

John Brown's Speech to the Court

I have, may it please the court, a few words to say. In the first place, I deny everything but what I have all along admitted. The design on my part to free the slaves. I intended certainly to have made a clean thing of that matter, as I did last winter when I went into Missouri and there took slaves without the snapping of a gun on either side, move them through the country, and finally left them in Canada. I designed to have done the same thing again on a larger scale. That was all I intended. I never did intend murder or treason or the destruction of property or to excite or incite slaves into rebellion or to make insurrection. I have another objection, and that is it is unjust that I should suffer such a penalty. Had I interfered in the manner which I admit, and which I admit has been fairly proved, for I admire the truthfulness and candor or the greater portion of the witnesses who have testified in this case. Had I so interfered on behalf of the rich, the powerful, the intelligent, the so called "great", or on behalf of any of their friends, either father, mother, brother, sister, wife or children, or any of that class, that suffered and sacrificed by having this interference, it would have been all right and every man in this court would have deemed it an act worthy of reward rather than punishment. This court acknowledges, as I suppose the validity of the law of God. I see a book kissed here, which I supposed to be the bible or at least the new testament. That teaches me that all things, what so ever I would, that men should do to me I should do even so to them. It teaches me further to remember them that are in bonds as bound with them. I endeavored to act up to that instruction. I say I am yet too young to understand that God is any respecter of persons. I believe that to have interfered as I have done, as I have always freely admitted I have done on behalf of his despised horde, was not wrong but right. Now, if it is deemed necessary that I should forfeit my life for the furtherance of the ends of justice, and mingle my blood further with the blood of my children and with the blood of millions in the slave country whose rights are disregarded by the wicked, cruel and unjust enactments, I submit. So let it be done.

Let me say one word further. I feel entirely satisfied with the treatment I have received on my trial. Considering all the circumstances, it has been more generous than I expected, but I feel no consciousness of guilt. I have stated from the first what was my intention and what was not. I never had any design against the life of any person nor any disposition to commit treason or incite slaves to rebel or make any general insurrection. I never encouraged any man to do so, but always discouraged any idea of that kind. Let me say also a word in regard to the statements made by some of those connected with me, I hear it has been stated by some of them that I induced them to join me, but the contrary is true. I do not say this to injure them, but as regretting their weakness. There is not one of them but joined me of his own accord, and the greater part of them at their own expense. A number of them I never saw and never had a word of conversation with 'till the day they came to me and that was for the purpose I have stated. Now I am done.