

Document analysis of john brown's address to the virginia court

[Sociology](#), [Slavery](#)



John Brown's address to the Virginia Court Origin: The address given by John Brown to the Virginia court was his final words before execution on charges of treason. The charges were given because of a raid that he directed with the intent to take federal weapons which is an act of treason. On October 16th-18th, 1859, the radical abolitionist John Brown led a group of white and black men, including two of his sons, on Harpers Ferry, Virginia. Brown's goal was to seize the federal arsenal, arm the local slaves, and fight a way into the North as described in this primary source in court.

This raid was not surprising because of his abolitionist background and insanity as described by the Robert E. Lee who led the Union Army that suppressed the revolt. The group held up in a fire department and was attacked by Lee's soldiers. The failed attempt resulted in Brown's capture, trial, and execution on December 2nd. This episode of slave resistance was the last major rebellion contributing to the secession of the South and, eventually, the Civil War. Purpose: John Brown had a a few purpose for delivering this address.

Obviously, it was given in response to charges accumulated from the raid, and the address also makes several points explaining his defense. Brown stated that he did not intend to fire a single gun but wanted simply to take slaves from plantations and lead them to northern states or Canada. Brown also stated that he did not induce the others involved in the raid to join him which lessened his crime in his mind. To the charges he addressed, " I never did intend murder, or treason, or the destruction of property, or to excite or incite slaves to rebellion, or to make insurrection.

Though he denied the charges, one can infer that Brown really did want a slave uprising to occur in the South due to his strong abolitionist morals and beliefs. If the raid were to be successful, Brown would not stop with those slaves, but rather continue his forced manumission of the South. Brown's impression of the trial was one of satisfaction, but he argued that " it is unjust that I should suffer such a penalty [of death]. " He made this argument because his intent was not to start this uprising but, instead, to be an act of defiance that he knew would indirectly cause a mass insurrection in the South.

Value: John Brown's address is not a historical landmark and was a less significant historical document that had minimal aftermath; however, it provides a specific example of responses in court giving insight into how acts of slave resistance are dealt with legally. Brown gives this document a unique texture because of his eloquence in court compared with his savagery in the raid. Overall, he is given the status of a martyr with his words: " I submit [to death]: so let it be done! " Brown reveals a very different side of his personality in which he is a dignified martyr.

He predicts that slavery will never end peacefully in the country whose " rights are disregarded by wicked, cruel, and unjust enactments". Historians can use this document today to show people strong in their beliefs who act upon them, and although some failed in their efforts, their cause was strengthened. Limitations: The address made by John Brown contains several limitations that affect its credit as a historical source. A significant limiting factor is that there is only one opinion to explain the raid. Brown had a

biased opinion mainly because of his childhood having been greatly influenced with abolitionist morals and beliefs.

One would think that Brown's address would be biased in spite of his numerous accusations, but he speaks as if he had nothing to lose. The aiding and abetting criminals in the raid would not have delivered a speech as dignified and passionate as Brown's but would obviously be similar in their renditions of the event. To fully understand Brown's raid, historians would need to consult Robert E. Lee's notes. After viewing both sides of the story, a historian can either choose a side or make an inference that incorporates both.