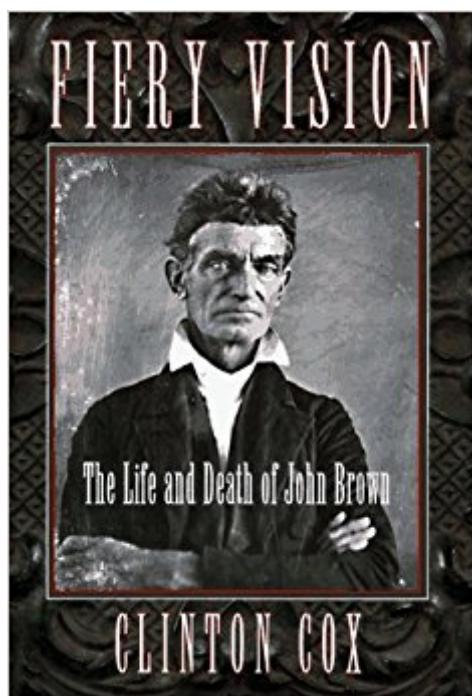


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Fiery Vision: The Life And Death Of John Brown



Synopsis

The story of abolitionist John Brown describes his dream of eliminating slavery from America and recounts his 1859 insurrection at Harpers Ferry, Virginia, where he and his band turned violent for the cause.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Grade 7-10. In many U.S. History courses, John Brown is quickly glossed over in the buildup to the Civil War. Although his raid of Harpers Ferry is much discussed, the man himself is often summed up as a martyr, a madman, or a mystery. Cox has done away with some of that mystery in this thorough and clearly written biography. Tracing his subject's abolitionism (and fanaticism) back to its earliest roots, the author gives readers a picture of Brown as a loving family man and a not-too-successful businessman. Some of the key events of the era are incorporated into the narrative, as are the personal stories of many slaves and fugitives. Within such a context, Brown's embracing of the cause of abolition seems quite reasonable and his devotion quite sane. Although the information leading up to the raid is lengthy, the coverage of the raid itself and Brown's well-publicized trial is relatively brief, which might disappoint some readers. The bibliography is excellent and the black-and-white reproductions greatly enhance the text. Like his book on Twain, Cox's enjoyable biography provides a good introduction for young adults. ?Elizabeth M. Reardon,

Gr. 7^10. This long biography of the famous abolitionist who was hanged for the raid on the arsenal at Harper's Ferry is filled with quotes from eyewitnesses and scrupulously detailed accounts of events. In fact, there's almost too much chronological detail here, and the drama is sometimes overwhelmed with particulars. Most YA readers would prefer a more general discussion of the issues, more analysis of the historical importance of the man and his cause, rather than the minutiae of almost every journey he ever took. Where the particulars are powerful, however, is in the accounts of slavery (especially the horror of enforced family separation); in the arguments for and against violent resistance; and in the planning, execution, failure, and lasting importance of the raid. "They could kill him, but they could not answer him," Frederick Douglass said, and Cox shows how Brown's action brought an end to compromise on slavery and helped bring about the Civil War.

Bibliography. Hazel Rochman

From this book you will read about the life and times in which John Brown lived in as well as a time when people of the black race were subjugated to a life of slavery. John Brown's religious convictions as well as his belief in the constitution enflamed his desire to fight the tyranny of slavery and as a result could be considered the catalyst for the Civil War. This book was well written yet easy to read. If you have read this book or have an interest in this subject I would also recommend the book "Cloud Splitter"

Would buy again

Who would have thought the Civil War started in Kansas? --Not at Gettysburg or Appomattox, but at Lawrence, Kansas. John Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry, now West Virginia, on the night of October 16, 1859, may have propelled the country into war but the first shots were fired in Kansas five years earlier as residents prepared to vote whether to allow slavery in their new state. Lawrence was a hotbed of conflict between Northern abolitionists and pro-slavery Southerners. The residents that founded the town were anti-slavery. Brown's actions prior to the Civil War as an abolitionist and the tactics he chose, still make him a controversial figure today. Judgment depends on point of view. He is sometimes called a hero and martyr and other times described as a madman and terrorist. Little known facts of his life are revealed in this book. Although he was always a fervent abolitionist, from the mid-1840s to the mid 1850s Brown built a reputation as an expert in fine sheep and wool. He

was a loving family man with some 20 children, tho' several died in childhood. He and his sons managed large flocks and farms, in addition to his successful tannery business. In Springfield Massachusetts he was a leader in St. John's Congregational church, called the "Free Church," and his family was active in the Underground Railroad, helping slaves escape to freedom. It was his perennial zeal for the underdog which drove him to struggle with political leaders and ultimately led to his death. When the new state of Kansas was opened to settlement, like hundreds of others John Brown and his sons headed there to get land and homestead. His brother-in-law Rev. Samuel Adair had already settled at Osawatomie and built his home so Brown built his cabin nearby. From 1855 to 1858, Kansas Territory experienced a multitude of violence and some open battles between the Pro-slavery groups and the "Free Staters." Brown never was shy about where he stood on the issue. A force of Missourians, led by Captain Henry Pate, captured John Brown's sons, John Jr. and Jason, and his men destroyed the Brown family homestead. These same men later participated in the Sack of Lawrence. In August a company of Missourians under Maj. Gen. John Reid attacked Statue of John Brown at Osawatomie, KS(not in the book)Osawatomie. They shot and killed Brown's son Frederick and his neighbor David Garrison on the outskirts of town. Brown, outnumbered more than seven to one, arranged his 38 men behind natural defenses along the road. Reid and his men regrouped, plundered and burned Osawatomie, but Brown's men defeated them. A month after his badly outnumbered men won that battle against the proslavery forces, Brown headed back east. He began to focus on Harper's Ferry, drawing sketches of log forts that he intended to build in the mountains surrounding the town. On October 16, 1859, Brown led 18 men in an attack on the Harpers Ferry Armory. Brown's hope was to limit and minimize bloodshed. They cut the telegraph wires and easily captured the armory, which was being defended by a single watchman. A company of militia seized the bridge, blocking the only escape route. Brown then moved his prisoners and remaining raiders into the engine house, a small brick building at the entrance to the armory. He had the doors and windows barred and loopholes were cut through the brick walls. Brown sent his son Watson and another supporter out under a white flag, but the angry crowd shot them. Intermittent shooting then broke out, and Brown's son Oliver was wounded. His son begged his father to kill him and end his suffering, but Brown said "If you must die, die like a man." A few minutes later Oliver was dead. A company of U.S. Marines under the command of Col. Robert E. Lee surrounded the building. A young Army lieutenant, J.E.B. Stuart approached under a white flag and told the raiders that their lives would be spared if they surrendered. Brown refused, saying, "No, I prefer to die here." In three minutes Brown and his surviving men were captives. Although the attack had taken place on Federal property, Brown and

his men were tried in CharlesTown, the nearby county seat capital of Jefferson County just seven miles west of Harpers Ferry, perhaps to avert Northern political pressure on the Federal government. Brown was charged with murdering four whites and a black, with conspiring to create a slave rebellion and with treason against Virginia. On November 2, after a week-long trial and 45 minutes of deliberation, the CharlesTown jury found Brown guilty. Altogether Brown's men killed four people, and wounded nine. Ten of Brown's men were killed, including his sons Watson and Oliver. Five of Brown's men escaped, including his son Owen, and seven were captured along with Brown. Southern Democrats charged that Brown's raid was an inevitable consequence of the Republican Party's political platform, which they associated with Abolitionism. *He was hanged at 11:15 a.m. and pronounced dead at 11:50 a.m. His body was placed in a wooden coffin with the noose still around his neck. In the North, large memorial meetings took place, church bells rang, minute guns were fired, and famous writers such as Emerson and Thoreau joined many Northerners in praising Brown.* John Brown is buried on his farm in North Elba, NY. My impression of this man and the book is that Brown was not insane, though he was as deeply flawed as he was religious; the Pottawatomie affair was indeed a crime, but Brown saw slavery as an unprovoked religious war of one race against another; and the Harpers Ferry raid was not a wild-eyed, erratic scheme doomed to failure. The most powerful description is in the accounts of slavery, especially the horror of enforced family separation and brutal treatment of slaves; and in the planning, execution, failure, and lasting importance of the raid. This is not in the book, but you can see the tombstone of John Brown's grandfather, Captain John Brown, serves as a memorial also for John and his son Oliver's names and dates.

This book has a concise overview of the complicated issues of John Brown's time. It is full of surprises like Harriet Tubman recommending July 4th for his attack on Harper's Ferry, and facts like the staggering growth of slavery in his lifetime. If, like me, you want a good overview, this book has it.

This book does an excellent job of tracing not only John Brown's travels through Harper's Ferry, but also the genesis of his abolitionism. Fanatic yes, but he was a fanatic on the right side of history. Also, there's no indication that Mr. Brown was a horse thief or a megalomaniac, although he did declare bankruptcy and did desire to lead, with the approval of freed blacks, a provisional territory until slavery had been eliminated from the south. Apologists for the Confederacy, like Steve Quick in his review of Penn's book on John Brown, should remember two words that destroy any

moral argument they might muster in support of the antebellum South, and against the actions of John Brown, and later the Union. The first word, obviously, is "slavery." It is unjustifiable, and any attempts to do so are disgraceful. The second word is "Andersonville." The inhumane treatment Union soldiers received at the hands of the Confederates should never be forgotten.

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