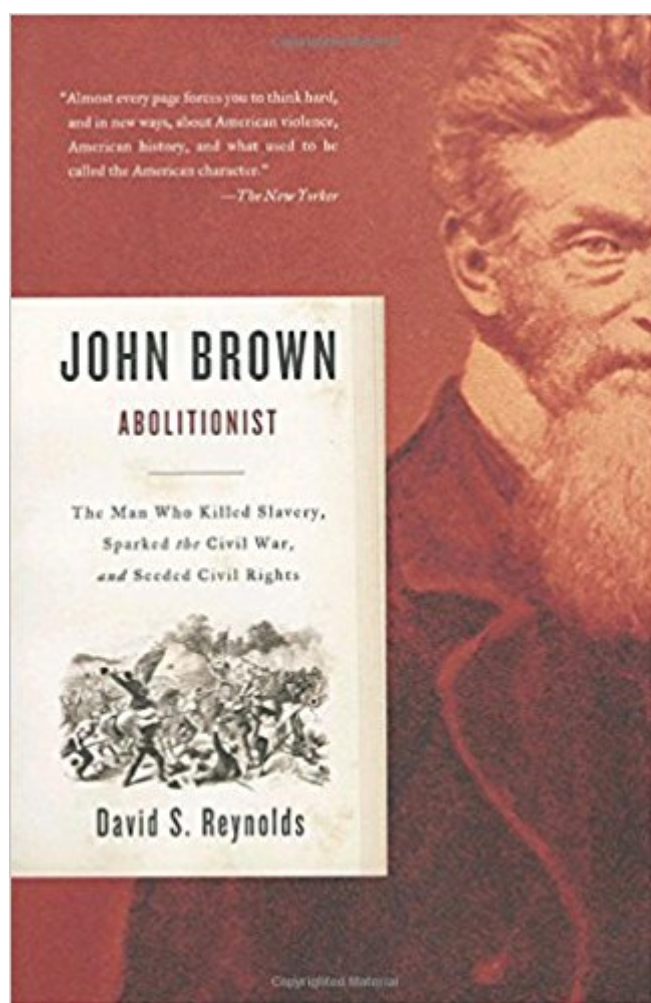


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# John Brown, Abolitionist: The Man Who Killed Slavery, Sparked The Civil War, And Seeded Civil Rights



## Synopsis

A cultural biography of John Brown, the controversial abolitionist who used violent tactics against slavery and single-handedly changed the course of American history. Reynolds brings to life the Puritan warrior who gripped slavery by the throat and triggered the Civil War. Reynolds demonstrates that Brown's most violent acts—including his killing of proslavery settlers in Kansas and his historic raid on Harpers Ferry, Virginia--were inspired by the slave revolts, guerilla warfare, and revolutionary Christianity of the day. He shows how Brown seized public attention, polarizing the nation and fueling the tensions that led to the Civil War. Reynolds recounts how Brown permeated American culture during the Civil War and beyond, and how he planted the seeds of the civil rights movement by making a pioneering demand for complete social and political equality for America's ethnic minorities.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In the very first paragraphs of this biography, Bancroft Prize-winner Reynolds (Walt Whitman's America) steps back a bit from the grandiose claims of his subtitle. Nevertheless, his book as a whole paints a positive portrait of the Calvinist terrorist Brown (1800-1859)--contrary to virtually all recent scholarship (by Stephen B. Oates and Robert Boyer, among others), which tends to depict Brown as a bloodthirsty zealot and madman who briefly stepped into history but did little to influence it. Reynolds's approach harks back to the hero-worship apparent in earlier books by W.E.B. Du Bois and Brown's surviving associates. John Brown waged a campaign so bloody during the Kansas

Civil War--in 1856 he chased men and elder sons from their beds in cabins along the Pottawatomie Creek, and then lopped off their heads with broadswords as sobbing wives and younger children looked on--that fellow Kansas antislavery settlers rebuked him. Even the abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison condemned Brown and his methods. After taking the federal armory and arsenal at Harpers Ferry in October 1859, Brown intended (had he not been swatted like a fly within hours) to raise and arm a large force of blacks capable of wreaking a terrible vengeance across Virginia. Yet Reynolds insists that "it is misleading to identify Brown with modern terrorists." Really? 25 b&w illus. (Apr. 21) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

The claims of Reynolds's subtitle strike many as inflated; while John Brown certainly grew into a towering folkloric figure after his death, the historians who review the book note that his actions were less a direct cause than an important symbolic precursor to the Civil War. Some critics believe Reynolds, winner of the Bancroft Prize for Walt Whitman's America, is overly sympathetic to Brown's use of violence. Though other reviewers counter that the author never turns full-scale apologist, the question of whether violence is an acceptable response to injustice--even one as grave as slavery--hangs over the text, especially as Reynolds examines the parallels between Brown's actions and our current understanding of terrorism. One thing is certain: John Brown's legacy is as unstable a part of our national history as ever. Copyright © 2004 Phillips & Nelson Media, Inc. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

A quick review of this book: This book is a fascinating read for those who have a vague sense that a person named John Brown played a major role in American history. Well written, this book would be appropriate for most adults in this country who are curious about Antebellum America and slavery. The negatives: I felt the author focused too much on Brown's religious background, primarily. I think the US is pretty far removed from Puritanism: when most think of puritans they incorrectly envision either Pilgrims or associate the term with denial of any sort of worldly pleasure. As such, Brown's religion wouldn't resonate in 21st c. America. That theme was overplayed, as was the connection with Cromwell, esp. for Americans, who have no connection to Cromwell. The positives: the author made the connection to Transcendental philosophy and philosophers well. Having the connection to the US' great intellectuals as a main theme in the book was effective. The contrast between Brown and the deified politicians of the era was also good. The chapter on Black support for Brown was excellent: it felt like a vindication of Brown's efforts. Finally, the most eye

opening aspect of this book was the discussion of Brown mania, both North and South which led to the Civil War. Many were taught for years that Lincoln's election precipitated the Civil War. This book makes it clear that after Harpers Ferry, the election of Lincoln was actually less consequential over all as a cause for secession, and actually was dwarfed by the paranoia around Brown after death. Overall, a good book and very informative. I would recommend it.

This is one of the most underrated white guys in history. Any Black studies that teaches about slavery must have this kind of material in it. I will take John Brown's efforts as a real commitment toward the end of old school slavery. Now talk about someone who is willing to give their life for a cause. It was John Brown. He set the white standard for the commitment for civil and human rights, and the rest of the Tim Wise types have to stand behind him.

The book certainly broadened my understanding of the abolitionist movement and Brown's pivotal role as a role model for the Union's prosecution of the war, and the Transcendentalist's role in establishing Brown's heroic image during that period. I do find it interesting that even today the author seemed to not be comfortable with rationalizing Brown's use of violence to bring down slavery. This in spite of the extreme acts of violence perpetrated by the proponents of slavery, especially in respect to the atrocities they committed during the sorry years of "bleeding Kansas." All in all a very good book.

"instead of hunting for a solution, the politicians had worked for a crisis. this they would presently get, and when they got it they would find it a catastrophe." thus bruce catton wrote in his 1961 book "the coming fury" though not in the library yet it should be. it has always ben fascinating to me to discover why things happen as much as what happened. there are big lessons in both of these books about where we may be headed. some politicians suggested that the blood spilled in that war would not fill a thimble. we seem to be engaged in the same sort of disconnect every day now with pundits and politicians urging us from one war to the next and i am afraid that it will eventually lead to the crisis and catastrophe we refuse to see looming in america and the world. john brown was a bell weather. the home grown spark that grew to a blaze we could not be put out but with much blood and suffering. there are big lessons in this book that we must learn very fast. our own catastrophe is lurking in the shadows.

As someone who enjoys history, particularly when it focuses on great people, I can honestly say I have never read a book that I got more out of. Though the book was well-done, Brown's saga, like his life, has enough inertia to move on its own. I always knew Brown was controversial and courageous, now I find myself weeping at the dearth of such people in today's culture. In a world where ideas spread so thickly and quickly that the salient ones are lost or easily labeled fringe, a character like Brown, who would not allow truth to be ignored, is sorely needed. Thank you David S. Reynolds.

Great for anyone who wants to understand history -- as in WHY was the Harpers Ferry raid so important. And --for a Missouri-Kansas border resident -- WHY did he travel half-way across the country to kill people in Kansas ? Gives one a chance to try to understand the personality of the man - who whether entirely sane or entirely intelligent -- was so dedicated to his beliefs that he risked everything including his children, to act on them.

This book seems to slant towards John Brown's unwavering devotion to not only ending slavery, but seeing slaves as equals, a man far ahead of his time. The book is very well researched, at times the author is a little wordy and the timeline is occasionally hard to follow. If you are interested in the civil war, or reading about abolition, this is the book for you

Excellent treatise on old Ossawatimie and his influence on emancipation and civil rights during the past 150 years. Brown was truly a negro in a white man's skin.

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