

**John Brown, a man who had a fanatical belief that he was chosen by God to overthrow black slavery in America.** 2020.0068.02

**For forty years John Brown reflected on the hopeless and miserable conditions of the slaves.** 2020.0068.03

Jacob Lawrence learned about John Brown and other important figures in Black history such as Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, and Toussiant L'Ouverture while growing up in Harlem, a predominantly African-American neighborhood in New York City. The Harlem Renaissance—a flourishing of art and culture—inspired Lawrence to choose these historical figures as subjects for his art.

*The Legend of John Brown* begins by foreshadowing Brown's piety and martyrdom, picturing him at the feet of a crucified Jesus and then leading his family in prayer.

**For twelve years John Brown engaged in land speculations and wool merchandizing. All this to make some money for his greater work which was the abolishment of slavery.** 2020.0068.04

**His ventures failing him, he accepted poverty.** 2020.0068.05

Lawrence's visual narrative emphasizes above all that Brown's religious beliefs motivated his efforts to abolish slavery. Rather than depict Brown's violent attacks against slaveholders, Lawrence focuses instead on his zealous work as a fundraiser and organizer for the abolitionist cause.

**John Brown, while tending his flock in Ohio, first communicated with his sons and daughters his plans of attacking slavery by force.** 2020.0068.06

**John Brown formed an organization among the colored people of the Adirondack woods to resist the capture of any fugitive slaves.** 2020.0068.07

(above)  
**To the people he found worthy of trust, he communicated his plans.** 2020.0068.08

(below)  
**John Brown's first thought of the place where he would make his attack came to him while surveying land for Oberlin College in West Virginia, 1840.** 2020.0068.09

While surveying land Oberlin College owned in Virginia (present-day West Virginia), Brown began planning to hide a militia in mountainous areas and launch guerrilla attacks to free enslaved persons from nearby plantations.

**Kansas was now the skirmish ground of the Civil War.** 2020.0068.10

**Those pro-slavery were murdered by those anti-slavery.** 2020.0068.11

**John Brown took to guerrilla warfare.** 2020.0068.12

In the mid-1850s, Brown and four of his sons settled in Kansas Territory and joined the fight for Kansas to enter the Union as a "free" state that outlawed slavery. After the city of Lawrence was sacked by pro-slavery forces in 1856, Brown and other men retaliated by brutally murdering five pro-slavery men near Pottawatomie Creek. Because of these violent interactions, the era from 1854 to 1859 became known as "Bleeding Kansas," a tragic prelude to the American Civil War.

**John Brown's victory at Black Jack drove those pro-slavery to new fury, and those who were anti-slavery to new efforts.** 2020.0068.13

**John Brown, after long meditation, planned to fortify himself somewhere in the mountains of Virginia or Tennessee and there make raids on surrounding plantations, freeing slaves.** 2020.0068.14

**John Brown collected money from sympathizers and friends to carry out his plans.** 2020.0068.15

On June 2, 1856, Brown's men defeated a larger battalion of pro-slavery Missouri forces at the Battle of Black Jack, a site south of Lawrence near Baldwin City, Kansas. Brown continued efforts to liberate enslaved people and raise funds for an abolitionist army.

**John Brown made many trips to Canada organizing for his assault on Harper's Ferry.** 2020.0068.16

(above)  
**In spite of a price on his head, John Brown in 1859 liberated twelve negroes from a Missouri plantation.** 2020.0068.17

(below)  
**John Brown remained a full winter in Canada, drilling negroes for his coming raid on Harper's Ferry.** 2020.0068.18

**July 3, 1850. John Brown stocked an old barn with guns and ammunition. He was ready to strike his first blow at slavery.** 2020.0068.19

Brown spent years preparing an assault on the United States Armory and Arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia (present-day West Virginia). He stockpiled weapons, intending to arm newly freed men who would join his crusade. These weapons included rifles and carbines, known as "Beecher's Bibles" in honor of the abolitionist New England minister Henry Ward Beecher, who financed arms for Free-Staters in Kansas.

Brown also commissioned hundreds of pikes, weapons with long wooden shafts ending in a pointed steel head, for freed men who had not used rifles before.



Scan the code to see one of John Brown's pikes.