

JOHN BROWN: AN ADDRESS BY FREDERICK DOUGLASS, AT THE FOURTEENTH ANNIVERSARY OF STORER COLLEGE, HARPER'S FERRY, WEST VIRGINIA, MAY 30, 1881
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On the night of the 16th of October, 1859, there appeared near the confluence of the Potomac and Shenandoah rivers, a party of nineteen men--fourteen white and five colored. They were not only armed themselves, but had brought with them a large supply of arms for such persons as might join them. These men invaded Harper's Ferry, disarmed the watchman, took possession of the arsenal, rifle-factory, armory and other government property at that place, arrested and made prisoners nearly all the prominent citizens of the neighborhood, collected about fifty slaves, put bayonets into the hands of such as were able and willing to fight for their liberty, killed three men, proclaimed general emancipation, held the ground more than thirty hours, were subsequently overpowered and nearly all killed, wounded or captured, by a body of United States troops, under command of Colonel Robert E. Lee, since famous as the rebel Gen. Lee. Three out of the nineteen invaders were captured whilst fighting, and one of these was Captain John Brown, the man who originated, planned and commanded the expedition. At the time of his capture Capt. Brown was supposed to be mortally wounded as he had several ugly gashes and bayonet wounds on his head and body; and apprehending that he might speedily die, or that he might be rescued by his friends, and thus the opportunity of making him a signal example of slave-holding vengeance would be lost, his captors hurried him to Charlestown two miles further within the border of Virginia, placed him in prison strongly guarded by troops, and before his wounds were healed he was brought into court, subjected to a nominal trial, convicted of high treason and inciting slaves to insurrection, and was executed. His corpse was given to his woe-stricken widow, and she, assisted by Antislavery friends, caused it to be borne to North Elba, Essex County, N.Y., and there his dust now reposes amid the silent, solemn and snowy grandeur of the Adirondacks.

Bibliographic information

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Summary: Douglass, in a highly personal speech, praises John Brown as a real hero of the abolitionist cause and seeks to promote a better understanding of the raid upon Harper's Ferry. Ends with a few words about Brown's companions in the raid.

Notes: Presented by the author to Storer College, the proceeds to go to the endowment of a John Brown professorship.