

Free essay on abolition, john brown and rebellion

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One of the most contentious subjects in post-colonial America in the 1800s was slavery. It was well known that the South relied heavily on slave labor to maintain its cotton-based economy; at the same time, the social conditions and squalor slaves were forced to live in were unbearable, and slave accounts were gaining more and more notoriety (Dew, 2001). The election of Abraham Lincoln was the final nail in the coffin for a secure Union, as the threat of abolition from Lincoln was what led the South to finally secede. The agricultural restrictions and changes, as well as the tariffs, that Lincoln proposed were incredibly unfavorable to the South, as they were attempts to facilitate abolition and the freeing of slaves. As slavery was the backbone of the Southern economy, Southern interests could not support these measures. Lincoln's Republican Party was committed to halt the spread of slavery to new states in the west. Southern politicians could not support these measures. Abolitionists in the North sought to end the practice of slavery, stating that it degraded the human rights of African-Americans, which placed the Southern economy in direct jeopardy - one of the factors that would lead to civil war and secession later in the century.

The North's continued aggressive stance on slavery caused the South to secede from the Union. In 1861, Texas officially seceded from the Union, a move that would eventually lead to the creation of the Confederacy and the beginning of the Civil War. The blame fell nearly solely on abolitionists for this happenstance - " For years past this abolition organization has been actively sowing the seeds of discord through the Union, and has rendered the federal congress the arena for spreading firebrands and hatred between the slave-holding and non-slave-holding States". The federal government

was also blamed for "trampling upon our rights" (Henretta, 1999).

Soon afterward, Alexander H. Stephens gave his Cornerstone Address, noting the various class and imperialist tendencies of the federal government, for better or worse. "I recollect once of having heard a gentleman from one of the Northern States, of great power and ability, announce in the House of Representatives, with imposing effect, that we of the South would be compelled, ultimately, to yield upon this subject of slavery; that it was as impossible to war successfully against a principle in politics, as it was in physics or mechanics" (Stephens, 1860). Regardless of the objectively correct assessment of the Northern representative, the forcefulness of this argument is further evidence of the North's sense of imperialism. Stephens noted that "Our new Government is founded upon exactly the opposite ideas; its foundations are laid, its cornerstone rests, upon the great truth that the negro is not equal to the white man; that slavery, subordination to the superior race, is his natural and moral condition" (Stephens, 1860).

Charles Dew had mentioned several reasons for the Southern secession, addressing them as "Apostles of Disunion" in his work. Most prominent of these apostles were the commissioners, who took a strict stance over the issue. The outrageous speeches and constitutional justifications presented by commissioners in many of their speeches were seen as sufficient reasons for secession (Dew, 2001). The South provided only short-term cooperation to the North, and their views on many issues, including slavery, caused fractures to form.

One of the most powerful and influential figures to me is John Brown, due to his role in romanticizing the abolition movement. Brown was one of the most

influential figures in American Civil War history; a famed abolitionist, he led the Pottawatomie Massacre and raided Harper's Ferry, without success.

Being an important white figure in the abolition movement, he has proven an important person to study when contemplating the Civil War and the fight to free the slaves. In his trial and execution, Brown turned out to be an incredibly important figure for the cause of abolition.

John Brown's story is full of interesting facts and tidbits, as he did not have a conventional (or fortunate) life - his myriad jobs, his financial difficulties, the death of his wife and children. These misfortunes are often linked by him to the plight of the slaves in the South, giving him a spiritual connection to them that made him sympathize with them directly. This was the inspiration for his "divine mission: to free the country of slavery" (Peterson, 2004). He then moved up to the Adirondacks and helped African Americans make their way to Canada.

Moving to Kansas after the doctrine of popular sovereignty was passed in 1854, Brown and his sons proceeded to take action against slavery. Killing five settlers at Pottawatomie Creek, he continued his campaign of terror against slave owners, hoping to discourage slavery altogether through his borderline terrorist attacks. Brown was committed to this task: "There will be no peace in this land until slavery is done for. I will give them something else to do than extend slave territory. I will carry the war to Africa" (Peterson, 2004). This determination and idealism is incredibly inspiring to me. The height of Brown's importance actually came during the last month of his life. Finally captured and on trial to be executed, Brown made many speeches, most or all of which are now thought of to be

extremely interesting and provocative anti-slavery messages (and are frequent reading when I need a bit of inspiration). With his own revolutionary ideas, and the lengths to which he decided he would go in favor of freeing the slaves, his actions may have been the first shot of the Civil War.

After his death, Americans remembered Brown fondly. Songs were written about him, including the 1861 gem "John Brown's Body" (Peterson, 2004).

During the war, people related to his message; however, after the war, he began to be more controversial. Brown was often painted as a murderer who wanted to incite pro-slavery riots in the South by any means necessary. Even in the North, he remained a mysterious, confusing figure - this made him one of the more interesting figures in Civil War history, despite not having a real consensus as to the effect of his effort. While I certainly would not wish to share his fate, John Brown's legacy as a hardworking fighter for equality is something that I respect very much, and his own determination is something I try to emulate in my own character whenever possible. I would love to meet him, just to see what his passion for freedom and abolition was like, and to see if he is interested in the legacy his martyrdom left behind.

Works Cited

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