

John Brown at the Gallows

The Anglo-African Magazine



OVERVIEW

On the night of October 16, 1859, John Brown and several of his followers invaded Harpers Ferry, Virginia. They occupied a federal armory, seized a rifle factory, and took several hostages. They hoped to ignite a slave revolt that would free all enslaved African Americans. After his arrest, Brown and some of his followers were convicted of treason against the state of Virginia and criminal conspiracy to incite a slave insurrection. Brown was hanged on December 2, 1859, and six of his followers were hanged subsequently. The *Anglo-African Magazine* gave this report of Brown's death.

GUIDED READING As you read, consider the following questions:

- What view of Brown does this article give?
 - What might the symbolic significance be of the image of Brown kissing an African American child?
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This execution, which took place Dec. 2 at 11:15 A.M., was in the highest degree imposing and solemn. . . . [P]atrols and pickets encircled the field for ten miles around, and over five hundred troops were posted about the gallows. . . .

On leaving the jail, John Brown had on his face an expression of calmness and serenity characteristic of the patriot who is about to die with a living consciousness that he is laying down his life for the good of his fellow creatures. His face was even joyous, and a forgiving smile rested upon his lips. His was the lightest heart, among friend or foe, in all Charlestown that day, and not a word was spoken that was not an intuitive appreciation of his manly courage. Firmly and with elastic step he moved forward. No flinching of a coward's heart there . . . John Brown was there every inch a man.

As he stepped out of the door, a black woman, with a little child in her arms, stood near his way. The twain were of the despised race for whose emancipation and elevation to the dignity of the children of God he was about to lay down his life. His thoughts at that moment none can know except as his acts interpret them. He stopped for a moment in his course, stooped over, and with the tenderness of one whose love is as broad as the brotherhood of man, kissed the child affectionately. That mother will be proud of that mark of distinction for her offspring, and some day, when over the ashes of John Brown the temple of Virginia liberty is reared, she may join in the joyful song of praise which on that soil will do justice to his memory.