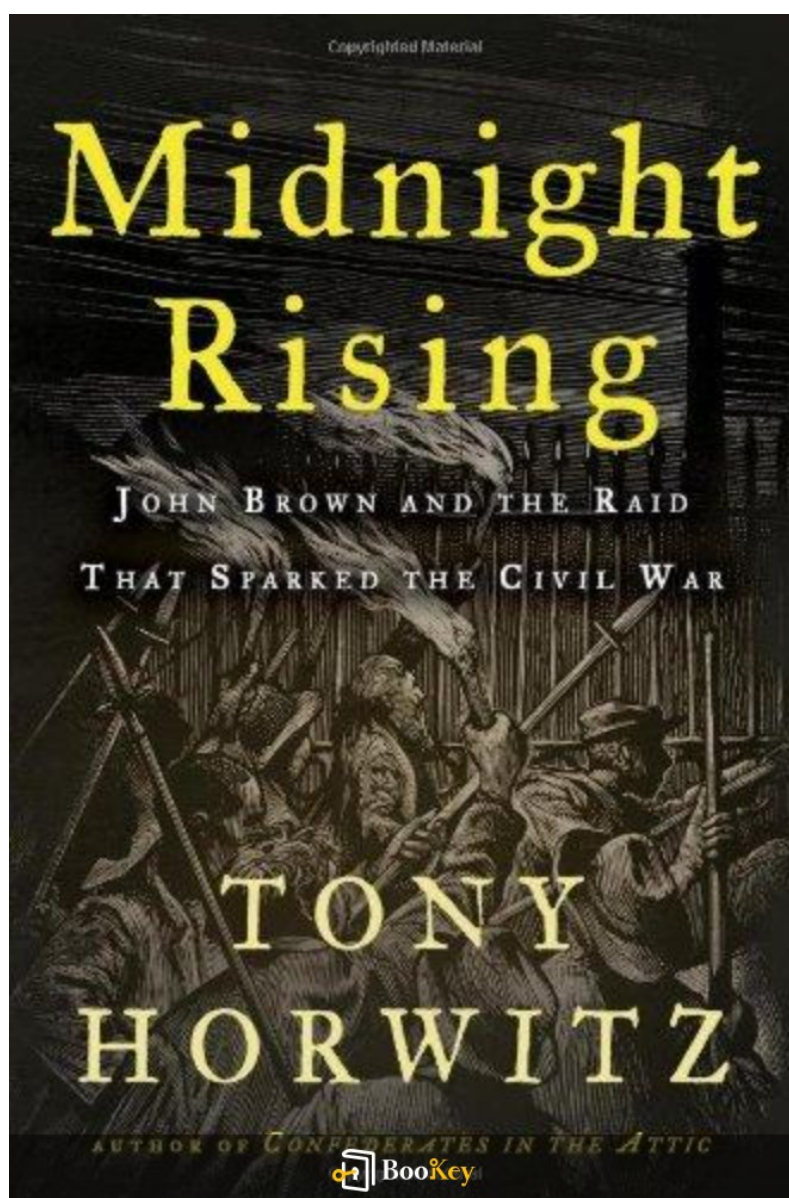


Midnight Rising By Tony Horwitz PDF

Tony Horwitz



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About the book

Title: Unveiling the Turmoil of Pre-Civil War America in "Midnight Rising"

Overview: In "Midnight Rising," Tony Horwitz, a celebrated historian, crafts a captivating narrative that explores the chaos of America's pre-Civil War landscape. The account reveals a time when the quest for freedom and justice demanded extraordinary courage and extreme determination.

Central Figure: At the core of this powerful story is John Brown, a controversial and passionate figure whose radical ideology propelled the notorious Harpers Ferry raid. This pivotal event serves as a spark that stirred the nation's moral compass, pushing it closer to the brink of civil war.

Narrative Style: Horwitz skillfully blends thorough research with the visceral emotions of individuals who fought for their beliefs in a divided society. Readers encounter a rich tapestry of bravery juxtaposed with horror, fanaticism against faith, reflecting the persistent struggle for liberty and equality.

Conclusion: Venture into this dark chapter of American history, where the interplay of courage and conviction gives rise to a new era of profound change.

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About the author

Profile: Tony Horwitz

Born: June 9, 1958, Washington, D.C.

Occupation: Journalist and Author

Career Highlights:

- Renowned for blending historical insights with captivating narratives, Tony Horwitz emerged as a significant figure in American journalism and literature.
- Winning the Pulitzer Prize for National Reporting in 1995 while contributing to The Wall Street Journal, he solidified his reputation for excellence in reporting.
- Best known for acclaimed books like *Confederates in the Attic* and *A Voyage Long and Strange*, Horwitz had a unique talent for making history engaging and accessible to a wide readership.

Writing Style:

Horwitz's work is celebrated for:

- Meticulous Research: His commitment to accuracy and detail ensures a solid foundation for his narratives.
- Vivid Storytelling: He captures the imagination of his audience, bringing historical events to life.

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- Human Dimension: He excels at revealing the personal stories and emotions behind the facts, adding depth to historical discourse.

Legacy:

Tony Horwitz's contributions to American historical literature continue to resonate, educating and captivating readers long after his death in 2019. His impact is felt in the way history is presented and understood today.

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1. Introduction: Setting the Stage for Harpers Ferry and John Brown's Raid

In order to understand the significance of John Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry in October 1859, one must first comprehend the complex web of social, political, and economic conditions that existed in the United States at the time. The nation was deeply divided over the issue of slavery, and tensions were escalating towards a breaking point. Harpers Ferry, located at the confluence of the Potomac and Shenandoah Rivers in present-day West Virginia, served as a crucial battleground in this conflict. The town was the site of a federal armory and arsenal, making it an attractive target for those who sought to instigate a larger uprising against slavery.

In the decades leading up to the raid, the abolitionist movement gained momentum, fueled by a moral imperative to end the institution of slavery. This was bolstered by the publication of influential literature, such as Harriet Beecher Stowe's "Uncle Tom's Cabin" in 1852, which humanized the plight of enslaved people and galvanized public opinion against slavery in the North. Brown, a deeply religious man who regarded slavery as a sin against God, viewed himself as an instrument of divine justice. His radical approach, which included violence as a means of liberation, placed him at odds with more moderate abolitionists who sought gradual reform rather than armed insurrection.

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At this time, Harpers Ferry was not just an ordinary town; it was emblematic of America's larger struggles. It held a strategic military position that was recognized by both the North and the South, being a pivotal point for transportation and logistics. The presence of the federal armory there also carried significant implications. The U.S. government's ownership of the arsenal represented a powerful entity that abolitionists wished to commandeer for their cause. Brown's raid was conceived as a means to seize the armory, arm enslaved individuals, and ignite a widespread rebellion against slaveholders.

The societal backdrop of the era included heated debates over states' rights and federal authority, with many southern states insisting that they had the right to maintain the institution of slavery against perceived encroachments by the federal government and abolitionists. The passage of the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850 further inflamed tensions, as it mandated that escaped slaves be returned to their owners, inciting anger among northern abolitionists. This led to acts of resistance and defiance in the face of what many viewed as an oppressive federal mandate.

Brown's chosen strategy of insurrection was controversial; many abolitionists were horrified at the prospect of violent rebellion. Brown's approach mirrored the sentiments of other radical movements in history that believed that extant systems of oppression could only be overturned through



militancy. In this context, Harpers Ferry was not merely a location; it was a powder keg of potential insurrection that Brown sought to ignite.

The raid would take place at a time when the nation was already on the brink of civil war. In the years leading up to the raid, a series of events, including the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 and the violence in “Bleeding Kansas,” highlighted the intensifying conflict between pro-slavery and anti-slavery factions. As these skirmishes unfolded, they only served to harden positions on both sides, setting the stage for a violent confrontation that would soon engulf the entire nation.

The events of October 1859 would mark a pivotal moment not just for John Brown, but for the United States as a whole. His actions at Harpers Ferry would ignite debates around morality, justice, and the means by which oppressed people seek freedom. Ultimately, these discussions would carry into the throes of the Civil War and help mold the narrative surrounding race and justice in America. John Brown may have been a singular figure driven by his convictions, but his raid reverberated throughout the country and began to crystallize the ideological divisions that would lead to a brutal conflict that consumed the nation.

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2. Chapter 1: Exploring the Early Life and Ideals of John Brown

John Brown, a figure shrouded in both reverence and controversy, emerged from humble beginnings in a society fractured by the institution of slavery. Born in 1800 in Torrington, Connecticut, Brown witnessed firsthand the pervasive injustices of his time. He grew up in a deeply religious family that was heavily influenced by the fervor of the Second Great Awakening, which emphasized moral responsibility and social justice. The evangelical principles of his upbringing instilled in him a profound sense of duty towards the oppressed, particularly the enslaved African Americans.

As a young man, Brown relocated to Ohio, a state that was both a borderland and a haven for fugitive slaves escaping from the South. This geographical position allowed Brown to interact with various abolitionist movements and prominent figures who advocated for the cause of emancipation. The early experiences he encountered in Ohio catalyzed his commitment to abolition, fostering a belief that it was not only a moral imperative but also a divine calling. Through these interactions, Brown developed a radical viewpoint that slavery was a sin that needed to be eradicated through direct and violent action if necessary. His zealous opposition to slavery was not merely philosophical; it was deeply personal, rooted in a sense of justice that felt incomprehensible in the face of such human suffering.



In the 1830s, Brown's life took a more tumultuous turn as he moved to various locations in search of economic opportunities and stability. His ventures, from wool trading to land speculation, were often met with failure, and he faced significant financial difficulties that impacted his family life. Despite these struggles, his dedication to the abolitionist cause did not waver. Notably, in the late 1840s, after witnessing the atrocities faced by African Americans in the South, Brown became increasingly radicalized, adopting the notion that bloodshed might be necessary to achieve freedom.

His radicalization solidified during a visit to the conflict-ridden state of Kansas in 1855. Here, Brown engaged fiercely in the violent struggle known as "Bleeding Kansas," where pro-slavery and anti-slavery factions clashed desperately over the destiny of the territory. His resolve to use violence as a mechanism for change crystallized when he led a raid on pro-slavery settlers, claiming it was a righteous act of rebellion against an oppressive system. This experience not only defined his militant approach to abolitionist action but also served as a precursor to his more notorious plans surrounding the raid on Harpers Ferry.

A key component of Brown's ideology was his unwavering belief in the equality of all people, regardless of race. His vision of a free America was incompatible with the existence of slavery, and he was prepared to sacrifice everything, including his life, to realize this dream. Brown's commitment



was rooted deeply in his interpretation of religious texts, which he often quoted to justify his actions and rally support from fellow abolitionists. The Old Testament, with its tales of liberation and justice, resonated strongly with Brown and provided a spiritual undercurrent to his campaign against slavery.

His personal relationships also played a crucial role in shaping his ideals. Brown had a close-knit family, and the values he imparted to his children reflected his abolitionist beliefs. He sought to raise them in an environment that emphasized empathy towards the plight of others, particularly the enslaved. His interactions with African American leaders and escaped slaves during this period further influenced his strategies and ideologies, fostering a sense of solidarity and urgency to act against the societal norms that permitted slavery's endurance.

Brown's life was a collage of contradictions—devout yet militant, idealistic yet pragmatic. While he sometimes engaged in acts deemed ruthless, his ultimate goal was to dismantle an institution that he viewed as an affront to humanity's moral fabric. This blend of fervor and zealotism would soon propel him to the forefront of the abolitionist movement, culminating in the high-stakes confrontation that would take place at Harpers Ferry.

To understand John Brown's legacy, it is essential to recognize the interplay

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of his early life experiences, personal convictions, and broader societal conflicts. His journey was characterized by a growing commitment to radical action against slavery, fueled by both personal conviction and the belief that the time for passive resistance had passed. Through this exploration of his life leading up to Harpers Ferry, we begin to see the foundations of a man who would not only challenge the status quo but also ignite the flames of a broader conflict that would engulf the entire nation.

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3. Chapter 2: The Build-Up to the Raid: Plans, Allies, and Controversies

As John Brown diligently worked towards his vision of a radical abolitionist uprising, the months leading up to the infamous raid on Harpers Ferry in October 1859 were marked by an intricate web of planning, alliances, and undeniably fierce controversies. This chapter delves into the pivotal moments and figures that shaped Brown's actions in the lead-up to this historic event.

After the violent confrontations in Kansas—known as "Bleeding Kansas"—which transformed him into a martyr for the abolitionist cause, Brown returned to his fervent mission with renewed determination. He believed the time had come to inspire a widespread insurrection against slavery. His target, Harpers Ferry, was not chosen lightly. The federal armory there housed an extensive supply of weapons, which Brown intended to seize to arm enslaved people and rally other abolitionists to his side. However, the complexities of this plan involved not only the physical acquisition of arms but also recruiting a cadre of reliable allies willing to join this high-stakes gamble for freedom.

In preparation for the raid, Brown enlisted a diverse group of supporters. His family members, including sons Owen, Watson, and Richard, were integral in executing his plans. Brown also reached out to established abolitionists



such as Frederick Douglass, a renowned figure in the movement. Douglass initially supported Brown's cause but ultimately declined to participate in the raid, arguing that the plan was too reckless. This point underscores the growing divide within the abolitionist movement, where methods of resistance and the morality of violent uprising were subjects of intense debate.

In addition to securing moral and ideological support, Brown tried to gather resources and funding. He engaged with prominent abolitionist circles and sought as much financial backing as possible from sympathizers in the North. Throughout these efforts, however, he found himself grappling with skepticism about the success of an armed rebellion. Many abolitionists considered his plans overly simplistic and potentially disastrous. The outcry against violent resistance fueled a rift within the community, questioning the efficacy and ethics of such actions.

A tenant of Brown's strategy was the notion of creating a sanctuary for freed slaves and runaway individuals, a bold proposal that exacerbated existing tensions. He envisioned establishing a stronghold in the mountains of Virginia that would serve both as a base for the insurrection and as a haven for those seeking liberation. This idea attracted some followers, particularly among radical abolitionists but also raised alarms among moderates who were concerned that such a public endeavor would provoke severe reprisals



against both black and white abolitionists.

Controversy swirled as the timing of the raid approached. The political climate was charged; tensions between the North and South had reached a boiling point with the emergence of the Republican Party and the continued entrenchment of slavery in the South. The Fugitive Slave Act had emboldened pro-slavery factions to enact stringent laws against abolitionists, creating an atmosphere rife with danger for anyone involved in orchestrating a violent uprising. Many viewed Brown's planned raid as likely to ignite a civil conflict, an idea that terrified those who hoped to resolve the tensions through political means.

Moreover, Brown's approach diverged significantly from other contemporaneous abolitionists, causing fractures within the anti-slavery movements. Figures like William Lloyd Garrison condemned violence and promoted a pacifist strategy, arguing that moral suasion was the more honorable path. The controversies surrounding Brown created a series of debates that reflected broader societal divides. For instance, while some abolitionists rallied around the idea of direct action, others remained steadfast in their belief that education, moral reform, and legal measures could pave the way toward ending slavery without bloodshed.

Despite the growing dissent and mounting risks, Brown remained resolute.



His determination to act was based on an unyielding belief that only through violence could the shackles of slavery be broken. As he tightened his plans and assembled a small band of committed followers, exhibition of unbending resolve came with an acknowledgment of potential failure. Brown understood the historical ramifications of his undertaking; he hoped it would serve as a catalyst for other enslaved individuals to rise up against their oppressors.

As the day of the raid loomed, these complex layers of planning, allied support, and fierce controversies painted a vivid picture of a man driven by conviction yet confronted by the fraught realities of his time. The stage was set not only for a desperate struggle against slavery but also for a significant moment that would resonate throughout American history.

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4. Chapter 3: The Events of October 1859: The Raid's Execution and Immediate Consequences

On the night of October 16, 1859, John Brown and his small band of followers embarked on a raid that would enter the annals of American history as a pivotal moment in the antebellum period. Armed with the fervent belief that slavery must end and that violent resistance was necessary, Brown's desperate gamble took them to Harpers Ferry, Virginia, a critical site due to its arsenal and its strategic location along the Potomac River. With the hope of inspiring a broader slave insurrection, Brown sought to seize the federal armory and distribute weapons to enslaved people in the region.

As the raiders approached Harpers Ferry, they faced the daunting challenge of executing a meticulously planned operation under the cover of night. Brown had prepared meticulously; he had studied the geography of Harpers Ferry, cultivated a network of support among abolitionists, and even had arms and provisions gathered for the mission. However, as they stormed the armory, the execution of their plan quickly unraveled. The first obstacle arose when they were confronted not just by the guards but by the local populace, who were at best indifferent and at worst hostile to their cause. The raiders managed to seize the armory, but their hold on the town was precarious from the outset.



Under intense confusion, the ranks of Brown's forces began to dwindle. Key members of the group, such as Hugh Forbes, became disillusioned as they faced fierce local resistance. Their plans for rallying local slaves to their cause did not materialize as they had hoped; the feared uprising was more of a whisper than a roar. Instead of joining Brown, local enslaved people largely remained passive, illustrating the complex realities of the enslaved individuals' lived experiences—fear of retribution and skepticism of Brown's success cast a long shadow over his aspirations.

By October 17, the situation had deteriorated significantly. A company of U.S. Marines under the command of Colonel Robert E. Lee was dispatched to reclaim the armory. The response was swift and orchestrated, indicating the federal government's immediate concern over Brown's incursion. As dawn broke on October 18, a fierce firefight erupted as federal troops began a coordinated assault to retake Harpers Ferry. The strategic advantages held by the government's forces, coupled with their superior numbers, ultimately turned the tide against Brown and his men.

In the face of inevitable defeat, Brown's determination did not waver. He fought bravely, showcasing a stoicism and resolve that, to some, transformed him into a martyr for the abolitionist cause, even as his main objective failed. The dramatic events concluded when Brown and a handful of his followers were captured or killed, and the raid ended in a catastrophic



failure. However, the immediate aftermath saw the nation erupt in fervent discourse over the moral implications of Brown's actions and the broader questions of slavery and civil rights.

The consequences of Brown's raid were profound and far-reaching. In the South, white reaction was swift and brutal; the raid incited fear, showing how fragile the institution of slavery was perceived to be. Southern states tightened their defenses against potential uprisings, leading to a wave of repression against both free blacks and abolitionists. This escalated the already fraught tensions between the North and South, pointing to a national divide that was beginning to harden into positions that would soon lead to the Civil War.

In the North, reactions were similarly polarized. Abolitionists hailed Brown as a hero; his staunch stand against slavery and willingness to shed blood for the cause resonated with many who felt increasingly justified in pursuing radical measures against the institution. However, many moderates and sympathizers of the cause distanced themselves from Brown, fearing the implications of violent rebellion and the potential backlash it would have on their own efforts toward gradual abolition. The public's reaction, fanned by sensationalist newspaper coverage, polarizing speeches, and the growing divide in society, demonstrated how the raid had galvanized opposing views regarding slavery and activism.



In conjunction with unfolding events, John Brown's trial began shortly thereafter, elevating him to a new status as a symbol of the anti-slavery movement. He carefully used the courtroom as a platform to articulate his beliefs and the necessity of his actions, which resonated with many abolitionists and further solidified his legacy.

In summary, while the raid on Harpers Ferry was tactically disastrous, its execution and the immediate consequences profoundly influenced American society. The events of October 1859 proved to be a flashpoint in the lead-up to a contentious Civil War, leaving a legacy marked by both intended and unintended implications for the future of the nation.

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5. Chapter 4: The Legacy of John Brown's Raid in American History and Morality

The legacy of John Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry in 1859 looms large in American history, shaping not only the trajectory of the Civil War but also the ongoing national conversation about race, liberty, and moral violence. This chapter explores how the event became a catalyst for deeper societal reflection on the institution of slavery, the meaning of freedom, and the moral questions surrounding the use of violence to effect change.

Following the raid, John Brown emerged as a polarizing figure. To many abolitionists and opponents of slavery, he became a martyr; a symbol of righteous resistance against an oppressive system. In contrast, pro-slavery factions viewed him as a dangerous terrorist whose actions justified harsher measures against abolitionists and free blacks. This duality in perception underscores a critical aspect of Brown's legacy—the moral ambiguity surrounding the values that he both fought for and fought against.

The raid had immediate effects that rippled through the nation. In the South, it stoked fear of slave revolts and led to a crackdown on abolitionist activities. Southern states tightened laws regarding enslaved people, employing stricter controls to prevent insurrections. The horror of Brown's attempted rebellion spread a wave of paranoia across slaveholding states as they increasingly saw themselves as under siege. This fear was further



inflamed by the growing northern abolitionist sentiment, leading to increased tensions that ultimately contributed to the outbreak of the Civil War.

In the North, however, Brown's actions ignited passionate discussions about the ethics of using violence against an unjust system. Many abolitionists admired his courage and commitment, framing him as a hero who was willing to sacrifice himself for the greater good of humanity. His trial and execution in 1859 became a focal point for these conversations, serving as a rallying cry that brought attention to the moral failings of slavery and the lengths to which individuals might go to combat it.

Key figures within the abolitionist movement, such as Frederick Douglass and William Lloyd Garrison, although initially hesitant about Brown's violent methods, later acknowledged the significance of his sacrifice. Douglass, in particular, grappled with the question of whether Brown's methods could be justified, reflecting a broader debate among abolitionists about the use of violence as a tool for liberation versus non-violent resistance.

Furthermore, John Brown's legacy persisted beyond the Civil War, influencing subsequent generations of activists. The moral dilemmas he faced have echoed through various civil rights movements, with leaders



confronting similar questions regarding the appropriateness of violent resistance against systemic oppression. The civil rights struggles of the 1960s saw a resurgence of interest in Brown's tactics as activists like Stokely Carmichael and the Black Panthers articulated a more militant stance in response to ongoing racism and disenfranchisement.

Today, the implications of Brown's legacy continue to resonate. The ongoing debates surrounding the ethics of resistance, the nature of justice, and the moral responsibilities of individuals in the fight against oppression reflect the unresolved questions that Brown's actions raise. For modern movements, his commitment to the cause challenges activists to consider what measures are acceptable in the pursuit of justice—an inquiry that remains pertinent in discussions of police brutality, systemic racism, and other forms of social injustices.

Ultimately, John Brown's raid at Harpers Ferry stands as a testament to the tumultuous moral landscape of 19th-century America. It forced the nation to confront its values, pitting the moral imperative of liberty against the brutal reality of violence. Brown's legacy, thus, is not only a story of a failed raid but also a profound reflection on the complexities of moral agency in the face of injustice, making it a pivotal moment in America's ongoing struggle to define freedom and equality for all.

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6. Conclusion: Reflections on the Impact of John Brown's Actions on the Civil War

John Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry in October 1859 stands as a pivotal moment leading up to the Civil War, reverberating through American history with far-reaching implications for the national conscience and the political landscape. Brown initiated an insurrection that not only aimed to liberate enslaved people but also sought to ignite a larger revolution against slavery in a nation teetering on the edge of division. In reflecting on the impact of his actions, it's essential to consider how his radical approach both catalyzed and crystallized the tensions that ultimately led to the Civil War.

One of the immediate impacts of Brown's raid was the intense polarization it caused between the North and the South. In the North, Brown was romanticized as a martyr and a hero of the abolitionist cause. His execution by hanging in December 1859 only served to amplify his status among abolitionists, who viewed him as a symbol of moral resistance against the institution of slavery. The song "John Brown's Body," which emerged shortly thereafter, captured the Northern sentiment and became an anthem for Union soldiers during the Civil War, illustrating how Brown's legacy motivated many to take staunch positions against slavery.

Conversely, in the Southern states, Brown's raid was perceived as an existential threat. It fueled fears of slave insurrections and reinforced the



notion that the North was intent on dismantling the Southern way of life. This led to increased vigilance among slaveholders and eventually shaped the rhetoric surrounding secession. Prominent Southern leaders used the incident as justification for a more aggressive stance against what they perceived as Northern aggressiveness, contributing to their calls for secession in the wake of Abraham Lincoln's election in 1860. The South's reaction to Brown's raid thus became part of the broader narrative of Southern defensiveness that defined the era leading up to the Civil War.

Furthermore, John Brown's ardent abolitionist stance and willingness to use violence highlighted the extremes of the debate over slavery. His radicalism contrasted sharply with more moderate approaches, such as those espoused by Frederick Douglass or even Lincoln in his earlier political career, emphasizing the terms under which discussions about abolition were being framed. This radicalization of the conversation around slavery forced moderates in both the North and South to reevaluate their positions, ultimately leading to the hardening of viewpoints that made compromise increasingly difficult.

The impact of Brown's actions also extended beyond immediate political outcomes; it sparked a profound moral reckoning in America. His stark dedication to the plight of enslaved people called into question the ethical underpinnings of the country's institutions and its founding ideals of liberty



and justice. The moral urgency that Brown embodied inspired individuals and movements, leading to heightened abolitionist activities, including the Underground Railroad, and creating an environment in which the existing social order was critically examined and challenged.

In conclusion, John Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry played a crucial role in shaping the trajectory of the American Civil War. It highlighted the divergent paths of North and South and expedited the radicalization of both public sentiment and political discourse surrounding slavery. The echoes of his actions resounded through the battles of the Civil War, influencing soldiers and their motivations as well as shaping national policies on emancipation. Brown's legacy reminds us of the profound complexities of resistance and the difficult choices faced by those who dare to confront injustice, ultimately propelling America toward a reckoning that would culminate in one of the most pivotal conflicts in its history.

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