

## Document 2

### Background Reading: John Brown

In 1800, John Brown was born into a deeply religious family in Connecticut. His father strongly opposed slavery. When he was 12, John Brown saw a young slave boy beaten terribly with a shovel and wondered, "If he has no mother or father, was God his father?"

Later, Brown worked in the Underground Railroad to protect escaped slaves from slave catchers. When his friend Elijah Lovejoy was murdered for writing against slavery, Brown stood up in church and said, "Here before God, I consecrate my life to the destruction of slavery." He even dreamed he was sent by God to end slavery.

In 1856, John Brown and his sons carried out an attack on proslavery settlers in Kansas. His sons dragged five men from their homes, brutally beat them, murdered them, and cut off their heads. He became an abolitionist hero as a result.

In 1859 Brown planned to attack the federal arsenal that contained 100,000 guns and rifles at Harpers Ferry, Virginia. He planned to capture the guns, free slaves to join him, and start a war. He met with Frederick Douglass at a nearby farm house. Frederick Douglass argued against this violent plan. He decided not to join Brown, saying the attack would be a fatal mistake. Douglass wrote, "Here we separated; he to go to Harpers Ferry, I to Rochester [New York]."

With 21 men Brown attacked Harpers Ferry. His men cut the telegraph wires, captured the armory, and rounded up hostages. However, the townspeople shot at them until the next morning when the U.S. Marines arrived and surrounded them.

The next day, the Marines made an offer: if the raiders surrendered, their lives would be spared. Brown refused. The Marines broke down the door and stormed the building. A Marine tried to run Brown through with his sword but the blade hit his belt buckle and he was wounded.

John Brown was taken to jail for trial. His statements from prison reached the nation and he inspired others to rally against slavery to fulfill the promise of the Declaration of Independence that "all men are created equal." His trial took a week. The jury reached a verdict: guilty of murder, treason, and inciting a slave rebellion. On December 2, 1859, John Brown was executed for his actions.

#### Guiding Questions

1. What experiences did Brown have that led him to try to become an abolitionist?

2. What actions did Brown take to end slavery?