

corporate women and African Americans, especially through their involvement with auxiliary Liberty Associations. Those auxiliaries did not survive the transition to the Free Soil Party, so this history of relative inclusiveness ended rather abruptly.

The four appendixes — which present election returns, “banner Liberty counties,” the 1844 national party platform, and absorbing biographical notes for all Liberty members mentioned — further reveal the depth and breadth of Johnson’s research, although the biographical notes would be much more useful if they had citations, especially since some of his claims about individuals’ Liberty allegiances are controversial.

Johnson’s major contribution is his persuasive argument for the Liberty Party’s influence on the long-term trajectory of antislavery politics. He refutes arguments of its insignificance, especially in relation to Garrisonian abolitionism, a faction whose actual impact he minimizes. At least for the Old Northwest, this claim requires further research, for he only cites older literature for his assertion that the Garrisonians merely had strength in Ohio. Johnson makes a compelling case that Liberty Party members helped to bring slavery to center stage in the 1840s, and that the decade represents the pivotal turning point for antislavery. He readily acknowledges that the racial justice agenda of the Liberty Party and the diversity of its participants diminished over time, but claims that this was part of its activists’ adaptation to their changing political world.

With this book, Johnson achieves his goal of merging the often separated studies of antebellum political history and antislavery reform. In the process he makes a substantial contribution to both fields.

John Brown’s Trial, by Brian McGinty. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009. 350 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$27.95 cloth.

Creating the John Brown Legend: Emerson, Thoreau, Douglass, Child, and Higginson in Defense of the Raid on Harpers Ferry, by Janet Kemper Beck. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2009. vii, 206 pp. Illustrations, timeline, notes, bibliography, index. \$35.00 paper.

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John Brown’s Trial, by Brian McGinty, is the first book in 150 years to deal exclusively with Brown’s trial for treason against the state of Vir-

ginia. McGinty, a trial lawyer, notes Americans' fascination with courtroom contests and regards this one to be the first to be treated as a media event commanding national attention. Although this book "is a *legal history*, it is not a *legal treatise*" (19), and general readers as well as scholars can read it with profit and pleasure.

After an introductory chapter sketching John Brown's career before Harpers Ferry and a second on the raid itself, McGinty deals in succeeding chapters with framing the charges against Brown, the indictment, jury selection, taking testimony, the issue of fairness, securing adequate counsel for Brown, the verdict, the sentence, Brown's execution, and, in a final chapter, the trial's impact.

One of McGinty's central arguments is that it was not the disastrous raid on Harpers Ferry itself but rather Brown's trial, and the forum it offered him to speak in his own behalf, that ensured Brown's place in history. "If he had been shot dead during his raid or if he had bled to death from the sword wounds inflicted on him when marines stormed his last refuge in the U.S. armory and arsenal, he would have died without a trial, been condemned as a madman, and been relegated to a footnote in history" (10).

On the possibility that John Brown might have saved his life by pleading insanity, McGinty notes that Brown himself explicitly rejected such a defense. Although one of his lawyers traveled to Ohio to collect affidavits of insanity from 19 persons who knew Brown, "they implicated families related to Brown by marriage more than his own. . . . Much of the information stated in them was hearsay . . . and it was clear that all of the affidavits were motivated by the desire to save Brown's life" (243). If Brown had been presented to the nation as a "lunatic," it seems unlikely that he could then have been transformed into a martyr.

Perhaps the most original part of McGinty's book is his discussion of the charge of treason leveled against John Brown on top of the more obvious charges of murder, conspiracy, and inciting a slave rebellion. Brown was clearly a citizen of the United States, and his offenses occurred on federal property: Should he not have been tried in federal rather than state court? Brown was neither a citizen nor a resident of Virginia, so how could he be tried for treason against a state to which he owed no allegiance? But Virginia Governor Henry A. Wise wanted Brown tried in Virginia, and the pro-Southern "doughface" President James Buchanan bowed to his wishes. Perhaps Virginia prosecutor Andrew Hunter "conceived of the charge of treason for the purpose of tying the hands of Governor Wise . . . who was given to unpredictable changes of course" and "would have the power to pardon or relieve

Brown . . . from any crime . . . except treason" (111). McGinty calls this "one of the most troubling legal questions raised by the trial, for it lay at the heart of the federal system" (14).

Janet Kemper Beck, who teaches English, has little to say about John Brown's trial in *Creating the John Brown Legend*, and nothing new to say about John Brown himself. Her interest is instead in how a small group of men and women, literary figures in Concord and Boston, transformed Brown's reputation from "terrorist" and "lunatic" into one of "a martyr for a holy cause whose execution made 'the gallows glorious like the cross'" (4).

Beck acknowledges that she "did not set out to write about John Brown's raid at Harpers Ferry" (3), and she summarizes what historians and biographers have said about it and Brown himself in two brief chapters in part one of her book. Part two, "The Players," consists of five chapters on the four men and one woman who really interest her: Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Frederick Douglass, Lydia Maria Child, and Thomas Wentworth Higginson. Emerson and Thoreau, initially the most hesitant to support Brown, receive the briefest discussions. Beck notes, as does Sandra Harbert Petrolionis in more detail in *To Set This World Right: The Antislavery Movement in Thoreau's Concord* (2006), that both were drawn somewhat reluctantly into anti-slavery activism by the women in their families: Both Emerson's wife, Lidian, and Thoreau's mother, two sisters, and three aunts were founding members of the Concord Female Anti-Slavery Society. Beck somewhat disparages Frederick Douglass for having refused to accompany John Brown to Harpers Ferry and fleeing for a time to Canada afterwards. Unlike Douglass and the others, Child never met Brown, but Beck lauds her for being one of his most steadfast supporters. Higginson alone among the Brown supporters known as the "Secret Six" not only stood his ground but even plotted to rescue Brown from his Virginia jail (126–28).

Part three of Beck's book consists of a long chapter on the literary efforts of her five subjects, whom she describes in her preface as "incredibly effective 'spin doctors,'" (3) to transform John Brown's reputation, followed by a brief epilogue describing their later efforts to burnish Brown's image. It is now the prevailing wisdom that the literary efforts of the New England Transcendentalists were the decisive factor in creating the John Brown legend. Largely missing from Beck's account are Brown's own words, uttered "with an eloquence that excited admiration throughout the country," as McGinty puts it (8). It was Brown's words that gave these literary "spin doctors" both the inspiration and the ammunition with which to craft their image of him.

Understandably, neither McGinty nor Beck has anything to say about John Brown in Iowa, although McGinty does note that Governor Wise said that Iowan Edwin Coppoc of Springdale was the only one of Brown's raiders whose sentence he had ever thought of commuting (248). As it happens, Brown's first meeting with Emerson and Thoreau in Concord in 1857 came just after his return to the East from Kansas by way of Iowa. It might have been possible for Beck to compare their responses to the charismatic Brown with the impressions he made on Josiah B. Grinnell and the somewhat more skeptical Rev. John Todd, who perhaps knew Brown better.

Surely McGinty is correct in arguing that it was John Brown's trial rather than his aborted Harpers Ferry raid that set the stage for his role as a catalyst for secession and Civil War, and Beck shows us that the trial alone would not have ensured his place in history and legend without the literary productions of the New England Transcendentalists. Both have produced readable books that make significant contributions to our understanding of John Brown.

Heartland Utopias, by Robert P. Sutton. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2009. 224 pp. Notes, bibliography, index. \$32.00 cloth.

Reviewer Peter Hoehnle is project manager for the Iowa Valley Resource Conservation and Development Council. He has written two articles about the Amanas for the *Annals of Iowa*, and his dissertation (Iowa State University, 2003) compared the organization of work in four communal societies.

Heartland Utopias was the final book written by the late Robert Sutton, long recognized as the foremost authority on the Icarian communities formed by followers of the nineteenth-century French Utopian socialist Etienne Cabet. The present volume focuses on the communal societies formed in the Midwest (here defined as the states of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, Michigan, Iowa, Missouri, and the Dakotas) in the nineteenth century. As one would expect, the chapter focusing on the turbulent 50-year history of the Icarians is well done, but otherwise the book suffers from numerous careless and unfortunate errors.

A broad survey of communal groups will, almost of necessity, be of uneven quality, reflecting the availability of records and other materials. *Heartland Utopias*, however, is constructed from secondary accounts and, like the unfortunately often cited work of Mark Halloway, is heavily dependent on Charles Nordhoff's *The Communistic Societies of the United States* (originally published in 1875). Although Nordhoff's observations are generally sound, they are those of a contemporary observer, not