

JOHN BROWN

PATRIOT OR TERRORIST?

John Brown was a radical abolitionist from the United States, who advocated and practiced armed insurrection as a means to abolish slavery for good. President Abraham Lincoln said he was a “misguided fanatic” and Brown has been called “the most controversial of all 19th-century Americans.” His actions are often referred to as “patriotic treason”, depicting both sides of the argument.

John Brown grew up in Ohio and Massachusetts. He grew up and moved to Pennsylvania where he married, bought a farm, and raised 13 children. In 1837, his Reverend Elijah Lovejoy was murdered by slaveowners for his abolitionist views. When Brown learned of the murder, he said he would, “consecrate my life to the destruction of slavery!”

Unlike most other Northerners, who advocated peaceful resistance to the pro-slavery faction, Brown demanded violent action in response to Southern aggression. Dissatisfied with the pacifism encouraged by the organized abolitionist movement, he reportedly said “These men are all talk. What we need is action—action!!”

During the rebellion in Kansas over the Kansas-Nebraska Act, Brown and his supporters killed 5 pro-slavery southerners with long broadswords in what became known as the Pottawatomie Massacre in May 1856. He and his supporters, which included 2 of his sons, escaped back to the east but felt positive about their violent acts against slaveholders.

John Brown then began plotting what he hoped would become a full-scale slave rebellion that would end slavery forever. In 1859, Brown and his supporters planned to arm freed slaves and move from plantation to plantation, freeing slaves and arming them with weapons. The first step in this would be to capture enough weapons to begin the rebellion. They targeted the federal armory at Harpers Ferry, Virginia (in modern-day West Virginia).



Brown was able to get 21 men (16 white and 5 black) to join him in the raid, but he felt as soon as they began, free blacks and slaves would join them. During the raid, they seized the armory; but 7 people were killed, and 10 or more were injured. Within 36 hours, Brown's men had fled or been killed or captured by local farmers, militiamen, and U.S. Marines led by Robert E. Lee. Brown was soon captured by federal forces. He was put on trial for treason by the state of Virginia and found guilty.

On the morning of December 2, Brown read his Bible and wrote a final letter to his wife, which included his will. At 11 am, he was escorted from the county jail through a crowd of 2,000 soldiers a few blocks away to a small field where the gallows were. Among the soldiers in the crowd was John Wilkes Booth, who borrowed a militia uniform to gain admission to the execution. The poet Walt Whitman wrote this after viewing the execution:

Historians agree John Brown played a major role in starting the Civil War. His role and actions prior to the Civil War as an abolitionist, and the tactics he chose, still make him a controversial figure today. He is sometimes memorialized as a heroic martyr and a visionary and sometimes vilified as a madman and a terrorist. Some writers call him “the father of American terrorism,” but others say Brown was “an American who gave his life that millions of other Americans might be free.”

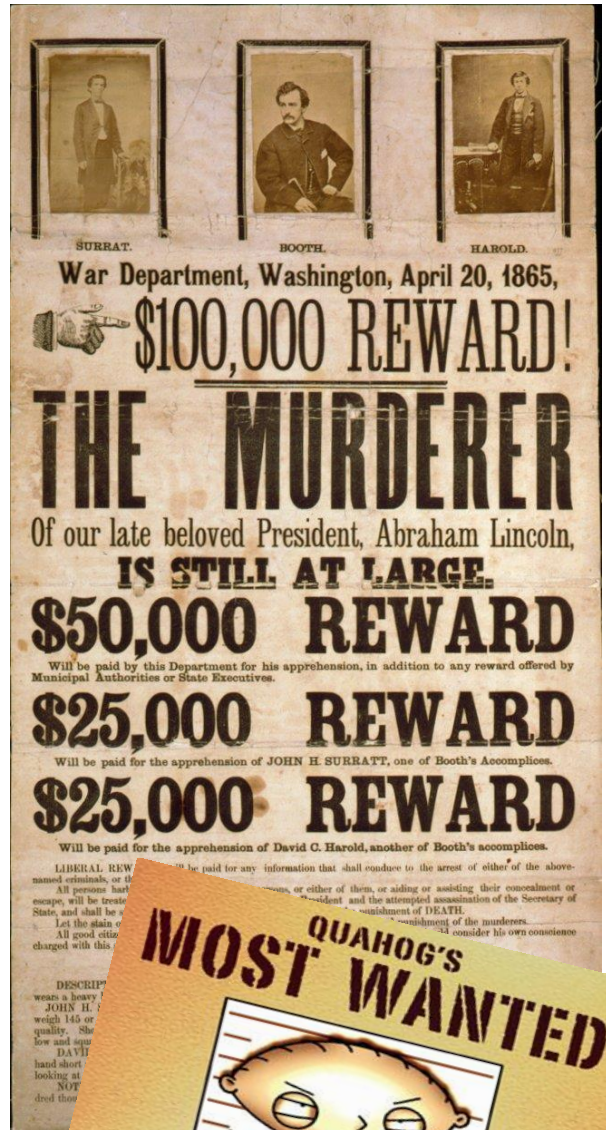
HERO OR VILLAIN?

As you read on the other side, John Brown is a controversial figure. Henry David Thoreau proclaimed Brown's "transcendent moral greatness." Senator Andrew Johnson of Tennessee called him "nothing more than a murderer, a robber, a thief, and a traitor."

To analyze this dichotomy, you are going to create a commemorative plaque to honor his great accomplishments **OR** a wanted poster to capture him as a known criminal. Choose 1 or the other – not both.

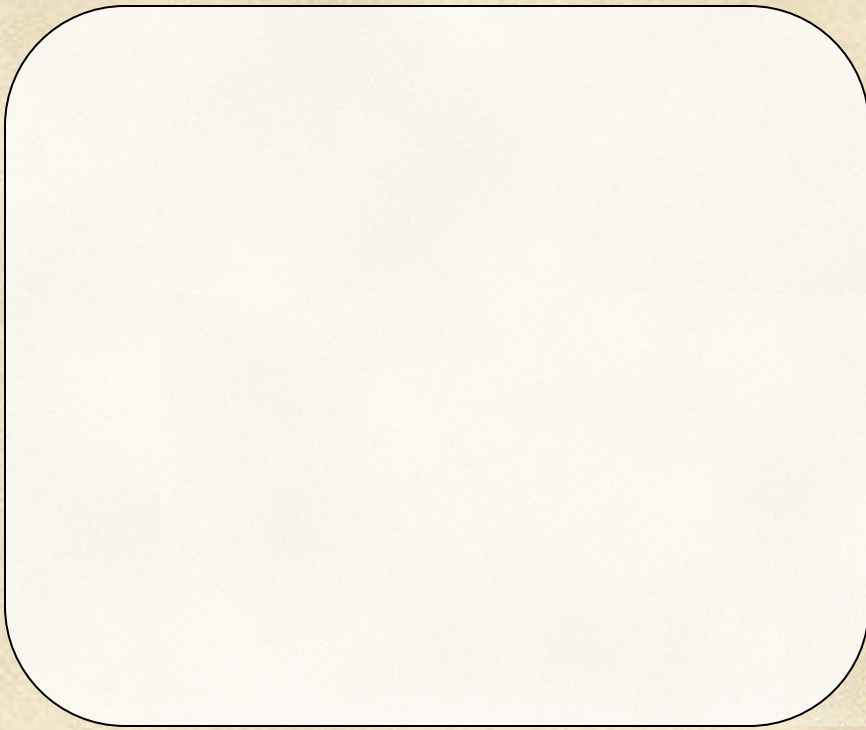
Each poster/plaque should include the name of the person, a picture of him and brief description of what he looks like, and a date. For the plaque, come up with a name for your reward (ex. The George Washington Award for Bravery) and then list **at least 3** reasons why he is receiving this award. For the wanted poster, you need to include a list of **at least 3 crimes** for which he is wanted, his last known location, and a reward in \$\$\$.

On the back, you need to include a short paragraph on why you chose either a wanted poster or plaque.



Name _____

WANTED



Name _____



