

Source: Horace Greeley, editorial, New York Tribune December 3, 1859

"We are not those who say. 'if slavery is wrong, then John Brown was wholly right.' There are fit and unfit modes of combating a great evil; we think Brown at Harper's Ferry pursued the latter. . . And, while we heartily wish every slave in the world would run away from his master tomorrow and never be retaken, we should not feel justified in entering a slave state to incite them to do so, even if we were sure to succeed in the enterprise. Of course, we regard Brown's raid as utterly mistaken and, in direct consequences, pernicious.

"But his are the errors of a fanatic, not the crimes of a felon."

Source: Henry David Thoreau, The Last Days of John Brown, 1859

"Men have been hung in the South before for attempting to rescue slaves, and the North was not much stirred by it. Whence, then, this wonderful difference? We were not so sure of [the] devotion [of these men] to principle. We [Northerners] made a subtle distinction [in regard to John Brown], forgot human laws, and did homage to an idea. The North, I mean the living North, was suddenly all transcendental. It went behind the human law, it went behind the apparent failure, and recognized eternal justice and glory. Commonly, men live according to a formula, and are satisfied if the order of law is observed, but in this instance they, to some extent, returned to original perceptions, and there was a slight revival of old religion."

Source: Editorial, Topeka Tribune, November 19, 1859

"There are two classes of men who apologize for 'Old Brown.' The one does so openly, boldly and without fear. These men, belonging to the Wendell Phillips school, call him patriot and Christian. They class him with . . . a Washington and a Bolivar, bestowing upon him all the praise due to a hero and a philanthropist. The other class, beneath a veil so thin that a fool can see the device, calling themselves law and order men, lovers of peace - Republicans, forsooth - apologize for Brown by publishing in their papers every word they can catch in his praise. . . .

"These two classes are alike the friends and comforters of Brown, one by open praise, and the other in a tacit endorsement by telling what somebody else has said, making themselves more than Phillips, the instruments in building up a reputation of martyr for Brown and his confederates."

Source: Campaign speech by Abraham Lincoln, Hartford, Connecticut, as reported in the Hartford Press, March 4, 1860

"The [Democrats] are given to 'bushwhacking.' After having their errors and mis-statements continually thrust in their faces, they pay no heed, but go on howling about Seward and the 'irrepressible conflict.' That is 'bushwhacking.' So with John Brown and Harpers Ferry. They charge it upon the Republican party and ignominiously fail in all attempts to substantiate the charge. Yet they go on with their bushwhacking, the pack in full cry after John Brown."

"The Democrats had just whipped in [some state elections], and seized upon the unfortunate Harpers Ferry affair to influence other elections then pending."

Source: Frederick Douglass, a letter to a group of abolitionists, July 4, 1860

"To have been acquainted with John Brown' shared his counsels, enjoyed his confidence, and sympathized with the great objects of his life and death, I esteem as among the highest privileges of my life. We do but honor to ourselves in doing honor to him, for it implies the possession of qualities akin to his."