

John Brown at Harper's Ferry 1859

The following are excerpts from editorials that appeared in the Pittsburgh (PA) Gazette and the Richmond (VA) Enquirer following Brown's Raid at Harper's Ferry.

"The immolation of John Brown was, in short, in accordance with the philosophy of slavery – a necessity. He had dared to act on the conviction of his life, and these settled principles of his were the only ones which such a man could entertain. He was too brave to have thought differently from what he did, and the same noble impulses which inculcated a love of Freedom and Right, impelled him constantly and irresistibly to the practical development of his theory. He has failed, according to the popular mode of calculating failure and success: but that his life and tragic death must of necessity constitute a failure, is a point too broad and high to be disposed of in this summary manner. We cannot but disapprove his mad and folly-stricken act, but the unselfishness of the deed; his moderation, when victorious, over the town which he captured; his Spartan courage in defending himself and his fellows, and his sublime contempt of death while overborne and made the manacled tenant of a prison; his stern integrity in scorning the technicalities of the law, and his manliness in all things, will not be quickly forgotten; but rather a contemplation of this heroic old man's character will irresistibly compel thinking men to ask themselves whether it is John Brown, of Ossawatimie, or the system of slavery which has failed in this conflict.

The execution of the old man at Charlestown yesterday, was a plain admission on the part of Slavery that they dare not spare a brave man's life, and that magnanimity is impossible to a system based on wrong and upheld by violence....Slavery in all the plentitude of its triumph and power is a failure; and old John Brown of Ossawatimie has succeeded – Sampson-like – in dragging down the pillars of Slavery in his fall, and his victory is complete! While millions of prayers went up for the old martyr yesterday, so millions of curses were uttered against the hellish system which so mercilessly and ferociously cried out for his blood. Every hear in which a free spirit throbbed gave utterance to its pent-up agony in contemplating the enormities of this bloody institution – this sum of all villainies – in the dispensations of its power and the exactions of its bloody code."

Pittsburgh *Gazette*, December, 3, 1859

"The Harper's Ferry invasion has advanced the cause of Disunion more than any other event...since the formation of the government; it has rallied to that standard men who formerly looked upon it with horror; it has revived, with tenfold strength, the desire of a Southern Confederacy. The heretofore most determined friends of the union may now be heard saying, 'If under the form of a Confederacy (Union) our peace is disturbed, our state invaded, its peaceful citizens cruelly murdered...by those who should be our warmest friends,...and the people of the North sustain the outrage, then let disunion come.'"

Richmond *Enquirer*, October 25, 1859