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John Brown, Slavery, and the Legacies of Revolutionary Violence in Our Own Time: A Conference Commemorating the 150th Anniversary of the Harpers Ferry Raid

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Was John Brown a Terrorist?

Beverly Gage, Yale University

Available online at <http://www.yale.edu/glc/john-brown/gage-abstract.pdf>
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Abstract

Was John Brown a terrorist? What is at stake in the question? My talk will explore three ways of thinking about John Brown in the context of modern debates about terrorism. The first involves language: Was John Brown literally a “terrorist” in the parlance of the mid-19th century? The second involves methodology: Did his activities meet the standards of accepted definitions of terrorism? The third addresses politics: What does it mean to apply the word “terrorism” to historical situations, and should we even try?